

# myphizz RESEARCH STUDY

The importance and impact of physical (and mental) activity on health, wellbeing, development and academic attainment in schools and colleges.

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## **Introduction:**

The myphizz team consists of professional teachers and educationalists passionately determined to improve a range of positive outcomes for students and teachers. The COVID pandemic of 2020 onwards, highlighted an increase in sedentary behaviours and mental health issues that were already a concern. Going some way to solve the short and long-term impact of these through an enjoyable and motivating technological platform seemed a worthwhile pursuit. Our solution is an innovative app (called myphizz) and strategy to encourage student and teacher participation and enjoyment in a whole range of physical (and mental) challenges.

Physical activity is part of our national identity as our passion for sport exemplifies. The UK invented some of the greatest games and host many of the most amazing competitions in the world. There is a tangible and positive lift to the country's psyche when our sporting heroes perform and succeed at the highest levels, including the Olympics, World Cup or Wimbledon. The same emotion is seen on faces at our local stadium or village pitches and games areas.

Sport teaches us how to overcome adversity, strengthen resilience, collaborate in teams, focus and cognitively gain advantage. Most importantly, involving ourselves in physical activity can be great fun and lead to a lifetime of opportunities and friendships.

**There are three questions that the team wanted to research, evidence and understand:**

- 1. What is the link between physical and mental health?**
- 2. What advantages are gained by improving physical and mental performance for students?**
- 3. How can improvements to physical and mental wellbeing be best achieved in a school environment?**



## The Research:

The benefits of taking part in sport and physical activity are well recognised. Government has big aspirations for increasing levels of participation and would like to see clear targets as recommended in the recent Triennial Review of Sport England and UK Sport.<sup>13</sup> Then formalised in the 'Personal Development' section the latest Ofsted Inspection Framework for every school. **Inspectors will expect to see schools offering children a broad, balanced education, including opportunities to be active during the school day and through extra-curricular activities.**

Dr Tara Porter writing in the TES, "Finding a sport or form of exercise that young people will pursue for the rest of their lives will have incalculable benefits in their mental and physical health, and reduce the burden on the NHS. Exercise is the single most important factor in warding off depression.

We know a lot about mental health at this point – but our knowledge base is far from complete. We know that mental health is correlated with poverty. Therefore, we must ensure that every child receives the education that will help to lead them to economic independence. Academic success is a factor in this – but it's just that, one factor.

Being mentally healthy means having a balanced life, avoiding addiction, being involved in activities that completely absorb you and make you happy, exercising, maintaining meaningful, supportive relationships and having good sleep habits.

Giving children the opportunities to discover their passions alongside education is an investment in their future mental health (and rather more prosaically, their likelihood of being a productive citizen).<sup>15</sup>

The government have made clear steps to develop a joined up approach by working with Sport England, Youth Sport Trust, Active Partnerships, Association of Physical Education, the Sport and Recreation Alliance, UKactive and leading sport organisations and NGBs (National Governing Bodies of Sport).

The government has three overarching ambitions for this plan:

- 1. All children and young people take part in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.**
- 2. Children and young people have the opportunity to realise developmental, character-building experiences through sport, competition and active pursuits.**



**3. All sport and physical activity provision for children and young people is designed around the principles of physical literacy, focuses on fun and enjoyment and aims to reach the least active.**

All young people should have the opportunity to live healthy and active lives. As set out in the 2015 cross-government sport strategy Sporting Future<sup>12</sup>, sport and physical activity improve our children's physical and mental wellbeing, and help them to develop important skills like teamwork and leadership.

A positive experience of sport and physical activity at a young age can build a lifetime habit of participation, improving physical literacy (building physical competency alongside confidence, enjoyment, knowledge and understanding)<sup>1</sup>. Engaging boys and girls of different backgrounds and abilities should be a central part of every child's school experience.

Ensuring young people have access to the right amount of daily activity can have wider benefits for pupils and schools, improving behaviour as well as enhancing learning and academic achievement. Sport has also been identified by the Department for Education as one of the five foundations for building character, helping young people develop resilience, determination and self-belief, and instilling values and virtues such as friendship and fair play. It can help children and young people to connect with their peers, tackling loneliness and social isolation and building stronger communities.<sup>1</sup>

The Department for Education has launched a scheme to help schools rate their health and wellbeing provision, which includes guidance on appropriate levels of PE provision. Earlier in July 2019, the Department for Education published details of its healthy schools rating scheme. This scheme will celebrate the positive actions that schools are delivering in terms of healthy living, healthy eating and physical activity.

The importance of daily physical activity has been known for decades, but the challenge we face in a world of fast food and sedentary screentime has never been greater. One third of children are overweight or obese by the time they leave primary school. Data from Sport England's Active Lives



Children and Young People survey<sup>2</sup> ('Active Lives Children') show that only 17.5% of children meet the Chief Medical Officers' guidance for how much activity children should be doing (at least 60 minutes every day), and stubborn inequalities remain; children from some Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups and poorer backgrounds are less active, and so are girls. Shockingly, the gender gap starts at just five years old. Too many children are losing confidence, understanding and enjoyment of sport as they progress through secondary school, with activity levels decreasing throughout education.<sup>1</sup>

Physical activity is a key part of developing a healthy lifestyle and plays an important role in maintaining a healthy weight as set out in the Childhood Obesity Action Plan<sup>14</sup>. The importance of physical activity in promoting children and young people's mental wellbeing is equally clear; one in eight 5-to-19-year-olds has at least one mental disorder<sup>4</sup>. Physical and mental health are inextricably linked; numerous studies confirm a positive association between physical activity and increased self-esteem, emotional wellbeing and future aspirations, and physical activity is also associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression. Active Lives Children data show us that children who are physically literate are happier, more resilient and more trusting of their peers, and we need to ensure that the importance of physical activity for mental wellbeing is recognised and understood by all young people.

Schools play an important role in young people's lives, and it is important that they are supported to provide high quality, modern PE lessons that engage young people as well as help schools build physical activity into the school day to help stem the drop-off in activity by older pupils.

Research<sup>17</sup> has found that the majority of UK adults (including teachers) are unaware of the amount of physical activity that children and young people should be doing every day. And parents often over-estimate the amount of exercise their children are doing at school, and therefore underestimate the amount of activity that they should be doing out of school hours. This is a fundamental issue that must be addressed. There is good work underway in many schools and local areas, as highlighted in Public Health England's What Works in Schools and Colleges to Increase Physical Activity guidance<sup>19</sup>. But we need to build on this to ensure that teachers, sport providers and parents



have a clear and shared understanding of the appropriate levels of physical activity and are working together to ensure children and young people can access it.<sup>1</sup>

To reach the least active groups, we need to understand the specific barriers they face. It is important to reframe sport and physical activity as part of everyday life, rather than the preserve of 'sporty kids'. We know that it is important to include young people in the process of designing policies that affect them, and research has shown that incorporating the views of young people into the sport and activity offer can increase their engagement and participation. This approach can be particularly important for girls, many of whom report negative experiences of sport at a young age which can leave them reluctant to take part in exercise later in life.<sup>1</sup>

Evidence suggests an association between regular exercise and academic performance<sup>20</sup> and a positive long-term association with moderate to vigorous physical activity on academic attainment in some subjects<sup>21</sup>. A systematic review found that with as little as 5 minutes of regular physical activity, positive results in academic behaviours (for example, attention, concentration and remaining 'on task') were observed and that this would be even more effective with at least 10 to 30 minutes of regular physical activity<sup>22</sup>. Evidence also shows that taking part in sport provides greater self-esteem and confidence with direct cognitive benefits<sup>23</sup>.

## Summary and Conclusion

The government are keen to launch new and innovative approaches to getting people active and tools like myphizz<sup>11</sup>, we believe, are a perfect solution to many of the challenges and aspirations of the proposals and groups mentioned. They are encouraging schools to include young people in the design of their sport offer by consulting with pupils directly to ensure that they offer a range of activities that appeal to young people from different backgrounds. These types of schemes can be mutually beneficial, helping pupils to develop skills like leadership and self-efficacy, while supporting the school through volunteering; for example, encouraging other pupils to participate in active break times. myphizz offers this platform for students to be creative and discover what they like in a safe



and engaging way. Opportunities to join and post favourite activities offer great ways to start the social media journey. With a teacher overview this is done safely and securely.

The increasing digital expectations of society are an opportunity for the sport and physical activity sector to embrace digital transformation<sup>1</sup>. Evidence and measurement are crucial and the myphizz app not only displays and evidences performance gains and participation but also provides opportunities for summative data and surveys on student's attitude and feelings about being more active over time.

Extracts from:

**1 School Sport and Activity Action Plan (July 2019)**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/848082/School\\_sport\\_and\\_activity\\_action\\_plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/848082/School_sport_and_activity_action_plan.pdf)

**2 Active Lives**

<https://www.sportengland.org/know-your-audience/data/active-lives>

**3 Physical Activity (EEF)**

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/physical-activity>

**4 Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2017**

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2017/2017>

**5 Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/918442/cycling-walking-investment-strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/918442/cycling-walking-investment-strategy.pdf)

**6 Active Lives Children and Young People Survey (March 2019)**

<https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/active-lives-children-survey-2017-18-attitudes-report.pdf>

**7 Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls (Women in Sport)**



<https://www.womeninsport.org/research-and-advice/our-publications/reframing-sport-for-teenage-girls-building-strong-foundations-for-their-futures/>

**8 Girls Active**

<https://www.youthsporttrust.org/programmes/girls-active>

**9 This Girls Can**

<https://www.thisgirlcan.co.uk/>

**10 Primary PE and sport premium survey**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/primary-pe-and-sport-premium-survey>

**11 myphizz app for schools and physical/mental activity**

<http://www.myphizz.com/>

**12 Sporting Future (2015)**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/486622/Sporting\\_Future\\_ACCESSIBLE.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486622/Sporting_Future_ACCESSIBLE.pdf)

**13 Triennial Review of UK Sport and Sport England**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/461075/160915\\_Report\\_of\\_triennial\\_review\\_of\\_UK\\_Sport\\_and\\_Sport\\_England\\_for\\_publication\\_REVISED\\_ANNEX\\_LINKS.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/461075/160915_Report_of_triennial_review_of_UK_Sport_and_Sport_England_for_publication_REVISED_ANNEX_LINKS.pdf)

**14 Childhood obesity: a plan for action**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/718903/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action-chapter-2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/718903/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action-chapter-2.pdf)

**15 Ofsted's framework: what it means for pupil mental health**

<https://www.tes.com/news/ofsteds-framework-what-it-means-pupil-mental-health>

**16 Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (updated 2021)**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework>

**17 Thousands of schools mark YST National School Sport Week 2019**

<https://www.youthsporttrust.org/news-insight/news/thousands-of-schools-mark-yst-national-school-sport-week-2019>

**18 Free meals and activities for 50,000 children over 2019 summer holidays**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/free-meals-and-activities-for-50000-children-over-2019-summer-holidays>



**19** Public Health England's What Works in Schools and Colleges to Increase Physical Activity guidance

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/876242/Guidance\\_to\\_increase\\_physical\\_activity\\_among\\_children\\_and\\_young\\_people\\_in\\_schools\\_and\\_colleges.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/876242/Guidance_to_increase_physical_activity_among_children_and_young_people_in_schools_and_colleges.pdf)

- 20** Haapala E. Physical activity, academic performance and cognition in children and adolescents. A Systematic Review. *Baltic Journal of Health and Physical Activity* 2012;4(1):53-61.
- 21** Booth J, Leary, SD, Joinson, C, Ness, AR, Tomporowski, PD, Boyle, JM et al. Associations between objectively measured physical activity and academic attainment in adolescents from a UK cohort. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*. 2014.
- 22** Sullivan R, Kuzel, AH, and Vaandering, M The Association of Physical Activity and Academic Behaviour: A Systematic Review. *Journal of School Health* 2017.
- 23** HM Government. *Sporting Future: A new strategy for an active nation*. 2015.

