

University and Tertiary Sport NZ: Intentions Document

Strategy Extension and 2021 Events Programme

Introduction

Much in our world has changed since COVID-19, and no less so within tertiary education settings and within the sport sector. We are faced with a number of new challenges as a result of the current pandemic, and some pre-existing challenges have been further exposed, the impacts of which need to be considered moving forward.

The following paper outlines UTSNZ's strategic intent post 2020 and proposed implementation tactics to ensure UTSNZ remains relevant and can respond to urgent needs while we monitor, gain insight and understand what the future holds – both within a sport context and within a tertiary education context.

Strategy Expansion

The term of the current UTSNZ Strategic Plan runs from 2018 – 2020. As highlighted in the 2019 Strategic Refresh, UTSNZ's key focus areas serve the organisation well in terms of an overall framework within which to operate.

Four key recommendations were proposed for the new strategic period to ensure UTSNZ continues to work towards an aligned message and vision that all tertiary institutions can buy into and engage with. These areas not a departure from the current strategy, more a progression within it.

While the current strategic framework remains valid, it is critical however that we consider the change in context resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and acknowledge that there may be shorter term priorities that require our immediate focus and better serve our membership and key stakeholders.

We know that tertiary institutions are facing significant budget deficits as a result in the downturn of international students. The impact and level to which sport and recreation services will be impacted remains unknown. We also know that in 2021 there will be a significantly lower number of Year 13 students entering tertiary education.

There are also likely significant changes for the sporting landscape and NSOs and it would be naïve to expect UTSNZ events and programmes to be unaffected.

Contextually, it has been agreed therefore that a plan that charts direction for a single year ahead may be more beneficial to Members, and as such the UTSNZ Board has made the decision to expand the current 2018-2020 strategy for a further 12 months.

The focus within this expansion on adaptability, flexibility and sustainability.

This approach will ensure alignment to relevant sector needs and flexibility in a constantly changing and unstable environment.



2021 Vision and Focus

Already, UTSNZ has demonstrated its ability to respond to a change in environment.

In 2020, a year where many unique sporting and academic opportunities within universities were lost, UTSNZ remained highly connected with its membership (Sport Managers and Administrators) and students.

During the initial alert level lockdown (including Level 4), UTSNZ adapted quickly creating an engaging platform for students to compete nationally and internationally via a series of online challenges. With 1398 student participants, 431 total event entries and over 276 video entries, the 'Lockdown League' ensured UTSNZ continued to deliver quality events during the period of physical isolation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It successfully increased and leveraged existing rivalry between institutions and student representation by providing a platform for any student to participate. It also resulted in new partnerships with other national sporting organisations (NSOs) not currently part of the UTSNZ events programme.

"It was awesome to have a variety of sports challenges to help keep students, athletes and staff busy during the lockdown. Creativity and a bit of friendly competition between each of the universities was really cool to be a part of", Ben Bowie, Lincoln University.

What remains clear is that there is still desire for quality competition at the national level for our students. Student interest and engagement in the national events remains high, and the UTSNZ Student Athlete Commission reiterated that the COVID-19 lockdown reinforced to them the value of quality inter-tertiary events, their desire to play competitively, as well as the importance of opportunities to connect with others through sport.

"Hearing that our biggest tournament of the year was given the green light was fantastic news. This tournament has been my highlight of the year from the moment I started university and will be an even bigger highlight this year as we've been so long without sport", Joel Gordon, Massey University.

In 2021, UTSNZ will therefore continue to work collaboratively and consistently to ensure quality events are provided that meet the aspirations of students, who don't just wish to participate, but wish to excel and advance in national and international environments (whether as an athlete, coach, manager, official or sports administrator). UTSNZ will however look to refine the NTC programme to meet the demands of the current environment, including from a financial and resourcing perspective.

In addition to the national programme, we also now have the ability to offer the opportunity to trial new and/or aspiring sports, formats and events that otherwise may not be represented at a tertiary level. This both as a result of the growth and maturity of UTSNZ, but also with COVID-19 providing the impetus to revisit the need for adaptability and inspiration in regards to new initiatives and partnerships aimed at dramatically increasing the provision of tertiary education sport for our tertiary students.

The 2021 plan will look to build on the innovation of 2020 and identify a set of actions we believe will continue to add value to student well-being and university outcomes. We see the next 12 months as an opportunity to continue to explore alternative and complementary models of delivery, in particular local, regional and online initiatives, as we continue to grow and meet the needs of a wider student group.

This extension remaining in line with the vision proposed in the original UTSNZ business case in 2015, which identified that the exact and future structure of inter tertiary sporting competitions would need to be adaptable and would emerge and evolve over time.

Events Programme – National, Regional and Online

During a period where physical sport has been put on hold, it has highlighted that as an organisation we must be innovative in order to meet our objectives. In response, UTSNZ has continued to progress the tertiary challenge category of events, as well as build on the success of the Lockdown League.

In 2020, the Challenge Series was launched. This event category aims to deliver quality events and contribute to positive student experiences by providing newly identified and online sports the opportunity to hold a tertiary event, thus catering to a wider student audience.

The over-arching principles of the Challenge Series are:

Continuity

- The development and inclusion of the Challenge Series events enables UTSNZ and members to build upon and deliver to the community established through the 2020 pandemic period. Characteristics of Challenge Series events include inter-university rivalry, pride of university representation and direct communication with participants.
- By establishing a local, regional and online suite of events, UTSNZ is diversifying its offerings and protecting from future circumstances that may result in the cessation of physical events. The events also aim to reduce barriers (including the time and cost to participate), increase accessibility and increase appeal across a larger student audience.

Event Development

- Challenge Series events offer the opportunity to trial new and/or aspiring sports, formats and events that otherwise may not be represented at a tertiary level.
- The Challenge Series provides sports that do not currently have an NTC event and/or that can be competed online the opportunity to partner with UTSNZ without the pressure of delivering an NTC event. This mitigates risk from the participant, university and UTSNZ perspectives as events will not be expected to immediately be up to the standard of an NTC event.

Engagement, Reach & Brand Awareness

- The Challenge Series provides UTSNZ another avenue to engage with students including those participating in the event, spectating at it or volunteering through event management and delivery. Participant numbers in a Challenge series event will not be limited (unless imposed by the event partner) meaning the event size could realistically exceed that of an NTC.
- Events would be made up of sports that UTSNZ does not currently cater for, meaning new communities of students would be uncovered and engaged.
- Challenge Series events will be open to competitors and teams from all tertiary institutions, as well as invitational and combined teams where appropriate. Already we have seen increased engagement with students from UCOL, SIT, Otago Polytechnic, NZIS and Toi Ohomai entering the 2020 series.
- Reaching a wider variety of students through new events exposes them to the UTSNZ brand, and many for the first time. As word of mouth is one of the most powerful marketing tools available to us, more students recognizing the brand and the quality events it delivers will contribute to the overall success of UTSNZ.

The objectives of the Challenge Series are to:

1. Deliver multiple high-quality events that are attended by representatives of a variety of tertiary institutions.
2. Provide members with a valuable, sustainable and more cost-effective competition platform within the current pandemic environment.
3. Allow inclusion of sports that otherwise may not be represented at a tertiary level.
4. Expose new communities of students to the UTSNZ brand, suite of events, international opportunities and health and wellbeing resources.
5. Increase the level of rivalry between tertiary institutions.
6. Increase the number of tertiary students engaging in events.
7. Develop positive working relationships with new event partners.

Evidence Base

The Challenge Series programme is underpinned by Active NZ data and utilises learnings from the Sport Beyond School research project (2013-2015).

In addition to the those seeking a national, competitive experience we know that social/modified sport at university appeals to more school leavers than other mediums of sport and recreation e.g. through a club.

The factors rated most highly in terms of discouraging continued participation in sport and recreation in the Sport Beyond School research were 'the lack of friends to participate with', followed by 'the cost to participate is not cheap' and 'takes up too much time'.

Findings from Active NZ survey tell us that the top three barriers for 18-24 year old participation are "other commitments are taking priority (e.g. work, family), I struggle to motivate myself and I am too tired or don't have the energy".

We also know that 'playing with friends / making new friends / social connectedness' and 'health and fitness benefits' are important motivators to participation for 18-24-year-olds. Important to note is that 'non-competitive / social focus' rated lower as a factor that would *definitely* encourage participation at university (Sport Beyond School, 2013-2015), suggesting that positioning events within the overall competition framework of UTSNZ may have its benefits.

It is also hoped that by offering a programme that removes as many barriers as possible, plus offers an exciting and engaging product/experience (outside the traditional sport offerings) we will connect with a greater number of students.

With regards to delivery, UTSNZ's role will continue to be as an interface between the education and sport sectors. This facilitation role is important to ensure the knowledge and expertise of sport sector practitioners, identifies and aligns with the realities and needs of sport and recreation specific to individual universities, and that the context, design and development of sport and recreation programmes appeals to students. It also increases the capacity for the delivery of larger scale sport projects across the tertiary sector as a whole.

In addition to strong NSO relationships, UTSNZ is also effectively positioned to ensure a bottom up process of development within the Universities. It is important that programmes are context specific, engaging the University's understanding of its own sports landscape, culture, and students. Through its direct connections to university sport departments, UTSNZ has greater ability to facilitate the identification of student needs and wants in regard to sport programmes and events, and to then lead

and champion experimentation to address these needs. This is important not only for the design of initiatives that will engage the students, but also providing a 'student voice' to projects.

For NSOs, many are seeking assistance in working with universities. They see value in working through a central point of contact as they do not always have the capacity to engage individually with each University, nor the understanding of tertiary environments.

Currently, UTSNZ is seeing increased demand in this space, which may possibly be from a reduction in NSO international and high-performance work programmes as a result of COVID-19 travel restrictions.

With national leadership, explicit advocacy and a dedicated entity to co-ordinate collaboration and delivery, it is more likely that there will be a strategic coming together of the tertiary and sports sectors in a way that can help realise the full potential of sport in education settings.

Targeted Groups and Initiatives

2021 also presents an opportunity to take a more targeted approach to identified priority groups and initiatives as follows.

School Leavers

Analysis between how much time school leavers think they might spend and how much time school leavers would like to spend participating in sport and active recreation, suggests that school leavers anticipate a decrease in the ability to participate in sport and active recreation once they leave secondary school and enter tertiary study (Sport Beyond School, 2013-2015). It is worth considering whether this anticipation is a cause of drop out as much as actual time constraints brought about by university commitments. One of UTSNZ's stated strategic objectives is to "increase the recruitment and retention of school leavers in sport as they transition into tertiary institutions; through the provision of relevant and appropriate sporting opportunities". In 2021, UTSNZ will explore initiatives that might assist in educating school leavers prior to their arrival at university about how sport and active recreation can complement their studies. This has also been identified as a need by a number of NSOs, following the cancellation of national secondary school and Year 13 events. In addition, stronger connections will ensure we can build on the knowledge and research into the needs and motivations of young people during the secondary to tertiary transition phase.

Volunteer recruitment

Past studies have indicated that a high proportion of students are interested in volunteering for in sport. A concerted effort to reach and engage these students and link them with opportunities will be a further goal in 2021, building on and further developing the UTSNZ Workforce Development Programme.

Women and Girls

There are clear inequalities for women and girls when it comes to participation, and their wider involvement and visibility within sport and recreation in New Zealand. COVID-19 research conducted by Sport NZ, also shows there are some groups who are more at risk of missing out or being less active as a result of the current pandemic. One group identified is young women aged 19-24-years.

Increasing participation in sport by women and girls is a current government priority and as such programmes or projects that reach these groups will be prioritised for funding. Some tertiary institutions are already tailoring and delivering innovative initiatives to this target group, however

UTSNZ believes the recently announced launched Tu Manawa Aotearoa funding support (which identifies 19-24-year-old females as a priority group for 2021) presents increased opportunities in this

space. UTSNZ will therefore be exploring new programmes, events and initiatives that will engage and deliver specifically to women and girls, whether that be at a national local, regional and/or online level.

“Research shows a direct correlation between participation in sport and greater achievement in higher education and employment.” – Hon Eugenie Sage, Acting NZ Minister for Women.

Workforce Development Programme

In 2021, UTSNZ will continue to look to increase ‘representation’ beyond student athletes through integrated learning opportunities that directly complement learning pathways and student skill development, and better connect to the academic mission of tertiary institutions i.e. make the skills agenda a central to the programme and offerings being made to New Zealand tertiary students.

Profile and Promotion

Existing objectives relating to increasing the profile of university and tertiary sport remain a priority also. Promoting smartly and reaching the right audiences to increase engagement and potentially helping to drive commercial partnerships that may benefit and drive the expansion of sport programmes longer term, will be a focus.

Research and Advocacy

UTSNZ will continue to encourage further building of the evidence base through high quality, credible research, monitoring and evaluation. This as we need to advocate more for the value of tertiary sport with key decision-makers and provide evidence to support its value.

A Look at 2021 in Operation

At a practical implementation level, below is a summary of what the 2021 calendar year may look like under the existing strategic framework.

Key principles underpinning the 2021 programme include:

- Rationalisation of events in respect of COVID-19 impacts
- Low cost, accessible event models and initiatives
- Recognition of new or exacerbated participation barriers
- More choice and ability to cater programmes to individual university needs and resource available
- Retention, expansion and strengthening of existing event categories
- University hosted where applicable

Event Categories

In order to ensure that a high standard of events are delivered and maintained under the UTSNZ banner, and to monitor the success or otherwise of current and/or potential inter-tertiary events, UTSNZ has established a set of criteria to assist in the selection and evaluation of events under two key event categories.

UTSNZ’s two event categories are:

1. National Tertiary Championship Events
2. Tertiary Challenge Events

In 2021, the following events programme has been confirmed:

1. National Tertiary Championships (Shield Events*, WUG/WUC/UWC selection*)

- ❖ University Rowing Championship**
- ❖ National Tertiary 3x3 Championship**
- ❖ National Tertiary Futsal Championship**
- ❖ National Tertiary Volleyball Championship*
- ❖ National Tertiary Badminton Championship**
- ❖ National Tertiary Ultimate Championship*
- ❖ National Tertiary 5x5 Championship*
- ❖ National Tertiary Netball Championship*

National Tertiary Championship events will be strategically aligned with UTSNZ objectives and performance based. National Tertiary Championships will be delivered in partnership with NSOs who have a formal MoU in place with UTSNZ and where they form part of the NSOs competitions pathway. Aligned to New Zealand selection for a FISU World University Games, World University Championship or University World Cup event, and selected events will attribute points to the National Tertiary Championship Shield.

Tertiary Challenge Events (physical, regional, virtual – UWC qualification*)

Physical

- ❖ Tertiary Challenge – Swimming
- ❖ Tertiary Challenge – Beach Volleyball
- ❖ Tertiary Challenge - Hockey 5s
- ❖ Tertiary Challenge - Rugby Sevens*
- ❖ Tertiary Challenge – Football*

Virtual

- ❖ Tertiary Challenge - Esports
- ❖ Tertiary Challenge - Virtual Rowing
- ❖ Tertiary Challenge - Virtual Athletics
- ❖ Tertiary Challenge - Virtual Swimming

Tertiary Challenge events will be coordinated by UTSNZ, in partnership with sporting organisations, universities, external event providers and/or not for profit organisations with strategies in place to attract the tertiary student demographic. Events may be national or regional and provide a more 'pick and choose' menu depending upon the interests and resources of each university. Aligned to FISU University World Cups and qualification events. All physical Challenge Events will offer a national title, medals and perpetual shield.

Rationale for re-categorisation

The above proposal will see a number of sports and events re-categorised and/or modified.

As highlighted in the initial UTSNZ Business Case, it was always anticipated that the exact and future structure of inter tertiary sporting competitions would need to be adaptable and would emerge and evolve over time.

Remaining relevant and engagement of students is of critical importance to the longer-term viability and success of any inter-tertiary competition. It makes sense to not set down any hard and fast rules that limit participation or tertiary institution commitment.

The broadening and re-categorisation of events ensures that both performance and participation aspirations of students are better met and helps UTSNZ to continue to achieve growth.

The two categories within the programme also provides individual universities more choice according to their own needs, interests and resources.

All events remain competitive, and the alignment of the FISU events programme (WUG, WUC, UWC) to both Championship and Challenge events helps retain the prestige and importance of both categories.