

# 2011 British Athletics Facts

## ABAC Fact File 4

### University Athletics

**1. Background.** It has long been recognised that there is a huge exodus from the sport by athletes between the ages of 16 and 20 years. Many clubs report promising youngsters turning away from the sport once they start at University. There are of course many sports oriented Universities and it might be expected that these would help retain and develop promising talent. But their numbers, size and population are small compared with the big hitters. An analysis of athletics popularity at University level is not easy to carry out because of the dearth of results from this group. In this Fact File we examine what is going on.

**2. University populations.** According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency for 2008/9 there are close to 2.3 million people enrolled at 164 universities typically in the age range of 18 to 22 years. The Open University which is by far the largest institution is not included in this population as it has mainly a non resident and mature student base.

Universities should be major contributors to the sporting wealth of the nation as nearly 45% of the country's 18 to 22 year olds pass through their portals. In reality they are not. We have examined university participation at their specialist championships such as the British University Championships (BUCS) plus Scottish Universities meetings and the Oxford v Cambridge match.

**3. 2010 analysis.** In the 2010 BUCS 835 athletes participated (499 men, 336 women) representing 83 universities. As one might expect 'sports' universities dominated the points table. Some of the very large universities had modest totals

**Table 1. BUCS results for the top 7 Sports Universities and the 4 largest Universities.**

	Size Ranking	Number Students	Points	Points/1000 students	Points/Student Ranking
Loughborough	(66)	17,165	285	16.7	(1)
Leeds Metro	(15)	27,800	129	4.6	(5)
Brunel	(77)	15,090	123.5	8.2	(4)
UWIC	(94)	11,170	119	10.7	(2)
Bath	(87)	13,380	114	8.5	(3)
Birmingham	(11)	29,185	94	3.2	(7)
St Marys	(80)	14,025	52.5	3.8	(6)
Sheffield Hallam	(4)	33,830	24	0.7	
Manchester	(2)	38,190	18	0.5	
Nottingham	(5)	32,935	4	0.1	
Manchester Metropolitan	(3)	34,515	0	0	

It will be noted that the highest number of points achieved related to the size of the Sports University shows that the top ranked three are: Loughborough, UWIC and Bath.

The lack of participants in the 2010 BUCS from the largest Universities is a demonstration of a major problem for the sport

**Table 2. Lists the number of athletes competing for the largest non Sports Universities**

	Students	Competitors at BUCS 2010
Manchester	38,190	8
Manchester Metro	34,515	1
Sheffield Hallam	33,830	20
Nottingham	32,925	9
West of England	31,645	7
Plymouth	30,930	0

That gives a total of 45 competitors from a student population of 202,035

**Performance and recruitment.** It is noted that the level of performances by some of the athletes competing in the BUCS championship is very low so this population is mainly producing results well below elite level.

It is noted that virtually all of the better performers are members of athletic clubs. Universities do not in the main recruit new athletes. Looking at university websites paints a grim picture. Both Manchester and Leeds state they have around 50 members in their athletic clubs and several websites are asking people to join the athletic club just to keep fit and state 'you do not have to compete in athletics'.