

SO YOU WANT TO START A FENCING CLUB?

Introduction. This briefing sheet begins to answer the question 'How do I start a fencing club?' The question is often asked by those who are not coaches or who have recently qualified as a coach for the first time. This brief is mainly for those people; it covers some key considerations and provides a check-list of actions and tasks that are necessary to establish a new club.

It seems obvious to say it but there are 6 vital ingredients that must be in place for a viable club, these are (in no particular order) funding and finance, members, coaches, a venue, equipment, management and leadership.

Membership. Club members might be existing fencers or complete beginners or a mixture of both. Either way you will have to advertise to find the demand. Local free-sheets, local papers, adverts in schools and shop and post-office windows, work-place flyers, word-of-mouth can all be employed to get recruits. You must decide if the club is for children and adults, or just children or just adults. If for children, from what age will you take them and if the club is to be mixed children and adults you should consider separate sessions. Gauge demand before going ahead and booking venues or buying equipment.

Once you have expressions of interest you can contact those people (or the parents/carers of children) and get them to commit to (ie pay for!) a beginners' course. Assuming you have a coach, you might start by establishing and running a beginners' course, even before you set up a club. Then those that want to continue become the basis of a newly formed club, form a management committee, draft a constitution and set up a club bank account. Many banks have special arrangements or accounts for sports clubs. You will also wish to affiliate your club with England Fencing. Go to http://www.britishfencing.com/British_Fencing.asp?PageID=159 for more details. You will find a draft constitution here as well.

Coaching. A club needs a coach of at least Level 2, to comply with most venue-hirers' regulations. England Fencing (EF) can provide details of registered coaches whose names appear of the EF Coach Database. The club's coach will devise training plans and programmes, and give group and individual lessons. The coach might be voluntary (ie unpaid but possibly in receipt of expenses if travelling from any distance) or might be paid – where 'paid' means in receipt of an agreed sum per session attended. The 'going rate' for coaches depends on level of qualification and Region.

Venue. You will need to find the equivalent of a badminton court-sized space for up to 12 beginners. The average school gym, school hall, village hall, and of course sports or leisure centre will be adequate. Venue hire charges vary widely and must be factored in to the financial details of club management. A hall hire fee of £25 pounds an hour means £37.50 for a 90 minute session. You may be able to organise discounts for a start-up period.

Equipment. Your Region, County Union, or a local coach may have equipment to lend in the short term. Alternatively, you may have to arrange and receive grant funding first before anything can happen. It's a bit chicken-and-egg in reality. Manufacturers/suppliers of kit are keen to win your business and have all sorts of club discounts and deals on sets of beginners' kit. Some offer staggered payments, especially for large capital outlay such as electric recording apparatus and electric kit.

Funding and Finance. For the time being EF can no longer provide development grants for new start-ups. However, your County or Borough Sports Development departments may well have funds for new ventures. Check out your local councillor as well as often these folk are given money to distribute to good causes in their constituencies. Awards-for-All (lottery funding) and local and national charities can be another potential source of funding, and you might want to explore potential sponsorship from local and national private organisations.

You should set up a simple business model that includes costings for venue hire and coach costs set against potential annual membership subscription and monthly training fees. This way you'll know how many paying members you must have to keep the venture afloat. As far as possible avoid handling cash on a weekly basis and get people to pay by cheque on a termly or block-of-sessions basis and/or by standing order. This means you will need a bank account and have to keep proper books of accounts.

Management and Leadership. From the outset you should aim to affiliate the club to England Fencing (see above) and establish a small management committee – a Chair person, a secretary and a treasurer at the very minimum. As the club establishes itself a Club Captain, Beginners' (or membership) secretary, a social secretary, etc might be added to the committee. The Coach might be on the committee or might be co-opted to advise on technical matters. *All* officers of the club must be CRB checked and have attended a *Safeguarding* programme.

Help and Support. EF can offer advice and support and put you in touch with those who are good role models of starting up a club and you should also contact your Region (or County Union if one exists) for help. Your local County or Borough Sports Partnership will be an excellent source of support and information as well as being able to point you in the direction of funding. For further information contact EF HQ on 01473 214554 or admin@englandfencing.org.uk