



Table Tennis England and TASS research project

The experiences of social to elite level female table tennis players in the English system in the 18-30 age group.

 tabletennisengland.co.uk

tass 

SUPPORTED BY



SPORT
ENGLAND

LOTTERY FUNDED



Table Tennis England and TASS recently collaborated on a research project exploring the experiences of social to elite level female players in the English system in the 18-30 age group.

This included specifically looking at why female players in this age group engage in the sport and what leads them to have long lasting positive experiences. TASS also outlined the reasons behind why female players in this age group drop out of the sport, and what would help with their re-engagement.

TASS also provided recommendations developed based on the outcomes of the research that could help improve experience and reduce the dropout rates for female players. The report has detailed qualitative and quantitative results which was collected in two parts - via survey and focus groups.

The recommendations have a mix of suggestions from the performance pathway to the first entry point of a young player. Some of these are already happening or about to be launched by Table Tennis England, some are around better communications and clarity via our website and news articles and some will require some longer-term planning or research.

The TASS research highlights issues in the sport that if are not resolved, will result in more and more females being lost in the game. Although this report is focused on women aged 18-30 and their unique experience in the sport, many of the issues raised could easily be applied across a wide age range of communities and different underrepresented groups.

Table Tennis England are working hard to address these inequalities, aiming to make table tennis a sport for all. However, to make a real impact and long-lasting change- we need the support of our members, clubs, leagues and volunteers to be part of the solution. The positive findings of the report show that 81% of the participants would return to the game if there was the right playing opportunity for them.

Players who are still in the sport also reported interest in becoming involved in other areas such as coaching, creating other opportunities to stay engaged than just playing.

As well as the recommendations, the research outlines some opportunities to embed into our current work areas and programmes. An example of this is the high number of females that were introduced into the game by a male family member. This is a key opportunity for the clubs delivering the TT Kidz programme to promote to existing male members within their clubs.

The table following shows a response from Table Tennis England to the report, detailing how the recommendations currently fit into the sports priorities. Increasing female participation is a key priority for the sport going forward and more detail about the 'how' and 'what success will look like', will be included in the Diversity and Inclusion strategy which is due to launch in September 2021. There will also be more details and key actions in the competition review and a coaching and education strategy.



Rec	TASS recommendation	Key priority area - short term (within next 6 months)	Key Priority area - long term (6 months and beyond)	Area needs more research/time to review	Potential future focus area
1	Provide more opportunities for female players to provide regular feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching and Education - implement feedback from surveys/coaching community • Marcomms - create specific W&G case studies to share good practise from the TT community • Marcomms - continue to collect feedback on female specific questions, use more polls on website and social media and promote these opportunities widely. • Performance - players have regular 121s with coaches where feedback can be given. • Performance - next season, all players leaving the pathway will have exit interviews, providing a feedback opportunity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching and Education - implement feedback from surveys/coaching community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future research projects on different age group opportunities to collect feedback and insight 	

2	Develop a forum for female players to voice their concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Across the Diversity and Inclusion work, there is an ongoing review on how to support process of reporting of discriminatory behaviour. This will raise wider awareness around language and emphasise there is no place for this in sport. • Participation - develop support and education for clubs, leagues and welfare officers to raise awareness around the process of reporting discriminatory behaviour 			
3	Opportunity to use the expertise of the 18-30 group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation - Female Ambassador programme to re-launch with more structure. An opportunity to directly engage with the 18-30 age group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance - in the future there are plans to have female only camps. This will give the opportunity for mentoring between players. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance - review the role of ex players who want to support younger players in the pathway • Performance - presence of a wellbeing officer to support sharing expertise of this age group 	
10	Develop a network for females	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation- an online community is being planned to launch in 2021 to build a female only network which will be open to all women and girls in the sport. This will provide an opportunity to share expertise and also for teams/individuals to recruit more players for events/competitions. 			

4	Develop a programme for experienced female players to mentor young aspiring females	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online community and Ambassador network (see above) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance - review in to potential of linking different age players together. Online community and female only camps could be platform for this. 	
6	Increase and adapt the competitive offer for female players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans for the TT Fast Format League to be utilised for individual Universities to run their own competitive frameworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review kit regulations for competitions and undertake research and consultation to see changes at domestic and international level • Participation - ensure clubs and leagues are aware of kit choices available for female players and how to make it more inclusive for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events/Competition: topics to be discussed as part of the national competition review 	

7	Development of more female only Table Tennis camps for all levels		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching and education/Performance: coaches who are going through the L3 qualification to be able to shadow top level coaches at England camps to build their experience and exposure • Performance - 2 W&G only camps next season which may increase if budget and calendar allow. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More research in this area needed to scope out how this could work at all levels • Potential to tie in with the University research and social playing opportunities
8	Support for High level players undertaking Key transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop clear processes and promotion of how to become involved in other areas of the sport, such as coaching or officiating • Performance- Development of a pathway handbook to support this transition period. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research into this area and the role Universities could play 	
9	Develop more age group female squads		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance - priority is to focus on building up the number of younger athletes in the pathway. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance- Development of an initiative to engage more female players at the start of the pathway is being looked into 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance - currently only a small number of girls are within the pathway and within limited resource it is not feasible to have specific female only squads

12	Update on guidance documents for female players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events/Competitions: provide more visible guidance on competition pathway on new TTE website • Performance - development of a pathway handbook to support this transition period. 			
13	Coach education around W&G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review previous coaching bursary and possibility of having funding available in the future. • Online community mentioned above, being open to coaches. • Ambassador programme and W&G case studies to promote coaches in the game and their role in the sport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching and education – Review future CPD opportunities to support coaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insight guide to cover content supporting coaches • How to engage a wider diversity of women into coaching 	

Do more to get female players involved with coaching and other areas of the sport

- Coaching and Education/Participation – Review bursary opportunities and encourage being part of the online community. Also continue promoting other roles than just playing at an earlier age e.g. TT Kidz encourages children to get involved in other ways than just playing and can engage younger activators as volunteers.

- Coaching and Education/Participation – Review the opportunity to deliver female only and female led coaching courses

- Participation - reviewing women in key committee/volunteering roles and understanding barriers for other women.
- Training and Education around committee roles and ensuring they are accessible and inclusive
- Reviewing language used across Table Tennis to ensure its inclusive and not gender specific
- Review the marketing and promotion of coaching courses
- Opportunity to upskill female players in the performance pathway
- Use programmes such as TT Kidz to target juniors into volunteering/coaching

5 & 8	<p>To build, promote and support more university pathways.</p> <p>Could TTE offer more support for high level players undertaking key transitions?</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review needed across all areas of university provision to understand the potential engagement and growth opportunities. These include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of TT Fast Formats University Leagues • Social offer • Supporting better club and university links to share facilities and coaches. • Guidance on Universities with strong performance set ups for aspiring players including scholarship information 	
11	<p>Promote the game at an earlier age</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation - TT Kidz is our flagship 7-11 programme to engage more juniors into the game. • Participation - funding support to run girls only sessions • Participation - build on the existing guidelines and support for clubs and leagues on creating good customer experiences for women and girls • Participation - work closely with partners to engage new audiences into the sport 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to have "fun zones" at events to promote the sport • Opportunities for family ticket offers • Review into how to make TT Kidz and other junior programmes inclusive and accessible 	

14	Development and promotion of female only/adult only club and league sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation - support clubs to develop more girls only/women only sessions and guidance on promoting these sessions to the wider community • Marcomms - W&G specific promotional posters • Collection of insight to share good practise with clubs/leagues/volunteers/coaches 			
15	Promote the stories and achievements in female players both in and out of Table Tennis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including female only editions of the Over the Net newsletter, spotlighting women and girls in the sport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marcomms - capturing and promotion of more imagery of women and girls to be used on the website, promotional material etc • Build profiles of and hear more from female performance athletes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of national campaigns to elevate the women and girls involved in table tennis • Diversity and inclusion/W&G brand guidelines 	

Points of accuracy

The feedback from the TASS research highlighted a few areas which require clarification around accuracy. These are listed below:

Events

1. Slide19 – all national events listed are played on a single-gender basis in singles matches, except SBL (and, sometimes, NCL/NJL) which is mixed gender
2. Slide24 – *“It was recognised that the U21 event used to exist within the grand prix circuit”* – this event remains part of the Grands Prix
3. Slide48 – *“The Grand Prix, you could literally play your group, get knocked out and you're on your way home and you paid 90 quid or whatever it is”* – a player entering the maximum number of events (four) would pay a total of £70, and typically be guaranteed a minimum of 11 games.