

New Opportunities for PE and Sport Final Evaluation Summary



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Stock code: BIG-NOPES09
ISSN 1744-4756 (Print)
ISSN 1744-4764 (Online)
Print Belmont Press
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Executive summary

This is a summary of the key findings from the evaluation of the £750.75 million New Opportunities in PE and Sport (NOPES) initiative that was delivered by the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) across the UK. It is our interpretation of the final evaluation report which is available on our website at: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

The evaluation was completed by the Loughborough Partnership and assessed the impact of the NOPES initiative on partnerships, participation and wider social change. The evaluators conclude that this large and ambitious programme has successfully delivered on all of its six key outcomes.



The main findings from the report include:

- ▶ The average number of community users in a typical week at NOPES projects has risen from 126 pre-opening to 301 post-opening.
- ▶ Staff and pupils both felt that the NOPES facilities have helped to create an environment in which pupils have more opportunities to succeed and achieve.
- ▶ Effective partnership working has made a substantial contribution to the achievement of the NOPES outcomes.
- ▶ The percentage of pupils receiving two hours of PE and school sport has risen from 71 per cent before the new facilities to 81 per cent after the new facilities opened.
- ▶ The quality of PE and school sport has been enhanced and the new facilities have attracted pupils who were previously inactive.
- ▶ The activities with the greatest increase in availability during curriculum time were table tennis (12 per cent), volleyball (12 per cent), tennis (12 per cent), badminton (10 per cent) and dance (9 per cent).
- ▶ The number of different activities available to the community has increased from an average of 5.2 per project site prior to opening to 10 per project site post-opening.
- ▶ The programme has made a positive impact on pupils' attitudes and behaviours and led to young people becoming more engaged in school.
- ▶ Eighty two per cent of pupils reported that the new facilities have improved the appearance of their school and 74 per cent of pupils agreed the new facility has made them feel prouder of their school.

Introduction

The NOPES programme was launched in November 2002 by the Big Lottery Fund. A total of £750.75 million was available for the programme across the UK. To date 2,980 facilities have been funded which range from outdoor activity centres to new or refurbished sports facilities at schools. All funding for the programme has now been committed.

The NOPES programme had six key outcomes:

- ▶ Improved physical education and sport in schools.
- ▶ Higher standards across the whole school through PE, sport and other forms of structured activity.
- ▶ Better opportunities to increase the levels of physical activity among the school age population and, more generally, local communities.
- ▶ Improved collaboration, co-operation and partnership between schools and between schools and their communities.
- ▶ Promotion of social inclusion through access to, and use of, sports and outdoor adventure facilities by all groups in society.
- ▶ Innovation and best practice in the design and management of facilities.

The evaluation

We commissioned the Loughborough Partnership, led by the Institute of Youth Sport, to evaluate the NOPES programme between February 2003 and February 2009. The evaluation explored the impact of the NOPES programme on partnership, participation and wider social change through a multi-method approach including baseline and annual surveys, case study visits to local authorities and projects, a discrete study about the design and management of facilities and a study about the impact of the programme on disaffected young people.

The Loughborough Partnership have produced six annual reports and several working papers based on findings from the evaluation which are available on our website at: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk



Key findings

“PE lessons are much better. It’s more spacious and the lessons are more planned out now”

(Year 9 girl, sports hall project)

UK findings

This section details evaluation findings from across the UK and is structured around the three key dimensions of partnership effectiveness, participation and wider social outcomes which link to the six outcomes for the NOPES programme.

Partnership effectiveness

Effective partnership working has made a significant contribution to the achievement of the NOPES outcomes. Across the UK, local authorities were required to develop partnership groups which oversaw the development of NOPES facilities in their area. Most local authorities employed a portfolio manager who progressed the NOPES projects in their area through the application and construction phases. The partnership groups provided support to the portfolio managers and scrutinised decisions and the progress of projects.

There were significant differences across the UK in the role of partnership groups and portfolio managers after the NOPES facilities opened. Some local authorities viewed NOPES as a purely capital programme and so there was little portfolio-level involvement after the facilities opened. Other local authorities took a more proactive approach to supporting projects after they opened and the portfolio managers played a key role in providing support with aspects such as developing community use at facilities.

The evaluators identified some of the key features for achieving the NOPES outcomes. These include inspirational leadership, effective partnership working and effective management systems. Monitoring and evaluation systems have also been used to help projects to plan and refine their activities.

NOPES local authority portfolios developed links with local strategies for sport, education, community development, regeneration and social inclusion. Schools have also developed links with initiatives such as School Sports Partnerships in England, Active Schools in Scotland and Dragon Sport in Wales. Aligning NOPES facilities with other programmes has enabled projects to share human and capital resources and supported the achievement of common outcomes between the different programmes.

Partnerships have been created between NOPES projects and other schools. For example, the average number of primary schools using NOPES facilities at nearby secondary schools has doubled from an average of four schools pre-opening to eight and a half post-opening. Similarly, the use of NOPES facilities by other secondary schools has also increased over the same period from an average of 1.4 per facility pre-opening to 2.8 post-opening.

NOPES projects have developed links with local organisations leading to increases in community use at facilities. The average number of sports clubs using NOPES projects in a typical week has doubled from 5.1 to 10.5 since the new facilities opened. The availability of dedicated staff has been particularly important to help generate links with local organisations. For example, in one Scottish case study, the staff played a vital role in supporting the development of school-club links. Similarly, at a Welsh rural case study, the NOPES facility has become the hub of the community. In Northern Ireland the improved communication between sport and non-sport clubs has led to better joint working on areas such as future funding applications.

The evaluators identified evidence of good, modern management practices at NOPES projects which has led to quality assurance awards such as Investors in People and National Governing Body NGB accreditations.

The evaluation survey found that only 22 per cent of survey respondents rated the quality of their facilities as good or excellent prior to the new facility opening, compared to 73 per cent after the facility opened. Survey results also showed that respondents were more likely to consider their new facilities as effective (82 per cent) than innovative in some aspect of their design (44 per cent). However, the evaluators did identify a few examples where NOPES facilities were innovative in their design. For example, a small playground project in Northern Ireland placed the swings in a square to encourage pupils with learning disabilities to communicate with each other. Similarly, in England two projects made considerable efforts to ensure that the facility design was ecologically sensitive while another had invested in interactive equipment designed to attract groups that traditionally did not participate in physical activity.

“the partnership has worked really well”

(Sport development officer, Wales)

Financial sustainability is an issue for some projects that were included as case studies in the evaluation. Some projects were affected by the end of short-term funding and others found a tension between generating sufficient income to make opening beyond the school day financially viable with developing community programmes that would meet the aspirations of schools, local authorities and BIG. In contrast, financial sustainability was less of an issue when local authorities were involved in the management of projects or supported the maintenance and operation of NOPES facilities through existing budgets. In other cases at some very successful larger projects, income from community use far exceeded their expectations.

Impact on participation

The NOPES programme has made a significant impact on increasing participation in physical activity. After the NOPES facilities opened, the minutes of curriculum PE in a typical week increased across all NOPES projects at Key Stages One, Two and Three¹. For example, at Key Stage One the minutes of PE increased from 83 to 98 minutes and at Key Stage Two the minutes of PE increased from 88 to 102 minutes pre- to post- opening. The increase in the amount of time available for PE across all NOPES projects was similar to the national average detailed in PE and School Club Links Survey which is sent to all schools. Staff at secondary schools cited resourcing and timetabling as constraints for increasing the amount of time available for PE.

NOPES facilities have led to significant increases in the percentage of pupils receiving two hours of PE and school sport each week². Prior to NOPES, 71 per cent of pupils took part in two hours of PE and sport, compared to 81 per cent after the projects opening. These increases were particularly significant at Key Stage One where there was an increase from 28 per cent to 76 per cent for boys and from 28 per cent to 79 per cent for girls. The evaluators found that pupils and staff across the UK felt that participation in the allocated minutes of PE had increased due to factors such as reduced transit-time to lessons, the availability of more activities and fewer cancellations of lessons due to bad weather.

¹For Scotland, pupils in Primary 1–3 were classed as Key Stage 1, Primary 4–7 were classed as Key Stage 2, Secondary 1 & 2 were classed as Key Stage 3 and Secondary 3 & 4 were classed as Key Stage 4.

² 90 minutes in Northern Ireland.

“The whole area has made a tremendous difference to our games activities”

(Head of PE, sports hall project)

The number of different activities available at NOPES projects has increased from 15.4 prior to opening, compared to 17.1 after opening. In addition, 75 per cent of pupils agreed that there was a greater range of activities as a result of the new facilities. The activities with the greatest increase in availability during curriculum time were table tennis (12 per cent), volleyball (12 per cent), tennis (12 per cent), badminton (10 per cent) and dance (9 per cent).

NOPES facilities have led to improvements in the quality of PE for pupils in a number of ways. For example, the profile and status of PE within schools has been raised which has led to improvements in staff and pupil motivation. Better equipment is also on offer and there are opportunities for pupils to participate in activities that were previously unavailable.

The provision of high quality changing facilities was cited by the evaluators as being a critical factor to improving the quality of PE for pupils. The evaluation survey to pupils found that cleanliness and comfort of changing facilities and the privacy of showers was cited as being important for over 70 per cent of pupils.

Extra-curricular activities during lunchtime at NOPES projects have increased from three hours 40 minutes in a typical week prior to facilities opening, compared to four hours and 58 minutes after opening. Similarly, the amount of time available for extra-curricular activities during school holidays has also doubled. The average number of boys attending after-school activities in a typical week at projects increased by 32 per cent from 95 pre-opening to 125 post-opening and the average number of girls increased also by 29 per cent from 68 to 88. Case study findings from Northern Ireland and Scotland found that smaller projects such as outdoor playground facilities, playground markings and multi-use games areas have made an important contribution to the provision of more opportunities to participate in activities during extra-curricular time. For example, in Wales one project was particularly successful at offering activities before school through a ‘Wake-up Club, which

provided cardiovascular activities, circuit training and indoor athletic events.

The average number of different extra-curricular activities on offer at projects has increased from 13.1 pre-opening to 16.1 post-opening. The activities with the greatest increase in availability during extra-curricular time were fitness (24 per cent), table tennis (20 per cent), badminton (19 per cent), multi-skills clubs (18 per cent), basketball (18 per cent) and gymnastics (16 per cent). These new activities were valued highly by both staff and pupils.

NOPES facilities have led to a significant increase in community use at projects. For example, community use in a typical week has almost trebled from an average of 126 users prior to projects opening, compared to 301 after opening. Projects that received revenue funding had greater success in increasing community use compared to projects that did not apply for revenue funding.

The average number of different activities available to the community increased from 5.2 pre-opening to 10 after the new NOPES facilities opened. The pupil survey found that 41 per cent of respondents reported that their families have used the new sports facilities to take part in physical activity.

“The dance hall is better. It used to be a bit small and not much room. Now it’s wider and you can do more things like fitness”
(Year 9 girl, dance studio project)

This element of enhanced choice in activities available to the community was particularly important for the disaffected young people that were interviewed as part of the evaluation. For this group of people, taking sport ‘too seriously’ was deemed an unattractive quality which prevented them from taking part in activities such as rugby. The young people preferred activities

“The pitches really help us to get better and improve our skills. I am much better since I have been going there”

(Pupil, Football Foundation project)

that were more fun and included an element of social engagement. Such activities cited by young people included kayaking, swimming and table tennis. Barriers to participation cited by disaffected young people included the requirements to pay for access or for hire of equipment, operational policies relating to gym use such as age restrictions and unfamiliar staff.

“We have been able to introduce new activities like badminton and that is flourishing, absolutely flourishing”

(Head of PE, new sports hall project)

The evaluators found that the potential to increase community use at facilities was to some extent dependent on the type of project and location. Artificial pitches appeared to address a substantial community demand for the provision of all-weather outdoor pitches, which helped to generate community use. For example, in England, one case study project with an artificial pitch was fully booked during evenings and weekends within the first few months of opening. Projects in rural areas that were geographically distant from other sporting facilities had fewer problems in generating community use. In contrast, developing community use at sports halls and multi-use games areas was more challenging as there appeared to be a stronger need to market the facilities to enhance their use.

The design of the NOPES facilities also has an impact on their ability to generate community use. For example, designing facilities so that they can be used simultaneously by different user groups has proved to be an effective method for maximising community use.

Impact on wider social outcomes

NOPES projects have contributed to delivering higher standards in school in a variety of ways. These include improvements in competitive and sporting success, higher standards in PE, increased sports leadership awards and higher standards in other areas of the curriculum. Other positive outcomes include behavioural and attitudinal changes among pupils in schools.

Findings from case study projects show that more pupils are opting to take GCSE PE at some NOPES project sites. Similarly, schools reported increases in the number of pupils completing sports leadership qualifications. For example, prior to NOPES, an average of 14 pupils received Junior Sports Leaders Awards at projects, compared to 20 pupils after the new facilities opened.

Staff and pupils at NOPES projects said that the new facilities were contributing to creating an environment where pupils had more opportunities to succeed and achieve. For example, at one case study project it was reported that pupils had taken part in handball for the first time and were now competing as part of the England handball squad.

Across the UK, NOPES facilities were often located at schools that served communities with some level of deprivation, and which had previously had inadequate sporting facilities. The evaluators found that NOPES facilities have helped to improve the appearance of some schools which has had an impact on both pupil and staff motivation. For example, 74 per cent of respondents to the pupil survey said that they now felt prouder of their school as a result of the new NOPES facilities.

Key findings

The increased range of activities offered to pupils at NOPES facilities has helped to create more opportunities for success in PE and sport for pupils who previously did not take part in it. For example, one Wales case study interviewee hoped that by experiencing success in physical activity, the pupils would be more motivated in school and benefit from higher self-esteem which in turn could lead to them achieving higher standards in school.

The evaluators found that the new NOPES facilities appealed to young people who were previously not engaged in physical activity. For example, in Northern Ireland pupils used a facility based at a university where they were taught by university students. This experience was said to have raised pupils' aspirations and encouraged them to feel comfortable in a university environment.

At case study projects in Scotland, the evaluators found that the new facilities have made an impact on pupils' attitudes and behaviour and contributed to the development of better relationships between staff and pupils. This was felt to be an important factor to delivering higher standards in schools. In Wales, some projects have helped to lead to improved behaviour from pupils in school as a result of using an outdoor education centre.

Staff at projects across the UK benefiting from playground marking improvements reported a positive impact on pupils' physical activity levels as they were engaged in activities during breaks and lunch-times. This has made an impact on reducing incidents at lunchtime and on improving behaviour in the classroom.

“We are building a sense of achievement through sport and we are beginning to see this transfer to academic success”
(Head teacher)

Staff at several case study projects viewed the new NOPES facilities as catalysts for involving local communities in schools and developing a sense of local community identity. For example, 60 per cent of pupils responding to the pupil survey agreed that the new facilities have made them feel better about the area where they live.

The new NOPES facilities have helped to remove barriers to participating in sport and to reduce social exclusion. For example, at one case study project in Northern Ireland pupils from both mainstream and special schools are able to participate in activities simultaneously for the first time. Similarly, a project in England overcame social exclusion by targeting young people who were carers to participate with their parents or siblings. The facility offered them the opportunity to take part in climbing, caving and high ropes courses at the outdoor centre and have a break from their home life.

The evaluators found that having dedicated staff to proactively target traditionally excluded groups was an effective approach to tackling social exclusion. Making links between NOPES facilities and other programmes or initiatives was an important factor in promoting social inclusion. For example, in Wales some NOPES facilities were used by staff in Communities First areas as part of their community development roles.

Key findings

Targeting specific groups was a method used by projects to promote social inclusion. The most frequently targeted group by projects was girls and women (84 per cent) followed by people living in an area of high deprivation (45 per cent). Engaging young people through novel approaches and offering a range of less formal activities can also be an effective method for promoting social inclusion. For example, one outdoor education facility engaged a wide range of groups including school children, college students, women's aid and refugee groups, students with disabilities, a club for partially sighted people and groups from special schools. The activities provided were novel, fun and helped to facilitate the development of personal and social skills.

NOPES facilities have also been used to contribute towards health outcomes. For example, several projects accepted referrals from GP's so that their patients could take part in physical activity.

The evaluators identified examples of projects specifically targeting people over sixty through a range of approaches including subsidised activities and social opportunities through having a 'tea and chat'.

The achievement of wider social outcomes has been delivered in various ways by NOPES projects. These include the NOPES facilities becoming symbols of change and hubs within their communities, breaking down barriers between groups, overcoming specific barriers to participation and engaging disaffected young people.

The NOPES programme has created an extensive infrastructure for PE and Sport across the UK and will leave a lasting legacy for both schools and the wider community. The programme complements other local and national initiatives about sport, well-being and social inclusion across the UK and has made a significant impact on re-engaging people who do not traditionally take part in sport or physical activity.



What next?

The evaluation has developed a significant evidence base about the impact of the NOPES programme over the past six years. The learning from the evaluation will be extensively disseminated to projects and stakeholders during the autumn. Several good practice guides have been produced for projects which provide advice on areas including developing community use and improving the quality of PE. All resources produced by the evaluation are available on our website at: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk



