

**AN EVALUATION OF
YOUTH SPORT NORTHERN IRELAND
PARTNER AGENCIES REPORT**

Mary Allison
Fred Coalter

Centre for Leisure Research
The University of Edinburgh
Cramond Road North
Edinburgh
EH4 6JD

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Youth Sport Northern Ireland was launched in Belfast in January 1995. The Youth Sport programmes are delivered through partnerships consisting of:

- Sports Council Northern Ireland *Youth Sport Director and Resource Officer*
- Education and Library Boards *Expressive Studies Advisors/ Sport Development Officer*
- Schools *School Sport Co-ordinators*
- District councils *Sports Development Officers*
- Governing Bodies *Coach Development Officers*

By the summer of 1998, Youth Sport was established in 4 education and library boards (Belfast, North East, South East, Western), involving 67 school sport co-ordinators working in 325 schools. The programme included 12 curriculum sports and was linked to the work of sports development officers in 16 district councils.

In August 1998, the Centre for Leisure Research (CLR) was commissioned by the Sports Council Northern Ireland and Making Belfast Work to "*measure the impact of Youth Sport Belfast and Youth Sport beyond Belfast*". This is a summary of the key findings of the research.

Opportunities Provided for Young People

Feeder Primary Schools

- In the 12 months prior to the survey, each co-ordinator had provided an average of 11 programmes in across their feeder primary schools.
- 94 per cent of co-ordinators had provided at least one *new* sport.
- 7 of the top 10 sports were team games, with soccer and basketball the most common.

Co-ordinators' Post Primary Schools

- An average of 8 extra-curricular sports were provided *prior* to the co-ordinators' appointment.
- 81 per cent of co-ordinators introduced an average of three new activities.
- Although the top 2 sports were basketball and rugby, 6 of the top 10 new sports were individual activities.
- 87 per cent of co-ordinators had established links with local clubs - mainly in traditional team sports.

Levels of Participation by Young People

- In the 10 surveyed schools, 88 per-cent-of-pupils had-been involved in extra-curricular sports in primary school and 58 per cent in post-primary school.
- At primary school, 80 per cent of pupils had been involved in clubs outside school and 68 per cent at post-primary school.
- 51 per cent of co-ordinators said that there had been an increase in number of post-primary school pupils joining local clubs.
- Although pupils' participation rate is lower in post-primary school, their perceptions are that they are offered a greater choice of sports than in primary schools and that generally sport was more fun.
- In and out of school, boys' participation rates were higher than girls', especially for post-primary competitive sports, where it was twice that of girls'. In 8 of the top 10 extra-curricular sports boys' participation exceeded girls', except in hockey and netball.

- Although girls' participation was lower, it was not dominated by a single sports activity as boys' was by soccer. Girls participated in a wider range of sports, with swimming, netball, hockey and dance being especially popular.

School Sports Co-ordinators: Key Observations

- In very few cases have there been any issues with the quality and commitment of those appointed as Co-ordinators.
- Personal interest and enthusiasm for sport by co-ordinators has been a significant factor in the success of the initiative.
- Most co-ordinators have received limited timetabled time for the initiative.
- Payments to co-ordinators represents only a token contribution towards their time on the initiative.
- Co-ordinators have delivered a significant range of new and extended sports activity.
- Half the co-ordinators have noted an increase in the number of post primary school pupils joining local sports clubs.
- Co-ordinators work in an average of 4 feeder primary schools but there is great demand to extend to a greater number of schools and a wider range of activities.
- The availability of coaches between 3-5 pm is a major constraint for Youth Sport as is developing links with primary schools in rural areas.
- Improvements in pupil/teacher relationships and increases in pupils self esteem were evidenced.
- Networking with Councils and Governing Bodies has been restricted due to the workload of everyone concerned.
- Success was unanimously recognised but demand to expand is unlikely to be satisfied within the current structures and resources.

Headteachers: Key Observations

- The main reasons for becoming involved in Youth Sport were:-
 - to strengthen and develop general links with primary schools,
 - to involve pupils in community regeneration,
 - to promote sport and enhance PE in their own schools.
- Many head teachers regarded sport as important to encouraging personal and social development and a lifelong interest for their pupils in physical activity.
- Many of the head teachers were keen that Youth Sport targeted young people that were previously turned off traditional sports activities.
- The head teachers recognised the potential of Youth Sport to:
 - bring on board pupils that did not identify with school, and
 - contribute indirectly to broader aspects of school development.
- They agreed that young peoples' self esteem was improved by involvement in Youth Sport.
- Youth Sport was recognised to have presented staff development opportunities.
- Some head teachers said there would be little difficulty resourcing Youth Sport at their school whilst others saw considerable difficulties allocating resources.

Partner Agencies: Key Observations

Education & Library Boards

- All boards were committed to the continuation and development of Youth Sport.
- They believed that priorities needed to be more specific to the needs of the different geographic areas within Youth Sport.
- They identified that a greater commitment is required at senior level with a more strategic approach to involvement in Youth Sport.
- Concern was expressed about the lack of suitably qualified coaches, lack of exit routes and the role of clubs.

- It was thought that through time the Sports Development Officers role could be expanded to take more general responsibilities for education-based sports activities.
- A need for 'assistant school sports co-ordinators' to be appointed was identified
- It was recommended that new schools meet 'readiness factors' before making co-ordinator appointments. These would include a commitment to:
 - the extended curriculum,
 - to staff development,
 - to providing necessary resources for Youth Sport.

District Councils

- Councils were positive about the continuation of Youth Sport and about the links at operational level between SDOs and co-ordinators.
- Stronger links at Chief Officer level would assist SDOs with the strategic development of Youth Sport.
- The absence of SDOs in some councils has weakened links.
- Councils prefer long term partnerships to short term initiatives - Youth Sport is seen as a long term partnership.
- There was a recognition that Youth Sport may play a role in the delivery of 'Best Value'.

Governing Bodies

- Governing body approaches to Youth Sport have varied.
- There is recognition that there is an overwhelming need to provide support to match the undoubted opportunities for development of sport among young people.
- Governing Bodies cannot meet the demands for resources and staff - Youth Sport has moved ahead too fast for these largely volunteer organisations to keep up.
- Their limited human and financial resources has greatly limited the governing bodies' ability to provide support for Youth Sport.

Conclusions

On average, Belfast co-ordinators had been in post for about 3 years and outside Belfast for an average of just over 1 year. With an *average* allocation of just over 2 hours per week, it is a testimony to the commitment of the co-ordinators and their partner agencies that so much has been delivered and well-received by pupils and teachers.

However, Youth Sport is paying the price of its success. There are demands to expand the programme at every level. To ensure the continued success of Youth Sport, the following need to be addressed:

- A commitment among all partner agencies *at a strategic level* to ensure long term sustainability.
- Increase the number of quality coaches available for after-school programmes.
- Development of more child-friendly clubs that are willing and able to meet young people's needs.
- Greater efforts to secure and/or maintain timetabled time for co-ordinators.
- Need to remain focused on Youth Sport as a key initiative - avoid "initiativitis".

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

In February 1993, a Strategy for Sport for Young People in Northern Ireland was officially launched. The Strategy, developed by a range of agencies responsible for the development and delivery of sport in Northern Ireland, identified the following fundamental needs:

- Improved partnerships.
- Improved structures to develop pathways of performance.
- Opportunities for post-school sport.
- Support for teachers.
- Resources.
- Education and Training.

These needs were to be met by programmes that focused on 13 curriculum sports:

Athletics	Hockey	Netball	Camogie
Badminton	Hurling	Soccer	
Basketball	Gaelic Football	Rugby	
Cricket	Lifestyle Sport	Tennis	

These programmes were to be delivered through a network of:

- Sports Development Officers
- Coach Development Officers
- School Sport Co-ordinators
- A Central Unit to resource, develop, co-ordinate and train.

Presentations of the Strategy were made by the Sports Council Northern Ireland (SCNI) to district councils, governing bodies of sport, education and library boards and community associations. Demonstration projects were also established in two schools (Antrim High School and Fleming Fulton School) to show how the school co-ordinator element of the strategy could work.

The appointment of a Youth Sport Director and a Resource Officer has meant that it was possible for the SCNI to develop partnerships throughout Northern Ireland.

In January 1995, this development started with the launch of Youth Sport Belfast, part-funded by Making Belfast Work and undertaken in partnership with the Sports Council Northern Ireland (SCNI) and the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB). The initiative started with the appointment of a development officer in the BELB and 14 school sport co-ordinators.

Since 1995, the programme has extended to the South East Education and Library Board area (1996/97), the North East Education and Library Board area (1998) and the Foyle area (1997) of the Western Education and Library Board in a cross border initiative with schools in Donegal. Proposals for other areas of the Western Board and a cross-border initiative in the Southern Board currently are being developed.

At the start of this research, there were a total of 67 school-sport co-ordinators working in 325 schools throughout Northern Ireland (this excludes the schools in the Donegal area). There were also 16 designated sports development officers in district councils that were linked to the programme.

This project has sought the views of all partner agencies involved in the initiative and has had the following aims and objectives.

1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research project (as identified in the client brief) was to:

“... develop means of measuring the impact of Youth Sport Belfast and Youth Sport beyond Belfast”

More specifically, the following objectives were identified:

1. To measure:
 - the increase in after school opportunities at sites employing a school sport co-ordinator,
 - the increase in the number of children attending activities and the range of activities offered,
 - the increase in girls' involvement in sports activities,
 - the increase in pupil membership of sports clubs in the community,
 - the involvement of parents and the number trained in the delivery of programmes,
 - the number of teachers trained and involved,
 - the use of schools by the community,
 - the extent to which the programme, in part or whole, has established itself on a self-financing basis,
 - the increase in participation in curriculum PE,
 - the reduction in the cost of vandalism and the decrease in truancy rates,
 - the greater involvement by pupils in the spirit and purpose of school,
 - the improved interpersonal relationships with school, pupil and teacher.
1. To evaluate the structures and systems established to manage the initiative.
2. To compare, when appropriate, the initiative with other similar initiatives.
3. To propose options for the sustainability of Youth Sport NI.

Within all of these objectives, there was a concern to consider the 'capacity building aspects of regeneration' (client brief, para.4.6) especially from the perspective of the children involved in the initiative.

For example:

- Has the initiative given children a greater sense of self-esteem?
- Has Youth Sport affected positively children's sense of belonging and their sense of wanting to contribute to an area?
- Has Youth Sport made the environment more liveable, lively and safe for children?

These objectives have been addressed through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods as set out in Section 2.

1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The report is set out as follows:

Section 2: This section provides details of the research approach (copies of all questionnaires are include in appendix 1).

Sections 3-6: These sections provide a detailed account of the levels of activity and the views of the key partner agencies involved in the Youth Sport programme, including the activity patterns and views of young people.

Section 7: This section presents the conclusions and recommendations for the future of the initiative.

SECTION 2: RESEARCH APPROACH

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The issues identified in Section 1.2 were addressed using a combination of surveys, face-to-face interviews and group discussions. At each stage in the project design the steering group were invited to comment on questionnaires, contacts for interviews and the interim survey findings.

2.2 SURVEYS

Postal surveys were undertaken with school sport co-ordinators and head teachers and classroom surveys were undertaken with school pupils.

School Sport Co-ordinators

This survey obtained information on:

- Background information (when appointed, why they applied).
- Sports provision in own school and in feeder primary schools.
- Numbers of boys and girls involved in school sport and changes in this.
- Views about the effects of participation in school sport on pupils.
- Links with local sports clubs.
- Resources to support the current and future programme.
- Views about the adequacy of the infrastructure (coaches, facilities, training etc).
- Views about the future of the programme.

Given the small sample available it was decided not to pilot the questionnaire. However, comments were received on the draft questionnaire from the clients and amendments made accordingly.

Of the 72 co-ordinators in post, a number were excluded:

- 5 schools in Donegal (outside the SCNI remit),
- 2 special schools (these were omitted on the advice of the ELB for that area),
- 1 school where the co-ordinator was on maternity leave, and
- 1 school where the co-ordinator had resigned and a replacement was not yet appointed.

Questionnaires were mailed to co-ordinators at their school address (with a pre-paid envelope for their return) and from the 63 co-ordinators, a total of 53 replies (85%) were received.

Non-respondents were chased extensively over an eight week period by the Centre for Leisure Research (CLR) (using reminder letters and telephone calls), by the relevant Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and by the SCNI. Every effort was made to achieve a 100% response but due to staff sickness and pressure of work, some co-ordinators were unable to respond.

Head Teachers

This survey obtained information on:

- Background information about the school (size, sports facilities available).
- Their perception of the value of school sport.
- Issues regarding current and required resources for school sport.
- Changing relationships with primary schools.
- Their views on the future of the programme.

As with the school sport co-ordinators, it was decided not to pilot the questionnaire. However, comments were received on the draft questionnaire from the clients and amendments made accordingly.

Questionnaires were mailed to head teachers in the 63 schools where a school sport co-ordinator had been included in the survey. From the 63 head teachers a total of 50 replies (80%) were received. Non-respondents were chased by CLR (using reminder letters) and by the relevant ELBs and the SCNI (using personal contacts).

Young People

A survey of young people was undertaken using self-completion questionnaires that pupils completed in the classroom under the supervision of a teacher. The questionnaire was piloted with a group of 20 Year 8 pupils in Edinburgh and changes were made to simplify the layout and routing of questions.

The questionnaire included sections on the following:

- About themselves (age, sex school year, primary and secondary schools attended).
- About sports activities they did at primary school.
- About sports activities they do at secondary school.
- Their favourite sports.
- Places and times when they take part in sports.
- What they think about sport at secondary school compared to primary school.
- Their involvement in and attitudes towards sports competitions.
- Their views about the positive and negative aspects of being involved in sport.

A total of 11 schools were involved in the survey and they were asked to distribute the questionnaires to a sample of about 50 pupils in Year 8. In the case of Belfast schools, where the initiative had been in place for a longer period of time, pupils from Years 8 and 9 were included.

Teachers were asked to select pupils randomly and the structure of the sample obtained can be seen in Table 2.1:

Table 2.1: Composition of the pupils' sample

	Percentage of respondents
Gender	
Boy	46
Girl	54
Age	
11 years old	44
12 years old	42
13 years old	14
School year	
Year 8	89
Year 9	11
Location of secondary school	
Belfast	29
Elsewhere	71
<i>Base number: 497</i>	

The achieved sample size was 497 pupil respondents from ten schools - questionnaires from one school were posted but never received.

2.3 INTERVIEWS AND GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Following initial analysis of the survey data, a programme of qualitative interviews and discussion groups was drawn up. This included:

- 6 school sport co-ordinators,
- 6 head teachers,
- 4 governing body development officers,
- 4 district council development officers,
- 4 education and library board development officers,
- 4 education and library board PE advisors (or equivalent),
- 1 programme sponsor, and
- 1 SCNI officer.

In addition, group discussions were undertaken in 6 schools with groups of around 10 boys and 10 girls from Year 8. These pupils were selected randomly and not necessarily for their involvement in Youth Sport programmes.

It was thought that this broader group of pupils would give a more balanced perspective on the role of sport in the lives of young people and allow us to comment on Youth Sport from the perspective of non-participants as well as participants.

The purpose of the interviews and group discussions was to clarify and explore further some of the findings of the postal surveys. Additionally, this qualitative dimension allowed for a more in-depth discussion and understanding of the 'capacity building' concept.

SECTIONS 3 & 4 are available in Separate Reports.

SECTION 5: PARTNER AGENCIES

5.1 BACKGROUND

In 1993, the Strategy for Sport for Young People in Northern Ireland was launched. The Strategy provided the rationale for, and acted as a catalyst to, the development of the Youth Sport initiative. The aim of the strategy is,

“to build strategies that remove the barriers that previously existed to young people’s participation in sport”

and its principal objective is,

“to create an environment in which every child can find an interest and involvement in sport, and to find ways in which those who want to improve can be encouraged and enabled to do so”.

It was recognised that to achieve this aim and objective it was necessary to put in place a structure that would include:

- Coach development officers with a remit to develop Youth Sport within each of 12 curriculum sports.
- Sports development officers in district councils and education and library boards,
- School sport co-ordinators in post primary schools to manage programmes of after-school sport linked to feeder primary schools, and
- A central development unit to co-ordinate and support a province wide Youth Sport programme.

Within this broad framework, the Sports Council Northern Ireland sought funding to demonstrate the potential of such an approach. In 1994, two school-based demonstration projects were started, one in Antrim and one in Belfast. Following their success, and with the support of Making Belfast Work and Belfast Education and Library Board, a much wider-ranging project was started in 1994 in 14 schools in Belfast.

The Belfast programme was the start of Youth Sport Northern Ireland. In 1994 a Director of Youth Sport was appointed, based in the Sports Council Northern Ireland. The Director has had a centrally important role in co-ordinating the establishment and development of the Youth Sport programme. Through the Director’s post and associated support staff, the SCNI continue to play a major role in brokering and co-ordinating relationships between the major partner agencies and in seeking funding for the consolidation and expansion of the Youth Sport programme.

The construction of successful partnerships has been a major achievement of Youth Sport and the key to its success. Youth Sport has been the catalyst for the creation and strengthening of formal links between agencies and organisations who previously co-operated in rather ad hoc and unsystematic ways. These agencies include the SCNI, education and library boards, district councils and governing bodies. In some areas, the initiative also has attracted commercial sponsors (e.g. Ballygowan in Belfast) and additional funding partners.

In this section we examine the attitudes and evaluations of key partners, which were obtained via in-depth interviews.

5.2 EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARDS

At the time of this research Youth Sport was established in four education and library board areas (Belfast, South East, North East and Foyle) and new programmes were being negotiated in a further two (South and West). In the established areas, expressive studies advisors had been closely involved in the establishment of the programme and in its strategic management. Youth Sport Co-ordinators had been appointed in each of the four areas to provide strategic management and co-ordination of the Youth Sport programmes and school-based co-ordinators.

Youth Sport co-ordinators and expressive studies advisors (or equivalent) were interviewed in each of the four boards where Youth Sport had been active. They were asked about their views on the philosophy of Youth Sport, their inputs to the development of the programme, their views on the management of the programme and the future of Youth Sport in Northern Ireland.

The Philosophy of Youth Sport

Some interviewees referred to sensitivities relating to the introduction of the initiative. For example, some teachers had expressed concern about the relationship between sport and physical education and the professional implications of introducing non-teaching staff to coach after-school sports programmes. Others had been concerned that Youth Sport might have been used as a "recruitment vehicle for sports clubs".

However, these initial concerns proved groundless and the quality of the programmes was beginning to convince teachers and head teachers of the value of Youth Sport to their pupils. The extent to which this was happening varied and, in part, reflected the differing lengths of time each initiative had been operating. One interviewee felt that more than the initial funding period of three years would be required to permit all schools to assimilate change and to demonstrate impact.

Although there were subtle differences in approach, all education and library board interviewees strongly supported the underlying philosophy of Youth Sport. In Belfast (the longest running programme) it was regarded as a form of "parallel provision" which extended sporting opportunities for the "non-team sport kids", complementing competitive games. Youth Sport was regarded as an holistic programme which served to enhance both pupils and teachers and supported the academic life of the school.

Another education and library board interviewee commented that,

"Youth Sport is not about producing great athletes - it's about extending opportunities for participation in sport, for having fun".

Others suggested that the purpose of Youth Sport was not only to enhance pupils' sports experience in schools, but also to ensure greater continuity in the transition from primary to secondary schools (an aim which many of the co-ordinators regarded as starting to be achieved, see section 3). However, few viewed this in terms of recruitment and 'promoting' secondary schools to feeder primaries. Rather, the key issues were essentially educational and reducing the possibly disruptive effects of the transition from primary to secondary schools.

Youth Sport was regarded as having promoted a more positive attitude towards sport among some teachers. By participating in Youth Sport training courses many primary teachers had learnt about new developments in sport for young people. In particular, the introduction of mini games had made many sports easier and more enjoyable for young people. Such simplified versions had also made many sports less threatening for non-specialist teachers, enabling them to provide increased opportunities for participation.

A major reason for the positive evaluations was the perception that concerns of educationalists had been understood, prior planning and training had been undertaken (which benefited from the Belfast experience) and a reasonable funding period had been agreed. As one interviewee commented,

"The Youth Sport programme has been well thought through - unlike some other Sports Council schemes where they wanted a quick return".

The Strategic Management of Youth Sport

The perception that the Youth Sport programme had better strategic planning and management than many other SCNI initiatives reflects the centrally important role played by SCNI (especially Ronnie Smyth). The education and library board interviewees felt that the communications with SCNI had been excellent and that the setting up of the initiative had been flexible enough to accommodate the circumstances specific to each board. Flexibility (within an agreed strategy) was regarded as a major strength of Youth Sport.

All interviewees acknowledged the major role played by the SCNI in the establishment of the initiative, the brokering of networks and the initial training of the school sport co-ordinators. The initial training was regarded by both the education and library board personnel and the co-ordinators as a major key to success. As one interviewee commented, "at the set-up the personal and professional development is enormous". Although most of the co-ordinators were teachers, the training introduced them to essential additional skills, ensured that all worked within a coherent and common philosophy and assisted them in developing the necessary community contacts. One interviewee commented that "the personal development of the co-ordinators was a big plus and a good advertisement for Youth Sport".

Following the training and set up, the SCNI continued to play a centrally important role in the strategic management of Youth Sport, meeting regularly with school sport co-ordinators to discuss progress and share experiences. Not surprisingly, this central role was most obvious in the original 'demonstration project' in Belfast and was also evident in a number of authorities who did not have the resources, or existing infrastructure, to establish the programme without substantial SCNI support - some said that they simply could not have done it on their own.

However, the flexibility of the Youth Sport initiative is indicated by the slightly different approach evident in the South East Education and Library Board (SEELB). Unlike other areas, there were pre-existing relationships between the SEELB and the five local authorities. This enabled the SEELB to take a more central leadership role and act as a catalyst to bring together a number of partners, each with a distinct role. Youth Sport provided an opportunity and the resources to develop a much more systematic set of relationships. The five district councils each have a sports development officer (SDO) with a nominal 50 per cent of their time dedicated to Youth Sport and have committed £10,000 to the initiative. The job of the district council SDOs is to develop clubs related to the identified twelve curriculum sports, with the SEELB's role being to assist the school sport co-ordinators to develop sport in schools. As Youth Sport was "about young people in our schools" and the SEELB was able to work across 21 schools and co-operate with five district councils, the SEELB regarded itself as *the* strategic agency in its area.

This slightly different emphasis in the strategic management of Youth Sport is reflected in attitudes to the role of the school sport co-ordinators. There was a concern that, because the school sport co-ordinators were part of a province-wide initiative, it might be presumed that they were also available for related SCNI initiatives. It was felt that the school sport co-ordinators must work through the SEELB (who have the strategic understanding in their area) and that it was essential that they remained focused on their core work. This concern about retaining a continuing focus and concentration on 'the local', was related to the concerns of some ELBs about the seeming proliferation of SCNI initiatives for young people in sport and an apparent lack of integration.

For example, some commented on the need for rationalisation of the various programmes for young people (for example, BT Top Sport, Youth Sport, Schools of Sport, Junior Club Development Pack and more recently the Millennium Youth Games bids). There was a desire for improved co-ordination between these programmes to ensure that resources were not being spread too thinly. For example, we have already noted the concern of one board that there was a danger of school sport co-ordinators being diverted by new initiatives before the Youth Sport programme was properly established - there was a danger in "feeling that if something is centrally initiated it is more important" than current programmes. Essentially such concerns reflected a desire to get away from "initiativitis", and to "stick with" what was regarded as a very successful and well planned programme, rather than divert energies into new short term initiatives.

There was general agreement that the SCNI should continue to act as the lead co-ordinator for Youth Sport. Although some areas had strong views about the strategic direction of the project and the need to set local priorities, they nonetheless felt that a single agency had to be aware of the strategic direction and co-ordination of the initiative across Northern Ireland. This was most especially in relation to the important role which SCNI had to play in co-ordinating the work of governing bodies in addressing the increasing problem of the shortage of coaches.

The ELBs vary in their ability or willingness to adopt the key strategic, catalytic, role in the development of Youth Sport. It is clear that the longer term sustainability of Youth Sport will require the range of partners (ELBs, district councils, clubs, governing bodies) to accept greater responsibility for the initiative. However, whatever the structure, all acknowledged the vitally important work of the SCNI in the development and strategic management of Youth Sport and none rejected their important strategic role.

The Management of Youth Sport

Most interviewees regarded "quality management" as a major factor in the success of Youth Sport. The installation of "a tight, quality control system" was regarded as central to the establishment, the identity and coherence of the programme and the trust of schools and other partners. For example, a major factor in persuading Ballygowan to sponsor the Youth Sport Belfast was a guarantee of a quality product based on good strategic management.

As Youth Sport had been established for varying lengths of time in each board - five years in Belfast, two years in the South East and Foyle and one year in the North East - the focus of their development work and the extent to which systems were in place inevitably varied. However, the structures were broadly similar.

Management Structure

In addition to the strategic input from SCNI, ELBs had divided Youth Sport schools into small 'clusters'. These clusters met to discuss progress and exchange ideas for the development of the programme. This support network included district council staff where relevant.

In all areas, the ELBs' sports development officers played a key strategic role. In addition to administering each school's Youth Sport budget, the ELBs' SDO acts as the key point of contact for the clusters and assists the school sport co-ordinators to write work programmes based on key tasks and targets for each year.

Monitoring Framework

We have already noted the importance of providing a consistently quality product and each of the ELBs' SDOs had a monitoring system to keep track of the nature and scale of their own work and that of the school sport co-ordinators. This generally involved a quantification of the numbers of pupils involved in programmes (although no allowance was made for double-counting resulting from some pupils attending a range of programmes) and festivals and the number of teachers undergoing training.

In some cases a more evaluative system had been established, in which school sport co-ordinators provided qualitative feedback on their work and the extent to which their targets had been realised. Sometimes this monitoring had included questionnaires to parents and others involved in the schemes.

Teacher and Coach Education Programmes

A key aspect of each board's development work has been to organise a programme of teacher and coach education. In the first three years of the Belfast programme a total of 250 teachers and coaches had been involved in such training. In Foyle, 15 training courses had been delivered during the first year and a half of the programme. These courses included such aspects as mini-games leaders' awards, first aid and more general sport-for-all leaders' awards.

A shortage of good quality coaches was regarded as a widespread problem and is likely to be a major constraint on the development and expansion of Youth Sport - if it continues to expand and include more schools, demand for quality coaches will outstrip supply. Although both the ELBs and district councils have a role to play in the development of coaches, this was regarded as a bigger issue and one where the SCNI (in close association with the governing bodies) had a central role to play.

In Belfast, which was now nearing the end of the first intensive development phase, the next step was to organise more courses to educate teachers about the role of sport in education and to develop coaching courses to produce more "sports teachers" - a task which will become increasingly central to the work of the ELB's SDO.

Resource Materials

All boards have committed staff time and resources to the development of information resources about Youth Sport. Most areas have contributed to Youth Sport Northern Ireland newsletters and have produced their own annual reports and information leaflets. Such material is deemed essential in raising the profile of the initiative (both inside and outside partner agencies), providing a coherent 'brand image' and the basis for sponsorship bids.

The Future of Youth Sport

All boards are committed to the continuation and development of Youth Sport. Although the Belfast model had been a useful broad template for the other boards, most found that they needed to address area-specific priorities. As one interviewee commented,

"it's a challenge to keep things within the broad parameters of Youth Sport but still give teachers scope to be flexible, to take account of their specific situation and interests".

These included the establishment of structures for rural primary schools, the co-ordination of cross-border initiatives, the streamlining of their various sport initiatives and the improvement of links with district councils. For example, although some ELBs have good links at the operational level (with SDOs), longer term development will require a greater commitment at senior officer level and a more strategic approach to youth sport.

In addition to the concern about the lack of suitably qualified coaches, there was concern about the lack of exit routes and the role of clubs. This was regarded by one interviewee as "the most difficult issue", although the degree of difficulty varied between areas and sports. For example, in most areas the Gaelic Athletic Association club/community links are strong, but in many other sports (where teams rather than clubs are the norm) there are more difficulties. There was a recognition that clubs and volunteers have their own culture and that these issues must be dealt with "step-by-step". Further, this is an area where the local authorities, SCNI and governing bodies have a major role to play.

Clearly all ELBs (except Belfast) are still in the development stages (e.g. some felt that even three years might not be sufficient time to change attitudes and convince sceptics). In Belfast, after five years there is a clearer view of the nature of longer term requirements.

Within the Belfast Education & Library Board the view is that school support co-ordinators will require a differentiated range of support which will be centrally co-ordinated by the Youth Sport Development Officer. There is additional potential in staff education and training programmes being twinned to wider strategic issues relevant to the Belfast Youth Sport Development Group.

The developing role of the Sports Development Officer has also been reviewed and a wider brief encompassing work in the area of Coaching courses for teachers and other "sports education" development is envisaged.

Within schools, school management groups and principals are actively undertaking to assimilation of the current post of school sports development co-ordinators into posts of responsibility with the staff structures of key posts of responsibilities. There is also a developmental consideration required at a strategic level to ensure that the present school sports co-ordinator posts have also linked to them the potential for "assistant co-ordinator posts". The assistant co-ordinators would work in partnership with the experienced co-ordinator who would "mentor" the assistant co-ordinator into the Youth Sport delivery programme.

5.3 DISTRICT COUNCILS

Introduction

In nearly all the areas where Youth Sport is established, formal and informal links with district councils have either been established or strengthened. At the time of this research it was estimated that 16 district councils were involved in Youth Sport. Most of the regular links are at an operational level, working in co-operation with sports development. Five district council representatives were interviewed (a sixth development officer was ill during the fieldwork).

Each development officer had a slightly different approach to Youth Sport, determined largely by their varied responsibilities and remits. However they all agreed that the philosophy of Youth Sport complemented and contributed to the corporate values of their councils - the promotion of social inclusion and participation, improving health and promoting cross-community co-operation and regeneration.

Development Work Associated with Youth Sport

Each district had slightly different work priorities, reflecting local needs and conditions: for example, rural sports development planning, facility planning and co-ordination and event management. However, there were three common priority areas - club development, coach education and child protection. In most cases these issues appeared in their annual youth development work plans.

Club Development

As with the education and library board interviewees, club development was regarded as a major priority. However, a number of constraints on club development were acknowledged, including a lack of paid staff, a small and generally overworked number of volunteers, a lack of knowledge about trends and changes in sports planning and, in some cases, an unwillingness to change their existing culture and practices.

The officers were working on a number of club development initiatives developed by the SCNI - Clubmark and the promotion of the Junior Club Development Packs. These initiatives worked on an opt-in basis, with clubs being invited to be part of a development initiative on the basis that they were willing to change and develop new practices. This may include, for example, coach education, development of a structure for junior players, improved administration and planning.

Development officers recognised the possible dangers involved in encouraging young people to join local sports clubs which were not "child centred". For example, there were dangers in children joining clubs which lacked a relevant development structure and/or did not have trained coaches/leaders to provide age-appropriate activity. Consequently, although clubs need to recruit young people for their future survival, many are unable, or unwilling, to develop this area of work.

Therefore the needs of Youth Sport for improved school/club links and the provision of post-school exit routes were being addressed by working on club development programmes. Most of these had a strong focus on the need for clubs to develop structures and practices relevant to the needs of young people. However, because of the resources available to the development officers they were restricted to a limited number of clubs and progress was inevitably slow. In at least one ELB area the policy was to deal with the club issues step-by-step and concentrate on one club in each of five selected sports at one time.

Coach Education

All Youth Sport partners identified the lack of availability of quality coaches for after-school activities as a major issue – both currently and as a possible constraint on the development and expansion of the programme. Development officers were also constrained by the absolute lack of coaches and, in some sports, the lack of coaches available during the working day.

In response to this most had developed coach education courses in partnership with governing bodies. In many cases these were initially targeted at adults in local sports clubs in the hope of increasing the likelihood of young people making the link from school to club. In some cases, coach education programmes were being developed to address some of the broader social policies of the district council, including various re-training and back-to-work schemes for the unemployed.

Child Protection

Issues of child protection were emphasised in relation to the development of coaches and clubs. These issues were being addressed via training courses and the establishment of procedures for checking and licensing coaches. Some interviewees had developed child protection training materials for the school sport co-ordinators to use when recruiting and briefing coaches. However, despite these local initiatives, this was an area where strategic co-ordination is required to ensure a standard system throughout Northern Ireland.

Management of Youth Sport

Interviewees were generally satisfied with the strategic management of the initiative. However, as with some of those in the education and library boards, there was a perceived lack of strategic integration between the various SCNI initiatives. There was a concern that already hard pressed district council sports development staff were being “pulled in every direction”, with no clear statement of overall priorities. The interviewees regarded Youth Sport and club development as their main priorities. However, all had examples of how they had been diverted from their main priorities by other work. A particular concern was the requirement to provide support for one-off events.

The concern was with the apparent lack of co-ordination of the various sports programmes and not with the strategic management of Youth Sport. They were positive that Youth Sport had provided a structure and focus to club development work. Because voluntary organisations like clubs rarely have a strong focus, Youth Sport had been particularly useful.

Although it did not hinder their day-to-day work, the SDOs expressed concern about the apparently weak links at the strategic policy level between education and library boards and recreation departments. For some, this lack of strategic policy linkages was reflected in the relatively limited crossover of use between school and district council facilities. This paralleled similar concerns among education and library board interviewees, who acknowledged that the strongest links were at an operational level.

The Future of Youth Sport

Interviewees were positive about the continuation of Youth Sport. However, there was a general feeling that a number of areas required to be better resourced before additional development work should take place and before more schools become involved.

Interviewees' positive attitudes reflected the strong operational links which characterise Youth Sport in many areas. However they, and some education and library board interviewees, felt that the strategic development of Youth Sport would be assisted greatly by stronger links at chief officer level – although a 'bottom up' approach has delivered substantial resources and progress, it will be important to involve chief officers more closely in the strategic development of the programme.

In some areas the absence of district council SDOs has meant that the links are much weaker. For example, in Belfast, the lack of specialist SDOs, the need to deal with the financial consequences of an over-supply of facilities, an associated emphasis on facilities rather than sports development and the pressures of compulsory competitive tendering all combined to produce a low level of involvement with Youth Sport. Although certain aspects of the Belfast situation are unique, other factors which made Belfast reluctant to participate may also have some credence at senior levels in other district councils. For example, there was general scepticism about "short term" initiatives from which initial funding was soon withdrawn, leaving councils with ongoing commitments - longer term partnerships are preferred in circumstances where sport and recreation budgets are under pressure. Further, where the main short term task is to increase paying usage of facilities, the longer term perspective of Youth Sport does not necessarily provide solutions.

However, the advent of Best Value may change many of these attitudes as this will require a radical review of the service, involving public consultation and a need to address wider issues of increasing participation (although it is likely that the emphasis will remain on general sports development, of which youth sport will only be a part).

Further, the involvement of Belfast City Council in the proposed Belfast Youth Sport Development Group Ltd, which will be able to access funds from a wide range of sources, may provide the financial basis to produce a change in attitude to the development of youth sport in this area.

5.4 GOVERNING BODIES

Introduction

Links with governing bodies in Youth Sport prioritised sports have to some extent depended on the availability of a governing body development officer. At the time of this research there were 12 sport-specific development officers involved in Youth Sport. However, in some of these sports, there have been limited inputs due to the lack of development officers' time.

Each of the three development officers interviewed had a slightly different approach to Youth Sport. This was determined largely by their available time and other governing body development responsibilities. However, it was possible to identify a range of generic issues including; their understanding and acceptance of the philosophy of Youth Sport, their priorities for development work, the overall management of Youth Sport and their views on the future of Youth Sport.

The Philosophy of Youth Sport

Each interviewee confirmed that youth development is a key priority for their governing body and agreed that Youth Sport represented a major opportunity to attract young people to sport at an early age. As many of the governing bodies of school sport were thought to be interested mostly in the competitive structure of youth sport, the Youth Sport initiative provided the mainstream governing bodies with opportunities to work with schools to promote and encourage participation.

The Development Work

Coach and Teacher Education Courses

All interviewees had provided a range of teacher/coach education courses for those involved in Youth Sport, mostly in response to requests from the education and library board development officers. As one interviewee commented,

“we're too strapped for time to be pro-active. We try to meet specific needs where they are identified”.

In some cases, courses had been developed for people working with primary-aged pupils and were based on 'mini' versions of the sport.

Production of Teaching/Coaching Resources

Governing bodies were also key agencies in the production of teaching and coaching resources - the mini-netball pack, the mini soccer video (“All Together Now”), the ‘Kids Stuff’ basketball pack and so on. Interviewees commented that these resources have become the foundation for in-service training courses, where the teacher/coach is taken through the material, given opportunities for practical sessions using the resource and can then be left with the pack as an ongoing teaching/coaching guide.

The Management of Youth Sport

The governing bodies agreed that communication with Youth Sport has been very good. They have been kept informed at all stages of the project and had been involved in all aspects of national training and development seminars. Further, there was a high level of regular informal contact with SCNI Youth Sport staff, enabling issues to be addressed and solved on an ongoing basis.

However, all were faced with the problems of increased demand created by the success of Youth Sport. This demand was increasingly outstripping supply at all levels: the development staff, the coaches, the clubs. For example, one development officer stated that,

“there is an overwhelming need to provide support to match the undoubted opportunities for our sport. However, with no new money, we are failing them every day. We simply cannot meet their need for resources and staff - it has all moved ahead too fast for volunteer organisations to keep up”.

Another interviewee commented,

“Expectations of councils and schools are very high - they have no idea how few resources governing bodies have”.

Although there is an undoubted pressure on governing bodies to provide sport-specific resources and support, it is clear that their ability to meet this demand is limited by a lack of paid development staff.

The Future of Youth Sport

Governing bodies' approach to Youth Sport has varied - some have focused development work in small clusters knowing that some areas will not be supported, others have tried to provide a minimal level of support across all areas.

In the words of one governing body development officer,

“if this project [Youth Sport] continues to grow it will become impossible for us to cope with it administratively. We only have one part-time member of staff for all the activities of the governing body - they could spend a full-time job on Youth Sport alone. It's a pity because the project represents a major opportunity for our sport”.

Therefore, although governing bodies have very positive attitudes towards Youth Sport and regard it as a significant development opportunity for their sports, limited human and financial resources greatly limit their ability to provide support.