



## **SUS VOLUNTEERS & SGB REPS SEMINAR PEFFERMILL PLAYING FIELDS 23/11**

### **SUMMARY REPORT**

Eighteen representatives from across fifteen Scottish governing bodies joined counterparts from within the SUS network at the inaugural SUS~SGB seminar on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November.

The evening has been celebrated as a genuine success, having given the delegates on both sides an opportunity to discuss some of the big issues of Scottish sport, share ideas and develop stronger collaborative working arrangements.

A copy of any presentations from the evening is available upon request from [Stew Fowlie](#) in the SUS office.

### **Format**

The evening began with a welcome from Jim Aitken (SUS Chair) and Neil Park (Chair of SSA). Both speakers spoke of the growing importance of the HE sector within Scottish sport and identified some of the potential benefits associated with closer partnership work with the Universities and with SUS. These include facility access, memberships and membership revenue, 'people' (coaches, volunteers, administrators, officials) and a growth in playing numbers at all stages from participation to elite level.

SUS Sports Manager Stew Fowlie went on to tee up the remainder of the evening by outlining some aspirations of how University sport could improve with a more joined-up approach in the future. It was confirmed that SUS and its member institutions stand ready to work more closely with partner organisations and groups in order to strengthen programmes, improve and increase delivery and make a more telling contribution to Scottish sport.

At this point there was an informal and informative intermission, while delegates took the opportunity to win much sought after SUS prizes in the interactive quiz. A steward's enquiry was only narrowly avoided as Jim Aitken was pipped at the post in round 1...

Following the quiz, the seminar heard about a number of existing examples of effective partnership between governing bodies and the HE sector.





## **Partnerships - Volleyball**

Kenny Barton (CEO, Scottish Volleyball Association) and Paul McPate (SDC, SUS Volleyball) gave a powerful and compelling presentation which outlined the mutual gains that have been enjoyed within their sport over recent years as a result of close collaboration.

The SVA includes a students commission in its internal decision making structure and thus has a clear vehicle and voice for a group which represents a significant percentage of the playing membership of the sport in Scotland.

This closeness allows the governing body to maintain better communications with the student clubs and ensures that these clubs are functioning well and that all activity is recognised and quality assured to the required standards. The student clubs are treated as a 'region', which ensures that all players are registered with the governing body.

The student clubs benefit from having a voice within the organisation, receive a good proportion of affiliation fees back from the SVA (as the other 'regions' do) and benefit from the range of support services that are available to regular clubs.

In addition, the SVA delivers bespoke training, coaching and officiating courses to the student clubs on an annual basis. This strengthens the programme within Universities and places people on a pathway which often leads them to a lifelong involvement in the sport.

The volleyball model is an excellent example of a symbiotic partnership which benefits everyone and can be achieved without investment of great amounts of money or time.

## **Partnerships - Rugby**

Andrew MacPherson (University and College retention manager - Scottish Rugby) offered a different approach to harnessing the potential of the student sector.

Andrew's role was created in 2005 as part of the re-organised Community Rugby department at the governing body. At that time it was recognised within Scottish Rugby that participation levels were key to the long-term success of the sport in this country and that tertiary education was a prime area for growth and development.

Since the role began, there have been a number of shared benefits realised by the University clubs and by Scottish Rugby. Playing number have increased by between 15 and 20% in little over a year and a number of initiatives have been advanced under a shared development plan for University rugby.



Progress has been made in developing the competition calendar for University rugby so that the season now runs for a greater part of the year and includes various formats of the game (touch, 7's, 10's etc.). There are also plans in place to deliver more activity at a recreational (intra-mural) level, thereby including more people in the game at an appropriate standard of play.

Andrew's appointment has led to the creation of a group which meets regularly to discuss new initiatives, ensure that university activities dovetail neatly with governing body programmes and steer the implementation of the agreed development plan.

All in all, this has been a very positive step forward for University rugby and the potential which this has unlocked is now paying dividends, not only within the university game, but within the broader arena of community rugby.

### **Partnerships – various**

Before the delegates split into smaller discussion groups, Stew Fowlie offered some brief further examples of current and emerging partnerships;

- Golf – new order of merit events delivered in conjunction with SGU
- Squash – delivery of events alongside Scottish Squash competition
- Curling – looking at pilot project to introduce sport to disability students
- Basketball – plans to roll-out subsidised officiating courses in order to sustain Wednesday afternoon programmes
- Table-tennis – coaching course delivered in conjunction with S.T.T.A to strengthen local University club activities

In summary, it was felt that governing bodies of all sizes could find a manageable way to work with the University sector and that there were benefits to be had on both sides where this kind of collaboration takes place.

### **Discussion Groups**

Delegates were split into smaller groups for a targeted discussion about some of the main topics to have been raised earlier in the evening. Each group comprised governing body representatives and volunteers from the SUS network, with a matching of sports on both sides wherever possible.

A brief summary of the questions and main responses can be found below.

**‘What is the most important contribution the HE sector can make to sport?’**

- Access to new participants into ‘smaller’ sports
- Providing next generation of coaches, officials and volunteers
- A boost to membership numbers and turnover
- Reliable volunteer support to major events
- Facility access for competitions, training events etc
- Providing a solid pathway for post-school activity (stemming drop-off)
- Assisting in the delivery of a number of governing body targets
- Providing a supportive and progressive environment for elite athletes

The above areas will best be delivered through partnerships between local areas, universities, governing bodies and SUS. The key aspects to these partnerships should include:

- better communication across the board
- new and imaginative approaches to traditional problems
- inclusion of HE sector in governing body plans
- better measurement of activity
- co-ordinated training and development of people within sector

**‘What is the most significant thing that the SGB’s could do to help improve university sport?’**

- Help University clubs cater better for excess demand, especially in early part of season
- Work with SUS to dovetail competitive calendars
- Assistance in promoting and delivering events
- Assistance in identifying and sustaining a resource of officials
- Flexibility over affiliation rates and deadlines
- Targeted delivery of coaching and officiating courses to students
- Development of club resources for specific HE club market
- Provide recognised point of contact to work with sector and deliver joint initiatives

**‘Would creation of a development plan or service level agreement between SUS and each SGB be worthwhile? If yes, what items would be covered by such a plan/ agreement?’**

There was broad support for this initiative and it was felt that such an agreement need not be too onerous or detailed. Groups felt that this would provide a useful rolling record of the commitment to partnership work on both sides and that it would provide a framework for mapping progress and setting realistic targets. Likely headings to be enshrined in such a plan might include:

- Coaching – a commitment to jointly train up x new coaches per year
- Officials – a commitment to jointly train up x new officials per year
- Volunteers – to work together towards identifying volunteers for major events
- Facility access – HE network to provide a base for training events as outlined above
- Participation – setting targets for the expansion of playing numbers within sector
- Competitions – outline events schedule for year ahead and agree on best delivery model



**‘Should all governing bodies have a dedicated or designated member of staff with responsibility for University sport? Is this feasible?’**

Many representatives felt that having a University specific member of staff would be ideal, but recognised that this was not likely to happen in the majority of sports due to the finite resources in place. However, there seemed to be broad support of the notion that every governing body could include the sector as a key partner and delegate responsibility for liaison with the sector to an appropriate staff member or volunteer.

Groups were very supportive of the Scottish Volleyball Association policy of incorporating the student voice through a sub-set of their board. Similar groups may perform useful functions within other sports governing body structures.

SUS is likely to continue to appoint sport-specific volunteers in each of its sports, that would act as the immediate liaison point on the HE side (with support from the SUS office).

**‘How can SUS help SGB’s achieve their targets over the coming three years, and should HE sector be clearly identified in SGB plans?’**

It was universally agreed that the HE sector, via SUS, should be referenced in an appropriate way within SGB plans. Groups felt that many of the common areas of interest were self-evident (coaching, volunteering, synergy of competition calendars, communication, membership etc).

SUS and its members have a meaningful contribution to make across many of these areas in a number of sports and can provide the target audience, the internal publicity, the facilities and the pathways to deliver these aims in a comprehensive and rewarding way.

The challenges will be in providing reliable and consistent channels of communication between the student clubs and the governing body and in accurately measuring the levels of activity within the sector.

SUS will advance work on both of these areas over the course of this season and will circulate initial baseline data of activity levels following an audit report in the spring of 2007.

**Final Remarks**

SUS is looking forward to taking forward some of the common recommendations from this inaugural SGB Seminar and hopes that the Governing body delegates found the evening to be a useful event.

For further information about SUS, please contact the office or visit [www.susport.org.uk](http://www.susport.org.uk)

Stew Fowlie

