

Key Evidence and Research

1.

Declining youth and adults sport participation in Aotearoa New Zealand

- a. Active NZ, Sport New Zealand's nationwide survey, has demonstrated decline in youth sport participation since 2017.
- b. 16-year Adult Participation Trends Report 1998-2014 (Trends Report) showed that weekly adult participation in sport dropped 7.7% (from 73.3 percent to 65.6 percent). This was most pronounced in younger adult's participation (18-24 year olds fell 13.9%, from 79.4% to 65.5%; and 25-34 year olds fell 10.4%, from 75.3% to 64.9%).
- c. National census data collected by School Sport NZ indicated that there has been a decline in rates of students with a meaningful involvement with a school sport programme from 56% to 51%.

2.

Research on and insights from young people strongly indicating that the sport system is not doing a good job at catering for their needs

- a. Analysis of 2017 and 2018 Active NZ Survey data sets showed that 66% of young people who do not meet recommended physical activity guideline levels and 61% of young people who do meet recommended physical activity guideline levels, want to do more physical activity (including sport).
- b. Voice of the participant data shows indicates young people aged 13 to 18 years old would like to see improved player development offerings at clubs.
- c. Voice of the rangatahi data shows general dissatisfaction by young people with all aspects of school sport experience, especially among girls.
- d. Secondary school age review (2020), outlined the following significant issues that impact the quality of young people's experiences:
 - i. Self-confidence, self-esteem and body image
 - ii. Overemphasis on competition and winning
 - iii. Early specialisation
 - iv. Poor player management – overuse injuries, pressure to succeed, selection/ deselection
 - v. Lack of ability/skills/physical competence
 - vi. Peer pressure
 - vii. Parental pressure and influence
 - viii. Competing demands on time and interest – study, friends, family, sport, work
 - ix. Club vs school competing demands
 - x. Sport structures and offerings not responding to youth expectations/lifestyle

3.

Reviews conducted into the New Zealand sport system, outlining the need for change

- a. Secondary school age review (2020), outlined key issues and constraints in the sport and education system that inhibit participation in sport being sustained, or non-participants re-entering into sport.
- b. Sport New Zealand's Talent plan (2015), outline core issues and myths undermining good talent id and development practice in New Zealand. In order to rectify this, the plan proposed that Sport NZ, Sport NZ's partners, coaches, teachers and parents need to align around the core beliefs of athlete's needs come first, working together for collective impact, effective pathways, continuous learning, quality coaching.

4.

New Zealand research perspectives from the past 20 years on sport participant and athlete development experiences and systems

- a. A study (Hodge et al., 2012) on NZ international athletes found most played a range of different sports as a teenager with some not taking up the sport they excel in until their teenage years.
- b. Walters et al. (2011) outlined how adult behaviors affect children's enjoyment of sport – with a focus on winning and competition – appearing to serve the needs of adults more than the needs of children.
- c. Some young people have become overrepresented in reports of acute and chronic injury due to excessive training and competition loads in sport.
 - i. McGowan, Whatman & Walters (2020), found that children participating in sport in excess of currently recommended sport participation volumes had increased odds of reporting a history of gradual onset injury.
 - ii. ACC statistics (2019) show a 60% surge since 2008 in sports-related injuries to children aged 10 to 14 – double the increase of any other age group.
- d. There is growing evidence that coaches and young people are not managing sport injuries by with the young person's long-term wellbeing at the forefront of decision-making.
 - i. Whatman, Walters, & Schluter (2018) study found 87% of New Zealand secondary school athletes surveyed, reported hiding an injury to continue playing. Approximately 50% of players and coaches has witnessed other players put under pressure to play when injured.

International research perspectives from the past 20 years on sport participant and athlete development experiences and systems

- a. Crane & Temple (2015) and Balish et al. (2014) conducted systematic evidence reviews and identified the following key factors were strongly evidenced as being correlated with youth sport attrition (drop-out)
 - i. Lack of enjoyment
 - ii. Perceptions of competence
 - iii. Social pressures
 - iv. Competing priorities
 - v. Physical factors (e.g., injury, maturation.)
- b. Several systemic reviews have been conducted on early specialisation and early diversification/sampling (Carder et al., 2020; DiSanti & Erickson, 2019; Baily et al, 2010; Hecimovich, 2004) and found that early specialisation increased physiological (injury) and psycho-social burnout, drop-out) risk factors. Early diversification/sampling also supported long term talent and participant development outcomes.
- c. A summary of evidenced-based policy guidance on participant development, athlete development and talent development programmes (Till & Baker, 2020; Côté & Hancock, 2016; LaPrade et al., 2016; Côté et al, 2009; Vaeyens, 2008)), including the IOC's consensus statement on youth athletic development (Bergeron et al., 2015), positions the following:
 - i. Talent is a complex and largely misunderstood phenomenon lacking robust research evidence, and given concerns that it is potentially unhealthy, talent identification and selection at younger ages is not recommended.
 - ii. Diversification and variability of athletic exposure between and within sports should be encouraged and promoted.
 - iii. Competition formats and settings should be age and skill appropriate, while allowing for sufficient rest and recovery time between multiple same-day contests.
 - iv. Quality coaches should support participant and athlete development by providing a challenging and enjoyable sporting climate that focuses on each athlete's personal assets and mastery orientation.
 - v. Coaching practice should evidence-informed and be aligned with the context, age, stage and motivation of the young person.

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