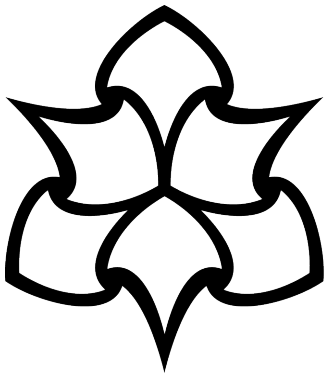

Brunton, J. and Mackintosh, C. (2016) Higher education sport development and physical activity policy and practice: A polemic

Submission to International Journal of Sport Politics and Policy: *Special Edition (Higher education sport policy)*

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Introduction

Sport policy analysis in the higher education sector has been a neglected source of both empirical and conceptual study. Few studies have examined government interest in this sphere of the public policy landscape in sport. The purpose of this paper is to begin to map out the potential for examination of this field of enquiry and consider the current state of understanding and knowledge, in particular relating to sport development and physical activity interventions focused on this area to date. Whilst considerable other academic studies and reviews have explored primary, secondary education and school sport policy sector (Bailey and Morley, TID REF; Ives, 2016 forthcoming, Mackintosh and Liddle, 2015) few have considered the higher education sport policy sector in terms of participation. As this paper will illustrate this is not to say that studies have not examined sport students in higher education, sociological aspects of the context of higher education participation or barriers and constraints limiting potential activity in sport and physical activity.

The total number of adults who have attained tertiary education in OECD 34 member countries is estimated at 222,074,000 (OECD, 2014). The OECD (2014; 23) definition of such 'tertiary programmes' encompass three distinct, but related educational programme areas, firstly, "largely theory-based programmes designed to provide sufficient qualifications for entry to professions…duration at least 3 years full time, these programmes are not exclusively offered at universities". Secondly vocational programmes with a minimum of two years full time contact and finally postgraduate 'advanced study programmes such as PhD. Thus given the national, and in some

cases complex picture of the global higher education systems it is far from easy to talk of a united higher education 'market', public policy area or education sphere. But for the purposes of this paper we refer to higher education sport and physical activity public policy sector as that which pertains to post-school sector definition used by the OECD above.

It is also important to recognise that such an artificially aggregated 'sector' cuts across a diversity of public, private, government and charitable organisations institutions that encompasses higher educational provision globally. It has been suggested that there were 170 million global university enrolments in 2009 (British Council, 2012) including four countries of China, India, USA and Russia accounting for some 45% of these enrolments. The scale of growth of this sector is rising exponentially from an estimated 33million globally in 1970 to 178 million in 2010 (HM Government, 2013). Indeed the complexity of this market is further exacerbated by a growing trend towards the development of global transnational education campuses outside the 'host' or accrediting university country. The British Council (2012) estimated there to be around 200 such UK-led campuses serving 120,000 students with a further 37 opening by 2013.

In OECD countries more than 40% of 25-34 year olds and partner countries* have tertiary education (as defined above). In Australia, Finland, Japan, the Netherlands and Sweden more than 30% do so at university level 5 and above.

*Argentina, Brazil, China, Columbia, India, Indonesia, Latvia, Russian Federation, Saudia Arabia, South Africa.

According to the OECD *Education at a Glance 2014* Report (2014) between 2000-2012 the proportion of people not accessing post-school education has continued to shrink by a rate of 3% year on year. Likewise, tertiary education, as defined above, has expanded as a sector by 10% since 2000. It should be recognised that this report proposes considerable variations in outcomes and orientation of the awarded qualifications (degree, foundation degree, advanced postgraduate through to highly vocational awards. Thus this is not meant as a measure of size of higher education 'market'. Countries themselves are not homogeneous, national and subnational educational systems vary considerably and such comparisons are incredibly complex. For example, in the US, 25-34 year olds with a tertiary

degree ranged from 29% in Nevada to 71% in Columbia. However, in Germany the variation is far lower between only 20% in the region of Sachsen-Anhalt to a high of 38% on Berlin. The United Kingdom (UK) ranges from 32% in Merseyside to 69% in London. This illustrates how country-wide variations mask complex internal sub-national variations in tertiary educational characteristics of the population.

The role of sport, physical activity, health and wellbeing in the higher education population

It has long been well established that higher education and universities in particular are critical to the health of national economy of countries (Universities UK, 2015; Universities UK, 2013), social outcomes for students (OECD, 2014; OECD 2010) and gains for future financial and social status of those successfully completed programmes of tertiary education (OECD, 2008). But despite this growth in scale, market size and political significance for national economies this has not been met by a parallel interest and analysis of the sport and physical activity public policy of national government's focused on this sector. Indeed this is particularly surprising given the growth of this sector, and the increasing salience of what some have referred to as the 'participation puzzle' (Girginov and Hills, 2008) in the desire to raise levels of societal sport and physical activity participation to tap into long established health and social benefits of such participation (Heath et al, 2012). The aim of this paper is therefore to begin to map out and review the current landscape of understanding, knowledge and research in the sport physical activity public policy sphere. If mass participation is becoming such a global point of interest across multiple governments then what might be the lessons we can learn from current understanding of the HE sector, and where should the research agenda go next in terms of exploring policy insights that can help clearly identify next steps for such an embryonic field of academic study.

This paper will examine the following research aims:

- To examine current knowledge, understanding and research on sport and physical activity development interventions and policy in higher education;

- To identify key debates and outline future research agenda directions for sport and physical activity intervention policy in higher education.

A starting point for a new research consolidated agenda: taking stock?

International interest in HE student sport participation patterns and understanding has grown in recent years encompassing a diversity of national settings as diverse and wide ranging as Greece (Tsigilis et al, 2002; Tsigilis et al, 2009), USA (Clift and Mower, 2011; McCance and Vanleer, 2003; Moffit, 2010 Stevens and Loudon, 1999), China (Chung, Liu and Chen, 2013), Turkey (Sarac and McCullick, 2015), Iran (Mirsafian, Doczi and Mohamadinejad, 2014) and Nigeria (Shehu, 2000). Whilst studies continue to emerge looking at countries, often these focus on single university settings and a cross section or small case study of students at one such HE institution. Likewise it has been argued that "research examining the motivation (or otherwise) of university students to engage in physical activity, sport or exercise is limited" (Roberts, Reeves and Ryrie, 2015; 599). It is this essential paradox between growing international governmental interest in raising participation (Houlihan, 2011; Mackintosh et al, 2015) alongside the emergent gap between a limited understanding of the expanding HE sector sport participants.

Sport development policy' central concern with increasing sport participation in communities has been conceptually driven by the three pillars of recruitment, retention and transition (into higher standards of performance) (Green, 2005). Here, green has argued that models of sport development are conceptually and empirically thin. The same can be noted about the higher education sport development sub-sector. This said, there are isolated recent examples of studies that have examined specific components of this spectrum of activities such as programmes of recreational activities retention processes (Kampf and Teske, 2013). Such insights help to inform how those involved in design of initiatives may move forward with evidence-underpinned plans and strategies in the sector. However, studies such as Kampf and Teske (2013) are only beginning to build an embryonic evidence base. Table 1 illustrates a taxonomy of the spectrum of sport participation activities and potential areas for intervention in higher education settings:

It could be argued that higher education participation programmes encompass five spheres of activity. The taxonomy below attempts to conceptualise the cross section of the student sports participation community in higher education.

Type of participation	Examples
Sport-based degree practical activity	Coaching sessions Physical activity programme peer practical Physical education pedagogical training
Elite and university club inter-university-led competitive or 'varsity' activity	University representative individuals and teams National HE sector representation Training and squad activity
Intra-mural, recreational programmes	HE designed friendly, participation and recreation-led groups, societies and leagues Pay and play sessions University (non-sport-led) society sport activities
Targeted physical activity or sport development intervention programmes	Government funded programmes Targeted initiatives from national governing bodies (NGBs) Social programmes themed around sport Health-led projects
Independent physical activity 'independent student activity	Fitness centre membership Ad hoc independent participation e.g. jogging Local community club-based involvement

Table 1: Higher education taxonomy of participation

The role of sport in delivering wider university policy agendas

Other studies have considered the role of sport participation within higher education and its impact on a sense of community, feeling good about themselves and relationships centred on integration

(Henchy, 2011). This small body of work is supported by Huesman et al (2009) who argue that such recreation had a link with educational success. However, such studies link to the wider sceptical debates around educational attainment and physical activity, and need to be the precursor to rigorous, platform of new research agendas in this policy area. Not seen as a simplistic panacea, solution and political device for seeking financial support for promoting initiatives in the sector. Ongoing debates about academic performance remain heavily contested and are out with the scope of this paper (Bailey et al, XXXX; Piggin, 2015).

However, a popular historical research theme present in some studies can be seen in the work of Bryant, Banta and Bradley (1995) who found that 30% of those engaged in campus recreational programmes said such facilities and activities played an important part on decision to attend, remain at their university. For others sport programmes have been seen as a source of holistic wellness and provide fundamental necessary social interaction with other students (Belch, Gebel and Maas, 2001). Again the appeal of arguments can be seen that in the role sport and active recreation may play in building social capital amongst students this adds to wellbeing and networks of student community identities. Numerous authors in the field have outlined the complexity of coming to simplistic conclusions around this area of theory development (Coalter, XXX; Nicholson and Hoye, XXXX; Nichols, XXXX). Research by Kampf and Teske (2013) in their study of 3809 American first year students found "formal social integration through campus recreation is a more important predictor of future enrolment than precollege characteristics" (p.92). Here, the club sport participant had a higher rate of retention than a non-participant. Furthermore, the more a student used sport and recreation the stronger the correlation with retention. Crucially, they argue how such data was used to support the 'club offering' and promotion and financing of sport participation on campus. It is worthy of noting this appealing argument, yet we suggest it is the determinants, processes and drivers of such behaviour and attitudes that further research is needed. Only through unpicking further the complex transition into further study and university environs and the interaction with sport and active recreation would this provide a robust benchmark for investment and policy decisions.

Current knowledge, understanding and research on sport development interventions in Higher Education

Currently there are no reviews of sport-based interventions in HE which is likely to be due to there being a limited number of sport-based interventions that have been conducted. There is only one review of college/university student behaviours that conducted a meta-analysis of physical activity (PA) behaviours (Keating et al, 2005), none since then, nor specifically focusing on sport. Research in this area does not seem to have moved on with similar conclusions being drawn now to that time where Keating et al (2005) found that most studies of college/university students were descriptive studies looking at PA patterns, stages of PA behaviour change, and determinants; there were only three studies at that time which had focused on intervention programmes promoting PA among students. With that, none focused solely on sport-based interventions. In England, 84% of students responded in the Higher Education and Sport Participation Survey that they would like to do more sport (Sport England, 2014), we know therefore, that sport is an important mode of PA for this population and thus warrants the focus on sport alone rather than as part of the broader term of PA. Similarly Bevan et al (2015) found that sports participation was significantly associated with leisure time physical activity for females and given we need to increase female participation further to readdress the gender imbalance in participation, this further supports the focus on university sport-based interventions.

Since 2005 there have been a limited number of intervention studies with this population as stated, even though Keating et al (2005) stated that more studies on PA interventions were needed for this population. Martens et al (2012) looked at a brief motivational intervention to increase PA that showed some success with increasing students vigorous PA more than moderate activities. This was thought to be related to the idea that university students think of vigorous activities, such as playing sport, when asked about PA rather than moderate activities, such as walking, that the general population more be more likely to consider. Whilst the premise has not been researched, it does make sense when considering the nature of the population and their previously cited enthusiasm for wishing to do more sport by the vast majority of the student population (Sport England, 2014). Kozak et al

(2013) investigated how best to frame messages for normal-weight and overweight/obese university students to persuade them to exercise and whilst there was some success for use of gain frame messages, the intervention focused on exercise. Topp et al (2011) used incorporated the use of the Transtheoretical Model of Health Behaviour Change into a 1-week program to improve PA, again with no particular focus on university sport. One sport-based intervention used different marketing techniques focusing on the effectiveness of intramural sports marketing and participant motives making recommendations for the most effective marketing techniques (Ciuffo et al, 2014). There is an evident need for more interventions looking specifically at engaging more students in university sport, whether intramural, more ad-hoc sport as well as club sport.

In England it took till 2011 for this population to be sufficiently recognised for substantial funding then to be made available (through Sport England) for the sector to apply for to increase participation in sport and active recreation. The focus of both rounds of funding (Active Universities Funding, 2011-14 and Sport Activation Fund, 2014-17) was to increase participation in what were described as 'inactive' – those doing no sport in the last 28 day period and 'semi-active students' – those doing sport once in the last 28 day period (Sport England, 2014). Most of the Sport Development programmes delivered at these funded universities are carrying out participation programmes that are largely not theoretically based nor systematically evaluated in a way that each university will know the specific mediating variables that brought about the change.

The hidden negative sport, health and wellbeing picture in HE sport communities: not a pancea?

It is often suggested that "higher levels of education attainment are associated with better health, more social engagement, higher employment rates and area perceived gateway to better labour opportunities and higher relative earnings" (OECD, 2014; 30). It has also been suggested that up to 70% of university students are not participating in regular free time physical activity or exercise (Haase, 2004). Furthermore, a growing body of work is also drawing attention to the negative side effects or hidden rituals of sports club membership for students (Partington et al, 2013; Groves,

Griggs and Leflay, 2012). This body of work is embryonic but challenges the notion of assumed positive relationship between sport participation and health and wellbeing in higher education that others have suggested (Byl, 2002; Ellis et al, 2002). In particular it is important to question the taken for granted assumption that student participation in sport and physical activity delivers enhanced quality of life in its broadest sense. For example, Partington (2013) in her study of university sports club drinking in seven English universities found that 79.1% of sports club members were classified as having an alcohol use disorder. Likewise, this rose in team-based sports to 84.5% and higher risk of alcohol-related harm. Studies in USA and New Zealand (Kueffler et al, 2005; Nattiv and Puffer, 1991; O'Brien et al, 2008) indicate far higher levels of drinking in sport students than those not engaged in sport clubs. No significant differences were found in the level of competitive opportunities students took part at (representative, recreational, intra-mural). Partington et al (2013) conclude that there is a lack of research in this area considering health and wellbeing factors such as harmful alcohol use by sport team and individual members. She suggests that UK students represent a 'high risk group for alcohol-related harm and may require targeted interventions (ibid, p346). In a study of 494 recreational (as opposed to university level competitive) participants Ward and Gryczynskui (2010) found that such participants were also still at risk of harm from alcohol, thus suggesting problematic alcohol use is not solely linked to club-based social networks.

Other considerations have recently been highlighted that include hazing and initiation ceremonies at university-based sports clubs which can generate outcomes ranging from the demeaning and socially negative to potentially fatal (Groves, Griggs and Leflay, 2012). Allan and Madden (2010) in a large scale USA-based study have identified that 74% of varsity students experience such initiations. Such activity breaks the simplistic link between positive university sport participation and improvements in health and social outcomes from such participation and engagement. If emerging understanding is being developed about the sports club-based student in terms of alcohol consumption and social patterns of behaviour less is known about the impact on wider self-esteem, physical health of this sub-population and the links to their sporting activities they choose to engage in.

Conclusions and future research agendas

The university environment, facilities and resources as part of the wider sport development policy and practice community

A few headline thoughts:

Understanding of the limitations from perspective of voluntary sector (GAP) – growing role for volunteers globally due to austerity – role for HE in this needs closer attention? Volunteering (Hayton, forthcoming). Griffiths and Rainer (2009) wales E/C delivery through university workforce

Partnerships to deliver outcomes increasingly important – role of the HE sector in this (GAP)

NGBs and governments need to work with HE – taxonomy of participants mentioned earlier and potential programmes to deliver increased participation. Delivery and products from outside agencies linking better. In particular what is needed here is a evidence and theory underpinned research-led programme of investment agenda to capitalise on the paradoxical gap between growing scope, size and influence of the HEI market in sport participation and current limited interventions and policy impact.

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