

# Supporting active lifestyles

## Developing your recreational sport provision.

This briefing will support students' union to understand how to implement programmes of activity to encourage students into an active lifestyle through recreational sport provision.

### Introduction

Sport plays a role in the lives of many students; whether competing in BUCS leagues to being part of IMS programmes. However whilst lots of students already participate in physical activity there are still huge swathes of the student population who aren't leading active lifestyles.

Students perceptions about sport have changed over time as a result of a number of different factors. Sport England highlighted a number of key trends as:

- University fees – the rise in the cost of attending university has led to an increase in student expectations but also in how they choose to spend their time
- A competitive market – both in activities that students can commit time to as well as the job market for students after they've completed their degree
- On demand – students have grown as 'generation 2.0' not knowing a life before the internet and a proliferation of smart phones making them more demanding for immediate action
- Hyperlocal – a shift in focus for students wanting to be able to find out

about local activities on that day that they can turn up to straight away

- Credibility – whilst online proliferation occurs students are reliant on understanding information from trusted sources, and therefore word of mouth still has valid currency.

All of these factors will influence how students want to access sport and also shape their views towards taking part in physical activity.

We believe that students should be able to access a breadth of opportunities to help them lead an active lifestyle.

### Why focus on active lifestyles?

Sport has been shown to have numerous benefits for individuals and the wider community.

Sport England have a really handy page which highlights a range of evidence for the value of sport and physical activity for:

- Economic
- Health
- Social and Cultural

You can view it on the Sport England site [here](#).

Scottish Student Sport and Sport Scotland recently carried out a study into evidence that shows the benefits of sport in Higher Education settings. You can find their report [online](#).

They look at evidence to show the value of physical activity in supporting Higher Education across a number of areas, including:

- Health
- Employability
- Academic attainment
- Inclusion and identity
- Social networks

The role of physical activity has also been shown to have numerous benefits in a report by the Sport and Recreation Alliance 'The Game of Life'. The research is split into the following chapters:

- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Education and Employment
- Antisocial Behaviour
- Crime Social Cohesion

You can view the full report [here](#) and a great infographic that summarises key highlights [here](#).

Whilst there is a huge amount of organised sport that happens through BUCS leagues and IMS programmes there is often a lack of knowledge and best practice examples to help students' union develop their provision for recreational sport and physical activity.

## Understanding your market

In creating physical activity opportunities that are attractive to students you first need to understand what students want, how they'd like to access opportunities, when and where.

It's therefore important to look at you current provision and who is participating in your different activities.

Sport England have undertaken a survey of HE students to give you a national picture of who participates in activity. You can view the results [here](#).

You can view data for the nations on non HE specific participation through the links below:

- Wales – [Active Adults Survey](#)
- Scotland – [Scottish Household Survey](#)
- Northern Ireland – [Continuous Household Survey](#)

Categorising students by both demographic characteristics and using their preferences for accessing sport is a great way to be able to make sure your offer is targeting a wide range of people.

Sport England market segmentation piece of work has a number of character profiles that are relevant to the way that your students will want to access physical activity. You can view their segmentation tool [here](#).

## Developing your offer

Appealing to a breath of audiences is important as this will support you in how you market and talk about your activity. In a report about Higher Education sport there were some key recommendations:

- A number of universities have noted that sports delivered in formats which focus more on the fun and social aspect (as opposed to sport for sports sake) have resonated.
- Offering opportunities at appropriate skill levels is important. How can you make it obvious that you might have never been in a gym before, done a step class or picked up a badminton racquet.
- Innovative delivery formats appeal, for example Glow in the Dark racquet sports and themed runs (zombie run for

Halloween and Santa fun runs for Christmas).

- Linking sporting activities to other interests such as music and cinema can attract alternative audiences; for example 'Cycle Cinema' involves watching a film whilst undertaking a spinning class.

In working out what your activities could include using an innovation matrix can help to identify opportunities for development.

Strategic consultancy agency Uscreates talked about innovation in four different stages:

- **Revolutionary work** - working with entirely new audiences, on entirely new issues, while creating entirely new offerings
- **Evolutionary work** - two novel territories, and one existing territory (for example the issue could be something we have worked on before, but we're now approaching a new audience and creating a new offering)
- **Incremental work** - two existing territories, and one novel territory (for example the audience and type of offering is familiar to us, but we're tackling a new issue)
- **Minimal work** - working with existing audiences, on existing issues, while creating similar offerings

There are some great examples of activity that other institutions have trialled through the Active Universities programme. Here are a few highlights:

- Bristol University's Just Sport. No dress code, no getting picked last, and no experience necessary. Just Sport. Full case study [here](#).

- Leeds University - Student park running programme with something for everyone. Full case study [here](#).

Many National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) have identified students as a key area to develop in their provision of activities. As a result they have identified a number of varied offerings that take the way sport might have been delivered traditionally and got a bit creative with their offers.

Highlights include:

- Athletics – through their 'Run England' they will provide support to create running routes of either 1, 2 or 3kms – great ways to get people interested in running
- Softball – they've established the first university championships to encourage fun competition between softball teams, a great opportunity for mixed teams to come together
- Rugby league – will provide touch rugby league kits to HEIs to support this much faster, mixed version of the game
- Squash – they have developed 'squashercise' a female focused activity class based on the skills and movement for needed for racquet sports.

You can see the full list of activities [here](#).

## Implementing your ideas

In creating your offer need to consider:

### Who are you targeting?

- Demographics – Understanding who your current students are will help understand different areas to target. Look at how many are international students, or think about gender

differences or ages. All will impact on how you design your activities

- Current participation rates – Who is involved and how are they involved? What are your successful activities and what don't people respond to
- What do your students want? When do they want to access activities and what do they want to do? Make sure you create mechanisms to consult with students, especially those not currently engaged in your work

### **What will you deliver?**

- Remember to think about what activities are offered, in what format, at what skill level and how formal. This will provide the basis for your offer.
- Consider the range and variety on offer – Do you give students lots of choice in terms of activity or time or a combination of both.
- How can you innovate – If the activity is mainstream it probably won't appeal to those not engaged. How can you innovate in your provision? We've got more examples later in the briefing.
- Sign up process and length of commitment – Students prefer ease and flexibility. They shouldn't have to commit to a 6 week programme of activity if they're not already engaged.
- Price and payment options – Can you afford to put resource into making the first session free.

### **Where will you deliver your activities?**

- What environment are you creating? Ambience, mood, music, acoustics all help to create an exciting environment that is attractive to students
- Venue options – Think about indoor or outdoor events, sporting or non-sporting venue. Consider the audience and where they feel comfortable

- Location – Look at where the location of the activities is. Proximity and convenience of locations is important. How can you consider less formal or unconventional spaces
- Changing facilities – Are there going to be changing facilities at your venue? If you want people to feel like it's easy to access changing rooms are a key component.

### **How will you deliver your activity?**

- What model best suits your delivery plan? Using coaches, volunteers, activators, interns, coordinators or would peer to peer engagement work better?
- You need to think about how many and what skills, knowledge and expertise is required for people to deliver activity?
- Could you work with other institutions or local community clubs to expand your current provision? Your local County Sports Partnership should have ideas as well

### **How will you promote the activities?**

- How will you reach your target audience? It's important to consider how students like to hear about things.
- Utilising social media – Social media is great but shouldn't be the only method of communications.
- Trusted sources - Peer to peer communication is often cited as the best way to develop relationships with students. Think about the role of student ambassadors to help with face to face promotion
- Tone of message – Make sure you're clear on what will you say and how will you say it. Competition and formal can put students off. You might need multiple messages for one activity that targets different audiences.

- How can you use targeted campaigns such as de-stressing around exams or new year health focus to theme activities for students, giving them an easy reason to get involved.

### **How will you retain participants?**

- What can you do to ensure sustainability of participation? Make it really easy for students to move through from taster sessions into other participation options. Don't just assume this means competitive teams however.
- Be responsive to student feedback through support and developments in your provision. Keep asking participants what they liked, what they'd like to change.
- How can you encourage students to stay engaged? Think about loyalty cards linked to the number of times they participate. What can they gain from continuing their involvement.
- Track on-going participation. How do you get students to follow up with their activity provision and understand the benefits of their involvement and thereby continue their engagement.

## **Conclusion**

You can find lots more information about sport in Higher Education using this incredibly handy guide from [Sport England](#) which we've used to reference much of the information in this briefing on.

Understanding why students aren't currently participating in activity will need to be your starting point in designing your opportunities. Making sure that your opportunities meet the needs of students will ultimately ensure they're inspired to take part.

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