

RISE.

Sunderland College Student Workforce Project Evaluation & Reflections Report

July 2023

Authors

Jade Scott

Strategic Lead - Adult Health and Wellbeing

Paul Biddle

Research and Insight Development Manager

About Rise

We are a charity working across Northumberland and Tyne & Wear, and we're passionate about the role that physical activity can play in improving people's lives.

Physical activity, sport or just moving more can deliver an amazing, positive impact on both individuals and communities, and can help to address issues as varied as raising the aspirations of children living in poverty, to supporting the mental wellbeing of men at risk of suicide.

We work with partners to collaborate around many of the big issues that are facing our communities today, using the power of sport and physical activity to tackle inequalities. We advocate for policy change, share best practice, provide advice, guidance, and support, and connect like-minded allies.

Our partners include those in health, education, the criminal justice system, transport and planning, and our work supports them to see how physical activity can help them achieve their aims.

Contact Us

Royal Quays Business Centre,
Coble Dene,
North Shields,
NE29 6DE.

T: 07973 786310

E: info@wearerise.co.uk

Company number - 07176549

Charity number - 1135223

Executive Summary

This report details the development, delivery and impacts of a Rise-funded project, implemented by Sunderland College. The project aimed to develop the capacity of the college to deliver physical activity opportunities to students (including less active students). The project aimed to do this by training students to deliver physical activity sessions to their fellow students.

A short film about the project can be viewed [here](#). This report should be read in conjunction with the film.

The strategy to engage students to train and deliver sessions is effective. It provides those students trained with the confidence, knowledge and expertise to deliver sessions, whilst also equipping them with experience and skills relevant to progressing their future career and employment aspirations. The formal qualifications that students, who were trained received, was key to securing their engagement.

The project has created a cohort of students able to deliver physical activity sessions outside of the project and led to wider 'spin off' initiatives to support physical activity. There is evidence that the project can deliver free, enjoyable physical activities sessions that can lead to increased physical activity (or plans to become more physically active) by participants (some of whom have historically been less active). Sessions have engaged students who, when not occupied, may cause issues on campus.

The project has identified popular activities (gym, football and basketball) and delivery times (lunchtimes) that can inform future delivery of similar initiatives.

There is scope to further develop promotion, insight/evaluation, maintain participation over time, and to change how sessions are managed and delivered to aid overall project sustainability. Ways forward, relating to these issues, are discussed in the latter section of the report.

Introduction

This report describes and evaluates the development, delivery and impact of a Rise-funded project at Sunderland College. The report:

- Discusses the development, delivery and outcomes achieved by the project.
- Identifies aspects of the project that could be beneficially repeated, where changes could usefully be made to enhance delivery of future similar projects, and what these changes could be.

Findings are drawn from:

- Data provided by Sunderland College about activities delivered and students engaged.
- The results of a Sunderland College-developed and administered survey completed by students to gather insight about their physical activity levels and physical activity preferences (designed to inform session delivery).
- Two focus groups undertaken with students who were trained and subsequently delivered physical activity sessions.
- Data from a survey administered to students who attended sessions.
- A reflection session with the member of staff at Sunderland College who managed the day-to-day delivery of the project.



The Project

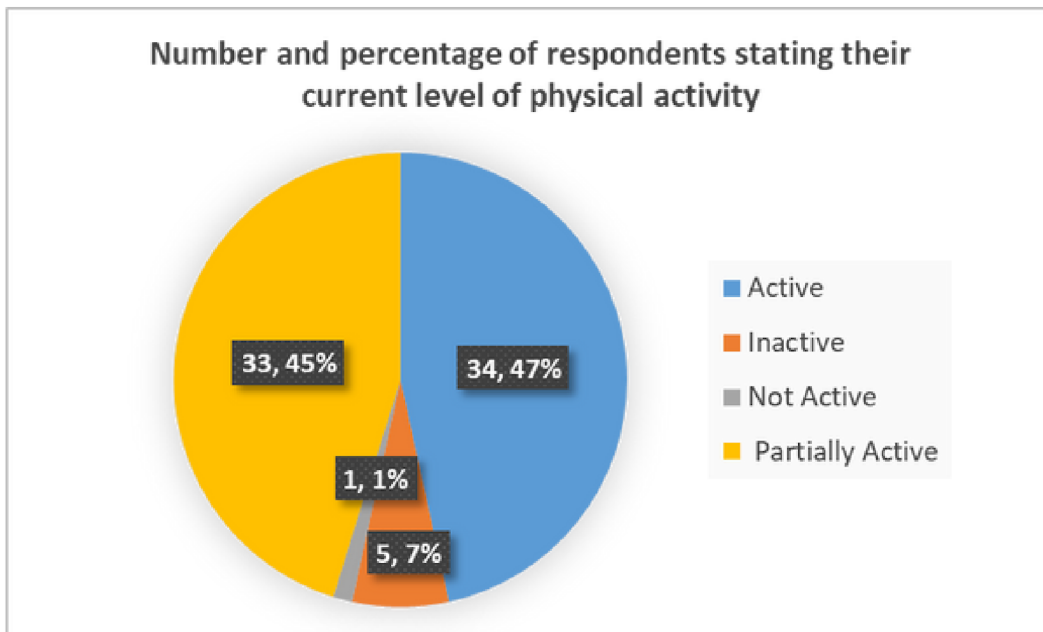
The project aimed to reduce rates of physical inactivity among students attending Sunderland College by developing a student workforce who, once trained, would deliver a range of physical activity sessions to their fellow students. The project was managed by a member of Sunderland College staff, who took on this role in addition to existing duties. The project was a response to relatively low levels of physical activity in Sunderland, plus consultation with Sunderland College students, that identified barriers young people can face when trying to be active (including a lack of time, lack of opportunities and available activities that are not seen as fun).

The project ran from Autumn 2022 to Spring 2023 and comprised the following components:

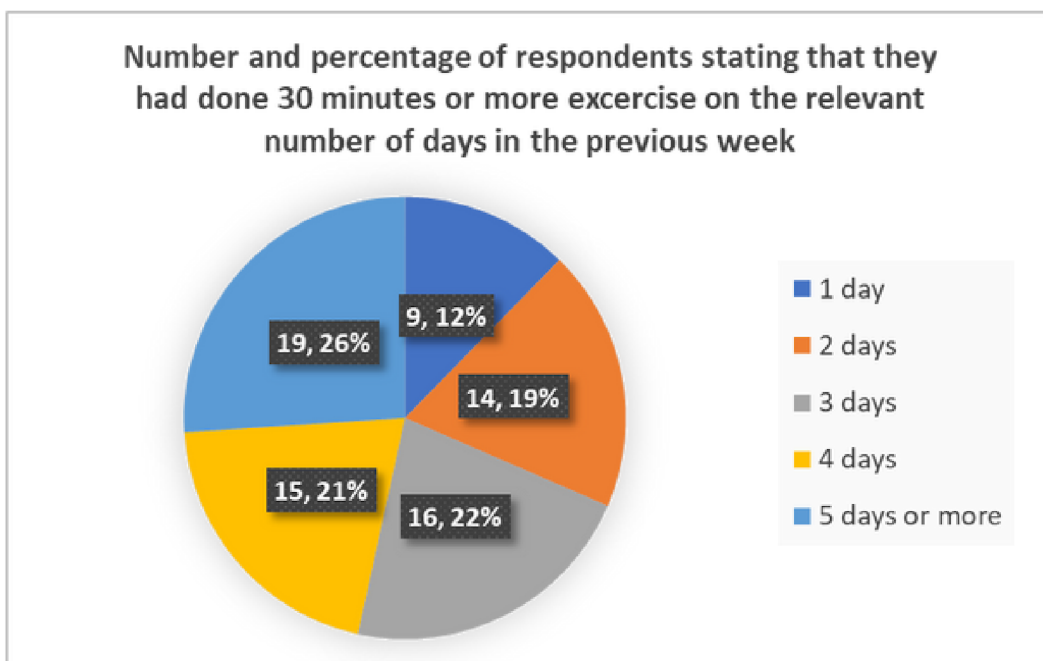
- Administration and analysis of a Sunderland College-administered student consultation questionnaire to understand the physical activity experiences and preferences.
- Recruitment and training of students to deliver sessions.
- Delivery of sessions by students for their fellow students.
- Administration of a questionnaire to students who participated in sessions to understand their experiences.
- Two focus groups with students who delivered sessions.
- A reflection session, with the member of staff who managed the project, to reflect on the development, delivery and outcomes achieved by the project to inform any future similar initiatives.

Student Physical Activity & Preferences Consultation Questionnaire

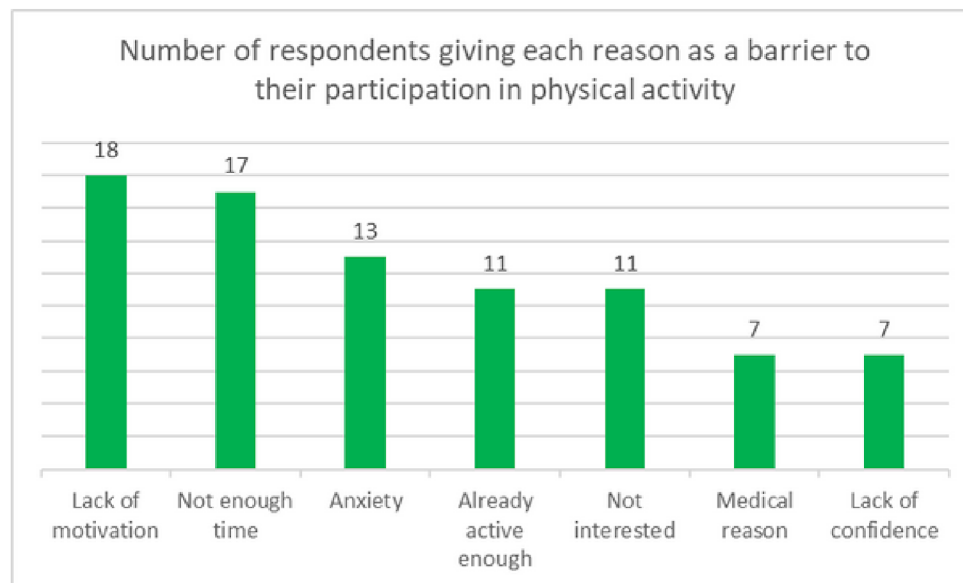
A total of 74 students completed a student questionnaire that was developed and administered by Sunderland College. A total of 73 respondents provided details about their current level of physical activity and information is presented in the pie chart below.



Seventy-three respondents also gave further details about their current level of physical activity, by providing information about the number of days in the past week (before they completed the questionnaire) that they had done 30 minutes or more of physical activity. Findings are presented in the pie chart below:



The graph below shows the most common reasons given by participants regarding the barriers preventing their participation in physical activities. Although various barriers are mentioned, the most common ones are a lack of both motivation and time.



The most frequently cited factors that would encourage participants to be more physically active are:

- Activities that enable them to have fun and socialise (33)
- A variety of activities to choose from (15)

Less frequently cited factors that would encourage participation in physical activities are:

- Taster sessions (7)
- Female only sessions (4)
- Male only sessions (3)

Questionnaire findings showed the most popular times of day for participating in physical activities would be:

- 13:00-14:00
- 16:00-17:00
- 12:00-13:00
- 09:00-10:00

Questionnaire findings identified Wednesday as the most popular day, closely followed by Friday, with Monday, Tuesday and Thursday noticeably less popular.

The table below presents data about activities respondents stated they would like to participate in if these were offered. Respondents had a wide range of preferences, with the most popular being:

- Gym (which is by far the most preferred activity)
- Football
- Dodgeball

Activity	Number of respondents who would participate in the relevant activity if delivered at College
Basketball	10
Cardio Tennis/Tennis	8
Circuits Fitness Based Activities	2
Climbing	14
Dance	4
Dodgeball	19
Esport	2
Football	24
Gym	40
Netball	4
Rock Up Badminton	5
Rugby	1
Sitting Volleyball	0
Soft Archery	10
Swimming	1
Target Shooting	1
UV Light Activities	3
Walking	10
Weights	1
Yoga	6
Zerobounds	0
Zumba	4

Recruitment & Training of Students

Recruitment

The member of staff managing the project provided information to colleagues who shared this with their students. Information explained the purpose of the project, the roles, responsibilities and opportunities that participating students would have, and the qualifications they would achieve. Information highlighted that students would be responsible for the organisation and delivery of sessions and that they would have some freedom to deliver activities as they preferred.

Students had to justify (via a short, written statement) why they should be selected.

This approach was effective as more than the target number of students attended the recruitment event. The event included a presentation about the project, participation requirements and qualifications that could be achieved.

The project recruited the target number of 16 students to train and deliver sessions, from 22 applications. Key to the success of the recruitment strategy was that it highlighted the benefits and qualifications that students who undertook training and delivered sessions would gain - and how these were relevant to their future career aspirations:

“We sold it as a package. It wasn’t just that you’re volunteering, it was you’re also getting something for your CV, it was you’re going to get some kit, you’re going to get these qualifications for free and it’ll help you when you apply for this job, that job etc. That was attractive to the students.” (Member of Staff).

Training

Training modules included First Aid, Boxing Activator, Gym Instruction, Group Exercise, Behaviour Management, Being an Activator, Street Games and Doorstep Sport. Overall, content supported students to deliver their sessions, whilst also equipping them with knowledge and skills to support their longer-term employment and career plans:

“I liked the Street Games (module) because I’ve only ever been focused on football... I’ve learned different ways of coaching people, different age groups...just expanded my knowledge.” (Student).

“The First Aid qualification helps with all the fundamentals, if there are injuries... things you need to know if you want to be a PE teacher or start your own business... you know we learn how to do CPR and how to use a defibrillator, how to use a sling.” (Student).

“I hadn’t really got an insight into what it takes to be a Sports Coach and what you’re going to experience...the student workforce programme has given me more of an insight, hands-on experience of what I’m going to be experiencing whilst I’m out coaching by myself. It’s been really enjoyable getting the knowledge and the practical work done...you do get some very essential qualifications.” (Participant)

“Organising our own sessions and getting people from around the college to participate...if you’re going to have your own coaching business, it’s gonna give us hands on experience on what we’ll be doing in the future.” (Student).

“The qualifications you get from it, it’s a good stepping-stone on the career path I want to do coaching-wise.” (Student).

“Once I’ve finished here, I’m looking to either start my own business, or to be a PE teacher, so obviously these qualifications will be handy for that...makes it more achievable for me.” (Student).

“You don’t think about if someone starts behaving badly how are you going to balance your focus between them and the rest of the group...that module gives you an insight into how to deal with badly behaved participants...the main thing I learned is keeping them occupied...make them the referee.” (Student).

The training also emphasised the importance of self-reliance and proactivity to engage participants and deliver sessions, both of which are relevant to future career aspirations:

“Organising our own sessions and getting people from around the college to participate...if you’re going to have your own coaching business, it’s gonna give us hands on experience on what we’ll be doing in the future.” (Student).

“The course had taught me how to be confident, how to be approachable ...all the basic skills of being a Sports Coach.” (Student).

As well as direct training and practical experiences, students were also provided with sources of information, advice and guidance that they found useful – and were also to utilise College facilities.

“We’ve got different websites and resources for sports coaching sessions that we’re going to run in the future.” (Student).

“If we need information, we’ve got the library to go and do some research.” (Student).

Session Delivery

Sessions were promoted via:

- Posters placed on campus.
- Word of mouth.
- Information shared with staff, via college IT systems, that was cascaded to students.

Physical activity sessions were delivered by students from w/c 23rd January to w/c 27th March 2023 (excluding half term). Over this 10-week period:

- 221 sessions were delivered.
- There were 364 session attendances by students.
- Attendances increased rapidly from weeks 1-3, but then declined consistently until week 10.
- The activities with the highest levels of attendance were gym sessions (174 attendances), football (62 attendances) and basketball (61 attendances). The table below presents further details about the variety of sessions delivered and attendance. The table also illustrates activity sessions where no students attended (e.g. yoga/pilates and circuits).



Activity	23/01/2023	30/01/2023	06/02/2023	13/02/2023	20/02/2023	27/02/2023	06/03/2023	13/03/2023	20/03/2023	27/03/2023	Total Attendances
	Half Term										
1. Gym	0	3	2	0	N/A	2	1	1	1	1	11
2. Multi Activity	0	0	1	2	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	3
3. Smash It Up Badminton	0	0	0	0	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0
4. Multi Sports	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	7	6	13
5. Dodge Ball	2	0	8	6	N/A	5	2	3	N/A	N/A	26
6. Gym	0	1	1	8	N/A	0	1	0	0	0	11
7. Bespoke Class	0	0	0	0	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0
8. Circuits	0	0	0	0	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0
9. Yoga/Pilates	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0
10. Gym	0	2	3	2	N/A	0	1	2	2	0	12
11. Multi Activity	0	2	1	0	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	3
12. Park Run	0	0	0	0	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0
13. Volleyball	0	0	0	0	N/A	2	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	2
14. Gym	1	2	2	1	N/A	1	1	3	2	1	14
15. Circuits	0	0	0	0	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0
16. Just Dance	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0
17. Boxercise	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0
18. Gym	1	4	1	1	N/A	3	3	3	3	3	22
19. Gym	N/A	3	2	3	N/A	1	2	0	3	0	14
20. PAN Disability Football	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0
21. Multi Sports Activity	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	10	11
22. Gym	N/A	0	6	1	N/A	0	2	1	2	0	12
23. Gym	2	5	4	2	N/A	1	1	1	1	1	18
24. Multi Sports	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	2	4
25. Gym	1	2	9	1	N/A	7	0	0	1	0	21
26. Gym	5	1	2	2	N/A	1	0	0	1	N/A	12
27. Gym	5	0	4	1	N/A	4	4	3	1	0	22
28. Multi Activity	0	0	1	0	N/A	1	1	1	N/A	N/A	4
29. Smash It Up Badminton	0	0	1	0	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	1
30. Basketball	8	16	N/A	5	N/A	7	9	9	7	N/A	61
31. Bespoke Class	0	0	0	0	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0
32. Gym	0	1	0	0	N/A	1	1	1	1	N/A	5
33. Football	1	9	13	16	N/A	8	10	5	0	0	62
Total Sessions	24	27	26	27	0	27	26	27	20	17	
Total Attendees each week	26	51	61	51	0	44	39	33	35	24	

Flexible delivery (in relation to both types and timings of activity) was critical to engage participants:

“In the original plan we had loads of activities in the mornings, but I think having the 8-9am classes, people weren’t looking to do that...a bit too early so we had to change to fit around what people could do...we went for dinner times (lunchtime).” (Member of Staff).

“We let them lead, if they wanted to do something else and we could do it, we’d do it.” (Student).

“I did dance because it’s not competitive. You can just join in and have fun...it’s not hard to do. People can choose what songs they want to do, what dances they want to do.” (Student)

Overall, students delivering the sessions gained positive outcomes. Benefits included improved confidence, learning how to engage people in physical activity that they find enjoyable, managing behaviour and motivating participants:

“Got confidence...I realised that as long as you keep people occupied they’ll do anything.” (Student).

“The training helped me with group dynamics and how to accommodate different needs, how to change what you’re doing to get more motivation.” (Student).

“Tweaked things...helped with behaviour management...tweaking things just to improve the quality.” (Student).

“Get them into pairs or with their friends...gets them more motivated to join in.” (Student).

“I had to join in with them, because they were a bit scared, I’d never have done that... they joined in they all left having enjoyed it.” (Student)

An online questionnaire was administered to students who participated in the sessions. However, the response rate was disappointing with only four students submitting a completed form (see below for a discussion of possible future strategies to improve participant feedback). However, the feedback that was gathered is largely positive. Key findings from this questionnaire are:

- Respondents took part in sessions as they offered a chance to do something they liked, something new, to increase their level of physical activity and because the times and locations of activities were convenient.
- Respondents enjoyed the activities they participated in and all or most agreed activities were well delivered and organised, at the right level for them to participate in, and would recommend activities to their family and friends.
- Most respondents agreed that students running the sessions were welcoming, good at explaining things and professional.
- Respondents were ‘fairly active’ before participating in their sessions and either agreed/strongly agreed that following their participation they have become, or plan to become, more physically active.

Comments from focus group participants suggest activities were able to engage less active students and maintain engagement over time:

“We had basketball at lunchtime on Fridays...before we knew it we had 20 people... and the students that were turning up were those students that don’t normally take part in sport and physical activity.” (Member of Staff)

“Lots of them (participants) said they hadn’t done any activities in years, but they’d had fun, they were laughing.” (Student).

“People would say see you next week and they’d come back, I’ve got regulars now.” (Student).

In this context, data (see above table) indicates that participation declined after week 3. As such, there is a need to consider how to maintain engagement throughout the project.

Learning and Reflection for Future Projects

This section of the report discusses learning points from the project. It illustrates a way forward for future projects by highlighting those elements of the project that can be usefully repeated and changes that could improve project development, delivery and evaluation.

Recruitment of Engagement of Students to Deliver Sessions:

The recruitment and engagement of students to deliver sessions worked effectively. Promotion of the project and roles, via college staff and a recruitment event, resulted in the target number of students being recruited. The recruitment strategy stressed that the experience and qualifications students would gain would be relevant to their future career aspirations. This was a significant factor in students deciding to participate. Therefore, similar future initiatives should include qualifications for participants.

Training:

Feedback from those students trained indicates that training successfully equipped them with the skills and confidence to plan and deliver their activities (that they often previously lacked). Furthermore, the content of the training has given these students skills relevant to their future employment and career aspirations. Training was delivered in a 2-month (approx.) window. Whilst a challenging timeframe, it is feasible and kept students engaged and focused. This approach – including the training modules delivered – can thus usefully form part of any future initiative.

Promotion of Sessions:

Word of mouth was effective at securing participant engagement in activities. Hearing about physical activity opportunities from other students made the message resonant. However, as a strategy word of mouth is limited. There are a finite number of students that can be engaged this way. Several strategies were discussed at the reflection session that could be considered to develop promotion (and so increase levels of participation) for any future projects. In addition to existing approaches (word of mouth, posters and using College IT systems to share information with staff to cascade with students) the following were discussed as future options:

- Holding a launch event as the activities begin.
- Ensuring that posters about activities are located where they are most visible. (this may require Sunderland College to change its poster-placing policies).
- Supplementing existing promotion with college staff with direct messaging to students. This could include emails, text alerts, plus information on any College twitter or Facebook pages.

““Being able to put posters in the library or the café would really help...if we were allowed to put information in social areas I think it would make a huge difference to the amount of people we could reach.” (Member of Staff).

Enhanced promotion is also important to address declining levels of participation over the duration of the project. As such, reminder emails, texts and information on social media are important to consider.

Project Management & Delivery: Key findings relating to project management and delivery are:

- The member of staff managing the project was critical to its success. They were very committed to the project and exploring its potential. Future projects need to ensure there is a committed project manager with sufficient time and support to undertake their project management role.
- Regular communication (weekly) between college staff managing the project and students delivering sessions was important to ensure clarity about which activities were being delivered when, by whom and to identify any issues that required resolution.
- The variety of activities delivered meant individual students were responsible for the delivery of multiple sessions each week. On reflection, to enhance manageability, it may be useful to consider having fewer activities delivered at any one time. In this context, each activity should be managed by 3-4 students (at least initially). This would provide greater capacity to promote and deliver activities, whilst also enhancing the team-work element of the project. Overall, adopting this approach would make a future, similar initiative more manageable.
- Fridays were a popular day for the delivery of activities. The most popular activities (and so which should form part of future projects) were gym, football and basketball. 8am-9am session were less popular. This insight should inform future timetabling.
- Flexible delivery was important to engage participants and deliver a positive experience. Changing times of sessions and delivering sessions that could be adapted to meet participants needs helped ensure a positive participant experience. Ensuring activities are fun and not always competitive is important to ensure a positive experience.
- Delivery of sessions in buildings throughout the campus (or outside) could boost participation further.

Wider Impacts:

Some students trained have delivered sessions outside the project. The project raised awareness of pan-disability football which the College is now trialling, with plans to create a team to represent the college and play at events.

Gathering Insight to inform delivery:

The delivery of the 'right' activities at the 'right' times was sometimes challenging. The initial survey of students identified that popular activities included football and gym sessions. These sessions were among the most popular delivered. However, some activities were more popular than was suggested by the survey (e.g. basketball and multi-sport activities) and some less so (pilates/yoga). Some of the days and times that survey findings suggested would be popular for the delivery of activities proved not to be the case. This suggests there is scope to develop insight further to maximise its accuracy and so support delivery as effectively as possible. Insight could be improved in the following ways:

- Increase response rates to any student questionnaires developed and administered by the College about physical activity preferences. Techniques to increase response rates include advance promotion of surveys and their importance (via emails, text alerts, posters and in-class announcements), incentives (e.g. prize draw) for completion, follow up emails or messages to 'nudge' completion, integrating completion into existing activities (e.g. dedicating 5-10 minutes in classes for completion) and providing multiple completion channels (e.g. online, via mobile phone and via hard copy). Piloting a survey with a small group of potential respondents is useful to identify any issues with question clarity, logic and overall design so these can be addressed.
- Focus insight gathering on students who are less active. This could be achieved using a preliminary screening questionnaire using Active Lives Survey questions to understand levels of physical activity. Those students who are inactive could then receive the fuller, follow up survey and be targeted by promotion activities. This would help to target inactive students that are our primary focus.
- Supplement any questionnaires with 2-3 focus groups. Focus groups are extremely useful to probe and explore motivation and capture 'fine-grain' detail of preferences and contexts that influence choices – which questionnaires may miss.

Evaluation:

The focus groups and reflection session enabled identification of aspects of evaluation that went well and where there is scope for improvement. To improve the volume and quality of insight gathered from participants in future similar projects, the following should be considered:

- As participants arrive, they would be asked to provide their mobile number so they can be texted a link to their phone to a short questionnaire to complete about their experience of a session or sessions. The students running the session would share contact details with Rise who would send out the text within a few days of each session:
 - OR:
- Administration of a short, paper survey to participants at the end of each session with results shared with Rise.
 - AND
- Ensuring students deliver the session pass on registers of attendance to enable a calculation of unique participants and how many activities individual participants attend.

It may be useful for similar future projects to include a minimum target for the number of unique, individual students who will participate in a student workforce delivered session. This would provide an additional quantitative benchmark against which to measure performance, whilst also helping us to consider value for money. This target should be set collaboratively with delivery partners and be realistic.

Conclusions

The project successfully trained students to deliver physical activity sessions. Training also enabled them to gather valuable experience and qualifications relevant to their future career aspirations.

The college has a cohort of students who can now organise and deliver sessions longer-term.

The project enabled students to participate in a range of physical activities that were enjoyable and which can spur participants to increase, or plan to increase, their level of physical activity.

There is some evidence the project was able to do this among students who have historically been less active.

There is scope to develop promotion, tweak delivery approaches and modify monitoring and evaluation



CONTACT US

Rise

Royal Quays Business Centre,

Coble Dene,

North Shields,

NE29 6DE.

T: 07973 786310

E: info@wearerise.co.uk

RISE.