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Football clubs and school sport: The badge is not enough

2nd December 2015

New research has examined the role of football clubs in the delivery of physical education and school sport across England, and questioned the need for greater evaluation.

Football clubs lie at the heart of many communities and, as such, they can have an important and distinctive role to play in introducing young people to sport and other physical activities.

This role has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years. The advent of a new 'PESS' (Physical Education and School Sport) strategy in England in 2013, accompanied by a £450million investment into school sport, brought the role of clubs into sharp focus.

The challenges outlined by academics in [recent research](#), developed as part of a special edition focused on Football and Health Improvement, became even more pertinent given the [recent joint funding](#) committed by both the English Premier League and Government.

Previously changes led by the Conservative Secretary of State, Michael Gove, in 2010 had seen the first attempts to dismantle the established School Sports Partnerships. However now headteachers have control of the budget to fund external provision of their activities, meaning that decision-making has been decentralised. This change has seen the emergence of external providers, including football clubs.

As the clubs and their respective community programmes have stepped forward to answer the call, it is important to ask how they are faring.

This [new research](#) by Parnell and colleagues (2015), published in the peer review Journal Soccer and Society, uses semi-structured interviews with community managers from football community programmes and headteachers to reveal key themes. The research points towards greater partnership working between football clubs and schools, in a bid to need to raise the quality of coaching.

With stakeholders such as the Premier League making a major investment into PE and School Sport, this current research shows the need for more action from all stakeholders involved. The three most important actions include:

- 1 Developing the scope of partnerships between clubs and school.
- 2 Developing the roles and skill-set of the community coaches working in school to achieve greater impact for PE and School Sport.
- 3 Tackling the deficit of high-quality, rigorous research and evaluation.

In simple terms the badge of the local football club, whilst appealing to many, is not in itself a guarantee of effectiveness. Acting on the call from this research, those involved must begin to develop more effective practice. Moreover, the research warns that without proper monitoring and evaluation “we can only speculate on how PESS can contribute to lifelong participation in children and young people”.

[Read more here](#) >>

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