

University sports courses in the United Kingdom: historical trends and curricula developments

Professor Jonathan Doust, Chelsea School of Sport,
University of Brighton, England
(A34)



Until the 1970s U.K. sports courses were entirely restricted to three year professional certificate courses training physical education teachers for schools (ages 11 to 17). These P.E. courses were then upgraded to honours bachelor's degrees. In the late 1970s courses began to appear that were not just to train physical education teachers. These were of two types. One type was humanities-based, exploring sport and leisure in a wide sense, often with components of management education, for a potential career working in public or private sector sport such as for a leisure centre or a professional sports club. The second type were sports science courses. These were usually housed in departments of physical education and drew on academic staff with a science interest and academic staff in allied departments such as biology, chemistry and engineering. These courses proved extremely popular with students and in the 1980s it was not unusual for a course to receive 1,500 applications for just 50 places. Gradually, over the two decades to the turn of the century, there was considerable expansion, degree courses became more diverse and often specialised. A wide variety of single and joint honours sports-related degrees became available including administration, coaching, economics, fitness, health, journalism, management, medicine, psychology, science, technology, and therapy. In 2012 there are 1,162 sports courses offered by 95 H.E. Institutions in the U.K. Mainly, quality control rests with the individual university. Some elements of national overview are provided through national benchmark statements and the accreditation scheme of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences. There are rudimentary attempts at a national coaching curriculum. Graduating students take two career paths, in approximately equal numbers. About half enter sports-related professions; there are around 500,000 people employed in the sport & leisure business in the U.K. from a population of 60 million. The other half of graduates enter the general graduate market, having found a sports degree and a university education provides qualities of analysis, numeracy, team work, presentation skills etc. that lead to high employment rates.

This paper will review how University degrees in sport have evolved and diversified. Information will be presented on typical curricula and how standards are achieved.