

Vicki Galvin



Sport and Physical Activity Manager

Name

Vicki Galvin

Job title

Sport and Physical Activity Manager at Oxford City Council

Qualifications

BA(Hons) Dance Performance, Middlesex University

Premier Diploma in Personal Training

Introduction

Vicki works for Oxford City Council as a sport and physical activity manager developing the opportunities in the city. This involves working on building facilities, promoting activities in schools and communities and engaging less active groups. She also teaches fitness classes in her spare time.

What do the City Council do in relation to sport and physical activity?

Within my team we oversee sports and physical activity for city. We look after facility developments as we've got a capital grant programme where we build facilities. For example, we're working on a £5m development at Horspath at the moment where we're building a brand-new sports complex in

partnership with Oxford United and BMW. We're resurfacing five of our outdoor tennis courts and installing new floodlights. We work in partnership and support other development projects that are going to generate better resources and facilities for the communities that we work within. We also have a remit within schools.

We have an officer who works with all the primary and secondary schools in the city to support them on spending their primary school premium package that they have ring-fenced from the government. This has recently been increased as a result of the sugar levy. The schools have more money ring-fenced for physical education and we have a package that they can spend that on. That is with Create Development who run Real Play, Real Coaching, Real PE. We deliver those courses to train teachers across the city and hopefully embed those skills within schools so that they can sustain their own physical education curriculum. We train primary school teachers to gain swimming qualifications so they can support or lead lessons for their children. The aim is for every year six child to leave primary school being able to swim.

We deliver countywide projects for the city which are sometimes funded by Sport England and sometimes by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). This could be engaging our inactive demographic or focusing on women and girls. We're currently about to launch a project around diabetes to involve pre-diabetics and diabetic patients.

What does your job entail on a daily basis?

My job is a management role around the strategic direction of the team and linking that in to other local and national strategies. I work with our county council, our partners in health, our County Sports Partnership, and then link to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Sport England strategies, ensuring there's that golden thread through to our leisure and wellbeing strategy. I ensure we are working to meet our team plan and therefore our leisure and wellbeing strategy and partner strategies as a result. So a lot of work is around partnership development and relationship development.

I manage a team of five people and then we have our instructors and volunteers, so it's about 40 staff that work on our programmes,

Tell me about your qualifications

I did A-levels in Dance because that was my passion, English and Psychology and Geography and then I did my degree which was a BA (Hons) in Dance Performance at Middlesex University. I loved doing my degree but looking back maybe I could have done something different but I would have regretted not following what my passion was at that time. During that time we had various fitness modules because if you're dancing six or seven hours a day you've got to be fit, and it can't just be achieved through dancing. We had modules on fitness modules, anatomy and physiology and I started to get interested in fitness.

Up until that point I'd just been dancing, and if you asked me to go for a run or go and do some weights or pull-ups I'd have said 'no way!'. But I started seeing the benefits of it and then I started to enjoy it a lot more. At the start of my degree if you'd said you're going to leave this course and have an interest in fitness I wouldn't have believed you. But when I left university I decided I wasn't going to pursue dance but work with my interest around fitness.

That's when I went to Premier Training to do my Diploma in Personal Training and tried to do every add-on course that I could, such as ultrasound, taping and strapping. From there I sent letters out to various sports clubs and contacted my local leisure centre. I managed to get myself into a position where I was volunteering to do sports massage for my local rugby club. And that's given me some great

experience in sports therapy. I ended up being there for seven or eight years working with Chinnor Rugby Club. That was fantastic because I learnt the therapeutic and injury rehab side of things. Also, it was great to be part of a sports team.

I also got part-time work as a gym instructor at the local leisure centre in Thame. They couldn't offer me full-time work, so I got qualified to teach circuit training, body combat and spinning to help fill the time and bring my wages up. When they offered me a full-time position, I actually didn't have time to take it. I was so busy by that point as I'd started personal training and sports massage as well.

After three or four years one of my friends, who was a master trainer for a company who make indoor spinning bikes and fitness equipment, persuaded me to meet their MD. She was one of their master trainers for the UK and they needed someone to help out with training. I think I talked myself into a job even though he wasn't sure whether there was even a role. I became their UK training and education manager and would go around and train people how to use their equipment. I developed the modules they delivered and got them accredited with CPD points. I worked with YMCA and various sports clubs.

I spent three years covering the whole of the UK by myself. Maybe I had shot myself in the foot by just agreeing to everything and being quite good at the things that they asked me to do. But the MD would ask me to do more and more. It got to the point where I was delivering the training, I was selling the training, I was developing the training, I was presenting and there was a lot of travelling involved and it just wasn't for me. I got to the point where I wasn't getting job satisfaction because I was so worn out. At this point a job had come up as Go Active Coordinator for Oxford City Council.

It was coordinating a physical activity project which is still in place and something I work on now. It felt like it combined the personal training skills that I'd built up, as well as some of the skills that I'd learnt from my time in my previous role - those management, marketing and communication skills. So it just seemed like it was a nice blend of them both and was still out and about but just round Oxford rather than the UK.

Then two years ago I was promoted to sport and physical activity manager to manage the team that I was a part of. And I think that journey has given me a good insight into what it's like to be out there delivering services to meet the needs of communities, through to how projects work and how they develop.

I understand the people that I manage because I've done one of their roles. So I actually have an understanding of what's involved in their roles. Whilst I want them to shape their roles in a way that suits them the environment that they're working in is constantly changing I know. There is pressure that they are under and barriers that they are coming up against and I can support them with that.

What advice would you have for people who are starting off studying sport now who want to get into your type of work?

I'm probably echoing what other people have said but it is so important to gain experience. We have a number of volunteering opportunities and offer work experience. Putting those hours in to gain experience, obviously looks great in terms of your commitment but also it might help shape your vision of what you want to do exactly. Local authorities do have a lot of opportunities and they're not as dull and boring as people think. As well as the benefits of flexibility and a supportive environment around health and wellbeing there are good structures in place in terms of your pension and your own personal development.

I'd say gain some experience, develop your skillset because there are a lot of transferable skills you will develop in our industry. Skills such as project management, communication skills, developing

partnerships and relationship building. They can come from any other industry but working in sport and physical activity can definitely help to develop these.

What are the possibilities for promotion and development working for a council?

If someone came to work in our city council they could start off as a lifeguard in a leisure centre and move up to become a duty manager. I started as a coordinator, moved into a permanent role, and then into a management position.

My line manager started off as a lifeguard and he's worked at the city council for 25 years. He now manages the whole of Active Community overseeing all the community centres, the green spaces, the youth ambition team and the leisure contracts. All from starting work as a lifeguard.