



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

NUSPORT

CHAIR REPORT

NEWCASTLE
UNIVERSITY SPORT

2020
EDITION

CHAIR'S REPORT

Gabriella Sainsbury



OVERVIEW

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, our students, members and staff were posed with many challenges that required great resilience, empathy and patience. We faced facility closures on short notice due to public health orders, our student and commercial programs were significantly impacted, and our staff had to adapt to significant changes in working conditions.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we commend the work ethic and tenacity shown by all affected. I would also like to sincerely thank our Board of Directors, who are themselves volunteers, who spent significant additional time guiding NUsport through significant business continuity risks.

Whilst my report will highlight the impact on our programs, services and facilities, I also celebrate the great success of delivering these programs in the context of the challenges of 2020.

I would like to take the opportunity to highlight noteworthy matters during 2020, touching on the following 5 areas:

1. Participation & Impacts of the Pandemic on NUsport programs
2. Pool Refurbishment
3. Club Engagement
4. Elite Sport
5. Financial Performance.

1. PARTICIPATION & IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON NUSPORT PROGRAMS

In 2020, visitations commenced strongly in January and February 2020 but began to decline in March 2020 amid COVID-19 concerns.

In response to public health orders, The Forum closed for 12 weeks from 23 March 2020 and reopened on 13 June 2020.



NUsport experienced reduced participation in sporting clubs, UniSport Australia events, sport programs and Swim Academy, which mirrors the experience of the market during the pandemic.

When operations ceased on immediate notice, our management team and Board needed to ensure business and financial continuity of NUsport. NUsport staff were instrumental in managing this response and are commended for their understanding and dedication to the issue.

Our management team were fast to adapt programs including moving to on-line delivery as well as establishing take home equipment hire and programs for our members.

After some of the public health orders were lifted in June 2020, NUsport was able to operate, although at a limited capacity with many operational constraints imposed on it.

To summarise visitation at our facilities during 2020:

- **Gym Visitations:** Visitation was lower than usual due to COVID-19 with average monthly visits to The Forum of 19,243. 75% of these were to the University and 25% to Harbourside.
- **Fitness Passport:** Fitness Passport visits totalled 48,392. 62% of these visits were to the University and 38% to Harbourside. Fitness Passport memberships are 4,701 as at December 2020 (up from 4,444 in December 2019).
- **Trends in Memberships:** Traditional memberships continued to decline with a portion of members converting to Fitness Passport and a preference for shorter term commitments due to COVID-19 uncertainty.
- **Clubs:** 1,304 members were registered across 17 active affiliated sporting clubs. 8 NUsport clubs were inactive. I will touch on this further shortly.
- **Social Sport:** Semester 1 Social Sport competitions, comprising 144 teams, were disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and then eventually cancelled. Social Sport competitions recommenced in Semester 2 with 61 teams competing across 6 competition formats, facilitating participation in sport for approximately 500 University students, staff and wider community.
- **College Programs:** NUsport managed a revised ResChallenge Sports Program during Semester 2, 2020 for our 430 residential students, facilitating regular sporting activities and friendly competition between residences.



2. POOL REFURBISHMENT

The Forum pool was built over 20 years ago and whilst it has been maintained with upgrades and repairs it was time for a major refurbishment to ensure that we continue to provide premier facilities to meet the needs of our members now and into the future.

We saw the pool closure as an opportunity to fast-track the major works to the Aquatic Centre and minimise the impact which would have to occur on our operations and to pool users.

We would like to acknowledge the support of the University who prioritised this project and dedicated funding of \$7.8M to enable these major works to occur.

Although our major asset was offline, we successfully continued to deliver a wide range of health, sport, recreation and well-being services to our students and staff.

Through some creative and adaptive commercial negotiations, NU Sport delivered swim academy programs at alternate facilities including Lake Macquarie City Council and Newcastle City Council pools (Charlestown, Lambton and Wallsend) from July 2020.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of Management and the Aquatics staff in successfully adapting our swim programs. The professionalism of our staff in the way they presented The Forum programs was noted by the community and our members.

We are otherwise very much looking forward to the Aquatic Centre reopening on 7 June 2021 to welcome back our programs to our facilities.



3. CLUB ENGAGEMENT

NUsport Affiliated Clubs

Membership across 25 NUsport affiliated sporting clubs declined due to the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions imposed.

Regular guidance and engagement with club committees by NUsport staff saw 17 NUsport clubs reactivated under COVID-19 Safety Plans to enable participation of 1,304 NUsport club Members.

NUsport continued to support our clubs through significantly discounted venue hire, subsidies for competition uniforms, equipment and first-aid supplies, and competition registration fees.

Our clubs continued to represent the University with distinction and although seasons were disrupted, we were really pleased to see so many club members participate throughout the year.

Some key club successes include:

- the University of Newcastle Cricket Club finished second in the Club Championship,
- the University of Newcastle Women's Netball Championship team finished undefeated in the NNA Greater Netball Series, and
- the University of Newcastle Rugby League Ladies League Tag team awarded for the second time Runner Up in the A Grade competition.



4. ELITE SPORT

UniSport Australia Events

Whilst it was disappointing that most UniSport events were cancelled for the year, including the Nationals, it was encouraging to have four students from The University of Newcastle compete in the UniSport Australia Esports Championships. One of NU Sport's greatest attributes is the breadth of services, programs and opportunities it provides to all students.

Elite Athlete Program

NU Sport supported 95 athletes through the Elite Athlete Program, by way of guidance, advocacy and support in negotiating academic flexibility in 2020.

Notable results of our elite student athletes include:

- NSWIS Sailing athlete and member of the Australian Sailing Squad, Simon Hoffman, (B Business) competed at the 2020 World Sailing Championships, held February 2020 in Geelong Victoria, NSWIS placing 24th in the 49er Open category and 1st in U23yrs category.
- Para Snow Sport athlete Patrick Jensen (Open Foundation) competed in the 2020 Para Alpine Skiing World Cup in Switzerland, placing 3rd in the Super G and picked up two further Bronze Medals in the Prato Nevoso 2020 World Para Alpine Skiing World Cup event.

Hosting of the Annual University of Newcastle Sports Awards Dinner

The University of Newcastle Sports Awards Dinner was not held in 2020 due to COVID-19 event restrictions.

The event is a key date in the calendar and showcases the exceptional standard of sporting achievement and administration by students of the University. We are eager to recognise these achievements of 2019, as well as 2020 at an event to be held later this year.



5. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

NUsport performed well financially for the year in a most challenging environment. Our financial results outline the effective approach taken by management to closely manage our assets using limited resources during significant business and operational disruption.

Notwithstanding these challenges, NUsport's support for student activities and programs continued and was wide ranging including:

- ongoing discounted gym memberships to The Forum,
- facilitation of 'the Lockdown League' was a light-hearted way for UniSport and its members to promote physical activity and support mental wellbeing amongst university staff, students and alumni during the COVID-19 pandemic,
- ongoing delivery of social sports competitions,
- support for NUsport affiliated clubs in particular working with clubs and codes for COVID-19 Safety Plans and compliance,
- Orientation Week and Open Day activities,
- ResChallenge activities.

Thanks

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the work of our Board, management and volunteers.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to express our sincere gratitude for the work of our staff who worked diligently during a disruptive period.

I would also like to thank each of you as our members for your participation and support. In particular, I would like to thank all those volunteers in University teams, clubs and colleges who have given of their time to make university sport an engaging and vibrant experience for so many students.

Lastly, but not least, I wish to thank my fellow Board members for their dedication, time and guidance in 2020.

Gabriella Sainsbury
Chair
25 May 2021