

# Learning note: Links between schools and clubs

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## Introduction

This learning note explores lessons learned about links between schools and clubs, in **sportscotland** supported work in the schools and education and clubs and communities environments.

It draws on 2018 evaluation reports undertaken by Research Scotland.

The learning note is for people working in these environments, to encourage reflection on practice and sharing of learning between practitioners.

## Existing links



In 2016/17, Active Schools teams recorded more than 2,700 clubs linking with schools. Each club often linked with more than one school, in different ways.

In a national survey involving almost 15,000 school pupils, most (66%) Active Schools participants said that they had become more interested in other sports clubs or groups outside school as a result of Active Schools. Almost all (94%) said that they were motivated to be more active in the future. Young people largely joined clubs to get healthy, fit and better at sport.

There is therefore lots of scope to capitalise on this interest, and support more Active Schools participants to become involved in clubs outside of school.

## What is a school - club link?

People in the schools and clubs environments felt that more should be done to define a school - club link. When talking about these links, people talked about lots of different components of a link, including:

- **participation pathways for young people** – and how they move from taking part in school activity into club activity;
- **leadership and coaching journeys for young people** – and how this is joined up between schools and clubs environments;
- **development of people and places** – including joint work around sharing resources, facilities and trained coaches and deliverers; and
- **inclusion** – encouraging links between schools and clubs to ensure that everyone has the chance to take part in both environments.

## Are school - club links working now?

People in both the schools and clubs environments had mixed views on the effectiveness of school-club links. While some felt links were working well, many identified challenges or concerns:

### **Defining school - club links**

Some felt it was important to clearly define a school – club link, and to clearly allocate responsibility for developing these. Some were unsure of whether all existing links were meaningful and achieved intended results.

### **Measuring links and connections**

Many felt that it was hard to quantify school – club links. Monitoring how many pupils went on to participate in clubs, and for how long, was challenging.

### **Developing relationships**

While in some areas people across the schools and clubs environments were working well together, some in the schools environment felt that clubs were not interested in developing links, while some in the clubs environment felt that it could be challenging linking with teachers and some Active Schools teams. Many indicated that while they recognized relationships were important, building them took time.

### Capacity and resources

One intended outcome of better school – club links is that more pupils move into participating in clubs. Some felt that it was challenging to match this new demand with supply, with many clubs being fragile, volunteer led and limited in terms of resources. Many clubs wanted to do more in terms of reaching out to schools, but did not have the capacity.

### Transitions between environments

While the schools environment is focused on inclusion, participation and activity, many clubs are perceived to be more focused on progression, performance and talent. Some felt that there was a big change moving from participation in a schools environment to a club environment, and that this could make it difficult to transition into clubs.



## Making school to club links work

**sportscotland** will work with partners to explore further how to address the challenges around defining school to club links. Examples of how local teams have addressed the other challenges are highlighted below.

### Developing relationships

In some cases, just knowing a bit more about priorities, needs and experiences across the clubs and schools environments has helped to build relationships.

#### Example – Building relationships between environments

In one area, school pupils were asked to provide information about their club membership to inform the development of CSH in the area. This led to a project that provided senior pupils with opportunities to gain work experience and qualifications through local clubs.

## Capacity and resources

In some areas, there has been a strong focus on developing young people as leaders to help build the capacity of clubs to support young people. This can have benefits for the young people, the clubs and schools. In others, clubs have used Awards for All funding to access training, purchase equipment and develop their pool of skilled coaches.

### Example – Developing coaching skills of young people as leaders

CSH and Active Schools leads worked together to liaise with SGBs, schools and clubs to host a coach education week. This offered a variety of qualifications to senior pupils and clubs in the local area. Sixty people gained qualifications in a range of fields including athletics, swimming, lifeguarding, volleyball and basketball. These leaders have supported club, CSH and Active Schools programmes. The project provided opportunities for senior pupils to gain qualifications and experience of working with local clubs, and created a good leadership pathway from school to club.

### Example – Building club links through volunteers in schools

One Active Schools team worked with a local sports club and a local college to recruit three additional volunteer coaches. These volunteers were placed into schools across the area, and delivered a number of sports clubs. These activities have helped to build stronger school to club links, and promoted a pathway into club sport – specifically rugby, tennis and football.

## Transitions between environments

One way in which clubs and schools are working to connect the two environments is through club sessions taking place within school facilities. Schools are often seen as welcoming and trusted, and are very visible to the wider community. Community Sport Hubs (CSHs) are helping to strengthen these links, particularly when they are based in schools.

### Example – Strengthening links between environments

One swimming club is a member of two school-based CSHs. Being part of the CSH has allowed the club to access school facilities at a reduced cost. The club provides expert coaching to pupils within both schools, building relationships and connections. In return, the club received priority access to the school facilities – which are familiar to the pupils.

## Successful approaches

The types of approach which clubs and Active Schools teams felt had worked in building links, included approaches such as:

- **taster sessions** – delivered in schools or clubs;
- **club accreditation schemes** – to give teachers and parents confidence in the quality of clubs;
- **developing the pathway** – through supporting or developing junior club sections, targeting key under represented groups, or supporting new clubs to develop;
- **competitive school sport opportunities** – working with clubs, SGBs, Active Schools and PE departments;
- **events and festivals for both clubs and Active Schools** – sometimes focusing on specific needs such as children with additional support needs;
- **joint training for club leaders and Active Schools deliverers** – allowing efficiencies and opportunities for building relationships; and
- **joint communication** – with clubs, Active Schools and schools coordinating their communication and awareness raising activity with children and parents.

The School Sport Award can also play an important role in building a more joined up approach across school and club activities.

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### Example – Clubs supporting schools

In one area, a club helped pupils to achieve the practical element of their higher PE course, which three students had been struggling with. The pupils attended a club to develop their skills, and went on to pass the practical element.

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## Overarching messages

- There is lots of scope to capitalise on the interest from school pupils and Active Schools participants in being more active and getting involved in clubs outside of school.
- School – club links can mean lots of different things. It is important to be clear about the overall purpose of the links and the change you are aiming to bring about so that everyone is working towards the same aims.
- Relationships play a key part in building these links, and can take time to develop. Young people themselves can play a very important role as young leaders in making these connections across the schools and clubs environments.