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Acknowledgments

We have been funding sport for development projects for many years and are interested in understanding how sport can be used to create the best outcomes, and this research is a key element in developing that understanding. Our thanks go to the organisations that took part (Sheffield United Community Foundation, Active Communities Network (Belfast), Street League, Fight with Insight, Grassroots Soccer) and to the many people who came to the stakeholder day which helped us test out our findings. Thanks also to Professor Fred Coalter, Jayne Wilson, Dr Kerry Griffiths (Sport Industry Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University) and Dr Geoff Nichols (Sheffield University) for undertaking the work with such efficiency.

We aim to disseminate this report widely and will continue to support this type of work through our grant making.
1. Background to the study

1.1. Introduction

Comic Relief has been funding Sport for Development projects internationally and in the UK for the last ten years and has made nearly 200 grants totalling about £27 million. Sport has been used to achieve a broad range of social outcomes, and Comic Relief has identified a number of areas where it sees sport having the most impact:

- Fighting discrimination and promoting equality;
- Reducing violence and increasing community cohesion;
- Developing young leaders to inspire others;
- Improving knowledge of, and access to, health care;
- Increasing access to education; and
- Supporting people at key transitions in their lives.

One element highlighted within ‘transitions’ is the potential role that sport can play in providing relevant skills, training and pathways to employment (or social enterprise based alternatives) to a broad range of marginalised and disadvantaged young people. Comic Relief currently funds 10 projects working around this issue in the UK and 10 internationally.

This report presents the findings of research commissioned by Comic Relief and undertaken by the Sport Industry Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University, along with Professor Fred Coalter, and Dr Geoff Nichols (University of Sheffield), between March and June 2015. The purpose of this research was to help to provide an evidence base about effective practice around sports interventions and employability.

The project was commissioned in order to address the following research question:

When providing sports based interventions for young people, what are the key components needed to produce the best outcomes around employability?

In addition, the following questions were posed as crucial to helping to understand the above research question:

- What approaches are currently taking place and what do they consist of?
- What evidence is there to demonstrate that these approaches are successful?
- Which approaches are not working so well and why?

Comic Relief wished to understand what difference has been made through sports based interventions, i.e. what outcomes have been achieved around employability and how and why this change happens. Thus they wished to test assumptions about the key factors that create change for their target groups, and find out which approaches or methodologies work best in different contexts.

1.2. Programme theory

The approach used was based on a programme theory perspective. This seeks to identify the components, mechanisms, relationships and sequences of causes and effects which are presumed to
lead to desired impacts on participants and subsequent behavioural outcomes. The advantages of this approach include:

- Emphasising the essential distinction between necessary conditions (participation in a programme) and sufficient conditions - the processes and experiences required to maximise the potential to achieve desired impacts and outcomes.
- Assisting in the formulation of theoretically coherent, realistic and precise impacts and outcomes related to programme processes and participants. This provides a robust basis for monitoring and evaluation.
- Enabling the identification of critical success factors.
- Providing the basis for formative, rather than summative (i.e. impact / outcome), evaluation. This contributes to the improvement of interventions by identifying where things may be going wrong.
- Exploring potentially generic mechanisms provides a basis for generalisation in order to inform future programme design.

1.3. Developing a programme theory for sport for change

In 2011, Professor Fred Coalter undertook an evaluation of seven Comic Relief funded sport-for-change projects to 'explore the extent which sport can play a role in changing young people's attitudes and how such change can help reduce community based conflicts and lead to better community cohesion'.

This research developed a broad programme theory framework for such programmes, which is shown in Figure 1. This was produced in order:

- To enable Comic Relief to understand the varied nature of the projects and processes contained in the broad area of sport-for-change.
- To enable programme designers, providers and evaluators to explore the various elements and presumed sequences of cause-and-effect in their programmes and to develop coherent theories of change.

The provision of a general framework rather than a specific programme theory was required because of the variety of sport-for-change programmes: ranging from open-access, relatively simple sports programmes to those which use sport to attract young people to intensive social work programmes.

This continuum contains a variety of programmes which exhibit differing balances between types of participants, the centrality of sport in the socialisation/learning process, the nature of the social climate and associated social relationships. The columns contain possible programme elements and have a broadly hierarchical ordering, with the most youth work-oriented programmes tending to contain all elements.
The framework in Figure 1 was used as the basis for the primary research in this project because:

- Feedback and workshops confirmed that the core elements of the framework had widespread relevance among sport-for-change projects. Despite some variations in context, appearance and style, the core mechanisms underpinning attitude and behaviour change were relatively common to most projects.
- Central to the processes and desired impacts is a concern with aspects of personal development — team work, perceived self-efficacy, ambition, time management, conflict management. These are related closely to the ‘soft skills’ which are increasingly regarded as key components of ‘employability’ in the literature (see section 2 below). Consequently, the presumption was that much of the components of the framework would remain relevant to understanding sport-for-employability projects. This would provide Comic Relief with a substantial amount of continuity in understanding the issues relating to the role of sports organisations in developing aspects of employability.

1.4. Methods

We undertook case study research with five projects, three in the UK and two in South Africa. These case studies were based on in-depth interviews with programme designers and deliverers, programme beneficiaries and other key stakeholders. Figure 1 was used as a framework for these interviews and its relevance and limitations were explored.

We also conducted a review of literature to identify and synthesise existing relevant research and literature on employability, to determine what is known and to enable us to compare and contrast what was recommended in the literature with existing practice in sport-for-employability programmes.

Finally, a workshop was conducted with Comic Relief personnel and representatives from projects which they fund. The interim findings and initial frameworks were discussed and developed further.

2. Findings from the literature

2.1. Employability and employment

Any discussion of employability must start with recognition of the distinction between various individual attributes which can be taken to indicate employability and employment — the obtaining of a paid occupation. While programmes may improve the mix of values, attitudes and skills which constitute an individual’s employability, most cannot guarantee subsequent employment, especially in an era of high youth unemployment. Spaaij, Magee and Jeanes (2013) contend that the broader impact on employment of such programmes is limited because it is strongly affected by external factors – the nature of the accessible local job market, employers’ attitudes to particular types of individual in a labour market experiencing over-supply and grade inflation, parental factors and home support. Such considerations have significant implications for the development of appropriate performance measures for such programmes.
2.2. What is employability?

The nature of 'employability' is increasingly subject to debate because of a number of interconnected factors:

- The changing structure of an increasingly post-industrial economy, as new technologies and industries change the nature of employment-related skills.
- High levels youth unemployment.
- The need for a more flexible labour market, with the reduction of life-long job security.

The term employability seeks to encompass a complex relationship between a set of individual attributes and the rather general needs of the labour market. Consequently, it is not surprising that there are a variety of definitions. However, despite the complexity and ambiguity of the concept there are common, if rather abstract, themes:

1. ‘...a person's capability for gaining and maintaining employment. For individuals, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and abilities they possess, in addition to the way they present those assets to employers’ (Wikipedia)

2. ‘...the combination of factors which enable individuals to progress towards or get into employment, to stay in employment and to progress during a career’ (Cedefop, 2011: 46)

3. ‘...a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful’ (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007: 280)

4. ‘...a set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy' (Yorke and Knight, 2006: 3)

Within this rather vague set of definitions of employability, two broad perspectives can be identified:

- **Hard skills.** Employability is defined in terms of the possession of technical, job-related, 'skills'. This reflects the UK government's 'skills agenda' in which skill shortages, skill gaps and skill under-utilisation are viewed as key issues confronting businesses and the changing nature of employability. This approach emphasises the development of a trained workforce and is outlined in government strategy document such as BIS (2010) and Spilsbury et al (2010). This perspective assumes that employability is a characteristic of individuals' set of identifiable and measurable skills, such as academic or vocational qualifications, technical or job-specific knowledge and work experience.

- **Soft skills.** The second perspective views the hard skill approach as too narrow and emphasises 'softer' personal qualities, attitudes and attributes. 'Soft skills' are viewed as including behavioural characteristics and elements of an individual's personality, values and attitudes. Soft skills include such elements as: team working, reliability and time management, problem solving, high motivation and ambition, personal presentation and dress. Rather than simply skills for employment, employability may instead be described as a '(multi-faceted) characteristic of the individual' (Yorke, 2006: 8).
While protagonists tend to view these two perspectives as representing different philosophies – hard skills with a narrow concentration of employment and soft skills concentrating on personal development - they are complementary. While most sport-for-employability programmes are based on the broad notion of personal development, some also provide a specific, if limited, hard skill focus on the sports employment market via the provision of access to Levels 1 and 2 coaching awards. However, in the main, sport-for-employability programmes tend to be concerned with the development of soft skills, reflecting traditional assumptions about the impact of sports participation (see section 2.7).

2.3. How do employers define employability?

Gillinson and O’Leary’s Demos (2006) report, Working Progress: How to reconnect young people and organisations found a widespread concern among employers about the lack of ‘soft skills’, or ‘intangible’ personal qualities, such as the ability to work in teams, communication skills, ability to be creative. Although job-specific skills remained important, the widespread lack of such soft skills made it difficult to fill all positons. In a later CBI survey (2011) more than two thirds of 566 employers viewed the lack of ‘employability skills’ as a significant problem. This ‘skill deficit’ related largely to a range of soft skills: self-management, time management, critical self-reflection, team working, problem solving, communication and literacy.

Within this context there is a variety of broadly similar lists of employers’ definitions of employability skills. For example, the National Careers Service website states that employers are looking for a variety of personal qualities such as:

1. Communication
2. Decision-making
3. Showing commitment
4. Flexibility
5. Time management
6. Leadership skills
7. Creativity and problem-solving skills
8. Being a team player
9. Accepting responsibility
10. Ability to work under pressure

A study of more than 500,000 job advertisements by the job search company Adzuna (reported in Benedictus, 2013) found that the top attributes required in advertisements were:

1. Organised
2. Communication skills
3. Motivated
4. Qualified
5. Flexible
6. Degree
7. Commitment
8. Passionate
9. Track record
10. Innovative
Two of these attributes are qualifications and a degree and these can be regarded as being modified by the point of entry. However, the other eight attributes serve to emphasise the central importance of ‘soft skills’ and personal qualities.

A model developed by Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) relates to graduate employability, but it contains a variety of generic skills and attributes and illustrates that employability needs to be regarded as a mixture of (relevant) qualifications, technical knowledge and ‘softer skills’. They describe the essential components of employability as being:

- Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills. This can be interpreted as varying depending on the entry point to the job market. For example, some of the sport-for-employability programmes provide remedial maths and English and one had a basic educational entry qualification.
- Generic skills: analysis skills, time management, working with others, communication skills and working under pressure.
- Emotional intelligence: the capacity to recognise personal feelings and those of others and to build personal relationships.
- Career development learning.
- Work and life experience.

The combination of generic skills and emotional intelligence seem to constitute the soft skills components of employability. Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) suggest that if individuals have opportunities to access and develop these components and to reflect on their development, they will gain in self-esteem and perceived self-efficacy, which are also crucial components of employability.

2.4. Enhancing employability: examples of interventions

In addition to such survey-based lists of employer requirements, research has also been undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes aimed at enhancing employability amongst young people.

2.4.1. Cedefop and generic lessons

Cedefop's (2011, 2013) studies of educational and vocational training providers across Europe identifies the following key components of programmes:

- Offer a variety of different education and training options, with flexible approaches and pathways.
- Create attractive environments and learning methods in order to engage individuals.
- Tailor programmes to individual learner needs. This is particularly beneficial for those who require additional support, such as early school leavers with few or no qualifications, ethnic minority groups, people from disadvantaged backgrounds, migrants, people with learning difficulties and / or disabilities.
- Undertake an initial assessment of an individual’s work-readiness, including learning needs. Making people’s knowledge, skills and competences visible can raise their self-esteem and provide them with an incentive for further learning.
- Provide work-based training programmes and learning opportunities, such as apprenticeship schemes, provide people with a realistic insight into the world of work and its requirements.
and norms. Also necessary to help people to develop practical job-seeking skills (interviews, CVs) and to provide practical help for job searching.

- Focus on key competences critical for employment and on job-specific knowledge.
- Develop entrepreneurial attitudes through early contact with the world of business, learning how to develop and carry out projects or setting-up and running student mini-companies.

### 2.4.2. Magic Bus: a sport plus approach

The aim of Magic Bus’s employability programme (Delhi) is 'to provide disadvantaged youth with the right training and support to enable them to identify and achieve their personal and professional goals and successfully move into sustained employment, further education, or job based training'.

A review of the programme identified a lack of individual needs assessment and effective matching of youth to appropriate skills training. It was concluded that a ‘one size fits all’ approach was unsuccessful as it ignored individual starting points, personal targets and individual skill gaps. Pre-training counselling, needs assessments, transition support and support in making long term plans were viewed as important.

Magic Bus drew on work on the Indian labour market by Accenture (2013) which identified:

- A lack of pre-training counselling in vocational training programmes was directly related to drop out and low job outcomes.
- The learning of employability and workplace skills in isolation, limited life skills investment and no direct link to target outcomes led to lower than expected placement rates.

As a result, the newly designed Magic Bus model includes:

- Sport-for-development: the sports activities provide opportunities for experiential learning of social skills during induction and subsequent skills training.
- More information, advice and guidance, career counselling and personal needs assessments, enabling individuals to understand their options and identify more precise career goals and associated pathways.
- One to one mentoring throughout the programme (this is also aimed at reducing drop out).
- Employability and life skills training based on the needs of individuals.
- Partnerships with specialist or vocational training providers.
- Pre-placement and post-placement support.
- Job matching and support to sustain placements beyond six months.

### 2.5. The use of sport

Most sport-for-change programmes are based on the assumption that sport is an effective medium for personal development, that participation in sport leads to the development of a range of personal and social skills: teamwork, self-discipline, resilience, social / cooperative skills, time management, perceived self-efficacy, self-esteem. Consequently, it is easy to understand why such programmes now claim that they can contribute to the soft skill components identified by employers as central to employability. Further, such programmes have often provided some low level vocational training aimed at a specific, but small, sector of the job market - Level 1 and 2 coaching certificates.
In this regard the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES, 2009a) highlighted good practice in an initiative by Renfrewshire Council in Scotland, which provides opportunities to gain Sport Leader Awards. Together with enabling participants to develop specific skills which would enable them to gain employment in the sport industry, training in sport leadership also helps to develop generic skills, knowledge and behaviours which would potentially be transferable to any occupation (e.g. leadership, motivational and communication skills).

The Sport Industry Research Centre (SIRC, 2013) explored the impact of engagement in sport on graduate employability and employment. It was found that graduates, employers and universities viewed sport as a sound investment. It was viewed as providing 'added value', especially via students undertaking voluntary roles in the leadership and management of sport. Engagement in sport was described by employers as providing graduates with a wide range of positive attributes, especially team working, communication skills, motivation, competitiveness and resilience. Employers described involvement in volunteer roles as demonstrating leadership skills and providing real 'added value'.

2.6. A cautionary note

Spaaij, Magee and Jeanes (2013) examined two programmes, in Rotterdam and Stoke on Trent, which combined educational work with sports activities to assist workless youth to develop new skills and to improve employability. They concluded that:

- Sport has value in engaging and building relationships, but it cannot overcome wider issues.
- There is a perception of success in developing employability skills, but sustainability of employment varies greatly. Similarly, Sampson’s (2015) evaluation of the Pathways programme of Fight for Peace found that the majority of the graduates of the programme were in low skill temporary or casual work, with an unstable employment record in the medium term.
- Broader impact on employment is limited and is strongly affected by external factors. A number of factors influence unemployment including individual, parental factors and support at home, the local labour markets and the economic downturn. Programmes do not always address these external factors.
- Programmes can be effective for some participants in some circumstances and different participants benefit to different degrees. The key question is of course what programmes benefit which participants?

Spaaij et al (2013) conclude that sport-for-employability programmes should consider the following:

- There is a need for longer-term investment to enable individuals to access satisfactory jobs, retain them and assist them in moving to better jobs - a need for more post-programme support.
- Move focus from success measured by employment and instead develop approaches responsive to local areas such as development of skills and social connections.
- Developing a more holistic approach that views employability as a long term developmental process.
- Linking to wider social policies, for example, on family situations, businesses, community regeneration. The focus should move away from social inclusion being equated to paid employment.
In relation to the above analysis it is worth noting Ungar’s (2006:8) conclusion in a major study of resilience among young people:

.... a child’s resilience remains contingent upon his or her negotiation for education and a place in society that is more responsive to his or her context and cultural realities. As hardy as the individual child may be, it is the child’s environment which lacks the resilience to negotiate with the child and provide what is needed. In this case, it is the child’s environment that lacks resilience, not the child per se.

More pithily, Ungar (2006:3-4) asks if ‘changing the odds’ is preferable to resourcing individuals to ‘beat the odds.’?

2.7. Summary

- There are two broad perspectives on the nature of ‘employability’ – one which emphasises more narrowly defined ‘hard’, or job-related, skills such as vocational education; a more general emphasis on ‘soft skills’, which are personal attitudinal and behavioural attributes. Although these perspectives are complementary, employers have increasingly identified the lack of soft skills as an obstacle to employment.
- While not always defined precisely, the soft skills tend to be those traditionally associated with sport – team working, communication, time management, problem solving, leadership, commitment, motivation. However, there is limited evidence as to the success of programmes in developing such skills.
- Evaluations of employability programmes for young people identify the need to tailor them to individual learner needs, based on an assessment of an individual’s work-readiness.
- The Magic Bus experience illustrates that there is a need for a systematic approach to emphasising the relevance of a variety of soft skills to the development of employability as this is not always recognised by participants.
- There is a need to provide some ‘work-oriented’ experiences, either via volunteering, work experience or work placement to provide an experience of the world of work and its norms.
- It is necessary to help people to develop practical job-seeking skills (interviews, CVs) and to provide practical help for job searching.
- It is unlikely that sport alone can address a variety of potential environmental obstacles such as unsupportive family situations or lack of local employment opportunities. Sport-for-employability organisations need to work with a range of relevant local organisations to address such wider issues.
- It is clear that sport on its own cannot address such issues and programmes should either be ‘Plus Sport’, where sport is used to complement a core employability programme, or ‘Sport Plus’, where a sports programme is adapted to contain and reinforce systematically core elements of employability.
3. Findings from the research

3.1. Sport, soft skills and employability

The appeal of sport as a vehicle for the development of employability is that it is presumed that participation in sport leads to the development of a range of personal and social skills which are similar to those defined as central components of employability and which many employers find lacking.

The similarity between sports' claims about personal and social development and the increasingly important components of employability means that most sport-for-change projects make some claims to be contributing to employability. Further, the increasing importance of such soft skills means that many components of Figure 1 – although not developed with employability in mind – still remain relevant. This was confirmed in the case study interviews, the workshop and in the limited feedback. The emphasis in Figure 1 on aspects of social climate, social relationships and the various components listed in Impacts 1 form the basis for the revised sport-and-employability framework (Figures 2 and 3). Social processes and relationships remain central to all such projects.

3.2. Sport and employability programmes: a continuum

Figure 2 illustrates the diversity of approaches identified in the in-depth interviews conducted with five sports-based organisations and confirmed in the workshops and limited feedback.

The programmes differed on a number of continua:

- **Sport.** The programmes varied in the extent to which sport is regarded as the key learning medium; is used to reinforce values and attitudes taught in more formal workshops (usually social skills); is simply a context for the learning and application of generic skills (e.g. planning, people and resource management, administration).
• **Recruitment.** The approach to the recruitment of participants and the degree of understanding of their ‘employability needs’ varied. This ranges from open access, self-selection, in areas of social and economic deprivation; referral from schools, other agencies and parents; the use of diagnostic testing; the use of some educational qualifications as an entry criterion, as these are viewed as necessary for both learning on the programme and employment). However, programmes are less likely to be open access and tend towards various mixtures of targeting and referral.

• **Individual assessment.** The extent to which relatively standard, one-size-fits-all approaches are used versus systematic use of detailed individual learning and personal development plans, with some even targeting types of (relatively unskilled) employment.

  Cedefop (2011) stressed the need to:
  • Provide an initial assessment of an individual’s work-readiness, including learning needs.
  • Tailor programmes to individual learner needs.
  • Provide quality information and guidance to make career decisions.

• **The role of mentoring.** All programmes viewed mentoring as a core mechanism for change, although its function varied; general adult behavioural role modelling and support (characteristic of most sport-for-change programmes); helping to develop and implement individual learning plans; constant monitoring to ensure adherence to programme; post-programme monitoring and support.

  Pawson’s (2006) analysis of research on programmes for young people at risk identifies mentoring as the key mechanism in effective programmes. He outlines the process as follows:
  • **Befriending:** creating bonds of trust/sharing of new experiences. The mentee begins to recognise the legitimacy of other people and perspectives
  • **Direction-setting:** the mentor promotes further self-reflection via discussion of alternatives and encourages participants to reconsider values, loyalties and ambitions.
  • **Coaching:** coaxing, cajoling and supporting the mentee to acquire skills, assets, credentials and testimonials needed to enter mainstream society and the employment market.
  • **Sponsoring:** The mentor advocates on behalf of mentees, using insider contacts and knowledge of opportunities to obtain employment.

• **Participant involvement.** The degree of involvement of participants in determining both the social climate (e.g. rules of behaviour) and the nature of activities. Some viewed this involvement as both ensuring ownership of and commitment to the programme and helping to develop a sense of cooperation, self-management and responsibility.

• **The mixture of learning opportunities provided:** the widespread use of Levels 1 and 2 vocational sport qualifications; formal social skills workshops, sometimes consciously reinforced via sports participation; educational compensation, especially in maths and English; volunteering within sporting organisations; job seeking skills (CV writing, interview skills); external work experience.
Cedefop (2011) emphasises the importance of:

- Work-based training programmes to provide a realistic insight into the world of work and its norms.
- Developing practical job-seeking skills and providing practical help for job searching.
- Systematically organised work-based experiences to provide a gradual transition to work.

- **Individual development and job skills.** The balance between individual development, various ‘soft skills’ and more specific job market oriented skills. We noted in the Literature Review that employers have widespread concerns about the low levels of soft skills. While all programmes emphasise such skills, some also systematically emphasise their importance for employability as this might not always be recognised by participants. For example, in one programme participants failed to recognise this connection and concentrated their attention on the more job-specific aspects of the programme. In contrast, one programme consistently emphasised the importance of a confident presentation of self (eye contact and a firm handshake) both in general and as preparation for interviews.

- **The external environment.** Some researchers point to the importance of the broader external context in influencing the relative effectiveness of programmes and most organisations acknowledge this. The nature of the home environment and parental support, community and peer pressures and the structure of local job markets will have an impact on the relative effectiveness of the programme in obtaining employment for its graduates. Some organisations seek to address such issues via partnerships with social and child services, the police and local employers and some even involve parents. However, except in the case of one organisation operating in a building with more than 30 social services, there is little evidence that such extra-programme factors are dealt with systematically. Further, few currently implement Pawson’s (2006) post programme sponsoring stage. While the importance of such work is acknowledged, resources are rarely available to undertake it systematically.

Such a variety of factors is reflected in the differences between three broad types of projects:

- **Sports-centred.** Those which have evolved from a general sport-for-change approach to a focus on employability, but still use sport as a key experiential learning environment for employability-related social skills. Such projects also provide vocational education opportunities via Levels 1 and 2 sports coaching qualifications and First Aid. These are viewed as important in attracting participants, contributing to personal development via a sense of achievement and providing a job-relevant qualification.

- **Sport plus.** Those which have reflected on the limitations of a sports-centred, one-size-fits-all approach and have adopted a more systematic individual-oriented, sport plus approach in which personal strengths and weaknesses are identified and developed. Provision may be made for educational compensation in numeracy and literacy and forms of work experience / volunteering will be provided mostly within the organisation.

- **Plus sport.** Such programmes take employability as the key focus, often recruiting those with educational qualifications, or targeting NEETS who can demonstrate that they are ‘attitudinally ready’ for such programmes. There is a more systematic and focussed approach on employment skills. They may use sport only as a generic environment in which to develop planning, organisational, management and relationship skills. For example, one approach is for participants to liaise with schools, obtain resources and plan, organise and deliver sports programmes.
3.3. Programmes’ views on employability

The case study interviewees referred to a variety of skills which they associated with employability and which they sought to develop. Table 1 provides a summary of these, which we have divided into three broad, if overlapping, categories – personal development, educational skills and directly employment-related skills.

Many of the elements of personal development were included in most sport-for-change projects and are almost identical to the ‘soft skills’ identified in the literature on employability. However, it was not always clear how some of them were achieved – a mixture of being inherent in the programme ethos, formal instruction and mutually reinforcing programme elements. Further, the definitions were often vague, lacking in conceptual precision and were rarely measured in a systematic or robust manner. The elements included under educational skills and employment skills were not included as systematically, although it can be argued that many of them are central to any definitions of employability and the important process of managing the transition to employment.

Table 1: Components of employability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal development</th>
<th>Educational skills</th>
<th>Employment skills</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Confidence</td>
<td>• Levels 1 and 2 in sports coaching/sports leadership</td>
<td>• Career development plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dress/self-presentation, body language</td>
<td>• English</td>
<td>• Administration/management skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal reflection and evaluation</td>
<td>• Maths</td>
<td>• Event organising and management</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Conflict management</td>
<td>• IT skills</td>
<td>• CV writing skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emotional management</td>
<td>• Presentation skills</td>
<td>• Completing application forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-motivation and ambition</td>
<td>• Personal finance planning</td>
<td>• Job searching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Behaving in a professional manner</td>
<td>• Enterprise/entrepreneurship</td>
<td>• Interview skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Polite, respectful, understanding boundaries</td>
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<td>• Time management</td>
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<td>• Communication skills</td>
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<td>• Reliability</td>
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<td>• Having initiative</td>
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<td>• Leadership skills</td>
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It can be concluded that most programmes have a broad awareness of the varied components of employability as outlined in the various surveys of employers’ requirements. The extent to which they are successful in achieving these remains an issue for more systematic, theoretically informed, investigation.

3.4. The components of a programme theory for sport and employability

As with Figure 1, a general framework is provided (Figure 3) rather than a specific programme theory because of the variety of programmes in what is an emerging field of practice. As with Figure 1, individual programmes can select the components, processes and presumed sequences of cause-and-effect relevant to their programmes and develop coherent theories of change.
Figure 3 Programme Theory for Sport and Employability: A framework

Inputs 1
Recruitment

Inputs 2
Participants

Outputs 1
Social climate

Outputs 2
Employability focus

Outputs 3

Impacts

Outcomes

Open + Targeting/ referrals

Self-selection.
Environmental
determinism/deficit
model

Referrals:
information from
courts/schools.

Analysis of local
labour market

Selection (e.g. on
academic basis)

Diagnosis of personal
circumstances/
constraints.

One size fits all?

Diagnostics/individual
learning plans

Referral to other
agencies?

Sport plus/plus sport
Youth worker/coach

• Sport: key
attraction
• Sport: basis for
experiential
learning/personal
development/discipline/social
skills
• ‘social skills’
workshops
• Coaching qual.
• Personal
learning/career
plan
• Employability
relevance of skills
reinforced
• Educational
compensation
Maths, English
• Small numbers
groups/ 
teamwork?

Sense of safety/
acceptance/belonging
• Interested/caring
adults
• Models for
conventional
behaviour
• Controls on deviant
behaviour
• Critical support
• Value placed on
achievement
• Positive attitudes
to future

In-house
Volunteering
• In-house
event organising
• Work
experience
• Work
placement
• IT
• Personal
financial
management
• CVs
• Interview
skills
• Employer/
partnership
working

Understanding of
others/perspectives
• Self-reflection/
evaluation
• Personal
responsibility
• Team working
• Time management
• Conflict
management
• Communication
skills
• Perceived self-
efficacy
• Problem solving
• Focus/direction
• Ambition/motivation/initiative
• Leadership skills
• Increased maturity

Individuals employed by
organisation
Choose FE
Employed by work
placement organisation
Seek jobs without
assistance
Organisation
sponsors/mediates
relationship with
employers
Referred to job agency
Remain unemployed

Befriending

↔

Direction-setting

↔

Coaching

↔

Sponsoring

Respect

trust

reciprocity
Inputs 1: Methods of recruitment

While it is possible that employability projects may have open access – i.e. self-selection – most appear to adopt some form of targeting and referrals (e.g. from school / probation). There is also geographical targeting where there is evidence of structural unemployment. To target those who are failing, or have failed, in the education system or lack the personal and social skills deemed to constitute ‘employability’ would seem to be the optimal approach to address issues of unemployment. Otherwise such programmes could be regarded simply as general sport-for-change projects seeking to develop general personal and social skills, which might contribute to employability. Others require a certain minimum level of formal educational qualifications or a demonstration that recruits are ‘attitudinally ready’ for such programmes. Clearly the nature of recruitment is a significant factor in deciding how to assess effectiveness and the ‘value added’ nature of programmes.

Inputs 2: The nature of participants

The assumption is that employability projects will be much more participant-centred and needs-based than general open-access, sport-for-change programmes. Although many of the programmes were relatively standardised, few believed that one-size-fits-all. Although some of the more focussed employability projects had ‘entrance qualifications’, the depth of diagnosis of individual strengths and weaknesses varied. Most projects had some information about individual participants from a mixture of sources - schools, referral agencies, meetings with programme mentors, or both formal and informal diagnostic approaches. Some developed formal individual learning plans and there is an increased recognition of the importance of such plans.

Participants’ environment

In addition to diagnosing the various strengths and weakness and personal development needs of individual recruits, some point to the importance of a broader social, cultural and economic understanding of the context within which such individuals live and may remain after they leave the programme. For example:

- **Local labour markets.** It is suggested that an analysis of the local labour market and the nature of employment opportunities should be undertaken. This is especially so if the programme has a strong orientation towards particular types of employment, rather than a more general personal development / employability focus. It should be noted that there are differences of opinion within the sector as to whether they should be increasing the ability to choose via a personal development / employability approach, or they should take a narrower, more pragmatic employment focus.

- **Resilient communities.** We have noted Ungar’s (2006) concerns about non-resilient or non-supportive environments and in some communities recruits might have to overcome constraints outside the immediate control of the programme: social and cultural obligations (e.g. domestic chores; certain caring roles; income generation); relatively unsupportive families or peer groups; cultures which resist aspiration.

Consequently the initial assessment of individuals and their development needs may need to include some form of ‘environmental analysis’, in which such obstacles are identified and steps taken to address them both during and after participation in the programme. Some organisations seek to address such issues via partnerships with social and child services, the police and local employers and some even involve parents.
However, except one organisation operating in a building with more than 30 social service organisations and headed by a child psychologist, there is little evidence that such extra-programme factors are dealt with systematically. While the importance of such work is acknowledged, resources and expertise are not always readily available.

**Outputs 1: Sport plus and plus sport**

The continuum of programmes reflects the balance between sport as the learning medium and other programme components. Currently, the predominant approaches can be defined as *Sport Plus 1* and *Sport Plus 2* and both are strongly participant-focused, delivered via a diagnostic, youth work approach with a degree of adaptation to meet individual needs.

- **Sport plus 1.** Such programmes are based on mutually reinforcing relationships between sport-based experiential learning and formal social skills workshops. They usually include the possibility of Level 1 and 2 coaching certificates, to provide a sense of achievement and a vocationally relevant qualification. Such qualifications also provide the basis for volunteering, which is highly valued by participants and contributes substantially to the achievement of some of the employability-related impacts such as perceived self-efficacy, self-esteem and communication skills.

- **Sport plus 2.** Such programmes also have mutually reinforcing relationships between sports participation and social skill workshops, but emphasise more systematically the relevance of such skills to employability, as this is not always recognised by participants. They have a stronger employability, or even employment, focus by addressing issues of educational underachievement (e.g. remedial maths and English), promoting volunteering systematically as a learning environment, facilitating some work experience and providing assistance with CV writing and interview techniques.

- **Plus sport.** Such programmes are currently in a small minority and use sport as a ‘fly paper’ to attract young people to programmes in which much of the developmental work is undertaken via a range of non-sporting activities - the educational and employment activities listed in Table 1 – and the employability focus is emphasised in all activities. Importantly, it is possible that such programmes are not inclusive, as they may require certain entry qualifications. For example, a certain level of educational qualification, or the possession of particular attitudes which indicate work ‘readiness’, may be required to ensure the ability to learn and benefit from programme activities and as an employment criteria.

One programme had identified the need to move from a Sport plus 2 approach to be much more clearly a self-defined ‘employability project’, with the consequent downgrading of sport as a learning medium, although retaining its fly paper importance.

Some projects felt that a more focused and systematic approach is required to the development of employability skills – especially where ‘harder’ skills are deemed to be important (e.g. numeracy, literacy, IT, financial understanding and personal budgeting). In such circumstances, while sport remains an important attraction, participation plays a subsidiary role in the development of employability, or is used to reinforce skills introduced elsewhere.

**Outputs 2: Social relationships and social climate**

*Cedefop* (2011; 2013) refers to the need to create an attractive and congenial learning environment.

For many this is the most important change mechanism in the programme – the nature of relationships, behavioural rules, limits of behaviour, the balance between caring and support and
the emphasis on team working, conformity to rules, achievement and positive attitudes. Programmes seek to provide a non-threatening, if disciplined, environment where participants feel a sense of safety and acceptance, which provides the context for developmental work.

**Participant involvement and the social climate**

Some organisations involve participants in the development of the rules and codes of behaviour and relationships which constitute a programme’s social climate. This is viewed as a means to achieve greater involvement in, and commitment to, the programme and as contributing to the personal development, maturity and sense of responsibility of participants. Within these contexts, varying types and degree of control on deviant behaviour are exercised – ranging from formal sanctions to a high level of self-control and peer policing. It is within this context that many of the ‘soft skills’ are developed both informally and formally – positive social relationships, team work, personal responsibility, ability to compromise, conflict management.

**The importance of the process of mentoring**

In Figure 3, both the various stages of mentoring and the associated development of respect / trust / reciprocity are presented as developing processes which underpin all activities and relationships within a programme. For example, befriending and the establishment of mutual respect occur as participants join the programme and develop throughout.

While the youth worker / coach approach is common in many sport-for-change programmes, it is central to sport and employability programmes. These programmes place strong emphasis on mentoring – for befriending and initial integration, diagnosing strengths and weaknesses, assisting personal development and maintaining participants’ commitment to the programmes. Some type of mentoring relationship runs through all programmes, and has a strong similarity to Pawson’s (2006) programme theory:

- **Befriending**: the initial creating of bonds of trust / sharing of new experiences and diagnosis of strength and weaknesses.
- **Direction-setting**: promoting participants’ self-reflection / self-awareness via discussion of alternatives and reconsidering values, loyalties and ambitions.
- **Coaching**: coaxing, cajoling and supporting the mentee to acquire skills, assets, credentials and testimonials needed to the employment market.

In terms of direction-setting and coaching, some programmes assist participants to develop individual learning plans. Some even develop a contract with participants to formalise their responsibilities and commitments. To varying degrees the mentor monitors, encourages and supports the implementation of such plans.

**Respect, trust, reciprocity**

Mentors, as interested, caring and supportive adults, are able to construct positive social relationships with young people, based on mutual respect. Evidence suggests that this leads to relationships based on trust and the development of feelings of reciprocity on the part of participants – ‘I do not want to let him down’ – that contribute to the participant’s motivation to change values, attitudes, aspirations and behaviour. However, all recognised that this was not necessarily a unilinear process, with ‘two steps forward and one back’ not uncommon. While nearly all sport-for-employability programmes contain elements of these three mechanisms, only a few have Pawson’s fourth component:
• **Sponsoring**: While many programmes do provide support for job seeking, CV preparation and interview techniques, few accept the full implications of sponsoring. This requires mentors to advocate and network on behalf of mentees, using their insider contacts and knowledge of employment opportunities. Many programmes recognised the importance of mediating participants’ initial relationship with the job market - and also the possible need for support after obtaining employment – but did not have the necessary resources. One of the case study programmes uses this approach through the provision of work placements, close working with employers and long term monitoring and support of individuals after they have obtained employment, but this approach is rare.

**Outputs 3: Focus on employability**

This output is the major addition to the original framework (Figure 1) and refers to components of the programme which deal with directly ‘employment-oriented’ issues. While programmes with an employability-focus emphasise the development of employability-relevant soft skills in all aspects of the programme, increasingly many include components which develop more practical employment-related skills and learning. These are not necessarily highly technical, vocational or job-specific skills. Rather, they are forms of work discipline and planning, administrative and organisational skills obtained via experiential learning as volunteers, or forms of work experience.

There is now a widespread provision of opportunities to volunteer and research has illustrated the importance attributed to such experiences by both participants and potential employers. Some programmes support participants to organise and deliver small scale events - this is especially a feature of plus sport programmes - and some facilitate real-world work experience. Others provide workshops on personal financial management, which was highly valued by participants in anticipation of their first wage.

In addition to such experiential learning, many programmes provide more practical support in CV writing, help participants to develop interview skills (some bring in employers to do such interviews) and facilitate job searching.

**Impacts**

The programmes combine, in a variety of ways, the development of both the soft and hard skills which are widely acknowledged to be components of employability (Table 1). There is often more emphasis on soft skills because they can be developed via the generic programme processes and relationships, whereas the hard, employment-related skills (interview skills, IT skills, finance) often require additional resources and expertise (which can be accessed via partnerships with certain employers). Consequently, many of the desired impacts are similar to those in more general sport-for-change programmes (Figure 1) – they deal with aspects of self- and social-awareness, perceived self-efficacy, team work, aspects of emotional intelligence, ambition and motivation and growing maturity.

Although an attempt has been made in Figure 3 to list a variety of impacts in a hierarchical, developmental sequence, it is difficult to be precise about the order in which such development occurs. This is because the development of such competences is often inter-related. For example, the development of leadership or communication skills depends on a degree of perceived self-efficacy, but success in such activities strengthens such confidence. Further, the order in which such skills are developed will reflect the nature of the processes and sequence of activities within each programme, as well as the nature of individual participants and relationships with mentors.
Outcomes

We have already noted the crucial distinction between employability and employment. Sport-for-employability programmes can, and do, deliver theoretically-informed, research-based and inclusive programmes which prepare young people for the labour market. In this regard many understand the basic components of the necessary soft skills identified by various academics and employers. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there are limited data relating to the relative effectiveness of the programmes, especially in the long term. Also such programmes cannot guarantee employment – except for a few graduates who are subsequently employed in some of the organisations – and this lack of guaranteed outcomes is reflected in the Outcomes column in Figure 3.

Spaaij et al’s (2013) research indicates that the broader impact on employment of such programmes is often limited because it is strongly affected by external factors – the nature of the accessible local job market, employers’ attitudes to particular types of individual in a labour market experiencing over-supply and grade inflation, parental factors and poor home support, peer pressures. Further, Sampson’s (2015) evaluation of the Pathways programme of Fight for Peace found that the majority of the graduates were in low skill, temporary or casual work with subsequent unstable employment patterns. Programmes which aim simply to develop individuals’ employability may underestimate the difficulties that many at-risk young people face, either in entering further education or entering the labour market and finding reasonably permanent jobs.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

• **Soft skills.** Most sport-for-employability projects seem to have identified correctly the type of soft skills which employers view as lacking in many job applicants: self-management, time management, critical self-reflection, team working, relationship building, problem solving, communication skills and literacy.

• **Sport plus.** Most programmes recognise that such skills will not be developed systematically via simple sports participation, but need to be addressed and emphasised systematically. Consequently programmes are various forms of sport plus, in which there are mutually reinforcing relationships between sport-based experiential learning and formal social skills workshops, with some providing opportunities to obtain sport-related vocational qualifications and volunteering. Some also provide assistance in CV writing, interview techniques and job searching.

• **Assessment of individual needs.** Although not widespread in sport for employability programmes, research on generic employability programmes (Cedefop, 2011, 2013) identifies the need to:
  • Undertake an initial assessment of an individual’s work-readiness, including learning needs.
  • Tailor aspects of programmes to meet individual learner needs.
  • Develop individual learning plans to provide a focus for learning and commitment to development.
  • Provide information and guidance to make appropriate career decisions.
• The broader context. In addition to diagnosing the various strengths, weaknesses and personal development needs of individuals there may be a need to develop a broader social understanding of the cultural and economic context within such individuals live. For example, what is the nature of the local labour market and what opportunities exist? Secondly, Ungar’s (2006) concerns about non-resilient environments mean that there is a need to understand the nature of individual and social constraints which some young people may have to confront. Some organisations address such issues via partnerships with social and child services, the police and local employers, and some even involve parents.

• Social climate. As with more general sport-for-change programmes the social climate is central to the success of a programme - the nature of social relationships, behavioural rules and limits, the balance between caring and critical support and the emphasis on team working, compromise, achievement and positive attitudes. Some organisations involve participants in the development and monitoring of the rules and codes of behaviour as a means to achieve greater involvement in, and commitment to, the programme and as contributing to the personal development, maturity and sense of responsibility.

• Mentoring. This is as a key mechanism for change and in employability programmes its key function is to provide a critical friend and to create bonds of trust, to assist in the development and implementation of individual learning plans, to promote self-reflection and encourage participants to reconsider values, loyalties and ambitions and to ensure adherence to the programme.

• Educational compensation. Because employability will also include basic literacy and numeracy skills, some programmes provide compensatory education classes. The need for this should be identified via initial assessments. Alternatively, some programmes address these issues by having certain education-related entry requirements which they regard as necessary for learning on the programme and for eventual employment. However, the latter approach cannot be regarded as an inclusive approach, although such programmes are likely to be measured as being effective.

• Vocational qualifications. Most programmes include opportunities to undertake Level 1 and 2 coaching certificates. This provides a sense of achievement and a vocationally relevant qualification. Such qualifications also provide the basis for volunteering within some organisations. Perhaps consideration should be given to a wider range of (non-sporting) vocational qualifications.

• Volunteering. Participants and employers highly value the experience of volunteering and the view is that it contributes to the achievement of employability-related impacts such as organisational skills, improved perceived self-efficacy, self-esteem and communication skills. Given the frequent obstacle of lack of work experience, consideration should be given to adopting more systematic and documented opportunities to volunteer.

• Work experience. While volunteering can provide a form of work experience, in terms of employability, experience of working in businesses outside the organisation would be more effective. This could be achieved via links with local businesses and programmes of work experience or work placement. The experience of the expectations, requirements and norms of the workplace is an increasingly important component of employability.

• Job preparation and the transition to employment. It is clear that many of the most vulnerable young people need assistance in the transition to employment. Pawson (2006)
argues that sponsoring, via which mentors advocate on behalf of mentees, using insider contacts and knowledge of opportunities, is an essential component of successful programmes. However, this requires substantial resources and is not feasible for many programmes. Nevertheless, many organisations assist with CV writing, interview practice (some with employers) and job searching and this seems the least that is required to mediate graduates’ relationship with the job market.

- **Monitoring, evaluation, effectiveness and programme development.** Although all recognise the importance of the systematic collection of information about the **effectiveness** of programmes, not all do so. Also, despite the fact that many of the desired impacts are common to all and relate to generic issues, there is a lack of a common evaluation framework. There is also a mistaken view that such soft skills are difficult to measure and also a lack of expertise and resources. Further, as the broader impact on employment of such programmes may be limited there is a need to better define measures of effectiveness.

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