Citation:
Fletcher, TE and Snape, B and Carnicelli, S and Lawrence, S (2015) Teaching and Learning Issues in the Disciplines: Leisure Studies. Project Report. Higher Education Academy. (Unpublished)

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Teaching and Learning Issues in the Disciplines: Leisure Studies[1]

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This report is submitted to the Higher Education Academy (HEA) on behalf of the Leisure Studies Association (LSA). LSA aims to foster research in Leisure Studies; to promote interest in Leisure Studies and advance education in this field; to encourage debate through publications, and an international journal *Leisure Studies*; to stimulate the exchange of ideas on contemporary leisure issues; to disseminate knowledge of Leisure Studies to create the conditions for better-informed decisions by policy makers.

Part one – outcomes of focus groups

Data for this report were collected via three focus groups conducted in Scotland, Northern England and Southern England. In total, 17 participants were involved. The vast majority of participants were either Lecturers of Senior Lecturers, though there were a couple of Professors and PhD students involved. Participants were either members of the LSA, or were currently employed and teaching within the field of Leisure Studies, broadly defined. Participants were from a variety of sub-fields of Leisure Studies, including Sociology, History, Physical Education, Outdoor Recreation, Football Studies, Events and Sports Events Management and Tourism. Focus groups were facilitated by different individuals at each host institution. A broad conceptualisation of 'Leisure Studies' (discussed below) has been adopted in this research. Subjects including Sport (sociology, history, development, management, science etc), Tourism and Events Management have all been included in what we might contemporarily think of as 'Leisure Studies'. We acknowledge that some of these subject areas have their own learned societies (e.g. BASES, AEME, ATHE, BSSH).[2] Our decision to include these subject areas is twofold. Firstly, the teaching of Leisure Studies degrees has been on the decline within UK Higher Education (HE) institutions over the last decade; and secondly, prior to their establishment as (sub) fields in their own right, each of these subject areas were taught as discreet areas within leisure-specific degrees.[3]

The challenges associated with this cultural shift away from leisure-specific degrees within UK HE institutions will be discussed later in this report. Given the current climate, focus group moderators were encouraged to ask participants how they would define 'Leisure Studies'. There was a feeling across the focus groups that the subject area is *"massively broad"* (FG1) and includes a series of other sub-fields within its epistemological frame. This participant expanded by saying:

> *Well I think if you think even just about the sort of Leisure Studies Association and the kind of disciplines that converge to form that Association, it's broad in terms of its sort*

[1] The Higher Education Academy supported this project as part of its programme of research with learned societies and professional bodies mapping the current range of disciplinary and subject-specific issues in higher education teaching and learning. The facts presented and views expressed in this report are, however, those of the authors and participants in the research not necessarily those of the HEA.
[2] The British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES), Association for Event Management Education (AEME), Association for Tourism in Higher Education (ATHE), British Society of Sport History (BSSH).
[3] In this report we differentiate between the terms 'leisure-specific' and 'leisure-based' degree programmes. Use of the term leisure-specific refers to programmes that centralise leisure as the epistemological focus. The term leisure-based refers to those programmes that have emerged out of leisure-specific programmes and which have leisure at their foundation.

> *of history, sociology, politics, tourism, events, hospitality, you know they are coming from different fields, coming from different disciplines, constitutes different kind of courses.* (FG1)

There was consensus within this focus group that whilst the majority of leisure scholars will view the field in this way, institutionally - that is, within universities - there remains a great deal of misunderstanding over what Leisure Studies actually represents. For example this participant said that his institution holds quite a narrow view of the field:

> *[…] we think about it quite narrow i'd say, like you know psychology is quite an important lens in terms of the leisure field and a lot of the sort of, Leisure Studies work, has come from the social psychological perspective … but Leisure Studies is not taught within psychology and psychology was not really taught in Leisure Studies … it [Leisure Studies] would traditionally be seen as 'over there' - not here - which is I think the way Leisure Studies is wrapped up and packaged and perceived here.* (FG1)

Another participant spoke quite critically about how Leisure Studies is viewed by his university:

> *I mean the University thinks that Leisure Studies is just kind of rag taggle of stuff that isn't sport and it isn't events, tourism and hospitality, and leisure, it's just the thing in the middle that's something to do with active recreation, that's all they know, the University.* (FG1)

There was a view that the changing position and relevance of Leisure Studies within HE settings presented scholars of leisure with a series of challenges; many of which will be discussed in Section 2.

1 What are the key resources you use in your own teaching?

Each of the focus groups identified similar resources currently used as part of teaching and learning. It should be noted that discussion concerned only undergraduate (UG) taught provision. There was general agreement that academic books, journal articles, industry reports, as well as professional bodies and websites like YouTube and Wikipedia provided the staple for teaching most modules at UG level. There was agreement across the focus groups that resources offered to students should be free of charge. Even where a core text might be necessary participants would prefer to adopt a text in ebook format rather than ask students to purchase a personal copy.

Given the diversity of subject areas represented through the participants and the fact that rarely were participants in each focus group teaching the same subjects in their institutions it was difficult to have meaningful discussions around specific core resources. It is possible to offer some broad comments from each subject area.

For those who would identify themselves as leisure scholars there was a feeling that there are limited text books that provide students with an introduction to the field. Those mentioned were: Spracklen, K. (2013) *Leisure, Sport and Society,* Palgrave; Bramham, P. and Wagg, S. (2014) An *Introduction to Leisure Studies: Principles and Practice*, Sage. Other texts cited were old, and whilst by no means irrelevant, would benefit from being updated. Journals that were noted were: *Leisure Studies, Leisure Sciences, World Leisure Journal, Journal of Leisure Research, Annals of Leisure Research, Leisure/Loisir.*

Those identifying themselves as scholars of sport (encompassing sociology, development, management, history) did not discuss core text books, but did identify some journals in addition to

those above: *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, Sport in Society, Soccer & Society, Journal of Sport and Social Issues, Sociology of Sport Journal, Sport in History, International Journal of the History of Sport, European Sport Management Quarterly.*

The most substantial discussion around key resources came from those who would identify themselves as scholars of Events and Events Management. This was not a complete surprise given that this subject area is the least mature of those represented in the focus groups. There was consensus that the majority of current textbooks in this area are management focused – for example, Bowdin, G. et al. (2010) *Events Management,* Routledge; and to a lesser extent Getz, D. (2008) *Event Studies,* Routledge. Participants also highlighted books that focused on more specific aspects of Events Management – for example Berridge, G. (2006) *Events Design and Experience*, Routledge. There was a feeling that many of the current texts are pitched at a basic level to attract first and second year UGs. Consequently, more theoretically robust books exploring the more social and cultural aspects of events, as well as those which attempt to combine both theory and practice are needed. There was limited discussion about specific journals. Those highlighted were: *Event Management, International Journal of Event and Festival Management, Annals of Tourism Research.*

It is important to note that participants also looked to publish their work and promote the work of others published in journals outside of their subject field/area. It was acknowledged that as pressure increases to publish work in high impact factor, 3-4* journals, coupled with a desire to develop their field/subject area, scholars working in these broad fields often aim to publish in other areas – for example, 'mainstream' sociology, cultural studies, history, politics, geography, management etc journals.

There was a feeling within the northern focus group in particular that whilst the provision of Leisure Studies within universities is in a fragile position, the strength of academic resources is at a high point. The number and strength of submissions to Unit 26 in the recent Research Excellent Framework (REF) exercise was believed to be evidence of the contemporary interest in Leisure Studies. As these participants said:

> *If you think about journal publications and sort of the recent REF there's a wealth of people who were entered under you know whatever the unit 26 is who were writing and researching around leisure and, you know, their work has not only got national recognition, its international and world leading so there's and extensive body of material that is cutting edge which is informing our curriculums [sic].* (FG1)

> *'Leisure Studies' the journal is one of the most popular journals in the Taylor and Francis Sport and Leisure portfolio … that includes all of the sports science and their sort of management. So 'Leisure Studies' is doing incredibly well; it has increased its numbers (volumes published per year), it has increased the number of papers published per year. Palgrave Macmillan has my [name of book series] that I read has got about 15 books commissioned, it might even be more … that is really popular worldwide, high sales, so there are things out there.* (FG1)

Others argued that judging the field's success by numbers of publications alone is limited. This participant for example, who identified herself as a historian of leisure said that publications in leisure history are declining. She attributed this in part to the prerogatives of universities to promote employability in graduates as well as the contemporary push towards providing evidence of impact in academic work – both of which she believed are more challenging for historians:

> *I am a historian so I am obliged to make the comment that actually the historical research that revolves around leisure is actually pretty fragmented and you know which is possibly understandable and does go back actually to the sort of perhaps neoliberal*

agenda but also the employability agenda and the impact agenda. You know people who put historical research in relation to leisure and so 'what's the point of that', you know, 'how is that gonna give us any payback?' other than perhaps to, I don't know, give our students some kind of contextual knowledge? So actually, as a historian, for me working in Leisure Studies if you like is actually pretty challenging, potentially to teach it because there isn't the same amount of research that goes on. (FG1)

Other respondents were critical of the amount of new publications. Speaking specifically about the areas of Events Management and Tourism this participant said that the constant stream of new publications made it difficult to stay up to date:

I sort of think we are getting to the point now where there is too much literature, you know I sometimes think 'oh god not another book coming out.' (FG3)

The subject matter and relevance of some publications was also questioned. There was a feeling amongst some participants that within some subject areas there is a tendency to publish for the sake of publishing, as opposed to publishing to inform industry practice, or feed directly into curriculum teaching:

I think tourism is worse for this … but things that are so specialised like, you know, tourism and tea, tourism and coffee … and I am just like, is sort of thing that industry wants? (FG3)

I agree, if industry looks at some of this stuff they will just go 'oh my god', you know, so I think there is a danger of just publishing for publishing sake. People think oh we have got to get textbooks, we have got to get journal articles we have got to get this because of the REF whereas really, how relevant is a lot of it to both the students and us? (FG3)

This fed into a broader discussion about the role of academic research for teaching. Participants in all focus groups emphasised an expectation that students (at all levels) should be engaging with academic publications – that is, journal articles, monographs and edited collections. There was a feeling among some however, that mnyof these 'resources' are written in an unnecessarily inaccessible style:

Right, for our students, I think the problem our students have is accessing academic material and understanding it … and a number of academics, I feel, write papers in that way. A good friend of mine that we all know, brilliant academic, but even I don't have diddly squat what he's writing about. (FG2)

This brought into question how relevant academic research is if students are unable to apply its content to 'real' life situations:

I have had the pleasure of being a reviewer for a few Leisure Studies articles and Leisure Studies is a journal that prides itself on being particularly difficult to get into … and I think the writing style of the colleague that we mentioned (above) has the kind of the right writing style for that, but it is a pain and it is difficult but I think for other students, well for other people, to understand what is being written, is difficult. I think there is a drive to writing that way to hold esteem. But it's not particularly good practice … people need to be able to engage with it and understand it. (FG2)

Definitely, that seems to be in Sports Development, they [students] need to be able to apply something. If you haven't got the foggiest of what something is written about, about the theory, then how are you supposed to apply that? (FG2)

Discussions around accessibility contributed to a wider debate about what constitutes academic sources and what sources students can legitimately use to inform their thinking. In addition to the traditional resources cited above some participants discussed the value of personal blogs and social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter which, it was felt, many academics are turning to in order to both respond quickly to emerging issues, and have their voice heard, without the strictures of peer review. The general consensus was that these are valuable resources, but that their use should have terms and conditions attached. For instance, they should be used *in addition to* mainstream sources – as a mechanism for building and sustaining an argument. Moreover, it was felt that, in social media spaces, the academic credibility of the author becomes even more relevant:

> *These resources start the dialog … it's very interesting. We have in my field … there is a very world renowned author who has been acclaimed for many books and journal papers and allsorts who has his own blog and students refer to that in their work, and I suppose because I know of the author … you accept that and that's a credible resource to use. If it was Joe Bloggs down the road blogging then it's a bit different because there is no credibility at all, so I think it's within context.* (FG2)

Discussions about the quality and availability of resources also extended to practical teaching and learning materials, including dance choreographies and coaching sessions. Speaking specifically about dance in the context of P.E. this participant believed that there are a wealth of quality dance and choreography resources that are available from professional bodies:

> *We have links with the major dance organisations around the country. We also have links with local companies like [list of companies] … so you have got a lot of stuff. They are not freely available, some of it is and the other resource that you get you can pick up things from other Universities that are good but you have got to sift through them to be careful. The TES has a wealth of material, The TES is usually quite sort of stringent because it's teachers that do produce the work on there.* (FG1)

Extending on from this another participant referred to the ease of availability of poor coaching videos/resources on the internet:

> *People are producing their resources and things like that [on the internet]. A very large European body produces their own video coaching resources which are very questionable in their quality, and a lot of the students will use them and reference them in their coaching plans. It does concern me when there are quite large bodies which are producing quite poor resources.* (FG2)

Some participants stressed that academics need to re-think what constitutes academic resources. Some spoke about how their own personal experiences of working in a particular industry was an invaluable resource, whilst others highlighted how industry practitioners are perhaps the most underused academic resource around. There was an acknowledgement that universities are increasingly utilising industry practitioners as guest lecturers, but that this is not yet accepted academic practice:

> *We are talking about resources and I am thinking well, I work with industry and that's a huge resource. Why don't we make that more common? To me one of the biggest weaknesses we have and it comes up in debate is the fact that academia doesn't use industry as a resource … I have been in contact with a number of universities which teach Events Management … they actually have live event companies that input into the curriculum. We don't do that; we are frightened of it (FG1).*

Participants agreed that there was scope for additional teaching and learning resources to be made available via, for example, learned societies, like LSA and/or the HEA. It was acknowledged

that the HEA used to hold a number of leisure-oriented resources on its website, but that these were no longer available. It was also suggested that the LSA could be doing more to encourage those working in the field to share teaching and learning resources (see Part 3).

2 What are the learning and teaching challenges you face in your subject area/discipline?

The main challenges identified were: the emergence and threat of new subject areas/fields, student expectations, vocationalism and central administration of courses. We are mindful that some of these are challenges across the HE sector and are certainly not isolated to Leisure Studies. As highlighted above, the number of leisure-specific degree programmes in UK universities has been in decline for the last decade. The main reason for this decline, it was felt, was due to the rise of other subject areas/fields that have emerged as direct competitors to Leisure Studies. As this participant highlighted:

> *When I started working here some of the new courses like Sport Business Management, Sports Marketing, they had sort of spun off from that main [Leisure Studies] course. The problem with Leisure Studies here is that it's seen other courses emerge in the portfolio that are actually direct competitors. So where does leisure go? The decision was made here to move Leisure Studies … make it something more sociological, so the management stuff disappeared from the portfolio. It wasn't because we didn't think management was important for our students, rather because there was a management option and a marketing option and a coaching option elsewhere. How does Leisure Studies survive under that?* (FG1)

This respondent identified the rising popularity of Sport-based degree programmes as the main threat to Leisure Studies provision:

> *Well actually sport itself is, sport as a cultural and social practice is one of the biggest threats to Leisure Studies because it undermines [it] because it is so far in the ascendancy that it undermines any other kinds of elements of leisure practices that might be important in society or critical to people and give people meaning in their lives. we wouldn't do a degree for example in Craft Studies would we, but perhaps we should because craft is just as important, probably, 'out there' to people in terms of the meaning it gives to their lives – productivity, how it intercepts with labour and leisure - but no one would do a degree in that. Sport, potentially, depresses other forms of leisure, although it is itself a form of leisure, but somehow it sits in this privileged position.* (FG1)

The idea that programmes in the field of Sport are in some way privileged institutionally was thought to be a reflection of neo-liberal market-driven politics:

> *I mean is it going back to power because … it's [Sport] got the numbers so they have got the power. They can invest in recruitment and therefore it's a propagating cycle isn't it, so gradually the smaller voices get smaller and less well heard. This university is a primary example of power … it's who has got the biggest voice.* (FG1)

The centralisation of 'sport' at the forefront of leisure-based learning was well articulated by this respondent who had recently been involved in the development of a new sport and social sciences degree programme:

> *We have positioned sport and given it a priority, and even though we have tried to keep the word 'leisure' in module titles and we will still speak about leisure in all the different*

courses in the breadth of the way that you can understand it, I just feel sad that we haven't been able to big it up … but because of the market and the way it is we have had to kind of keep it at the back and sport at the forefront. (FG1)

There was a belief that the word 'leisure' simply did not hold cogency like it once did. This respondent commented that the notion of 'leisure' is too broad for students to identify with; especially when compared to other subjects like Sport Development, which are more self-explanatory.

Leisure is … such a broad concept, no one student or course probably identifies that clearly actually. The students I teach are all about a particular part of the sector … they wouldn't recognise leisure as being relevant to them. We don't offer leisure studies anymore and we leisure lecturers are a dying breed. (FG3)

It was perceived that the teaching in the field was divided by two different epistemological approaches: one favouring typically theory-driven teaching and learning methods; and another which is more practical and vocational in nature. There was a belief that Leisure Studies programmes had traditionally favoured the former, but would have to embrace the vocational shift, stressing employability, in order to survive. This participant had recently been involved in validating a new course and was able to reflect on the findings of some market research she had undertaken:

Leisure has just been completely dropped from, you know, most peoples' provision. Leisure at GCSE and A-Level is being cut, so it's almost like it's lost salience … it's almost become like a taboo word, you know, it's a word that's antithetical to being seen to getting a job in the real world. (FG1)

Building on this, another participant questioned the value of leisure-based degrees:

I feel that industry - and I only have experience of this in business - you start to see degrees as being irrelevant. I already know that the number of major companies are now looking for A-Levels. They don't want graduates because graduates aren't coming out with the skills they want. They will train their own.

But is that specific to leisure?

Yeah … why would anyone in the leisure industry look for a sport and leisure graduate? They could take someone from A-Level and they probably won't find that much difference in ability. (FG2)

This move towards vocationalism and structuring degrees around employability agendas did not sit well with everyone:

I think one of the issues with our type of course, as well as the likes of Events, Entertainment Management and things like that is kind of the employability agenda. There is in some ways more legitimacy to the management side to the study of leisure compared to the sociological and historical … and I think that we feel pressure, well I feel pressure, on that side to stress the management worth of it and how this will help you in a job rather than just develop your knowledge. (FG1)

When I went into teaching, that was important to me, the subject of student study, the fact that they were reading and studying and thinking. I used to sell the sports degree as a degree in thinking, not necessarily a career, but a degree in thinking. I think we have lost that. I think we have gone down this vocational trading route. (FG3)

Discussions also addressed the expectations of students who study for leisure-related degrees. There was some discussion around the price of tuition fees, with the general consensus being that

students are increasingly being viewed as customers who want value for money. This brought to the fore the much maligned notion of 'managing student expectations'. One participant in FG3 for example, believed that students are increasingly coming to university with a perception that they are buying a degree and, equally, academic staff are becoming more aware that they are in the business of 'selling' an education:

> *We are a business. We are a business of selling qualifications.* (FG3)

This is challenging for academics who may struggle to reconcile their belief that higher level study ought to promote independent learning with the student view that they are involved in an economic transaction:

> *I do feel culturally that we have moved in the last 20 odd years from us as tutors providing a framework in which students study so we will map an area and then students will fill in those gaps to now students expect everything that they need to know coming from us and I think part of that cultural change is to do with tuition fees. There is expectation that they are buying something. I get my experience, I get my learning experience, but it's given to me.* (FG3)

Discussions also addressed the view that students are becoming more influential in dictating the content of their programmes. The potential impact of the National Student Survey, it was believed, gave students unprecedented levels of power. It was agreed that students should be consulted on the content of their learning, but that ultimately, academic staff are best placed to know what students do and do not need from their degree programmes:

> *They come in and they are thinking "I really want to do that", practical events management – I really want to do that, event design – I really … event policy and strategy, "oh right, okay". "What am I going to do with that?" and I think sometimes, if it is not directly linked to an immediate management function or a management job they are not interested, but they need the policy and strategy stuff too.* (FG2)

This being said participants were concerned about the overall student experience:

> *Don't forget the power of the student to determine what they should be taught and how they should be taught … that's something that does trouble me … I always come back to event and venue sustainability which … I had to teach it for a year and I could see the look in their eyes as they walked into the room … I am kind of looking at them and going "look, I don't want to teach it but I am relatively certain as a graduate that this is something you need to have an understanding of", and I think there is a danger that when we just live and die by what the students say …* (FG2)

The final challenge is related to how degree courses are managed and delivered. There was a feeling that power and decision making processes were becoming increasingly centralised in most HE institutions. The result of this was a view that academic staff lack freedom and autonomy to design and deliver their own provision. In some cases it was felt that, as many modules are shared by different cohorts on different courses, content has to be fairly generic:

> *As the current programme leader at [institution] I am never going to get a blank sheet [of paper] because I am within a tourism subject group where my students share modules with tourism and hospitality and within a business school so there are modules they share with all of them.* (FG2)

While some participants wanted to have more control over their provision, others believed that their courses would be more interesting and more sustainable if modules were available as electives for more students, across more courses:

We should be having conversations across faculties so we have connections with people for example in the media cultural studies thing, health and social sciences, the politics unit etc and like we don't have those conversations and actually do you know it would benefit us and our students. (FG1)

In some cases, this extended to a feeling that those working in senior management positions did not trust individual course teams to market themselves effectively.

Sometimes if you are a programme leader you don't necessarily have the authority to make the changes anyway. (FG2)

I feel like some of the structures here keep us back. (FG1)

Clearly the teaching of Leisure Studies is surrounded by a range of intersecting challenges; many of which influenced how participants thought teaching in the subject area would evolve in the future. It is to those issues that this report now turns.

3 How do you think the teaching in your subject area is likely to evolve over the next few years?

The main issues discussed in this section were related to the use of technology in teaching, increasing student numbers, embedding research in teaching and a broader drive in HE towards internationalisation. Developments in technology were considered to be both opportunities and threats. All participants acknowledged that upon graduation their students had to be technologically literate to ensure employability:

It's also about how we keep a pace with quite a dynamic industry and the technologies of marketing and promotion, the technologies of staging and actually delivering an experience to people is moving quite fast. (FG2)

We have an obligation to do the things that we expect our students to be able to do when they graduate. (FG3)

There was also a view that developments in technology provided opportunities for more creative and experiential teaching and learning methods, which had scope outside the classroom:

We teach in a very old fashioned way, I am talking medieval ways - lectures and even seminars - now to a generation who aren't necessarily responsive to that mode of teaching, they want to be online, they want to be individualised as well. (FG3)

I mean you guys get them doing things like talking heads and stuff like that and You Tube videos. You don't teach them how to do it but it's the skill that a graduate probably needs. (FG2)

It is going to evolve more into experience economy, experiential learning, co-creation, you know things where the students actually want to be engaged in the whole experience … I think there is definitely a move away from classroom-based. (FG3)

However, there was concern – especially among older participants – that the speed of technological change meant they struggle to keep up to date. For example:

I feel I have got a gap … I don't feel confident. If the way we go forward in terms of digital technology and stuff, I don't feel comfortable delivering a lot of that stuff and I don't think I am on my own in that so I think there is a skills gap. I think there is a skills

gap with some of the people teaching, particularly people who have been teaching quite a while in terms of having the skills to deliver what the students want. (FG2)

I think one thing for me with dance physical activity is keeping up with technology because, I mean, for example the feedback that I give … we use iPads, we use iPads in schools. We get the young people interviewing each other and videoing each other so you bring in technology all the time and I think because technology changes so quick its actually trying to keep up with it. (FG1)

This participant continued by arguing that, within the context of P.E. and teacher training courses, students are expected to demonstrate an awareness of a range of technologies whilst on placements, but due mainly to expense, many schools do not have access to these technologies.

Moreover, there was a feeling that universities are often too slow to react to technological change, making it hard for academics to utilise new and innovative methods in their teaching:

I think institutionally a related problem would be that this university - and I imagine most universities - are not particularly quick at adopting things and having the systems in place to allow you to do these things without being incredibly slow and difficult for individual staff members … trying to do the most simple things is really hard isn't it. I mean I was at a conference where they had that system where you could ask the audience questions and they responded straight away and it could come up on the screen …

Oh instant polling yeah …

And that is really good. That would be really good with our students but our lecture theatres barely manage to do Powerpoint. (FG1)

In addition, where resources were available to deliver creative, innovative and experiential teaching and learning exercises, a number of interacting challenges in the form of rising student numbers, pressures to publish and undertake enterprise activities, make implementing these sessions increasingly difficult:

I think Higher Education has changed though … When I was at [institution] we did all sorts of really great things with students, and took them here, because we only had about 20 students at the beginning and we had funding and we had less pressure in terms of things like REF and overseas teaching and all of this stuff that we have now. (FG2)

If you have got big student numbers, which quite a few of us have now. trying to do those experiential learning things are just so difficult to manage because of resources and staff time and … how do you manage a field trip for 100 people? (FG2)

There was also a view that academics would be expected to embed their own research into teaching. For many this was already standard practice, but for others, this would represent significant changes. The majority of participants in these focus groups were research active academics, but others were not. It was widely acknowledged that universities are expecting more staff to be research active, and to publish. It was believed that this shift would cause conflict between the 'academics' and the 'practitioners' teaching in these areas:

I think around this table we have a bunch of people who are more critically informed, more critically orientated. I mean, maybe people come from sociological backgrounds or from policy backgrounds, there are still an awful lot of events academics who came in through the practitioner route and are high vis jacket wearing who the idea of

research lead teaching is another fancy way of saying lots of ideas but no actual clue how to do the job. (FG2)

This issue goes beyond individual teaching philosophies; extending to consider what the roles of universities are in terms of enabling and supporting academics to undertake research.

The final point in this section relates to internationalisation. All participants acknowledged the contemporary drive within HE institutions to recruit international students, and to form international partnerships. These partnerships were thought to be important as they are financially lucrative, but equally, they bring with them challenges. This participant reflected on her experiences of a newly formed partnership:

> *Well it's a psychological challenge because you are in three different places at the same time. So the modules …they're delivered in [foreign country], delivered in [employing university], it might be delivered in [another foreign country] or somewhere else as well. And the contents appear to be the same but obviously can't really be the same because they have to be relevant.*
>
> So that effectively means writing the same session 2, 3, 4 times over?
>
> *Yep! … These sort of things are obviously in some ways lucrative, in some ways a challenge … it's going to be interesting to see what happens.* (FG3)

In addition to the stated demands on an individual's time there was also some concern about whether academic staff are provided enough support from their institution to work successfully overseas and in the context of increasing internationalisation – e.g. cultural awareness:

> *The growth the international students will create its own issues … we don't have a huge number, but you know, from my experience of students who are coming from certain countries, it's hard.*
>
> For us it's the cultural understanding that's different.
>
> *The conversations we have had lately are about actually having to send someone out to that part of the world for twelve weeks.* (FG3)

4 What gaps can you identify in the current coverage of teaching and learning resources for your subject discipline and how might your PSRB/Learned Society or the HEA best address the identified gaps?

There was limited discussion around the gaps in teaching and learning resources as the majority of participants believed that there is a wealth of academic literature available for using in teaching materials. Gaps were identified in a number of other areas. For example, a number of participants reflected on continuing difficulties to access relevant guest speakers. Some believed that the creation of a catalogue of industry and guest speakers who can contribute to teaching would be a welcome resource:

> *Here is an idea for you … what about the LSA setting up a bank of guest speakers, so we could see a short biography of them and what their specialism is, and whether they are available to visit universities and to give a presentation of a particular subject area. You could regionalise it. Because I know that we all have this problem, don't we have a problem bringing in suitable speakers you know who are going to talk about something you want them to talk about?* (FG3)

Well there's the chance to build a resource of speakers who would be more than happy to at least offer some sort of input into teaching curriculum … There are industry speakers and maybe something that the HEA could actually co-ordinate and ask, you know, "what would you like?" (FG2)

Others commented quite critically on how leisure-specific resources were no longer available from the HEA website. There was a belief that a central hub of resources (like those available previously) where academics can share good practice, was needed:

There is no longer hospitality, leisure, tourism sector network is there? There used to be a repository of lots of resources … I think it's all gone from the HEA website … so there has been a huge resource which has just gone, I don't know whether you can access it anymore, because there were some great study guides … study guides on the HEA website for hospitality, leisure and tourism and that's a crying shame in my view. (FG1)

I would like to see a situation where there is someone who is doing a bit of an innovative assessment or teaching, I would like to be able to say "well how can I take some of those ideas?" I mean if I think to myself I am doing alright in some areas but really I'd benefit from seeing other peoples' [materials] … more showcasing I suppose of good practice and things like that. (FG2)

5 Thinking back to question 2, what gaps might emerge in the near future, given the projected evolution of teaching and learning in your subject?

Building upon comments about the current threats to the teaching of Leisure Studies identified earlier the main gaps that might emerge are related to the perceived relevance of Leisure Studies as a degree subject. We are not witnessing the evolution of leisure-specific degrees, rather a devolution, whereby previous sub-fields within Leisure Studies are growing in their own right and subsequently, threatening the existence of leisure-specific degrees in their entirety. The gaps therefore, are in the future provision of leisure-specific degrees themselves.

6 Can you think of any other ways in which your PSRB, learned society or the HEA could support and advance learning and teaching in your subject-based practice?

Comments to this question addressed the LSA and HEA individually.

LSA

Most of these have already been discussed above and some mechanisms for tackling these are offered in Part 3. There were five areas discussed. Firstly, it was felt that the LSA could facilitate the creation of a catalogue of guest speakers. Secondly, the LSA could play host to a bank of teaching and learning resources that could be shared through the leisure community (similar to those previously held by the HEA). Thirdly, The LSA should promote and provide a space for academics to write student-friendly resources. Fourthly, it was felt that the LSA has become quite distant from the student body and would benefit from engaging directly with students and staff, at all levels, in order to promote the work of leisure scholars, and also listen to what those in the field want from the body representing them. Finally, some participants thought that the LSA could engage more

closely with its members and their institutions to tender for research and consultancy projects. In the first instance, they believed that the LSA could be more forward facing with key non-academic organisations.

HEA

Participants believed that the HEA could be doing more to help sustain Leisure Studies. They identified three areas. Firstly, some participants said that the HEA could be doing more to promote the field of leisure in its own right. There was a feeling that as sub-fields of leisure have established themselves as independent degree subjects (discussed above), core definitions of what Leisure Studies is have become lost within the academy. To illustrate, this participant argued how keeping Leisure Studies on the academic radar requires institutions to acknowledge that all of their Sport-, Events-, Tourism-, and Hospitality-related degrees are all effectively Leisure degrees:

> *But that's my point, the HEA need to take control of it and say, "right you are all doing leisure", whether its, I don't care, "you are all doing leisure whether its sports science, sports coaching, leisure studies, events management, entertainment management, tourism", it's all leisure, so call it 'Leisure' and that then forces you all to think as teachers, as School leaders that they are connected. And this is what I think the HEA might do to further our cause in Leisure Studies is to acknowledge in the name of the group and the kind of aims and objectives of the group that this is 'leisure' and all of these things underneath it are part of 'leisure'.* (FG1)

Secondly, it was felt that the only reason leisure scholars have any academic integrity is because the REF assessment acknowledged 'leisure' as part of Unit 26. Without this unit of assessment many leisure scholars' position within their institutions could become vulnerable. Participants urged the HEA to promote the inclusion of this Unit (or a variant of it) in future REF exercises.

> *If in the REF leisure isn't part of that kind of multidisciplinary unit it will be the end of Leisure Studies in lots of places because why would … I mean Leisure Studies survives here because we are part of the REF and because it' part of the REF people think we are significant enough to be employed and to have our courses, but if that goes, if Leisure Studies kind of merged with Events and Tourism and went into the Business unit that would be the end of Leisure Studies here. (FG1)*

Thirdly, there was a view that the HEA could provide small pockets of funding to help learned societies engage with their members, wider academic community and industry.

Part two – learned society / PSRB reflection and commentary

Participation in this research project has prompted the LSA to critically reflect on itself in terms of its aims, ambitions, current and future objectives. We remain committed to our central goals of fostering research in Leisure Studies; promoting interest in Leisure Studies and advancing education in this field; encouraging debate through publications (mainly via our journal); stimulating the exchange of ideas on contemporary leisure issues; and disseminating knowledge of Leisure Studies to create the conditions for better-informed decisions by policy makers. However, we are perhaps more mindful than ever that these aims were established in 1975, at a time when the field of Leisure Studies was bourgeoning, less competitive and the HE sector was less market driven. The position of Leisure Studies is quite different from when these aims were imagined. It would be easy for the LSA to ignore the challenges identified in the narratives above as, in many cases, these are not isolated to Leisure Studies and/or are too big for a single learned society to tackle alone. However,

this would be counter-productive. As a learned society we have embraced this project as a basis for reviewing how we operate, serve our current and future membership and, most importantly, how we ensure the sustainability and development of our subject field.

The above paragraphs offer ample evidence that even within the wider field of leisure-based courses, i.e. those which are devoted to specific forms of leisure such as sport, tourism or events, there is a skepticism about the value of conceptualising them as leisure. A brief historical overview may help clarify why this has come about. The single biggest driver in the emergence of a viable Leisure Studies curriculum in both the FE and HE sectors was arguably the local government re-organisation of 1974 which created fewer but larger authorities and the idea of a comprehensive Leisure Services department which brought under one head all the leisure provision made by that authority. Within this context, sport, the arts, parks, theatres, leisure centres and libraries all effectively became leisure institutions. This created a significant demand for graduate courses in Leisure Management at all levels. Also significant is the fact the Leisure Management was represented by a professional association, the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management, which certified FE and HE courses and had a strong regional network. When leisure services were made subject to compulsory competitive tendering in the late 1980s, the need for Leisure Management courses changed in nature but remained high. However as the management of local authority leisure services were taken over by private contractors the level of demand gradually declined. Simultaneously, as FE and HE became dependent on student recruitment for funding, institutions became concerned to think in market terms and began to design courses which were felt to appeal most to students. Few things were more effective to recruitment than courses with the word "sport" in the title and over a long period – perhaps around fifteen years – sport courses have almost entirely replaced Leisure Studies/Management courses. Latterly even sport itself has been replaced by an even more narrow approach through the introduction of degrees in Football and Golf Studies.

However there is currently an interesting debate in the field of Sports History in which there is a growing pressure to locate Sport History within a wider context of Leisure History as this is seen to provide a richer and more revealing historical understanding. This argument is equally valid when applied to the sports curriculum. Much research in leisure, for example, relates to themes which are important to all specific forms of leisure such as well-being, physical and mental health, consumption, issues of social class, gender, 'race' and ethnicity and disability, community development and regeneration and, especially, social policy. Particularly in Higher Education it should be important that students are able to understand the generalities of leisure and apply them to sport, tourism, events etc. It is worrying that teaching staff seem unable to recognise this.

The LSA is a learned society and its primary function is to promote and support the development of Leisure Studies. It does see importance of maintaining and promoting an understanding of leisure within the HE curriculum even if this is not in the form of specific Leisure Studies degrees. It is interesting to note that there is actually an increased interest in leisure in some other subject areas; mental health and well being and public health in general are now fields in which an understanding of the potential of leisure is increasing. Our participation in the current project is itself an expression of the LSA's wish to enhance the status of leisure in the HE curriculum. The results of this research are thus very valuable to us and will be given careful consideration and, we hope, will be of help in re-affirming the value of leisure-based concepts to sport, tourism, events and all other forms of leisure activity and provision.

Very little from the focus group research comes as a particular surprise. We have been acutely aware of the declining number (and significance) of leisure-specific degrees in universities for quite some time. We have been actively involved in the ACSS's Campaign for Social Science, championing the relevance of Leisure Studies to students in the Social Sciences. In many ways, we have reconciled declining student numbers and degree programmes on the basis that other fields

within the Social Sciences were suffering in similar ways. Many subjects within the Social Sciences are being threatened by neo-liberal agendas influenced by cost-efficiencies and utilitarian learning, which means that subjects liked Leisure Studies may be viewed as less germane, inappropriate, and/or undeserving of scholarly scrutiny. Carrington recently wrote:

> In our neo-liberal age of public sector austerity and instrumental learning, wherein grant-driven scientization and the biomedicalization of research dominates the corporate university, trying to convince undergrads (let alone Deans) to appreciate the relevance of Antonio Gramsci's writings … seems nostalgically utopian. (Carrington, 2015: 393)

It is interesting then that as the study of Leisure Studies in universities is declining, research and publications in the field are thriving; attracting scholarly gaze from a wide variety of disciplinary fields. It is for this reason that many of us remain buoyed by the relevance of Leisure Studies. The challenge for the LSA, other learned societies and the leisure 'community' is in reclaiming the 'L' word and repositioning its relevance in academic courses and degrees which would not immediately be identified as leisure-specific, but have emerged out of leisure epistemologies. Some mechanisms for addressing these challenges are highlighted in the following section.

Part three – solutions and desirable outcomes

Results of the focus groups have been shared among a number of the Executive Committee of the LSA. Collaboratively these representatives have proposed a series of mechanisms for addressing the challenges respondents identified in the focus groups. Each of these mechanisms, representatives of the LSA believe, can be achieved and, if implemented in consultation with its members and 'friends', may have positive impacts on teaching and learning in Leisure Studies.

Given the interconnected nature of these challenges, we would like to stress that the mechanisms listed below are of an 'all or nothing' character. We therefore refer to 'chains' of recommendations, rather than single recommendations, since this better captures the idea that a series of interrelated actions, applied collectively should have the greatest impact This links to the philosophical idea of *necessary* and *sufficient* conditions for social change (Lewis, 2000). We believe that these recommendations, only when taken collectively, will be sufficient to have a significant impact on teaching and learning in Leisure Studies.

In no specific order each of the recommended responses below is in response to a specific challenge identified in the focus group research:

The declining availability of Leisure Studies degrees in UK universities is the largest challenge faced by the LSA.

This is arguably the LSA's greatest challenge and in some ways is the one the LSA has least control and influence over. Tackling this decline is beyond the scope of the LSA. LSA is not in a position to influence strategic decisions taken at senior management levels of universities. LSA is a learned society within the Academy of Social Sciences. We continue to be actively involved in the ACSS's Campaign for Social Science. Our relationship with ACSS and other learned societies means we are able to draw upon a critical mass of academics and activists committed to lobbying universities and policy makers to ensure the social sciences, including Leisure Studies, have a future.

There was a feeling in some focus groups that 'leisure' is being cut from teaching of sub-fields that emerged out of Leisure Studies.

The LSA needs to liaise more closely with other learned societies in the sub-fields of sport, events, tourism etc. to ensure the inclusion of leisure-related subjects in their degree programmes.

Leisure Studies needs to be taught – especially in single Leisure Studies degrees – but in their absence, in sport, tourism and event-related studies.

Some respondents did not feel as though the LSA is visible enough among policy makers, other learned societies and professional bodies.

As a learned society within the ACSS we have the capacity to work with other societies which might have overlapping interests in leisure pedagogy.

LSA could possibly seek joint funding for research in the hope of conducting 'impactful' leisure work with and on behalf of professional bodies.

LSA already has memoranda of understanding with ANZALS and CALS[4] and we are pursuing how best to get the most out of these relationships – e.g. sharing of resources, collaborative bidding.

Some respondents felt that the LSA needs to be engaged in 'real' world research.

LSA might consider tendering for research projects and inviting collaborations between other learned societies (UK and abroad) working in the field of Leisure Studies.

The LSA might commit to contributing towards multi- and inter-disciplinary research to provide originality.

The LSA could pursue policy-related research to develop rigor.

In collaboration with members, friends and partner societies the LSA could investigate ways in which the field of 'Leisure' can address global challenges.

Provide financial support/funds for action research (see next point).

One of the LSA's aims is to 'foster research in Leisure Studies'. It was believed that the LSA needed to be more actively involved in enabling this research.

The LSA remains committed to this aim. The Association has an inventory of thousands of books, which are available to purchase from our website. However, in recent years, the financial stability of the Association has been threatened. In house book production had become too expensive as a result of the increased cost of production, combined with declining publication sales. To ensure financial solvency, in 2014 the Executive Committee took the decision that LSA would no longer produce its own books. The fact that its conferences attracted research of publishable quality has always been a source of pride for LSA and it is regrettable that it is no longer able to publish these books. That being said some members of the Executive Committee are currently discussing the possibility of establishing a new book series with a commercial publisher.

LSA might consider providing small pools of money to facilitate research that members could apply for - e.g. £500-1000 twice a year. This might draw in more members, but more importantly ensures LSA is directly contributing to the development of the field.

[4] Australia and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies (ANZALS), Canadian Association for Leisure Studies (CALS).

It was felt that teaching and learning issues are not discussed regularly enough at events where leisure scholars meet – e.g. conferences. Instead, research tends to be the focus.

The LSA could make it a contractual agreement that hosts of the annual conference must include at least one panel on teaching and learning in Leisure Studies.

The potential for LSA to host single day conferences and symposia on leisure pedagogies has been discussed in recent years. Other priorities have hindered further development of these ideas. In addition to, or in conjunction with, the annual conference LSA could host such events throughout the academic year.

Respondents felt that the LSA (and HEA) could be more active and visible in creating and sharing resources for teaching and learning.

With the help of its membership the LSA could create a 'Member's area' on its website where resources for teaching and learning – e.g. lectures, seminars, webinars, readings, web links - can be stored and shared.

Given its position within the network of leisure scholars in the UK and abroad, the LSA is well placed for identifying guest speakers from both academia and industry to facilitate teaching on modules. The LSA could store a database of contacts on its website that members are able to update and edit through the Member's area.

The relevance of the LSA to its membership was thought to be less than in previous years.

Over the last 2-3 years the LSA has worked hard to enhance the way that it communicates with its members and other friends of the Association by implementing a new digital strategy. The core of this strategy has been the establishment of a new website, which has increased functionality for sharing information with and between its members. The LSA has also substantially increased its presence on social media in the hope of more effectively connecting its worldwide membership.

A review of membership details and in particular, membership benefits is currently underway. The broad field of Leisure Studies is now quite crowded in terms of different learned societies which are competing for members. The LSA needs to ensure that its terms of membership are competitive with other societies. In addition to asking its membership what they want from their learned society, the LSA may also undertake some market research of other learned societies and what they offer members.

As a professional academic body the LSA could be more active in delivering CPD courses and training.