



**Sport & Active Wellbeing Survey 2024:
Executive Summary & Full Report**

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Executive Summary

To help support the aims of the Sport & Active Wellbeing Vision 2026, a comprehensive survey was carried out across the University's student and staff population to capture participation trends, evaluate the impact sport and physical activity has on the campus community, and to provide a basis for future programming and service provision.

The survey was conducted from October to December 2024, with 1018 responses received in total. The key findings from the survey include:

- 59% of **students** and **staff** are meeting the World Health Organisation's guidelines of 150 minutes or more of physical activity per week.
- The top three reasons for being physically active are for physical health benefits (73%), to aid with mental wellbeing (43%), and to improve body image (41%).
- Of the 37% respondents who were members of the SportsPark, 76% were either satisfied or very satisfied with the University's sports facilities. Of those who were neutral, satisfied or dissatisfied, the main reasons given were lack of facilities / facilities too busy (66%), the cost of membership / pricing (44%) and the quality of the facilities (34%).
- 23% of SportsPark members used the facilities five or more times per week.
- The most popular facilities being used by our members are the gym (65%), the sports hall (25%) and the group exercise studios (23%).
- The most popular activities participated in by members and non-members alike are walking, running, weight training, team sports, and yoga / Pilates.
- Of the 68% of respondents who don't use the University's sports facilities, 48% cited cost as being the biggest factor, followed by lack of time (35%) and preference of using off campus locations instead (20%).
- 87% of **student** sport club members were either satisfied or very satisfied with their club experience. For the remaining 13%, the top three ways their experience could be improved was to have better facilities available (53%), improved communication and administration from Reading Students' Union (29%), and improved coaching (25%).
- For **student** club committee members, 47% were either unsatisfied, very unsatisfied or neutral in regards to the level of training and support they have received to effectively carry out their role.
- A total of 19% of all respondents were members of sports clubs outside of the University.
- **Students** who achieve 150 minutes or more of physical activity per week have a 17% combined stronger sense of belonging than those who achieve 30 minutes or less.
- **Students** who achieve 150 minutes or more of physical activity per week have a combined positive mental wellbeing score of 23% more than those who achieve 30 minutes or less.
- **Staff** who achieve 150 minutes or more of physical activity per week have a combined positive mental wellbeing score of 21% more than those who achieve 30 minutes or less.
- 84% of **students** and **staff** stated being physically active has a positive impact on academic or work-related attainment.
- The most active category of **students** had a 16% positive difference compared to the third least active category in their expectation of gaining a first or distinction in their degree classification.
- **Students** who are the most active have the highest confidence levels in finding a job within 6 months of finishing university.

- 55% of **students** and **staff** stated the sporting offer and facilities were influential in coming to study or work at the University in varying degrees.
- 50% of all respondents stated they were either very likely or likely to recommend the University's sport and active wellbeing offer to a friend or colleague, giving a Net Promoter Score of 50.

Open comments were received across a range of different aspects linked to the University's offer of sport and active wellbeing, which were categorised into group exercise, the gym, memberships and prices, wellbeing, sports clubs and facilities and provision. The comments will be reviewed and actioned accordingly, with communications being made public about what we can do moving forward, and what we can't do to aid transparency and understanding of feasibility. We will then provide an update later in the year in a 'You Said, We Did' format, highlighting the actions taken in response to the feedback provided.

Future recommendations have also been made in how to develop the survey for future iterations that would underpin the next sports strategy due at the end of 2026, and how the University needs to move forward in growing student and staff participation, and ensuring a positive experience for wider health, social and employability-related benefits. These recommendations are:

- Separate surveys for students and staff, with an additional one for community members.
- The utilisation of tools to evaluate the social and financial impact our sporting offer has on the local area.
- Increasing responses related to memberships, staffing, skill development and sustainability.
- Linking actual graduate degree results and starting graduate salaries to levels of physical activity with the Student Academic Records Office and Student Success teams' involvement.
- Obtaining undergraduate to postgraduate conversion levels to undertake a comparison of the impact sport plays on retention at the University.

Full Report

Introduction

To help underpin the aims of the Sport & Active Wellbeing Vision 2026, the SportsPark carried out a university-wide comprehensive survey to best capture current participation habits in sport and physical activity of its students and staff, analyse the impact of the Vision's first year, and provide a basis to determine future programmes, decisions and actions relating to the University's sporting provision. The SportsPark collaborated with Reading Students' Union, Human Resources and the Research & Evaluation Team to ensure information being requested from respondents could help gain a better understanding of our campus community, and support several departments with wider strategic developments.

The questions we asked in the survey related to demographics, participation habits, satisfaction and the impact of physical activity in respondents' everyday lives including on physical, mental and social health. In total, we received 1018 responses over a five-week period from 23rd October to 1st December 2024.

The following report aims to give a detailed breakdown and understanding of all responses and categorised feedback, for the purpose of aiding committee and working group discussions, and to inform the wider student and staff body of the key data and messages from the survey.

Demographics

Of the 1018 student and staff responses received, 38% were from individuals who identified as male, 59% from those who identified as female, 1% as transgender, 1% as non-binary, and 2% preferring not to say. The higher percentage of females is in line with [findings that females tend to complete surveys more than males](#).

In terms of ethnicity, as a summary, over two thirds of respondents (68%) identified as being from a white background, 18% from an Asian background, and 4% from a black background. The remaining 10% were either from mixed, multiple or other ethnic backgrounds, or who would prefer not to say.

From a disability perspective, 86% of respondents responded 'no' to identifying as a person with a disability, with 9% stating 'yes' and 5% preferring not to say.

In terms of how the above demographic data compares to the student and staff body as a whole at the University, a comparison was made against the 2022-23 Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report (data for the current academic year was unavailable at the time of analysis). As the low variation rates in *Table 1* below indicate, it is clear to see that survey respondents are representative of the University across gender, ethnicity and disability characteristics.

Table 1: Demographic Comparison Table

Characteristic	University-wide Data	Sport & Active Wellbeing Respondents
Gender: Male	43%	38%
Gender: Female	56%	58%
Gender: Other/Not specified	2%	4%
Ethnicity: White background	58%	68%
Ethnicity: Asian background	12%	18%
Ethnicity: Black background	4%	4%
Ethnicity: Multiple/Other/Not specified	26%	10%
Disability: Yes	18%^	9%
Disability: No	82%^	86%

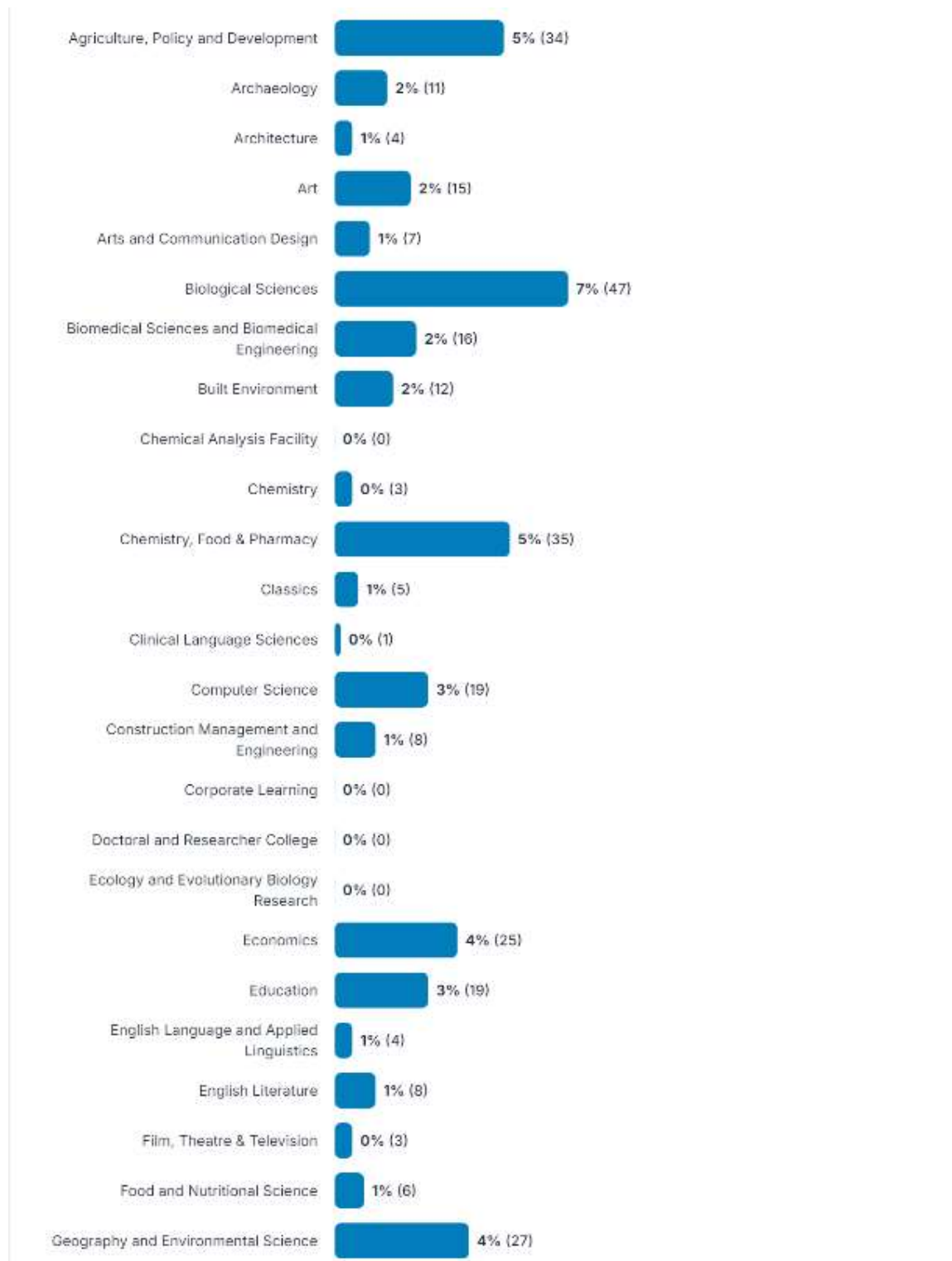
^ student data only

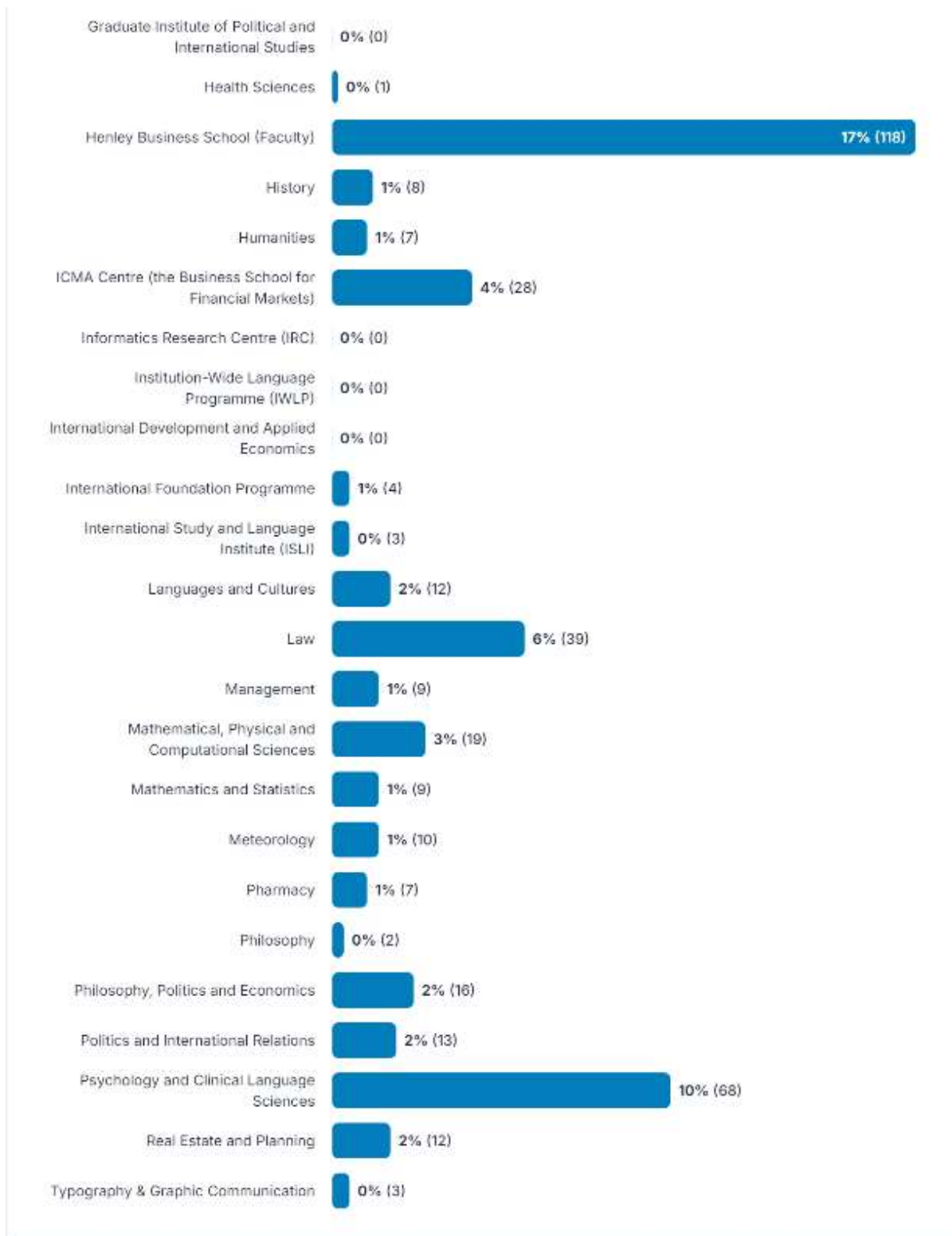
N.B. for ease of viewing, the percentage figure for responses has been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number from one decimal place only, so there may be slight discrepancies in totalling 100.

As can be expected from conducting a generic university survey, the bulk of responses were from students (68%) compared to staff (32%), with the most prominent age group across both categories being 18-25 year olds, followed by 26-35s (11%), and an equal amount (9% each) for 36-45s and 46-55s. Only 6% of respondents were aged 56 or over. The survey sample size was, therefore, representative of all age categories. For both students and staff, 96% were based at the Whiteknights campus, with 3% at London Road and only 1% at Henley Greenlands.

For student respondents, 85% were classed as undergraduate and 15% as postgraduate. Of the 49 official schools that form part of the academic faculties, the highest response rates were from Henley Business School (17%), Psychology & Clinical Language Sciences (10%), Biological Sciences (10%), the School of Law (7%) and Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy (5%). More first year undergraduate students completed the survey than any other year of study (36%), followed by year two students (26%) and then year threes (22%). Year one postgraduate students made up 10% of the respondents, followed by PhD students (4%) and, finally, year two postgraduates (1%).

Graph 1: Breakdown of Student Respondents by School

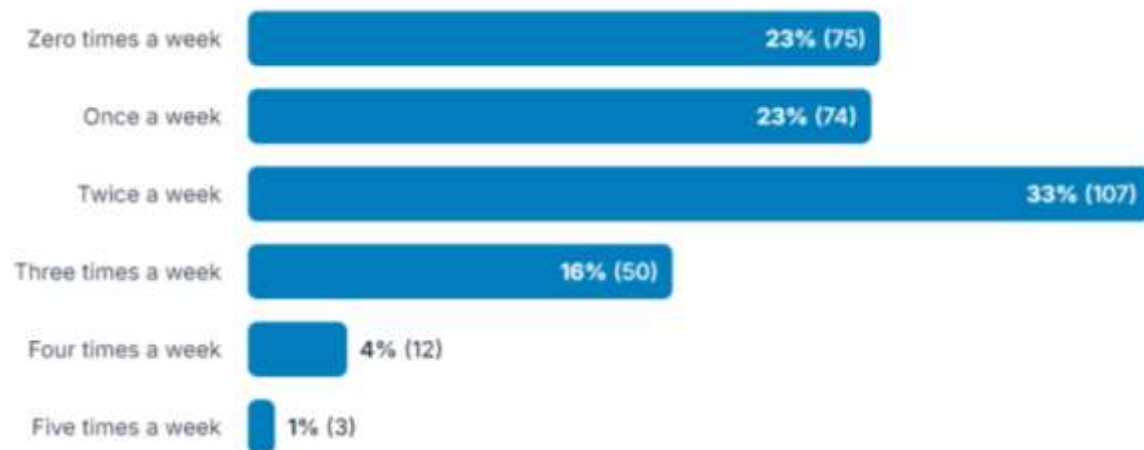




A considerable number of students (46%) commute to campus or live at home as opposed to living in the 21 officially recognised halls of residence, which all had a similar range of response rates, varying from zero to 6%. This figure is reflective of the increasing number of students choosing to commute in to campus, either from shared accommodation in and around Reading, or from the family home, and that aren't first year students living in halls of residence.

For staff respondents, 58% work in professional services and 42% in academic services, with almost a quarter of all staff (23%) working on campus every day. For those who do work from home, 23% do it just once a week, 33% twice a week, 16% three times a week, 4% four times a week, and just 1% of staff work from home five days per week.

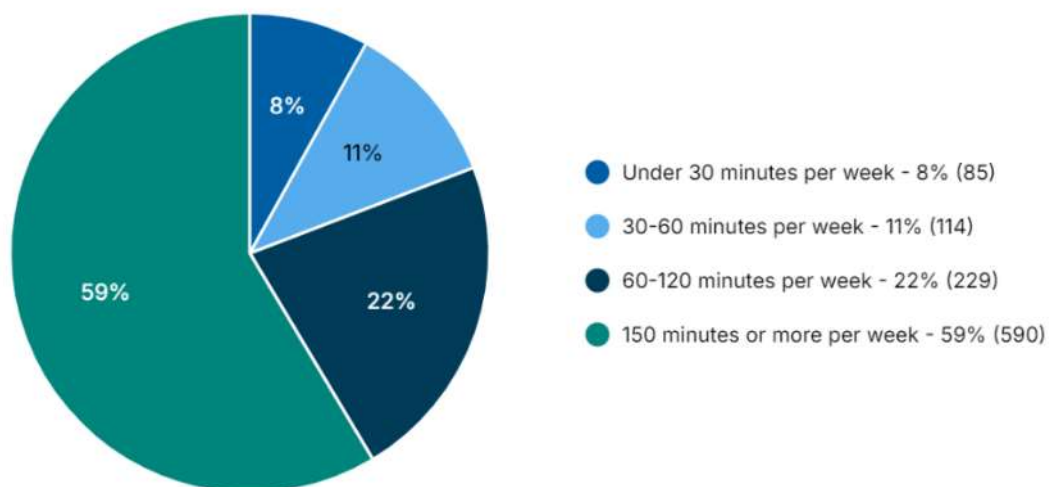
Graph 2: Frequency of Working from Home for Staff



Participation Habits

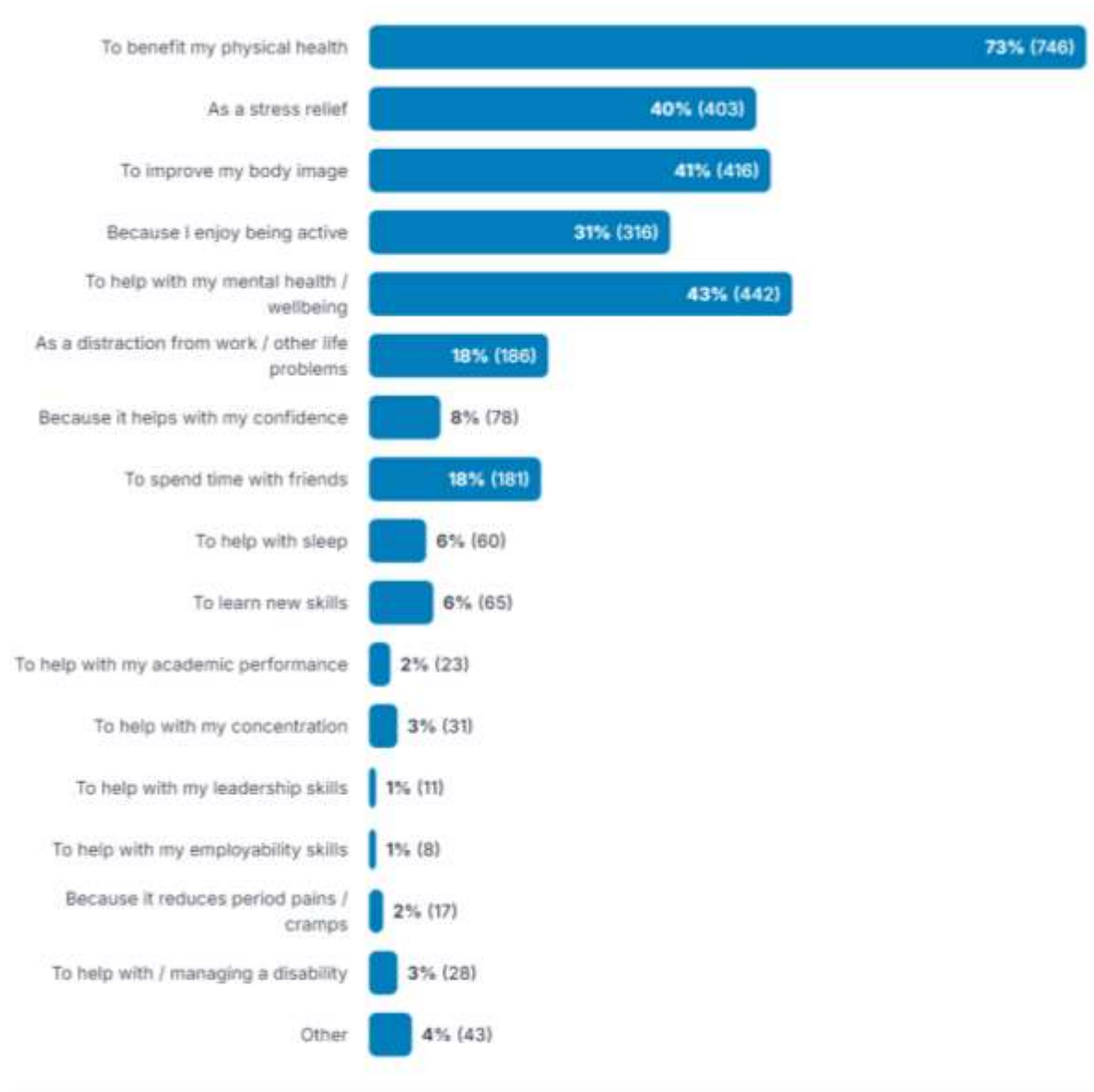
In terms of how active our students and staff are, 58% are currently meeting the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) guidelines of 150 minutes or more of physical activity per week, with 22% achieving between 60 to 120 minutes, 11% achieving between 30 to 60 minutes, and just 8% achieving under 30 minutes. The aim longer-term will be to target the 41% who are not achieving the recommended guidelines, to help improve their frequency of activity. A realistic target similar to ones set by other institutions across the sector would be for two thirds of our students and staff to be achieving 150 minutes or more per week.

Graph 3: Breakdown of Physical Activity Levels of all Respondents



In regards to motivational aspects to undertake sport and / or physical activity, respondents were asked to select their top three reasons from a pre-determined list of 16, with a minimum of one and a maximum of three responses, which saw 'to benefit my physical health' score highest (73%), followed by 'to help with my mental health / wellbeing' (43%), then 'to improve my body image' and 'stress relief' (41% and 40% respectively) and, finally, 'because I enjoy being active' (31%).

Graph 4: Motivational Reasons to Exercise



Facilities & Activities

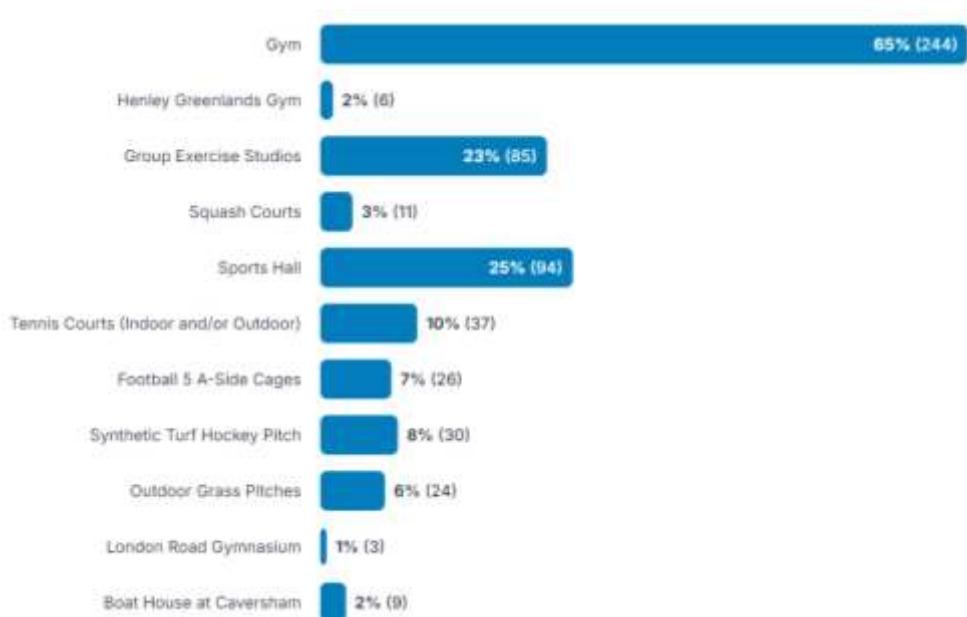
When asked if respondents were members of the University of Reading's SportsPark, 37% stated 'yes'. This equates to 374 respondents which is 11.7% of our total 3190 SportsPark membership base (as of December 2024). Whilst we would have liked a higher representation of members to have completed the survey, an upside of this is that the survey has resonated with students and staff who aren't members but who still have an interest in providing insight, data and feedback, which is extremely valuable in helping with our analysis so we aren't just seen as predominantly member-focussed.

Of the 37% who are members, 76% were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the university's sports facilities, with only 7% being either 'unsatisfied' or 'very unsatisfied'. 17% stated they were 'neutral'. The main reasons given for those respondents who selected 'unsatisfied', 'very unsatisfied' and 'neutral' were the 'lack of available facilities / facilities too busy' (66%), the 'cost of membership and pricing' (44%), and the 'quality of the facilities' (34%), which marries up with many of the open comments and feedback provided as part of the survey. Costs have risen in line with the Retail Price Index (RPI) but a recent benchmarking report demonstrated that the University of Reading's membership prices are above the sector average. With a current cost of living crisis occurring it is perhaps not unexpected that cost plays a significant part in member dissatisfaction. Coupled with ageing facilities and a lack of investment in new ones any time soon, it is felt that the issue around value for money will remain a constant in future surveys until new facilities can justify the higher-than-average membership fees.

For the 374 members, 23% used the facilities five or more times per week, with 40% using the facilities either three or four times, and 37% using them either once or twice, which gives good representation on frequency of usage across the board.

In terms of facility usage, the most popular facilities being used by our members are the gym (65%), the sports hall (25%) and the group exercise studios (23%).

Graph 5: Breakdown of Facility Usage of SportsPark Members



When the 374 respondents were asked what other activities they participate in away from the University’s sports facilities, walking was the highest scoring activity at 35%, followed by running (34%), weight training (28%), team sports (14%) and, finally, yoga / Pilates (11%).

When asked what type of activities respondents who weren’t members of the SportsPark participated in, the top five responses were identical to those respondents who were members, that is: walking (49%), running (31%), weight training (27%), team sports (17%), and yoga / Pilates (16%).

The basis of these questions was to evaluate whether there are activities that are trending or in high demand at present that we could better tailor our provision to, or whether we simply don’t have the capacity for. Both the SportsPark facilities and Whiteknights campus provide all top five activities, but the question remains whether more can be done to increase frequency, i.e. through structured provision, and whether capacity levels (i.e. in regards to the gym) do in fact restrict further activity from taking place.

One key change the sector has witnessed since the pandemic, is the number of staff memberships across university sport facilities declining due to the ability of being able to work from home more conveniently. This has undoubtedly changed physical activity behaviours and preferences, and universities must look at ways to adapt to such changes and support such preferences instead of simply continuing with the narrative of trying to increase staff member / engagement numbers on campus to pre-pandemic levels.

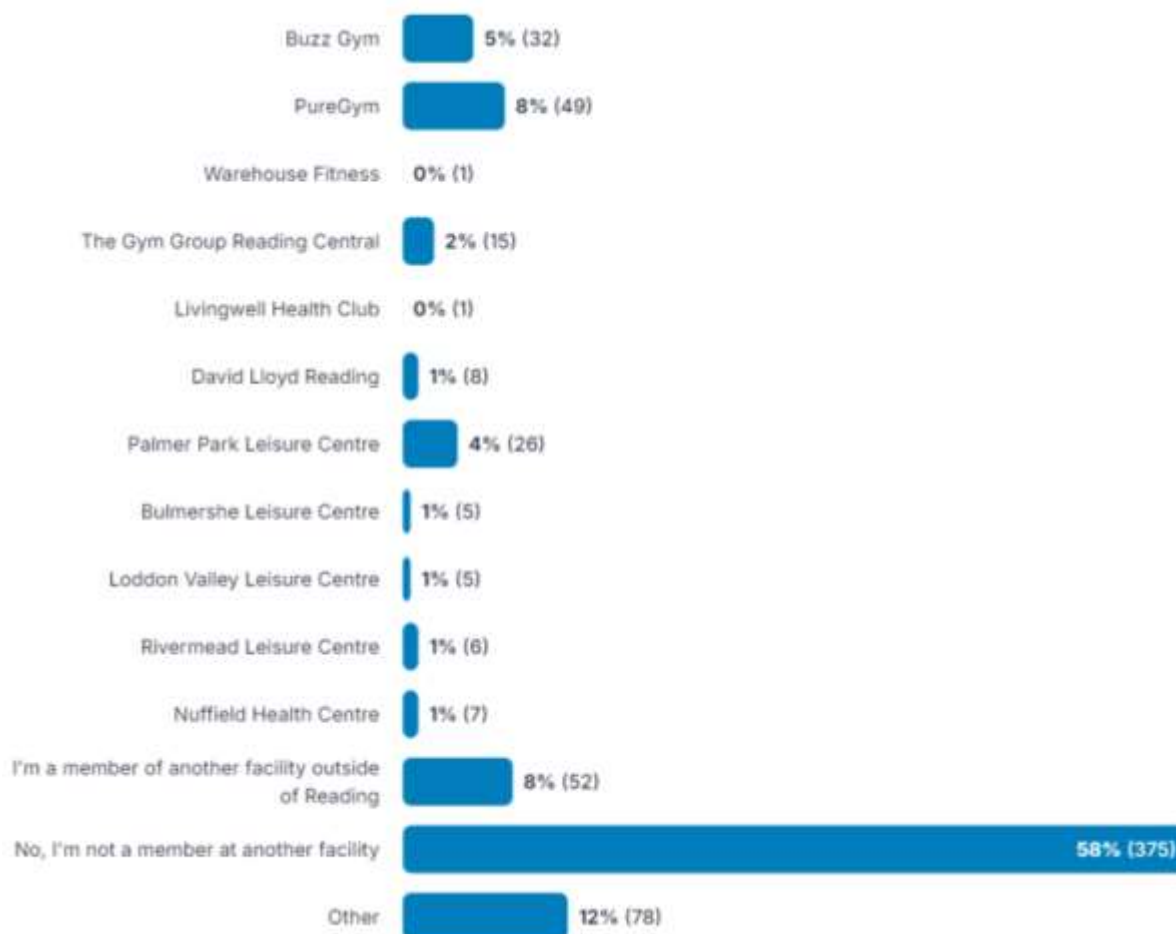
Of the 68% of respondents who don’t use the University’s sports facilities, 48% cited ‘cost’ as being the biggest factor, followed by ‘lack of time’ (35%) and ‘preference of using off campus locations’ instead (20%). Respondents were asked to list all that apply in order to give us a greater level of detail with the data.

Graph 6: Reasons for not using the University’s sports facilities



However, 58% of non-users weren’t a member of any other facility. The remaining respondents who do use other facilities do so primarily outside of the Reading area, which possibly could coincide with the high percentage of students and staff who commute in to the University from home. Local competitors in Reading with the highest scores were PureGym (8%), Buzz Gym (5%) and Palmer Park Leisure Centre (4%), which helps us understand which facilities pose the greatest competitive threat in the current climate. As mentioned previously, cost and value for money are our biggest challenges in trying to maximise our membership base.

Graph 7: Membership rates of non-University owned sports facilities



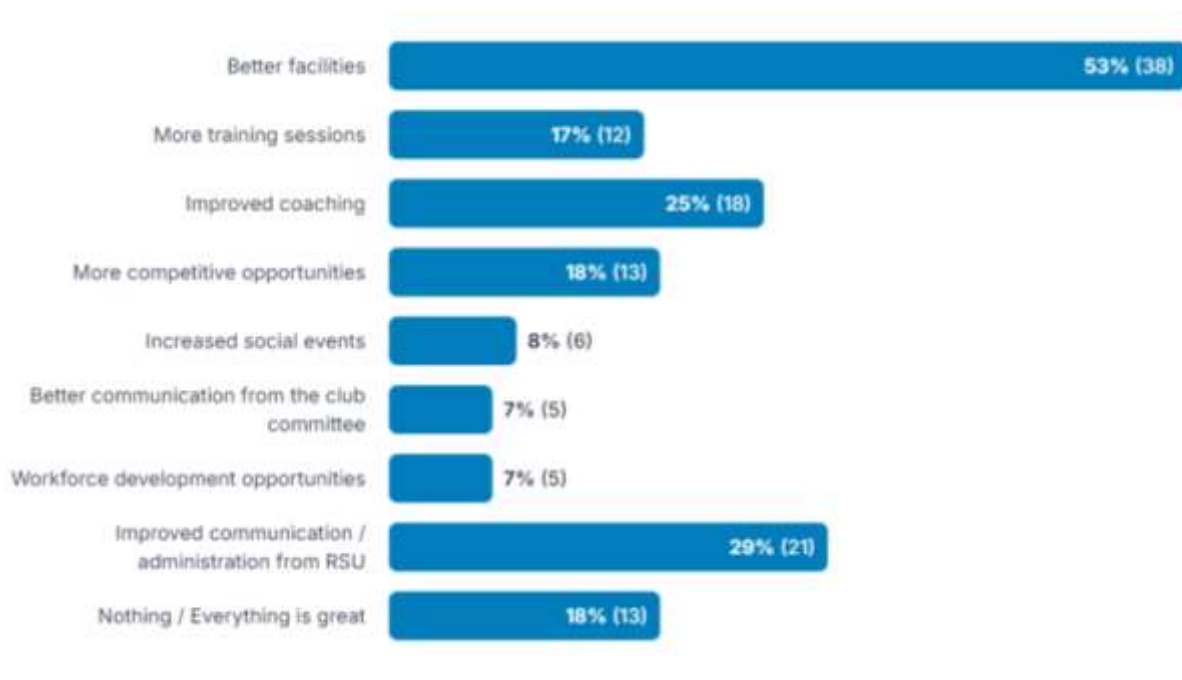
Sports Clubs

For student respondents, 54% formed part of a student sports club. This equates to 379 students, which is a similar figure and response rate to that of SportsPark member representation as a whole, and which represents 12.8% of the total student sports club membership base. The preference would have been to have a greater representation of the 2957 student sports club members but, equally, the insight and feedback from students not involved in club sport is just as important and valuable in many regards.

Of these 379 sports club students, 87% were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their club experience. For the remaining 13% who voted that they were 'unsatisfied', 'very unsatisfied' or 'neutral', the top three ways their experience could be improved was to have 'better facilities available' (53%), 'improved communication and administration from Reading Students' Union' (29%), and 'improved coaching' (25%).

The answers surrounding the improvement of the facilities supports many of the open comments received in the survey, and is an urgent area that the University must address if student satisfaction and membership growth is to be considered in the future. Communication, administration and coaching are areas that also need addressing moving forward in order to improve the sports club experience.

Graph 8: Reasons for Student Sports Club Experience Improvements



Of those students who were members of a club, 19% were on a club committee. Of these committee members, 47% were either ‘unsatisfied’, ‘very unsatisfied’ or ‘neutral’ in regards to the level of training and support they have received to effectively carry out their role, which is an area that needs addressing by further evaluating what areas of training and education are lacking.

Of all students and staff who completed the survey, a total of 19% were members of sports clubs outside of the University. 28% of these external club members undertook roles such as a coach or referee either alongside, or instead of, being a participant, thus demonstrating the desire to be involved in all aspects of running a sports club.

Impact & Influence

One key benefit from participating in sport and physical activity is the increase in wellbeing-related aspects, whether it be physical, mental or social. Part of social wellbeing is the sense of belonging participants have with their institution and local community, and so four questions relating to this were asked as part of the survey.

In *Table 2* below, a comparison was made between those students and staff who achieved the WHO’s recommended physical activity guidelines per week (150 minutes or more) against those who achieved the least (30 minutes or less) and how this affected their sense of belonging. For each of the four questions, those who achieved the recommended physical activity levels or more per week scored more positively with their responses across every score than the least active group of respondents. The responses ‘All of the time’, and ‘Often’ are seen as positive as it shows a more frequent sense of belonging, with ‘Some of the time’, ‘Rarely’ and ‘None of the time’ seen as increasingly negative responses. The mean average percentage across the four questions shows that students who achieve 150 minutes or more of physical activity per week have a 17%

stronger sense of belonging combined across both positive categories of ‘All of the time’ and ‘Often’.

These results are consistent with responses from similar surveys, such as the [British & Universities & Colleges Sport \(BUCS\) Student Survey 2023-24](#), that states 93.5% of students nationwide agreed that being involved in a sport gave them a sense of belonging to their institution and its community, and 88.5% of students agreed that BUCS sport has contributed positively to their higher education experience. Similarly, 84.5% of students agreed that being involved in BUCS sport has allowed them to culturally and socially interact with a wider group of students.

Table 2: Sense of Belonging Data

In terms of your overall sense of belonging at present:						
	Physical Activity Levels	All of the time	Often	Some of the time	Rarely	None of the time
1) I made the right decision in choosing to study at this higher education institution	150 mins or more	30%	44%	22%	2%	2%
	30 mins or less	25%	30%	25%	14%	5%
2) I feel like I belong in higher education	150 mins or more	37%	42%	18%	2%	1%
	30 mins or less	32%	32%	23%	7%	4%
3) I feel part of the community at this higher education institution	150 mins or more	21%	46%	25%	6%	1%
	30 mins or less	18%	38%	29%	7%	7%
4) I feel supported by this higher education institution	150 mins or more	25%	40%	24%	7%	3%
	30 mins or less	14%	27%	34%	13%	11%
Mean Average across all four questions	150 mins or more	28%	43%	22%	4%	2%
	30 mins or less	22%	32%	28%	10%	7%

N.B. for ease of viewing, the percentage figure for responses has been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number from one decimal place only, so there may be slight discrepancies in totalling 100.

In order to gauge an accurate perspective on the impact of physical activity on mental wellbeing, the Shortened Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) was used, asking 7 specific questions to participants about their thoughts and feelings over the two weeks’ prior to completing the survey. Results were separated into students and staff, to give a more accurate picture of mental health across the two communities.

The survey used the SWEMWBS questionnaire / toolkit to establish the overall mental wellbeing of both staff and students. However, it is difficult to fully interpret what the scores mean for each individual and whilst we haven’t provided the overall mean for each 1018 individualised responses as per the standard scoring suggestion, we have correlated physical activity levels against overall mental wellbeing.

In a similar analysis to the sense of belonging data, the responses in *Table 3* of ‘All of the time’ and ‘Often’ are classed as positive, with ‘Some of the time’, ‘Rarely’ and ‘None of the time’ deemed more negative. For all but one single score (which only had a 1% difference), the data indicates that those who are most physically active have more positive mental wellbeing scores than those who are least active, supporting the BUCS Student Survey 2023-24 result that 88.7% of students nationwide believed that taking part in a BUCS sport has helped support their mental wellbeing.

The mean average percentage across the 7 questions shows that students who achieve 150 minutes or more of physical activity per week have a combined positive mental wellbeing score of 23% more than those who only achieve 30 minutes or less. It must be acknowledged that this data has not been tested using statistical methods; however, the questions and analysis presented here give useful indications of impact.

Table 3: Mental Wellbeing Data (Students)

Below are statements about feelings and thoughts as used in the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS). In terms of your overall mental health at present, please select the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks:						
	Physical Activity Levels	All of the time	Often	Some of the time	Rarely	None of the time
1) I've been feeling relaxed	150 mins or more	8%	42%	40%	10%	1%
	30 mins or less	1%	21%	52%	16%	9%
2) I've been feeling useful	150 mins or more	9%	45%	35%	9%	1%
	30 mins or less	6%	28%	42%	15%	7%
3) I've been feeling optimistic	150 mins or more	4%	30%	41%	23%	2%
	30 mins or less	1%	11%	40%	36%	9%
4) I've been feeling closer to other people	150 mins or more	9%	41%	38%	10%	2%
	30 mins or less	6%	24%	42%	21%	6%
5) I've been thinking clearly	150 mins or more	9%	46%	36%	8%	1%
	30 mins or less	7%	26%	39%	19%	8%
6) I've been able to make up my mind about things	150 mins or more	10%	42%	32%	14%	2%
	30 mins or less	6%	18%	44%	18%	12%
7) I've been dealing with problems well	150 mins or more	21%	49%	22%	7%	1%
	30 mins or less	13%	33%	31%	16%	6%
Mean average across all 7 questions	150 mins or more	10%	42%	35%	12%	1%
	30 mins or less	6%	23%	41%	20%	8%

N.B. for ease of viewing, the percentage figure for responses has been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number from one decimal place only, so there may be slight discrepancies in totalling 100.

For staff results, there was slightly less consistency across the board with 30 out of 35 comparison scores supporting the statement. However, these scores still suggest that those who are most physically active have more positive mental wellbeing scores than those who are least active. The mean average percentage across the 7 questions shows that staff who achieve 150 minutes or more of physical activity per week have a combined positive mental wellbeing score of 21% more than those who only achieve 30 minutes or less.

Table 4: Mental Wellbeing Data (Staff)

Below are statements about feelings and thoughts as used in the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS). In terms of your overall mental health at present, please select the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks:						
	Physical Activity Levels	All of the time	Often	Some of the time	Rarely	None of the time
1) I've been feeling relaxed	150 mins or more	6%	44%	41%	8%	1%
	30 mins or less	3%	10%	66%	17%	3%
2) I've been feeling useful	150 mins or more	12%	56%	28%	3%	1%
	30 mins or less	14%	31%	41%	7%	7%
3) I've been feeling optimistic	150 mins or more	2%	30%	41%	25%	1%
	30 mins or less	0%	14%	31%	48%	3%
4) I've been feeling closer to other people	150 mins or more	9%	45%	37%	6%	3%
	30 mins or less	3%	34%	38%	21%	3%
5) I've been thinking clearly	150 mins or more	13%	47%	33%	7%	1%
	30 mins or less	14%	31%	34%	14%	7%
6) I've been able to make up my mind about things	150 mins or more	7%	42%	35%	14%	2%
	30 mins or less	7%	10%	52%	17%	10%
7) I've been dealing with problems well	150 mins or more	27%	44%	23%	4%	1%
	30 mins or less	21%	45%	21%	10%	3%
Mean average across all 7 questions	150 mins or more	11%	44%	34%	10%	1%
	30 mins or less	9%	25%	40%	19%	5%

N.B. for ease of viewing, the percentage figure for responses has been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number from one decimal place only, so there may be slight discrepancies in totalling 100.

In terms of demonstrating the impact of physical activity levels on attainment for both students (academic) and staff (work), we asked all 1018 respondents what impact, positive or negative, does being physically active have on their academic or work attainment. 84% stated it was either 'very positive' or 'positive'. 15% stated they were 'neutral' on the comment, and only 1% stated it was 'negative'. Referencing the BUCS Student Survey 2023-24, the results from that showed that 64% of students across the country believed the soft skills they have developed through BUCS sports have enhanced their ability to study.

Further to the attainment question, we asked all final year students (195 in total) what their expected grade was upon graduation to see if being more physically active had a bearing on academic attainment to support wider sector-based research.

For the most part of this finding, the data suggests that higher academic results are linked with increased physical activity levels. From viewing *Table 5* below, the more active the respondent, the more likely they are to earn a first, or distinction, degree classification instead of a second, or merit, classification or lower. The most active category of students had a 16% positive difference compared to the third least active category in their expectation of gaining a first, or distinction, degree classification.

The main anomaly lies with the 40% of respondents who are least active but who are expecting a first, or distinction, degree classification which could support the narrative that many inactive students, particularly internationals, spend an over and above amount of time on their academic studies at the sacrifice of more social and leisure time.

It is also worth noting that these are expected grades and not actual ones, which highlights the need that for future surveys and more accurate data reporting on the links between physical activity levels and academic attainment, a collaboration with the Student Academic Records department would be extremely valuable.

Table 5: Academic Attainment Data

	Physical Activity Levels	1 st Class / Distinction	Upper 2 nd Class / Merit	Lower 2 nd Class / Pass	UG Third Class
Q34. What is your expected grade upon graduation?	150 mins or more	39%	53%	11%	1%
	60 - 120 mins	32%	62%	6%	0%
	30 – 60 mins	23%	73%	5%	0%
	30 mins or less	40%	40%	10%	10%

N.B. for ease of viewing, the percentage figure for responses has been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number from one decimal place only, so there may be slight discrepancies in totalling 100.

For final year undergraduate students, an additional question was asked in how confident they were in finding employment within the first 6 months of finishing university. The results showed slightly more confidence from those students who achieved higher levels of physical activity in both the positive ‘very confident’ and ‘confident’ categories. Combining both positive confidence scores across each physical activity level, the data shows that those who are the most active have the highest confidence levels with 45% in total, those who are second most active have a 42% confidence level, and those who are third least active have a combined confidence level of 32%.

Similar to the academic attainment question, the anomaly lies with the least active group who scored a combined 44% with confidence levels, skewing the data somewhat and opening up the same question as before, in why are those who achieve the least amount of exercise more confident in their career, going against sector-wide evidence? One possible explanation for the least active having so much confidence is that it marries up with the academic attainment answer, i.e. they believe that their expected first, or distinction, degree classification will naturally

lead them into employment, and / or that they might also be spending time on internships or other career-related activities, leaving less time for exercise. However, as we know for many job roles the classification of a degree is only one-part of the application process, with well-established skillsets, experience, character, etc, contributing significantly to the other. This can be supported by a related statistic from the BUCS Student Survey 2023-24, which stated that 82.8% of students agreed that they have been able to develop softer skills (i.e. communication, leadership, time management, etc) from being involved in BUCS sports. For future surveys undertaken at the University of Reading, it is recommended that more sub-questions are asked to attain what is driving respondents' levels of confidence, i.e. skillsets, teamwork, mental attitude, etc.

Table 6: Undergraduate Employability Confidence Data

	Physical Activity Levels	Very confident	Confident	Neutral	Somewhat confident	Not at all confident
Q35. How confident are you about finding a job within the first 6 months of finishing university?	150 mins or more	18%	27%	28%	16%	12%
	60 – 120 mins	16%	26%	18%	18%	21%
	30 – 60 mins	16%	16%	53%	5%	11%
	30 mins or less	33%	11%	22%	33%	0%

N.B. for ease of viewing, the percentage figure for responses has been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number from one decimal place only, so there may be slight discrepancies in totalling 100.

In terms of how influential the sporting offer and facilities are to students and staff in their decision to come and study or work at the University, 45% stated it was 'not at all influential' with the remaining 55% stating it was 'influential' in varying degrees. This data is not too dissimilar to recent Open Day (Oct, 2024) data in which 46% of potential students considered the provision of sport either 'important' or 'very important'. What is worth noting in the Sport & Active Wellbeing 2024 survey data is that staff and students are combined in the responses, and whilst sport may play a significant factor in the decision of where to study for many students, it perhaps wouldn't feature as highly for staff accepting a position to come and work at the University. For future surveys, we would look to separate students and staff to assist with more detailed reporting.

Being able to evidence the impact of sport and active wellbeing is one of the two principle reasons for rolling out the survey. The other is ensuring we are getting our offer and provision right for our users. Thus, all 1018 respondents were asked how likely they were to recommend the University's sport and active wellbeing offer to a friend or colleague, with 50% stating either 'very likely' or 'likely', and 18% stating 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely'. The remaining 33% stated they were 'not familiar with the offering' so could not comment. This latter response in itself highlights that more could possibly be done in regards to awareness of programmes, facilities, opportunities, etc, to promote sport and active wellbeing more visibly across campus and to achieve a wider buy-in from faculties, schools and professional services.

If we remove the 33% who are unfamiliar so as to be able to calculate the Net Promoter Score (NPS), then we have 512 respondents acting as promoters (very likely / likely), and 175 respondents acting as detractors (unlikely / very unlikely). Based on the following industry-standardised calculation below, we therefore achieve a NPS score of 50.

Total % of Promoters (75%) – Total % of Detractors (25%) = NPS (50)

The score is always a whole number ranging from -100 to +100 and indicates happiness with brand experience or service. In this case, a score of 50 is deemed very good, and is a benchmark for future surveys to monitor our growth in provision and impact, but also to compare to HE competitors.

Comments & Feedback

A key objective from this survey was to ensure that along with quantitative data from respondents, we also obtained valuable qualitative data from open feedback to be able to gain a more in-depth understanding and insight into students and staff members' opinions and ideas in relation to the sport and active wellbeing provision at the University. In total, 331 open responses were submitted which were then categorised into different subject areas for an easier overview and analysis.

As with any typical customer service-styled survey, there are:

- Practical comments that contain some useful insight that can help us try to improve a particular service or provision;
- Comments that help reiterate our cause for investment, change, etc, and add to that narrative further;
- Comments about the individual's personal situations or preferences which are often more challenging to cater for, or are unrealistic in terms of us being able to meet their expectations;
- Feedback that highlights a limited understanding or awareness of various financial and/or operational challenges that may prevent us from achieving their desired outcomes, which may mean our communications need to improve.

We have set out a summary in each subject area that intends to report on *what we can* do and *what we can't do*, and to explain our reasons for such as best as possible.

Group Exercise Programme

With approximately 70 classes offered per week to students, staff and community users and upwards of 25,000 attendances per year, the Group Exercise programme is by far SportsPark's flagship programme. In total, 29 responses were provided, mainly centred around personal preference of the type of classes on offer, preference of class timing, space to exercise and running more of the popular classes due to them often filling up too quickly.

What we can do: We will review our timetable, including attendances, type of activities, who they're for and their ability levels, and try and reflect the needs of participants as best as possible so classes are well-attended but with no waiting lists, and classes with low numbers get cancelled or re-programmed differently. We often experiment with new classes and times in response to comments by customers and ongoing trends, and will now review via our Sports Leadership Team.

What we can't do: Be everything to everyone all of the time! Everyone has their own personal preference of when they want classes to be held based on when they are on campus. However, our basis for scheduling classes is on when it is convenient for the majority of participants and also instructor availability. It is a constant challenge to source and retain high-quality group

exercise instructors during peak times, especially when the market is seeing lower numbers of instructors gaining qualifications. Often, despite wanting to run a new class activity or reschedule one to a different time, we are not able to recruit an appropriate instructor.

Gym Provision

Our most popular facility at the SportsPark by usage is the gym, which is 132 station-sized over an area of 598 square metres. Industry analysis shows that the gym is too small and under-resourced for the number of members using it. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that much of the feedback received about the gym facility is that it is too busy too often, and does not contain enough equipment to meet demand, especially lifting platforms. Music levels were also reported as being too loud for many customers.

What we can do: Investigate the implementation of a usage map to show members when it is busy to help improve the flow of customers better. We can also look to install a new music system that regulates sound better across both floors, and is not concentrated in certain areas. We can also raise more communication about users sitting on equipment on their phones in between sets for extended periods of time. We can help improve exercise programme options by rolling out our proposed TRAKK app that supports training regimes and provides clear guidance, etiquette and goals to all members. Finally, we can look at replacing worn or damaged equipment and add niche smaller pieces to support workouts better.

What we can't do: We sadly can't increase the number of larger equipment stations due to health and safety regulations regarding space and also cost. We cannot open earlier or become a 24/7 operation due to the impact on staffing numbers and contractual hours, as this would see us needing to charge members more to cover such costs.

Wellbeing

There were 17 comments specifically around wellbeing and the impact that it has on our students and staff, and how important it is in their day to day lives. Many respondents struggle to allocate time to physical activity, despite knowing the important role that it plays. Some have even commented that their mental health would have spiralled if it hadn't been for physical activity, the SportsPark and the green campus. There appeared to be a high response rate from staff members, based on their reference to working environments, and that the University should be doing more to encourage wellbeing initiatives and reducing workloads for them.

What we can do: Look at collaborating with other departments across the University to try to facilitate more opportunities to promote and enable wellbeing activities to occur, either through structured activity, or from active promotion and advocacy from management and senior leaders.

What we can't do: Solve personal or workload-based challenges, we can only signpost, encourage and support as best as possible.

Sports Clubs

Due to the nature of having 50 student sports clubs on offer, there was obviously quite a wide variety of comments relating to them (58 in total). Many were club-specific in relation to aspects such as scheduling and event planning, as well as the culture within the club not always being supportive, communicative or as inclusive as expected. However, one regular theme was around the cost of membership to join the club and accessing the SportsPark facilities being too high.

The rowing club received a strong mention with all-positive reviews, citing it as having a great atmosphere with excellent coaches and a supportive environment and, for several respondents, was the reason they decided to study at Reading. This is to be expected as rowing has designated staffing, along with its own specific facilities, and considerable financial support to be able to make it a focus sport at the institution.

What we can do: 'SportsPark and Reading Students' Union will form a Sport Working Group to discuss ongoing collaboration and communication with clubs about how best to facilitate club training and competitions. This will help to ensure that SportsPark is kept informed and consulted on cost and membership processes for clubs.'

What we can't do: Reduce costs to the point where the SportsPark runs at a deficit due to tight targets currently being set by the University to ensure financial and operational sustainability. Trying to find the balance between not discouraging or pricing students out of joining clubs but remaining financially buoyant is very challenging in present times.

Membership & Prices

A total of 27 comments were submitted in relation to the membership prices and charges to use the SportsPark, with many respondents calling for subsidised memberships by the University to help address wellbeing challenges, and prevent users from going to local competitors and losing time spent on travel that could be used for working/studying. Some believed the costs were at odds with the University's strategies and that more could be done to support students and staff as opposed to putting up a large-scale barrier to access. There were also several comments with proposals about how the memberships are structured, calling for more specific categories to target those individuals who may only want access to one or two facilities/programmes.

What we can do: Review the membership categories at Committee level to ensure we are providing the right packages to different user groups, including irregular campus visitors, to better suit their needs. Conversations with the University and sector benchmarking will continue to try and find a reasonable balance between cost to members and the ability to generate enough revenue to remain financially viable.

What we can't do: Reduce the cost below the point where SportsPark is in financial deficit. Operating costs have increased dramatically over the past two to three years, and those costs – as we've seen with many businesses – sometimes cannot be subsumed by the operator and have to be passed on to the customer in order to stay buoyant. At present, SportsPark is still operating in deficit so costs will not be changing radically any time soon unless the University wishes to subsidise memberships.

Facilities & Provision

By far the most comments received (82 in total) were in relation to the overall facilities and provision as a whole not being enough to meet demand. The current SportsPark site was built in 1987 with various small-scale add-ons since then. In 2012, the on-site student population was approximately 11,000 but today, it stands at around 17,000. Unfortunately, the sports facilities have not grown in tandem with the student population meaning the demand is now outweighing the supply, is often overcrowded, and is cited as the number one barrier to growing sport and increasing levels of participation on campus. One comment stated the Sport & Active Wellbeing Vision was too ambitious due to not having the required facility space to support and cater for its aims. In addition to capacity issues, many comments alluded to the state of some facilities being

in desperate need of refurbishment, i.e. the changing rooms, showers and lack of sufficient lockers, as well as cleanliness issues.

Some respondents were aware of the different programmes that were on offer, i.e. the Knights Active social sport programme, stating they have been extremely well-received with a good variety to choose from, and sport is becoming much more visible now on campus than before, with a great community feel now felt at the SportsPark. Several comments were received in relation to the relatively new gym at Henley Greenlands campus which has been a great addition to the site, although more pieces of equipment would be preferable. Several similar comments highlighted how great it is to have a SportsPark on campus, and how it always looks busy and full of activity. Additionally, there were many positive comments made about SportsPark staff being welcoming and supportive, with specific names often being mentioned in relation to delivering great sessions or providing excellent customer service.

One specific question in the survey asked staff respondents what type of provision or activities they would like to see more of, with responses ranging from group exercise activities currently being offered already, to more outdoor, off-campus activity such as hiking and sailing. There were some comments citing that team sports would be well-appreciated, as well as staff-only changing spaces as evidence from the survey shows that many staff do not enjoy participating in sport or physical activity around students.

There were also requests for more beginner sessions to cater for those who are completely new to sport or exercise and don't know where to start, as well as facilitate medical referrals, and to provide opportunities to participate on campus or in staff locations other than the SportsPark for ease of access and time-saving. There were also calls for more information and communication about the University's provision in staff inductions by HR and in general across campus.

There were several comments about the complexities linked to the bookings process for members, citing availability issues and functionality of the associated app, and the penalties for missing booked sessions.

Finally, there were 15 comments referring to the need for a swimming pool on campus which would drive up engagement and membership rates, and reduce the need for students/staff to attend Palmer Park Leisure Centre and other swimming providers instead.

What we can do: We will continually review and aim to grow the variety of sports and activities on offer to encourage participation wherever and whenever possible. Our social sport programme is growing in size and variety each semester, and we welcome feedback about what activities we should schedule. We will also continually look at and review different spaces across our campuses that have potential to facilitate activities, such as Padel pop-up courts, a campus running club, and group exercise roadshows. We will also review and closely monitor our customer app for any signs of booking abuse and bots with a planned management system upgrade due in 2025. We also recognise the need to support more beginners and those with health concerns who would greatly benefit from more regular and structured activities. In addition, we will continue to engage in dialogue with the University and key stakeholders in regards to facility growth and improvements to allow for greater numbers of students, staff and the community to engage in sport and physical activity on campus. We will monitor the cleanliness of facilities more alongside the contracted cleaners and push for quicker, more reactive maintenance from the Estates department and any subsequent contractors.

What we can't do: Sadly, any large-scale facility build or extension will not be delivered for several years and only if and when the University's financial situation allows such growth to occur. The next few years in higher education are going to be critical to the survival of many universities, and the challenge that is being presented to us is trying to offer a high-quality sporting environment that satisfies its participants, whilst maintaining financial and operational efficiencies. We are also mindful that we cannot provide every sport that some respondents would like to see, either due to facility restrictions or cost. However, we will be happy to experiment with new programmes and ideas as a team, and aim to make participation as enjoyable, accessible and affordable as possible.

Future Recommendations

Whilst surveys have been conducted in the past regarding various aspects of sport provision at the University, none have been carried out covering such a wide variety of topics or in partnership with such key stakeholders, such as Reading Students' Union and Human Resources.

This survey has formed a strong foundation on which to cross-reference and build on the Sport & Active Wellbeing Vision 2026 further over the remaining two years. The data and feedback has been invaluable to understanding our students and staff better which will, subsequently, allow us to have a more refined focus to enhance planning and delivery.

However, based on the survey results and by continually reviewing other institution equivalents from across the sector, there are recommendations to be made in how we could strengthen the survey for next time. More than likely, this will be in late 2026 and will form the very start and foundation of the next sports strategy in the University's centenary year. Such recommendations include the following:

- Separate surveys for students and staff, as this will allow us more flexibility with the question logic and will be easier to analyse and report on for separate purposes, committees and departments.
- Potentially run a community-based survey for both members and non-members via the Community Engagement team, to be able to evaluate what we can do as a campus and service to increase engagement levels and help contribute towards being an 'Engaged University'.
- Ask questions and utilise tools to evaluate the social and financial impact our students, staff and sporting provision / facilities has on the local area. Several universities have already conducted such an analysis that demonstrates how significant university sport is within the wider context of the town or city it is located in, i.e. volunteering hours, social capital, economic contribution, etc.
- Ask more quantitative questions relating to membership categories along with satisfaction of staffing and cleanliness, as this will ensure we are able to collect valuable data on key topics of interest as highlighted in this survey's comments section.
- With the University very much focussed on sustainability and the environment, it seems pertinent to blend this theme into the survey to obtain respondents' views on how sustainability in sport can be improved or considered more, and how much of a role the environment itself plays in facilitating – or hindering – participation.
- In regards to the student employability aspect of the survey, this is also an area that can be delved into deeper to assess more specifically the impact of being physically active on

actual attainment and output, as the results from this survey were only based on perception and expectation from students. In order to progress this, there would need to be the resources and buy-in from both the Student Academic Records team, and the department for Student Success, in order to cross-reference actual grades to respondents. Engaging with these teams and having the ability to track graduate starting salaries would also be recommended to provide robust data that can support the research that links graduate success to participation in sport. Several institutions have already managed to undertake surveys and reports of this nature with resounding success in their data that they have then presented wider to the sector.

- In a similar vein to the above recommendation, it would also be pertinent to provide questions that establish the conversion rate of undergraduate students to postgraduate students as, again, sector-wide research is currently indicating that those students who participate in campus and social sport have a stronger tendency to stay on at their institution and enrol in further study, than those who don't.
- Finally, and linked to the point raised about the impact of sport on employability, would be to ask more questions in regards to perceptions around soft skill development through sport, i.e. communication, leadership, resilience, teamwork, etc, to be able to evidence this aspect of professional development and how such skills are symptomatic of participation in sport.

Conclusion

The results from this first Sport & Active Wellbeing survey 2024 provide valuable insights into the demographics, behaviours, experiences and perceptions of the University of Reading's students and staff, whether they are active or inactive, SportsPark members or non-members. The findings highlight the positive impact that sport and physical activity has on physical, social and mental wellbeing, and both academic and professional performance, whilst also identifying areas for improvement with our service provision, which will now be one of our key focal points over the coming months.

The University now needs to acknowledge the importance sport and active wellbeing plays in achieving its strategic outcomes, from recruitment through to retention, health and wellbeing through to satisfaction, and graduate attainment through to employability, and to invest financially if it wants growth to occur that meets the ever-increasing demand being placed on its existing sports facilities. Such growth will allow for a range of programmes that facilitate the increase of participation and opportunities for student development, as well as an enhanced overall experience.

Aligning the insights of this survey to the intended outcomes of the current Sport & Active Wellbeing Vision 2026 will, hopefully, help enhance engagement and foster a more active and engaged University of Reading community.