

Club 360 Report

Bedford & County AC, Bedford International Stadium, Barkers Ln, Bedford, MK41 9SB

Bedford & County Representatives present: Rob Simmons, Allen Adamson

Club Support Manager's Involved: Tania Spurling (TS), Sarah Gardiner (SG), Emma Hurst (EH)

CLUB BACKGROUND AND CURRENT STATUS

The club was founded in 1885 as a cycling and athletics club, the club moved to its current location in 1948 with a cinder track, and the track is now a synthetic Mondo track resurfaced in 2010. The centre has athletics indoor training facilities and is operated by Fusion Leisure. The club offers Track and Field, Cross Country and Road Running, and is operated as a company limited by guarantee.

The club has a membership of approximately 600, of which 388 are England Athletics Affiliated athletes. There is an active U11 section called the Beagles with 94 athletes registered and from this the pathway then continues into Passport juniors.

The club has a range of membership options, and a highly decorated history with performance athletes such as Paula Radcliffe having trained at the club. The club offers a good range of competitive opportunities which athletes' value highly. The club has a good base of volunteers and benefit from having many experienced coaches and a proactive committee keen to help further develop the club.

DETAILS OF PROJECT

Desktop research

This was performed by CSMs Tania Spurling, Sarah Gardiner & Emma Hurst in December 2018. The sources used were from Bedford & County AC website, EA's club data and the Companies House/Charity Commission

Facilitated Discussion

The facilitated discussion took place on Monday 4th February. CSM's Tania Spurling, Sarah Gardiner, Emma Hurst & Richard Fishlock from Sporting Assets met with club members Rob Simmons (Chairman) & Allen Adamson (Secretary & Coach).

Members Views

This was actioned in two ways:

1. A short online survey was conducted for 4 weeks during January & February. The survey was sent out by the club to all their members by email. 74 members completed the survey which is approx. 12% of the club membership of 600.
2. An external researcher attended Bedford & County AC club training session on Thursday 7th February 2019. The researcher interviewed 19 athletes, 8 coaches and 7 parents. An additional 11 discussions with female athletes (ages 11-16yrs) were completed by SG / TS.

External Stakeholders Views

A short online survey was sent to Fusion Lifestyle by the club committee. Unfortunately, no response received from the key stakeholder.

Summary of findings

The club benefits from excellent facilities both indoors and outdoors and has a good relationship with the leisure operator. The facilities are well maintained and the relationship between the club and the operator was very positive, with a general feeling that the club had a good agreement regarding club exclusive use and fees. 93% of respondents in the club survey rate the venue highly.

Coaches are passionate and committed to the athletes and club, and many have been with the club for several years. The club offer both performance and participation opportunities, with the emphasis from event groups upwards towards performance and competition. 89% of respondents believe the club offers a wide range of competition, and 70% disagree/strongly disagree that the club is only interested in winning. The coaches appear to be very passionate in their commitment to the club and offer a variety of experience and opportunities between them. 83% of respondents believe that coaching exceeds or far exceeds their expectations.

The club is in a good financial position with a healthy bank reserve; income is generated primarily from membership. The decision to be a company limited by guarantee was taken to avoid financial risk to committee members and was agreed by the committee as being the correct status.

At the facilitated discussion club representatives clearly articulated the main priorities for the club however, there isn't currently a clear vision agreed across all key stakeholders or a documented development plan in place. The committee appear to work well together in making decisions for the good of the club, however they were conscious of having no long-term plans and are keen to start succession planning. It was felt that the club had lost its 'heart' and whilst there are some areas for development there were 93% members that felt positive about the training environment with comments from athletes such as "I really enjoy being a member of this club, keep up the good work".

The club have a good structure in place for young athletes through the Beagles and Passport sessions however there appears to be a lack of clarity regarding the pathway for athletes after this point. There are some gaps in specific T&F disciplines and the club require new volunteers to fill these roles in order to implement a clear athlete pathway across all events.

From the facilitated discussion, club surveys and researcher discussions, it became apparent that that the relationships between some coaches are strained, and that athletes do not always feel comfortable moving between training groups to try different events/ progress through the club. Coaches at the club show a great deal of time, dedication and commitment however there appears to be a lack of unity amongst the coaching team, with some working in isolation rather than as part of the athlete's journey. This was picked up by athletes and parents at the research session, with one parent commenting "My view is that coaches tend to hold onto athletes and as such they don't get to try different events or coaching styles".

Marketing and communication is recognised by the club as an area for development. The need for developing better communication with members was also reflected in survey responses with 48% stating the website isn't modern and 63% suggesting that the club would benefit from digital support. Some positive initial steps have already been taken in developing a new club website which will be beneficial for both new and existing athletes. The club have had continued success in developing talented young athletes and an increase in the promotion of such success both within the club and the wider community could help to both further raise the club's profile and help to provide recognition for local athletes.

The club recognises the lack of community partners, sponsors and links to schools and university's (which is largely due to the lack of available volunteers), however the club are exploring the potential opportunity to link with other sports such as Rugby. The club have now identified an athlete ambassador who will provide a good link between the club and local schools. There is a hardship fund in place to support members on a low income however consideration should be given as to how this is promoted in order to ensure that potential new members are not deterred from joining the club due to cost.

Priority Recommendations:

Club Vision:

- a. Develop a clear vision for the club and communicate this across the membership.
- b. Create a development plan and share with the members for feedback.

Volunteer recruitment and succession planning:

- a. Appoint a vice chair
- b. Create role descriptions for all committee and other volunteer roles within the club
- c. Consider term length for each committee position and how the committee can support new volunteers in their role (buddying, length of handover etc.)
- d. Promote and recruit for a new Volunteer coordinator role to lead in liaising with parents/prospective new volunteers.

Club policies and procedures.

- a. Adopt the UKA Safeguarding policy and promote & implement this within the club.
- b. Adopt and implement a Discipline and Appeals process within the club.

Coach and athlete pathways:

- a. Work with CSM to identify what the club would like the coach and athlete pathway to look like (in the future) and determine the process for how and when athletes should progress through the pathway within the club. Alongside this, also create a diagram of the current coaching structure and identify any new roles/gaps in coaching.
- b. Establish a coaching sub group to meet on a regular basis aimed at making improvements to the athlete and coach pathway.
- c. Hold a coaches' meeting to discuss the outcome of club surveys and the research session in relation to the athlete pathway.
- d. Consider possible training/ development opportunities for the committee in relation to change management.

Other recommendations:

Marketing & Communications

- Produce role descriptions for the various areas of Marketing & Communications
- Identify volunteers to lead on marketing and communication (this could include several key roles e.g. social media, press, website, e-mail etc.)
- Launch the new club website (already nearing completion).
- Consider the best use of social media and further consult with athletes regarding the type of social media they are likely to engage with.
- Ensure that the committee are visible and known by club members, and ensure that club documentation, policies and procedures are included on the website.
- Consider how the club can celebrate their successes through website, social media and local press.

Volunteering

- In conjunction with the CSM, explore how the club can provide a positive experience for volunteers (Impacting on recruitment and retention of volunteers).
- Create a structured induction process for new volunteers.
- Organise a club volunteer open evening/event which is open to parents of young athletes and potential new volunteers to find out about the volunteer opportunities at the club.
- Establish a youth forum (linked to the Gamechangers programme) to provide a means of ensuring that members views are fed into the club committee.

Finance

- Review the efficiency of processes for membership payments and cash handling.
- Review the club's hardship fund in relation to club membership and consider the best way to promote this to potential new members.

Members

- Promote the club structure to members through the club website.
- Create a structured induction process for new athletes, and parents of junior athletes.
- Agree upon possible ways to create more social opportunities for members.

Community Links

- Create links with other sports and the wider community to further raise the profile of the club and to aid growth in club membership.

The above recommendations will be discussed further with your Club Support Manager during your review meeting set for the 13th March. Support will also be provided with action planning to begin to address some of the initial priority recommendations.