

## An investigation into the potential for a higher education institute network to deliver sport science support services to sports in the UK

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There is uncertainty over the sporting landscape in the UK after the London 2012 Olympic Games as it is widely accepted that the current level of public investment will reduce to performance sport as of April 2013. The Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS) is a government funded agency tasked with developing and supporting a network of athlete-friendly Universities that deliver support services for all levels of elite athletes, nominated by their sports, in further and higher education.

A joint research project as part of a Knowledge Transfer Partnership between TASS and Northumbria University; funded by TSB, ESRC and ONE aimed to assess the requirements of sports for support services based in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in the UK post-2012. A questionnaire was developed (containing 68 questions) and administered to appropriate individuals within summer and winter Olympic/Paralympic Sports (n=55). Northumbria University Ethics Committee approved the experimental design.

The results indicate that Quality of Service is the most important factor, with all sports ranking it as important when deciding on which service providers to use. Funding levels were a concern for 22% of sports (the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest ranked factor behind Quality) however only 20% felt that the current High Performance system was unsustainable.

69% of the NGBs indicated they thought they would use TASS services delivered through HEIs after 2012 and when directly asked how likely the NGB is to use a HEI Network to deliver to their athletes, 59% responded positively; whilst only 17% responded negatively.

In summary, a HEI network would need to provide a high quality service which was competitively priced in the market place amongst other providers. Sports are cautious due to funding uncertainty, but the majority would consider buying into support services from a HEI network as they see value in partnerships with HEIs to complement their performance programmes.