

# **Global Athletes: Communication through competition. How to engage student sports men and women**

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&  
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University of Gloucestershire Students' Union

# Students' Green Fund



- HEFCE funded
  - £5million - 25 Students' Unions
- NUS management and oversight
- UoG bid outlined plans for engaging students across all courses and campuses

*“The project takes on the challenge of reaching out to students who are yet to engage with sustainability...”*

# The University of Gloucestershire

- Multi-campus university
- Generally low student engagement
- Pockets of high level integration of ESD
- Students Union Green Team – from Sept '13
- Low sustainability awareness



# The University of Gloucestershire

## Sports



- High proportion of sport students
- UoG known publicly for poor behaviour of sports teams
- Sports teams underfunded for current achievements and aspirations

# Assumptions

- Athletic performance improvement can match sustainability agenda
- Athletes will change behaviours to improve performance
- Teams will want to compete against each other to be the best at anything
- Sports teams want greater recognition by their institution and the public

# Assumptions cont.

- If students won't engage with complex and political messages, would current sport events be a better platform to hang the sustainability conversation
- By targeting sports students we can harness the power of teamwork to achieve change
- Sports teams will relate to sporting role models from within their own sport
- Sustainable Sports companies would engage with a new program – leading to a new source of sponsorship

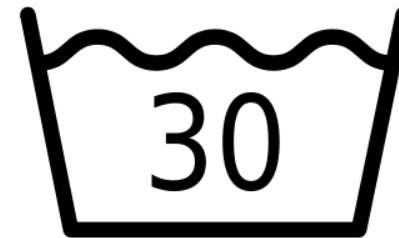


# Global Athletes

- A competition for UoG sports teams run through the year
- Players encouraged to consider different elements of being a sustainable sports team
- Focused on benefits to the Athlete and Team
- Competitions through year sponsored by external local brands
  
- End of year award
- Additional funding for clubs

# The challenges

- Community
- Charity
- Waste/Recycling
- Actions at home
- Kit
- Nutrition





# Community & Charity

- Already Club of the Year Award
- Already a Fundraising Award
- Incorporated into Global Athletes program and all clubs encouraged and supported to undertake new initiatives

GLOUCESTERSHIRE  
**YOUNG**  
CARERS



# Waste & Recycling

- Initial focus on removal of disposable water bottles from trainings and competitions
- Use budget to buy every sports player a re-usable water bottle

***“I find myself drinking more water than I was before”***

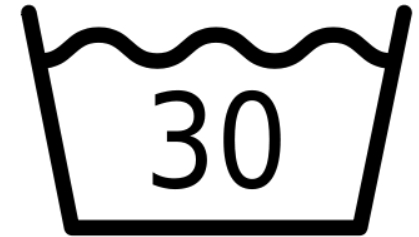
Georgie – Rowing

- Promote responsible waste provision at venues and training



# Actions at home

- Buy Fair Trade food – (e.g bananas)
- Wash kit at 30
- Hang dry kit
- Travel by public transport or bike to trainings where possible



# Clothing

- Aware of existing supplier contracts
- Donate equipment for re-use/recycle
- Recognise when manufacturers have a positive impact and connect and promote
- Communicate when kit companies which are having a negative impact



**GIFT  
YOUR  
GEAR**

# Nutrition

- Protein, Practice, Protein, Practice, Protein



- Encourage alternatives to animal protein
- Encourage locally produced foods
- Increase awareness of ethical production

# Short term competitions

- The shoe lace vs the water bottle
- Shoelaces distributed to first years at freshers' fair with a chance to win a tablet computer
- Water bottles distributed to team ambassadors with a chance to win a Weirdfish drinking mug

Love @y

UoG Dynamites @UoGDynamites

Pink and pink theme to showing of and using @yourGlobalSport wa #wlovethe

UoG Dynamites @UoGDynamites

One of our first se come @yourGlob



RETWEET 1 FAVORITES 4

2:00 PM - 22 Oct 2014

UoG Dynamites

Following

UoG Dynamites @UoGDynamites

Dynamites are promoting our water bottles to everyone @yourGlobalSport @monikafraser #drinkup



RETWEETS 4 FAVORITES 6

11:39 AM - 1 Nov 2014

Thank you @yourGlobalSport for our water bottles!!



o Club

Following

@yourGlobalSport They all wondered what label.



9:12 PM - 23 Oct 2014

RETWEETS 6 FAVORITES 11

5:30 PM - 30 Oct 2014

1 1

11:28 AM - 27 Oct 2014

# Competition learning so far

- Water bottles are a better freebie than shoe laces?
- Beer mugs are a better prize than a tablet computer?



# Competition learning so far (cont.)

- First years don't know understand the social norms – lead to fear of standing out?
- Team ambassadors are much better at getting the message (and freebies) into the clubs
- Messaging works better top down within a club rather than bottom up

# The ambassadors

- Some students showed early interest
- Student sports teams are structured – with committees of mostly 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years
- Coincided with UoG Sport initiative to formalise committee structure
  - Each committee role had a job description
- Each committee was to have a Community Role
- Able to add “Sustainability” to job brief of Community role

- Access to sports teams through Committees  
Facebook page and Community officers  
Facebook page
- In addition to email of registered teams  
ambassadors
- Ambassadors to be rewarded with T-shirts

# Early wins

- Water bottle campaign
- Rowers & meat free Mondays
- Water-polo and “Green tournament”
- Womens Rugby - Climb height of Everest for Prostate UK
- Basketball
  - ethical warm-up kit supplier
  - WKD Sponsorship



# Assumptions

*“Athletic performance improvement can match sustainability agenda”*

- Diet
  - Athletes need high protein diets
  - Meat is expensive
  - Cheaper alternatives can have additional health benefits
  - Cultural significance of “high protein athletic diet”

# Assumptions

*“Athletic performance improvement can match sustainability agenda”*

- Venues
  - Outdoor facilities are being affected by extreme weather events e.g. Flooding fields/rivers
  - Estates wish to reduce their energy & water use
- Transport
  - Alternative transport methods promoted
  - Car share to build team cohesion

# Assumptions

*“Athletic performance improvement can match sustainability agenda”*

- Clothing
  - Athletes care about the providence of their kit
  - Sustainable brands can be as desirable as alternatives

Womens Basketball seeking out Ethical and fair trade warm-up gear

# Assumptions

*“Athletes will change behaviours to improve performance”*

Messaging hierarchy:

- Perform better
  - Save money
  - Support your local and global community
  - Gain recognition
- 
- Diet changes will be biggest test
  - will run athlete focused cookery course and awareness campaign



# Assumptions

*“Teams will want to compete against each other to be the best at anything”*

**“We’ll be aiming for Gold then, otherwise what’s the point?”**

**Catherine - Women’s Rugby**

# Assumptions

*“By targeting sports students we can harness the power of teamwork to achieve change”*



# Assumptions

*“Sports teams want greater recognition by their institution and public for their achievements”*



# Assumptions

*“If students won’t engage with political messages, would current sport events be a better platform to hang the sustainability conversation”*

**- Still to be fully tested**

# Assumptions

*“Sports teams will relate to sporting role models from within their own sport”*

- Role models not been overly used to date
- little twitter engagement with “known names” so far
- Few active role models
- NGB relevant to sport shown more success

Boardriders support a  
Surfers Against Sewage  
beach clean as part of  
BUCS Surf competition  
2014



# Assumptions

*“Sustainable Sports companies would engage with a new program – leading to a new source of sponsorship”*



# Observations

- Male teams: 5
  - Mixed: 7
  - Female: 9
  - Male ambassadors: 8
  - Female ambassadors: 13
- 
- Photo tweets – 90% female



# Impact

## Community

- Formalising and supporting community links.
- Increases sport's teams positive position within the local community.

## Students

- Teams and individuals rewarded for good actions
- Connects sustainability agenda to their existing passions
- Able to make tangible changes and see immediate feedback

## Staff

- Additional incentive for students to incorporate sustainability into course work

E.g. Water polo charity event

- Positive impact of sport connects with Sport Development course



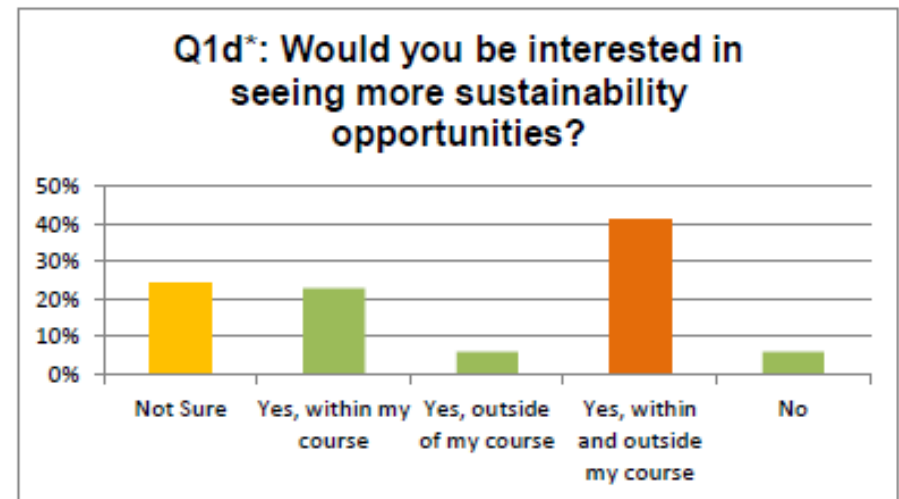
# Lessons

- Engaging a team is often easier than engaging individuals
  - students often unwilling to take that step forward and act on their own.
- Open with a simple message and connect with existing cultures
- Face-to-face communication builds up stronger ties / ambassadors
  - Go out and join them, fastest way to earn respect
- Facebook can be used to continue relationships/discussions.
  - Sports groups have very high use + engagement.

# Lessons

- Targeting specific student groups works well
  - Sports has a particularly useful hierarchy of communication

- What students will say in a survey does not necessarily correlate with how they will act



- Important to engage relevant staff early
  - Although often difficult to engage staff at the start of a project without successful case studies

## Is it replicable?

- Case studies are now being developed
- Focus of competitions can be changed to match successes/culture already present at different institutions
- Sustainability in sport is growing sector within the UK
- Program kite marked by BASIS (British Association for Sustainable Sport)
- Supported by NUS (National Union of Students)
- In conversation with BUCS (British University and College Sport) to see where can sit within their national offering



# Summary

- **HERE & NOW**

Important to tie in with students' day-to-day cares, concerns and passions

- **Overcome the 'uncool' factor**

- Connect with organisations they can relate to, connect with teams as a whole to develop new social norms, use the right incentives

- Many students **don't know how** to be more sustainable

- Global Athletes breaks that down into simple suggestions and relates to activities they are already discussing (Food, Suppliers, Logistics)

- **Positive Framing**

- Teams offered recognition and reward in return for positive sustainability action on local and global community.

- Emphasis on existing global sports network

- Avoid preaching and fear-mongering

- Emphasise the power of sport to do good

# Questions?

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Students' Union

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## Can sport change the way we think about the energy crisis?

Manchester United has pledged to turn its supporters into friends of the environment – and it's not alone