

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEMBERS

We recognise that our members vary in size, resources and how they administer sport and physical activity. We have included a range of recommendations so members can choose what works best for their individual contexts. We have given some examples in the recommendations below but again realise that the examples provided will not work in every situation.

1. FIND WAYS TO BRING A SENSE OF BELONGING AND SPORT CULTURE INTO NON-COMPETITIVE PROGRAMMES, INCLUDING ACTIVE WELLBEING PROGRAMMES.

Sense of belonging is key to staying engaged with sport and physical activity, but non-competitive offers can be seen as “add-ons” rather than at the heart of the institution’s offer. There are many ways of helping participants in active wellbeing programmes feel like they are part of something larger; one institution has had success rebranding their active wellbeing programmes to look and feel like the sports programmes, including using the school mascot and colours and renaming the programme. We note that other institutions have found that sport branding is off-putting to casual participants, so this is not a one size fits all solution. Whatever solution an institution pursues, it should feel inclusive and give all students a sense of being part of something larger.

2. PROVIDE CLEAR INFORMATION TO STUDENTS REGARDING THE INSTITUTION’S SPORT PATHWAY.

Institutions and club committees should work together to ensure that students have an awareness of and are signposted to the full range of sports and physical activities offered at their institution. This can help students who face barriers such as cost when wanting to take up top-level competitive sport to stay engaged with sport and physical activity through activities such as intramural sport and free active wellbeing opportunities. Since the cost-of-living situation has impacted students in different ways, this widened awareness will support students to move to different parts of the overall sporting pathway as and when it is possible for them to do so.

3. IDENTIFY AND SHARE BEST PRACTISE FOR INCREASING TRANSPARENCY AROUND COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH SPORT.

Students are quick to notice and question rising costs associated with sport and physical activity at higher education institutions. In our research, we found that when staff provided an explanation of this rise, students generally felt appeased and were more understanding. This is best practice and institutions should seek out opportunities to have these conversations with students. It is important to share all aspects of the financial commitment to higher education sport with current and prospective members (e.g., including kit, membership, travel and other associated costs) in an open, honest and consistent manner, so students can make informed decisions. For instance, members could provide

templates for clubs to post at sports fairs that require the clubs to publish specific, standardised information about their membership costs so students can easily compare costs. Some members have said that students don't acknowledge financial information they are given, so we recommend working with club committees to identify best practice. We also encourage members to share with one another what has worked best for them in this area.

4. FIND MORE AND CREATIVE WAYS TO DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE OF OPPORTUNITIES TO STUDENTS.

Students told us they were frustrated when their institutions raised membership costs without providing additional value. In some cases, institutions had to do this just to cover their own rising costs, but in other cases they were able to offer additional value that students overlooked. Whenever possible, institutions should shout about discounts or savings they are making for their students. One way to do this is by showing students how much they would pay for the same service outside of the institution (this is often higher because it is not subsidised). Another is to think creatively about how to market new offers; for example, if an institution offers the [UNiversal Gym](#) programme, they could describe this as providing 33% increased value because students are able to attend a gym 12 months of the year rather than eight months. Finally, institutions should talk about the value of sport for students outside of the financial value. We know that employers are looking for graduates with skills that are acquired and proven through involvement in sport (e.g., resilience, teamwork, and achieving goals) and we should use this fact to market sport to students and add to the value proposition.

5. ADD FINANCE/BUDGET GUIDANCE AND BEST PRACTISE INTO CLUB COMMITTEE TRAINING.

During club committee training, institutions should include training on finances and budgets as standard to help clubs maintain good financial practices. Some institutions offer this as an e-module, which allows club committee members to refresh their knowledge as needed. The financial aspect of the training should provide the necessary autonomy for students to learn new skills in this area, while safeguarding against any mistakes that could cause lasting damage to the club.

6. PROVIDE SUPPORT TO STUDENTS WHO HAVE STRUGGLED MOST.

Our research found that students with disabilities and those from Black/Black British backgrounds were the most negatively impacted by the cost-of-living situation. Institutions should prioritise efforts to support these groups to take part in sport and physical activity. For instance, they could offer a certain number of free or heavily discounted gym passes for members of these groups. Make sure any support is clearly advertised and wherever possible advertised directly to students who qualify (e.g. through email). Charities like [Activity Alliance](#) and [Sporting Equals](#) provide resources on how to best engage these groups in sport. [Living Black at University](#), a report by Unite Students about racism in

student accommodation, has helpful recommendations that apply to the wider higher education experience.

7. REDUCE THE STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH HARDSHIP FUNDS.

Where possible, remove the term “hardship funds” and instead refer to “access funds” or similar to reduce stigma. Changing this terminology can encourage more students to apply. To help remove barriers in the use of these funds, ensure communication about eligibility to students is clear, make students aware of application deadlines as early as possible to allow suitable time to pull necessary information together and, wherever possible, provide funding upfront rather than as a reimbursement to help those most in need.

8. UTILISE ALL AVAILABLE INFORMATION TO DEMONSTRATE VALUE OF SPORT TO INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP.

The funding environment for higher education sport is tight, and the cost-of-living situation has only worsened this situation. Wherever possible, consider the larger challenges and context of your institution and fit sport and physical activity into that conversation. For instance, active wellbeing aligns well with the needs of stretched student wellbeing departments and can inherently show the value of sport and physical activity. Sport departments can also offer placements for students in tangential areas, e.g., sports journalism or physiotherapy, offering valuable hands-on experience. Demonstrating the value of sport can protect from future reductions in funding. BUCS' [Value of University Sport and Physical Activity](#) position paper offers more proof points of the value of sport and physical activity in higher education and can be used for advocacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUCS STAFF

SHORT TERM

1. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEMBERS TO SHARE BEST PRACTICE CASE STUDIES ON THE COST-OF-LIVING SITUATION.

While every institution is different, members can benefit from understanding what others are doing. The BUCS Insight team will support information-sharing by collecting case studies from members and storing these in an accessible location (e.g., the BUCS website). Case studies will cover a wide range of topics but potential focuses will include: transport cost reduction strategies; finding ways of increasing student belonging in non-competitive physical activity; and models of financial support that have seen student engagement in sport remain high during the cost-of-living situation.

2. SUPPORT MEMBER INSTITUTIONS TO MINIMISE BUCS IN-SEASON FINES.

The Competitions and Events team understand the impact fines can have on operational budgets for our members. The BUCS office wants to ensure that we support our members in incurring minimal fines throughout the season as they engage in our offers. Although we already have all fines and their related costs detailed within our rules and regulations, we will now build a fines (including associated sanctions) guidance document that will assist all staff and members in their understanding of what fines may be applicable to them throughout the season, and significantly, how the BUCS office can help mitigate against incurring fines. The guidance document and associated fines information will be released prior the first fixture in the season.

3. PUBLISH EVENT DATES AND TIMING AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE.

The BUCS Events team will commit to publishing event dates, registration and competition times and locations at the earliest opportunity so that participants can book accommodation and transport as soon as possible. Booking earlier can help participants reduce their costs, sometimes significantly.

MEDIUM TERM

4. FORM A WORKING GROUP TO ADVISE AND DIRECT THE BUCS EXECUTIVE ON ADJUSTMENTS WITHIN THE DELIVERY PROGRAMME THAT CAN ASSIST WITH ALLEVIATING COST.

This group will consider possible adjustments to league, knockout and event delivery that could alleviate member costs for BUCS competitions, including (but not limited to): changes to league structure, changes to the knockout programme, and changes to sports events. The group will consider how the BUCS office can work with regions to provide guidance on block fixture booking and

regionalising their own structures (within existing capacity limitations). The group will consist of a range of BUCS staff and member representatives.

5. FACILITATE CONVERSATIONS ON HOW SENSE OF BELONGING CAN BE INCREASED IN ACTIVE WELLBEING OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH AN ACTIVE WELLBEING ADVISORY GROUP.

BUCS is setting up an Active Wellbeing advisory group to facilitate conversations amongst members on this topic. As part of this group, BUCS staff and members will identify best practice and strategies for increasing sense of belonging within active wellbeing opportunities. Conversations in this advisory group will be shared more widely with all members.

6. MONITOR AND UNDERSTAND THE ONGOING COST-OF-LIVING SITUATION AND ITS IMPACT THROUGH THE 2023-24 SEASON.

The cost-of-living situation is an ongoing and evolving issue, with its impact all but certain to continue within the 2023-24 academic year and BUCS season. To monitor how the ongoing impact is felt across member institutions and students, the BUCS Insight team will collect additional data in spring 2024. The team will identify any changes from the data collected in this report and communicate it to members.

LONG TERM

7. IDENTIFY AND PILOT REGIONAL SOLUTIONS TO SUPPORT THE STUDENTS MOST AFFECTED BY THE COST-OF-LIVING SITUATION.

Black/Black British students and students with disabilities were hit hardest by the cost-of-living situation. BUCS staff and members will consider how to help these students re-engage with sport and physical activity. The Insight and Development teams at BUCS will work together to realise this goal in the long term.