



Biggleswade Athletics Club

The Sport England Clubmark Accreditation has given Biggleswade Athletics Club a new lease of life, helping to attract younger and more diverse members and build on its coaching strengths.

Biggleswade Athletics Club is thriving – it has plenty of developing young members eagerly awaiting the completion of its brand new track, and their parents can be certain that they are spending time within a safe environment. The club has spent the last five years building up to this point, and used the Sport England Clubmark Accreditation as a way to ensure it was adopting the right approach.

“We knew that we had always operated well as a club, so it seemed natural for us to pursue the accreditation, especially when we were encouraged to do so,” explains club secretary Stuart Galloway.

The Sport England Clubmark is used by national governing bodies of sport as part of their club accreditation programmes for sports clubs with junior sections in recognition of a quality club. By creating a single, national standard, Clubmark helps give all kinds of sports clubs a structure and direction that will benefit them in many ways.

“We used the guidance from the accreditation application to help us to form our procedures, building on our existing strengths to attract new junior and women members. Four of us on the club committee spent time working on the process, and after about six months we decided to go for it – and got it! That was in 2003. We were the first athletics club in England to be awarded the accreditation.”

Although many of the changes implemented through the accreditation were minor, Stuart believes that many parents are reassured to know that the club is meeting the highest standards and that their children are training in a safe environment. “Parents are certainly happier,” he says. “It’s so important to get the balance right, to be a caring club but encourage responsibility too. It’s one thing to attract new members, but a club must retain them to survive.”

One of the biggest changes is that parents have become members, and some are also coaching. They have been impressed with the club’s approach and have wanted to get more involved. “It’s been important to us to be accessible – we want to work with parents, not scare them away,” Stuart explains.

It’s also been useful for the club to encourage new ideas and approaches. Biggleswade Athletics Club was founded in 1952 and has always been strong,



but even the healthiest club can benefit from sharing ideas and advice. “We’ve found the support from Sport England very practical. We’ve been given some great ideas and the help to make them happen. We’ve always been good at attracting new members, so the most effective help we’ve received has been about retaining our volunteers and athletes.”

For Biggleswade it was essential that their new policies were practical and would have meaning. The club found that the advice and support they received helped to ensure that their approach to young people was based on best practice and could be audited and reviewed to keep it on track.

“We found the process to be very good,” says Stuart. “We didn’t dread it because we knew that we were pretty good to begin with. It’s good for any club to take the time to reflect on its achievements and to look at ways to help improve its standing in the community. The Clubmark process did that for us.”

The club also saw the application process as an opportunity to review internal systems and structures, refining roles and responsibilities to make the most of its supporters’ talents. Although most changes were minor, this exercise has helped keep the club running smoothly as its membership has grown.