

Organising a Block of Club Introductory Sessions

Why?

- To attract new members to the sport and club
- Sessions which are specifically targeted at newcomers are less intimidating for people to sign up to and join in with, compared to turning up at a regular event.
- A block of sessions can help newcomers focus their attention on the sport for a fixed period of time. If they sign up and pay in advance then they have made a commitment to giving the sport a try which they are more likely to stick with.
- It often takes more than one session for people to grasp enough of the sport to realise what they may get from it and how much they enjoy it.
- Introductory sessions provide an opportunity to ensure that the basics of orienteering maps and navigation are understood and to jargon bust.
- A series of sessions working with coaches and other club members provides an opportunity to get to know people, making the club more welcoming and sociable.

What Format?

- The best format for introductory sessions will depend on your particular situation - who the club is targeting to join, where the club is based, and who is going to facilitate the sessions.
- A minimum of 4 sessions is recommended. This might be as a weekly block, or spaced out over a longer period, but it's a good idea to keep them quite frequent to make them most effective.
- It is recommended that at least some of the sessions have no "competitive" element to them, and focus simply on learning and practising skills. Ideally, these sessions would be led by a trained orienteering coach.
- It's a good idea to mix up your block with a combination of some coached training sessions and some low key events, to introduce the formats and experience that people will encounter when they come along to an event.
- The introductory sessions don't need to be solely for newcomers, they can be tagged on to planned events and club training sessions, but should ensure that specific attention is paid to the newcomers.
- Ensure that you have at least one nominated "coach" to work with your newcomers, even at the events. Ideally the same familiar face at each session is great, but the main thing is to ensure that people know who they will meet when they arrive.
- Introductory blocks could be targeted at different groups of people - families, adults only, or juniors. If you are mainly targeting juniors, then it's recommended to ensure that their parents are also engaged in some way (i.e. don't drop and

run). Continued participation in the sport is much more likely if the interest of parents is sparked.

Who?

- An introductory block of sessions is likely to be planned by the club's lead coach or development officer, in liaison with the club's event official and other coaches.
- The lead organiser will likely want to be responsible for communications with the newcomers too - this should be frequent and err on the side of spoon-feeding.
- Don't rely on one person to deliver sessions like this. They can involve a lot of work and need communal effort. It's also good for newcomers to meet a number of different club members.

Example

- Overview of the plan for Maroc winter 2020 introductory block (*add link*)
- FVO?
- ESOC?

Tips

- Timing of introductory blocks is quite key - think about how they will tie in with upcoming club activities, or might clash with school holidays and other (non-club) events.
- If you can set a challenge or goal for participants this may motivate them to continue e.g. to gain a colour badge, participate in an upcoming event etc.
- Be wary of linking in "big" events too soon as they can seem overly intimidating and off-putting to newcomers, especially if they have young family.
- On the other hand, festival events such as the Scottish 6-Days can really inspire people, as long as they have some idea of what is happening!
- Plan your block of sessions for a time that the club regularly meets - there is little point in getting people interested only for them to discover that regular activities clash with other existing commitments.
- Think about which areas are best for introducing your new group to orienteering (this may depend on age / background etc.).
- Communication is absolutely key and personal emails (or preferred communication method) are best at the outset.
- There are pros and cons of automatically joining people as club members when they sign up for your block. On the plus side, you will have a longer term agreed communication with them and can ensure that they are welcomed into the club. On the down side, you will get a lot of member churn, as many people will try the sport out for few sessions and then decide that it's not for them.
- Don't take it personally if newcomers don't come back - at least they've tried it out!
- Celebrate success!