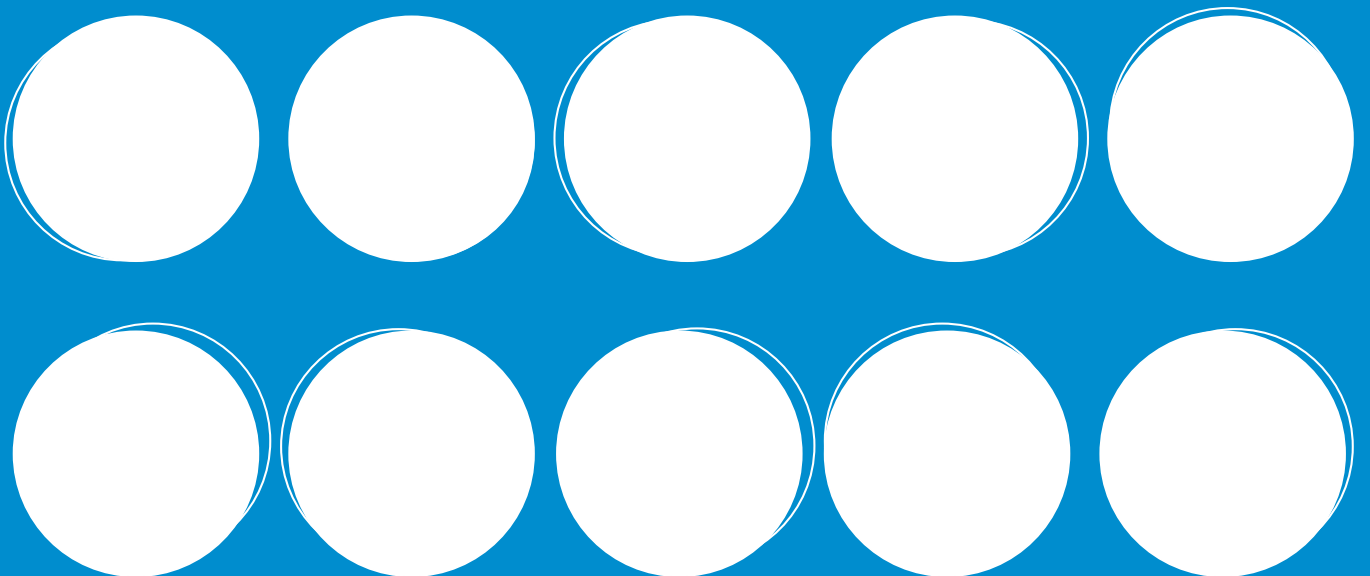


WOMEN IN SPORT AND EXERCISE (WISE)

A strategy for the
University of Worcester



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CONTEXT

Female participation in sport has always been an area of debate from a number of perspectives; attitudes towards women across the world, biological and cultural differences, women's perceptions of themselves, and, historically there has been a reflection of the role women play in society at any given point of time. In the last four years women's participation in sport has had much greater scrutiny with a real movement nationally to address the range of complex issues that surround the low levels of engagement of physical activity we appear to have in the UK. According to Sport England (2014) there are currently approximately 2 million fewer women taking part in sport than men at every age group up to the age of 65; furthermore the UK is in top 10 in Europe for inactivity amongst young women, and although 13 million women in England report a desire to play sport - 6 million are currently inactive. We know the benefits that accompany engagement in sport and exercise: improved physical and mental health, higher self-esteem, better body image, increased social cohesion and life skills such as team work and resilience yet many women still face a range of barriers to engagement in sport and physical activity (Hargreaves 2014). This theme of barriers to engagement is picked up by the Interim Report of the Government's Women and Sport Advisory Board, published by Department for Culture, Media and Sport in October 2014, they identified barriers as; emotional – where there had been poor experiences and memories of sport and physical activity; capability – a lack of confidence in ability; and opportunity – restrictions on time, finance accessibility.

As we approached the 21st century we saw a shift with the number of women gaining political, economic and social power. Sport has been shown to be a vehicle in which women can feel empowered and demonstrate skills and attitudes which can challenge and change perceptions of what society has often determined is their role and behaviours (Costa and Guthrie 1994). The women in sport movement is now firmly established on the political agenda of the country and is clearly gaining momentum and support from a range of institutions and organisations. This could be attributed to a number of reasons: the health and wellbeing agenda; recognition of the role women play as mothers and 'influencers'; the growing professionalisation of some women's sports and the increased coverage of women's sport in the media; to the number of women who now hold key leadership roles in our main sports organisations in the UK – the gaining, as suggested earlier, of greater political, economic and social power.

In 2012 Baroness Tanni-Grey Thomson and Barbara Keeley (Member of Parliament for Salford) formed the All-Party Parliamentary Women in Sport Group with a strategic aim to:

- raise profile of women's sport
- promote better coverage in the media
- Increase participation/reduce barriers

This was followed in 2013 with the formation of the Government Advisory Group for Women and Sport chaired by the Minister for Sport and Culture Helen Grant (MP), putting together an impressive team which includes Barbara Slater (Director of Sport for the BBC) Simon Green (Head of BT Sport) and Baroness Karren Brady (Vice Chair of West Ham United). They too have also identified, in the aims they set, the need to increase female participation by removing barriers and promote better coverage of female sport in the media, but they also added the following:

- Increasing commercial investment in women's sport
- Improving women's representation on sports boards
- Encouraging greater recognition women's sporting achievements



In October 2014 they published the 'Interim Report of the Government's Women in Sport Advisory Board' which provided a 'snapshot' of action being taken by the Government demonstrating some measure of improvement and impact. According to the report there were 63,000 more women playing sport in 2014 compared to 2013.

As a university with a large female student and staff population and a thriving Institute of Sport and Exercise Science it would be pertinent to develop a strategy that supports, develops and promotes an equitable approach to sport and exercise in our university, the wider community, and aligning it to the work being carried out on a national and international scale. Such a strategy would support a number of the university strategic aims (being actively involved in fulfilling cultural, sporting and community activities; to developing self-confidence; creating opportunities to flourish and achieve, acquire high level employability skills), and also supports the development of the International Centre for Inclusive Sport. The need for such a strategy would be driven by equity of opportunity; responding to needs of our future generations and raising aspirations of our female students in many different ways.

Our efforts are not to be seen as deliberately discriminatory but to level the playing field and to ensure that female sport and physical activity has the same support and opportunities afforded as male sport. It is important also to recognise the potential for this as a whole university strategy, including all institutes; just the impact of student sport alone on the student experience is clearly important and plays a big part in student recruitment. By working across institutes on such a strategy we will be able to hopefully create some innovative curriculum developments, share expertise in terms of developing the employability agenda and transferable skills, build sustainable partnerships (e.g. industry - private and public sector, elite and grass roots sport, education sector, at regional, national and international level, and develop a respected reputation within our sector which will have an impact on the diverse sport and exercise industry.

There are initially four broad areas we have identified to address – engagement in sport, physical activity and exercise at all levels; graduate level employment; increase the number of female coaches at all levels through effective Coach Education; and raising the profile of women's sport through the media. Underpinning all aspects of this strategic plan will have a clear and robust research strategy. These aims have been divided further into six distinct working areas in order to afford a manageable structure.

The initial overarching aims of this strategy are to:

- Clearly align with the strategic development of the International Centre for Inclusive Sport at the University of Worcester and the University Strategic Plan.
- Establish a WISE Advisory Group to help develop a university wide strategy and a structure for that group; clear leads for sub teams for identified areas.
- Devise an action plan to deliver the strategy with clear targets to monitor and measure impact – this will become an annual Action Plan.
- Ensure that research is central to this strategy to provide substance to specific initiatives and also a valid means of evaluating, reporting and disseminating progress and change to a wide and relevant audience (REF 2020).
- Identify key partners/groups/individuals who would be important in terms of effective team work and contribution – cross university and wider community.
- Improve our recruitment statistics of female students within ISES specifically (28% female currently as opposed to 72% male).



DISTINCT WORKING AREAS:

Each of these distinct areas has its own aim and key objectives and its own group led by an identified 'lead person'.



RECRUITMENT

AIM

To increase recruitment of female undergraduate students across all courses in ISES, and the university as a whole.

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Develop a data base and establish links with schools and colleges which have successful extracurricular programmes and successful teams at county level – (Regional Hubs).
- Utilise staff and student 'aspirational figures' to help with recruitment/promotional activities – use social media to showcase.
- Summer Schools/coaching workshops for specific sports i.e. netball, hockey, football, basketball, badminton, cricket, rowing which would be open to all institutes within the university.
- Use positive female sport images in promotional material.
- Include 'Inspire' visits and talks at Open /Interview Days – Talking Heads on website etc.
- Hold a WISE UW sport conference – invite high profile leaders/performers.
- Establish and promote a Graduate Employment Skills Programme to include high quality placements, workshops and partnerships within the industry (explore potential links with other institutes/departments to support such a programme e.g. Digital Arts, Journalism, Computing).

GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

AIM

To raise career aspirations of female students to enter graduate level (sport) related professions.

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Develop staff awareness of course and module content that ensures an equitable, and appropriate, approach to the development of knowledge and skill sets that are industry relevant and build student motivation and confidence.
- Support students with gaining National Governing Body (NGB) qualifications and professional qualifications to enhance employability (BASES; WABBA; REPs).
- Work with National Governing Bodies (NGBs) – develop and support more female coaches – e.g. links with the Football Association, Sport Coach UK, British Athletics.
- Track student employability, nurture alumni.
- Campaign/work strategically with sports organisations and agencies to develop Internship Programmes, Graduate Training Programmes, mentoring opportunities and CPD to support both the industry, students and graduates in sport careers.
- Work across institutes to support a Graduate Employment Skills Programme.



PERFORMANCE

AIM

To increase and effectively support the number of potential elite athletes and sports teams.

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Establish a super league netball franchise by 2017/18 season.
- Develop a high quality coaching team to support female Performance teams that are on a par with male sport (Title XI).
- Establish a more effective scholarship programme with selected regional sports – e.g. Worcester Warriors Rugby, Worcestershire County Cricket, Basketball, Rowing, Hockey.
- Achieve first/premier league status for BUCS for Performance Teams sports initially – identify not only our own strengths but those in the region.
- Seek sponsorship and funding at a level which truly supports the development of elite student sport and raises the profile of UW sport – impact on recruitment.
- Nurture /develop links with local /regional sport organisations to ensure progression opportunities for students wishing to compete at a higher level.
- Provide mentors, coaches, sport science support with regional sports teams/ county teams.
- Further develop Coach Education programme with a clear strategy to encourage and support female coaching

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

AIM

To increase participation in sport and exercise with students, staff and the wider community.

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Work collaboratively with a range of institutes, groups and centres on female health and wellbeing projects and initiatives e.g. Director of Health and Wellbeing, McClelland Centre; National Centre for the Study of Violence and Abuse (NCSPVA); Sport and the Elderly group (IHS, IHCA, WBS, IoE & ISE) and also the PVC for Student Experience and the Students' Union.
- Develop a programme of exercise and recreational activities for non-elite sports groups and classes for students and staff – e.g. 'This Girl Can Campaign'; nutritional advice; personal training; running groups for staff and students; staff netball.
- Establish a programme of physical activities and workshops for students and the community to address self-esteem and confidence building.
- Promote and engage in research; funded projects etc. at local to national/ international level with a variety of partners e.g. Worcestershire Health Authority



PROFILE AND MEDIA

AIM

To raise UW profile through the promotion of WISE, female sport and our International Centre for Excellence in Inclusive Sport at a regional, national and international level.

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Utilise local, regional and 'national' networks to promote sport – BBC Hereford and Worcester; national and local papers and local radio stations.
- Develop student skills to publicise, report and promote their own sport and academic activities.
- Effectively use UW website, social media, Twitter, Instagram, etc. to promote WISE activities; student success (sport /academic reports and focus 'stories).
- Utilise internal communication networks (live screens etc.) team of the week, player of the week etc. on equal footing with male sport.
- Network with key leaders within the sports industry, particularly female, to raise awareness of the WISE strategy and utilise Women in Sport networks e.g. corporate membership to have a presence in the industry at a national and international level.
- Establish a local or regional WISE Advisory Board/Network with people involved in sport or who have a strong interest in female sport.
- Establish a Women in Sport and Exercise Seminar Series for UW and the wider community.

RESEARCH

AIM

Underpin all activity within the Women in Sport and Exercise Strategy with strong and effective research based activity.

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Establish a WISE Research Interest Group (Research Interest Group RIG) – cross institute.
- Identify potential funding streams /bid for funding for projects.
- Promote conference attendance; publications in both peer reviewed and professional journals and sport specific newsletters or publications.
- Promote cross institute and international collaboration with existing networks and develop new networks/partners.
- Targeted student engagement in collaborative research and dissemination.
- Explore innovative strategies for recruitment for postgraduate study and research.

This proposed strategy aims to build upon the current national perspective and the collective work of the women in sport networks, All-Parliamentary Group, Government Women and Sport Advisory Group, contemporary research and the work vision, policies and practice of the sport related organisations and agencies.

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BASES - British Association of Sport and Exercise Science

WABBA – World Amateur Body Building Association (strength and conditioning)

REPS – Register of Exercise Professionals

