Sheffield Hallam University

Interpreting university sport policy in England: seeking a purpose in turbulent times?

BRUNTON, Julie <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5808-0168> and MACKINTOSH, C. I.

Interpreting university sport policy in England: Seeking a purpose in turbulent times?

J.A. Brunton*

Department of Sport, Nottingham University Ningbo, China, 199 Taikang East Road, Zhejiang, China.

C.I. Mackintosh

Faculty of Business and Law, Department of Management, Manchester Metropolitan University,

Manchester, UK.

Abstract:

Given the fundamental change in political landscape of current higher education in England, it is timely to (re)consider the purpose of university sport and its fit with national sports policy. This research investigates the purpose of university sport; how university sport fits with national sport strategies, if at all; and whether universities and sport policy are capitalising on Higher Education (HE) sport. An interpretivistic public policy analysis was carried out using eight semi-structured interviews with senior leaders of sport within universities in one region of the north of England. In addition, documentary analysis was examined. Outcomes illustrate the changed landscape for university sport in England with the key purpose of sport focusing on wider student experience; to engage students in sport and contribute to enhancing student recruitment, retention, satisfaction, mental health and graduate employability. However, there were mixed views as to whether senior university leaders were fully aware of the extent of the role of sport. Strategic drivers were more internal than external although universities recognised the value of working in a symbiotic relationship with internal and external stakeholders. Recommendations are offered for university leaders and sport policy makers on how to better capitalise on sport in England and beyond.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Introduction

Given the fundamental political change in landscape of universities in England, and globally, in recent years (British Council 2012, HM Government 2013, OECD 2014, Universities UK 2015) it is timely to consider the purpose of university sport and where the university sector fits within national sport policy. This work is particularly timely given what are considered to be turbulent times in England with recent political changes bringing about a major reduction in government funding to the Higher Education (HE) sector, a significant rise in student fees in 2012, the impact from BREXIT and uncertainty around political party leadership that bring into question major issues such as student fees, global mobility and research funding (Burnett 2016, Business, Innovation and Skills [BIS] 2011). Furthermore, the rise in tuition fees has brought questions around value for money to students and the government that led to the first Teaching Excellence Framework in England (BIS 2016). Providing an outstanding student experience is a service that sport is a key part of and has been inextricably linked to student satisfaction, where service quality is seen as a precursor of satisfaction (Douglas, McClelland and Davies 2008). Likewise, student satisfaction has become a key metric discussed within the Teaching Excellence Framework (BIS 2016). Given the lack of financial stability for many universities in England, with forecasts for 2018-19 signalling trends of financial uncertainty (Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE] 2016), it makes sense to identify the critical areas of significance and to take full advantage from that service. The evidence to substantiate the use of university sport to support university strategy however, is limited this is the first such paper to examine this sphere of policy.

Equally, how national sport policy is intended to work with the university sector to achieve its' ambitions is also timely given the recent changes in government and national sports strategy (HM Government 2015, Sport England 2016). British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) is the lead body for HE sport in Britain, who work closely with Sport England, the lead body for sport in England, therefore, this paper considers all such key strategies in relation to this sector.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Research exploring university sport policy is scant in the UK (Groves et al. 2012, Roberts et al. 2015). A rare applied exception to this is the relatively recent publication of the Active Universities evaluation report (Sport England 2014) that began to examine patterns of HE student participation and the role and importance of sport in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In contrast, there has been a consistent growth in recent years in HE sport research conducted predominantly in North America, this has largely focused on using sport and campus recreation to help with retention, social bonding, sense of campus community and student satisfaction (Belch et al. 2001, Elkins et al. 2011, Hains 2001, Henchy 2013, Lewis et al. 2001, Lindsey and Sessoms 2006, Hall 2006, Miller et al. 2011, Moffit 2010). Very little of this body of work is related to sport policy or politics, neither empirically nor conceptually. The same applies to wider research undertaken globally, where the focus tends to be on 'active campus' patterns of behaviour in diverse student populations in Greece (Tsigilis et al. 2007; Tsigilis et al. 2009), Hong Kong (Chung, Liu and Chen 2013), Turkey (Sarac and McCullick 2017), Iran (Mirsafian, Doczi and Mohamadinejad 2014) and Nigeria (Shehu 2000).

The extent to which sport is being used as a vehicle to help achieve core aspects of university strategy is unknown. This gap in understanding remains a key motivation for this study. Many universities in England are focusing on enhancing the overall student experience or student life as a relatively new area of explicit core work cited as a key theme within strategic plans, in addition to focusing on teaching and research (Universities UK 2015, BIS 2016). Sport is often heard anecdotally to help enhance the student experience (Roberts, Reeves and Ryrie 2015). Sport is however, not always explicitly mentioned within university strategic plans and not all universities have a sports strategy. This makes it more difficult for those in positions of leadership and management in university sport to fully capitalise on sport. This then begs the question around the purpose, role and interpretation(s) of university sport policy by key policy actors in HE.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

From the student's perspective, sport is seen to be important in England when 85% report that they would like to do more sport in the next 12 months and a third intended to do so (Sport England 2015), recognising that it is well known that intention does not necessarily lead to behaviour change. Given the size of the HE sector, the potential for using sport to help achieve the wider community health and physical activity agenda is substantial and one not to undervalue. In 2015-2016 there were around 2.28 million students registered to study at the 163 HEIs in the United Kingdom (UK) (Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA] 2017), including both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Considering the ambitions of the national sport strategy in England (HM Government 2015) to decrease inactivity and use sport as a key contributing factor to increase overall physical activity levels, how the university sector is seen to fit within this strategic plan, poses complex questions.

National Sport Policy and University Sport in England

BUCS has seen significant changes in policy over their existence of nearly 100 years of university sport competition. With that, the purpose of university sport has changed noticeably over its history (BUCS 2017a). In England, this can be seen clearly when looking at the changes to BUCS strategies. The developments more recently are seen within the most recent strategic plans where there is a broader agenda than inter-varsity sport competition that was once the main focus, to one that widens the definition and aims of university sport. In the strategy period 2011-2015 sport was to focus on competition, participation, and performance, with objectives of getting more people playing and taking part in physical activity as well as improving the quality of the student and staff experience in sport offered through intra-mural sports programmes, in addition to a focus on the provision of competitions, regional, national and international sport. In 2013 a new BUCS Sport Development Strategy for England 2013-17 was produced that recognised also the government white paper Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System (BIS 2011), with the focus for institutions to deliver a high-quality student experience (BUCS 2017b), this was subsequently followed by a further strategy update in 2015-18 (BUCS 2017b) with the headline being: 'The Best University Sport Experience in the World' is the vision for the next BUCS strategy.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

The most recent national sports strategy in England is *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation* (HM Government 2015). The purpose of the strategy is to engage more people in sport with success being redefined to measure five core policy outcomes: physical wellbeing; mental wellbeing; individual development; social and community development; and economic development. Here the focus is "how to measure success more effectively than in the past, how to reflect the complexity of what sport can deliver and how to ensure government works in a more joined-up way." (HM Government 2015, p. 8). Funding is now intended to be directed to help support the achievement of these outcomes with the aim for cross-governmental departments and organisations to work more together, such as, sport with public health and the role of sport in physical activity. The intention is to distribute funding to focus on: "those people who tend not to take part in sport, including women and girls, disabled people, those in lower socio-economic groups and older people" (HM Government 2015, p.10).

The latest Sport England strategy aims to help deliver the government strategy and aims to engage more people who are inactive, with a particular focus on children and young people in sport, helping those who are already active to continue to stay active as well as focusing on the inequalities of participation in sport (Sport England 2016). The role of HE has only a brief mention in both national sports strategies, however, the strategy Sporting Futures does not take a specific settings approach that may account for this. It is recognised however, that specific inclusion of universities within a strategy does not necessarily mean an increase in funding to that sector will follow, equally the lack of mention of a setting does not necessarily preclude funding to this area either. UK Sport 2013-17 Business Plan has a mission to work in partnership to lead sport in the UK to World Class Success (UK Sport 2013, p. 6). There is also no obvious mention of universities as a partner within their plan even though ironically, many Olympic athletes are university students.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Much has been written about sport policy in England around key delivery partners such as County Sport Partnerships (Mackintosh 2011, Philpotts et al. 2011) schools (Mackintosh 2014, Mackintosh and Liddle 2015, Griggs and Ward 2013), local authority sport units (Bloyce et al. 2008)) and voluntary community sport clubs (Harris et al. 2009, Harris and Houlihan 2014). Reference to sport policy and practice delivery partnerships with higher education in this body of academic literature is minimal. However, this article is the start of a movement to explore the role of universities as part of this infrastructure of community sport delivery and its decision makers as political actors engaged in interpreting and reconstructing sport policy. Furthermore, whether universities are influenced by national sports policy to help guide their focus of work is yet to be explored. The gap in current understanding is something that findings from this paper aim to contribute towards and influence wider government policy.

There are many potential competing agendas and stakeholders for the leaders and managers of university sport and active recreation, such as, increasing student sports participation to contribute to raising activity levels of the nation, supporting the agenda around mental health, and supporting elite sport (DoH 2011, HM Government 2015, Sport England 2016, UK Sport 2013) in addition to supporting the universities' own internal agendas, as illustrated in Table 1.

HE is now funded primarily via tuition fees, where the costs are shared between students and taxpayers through income-contingent student loans (BIS 2016). The government in England regulates tuition fees, student loans and the research assessment and teaching reviews, as evident within Table 1. For the most part, universities in England are not answerable to anyone for their provision of sport, only to their Board of Governors or for those receiving external grants such as from Sport England where recently two rounds of funding were available for universities to bid for funds (Sport England 2014, 2015). In such cases, those universities holding grants have a commitment to realising targets set out in their funding bids guided by the conditions set by external funders. Aside from this, the purpose of university sport remains the concern of universities themselves.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Table 1: An overview of priorities for universities and national sports policy in England

Primary areas of university strategy and metrics	Core areas of National Sport Policy
Strategic priorities (Universities UK 2013): Education Research Innovation Civic Engagement	**BUCS: (BUCS 2017b)** Competition Participation Performance Student Experience
Key University Metrics: **Teaching Excellence Framework (BIS 2016):** Recognise and reward high quality in: Teaching Quality Learning Environment Student Outcomes and Learning Gain Key metrics: Continuation rates Student satisfaction Graduate Employability **Research Excellence Framework (Universities UK 2017):** Research excellence Key metrics: Outputs and Impact (In review and consultation at time of writing)	**Sport England (Sport England 2016):** More people engaged in sport; Support for the Sector More inactive people in sport, with a focus on children and young people; Those already active to continue to stay active; Focusing on inequalities of participation **English Government Sports Strategy (HM Government 2015):** Engage more people in sport, targeting minority populations Five core policy outcomes: Physical wellbeing Mental wellbeing Individual development Social and community development Economic development **UK SPORT (2013)** Work in partnership to lead sport in the UK to World Class Success Success in both Olympic & Paralympic Games post hosting; UK as a leading host of major international sporting events; NGBs to be recognised within sport nationally and internationally.

Education, research, innovation and civic engagement are primary aims of UK universities, as seen in Table 1 with recruitment, student engagement and many other factors supporting the achievement of these aims (UK Universities 2013). Furthermore, the emergence of the Teaching Excellence Framework heightens retention, satisfaction and graduate employability as key metrics (BIS 2016). If the purpose of sport is to support such core areas of university strategy, the extent that this is being

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

achieved is unknown. The different priorities identified in Table 1 suggest that the purpose of university sport and its alignment to university strategy, will be determined by the senior leaders and, or, sports leaders and managers at each university. Furthermore, what determines this priority for senior leaders, is perhaps the value of sport seen by the senior leaders themselves. Table 1 clearly illustrates that the key drivers for university sport are different to key stakeholders responsible for national sports policies. Whether university sport fits with, or is influenced by national sports strategies, is likely to vary by the nature of universities and communities they serve in relation to how all stakeholders work together. There is a need and opportunity for universities to demonstrate the role and value of sport; but there is also a need for all interested parties to know about this role and be clear how to fully exploit all agendas to create a mutually beneficial state. To ensure the best use of resources and from a cost-benefit perspective to the HE sector, it is important to have a clear rationale for university sport in order to enable all key stakeholders, including universities themselves, to better capitalise on sport. This paper aims to investigate this key purpose and whether universities are considered to be capitalising on sport as a vehicle for supporting both university strategy and national sports policy.

Research Questions

The research therefore, seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the purpose and role of university sport, as seen by sport leaders and managers within the HE sector of England?

2. How do university sport agendas fit with, or are influenced by national sport policy and strategies?

3. What opportunities are there for future development of the HE sport policy sector in England?

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Theoretical framework

This research is underpinned by a social constructivist ontology and an epistemological position located within the critical interpretivist public policy analysis paradigm. As researchers of sport public policy this study is located alongside what some have called the 'interpretivist turn' in public policy analysis (Bevir and Rhodes 2004, Bevir and Rhodes 2006, Hay 2011, Wagenaar 2011). Here, we agree with the call by Houlihan et al. (2009, p. 4) to explore the "established, emerging or implicit propositions" within current sport policy. This is aligned with what Smith and Sparkes (2013) refer to as a social reality that is socially constructed consisting of fluid, multiple subjective realities. They argue that researchers in this sphere are ultimately interested in interpreting the interpretations of others from the perspective of the voices of participants. In this sense, they highlight the emergence of understanding and knowledge coming from interactions between investigator and respondent/participant. Consequently, we make no use of a single unified, overarching theoretical framework or model. It is through the use of an interpretivist policy analysis lens that we will engage with the perspectives, constructs and meanings held by policy actors that inhabit the HE sport policy in England. In this way, the paper is located within fluid discussions of public policy agenda setting, interpretations, implementation and policy reconstruction/re-interpretation. We acknowledge the complexity of the policy process (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 2003, Houlihan 2005), which, when combined with the minimal prior analysis of HE sport policy in England, requires a grounded, inductive empirical investigation. Furthermore, Palmer (2013) has called for more interpretivist analysis of sport policy. Likewise, Houlihan et al. (2009) argued for the potentially "rich insights into the policy process" (p. 4) such social constructivist frameworks can offer. We are responding to this call, in the specific sector of the under-researched sphere of HE sport policy in England.

We are influenced here by Rhodes and Bevir's suggestion to centre on a drive to recover the beliefs of policy actors (2012), in our case, senior sport leaders and managers in HE institutions within one case study region. Of particular significance here is how the limits of the narratives, rationalities and

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

expertise can, and do, inform public policy (Bevir and Rhodes 2010). Our core focus, as recognised by Yanow (2000) and Fischer (2003) then becomes the expression of social meanings of policy actors. It is the assumptions and discrepancies underlying policy and political actors expressed views that offers key insights. Fischer (2003) conceptualises such deep-rooted policy leanings as 'storylines'. We intend to examine such 'storylines' in this empirically grounded study.

Methodology

Given our research philosophy previously outlined, methods have been chosen and designed to engage with research subjects that employ 'the emic' (entering into) perspective through quality, texture and process not cause and effect (Smith and Sparkes 2013). Here, crucially, we aim to not arrive with social scientific concepts to impose on the research subjects, but instead to "firstly determine whether the social actors have such a concept without necessarily being able to explicitly identify or explain it (Fischer 2003, p.142). In attempting to examine the storylines of public policy in HE sport (Fischer 2003, Green 2006a) we have used our face-to-face interview setting to provide an opportunity to build a strong contextual understanding through accessing local knowledge, policies and practices rendering local actor meanings of their beliefs, fears, ideas and interpretations (Yanow, 2000). We aimed to build 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of meanings and beliefs through confronting the constructed policy ideas of those we interviewed. We drew upon the broad interpretive methodological position of Fisher (2003) and Bevir and Rhodes (2010) aiming to both set the actors behaviour and viewpoint within the context we were exploring, examine meanings they drew upon and outline the actions that emerge from these interactions. In employing in-depth interviews we therefore explore the social meanings, ideas and constructs of public policy that elite actors in the HE sector draw upon, readily negotiate and reconstruct (Bevir and Rhodes 2010). We also try through our thematic analysis to build a rich insight into 'short hand constructions' (Fischer 2003, p.86) that moves beyond assumed storylines which, again, as Fischer argues "serve to position social actors and institutional practices in ongoing, competing narratives" (2003, p.87). It is this positioning, congruence and at times conflict that we have tried to identify and draw upon in our findings.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

This study used eight semi-structured interviews at universities within one region of the north of England. This covered 80% of the universities within this region totalling 10 universities. It is recognised that variations will exist between universities within regions of England. However, the aim of this interpretivistic research project is to develop a rich understanding of one region. The aim was not to generate a 'representative' sample, instead interviews covered the majority of one large region in the UK and included all types and size of universities within the UK (UKUNI.net 2017). Staff interviewed within this region, were those who held responsibility to lead university sport at each university and who were willing to be interviewed on the subject. The term sport was used here to include all aspects of university sport, including active recreation, intramural sport, formal competition that includes club sport and national league games or competition. Each interview lasted approximately 1 h. In addition, documentary analysis was carried out to consider the evidence of how universities link to government and national sports policy. The strategic plan of each university was analysed alongside key strategies for sport and higher education sport in England discussed earlier. Qualitative content analysis was used, being one of many qualitative methods currently available for analysing data and interpreting its meaning (Schreier 2012). It was used as a means of describing and analysing the data. Key areas of thematic analysis included: 1) forming categories to identify the purpose for each university, grouping areas in common; 2) systematically identifying any mention of sport, physical activity, and health in university strategy; 3) systematically identifying any link and explicit mention of university sport in national sport policies (aside that relating to BUCS 2015-18).

A purposive sampling technique was used. Universities ranged from those classified as being: New Universities; Plate Glass and Red Brick Universities (UKUNI.net 2017); with student populations from 3000-35000. Participants were e-mailed to invite them to take part within the research, reinforcing that it was a voluntary process. Interviews were conducted at a time and location convenient to each participant and to ensure participants were at ease to speak freely on the subject. An interview topic guide was developed based on a literature review of existing sources on higher education sport policy

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

focused on themes including: background in HE delivery and wider sport policy, current university strategic priorities in sport, wider collaborations in community and elite sport, programmes in sport development in HE, approaches to navigating change, and responses to national sport policy. Ethics approval was obtained prior to data collection. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Table 2 contains an anonymised outline of the interview respondents and researched universities.

Table 2: Detail of HE sport policy interview respondents and universities

Respondent	University	Size (1000, s) Small (<10), Mid-Sized (11-19) and large (20 – 35)	Key area of responsibility and Type of HE
Participant 1, Male	University 1	Large	Leader and manager of university sport; Red Brick
Participant 2, Male	University 2	Mid-Size	Leader and manager of university sport; Plate Glass
Participant 3, Male	University 3	Large	Leader and manager of university sport; New University
Participant 4, Female	University 4	Large	Leader and manager of university sport; New University
Participant 5, Female	University 5	Large	Leader and manager of university sport; New University
Participant 6, Male	University 6	Large	Leader and manager of university sport; Red Brick
Participant 7, Male	University 7	Small	Academic; Leader and manager of University Sport; New University
Participant 8, Male	University 8	Mid-Size	Leader and manager of university sport; Plate Glass

This project employed thematic analysis as the core methodological tool of analysis, identified as a particularly useful tool to inform policy development (Braun and Clarke 2006, Darko and Mackintosh 2015, Smith and Sparkes 2013). In this process we tried to move away from the main verbatim

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

transcripts towards finer units or codes of data then to consider patterns and themes that emerged from this process. This style of analysis has a belief in the power of 'rich description' (Geertz, 1973) as an interpretive tool to move beyond the assumed values and descriptions provided by the research respondents. Transcripts were analysed using coding techniques (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). The process of coding the data was an on-going research process throughout the primary data collection phase which aimed to develop 'analysable units' and create labels and tags to attach to the raw data. As suggested by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) this effectively fragments the data and allows data to be organised and managed around key themes. It has been suggested by Smith and Sparkes (2013) that such techniques do have clear weaknesses including, sometimes ironing out nuances and contradictions and a lack of engagement with what they call the fine-grained use of 'talk'. We attempted to acknowledge this and consider areas of subtle nuance and contradiction methodologically and embrace them within the wider coding process.

Findings and Discussion

HE as an emerging public policy concern: Sport supporting HE 'core strategy'

The diversity of universities within this analysis, as detailed earlier in the paper, is important to note when considering the purpose of sport for all universities given the potential differences in overall strategic plans. With the increase in student fees and a greater perceived value being placed on students gaining 'value for money', documentary analysis showed that there was little difference in foci across the universities, with all in various ways addressing: research excellence and teaching; student experience; globalisation or internationalisation; civic contribution or an external focus; attracting and developing staff; and a focus on having an excellent campus and resources. Additionally, all universities addressed the employability agenda although it was only identified as a core theme in one university strategic plan, outside of this it was detailed as part of various themes. Sport, however, was only explicitly mentioned within one university strategic plan leaving the university staff to see how best to align this activity to university business. Although, it was referred to indirectly via provision of a

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

healthy campus to support student and staff wellbeing; investment in sports facilities; and support to student's active participation in university life with reference to clubs and societies. However, all staff interviewed said that they aligned sport to the student experience, suggesting this is where they see the priority for sport regardless of whether it is within the strategic plan or not. In addition to the student experience, all sport leaders expressed a wider view that they were here to support core university business in a range of areas such as around recruitment and retention 'storylines' (Fischer, 2003):

I think we're here to support the university in its main core business. Increasingly here to support, or I'm trying to convince people in the university, that we're here to attract students to this university. But, when they're here that we give people a great experience really, while they're at university. [University 1]

For many years probably up until around about six years ago, we've always done it as a social entity rather than anything else…now one of the key elements and purpose of sport is about that sort of camaraderie with students which you know supports longer term achievement and very much retention as well. [University 2]

I think we're here to exist to support the university in its strategy of recruiting students keeping them here and giving them a good experience when they're here. Whether that be playing intra-mural, going to Badminton with friends, or whether it's trying to get into the Olympic squad. Creating that sense of community and really enhancing that experience while they're here. [University 3]

So our remit really is to consider the student experience first and foremost. [University 4]

When probed what the leaders of sport felt the purpose was to senior university leaders, there were mixed views although most felt there was a degree of support for sport, particularly where there was a personal interest in sport, but the full extent of the work in sport was not known:

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

There's still a lot of people that still think we're here for people to turn up on a Wednesday afternoon and kick a ball around. I don't think they realise the extent of work that we do, from social sport programmes and getting people involved, right up to supporting elite athletes and attracting elite athletes to this city. I don't think they understand the breadth of work that we do now, within the city, to influence the city and how we're involved in that really…If you ask the Vice Chancellor all of that, I'm not sure he'd be aware that it is lots more than just turning up and playing sport. [University 1]

We had a Pro Vice Chancellor at the time who was sporty, and very much saw that we needed a strategy for sport. So in a roundabout way, he was pro, he actually said "write up this strategy." I had to then go back to the gatekeeper and he stumped it at that end. [University 4]

One university expressed a view where student sport and associated behaviours with drinking and socialising did not always help their cause and periodically came to the fore. This point is supported by an emerging body of academic research in this area drawing attention to the negative side effects or hidden rituals of sports club membership for students (Groves et al. 2012, Partington et al. 2013). This work is embryonic but challenges the notion of an assumed positive relationship between sport participation and health and wellbeing in HE that others have historically suggested (Byl 2002, Ellis et al. 2002). However, beyond this the value of sport was seen particularly with helping to instrumentally support graduate employability and marketing the university:

I think there is an understanding like you say, about things like the employability side of it. It's strong in terms of I think they see the value that you can get from playing sport and being in sport however there's the other side to sport that also rears its head here. As you know, which holds us back a little bit, the social side of it, with the behaviour at times of the students. Which obviously doesn't help. But generally I think they do see the value. [University 3]

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

> I think I've got a lot more buy in now, certainly the Director of Marketing is very focused on sport. Very much around recruitment, but he sees the value of the effect sport can have on the university community, and in terms of creating that sense of belonging. [University 3]

Here universities are using a common branding across all sports teams by using the university name in the title of their teams, such as "Team X" [X = university name] to provide this feeling around belonging to the university via a university sports team. Some universities were also using this sports branding more widely across other areas of university business.

Operationalising HE sport policy within University structures: a view from senior leaders

Some of the issues around how sport was seen by senior leaders was felt to be to do with the line management and location of where they were based within the university, where 75% of the universities researched housed university sport under commercial services within an estates (responsible for campus facilities) area. This moves the debate beyond existing understanding of the role of HE in providing elite sport facilities (Thorpe and Collins 2010) as vehicles for talent development and political gain (Green 2006b, Dennis and Grix 2000) or sport science hubs to support elite athletes (Collins and Bailey 2015). This is evident from the beliefs of one sport leadership figure who stated in relation to this more nuanced understanding of sport policy in HE:

> My Line Manager, basically her background is cleaning. She openly admits she actually knows nothing about sport at all… they're responsible for us, but generally the aims and objectives are set by myself, and I set the strategic agenda for sport. It's a little bit frustrating at times because we write Sports Strategies but then we're told "we're not really interested in your Sports Strategy because we've got our own Estates Strategy and you just need to sit under that." [University 4]

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Here the issue was that the university sport leader wrote the sport strategy aligning it to the strategic plan, falling predominantly under the student experience area, while their administrative home and line management was under estates, leaving the feeling of a lack of support or interest in sport.

The one university that did not specifically refer to sport being about supporting university business came from the one university where sport was led by an academic member of staff with a subject specialism in physical activity and health. This was not to say that the university was not promoting sport for the student experience, as they did and explicitly referred to this, it was more the use of the term 'business' that was not liked:

> I can say with hand on heart that every penny that we raise through income generating activity gets ploughed back into sport. I don't think universities are a business, but let's not have that philosophical debate. [University 7]

It was not surprising to hear more of the academic argument from this participant around wanting to instil sport in students to help with lifelong participation (Thorpe and Collins 2010, Mackintosh and Liddle 2015), that would also fit the national sports strategy objectives:

> So one of the things that we're trying to avoid is the tyranny of the 'either, or', elite or recreational sport, recognising that what we needed to do was to help people be physically active when they were 50 and 60 and taking that long-term view. Recognising that at this point in their life span, many people who are students will play competitive sport, but later on they'll migrate to other types of physical activity. So what we've tried to do is to present a range of opportunities for students, which gives them an experience on both sides, to get a joined up approach. [University 7]

This was however, the minority view, potentially due to where the administrative home of sport sat in an academic area versus the norm within the commercial services or other non-academic areas.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

When considering the delivery of the type of sport, all universities offered the full range of sport from students just turning up to play with no commitment, regular informal non-competitive and competitive activities, to more competitive team sports within the BUCS league system. Furthermore, all universities aimed to support elite sport in various amounts where students already played sport outside of university life at national and international level. In addition, to sport being housed within the university, most universities had the Student Union also delivering sport, in some cases without harmony: …the Student Union …it's almost like they compete with us. [University 4]

Two universities referred to the need to be outward facing within their purpose and provide provision for community sport predominantly to build reputation of the institutions:

So it's about offering the students an experience first and foremost. It's about staff engagement, about having healthy staff, about having staff that have the opportunity to participate in exercise and activity. Then there is a real steer for us to be outwardly facing, to link in as I say through these partnership pathways, schools, elite sports clubs and organisations. [University 5]

Beyond the internal part of sport's role to the organisation, I think we also see sport as a means by which we can engage our community and play an effective role in the city and beyond. So it plays both internally and externally. [University 6]

I think now we're in a kind of very different market with much more of a competitive situation for students. Universities like XXX and other Russell Group universities are now becoming more aware of the importance of its external reputation and the consequence of that is things like sport and the way we integrate with the city and our national profile having elite athletes who are doing very well in the Olympics, you know all those sorts of things add a useful favour and are becoming more and more important. [University 6]

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

It seems there are parallels here with HE investment in sport and that of government's instrumental financing of elite sport (Grix and Carmichael 2012). But, the nuanced interpretation is very specific to the policy problems specific to this sub sector of sport policy.

The interpretation of HE sport with external agencies and wider sport policy community

As already uncovered, in this region alone there is a considerable volume of activity in sport policy on-going within the eight HEIs. But, depth of understanding is limited. All universities referred to some aspect of how universities worked within their communities or sat on external sports boards, but this mostly came from a position of seeing the wider university picture around seeing the need to help with recruitment. Or, it might be giving access to their facilities that in turn provided a spin-off to income generation or potential income through future student recruitment, as illustrated below:

> I think increasingly now our focus over the next five years is going to be around the community as well. I think it's not just students, it's not just staff, it's about the local people around us and the schools and everyone else that we can influence possibly, to come to university in the long term. [University 1]

> I can do more and I can offer more through working with NGBs or County Sports Partnerships, I can offer more student opportunities to go and volunteer, to get qualified. [University 1]

One university mentioned their link to wider sports strategy in terms of a possible influence:

> But obviously we're taking influence from the wider agenda, what's happening in sport. From students, from customers, from staff. That's the thing that's shaping, with trying to have an alignment to the universities' strategy. So obviously we're not doing things differently or against. That's currently where we are, we've just been aligning stuff to the university, we've waited for Sport England strategy to come out, so we're just aligning ourselves now with that. [University 1]

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Here the university sport leader stated that they were aligning themselves to national strategy and later revealed the symbiotic nature of the drivers where potential areas of national policy overlap. For example, the drive for external partnerships and involvement of university sport staff on external sports boards came from a purpose to benefit the university, such as, to seek work placements for students or to gain insight about potential external sources of funding that they could bid for. This conversely fits national sports strategy by the university sector offering students to work in a voluntary capacity or to engage more students in sport and active recreation through external funding, meeting the national health agenda. This public policy contradiction is something we have sought to acknowledge rather than smooth out in our thematic analysis (Smith and Sparkes 2013).

Just one university sport leader mentioned more of a national sports policy view of wanting to enable sports students to continue sport and physical activity for health reasons as well as for sports performance, for those students with a talent in sport:

> I think there's two angles. There is this pathway for school pupils, and then seamless through further education, higher education. So it doesn't feel like they finish their school sport element, but what do they do in a university and how do they fit in? Then I think ultimately there is this performance sport element, which is potentially much closer to a good percentage of what we do. Which is more around how do you select the right university to go to in relation to what sport you do. I think on top of that it's making sure that the opportunities that we provide are then followed through once they graduate. [University 5]

Yet it seems universities primary aims rest, in the majority, with meeting the strategic agenda of universities rather than the national agenda for sport and raising physical activity levels. Where the majority of university sport leaders talked about engaging the external community, this was with the purpose of ultimately attracting more students or seeking for the university to gain in other ways, rather than with the primary aim of increasing sports participation or enabling talented athletes to excel. Therefore, the benefit of working externally within the wider community was recognised, but mostly

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

for the universities gain. A further example of this was the acknowledgement that a positive outcome for the university is gained when elite level students represent their university in national and international sporting events; it cannot be said that universities are influenced by elite national sports policy, more that they enjoy the benefits from gaining reputational benefits from attracting high level sports performers to their university.

Documentary analysis illustrated that the role of higher education has only a brief mention in both national sport strategies, for example, there is no mention about higher education within Sporting Future (HM Government 2015), until page 32:

> We know for example that there has been good progress in recent years in transforming the offer in Further and Higher Education which is of course welcome, but the key is for experiences there to now be better connected to the overall customer journey of young people through sport rather than just being good in each individual environment. (HM Government 2015, p.32)

However, the strategy Sporting Future does not take a specific settings approach which may account for this. The above quote infers the need for universities to help instil a lifelong involvement in sport as opposed to students just being active at their time at university. The purpose of university sport from the perspective of university sport leaders is clearly more focusing on their time during their university life rather than how they are going to specifically instil students to be active thereafter. This is not to say that this might not be a positive bi-product, but it is not the aim. Perhaps this explains the lack of reference or focus to HE sport within the national strategy if this sub-population is seen to operate outside of the wider community sport sector, having a different set of priorities. As would be expected from the lead body for British Universities and Colleges, BUCS (2017b) clearly support university sport in their strategic priorities stating a clear mission to achieve the best university sport experience in the world, aligning with the findings from the university sport leaders.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

The findings here would support the view that universities have a particular agenda and associated narratives and storylines (Fischer 2003, Wagennar 2011) with university leaders' interests being the provision of high quality teaching, learning and research with a strong focus on the wider student experience. This is critical in considering the interpretation of what sport policy means to the key policy actors in the HE sport sector in England. Where sport fits within this varies in 'presence' but as for university sport being provided to help increase national sports participation figures, this is not the view of the sport leaders in universities never mind the senior university leaders who are less likely to hold this view. University sport however, has more recently benefitted from national sports strategy from the provision of Sport England funding for HE sport. Here just under a half of English universities have benefitted from national funding with the aim of increasing the participation of the least or semi-active students in sport and active recreation (Sport England 2015). Through these funded projects universities have addressed national sports policy given their funding was externally funded specifically to meet national sport aims. Additionally, a concern noted by one university was that they had their own strategy and agenda to follow rather than being there to deliver external strategies:

> We work with lots of partners, but not here to deliver their strategies, 'because I've got my own strategy. So I engage with them but, the university has an agenda, the university has invested millions of pounds and is continuing to invest millions of pounds of its own money in sport. We're here to develop our strategy. Now your strategy coalesces with ours, and we can get economies of scale and benefit, then we'll work with you. But it's our strategy, because the money is coming from our students. So I hope that doesn't sound too aggressive, but there are some bodies and agencies who think that we're here to deliver their strategy. [University 7]

Similarly, another university felt that while they were aware of the importance of national sports strategy, that they did not have time to focus on the detail of it:

> In terms of me focusing on that I just haven't got the time. I've got enough of a job just to keep the place going and do all the things we're doing now. [University 4]

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

The key feeling was that universities and external sport partners needed work to achieve a symbiotic relationship to get the full support from all partners. Specifically, for universities, the feeling from the sport leaders was one of having a lack of time to carry out their work as well as a recognition of the amount of money that universities are investing into the development of sport, which seemed to bring the support from sport leaders that their purpose was to the university priority areas (as detailed earlier in Table 1) unless the work could suit both, the universities and external partners.

Living and working in the HE sport policy agenda: negotiating capacity and identifying a purpose

All but one university leaders of sport felt that their university was not fully capitalising on sport at the moment. The one university that did was the smallest university, as noted earlier, where sport was housed under the area of academic sport and the lead of sport at this university felt that due to the small size of university, they had less room for error therefore, were already using sport to help with recruitment, retention and other such areas:

> An organisation of this size really has to stay on top of its data and its metrics, because we don't
> have much 'wriggle room' either way. We're incredibly financially secure, like a number of small
> universities and institutions, because we pay rigorous attention to all of those metrics. Whereas if
> we have 30,000 students perhaps there is a little bit more protection there. [University 7]

Most felt that they were heading in the right direction. There was a recognition that more could be done, but most found the questions thought provoking that made them think further about what they could be doing to better capitalise on sport. Recruitment was a strategic area that was believed to be more obviously influenced by sport and recognised:

> I think we are doing okay with that, we probably could do more. I think that the recruitment team
> probably would say that sport is not a differentiator at recruitment but out of the five if they've got

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

a similar course and quite like the campuses, residencies that's a factor, sport yeah I'm sporty that's a factor. So that's the research that they're telling us. [University 6]

There was a strong feeling that universities were 'led by the evidence' to capitalise on sport, the evidence needed to show the benefits rather than trying to drive the agenda for sport without any 'hard' evidence:

> If their [Marketing Department] research is telling them we are a part of that then we need to be ready to be able to contribute, but if the research is saying it isn't then we could shout as much as we like, actually spending a lot of energy on trying to convince them that their research is wrong is probably not the right thing. [University 6]

The leaders of sport most specifically referred to their need to improve measures for sport in achieving core areas of university strategy such as helping to increase graduate employability or improve the student experience or retention. This was thought to be partly due to the lack of their own academic research knowledge of how to better evidence the work along with a lack of resource to do this. Where universities have an academic sport area this offers potential opportunities for staff to marry their research with the practice of sport development and management. There was also a recognition that most university non-academic sport departments that run university sport do not have the capability to collect the desired evidence required:

> Most university sport departments, by which I mean the non-academic side, don't have the capability to do randomised control trials. Many academic sports departments in universities of the small size, also don't have the expertise to do randomised control trials. Up until now the National Health Service has been relatively good at doing randomised control trials and Cochrane Reviews and all this stuff we're aware of, but university sport hasn't, has it? [University 7]

Similarly, there was also a recognition that the required data was difficult to collect given a lack of time, appropriate resource and difficulty to produce causal data in the university sport setting:

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Do we have the data to link it back to recruitment and retention in the sort of, and I'm not being critical, the mechanistic way that you've described? The really academic research, harsh methodology perspective is no, we don't. But that's a challenge for our next generation. Seriously, that's the next challenge for our professional area, isn't it? I can produce loads of data, and one of the things that I'm just about to start doing is looking at all of those sort of things from a statistical perspective. My hunch is, without having done all of that number crunching, that what we will see is relationships. But it will be difficult to prove causality. [University 7]

One university mentioned other areas of university strategy that sport sought to impact:

If we took student retention we've got a very comprehensive programme with counselling, so any student that is seen by a counsellor where physical activity or sport (primarily physical activity) could help with their mental wellbeing, there is a referral programme that we've got in place. That's a little example of how in the student experience context we've got little programmes where sport is playing its role. In our strategy we've got a big segment around employability and development of skills and we resource quite a lot of professional development. Two full time members of staff in sport are looking at the development of skills through sport, so to make students more employable. [University 6]

There was also reference to the greater focus of prospective students on national student satisfaction and experience surveys that is recognised by senior university leaders, with a corresponding acknowledgement of sport having a part to play in improving such survey rankings:

The Times Higher Education student experience survey explicitly includes sport. I think increasingly its [sport] being seen as a measure that we've got to get right. And so that's shifting the senior team's perception of the role of sport. [University 6]

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Clearly there are tensions and nuances in the lived experiences of those working as senior managers and leaders in the sport policy HE environment. This multiplicity of meanings and beliefs has begun to be illustrated in this study.

Conclusion

Analysis of sport policy in the HE sector in England to date has been minimal (Thorpe and Collins 2010; Roberts et al. 2015). This is the first study to specifically look at sport policy in the HE sector in England. Results from this exploratory study illustrate how these universities use sport as part of their branding and to enhance the student experience therefore, have a belief that sport can help with achieving key aspects of university strategic goals. This public policy storyline (Fischer, 2003) stands in contrast to previous findings that illustrate the negative aspects of sport activities in universities around a drinking culture, mental health and initiation ceremonies for new participants (Partington et al. 2013; Groves et al. 2012). In answering research question one: What is the purpose and role of university sport, as seen by sport leaders and managers within the higher education sector of England? - here, the sport leaders state that sport helps with a range of known university strategic areas such as enhancing the overall student experience, some aspects of mental health and retention, and supporting graduate employability. While there were a number of contextual differences that could be found between universities, for example in size, administrative home for sport and the quantity of programmes offered, this had no bearing on the purpose and role for university sport within the researched universities, given little difference in foci across the universities was found. There is no real policy evidence, however, to support the benefit of sport to these areas in the context of the HE sector specifically. This parallels other studies that have questioned the genuine evidence base for many of the supposed claims made by sport policy makers and those engaged in its implementation in England (Coalter 2007, Mackintosh 2014, Smith and Leech 2010). Regardless of the 'evidence' the majority of university leaders interviewed felt that the senior university management leaders were aware of some of the potential health, but also marketing benefits, but not necessarily the full range of opportunity that could be gained.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

It is difficult to see, however, any overt formal support for sport to be used to support key areas of the strategic plan beyond funding for sports facilities, and evidence tells us that those responsible for leading and managing sport battle for funding to support their work in addition to battling for strategic presence. This in itself is a key finding that in several cases there appears to be an 'institution first' argument and narrative presented over potential synergy with existing 'external' national sport policy. This remains a line for potential future research as to the drivers for this lack of engagement with this sub-sector of public sport policy. Likewise, relationships with partner agencies and collaborative policy actors in NGBs, CSPs and national partners could also be examined in future research avenues. Such projects would hopefully provide further insight into the nuances of lack of uptake and integration of HEIs with wider sport policy.

This is coupled with the absence of sport directly stated within strategic plans and the often weak link from the university sports strategies to university strategy. Thus, it makes it difficult to be able to justify why the sport leaders require further resources or how they are contributing to the university strategy in a direct and measurable way. From a strategic management view point, working without a strategy makes it difficult to know for both the senior leaders of universities and those working in sport, to know exactly what sports staff are doing yet alone achieving for their universities. This leaves the end result being an area of work within a university that is underutilised and in some cases undervalued and under-resourced. The narratives that emerged around whether senior leaders value university sport is an interesting one and the leaders of university sport would say that they gain support from those with a personal interest in sport more often rather than because the value of university sport is recognised per se. The role of the leaders of sport could be enhanced therefore, by more of their work given to influencing senior university leaders around the full extent of their role that could be greatly enhanced and recognised by more rigorous evidence to demonstrate the full use of sport. Here, other authors have questioned the ability of the sport development workforce to respond to genuine requirements to build evidence-based practice and policy (Mackintosh 2012).

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

In answering research question two and three: How do university sport agendas fit with, or are influenced by national sport policy and strategies? And what opportunities are there for future development of the HE sports policy sector in England? – At present there appears to be little direct fit, given there is little explicit mention of HE sport in national sports strategy as previously outlined, and conversely, there was also little mention of how HE sport contributes to achieving national sports strategy. Our evidence suggests one of parallel rather than connecting strategies. Looking at future opportunities, for national sports policy to influence the sports agenda of universities and better capitalise on this resource and opportunities in this sector, external actors for national sports policy need to have a clearer understanding of what can be described as a new and enhanced purpose of university sport. This stands in contrast to one that previously focused more on engaging students in 'sport for sports sake' where no mention was made to supporting the wider work of universities in earlier strategic plans and annual reviews (BUCS 2017b). Previously the earlier BUCS strategies focused on high performance sport with less resource given to engaging inactive students in sport where there has been an increasing shift since the partnership between Sport England and BUCS, as referred to earlier, to widening sports participation to more of the student body. BUCS are aware of the new agenda for universities as illustrated in their vision to support the wider student experience (BUCS 2017b) and in their provision of funding to help demonstrate the benefit of sport on graduate employability (Allen et al. 2013). To enable the university sector to contribute more to national government sports strategy, local delivery partners and universities need to map out how a shared purpose can be achieved to gain a mutually beneficial situation for all. Currently, there is little evidence of a substantial influence of national sports policy actors, or regional agencies on the remit of those leading university sport unless external funding has been achieved that requires those universities to meet specific objectives. In itself the lack of research in this area compared to community, school and elite sport is a potential avenue for sport policy research.

Beyond this, with the greater shift towards achieving 'value for money' for students providing a greater focus on the wider student experience, it seems universities have started to look more towards sport as a vehicle towards helping support this ambition. In this way, the changing landscape of HE, if not

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

carefully planned, may move university sport further away from national sports policy agendas around increasing inactivity for health gain. There was some evidence of sport leaders trying to support student mental health by linking with student support and counselling services to offer sports programmes but this was not always systematically happening in all universities nor was it being measured to evaluate the outcomes. Therefore, while the potential was there for universities to help support national sports policy around improving mental health and wellbeing, this would need to become a strategic priority for sport and ideally be evidenced based from institutional academic research.

These key findings aside, it is also recognised that this is a first exploratory study in one region of England. Therefore, such limitations must be recognised. Furthermore, given the nature of HE sport policy being limited in terms of linkage and synergy with national policy, wider research with partners is also an opportunity, but also, a potential limit of this study. Complementary research interviews with regional stakeholders could have also offered perspectives on the assumptions, meanings and perceptions of the universities in the region. Not accessing such external actors perhaps constrains gaining a wider understanding of the context of the sector. Finally, the study would benefit from wider national coverage and also potentially a longitudinal qualitative study component that could build an on-going picture of the changing narratives and imprints that national sport policy makes on this sector and vice versa. We also recognise that undertaking research from an interpretivistic public policy analytical stand point and the associated methodologies opens up potential critique conceptually and theoretically. We therefore also encourage researchers from other standpoints and theoretical domains to embrace the examination of and complexity of HE sport policy in England and beyond. We consider the conceptual lens useful in exploring meanings and also opening up new lines of research as we have identified. We also consider that accessing of understanding of actors individual agency, motivations and behaviour critical in moving further theory development in wider sport policy analysis. In this case we consider this case study a useful example of how this framing of a research problem can open further lines of enquiry and possibilities for other 'non-sport' policy arenas in explaining HE policy.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

The purpose of university sport has therefore, shifted in focus to help support the broader student experience that includes such areas of provision for recruitment, retention, satisfaction, mental health and graduate employability versus delivering sport to engage students in sport without the link to the wider university strategy. This research suggests that this shift is in a phase of transition therefore, sport is predominantly not clearly within strategic plans and with that universities cannot be considered to be fully capitalising on sport as one of the key mechanisms to help address this wider student experience, where previous research has shown positive outcomes as discussed earlier.

In terms of recommendations we suggest university sports strategies need to be clearly aligned to university strategies with specific action plans to include pilot studies, interventions, monitoring and evaluation; endorsed by university committees within the formal deliberative structures. Furthermore, more rigorous research is required to evidence the work of university sport across a range of measures such as recruitment, retention, graduate employability, mental health and student satisfaction that link to the national policy agendas (HM Government 2015, Sport England 2016). To achieve this, it is suggested university sport leaders would benefit from further training in strategy, influencing key stakeholders and in how to set up pilots and interventions to use sport as a vehicle to better support key university agendas. Finally, university sport leaders need to promote the work that they do more widely within their organisations working to raise awareness about the full extent of their work, particularly working with the university senior leadership teams and boards of trustees/governors. It also seems university sport leaders need to educate external sports stakeholders about the purpose of sport to universities and work together to clearly map out a mutually beneficial agenda and in that way, help to contribute more evidently to national sports policy. How university policy actors and key decision makers in the sport policy community respond to such future requirements, in the turbulent times of sport policy in England, remains to be seen.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

References

Allen, K., Bullough, S., Cole, D., Shibli, S. and Wilson, J. (2013). The impact of sport engagement on graduate employability: Final Report, Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University.

Belch, H.A., M. Gebel, and Maas, G.M. (2001). Relationship between student recreation complex use, academic performance, and persistence of first-time freshmen. *NASPA journal*, 38(2), 254-268.

Bevir, M. and Rhodes, R.A.W. (2010). *The State as Cultural Practice*, London, Routledge.

Bevir, M. and Rhodes, R.A.W. (2006). *Governance Stories*, London, Routledge.

Bevir, M. and Rhodes, R.A.W. (2004). Interpreting British Governance, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6 (2), 130-136.

Bloyce, D., Smith, A., Mead, R. and Morris, J. (2008). 'Playing the Game (Plan)': A figurational analysis of organisational change in sport development in England, *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 8(4), 359-378.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2). pp. 77-101.

British Council. (2012). *The shape of things to come: Higher education global trends and emerging opportunities to 2020*, London, British Council.

British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) (2017a). *Our History*. [online]. Available at: http://www.bucs.gov.uk. [Accessed 09 January 2017].

BUCS (2017b). *Governance*. [online]. Available at: www.bucs.org.uk. [Accessed 6 June 2017].

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Burnett, K. (20016). *Life after Brexit: what next for British universities*? Times Higher Education. June 24 2016. [online]. Available at: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/life-after-brexit-what-next-british-universities. [Accessed 4 June 2017].

Business, Innovation and Skills [BIS] (2016). *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*. [online]. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications. [Accessed 4 June 2017].

Business, Innovation and Systems [BIS] (2011). *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*. [online]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-students-at-the-heart-of-the-system--2. Accessed 4 June 2017.

Byl, J. (2002) *Intramural Recreation: A Step-by-step Guide to Creating an Effective Program*, London, Human Kinetics.

Chung, P.K., Liu, J.D. and Chen, W.P. (2013) perceived constraints on recreational sport participation: evidence from Chinese university students in Hong Kong, *World Leisure Journal,* 55 (4), 347-359.

Coalter, F. 2007. *A Wider Social Role for Sport: who's keeping the score?* London, Routledge.

Coffey, A. J. and Atkinson, P. A. (1996) *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*, London, Thousand Oaks Publishing.

Collins, D. and Bailey, R. (2015) 'Scienciness' and the allure of second hand strategy in talent identification and development, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 5(2), 183-191.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Darko, N. and Mackintosh, C. (2015) Challenges and constraints in developing and implementing sports policy and provision in Antigua and Barbuda: which way now for a small island state?, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 7 (3), 365-390.

Dennis, and Grix, J. (2000) *Sport under Communism: Behind the East German 'Miracle'*, London, Palgrave MacMillan.

Department of Health [DoH] (2011) *2010-2015 government policy*: *Obesity and Healthy Eating*; *UK Physical Activity Guidelines*: *Factsheet 4, Physical activity guidelines for Adults (19–64 years)*. DoH: United Kingdom.

Douglas, J., McClelland, R. and Davies, J. (2008) The development of a conceptual model of student satisfaction with their experience in higher education, *Quality Assurance in Education*, 16 (1), 19-35.

Elkins, D.J., Forrester, S.A. and Noël-Elkins, A.V. (2011) The contribution of campus recreational sports participation to perceived sense of campus community, *Recreational Sports Journal*, 35 (1), 24-34.

Ellis, G., Compton, D., Tyson, B. and Bohlig, M. (2002) Campus recreation participation, health, and quality of life, *NIRSA Journal,* 26 (2), 51-60.

Fischer, F. (2003) *Reframing Public Policy: Discursive Politics and Deliberative Practices*, London, Open University Press.

Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York, Basic Books.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Green, M. (2006a) 'Sport for All' to Not About 'Sport' at All?: Interrogating Sport Policy Interventions in the United Kingdom, *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 6 (3), 217-238.

Green, M. (2006b) *Elite Sport Development*, London, Routledge.

Griggs, G. and Ward, G. (2013) The London 2012 legacy for primary physical education: policy by the way? *Sociological Research Online*, 18 (3), 13.

Grix, J. and Carmichael, F. (2012) Why do governments invest in elite sport? A polemic, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 4(1), 73-90.

Groves, M., Griggs, G. and Leflay, K. (2012) Hazing and initiation ceremonies in university sport: setting the scene for further research in the United Kingdom, *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, 15 (1), 117-131.

Haines, D.J. (2001) Undergraduate student benefits from university recreation, *NIRSA Journal*, 25 (1), 25-33.

Harris, S. and Houlihan, B. (2014) Delivery networks and community sport in England, *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 27(2), 113-128.

Harris, S., Mori, K. and Collins, M. (2009) Great expectations: the role of voluntary sports clubs as policy implementers, *Voluntas International Journal*, 20 (4): 405–423.

Hall, D. (2006) Participation in a campus recreation program and its effect on student retention. *Recreational Sports Journal*, 30 (1), 40–45.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Hay, C. (2011) Interpreting interpretivism interpreting interpretations: the new hermeneutics of public administration, *Public Administration*, 89 (1), 167-182.

Henchy, A. (2013) The Perceived Benefits of Participating in Campus Recreation Programs and Facilities: A Comparison Between Undergraduate and Graduate Students, Recreational Sports Journal, 37 (2).

HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) (2017) Headline Statistics. Home. [online]. Available: https://www.hesa.ac.uk. [Accessed 09 Feb, 2016].

Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE]. (2016). *Financial health of the higher education sector 2015-16 to 2018-19 forecasts*. [online]. Available: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Pubs/2016/201634/HEFCE2016_34.pdf. [Accessed 04 June, 2017].

HM Government (2013) *International education – Global growth and prosperity: An accompanying narrative*, London, HM Government.

HM Government (2015) *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation*. DCMS: London.

Houlihan, B. (2005) Public Sector Sport Policy: Developing a Framework for Analysis, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 40 (2), 163 – 185.

Houlihan, B. Bloyce, D. and Smith. A. (2009) Developing the research agenda in sport policy, *International Journal of Sport Policy*, 1(1), 1-12.

Lewis, J.B., Barcelona, R. and Jones, T. (2001) Leisure satisfaction and quality of life: Issues for the justification of campus recreation. *NIRSA Journal*, 25 (2), 57-63.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Lindsey, R. and Sessoms, E. (2006) Assessment of a campus recreation program on student recruitment, retention, and frequency of participation across certain demographic variables, *Recreational Sports Journal*, 30 (1), 30-39.

Mackintosh, C. (2014) Dismantling the school sport partnership infrastructure: findings from a survey of physical education and school sport practitioners, *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years*, 42(4), 432-449.

Mackintosh, C. (2012) 'The shifting dynamics of local government sport development officer practice in England: new identities and hazy professional boundaries' in Harris, S., Bell, B., Adams, A. and Mackintosh, C. (eds.) *Sport for Sport? Theoretical and Practical Insights into Sport Development*, Eastbourne, Leisure Studies Association, 113-130.

Mackintosh, C. (2011) An analysis of County Sports Partnerships in England: the fragility, challenges and complexity of partnership working in sport development', *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 3(1), 45-64.

Mackintosh, C. and Liddle, J. (2015) Emerging school sport development policy, practice and governance in England: Big Society, autonomy and decentralisation, *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years,* 43(6), 603-620.

Miller, K.H., Noland, M., Rayens, M.K. and Staten, R. (2011) Characteristics of users and nonusers of a campus recreation center, *Recreational Sports Journal*, 32 (2), 87-92.

Mirsafian, H., Doczi, T. and Mohamedinejad, A. (2014) Attitude of Iranian female university students to sport and exercise, *Iranian Studies*, 47 (6), 951-966.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

OECD (2014) *Education at a glance; OECD Indicators*, Paris, OECD.

Moffitt, J. (2010) Recreating retention, *Recreational Sports Journal,* 34 (1), 24-33.

Palmer, C. (2013) *Global Sport Policy,* London, Sage.

Partington, S., Partington, E., Heather, N., Longstaff, F., Allsop, S., Jankowski, M., Stephens, R., St. Clair Gibson, A. (2013). The relationship between membership of a university sports group and drinking behaviour among students at English Universities, *Addiction Research and Theory*, 10, 1-9.

Philpotts, L., Grix, J. and Quarmby, T. (2011) Centralised grass roots policy and 'new governance': a case study of County Sport Partnerships in the UK - unpacking the paradox, *International Review of Sport Sociology*, 46 (3), 265-281.

Rhodes, R.A.W. and Bevir, Mark (2012) Interpretivism and the analysis of traditions and practices, *Critical Policy Studies*, 6, (2), pp. 201-208.

Roberts, S., Reeves, M. and Ryrie, G. (2015) the influence of physical activity, sport and exercise motives among UK-based university students, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 39 (4), 598-607.

Sabatier, P.A., and Jenkins-Smith, H., (2003) *Policy Change and Learning: An Advocacy Coalition Approach*, Boulder, Col: Westview Press.

Sarac, L. and McCullick, B. (2017) The life of a gay student in a university physical education and sports department: a case study in Turkey, *Sport, Education and Society*, 22(3) 338-354.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*, California, Sage Publications.

Shehu, J. (2000) Sport in higher education: An assessment of the national sports development policy in Nigerian universities, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 25 (1), 39-50.

Smith, A. and Leech, R. (2010) 'Evidence. What evidence?': evidence-based policy making and school sport partnerships in North West England, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 2(3), 327–345.

Smith, B., and Sparkes, A. (2013) *Qualitative Research Methods in Sport, Exercise and Health: From Process to Product*, London: Routledge.

Sport England (2016) *Sport England Towards an Active Nation: Strategy 2016-2021* London, Sport England.

Sport England (2015) *Higher Education Sport Participation and Satisfaction Survey, National Report 2014/15*, London, TNS BMRB.

Sport England (2014) *Active Universities Evaluation Report: Year Three. Summer 2014*. [online]. Available: at: http://www. www.sportengland.org. [Accessed 09 June 2016].

Thorpe, R. and Collins, M. (2010) Sport and higher education: participation and excellence, in M. Collins (ed.) *Examining Sport Development*, London, Routledge, 105-117.

Tsigilis, N., Koustelios, A. and Theodorakis, Y. (2007) The role of knowledge and information in predicting participation in campus recreation programs: A planned behaviour theory perspective, *International Journal of Physical Education*, 44, 143-152.

*Corresponding author: Email: jabrunton12@gmail.com

Tsigilis, N. Masmaidis, T. and Koustelios, A. (2009) University students' satisfaction and effectiveness of campus recreation programs, *Recreational Sports Journal*, 33, 65-77.

UK Sport (2013). *UK Sport 2013-17 Business Plan Summary,* London, UK Sport.

UKUNI.net. (2017). *Types of UK universities*. [online]. Accessed: https://www.ukuni.net/articles/types-uk-universities. [Available 05 June 2017].

Universities UK (2017) *UNIVERSITIES UK RESPONSE TO THE UK FUNDING COUNCILS CONSULTATION ON THE SECOND RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK*. London, Universities UK. [online]. Accessed: http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2017/second-ref-consultation-response.pdf. [Available 10 June 2017].

Universities UK (2015) *The economic role of UK universities.* London, Universities UK.

Universities UK (2013) *Strategic Plan 2013-2018.* London, Universities UK.

Wagenaar, H. (2011) *Meaning in Action: Interpretation and Dialogue in Policy Analysis*, Armonk, New York, M.E.Sharpe.

Yanow, D. (2000) *Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis,* Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications.