



Active for Employment: Enhancing employability through sport and
physical activity participation

Final Report

Prepared by

Dr Haydn Morgan, Dr Anthony Bush, Dr Harry Bowles
(University of Bath)

November 2022

Contact information:

Dr Haydn Morgan

Department for Health

University of Bath

Claverton Down

Bath

BA2 7AY

hjm23@bath.ac.uk

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Main Recommendations	5
Additional Recommendations for Sport-based Employability Interventions	6
1.0 Introduction	8
2.0 Policy Background	10
3.0 Sport and Employability - a Review of Academic Literature	14
4.0 Methods	17
5.0 Findings	20
5.1 Employment Challenges and the Impact of COVID-19	20
5.2 Enabling Employment via Sport-Based Interventions	33
Table 1: The extent to which survey respondents provide a particular employability activity	42
5.3 Skills and Capital	47
Table 2: The extent to which survey respondents seek to develop specific employability skills	51
6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations	57
Main Recommendations	57
Additional Recommendations for Sport-based Employability Interventions	59
7.0 Next Steps	61
8.0 References	62
Appendix 1: Key ALMPs announced in the Plan for Jobs	67
Appendix 2: List of interviewed organisations	68

Executive Summary

The intentional use of sport and physical activity as a conduit to achieving positive social change, commonly termed ‘sport for development’, has been widely implemented to tackle a number of health and societal inequalities. Using sport and physical activity as an instrument to engage young people and support their employability is a key objective within the sport for development sector. The value of sport and physical activity revolves around longstanding claims that participation can enable the development of a range of personal and social skills, such as teamwork, self-discipline, resilience, time management, perceived self-efficacy and self-esteem (Coalter et al., 2020), which are deemed fundamental to obtaining and sustaining employment.

Youth employability has been a staple concern of Government policy for several decades. While this complex policy area is influenced by a variety of longstanding issues and challenges, the global COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted employment, economic participation, education, and training across the UK, with the impact most acute for young people. For example, between March 2020 and March 2021, over 800,000 jobs were lost, with 54% of these young people (Office for National Statistics, April 2021). Overall, youth unemployment rose to 14.4% during 2020 (a 2.3% increase on the previous year) and the number of young people in employment fell to 51.9%, a decrease of 2.6% (Office for National Statistics, May 2021).

Recent Office for National Statistics data (October 2022) revealed that the UK labour market is showing signs of a recovery, with the current unemployment rate (3.5%) representing the lowest percentage for nearly five decades and job vacancies at record levels. However, economic inactivity continues to rise, with 629,000 people in the UK not currently seeking work, an increase of over 225,000 in the last year, of whom the highest proportion is those aged 16-24 (28%). However economic inactivity is on the rise, with the number of young people who are not seeking work estimated to be 457,000, an increase of 43,000 in the last year. In addition, the issue of underemployment remains problematic, which tends to be disproportionately high among those aged 16-24. Consequently, the long-term, delayed and indeed detrimental effects on young people’s confidence, motivation and preparedness for employment remains uncertain particularly for those facing additional barriers to entering the labour market.

However, engagement in sport for development programmes is not a panacea for addressing these employment challenges. Furthermore, sport is often not explicitly noted by Government as a key actor within policy responses to youth employment. Nevertheless, there is evidence to indicate that involvement in relevant interventions can contribute to employment policy solutions and enhance the employability of young people. There is also evidence that sport-based employability interventions can

support multiple returns on investment, both in terms of providing a cheaper alternative to many active labour market policies and as a mechanism to promote cost-savings.

By employing a mixed methods approach involving primary data collection from a questionnaire and interviews with key stakeholders within and outside of the Sport for Development Coalition network, this report presents evidence-based recommendations for future policy and practice on enhancing the employment and skill development outcomes that can be delivered through sport for development approaches. The report also highlights the potential of sport-based approaches to strengthen pathways into employment both ‘within’ the sport and physical activity sector, but also towards broader employment sectors. In addition, the report considers the wider impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, both on the sport for development sector in general, but also on how it may have affected employment inequalities across different communities and social groups. The report is intended to inform government policy approaches to sport for development and support the work of public bodies, funders, commissioners, policy makers, and providers of community-based programmes which seek to enhance the employability of young people from different communities and social groups.

The findings of the report indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the physical and mental health and wellbeing of young people, and in many cases, has impacted their confidence and motivation to engage in employment-focused activity. However, sport and physical activity continue to provide a number of clearly defined benefits to aid progress towards enhanced employability and employment destinations. Importantly the findings suggest that sport and physical activity interventions can be particularly effective in supporting individuals who are furthest from an employment destination or are not engaged in formal systems of Government support for employment. Furthermore, the report notes how sport for development organisations often provide a valuable complement to formal mechanisms of addressing (youth) unemployment and are frequently used as sites to deliver employment-focused initiatives or act as an alternative to Job Centres.

The report also highlights a number of key mechanisms that appear to be critical in the design of sport-based interventions which seek to enhance employability. Evidence indicates that interventions that are individualised towards participant aspirations, and which are developed to accentuate existing strengths, are most effective in progressing young people to employment destinations or further education and training. Moreover, while many sport for development interventions focus on developing a range of technical and transferable skills that are important to enhance employability, it would appear that those interventions which focus on the longer-term aspects of enabling *career readiness* (as well as job readiness) help to support more meaningful and sustainable work opportunities both in and through sport.

Employer networks were viewed as pivotal to enabling work opportunities for participants of sport-based employability interventions. However, while examples exist of strong employer engagement and networking, it seems that efforts within the sport for development sector to broaden and develop these networks are in their infancy or need further attention. In addition, employers often lack the competence and confidence to support young people with diverse needs, and this often impedes their readiness to facilitate opportunities into employment for participants of sport-based interventions. Finally, given the precarious and transitional nature of youth employment it is important that young people continue to receive support once they have entered the employment market. The report findings indicate that sport for development organisations are effective in providing ongoing mentoring to support protracted transitions into work, as well as manage periods of unemployment, to reduce the employment ‘cliff edge’ experienced by many individuals with limited experience in the employment market.

The report also acknowledges some key challenges to the on-going facilitation of sport-based employability interventions. Foremost is that the sport for development workforce is experiencing severe challenges in sustaining meaningful careers in the sector, which can be the result of zero hours contracts and/or sessional work. Work in the sector is often poorly or underpaid, with limited career progression opportunities, which leads to challenges in retaining talent. Given that mentors and leaders (e.g., coaches) of sport for development interventions are essential to engaging and offering direction for participants of such interventions, in particular those individuals furthest from the employment market, this is an important challenge to address. In addition, the impact of youth-focused, sport-based interventions is still too often measured by simplistic metrics (e.g., employment destination data) and hard progressions, which may encourage sport for development organisations to support only those most easily transitioned into employment destinations. Focusing on employability *and* employment outcomes would help to support those furthest from employment and tackle inequalities in most disadvantaged communities, enabling the sport for development sector to play a key role in the Levelling Up agenda.

Main Recommendations

1. The physical and mental wellbeing of participants should be an essential first step within a sport-based employability intervention and is a necessary component within the employability pathway. In addition, given the clear benefits of sport and physical activity on physical and mental wellbeing, relevant Government departments and agencies should consider how the benefits of sport and physical activity may be integrated into employment-based interventions.

2. Sport for development interventions often play a key role in enabling populations outside of formal education and training systems and those furthest away from an employment destination to access education, training and work experience opportunities. The sport for development sector should be supported to partner with relevant public and private funding bodies, and evidence how they contribute to enabling and maintaining engagement with formal education and training systems. The Government should engage directly with the sport for development sector to expand the use of sport and physical activity organisations as sites for engagement in work-related programmes.
3. Sport for development organisations should be supported by commissioners and funders to develop networks and connections with employers from a range of sectors and industries, both within and beyond sport, to facilitate potential pathways into employment, education and training for their beneficiaries. However, sport for development organisations should be supported by public and private sector funding to create tailored training and support opportunities to prepare employers for recruiting and working with their beneficiaries.
4. Investment into the career development of the sport for development workforce should be addressed. This could be achieved by identifying and developing opportunities to ring-fence core funding for sport for development organisations. Looking after and supporting the sport for development workforce, particularly those in ‘front-line’ programme delivery roles, is fundamental to the success and sustainability of the sector.
5. Measurement frameworks and methods which evidence the breadth of personal development that young people achieve through sport for development interventions need to be generated by commissioners, funders, project implementers and research partners. Any such frameworks should be able to measure the impact and added value of interventions that support young people who are furthest from employment destinations. Measurement frameworks which are generated by the sport for development sector need to be recognised and adopted by funders.

Additional Recommendations for Sport-based Employability Interventions

- Sport for development organisations who provide access to qualifications should be encouraged and supported to broaden the qualification offer to include a wider array of jobs *in* the sport and physical activity sector. They should also be encouraged and supported to provide access to qualifications that are transferable to other employment sectors.

- Broadening the focus of sport-based employability interventions to consider a wider array of physical activity pursuits (e.g., physical activity, fitness, dance, health related activities, ‘activities of daily living’, exergaming and e-sports) should be encouraged to appeal to a wider diversity of potential beneficiaries and respond to the shifting nature of youth physical culture.
- Sport for development organisations should be encouraged and supported to incorporate ongoing mentoring support for ‘graduates’ of their programmes as part of collaborative efforts with employers to mediate against the often cyclical nature of youth unemployment.
- Sport for development organisations should implement a ‘strengths-based’ and ‘person-centred’ approach to employability interventions, working *with* the young person to build foundational personal awareness, develop individual career aspirations, and tailored developmental activities. In addition, sport for development interventions should seek to facilitate the acquisition and accumulation of human, social and psychological capital, which are critical to enhanced employability.
- Innovative and more proactive approaches, which are less reliant on formal referrals, to identify and recruit young people to sport-based interventions are needed.

We invite policy-makers and practitioners to consider these recommendations, and we welcome the opportunity to work together with partners on how best to implement them in a meaningful and impactful way.

1.0 Introduction

This report presents the findings of an independent research project, conducted by the University of Bath, which sought to assess the employment challenges that have been created or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the contribution that the sport for development sector makes to enhancing employability and employment opportunities. The research engaged a mixed method approach, and the findings presented in this report are drawn from multiple perspectives on the connection between sport and employability from organisations who use sport intentionally and instrumentally to enhance employability, as well as organisations whose main focus is enhancing youth employability prospects and have engaged with sport-based activity within the programmes that they operate.

The primary purpose of the report is to present evidence-based recommendations for future policy and practice on enhancing the employment and skill development outcomes that can be delivered through sport for development approaches. However, the report also highlights the potential of sport-based interventions to strengthen pathways into employment both ‘within’ the sport and physical activity sector, but also towards broader employment sectors. In addition, the report considers the wider impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, both on the sport for development sector in general, but also on how it may have affected employment inequalities across different communities and social groups.

As an initial step in the research, and to position the contribution of sport on youth employment within the context of the UK political landscape, an extensive review of key Government policy related to youth employment was performed. The aim of this review was to map and cohere this contested policy area and identify potential avenues of opportunity for sport and physical activity stakeholders to contribute towards youth employment policy outcomes. In addition, a secondary data analysis was conducted of submissions received from the Sport for Development Coalition request for evidence on sport and employability. These submissions, provided by members of the Sport for Development Coalition network, were examined to offer a preliminary understanding of the role of sport-based interventions on supporting young people’s transitions into employment. Both the policy review and the analysis of member submissions were used to establish the foundations for the primary data methods upon which this report is based.

At this juncture, it is important to define the use of the term ‘sport’ within this report. The term ‘sport’ can be problematic in some contexts and there is a growing realisation across the sports industry as to how limiting the use of this singular term can be. Sport is a vague and imprecise noun (Andrews, 2008).

Sport is often defined in terms of team sports (e.g., football, rugby and cricket) or individual sports (e.g., boxing, BMX and tennis), and is usually refined by adding that sport is normally associated with being physical, requiring skill, involving competition, and that sport is played or performed according to set rules (Council of Europe European Sports Charter, 2001). This definition of sport often leads to entrenched attitudes about whether a particular activity is a sport or not and therefore systematically includes and excludes activities from being utilised in sport for development interventions. To alleviate the practical and conceptual weakness of the term, it seems prudent for the sport for development sector to embrace a more nuanced appreciation of sport as *physical culture* (Ingham, 1997; cf. Andrews, 2008; Bush et al., 2013). In doing so, it facilitates the mobilisation of the unrestricted dimensions of physicality under more conventional notions of sport. The dimensions of physicality are expanded—in addition to traditional notions of sport—to include, but not restricted to, physical activity, fitness, dance, health related activities, ‘activities of daily living’, exergaming and e-sports. Indeed, evolving the understanding of sport allows an articulation of physical activity being undertaken for myriad reasons in addition to the competitive domain, such as enjoyment, social activity, weight management, friendships, and developing self-esteem. It also recognises how the experience of sport can often be more ‘passive’ than ‘active’, through participation as a spectator, which may equally be used for wider instrumental purposes, such as a topic of discussion to build rapport with disenfranchised young people or within reminiscence projects with older populations. However, for the purposes of the report, reference to the term ‘sport’ should be viewed as referring to an activity which involves any degree of physicality undertaken for any reason.

2.0 Policy Background

The global COVID-19 pandemic, and ensuing national cost of living crisis, has had a profound impact across the United Kingdom and created a number of health, wellbeing, and economic challenges which have exacerbated many deep-rooted inequalities. The effect of the pandemic on employment, economic participation, education, and training across the UK was substantial, particularly for young people. Between March 2020 and March 2021, over 800,000 jobs were lost, with 54% of these young people (Office for National Statistics, April 2021). Overall, youth unemployment rose to 14.4% during 2020 (a 2.3% increase on the previous year) and the number of young people in employment fell to 51.9%, a decrease of 2.6% (Office for National Statistics, May 2021). Long-term unemployment also increased during this period with the number of young people out of work for six months or more rising by 50%, with 48% of young people who were classified as ‘not in employment, education or training’ (NEET) reporting that they were unable to see an end to their unemployment (Youth Employment UK, 2021).

Recent Office for National Statistics data (October 2022) revealed that the UK labour market is showing signs of a recovery, with the current unemployment rate (3.5%) representing the lowest percentage for nearly five decades and job vacancies at record levels. However, economic inactivity continues to rise, with 629,000 people in the UK not currently seeking work, an increase of over 225,000 in the last year, of whom the highest proportion is those aged 16-24 (28%). In addition, the issue of underemployment¹ remains problematic, with 7% of employed people aged 16-64 years claiming to be underemployed (ONS, May 2022). While underemployment data is not disaggregated by age, assumptions about the employment sectors that young people tend to enter would indicate that underemployment is disproportionately high among those aged 16-24 (Catch 22, 2022). Consequently, the long-term, delayed and indeed detrimental effects on young people’s confidence, motivation and preparedness for employment remains uncertain particularly for those facing additional barriers to entering the labour market. For example, the percentage of 16 to 24-year-olds who are unemployed for 12 months or more remains elevated above pre-pandemic levels suggesting the effects of the pandemic are felt worse by those furthest from employment.

¹ We refer to underemployment as the percentage of employed people who are either i) looking for an additional job, or ii) are looking for a new job with longer hours to replace their current (main) job, or iii) want to work longer hours in their current job (at their basic rate of pay).

Another factor, which may yet to be fully realised in relation to its impact on the labour market, is the current cost of living crisis. While figures from 2020 revealed that the percentage of working-age adults in working families who are living in poverty had risen to 68%, the highest level since records began (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2022), it is likely that this figure will continue to rise, especially as 91% of adults in Great Britain reported an increase in their cost of living between June and July 2022 (ONS, 2022). In this context, understanding how sport-based employability interventions can help to facilitate economic recovery and improve employment and skill development outcomes for young people is of critical importance. Furthermore, this understanding may also provide key direction in demonstrating how sport-based interventions may offer a collective impact against a series of specific health and societal outcomes to capitalise on the potential multiple returns on investment provided by sport for development organisations.

In terms of tangible policy and practice interventions, a variety of approaches, over a period of nearly three decades, have attempted to address the issue of unemployment in young people (Maguire & Keep, 2021; House of Lords, 2021). Traditionally, interventions to address youth employability have centred on populations classified as NEET². A recent House of Lords report *Skills for Every Young Person* (House of Lords, 2021) highlighted several longstanding drivers of youth unemployment. Among these, specific skills gaps in young people were highlighted, whether in relation to the proportion of young people possessing low skill levels, or the prevalence of skills shortages in particular industries (with the digital and green economies being noted). The report also indicated that youth unemployment has been influenced by poor careers education provision and a lack of work experience and apprenticeship opportunities. At a policy level, a lack of Government department co-ordination and responsibility for youth employment has contributed to youth unemployment, but problems in identifying and tackling disadvantage and inequality, be this geographical, socio-economic, and/or demographic, was also cited as a major issue (House of Lords, 2021). These drivers have been further exacerbated in the last decade, where global economic conditions, austerity policies, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, have meant that youth transitions into employment have become increasingly complex, conditional, and risky, where the task of entering and sustaining involvement in the labour market is often precarious and discontinuous (Purcell et al., 2017).

Within the UK context, research has noted how the devolved nature of youth employment policy means there is no UK-wide NEET policy or strategy. Further issues are created through a disparity of provision

² For the purposes of this report, we draw upon the European Commission (2013) definition of NEET, which refers to “young people aged 18-24 who have only lower secondary education or less and are no longer in education or training” (p.8).

across the four UK nations, resulting in reduced and uneven interventions available to support young people (Maguire & Keep, 2021). The removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance in England, as opposed to its retention in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, is one example. Moreover, while devolution has the benefit of enabling policy solutions that are better aligned to local needs, the propensity for employment policy to be created in isolation has led to limited knowledge and policy exchange. A further political issue, which is yet to be fully understood, is the impact of Brexit on youth employability and the NEET agenda. While estimates and analyses of the economic impact of Brexit are varied, one indisputable fact is that a disproportionate number of ‘NEET’-focused interventions were underpinned by EU funding (Maguire & Keep, 2021), which presents a further policy-related challenge and may accentuate the employment issues faced by young people.

Interventions to address youth unemployment broadly fall into two categories - ‘preventative’ and ‘reintegration’ strategies (Maguire, 2021; Strathdee, 2013). Preventative strategies typically employ ‘early warning systems’ using school-based data (e.g., levels of attendance and fluctuations in academic performance) to identify young people ‘at risk’ of educational drop-out, whereas reintegration strategies target those who have already dropped out of the education and training system (Maguire, 2021; Morgan & Bush, 2016). Re-integration strategies often incorporate specific active labour market policies (ALMPs) to stimulate the supply and demand for labour. Generally, five types of ALMPs are integrated in employment policy interventions – i) job-search assistance; ii) targeted training programmes; iii) subsidised employment; iv) direct job creation and public employment programmes; and v) start-up subsidies, self-employment assistance and support. While these interventions are often incentivised and act as motivational strategy to both NEETs and potential employers (Seddon et al., 2013; Spaaij et al., 2013; Strathdee, 2013), they also tend to advantage young people who are ‘work ready’, thereby offering a significant barrier to ‘under-represented’ or ‘disengaged’ groups of young people (Maguire, 2021).

Nevertheless, these five ALMPs are evident within policy initiatives devised by the UK Government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of these, the Plan for Jobs, announced by the UK Government in July 2020, was a vanguard policy which provided £30bn in funding for a variety of schemes designed to support, protect, and create jobs in the wake of the pandemic (see Appendix 1). Several of the initiatives contained within the Plan for Jobs were focused upon young people and recognised that this sector of the population had been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. These initiatives not only sought to enhance employability prospects in the short-term, but also identified the longstanding implications that unemployment can have on future jobs and wages (Plan for Jobs, 2021).

Uppermost within these initiatives was the Kickstart scheme which provided £2bn to deliver subsidised employment and work experience placements for young people claiming Universal Credit. Kickstart promised at least 25 hours a week of work for six months, enabling employers to take on a young person who otherwise might not have accessed work or employment support (House of Lords, 2021). Also contained within the Plan for Jobs is the Youth Offer, a five-year, multi-element programme targeted at 18 to 24-year-olds who are claiming Universal Credit in the Intensive Work Search group. The Youth Offer comprises three components: i) a Youth Employment Programme, which offers 13 weeks of intensive support to help new claimants into suitable opportunities; ii) the provision of a number of Youth Hubs which incorporate a variety of partners, including colleges, charities, training providers and local councils, to enable young people to access a range of services in one location; and iii) the provision of Youth Employability Coaches who provide flexible support for young people with significant or complex needs and barriers to help them move into employment.

As an additional commitment to the employment challenges created by the pandemic, in September 2021 the UK Government announced the introduction of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, which offered people who have not yet attained a recognised Level 3 qualification the opportunity to study for a fully-funded course in a skills shortage area – in particular in the construction, healthcare and digital sectors. The House of Lords Youth Employment Committee welcomed the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, but noted in *Skills for Every Young Person* (House of Lords, 2021) that the guarantee needed to be expanded to enable young people without the prerequisites to access a Level 3 qualification to undertake qualifications below Level 3, and widened to include a similar guarantee for those people who already possess a Level 3 qualification but wish to re/upskill in order to take account of the changing needs of the economy. Furthermore, as the Lifetime Skills Guarantee is only available in England, it reinforces longstanding issues surrounding the absence of a UK-wide youth employment strategy.

While sport is often not explicitly noted by Government as a key actor within policy responses to youth employment challenges, there is clear potential for sport for development organisations that focus upon broader health and social challenges to contribute to employment policy solutions. There is also scope for sport for development organisations to reinforce the multiple returns on investment that they can offer, both in terms of providing a cheaper alternative to many ALMPs and as a mechanism to promote cost-savings. Aligned with the social integrationist discourse of exclusion, which prioritises paid employment as the key to social inclusion (Levitas, 2005), young people who acquire employment via participation in a sport-based interventions become active contributors to society through taxation and economic productivity as they transition from ‘NEET’ to employment destinations.

3.0 Sport and Employability - a Review of Academic Literature

Peer-reviewed research studies which have examined the instrumental role of sport and physical activity in contributing to broader social outcomes have frequently highlighted the potential for sport-based interventions to enhance employability, most prominently through the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes which may provide opportunities in the employment market (Spaaij et al. 2013; Sherry et al. 2015; Morgan 2018; Morgan et al. 2020; Coalter et al., 2020; Theeboom et al., 2017; Hermens et al., 2017). However, in order to build a more robust evidence-base regarding the contribution that sport and physical activity make to enhancing employability and employment opportunities, it is important to understand more about the specific mechanisms that act as critical success factors within sport-based interventions (Theeboom et al., 2017).

The findings of an EU-funded study on the contribution of sport to the employability of young people (see Theeboom et al., 2017; Coalter et al., 2020) presented a series of mechanisms specific to the ‘sport for employability’ domain. The first of these is ensuring that **sport and physical activity are used as a method to attract targeted participants** to related programmes and employed as a means to **establish meaningful relationships between programme providers and beneficiaries**. Academic research reinforces how sport can act as a ‘hook’ for engagement in interventions designed to support social outcomes (Collins & Kay, 2014; Coalter, 2013; Morgan & Costas Batlle, 2020; Morgan et al., 2020), particularly when participants arrive at the programme in possession of a level of intrinsic motivation and some base competencies (Spaaij et al., 2013). Furthermore, studies reveal how sport-based interventions can be effective in constructing interpersonal relationships between programme participants and delivery providers that are meaningful and enable participants to feel valued (Morgan & Parker, 2021; Morgan & Parker, 2017; Coalter, 2013; Spaaij & Jeanes, 2013).

The importance of meaningful and supportive relationships features within the second key mechanism of sport and employability programmes (Theeboom et al., 2017). More specifically, the **social climate** that is facilitated by programme staff is critical to programme success. Research highlights how an appropriate social climate serves to enable a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment for the development of participants, where participants are encouraged to talk to staff in an open environment about their concerns, aspirations, and personal development (Spaaij & Jeanes, 2013; Coalter et al., 2020; Morgan & Parker, 2022). Building upon this mechanism, the third set of mechanisms highlight an **individualised approach** to sport and employability programmes. Consequently, there is a necessity to develop tailored, bespoke sport-based interventions (rather than generic, ‘one size fits all’ interventions) that take account of participant aspirations and developmental needs (Theeboom et al., 2017). This

enables the production of individual learning plans which reflect the circumstances, prior experience and motives of the beneficiary to provide structure and focus on their employability and employment journey. Research confirms the need to obtain a stronger appreciation of individual aspirations as part of developmental approaches (Spaaij & Jeanes, 2013; Nols et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2021) and this should be at the heart of employability programmes which utilise sport and physical activity.

For the fourth mechanism, attention turns to **tangible activities that support employability**. Among these are opportunities to engage in workshops in which a range of social and employability skills are introduced and discussed, access to validated qualifications which provide specific skills to enhance employability, and openings to gain valuable workplace experience (Theeboom et al., 2017; Spaaij & Jeanes, 2013; Morgan & Parker, 2021). With workshops, the focus is often on developing ‘soft skills’, such as personal responsibility, teamworking, time management, conflict management, communication skills etc., where the sport aspect of employability programmes is used to support and reinforce the issues addressed and skills acquired (Coalter et al., 2020). However, as Coalter et al. (2020) note, it is important that sport-based interventions ‘go beyond’ the development of soft/employability skills and prepare participants to negotiate and enter the employment market by offering training and guidance in interview technique, CV writing, and assistance in job searching.

Finally, and critically, sport for employability interventions need to incorporate **ongoing support and mentoring** for participants who have progressed into employment destinations. Research indicates this will increase graduates’ chances for sustained employment (Theeboom et al., 2017), and avoid them encountering the many challenges that are presented if employment ceases. Furthermore, research suggests it is equally crucial that programme providers retain contact with those graduates who remain unemployed after completion of their programme, and continue to offer additional, individualised employability support beyond the confines of the sport-based programme (Coalter et al., 2020).

While these mechanisms are helpful in providing a template to evidence claims about the ‘power of sport’ to address issues like youth employability, from a theoretical angle, a more nuanced appreciation of what sport-based interventions can develop (and how) are critical to building robust evidence to highlight the contribution that sport and physical activity interventions can make to employment and skills development within young people (see Bailey, 2005; Morgan & Parker, 2017). Specifically, research has demonstrated how participation in sport and physical activity has the potential to enable the acquisition and accumulation of various forms of **capital** that can be exchanged to enable access into the employment market (Morgan & Parker, 2021). Drawing parallels with the intentions and logic

of the UK Government's *Levelling Up* agenda, academic literature points to three forms of capital – human, social and psychological – which are directly connected with enhancing employment prospects, and which can be acquired and accumulated through participation in sport. In the case of human capital, research has explored how participation in sport and physical activity might unlock the economic potential of young people through the acquisition of specific knowledge, skills and attitudes (Hermens et al., 2017). More specifically, there is evidence to suggest that engagement in sport can develop human capital by acting as a conduit to formal education and training, and the pursuit of recognised academic or vocational qualifications (Parker et al., 2018; Morgan & Parker, 2021). Similarly social capital, or the extent of an individual's social network (Hermens et al., 2017) may be enhanced through sport given its universal appeal to bring people together from across different social strata (Collins & Kay, 2014). Research has also observed the potential for sport-based interventions to facilitate connections which lead to social mobility, in particular to connect young people with potential employers (Morgan et al., 2020). Finally, and as noted, academic studies have explored the extent to which 'softer skills' might be acquired or developed through sport (Morgan, 2018). Of these, research indicates the acquisition and consolidation of psychological capital – consisting of self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience – is attainable through non-formal educational pathways including those allied to sport and physical activity (Brown et al., 2011; Morgan, 2018; Morgan et al., 2019).

While the evidence would indicate that sport-based interventions can be a fertile environment for fostering positive developmental outcomes, one of the most significant challenges in building the evidence-base is demonstrating the extent to which skills, attributes, and personal qualities developed through sport for employability interventions transfer to other contexts. For critics of sport's transformative potential, **transferability** represents a major point of contention, where anecdotal evidence regarding the 'power of sport' often provides cliched responses from those who have benefited from their sporting participation. Surprisingly, existing academic research on this phenomenon is scarce, however, there is some indication that skills and values acquired through sport can foster a wealth of cognitive, emotional or social skills (see Ekholm, 2013; Turnnidge et al., 2014).

4.0 Methods

The research adopted a mixed-methods approach combining multiple qualitative and quantitative forms of inquiry to generate breadth and depth of understating of the complex connection between participation in sport-based interventions and enhanced youth employability (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Selected methods were utilised concurrently to allow comparison and triangulation of emerging research findings (Creswell, 2014).

Primary research data was collected through 18 semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives from a variety of sport for development and non-sport organisations working in the youth employability sector (see Appendix 2). Interview participants were sampled purposefully from across the Sport for Development Coalition network to gain a diversity of perspectives and ‘information rich’ cases (Patton, 2015). Interviewees were recruited from multiple organisations and geographic locations and consisted of people working in both ‘strategic’ and ‘frontline’ roles. One additional interview was conducted with two members of the Sport for Development Coalition Youth Advisory Group. All interviews were conducted online and lasted between 36 and 81 minutes in length (mean 50 minutes).

To support the interview process, a semi-structured interview guide was devised to direct dialogue and allow sufficient flexibility for salient discussion topics to emerge during each interview (Kvale, 2007). The interview guide contained a series of open-ended questions thematically organised to explore in detail: i) the unique contribution of sport to enhance employability in marginalised youth compared to other non-formal education programmes; ii) how sport-based projects might build qualities and attributes that are pivotal to enhanced employability; iii) particular issues in transference between the skills developed through sport-based interventions and those required for employment both ‘in’ sport and within broader sectors/industries; and iv) the challenges experienced by young people as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. An adjusted interview guide was used for the interview with members of the Youth Advisory Group to tailor the conversation to a ‘youth perspective’ and capture the retrospective views and experiences of two former project recipients.

To ensure the accuracy of interview data, interviews were audio-recorded using a digital Dictaphone and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription provider. An extensive set of ‘fieldnotes’ containing key discussion points and analytical memos captured during each interview provided a supplement to the qualitative dataset and its subsequent analysis. All interview transcripts were

reviewed by the research team and analysed according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage approach to thematic analysis.

In order to capture the views of a wider set of stakeholders, an online questionnaire was distributed to organisations within and outside the Sport for Development Coalition network. A total of 70 respondents completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised of both quantitative and qualitative elements. The qualitative element asked respondents to describe their organisation's target beneficiary groups and explain how beneficiaries are typically recruited onto their programme(s), while the quantitative component consisted of a further five questions which were largely adopted from two previously validated surveys – the Employability Opportunity Questionnaire and the Employability Efficacy Questionnaire (see Orji, 2013). The first question asked respondents to self-categorise their organisation as either sport-based or non-sport-based and whether their organisation had an interest in youth employability or not. Of the 70 responses to the questionnaire, 54 were received from sport-based organisations with an interest in youth employability, 13 from non-sport organisations with an interest in youth employability, two from sport-based organisations with no interest in youth employability, and one from a non-sport organisation with no interest in youth employability.

The remaining four questions were designed using a five-point Likert-type scale to probe: i) the extent to which organisations seek to develop particular employability skills; ii) the range of employability activities available to programme beneficiaries; iii) perceptions of the extent to which participation in sport can develop employability skills; and iv) the perceived effectiveness of sport-based interventions in enhancing employability compared to other developmental activities. Each of these questions contained a series of related items based on a review of sport and employability literature. Methods sensitive to the ordinal and discrete nature of the questionnaire data were deployed to analyse the Likert scale responses.

In addition to these primary data collection methods, the research team (in conjunction with the Sport for Development Coalition) facilitated a series of stakeholder engagement activities to corroborate the findings of the research and refine draft recommendations. These stakeholder activities included consultations with the Coalition's Working and Advisory Groups and a roundtable discussion with input from policy and practice experts.

Prior to the commencement of the research, a full ethical review of the study's research design was obtained by the University of Bath's Research Ethics Committee to ensure the ethical integrity and rigour of the project. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary. All data featured in this report has been anonymised to respect the privacy of individual contributors.

5.0 Findings

5.1 Employment Challenges and the Impact of COVID-19

While issues of youth unemployment have existed for several decades, the circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the employment challenges faced by all young people. Uppermost the data revealed that the pandemic, and in particular restrictions on social connectivity and the necessity for education and training to be conducted ‘online’, caused **significant impacts on mental health**. Respondents reported a significant increase in mental health concerns, such as a lack of motivation to work and/or study and the loss of social structures. Echoing many similar testimonies, Sports Leaders explained:

... the pandemic has definitely had an effect on the social value of young people. Just from the point of view that it took everything they knew from the community they lived in, the families that they lived with, and actually made it so that it was comfortable to be more of a hermit ... [A] lot of young people did go into the situation where [there was] quite a lot of isolation, and I believe that we’ve not seen the full effects yet.

Consequently, some respondents believed that **rebuilding the mental health of young people is essential in the short term** and should supersede attempts to focus purely on enhancing employability through sport. For example, Spiral explained how addressing the trauma brought about by the pandemic and re-building the foundations of mental health in the young people they worked with was central to their ‘post-pandemic’ operations:

... mental health is a massive problem for everyone, especially these young people, like the trauma that they’ve experienced to expect them to go to work is like bonkers. Some of my young people in work has (sic) lost eight friends - that is like so mind-blowing. It’s impressive that they get up out of bed at all and that they’re still with us. So now we’re trying to invest in getting therapeutic support for young people...

Clearly sport and physical activity can have a significant role in addressing spiralling mental health concerns and several organisations outlined how they were using sport and physical activity instrumentally for this purpose. For instance, the Association of Colleges provided a wealth of examples of sport and physical activity projects that were being initiated across the network of Further Education (FE) colleges in the UK:

there's an absolute mental health crisis within FE, seeing more and more students having mental health issues and challenges around that. Sport across the board is a tool that lots and lots of colleges are using as a way of early intervention and prevention and some colleges have adopted a social prescribing model where students are referred on to sport or physical activity programmes or offers as a way of supporting their mental health...

Support for sport and physical activity interventions that helped to re-build mental health was also received from 'outside' the sport for development sector. For example, the Berkeley Foundation highlighted how **improving physical and mental health was pivotal when beginning the 'journey' to employment** and was a clear attraction for their support of sport-based interventions. They explained:

... getting young people back into sport and getting them active is having massive impacts as well. So, you know, young people giving up smoking or drug use was reducing or, you know, just fitness levels increasing ... But actually, you know, those sorts of lifestyle improvements also help if somebody is trying to move forwards with their lives and get into work.

Action: Rebuilding or supporting mental health through sport and physical activity is an essential component of related employability interventions.

Nevertheless, while there was a view that the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively affected the majority of young people, it was those **individuals who faced significant employment inequalities prior to the pandemic who had been further disadvantaged by it**. The Positive Youth Foundation spoke of many young people who they had engaged whose 'distance' to employment had been lengthened by being outside of formal education and training or were experiencing unemployment when COVID-19 struck. They explained:

... the ones that really need it are the ones that won't go out the house, that won't travel to you. That's been made worse by the pandemic as well because you've got a lot of people with social anxieties out there, additional mental health needs and long-term unemployed and those being 12 months plus unemployed. While the pandemic was about for two years it's almost that most people that weren't employed through that period are automatically long-term unemployed and have had their world turned upside down and additional issues because of what the pandemic has presented to them.

Other respondents outlined how the COVID-19 pandemic had created further challenges, which only served to challenge efforts to enhance employability or support progressions into work. For example, the EFL Trust provided an insight into the work-related challenges that many of their beneficiaries faced:

Poor home environment, in terms of worklessness ... not being surrounded by people who have a routine of work. Maybe being the only one in the house having to get up and go to work at 9 o'clock. All of those things can be a real barrier ... A big issue for a lot of our participants over the last 12 months has been living arrangements. A significant number would be living in supported housing arrangements, hostels, sofa-surfing, so on the cusp of homelessness.

Such testimonies highlighted how **many young people had (willingly or otherwise) disengaged with formal systems which supported them into employment**. However, there was again evidence to suggest that Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations could be effective in supporting individuals who had become distanced from formal employment systems and mechanisms. One such example came from VIY, an organisation which offers short-term work experience opportunities within construction and refurbishment projects in community sports clubs for young people classified as NEET. They disclosed:

... by the nature of their backgrounds, they're not ready to just go straight into a job ... so I think we sort of recognise that there's quite a divide between trying to get somebody who's NEET into employment off the back of a three or four-day experience of working with us. So, I think [we've] recognised that there's a bit of a bridge that needs to be built between being on a VIY project to being employment ready.

Other respondents extended the metaphor of 'bridge building' by outlining how **sport-based interventions had strong potential to reconnect these individuals with formal systems** and support them in navigating the often unwelcoming employment landscape they encountered. For example, when speaking about one of the organisations that they funded, the Berkeley Foundation revealed:

I think that quite an important part of [sport and physical activity] is helping young people to navigate those systems, which can be not the most welcoming or easiest to navigate. I think the Change Foundation linked up with one of our other partners and did some training with the young people around like how to navigate financial systems. They do things like helping young people to get bank accounts when they don't have bank accounts. You know, they're often not young people who are engaging with the Job Centre. I mean certainly, to be brutally honest,

they [programme participants] wouldn't be engaging with the Job Centre before they come onto the programme.

Testimony from the Change Foundation indicated specifically that (re)building trust and reconnection with formal systems was a process involving a complex series of 'investments'. While these 'investments' will be highlighted later in this report, it is sufficient to say at this juncture that sport and physical activity could help to facilitate a gradual reintegration with formal systems:

... the 'system' has failed a lot of these young people. We don't want to put them [straight] back in the system. We want to get them ready, for themselves first, get them ready for their community second, and get them ready to join the system third. And it works in that way.

Not surprisingly, as many sport for development organisations had been instrumental in reconnecting young people with formal systems, there were several examples provided in the data of these organisations continuing to support these individuals within and through them. Typically, this support consisted of access to Government-supported initiatives for employment. For some organisations, supporting young people through recognised and intentional active labour market policies (ALMPs) and 'vanguard' initiatives provided a key source of funding. Importantly data revealed how sport for development organisations were able to offer a broader range of support to young people who engaged with these initiatives when compared to more generic providers of employment-focussed training. For example, Sport4Life regularly supported young people who were engaged in variants of the 'welfare to work' programme. However, they believed their sport-based provision was more effective in addressing some of the problems associated with such initiatives, in particular, the often transactional nature of these 'contracts' and the challenges of enabling longer term and sustainable work opportunities. They revealed:

I think sport is a massive enabler ... it's a universal language that loads of young people speak. It is a bit of a USP compared to training providers. They're trying to churn out young people, get them into qualifications, draw down funding on 'welfare to work' contracts.

However, despite the clear potential for sport for development organisations to provide effective support within Government initiatives and programmes, several respondents expressed a sense of frustration that they were unable to engage with them more fully. A range of barriers were cited which impacted on opportunities to provide more extensive support, and, consequently, access-related funding. For example, StreetGames reflected:

.... Government funding is incredibly demanding and complex and not designed to help niche specialist providers, which is a shame, because quite often our experience, both of our own delivery but of those we've worked with in the past, is smaller providers are sometimes just better [at supporting young people].

A case in point, which some respondents reflected upon, was the recent Kickstart programme which provided subsidised employment and work experience placements for young people claiming Universal Credit. Again, issues concerning the criteria to engage with Kickstart acted as a clear barrier to engaging with this initiative. These included the initial stipulation for a potential employer to have to create a minimum of 30 job placements, which proved problematic for most sport for development organisations, and the fact that Kickstart only supported those on Universal Credit. The Lord's Taverners provided this reflection:

... the one experience that we did have was through the Kickstart Government scheme. We found that the criteria set out for that was actually really limiting for the young people that we worked with. For example, I think the criteria is that they have to be on Universal Credit. We were working with groups of Afghan refugees that we thought, it would be great to put these guys on something like that and help them take steps. But actually, there's no way that they will be claiming Universal Credit. I think like, yes, I can understand why there's criteria within that, but I think it is limiting people that are really going to benefit from that [initiative].

However, for some of the larger organisations that were interviewed, Kickstart provided an exciting opportunity to enhance employability and support employment into the sport sector, and that its discontinuation would likely be missed. For example, the EFL Trust reflected:

Kickstart. Yes, it is 'here today, gone tomorrow'. But we are collecting our stats on Kickstart, and we're at something like over 80% of our young people that have done a Kickstart placement have then moved into a positive destination [into education, further training, or employment] ... So really it has been a positive scheme for those young people that have taken up some of the EFL opportunities that were placed out there ... We've always got an ambition to get a programme where all 72 [member clubs] come in, and it's not always feasible. So, it was good in that regard.

This example, and others like it, reinforce the **clear potential that sport for development organisations hold in complementing efforts by Government to enhance employability** and

pathways into work. Respondents offered a wealth of other examples to highlight how sport can sustain Government ALMPs. In some cases, the support that could be offered was formal in nature, where the sport for development organisation acted as an identified and trusted partner in supporting Government employment schemes. For example, the EFL Trust explained how they supported local Job Centre provision and that several member clubs hosted Youth Hubs across England:

... some of [our clubs] had never been in their local Job Centre because they don't necessarily do employability programmes. [But now] we've got a lot of our football clubs that offer the Youth Hubs ... that were launched to tackle youth unemployment as a result of the pandemic. So Rotherham United is a youth hub; they have the DWP work coaches based in Rotherham United, and the young people go there, rather than the local DWP office.

Similarly Sport4Life explained how they had been active partners in supporting caseloads in local Job Centres:

What we know is, when we [consulted] our young people, they wanted one person and one contact to support them. They really felt that they were pulled from pillar to post; different training providers, job centres, job coaches, different people ... We have key relationships with different job centres across the region, and actually a lot of our mentors ... often they might spend an entire day based at a job centre. So, there's that relationship with them, they know what we do. It's kind of a win-win. They've got to get their young people off their caseloads, and we can support by taking them onto our caseloads.

In other cases, VCSE organisations offered more informal support and provided an alternative or complementary service to formal employment mechanisms, like Job Centres. Several organisations spoke of young people's reluctance to engage with these formal mechanisms, and in themselves became quasi-Job Centres or 'one-stop shops' for employability concerns. For example, Spiral explained:

I mean the Job Centre, those guys have got a hard job, haven't they? There's such ridiculous caseloads, you get 10 minutes with a young person to check how many jobs they've applied for, it's like that's not going to do the job. But that's the resources that they have to do it. So, we invest in them long term ... and have the whole team up there to support these young people.

Action: Sport for development organisations should advocate the important role that sport and physical activity can play in (re)engaging individuals who (for multiple reasons) have disengaged

with, or are excluded from, formal systems by offering education, training, and work experience opportunities.

A further, and important, employment challenge identified by the research is the **significant number of issues which are impacting negatively on the workforce of sport for development and VCSE organisations**. Indeed insight produced by the Chartered Institute of Management of Sport and Physical Activity (November, 2020) showed that a fifth of the workforce they surveyed over the pandemic period had to find alternative work to replace or supplement their current job, while just 12% felt their future income was fully sustainable. These effects were acutely felt by young people, with over 30% of the 570,000 people estimated to be working within the sport and physical activity sector being aged between 16 and 24 years of age (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (January 2021).

Respondents highlighted a variety of workforce issues that illustrated the precarity of employment in the sport for development sector. Issues included concerns over poor/low pay, the prevalence of part-time or sessional contracts, increased employee burnout, and limited progression opportunities. Several respondents revealed that challenges in obtaining core funding for their organisations had exacerbated these workforce issues and had forced them to operate within a short-term, project-based framework. Other respondents reflected on the significant challenges of recruiting staff to their sport-based interventions, indicating that the specific skill-set required to implement effective employment-focused interventions was often difficult to identify in a solitary person. Encapsulating these workforce issues, the Lord's Taverners revealed:

We're limited by the salary scale we can offer up to those [coaching/mentoring] roles and often ... people get to a point where they can then go onto other things and progress a little bit. So that retainment of coaches is a real hard one for us ... Actually, they're difficult roles to recruit for, the fact that they are the sort of coach, come mentor, come project manager, so a lot of skill sets. It's very rare that we find someone with all the skill sets, it's usually we have to just leave it and say, they're really strong in this [one] area, and we have to work with them in this [other] area.

To address some of the challenges related to staff recruitment, respondents agreed that there is a need to re-frame the narrative about what employment in the sport industry entailed to draw new talent into the sector. Several respondents revealed that stereotypical perspectives of work in the sport sector still prevailed, with the Association of Colleges explaining:

I don't think it's widely understood around the range of opportunities to work in the sports sector. I think young people don't understand it, I certainly don't think parents understand it. I think there is still that snobbery around, 'you're going to study sport? You'll be putting cones out on a Saturday morning or sat in a chair watching people swimming' ...

Furthermore, evidence outlined how the need to alter the narrative about employment in sport was also critical at a policy level, with the sport sector needing to do more to counter these stereotypes in the eyes of Government and convince Treasury that sport is a sector that requires appropriate investment and training opportunities. The Association of Colleges continued:

One thing though that I think is totally overlooked is sport as a professional sector for employment ... [for example] we've not got a T Level. It's not held in the same esteem as engineering you know, STEM subjects and its very rarely referenced as a growth area or an investment area, jobs in sport are not particularly well paid so you know it's not always valued by the Treasury as a sector to drive forward and drive employment. I think there's still a lot that we need to do around recognition of what the sport sector can do for other areas of Government around health, active travel, education, you know prisons, all of those things...

The need to support and invest in the workforce of sport for development and VCSE organisations was a recurring theme, in particular as it is often the interpersonal relationships that are built between staff associated with sport-based interventions and their beneficiaries which enables the transformative potential of sport and physical activity to be realised. Reflecting the majority view, the Bath Rugby Foundation explained:

Often the statement in this industry is if we put the young people at the centre of everything it will be fine. Well actually it won't, because if your staff are completely stressed out, all having mental health issues and you're not treating each other with the respect you need to treat the young people with, it doesn't matter how many times you put the young people at the centre of everything, you're going to carry those problems into those conversations.

The research revealed that many of the organisations which engaged with the study are alert to these workforce challenges and have recognised this within their own structures and operations. There were also emerging examples of specific initiatives being implemented which were designed to support and progress the personal and professional development of employees. Most of these focused on dedicated

personal development planning activities and identifying avenues for staff to acquire higher level qualifications. As one example, the EFL Trust indicated:

100%, probably the biggest anxiety of our network is staff turnover. The 'Big Resign', I think they were calling it after Covid. I'm not sure it's quite come to fruition fully yet, but I know it's the biggest headache [for us] ... People have had a lot of time over the last two years to think about what they actually want to be doing. Looking at their finances, and might see better opportunities if they go to work in a school, or if they go to work in Local Government or private sector. So we're actually looking at how we support the network of CCOs [Club Community Organisations] through workforce development, whether it's high-level apprenticeships to try and get really good quality workforce development programmes in place so that people are on a kind of developmental journey and are more likely to be retained because they can see a career.

In other cases, investment took on an entirely more thorough process, which recognised the specific challenges encountered by front-line delivery staff in the sport for development sector. The Change Foundation provided one such example:

... when you design an employability programme, you need to take care of the cycle of the life of a coach in that... So what we do is two things really. We put a personal development plan [in place] for each individual. But we [also] have a reflective practice facilitator, that's independent from [Change Foundation]. It's kind of like a case offload space really, for that individual ... we kind of have more formal structures of looking after individuals' well-being really. Just ensuring that they've [staff] got a wellbeing space that they can use, they've got a professional development plan that they have, and they have a case offload space, because it does get too much, especially in the height of delivery ... So there's a number of things that we put into it, and actually there's less staff turnover which is awesome.

Action: Investment into the career development of the sport for development workforce should be addressed, and opportunities to secure core funding for sport for development organisations need to be explored.

A final challenge, which many in the sport for development sector identified, was the constant necessity to measure and evidence the impact of how their work enabled employment outcomes in beneficiaries. While all accepted that this was an important and, indeed, essential task, the consensus was that the

overemphasis on the collection and presentation of quantitative metrics as indicators of the impact of sport-based interventions on employability was restrictive and did not adequately capture the full extent of their work. Respondents revealed that quantifying ‘hard progressions’ (i.e. the number of beneficiaries moving into identifiable employment, education or training destinations) was most focused upon and, indeed, was the metric which funders most valued to demonstrate impact. While all organisations who were interviewed were mindful of the need to gather and disseminate their organisational data in respect of ‘hard progressions’, there was a consensus that merely concentrating on and reporting progression data provided a limited picture of the impact of sport-based interventions on young people’s employability. Mirroring the evaluation practices found in other sectors and responding to the preferences of funders, respondents disclosed that the preoccupation with quantitative outcomes rather constrained the focus of their work and often meant that examining the process of supporting young people to enhance their employability was largely lost. Capturing this issue most bluntly, Dallaglio Rugby Works explained:

We’ve become so obsessed with impact measures that showed our performance, that we actually continually weigh the pig and forget to feed it.

The implications of this restrictive, quantitatively-oriented approach to evaluation and measuring impact was highlighted by several respondents. Predominant among these implications was the view that a concern with ‘hard progressions’ merely sought to encourage organisations (and competitors) to engage and support young people who were most easily transitioned into education, employment, and training destinations, at the expense of working with those most in need of employability support. As an example, London Youth outlined the potential issues of working in this narrowly-focused manner, and how their philosophy was much broader than simply ‘picking the low hanging fruit’:

London has a number of players [organisations] who are focused on getting young people into a job by tomorrow, next weekend, stuff like that ... [There’s] nothing wrong with that and that’s great, but actually, we need to prepare young people for the world of work, and also the world [in general] as well.

Picking up on this theme, both StreetGames and Sport4Life outlined how the instrumental use of sport and physical activity (and other types of non-formal education) was often reduced to an economic imperative, rather than one which truly valued the longer-term development and support of their beneficiaries.

I suppose there is a false economy I think between the cheapest per-head offer and the best per-head offer and understanding that one size does not fit all ... that means providers are just going to work with the easier low hanging fruit (StreetGames).

... obviously our cost per head is so much more for that young person [those further away from an employment destination] ... And that's where there's always this key challenge with contract funding. You'll get a lot of training providers that want to take the funding for getting young people into jobs, so they'll do the easiest job possible ... you know in some of our welfare-to-work contracts, it's just the training providers who are just trying to get the low hanging fruit and just get the funding, and therefore highest volume, cheapest cost per head (Sport4Life).

Similarly other respondents spoke of how they had seen organisations 'pushing' young people into employment destinations, merely to maximise their impact data rather than to support sustainable employment opportunities. For example, the Positive Youth Foundation revealed:

... we do find that a lot of the time especially with young people is that they will be placed into opportunities that might not necessarily meet their needs or they might not have the necessary skills to cope with ... they are pushed into opportunities or destinations that are not suitable for their needs, [and] they then become NEET again ...

Equality of opportunity and socio-demographic factors, such as the geographical location in which a sport for development organisation was operating, were also highlighted as potential barriers that are regularly overlooked in providing comparative data on the impact of sport-based interventions. Reflecting this view, the EFL Trust, whose constituent Club Community Organisations operate across England, explained:

Getting into work is the most obvious impact scale for an employability programme, but it's not perfect because there are external factors, the environment, what's going on. [We have to consider] what's happening in the local job market? Who are they up against? Are there dozens of graduates coming out of universities taking entry level jobs? So, I do think it can be a crude reflection of the impact that a programme is having.

Interviews with funders of sport for development projects touched upon the challenge of enabling (and evidencing) identifiable, hard progressions when working with young people who were furthest from

employment. The Berkeley Foundation provided a very honest perspective on this issue, but also conceded that some funders look beyond short-term impact and that there was still a need for sport for development organisations to think in broad terms about what a sport-for-employability project should offer. They explained:

... it kind of is about return on investment, and people in businesses are, you know, often interested in the numbers. But, you know, in my experience I think also they're just like everybody else. And if they get the idea, if they get the concept, if they get the sort of heart of what you're trying to do, I don't think it always comes down to return on investment.

This need to reimagine 'progression' as it pertains to sport-based employability interventions was captured by a number of interview respondents. Indeed, there were several examples where sport for development and VCSE organisations had begun to set their own criteria regarding what constituted a progression. Reflecting a number of similar perspectives, two respondents in particular provided insight into how they were starting to think differently about 'progress'.

... that spectrum of that end goal is really wide. So for a young person on one of our disability programmes that is non-verbal, for example, the end goal for that person might be to lead a more fulfilling social life (Lord's Taverners).

... fortunately 70% of our learners do achieve a City & Guild accreditation so that's one of the easier ones [progression targets] to meet ... But I think we've recognised that actually you know progress can sometimes come further down the line and progressions take time ... It's quite hard because some of our KPIs with our partners they want evidence there and then or, you know, at the end of the programme they want hard and fast progression outcomes. But by their nature [hard progressions] can take time, and especially with the audience we're working with, that can take time ... When we use the word progression, progression pathway, it's very subjective isn't it because there's no 'one size fits all' for what progression looks like for an individual and I think quite often our funders will expect or want to see hard progression, so into employment, education or training but actually the audience we're working with so often just need baby steps to get there (VIY).

Given the general agreement amongst sport for development organisations to think more broadly about how the impact of sport on employability can be measured, there is **clear potential for those in the sector to draw a consensus on an evaluation framework** for this purpose. Critically any evaluation

framework would need to encompass the complexity and scale of sport for employability work, including a differentiated appreciation of the various ‘progressions’ that young people might make, yet be sufficiently concise to engage and influence those beyond the sector, including funders and Government departments. An appetite for such an exercise was clearly evident from the interviews, with Sports Leaders capturing the views of many. They suggested:

I think the sports sector as a whole [need] to agree on terminology first of all ... And so actually can we agree on, this is what [an employability programme] does, and this is how it’s measured, so that everyone can say, “This intervention that I delivered has this impact, this intervention that I deliver has that impact.” And there’s a place for everybody, there’s enough of the pie for everybody to move that forward. And it would just mean that actually it’s not confusing [and] to be fair [to the] Government, it wouldn’t be confusing for them to be able to decipher what is the best [sport-based] intervention for the targeted groups that we’re looking for.

Action: The impact of employment-focused, sport-based interventions is still too often measured by simplistic metrics (e.g., employment destination data) and hard progressions, which may encourage sport for development organisations to support those most easily transitioned into employment destinations. Frameworks of measurement need to be developed to capture and recognise the impact of sport for development interventions which support young people who are furthest from employment destinations.

5.2 Enabling Employment via Sport-Based Interventions

As noted, a theory of change model developed by Theeboom et al. (2017) presents a series of mechanisms specific to the instrumental use of sport and physical activity to enhance employability and enable employment. Findings demonstrate that these mechanisms are particularly evident among the practices of those organisations which engaged in the research, however, there are a number of contextual challenges which may impede efforts to implement these mechanisms.

First, there was clear reflection on how **sport and physical activity is used as a means to attract and recruit targeted participants to related interventions**. 89% of respondents indicated positively they either ‘agreed’ (40%) or ‘strongly agreed’ (49%) that participation in sport-based interventions acted as a hook for engagement with educational programmes. Additionally, in relation to participation in sport-based interventions acting as a platform for formal learning, 81% of respondents indicated positively this was the case, with 47% ‘agreeing’ and 34% ‘strongly agreeing’ with the statement.

Qualitative data also indicated how sport acted as a ‘hook’ for participation and provided a platform for engagement in more specific activities to enhance employability. However, other insights highlighted how **sport and physical activity were more than a simple ‘hook’ for engagement and actually provided a meaningful and important function in understanding the workplace**. For example, members of the Youth Advisory Group spoke of the many cultural overlaps they experienced between participating in sport and the workplace. As one member of the Sport and Employability Youth Advisory Group shared:

Generally [in sport], you’re in a team – some people you’ll like, some people you won’t like, people with completely different characteristics, and you have to be in that social situation through the highs and the lows and I feel that replicates a workplace ...

Similar support for the influence of sport as an important enabler of engagement with employment programmes came from respondents who represented the wider employability sector. This was particularly the case in efforts to support young people who had challenging personal circumstances and/or disrupted experiences of formal education, and were, consequently, furthest from the employment market. Youth Employment UK, a social enterprise focused on tackling youth unemployment, revealed that in their experience **sports clubs had the capacity to enhance self-esteem and help forge young people’s sense of identity**:

... sport has a real potential to cut through to those young people, it can be a place for them to identify in that community. It [their sports club] might be the one place in their town or city that they actually don't hate you know. We've had young lads who hate where they live but they love their club, and their club is at the heart of it and it's the thing that's got them back into education.

Using sport as a means to support identity development in young people and act as a point of community connection was an area that several respondents reflected upon. Respondents with a connection to a professional sport club were particularly vocal in this regard, making reference to the 'Power of the Badge' as a key tool for engagement. For example, Bath Rugby Foundation reflected on how their club logo had provided a recognisable point of reference to benefit their efforts to engage young people on employability programmes. They explained:

I think for young people, particularly certain groups of young people, [they] really identify with badges because that team is their special interest or whatever it is. But I think it's about that sense of belonging ... you know, by building that culture, this badge comes to mean something else other than just rugby.

There was also evidence to indicate how professional sport clubs provided more than just a place to foster identity and connection, but also enacted a pivotal role as an employer or as a site for volunteering and work experience opportunities. Respondents spoke of the diverse employment roles that professional sport clubs offered, with hospitality, stadium management, and stewarding noted as potential employment avenues. Premiership Rugby noted how this was often more of an attraction for young people to engage with their programmes than the opportunity to participate in sport:

I think for [some clubs] ... using the club badge to [create] the opportunity to work in the stadium is what draws young people in rather than it being, "Oh I want to go and play rugby."

Moreover, in addition to using professional sport clubs to attract young people to programmes, respondents spoke of the 'Power of the Badge' providing similar attraction to potential funders and supporters of sport-based employability interventions. Bath Rugby Foundation revealed:

[The 'Power of the Badge' is] absolutely huge because people want to be involved with it and they may not know who we [Bath Rugby Foundation] are but as soon as they hear there is good work going on with something they love, they're interested. So it gives us huge access to amazing people.

This attraction also extended to Government departments and officials, with the EFL Trust mentioning that the opportunity for politicians to demonstrate their connection with professional football clubs was often appealing as a public relations exercise. Furthermore, the ‘Power of the Badge’ was also highlighted as key to their on-going relationship with the Department for Work and Pensions and support for the Kickstart programme. They explained:

... there’s no doubt that football has been really powerful there, and it’s such a cultural institution ... MPs just love getting their photograph at a football club, and DWP loved it. [For example], in the West Midlands they [DWP] were struggling to fill places [for the Kickstart programme]; they were struggling to get employers onboard, so they asked us to convene a conference with all the West Midlands clubs. So, we did and it had a positive impact, so in some cases it is purely because of the magnifying effect football has in [certain] areas.

Action: The sport for development sector should engage more readily with professional sport organisations and/or those with strong commercial imperatives to harness the ‘Power of the Badge’ and the obvious presence that these sport organisations have within their communities.

While the interview data outlined how the ‘Power of the Badge’ often supported the recruitment of beneficiaries to sport-based employability interventions, questionnaire data revealed a variety of methods were used to recruit individuals to sport-based interventions. Five categories were used to code the modes of recruitment: ‘Self-referral’, ‘statutory referral’, ‘non-statutory referral’, ‘outreach activities’ or ‘other’ (such as word of mouth, referred by family member or progression from another programme). From the 68 respondents who provided data to this question, there were a total of 155 coded modes of beneficiary recruitment, with the most prevalent mode of recruitment being ‘statutory referral’ (31% of coded responses), then ‘self-referral’ (22%), ‘non-statutory referral’ and ‘outreach’ (both 18%) and then ‘other’ (11%). It should be highlighted that a single organisation might deploy multiple modes of recruitment. two of the 68 respondents (3%) deployed all five coded modes of recruitment, eight had (12%) four or more, and 27 (40%) three or more. That said, 17 of the 68 respondents (25%) relied on a single mode of recruitment, of which 10 of these respondents (59%) depended solely on ‘statutory referral’.

However several respondents highlighted recent challenges, some of which had been caused or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had disrupted recruitment activity. Common reasons for lower than usual recruitment to sport-based interventions was attributed to the interruption or loss of typical referral routes through statutory organisations, the difficulty of maintaining contact with

young people that some referral partners experienced, and the possible impact of teacher-assessed grading for GCSE examinations across the UK in 2020 and 2021. Summarising many of the challenges that were highlighted, Premiership Rugby revealed:

...with the pandemic we've really struggled with [the] recruitment of young people and that's been for many reasons. I think for the young people themselves we've seen a change in their behaviours and attitudes because the pandemic has made it so much easier for young people to stay at home and not do a lot ... We've also seen a lot more anxiety about leaving home and being in big groups of people again, and also the inflated GCSE grades meant that lots of people went to college in September and got on to courses that they probably weren't qualified to do or able to do rather than being the ones that needed our support ... and because we get lots of referrals from partners, because those referral partners had lost that face-to-face contact with young people as well, they just lost touch and they had no links to young people anymore either so they didn't have anyone to refer in to us...

Such challenges were corroborated by VCSE organisations from wider sectors, with VIY noting that their experience of supporting young people to enhance their employability had encountered similar difficulties:

... since Covid, [recruitment] has been challenging. I think we had hoped that we would have bounced back a little bit or the youth engagement market would have bounced back a little bit quicker than it has. I think, I'm hearing that other organisations who sort of look to work with this audience are still struggling and I think youth engagement partners, youth referral partners who we work with are struggling to engage the young people and therefore you know, they haven't got the numbers of young people to refer to us as they would have done pre-Covid.

In some cases, the systems used to identify and engage a young person with a sport-based employability programme acted as a barrier to recruitment. StreetGames revealed how access to sport-based interventions needed to be simpler and more aligned to the needs and preferences of their target audiences. Reflecting on conversations they had undertaken with other sport for development organisations, StreetGames explained:

... [a colleague at another sport for development organisation] was talking about the fact that it's harder to sign up for [a sports-based] programme than it is to get a KFC delivered.

With several pandemic-related challenges still evident, some **organisations revealed they had decided to rely less on statutory services for referrals and had instead opted to implement more direct recruitment approaches**. The Change Foundation provided one of the clearest examples of such efforts, highlighting the broader and longer-term benefits of using their recruitment practices to establish relationships between staff and young person that were meaningful and enabled participants to feel valued. The Change Foundation explained:

... the method that has been the most successful in our recruitment, is the recruitment that you do when you go out on the street ... actually going out in estates, actually walking on the streets, looking for clusters of young people. That is the best method of recruitment. It's amazing. Everything that comes from it. Because that relationship that you start right there, they're the relationships that produce so much more meaningful change. Because you had the gusto to go and have that conversation in the first place, and you've proven yourself to be credible to do that ... It's really, really tough work, but it is the most critical part, for me, of any employability intervention.

Action: There is a need to deploy innovative and more pro-active approaches to identifying and recruiting young people to sport-based interventions, which are less reliant on formal referral systems.

Recruitment approaches which accentuate the importance of establishing strong interpersonal relationships is directly connected to the second mechanism of effective employment interventions, namely facilitating a safe, supportive, and inclusive social climate for the development of beneficiaries. Data described a variety of examples of the social climates that they created, however, there was consensus that **the most critical element of an effective social climate, was the quality of interaction between delivery staff and beneficiaries of their interventions**. Reflecting this consensus, and outlining the most critical aspect of their programmes, the Lord's Taverners acknowledged:

Definitely, definitely, the people [delivery staff]. That's almost, I'd say second to none. Our projects are somewhat a reflection of that lead, and not the level of work that they put in.

Several respondents highlighted the necessity to provide beneficiaries with a consistent environment throughout their engagement with a programme, and again delivery staff were fundamental to achieving this through an effective mentoring approach. Coach Core explained how their 'Learning Coaches' were central to ensuring that their beneficiaries remained engaged with apprenticeship opportunities:

... more than anything, it's about their [mentor's] ability to just listen, you know, to be able to understand the needs of each young person and work with them to work through some of those challenges ... For a lot of our young people, I think they kind of get to a point where they probably question whether the apprenticeship is still the right option for them. Often there are roles that come up that are probably better paid, certainly on an hourly basis, than an apprenticeship would be. And I think it's, you know, our best learning coaches are able to kind of help our young people see that bigger picture and support them on a longer-term journey...

The importance of mentoring relationships as part of an effective social climate was highlighted as particularly relevant to addressing issues of employment inequalities and supporting young people who faced multiple socio-demographic barriers to employment. Speaking on behalf of the beneficiaries of their programmes, the Lord's Taverners explained:

[Mentoring] is even more important when you're talking about people with disabilities ... that environment's really, really, really key and to some extent, as well, having some structure, having some structure and some consistency. Lots of these young people don't have structure and consistency and that's partly why they don't have the same opportunities as well.

Various perspectives were offered on the qualities that a mentor within a sport-based employability programme should possess, with much of the discussion focused on the importance of lived experience. While there was general agreement that an element of lived experience was important to enable mentors to be relatable to the young people they supported, many recognised this was not the sole 'qualification' for being an effective mentor and that 'learned' or 'qualified' experience was equally important in understanding how to best support and facilitate opportunities for young people. Reflecting this consensus, Sport4Life explained:

We want our mentors first and foremost to be relatable to young people. They've got to speak to them at their level ... Obviously it helps if there's a strong level of lived experience there as well, which we know there is in our mentoring group, [but] they've got to get on with the young people; the young person [has] got to like them, otherwise it's not going to work.

Nevertheless, other important qualities were identified, including the ability to recognise when and how a sporting experience could be transferred into a broader educational opportunity. Two respondents in particular commented on the importance of identifying 'teachable moments', which often arose during informal interactions rather than formal educational activities:

The biggest single determinant of how well a young person does in a subject is the quality of the teaching. There is no other measure. That's it ... And then the second thing, which stems from the quality of the teaching, is the nature of the relationships (Dallaglio Rugby Works).

Getting to know people is really important. We go for walks, we go to cafes, we have table tennis tournaments, we say 'I bet you can't beat me at FIFA' which they are obviously going to! They are those moments when you learn things that you didn't know, and no matter how good you are at your job, you are not going to get out of someone in a [formal] session (Bath Rugby Foundation).

That said, some VCSEs which engaged sport for development organisations to deliver elements of their employability programmes, disclosed that in their experience sport for development organisations can sometimes overlook the need for a sport-based activity to enhance employment, instead focusing purely on the 'sport' aspects of their delivery. Capturing this point, Motiv8 South revealed:

I've seen some brilliant sport-facilitated sessions, but I always wish they'd go a little bit further. Because I think you've got those young people, you know, you've got those relationships, [and] actually afterwards a conversation with those young people about what they plan to do, what are their goals, where do they see themselves, that's the bit that I think sometimes can get missed.

Recognising the need to respond to the individual requirements of beneficiaries of sport-based interventions and avoid a generic, 'one size fits all' approach aligns with the third mechanism outlined by Theeboom et al. (2017), which proposes an individualised approach to programme design. For the majority of respondents, the decision to work with young people in small groups, or on occasion on a one-to-one basis, reflected the preferences of the young people they engaged and recognised that larger-group provision (akin to that provided within schools) had, in general, been ineffective in supporting these young people. As one proponent of this provision, the EFL Trust explained:

Quite often they'll [the young people] be the people that maybe got disillusioned at school, got to college and then dropped out. Or they find other local education institutions to be overwhelming or whatever. [In] the environment of the football club, it's a bit more informal [and] smaller groups ... Most of our group sizes are kind of capped at like 10 [or] 12. So you then add into the equation that these are not high-level learners, the fact that they've maybe gone through a school system where they were in either groups of 30, or they were in small

groups with maybe disruptive pupils that have been moved into the bottom set for behaviour rather than ability, when you add that in they're now suddenly in an environment where everybody there wants to do well because they've chosen to come on the course...

Aligned to a small group programme design, the Change Foundation outlined how they implemented a 'place-based' approach to their delivery, with detailed consideration given to where they located sport-based and educational provision. Demonstrating a clear community consciousness, the Change Foundation revealed:

... the sessions are all set up in the heart of the community ... and we try to look for a space where you can play sport and you can have some conversations as well really ... So, the space and the venue is very much in the heart of the community, something easy to access. It generally doesn't cross postcodes. It's the same place. We will have young people outright saying, "I'm not going over to that part of town. It's not happening."

Continuing this theme, several organisations revealed that, at a philosophical level, the interventions were underpinned by a 'strengths-based' approach. In contrast to a 'deficit approach', where the sport for development organisation focusses on repairing individual deficiencies, in a 'strengths-based' approach the programme is built upon individuals' acquired and demonstrated strengths and uses resources in their community to enhance these strengths (Paraschak & Thompson, 2014). While terminology between organisations differed, **there were several examples evident of respondents working 'with' (not 'on') individuals to further advance their acquired strengths and support individual aspiration.** For example, the Positive Youth Foundation and Spiral explained how they portrayed a strengths-based approach within their delivery:

... we do a lot of asset-based mentoring so the mentoring will be based around some sort of activity or interest that the young person enjoys, building up a trusted relationship with that young person, to then see if we can direct them or re-engage them with more mainstream services like school, college or going into an apprenticeship or a job (Positive Youth Foundation).

... the barriers that these young people face are so extensive and vast, like money, we're talking about risk of gangs, like maybe family stuff, living conditions, your relationship with school, your relationship with peers, your learning disabilities ... Like there's so many barriers with these young people but we just don't focus on the barriers. We talk about them like positively,

aspirationally (sic), create an environment that is exciting and it's just like, everybody's interested in something right? So, like we'll pounce on any bit of relationship that we can build and we'll use that and then we'll be like right, you were interested in gaming, I'm going to get a gaming developer in in week three if you can show me that you can do these kind of things...(Spiral)

Other examples of a strengths-based approach that catered for individual needs and aspirations, were provided in relation to enabling young participants to become independent and responsible for how they navigated a sport-based programme and what they wanted to achieve through it. Dallaglio Rugby Works provided a tangible example of how they encouraged beneficiaries to take control of their own progression outcomes and personal objectives:

We have developed an app called Player Profile ... [where] young people set their own goals ... they monitor their own progress, and they validate their own achievement. And then we give them kudos. We do not give them a 'pass' or 'fail'. That's down for them to say, "I am now able to achieve this task." ... So they use that lived experience and they share it with their mentor and they get kudos, they get credit, they get encouragement. But they actually own that data, we don't ... You get the tool, do what you want with it, we get no benefit whatsoever as an organisation. It's entirely for you.

Action: Sport-based interventions that are individualised towards participant aspirations and which accentuate a 'strengths-based' philosophy should be prioritised as a more effective means to support young people into employment and enhancing employability.

The penultimate mechanism identified by Theeboom et al. (2017) is for sport for development organisations to provide a range of tangible activities that support employability. Table 1 (page 34) identifies the extent to which the respondents to the survey provide a particular employability activity to their beneficiaries. The employability activity deployed most frequently by the respondents were those designed to encourage teamwork and working with others. 100% of respondents indicated positively ('some' 11%; 'quite a lot' 31%; 'significant amount' 57%) that they undertook employability activities of this type. The next most highly rated activity which respondents undertook a 'significant amount' is providing hands-on work experience to their beneficiaries (33%), then courses to enhance employability (30%) and helping beneficiaries find and secure work placements (23%). Organisations identified the use of talks from industry professionals (43%), excursions and field trips (39%), visits to workplace settings (33%), participant presentations (39%) and participant debates (31%) as popular

employability activities which were provided ‘some’ of the time by organisations for their beneficiaries. It is important to note that the highest rated employability activities which were reported as being engaged with ‘very little’ or ‘not at all’ were developing entrepreneurial skills (40% and 14% respectively), academic skill acquisition programmes (30% and 23% respectively) and structured and regular work placements (19% and 23% respectively).

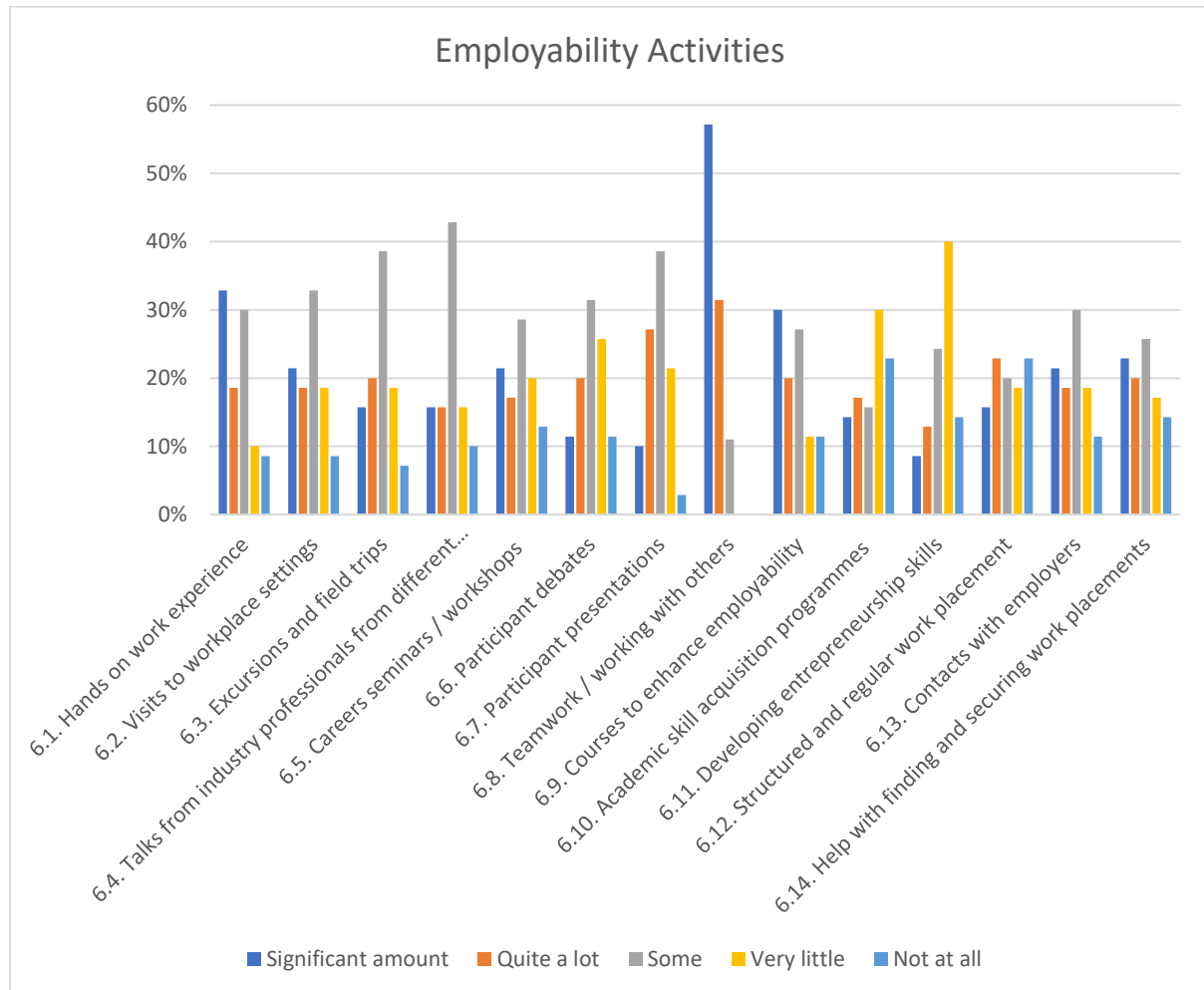


Table 1: The extent to which survey respondents provide a particular employability activity

While the qualitative data provided similar insights into the range of activities that respondents provided to support and enhance employability, **a key finding was the extent to which sport for development organisations had generated connections with potential employers to provide tangible employment destinations for their beneficiaries.** This benefit was most obvious for organisations that supported apprenticeship opportunities for young people, with Coach Core providing one such example. They explained how employers in their network were often able to offer further paid employment opportunities for graduates of their apprentice programme. However for these opportunities to be meaningful for young people, identifying employers whose values aligned with theirs was a critical success factor. Coach Core revealed:

Because employers have essentially invested in that young person for 15, 16 [and] sometimes up to 18 months [and] put a lot of time and energy and resource into that young person, it's often in their interests to keep them on and find a role for them within the organisation ... [But] one of the biggest challenges we face is employer recruitment, firstly in terms of depth of employers, but also in terms of the employers having the right infrastructure and also having the right environment and culture to support a young person as an apprentice.

Other respondents spoke of the importance of connecting with employers who possessed shared cultural values, who were prepared to invest in young people, and recognise that the individuals who graduated from sport-based interventions were often inexperienced and faced significant personal challenges which might impact on their progress as employees. Two examples, from Sport4Life and Motiv8 South respectively, accentuated this point:

I think what we want to do is find a partnership that works for both sides, that's mutually beneficial. So, we want to find an employer that takes on young people, that has a positive culture of working with young people, that believes in young people, that has roles available fairly regularly ... So it's trying to find a local or regional firm that's taking on young people on a regular basis, that can offer meaningful employment, and wants us to almost act as that recruitment solution for them (Sport4Life).

... we have had that conversation [with employers] that there will be some that are gonna (sic) mess up here, and you know we need to just be okay with that. We'll do the best that we can to triage and feed young people in, but there may be those mess-ups. It was good to have those conversations beforehand, but I think they're [the employers] vested in the local area, so they wanted to make it work.

The opportunity to provide a recruitment solution for employers was an area that several respondents shared when in conversation about providing work opportunities for their beneficiaries. For example, VIY explained how providing a willing and able workforce was very much part of their partnership with employers in the construction industry. They explained:

... the home building and construction industries are crying out for labour, and I think they see VIY as that first stepping stone really. I think it's mutually beneficial. They give us materials in kind, and we are supplying a workforce that's had some experience and have enjoyed the

experience and want to explore more, [and] how they can get involved in that construction industry.

Other respondents outlined how the **strong capacity for sport-based interventions to engage and support young people with a range of socio-demographic challenges** and/or furthest from employment was a critical factor to be voiced, especially in enabling employers **to diversify their workforce**. Among many respondents who shared this view, the Berkeley Foundation stated:

... perhaps [an] employer actually isn't very well experienced at, you know, posting work experience placements or working with young people from these types of backgrounds. And you're doing a massive thing for them, probably, in terms of helping them to diversify their workforce, and bring in new prospectives (sic). But actually [there is scope to] think about how you can work together on that and how you can sort of go on the journey with the employer.

However despite the potential benefits of enhanced employer networks, respondents highlighted a series of challenges in generating such partnerships. Uppermost was the concession that it was often easier or more productive to generate partnerships with businesses in 'other' employment sectors through sport-based interventions than it was to establish them for employment into sport-related employment. For example, Sport4Life explained:

We're quite early days with it, you know, we're not sitting here with a perfect partnership in every single sector. And it is interesting, whilst we do get young people into the sports sector, there's more that go into retail, customer service, construction etc.

Other respondents spoke of the **challenges associated with partnering with employers who lacked specialised knowledge of working with some populations engaged by sport for development organisations**. Indeed, the Lord's Taverners expressed that, in their experience, the limited number of employer partnerships that sport for development organisations could boast was attributable to a lack of experience of providing employment opportunities for a more diverse workforce. They explained:

... when we're talking about local organisations or local businesses, many of them don't have experience or confidence or capacity, in working with the young people that we work with. So, disability [for example], there's still very few organisations that have the confidence or accessibility or capability to step into that [situation] ... I think that's probably a big gap in the whole jigsaw ... how can we make those organisations more confident, more capable, have better capacity to do that and play a significant role in that? But also, we're not experts in how

to make your organisation a better place for a young person ... we don't have experience in terms of saying, this is what you need to do as an employer.

The Change Foundation explained how they had been proactive in trying to address these capacity issues by offering bespoke training to potential employers of graduates of their programmes. They presented an open and honest account of what employing one of their graduates entailed:

... we work with employers giving a real realistic picture of the nature of the journey [for a young person through the sports-based employment programme]. So, we go through quite a lot of training with them before any relationship is started ... what does an inclusive employer look like for those most vulnerable, most likely to be unemployed for a longer period of time? ... We use a lot of quite deep case studies ... like they go through the whole detail, piece by piece, about what happened to them ... That sometimes is good for employers. And sometimes it scares them a little bit, but we get through that barrier.

Action: Employer networks are pivotal to enabling work opportunities for beneficiaries and graduates of sport-based employment interventions. The sport for development sector needs to identify opportunities to broaden and develop these networks.

The propensity of many sport for development organisations to be proactive in providing a smoother transition through an employability programme and towards an employment destination was indicative of efforts to demonstrate the final mechanism outlined by Theeboom et al. (2017) and incorporate ongoing support and mentoring for participants who have progressed into employment destinations. While this was perhaps the element most lacking within the interventions that were analysed, several organisations appreciated the importance of this mechanism within their programme design and recognised many of the longer-term perils associated with sustaining youth employment. For example, Coach Core outlined how they were developing a dedicated range of activities specifically designed to maintain engagement with graduates of their apprenticeship programmes. They explained:

... we're looking at building more formalised support for our graduates ... to sort of develop and invest in, [and] sustain that employment opportunity for young people ... just to continue to support them and work with them. Once they finish their apprenticeship we can lose sight of them quite quickly, so the first step, really, is to continue to engage them in things like our development weeks [and] make sure that they are aware they can still access [other] opportunities around that long-term employability piece...

Perhaps the most detailed example of ongoing mentoring support was provided by the EFL Trust, who highlighted the precarity of youth employment initiatives, which can often be successful in the short term but lack sustainability longer term. Outlining their efforts to avoid the often-cyclical nature of youth unemployment, the EFL Trust explained:

... we were conscious that for a lot of training providers people come on the programme, and then there's a cliff edge when it finishes ... So, we've actually built into a lot of our projects an eight-week post-programme mentoring ... just so that there isn't that cliff edge, so they still know they've got somebody that they can turn to ... For a lot of beneficiaries, they come from backgrounds where maybe they haven't got that support, and that's why there in the situation or position where they're in. It's really dangerous to have that, and suddenly they know what it's like to be supported ... so we try to cut that sort of transactional kind of relationship out of the mix, because short-term it might be okay, but actually it doesn't really do much for anybody.

5.3 Skills and Capital

Developing skills for employment has been central to employment-focused Government policy for several decades (Maguire & Keep, 2021). However before considering which skills are relevant for the modern economy or identifying if such skills can be obtained or developed within sport-based interventions, there is a need to be clear on what the purpose of employment-focused interventions should be. While opinions differed, there was a majority view that sport-based interventions are better aligned with **enhancing employability rather than targeting specific employment outcomes**. Consequently several respondents saw value in using sport and physical activity to enhance the skills needed by an individual to make them more employable. This view was stronger from organisations who worked specifically with populations who face specific barriers to employment or those furthest from the job market. For example, the Lord's Taverners stated:

When we talk about employability, I think people instantly think of employment. For us, we've done quite a bit of work on trying to change how that's interpreted to actually mean skills development and preparing people to have a better opportunity later on in life for employment.

Nevertheless, whether sport for development organisations were focused on enhancing employability or targeting employment, **the acquisition of formal, recognised qualifications was still seen as an important enabler**. Analysis revealed that many sport for development organisations offered formal, recognised qualifications within their programming or directed young people towards these through local providers. While there were examples of courses being offered from Level 1 entry qualifications to degree level courses, the majority of course offerings were pitched at Level 2 and were specific to sport and physical activity.

However, several respondents raised questions over the suitability of existing sport-related courses, and formal qualifications in the sector more broadly, as the most appropriate preparation for supporting people into employment in sport and physical activity. For instance, the Association of Colleges noted how their consultations with employer forums had identified the shortcomings of existing sport and physical activity qualifications:

... we still hear loads from employers saying, we have to spend thousands on retraining young people when they've come to us with qualifications at whatever level ... for jobs in sport. For example, [employers have said] "the Level 2 BTEC Sport is not really producing young people with the skills, knowledge and behaviour we need for employment; these are the things we need". So, we've said "right okay, we'll remove that from the study programme at Level 2 and

put in a range of smaller qualifications based around what employers really need". So, lifeguarding, Level 2 fitness instructor, some exercise music and dance, teaching quals [qualifications] because actually that's the stuff that they'll be delivering and what the employers in that area really want.

To create stronger employment pathways between qualifications and paid work, several respondents reflected on the potential of apprenticeship programmes as a facilitator. Many of the organisations who were interviewed had experience of either offering or supporting apprenticeship opportunities, and data indicated how the opportunity to combine a formal qualification with 'on the job' experience gained in the workplace had benefited young people. For example, Coach Core, which operates exclusively through the provision of apprenticeships, stated several benefits of this approach, both in terms of acquiring suitable workplace skills but also in securing employment. Coach Core explained:

I suppose the apprenticeship itself supports [skill development] to an extent because it's a 15-to-18-month programme as opposed to a six- or 12-week programme ... We want [our apprentices] to come together as a group and try and have the opportunity to learn from each other, share ideas and share learning and hopefully share a bit of best practice as well ... A lot of our young people actually stay with their original organisation which is a sort of ideal outcome for everyone ... but putting our young people into any outcome is a real success for us; to be able to get them into sustainable employment in any sector.

However, respondents outlined a number of challenges in supporting apprenticeship opportunities within the sport sector. Uppermost among these challenges was the difficulty attached to recruiting employers in the sport sector as providers of apprenticeships. For example, the Association of Colleges suggested that potential employers in the sport industry were often not large enough in scale or stature to provide meaningful apprenticeships:

... employers have been difficult to attract. A lot of employers are not screaming out for apprentices or not desperately looking for apprentices at 16, 17 [years old] ... we also know that the bulk are very small or are self-employed, think of personal trainers ... so to recruit a 16, 17-year-old to deliver alongside them is quite a challenge.

Despite these concerns Coach Core indicated that there were encouraging signs in terms of employer recruitment, and that the COVID-19 pandemic had enabled sport organisations to re-assess the longer term value that an apprentice could offer. Coach Core mentioned:

We did go through a period of time across the pandemic where I think employers didn't have the head space to think about apprenticeships. If it's new to them, it's a complex world, they didn't have the time to sit down and really understand it and really sort of work out what that meant for them. But I think now we're starting to see ... [that] investing some time and money into them [apprenticeships] and have them [apprentices] with you 30 hours a week where they can support lots of wider roles of the organisation [is beneficial], as opposed to constantly going out to recruit sessional coaches that could leave you tomorrow...

That said, respondents also noted that negative preconceptions about the quality of apprenticeships prevailed with young people often perceiving that they lacked the pedigree of university degrees or further education qualifications. Furthermore, potential providers of apprenticeships questioned their financial viability, highlighting that while they saw value to young people in offering apprenticeships (and had seen tangible success in offering them), they were often too costly to facilitate. Supporting this view, StreetGames reflected on an apprenticeship programme that they previously offered:

... until the middle of last year we were delivering a nationally funded apprenticeship programme. We became an approved provider for the Department of Education, we designed the programme, we met the standards, we employed the tutors and the mentors ... We had a really high retention rate and a really high achievement rate actually ... [but] we finished it last year, essentially we couldn't make it financially viable with such small numbers.

As such, the 'traditional' route of acquiring workplace skills through formal qualifications was still very much in evidence. Yet respondents also recognised a need to think more creatively and broadly in the design of qualifications which were oriented towards employment in sport and physical activity. For example, the Lord's Taverners noted:

... within the sporting sector, the whole employment piece is way too focused on coaching as the pathway ... I haven't come across a sports apprenticeship that doesn't [loosely] involve coaching, for example.

Similarly, the Association of Colleges indicated that sport and physical activity qualifications needed to be mindful that many jobs in the sector were 'customer services focused' and that developing these skills was arguably more critical than developing technical skills in coaching, training, and/or instruction:

... for PTs, gym instructors, other sort of operational staff, they're all on the customer services framework; they are customer facing organisations [and it] is all about relationships [and] interacting with people. So, there isn't a real focus on the customer services [at present] but we're a customer-facing industry predominately and a lot of it is about relationships and you need the relationship before you can impart a lot of the technical knowledge that might be required for the role.

Action: The qualification offer within sport-based employability interventions needs to be broadened to include a wider array of jobs both *in* the sport and physical activity sector but also in other sectors.

This view of equipping individuals with a broader array of skills, which met employers' current needs, was highlighted by the survey data. Table 2 (page 41) identifies the extent to which the respondents to the survey seek to develop specific employability skills. The employability skill which the respondents seek to develop the most is teamwork and working with others. 99% of respondents indicated positively ('some' 7%; 'quite a lot' 23%; 'significant amount' 69%) that they seek to develop this specific skill set. The next highest rated employability skill which respondents seek to develop a 'significant amount' is self-management (53%), decision making (51%) and planning and organising skills (46%). Organisations also identified time management (49%), communication and presentation (47%), problem-solving (39%), and information retrieval (31%) as skills sought to be developed 'quite a lot' of the time by organisations for their beneficiaries. It is important to note that the highest rated employability skills which were reported as being developed 'very little' or 'not at all' were numeracy (34% and 10% respectively), Information Communication Technology (ICT) (23% and 10% respectively) and independent study (27% and 6% respectively). Given that the Government have identified acute skill shortages within the digital sector in particular (Plan for Jobs, 2021) suggests that the sport for development sector could seek to identify opportunities to integrate more activities which enable ICT skills to be developed through sport participation.

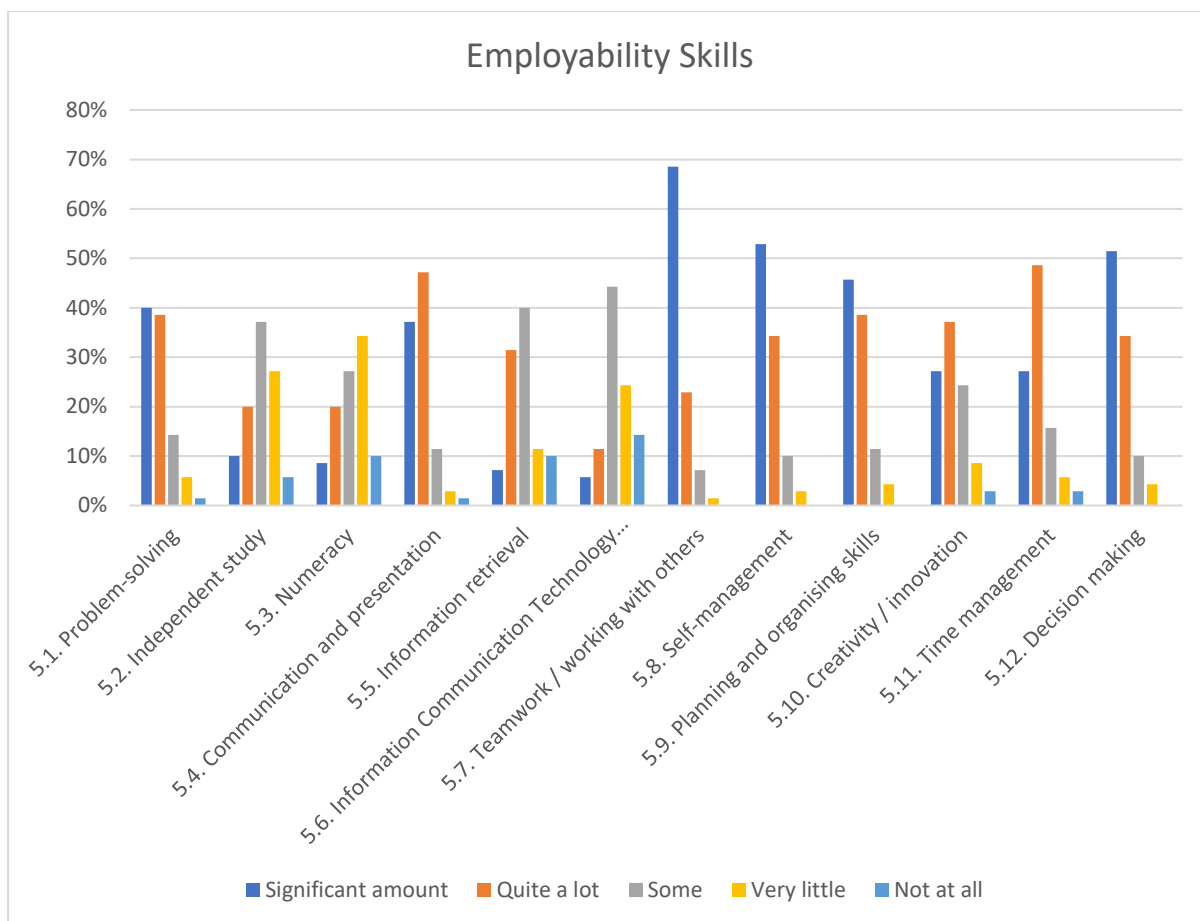


Table 2: The extent to which survey respondents seek to develop specific employability skills

The need to develop a broader range of skills was also evidenced through the qualitative data in programmes which facilitate employment into other sectors ‘through’ sport and physical activity. For example, Motiv8 South explained how communication with employers in the construction industry was central to their planning on what skills their programmes should promote:

... it’s a two-way process, because you need to listen to them [employers] in terms of what are the skills that they [young people] need? So, when Travis Perkins came in, they said: “You know, forget about the qualifications, what we need is young people that are going to turn up on time, and who are going to have the willingness to, you know, push themselves”. You know, it’s your work ethic, really.

This perspective was reflected by several respondents noting how the focus of their sport-based interventions was on **developing a wider set of skills that might be transferable within and between employment sectors**. While respondents often labelled these ‘transferable skills’ differently (e.g., essential skills, foundational skills, soft skills, core skills), and used different frameworks to provide

direction for the skills which they felt needed to be developed (e.g., World Economic Forum, Skills Builder, Outcome Star), there was a general consensus regarding what these skills might entail and how they were important for enhancing employment opportunities. Reflecting this consensus, Sports Leaders outlined their skills framework which had been developed in consultation with employers. They explained:

... [our] skills framework was brought about from research that looked at a lot of employers and [other] skills frameworks. And it was agreed between all employers, that these were the five key skills that they were requiring as transferable across from education into the workplace. The five skills are communication, teamwork, self-management, self-belief and problem-solving.

Some organisations outlined how they used sport and physical activity to facilitate the development of these (and similar) skills. For instance, the Change Foundation noted:

... [our programme consists of] 15 weeks of weekly sessions that are about three hours, and they combine sport and different employability skills. So, there will be a variety of sports ... and each week there's a different employability message around punctuality, honesty, working hard, communication. All of those transferable skills...

The importance of developing these transferable skills was highlighted by Youth Employment UK as a critical conduit to providing individuals with meaningful work and developing a wider array of career options. They explained:

We work on five core skills [problem-solving, self-belief, self-management, teamwork and motivation] so they've [young people] got the core basis of things [that] are going to be so important in bringing forward and developing their life the way they want it rather than being pushed one way or another.

This testimony, and others like it, raised an important question for the design of employment programmes which use sport and physical activity in an instrumental manner. Specifically, should the focus be on '**job readiness**' or '**career readiness**'? Respondents spoke about the pre-occupation of progressing participants into a job as an outcome of many employment-focused interventions. However, there was evidence to suggest that this narrow outcome measure was often counterproductive to enabling longer-term or sustained employment and was often unachievable for those individuals furthest from employment. For example, the EFL Trust revealed:

... we've run a number of 'Introduction to' courses that were developed by Skills First to add to a traineeship offer but could also be offered as stand-alone qualifications. So, I found that a lot of the young people on employability programmes don't necessarily have really high aspirations, just simply because of their experience to date with education. They're not aiming particularly high. So a lot of those 'intro to' quals [qualifications] were in things such as warehousing and distributing, because they wanted something that they could go to, do their eight hours, get paid and leave ... We felt that traineeships were very much qualification based, they were very much kind of like, "You do this, you do this, you do your work placement, you get a job or an apprenticeship. Bye bye."

Consequently the consensus was that there was a need for sport for development organisations to move the focus away from simple 'job readiness' towards preparing participants of their interventions for a defined career. Three examples captured the essence of respondents' views on this topic:

... we are keen to get employers that can offer young people on our programmes career pathways, and not just a job for now. So, I think it's really about finding the platform for participants to then move on with their career (EFL Trust).

[We produce] job-ready young people, and they've gone through our intensive programme, they've really improved their life skills ... [but] I also think it's making sure that the jobs are meaningful jobs. There's an issue with zero-hour contracts, sessional, seasonal roles. Underemployment is a big issue ... and we don't want to contribute to that, so we try and make sure it's meaningful work (Sport4Life).

... we believe that all young Londoners should be excited and inspired about their futures, particularly around actually, what job, or more important what career. Because I think a job is the day-to-day, a career, that's where that energy and fire should come from. But what we recognise is what do they need to have the skills and networks and the knowledge to be able to do that (London Youth).

Action: The sport for development sector should focus on enabling career readiness (rather than job readiness) to support more meaningful work opportunities both in and through sport.

The consensus that sport-based interventions are perhaps better suited to enhancing employability and enabling career readiness presents the potential for sport-based interventions to look differently at how these outcomes may be achieved. Guidance from the academic literature indicates that **identifying various forms of capital that are instrumental to employability and career progression may be worth further investigation**. Of the various forms of capital discussed in the academic literature, human, social, and psychological capital appear most salient. While this terminology was not widely used by practitioners, there was a wealth of evidence indicating that sport for development organisations support the acquisition and accumulation of these three forms of capital.

As noted, several organisations provide participants with regular opportunities to acquire formal qualifications, obtain work experience, and support broader skill development, to foster human capital. Echoing the majority of respondents, StreetGames provided insight into the broad range of qualifications and courses that they offer to enhance employability within the sport sector, and Premiership Rugby outlined how their HITZ programme had a significant onus on human capital development:

... [we have a range of courses] that was about taking that first step into employment in our sector ... We've got about 36 workshops which are mainly focused on either building your skills, understanding and working with young people, or building your skills at using sport [instrumentally] (StreetGames).

... in most cases our young people don't even care what the course is, they just want to get their Maths and English ... [and] after their time with us we've made them feel comfortable enough to be able to go back into a college environment (Premiership Rugby).

In addition, there was strong evidence of organisations using sport-based interventions to enhance social capital, whereby participants and beneficiaries were able to strengthen their relationships with peers, (re)connect with formal systems of education and training or broaden their networks with individuals and organisations who may enhance their employment prospects. Organisations were asked the extent to which they perceive that participation in sport-based interventions helps their beneficiaries to develop relationships with peers, helps to develop relationships with others, and helps to develop relationships with organisations. 100% of respondents indicated positively that they 'agree' (20%) or 'strongly agree' (80%) that participation in sport-based interventions helps beneficiaries develop relationships with peers. Similarly 100% of respondents indicated positively that they 'agree' (27%) or 'strongly agree' (73%) that participation in sport-based interventions helps beneficiaries develop relationships with

others. In relation to participation in sport-based interventions helping beneficiaries to develop relationships with organisations, 84% of respondents indicated positively that they ‘agree’ (40%) or ‘strongly agree’ (44%) with this statement, however, 14% did not indicate a positive or negative response to this statement and 1% indicated a ‘strong disagreement’ with the sentiments of the statement.

Furthermore, there were multiple examples provided in the qualitative data to corroborate these findings. For Sports Leaders, the necessity to accumulate social capital was pivotal and, in their view, helped to extend the benefits that formal qualifications (and human capital) could provide in relation to employability. They reported:

... we’re starting to say, “So what? You’ve got our qualification, what next? So you’ve got this [qualification], how can you actually show that moving forward?” So we’re trying to add value to that young person ... the key outcome for us is that they add social value to their community, social value for themselves...

Interestingly, the accumulation of social capital was something that funding organisations perceived as a key point of difference between employment-focussed sport-based interventions and those delivered using other types of non-formal education. For example, the Berkeley Foundation noted:

I think with a sports programme, those peer relationships within cohorts can be quite important ... You know, you can see other people around you succeeding and that spurs you on to try and do the same. You know, if you can meet people who’ve been through a similar process in the past and actually now have a great job and can tell you about that, then that’s really positive. I think it’s about building [relationships]; helping young people to develop networks of relationships and groups of people around them who kind of want the same sorts of things...

However it was the accumulation of positive psychological capital that respondents appeared to be most commonly developing in participants of their interventions, using sport and physical activity to develop qualities such as self-efficacy (confidence), optimism, hope and resilience. Organisations were asked the extent to which they perceive that participation in sport-based interventions helps the beneficiaries to develop confidence, hope, resilience and optimism. Responses to this were overwhelmingly positive, with no respondent indicating that they either ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ with the statements presented. 99% of respondents indicated positively that they ‘agree’ (13%) or ‘strongly agree’ (86%) that participation in sport-based interventions helps beneficiaries develop confidence. 96% of

respondents indicated positively that they ‘agree’ (23%) or ‘strongly agree’ (73%) that participation in sport-based interventions helps beneficiaries develop hope, 96% of respondents indicated positively that they ‘agree’ (20%) or ‘strongly agree’ (76%) that participation in sport-based interventions helps beneficiaries develop resilience, and, 96% of respondents indicated positively that they ‘agree’ (24%) or ‘strongly agree’ (75%) that participation in sport-based interventions helps beneficiaries develop optimism.

Again, the qualitative insights provided further indication of the strong potential for sport and physical activity to enhance psychological capital. Reflecting a number of similar views, the EFL Trust outlined how the development of qualities associated with psychological capital had become a deliberate aspect of their programming to complement the acquisition of other forms of capital.

Within [our] programmes we give people the opportunity to do something along social action or volunteering, as a stepping stone before maybe thinking of going into a work placement environment ... just to build up their ‘can do’ and their resilience, and improvements to their self-efficacy.

Further advocacy for the importance of psychological capital accumulation within sport-based employability interventions was provided by London Youth. Again, while psychological capital was not named directly, facilitating the elements of this form of capital was deemed essential.

I think there’s other important bits around the sort of the skill and really embedding those, that young people are resilient, that they have aspirations, they’re confident, they can do challenge ... rather than just “is your CV up to date?”

Action: Sport for development organisations need to identify how their employability interventions can facilitate the acquisition and accumulation of human, social and psychological capital.

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Main Recommendations

- The pandemic has adversely affected the physical and mental health and wellbeing of young people, and in many cases, this has impacted their confidence and motivation to engage in employment-focused activity.

Recommendation 1: The physical and mental wellbeing of participants should be an essential first step within a sport-based employability intervention and is a necessary component within the employability pathway. In addition, given the clear benefits of sport and physical activity on physical and mental wellbeing, relevant Government departments and agencies should consider how the benefits of sport and physical activity may be integrated into employment-based interventions.

- Sport and physical activity continue to provide a number of clearly defined benefits to aid progress towards enhanced employability and employment destinations. In addition, sport for development interventions appear to be highly effective in supporting individuals who are furthest from an employment destination. As Government policy for employment is highly focused upon individuals ‘within’ formal systems (e.g., on Universal Credit), this can be problematic for people outside of these systems, such as those who are economically inactive, not actively seeking work, or unable to work (e.g., carers, disabled populations, asylum seekers). Sport for development organisations can offer an important alternative to Job Centres or can complement formal mechanisms of addressing (youth) unemployment. This is especially the case for individuals who are reluctant or unable to access formal systems.

Recommendation 2: Sport for development interventions often play a key role in enabling populations outside of formal education and training systems and those furthest away from an employment destination to access education, training and work experience opportunities. The sport for development sector should be supported to partner with relevant public and private funding bodies, and evidence how they contribute to enabling and maintaining engagement with formal education and training systems. The Government should engage directly with the sport for development sector to expand the use of sport and physical activity organisations as sites for engagement in work-related programmes.

- Employer networks appear pivotal to enabling work opportunities for participants/graduates of sport for development employability interventions. While examples exist of strong employer engagement and networking, it appears that efforts within the sport for development sector to broaden and develop these networks are in their infancy or need further attention. In addition, employers often lack the competence and confidence to support young people with diverse needs, and this often impedes their readiness to facilitate opportunities into employment.

Recommendation 3: Sport for development organisations should be supported by commissioners and funders to develop networks and connections with employers from a range of sectors and industries, both within and beyond sport, to facilitate potential pathways into employment, education and training for their beneficiaries. However, sport for development organisations should be supported by public and private sector funding to create tailored training and support opportunities to prepare employers for recruiting and working with their beneficiaries.

- Mentors and leaders (e.g., coaches) of sport for development interventions are pivotal to engaging and offering direction for participants of such programmes, in particular those individuals furthest from the employment market. However, the workforce in sport for development is experiencing severe challenges in sustaining meaningful careers in the sector, which can be the result of zero hours contracts and/or sessional work. Work in the sector is often poorly or underpaid, with limited career progression opportunities, which leads to challenges in retaining talent.

Recommendation 4: Investment into the career development of the sport for development workforce should be addressed. This could be achieved by identifying and developing opportunities to ring-fence core funding for sport for development organisations. Looking after and supporting the sport for development workforce, particularly those in ‘front-line’ programme delivery roles, is fundamental to the success and sustainability of the sector.

- The impact of youth-focused, sport-based employability interventions is still too often measured by simplistic metrics (e.g., employment destination data) and hard progressions, which may encourage sport for development organisations to support those most easily transitioned into employment destinations. Focusing on employability *and* employment outcomes would help to support those furthest from employment and tackle inequalities in most disadvantaged communities, enabling the sport for development sector to play a key role in the Levelling Up agenda.

Recommendation 5: Measurement frameworks and methods which evidence the breadth of personal development that young people achieve through sport for development interventions need to be generated by commissioners, funders, project implementers and research partners. Any such frameworks should be able to measure the impact and added value of interventions that support young people who are furthest from employment destinations. Measurement frameworks which are generated by the sport for development sector need to be recognised and adopted by funders.

Additional Recommendations for Sport-based Employability Interventions

- Sport-related qualifications delivered and/or offered by sport-based organisations are often narrowly focused on sport coaching and physical activity instruction, with exit routes towards related vocations similarly limited.

Recommendation 6: Sport for development organisations who provide access to qualifications should be encouraged and supported to broaden the qualification offer to include a wider array of jobs *in* the sport and physical activity sector. They should also be encouraged and supported to provide access to qualifications that are transferable to other employment sectors.

- The intentional use of sport, when delivered safely and inclusively, is an effective tool through which to engage people with alternative approaches to enhancing employability and employment opportunities. However, when sport is delivered solely for competitive purposes, it can be a polarising activity which can act as a barrier to engagement.

Recommendation 7: Broadening the focus of sport-based employability interventions to consider a wider array of physical activity pursuits (e.g., physical activity, fitness, dance, health related activities, ‘activities of daily living’, exergaming and e-sports) should be encouraged to appeal to a wider diversity of potential beneficiaries and respond to the shifting nature of youth physical culture.

- Youth employment is highly precarious and transitional, and many young people receive limited support once they have entered the employment market. Sport for development organisations are effective in providing ongoing mentoring to support protracted transitions into work, as well as periods of unemployment, and reducing the employment ‘cliff edge’ experienced by many individuals with limited experience in the employment market.

Recommendation 8: Sport for development organisations should be encouraged and supported to incorporate ongoing mentoring support for ‘graduates’ of their programmes as part of collaborative efforts with employers to mediate against the often cyclical nature of youth unemployment.

- Sport-based interventions that are individualised towards participant aspirations and which are developed to accentuate existing strengths appear to be the most effective in progressing young people to employment destinations or further education and training. While a range of skills (technical and transferable) are important to enhance employability, there is a clear need to focus on enabling *career readiness* (as well as job readiness) to support more meaningful work opportunities both in and through sport.

Recommendation 9: Sport for development organisations should implement a ‘strengths-based’ and ‘person-centred’ approach to employability interventions, working *with* the young person to build foundational personal awareness, develop individual career aspirations, and tailored developmental activities. In addition, sport for development interventions should seek to facilitate the acquisition and accumulation of human, social and psychological capital, which are critical to enhanced employability.

- The pandemic has significantly impacted and disrupted traditional referral routes into sport-based interventions which support employment pathways.

Recommendation 10: Innovative and more proactive approaches, which are less reliant on formal referrals, to identify and recruit young people to sport-based interventions are needed.

7.0 Next Steps

Following stakeholder engagement by the Sport for Development Coalition, experts in policy and practice provided valuable insight to develop and operationalise the research recommendations. This highlighted three key priority actions to support the implementation of the research recommendations.

1. **An alignment of national policies and funding systems to better enable the coordination and development of local policy and practice.** This could be supported by a partnership approach involving private, public (local and national), and VCSE (voluntary, community and social enterprise) organisations.
2. **Developing a common language around employability outcomes within the evaluation of sport for development interventions.** Fundamentally, this needs to involve debate and consensus on *what* outcomes should be measured and *how*. A wide variety of skills frameworks are employed within the sport for development sector to assess personal skills development, so obtaining a consensus may present a challenge. Focusing on how sport for development interventions enable the acquisition and accumulation of human, social and psychological capital could offer a novel way forward.
3. **A greater developmental focus on the sport for development workforce.** This is to address career progression, professional recognition and a remuneration system which rewards the qualities that the sport for development workforce possesses. Future policy campaigns and lobbying efforts should prioritise the value of both *learned and lived experience* within workforce development and amplify the breadth of career opportunities that lie within the sport industry.

The Sport for Development Coalition and stakeholders who informed this policy brief are ready to mobilise collectively to implement the key actions and evidence based recommendations at both locally and nationally and would welcome the opportunity to work with policy makers, funders and commissioners on what happens next.

8.0 References

- Andrews, D.L. (2008). Kinesiology's inconvenient truth and the physical cultural studies imperative, *Quest*, 60, 45-62.
- Bailey, R. (2005). Evaluating the relationship between physical education, sport and social inclusion. *Educational Review*, 57(1), 71-90.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, C. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Brown, P., Lauder, H., & Ashton, D. (2011). *The global auction: The broken promises of education, jobs and income*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bush, A.J., Silk, M.L., Andrews, D.L. & Lauder, H. (2013). *Sports coaching research: context, consequences, and consciousness*. London: Routledge.
- Catch 22 (2022). Underemployment: the hidden face of the youth employment crisis. Retrieved from www.catch-22.org.uk/news/underemployment-hidden-face/ [Retrieved 3 August 2022].
- Chartered Institute of Management of Sport and Physical Activity. (November, 2020). Workforce impact survey: Retrieved from: <https://www.cimspa.co.uk/cimspa-news/workforce-insight#LMI>
- Coalter, F. (2013). 'There is loads of relationships here': Developing a programme theory for sport-for-change programmes." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 48(5), 594-612.
- Coalter, F., Theeboom, M. & Truyens, J. (2020). Developing a programme theory for sport and employability programmes for NEETs. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 12(4), 679-697.
- Council of Europe (2001). Recommendation No. R. (92) 13 REV of the Committee of Ministers of Members States on the Revised European Sports Charter (Strasbourg, CoE).
- Collins, M.F., & Kay, T. (2014). *Sport and social exclusion* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design, qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. & Plano-Clark, V.L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. (January, 2021). Sector Economic Estimates: Employment Oct 2019 - Sep 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dcms-sector-economic-estimates-employment-oct-2019-sep-2020>
- Ekholm, D. (2013). Sport and crime prevention: Individuality and transferability in research. *Journal of Sport for Development* 1(2), 1-12.
- European Commission. (2013). *Reducing early school leaving: key messages and policy support*. Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving. Brussels: European Commission.
- Hermens, N., Super, S., Verkooijen, K.T. & Koelen, M. A. (2017). A systematic review of life skill development through sports programs serving socially vulnerable youth. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 88(4), 408-424.
- HM Government (2021). *Plan for Jobs: progress update*. London: HM Government.
- House of Lords Youth Unemployment Committee (2021). *Skills for every young person: Report of Session 2021–22* (HL Paper 98). London: House of Lords.
- Ingham, A.G. (1997). Toward a department of physical cultural studies and an end to tribal warfare. In: J. Fernandez-Balboa (Ed.), *Critical postmodernism in human movement, physical education, and sport*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 157-182.
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2022). Working age poverty: Working households and individuals. Retrieved from [www.jrf.org.uk/data/working-age-poverty-working-households-and-individuals#:~:text=Around%20two%2Dthirds%20\(68%25\),began%20in%201996%2F97](http://www.jrf.org.uk/data/working-age-poverty-working-households-and-individuals#:~:text=Around%20two%2Dthirds%20(68%25),began%20in%201996%2F97).
- Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing interviews*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Maguire, S. (2021). Early leaving and the NEET agenda across the UK. *Journal of Education and Work*, 34(7/8), 826-838.
- Maguire, S. & Keep, E. (2021). *Singing from the same hymn sheet? UK policy responses to the NEET agenda*. SKOPE Research Paper No. 130. University of Oxford: Oxford.
- Morgan, H.J. (2018). Enhancing social mobility within marginalised youth: The accumulation of positive psychological capital through engagement with community sports clubs. *Sport in Society*, 22(11), 1669-1685.
- Morgan, H.J. & Bush, A.J. (2016). Sports coach as transformative leader: Arresting school disengagement through community sport-based initiatives. *Sport, Education and Society* 21(5), 759-777.

- Morgan, H.J. & Costas Batlle, I. (2020). “It’s borderline hypocrisy”: Recruitment practices in youth sport-based interventions. *Journal of Sport for Development*, 13(7), 1-14.
- Morgan, H.J. & Parker, A. (2017). Generating recognition, acceptance and social inclusion in marginalised youth populations: The potential of sports-based Interventions. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 20(8), 1028-1043.
- Morgan, H. & Parker, A. (2021). Sport-based interventions and social inclusion: insights on the ‘power of sport’. In: P. Liamputtong (ed.). *Handbook of Social Inclusion: Research and Practices in Health and Social Sciences*, Cham, Switzerland: Springer, pp. 1739-1757.
- Morgan, H. & Parker, A. (2022). Sport-for-development, critical pedagogy and marginalised youth: engagement, co-creation and community consciousness. *Sport, Education and Society*, doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2022.2075336.
- Morgan, H.J., Parker, A. & Marturano, N. (2020). Community-based intervention and marginalised youth: Inclusion, social mobility and life-course transition. *Journal of Education and Work*, 33(5/6), 327-342.
- Morgan, H., Parker, A. & Marturano, N. (2021). Evoking hope in marginalised youth populations through non-formal education: critical pedagogy in sports-based interventions. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 42(3), 307-322.
- Morgan, H.J., Parker, A. & Roberts, W. (2019). Community sport programmes and social inclusion: What role for positive psychological capital? *Sport in Society*, 22(6), 1100-1114.
- Nols, Z., Haudenhuyse, R., Spaaij, R. & Theeboom, M. (2019). Social change through an urban sport for development initiative? Investigating critical pedagogy through the voices of young people. *Sport, Education and Society*, 24(7), 727-741.
- Office for National Statistics. (October, 2022). Labour market overview, UK. Retrieved from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/october2022>
- Office for National Statistics. (May, 2020). Coronavirus and the effects on UK labour market statistics. Retrieved from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/coronavirusandtheeffectsonuklabourmarketstatistics/2020-05-06>
- Office for National Statistics. (April, 2021). Labour market overview, UK. Retrieved from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/april2021>

- Office for National Statistics (May, 2022). EMP16: Underemployment and overemployment. Retrieved from: www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/underemploymentandoveremploymentemp16
- Office for National Statistics. (June, 2022). The cost of living, current and upcoming work. Retrieved from: www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/thecostoflivingcurrentandupcomingwork/june2022#:~:text=1.Overview%20of%20the%20cost%20of%20living,up%20from%207.0%25%20in%20March.
- Office for National Statistics. (July, 2022). Labour market overview, UK. Retrieved from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/july2022>
- Orji, S. (2013). Assessment of employability skills development opportunities for senior secondary school chemistry students. *Journal of Educational Research and Reviews*, 1(2), 16-26.
- Parker, A., Morgan, H., Farooq, S., Moreland, B. & Pitchford, A. (2018). Sporting intervention and social change: Football, marginalised youth and citizenship development. *Sport, Education and Society*, 24(3), 298-310.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: integrating theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Purcell, K., Elias P., Green, A., Mizen, P., Simms, M., Whiteside, N., Wilson, D., Robertson, A., & Tzanakou, C. (2017). *Present tense, future imperfect? – young people’s pathways into work*. Warwick University Institute for Employment Research: Coventry.
- Seddon, F., Hazenberg, R., & Denny, S., 2013. Effects of an employment enhancement programme on participant NEETs. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 16(4), 503-520.
- Sherry, E., Schulenkorf, N., & Chalip, L. (2015). Managing sport for social change: The state of play. *Sport Management Review* 18, 1-5.
- Spaaij, R. & Jeanes, R. (2013). Education for social change? A Freirean critique of sport for development and peace. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 18(4), 442-457.
- Spaaij, R., Magee, J. & Jeanes, R. (2013). Urban youth, worklessness and sport: A comparison of sports-based employability programmes in Rotterdam and Stoke-on-Trent. *Urban Studies* 50(8), 1608-1624.
- Strathdee, R. (2013). Reclaiming the disengaged: Reform of New Zealand’s vocational education and training and social welfare systems. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 18(1-2), 29-45.

Theeboom, M., Coalter, F., Truyens, J. et al. (2017). *Study on the contribution of sport to the employability of young people in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy – Final Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Turnnidge, J., Cote, J. & Hancock, D. (2014). Positive youth development from sport to life: explicit or implicit transfer? *Quest*, 66(2), 203-217.

Youth Employment UK. (2021). Labour market statistics: April 2021. Retrieved from:
<https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/labour-market-statistics-april-2021/>

Appendix 1: Key ALMPs announced in the Plan for Jobs (adapted from House of Lords, 2021)

Name	Type	Detail
Apprenticeship incentives (2020–22)	Wage subsidy	Government provided employers £3,000 for every apprentice they hired (of any age), which equates to a 35% wage subsidy for an apprentice on the Apprentice Minimum Wage
Coronavirus Job Retention ‘Furlough’ Scheme	Wage subsidy	Set up to support employers to retain and pay their employees on temporary leave throughout the pandemic.
Find a job (2020)	Job-search assistance	Free website run by the Government Digital Service.
Job entry targeted support (JETS) (2020–22)	Job-search assistance	Employment support for unemployed people who have been claiming UC or new style JSA for 13 weeks. Available in England and Wales.
Job finding support (2021–January 22)	Job-search assistance	Online service to help people who have been unemployed for up to 13 weeks who do not need extensive support.
Job help (2020)	Job-search assistance	Free to access website open to all and run by the Government Digital Service.
Kickstart (2020–22)	Subsidised employment/ work experience	Kickstart provides work placements for young people claiming UC for at least 25 hours a week for six months, with additional employment support. It is funded at £6,700 per person.
Restart (2021–24)	Job-search assistance	Mandatory post-referral for UC claimants in the Intensive Work Search group for over 12 months.
Sector Based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) (2011–)	Training programme	Expanded in 2020. Employment support scheme for people looking to swap sectors. Includes pre-employment training, work experience and a guaranteed interview. Only available in England and Scotland.
Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)	Wage subsidy	Set up to support self-employed people during the pandemic.
Traineeship expansion	Work experience	The Government pledged to triple the number of traineeships available.
Youth Offer (2020–25)	Multi-element programme with an integrated offer	Support for those aged 18 to 24 (extended to 16- and 17-year-olds in October 2021) claiming UC in the Intensive Work Search group. It has three components: 1. Youth Employment Programme offering 13 weeks of support with referrals to support (mandatory) 2. Youth Hubs offer support alongside co-located partners 3. Youth Employability Coaches provide up to six months specialist support for those with complex barriers to work.

Appendix 2: List of interviewed organisations

Association of Colleges
Bath Rugby Foundation
Berkeley Foundation
Change Foundation
Coach Core
Dallaglio Rugby Works
EFL Trust
London Youth
Lord's Taverners
Motiv8 South
Positive Youth Foundation
Premiership Rugby
Spiral Skills
Sport4Life
Sports Leaders
StreetGames
VIY
Youth Employment UK