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Attracting and Retaining Female Participants

This factsheet is one of a series produced by sports coach UK and Women in Sport aimed at sports deliverers and sports coaches who work with women in informal sports settings. These factsheets provide insight into the informal female participant and her needs, and provide guidance on the type of environment and coaching style she needs in order to be attracted to, and retained in, informal sport.

In particular, this factsheet is relevant to people responsible for the delivery of informal sport (coaches, leaders, coordinators etc – referred to as 'coach').

The information contained in this factsheet was obtained by an independent research agency who interviewed over 40 women and 11 coaches from across the country who participate in Run England, No Strings Badminton or Just Play football. The sports were selected to be representative of individual, racquet and team sports.

While we aim to provide advice and guidance, we are cautious about making generalisations, and it is for you, the coach and sports deliverer, to contextualise the following information to your own settings. Also, remember that your participants are individuals. What appears in the information below will not be representative of all female participants but is a generalisation based on research carried out. This information is for guidance only.



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How to attract new female participants to your sessions

- **Advertise the sessions to the right people:**

- Do you know who you would like to attract to your session?
- Are you attracting new participants, those returning to your sport, or both?
- What venue and time of session will best suit your participants' lifestyle?
- Your coaches/coordinators should have an awareness of progression opportunities, should your participants wish to pursue these.

- **Advertise the sessions in different formats and locations:**

- Try getting your information included on your participants' local council, leisure centre or community group website – many are free to advertise on.
- Think about the keywords people might search for when trying to find your session, and include these in your title and session description; for example, 'badminton in Leeds'.
- Create posters with images that reflect the participants you are trying to attract. Include information on session date, time, place and postcode, as well as dress code and cost. Provide your name and contact details for people to get in touch if they have any queries. Your governing body of sport may have a poster template you could use.
- Avoid using jargon and emphasise the social aspects of your session.
- Encourage your existing participants to invite their friends or to tell their work colleagues about your sessions.
- Share your session times with other local coaches/coordinators and ensure participants are made aware of other sessions that are being run if the timings of these are more suitable.

- **Create the right environment:**

- Local facilities are preferred by new participants, rather than impressive sports facilities. Try having your session at the local church or village hall, or school sports hall. Check to see if there is ample parking or if it has public transport links.
- The social side of your session will be, for many participants, one of the main reasons for attending. Try to create time for socialising among your participants and remember to take part in the social side yourself.
- Using social media is a helpful way for you and your participants to keep in touch outside of timetabled sessions. It also helps participants who have missed a week to still feel part of the group, making it easier for them to return to your session.
- Cost your sessions so they are affordable for participants and considered good value for money. Adopt a pay-and-play method for paying and have change available, and a set system for when participants are to pay for the session.



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The role of the coach/coordinator

The role of the coach/coordinator in sessions is critical to participants' enjoyment. Many participants new to sport want their coach/coordinator to organise, coordinate and facilitate the sessions and games, as well as being able to provide advice, hints and tips when asked.

As a coach/coordinator you should be able to:

- get to know the people who attend your sessions as individuals, including their personal goals for attending
- facilitate a social environment both within and between sessions; coaches/coordinators need to understand that sport sessions are a social event for many participants – not everyone who attends your sessions wants to take part in competitive games; some people just want to play in a fun, friendly and safe environment
- understand what advice to give if asked about injury support, or know where you can signpost to for further expert advice
- introduce those participants who want to access more than an informal session to a more organised setting, knowing what other clubs exist in and around the area.



For further information, refer to the 'Women and Informal Sports Participation' factsheet.

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