

Gymnastics Participant Segments

The following tables provide detailed information about the different gymnastics participant segments identified via research conducted in 2012 (Leeds Metropolitan University, Further Development of the Gymnastics Participant Model). The segments are used to identify and store important information - why gymnasts participate, where and with whom, what they want from the sport, why they choose to stay or leave, what can be done better to support them etc. This information can then be used to target the most appropriate messages, environments, activities, and coaching style to meet the gymnasts' wants/needs.

There are 8 gymnastics segments:

- Early start
- Exploring the options
- Late start
- Flexibility, strength and fitness
- Dance, display and socialise
- Compete
- Talent and performance
- Guiding and helping

The segments have been created through extensive research which included talking to a number of coaches, gymnasts and parents.

EARLY START	Characteristics	Comments
Age	0-4 years	
Motivations for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gymnasts usually brought by parent/guardian Parents may take youngsters to sessions to socialise with other parents, to give them an opportunity to interact and move about To learn ABCs (agility, balance, coordination) fundamental movement skills To gain in confidence To learn discipline To burn off energy 	<p>Gymnasts at this age will have a very low level of awareness of why they are there</p> <p>"0-5 years is a crucial period" for learning ABCs</p>
Entry Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent's earlier involvement in sport Word of mouth 	
Physical characteristics and development	Gymnasts are very small	
Psychological characteristics and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gymnasts highly dependent on parent/guardian in sessions Children from 3 years onwards may become more independent from their parents 	
Family/friends	Gymnasts highly dependent on parent/guardian in sessions	Considerable effort should be given to supporting parents
Other influences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baby/toddler swimming Later dance/ballet 	
Sport structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Fun for Babies': 8 weeks – 18 months 'Parent and Toddler': 18 months – 3 years 'Independent' / Pre-school gymnastics: 3-5 years 	
Environments	Emphasis on fun and relationship building	"It is just play in a gym environment based around gymnastics skills"
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play Simple exercises with parents 	
Coaching	Coaches coach through the parents	Concerns that some pre-school provision may be too structured in terms of session activities
Progression / Exit Routes	Gymnastics clubs – junior sessions Some youngsters "talent ID'd" for more "challenging opportunities"	
Drop-out	No issues detected	

EARLY START	Characteristics	Comments
Age	5-7 years	Should be an introductory/fun age/stage – but concerns that the coaches are 'getting down to business' too quickly. Evidence suggests environments are too serious; there is too much emphasis on talent and performance in competitions
Motivations for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent brings them • To develop movement skills and competence • To develop confidence and discipline • To have fun and enjoyment • To develop social ties 	
Entry Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-school Gymnastics • Gymnasts come because their friends go, or because they want to be with their friends • Club taster sessions in schools • Gymnastics is on the PE curriculum in primary schools • After-school clubs 	Gymnasts may have done other classes – like dance classes
Physical characteristics and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant variation in physical size • Significant variation in movement skills – depending, amongst other things, on their developmental history (e.g. whether they've done pre-school gymnastics) 	"at 5 some seem like 3, some seem like 8"
Psychological characteristics and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant variation in attention spans – some can listen, others find it very difficult • Many gymnasts will struggle to focus on instruction • Attention spans will improve the more they are exposed to the environment (for example, if they have been there from pre-school) • At 5 years old gymnasts may still look to their parents for purpose and engagement • The younger ones like structure, familiarity, to know what they are doing, to see the same coaches week on week • At 6/7 years the gymnasts are much more likely to be able to say what they do and don't like 	If gymnasts are not kept engaged/busy they may quickly become distracted/bored
Family/friends	Parents are still very important to this group. Parents who are interested primarily in the child's development (both movement skills and in relation to the sport) may often be very keen to receive feedback on the child's progress. However, the parents also have to	Considerable effort should be made in managing parents – their objectives, their views on how the sport should be structured, their child's involvement, and progress

	<p>be managed in terms of space. Some clubs ask parents to wait outside until the session is over because it can be too distracting for the younger gymnasts</p> <p>At 5 years old the gymnasts often ignore each other. At 6/7 years they start making friends in the group</p>	<p>Parents need to be managed around the gym. Dedicated viewing areas may be preferable to them sitting round the gym where it can be a 'health and safety' issue</p> <p>Many parents/guardians do like to see their children take part in the session</p> <p>The BG Child Protection Policy has guidelines for clubs including the provision of an open door environment</p>
Other influences	Some coaches believe that boys and girls can comfortably co-exist in sessions until about 6-7 years – then they should be separated	This of course may not apply to some disciplines e.g. ACRO, Aerobics, TeamGym
Sport structures	Freestyle – might bring in boys Some local/regional competition	
Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive, encouraging, inclusive, fun, enjoyable, developmental • Learning through play, experiment and experience; not through assessment and feedback • 5-7 year olds need engagement, keeping busy "or they start looking for mum, running around, hitting each other" • Use music 	<p>Concern that some coaches are creating quite serious/formal environments - that lack variety, are boring - at too young an age because they are primarily motivated by performance and competition.</p> <p>Concerns that there is too much queuing at stations/equipment</p>
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A general introduction "a taster" to gymnastics drawing on elements from all the disciplines • Variety, music • Use of equipment – bean bags, hoops etc. • Circuits with multiple activities – floor, vault, trampette, bars, pits, ropes • Lots of games – 'Traffic Lights', 'Washing Machine' • Activities no more than 10-15 minutes in length including set-up • Set up competitions on each piece of equipment e.g. "how long can you balance on the floor bar?" • 1-2 hours per week. • Proficiency Badges 8-1 • Larger groups may warm up together and then split up into age groups – 5's, 6's, 7's etc. 	
Coaching	<p>This is a tricky age to coach!</p> <p>A balance should be achieved between structure, familiarity, keeping the youngsters busy, and allowing fun and expression.</p> <p>This requires an appropriate coach to gymnast ratio - no more than 1:8.</p> <p>The sessions need to be planned – lots of activities, games – no more than 10-15 minutes long for each activity/games.</p> <p>The coach needs to use simple clear language</p>	<p>Use incentives to make things more fun e.g. Coach: "if you balance for 15 seconds, I'll show you my somersault"</p> <p>For younger members of the age group the coach should use imagery/communications/language (body position, facial expression and tone of voice) which "enters</p>

	<p>and keep instruction to a minimum The coach needs to be fun, vibrant, engaged, busy, and energised, be prepared to make a fool of him/herself. The gymnasts need the freedom to play, experiment and interact. The coach will need to have some idea about individual gymnast progress (to ensure challenge) but avoid too much assessment and selection at this age (though many coaches will use this age to identify more able gymnasts for squads). It is important to build variety into sessions – use games, as well as circuits – for example, game, equipment, game. This includes setting up ground rules, for example, about when the young gymnasts can go and see mum and dad, for example, to get a drink</p>	<p>their head space” e.g. ‘pretending to be zoo animals’ or ‘making a pizza’ Considerable efforts have to be made to manage parents’ expectations</p>
Progression / Exit Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anywhere between 4-7 years the gymnasts might be spotted for ‘development squads’ – if they show appropriate balance, strength, coordination, listening skills. • In terms of competition, gymnasts compete at 5 years (under 6) in club events, at 6 years (under 7), in county events, at 7 years (under 8) in regional events, and 8 years (under 9) for national events • Others – if provision is available – can enter intermediary or recreational groups 	
Drop-out	<p>Though drop-out in the sport does not start to any significant degree until 7-8 years there are concerns that the groundwork for this has already started. There needs to be more emphasis on fun, a variety of experiences, games, play and experimentation (especially to keep in boys)</p>	

EXPLORING THE OPTIONS	Characteristics	Comments
Age	8-11 years	This, it is suggested, is a crucial age for gymnastics (where most of the drop-out occurs). Currently, many gymnasts move from an introductory experience in the 0-4 years and (for some) 5-7 years, straight to narrow discipline specific work from 7-8 years onwards. This might be appropriate for some gymnasts who have developed the appropriate flexibility, strength and skills, and who have the requisite mind set, ambition and support. However, for others "it becomes too difficult ... when they get to 9 the skills get too difficult, they get stuck, notably particular skills in the advanced badges"
Motivations for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop movement skills and competence • To develop confidence and discipline • As a distraction, an activity • To develop social ties • To be part of the gymnastics community • For some there may be a fitness component at this age 	Parents still bring them along (though parental influence may be starting to wane at this age)
Entry Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections to school provision, and school friends • Connections to leisure centre provision • Club pathways 	
Physical characteristics and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be noticeable differences in the flexibility, strength, and skills of the gymnasts – especially those who have been in the sport since pre-school, 5-7 years. • These markers need to be used to tailor programmes 	
Psychological characteristics and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At 8-9 years they are becoming much more conscious of their own ability – what their bodies can and cannot do, and their strengths/weaknesses in relation to their peers. • More conscious of body image • They become sensitive about their competence • It is very important to the gymnasts that coaches and peers are friendly and encouraging, and that they feel part of the 'family' 	<p>This is the start of a very sensitive age for the gymnasts.</p> <p>If the gymnasts are forced into forms of sport where they are uncomfortable i.e. individual performances they may leave the sport.</p> <p>However, they also need to be appropriately stimulated and challenged</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inappropriate selection/summative feedback could easily lead to drop-out. Thus, pair work, team work and displays may become more important • This group wants to be much more involved in the longer term and session planning • This group may start to get bored easily, especially if they are constrained by physical and skill development, and the coach is not providing the options/variety required. 	This group are also much more conscious of their wants and needs/likes and dislikes and are prepared to vocalise this – “this is boring, why are we doing this?”
Family/friends	<p>Parents who are interested primarily in the child’s development (both movement skills and in relation to the sport) will be keen to receive feedback on the child’s progress</p> <p>However, the parents also have to be managed in terms of space. Some clubs ask parents to wait outside until the session is over because it can be too distracting for the younger gymnasts. Boy and girls (“but mainly girls from about 11 onwards”) start to get very chatty and sociable. They may show less interest in gymnastics and more in talking about “pop stars”.</p>	Considerable effort need to be made in managing parents – their objectives, their views on how the sport should be structured, their child’s involvement, and progress
Other influences	<p>Youngsters in this age group experience a wide range of leisure and sporting opportunities</p> <p>Many gymnasts will be participating in other sports e.g. dance, street dance, ballet, swimming, athletics.</p> <p>Boys, in particular, may fall out of gymnastics to play others sports such as football</p>	
Sport structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational participation peaks at 7-8 years just before the onset of national competition structures • In terms of competition, gymnasts compete at 5 years (under 6) in club events, at 6 years (under 7), in county events, at 7 years (under 8) in regional events, and 8 years (under 9) for national events • The grades get much harder at 8-9 years • By 10 the gymnasts should have a very clear idea of the options available to them (for better or worse) • Competitive participation peaks at 11 years of age. • Advanced award badges for those who have been in the sport since 5 years of age 	<p>Concerns that many gymnasts are leaving the sport at 8-9 years because the sport gets much harder if they are in a competitive pathway structure/or undertaking advanced badges</p> <p>These gymnasts are very often not being offered an alternative</p>
Environments	<p>There should still be emphasis on fun, enjoyment, though, for some, it may be appropriate to focus much more on skill development and preparation (for example, for competitions and displays)</p> <p>There should be no pressure for gymnasts to do moves/use equipment that they don’t feel comfortable with.</p> <p>Sessions should continue to show variation, use games, be busy and challenging.</p>	<p>Gymnasts of this age may start to become very chatty and less focused.</p> <p>The coach will need to take a view on the goals of the group/session but perhaps set-up some rules about talk e.g. gym talk in the gym, social talk in breaks and in the changing room</p>

	<p>The sporting and social environment and culture are increasingly important to this age The gymnasts are likely to respond to a very friendly, inclusive, respectful, but 'family/community' orientated approach. For better or worse – coach, gymnast, parent should be in it together. Recreational groups 1-2 hours per week</p>	
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Again, variety is very important. • Warm ups, cool downs, skill work, equipment work, games etc. should all be in the mix – with different ingredients in different sessions • It is appropriate to offer gymnasts in this age group a range of product options – sessions/skill development/games, badges, displays (local galas/schools), competition – though the balance will depend on their ambitions/pathway stage 	<p>Where general gymnastics clubs are offering competition opportunities – the gymnasts, when they compete, may not perform very well and this may lead to problems with the gymnasts and the parent. There are two issues here – appropriate recreational competition, and how the coach manages the gymnasts and the parents. For example, parents need to understand that if their child is doing 1 hour per week they are not going to perform at the highest level in competition</p>
Coaching	<p>There are three main issues that the coach should attend to at this age (1) increasing individualisation of programmes (2) involving the gymnasts more (3) environment and culture <u>Increasing individualisation/recognition of different pathways</u> The clubs/coaches need to provide a broad range of options to the gymnasts which meet their needs, aspirations and abilities – this includes recreational, competitive, and higher level competitive opportunities There should be no pressure on the gymnasts to follow pathways, undertake moves/skills, or use equipment that they do not want to. Development programmes could be structured, for example, through the proficiency awards.</p> <p><u>Involving the gymnasts more</u> The coach should actively seek to understand the gymnasts' experiences and opinions in terms of long term and session planning, environments, activities and so on "what would you like to do today? What pieces of equipment would you like to go on?" They should ask the gymnasts what works, and what does not in sessions and look to modify planning/sessions. Individualised programmes will be very important because some gymnasts may have been in the sport for 6-8 years. The coach needs to ensure an appropriate level of challenge. There should still be a significant emphasis on fun, enjoyment, games and so on for all groups However, the coach should start to be more</p>	<p>There is little doubt that coaches are making important assessments about the gymnasts' capabilities at these ages. This may be legitimate, but there are concerns that those who are not making the grade in terms of competitive performance are being neglected/not being offered alternative disciplinary and recreational opportunities. E.g. a gymnast that does not make the grade in Women's Artistic could be offered opportunities in a different discipline e.g. ACRO opportunity. This happens in some instances but it is far from universal</p>

	<p>specific about the gymnasts' body management, strength and conditioning and skill development This includes goal setting, and providing technical feedback.</p> <p><u>Environment and culture</u> The coach should establish a very friendly, encouraging, supportive environment around the gymnasts which includes a community of gymnasts, parents and coaches working together. Getting this environment/culture right may be one of the most important issues in determining what happens to the gymnasts as they progress. Though there is a need for individualisation, this does not mean that the coach should not encourage pair and team work, and displays. The gymnasts at this age like working together. The coach will need to understand and account for the gymnasts undertaking a range of sports at this age. Within one session the gymnasts could rotate between coaches with different styles, for example, one coach who is 'stricter' who focuses on skills, another who is more informal and plays more games 'jump over the safety mat'</p>	
Progression / Exit Routes	<p>Those showing good flexibility, strength, skills, determination, willingness to learn, ambition, support should be directed towards competitive pathways e.g. development squads, the National Development Plan. Those who are interested/keen but may have less ability/drive should be given a range of alternatives.</p>	
Drop-out	<p>This is the age group in which serious drop-out starts to occur in the sport – particularly 8-9 years old. There appears to be a number of reasons for this (some of which the sport can control, some it cannot):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some gymnasts appear to be 'selected' out of the sport due to their lack of competitive success. • The sport is argued to get harder for 9 year olds. This was more common from artistic coaches. • Some parents seem to have a view that gymnastics is for small girls "who can throw themselves around", and is competitive. These ideas could be influencing the gymnasts • Gymnasts of this age also have lots more sporting options. From 10/11 years, and at secondary school, gymnasts are playing a number of sports and may make a decision to invest in another sport, or to narrow their sporting options • Children are much more conscious of their options 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Those gymnasts who have set out in a discipline specific competitive pathway will generally have received signals either from their coach, or competitive results, that they will not make it by 9-10 years old	
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LATE START	Characteristics	Comments
Age	10 years and upwards	
Motivations for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve physical condition To have fun and enjoyment To develop movement skills and competence To develop confidence and discipline To develop social ties To be part of a community Sense of excitement/achievement when performing and mastering a move To do something different 	
Entry Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some returners who have already had previous experience of the sport ("about 22-30 years") Some from other sports – cheerleading, dance, martial arts, free-running, other urban such as 'tricking', cycling 13/14 to 18/19 year olds - freestyle (mainly boys) Adult classes – 15/16 50/50 gymnastics/non-gymnastic background With family/partner/friend 	A number of coaches noted that it was easier to target late starters amongst boys than girls – notably around products such as freestyle
Physical characteristics and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibly unfit and out of condition. Possibly fit, but lacking flexibility, strength and body control provided by gymnastics conditioning and skills to undertake more complex and potentially dangerous skills/moves 	
Psychological characteristics and development	Older gymnasts may be reluctant to attempt more complex and potentially dangerous skills/moves.	
Sport structures	"Novice class" Adult session/group Freestyle	
Environments	The facilities/equipment/safety – sprung floors/pits – are very important 1-2 hours per week.	Freestyle might need non-traditional equipment e.g. a false wall
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm-up together Individualised programmes Gymnasts will work in groups on a particular activity/piece of equipment 	
Coaching	Some freestyle/adult class sessions are coached in a more structured fashion "to get the technique right, to ensure the safety dimension".	<p>"I will look at their strength, flexibility etc. The moves and techniques will build. You break the more complicated movements down and build confidence"</p> <p>"I will build them individualised programmes depending on what they want out of the sport"</p> <p>Other coaches have a more relaxed "come in and use the equipment" approach</p> <p>"In the freestyle class [with</p>

		13-18 year olds] we don't tell them what to do"
Progression / Exit Routes	Mainly Flexibility, Strength and Fitness Also, Dance, Display and Socialise and Competition Trampolining Tumbling, Vault and Floor, Cheerleading	"Many people don't get into tumbling until about 12 years old"

FLEXIBLE, STRONG AND FIT	Characteristics	Comments
Age	From 12 years onwards Some may come in from 15/16 years Most, however, appear to be in their late teens/early 20s Very few in 30s/40s	
Motivations for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve physical condition To develop movement skills and competence To develop confidence and discipline To develop social ties To be part of a community Sense of excitement/achievement when performing and mastering a move To have fun and enjoyment To do something different 	"It needs to move away from the leotard image, prancing about, it needs marketing as a cool urban sport. If you're in your 20s you're not going to the Olympics, you just want to come down and learn the moves"
Entry Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Club pathway Returners, for example, to their childrens' club Late entry e.g. performers from other sports – Cheerleading, Ice Skating, Kick Boxing, Martial Arts, Snow Boarding, Tricking, Trial Biking Young males – free running, tricking Many are likely to play other sports; one respondent noted similarities in movement with Basketball Some come with friends/partners Gymnasts will 'sell' the sport to friends 	With beginners/returners there can be a perception that adult classes are full of high performing gymnasts and that they will be out of their depth. This perception, however, appears ill-conceived and the club/coach needs to work on promoting the right messages
Physical characteristics and development	Longer term participant – building flexibility, strength, body coordination, skills	
Psychological characteristics and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant motivation to change body Significant motivation to interact with other gymnasts Many gymnasts will want a significant degree of control over activities and coaching input Others will want a more structured class No desire to 'show off' skills e.g. through display work or competition (at least in a gymnastics context), though they may use skills in other display environments/sports 	
Family/friends	Gymnasts may come with family/friends to group. For example, they may notice an 'adult group' when bringing their child to a session. They may come with an ex-gymnast friend etc. They may be looking to make friends within the group	

Other influences	Significant conflicts with education, work, family and social life. Gymnasts may have difficulties committing to every session	
Sport structures	Freestyle Adult sessions/group	There was some evidence of very limited provision of adult classes across quite large geographical areas.
Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendly supportive relaxed atmosphere High quality equipment and facilities e.g. sprung floor, trampolines – are very important Low profile presence from coach Low levels of structure – gymnasts may warm-up together and then focus on those activities they benefit from/enjoy Appropriate group numbers Opportunities for social interaction – possibly even 'nights out' Non-typical times e.g. later evenings 8 pm onwards Once a week for 2 hours 	<p>In a multi age group, multi-discipline gyms, the freestylers complained that they got second options on the equipment – thus there was often only limited space/kit they could work with. This reflected the priorities of the club.</p> <p>It's important to have appropriate group numbers – "you don't want to be waiting for too long for equipment"</p>
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varied depending on individual gymnast and their objectives Most will 'get on and do' with support from coach if required Others will want a structured programme 	<p>"It's good to have a joint warm up and then people just work to their personal aspirations and goals; everyone gets to do their own thing"</p> <p>It's kind of high quality personal training</p>
Coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low key approach to coaching from Head Coach respecting adults' choices about what they want Low key approach in freestyle session with 13-14 year olds. Considerable peer coaching 	
Other support/services	Access to high quality facilities is clearly very important to this group – sprung floors etc.	
Progression / Exit Routes	Some may move into 'Display, Dance and Socialise', and 'Competition' e.g. regional/veterans competition	
Drop-out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost may be an issue for some gymnasts Access/transport to appropriate facilities If peers within the group drop-out Injury 	

DANCE, DISPLAY & SOCIALISE	Characteristics	Comments
Age	<p>Some display groups start as young as 6 years (rec classes and junior squads). At 12 onwards there may be two different types of provision (a recreational offer and senior squads). There is a slight difference between 12-14 year olds (more coach-led), and 15 years and above (more gymnast-led) It is probably good practice to keep the 12-15 year olds separate from the 16 years and over. Display groups extend to 50/60s and above</p>	<p>There is little doubt that encouragement and support for this segment – notably access to facilities and display events – will encourage older age participation in gymnastics</p>
Motivations for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have fun and enjoyment • To display/perform • To develop social ties • To be part of a community • To improve physical condition • To develop movement skills and competence • To develop confidence • Sense of excitement/achievement when performing and mastering a move 	<p>Display groups provide options for gymnasts of differing levels of confidence and gregariousness. "Those who want to be up front can be, but display groups may have 20-30 members, so the shyer ones can also get involved but in a way they feel comfortable"</p>
Entry Routes	<p>Club pathway (e.g. those not entering or falling out of the competition pathway)</p> <p>"Anyone can come who wants to get involved"</p>	<p>"There is loads of appetite out there for display group gymnastics. There are loads of competitive gymnasts – regional, national, international – who when they get to 13 think they have to quit the sport. But they don't have to think like that, or do that, they can join a display group"</p>
Physical characteristics and development	<p>Many of these gymnasts will have developed a certain level of flexibility, strength, coordination and skills from earlier experiences in the sport However, physical condition needs to be watched in older gymnasts - particularly in relation to the complexity/difficulty of the moves</p>	<p>Some may suffer from older injuries</p>
Psychological characteristics and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some gymnasts may have been in the sport for 8-9 years at 12, and even longer for those who are older. • At the younger ages there is a need to re-energise/re-engage these gymnasts' love of the sport through different environments and activities • At 12 years of age many gymnasts (perhaps related to the changes associated with sexual maturity) show less interest in competing • This reenergising/change of direction may involve a coach/leader • In the older age groups 15/16 years and onwards (who have stuck with the 	

	<p>sport) they will often be very self-motivated – “they don’t want anyone telling them what to do” - and will often coach themselves (a lead coach may not be required)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Particular emphasis is placed on team work, camaraderie, and social ties in all groups • There is a particular emphasis on performance • They want to show off their skills and work towards a final goal (e.g. a performance/display) • Having a goal to work towards e.g. GymFusion or big events is a central motivating element for this segment 	
Family/friends	<p>Social ties are <u>very</u> important to this group They want to stay loyal to the club, their coach, their friends/community. They feel like they belong to a big family. They want to have a laugh together, to travel, to see different parts of the UK and overseas</p>	
Other influences	<p>Significant conflicts with education, work, family and social life. Gymnasts may have difficulties committing to every session. It requires a flexible approach from the group to gymnasts entering and withdrawing from routines.</p>	
Sport structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult session • Display groups • School fairs • Club competitions/veterans competitions • Gym Fusion (Regional and National) 	<p>“The national Gym Fusion events are better, the crowds are bigger, the crowd are more informed, they can appreciate what you’re doing”</p> <p>“The regional ones are better for the younger gymnasts. It lets them have a go”</p>
Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly, welcoming, supportive, “a laugh” • Sessions/displays established so that the gymnasts have a large say in the moves/skills and choreography. • There is not as much pressure to perform as in, for example, competitive gymnastics. This provides, it is argued, a more comfortable experience for the gymnasts and the coaches. • Variety comes from the different backgrounds of the display group – gymnastics, cheerleading, dancing and so on • Goal focused • Self-organising • Self-coaching • The coach (where there is one) will largely just facilitate this. • That said there is need for leadership with groups to broker decisions. A clear agreed leader can make the 	<p>Putting on a display can be quite hard work. It requires focused effort and attention and the ‘fun’ element can sometimes be lacking. But there are significant rewards after a ‘successful’ display.</p> <p>“The displays have to be engaging and exciting because that keeps people in [the groups]. We don’t want to do the same things every day or week because people will drop out”</p>

	<p>group function much more effectively</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-typical times for sessions e.g. later evenings 8 pm onwards • 2 hours per week • Sessions typically run once a week for 1-2 hours, though there may be more sessions closer to the Display (e.g. 2/3 times a week). 	
Activities	<p>Varied – gymnast led “They agree on the session agenda and get on with it”</p>	<p>One coach estimated that of those that would drop-out from the sport at 12-13 years under the traditional provision, 60% would stay on if the provision was changed to emphasise dancing, displays and floor work</p>
Coaching	<p>In the younger age groups the coach may have a more central role – though they will be guided by what the gymnasts want/enjoy doing. For example, the gymnasts will not be split up into groups by ability, but by friendship. There may be less of a role for a head coach/coach in older age groups – these gymnasts will often coach themselves.</p>	<p>The lack of a clear leader in the older age group can cause problems – there is often a lot of opinions (many of them are coaches), but no-one to make the final decision. This can present tensions with the group.</p>
Progression / Exit Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some groups go on until their late 60s and beyond • GymFusion/Festivals • Those who don’t want to display may go into ‘Flexible, Strong and Fit’ 	
Drop-out	<p>Many gymnasts join display groups 14/15/16 years. However, they tend to drop-out when they go to university.</p>	

COMPETITION	Characteristics	Comments
Age	Mainly 8 years and upwards (though it can start before at local level e.g. 6 years)	Beyond the 'Early Start' phases 'Competition' has historically been one of the main pathway options for gymnasts. It is clear that many youngsters and indeed many adults get a great deal out of preparing for, and competing in competition. It provides focus, excitement and potentially reward. The use of competition is encouraged if appropriate to the gymnasts (i.e. in a consultation between coach, gymnast (and parent)).
Motivations for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To compete To win competitions 	
Entry Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Club pathways 'Flexibility, Strength and Fitness' 'Dance, Display and Socialise' <p>(The research picked up a number of individuals in these groups who were training – over the medium to long term – for a 'return' to competition)</p>	The coach is encouraged to have an open dialogue with the gymnasts, and parents about the commitments involved preparing for and entering competitions. It should be a joint decision because it implies considerable commitment
Physical characteristics and development	Competition – at all levels – may require superior physical preparation. Injury may be an issue for some competitive gymnasts	Even at the lower levels one or two gymnasts suggested "sometimes when we are practicing for competition it gets too much ... it gets difficult ... and you feel like you can't do it"
Psychological characteristics and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competition performers may require particular psychological attributes - competence, confidence, extroversion Confidence/self-motivation is the key because it can be a very individual sport – training and competing alone (depending on discipline and club set-up). Competition performers enjoy the status of competing On the other hand, some gymnasts may find it difficult to handle the training, and not winning/rejection. 	Gymnasts without the appropriate levels (or perceived levels) of ability may need to be managed because they can be quickly be put off if they are not keeping up, or are not progressing relative to their peer groups
Family/friends	Parents will often need to be very supportive of their child's participation – transport, funding, emotional support. There may be tensions/conflicts with school friends, for example, in relation to going to parties. Gymnasts may prioritise the sport over friends and this can lead to some issues. However,	

	many gymnasts make friends at the gymnastics club	
Other influences	Talented performers will often be focused on gymnastics at the expense of other areas of their lives e.g. school work. Special arrangements may need to be made with, for example, schools so that schoolwork and gymnastics don't conflict with each other substantially	
Sport structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower level competition (e.g. grass roots/general gymnastics) • Veterans' competitions (over 19s, 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s) 	Low level competition structures in many disciplines are not well established. Even those low level structures may still be too difficult for many gymnasts.
Environments	Sessions more serious; more structured	
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced badges • National finals 	There is concern that the competition requirements/badges in the 8-11 years segment (especially around 8-9 years) becomes too difficult for many gymnasts and thus this may lead to drop-out.
Coaching	Personal conditioning sheets	Coaches could think about passing gymnasts on to other clubs/coaches
Progression / Exit Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display groups • Coaching 	
Drop-out	<p>It is suggested that those gymnasts who had experienced some success in a competition environment were among the most likely to stay in the sport. These participants were seen to be amongst the most enthusiastic about the sport, they were committed.</p> <p>Though the drop down to recreational gymnastics can be a challenge for some, there are certainly routes into display groups. Many competitive gymnasts, it was argued, go on to be coaches</p>	<p>"The pressure of competing is so high that people do drop-out, even at county level, if you are not doing certain moves, you can't compete".</p> <p>One of the issues with competition is that it requires minimum standards of performance for entry, and specific moves. This means that many gymnasts who were previously competing either cannot and do not want to do the moves.</p>

TALENT & PERFORMANCE	Characteristics	Comments
Age	<p>Young children may be recognised as early as 4 years for having exceptional flexibility, strength, coordination and skill</p> <p>5-7 year olds with this ability may be given more specialised support</p> <p>BG Talent Pool includes youngsters as young as 8 years, and peaks about 11 years – there is a sharp drop-off from 11-12 year onwards until about 20 years when only the highest level performers are left in this pathway</p>	The 'Talent Pool' describes the gymnasts that are below World Class programmes (or the equivalent for non-funded disciplines). Gymnasts are identified as talented based on the high standard of their competition results.
Motivations for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To compete and win at the highest level 	
Entry Routes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talent ID can happen from any age from 4 to 12 years Progression from club 'development squads' to national programmes can happen anywhere between 12 to 18 years. 	
Physical characteristics and development	High level of physical development – flexibility, strength, body control, skills etc.	
Psychological characteristics and development	<p>To compete at the highest level requires an almost fanatical devotion to the sport</p> <p>For many this psychological component is one of the main determining factors</p>	
Other influences	Talented and high performing gymnasts – in many respects – need to block out 'the other' distractions. Relationships and social life may suffer. This needs to be carefully managed	
Sport structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional/national/international competition National Development Plan 	
Environments	A noticeable change in sporting environment. Much more serious/intense but with significant opportunities and rewards	
Coaching	<p>Of all the segments, the traditional discipline specific – technical skills/instructional – coaching model is argued to fit most comfortably here.</p> <p>There should, however, be a time for fun and variation in any training programme.</p> <p>Coaches also need to acknowledge that as the gymnasts get older they will require a much bigger say in their training, preparation and competition</p>	
Other support/services		The time involved in training and competing at the highest levels can be very onerous on the gymnasts – many drop-out because of over-training or because they have other competing considerations – school, other sport, friends etc.

Drop-out	<p>According to BG data a great many talented/performance gymnasts drop-out of this pathway from 11-12 years onwards (well below peak competition age)</p> <p>As might be expected from a high performance pathway there is considerable drop-out</p>	
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GUIDING AND HELPING	Characteristics	Comments
Age	12 years and upwards Many youngsters get a taste for leadership and coaching from a young age Coaching starts (formally) at 16 years	Awards Scheme Coach is available from age 14 upwards
Motivations for engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To guide and support younger gymnasts To stay in a sport they love To give something back to the sport 	"Leadership academies have been very successful at keeping youngsters in the sport at 12-14 years"
Entry Routes	Mainly through club pathways. Leadership academies can be used to address drop-off in the 12-14 years age range	
Psychological characteristics and development		<p>"They get recognition in school when they're doing awards associated with the leadership academies"</p> <p>"I get much more out of coaching than I did as a participant"</p>
Family/friends	Friendship and social ties are very important in gymnastics clubs. Leading, coaching, officiating, and other roles provide a means of keeping in touch.	
Sport structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership Academies Award Scheme Coach UKCC Levels 1-3 	
Activities	Judging course for 13 year olds	"they feel like they're getting a qualification"
Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BG bursary scheme 'New Coach' initiative 	<p>The cost of coach education has increased since the introduction of the UKCC especially at Level 2.</p> <p>This is prohibitive to some potential coaches, but – it is argued – is also forcing clubs to think more carefully about who they put forward for coaching qualifications.</p>
Drop-out	Many coaches will go to university at 18 years – but will look for participation and coaching opportunities when they are there	