

Pathways to Employment through Sport Findings from Mid Term Review

Executive Summary

Background to Programme

The Pathways to Employment through Sport Programme was established in October 2002 with £1.8m funding secured from Advantage West Midlands (AWM) through the South Black Country West Birmingham (SBCWB) Regeneration Zone. The programme was devised by the Zone's Heritage and Culture Theme Group following the identification of Sports and Leisure as a growth sector within the Regional Economic Strategy (RES).

Resourced through the RES Pillar 2, Promoting a Learning & Skilful Region, the Programme consists of a portfolio of projects aimed at tackling social exclusion through encouraging employment in sports and leisure activities, thus aiming to:

- Reduce disaffection, inequality and exclusion;
- Encourage people to enter careers in the sector;
- Tackle barriers to growth within the sector; and
- Reduce obesity and contribute to healthier lifestyles.

The programme will run for 5 years until March 2008. It is led by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC), who act as the Accountable Body and it is delivered in partnership with Birmingham City Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Black Country Connexions, Pertemps Employment Alliance, Sports Structures Ltd, SkillsActive, Ugly Bug World Ltd, West Bromwich Albion FC Community Programme and Wood Green High College of Sport.

Projects supported through the Programme

The projects supported have been designed to respond to an evidenced need in the training and employment landscape across the Zone; providing additional routes into the Sports & Leisure sector for disadvantaged and disengaged young people and adults and developing sector specific e-learning tools. They also aimed to be capable of delivering across the target area over time.

To date, the Programme has funded 8 main projects:

- Dance Mentor;
- Personal Social Health Education;
- Pre Volunteer Scheme;
- Transitions through Sport;
- Birmingham Inner City Coaching Scheme (BICCS);
- Positive Mentoring;
- Equaliser; and
- Coach Education.

The number and range of initiatives supported reflect the broad spectrum of the industry itself. For many activities a specialist qualification is required, and the opportunities even within one specialism such as coaching, require both teaching and technical skills. The diversity of the projects also reflects the range of client groups that the Programme is trying to reach, with varying degrees of engagement dependent upon the target group. In some cases beneficiaries can be supported into learning and employment opportunities quite quickly, while in others, re-engagement is a major challenge. This particularly applies to those with social, learning and behavioural difficulties.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the mid term evaluation was to assess the Programme's progress regarding spend and outputs, identify any issues/barriers which may have been hampering the performance of individual projects, review its continued strategic relevance and make recommendations on the future delivery and direction of the Programme.

The review involved a combination of primary and desk-based research. Significant emphasis was placed on gathering the views of key stakeholders, project managers and individual beneficiaries through a process of face-to-face interviews and focus groups.

Outputs and Outcomes

- ❖ The scale of activity has been considerable and to date:
 - Over **1,500 individuals** have benefited from project activity;
 - Over **750 learning opportunities** have been recorded, with more likely to be reported; and
 - Over **350 qualifications** have been achieved, with more to be reported.
- ❖ There have been significant additional impacts. In broad terms these are concerned with:
 - Working with young people
 - BME beneficiaries
 - Addressing basic skills
 - Engaging long term unemployed
- ❖ A substantial number of people assisted have gone on to take up other training, learning and employment opportunities, including part time work.
- ❖ Additional outputs are likely to be reported as activity concludes.

Value for Money

- ❖ The average cost of Pathways Programme compares favourably with Measure 2 – Equal Opportunities For All & Promoting Social Exclusion of the current UK European Social Fund (ESF) Programme.
- ❖ Project costs are also in line with similar SRB or Accountable Body managed programmes

Stakeholders Views of Programme

“Essential, extremely beneficial...needs to be rolled out”

“...delivers progression routes into employment for those groups that we can't always support”

“contributes significantly to the overall pillar outputs for the Zone”

“a key part of (our) forward plans and platform on which to build work in the future”

“extremely innovative”

Beneficiaries View of Programme

“Really enjoyable...gives me responsibilities that I have never had before”

“I didn’t think I would get a job after school...but I think I have a really good chance now”

“I have gained more confidence and experience in coaching. I now have a better chance of finding employment”

“I wasn’t prepared for interviews before, but now I feel more confident and prepared”
“Before Equaliser, I was going nowhere, doing nothing. I’ve been mentally and physically and didn’t have any experience but...things are looking up”

Conclusions

The Programme and the projects being delivered are an important response by a range of partner organisations to the challenges and opportunities facing the sub region. The strategic goals of the Programme provide a coherent focus and are well aligned with strategies at the national, regional and sub regional level.

The Pathways Programme has established a case for the extension of provision across a wider geography and over the longer term. Its track record in providing support to difficult to reach groups, using sports as a means of engaging people, provides a new dimension to working with certain client groups. The work of Pathways capitalises on both growth in the sector and the nature of the opportunities, many of which are part time and available locally – ideal for people entering or re-entering the labour market with limited qualifications.

Overall the mid term review identified that the Pathways to Employment through Sport is beginning to make a **significant contribution to the tackling of economic and social exclusion for residents of the Zone through the provision of progression routes to employment and training through the medium of sport.**

Recommendations

The programme requires support from sub-regional as well as local stakeholders and partnerships to ensure that the potential is maximised. This involves both further development work by those managing the current Programme and a supportive environment from major stakeholders, including AWM, the Learning and Skills Council, SkillsActive and the County Sports Partnerships.

There are a number of actions that need to be considered to both build on the successes to date and the issues highlighted in the review.

Increasing effectiveness

There are a number of steps, which need to be taken to increase the effectiveness of project activity. These are aimed at both increasing the likelihood of meeting in full the AWM related targets and also improving the services offered to beneficiaries.

The recommendations are:

- Undertake a review of the current basic skills support provided by projects and assess the extent to which further support/improvements are required
- Basic skills support should be built into all new project activity
- Use expertise of LSCs to ensure provision is adequate
- Priority given to new projects which most directly contribute to output targets and priorities of AWM
- Investigate how to strengthen linkages between projects/project beneficiaries with recruitment and employment networks

Basic Skills and Workforce Development are key priorities for a number of agencies involved in the sector, including AWM's cluster development strategy. The Programme is a clear and innovative approach, which delivers on these agendas and building on this base should be another key priority for its next phase of delivery.

Succession Strategy

In moving in to the final stages of the programme, while seeking to develop a succession strategy there is a need to continue to ensure that the Programme fits with the evolving regional agendas by fully engaging with the key stakeholders, through the new Strategic Steering Group being established; and develop a regular dialogue with key post holders within AWM.

The recommendations are:

- Develop and implement a successor strategy through the Steering Group
- Produce a business/delivery plan to identify succession funding and broadening activity
- Basic skills priority of the LSC – discussions about how programme can contribute
- Work with SkillsActive and LSCs to ensure employer demanded vocational courses are recognised
- Develop additional linkages with Tourism & Leisure cluster

The development of a succession strategy is likely to take 12-18 months to finalise. It is important that work begins as soon as possible. There is still a need to promote the work of the Programme to key stakeholders and to ensure that new arrangements fully address the objectives of other organisations, such as the Learning and Skills Councils.

Assessment of the mid-term review

"The mid-term review of the Pathways Programme demonstrates that real progress is being made to support individuals from hard to reach groups, provide training and assist them with finding work within the sports industry. The project is working at the cutting edge and is an exemplar of the partnership approach, from the top level matching of sport with regeneration right down to the daily operations with the delivery of each project by different partners. Advantage West Midlands and the Arc of Opportunity Regeneration Zone are to be commended for funding this innovative initiative. Amanda Beehag, her colleagues in the projects and all the project's partners are to be applauded for their achievements in such a difficult area. This report offers lessons to others working in similar areas, highlights the challenges faced and also presents the major issues that the programme itself now needs to work on as it moves into its next phase of operation."

Loretta Sollars

Regional Director, Sport England West Midlands region

"The Arc of Opportunity welcomes the mid term review of the Pathways to Sport programme. The programme demonstrates through the variety of projects which have been developed just how vital sport can be in providing the first rung of engagement for large numbers of people and communities who still remain excluded from main stream employment opportunities.

The mid-term evaluation identifies a number of weaknesses within the support structure to the Pathways programme, particularly at a strategic planning level. The Arc of Opportunity has identified this as one of its major priorities in ensuring a successful succession to significant investments already made within the programme. It is looking forward to playing a proactive role with the Programme Management team in ensuring a successful transition into long term sustainable and supported projects.”

Ged Bowles

Chief Executive, South Black Country & West Birmingham Zone

If you would like any information about the Pathways to Employment through Sport or a copy of the full report of the Mid Term Review please contact:

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