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Sport students' experiences of teaching and learning in the United Kingdom: A comparison between further and higher education settings

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ABSTRACT

Few studies have investigated teaching and learning experiences of university sports students which is surprising considering the high annual numbers recruited to sport degree programmes and consequent non-completion rates. This study compared teaching and learning experiences of 350 first-year sport students at a post-92 English University with how they were taught at their further education institutions. Key findings showed the teaching and learning methods at university were less structured and tutor-led but with more teaching staff involved. Practical implications for developing rich modes of university provision that best support the needs and expectations of newly arrived sports students are provided.

1. Introduction

1.1. University student expectations

With the British government's categorising of students as 'customers' (Dearing, 1997) and introduction of tuition fees in the late 1990's, English higher education institutions (HEIs) have since operated under increased forces of marketisation (Bunce, Baird, & Jones, 2017), resulting in many students now adopting a consumer-based identity towards their university education (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006; Balloo, Pauli, & Worrell, 2017; Kreig, 2013). Much of the existing literature shows how student expectations are complex constructs with many contributing factors (Tomlinson, Simpson, & Killingback, 2023) and that engagement, attendance and achievement in higher education (HE) is more likely to be positive and longer lasting when their teaching and learning expectations are fully met (Byrne, Flood, Hassall, Joyce & Montano, 2012; Guzmán, Gomez, & Santelices, 2021; Voss, Gruber, & Szmigin, 2007). But there is also good evidence of a mismatch between student expectations and what universities can realistically provide and how this can lead to consequent disengagement, under-achievement and discontinuing of studies (Tomlinson et al., 2023; Turner et al., 2017).

Students now commonly enter HEIs with an unrealistic understanding of what is expected of them academically (Gill, 2020) and face different approaches to teaching, learning and assessment than they have been used too in their previous secondary and further education settings (Money et al., 2017). These tend typically to be more structured and tutor-led than at university, with fewer

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teaching staff involved and where groups are small enough for everybody to know one another (Belfield, Britton, Dearden, & van der Erve, 2017). Newly arrived HE students have also reported lacking in self-regulation skills (Jonker, Elferink-Gemser, & Visscher, 2011), difficulty with managing own learning and workload (Pather & Boii, 2018; Rowley, Hartley, & Larkin, 2008) having insufficient understanding of what degree level learning entails (Farhat, Bingham, Caulfield, & Grieve, 2017; Lowe & Cook, 2003) being unfamiliar with independent learning and the important role it can play in academic success (Hockings, Thomas, Ottaway, & Jones, 2018) and having limited experience of learning collaboratively, thinking critically and communicating in front of large audiences (Hayman, 2017, 2018; Hockings et al., 2018; McMillan, 2013). Formal lectures are also ranked as the most expected teaching and learning method at university (Maloshonok & Terentev, 2017; Sander, Stevenson, King, & Coates, 2000).

Research further highlights how students often expect to face difficulties in balancing their study and work commitments (Hassel & Ridout, 2018), are more likely to engage if there is a perceived assessment benefit (Stokes & Martin, 2008), assume for all timetabled lessons to be enjoyable and interesting (Borghini, Mainardes & Silva, 2016) and that they must spend significant periods of time each week completing directed readings and summative assessments (Maloshonok & Terentev, 2017; Pather & Dorasamy, 2018). Students also have high demands of their academic tutors, expecting them to have subject expertise (Crisp et al., 2009; Pather & Dorasamy, 2018; Scutter, Palmer, Luzeckyj, Burke da Silva, & Brinkworth, 2011) and outstanding digital literacy (Crisp et al., 2009) and time management skills (Rowley et al., 2008).

1.2. Sport student expectations of university education

Whilst there has been a continual growth over the past two decades in the number and types of sport degrees in the UK, with 125 universities now offering 639 programmes across undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Universities UK, 2024), sports programmes are ranked below national benchmarks for numbers of students projected to successfully obtain a degree, with only 74% graduating in 2022 compared with the sector average of 85% (HESA, 2022).

An emerging body of work over the past decade has investigated sports students' expectations and experiences of university life. Gill (2017) found that sports students had a largely positive transition from further education into a post-92 HEI but encountered some difficulties with managing the crossing of both institutional and programme boundaries and negotiating a new academic culture. Further research exploring the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of sport and exercise students and their forthcoming transition to an HEI found that they expected to encounter academic challenges when progressing to university and successfully integrating within the systems and processes (Gill, 2020). Further evidence has shown how first year HE sports students felt anxious about the transition period and encountered difficulties with managing workload, having the confidence to seek academic support (2021), learning independently and completing assessments to expected standards (Gill, 2019).

Hayman et al., (2022) found first-year sports students entered HE feeling underprepared for the teaching and assessment methods that they were likely to face, including getting to grips with assessment requirements, managing workload, understanding subject knowledge and dealing with exams. Further quantitative and qualitative evidence shows how first year HE sports students encountered difficulties with completing assessments to expected academic standards and learning independently (Gill, 2019), but engaged positively when provided with opportunities to discuss ideas, solve problems and to share and reflect upon personal experiences of playing, coaching and observing sport (Groves, Bowd, & Smith, 2010; Hayman, 2017; Peters, Jones, & Peters, 2008). More recently, Hayman, Coyle, Wharton, and Mellor (2020) found how first-year sport students were likely to be strategic learners on entry to university (e.g., assessment focussed), expecting immediate access to approachable academic staff that taught them regularly and provide summative assessment support when required.

1.3. Study context, rationale and objectives

This study was undertaken at an English HEI (hereafter referred to as DLH). DLH was one of the first institutions in Britain to offer sport degree courses and over a 40-year period has expanded its provision to depict the current sport industry and the diverse range of careers now available to graduates. From 1979 with a founding Sport Studies degree, the discipline has grown to meet industry demands and there is now a pathway for academic study across 5 undergraduate and 4 postgraduate degree programmes. DLH has long encountered retention issues in first year undergraduate sport students. This has increased over the past decade as significantly larger proportions of students have enrolled on programmes each year from backgrounds not typically considered traditional and who may need greater levels of academic support and guidance to settle and adapt into university life. Few studies have explored the teaching and learning experiences of university sports students, which is surprising considering both the high annual numbers recruited to English HEI sport programmes and consequent non-completion rates. This study responds directly to several years of low retention and progression rates across first year sport degree programmes at an English post 1992 HEI. Building on the recommendations of Tomlinson et al. (2023), the aim was to specifically examine the teaching and learning experiences of first year sport degree students who had recently enrolled at a post-92 English HEI and then compare directly with how they were taught at their respective further education institutions.

Specifically, the study investigated the following objectives.

1. What are sports students preferred teaching formats at university?
2. Are there differences in sports students preferred communication methods with tutors at college/sixth form (CSF) vs university?
3. What skills do sports students view as necessary to be successful on their university course?
4. Are there comparisons in the teaching resources utilised by sports students at CSF vs university?

Findings will provide recommendations that will help ensure the most effective approaches to teaching and learning in HE sports degree programmes are used to support positive outcomes for a wide and diverse demographic of learners with contrasting needs, motivations and abilities, including greater numbers from non-traditional, first generation and vocational backgrounds.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

Of 535 eligible participants, 350 (66%) completed the current study, representing 238 (68%) males and 112 (32%) females. The majority of participants were aged 18 or 19 ($n = 301$, 86%) and Caucasian ($n = 298$, 85%). The participants were studying A level ($n = 161$, 47%) or BTEC courses ($n = 70$, 20%), a combination of both ($n = 74$, 21%) or other ($n = 42$, 12%) Participants were mostly enrolled full-time (97%) in these courses at sixth form (67%), compared to college (26%). BTEC Nationals and A-Levels are widely recognised level 3 qualifications that enable entry into higher education settings within the United Kingdom. BTEC's are vocational and renowned for providing specialist and applied work-related learning across a range of sectors whereas A-Levels offer more traditional subjects and class-based approaches to teaching and assessment. Demographics of each programme included in the analysis can be seen in [Table 1](#).

2.2. Procedure

In late October 2023, all newly arrived DHL first year undergraduate and foundation sport students were invited to participate in the study (see [Table 1](#)). Once institutional ethical clearance was granted, an initial recruitment email briefly outlining the study aims, objectives and procedures to follow, along with participant information sheet and consent form were communicated by the first author on individual sport programme sites via the online Blackboard portal. Prior to data collection, consenting participants were informed how they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without providing any reasoning and assigned numbers to protect anonymity.

Surveys were completed during teaching weeks six and seven of semester one (mid- November 2023). This took place at the start of several face-to-face generic sport module lectures that were delivered to first-year undergraduate and foundation sport programmes within the university department. Participants were briefed to answer each section honestly and to leave any questions blank which they did not fully understand. Two members of the research team attended each of the six separate data collection sessions, distributed then collected completed hardcopies of surveys and responded to any participant queries.

2.3. Design and analysis

The study design employed a quantitative approach. The survey structure was developed by the research team and informed by previous HE transitional studies (e.g., [Gill, 2017, 2020](#); [Hayman, Allin, & Coyles, 2017](#)) which had identified several relatable variables and key demographics. The survey comprised mainly closed questions to ensure prompt and simple completion, including a mix of yes or no and likert scale options. There were no correct or incorrect answers. The survey was piloted with 4 s-year sport undergraduate students which established an approximate completion time of 10 min, with all wording considered appropriate and understandable for first-year undergraduate and foundation cohorts. In the survey, participants provided responses to five separate sections addressing: (A) background demographic information including gender, age, ethnicity, previous study experience and qualifications (B) experiences of completing their further education qualifications at CSF (C) expectations and experiences to date of their university sports degree programme and (D) skills they perceived as necessary to be successful on their university course and (E) teaching resources they utilised within their further education and university studies to date. A copy of the survey is available on request from the first author.

Descriptive statistics (median) were obtained for the Likert scale responses and the frequency data was explored using Chi Square test of independence to establish any programme of study difference. Statistical testing could only take place where there was a sufficient number of responses ($n > 5$). Level of significance was set at $P < 0.05$. Cramer's V test was run to calculate effect size for any significant findings with $>.25$ very strong, $>.15$ strong, $>.10$ moderate and $>.05$ weak association.

3. Results

3.1. Objective 1: what are sports students preferred teaching styles and formats at university

When asked what format of teaching provision they had thus far enjoyed the most at university, 35% ($n = 123$) stated group seminars involving 10–20 people, 33% ($n = 116$) stated classroom lectures, 18% ($n = 63$) stated practical sessions, 6% ($n = 21$) most enjoyed smaller group seminars of less than 6 people and 7% ($n = 25$) most liked laboratory sessions. Significant programme differences with very strong effect sizes were observed for group seminars (>10 people) ($X^2(5) = 39.9$; $P < 0.001$; Cramer V = .330) and laboratory sessions ($X^2(5) = 38.76$; $P < 0.001$; Cramer V = .335). Practical sessions imply a programme difference but insufficient number of responses for some programmes prevented statistical comparisons ([Fig. 1](#)). Exploring the programme frequency distributions, it can be observed that physiotherapy students favour practical sessions over other formats unlike the sport programmes. No other significant differences were observed.

Table 1
Respondent demographics of each programme included in the study. In brackets is the % of the programme cohort sample.

		Sport Exercise Nutrition	Physio-therapy	Sport Coaching	Sport and Exercise Science	Sport Management	Sport Foundation
Total Responses		31 (9%)	56 (16%)	55 (15%)	104 (30%)	62 (18%)	42 (12%)
Gender	Male	21 (69%)	16 (28%)	41 (76%)	74 (71%)	52 (84%)	33 (80%)
	Female	9 (31%)	40 (62%)	13 (24%)	30 (29%)	9 (16%)	8 (20%)
Age (years)	18–19	26 (87%)	47 (83%)	46 (85%)	91 (88%)	55 (88%)	32 (78%)
	20–21	3 (10%)	7 (13%)	7 (13%)	9 (8%)	6 (10%)	8 (20%)
	22–25	1 (3%)	1 (2%)	–	4 (4%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
	26–34	–	–	1 (2%)	–	–	–
	34+	–	1 (2%)	–	–	–	–
Ethnicity	White	29 (97%)	52 (93%)	46 (85%)	87 (84%)	48 (77%)	35 (86%)
	Asian	1 (3%)	3 (5%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)	2 (3%)	1 (2%)
	Black	–	–	1 (2%)	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	2 (5%)
	Other	–	–	6 (11%)	9 (9%)	9 (15%)	3 (7%)
	Prefer not to say	–	1 (2%)	–	–	1 (2%)	–

The majority of respondents ($n = 201$, 60%) stated that the duration of taught classroom-based lessons at CSF lasted 1–2 h and practical's either 30 minutes–1 hour ($n = 147$, 42%) or 1–2 h ($n = 154$, 44%). This is in agreement with the typical duration experienced by students attending university. When asked about the structure of the teaching delivery on CSF programmes, students reported that they had either 1 ($n = 70$, 20%), 2 ($n = 116$, 33%), or more than 3+ ($n = 74$, 21%) staff teaching on a particular subject or that staff numbers varied between subjects ($n = 102$, 29%).

3.2. Objective 2: are there differences in sports students preferred communication methods with tutors at CSF vs university

When exploring what communication methods were used to communicate with academic staff, emails were reported to be the most common method at both CSF ($n = 308$, 88%) and university ($n = 326$, 93%) followed by conversations before or after a taught session (CSF $n = 203$, 58%; University $n = 109$, 31%) and 'knock on the door' (CSF $n = 214$, 61%; University $n = 25$, 7%). Significant differences with very strong effect sizes were observed for 'before and after taught sessions' ($X^2(1) = 51.97$; $P < 0.001$; Cramer $V = .272$), 'pre-booked tutorials' ($X^2(1) = 26.87$; $P < 0.001$; Cramer $V = .196$) and 'knock on the door' ($X^2(1) = 205.1$; $P < 0.001$; Cramer $V = .540$). No other significant differences were observed (Fig. 2).

Significant differences with very strong effect sizes were observed for the preferred communication methods depending on the student's programme of study (Before/after a taught session ($X^2(5) = 32.62$; $P < 0.01$; Cramer $V = .332$); Email ($X^2(5) = 44.78$; $P < 0.01$; Cramer $V = .271$). Physiotherapy students preferred to communicate with tutors before or after a taught session ($n = 175$, 50%) rather than emails ($n = 151$, 43%). This contrasts with the other sports programmes who all preferred using email to communicate with tutors (60%–74%). No other significant differences were observed (Fig. 3.).

There was a significant shift away from participants communicating with their academic tutors on a daily ($X^2(1) = 167.23$; $P < 0.001$, Cramer $V = .246$) or weekly ($X^2(1) = 134.67$; $P < 0.001$, Cramer $V = .301$) basis at university (14%) compared to CSF (49%). University students were also found to communicate with tutors significantly more on a monthly (CSF 16%; University 37%; $X^2(1) = 143.55$; $P < 0.001$, Cramer $V = .298$), and 'when they needed too' basis at university (CSF 11%; university 25%; $X^2(1) = 86.12$; $P < 0.001$, Cramer $V = .184$) (Fig. 4.). There were no significant programme variations to this trend.

3.3. Objective 3: what skills do sports students view as necessary to be successful on their university course?

Over 90% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed to the statements that to be successful on their university course they will need to 'attend most of my taught sessions' (median; 4.67), 'have high quality teaching' (4.56), 'take responsibility for my own learning' (4.55), 'be an independent learner' (4.44), 'have excellent time management skills' (4.33) and 'have enthusiastic and motivated tutors' (4.34). Over 85% of participants either strongly agreed or agreed to the following statements: 'have excellent organisation skills' (4.25), 'reach out to my tutors when I need help' (4.29), 'have critical thinking skills' (4.22) and 'have excellent communication skills' (4.21). Over 70% of students either strongly agreed or agreed to the statements; 'be good at goal-setting' (4.08), 'have state of the art facilities' (3.93). The lowest ranked statements were 'have excellent technology skills' (3.72) and 'have combination of face to face and online teaching' (3.58) (Fig. 5).

3.4. Objective 4: are there comparisons in the teaching resources utilised by sports students at CSF vs university

In the university setting, students experienced significantly less pen and paper tasks ($X^2(1) = 132.76$, $P < 0.001$, Cramer $V = .444$) and significantly more online ($X^2(1) = 29.82$, $P < 0.001$, Cramer $V = .210$) and pre-recorded sessions ($X^2(1) = 63.46$, $P < 0.001$, Cramer $V = .307$) (See Table 2). In addition, students at university experienced a significant increase in the use of ebooks and journal articles ($X^2(1) = 93.8$, $P < 0.001$, Cramer $V = .373$) and mobile technology for teaching purposes ($X^2(1) = 11.68$, $P < 0.001$, Cramer $V = .132$) but significantly less use of textbooks ($X^2(1) = 41.3$, $P < 0.001$, Cramer $V = .248$). Working in small groups, the amount of face to face taught sessions and the use of virtual reality technology did not show any institutional differences. No programme specific differences were observed.

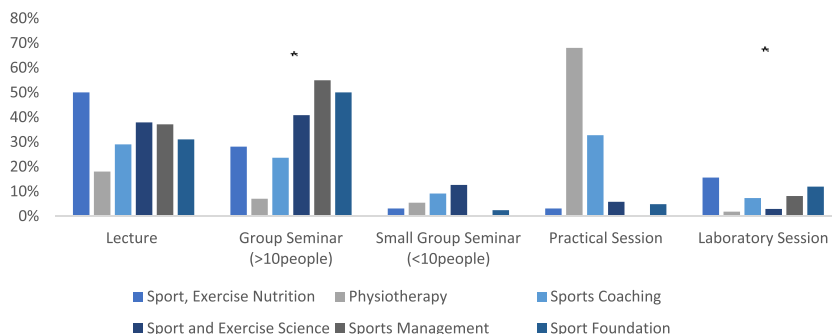


Fig. 1. Sports students preferred teaching style format at university per programme of study. * Indicates significant programme of study difference ($P < 0.05$).

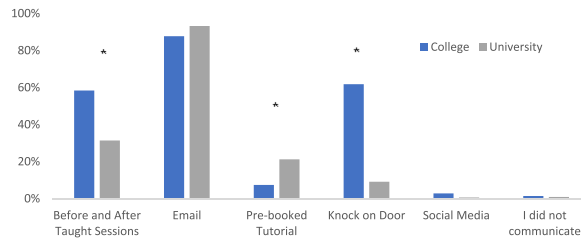


Fig. 2. Methods used by students to communication with academic staff at CSF and University.

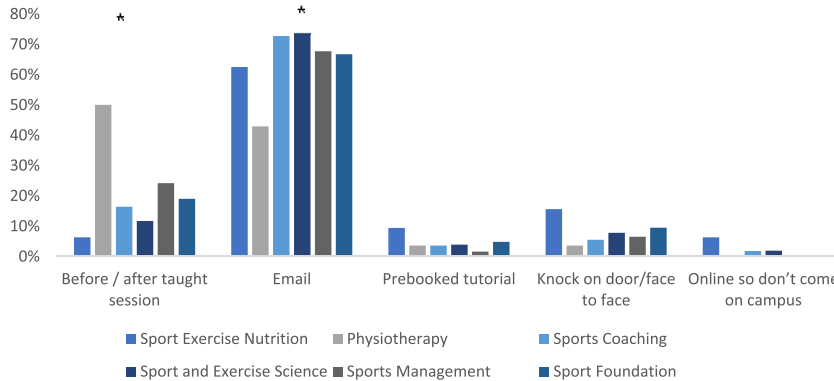


Fig. 3. Sports students preferred communication method with tutors at university. * Indicates a significant programme of study difference ($P < 0.05$).

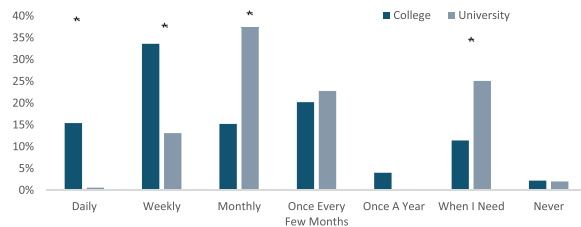


Fig. 4. Students' communication frequency with CSF and university tutors.

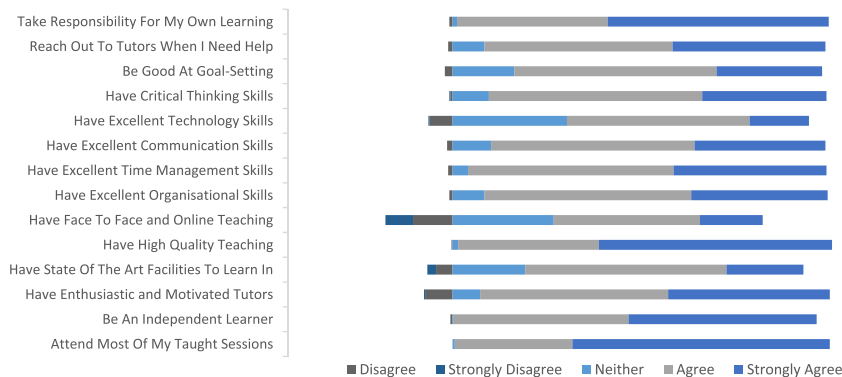


Fig. 5. What skills do you see as necessary to be successful on your university course.?

Table 2
Comparison of teaching resources utilised at CSF vs University (n = 350).

		YES	NO	NO RESPONSE
Old School Pen and Paper ^a	CSF	326 (93%)	16 (5%)	8 (3%)
	University	195 (56%)	143 (41%)	12 (3%)
Working in Small Groups with peers	CSF	302 (86%)	37 (11%)	11 (3%)
	University	293 (84%)	42 (12%)	15 (4%)
Face to Face Taught Sessions	CSF	315 (90%)	24 (7%)	11 (3%)
	University	308 (88%)	28 (8%)	14 (4%)
Online Face to Face Sessions ^a	CSF	191 (54%)	148 (43%)	11 (3%)
	University	256 (73%)	80 (23%)	14 (4%)
Online Pre-Recording Sessions ^a	CSF	104 (30%)	235 (67%)	11 (3%)
	University	204 (58%)	132 (38%)	14 (4%)
Using Hard Copies of Books/Articles ^a	CSF	279 (80%)	60 (17%)	11 (3%)
	University	200 (57%)	136 (39%)	14 (4%)
Using E Books/Journals ^a	CSF	181 (52%)	158 (45%)	11 (3%)
	University	293 (84%)	43 (12%)	14 (4%)
Mobile Technology ^a	CSF	244 (70%)	95 (27%)	11 (3%)
	University	279 (80%)	57 (16%)	14 (4%)
Virtual Reality Technology	CSF	63 (18%)	276 (79%)	11 (3%)
	University	77 (22%)	259 (74%)	14 (4%)

^a Indicates significant of $P < 0.05$.

4. Discussion

This study arose in direct response to several years of high withdrawal and non-continuation rates across first year sports students at a post-92 English HEI. The primary aim was to examine the teaching and learning experiences of current first year sport degree students who had recently enrolled at the institution and then compare directly with how they were taught at their respective CSF.

Some key study findings are already recorded in the literature, such as participants expecting lectures to be the main teaching and learning method (Tomlinson et al., 2023) and having a good understanding of how independent learning and effective time management are necessary to be successful at university (Christie, Barron, & D'Annunzio-Green, 2013). But some important new contributions to the literature also surfaced. For example, we found large differences in how students are taught and what ways they communicate with tutors within CSF and university settings. The teaching and learning methods used at university were found to be generally less structured and tutor-led but with more teaching staff involved than at CSF. Physiotherapy and sport coaching students generally liked and preferred practical teaching sessions the most. This could be linked to varied learning outcomes across courses. Hence physiotherapy and sport coaching have more competency-based learning outcomes which are better taught in such sessions than other programmes, including sports management. There has been significant discussion on the pedagogical efficacy of lectures and their decreasing attendance (Dolnicar, 2005; Loughlin & Lindberg-Sand, 2023). Overall, the lecture was still seen as a viable and enjoyable teaching strategy by study participants.

Research demonstrates how university students have high expectations of being able to access academic staff outside of scheduled teaching classes (Tomlinson et al., 2023). Email was the preferred communication strategy at both CSF and university. When entering university there was a drop in communication with staff after taught sessions. This could be due to reduced average face-to-face contact time per week at university (11 h) vs CSF (22 h). In addition, at university there is an official online booking system for students to arrange meetings with staff. Physiotherapy students stated that their preferred method of communication was face-to-face either before or after taught sessions (50%). This may be explained by the low cohort numbers (capped at 60 in academic year 2023–2024) and having more teaching contact hours than any other sport related degree programme because of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PRSB) accreditation requirements.

Liu and Zhang (2023) outlined that many students are unfamiliar with the freedom that university life entails and being solely responsible for their time management and engaging with independent learning. Over 90% of participants indicated that the self-regulatory skills of attending all taught sessions, taking responsibility for own learning and effective time management were important for academic success. Our, data, unfortunately do not indicate whether students had these self-regulatory skills. However, past research highlights the importance of how newly arrived university students who became increasingly self-regulated and independent learners led to positive academic outcomes (Hockings et al., 2018; Thompson, Pawson, & Evans, 2021) but how the process is a long-term, non-linear transition that is best to start within CSF (Dinsmore, Alexander, & Loughlin, 2008).

There is still limited evidence for the efficacy of online learning within both CSF and university settings. Recent research has indicated that sport students can struggle to fully engage with online delivery of information, that it can reduce connectivity between students and staff and provides lack of opportunity for peer support learning (McCulloch, Allen, Boocock, Peart, & Hayman, 2022). Findings revealed how a mixture of face-to-face and online learning was lowest ranked by students for preferred university teaching styles. The use of virtual reality technology is expensive, time consuming and still some way from being fully utilised at in either CSF or university settings as a viable pedagogy. Although simulation training is becoming recognised as a viable alternative for many health professions, the use of VR does not seem to fill this void in sport related degrees. Participants were increasingly more likely to use ebooks and ejournals at university (84%) than at CSF (52%). This might reflect the significant higher investment by universities in library facilities compared to CSF.

4.1. Recommendations for teaching and learning practice

Some important implications for designing increasingly flexible and relational modes of sport education provision emerged from the study (Su & Wood, 2023). This relationship rich approach to educating (Felten & Lambert, 2020; Gravett, 2023) is likely to better support the academic needs (Hockings et al., 2018) and ease the transition to independent learning of sports students during their time at university, thus improving their learning experience and equipping them with more of the skills that are needed to secure high-quality employment or enter postgraduate study. This is especially the case for the high number of students from widening participation backgrounds now enrolling annually on sports degree programmes across the UK who may be lesser equipped to master the dominant cultural codes and practices in university settings, which 'traditional' students may have already obtained through their prior social, cultural, and educational experience (Chung, Turnbull, & Chur-Hansen, 2017; Reay, 2018; Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2010). This often means that these students arrive at university lacking the behaviours, skills, or ways of interacting necessary for academic success (Ivemark & Ambrose, 2021).

Universities may provide regular workforce development training that support colleagues, regardless of their discipline, standing and career stage, to further improve their understanding and practice of relational pedagogies and suitability for supporting the needs and expectations of university sports students (Bell, 2021; Felten & Lambert, 2020). Secondly, embed the teaching of self-regulatory skills across all components of degree programmes and clearly explain to students the important role that this has to play in developing autonomous and independent learners (Bjork, Dunlosky, & Kornell, 2013; Hattie, 2013). Thirdly, we propose that universities consider offering buddy support groups and/or peer assisted learning schemes too all newly arrived students that provide guidance and opportunities to ask questions on all aspects of academic university life (Hayman, Wharton, Bruce-Martin, & Allin, 2022). This would commence during early semester one and focus on promoting the early stages of self-regulation and helping with preparing for the more independent nature of HE. Fourthly, having smaller staff module teaching teams at university would provide a greater familiarity to students and help with promoting a sense of belonging, connectedness, and confidence to achieve within and outside of taught sessions (Pedler, Willis & Nieuwoudt, 2022). Finally, as the early stages of university transition can be a particularly sensitive time for students, it is important to provide them with additional academic guidance to ensure they have accurate expectations and feel suitably confident, connected, prepared, and supported. Ensuring academic staff are always freely contactable and approachable to field questions and offer clear, accurate and consistent information throughout their first year of studies is advised, especially during the initial weeks of semester one (Gill, 2021).

4.2. Study limitations and future research

This study was not without any limitations. Findings were derived from survey data in which responses relied on both the way questions were presented and participant interpretations of their meaning. For some questions, participants could provide multiple responses making it more difficult to identify the most salient features. Whilst there was only a short recall period to when participants were studying at CSF, recollections may have been liable to forgetting. Additional validation of participant accounts with those from CSF staff (e.g., module and subject leaders, personal tutors) would have strengthened findings. Further research that qualitatively compares the CSF and university teaching and learning experiences of current first year undergraduate sport degree students is also warranted.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights differences between teaching styles and formats experienced by sports students in CSF and university settings. Staff within CSF have a key role to play in managing the expectations of students who are going to university and with starting to fully prepare them for the greater freedoms and student-led teaching and learning environments that they will likely face. The current heavily focussed tutor-led approach to educating within CSF is ill-preparing students for the more student-led learning environments that they are likely to encounter at university. This could lead to student underachievement, dissatisfaction, disengagement and ultimately non-continuation and/or withdrawal.

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CRedit authorship contribution statement

Angela Hibbs: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis. **Rick Hayman:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Elizabeth Fox:** Visualization, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Sean Wilson:** Visualization, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Matthew Timmis:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Conceptualization. **David Stephens:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Remco Polman:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization.

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