

The Value of Sport to the Tertiary Sector

We know the value of tertiary education

Attracting students to tertiary study or training, retaining them in study and helping them achieve positive outcomes, is important to government, to tertiary institutions and to wider society. Why? Because on every social and economic measure from health, to quality of life, to financial security, people who achieve higher qualifications, fare better in life. We want our young people to succeed, and the more that access tertiary study and training the better.

The US economist, Henry Levin, has long shown that the best predictor of adult wealth, health and happiness is not achievement at school, but the number of years of schooling, including tertiary education.

What does sport have to do with this?

In the tertiary setting, competitive sport adds unique value to student engagement and achievement. Before we summarise that value, it is important to acknowledge the current limitations of the evidence base.

- There are strong theoretical grounds for assuming that sport can contribute to a range of outcomes in tertiary education. A number of associations have been made between tertiary sport and a host of positive outcomes for both individuals and institutions. However, the evidence base, with robust empirical data, is still in its infancy.
- The lack of evidence, however, does not mean that such positive associations do not occur; but it does make it difficult for organisations and institutions to develop clear strategies for future work in the tertiary education sector, and justify resourcing them. We need to ensure that when we develop programmes and implement sport offerings, we consider how to include evaluation, monitoring and research to grow that evidence base.

Growing the Evidence Base

At the back of this document we list some studies of interest, including some information from evaluations and case studies regarding how to provide a quality sport offering.

One of the future aims of UTSNZ is to encourage more NZ specific research into the value of competitive sport in tertiary settings. UTSNZ looks forward to working with tertiary institutions and national sport organisations to further build the evidence around the value of sport. If you want to discuss research, or find more information, don't hesitate to contact us.

So, what do we know about the value of competitive sport in the tertiary sector?

Below is a summary of the known positive associations between competitive sport and tertiary sector.

- **Increase Enrolments** - There is some evidence to suggest that investment made into sports programmes and facilities is an attraction for students when selecting a university or tertiary institute - particularly for students who are competitive sport participants or who are looking for an institution that will offer them a well-rounded life experience. With forecast falling degree and postgraduate enrolments by New Zealand domestic students until at least 2019, a quality sport programme and profile can help attract prospective students.
- **Improve the Student Experience**- A stimulating and rewarding 'student experience' is key to students engaging positively with their institution and their study. Tertiary institutions operate in an increasingly



competitive environment, so improving the student experience to attract and retain students is a high priority. At an international level, student participation in arenas such as the FISU World University events provides them with exposure to the environment of representing their university and their country, developing coping skills in a high-performance environment and delivering lifelong learning experiences from both a sport and cultural diversity viewpoint. Evidence suggests sport offerings/provision are a notable driver of student experience scores and these in turn are major part of positioning sport in recruitment terms.

- **Improve Engagement and Retention** - Sport can help students to cope with academic pressures and stress, not just through the benefits regular physical activity provides for mental and physical health, but through the social support networks. Belonging to a sports club/team and joining events also helps with social and cultural integration. Student engagement in campus life and positive experiences through sport can impact student retention.
- **Engage International students** - Sport is a vehicle that can cross gender, ethnicity, religious and cultural boundaries. It has been shown to help international students engage more positively with their tertiary institution, make friends and improve their general cultural integration. It also offers them an avenue to take leadership positions on campus. The ability to market as a 'sport' university also can be a powerful recruitment tool and can add significantly to international profile.
- **Increase Employability** - Having participated in sport, particularly when students can demonstrate structured engagement (competition attendance, being a sport leader, volunteering, event management etc.) enhances student employability. Employers recognise the value of graduates having been involved in sport and actively look for mention of sports involvement in graduate job applications. This is because sport enhances soft skills such as teamwork, relating to others, leadership, planning, communication, time management, resilience, problem solving and adaptability. Students know structured sport participation can help with a well-rounded resume.
- **Support Equity in Achievement** - The government is seeking further strengthening of the tertiary education sector's focus on supporting improved achievement from two key groups: Māori and Pasifika learners. Particular sports can engage particular ethnicities and research shows that positive sport participation can engage and empower students. There is also some evidence that sport participation has a positive effect on time management, educational productivity, aspirations to engage in tertiary education and increased chance of obtaining a degree.
- **Profile and Business Sustainability** - Internationally, some universities have identified that sport has the ability to generate revenue to help offset the cost of provision. Sport and recreation can support marketing and visibility of a tertiary institution into its wider community leveraging sponsorship and investment.
- **Growing International Linkages** - International sport connections stimulate international linkages with overseas counterparts. International opportunities as a result of sport affiliations open the doors to participation of tertiary institutions and tertiary students at events and forums all across the globe. Leverage of these opportunities in relation to university profile and marketing is growing.
- **Alumni Engagement** – For many Alumni, sport is an opportunity to give back to the university or tertiary institution they once attended. Research has shown some correlation between alumni giving and tertiary



institution teams' on-the-field success. Alumni can be a valuable source of not just funding, but also coaching, officiating and mentoring support in the tertiary sport space and links into industry.

You may be interested in the following reports and articles:

- Sport England, 'Active Universities evaluation report Year Three Summer 2014', 2014. This report outlines findings from a three-year project to increase sport in a select number of universities in the United Kingdom.
- Sport Industry Research Centre, Sheffield Hallam University 'The Impact of Engagement in Sport on Graduate Employability', 2013. e City University project, in partnership with the University's Careers Department, also publicised the findings of the BUCS employability study 2013, 'The impact of engagement in sport on graduate employability,' which demonstrated advantages associated with sports participation. <http://bucs.org.uk/page.asp?section=17397§ionTitle=Research>
- Australian Government 2008, "Review of Australian Higher Education – Final Report", Bradley, D (Chair), Noonan, P, Nugent, H, & Scales, B, Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia Publications. A major aim of the 'Bradley Review' was to identify the factors that would enable the Australian tertiary education system to increase and sustain its international competitiveness in the future.
- Final report to Scottish Student Sport and sportscotland from the Brunel Centre for Sport, Health and Wellbeing: "Evidence Review: Understanding the value of sport and physical activity in tertiary education". Dr Louise Mansfield Professor Tess Kay Brunel Centre for Sport, Health and Well Being (BC•SHaW) Dr. Catherine Meads Health Economics Research Group (HERG), with Dr. Iain Lindsay Brunel Centre for Sport, Health and Wellbeing (BC•SHaW). BC•SHaW, Brunel University, July 2013

