



# **RESPONSE TO THE SPORT ENGLAND ACTIVE LIVES SURVEY**

## How can the BDSA get more people dancing?

Some of you may be familiar with Sport England’s annual Active Lives survey. This annual publication gives details of adult and young people’s participation in different sports across England. The results can be analysed against a range of criteria to understand the different factors influencing participation in sports, positively or negatively.

The most recent Active Lives survey data was published in Summer 2024. The data covers a 12-month period from November 2022 to 2023. What’s the headline news for dance and how can the BDSA use this data to get more people in the UK dancing?

## Data From the Active Lives Survey

### Participation is rising, but progress is slow

The good news that was demonstrated by the Active Lives survey is there has been a slight increase in the number of people attending dance-based classes in 2022/23. 5.6% of adults (aged 16 and over) attended at least one dance-based class during that time. This equates to 2,625,700 people overall. However, the increase is small and participation has remained stubbornly static over the past 3 years as the following table shows.

	November 22-23	November 21-22	November 20-21
Percentage %	5.6%	5.2%	5.3%
Number	2,625,700	2,412,700	2,402,500

Adults (16+) participating in dance-based class in past 12 months

There is still a long way to go to hit the dizzy pre-pandemic heights when participation was at 7.1%, or the high point of 7.6% way back in 2015/16 when the Active Lives survey began. Our sport is still playing catch-up to get more people regularly attending dance classes again. If the current slow and steady trend continues, it will take at least another two years to get back to the 7% level of participation.

## Fewer young people are dancing in school

Under 16s are also represented in the Active Lives survey. Participation is calculated for those attending dance classes either in or out of school, one or more times per week. Unfortunately, both are shown to be on a slight downward trend since the pandemic. Out-of-school participation is higher than in-school attendance at dance classes. This may be due to having more choice of dance styles and availability of teaching at private classes in dance studios compared to the more limited opportunities in the school PE curriculum.

	November 22-23	November 21-22	November 20-21
Percentage %	20.7%	21.7%	24.1%

Young people participating in dance in school, 1 or more times per week

	November 22-23	November 21-22	November 20-21
Percentage %	27.1%	28.1%	30.3%

Young people participating in dance out of school, 1 or more times per week

In-school dance class participation averaged 19.9% from 2017/18 to 2019/20. The participation level is slightly higher than the average now. Out of school participation averaged 26% over the same period. Again, current figures demonstrated by the survey are on a par with the pre-pandemic average. The drop-off in young people’s participation is less acute than for adults. But there is clearly work to do to level up participation between schools and private dance studios.

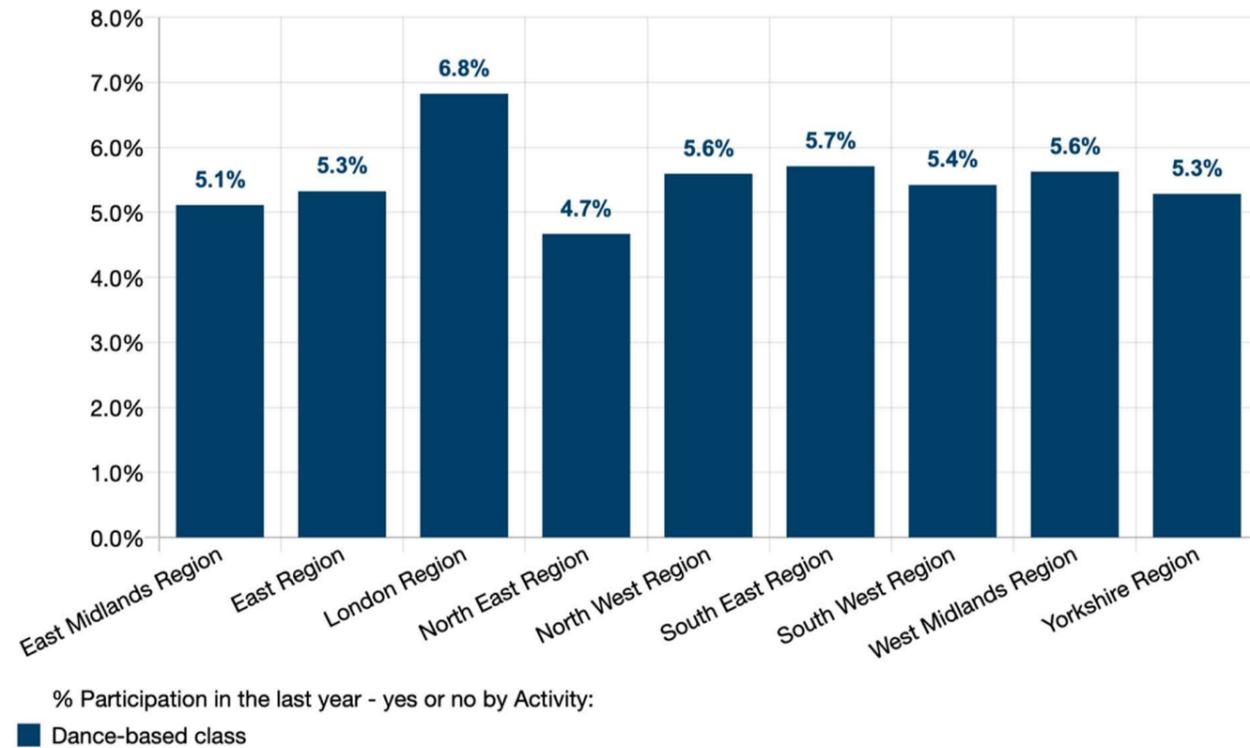
## Inclusive? Equal? Diverse?

What does the picture look like for dance taking different locations, ages groups, socio-economic background, gender, and sexuality into consideration?

### Regional Variations

- Most English regions perform close to overall 5.6% participation rate
- London has the highest rate (6.8%), North-East region the lowest (4.7%)

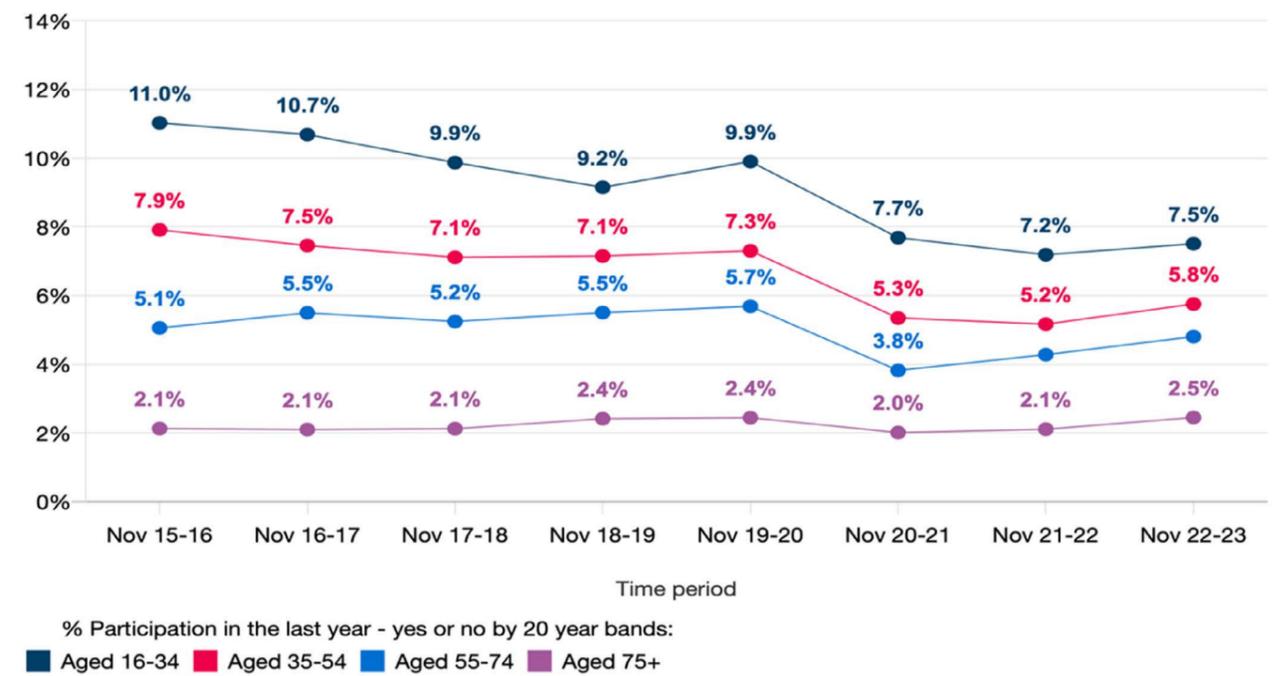
Participation in the last year - yes or no: Participated in the last year by activity Region



### Differences between age groups

- Participation highest amongst younger age groups
- 7.5% of 16–34-year-olds attended dance class last year
- Rate is 5.8% for 35-54 age category and 5.6% for 55-74
- Static participation for over 75s since 2015/16
- Highest drop off rate for young people after pandemic
- Participation gap between age categories has closed

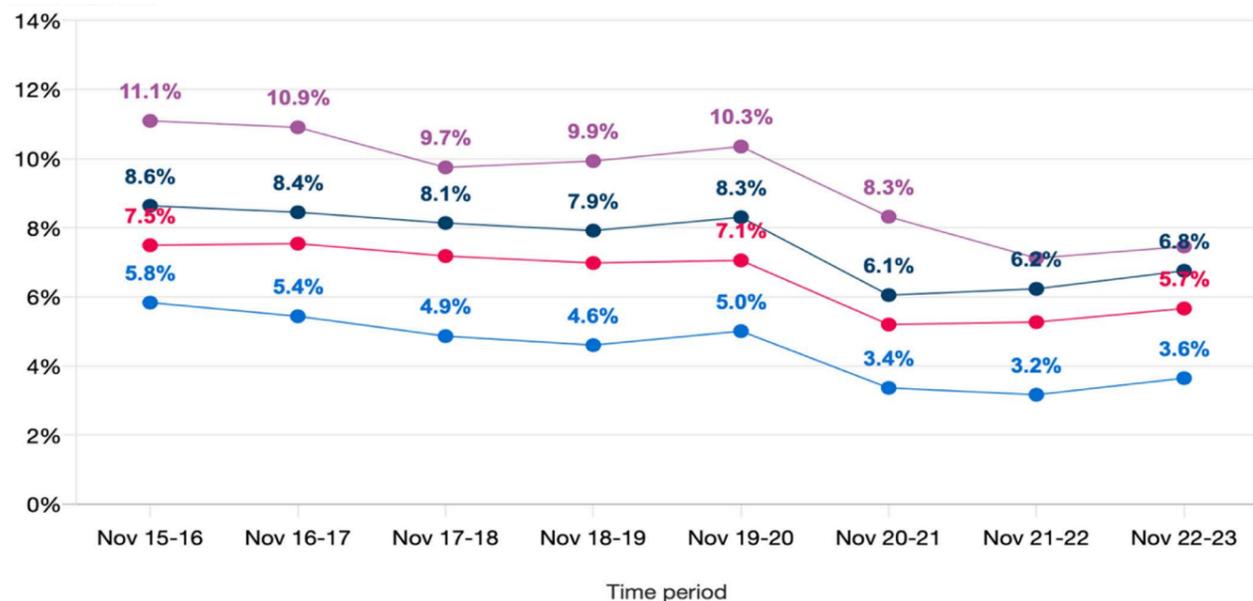
Participation in the last year - yes or no: Participated in the last year by activity - Age Dance-based class



### Impact of socio-economic circumstances

- Clear disparities between different socio-economic groups
- Full-time students are most active participants
- Higher and middle socio-economic categories both on par with average participation rate
- Lower socio-economic groups significantly under-represented
- Higher levels of engagement from higher socio-economic categories
- Most deprived decile has lowest participation rate
- Middle deciles matching the overall adult participation rate

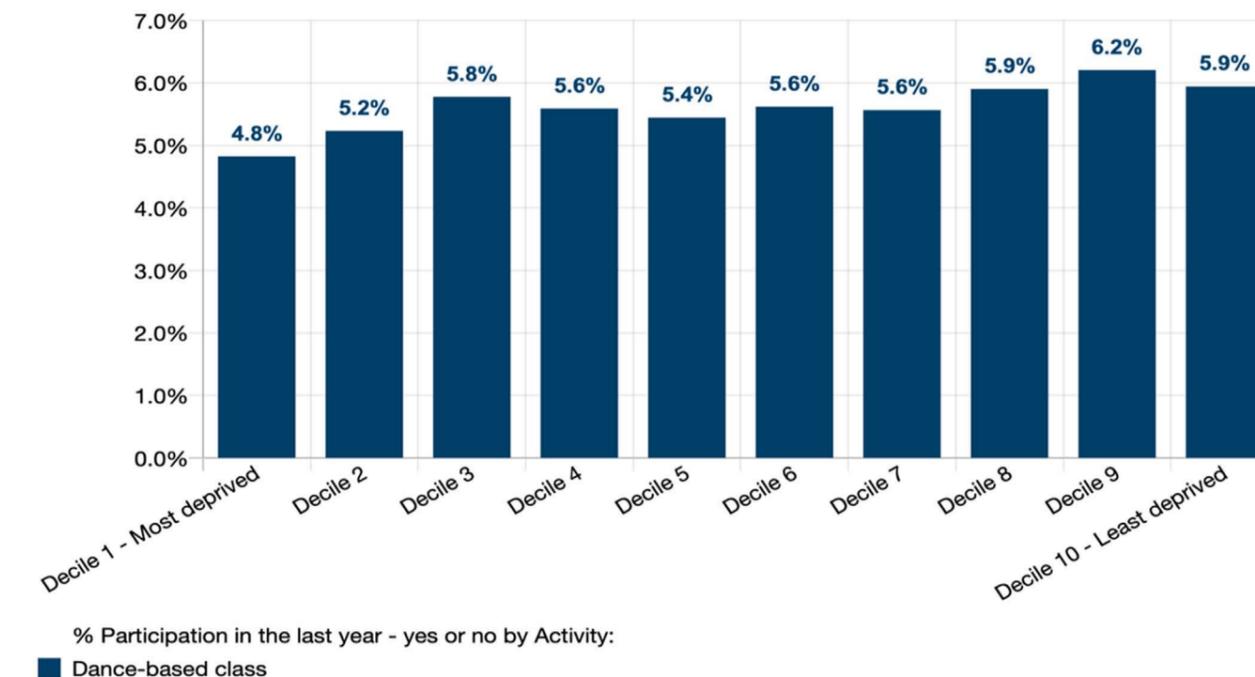
Participation in the last year - yes or no: Participated in the last year by activity - Social status Dance-based class



% Participation in the last year - yes or no by Summary groups:  
 ■ NS SEC 1-2 (higher) ■ NS SEC 3-5 (middle) ■ NS SEC 6-8 (lower) ■ NS SEC 9 (students and other)

### Impact of deprivation

Participation in the last year - yes or no: Participated in the last year by activity - Indices of multiple deprivation



% Participation in the last year - yes or no by Activity:  
 ■ Dance-based class

### The gender dance gap

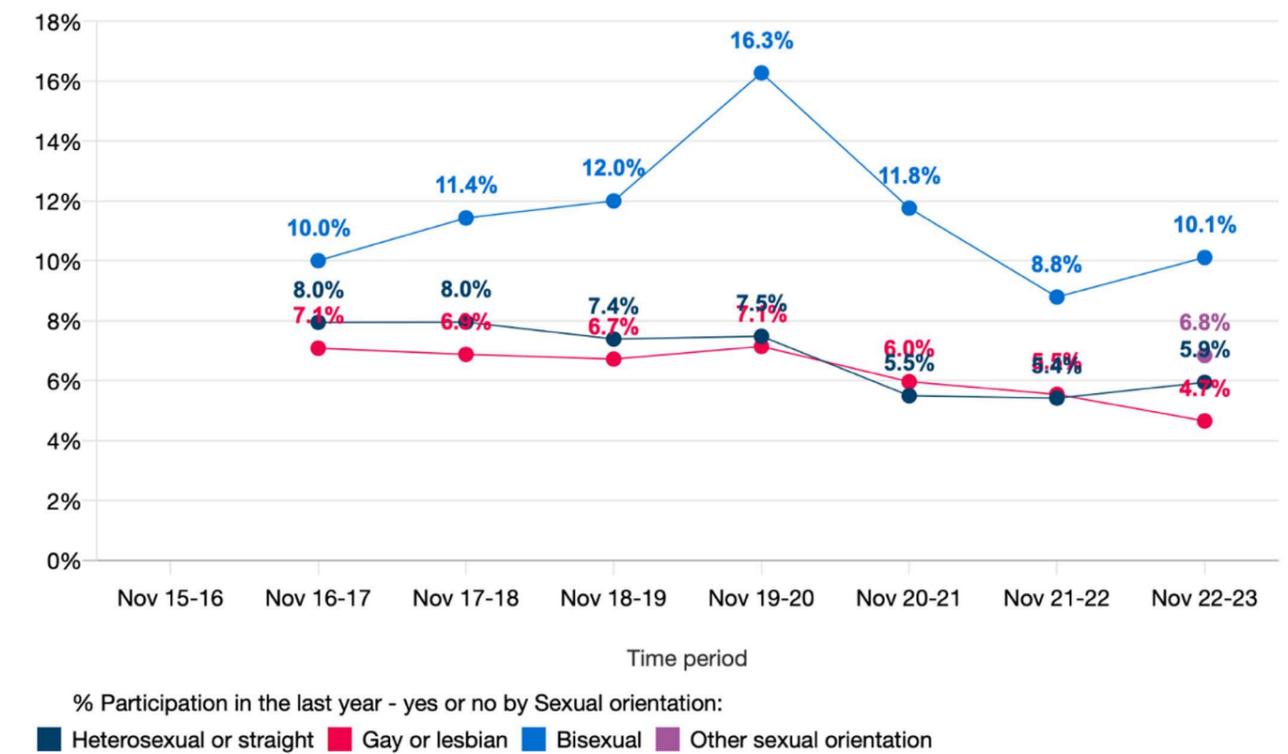
- Significant gap between male and female participation in dance-based classes
- Male participation rate 1.2% compared to 9.9% for females in past year
- Gap closed slightly in years since pandemic
- Female participation dropped from 13.4% high, remains below 10% for past 3 years
- Transgender participation; new category in 2022/23 survey with rate of 5.5%
- ‘Other’ gender category accounts for 5.3% of participation, 3% lower than pre-pandemic

Gender	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23
Female	13.4%	13.0%	12.1%	12.0%	12.6%	9.2%	9.1%	9.9%
Male	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.4%	1.5%	1.1%	1.1%	1.2%
Other	-	-	-	-	8.3%	6.4%	5.3%	5.3%
Transgender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.5%

### Strong representation from bisexual dancers

- Highest representation from bisexual participants which is considerably more than other categories
- Bisexual group accounted for 10.1% of participation in 2022/23
- This compared to 6.8% (other), 5.9% (heterosexual/straight) and 4.7% (gay or lesbian)

Participation in the last year - yes or no: Participated in the last year by activity - Sexual Orientation dance-based class



### Mixed performance on ethnic representation

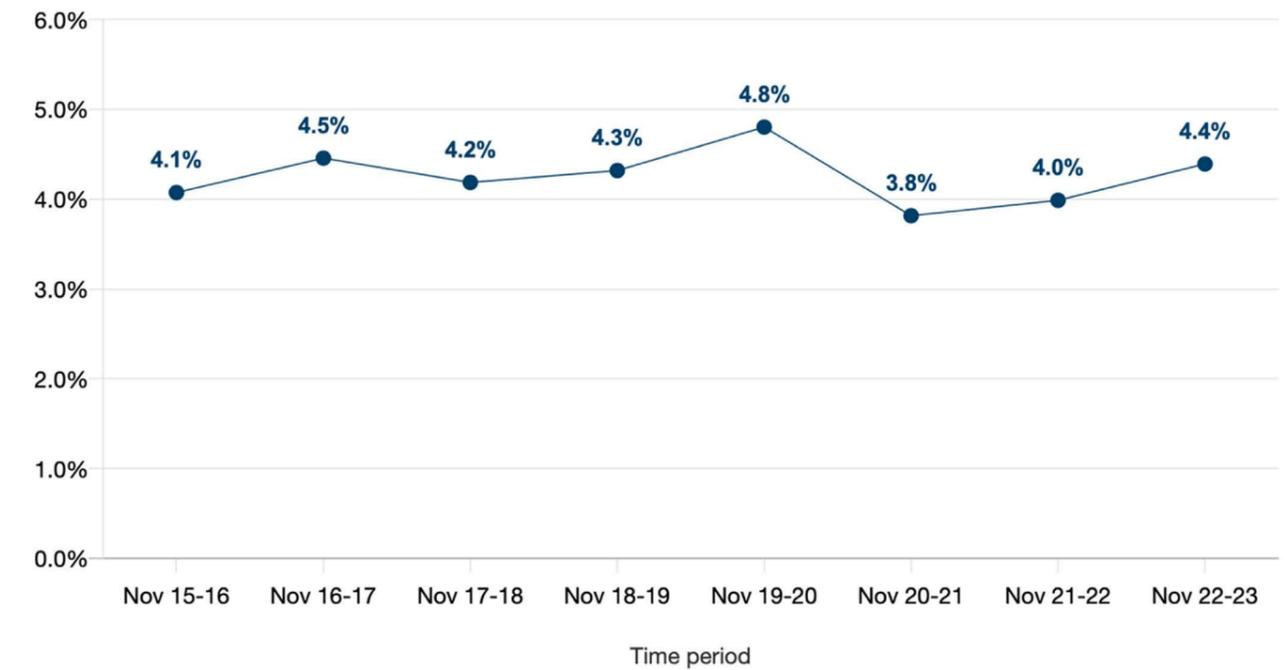
- Mixed race, Black and Chinese ethnic groups have highest representation at 9.9%, 7.7% and 6.9% respectively
- Asian groups (excluding Chinese participants) have lowest rate at 4.8%
- White British participation has dropped by 1.7% since 2015/16; White Other category also 3% down over this time frame
- Just over 4% decrease in representation from other ethnic groups

Gender	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23
White British	7.2%	7.1%	6.6%	6.6%	6.9%	4.9%	5.0%	5.5%
White Other	9.6%	8.7%	8.7%	8.2%	8.1%	6.4%	6.9%	6.6%
Asian (excluding Chinese)	7.6%	7.6%	6.3%	5.8%	6.4%	4.9%	4.4%	4.8%
Black	12.8%	11.2%	11.1%	11.1%	11.6%	10.2%	8.6%	7.7%
Chinese	6.6%	6.7%	8.2%	8.4%	7.6%	6.0%	6.2%	6.9%
Mixed	11.4%	10.0%	12.4%	11.5%	11.4%	9.8%	7.6%	9.9%
Other ethnic origin	10.6%	9.1%	7.6%	7.4%	8.2%	7.5%	5.2%	6.3%

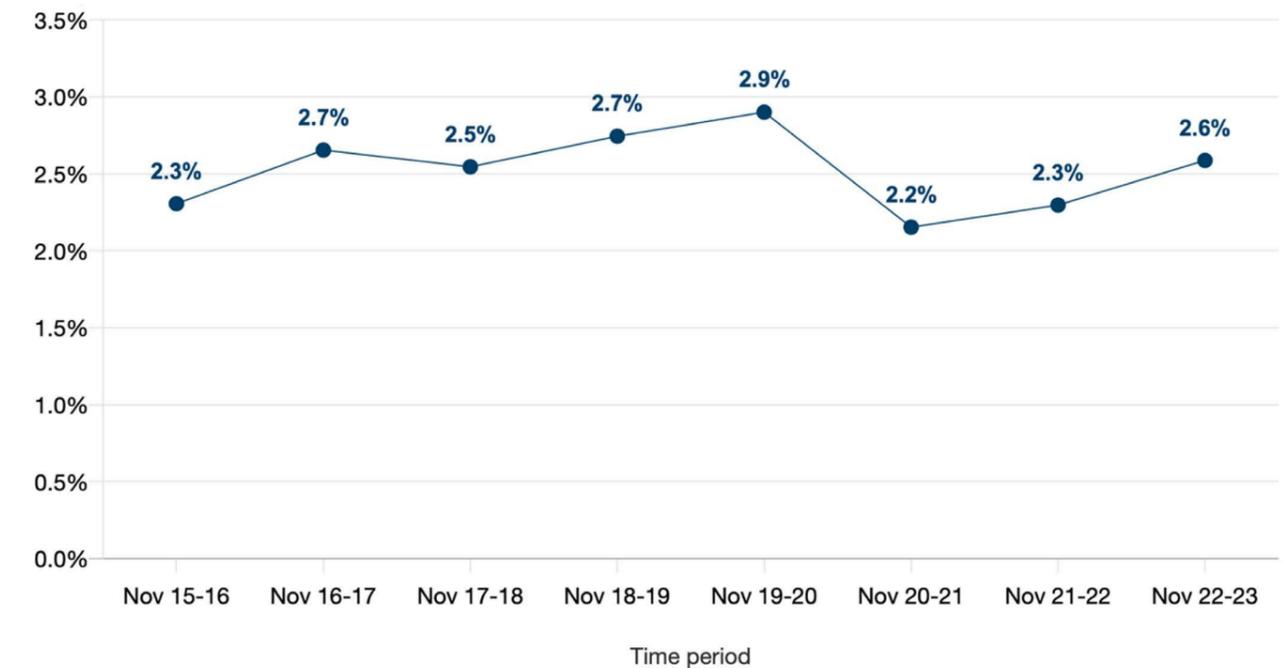
### Dancing with disabilities

- Participation by people with disability or long-term health condition averaged 4.3% over 8 years
- 2022/23 saw a 4.4% rate, 0.4% rise on previous year
- People with mobility issues account for 2.6% of participation
- Both rates sit well below the 5.6% overall participation rate for adults

Participation in the last year - yes or no: Participated in the last year by activity - Disability or long-term health condition.



Participation in the last year - yes or no: Participated in the last year by activity - Disability Mobility



% Participation in the last year - yes or no by Activity:  
■ Dance-based class

## What does this mean for the BDSA?

As the governing body for Ballroom and Latin American dancing, we have a responsibility to increase participation in dance. Making the sport safer, more inclusive with diverse, fair, and equal representation for all our members is our core purpose.

We see the results and trends from Sport England's Active Lives survey as a real opportunity to focus our work on the actions that can help push participation levels upwards across all demographics and return to the higher attendance rates before the pandemic.

It's clear we need to address the disparities associated with deprivation and socio-economic circumstances. This is something many sports are struggling with. Some are introducing fantastic initiatives to combat this. The BDSA wants to learn from others whilst also creating its own ground-breaking approach to tackling affordability. This is one of the things we are actively talking to other National Governing Bodies about. We are all too aware that participating in dance can be an expensive business, particularly for competitions. Our partnership with [All Nations Dance](#) is one of the ways we are looking to make dance a more affordable sport. All Nations bring a fresh perspective on costume requirements, for example, which are less prescriptive than those expected for traditional Ballroom and Latin competitions, making their dance competitions more affordable and accessible to everyone. Another initiative introduced to try and eliminate some of the costs with dance competitions is the BDSA's [Admittance to Events Policy](#), which gives free spectator tickets to parents or guardians of children competing at our events. We've also been working hard to secure discounts on a whole range of goods and services for our members to enjoy. These are small but important steps towards making our sport more affordable.

The survey shows there are major barriers to participating in dance for people with disabilities. That's why we have appointed [Rebecca Fowler](#) and [James Ireland](#) as BDSA Athlete Representatives. They will be advising us on ways to reduce those barriers through improving facilities, teaching standards and competition structures for wheelchair dancers. We're also committed to including para-dance categories in all our competitions. The BDSA, with the help of Rebecca and James will continuously strive to improve all aspects of dance for wheelchair dancers, to encourage more people with disabilities to participate in dance.

Active Lives paints a bleak picture regarding the number of males attending dance-based classes. 1.2% is an extremely low participation rate. This may not be reflective of the number of male dancers engaged in Ballroom and Latin dancing. We have been seeing good engagement from young boys at dance schools in all parts of the UK. Even so, we are mindful that dance sport must be open and welcoming to all genders. For example, our [Trans Inclusion Policy](#) sets out clear guidelines to encourage and protect trans participation in our sport. Our [Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Policy](#) (DEI) also provides an over-arching framework to create a dance community where individuals of all backgrounds feel welcome, respected, safe and valued.

The survey showed a high level of participation for bisexual dancers when compared with gay or lesbian participants. Again, our DEI Policy focuses on supporting dancers of all sexualities. We are also working with new

BDSA member, [Equality Dance](#), to explore ideas for boosting participation levels. Their 'open couple' competition category is a great example of increasing opportunities for all sexual orientations.

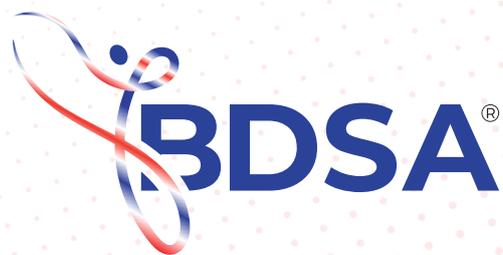
Fewer young people accessing dance lessons in school is concerning. As a governing body, we want to see more dance on the PE curriculum. Having more young people exposed to the health benefits of dance at an early age is a vital starting point for increasing participation throughout their lives and across all demographics of children. As a governing body, we are committed to creating different pathways to enjoy dance from grassroots to professional level. Having dance on the school curriculum is a crucial component of developing these pathways.

Our action to get more people participating in dance sport will help bolster UK government efforts to create a healthier society. With high levels of physical inactivity amongst adults, young people and children in the UK, rising obesity levels and the least affluent being the least active, there is a huge challenge ahead to address this and help reduce the enormous strain on the NHS. With huge challenges, lies great opportunity to tackle inequality, prevent ill health and create economic and community benefits.

## How can our members help?

Improving participation in dance depends on your support. Working together, we can focus our attention on initiatives that target specific groups who are under-represented in our sport. There are many ways we can do this through our membership. Running special events is one way to attract new interest in dance however we need to create sustainability. To do this we need to work together to be inclusive and be progressive. We need to create safe spaces for people of diverse backgrounds to be included. We need to create opportunities for people to come to dance, see opportunities to stay and have an effective pathway to dance available. We are always open to hearing from dance schools and all our members about any initiatives you have got up and running to boost participation. Please get in touch if you'd like to be a case study for our newsletter.

The [Active Lives Survey](#) shows us there's lots to do. We are ready and eager to play our part.



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