

**Sport Action Zones –
The key to transforming
community participation**



1 Introduction

“This report outlines the results of independent research carried out to evaluate the impact of Sport Action Zones (SAZ).”

This research provides evidence of a kind not gathered previously – it provides a robust and clear measure of participation change over time, and highlights areas experiencing severe social and economic deprivation that have seen significant increases in participation. Sport England launched the Sport Action Zone initiative in 2000 to help combat low levels of participation in sport in communities that experience the effects of poverty and deprivation. The aim was to help local communities to help themselves by getting local people to play a role in identifying what was needed in each Zone and then involving them in the planning and delivery process. The 12 Zones were located throughout England, ranging in size from just a couple of wards to whole counties, and represented some of the most deprived parts of the country.

In order to evaluate the success of the initiative, Sport England commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct robust quantitative research in four SAZs. The research comprised:

- Research in Barrow-in-Furness¹, Liverpool, Bradford and Luton SAZ
- Two waves of around 1,000 interviews in each zone, the first conducted in the early days of the initiative across the winter months of 2001/2, and the second across the same months in 2005/6

The results from the two waves of research in each area were then compared to identify changes in sports participation rates across the four-year period. Sport England was particularly interested in changes in the overall participation levels, and also those for specific target groups which traditionally participate in less sport and physical activity than average, namely – women, older people, lower social class groups, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.

The results from the quantitative study can be found in Table 1 (below). These illustrate some extremely positive shifts in participation, particularly in the Liverpool and Barrow-in-Furness SAZ. Also notable are the increases in participation among the target groups mentioned above. For example, participation among DE social groups in the Liverpool SAZ increased by 11% over the four-year period.

In light of the increases in participation highlighted in the quantitative research and the qualitative evidence available from the other eight SAZs², Sport England undertook a further phase of research during 2006. The main aim of this qualitative research was to understand more about the key success factors, and to establish a link between activities the SAZ focused on, and the results. This research involved in-depth interviews with the Liverpool and Barrow-in-Furness SAZ Managers, and other staff from the SAZ. A summary of the key findings is outlined Section 3.

¹ Please note that the West Cumbria and Barrow Sport Action Zone covered three districts (Allerdale, Copeland and Barrow). The research focussed on Barrow only, so where this document refers to the ‘Barrow SAZ’, this constitutes part of the West Cumbria and Barrow SAZ.

² An intensive programme of qualitative research was carried out throughout the lifetime of the SAZ. The other eight SAZs were: East Manchester, Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly, Braunstone, Wear Valley, Southwark & Lambeth, North Derbyshire & North Nottinghamshire, Birmingham, and South Yorkshire.

2 Sport Action Zone quantitative results from the 2001/2 and 2005/6 surveys

Overall participation in the Liverpool SAZ has increased by 5% in four years **

- Among older people (50 plus) by 12%
- Among C2DE's by 10%
- DE's participation has increased by 11%

In Barrow-in-Furness, overall participation levels have increased by 6% over four years**

- Increase among women of 8%
- Increase among older people (50 plus) of 7%
- Increase among C2DE's of 6%

Table 1

Bases	Percentage of the population participating in sport/physical activity at least 4 times in an average 4 week period (including walking)							
	Barrow-in-Furness		Bradford		Liverpool		Luton	
	2001/02 (1,016) %	2005/06 (1,175) %	2001/02 (1,024) %	2005/06 (1,067) %	2001/02 (1,016) %	2005/06 (1,168) %	2001/02 (997) %	2005/06 (1,174) %
All	66	72	54	53	60	65	64	63
Age								
16-35	82	87	69	66	76	78	71	72
36-49	71	73	52	48	60	64	68	67
50+	53	60	27	31	36	48	53	49
Gender								
Men	72	75	64	60	66	72	67	67
Women	61	69	44	46	54	59	61	59
Ethnicity								
White	66	72	48	53	60	66	66	64
Non-white	*n/a	*n/a	58	53	56	59	61	60
Disability/illness								
Long term ill/Disabled	42	45	27	33	33	38	42	43
Social Class								
ABC1s	73	78	66	64	77	76	72	69
C2s	66	74	55	56	52	60	67	62
C2DEs	61	67	48	47	43	53	58	57
DEs	57	61	45	44	40	51	52	54
Young men (aged 16-25)	95	90	89	86	85	83	84	88

Source: Ipsos MORI

* n/a small base size. Percentages in bold represent significant change.

**NB: Increase in participation refers to a statistically significant increase from the 2001/2 to the 2005/6 SAZ evaluation

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Sport Action Zone qualitative follow up research – June 2006

The main aim of the qualitative research was to establish the success factors connected with the increased sport and physical activity participation rates in Liverpool and Barrow-in-Furness Sport Action Zones. There are different lessons to be learnt from each SAZ, and provided below is an outline of what the research has established to be the ideal ingredients, when worked in combination, for driving up sport and physical activity participation at a local level:

- Appoint a highly motivated charismatic leader who can quickly establish local credibility and respect;
- Establish clear strategic direction supported by a systematic needs assessment;
- Create a focused team to deliver the strategic vision on the ground. Driving up participation rates requires engagement with local communities, this is most effectively delivered by paid full and part-time officers;
- Build strong partnerships – to include sport and non-sport – the more partnerships and the more diverse the partnerships the better – have ‘a foot in both camps’ by working closely with people from a number of different organisations;
- Empower local people through a bottom up approach. Listen to what local people want, use outreach to cascade training and help people help themselves;
- Create local capacity – promote and support volunteering by residents but expect turnover of volunteers and plan and manage for this;
- Invest in facilities to provide the opportunities for participation but focus on people as the keys to success. Take a ‘whole environment’ approach to include parks and informal open spaces;
- Provide small grants, as part of a strategic vision, to help build goodwill with local communities and stakeholders, and generate a climate of trust;
- Ensure marketing and communications are tailored to target groups – many will immediately switch-off with references to sport;
- Run low cost taster sessions to see what works – expect some initiatives to fail but ensure progression routes to sustain participation for those that succeed;
- Offer a wide diversity of sport and recreational activities tailored to what works for different groups of people;
- Make the sense of ‘local identity’ and ‘community’ work for you – be part of ‘us’ and not part of ‘them’;
- Make it last – build a culture of sustainability and self help.

4 Implications for sports policy and funding

Arguably the most remarkable thing about the “critical success factors” outlined above is the fact that there is nothing actually very remarkable about them. In effect there are no real surprises. They all represent good community sports development principles and practices. However, what is highly significant is: firstly how these factors have been strategically applied together in a concerted and focused way over a five year period with the aim of raising levels of participation in some of our most deprived communities and secondly; that because of our focussed and continued research effort we can state with confidence that this “way of working” has led to real and significant participation increases amongst some of our most hard to reach priority groups.

The findings of the SAZ research present Sport England and its partners with some exciting and challenging policy implications in terms of how the SAZ ‘model’ of local area community engagement can be replicated within the ‘Sport Delivery System’, in particular at the Community Sport Network level and below in more localised neighbourhoods. It is vital that any subsequent policy priorities emanating from this work show consistency with and connect robustly to the Sport Delivery System.

The key policy implications for Sport England that emerge from this research are:

- Depending on local circumstances and need, consider working at a sub-local authority level (neighbourhood), as in the Liverpool SAZ. The policy challenge is to focus resources in an even more targeted way in order to deliver the biggest impact in participation terms;
- Use Active People and Active Places data as two of the key determinants to identify the priority areas on which we focus and potentially invest i.e. putting evidence-based policy-making and investment decisions into practice;
- Consider allocating funding to an area, based on a prioritised community needs assessment which will facilitate innovation and flexibility to respond to identified community needs. For example, the ability of both the Liverpool and Barrow SAZ to give small grants (usually only a few hundred pounds) was a direct result of our flexibility in the implementation of the ‘SAZ Magnet Fund’.

4 Implications for sports policy and funding Continued

- Consider how we can support the need for investment in well-paid strategic posts at a very local level. The critical success factor of getting strong leadership at the local level cannot be overstated – investment early on in the “right leader “ is rewarded with long term impacts further down the line. The challenge for Sport England is to strategically influence the positioning of these posts by ‘bending’ existing local authority and other partnership mainstream resources rather than through exclusive support with its own funding.
- Actively encourage as wide a set of partnerships within and outside of sport as possible as this will be the key to delivering sustainable community sporting opportunities. Worked with in the right way and given the right context wider partners beyond sport can be key to achieving our outcomes as opposed to deflecting us off course;
- Take a medium to long-term view about the length of time this approach will take to generate real impact. Existing Sport Action Zones have been five years in operation.

**Sport England Policy and Research
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Appendix Funding of the Sport Action Zones

The funding philosophy that underpinned the SAZ programme was unlike any other Area Based Initiative. The Sports Lottery core funding was kept to a minimum and the SAZ Managers were given the remit of working to attract funding in to their Zone from established sporting and non-sporting funding streams.

The core funding was limited to the infrastructure of the SAZ 'team' for the five-year life of the Zone. Usually this funding supported the employment of the SAZ Manager and some administrative or developmental support officers, with accompanying overheads, and a small developmental budget that was designed to attract some match funding. In Liverpool the total core funding was £501,550 towards a total cost of £597,060 over the five year period. In West Cumbria and Barrow it totalled £482,248 towards a total of £551,705.

After the Zones had been established, and on the advice of all of the Zone Managers, a new Lottery funding stream was created to enable the managers to lever in additional funding from partners for locally based projects. Known as the Magnet Fund, it was ring-fenced to the SAZ areas with a target of achieving match funding at a 100% level. The Liverpool SAZ met this target (£354,330 awarded towards project costs of £737,080) and the Barrow area outstripped the target, achieving a ratio of almost 1:3 (£174,000 awarded towards project costs of £555,000).

Projects developed by the SAZ were submitted for existing Sports Lottery and related Big Lottery funding streams from all of the SAZ areas. Both Liverpool and West

Cumbria and Barrow made extensive use of the Awards for All funding. The Liverpool area saw 58 projects receive awards, totalling £248,000; the Barrow area had 65 projects totalling £230,149).

The Sport England Community Capital fund made awards totalling £9,239,494 towards capital projects worth £19,453,175 in the Liverpool SAZ. The same fund made awards totalling £1,970,266 towards a total project cost of £2,763,157 in Barrow. Other Sport England funding in Liverpool supported Active Communities projects to the tune of £625,868 and an Active England grant offer of £727,000.

Many of the Sport Action Zones made use of the Space for Sport and the Arts funding stream. Liverpool received £2,961,000 in awards for projects costing £4,182,083 and Barrow £450,000 towards project costing £460,000. The Liverpool Zone also secured a total of £777,826 from the Football Foundation.

Non-sporting funding streams also supported work in the Liverpool Zone, with; Home Office Positive Futures funding (£187,000) and ; Education Action Zone funding for improved playgrounds (£260,000).

In both Zones much of the partnership funding generated to 'match' the funding streams described above was also from non-sporting sources. The Liverpool SAZ Manager has calculated that over the life of the Zone, £3,482,638 was generated as revenue funding for the SAZ Action Plan, with 49% coming from non-sporting sources.