

<b>Institution: Liverpool Hope University</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: 24</b>		
<b>Title of case study: Transforming the culture of student sport initiation ceremonies: time for a CHANGE</b>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2018</b>		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Caroline Wakefield	Associate Professor in Sport Psychology	2009-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017-2020</b>		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>The negative effects of engaging in student initiation ceremonies are well-documented and include risk of harm, injury and death. Yet despite these risks and the adoption of a mandatory zero-tolerance policy within Universities, students report continuation of initiation ceremonies that aim to increase cohesion and uphold tradition. The current case study posits that an intervention was warranted to educate and empower students against these risks. Impact has been achieved via policy change, increased awareness of the risks associated with initiation ceremonies, change of universities' activities around initiations, and reduction of anti-social behaviour across the national picture of student sport.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Following a spate of student deaths as a result of partaking in sporting initiation ceremonies, the Tinmouth report (2004) recommended that universities should adopt a zero-tolerance mandate and formulate an agreement with the National Union of Students and British University and College Sport (BUCS) to this effect. Those students participating are at risk of physical harm, psychological harm, social harm and academic/career harm (where, for example, intending teachers/medics obtain criminal records). This also has a broader effect as many students report dropping out of, or not partaking in, university sport owing to the fear and consequences of such initiation activities. Despite this, students report engaging in such initiation behaviours with the aim of increasing cohesion and upholding tradition. As a result of this, Dr Wakefield (Liverpool Hope University) and Professor Moira Lafferty (University of Chester) researched the topic of initiations in UK universities. The collective aim was to use the findings to develop an intervention to promote behaviour change with regard to initiations and subsequently reduce anti-social and risk-laden behaviours amongst student athletes.</p> <p>The first in the series of studies (3.1) examined the prevalence of initiation and team building activities in a UK-based population, alongside measures of cohesion. The research findings indicated that initiation activities remain commonplace across university sport, particularly amongst interacting team sport players. However, the results demonstrated that these inappropriate behaviours were not related to the cohesion of the team unit. This challenged the common reasoning given by students for engaging in initiation activities, which is to enhance team spirit and build cohesion amongst teams. Following the dispelling of the myth of increased cohesion, a further study was carried out utilising interviews with student athletes in order to gain qualitative data on students' experiences of initiation events (3.2). The qualitative data revealed that initiation activities were perceived to be a discrete stage that it was necessary to overcome in order to become an accepted member of a sports team. Furthermore, all of the initiation</p>		

ceremonies outlined in the analysis had a direct or indirect link to alcohol consumption, in addition to a series of behavioural and health related risks as a result of participation in the activities.

The interview data from these studies was then woven together at Liverpool Hope University to build comprehensive narratives of initiation experiences (March 2014). These narratives were subsequently filmed at Liverpool Hope University (November 2014) using actors and were backlit to imitate a witness statement and minimise distractions for the observer. The narratives then formed the central component of an intervention workshop aiming to challenge inappropriate and risk behaviours around initiations and become a tool for meaningful behaviour change. With recent UK student deaths resulting from initiation ceremonies, one of the coroners filed a Prevention of Future Deaths report that called for intervention to “address the inherent risks of participating in initiation events” (Karen Dilks, 2018), which adds an urgency and importance to the roll out of the interactive and collaborative intervention developed as a result of the research.

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

3.1 Lafferty, M., **Wakefield, C.J.**, & Fountain 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. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2015.1121507>. This paper has undergone a rigorous peer review process and the journal is of international quality.

3.2 Lafferty, M. & **Wakefield, C.J.** (2018). Becoming part of the team: Female student athletes’ engagement in initiation activities. *The Sport Psychologist*. <https://doi.org/10.1123/TSP.2016-0115>. This journal is highly regarded in the field and is international in scope. The paper has undergone a rigorous peer review process prior to publication in the journal.

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

The research resulted in the development of an intervention workshop named CHANGES (Challenging Hazing and Negative Group Events in Sport). This intervention is a tool for the promotion of behaviour change, using a collaborative approach to highlight risk-laden behaviours and educate and empower student sport officers to foster a more positive team culture. Thus, the intervention workshop is not primarily conceived of as dissemination but as an agent to promote demonstrable change. Evidence of its success in this respect includes:

#### 1. Impact on Policy

##### *i) BUCS.*

Following the development of the intervention, Liverpool Hope University invited the CEO of British University and College Sports (BUCS) to campus to promote the intervention and obtain backing from BUCS (25/05/2017). BUCS referenced the collaboration in a press release (5.1), explaining that “it is the first programme of its kind to be developed and implemented in Higher Education”, which is a key marker of originality and an example of early impact on policy to be adopted at a national level. Subsequent meetings with BUCS senior and regional management resulted in the signing of an official partnership agreement with the CHANGES team (consisting of Caroline Wakefield and Moira Lafferty) in 2018 (5.2) with the aim of effecting “a reduction in the instances of anti-social behaviour associated with higher education sport”. The intervention is now formally endorsed by BUCS, demonstrating a policy impact which forms a part of their inclusion agenda.

*ii) Universities UK.*

The intervention was highlighted as an example by Universities UK, where a consensus on dealing with initiation activities was obtained by key stakeholders. This resulted in the publication of a briefing on student initiation ceremonies (5.3) with numerous signatories including CHANGES and the Department for Education. Here, the briefing recommends that universities collaborate with the CHANGES intervention “to empower students to hold each other to account for inappropriate and dangerous behaviours” (p.25).

*iii) Universities.*

The national take-up of the intervention indicates that universities have an increased awareness of initiation activities which were previously pushed ‘underground’, and are willing to engage in the programme. The intervention provides universities with demonstrable evidence that they have challenged behaviours regarding initiations and raised awareness of the risks and challenges amongst student officers. This has led to policy decisions by universities to implement the workshop. For example, when one Vice Chancellor was enquiring about measures taken by their student union to prevent initiations, CHANGES was outlined as a key measure being undertaken to eradicate risk-laden initiation rituals (5.4).

2. Impact on Behaviour

The intervention has had significant reach with participation from over 1000 student officers from 20 Universities (5.5) consisting of club and team captains. Each of these student officers holds responsibility for 10-15 student athletes. Therefore, the intervention has potentially impacted the experience of 10,000-15,000 students.

This has had a significant and direct impact on the behaviour of the student athletes nationally. A BUCS representative confirmed that, since the CHANGES intervention was rolled out, they “have noted a decrease in initiation-related activities and associated well-being outcomes” (5.6). This impact is echoed at individual universities with declarations such as “the University PCSO reported the lowest number of complaints from the community he had ever had at the start of a term” which “used to take up a fifth of my time as Chief Executive” (5.7). Further institutions attested that they noticed “a marked improvement in complaints, with zero recorded since the intervention” (5.8) and “in the academic year that the training was delivered we had no reported incidents of initiations within our clubs” (5.9).

The BUCS representative testified to a change in behaviour and mindset (5.6), stating “the CHANGES programme has been successful in changing attitudes and upholding the ethos of university sport”. Several institutions also recognised a change in culture, citing that the intervention led to increased dialogue between the university and the students about initiations. For example, the intervention “ignited some excellent discussion around being proactive with regards to challenging unwanted behaviours” (5.10) and “clubs were more receptive to working with the union in creating a more welcoming and inclusive event that students could feel safe and free from pressure” (5.8)

To conclude, the intervention has had demonstrable impact both on policy and behaviour, from BUCS and Universities UK to reports of decreased anti-social behaviour, both institutionally and nationally. Changing the culture of initiations in this way has raised awareness and reduced risk behaviours, allowing a more inclusive agenda which will enrich the lives of student athletes and have immeasurable health, social and well-being benefits.

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

- 5.1 Press release from BUCS outlining collaboration and intended national roll-out
- 5.2 Partnership agreement with BUCS
- 5.3 Universities UK briefing document on student initiations
- 5.4 Email thread with Vice Chancellor
- 5.5 Evidence of impact reach: Delivery map
- 5.6 Letter from North regional representative, British University College Sport
- 5.7 University testimonial: University of Worcester
- 5.8 University testimonial: University of Derby
- 5.9 University testimonial: Anglia Ruskin University
- 5.10 University testimonial: University of Edinburgh