

Julian Starkey – Written evidence (NPS0067)

Summary

The evidence presented is based on an in depth case study around Bracknell ACs success in mobilising a young Coaching Programme for 16 -1Yos to enable an additional 100 children 8 -11 to experience athletics as a sporting activity.

Where possible some comment has been made around the study questions where the author has some experience, these could be explored further if wished.

Introduction

This evidence is presented following experiences gained as being the Chair of Bracknell Athletic club which it is felt provides a good case study around developing and promoting active lifestyles.

The club has approx. 300 annual members and provides coaching to children from School Yr4 upwards, the evidence presented below outlines the changes to the way we used young coaches to provide coaching to primary age athletes (100+ per week) who are outside the annual membership numbers. To deliver the sport the club also has 26 licenced adult coaches, and 30 technical officials and a committee of 15.

In addition to being Chair of Bracknell Athletic Club, I am for English Clubs representative on the UK athletics Members Council, Chair of the South East Region For England Athletics, have a Level 3 Coaching Licence, Level 4 Officials Licence and an MSc in Behaviour Change with a dissertation on Volunteering.

Study Response

How can local delivery, including funding structures, of sport and recreation be improved to ensure that people of all ages and abilities are able to lead an active lifestyle? For example, how successfully do local authorities and other bodies such as Active Partnerships, Leisure Trusts, local sports clubs and charities work together, and how might coordination be improved?

How can children and young people be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation both at school and outside school, and lead an active lifestyle? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

The 2012 Olympics appeared to generate an upsurge in interest in Athletics from around 2010 when Bracknell AC needed to start managing membership in more organised manner requiring a waiting list, mainly for children under the age of 12, to avoid having more members than coaching resources (Qualified Coaches and volunteer hours they were prepared to commit, available facilities and the appropriate equipment) would allow.

The club needed to increase the amount on offer to reduce the waiting list size and allow a greater number of children to experience sport. This needed an approach that increased the coaching cadre, financed the equipment, financed the facility rental, and managed the opportunity.

Our initial approach was to pay some expenses to an individual who was happy to put some effort into delivering a once-a-week activity on a Saturday, this helped reduce waiting list growth.

Following relocation, I stepped in and soon realised that I needed some assistance and turned to several female athletes who were 16 and deciding whether to continue to drop-out, I felt that they didn't realise that they could participate beyond being a competitor, and that they could become coaches. Offering expenses helped.

Using 16 Y.O. to coach had advantages in that the children could relate to them better than they could to an adult, and it demonstrated to other 16 Y.O. that there were opportunities to be seized. This brought additional offers of help which in turn allowed more offers to be made thus reducing the waiting list.

An England Athletics/Spirit of 2012 grant enabled the scheme to grow and a pathway established. Since 2015 over 35 prospective coaches have been through the scheme, with over 25 either passing their Level 1 (supervised) or waiting for a course, with four reaching level 2 (unsupervised).

A measure of success was the ability of two coaches who reached L2 creating a summer school business to earn money during their summer break.

Challenges

The generation of a team of young coaches has challenges, session supervision and gaining appropriate qualifications is a limiting factor and sport dependent. In general sports have similar qualification age minimums for different levels, the first requiring supervision and the second allowing sessions to be delivered unsupervised, some have lower minimums for unsupervised coaching. Some sports are strict about the age you can take the course while others allow courses to be booked/taken in advance of a birthday with licences being issued once the minimum age has been reached.

Sport	L1 (Supervised)	L2 (Unsupervised)
Athletics	16	18
Boxing	17	18
Cricket	16	17
Cycling	16	18

Gymnastics	16	17
Hockey	16	18
Netball	16	18
Rugby	16	18
Sailing	16	16
Soccer	16	16
Swimming	16	16
Tennis	16	?
Triathlon	16	18

The inconsistency when coupled with the timing of 16th birthdays can mean that teenagers who take school exams together are unable to gain coaching qualifications together. This results in bias to and engagement with those who can reach L2 before they leave secondary education.

Access to a course can also be a barrier with geography restricting opportunities to a small number of local instances with capacity limitations, which can lead to cancellation or deferment. Two 100 miles round trips over a weekend to attend a course requires commitment from child and parent. The shift to online learning can help address this, however, accreditation is likely to still require a physical assessment.

The use of 16-18 YO's to coach while a positive learning experience for that age group and it helps meet the need to mobilise younger children it avoids the issue of why use this age group to coach children.

The valuable skills learnt by this age group could be more formally recognised and learning credits

Using these age groups to requires qualified adult supervision and administration, particularly around access to personal details, handling payments, procuring equipment and scheduling.

Opportunities

- Provision of learning credits/CPD to all course attendees, not just adults.
- Alignment of course provision across all sports
- A national project to mobilise young coaches

Figure 1 Case Study using young coaches at Bracknell AC

Activity Generation

To generate an Activity capability several components, need to be brought together: (Based on the Lines of Development used by MoD to generate a military capability)

- People: Coaches, administrators, supervisors

- Infrastructure: Playing fields, indoors halls, athletic tracks, swimming pools, ...
- Logistics/Support: Bus routes, facility booking systems, ground maintenance, ...
- Organisation: Competitions, coaching rotas, booking in, taking payments
- Training: course to enable coaches to be insured, licenced and DBS checked
- Doctrine/Concept: a philosophy around child sporting development
- Information: Medical, emergency numbers, attendance
- Equipment: For coaches: balls, mats, cones, arm bands,
For children: specialist shoes, sports kits, ...

Local delivery and investment can and will support some these aspects, however, they are not able to control all aspects and some are dependent on volunteers deciding to direct their time towards a particular activity while other require NGBs and Government to

- People: Local Community
- Infrastructure: Local Authority
- Logistics/Support: Local Authority
- Organisation: NGB, County Association, Local Community
- Training: NGB
- Doctrine/Concept: NGB, Government
- Information: Local Community
- Equipment: Local Authority, Local Community

'Local communities' with individuals/groups wanting to set up an exercise class or create a sports club within them are responsible to the generation of the activity based on the provision available, some may be able to lobby Local Government for a facility.

An U17 football team may need 15 -20 players some coaches (2-3) and a manager (25 pax), officials are contracted in form a pool.

The football team needs a pitch for approx. 2 hrs including set up. £100 - £150

A Football Match may engage 25 -35 people for 2 Hrs

£1.40 - £3 per hr of sport engagement per person

An U17 Athletic team needs two people of each gender to cover 17 Disciplines 50 Athletes (some can double up), relevant coaches (4/5) a manager and 7 Officials, (61 pax)

The Athletic team would require the 6 Hours including 2 Hrs set up. £600 - £800 + equipment hire (£200).

An Athletic Match, (6-8 teams) may engage 360 – 480 people for 6 hrs (not necessarily continuously active.

£0.33 - £0.50 per hr of sport engagement per person

While the example above shows one sport is cheaper in terms of engagement costs it does not illustrate the differences in start-up and maintenance costs. Each sport is likely to have different start-up costs and different maintenance costs. Athletics Tracks cost about £250k to replace every 20 – 25 years if well maintained, this scale of investment makes it challenging for local authorities who are more able to make smaller investments across a range of sports than the whole of their budget on one.

Each sport also has a different engagement Capacity. Capacity is the space each coach needs to train their group, throwing the Javelin is dangerous and needs space approx. 50m by 30 m for 8, while a series of floor exercises in a gym will require less space. 3m by 3m box for 12 athletes. The attention required by the coach and the time absorbed by an activity will change the number of people in a group depending on whether the drill can be done by all at the same time or needs to be done sequentially.

The investment and return on sporting facilities is dependent and the number of people in a club to sustain it and these costs can vary enormously, bringing with it the need for additional roles and management overhead see Figure 1.

Figure 2 Comparison of participation athletics and football

Development Pathways

The pathways that allow children to develop in a sport need to better reflect their needs as they grow, taking into account puberty, strength and development.

While prepubescent children are similar in stature some sports discriminate between genders. In athletics coaches are taught that Girls develop earlier than Boys, however, they are treated as if weaker and provided with events that should be equal, U13G do 75m while boys do 100m, both should do the shorter event, if the pathway was followed. The UK also offers a wider range of Athletic events for children than other countries pushing decisions around where to focus. 'You are taller than the other 12 YOs therefore do high jump' these choices are made prior to growth spurts and puberty and because the Athletics Governing body has competition rules for these events, as a result competition are created to cater for the rules. Other sports have more gradual development pathways that provide participants to aspire to the next step. Rugby, Football use smaller pitches and balls and rules where coaching and competition develops in parallel.

There is an opportunity to create philosophy across all sports, where younger children receive similar basic skills around balance, co-ordination, endurance, and strength in an environment which they wish to align with, i.e., football, netball, swimming, this would reduce pressure to achieve too early. Success at an early age generally leads to long term disengagement, Medallists at the English Schools Athletics Championships tend to fail while those in 4th succeed as adults.

How can adults of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those from under-represented groups, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled

people, older people, and those from less affluent backgrounds, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

Our youth coaching programme has been dominated by girls 75% of applicants and we have a greater problem attracting boys to Athletics than girls, though retaining girls is more challenging.

Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation, the Government's 2015 sports strategy, outlines five outcome priorities: physical health, mental health, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Are these the right priorities and how successful has the government been in measuring and delivering these outcomes to date?

The relationship between the five outcomes needs to be explored further and the contribution of sport to each and the interrelationships articulated. There are many people who are involved in sport volunteering¹ as it provides a welcome change to their lives and provides the social interaction they desire. The measures of success need to be carefully determined and the whole enterprise treated as a system.

There is a lot of visible focus around 'Actions that meet the need of the elite, ... sporting events'. This may be a result of the way the funding systems works and the provision of 'Grants' to NGBs to enable Elite sport to progress, UK sport and others have created an environment around medals instead of participation from which medals should come, this is easier to measure and justify to Ministers. More in at the bottom leads to more out at the top.

The sports sector is changing with the rise of self-employed coaches providing fitness services, vs. sporting excellence, this is positive as it maintains UK overall fitness, but can detract from the offer of traditional clubs whose offer is based on traditional sports feeding through to elite performance and their

England athletics has over 140,000 registered athletes (11 yo plus) of which less than 45,000 participated in 'Olympic Athletics as seen on TV' in 2019 the remainder being adults who want to run off track and be part of a licenced running group. The track and field club operating costs are disproportionate to 'Running' clubs who can survive off lower annual fees (£200 vs. £35).

Figure 3 England Athletics participation
delivery within NGBs rules and competition frameworks.

There is divided opinion around Parkrun in the athletics community, some feeling it allows people to run outside the NGB and Club framework, while other view it

¹ A framework for clubs to improve volunteer experiences MSc Dissertation, Starkey 2018

as an opportunity for people to engage in running and subsequently join the Athletics Community.

Is government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in sport and recreation activities in its data collection? How could this be improved?

Ask NGBs for data on number of licensed coaches, their age profile and ethnicity and whether that is rising or falling will provide an idea of capacity for sports to deliver. The number of qualified officials at different levels, Club, County, Region, Home Country, International for example will help illustrate national standing and capacity for international competition.

Different sports have different reward mechanisms discovering this will illustrate whether any costs are hidden and masking the true costs. Some coaching and officiating positions are paid while other rely on volunteers, this creates the distortion. A football or Netball referee gets a game fee while a similar role in athletics gets a sandwich if lucky.

How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?

Increasing the coaching cadre in the UK should help manage some of the ED&I challenges, particularly if some of the coaches match the gender, race, ... inequalities. Research² on sports clubs in Germany did identify Males as being more likely to step forward into coaching roles, leaving Females to fill administration roles this it was felt was due to males wanting to be noticed for what they were doing an opportunity pandered to in a coaching role. If this is true, NGBs can provide data, Athletics is about 50/50

Training for coaches and officials to ask better questions when engaging with minorities, together with some guidance on how you might address training challenges and risks presented by religious clothing or special attention requirements/needs. I can't recall much in the way of advice or course content that helped raise awareness of how to coach in these circumstances.

What can be done to improve and implement effective duty of care and safeguarding standards for sports and recreation actives at all levels?

Make it a requirement for clubs and other providers to make available to clients licencing and safeguarding information, make it public, then people may be more prepared to become qualified, it is too easy to not bother.

What are the opportunities and challenges facing elite sports in the UK and what can be done to make national sports governing bodies more accountable? For example, accountability for representing and protecting their membership, promoting their sport and maximising participation.

The complicated network of NGBs with jurisdictions that vary and are confusing to 'members' Athletics has four home county NGBs responsible for non-elite development into which members pay a membership fee which pays for overall

² Modelling the decision to Volunteer, K. Hallmann / Sport Management Review 18 (2015) 448-463

administration, coaching and officials courses and home country, competition. UK athletics are responsible for Elite competition, liaison outside the UK and provision of services such as anti-doping, safeguarding and higher-level courses, where it is sensible to collate effort. This has led to confusion, in England where many use England and the UK in the same sentence and can't differentiate, resulting in the wrong body being subjected to criticism and calls for accountability. Clarity around the roles of the NGBs is required, UK Sport fund UK Athletics' Elite Athlete programme not to develop the sport.

What successful policy interventions have other countries used to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to participate in sport and recreation, and lead more active lifestyles?

Germany has a [Bundesjugendspiele](#) (Federal Youth Games) to promote sport among the youth and NGBs provide aligned programmes. The German Government programme drives NGB behaviour, whereas in the UK this is left to others. Participation is compulsory, France also requires children to participate in three sports as part of their Baccalaureate. The French education programme facilitates participation by having a Wednesday sports afternoon when Sports Club operate and provide coaching services.

Most of the rest of the world operate Athletics in a different way to the UK by limiting national records and competitions to those who sit in the U18, U20 and Senior (Over 20) age groups. This has aligned event choice (Throws, Endurance, Jumps and Sprints) to post puberty and exam choice in schools. Below these age group children can only do multi-events (Run-Jump-Throw) which forms the basics of balance, conditioning, co-ordination and strength. In the UK a 11 YO boy can do an Olympic Distance event (100, 200, 800, 1500) whereas Girls can't. A recent equality complaint raised this discrimination to the Youth Development League, an athletic competition provider, who after consultation reduced the boys' events to match the girls based on coaching advice. Whether the events are even appropriate is another debate.

Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation? Why/why not?

Having a national plan will help focus effort around making changes to meet the evolving need, and review progress, it would also show the government is behind the population being more active. Most importantly it will establish a philosophy around the need for sport and it's contribution to national wellbeing, beyond watching elite sport and the economy revolving around it.

The socialisation culture has shifted in the UK because of things like:

- improved transportation, higher mobility, less localisation of activity as people can travel;
- the demise of Pubs as social hubs;
- the increase in size the work force (women, people with disabilities, ...);
- the shift to working at home brought about by the pandemic;
- TV watching and Computer Gaming becoming pastimes

These and other factors will evolve in the future and the nation should try and evolve along side it.

Membership of a sports club and participation in sport is a social activity:

- parents want children to engage in to widen their social circle beyond their school, find an outdoor pastime, be part of a team, which has shown to be important in the workplace in later life, particularly for Girls.
- Adults want to volunteer and be part of a sports club to socialise with like-minded people, get away from their work environment, relieve stress, ...

These and other factors need to be socialised as it will help improve levels of engagement and understanding across communities.

Without a plan there would be organic growth in sporting activities, however, some of the wider need for sport factors identified above would not be recognised, and 'sport equals competition' may dominate dividing rather than uniting people around sport and perhaps promoting the growth in obesity in the UK rather than reducing it.

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