**Introduction:** There is no one-size-fits-all operating model for community use. Each school will need to make a decision on whether it manages its community programme in-house or looks to appoint a third-party. The purpose of this document is to help schools explore the different operating models available to them highlighting some of the key advantages and considerations related to each. Some schools may choose to opt for one operating model or a hybrid approach. This document is not an exhausative list and a school could approach its active partnership or local authority for additional support and guidance.

**Definition of ‘ideal model’ – principles**

* Sports facilities (and other available community spaces) at the school are fully utilised (for 51 weeks) on every weekday, at weekends and during school holidays
* Community access to school sports/community facilities is continuous (i.e., is uninterrupted by loss of access for exams, parents’ evenings etc.)
* The management, administrative and operational ‘hassle factor’ for the school is minimised.
* The cost of hire of the facilities on offer is reasonable and fair.
* The financial return to the school is such that it does not have to subsidise community use (in financial/human resource terms). Where a school makes a surplus, this is invested in its community-facing sports facilities and equipment.
* Use of facilities is geared to servicing people and groups that live within the area local to the school.
* A good range of community groups, sports and physical activities is accommodated; servicing established participation plus coaching and development activity (geared to catering both for existing participation activity and provision geared to getting the inactive active).
* Where possible, users of facilities also offer reciprocal benefit, e.g., in the form of curricular/extra-curricular opportunity, strong school to club links, opportunity to acquire leadership and coaching qualifications and experience etc

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| Manager | Management method | Notes | Pluses | Minuses |
| School (1) | Sporadic: largely/entirely responsive and not handled by any particular staff member.  | Presumes role simply is an unspecified additional function of (one or more than one) members of staff with full existing role(s). | (Good for starting and then scaling up).(Works well if you just have block bookings from regular clubs).Can include block booking from regular clubs.Given that operating costs are low this can generate an operating surplus for the school. | Often inefficient use of space (clubs book the time that they want not what the school could feasibly ‘sell’) – elements thus unlet for substantial periods of time.Can be a drain on the time of the staff involved.‘First come first served’- normally no qualitative assessment of the ‘value’ of user groups.Not usually based upon a robust lettings policy – usually far more informal.Normally not feasible to offer pay and play opportunity. |
| School (2) | Formalised: using identified existing (but not specifically dedicated) school staff (e.g.) bursar/school facilities manager, school secretary head of PE, etc | Presumes role simply is a specified additional function of (one or more than one) members of staff with other existing role(s). | (Good for starting and then scaling up).(Works well if you just have block bookings from regular clubs).Can include block booking from regular clubs.Enables development of a more robust/coherent lettings policy and related procedures. | Often inefficient use of space (user groups book the time that they want not what the school could feasibly ‘sell’) – elements thus unlet for substantial periods of time.Can be a drain on the time of the staff involved.It may not a high priority for the relevant member of staff.Often revolves around catering for ‘first come first served’ - normally no qualitative assessment of the ‘value of specific user groups. |
| School (3) | Employing specific staff to manage sports/ community facilities staff. | Tends to apply when a school has a ‘critical mass’ of facilities or a particularly committed headteacher/board of governors. | Should:* Be a better focus on developing/extending programme offered.
* Be easier to be responsive to community need.
* Lead to better occupancy.
* Make it more possible to offer pay and play or other forms of intermittent access.
* Enable the school to make changes as/when required.[[1]](#footnote-1)
 | Given that the costs of specific staff need to be covered, this is arguably a higher risk financial model.Sometimes staff employed are essentially just supervisory and offer little by way of sports development thought or emphasis. |
| School (4) | Managed by school FM provider – as part of BSF/ PFI arrangement. | Some do not offer any community use, some FM operators just manage lettings themselves, others partner with existing local or other operators to enable lettings. | In some areas where this has been delegated to the local leisure provider this appears to be working well and enabling affordable access for local groups[[2]](#footnote-2).Has minimal impact on school resources. | FM providers in some areas appear to build in direct and apportioned costs (and require staffing supervision) at a level which leaves unit pricing of school facilities at a level which deters realistic community use.Direct links between the school and community groups tend not to be not established and sports development opportunities may be missed. |
| School (5) | Combination of operators | This could, for example, be a:* 5-a-side facility operator.
* Swim school operating swimming pool.
* School/LA/FM/Trust/other operating indoor sports facilities
 | Some of the 5-a-side operators bring an injection of capital into facilities that are available to the school during the day.Swim schools can bring pool and plant expertise, lifeguards and could, if full advantage is taken of these arrangements, be a good resource for teaching swimming (to school pupils) during the school day.. | Can lead to conflicts in respect of responsibility for supervision of premises.Some of these operations commence quite early and can curtail after-school activities.Operators can generate substantial income for their own businesses whilst paying a standard hire rate to the school; it may not get ‘its share’.Direct links between the school and community groups tend not to be not established and sports development opportunities may be missed. |
| Manager | Management method | Notes | Pluses | Minuses |
| Third party operator (1) | Local authority - dual use arrangement – with in house direct services organisation (DSO) | *LA may historically have taken on responsibility for an array of cost elements associated with running the premises* | Can mean that the school’s facility is part of wider strategic programming and management arrangements in the authority.Usually applies when there is a reasonable base and combination of facilities to work with.At its best can reduce operating costs via the flexible deployment of staff whose primary role relates to the operation of adjacent facilities.Strong(er) operating procedures and practices. May acquire Quest accreditation.Can cater for casual use and pay as you go customers.Tend to offer a degree of (at least financial (not always political) stability given the (normally) relatively close links with the local authority. | Where there is a dependence upon local authority subsidy to underpin.Limited school/club relationship and benefits to the school. |
| Third party operator (2) | Via ‘standard’ commercial leisure provider (i.e., GLL Everyone Active) | National and regional presence. | Strong(er) operating procedures/practices, may acquire Quest Tends to work well with established (larger) clubs.Typically, fitness and swimming are the key focus areas.Clear operating targets are set and delivered.Can offer a national and regional network and support.Tend to be based upon clear responsibilities, and agreementsFacilities are available to the community at regular times and days.Can cater for casual use and pay as you go. | Geared to meeting (primarily) financial targets.Can be so commercial that new and smaller clubs / groups struggle to meet financial demands e.g. committing to long-term bookings/advanced paymentMay not focus on local need and community, may be run more on the basis of a more regional and national standardised approach. Less ‘bespoke’.Can require a larger/more comprehensive facility mix, in an urban area to be attractive to the leisure provider.Tend to offer a degree of stability given the (normally) relatively close links with the relevant local authority. |
| Third party operator (3) | Via leisure trust or similar |  | Strong(er) operating procedures and practices, may acquire Quest accreditation.Tends to work well with established (larger) clubs.Typically, fitness and swimming are key focus areas.Tend to be based upon clear(er) responsibilities, and agreements.Facilities are available to the community at regular times and days.Can cater for casual use and pay as you go. | Will have financial targets to meet.To ensure viability, may need to encompass a larger/more comprehensive facility mix to be attractive to the trust.Tend to offer a degree of stability given the (normally) relatively close links with the relevant local authority. |
| Third party operator (4) | Via a specific schools’ letting company (e.g. Schools Plus Ltd) | Tends to originate from a school wishing to retain some level of control over the hiring of its facilities rather than allowing a commercial/community operator to access school facilities.  | School works closely with the provider to determine what is available and when. Responsibility for taking bookings, staffing and operational issues lies with the operating company.School normally has ability to view detail as to what organisation is using which facilities, when.Invoicing is normally handled by the operating company. | The company effectively functions as a ‘middle-man’ between the school and users. As seen in recent Covid-19 pandemic, such companies tend to be non-asset owning and, given the absence of collateral, are a higher risk financially. (It is very difficult to obtain business loans without assets).Tend not to evaluate booking ‘contribution’- simply hirer viability. |
| Third party operator (5) | Via partnership operation with a local coach, club, league or NGB | Often a single person/agency/sport centred approach; NGB examples include Badminton England | Easily managed.Strong school to hirer relationship.School gains recognition as hub/go to place for a particular sport.NGB or (say) county association involvement can strengthen partner base in community/wider local area.School to club player development pathway is likely to be strong.Has potential for strong school/user relationships and benefits to the school e.g., coach education/access to quality coaches/ competitions. | Relationship dependent. Risk relationship with person/club fall out will lose all bookings.Can limit diversity of offer, typically single sport/activityThere is a risk that such an arrangement can become highly performance based – limiting school-club link potential.May not offer any real breadth of activity to the immediate local community. Typically, players travel in from a wide catchment area and may not, thus, be local to the school. |
| Other (1) | ‘Commercial occupier’ – i.e. Go Mammoth – which programmes its own provision *in situ* | Social sports and fitness commercial body that organises team sport leagues, group fitness and corporate programmes (hires sports facilities). | Enables more informal and casual play.Serves the schools community.Can be quite profitable for the school (and the operator). | Does not maximise use of all school’s facilities - typically focuses on one facility e.g. 3G pitch/sports hall.Typically block bookings of 6-8 weeks at a time not normally a long-term commitment.  |
| Other (2) | Via consortium or network of schools. | Usually where a school is part of a foundation trust, multi-academy trust etc. | Can procure – normally via one (or a combination of the mechanisms set out above).. |  |

**A list of operating systems some schools are using (this is not an exhaustive list)**

[freeperiod](http://www.freeperiod.co.uk/)

[GO Mammoth](https://www.gomammoth.co.uk/)

[Ofec](http://www.ofec.co.uk/)

[Parago](http://www.paragosoftware.com/)

[Playfinder](https://www.playfinder.com/uk)

[Progressive Schools Ltd](https://www.progressive-lettings.co.uk/)

[Sports-booker](https://sports-booker.com/)

[Schoolbooking](http://www.schoolbooking.com/)

[School Cloud](http://www.roombookingsystem.co.uk/)

[SchoolHire](http://www.schoolhire.co.uk/)

[Schools Plus Ltd](https://www.schoolsplus.co.uk/)

[Vivify](https://www.vivifyvenues.com/)

1. Case study: Westfield Academy – Yeovil (South Somerset) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Case study: Salford Community Leisure [↑](#footnote-ref-2)