READY FOR THE WORLD?

LEVELS OF HEALTH AND FITNESS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE UK 2014
To get ahead in today’s world young people need to be well-rounded individuals; not just focused on academic achievement but also able to challenge themselves, gaining life experience and valuable transferable skills. Taking on an expedition is a fantastic way for young people to push themselves outside of their comfort zone, both physically and mentally, whilst at the same time experiencing international cultures and forging life-long friendships. But to be able to access this type of opportunity – and to make the most of the experience whilst there – physical fitness is key.

At World Challenge our experience of delivering expeditions of all shapes and sizes (we work with schools in 25 countries and over 10,000 students, or Challengers as we like to call them) means that we are acutely aware of the importance of being physically and mentally prepared for the challenge. There will undoubtedly be illness and injury on any expedition, but if the team is physically fit then this shouldn’t get in the way of what should be the experience of a lifetime.

In 2013 we introduced compulsory fitness testing for all Challengers signing up to a World Challenge expedition. Far too often we look only at measurements like BMI to judge fitness, but fitness is not just about weight. Our data taken over the last year shows that whilst students signing up to World Challenge are more likely to be of a healthy weight, still more than one in four will fail to reach our recommended target fitness level first time around.

Looking to guidance from the government it is not clear where the responsibility for young people’s fitness lies. Most young people are fit and healthy because of a combination of school and parental influence along with the child’s own interests but increasingly young people are falling through the cracks. What is worrying for me is that if we don’t take responsibility for
the fitness of young people on our expeditions it is rare that anyone else does.

Following the London 2012 Olympic Games the government has talked about the legacy

To get ahead in today’s world young people need to be well-rounded individuals

of sport in our schools. This has resulted in positive developments like the announcement of an extra £150m a year for sport in primary schools until 2020 (Department for Education (DfE), February 2014) and an £18m fund from Sport England to improve primary school sports facilities from 2014.

Yet at the same time targets for school sports participation have been scrapped and no additional support has been provided to secondary schools to replace the School Sports Partnerships which were pulled in 2011. Evidence from the DfE\(^1\) shows that participation in sport in secondary schools is declining whilst levels in primary schools are rising so how can we ensure that we maintain this focus on fitness and physical activity through the teenage years?

A report published by the Department for Health in 2014 (Moving more, living more: Olympic and Paralympic Games legacy) highlighted that for young people physical activity is essential for healthy growth and development, increases cognitive outcomes and school attainment, and improves social interaction and confidence.

To stand out in today’s world a graduate needs to be able to demonstrate global citizenship, an awareness of international culture, issues and opportunities in addition to a strong academic track record. Students must also work on their soft skills such as teamwork and leadership, thus demonstrating that they have more to offer their prospective employer, or indeed the passion to go it alone.

Through setting about a tough mental and physical challenge they are able to demonstrate a sense of commitment, focus and self-reliance, all highly useful skills to help shape future success.

\(\text{\textcopyright Matt Eastlake, Group Managing Director, World Challenge}\)

---

\(^1\) Evidence on Physical Education and Sport in Schools’, Department for Education, June 2013
In 2013 World Challenge introduced compulsory fitness testing to determine whether an applicant would be capable of coping with the physical challenge of an extended expedition.

We were surprised to see that from the sample of 5,000 students (predominantly aged 15-16) 28% failed to reach our recommended level of fitness. This number is even more surprising taking into consideration that the self-selection process of signing up for an expedition means that, compared with the general population at this age group, this sample has proportionately fewer individuals who are overweight or obese.

National statistics on the fitness levels of young people (Health Survey for England 2012) show that older children and teenagers, and girls are least likely to be meeting the government’s recommendations for physical activity in a week. Our results also show that when a second bleep test is conducted three months after the first, 25% who did not reach the recommended level first time round will succeed on a second attempt, showing that focusing on improving fitness can have a quick and clear impact.
28% of World Challenge applicants failed to reach an average level of fitness in an initial test.

9% 28%

Only 9% of World Challenge applicants are considered overweight or obese compared with a national average of 28% (2-15 year olds, Health Survey for England, 2012).

A further 14% of World Challenge applicants are considered underweight.

46% of pupils in secondary schools reported participating in at least three hours of high quality PE and out-of-hours school sport a week (PE and Sport Survey 2009-2010, DfE).

The proportion of young people meeting recommendations for physical activity is lower in older children and teenagers (Health Survey for England, 2012).

The gender gap is clear by the age of seven with 63% of boys reaching a recommended daily target compared to just 38% of girls (Tackling physical inactivity: A co-ordinated approach, All-party Commission on Physical Activity, 2014).

Amongst young people aged 13-15 only 14% of boys and just 8% of girls are meeting the government’s recommended target for physical activity (Health Survey for England, 2012).

As a society, compared to 1961 levels we are now 24% less active (All-party Commission on Physical Activity, 2014).

Physical inactivity leads to around 37,000 premature deaths a year, more than all deaths from murder, suicide and accidents combined (All-party Commission on Physical Activity, 2014).
EXPERIOD DOCTOR

Expeditions present many challenges – whatever age you are.

Being physically fit means that climbing mountains, navigating through jungles, camel trekking in the heat of the desert or walking through snow can all be savoured rather than endured because of poor levels of fitness.

If you are unfit, the privilege of walking for five hours each day in the Himalayas will seem more like a survival exercise! Good aerobic fitness is required for all expeditions – particularly when trekking at high altitude or in hot, cold or humid environments. World Challenge now ask all Challengers to complete a fitness test during their preparations to help develop a clear picture of their level of fitness compared to their peers, and with the guidance of school PE staff, can create a training programme to increase those levels to a stage where they can get the most out of their planned expedition.

It is a good idea to start by undertaking similar levels of activity at home before visiting a new environment. Walking in the British hills with a rucksack and well-fitting boots is a very good way to develop expedition fitness; it’s not essential to go running to get fit.

Simply doing your preferred exercise for half an hour, three times each week, will help to increase fitness levels, reduce heart rate and reduce recovery times. This could be walking or cycling to school instead of getting a lift, swimming, going to the gym or playing a sport. What’s most important is that the activity is enjoyable, sustainable and is at a level to increase heart rate for at least half an hour.

Working together as a team ahead of any expedition is a good way of getting ready to deal with any possible difficulties – illness, over-tiredness, hunger, travel delays, emotional hardships. A good sense of humour will always be an essential asset!

>> Dr Jon Dallimore, Expedition Medical Expert (below)

In 2004 Dr Jon Dallimore published a report looking at the prevalence of illness and injury on youth expeditions based on an analysis of medical cards from 2,402 World Challengers.

The overall finding was that illness and injury on expeditions was common (being reported by 64% of participants), but serious incidents were rare. The five most prevalent medical problems were:

- Diarrhoea: 22%
- Nausea/vomiting: 20%
- Cold or sore throat: 11%
- Headache: 11%
- Physical Injury: 10%
Exercise helps children and young people to develop healthy bones, muscles and joints, a healthy heart and lungs, and aids the development of movement and coordination skills whilst enabling them to maintain a healthy body weight. What some people don’t realise is that children should be physically active from birth. Even young babies can move their arms, legs and head in a safe and supervised environment. Once children get to five years old they should be doing a few different types of exercise a week that will help to build their muscles and bone strength as well as their fitness levels. All young people between the ages of five and 18 should be doing 60-minutes of physical activity a week, complimented by muscle-strengthening activities, which includes things like running and gymnastics, three times a week.

Instilling good habits from childhood is paramount. When we’re young we are more impressionable and the habits we learn stay with us throughout our lives.

At Nuffield Health we take a proactive approach in providing preventative and curative health and wellbeing initiatives to education institutions and local communities to help combat national health concerns. This not only helps improve the health and wellbeing of young people, but spurs them on to greater successes. Preventative health, through all-round fitness, is the future of healthcare. Nuffield Health believes in encouraging children and young people to learn about their health and fitness and we are delighted to see that World Challenge is seeking to increase awareness of the importance of keeping fit from an early age.

About Nuffield Health

• Established in 1957, Nuffield Health is the UK’s largest not-for-profit healthcare organisation. We provide clinical, fitness and wellbeing services to educational institutions, seeking to show that improving the health and wellbeing of young people can impact on every aspect of their lives, especially their ability to learn.

• Nuffield Health provides expert, joined-up healthcare defined by and created for UK health consumers. We are independent of Government, have no shareholders and reinvest our surplus to improve our facilities or provide public health education. We provide access to 15,000 health experts through our 31 hospitals, 65 fitness & wellbeing centres, 200 corporate facilities and 20 medical clinics to help people get healthy, and stay healthy. Nuffield Health is an award-winning not-for-profit organisation, winning Health Investor Social Enterprise of the Year in 2010 and Private Hospital Group of the Year in 2011.

www.nuffieldhealth.com
TOP TIPS FOR CHALLENGERS

How to ensure that students have a safe and enjoyable expedition.

one

Do your research. Challengers need to know what to expect on their expedition as some expeditions are more demanding than others and more physical and mental preparation is needed. The target fitness levels given to participants by World Challenge should be viewed as the minimum level and those taking part in tough trekking expeditions will benefit from setting themselves a higher target.

two

Start early. It’s never too early to start preparing. As soon as the trip is confirmed students should start their own research and fitness programme. As the departure date gets closer the focus on preparation will need to increase, but it doesn’t take much to get started.

three

Start small. You don’t need to be a serious athlete but a good level of fitness is important. If this doesn’t come naturally, students should start small and build themselves up. Those who have never been on a trek before are unlikely to be able to tackle an extended trek into the mountains straightaway, so Challengers should get outside and get used to walking in the local area.

four

Set yourself targets. If students are not naturally ‘sporty’ and are starting a fitness programme for the first time it will help to set some targets – just make sure they are manageable. This will help them to see how they are progressing as the intensity and duration of the activity increases. Getting started can be a challenge psychologically, but once they get going students will realise just what they can achieve.
**Get your heart rate up.** Developing good cardiovascular fitness is key. Going to the gym to pump weights may help with carrying your pack but won’t assist your stamina during a long trek in the mountains. Challengers should try walking, swimming, jogging or team games – anything that raises the heart rate is good.

**Make it social.** Team games like football or netball are a great form of cardiovascular exercise and fun. Challengers don’t need to be playing competitively but should try and get together as a team to play sport. As well as helping to prepare for the physical challenge by improving fitness, it will also help build a strong team bond that is vital on expedition.

**Get out there and give it a go!** Challengers don’t need lots of time, money or fancy equipment to start preparing for their expedition. Whatever their level of fitness they should just start out at a pace that is comfortable, choosing an activity that they enjoy, and gradually increase the intensity and duration of the exercise as their body adapts.
“Everything in life is a learning curve but my experience in Kenya definitely put me on the path to wanting to find new adventures all over the world and do more interesting and engaging things with my life. It was the catalyst and perhaps if I hadn’t gone on the expedition then my life may have panned out differently.”

Paul (inset) said:
“After coming back from Kenya I went and worked for six months on a building site to save money so that I could fly back out to Africa! I have since hitchhiked and used local transport to cross West Africa and the Sahara Desert; snow-boarded in the Himalayas; kayaked the White Nile; started an on-going volunteer project in Uganda and also driven a taxi around the world.

“People who aren’t fit tend to have a miserable time on expedition, particularly in the tougher areas when everyone else is enjoying looking at the surrounding scenery and really making the most of the experience.”

CHALLENGERS

Jamie Maddison and Paul Archer from Marling School in Stroud, Gloucestershire were both part of a World Challenge expedition to Kenya in 2005. Both Jamie and Paul have gone on to further adventures. Jamie is currently writing his first book, an account of four journeys to Central Asia including a challenging 1,100km horse ride through Kazakhstan, whilst Paul broke the world records for the longest ever journey by taxi and the highest altitude reached by taxi on a journey that went around the world and raised £20,000 for charity.

Jamie (top) said:
“Being physically fit helps you to deal with stressful situations on expedition, most of which occur when you’re tired after a long, hard day and are out of your comfort zone. So if you’re physically fit then you can tend to keep things in perspective a lot more and as a result enjoy yourself and have much more of a pleasant time in a foreign country.

“Everything in life is a learning curve but my experience in Kenya definitely put me on the path to wanting to find new adventures all over the world and do more interesting and engaging things with my life. It was the catalyst and perhaps if I hadn’t gone on the expedition then my life may have panned out differently.”

Paul (inset) said:
“After coming back from Kenya I went and worked for six months on a building site to save money so that I could fly back out to Africa! I have since hitchhiked and used local transport to cross West Africa and the Sahara Desert; snow-boarded in the Himalayas; kayaked the White Nile; started an on-going volunteer project in Uganda and also driven a taxi around the world.

“People who aren’t fit tend to have a miserable time on expedition, particularly in the tougher areas when everyone else is enjoying looking at the surrounding scenery and really making the most of the experience.”
LIZZY YARNOLD
Winter Olympics Gold Medallist

is also a former Challenger having taken part in her school’s expedition along the Maya Route in 2006. She said of her experience:

“I learnt a lot about leadership, drive, fitness and motivation during my expedition experience and I have carried those disciplines forward into my career as an athlete.

“Anything can happen whilst you’re in-country – very much like it can in skeleton – and you have to be both mentally and physically prepared. Being fit makes activity a lot more enjoyable.”
Vanessa Johnson is a personal trainer and World Challenge Expedition Leader. An experienced mountaineer, Vanessa leads expeditions around the world that involve mountainous or strenuous treks.

"On a seven–14 day trek you need to have everything with you and so need to be able to carry a heavy pack on what can be quite difficult terrain. Seven days on Kilimanjaro (Tanzania) is tough even for Expedition Leaders – battling cold nights, hot days, sand blowing.

"Last year in Borneo we had a small number of Challengers who hadn’t taken the fitness aspect seriously and ultimately were not fit enough to be able to summit. A teacher has to stay back with that group so unless the ratios are right for the Expedition Leader to take a group on ahead then the whole group suffers. Fortunately in Borneo we were able to join up with another group and were able to summit but it would have been so disappointing for those students to have got so far and not been able to complete their mission simply because a small number had not trained for the challenge.”

In July 2014 Robert Molnar will be leading his 20th expedition with World Challenge after first joining as an Expedition Leader in 2006. With a background in orienteering – competing on an international level – Robert specialises in high altitude expeditions around the world, particularly in the Himalayas and East Africa.

With a degree in Physical Education and a Masters in Sports Science Robert is well aware of the importance of fitness when it comes to tackling a challenging expedition. He says:

"Even just being at altitude, if you are struggling physically this will have a big impact on your health and wellbeing. These expeditions are already putting students well outside their comfort zone and so if they are not physically prepared there will be no resources left to help them recover from any set backs or challenges faced on the trip.

"However, at the same time being extremely fit can also be a disadvantage on expedition. It is not an individual pursuit, you need to pull together as a team and I have often seen strong athletes struggle mentally because they get frustrated with having to slow their pace to match the rest of the group. At altitude, whatever age group you are working with, you also find that very strong athletes also struggle more with altitude sickness as they push themselves too far and too fast, not noticing the warning signs of altitude sickness.

"If a student on expedition wakes up one morning and their first thought is for someone else, or their team as a whole and not themselves, that is when I think they have succeeded. These experiences force us to think beyond ourselves. Being part of a team you can feed off the energy of those around you and for these young Challengers it can really push them to achieve what they didn’t think was possible.”

Taking young people outside of their ‘comfort zone’ leads to a transformation in confidence and ability to take on more everyday challenges back home.
Dave Hart spent 24 years in the Royal Marines – including 20 years as a physical training instructor – before becoming a World Challenge Expedition Leader in 2008. Due to lead his 13th expedition in summer 2014 Dave has worked on a wide range of expeditions across the world, drawing on his experience of operating in all kinds of extreme environments as a Marine.

“A lot of the Challengers I talk to during the ‘meet the leaders’ session almost see the expedition as a holiday, they don’t understand just how difficult it could be,” said Dave. “The research they do into the country and the expedition looks fantastic – and it is – but the reality is that it is a challenging experience.

“My advice to any Challenger would be to spend time on your feet; a 2k walk isn’t far enough, can you do 10k? One night out camping might be easy but can you do two or three nights, walking in between?

The expedition looks fantastic – and it is – but the reality is that it is a challenging experience

“Confidence is the most important factor as, after committing to a physical conditioning programme prior to the start of an expedition, it’s been observed just how much better these Challengers operate and deal more confidently with their lives, routines, stresses and behaviour in the challenging situations and conditions they are faced with.”
In addition to helping students build interpersonal skills, school trips are considered by Ofsted to be powerful tools for significantly raising personal achievement.

Tom Burnett (right), World Challenge School Leader at Gillotts School in Henley-on-Thames, led his first expedition to Kenya’s Rift Valley in 2012. The group spent some time acclimatising to the culture, altitude and temperature before spending a week living in and working with a local community to help build a new health centre. They then headed into the Aberdare Mountains for a five day trekking expedition before heading north to Lake Baringo and Lake Bogoria for some rest and relaxation.

“Fitness testing is critical. It really hits home to students that this is more than just a holiday and setting targets can encourage a strong work ethic, giving a greater sense of achievement when they are successful. Having a focus on fitness can also build resilience amongst the students, something that is vital out on expedition and in many other aspects of life.

“On our first trip a couple of the students didn’t really take fitness all that seriously and then struggled on the practice expedition in the UK. One particular student had difficulties with the hike which impacted negatively on the rest of the team. Going through this experience taught him that he could do more than he thought he could, pushing his body beyond what his mind was telling him he could do.”

Tom’s next World Challenge trip will be a two-week expedition to Morocco in 2015.

Andy Bishop went on his first World Challenge expedition when he was 16 – and with a new thirst for adventure, spent much of his available time during and between his degree and PGCE travelling in South America, Africa and Asia. “I always tried to avoid the touristic places,” he said. “I’ve lived among communities in the slums of Brazil and in mud huts on the Maasai Mara reserve.”

Andy, a World Challenge School Leader at Park View School in Chester-le-Street, doesn’t want young people in his school to miss out on the opportunities he’s had.

“It opens their eyes to the wider world, what’s important and what’s not. It’s great preparation for life. There are some of our pupils who wouldn’t otherwise look beyond Chester-le-Street, who think that’s it for their lives, who might not be given the opportunity to do other things. This is a way to break down that sense of limitations – they can do anything if they work at it.

“You get such a mixture of types of fitness. A lot of students at the age of 16 or 17 will go to the gym or do weight training. But it can be a fad – and we found that a lot of students who thought they were very fit struggled when they were out there.”

A Park View expedition team heads off to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands on 4 July 2014.
Speaking to Challengers, School Leaders, Doctors and Expedition Leaders it is clear that having a good base level of fitness is absolutely essential to make the most of your time on expedition. However, it is also important to remember that physical fitness has an impact on a young person’s longer term health and wellbeing.

The fact is that more than one in four World Challenge applicants does not reach our recommended level of fitness the first time around. This is not a particularly high grade of fitness; our target levels are set to an ‘average’ level of cardiovascular fitness in relation to a participant’s age and gender. With this in mind, the results are both surprising and disappointing.

It is not currently clear where the responsibility for the fitness of young people lies so we all – government, media, business, parents, school – need to take stock. An abundance of effort has been put into campaigns and initiatives to address obesity amongst young people, but fitness is about so much more than just weight or a BMI score; many of the students who didn’t reach the recommended level of fitness were within the ‘healthy’ range for BMI.

So what should we be doing to improve this situation? At World Challenge we recognise that we are in an advantageous position to be able to have an impact on young people’s fitness and as a result have developed Fitness Assistance Packs to support all Challengers to prepare for their very own expedition.

But on a broader level the first step is to start talking more widely about fitness – why is it so important, how can young people be supported to improve their fitness, what should schools/government be doing? Every little helps.

We hope that this report has provided some valuable food for thought and will further contribute to the dialogue on the importance of being fit and healthy and how, moving forward, we ensure that our young people truly are Ready for this World.

SO WHAT’S NEXT?

But on a broader level the first step is to start talking more widely about fitness – why is it so important, how can young people be supported to improve their fitness, what should schools/government be doing? Every little helps.

We hope that this report has provided some valuable food for thought and will further contribute to the dialogue on the importance of being fit and healthy and how, moving forward, we ensure that our young people truly are Ready for this World.

>> World Challenge

Further Information

For media enquiries or images, contact:
Global Communications Manager Jon Dale on +44 (0)1494 427621 or +44 (0)7824 016041 or email: jdale@world-challenge.co.uk
To discuss the findings of this report contact:
Group Managing Director Matt Eastlake on +44 (0) 1494 427595 or email: meastlake@world-challenge.co.uk