



KEEPING UP AND RUNNING

THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY SPORTS HUBS

Victoria Boelman
Peter Gerry
Rachel Schon



ABOUT THE YOUNG FOUNDATION

The Young Foundation takes its name from the social entrepreneur, activist and pioneer, Michael Young. For over 60 years, Michael brought together collaborations of the brightest, the best and the most innovative to solve social problems.

We harness the power of disruptive innovation to address the structural causes of inequality. We create new movements, institutions and companies that empower people to lead happier and more meaningful lives. We work with the public, private and voluntary sectors to strengthen their positive impact on communities.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Objectives and scope

This report provides advice to national funding bodies, national governing bodies for sports, policy-makers and social investors on how they can most effectively deploy their resources to improve the capacity, delivery and outcomes of community sports hubs.

We focus particularly on community sports 'hubs', defined here as those which own or manage a physical asset/ facility as they face a unique set of challenges in offering a valuable resource. We address the following:

- The current scope and value of community sports hubs
- The nature and scale of challenges faced by hubs, and the gains to be made from systematically tackling these
- What can be done to support the sector to grow, become more sustainable and deliver high quality sports and physical activity opportunities



FOREWORD

Physical inactivity is one of the biggest threats our society faces. We see across the world, as countries become wealthier they become less active. This damages health, wellbeing, and competitiveness. All this is well known. We need to change how we approach physical activity and bring it back into our everyday lives.

Inactivity is a key driver of a host of wider health and social inequalities. In the UK, if you are richer, you are also more active. With evidence linking physical activity to happiness, educational attainment, social capital, and more, the need to enable everyone in our society to lead an active life is clear.

The Young Foundation is committed to tackling inequality wherever it manifests itself. Inequality is of course about income and wealth, but it is also about who has access to facilities, who can cycle to work safely, or who has time to take their children to the park. If we do not tackle these wider inequalities we will not produce the kind of society we all want to live in.

The Young Foundation has been investigating this issue for some time. In 2012 we released the report *Move It: Increasing young people's participation in sport*, which provided recommendations to get our young people enjoying a more active lifestyle. Since then we have been a champion of the *Designed to Move* initiative, with over 70 other international organisations, which works to get the whole world moving again. Finally we supported the 2014 All Party Commission on Physical Activity to produce their report on how we tackle the crisis in the UK.

Yet there is still much to do. We need a national movement to increase our levels of physical activity.

This report is a timely call to refocus the efforts of our funding to help the committed individuals, organisations, and communities to provide sporting opportunities for all. If we are to reverse declining levels of physical activity we must help grassroots organisations to ensure we all have somewhere to be active.

Community sports hubs are a crucial and often undervalued part of our sporting landscape. They are also under-represented in our discourse around social enterprise. At The Young Foundation we believe there is much to be gained from bridging that divide and drawing on the combined expertise of sporting and social enterprise sectors, enabling community sports hubs to achieve their full potential in terms of social impact.

We set out here the challenge and call upon funders and policy makers alike to work with us to meet it.

Simon Willis
Chief Executive, The Young Foundation



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK is facing a physical inactivity crisis. The benefits to our society from reversing the current trend are unambiguous and widely accepted: it is good for our health and wellbeing, our society, our economy, and our environment. However only around a third of the population reach the daily target of physical activity¹. Lack of access to local, affordable and appealing opportunities for physical activity is a critical barrier. Ensuring universal access to sport should be a cornerstone of our ambitions to be a high-performing nation at elite levels.

A growing number of communities are coming together to run their own sports facilities, taking on or setting up a facility and running sports activities for local benefit on a not for profit basis. These community sports hubs play a crucial role in widening access and increasing participation. Our research shows that while many community sports hubs make a real difference to their community, they often also lack the support and resources to be sustainable and maximise their impact. Yet these organisations operate in a climate of reduced public sector and grant funding. Grassroots funding from National Governing Bodies is also typically targeted at 14+ groups, reducing the scope for action and providing high quality experiences for younger age groups.

Our research shows that there is huge potential for funders, policymakers and other stakeholders to support community sports hubs. This report is aimed at them and anyone interested in seeing community sports thrive. The recommendations in this report could radically transform the reach of these organisations to work in their communities.

Throwing more money at the problem is not the solution. Instead we must be smarter about how we spend existing funds. We need strategic investment to help the sector become more sustainable to achieve its potential.

Core strengths

The community sports hubs we spoke to had many strengths compared to traditional sports clubs:

Inspirational, creative and motivated leaders

- These organisations are almost always founded and led by inspiring, creative, motivated individuals, supported by equally committed teams. They put the benefit of their local community above everything else, often in areas of disadvantage and inequality.

Grounded in the communities they serve, and responsive to local demand

- Many of the most successful hubs are deeply rooted in their communities. They have a strong volunteer base which is instrumental in keeping the hub up and running. A deep connection to their local community also allows the hubs to draw on a range of other forms of support from their community such as help with fundraising.

An ability to adapt and innovate which is often not available to public sector facilities. Many offer 'something different'

- Their small size and organisational structure allows them to be creative, flexible, and responsive to local demand.

- Be it culture, facilities or a quirky history, hubs often differentiate themselves with an offer that is unique in their community

The Challenges

Despite their strengths the organisations we spoke to faced significant challenges that could be relatively easily overcome:

- Widening participation:
Increasing participation and finding effective ways to engage 'hard to reach' groups are often key priorities for hubs.
- Business management and financial stability:
Skills gaps and capacity constraints in the area of business management, marketing and fundraising put huge pressures on leaders. This frequently diverts focus and energy away from the core mission of the hub, limiting impact.
- Ensuring high-quality sports provision and that children in particular have early positive experiences of physical activity:
Time and financial constraints and a reliance on volunteers often limits the amount that can be invested in monitoring and improving quality, even though this may be the main passion and area of expertise of leaders and managers.
- Demonstrating impact
Demonstrating impact is a significant challenge, compounded in multi-sport environments and subject to the varying requests of different funding bodies.

Across all areas of operations, there are limited opportunities to learn from others or share examples of best practice and innovative ideas. These hubs are often isolated from organisations facing similar issues.

Transforming the sector

There is substantial scope for funders to help deliver more sustainable and effective community sports hubs. Our conversations with local community sports hubs, our work incubating diverse social ventures, and experience of helping third sector organisations develop sustainable strategies in a range of sectors have all contributed to shaping three specific recommendations to help transform the sector and increase its social impact. The teams running community sports hub require expert input to help them move to a surer footing. Tailored support in the area of business, marketing and finance will help free up time to focus on delivering high quality sports and physical activity experiences and engaging new groups. Nonetheless, for many, the ability to deliver high quality and positive experiences is also dependent on additional support to understand the elements which underpin this.

1. Accelerator/ venture support programmes



Accelerator programmes have been shown to have significant impact on the trajectory of social enterprises in a wide range of sectors. They provide intensive business skills training, help in the articulation of impact, mentoring and typically broker introductions to potential investors and funders. A bespoke sports hub accelerator could also incorporate sessions on the delivery of physical activity sessions which promote physical literacy while ensuring an emphasis on delivering positive experiences for all.

2. Venture Philanthropy



Venture philanthropy applies a business development approach to achieving philanthropic goals. Typically this involves a blend of grant funding and pro bono professional support targeted at building organisational capacity.

By harnessing relevant professional support, organisations may be able to fill gaps in their existing model and build internal capacity to continue after the period of venture philanthropy ends. It may also prove an effective way to broaden local ownership of the hub through connection to local businesses.

3. Community Share Offers



Community Share Offers are a way for community organisations to raise capital to fund their work. They work by offering withdrawable share capital to the local community to provide finance for an organisation. It offers an attractive route for community sports hubs as it ensures local support for their work and a quick source of finance. Community shares also promote a greater level of engagement and participation in the organisation through a vested and genuine interest.⁶

Our approach

This report draws on a combination of desk research to map the community hub landscape across the UK, and a series of interviews with over 40 leaders of hubs and experts in community sport at the local, regional and national level. We believe this approach has produced a clear and compelling set of conclusions, based on robust evidence.

We also recognise that a huge amount of work and investment is already underway across the UK to try and strengthen the community sports sector. This report is intended as a complement to these ongoing efforts, highlighting areas where we have found gaps and see opportunities.⁷



Many different types of organisation now provide sports activities and services, from private companies to local government to charities. This report focuses specifically on community sports hubs, which we define as having four many key elements:

DEFINING THE SECTOR

A community sports hub is...

Operating on a non-profit basis with no profits distributed other than for the benefit of membership



Land or facilities exclusively or primarily for sporting purposes



Community-led or managed



Responsible for or owns a sports facility



Community sports hubs may be focused on offering one specific sport or physical activity opportunity or a wide range, and facilities may be exclusively used by organisation or serve as home to a wider range of organisations or community services.

Our definition is intended as a pragmatic framing - we recognise the blurred boundaries between clubs, teams, hubs and groups and that many of the points we make will be relevant to those outside this definition. Indeed, many of the organisations we spoke to would not necessarily categorise themselves as a community sports hub - some offer a wider range of community activities than just sports, others have a youth focus and some are an evolution of Health and Wellbeing Centres.

Some centres are focused on traditional sports and offer a relatively narrow range of activities, while others are more akin to a multi-sport leisure centre. The mix also includes hubs dedicated to an individual sport, often those which are more 'extreme' or 'niche' and less widely available.

Yet for many organisations, their primary objective is community development, such as helping keep young people out of crime or 'off the streets', or providing additional educational opportunities. Sport and physical activity are a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.

"We try and make the park a friendlier place for the community by having activities going on often. I see sport as a neutral way of bringing different groups together and building social capital". 8

Perhaps unsurprisingly given their highly local, diverse and organic nature, as well as the variations in definition, estimates for the number of community sports hubs in the UK vary dramatically, from as few as 400² to the tens of thousands³. Our research suggests that something closer to the lower estimate is more likely if a very strict definition is applied, but ascertaining the exact number is difficult given the diverse nature of the organisations and varying classifications.

STRENGTHS

Community sports hubs are often unique and can exist almost under the radar; significant in their communities but with limited online presence and awareness among those beyond their reach. Our research showed that the most successful hubs tended to share a number of characteristics:

Inspirational, creative and motivated leaders

For the individuals working and volunteering within community sports hubs it is more than a 9 to 5 job. They are not motivated by financial return or the need for status, instead they seek to improve their local community. They are inspired by their love of sport and its power to change people's lives.

Limited resources mean these individuals often take on the role of coach, office manager, janitor, cleaner, marketer, role model and much more.

They deploy a range of skills to keeping these organisations afloat. Indeed the strength of these hubs is the entrepreneurial and innovative approach taken by their leaders.



Coaching: more than a 9-5 job

Karim is a coach at a Black Prince Community Hub in a deprived area of Lambeth, south London. In addition, he volunteers his time in the evenings, and weekends to help the young people that use the site. This includes taking them out on trips they would otherwise not be able to go on, like to Premier League football games or talent spotting sessions, as well as offering advice and support for young people on the edge of crime

Grounded in the communities they serve, and responsive to local demand

Because they are community owned, hubs often draw on volunteers, financial support, and goodwill from their local community to survive. Local political relations can also be instrumental to success. This involves everything from donations for fundraising raffles to local MPs intervening in relationships with the council. Communities that truly feel a sense of ownership invest in its success. This also extends to the practical aspects of running a hub, with the ability to adapt what is offered to ensure it meets local need and attracts the community to attend.



Local community support

Blackbridge Jubilee Athletics Track in Gloucester is run entirely by volunteers. They have a carefully selected board of Directors and Trustees who all bring complementary skills, and have benefited from strong local political support which has also helped to leverage corporate funding. They work closely with local schools and other voluntary groups to ensure that sessions are available which meet the needs of different groups.⁹

An ability to adapt and innovate which is often not available to public sector facilities

Community sports hubs are free from the constraints of many public sector facilities. This freedom allows them to adapt to demand, innovate in how they deliver their services and be creative in how they raise additional funds. From using a football pitch as a car park in the off-season, to catering for weddings and other community celebrations, hubs can be flexible in what and how they operate. Many have differential pricing structures which are also important in widening participation in disadvantaged areas.

Hubs are also free from the procurement processes that constrain the public sector and are able to access 'charity rates', shop in discount stores for supplies, take a DIY approach to repairs or new projects, and even engage in bartering with other local community groups to access equipment and skills which would otherwise be unattainable or unaffordable.



After Spectrum Leisure Centre in Durham was taken over by a charity, they diversified so that 25% of their income comes from non-traditional sources. They host conferences, meetings, childrens' parties and concerts amongst other innovative uses for their building. Their gym is the first in the country to employ technology which means that energy generated by users is harnessed to help power the building, and they have also created a transport company to help people access the centre and generate extra income. Staff are encouraged to develop skills so that they can be flexible and fulfil a number of different roles as needed.

Something "different"

Almost all the hubs we spoke to offer something out of the ordinary - be it culture, facilities or a unique and quirky history. They range from skate parks built in old factories, with the dilapidation a 'feature' and everyone involved in creating something new from old, to a community-run dry ski slope, to a modern purpose-built hub in a rural area offering facilities previously unavailable without an extended journey.



The Factory Skatepark Dundee, which will celebrate 10 years in December 2014, is the first purpose-built indoor skate park in the UK. Originally started by a local Church, the inspiration came from a group of skaters who wanted to practice outside run-down parish buildings. Now boasting almost 20,000 members, the skate park incorporates a neighbouring soft play centre making it an attractive destination for children of all ages. Although situated in an area of significant deprivation membership and entrance fees make up the bulk of its income. 10

WHY THEY MATTER

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY SPORTS HUBS

Ensuring that we have strong community sports provision is vital to halt declining levels of physical activity, especially for young people. Community sports hubs are where the majority of sport occurs. Despite declining levels of physical activity, Sport England calculated in 2008 that over 10 million adults play sport in a club environment⁴.

In addition, the evidence suggests that community sports hubs are vital to creating thriving, healthy and prosperous communities. They have a unique role in supporting community life separate from that fulfilled by gyms and leisure centres and have three major impacts on our local communities.

Increase social capital and improve our civic life



The relationship between community sports organisations and the communities they serve is not one way, or simply limited to increasing levels of physical activity. Research suggests that community sports clubs and hubs are a vital component of social capital⁵. The bonds that are created between participants at a sports hub improve the civic life of the whole community.

This is particularly true for young people. Evidence suggests that participation in sport or arts early in life increases the likelihood of participation in the local community later in life⁶. Yet the benefit of the increased social capital is only felt if a sport club or hub serves a small enough population. If people have to travel across a city, or to another town, to participate in sport the connections they make to their team mates will not translate to their local community.

Providing opportunities for all



Local sports facilities also have a key role in increasing participation in sport and physical activity. It is not just about giving those who are already active more opportunities, but about finding new, creative and relevant ways to engage those who do not currently take part. Evidence suggests that communities with real ownership of local resources are able to increase participation rates⁷. The closer a sports hub or club is to its target population, the stronger the social capital within that community, and the more active people will be.

Spurring economic growth



Lastly, but by no means least, community sports also has a role in helping to drive local economic growth and employment through the creation of local employment and training opportunities. For example, a study of a typical multi-sport centre in Glasgow found over 200 people saw some employment benefit from the hub, with 130 full-time equivalent jobs either directly or indirectly created⁸.

A SEDENTARY NATION

In addition, physical activity and sport have a host of benefits that stretch far beyond physical ‘fitness’ and encompass all areas of life. Figure 1 demonstrates the benefits to individuals and society from increasing levels of physical activity.

Figure 1: The Human Capital Model



Source: Tackling Physical Inactivity - A Coordinated Approach.
Report of the All-Party Commission on Physical Activity⁹

Yet we face an epidemic of inactivity: less than one-quarter of adults achieve even 30 minutes of activity over seven days, compared to a recommended target of 150 minutes. It leads to 37,000 premature deaths a year and costs our economy an estimated £20 billion every year¹⁰. Just 51% of children reach the daily target for young people, despite physical education lessons in schools¹¹.

There is mounting pressure on the public, private and third sectors to prioritise and integrate measures to increase levels of physical activity through their work. It is in this context that policy makers, funders, commissioners and service providers must work together to address the epidemic we face and increase participation levels across the UK.



SUSTAINABLE & SUCCESSFUL?

The challenge: Community Sports Hubs for the 21st Century

The solution is simple, yet incredibly hard to deliver: to create sustainable community hubs that deliver high quality physical activity and sports.

Achieving sustainability

Very few community organisations will be able to generate sufficient income to cover all costs (including a full staff), invest for the future and build substantial reserves. Our research suggested that for a hub to be successful and sustainable this is not necessary. Indeed, a financially healthy community hub may still be reliant on some grant funding but will have maximised its use of assets and diversified its income portfolio to mitigate the risks of any one funding stream ending.

Genuine community engagement and demand must be at the heart of any successful community hub. Volunteering is an expression of strong engagement which has been shown to have many benefits for the individual, the organisation they support, and social capital and cohesion within the community^{12 13 14}. However, there are two other important factors affecting sustainability:

A tough funding climate

The landscape of community sports provision has changed considerably over the last few years, largely due to the consequences of recession and subsequent austerity measures. 52% of Sport and Recreation Alliance member clubs surveyed in 2013 worried about accessing funding over the next two years. The same survey also found that 47% of clubs were concerned by increasing facilities costs¹⁵.

Local council funding cuts

Traditionally councils have dominated a mixed local sport and leisure economy which has included private sector, community groups, and informal clubs. The financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent austerity measures have led to significant cuts in council funding of facilities and programmes¹⁶. This has led a number of commentators to suggest that councils may not be able to continue funding these facilities and programmes in the near future¹⁷.

This fiscal pressure has coincided with a public desire for control over local assets. Leading many councils to reduce their in-house sport and leisure provision by transferring services, including leisure centres, over to community ownership.

Grant funding

Across the country, groups are reporting that grant funding, the traditional mainstay of many community organisations, has become harder to obtain as competition increases and more groups need the support to replace lost public funding¹⁸. This decrease in income just as costs increase as community hubs deliver ever more services is putting many hubs in a financially precarious positions.

The socio-economic and political environment

Organisations work in hyper-local contexts, with many feeling much of their potential for success or failure is seemingly dictated by their environment and community:

- Relative wealth and deprivation sharply defines the income and volunteer support model.
- The size of the 'catchment area' is also fundamental, with some urban hubs having even smaller areas than those in rural areas.
- Relations with the local authority, in terms of support for their activities, asset transfers or facility leases.
- The level of genuine community 'demand' and the extent to which the establishing of the hub is led by a broad spectrum of the population versus a smaller number of committed individuals.

These local factors are important, in that they shape the nature and model of each hub, but they cannot and need not be barriers to success. The innovative solutions already adopted by many organisations demonstrate that much can be achieved even in the most constrained of situations.¹⁴

THE CHALLENGES



There are four common areas which community sports hubs find challenging, and where they have to juggle competing priorities.



WIDENING PARTICIPATION



QUALITY OF PROVISION



BUSINESS & FINANCE



DEMONSTRATING IMPACT

Each of these dimensions encompasses a wealth of other challenges and they inevitably are closely interlinked. By addressing one area, gains may be made in another, but the reverse is equally true.

For example, increasing accessibility and hence the number of participants may improve the financial situation of the organisation, making the running of it easier, but a dip in attendance figures can also threaten its very survival, leading to a diversion of resources away from all other areas of work.

In essence, our research shows that many community sports hubs could be helped not just by more funding, but by a more concerted and targeted use of resources to help them increase their capacity and skills, equipping them to develop more robust business models and freeing up time to deliver high quality experiences.

We call on funders and policymakers to consider each of these challenges and act on the opportunities to support community sports hubs.

WIDENING PARTICIPATION



Inclusivity and accessibility.

Every hub is different but widening participation is almost always important, not least to help ensure financial survival. The community focus of most organisations also means that many have a specific remit or ambition to engage hard-to-reach groups such as disabled groups, women, girls, disadvantaged communities, or young people.

We uncovered a wealth of creative and successful approaches, yet many hubs reported problems in reaching out beyond the usual suspects, such as the already active, or achieving their target attendance figures.

Solutions reflect common marketing issues such as differential pricing, advertising, and diversification of offering - but without that experience or those skills to draw on, identifying the best opportunity can be daunting. There is also no mechanism for sharing successful solutions and innovations, so their potential positive impact is not realised, and common mistakes repeated.

“We find it hardest to engage young mums. We’ve been providing crèche support but it’s very expensive; it’s three times what it costs to run a class”.

The underlying principles for success are often simple but the challenge lies in sharing good practice and innovative ideas:

- **Understand the local barriers to access and tackle them head on** - for example, by creating a more welcoming and appropriate space, scheduling crèche sessions at the same time as adult fitness classes, or aligning with public transport timetables. Respond to local demand for different activities and diversify, potentially including non-traditional sports and activities.
- **Engage in proactive outreach** - various models of taster days, fun days and community delivery of sessions have been tried and tested; engage with local community leaders to shape programmes; build partnerships with local groups including youth, disability and older people.
- **Reduce financial barriers** - for example through differential pricing, keeping prices low but not free, and accessing grants for engaging specific hard-to-reach groups.
- **Work with schools** - for example placing coaches, offering sessions and breaking the barriers by offering solutions such as ‘walking buses’ between schools and after-school clubs to overcome transport problems.



BUSINESS & FINANCE

Running a successful and sustainable hub is, like with most small enterprises, about developing a robust business model and having the skills and capacity to deliver it.

The demands of keeping a hub afloat is often a source of extreme stress for the individuals and teams in charge and drains resources. In particular, hub leaders told us that the early phases of establishing a new hub can be particularly difficult when there are often additional tasks relating to planning, or establishment as a legal entity.

In some instances management committees and/or boards of trustees are able to draw on skills such as accountancy, marketing or legal expertise from within their members, but frequently this is not the case. Very few can afford to pay for professional support.

The lack of skills and capacity hampers delivery of core programmes (either due to lack of time or funds) and the financial sustainability of the hub. It means that strategic planning to move hubs on to a more secure footing all too often falls to the bottom of the priority list.

Often there are also **significant weaknesses in understanding how revenue flows can be increased and the importance of diversification of income**. The most successful hubs exploit every asset, have creatively diversified their income sources, capitalise on their charitable status, make strategic use of volunteers and trustees, work collaboratively with other local groups, and have developed effective grant application models. These lessons are frequently replicable and could be applied by many other hubs.

We heard about many creative, effective and innovative approaches to increase income – often but by no means always closely connected with ideas to increase participation levels – but as identified previously, we also found that leaders and managers lack appropriate space and opportunity to share best practice and learn from others; fantastic ideas are not being systematically replicated and groups often needlessly start ‘from scratch’.

“We employed people for a while but everything that went with it, like payroll, was too much. We now take people on self-employed.”¹⁷

Although we identified numerous toolkits, guides to best practice and other resources to help community groups and hubs with business management, these are often poorly signposted and promoted. They also rarely link to each other as complementary resources.

Practical, hands-on, tailored advice is much harder to come by, especially on a limited budget, although some organisations such as Community Matters, Locality, Social Enterprise UK, and the Sport and Recreation Alliance offer support to members.

Many community sports hubs are in an unusual position compared to ones small charities and enterprises: they often own or manage large sites, frequently with a range of facilities such as astro-turf pitches, sports halls, and even swimming pools. **Grant funding or community fundraising has often resulted in first-class facilities without a business model that provides for longer-term repair, maintenance or eventual replacement**. Clearly these are of huge community benefit and give organisations significant control over the programmes they offer, but at the same time represent significant financial liabilities. Further support and guidance for community sports hubs on managing the business side of their work would significantly improve their impact.

To achieve a more sustainable position and free-up teams to focus on delivery of high quality, high-impact programmes, solutions must be identified which increase skills and capacity in a number of areas:

- Business and strategic planning
- Financial management and accountancy
- Marketing
- Fundraising and writing grant applications
- Keeping on top of legal obligations such as health and safety requirements
- Relations with local authorities, including asset transfers and planning permission/applications
- Human Resources, Payroll and other consequences of employing staff or taking on volunteers



The evidence shows that physical activity needs to be age and ability appropriate¹⁹, and that building physical literacy is important to individual outcomes²⁰. Appealing to the intrinsic motivations of people also increases participations levels (for example, by making it fun, sociable and promoting a sense of achievement²¹). Supportive, good quality coaches and role models also play an important role in engagement²².

If community sports hubs are to achieve their potential in terms of increasing participation, promoting life-long physical activity habits, and developing those who show exceptional talent, ensuring the quality of provision is non-negotiable. Providing early positive experiences for young people will ensure they keep coming back to the hub and being active for the rest of their lives. There are many examples of excellent practice across the UK and National Governing Bodies and other organisations provide increasing amounts of support and resources to grass-roots groups.

“We do a lot of different activities and multi-sports ... I’m trying to train my staff to be coaches in different sports”

Nonetheless, the majority of the hubs face similar challenges and must determine how to balance:

- The need or desire to offer a wide range of sports and activities, but without specialist staff and coaches in each
- A reliance on volunteer coaches, with funding to provide only minimal training at best
- The lack of capacity to keep up-to-date with best practice (especially in multi-sports environments) or monitor the quality of provision (rather than simply attendance figures and customer satisfaction).

Many hubs are aware of the need to deliver a quality experience, but others feel they lack knowledge about how to make their offering more inclusive or to attract ‘hard-to-reach’ groups.



There is a significant gap in what community hubs are doing to measure and demonstrate their impact both for the benefit of their own service development and to improve their chances of obtaining funding.

Hubs routinely capture attendance and/ or membership data, but other data is generally only recorded if required by a grant funder or for the purposes of achieving accreditations. Differing requirements of grant funders is a source of additional work and frustration for many.

Hubs also report that funders are typically more interested in tracking number of participants or 'new' projects than in providing ongoing funding for existing successful projects or helping them to improve or demonstrate the wider impacts that they have.

*"It's an extra piece of work for somebody to do. So we don't necessarily do that as much, but we do monitor how many people are coming and whether we're reaching out to newer people or whether it's the same people, the same faces coming in week after week."*¹⁹

Support is needed to overcome the inherent challenges in impact measurement and in particular there is need for a tool or process that:

- Will enable organisations to identify which outcomes are appropriate for them to measure in each instance;
- Is simple enough that it can be administered by volunteers if necessary, with minimal training;
- Is applicable across a wide range of sports and activities, rather than a bespoke tool for each different activity a hub may offer;
- Does not require participants in activities to spend substantial amounts of time in form-filling or other data capture exercises;
- Will be readily accepted as robust by funders - Funders can play an important role by standardising and simplifying as far as possible their requirements.

With greater understanding of their impact, the importance of communicating it, and the most effective ways to do so, many hubs would almost certainly be able to leverage increased funding for their activities and likely streamline the time required to prepare applications.



The challenges community sport hubs face are complex and closely interlinked. Tackling one area will almost certainly have an impact on others. For example, if a hub becomes more inclusive and accessible, revenues will likely rise. An improved ability to demonstrate impact may also increase access to funding which in turn will increase participation levels and community reach.

Our recommendations reflect a need for systemic and integrated solutions which will cut across multiple areas of work. We believe that by freeing up staff to focus on the delivery of high quality activities through supporting them to put in place more sustainable models of operation, there is huge potential for funders, social investors, and other stakeholders to lead the way in transforming this vital aspect of our sporting landscape.

The opportunities presented here are bold and represent a step-change in the support available to these organisations, despite these ideas are not untested. These approaches have strong track records which can complement and build on existing strengths. There is much good work already being done across the UK and we do not propose to replicate that. We see potential for more collaboration, improved signposting and dissemination of resources, and we would like to see organisations do more to share the outcomes of their work - both success and failure.

In addition, we suggest that there are three pillars of support which could form the foundation of a comprehensive offering to enable community sports hubs (and many other community hubs or local sports clubs) to become more sustainable and increase their social impact.



Accelerator/venture support



Community shares



***Venture Philanthropy
(eg Factory Skatepark Dundee²³)***



ACCELERATOR/VENTURE SUPPORT

Main challenges tackled: business management and financial sustainability, demonstrating impact; quality of provision

While those who run community sports hubs are almost universally passionate about sport and achieving social impact, the lack of key business skills and capacity necessary to manage a successful business is severely constraining many organisations.

In particular, our research identified marketing, financial and business planning, and legal/ HR expertise. This problem is common to many social entrepreneurs who are motivated by achieving impact and do not necessarily have a commercial background, yet the unique and additional challenges of asset ownership and management are far more prevalent in this sector. Accelerator or venture support through an intermediary organisation addresses these challenges.

Opportunity

Many community sports hubs operate as social enterprises, yet are very marginal in social enterprise discourse which often focuses on sectors such as education, health, digital technologies, and the environment. There is a great deal of support available for social enterprises through various types of 'incubation' programmes and these models of helping organisations become more sustainable and 'accelerate' their social impact could be applied more widely in the sports sector.

In particular, a potential route to addressing the challenges would be through a sports-hub specific "Accelerator" programme. These programmes competitively recruit a cohort of ventures and then put them through a taught curriculum on areas such as business skills and demonstrating impact over a fixed period of time, usually a few months. Often this group support will be paired with some kind of one to one mentorship and an introduction upon completion to social investors, buyers or funders as appropriate²⁴. They also provide a space for peer-to-peer learning and support to facilitate the sharing of best practice.

An accelerator programme for community sports hubs would be tailored to their circumstances, for example by looking at how to diversify their income streams to make maximum use of the assets they own/ manage. It could also support organisations to understand how they can effectively demonstrate their impact across a range of domains (for example, physical and mental health, education, or the environment) and hence leverage grant funding from sources they may not have previously considered. This is crucial in light of the growing drive for collaborative commissioning for preventative services.

Efficacy and impact

Research by Nesta and The Young Foundation identified a 'missing middle' in terms of support for entrepreneurs which are already providing a service and need assistance with their business skills in order to scale their impact. In particular they found that there was a gap in advice specifically around human resources, marketing and sales, policy networks, growing market share and developing systems²⁵.

One early Young Foundation Accelerator programme has had demonstrable impact. Two years after graduating, the first cohort have seen an increase in growth of approximately 343% and a dramatic increase in the number of beneficiaries²⁶. Given the many similarities between the problems faced by hubs and those faced by social ventures more generally, it seems that an accelerator programme aimed at sports hubs could be an excellent way to address these problems.



COMMUNITY SHARE OFFERS

Main challenges tackled: financial sustainability; inclusivity

Many community sports hubs struggle financially. This problem is by no means unique in the community and voluntary sector. The need to raise and save money for long-term maintenance or replacement of expensive facilities is another burden faced by community sports hubs. They also struggle to raise capital to scale the impact of their activities. Traditional commercial methods of investment are typically not available due to the low potential returns and high levels of risk.

Opportunity

Community Share Offers are a way for social enterprises to raise capital to fund their work. They have risen in prominence over the last decade with 130 share offers since 2009 raising over £20m from 20,000 investors²⁷. These share offers traditionally take one of three forms:

- the takeover of an asset that is going to be lost by a community, such as a pub that is closing²⁸;
- investment in a new project that has a benefit to the whole community, such as a renewable power plant²⁹;
- supporting an existing social enterprise within the community to survive and grow³⁰.

Community shares work by offering members of the community 'withdrawable share capital'. As opposed to commercial shares which investors purchase in order to receive a dividend and which can be traded for a profit³¹. Shareholders receive interest on their investment and can redeem it at almost any time. There are various limits and locks in place to avoid speculation.

The community hubs we spoke to were often asset rich, but cash poor. Offering community shares is a way for these organisations to raise capital to invest in areas they told us that would help them to expand their work. This could be hiring a business manager, expanding their marketing, or carrying out much needed refurbishments.

Equally, a successful community share offer provides a ready set of enthusiastic users. Those who have invested are much more likely to use a community sports hub, offer to volunteer, or help out by providing advice and support. The Young Foundation's research for Power to Change identified that when implemented thoughtfully, multi-use facilities with rental income are an area that community share issues work well for³². Through a community share offer community sports hubs can make the case to their users and stakeholders for the importance of their work.

There is an important role for the Community Shares Unit to play in actively targeting community sports hub and ensuring that awareness of this opportunity is maximised. Crucially however, given the administrative burdens and challenges already faced by these organisations, practical support and tools to simplify the process will be essential to achieving uptake.

Efficacy and impact

Community shares address two areas that our research highlighted hubs needed greater support on: access to capital to scale impact and support from the local community. There is growing evidence of their impact: over 100 organisations in a range of sectors had raised a total of over £15 million pounds by 2013.

In the sporting arena, the most famous and successful example is that of F.C. United of Manchester. This cooperatively owned club has raised over £1.8 million pounds since 2009 towards the building of its own stadium, through the issue of community shares³³.



VENTURE PHILANTHROPY

Main challenges tackled: financial sustainability, demonstrating impact

Opportunity

Venture philanthropy applies a business development approach to achieving philanthropic goals. Typically this involves a blend of grant funding and pro bono professional support targeted at building organisational capacity.

In 2013 there were 22 reported venture philanthropy organisations in the UK expending £168 million each year. While this funding is concentrated in large scale organisations such as Impetus PEF³⁴, the venture philanthropy model is not restricted to established organisations.

In Leeds the Yorkshire Venture Philanthropy Programme³⁵ has been created by the local Community Development Foundation to provide financial and professional support to local social enterprises. Similarly Young Philanthropy³⁶ has been set up to match groups of professionals working at large public and private sector organisations with charity projects who they work with for up to 12 months.

Efficacy and impact

We feel that this model of pro bono business support and grant funding for infrastructure development could be appropriate model for community sport hubs.

It can be used to enhance existing philanthropic donations from local high net worth individuals with mentoring or other pro bono support from individuals or groups signed up to volunteering schemes run by the likes of Business in the Community or local business networks. Local businesses are often a prominent source of income for sports hubs through involvement in sports leagues - for example football or squash - which may make them an easy source of recruitment for pro bono support.

By harnessing relevant professional support, organisations may be able to fill gaps in their existing model and build internal capacity to continue after the period of venture philanthropy ends. It may also prove an effective way to broaden local ownership of the hub through connection to local businesses.

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