



Sport England: Understanding variations in sports participation

Case study in driving participation: England
Athletics and running

August 2010

Background

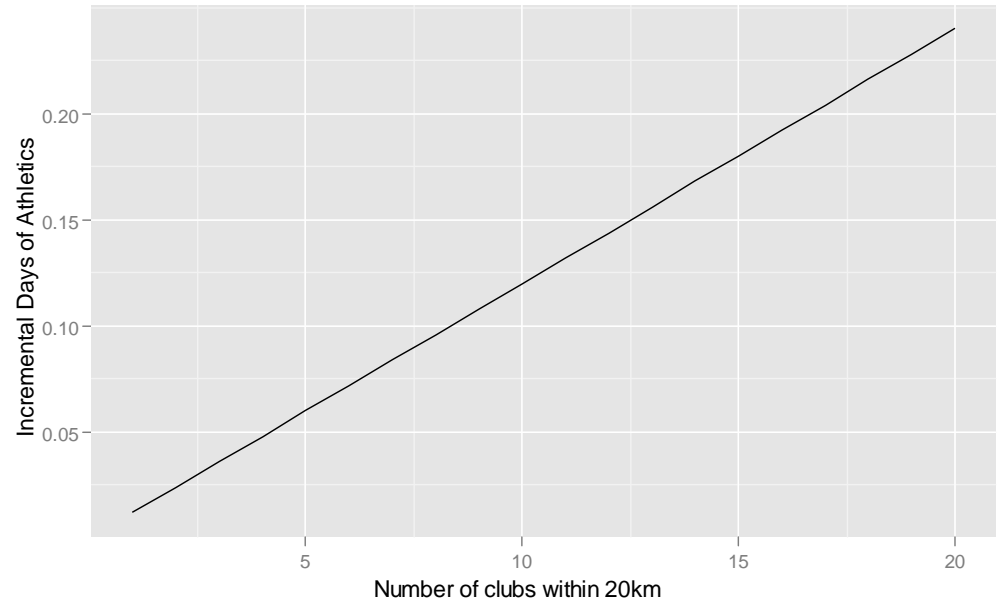
- Sport England is focused on the creation of a world-leading community sport system
 - Investing to grow and sustain participation in grassroots sport
 - Collaborating with partners at a national and local level
 - Targeting an additional 1 million people doing more sport by 2012-13.
- As part of this objective, Sport England has commissioned a series of robust quantitative models aimed at better understanding the factors which account for variations in sports participation, and thereby identify the levers most amenable to public policy intervention.
- This case study attempts to illustrate some of the findings from the quantitative modelling, and also provide practical learning with examples of specific interventions.



Running club activity catalyses participation in local areas

- The modelling work found that active people who have more running clubs in their local area, run more often. (See diagram on the right hand side.) In other words, if you live near to a running club, you are likely to run more often, all other things being equal.
- While the structure and training offered by a club are likely to improve participation rates for those people who join the club, most people who run are not members of a running club (less than 10% of people who have run once in the last week are club members). However, even *non-club members* are likely to run more often by virtue of living near a club. We can hypothesize from this that **clubs catalyse participation in local areas.**

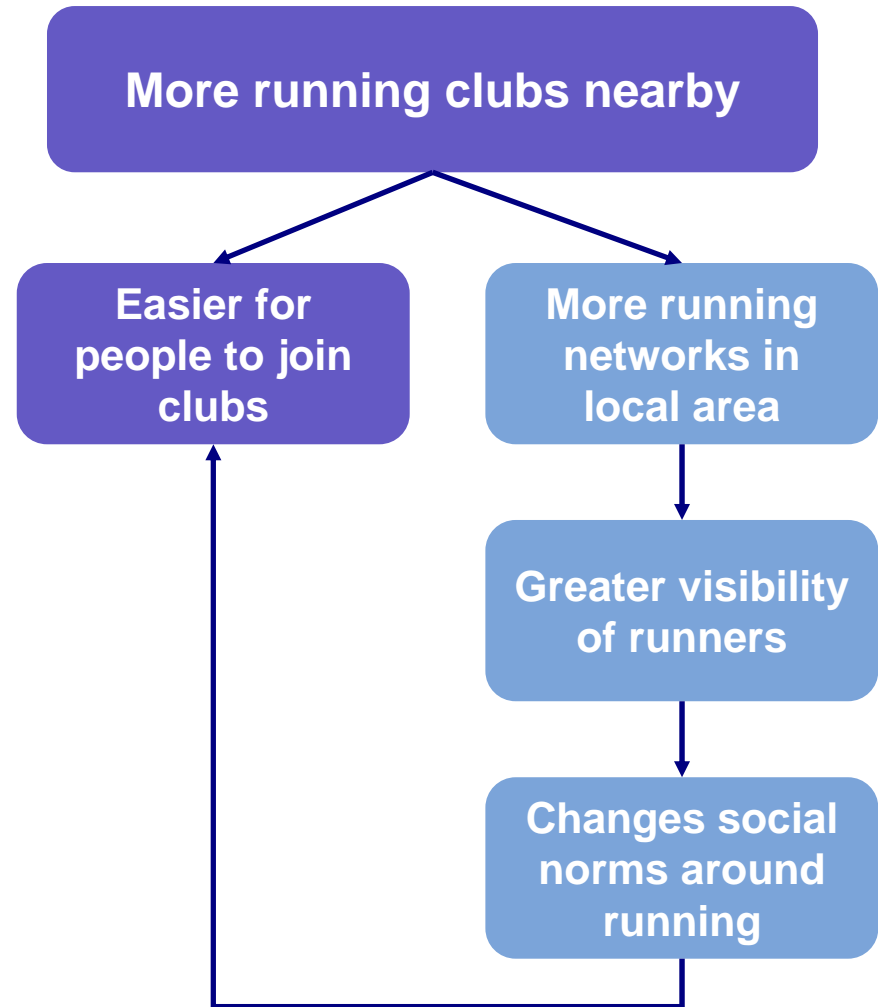
**Incremental number of Athletics Days
Amongst Active People**



Number of running clubs within 20km

Running club activity drives participation in local areas: hypothesis for why this happens

- Clubs drive participation in local areas for people who join clubs and those who don't.
- The diagram to the right depicts why this may be the case. The primary and most obvious benefit to having more running clubs nearby is that it becomes easier for people to join local clubs. However, we can hypothesise that there is an additional secondary benefit: more clubs in the area boost the number of running networks, which increases the visibility of running; as runners are more likely to be seen on a regular basis in the streets or parks in an area, which in turn changes the social norms around running by making it appear safer, more accessible and more for a “person like me”. This in turn is likely to lower the barriers for some people to join running clubs, forming a virtuous circle.



Example: the Run in England programme

- The Run in England programme was set up by England Athletics to “bring running and fun to the heart of our communities”, by setting up running networks as satellites to existing clubs.
- The aim of the programme is to support new runners and unattached runners and signpost them to their local clubs.
- The model runs on the “follow my leader” basis to guide novice or unattached runners through their first steps towards joining a club. A club finds runners willing to train as Leader(s) and start a Run in England group. The group may or may not be on the same night, or in the same location as the club. They often work as satellites in local towns, villages, workplace, etc., within the club catchment area. Some groups may be age, gender or community specific to attract different people.
- More information is available at www.runinengland.co.uk



“I think the key is to get out there and not get put off by thinking it’s too big a deal. Contact your local paper, maybe your radio station, get it publicized and just get out there. Even if you’ve just got a few runners you’ll find it does snowball if you continue with the publicity.”

- Peta Bee, Cookham RiE Leader

Example: the England Athletics *Athletics Networks*

- Athletics Networks are clusters of clubs working strategically with other local key partners to develop athletic networks in the area.
- For instance, Cambridge & Coleridge Athletic Club, the lead club in the Greater Cambridge Athletics Network, developed four local satellite run, jump, and throw community clubs on community school sites as part of an after-school initiative.
- These community satellite clubs for youngsters have been affiliated to the main C&C club, and the exit route for participants is clearly marked should they wish to progress into the formal sport.
- Such an approach makes it easier for parents and children living outside the catchment area to participate, for instance in urban fringe settlements such as Cambourne with a population of 25,000 people but over 10 miles from the nearest track and field facility.



“We would encourage clubs to build partnerships with their local community, so they can understand how to position activities and services to meet local need –England Athletics provides a national framework for delivering activities but often it is adapted and best delivered through a local solution.”

- Chris Jones, Head of Marketing and Strategy, England Athletics

Questions and implications for other sports and regions

- *Is the Run in England “follow my leader” model or the Athletics Networks approach transferrable to your sport or local area?*
- *If not, how else could you boost participation in your sport or local area by setting up informal satellite networks for beginners or people unattached to formal clubs?*

Running is a more open and democratic sport

- The modelling work established that, unlike some other sports, income or work status (managerial, manual, etc.) are not significant drivers of participation for running. Running appears to be a more open and “democratic” sport.
- Part of this is due to the intrinsic nature of running as a more accessible sport: running is more of a “365 days a year” sport as factors like seasonality and rainfall do not significantly alter participation rates, and there is obviously less of a cost barrier for running than other sports that require more expensive equipment, facilities or training.
- However, running has also become a more open and accessible sport over the past 5-10 years – which is reflected in trends like the growing readership of Runner’s World magazine and growth of accessible races like Race For Life*. Much of this is probably due to initiatives from the public and private sector, e.g. the Nike Run London events or the Running Sisters network for women, which place greater emphasis on participation and less on performance.



*** Footnote: Evidence of growing interest in running**

- Reading Half Marathon entry up by 47.4%
- Running retail sales up by 70-90%
- Race for Life entry up from 120,000 to 750,000

- Runners' World online members up from zero to 330,000
 - Runners' World magazine subscriptions up from 50,000 to 85,000
- (Source: England Athletics)

How the Run in England programme promotes running as an accessible and open sport

- Previous Sport England qualitative research on the drivers of participation of sport has found that in general, the concepts of ‘performance’ and ‘potential’ can be off-putting for many people who might otherwise be on the borderline of participation. It is therefore important to communicate the accessibility of any sport to increase participation rates.
- The Run in England programme communicates its open and accessible nature through both its stated purpose - “We make running accessible for everyone - men, women, groups and families of all ages, shapes, sizes and abilities” – as well as the use of visuals in its communication materials, which show a broad range of age groups and stress fun and sociability rather than performance.



Run in England facebook group



Questions and implications for other sports

- How can you create a programme (or tailor an existing one) to make your sport more accessible to a specific age group, ability or ethnic group?
- Ensure that the language and visuals you use in your communication emphasise inclusiveness and accessibility to encourage potential borderline participants.

Summary of key messages

- **Club activity can drive participation in sport in local areas**
 - By making it easier for people to join clubs in their local area
 - Potentially by increasing the visibility of the sport in a local area, and thereby making it appear more accessible
 - Finally, there is potentially a “virtuous circle” effect, as changing social norms around a sport as a result of its increased visibility in an area, eventually drives greater club membership.
- **Promoting the accessible and open nature of a sport can boost participation levels**
 - By communicating participation rather than performance through appropriate language, spokespeople and visuals featuring a range of ages and abilities
 - Satellite networks for beginners such as Run in England are also an effective model for this.