

Survey May 2022: Strength and balance messaging development research – Key findings

This report summarises key findings of qualitative research from Hampshire County Council on strength and balance messaging development.

The research included one hour depth and paired depth interviews with Hampshire Perspectives forum members aged 49-85 (mainly over 65), predominantly female to explore response to a number of potential messaging routes for social media, assessing key message communication, relevance and resonance and areas of optimisation. All recruited on previous survey claims of doing strength and balance activities less than once a fortnight, or not at all. Respondents included 3 with specific health and mobility challenges that impacted ability to exercise, 2 of whom also had specific experience in the field of mobility for older people.

This research was conducted between 4 and 7 July 2022

The findings were as follows:

1. Creating engagement in the topic itself is challenging

- a) *Seen as unimportant*: Strength and balance not regarded as important 'for me' or contain any benefits 'for me'. Strength and balance only become important when you lose them: otherwise, they are rarely considered. The topic only really resonated with those in the research with physical limitations.
- b) *Believed to have Limited Perceived benefit*: Behavioural Economics tells us that benefits that are perceived as a long way in the future do not compensate for the cost of taking action now.
- c) *Ageing an unwelcome subject*: People don't want to think about getting older.
- d) *Exercise is hard*: There are barriers to exercise (even for those who are more active): boredom, time pressures, physical limitations, lack of motivation. Classes are polarising in appeal.

2. The creative routes explored also did little to engage

- a) *Too complex*: There is too much information to get across in a single execution, creating confusion over the message and leaving unanswered questions. Requirement to split up 'strength' and 'balance' as they are too complex to address in one single execution.
- b) *Unclear objective*: Not clear what is being promoted (specific classes, or general activity?), so no clear call to action.
- c) *Not motivating*: Benefits as expressed did not motivate respondents who are currently physically able.
- d) *Not Relevant*: Targeting is unclear, reducing relevance/engagement and inviting criticism. Trying to be all things to all people and failing. Therefore, respondents did not see themselves as the target audience

3. Recommendations

- a) Make benefits tangible and based in the present to make strength and balance more relevant. Be clearer on the call to action.
- b) Portray exercise as fun (wording tone and visuals both important), and/or something that can be worked into everyday activity.
- c) Avoid language around ageing.
- d) Educating, motivating and engaging all remain important, but are hard to do in a single execution, especially if the target audience is broad. Consider using multiple executions (or video) to cover all objectives, and increase relevance and inclusivity (targeting different people and showing different activities).
- e) Show exercise classes with caution – they do not appeal to all.
- f) Some respondents felt the best approach to encourage strength and balance exercise is to show it incorporated into daily life