Sportivate - best practice and support:  
An Active Sussex case study

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Executive Summary

Broadly, this study sought to examine: i) how the Sportivate programme in Sussex has benefited from a range of initiatives developed by Active Sussex, ii) to identify good practice from the perspective of the project leads and their partners, and iii) to determine the extent to which the Coach Support Officer (CSO) scheme, one where a team of experienced coaches would mentor and give advice to projects and their coaches, ‘worked’. The study used a range of data accrued from the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th quarters of the Sportivate project for 2013-14 (April to March inclusive). The methods of data collection included surveys, the statistical data generated through various categories that the projects had to provide, case studies, and a collection of meeting notes, focus groups, and interviews from CSO workshops information collected additional from project leads and their coaches.

In relation to the Sportivate projects and the possible implications for attending induction meetings, the findings outlined that when it came to project completion and even retention, it was unlikely that attendance at the meeting created any meaningful advantage. However, in terms of engagement (the number of participants), attendance at induction was associated with significantly higher engagement numbers. In regards to whether there were any variations between the types of deliverers and how successful projects were, there were no significant differences between the relative successes between them. And similarly, seeking to find contrasting findings between the different ‘types’ of sports led to few differences found.

In terms of what might be considered best practice from the project leads, a number of themes stood out, nine to be exact. The first theme, ‘Informal sessions, no frills, fun, friendly and no commitment’, suggested that fun-based engagement within the sessions and activities was key. The second theme ‘Graded challenges or competition’ outlined that, for the most part, adapted, easier to follow formats of sports and games were successfully received. Theme Three – ‘The appeal of new, novel or innovative activities’, highlighted how ‘novel’ (i.e. parkour), or ‘re-packaged’ traditional sports (e.g. Last Man Stands cricket), were greeted very favourably. The fourth theme, the ‘Use of Incentives’, demonstrated how projects that planned to use incentives oftentimes met with success in terms of retaining participants. Theme Five, ‘Working effectively with partners’ showed how partnership working was highly associated with successful projects, in particular in regards to how resources or specialist advice were accessed. The sixth theme, ‘Using inspirational or highly competent coaches’, emphasised that coaching competency, across a range of activities, settings and offers, was a key element of success. The seventh theme, ‘Incorporating a social element and promoting new friendships’ was an area that all projects felt impacted greatly on engagement and retention, and one that helped ease many into regular participation following the project. Theme Eight ‘Working with minority groups’, was one that illustrated how those projects focused on the delivery of activities to minority groups or hard-to-reach groups, require a range of skills to ensure success. And the last theme that emerged from the data, ‘Challenges’, outlined how planning was key in ensuring that disruption to projects from many areas, i.e. venues, timing, needed to be mitigated to promote success.

With reference to the CSO project and the impact that it had, the findings illustrated the way in which ‘mentorship’ and project completion were highly associated. Moreover, there is now a quite telling amount of evidence that demonstrates the impact that the CSO’s have had in
terms of supporting projects. The support has been given through a wide range of areas, such as helping with planning, partnership working, best practice, and engagement and retention strategies. This support is evidenced through the personal testimonies and outstanding references given by, so far, all of the projects that have been supported with the scheme.

For the most part then there are a number of elements to consider within this document. Firstly, that support in planning and understanding the ethos and delivery of Sportivate projects helped projects, irrespective of what sport or activity they promoted or what kind of deliverer they were. Secondly, that there is now – presented in this document – what might be considered a substantial amount of agreement across projects in what helps make the projects successful, and what pitfalls they may encounter. And lastly, that after the first year the CSO project has delivered meaningful results in terms of helping projects achieve completion and, more particularly, in helping facilitate a number of wider impacts and help that has benefited the projects and their deliverers.
Foreword

The role of the coach in sports projects

The use of sport in the community (i.e. non-school and non-‘performance’ sport) now has what might be considered a long history in the UK. Often used primarily to address wider social policy objectives such as civic engagement, health, educational attainment, crime prevention, and community development, successive policy papers both within sports (see Policy Action Team Audit: Report of the Policy Action Team 10: The contribution of Sport and the Arts, 1999 [otherwise known as the PAT 10 report], A Sporting Future for All, 2000, Governments Plan for Sport, 2001, and Game Plan, 2002), and coaching (North, 2009), and supported by academic literature (i.e. Hylton et al., 2001; Collins and Kay, 2003; Green and Houlihan, 2005; Coalter, 2007; Collins, 2010), have created and fostered the belief that funding in sports projects has a number of benefits. This funding of sports projects continues to take place, even in the context of the current Coalition Government’s series of cuts to public spending and commitment to austerity. Whilst the mechanisms for funding community sport in this country are based upon a reliance of a combination of public, private, and (given the ‘in-kind’ worth) voluntary donations, it is also quite clear that the Sport England funding system accounts for a significant expenditure in terms of both public spend and the lottery system.

This Sport England expenditure is, of course, spread through a number of ways. Principally through the National Governing Bodies (NGBs – most notably 46 of the 100+ sports that Sport England recognise), National Partners (such as the Child Protection in Sport Unit [CPSU], Sports Coach UK [scUK], and Streetgames), and their commitment to improving sporting opportunities for young people. Examples of schemes related to this objective include the Active Universities programme, and quite critically in the context of this report – the Sportivate 1 and Satellite Clubs projects 2.

Given the accepted use and funding of community sports projects, it makes sense to try to critically frame and understand how best they might be implemented. In this respect, there exists what might be termed ‘best practice’ within both academic (i.e. Martinek and Hellison’s [1997] work that synthesised a range of literature relating to youth programme best practice and research), and National Partner fields (i.e. Streetgames and Sport England case studies). But what might be one of the most critical observations that exists, throughout what most proponents of best practice and research in youth and community programmes strongly suggest, is that the role of the coach is critical to success (see Lyle, 2008). These observations

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1 Started in 2011 and with funding assured until at least 2017, Sportivate is a Lottery funded project that forms part of the London 2012 Olympic Legacy and looks to offer new and exciting sport activities for young people aged 14-25. Funded by Sport England, and distributed by the county sports partnership network, individual projects are typically run over 6-8 week coaching blocks.

2 The Satellite Clubs project forms a key part of Sport England’s 2012-17 Youth and Community Strategy, part of which asks for greater use of the secondary school and further education facilities. In brief, the Satellite Clubs project looks to create and sustain links between schools and community clubs by allowing the community clubs to set up ‘outposts’ within education facilities (with funding), in effect acting as the hub of potentially several Satellite Clubs.
and recommendations also reflect and are integrated with The UK Coaching Framework: The Coaching Workforce 2009-16 (North, 2009) strategy that highlights the necessity of following a more participant needs-led model.

So what we are left with is an understanding that the coach plays an essential part in the successful delivery of sport projects, not simply as the architects of the sessions but also in how they can influence the way people will engage with the project, both in the beginning and throughout its ‘lifecycle’. What this might mean, particularly in the context of publically funded projects, is that focusing on the behaviour and practice of the sports coaches within sport schemes might prove to be the best way of ensuring that they meet requirements. The emphasis, therefore, for sports providers should be to support coaches, alongside deliverers, through systems of learning that can encourage improvement.

In terms of learning and coach education, we can broadly use the models which Cushion et al. (2010) propose: formal coach education, informal coach learning and non-formal coach learning. The first, formal coach education, is principally concerned with the delivery of national governing body awards and official accreditation. In contrast, informal coach learning is self-directed, and uses a range of sources. This last learning source that Cushion et al. (2010) outline, non-formal coach learning, incorporates a variety of methods such as workshops, small courses and general continuous professional development (CPD). Whilst all three forms of learning have their merits, what is of interest is that current literature (e.g. Irwin et al., 2004; Gilbert & Trudel, 2006; Cushion et al., 2010) typically suggests that informal learning has a greater impact and importance on the development of coaching practice than that of formal and non-formal coach education.

Whilst coaches delivering publically funded sports projects could be given some formal qualifications, it does seem that supporting them through shared experience and reflection can be even more important for developing sound coaching practice. This might be particularly important when we consider just how to define, or assess, the competency – or even ‘expertise’ - of coaches across a range of different areas, sports and participation groups in community sport. This idea of supporting coaches through a more informal process of learning, one that was intended to use experienced coaches as mentors and a ‘second eye’ to help coaches in projects by visiting them in an advisory capacity and offering help and feedback, underpinned the creation of the Coach Support Officer Scheme. This scheme, at time of writing, has been delivered for more than 24 months with what appears to be a range of benefits.

The aims of this evaluation are threefold. Firstly, to identify good practice and to act as a resource to future organisations to help with their planning, development and delivery of similar projects. Secondly, to examine how the Sportivate programme in Sussex has benefited from the range of initiatives developed by Active Sussex (such as the Coach Bursary Programme, Coach of the Quarter Award, and induction and training meetings held for Sportivate projects). Lastly, although clearly linked to the second aim but in particular focusing on the CSO scheme, the report looks to more formally acknowledge, from a range of methods, the extent to which the CSO scheme has been successful.
Introduction

Creation of the CSO Scheme

The idea of the Coach Support Officer (CSO) scheme came about as a result of a piece of research undertaken by the University of Chichester for Active Sussex in 2012/13. This project centred on establishing the extent to which the then CoachSussex bursary scheme had impacted upon both the recipients of the award and the projects with which they were helping. Briefly, the coach bursary scheme was started as part of the London 2012 legacy programme, and provided financial support for coaches undertaking Level 1 and 2 coaching qualifications, chiefly on the proviso that the recipients could evidence contributing to a 6-8 week coaching programme for young participants. This was one element of the approach that Active Sussex/CoachSussex took at that time to support both coaches and projects in receipt of funding in Sussex.

Whilst the final report related to the Bursary Scheme, ‘An evaluation of the CoachSussex Bursary scheme – one year on’, was not published until mid-2013, both the author, Philippe Crisp, and Anthony Statham, then the Coaching Development Manager for Active Sussex, observed that all interviewed coaches indicated they might develop as coaches in the future through “a coach mentoring scheme led by experienced coaches.” (Crisp, 2013:25). So even before the final publication of the CoachSussex Bursary evaluation, with its list of recommendations including the possible establishment of a coach support system, Philippe and Anthony commenced planning how a mentoring scheme might be developed.

Whilst supporting coaches within the entire remit of Active Sussex would have been a large, unrealistic and eventually under-resourced project, Anthony decided that the initial premise of starting a CSO scheme would be to support both the coaches and organisers of projects that successfully bid for Sportivate funding in Sussex. Gemma Finlay, then Sports Development Manager for Active Sussex, also helped refine how the project would work. The intention was broadly to develop the CSO role as part of a wider ‘mentoring’ project with two underpinning ideas. Firstly, to assess whether the scheme could help coaches and projects in terms of delivery, and secondly, to collate evidence of best practice which could be passed on to others or used as resources/advice for future projects.

Six highly experienced coaches were recruited to the CSO roles, and the CSO ‘training’ commenced in February 2013. This February start allowed all CSO’s to be allocated a number of Sportivate 2012-13 first quarter projects the way CSO’s were allocated and assigned to a cross-section of projects was based on Sportivate criteria (for example if there was a female, disability or specific geographical focus for that round), new projects starting that needed additional support, projects that perhaps needed to comply with what might be termed quality assurance principles, and also if a project had identified the CSO as a support need in their Sportivate application. After this allocation, each CSO contacted and met with the individual project leads and undertook a number of site visits from which feedback was generated and disseminated.

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3 Active Sussex is one of the 45 county sports partnerships (CSPs) covering England.
The CSO’s then continued to meet with Philippe, Anthony, and Gemma over the summer of 2013 to ensure that consistent monitoring and evaluation had taken place (see Table 1). This consistent monitoring and evaluation was also supported by a series of visits, in effect a standardisation process, from Anthony and Philippe which ensured all CSO’s were giving comparable feedback through both the first and second Sportivate quarters.

**Table 1 - CSO Spring/Summer 2013 meeting timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05/02/2013</td>
<td>Coach Support Officer Training – welcome and induction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/02/2013</td>
<td>Coach Support Officer Training – mentoring workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/03/2013</td>
<td>Sportivate projects induction – CSO meet up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/05/2013</td>
<td>CSO Review Meeting &amp; Update</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31/07/2013</td>
<td>CSO Review Meeting End of quarter reflections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interim evaluation developed in September 2013 demonstrated that whilst the ‘mentoring’ project was still in its infancy, the initial feedback was that it had been helpful in increasing the success of a number of projects. This success was principally through comparing those projects that were mentored, and their rate of success (measured, in this instance by taking place) against those that were not mentored – which revealed a far higher number of projects took place when ‘mentored’. Additionally, the interim evaluation also pulled together a notable amount of qualitative information that broadly supported the mentoring project through positive project feedback.

The interim evaluation served as an indicator for the following areas and subsequent recommendations:

- *That each project would clearly outline the roles and responsibilities that people had. In particular, who would be coaching and when and how to directly contact them*
- *That two specific site visits per project would occur to enable CSO’s an opportunity to more clearly demonstrate a positive impact upon coach behaviour - to be evaluated through whether suggested action points, in roughly weeks three or four, might impact on coaching practice or the success of the projects at the end (generally in week seven).*
- *An increased promotion of the scheme to potential projects and the wider network of sport in Sussex*

However, the interim evaluation was not intended to be a definitive document, rather one that could quickly establish how the project was working and communicating the potential benefits of the CSO pilot study scheme. This document then, is intended to be a more comprehensive review and seeks to more fully articulate the success of the scheme by drawing upon a variety of research methods.
Recognition of the CSO Scheme

Before moving on to the next section of the document, it is helpful to highlight how the scheme has been nationally recognised, as well as give a brief update on its current state of play. Firstly, because of the fact that the mentoring scheme looks to highlight and focus upon a number of minimum standards (e.g. safeguarding) and work in a quality assurance manner, the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) have covered the project as a good practice example:

Secondly, the scheme also gained wider recognition through Sport England (identified as one of 3 case studies of best practice in the 45 County Sports Partnerships - CSPs), scUK (material to be available through the scUK knowledge data bank), and has had some of its key elements disseminated through the CSP network.

At time of writing (late 2014), the CSO scheme is still in operation and supporting a percentage of Sportivate schemes within Sussex. The CSO team meet regularly, occasionally observe each other, and in general look to support their CSO work as well as their other sports coaching, administrative, and development responsibilities (all of the CSO’s are active coaches and sports facilitators). But what is quite significant is that the CSO’s have now been allocated to a percentage of new Satellite clubs too – expanding the potential reach of their expertise and allowing more projects and sports clubs the ability to gain supportive feedback. Moreover, the CSO scheme has also been highlighted at the October 2014 CSP Coaching Conference and met with considerable praise. Indeed, a number of CSPs are now looking at implementing the scheme as part of their 2014/15 delivery plans. To summarise, the scheme has been met with a broad agreement that it is a good idea and, furthermore, has led to a number of other CSP’s looking closely at the scheme.
Methods and Results

Rationale

With the pragmatic intention to gather the maximum amount of meaningful information, this report utilised a mixed methods approach to data gathering. While the engagement and retention figures were available for analysis using quantitative methods there was also large amount of experiential information available, potentially very valuable to the planning and implementation of future projects. Therefore a combination of research methods were selected for particular purposes for this project.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative analysis was completed on the measureable elements of the Sportivate sessions, the retention and engagement figures, the performance of specific sports, and most particularly the comparative effectiveness of the CSO scheme. In order to extract the maximum information from the individuals involved in the pilot scheme a range of qualitative gathering techniques were used. Primarily, a detailed thematic analysis was conducted on the response sheets received from all project organisers in order to capture direct and timely information regarding the experiences of planning, implementing and managing the Sportivate projects. Lastly, additional sources of information were gathered from holding focus groups with the CSO’s, inviting testimonials from CSO’s and project organisers, and tracking information from coaches delivering the sessions.

Quantitative Findings

The Sportivate funding stream under investigation was implemented across one year from March 2013 to April 2014. Within this timeframe 221 projects were planned, of which 176 were implemented and completed. Over the year 4080 individual participants were engaged into attending one of the projects, at an average of 18 participants a project. Of these, 3482 participants (85%) were retained in the project for at least six sessions.

1. Did the CSO scheme help retention rates?

Ten projects received mentorship in Phase One from the 55 that were completed. In Phase Two, five of the 121 completed projects received mentorship⁴. The retention rates are expressed as percentages in Figure 1. The data clearly indicate that the retention rates were marginally higher for standard projects than for those whom received mentoring. Due to the cross-sectional collection of data it is not possible to discover causality in this case. It can be stated, however, that for this data set mentoring was associated with lower retention rates across both phases of project implementation.

⁴ CSO’s were allocated and assigned to a cross section of projects based on Sportivate criteria (for example if there was a female or disability or specific geographical focus for that round), new projects starting that needed additional support, projects that required of quality assurance and if a project had identified the CSO as a support need in their Sportivate application.
2. Did the CSO scheme help project completion rates?

Of the 221 projects that were planned across the two phases, 176 were completed while 48 were cancelled. All 15 of the mentored projects were completed, with no mentored projects having to be cancelled. Once again it is not possible to suggest from the data that mentorship possessed any causal influence on project completion, but mentorship and project completion were highly associated. CSO’s were allocated and assigned to a cross section of projects based on Sportivate criteria (for example if there was a female or disability or specific geographical focus for that round), new projects starting that needed additional support, projects that required of quality assurance and if a project had identified the CSO as a support need in their Sportivate application.

3. Was there an association between the CSO scheme and the award of Coach of the Quarter?

One of the four coaches to have been awarded Coach of the Quarter delivered on a mentored project, with the remaining three Coaches of the Quarter delivering on standard projects. These numbers are too small to permit a firm answer to this question. However, given the total number of projects run, and the number of projects mentored, chance alone would have meant a mentored scheme would produce a Coach of the Quarter for approximately every eleven standard projects, so one-in-four represents an improvement upon this estimate.

4. Was there an association between attendance at induction and project success?

Of the total projects planned ninety-six of the project coordinators attended the induction meeting. 73% of the projects for which staff attended the induction meeting were implemented and completed. However, 82% of the projects for which staff did not attend the meeting achieved completion. While it is unlikely that attendance at the meeting caused harm to the potential for a project to complete the data reveal no advantage for attendance at the induction meeting.
Of the 176 completed projects, 70 the project coordinators attended the induction meeting. The engagement and retention figures are presented in Figure 2. For those projects for which coordinators attended the induction meeting, engagement figures are improved by approximately seven participants per completed project. 86% of the participants within the projects that attended the induction were retained for the required number of sessions. 84% of participants were retained within the projects whom did not attend the induction. The advantage of attending induction is therefore associated with greater engagement, rather than improving retention within the sessions. Some selection bias may have influenced these data, as it would be reasonable to assume that the more committed project coordinators would attend the induction, and also that these projects attracted more participants. It can therefore be stated that attendance at induction was associated with significantly higher engagement, but not with greater retention.

![Figure 2 - Bar Chart Showing Mean Engagement and Retention Figures per Project for the 171 Completed Projects](image)

5. **Was there an association between awarding of coaching bursary and project completion?**

Of the 221 projects that were planned across the two phases eight projects were in receipt of a coaching bursary\(^5\). Of these eight projects, seven were completed and one was cancelled, revealing an association between coaching bursary and project completion. This suggests that projects in receipt of a coaching bursary were approximately twice as likely to successfully complete as non-bursary projects. These figures are to be treated with caution as the numbers are low and causality cannot be assumed.

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\(^5\) Coaching bursaries were allocated by those projects applying for the funding through a bursary application process and meeting the required criteria (to deliver 6-8 sessions to 14-25 year olds and successfully complete their Level 1 or 2 coaching qualification). Projects identified this support in their Sportivate application form and are sent the relevant information to apply should they wish.
6. What was the relative success of different providers?

The providers of the projects can be largely categorised as either club, private, council, educational, NGB, charity or public services. As can be seen in Figure 3 all projects run by public services, typically cadet forces, successfully completed. The relative success of projects run by educational establishments and private providers was also noteworthy. Projects run by clubs possessed the highest cancellation percentage of 37%.

![Stacked Bar Chart Showing the Number of Completed and Cancelled Projects by Provider](image)

Figure 3 - Stacked Bar Chart Showing the Number of Completed and Cancelled Projects by Provider

The relative success of different providers at the engagement and retention of participants is presented in Figure 4. The data show that projects provided by NGB’s and public services engaged and retained a comparatively high number of participants per completed project. Projects provided by councils and charities engaged and retained comparatively low numbers of participant per completed project. This may be due to the nature of the activity, i.e. some activities are limited in the number of participants that can realistically be involved, and may be due to special circumstances in which participation may be limited; e.g. it can be assumed that charities provide comparatively larger numbers of disability sports which may necessarily involve caps on participation numbers.
Figure 4 - Bar Graph Showing Mean Engagement and Retention Data per Completed Project by Provider

7. What was the relative success of different deliverers?

The majority of the providers also delivered the projects. However, a number of projects were delivered by individual coaches hired in or nominated due to their knowledge or expertise. The number of projects that were completed or cancelled is shown in Figure 5, revealing a similar pattern to the provider data. The use of individual coaches does not appear to benefit or harm the likelihood of project completion relative to the overall findings.

Figure 5 - Stacked Bar Graph Showing the Number of Completed and Cancelled Projects by Deliverer

The relative success of different deliverers regarding the engagement and retention of participants is presented in Figure 6. There were no significant differences between the relative successes between deliverers, although projects delivered by education-orientated staff showed the least success at participant retention (69%). This may represent a feature
of the participant group or the project strategy within the educational setting, potentially emphasising drop-in participation rather than retention. The use of individual coaches showed no benefit or cost on retention figures relative to other deliverers.

**Figure 6 - Bar Graph Showing Mean Engagement and Retention Data per Completed Project by Deliverer**

8. **What was the relative success of different sports?**

Across the 221 planned projects there were 54 separate sports or activities, the five most numerous being Football (20), Basketball (13), Hockey/Unihoc (13), Cricket (12) and Dance/Zumba (11). The quantification of relative ‘success’ between sports is challenging in that many sports were only involved in a single project, thereby reducing the chances that this project would not run to completion. The smaller projects which attracted smaller numbers of participants would also be presented as having the best retention rates, even though their participation numbers were comparatively low (e.g. equestrian was involved in a single project recruiting only six participants, but retention was 100%). Equally, where a sport was involved in a single project, the completion percentage, would be either 100% or 0% depending on whether it completed or was cancelled.
Qualitative Analysis

The gathered responses were read through as an initial engagement with the data and the descriptive information relevant to the core research questions was extracted and placed into a single document organised under each project. A process of open coding then occurred on this document, using highlighting to identify related concepts, or ‘themes’. Following the completion of this open coding, a process of focused coding was then completed in which related statements from the reports were recombined into groups of associated information. The final stage was to summarise these groups into logical descriptions of the themed evidence drawn from the reports. These themes are described below.

Qualitative Findings

There was a notable variation in the quality and quantity of the information submitted within the case studies, with some submissions including only the most basic details and others including a comprehensive account of the planning and implementation of the project. This variation is likely to have introduced reporting bias into the analysis presented below. However, it was assumed that the key relevant information was duly reported and therefore the analysis below represents a valid account of the experiences of the project leaders.

It was inevitable that the identified themes were subjective, doubly so as the project leaders completing the forms selectively reported what they perceived to be the relevant information. In addition, the researcher possessed experience in sport development and in the planning and implementation of numerous similar projects and would inevitably have had pre-existing perceptions of the requirements for a successful project. However, the large number of project reports received and reviewed represented a strong body of evidence for the identified themes. The investigator followed a clear and a priori rationale and methodology for the identification and reporting of the themes, representing a rigorous approach to the analysis of the available evidence and the reporting of these.

Theme One – Informal sessions, no frills, fun, friendly and no commitment

A dominant theme surrounded the commitment to providing non-threatening and friendly sessions in which the idea was to promote a fun-based engagement with the activity. The primary method by which this was delivered was by a stated aim of providing an informal atmosphere without the requirement to compete against each other. ‘Fun’ was the most commonly used descriptive across the reports, although it was inevitably delivered in different manners. Some projects used music during the sessions, while others offered informal drop-in sessions with no required commitment, in the attempt to promote an enjoyable but informal experience for the participants.

“…not feeling like they have to commit to a full term of climbing, but more drop in as and when they feel like a climb” – Chichester College Rock Climbing

“...emphasis on fun, enjoyment, inclusivity and allowing participants to experience a lively, active session” – Bexhill Girls Basketball
**Theme Two – Including graded challenges or competition**

There were some clear exceptions to the non-competitive trend within the reports, with sessions aimed primarily at recruiting either lapsed participants back into competition, or additional participants looking to have fun through a more competitive environment. The majority of these projects were concerned with adding participants to an existing competitive club or to enlisting players in order to maintain a league team. Competition was typically presented in a form that was not the full version of the competitive game, but involved a reduced number per team or a new or adapted format.

“...aimed at lapsed players looking for brief but competitive cricket” – Hastings Cricket  
“...league table for element of competition” or “an in-house league competition” – Worthing Basketball/North Sussex Dodgeball  
“...introduced a competitive element from the outset in order to maintain interest” – Worthing Badminton

Several competitive-based elements were implemented in a friendly manner, as opposed to a ‘trials’ based arrangement. Many of the sessions involved ‘challenges’ rather than competition, allowing participants to practice and master a skill in an informal game, which allowed for differentiation as well as fun practice within a session. The best examples of the implementation of these games was so that the participants could readily perceive the relevance of the skills to the game.

"...emphasis was very much on fun with lots of games to help consolidate the learning process and keep the participants engaged and motivated“ – Rustington Women’s Golf

**Theme Three – The appeal of new, novel or innovative activities**

A number of case studies highlighted the intention to deliver a new, ‘novel’ or ‘innovative’ activity for participants. This typically involved either a ‘re-packaging’ of a traditional sport (e.g. Last Man Stands cricket), situations in which the activity was itself novel (e.g. parkour), or where the activity/sport was new or unique within the local setting (e.g. college Zumba classes).

“...an exciting and new way to work out” – Hove Stand-up Paddle-boarding  
"students initially engaged with the activity as it is something different with nothing like this currently on offer” – Brighton University Dance  
“...introduce a new form of the game to a new audience” – Day Centre Cricket

A key criteria for the success of these novel or innovative projects was the extent to which it had been researched and involved a strategic implementation of the activity. This was particularly relevant when the sport or activity addressed an unmet need within either the local area or educational establishment. Reports were consistently positive that when this preparation and planning had been completed the initial recruitment was strong and retention was comparatively high.

“...offering a unique offer within locality” – Bognor Football  
“...following a well-researched plan” – Young Mum’s Fitness  
“...unique product within the facility” – Eastbourne College Zumba
On occasion the novelty of an activity did not result in a positive outcome for a project, particularly in the engagement stage. It was suggested that this occurred because it was not easy to describe the activity to a new audience.

“...difficult to convey what session actually was” – Hastings Cricket

**Theme Four – Use of Incentives**

A variety of incentives were used across a large number of the projects. Often this involved financial incentives, either discounting or waiving the cost of attendance at the funded sessions or at subsequent sessions, including free membership, either of a gym or a club, for a limited time after the project in order to remove the financial barrier to transition. These were typically used in order to promote continued engagement with the scheme, often providing participants with a material object following engagement with a minimum of five or six of the sessions. This object was often directly related to the sport (e.g. hand bandages in boxing).

“...provided a membership cost waiver...incentive for participants to remain in the sport” – Burgess Hill Hockey
“we discounted or subsidised attendance to remove the cost barrier” – Young Mum’s Fitness
“free club kit and membership to promote engagement” – East Grinstead Women’s Cricket
“boxing related prizes for participation” – Brighton Boxing

**Theme Five – Working effectively with partners**

Partnership working was highly associated with successful projects. This association occurred across the continuum of project size, including projects that aimed at a large recruitment, projects targeting minority or specific groups, and small-focused projects that had a particular outcome in mind. In particular, the planning stage was reported as a success when partners facilitated access to resources or specialist advice on a particular client group and provided support regarding the specific requirements for delivery.

“...insight into target group via partners” – Hastings Disability Cricket
"we worked very hard to build relationships with partners to engage young people” – Worthing Judo
"good contact and relationships with local young people... working closely with partners” and “good contacts and partners enabled relationship with young people” – Crawley Parkour

**Theme Six – Using inspirational or highly competent coaches**

A number of the reports detailed coaching competency as a key element of success. While this is initially intuitive there is more complexity to this issue as the requirements differ across activities, settings and offers. The presence of a member of delivery staff that is able to inspire the participants was uniformly seen as a positive element within the delivery of sessions. This form of inspiration occurred when the coach, or an assistant staff member, possessed the ability to demonstrate a high level of competence at the specific activity, irrespective of what that activity may be. While this was particularly important to the younger client groups it also proved to be equally as important to alternative participants groups.
“top players as coaches acted as role-models” – Brighton Table Tennis
“top performer as activity leader” and “role-model coach inspiring high standard” – Brighton Girls Skateboarding
“the impact of the demonstrations within schools was extremely popular due to using GB Olympians” – Sportiversity Judo

While this form of coaching provision was inevitably positive there were alternative skill sets by which the coaching had been reported to have a positive and meaningful impact on the success of a project. A number of sessions reported the requirement for a coach to be comfortable and confident in the differentiation of meaningful activity for a variety of skill levels within the same session. For each participant to have gained a meaningful and positive experience from the session the coach needed to cater for a number of requirements, most importantly the engagement and improvement of a skill-set for each individual participant while also moving the group forwards towards the intended outcome of the project.

“coaching demonstrated relevance of learning within the game” – Rustington Golf
“competent coaches across a range of abilities” – Eastbourne Golf

The interpersonal skills of the coach were also highlighted in the success of a project. For beginners, the ability of a coach to create a welcoming, fun, friendly and informal atmosphere was seen as particularly important. While these participants wanted to gain in skill level, they particularly valued the ability to try something new in a non-competitive environment. Interpersonal skills were also always mentioned as being fundamental to success when the project was involved with recruiting low socio-economic status or other disadvantaged groups. The challenging behaviour that appeared inevitable in these sessions at times needed to be handled and channelled in an appropriate manner and the burden upon the coach to effect this in the session was clear.

"I believe the girls have kept coming back because the coaches delivered some really fun but very informative coaching sessions" – Horsham Cricket
"warm and welcoming atmosphere to all newcomers" – Shoreham Basketball
“interpersonal skills of the coach vital” – Brighton Football

In addition to the coaches there was also an element of buy-in and involvement from the wider club/organisation. A number of the more competition-based projects, and specifically those projects intended to recruit new club or team members for competitive or league play, mentioned the importance of existing senior club members or team representatives staying to attend the session and help out. This fostered a positive interaction with the established players and facilitated the interaction for transition into the club.

"existing players at the target club completely bought into the programme" – Bognor Girls Football
“the input from senior club players has ensured the sessions are approachable and welcoming” – Sussex University Frisbee

**Theme Seven – Incorporating a social element and promoting new friendships**

The opportunity to develop new friendships at the session was mentioned as a key positive outcome for the projects. This was perceived to be a major positive for engagement and
retention, as well as facilitating the transition into regular participation following the project. Having the intention to promote the development of new friendships made explicit at the outset appeared to benefit the planning and implementation of the project.

"after several weeks a real group identity and bonding was established" – Southwick Football
“encouraging participants to bring friends... encourage development of new friendships” – Burgess Hill Hockey
“the group developed a strong bond” – Young Mum’s Fitness

Theme Eight – Working with minority groups

Several projects focused on the delivery of activities to minority groups or hard-to-reach groups, including the homeless, learning disabilities, low SES communities and disability sport. Examples included those involved with housing association groups, and several projects that specifically targeted areas with low SES. These projects brought their own complications, although they largely met their objectives. It appeared to require a blend of skills to ensure that these projects achieved success, and it was important to accept that these projects are part of a wider agenda of preliminary engagement for these client groups. The reports stated that the deliverer must be experienced with the target client group and have prospectively considered that challenging behaviour traits would arise.

“all participants were from low SES, passionate about sport but with some behavioural issues” – Brighton Hardball
“large variety within the group was challenging” – Adult Learning Disability Multi-sports
“participants activity level, fitness, as well as confidence and ability...a success story with hard-to-reach individuals” – Crawley Parkour
“all participants had/have personal difficulties [and] some behavioural issues...participation improved behaviour” – Brighton Football

Theme Nine - Challenges

The final theme to emerge from the reports was the almost inevitable issue that these schemes were not without their challenges. These largely involved the convenience of transport, timing and venue. Access to a venue was a consideration for a number of projects, in particular those projects involving specialist venues such as climbing walls or watersports facilities. More portable activities did not suffer from this potential drawback, but there remained the possibility that the novelty of the activity, which required the specialist equipment or venue, was the reason that the participants took up the project. In addition to transport, securing a venue represented a challenge for several projects. In particular, those activities that require large venue allocations or whole sports halls (e.g. basketball) found it difficult to access a suitable venue at a time that suited the participant group. In addition, the weather affected those activities that required an outdoor venue.

“issues with access and transport” – Cadets Watersports
“problems in finding venue space” – Chichester Multi-sports
“the weather was the biggest challenge” – Eastbourne & Lewes Table Tennis

Another commonly reported challenge was that the timing of the block of sessions was difficult. This was both in terms of the time of day when working with specific groups, for
example young mothers needed to be engaged in an activity in the morning but after the school run. In terms of the timing dates, those projects seeking to recruit participants in full- or part-time education needed to avoid the exam and revision periods, but equally summer sessions were difficult to deliver as people were on holiday.

“difficult and perhaps limited client group...attendance was poor in summer” – Chichester Rock Climbing
“fall off significant...multiple issues with attendees...project occurred in exam period” – Worthing Boxing
“recruitment although fell short of optimum...potential clashes with coursework” – Bexhill Girls Basketball

The final challenge that was reported in the project summaries was the difficulty in attracting participants to attend the initial sessions. A number of projects reported problems with promoting the sessions, specifically getting the message to the correct potential participants.

“greatest challenge was initial recruitment not maintenance” – Worthing Basketball
“relied too heavily on social media, failing to reach as many students as we might have hoped...posters not placed correctly” – Brighton University Dance

CSO Analysis

The previous two sections have concentrated on the information garnered either from the perspective of the projects (qualitative), and the statistical data generated through various categories that the 221 projects within the timeframe provided (quantitative). However, neither of these approaches necessarily tells the whole story. And it is this section that highlights both more examples of qualitative data from the projects, whilst also providing an account of how the CSO’s themselves interpreted the impact that they had.

This section then, looks to present a range of information collated from regular meetings with the CSO’s, as well as focus group meetings and material gathered from testimonies of project leads and their coaches. In brief, Table 2 below summarises a number of specific areas that the CSO’s helped projects with during the first year of the scheme.
**CSO’s helped with:**

| - Advice on publicity and even finding participants—i.e. potential networks and media outlets that some CSO’s had access to. |
| - ‘Vetting’ & access – in this instance helping a project gain access to an offender’s institution. |
| - Discussing and signposting exit routes – oftentimes the CSO’s used their knowledge of the local sports network to explain exactly who a project might pass, or accept, participants along the local performance and participation pathways. |
| - Providing equipment and, at least one time, helping project leads and coaches with transport of equipment. |
| - Giving ‘specific’/specialised coaching advice - i.e. with a disability project, giving specific coaching advice and a bespoke workshop. |
| - Advising on requirements – i.e. planning sessions, encouraging sustainability, helping with facilitating a move from ‘instruction’ to coaching, and longer term planning. |
| - Signposting training - i.e. project 500, and specific disability sports training. |
| - Mentoring coaches and, in several instances, helping the lead coach formulate some coach development ideas for their assistant coaches |
| - Helping projects start – through much of the above |

*Table 2 - Project Areas Addressed by CSO’s in Year One*

Moreover, Table 3 & Table 4 below offer further testimony on the implementation and effectiveness of the CSO scheme. Additionally, a reference email from a session organiser is provided in Appendix A.
In Focus: CSO help

CSO 1 - effecting change through asking a project about exit routes. At the time of asking/feeding back they were not in place. By the next week the provider was happy to report that they had found a club as an exit route.

CSO 2 – coaching suggestions of simplifying language for disability participants were taken on and proved to be successful – schools developed visual aids

CSO 3 – in a cycling project, outlining the benefits of using video assessment on a tablet in order to help participants see their own strengths & areas for development whilst waiting their turn to get on the track.

CSO 4 – outlining appropriate entrance activities to projects and coaches – ensuring that all participants could meaningfully engage in activity as soon as they arrived.

Table 3 - Examples of Specific Help Offered to Projects by CSO's

A coach tracking survey (March 2014): Active Sussex asked coaches who had received funding from the Active Sussex Coaching Bursary and Sportivate coaches to complete a survey in February - March 2014. Part of this survey asked for the coaches to provide any additional comments on their experiences since qualifying as a coach through the bursary or since delivering Sportivate projects:

Response 7

‘The ability to network with other coaches of similar, higher level has been invaluable. In addition, this coaching qualification has assisted in my technical coaching for other sports from more of an S&C perspective’

Response 3

Thank you to Active Sussex for the continued support of Brighton TTC Ping Pong 4 All projects. We have had literally hundreds of new players get involved and engaged through Sportivate sessions over the last couple of years. The coaching mentoring has been invaluable. Sport England are investing in people and clubs to make a real difference to lives through bursaries and Sportivate sessions

Table 4 - Responses on Coach Tracking Survey
Conclusion and Recommendations

Taken as a cumulative body of evidence the quantitative, qualitative and pragmatic data support the overall effectiveness of the CSO scheme. In particular the positive light in which the session organisers perceived the involvement of the CSO’s. The recommendations below set out the gathered knowledge for future reference when planning and implementing Sportivate sessions in subsequent funding cycles.

1. It is important to have a clear rationale for every project, rather than use the funding as an opportunity to run some sessions. The outcome from the project must be precisely identified prior to any implementation in order to gauge success and inform the delivery staff of their duties and goals. Typically these goals are not concerned with the development of sporting skill, more often they are concerned with attracting extra players for a team, promoting a new offer or activity, or broadening the base of beginners in order to promote interest in participation.

2. Careful thought needs to be given on the amount or nature of competition included in the session, and the extent to which this meets the primary objectives of the project. Many sessions have no competition, placing the emphasis on ‘fun’. These are not mutually exclusive, but the avoidance of formal competition appears to be successful when attempting to recruit new participants into an activity. The inclusion of graded challenges, particularly where these reinforced and consolidated skills and exemplified their relevance to the game, appeared to be popular with participants.

3. Identify the specific client group to whom you wish to promote the project. This is comparatively easy when the project targets a particular minority group, although careful thought needs to be given on the optimum engagement strategy and promotion. For wider participation programmes there still remained the opportunity for a focussed recruitment strategy. However, once the recruitment promotion has been implemented it is important to avoid excluding participants from the sessions if they do not precisely meet the target audience as many projects relied on additional participants to meet their goals.

4. The early identification of and engagement with relevant partners were key to the success of many projects. In particular, this was relevant to those projects targeting minority or hard-to-reach groups. Partnership working facilitated access to the participants, provided advice on interaction with participants and on some occasions provided staff time to assist with planning and/or implementation of the project. The engagement of potential partners that have a stake in provision of activities to the target group is more likely to result in a positive outcome. On occasion this required more work at the planning stage but typically proved worthwhile over the full course of a project.

5. Projects will be more likely to achieve success if they are targeted at a group where there is little or no current provision. Opportunities may arise following the closure of a facility or folding of a club or other provider. Alternatively, it may be evident that a particular sport is not represented in the locality or facility. This opportunity also exists for projects that are introducing new or innovative activities, whether this is a new sport or a recent adaptation of an existing sport. There exists a challenge, however, where the activity is
difficult to describe, in which case careful consideration needs is required to optimally promote the session. In order to inform potential participants it may be necessary to provide demonstrations or tasters using inspirational performances and possibly in collaboration with partners to assist in the implementation.

6. The use of incentives should be considered as a means of encouraging and rewarding continued engagement with the sessions. The manner of the incentives varied across the projects, but successful examples included offering free or discounted membership for continued participation following the end of the project, or equipment that was directly related to the specific activity. Both methods have the benefit of encouraging continued participation and/or transition into membership following project completion.

7. Successful schemes placed a high priority on the identification and utilisation of quality coaching staff. This typically occurred in one of two ways. Either coaching staff, or assistants, were highly competent in their ability or background in that they had competed/currently compete to a high level and could therefore provide technically excellent demonstrations and tell inspirational stories. Alternatively, highly personable and experienced coaches were recruited who were, in particular, very comfortable with differentiating for varying abilities in sessions.

8. The promotion of social interaction within the sessions was mentioned within numerous successful schemes. This was largely a function of the atmosphere of the session, but also due to the skill of the coaches and other staff in ensuring this occurs. New friendships developed within the session was reported on a number of occasions and was associated with expected future engagement. The key for success was to include this as an aim from the outset, over and above the progression of activity-specific skills, in an effort to encourage continued participation. This needed to be explicitly agreed by the coaching staff as one of their required outcomes.

9. In the specific case of targeting minority groups, careful consideration is required in the planning stage. The engagement and involvement of partnerships was seen to be very important in success. In the case of disadvantaged groups and low SES participants, projects were largely successful, but the delivery staff needed to be experienced and fully understand the required role. Challenging behaviour was highly associated with this manner of client group and should be expected and planned for prospectively. Without reinforcing a stereotype it remains important to be realistic about the potential that some client groups will likely involve more challenging behaviour than others.

10. Challenges identified by existing and previous projects will be common to the majority of planned sessions and therefore the above best practice recommendations should be seen as both a guide and a checklist for promoting success. Challenges typically represented identification of venue space, which should be identified and, where possible, secured prior to implementation. This included allowing for wet weather alternatives and the potential for interruptions to the weekly schedule in the bookings. Other challenges involved the timings of the sessions, particularly those targeting students and their exam timetables, and also those targeting young adult females, as it is best to coincide with the ‘coffee morning’ slot.
References


Appendices

Appendix A – Reference Email

Sorry for the delay but I wanted to take time and give you something decent (hopefully this is ok?). The programme is still going very well, because if exams at Collyer’s we are now running the sessions outside and numbers are still increasing. We may need more chairs soon! :-D. Here’s what I wrote but please let me know if you need the time of it changed or anything, I’m definitely happy to as you gave us a lot of help!!

"When we at Horsham leisure link were in the planning phase of the sportivate wheelchair basketball programme at college we were looking for some extra insight to the world of wheelchair basketball. Fortunately we were put in contact with Coach Name Omitted from the Little Hampton tornadoes who acted as my mentor and a general support provider to us during the start-up of the course. Before even advertising we were given some good ideas regarding adaptability, accessibility and keeping the session’s fun. A big help in publicising came from Coach’s contacts in the Littlehampton tornadoes as they actually brought the team to our promo event, offering not only the chance to show our young people and parents some great wheelchair basketball action but also the chance for the attendees to receive coaching tips from the professionals which certainly helped drum up interest for our upcoming block of coaching sessions. 2 weeks before the start date Coach ran a workshop for us to adopt some of his ideas and coaching games etc. to help us along the way. During the initial six weeks of the sportivate programme Coach dropped in on the sessions a few times to assess and give constructive feedback on how it was going. This advice greatly helped myself improve the sessions in regards to structure and making sure all of the players had fun and were stretched within their capabilities. Coach’s advice meant we always had ways to improve, ways which may not have been identified had we not had that support for such an experienced player of the game. Our numbers grew every week and because of the success we are now still able to run these sessions even after the funding period was over. We’re very grateful to have had this input as it undoubtedly increased the quality and suitability of our sessions and helped us know for sure when we were doing things well! I feel that every project of this kind should have a similar mentor to refer to and to guide them through."
### Glossary of Terms

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuous professional development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPSU</td>
<td>Child Protection in Sport Unit</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Coach Support Officer</td>
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<td>CSP</td>
<td>County Sports Partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCMS</td>
<td>Department for Culture, Media, and Sport</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGB</td>
<td>National Governing Body</td>
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<td>REEO</td>
<td>Research and Employer Engagement Office</td>
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<td>scUK</td>
<td>sports coach UK</td>
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<td>Social Exclusion Unit</td>
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