



A STUDY ON THE BENEFITS  
AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)  
OF SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES  
IN THE SPORTS SECTOR (PHASE 2)



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# Executive Summary

## Overview

In 2014, CLT envirolaw conducted a pilot study among eight sporting venues, assessing the drivers and barriers to the implementation of diverse sustainability strategies, and their associated benefits and costs. While the study generated considerable interest amongst those organisations surveyed, and more broadly, it was determined that further investigation would be necessary for a more comprehensive assessment, with additional respondents needed to improve the quality of the sample and the credibility of its findings.

On the basis of this determination, a second study was recently carried out as an extension of the pilot phase - one intended to move beyond the limitations and resource constraints of the initial research in order to generate a more reliable database, and a deeper discussion of all aspects of sustainability in the sports sector.

## Methodology

Two sets of interviewees were identified for inclusion in the study - one group made up of clubs and venues representing different sports, the other made up of National Governing Bodies (NGBs) as well as UK Sport and Sport England - supporting organisations providing guidance and funding to NGBs to embed sustainability.

Built on findings from the pilot study, the research process comprised a survey and a follow-up interview, both designed to capture the full spectrum of participants' views on sustainability while considering quantitative data and qualitative feedback. Questions ranged from an examination of key sustainability drivers and barriers, to return on investment (ROI) figures relating to certain sustainability initiatives, an assessment of the sports sector's current standards and measurements of sustainability.

## Summary of Findings

A high degree of commonality was found in answers given at both the survey and the interview stages, with

further similarities noted between the two groups of participants interviewed. Bearing these factors in mind, the key findings of the study are as follows:

- both clubs/venues and NGBs have differing views on sustainability as a whole, with those in the former group connecting more with the environmental aspects of sustainability, and those in the latter focusing on 'participation' sustainability, with particular emphasis on methods of sustaining and increasing memberships.
- when building a convincing business case for the embedding of sustainability initiatives, the presentation of environmental sustainability strategies in terms of their cost-saving benefits has proven to be the most effective means of gaining board approval; however, in the case of social aspects, doing good for a cause, also plays a key role. While quantitative data is of prime importance when presenting environmental strategies, qualitative data, particularly when gathered from case studies, is preferred for the presentation of social sustainability strategies, as is a focus on the improved reputation of an organisation as a result of implementing such policies.
- interest in sustainability initiatives at board level, when viewed from an environmental or social sustainability perspective, was found to be relatively insignificant for both clubs and venues and NGBs, with concern often going no further than an allocated budget and a dedicated human resource.
- frequent drivers for the embedding of sustainability initiatives at clubs and venues include cost savings, compliance, environmental management, and positive community impact and contributions. Similarly, drivers within NGBs also include cost savings, as well as giving back to the community, improved reputation and legislative compliance.
- as it stands, attracting sponsors has not been affected by the sustainability credentials or performance of participants, nor did any, save one, of the participants mention instances of sustainability requirements being imposed as a condition for sponsorship or funding. Sustainability is not widely raised in conversations with external stakeholders, from .....

sponsors to suppliers, although NGBs stated that sustainability may on occasion feature in request for proposals (RFPs).

- barriers to the implementation of sustainability strategies within clubs and venues range from ineffective internal communication, to lack of budget, and the difficulties in measuring sustainability as a whole. By contrast, no single barrier was found to stand out within NGBs, however a lack of senior management support and dedicated resources was highlighted as a point of concern.
- Sport England and UK Sport provide a number of guidance and funding opportunities for NGBs in order to implement, embed and improve sustainability initiatives. While some NGBs have adopted best practice strategies taken from Sport England websites, such as [www.sustainableclubs.co.uk](http://www.sustainableclubs.co.uk), the low take-up of funding opportunities would seem to suggest an unfamiliarity on the part of the NGBs and clubs and venues as to the scope of support available to them.
- the most verifiable cost savings in clubs and venues and NGBs were found to be in the environmental aspects of sustainability strategies, namely energy and waste management.
- sustainability initiatives undertaken by participants' organisations include management of energy, waste, water and transport, as well as charitable projects and employee engagement.
- ROI figures for certain environmental initiatives were found to be unavailable across the board, with key barriers being time, priority, money, missing information, inaccuracy of measuring devices and lack of interest.
- when used, social sustainability strategies such as employee engagement were found to have a positive effect on job satisfaction and staff retention, with the exception of those NGBs in which social sustainability implementation is still a relatively new development.
- barriers for calculating the ROI of employee engagement strategies include the time and money involved in collecting reliable, comparable data, and the lack of confidence in often subjective data. There is currently a lack of information for organisations to benchmark their performance effectively.
- both clubs and venues and NGBs place considerable importance on volunteering and local community engagement programmes, however there are few, if any, procedures in place for the measuring of these initiatives in terms of time, money and impact.
- social sustainability proves challenging to monitor in all organisations, with the effort of measuring social initiatives being perceived to be much higher than the benefit of doing so. It is agreed that the impact of qualitative data far outweighs that of quantitative data in this instance, with case studies being a valuable tool in measuring the value of embedding social sustainability initiatives.

## Recommendations

Taking these findings into consideration, the ultimate outcome of the study is the formulation of a set of case studies, tips, and information on the practicalities of embedding sustainability in the sports sector. Increased budget and resources, as well as improved measurement and monitoring of ROI will go towards establishing more reliable quantitative data, while the increased emphasis on case studies as a demonstration of the intangible benefits will strengthen board approval and business buy-in, and act as a key driver going forward.

*"It is important to know what can be measured and what should be measured. It's not all about measuring the Return on Investment. Efficiency and improved performance is equally important! What is clear is that we'll never be completely sustainable if everything is only about money."* Dr. Russell Seymour, MCC