

Briefing: The Value of University Sport and Physical Activity

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Introduction

In November 2020, BUCS published a report on The Value of University Sport and Physical Activity.¹ This report provides information and recommendations for universities to review how they engage with sport and physical activity during the unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic. The report calls for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to increase engagement in sport and physical activity for all their students and staff and ensure it becomes an essential part of their university strategy.

Findings

The following positions highlighted by the BUCS report aim to put sport and physical activity at the forefront of strategic planning and operational activities:

1. University sport and student recruitment

The report illustrates the impact sport has on students' choice of university, the university's market position and the 'brand pull' of university sport. In the UK, sport has provided numerous benefits for the student experience and has a significant attraction for students. University sport brands provide a sense of belonging for prospective students and loyalty for alumni.

2. University sport, transitions, and retention

Sport provides opportunities for socialisation that affect the student experience. For first-year students, sport plays a crucial role in helping students feel a sense of belonging more quickly. There is a strong link between students participating in sport at university and their decision to attend and remain at their institutions. When students are actively participating in sport, studies have shown an increase in student retention at university. Also, the value of campus recreational sports facilities and programs contributes to student retention for active students in comparison to non-users.

3. Student sport, physical activity, health, and wellbeing

Sport can have important impacts on health and wellbeing. According to British Active Students Survey (BASS), 76% of students are classified as being active, which is defined as 150 minutes of moderate intense physical activity per week. However, female students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds and BAME students are less active than their counterparts.

¹ <https://www.bucs.org.uk/resources-page/the-value-of-university-sport-and-physical-activity-pdf.html>

4. University sport and graduate attainment and employability

According to the BUCS report, students that participated in sport at university were more likely to receive first class and upper second-class degrees, potentially due to the improved cognition and learning abilities. Sport also provided important leadership opportunities which were valuable for employability.

5. University sport and the civic and global agendas

The report recognises the benefits of university sport and physical activity in internal HE community and wider society. It was found that £1 spent on community sport and physical activity generates an economic and social return of £3.91, and contributes an estimated £85.5 billion annually to the UK economy which demonstrates civic and global value of sport.