

# STAFF ON-SIDE

## APPLIED FOOTBALL STUDIES: MODULE 2

Examining pedagogical and design elements of an accredited sport-based intervention with prisoners.

A Psychosocial Evaluation of the 'Football and Society' (PUP386) module.

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Foundation



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

Examining pedagogical and design elements of an accredited sport-based intervention with prisoners. A Psychosocial Evaluation of the 'Football and Society' (PUP386) module.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Understanding of the brief

In August 2020, Ulster University (UU)<sup>1</sup> 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 second module in the series: *Football and Society (PPD386)***, which was delivered to prisoners on the separated regime across six days between March and May 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).

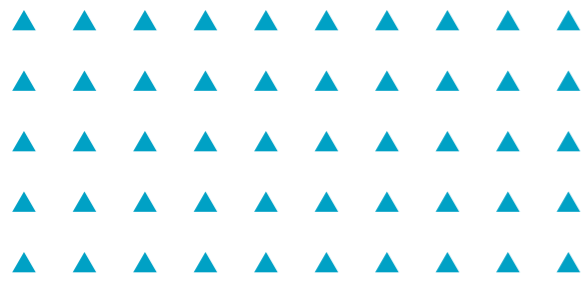
The prisoners that took part in the ***Football and Society (PPD386)*** module reside in two self-contained houses in Maghaberry Prison. Separated male republican prisoners are housed on two landings in Roe House, while separated male loyalist prisoners are housed on two landings in Bush House. They 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: psychology, mental health and well-being in sport; strength and conditioning in football; and leadership both on and off the pitch. 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 ***Football and Society (PUP386)*** module was to explore the relationship between football and society. In doing so, it considered the contemporary complexities of football, including discussions on both its divisive and inclusive role in society. Intended outcomes of the module focused upon participants' ability to:

- Demonstrate psychosocial knowledge of the key theories and debates about the social and cultural aspects of sport in late-modern life;
- Evaluate, conceptually and empirically, the role of football in relation to the creation and expression of racialised, classed and gendered forms of identity and identification;
- Link and evaluate the different principles, factors, and legal guidelines, that inform the policy and governance of football; and
- Analyse certain controversies relating to football and society.

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 ***Football and Society (PPD386)*** module. For their assessment on the module, participants were tasked with working as a group to develop and deliver a one-hour coaching session on the penultimate week. The participants were provided with autonomy to select the aspect of football they wished to focus on (i.e. defending, passing, shooting), but the session had to be shaped around the concept of leadership. Each participant had to lead on at least ten-minutes of the session. Each participant had to submit a session plan which followed the template used by IFA coaches. In the plan participants had to include a discussion on safety, learning outcomes, coaching points, and progression/regression. They were also asked to include a reflection on how the session went, and their experiences of delivery. Participants approaches to, and experiences of the assessment 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 **Football and Society (PUP386)** module with separated prisoners set against the five research objectives outlined below:

- 1) to understand participants' experiences and attitudes towards the **Football and Society (PUP386)** module;
- 2) to explore the benefits, and identify areas that could be improved, of the **Football and Society (PUP386)** module;
- 3) to conduct primary research with prisoners and facilitators/organisers involved in the **Football and Society (PUP386)** 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 sport-based interventions in the prison system.

This summative evaluation is based upon qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 10 participants and facilitators/organisers from the **Football and Society (PPD386)** module which was held with separated prisoners in Maghaberry (n = seven prisoners, n = three module facilitators/organisers). All seven male prisoners who started the module in March completed the module content in May 2022. 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. It should be noted that six of these individuals who completed this module had also completed the first module in the *Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies* series, the **Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PPD385)** module. 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.

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?



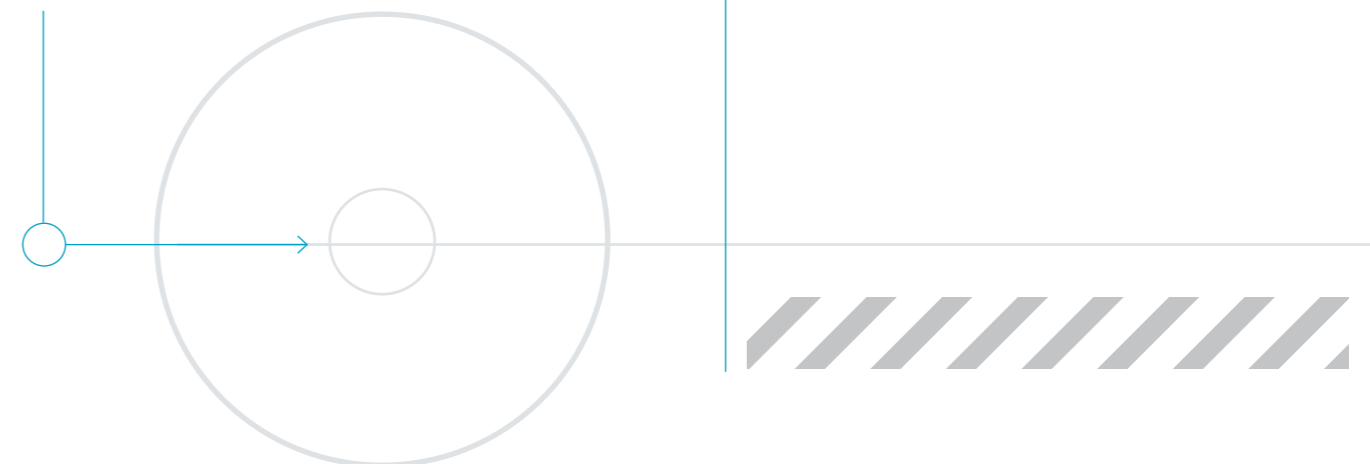
With the fully informed and written consent of participants, interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription and detailed *verbatim* analysis. All interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality and were informed that they may withdraw from the research process at any stage. Throughout 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 positive impact of the mixed nature of the sessions, the impact of the guest speaker talks on levels of knowledge, increasing physical fitness as a result of participation in the module, a building of 'soft skills' and helping build relationships between participants (and facilitators/organisers and families), and the perceived benefits of the module being accredited.

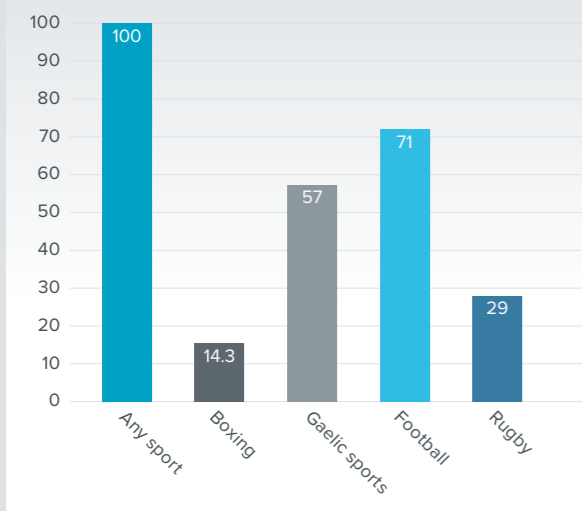
Section four moves on to document some of the challenges encountered during the delivery of the module. These include the general challenge in making academic courses accessible to a greater pool of participants, the impact of Covid-19 on module delivery (although it should be noted that this impact was much reduced when compared to the delivery of the **Introduction to the Sociology of Football [PPD385]** module), and difficulties encountered with facilities/technology. 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

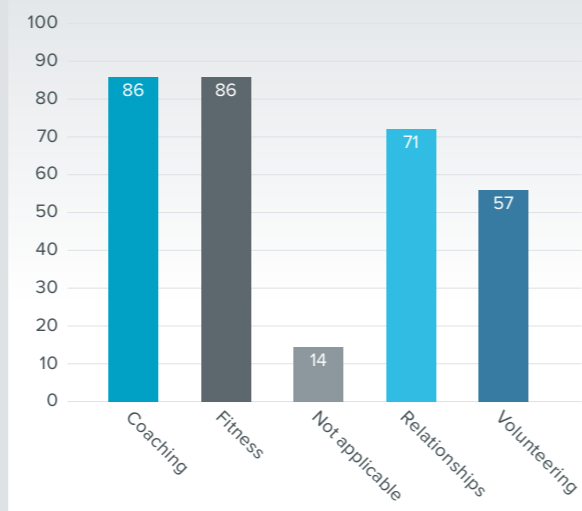
Seven participants completed a separate demographics and experience of sport questionnaire. The average age of participants was 35-years-old. This ranged between 27- and 41-years-old. Of those, all had previous experience of some type of sport (see fig. 1). Indeed, many had experienced multiple sports. These appear to be limited, however, to four in particular, with football representing the majority.

Figure 1. Previous Sporting Experience



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.

Figure 2. Aspects of the module most looking forward to



Motivations similarly varied, but clustered around four key themes: to be a part of a team, because they were bored, to learn more and to 'better' oneself (see fig. 3).

Figure 3. Motivations

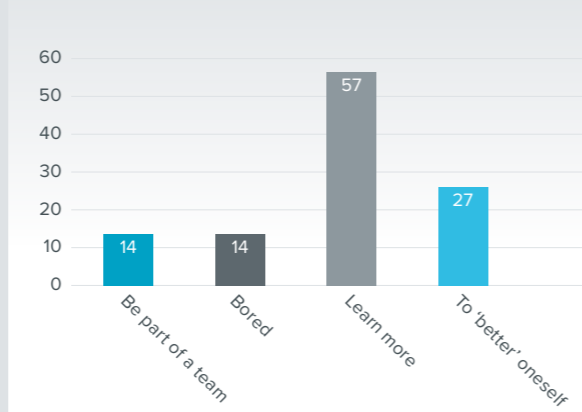


Table 1: Mean and standard deviation scores for the psychological scales at baseline and end point.

| Psychological Wellbeing Scale                          | Baseline (Mean/SD) | End Point (Mean/SD) |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|
| Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWS)       | 60 (6.4)           | 61 (4.9)            |
| Brief Resiliency Scale                                 | 3.7 (.33)          | 4.5 (.56)           |
| General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) Mean Total Score | 11.2 (4.2)         | 8.0 (5)             |
| Somatic  | 3.6 (3.3)          | 1.7 (2.1)           |
| Anxiety  | .71 (1.5)          | .57 (.71)           |
| Social   | 6.6 (.53)          | 5.3 (2.9)           |
| Depression   | 0 (0)              | 0 (0)               |

In addition to the demographic questionnaire, the seven participants completed three validated psychological instruments to assess resilience (Brief Resiliency Scale), well-being (Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale-7) and general health (General Health Questionnaire-28). Participants completed these measures at baseline (on the day module delivery commenced) and then again at endpoint (on the day that module delivery concluded). Mean average and standard deviation statistics are presented in Table 1. Across the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale mean scores increased between baseline and follow up. An increase in score is indicative of psychological improvement. There was little change in scores in resilience between the start and end of the module.

Means values decreased for the total score for the GHQ-28 from baseline to follow-up. Higher scores on the GHQ-28 indicate a greater possibility of psychological distress. The GHQ-28 was further analysed by averaging four separate factors of the scale: anxiety/somatic, social dysfunction, somatic symptoms and depression. Mean scores decreased for anxiety/somatic, social dysfunction, and somatic scales. There was no change in depression, this may be due to all participants scoring 0 at baseline and this remaining unchanged. The issue of a low sample size prevented the use of inferential statistical tests being calculated on the data, a larger sample size is needed to enhance statistical power to detect any changes that might be occurring. Further, the inability to connect key demographic data with these measures limits the type of analysis that can be undertaken. Overall, the trends in the data from baseline to module completing are encouraging and in the direction expected of an effective module on improving psychological functioning and reducing distress.

# 5

## KEY THEMES

- BALANCED PEDAGOGIC APPROACH
- KNOWLEDGE AND THE IMPACT OF GUEST SPEAKERS
- INCREASING PHYSICAL FITNESS
- 'SOFT SKILLS' AND RELATIONSHIPS
- ACCREDITATION

## 3 EVALUATION FINDINGS

The following section focuses on five key themes which emerged from an analysis of the interview data: the appeal of the mixed pedagogic approach across the module; the value and impact of guest speakers; the development of physical fitness; the improvement of 'soft skills'; and the benefits associated with an accredited module.

### 3.1 Balanced Pedagogic Approach

It became clear from the analysis of interview data that the mixed element of the Football and Society (PPD386) module – linking practical aspects of football skill development with coaching practice alongside classroom-based discussions on topics such as psychology, health and wellbeing and leadership – were viewed as crucial, both to the initial appeal and subsequent success of the module:

*'Physical and mental benefits, both sides of or aspects of that... I was just attracted to the football, I enjoy playing football and the whole discussions and the debates and the whole process of football, you know to be in management and training and all that.'* (P 3)

The perception that the 'balance was right' (P3) between the physical, participative components of the module, and the academic discussion was important. This balance encouraged participants who had completed the first module in the series, an Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PUP385), to take on this new module, while also encouraging newer participants to engage:


*'I'd heard [name removed] and other boys who had done it previously before I came in talk about it and there were glowing reviews. Obviously, I've a keen interest in football anyway, so I thought I'd avail of the opportunity whilst I was inside.'* (P 5)

*'I really did enjoy the kick around we had outside there, and I also enjoyed being in the classroom here like. Because all the talk about the kinda [sic], what would you say, the schoolbook side of it? Like I never really heard any of that before. I found it interesting.'* (P 6)

That six of the participants from the first module had returned for 'more' was a direct result of enjoying the differing practical football skills and taught academic elements of the module, as well as the interactive and participatory mode of delivery:

*'... I enjoyed it so much the first time. I enjoyed the banter, I enjoyed what I was doing, and that was a big factor of how I got on well with everybody previously. I didn't realise that there was another bit to the programme, so I wanted to do that... it wasn't put across in too serious a way where it wasn't interesting, and it had a real aspect to it regarding bringing the different people in and the conversations we had.'* (P 1)

*'The first round I really enjoyed all the different people coming to talk to us with the books that you get as well and the history of some parts of football, particularly the social aspects of football... That made me come back and do a little more again and see who else was going to come in and listen to what they have to say and stuff like that. That was a massive reason why I came back for the second round.'* (P 4)



There was also perceived to be a balance between academic and experiential discussions in the classroom. This was important for participants so that they could learn about academic theories, while also listening to coaches and experts working in the area speak of their real-life experience:

*'The talks were very balanced, so it wasn't every week we were listening to a different person's experience in the game and how they may have succeeded or how they may have not made it to the level they may have expected to. That can get tiring. It was good to get more aspects of the game than just playing and coaching. There is all this stuff going on and it was good to see the background academic aspect of the game.'* (P 4)

*'... even the theory side of things was really laid back, very informative. It was open for discussions and stuff, it wasn't like a lesson you know, but more so contribution based from everybody, no, it was enjoyable... there was good variety to mix things up too, but as I say, I wouldn't be the best sitting in classrooms and stuff, but even, what surprised me, the theory side of the course, I really enjoyed. You know, because it wasn't like, 'we're the teachers and you're the students', you know, it was like a collective, you know, good atmosphere and stuff.'* (P 5)

P5's subsequent comment was that he 'can't wait to go again in September', to commence the next module in the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series. This was a sentiment that was shared and articulated by five other participants interviewed as part of this study.




### 3.2 Developing Knowledge and the Impact of Guest Speakers

While the previous module in the series – an Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PUP385) – had increased participant knowledge around football fan culture, commercialisation in the game, racism/sexism and other forms of intolerance; it became apparent that the second module similarly enhanced the knowledge of participants. In this instance, the module focused on topics such as psychology and mental health in football; the importance of positive leadership in coaching; and the role played by physical fitness and strength and conditioning. Participants were often able to relate elements of the taught module to their own experiences in terms of mental health, coming from working-class areas and growing up with poverty and deprivation, or through a renewed focus on physical fitness and/or education/employment pathways for the future:

*'I enjoyed that [mental health and wellbeing in sport session] from having to go to a psychologist myself... It was interesting to hear him talking about some of the mindsets to certain things... It was also good to hear the stories from [Gary Wallace about] the international set-up and how they go about what they are trying to drum into the younger players there now but also listen to more experienced players that don't need to be told what to do you know.'* (P 1)

*'I found it [mental health and wellbeing in sport session] very interesting. I didn't know they were that involved in the youth game with that there, and well-being as well within clubs which I think is great. Obviously, I know sport can have a massive impact on a child's life, especially in a working-class area where poverty is rife, and opportunities are few and far between. So, I think for the module to cover all those aspects of the game is good.'* (P 3)



The session on leadership and coaching, which drew upon personal experiences of IFA coach Stephen Livingstone, a former youth academy player in England, appeared to have a particular impact on participants:

*'The [leadership in sport session] was saying that the wee woman he was staying with was a bit of drinker, and he was telling us wee stories about that. It was one of those of kids being thrown in, and if you weren't settling in, you had nothing to do. It actually sounded like the Keith Gillespie thing where he said whenever his football training was over, he had nothing else to do, so you were just down in the streets and that type of thing, you were lost.'* (P 2)

*'... just you know, to get an insight into someone who's played at a high level so even the demonstrations it's just, talking through the game, and even his understanding of how the game's developed from youth, you know what way he was treated when he was away at boarding houses and him living with an alcoholic and all that stuff compared to what way it is now the modern day, you know they're lifted and laid basically.'* (P 3)

**Guest speaker impact on knowledge was also a point that was acknowledged by module facilitators/organisers:**

*'The guest speakers, as opposed to us just delivering to them on a particular subject, it works an awful lot better when you have somebody in with their own story or, if we are talking about a particular subject on coaching that they have a story to actually tell. Because then, you can see the interest just goes up straight away, maybe it's because it's professional football and they just love to hear about so-and-so; and how did that work? And how did that not work?'* (F 1)

The fact that UU and the IFA were able to bring in such well-respected and distinguished speakers, some of whom currently worked with the Northern Ireland men's senior international team, was felt to have bestowed greater credibility and legitimacy on the module. It also meant that participants felt that they were valued, as they were being given the time of international experts in their respective fields, which they suggested was a rare occurrence for them in their current circumstances. In addition, the content, alongside how it was delivered, appeared to resonate for those taking part, and encouraged them to think differently about psychology, mental health, wellbeing, leadership and how these relate to coaching practice:

*'... coaching is not as simple as it's made out to be. There's a lot of complexities, you know, the way that I saw [the facilitator/organiser] going about it, you know, getting to understand the different age groups and what way you have to conduct yourself and how you go through different age groups and what way they'll be receptive to your actual coaching skills and what needs to be done etc, and then obviously bringing the psychology into things. Yeah, it was a very interesting course like.'* (P 3)

*'... what happens to these players that do go to the big clubs when they are kids and don't make it. Their whole life up until then has been geared to becoming a professional footballer and then all of a sudden, they get an injury or something or simply don't make it once they get to a senior level. But it was great to hear someone's story first hand from them... It was just great to hear his story first-hand and not just when you see it on Football Focus or whatever, or seeing someone who lives 500 miles away... whereby, having him in the room and listening to his story and he had everyone in the room waiting and listening to him and everyone was captivated.'* (P 4)



As part of the module assessment, participants were asked to develop and then deliver a coaching session shaped around the concept of leadership, and then to reflect upon it. With a practical focus on principles and drills, this fifth session on coaching was one that participants roundly praised in terms of its impact. In particular, the applied, reflective nature of the assessment encouraged participants to think differently about their practical input:

*'... my session in particular was a progression from [name removed] activity one. His activity one I believe was on shooting. So, I tried to progress that by, first of all trying to use your weaker foot, and obviously the two coaching points on that were accuracy, hitting it with the instep of your foot, because you've a bigger surface area, and also your balance, so letting the ball come across you, putting your right arm out if you're left footed, so you've got balance and making good contact with the ball, and then after that we progressed to add a goalkeeper in the nets, so... no I really enjoyed it... But he [facilitator/organiser] asked me one thing I would've changed, and I think I said at that point, you know, instead of explaining what we're doing and why we're doing it, I should've maybe asked the group, "Why do you think we're doing this? Why do you think it's important to have balance or why do you think it's important to hit it with the instep?" I was sort of telling them why to do it, as opposed to maybe opening it up to the group for feedback, but that's something that I'll take onboard next time if I'm taking a session.'* (P 2)

*'Just reflecting on how the thing could've changed differently, how you could've done things different during the drill, and then obviously depending on what age group you're working with, you know, that's how you could do wee tweaks within the drill, the drill itself was ok, but just tweak it for their age groups and dictate the numbers etc.'* (P 3)

### 3.3 Increasing Physical Fitness

While improving physical fitness was also an important part of the first module, the data would suggest that the fitness improvements experienced by participants were more pronounced over the course of the second module. Part of this was related to the applied focus of this second module on coaching football skills:

*'... passing, shooting, accuracy. Just taking a touch and volleying things like that... we were working with accuracy and then, movement as well. So, pass, shooting and movement and that type of thing. We could have brought in different types of things. We brought in 'use your bad foot' and things like that.'* (P 2)

*'... fitness is up there, yeah, absolutely... I've explained the way it works here before, but the numbers [of prisoners on the wing] dictates how many games of football we get ourselves, and the numbers are down [at the moment], so with you boys coming in once a week, we're getting at least one match a week which is helpful for the physical aspect of it.'* (P 3)

**Due to the high security restrictions placed on prisoners on the separated regime, the participants had limited access to the main prison gym. Therefore, improvements in their physical fitness were also aided by Gary Wallace, one of the lead strength and conditioning coaches for the Northern Ireland men's team. After his classroom session, Gary spent time discussing how the prisoners could maximise the fitness equipment they had on the wings:**

*'[Gary Wallace] was able then to give them extra guidance and advice on the use of the treadmill and what types of programmes can be of use on that and different ways of using the multi-gym in terms of if they have maxed out their weights, different tempos and when they are outside too their movement and runs that they can actually incorporate into... as well as playing.'* (F 2)

Following his session in the prison, Gary developed a bespoke exercise plan for the participants based on the equipment available to them. This strength training programme included advised exercises along with set/rep advice as well as potential weights and rest periods:

*'He gave us three or four different training exercises like to do with core and legs and stuff like that... I train twice a day with weights and cardio and take a few programmes. So, we can take some of that and go and implement it ourselves, and try and sort of do it based on the internationals and the way their programmes are set and stuff like that there.'* (P 1)

*'... he got me doing that HIIT training. He's got me doing an hour or 45 mins to an hour – where he said try the HIIT thing 30 seconds on and 30 seconds off. So, I have actually been doing that there, just trying something different... I said to him I'm going there and feel sometimes I could just run all day. Maybe I'm sprinting and getting a good 5km time and things like that there, but I don't seem to be losing weight. And I'm doing probably doing 3 or 4 times more than anyone else is doing but my body always seem to hold the weight here. So, he said just to try the wee HIIT things.'* (P 2)

**It was felt that this training regime was also starting to be utilised by prisoners who had not been part of the module:**

*'... we were actually over in the gym the other day. I saw the one [workout] to do with the legs, and I took a couple of exercises out of it... some of the boys who aren't on the course, but who do training were looking at it, and said it looks very, very good.'* (P 5)

### 3.4 Impact on 'Soft Skills' and Relationships


As was the case with the previous module, both module participants and module facilitators/organisers felt that this second module had helped improved the communication skills, teamwork and self-confidence of participants:

*'I can talk to people a bit better than I thought I could...'* (P 4)

*'I would have a bit more confidence to take a coaching session there, which I probably wouldn't have had 6-7 weeks ago... I've never took a coaching session before and at the end I was taking a session and I was very confident, you know? I knew exactly what I was doing and how to take a coaching session, like if you'd have said to me 6 weeks ago, "What's a coaching point?" I wouldn't have had a clue what you were talking about, but now, I know how to set up drills and how to progress drills and regress drills as well, so I've learnt a lot of new skills.'* (P 5)

*'I think there are real benefits, I think it does so much in relation to their self-confidence, teamwork, and communication and... just across the board, all those essential skills that are needed for them to actually take the next step as well in life when they do get out.'* (F 1)





Module activities were, in part, actively designed to facilitate a range of teamwork and team-building exercises that could help participants develop these ‘soft skills’:

*‘We actually gave them the brief and worked with them the week before. So, we worked with one individual on a warmup; we worked with somebody who was going to deliver the session. We asked them: what their session would be? What are you hoping to achieve? What are you looking to improve on? So, there was a lot of good thought, good engagement and good planning in their session... the next week we set it up and they told us they were very nervous, so it shows you it’s not just a case of turning up and doing something. They took it very seriously... you could see the leadership on both sides [participants from Bush and Roe], you could see how certain people took control, certain people will challenge others when it comes to it and again how they supported one another to achieve their goal.’ (F 1)*

*‘... we looked at leadership within both a managerial role and on the pitch looked like. We had open discussions with them what they thought even within youth provision, and we looked at education around that, how do you grow a leader, how do you become someone who is a role model for other people and what qualities you need to have?... the qualities they came up with of what makes a good leader, you know someone being positive, someone having that right mind set as well, you know someone that can inspire other people... there were some very frightening open conversations about maybe the people that influenced their life that they maybe thought was a good leader and it turns out that they were only just being used for whatever.’ (F 3)*


It was believed that participation in the module had helped in terms of relationships across three spheres: with module facilitators/organisers, with other prisoners, and with family members. In terms of building trust and relationships with module facilitators/organisers, participants felt that this was due to the ‘down to earth’ nature of those taking the module:

*‘[facilitator/organiser] he was telling us a bit about his own personal background. You know he comes from [area] it’s a working-class area, something similar to the working-class areas we come from you know what I mean, so we can identify with the big fella.’ (P 1)*

*‘I got an email from our director after the tournament, thanking us for taking them in, how much he enjoyed it. But highlighting the rapport that we had with both groups, and he said for him that’s what really stood out. That was the rapport that we had with both groups, and what they thought of us, and he said that that was so clear to see that they just buy into you guys so much, you know.’ (F 1)*

It should be noted that this feeling was mutual between participants and the facilitators/organisers. Several facilitators/organisers recalled the friendliness with which they were welcomed in the prison setting, being offered tea/coffee and biscuits (on some occasions buns) at the start of each session by the participants. They were also particularly taken aback by the sliced oranges which participants went at lengths to prepare for them at the final tournament which concluded the module. The facilitators/organisers believed that it was often during periods after the games when the best discussions took place:

*‘The programme, you can present in the class, you can do whatever, you can play on the pitch, but it’s the conversations off the pitch after the game that for me have always been the real ones. It’s always been the ones that made the biggest impact.’ (F 1)*



In this regard, it was felt that the module helped break down barriers and stereotypes in social interactions between people coming from different community backgrounds:

*‘... he was telling me he’s a Rangers man [facilitator/organiser]... but he’s a good lad and brilliant footballer too, and obviously all the rest of them [name removed] and all, they’re all sound lads, so it’s good to meet new people too... he says he grew up supporting I think it was... Liverpool and Rangers, think he said he grew in a working-class, Protestant background and stuff, but anybody could come in here and they’d be treated equally... I’m going to start talking about Celtic again, like Celtic’s greatest figures were Protestants, Jock Stein, Kenny Dalglish, that’s from even the club’s conception...’ (P 5)*

While some participants noted that they had strong bonds with other prisoners which predated their involvement in either module on the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series, several other participants felt that they had deepened their relationships with other prisoners as a result of their involvement in the module:

*‘... with the IFA course you have got to know [other prisoners]. When wee [name removed] was doing it and he was next door to me, and I think in five years we hardly spoke, but that there I found myself speaking to people a bit more on “What did you think about that today?” you know and the reflections of your sessions afterward.’ (P 1)*

*‘...we are here to do a course, but it’s the social aspect of it. Just seeing new people, hearing different stories. We live in a very confined bubble here; we are looking at the same people all the time. It’s just really the social aspect of the whole thing... like other the lads here that took part in the course from our side, even though there are 15 of us living here, maybe 16 of us now... you might not see someone from one end of the day to another, so we got interacting with each other here a bit more than we normally would. That was a positive aspect of the programme.’ (P 4)*

Building on the impact of the *Introduction to the Sociology of Sport (PUP385)* module, several participants spoke at length on how their involvement had given them ‘something to talk about’ with family members (particularly partners or sons) or increased their confidence to get involved in coaching with their children upon their release:

*‘I think me telling him [16-year-old son] a lot about, what I’m saying is I mean my wee lad is football on the brain, but I think he wants to do something within football even if he can’t make it as a proper footballer. So, for him what I’m saying, me talking to him about our aspect, it has maybe put ideas into his own head and he wants to do, whatever course he’s going to do with this team they’ve got going gets him three A-Levels... if other kids had the like of [facilitator/organiser’s name] and trying to get that input in them, it might influence them to make some of the decisions that my wee lad is starting to think for himself, you know what I mean.’ (P 1)*

*‘It was great to actually have... an excuse to talk to them [family] about something other than we had chips for dinner today. Obviously, they were very helpful [in doing research for the module online for the participants], they were great for anything like that ... even if we were having an argument on the landing here about who scored more goals, is it Ronaldo or Messi? ... they were getting these phone calls ... “Who scored more goals - Ronaldo in comparison to Messi?” Definitely with my young son, I would like to get into all types of sports, and football in particular as well, and that would certainly give me a bit more confidence to try out the coaching side of the game. Definitely.’ (P 4)*

*‘... So, you know, my wee lads play football and, you know it would give you a wee bit of confidence to maybe help out along the way you know if you’re maybe taking them ones to football, maybe helping out with sessions and stuff that I’d certainly look into.’ (P 5)*

### 3.5 Accreditation

As was the case with the previous module in *Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies* series, accreditation was viewed as an important element of the module:

*'... what opprtunities I could have outside if I put the head down and get my studies and get my degree and so where the door is not being closed in here as I thought it would be, but because of where I am I am actually starting to see doors open.'* (P 1)

*'I like football anyway, so and it was an extra qualification in here too... I'm studying something that's interesting for a start. Whereas before [when I was in School] I was daydreaming about being at home working and if I wasn't at school, I was just mitching off to go to work.'* (P 2)

*'The accreditation that we get from the Ulster University is a massive positive for us... We would probably do it anyway, but it is that extra bit of a positive – you are not just sitting around doing something, listening but at the end of it all it doesn't mean anything. Although, yes, it's great craic but it gives you that extra bit of a thing, the accreditation at the end of it.'* (P 4)

*'I mean like I'm interested in doing further education when I get out, so's [names removed] and its credits towards stuff like, but also, you're gaining like valuable life experience along the way... good for confidence and stuff isn't it? And as I say, it's the experience and the skills and qualities you're developing along the way.'* (P 5)

The module was viewed as complementing not only the previous module, but other academic and practical courses that many of the participants were currently involved in:

*'I have done IFA; I have done gym instructor; I have done First Aid; I have done 'Goals' courses; all my OU stuff and other education stuff. If I get a degree, I will say I have got a degree! And the best of it is the degree I have done it myself the jail hasn't helped me in any way. All they did was send my application away and send my assignments away.'* (P 2)

The relaxed nature of the module and how it was delivered was viewed positively in terms of encouraging participants down a pathway involving education and training. For some, the module represented an 'easy introduction' to educational opportunities that might have previously been seen as unattainable due to their circumstances:

*'When you look around all the jails here – 99% of prisoners are from working-class council estates who probably never dreamt they could go to college or weren't capable or able to do it. But I think with this course it gives you a sort of easy introduction. It's not hard work – it's more about interaction, social interaction rather than sitting writing essay after essay or having a big exam at the end of it. I think it would be for a lot of people, a lot of prisoners in particular, it would their only way of getting to see that they can actually do it.'* (P 4)

Indeed, several participants spoke of how their involvement in education in prison had changed their outlook on life and their future aspirations:

*'... my views now are completely different to where they were when I first came in, and that is due to doing all these different courses. Not just with the IFA, but my studies, I have done a lot of courses within the jail and stuff like that there, I've done mentoring courses and counselling courses and been to psychology so all these different things I have implemented as well and the IFA have implemented a change in me. Getting to speak to yourself and stuff like that there and maybe getting work experience, and if you boys can help out with that there. So, my mindset has completely changed... when we were younger, we were taught to hate, but as I got older even before I came to jail my mindset was completely changed and I didn't want that sort of lifestyle for my kids and stuff like...'* (P 1)

# 3

## KEY ISSUES

- ▾ ACADEMIC VERSUS NON-ACADEMIC MODULE CONTENT?
- ▾ COVID-19 AND SCHEDULING/TIMING
- ▾ FACILITIES

## 4 CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

While there were fewer challenges associated with the operational delivery of the *Football and Society (PUP386)* module, when compared to the *Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PUP385)* module, there remain three key issues which module facilitators/organisers should seek to address moving forwards. The first relates to module content while the second two relate to practical module delivery.

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

A point raised in the evaluation of the previous module in the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series was that, although most participants felt that the academic and practical elements of the module were well balanced, there were believed to be some difficulties for some participants perhaps not familiar with reading academic work – for example, some mentioned difficulties in understanding referencing – which may be off-putting or limit the impact of the reading beyond the smaller cohort of prisoners who were already familiar with academic literature:

*'... with those books a couple decided not to read those books, it was just gibberish to them. Their English would be basic. I'm used to reading academic reports and stuff like that and even for me it was like fucking... I was all over the place. In a sentence of that length there were 7 or 8 references within it, and it is confusing for people who don't understand that... [Name removed] can't read. [Name removed] he can write a bit and he can read a bit but he's not good at it. He's not comfortable speaking off a sheet of paper. So, a book like that for them – it would be far safer to give them a newspaper and let them read the newspaper.'* (P 2)

This view was repeated in this evaluation by a small number of participants. However, given the somewhat more practical and skills-based content of this module, there was slightly less concern in this regard than there had been in the first module in the series.

### 4.2 Covid-19 and Scheduling/Timing

It should be noted that Covid-19 impacted upon the second module, *Football and Society (PUP386)*, with separated prisoners much less than it had done the first module. During the delivery of the *Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PUP385)* module, a Covid-19 outbreak in Maghaberry before Christmas 2021 was followed by a government-imposed lockdown period commencing at the end of December 2021. This meant that the module had to break until March 2022 before the final three sessions could be held. Alongside prisoner release during this period, this lack of continuity between sessions resulted in fewer participants completing the first module:

*'[This time] it was done every week in a row, whereas the last one we had Covid and there was a gap, and then there was a gap at Christmas, so that didn't help. One lad got out and then another lad took on stuff in the meantime and whenever it came back, he was busy with other stuff. I think it was just that gap that kind of put people off. I don't think it had anything to do with the course itself.'* (P 4)

In this second module, although Covid-19 did not force a break in the delivery of the six-week module, several participants did contract Covid-19 prior to the module starting which delayed commencement. For those that contracted Covid-19, the after-effects were noticeable at the next session and the facilitators/organisers adapted the delivery because of this:

*'...two or three of the participants ended up with Covid. So, basically, we had to step back for two to three weeks and just leave it... they were badly hit by it – so it's not just a case of us coming in the next week and suddenly you are doing a class session and you are back out on the pitch. We did have to cater for how they felt as well.'* (F 1)

While there is little that module facilitators/organisers can do about the impact of Covid-19, it became apparent that there were wider issues to do with when sessions should and could be scheduled to encourage maximal uptake and engagement from prospective participants:

*'I see it across some other prison establishments where I would go at a particular time, I might even do a 5 to 7 slot, I know it's not possible there, but I do a slot to suit them which means you get a greater buy-in. It is just interesting to see, are there any other times when we can present? Although we are a bit we restricted – yes for me I have to think about it and rely on others as well, to ensure their timetable isn't clogged or they are not double booked.'* (F 1)

It is also important that sessions, where possible, run from and to the advertised time. Any deviance from this can impact upon the delivery of sessions:

*'... it was good, but because [one of the presenters] was late getting in [due to security reasons], then it was dinner time here and then we never go talking to him properly and getting into more conversation with him than we should have done. There were delays when you were coming in again... it was too late to go out to the pitch. We need to get you in earlier if we want to go out and do a bit of football or something.'* (P 2)

### 4.3 Facilities

A further issue pertaining to the operational delivery of the module, which was also highlighted in the evaluation of the *Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PUP385)* module, relates to the quality of the facilities available to deliver class-based sessions as well as the football-skills coaching element of the module:

*'... presentation-wise moving forward, if you're want to go into more detail, we haven't got the facilities here for interactive whiteboards, interactive tv's or screens and stuff there, so I think you've noticed that there from your own side, having to work through your laptop, it's a bit of a hinderance and so, for your own presentations and all... you've might be able to present a real case for pushing to get better technology here... there's obviously major issues for us [around security], even with this new place [education building] over here, you know? You're going over to do an Irish class, but he can't even get access to the computers to do mock listening exams or anything like that ...'* (P 3)

*'a lot of the time, [name removed] had a laptop up and showing us your laptop, but if we had a bigger screen in here or something we could project onto to make it more visual for everybody? Sometimes it's hard to see exactly what's going on, you know I'm a visual learner, so I like to watch things and stuff as opposed to just looking at a sheet or whatever... I know that TV's a bit small. Stuff like that would probably help, I don't know if that's something that will ever be facilitated like.'* (P 5)

*'I think facilities, it's a small pitch and not a very good pitch, it's a small classroom, it's delivering on a very small TV, it's not conducive I think to what our norm is, so, I think ultimately the facilities is lacking (sic) and that would be one of the main things.'* (F 3)



# 5

## KEY BENEFITS

- MIXED NATURE OF THE SESSIONS
- KNOWLEDGE OF GUEST SPEAKERS
- INCREASE IN FITNESS
- SOFT SKILLS AND RELATIONSHIPS
- MODULE BENEFITS



## 5 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The key benefits of the Football and Society (PUP386) module were clearly outlined by participants. The fact that all seven participants completed the module, and six of these participants had also completed the first module in the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series, indicates that the continuity in the programme across two modules with separated prisoners has encouraged participation and supported ongoing education and employment pathways.

### Key module benefits highlighted by participants included:

- The positive impact of the mixed nature of the sessions;
- The impact of the guest speaker talks on levels of knowledge;
- Increasing physical fitness as a result of participation in the module;
- A building of 'soft skills' (communication, teamwork and self-confidence) and helping build a variety of relationships between participants;
- The perceived benefits of the module being accredited and pathways into education and employment.

While several participants felt more could be done in terms of the academic elements of the module to make it more user-friendly for those prisoners with less experience of academic work (and those with greater difficulties with literacy), generally the key challenges with the second module were linked to module delivery rather than content, and focused upon the scheduling of the module alongside the facilities required for delivery.

As was previously noted in the evaluation of the *Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PUP385)* module, given that participants are still incarcerated, it is too early to tell the extent to which the module can provide pathways into coaching, clubs and the community upon return to the community (hence recommendation 1). However, the emerging findings from the small cohort of participants so far suggest positive trends with regards to encouraging participants along the pathway of education, training and possibly (re)employment upon release. However, more longitudinal data is required in future to assess the extent to which the outcomes of this module meet the well-intentioned perceptions of participants with regards their future pathways at present.

The following are a series of recommendations which aim to support the development and delivery of future modules in the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series. It is worth noting that there was a short gap between the end of the delivery of the *Introduction to the Sociology of Football (PUP385)* module, and the commencement of delivery of the *Football and Society (PUP386)* module. Therefore, the recommendations included below largely mirror the recommendations suggested for the previous module, albeit with some subtle modifications reflective of specific module content:

- 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 educational/employment terms upon their release.
- 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** Future evaluations of modules in the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series should be commissioned as a single report with differing sections for modules – rather than as separate documents. This will reduce thematic repetition between module evaluations as demographic cohorts, issues, dynamics and recommendations will be broadly similar.
- R.4** Conversations should be held between the IFA, UU and the NIPS to ascertain how future courses could be promoted to a greater extent within the prison environment.
- R.5** It is important given the relatively small numbers of separated prisoners, and therefore smaller pool of potential participants, that the curriculum of the module be continually reviewed to ensure that those students seeking to undertake the module in future are being offered an evolving, thematically dynamic module (rather than repetition of previous themes/courses).
- R.6** 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.7** 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. It 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.8** Consideration should be given on how to integrate more critical perspectives on social issues relating to football. For example, corruption, elite football's carbon footprint, and club ownership and sport washing.
- R.9** Neither module was able to deliver the 'Women in Football' session for a variety of reasons. This session would be a strong addition to future modules in the Stay Onside: Applied Football Studies series.
- R.10** 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.11** Wider discussions between relevant stakeholders should take place with regards to narrowing the educational gap and courses 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> This was potentially because the commencement of the second module was so close to the finish of the first module – and therefore the participants may have experienced a continuous progression.
- <sup>12</sup> Including flat barbell bench press, standing barbell shoulder press, incline barbell bench press, flat dumbbell bench press, seated dumbbell shoulder press. Advice also focused on a plethora of other exercises including, but not limited to, deadlifts, pull-ups, dumbbell/barbell rows, squats, leg presses, calf raises/presses.
- <sup>13</sup> High Intensity Interval Training.

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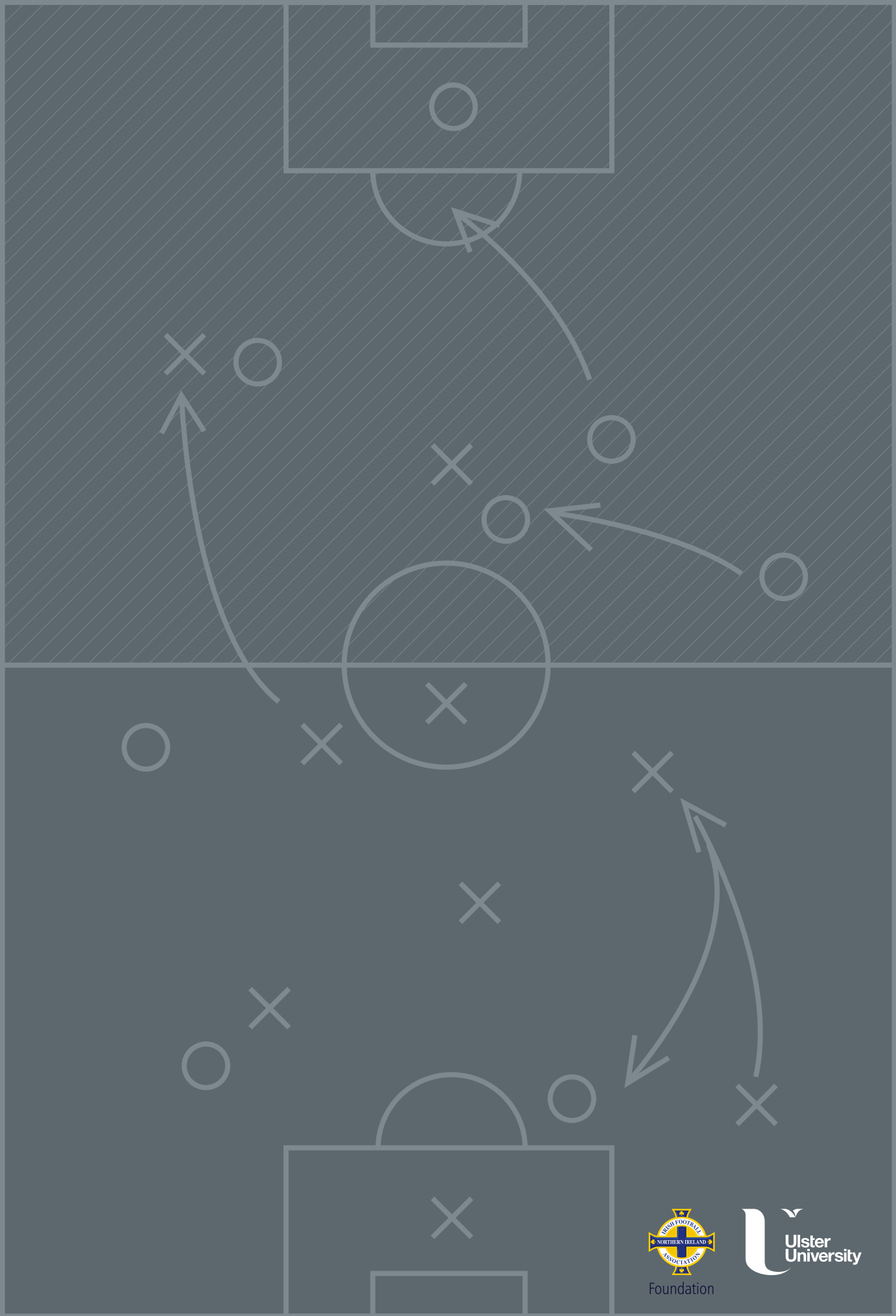
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