

Skills for Life at Brighton and Hove Albion Football Club

Albion Football Club, Withdean Stadium, Brighton.

In March 2007, Brighton and Hove Albion Football Club won the award of Community Football Club of the year, evidence of its commitment to and success in engaging the local community in learning.

The club's highly successful Study Support Centre is overseen by Dr Alan Sanders who was appointed to Brighton and Hove Albion Football Club in 2002, to manage the Club's Study Support Centre for Adult Learning. As Principal of Education, Alan currently manages not only the club's own study Support Centre but eight others at semi-professional football clubs across Sussex, which are currently funded through the LSC and were also given ESF funding until December 2006. Educational provision at Brighton and Hove Albion includes a wide range of local, national and international projects for children and adults as well as Skills for Life.

Albion in the Community

Albion in the Community is a registered charity and is the charitable arm of the club which focuses on three key areas in the community: Education, Football and Health, harnessing the universal appeal and power of football for local benefit and extending awareness of the club beyond traditional football. Programmes in the above areas reach 13,000 people a year across Sussex, with 1000 benefiting at the temporary stadium currently in use at Withdean in Brighton.

Employability and changing lifestyles

The programmes inspire individuals into education and new careers, by enhancing employability skills. In terms of engaging hard to reach learners, football inclusion programmes target and motivate those living in deprived areas, whilst Healthy Living courses also help adults towards positive lifestyle changes.

Engaging the young in learning – Playing for Success

Brighton and Hove City council funds work with schools under a scheme called Playing for Success. This includes after school football clubs, curriculum time football coaching and staff football training programmes. A key area of provision in terms of Skills for Life is a programme called 'Playing for Success' at the Seagulls Learning Centre, which provides Maths, English and IT for pupils after school.

Multi-agency working

Multi-agency liaison and co-operation support the success of the community education programmes – those involved include: eight Sussex professional and semi-professional football clubs, six FE colleges, the Sussex Careers Service, Job

Centres, community groups, the Fire Service, local schools and local businesses who provide sponsorship and Gift Aid donations.

The Professional Football Apprenticeship Scheme

In partnership with Sussex Downs College, Albion runs an apprenticeship scheme known as 'Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence'. This consists of four elements, a BTEC technical certificate, an NVQ in Sporting Excellence, Level 2 Coaching and Key Skills in Communications and Application of Number, if required in the event of apprentices not having GCSE English and Maths at the appropriate level. Apprentices are able to access Skills for Life support if required.

The Success of the European Social Fund Adult Education Project

With ESF funding of 2 million pounds, an adult education project ran from January 2004 to December 2006 and engaged over 3000 learners. There were 3,200 achievements overall. Careers information, advice and guidance were provided by the local careers services.

Courses delivered under the ESF project included:

Literacy and Numeracy, ECDL European Computer Driving Licence, non-accredited courses such as beginners IT.

Skills for Life achievements totalled 1,665, with 1,109 achievements at level 1, and 556 at level 2. In addition, there were 330 ECDL achievements and 1294 non-accredited short IT courses were completed.

Sustainability

The courses were sub-contracted out to the local Sussex colleges within the project and although ESF funding ended in December 2006, five FE colleges are continuing to work with Albion, continuing the success of this work under partnership or franchising funding.

Permanent appointment of Skills for Life Tutor

A further positive development from the project was that the Albion employed a permanent Skills for Life tutor together with an IT tutor and a tutor for the Health and Sport programmes. These three staff share the day to day running of the centre with administrative duties subsumed into their job roles.

Critical success factors in Skills for Life

Sarah Brooker, the Skills for Life tutor was asked to identify what made Skills for Life work in the football club setting. She identified the following:

The Learning Environment

The location and adult environment, Sarah felt played an important part in attracting adult learners who would not otherwise attend a college. Many adults perceived the local colleges as being predominantly for 16-19 year olds. The relaxed, informal environment provided at the club, whereby the hospitality suite converts into classrooms on non-match days and lap tops are used flexibly, is a safe and calm learning context for adults. They can work overlooking the stands and the pitch and can make coffees and teas and sit in comfortable chairs during breaks.

Interaction between the learners and the different groups working in the Centre is fostered through the relaxed atmosphere and the tightly knit teaching team who get to know all the learners. Phone contact is important and learners can be assured of personalised responses when they contact the centre

Sensitive use of a range of initial assessment tools and the importance of positive wording

All learners are assessed for their Skills for Life levels at the start of their programmes, but choices about which assessment to use and when and how to use it, are key to engaging volatile learners. The tutor uses her discretion and experience and gives carefully worded explanations to new learners about the reasons for initial assessment. Besides generic assessment tools and the national practice tests, a range of contextualised screening tools have been developed. Learners may be asked to carry out supplementary tasks such as free writing, to augment the outcomes of initial assessment and to give a fuller picture of specific Skills for Life needs.

Sarah stresses the importance of using the right wording when conducting initial assessment and when speaking with learners, refers to 'identifying gaps' and 'addressing gaps' or 'refreshing skills' which will help them succeed in their programmes of study..

Programmes at the Centre

The centre is funded to deliver Skills for Life at level 1 and level 2, but high Entry level 3 learners are taken on too.

Besides Skills for Life, the range of other courses on offer includes: Health for Life at levels 1 and 2, a level 2 programme called 'Winning with Women' which targets hard to reach women and encourages them to develop careers in sport, Sports BTEC, Football Coaching at level 1 and Match Day Stewarding at level 2, all of which can access Skills for Life support and full Skills for Life programmes. Pre-

course Literacy programmes are offered to learners who are planning to take up other areas of study.

Teaching sessions are always planned to take account of the full range of learning styles and include memory boosting strategies, colour coding, and interaction between learners.

By just being in the centre and mixing with others and hearing of their positive experiences, learners frequently progress between groups and from one course to the next, for example from an IT course into a Skills for Life course, then from that into a Healthy Living course.

Marketing

Word of mouth recommendation is by far the most successful way of marketing Skills for Life and the other programmes, with satisfied and motivated learners spreading the news of their successes within the local community.

Many learners come to Skills for Life through signing up for a Beginners' IT programme. There are Job Centre referrals for Skills for Life, and the Centre's tutors also attend Careers Fairs.

A very successful approach has been to hold open afternoons where a range of agencies attend the Centre to see what is on offer. It is planned to hold more of these.

Strong contacts have been made with Brighton and Hove City Council who refer unsuccessful job applicants to the Centre to brush up their IT and Skills for Life. The applicants are then referred back to the Council once they have reached the required level of competence.

Learner engagement, success and progression to employability

The success of Albion's Skills for Life provision is evidenced in the many examples of learner achievement and progression.

For example, one learner came into the Centre at Entry level 3; he worked on Literacy and progressed to achieve Level 2. He then felt confident enough to attend a three month taster in Bricklaying at City College Brighton and has decided to become a bricklayer as a result.

Another learner had been workless for a long time. When he joined the Centre he had not read for a number of years, but progressed to reach level 2 Literacy. This gave him the confidence to apply for a job. He succeeded in gaining employment and as he will be working in the mornings, still plans to attend the Centre to continue his learning.

Another learner became engaged in Skills for Life through taking a Health for Life course. She progressed from Literacy level 1 to level 2, then tackled Numeracy Level 1 and is now working on CLAIT level 2. She also became very interested in story writing and has entered a BBC competition to attend a Story Writing workshop.

A model of best practice

With its current award for being the Community Club of the year, it is clear that the range of programmes being run at The Study Support Centre together with the approaches taken, provide an excellent model for success.

The employment of highly skilled staff who understand the needs of the target group, the holistic approaches adopted, the learning environment and sensitive marketing in engaging hard to reach learners, enabling them to develop the skills and confidence to progress to employment, are the critical success factors which have laid the foundations for Albion's Study Centre's development and a model of excellence for other providers and employers to follow.