



Erasmus+

Shaping Characters

Research into extra-curricular activities

Why do some young people choose to take part and others not?



**SHAPING
CHARACTERS**

Building resilience through
character education

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Executive summary

There has been much focus on how work ready young people are when leaving education with employers reporting that many young people do not have the skills and qualities they look for when recruiting new staff. Similarly there has been increasing attention around the place extra-curricular activities hold in preparing young people for the future.

Each of the four cities involved in the Shaping Characters project decided to undertake their own research to better understand why some of their young people choose to take part in activities outside of school and others do not.

The key points to emerge from our research were:

- The percentage of young people taking part in activities was significantly higher for the younger age group. (81% of 11 to 14 year olds against 53% of 16-18 year olds)
- Friendships are central to young people's decisions to join and remain with an activity
- Encouragement and financial support from family is important
- Sporting activities are the most widespread but some are put off by the competitiveness of sport leagues and would like to play just for fun
- Those engaged in organised activities are better able to articulate the skills they are developing than those doing things informally with friends
- The young people get enjoyment, a sense of achievement and a chance to improve their skills from their involvement in the activities
- Lack of spare time was the main reason cited for not taking part in activities

The partners in the Shaping Characters project are all committed to character education and believe that extra-curricular activities play an important role in the development of young people. Undertaking this research enabled them to better understand what motivates the young people in their town/city to get involved in activities outside of school and what barriers they may face.

Introduction

Project background

With high levels of youth unemployment across Europe and an ever more competitive labour market, young people leaving education are expected to not only have the technical skills required by employers but also to be well rounded individuals with the attitude, attributes and employability skills necessary to enter the labour market effectively.

Employers often report that young people leaving education are not work-ready and lack some of the core skills employers require for effective entry into the world of work. Furthermore, consultation with students and teachers has shown that students often find it difficult to make the connection between what they are taught and its relevance to the world of work or are unable to articulate how what they do in school and out of school gives them the essential and basic skills employers require.

Currently, employability skills and character resilience tend to be taught on an ad-hoc basis and are very often linked to specific projects. There isn't a widespread consistent approach whereby character education and employability form an integral part of teaching and where students are being equipped with the skills, attributes and behaviour that will empower them to take ownership of their own development, improve educational engagement and attainment and build their resilience when entering the world of work.

The Shaping Characters project was funded under the Erasmus + programme and explored activities which develop key traits in people under the age of 18 such as confidence, resilience, ambition and respect. During the project, partners from Gävle in Sweden, Riga in Latvia, Olomouc in the Czech Republic and Basingstoke in the UK carried out research, shared resources and looked at best practice examples. Young people from each of the four countries also came together for a week in February 2017 to test some of these resources. The project ran for 2 years from October 2015.

To find out more about the partners and the work carried out through the project visit the project website at: <http://www.shapingcharacters.eu/>

Objectives

The purpose of this research was to better understand the motivations of young people and why some are far more involved in clubs, societies, volunteering and other activities than others.

The results will be used by the partners to shape local projects and to influence where possible the design, promotion and planning of activities.

Methodology

Young people between the ages of 11 and 18 were asked a series of questions either via online or printed surveys or through focus groups. The breakdown of respondents is listed in the table below:

Basingstoke	Age range	No of respondents
The Costello School	13-15	63
Basingstoke College of Technology	16-18	10
Queen Mary's College	16-18	20
Royal air Force Cadets	13-19	18
Girlguiding	10-19	13
Gävle		
Young Enterprise	16-18	20
Sofiedalskolan - school	15-16	16
Olomouc		
Masaryk's elementary school and kindergarten in Velká Bystřice	11-14	100
Riga		
Riga Secondary School No. 64	13-18	80

Each city correlated and presented their results at the Shaping Characters transnational meeting in Riga in October 2016. The results were also shared with local partners and stakeholders in each city.

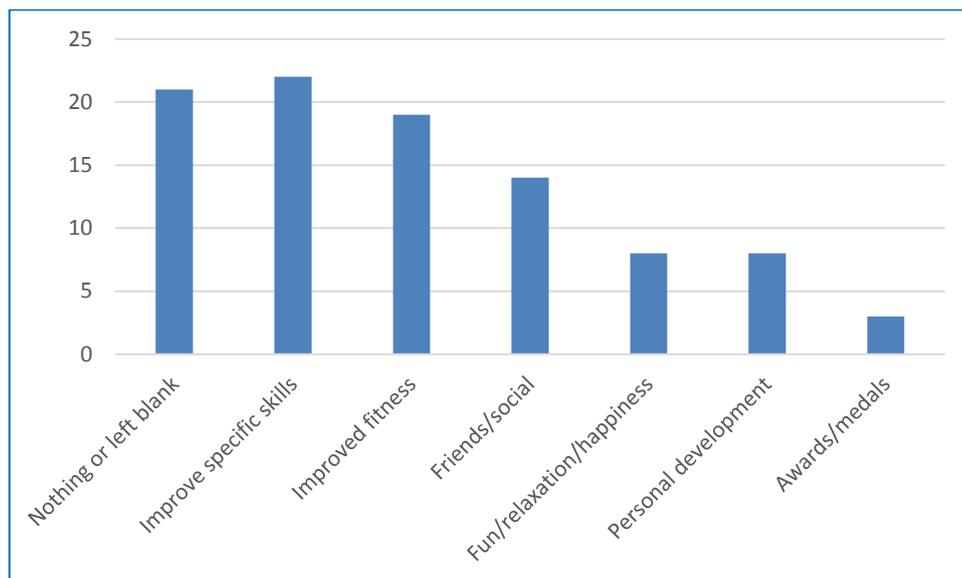
Results

The results are presented for each city individually with common themes identified in the conclusion.

Basingstoke

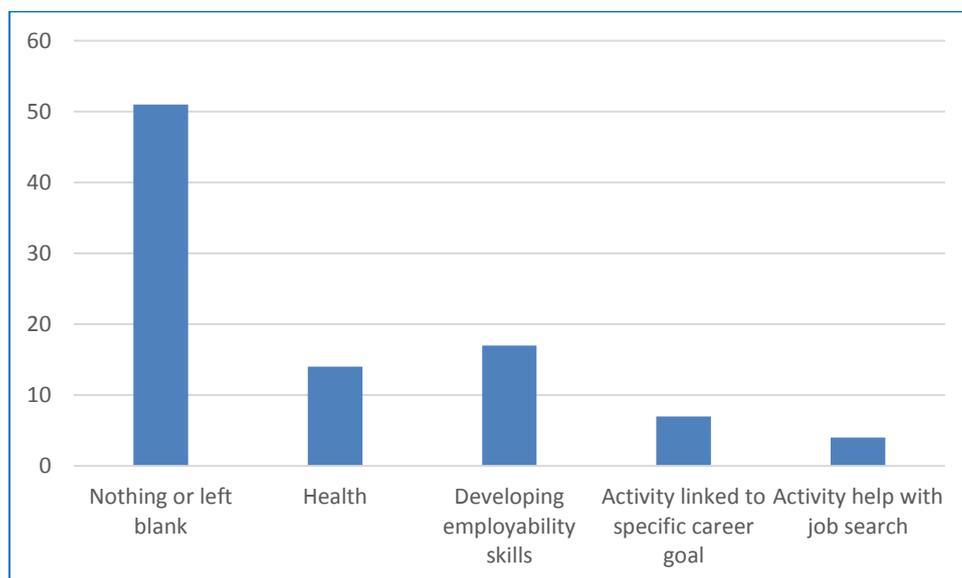
- Participation in extra-curricular activities in the 13-15 age group was higher among boys than girls (91% as against 64%)
- Participation in extra-curricular activities was higher among 13 to 15 year olds than among 16-18 year olds (74% as against 48%)
- Sporting activities were by far the most common, particularly football, with dance being the second most popular.
- The most common reason for joining an activity was enjoyment and an interest in the particular activity, followed by influence from friends or family. This was replicated in the reasons for staying with an activity.
- 68% of young people answered 'Yes' when asked '*do you think belonging to clubs, doing organised activities or volunteering could help you get into college or get a job?*'
- 62% who answered 'Yes' to the above question also answered 'Yes' when asked '*is this important to you*'.
- When asked what organisers could do to encourage young people to join, the most common response was 'don't know', followed by advertising via posters, the internet and through school assemblies and selling the benefits of joining. Other suggestions included taster sessions, offer a wider variety, make it fun and provide free travel.

What do you get from doing this activity?



Under ‘improve specific skills’ we grouped all answers that related to developing skills in that activity, such as getting better at football or an instrument. Under personal development we grouped together answers such as increased self-confidence, perseverance, discipline, team-work and leadership skills.

In what way will this activity help you in later life?



“It does look good on my CV and helped me get my job”, “made me realise I can do it!”

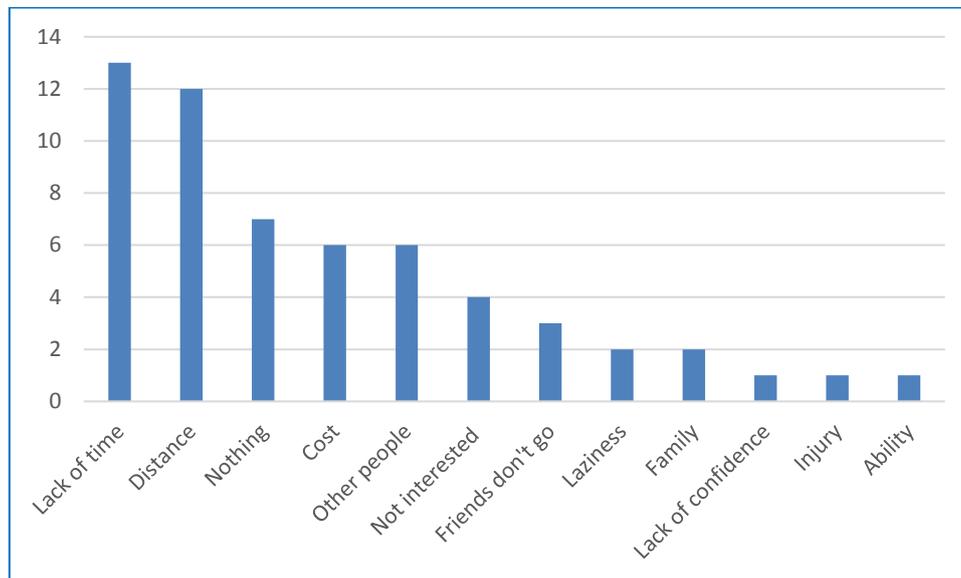
“I didn’t realise how much it had helped me till I went on work experience!”

“It has taught me how to focus for long periods of time and determination even when things get tough!”

In both age groups the majority of young people did feel the activity would help them in later life but many were unable to articulate in what way. We did notice however that those involved in activities through Royal Air Force Cadets and Guiding groups were more skilled at articulating the skills they

were developing and felt this was because these organisations are explicit in relating the activities they lead to the skills they develop.

What would stop you joining a club or organised activity?



Lack of time due to homework or, among the older age group part time work, featured strongly in the responses as did the distance they would have to travel to attend. Within 'other people' we grouped comments related to not liking the other members or teachers/instructors as well as those relating to fear of being teased by peers. This came out further in a focus group session, particularly in relation to boys wanting to do activities considered to be for girls such as dance.

Gávle

- The most common activities were sport related, with some of the young people taking leader roles. There were also some who were involved in volunteering.
- The main reasons for joining activities were influence from friends and family, enjoyment and to improve fitness. These were also the main reasons for remaining with the activity.
- The majority did feel that their extra-curricular activities would help them in later life:

*"In my social life and my health", "I learn to cooperate with different people", "Social skills"
"Work experience", "It helps me concentrate in school"*

"I've learned so much through gymnastics, especially since I became an instructor. I've learned to talk in front of large groups, and to take both responsibility and initiative."

"I get to learn how things work in "real life" and get a lot of advice from people with more experience."

- To be able to participate they need financial support from their parents to buy uniform and equipment and with transport to and from activities but some also mentioned encouragement from family as being important.
- The main reasons cited for not taking part were lack of interest, lack of variety in activities offered at school and lack of time.
- Having to take part in competitions and having too much homework were also given as reasons for not joining activities or for leaving clubs.
- Those who do not participate were however well aware that participating could be something that would benefit them in the future.

"If my future is at stake, I would do it, but I'd rather not!"

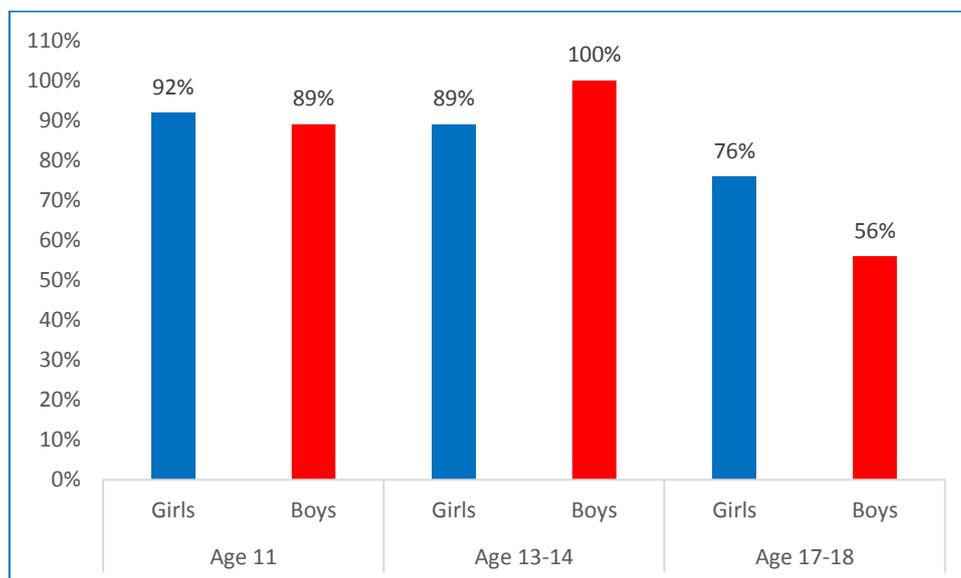
Olomouc

- 74% of the respondents do take part in extra-curricular activities
- Sporting and dancing activities were the most popular
- The most common reason for joining an activity was interest (52%), with influence from parents the second most common (18%) and influence from friends the third (15%). 87% said they stayed with the activity because they enjoy it.
- When asked *'What do you get from this activity'*, the majority (63%) replied in terms of improving their skills in the particular activity with 23% saying they formed friendships through the activities.
- 48% of young people answered 'Yes' when asked *'do you think belonging to clubs, doing organised activities or volunteering could help you get into college or get a job?'*
- When asked *'In what way?'* they talked about health benefits, gaining access to a particular career (e.g. volunteer fireman) and that it could improve their earnings in later life.
- Things that would stop them joining an activity included:

'Bad trainer', 'I wouldn't be good at it', 'Bad people', 'Money', 'Regular attendance' 'bad teammates'

Riga

Do you take part in organised after school or weekend activities?



- Participation in activities is high for both sexes but dropped among the older age group surveyed, most significantly among boys.
- Sporting activities were the most popular, followed by dance and art. Language classes and seminars also featured among the older age groups.
- The most common reasons for joining an activity were influence from parents and friends and because it was something they were interested in. They stay because they enjoy it, have made friends through the activity and it keeps them fit and healthy.
- When asked *'What do you get from this activity'*, responses included knowledge, experience, skills, happiness, self-confidence and health. The older respondents also said the activities helped them develop team-working skills,
- The majority answered 'Yes' when asked *'do you think belonging to clubs, doing organised activities or volunteering could help you get into college or get a job?'*
- To take part in the activity they need financial support from their parents and to enjoy the activity completely, they needed good friends.
- Those who do not take part in extra-curricular activities say this is because they do not have enough time with school and homework.

Conclusion

The single most influential factor across the 4 cities in why young people joined clubs or projects was their friends. The friends they made through the activities were the main reason they stayed and not liking the other people was cited as a reason for leaving or deciding not to join a club. For one young person, negative comments from peers had stopped them taking part in an activity they had loved.

While not unexpected, the fact that influence from peers is so important should perhaps be given greater consideration when trying to engage young people whose peer networks do not usually take part in youth activities.

Parents and other family members were also key in encouraging our respondents to start activities, particularly those started when younger and in supporting them to continue via financial support for equipment and transport to activities. Not all young people however have family networks able to support them in this way and our research showed that free activities, delivered after school on school premises are an effective way of enabling more young people to take part.

Our research also suggests there is an opportunity to support young people in establishing their own informal sports or arts based clubs that are not exam or competition based but can still offer them character building opportunities and the chance to improve their skills in areas they are interested in.

Many youth organisations have clear purpose with regards developing young people's character and where this is explicitly communicated the young people articulate this well and can see how this will help them in later life. Our research suggests we could help young people who organise outings with friends, play in bands, play sport informally to see, and be able to articulate, how they are developing similar skills.

Finally, academic success is very important to many of the young people we spoke to in all the cities and some saw other activities as time wasted if not spent studying. A wider awareness of studies showing a link between participation in non-formal learning activities and improvement in attainment could help young people and educators better understand the value of these activities.