

**The Use of School Sports and
Cultural Facilities**

**A Review of the Impact of Policies
and Management Regimes**

Summary

Research Digest no. 100

Based on research by
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and
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for

sportscotland
Scottish Arts Council
Scottish Government

Published by:

© **sportscotland**
Caledonia House, South Gyle
Edinburgh EH12 9DQ
Tel: 0131 317 7200

ISBN 978 1 85060 501 0

December 2006
(With minor updates December 2008)

FURTHER INFORMATION

This is the summary of a comprehensive study prepared on behalf of **sportscotland**, the Scottish Arts Council and the (then) Scottish Executive. Most of the work was carried out in 2004 but the bulk of the findings and conclusions remain of value. The study was undertaken by Genesis Strategic Management Consultants and Professor Fred Coalter with additional contributions by Penny Lochhead of PMR Leisure.

The main report is published as the following document:

- *The use of school sports and cultural facilities: a review of the impact of policies and management regimes.* (**sportscotland** Research Report no. 107) Edinburgh: **sportscotland**, 2006 (minor updates, 2008).

Guidelines have been prepared based on the study:

- *Managing school facilities for community use: practical guidelines.* Edinburgh: **sportscotland**, 2006 (minor updates, 2008).

A detailed guide to planning for community use of school facilities for sport is available from **sportscotland**:

- *Guide to community use of school sports facilities.* Edinburgh: **sportscotland**, 2004.
www.sportscotland.org.uk/ChannelNavigation/Resource+Library/Publications/Guide+to+Community+Use+of+School+Sports+Facilities.htm
- *Community use of school sports facilities: workbook.* Edinburgh: **sportscotland**, 2004. (A second edition incorporating the results of the study has been drafted.)
www.sportscotland.org.uk/ChannelNavigation/Resource+Library/Publications/Workbook+for+Community+Use+of+School+Sports+Facilities.htm

These can be viewed on the sportscotland website: www.sportscotland.org.uk

For further information on research commissioned by **sportscotland**, please contact the Research Unit: research@sportscotland.org.uk.

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Note: Links for website locations of the documents cited in the text were all valid at 20 Nov 2008.

Introduction

Schools throughout Scotland provide a critically important resource to support local community cultural and sporting activities of every level and type. The strategic importance of school facilities has been fully recognised in the national strategy for sport *Reaching higher*¹ and by the Scottish Arts Council in their developing facilities strategy. With the current record levels of government and local authority investment in the school estate, it is all the more important to consider how best to optimise the opportunities presented by these developments and to ensure that all schools make the most effective contribution to cultural and sporting life throughout Scotland.

In 1999 the Programme for Government² committed to building or significantly renovating 100 schools by 2003. In 2002 a further commitment was made to complete an additional 200 new or substantially refurbished schools by 2006³, and in 2003 this was extended to enable the renewal of 300 schools by 2009 (including the 200 schools identified in 2002)⁴. Audit Scotland considered that, depending on how 'significantly renovate' and 'substantially refurbished' are defined, the targets for 2003 and 2006 had been achieved and the 2009 target would be achieved⁵. Local councils and the (then) Scottish Executive spent or committed some £3.9bn on capital improvements to school buildings during the seven years 2000/01-06/07, which was likely to reach more than £5.2bn by April 2008. Most of that additional investment was due to PFI contracts, estimated at £896m in 2007/08⁵.

This level of investment has been accompanied by increased emphasis on maximising the use of the school estate. The Scottish Executive partnership agreement⁶ of 2003 stated that:

- We will develop the largest ever school building programme in Scotland's history, renewing 200 more schools by 2006, rising to 300 by 2009. These schools should be available to the whole community and include high quality facilities for drama, music, sport, IT and, in secondary schools, science laboratories.

¹ Scottish Executive *Reaching higher: building on the success of Sport 21*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2007. www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/07105145/0

² Scottish Executive *Making it work together: a programme for government*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 1999. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/1999/09/3423/File-1>

³ Scottish Executive *Closing the opportunity gap: Scottish budget for 2003-2006*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2002, p12. www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2002/10/15579/11900

⁴ Scottish Executive *A partnership for a better Scotland: partnership agreement*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2003. www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/05/17150/21952

⁵ Audit Scotland *Improving the school estate*. Edinburgh: Audit Scotland, 2008. www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/utilities/search_report.php?id=750

⁶ Scottish Executive *A partnership for a better Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2003, p26. www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/05/17150/21958

- New schools should demonstrate commitment to the highest design and environmental standards.
- We will make sure that by 2007 every school is an integrated community school.

In 2003 the strategy for Scotland's school estate⁷ identified PPP as a key funding mechanism for achieving these targets.

In 2006, the Scottish Executive stated that the Integrated Community School initiative had developed and been overtaken by the wider integration agenda. "It no longer makes sense to think of schools separately from other agencies. We would now say that: 'By 2007 every school in Scotland will participate in delivering Integrated Children's Services'."⁸

Paralleling these policy developments there has been a concern to increase levels of participation in extracurricular sport among school-aged children and participation in sport within local communities. Reflecting this policy concern, Active Schools coordinators have been appointed in most schools to provide after-school activities and to establish closer links with local clubs. Further, the long-standing recognition of the need for local and accessible facilities and restrictions on local government capital spending have led to greater interest in the use of school facilities to address issues of poor fitness and health in the adult population.

Within this context **sportscotland**, the (then) Scottish Executive and the Scottish Arts Council combined to fund this investigation into the impact of different management regimes on the extracurricular and community use of schools for sport and cultural activities (drama, dance, music, visual arts, crafts, literature). The main aim of the research was to explore the current situation⁹ and investigate differing approaches to the management of the school estate. This will enable the production of practical advice to ensure that the management of sports and cultural facilities in schools results in maximum benefit to community and extracurricular users, particularly in opening them up to the former.

⁷ Scottish Executive and COSLA *Building our future: Scotland's school estate*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2003, p20. www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2003/02/16251/17445

⁸ Scottish Executive and HMIE *Improving outcomes for children and young people: the role of schools in delivering integrated children's services*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2006. www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/02/03143159/1

⁹ The bulk of the research for this investigation was undertaken in 2004. The reports were circulated in the interim and are now (December 2008) being published for wider availability in the context of the review of the School Estates Strategy being undertaken by the Scottish Government. This report reflects the circumstances at the time of the research; while a number of recommendations have been acted on, the findings do largely remain of value in the current environment.

Research Approach

To achieve this aim a range of data were collected through surveys, interviews and case studies. These data documented current patterns of community use and the variety of management regimes utilised. The research included the following elements:

- Postal survey of local authority directors of education to collect information about policies and provision of community use.
- In-depth case studies of eight local authorities. The authorities were chosen to reflect different geographical locations and different approaches to managing the school estate. In each authority, interviews were undertaken with key senior staff in Education and Leisure Services or equivalent departments. In addition, a focus group was conducted with staff at different levels in relevant departments and from schools. Both approaches explored broadly similar issues and were structured around three themes which inform the project – policy, provision and performance.
- Postal survey of 80 schools, which collected information on provision for community use and extracurricular activities, as well as the perceived impact on the school.
- Case studies of 18 schools identified from the eight case study local authorities. These included interviews with key personnel involved in the management of the school for community use, a survey of individual and club community users and a pupil survey.
- Interviews with key stakeholders, including the (then) Scottish Executive, the Scottish Arts Council, **sportscotland**, Voice of Chief Officers of Cultural, Community and Leisure Services in Scotland (VOCAL), the Scottish Association of Local Sports Councils, PPP contractors, and officers with PPP responsibilities through the Association of Directors of Education for Scotland.

Patterns of Community and Extracurricular Use of School Facilities

The data on local authority policies and practices indicate both common patterns and substantial variations:

- Community access to schools is widespread, with 80 per cent of responding authorities providing access to all their secondary schools. Access to primary schools is less common, and the primary schools are generally less well-equipped for community use. One-third of responding authorities provide access to all of their primary schools, while a further 40 per cent provide access to 80 per cent of their primary schools. Approximately three-

quarters of primary and secondary schools are available during out of school hours on weekdays. In general, weekend availability is less than that on weekdays.

- The reported provision of cultural facilities is much lower than for sport. It is not wholly clear if this reflects a lack of local demand or a perception of a lack of 'specialist facilities'. In some cases it is clear that cultural organisations are using community halls and other facilities because the costs for school use are higher or because the other facilities are more appropriate for their needs. Extracurricular use for cultural activities is limited across all schools, although there are a wide variety of extracurricular sports activities provided. There may be a need for more active promotion of cultural and arts facilities for community use and for extracurricular activity.
- Various forms of pre-booked and regular lets dominate. Although this is a cost effective approach, it probably reflects (and reinforces) historical patterns of use. In the sample schools, the predominant regular lets in sport are football, basketball and badminton. The predominant regular lets for cultural activities are dance, drama and music (with local authority classes also widespread).
- Levels of availability for the administratively more complex casual use are much lower and concentrated in secondary schools. This may be a more significant issue in rural communities, as alternative facilities are less likely to be available in the local area.

Patterns of Managing School Facilities for Community Use

Community use is managed in a variety of ways, largely reflecting different local government. Several different management models may be present within a single local authority. Facilities built through PPP arrangements are also subject to a variety of management arrangements. Despite the diversity of local solutions, it is possible to characterise a series of 'ideal types', or basic modes of management:

- Devolved responsibility to the school. A variety of management initiatives may be available within this option. Schools may appoint a community use manager; head teachers or heads of departments may be involved in directing and managing community use. This style of management can be effective and innovative, but does place time demands on school staff, who may need additional support. The most traditional method of devolved school management involves a system in which janitors book and oversee lets.

- Management by local authority departments, including community education, culture and leisure.
- Management by a trust or other independent body drawing membership from various stakeholders, including schools, local authority, sports clubs and others.
- Management by a third-party PPP contractor. Some PPP arrangements provide on-site staff to manage bookings, provide support services and handle maintenance issues. Others manage bookings and maintenance centrally. In such cases the contract may provide support staff to the facilities, or support may be the responsibility of school staff.

The responsibility for managing community use of primary schools is generally provided through devolved responsibility to the school, management by community education, culture and leisure departments and 'other' (presumably the janitor). The same options are most prevalent in secondary schools; the main difference is that community use in one-fifth of secondary schools is managed via PPP contract.

School staff provide out-of-hours cover for sports and cultural activities in about one-third of the sample schools, with others depending upon a mixture of staff, local authority personnel and PPP contractors to provide this cover. Specifically hired non-school staff are more likely for sport than for cultural activities.

The main funding sources for community use of school facilities are education and community education departments. There are, however, a variety of approaches to funding, which reflect differing local authority structures and management approaches.

Key Policy Issues

Most local authorities lack clearly delineated strategic responsibility and an integrated strategy for managing the community use of school facilities. Research suggests that the presence of a clear strategy for the management of school facilities is the most critical success factor for ensuring effective provision for community use.

With a few exceptions, coherent approaches to subsidising community use are also generally lacking. As a result, provision in many areas is reactive and demand-led, and frequently follows historical precedent, which may particularly limit the development of cultural and arts programmes or the marketing of the facilities to less active groups within the community.

Cost has often been identified as one of the most significant barriers to providing community use of school facilities, and effective management must ensure that the cost for using the facilities out of core hours is not prohibitive. Providing

janitorial cover and staff to meet health and safety requirements out of school hours and on the weekend provides the most significant and widespread cost issue. The high cost of salaries has led to prohibitively expensive rates for the use of facilities on weekends in many areas because full-cost recovery rates typically apply outwith the school week. Some schools have developed creative responses to this challenge in both PPP and devolved management structures.

Although data are limited, there is no evidence at this time that any one management model is more effective than others in developing community use. The critical issue seems to be the policy framework within which management regimes operate. In authorities where the policies for community use had been reviewed and revised, the various management models generally worked quite well. Where the policy context and strategic commitment to community use was not clear, provision tended to be reactive and ad hoc.

Some local authorities have made significant strides toward implementing an integrated approach to the provision of community facilities in all their schools, regardless of the management regime. This is only possible if the scope of PPP contracts (where they are involved) leaves the council with sufficient flexibility and control of the facilities and policies. This is an important issue that must be considered when PPP agreements are initiated.

There is an acknowledged need for development work in order to make community use more effective. This would entail not only programme development, but also the development of funding sources to offset the cost of expanded community use. Development is a particularly important issue for cultural and arts facilities, which are more subject to underutilisation. In some authorities this work is beginning, with the appointment of cultural and sports development officers working from schools. Research suggests that the appointment of dedicated staff for the management of community use and the provision of these staff with adequate support is important for successful development of community programmes.

Community use of school facilities poses several challenges that must be approached strategically from the initial design phase of the project. These challenges have implications for both design and management of school facilities:

- Managing shared facilities to minimise damage or disruption to the teaching environment.
- Demands on staff, both paid and volunteer.
- Child protection.

Success Factors for Community Use

Research has identified a series of factors that significantly influence the success of community use:

- Community school status, with dedicated staff and budget for the management of community use
- Positive attitude and support of the head teacher
- Appropriate facilities, available at the right price and open at the right times
- Simple letting procedures, easily understood by users and operated well by providers
- Good communication:
 - Formal meetings between relevant stakeholders
 - Informal personal contacts
- Partnership working, for example with a sports centre or clubs
- Proactive promotion of community use of schools

PPP and Community Use

While PPP arrangements offer the opportunity to increase the quality of facilities, successful PPP requires careful strategic management. Clearly, external investment has enabled the provision of much better facilities in a shorter timescale than would have been possible for the local authorities working on their own. PPP schools tend to have all-weather sports areas, large multi-use areas and games halls, purpose-built and well-equipped drama facilities and modern music areas.

In some cases, there was meaningful and constructive consultation with staff (particularly specialist staff) prior to the finalisation of plans, resulting in facilities of high quality that were well suited to the needs of the school and community. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case. In others, a more generic approach was adopted and such consultation was considered impossible. In some schools visited, whether or not consultation had taken place, frustrations were expressed that the facilities were not as good as they could have been, often because specialist teaching staff had not been included at the planning stage. This is a critical issue in the design and refurbishment of facilities (detailed design specifications for sports facilities that are appropriate for community use have been published by **sportscotland**¹⁰).

¹⁰ See: *Secondary school sports facilities: designing for school and community use* (Edinburgh: **sportscotland**, 2003), *Primary school sports facilities* (Edinburgh: **sportscotland**, 2004) and *School playing fields: planning and design guidance* (Edinburgh: **sportscotland**, 2006).

Once the school construction and/or refurbishment have been completed, the responsibility for security, health and safety, maintenance and management passes to a facilities management company. In some cases, the company appoints a manager for each school; in others, the manager carries responsibility for a number of schools spread across the local authority area. The benefits of a facilities management company were identified as being:

- Greater commitment to the maintenance of the school fabric – the assertion was that in the past, the maintenance budget was always the first to be cut in a difficult financial climate.
- Risks and costs are transferred from the school to the contractor, and school staff are released from commercial matters to focus more on educational matters.
- The contractor has greater experience in deploying and managing support staff and can introduce standardised procedures and good practice, so that support staff are developed and rapid response to problems can be made.
- Discrete and experienced staff on site can ensure higher standards of maintenance.

This arrangement appears to work best when the contractor has a representative on site to monitor performance, liaise with the school and respond quickly to problems. It works less well where the contractor operates a centralised help line.

The lack of flexibility occasioned by centralised management of facilities was a recurrent theme. Where there were contractor personnel on site, these problems seemed to be more easily resolved.

Under PPP management, the cost of access to facilities outwith core hours, especially for users designated as ‘third party’, is often identified as a significant issue. When users have to bear the full cost of additional cleaning and janitorial staff the costs become prohibitive to sports clubs, amateur dramatic societies and similar organisations that are largely dependent on voluntary leadership and members’ subscriptions. If local authorities are committed to the greater use of school facilities, they must consider how the question of charges can be resolved, either through more tightly controlled PPP contracts that expand the definition of core hours in accordance with the actual needs of organisations wishing to use the facilities, or through subsidies. In the mean time, some excellent facilities are largely unused outside core hours. PPP management is not, in and of itself, a solution to this problem, and PPP contracts should be negotiated so that the problem of cost to community users is minimised.

Success Factors for the Management of PPP Schools

- Meaningful consultation with school staff, particularly specialist staff, to ensure appropriate and practical teaching facilities and the commitment of teachers to the PPP concept.
- Meaningful consultation with potential community users to ascertain their needs and requirements for facilities and times of access prior to the execution of a PPP contract.
- Facilities management staff (which could be an **empowered** head janitor) on site to ensure speedy repairs, quality maintenance and good liaison and communication with school staff.
- Two discrete functions are needed:
 - Management and supervision of community lets
 - Delivery of all security, health and safety requirements
- It is, however, the responsibility of each local authority to decide how these two functions are delivered:
 - By one management body
 - The first by community use staff and the second by facilities management staff

Key Recommendations

The key recommendations of the study can be divided into three categories: those related to **policy**, to **provision** and to **performance**.

Policy

Clear and Integrated Policies

Although there was no robust evidence that there is one optimal management regime, it is clear that the general policy framework has a major impact on attitudes to community use and the approach to provision and management. Consequently, the primary recommendation is that there is an urgent need for local authorities to develop clear and integrated policies for the promotion of community use of schools. These policies would:

- Establish a clear philosophy about the required balance between schools as child-centred educational establishments and as community resources.

- Provide detailed understanding of the relationship and contribution of community use to broader strategies for sports and arts development.
- Establish the role and function of school facilities within the councils' wider sports and arts facility strategies (including weekday and weekend use). In this regard it should be noted that the community use of schools for cultural activities is much less than for sport.
- Provide a clear and coherent framework for decisions about the relative pricing of schools and other council sports and arts facilities. There is also a need to simplify current pricing structures.
- Establish a coherent basis for the funding of the community use of schools.
- Establish clear management responsibility for the community use of schools, with an appropriate level of resources.
- Identify the subsidy philosophy and commit the funding required.
- Show a clear understanding of the issues of complementarity and the impact of competing provision and pricing regimes.

The Standard PPP Contract

There is provision in the Scottish Schools Standard PPP Contract for community use of school facilities. However, it is up to local authorities to stipulate local requirements, including appropriate community use. Details are for agreement between the local authority and the PPP provider in the light of demand and other local considerations. Consequently, we recommend that such arrangements should enable an integrated approach and, where desired, the use of leisure departments or trusts to deliver community use.

Community Use Manuals

To enable the systematic development of community use, authorities should produce community use manuals. These would document all aspects of policies and practice and provide the framework for local community management and/or agreements with leisure trusts or cultural and leisure departments for the management of community use.

Provision

Changing and Showering Facilities

Evidence from various PPP schools suggests that their improved facilities have attracted increased community use (especially for sport). Conversely, a widespread view is that poor quality changing and showering facilities are restricting the development of community use. Consequently, if a broad policy

for the development of community use is desired, this will require some strategic investment in such facilities to ensure that they are suitable for adult use.

Daytime Use

In certain locations there may be a demand for daytime use from particular target groups (eg, retired people, women with young children). Where possible, especially when refurbishment or new build occurs, consideration should be given to the development of zoning to enable such use.

Holiday Opening

Many schools are closed for significant periods during the main holidays at Christmas, Easter and in the summer. In the worst examples, schools are not available for community use on public holidays and at mid-term breaks. Although demand may drop at some of the main holiday periods, authorities need to examine their approaches to ensure that an appropriate level of service is maintained.

Casual Use

Current use is dominated by the administratively convenient system of block lettings. This may reflect the nature of current demand and/or the nature of available school facilities. However, there is a general need to consider policies for casual access within the context of the local network of sporting and cultural opportunities.

Use by Sport and the Arts

There is a general commitment being made by authorities to the opening up of specialist sporting facilities, particularly in response to the national strategy for sport and local strategies for sport and physical activity. The lack of a similar strategic framework for the development of facilities for the arts needs to be addressed if the general and specialist facilities which are available in schools are to make their full contribution to community arts activity.

Design

Although design was not an explicit part of this study, the challenges of poor design came up in all forms of management regime. It is necessary to state what should be obvious – that proper provision for community use needs to be designed into all new build and renovation projects from the outset and not added as an afterthought.

Performance

The Role of Head Teachers

There is also a need to consider the desired role of head teachers in the development of community use: the data suggest that the attitude of the head teacher is crucial to the commitment to community use. If head teachers are to play a significant role they must be provided with relevant support (eg, directors of community use, leisure trusts) either on an area or individual school basis.

Janitorial Approach

The evidence suggests that the standard janitorial approach often makes the costs of community use prohibitive and restricts the hours available for community use. If councils wish to promote the community use of schools, it is essential that this issue be addressed, for example, by using cultural and leisure services, leisure trusts or PPP leisure staff to provide more cost-effective and flexible solutions.

Involvement of Staff and the Community

More generally, the data illustrate the need for greater overall commitment to the involvement of relevant staff and the community in the planning and design of PPP and other new school-based facilities.

There is a need for community user groups in all schools with reasonable levels of community use or the potential to achieve this. Although the school board could perform this function, there was no evidence of this happening.

Booking Processes

In some of the case studies, both users and managers identified the issue of historical booking processes and multiple user categories as a major concern. As part of the general strategic review, consideration should be given to simplification and integration into the councils' broader pricing strategies.

Management Information

The project identified a widespread lack of robust and detailed information on the nature and extent of community use. Consequently, there is a clear need for a more effective approach to the collection of information about community use. This is required to establish the nature of current use as a basis for the formulation of informed strategies and in order to evaluate the longer-term impact of new policies and provision.

Marketing

Community use is generally reactive and based on historical precedent. While such provision is catering for aspects of local demand, there is a clear need to adopt a more proactive, marketing approach if the community use of schools is to become more inclusive and needs-orientated. Some authorities are in the early stages of developing such an approach with the appointment of sports and arts development officers. However, a more systematic and integrated approach is required.

Dedicated Staff

It is unlikely that the optimal community use of schools will be achieved without dedicated community use staff. The evidence from this research indicates that, as with local authority sports and cultural facilities, resources are required to promote facilities and to encourage increased participation. However, as previously argued, this work must be undertaken within the context of a **coherent, integrated strategy** which identifies the precise contribution of the community use of school to the council's overall strategic objectives in sport and the arts.