

Cumbrian coach trip to participation

Since Seb Coe flew a rainbow nation of youngsters to Singapore and promised the International Olympic Committee that London would provide a wonderful sporting legacy from 2012 sceptics have waited for palpable evidence beyond the facilities themselves and certainly beyond the M25 that the London Olympics would actually deliver “more people” to match the “more places” and the expected “more medals”. In the top left hand corner of England Rachel Walker is managing to ensure that Seb’s promise was not just empty bombast.

For people who work or volunteer in sport it would seem axiomatic that to increase the number of people participating in sport you first need to increase the number of people providing them with the opportunity. Of course people can set up and run their own soccer teams, squash leagues and social cricket matches but when young people or complete beginners are involved and especially when you move towards ‘active leisure’ then somebody has to start organising, leading and coaching. In Cumbria that has been recognised for some years and the response to it, a scheme called Get Qualified, has now entered its third phase.

Buoyed by the success of the original scheme which supported over 300 coaches to get qualified in outdoor sector national governing body (NGB) qualifications in Cumbria, Get Qualified 2 was approved in 2008 and received funding from Sport England. The two-year project exceeded all expectations and targets, supporting more than 1,500 NGB and minimum deployment standard qualifications across Lancashire and Cumbria. The axiom that more coaches equals more participants was proved with data collected, which showed there were nearly 24,000 new participants to sport and that the newly qualified coaches delivered over 40,000 coaching hours. This project was a tremendous success and went some way to increase the numbers of coaches available to support new participants and existing players inspired by the 2012 dream.

Not that inspiration is limited to sports that are on the 2012 programme, as the case of James Pearson, a baseball coach, shows. James achieved his Level 2 baseball qualification with the help of Get Qualified and is now able to deliver practice sessions for his club and its members. Having qualified at Level 2, the ambitious Pearson went on to apply for and be selected to act as an assistant coach to the Great Britain cadet (under 15) squad and he hopes to continue coaching in the GB programme and to develop his coaching skills further.

The success of Get Qualified in its first two phases led the University of Cumbria to apply for European Social Fund support with the aim of helping a further 800 coaches progress to Level 2 and Level 3 of their NGB’s qualification structures. The expanded project, now called Get Qualified NW, is designed to support coach development and skills across the whole of the north west region in sport as well as both the outdoors and fitness sectors. These initiatives have received funding from the Learning and Skills Council (now the Skills Funding Agency), the European Social Fund and the Sport Lottery fund and have continued to expand as sport and physical activity grow in the build up to 2012.

The new scheme has opened for business and is currently accepting applications from anyone in the region who wants to complete either their Level 2 or Level 3 qualifications in sport, the outdoors or fitness. The project can provide successful applicants with 60% of their course fees, although this is capped at £200 for a Level 2 and £300 for a Level 3 qualification. Applicants must be 19 or over, be working or living in the north west and not be in full time education. The scheme works equally well whether the coaches are club volunteers or in paid employment within the sector just as long as they have secured a place on the course before submitting their application. Sports that are currently involved include angling, athletics, badminton, baseball, basketball, cricket, cycling, football, hockey, judo, lacrosse, netball, orienteering, rowing, softball, snowsport, squash, swimming, table tennis, tennis, triathlon and volleyball. The project team is currently in discussions with gymnastics, ju-jitsu, handball and rugby league, and are happy to work with additional sports.

The outdoor and fitness aspects of the project are managed by the National Skills Academy for Sport and Active Leisure with outdoor qualifications currently supported in climbing, walking, mountaineering, canoeing, mountain biking, sailing and windsurfing courses. In April this year Rick Patterson got 60% off his British Canoe Union Level 3 coach assessment and made the journey to the national centre at Plas y Brenin. Patterson, who has been an instructor and youth worker for www.theleisurereview.co.uk



Cartmel Baseball: part of the north west's Get Qualified success story

“This is the third time we’ve run this scheme but the first time its remit has been extended to the fitness industry as well as sport and the outdoor sector. This means that we can help even more people gain the qualifications to realise their ambitions.”



Rachel Walker: getting qualified

most of his career and currently works both as a freelance instructor and volunteer coach at Ribble Canoe Club, said: "It has taken me a while to get round to doing my Level 3 assessment, but knowing that I could get funding towards the course really helped me speed up the decision. Sea kayaking is an expensive sport and getting qualifications is more so now than ever. Being able to get a 60% refund has made a real difference." Now that he has the qualification Patterson is running a 3-star sea kayaking course at Ribble Canoe Club which is proving so popular that the club has had to pull in other coaches to help.

The picture is much the same in the fitness sector where the project supports a variety of industry-relevant fitness courses which correspond with the Register of Exercise Professionals (REPS) standards. Qualifications include certificates and awards in gym and fitness instructing, personal training, nutrition and weight management as well as business and marketing.

All of the Get Qualified projects have been managed from the University of Cumbria's school of sport and the university is the lead organisation for Get Qualified NW in a partnership which involves a variety of delivery partners, including various national governing bodies, all five of the region's county sport partnerships, Sportscoach UK, SkillsActive and the National Skills Academy. Dr Dave Houlston, head of the school, commented: "We are committed to helping people in the region advance themselves and achieve the career goals they set themselves. This is the third time we've run this scheme but the first time its remit has been extended to the fitness industry as well as sport and the outdoor sector. This means that we can help even more people gain the qualifications to realise their ambitions."

With over 800 coaches, instructors and teachers set to benefit directly from the scheme and in turn thousands of participants being able to take up or take more part in sport and active leisure across the north west it is gratifying that Cumbria is doing its best to make Baron Coe's Singapore claim that little bit more likely.

Rachel Walker is the Get Qualified projects manager for the University of Cumbria.

For further information, a list of the qualifications that Get Qualified NW can support and to apply visit www.getqualifiednw.org.uk

The Leisure Review, July 2010

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