

Playing For Success – An innovative scheme to engage reluctant learners

Through *Playing for Success*, out of school hours study support centres are established within top football clubs and at other sports' clubs grounds and venues. The centres use the environment and medium of football, rugby and other sports to help motivate pupils identified by their schools, as being in need of a boost to help them get back up to speed in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT).

Centres are equipped with the latest ICT facilities and are open after school hours, at the weekend and in the holidays. Typically, each pupil attends a two hour session each week for 10 weeks.

A Centre Manager (a qualified and experienced teacher), supported by higher education and further education students and members of the local community working as mentors, staff the centres. Centres have strong links with schools to ensure that Centre Managers understand pupils needs and schools recognise pupils' achievements at the centre.

Following the success of *Playing for Success* in [FA Premier League](#) and Nationwide Division One clubs the Department for Education and Skills supported a small pilot extension. A second phase extension included lower division football clubs, through a unique partnership between the [Football Foundation](#) and the UK Department for Education and Skills; New sports became involved including rugby league/union, cricket, hockey, ice hockey, tennis, gymnastics, basketball and horseracing.

More than 102 football and other sports' clubs have signed up to the full *Playing for Success* and around 10,000 pupils have benefited so far. Over 40,000 will benefit each year when all centres are open.

Funding is based on a three way partnership between Government (Department for Education and Skills and Local Education Authorities through the [Standards Fund](#)), the sports clubs and business sponsors. The [Football Foundation](#) became a new partner in supporting centres in football clubs outside the FA Premier and Division One leagues.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has carried out four national evaluations of *Playing for Success*. The first looked at the first six centres to open and found significant gains amongst pupils attending. The second, covering 12 centres, found gains of even greater significance. The third evaluation of 27 centres shows even more significant gains.

The report of the 4th national, independent evaluation were announced by the Secretary of State, Charles Clarke, at the official opening of the Burnley FC and Preston North End FC centres.

All evaluations have demonstrated *PfS* to be very effective in raising standards and in motivating young people who are underachieving. Key findings from the fourth evaluation are:

- on average primary pupils improved their numeracy scores by an average of 17 months, and secondary by 24 months;
- whilst primary pupils' reading comprehension did not quite reach statistical significance, secondary pupils' performance improved by 8 months;
- pupils ICT skills improved significantly;
- pupils made significant progress in their independent study skills and self image, and parents and teachers noticed particular improvements in their attitudes to education;

- *PfS* reached its target group of underachieving pupils with improvements regardless of gender, deprivation, ethnicity or fluency in English.

In addition to taking part in the national evaluation, centres have been developing strategies to provide feedback to their partners on the local impact of the initiative and these local studies have helped to inform future practice.

Curriculum

Centres have a good deal of autonomy in developing a curriculum within the key parameters of improving pupils' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. They also focus on improving key skills, boosting self-esteem and confidence, and developing independent learning skills amongst pupils. Each therefore has a unique programme with the link to the club's sport at its core.

Centres use cutting edge IT equipment to help deliver their curricula with computer networks linked to the Internet, interactive white boards, touch screen kiosks, and video and media equipment. Club staff and players are also a valuable resource for centres, for example by providing pupils with opportunities for interview sessions and encouraging learning by players signing pupil "learning contracts".

Tutors/Mentors

All centres use volunteer tutors/mentors to support pupils learning. They come with a wide range of skills and experience and from a variety of backgrounds and bring with them a range of experience making a real difference to the way in which centres deliver the *PfS* curriculum.

The tutor/mentor's role can be wide-ranging, from supporting small groups or individual pupils with specific tasks, assisting pupils in personal target setting and recording learning gains. Some have specific roles such as developing the centre's website and following up pupil progress back in school. Some centres encourage and prepare pupils to return as peer tutors/mentors through a graduate *PfS* programme, and some have accreditation in place for their tutors/mentors.

Critical Friends

Quality support for centres is key to the success of the initiative. A team of Critical Friends is in place, all of whom are experienced education consultants involved in the development and management of out of school hours learning. Each centre is supported by a Critical Friend at both the development stage and on an ongoing basis.

Networking

Six networking and support groups have been set up by Centre Managers covering all areas of the country. These Regional Networks provide an excellent local support forum relevant to both experienced and newly appointed Centre Managers. Centres also draw informally on the experience of others around the country, pooling expertise and sharing good practice. The Department for Education and Skills also hosts an annual conference for Centre Managers, clubs and Local Education Authorities, and organises training events, and ad hoc seminars and workshops.

Working with...

Schools:

Strong partnerships with schools are crucial to a centres' success. Schools select pupils to attend the centres and provide baseline information before attendance. Centres work with school link teachers providing feedback to and involving them in pre and post course

assessments and evaluation. Steering groups regularly involve teachers from both primary and secondary sectors. Schools have developed confidence in *Playing for Success* recognising the complementary nature of the centre's work with their pupils.

Parents:

The support and involvement of parents and carers is a key goal for all Centre Managers. Contact is established as soon as a new cohort of pupils has been identified and meetings arranged to share information and to outline expectations placed upon parents and their children.

A variety of strategies are employed to maintain parental involvement, including attendance at presentation evenings, "open days", and encouragement to take part in adult learning at centres. Parents and carers are also asked to complete questionnaires both before and after the course outlining their expectations and how they feel their child has benefited.

Local Education Authorities (LEAs):

LEAs are the driving force locally behind the *PfS* initiative and are the fund-holders, and line managers of Centre Managers. Key amongst their other *PfS* responsibilities is to integrate *PfS* within their wider study support agenda, and many have embedded *PfS* as part of a strategic approach, across all schools, recognising that both the centre and its curriculum can contribute to their achievement targets. LEAs are also usually the lead body in bringing together the various local partners into a steering group, a very important support mechanism for centres and their host clubs.

Clubs:

Centres' location within sports clubs is a major contributory factor in providing an exciting environment for *PfS* and for encouraging enthusiastic participation from pupils, parents and schools.

PfS offers the host club a focused and structured programme of work in developing literacy, numeracy and ICT skills among young people in the community, where the club, its sport and its players provide the context for learning.

Sponsorship

Playing for Success centres attract local businesses with an interest in working in partnership to contribute to raising educational achievement amongst young people. Sponsorship includes the provision of ICT hardware, software and technical support, furnishings, centre design, refreshments and books. Some businesses also provide tutors/mentors for the centres as part of the company's staff development strategy.

These are a very popular and rewarding feature of *Playing for Success*. Celebration events are held at the end of a cohort attendance either in school or, in most cases, at the club itself. Pupils, mentors, family members, link teachers, headteachers, club directors, sponsors and the media are all invited.

At most events the club manager and/or high profile players present the pupils with certificates and awards. Regular attendance, particular effort, achievement, special pieces of work and Fantasy Football champions are amongst the range of recognised achievements. Rewards include match tickets, club branded prizes/shop vouchers and special guest status at matches for pupils' and their parents or carers. Some club sponsors also contribute prizes.

Daytime use of centres

Whilst *Playing for Success* remains the focus of centre activity, centres are increasingly offering daytime and holiday provision for other groups of learners of all ages and abilities. For example, some centres run revision and booster courses for local schools, family learning sessions, courses for parents and carers, Basic Skills Agency courses, adult education ICT courses, 'New Deal' training, gifted and talented courses and summer schools. Centres are also used by the club's academy players.