

Achieving Healthy Stadia Status



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1. Introduction

“A healthy stadium is one which promotes the health of visitors, fans, players, employees and the surrounding community...its is a place where people can go to have a positive, healthy experience playing or watching sport and which promotes positive healthy living opportunities in its surrounding community”

Cardiff, as a city, developed interest in the Healthy Stadia programme during 2009 and a representative attended the European Healthy Stadia conference in Liverpool in September 2009 to explore details of the initiative. A number of sporting stadia in Cardiff were initially approached to gauge interest in joining the network and they were asked to take part in an intervention that supported Cardiff's World Health Organization (WHO) Healthy City application. Following these discussions Cardiff City Stadium agreed to work with Cardiff Council's Health Partnership Team and the Healthy Stadia Network to work towards Healthy Stadia status.

1.2 The Healthy Stadia programme

Sport plays an important role within society. Sporting stadia are iconic venues which are in a powerful position to influence healthier lifestyles within their communities. Millions of people across Europe attend a sports stadium each week to watch their team, to work, or to use the stadium's facilities.

The European Healthy Stadia Network (EHSN) is coordinated by the UK Cardiovascular Disease Prevention Charity, Heart of Mersey. Its aim is to support sports stadia to promote public health initiatives that both fans and staff can choose to participate in. The EHSN has worked in eight European countries to promote the concept and develop guidance for stadia to roll out health interventions with the support of local service providers. After initial funding from the European Commission the EHSN is now funded through the World Heart Federation as part of their health partnership with UEFA.

The EHSN works with nine “Associate Partner” agencies across Europe to deliver healthy initiatives through sports stadia. In addition the network has over 150 collaborative partners who advise, facilitate and promote the Healthy Stadia concept across Europe. These include over 90 sports stadia plus a wide range of stakeholder agencies. These include representatives from national leagues and governing bodies of sport, government departments, academic institutions, and many national and pan - European public health agencies.

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1.3 The Cardiff City Stadium

Cardiff City Football Club (The “Bluebirds”) are in the Football League Championship and play their home games at the Cardiff City Stadium. In June 2009 Cardiff City completed the state of the art 27,000 seater stadium costing £50+ million. The club has planning consent to increase capacity to 60,000 in the future should they achieve their Premiership ambitions. The official opening in July 2009 was marked with a game against Glasgow Celtic. The Cardiff Blues rugby union side have also become tenants of Cardiff City FC.

2. Aims and objectives

The EHSN has the following aims and objectives:

- promoting healthier lifestyle messages and social/environmental practices to stadia,
- increasing the recognition of corporate and social responsibilities,
- supporting stadia and national governing bodies/leagues to form successful partnerships with key stakeholders,
- specialist support for stadia and intermediary agencies from European countries not currently engaged in the programme,
- development of specialist guidance documents for stadia to help the planning, roll out and evaluation of established initiatives,
- collation and dissemination of new developments and examples of good practice across the EHSN, and
- to act as a communication and signposting hub for key stakeholders.

3. Application process

3.1 Healthy Stadia Toolkit

The Healthy Stadia Toolkit offers a guidance plan to stadia based upon a seven point “step by step” guide. This toolkit was used as the template for the Cardiff City Stadium application. The toolkit provides users with a walk through of the basic steps to planning initiatives, including advice on how to put an action plan together. The action plan needs to identify what work and initiatives are being undertaken to promote health and well being. In developing the action plan it would also be important to progress lifestyle, social and environmental projects.

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3.2 Cardiff City Community Foundation action plan

An initial meeting with the Assistant Community Manager of the Community Foundation served to register the stadium's interest and to log contact details.

Further meetings involved identifying the number of stadia and community based interventions that the club was involved in. This formed the basis of the first part of the action plan, identifying what the club were currently doing.

School based interventions focussed on the promotion of literacy skills, raising the awareness of recycling and running breakfast and after school clubs. The range of initiatives demonstrated that the club had identified projects across all of the key themes.

Staff based initiatives included employee discounts at a local health club and a cycle to work scheme. Working in partnership with stadium caterers the club also introduced a healthier meal deal option at stadia match day kiosks and made fresh fruit more readily available to staff and visitors. These lifestyle based stadia focussed interventions supported the existing community work programme.

The information from each programme was collated and presented in the application in the form of case studies under the following headings:

- Type of case study
- Action
- Aim
- Evaluation
- How it made a difference.

Each case study was supported with additional notes which provided detail on each scheme.

Further information relating to transport routes and environmental resource management was also included in the application, providing insight to the stadium's commitment to sustainability issues.

Following completion of the action plan the application was submitted to the EHSN. The strength of the application resulted in the Cardiff City Stadium being invited to join the Network as its first Welsh representative in January 2010. At the Cardiff Healthy City launch event held at the stadium, the club was presented with a Healthy Stadia plaque and certificate of membership by Mr Matthew Philpott (European Healthy Stadia Coordinator).

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4. Evaluation

Evaluation of the different initiatives varied depending upon the type of intervention.

Evaluation tools used by the club included:

- feedback from participants
- feedback from staff
- review of pre and post evaluation questionnaires
- review of demand for further interventions
- numbers of schools taking further action as a result of an intervention.

Some interventions have been introduced recently, and further evaluation will take place following pilot programmes.

5. The next steps

The award of Healthy Stadia membership acknowledges the stadium's commitment to promoting health and well being. The club will continue to monitor, evaluate and review all of their interventions. The club will then have opportunities to share their work and projects with other stadia around Europe, and thereby promote good practice. Over time, the club will need to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to the programme and further developments. It has been recommended that Healthy Stadia issues be raised as a regular item on club meetings, and that the club appoint a Healthy Stadia Champion. This role would involve continually striving to develop new initiatives, improve existing ones and nurture strong collaboration with partner organisations. Key to all of this will be keeping the EHSN informed of progress since ultimately the European Healthy Stadia programme will depend upon the success of its member stadia.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Benefits

The benefits to stadia in joining the EHSN are:

- development and maintenance of a positive relationship with local communities,
- environmental savings and minimisation of carbon footprint,
- promotion of previously unexplored revenue streams, for example, the provision of healthier food options,
- greater access to new funding streams through collaboration with other organisations,
- learning from others and sharing good practice, and
- local, regional and national recognition.

Further benefits for Cardiff City FC included:

- formation of new partnerships with the Cardiff Health Alliance and its partnership members in the development of new initiatives, and
- prestige of being welcomed into the Network during the launch event to celebrate Cardiff's World Health Organization (WHO) Healthy City status.

6.2 Lessons for the future

In general terms the stated aim of the Health Partnership Team (HPT) of the Cardiff Health Alliance to introduce the Healthy Stadia concept was a success. In becoming the first Welsh representatives of the Network the EHSN stated that "the application document and the interventions stated within it are some of the strongest we have received from a stadium".

However, it was also noted that much of that praise could be attributed to the HPT's facilitative role in coordinating relevant activities and compiling the final document. This illustrated one of the lessons to be learnt in working with stadia in the future. Whilst Cardiff City Community Foundation did engage with the initiative, a considerable amount of time and effort was invested by the HPT, due to their desire to promote the EHSN.

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It is likely that whilst other stadia wishing to apply will receive some support they will not be able to be guided through the process as thoroughly as in this instance. It would be important for other stadia to be focussed and to direct the initiative development.

Furthermore, the Cardiff City application was unusual insofar as credit was given for both existing and planned interventions. Whilst satisfying the necessary criteria for invitation onto the programme, it was also the case that the application was “fast tracked” in order to link in with Cardiff’s Healthy City status launch. Other applications would be assessed over a longer time frame.

Whilst Cardiff City Stadium will be required to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to the scheme there is no doubt that the scheme has already been a success. The club supported National No Smoking Day in March 2010 during the home game against Middlesbrough FC. This showed the club’s willingness to embed healthy stadia principles into its work. It is to be hoped that this will be further developed over time.

The quality of the application and the platform afforded at the Health City Launch event has raised awareness of the EHSN within Cardiff and across South Wales. Increased knowledge of the scheme amongst public health professionals has also resulted in plans to extend the work of the EHSN. Discussions are underway to consider a pilot project with the SWALEC Stadium (Glamorgan County Cricket Club) and work is ongoing with the Millennium Stadium in offering healthier food choices. There is also the possibility that the Liberty Stadium (home of Swansea City FC and the Ospreys rugby union team) will look to the programme in the future. If these plans succeed there is every hope that the EHSN may continue to grow, and that the wide range of interventions it supports will play an important part in improving health and reducing inequalities.

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