

Community Sport: Year two evaluation summary



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1 Executive summary

Background

This document summarises the year two key findings from the Community Sport evaluation. It is our interpretation of the main findings from the evaluation report.

The Community Sport initiative includes the following programmes:

- Active England (jointly funded with Sport England)
- The Active Lifestyles and Community Sport programmes in Northern Ireland
- Active Futures in Scotland
- Mentro Allan in Wales.

Key Findings in all four countries

1. Engaging people who are new to physical activity

Programmes are successfully attracting people who were inactive or had low levels of participation in physical activity prior to their involvement in projects supported by these programmes. For example, 50 per cent of Northern Ireland Active Lifestyles participants and almost 40 per cent of people participating in the Scottish Active Futures programme are new to sport. The data also suggests that the programmes are reaching their target audiences.

2. Development of good practice models

There are emerging good practice models relating to training, collaboration and involving participants in decision-making and project planning.

3. Relationships with strategic partners

Projects have made links with local strategic partners. Early findings suggest that these relationships are strengthening projects. Subsequent evaluation reports will make an assessment about the importance of these relationships.

4. Programmes are supporting local priorities and policies

The programmes in all four countries complement existing sport and physical activity programmes. The programmes support local social development and health strategies.

5. Self evaluation

There is emerging effective practice in self-evaluation and the use of a range of tools and techniques.

Challenges

1. Barriers to accessing services

A number of projects found that barriers to access still exist for certain target groups, particularly for participants with a disability.

2. Collection of regular physical activity data

Projects in all countries have experienced some difficulties in collecting regular physical activity data. Hall Aitken and BIG will facilitate sharing of learning and good practice about collecting this data in the future.

“A social, welcoming and well-organised gentle activity that is non-competitive has enabled us to attract adults over 45 who are not currently active.”

Project co-ordinator in North West England.

2 The Community Sport initiative

This section provides information about each of the programmes that are being delivered across the UK.

Northern Ireland

BIG has provided £4.5 million to support two programmes in Northern Ireland. £2.4 million has been allocated to Sport Northern Ireland (formerly the Sports Council for Northern Ireland) to deliver Community Sport. This programme aims to initiate community sport development projects in disadvantaged communities that will improve the well being of individuals and increase participation among groups that are under represented in sport and physical activity.

A further £2.1 million has been allocated to support the Active Lifestyles programme. This aims to increase grassroots participation in physical activity among groups that are currently inactive. The Active Lifestyles programme has supported small and medium sized projects that last for up to three years, and one-year projects with grants of up to £1,000. The programme is piloting ways of engaging particular target groups such as older people, people with disabilities and socially and economically deprived groups of people.

Scotland

We have committed £5.5 million in Scotland to support the Active Futures programme. Active Futures is supporting projects that encourage inactive 17-24 year olds to participate in physical activity. It also aims to prevent people who are currently active from giving up physical activity. Active Futures has prioritised projects that target young women, young disabled people and black and minority ethnic communities. Funding is supporting partnerships that open up existing facilities and activities, or introduce a new activity programme.

Wales

Mentro Allan is a £6.5 million programme that aims to increase activity levels among 'hard to reach' groups with low levels of participation in physical activity. The programme seeks to achieve this aim by increasing recreational use of the natural environment in Wales. The 15 projects are each targeting one community in a specific geographical area.

A National Partnership was funded in Wales to help organisations develop and deliver projects. The National Partnership is conducting its own evaluation of the Mentro Allan programme and the findings will link into the evaluation of the Community Sport initiative. The Community Sport evaluation will conduct case study visits to projects in Wales to complement the National Partnership's evaluation. Further information about the National Partnership's evaluation is available at www.mentroallan.co.uk

England

Active England is a jointly funded programme between BIG (£77.5 million) and Sport England (£31 million). The programme is supporting over 250 projects that encourage creative approaches to increasing physical activity levels and sports participation rates, particularly targeting people who are not currently active. It seeks to create sustainable, innovative and multi-activity environments in areas of social, sport and health deprivation. The average value of grants ranges from £260,000 in the south east region to £1,400,000 in London. Most Active England projects are delivered by three main types of bodies:

- sports clubs, associations or trusts
- other charities and voluntary organisations and
- local authorities and NHS Trusts.

“One boy was referred to a Friday gardening project in Wales. Before participating in the project, he didn't speak or go outside his door, now he's doing five days a week outreach gardening in the community.” Project co-ordinator in Wales.

3 The evaluation

The aim of the evaluation is to assess whether the programmes are meeting their aims and to examine 'what works' in increasing physical activity among people who experience barriers to participation. BIG has commissioned Hall Aitken to evaluate the programme in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales between 2005 and 2010. Sport England has commissioned Hall Aitken and Bearhunt to undertake a separate evaluation of the Active England programme between 2004 and 2008. The findings from this separate evaluation are included for comparison. This report represents our interpretation of the second year evaluation report for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and the third year evaluation report for Active England and was written by Alison Pollard. The evaluation reports are available on the BIG website at: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

The specific objectives of the evaluation are:

1. To determine the programmes' impact in relation to their aims and to BIG's mission and values. Particular focus is placed on strategic working, supporting partnerships, and promoting social inclusion, equality and diversity.
2. To compare the impact of the programmes in increasing physical activity among the different target groups in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.
3. To add to the evidence base and develop a theory of 'what works' in meeting the aims of the programmes and increasing participation in physical activity among the target groups.
4. To highlight and disseminate evidence of good practice and innovative approaches in delivering and sustaining projects.
5. To assess the impact of partnership working on meeting the programme aims.
6. To assess how projects have linked with local and national strategies and how these have complemented the delivery of the programmes.
7. To highlight lessons learned in order to inform future policy development.

Hall Aitken is using a variety of methods to evaluate the programmes including analysis of annual monitoring reports, stakeholder interviews and case study visits to projects. A website (www.bigcsi.com) has been developed to provide tools for projects and a series of workshops will be held to provide support for projects. Projects are still in progress, so some of the findings are preliminary.



4 Country findings

The following section details key findings from the four UK countries.

Northern Ireland

Impact on participation

- ▶ Projects supported as part of the Community Sport and Active Lifestyles programmes have been successful in attracting people who have low levels of participation in physical activity. One in three Community Sport participants reported doing no physical exercise prior to their involvement in the projects and almost half of Active Lifestyles participants are new to physical activity.
- ▶ Projects supported by both programmes engage a high percentage of participants from disadvantaged communities. Three out of four

participants in projects funded by Community Sport and over half of the participants of projects supported by Active Lifestyles are socially or economically disadvantaged.

- ▶ The Active Lifestyles programme has been successful in targeting disabled people. Nearly a quarter of Active Lifestyle participants have a disability.
- ▶ As well as increasing physical activity, projects are reporting wider social benefits, including increased confidence and self-esteem of participants.

Innovation and good practice

- ▶ For some projects, appropriate marketing of physical activity is very important to attracting sufficient interest and participation in activities.



Northern Ireland

Those providing activities for older people benefited from promoting social interaction as the primary outcome and physical activity as a secondary outcome of project activities. Projects have benefited from marketing themselves according to the interests and priorities of their target beneficiary group.

- ▶ One project is increasing physical activity through conservation work, engaging people in planting and gardening. Projects have been successful in attracting a wide range of participants who were unlikely to have been engaged by more traditional approaches to physical activity. The wider community and project participants receive many benefits, including improved physical health.
- ▶ The provision of 'taster' sessions resulted in the development of new regular activities at different times of the day, as a result of feedback from targeted beneficiary groups. The evaluators will continue to collect evidence to assess the effectiveness of this approach in reaching the targeted groups.
- ▶ Projects that have targeted specific geographical areas have found that traditional advertising in local newspapers and in GP surgeries are the most effective methods of recruiting people to become involved in projects. More informal techniques including using 'word of mouth' have been more successful methods of recruiting people from disadvantaged groups that do not live in the same geographical area.

Delivery

Volunteers play an important role in many projects through delivering activities and as members of steering groups. Both programmes use a high number of volunteer coaches. The first year evaluation identified that a number of projects in Northern Ireland experienced difficulties in recruiting volunteers. These problems were largely overcome in the second year. Projects are now successfully attracting and retaining

Case study

A project in Northern Ireland is providing physical activity opportunities for older men. It builds on an existing project with a successful track record in providing social, recreational and educational activities. Transport barriers to participation are removed to make it easier for people to take part by encouraging a car sharing scheme.

volunteers and finding alternative means of delivering activities such as recruiting paid staff.

For example, one project developed a successful relationship with a local charity that works with businesses to place employees in voluntary roles for short periods of time each week. This charity has supported the development of a relationship where two local companies volunteer their staff to support the delivery of activities.

Partnerships

- ▶ Partnerships have made a contribution to the success of many projects. They have helped to increase community involvement and support for projects, contributed to the effectiveness of activities and led to projects accessing additional funding.
- ▶ Working in close partnership with statutory agencies has resulted in a number of projects influencing local strategies and policies. This could contribute to the sustainability of the work that is being achieved by the programme.
- ▶ Analysis of annual monitoring data shows that most projects have identified and/or established links with the local, regional or national strategies and infrastructures. Many projects use and build upon existing networks and support systems within the communities.

Country findings

Scotland

Impact on participation

- ▶ Projects appear to be successful in targeting people who are currently inactive or have limited participation in physical activity. Almost 40 per cent of participants are new to sport. Approximately 60 per cent of participants are from socially and/or economically disadvantaged communities.
- ▶ A number of projects are successfully targeting disabled people.
- ▶ Several projects are aiming to target people from black and minority ethnic communities, but there appears to be a low percentage of participants from these communities at the present time. Research conducted by one project highlighted the need for parental acceptance for some young Muslim women to participate in project activities and the effect of marriage on participation.
- ▶ The evaluation has highlighted the wider social impact of projects. Participants have developed increased confidence, motivation and basic skills as a result of participation in activities.

Innovation and good practice

- ▶ Non-traditional and innovative methods of targeting beneficiaries have been developed. These include the recruitment of a disabled ambassador to help target disabled participants, using MySpace to promote activities and a 'Fitness Bus' to tour targeted communities to raise awareness about activities.
- ▶ Several projects working with disabled participants are helping to raise awareness of the needs and rights of disabled people among providers and staff of sports and leisure facilities.
- ▶ A number of projects highlight examples of good practice in recruiting staff. These have actively involved their beneficiaries in recruiting project staff to ensure that they are suitable. Some projects have involved beneficiaries in project planning, delivery and decision making.

Delivery

- ▶ There is emerging evidence that projects are successfully working with voluntary and statutory agencies that are engaged with the targeted beneficiary groups. This is helping projects to effectively target and recruit participants. For example, one voluntary group runs a 'Team Challenge' event and has sent people involved in this challenge to an Active Lifestyle project as an added dimension of the Team Challenge activities.
- ▶ Paid staff rather than volunteers are delivering activities in the majority of projects. Some have experienced difficulties in recruiting volunteers to support projects during times when activities are scheduled.



Scotland

Partnerships

- ▶ Most projects have relationships with partners and physical exercise providers who are leading on the delivery of local physical activity strategies, such as community sports centres. For example, a project working to promote participation among young people from black and minority ethnic communities has made links with a number of local agencies. In partnership with five local partners it has signed up to Scotland's first 'Race Equality in Sport Charter'.
- ▶ Partnership working appears to bring added value to the projects, although the specific value is difficult to quantify. There is potential for more joint working and sharing of practice between projects.

Case study

A project in Scotland is delivering dance classes to young people in the most deprived areas of the central Scottish highlands. The programme is targeting hard to reach young women, particularly teenage mothers. Through dance, the participants can take part in physical activity in a fun, non-threatening, non-competitive environment.



Country findings

Wales

Impact on participation

- ▶ The timetable for the programme means that projects in Wales started later than in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Consequently we only have early evaluation findings. Projects have focused on taster sessions, open days and other activities designed to recruit participants.
- ▶ Approximately 65 per cent of the adult participants undertake light physical activity less than five days a week, suggesting that projects are successfully reaching their target audience.
- ▶ There is emerging evidence that participants are increasing their levels of physical activity through involvement in projects.
- ▶ Projects are successfully targeting disabled people. One in ten project participants has a disability.
- ▶ Many projects offer traditional forms of outdoor activities such as walking and mountain biking, while others offer less traditional activities such as frisbees and Tai Chi. For some, the use of indoor based activities is seen as necessary to build up trust and confidence among participants before taking part in outdoor exercise. There are some examples of indoor activities being in demand by participants. The extent to which these are offered, and whether they lead to an increase in outdoor activities, is unclear at the present time.
- ▶ Some projects are experiencing difficulties in targeting beneficiaries. For example, a project targeting people with mental ill health has plans to attract more participants, but this is difficult, as many of those targeted do not see themselves as experiencing mental ill health. There are some examples of projects benefiting those from outside the intended focus group due to difficulties in targeting.

Innovation and good practice

- ▶ Projects are actively involving participants in planning and decision-making. For example, one

project that is targeting young people involves them in marketing activities and also consults extensively around activities that are offered. It holds a consultation or evaluation event with participants each month.

- ▶ There is emerging good practice around partnership delivery on an operational level. One project targeting participants with mental illness has established an effective referral scheme that is directly linked to local GPs.



- ▶ All projects are using innovative and effective self-evaluation tools, in line with guidance and training in participatory action research methods from the National Partnership. In addition to the tools supported by the National Partnership, projects are using combinations of video, photography and card systems to monitor their activities and outcomes.

Delivery

- ▶ Projects that are running are well planned and projects that are in the early stages of implementation have clear delivery plans in place. They deliver their activities through paid staff, supported by volunteers.
- ▶ Mentro Allan projects use a variety of methods to recruit participants. They include traditional methods such as local press releases, promotional material and launch events. Some are using more innovative methods such as targeted SMS texting, DVDs and emails. The evaluation will review whether these methods work more effectively than more traditional methods.
- ▶ There is emerging evidence of good practice by projects in involving beneficiaries in project planning, management and delivery. Ongoing consultation and research is a prominent feature of all the projects visited.

Partnerships

- ▶ All projects are involved in partnership working. Partners in Wales are more often strategic rather than operational. In most cases they provide advisory and management support.
- ▶ Mentro Allan projects highlight the value of the National Partnership in supporting the development and planning of activities. The role of the National Partnership has moved from general support to focused support for monitoring and evaluation. The evaluation found that there is

Case study

In Wales one project is providing people with severe mental ill health with access to 'green exercise'. Proposed activities include walking, outdoor activities and gardening. Through these activities, the project aims to remove the barriers that people with severe mental ill health experience when participating in physical activity.

widespread opinion among projects that, largely as a result of links that have been generated by the National Partnership, Mentro Allan is now recognised as one of the key elements in the national public health plan in Wales. Projects have relationships with a number of strategic partners who are well placed to ensure links to relevant strategies.

- ▶ There are a variety of links between projects and a range of local agencies. It is too early to establish the added value of these relationships but they demonstrate a desire to complement local services and initiatives. Projects have found the National Partnership useful while developing their applications and welcomed the ongoing support provided. The partnership is also facilitating shared learning and dissemination of good practice.
- ▶ One project that is working to promote disabled people's use of the outdoor environment has relationships with local social services, the council and activity networks. It reports that, as a result of these links, activities are better organised and have wider support from the community. It is also anticipated that as a result of these relationships, the project will be sustainable after initial funding from BIG.

Country findings

England

The timetable for Active England means that projects in England started between 12 and 18 months earlier than in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The key findings of the third year of the Active England evaluation are highlighted in this section.

Impact on participation

- ▶ One of the key aims of Active England is to encourage people who are new to sport to take up physical activity. Approximately 13 per cent of Active England participants are new to sport.
- ▶ Only four per cent of participants involved in projects led by club associations are new to sport.

In comparison, between fourteen and sixteen percent of people who participate in projects managed by other types of organisations are new to sport.

- ▶ Projects that deliberately target groups that are known to have lower levels of participation in sport are much more likely to reach people who are new to physical exercise. Some of these projects are almost four times more successful in reaching people who currently do not participate in physical activity, than those that do not have this focus.



- ▶ To attract young people, projects have offered new and unusual activities that are different to those available in the school environment. Activities that were popular with young people provided learning opportunities, were fun and low cost. Popular activities such as 'street dance' were easily accessible, taking activities to where young people live or providing transport.
- ▶ The Active England programme has found that projects need to be sensitive to different religious and cultural values.
- ▶ Projects that target women have found that focusing on health rather than competition is a more effective method of recruiting and sustaining female participation in activities.

Innovation

The programme has delivered some innovative ways of working. Projects have been encouraged to view risk as having a positive impact on a project, on the understanding that change and innovation will not happen without taking some risks.

Projects that have successfully delivered new ways of working share the following characteristics:

- **Proximity:** Projects that are 'in tune' with the target group.
- **Curiosity:** Staff who look for new ideas and approaches.
- **A risk acceptance culture**
- **Connectedness:** Projects that have relationships with other projects and local strategies.
- **Ownership by participants:** Continuity from application for funds to delivery.
- **A flat, flexible and non-bureaucratic structure.**

Good practice

Active England projects have used a number of approaches to increase participation in physical activity. Some of the most effective are:

- assessing the needs of the target group and offering activities based on their needs and aspirations
- packaging activities in a way that makes them seem less like sport and more like fun
- making the activities relevant to the target group. Activities must be local, run at the right time, be at the right price and transport might need to be provided
- communication, outreach and marketing must be appropriate for the target group
- being aware of the social and psychological reasons that may motivate or discourage a target group from taking part in activities, and
- choosing the right staff.

Case study

A project co-ordinated by Blyth Valley Borough Council was struggling to engage teenage girls. To address this problem, the project manager went to a park where a group of girls congregated and asked them what they would like to do. They said they felt intimidated and sometimes embarrassed doing activities with boys, but liked the idea of a street dance group. Out of this grew a dance troupe that has performed at the Newcastle Falcons.

Comparisons between countries

Impact on participation

All programmes are successfully attracting inactive people. The Northern Ireland Community Sport programme has attracted the largest percentage of participants that were previously doing no exercise. It has also recruited the highest percentage of participants from socially or economically deprived areas.

The Northern Ireland Active Lifestyles projects have the highest percentage of participants with a disability. The Scotland Active Futures projects also perform well, reflecting the disability focus of several projects. Mentro Allan projects attract the highest percentage of participants from black and minority ethnic communities. Projects that have worked to target black and minority ethnic groups have found that they need to be sensitive to different religious and cultural values and work closely with community groups.

An indirect benefit of projects in all four countries has been increased self-esteem and confidence of participants.

Innovation and good practice

There is emerging good practice developing from the projects in all four countries. Projects have found that it is important to undertake a comprehensive needs analysis to understand what interests and motivates target groups to participate in activities, and to design and market activities accordingly.

Projects in Scotland and Wales are actively involving participants in recruitment of staff, planning and decision-making. The provision of 'taster' sessions by some projects in Northern Ireland and Wales resulted in the development of new regular activities, at different times of the day, as a result of feedback from targeted beneficiary groups.

Delivery

Volunteers play important roles in delivering project activities in all four countries. In Northern Ireland volunteers play greater roles in running projects than in Scotland and Wales.

Projects in all four countries have used a variety of methods to recruit participants. Advertising in local newspapers, GP surgeries and increasing awareness about activities by word of mouth have been successful strategies in raising awareness and attracting target groups. More innovative methods including SMS texting, utilising DVDs and emails have been used by some projects in Wales. At the present time it is too early to assess how successful these methods have been in recruiting participants.

Partnerships

Projects in all four countries have developed strategic and operational partnerships with a variety of statutory and voluntary sector agencies. In Wales partnerships have been primarily strategic rather than operational. This is a result of the operational role that the National Partnership plays in Wales. A large percentage of projects in all four countries complement and support local and national strategies to increase uptake of physical activity.

Next steps

The evaluators will continue case study visits to projects in 2008 and send surveys to projects. Further examples of good practice will be posted on the evaluation website.

“I found a new lease of life and reason to carry on.” Project participant who had a stroke and recently joined a sport project in Northern Ireland.

Further information

To download a copy of the full evaluation report please visit: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

To find out more about the evaluation and to download tools please visit: www.bigcsi.com

To find out more about Active England please visit: www.aelz.org

