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# Schools' engagement with the Get Set London 2012 Olympic education programme: Empirical insights from schools in a non-hosting region

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## **Abstract**

During the Olympiad, an Olympic host country is required to organise and deliver an education programme to schools nationwide. Schools' experiences of engagement with such programmes are often reported on by the government rather than being rigorously examined by academics. Moreover, there is little scientific understanding of how individual schools facilitate the programmes and why different schools engaged with the same programme in different ways and to varying degrees, and generated different levels of impact. Looking at the London 2012 Olympic education programme called Get Set, this original qualitative research was undertaken to explore local schools' experiences of involvement with the programme in a non-hosting region, Leicestershire. The paper advocates the use of programme-theory-driven evaluations (a realist evaluation approach, in particular) to assess programme implementation. The results provide explanations of how and why case-study schools engage more effectively or less effectively with the programme. The results identify the missing links in the programme theory, highlighting the significance of contextual factors at individual school levels, and arguing for the adoption of tailored strategies for effective programme implementation.

## **Keywords**

Olympic education programme, London 2012, Get Set, programme theory, realist evaluation

## **Introduction**

According to the Host City Contract Operational Requirements (International Olympic Committee (IOC), 2016), every Organising Committee for the Olympic Games should 'organise and distribute a programme of education about sport, the Olympic Games and the Olympic values on offer to schools and colleges through the Host Country during the Olympiad' (p. 46). For previous Olympic Games, such as the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, study of Olympic values was integrated into the curricula of more than 400,000 schools (China Ministry of Education, 2008). In the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games, a pioneering online education programme called 'Share the Dream' received more than 200,000 hits (IOC, 2014). However, host nation schools' involvement with the Olympic education programme and potential impacts generated by these schools' engagement with the programme have tended to get reported via anecdotal evidence that has been led (or funded) by government (see for example, Nielsen and London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Game (LOCOG), 2011; LOCOG, 2012a, 2012b). Such evidence is likely subject to bias. Moreover, there has been little in the way of rigorous investigation of the situation.

Drawing on empirical findings from a London 2012 Olympic Games non-hosting region, this study aims to explore how local schools engaged with the London 2012 Olympic educational programme Get Set. It also intends to reveal why different schools engaged with the same programme in different ways and to varying degrees, and how the impacts of Get Set were perceived in different schools. The paper begins

with a brief review of the literature and offers some background discussion on the study. It then discusses merits of the theoretical framework applied in the study, namely realist evaluation, and follows this by discussing the operationalisation of some key concepts and factors in the application of this approach. Research findings and implications of the study are provided at the end.

## **Literature review**

The notion of using the Olympics for education development has been subject to debate. Some scholars have questioned the event's suitability to serve as a platform for promoting education (Kohe and Bowen-Jones, 2016; Lenskyj, 2000; Tomlinson, 2004), given the money-oriented and excessive nature of the Olympics; but some support its values as far as the aspiration of enhancing lives, particularly young people's (Chatziefstathiou and Henry, 2009).

A group of studies have specifically examined youth engagement with the Olympics (Cotton, 2012; Griffiths and Armour, 2013; Johnson et al., 2008; Kohe and Bowen-Jones, 2016; Reis et al., 2014). Focusing on the London 2012 Olympic Games, the work of Cotton (2012), Griffiths and Armour (2013), Kohe and Bowen-Jones (2016) and of Mackintosh et al. (2015), are all particularly useful. Written before the London 2012 Olympic Games, Cotton's small-scale qualitative study revealed that, although the event may have been able to inspire young people to take up sports, the Olympic Games' association with certain Olympic sponsors (e.g. McDonalds and Coca-Cola) was negatively perceived. Griffiths and Armour (2013) were sceptical about the Olympic legacy aspirations and suggested adopting a

more critical view of sport and of its contribution to the development of social capital for young people following the staging of the Olympic Games. In the same vein, Mackintosh et al. (2015) note in their study that the virtuous legacy of the Olympics may still remain untested, and they highlight the need for considering a series of challenges relating to accessibility, cost, and project design which prohibited sport participation. Using a mixed-method approach with students in England aged from 11 to 13 years old, Kohe and Bowen-Jones (2016) examined the London 2012 Olympics' education and participation impacts and revealed temporary affections for sport, physical education (PE), and physical activity following the Games, but they questioned the Olympics' ability to provide sustained attitudinal and/or social changes.

Education benefits are generally derived through the activities delivered as part of structured education programmes/initiatives. Studies exploring schools' involvement with Olympic education programmes have nonetheless been rather limited. Employing a rigorous research approach, this study stands to significantly extend current knowledge about schools' experiences of engagement with the London 2012 Olympic education programme, about their ability to absorb the programme into their operations, and about perceptions regarding the programme's potential outcomes for schools and students.

### *The Get Set programme: the national and Leicestershire context*

Get Set was the London 2012 Olympic official education programme for enabling schools, colleges, and other learning providers to inspire young people to adopt and

share the Olympic and Paralympic values (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2008). It was launched in September 2008, immediately after the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, targeting children and young people aged from three to 19 years old. It was run by the LOCOG, working in partnership with the Department of Education and other key national education providers and Olympic sponsors.

Get Set provided an online library featuring a whole range of interactive learning resources spanning the entire curriculum (including mathematics, geography, and humanities) and designed to get schools and colleges to learn about Olympic and Paralympic values (e.g. respect, friendship, and excellence) and about the London 2012 Olympic Games. Sport and PE was one of the strands. Schools and colleges registered with Get Set were expected to use the Olympic and Paralympic Games and the aforementioned values in support of their PE and school sport objectives.

The Get Set Network (GSN) was the London 2012 reward and recognition scheme for active Get Set schools and colleges that demonstrated a commitment to Olympic and Paralympic values. Members of the network gained the right to use the London 2012 education logo, received a plaque and a certificate for their achievements, and were given priority access to the most exclusive prizes and opportunities (e.g. visits from athletes, Olympic Park tours, and 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games tickets).

In Leicestershire, a regional children and young people legacy coordinator (the regional coordinator) worked closely with Leicestershire local authorities and with partners in Leicester (e.g. Leicester-Shire Rutland Sport, School Sport Partnerships,

and the Leicestershire 2012 Steering Group) to develop a more detailed action plan for encouraging schools to take part in Get Set (Name withheld, 2012) and for supporting their Get Set activities (mainly through marketing promotions, school visits, Get Set award presentations, and through organising celebration events).

### **Realist evaluation**

The last 15 years have seen a gradual increase in the number of papers applying realist evaluation principles (Marchal et al., 2012), for example, in the contexts of policy, practice, and other social evaluation (Gill and Turbin, 1999; Greenhalgh et al., 2009; Pedersen et al., 2012). However, the applications of these principles in the field of sport have been rather limited—with only a handful of exceptions. For example, the study by Tacon (2007) advocated use of realist evaluation as a methodology for evaluating football-based social inclusion projects and concluded that such a framework could contribute to theory development as well as to the betterment of social programmes. Hughes (2013) adopted the realist evaluation framework to assess whether hosting the 2012 Olympics could leave a legacy of increased mass sport participation in the host country and, if so, in what ways. For Hughes (2013), realist evaluation had the ability to ‘explain the varying relationships that are found between mechanisms and contexts and how this impacts on generating the desired outcome’ (p. 136). This view was supported by Chen and Henry (2015), who wrote that the application of realist evaluation promoted the opportunity to evaluate claims about the causes or the generative mechanisms involved in producing outcomes in the context of a specific sport participation-related project. More recently, Daniels (2015) adopted

the framework for analysing a local sport and physical activity strategy, whereas, Girginov (2016) presented the ways in which a realist perspective could be adopted in interrogating official evaluations of the London 2012 Inspire programme.

The key principles of realist evaluation were elaborated in Pawson and Tilley's (1997) book, *Realist Evaluation*, in which the authors proposed a basic realist explanatory formula, i.e. Outcomes = Contexts + Mechanisms (CMOs), addressing the need to evaluate an intervention within its 'context' and to ask what 'mechanisms' acted to produce which 'outcomes.' In simple terms, 'context' refers to those conditions—in which programmes are introduced—that are relevant to the operation of a programme. 'Mechanisms' describe what it is about programmes and interventions that bring about any effects. 'Outcome patterns' outline the programmes' intended and unintended consequences resulting from different mechanisms getting activated in different contexts. In an attempt to refine the ideas of realist evaluation, Pawson (2013) encouraged, in his recent book (i.e. *the Science of Evaluation*), evaluation research to accept complexity as a normative feature rather than as a confrontational threat, and, for him, 'programmes are complex interventions introduced into complex social systems' (p. 33). He advocated realist perspectives as a solution to the challenges of complexity that starts with the development of programme theory. Developing programme theory is therefore essential. Programme theory, referring to theory of change (Weiss, 1995), is closely related to logic models and emerged from the tradition of theory-driven evaluation (Chen and Rossi, 1980; Chen, 1990; Coryn et al., 2011; Rogers, 2008).



This study adopts Pawson and Tilley's (1997) realist evaluation (in particular the CMOs principles) framework as it serves perfectly to answer the question 'Which contextual factors encourage or prohibit schools' engagement with the programme to generate which outcomes?'. This framework pays particular attention to casual mechanisms and their relationships with the local (social, economic, political, organisational and/or cultural) contexts. We concur with Pawson and Tilley's (1997) assertion that simply understanding whether or not a policy or programme worked would be of little value if there were no addressing or understanding of the reasons why such success had been achieved.

## **Research method**

Guided by Pawson and Tilley's (1997) realist evaluation framework, this paper aims to investigate schools' experiences of engaging with Get Set, to explore the underlying factors causing divergence in different schools' levels of engagement with Get Set, and to understand how the impacts of Get Set were perceived. A multiple holistic case-study approach was applied for research design. The four case-study schools represented four units of analysis for this study to facilitate its analysis of the disparities between different cases. The case-study approach can also illustrate emergent themes within a study, and it has a distinctive place in evaluation research (Chen, 1990), contributing to *describing, explaining, illustrating, and enlightening* (Yin, 2009).

Both document analysis and semi-structured interviews were adopted. The documents reviewed included information retrieved from the official Get Set website,

key strategic documents (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2010; Inspire Leicestershire, 2009), teaching materials (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009a, 2009b), and relevant reports published at both national and regional levels (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2012; Grant Thornton et al., 2011; HM Government, 2016; LOCOG, 2012a, 2012b; Nielsen and LOCOG, 2011), as well as the regional programme operational practitioner's monthly updates.

Empirical evidence was also obtained from qualitative research involving staff and students from four case-study schools and relevant stakeholders. To complement document analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted between January and July 2012, including a total of seven interviews with school heads and relevant teachers, three interviews with relevant stakeholders, and one focus group with students. A detailed table of interviewees' profiles is provided in Appendix 1.

As for the interviews with relevant stakeholders, a purposive sampling approach was adopted, including one with a regional key stakeholder (i.e. a senior officer from Inspire Leicestershire who supported the delivery of Get Set) and two individual interviews with two programme practitioners (i.e. the regional coordinator and a Leicestershire Get Set volunteer ambassador, recruited by the regional coordinator, who helped local schools to register and to engage with the programme). An interview guide was used for these preliminary exploratory interviews: a) what was Get Set's operational strategy (if any)? b) how did the programme work on the ground? and c) what were the main programme outcomes and mechanisms, as perceived by the interviewees.

The selection of schools as case studies was based on purposive sampling, identifying primary and secondary schools that had adopted Get Set. A pool of potential case-study schools, representing *very enthusiastic adopters*, some *moderately enthusiastic adopters*, and some *less enthusiastic adopters*<sup>1</sup>, were identified judging by the length and intensity of schools' Get Set engagement<sup>2</sup>. Seven primary schools and three secondary schools were approached for the purpose of assessing their willingness to participate in the study, with a total of four schools (three primary and one secondary) ultimately agreeing to take part in the study. The interview guide was structured around three topics: a) how has Get Set been delivered in the schools? b) what are the perceived impacts of Get Set for the schools and for their students? and c) what have schools' experiences been like during the process of engaging with Get Set? (including rationales for registration and commitment, challenges and barriers regarding engagement, and support received from the local level). In the meantime, the first author, who conducted all the interviews, also made reference to the developed programme theory based on the analysis of policy documents and strategic statements. It was thus ensured that all the key features of programme theory were discussed during each interview. When unexpected or ambiguous responses arose, the researcher paused to explore these more deeply.

In the process of programme theory development, the three theory-of-change models (see Figure 1) were established: the first theory of change model was developed by an inductive analysis of policy documents and strategic statements, and the second model was derived from a collection of insights shared by the regional

stakeholder and programme practitioners involved with promoting and facilitating Get Set. The identified assumptions underlying these two sets of models were used for comparison with the third programme theory, which was created using data from interviews with school teachers and students.

The interviews varied in length from 50 minutes to 90 minutes, and the focus group lasted for approximately 40 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded, and interviewees were informed that they would not be identified when quoted. Both interview transcripts and policy documents were subjected to repeated readings and thematic content analysis (Patton, 2002). Themes were identified deductively, based on Ryan and Bernard's (2003) suggestions, echoing (a) the research questions; (b) theories relevant to realist evaluation; (c) similarities between items of content and meanings, as identified in the first round of initial clustering. The identified themes were reviewed against transcripts and the entire data set. This process led to the emergence of three main themes and six sub-themes. Nvivo software was used to develop themes and key concepts that emerged from the collected data. We acknowledge the limitations of our sampling strategy, especially in terms of potential outcomes for students being inadequately measured. However, given that our primary focus for the study was on evaluating programme implementation, the qualitative interviews conducted represented the perspectives of those responsible for implementing and using the Get Set programme.

## **Results and discussion**

Quantitative data shared by the regional coordinator indicates that 90.5% (n=279) of

Leicestershire schools registered with Get Set towards the end of the programme, and, of those, 257 schools were awarded GSN status. Leicestershire's Get Set engagement levels ranked in the top position within the region and above national statistics.

As a first step in the process of realist evaluation, we sought to identify the premises underlying the approach adopted by Get Set. Given that our primary interests lay in the strand of sport and PE, the following chain of logic (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) concerns only with sport and PE's outcomes: 1. London's staging of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games provides an opportunity for the government to use the power of the Olympics along with the relevant values to engage children and young people. 2. Schools and colleges engaged with the Get Set programme are expected to adapt their PE and sport activities according to a range of sport- and PE-related opportunities and to resources offered by Get Set. 3. Involvement with Get Set or with Olympics- and Paralympics-related events and activities is anticipated to increase students' awareness of the 2012 Olympics and the Olympic and Paralympic values. Increased sport- and PE-related opportunities are provided to students; these subsequently impact young people's attitudes to PE and sport. 4. Eventually, young people's participation in sport and PE may be increased.

Following Coryn et al.'s (2011) call to construct competing theories (e.g. stakeholder-derived theories versus theories arising from prior empirical research), the following section elaborates further on the programme theory by presenting three theory-of-change models (see Figure 1).

[Figure 1 near here]

### *Theory of change*

The theory-building process began by studying the background of the programme, assisting stakeholders in clarifying the theories underlying the programme, to comparing the programme theory with the empirical data collected from the study in order to compare and contrast the conjectured and observed processes as well as outcomes (Chen, 1990). The relationships among the components in the first model were connected by a chain of logic such that ‘*if* you have the resources—like financing and human as well as political will—as inputs and use them to accomplish the planned activities and to deliver services, *then* you would be more likely to accomplish the planned outputs (e.g. getting as many schools as possible engaged with Get Set), *then* the Get Set participants would experience those outcomes listed in the first model’. This theory of change was presented back to this group of stakeholders prior to the evaluation of the programme in order to let them reach an understanding of and an agreement about programme outcomes and other components.

When comparing and contrasting the three models, two important points uncovered by this research might obstruct Get Set’s achievement of its aims and objectives. The first is that, to increase awareness of the London 2012 Games and knowledge of the Olympic and Paralympic values, Get Set-related activities are expected to be integrated within and/or outside of the curricula. This process might require either employing new staff members who could delicately facilitate the delivery of the programme or rearranging workloads among existing staff and

reallocating the Get Set-related tasks to a responsible staff member. Yet, regarding the former tactic, no extra human resources input was allocated by national or regional organising authorities; with regards to the latter alternative, there was no specific guidance on how to rearrange workloads or on how to assign a staff member dedicated to the Get Set activities. Thus, for the schools whose head teachers were more willing to take on extra jobs, the programme was more likely to be delivered effectively and vice versa. The same issues with lack of input and of support, from the top down, are seen more prominently in other areas such as sports facilities and finance. Such challenges become critical for schools with limited open space and resources. Therefore, in reality, the objective of engaging ‘as many schools as possible’ (see the first model, *Box outputs*) was changed into a mission to engage as many *capable* schools as possible in the region (see the second model, *Box outputs*), resulting in schools with fewer resources being left out (see the third model, *Box inputs*).

Second, there are some missing links emerged when comparing the three programme theories: for the purpose of changing sport participation behaviour, the logic derived from the national policy documents and statements suggested that through engaging with the programme, more learning opportunities in relation to sport, culture, and education will be offered to young people, which would lead to enhanced participation (see the first model, *Box outcomes*). Yet, this logic of ‘Get Set–providing more opportunities–which leads to the likelihood of increasing participation’ was reduced by the local programme practitioners to ‘Get Set–could

increase sport participation’ (see the second model, *Box outcomes*) and was reinterpreted by the school stakeholders as ‘any change in sporting behaviour before/after Get Set are thought to be because of Get Set’s impacts’ (see the third model, *Box outcomes*). The local programme practitioners seemed to think that schools reporting no significant changes in student sport participation must have failed to actively engage with Get Set, not that schools had failed to expose their students to the right sporting opportunities and messages provided by Get Set; at the school level, there is a tendency to neglect other factors which may contribute to changes in students’ sport participation. The extent to which engagement with the programme could lead to the sport participation changes reported becomes questionable (to be discussed in more detail later).

The following discussion outlines a structured account of each case study, a basic description of individual schools, the kinds of Get Set activities delivered in those schools, and the impact of the programme on the schools and their students. This analysis should be read in parallel with Table 1, which summarises the contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes for the four case-study schools.

#### *Case study one: a very enthusiastic Get Set adopter*

This school was a large secondary school with specialist sports college status (strong in the areas of rugby and football) serving more than 1300 students, aged 14 to 19 years old, with less than 5% minority ethnic students. Less than 5% of students were on free school meals. The school joined Get Set in 2009 and was identified as the first secondary school in Leicestershire to receive GSN status, with over three years’



involvement in the programme. As a reflection of the work they had undertaken to promote values associated with the Olympics and Paralympics, the school was granted Plan Your 2012 funding (which only seven other Leicestershire schools received).

*Get Set activities implemented.* This school has undertaken a range of activities as a result of its engagement with Get Set. For example, assemblies were presented for all students, reinforcing the Olympics and Paralympic values continually promoted in PE. Inspired by the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, a mini-Olympics-style competition was organised annually—an event which involved several local schools and was led by the schools’ young leaders. Another event related to the Paralympics, ‘Paralympics Week’, was also held. Paralympics Week gave students an opportunity to try out Paralympic sports such as wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball, and goalball. Another annual charity event, ‘Lock-In’ (a 24-hour sponsored sport event), was specially tailored to the Olympics of the last couple of years, and this event promoted the Olympic and Paralympic sports and values associated with them. Teamwork, between the school in question and other neighbouring schools, was enhanced following a series of sports events inspired by London 2012.

*The impact of Get Set on the school and on students.* The profile of the school has improved since its participation in Get Set, with its sporting achievements and its successful Sports Ambassador programme being more widely recognised in

the local community. The media were attracted by the school's activities, and this attention helped to raise awareness of the work that this school and its students were doing.

Definitely raise the [school's] profile in the county sport partnership and in the [Get Set] event national meetings – I mean, for planning of the 2012, there were only 40 schools across the country were invited to go down to London by the Olympic Park for a meeting about it. (PE teacher, Case study one)

This PE teacher also recognised the Get Set programme and the Olympic Games as being teaching vehicles with utility for promoting different values, values relating not only to sporting performance but also to other areas. In terms of Get Set's impacts on students, the most noticeable benefits students gained from being involved with Get Set activities were leadership and communication skills. Get Set also helped with boosting students' confidence; other additional benefits, such as personal development and career development, were reported by the interviewees.

#### *Case study two: a moderately enthusiastic Get Set adopter*

This case-study school was a community primary school with over 340 students (aged three to 11 years old), of which around a quarter of the pupils came from families that received free school meals, and more than 10% of the pupils were in the non-white British category. The school joined Get Set in early 2011. Their enthusiastic engagement with the programme was recognised and rewarded, for instance through free Olympic Games tickets.

*Get Set activities implemented.* The Olympic and Paralympic values spanned the whole curriculum as well as afterschool clubs, and were built on an existing educational programme. The resources and information offered by Get Set helped to consolidate activities (relating to science, culture, and sport lessons). For instance, each year group adopted the task of studying a country represented at the Olympics and spent a whole week learning about the country's flag, its culture, and its well-known athletes.

All year groups made extensive use of the Get Set resources. For example, the Get Set films were used in pupils' curricular activities and in school assemblies. Pupils also entered a '*Get Set to make your mascot competition*' and won a visit from the Olympic mascot. The school developed the variety of sports on offer and gave students the chance to take part in various new Olympic and Paralympic sports (e.g. trampolining, wheelchair basketball, and archery).

*The impact of Get Set on the school and on students.* Get Set's resources were considered by teachers to be helpful and to serve as useful teaching materials. The programme also helped to bring school staff together, to create links with other schools in the community, and to enable sharing of other schools' facilities and equipment.

Regarding impacts on pupils, teachers reported that participation and engagement with afterschool clubs improved. In addition, the sports activities offered

by the afterschool clubs increased in variety, no longer being limited to ‘traditional’ sports like football but extending to new and different activities.

[Students] never get that opportunity in a [normal] primary school... [In our school] we got wheelchair basketball this afternoon, and other Paralympic sports [will be] coming for them to try. It makes them more confident in their own abilities, because they can find something [that] is not just football. Obviously, it tends to be [only football on offer] in primary schools, because it is easy. And if you don't like football, well, you don't get the chance ... [whereas our school has] got athletics, swimming, Paralympic sports ... (Head teacher, Case study two)

Learning about different countries was seen to be broadening pupils’ horizons, igniting their excitement about the Olympic Games, and bringing the Olympics to life. Moreover, the impact of learning the Olympic and Paralympic values proved to be positive, with a clear change noted in pupils’ attitudes towards each other and towards teachers.

### *Case study three: a moderately enthusiastic Get Set adopter*

This case-study school was a primary school with strong sporting interest, benefiting from its own outdoor sports area and sports facilities, and working within the local School Sport Partnership. This primary school had over 570 students, with 1.2% minority ethnic students and over 18% of all students claiming free school meals. It had joined Get Set more than 18 months previously (prior to the time of interview) and had been actively engaged ever since.

*Get Set activities implemented.* Activities inspired by Get Set and the London 2012 Olympics and delivered in this school included promoting the Olympic and Paralympic values in assemblies for a seven-week period, participating in School Sports Week, and organising an Olympics-style sports day. Many other local Inspire Mark programmes were adopted to meet the school's particular needs: for example, the Patchwork Pledge (targeting students not usually keen on sports activities), and the Big Dance (targeting girls in particular).

The school placed Olympic and Paralympic values at the core of its daily life. The values were embedded in all parts of school life to inspire pupils' learning in areas as diverse as geography, research elements, cultural activities, and PE. In addition, this case-study school introduced a 'sticker award system' linked to these values.

A wider range of sports were on offer (Paralympic sports in particular) to students and staff, both in lunchtime clubs and at afterschool clubs, aiming to improve sport participation. For instance, with the help of the apprentice sport coach, all school staff members were trained in Boccia and could then introduce it to students. An intra-school competition (a teachers' team versus a students' team) was also organised. In recognition of its active involvement with Get Set, this school won an 'Olympic Park Visit'. Winning the prize boosted enthusiasm for the London 2012 Olympic Games, and sports thus started to build momentum within the school.

*The impact of Get Set on the school and on students.* It was evident that not only did teachers' interest in the Olympic Games increase—with around 40-50 members of the staff visiting the Olympic Park during the Easter holidays, for example—but that teachers were also more engaged with team sport events. This behaviour helped to build positive friendships and a strong sense of community across the school. Comments from the teachers regarding Get Set were generally positive and asserted that Get Set provided good learning resources, accessible via the website.

In general, there was a significant and wide-ranging impact on students at the school. For instance, learning about the values produced noticeable improvements in social behaviour (e.g. increasing self-esteem and more respect for teachers as well as for students). In addition, the positive effect on sport participation (evidenced both by the school's afterschool club and by its lunchtime club) was noticeable. In particular, in order to motivate girls' engagement with sport, the school introduced a gender-segregated afterschool club, offering a relatively 'fairer' environment.

#### *Case study four: a less enthusiastic Get Set adopter*

This case-study school was a small primary school in Leicestershire with around 200 students, of which 39% received free school meals, and more than 9% were non-white British. The school was relatively new to GSN.

*Get Set activities implemented.* Drawing on the resources and activities accessed through Get Set, this case-study school integrated Get Set into a few subjects, including mathematics, geography, and PE. Work related to the values was

consolidated, in a less innovative way, through regular assemblies and classroom activities by playing Olympics-related videos. Other Get Set-related activities implemented included some design competitions such as for the Olympic torch and athletes' uniforms. Outside of the curriculum, Get Set-related activities included an Olympics-themed sports day, and an Olympics-related football tournament.

*The impact of Get Set on the school and on students.* The teachers reported that they enjoyed the opportunities offered by Get Set, and those Get Set videos were useful for assisting teaching and for helping children to understand the Olympic Games. In terms of the Get Set programme's impacts on students, teachers perceived that involvement with the programme—particularly studying the respective values—resulted in students being more confident, gaining more well-rounded skill sets, understanding the meanings of the Olympic and Paralympic values, and being able to apply the Olympic values to daily life.

I think the Olympic values have the most impact on the children...not just [regarding] sport... they [the pupils] understand what they [the values] mean. As an example, in our sports day this year, one of our Year 5 boys fell during a race. Another boy from the same class stopped running and went to pick him up...because they watched the videos, one of the mascots does that: stops and goes back to help the others. It is just really nice. So they see a little bit, and then they [copy]. (PE teacher, Case study four)

The school's determination to encourage sporting participation and school inclusion was effective in motivating so-called 'harder to reach pupils'. In particular, the school created a unique afterschool club, especially for pupils who were not sporty

or who struggled with sport competition, with the intention of motivating this particular group of children to participate in sports. Subsequently, teachers observed a steady take-up throughout the term, improved behaviour, and increased self-esteem among pupils.

### *The application of realist evaluation*

As explained earlier, adopting a case-study approach was largely down to recognition of the fact that contexts varied among schools. Various contextual conditions permit or prevent the delivery of Get Set such that different degrees of outcomes are generated, even though schools all take part in the same programme. The realist evaluation's CMO configuration was used to identify underlying factors leading to varying levels, among the four case-study schools, of engagement with Get Set and of subsequent success (see Table 1).

[Table 1 near here]

*Contexts.* In terms of under which circumstances Get Set worked, a comparative analysis between those case-study schools who were enthusiastic Get Set adopters and those who were less enthusiastic Get Set adopters suggested that the key stakeholders of the schools (normally head teachers in the case of primary schools and PE teachers in secondary schools) made a significant contribution towards driving their schools to be more engaged with Get Set—or not to be engaged at all with it. As one Get Set practitioner and one PE teacher respectively explained:



I think it is more to do with the teachers and with schools' ways of viewing the Olympics... I think that's the main thing that I found, when I go into schools. Either the head teacher was pro Olympics—'Yes, let's have all this, let's get the school involved'—or they were like, 'Oh yeah, that's in six months' time, we will put it on a big screen and watch TV in the assembly'. So I think it is very much down to the individual. (Operational Practitioner)

This is just because it is Olympic year, and we got a new head. So she does things differently. That last head wasn't like this head....she loves sports anyway. And I think she wants every child to have a chance, [and she wants] every child to take on the Olympics in some way or another and remember the Olympics as well. And we both share the same view on that. It was Mrs XX registered it, searched online, and [did] all the stuff. (PE teacher, Case study two)

The context of the less enthusiastic adopter was characterised by a number of factors—such as staff shortages, limited resources and time constraints, and a struggle between existing school curriculum requirements. Case study four reported that the processes of registering on the programme and of participating in GSN were rather 'complicated' and paperwork-heavy, which deterred the school from registering earlier. This point was further confirmed by a Get Set volunteer who indicated that she helped seven schools (out of ten local schools that she worked with) with their Get Set registration, paperwork, and with running Get Set activities.

...Time and staffing are the main issues...So we then did [registration and activities] for them!...The way we are running it at the moment is that, basically, we go to the head teacher [and] say, right, this is what Get Set is, this is what it can give to your school. We are volunteering, ready here, waiting for you...we will take over your lessons, and we would do it. So this [has happened] since 2010, and just kind of grows and grows...Some people send me an email saying,

‘right, I want a one-off session, [I] just want you [to] come in, and just do one assembly [at] the school’. And that’s it, which again [means] it still gets that school to become [Get Set] Network registered... Stats-wise, I am sure it [number of Get Set schools] just increases massively in [the] Leicestershire area, [regarding] which I would like to think we have some sort of contribution to that. (Get Set volunteer)

Moreover, local schools were overwhelmed by a number of Olympic Games-related initiatives in the 2012 Olympic year, meaning that some schools’ energies were diverted from Get Set. Limitations on available resources suggest that some schools may have selected initiatives other than Get Set. As one PE teacher further explained:

Obviously, you can’t do everything. In schools, there are thousands and thousands of initiatives or programmes that come in. Sometimes it is difficult to choose which is appropriate to get involved with. You can go to a school down the road [and] they have nothing to do with Get Set. And they do something else... (PE teacher, Case study four)

On the other hand, the reasons for some schools’ heavy engagement with the programme included pressure being applied by parents who valued other education-related attainments besides their children’s academic achievements. Case study one therefore actively sought education-related initiatives and programmes, such as Get Set, and brought them to the students; this, in turn, helped to ‘develop students’ social skills and raised schools’ profile[s]’ (PE teacher, Case study one).

*Mechanisms.* In terms of what has worked to engage schools with Get Set, the mechanism most recognised as being effective was the teaching materials and templates, provided by Get Set, relating to Olympics and Paralympic values and to the London 2012 Olympic Games. These materials appeared to serve as useful off-the-shelf teaching tools. In particular, the Olympic and Paralympic values were widely appreciated and commonly recognised as useful content, echoing with schools' ethos. The case-study schools therefore found Get Set easier to align with and/or to integrate into curricula.

For effective engagement with Get Set, all four case-study schools had in common were the contribution afforded by communication with and commitment from regional operational practitioners such as the regional coordinator and School Sport Partnership coordinators. Although the teaching of Get Set activities remained schools' responsibility, the operational practitioners played a critical role in leveraging and promoting the programme.

When examining the effects of the incentives offered by the GSN (e.g. visits from athletes, Olympic Park tours, and 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games tickets) for motivating schools to engage more with the programme, a common response from all case-study schools is that the incentives had made no significant difference to their levels of engagement. As for the schools which received rewards (including Case study one, Case study two, and Case study three), their enthusiasms for the London 2012 Olympics were raised and the role of sports within the schools was enhanced, whereas for the last case (i.e. a *less enthusiastic adopter*), time and resource

limitations meant that the school was unable to increase its commitment to the programme purely for the purpose of profiting from incentives made available.

*Outcomes.* As presented in Table 1, there is a range of impacts reported, e.g. improved knowledge about the Olympic and Paralympic Games, enhanced social impacts (e.g. confidence, respect, leadership), and more opportunities being offered to try different sports. However, in terms of assessing the impacts of the programme, it was evidenced from the qualitative data that a substitutional impact existed. At schools which already had an existing education programme and/or a sports-day scheme, the teachers simply plugged the Olympic and Paralympic values into the existing education programme and/or organised an Olympics-style sports day.

We have been using the SEAL (social, educational, aspects, and learning) which is a programme [spanning] a year: it has New Beginning, Going for Gold, Changes, and all those kinds of topics. It brings all these kinds of things. The Get Set just fits so well with the programme that we used, so.... I would say that the attitudes [of] children towards each other [and] towards staff have improved through the Olympic values and [the] SEAL programme. It has just been another add-on for it, to consolidate the activities. (Head teacher, Case study two)

In addition, there was an obvious difference between what would supposedly be the ‘positive sport participation impacts generated by the engagement with Get Set’—as per the assumptions of policy actors and frontline practitioners (see Figure 1: the first and second models)—and the real ‘impact of the programme on sport participation’. For example, when one head teacher was asked whether there had been a change of sport participation among students, he replied:

Yes, the number of children attending the afterschool clubs has been increased, [and] not just the afterschool [clubs, but] there were lunch time clubs as well. The number of lunchtime clubs going on now has been increased. (Head teacher, Case study three)

A follow-up question was asked to further clarify whether the increased sport participation was as a result of Get Set. The interviewee paused a few seconds, before stating the following:

I think the other thing which I noticed this year is that there has been an increased interest in sport in the school. I would like that to be continued...That's partly through Get Set and so partly because we have had the apprentice sport coach, [who] has been putting on extra [activities] at lunch time. (Head teacher, Case study two)

All the case-study schools were subjected to such probes. Overall, the evidence collected suggested that it was difficult to isolate Get Set's impact on sport participation improvement. The following quote supported this finding.

There definitely has been a big increase in afterschool clubs. Whether you can put that down to Get Set, I couldn't really say, because we would have just encouraged them [students] to do [those clubs] anyway. (Head teacher, Case study two)

In summary, the established CMOs seem to offer a useful explanatory outline of the unique features belonging to each type of school and of the precise way in which mechanisms work within the given context to produce certain outcomes. This is a critical step in this research for two reasons. The first is that, although this study

partly confirms the frequently reported impacts/legacies, for children and young people, of the 2012 Olympic Games, it reveals the existence of substitution and potential overestimation of Olympic impacts/legacies on boosting sport participation levels. Second, the development of the CMO triads helped to recognise the fragmentation and differences in local subcultures; such differences between case studies produced a range of incommensurable *conditions* which render it impossible to make universal claims of ‘if we do X, it will trigger Y’ in any or all circumstances. The CMO configuration presents a clear view of how concepts were connected theoretically and of why there were variations between schools in terms of Get Set engagement levels and of the subsequent success enjoyed, for which schools’ own contexts enabled or disabled the effects of the designed mechanisms.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we argue for the importance of going beyond collecting evidence about schools’ experiences of involvement with Get Set. Through the incorporation of programme theory into the research process, this study discussed ‘how’ and ‘why’ affected schools are engaged.

To systematically configure different stakeholders’ underlying assumptions about the programme, the three theoretical models created constitute the key foundation for programme evaluation. The models offer clear benefits, for example, uncovering missing links in the theory chain, identifying misinterpretation of policy, and achieving consensus in evaluation planning. In contrast with the common evaluation practice whereby theories are often heuristically synthesised to devise a

plausible programme theory for evaluation use (Donaldson and Gooler, 2002, 2003), the explication of the three plausible programme theories is essential to the planning, the delivery, and the execution of the study. The development of multiple theories helps to make comparisons between actual achievements recognised by the programme participants and the objectives of a programme set out by the stakeholders. Unintentional outputs/outcomes can thereby be identified.

Rather than being viewed as a logical set of associations, the CMOs were seen as a combination of socially relevant influences. The realist evaluation approach was useful for developing the programme's underlying theories and for articulating which causal mechanisms function to generate changes. The complexity of the schools' contexts and features furthermore suggests a need for multiple working theories of programme impact and for attention to conditions as well as to causes. This form of policy assessment would be analytical and explanatory rather than being evaluative.

This study also suggests a practical implication as to how the programme might be more effectively implemented. For example, a clear lesson learned from the Get Set programme was that extra help with programme registration or a reduction in the amount of paperwork involved would likely encourage more schools to engage with the programme. This was particularly the case for *less enthusiastic Get Set adopters*, whereas for those *more enthusiastic Get Set schools*, it is recommended that a prompt decision to register with the programme might bring about better outcomes: A relatively long period of activity preparation and of time spent planning in advance made for increased engagement with Get Set. The intention is therefore to inform

stakeholders and practitioners about how different strategies could be tailored according to individual schools' varying commitment levels.

Regarding the approach adopted, some of the constraints need to be considered. For example, this study failed to access schools that did not register with Get Set, whose experiences could have been useful for the discussion of how to involve schools with the programme. Additional interviews with students to assess immediate impacts of the programme could have been valuable. In further research, research should concentrate on the identification of effective mechanisms and on integrating contextual elements in order to investigate the real causal impacts of the events.

#### **Notes.**

- [1] As critical realists, we recognise the significance of meaning construction among human actors. The categorisation of the schools according to their levels of engagement with Get Set has been established because we argue that human actors—rather than the programme itself alone—wield the power to be causally efficacious in the programme implementation. Hence, we have seen schools engaging to different degrees with the same programme.
- [2] At the time of the research, Get Set had been running for four years. To categorise schools' engagement with the programme by duration, Leicestershire schools involved with the programme for more than three years were considered 'very enthusiastic adopters', those with between one and two years' involvement were considered 'moderately enthusiastic adopters', and schools registered with the programme for less than one year were referred to as 'less enthusiastic adopters'. There was additional consultation with the regional coordinator, whose experience of delivering and promoting the programme on the ground was useful for judging the intensity of schools'



engagement with Get Set (in terms of the range and number of Get Set activities adopted).

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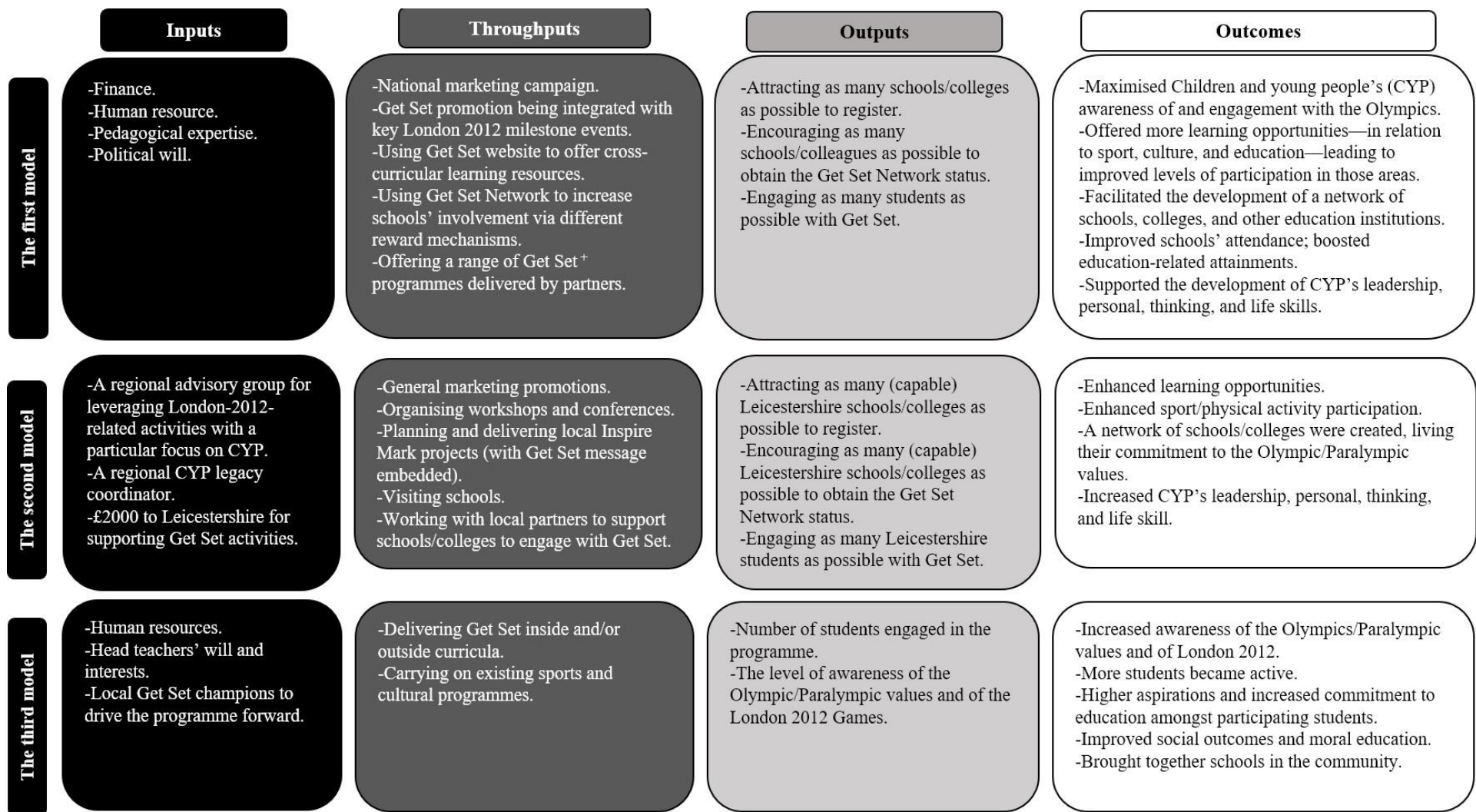
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**Figure 1.** Three theory-of-change models.

Source: The first model was developed by drawing evidence from policy documents and statements analysis; the second model was developed by drawing evidence from documents analysis and interviews with local programme practitioners; the third model was developed by drawing evidence from interviews with school teachers and students.

CYP: children and young people.

**Table 1.** Get Set Context–Mechanism–Outcome configurations.

	<b>Contexts</b> +	<b>Mechanisms</b> =	<b>Outcomes</b>
<b>Case study one: a very enthusiastic adopter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Academic achievement and other education-related attainments valued.</li> <li>- Teachers supportive regarding the London 2012 Olympic Games.</li> <li>- Get Set activities led mainly by students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good learning resources easily accessible on the Get Set website.</li> <li>- Most Get Set activities delivered separately from the curriculum.</li> <li>- Olympic/Paralympic values promoted in school assemblies.</li> <li>- The school developed its own Get Set events.</li> <li>- Local Get Set champions helped facilitate programme delivery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Raised school profile within the local community.</li> <li>- Improved social outcomes and personal development (e.g. leadership and communication) for students.</li> <li>- Improved self-esteem and self-confidence among students.</li> </ul>
<b>Case study two: a moderately enthusiastic adopter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A passionate head teacher—strongly advocating physical education and sport-related activities—leading the delivery of Get Set.</li> <li>- Physical education teacher and other assistant teachers providing support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Useful Get Set materials available on the Get Set website.</li> <li>- Olympic/Paralympic values spanned the whole curriculum, including afterschool clubs, and built on an existing education programme.</li> <li>- Olympic/Paralympic values were promoted during assemblies.</li> <li>- Local Get Set champions helped facilitate programme delivery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased variety of sports on offer, with new Olympic/Paralympic sports introduced.</li> <li>- Brought together school staff.</li> <li>- Developed links with other schools in the respective community.</li> <li>- Improved participation in afterschool clubs.</li> <li>- Broadened horizons, increased excitement about the Olympics, improved attitudes of students towards one another and towards teachers.</li> </ul>
<b>Case study three: a moderately enthusiastic adopter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Always actively engaging with major events.</li> <li>- A head teacher demonstrating proactivity with respect to the Olympics.</li> <li>- Assistant teachers and a newly appointed sports coach providing support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A range of off-the-shelf teaching resources available.</li> <li>- Get Set activities delivered either as part of the curriculum or separately, during extra-curricular time.</li> <li>- Olympic/Paralympic values were promoted during school assemblies and embedded in curricular activities.</li> <li>- Local Get Set champions helped facilitate programme delivery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Different sports introduced.</li> <li>- A positive effect on students' sport participation habits.</li> <li>- Noticeable improvements in pupils' social behaviour.</li> <li>- Improved academic achievement and student attendance.</li> <li>- Facilitated inclusivity.</li> </ul>
<b>Case study four: a less enthusiastic adopter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A head teacher with little enthusiasm regarding the Olympics.</li> <li>- Limited staff, facilities, and resources.</li> <li>- Time constraints.</li> <li>- Staff deterred by paperwork.</li> <li>- Overwhelming quantity of initiatives.</li> <li>- Existing school curriculum requirements clashing with the introduction of new initiatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Useful Get Set materials available on the Get Set website.</li> <li>- Only a few Get Set activities were delivered—as part of or separately from the curriculum.</li> <li>- Specialised one-to-one assistance, from Get Set volunteers, with teaching school activities.</li> <li>- Olympic/Paralympic values promoted during school assemblies and embedded in curricular activities.</li> <li>- Local Get Set champions promoted programme actively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Positive impacts on students' confidence, self-esteem, class behaviour, and other social skills.</li> <li>- A steady taking up of afterschool clubs.</li> <li>- Improved behaviour and self-esteem among pupils.</li> </ul>