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LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

WORKFORCE COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS FOR PRACTITIONERS DELIVERING 'SPORTPLUS' SPORT-BASED INTERVENTIONS

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WORKFORCE COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS REQUIRED FOR SECONDARY LEVEL SPORT-BASED INTERVENTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the fifth literature review in the series produced by Loughborough University on behalf of StreetGames. As the role of the practitioner and their relationship with the young person is central to the success of any youth intervention programme (Weaver, 2011), insight into the workforce skills and competencies is a key element for the effective development and delivery of a secondary level Sport-Based Intervention (SBI) (also known as SportPlus).

Although there is academic insight into the role, qualities and competencies of sports practitioners including sports coaches, it mainly exists in different settings such as schools, sports clubs, elite sport or community sport programmes rather than in the context of secondary level SBIs. This literature review will, therefore, also make use of academic insight from criminal and youth justice work and family and youth work. Moreover, it will also draw on insight from research and evaluation programmes carried out by Loughborough University in relation to the workforce competencies and skills needed, in particular, for SportPlus SBIs that work with young people to prevent and reduce their involvement in offending and serious youth violence.

BACKGROUND

Academic insight into SBIs agrees that the practitioner is at the heart of effective sports interventions (Coalter, 2007; Nichols, 2007). Indeed, policymakers consider sports coaches (often viewed as the key roles in the workforce) as the interface between social policy objectives and the targeted young people who have the responsibility for turning policy into tangible social policy outcomes (Morgan and Parker, 2017).

This literature review consists of three sections. Section A will set the context for the SportPlus workforce by providing a definition and explanation of SportPlus SBIs. Section B will present insight into the different roles of the SportPlus workforce. Section C will highlight the competencies needed by the SportPlus workforce, the challenges that they face and the support that is needed.



SECTION A

THE CONTEXT OF THE 'SPORTPLUS' SPORT-BASED INTERVENTION

DEFINITION OF THE SPORTPLUS SBI

Sport is increasingly being used to work with young people who are at risk of involvement in or who are already involved in offending and Serious Youth Violence (SYV). Sport used in this context is also known as a Sport-Based Intervention (Coalter, 2007). As it is labelled as a Sport-Based Intervention (SBI) rather than as a sport playing opportunity, sport coaching course or programme, this means that it has a wider purpose than just playing sport. An SBI aims to intervene by using sport purposefully to make a positive change in a young person's life and is located within a wider social welfare context (such as family life, the community, school). This means that SBIs need to offer young people an experience which is more than just playing sport (Coalter, 2007). It is, therefore, important that the workforce has the required competencies for the appropriate type of SBI – Sport, SportPlus or PlusSport.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF SBIS

SBIs can be described as being either 'Sport', 'SportPlus' or 'PlusSport'

- 'Sport' is a sport playing session open to everyone which has a preventative role
- 'SportPlus' is a targeted intervention which uses sport purposefully to support young people's personal development and can include additional support or services
- 'PlusSport' is a specialist intervention with a holistic focus on supporting an individual young person and uses sport to attract the young person to the intervention, as a reward or to support intensive youth work

(Coalter, 2007)

A young person's involvement in a specific type of SBI is often determined by their level of need and vulnerability. It can, therefore, be helpful to use the 'public health approach' which is used by criminal, youth justice and social welfare partners when they work with young people. This approach uses the three categories of primary level, secondary level and tertiary level which recognises that young people have different levels of needs and vulnerabilities and would, therefore, benefit from different types of interventions.

Table 1 shows how the different types of Sport-Based Interventions match to this public health approach. This literature review will focus on secondary level 'SportPlus' interventions and the competencies required by the workforce to deliver this type of SBI.



Table 1: Matching a public health approach with different types of Sport-Based Interventions (adapted from Coalter, 2007)

PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH	TYPE OF APPROACH FOR WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE	TYPE OF SPORT-BASED INTERVENTION	DESCRIPTION
PRIMARY LEVEL (Prevention before offending and violence takes place)	Universal level, open to all young people with the aim of preventing offending. These young people are not showing signs of vulnerabilities or engaging in offending behaviours.	Sport	Focus on sports activities and playing sport, open access recruitment of young people, coaches might have ad hoc, informal conversations with young people, some opportunities for young people to help out at the sessions.
SECONDARY LEVEL (Intervening at an early stage when there are signs of offending/ violence)	Targeted approach for young people who have been identified as experiencing multiple, underlying risk factors and have vulnerabilities and/or are engaging in behaviours associated with offending or who are at risk of offending. This level of intervention requires more formal support and expertise.	SportPlus	Focus on purposefully designed sports activities plus other activities to support young people including volunteering, mentoring, advice, workshops, training and qualifications. Often a targeted recruitment of young people including referrals
TERTIARY LEVEL (Intervening when offending/ violence has already taken place)	Targeted approach, usually focused on young people who have already offended and have multiple vulnerabilities. Interventions at this level require high levels of expertise and resource based on holistic support for the young person.	PlusSport	Focus on providing support for the young person first including 121 mentoring, holistic/ family support, workshops etc with sport used as a hook, reward or engagement tool. Almost always a targeted recruitment of young people based on referrals

DESCRIPTION OF THE SPORTPLUS SBI

As a SportPlus SBI is different from a traditional 'sport' playing session or a sports coaching programme, it is important to clarify what the activities of a SportPlus SBI look like as this determines the competencies required for the SportPlus workforce.

Table 2 provides a more detailed description of potential activities for SportPlus programmes which can be used to identify the required workforce competencies and which has the potential to be adapted to develop job descriptions for this role. (Please note that these are only examples and SportPlus programmes might include other activities). Some SportPlus programmes might only offer one of these types of activities whereas others might offer more than one activity if they have access to sufficient resources in recognition of the different benefits for young people that can come from being involved in different types of activities.

Table 2: An example of SportPlus activities

TYPE OF ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
Purposefully designed sports activity or playing sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either a single sport or physical activity such as boxing, football, martial arts, gym or dance or a multi-sport approach, providing a wide range of sports for young people to play • Providing a physically and emotionally safe environment • Developing a positive 'socio-moral' atmosphere at the sessions • Emphasis on having fun and positive experiences whilst playing sport • Sport activity or playing sessions purposefully designed to develop sport 'mastery'. This might include additional elements such as 'hidden sports coaching skills' and hidden game tactics to improve sports playing skills. • Sports activity or playing sessions purposefully designed to provide experiential opportunities for personal development, life skills, achievements etc. This might include using the sport playing context for 'teachable moments', dealing differently with difficult situations, critical reflection, negotiation skills, the benefits of rules and identifying and rewarding the young person's achievements. • Sport delivery staff as positive role models for the young people • Supporting young people's engagement at the session based on positive, trusted relationships between the delivery staff and the young people • Supporting friendships with pro-social young people at the sessions. • Providing informal advice to individual young people and signposting them to local partners • Leading or supporting group discussions on current issues relevant to young people attending the sport session, during or after sessions
Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing incremental opportunities for helping out, leading or coaching at a sport activity session. • Providing opportunities for carrying out other activities such as admin, social media at the LTO as well as volunteering in the local community as a form of social action. • Support from a delivery staff member for the young person volunteering by providing opportunities for shadowing and being mentored, setting goals, feedback, supported with developing reflexivity skills • Providing opportunities for training, leadership and coaching qualifications. • Providing recognition of positive achievements whilst volunteering
One to one sport-based mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing the opportunity for an experienced adult as a mentor to work with the young person (mentee) on an individual basis. • Building a trusted relationship between the mentor and mentee, someone for the young person to talk to and to listen to them. • Helping the young person to reflect on and work towards achieving their own personal development goals. • Using sport to build the mentoring relationship • Embedding playing and volunteering in sport into the mentoring programme for the young person



As SportPlus SBIs are intended to deliver more than just a sporting experience, it can be helpful if they are underpinned by 'a process' for working with young people as shown by the five stages in table 3. This can help to support the recruitment, engagement and retention of young people as well as building the foundations for the benefits and outcomes experienced by young people attending SBIs. This five-stage process can also be shared with other delivery staff at the sessions to ensure that everyone is working towards the same goals. This five-stage process might also be helpful as part of a job description or list of duties and for starting to identify the competencies required for this role. SBI managers can also consider this when identifying the level of resource required for an SBI in terms of staff time and staff ratios as this suggests that staff will also need time outside the sessions to plan, reflect, develop their knowledge and contacts with local partners and support young people.



Table 3: The process guiding the role of the coach at a SportPlus session (adapted from Pawson (2006) and Witt and Crompton (1997))

STAGES OF THE PROCESS	ROLE OF THE COACH	EXAMPLES
First stage: Creating the social climate (environment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making sure that there is a positive and welcoming 'feel' to the session and that the young person feels safe and comfortable at the session Taking an interest in the young person and demonstrating that they care Helping the young person to feel accepted and that they belong at the session 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greeting them by their name when they arrive and leave Talking, listening and asking about what's happening at school, home, with friends. Having impromptu chats with them during the session Use the time whilst playing sport or having a break to help the young person to get to know other young people at the session
Second Stage: Befriending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating a sense of trust between themselves and the young person Sharing experiences and perspectives with each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be at all the sessions to become a familiar face Continue to talk, listen and ask Talk about similar experiences with the young person (if comfortable and appropriate) Use positive humour when appropriate
Third stage: Supporting the young person to see the value of pro-social behaviours, values and attitudes and to understand the consequences of their behaviours and to change or adapt their behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modelling conventional behaviour to the young person so that they know what is expected in wider society and so they can start to copy it Having conversations about the consequences of actions Using specific incidents whilst playing sport to firstly, positively reinforce the need for self-control and secondly to consider the potential consequences in different settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show politeness and respect to the young people at the session – when arriving, playing and leaving Use the sports session to show different ways of dealing with difficult situations Show calmness and be polite when young people get angry or are disrespectful Show how to negotiate and to come to a compromise with disagreements Discuss with the young person about how an incident could have ended if it had been at home, in school or in the community and what the consequences could have been for them and for others Discuss with the young person about how they could try to do something differently if it happened again to help them to start to change or adapt their behaviours
Fourth stage: Placing a high value on the young person's achievements and positive attitudes for the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognising the small steps forward taken by the young person Helping the young person to set a direction and develop aspirations for the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise their progress by giving them praise and encouragement Provide positive feedback to other adults and agencies such as schools, youth justice workers, parents and guardians Listen and ask the young person what they would like to do in the future Help the young person to think about what might be possible
Fifth stage: 'Coaching' the young person to develop the skills and assets for the mainstream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting the young person to be reflexive Helping the young person to think about their loyalties, values, ambitions and relationships with their peers Providing support and encouragement Helping the young person to access training, coaching and qualifications Helping young people to make contacts and to find opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helping the young person to think about situations in different ways by themselves Encouraging the young person to think about what they would like to do in the future and how this fits with their values and friendships Finding training or qualifications courses that would support the young person, helping them to enrol on the course, find funding if needed and to travel there if it is not based at the project. To go with them to at least the first session. To help the young person to reflect on the benefits of the training or qualification Using the sessions to help the young person to develop the skills for attending school, college or a job. This includes developing routines, timekeeping, planning, being polite and respectful, setting goals, taking responsibility, self-awareness, developing positive friendships and relationships with other adults Being a champion for the young person and helping them to access opportunities by talking to teachers about going back to school if they haven't been attending, to attend a College open day and apply for a course, or to find a job

SECTION B

DEVELOPING INSIGHT INTO THE ROLES OF THE SPORTPLUS WORKFORCE

As discussed in Section A, providing a sport playing session by itself is not sufficient for a secondary-level SBI. This type of intervention is based on a young-person centred approach rather than just a sport-centred approach. This suggests that the role of the delivery staff needs to extend beyond a traditional sports coach role and that they, therefore, require different workforce competencies.

THE APPROACH NEEDED FOR THE SPORTPLUS WORKFORCE ROLE

The SportPlus workforce delivery role needs to be underpinned by:

- An approach which combines befriending, mentoring and being a role model to the young person
- The development of a relationship with the young person built on trust and reciprocity (i.e. having a two-way relationship)
- An emphasis on making positive behaviour changes and achievements
- A step-by-step approach to developing the young person's sense of self-worth, ambition and direction in their life.

(Coalter, 2007)

THE ROLE OF THE 'SPORTPLUS' COACH

Coaches have an important role as they are the 'frontline professionals' delivering the service at the interface between the organisation and the individual (Van der Veken et al., 2021). The actions and interactions of coaches influence the extent to which young people experience the positive aspects of sport (Bailey and Dismore, 2004).

In the context of this type of SBI, it needs to be a SportPlus coaching role rather than just a technical sports coach role (Coalter, 2007; Nichols, 2007; Haudenhuyse et al., 2012; Van der Veken et al., 2021). The SportPlus coach is responsible for delivering an intervention which needs to provide purposefully designed sports activities as well as additional opportunities for the young person such as empowerment (Crisp, 2020) and personal development (Coalter, 2007) as these are often viewed as one of the key determining factors of long-term behaviour changes (Nichols 2007).

EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is when individuals gain control and mastery within their lives to improve the quality of their life (Rappaport, 1984)

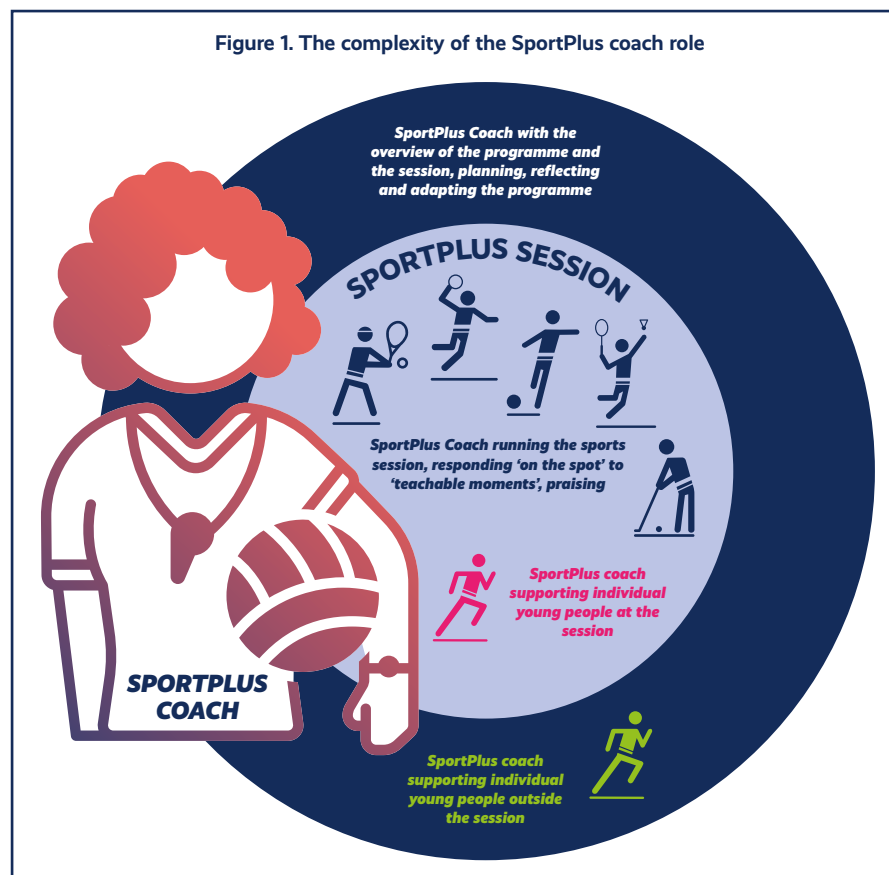
A key role for the SportPlus coach is to support the empowerment of the young people that they are working with. This role includes:

- **Creating a welcoming and safe environment by giving support, trust and encouragement to young people** so that they feel that they belong, have the freedom to be themselves, voice opinions, share their feelings, try out new skills and roles, rise to new challenges, take risks and have fun
- **Helping young people to experience success and failure.** The coach needs to use feedback and encouragement to show that learning can also come from failure as well as success.
- **Providing meaningful activities that are relevant to young people's lives that excite and challenge them.** The coach can support young people to develop their skills, competence and confidence so that they can 'master' what they are interested in.
- **Sharing power with young people so that they can determine and direct what happens at the sessions.** The coach needs to identify the most appropriate roles for young people, have high expectations of them, encourage and allow them time to master the role.
- **Supporting young people to develop critical thinking skills.** The coach needs to have the skills and knowledge to extend beyond reflecting on activities at the sessions to the wider issues affecting their lives and community to support enjoyable and intellectually challenging discussions.
- **Empowering young people at a community level.** The coach needs to provide opportunities to help young people to build stronger ties with their community so that they feel committed to making their community a better place for the future.

(Jennings et al., 2006)

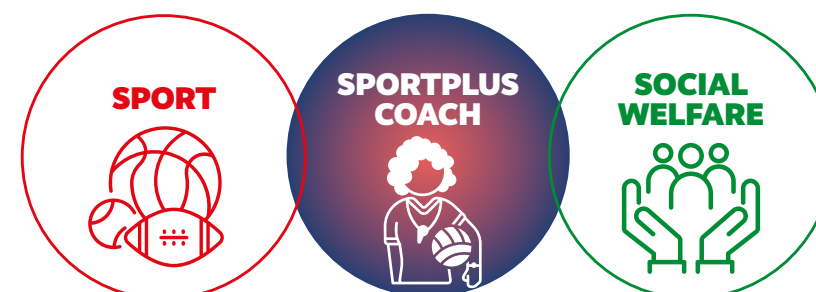


Although there should be an overall programme aim and outline in place for the SBI, the SportPlus coach needs to have an ongoing combined coaching and programme design role as this type of SBI focuses on the needs of the young person (Crisp, 2020). This means that the SportPlus coach cannot rely on strictly following pre-existing session plans. Instead, the coach needs to continually design the detailed content of the programme purposefully whilst still being able to adapt and respond 'on the spot' as the needs of the young people continue to emerge and adapt the delivery of the sessions to reflect this. The SportPlus coach needs to have an overview of what is happening during the sport session whilst also being aware of the needs of individual young people. This requires a higher level order of thinking with a clear understanding of the overall programme aims and required outcomes, effective observation skills, understanding of the young people, strong reflexive skills and the ability and opportunity to review and report back on the progress being made. Figure 1 shows the complexity of the SportPlus coach role.



Coaches (and other delivery staff) working on a SportPlus programme are expected to do many roles, which is sometimes seen as a 'double burden' as they have to deliver both sport and development programmes, requiring a combination of skills (Svensson et al., 2021). Van der Veken et al. (2021) describe them as not traditional sports coaches and not as a social worker but working in a third space where they span the boundaries of both worlds, known as a 'boundary spanner' coach as shown in Figure 2. Boundary spanners tackle complex problems and link individuals or groups together (Jeanes et al., 2019).

Figure 2: The SportPlus coach as a boundary spanner coach



MODELS FOR THE 'SPORTPLUS' WORKFORCE

Identifying a workforce model for a SportPlus programme is not straightforward as it depends on the type of SBI, the expertise of the workforce and the nature (and size) of the organisation running the SBI. A minimum of two deliverers would be expected to run a SportPlus sport playing session although this might be different for some types of programmes. The complexity of the roles suggests that for sport playing sessions at SportPlus SBIs, having an experienced, mature and knowledgeable 'lead' SportPlus coach would be beneficial. This role could also support SportPlus coaches who are new to the sector or who have been following the participant to volunteer to coach pathway and would benefit from the mentoring and role-modelling of a more experienced SportPlus coach especially in recognition of the lack of formal training and qualifications for this role in the community sport sector.

Examples of models for the workforce include amongst others:

- A sports coach who coaches or leads sport and does the 'social, youth work coaching' with young people at the same time. (Svensson et al., 2021; Van der Veken et al., 2021)
- A sports coach whose role is to run the sports sessions but is supported by a 'social' coach or youth worker on the sidelines who works with the young people beyond sport (Van der Veken et al., 2021).
- A coach who mentors young people on a one-to-one basis using sport. (This might also include working with the young person within a group sports setting)
- A coach who works with young people to support their volunteering in sport either on an individual or group basis. (This might include volunteering at a sports session or it might be in other settings such as running a sports event, or social action project)
- A coach who combines the delivery of the sport playing sessions with training young people at the sessions to become volunteers with the potential to become future coaches
- A coach who is also the team leader or project manager

Crisp (2020) also highlights that the role of some coaches is to keep 'chasing' the funding for their own jobs which requires additional skills for identifying funding sources and bid writing.



THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF THE YOUTH WORKER AS PART OF THE SPORTSPPLUS WORKFORCE

It is helpful to consider the potential role of the youth worker or to consider adopting a youth work approach within the SportPlus workforce. This is valuable as it complements the aim of the SBI since the purpose of youth work is to 'enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential' (National Youth Agency, 2023).

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH WORK

- The young person's life is the starting point
- Young people voluntarily choose to take part
- Focusing on the needs, experiences and interests of young people
- It can take different forms including detached youth work, social group work, individual work as well as giving information and advice
- Developing a sense of belonging
- Using an open approach that is not time-limited and not pre-planned, it is fluid and responsive
- Able to adapt to respond to positive and negative life events

(Sonneveld et al., 2020)

THE GENERAL ROLE OF THE YOUTH WORKER

- Identifying young people's needs and problems
- Supporting the transition from childhood to adolescence
- Providing early intervention help for social and personal problems
- Creating experiential learning opportunities
- Supporting young people before they access specialised care services
- Encouraging young people to participate in society

(Sonneveld et al., 2020)

THE POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT ROLE OF THE YOUTH WORKER

- Helping young people to develop positive peer interactions by using group work including sport, so that young people can share experiences, support each other and make new friends
- Developing life skills by providing informal learning opportunities for getting on in society – responsibility, pro-social skills (punctuality, dealing with authority, complying with rules and structures) and socio-emotional skills
- Strengthening schoolwork and careers – developing aspirations and dreams, improving skills including concentration, scheduling, conflict management and linking young people back into institutions, school, college etc
- Improving health and well-being through referrals to support services and health promotion
- Supporting young people before they access specialised care services
- Encouraging young people to participate in society

(Sonneveld et al., 2020)

Recent academic insight has found that the youth worker role can play a preventative role in a wide range of informal contexts including sport, youth clubs and on the street (Sonneveld et al., 2020). The benefits for SBLs also includes:

- A youth worker approach is a more person-centred than a sports coach approach and can lead to more in-depth, intensive and extensive social relationships (Coalter and Taylor, 2010)
- Youth workers are used to working with youth problems and are in a good position to work with youth in sport (Theebom et al., 1993)
- However, youth work can also be seen as being too vague and without the thought processes that are required for SBLs (Coussee et al., 2010)

There are different approaches for integrating youth work into the SportPlus workforce.

- Sports coaches attending youth work training and qualification courses
- Training up existing qualified youth workers as sports coaches
- Using qualified youth workers to support sports coaches whilst they are running sports sessions
- Using qualified youth workers to do additional support work outside the sports sessions with young people including one to one advice, group work and discussions, outreach work.

There is limited recent academic insight into the effectiveness of these approaches although Robins (1990) argues that it is easier and more effective for youth workers to learn sports skills than for sports coaches to learn youth worker skills.

THE QUALITIES OF YOUTH WORKERS

- Being approachable
- Willing to share similar personal experiences on an individual basis
- Being a role model for young people
- Ability to give young people confidence to deal with setbacks
- Skills for informal and formal collaboration with other professionals
- Ability to collaborate with parents (which can be challenging as they can help or hinder)

(Sonneveld et al., 2020)



SECTION C THE WORKFORCE COMPETENCIES

INTRODUCTION TO WORKFORCE COMPETENCE AND COMPETENCIES

Workforce competency can be defined as:

- Having a set of knowledge, skills and abilities so that you can effectively perform the activities of a job and produce an outcome that has value to oneself and the organisation. (Chyung et al., 2005)
- Working to a defined and accepted level on a regular basis. (National Youth Agency, 2021)
- But/ competence can be affected by a worker's skills, knowledge, experience, qualifications, training and personal attributes such as self-awareness and judgement. (National Youth Agency, 2021)

Workforce competencies can be defined as:

'the sets of behaviour that a person must display in order to perform the tasks or functions of a job'. Competencies include personal features and abilities alongside skills, attitudes and knowledge (Hayes et al., 2000, p 93)

Organisational context is important for workforce competence in terms of the type of organisation, the organisation's purpose and the type of programmes and interventions that are provided. This means that different organisations might require different competencies and some skills and abilities might be more important than others. (Fahrner and Schüttoff, 2020).

This also means that workforce competence can be situational - a worker can be competent in one setting but not in another setting (National Youth Agency, 2021). This is a particularly important consideration for LTOs that provide both Sport and SportPlus programmes as this suggests that some coaches might not be suitable for both Sport and SportPlus SBIs. Workers, therefore, need to be assigned roles that match their level of competence and potential. (National Youth Agency, 2021).

COMPETENCIES REQUIRED BY THE FRONTLINE SPORTPLUS WORKFORCE

This part summarises the competencies required by the SportPlus workforce in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, qualities and behaviours.



KNOWLEDGE

The following areas of knowledge and understanding are important for practitioners:

- Knowledge of the aim of the programme, how it should work and the intended outcomes (Harris, 2018)
- Knowledge of the importance of long term, meaningful personal goals for a young person to work towards which can help to transform the young person's personal narrative (that is, how they think and talk about themselves and their life), provide hope for the future and contribute to the achievement of their aspirational, 'projected self' as a shift in identity (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015)
- Knowledge and understanding of personal development and life skills. (N.B. Sport practitioners often find it difficult to define or to describe personal development even though they confirmed that this was important for their work (Debognies et al., 2019))

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Personal development in this context can be described as helping young people to develop into adults by providing opportunities to gain knowledge, learn and practice new skills and set goals.

More recently, the term 'positive youth development' has been used. This is a strengths-based approach which includes three areas:

- Personal development including self-esteem, self-efficacy, confidence, resilience, respect, taking responsibility, problem solving, goal-setting, hope for the future
- Social development including friendships, teamwork, leadership skills, communication skills, decision-making and negotiation skills
- Physical development including movement and coordination skills, healthy and active living

(adapted from Catalano et al., 2004)

- Knowledge of contextual safeguarding which recognises that risk and harm can also come from outside the home and family including from peers, school and the community (Wroe et al., 2023)
- Knowledge of trauma and the importance of being trauma-informed (National Youth Agency, 2023)
- Knowledge of the importance of confidentiality about young people's background and circumstances (Stephenson et al., 2011)
- Having knowledge of young people's gender specific needs which require a focus on self-esteem for girls and healthy masculinity and relationships for boys (Big Lottery Fund, 2018)
- Pedagogical knowledge about how young people can learn through playing sport i.e. experiential learning (Spruit et al., 2018).
- Technical knowledge and qualifications for coaching when appropriate (Van der Veken et al., 2021).
- Knowledge of the role of competition in sport but understanding the potential for competition to provide a negative experience for some young people. (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012)
- Knowledge about local cross sectoral, welfare partners (Van der Veken et al., 2021)

SKILLS

The following sets of skills are important for practitioners:

Technical skills for running a sports session:

- Ability to deliver sports sessions, organise risk assessments, mobilise session plans, teach technical sports skills and provide fun activities (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012; Van der Veken et al., 2021)
- Ability to provide a safe environment for the development of learning in a group (Marmet and Meyer, 2008)
- To create an environment where socially vulnerable young people feel successful rather than experiencing the usual feelings of incompetence and failure (Andrews and Andrews, 2003)
- Ability to create a 'mastery' environment which means that young people are able to improve their sporting skills by thinking about their own playing ability rather than comparing their own performance with others (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012)
- Ability to provide 'experiential' learning for young people through practicing skills and behaviours rather than talking about skills and behaviours: 'doing is better than abstract talking' (Gatzemann et al., 2008; Haudenhuyse et al., 2012)
- The ability to identify if the programme is working (Harris, 2018)

Skills for working with children and young people:

- Ability to build relationships with young people (Coalter, 2007; Haudenhuyse et al., 2012) and not wanting to 'fix' young people (Debognies et al., 2019))
- Ability to 'equalize' expertise by recognising that expertise lies with the young person as they know themselves best of all (Debognies et al., 2019)
- Ability to develop trust with young people (Van der Veken et al., 2021)
- Ability to develop emotional connectivity with young people (Williams, 2013)
- Ability to use trauma-informed approaches to work with young people (Big Lottery Fund, 2018)
- Ability to create a caring environment (Rutten et al., 2007)
- Ability to be sensitive and respond to the developmental needs of adolescents as they transition to adulthood (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012; Spruit et al., 2018)



- Flexibility to change as young people's needs change
- Perceptiveness about the well-being and needs of young people by observing emotions, behaviours, what is happening at the session and being aware of what is going on at school and home (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012)
- Create an authoritative rather than authoritarian relationship with clear rules (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012)
- Appropriate communication (including listening skills) and interaction with young people verbally and physically (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012; Williams, 2013)
- Ability to manage group dynamics and integrate new participants (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012)
- Negotiation and consensus building (Williams, 2013)
- Able to respond sympathetically when young people demonstrate challenging behaviour (Crisp, 2020)
- Able to offer positive learning opportunities to young people (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012)
- Ability to empower young people to make positive choices (Big Lottery Fund, 2018)
- Adaptable to different situations (Van der Veken et al., 2021)
- Reflexive (Van der Veken et al., 2021) and higher level order of thinking to develop young people
- Able to work with partners in an open and transparent manner (Robinson, 2014)
- Political skills to network and influence partners (Van der Veken et al., 2021)
- Develop and maintain links with welfare partners as an informal network and able to signpost young people to them (Van der Veken et al., 2021)
- Willing to share professional knowledge with others and access knowledge from outside one's own sphere (Robinson, 2014)



ATTITUDES

- A ChildFirst approach towards working with children and young people at risk of or involved in offending that recognises that they are not 'mini-adults' and need to be treated appropriately as children rather than as (potential) offenders (Haines and Case, 2015)
- Belief that the young person is at the centre of their work and that the young person needs to be supported in their personal development and is not an asset to be developed for sport (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012)
- Belief that the social and personal development of young people is more important than winning (Rutten et al., 2008)
- Authenticity and genuinely wanting to work with young people (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012)
- Empathy, caring and being respectful towards young people (Rutten et al., 2007; Rutten et al., 2008; Williams, 2013)
- Shows humility and is able to admit mistakes (Carey et al., 2018; Nichols, 2007)
- Non-judgemental (Big Lottery Fund, 2018)
- Fair play when they and others play sport (Rutten et al., 2007)

QUALITIES

The following qualities are important for practitioners:

- Committed to the values of equity, diversity and inclusion (National Youth Agency, 2023)
- A coach with similarities to the young person as a form of 'cultural capital' through lived experience and shared knowledge of language, lifestyle and taste although this can also be provided by another staff at the session (Bandura 1995; Crabbe 2006)
- Depth of maturity to deal with a young person in the transition stage of their self-identity (Nichols, 2007)
- Able to demonstrate self-awareness, self-regulation, self-responsibility and being aspirational through their practice as this can have positive benefits (Lugueti et al., 2017)
- Having high emotional intelligence as this helps coaches to deal with the emotional work that they do with young people (Svensson et al., 2021)
- Having 'a sense of humour ... which supports purposeful, lively challenges' as this is a key to engagement (Hoon Lee and Chelludurai, 2018; Visser, 2003)
- Role model for the values that young people need in order to get on with others (Coalter, 2010; Nichols, 2007)

THE SPORTPLUS COACH AS A ROLE MODEL

A role model is an individual who inspires, leads by example, excites admiration and makes others want to be like them (Paice et al., 2002).

The role model makes the young person believe that they are capable of the same behaviours as the role model and that if they copy these behaviours then they can achieve what they set out to do and will get the results that they want (Coalter, 2010).

A role model is:

- Successful as a result of their own efforts and not by chance
- But/ if they are too successful, this can make them seem 'out of reach'
- Admired because of their competence (including technical skills and intelligence), good social skills (including being likeable) and integrity
- Similar to the young person that they are working with in aspects such as gender, race or other characteristics
- Able to draw on shared lived experiences to show that they have had to face difficulties and challenges to succeed as this helps the young person to identify with them
- Is able to inspire and show the young person how to perform a skill and achieve a goal so that the young person can copy it and feel that they can succeed
- Shows the young person that a goal can be achieved
- Makes the young person want to achieve the goal

(Based on Morganroth et al., (2015), Hoyt and Simon (2011), Bandura (1977), Lockwood and Kunda (1997))



BEHAVIOURS

The following behaviours are important for practitioners:

- Calm, inquisitive coaching behaviours (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012)
- Supportive and responsive to young people (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012)
- Never responding aggressively to aggression (Nichols, 2007)
- Integrity and honesty (Big Lottery Fund, 2018; Haudenhuyse et al., 2012)
- Consistency as they need to follow through with what they say that they will do (Carey et al., 2018)
- Patience as building trusted relationships with young people takes time

STRATEGIES FOR ASSESSING WORKFORCE COMPETENCE

As the success of the SportPlus programme relies on the competence of the SportPlus coach, it is important to ensure that the right workforce is recruited and in place. This is important because:

- The amount of positive change for young people both on and off the 'pitch' can vary between coaches suggesting that not all coaches are the same in their behaviours and attitudes (Spruit et al., 2018)
- Coaches from different sports tended to demonstrate different behaviours. As an example, some coaches created a more positive socio-moral environment than others, paid more attention to rules about behaviour, were more motivating, and gave more individual guidance (Spruit et al 2018)
- The coach's own vulnerability including their own lived experience can either support or hinder their work (Van der Veken et al., 2021)
- Some coaches can be negative role models (Collison, 1996)

It is, therefore, helpful to have strategies in place to assess competence at the recruitment stage as well as throughout the programme to support the workforce development and training programme.

The following strategies might be helpful (National Youth Agency, 2021):

- Evidence and verification of training and qualifications
- Evidence and understanding of relevant skills and knowledge
- Experience and practical application of the skills needed for the intervention
- Observation of practice
- Evidence of an understanding of the individual attributes relevant to the intervention



UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATION OF THE SPORTPLUS WORKFORCE

The SportPlus workforce places a high value on their work with young people and it is this which makes their role meaningful. This means that they are psychologically willing to give more to the job and are motivated to do their roles because it is important to them, rather than for other reasons like being praised by others or rewarded with pay (although they do, of course, need to be paid fairly).

The SportPlus workforce (Svensson et al., 2020):

- Believes in the mission and purpose of the work
- Has a love of sport – this is based on the value that sport represents to them
- Have their own personal experiences that they bring with them (i.e. lived experience) which are relevant to the work
- Have compassion for young people in challenging circumstances and want to help them
- Like to be independent and have autonomy. (This matches well with the requirement for them to be responsive, flexible and adaptable in their work with young people)
- Are attracted to the social mission of the non-profit or charitable organisation that they work for which means that they are likely to put the organisation before themselves



CHALLENGES FOR THE SPORTPLUS COACH

However, there are a wide range of challenges for the role of the SportPlus coach:

- There is a lack of professional recognition or career development for the SportPlus coach (Van der Veken et al., 2021).
- Their role is characterised by short-term, part-time or casual contracts, low salaries and lack of benefits (Svensson et al., 2021). This has been shown to act as significant sources of stress for coaches (Potts et al., 2019) and is likely to have a negative effect on the recruitment and retention of the SportPlus workforce
- There are rarely job descriptions in place for the role of SportPlus coach (job descriptions are often based on the traditional sports coach role) but it was acknowledged that this was challenging as coaches often needed to innovate and improvise on the spot (Van der Veken et al., 2021)
- Confidentiality and agency accountability emerged as a key issue (Rumgay, 2000) and this was exacerbated by the fact that project workers felt that young people would not disclose sensitive information to them if they were seen to be working too closely with the criminal justice system (Minkes et al., 2005).
- Coaches can often be project managers looking for funding at the same times whilst coaching especially in smaller organisations – this can create issues and reduce it to just a 'sport' playing session (Van der Veken et al., 2021)

SUPPORT REQUIRED BY THE SPORTPLUS WORKFORCE TO CARRY OUT THEIR ROLES

Insight from recent evaluation programmes indicates that it is difficult to recruit and retain the SportPlus workforce in the context of short-term funded SBI programmes, the 'cost of living crisis', the lack of career development and other factors. This affects the ability to retain coaches which is important for the long-term engagement of the young person and the development of the 'trusted adult' relationship which is at the foundation of the SBI.

The SportPlus coach needs the following measures to be in place:

- Enough (long-term) project funding to pay for their time to do their job and for the resources that they need including facilities and equipment
- They need to feel that they are part of the organisation as this supports their retention (Spruit et al., 2018)
- An identity as a SportPlus coach is important as this is linked to their intention to stay in the role, to work hard and to stay focused (Svensson et al., 2021)
- A salary that matches their level of competence as there is often a reliance on paid staff since local volunteering traditions can be limited or not in place in deprived areas (Svensson et al., 2021)
- They need to receive regular supervision where they can discuss their work. The SportPlus coach role is 'emotion laden'. They can experience strong emotions both 'on and off the field', including pleasant and unpleasant emotions which they need to regulate and display appropriate emotions otherwise it will have negative consequences. (Svensson et al., 2021)
- They need to have access to emotional support which could include counselling or clinical supervision as this can be important if they are working with young people with ACEs and have shared similar experiences as this can lead to stress and emotional burnout
- They need to have access to continuous training and development opportunities as this supports retention (Van der Veken et al., 2021)
- Project staff can feel overwhelmed as they try to balance fundraising, admin, running the programme and coaching and need to have funded support in place (Svensson et al., 2021)



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ENDNOTES

¹Sport includes indoor and outdoor sports, martial arts, lifestyle sports, dance, team sports and individual sports and physical activities such as going to the gym, cycling and walking.

²This is based on definitions used by a range of Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) in England in 2023

³For more guidance on the competencies required for sport-based mentoring, please see the 'Literature Review summary: The use of Sport-Based mentoring programmes as an intervention for preventing and reducing youth offending' Produced for StreetGames in 2020 by C. Walpole and C. Mason, Loughborough University

⁴The term 'SportPlus coach' is used in the absence of a more appropriate or commonly used term. As this literature review summary highlights this is not a traditional sports coach role and would benefit from a more appropriate term

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES IN THIS SERIES:

Referral guidance for the use of sport to prevent and reduce Serious Youth Violence

Using Sport to enhance positive outcomes for young people in the context of Serious Youth Violence: Making Referrals: Guidance and toolkit to support Locally Trusted Organisations (LTOs) and Referral agencies (2024) Author: C. Walpole

Theory of Change

Using Sport to enhance positive outcomes for young people in the context of Serious Youth Violence: A Theory of Change (2020) Authors: C. Mason, C., Walpole and S. Case

Summary reviews of the academic literature for policymakers and practitioners:

- Vulnerable Girls and Young Women and Sport in the context of Violence Reduction (2021) Authors: C. Walpole and C. Mason
- The Use of Sport-based Mentoring Programmes as an intervention for preventing and reducing youth offending (2021) Authors: C. Walpole and C. Mason
- Sport and Serious Youth Violence (2020) Authors: C. Walpole, C. Mason, S. Case and P. Downward
- Safer Together: Creating partnerships for positive change (2019) Authors: C. Walpole, C. Mason, S. Case and P. Downward

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