

Institution: University of Chester		
Unit of Assessment: 4 Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience		
Title of case study: Eliminating Harmful Initiation Rituals in Student Sport: the CHANGES programme.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Moirra Lafferty David Ryan	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor Research Assistant	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1998 (ongoing) 2016 – 2018
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

When sport players join a new team they often have to undertake a series of non-sport related trials in order to prove their worth as a team member. These activities are often referred to as initiation events or hazing, and can have serious social, physical and psychological consequences. The research undertaken in this impact case study was the first of its kind in the UK and underpinned the development of the CHANGES-Intervention workshop. Beneficiaries of this work include 1000 student sport officers at 40 universities in England and Scotland, representing a reach of 20,000 student sport players; student sport managers and university staff; student and athletic unions; the British Universities and Colleges Sport organisation, Scottish Student Sport and Universities UK. The research has informed national policy, resulted in partnership agreements for training and contributed to the governance of both the university sport sector and university community nationally, indicating both reach and contextual and instrumental impact.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Initiation activities are often conducted as they are believed to develop and enhance cohesion and team unity, strengthen bonds and ultimately impact positively on sporting performance. These hazing or initiation rituals vary widely in nature, ranging from milder rituals, including singing and wearing embarrassing clothing, to more extreme rituals, involving binge drinking, assault and illegal anti-social behaviour. Crucially, most of the research within the area of initiation activity and hazing in student sport has originated in the United States of America and the application and applicability of these findings to the United Kingdom is limited due to differences in context and culture. For example, the drinking culture of UK students differs to that of their USA counterparts and UK sport societies are led by senior students with reduced faculty input.

The underpinning body of research for this case study sought to investigate the legitimacy of the cohesion initiation activity claims and explore the effect of initiations on male and female sport players in order to produce a research informed intervention that presents a proactive, rather than reactive, method of challenging unwanted behaviours.

The CHANGES (Challenging Hazing and Negative Group Events in Sport) intervention workshop has been developed from research led by Professor Lafferty within Chester's School of Psychology in collaboration with Dr Caroline Wakefield, Liverpool Hope University. As principal investigator, Professor Lafferty secured QR funding to develop the research and intervention portfolio of work. She planned, gained ethical approval and ran each of the studies cited within this impact case study and planned, developed and was lead facilitator for all workshops delivered to student officers.

Professor Lafferty's programme of work began in 2010 and focused on initiation ceremonies within university student sport. Initial survey pilot work suggested that despite the zero-tolerance stance adopted by all UK universities, initiation activities were still occurring [R5]. This pilot work underpinned the first UK study to explore the relationship between initiation activity and

perceptions of increased cohesion [R2]. Replicating the findings of the initial pilot work with respect to continued initiation activity, this quantitative survey study found no significant relationship between hazing and cohesion, providing evidence to counteract the mythical claim that initiations enhanced cohesion. The study also highlighted between-sport differences (team versus individual) and differences between male and female athletes with respect to initiation tasks [R2].

Building on this work, Professor Lafferty subsequently conducted a series of in-depth and substantial qualitative studies with male and female university sport players to explore in detail the lived experiences of those who participated in initiation activities in UK University sport. In contrast to work from the USA and Canada, Professor Lafferty's work has shown that male initiation participation can be mapped to all four areas of the "sport ethic" model. The sport ethic model suggests that an athlete's behaviour towards sport is underpinned by their willingness to make sacrifices for the game, seek distinction, take risks and challenge their limits. Whilst these can be considered attributes of sporting excellence, over-conformity can lead to deviant behaviours that have physical and mental consequences. This suggests that, in the UK, deviant over-conformity and the need for social approval led to increased health risk and health compromising behaviours in student athletes engaging in initiation activities [R1]:[R3]. The risks to health and wellbeing can have short- and long-term effects and can include significant mental health problems arising from what has been described as social bullying, for example initiation activity has been described as a form of non-relational maltreatment in sport. In exploring this notion, Professor Lafferty has shown that, during initiation activities, individuals can be subjected to not only social but also physical and emotional bullying and that athletes' progression through university sport can perpetuate the cycle of bullying with initiates becoming initiators [R4].

Professor Lafferty's research has also provided the first evidence of the impact of initiations on female student sport athletes in the UK context. Elements most often reported in male initiation and hazing rituals were evident in the findings. Critically, the notion of power and hierarchy, dominant within the male sporting culture, were obvious within the stories told. Furthermore, the role of alcohol both as part of challenges and generally as part of the event gives rise to concerns over student athlete health risk behaviours [R1]. The combined findings of this body of work have underpinned the development of the CHANGES-Intervention.

Professor Lafferty's research has resulted in the development of the CHANGES-Intervention, a workshop for society captains and secretaries which is the first programme of its kind to be developed and implemented in higher education. Two narratives were produced based on the qualitative research findings and transformed into short films. Narrated by two actors, these follow a new sport society member as they prepare for, attend and reflect on their participation in an initiation event. After watching the films, workshop attendees engage in reflective activities designed to explore their thoughts and feelings and, subsequently, the development of their own personal standards in terms of their team and appropriate behaviours. Simple worksheets complement the group activities and provide a means of exploring the workshop's impact. Importantly, unlike other interventions, the CHANGES-Intervention utilises an engagement rather than a prescriptive approach and this has drawn interest from non-UK based organisations.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] Lafferty, M.E., & Wakefield, C. (2018). Becoming part of the team: Female student athletes' engagement in initiation activities. *The Sport Psychologist*, 32(2), 125 – 135. DOI: [10.1123/tsp.2016-0115](https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2016-0115)

[R2] Lafferty, M.E., Wakefield, C., & Brown, H. (2016). "We do it for the team" –Student-athletes' initiation practices and their impact on group cohesion. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 15:4, 438-446, (Advance Online Publication) DOI: [10.1080/1612197X.2015.1121507](https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2015.1121507)

[R3] Lafferty, M.E., & Wakefield, C. (2017). Making the team: an exploration of male student athletes' engagement in initiation activities. *Journal of Sport Sciences*, 35, sup 1, s100. DOI:10.1080/02640414.2017.1378421

Impact case study (REF3)

[R4] Lafferty, M.E., Wakefield, C., & Ryan, D. (2017). “For the love of the game”: The hidden mental health consequences of sport teams’ initiations. Proceedings of the Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology Conference, British Psychological Society. Leicester: British Psychological Society.

[R5] Lafferty, M.E. & Wakefield, C. (2010). So you want to be in my team!’ – An exploration of initiation practices and team building activities in sport. Proceedings of the British Psychological Society, 77. Leicester: British Psychological Society.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Overview

The combined effect of the research and the CHANGES programme has led to impact at three distinct but interlinked levels. These can be described as: UK institution level; university sport governance level (England and Scotland) through partnership agreements and inclusion in governing body policy; and finally, at a broader governance university policy level through the work with Universities UK.

Establishing pathways to impact

Building on the findings of the research that initiation activities did not build cohesion, were destructive both psychologically and physically and were widespread, Professor Lafferty led the development and piloting of the CHANGES-Intervention which resulted in the programme being shortlisted for the Educate North Awards (2016). This initial corpus of activity led to a meeting with the Chief Executive Officer, Vince Maine, of British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) and the opportunity to present an overview of the CHANGES-Intervention. BUCS provides the overarching governance for all university and college sport in the UK. From this, Professor Lafferty was invited to present to all UK student sport managers at the BUCS Managers Conference (June 2017) and subsequently, to the regional chairs and BUCS board, who have responsibility for strategy implementation at regional level, in January 2018. From this the CHANGES-Intervention was presented at regional meetings to chairs and committees in 9 of the 12 BUCS regions across the UK and at their national conference (July 2018). These activities underpinned the three levels of impact cited above.

UK Impact on student sport officers, students, and university staff

Between 2016 and the end of 2020 Professor Lafferty has delivered the CHANGES-Intervention workshop to over 1000 student sport officers in 40 Universities in England and Scotland through continued QR funding from the University of Chester. This represents a reach in 2020 to over 20,000 sport players. Participant feedback collected post-workshop shows that the intervention met its objectives with participants reporting increased understanding and knowledge as to the negative impacts of initiation activities and, importantly, stating that they would be altering their behaviours post workshop. Recurrent feedback themes included statements such as “*I realised the peer pressure felt*”, “*...how people felt they had to do it*” and indicators of behaviour change through statements such as “*making sure that social events are inclusive*” and that “*new members are seen as equals.*”

Further evidence as to institutional level impact can be seen through the feedback from student sport managers, salaried university staff and operation managers who reported a noticeable change in ethos through feedback such as; “*I am convinced that the culture amongst our teams has already changed significantly and the part you have played in that is much appreciated*” ([S1] pg.3) and “*...they fed back that the workshop was really valuable and that it made them more aware of how other members, particularly first years, may feel when joining a club. They were pleased that these issues were being directly addressed through the workshop, recognising the need for this training*” ([S1] pg.4). These participating universities reported a decrease in negative initiation activity and increase in positive effect as evidenced by feedback such as “*Over the course of the year, we have seen a significant decrease in disciplinary issues and reports of poor or inappropriate behaviour from others such as campus security and partners in the night-time*

economy" [S2]. Furthermore, Professor Lafferty's research has also been used by student unions to inform their own guidance [S3].

Impact on University sport bodies in England and Scotland

In 2018, Professor Lafferty was invited to be an expert advisor to the BUCS Inclusion Advisory Board. The National Inclusion Strategy was developed to ensure that sport is accessible and available to all university students and focuses on addressing areas of concern that threaten inclusivity. The CHANGES programme is now included in the National Inclusion Strategy [S4] and the Advisory Board has committed to "*Implement the CHANGES programme across higher education institutions. - Support the implementation of the BUCS and CHANGES MOU (signed in 2018) - Use BUCS communication networks to promote the CHANGES programme and its relevance to all members*" ([S4], pg. 2).

The significance of the research and intervention work by Professor Lafferty resulted in a CHANGES partnership agreement with BUCS in 2018, to ensure that CHANGES is part of their National Sport agenda and that the work will continue within the sector and inform future policy and practice for the next 5 years [S5]. To-date, CHANGES has been written into the BUCS National Stop Initiation Campaign as the only recognised intervention of its kind. The success of the intervention workshops at Scottish universities has resulted in a second partnership in 2019 with Scottish Student Sport who are responsible for university and college sport in Scotland [S6]. These partnership agreements ensure that CHANGES and the work continues to impact on positive sport experiences for all student sport athletes and the research of the CHANGES programme informs policy and practice. In summary, the CHANGES-Intervention is now firmly embedded as part of the National Strategy in both England and Scotland for student sport.

Impact on policy through Universities UK

Further to the impact of CHANGES within student sport and in recognition of the CHANGES programme and her expertise, research and knowledge of initiation activity, Professor Lafferty was invited to be a panel member on the Universities UK (UUK) Round Table Panel on Initiations (May, 2019) drawn together as a result of the coroner report relating to the death of Newcastle student Ed Farmer. Universities UK represents 139 universities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and devises policy and strategies at a national level that focus on enhancing both the UK university sector, student experience and the impact of universities on students and the wider society. As a member of this panel and signatory of the emergent briefing document, Professor Lafferty's research has informed and is cited within the consensus statement. In its recommendations, Universities UK recognises the strength of Professor Lafferty's work and states "*Universities UK recommends collaborating with Professor Moira Lafferty of the University of Chester and the CHANGES Intervention*" ([S7] pg. 25). Furthermore, the CHANGES-Intervention is included as a positive case study within the briefing document and is the only one to explicitly focus on initiations [S7].

The impact of the CHANGES-Intervention in UK universities has drawn interest from non-UK based institutions and an extension of the work is currently being developed through the O-CHANGES (Online training) programme.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[S1] Feedback from managers / salaried staff

[S2] University level feedback

[S3] Informing Student Guidance

https://www.thesubath.com/blogs/blog/sport_officer_blog/2018/11/09/Sports-Initiations-Tackling-the-Issue/

[S4] BUCS Inclusion Strategy

[S5] BUCS Partnership Agreement

[S6] Scottish Student Sport Partnership Agreement

[S7] Universities UK Initiation Policy Guide (2019)