

OPENING A CENTRE

1. What is the Centre setting out to achieve: in attendance, in activity, in financial and social terms? If the Centre hasn't these objectives, you won't know whether you have succeeded!

STAFF

2. How many staff do you need: full-time, part-time? For the former: enough to cover all opening hours with a satisfactory complement?
3. Who are the important staff - before you open? during the first two months of opening? during the day-time, evenings & weekends?
4. Who are the important staff - to answer questions knowledgeably? to take and deal with complaints? to encourage the correct use of the building? to control? to assess real & potential interest and to "play it by ear"? to encourage more activity to & in the Centre?

It's surprising how many times the answer is "the Receptionist" or the man or woman "on the floor".

5. When do you appoint these staff? Early!
6. How do you prepare the staff for the actual opening? They should at least visit one other Centre operating at peak time. Can they or the building cope with a large number of uninformed visitors?
7. Have you a fund of competent part-timers on whom you can call for duties of reception, secretary, guides, bar & cafeteria, manual staff, event stewards, first aid, coaches & supervisors?

ADMINISTRATION

8. On what have you based your budget? What you expect to happen. On what have you based your targets? - what are you aiming for?
9. How long will it take you to reach your budgetted usage & income? One week or three months?
10. Have you established procedures to deal with enquiries, bookings, internal communication, ensuring the booking requirements appear "on the floor", finance collection & control, advertising & press liaison, user centre liaison etc.

OPENING

11. When will the Centre open? (a) Take the most pessimistic date, add three months and therefore make sure you know the building better than your users! (b) Is there a better time of year to open? Some considerations: The decision "when" could be political! September is a new sporting season, but if it means that how you set up the Centre has got to be correct! Opening January to April gives you a short period to experiment, before deciding all priorities.
12. What are you trying to achieve by your opening?
13. How do you open? A week of local activity? A series of one off events? - this strains the new Centres resources considerably! Offer free rates to members for a period of say three weeks. This would certainly encourage new members. Open with "Learn a new Sport" taster course? Be careful you might find you can't cope with the numbers.

14. What happens if you, the press and one person arrives on the opening day? or 5,000 people arrive? Both have happened! Don't forget, your initial visitors won't be wanting to participate - they'll be wanting to look into every corner, activity room, unlocked door and they'll eat their sandwiches in a squash court if there is nowhere else! Can your social & circulation areas cope?

OFFICIAL OPENING

15. Who? would depend on what you are trying to achieve, and which body owns the Centre!
16. When? get the Centre completed and running relatively smoothly first! We found the date of the official opening certainly accelerated the apparent completion of the building - we had been open for a number of months!
17. Who arranges it?
18. When is it arranged? As Princess Anne said recently "The Family are committed a number of months (-) ahead.....(!)"

THE BUILDING

19. Have you been appointed early enough to ensure the necessary, if any, changes to the building? If not, how can you compensate for this? With staff and equipment?
20. Is it ready to be opened?
21. Do you know its weaknesses in relation to circulation, security and vandalism? i.e. have you projected how the public will use the building?
22. Has the Centre sufficient equipment? For Sports Buildings: 10 - 15% of the building capital cost is a useful rule of thumb. For swimming pools 5 - 7%! Don't forget the greater flexibility you require the higher the percentage must be!

USAGE

23. Have you decided on Centre Regulations? These should be the guide lines for what you believe to be the right usage of the Centre, safeguarding its interests, without prejudicing the future development of usage.
24. Again, what are you trying to achieve?
25. What mix of activity will you accept within the programme? Only "sport"? Within the sports programme what allocation will go to casual bookings, coaching, block bookings, one off events, or anything else? Will there be a difference of approach to peak and off peak time? How do you decide priorities between one activity and other?
26. How do people get to the Centre? If there is a limited public service it will affect the mix of people arriving.

The question that follows is how do you satisfy the initial interest most efficiently?

The above are a few of the points to be considered when opening a Centre? The answer to most will vary depending on the catchment area, the size of your complex - the larger it is the more requirement for answers to be established early (whether they are correct or not!), your committee, you, your resources, and again - the Centre's objectives!