



Women and Sport at University

In September 2009 WSFF delivered a workshop at the annual BUCS conference. This fact sheet captures some of the key elements of the presentation and the discussion that took place.

When it comes to women's participation in sport it is amongst students that the highest levels are seen, however, the statistics are still well below those for men; with 41% of female students never taking part in any exercise.

There is a clear need for policies and programmes to be developed that will encourage women to become more active and to better understand what prevents higher levels of participation.

The workshop session was used to explore what different institutions wanted to do to get women more active, the barriers to this and how these might be overcome from both a strategic and delivery point of view.

- For there to be buddy schemes developed to encourage more women to participate. (64% of women would exercise more if they had a friend to do it with – Creating a Nation of Active Women, WSFF 2008)
- The beginners should be better targeted and catered for
- For a more customer orientated approach to be taken to university sport for it to appeal more to women
- That there is a shift in the weighting of points in terms of BUCS to encourage women's teams and participation

Broadly, there are two different types of barrier to participation: practical barriers and psychological barriers. Practical barriers include the types of activity available, cost of participation and flexibility of timing. The psychological barriers include low body confidence and a belief that sporty, or even fit, women are neither feminine nor aspirational.

(Sweat in the City Project Report 2009)

Vision for women's sport at university

- Provision of a wider range of activities that appeal more to women. Recognising that 6 out of 10 women prefer exercise to sport
- That there is equality of provision and opportunity and policies in place to ensure this
- That there are 50/50 participation targets and appropriate resource is allocated to make this happen
- For there to be greater recognition/ profile / promotion of women's sporting achievements
- Greater unity between the men's and women's teams and a more joined up approach

Barriers to realising this vision

It was evident from the discussion that there are a number of factors preventing women becoming more involved in sport at university, Many of these related to perceptions of what sport at university would be like although some were more practical. Included were;

- Stereotypes and negative images of women who play sport and social conditioning from and early age
- The initiation/drinking culture of university sport
- Negative prior experiences of sport e.g. at school
- Body image and confidence to participate
- Not having anyone to exercise with

- Inappropriate/ inadequate facilities
- No recognition of the fact that women may have different requirements from sport that men e.g. social aspect, style of coaching provision etc.
- Current membership systems often require long terms of commitment
- Sport can be perceived as cliquey
- Inability of institutions to react to fashion and provide what women want e.g. street dance sessions
- Distribution of resources in universities is often skewed towards the elite end, leaving recreational provision under resourced.
- Share good practice between female sports clubs
- Increase the focus on the provision of recreational sport .Encourage clubs to be welcoming and to provide taster sessions for prospective members
- Ensure that the Athletic Union promotes recreation as well as competitive sports teams

Implementing policies, programmes and initiatives to address issues relating to women's participation in sport will take commitment from institutions, their athletics unions, sports clubs and individuals.

For additional information and ideas we recommend that you look at some of our other fact sheets. They cover a range of issues including barriers to participation for women and girls, how can sports clubs attract and retain women, Muslim women in sport and the player pathway for women and girls. If you cannot find the information that you are looking for, please contact info@wsff.org.uk

You may also be interested in the Sweat in the City project (2009) for hints and tips around women's motivations to exercise and ideas on getting them more active.

http://www.wsff.org.uk/docs/SitC_Report.pdf

WSFF are always on the lookout for examples of good practice, if you know of a project that you think delivers well for women and girls let us know about it and we will turn the best into case-studies and promote them on our website.

Please email info@wsff.org.uk

Potential solutions

Given the barriers identified, the workshop then focused on how these might be overcome.

- Targeted recruitment campaigns
- More cohesive approach towards attracting female participants across a variety of sports
- Better quality coaching
- Single sex sessions
- Specific marketing that is aimed at women and encouraging them to participate
- More consideration of when and where training sessions take place to ensure accessibility
- Greater consideration should be given to understanding different groups and their needs e.g. mature students
- Measures taken to address the drinking/ initiation culture of university Sport England
- More positive promotion of the benefits of sport to your health
- Greater use of ambassadors and role models to inspire others to participate and to raise the profile of sportswomen
- Take a more customer focused approach, paying greater consideration to the quality of experience enjoyed by the participant
- Consider offering promotions or special offers to get people more interested – learning from gyms and fitness providers

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