

# Active Universities evaluation report Year Three Summer 2014



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## Executive Summary



Active Universities is a three year £8 million funding programme into Higher Education which officially ended in April 2014. From the 41 successful projects funded, for 22 projects this was their final report submission, 15 projects will complete final reports in January 2015, with four projects reporting for the last time in July 2015. This report concludes the overall summary of learning from the 41 successful funded projects (2011-2014).

The aim of the funding was to increase participation rates of students within funded institutions resulting in a regular 1 x 30 participation in sport a week. Projects have reported 160,018 new participants engaged within Active Universities. This means projects have achieved 130% of the overall participant target. The HE sport survey (student survey measuring student participation within the 41 funded projects) has also reported a 2% increase in participation across the three years.

The impact of the programme has been far wider than this outcome alone. Projects have reported a change in perception from both students and the university in the way in which sport is viewed. There is a recognition across projects of the value of recreational sport and the contribution participation can bring to wider university outcomes such as graduate employability, student experience and student attraction and retention. Reports submitted suggest a steer in recognition of recreational sport becoming more balanced with that of performance sport as it becomes more integrated within institutions delivery systems.

Over the last three years of reports, projects have talked about the importance of student consultation ensuring ownership over the programme, resulting in successful delivery. The peer to peer delivery through student ambassador schemes has been a strong talking point from projects. This agenda has worked extremely well allowing students to add to their CVs and universities utilising the student workforce to capture and engage more participants into the programme. The programme (33 projects reporting) has trained and recruited 3544 coaches and 3693 volunteers.

Innovative delivery styles have emerged with the rise of glow in the dark based activities, cycle cinemas and themed runs among many. Similarly marketing messages have been designed specific to audience needs relating to the student agenda and specific time periods.

It is acknowledged that the economic current climate may potentially add strain to projects looking to sustain activities post 2014. Projects acknowledge the shift in perception of recreational sport has added benefit to securing buy in from internal partners within the institution to sustain activity. Many projects have spoken around the student employability agenda and exploring the student workforce as an option moving forward. Others have been successful in securing University Sport Activation funding 2014-2017 as a means of enhancing and extending programmes to reach a far wider reaching audience.

## Introduction

Sport England funded 41 projects through the Active Universities programme (2011-2014) totalling £8million pounds. As part of the funding, projects were asked to submit six monthly reports on progress in relation to targets set by their own organisation which were agreed with Sport England.

Progress has been reported both quantitatively and qualitatively by the projects on a six month basis over the course of Active Universities Lottery Revenue Funding. For 22 projects this was their final submission, 15 projects will complete final reports in January 2015, with four projects reporting for the last time in July 2015.

This report concentrates on the messages and conclusions from completed projects, complimented by information from projects which have not yet completed their Active Universities delivery. The report aims to draw conclusions based upon the feedback from projects over the last three years of delivery.

Projects completing their programme delivery were asked to report specifically on:

- The impact of the investment,
- Learning and overall experience,
- Sustainability

Projects that are continuing their delivery were asked to report on:

- Main achievements within the last reporting period (January- June 2014)
- Successful communication channels
- Challenges and how these have been addressed
- Sustainability
- Learning from the last reporting period

The report further contains information from three other HE projects in Yorkshire that were also funded by Sport England for three years and reported at the end of their second year of delivery.

## Quantitative Results:

Participation:

This section summarises the information provided by the universities in their reporting spreadsheets.

### HE student participants (41 projects)

Year 3 Target	Year 3 Actual	% of Y3 Target Achieved
122,766	160,018	130%

- 22 projects have reported their final participant figures.
- The total number of participants reported so far is 160,018. This is an increase of 22,712 on the figure reported after 30 months.
- Projects have therefore achieved 130% of their target over the 3 years of the programme

### Percentage of total participants that are HE students (41 projects)

HE Students	Other Participants (inc. Staff)	Total
92%	8%	100%

- All of the participants figures presented in this report show the number of HE students. However, over 12,000 other individuals have also taken part in Active Universities activity across the programme.
- The proportion of non-HE student participants has decreased slightly since 30 months when it was 9%.

### Percentage of total participants by gender (41 projects)

Male	Female	Total
57%	43%	100%

- 57% of participants in the programme have been male and 43% have been female.
- The overall proportion of female participants has stayed the same since 30 months when it was also 43%.

### Percentage of total participants by age (39 projects)

0-15	16-19	20+	Total
0%	39%	61%	100%

- 39 of the 41 projects have reported actual figures for participants by age.

- 39% of participants in the programme have been aged 16-19 and 61% have been aged 20+.

### Percentage of total participants by ethnicity (23 projects)

BME	White	Total
37%	63%	100%

- 23 projects have reported actual figures for participants by ethnicity.
- 37% of participants in the programme have been from BME groups and 63% have been white.

### Percentage of total participants by disability (23 projects)

No Disability or LLI	Disability or LLI	Total
96%	4%	100%

- 23 projects have reported actual figures for participants by disability or limiting long term illness.
- 96% of participants in the programme have not had a reported disability or limiting long term illness and 4 have had a reported disability or limiting long term illness.

### Throughput (28 projects)

Year 3 Target	Year 3 Actual	% of Year 3 Target Achieved
2,485,016	1,123,991	45%

- 28 projects have reported throughput figures.
- 25 projects have reported their year 3 throughput figures.
- The total throughput reported so far is 1,123,991. This is an increase of 175,087 on the figure reported after the first 30 months.
- The target throughput number for the period to date is 2,485,016.
- Projects therefore achieved 45% of their target over the three years of the programme.

### Visits per participant (inc non-HE students) for projects reporting both measures (28 projects)

Participants	Throughput	Average Visits per Participant
115,560	1,123,991	10

- 28 projects have reported actual figures for both participants and throughput.
- There has been an average of 10 visits per participant for these projects.

- This figure has stayed the same since 30 months when the average number of visits per participant was also 10.
- The average figure masks significant variation by project.

### Coaches and volunteers (33 projects for coaches and 28 for volunteers)

	Expected Number	Actual Number	Actual vs Expected
Coaches	3,426	3,544	103%
Volunteers	2,626	3,693	141%

- 33 projects have reported actual figures for coaches and 28 projects have reported actual figures for volunteers.
- The total number of coaches reported to have been involved in projects is 3,544.
- The number of coaches involved is just above the number expected (103%) at the outset.
- The total number of volunteers reported to have been involved in projects is 3,693.
- The number of volunteers involved is well above the number expected (141%) at the outset.

### Interpretation and Discussion

- Progress against participation has continued to over exceed its target demonstrating engagement methods have been particularly effective. These are explained within the qualitative section of the report.
- Female participation rates have remained consistent from the last reporting period. This will be reviewed later in the report. WSFF and BUCS are using research conducted into Active University projects to help offer support for projects aiming to engage females. The webinar can be found on the Sport England you tube channel.
- Disability rates of participation are low however this reflects the small number of projects focusing upon this element.
- Coaching and volunteer numbers have over exceeded their target demonstrating the need for this area from students. This will be further discussed within the wider outcomes section of the report.
- Throughput is still below target but is showing gradual increase. Data continues to suggest that participants are moving into exit routes more quickly than anticipated and therefore not captured by this measure.

## Impact



The impact of Active Universities investment has been wide ranging across institutions. Projects evidenced impact in a number of ways including:

- Increase in participation rates across institution's
- Broader sports offer to include those who wish to participate recreationally
- Acknowledgement of the contribution of recreational sport within corporate strategies and at a senior level
- Recreational sport attracting and retaining new students to the institution.
- Demonstration of the role sport can play in bringing new investment to Universities towards facilities and recreational sport participation

This section of the report evidences and highlights project case studies and the outcome of Active Universities investment within individual institutions.

### Sports participation rates

The impact demonstrated by the end of year two by Active Universities projects was instrumental in securing further funding towards the sector (*University Sport Activation Funding announced November 2013, awards made June 2014.*) Top line figures on participation have shown an overall growth achieving 130% of the overall target set. Some projects are extending their delivery due to current underspends meaning participation figures are set to increase further.

Attendances (throughput) overall have been successful but have proved more difficult to attain. Due to the success of the programme, it has been reported that students have left the programme early to join clubs or participate independently away from the funded element. The HE Sport Survey has demonstrated that there has been a 2% increase in once a week participation which has been maintained into year three of the programme, demonstrating that overall more students are playing sport regularly, but perhaps not through Active Universities funded projects.

Across the board projects reported growth in student participation in sport activities, evidenced by increased membership of student clubs and the take up of previously unavailable opportunities by students who would not otherwise have engaged in sport. Feedback from projects suggest a high proportion of students engaged are believed to be students who would otherwise have prioritised other activities over sport or undertaken no sport at all.

Bath University project summed up its impact as, *'a catalyst for cultural change in the provision of student sport resulting in a more integrated delivery system, allowing a far greater number of students to be active.'* The project reported that the rise in the number of 'sport passes' activated by students in 13/14 suggests a 60% increase.

At some universities there had initially been concerns that the project activities would draw students away from Student Union club membership however the reverse effect was observed. Many existing clubs have developed an extended, structured approach

with an additional ‘tier’ offering the option of more inclusive recreational activities that demand less commitment.

The Active Universities programme has also spawned a large number of new clubs, together with new and expanded intramural competitions. Some institutions reported that the most significant area of growth was in gym and fitness activities that appeal to a wider range of students than the traditional sports offer.

### The overall student experience

Projects were unanimous in their accounts of students’ enjoyment of the broad range of opportunities offered. Some quoting up to an additional 20 or 30 different sports, “something to suit everyone” and in particular the inclusive relaxed informal and sociable atmosphere of many of the most popular activities.

*“Sport is now played for fun as well as for success and winning.”* Loughborough University.

Students’ involvement in coaching, volunteering in other support roles has enriched their University experience as well as provided students with personal development and lifelong skills which can be utilised with their careers.



*(Photo courtesy of University of Bournemouth)*

At the University of East London 86% of respondents in a recent survey said they were very satisfied with UEL sports participation offer.

One female student commented: *“I have loved being at UEL and this is mainly due to participating in sports. I took part in Try a Sport 365 basketball and football and I met lots of new friends and even decided to join the clubs to help improve my skills.”*

Another student, who has autism and finds certain situations difficult, said: *“participating in sport has made me much more confident and I have been able to make friends who share the same interests as me”*.

Projects have reported how University can sometimes be a lonely, isolating experience if students are not brought together. Sport can be a median for this to meet new friends and break from studies.

Bucks New University project believed its activities played a major part in the Student Union’s 17<sup>th</sup> place ranking in the National Student Survey. Its participants’ feedback on what they liked most illustrate themes from across the programme: *“Meeting new people through the sport and having something else to take part in at University.”*

Factors that contributed to students’ enjoyment were the peer led nature of many activities and various measures to remove barriers to participation. Students’ involvement in coaching and volunteering in other support roles has also enriched their University experience, including the social dimension.

### **The role and importance of sport at University**

Overwhelmingly the completed projects reported that the Active Universities programme had led to greater recognition of sport by both senior management teams (SMTs) and Student Unions as an important element of the University experience. There appears to be a growing appreciation of the role sport can play in delivering a range of benefits to a wide cross section of students.

In many cases this was evidenced by the inclusion of recreational sport in corporate strategies and plans and by financial commitments to support the development and continuation of programmes widening students’ participation in sport, building upon the foundations that have been laid down over the past three years, for example at the University of East London and Loughborough University.

A number of projects explained that this increased awareness was achieved by regular reports to senior management providing details of achievements, participation data and wider impacts. At the University of Bath this has led to the production of a new Recreational Strategy and ongoing discussions of how the offer will be supported.

The University of Central Lancashire delivered presentations showcasing the impact on student experience to audiences that included the Vice-Chancellor, lecturers and other staff who have regular contact with students have also been supportive and played a valuable role.

The University of Hertfordshire’s project has featured in the University prospectus as has Manchester Universities ‘Hall Sport’ programme. The high level of senior staff support can also be seen on social media, for example the University of Hertfordshire’s

Dean of Student Experience is a keen Twitter user and has often retweeted and commented on events that have been organised by the project.

Projects also reported that the Active Universities programme had helped to stimulate investment in new sports facilities, and secure influence over plans for major capital schemes to ensure that provision for sports participation is an integral part of new developments. The University of Chichester is investing c.£2m into the development of new sports facilities in partnership with a local sports club. This will provide new spaces for the sports clubs and sports science department to use, freeing up space at the University Sports Centre - which is closer to the students and main campus – for more recreational activities. At the University of Hertfordshire new sports facilities (new ¾ 3G pitch, MUGA and gym) are being constructed with the primary aim for student use as part of a redevelopment to provide 1500 new student residences.

Following on from the Active Universities project the University of Salford is now working towards a target of 30% of students participating in sport, and sees recreational sport as a key contributor to reaching that goal.

### **The contribution of Active Universities to wider university outcomes**

Projects have reported how Active Universities delivery has contributed in a number of ways to wider university outcomes.

Specifically:

- enhancing student employability,
- aiding students to cope with academic pressures,
- assisting social integration,
- enhancing the overall University experience,
- supporting the promotion of healthier lifestyles and
- helping to attract as well as retain prospective students

Through the many volunteer and paid roles students have performed with the projects, a number of students have gained valuable experience and skills and in many cases additional qualifications that enhance their Higher Education Achievement Records (HEARs) CVs and increase their suitability to future employers.

The University of Gloucestershire stated that co-curricular sport had been recognised as *“an excellent vehicle for transformative experiential learning”*. The range of skills students can develop through the programme is vast.

The City University project, in partnership with the University’s Careers Department, also publicised the findings of the BUCS employability study 2013, ‘The impact of engagement in sport on graduate employability,’ which demonstrated advantages associated with sports participation. The full report can be accessed here: <http://bucs.org.uk/page.asp?section=17397&sectionTitle=Research>

Sheffield Hallam University who has continued to place emphasis on their student activator scheme through the Active University programme said, *“The Student Sport Activator (SSA) scheme continues to witness how the employability support offered to SSAs is paying great dividend in terms of graduates from the scheme attaining pertinent employment post-University.”* One Sheffield Hallam student commented:

*“The SSA scheme has helped me to develop both personally and professionally. It has helped me to gain qualifications in my sport, but I have also made friends. My participants always stop me in the street for a chat!”* (SSA Assistant – Swimming).

The Loughborough University project expressed the message from many projects that, *“being able to demonstrate sport opportunities across all levels at the University is a very attractive offer for prospective students wishing to participate in sport, contributing to the overall student experience.”* The University uses case studies of student volunteers and coaches who have gone on to gain employment in sport, both regionally and nationally, on their website and at University open days in order to attract prospective students. For examples of case studies please refer to the Loughborough website: <http://loughboroughsport.com/blog/2014/09/25/coach-and-volunteer-academy-graduate-secures-coaching-role-in-brazil/>

A number of projects highlighted the value of participation in sport and physical activity as a way of channelling stress around exam time and before assignment deadlines. University teaching staff have promoted this benefit to their students, encouraging them to take part in project activities. One student who participated in the University of Bradford’s project sessions said *“sport made all the stresses of exams and assignments disappear.”*

The contribution of sports participation to students’ mental and physical health and wellbeing has been widely recognised, and projects have been involved in promotional events and campaigns highlighting these benefits, for example Bucks New University’s annual ‘Health and Wellbeing Fair’ included project taster sessions and publicity.

Manchester University highlighted that their Active University project *‘Hall Sport had been recognised by the College & Universities Business Officers awards (CUBO) in 2014 for ‘Excellence in Student Sport Experience’.*

Portsmouth University programme has helped the University to become *“a University of Choice”* by encouraging students from the city’s Language School to take part in project activities, which has prompted them to apply to study at the University and the University of East London also generated this effect with local college students.



*(Picture courtesy of the University of Portsmouth: Football referee hub)*

Projects also described how the Active Universities programme had helped to retain students in their University studies. At the University of East London (UEL) one student, “Lucy,” described her experience as follows: ***“In my second year of University I almost quit, and having a sport to focus on is what stopped me.”***

The University of Salford said they have had feedback from students that, not only does participation help with retention rates, but it also encourages them to do further studies, so they can stay involved with the University and the things it has to offer.

### **Changes in students’ behaviour and attitude towards sport**

Many projects felt that the numbers attracted to Active Universities sessions demonstrated that students’ behaviour and attitude to sport had changed as a result of the programme.

The numbers indicate that a cultural shift has been achieved and that the students involved in running University sports clubs, some of whom had originally seen the project as a threat, have changed their approach and expanded their focus. Some clubs were now pushing for additional ‘development squads’ while others were simply keen to get more people involved in their sport, boosting recreational opportunities and the sporting pathway.

The University of York Students Union said: ***“we are observing a culture change in clubs understanding of the sport participation pathway and their need to develop in house skills to sustain the sessions.”***

More than one report mentioned that at some Universities, Active Universities had made considerable progress countering traditional perceptions among students and staff that University sport is the preserve of “fraternities and subcultures” and mainly about “drinking, socialising and bonding”.



*(Picture courtesy of Roehampton University)*

At institutions traditionally seen as catering exclusively for elite sport the projects have started to redress the balance. Loughborough University stated, “*Students feel much more welcomed into sport than they have in the past, and understand that there is a diverse range of opportunities to participate from recreational through to performance sport. Sport is no longer ‘exclusive’ for those that are the best at it, sport is now a part of every students experience at Loughborough.*”

Queen Mary University, a University who previously felt without much of a tradition of sports participation, commented, “*there has been a massive increase in the number of students regularly taking part in different kinds of sporting activity. This suggests that we have been successful in creating an understanding and feeling that even if you are not a ‘sporty’ student there is still plenty on offer for you in terms of being active and taking part in some form of physical activity.*”

## Learning

### Encouraging students to participate:

At many institutions, the Active Universities programme has increased the available opportunities and engagement of groups that have historically been under-represented in sports participation, including females, disabled students, international students and students from BME backgrounds.

- Importance of the ongoing consultation with the target group
- Making use of relevant role models
- Specific and appropriate marketing messages
- Utilising partner expertise
- Using sport as a tool to integrate students into University life

### Female students

A high proportion of projects have sought to increase female students' participation in sport. The majority of these have developed successful initiatives and gathered key insight in doing so. Consultation with females has been a key factor in order to engage within the sporting offer.

The University of Central Lancashire more than doubled the proportion of its Active University participants who were female, from 17% in year 1 to 38% in year 3. They established there was significant demand from women for self-defence classes. Classes were offered through a partnership with a local martial arts club, which led to many of the students continuing their participation at the club. The project also recruited female volunteers and in common with other projects found that this helped to encourage more females to take part in sessions.

Brunel University worked with the Muslim Sisters group to enable them to have closed sessions of Badminton and Basketball which participants welcomed.

Projects typically found that female friendly based activity included informal, non-competitive activities marketing them as fitness type activities such as body conditioning and boot-camp. Netball and Badminton have shown the widest appeal of the traditional sports through this programme. Interestingly, although less traditionally female orientated, boxing also proved highly attractive to this target group.

## Disabled students



*(Photo courtesy of University of Central Lancashire)*

Disabled students continue to be significantly under-represented in sports participation. Active Universities has shown a number of students with a range of disabilities, who would otherwise have been unlikely to take part in University sport, have been able to engage in sport through this programme. Some projects were able to exceed their disability participant's targets.

In some instances projects simply endeavoured to make Active Universities sessions inclusive making this evident through their marketing messages. Others decided to take a more strategic approach and engage disabled students by working in partnership with University departments and external partners to offer parasports/adaptive sports sessions. Canterbury Christchurch University exceeded its target for disabled participants by offering more accessible activities such as sitting volleyball and providing transport to activities.

At the University of Bradford, working alongside the University's Disability Sports Co-ordinator, twenty disabled students took part in Cycle4All. The project also organised a sitting Volleyball competition and come and try Wheelchair Basketball, with disabled students playing together with non-disabled students.

Brunel University worked alongside the University's Disability and Dyslexia service to support students who were suffering with stress, depression and anxiety. Selected students were offered free access to the gym (at any time) as well as to all of the activities on the Active Brunel calendar. An Active Brunel ambassador explained the programme and offered continued support and encouragement to the students via emails, text messages, and further meetings to ensure that they used the programme fully and gained the most from it. This support system worked well and students reported the benefits that attending sessions had on their general wellbeing and that they felt less stressed.

Some projects engaged disabled students in activities delivered in conjunction with external partners, for example local colleges (University of East London – inclusive Archery and Wheelchair Basketball) and local disability organisations (Chichester).

The University of Chichester piloted two partnership projects for young people with learning and physical disabilities. As well as providing opportunities for disabled students and other local young people with disabilities to participate, these initiatives enabled students to be upskilled as coaches and coordinators.

### **Students from BME backgrounds and international students**

A number of projects reported that they had increased the take up of sports opportunities by students from black and minority ethnic groups. In some cases the increases were achieved through joint work with the international office or international students or faith group societies.

Projects at Universities with ethnically diverse home student populations found that recruiting ambassadors and other student volunteers from ethnic and faith groups that are under-represented in sports participation plays a major part in encouraging students from a similar background to take part.

More than half of the Activator team at the University of Hertfordshire were BME students. 52% of the University's students are from BME backgrounds. The project's marketing materials featured real University of Hertfordshire students from BME backgrounds, giving the programme an inclusive image. The project reported that particular sports were highly attractive to certain groups, for example Cricket (Asian males) and Volleyball (popular with many European students from countries where it is a national sport). In some cases, students from cultural and faith societies attended certain activities together and used 'Active Students' as a society sport session. Groups of females from the Malaysian and Hindu societies participated in netball sessions prior to a national student society tournament, and the Afro-Caribbean, Sikh and Chinese societies had large turn-outs at Football and Basketball sessions.

The University of Central Lancashire saw the rise in the numbers of participants from BME backgrounds was attributed partly to an expansion in the number of international students at the University and partly to the opening of an Active Universities project reception in a location that is the base for courses such as pharmacy, that have a high proportion of BME students.

Portsmouth University's impact on international students was described by a member of staff from the University's International Office as: ***"Intramural sport has been hugely important in the engagement of international students with the University, life in the UK, making friends and cultural integration"***.

Warwick University have used the attraction of University events and challenges to engage with key groups such as the 'Where's Wally,' challenge. The University said:

*“We were looking to put on an event at the beginning of term to achieve a number of aims:*

- *Engage new participants and hard to reach groups in a ‘fun event’*
- *Engage ‘non-sporty’ people*
- *Orientate and introduce new students to the Sports Facilities we have on Campus*
- *Provide a fabulous introduction to the Warwick Active programme*

*We were already in the planning stages of this when we were approached by the University’s International Office to host an event that would become part of their ‘Orientation Programme’ held for International Students the week before Term begins.*

*The basic idea was 5 different bases around Campus (Outdoor Netball Courts, Athletics Track, Tennis Centre etc). Each base had a fun 3-4 minute challenge for teams to perform and was manned by a pair of Activator dressed up as ‘Where’s Wally’. There was also a roaming ‘Wizard’ who posted clues to his whereabouts via facebook and twitter, teams were given bonus points for finding him. We had an overwhelming turnout for this event with 360 purely international students taking part.”*



*(Photo courtesy of Warwick University)*

The University of Nottingham Trent took part in the University wide campaign called, Global Week that celebrates the rich cultural diversity at NTU. ***“We had 3 sports from 3 different origins (Tchoukball, Touch American Football and Climbing) and had a total of 51 participants attend the sessions.”***

### **Engaging students through key messaging and effective communication channels**

It was widely reported that word of mouth communication with peer encouragement, worked most effectively with students, however social media, emails and printed posters were also rated highly by projects. Promotional and viral videos were also mentioned, as were pop-up stalls and taster opportunities in high footfall locations. Some projects found the support of lecturers very helpful in promoting participation and volunteering to their students.

Sheffield Hallam highlighted the importance of word of mouth however, accurately raised that the resource required to successfully implement this communication mechanism is vast.

*“With this in mind, the Student Sport Activator scheme (SSA) expanded to include ambassadorial roles alongside the traditional coaching and officiating positions. The SSA Ambassadors were trained to promote the social sport offer to SHU students, and were deployed across both the City and Collegiate campuses at various points. Sheffield Hallam found great success with this approach and have modelled a new ambassadorial role using the framework to deploy students across campus during key periods of the next academic year.”*

Bucks New University project supported this saying, *“We found that peer to peer engagement was one of the most successful communication channels to engage students, hence why our student ambassador programme was so valuable. Students were more likely to try a sport if they had heard positive things about it from a fellow student as opposed to a member of staff.”*

Other targeted approaches included visits to halls of residence, for example on ‘moving in weekend’ and during term ‘kitchen visits’ between 5pm and 7pm when students can be found preparing their meals.

Projects also highlighted the importance of choosing wording and imagery carefully in order to create the right impression for the target group.

Promotional profile-raising campaigns at certain times of the year have been popular, for example the Brunel University project’s *“Recommend a Friend”* (late November – middle December), *“Commit to Get Fit”* (January), *“Stress Less and Well Being”* (run late April – May), often accompanied by competitions and incentives.

*“Volunteers are also a good tool to use during the session to learn about what the participants think about the sessions and what they would be interested in giving a go next term or year.”* (Coventry University project)

The Leeds Trinity University project (one of the three Yorkshire HE projects funded separately from the Active Universities programme) described how different methods can work together effectively: *“Pop up stalls around Leeds Trinity in high footfall places on the campus work well. The setting up and moving the stall can be time consuming and labour intensive but the results speak for themselves especially in terms of getting new faces to attend activity sessions.”*



*(Photo courtesy of Leeds Trinity)*

Leeds Trinity also produces posters/fliers which they say on their own would have limited impact, according to feedback from participants, but backed up by talking to individuals/groups they serve to confirm and remind people as they walk around campus. For “one off” events notices are put up in alternative, slightly unusual places such as hanging from trees or on the printers.

As well as websites, which are commonly used to provide reference information to which students are signposted, all projects have used social media, mainly Facebook and Twitter, but WhatsApp was also mentioned (by the University of Staffordshire project), with the majority finding it a highly effective means of communication. The University of Staffordshire project said that social media is the most effective way to get an instant response, as students’ mobile phones are always within arm’s reach. Various videos have been produced both for university and project websites, displays on TV screens around the campus and publicity stalls, and ‘viral’ videos circulated via social media.

Capitalising on students’ desire to look good on social media, and be in on the latest craze, the University of Central Lancashire project took photos of participants that could then be used as profile pictures: ***“The interaction on the S4U Facebook page has increased significantly and many more people are seeing the fun that fellow students are having at the sessions and events. For example our most recent Bubble Football pictures reached over 10,000 people.”***

Two-way communication via social media has also proved useful, allowing students to provide feedback and generally comment and ask questions. Sharing and retweeting, by both students and other university departments, has helped to spread awareness and interest among wider audiences.

Bucks New University ran a social media campaign called ‘***#Sport For...***’, where ***students were encouraged to ‘tweet’ what sport meant to them.*** In conjunction with this, they delivered taster sporting sessions outside on the University campus, including

rowing, football and mini tennis, in which students passing by could participate. The project said: *“This creative initiative helped raise awareness of our project and subsequently increased the number of students participating in recreational sport.”*

The University of Derby project’s report illustrated the challenges of attracting groups with different experiences and attitudes to sport to the same activities: *“Our target markets (for intramural/touch rugby) were primarily 1) players that had not been selected for the BUCS/1st team Rugby and 2) “new to sport” participants. Feedback suggests that those unsuccessful in team selection still wished to play/train as club members and did not want to commit to participation in small-sided Touch-format games, and new to sport participants perceived Touch as “daunting” and competitive (rather than social) and therefore preferred to engage in other activities.”*

As an example of overcoming this type of challenge Northumbria University’s project found that the large number of netball players who had not been chosen for the university’s three teams did not initially see the programmed sessions as ‘for them’. To counter this the project worked closely with the Netball Head Coach to change the student perception of the Campus Sport programme so that netball sessions are seen as part of a development pathway, which can support and lead to recognition and a place in one of the performance teams in the future. Training was scheduled at the same time on adjacent courts so that Campus Sport Netball players did not feel excluded from the performance setup. All Campus Sport participants were given access to similar sports kit as the performance teams so that a similar sense of identity could be shared.

### **Knowing your audience and the importance of student consultation**

Many projects described the input that students had into the original design of their Active Universities programmes and their ongoing role in delivery and influence on the nature, timing and location of the activities that have been offered.

The Queen Mary Students Union project commented, *“We have gained a vast amount of information about our student population and the way in which they want to access sport.”*

The University of Bath stated the programme had been student-led throughout its conception and delivery. Student groups had been asked to say what activities they wanted and what were the barriers to participation in sport. Students filled lead roles in year-long industrial placements, volunteered as ambassadors and provided constant feedback via social media. Staff have been a *‘guiding hand behind the scenes’*, supporting students with the development of their ideas.

In addition to social media a number of projects captured students’ views through regular surveys and with face to face opportunities, both informally via volunteers and in focus groups, forums and steering groups.

Brunel University ambassadors collected views in sessions and around the campus with a ‘quick tap’ survey on an iPad. The importance of re-consulting students was highlighted, partly due to the fact that a third of the student body changes each year.

Portsmouth University observed: “*students feel more comfortable providing feedback (good and bad comments) to other students.*” They also emphasised the ongoing need to speak, not only to participants, but also to students not currently involved in the programme to find out what they would like to see added or changed.

This example from the University of Hertfordshire illustrates how responsiveness to student demand has led to new sustainable opportunities for regular participation, despite the hesitancy of some staff: “*The rapid growth of sports such as ultimate frisbee, judo, volleyball and table tennis was in response to the demand from students at sessions. The transition of them all from weekly Active Students sessions to an AU associate club through to fully-fledged, operational AU clubs was driven by the students. The development of each sport has been led by either an individual or two or three friends who have developed a passion for their new-found sport and led from the front, taking it from strength-to-strength.*”

### **Engagement and retention of students in activities:**

Students’ interest and readiness to participate can vary over time, so maintaining an agile and flexible offer helps to ensure that they can participate when they want to.

The increased pressure on student’s time was been raised several times. The University of Plymouth said the solution was: “*Flexibility of sessions and changing the times to suit student need. Choosing closer venues to reduce travel and time for students. The changes did work and the feedback was really positive.*”

Students can be turned off by a poor experience due to overcrowding, so numbers at popular sessions may need to be capped at a level that allows quality to be maintained. Where sessions are running at capacity it is vital that the quality is kept high so that students are retained.

The Manchester University plans to have regular client group meetings with external facility providers as they identified a need to educate staff about the programme so that they can be more helpful and contribute to a better experience. Students had fed back that they had previously gone along and found staff did not know anything about the sessions.

Leeds Trinity University has created a ‘sport development hub,’ which they describe as “a walk in space to allow creative thinking and an open house attitude to listening, dealing with issues and developing ideas.”

The Leeds Metropolitan University has learned that sessions that are marketed as fitness classes will attract ‘non-sporty’ participants who are looking for a session that is

a bit of a change from their usual workout, who haven't been confident enough to turn up to a 'basic' sports coaching session, but are more comfortable with attending a fitness session. Cardio Tennis and Squashercise, for example, allow for all abilities, can accommodate more participants per session, and can be offered in multiple slots per week, as they are shorter and capture a wider audience.

The Salford University found that having leagues can help retention in some sports, as students feel obliged to find someone to take their place if they can't attend a session, and many of the replacements go on to become regular participants themselves.

Students who take part in trials but are not selected for University teams have an appetite for competition, so are more likely to be retained if regular competitions are offered, for example friendly matches with other universities, and if there is a clear link and comparability with the representative squad training, with the possibility of progression.

City University said that more account would also be taken of possible issues relating to students' faith, for example observance of Ramadan and Yom Kippur.

## Sustainability

Sustainability is a core element of Sport England funding. Projects have been encouraged to start considering sustainability within their institutions from an early stage. This section of the report demonstrates projects approach to sustainability and the various methods used to continue project delivery, including:

- Utilising volunteers and the evolving ambassador schemes
- Increase in a charges
- Developing internal and external partnerships

A high proportion of the opportunities for students to participate in sport that have been developed through the Active Universities programme are expected to continue via student clubs, volunteers, placements and internships programmes or programme elements being absorbed into the University's annual delivery programmes. Many instances of mainstreaming of project coordinator or posts with a similar remit, often on a permanent basis, and funding secured from external sources, including NGBs, or other University departments.

At the University of Bristol the benefits gained by students in roles supporting the project are being used to help secure scarce funding, *"in the current HE environment, gaining additional support internally from core budgets is very hard if not impossible. What we are seeking therefore to do is ensure that, for example, our Activator and Coaching roles offer a benefit directly to students who take them on. This type of skill-development enables us to unlock some additional sources of financial support which are aimed at benefitting Bristol students."*

At the University of Essex the project has had encouraging conversations with club officials and is working towards having a volunteer position in every club whose role will be to lead on coaching, marketing and attracting new participants, and monitoring and evaluating participant data.

Some projects said that charges would be introduced or increased to help cover costs or that the membership fee that enables students to access activities would be increased. Some projects said activities would continue provided they were self-funding. Other had managed to secure funding either internally or from partners.

Bucks New University commented, *“As we have secured £70,000 from the University, the Sport for Fun programme will continue to run next academic year. In addition to maintaining activity delivered through the current project we will also be able to offer new, alternative sports as we have received additional funding (approximately £4000) from the County Sport Partnership.”*

### **Sustained new partnerships**

Projects have worked collaboratively to develop, promote, support and deliver sports activities with a range of internal and external partners. Many new internal and external partnerships have been developed and a number of existing links have been strengthened.

Links with the University’s Students Union, and its sports clubs and societies, feature most frequently in reports, together with University academic and other departments such as:

- International student recruitment office,
- student support services,
- counselling,
- disability and dyslexia services,
- residences,
- the graduate school and
- libraries

These partners are all reported to have recognised the value of the Active Universities programme and be keen to carry on their role in enabling more students to take part in sport with a ‘joined up’ approach. The Manchester University project mentioned the tie in with the University’s goal of *‘single team working’*.

At Bath University the project has engaged with the Department of Education to offer the opportunity for a range of dissertation topics for final year students. This has been seen to benefit both partners and will continue.

Some projects operated across two institutions, for example the programme created for the students of the University of Hertfordshire and the Royal Veterinary College. The project won a national award for ‘Best Partnership’ at the 2014 ukactive Flame awards,

for the health and fitness industry. David Stalker, ukactive CEO, said: *“The judges were particularly impressed with the great NGB engagement, student activation and staff integration of this project.”*

Relationships with National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) have been developed through the Active Universities programme. NGBs have helped with the planning and delivery of events, competitions and sessions and with workforce development.

At the University of Gloucestershire, a number of existing links with NGBs have been strengthened by the project and *“In addition, it has also activated new partnerships with NGBs that were not previously on our radar, and can continue to develop these longer terms to support in the development of the identifiable pathways that we look to create longer term in a number of targeted sports.”*

The University of Nottingham Canoe Polo club has been working closely with NU2Sport and Canoe England in order to raise participation in that sport. *“We have been working hard over the last two years and saw the National Launch day of Ucanoe at the University this summer. This attracted hundreds of students to the event and saw beginners take to the lake to undertake the sport for the first time.”*

County Sport Partnerships have helped to broker wider partnerships supporting project development and delivery, and have provided training. West Yorkshire Sport is holding an event (in September 2014) that will enhance Bradford University’s students’ knowledge around leadership, coaching and working with different groups of people. The project says: *“This link and training is important for the success of the teams, going forward at the University, at both competition and fun social turn up and play sessions.”*

A number of projects have engaged with local networks (for example Community Sport and Physical Activity Networks - CSPANs) and other strategic groups, including the Leicester DeMontfort University project’s partnership with the Leicester and Rutland Inclusive Sport Alliance.

The Tremough project in Cornwall is maintaining close links with the Sports Development Head of Department at the County Leisure provider, which enables University students to swim at low cost at leisure centres in three separate towns.

A number of projects have built mutually advantageous relationships with local schools and colleges. Bradford University reported: *“external links through the University have developed to a point in which facilities and staff are shared with no cost for this. The University has also set up a link at two local secondary schools, enabling volunteers to deliver coaching in different sports and help out with the school curriculum. This in turn will make hours available for the University to access the school sports hall on an evening and the University will only have to pay for out of hour’s staff costs. The University will also allow the school and college to access their facilities on a regular basis without charging them, as during the day the University Sports Hall, five aside*

*MUGA and astro-turf pitches are not being used. The University have also been in talks with a local secondary school around minibus usage, so this may be in place for September to transport students to various activities if required.”*

The University of East London project has also developed enduring productive links with local colleges and schools that are delivering many lasting benefits. *“Two partnerships have been developed by our basketball sessions being run at Redbridge College and Chobham Academy. The college and school had approached us about how busy the sessions were and that they would be interested in creating a partnership in order to create basketball academies within their establishments. We have been able to work with them to develop a programme for their students which will then lead them into coming to University. The sessions will be run by our student graduates, which also show how the project has helped to employ students of UEL.”*

## **Conclusion**

The report shows that the Active Universities programme has had a considerable impact on students’ participation in sport, contributing to enhancing the University experience. Sports programmes have been expanded and opened up and made attractive to a far broader range of students. The programme has prompted the development of opportunities that have increased the involvement of groups that tend to be under-represented in sports participation. The projects have boosted the role and importance of sport in Higher Education, having demonstrated the contribution it can make to wider University outcomes.

Through the delivery of Active Universities, valuable knowledge has been gained regarding the most effective ways to engage and retain students in sport. Projects have in some cases changed students’ behaviour and attitudes towards sport, countering long held preconceptions, challenging some negative stereotypes. Much of the success of the initiatives has been credited to the involvement of students in both the design and tailoring of activities and in encouraging their peers to take part. Valuable learning has been gained that will feed in to future delivery and has helped Sport England with its insight into young people’s behaviours and attitudes towards sport. It cannot be forgotten that without the work of these projects demonstrating such an impact, new funding through the University Sport Activation Fund would not have been made available. This funding is to delve deeper into the student population to understand and encourage students not yet touched by the work of Active Universities.

Sport England would like to thank all the projects whether completed or not for their dedication and hard work to make the programme a success.

## Appendices: Additional projects output information



### YORKSHIRE UNIVERSITIES 2 YEAR REPORT

This appendix summarises the output information provided by three universities in Yorkshire who are not funded via the Active Universities Programme but have similar project aims and objectives.

#### Basic data summary

This section summarises the information provided by the universities in their reporting spreadsheets.

#### HE student participants (3 projects)

Year 2 Target	Year 2 Actual	% of Y2 Target Achieved
2,783	4,288	154%

- All 3 projects have targets for participants and have reported actual figures.
- The total number of participants reported so far is 4,288. This is an increase of 1,059 on the figure reported after 18 months.
- The target number of participants for the period to date is 2,783.
- Projects have therefore achieved 154% of their target over the two years of the programme.

#### Visits per participant (inc. non-HE students) for projects reporting both measures (3 projects)

Participants	Throughput	Average Visits per Participant
4,288	20,929	5

- 3 projects have reported actual figures for both participants and throughput.
- There has been an average of 5 visits per participant for these projects.
- This figure has increased since 18 months when the average number of visits per participant was 4

#### Percentage of total participants that are HE students (3 projects)

HE Students	Other Participants (inc. Staff)	Total
94%	6%	100%

- All of the participants figures presented in this report show the number of HE students. However, 280 other individuals have also taken part in activity in the projects.

- The proportion of non-HE student participants has increased slightly since 18 months when it was 3%.

### Percentage of total participants by gender (3 projects)

Male	Female	Total
64%	36%	100%

- 64% of participants in the programme have been male and 36% have been female.
- The overall proportion of female participants has increased very slightly since 18 months when it was also 35%.

### Percentage of total participants by age (3 projects)

0-15	16-19	20+	Total
0%	30%	70%	100%

- 3 projects have reported actual figures for participants by age.
- No participants aged 0-15 have taken part in the projects.
- 30% of participants in the projects have been aged 16-19 and 70% have been aged 20+.

### Percentage of total participants by ethnicity (3 projects)

BME	White	Total
28%	72%	100%

- 3 projects have reported actual figures for participants by ethnicity.
- 28% of participants in the programme have been from BME groups and 72% have been white.

### Percentage of total participants by disability (3 projects)

No Disability or LLI	Disability or LLI	Total
99%	1%	100%

- 3 projects have reported actual figures for participants by disability or limiting long term illness.
- 99% of participants in the programme have not had a reported disability or limiting long term illness and 1% have had a reported disability or limiting long term illness.

### Throughput (3 projects)

Year 2 Target	Year 2 Actual	% of Year 2 Target Achieved
26,796	20,929	78%

- 3 projects have targets for throughput and have reported actual figures.
- The total throughput reported so far is 20,929. This is an increase of 8,578 on the figure reported after the first 18 months.
- The target throughput number for the period to date is 26,796.
- Projects therefore achieved 78% of their target over the first two years of the programme.

### **Coaches and volunteers (3 projects for coaches and 2 for volunteers)**

	Expected Number	Actual Number	Actual vs Expected
Coaches	119	214	180%
Volunteers	28	73	261%

- 3 projects have reported actual figures for coaches and 2 projects have reported actual figures for volunteers.
- The total number of coaches reported to have been involved in projects is 214.
- The number of coaches involved is well above the number expected (180%) at the outset.
- The total number of volunteers reported to have been involved in projects is 73.
- The number of volunteers involved is well above the number expected (261%) at the outset.