



PLAYED IN EVERY PARK

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Message from the Chair

The highlight of this past year was the launch of our 'Hit the Pitch' participation growth programme. BaseballSoftballUK continues to innovate and change. Innovation is about weighing options, making choices, and taking risks. Our mission remains to grow participation across the sports - that is what we do. 'Hit the Pitch' is the answer to how we believe we can better achieve that mission.

In many ways, 'Hit the Pitch' is a consolidation of everything we've learned over the last few years. We've learned what works, and more importantly what doesn't work, when it comes to growing sport participation. Baseball and softball are in the enviable position of being growing sports. London 2012 and Glasgow 2014 led to a high-water mark for public investment in sport, and was intended to serve as a catalyst for more people playing more sport more often.

In baseball and softball, we've translated that into growth in all areas of our activity. This is no easy task, but we believe the combination of local on-the-ground action, together with a national development support base, will deliver more people playing our sports.

With 'Hit the Pitch' we're ready to accelerate. We have ambitious plans to grow at a faster rate over the next few years. We will do this by working with teams, clubs and leagues to expand capacity and depth. We will work with individuals, community organisations and companies to extend interest in the sports. 'Hit the Pitch' is a compelling brand but it is also a tangible way of growing participation through a series of tools and actions that we know can work.

I'm excited about the opportunity that slowpitch softball brings for us to work with exceptional partners such as Carluccio's restaurants and Segro, the estate management company. We have embarked on different programmes with both of these companies to use sport in the workplace as a team builder and as a relationship-building activity. As more employers look to broaden their appeal to both employees and customers, it's clear that the health and social benefits of sport have a key role to play and I look forward to expanding the number of our corporate partners in the year ahead.

My number one request to the people currently playing and coaching our sports is to be welcoming to newcomers. The primary measure of success in sports coaching should be: will this person come back again next week? What engages each person, what sparks their interest, what fans the spark into a fire, is different for everyone - but we know that a warm welcome to what might seem to be a settled team or club is vitally important for that team or club to survive and thrive and be around for the long haul.

Turning to other topics, I'm excited by the progress we and the two national governing bodies have made as we review the organisational structure for the sports, with a case now made for a single integrated organisation spanning the work and functions of the current three bodies. There is much still to do and a long road ahead, but we've made meaningful steps and I'm grateful to the presidents of the two NGBs for their positive engagement and the work done over the last 12 months.

On the Board, we bade goodbye to three directors who have made significant contributions to our work in Will Parker, Simon Kirkland and Andy Anstey, and we also saw Mark Wigington leave the Board through ill-health. On behalf of BSUK, I send Mark and his family our best wishes for his continued recovery.

Joining the Board in their place are Andrew Bird, Cate Gillingwater, Chris Greenhalgh and Mark Munnery, who individually and collectively add a range of experience and skills to the company.

Finally, my sincere thanks go to Jenny Fromer and John Boyd and their team. In the last year they've led growth in the sports, consolidated our facilities development approach and launched our English Talent pathway with funding from our primary investor, Sport England. I'm also grateful to Sport England, Major League Baseball, the Baseball Tomorrow Fund, our corporate partners, and not least our two NGBs.



John Walmsley
BSUK Chair

About BSUK

BaseballSoftballUK is the national development agency for the British Baseball and British Softball Federations. We were set up 15 years ago with three key aims in mind.

First, we were to achieve operational cost efficiencies. By putting in place a single professional organisation with paid staff working on behalf of both Federations, the founding principle was that we could achieve far more than if baseball and softball worked alone. Fifteen years on, there are many examples of where this has been the case. Highlights from 2014-15 alone include:

- the success of the first full season of the Farnham Park baseball and softball facility;
- the ongoing strong communications offered by the three organisations, powered by BaseballSoftballUK staff, including an effective and modern website for each;
- a very strong social media presence and the regular publication of a three-way online newsletter, Hot Corner;
- another year of no increase in insurance rates for both sports;
- event support across both sports and their national championships.

Second, our founding vision saw us appealing together to business. This past year, BSUK was the driving force in forming a three-way Commercial Committee with the BSF and BBF. This committee has explored ways in which the three organisations can develop commercial relationships and find partners who are prepared to invest in our sports.

The Commercial Committee has established the value of what the three organisations and the sports can offer to potential partners and has devised a number of routes that can lead to attracting additional income. Towards the end of 2014-15, the group established an official ball deal with Ransom Sporting Goods. It has also developed relationships with a sports clothing company, Aswani Sports, and offered support and guidance to national teams seeking funding.

Third, and to date the most successful of BSUK's founding aims, has been to maximise government investment. Sport England has continued to invest in baseball and softball through BaseballSoftballUK, believing in the work we are doing to grow participation and respecting the sound governance systems we have in place. We continue to punch above our weight in terms of what we're achieving and how we're going about it, proving to other sports that it is possible to have really sound procedures, processes and governance while delivering outcomes that make a difference to our sports across the country.



About BSUK continued

Our vision of 'Played in Every Park' came alive this year. We started 2014-15 with a number of programmes designed to attract new players to our sports. In reviewing this, we settled on one programme – 'Hit the Pitch' – which we launched to the public at the end of the year. 'Hit the Pitch' consolidates what we do into a simpler, easier-to-understand programme. It is our tool to introduce a new cohort of people to our sports, offering them a really strong and appealing first experience of baseball and softball.

With 'Hit the Pitch', confidence has grown this year in what we believe we can achieve. We have set ourselves the 10-20-30-50 challenge. From 10,000 participants in 2008, we want to double that to 20,000 players in teams in 2015, triple it by 2017 and reach 50,000 by 2021. We will reach the first milestone in 2015 and will celebrate achieving a doubling of participation before knuckling down to redouble our efforts.

And our job doesn't stop there. We may be reaching for ambitious growth in participation, but we haven't forgotten about looking after the needs of those currently playing. Quite the opposite – our staff and many members of our Board are grounded in the sports and many have a firm and recent experience of developing them. Between our staff and Board, we have nearly 300 years of collective experience in baseball and softball in this country, a remarkable figure that demonstrates the continuity and experience of the team working to achieve a brighter future for the sports.

This experience has ensured that we can find the right balance between growing participation and still being a mainstay for those already playing. We do that by:

- running an outstanding Academy and High Performance Academy;
- developing and funding new facilities across the country, including Farnham Park and many other club and league sites;
- helping clubs and leagues develop and attract their own grant funding (over £50,000 in the last year);
- offering a compelling coach and workforce education programme;
- helping new youth programmes form in conjunction with local schools.

We have also helped the sports to reach modern standards in safeguarding, leading the group of sports compliant with Child Protection in Sport Unit standards. Our work has put baseball and softball's development services on a par with traditional sports.

Sports funding has never been greater than it is at this present time, but neither has the scrutiny

placed on national organisations funded by Sport England through their National Governing Body funding stream. While other sports have been put on year-by-year funding programmes or, worse, have had development funds taken away from them for failure to meet targets, BaseballSoftballUK continues to set a high bar for delivery in working towards substantial participation growth.

BaseballSoftballUK sees itself as an agency for change that can achieve a brighter future for our sports. We are proud of what we have achieved and the foundations we have built, this year and over the past 15 years, for a future in which our sports are 'Played in Every Park'.



The BSUK Board

Overview

The BSUK Board met six times during the year, and the Chair also met with representatives from the two Federations at the company's AGM in November 2014.

The Board operates with a number of committees and these met at various intervals. There are committees for finance, development, governance and facilities, and there was also a three-way working group (with the two NGBs) to address joint commercial activities.

During the year, the Board considered making significant changes to the function and form of its committees, together with the support required by the CEOs in running the business. The review of committee changes was set to continue in 2015-16.

Focus

In 2014-15, BSUK the company was focused on a number of ambitious projects intended to lay the groundwork for significant participation growth. These included Phase 2 of the Farnham Park facility, the launch of the new development programme 'Hit the Pitch' and the building of a new participant website. This meant that BSUK the Board spent much of the year scrutinising the business case and plans for these projects with a view to minimising risk.

This was also year two of the current Whole Sport Plan funding cycle, so a close eye was kept on BSUK's performance against current targets and the quality of data being gathered to report this.

Focus was also on recruitment, as the BSUK Board went through significant turnover during the year. One Independent Director completed the maximum of six years and two others chose not to restand at the end of their second two-year term. The Board carried out a skills-based recruitment process which resulted in three new Directors joining the Board.

Sadly, there was further turnover when Mark Wigington, a Representative Director from the BSF, became ill and had to withdraw from the Board. Mark had been a highly engaged and active member of the Board as well as giving countless hours volunteering in the sport and his absence has been keenly felt. However, the BSF was able to identify a replacement Director with relevant skills. Within this context, the Board and its related sub-committees focused on the following areas.

Board evaluation

At the end of the year, the Board undertook some self-analysis into how it operates, and a number of improvements – chiefly related to effective

Board meetings and decision making – were made. The Governance Committee also spent some time looking at options for carrying out a more meaningful evaluation of the Board and Chair's performance. There was an appetite for bringing in an external consultant to deliver the process and this will be carried out in 2015.

Marketing and PR

In an effort to raise the understanding of the Board as a whole, Independent Director Jon Deacon, a communications and content specialist running his own consultancy, JDBrightly, gave a presentation to the Board on the key principles of marketing and PR.

As an offshoot to this focus, Jon and fellow Independent Director Jennifer Cruickshank led the development of a protocol for BSUK in dealing with media enquiries and for proactively seeking media opportunities.

Commercial

Under the auspices of the tripartite Commercial Committee, we went through a tendering process to secure a ball deal for the BBF, BSF and BSUK, and additionally BSUK ran a parallel process for an equipment partner. While both were relatively low-value deals, the process and principles were instructive for future work in this area.

Development

The Development Committee worked closely with BSUK staff to support the development of BSUK's new participation programme, 'Hit the Pitch'. The strategic thinking around the new programme was regularly tested at review meetings and several Directors were involved in the pitch meeting to Sport England. There was strong Board support for the initial launch of the programme, an event which provided a key opportunity for BSUK Directors to network with representatives across the sports landscape.

Recruitment

Over the course of 2014-15 the BSUK Board ran a recruitment process for three new Independent Directors. With the departure of outgoing Directors Will Parker, Simon Kirkland and Andy Anstey, there was a clear skills gap in the area of sports development and a reduction in marketing expertise. Fortunately, there was a high level of interest in joining the Board and by the end of the process we had closed the skills gap and added a facilities dimension with the selection of Cate Gillingwater, Chris Greenhalgh and Andrew Bird.

Additional projects

Some of the other pieces of work carried out by the BSUK Board in 2014-15 included: a review of the new 'Hit the Pitch' website, a proposal to restructure Board committees in order to provide both formal and advisory functions and consideration of further facility investment and development.

BaseballSoftballUK board structure

	Name	Position	Appointment*	Resignation**
Chair	John Walmsley			
BBF	Earl Dix	President		
	Cody Cain	Elected Member		
	Gerry Perez	Elected Member		
BSF	Stella Ackrell	President		
	Mike Jennings	Elected Member		
	Mark Wigington	Elected Member		February 2015
	Mark Munnery	Elected Member	February 2015	
Independent	Will Parker			November 2014
	Andy Anstey			November 2014
	Simon Kirkland			November 2014
	Jon Deacon			
	Jennifer Cruickshank			
	Cate Gillingwater		November 2014	
	Chris Greenhalgh		November 2014	
Andrew Bird		November 2014		

*After 1 April 2014 **Before 31 March 2014

BaseballSoftballUK staff structure

	Name	Position	Appointment*	Resignation**
CEOs	Jenny Fromer	Joint CEO and Head of Operations		
	John Boyd	Joint CEO and Head of Development		
Development	Chris Rawlings	National Development Manager		
	Will Lintern	National Development Manager		
	Luis Arrebillagas	Regional Development Manager		
	Patrick Knock	Regional Development Manager		
	Liz Knight	Regional Development Manager		
	Tom Mapp	Regional Development Manager		
Operations	Tim Stride	Operations Manager		
	Bob Fromer	Communications Consultant		
	Mark Caress	Finance and Governance Officer		
	Trevor Greenaway-Clissold	Marketing, Communications and Events Officer		

*After 1 April 2014 **Before 31 March 2014

Structural Review

The Structural Review process which has been underway during much of the past year is intended to question whether the current structure of the sports – that of two national governing bodies (BBF, BSF) and one development organisation (BSUK) – is the optimal structure for the future of baseball and softball.

During the past year, substantial progress has been made by senior leaders from each of the two national governing bodies and from BSUK. The process has been facilitated by an external consultant and by people with experiences drawn from other UK sports that have gone through similar organisational transformations.

This small group has explored other governance models and also polled opinions across a wide number of people involved in baseball and softball. The consultant has attended a number of meetings with representatives and members of the two Federations as well as people involved with BSUK.

The conclusion of this three-way group is that a case has now been made for a new single integrated organisation spanning all UK baseball and softball activities and interests. However, there are still a number of important and significant steps to take to bring about such change, and as might be expected there are significant levels of detail and agreement yet to be reached. No final decision for change will be made without the widest possible consultation and agreement across the three organisations.

The next steps include a broadening of the conversation to include the full Boards of the three organisations and to further engage with the broader memberships of the two Federations. Progress will be steady but paced. There is no rush to change, and such a fundamental alteration to the status quo needs to be taken in a measured and considered manner.



Safeguarding

Overview

In 2014-15 we continued to deliver against a four-year Safeguarding Action Plan agreed with the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU). The plan that we set out is designed to progress our sports from a position of compliance and developing awareness to a point where baseball and softball are able to provide a robust, safe and welcoming environment for young people.

What we said we would do

- Develop a strategic delivery plan.
- Complete a safeguarding resource review.
- Deliver regional 'Time to Listen' courses.
- Continue to roll out training to clubs, staff and board members.
- Create a training and education plan.
- Review communications strategy.
- Identify opportunities for youth leadership roles.

What we did

We worked closely with club and team Welfare Officers to help ensure that all coaches are DBS checked and that these checks are renewed annually. We worked to ensure that this becomes a normal routine for teams and clubs to follow and have been able to reduce the burden of this process by offering an update service so that re-checks are automatic. We completed 81 new DBS-checks and renewed 45 checks in 2014-15.

Throughout the year, a review of available online safeguarding training was carried out. After the review, we selected the Educare's online training programme to roll out to volunteers, staff and Board members.

In order to better equip club safeguarding officers, we purchased multiple registrations for Educare's online training programme to allow relevant volunteers, for a small fee, to achieve a safeguarding qualification that could be completed over time. By making online training readily available, we reduced the need to run regional Time to Listen courses, which can be expensive and not reach as many participants. So far, over 50 clubs have signed up for the Educare training.

In 2014-15, the BSUK website was updated with regard to relevant safeguarding information. There is still a need to complete a full review of our safeguarding resources.

With the launch of BSUK's new coach licensing programme, we added the requirement that all licensed coaches be DBS-checked and hold an appropriate safeguarding qualification. Going forward, BSUK will only employ licensed coaches to deliver courses and programmes. So far, over 30 coaches have purchased safeguarding training. This will ensure that BSUK coaches have a better understanding of safeguarding issues as well as technical skills.

Now that we have a complete database of Safeguarding Officers and contacts for clubs and teams with young players, we are able to communicate regularly with relevant volunteers to convey information and opportunities for upskilling. This is the first step in creating a community of people working in baseball and softball with safeguarding responsibilities.

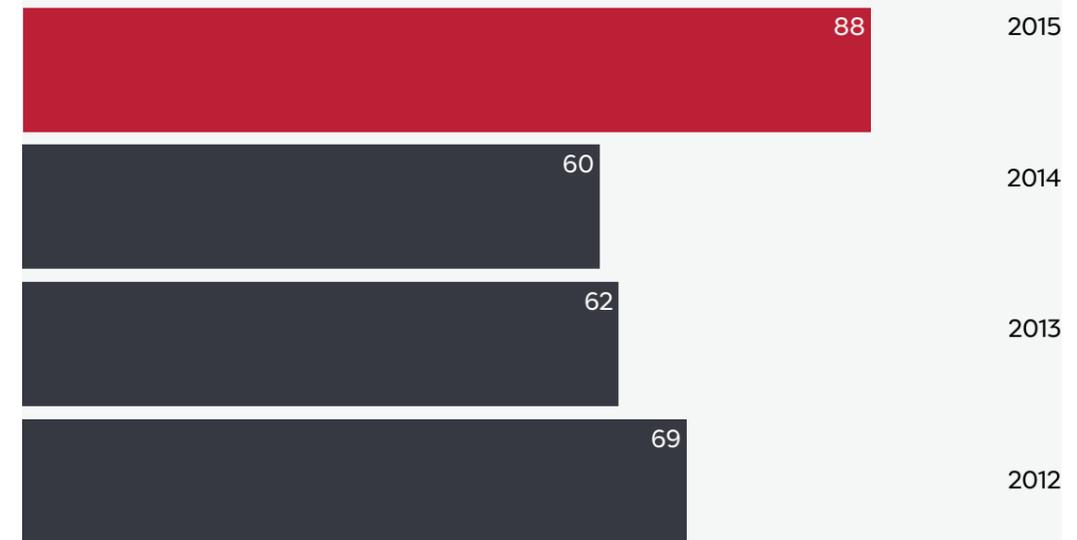
Areas that need further attention

- In 2014-15 we arranged for bespoke training for BSUK and Federation Board members to cover safeguarding issues and responsibilities. Low take-up meant that this has been pushed back to 2015-16.
- We intended to focus on youth leadership roles in our sports in 2014-15 but this was not progressed and will now be rolled into our broader plan for youth engagement in 2015-16.

Priorities for 2015-16

- Progress our strategic delivery plan.
- Complete the safeguarding resource review.
- Continue to support Safeguarding Officers with regard to training and education.
- Define and communicate safeguarding roles for all staff and volunteers.
- Deliver a youth engagement plan for a consultation on communications and resources through the use of focus groups, questionnaires and working with youth leaders.

DBS forms processed





Diversity

Baseball and softball are sports that can appeal more widely than many traditional sports – they offer a new experience and aren't bogged down by ideas of what sort of people do or don't play them. The mixed nature of slowpitch softball promotes female participation, and the international profile of the sports can be very appealing to people of a minority background as well as to people who want to look beyond traditionally British sporting opportunities.

The sports can also easily accommodate some disabilities, such as hearing disabilities and some minor physical disabilities – and, thanks to being team sports, are a good outlet for people with learning and emotional difficulties.

We put into place a five-point diversity action plan this year and have progressed much of it to date. We audited the playing community and from that have identified an increase in the number of women playing from 32% to 38% overall (42% to 49% in softball).

We established a baseline for the number of people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual – our sports, with 11%, show far more participants than are found in the general population (1.5%).

We also briefed photographers and film crews to capture imagery that can be used in our publications to visually promote diversity within our sports and encourage the view that our sports are welcoming to everyone.

We worked with Active and Inclusive 2, a London-based project to help organisations become more diverse, which included online training undertaken by our Board and staff. We also offered Educare training to our workforce, which has been widely taken up.

Although we didn't review the make-up of our staff and wider workforce through the Equity Audit, nor implement equity impact assessments as a routine part of our project planning, nor create a full resource bank of positive imagery, these initiatives will be picked up soon.

Our development projects seeking to increase participation included projects to proactively target new audiences. In this regard, we worked well with Pride Sports, an LGBT group based in Manchester, and ran blind baseball sessions at our flagship facility in Farnham Park.

Development

Overview

This year has been a formative one for the development services offered by BSUK. We reviewed the programmes we were using to help grow participation in baseball and softball and quickly decided that we needed one programme to encompass all of our new growth work. After settling on 'Hit the Pitch' to achieve this, much of the year was spent devising the programme, content and approach. This led to a launch of the programme to sports partners in December 2014 and a national launch on 1 April 2015. Our work setting up 'Hit the Pitch' will pay dividends for years to come, offering a full package of support for the formation of new company, university, college, leisure centre and after-school teams and leagues.

As part of our work testing 'Hit the Pitch', we were fortunate to find a strong partner in Carluccio's, who run a chain of Italian restaurants across the country, and we supported Carluccio's to run a national 18-team softball league. We also began work with the Slough Trading Estate through their management agency, SEGRO, which will lead to a company softball league in 2015 at Farnham Park.

2014-15 was another good year in terms of overall growth in participation, largely due to our direct efforts to grow the sports. While meeting targets set with Sport England, we also successfully implemented a number of development projects, both across our four key regions and in hot spots around the country. It would have been our best year to date had a key partner, Wickes Homestores, not decided to stop running their softball league. This was due to organisational challenges that we were not able to overcome.

In East London we were involved in the 'Coke Zero Park Lives' project and offered softball opportunities in low-income areas. This project culminated with a wrap-up event attended by London Mayor Boris Johnson, who took a few swings during a press gathering, achieving good press coverage for our sports in London.

In fastpitch softball, we worked with the British Softball Federation's GB Management Committee to devise and begin work on a plan to solidify and grow this important format of play.

Our national playing centre at Farnham Park, in its first full year of operation, also became a strong development tool, with the formation of a plan of local programming centred around the newly-named Farnham Park Baseball and Softball Club. This new club came about through a partnership with the former Chalfont Softball Club, which appealed to us due to its strength of organisation. We asked the Chalfont Softball

Club to become the hub for development work at Farnham Park, having explored the possibility of partnership with two other strong local organisations – Bracknell Baseball and Softball Club and the Windsor and Maidenhead District Softball League. As well as adopting a new name and taking up residence as the 'home club' at Farnham Park, the club worked with us to come up with an ambitious development plan for the local area.

During 2014-15, we also decided to explore a project to build a second baseball field (with a fourth softball field in the right field corner) at Farnham Park and take on a building on site to potentially become a dedicated baseball and softball clubhouse. We negotiated Heads of Terms with the landlords, South Bucks District Council, and are set to complete building works on the new field later in 2015.

In addition to facility development work at Farnham Park, we continued to work with Milton Keynes Council to develop a national training centre at Woughton-on-the-Green, the current venue for The Academy. We had hoped to be further along with these plans, but due to complexities relating to the MK Dons' use of the site as their training venue, we have been unable to make much headway.

We also announced our intention to build a northern facility in Manchester and started work with Manchester City Council to develop either Hough End Playing Fields or Wythenshawe Playing Fields – or both – over time. Manchester remains a priority city for us, in the heart of the North West region.

2014-15 was our second year of running an extended programme of support for talented athletes in our sports. Improvements were made to the High Performance Academy, particularly in fastpitch softball, where we addressed some of the issues that arose during the first year, and we met targets set for improving the standard of play of those coming through The Academy and High Performance Academy.

Baseball clubs and softball leagues across the country continued to receive direct support from BSUK and continued to grow. Our work with baseball clubs has been one of the catalysts for the recent growth of baseball in the UK, which has returned the number of baseball teams to levels last seen in 1991.

However, it was a quiet year in terms of developing the support services and tools on offer to baseball clubs and softball leagues, as we decided to put further improvements on hold in order to make the most of work that Sport England was doing to develop these same services through a programme called Club Matters, which they launched early in 2015.

Working closely with the Youth Sport Trust, we extended the number of County Level School Games offering a softball competition to 11

Development continued

(out of a possible 49). We also worked with the Trust on a few local projects focusing on youth play. And 2014 featured the return of a programme called 'Play Ball!', a support package to help local youth leagues form, which we piloted in Leicester, Hull and at Farnham Park.

At either end of the winter off-season, we had very successful National University Championships in baseball and slowpitch softball, run in October 2014 and March 2015 at Farnham Park. The number of teams playing in these competitions reached an all-time high, with eight baseball teams and 12 softball teams taking part.

Our coach education services were also improved this year with the establishment of a service level agreement with coaching course experts Sport Structures. Sport Structures has taken on the organisation and promotion of our courses and worked closely with our staff to improve our coach education offering.

It is a sign of the clarity of purpose we have reached this year that we are able to summarise our development services within two areas – growing the game, which we'll predominately achieve through 'Hit the Pitch'; and improving the health of the sports through services to clubs and leagues, facility development, improving the level of play of talented athletes and workforce development through our coach education programmes.



Development continued

Children and young people

Working closely with national partners such as the Youth Sport Trust, we hoped to have softball played as part of County Level 3 competition in 12 counties in 2014-15, extending the reach of the programme. In the end, 11 counties offered softball, and productive conversations have been had with Northamptonshire, Manchester, Nottinghamshire and Kent, which we hope will offer softball in 2015-16.

Our relationship with the Youth Sport Trust (YST) has continued to be strong as we work with them through a supply and demand partnership programme. We are the only sport to be invited back for a second year of involvement in 2015-16.

With the YST, we've updated their School Games Resources and developed a Multi-Skills Resource with them, though it has yet to be produced.

There has been a net increase of 81 youth teams in 2014-15, both in clubs and in after-school and community settings.

The Sainsbury's School Games programme has been the major catalyst for growth in this sector, with new teams being added in Gloucestershire, Birmingham, Hertfordshire, Northamptonshire and Shropshire.

The Farnham Park Schools Softball Series was another significant development programme in 2014, spreading the word among young people in South Buckinghamshire, and there was also a small but significant girls fastpitch programme taking root in Nottingham.

Case study

School Games programme in Gloucestershire

What started as a showcase event and a chance to gauge interest in softball has become one of the biggest schools programmes in the country. With all corners of the county offering softball at district level, the foundations have been put in place to firmly cement softball as part of the fabric of school sport in Gloucestershire – not historically known as a softball hotbed. In 2014-15, two county competitions were run: a continuation of the Year 9/10 programme that has been running for the past three years and a new post-16 competition for students in sixth forms and further education colleges in Gloucestershire.

Further education

2014-15 was a quieter year for our further education work. We maintained programming for over 80 FE colleges and secondary schools and added nine new teams, resulting in a standstill position on the number of teams playing in this area. The programmes in further education continue to focus on developing

college teams to enter local competitions – for example in the Gloucestershire School Games – and the development of intramural competitions at colleges such as Stockport College in Greater Manchester and East Kent College.

Higher education

Higher Education – or universities – continues to be a ripe and fruitful market for our work. We set out to run successful National Championships for baseball and slowpitch softball, and attracted two more than the targeted number of teams in each format (eight teams took part in baseball and 12 in softball).

We wanted our University Officer network to reach 16 institutions, which we achieved. We also wanted to build our links with BUCS, the national organisation for university sport, and their Head of Development attended our National University Softball Championships in October 2014.

This has opened up an opportunity for us to work within the London University Sports League in 2015-16. Overall, we maintained the involvement of 45 university teams, plus adding three to increase the total number to 48.

Case study

National University Championships

BaseballSoftballUK staged four National University Championships in 2014-15 – two in each format – and attracted a record number of entries. In the softball championships, the University of Portsmouth took the honours in October but then lost their title to Loughborough University in the second competition in March, both of which took place at Farnham Park. In the baseball competitions, the University of East Anglia took the autumn competition before Loughborough cemented their growing reputation by taking the baseball championship in March to hold both titles.

Teams competing in the National University Softball Championships (NUSC) in 2014-15:

- Portsmouth University
- University of East Anglia
- University of Nottingham
- Loughborough University (two teams)
- Brighton University
- University College London
- Manchester Metropolitan University (Crewe)
- University of Kent
- University of Manchester
- Bucks New College
- Imperial College.

Teams competing in the National University Baseball Championships (NUBC) in 2014-15:

- University of East Anglia
- University of Nottingham
- Imperial College
- Loughborough University
- University College London
- Southampton University
- Sheffield University
- Oxford University.



Development continued

"This National University Baseball Championship is the culmination of years of hard work in terms of coaching and recruitment," said Loughborough University captain Luke Stott. "I lead a team with a huge mix of nationalities, ages and experience but with two things in common: they are proud to represent Loughborough University and they love to play baseball. The standard of play, particularly the pitching depth, was incredible. With MIST and other tournaments complementing the NUBC and giving university players access to high-level competition, I can only foresee positive things for baseball in the future."

BSUK National Development Manager Chris Rawlings said: "There has been a marked increase in the standard of play across university baseball in recent years. The fields at Farnham Park provide a fantastic venue and the tournament is often the first time students have played on dedicated fields. I can't wait to see what this tournament looks over the next few years as university baseball growth continues."

"This is our fourth NUSC and we are really pleased with the way the tournament has grown from the initial six teams, with a marked improvement in play from the first year," said Liz Knight, BaseballSoftballUK's London Development Manager and organiser of the National University Softball Championships. "The tournament is open to teams of all abilities; some teams have been established for some time while for others this is their first year. Some players have extensive playing experience, including with the GB Junior National Team, BSF clubs, playing abroad and even in our workplace leagues such as Carluccio's but for others the NUSC provided their first competitive playing opportunity."

New adult leagues

BSUK has prioritised the formation of new adult leagues for many years. To do this, we've worked with corporate partners, Leisure and Culture trusts and the County Sport Partnership Network Workplace Challenge and have targeted a number of cities and towns. Our historical successes have included helping Birmingham re-establish a city softball league and developing softball in Sefton on Merseyside towards the creation of a town league.

We have also been very proud of the support we've offered Wickes DIY stores to run an extensive company softball programme for staff while also raising funds for the charity Leukaemia and Lymphoma Research.

But we had a mixed year in 2014-15. On the up side, we were able to pilot the development of our new participation programme,

'Hit the Pitch', with an emerging new company league for the Carluccio's restaurant chain. This resulted in an 18-team league for Carluccio's staff members from across the country, who converged in London for games. This was an extremely valuable and rewarding extension of our corporate league client list and we hope the programme will go from strength to strength in the future.

However, we were disappointed to lose the Wickes Softball League in 2014-15. We made extensive efforts to re-position our offer to reflect the organisation's changing needs, but were not able to reach agreement. This had a substantial impact on our participation figures, and despite productive work elsewhere resulting in 65 new teams, it meant we finished the year 13 teams behind our 2013-14 position for new adult leagues.

Case study

Carluccio's Company Softball

Carluccio's, a well-known chain of Italian restaurants, has become the latest company to join the growing list of businesses that are playing softball. Over five weeks during the summer of 2014, 18 teams made up of Carluccio's staff travelled to Holland Park in London to take part in the company's softball programme.

Colleagues from Carluccio's restaurants all across the country combined to form regional softball teams, connecting members of staff who would not normally meet.

Chris Rawlings, National Development Manager at BaseballSoftballUK, said: "The partnership with Carluccio's has been a great success this summer. Carluccio's have clearly enjoyed the softball programme, and it has helped them with staff development and communication across the company. It reinforces the clear role that company softball can have for organisations, and we will be working hard in the coming months to engage more businesses in playing the sport."

Chris Pool, Regional Operations Director at Carluccio's, said: "On behalf of everyone at Carluccio's, a huge thank you to BSUK for organising us this year! I speak on behalf of everyone in saying that it was a huge success and we couldn't have achieved it without your help and support. Speak to you soon regarding next year!"

Corporate softball

Corporate softball days in London have been part of our business since the very early days of BaseballSoftballUK. This year, we have extensively reviewed our work in this area and incorporated it into our 'Hit the Pitch' programme, linked to our commercial plan. This means that we now see corporate softball days as a key way of finding companies or employees who are interested in playing our sports more regularly. We also see corporate day clients as a hopefully

Development continued

receptive audience for developing business partnerships that can generate mutual value.

The opening of dedicated baseball and softball facilities at Farnham Park has meant that our corporate softball offer has been enhanced for those companies interested in hiring the best facility in the country. This was instrumental in helping the concept of a Slough Trading Estate League to take shape, and a corporate day for the Estate was run at Farnham Park in September 2014.

Case study

SEGRO and the Slough Trading Estate Softball League

BSUK's facility at Farnham Park played host on 12 September 2014 to a Summer Softball BBQ event that kicked off a major new development programme in the local community, a league for the wide range of companies that are based on the Slough Trading Estate, the largest in Europe, owned and operated by property developers SEGRO.

Both softball diamonds at Farnham Park were in use for the event and there was a hive of activity at the batting cage that BSUK provided, offering the chance for participants – many of whom had never played before – to have a swing and get a feel for the sport.

BSUK has been working closely with SEGRO to introduce softball as a new sporting activity that the firm can offer to the wide range of companies that are its tenants at the Slough Trading Estate. SEGRO is keen to take advantage of the great softball facility just up the road at Farnham Park, and also recognises softball as an opportunity to provide a new, fun, mixed-gender social activity, open to all, that could be an exciting new strand to the service they offer their clients.

One of the participants at the Summer Softball BBQ event, Nicola from the company Kidd Rapinet, said: "The softball event left all of us here at Kidd Rapinet feeling up-beat and inspired us to get back into fitness. We look forward to hearing more about the Slough Trading Estate Softball League and signing up as a team."

Future leaders

This was a relatively quiet year for the BSUK Future Leaders group. We will be working hard in the coming 12 months to look at the focus and purpose of this group in supporting the growth of baseball and softball for young people.



The Academy

Overview

The aim was for 2014-15 to be the biggest and best year so far for both the Academy and the High Performance Academy (HPA).

Following successful pilots of the HPA for baseball in Brighton/Horsham and fastpitch softball in Maidenhead, BSUK set out in 2014-15 to add a second venue to the HPA baseball programme and to re-energise the Academy Softball winter training programme. With the appointment of Nik Patterson as Talent Development Coordinator and Robbie Robison as the Head Coach for Academy Softball and the HPA fastpitch softball programme, an intensive winter season of talent development was delivered.

Our relationships with Major League Baseball and the Dutch National Fastpitch Softball Team are strong and enabled us to add significant additional value and support to our Talent programmes. Guest coaches from Holland provided fastpitch pitching training for players and coaches at Academy Softball and Virginie Anneveld, who played for Holland at the 2014 Women's Fastpitch Softball World Championships, attended both the launch weekend for the HPA as a guest speaker and the first HPA softball practice of the winter.

Baseball also added to its Academy and HPA coaching staff. Supporting Academy Director Liam Carroll were new arrivals Zach Graefser and Cam McHag. Graefser is a Junior College pitching coach from St Louis while McHag has experience with the Australian Academies and Australian Under-19 National Teams.

In 2014-15 we had 116 Academy baseball members (including 28 HPA baseball members) and 32 Academy softball members (including 11 HPA softball members).

Over the winter we ran 13 Academy Baseball practices and nine Academy Softball practices at venues in Milton Keynes, Uxbridge, Manchester and Maidenhead. Additionally, a final weekend of Academy Series games was played at Farnham Park in the early spring, with both Academies represented over the two days.

The HPA expanded into two areas for baseball. One venue was in Central London, while the South Coast HPA moved from Brighton to Worthing, each practicing three times per week. HPA softball continued to practice in Maidenhead, increasing from one to two days per week.

Case study

European success for HPA Players

In the summer of 2014, following the first full year of running High Performance Academy sessions, players on the Junior (Under-19) national teams from both baseball and fastpitch softball realised unprecedented levels of success.

The Great Britain Junior National Baseball Team finished second in the European Qualifier in Croatia and qualified for the 2015 European Junior Championships, which will be the first time the GB Junior programme has played at this level in Europe since 2005. Of the squad of 16 that travelled to Croatia, 15 were members of the HPA, and seven of them practiced three times a week from January to April in Worthing. The remaining eight players were members of the High Performance Academy Distance Learning Programme.

The Junior (Under-19) Women's Fastpitch Team achieved a fourth place finish at the 2014 European Junior Championships, the team's highest-ever placing. All of the UK-based players who made the team were HPA athletes and had practiced together in Maidenhead from February through April.

The Talent programme has also led to a number of standout individual athletes developing this year.

In baseball, Jonathan Fretheim was selected to the Major League Baseball European Academy and was joined by Jacob Dean, who was also selected to play on the European Academy All-Star team. In fastpitch softball, the female branch of our Talent pathway, Under-19 player Chloe Wigington was selected to both the Senior and Junior Women's Teams and played in both the European Junior Championships and Women's World Championships in the same summer.

Overview

Coaching and coach education are the cornerstones of our sports' success. We therefore chose to take on a coaching delivery partner, Sport Structures, from June 2014 to streamline and professionalise the delivery and administration of coaching courses. In 2014-15 – and effectively in just nine months – Sport Structures' delivery across England led to five courses (four Level 1 and one Activator course) and 61 newly-qualified coaches (33% of new coaches and Activators were female).

Due to Sport Structures' support and delivery, BSUK development staff have been able to focus on other areas of coach education, resulting in a number of new initiatives:

- a new Activator course to support the delivery of 'Hit the Pitch' was launched in March 2015;
- BSUK's improved Coach Licence scheme came on line in January 2015. The Coach Licence ensures that coaches are suitably qualified and insured for the work they are undertaking, and licensed coaches are also provided with unique and bespoke CPD clinics and communications;
- the Coach Steering Group reconvened, in partnership with Sport Structures, to review the current strategy for coaching. With coaching representatives from the British Baseball Federation and the British Softball Federation, the steering group's aims are to ensure that current and future coach education tools are right for the needs of British baseball and softball coaches.

Looking ahead to 2015-16, we hope to increase the number of coaches attending and completing coaching qualifications, especially Activator and Level 2 certificates. There are also plans to rewrite the Level 1 coaching qualification so that it is in line with cutting-edge practices in coaching, and to increase the number of skills and CPD workshops for coaches.

Case study

Activator Course, London

To support the delivery of 'Hit the Pitch', BSUK launched a new suite of Activator courses in 2014-15, delivered with our coach education partner Sport Structures. These included courses for young Activators (14-16 years of age), Activators (16 years of age and above) and Teacher Activators (aimed at teachers or those on PGCE pathways).

The 'Hit the Pitch' Activator is a new role, aimed at increasing the number of people playing recreational softball and baseball on a regular basis. Those who signed up for the three-hour course received a free one-year Activator licence to deliver 'Hit the Pitch' programmes, including insurance and additional benefits for being part of the scheme. Attendees learned the basics of baseball and softball and how to deliver these sports in a fun and engaging way to a range of audiences. Trainees were given a basic understanding of how to run a game, organise a league, coach players, umpire games and encourage participation.

Here is what coaches from the sports coaching and teaching company BADU Sports had to say about the Activator course:

"The course is fun, fast and informative."

"BSUK's Activator course provided me with all the information I need to run baseball and softball sessions, and I would definitely recommend it to other coaches."

"The information given to us was brilliant and my skills to teach the sports to others have improved."

"BSUK's Activator's course is fun, exciting and hands-on."

Overview

Appropriate facilities are one of the great needs of baseball and softball in the UK. Not only do we need appropriate playing surfaces for a small ball sport, but we also need facilities to cater for our growing talent pool, provide a quality experience for both existing and new participants, and raise the profile and awareness of baseball and softball in the communities in which we play.

The baseball and softball centre developed by BSUK at Farnham Park in South Buckinghamshire and opened in June 2013 has addressed several of these issues, especially providing a quality playing experience for the existing membership. A number of tournaments and National Championship weekends were played at Farnham Park by baseball, slowpitch and fastpitch softball in 2014-15.

However, the two things lacking at Farnham Park to make it a fully functional tournament venue are a second baseball field and a clubhouse. Phase Two of the Farnham Park construction programme will address both of these issues. With completion scheduled for 2015-16, planning work is already underway to ensure that Farnham Park is the facility our sports need it to be.

Away from Farnham Park, there are ongoing plans to build and open a baseball and softball facility in the north of England. Having consulted with a number of clubs, local authorities and other sports, Manchester was chosen as the ideal location for a new northern facility. Preliminary meetings and discussions have taken place with the Manchester Baseball Club, Manchester Softball League and Manchester City Council. Though there have been issues and delays beyond our control, we remain 100% committed to ensuring that a facility of suitable quality and scale is delivered in the north.

BSUK doesn't just build facilities ourselves – we have, over the years, supported a number of clubs to build and develop their own facilities, and where needed we have supported grant applications to Sport England and other bodies to help fund these projects.

During 2014-15, Richmond Baseball and Softball Club completed the construction of its new field, which included the redevelopment of the infield, laser levelling of the grass areas, new outfield fencing and a pop-up sprinkler system. This was paid for by a Sport England Inspired Facilities grant, for which Richmond received significant support from BSUK staff members.

Clubs were also treated to expert advice from BSUK Facilities Consultant Mac Clonan, who provided information on where and how to source materials appropriate for use as an infield mix and on the clay content needed to build a baseball pitcher's mound.

Looking ahead to 2015-16, BSUK will be progressing facilities construction at both Farnham Park and in Manchester. A review of our facilities strategy will also take place, and with that will come substantial help for clubs that need support and guidance to develop their own facilities.

Case study

Richmond Baseball and Softball Club

The Richmond Baseball and Softball Club was awarded £50,000 from Sport England's Inspired Facilities programme to make significant improvements to their field. Work began in March 2014 and was concluded over the summer of 2014, resulting in:

- laser levelling of the grass areas;
- a newly-installed fully-skinned infield;
- new outfield fencing;
- an automated pop-up sprinkler and irrigation system.

"This is a complete game changer for the club," said Richmond President Nick Hadley. "Over the last few years we have raised significant funds to improve the club and its facilities; this will ensure the playing and practicing experience is both more enjoyable and safer."

BSUK worked closely with the club during the application stage of the project to ensure that the application submitted by Richmond was as sound and persuasive as possible. Additional support and discussions took place between the club and BSUK around sourcing appropriate materials for the infield mix and the high-impact areas of the mound and home plate circle.



Overview

Supporting existing clubs and leagues to grow and develop has been at the very core of what we do since BSUK's inception in 2000. We prioritise working with clubs and leagues that are looking to increase their membership or that want to establish a higher level of governance so they are stable and self-sufficient.

Sport England's new club development tool, Club Matters, was launched during 2014-15, incorporating previous club development initiatives such as Clubmark, Club Leaders and Running Sports under one convenient, free and easy-to-use platform. Clubmark will remain the gold standard for club governance and BSUK will continue to push clubs towards achieving Clubmark accreditation. However, no new baseball or softball clubs attained Clubmark status in 2014-15 and more efforts need to be made to ensure that clubs meet the standards required of them.

Little League baseball was revived in 2014-15 as part of a new youth baseball strategy put forward jointly by BSUK and the British Baseball Federation. Farnham Park hosted the largest ever Little League tournament in June 2014, with 11 teams participating across four different age groups.

While the tournament itself was a great achievement, there is still much work to be done to raise the number of children and young people playing so that more local youth baseball leagues can be set up across all of BSUK's target regions. Additionally, a much-needed push to grow the number of girls playing fastpitch softball will be required in 2015-16.

BSUK doesn't just offer development support; we also help to bring cash into existing clubs and leagues so they can run their own development initiatives and programmes. Through the Sport England Small Grants scheme alone, BSUK helped bring over £50,000 into clubs across England. Additionally, funding from Sportivate and the Satellite Club programme has helped clubs to establish new relationships with local school and community groups.

Existing clubs and leagues will remain at the core of our sports. With the arrival of 'Hit the Pitch', BSUK's club development support will begin to focus on how clubs and leagues can use this new programme to facilitate growth and open up new opportunities on their doorstep.

Case study

Farnham Park Baseball and Softball Club

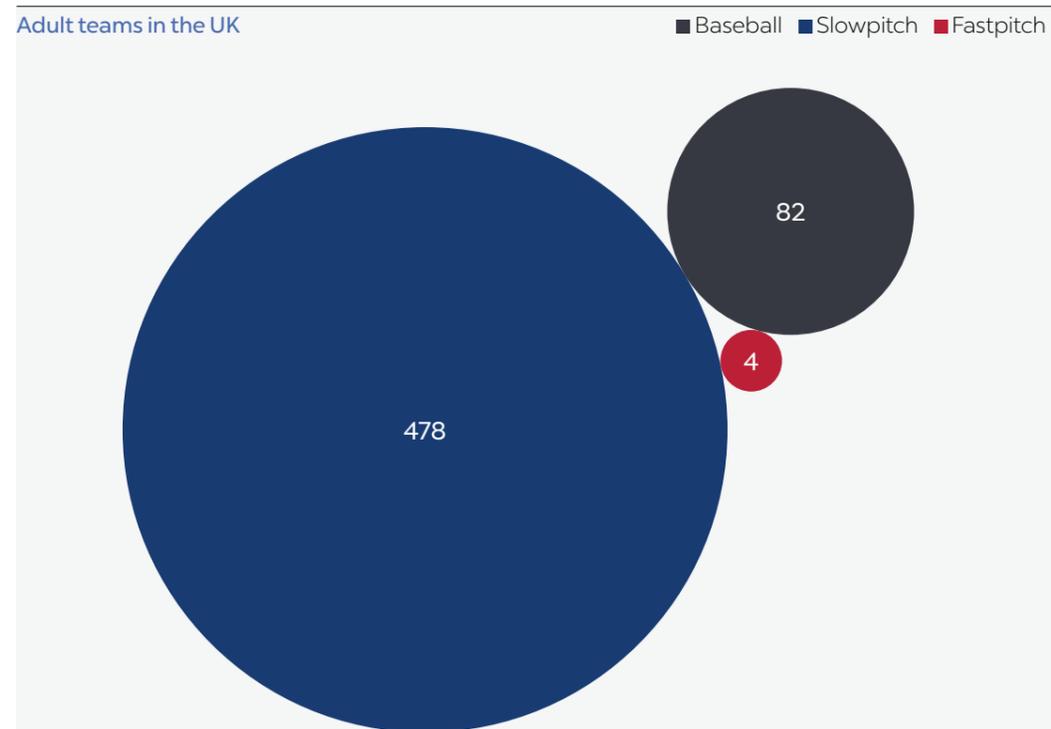
With the opening of Farnham Park, a new challenge presented itself: how can this facility meet the needs of new participants as well as the existing playing community? Working in partnership with BSUK, the nearby Chalfont Softball Club transitioned into the Farnham Park Baseball and Softball Club. The partnership produced a collaborative vision and a development plan. Key milestones for the growth of all three sports were laid out and included a delivery schedule at Farnham Park throughout the summer of 2014 that will continue into 2015 and beyond.

By 2024 the FPBSC will have established:

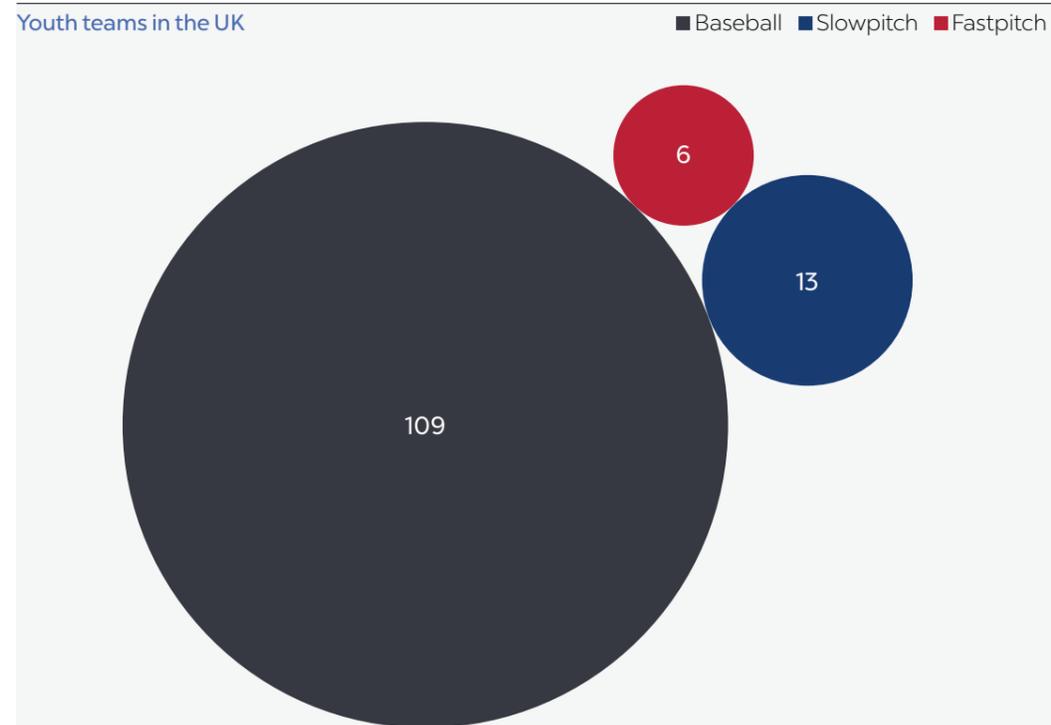
- a four-tier adult baseball programme with teams playing at every level of BBF sanctioned competition, including the National Baseball League;
- five adult women's fastpitch teams competing at various levels within BSF sanctioned competitions;
- five adult slowpitch teams playing in the Windsor and Maidenhead District Softball League (currently three teams);
- local Little Leagues for baseball and fastpitch softball at Under-17, Under-15, Under-13 and Under-12 age groups.

"We are really excited about our vision," said FPBSC Club Chairman Chris Yoxall. "Having BSUK's support will be critical to our success, and while this presents a tremendous opportunity, there is a lot of work to do if we are to successfully deliver our plan by 2024."

Adult teams in the UK



Youth teams in the UK



Operations

Year Two of BSUK's third Whole Sport Plan cycle was a busy year for the Operations Department, with three key projects added to ongoing work: an onsite management audit, adding the web-streaming of tournaments to our events arm and supporting the launch of BSUK's new 'Hit the Pitch' participation programme through the building of a new website and creation of a range of support materials.

An onsite audit is carried out at least once for every funded sport in a Whole Sport Plan cycle by independent auditors Moore Stephens. Key functions of the department such as financial management, organisational policies, risk management, communications and governance have become consistently more robust each year, as evidenced by seven consecutive 'green' ratings by Sport England, so we approached the audit with confidence. Even with this, the process took a great deal of preparation and drew heavily on the capacity of the department.

An exciting opportunity presented itself during the year when we were approached by JP Productions, based in Loughborough, about the possibility of live streaming some of our events. With the twin goals of raising the profile of our sports and professionalising our events, we decided to move forward with this. In our first year we chose to stream post-event rather than live so that we could address any unforeseen problems. This proved to be a good move as our filming of the final game at the slowpitch Premier Nationals was largely successful, but our filming of the National Baseball Championships had a number of technical faults. Overall, though, we saw 2014 as a learning process and the experience whet our appetite regarding the possibilities of the format and led to our planning to live stream two more events the following year.

The biggest project of 2014-15 was the launch of the 'Hit the Pitch' participant growth programme, something that was not on our radar at the start of the year. The Development Department carried out a programme review over the summer of 2014 which led to the conception of 'Hit the Pitch' as the overarching development tool for the organisation going forward. With challenging timeframes in place for the launch, the Operations Department mobilised to fully support the project by working with Deep Red Creative to build a brand new website and to create a range of support materials so that the programme could be launched before the 2015-16 season. It was an ambitious project that had the entire staff team pulling together to deliver it.

In addition to the larger projects above, the Operations Department continued to deliver extra-value functions such as an events programme, media coverage of all key domestic and international competitions, support to the Federations through a service level agreement, delivery of a corporate softball arm, managing safeguarding systems for the sports and support to the BSUK Board and its standing committees.

In 2014-15 BSUK Board support was particularly significant as we arranged for bespoke Institute of Directors training for directors, supported the search for three new independent directors and managed the review of the structure of the BBF, BSF and BSUK, a process that began in 2014 with the selection of a consultant to drive the project.

In the previous year, we had stated that a key priority for 2014-15 would be strategic planning to enable us to function more efficiently as a department and an organisation. For 2014-15, we focused on marketing and social media to coincide with the launch of 'Hit the Pitch'. Working closely with Sport Structures, we developed a marketing plan and provided social media training to all staff.

For the Operations Department, there is always an element of business as usual that comes with back-end delivery. There are core organisational functions that must be continuously in place and managed around larger projects. With a small operations team of four and a communications consultant, we were stretched to capacity at times, but are able to look back on 2014-15 as a highly successful year.

Communications

Overview

One of the key roles of the BSUK Operations Department is to create and manage communications for and about baseball and softball, directed to the communities that exist around the sports as well as to external media and partner agencies and organisations.

Much of this work is carried out on behalf of the British Baseball and Softball Federations, but a significant element is designed to communicate the content, progress and value of BSUK's development programmes and initiatives to internal and external stakeholders.

This was particularly the case during the first three months of 2015, leading up to the launch of BSUK's major new development initiative, 'Hit the Pitch', on 1 April 2015. The creation of information and marketing materials for 'Hit the Pitch', including a new website to facilitate programme operations and a major promotion for the programme on social media, dominated the work of both development and operations staff during this period.

During 2014-15 as a whole, operations staff were involved in a wide range of communication activities designed to report on and promote the sports.

Website content

BSUK manages its own website and those of the British Baseball and Softball Federations and posts almost all the content on these sites. The aim is to maintain a steady turnover of news stories, particularly on the Federation websites, and this was successfully achieved (though there are no specific targets against which to measure performance in this regard). The Federation websites also contain various databases, including membership, registration and league and team management systems, which are largely maintained and updated by the Operations Department.

During 2014-15, the BSUK website was adapted to be more focused on BSUK projects and initiatives, including the creation of mini-sites for coaching and for BSUK's National Baseball and Softball Centre at Farnham Park. However, the site retains a news section featuring development stories and updates.

The Operations Department, over a number of years, has also been the first responder to all queries directed to info@ mailboxes on each of the three websites. Targets regarding response times have been regularly exceeded in most cases over the past two or three years by BSUK staff, and early in 2015, a new online CRM system was put in place to provide better management of enquiries as well as other tasks.

Nevertheless, the British Baseball Federation has elected to take back responsibility for managing queries to its website.

Organisation website analytics

	Total users	Total sessions	Total page views	Page views per session
baseballsoftballuk.com	46,475	74,658	160,607	2.15
britishbaseball.org	65,041	146,465	596,799	4.07
britishsoftball.org	48,656	122,520	353,964	2.89

Social media analytics

	Facebook likes*	Facebook reach	YouTube views	Twitter impressions
BaseballSoftballUK	1,754	183,301	9,761	564,384
British Baseball Federation	1,632	162,712	—	—
British Softball Federation	771	36,135	—	—

*as at 31 March 2015



Website management

The BSUK Operations Department undertakes ongoing maintenance and development work on the three websites, and tries to ensure that the Federation websites, in particular, meet changing Federation needs.

BSUK maintains regular contact with Federation representatives over website issues and carries out work to update or improve their websites where practicable. In 2014-15, this work included development of a new section on the National Championships for the BSF website and a range of functionality improvements on the BBF website.

Social media

Another part of BSUK's communications remit has been to manage the social media output for the three organisations (BSUK, BBF and BSF), covering Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. However, following discussions with the Federations, BSUK was asked to step back from managing Federation Twitter and Facebook feeds so the BBF and BSF could take greater control. This has seen mixed results, with the BSF losing their Social Media Officer, and increase in acquisitions to the respective websites from their social media channels has slowed.

BSUK's Facebook reach returned to a more natural level following a ten-fold increase in numbers over the 2013-14 period, largely based around the coverage and exposure that the Farnham Park opening ceremony received in July 2013. In contrast, BSUK's Twitter impressions more than doubled compared to the previous comparable period, as did visits to the BSUK YouTube channel as we increased our video production, including trial runs of recorded webstreams of Farnham Park live events.

Much of the success in increasing BSUK's social media profile has been down to a change in communications strategy, started in 2013-14, to move away from news-based postings in favour of co-ordinated social media campaigns. A prime example of this was the period around the engagement event for 'Hit the Pitch' and the build-up to the official launch event on 1 April 2015.

With plans in hand to create greater promotion for 'Hit the Pitch' programmes following its launch, BSUK teamed up with Sport Structures to run a social media workshop for BSUK staff. The workshop focused on social media strategies and tools to help co-ordinate communications across a number of different channels, with a view to creating greater engagement from our audience. Some basic analytics on our social media reach are in the table on the previous page.

Hot Corner

Hot Corner is an e-newsletter designed to bring breaking news about baseball, softball and BSUK development activities to subscribers who sign up through the BSUK, BBF or BSF websites. As of 31 March 2015, Hot Corner had 6,831 subscribers and the number has continued to grow since the publication was launched at the beginning of 2011.

The intention is to produce Hot Corner twice a month during the playing season (April through September) and once a month during the off-season, which implies 18 issues a year. In 2014-15 we produced 17 issues plus a number of single-topic newsflashes.

Webstreaming

A new communications initiative carried out at the end of the 2014 season was a pilot project to webstream games from the BSF's top national championship, the Premier Nationals, and from the BBF's Double-A National Championships, both played at Farnham Park.

Because filming baseball and softball games to a high standard involved a learning curve for both BSUK staff and for Loughborough-based film company JP Productions, it was decided not to webstream these telecasts live but to record them for later viewing as a prelude to doing live webcasts in 2015. The telecast of the final game from the BSF Premier Nationals, posted within a few days of the event, was very successful and attracted 1,129 viewers. The baseball telecast, for technical reasons, was less successful and was not posted.

In 2015, BSUK plans to webstream games live from the London Cup, an international women's fastpitch tournament, and from the UK Little League qualifiers, both played at Farnham Park, and we hope to expand webstreaming of British baseball and softball in future.

Event coverage

Another communications function carried out by the BSUK Operations Department is reporting on significant baseball, softball and BSUK events, usually through stories on one or more of the websites. Events covered can range from meetings to development projects to domestic and international competitions involving British national or club teams.

In 2014-15, Operations Department members attended and reported on:

- both Federation AGMs, all monthly BSF Executive meetings, the BSF League Heads Forum and International Baseball and Softball Federation meetings attended by British representatives;
- all weekly BBF league play through commissioned divisional reporters plus the Herts Spring League, the Great Britain All-Star Series, British Little League qualifiers, the London Tournament, adult and youth playoffs and the National Baseball Championships;"

- The Great Britain Fastpitch League, the National Softball League, Single-sex and Co-ed Slowpitch National Championships, the Softball World Series, slowpitch leagues via monthly round-up reports and a range of domestic open tournaments;
- GB teams at the Pony Baseball European Championships, the GB Cadet tour to Florida and the GB Senior Baseball Team at European Championships in Germany and the Czech Republic;
- The Zeisterslot Men's Fastpitch Tournament in Holland, the European Men's Fastpitch Championships in the Czech Republic, the European Junior (Under-19) Women's Fastpitch Championships in Holland, the European Slowpitch Cup in the Czech Republic, the ESF Massimo Romeo Fastpitch Cup for Under-13 Girls in Italy and the ISF Women's World Championships in Holland;
- Academy and High Performance Academy programmes, the new Carluccio's Softball League, School Games events, University Baseball and Softball Championships, Play Ball! and Little League youth baseball and a wide range of other development programmes and initiatives.

Image library

The BSUK Operations Department maintains an extensive library of still images covering all aspects of baseball and softball competition and development work, and this library is added to each year through images commissioned by BSUK or supplied through community or other sources.

The primary use for these images is to illustrate stories on the Federation and BSUK websites and in our printed publications, or to supply images of our sports to external agencies.

BSUK also maintains a YouTube account and we are keen to increase the amount of video material available through that channel, including webstreamed telecasts of domestic competition. In 2014, we ran a video competition which produced some interesting work.

Manuals and other documents

The BSUK Operations Department is responsible for the production of a wide range of internal documents and publications designed for current or potential members of the baseball and softball communities.

These range from Minutes of BSUK Board and committee meetings to coaching manuals, development programme materials and promotional materials for the sports and for BSUK initiatives. In the months leading up to the launch of BSUK's 'Hit the Pitch' programme

on 1 April 2015, a great deal of effort was put into the creation of a wide range of materials for this initiative.

BSUK put the design and production of a new 'Hit the Pitch' logo and promotional materials out to tender before engaging with Mosaic Media. Mosaic created a new brand identity for 'Hit the Pitch' as well as brochures and case study templates to promote the programme.

External communications

While most of the communications work carried out by the BSUK Operations Department is aimed at the UK baseball and softball communities, some communications are directed to external agencies and stakeholders or to the general public.

We maintain a database of national and local media outlets, and a number of press releases are written and distributed to these outlets each year, despite the difficulty of getting national media to take much notice of our sports. Press releases directed at local media, whether by BSUK or by local clubs or leagues, tend to be more successful.

In 2014-15, we created and distributed external press releases and other information on national team events and appointments, the High Performance Academy, expansion of the UK Little League qualifier and facility development plans for Manchester and Farnham Park.

The Operations Department also produces this Annual Review each year, available in electronic and printed form, detailing the work carried out by BSUK during the previous 12 months.

Finally, the Operations Department produces a range of flyers and posters each year designed to promote BSUK development programmes to members of the public as well as overseeing the creative process for outsourced production.

Events

Overview

While BaseballSoftballUK's event work is normally focused on running or supporting a range of baseball and softball tournaments and Championships, much of our attention during the past year was on two events off the field: a sports industry engagement event for 'Hit the Pitch', and the build-up to the official 'Hit the Pitch' launch event on 1 April 2015.

Hit the Pitch

The 'Hit the Pitch' engagement event was an evening reception with invited guests from the sports industry and prospective 'Hit the Pitch' customers. This was a first chance to offer a closed preview of 'Hit the Pitch' and to showcase BSUK's ambitious plans to use this programme as the main tool for increasing participation in our sports.

The event also offered the opportunity to unveil the new identity for 'Hit the Pitch' as well as the first run of promotional resources and videos showcasing the programme.

Preparations for the official public launch of 'Hit the Pitch' were ramped up in the new year. This was to be a national launch, consisting of three regional events in Manchester, Loughborough and Guildford and a London launch to be held on 1 April 2015 and hosted by one of the key 'Hit the Pitch' participants, Carluccio's, at their Covent Garden restaurant.

Two of the regional launches – those at Guildford and Manchester – took place on 31 March 2015, showcasing company softball with a number of local companies entering teams in mini-tournaments and other guests and prospective participants able to watch and discuss opportunities. The Loughborough event was scheduled to take place on 1 April 2015 before the London launch.

Videographers were sent to each of the regional events to capture footage and interview participants for a video that would be shown the next night in London, as well as being available on the BSUK's YouTube channel.

University Championships

For the past two years, BSUK has run National University Softball Championships (NUSC) and, in October 2014, National University Baseball Championships (NUBC) were added to the BSUK tournament schedule.

The NUSC has gone from strength-to-strength, from six teams two years ago to 12 teams taking part in what is now a twice-annual tournament held at Farnham Park at the start and end of the season. Teams from across the country are taking

part, from Brighton on the south coast to Manchester in the North West.

There had already been a small but established university baseball tournament – the Spring Cup – organised by the British University Baseball Association (BUBA), and in March 2014, this was co-hosted by BUBA and BSUK at the University of East Anglia. This led to plans to launch the National University Baseball Championships, which ran for the first time in October 2014 with five teams and grew to eight teams when the event was re-staged in March 2015.

The swift growth in numbers for both events shows the potential for university baseball and softball, with regional competitions planned for the following year that will lead to the National Championships.

UK Little League Qualifier

In the past, Little League has not had much presence in the UK and was largely organised independently by organisations such as the London Youth Baseball League and London Mets. However, in June 2014, BSUK, along with the British Baseball Federation, hosted the largest-ever UK Little League Qualifier.

Held at Farnham Park, the Qualifier featured competitions at U17, U15 and U13 levels and, for the first time in the UK, featured an U12 Minors division. The winners of each competition apart from U12 would go on to represent the UK at the European and African Qualifiers.

Federation events

BSUK continues to support the BBF and BSF with a number of events, with support including logistics, scheduling and promotion.

A new event on the calendar in 2014 was the Masters Tournament, a slowpitch softball event held in a Ryder Cup-style format involving teams from Senior Softball USA, a mixed team of GB National Team players and others and the British domestic tournament team Japan Softball Godzillas. BSUK assisted with travel plans for the US teams and hosted the tournament at Farnham Park. The event was played in glorious sunshine and, while competitive, was aimed mainly at promoting Senior Softball beyond the United States. The tournament was followed by a meal and presentations from the BSF and the travelling team organisers.

BSUK continued to support the National Championships for both the BBF and BSF, with the BSF Premier Nationals as well as the BBF's National Baseball Championships and Youth National Baseball Championships held at Farnham Park. For the first time, BSUK planned recorded webstreams of the finals from the Premier Nationals and Double-A NBCs, and there is more on this in the Communications section.

The BSF took greater control over the running of the ever-popular Softball World Series tournament, but BSUK still provided most of the

Events continued

pre-tournament organisation, and the event again reached capacity in terms of the number of teams involved and the number of teams flying in from Europe to take part.

Indoor softball

BSUK continues to run the London Indoor Softball League and has added new regional leagues in Manchester and Sefton in the North West. We also support the GO Mammoth leagues at Canary Wharf in London.

BSUK's annual AstroSeries event took on a slightly different form in 2015 and became a charity tournament called the Homecoming Ball. Run in aid of the premature and sick baby charity Bliss, the event featured a number of teams from the London Indoor Softball League and included fundraising activities. Hosted at Play On Sports in Canary Wharf, the event raised in excess of £1,300 for the charity.



Service Level Agreements

While development of the sports is BSUK's primary purpose, an important secondary role is to provide the two national governing bodies of baseball and softball, the BBF and the BSF, with administrative and operational support. Since BSUK became an incorporated company in 2007, the staff resources that we can offer to assist the BBF and BSF Boards have been described in Service Level Agreements (SLAs).

Two SLAs are drawn up and agreed each year: one between BSUK and the BBF and the other between BSUK and the BSF. The SLAs outline the Federation activities that BSUK staff will work on during the year and for which the BBF and BSF Boards agree to pay an annual service charge, as this type of work is not funded by Sport England.

During the year, the amount of time staff spent in each category of activity is recorded. This enables us to report back to the Federation Boards on this activity during the year. Quarterly reports detailing SLA activity are reviewed at meetings of the BSUK Board's Finance Committee, which includes representatives from the BBF and BSF Boards.

SLA activities in 2014-15

SLA activity is handled by BSUK's Operations Department. In 2014-15, four members of operations staff spent a combined average of six hours per week on BBF work and six hours per week on BSF activity. The five areas we spent most time on for each Federation during the year are outlined in the table below.

The percentage of total SLA hours spent on each area stayed roughly the same as in 2013-14, with the exception that for both the BBF and BSF, the proportion of time spent creating and publishing website content increased by around 10%, making it now over half of the total SLA hours delivered to each Federation.

British Baseball Federation	Hours	%
Creation and publication of related articles on the website, including coverage of BBF events and Great Britain baseball teams in international competition	176	58
Website and IT maintenance and user support	53	17
Administration of insurance policies and claims	15	5
Preparation support for BBF meetings such as the AGM	11	4
Production of print and electronic materials	10	3

British Softball Federation	Hours	%
Creation and publication of related articles on the website, including coverage of BSF events and Great Britain softball teams in international competition	156	52
Support for organisation and coverage of BSF events	28	9
Administration and reporting of BSF meetings	25	8
Website and IT maintenance and user support	20	7
Support for Great Britain national softball teams related to financial and organisational administration	18	6

Service Level Agreements continued

Value for money

Once the number of hours spent on SLA work is converted to a monetary equivalent (i.e. what the staff time expended represents as a financial cost to BSUK) it produces the results outlined in the table below.

In the early years of the SLA, the value of staff time received by each Federation was hugely disproportionate to the annual service charge; in other words, both Federations frequently received a much greater degree of services than they paid for. The knock-on effect was that this drew Operations staff away from providing support to BSUK's own development activities.

For the past three years, a revised agreement has been in place between BSUK and the two Federations. This agreement sets an hourly rate based on an average of operations staff salaries plus on-costs (in 2014-15 this was £18.25 per hour), and starts with the principle that BSUK will provide a certain value of support to each Federation free of charge (in 2014-15 this was £4800, or 263 hours) provided that this is topped up with some level of paid-for hours through a service charge. With the agreed service charge added on top, the BBF had available a total of about £7,800 (427 hours) worth of services that it could call on and the BSF had up to £8,800 (482 hours).

As shown in the table (right) this has had the desired effect of establishing a better structure to the provision of services over the years and developing a greater parity between the amount of staff time spent on SLA activities overall and the amount paid for in service fees. In 2014-15, for the first time, the value of hours used by the Federations actually dropped significantly below the total available to them, with each Federation using around £5,500 worth of services.

Going forward

The trend of the past few years suggests that the number of SLA hours required by the Federations is reducing each year. One reason for this might be a change in the type of support needed from BSUK. For example, BSUK has not been heavily involved in running Federation-owned tournaments or providing financial and administrative support to Great Britain national teams in the way that it once was, which were activities that ate up a large portion of SLA hours.

Equally, an ongoing challenge for all three organisations – and in particular the two Federations – is to better strategise the allocation of SLA hours across the year in order to make effective use of all available hours in the areas where they can best support Federation activities, while allowing BSUK to plan allocation of staff resource. We are still trying to strike the right balance between the quantity of hours required, the hours delivered and the associated service charges. If, as the current trend suggests, the level of support required by the Federations is changing, this could prompt another change in how the SLA is structured in future years.

SLA charges	BBF (£)	BSF (£)
Service charge	3,000	4,000
Value of staff time received 2014-15	5,600	5,500
Value of staff time received 2013-14	8,300	9,800
Value of staff time received 2012-13	6,000	10,300
Value of staff time received 2011-12	13,500	18,600

Financial Summary

Income	£
Sport England	707,995
Regional development programmes	45,868
Farnham Park operating revenue	27,283
Baseball and softball academies	26,880
Baseball and softball events	24,104
Sport England facility development funding	21,322
Advertising, merchandising and commercial	20,873
Federation service fees	7,000
Coach education	4,905
Company softball days	4,850
Other adult development programmes	2,475
Total income	893,555

Expenditure	£
Baseball and softball development activities	403,120
Operations, HR, infrastructure and governance	255,431
Academies and English Talent Development	66,254
Farnham Park operating costs	54,452
Communications, news and event coverage	52,045
Advertising, merchandising and commercial	31,081
Depreciation of Farnham Park and other assets	30,112
Advertising, merchandising and commercial	20,873
Website development and maintenance	19,998
Coach education	13,551
Company softball days	4,466
Total expenditure	956,390

Full company accounts are available at baseballsoftballuk.com/company.

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