

# Learning about what works in Phase Two of the Mayor of London's Sport Unites Programme

## Spotlight: Internships Programme (Lawn Tennis Association)

### Background



*“Our vision is ‘Tennis Opened Up’, and our mission is to transform communities through tennis, focusing on three areas – making tennis welcoming, enjoyable and inspiring to everyone.”*



The Sport Internship Programme provides 12-month paid internship opportunities to young Londoners from groups typically underrepresented within the sports industry. 12 organisations are hosting interns, including the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA). These organisations are all leaders in the sport industry and include national sports umbrella bodies.

When a colleague in the LTA's London and Southeast Area Team first saw the opportunity advertised, she was keen for the LTA to apply. Not only was she committed to the principles underpinning the development opportunity, but it was also in line with the organisational push to increase diversity within the workforce. In addition, she saw potential in strengthening the partnership with the GLA's Sport Team.

### What happened?

*(The Experience Day) “set a tone that I wouldn't have expected. It made me visualise. I could see myself working here.” (Intern)*

When the LTA bid was successful, the lead colleague spoke with colleagues to introduce the internship project and to start designing a workplan for the interns at an early stage.

Recruiting the interns proved to be an exciting opportunity for the LTA, which had a well-established recruitment process in place. They began by using their usual channels to advertise and received a high volume of applications (325). While this was a great response, they focused on refining their approach to better reach the GLA target group of young people aged 18 to 25 from underserved communities.

The LTA reviewed their approach and tailored it to support them in attracting the target groups, this time by tapping into informal networks and delivery partners. As part of the shortlisting process, they looked at applicants' postcodes, mapped against indices of deprivation, as a proxy for under-served communities. With support from the GLA Sport Team, this enabled the LTA to reduce the shortlist to six people.

The LTA lead, with the support of the Recruitment team also adapted the interview process (which is typically made up of a traditional competency based interview, presentation and/or a task) to introduce an experience day for shortlisted applicants, including an overview of the organisation and a game of padel, making it more engaging, enjoyable, and inclusive.

Two interns were recruited through the revised process and started work at the LTA in May 2024.

The People Director of the LTA had previous experience of internships and was keen to ensure that the interns were well supported. They were paid the London Living Wage, plus a contribution to food, transport and other expenses to enable them to participate fully in the work of the organisation. They received the same induction as other LTA staff, as well as a tailored induction for the role. They are office based, maximising opportunities to network and to be supported, as well as ensuring their visibility within the organisation. They sit within the line management structure of the London and South East team, and in addition, have mentors from within the organisation. A colleague from the EDI team also provided informal support to the interns, drawing on his experience of the LTA.

***“Our conversations have been about using their voice, as they may be the only black person in the room.”*** (LTA colleague)

The programme consisted of a series of 'rotations' between different LTA departments, to give the interns experience of a wide range of different activities and roles. Rotations included time with the major events team at the LTA Queen's tournament, and opportunities to work alongside the Coaching, Competitions and Safeguarding teams. The interns were also involved in bespoke projects, for example with a focus on Black tennis, and presented to the whole staff team at a Black History Month event. As one intern commented:

***“With each rotation I had a sense of achievement.”***

Alongside the support offered by host organisations, interns and their hosts from across the programme were brought together regularly by the GLA Sport Team to share experience and learning.

## What has been the impact?

The internship programme has clearly had a significant impact, not only on the interns, but also on the LTA's colleague base and ways of working, as summarised below.

### Impact on the interns has been:

*"The internship pushed me to step outside of my comfort zone."* (Intern)

*"I'm immensely proud of the structure of the programme. It has really developed them."* (LTA colleague)

- **Greater confidence and self-belief** as a result of successfully taking on a wide range of new and different challenges
- **Rapid growth in skills** because the programme was designed to give the interns a taste of different roles and varied types of work
- **Increased self awareness** about areas such as strengths, development priorities and interests, which has grown through the structured mentoring sessions
- **Excellent networks** – inside the LTA, with colleagues commenting that the interns had stronger connections across the organisation than they themselves had, and also with partners
- **Access to organisational support**, not only during the internship, but also in helping interns plan and **prepare for their next move**.

### Impact on the organisation has been:

*"Having things change at the LTA because of the interns is brilliant."* (LTA colleague)

- A more **inclusive recruitment process**, as a result of the learning from the intern recruitment, adapting to the capabilities of the individuals
- **Greater openness and awareness** because the interns have been high profile (including presenting at an LTA all colleague meeting) and their contribution has been valued - *There's a recognition that the interns are capable and skilled.*
- **New and organisationally useful skills** among LTA colleagues, for example the two mentors were new to the role.



## What helped?

*“The culture of the LTA has a core focus on colleague engagement. A major part of the success of the internship is that we’re included in that culture.”* (Intern)

*“I feel everyone has lived their values about this – passion, inclusion and teamwork.”* (LTA colleague)

- An **organisational culture** and ways of working that emphasise engagement and inclusion
- **Flexibility** on the part of the LTA and a commitment to making the most of the opportunity, both to develop the interns and to improve the organisation
- The **interns’ willingness to grasp the opportunities** offered by the internship
- The **infrastructure of support** around the interns, in particular mentoring
- The thoughtful **design of the programme**, with rotations through different teams and roles
- The **tenacity** of the LTA colleague who was determined to make the internships work for everyone involved, in partnership with the key internal stakeholders.



## What are the key lessons?

*(Our line manager) “took a lot of care to make sure we feel embedded in the business. At the first team meeting we had a shout out. It was a special moment.”* (Intern)

*“Massive thanks to the GLA, their investment has been huge especially when you have a very structured traditional organisation (like the LTA).”* (LTA colleague)

- Aligning the work of the interns with the **organisation’s priorities** so that their roles were embedded within the core business
- Designing a programme for interns that gave them **visibility and profile**, as well as building their skills
- Ensuring that there is a lot of **support**, particularly mentoring, including from: *“People who understand, who look like me.”*

- Preparing to be flexible, and to **test and learn** ways of working that are new to the organisation (for example trying out new approaches to recruitment).

## What next?

*“We need to do more than have two interns! It’s been influential, but will we invest in the future?  
Let’s put our money where our mouth is...”*

The internships are due to last until May 2025. The focus is now on the interns’ final rotations, as well as on preparing them for their next career move. This will include exploring their aspirations and encouraging them to make best use of the resources available to them within the LTA, such as help and advice from the Recruitment team on CVs, applications and interviews.

There has been a great deal of enthusiasm about the internships programme across the LTA, with colleagues wanting to become involved and to offer support. It is exciting to see that the LTA is exploring the potential of continuing an intern programme in some form and that the experience gained has been influential in helping the LTA to consider more interns in the future

