

# STAFF ON-SIDE

## APPLIED FOOTBALL STUDIES: MODULE 1

Piloting an accredited sport-based intervention with prisoners.

A Psychosocial Evaluation of the 'Introduction to the Sociology of Football' (PUP385) module.

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Foundation



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Murray, C., Bell, J., McCready, P., Walsh, C., Breslin, G. and Coyle, B. (2022).

Piloting an academically accredited sport-based intervention with prisoners. An Evaluation of the 'Introduction to the Sociology of Football' (PUP385) module.

Ulster University: Belfast

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Understanding of the brief

In August 2020, Ulster University<sup>1</sup> (UU) was commissioned by the Irish Football Association Foundation (IFA) to conduct an evaluation of their 'Stay Onside' programme, which was due to be delivered to prisoners on the separated regime<sup>2</sup> in the high-security Maghaberry prison in March 2021<sup>3</sup>. The delivery of the programme was delayed due to the government-imposed public health restrictions put in place to reduce the spread of the severe acute respiratory syndrome, COVID-19. During the interim 'lockdown' period, the IFA and UU partnered to develop the IFA's existing 'Stay Onside' content into a series of UU accredited Personal and Professional Development (PDD) modules, under the series title: 'Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies'<sup>4</sup>. Upon completion of any one of the Level 4 modules included in the series<sup>5</sup>, participants are awarded 10 credits towards an undergraduate Honours degree at UU. These modules are unique as they are a combined *education and sport-based intervention*. **This report is based upon the evaluation of the first module in the series: *Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PPD385)***, which was delivered to prisoners on the separated regime across six days between November 2021 and March 2022<sup>6</sup>.

The Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series builds upon the 'B9 Review Team Report', chaired by Catherine Bell, whereby recommendation 7.37 suggested that separated prisoners should be offered increased opportunities to "*reduce prisoners' boredom and isolation including life skills and arts, music and sport activities*" (Bell et al., 2019: 27). It also comes at a time when there has been a significant increase in public and political interest in the power of sport to promote social, psychological, and physical well-being (Schulenkorf et al., 2016), with a particular focus on football as the 'hook' to

increase engagement for such interventions (Spaaij, 2013; Ekholm, 2019). In the academic sphere, the benefits of physical activity and sport in promoting social cohesion and psychological well-being have been well-established (Taliaferro et al., 2011; Vella et al., 2018; Luna et al., 2020). However, existing studies have largely focused on the delivery of sport-based programmes in the community setting (see for example Coyle et al., 2022; Murray et al., 2022) with few studies being adequately adopted, conducted, and evaluated in prisons (Woods et al., 2017).

The prisoners that took part in the ***Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PPD385)*** module reside in two self-contained houses in Maghaberry prison. Separated male republican prisoners are housed on two landings in Roe House, while separated male loyalist prisoners are housed on two landings in Bush House. They are separated from both the general prison population and from each other. As the two groups could not be mixed, UU and IFA had to accommodate and deliver two identical sessions (a morning session and an afternoon session) on each occasion they were in the prison, one to the participants in Bush House and one to the participants in Roe House. The sessions were delivered in a two-hour block. The first hour was the academic teaching/lecturing element of the module, it took place in a classroom and consisted of one hour of taught material/classroom-based discussion. Lectures were delivered by UU, IFA, and expert guest speakers, and the topics covered in these sessions included: an introduction to sociology and key definitions; violence, aggression, and football fan behaviour; and identity, bias, and inclusivity in football. The classroom-based sessions were followed by one hour of practical football training and coaching on an outside artificial football pitch, which finished with a small-sided, high-intensity game.

**The general aim of the module was to introduce the sociology of football. In doing so, it considered the role of violence and aggression in football and explored the extent to which football can contribute to health and wellbeing. Intended outcomes of the module focused upon participants' ability to:**

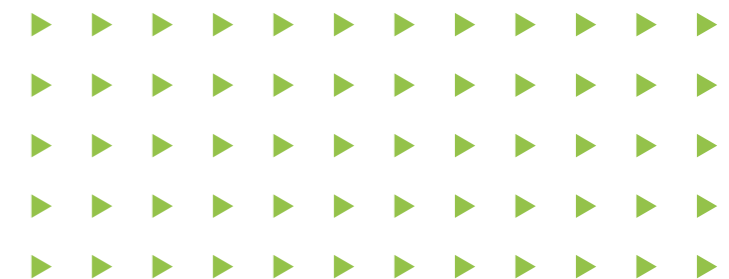
- Apply different sociological theories to analyse the role football plays within society;
- Analyse the role violence and aggression play in football;
- Evaluate, conceptually and empirically, the different intersectional social issues which impact participation and engagement in football; (including issues linked with identity, racism/sectarianism, gender, sexuality and homophobia); and
- Demonstrate sociological knowledge of the importance of sport, sports fandom, community sport and 'place' in late-modern life.

As part of the academic component of the module, participants were expected to conduct approximately 14.5 hours of independent study using assigned module textbooks per week. As part of their commitment to the success of the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series, UU provided two textbooks to every participant that enrolled on the module<sup>7</sup>. Due to the high-security restrictions<sup>8</sup> placed on prisoners on the separated regime, the participants on the module had little access to any form of learning resource (research articles, or online content), and therefore the weekly essential and suggested reading primarily derived from the two books provided to participants.

As with most University accredited modules, academic assessment was a key component of the ***Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PPD385)*** module. For their assessment on the module, participants were tasked with delivering an individual 10-minute presentation on the final week. The topic for the presentation stemmed from the lecture on violence, aggression, and football fan behaviour. Participants were asked to consider the following statement:

**Football has been associated with several forms of violence. Various instances have been recorded implicating players, but such forms of disorder have been more prevalent involving supporters, particularly against fellow fans and the police (Rookwood and Spaaij, 2017: 26).**

Participants' approaches to responding to this statement, and their reflections on their experiences of delivering individual presentations in front of their peers, will be discussed in more detail in section four of this report.



## 1.2 Methodology

The primary aim of this research was to evaluate the **Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PPD385)** module with separated prisoners set against the five research objectives outlined below:

1. to understand participants' experiences and attitudes towards the **Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PPD385)** module;
2. to explore the benefits, and identify areas that could be improved, of the **Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PPD385)** module;
3. to conduct primary research with prisoners and facilitators involved in the **Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PPD385)** module;
4. to assess the impact of the module on prisoner well-being and opportunities for engaging in volunteering, education or employment;
5. to provide material that could potentially contribute to the development of more appropriate policies and practice for education and sport-based interventions in the prison system.

This summative<sup>9</sup> evaluation is based upon qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 10 participants and facilitators from the **Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PPD385)** module which was held with separated prisoners in Maghaberry (n = seven prisoners, n = three module facilitators/organisers). While 11 male prisoners originally started the module in November 2021, only seven completed the module in March 2022 (and reasons for this will be discussed in section four). The prisoners were all adults, aged at least 18 years and over. All the prisoners who finished the module were interviewed after the final session to reflect upon their thoughts and experiences. Ethical approval to conduct the research was secured prior to the commencement of the module via NHS/HSC Research Ethics Committee B alongside the requisite ethics filter committee of the School of Applied Social and Policy Sciences at UU<sup>10</sup>.

Interviews were conducted by the lead author (CM) within the prison setting. These were conducted on a one-to-one basis with prisoners and in a separate room, out of earshot of other participants and module facilitators/organisers. The rationale for holding semi-structured interviews (as opposed to life-history or biographical interviews) was that they are open-ended and allow for participants to help shape the discussion and attempt to some extent to address the power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee (Rubin and Rubin, 1995); however, they retain enough structure with similar questions across the interview schedule to allow for more systemic analysis across the data for recurring core themes (Sarantakos, 2013). Key research questions included:

- What are your experiences of living in the community prior to imprisonment with regard to: participation in sport; education; work; family; community; relationships?
- What have your experiences of life in prison been like, with regard to: participation in sport; education; work; family; community; relationships?
- Do you have any aspirations or concerns for when you leave prison?
- Have these changed since commencing the module?
- What did you hope to get out of the module when you signed up to it?
- What made you want to participate in the first place?
- Did you enjoy the module?
- What aspects did you enjoy the most? What aspects did you enjoy the least?
- Do you feel you have benefited from the module? In what way?
- Are there any areas for improvement?
- Did you make any friends?
- Did any opportunities arise from the module that will support you when you return to the community, for example, through employment or involvement with a local team?

With the fully informed and written consent of participants, interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription and detailed *verbatim* analysis. All interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality and were informed that they may withdraw from the research process at any stage. Throughout this report, module participants have been assigned the designation P with a randomly assigned number between one and seven. The three module facilitators/organisers have simply been assigned the designation F alongside a randomly assigned number between one and three.

Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis software (CAQDAS) in the form of NVivo 12 was utilised to code, organise and analyse the interview data (Bazeley and Jackson, 2014). This software allows for a more efficient coding of themes into differing categories (nodes) which can then be analysed vis-à-vis one another to explore possible connections between the data.

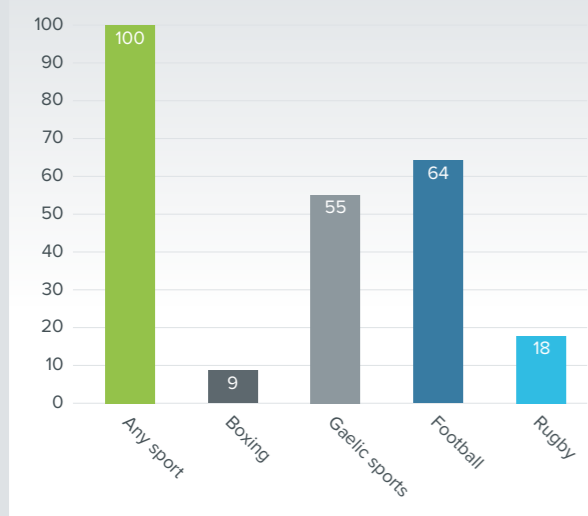
## 1.3 Structure of the report

The remainder of the report is divided into four sections. Section two provides an overview of participant engagement, while section three documents the main findings emerging from the interviews with module participants. These include the impact of the module on knowledge, confidence/communication, behaviour, and physical fitness, alongside its impact on future education and employment pathways for prisoners upon their return to the community. Section four moves on to document some of the challenges encountered during the delivery of the module. These include the impact of Covid-19 and prisoner release on module participation rates; challenges associated with facilities (and lack of IT access for prisoners); recruitment and advertising the module; the academic focus of the module for those less familiar with such modules; and scheduling conflicts with other modules being undertaken by prisoners. Section five concludes the report with a brief discussion of some of the key emerging themes, before offering recommendations to consider prior to the delivery of the module moving forwards.

## 2 OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT

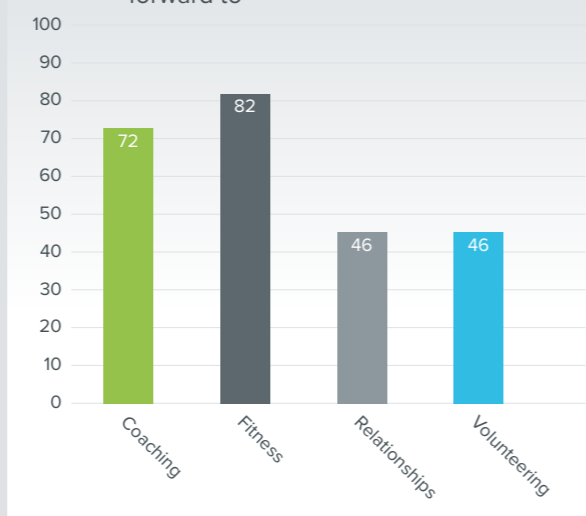
11 male prisoners commenced the module in November 2021. All these participants took part in at least three of the sessions. While only seven were able to complete the module, the information included below reflects the wider cohort that started the module, as opposed to only those that completed the module.

Figure 1. Previous Sporting Experience



The average age of participants was 36-years-old. This ranged between 27- and 42-years-old. Of those, all had previous experience of some type of sport (see fig. 1). Indeed, many had experienced multiple sports. These appear to be limited, however, to four in particular, with football representing the majority.

Figure 2. Aspects of the module most looking forward to



Participants were asked about the aspects of the module that they were most looking forward to. Participants could select multiple responses. The responses varied, but the majority were interested in increasing their fitness levels. Other options included the skills that could be enhanced (e.g., coaching), the opportunities that they could avail of (e.g., volunteering) and the social aspect of the module (relationships). Fig. 2 illustrates the breakdown of these responses.



Participants were also asked about their motivations for signing up to the module. While motivations for enrolling on the module also varied, they clustered around four key themes: boredom; to learn more about a sport; be part of a team and; to 'better' oneself (see fig. 3).

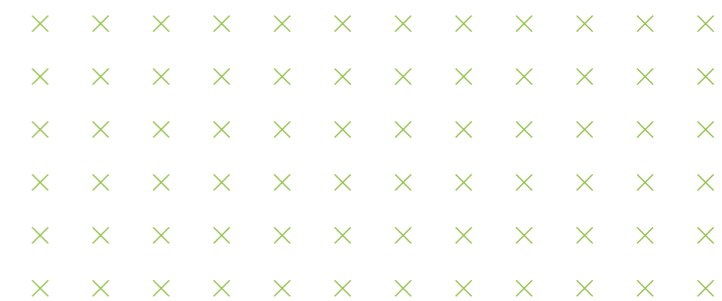
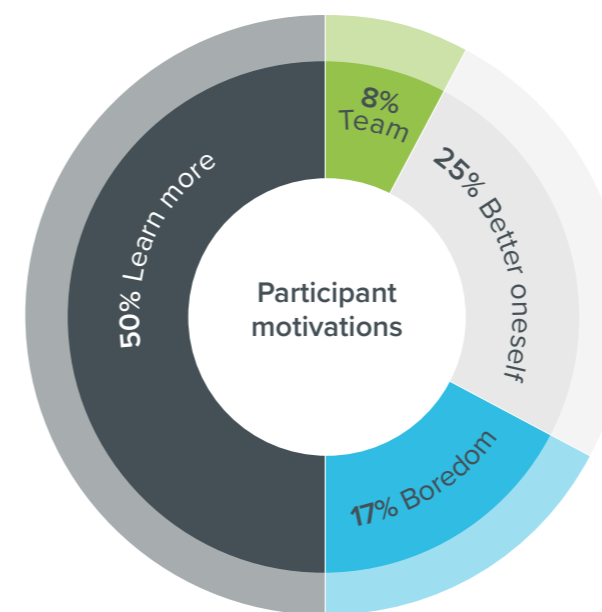


Figure 3. Motivations for enrolling on the module



# 4

## KEY THEMES

- KNOWLEDGE/EDUCATION
- CONFIDENCE/COMMUNICATION/BEHAVIOUR
- PHYSICAL FITNESS/SKILLS
- BUILDING FUTURE PATHWAYS

## 3 EVALUATION FINDINGS

The following section focuses on four key themes from the interview data: impact on knowledge/education; impact on confidence/communication/behaviour; impact on physical fitness/skills; and building future pathways. Arranged in no particular order, these positive impacts will be discussed in turn below<sup>11</sup>.

### 3.1 Impact on Knowledge/Education

One of the key impacts of participation cited by prisoners was the impact that the module had on their levels of knowledge on various facets of the sociology of football. This varied from the impact of commercialisation on supporters of the game in the aftermath of the 1990 Taylor Report, to the current debates on the ‘criminalisation’ of working-class supporters for ‘cultural singing’; to the role of women’s football; and the impact of racism and intolerance on supporters and players. The majority of interviewees were able to discuss, in impressive historical and academic detail, the key themes underpinning the taught sessions:

*‘I know we spoke about inclusivity in football, I think now you can see they’re trying to support women’s football a lot more. Like if you’d turned on the teletext years ago you’d have never seen them talking about women’s football... I seen yesterday that United women played at Old Trafford for the first time ever... gender rights and sexual equality there’s a big highlight on it, especially in sports... I think it’s great because football should be for everyone not just a certain race or gender... So, I thought it was very informative and I really enjoyed it.’ (P 5)*

*‘The stats sort of indicate... there is an incremental rise of black players within the game and obviously that increased with the Premier League and foreign football and investment and all. But the significant thing to take out of that is it wasn’t until 1993, that’s 20 years later, that there was an incentive from the British Government to the anti-racism campaign which at that time was to ‘end racism’ and in 1997 that became the ‘Kick it Out’ campaign... Another survey was done from 1990 onwards was with 2,500 supporters at the grounds into racism. So, from 1990 to 1999, 67% witnessed racism, 2000-2009, 61% witnessed racism at the grounds and then 2010-2014,*

*50% witnessed racism. So, I can see a decline at the grounds over racism within the grounds but that is absolutely coinciding with the emergence of social media which seems to be the key platform there for racism at the minute within society.’ (P 7)*

Many of the themes and current debates discussed in the interviews stemmed from the directed reading on the module. The majority of participants welcomed the module textbooks which were provided for study:

*‘The book had some excellent points – very detailed and it was great to read about our understanding of how football clubs developed alongside their communities and their supporters’ clubs throughout Europe and not what you see every day on tele [sic]. I watch it here in the papers about English clubs and Scottish clubs... it is great to get a wider picture.’ (P 1)*

*‘... a lot of information was given in that chapter regarding what maybe we could do different when it comes to punishing people regarding football fights and stuff like that. That was why I suggested more educational programmes needed to be done and a lot more work needed to be done explaining to people, and let them see the harm and hurt and pain that they have caused other people - whether it was intentionally or for whatever the reasons - and realise there’s a bit more to life than kicking someone’s head off them.’ (P 2)*



The assessed presentation was also generally praised for allowing participants to learn about their particular topic of choice in-depth:

*'I thought the form of assessment we used for this module was very good. I enjoyed doing it... You don't want to be giving them [participants] everything they need, you want them to go and think for themselves as well.'* (P 1)

*'I was pleasantly surprised how the actual course went. I actually enjoyed doing my presentation, because I could actually relate to a lot of it.'* (P 2)

*'I think that's the right way to do it. Somebody gives a presentation, you really know what their knowledge is.'* (P 3)

**Participants were also able to display an ability to link the academic and theoretical discussion with practical and contemporary events which impact on the lives of people in society:**

*'...we were disgusted after Euro 2020. How Marcus Rashford in particular, the community work he is doing for working-class families and working-class kids and then he's a hero for all of that. ...The pressure he put the government under and forced them to bow, and (then) the abuse he gets for missing a penalty kick, which is really insignificant in the grand scheme of things. The racial abuse he got was absolutely disgusting and shows there's still a wider societal issue there.'* (P 1)

*'... the Public Offences and Disorder Act, you know? A line that they have around their legislation which is crazy from the ground perspective is so a crime is committed by racist chanting, but single abusive shouts are not a breach of the act which is fucking crazy in my opinion.'* (P 7)

Facilitators similarly recognised the impact of the module on participants' levels of knowledge, as well as participants' efforts and engagement with the assessment process:

*'...in terms of upskilling them in a way to, you know, how they can deliver, how they can communicate better, you know, how they get in the way of planning, organising, delivery... they are choosing the topics, they have ownership over what they can talk about, they're putting it into their own words... I think it was (name removed) who was ringing home, you know, to get his partner to do research. So, like that, that's huge for me... he's ringing his partner from prison to say, "Can you research this topic because that's what we're going to discuss?"'* (F 2)

*'I was really impressed about how seriously they were taking the topic, the research they put in place. They were actually able to provide evidence when they delivered their presentations. So, if they were giving a particular example, then they'd tie that into a bit of academic research as well. The focus they had on it wasn't just the case of standing up and chatting about football fan violence and social media. There was a structure in and around it.'* (F 3)

**Visual learning, participatory discussion, and the interactive approach of presenters was also warmly welcomed by participants:**

*'The aspect that I have enjoyed most about it is, it wasn't really, really formal. I wasn't sitting in a classroom being lectured to and then being told to go away and do presentations. The great part of it was the social interaction – we were all talking about a common subject that we all love and learning about different aspects of it and something we are all interested in anyway. The informal aspect of it was something I really enjoyed.'* (P 1)

*'I'm a visual learner, I like to do things to learn instead of just sitting in a classroom. So, the power-points were highly interactive that's how I found I would learn a lot more and become a lot more interested in stuff, as opposed to getting bored just reading books... It's everyone interacting and debating. Very informative and I really enjoyed it.'* (P 6)

Participants were also keen to highlight what they perceived to be the supportive learning environment enabled by the small numbers of participants and facilitators, which encouraged participants to fully engage with the classroom-based sessions:

*'I think the number of people in the classroom was perfect because I think sometimes when there are too many in the class, sometimes people would be afraid or wouldn't feel confident enough to come forward, to speak out. But because I think there was half a dozen of us, I think everyone got the opportunity to speak, it wasn't like there were people who were taking control of it or anything, everybody was interacting, I thought it was a great number for a discussion, it wasn't too much.'* (P 6)

The academic learning and the process of taking part in the module was also felt to have had a significant impact on a second key theme – improving self-confidence, communication and participant behaviour.

### 3.2 Impact on Confidence/ Communication/Behaviour

**Participants and module facilitators felt that participation in the module had a discernible impact on participants' confidence and communication:**

*'I think I gained a bit more confidence speaking in groups, that would not be something I'm used to so that was sort of a new experience for me... I think I developed some communication skills. Obviously sitting talking to groups and stuff would've been alien to me... I was always working at my own desk, my own computer, my own phone. And I wasn't really engaging in like the teamwork stuff... So that was kind of a new experience, so I developed some interpersonal skills and communication skills.'* (P 6)

*'I suppose the interaction with everyone in the room and the discussion getting different points of views I thought that was great to see, although we had similar views... we didn't know who wasn't automatically going to agree with us.'* (P 1)

Communication and confidence were viewed as important 'soft skills', key to participants' hopes to re-enter education or employment upon their return to the community. One participant from Bush house spoke at length about his personal circumstances and how the module had helped him reflect upon his life, his social context, and the circumstances and choices which had led him to prison:

*'I think a lot of decisions were made for me... You know, my path was sort of already chosen because of the lifestyle that I was around, the things I had already seen. I grew up in a home where my mum was an alcoholic and there was a lot of domestic violence, my da' wasn't there, my ma's boyfriend used to beat her up. I used to help my mum and he used to beat me up, so I got used to violence. So as I got older, I used to see mum trying to kill herself, and I used to find her, so I always says anybody tries to hurt me as I get older, or tries to hurt my sisters, or me or my mum, I'm going to hurt them before they hurt me... Because I'll be a bit bigger and I'll get a bit stronger, that was the attitude I had... I never had an older brother. My mates had older brothers, so they always had someone they could go to, I never.'* (P 2)

**Reflecting upon his search for a 'surrogate family', the interviewee continued:**

*'So when I was growing up I seen paramilitaries and people like that as family... you felt wanted, you felt loved – I was supplementing a lot of things from what I didn't have as I was growing up and it led me into that sort of path... I just felt I was wanted, and I felt I was part of something, whereas in my home life I didn't.'* (P 2)



**P2 continued to reflect upon how participation on the module had impacted upon his self-perception and how participation felt like an escape from regular prison routine and identity as a prisoner:**

*'...It was good to be treated as a normal person as opposed to a prisoner with a number, you know what I mean, because this is what people forget, we are only known by the people and the staff in here as our second names and our number, we are forgotten about. It's hard to explain, you're not a person, you're a number, and sometimes, while the vast majority of staff don't treat you like that, you get one or two that does, and that can become a problem... That there was something I appreciated and when I was coming to the class it was good to just feel normal again. It was like attending a class outside and I was able to forget I was in jail for a bit.'* (P 2)

**The social element and a sense of belonging provided by the module was praised by several interviewees:**

*'... it's a break for us in here... coming in in here just having a chit chat, you know, we don't normally get that, so even if it is only a wee kick about down there and a laugh and a joke, it's a break in our routine.'* (P 4)

*'... because I haven't seen my family, I think I've had only one face-to-face, which was a behind the screen visit, and I've had about three video visits in two years... it's good [this module] and listen we just actually look forward to someone actually coming in... You may think that's simple, but it's just a break in our routine, it's something else, it's bit of craic, different people, you know? Especially with the last few years with Covid, I mean I've seen them [the facilitators/organisers] more than I've seen my family.'* (P 5)

**Another key positive of the module, referred to consistently by participants, was the feeling that what they had learned impacted their perceptions of others. Some spoke about an increased awareness regarding the impact that their use of language may have on others:**

*'I probably would be more aware of racist issues and religious issues in football, that kind of thing, and especially the language they use... It's not that I wouldn't have been familiar with it but, probably didn't think that some of the things can be said could be so offensive, you know that way?... Just the way I talk to people and the language that I use and just being aware of it and to be sensitive to it, that'd probably be the main thing, you know?'* (P 5)

**Interviewee P3 also indicated how he thought his behaviour may change towards other people from a different background as a result of the module:**

*'In a sense if I went to one of my wee lad's matches and certain people were there from different backgrounds, I'll not sort of have the same approach, you know what I mean? I'll understand more that people are just there to play football, you know what I mean?'* (P 3)

**Several interviewees cited the important impact that their involvement has had (or will have) on their relationships with family members – and particularly how these relationships can be further improved upon release from prison and their return to the community. The interviewees particularly highlighted that what they do now and in the future can influence their children's choices and behaviours:**

*'It makes me feel great, good, cause it gives me a sense of purpose, I'm achieving something you know what I mean? Cause I bang on day and night to my eldest son, he's 16 now and he's doing his GCSEs and he's already got two B's from something he's already done, you know what I mean, so I've told him, look what your dad's doing, so he sees his dad's trying to do something, so I'm telling him he can do the same thing.'* (P 2)

*'I wanted to do the course and as you know my wee lad, he's getting into football and I used to always bring him down to train and to football matches, and I always wanted to be more involved, instead of just standing on the side of the pitch. The other reason, I don't want him taking the road that I took you know what I mean, as in how it went wrong and just give him a better upbringing than I had basically.'* (P 3).

### 3.3 Impact on Physical Fitness/skills

**While participants praised the content of the taught academic element of the module, the fact that the module involved participation in football, was a core attraction to participants. It appeared that, once participants got involved, they were comfortable with the atmosphere and respectful interactions:**

*'Somebody says about coming in and playing football and I heard they were stuck for numbers. I had no intentions of basically coming down and it was only really for that there reason because I didn't want to particularly take too much on because of my own studies and stuff like that there... once I did come down I found it to be fairly easy going. I found all the lads to be respectful, polite and there was a bit of banter with them and a bit of craic. You know the boys weren't stuck up themselves. A lot of the people in here and some of the staff think they are better than ye [sic] and you end up having a row with one of them. So, there was none of that. Everybody was approachable, everybody was respectful, prisoners, coaches, like the way the courses were put out, the way things were explained, it was brilliant...'* (P 2)

**The majority of participants referred to how their participation in the module had helped to improve their physical fitness. Alongside the weekly hour of playing football, participants began exercising themselves two-three times per week in order to enhance their fitness. This promotion of exercise was also felt to have improved mental health and overall well-being for some. Several module facilitators/organisers spoke about this improvement at length:**

*'... if you take from a purely football point of view, they're always getting to play football afterwards, so there's the health and mental health benefits from just getting active. I don't know what they do on their normal daily week... but this programme is giving them that opportunity and hopefully that does have a follow on effect if they do go onto become more active... I just think it benefits them so much in terms of their... mental and physical health...'* (F 1)

*'... number one: it's the physical activity; number two: its upskilling them in relation to the issues and the topic in and around the sociology of football... I think they really do benefit from a mental health point of view as well, that's huge for them. They'll tell us that certainly that's maybe the second and third time they've got to exercise that week... I found it really benefitted them in a number of ways in physical activity, mental health...'* (F 3)

**Football was also viewed as being particularly beneficial as the 'hook' upon which to frame a personal development module. Football was viewed as a 'neutral' or 'inclusive' sport which participants from a diverse array of backgrounds could partake in, whereas other sports may have been associated with a certain ethno-political background:**

*'The only thing that is offered to you is GAA. Not that I have a problem with it, you sort of can't take part, you know what I mean?'* (P 3)

Participants also spoke of the improvement in their football skill levels, which some felt was important if they had future aspirations to become involved in coaching upon their return to the community. More shall be said about this theme in the following sub-section.



### 3.4 Building Future Pathways

It became apparent that one of the main 'selling points' of the module, alongside the physical element of playing football, was the opportunity to complete an accredited module. Facilitators highlighted that the 'partnership' between the IFA and UU bestowed kudos upon the module, and that the module's undergraduate credits could be used to assist any participants wishing to study with UU upon their return to the community:

*'I think because it's so positive, it's another feather to the bow of the participants who are... and looking to upskill themselves positively and... to have it accredited, it just takes it to another level and hopefully assists in the long term, i.e. reintegration into the community as well, through having these qualifications.'* (F 1)

The majority of module participants were keen to build their CVs whilst incarcerated. The module therefore dovetailed with other academic/training qualifications that participants were working towards (for example, some were doing A-levels and others were doing degrees with the Open University<sup>12</sup>). It was believed that the accreditation status of *Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PPD385)* encouraged and further supported these education pathways:

*'... But with this giving us some credits towards a degree or a cert or a diploma, it would definitely encourage me to want to build on those points and take the next step or take a diploma or a degree and even go further. This would definitely encourage me to take that extra step.'* (P 1)

*'... building a CV and how that goes, you know that way?... it's good for me, learning stuff as well. You know, so with the OU course I'm doing, some of the material we were doing is similar to some of that stuff, only it's from a different angle. You know, so that's helping me as well.'* (P 5)

Several participants were keen to explore training pathways into coaching upon their return to the community, particularly in terms of future coaching badges:

*'Definitely, hopefully get my coaching badges get down to (team) to my wee lad and get involved, you know what I mean.'* (P 3)

*'I don't think there's any point in being passive in a course like this, I might as well have an end-game and act on that, so yeah I would like to progress and if I can gain as many qualifications out of it as possible then I'd certainly be interested in that... when I'm going back into the community, you know I've got young sons who love football and all play it... if I had the opportunity to get involved in some coaching when I'm here, I'd like to have a look at that, you know to try and get my qualifications to do that while I'm here.'* (P 6)

Several interviewees spoke of their desire to work with young people upon their return to the community. P2, a resident in Bush house, believed he could be a useful asset to the community in the future in providing support and encouragement to young people:

*'I want to be able to help them there and steer them away from the world of drugs and paramilitaries and help them with their home life problems and things they can talk and open up about that they won't talk to anybody else... when they would hear my own life experiences that would help them open up and discuss their feelings and hopefully by working with different organisations like charitable things and stuff like that there where they are learning to help people... as opposed to the local commander of the UVF or the local commander of the UDA, you know what I mean?'* (P 2)



Another interviewee spoke of wanting to go back to being self-employed, and while he felt the module wouldn't particularly help him work wise, he did feel it would help him in his personal life upon return to the community:

*'I always go to my wee lad's football matches you know what I mean, so I'm going to contact yourselves [the IFA] and maybe get them coaching badges. I want to get involved in younger kids, sort of 10-15 teenagers. I just fell in with the wrong people, pursued it for a load of years and there's no need for it. So I would sort of tell the kids, who to stay away from, and what to do, how not to go down that line and if people approach you, you can say no, do you know what I mean?'* (P 3)

The prisoners on the separated regime are regarded as politically affiliated prisoners, hence why they are separated from the general prison population and placed on a different regime. However, module facilitators/organisers highlighted the emergence of pathways for individuals from the general prison population, who took part in the unaccredited Stay Onside programme, to become involved in coaching, refereeing and volunteering in the community after their release:

*'... paid employment, that's something that we can bring somebody back in and we do that with one case study where we bring [name removed] back in... So, he'd been in there and gave his story again as his pathway, I suppose. And his is the perfect pathway for where he's actually completed a coaching certificate in prison, he's engaged with us straight when he came out, he started volunteering. He became a member of casual staff, he's now a paid employee.'* (F 3)

While the vignette above referred to an individual from the general prison population, there was a more general hope that the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series could provide similar opportunities to those on the separated regime:

*'... this can be used not only as a well-being programme... We can add in the pathways, so maybe we look to incorporate in some of our*

*coaching qualifications within that... There's chance for employability, maybe just casual but maybe that leads to full time employment, which would be amazing to have someone that's been incarcerated, you know, going through a programme all the way through to being a casual, to them being a full-time member of staff. So, I think there's a lot of growth both inside and outside of prison service.'* (F 2)

However, several coaches were also cognisant of the limitations of coaching opportunities in the community in a competitive environment, and suggested it was important not to promise such positions if they could not be guaranteed:

*'We did have qualifications as in coaching, but again I think your kind of pushing prisoners down a line that they maybe don't want to do or maybe aren't equipped to do, so you're almost giving them sometimes false hope that coaching is for you or this is for you...like any profession it's something you could take to easy or something you could struggle with. So, when they are outside and they're thinking, 'Aw I've got my coaching badges, I can go on and be a coach' that isn't always the case...'* (FAC2)

While the potential for educational and employment/coaching pathways was generally framed as a positive, this latter comment highlighted a challenge which was worth bearing in mind. However, even in the context of potentially limited coaching opportunities, the creation of community-oriented pathways for participants was consistently couched in positive terms:

*What is good though, we do find that when there's someone who is passionate, or maybe who do the programme that, because we do that in the community, there is a link there. There is a way that they can come on and support that programme from when they get outside and how they can add value to that. And there are obviously roles within that. We have the likes of (name removed) who came out of prison and he actually would work as a causal for ourselves, so he adds a lot of value to the programme, and he even would help us in terms of giving us feedback and reflections on what's being delivered.'* (F 2).

# 5

## KEY CHALLENGES

- ▾ COVID-19 AND PRISONER RELEASE
- ▾ SUITABLE FACILITIES AND IT
- ▾ CONVEYING MODULE INFORMATION
- ▾ ACADEMIC VERSUS NON-ACADEMIC
- ▾ SCHEDULING

## 4 CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

There were five key challenges highlighted which impacted upon the delivery of the module: the impact of Covid-19 and prisoner release; the availability of suitable facilities; the consistency of conveying information about the module; the balance between the academic and non-academic elements of the module; and scheduling issues.

### 4.1 Covid-19 and Prisoner Release

The two key reasons cited as to why module participation rates dropped from 11 male prisoners in November 2021 to seven by March 2022, were the outbreak of Covid-19 in Maghaberry pre-Christmas 2021, and the release of participants before the final sessions of the module could be completed<sup>13</sup>. These were the most significant challenges which faced this module with separated prisoners:

*'I think part of the reason [that participation fell] was the gap – the break-up in the middle of the course was certainly a big part of it. What was it a 6 or 8-week break in the middle of it with a couple of weeks of the course to go? That was certainly a contributing factor. The world that we live in too, one of the prisoners was released and then lads have the means to solicitors and court dates and stuff like that. So, we were missing one or two then they felt they missed too much and didn't go back into it, which has happened with one person.'* (P 1)

*'... my personal view is sometimes people have a lot going on in terms of their cases and their legal visits, and all of it. So sometimes it can be tricky for people to fit it all in... now I know speaking to [name removed] who was previously here, he really enjoyed the class and enjoyed going. He's obviously in the middle of the trial. I don't think it's anything to do with the course itself, I think it was just to do with availability.'* (P 6)

### 4.2 Suitable Facilities and IT

All of the participants and module facilitators/organisers welcomed the opportunity to conduct the module together within the prison environment. However, on several occasions, participants raised the issue of quality of equipment provided to deliver the sessions. For module facilitators/organisers, this sometimes related to the antiquated nature of some of the equipment they had to use for delivering presentations:

*'...the standard of I suppose facilities when it comes to actually delivering and presenting a programme as well. I think we're left with an old tv on a wall for a presentation.'* (F 3)

The same interviewee expressed a desire to move future modules in the series, security considerations permitting, to a different location in the prison:

*'... I would like to take them out of that environment and actually have learning somewhere else in a more learning-based environment within the prison... I do feel a wee bit frustrated at times from when we're presenting in Bush when we're stuck in... a horrendous dark room and I don't think it lends itself to enhancing our delivery as well. I think that could be improved.'* (F 3)

Another point to bear in mind is that, again for security considerations, prisoners cannot use the internet to conduct their own research for their presentations. While this leads to a related challenge with regards to the over-reliance on textbooks, it also meant that it was more difficult for module participants to conduct their own research and explore learning in a more independent, learner driven interactive manner outside of class hours:

*'...they can't use IT, you know, so they can't have a visual presentation. I think since Covid there is maybe a bigger desire to use IT in a safer way, yes. So, I think it's something that I believe would improve their research and improve their presentations in future.'* (F 3)

#### 4.3 Conveying Module Information

One interesting difference between module participants and facilitators/organisers was that the former tended to prefer smaller numbers in academic sessions, seen as making sessions more interactive and accessible, while the latter expressed a desire for larger classes in future modules in the series. Yet regardless of this difference in perspective, there was a divergent approach to conveying information about the module in the two houses. In Roe house, one individual was responsible for conveying information about the module to the wider group in the house, which appeared to work well:

*'There is someone [a prisoner] who looks after [education] this location [house]. So, someone within the education unit within the jail would come and say these are the classes that are on. So, that person would talk to us and see if there were anyone interested in it and then put their names down... so someone gets a print-out of who's going where the next day and then that's where, that person would go around and tell everyone where they are tomorrow and what class they are under.'* (P 1)

The environment in Bush house seemed to be slightly more fragmented. As a result, residents in Bush felt that the provision of information about the module, both at the outset and on a weekly basis, could be improved:

[CM: how did you hear about the module?] *'Another prisoner. Staff will put a notice up or something like that there and they will tell somebody and they are left to tell everybody else. Look in here, to be honest in here the fucking left arm don't know what the right arm's doing... if it was on a poster up on the notice board, where it will stick out, more people may see it and then more people may get interest on it, but quite frankly, but there's a lot of people in here that's just not football inclined and maybe more into their play stations or cars or mechanics and things like that there'* (P 2)

*'If you've [sic] did a poster, like on a big sheet of paper, IFA starting blah, blah, blah and we could see it (that might work), you know what I mean.'* (P 3)



#### 4.4 Academic versus Non-academic Module Content?

While the majority of participants welcomed and enjoyed the academic elements of the module, particularly studying the provided textbooks and assigned reading, several participants admitted to struggling with some academic elements of the module. It was also suggested by several participants and module facilitators/organisers that a broader range of readings could be provided in future modules in the series including non-academic materials (e.g. newspaper sources), to make the process inclusive for those prisoners less used to academic study, and for those with lower levels of literacy:

*'... even within the readings, there wasn't a massive uptake and ones doing outside reading of it that maybe weren't already doing education programmes within the prison. So, I think there is a little bit of downside on that. But I think ultimately, the benefits far outweigh the kind of slight downsides and that's maybe something that could be looked at and reflected upon...'* (F 2)

*'I'm used to doing the Open University stuff, I can read it, but there's maybe other people who maybe can't read that there because there's a lot of references and stuff throughout the whole thing and all, the books were more like an academic style which didn't really suit some of the fella's here... the only thing I'd say is that the books aren't ideal for some people, that's the only thing I'd say, but again it depends on what level of education you have to start with, you know? Some of the fellas we have here can't really read or write, you know?'* (P 5)

It was suggested that while prisoners were given whole textbooks, but only assigned a single chapter to read, the size of the book itself may be daunting. Participants proposed that it may be worthwhile exploring whether there is a more accessible way of furnishing individuals with reading material in a less intimidating form, including printing out chapters (copyright permitting). One of the key benefits of the module was believed to be the 'balance' that was achieved between academic, practical and 'fun' elements, and any alteration to this dynamic would have to be carefully thought through:

*'If it started getting bogged down with a lot a lot of paperwork, so we were having to do a lot more, it would definitely start to clash with my own essays and stuff like that there. Cause where I'm doing a lot of essays and that there, there's a lot of reading that I have to do and taking notes and stuff like that... so I would suggest something on the same sort of scale and maybe incorporate something into it, like written something into it like maybe like a written exam at the end of it or something. But, in general like that there, I don't see any reason to change...'* (P 2)

#### 4.5 Scheduling

The final challenge associated with the first module in the series delivered to prisoners on the separated regime were occasional scheduling conflicts between module delivery and alternative academic courses that individuals were also enrolled in, particularly Open University courses. It was suggested by both participants and module facilitators/organisers that a summer delivery of the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies modules may better suit those participants who were also Open University students:

*'... other educational courses or other training in there... the number of them are actually either completing a degree or some form of education and sometimes it just clashed with the sessions there. It has got better, but I think that's always going to be a challenge that we're going to have, as you know, how do we make it appealing? I think we've made it more appealing, by way of tying in the university credits things but I think that that's the challenge...'* (F 3)

*'... we've got nothing on (June-September), the only thing we've literally have on within them months are the gym and visits... I wouldn't mind sitting down and doing essays and stuff like that (between June-September) but at the minute with the OU stuff, I'd have to put one ahead of the other... I would have you've [sic] in at the time when we're not doing OU and then we can work better on your stuff.'* (P 3)




# IMPACT





## 5 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants spoke in positive terms about the impact of the *Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PPD385)* module across a number of key areas. These included the positive impact of the football element of the module on mental and physical health; the significant impact of the taught/academic element of the module on levels of knowledge, confidence, communication skills, attitudes and behaviour; and the *perceived* impact on future education and employment pathways for participants upon their return to the community. The important word here however is *perceived*, as it is simply too early within this process of assessing the first cohort of separated prisoners involved in the accredited module to assess if their involvement will help build these pathways into coaching, clubs and the community upon return to the community. However, there is some emerging anecdotal evidence from the unaccredited 'Stay Onside' programme, delivered to participants in the general prison population, that suggests that pathways are emerging between prison and the community that may assist some individuals in their experiences of re-entry and reintegration. The cultivation of such pathways, particularly links with IFA grassroots coaches and local clubs, should be an active consideration in the iterative, sustainable development of the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series.



The main 'negatives' regarding the module were primarily related to the impact of Covid-19 and prisoner release on operational delivery; challenges associated with facilities and lack of IT access for participants; inconsistencies in recruitment, advertising and communication; the academic focus of the module for those with lower levels of literacy; and scheduling conflicts with other courses being concurrently undertaken by prisoners.



**The following are a small series of recommendations which aim to support delivery of the other modules in the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series:**

- R.1** There is a need for more in-depth, longitudinal pre and post qualitative and quantitative data on module participants to assess the impact on actual outcomes - rather than on aspirational outcomes and what participants 'think may happen' in terms of educational/employment upon their return to the community.
- R.2** Consideration should be given to scheduling future modules in the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series with separated prisoners during the summer months, to allow those studying for other degrees/academic qualifications greater time to dedicate to the module.
- R.3** Conversations should be held between the IFA, UU and the NIPS to ascertain how future modules could be promoted to a greater extent within the prison environment.
- R.4** While the presentation element of the assessment was largely welcomed, there should be further consideration amongst all relevant parties of whether assessment will take the form of group or individual work.
- R.5** Where possible and Covid-19 permitting, module delivery should run weekly from inception through conclusion to maximise participant interest and uptake and avoid drop-out due to prisoner release.
- R.6** It is important given the relatively small numbers of separated prisoners, and therefore smaller pool of potential participants, that the curriculum of the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series be continually reviewed to ensure that those students seeking to undertake the modules in future are being offered an evolving, thematically dynamic modules (rather than repetition of previous themes/modules).

- R.7** Conversations should be held between the IFA, UU and NIPS staff to ascertain the most appropriate section within the prison to hold class-based taught-sessions that can meet security requirements while also meeting IT/technology needs.
- R.8** Consideration should be given as to the best means of assigning module readings to students, given the IT restrictions. While module textbooks work well for those familiar with academic study, those with lower levels of literacy may struggle with more academic textbooks. In such instances it may be appropriate to assign academic readings in smaller or more accessible chunks. It may also be useful to increase the newspaper elements of reading - tying module themes to contemporary events/media depictions (particularly given the reasonable access to newspapers within prison - although the IFA and/or UU may want to consider subsidising these given the costs for prisoners and their families).
- R.9** Several prisoners, and module staff, expressed the desire for residents of Bush and Roe to be able to play a football match against one another. In the longer-term, the practicalities and potential benefits (and challenges) of such a scenario should be detailed and discussed between all relevant parties.
- R.10** Wider discussions between relevant stakeholders should take place with regards to narrowing the educational gap and modules offered for those prisoners who are on remand compared to those who have been sentenced.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For correspondence, please contact Dr Conor Murray (Principal Investigator) at: c.murray4@ulster.ac.uk.
- <sup>2</sup> The Steele Review Panel recommended in 2003 that loyalist and republican prisoners with paramilitary affiliations should be accommodated separately from each other, and from the rest of the prison population, on a voluntary basis. As a result of the recommendations, prisoners can apply to enter separated conditions.
- <sup>3</sup> The 'Stay Onside' programme is delivered in the community and to prisoners across the prison estate. UU were commissioned to focus specifically on the version of the programme available to prisoners on the separate regime in Maghaberry.
- <sup>4</sup> The original 'Stay Onside' programme continues to be delivered to prisoners not on the separated regime across the prison estate. The bespoke 'Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies' series of modules is currently only available to prisoners on the separated regime, and therefore they are the only prisoners that receive credits towards a degree at UU.
- <sup>5</sup> UU's Academic Office is responsible for overseeing the approval of UU's award-bearing programmes of study. Evaluation procedures have been developed to ensure that courses and undergraduate Honours subjects are of a type and quality consistent with the University's overall objectives and that their aims, organisation, content, teaching, learning and assessment methods, and the resources available to support them are appropriate. The first (*Introduction to the Sociology of Football [PPD385]*) and second (*Football and Society [PUP386]*) modules in the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series have progressed through this evaluation process and been approved accreditation. Two other modules are going through the process currently, their provisional titles are: *Critical Perspectives on Football*; and *Football and the Environment*.
- <sup>6</sup> The six sessions were originally scheduled to take place back-to-back in November and December 2021 but after the first three sessions took place there was a Covid-19 outbreak in the prison and the module had to break until March 2nd 2022. More shall be said on the impact of Covid-19 on module delivery in section three of this report.
- <sup>7</sup> John Hughson, Kevin Moore, Ramón Spaaij and Joseph Maguire's (2017) edited book: *The Routledge Handbook of Football Studies*. London: Routledge; and Jamie Clelland's (2015) book: *A Sociology of Football in a Global Context*. London: Routledge.
- <sup>8</sup> High-security prisons are those with the most secure levels of custody in the prison estate. Different houses or units within prisons can also have higher levels of security restrictions based upon perceived threat of prisoners escaping or from doing harm to themselves, other prisoners, or prison officers.
- <sup>9</sup> The evaluation is summative in the sense it was completed in the aftermath of the module – rather than a formative evaluation which is conducted throughout the duration.
- <sup>10</sup> Approval was sought on 10th July 2020 via the NHS/HSC Ethics committee.
- <sup>11</sup> P6 was the only participant who could not discern any benefits to themselves from taking part in the module – other than enjoying it. They also said they found the presentation 'hard' as they have trouble reading and writing. This point will be returned to in section 3.
- <sup>12</sup> Although a challenge that was highlighted was that such formal educational provision was reserved for sentenced prisoners, and not those on remand.
- <sup>13</sup> Due to the break between sessions, module coordinators reconfigured the module plan and focused on the presentations in the second three week block. This meant that the module did not cover the 'Strength and Conditioning' and 'Women in football' sessions included in the original PUP385 module handbook.

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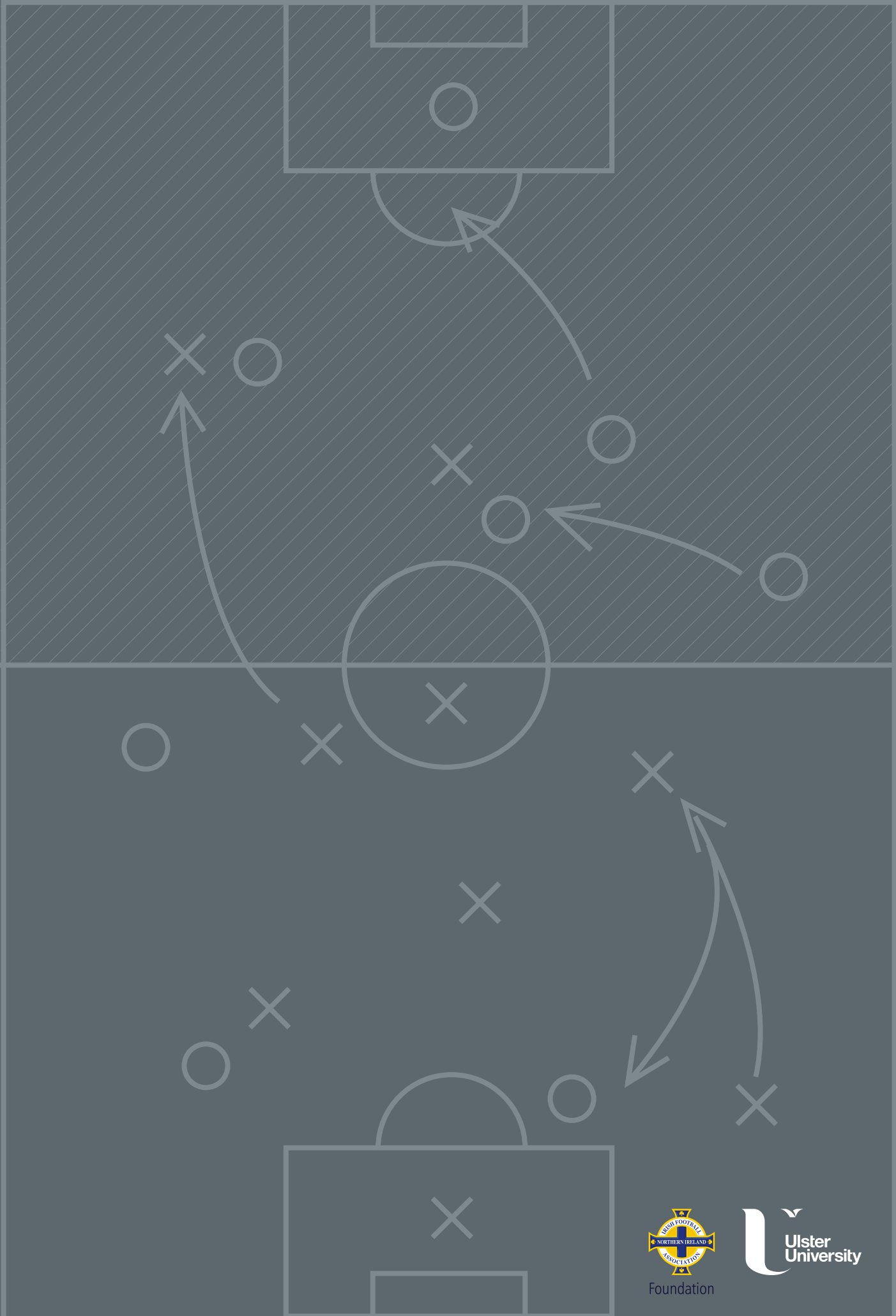
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