

Reaching Out: An Evaluation of the Process of Phase 2 of Sport Wales' 'Calls 4 Action'



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Foreword

It is a privilege to support Sport Wales in the evaluation of this important programme and its innovative projects. This Phase 2 Process evaluation report is part of a wider three-year evaluation of both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Calls for Action Programme. It has benefited greatly from close engagement by Sport Wales' research and operational staff, and it has been made possible by the cooperation and responsiveness of many people throughout the staff and Board of Sport Wales, those associated with the projects in particular, and many stakeholders, including those who were not successful in their applications for funding. We are grateful for and acknowledge their input to this stage of our work.

Dr Clive Grace
Evaluation Project Director
September 2016

Executive Summary

C4A was first developed in 2012 in order to target resources to projects designed to engage groups that are underrepresented in sports participation, in accordance with the Community Sport Strategy 2012-2020. Eleven projects were implemented under Phase 1 of the initiative. The C4A Phase 2 was launched in 2014 to further tackle inequalities and barriers to participation within sport. A total of 144 applications were received and eleven organisations were awarded grant funding with a total budget commitment of £3 million. The overarching objectives of the programme are focused on **positive action, changing lives, encouraging new approaches, and increasing regular and frequent sporting activity** in Wales.

Phase 2 has been project based, and aimed to attract new partners and encourage innovative methods. The funded organisations are a mix of traditional partners exploring new approaches, and new partners.

Sport Wales evaluated the process aspects of C4A Phase 1 in-house and wanted to be sure that the recommendations of that study had been applied successfully to Phase 2. Accordingly, it commissioned a process evaluation of Phase 2 (alongside a larger study which is assessing the impacts of both Phase 1 and 2). This Report focusses on our findings with respect to the process used to implement Phase 2 based on a combination of stakeholder interviews and desk based review.

We looked at the perspectives of three groups of stakeholders – Sport Wales Case Officers, Administrators and Managers; Successful Applicants; and Unsuccessful Applicants. The views of Sport Wales staff, managers and Board members were strongly positive. Applicants were also positive about the process, especially (and perhaps unsurprisingly) the successful applicants. Some unsuccessful applicants expressed frustration with aspects of the process but they also pointed to some positives. Our independent assessment broadly confirmed the perspectives of interviewees, including many of the positive attributes that they identified but also some of the critical observations made by unsuccessful applicants.

Our key conclusion is that the process used to implement C4A Phase 2 largely delivered on the recommendations of the Report of the Phase 1 process. There were significant improvements compared to Phase 1 including:

- A clearer focus on what Calls for Action should achieve and on projects with potential to have a significant impact on participation by under-represented groups.
- A broader approach which includes new partners and new methods of promotion.
- A timescale which allowed much more time at the initial application stage.
- The use of meetings and open days to attract applicants and provide the opportunity for dialogue.
- Clearer prior identification of a set number of projects across each of the themed areas, although it was not possible to give complete effect to this principle.
- Applicants had early contact with a Sport Wales Officer and were offered assistance to develop their project where it met C4A aims and had a realistic chance of success.
- Provision of a specific C4A form.

- Applications were assessed by cross-section teams and external experts.
- A more refined assessment process which was more transparent to applicants.
- Deployment of a general funding pot rather than specific minimum and maximum grants, although indicative amounts were identified internally.
- The provision of helpful feedback to unsuccessful applicants, although this fell short in a number of cases.

The overall principal recommendations of this part of the evaluation are, therefore, that Sport Wales should:

- Recognise the many successful features of the Phase 2 process.
- Maintain these features in any future or extension phases.
- Consider whether Sport Wales might usefully apply the lessons from the C4A Process to other application and assessment processes in other parts of the organisation's activities.

There are some other lessons which should be considered in due course. Four areas may require attention:

- There is a need for further engagement with the BME community as reflected in the separate report on the BME applications.
- The Equalities Impact Assessment process may have a specific role to play in both future programme development and application assessments.
- There should be active work to explore how best to connect traditional and new partners.
- Some of the lessons emerging from the early stages of the Phase 2 Impact evaluation will be relevant to future phases or extensions of C4A, in particular value for money considerations.

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Introduction and Context

The Calls for Action Programme: C4A was first developed in 2012 in order to support Sport Wales' goals to increase participation in sport in Wales, particularly among specific under-represented groups. Whilst the number of people in Wales who are 'hooked on sport' has increased in recent years, this has not been reflected evenly across all groups or areas. Supported through National Lottery Funding, the C4A programme aims to generate and foster innovative responses which enable a step change in participation in sport among these groups.

A total of 11 projects were implemented under Phase 1 of the initiative. The C4A Phase 2 was launched in 2014 to further tackle inequalities and barriers to participation within sport. In this Phase, Sport Wales received a total of 144 applications for investment, and 11 organisations were awarded grant funding with a total budget commitment of £3 million.

The overarching objectives of the Programme are focused on:

- Generating **positive action** to address known areas of inequality;
- **Changing lives** through sport;
- Being bold and **encouraging new approaches**; and
- Increasing the amount of **regular and frequent activity** taking place throughout Wales.

The programme aims to support Sport Wales to increase the number of people who are 'Hooked on Sport' defined as those who on average participate in sport or physical recreation on three or more occasions a week. C4A has been implemented in a context in which an increase in participation is seen as crucial to achieving the overall vision of Sport Wales:

*"Our vision is to **UNITE A PROUD SPORTING NATION**, where **EVERY CHILD** is **HOOKED ON SPORT FOR LIFE** and Wales is a **NATION OF CHAMPIONS**.*

This vision is supported by a number of clearly defined priorities, designed to form the building blocks to deliver a Wales where sport is at the heart of the community, and impacts positively on the lives of all:

1. Sporting Innovation

Wales has a sports sector that embraces collaboration, encouraging new ways of delivering opportunities to increase participation and improve elite performance.

2. Skills for a Life in Sport

Every child and young person is provided with the skills and confidence from an early age to be physically literate through high quality, engaging sporting experiences.

3. Sporting Communities

Wales has communities with sport at the heart of them, offering joined up opportunities for every child and young person to undertake at least five hours of safe, high quality sport every week and sustaining their engagement throughout their adult life.

4. Sporting Excellence

Wales a nation that excels in nurturing sporting talent and delivers on-going success on the international stage.

5. Growing a Skilled & Passionate Workforce

All those involved in sport, whether in a professional or voluntary capacity, are supported to pass on their skills and passion for sport to the people of Wales."

In relation to the Phase 2 Focus and Budget, its foci are:

- Girls & Young Women.
- Young people living in poverty (up to 24yrs).
- People with a disability.
- People from a BME background.

The budget commitment, funded by the National Lottery for the programme is £3 million in total which was allocated:

- £1.5 million for Girls & Young Women.
- £1.5 million for Poverty; Disability & BME.

The approach of Phase 2 has been:

- Project based.
- Aimed at new partners.
- Aimed to encourage innovative methods.
- Comprises 11 Projects:
 - Brecon Beacons NPA
 - Bridgend CBC
 - Girl Guiding Cymru
 - Welsh Gymnastics
 - Rhondda Cynon Taff Homes
 - Mind (Time to Change)
 - Welsh Cycling Union
 - Cricket Board of Wales
 - Public Health Wales (Aneurin Bevan)
 - Street Football Wales
 - StreetGames UK Ltd.

The Project Themes, sponsoring organisations, titles, and timelines, are as follows:

Theme	Organisation	Project Title	Project Start Date	Project End Date
Poverty	Brecon Beacons National Park Authority	C4A2 - Geocaching	01/04/2015	31/03/2017
Poverty	Rhondda Cynon Taf Homes	C4A2 - Ziggies (incorporating Play to Learn Project)	01/04/2015	31/03/2018
Poverty	Public Health Wales (Aneurin Bevan)	C4A2 - Active Gwent & Aneurin Bevan Gwent Public Health Team – “Large Scale Behaviour Change”	30/04/2015	29/04/2018
Disability	Bridgend County Borough Council	C4A2 - Disability Sport Development	01/01/2015	31/07/2016
Disability	Mind (Time to Change Wales)	C4A2 - Time to Change Wales	01/04/2015	01/05/2017
G & YW	Street Football Wales	C4A2 - Street Football Wales	01/04/2015	01/04/2018
G & YW	Girlguiding Cymru	C4A2 - Sports through guiding project	01/04/2015	31/03/2018
G & YW	Welsh Cycling Union	C4A2 - Women and Girls Programme, including Breeze	01/06/2015	01/06/2018
G & YW	StreetGames UK Ltd	C4A2 - Us Girls	01/04/2015	31/03/2017
BME	Welsh Gymnastics	C4A2 - Bute Gymnastics Club in Conjunction with Welsh Gymnastics and Diverse Cymru	01/04/2015	31/03/2018
BME	Cricket Board of Wales	C4A2 - Cricket Without Boundaries	01/04/2015	01/03/2018

The Evaluation of C4A and the Phase 2 Process: The evaluation of the C4A programme is based on, and aims to reflect, the innovative character of the initiative. It comprises assessments of:

- Phase 1 Impact;
- Phase 2 Process; and
- Phase 2 Impact.

The longitudinal study is being conducted in real time over three years. The evaluation team is producing an independent, empirically based assessment of the impact of the C4A programme in relation to its objectives, but also to generate useful real time learning. The Phase 1 impact evaluation has been completed, and the Phase 2 impact evaluation is underway, and will be reported through a series of reports being produced through to the end of 2018.

This Report focusses on the processes by which Phase 2 of the Programme was implemented. Our role as evaluators is to be independent, but also to generate useful real

time learning. Sport Wales evaluated the process aspects of C4A Phase 1 in-house, and a number of detailed lessons were drawn out. The declared intention was to apply the lessons to Phase 2. Sport Wales wanted to be sure that this had been achieved, and also to identify any further learning there was to be had from the Phase 2 process. Accordingly, they commissioned a process evaluation of Phase 2 as part of the broader evaluation study.

Our Methods included:

- Interviews with a sample of Sport Wales staff and stakeholders including both successful and unsuccessful applicants (n = 20);
- A desk based review of the process used to implement Phase 2 including reviewing grant applications, Board papers, C4A meeting notes and presentations; and
- A specific assessment of the process used to appraise applications to increase participation among the BME community (which is touched on later but is also the subject of a separate report).

The issues addressed in our process evaluation included:

- How well did Sport Wales engage with potential partners?
- To what extent has it engaged with partners who are new to sport based projects and/or to working with Sport Wales?
- What worked well, what was difficult? What type of engagement was best with target audiences and does this change over time?
- Did Sport Wales have the right skill sets to engage new partners? Does it need to develop additional skills?
- What were applicants' perceptions of Sport Wales? Do potential partners want to engage in sport and physical activity generally, and with Sport Wales as an organisation?

The way in which we report the evidence is to report on in turn:

- The perspectives of key stakeholders
 - Sport Wales' Views of the Phase 2 process
 - Perspectives of successful applicants
 - Perspectives of unsuccessful applicants.
- The Evaluation team's judgements about the process.
- Whether the lessons of Phase 1 were applied, and what any other lessons we identified.

In addition to the authors, all members of the evaluation team contributed to the research by undertaking interviews with the successful applicants and Sport Wales case officers – that is, Sally Church, Ruby Dixon, and Mark Frost. The evaluators also undertook a desk based review of own case studies that fed into the P2 Process evaluation.

The Perspectives of Stakeholders

We looked at the perspectives of three groups of stakeholders – Sport Wales Case Officers, Administrators and Managers; Successful Applicants; and Unsuccessful Applicants – in order to ensure that the Phase 2 process was examined from all perspectives, including those who did not succeed within it as well as those who did. We looked at a range of issues including the launch phase and messaging together with the application and assessment process.

Sport Wales Case Officers, Administrators and Managers: The views of Sport Wales staff, managers and Board members of Phase 2 were strongly positive. Phase 2 was seen as focussing much more on projects and the development of people and services than Phase 1 had achieved. The Sport Wales Board saw itself as providing strategic direction and the C4A Steering Group as key in developing the operational procedures for the Phase 2 application process and that perspective was echoed by its staff.

Sports Wales Officers had a clear understanding of the equalities focus of Phase 2. Officers understood that Phase 2 aimed to attract new partners and foster innovative, collaborative, and sustainable projects that would increase regular participation in physical activity in under-represented groups. They 'bought into' Phase 2 and the second phase operated on more a coordinated, 'cross organisation' basis than the first. Cross organisational working and dialogue was key with a number of respondents seeing this as ground-breaking for Sport Wales.

There was more emphasis on 'pro-active and responsive' stakeholder communication with organisations that Sport Wales had had little or no contact with in the past. Officers were encouraged to have direct contact with them, and a range of mechanisms - roadshows, a telephone 'helpline', and social media mechanisms - were deployed. Communication with interested parties was seen as having been clear, explicit, and comprehensible. But it was recognised that applicants may not have interpreted this messaging as intended, and as will be seen later that did prove to be the case.

The time for initial submissions was thought to have been sufficient, although the launch window (the period from announcement to implementation) needs to be as long as possible, especially for non-traditional or less 'experienced' applicants.

Finally, the learning from C4A Phase 1 was thought to have directly and strongly informed the design of Phase 2, although the close follow on may have limited the opportunity for cross learning.

In terms of the application and assessment process, the scope of Phase 2 was thought to have been 'about right', attracting a significant number of applications from both inside and outside the sports sector, and the three-year funding period allowed partners to develop more ambitious, longer-term projects. But only a limited number of applicants were seen as having presented a convincing case. The standard of some applications was regarded as quite poor.

The two-stage process worked well for applicants and for Sport Wales Officers. But a number of partners struggled with the short period of time between the announcement of funding and the start of projects. There were clearer and more targeted criteria which enabled assessment on a consistent basis than in Phase 1 and applicants were provided with a clear indication of what Sport Wales expected from projects. Sport Wales Officers were generally proactive in providing guidance and support to applicants, although in cases outside of their 'comfort zone', it took time for them to understand projects.

Successful applications tended to be able to demonstrate some commitment to evidence corporate commitment, some governance, and evidence of future sustainability. Overall the applications addressed these issues and identified explicit goals backed by evidence of need. In many cases Sport Wales Officers felt they had facilitated this, and they pointed applicants to evidence to strengthen their application. Those that could bring additional investment or added value were also attractive.

All applications were evaluated against a standard set of objective criteria. The nomination of specific officers to support the development of full applications in stage 2 was also useful. The assessment process was thought to be fair and transparent, but respondents considered that Sport Wales is less confident in assessing the governance structures of new partners. The assessment of projects focussing on equalities in relation to women and girls and to the BME community is also seen as problematic for Sport Wales because of its sports development lens - 'check and challenge' expert advice may help.

Finally, Sport Wales respondents felt that the organisation did 'the best it could', but perhaps not enough, in giving feedback to unsuccessful applicants. As will be seen, this less than very positive response found an echo in the perceptions of those receiving the feedback.

Overall, the view of Sport Wales staff and Board members view was very consistent across the whole organisation. They agreed that Phase 2 had been effective and well managed. C4A did not attract as many new partners or innovative approaches as they originally hoped for, and in general those applicants that had experience of applying for grants in the sports sector generally found the application process more straightforward than those without it. There is a need to strike a balance between achieving Sport Wales' objectives in sports development, with those of public and third sector organisations who use sport as a vehicle to achieve other outcomes. And there is potential to use 'brokers' to engage with non-traditional partners.

They felt that potentially Sport Wales' new and traditional partners can work collaboratively to implement sports/physical activity projects focused on tackling inequalities. The barriers to doing so include a lack of awareness to adopt new working approaches, and concern about financial resources.

Nonetheless, the Phase 2 process was generally thought to have been well received by applicants, as was the support of Sport Wales officers, although it was recognised that where prior working relationships with applicants existed this was an advantage in shaping the submission. Some Sport Wales Case Officers were very heavily involved in the process

of supporting applicants to develop their applications during the development stage, and more so than during the subsequent implementation phase.

Perspectives of Successful Applicants: Successful applicants learned about Phase 2 from a variety of sources. Some were informed by Sport Wales Officers while others were made aware through the marketing material distributed by Sport Wales, or through their own networks. Some had prior working relationships with Sport Wales. A number became aware through Sport Wales roadshows and the Sport Wales Conference. Several of the successful applicants were aware of Phase 2 having applied in Phase 1 and thereafter being 'in the loop'.

The underlying concepts for funded projects usually existed prior to Phase 2, and were not heavily altered to reflect C4A marketing or eligibility criteria. Some were expanded versions of pilot projects. Rather, Sport Wales and applicant interests became aligned through the creation of the C4A programme, and through the strengthened interest of Sport Wales in tackling inequality in sport participation. For some, the C4A programme capitalised on existing interest in tackling inequality, and for others it also stimulated that interest.

Sport Wales' marketing and guidance materials were considered clear with regard to the defined priorities, and the aim to develop new approaches. This was identified as an improvement when compared to Phase 1. Applicants understood that Phase 2 sought more 'challenging' projects and new partners, including an emphasis on the third sector. Sport Wales' approach in this regard 'stood out compared with other funders', and Phase 2 was seen as genuinely attempting to engage with new partners.

The scope of Phase 2 was seen as appropriate. However, focusing on four separate equality strands led to a tendency for some respondents to ignore the links between them and the multifaceted nature of inequality. One applicant also expressed the view that there is a lack of Sport Wales expertise for poverty and BME projects.

The application process was clear and straightforward for applicants, and the two-stage procedure implemented was useful as the work required to produce the initial proposal was not onerous and required less support. The support of Sport Wales Officers was appropriate and highly valued. The deeper level of feedback provided by Sport Wales Officers at the full application stage was in some cases crucial to realising the project, particularly for new partners not in the sport sector. In one case, advice changed an applicant's thinking in relation to equalities. In another, Sport Wales Officers remained supportive of a project application that was conceptually quite complex and 'outside of their comfort zone' while issues were worked through.

The timetable for the application processes itself was appropriate but the lead-in time between the announcement of project funding and the project start date was thought to be too brief. The beginning of some projects was delayed. One successful applicant found the period between approval and start messy and bureaucratic. The appraisal process was seen as fair and transparent, and the feedback from Sport Wales on both their initial proposals and full applications was valued. One applicant commented that they were asked to reduce the level of funding requested in their initial proposal, but had not had an explanation why.

Perspectives of Unsuccessful Applicants: The perspective of unsuccessful applicants was overall less favourable, although it was by no means entirely negative. For those interviewed, project ideas generally predated Phase 2, which was seen as a mechanism for these ideas to be (potentially) operationalised. Several unsuccessful applicants had longstanding relationships with Sport Wales, including a number who received core funding, whilst others had never worked with the organisation before.

Unsuccessful applicants learned about Phase 2 through several mechanisms, most prominently through emails distributed by Sport Wales or third sector organisations such as WCVA. Word of mouth was also an important communication mechanism. The timeline for development and submission of initial proposals was felt to be sufficient by unsuccessful applicants. They were able to complete the process without undue difficulty. The design of projects was not particularly influenced by C4A marketing or eligibility criteria. Applicants did tailor their proposals according to Sport Wales' application requirements, but project design was largely unaffected. A number of applications outlined initiatives in which very small third sector organisations were to manage and direct a project, but rely on project partners for delivery due to a lack of capacity and appropriate skills in the sports area.

Initially the Sport Wales marketing materials, guidance documentation, and eligibility and application criteria appeared to be clear and understandable, as was information provided by Sport Wales Officers. But several unsuccessful applicants expressed frustration that the guidance provided had been misleading, and was directly responsible for the rejection of their initial proposals. Examples related to requirements detailed financial information and the need to take a 'strategic' approach. Some unsuccessful applicants felt that Sport Wales was not clear enough about exactly what was required from project applications, and that there was miscommunication and 'changes in direction' in this regard.

Unsuccessful applicants were generally satisfied with the availability of Sport Wales Officers and their responsiveness. The roadshows and the face to face contact were particularly helpful, but one unsuccessful applicant stated that the Sport Wales Officers in North Wales were 'a little difficult to get hold of'. Unsuccessful applicants were divided on the level of transparency and fairness of the assessment process. Some felt it was, but non-traditional partners in particular would like to see greater transparency in relation to the assessment processes, for example through better and fuller feedback.

Views on the feedback given by Sport Wales were mixed. Unsuccessful applicants appreciated the feedback, but it was generally experienced as 'standard' and of limited utility. However, those applicants that were invited to apply for alternative sources of Sport Wales funding (such as development grants) in their feedback were more positive.

Perceptions of Sport Wales in this process on the part of unsuccessful applicants are potentially very important to future partnerships. Traditional partners were found to have a positive view of Sport Wales and the sports development community, even where they were unsuccessful applicants. They valued the proactivity of Sport Wales Officers. New partners – particularly those that operate outside the sport sector – perceived Sport Wales somewhat differently. Some see Sport Wales as a 'white, male, middle class' organisation

attempting to diversify – but do appreciate that Sport Wales is committed to addressing equalities and providing funding, and C4A reinforced that more positive view to some extent. New partners would like Sport Wales to develop much clearer communication about funding and objectives, to be clearer about what ‘sport’ is, and reach out more to new partners.

The view of respondents was that to improve participation rates, Sport Wales need to fund the activities that stakeholders in these groups are interested and take part in, rather than attempting to ‘push’ them into traditional sports provision. On the other hand, some traditional partners question the effectiveness of ‘chasing’ new partners and innovative approaches when Sport Wales has traditional partners implementing projects that are having an impact in the chosen areas of hard-to-reach groups.

We found some appetite for new and traditional Sport Wales partners to work together more collaboratively to achieve common goals. This was described as a ‘no brainer’ and as absolutely necessary to achieve sustainable results in communities of under-represented stakeholders. Effective collaboration requires will, capacity, and leadership among organisations. Some organisations are seen as unwilling to share funding resources with others. Respondents looked to Sport Wales to show greater leadership, possibly through guidelines on cooperation, or the inclusion of provisions on collaboration within eligibility criteria for project funding.

A ‘subset’ of the unsuccessful applications were those from projects that aimed to raise sports participation among members of the BME community, one of key target hard-to-reach groups. Sport Wales put explicit effort into engaging BME community organisations, and targeted some of the resource of the C4A programme to meeting the needs of the BME community. In the event three of the applications which sought to engage with this community had, in Sport Wales’ view, a degree of congruence. The initial Sport Wales’ assessment was that these applications would be stronger if consolidated, and Sport Wales encouraged that to happen. However, the groups concerned were reluctant to collaborate with each, and one complained formally. Thereafter, two of the original applications went forward to the next stage but were subsequently rejected. In order to maintain a focus on the needs of the BME community, Sport Wales commissioned the WCVA to act as a ‘broker’ to develop a project in conjunction with BME groups. This eventually led to the creation of a specific project focussed on increasing BME sport participation outside of the C4A programme. Overall this was a difficult process for Sport Wales and for the groups concerned. It is the subject of separate evaluation report which draws out the lessons in detail.

Documentary Analysis

Our documentary analysis provided additional testing of the findings from interviews. A range of internal and client-facing documentation was analysed, including:

- Internal SW briefing documents and presentations;
- Documentation providing guidance on internal operational and assessment processes;
- Marketing materials;
- Application guidance documentation;
- Initial proposal and full application forms;
- Sport Wales assessment forms;
- Specimen letters of rejection and feedback to applicants; and,
- C4A Phase 2 reports to the Sport Wales Board.

Our assessment of these documents broadly confirmed the perspectives of interviewees where we have separate sources of evidence, or where the evidence of interviews sufficiently 'triangulates' for us to be confident about its implications. It confirmed that the scope and focus of Phase 2 of C4A was articulated clearly. Internal materials outline the rationale behind the equalities agenda and the groups to be targeted, and explicitly presented the aspects that Sport Wales wanted to foster. The operational documentation reflects a well-planned, clear, and considered process which set out how to assess applications and use the 'red, amber, green' (RAG) assessment criteria, as well as the format of the assessment documents themselves. Guidance documentation, particularly the Frequently Asked Questions document, effectively outlined what Sport Wales was looking for. The application forms and guidance produced to facilitate the process of making applications were clear, understandable, and transparent.

The procedures used to assess project applications were clearly defined, objective, and consistent. Initial project proposals were assessed against a clear set of standard criteria using the RAG approach. The assessment forms were concise and comprehensible, and provided clear reasons for the rejection or advancement of projects to stage 2. There was a clear and appropriate documentary record of the decisions taken in relation to project applications, and the reasons behind those decisions, throughout the assessment process. This supports the interviewees' view that evaluation of applications was generally fair and transparent. Sport Wales also took issues such as conflicts of interest into account. The documentation and reports produced by Sport Wales staff for the Board on the progress of Phase 2 have been clear, concise, and comprehensible.

We also reviewed the feedback provided to unsuccessful applicants. It was expressed in an unusual way, and one which gave the impression that it was less tailored to the assessment of the particular project in question than in fact it had been. To the reader, it appeared to simply rehearse standard categories, although in fact these had been selected for inclusion in each particular feedback letter with a reasonable degree of care. The mode of expression appears to have been chosen in order to minimise any negative judgement about the application in saying that it had satisfied certain criteria 'less well than other applications'. However, some unsuccessful applicants experienced the feedback as being cursory and

relatively unhelpful. Fuller and more direct feedback may have been more effective, albeit that the sheer number of unsuccessful applications (about 130) limited what could be done with the resource available. Although time consuming to do, it may be worth the resources given the importance of avoiding poor perceptions of Sport Wales. A positive reputation on giving good feedback may help to foster future partnerships and successful bids, so leading to a long-term gain.

There were concerns from some unsuccessful applicants that their projects were turned down for not providing information which was not required by the documentation. One told us that their project was rejected because of a lack of detailed financial information in their initial proposal but that it was not clear from the documentation that this was required. The only financial information requested on the initial proposal form was the total cost of the project, and the total grant requested. Another stated that their application was rejected on the basis that it was not strategic enough, and that this was a crucial element of C4A. Again, it is true that there is no explicit statement within the Phase 2 client-facing documentation that projects must have a broader strategic focus (although this is implied).

Our analysis indicates that successful applicants developed bids which most effectively met the key criteria assessed through use of the RAG system, namely appropriate target group; evidence of need; project clarity; impact; partnership/collaboration; and sustainability. Projects that were successfully funded displayed a clear focus in their applications and explained the aims, activities, and outcomes of the initiative effectively. Other significant factors include the effectiveness and clarity of the business plan and delivery plan. Sport Wales' perception of the organisation's reputation, track record, and ability of the project working group to ensure delivery of the desired outcomes also had an influence on decision making.

Applicants that had prior working relationships seemed more able to design projects and submit applications that achieved an effective alignment between their needs and those of Sport Wales. Successful applicants' written proposals were detailed, thorough, and professional. They demonstrated clear evidence of need, explicit targets and outputs, and contained convincing plans for operationalisation and implementation.

However, despite these reservations, the Phase 2 application process worked well for non-traditional partners and for Sport Wales. The marketing materials and other forms of promotion and communication allowed Phase 2 to reach new organisations. The assessment process appeared from the documentary material to be fair and transparent. Sport Wales Officers were supportive of applicants, and applicants valued this support and the level of engagement they enjoyed. It has resulted in a number of strong working relationships between project leads and Case Officers during the implementation phase.

The exception to the overall picture of broad satisfaction with the process was the case of the projects which sought to engage members of the BME community. As explained above, we have produced a separate report on these which analyses their experiences and makes recommendations for lessons for Sport Wales.

Lessons Learned

The key lesson learned from this evaluation of the C4A Phase 2 process is that it largely delivered on the recommendations of the Report of the Phase 1 process. When compared to the evaluation of Phase 1, there is clear evidence of progress being made. In summary, the process in Phase 2 has succeeded in achieving the following:

- A clearer focus on what Calls for Action should achieve and on projects which deliver a significant impact on participation by under-represented groups.
- A broader approach to include new partners and new methods of promotion.
- An adjusted timescale which allowed much more time at the initial application stage.
- The use of meetings and open days to attract applicants and provide the opportunity for dialogue.
- Clearer prior identification of a set number of projects across each of the themed areas, although it was not possible to give complete effect to this principle.
- Applicants to have early contact with a Sport Wales Officer and assistance offered to applicants to develop their project where it met C4A aims and had a realistic chance of success.
- Provision of a specific C4A form.
- Applications assessed by theme using cross-section teams, and with external experts used in the assessment process.
- The assessment process refined and made more transparent to applicants.
- Deployment of a general funding pot rather than specific minimum and maximum grants, although indicative amounts were identified internally.
- The provision of adequate and helpful feedback to unsuccessful applicants, although this fell short in at least some cases.

The overall principal recommendation of this part of the evaluation is, therefore, that Sport Wales should:

- recognise the many successful features of the Phase 2 process;
- maintain these features in any future or extension phases; and,
- consider whether they might usefully be applied to other application and assessment processes in other parts of their activities.

It is very important that this overall lesson is not simply lost because it is not critical or negative. Applying the results of positive developments and amplifying them where possible is a significant way in which to embed and entrench good practice.

There are some other lessons which should be considered in due course. One relatively minor practical one is to allow more time between project approval and project start date. The tight timetable in Phase 2 was not particularly problematic in that projects did not suffer adverse consequences (such as funding limitation) as a result. But the effect was to throw out some initial timetables and require timelines to be re-set, especially for those projects scheduled to operate for less than three years.

More significantly there are four areas which may require attention:

- There is a need for further engagement with the BME community as reflected in the separate report on the BME applications.
- The Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) process within Sport Wales may have a specific role to play in both future programme development and application assessments. EIAs were introduced as part of the Phase 2 C4A, but were completed after the application process had concluded. Specific learning on the possible future role of EIAs has taken place at a facilitated workshop on 14th September. It may be appropriate to take that forward as part of a wider approach to impact assessment based on the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- There should be active work to explore how best to connect traditional and new partners. Unsurprisingly, some of the newer partners found it harder to engage with Sport Wales but clearly wanted to do so. Linking them as new sources of potential energy and engagement with traditional partners who are already very well versed in sport participation development in their particular domain could create a powerful synergy to inform future projects and activities. This is to be part of the thematic evaluation work to be undertaken in relation to the Impact of Phase 2, and should produce useful insights and lessons over the coming period.
- Some of the lessons emerging from the early stages of the Phase 2 Impact evaluation will be relevant to future phases or extensions of C4A, and in particular the extent to which and the way in which value for money considerations can and should play a part in the application, assessment, and monitoring processes. This too is to be part of the thematic evaluation work to be undertaken in relation to the Impact of Phase 2, and should produce useful insights and lessons over the coming period.

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