

Sportivate in Higher Education

Since launching the Higher Education and Community Sport Partnership Plan in July 2009, Sport England has seen the sector as crucial to its efforts to increase participation among the 18 – 25 age group. Partners now see a clear opportunity to use Sportivate to either compliment their excellent work through the Active Universities investment, or to expand their existing sports programme, to widen the sporting offer to students, and deliver a high quality student experience.



Active Devon funded Plymouth University to successfully introduce the 'Gems Netball' programme aimed at first year students who were unsuccessful in getting into the formal university teams. The scheme offered the chance to play social netball at the weekend and provided suitable coaching, training and match play. The project engaged 90 young women of which 72 were retained. A large proportion are set to continue playing next year with the social netball sessions being run in the long term as part of the university's intra-mural programme. Although the heavy programming schedule at university facilities proved challenging and sessions could only take place in the sports hall for one hour on Sunday mornings,

"The Gems Activity was very hard work but a huge success. The Sportivate funding allowed us to get a coach in to provide added value to the training sessions and made the activity very affordable"

Sam Cronk, Project organiser

the social atmosphere of the project has drawn new players and many have subsequently become friends. A league has since been set up based at outdoor courts at a local school and now involves 11 new teams in friendly competition.

The University of Wolverhampton wanted to supplement its existing judo provision by introducing a Thursday evening session and put together a Sportivate judo project aimed at new and existing students as well



as the local community. With funding from the BeActive Partnership, six sessions were run at the Walsall campus as an introduction to the sport. The project was so popular (22 engaged and 20 retained) that students have asked for a similar course to be provided at the Wolverhampton campus as well. Instructor Wayne MacDonald was able to deliver the key British Judo senior syllabus, which involves fighting, fitness and technical aspects, in a fun and informal environment. He had a good local network of contacts and was able to promote the programme not only to students but also to local community groups and residents. The sessions have since continued and attendances have grown. Students are now in the minority but continue to take part alongside local people of all ages.

Manchester University Handball Club, having existed for many years, decided it needed to attract more students who would like to try the sport but were perhaps not ready to commit to fully joining the club. Several weeks of tasters started with a launch at fresher's fair. The club, funded by Greater Sport, worked closely with the University's Campus Sport staff and the NGB to develop these sessions, and by the end of the sessions the club ran an internal competition day. Students who came on a regular basis received a t-shirt and were given cheaper membership to join the university handball club.



Likewise, [The University of Sussex](#) community archery club had over 40 competitive members but realised that competitive environments can be intimidating to some people who may want to try the sport on a more informal basis. As a result, the club identified the need to run sessions that students, staff and community members could attend regardless of ability. After funding from [Active Sussex](#), the club was proactive during fresher's fair and promotion was highly visible on campus. New members found the Facebook pages, and once signed up for Sportivate they received the regular archery club email so they were made to feel like members of the club. The project engaged 20 new participants and retained 19 of them. Sessions themselves were delivered by newly qualified archery coaches from within the University who were in turn able to develop their coaching. The club has subsequently offered ongoing coaching sessions featuring the same casual, social, non-competitive atmosphere (a delivery style that's very successful in Active Universities projects). These sessions, together with subsidised membership, have helped to integrate several people into full club membership.

[Tyne and Wear Sport Sport](#) funded the county cricket board to work in partnership with [Northumbria University](#) to provide an indoor cricket league for its students. The cricket was part of a two hour slot at the facility on a Tuesday evening with two games of 8 a-side cricket played each week. The standard of the cricket being played wasn't high, yet students returned to receive 'light touch' coaching and the standard improved over the weeks.

The short format of the game was aimed at engaging students that had never played cricket or were unable to get into the university cricket team. As a result the project was a success with over 30 students engaged and 21 retained.

"The project format worked fantastically" Daniel Shurben,
Northumbria Cricket Board coach

Organisers believe this was because it was based around a much more informal and social form of cricket. Initial taster sessions were poorly attended but word of mouth and the efforts of organisers spread news of the project around the campus.

[Oxford Brookes University Sport](#) has previously consisted of training and competition for BUCS athletes and a general use facility for all students to utilise at their discretion. In September 2011, Brookes began using Sportivate funding from [Oxfordshire Sports Partnership](#) to kick start intra-mural sport for all students. As a result 6 projects in 5 different sports were organised; football (11 a side), football (5 a side), basketball, netball, badminton and squash. The Sportivate sessions were all set at £3 each, and ran for six weeks with the exit route being the continuation of the sessions on a self-financing basis. Sessions were run by students, often those involved in the BUCS sport teams, who were given free membership to incentivise their support throughout the year. The projects were marketed in a variety of ways through fresher's fairs, posters, emails and both

Facebook and Twitter campaigns (Active Universities projects say that these campaigns are essential to retain student participants). An 11 a side football team and two five a side football teams have since been entered into local leagues. Furthermore, sport/gym participation numbers have now risen by 400 due to the new intra mural sessions. Autumn 2012 will see further projects in three more sports; lacrosse, cycling and softball.

West View Climbing and Leisure Centre in Preston launched a Sportivate climbing programme aimed at attracting non-climbers from a number of higher educational establishments which enabled them to become competent climbers. By the end of the course, which covered basic climbing skills and technique, students were proficient enough to register at the centre and could then



continue to climb at the centre unsupervised. With funding from Lancashire Sports Partnership, the centre has delivered three courses targeting students from Preston College and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). A total of 25 students registered with the Sportivate scheme, all of whom are now registered as climbers. Not only did the students complete the course, but each of them was given the opportunity to work towards the recognised NICAS (National Indoor Climbing Award Scheme) award. All of the students obtained their level 1 after completing the course and at least 12 of the students obtained level 2. To organise the courses, the Centre worked with the new Sport 4U team at UCLan (funded through Active Universities) whose primary role is to get students more active and encourage them to take up new sport. Not only has the Sportivate programme been very rewarding for the participants involved but the funding from the scheme has helped purchase new climbing equipment to cater for the extra usage. In particular the purchase of new climbing shoes has made the sport more accessible by reducing additional costs of having to purchase their own equipment. The centre is set to deliver four new courses which will accommodate a total of 46 new users.

“The Sportivate programme has been hugely beneficial to the Sport 4 U project and the University as a whole. Being provided with the funding meant the beginners climbing course was reduced from £55 to just £10” Melissa – Climbing instructor

The critical success factors

- It is important to understand the student demographic. Many projects have had particular success aiming at students who either haven't played the sport before, are returning to a sport they've played before or were unable to get in to their university's BUCS team(s).
- Some university sports clubs can be intimidating and unwelcoming to casual players and have created more informal sessions
- While informal flexible 'drop in' activities (with no obligation to attend every week) are proving appealing to students, by their nature they lead to irregular attendance. This is a challenge to a scheme such as Sportivate. Some organisers have offered incentives to complete the course such as proficiency awards, free gifts and reduced future membership
- Evening sessions off campus have been replaced by daytime sessions on campus (albeit at weekends) with more success. Travel times to off campus facilities have been identified as a problem and some projects have tried hard to ensure facilities are within walking distance of halls of residence
- Don't just rely on fresher's week - it presents only one opportunity to reach certain students. Many projects report using a mix of promotional tools including old fashioned print media and word of mouth. In some cases this has been formalised with student ambassadors / 'activators' employed to deliver and promote sessions
- Some projects have managed to include both students, staff and members of the local community – often the non student friends of participants
- Partnerships within the institution – between the student union, registry, accommodation, academic and commercial departments are important to the success of projects. In a number of cases relationships with NGBs have flourished – handball in Manchester being a prime example
- The low cost of heavily subsidised introductory sessions can tend to make it difficult to sustain participation, as exit routes into sports clubs or leagues require students to pay more. 'Parachute payments' have been made for an initial period to soften the blow and encourage long term membership.

