



LONDON YOUTH ROWING AND
AQR – A CASE STUDY IN THE
APPLICATION OF MENTAL
TOUGHNESS ASSESSMENT AND
DEVELOPMENT WITH YOUNG
PEOPLE

At London 2012, the 7% of privately educated citizens in this country made up 50% of Great Britain's Olympic team. That is an arresting statistic. Such a disproportionate impact at the highest level does prompt a question as to whether investment in school sport, including a willingness to fully exploit its educational capacity, is possible within the state sector.

Many independent schools Headteachers' feel sport is a crucial area which helps create their 'competitive advantage' - both in terms of the product they supply - and the life chances of their graduates. But what of the other 93% of young people in this country, particularly those from more deprived communities?

Conceived on the banks of Henley Royal Regatta and based on the notion that the developmental benefits of sport could be better shared across the capital, London Youth Rowing (LYR) was established in 2004. For the past 12 years, we have sought to show that through sport in general, and rowing in particular, such positive activity can become a vehicle for personal development in those young people considered 'hard to reach'.

Through its Sport England-funded Satellite Hubs and Clubs model, LYR has brought the sport of rowing to tens of thousands of new participants. Whilst this has been successful in terms of creating open access to a traditionally exclusive sport, our most exciting results have been through targeted and intensive programmes of activity. The most effective initiative has been our *Rowing Academies* programme where full-time professional coaches are seconded into participating state schools.

Based on the success of this framework and seeking to build a systematic link between sport and employability, LYR's life skills programme, 'Breaking Barriers' was introduced in 2014. We feel that each training session, mentoring conversation and every race needs to be understood and exploited for its educational value. In doing so we hope to engender the non-cognitive traits which will promote progression into further education, employment and training.

From its inception, LYR recognised the importance of robust monitoring and evaluation to demonstrate success, to gain actionable insights, and of course to apply for future funding. Our preference for market-based accountability - and therefore our insistence upon a recognised impact assessment tool for Breaking Barriers - led us to AQR.

We became aware of AQR during the launch of Alan Milburn's Social Mobility Whitepaper in 2013 and came to understand that AQR's shared a commitment to the issues which drive London Youth Rowing's work. Before formalising our partnership with AQR, we explored a variety of tools and options. We made the decision to proceed with AQR for two main reasons. Firstly, AQR's model was and is a well-respected measurement tool for the seemingly intangible outcomes we sought. Equally important, however, AQR showed a genuine enthusiasm to partner with LYR to support us and gain insights into the application of the MTQ48 test across our programmes.

Breaking Barriers – The Case Study

In September 2014, LYR launched the Breaking Barriers pilot. Run alongside LYR's participation and performance rowing programmes, this initiative links a rowing programme with corporate mentoring, skills sessions and project management delivery. This helps students to consciously link the attributes they take from sport (and other disciplines) to the non-cognitive skills which will lead them into further positive outcomes in education and the workplace.

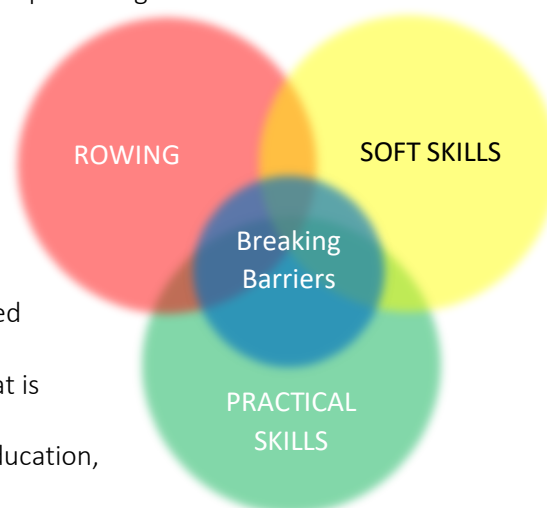


For a school to take part in Breaking Barriers it is required that the percentage of its students on Free School Meals (FSM) exceeds the London average of 25%.

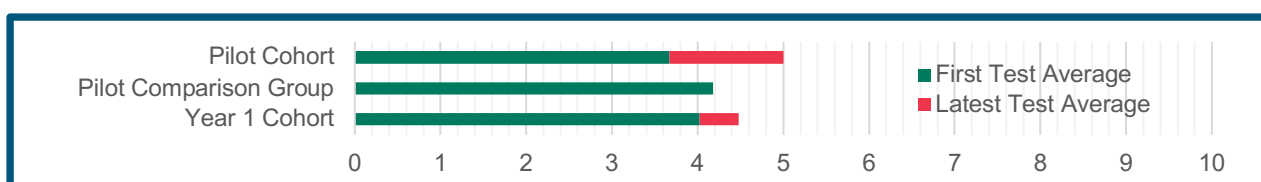
For context, to qualify for free school meals, the combined household income threshold is £16,190 per annum.

Students remain part of the programme for two years to ensure that they have the long term support they require. The core objectives of the programme are as follows:

1. To develop the life skills of young people through a structured programme of rowing and mentoring
2. To broaden the future aspirations of young people as to what is available after school
3. To provide future pathways for young people into further education, training or employment



Participants are tested at three intervals throughout to assess the impact of the programme using the MTQ48 test. The chart below shows improvements made (red bars) by the pilot cohort vs. a control group, and then progress so far this year by the 2015/16 cohort.



Interestingly, all participants have claimed to really enjoy the testing and particularly liked seeing their early development reports as compared to those at the end of the process. The mentors found the coaching reports very useful and, for LYR, it allowed us to match mentors with mentees based on the skill sets we thought would be most useful to each candidate.

MTQ48 is an integral part of understanding how to work with young people and give them the right support and a plan that's personalised to their mental toughness level. By incorporating MTQ48 it has also allowed us at LYR to gather intelligent data that can be used accurately to support people, while also being vital for reporting impact. Internally, the team at LYR found the process very straightforward and simple. The team were brilliant at coming back to us with any queries we had as we tested the process. It is now a key part of the programme and embedded into our process."

Loyal Marten – Former Head of Development, London Youth Rowing

Testimonials

Importantly, the feedback from our corporate partners has been very encouraging. The senior partner at PwC responsible for the establishment of the programme during its pilot phase spoke of the benefits to his firm:

As an employer it gives us a great opportunity to spot and nurture talent; it also – and I'm sure all the PwC and LYR participants will agree – gives us as individuals the chance to be part of something truly meaningful. For LYR I hope it's helped in the realisation of their mission. But most importantly I hope and believe it has shown [these] fantastic young adults that despite clear challenges, social disadvantage can be overcome and should not be a barrier to achieving potential.

Mentors, coaches and teachers all recognised the progress made by the students:

Comparing the students now to how they were back in January, there is a real difference. Confidence, enthusiasm, motivation and a hard work attitude are now synonymous with our students

Teacher

Following several skills sessions held between PwC and LYR, there was a notable difference in the way that the participants engaged in activities. Those who had less confidence were now confident enough to speak their opinions to the group

Mentor

It's clear that their confidence has grown throughout the programme from the mentoring sessions. At first they were too self-conscious to ask many questions, but as the sessions have continued, so has their ability to analyse and evaluate their own performance. The feedback they receive is not so much one way - they really ask to understand what is being asked of them and apply this in a practical sense in their rowing.

Coach

Not only have the young people on the programme made measurable progress in terms of their results on the MTQ48 test, now they are able to articulate that progress in more challenging environments and in more sophisticated terms.

Before starting Breaking Barriers I wasn't very confident, especially in situations where new people were involved as I felt shy. The past six months on the programme have taught me not to be afraid and to do new things.

I now know it is more important to get yourself in the right mindset, and I'm really proud of speaking to a room full of business people at the event that we helped to organise with PwC. I also won my first medal!

My goals are more organised, to push myself, and to practice as much as I can by using the skills I have learnt on Breaking Barriers

Looking Forward

As Breaking Barriers matures, we are aiming to further incorporate the insights, structures and resources that AQR offers.

In a bid to drive retention on the programme we will now seek to begin with more informal engagements in Key Stage 3 and progress gradually to the more formal learning environment of the Key Stage 4 mentoring sessions.

By introducing participants to rowing earlier in Key Stage 3 we will aim to establish social groups sooner and engender an enthusiasm for the sport ahead of the more structured mentoring in Year 10. It is critical that participants are not to be shielded from experiencing the disappointment that inevitably sometimes comes with competition. While we acknowledge the importance of developing mental toughness through exposure

to disappointment, at this transitional age, the focus will be mainly on enjoyment and in learning to win and lose as part of a team.

We will look to promote a sense of *esprit de corp* and introduce consistent messaging around key themes. In allowing a more informal introduction to the programme at a slightly more formative stage of the students' development, we hope that the later step into more sophisticated and conscious adjustments to mindset will feel more natural and therefore be more enduring and effective.

Beyond this, we will be looking to evolve our mentoring programme to incorporate Key Stage 5 wherein we will train the sixth formers to be mentors and coaches to their younger peers. We are keen that students identify more as leaders than performance athletes and will look to weave this language into our programmes going forward. This important distinction will allow students to demonstrate leadership qualities in a number of ways, but importantly, always by example.

AQR is a very important and valued partner for LYR. As Breaking Barriers grows and improves, we see AQR as a key contributor in helping to refine and improve our model. The ongoing support we receive, and the exciting new resources being developed, will all be vital components in allowing LYR to develop the programmes which are so important to us and hopefully the young people we exist to support.

