

# Playing for Success: an Evaluation of the First Year

Caroline Sharp, Clare Mawson, Keith Pocklington, Lesley Kendall and Jo Morrison

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*Playing for Success* is a national initiative, established by the DfEE in partnership with the Premier League, the Nationwide League and their clubs and LEAs. It aims to contribute to raising educational standards, especially in urban areas, by establishing out-of-school-hours Study Support Centres in professional football clubs. Centres are managed by experienced teachers. They use the medium and environment of football to support work in literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, and provide facilities for pupils to complete their homework. With a focus on addressing the needs of underachieving young people in Key Stages 2 and 3, the initiative places a strong emphasis on improving pupils' attitudes and motivation to learn.

## Key Findings

***Playing for Success* has proved popular with pupils, parents and schools**

- Pupils had a very positive response to attending *Playing for Success*, finding it enjoyable and gaining a great deal from it. Few could identify anything they did not like about taking part.
- Despite the sessions being after school, most pupils attended over 80 per cent of the course, and just under half attended all available sessions at the Centre.
- Parents had very positive views about their child's participation in *Playing for Success*.
- The Centres had no difficulty filling their places, and most schools would welcome another opportunity to send pupils to *Playing for Success*.

***Playing for Success* has contributed to improved attitudes, motivation and self-esteem**

- Pupils' attitudes to reading and mathematics became significantly more positive during their time at the Centre.
- By the end of their course, pupils' responses showed that they enjoyed reading and mathematics more and were more confident in each; they also considered mathematics to be more relevant.
- Both teachers in school and parents noticed improvements in pupils' self-confidence and esteem.

**The initiative has contributed to improved academic skills and achievement**

- Pupils made significant progress in both mental arithmetic and reading. On average, primary pupils improved their reading scores by the equivalent of six months and secondary pupils improved their reading scores by about eight months.
- Their teachers noticed particular improvements in pupils' ICT and study skills.
- Parents felt the Centres had helped with many aspects of their child's learning, including ICT, mathematics, reading, writing and homework.

### ***Playing for Success* has reached its target group of underachieving pupils**

- The initial reading and mental arithmetic scores of participating pupils were well below average. Just under a third of pupils attending the Centres had special educational needs.
- Over a third of pupils were eligible for free school meals.
- The Centres catered for equal numbers of boys and girls. Over a quarter of pupils were from non-White backgrounds, including Black, Asian and other ethnic groups.
- The initiative benefited all pupils, regardless of gender, deprivation, ethnicity and special needs. There was no strong, consistent relationship between the amount of time pupils spent at the Centre and their performance in relation to the outcome measures.

### **What contributed to the Centres' success?**

The football setting proved attractive and was a strong element in motivating pupils to become involved in *Playing for Success*. Pupils responded positively to many aspects of the Centres, especially using computers and the Internet. They enjoyed the work, felt they had made progress, and were grateful for the help they received. They also benefited from the opportunity to meet people and make new friends.

Attending an educational setting other than school gave underachieving youngsters the opportunity to make a 'fresh start'. Student mentors were used in the Centres to provide advice and support, and the high ratio of staff to pupils enabled pupils to get immediate help and to make progress in their learning.

The Centres established an informal, supportive atmosphere. Centre Managers and student mentors encouraged pupils to try things out for themselves. There were opportunities for pupils to make choices and to develop independent study skills. Pupils responded well to incentives and rewards provided by the Centres, such as competitions, prizes and certificates.

## **What are the lessons from the first year?**

### *Staffing*

Centre Managers have worked extremely hard to make the initiative a success. They need a teacher/deputy to release them from running sessions so they can devote their energies to management, liaison and planning. In particular:

- a deputy would enable the Centres to remain open if the Centre Manager is taken ill or needs to take time away from the Centre;
- some Centre Managers need more administrative support.

### *Planning*

There is a need to allow sufficient time for planning and review. Time is required for planning before the Centre opens, and for further planning and review between courses. Centre Managers interviewed in this evaluation recommended that new Centres should start operating on a pilot basis at first.

### *Support from LEAs and clubs*

Centre Managers need support and advice to help them work effectively. The partnership between football club and LEA has worked best where both parties are represented on a formal management group, responsible for a strategic overview of the initiative. The Centre should form an integral part of the LEA's overall strategies.

It is important that Centre Managers, the clubs and LEAs work together to identify sponsorship opportunities to equip their Centres with ICT facilities.

### *Involving the players*

It is not easy to involve football players on a regular basis in the work of the Centres. Some Centres have managed to involve first team players in special events, such as presentations of certificates to pupils. The involvement of former players, academy (youth team) players and grounds staff has proved popular with pupils.

## **What should be the priorities for next year?**

### *Improving the liaison between Centres and schools*

There is a need to focus on improving the liaison between Centres and schools. Centre Managers have found it difficult to obtain background information on pupils from schools. This information is important in helping them to address pupils' individual learning needs.

Centre Managers would welcome more involvement of teachers, and teachers would like more feedback on pupils' progress at the Centre. The relationship between Centres and schools is fundamental to ensuring that pupils' learning gains are recognised and built on at school.

### *Extending the Centres' expertise*

There is a need to consider how best to use the facilities and experiences gained through *Playing for Success*. The first six Centres have already begun to extend their operation, making their facilities available to a range of educational users.

There is potential for the Centres to act as models of good practice, particularly in relation to providing study support, deploying student mentors and the use of ICT.

Local authorities and clubs need to consider how best to secure the future viability of their Study Support Centres.

### **About the evaluation**

This evaluation was carried out for the DfEE by a team of researchers based at the National Foundation for Educational Research. The team gathered information during 1998-99 from the first six Study Support Centres to be established in English football clubs. The researchers visited each Centre on more than one occasion to observe study support sessions and to interview Centre staff and volunteers, football club officers, LEA personnel and business sponsors. The views of pupils, parents and schools were gathered by means of questionnaires. Pupils' attitudes were gathered at the beginning and end of their time at the Centre. Tests of reading and mental arithmetic were used to assess pupils' progress. Over 600 pupils took part in the evaluation. A full report, including case-study descriptions of the six Centres, is available from the DfEE.

### **Further Information**

*Copies of this Research Brief (RB167) are available free of charge from DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ (Tel: 0845 60 22260). The Research Report (RR167), priced at £4.95, is available by writing to DfES Publications at the above address. Cheques should be made payable to 'DfES Priced Publications'.*

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### Reference:

SHARP, C., MAWSON, C., POCKLINGTON, K., KENDALL, L. and MORRISON, J. (1999). *Playing for Success: an Evaluation of the First Year* (DfEE Research Report 167). London: DfEE.