



Annex A – Studentship Application Form

<p>Title of proposed research – Health & Wellbeing pathway</p>
<p>The impact on QoL of kitesurfing for disabled people: a mixed methods study</p>
<p>Your research proposal.</p> <p>IMPORTANT: There is a <u>strict</u> 1300-word limit, fully inclusive of everything except references. This includes all the written text, quotes, in-line citations, section headers, captions, the contents of tables and any foot-/endnotes. Each figure/graphic should be counted as equivalent to 200 words. Tables should be counted as the number of words they contain. Proposals that are found to be overlength will be rejected. Remember that if you are applying to one of our interdisciplinary programmes, a clearly articulated interdisciplinary approach should be evident.</p>
<p>Background</p> <p>Disability is a major global health and human rights issue (1), with an estimated 1.5 billion disabled people worldwide (2). Quality of life (QoL) is an interdisciplinary concept affected in a complex way by key indicators such as physical health, psychological state and social relationships (3). Yet, when compared to people without disabilities, disabled people are at greater risk of developing health problems including, overweight and obesity (4), have a 3.7-fold higher incidence of depression (5) and experience loneliness and social isolation at significantly higher rates (6) resulting in decreased quality of life (QoL)(7-8). Regular physical activity (PA) and participation in sports can expand disabled people’s social networks, develop relationships and improve their physical and psychological health (9). Disabled people are twice as likely to be inactive when compared to non-disabled people with 43% of all disabled adults doing less than 30 minutes of PA a week, well below the current government PA guidelines of 150-300 minutes (10-11). The PA levels of disabled people have also been disproportionately affected during the COVID-19 pandemic (12). Given the serious public health implications of physical inactivity and its impact on QoL, it is imperative to find novel ways of engaging disabled people in PA (13), providing solutions that can align with ESRC priorities.</p>



There is growing evidence to suggest the health benefits of participating in lifestyle sports for disabled people, including improving PA levels (14), psychological benefit (15-17) and therapeutic interventions (18-19). Lifestyle sports are different from traditional sports in that they are not governed by rules and regulations (20) and thus have the potential to include people traditionally associated with low sporting participation such as disabled people (21). Kitesurfing is a lifestyle sport that combines surfing, kite flying and wakeboarding. The unique characteristics of kitesurfing mean that it can be performed by people of any age, gender or physical fitness level. The development of adaptive kitesurfing equipment and the promotion of entry level courses for disabled people create an opportunity for the sport to be promoted recreationally as well as implemented therapeutically across a large demographic.

Rationale

Lifestyle sports' power to affect health and wellbeing make it an extremely crucial area of research for disabled people. I have conducted a scoping review on this topic, (submitted to the Journal of Sport for Development), identifying 57 studies, across 7 different lifestyle sports, all showing positive impacts between participation and physical and mental health. The majority of studies were on watersports (68%) with prominent benefits coming from the effects of surfing (waves) and sailing (wind). There was a complete lack of research on new and emerging lifestyle sports such as kitesurfing, which harnesses both of these elements. A key finding was how lifestyle sports could improve socialisation for some disabled people with benefits ranging from greater friendships to improved homelife. Overall studies mainly focused on a single health outcome, for example 75% of the studies reported mental health benefits, highlighting a need for more lifestyle sports' research that examines interdisciplinary benefits across health in order to understand the broader impact on QoL.

My Phd proposes to address these limitations by adopting an interdisciplinary approach that simultaneously considers how the physical, psychological and sociological health outcomes found from kitesurfing interact to improve QoL for disabled people. The study will identify the benefits of kitesurfing across health disciplines and the challenges and barriers to participation, the benefits to family and caregivers, the outcomes in different settings, and the



effectiveness of new therapeutic interventions. It is an exciting time for kitesurfing as it will become an Olympic sport in Paris 2024 and to date, no research has been conducted on the benefits, despite its popularity.

The proposed mixed methods study will be interdisciplinary in method, supervision and objectives (22). The success of this project will be based upon how objective measurements of QoL, such as physical fitness tests, interact with more subjective measures such as mental health and socialisation (objectives 1-3) to offer a more holistic indicator of the effect of kitesurfing on QoL (23). I am aware of the ethical issues arising with research on my chosen population and the potential challenges in recruiting participants and running interventions for an 'extreme sport'. Having been a kitesurfer myself for the last 12 years, I will be able to utilise contacts and key stakeholders such as kitesurfing professionals (objective 1) and kitesurfing schools to help access participants and run my own intervention (objective 3). I will also work in collaboration with a non-profit organisation, evaluating their ground-breaking therapeutic kitesurfing programmes for adolescents with developmental disabilities (see letter of support). This allows me to address these participant issues, provides the platform for me to develop my knowledge on this exciting new area, and ultimately to disseminate evidence through their networks. Progress across the PhD will be overseen by a project advisory group; Jeff Lambert (psychology), Charlie Foster (epidemiology) and Simon Hayhoe (sociology/disability) with whom I wish to learn and share knowledge across the disciplines.

Objectives and methods

Objective 1: A phenomenological exploration of the impact of kitesurfing on physical health for disabled kitesurfers.

Method 1: A qualitative study using a small cohort of adaptive kitesurfers. Data will be collected in-person and through online interviews. Thematic analysis will be utilised to highlight key areas.



Objective 2: An evaluation of the effectiveness of kitesurf therapy for adolescents with developmental disability.

Method 2: Working in collaboration with the University Cattolica, Milan, this will be a qualitative study exploring the effects of kitesurf therapy camps using participants enrolled on their programmes. Data will be collected over 4 months via focus groups, pre and post-test, with thematic analysis then conducted.

Objective 3: What are the physical, psychological and socialisation benefits of kitesurfing for disabled people.

Method 3: A small-scale intervention, recruiting participants through disability groups, sport and recreation groups, therapy services, special schools and sporting institutions. A mixed methods approach will be used, quantitatively examining physical health (Brockport Physical Fitness Test) and psychological wellbeing (PWB) pre and post-test. Socialisation benefits will be qualitatively measured via focus groups. Overall QoL will be measured by qualitative interviews with family / caregivers. The intervention will run for 1 month over 4 weekends utilising a time series data collection method.

Potential impact

My interdisciplinary and multiphase PhD will be a first of its kind project on kitesurfing for disabled people, aiming to provide insights that are genuinely innovative. I hope primarily to improve the QoL of disabled people by encouraging participation in a sport that could have multiple health benefits. I will conclude with a list of recommendations for kite schools and government on the health benefits of kitesurfing and how it should be utilised for best practice. This can act as a catalyst to enhance provision of adaptive equipment and promote government funding. Key benefits experienced will be captured using video footage and interviews, delivered via social media to governments, disability sports groups and sports providers, ultimately encouraging a more active lifestyle for disabled people at risk of not meeting government PA guidelines.



The therapeutic effects of kitesurfing found from this study, specifically related to psychological wellbeing, may result in the sport becoming socially prescribed, offering a fun and alternative method of treatment for an at-risk population. My PhD can act as a framework for this development. This research has the potential to enable kitesurfing to join other sports which are now being used around the world for therapy.

The PhD will benefit key stakeholders whilst having an international collaborative element that enables learning from other organisations and institutions. Evidence from my research can help improve local business and even develop an Olympic and Paralympic pathway to participation. I will be conducting overseas fieldwork and continuing to develop my skills throughout this research project with an overseas institutional visit, delivering research that benefits both parties.

Word count : 1299

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