
Active Schools Evaluation

Executive Summary
October 2014

Putting sport first

sportscotland
the national agency for sport

Executive Summary

About this report

This report sets out findings from the 2014 evaluation of Active Schools. Active Schools is **sportscotland's** flagship programme. It aims to ensure that there are more and higher quality opportunities to participate in sports (and wider play, dance and exercise activities) within schools. It involves approximately £12.5 million investment per year. The vast majority of funding goes into staffing – to ensure that a network of Active Schools managers and coordinators is in place at local level.

This evaluation involved telephone interviews with Active Schools managers in all 32 local authority areas in Scotland; an online survey of Active Schools coordinators, teachers and wider stakeholders including clubs, deliverers, parents and partners; and eight focus group discussions with pupils. The full evaluation report can be accessed here: www.sportscotland.org.uk/activeschoolsevaluation

Activities and opportunities

In 2013/14, pupils made 5.8 million visits to Active Schools supported sessions – an increase of 15 per cent from 2012/13. Most commonly, a balance of supply and demand drove how Active Schools supported opportunities and activities developed. Supply was affected by:

- the availability and profile of volunteers to deliver Active Schools supported activities;
- links with local clubs – providing a source of deliverers, and a pathway from school to club based activity; and
- practical constraints such as facilities, geography, travel and transport.

Most Active Schools teams balanced supply with demand - exploring demand through consultation with pupils and teachers, and testing demand through taster sessions. In some areas, Active Schools teams felt that the Commonwealth Games 2014 had helped to stimulate demand in new sports and activities. There was a strong message that Active Schools supported activities and opportunities worked best when they developed in a way which suited local circumstances, needs, culture and history.

Teachers, pupils, Active Schools teams and wider stakeholders generally rated the quality of Active Schools supported opportunities and activities highly. Pupils involved in this research were extremely positive about the Active Schools supported opportunities they had been able to access, and the quality of those delivering the

activities. However, some Active Schools managers and teachers felt that quality could vary significantly depending on the deliverer.

Recommendation 1: The Active Schools programme achieves its core aim. It is recommended that the programme of supporting more and better opportunities is continued, to allow the next generation of children and young people to benefit from its activities.

National initiatives

sportscotland runs a number of national initiatives, in partnership with other organisations, within the Active Schools programme. Overall, most Active Schools teams were positive about national initiatives.

Young Ambassadors, a programme designed to support young people to motivate and inspire other young people to get involved in sport, was largely seen as having a very positive impact on young people. It was seen as linking well with Active Schools aims, and with the Curriculum for Excellence. Activity to promote leadership among young people was often highlighted as a key success of Active Schools locally. However, some Active Schools teams were unsure about the Lead 2014 programme, with many feeling it overlapped a little with Young Ambassadors, and was less clear in its aims.

In terms of other national initiatives:

- There was strong support for **YDance**, which supports young women to become dance leaders. Many felt that it was a high quality programme, and led to many young women volunteering to deliver dance activities.
- There was mixed experience of **ClubGolf**. While it is clear that the programme works well in some areas, most Active Schools teams expressed concerns about the programme in terms of the difficulties building strong pathways to local golf clubs; and involvement of Active Schools teams in directly delivering ClubGolf in some areas.
- **Sports Relief** was largely seen as a programme led by schools – with limited involvement from Active Schools teams.

Recommendation 2: Leadership should remain a key priority within Active Schools. Consideration should be given to amalgamating or better linking the range of leadership initiatives in place. Guidance on selecting young people for leadership initiatives should be clear that a range of young people should be given these opportunities. Figures on involvement in Active Schools leadership programmes should be collated and analysed nationally.

Recommendation 3: The approach to promoting golf to school pupils should be reviewed after September 2014. Consideration should be given as to whether a national programme is needed, or whether there should be more local flexibility as with other sports.

Recommendation 4: National initiatives should continue to have a role in Active Schools. However, consideration should be given to the number of initiatives; the flexibility local Active Schools teams should have in implementing these; and the lead in time. Active Schools Managers should continue to be involved in developing and piloting new national initiatives.

Links between schools and clubs

In 2013/14, 93 per cent of all schools had at least one link to a local club. The strength and nature of these links varied substantially. However, many were felt to be strong. There was agreement that good quality links should:

- involve the club having a direct presence in the school;
- involve a genuine relationship between committed and enthusiastic individuals at both the school and club;
- be based on trust, communication and positive relationships;
- be long term – a pathway approach over primary and secondary school; and
- be self-sustaining, after initial development.

There were many examples of how strong links between schools and clubs had provided young people with opportunities to become involved in new sports, with some going on to compete at high level. However, a small number of pupils involved in this research highlighted that they would like to go on to clubs simply to stay active and learn, rather than to compete.

Recommendation 5: There should be an ongoing focus on developing links from schools to clubs. Where possible, links should be made with a mix of competitive clubs and community clubs or classes – to provide opportunities at all levels. **sportscotland** should develop a system to gather both quantitative and qualitative information about the number of young people who go on to be involved in clubs, their achievements and the impact on their lives.

Encouraging participation

This evaluation explored participation in Active Schools supported activity among under-represented groups – girls and young women; and pupils with Additional Support Needs (ASN). The vast majority of Active Schools teams used local data to identify and target those who were not participating in Active Schools supported activities. General barriers to participation for all included:

- **Transport** – Where young people are bussed to and from school, Active Schools teams are experiencing real challenges in finding suitable times to schedule activities.
- **Fees for activities** – In a minority of areas (at least five) very small charges were made for Active Schools supported activities. But these can be too much for some pupils.
- **Disadvantage** – A significant proportion of Active Schools teams highlighted that a different approach was needed to encourage participation in disadvantaged areas.
- **Facilities** – Some Active Schools teams, particularly in remote rural areas, reported significant challenges around facilities.

Active Schools teams had tried a range of methods to address these barriers.

Participation of girls and young women

There was very strong agreement across all stakeholders that introducing girls only activities made a big difference in encouraging participation of girls and young women. In addition, there were clear messages that:

- activities for girls should be based on consultation;
- a range of activities should be available – including team sports and individual activities; and
- peer support and leadership opportunities can build confidence, provide role models and provide opportunities for girls who are not traditionally sporty.

While many highlighted significant successes in engaging girls and young women, it was felt that this was an area which required ongoing attention to sustain and increase participation levels.

Participation of young people with additional support needs

Active Schools teams used a wide range of approaches to engage and involve young people with Additional Support Needs. Generally, approaches targeted at schools for young people with ASN were felt to work well, but there were some challenges to involving young people with ASN in mainstream schools:

- **Identifying pupils** - The biggest challenge was that most Active Schools teams did not know whether pupils at mainstream schools had ASN, and so couldn't assess participation levels, introduce additional support, or plan targeted activities based on needs.
- **Parental permission** – Active Schools teams found some resistance to ASN specific activities, as pupils were often at mainstream schools due to a desire to integrate and not be singled out.
- **Transport, facilities and resources** – Sometimes, activity required specialist equipment, facilities, transport to a central venue, or one to one support.

Recommendation 6: Active Schools should continue a targeted element to its work. Girls and young people with ASN should continue to be a priority. Girls only activities should be promoted as a key way of engaging girls. Active Schools teams should be supported to gather evidence about participation of young people with ASN in Active Schools supported activities (perhaps through parental consent forms) to gather a baseline of evidence of participation. This would help to inform future approaches to supporting people with ASN. **sportscotland** should consider introducing young people living in areas of deprivation as a further target group.

Delivery and coordination

Active Schools delivery

In 2013/14, over 20,000 individuals contributed to delivering Active Schools supported activities and opportunities – with the vast majority (84%) doing so on a voluntary basis. This included teachers and other school staff, pupils, parents, club coaches, students, sessional coaches and others. Most Active Schools teams felt that the balance between paid and unpaid deliverers in their area was good, but felt that ongoing work was required to maintain volunteering levels.

Deliverers were supported in a wide range of ways. Overall, wider stakeholders such as parents, coaches and students were more positive than teachers about the support they were offered. Over half of wider stakeholders felt the support was very good, compared to just over a third of teachers. Generally, Active Schools Managers felt that deliverers largely had the skills they required – but some felt that volunteer standards were variable.

Active Schools coordination

Generally, Active Schools Managers were very positive about the skills and experience of their team. There were very few management issues. However, the majority of Active Schools teams found that it was challenging to attract high quality Active Schools Coordinators. It was felt that this was due to a lack of understanding about the Coordinator role, resulting in many recently qualified graduates applying.

Many felt that it was difficult for young people to get relevant experience which would help them to obtain an Active Schools Coordinator position.

Coordinators generally felt that the support they received from the local authority and **sportscotland** was moderate to good. However, almost all felt that there was a need for additional training or support, including training on skills such as people and project management; systems such as IT and database skills; and more opportunities for networking and sharing experiences.

Recommendation 7: Working in partnership with local authorities, **sportscotland** should consider options for piloting a new approach to ensuring that young people engaged in sport and Active Schools through school and university can progress into the Active Schools workforce.

Impact of Active Schools

There are strong indications from a range of stakeholders that Active Schools has resulted in young people:

- developing positive attitudes to sport and health;
- feeling happier – in themselves, and about their body image;
- developing sporting skills – in a range of sports, or in their specialist sport;
- having more confidence and making friends;
- understanding more about inclusion and equality;
- having more positive role models;
- being inspired; and
- considering and progressing in careers in sport.

The research suggests that Active Schools has had a positive impact on attitudes to sport and health; confidence; volunteering and leadership opportunities; and the culture and ethos of schools. It has also contributed to changing school culture and ethos around sport and health. Some schools have seen improved behaviour and attendance as a result and others have seen more teacher and pupil joint working. Schools felt that Active Schools strongly contributed to the health and wellbeing outcomes within the Curriculum for Excellence.