

BACKGROUND

Why were they set up?

Following the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games the Government agreed that Lottery sports funding could be used for revenue purposes. In response the World Class Performance programme was launched and research was conducted into the need for other programmes. It revealed:

- High levels of public support (89/90%) for improving coaching opportunities for young people and developing their talent
- Existing talented performers were selected from a very narrow base of the population and a variable level of understanding of talent selection processes by NGBs
- Young sports competitors most valued: enjoyment, improving personal performance and playing in a sports person-like manner.

The original concept was to create a nation-wide network of Partnerships to co-ordinate the work of the different sports providers giving more young people access into organised sport with better coaching, clubs and support to progress. The county area emerged as the as the best 'catchment' size to attract sufficient young people and to build links between local and NGB performance programmes. This was the rationale for establishing 45 Partnerships to deliver Active Sports.

How were they set up?

They were set up between September 1999 and March 2000. Local authorities were required to involve at least 60% of the authorities in their area including all LEAs and the county governing bodies they wanted to work with. All Partnerships needed to be formally established through a Memorandum of Understanding (or equivalent) identifying a host agency that would:

- Employ and accommodate the Sports Partnership or Active Sports Manager and team
- Submit applications and receive funding on behalf of the Partnership
- Ensure proper auditing and accountability systems.

Managers were appointed to plan, secure funding and deliver Active Sports.

What do they do?

Originally effort focussed on Active Sports and has gradually widened. Core components include countywide plans for developing and monitoring the impact of:

- Individual sports selected by the Partnership covering four stages of operation (local coaching, club links, selection processes and development squads)
- Coaches and coaching
- Clubs and volunteers
- Partnership Youth Games
- Sports equity policies and practices
- Child protection policies and practices.

How are they resourced?

The Managers were appointed for five years with approximately £30k funding from Sport England. The Partnership also receives a single award which is broken down into:

- Five year funding for each of sports plan (up to nine sports phased in over three years)
- Seven year funding for partnership services including investment in coaches, clubs, volunteers, youth games, equity and child protections programmes.

On average Partnerships have been awarded £1m Lottery funding to implement their full five/seven year programmes (£150k per year) based on their population size and the number of sports. They must raise a minimum of 20% funding from their own resources. Funding is subject to satisfactory achievement against targets, performance indicators and improvement plan agreed annually with each Partnership.

Who are they accountable to?

The formally agreed Memorandum of Understanding includes the decision making structure of the Partnerships. Most have set up a Board or Steering Group for this purpose.

What impact are they having?

Figures issued in November 2004 reveals the scale of activity:

- 435,101 young people nationally participating (average of 9,666 per Partnership)
- 28,769 coaches nationally receiving support (average of 640 per Partnership)
- 5,873 clubs nationally receiving support (average of 130 per Partnership).

An independent impact study undertaken last year revealed very strong support for Partnerships by NGBs and evidence of significant and positive impact on:

- Participation amongst girls
- Clubs especially helping them to cater for young people
- Coach recruitment and education
- Child protection by providing a focus and impetus for this work.

CURRENT SITUATION

What happened during the Sport England review?

Partnerships were informed their long term awards would be honoured. Many were still introducing new sports and were awarded one year funding for new plans to 'keep the business going' until the outcome of the review was known and the new Regional Sports Boards operational. The review has created uncertainty at a time when the first phase of Partnerships are coming to the end of their first five year period and the Manager's contracts expire.

What is their role?

After many months of high-level discussions with the DCMS, other national agencies, regions and existing Partnership Managers a role for the Partnerships emerged and was presented to the Sports Cabinet by the Minister's sports adviser. They are starting to be used to help deliver aspects of the PESSCL and the Coaching Task Force Strategies.

What is their common core purpose?

A forum of existing Partnership Managers and Sport England worked up a common core purpose to help Active Sports Partnerships consider a wider role around player development, coaches, clubs, volunteers and school-community links.

Sport England has recently established an 'acceleration project team' to provide clarity on the role of County Sports Partnerships and to drive forward their evolution so that they are fit for purpose by April 2006. Briefing updates are now being issued on a regular basis.

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