



European
Commission

Study on the Contribution of Sport to the Employability of Young People in the Context of the Europe 2020 Strategy

Executive summary



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Introduction

This study, commissioned by the European Commission and the Executive Agency for Education, Audiovisual and Culture, investigates sport's contribution to the employability of disadvantaged young people in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy. **This study aims to identify the key components needed to effectively produce outcomes regarding the employability in sport-based interventions for young people.**

Additionally, the following questions were formulated:

- *What policy measures/recommendations, legislations and initiatives can currently be found in the EU Member States and what are good practices in use?*
- *What evidence is there to demonstrate that practices are effective?*
- *What recommendations can be addressed to different stakeholders?*

Employability

There are two broad perspectives on the nature of 'employability' – one which emphasises more narrowly defined 'hard', or job-related, skills such as vocational education; and another that relates to a more general emphasis on 'soft skills' ('transversal skills'), which are personal attitudinal and behavioural attributes. Although these perspectives are complementary, employers have increasingly identified the lack of soft skills as an obstacle to employment. While not always defined precisely, the soft skills tend to be those traditionally associated with sport – teamwork, communication, time management, problem solving, leadership, commitment and motivation. However, there is limited evidence as to the success of programmes in developing such skills solely through sport. It is also unlikely that sport alone can address a variety of potential environmental obstacles to increasing employability and employment, such as unsupportive family situations or lack of local employment opportunities. Literature shows that programmes need to be '*Sport Plus*', where sport is used to establish positive social relationships and develop certain social skills. This is complemented by other more formal, educational components which develop and reinforce systematically core elements of employability.

Mapping the field

To map sport and employability programmes in Europe, a promotional campaign using targeted e-mails and several surveys was launched to map existing programmes with the aim to collect general data on the characteristics of specific sport and employability programmes. These characteristics were used as selection criteria to identify sport and employability programmes which corresponded well with the aim of the study. This procedure first provided a list of 22 organisations, which afterwards resulted in a final selection of 10 cases from 8 different European Member States. Additionally, via a short open-access survey, information on policy measures relevant to sport and employability from 7 EU Member States was collected. Among other things, this related to sport-based developmental initiatives in collaboration with the sport sector; inclusive policies towards lower level qualifications and support for local collaboration with job centres.

Case study research

An in-depth investigation was conducted of the following 10 selected sport and employability organisations: *Albion in the Community* (UK); *Bewegen naar werk* (NL); *CAIS* (PT); *Oltalom Sport Association* (HU); *Rheinflanke* (DE); *Sport dans la ville* (FR); *Sport 4 Life* (UK); *Start2* (BE); *Street League* (UK); *UFEC/INSERsport* (ES). In total, 85 on-site in-depth interviews in 4 different languages were conducted with programme designers, social workers, sport coaches, participants and former participants for each of the selected organisations. Documents, field notes and follow-up interviews provided more understanding of the complexity of the workings of each organisation and their programme. A theoretical sport and employability framework, based on previous similar research, provided the basis for data collection and analysis. The approach used was

based on a '*programme theory*' perspective which seeks to identify the components, mechanisms, relationships and sequences of causes and effects which are presumed to lead to desired impacts on participants and subsequent behavioural outcomes. The framework included the following programme theory elements: *methods of recruitment of participants; nature of participants; role of sport; social relationships and social climate; employability focus; outcomes and impacts of the programme.*

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the workings of the 10 selected organisations and findings reported in the literature, a '*generic programme theory*' for sport for employability programmes was then developed (see Figure). The following key elements were distinguished:

1. *The use of sport as a means to attract targeted participants and establish meaningful relationships between providers and participants*

Free sport as part of an employability programme is an important reason why many young people become involved. A targeted approach focussing on attracting a specific group of youth (in most cases NEETs) has the advantage that potential participants are more aware of the actual purpose of their involvement. Besides sport's appeal, the more informal context of interacting during and after sport activities also provides opportunities for staff members to build meaningful relationships with young people based on mutual respect and trust.

2. *Social Climate: a safe and secure environment for development*

The type of social climate that is created from the start and continued throughout the programme is an essential mechanism in establishing meaningful relationships between staff members and participants and, when done properly, will serve to construct a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for the development of participating youth. Staff members see their relationship with young people as 'amicable, but professional', which enables participants to talk openly and confidently about their personal life and their strengths and weaknesses. In their approach, which is in essence a youth work approach, they encourage independence and enable participants to deal with relevant issues.

3. *Individual needs assessment*

Formal needs assessment will help to provide more insight into participants' personal circumstances and constraints, as well as the nature of their employability skills. In order for young people to better understand their own level of employability, a mentoring or guidance approach that stimulates self-reflection, self-awareness and ambition is a critical factor for success. Joint assessment with staff can improve youth's understanding of the impact of personal and socio-cultural barriers they feel they face when trying to secure employment. It can allow them to get a realistic view of how far they are away from successfully entering the labour market and to identify their individual developmental needs.

4. *Individual learning plans*

A planned and tailored approach is required to give the programme a clear and agreed structure and a set of clear goals related to participants' personal development and employability level. The use of an individual learning plan will not only help participants to better understand how and when these goals can be achieved, it will also make them more aware of their own role and responsibility in the learning process. A key element for this is the requirement that participants need to be self-reflective regarding their strengths and weaknesses, as well as with regard to the level of progress they are making during the different stages of the programme.

5. Workshops

One of the core elements of a Sport Plus programme consists of the delivery of workshops on a range of soft/employability skills to small groups of participants. During these workshops, different issues and soft skills are systematically addressed and discussed in relation to such issues as: understanding of others, personal responsibility, teamwork, time management, conflict management, communication skills, perceived self-efficacy, problem solving, focus/direction, ambition, motivation, initiative and leadership skills. The approach to learning that is used for the workshops is aimed to develop critical self-reflection and self-development.

6. Validated qualifications

These qualifications, which are often externally reviewed and awarded, are mainly in basic levels of sport leadership and training and mostly develop generic organisational and planning skills. The emphasis is on learning by doing and reflecting on the experience via workbooks. It provides a means to experience a sense of achievement and to show participants' level of planning, organisational and communication skills plus work discipline. Again, critical self-reflection is a key mechanism within this approach. In addition, acquiring validated qualifications contributes to participants' CV building and can, in some cases, also lead to opportunities for employment or provides the basis for volunteering within some organisations.

7. Sport Plus 2

Apart from using sport as a means to attract youth and to establish meaningful relationships with staff and develop certain social skills, it is also used to support and reinforce issues that have been addressed during the employability workshops. It also provides a context for delivering practical elements of the validated qualifications. A key characteristic of the Sport Plus 2 approach is that the issues dealt with in the workshops are illustrated and formally re-enforced via sport practice. We have labelled it as Sport Plus 2, to make a clear distinction with Sport Plus 1 where there is no systematic and conscious attempt to integrate and reinforce the issues addressed in the workshops in the sport programme.

8. Work experience

To increase participants' understanding of what it means to be employed and to self-assess the extent to which they are equipped with the proper skills to be introduced to the world of work, it is an essential element in programmes to provide opportunities for participants to have work experiences. The provision of real work experience opportunities will only be available if there are well-established links with employers who are willing to offer these opportunities to the type of participants enrolled in the programme. Here too, an approach where self-reflection and self-assessment by participants is organised will facilitate the learning process.

9. Outcomes which strengthen employability skills

Organisations with an employability-focus will largely emphasise the development of employability-relevant soft skills. These skills relate to perceived self-efficacy; communication skills; conflict management; problem solving; leadership skills; focus and ambition. Again, a key mechanism to this development is the use of a critical self-reflective approach.

10. Preparation for employment

For those organisations that focus on employment for their programme graduates, there is a need to go beyond the development of soft/employability skills and to prepare young people for entry into the labour market. This involves training and guidance from a job coach in interview techniques (e.g. through 'mock' job interviews), CV writing and assistance in job searching. It also requires more work experience and work placement.

11. Employment or education: ongoing support

While other types of impact remain an option (such as seeking work without assistance; being referred (back) to job agencies or remaining unemployed), organisations adopting the approach outlined above, will be most likely to find their programme graduates either in employment or further education. As transition to actual employment remains a challenge for many programme graduates, organisations may need to provide support after obtaining employment.

In addition, there is an emphasis on the delivery of specific mentoring or guidance styles according to the various components and mechanisms of the programmes (i.e. 'befriending', 'direction-setting', 'coaching' or 'sponsoring'). All of these mechanisms have been found to be effective in practice. The organisations that have been investigated in this study, have incorporated these components and mechanisms in varying degrees, although some organisations have more in common with the generic programme theory than others. This theory, which is normative in nature, can be used as a robust basis for monitoring and evaluation purposes. It offers the basis for a formative evaluation which can contribute to the improvement of interventions.

Recommendations

The described components, mechanisms and relationships outlined in the generic programme theory, provide a set of guiding principles/recommendations for organisations that want to deliver sport and employability programmes for NEETs. Insights can also serve as a basis for the following *general policy recommendations*:

1. Develop a general Sport Plus coaching methodology

In order to deliver developmental *Sport Plus* sessions, specific coaching expertise is needed which goes beyond 'traditional' youth sport coaching – as there is a need to take the participant's needs as the starting point, rather than 'sport'. The EU could work towards developing a Sport Plus coaching methodology and curriculum. In order to do so, it is advisable to collaboratively work with institutes and organisations delivering education for sport coaches and for youth / social workers.

2. Increase awareness of the relevance of systematic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for sport and employability programmes and facilitate knowledge dissemination of M&E

There is not only a need for a better understanding among organisations regarding measuring soft/employability skills, but also to be able to define more precisely what type of impact they aim for. The EU could consider to work towards developing a general M&E toolkit for sport for employability programmes, including guidance on how to define soft skill developmental outcomes and impact; a set of validated tools for impact measurement of these skills, as well as information on how to administer and analyse the measures.

3. Facilitate access to validated qualifications for participants of sport and employability organisations

Educational institutes that deliver validated qualifications (focussing on organisational and planning skills) could facilitate inclusion of these courses for participants of sport and employability organisations. Member states could encourage the development of local networks between sport and employability programmes and providers of relevant validated qualifications.

4. Recognise the importance of local partnerships between sport and employability programmes and others

It is recommended that national authorities and programme funders emphasise the need to include relevant local partnerships in the context of sport and employability initiatives with, among others, local employers, schools, referral agencies and youth organisations.

5. Encourage knowledge transfer and sector development

Member states could make use of the generic programme theory as a guiding framework to support new initiatives and optimise existing ones in relevant policy domains (e.g. employment, education, welfare, youth work and sport).

6. Recognise the contribution that can be made by sport to other policy domains

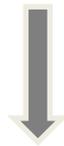
National governments could raise awareness of the potential of sport and employability programmes to various policy domains (employment, youth, education, ...) and to relevant stakeholders (e.g. public employment services).

Sport used to attract targeted participants. Used to build *relationships* based on respect and trust which enable the identification of *participants' developmental needs* and facilitate a *mentoring approach*. Also used to develop the soft skills of employability such as *teamworking, communication, perceived self-efficacy*.

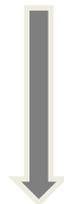
Mentoring



**Befriending
(affective)**



**Direction
setting
(cognitive)**



**Coaching
(aptitudinal)**



**Sponsoring
(positional)**



**Ongoing
support**

Social Climate: a safe and secure environment for personal development. A *sense of safety/acceptance/belonging, interested and caring adults, models for conventional behaviour, controls on deviant behaviour, critical support, value placed on achievement and positive attitudes to the future*.

Individual needs assessment. Used to understand the level of employability and to develop *self-reflection, self-awareness and ambition*. This provides a focus for the programme and ensures that participants recognise the contribution of each component to their personal development.

Individual learning plans. Related to developing aspects of employability. This is used to provide a *sense of direction and focus on the goals of employability and employment*.

Workshops. On a range of social/employability skills and to develop *critical self-reflection and self-development*.

Validated qualifications. *Sense of achievement; critical self-reflection; organisational skills; communication skills; work disciplines; CV building*.

Sport Plus 2. *Experiential learning*: Integrated Sport Plus programme used to *support and reinforce* issues in employability workshops and as context for delivering practical elements of qualifications.

Work experience. An introduction to the *world of work* and its requirements.

Outcomes. *Perceived self-efficacy; communication skills; conflict management; problem solving; leadership skills; focus and ambition*.

Preparation for employment. *Interviewing/CV writing/work experience/job searching*.

Employed or education.

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