

## USING SPORT STRATEGICALLY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A UNIVERSITY SPORT STRATEGY

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achievement of a set of University objectives that focus on the following: increased student satisfaction, product image and awareness for student recruitment, corporate image and awareness for the University, regional and local municipal external relations, and development of a national contribution to sports provision. The challenges ahead are significant and they highlight the importance of all these areas of performance but what was important here is that sport was identified as the strategic catalyst and at a key time with sport figuring so highly in the public domain. The strategies that are being implemented address a number of areas, enhancement of student experience in sport teaching, recreation and performance, development of student employability via an increased number of sport opportunities, growth in the recruitment of international and postgraduate students, increased quality of students, growth in research and knowledge transfer, and the development of health and wellbeing across the University community. An analysis of how this strategy addresses the effective development of five key areas of University business (taught sport programmes, sport research and transfer of knowledge, performance sport, participation in sport by all students and staff, and partnership work) will be provided in this paper.

### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to consider the use of sport to achieve University objectives and in particular to consider the approach in that taken by Sheffield Hallam University.

Arguably the next few years will be the most challenging yet for universities in England. The onset of a new student fee paying system and the establishment of measures that further promote the importance of the student experience and employability will be critical factors in a highly competitive arena. As a consequence, several universities have recognised the important role sport can play in the market positioning that will ensue, but in different ways. Several universities have produced sport strategies.

For lead-in purposes, this paper will consider some of those strategies, for example at the universities of Brunel, Northumbria and East London. The focus will then be via a case study on the formation of a sport strategy at Sheffield Hallam University. A keener focus on sport was sought by a number of players at the university for a number of years, the emphasis was on the development of facilities in particular but other views were in support of elite programmes. In the summer of 2009 there was a call for a more strategic approach and new personnel appointments were made. This paper will consider the organisational change and cultural shift that was then managed to achieve a comprehensive strategy that was proposed and subsequently adopted by the Vice Chancellor, University Executive and Board of Governors, all in a 9 month period. A University Sport Board now exists and the key elements of the strategy are Facility Development, Partnerships, Performance Athlete Scholarships and in September 2011 a new Academy of Sport and Physical Activity launches. The latter brings together 3 top class research centres and a department of sport for a 100+ academic staff strong business unit. Amongst the significant investment in the University's estate is a 10 year contract for the use of the world class indoor facility, the English Institute of Sport Sheffield.

These elements all form a coherent approach for the

Whilst the results of this strategy are as yet unknown, the result of successfully seeking support and buy-in to the process of developing such a strategy makes an interesting and useful case. Detailed insight into the identification of the need for change management, cultural shift strategies and political lobbying will be highlighted in the paper. The analysis will show the importance of timing, thorough situational evaluation and the attention required to align to University objectives via an identification of key players from across the University from marketing, communications, research centres and facilities departments as well as the University Executive. A key outcome is how this identification and solicited buy-in took a prescribed timing. This was a process that went through many barriers from a base line of little support all the way to adoption across the University and as such may offer some insight and be of interest to others in higher education wishing to undergo strategy making and in particular sport strategy implementation.

