

The 3G Pitch: The Demand from Student Experience

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Summary:

If we want sport (and the physical and mental health benefits that come along with it) to be accessible to all students, our facilities need to be expanded. It is impossible to widen participation and provide equal opportunity in sport whilst there is no physical space to do so. We are at our limit.

Why, and how, the 3G pitch benefits the UoR community:

1) The pitch will directly benefit the following sports teams:

- a. Men's Rugby Union (4 teams)
- b. Women's Rugby
- c. Men's Rugby League
- d. Men's Lacrosse
- e. Women's Lacrosse (2 teams)
- f. Mixed Lacrosse
- g. Men's Football (4 teams)
- h. Women's Football (2 teams)
- i. Ultimate Frisbee
- j. American Football
- k. Men's cricket (cricket nets on the build; 2 teams)
- l. Women's cricket (cricket nets on the build)
- m. Intramural football
- n. Casual student bookings
- o. Staff bookings
- p. Community bookings

The pitch will indirectly benefit the following teams by freeing up space on the existing AstroTurf and surrounding grass areas:

- a. Men's Hockey (5 teams)
- b. Women's Hockey (4 teams)
- c. Mixed Hockey
- d. Rounders
- e. Softball

2) Increasing and widening participation is *not possible* whilst our facilities are at capacity. Both RUSU and the University want to increase participation in sport, as seen in the Active Campus strategy. Clubs themselves also want to expand the number of minority

students involved (post-grads, mature students, international students etc.), but they cannot whilst there is no space. Examples of how the current capacity limits participation include:

- a. Men's football has at least 200 students turning up to trials at the start of the year. They can only accept a handful of these due to lack of facility time and space.
- b. Women's football has at least 100 students turning up to trials; they can accept even fewer new recruits than the men's club can.
- c. Women's Netball have around 200 students turning up to trials, but can only take around 10 girls.
- d. The intermural football teams can only take around 40 5-a-side teams however they have around 60 teams wishing to compete
- e. Men's, Women's and mixed hockey all want to increase their team numbers to meet demand, and again they cannot due to lack of time available on the astro-turf.

These issues disproportionately affect women. Despite improvements at Reading and nationally, sport provision is still primarily male. If existing provision is taking up full facility capacity, there is no space for more female teams and training slots. This is a real, tangible, issue. For several years there has been a hunger from clubs to improve and grow their provision, but they have often been unable to as there is simply no more space. The same applies for other minority groups who are historically less likely to participate in sport. **We cannot widen participation and provide equal opportunity in sport whilst there is no physical space to do so.**

- 3) Playing sport is incredibly beneficial for our students physical and mental wellbeing; there is *countless* evidence for both of these. University counselling suggests exercise to the students who come to them, and we cannot accept all students who come to us whilst facilities are at capacity
- 4) These capacity issues occur *despite* the fact that lots of our teams (including teams from Rugby Union, Hockey, Football and Lacrosse) travel off campus to train. They are forced to do that at great cost and inconvenience to themselves. The costs of booking and travelling to off-campus training facilities are high. This excludes low-income students who simply cannot afford to participate.
- 5) Current facilities are incredibly over-used. This makes maintenance more difficult and expensive, and occasionally posts a safety risk too.
 - a. Currently the paddock is used weekly for 25 hours with a total of 625 using it (grass pitches should only be used for 6 hours per week)
 - b. The grass football pitches are used for matches for a total of 8 hours weekly (200 student uses per week)
 - c. The Astro is used for a total of 32 hours weekly with a total of 1,280s students.
 - d. SoccerPark Astro pitches are used for 11 hours with 250 students using it a week.

- 6) Over-use also means that the quality of current facilities is not good enough. The football pitches at Bulmershe were built in order for planning permission to be agreed on the housing development it is situated on. Our football clubs now have to play away from campus on external 3G facilities at a huge cost to themselves because they are so unhappy with the quality of our grass pitches.
- 7) It is incredibly difficult to avoid conceding BUCS fixtures when there is nowhere for the match to be played. This is a huge frustration for our sports teams, and is bad for our reputation as a Union and a University.
- 8) The new proposal increases sports participation in that area by **1627%**:

Total annual uses of the cricket pitch site currently: 1,584.

Total annual uses of the proposed 3G pitch: 27,360.

These numbers are staggeringly different. This is due to the wider range of sports that can be played on the 3G, the later hours allowed by the floodlighting, and the all-year usage allowed by the drainage surfacing. See Appendix A for the calculations.

- 9) We have fallen behind in the University sector. In the 2017 SUMS benchmarking Report against other Universities of our size nationally, only two didn't have a full sized 3G. This is an unacceptable statistic for a University that promotes sport as much as we do and has students performing at the level that we do.
- 10) We have 12 (numbers to be confirmed in October) Sporting Excellence Scholars at Reading, who are all performing at national level (or are on the national pathway). We need to provide for these elite-level athletes, some of whom will go on to represent GB and the University of Reading at the Olympics and world championships in their sports. We have a premier division men's Rugby Union (as well as several other teams near to premier) who should be playing on a higher standard than they are.
- 11) Involvement in extra-curricular activities boosts employability- as evidenced by our new campaign about employability in RUSU, having a leading role in a sports club helps students after graduation as well as whilst still at Reading. This opportunity is being limited due to the constraints of our facilities.
- 12) The pitch would also be available for community and staff bookings. Local residents are sometimes involved in tension with the University; the 3G pitch would provide a common space to enjoy the beautiful campus and hold community sporting events. The 3G pitch would make exercise more accessible to everyone in the community. Of course, the substantial physical and mental health rewards of exercise would also benefit the staff and community users.
- 13) The proposal for a 3G pitch was submitted to student voice via our Change It! platform by a student in Autumn 2017. It was "Actioned" (rather than sent to a student vote) because it was believed to be happening already. Since then, students have repeatedly

been put a 3G pitch forward as a proposal again. As you can also see from the student quotes later in this document, there is enormous student demand for this.

- 14) Large sums of money are pumped into developments providing more academic space (£40M on the library refurbishment, £50m on the life sciences building etc.), and there has been very little investment in our sports facilities in comparison. The SportsPark hall was built in 1987 and nothing has been done since then to increase its size even though the size of the student body has gotten drastically bigger.
- 15) When changes have been made to sports facilities, it has been last minute re-active rather than pro-active:
 - a. The pavilion was redone because it had reached the point where it was being condemned.
 - b. The tennis courts had reached the point where they were almost unusable; the lights couldn't be used, as they were condemned so no play could take place once it was dark. The LTA provided for a large chunk of the money put towards the build of the tennis dome.
 - c. The astro was resurfaced because it was in such a poor state that for two seasons all of our hockey teams refused to play on it, instead playing all of their training sessions and matches at Reading Hockey Club

The need for a 3G pitch is now in the same situation as these examples. We are past the point of pro-active development- we need the pitch to cope with the *current* demand of our students.

- 16) The project has the backing of Sports Management Committee, the University Executive Board (shown by their proposal to fund the remainder of the build equated as £794,000 at the moment to realise the build), SportsPark, the outgoing Director of Sport and Recreation, RUSU Trustee Board, the Sports Activity Groups and Student Activities. Estates and facilities have also now factored this build into the business plan for sports here at the University. It is also explicitly detailed in the RUSU sports strategy, which means that RUSU and its officers will continue to support the project for the foreseeable future.

Appendix A: Usage calculations (by SportsPark)

Usage Winter Term			
Bookings	Players	Weeks	Total
7	24	20	3360
5	24	20	2400
10	24	20	4800
7	24	20	3360
4	24	20	1920
8	24	20	3840
6	24	20	2880
			22560

Usage Winter Outside Term			
Bookings	Players	Weeks	Total
4	24	10	960
5	24	10	1200
2	24	10	480
4	24	10	960
3	24	10	720
			4320

Usage Summer			
Bookings	Players	Weeks	Total
1	24	20	480
			480
Total STP Usage			27360

Cricket Usage Summer			
Bookings	Players	Weeks	Total
4	22	18	1584

Calculated 3G use

Current use

Student Quotes

- **Tim Stiles, Lacrosse President** - *“The growth of our club has been stunted due to the lack of facilities, constantly we have players leaving the club due to the lack of a 2nd men’s team and therefore their lack of playing time. However, the only reason we do not have another men’s team and therefore getting more people involved is due to the lack of astro-turf facilities at the University. A 3G pitch would also allow us to play matches on an extra facility, rather than travelling to the local club as we have often done in previous sessions. There is often too any avoidable minor injuries whilst playing on the astro-turf pitch that wouldn’t occur if playing on a 3G pitch.”*
- **Harry Dobson, Mixed Lacrosse Captain** – *“Having a 3G pitch would not only benefit mixed lacrosse but lacrosse in Reading as well. Lacrosse is extremely hard to do as there are no permanent facilities that have lacrosse pitch markings in Reading. This puts pressure on every single competing team, including the local team, Reading Wildcats. Having a 3G pitch build would not only benefit other sports, but would really allow lacrosse at the university to expand and excel, drawing sporting excellence to the University of Reading and potentially increasing visibility of the Reading Knights brand. A 3G pitch would allow all of our fixtures and training to go ahead as planned and would never mean that either would be postponed or cancelled. It would also benefit the community as the local lacrosse teams currently train on unmarked half pitches in Whitley whilst other sports training occurs at the same time, hindering teams ability to reach their maximum potential. This pitch would be the absolute starting point of putting Reading back in the running for succeeding in Lacrosse, and would be the beginning of the expansion of sports in the area”*
- **Ella Povey, Women’s Rugby Union President** – *“A 3G pitch would provide additional training space for all sports clubs which is only a good thing. Whilst rugby is more suited to grass, it could free up space for rugby to train by providing other sports with other options. It would be a great option for rugby to use the 3G facilities in very cold and bad conditions so that training can still continue. Sports are a big side to many student lives and more investment into facilities is great.”*
- **Ed Williams, Men’s Football President** – *“Multiple times this year we have had nowhere to train as pitches are booked, leading us to training on Fridays on the 5-a side pitches when we are an 11-a side squad. I was shocked that a University this size does not have a 3G and it is an investment that is desperately needed at Reading. This would also give the pitches more time to rest as there would not be as many fixtures on the grass meaning they would be in a better condition.”*
- **Henry Conen, Men’s Rugby Union President** – *“Having a 3G pitch will benefit student involvement for rugby massively. Due to the limited capacity of current facilities half of the club have to train on facilities elsewhere. Having the 3G pitch will allow us to train on campus and increase participation.”*

- **Rhys Davies, Men's Rugby League President** – *“We've had a number of games cancelled this year due to the conditions of the pitches we are expected to play on. With a 3G pitch the grounds will not become as much of a problem. Also, we can use the 3G to train instead of the paddock which isn't an adequate training ground for a team who wishes to grow.”*
- **James Hegarty, American Football President** – *“A 3G is great for American Football as grass pitches often become ruined in centre where linemen play but with a 3G facility this doesn't happen. It also allows for better running and making sharp cuts (changes of direction) with less chance of slipping or falling over. This is a facility that is very much in demand and should be invested in by the University.”*
- **Emily Ackland, Women's Hockey President** – *“Alongside having recently introduced a Ladies 4th team for hockey, as a club, we are really struggling for pitch and training time. The 3G pitch would open up space on the astro-turf pitch and would mean the University Hockey Club could further strengthen and grow in numbers.”*
- **Fergus Jones, Men's Hockey President** – *“Having a 3G pitch would have a huge impact on the hockey club. It would lead to a lower demand for the astro turf because of other clubs playing on the 3G pitch. This would allow us to play a whole club on a Monday and Thursday instead of training being dispersed throughout the day as well as train more often.”*
- **Jake Brett, Mixed Hockey President** – *“With so many sports clubs vying for time slots on the AstroTurf pitch it becomes difficult to get enough training sessions and book matches, we've already had to cut down the length of our Wednesday training sessions. A new 3G pitch facility will free up more time slots on the astro meaning we can train more often and improve our team further.”*

Why the 3G was put forward in the first place

As a University of our size, we are lacking in sport facilities- this was shown in the SUMS sports benchmark report. There have been numerous complaints about the lack of a 3G pitch, from both students and our sports coaches. Something needs to be done to meet the requirements of current students. At the start of the year through Change It! there was a proposal to continue to lobby the University for the build of a pitch.

“I want RUSU to continue lobbying the University to continue lobbying the University to construct a 4G astro facility, fully equipped with regulation markings for Lacrosse, Rugby, Football and American football.”

The problem is that our sporting facilities are at capacity; UoR sports clubs are suffering as a consequence of this. There is not only a lack of available training time on suitable grounds, but the quality of the grounds that clubs are expected to play on is insufficient through many months of the year. The grass areas, especially the paddock, which are used extensively for training often become unplayable in the winter months of the year, due to over usage, thus general wear and tear, as well as rain. Eventually this causes the ground to be unusable. A 3G pitch wouldn't be destroyed by constant usage, would be floodlit, and would be useable in all weather.

The Sport Benchmarking Comparator Report, commissioned by UoR and Oxford Brookes concluded that our provision of artificial pitches is poor: the only other University included in the study to have only one artificial pitch was the University of Leicester. If we don't increase sports facilities provisions, participation in sport and recreation will fall below the average compared to other comparable universities. We do not have the current facilities to continue to increase participation at the rate we have been up until now. The creation of this pitch is essential to grow the number and diversity of students participating in sport, in line with RUSU's goal of 50% of students participating in sport by 2026, and the University's Active Campus strategy.