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## The Impact of Engagement in Sport on Graduate Employability

Final Report

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

- This report presents the findings of research commissioned by British University and Colleges Sport (BUCS) and undertaken by the Sport Industry Research Centre from March to June 2013. The purpose of this research is to provide evidence of the value of sport on graduate employability. We consider engagement in sport to include: participation, competition, volunteering, leading activities, and coaching. To deliver the research we have sought the views of graduates from a wide range of academic disciplines, graduate employers and senior executives of UK universities.
- Significant work has been undertaken in the last decade to articulate the potential value and impact of engagement in sport to a whole range of policy priorities. In terms of education the focus has largely been on the relationship between sports participation and school based educational performance and the role of sport volunteering in lifelong learning.
- Whilst those involved in sport in the Higher Education Sector believe that engagement in sport has a positive impact on a student's employability, for example the development of team working and leadership skills, the evidence is largely anecdotal.
- HE Institutions are now operating in an increasingly competitive environment, improving student experience and a greater focus on performance regarding graduate employability are priorities in the 2011 White Paper which places 'Students at the heart of the system.' There is both an opportunity and strategic need for sport in higher education to demonstrate its role and value.

### Research Objectives

The research was commissioned to address the following questions:-

- Does engagement in sport impact positively on graduate employment and longer term employability?
- Do universities with an explicit strategic commitment to sport experience perform better in against measures of graduate employment?
- Do medium / longer term graduates recognise the impact of engagement with sport on their employability?
- Are their differences depending on the type of engagement in sport - e.g. recreational, competitive, high performance, volunteering, and administration?

- Do employers understand / recognise the different types of engagement in sport and are there different impacts in terms of employability?
- Are there differences in the importance and value placed on engagement with sport by different institutions?

## Review of Literature

- There was a perception at the outset that there was very little in the literature relating specifically to engagement in sport and impact on graduate employability. The review sets the scene for the research by introducing the concept of employability, the current policy context and drivers for graduate employability, and the role of higher education
- Graduate employability is a key issue, driven by our changing economy (specifically the economic downturn), the role of Higher Education in improving the UK economy through the skills agenda, competition for graduate employment, and the rise in tuition fees.
- Definitions of employability have become increasingly complex and have developed beyond simply being skills for employment to incorporate additional factors, including the development of values, behaviours, attitudes and competencies aimed at supporting career development, thus going beyond developing skills to gain a first job, and instead building the potential required for a longer term career. The most widely accepted definition is that of Yorke and Knight propose their definition of employability as:

*'a set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy' (2006: 3)*

- In line with the increasing focus on graduate employability a number of frameworks and models have evolved to help those working in HE develop the employability offer to students.
- The various models and frameworks of employability are often audience specific, some are aimed at academics involved in curriculum development (HSEM), whilst others are more of a personal development planning framework for students (SOAR). Research with employers by Dacre, Pool and Sewell (2007) produced a framework for multiple audiences (students, academics, careers advisors) which sets out the essential components of employability as:
  - Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills;
  - Generic skills - developed across degree programmes, including analysis skills, time management, working with others, communication skills and working under pressure;
  - Emotional intelligence - the capacity for recognising own feelings and those of others, and to build personal relationships;
  - Career development learning;
  - Experience - work and life.

- Our literature search has found that, whilst there is an abundance of literature about employability in general, there is a clear lack of material which explores explicitly the role of sport in developing employability. Some attention has been paid to the influence of extra-curricular activity on academic achievement demonstrating that extra-curricular activity can be positively linked to high achievement, and that in particular students who participate are often more productive, through developing good time management skills. There is relatively little research into the influence of extra-curricular activity and sport on the transition to employment.
- Some academics have looked at the impact of participation on earnings, for example Eide and Ronan (2001) found that participation in varsity sports in the United States had a positive impact upon future earnings, however the impact upon graduate employability has been very much under-researched.
- 'Futuretrack' (HECSU, 2012) is a longitudinal survey funded by Higher Education Careers Services Unit which tracked a cohort of students through their degree courses and beyond, in order to explore the relationship between higher education, employability and career planning. It found that participation in extra-curricular activity at university (encompassing both sport and involvement in other activities and societies) had a positive impact upon labour market integration.
- Finding similar results was a small scale survey of graduates, conducted by Tchibozo (2007), using a sample of 119 students in the UK with an aim to explore the impact of participation in extra-curricular activity on the transition from Higher Education to employment.
- The findings of the Futuretrack research, and of the smaller-scale studies by both Tchibozo and Leung, provide useful and interesting insights, with the findings of each of these demonstrating a clear and positive link between participation in extra-curricular activities and employability.
- The primary research detailed in this report fills a gap in current research, by presenting high-level and relatively large-scale research into the impact of engagement in sport on graduate employability.

## Methodology

The research used a 'mixed methods' approach which included:-

- Secondary analysis of Sport England's Active People 6 data set to explore the relationships between graduate qualifications, sports participation, volunteering and household income (as a strong proxy for earnings).
- Secondary analysis of the data from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, BUCS League Tables with universities which have an explicit sport strategy. This is to

test the notion that graduates from universities that are committed to sport do better in getting their first job.

- Primary research with three key audiences, graduates, employers and university Vice Chancellors and senior executives. The research attracted on line survey responses from nearly 6,000 graduates and over 100 graduate employers. Telephone interviews were conducted with senior executives from universities.
- Case studies have also been developed in partnership with Universities to illustrate the impact of engagement in sport for selected graduates and to showcase projects which have been developed to use engagement in sport to enhance graduate employability.

## Findings

### The Graduate's Perspective

- From secondary research there is a positive relationship between participation in sport and household income (a strong proxy for earnings). Our primary research confirms this finding when we look at participation in sport and personal salary levels.
- Secondary analysis of the Sport England Active People 6 dataset (155,853 responses) reveals that graduates who take part in sport have a higher annual household income than graduates who do no sport. This premium is £6,344 per annum.
- For graduates who take part in sport and undertake volunteering activity related to sport the difference in annual household income is even higher, a further premium of £2,704 per annum.
- The survey sample (5,838) included graduates from across the age range and a wide range of degree subjects.
- 69% of the sample took part in sport and physical activity of some sort, this included 45% who took part in sport and 24% who just used the gym.
- 31% of the sample did not engage in any form of sport.
- The graduate survey found a similar relationship to the findings in the Active People Survey data. Those who took part in sport at university (£32,344) had a personal income greater than those who attended the gym only (£28,080), or did not engage in sport (£26,728). Those who did not engage in sport had the lowest levels of income. In short participation and volunteering in sport is associated with a premium in salary of between £4264 and £5616 per annum.

- Graduates who had also been involved in the organisation and management of university sport reported that this experience had the greatest impact on developing key skills for employability.
- Furthermore they were also the least likely to have encountered a period of unemployment in their career than other groups.
- Graduates who did no sport and no other extra-curricular activities at university were amongst the lowest earners, and were the most likely to have had periods of unemployment.

*'I think that what you get from sport is teamwork, application, prioritisation of time, and commitment - these are things that are valued by employers. Sport therefore has a number of dimensions that make our students more attractive to employers.'*

### **The Employer's Perspective**

- Graduate employers were overwhelmingly positive about the benefits of graduates having engaged in sport whilst at University and the skills and strengths that this would bring them in applying to jobs at their organisation
- Many employers actively looked for mention of engagement in sport on graduates' job applications.
- Academic qualifications and subject specific skills were deemed necessary, but the 'soft skills' such as behaviours, qualities and attitudes developed through sport were deemed equally as important by many employers.
- A wide range of positive attributes were listed by employers as being developed through sport including, amongst many others, team working, communication skills, motivation, competitiveness and resilience.
- Many employers revealed that sport was a part of their workplace culture and therefore graduates who continued to participate in sport throughout their career could develop their employability even further.
- Within the workplace sport was seen to provide networking opportunities and continued development of team working skills, as well as good health and wellbeing.
- It was stated consistently by employers that leadership positions, organisational roles and other positions of responsibility within sports clubs and societies were particularly beneficial in providing 'added value' for graduate employability.
- Employers emphasised that it would not be enough for graduates to simply list playing sport on an application form, but rather they are looking for graduates to be able to demonstrate

the employability skills and attributes that they have developed through sport. Some graduates sell themselves short by not doing this as well as they might.

### **The Universities' Perspective**

- The view of senior executives within universities is that the sport 'offer' is seen as an important driver of student experience, an important determinant of choice in student recruitment and in some cases it is fundamental to a university's market position.
- Student engagement in sport whilst at university (especially volunteering) is considered to have significant impact on student employability and is an essential part of the development of 'well rounded' graduates.

## **Conclusions**

We set out to research the impact of engagement with sport on graduate employability from the perspective of graduates, employers and university senior management and to 'fill the gap' in research evidence relating to this theme. From our findings we conclude that engagement in sport at university has a positive impact from the following perspectives.

### **The Graduate's Perspective**

- As numbers of graduates increase, students need to do more than pass a degree to get their first job and to sustain their employability. The evidence indicates strongly that in the context of rising fees, engagement in sport is associated with provides a good career return on investment of £4264 and £5616 per annum.
- There is significant evidence from employers that engagement in sport is a recognised strength, but it's not just about playing sport it's the involvement in volunteering and management aspects that provide competitive advantage in the jobs' market.

### **The Employer's Perspective**

- Engagement in sport provides a wide range of positive attributes wanted by employers notably: team working, communication skills, motivation, competitiveness and resilience.
- Enhanced employability is not just about playing sport. Employers consider that leadership positions, organisational roles and other positions of responsibility within sports clubs and societies were particularly beneficial in providing 'added value' for graduate employability. Some students who engage in sport are able to make the best use of their experience in a recruitment process by demonstrating transferable skills.

### **The Universities' Perspective**

- Senior executives within universities should be fully aware that the sport offer is not just about investment in facilities, it's an overall package which includes participation and opportunities for engagement in volunteering, management and leadership activity.
- There is a need to ensure that the value of engagement in sport (as recognised by graduate employers) is communicated and promoted in universities to all who have a role in helping graduates prepare for employment.

This research concludes that sport does matter and can contribute in various domains. It is a *force for good* and a sound investment from the graduate, employer and universities' perspectives. Now is the time for all partners and stakeholders to realise the potential of sport and to act accordingly.

# Main Report

## 1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of research commissioned by British University and Colleges Sport (BUCS) and undertaken by the Sport Industry Research Centre from March to June 2013. The purpose of this research is to provide evidence of the value of sport on graduate employability. We consider engagement in sport to include: participation, competition, volunteering, leading activities, and coaching. To deliver the research we have sought the views of graduates from a wide range of academic disciplines, graduate employers and senior executives of UK universities.

Significant work has been undertaken in the last decade to articulate the potential value and impact of engagement in sport to a whole range of policy priorities. These generally include the themes of health and wellbeing, educational attainment, community cohesion, social inclusion, crime reduction, social capital and economic vitality (Sport England Value of Sport Monitor). In terms of education the focus has largely been on the relationship between sports participation and school based educational performance and the role of sport volunteering in lifelong learning.

Whilst those involved in sport in the Higher Education Sector believe that engagement in sport has a positive impact on a student's employability, for example the development of team working and leadership skills, the evidence is largely anecdotal.

HE Institutions are now operating in an increasingly competitive environment, improving student experience and a greater focus on performance regarding graduate employability are priorities in the 2011 White Paper which places 'Students at the heart of the system.' There is both an opportunity and strategic need for sport in higher education to demonstrate its role and value.

### 1.1 Research Objectives

- Does engagement in sport impact on graduate employment and longer term employability?
- Do universities with an explicit strategic commitment to sport experience perform better in against measures of graduate employment?
- Do medium / longer term graduates recognise the impact of engagement with sport on their employability?
- Are their differences depending on the type of engagement in sport - e.g. recreational, competitive, high performance, volunteering, and administration?
- Do employers understand / recognise the different types of engagement in sport and are there different impacts in terms of employability?

- Are there differences in the importance and value placed on engagement with sport by different institutions?

## 2. Review of Literature

Stage 1 of the project involved a review of the literature specifically relating to engagement in sport and graduate employability to determine what was already known and thereby to identify the gaps in research. This was achieved by extending a recent systematic review undertaken on behalf of the Department of Culture Media and Sport and working with other academic colleagues with an expertise in the employability agenda. The review also was important in providing further context for the report and developing an understanding of the concept of employability to inform the design of the research tools.

We begin by outlining the background and context to debates around employability, positioning employability as a 'buzzword' in both academic research and policy debates around the role of higher education. We explore literature which attempts to define the concept of employability, highlighting in particular the complexity of the concept, as demonstrated by the wide range of definitions and models of employability that have been produced. We then examine research which has looked at employer perspectives on employability, which finds that employers describe an interest in 'soft skills' which goes beyond subject-specific learning from academic study and with extra-curricular activity seen as providing 'added value' for graduates. We highlight the work of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to develop employability skills amongst students, including with the use of 'models' of employability.

We have found the literature to show that participation in extra-curricular activity is generally valued by both employers and HEIs, yet there is little specific mention in the literature of the precise value of sport or the types of skills, characteristics and behaviours that could be developed through sport.

There is a distinct lack of empirical research which explores specific links between sport and graduate employability, with the research that is currently available being small-scale, and focused on extra-curricular activity as a whole, rather than explicitly focused on the value of participation in sport. Our literature review therefore clearly shows a gap in the current understanding of the value of the engagement in sport and graduate employability, and positions this as a topic requiring further exploration in empirical research.

### 2.1 Employability: Background and Context

The notion of 'employability' has been discussed for a number of years but it has received growing interest in particular over the last decade, mainly driven by four major factors.

- A changing economy, in particular the economic downturn; high unemployment levels; erosion of job security; the changing nature of employment (as new technologies and new industries have changed the types of jobs available); and the need to address these issues at a public policy level (Clarke and Patrickson, 2008; Hillage and Pollard, 1998).

- The Coalition government's emphasis on the role of Higher Education for improving the competitiveness of the UK economy through the 'skills agenda', as outlined in 'Ambition 2020: World Class Skills and Jobs for the UK: Key Findings and Implications for Action' (Spilsbury et al, 2010), which emphasises the importance of raising the skill levels of the UK workforce.
- The impact of the changes to the economy for graduates, in particular increased competition for graduate employment, with only a minority of graduates able to gain employment which directly utilises the academic content of their degree, and a need for a flexible workforce prepared for a lifetime of change and development. It appears to be increasingly the norm for individuals to be required to engage in re-training and personal development throughout their working lives.
- The rise in Higher Education tuition fees (from £3k to up to £9k), coupled with job insecurities and increased competition for graduate jobs means that students are perhaps becoming more selective in their choice of courses and institutions. As a result they may increasingly be looking at the employability statements of different institutions when making their choices of where and what to study;

These factors have placed increasing pressure on HEIs to provide education which encompasses employability practice (Fallows and Steven, 2000). In recent years, therefore, various agencies and providers of Higher Education have engaged in initiatives intended to promote graduate employability.

Increased pressure also appears to be placed on students themselves to ensure that they graduate with the employability skills that employers prefer them to possess, in order to be competitive in their search for employment (Ball, 2003; Wickramasinghe and Perera, 2010). In 2011 the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the National Union of Students (NUS) produced a joint report aimed at students, titled 'Working Towards your Future - Making the Most of your Time in Higher Education' which highlighted the skills required by graduates to improve their employability (CBI/NUS, 2011).

As a consequence of the factors outlined above, employability appears to have become a 'buzzword'; and a concept at the forefront of academic debate and research (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Lowden et al., 2011; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). This research is based on the notion that employability is of increasing importance for three key groups of stakeholders in the HE process, namely: students and graduates; graduate employers; and those working with students at HEIs, including lecturers, personal tutors and careers advisors.

## 2.2 Definitions of Employability

There appears to be no singular definition of employability, with our literature review finding a great number of authors who have attempted to define the term with a wide range of definitions and concepts having been put forward (for example, Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007; Harvey, 2001; Hillage and Pollard, 1998; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2002; 2005; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Yorke, 2006).

However, whilst employability appears to be a difficult term to define, we can nevertheless draw a number of key themes from the literature.

Firstly, many authors describe employability through an explanation of what employability is not, with the use of an observation that a distinction must be made between employment and employability. This distinction positions employment as a graduate outcome which may be measured and used within information published by universities, with the proportion of graduates obtaining jobs remaining a key performance indicator for Universities.

By contrast, the term employability is seen to relate to a set of achievements and the learning of a wide range of skills, knowledge and attributes to support both securing and keeping a job. Employability therefore '...refers to a graduate's achievements and his/her potential to obtain a 'graduate job', and should not be confused with the actual acquisition of a 'graduate job" (Yorke, 2006: 2).

Acknowledging that employability appears to be most commonly used to refer to the potential to obtain and retain a job, a wide range of further definitions and explanations exist in the academic literature, which we can broadly group into two categories.

The first of these is a focus on the importance of developing 'skills' for ensuring employability. This approach tends to focus on missing skills as valued by employers, i.e. the gaps between employer expectations and what they perceive as receiving from graduates, with a focus on the need to develop these missing skills in order to fill the gaps and enable students to gain jobs after graduation.

This approach ties in with the Government's 'skills agenda' by which the Government cites skill shortages, skill gaps and skill under-utilisation as some of the main problems facing the current employment system, and has thus placed precedence on delivering skills and ensuring a trained workforce is in place, in order to ensure that businesses can flourish (outlined in various Coalition government strategy documents, for example BIS, 2010; Spilsbury et al, 2010). This focus places emphasis on the importance of HEIs for improving the skills of graduates. The translation of policy into action by HEIs has mainly taken the form of a skills development approach, assuming that employability is a characteristic of individuals comprised of a set of identifiable skills, and as a result, a number of lists and models of 'skills' have been constructed.

The notion of 'skills' has, however, attracted some criticism, particularly due to a lack of clarity as to the meaning of the purported skills, with a variety of surveys providing lists of supposed skills and asking respondents to tick those which they feel best represent employability, thus assuming universal agreement as to the meaning of each term (Holmes, 2001). Also, within Higher Education the skills agenda has been criticised as reflecting a narrow view of educational aims (Morley, 2001), and as seeming to not take into account other 'softer' and more 'generic' personal qualities, attitudes and attributes which may impact upon an individual's ability to obtain and retain employment (Pegg et al, 2012; Yorke, 2006). It appears therefore that there has been a move within the theoretical understanding of employability towards a second approach which does not ignore the development of skills but which incorporates additional factors, including the development of values, behaviours, attitudes and competencies aimed at supporting career development, thus going beyond developing

skills to gain a first job, and instead building the potential required for a longer term career. Indeed in recent literature (over the last decade) there is a general consensus that employability is about much more than just obtaining and retaining a job, but also about being successful in that job and ensuring personal fulfilment and satisfaction. This is said to require a broader set of characteristics than just 'skills'.

More recently, therefore, authors appear to have moved towards a more complex understanding of employability. Rather than simply skills for employment, employability may instead be described as a '*(multi-faceted) characteristic of the individual*' (Yorke, 2006: 8). In light of this, Yorke and Knight propose their definition of employability as:

*'a set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy'* (2006: 3)

Yorke and Knight's definition of employability appears to be increasingly used in academic literature, as one which appears to most adequately describe the complexity of the concept. In order to consider the area of employability fully, however, it appears to be important to not only consider previous academic literature which provides definitions and explanations of employability, but also to explore the concept in relation to the ways in which it is used in practice. This involves identifying the perspectives of graduate employers and those working in Higher Education with a responsibility for employability. One key criticism of employability literature and research is that it has emphasised employability as a construct of individual attributes and as being the responsibility of individuals, yet employability is also determined by the labour market - for example, whether or not someone is employable is determined by the demand for certain attributes, i.e. what employers are looking for (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006).

### 2.3 Employer Perspectives on Employability

Much academic research on employer perspectives on employability appears to reflect the more recent definitions and ideas around employability, namely that it encompasses much more than the development of skills, and instead it appears that a number of more generic (i.e. non subject specific) factors are viewed as important for employers.

Some authors find that employers tend to see the achievements of a graduate which are related to their academic discipline, i.e. subject specific skills and knowledge, as being necessary, but not in themselves sufficient to secure a job. Achievements outside of the discipline, including the possession of 'soft skills', are found to be equally as important in the recruitment of graduates (Harvey et al, 1997; Harvey, 1999; Yorke, 2006).

Harvey et al (1997) stated that the changes in the work place and the economy (as we highlighted earlier), in particular the reduction in size of organisations and the uncertain future, have meant that what employers are looking for in employees has changed in recent years. In order to deal with uncertain times and a changing workplace, new attributes are required in employees:

*'Employers indicate that what they want now, and in the foreseeable future, are intelligent, flexible, adaptable employees who are quick to learn and who can deal with change....In a future world of uncertainty, employers do not want people who are unable to work on a range of tasks simultaneously, people who are resistant to new approaches or who are slow to respond to cues. In the de-layered, down-sized, information technology-driven, innovative organisation there is likely to be less and less time for new recruits to get up to speed. Employers want people who can rapidly fit into the workplace culture, work in teams, exhibit good interpersonal skills, communicate well, take on responsibility for an area of work, and perform efficiently and effectively to add value to the organization – they want adaptive recruits.'* (Harvey et al, 1997, cited in Kumar, 2007: 215)

Lowden et al (2011) conducted research in Scotland to explore employers' perceptions with regard to the skills, knowledge and characteristics which help graduates to be employable. Through case studies with employers and some interviews, they found that participation in work experience, internships and extra-curricular activities was valued by both employers and graduates in helping to develop transferable skills. Some employers believed that a degree was required for certain jobs, but in isolation this added little to a graduate's long term employability.

Literature indicates that employers want graduates who can adapt to workplace culture, use their abilities and skills to evolve the organisation and participate in innovative teamwork. Employers expect graduates to have the technical and discipline competencies from their degrees but require graduates to demonstrate a range of broader skills and attributes that include team working, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem solving and often managerial abilities or potential.

'Soft skills' are said to include behavioural characteristics and elements of an individual's personality, comprising of interpersonal and organisational skills. Research appears to confirm that these types of attribute are seen as important to employers. The International Employer Barometer Survey (2007, cited in Archer and Davison, 2008: 7) found that most employers viewed social skills and personality type as more important considerations than degree qualifications when recruiting graduates. Their survey results showed that 60% of employers rated a good degree qualification as being an important factor, yet good communication skills were considered to be the most important factor by 86% of employers, closely followed by teamwork (85%) and confidence (80%). Fleming et al (2008) studied the most important competencies for employers when recruiting and found that the top five were:

1. Ability and willingness to learn;
2. Initiative;
3. Personal planning and organisational skills;
4. Relationship building; and
5. Teamwork and cooperation.

A careers advisory document produced by HECSU and the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) outlines the '*skills that employers want*' as being self-reliance, people skills, general employment skills and specialist skills (2011: 3). HECSU and AGCAS indicate how these skills can be

developed, giving examples for each. Whilst specialist skills might be more likely to be developed through subject specific qualifications, technical skills and specialist relevant knowledge, the advice specifies that the other attributes might potentially be developed through personal interests, work experience and extra-curricular activity, including participation in competitive and team sports.

## 2.4 Models of Employability

Our review of literature thus far has demonstrated that interest in promoting graduate employability has increased in recent years, and it has been acknowledged increasingly that employability is a broad concept which encompasses a wide range of characteristics, skills and competencies, with research indicating that a wide range of attributes are valued by employers. In light of this, it is not surprising that HEIs have been urged to focus on the development of employability.

Much of the work on graduate employability has concentrated on constructing models of the essential components that HEIs need to develop within students to ensure their employability. This has generally been against Quality Assurance Agency subject specific benchmarks and university-wide models, standards and benchmarks of employability. From 2010 each English HEI has been required to articulate their position in relation to student employability through the provision of an 'employability statement' for prospective students. As a result, a number of authors have produced taxonomies, frameworks and models of employability which outline the particular attributes that are required for employability, with the aim to provide guidance on the development and utilisation of these attributes.

A key tool underpinning much of the current work on employability within HEIs is the 'USEM model', developed by Yorke and Knight (2004; 2006) which provides an overview of the influences on employability and aims to increase thinking about employability in Higher Education settings. This model is aimed at people working in Higher Education who have responsibility for developing employability in students, such as lecturers, careers advisers and personal tutors. It is proposed that HEIs should analyse their current curriculum by looking at four components, and ask to what extent these are being developed. These include:

1. **Understanding** - of subject specific material and, more generally, of 'how the world works';
2. **Skilful practices in context** - whether practices are discipline related or more generic;
3. **Efficacy beliefs** - under which are subsumed a range of personal qualities and attributes;
4. **Metacognition** - including the capacity for reflection and self-regulation.

A personal development model for employability put forward by Kumar (2007; 2008), titled the 'SOAR' model, places emphasis on enabling students *'to value and exploit learning...for the linked purposes of personal growth, intellectual ability and preparation for future careers'* (2007: pp. 7-8). This model is based on the consideration and development of four aspects:

1. **Self** - an awareness of the characteristics that define the person one is (e.g. strengths), and the person that one wants to become (development needs);
2. **Opportunity** - an awareness of the possibilities that exist, the demands they make, and the rewards and satisfactions they offer;

3. **Aspirations** - the ability to make realistic choices and plan based on sound information and on self-opportunity alignment;
4. **Results** - the ability to review outcomes, plan and take action to implement decisions and aspirations, especially at points of transition.

The SOAR model as depicted in Kumar's guide 'Personal, Academic and Career Development in Higher Education: SOARing to Success' (2008) has come to be widely known and used as an approach and resource within HEIs to be utilised as part of subject-specific curricular. The emphasis is on individual students being pro-active and actively engaging in the development of these four aspects for themselves, personalising the approach to their own needs. It is said to enable individuals to identify and critically appreciate the universal and personal recursive relationships between **Self**, **Opportunity**, **Aspirations**, and **Results**.

Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) have also developed a model of graduate employability, but which is targeted at a much broader audience - for all those who have a vested interest in employability, including the three key groups that we outlined earlier: students and graduates themselves; graduate employers; and those working with students at HEIs. Dacre Pool and Sewell's aim was to develop a model which was sufficient to demonstrate the complexity of employability, but at the same time would be accessible. They propose a definition of employability as being '*a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful*' (2007: 280) and they use this definition as a starting point from which to develop their model 'the key to employability'. They describe the essential components of employability as being:

1. Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills;
2. Generic skills - developed across degree programmes, including analysis skills, time management, working with others, communication skills and working under pressure;
3. Emotional intelligence - the capacity for recognising own feelings and those of others, and to build personal relationships;
4. Career development learning; and
5. Experience - work and life.

Dacre Pool and Sewell argue that if students have opportunities to access and develop all of these components, and also to reflect and evaluate on their development of these components, they will gain in self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-confidence, which are the crucial links to employability. Through their model of employability, Dacre Pool and Sewell demonstrate that, whilst degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills are extremely important, this alone is unlikely to secure an appropriate a job in which graduates can be satisfied and successful.

Certainly, this model reflects the findings of research with employers, as outlined earlier, that qualifications alone are not enough to secure employment, and employers are looking for a range of other 'softer' skills and characteristics.

## 2.5 Role of Sport in Employability

Our literature search has found that, whilst there is an abundance of literature about employability in general, there is a clear lack of material which explores explicitly the role of sport in developing employability.

Some attention has been paid to the influence of extra-curricular activity on academic achievement (for example DeMoulin, 2002; Gerber, 1996), demonstrating that extra-curricular activity can be positively linked to high achievement, and that in particular students who participate are often more productive, through developing good time management skills.

Recent research in the United States has suggested that participation in team sport is the only extra-curricular activity that has a consistent and significant impact on students' grades at school (Irvin et al, cited in Bloom, 2013). The development of mentoring relationships, the ability to work with others, time management skills, initiative, determination and focus were all said to be developed through team sport, which in turn had a positive impact upon students' grades. Participation in team sport was also related to a higher likelihood of completing high school and going on to university.

There has been relatively little research into the influence of extra-curricular activity and sport on the transition to the work force. Some academics have looked at the impact of participation on earnings, for example Eide and Ronan (2001) found that participation in varsity sports in the United States had a positive impact upon future earnings, however the impact upon graduate employability has been very much under-researched. The following paragraphs describe the key papers and research studies in this area.

Pegg et al (2012) produced a publication titled 'Pedagogy for Employability' on behalf of the Higher Education Academy and the Enhancing Employability Co-ordination Team. This publication is aimed at teaching staff, careers advisors and others working with students and describes that the development of graduates with relevant skills and knowledge should be at the centre of the Higher Education agenda in order to develop the employable graduate as 'Future Fit' - a term coined by CBI and Universities UK (2009). Pegg et al also outline the importance of extra-curricular activity alongside study for the development of employability, including in particular involvement in work-based learning, placements, part-time employment and voluntary employment, which it is argued may enhance independence, communication skills, confidence and enterprise skills in graduates.

Watts (2006: 6) refers to the 'wider student experience' and describes this as including participation in student organised activities and suggests that academics, careers advisers and others working with students to enhance employability should place emphasis on wider experience, outside of a student's degree programme, for the development of what is described as 'generic competencies', including behavioural skills, reflection skills and career development skills, rather than direct subject relevance.

'Futuretrack' (HECSU, 2012) is a longitudinal survey funded by HECSU which tracked a cohort of students through their degree courses and beyond, in order to explore the relationship between higher education, employability and career planning. It found that participation in extra-curricular activity at University (encompassing both sport and involvement in other activities and societies) had

a positive impact upon labour market integration. In particular, graduates taking part in extra-curricular activity were less likely to be unemployed after graduation and instead were more likely to be employed in graduate jobs with comparatively higher salaries, as well as being more likely to be positive about their post-graduation careers. The research suggested that:

*'As increasing proportions of graduates leave HE with a 1st or 2:1 (the traditional requirement for employment in a graduate job), 'added value' in the form of extra-curricular experience, along with work experience outside academic studies has become an increasingly important way graduates may set themselves apart from others in their graduating cohort' (HECSU, 2012: 7).*

Interestingly, the research also found that those individuals who had leadership roles within their extra-curricular activity, for example as a member of the committee or as a student representative, had particularly positive experiences in terms of an even greater likelihood of employment in graduate jobs, higher salaries and greater levels of satisfaction with their current jobs and with their future prospects.

Finding similar results was a small scale survey of graduates, conducted by Tchibozo (2007), using a sample of 119 students in the UK with an aim to explore the impact of participation in extra-curricular activity on the transition from Higher Education to employment. Like with the Futuretrack research, Tchibozo reported that participation had a significant influence, finding that those students who participated in extra-curricular activities (including a range of social and leisure activities) had access to a better occupational status post-graduation than those who did not. Students who did not participate in any extra-curricular activity were three times more likely to begin their careers as office employees rather than as managers. Participation in extra-curricular activity was viewed by employers and graduates as a determinant of productivity, showing an ability to manage one's time between different interests, and therefore influencing the employment decision.

Research by Leung (2003) with secondary school students in Hong Kong who participated in music demonstrated the importance of extra-curricular activity for student development, finding that students who participated would adjust better to the 'real world' upon graduation. These extra-curricular activities involve learning something new, and help to prepare the music students for the need to learn new skills and participate in personal development within the workplace on a continuous basis. Whilst this research relates to participation primarily in music as an extra-curricular activity, the findings could most likely also be related to participation in sport, which can also involve the learning and development of new skills.

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES, 2009a) highlights good practice in developing employability in young people through an initiative introduced by Renfrewshire Council in Scotland, which aims to provide opportunities for young people to gain Sport Leader Awards. UKCES claim that, alongside enabling young people to develop specific skills which would enable them to gain employment within the sport industry, training in sport leadership also helps young people to develop generic skills, knowledge and behaviours which would potentially be transferable to any occupation. These skills include leadership, motivation and communication.

The findings of the Futuretrack research, and of the smaller-scale studies by both Tchibozo and Leung, provide useful and interesting insights, with the findings of both demonstrating a clear and positive link between participation in extra-curricular activities and employability. These are, however, small-scale projects which focus on wider extra-curricular activity, without a primary focus on sport.

Similarly, the claims by UKCES (2009a) that sports leadership programmes can develop generic and transferable employability skills relate to a small-scale initiative in Scotland, and research has not, to date, been undertaken in order to prove this claim. The reference to extra-curricular activities in many of the HEI and careers advisory documents demonstrates that extra-curricular activity is valued, and seen as enhancing employability, but the specific value has not been explicitly outlined. Similarly, research that has been undertaken with employers highlights the importance of 'soft skills' such as team working, communication and confidence - attributes which can potentially be developed through participation in sport, yet little research has made these specific links.

The primary research conducted for this report therefore helps to fill this gap in current research, by presenting high-level and relatively large-scale research into the impact of the engagement in sport on graduate employability.

### 3. Methods

In order to address the research questions a two-stage, mixed methods approach was adopted.

#### 3.1 Stage 1 Desk Research and Secondary Data Analysis

This first stage of the project focused on objectives 1 and 2, using secondary data analysis to explore potential relationships between engagement in sport and graduate employability.

1. Does engagement in sport impact on graduate employment and longer term employability?
2. Do universities with an explicit strategic commitment to sport perform better against measures of graduate employment?

##### 3.1.1 Strategic Engagement with Sport by Universities and Graduate Employment

We wanted to test the notion that sport and employability are associated at a macro level. This was achieved by developing a database of all universities with their Graduate Employability Score (taken from the most recent data from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey) and whether or not whether they had an explicit sport strategy. The combination of these two variables will indicate whether or not there is a macro-level relationship between sport and employability. Although less relevant it was then straightforward to correlate employability scores against ranking in the BUCS league table.

##### 3.1.2 Sports Participation and Graduate Earnings - Active People Secondary Data Analysis

Secondary analysis of the Active People Survey 6 Dataset (n=155,853) was undertaken to explore the data relating to those with graduate level qualifications. We already know that sport participation is highly correlated with socio-economic group. The aim was to examine for example whether there any differences between graduates who play sport and graduates who do not, in terms of annual household income (as a proxy indicator for earnings). This analysis was extended to include involvement in sports volunteering as a further dimension of engagement in sport. The findings from this could then be compared against the primary research with graduates.

#### 3.2 Stage 2 - Primary Research

Stage 2 focused primarily on delivering research objectives 3 to 6, but also captured qualitative data to from key stakeholders in relation to objectives 1 and 2.

- Do medium / longer term graduates recognise the impact of engagement with sport on their employability?
- Are there differences depending on the type of engagement in sport - e.g. recreational, competitive, high performance, volunteering, and administration?
- Do employers understand / recognise the different types of engagement in sport and are there different impacts in terms of employability?
- Are there differences in the importance and value placed on engagement with sport by different institutions?

### 3.2.1 Graduate Survey

A link to an online survey was distributed by 24 partner universities who via either a direct communication to their alumni network, or as an indirect communication as part of an alumni newsletter. This survey achieved 5,838 responses from graduates, representing over 120 institutions at undergraduate level due to alumni databases having postgraduate students that did their undergraduate course elsewhere. The survey was structured so as to enable three clusters of respondents to be identified, those who did no extra-curricular activity, those who took part in other activities excluding sport, and those who engaged in sport.

Additional data were collected on university attended; type of course, employment history, and current earnings. Graduates were also asked for their views on how participation in extra - curricular activity had contributed to their employability (skills, attributes and behaviours) and the impact of different types of engagement.

### 3.2.2 Graduate Employer Survey and Interviews

A short online survey was developed for graduate employers and SIRC worked with the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) to distribute the link to its 750 members. University of Leeds and Manchester provided access to companies involved in their Graduate Recruitment Fairs, and Sheffield Hallam University distributed the link to its employer network. A total of 112 companies contributed including 25 face to face interviews at the graduate fairs.

To maximise potential engagement, employers were asked just 2 short open questions.

- What are your views on the benefits of engaging in sport to graduate employability?
- Are there any specific skills, experience, attributes that are developed through engagement in sport that you feel impact positively on employability?

### 3.2.3 Interviews with Vice Chancellors and Senior Executives of Universities

Thirteen telephone interviews were secured with Vice Chancellors or a nominated deputy. The purpose of the interview being to investigate the importance and value placed on engagement in sport by different institutions and to explore views on the contribution of sport to the employability agenda.

The interviews covered the following issues:

- each university's strategic commitment to sport and perceptions of its importance;
- the importance of sport to the student experience; and
- views on the contribution of student engagement in sport to employability.

All interviews were recorded, fully transcribed and subjected to a themed content analysis.

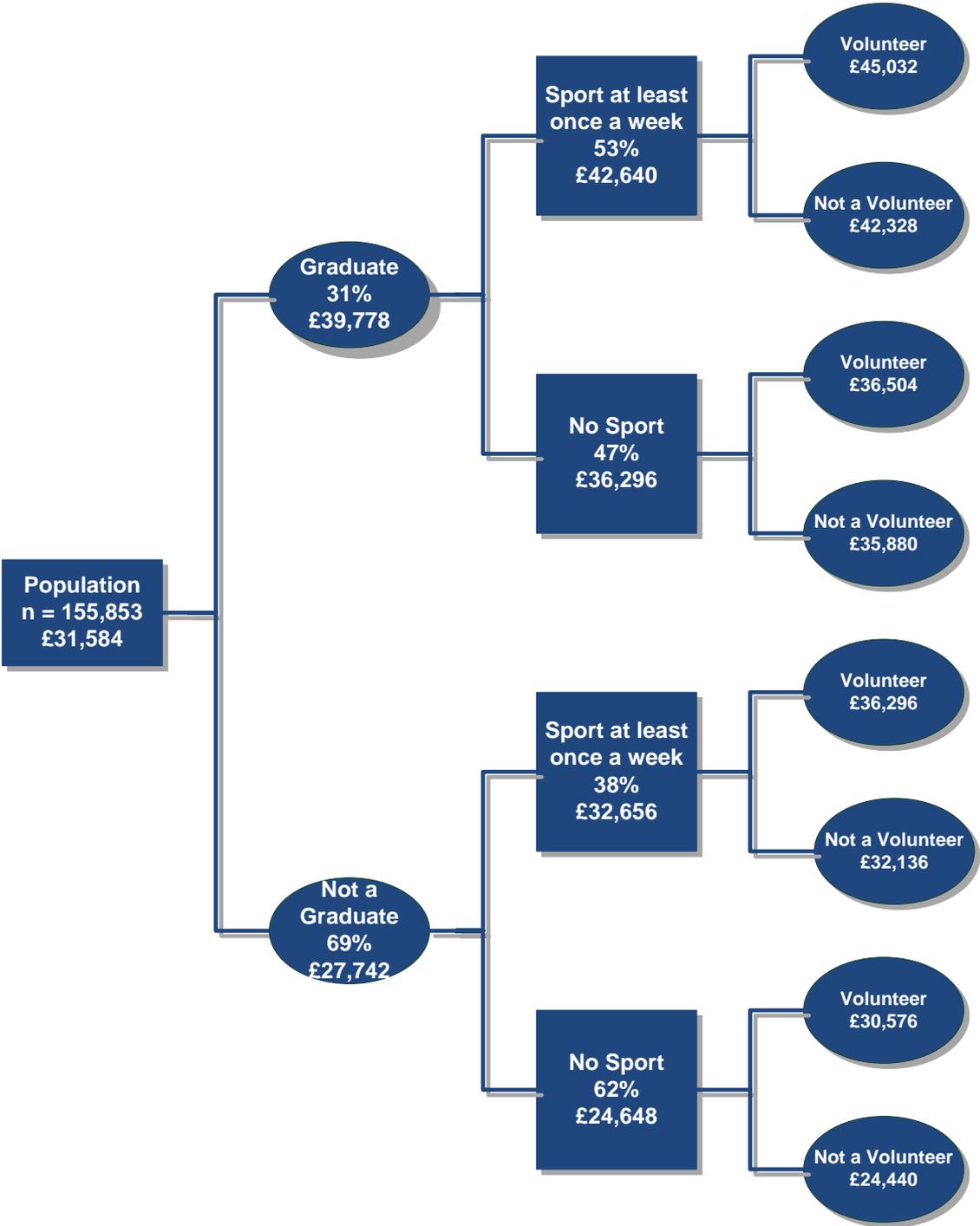
## 4. Findings

In this section we present the findings from the research from the perspective of the key audiences, graduates, employers and university senior executives.

### 4.1 The Graduate's Perspective

#### 4.1.1 Findings from Secondary Analysis of Active People Data

Figure 1 : The impact of education, participation in sport and volunteering on household income



The sixth edition of the Active People Survey was conducted between October 2011 and October 2012 by BMRB on behalf of Sport England. The results are based on interviews with 155,853 adults (aged 16+) in England conducted evenly over the year. In addition to containing questions directly linked to participation in sport, Active People also contains numerous demographic and socio-economic variables. These can be used in combination to conduct secondary analysis on the data which goes beyond the primary objectives of the survey. In particular, we were able to reanalyse the data to explore household income (a strong proxy for earnings) with variables such as: whether or not respondents were graduates; whether or not they took part in sport; and whether or not they volunteered in sport.

The main findings from the secondary analysis are shown in Figure 1 and are outlined in narrative form below.

- 31% of respondents were graduates holding a bachelor's degree or higher and 69% were non-graduates.
- The majority of graduates (53%) took part in sport at least once per week and 47% did not.
- By contrast, for non-graduates sport is a minority pursuit with 38% taking part at least once per week and 62% not taking part.
- Average household income is £31,584 and there is a £12,000 difference in household incomes between graduates and non-graduates. Active People is a cross-sectional survey, meaning its sample is drawn from different cohorts every time it is conducted. Cross sectional surveys can describe the strength of a relationship between two variables but they cannot determine causality. Thus we cannot say that being a graduate causes a £12,000 increase in salary, but we can say that being a graduate is associated with a higher salary than non-graduates
- Graduates who took part in sport have a higher annual household income (£42,640) than graduates who did not (£36,296), a difference of £6,344.
- Amongst non-graduates we find a similar relationship to graduates, that is, those who do sport (£32,656) have a higher annual household income than those who do not (£24,648), a difference of £8,008.
- Graduates who took part in sport **and** were also involved in volunteering had an even higher annual household income (£45,032) than those graduates who took part in sport but did not volunteer (£42,328), a premium of £2,704
- Amongst non-graduates again we find a similar relationship to graduates but an even greater differential. Non-graduates who took part in sport **and** were involved in volunteering have a higher annual household income (£36,296) than those who do no sport or volunteering (£24,440), a difference of £11,856.

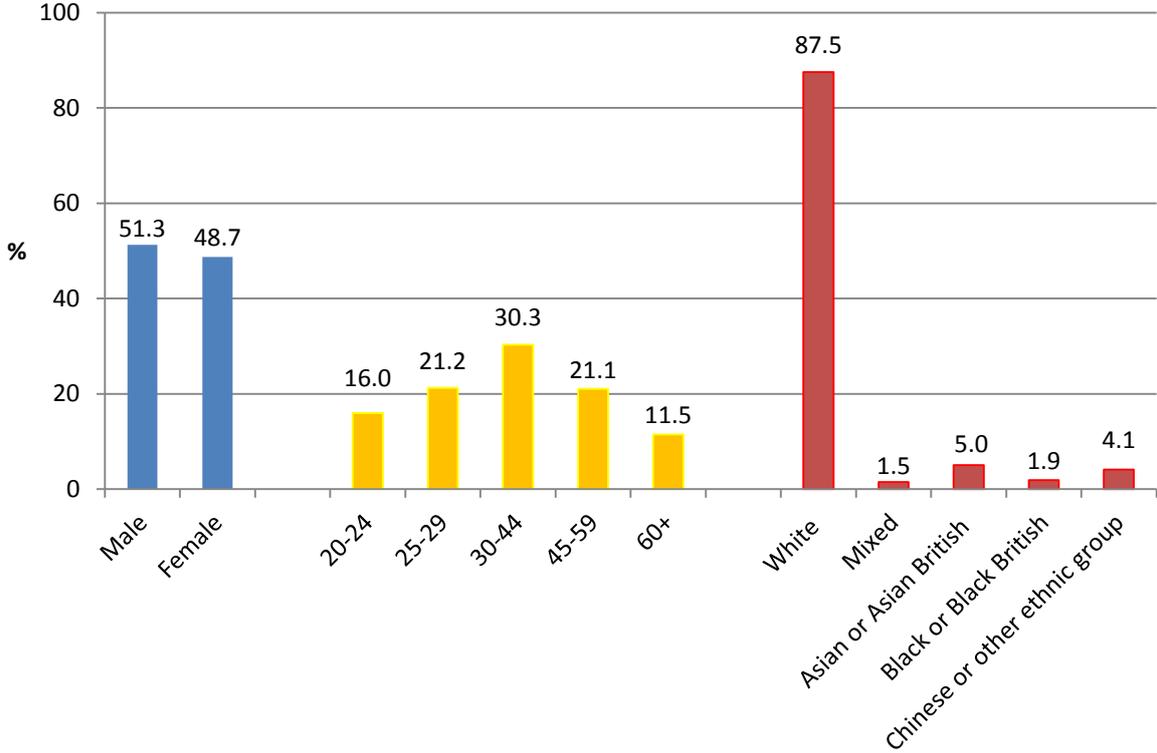
Whilst these findings do not prove that sport and volunteering have a positive impact on graduates' earnings, they do enable us to form a hypothesis that this is a notion that is worth testing in the primary research. The online survey of graduates was designed in such a way as to see whether similar findings would be revealed when talking to graduates about their individual salaries and their engagement or otherwise in sport and other extra-curricular activities.

## 4.2 Findings from the Graduate Survey

### 4.2.1 Nature of the Sample

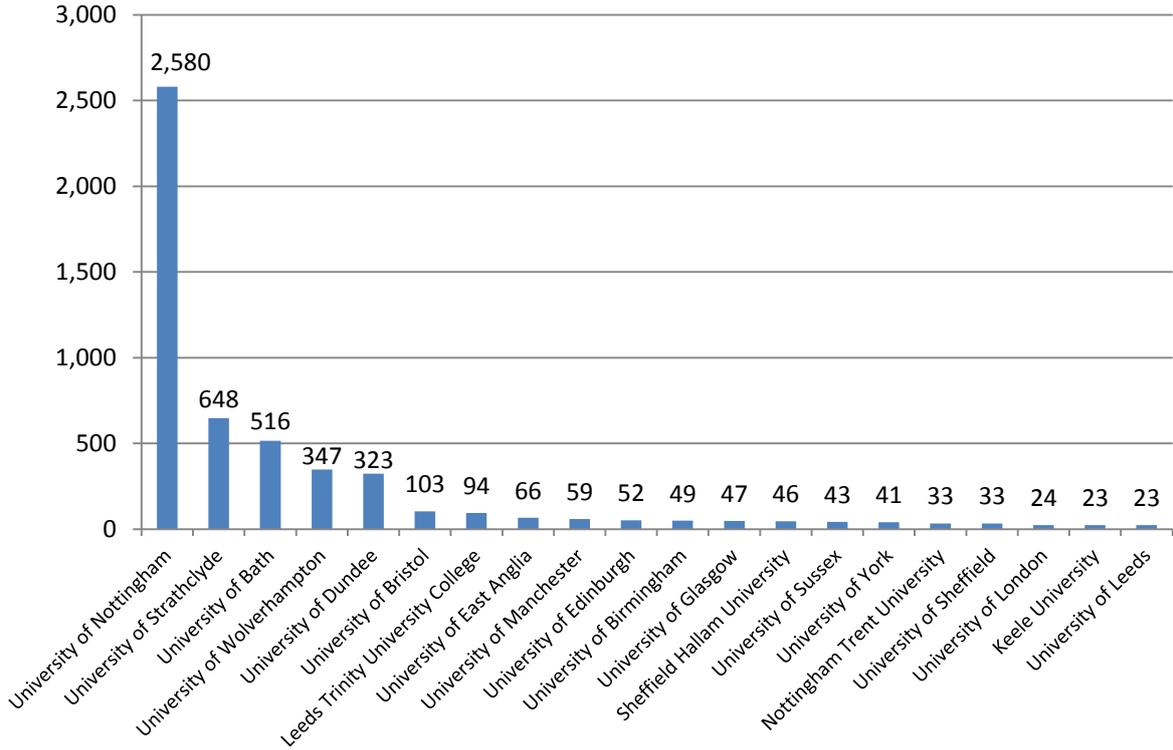
Prior to presenting the headline findings it is important to outline the nature of the sample from which the results are derived. The 5,838 responses came from a cross-section of graduates, including representation from a broad range of institutions including Russell Group, 'red brick', and the post 1992 new' universities. The following three graphs show: the demographic breakdown of the survey sample; the university respondents attended (for their undergraduate degree); and, their course type according to the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS3).

Graph 1: Overall demographics

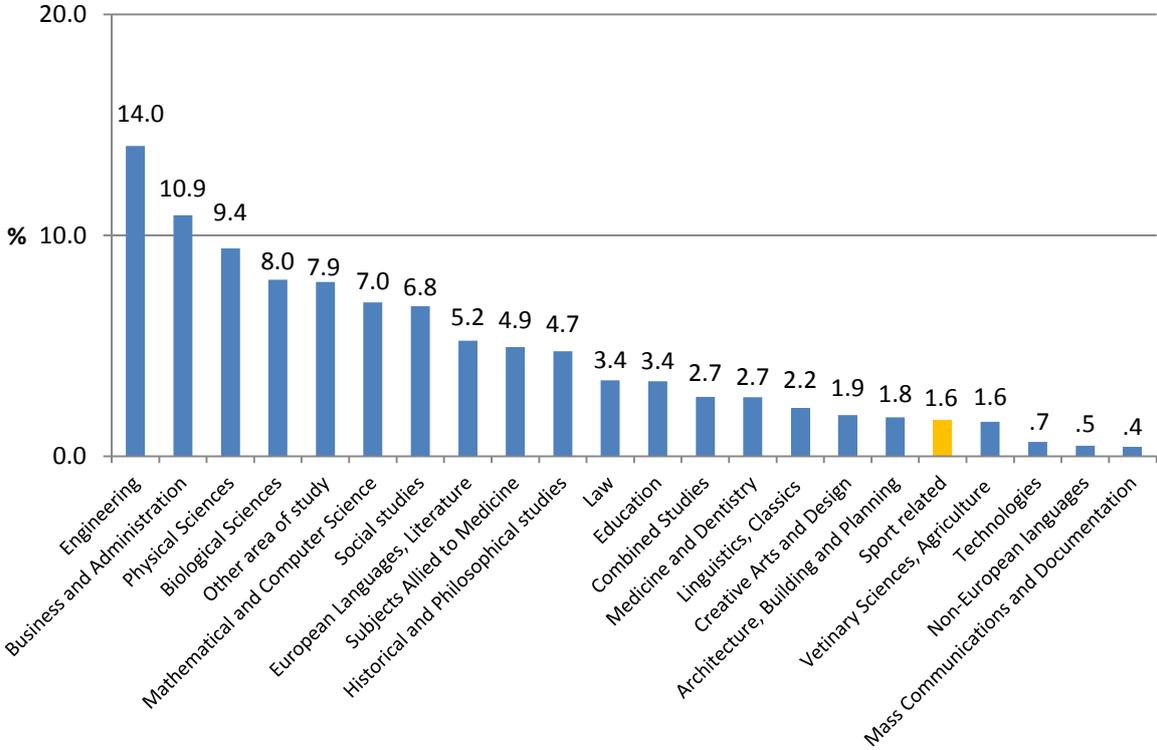


The survey of graduates showed there was a slight majority of males (51%) compared to females (49 %) in the sample. The most commonly cited age category was 30-44 (30%) although there was representation from across the age ranges. Despite the vast majority of the sample being of 'White' ethnic origin, those from other ethnic groups were over-represented compared with the UK population as a whole.

**Graph 2: University attended (undergraduate) - top 20 in terms of responses**



**Graph 3: Course studied (JACS3)**

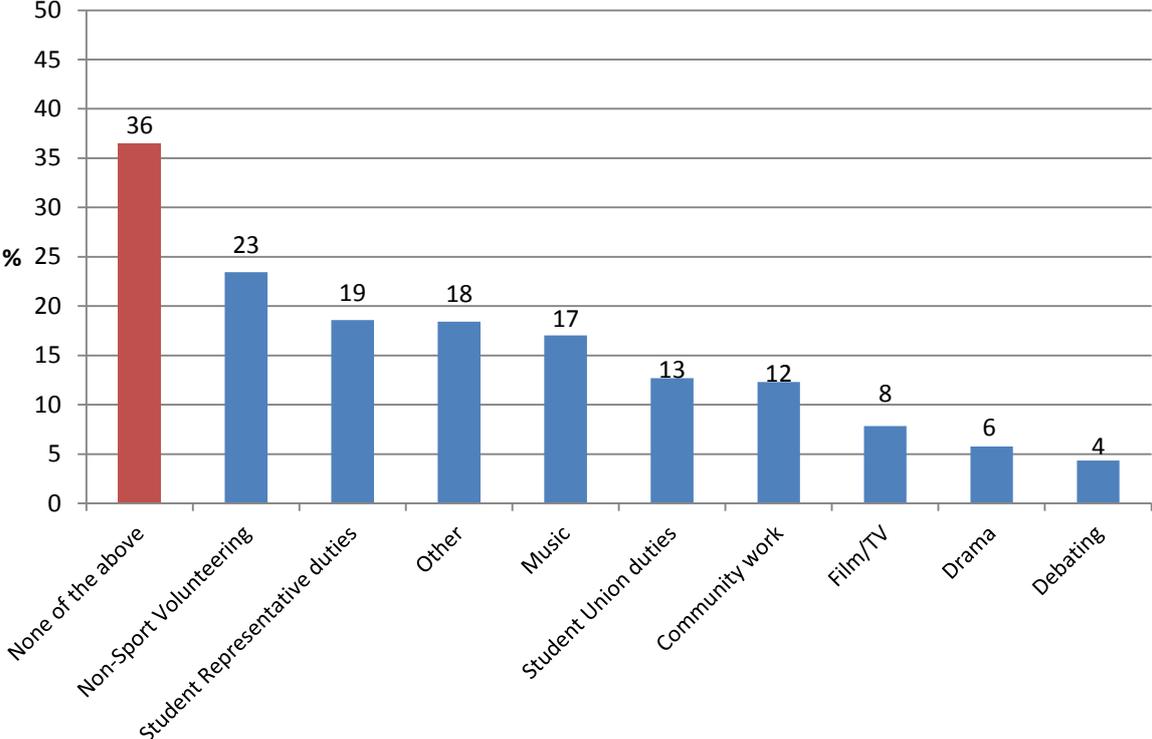


As stated in section 2.2.1, 24 universities distributed the survey, although the seven universities that distributed individual emails recorded the greatest responses. Although not every university distributed the survey, almost every UK University was cited at least once in the results. The



The majority of the sample (69%) engaged in some form of sport during their time at university, and 31% said that they did no form of sport from the list of options given. By some margin, the most commonly cited form of sport activity cited was recreational use of the gym. In addition to sporting engagement, graduates were asked about the other extra-curricular activities they took part in, as shown in Graph 5.

**Graph 5: Engagement in other extra-curricular activities at university**



The majority of the survey sample (64%) did at least one of the nine other extra-curricular pursuits and 36% said that they did none of the activities listed. Non-sport volunteering (23%) and student representative duties (19%) were the most commonly cited of this group of non-sport extra-curricular activities.

**4.2.3 Creating Clusters for Analysis**

In order to examine graduates' experiences in regard to employability, we created clusters based on respondents' extra-curricular pursuits at university. The nine sporting categories can be collapsed to create four distinct clusters relating to sport engagement, namely: no sport; gym only; sport excluding volunteering and management; and, sport including volunteering and management, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Sport categories - cluster 1**

<b>Cluster 1 - Sport</b>	<b>%</b>
Sport excluding volunteering / management	31%
No sport at university	31%
Gym only	24%
Sport including volunteering / management	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 6 shows that the two largest clusters are those graduates that took part in sport, but were not involved in the management / volunteering roles, and those that did no sport at university (31%).

Collapsing the extra-curricular activities alongside sporting engagement allows an additional six clusters to be created, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 All extra-curricular categories - cluster 2**

<b>Cluster 2 - All extra-curricular</b>	<b>%</b>
Sport at university plus other extra-curricular activities	30%
Sport at university only, no other extra-curricular activities	16%
Gym only, plus other extra-curricular activities	16%
Gym only, no other extra-curricular activities	8%
Other extra-curricular activities only	18%
No sport or other extra-curricular activities	13%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

When combining the two types of extra-curricular questions together, the majority of the sample (30%) is those graduates that took part in sporting pursuits and at least one other extra-curricular activity. Overall, 13% of the sample took part in no sport or other extra-curricular activities at university.

The creation of the two groups of clusters allows the data to be analysed according to specific types of engagement which is shown in the following sub-sections.

**4.2.4 Income**

Graduates were asked to state their starting salary (using the same bandings as Active People 6), and their current salary using the same options. All average starting salaries have been adjusted to reflect inflation based on the time they were applicable using the Bank of England Inflation Calculator. This is in order to standardise the figures to account for the length of time since graduation. Table 8 shows the headline average salary figures from the survey results.

**Table 3 Headline salary figures**

	Salary
Average starting salary (adjusted)	£ 15,388
Average current salary	£ 29,536
<b>Average current salary - Male</b>	
Average current salary - Male	£ 33,592
<b>Average current salary - Female</b>	
Average current salary - Female	£ 25,376
<b>Age groups</b>	
20-24	£ 15,704
25-29	£ 24,544
30-44	£ 33,592
45-59	£ 37,336
60+	£ 34,944

The headline figures demonstrated differences in earnings at a headline level, as shown in Table 3. The adjusted average starting salary for all graduates was £15,388, compared to an average salary currently of £29,536, which is slightly above the UK national average. However, males in the sample earned, on average, £2,586 more for their first salary than females (at £16,817) and this increased to a difference of £8,216 for current salary. It was clear from the survey responses that a lot of female graduates had left work for periods of maternity/extended childcare before returning to part or full-time jobs, which may explain the variation in income by gender.

Those graduates leaving university between 1983 and 1992 were the highest earners (£40,352) with a large difference compared with those graduating in the last ten years (£22,568). This is not surprising as those who have been in the workplace the longest are more experienced and established in their careers than more recent graduates. The most interesting income differentials become apparent when applied to the clusters created above, and regarding current physical activity levels. Beginning with the sport engagement classification, Table 4 shows the average salary figures.

**Table 4 Average current salary by sport engagement at university**

Cluster 1	Salary	Variance from average salary
<b>Average salary</b>	<b>£ 29,536</b>	<b>-</b>
No sport at university	£ 26,728	- £ 2,808
Gym only	£ 28,080	- £ 1,456
Sport including volunteering/managing	£ 31,720	+ £2,184
Sport excluding volunteering/managing	£ 32,552	+ £ 3,016

As Table 4 shows, those graduates who did not take part in sport at university had the lowest average current salary, with those that making use of the gym only earning, on average, c. £1,300 more. However, those graduates who engaged in sport at university had the highest average salaries although experience of volunteering or managing sport showed no sign of a premium as per our analysis of the Active People 6 data. A similar pattern emerged when looking at cluster 2, as shown below.

**Table 5 Average current salary by extra-curricular engagement at university**

Cluster 2	Salary	Variance from average salary
<b>Average salary</b>	<b>£ 29,536</b>	<b>-</b>
Gym only, plus extra-curricular activities	£ 26,624	<b>- £ 2,912</b>
Other extra-curricular activities only	£ 26,728	<b>- £ 2,808</b>
No extra-curricular activities	£ 27,248	<b>- £ 2,288</b>
Gym only, no other extra-curricular activities	£ 29,744	<b>+ £ 208</b>
Sport plus other extra-curricular activities	£ 31,200	<b>+ £ 1,664</b>
Sport only, no other extra-curricular activities	£ 34,320	<b>+ £ 4,784</b>

Those graduates who used the gym, those that did non-sporting extra-curricular activities and those that did no extra-curricular activities all earn, on average, less than the overall average. By contrast, those graduates who engaged in sport at university earned in excess of £31,000 and £34,000 respectively. The final categorisation for analysing current salary is by current activity level, in an attempt to test whether there is a similar relationship to the Active People Survey flow diagram (shown in Figure 1).

**Table 6 Average current salary by extra-curricular engagement at university**

Current activity level	Salary
Zero Days a week	£ 28,600
One-Two Days a week (1-11 days a month)	£ 29,744
Three+ Days a week (12+ Days a month)	£ 30,264

Table 6 outlines that those graduates who are currently active (i.e. those that answered 12 or more to the question *"In the past 4 weeks, on how many days have you done at least 30 minutes of sport or recreational physical activity when the effort was usually enough to raise your breathing rate?"*) were the highest earners. Those reporting no activity in the previous 4 weeks were the lowest earners. This finding is consistent with the findings above for cluster 1 and cluster 2 in terms of engagement in sporting activities. Furthermore the data are also consistent with, but on a much smaller scale, the findings of the Active People 6 secondary analysis; which showed that graduates who took part in sport currently, enjoyed higher household incomes than those who did not.

Finally in this sub-section we compare the growth in earnings over time, as outlined in the following two tables. The average starting income has been weighted using the Bank of England inflation calculator, as stated previously.

**Table 7 Career income increases (1)**

Cluster 1	Weighted starting salary	Current	Relative growth in Earnings
<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>£ 15,388</b>	<b>£ 29,536</b>	<b>£ 14,148</b>
Gym Only	£ 14,652	£ 28,080	£ 13,428
Sport including volunteering/managing	£ 16,026	£ 31,720	£ 15,694
Sport excluding volunteering/managing	£ 16,593	£ 32,552	£ 15,959
No sport at university	£ 13,793	£ 26,728	£ 12,935

**Table 8 Career income increases (2)**

Cluster 2	Weighted starting salary	Current	Relative growth in Earnings
<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>£ 15,388</b>	<b>£ 29,536</b>	<b>£ 14,148</b>
Gym only, no other extra-curricular	£ 15,498	£ 29,744	£ 14,246
Sport only, no other extra-curricular	£ 17,028	£ 34,320	£ 17,292
Sport plus other extra-curricular	£ 15,708	£ 31,200	£ 15,492
Other extra-curricular only	£ 13,206	£ 26,728	£ 13,522
Gym only, plus extra-curricular activities	£ 14,347	£ 26,624	£ 12,277
No extra-curricular activities	£ 15,714	£ 27,248	£ 11,534

As the two tables demonstrate, the average increases in earnings are greatest for those graduates that engaged in sport at university. Interestingly, those graduates that did no sport (table 7) and no other extra-curricular activities (table 8) at all had the lowest increase in career earnings.

Although engagement in sport is not the sole driver of enhanced income, there appears to be a positive relationship between engagement in sport, both at university and afterwards, and earnings. In our research with graduate employers we sought to establish whether there was anything about graduates who engaged in sport that made them more attractive to employers than graduates who did not engage in sport.

#### 4.2.5 Skill Development

Graduates were asked about eleven attributes, three 'technical' skills and eight 'personal' skills in relation to the question:

*"To what extent did the extra-curricular activities you did at university contribute to developing your employability in the following areas?"*

Graduates were asked to rate each attribute based on a scoring system of 0 = no contribution, 1 = minor contribution, 2 = moderate contribution, 3 = major contribution, and the averages for each attribute are presented in the two tables below.

**Table 9 Extra-curricular impact on employability - Cluster 1**

Attribute	Overall	No sport	Gym only	Sport including volunteering / management	Sport excluding volunteering / management
Good numeracy skills	<b>0.71</b>	0.68	0.62	0.90	0.70
Clear written communication	<b>1.18</b>	1.24	1.06	1.47	1.09
Using appropriate IT applications	<b>0.73</b>	0.72	0.70	0.92	0.67
Good time management	<b>1.48</b>	1.31	1.26	1.91	1.50
Organising, planning and coordinating	<b>1.71</b>	1.62	1.44	2.24	1.70
Good at solving problems	<b>1.44</b>	1.42	1.26	1.91	1.36
Ability to be creative, innovative	<b>1.48</b>	1.54	1.34	1.74	1.40
Ability to work as part of a team	<b>1.98</b>	1.77	1.64	2.46	2.09
Ability to lead / manage others	<b>1.76</b>	1.55	1.35	2.38	1.84
Good understanding of customer handling	<b>1.12</b>	1.11	0.95	1.51	1.05
Making a positive contribution	<b>1.59</b>	1.52	1.34	2.01	1.60

**Table 10 Extra-curricular impact on employability - Cluster 2**

Attribute	Overall	Gym only, no other extra-curricular	Sport only, no other extra-curricular	Sport plus other extra-curricular	Other extra-curricular only	Gym only, plus extra-curricular activities
Good numeracy skills	<b>0.71</b>	0.53	0.52	0.87	0.67	0.65
Clear written communication	<b>1.18</b>	0.64	0.76	1.42	1.23	1.19
Using appropriate IT applications	<b>0.73</b>	0.58	0.46	0.88	0.72	0.73
Good time management	<b>1.48</b>	0.76	1.39	1.74	1.31	1.41
Organising, planning and coordinating	<b>1.71</b>	0.81	1.59	2.00	1.62	1.62
Good at solving problems	<b>1.44</b>	0.72	1.16	1.71	1.42	1.41
Ability to be creative, innovative	<b>1.48</b>	0.72	1.10	1.70	1.54	1.52
Ability to work as part of a team	<b>1.98</b>	0.98	2.08	2.26	1.77	1.85
Ability to lead / manage others	<b>1.76</b>	0.80	1.82	2.10	1.55	1.52
Good understanding of customer handling	<b>1.12</b>	0.59	0.87	1.35	1.11	1.06
Making a positive contribution	<b>1.59</b>	0.75	1.45	1.86	1.52	1.51

As tables 9 and 10 show, graduates involved in the leadership and management of sporting activities at university felt that these activities had the greatest impact on the development of the eleven attributes, in particular the eight "personal" skills. None of the attributes scored an average above '2 - moderate contribution' for the sample as a whole, but four of the personal skills scored in excess of 2 for those graduates that took part in the volunteering / management of university sport (table 9). Furthermore, those graduates who took part in sport and other extra-curricular activities scored the highest for each attribute, three of which scoring above 2 (table 10). This suggests that those graduates who did activities in addition to their studies helped to further develop their skill set through extra-curricular activities. This is not to say that university courses and part-time work would not develop such skills, more that extra-curricular activities, particularly those that require individuals to take responsibility for others, contribute to the development of well-rounded graduates.

Graduates were also asked to rate their agreement with four statements on a 5 point Likert scale, as presented in the following tables.

**Table 11 Agreement questions -Cluster 1**

	Overall	Gym only	Sport including volunteering/ managing	Sport excluding volunteering/ management	No Sport
"I am generally more productive in my job than my colleagues"	3.74	3.66	3.88	3.76	3.71
"I tend to have less time off with sickness and illness than others in my workplace"	4.05	3.99	4.18	4.13	3.94
"I was able to use examples from university extra-curricular experiences in job applications / interviews"	3.37	3.23	4.13	3.53	2.95
"I use the skills developed from extra-curricular activities at university in my job"	3.18	3.04	3.88	3.35	2.79

**Table 12 Agreement questions - Cluster 2**

	Overall	Gym only, no other E/C	Sport only, no other E/C	Sport plus other E/C	Other E/C only	Gym only, plus other E/C activities	No E/C
"I am generally more productive in my job than my colleagues"	3.74	3.65	3.75	3.83	3.71	3.66	3.70
"I tend to have less time off with sickness and illness than others in my workplace"	4.05	4.00	4.16	4.14	3.93	3.98	3.96
"I was able to use examples from university extra-curricular experiences in job applications / interviews"	3.37	2.68	3.46	3.84	3.35	3.50	2.41
"I use the skills developed from extra-curricular activities at university in my job"	3.18	2.53	3.24	3.65	3.15	3.28	2.31

Overall the graduates in our sample gave broadly positive answers to the Likert scale questions. What is of particular interest is any variation in scores between clusters. Further to the earlier findings, those graduates with experience of volunteering and managing sport at university had the highest agreement levels with all four statements (in green), and those that did no sport (in terms of sport) scored lowest (in red). Similarly, in cluster 2, graduates taking part in sport scored highest against the statements, and those that did not scored lowest, two of which were those graduates that did no sport or other extra-curricular activities. Without trying to attribute causality, there appears to be a positive relationship between those people who took responsibility for activities at university and their ability to use those experiences post-graduation in the jobs' market.

**4.2.6 Employment and Unemployment**

Overall 25% of the sample had encountered a period of unemployment at some point in their career, although those who engaged in sport at university were slightly less likely to have experienced a period of unemployment (21%, than all other groups (25%-28%) as shown in table 13.

**Table 13 Have you had any periods of unemployment since your first job? - Cluster 1**

	% "Yes"
Gym only	28%
No sport at university	27%
Sport excluding volunteering/managing	24%
Sport including volunteering/managing	21%

Table 13 suggests that 1 in 5 of those people engaged in sport at university had experienced a period of unemployment, the corresponding proportion for those that didn't was 1 in 4 graduates. Those graduates involved in the management of sport were around a third less likely to have experienced unemployment than those who did no sport or only attended the gym.

**4.2.7 Overall Impact**

Finally from the graduate survey, those graduates who took part in sport were asked to state their agreement with the statement *"Engagement in sport at university had a positive impact on my employability skills/attributes?"* as shown in table 14.

**Table 14 Sport having a positive impact**

	%
Strongly Agree	19%
Agree	32%
Neither agree nor Disagree	30%
Disagree	12%
Strongly Disagree	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Over half of the sample (51%) agreed with the statement above, 30% felt it had little in the way of impact, and 18% disagreed, which is a net positive score of +33 (*Strongly Agree + Agree - Disagree +*

*Strongly Disagree*). For those that disagreed, the consensus was that employers were more interested in demonstrating specific ability in the area of work, rather than some of the softer, personal skills that those in agreement cited. Interestingly, employers consulted through this research suggested that the softer skills and ability to draw on other experiences outside the academic element of university was important (see section 3.3). However, the results using cluster 1 show an interesting difference in opinion depending on the level of engagement, as shown in Table 15.

**Table 15 Sport having a positive impact - Cluster 1**

	<b>Net agreement</b>
Gym only	-8
Sport including volunteering/ management	+76
Sport excluding volunteering / management	+44

Table 15 shows that, for those graduates that attended the gym only, there was a negative score (i.e. more graduates disagreed that sport had a positive impact on their employability than agreed). However, for those graduates engaged in sport, and particularly those involved in the volunteering and management of sport at university, the level of net agreement was much higher. This suggests that those taking extra responsibility through university sport felt those experiences had a positive impact upon their skills and development.

**Some sample comments include:**

*"I've made a good living since graduating 30 years ago and feel very fortunate to have done so. My involvement in playing, coaching and organising sport gave me the knowledge, skills and confidence to sell myself to employers."*

*"I felt that being a team captain in a university sport provided me with an opportunity to develop my leadership qualities and encouraged me to improve my ability to approach work in a more proactive and organised fashion. This has also given me situations and experiences to draw upon in job applications and interviews."*

*"Having rowed for the University, there is a lot of transferable attributes that I know are seen as very desirable by employers e.g. drive, teamwork, dedication etc. I also was secretary of my boat club which showed good leadership skills and the ability to take on even more responsibilities whilst studying a challenging degree successfully."*

Respondents were also asked to explain why they gave this answer, and the word cloud below gives an indication of the key words used by graduates.





### 4.3 Graduate Employer's Perspective

The results from our research with graduate employers found that they were overwhelmingly positive about the benefits of graduates having been engaged in sport whilst at University. 78 employers completed the online survey and out of these, 73 (94%) responded positively about the impact of sport. All of the employers that we spoke to via other methods, including email correspondence, telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews at the Graduate Recruitment Fair, were also positive about the benefits of engagement in sport for graduate employability.

Thus the vast majority of employers recognised a value in graduates having engaged in sport whilst at University, and in this section we highlight some of the views and comments made by employers to this effect. We show that many employers actively look for mention of sports participation in graduate job applications, and we describe some of the skills, characteristics and qualities that employers suggested were successfully developed through sport, for example citing particular attributes gained from sport that would help graduates to make more convincing job applications to their company. Sport was, for some organisations, part of workplace culture, where employees were encouraged to continue to participate throughout their careers.

We found that employers place particular value on graduates' engagement in leadership and organisational roles and positions of responsibility within sport, with this providing real 'added value' to job applications. Finally, we show that many employers specified the importance of applicants being able to demonstrate effectively the skills that they have developed through sport in their job applications, i.e. in order to demonstrate their employability.

The employers that we spoke to for this element of the research were predominantly involved in graduate recruitment within their organisation, for example either as heads of Human Resource departments or as Graduate Recruitment Managers responsible for recruitment to graduate programmes. The respondents also include some representatives from graduate recruitment agencies and careers departments. The focus for all respondents was therefore primarily on the recruitment of graduates to graduate programmes and schemes, and they spoke in relation to what characteristics they saw as indicative of employability when assessing job applications and conducting selection events.

#### 4.3.1 Graduate Recruitment and Applications

In the current economic climate, a shortage of jobs and high demand for graduate positions means that having a degree appears to no longer be enough on its own to secure employment, and to develop employability. Many of the employers that we spoke to tended to see the achievements of a graduate which are related to their academic discipline, i.e. qualifications and subject specific skills, as being necessary, but not as being sufficient enough for them to be recruited. All applicants for a graduate level post will be in possession of a degree; therefore graduates appear to need something more than their degree qualification in order to differentiate themselves from other applicants.

*'Every applicant who applies to us has experienced University, so you might want to think about finding examples outside your University or academic experience if possible to really set you apart.'* (John Lewis)

*'Nowadays employers are looking for much more outside of academic ability (more than ever) as things have become more competitive in the job market.'* (Experior Ltd)

These findings reflect the research outlined in our literature review in section 1.3, which showed that achievements outside of the discipline, including the possession of 'soft skills', are equally as important to employers who recruit graduates. The employers we spoke to in this research described engagement in sport as a way of developing these types of 'soft skills'.

*'What employers don't want to see is that you've just done your degree and that's all you have. So you definitely need something more. It doesn't have to be a medal in sports, but the fact that you, for example if the sport is football, can give an indication of your team working skills. If it is something highly pressured like badminton that is more independent, that can show different skills. So employers do definitely assess more than just your degree, and sports clubs is one of the things that they look for. If you got a first in a certain subject at a certain university might not really cut it anymore, if that's all you've got to show for it. So you do have to show your drive, your independence and that you are able to make things happen for yourself. So for this I think sports can be a good indication of that. What they are looking for is your personality as well. So having a degree is still important and that's not going away, but because they can choose, they have more to choose from, so they look for more things outside of the degree as well'* (Graduate Recruitment Bureau)

Many of the employers that we have spoken to describe that participation in sport is something which they actively look for during their selection processes when assessing graduate job applications.

*'We typically recruit hungry, motivated, competitive people, so as part of our selection process we like to see people who have been in sports teams, have competed, have got that cutting edge, so definitely someone who has got a sporty background has got an initial tick in the box for us, it's something we like to see'* (ATA Recruitment)

*'We tend to look for people that have played sport at university; it demonstrates that they can do something outside of their degree, shows commitment to something they enjoy, dedicated to something. It shows a lot about that person. Also the leadership element, looking for the sports captains who want to take responsibility, want to take leadership roles - for us it says a lot about that person wanting to elevate themselves to that position - they are the people we want in our business. We look specifically for sport people. Working in recruitment is very tough and you have to be dedicated and a lot of sports people are the best demonstrations of that, they have dedicated to something, worked really hard to achieve that and it reflects well in their work and work ethic. We actively seek out people who did sport at university, it is fair to say that most of our office takes part in sport still and they fit well into the culture of the*

*business. Sport is a good example of being able to draw on experience in interviews, and we think it reflects well on the graduate when they interview with us.'* (Mackenzie Stewart)

*'I speak to HR managers every day and they all say to me we are looking for more than just a degree, we understand that these candidates have little experience so find me someone with a passion for something. Education is something we all have to do. Sport isn't. Therefore those who proactively participate in sport in their spare time shows some element of going the extra mile, trying to achieve more and pushing themselves to their limit.'* (Reed Graduates)

Some employers valued sport more than others, and this depends on the type of organisation and the type of role, for example for roles which require very specific technical knowledge, this expertise might be regarded as more crucial to a candidates' job application than the qualities developed through sport.

Sport is also valued highly if the job itself requires a level of physical fitness, for example the Royal Air Force.

*'In some respects we would rather have someone with a 2:2 or a 3rd but who had been involved in sport, participating, running clubs etc. as the student gets so much more out of that than just the pure academic side and we would be at the stage where we would actively discourage someone from applying if they didn't have that sort of background.'* (Royal Air Force)

Generally, most employers from organisations that are not part of the sports industry or do not have fitness or health requirements also highlighted some of the key employability skills that are developed through sport and which would benefit graduates working in their organisations, regardless of job role or type of organisation.

#### **4.3.3 Role of Sport in Employability**

Employers described a wide range of skills and attributes as being developed through participation in sport, many providing a long list of potential attributes that would all be valuable in applying for a job in their organisation. The following table lists the main employability attributes which were mentioned by employers as being developed through sport.

Employers' perspective on employability attributes developed through sport	
Team working	Leadership
Motivation	Organisational skills
Communication	Flexibility
Networking / social skills	Good health and mental wellbeing
Confidence	Self-discipline
Time management	Determination
Competitiveness	Ambition
Resilience	Problem solving skills
Personal drive	Planning and strategic skills
Commitment	Passion
Able to take instruction	Energy
Self-awareness	Ability to multi-task
Respect for others	Initiative
Sense of fun	Self-respect
Tenacity	Pride
Breadth of interests	

The majority of employers provided examples to describe the ways in which sport could help develop these types of qualities, and how these would be beneficial in the workplace.

*'In banking you need soft skills as well as technical skills. For me if I see that someone has been involved in sport then they're more likely to be competitive and driven to meet targets. They're also likely to have team working skills, to be organised and maybe even have a bit more about them on the leadership front. We need to be able to trust staff to go out and meet clients and hope that they know how to conduct themselves socially. I'm more confident that people who have been involved in sport have those skills from doing things that come naturally like communicating with their own team, socialising with opponents, showing respect for match officials and generally having more extrovert and driven personalities.'* (Handelsbanken, Cambridge)

*'Resilience - in sport you experience defeats, set-backs, trials and tribulations. At a graduate level employers like to see that you have experienced this. Because in your career everything is not going to be smooth sailing, you might face external problems that could affect your work, you might not get the promotion you wanted or you might not receive the recognition you deserve. Experience can make you immune to these types of situations; your attitude becomes more resilient. Sport helps you go through these and starts carving your attitude which can be transferable into the work place. Competitiveness, most businesses are created to make money and as a result it spurs on growth. Sport creates a competitive attitude that employers like to see in their staff. That attitude of continuous improvement and a desire to come out on top is a culture that most managers like to create.'* (Reed Graduates)

*'We would regard participation in sport, particularly representative levels, as being very beneficial. Personality is as important to us as specific job skills and participation in sports shows a breadth of interest outside of academic and work spheres and competitive nature suggests a drive and commitment and a will to succeed.'* (Property Vision)

*'As a graduate employer we look for key behaviours in the graduates that we look to employ, a number of which I feel can be gained and demonstrated by students through engagement in sport. It helps to demonstrate wider social skills (particularly if engaged in a team sport), that the individual is organised enough to balance study, social activity and sport, and that they have personal drive. The ability to demonstrate these skills to a graduate employer are key to success in the graduate job hunt, and sport offers a potential way to build, develop and demonstrate these skills.'* (AXA UK)

*'It's all about tenacity, not giving up. We work in a really targeted, difficult, quite cut throat environment, where things don't always go your way, so anyone who has played in a team or been in an environment where they have to pull themselves up when things go against them, that ability to keep going. That's what we like to see. So team sports are great, individual sports yes, less so, but anyone who is engaged in, say, rugby, football, cricket, anything where there is a real desire to win, and you can be a game changer, we like to see that. If we see someone who has been really sporty, it's quite an old fashioned way of looking at it, but it's always been the guys who are successful in our business all tend to play sport. I think there is definitely some correlation there between sporty guys and people who do well in our business.'* (ATA Recruitment)

Some employers referred to other extra-curricular activities as also assisting in developing employability, for example part-time employment, volunteering and participation in other societies and other hobbies. A small minority of just 5 employers (6%) that completed the online survey were less positive about the impact of sport, making comments to indicate that they either did not believe that sport has an impact upon employability or that they believed participation in other extra-curricular activities was more beneficial. Yet for the vast majority, sport was said to have a positive impact and some employers actually saw sport as offering qualities over and above participation in these other types of activity.

*'In general, almost any structured extra-curricular activity will have benefits for students' employability, and sport is absolutely one of the key examples of this. While other extra-curricular activities are likely to develop more directly transferable skills (e.g. a classroom support volunteer will develop many practical skills directly relevant to teaching, as well as any role involving interpersonal support), I believe sport rivals or even exceeds other activities for the benefits it has for broader personal attributes and understanding.'* (University of Glasgow Careers Service).

*'If they play for a team, this demonstrates an ability to interact in a positive way with others and a willingness to achieve shared goals. It also demonstrates social skills, commitment and if they are new to an area, it allows them to have an outlet which will encourage the forming of new friendships. Obviously this applies to other interests e.g. music and the arts but sport has additional benefits to an employer as it has been shown to help with stress as well as improving fitness levels.'* (Rawwater Engineering Co Ltd)

*'Drive, determination, passion, overcoming obstacles (especially after a defeat) - just because somebody does a sport doesn't mean they have these but you have an area to question and*

*delve further and hopefully see a passion in their personality when discussing the subject. In addition, this is not solely selective to outside sporting interests, outside interests on the whole is a great tick box for us but sporting interests is top of the list.'* (UKFast)

*'It is very important for graduates to have extra activities (on their CV) that they did at university; anybody that hasn't done anything at all isn't worth looking at so they need to have done something. People that have done sport are always more interesting to us than those that haven't, we like people who look after themselves and a lot of people in the company play sport so they are all going to be like-minded people working together.'* (Corecom Consulting)

*'Achievement in sport is the only real key indicator an employer can take of the fibre / capability of a graduate.'* (CommuniGator Ltd)

Employers also talked about the health benefits of participation in sport. Firstly, participation was seen as indicative of graduates being fit and healthy, therefore more capable in the workplace on a day-to-day basis due to higher energy levels, stamina and productivity, and resulting in less chance of them taking time off work due to sickness. Secondly, keeping fit and healthy was seen in relation to individuals having a sense of personal responsibility, a care in one's personal appearance and pride in looking after oneself, demonstrating self-discipline, awareness and commitment to self-improvement, and the ability to set and achieve personal goals, all of which were qualities which were valued within the workplace.

#### **4.3.4 Sport as Part of Workplace Culture**

Some employers described the importance of graduates continuing to participate in sport once employed, and throughout the course of their employment, as sport events are highly valued within some organisations, and seen as part of the culture. In some organisations, for example, sport was organised with clients, as a method of providing networking opportunities, or as part of corporate team building events.

*'Sport is a great ice-breaker and a 'way in' to forming relationships with clients. If your client plays golf and you do too, there's obvious conversations about your handicap, what club you belong to, what courses you've played, what equipment you use, who you know and so on. On a more mundane level if we are doing corporate hospitality at a sports event, these things always go better if your colleagues know about the sport being played and can make polite conversation about it. At Handelsbanken we encourage our staff to be physically active and we operate schemes such as annual health screening and subsidised gym membership fees so that staff are properly looked after and helped to look after themselves.'* (Handelsbanken, Cambridge)

*'We have a lively graduate association that regularly organises events such as paint-balling, themed nights and sporting get-togethers. Along with all this, we also run a number of major events for our employees. Take the Jaguar Land Rover Challenge, for example. Held in Wales each year, it brings together teams from across our business and the wider TATA group –*

*daring them to confront challenges such as abseiling, canoeing and high-rope confidence tests. Only the bravest succeed!' (Jaguar Land Rover)*

Sport was also seen as providing graduates with communication and social skills, and as being indicative of a sense of fun and personality, which would mean they might be more likely to make friends within the organisation, and fit in well as part of a team.

*'It can also assist in developing communication and social skills which often imply that someone has a greater chance of 'fitting in' to our organisation if they have been involved in sport.'* (OCF)

#### **4.3.5 Developing 'Added Value' through Sports Leadership**

Many of the employers highlighted that they particularly look for candidates who have not only participated in sport, but who have also had positions of responsibility as part of a sports team, in terms of leadership positions such as captain or president of a sports club or society, or in terms of organisational roles such as team secretary or social secretary. These types of role were seen as showing commitment and providing 'added value' in developing employability, in particular leadership skills.

*'And if they've taken any leadership roles within that sports team, such as being social secretary or president of the sports team that can also demonstrate leadership qualities as well. I'm always interested when I see that in some detail on someone's application. You often get applications that say 'five a side', 'I have a bit of a kick around', which is good, but I like people that have been involved maybe a little bit more in structured teams at University, because of all those reasons I've just said, it's something they have to demonstrate commitment to throughout the year.'* (Enterprise Rent a Car)

*'It differs if they have taken up a role or not - captain, society roles - at interview stages it allows you to demonstrate organisation skills, leading, teamwork. If someone didn't make as much of an effort, or just played, then they are less likely to be able to draw upon those experiences. Those that do go above and beyond and volunteer to do additional work we can relate to it.'* (BW Penman)

*'My view is that engaging in sport could have some significant benefits to candidates when making job applications. It would clearly depend on which sport they were participating in and their level of commitment. If it was a team sport and the candidate was a captain or took a leading role we would take this as seriously as a non-academic achievement and supporting factor with their application having the opportunity to practise and develop leadership skills.'* (Waitrose)

#### **4.3.6 Using Sport in Job Applications to Demonstrate Employability**

Employers described that, whilst they believed that sport had many benefits for employability, when assessing graduate job applications, it would not be enough simply for applicants to specify that they had been involved in sport. Rather what employers are looking for is how the applicant can demonstrate that they have the right skills, attributes and qualities for the role. Whether or not the applicant has gained these through sport, they need to demonstrate clearly what employability skills they have acquired and the ways in which these skills have been developed, i.e. the ways in which

sport has helped them in developing these skills, and how this could benefit them in the role in the organisation to which they are applying.

*'Our selection process focuses on two key elements of the candidate: their technical skills/knowledge and their leadership skills. It would not be their involvement in sport that would, itself, give a candidate advantage in our selection process. The main way it might allow them to be seen in a more positive light, would be what they learnt from this experience and how they articulate this in their answers. If they took on a leadership role in any capacity as part of this involvement in sport, and could demonstrate from this the skills that would be relevant to leading a team in the John Lewis Partnership, then this would help them stand out from other applicants. It would give them examples to draw on in their application form, and also give them the experience to demonstrate leadership capabilities during group exercises as part of the assessment centre, in line with our Partnership Leadership Behaviours.'* (John Lewis)

*'There are benefits in engaging in sport, provided students can identify what those benefits actually are and use them appropriately. Too many applications list various sports activities but don't reference the skills developed or identify key achievements.'* (Bond Dickinson LLP)

It was also stated that students need to be aware of, and make the most of, the opportunities available to develop their employability through sport - continuing to participate over a sustained period of time, as well as demonstrating how their participation in sport has had a positive outcome.

*'Engaging in sport in itself doesn't have an impact per se. Participating in sport is an opportunity to gain experience in leadership, team work etc., just as membership of other clubs and societies is, as long as individuals take up those opportunities. Individuals must make the most of those opportunities for it to have a positive impact. It depends on how the individual approaches participating in sport. I would really encourage individuals to understand how they can increase their employability through sport, as my experience is that many students don't understand this, and miss this opportunity.'* (Department for Work and Pensions)

*'I would say sport is one area of extra-curricular activity that may indeed be viewed positively as demonstration of team work, leadership capabilities, community engagement, or perhaps innovation, resilience or learning agility. It would depend however on whether this took place over a sustained period and whether there was evidence that positive outcomes were achieved, with effective relationships demonstrated.'* (Civil Service)

#### 4.3.7 Summary of the Employer Perspective

- The vast majority (c. 94%) of graduate employers were overwhelmingly positive about the benefits of graduates having been engaged in sport whilst at university and the skills and strengths that this would bring them in applying to jobs at their organisation.
- Many employers actively looked for mention of engagement in sport on graduates' job applications.
- Academic qualifications and subject-specific skills were deemed necessary, but the 'soft skills' such as behaviours, qualities and attitudes developed through sport were deemed equally as important by the majority of employers.
- A wide range of positive attributes were described by employers as being developed through sport including, amongst many others, team working, communication skills, motivation, competitiveness and resilience.
- For some organisations sport was a part of their workplace culture and therefore graduates who continued to participate in sport throughout their career would further develop their employability. Within the workplace sport was seen to provide networking opportunities and continued development of team working skills, as well as good health and wellbeing.
- The majority of employers felt that leadership positions, organisational roles and other positions of responsibility within sports clubs and societies were particularly beneficial in providing 'added value' for graduate employability.
- Employers described that it would not be enough for graduates simply to list their participation in sport on an application form. Rather they are looking for graduates to be able to demonstrate effectively the employability skills and attributes that they have developed through sport.

## 4.4 The Universities' Perspective

One of the early activities of the research was secondary data analysis of the Secondary analysis of the data from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, BUCS League Tables with universities which have an explicit sport strategy. This was to test the notion that graduates from universities that are committed to sport do better in getting their first job. The headline results, however, showed little correlation between the DLHE survey and performance in the BUCS tables.

One of the specific research objectives was to investigate the importance and value placed on engagement with sport by different institutions and to explore views on sports contribution to the employability agenda.

In order to tackle this question 13 Vice Chancellors were approached for a telephone interview to discuss this, and their views on sport and employability. Overall, 10 Vice Chancellors or Pro-Vice Chancellors contributed, and three Registrars. The universities represented included institutions from England, Wales and Scotland and were a mix of Russell Group and post 1992 Universities. The sample included 4 from the BUCS league table top 12 (2012/13) with the remaining Universities distributed between positions 13 and 100.

The discussions covered the following broad themes:

- the University's strategic commitment to sport and perceptions of its importance
- the importance of sport to student experience
- views on the contribution of student engagement in sport to employability

### 4.4.1 Strategic Commitment and the Importance of Sport

It was clear from the interviews that sport had strategic importance in all institutions interviewed, and was a driver for a positive student experience. All reported they had a *strategic commitment to sport*, however this manifested itself in different ways. For some universities there was an explicit high level sport strategy focusing on facility development, participation and performance driven at executive level. For others sport was *implicit* in the overall corporate plan or, or there was a second tier strategy or department level plan. Investment in new facilities was often used to underline strategic commitment.

*We have just invested £22m in sports facilities jointly with the city giving us the best sports facilities, in our view, at any university in the UK.*

Some VCs outlined their strategic priorities as having three distinct strands.

*'Sports facilities, participation for both staff and students, and performance. What we are trying to achieve is a high quality experience for our students.'*

One driver of strategic commitment was clearly the impact on recruitment, one University interviewee pointed specifically to the research by Sport England (2012) which reported that 33% of

a sample of 31,448 students said that universities' sporting opportunities and facilities were 'very important' or 'fairly important' to them when selecting their university.

*'We are very clear that the investment we have made in our facilities is an attraction for our students, no question whatsoever. We are clear that this is a journey we are on, with focussed sports, promoting wellbeing - it is part of an integrated package and clearly sport is important to us.'*

Sport is obviously a major driver for recruitment at the universities where the offer is fundamental to their market position as a 'sport' university. For others it was part of the 'must do' to be in the 'best of the rest.'

There was evidence that this was less of a driver for the very high ranking universities but was still important determinant of student choice.

*'Being a very selective university, the 6th most in terms of A level grades, I wouldn't say sport is a primary factor in recruitment within the groups we recruit, but the sport element, we feel, does give us a bit of an edge.'*

*'We see sport as something which is more underpinning, if we don't do it well then there are high achieving students (both academically and through sport) that might not choose us as actively as they may have done otherwise.'*

Another University viewed sport as having major impact on the personal development of graduates whilst also recognising its impact on student choice.

*'It (sport) is very important. The philosophy that we adopt here is that we are concerned with the all-round development of our students - their academic development and their extra-curricular development. So when we talk to someone who is considering the University we would be talking to them about the way participating in sport is part of that process of their all-round development, and people that come here will say to us 'the provision of those sporting activities is an important determinate' of their choice in coming to this university. '*

There was a view which developed this further, making the connection between sport, academic performance and the health and wellbeing agenda for their university community.

*'We believe strongly in the correlation between sporting performance (and other extracurricular activities for that matter) and academic performance, there are clear correlations.'*

*'We see there being enormous positives about physical activity and wellbeing and that one big transition points in terms of physical activity drop off is the transition to university and we worry about that, which links to our wellbeing strategy. It is not just about students here, we have a strong health and wellbeing agenda for our staff.'*

#### 4.4.2 The Importance of Competitive Sport and BUCS League Tables

Universities were specifically asked about the importance of the BUCS league table, and nearly all Universities said that their position in the BUCS league table was important and for some a top 12 ranking was a specific priority. A minority commented that whilst it was important there was a *trade off* in terms of the investment in facilities to move up the ranking or sustain it given competing priorities. For some BUCS ranking was important but they tempered this with the importance of the participation agenda and the need to provide opportunities for all students.

#### 4.4.3 Sport's Contribution to Business Sustainability

Universities were asked about the contribution of university sport to business sustainability, aside from the obvious benefit from student recruitment. Some reported that income streams from sport activities within the University had increased significantly, but sport was still a net cost to the university.

*'We are not trying to exploit sport as an income stream but it is generating income which offsets the cost. In the sector we are driven to greater efficiencies, especially post 2015 because of treasury targets. Therefore this activity [sport] is win-win. It is very much about enhancing the student experience, but it is bringing commercial income streams which the students benefit from. The net cost is about £1.5 million of an overall £110 million operation. In terms of what we are getting, it is a very good deal.'*

#### 4.4.4 Sport's Contribution to the Student Experience and Graduate Employability

The universities were all in agreement that their sport offer was a notable driver of student experience scores and this in turn was a major part of positioning a University in recruitment terms. One University described specifically how it used the power of sport to recruit students by providing a wide range of accessible sports facilities and that combined data from the International Student Barometer and UK Student Barometer 2012 revealed that it had achieved the highest score across the UK and globally for satisfaction with 'sports facilities' (95%).

*'We have a great emphasis on student experience and we have never been outside the top 10 for NSS scores for satisfaction and we feel that part of that is our sporting offer.'*

*'That is pretty important actually and perhaps somewhat hidden from many people in the university that are academically focussed. The feedback we get from the student union and the student body as a whole shows that sporting facilities, sport availability and health programmes are an important part of what they expect to do here.'*

*'100% - it is incredibly important. We see our number one priority at this university as student experience, second to none. Part of that, we see the extra-curricular part as really important, giving the students the opportunity to participate in sport, engage in physical activity, link to wellbeing all of which aid studying, which is central to what we are trying to achieve.'*

Interestingly when colleagues were asked about *sport and the student experience*, the discussion seamlessly extended into impact on employability and the dimensions of employability that sport could develop.

*'It is a very important part of our students' rounded education; it gives them skills such as team work, leadership and is very critical as far as employability is concerned.'*

*'Our alumni go on to big jobs in the city and have benefitted from sport, rowing in particular, helps them get fantastic jobs because the discipline involved, sport is absolutely critical to the success of them as alumni, not just in sport but in their careers in general.'*

*'It helps social interaction, physical and social wellbeing, friendships and there are opportunities to gain skills and experiences including leadership, organisation and communication skills. We put a lot of emphasis on this.'*

*'I think that what you get from sport is teamwork, application, prioritisation of time, and commitment - these are things that are valued by employers. Sport therefore has a number of dimensions that make our students more attractive to employers. By the same token if you were heavily involved in the arts, you might get the same thing, but it would appear that more students get these benefits from sport than the arts and it's more easily measurable.'*

*'Firstly, we take a view, very strongly; that participation in sport is linked to the whole employability agenda, the whole nature of team working, communication, and goal orientation is incredibly important.'*

*'we are creating all-rounders, excellent in their academic achievements but then have something extra and I think that if you look at the employability statistics for this university, then you find that our students are some of the most highly sought after in the country. Their immediate employability prospects are very high; it is still about 95% going into graduate level jobs immediately. If you look at the longer term success of our graduates the profiles are exceptional.'*

For one university committed to the Widening Participation agenda, engagement in sport was a major tool in developing employability.

*'If you think of the benefits that the students often lack, it is the social capital, esteem, cultural capital and it is in that area; and I have seen it; they have got jobs and they have got jobs not only because of the academic performance but also they have enhanced confidence and proven work experience - the community work looks really good on their CV.'*

Interestingly there was a sense that evidence relating to the impact of sport on graduate employability was much needed especially to inform internal audiences.

*'Again the hard evidence is vital; we are looking to gather information for this which means longitudinal studies through our alumni.'*

*'They (employers) are aware that sportsmen and women are people that they want to recruit and that they are likely to have developed some practical organisation and communication skills while they are at university which complements their academic education. The employer probably recognises it more than the university.'*

There were good examples of Universities delivering sport services to the local community and using this to engage students in volunteering, coaching work experience. One university reported that it had taken over the management of community facilities on behalf of their local authority and students were delivering community sport programmes. In the future the plans were to bring the strategies for academic sport and sports development together to create a 'new holistic approach', which in turn would provide greater potential to connect sport and the employability agenda.

#### **4.4.5 Summary of the Universities' Perspective**

- There was evidence of strategic commitment to sport in all universities consulted and in some cases significant investment.
- The sport offer is seen as a notable driver of the student experience, an important determinant of choice in student recruitment and in some cases it is fundamental to market position.
- Engagement in sport is considered to have significant positive impact on student employability and some universities are using sport projects specifically to drive the employability agenda.

## 5. Conclusions

We set out to research the impact of engagement with sport on graduate employability from the perspective of graduates, employers and university senior management and to 'fill the gap' in research evidence relating to this theme. From our findings we conclude that engagement in sport at university has a positive impact from the following perspectives.

### The Graduate's Perspective

- As numbers of graduates increase, students need to do more than pass a degree to get their first job and to sustain their employability. The evidence indicates strongly that in the context of rising fees, engagement in sport provides a good career return on investment of around ££4264 and £5616 per annum, terms of current average salary, compared to those that did not engage in sport.
- There is significant evidence from employers that engagement in sport is a recognised strength, but it's not just about playing sport it's the involvement in volunteering and management aspects that provide competitive advantage in the jobs' market.

### The Employer's Perspective

- Engagement in sport provides a wide range of positive attributes wanted by employers notably: team working, communication skills, motivation, competitiveness and resilience.
- It is not just about playing sport, employers consider that leadership positions, organisational roles and other positions of responsibility within sports clubs and societies were particularly beneficial in providing 'added value' for graduate employability. Some students who engage in sport are able to make the best use of their experience in a recruitment process by demonstrating transferable skills.

### The Universities' Perspective

- Senior executives within universities should be fully aware that the sport offer is not just about investment in facilities, it's an overall package which includes participation and opportunities for engagement in volunteering, management and leadership activity.
- There is a need to ensure that the value of engagement in sport (as recognised by graduate employers) is communicated and promoted in universities to all who have a role in helping graduates prepare for employment.

This research concludes that sport does matter and can contribute positively in various domains. It is a *force for good* and a sound investment from the perspective of the graduate, employer and universities'. Now is the time for all partners and stakeholders to realise the potential of sport and to act accordingly.

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