

Degrees of change

Many universities are investing in state-of-the-art gym facilities with fantastic kit and specialist training for staff. But why go to all this bother for a load of students? Emma Procter looks at two prominent universities, Newcastle and Liverpool, who have really taken up the health and fitness mantle.

This Summer expect to start seeing many of the students and staff at Newcastle University looking a bit leaner and maybe having more of a spring in their step as they head towards the lecture halls...By then the university will have a new, high-quality gym suite which will include: premium line Sygnum Strength, top range CV and even Cardio Theater – the world's leader in audio visual entertainment systems.

It is a sign of the times that universities have to take on a more corporate mentality – new enrollers are not just new students, they are new customers. And with all the pressure to attract these new customers and therefore gain the associated funds, universities have to really showcase what they offer. Thus the sudden surge in investment in fantastic gym facilities.

Although obviously not every prospective student will be drawn in by a top-of-the-range fitness suite – there is a steady increase in those interested in a healthy lifestyle so it's the canny gym managers who are now pushing for expansion and improvement.

Students are becoming increasingly more calculating in their purchasing decisions regarding choice of University and course. The University must create an 'expectation level' to attract newcomers, deliver on this expectation when they are at



University by giving a quality 'student experience' and then allow former students to pass this message on once they leave.

Colin Blackburn, Newcastle's Deputy Director of the Centre for Physical Recreation and Sport, believes that their new Precor facilities will be a great boost for all concerned. He admits though, that the university took it's time deciding exactly what it wanted. "It had to be light, spacious and with air-conditioning – able to accommodate 120 stations comfortably with good site lines for supervision". He added "It had to be functional to a wide range of users, from the Olympic athlete to the recreational user – without either party being intimidated by the environment".

Meanwhile, at Liverpool University, their new impressive Precor suite – which covers 450 square metres – is nearly up-and-running, and everyone is ambitious for the future. They believe that the new development will have definite pulling power when it comes to getting new students to enrol and will generally add to Liverpool University's reputation as fantastic centre for sport and fitness.

And Liverpool has also placed an emphasis on making the gym totally user-friendly to disabled users. This is an issue often overlooked or given low priority, so Bryan Kelly, Liverpool's Health and Fitness Development Manager, believes that a DDA compliant facility could be a real selling point. He explained "I personally have experience of working with people with disabilities within sport and take every opportunity to promote health and fitness to all. I have looked at a lot of the access

issues highlighted by the Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI) and tried to incorporate them into the Health and Fitness Suite once again helped with IFI accredited equipment. We are also currently reviewing all DDA requirements within the sport centre and expect to push accessibility and participation to promote an inclusive environment and not just conform to reasonable adjustment". He added "This is a very exciting time for us".

And more and more are coming on board the fitness investment train. Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen recently installed the gym management system, FitLinxx, in combination with Precor equipment, in its new £11million sports centre. The students will be the primary users of the centre, but it will also be used for academic purposes by incorporating it in the Sports Science Degree syllabus. The university believes that along with providing an additional revenue stream in the future, it will offer something to prospective members that differentiates them from local competition.

So if, as new evidence suggests, fit and healthy individuals have better mental capability and achieve higher grades, then maybe it's safe to expect an increase in the number of rocket scientists and brain surgeons coming out the British universities in the not-so-distant future.

PRECOR^{USA}
move beyond™

0118 973 3994
info@precor.co.uk

