UNIVERSITY SPORT ACTIVATION FUND

6 Months Evaluation Report – May 2015

Contents

Introduction

This report provides a summary of the first set of reports received in April 2015 from the 62 projects funded through Sport England's University Sport Activation Fund (USAF). 33 of the institutions had previously hosted Active Universities funded projects.

Quantitative data

The projects reported 62,670 HE student participants. This exceeded the programme's six month target by 56%. The overall cumulative throughput figure was 455,338 attendances, exceeding the programme's target for the first six months by 22%. (Charts showing how each project's reported figures compare to their targets can be found at the end of this report.)

Progress

Many projects have enjoyed early success in attracting students to project activities, and some have exceeded targets by a considerable margin, as shown by the total figures for the programme. Projects that reported a shortfall on expected numbers generally linked this to initial staffing and setup issues, which had been addressed, but some had not anticipated the

impact of seasonal weather on outdoor activities. One project also commented that, in HE institutions, planning normally takes place during the summer months. In some cases staff had commenced their roles too late to be able to promote their project to freshers at the start of the academic year, when students are most receptive to taking up new activities. Projects at institutions that had previously delivered Active Universities programmes were generally better able to start deploying volunteers and rolling out activities promptly.

Data collection

The University of Plymouth was among many projects to use paper forms to collect monitoring data. Each participant completes a registration form at their first attendance. The form captures age, gender etc., participant's current participation profile (based on SE Youth Insight), motivation for taking part and how they found out about the activity. This allows the project to ensure the right students (target groups, non-active) are being reached, understand why these students are choosing to participate and the most successful ways of marketing the activity. As the form relies on students to self-disclose whether they consider themselves to have a disability many disabled students who do not feel comfortable disclosing this information may be missed from the figures. To address this the project planned to trial a form which does not include the name to encourage more students to disclose their disability status.

It was observed that requiring students to provide lots of information appears to be at odds with the no commitment relaxed nature of the programme offer.

Some projects have introduced electronic systems that use barcode scanners but have needed to fall back on traditional manual methods:

At the University of Hertfordshire the introduction of the new system was not without its challenges. The project reported:

"Our biggest challenge this year has come as a result of one of our biggest successes. Along with the new designs for marketing materials and website, the way the data has been collected and monitored has been updated. Throughout Active Universities, all student ID numbers were taken manually by the Activators and entered in to the back-end of the previous website. This was a laborious process and encountered several opportunities for human error. After consulting with several departments within the university to look at different ways to gather students' data from each session, mobile barcode scanners were purchased and issued one to each Activator. The website is designed to interpret and store the data that is uploaded from each session. Additional consideration had to be applied when devising the monitoring part of the website as 4 sets of data have been collected as part of the project; students and staff from the University of Hertfordshire and students and staff from the Royal Veterinary College – each of which have a differing number of digits and patterns within each barcode.

The launch of the new data system was later than planned due to its complexity and the tight turnaround time from the funding announcement. A back-up method was put in place to ensure no data was lost during this time. The tight timescales also meant there was minimal opportunity for a trial period with the scanners for the project team or the student Activators.

Activators were asked to collect data manually as well as scan data for the majority of the first term to ensure everything was operating properly.

Many additional hours of resource have been invested in ensuring all data has been monitored and evaluated correctly. Changes will be made over the summer months to ensure all processes are smoother for year 2 delivery. Whilst it hasn't been a smooth operation, it's recognised within the University as an innovative way of monitoring student activity. Colleagues in the Students' Union are looking to adopt the same methods to make the collection of their data more reliable."

The Manchester Metropolitan University project uses scanning software that captures accurate Student ID numbers and submits them back to the University through Planning and Management Information (PMI Department) in order to gain all the necessary demographic details.

The University of Bedfordshire project had difficulties with its database system. Students often forget their barcodes or find an excuse not to sign up despite a simple online process. There is a contingency plan of manual registration to ensure accurate target audience research and the project is working on incentives for students to use the system. The project has also had to refresh their activators' training to address the lack of registers and attendance records that emerged, clarifying requirements and their roles, and setting individual KPI's, also sharing data with the students to enhance on-going target research, involve them further and increase their responsibilities. The activators as a collective now engage regularly to share best practice, observe sessions and work together on both sessions and taster days.

Workforce

As indicated earlier, with some of the paid and/or volunteer roles being filled after the start of term, some projects have had to launch promotional campaigns and start delivery of activities later than anticipated. It was also mentioned that there hasn't been much time for staff induction and training, with knock-on effects on the allocation of volunteer roles. Echoing the message from the earlier Active Universities programme, the responsiveness and readiness of staff and volunteers to adapt to student demand has helped projects to succeed. Projects that had previously developed programmes with Active Universities funding have in many cases reaped the benefits of established processes and infrastructure, for example Staffordshire University's Sports Volunteering Academy.

The University of Portsmouth described the recruitment and deployment of its student volunteers:

"At the start of the academic year, student volunteer (Activators and Coordinators) advertisements, interviews and workshops were conducted. A total of 26 student volunteers were recruited and trained to support the delivery of around 40 drop-in/learn to lessons as well

as one-off taster events or tournaments. The Coordinators support session delivery and are voluntary roles with the incentive of participating for free. The Activators have more responsibilities, which include promoting the sessions and reporting back registers. In turn they receive two bursaries and CPD within the academic year, e.g. attending NGB specific courses and in-house Activator training each term.

The Activators commit 4 hours per week to: assist promotion (via social media, in lectures and halls, at events such as Freshers Fayre and word of mouth in student spaces such as the union and library), assist in building a stronger relationship with the Athletic Union (AU) clubs so there is a clear pathway/exit route for all participants, gain feedback/data from the participants and AU clubs, and establish areas where further partnerships (internal and external) could be built to develop participation.

We have a new volunteer database (Volunteer Kinetic) so our student volunteers can record their hours and receive recognition for this. Although we offer a large number of sports science/development courses, the majority of our volunteers involved in the project study a non-sports course.

As we develop the project, the student workforce constantly expands to cater for the student demand. For example, we are aware that we need to increase female participation within the project, so we have recently recruited a This Girl Can student ambassador to help deliver and promote to engage more female participation.

Learning from the first 6 months of volunteer recruitment, the decision was made to formalise these roles. Service level agreements were put in place to ensure that expectations of the role were clear to both the student Activator/Coordinator and project staff. We have also learnt Activators/Coordinators within an Active Universities sports club have generally been more successful at their role. As a result, project staff have been working closely with AU sport clubs to attend their end of year AGM to promote the Activator/Coordinator roles for next academic year."

The University of Salford Students Union project encourages its female Student Activities Assistants to participate in its female-focused sessions, creating a role model for other students to relate to and someone who returning attendees can recognise, creating an environment which people can feel comfortable in. Maintaining a regular instructor has also helped make activities a success as it allows attendees to develop a relationship with the instructor who can tailor sessions to suit.

Audience

Projects have carried out their own research and used Sport England's Youth Insight to gain an understanding of their target groups' motivations and barriers, and used this to tailor activities and marketing to maximise their appeal. Some projects have aimed to recruit volunteers who can be seen to have more in common with their target audiences than 'traditional' sports volunteers, as this has helped to change some students' perceptions of sport and encourage

inactive groups / students that haven't previously engaged in university sport to feel welcome and that the activity is for them.

Many projects have successfully offered a choice of fitness-focused activities aimed at inactive/less active students who are motivated by the functional benefits of engaging in sport. Student consultation showed 56% of females, 49% of first years and 49% students with disabilities at the University of Portsmouth wanted to take part in activity that would help them to improve fitness and body image.

A number of projects have sought to understand disabled students preferences. The University of Plymouth project's general survey revealed just 3% of students with disabilities said they would take part in disability specific sport, reinforcing the advice of the university's Disability Support team that the students prefer inclusive services and activity. Based on this the project has delivered an inclusive programme within which additional support can be offered if needed. Students with disabilities have been recruited as ambassadors. Coach education is key, with those leading sessions being up-skilled to be able to adapt their coaching to cater for the needs of disabled students. 9% of participants have stated that they have a disability; the project believes that with stronger partnership working and improved methods of marketing to disabled students there is scope to increase this figure further. At pop-up activities 16% of participants have been disabled students, partly explained by the location outside a disability assistace service. The students have not been persuaded to voice their views in person: A focus group was set up to encourage students with disabilities to talk about their feelings on sport at university, barriers they have encountered and ways in which we could help. Disability support staff helped to promote the group to students they had contact with yet nobody attended.

Other projects also tended to report that inclusive activities – with this aspect made clear in marketing and FAQs - have had wider appeal to disabled students than disability specific sessions. The Staffordshire University project offered sitting volleyball, wheelchair basketball, boccia, table top cricket and goalball, and a disability taster day linked with the students union but struggled to engage students. A disability sports forum has been set up and the project plans to promote opportunities in the local community as well as exploring the possibility of a campus-based disability club.

Marketing and messages

Projects have tried to tailor marketing to appeal to their target audiences, including paying attention to the messages and imagery.

The University of Derby project described their efforts to strike the right note. The first term timetable had already been published when the project lead started in post. It used the 'Team Derby' branding with photos of club players, and didn't include the price or many other details felt to be crucial to promote the 'unique selling points' of the project and make it attractive to

non-engaged students. Rebranding was therefore a high priority, and led to a significant increase in uptake. Among the key changes:

- Six strands previously referred to by different names were streamlined as 'Social Sport'
- The "Team Derby – Serious about Sport" logo was replaced with "Social Sport – Fun On Pressure Off" with "powered by Team Derby" in a smaller font
- Images of people in more casual non-branded kit looking like they are having fun were used, including a range of people who are not "overly sporty looking and muscular"
- An FAQ section added to the timetable to try and remove barriers
- Maps added for those unsure of the locations of facilities
- Pricing changed to £1 for all activities to make it easier to market
- Photos of the sessions posted on social media to increase awareness
- Social media accounts under the project lead's name, to communicate better with the target audience without diluting the impact of the main Team Derby site; all traffic is directed there still. This is felt be successful because the project lead does not appear to be selling a product but promoting an opportunity that people can interact with and know who to contact directly
- A wide range of posters advertised the sessions separately and were placed around areas of the university not usually used for sports advertising.

The University of Hertfordshire and Royal Veterinary College project appears to have been unique in making a complete break from previous marketing approaches. Consultation showed students were concerned with appearance as well as functionality, and supported the project team's observations that the visual appearance of digital media interfaces has changed dramatically since 2011 when the previous website was launched. It was decided to update the 'look and feel' of the Active Students website and marketing collateral in time for the start of term, and so be in a strong position to engage and interact with students at the optimal time of the academic year; when students are looking for what's on offer for them at University.

Students arriving at University for the first time as 'Freshers' are faced with a lot of vibrant organisations and initiatives all vying for their involvement with incentives and offers. The aim was to put the project, 'Active Students', at the forefront. The logo was changed slightly to give an edgier look and the accompanying marketing materials presented were extremely different to those used in the previous campaign. The flyers, posters and website were transformed from being a mixture of large colourful titles, tag lines, photos and informative text, to a block colour background (with small icons blended in to the base colour) with comparatively minimal white text and social media icons. (http://www.activestudents.co.uk/)

There are no images or photographs on the flyers, posters or website – a significant change to the previous campaign that featured real students. The website was designed and built initially with a focus for use on smart phones and tablets and is extremely easy to navigate; it was subsequently developed for PCs. This was a big change from the previous website which had limited smart phone capability.

The designers explained that images immediately create a visual impression to the user about the product or brand. In a diverse higher educational institution where there are so many differing social groups, most images fail to resonate across more than a couple of groups. As a result, many students do not or cannot associate with the image and conclude that the product is not suitable for them. The new 'image-less' Active Students campaign doesn't allow any pre-conceived ideas about what sports are on offer, how good you have to be, what to wear or who can come along to sessions. Instead, the main message on the poster addresses the main barriers to participation and states the Active Students slogan: 'No Sign Up, No Commitment, No Cost'.

The designs came as something of a surprise, but the rationale was explained and it was made clear that the designs were not intended to attract professional staff who were no longer of student age or living a student lifestyle. There was resounding positivity from the Student Activators, all of whom preferred the new designs to previous ones, and said they would be proud to endorse the brand and were excited to promote the programme to new students.

When shared with partners in the steering group, the new branding was met with a very mixed reaction as the group, mostly senior managers, did not feel they could connect with the brand or new look and feel. The theory behind the design was discussed and appreciated by the group. Members of the group with student-age offspring reported that they liked the designs. There has been a marked shift of appreciation in the need for appropriate marketing and messaging when targeting students. Moreover, staff managing and steering the projects now accept that they are not best placed to make decisions about what students want and what they relate to. This attitudinal change has reinforced the reach of the Activators in communicating and understanding the student audience.

The University of Plymouth project described how it has focused its offer and communications on particular motivations/target groups e.g. highlighting calories burnt for fitness focused activities and learning new skills for non-traditional sport. Social media presence (Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest – led by a student volunteer) is important, not just in terms of promoting activity but giving the project an identity through promoting the key values of the project: positive mental and physical health and wellbeing, fun and adventure, fitness and healthy lifestyle, female empowerment and motivation.

Many projects have used the This Girl Can campaign to encourage female students to take part in activities.

At Leeds Trinity University the project launched 'LOVE Sport' week around Valentine's Day in February when the students returned for term 2. This featured tailored marketing and incentives for sign ups, with a heavy activator presence on campus, and staff out on campus promoting sessions. Programmes were re-launched after a heavy planning phase at the end of term 1. As fresher's week had been missed this was key to being successful in term 2 and gaining interest. 'LOVE Sport' week tied into the national 'This Girl Can' (TGC) campaign, with marketing and planning turned round in time to coincide with the TV adverts, and so be part of the 'buzz'. This created a talking point around campus, with TGC very popular with the students. The project selected several sports for the initial focus and ensured it had a heavy social media presence. The sports chosen were socially themed (Rounders, Trampolining) but

also in keeping with the TGC campaign (Spinning and Zumba) to gain maximum benefit from the TV advert and the external advertising material for example the bus stop campaigns. The posters were eye catching and the project says students felt they were part of something bigger than Leeds Trinity, which encouraged them to give the sessions a try. Incentives for attending 3 and then 5 sessions helped to retain the students after their first session and then embed the sessions into their weekly routines. The T-shirts and gym bags also gave the participants a sense of team identity and helped to market the campaign around the University.

The Southampton Solent University project also ran a week long event inspired by TGC: 'Solent Girls Can'. The project collaborated with the BA (Hons) Fashion with Public Relations course. Entry to fitness classes and 'Don't Be Shy' sessions was free, with a large event on the Friday where students could pick up free goodies, enter into a New Look sports wear give away, try MAC sweat proof make up, try fairtrade healthy smoothies and also speak to Solent Sport & Give Sport A Try (the project) about the activities on offer and complete a short survey to find out what sports activities female students would like in the next academic year.

Activities

Weekly GymFit, Kickboxing, Bootcamp, Ladies Running and Power Bounce Trampolining have been delivered successfully at the University of Plymouth, all with the emphasis on the functional fitness benefits. The major motivations for participation in these activities have been to improve fitness and/or body image, to have fun and to improve health and wellbeing. 87% of participants within the fitness focused sessions have been female.

The Oxford Brookes University project found that individual sports such as tennis, fencing and bouldering have proved particularly popular with female students, something that is echoed by other projects. The project has noted that females' attendance patterns tend to be less regular than male students'. The appeal seems to lie in the opportunity to try something new without any of the stigma attached to traditional sports or the commitment that team sports demand. Women have also taken advantage of the low cost all-inclusive membership scheme to try multiple sessions. Offering sessions free of charge to gym members has also encouraged many females to take part in the activities. A number of projects have engaged previously inactive female students through women-only activities, together with non-gender specific sessions that have a strong appeal to females.

Taking activities to students has helped to break down some persistent barriers. The Roehampton University project found that arranging for a boxing coach to run women-only group boxercise sessions at weekly Islamic Society meetings was key to engaging Muslim females who were not attending sessions at other venues/times. Taking on board students' suggestions regarding time, location, activity, restricted viewing and female instructors had failed to attract this group.

Feedback from nursing lecturers at the University of Salford was that students were reluctant to cross campus to participate, so the project has located activities within the buildings they use day to day and timetabled sessions around their academic timetable.

The University of Bath project was one of a number of projects to have taken activities to students in non-traditional indoor and outdoor spaces. The project has developed a tiered structure to provide students with a new step on to the sporting pathway. The 'Pop up' and 'Top up' tiers sit below the current recreational sport level and create an entry level into participation that targets students currently not participating in sport. 'Pop up' sport acts as the initial step, primarily targeted at first year students based on campus, as a new opportunity to try a range of fun and inclusive activities. Activities appear around campus, bringing sport to students in unconventional venues. Venues such as the Students' Union building, the area surrounding the lake, the parade and the arts building have been used to build the confidence of students who may feel intimidated by either the facilities or the club environments in regards to the level of performance expected. The 'Top up' tier is designed to encourage 'Pop up' participants to become more active on a regular basis. 'Top up' continues to offer the non-competitive activities from the 'Pop up' tier but allows regular weekly participation, supporting the next step of the pathway into the student club levels above it.

Some projects have aimed activities at students on particular types of courses. At Sheffield Hallam University 'Nurses Netball' has been such a success that the Teaching Society has requested a similar opportunity. Turn up and play sessions led by an activator enabled students to develop their skills, in a comfortable and convenient environment, and have led to a regular Nursing Society team playing in the intramural league.

Many projects struggle with the challenge of engaging students whose courses involve lengthy placements away from the university, for example in schools or NHS settings. At Yorks St John University a 'Get Fit and Sporty for Placement' strand has been designed around what students do and their behaviours. Project staff have developed a good working relationship with the academics who run the placement programmes and have been invited into sessions to talk to students. An Occupational Therapy student has highlighted that group work is a core skill of the profession and explained how the 'Fit and Sporty for Placement' programme could help address this professional requirement.

Arts students at University of the Arts London (UAL) have responded well to the activities that have been selected following consultation: fencing, badminton, aerobics/fitness and dance sessions, with archery to be added – without 'traditional' sports associations, offering flexible 'drop in/out' attendance, individual activities that don't depend on others and relate well to student and course characteristics. The team sport is football – men's and women's, offered close to the College of Communication. Fashion students requested aerobics, while drama students see a career benefit to fencing's combat practice, which has been endorsed by their tutors. The project is working to counter some negative pressure from some drama and fashion tutors, who see the activities as a waste of students' time. UAL has a number of colleges and sites and student halls, some situated centrally others dispersed, and with differing student preferences, so the project is developing its offer to provide activities where the demand is located. The programme design and delivery allows students to not feel pressured into weekly commitments but able to come back when they next have the chance to. Although this translates into inconsistent attendance it is the aspect of the offer that attracts students.

More than one project said that swimming lessons had been popular, but coach-supported sessions at fixed times were not well attended, with much greater take up of flexible opportunities for subsidised swims.

Retention

Many projects reported that delivery staff – whether students or professionals – who create a relaxed atmosphere and have a rapport with participants generate good retention rates. The convenience of the location was the other key factor in more consistent attendance, together with loyalty incentive schemes designed and publicised to have maximum appeal.

> The University Campus Suffolk Students' Union project said: "Our sessions, while run by professionally qualified and local instructors, have been run very informally and this has been very well received by our student demographic. Whether a student is attending their first or 20th session, they feel welcome and part of the group and this has been a crucial factor in retaining them to the project. We have also used our rewards package to create a slightly competitive environment among peers as to who can reach milestones the quickest to receive the next reward. We have used social media to promote students collecting their rewards and this has encouraged others to join the project also.
>
> Location of our sessions has been a key factor in our year 1 success. We have one dance studio on campus which provides nearly half of our activities a week. We also hire a sports centre which is next door. The close proximity of the sessions to the main university campus and student halls has proved vital as they have been very accessible for students. For the sessions run off campus (for example: snowboarding at a local ski slope) we have provided transport to and from the venue as we found not doing this decreased the number of attendees."

The University of Hull project's female only programme, Fabulass, achieved high levels of retention. The five week sport programme took place at the Halls of Residence and included cricket, boxing, rugby, netball, incorporating the fitness element of each sport. There was a surprise element each week, regarding which sporting activity took place. 40 female students took part, with an 80% retention rate throughout. The "Girls Night In" finale was not only a chance for all those involved to get together and celebrate the success of Fabulass, it also allowed us to gain important feedback. Feedback showed that 100% of the females that participated prefer to take part in female only sessions and that their original perceptions, attitudes and behaviour towards sport had been positively changed as a result of taking part in the programme.

Futsal sessions have been very well attended and prompted a new society aiming for club status at Lancaster University, where the activator concentrated his promotional efforts, outside of session delivery, on international students, who tend to be more familiar with the sport.

Some projects, for example at Loughborough University, have run successful turn up and play sessions with pathways from casual attendance to more regular organised activity and "making a commitment" to their activity through signing up to a league structure.

At the University of Hertfordshire the figures show that students attended (on average) nearly 7 sessions in this monitoring period, suggesting that students are establishing a regular sporting habit during their time at University. Information is being gathered to provide a fuller understanding but feedback from the student Activators (who are present at each session) is that many sessions have regular attendees who make session(s) part of their weekly routine, alongside their lecture and seminar timetable.

The St Mary's University College project consulted students on the 'prizes' they would like, and found that entries into a Bubble Football event (for attending 10 football sessions) or the London Colour Run (for attendance at 10 running sessions) have generated lots of interest and been more influencial than the generic scheme offering water bottles and T-shirts, for attending any 10 project sessions. Participants who have earned the generic rewards have left them unclaimed.

Conclusion

Overall the USAF programme has got off to a very good start, with strong performance against quantitative targets. Effective means have been found to tackle the challenge of data collection for monitoring purposes. Systems have been developed to recruit, train, manage and deploy the student workforce to support programme goals. Projects have gained greater understanding of a target audiences and used this to develop marketing and offer appealing opportunities to participate in sport and increase retention rates, although many students still tend to take part sporadically and appreciate the flexibility to be able to dip in and out of sport.