

**Developing, implementing, and evaluating a parent support programme for rugby parents:
An action research project.**

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Abstract

Objectives

The aim of this project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a parent support programme for an under 18 rugby academy team.

Methods

A revised version of Lewin's model of action research (Elliot, 1991) guided the study. Firstly, observations, interviews, and informal conversations occurred with parents and staff members to identify parent support needs. Data were analysed following the guidance of Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2018). Analysis indicated that a series of face-to-face interactive workshops broadly focused on topics related to transitions would be most useful and desirable. Thus, a four-workshop programme was developed and delivered. The programme was evaluated throughout by informal conversations during the workshop, completion of an online survey and interviews.

Findings and Discussions

The four workshops focused on the transition from under 17s to 18s, potential pathways after the under 18-season, handling non-normative transitions, and autonomy-supportive parenting were delivered. Overall, parents indicated that they found the workshops to be beneficial and enjoyable, particularly when they had opportunities to engage in discussion with other parents. They perceived that the content was useful, although some were unsure of the duration and regularity of the workshops. Researcher field notes highlighted both strengths of the programme and areas for further consideration.

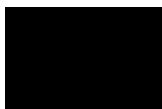
Conclusions

Utilising an action research approach to develop, implement, and evaluate parent support programmes appears to be effective. Particularly, it allows for a more nuanced programme to be developed, which particularly caters to the needs of the parents and organisation in which it is being delivered.

Declarations

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed



Date: 20/12/2022

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed:



Date: 20/12/2022

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for electronic sharing.

Signed:



Date: 20/12/2022

The University's ethical procedures have been followed and, where appropriate, that ethical approval has been granted.

Signed:



Date: 20/12/2022

Contents

Abstract	I
Declarations	II
List of Tables and Illustrations	V
List of Abbreviations	VI
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	4
2.1. How Parents Influence Sporting Experience	4
2.2. Factors Effecting Parents	8
2.3. Previous Sport Parenting Interventions	12
2.4. Aims and research questions	17
Chapter 3: Method	18
3.1. Philosophical Underpinnings and Methodology	18
3.2. Action Research	19
3.3. Procedure	27
3.4. Methodological Rigour	35
Chapter 4: Results	37
4.1. Stage 1: Reconnaissance	37
4.2. Stage 2: Plan	46
4.3. Stage 3: Action Intervention	56
4.4. Stage 4: Evaluation	68
Chapter 5: Discussion and Reflection	89
5.1. Thoughts on the Research Process	89
5.2. Learning from the Evaluation Stage	91
5.3. Suggestions for Future Parent Programmes and Applied Implications	94
5.4. Limitations and Future Research Directions	95
5.5. Conclusion	97
Appendices	99
Appendix A. Parent Information Sheet	100
Appendix B. Participant Consent Form	104

Appendix C. Parent Interview Guide: Reconnaissance Stage	<u>106</u>
Appendix D. Staff Interview Guide: Reconnaissance Stage	<u>109</u>
Appendix E. Parent Interview Guide: Evaluation Stage	<u>112</u>
Appendix F. Staff Interview Guide: Evaluation Stage	<u>116</u>
References	<u>120</u>

List of Tables and Illustrations

Figure 3.1: Action-Reflection Cycle (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011) _____	21
Figure 3.2: O’Leary’s cycles of research as cited by (Koshy et al., 2010) _____	22
Figure 3.3: Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) Action Research Spiral _____	23
Figure 3.4: Kurt Lewin’s model of action research as interpreted by Kemmis (Elliot, 1991; Kemmis, 1980) _____	24
Figure 3.5: A revised version of Lewin’s model of action research (Elliot, 1991) _____	25
Figure 3.6: Emended Action Research Model _____	27
Table 4.1: Content Themes with Planned Delivery and Evidence of Need _____	47
Table 4.2: What did parents learn from the support programme? _____	71
Table 4.3: Parent Recommendations (Content) _____	78
Table 4.4: Parent Recommendations (Format) _____	81
Table 4.5: Parent Recommendations (Logistics) _____	85

List of Abbreviations

PAR: Participatory Action Research

SAM: Senior Academy Manager

BUCS: British Universities and Colleges Sport

RFU: Rugby Football Union

Chapter 1:

Introduction

Over the last few decades, considerable time has been spent considering the influence of parents within youth sport settings (Dorsch et al., 2021; Harwood & Knight, 2015; 2016; Knight, 2019; Knight et al., 2017). This includes aiming to identify and understand the effects of the different forms of support that parents display (Dorsch et al., 2021; Knight et al., 2017) and the consequences this has. For instance, it has been recognised that parents can support their children through offering encouragement to their child after performances and using positive verbal feedback when communicating with their children (Elliot & Drummond, 2017; Knight, 2019; Tamminen et al., 2017; Elliot & Drummond, 2017). Displays of affect towards their children as they demonstrate unconditional and physical comfort, are also viewed as supportive (Baker et al., 2003; Dorsch et al., 2021). Parents can also offer logistical support to their children by transporting them to and from sporting activity and paying for the necessities for participating in their chosen sport (Elliot et al., 2017; 2023; Harwood & Knight, 2015). When the type of supportive behaviour fits the needs of the child, it can positively influence the parent-child relationship as well as children's sporting experiences (Dorsch et al., 2017; 2021). Conversely, when the parent pressures their child, or when the supportive behaviours fail to meet the needs of the child, this can have a detrimental impact on the child (Dorsch et al., 2017; 2021; Knight et al., 2011). It is therefore important for parents to ensure that they are providing support to their children and that this support is appropriate for the environment and meets the needs of their children.

However, this is not always easy for parents and substantial research has considered the range of factors that may affect parents' involvement in their children's sport (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009; Knight et al., 2016; Knight & Holt, 2013). Individual factors that affect how a parent supports their child include their parenting style and their own past sporting experience (Dorsch et al., 2015; 2016; Knight, 2019). Meanwhile, environmental factors influencing parental involvement can include the sport culture and organisational stressors (such as inefficiencies of the organisation that the child is a part of) among others (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009; Knight et al., 2016; Knight & Holt, 2013). Furthermore, what is expected of parents changes depending on how their children develop, which can further influence the extent to which parents' are able to address their child's specific support needs. For instance, when a child enters adolescence, the role of the parent changes (Knight et al., 2017; Knight, 2019).

Parents become less involved with the child within the sporting setting and are instead seen as more of a background supporter (Kanters et al., 2013; Tamminen & Holt, 2012; Woodcock et al., 2011).

From the wide range of sport parenting literature now available, it is clear to see the importance of parental support within a sporting context (Harwood & Knight, 2016; Knight, 2019; Knight et al., 2017). However, helping parents through the pressures that they face when parenting their child in a sporting setting is vital (Dorsch et al., 2021; Knight et al., 2016; 2017) as is providing them with guidance and support to optimise their support (Burke et al., 2021). Consequently, researchers have recognised the need to develop interventions and programmes of support to help parents optimise their involvement in their child's sporting lives (Azimi & Tamminen, 2020; Lisinskine & Lochbaum, 2019; Richards & Winter, 2013; Thrower et al., 2017; 2019). The interventions to date have been relatively successful. For instance, Thrower et al. (2017) had successful outcomes from their workshop-based parent education programme, which included improving parents' confidence in supporting their children, hence leading to a buffer against the stressors that sport parents face. Furthermore, Richards & Winter (2013) held another successful educational programme which resulted in parents gaining a greater understanding of their children's perceptions of their own sporting experiences and their parents' actions. This in turn lead to parents gaining a greater understanding of their own behaviours towards their children. Parent education has also aimed to improve the communication between parents and children, with Azimi & Tamminen (2020) seeing positive outcomes from their intervention. They found that most children in their study saw an improvement in their parent's communication and that parents in their study became more aware of their communication behaviours.

Nevertheless, there is still a need for more sport parenting interventions across a wider range of environments and demographics (Dorsch et al., 2021). One gap in the literature for instance is that there is a lack of interventions within the elite youth rugby setting. The elite youth rugby environment can be incredibly complex due to the competitive climate and the influence that different parties (such as parents, player, coaches, and other members of staff) have on the environment (Woodcock et al., 2011). In order to further understand the effects that parents have within this environment and the support they require to fulfil their roles as effective supporters, parental support interventions within elite youth rugby should be encouraged.

There is also a lack of literature specifically focussed on players who are in the later stages of adolescence and leading into the emerging adulthood stage of their development. As children enter later adolescent, it is not uncommon for issues to arise due, for instance, to the uncertainties their futures hold after leaving school and balancing their school, social, and sporting lives (Wylleman et al., 2013). Thus, although parents may take more of a background role at this age with regards to sport (e.g., Côté, 1999), they are key emotional supports and continue to be particularly influential with regards to providing information and reassurance regarding these bigger life decisions and helping children to cope with the highs and lows of performance sport (Harwood & Knight, 2016).

Finally, many of the interventions have been designed, developed, and implemented by researchers with minimal input from the target audience (Ford et al., 2012; Richards & Winter, 2013). One exception to this is the work by Thrower et al., (2016) which utilised an action research approach to develop their intervention. Action research is a methodology that allows the reader to work closely with the target population, design an intervention to solve the needs, and evaluate said intervention (Adelman, 1993; Koshy et al., 2010; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). As youth sport environments can be complex and the needs of parents very specific, utilising such an approach to develop and evaluate a tailored intervention seems valuable.

Consequently, given the importance of providing support to parents within youth sport and recognising the limitations with current interventions, the purpose of the current study was to develop, implement and evaluate a parent support programme for parents of late adolescent rugby players. Specifically, the study had three aims. Firstly, one aim was to identify what is need from a support programme aimed at parents of boys in an under 18s elite academy rugby team. The second aim was to provide an action intervention which addresses the needs of the parents within the elite academy rugby environment. This would include informing parents what their children will experience during the under 18s season and how to best support them through it, as well as providing information to parents on what they will experience over the upcoming season and ways in which they can get through any struggles. The final aim was to analyse the effectiveness of the intervention and give recommendations to future researchers aiming to develop a sport parenting intervention.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review

Within this literature review, I will be aiming to encapsulate the findings found in the area of sport parenting. This will include: a) how parents influence sporting experience, b) factors effecting parents, c) previous sport parenting interventions, d) a critique of current literature, and e) the aims of the current thesis.

2.1 How Parents Influence Sporting Experience

The origins of sport parenting research aimed to first gain an understanding of the ways in which parents influence sporting experience (Dorsch et al., 2021). This means that these studies sought to explore the different types of behaviours that parents exhibited and the effects they had on their children. The result of this initial wave of sport parenting research led to the discovery that parental involvement in sport can be perceived by children in two main ways: Support and pressure (Knight et al., 2017).

2.1.1. Parental Support

Parental support is defined as the efforts parents demonstrate to help aid their child during their sporting experience, and when correctly applied it is associated with positive developmental and psychosocial consequences (Knight, 2019). Support can be provided in a number of specific environments such as before, during, and after competition (Teques et al., 2018; Dorsch et al., 2021; Tamminen et al., 2017, Knight et al., 2011; Knight, 2019). Support can also take place at home and in relation to training (Elliot & Drummond, 2017; Dorsch et al., 2021). The ways in which parents provide support will likely vary across these settings (Knight et al., 2016).

One way in which parents can display support for children is through the provision of praise (Dorsch et al., 2021; Holt et al., 2008). This form of behaviour usually involves parents aiming to verbally encourage their children after both positive and negative performances or efforts within a sporting context (Knight et al., 2017). One common form of praise that parents use with the aim of encouraging their child is giving positive verbal feedback (Knight, 2019; Tamminen et al., 2017; Elliot & Drummond, 2017). This can occur in several situations, such as when travelling to and from competitions or training, during these events, and at home away from the sporting environment (Knight et al, 2011; Knight, 2019). Positive feedback can be centred around results of competition and the individual performance of the child (Knight et al., 2017; Pynn et al., 2019). Following this, positive feedback can therefore add to a parent's attempts to deliver reinforcement

of mastery attempts to their children (Dorsch et al., 2021; LaVoi & Babkes-Stellino, 2008). This refers to parents praising their child when they attempt and learn new skills. Previous studies have also highlighted parents' tendencies to show affection towards their children, both verbally and physically, in a sporting context and the subsequent consequences of this. Parents can show verbal affection towards their children through voicing their unconditional love for their child (Baker et al., 2003; Burke et al., 2021) and demonstrating physical affection towards their children (Dorsch et al., 2021).

In contrast, parents can also provide tangible support to their children (Dorsch et al., 2021). One example of this is financial support, which involves parents demonstrating a desire to help their child through their sporting journey by paying for necessary membership fees, equipment, and various other necessities (Harwood & Knight, 2015; Ross et al., 2015). Parents also show support for their child's sporting endeavours by contributing to their travel needs (Elliot et al., 2023). This can include parents driving their children to and from training sessions and matches or in some cases organising carpools to ensure that their children can participate in sport (Elliot et al., 2023; Knight et al., 2016). Another way that parents can support their children is by ensuring that they have access to the appropriate food when at home (Elliot et al., 2016). This includes parents ensuring that the food they prepare to meet the nutritional needs of their children. A final form of tangible support would in this case be parents supporting their children through other aspects in their lives, away from the sporting environment such as managing their school demands (Dorsch et al., 2021).

Overall, when parents provide support for their children, desirable outcomes become more apparent as support is generally the desired type of behaviour that children want to receive from their parents (Knight et al., 2011; Omli & Bjornstal, 2011). These include an increase in perceived sport competence, self-esteem, and enjoyment of the sport that the child is participating in (Atkins et al., 2013; Mossman & Cronin, 2019; Sánchez-Miguel et al., 2013). Children have also been shown to demonstrate a higher level of sporting enjoyment when their needs for supportive parenting are being met by their parents (Knight et al., 2017). As seen by these previous findings, the benefits of youth sport participation more likely to occur when children have positive, supportive relationships with their parents (Blom et al., 2013; Knight et al., 2019). Showing a child unconditional love within a sporting context can lead to an increased facilitation of a child's sporting experience (Ross et al., 2015). This can therefore lead to positive outcomes such as an

increase in the child's motivation, an increase in the enjoyment of the sport, or an influence of their continuous sport participation (Atkins et al., 2013; O'Rourke et al., 2014).

Considering motivation, parental involvement in sport can also have an impact on their child's motivation. As a result of this, parental involvement in a sporting context sport has been evaluated using motivation-related theories (Rouquette et al., 2020). These evaluations can be looked through a range of theories such as, Achievement Goal Theory (Nicholls, 1984) and Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Achievement Goal Theory has been used in the field of sport parenting to aid in the explanation of why children take on achievement goals similar beliefs to their parents (Dorsch et al., 2021). Using Self-Determination Theory, researchers have attempted to develop an understanding of how a parents' level of feedback and encouragement may influence their child's intrinsic motivation. Particularly, this research has highlighted the importance of parents' engaging in autonomy-supportive behaviours (Ambrose et al., 2016), and developing more positive parent-child relationship (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006) to enhance self-determined motivation. Researchers from previous studies have sought to evaluate the behaviours that parents display towards their children, and the impacts they have on their children's sporting experiences. The consequences of parental behaviour that have been identified include the child's motivation, enjoyment, anxiety, and how they perceive pressure (Rouquette et al., 2020).

2.1.2 Parental Pressure

Parental pressure is defined as an unattainable expectation towards a child's participation in sport (Leff & Hoyle, 1995). Findings suggest that parental pressure can have a detrimental effect on children within a sporting environment (Knight et al., 2017). Pressuring behaviours can come in the form of overemphasising the importance of outcome goals and being harsh in criticism (Dorsch et al., 2021). Having an overemphasis on outcome goals refers to parents being overly focussed on results-based goals, such as winning a match or competition (Lindstrom-Brener, 2012). When this is the case, children can be led to focussing on outcome goals as opposed to focussing on their own personal development within sport. It has been shown that an athlete emphasising too much on outcome goals can result in a lack of skill development and can also lead to an increased chance of burnout and dropout occurring (Harris & Smith, 2009). Hence prioritising outcome goals over process and performance goals is an important practise. Harshly

criticising children in a sporting context has also been shown to have adverse effects of said children, such as a breakdown between the parent-child relationship (Dorsch et al., 2021; 2017).

In addition to this, another form of parental pressure comes in the form of parents having expectations of their children that are too high (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Gould et al., 2006). Parents who have children within an elite sporting environment may have inaccurate expectations regarding what their children can achieve (Knight, 2019; Burke et al., 2021). This can include parents believing that their child will move into professional sport after their youth sporting journey has ended. These heightened expectations being placed upon a child can lead to children feeling pressured as these goals can be unrealistic. Pressure can also arise as a result of perceived directive parenting practices, for example parents limiting children's autonomy and relying on controlling behaviours. This form of parenting has been shown to have maladaptive consequences for children receiving directive parenting practices, because even if parents think they are being supportive it is not desired by children (Amado et al., 2015; Bean et al., 2016; Jõesaar & Hein, 2011; Ross et al., 2015; Sánchez-Miguelet al., 2013).

Perceived parental pressure has led to children reporting increases in anxiety and stress, reduced motivation, and a greater risk of burnout and dropout occurring (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). Some parental behaviours, such as overemphasizing winning and excessively criticizing performances, considered as inappropriate have been found to be associated with more negative psychosocial outcomes, such as athletes perceiving greater pressure to perform, developing fear of failure, and reducing perceived sporting competence (Bois et al., 2009; Knight et al., 2011; Sagar & Lavalley, 2010). Moreover, parental pressure can result in a decrease in sporting enjoyment (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). Children have also been shown to have a heightened perception of their sporting environment being threatening, meaning that they no longer feel comfortable performing in their sport environment as a result of their parents acting in a pressuring manner (Amado et al., 2015; Ross et al., 2015). Finally, perceived parental pressure can lead to a lowered intrinsic motivation towards participating in sport, which could lead to an increased chance of the children suffering from burnout and subsequently dropping out of sport (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Sagar & Lavalley, 2010).

2.1.3 Complexities in the perceptions of support and pressure

As detailed above, there are a range of behaviours that are broadly considered to be supportive and those seen to be pressuring. However, it is important to not just consider parental

behaviours as simply negative and positive (Knight et al., 2017). There are several complexities to sport parenting, and it is not as simple as stating that some forms of sport parenting are bad, and some are good. Rather, the outcomes associated with different types of behaviours are largely influenced by children's perceptions, the quality of the relationship children and parents have, and the broader sporting culture/environment.

When examining types of parental involvement and behaviours, it is important to consider how the children perceive the behaviours of their parents. When the children receive parental support that they perceive to suit their needs, there tends to be a higher likelihood of positive outcomes occurring (Rouquette et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). More specifically, perceived parental responsive support has been seen to lead to an increase in the athlete's self-esteem and self-efficacy (Rouquette et al., 2021a). Results have also indicated that parent responsiveness is related positively to thriving, and negatively to worry around their sporting performance (Rouquette et al., 2021b). Parent responsiveness also positively impacts the child's self-efficacy to achieve their goals, and hence influences their goal accomplishments (Rouquette et al., 2021c). Taken together these findings highlight the importance of parents' adapting specifically to the needs of their children rather than there being a blanket approach to "good" and "bad" behaviours.

2.2. Factors Effecting Parents

Just as parents can influence children's sporting experiences, children's sporting involvement can also influence parents. Specifically, parents can be influenced by two broad categories - "Individual" and "environmental" factors. The individual factors that influence the parent in a sporting context refer to how each parent is in fact different due to a number of reasons. These include past experiences, level of sporting knowledge, parent expectations, and parenting styles. The environmental factors however refer to how the parent has been influenced by their immediate environment. These factors include the characteristics of the sport culture and the various stressors and challenges that parents face. Understanding these factors is important because it ensures that researchers recognised why parents may be involved in the ways they are and that such factors can be considered and accounted for within interventions.

2.2.1. Individual Factors

The individual factors that have been explored in previous literature can themselves be used to identify several elements of the sport parenting experience. These include a parents' own past sporting experience, their level of sporting knowledge, the goals and expectations they have

for their children, and styles of parenting (Dorsch et al 2021). In turn, these can have an impact on the sporting experience of the child and should therefore be considered.

2.2.1.1. Parental Experience

When discussing parental involvement, it is important to consider the parents' own past sporting experience, their level of sporting knowledge, and the goals and expectations they hold for their child (Dorsch et al., 2021). All of these factors have been shown to shape the parent's approach to their child's sporting participation and how effectively they are able to support them (Dorsch et al., 2015; 2016; Knight, 2019). Parents who have past experiences of the sport their child participates in, and hence have knowledge of the sport, may be more likely to provide sport related advice to their child and, in turn, become an informal parent-coach (Harwood & Knight, 2016; Knight et al., 2016). When this behaviour is not desired by the child, it can lead to an added sense of perceived pressure and an increase in unrealistic expectations being placed on the child (Knight et al., 2017). These unrealistic expectations of their child can lead to parents setting their child ego-oriented goals, meaning that the child's focus is shifting from improving on themselves to purely winning (Gould et al., 2006). According to Achievement Goal Theory, when coupled with a low perceived ability to achieve an ego goal, avoidance of the task at hand can occur (Duda & Nicholls, 1992).

In contrast, parents who lack experience in the sport that their child participates in tend to opt for purely emotional support rather than giving technical recommendations. This form of support is well received by most children (Harwood & Knight, 2016). However, it has been noted that parents who do not know or understand their child's sport may undermine their enjoyment of participating (Furusa et al., 2021). With this information in mind, the nuances of the requirements of athletes are apparent. The individual factors effecting parental support need to be considered when observing the needs of athletes. Organisations and researchers need to acknowledge and remedy of the factors which influence parental involvement.

2.2.1.2. Parenting Styles

A parent's parenting style is the global approach an individual has when parenting their child and styles of parenting are seen as the ways in which parents aim to guide their children through childhood. There are generally two different classifications of parenting styles that are considered within sport: authoritative or authoritarian parenting (Baumrind, 1971; 2005) and autonomy supportive parenting (Grolnick et al., 2002; Ryan et al., 2015). Authoritative parenting

involves parents being supportive, responsive, and nurturing, whilst also setting firm limits and rules on their children while authoritarian parents are high in demandingness and low in responsiveness (Baumrind 1971). Generally, literature indicates that authoritative parenting is associated with more positive outcomes within sport (Holt et al., 2009; Pynn et al., 2019).

Similarly, autonomy-supportive parenting is seen as a beneficial parenting style within sport (Harwood & Knight, 2015; Holt et al., 2009). Autonomy supportive parenting styles defines the practise of parents allowing their children to have their own choices when making decisions (Grolnick et al., 2002; Ryan et al., 2015). A key element of autonomy supportive parenting is the parents' capacity to provide children with an adequate amount of choice to their children, in order to encourage and stimulate their children to take initiative (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2015). Parents who can successfully use autonomy supportive parenting techniques have been shown to have more open communication with their children whilst also being able to read the mood of their children and make training and competition-related decisions together (Holt et al., 2009).

2.2.1.3. Children Preferences and emotional bond

As detailed above, studies of children's preferences for parental involvement provide a clear indication of the types of behaviours they would like to see from parents (Knight et al., 2010, 2011; 2016; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011) and it is clear that responsive support is beneficial (Rouquette et al., 2021a, 2021c). Consequently, children themselves can be seen as an influencing factor for parents. Moreover, the emotional attachment that exists between parents and their children can also influence how parents choose or find themselves to be involved (Holt et al., 2008). Parents share in the highs and lows of their children's sporting experiences, and this has been shown to affect parents' behaviours (Elliot & Drummond, 2017).

2.2.2. Environmental factors

As well as considering the individual factors that differentiate individual parents from each other, the factors concerning the environment surrounding the parents should also be considered as influences on the ways in which parents support their children. The sport culture that the parents are situated in has been shown to influence parental behaviour (Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Dorsch et al., 2015). These characteristics of the sporting culture include the selection process (Kovas et al., 2022), the time taken to enable their child to participate (Harwood & Knight, 2009), and the financial demands surrounding sport (Clarke & Harwood, 2014). Specifically, it has been shown that the youth sport competitive experience can cause a shift in parents' beliefs and behaviours

regarding their child's sport participation (Dorsch et al., 2009). For instance, when parents become embedded within a sporting environment, attitudes of performance-orientated goals and perfectionist views, that align with the sport culture, are reinforced (McMahon & Penny, 2015).

Moreover, as a result of their children's involvement in sport, different stressors and challenges are constantly being presented to parents, which have been suggested to influence parents' emotions and involvement (Harwood et al., 2019; Lienhart et al., 2020). These stressors have since been categorised into competitive, organisational, and developmental stressors (Harwood et al., 2010; Knight et al., 2016; Knight & Holt, 2013).

Organisational stressors can include family-role conflict, which refers to a parent's struggle between balancing work and family aspects of their lives (Harwood et al., 2010). Financial constraints can also be a challenge because performance sport is often very costly (Ross et al., 2015; Knight & Holt., 2013). In other words, organisational stressors highlight some of the daily burdens of supporting children in a sporting environment, such as transportation, covering high financial costs, and managing injuries (Dorsch et al., 2009; Harwood et al., 2019). From previous studies, there have been other organisational stressors identified, including having access to information, the parent's level of sporting knowledge, and the risk of injury (Burgess et al., 2016). Balancing attention between siblings in the family setting has also been identified as a stressor because of the time that parents have to commit to their children's sport (Dorsch et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, parents are also having to contend with development stressors, which are concerns that the parents have around the development of their children, both in a sporting context and away from sport (Dorsch et al., 2021; Harwood & Knight, 2015). Developmental stressors encompass the demands related to their child's personal development and future endeavours in sport (Harwood et al., 2019). Developmental stressors are also concerned with stressors that come about related to a parent's concerns regarding children's sport, school, and personal development (Harwood & Knight, 2009). It has been stated that parents with children who are in the specialising stages of their sport development, meaning they are starting to focus on and invest their time towards one sport, are more likely to experience developmental stressors related to being uncertain of the child's future (Harwood & Knight, 2009).

Away from developmental and organisation related stressors, competitions themselves can lead to parents encountering a lot of stressors and different emotions (Bowker et al., 2009; Omli & La Voi, 2012). Competitive stressors are the demands that fall in and around competition,

including match preparation and managing interactions with others (Harwood & Knight, 2009). For instance, parents can be affected by several occurrences, including player performances, poor refereeing decisions, and opposition parents to name a few (Omli & La Voi, 2012). The emotionally charged nature of sporting events has been shown to be a factor contributing to parents changing the way they behave and support at said sporting events (Knight & Holt, 2013; Knight, 2019). In addition to this, specific situations in competition such as a perceived injustice towards the parent's child, poor refereeing decisions, and inappropriate interactions from other parents may increase the chance of parents feeling anger and acting on this with negative reactions (Omli & LaVoi, 2012).

2.3. Previous Sport Parenting Interventions

Recognising the impact that parents can have on children's sporting experiences, as well as the potential impact supporting children can have on parents, it has been recognised that education and/or support for parents might be warranted (Knight et al., 2017; 2019). Consequently, particularly in the last decade, an increasing number of researchers have carried out sport parenting interventions, typically with a focus on educating parents to improve their involvement and support for their children (Burke et al., 2021).

2.3.1. Overview of Previous Interventions

Previously interventions have often taken the form of seminars. These have been delivered online (Ford et al., 2012; Tamminen et al., 2020; Thrower et al., 2019), and in-person (Thrower et al., 2017; Richards & Winter, 2013). Information delivery has also taken place through self-paced learning (Azimi & Tamminen, 2020; Harwood & Swain, 2002), meaning that parents were given hard copies or online guides containing the information that they require. One of the first interventions to be evaluated within the literature was based on the delivery of an education programme to parents of children in gymnastics in the United Kingdom (Richards & Winter, 2013). The programme took the form of six 20-30 minute face-to-face sessions focused on helping parents create a more task orientated motivational climate. The sessions covered the importance of children demonstrating competence, the consequences of being ego and task-orientated, how parents can impact on their child's goal orientation, and how parents could create a more optimal motivational climate. In evaluating this programme, 100% of the 21 parents reported that the programme was useful and 75% said they would use the strategies provided. The authors reflected that being familiar with the environment was important to designing an effective programme, as

they understood the needs of the parents. This led to the designing of a programme that lasted an appropriate time and at a suitable location and time.

Extending this work, Thrower et al, (2017) aimed to examine the effectiveness of an evidence-based sport parent education programme designed to meet needs of British tennis parents. This was done utilising an action research process and resulted in the development of six workshops being run for parents with children between the ages of 5 and 10 years old. Results indicated the programme was effective in enhancing tennis parents' perceived knowledge on a range of key learning objectives, including supporting their child through mini tennis, the roles of a parent during competition, and talent development in tennis. In terms of knowledge, parents gained an improved understanding of tennis, the youth sport environment, children's psychosocial needs and talent development pathways.

Subsequently, Thrower et al., (2019) went on to develop another parent education programme, this time with the aim of evaluating the effectiveness of a large-scale online education program for British Tennis parents. The intervention took the form of 8 online modules comprising 6-30 minutes videos and was supplemented by journal articles, information sheets and practical tasks. For data collection, 13 parents completed pre- and post-program online questionnaires, and 9 participants shared their experiences via an interview. Quantitative findings revealed positive directional changes for emotional experiences, goal orientations, tennis parent efficacy, and general parenting efficacy. When concluding, it was stated there was a need for greater support from the National Governing Bodies to promote parent-education programs and that it was important to incentivize programs in the future, due to low attendance levels.

At a similar time, Lisinskiene and Lochbaum (2019) sought to examine parent-child relationship changes within martial arts over a 12-month period, as a result of a parenting intervention. The programme consisted of 12 theory classes lasting an hour each. The sessions from this programme were unique as they encompassed information delivery on parent education theory, individual and family orientated psychological support, and practical sport training classes. The participants in the intervention were 10 youth sport parents who had one child each aged 5-6 years, who would both attend the organised education sessions. From the results, it was revealed that the intervention programme had a positive impact on the parent-child relationship in the sports context, parent-child attachment, the quality of interpersonal relationships between the parents and the children, and effective sport parenting support strategies.

Finally, Azimi and Tamminen (2020) aimed to enhance parent-child communication and parental involvement with their designed intervention. A 45-minute workshop to soccer and hockey parents in Canada was developed and delivered, as well as a handbook and a six-week reflective task. The 45-minute workshop included discussions around: the role of parents in sport, parent-athlete interactions, parental behaviour in sport, developmental changes in parent-child communication, and preferred parental behaviour in sport. Data collection took the form of audio-recordings, semi-structured interviews, and surveys. The educational workshop, handbook, and reflective task appeared to enhance parents' communication with their children before, during, and after training and competitions. The intervention increased parents' awareness of their communication, emotions, their child's development, and their role as a parent. Some athletes felt that their parents' communication had improved, but others felt there was no improvement/change.

2.3.2. Results of parent interventions

Overall previous interventions have been successful, with several different positive outcomes for the parents who took part in the interventions. (Burke et al., 2021). As expected, one of the most common aims of sport parenting interventions is to increase the ability for parents to demonstrate positive parental support. Interventions have seen significant increases in parents' ability to give parental support (Dorsch et al., 2017), and in the confidence of parents being able to support their children (Thrower et al., 2017). This increase in confidence has led to other associated effects including significant decreases in parental pressure and anxiety (Dorsch et al., 2017; Smoll et al., 2007). This is an important outcome for all potential sport parenting support programmes as with a decrease in perceived pressure, parents can optimally support their child and avoid negative behaviours which add to the perceived pressure from the point of view from the child.

Parent education programmes have also been shown to increase the strength of the parent-child relationship, between the parents who participated in the interventions and their sporting children (Dorsch et al., 2017; Lisinskiene & Lochbaum, 2019; Richards & Winter, 2013; Azimi and Tamminen, 2020; Harwood & Swain, 2002). The benefits of improving the parent-child relationship are numerous, as they include improving the quality of interactions between parent and children (Azimi & Tamminen, 2020), as well as parent-child trust, communication, support, and understanding (Lisinskiene & Lochbaum, 2019).

Parents have also acquired new knowledge of sport parenting by participating in support programmes. This knowledge includes gaining expertise and understanding of the sporting culture in which they are parenting in (Thrower et al., 2016; 2017) and of the various parenting support techniques that are available to them in order to best support their children (Richards & Winter, 2013; Thrower et al., 2017). By ensuring this, parents from these studies also reported increases in their parenting efficacy (Harwood & Swain, 2002; Thrower et al. 2019), meaning that parents have gained more belief in their ability to effectively parent their children in a sporting context as a result of the intervention they took part in. Parents in these interventions have been found to overcome the widely used parenting strategies of following “trial and error” in sporting contexts and have hence benefitted from participating in the interventions (Knight et al, 2017; 2019). The success of these interventions indicates the value of developing evidence-based, individualized strategies to support, and not just educate, parents.

2.3.3. Limitations with Parent Education Programmes

As to be expected, most parental support programmes have had to tackle some logistical obstructions. One common problem that interventions come across is the attendance levels, with researchers experiencing poor engagement and retainment with parent programmes (Dorsch et al., 2019). One potential reason for low parent engagement at support programmes is that they feel that they are not in need of the information being delivered, with some parents from past programmes feeling that they already know the information that is being delivered and hence do not feel the need to attend (Thrower et al., 2019). A more detailed understanding of the needs of the parents in the environment being studied could lead to this being avoided.

Secondly, despite initial findings suggesting that sport parent interventions may help to promote changes in parents’ knowledge and behaviours, the extent to which these lead to long-term changes or benefits is yet to be determined (Dorsch et al., 2021). There is a need for more longitudinal studies to take place and explicitly seek to understand the influence of the parent education programme on children and their parents. This may occur through observations and/or repeated measures. Although the parents from previous interventions stating initial enjoyment and changes in behaviours is promising, it is perhaps even more important to ensure that parents who are receiving support from interventions are continuing to apply what they take from such programmes in the long term.

Third, the majority of interventions have occurred in limited numbers of sports and with parents of children and young adolescents. Most previous interventions in sport parenting have only focussed on one sport. These include tennis (Thrower et al., 2017; 2019), swimming (Richards & Winter, 2013), football (Dorsch et al., 2017), and martial arts (Lisinskiene & Lochbaum, 2019). Parents of adolescent child athletes have also been supported, with positive outcomes (Azimi & Tamminen, 2020). After seeing positive outcomes from a variety of sports, and with parents with adolescent children, there are promising signs that the previous findings in sport parenting literature can contribute to support programmes across a variety of sports.

Fourth, a further drawback of past interventions, has been centred around the way that information has been delivered to parents, which have been centred around a “one size fits all approach” and doesn’t consider the individual needs of parents (Knight et al., 2016). Future researchers need to encourage further research with novel approaches to parent support. This means moving away from simply lecturing information to parents, and instead delivering information in more inventive and engaging ways (Dorsch et al., 2021). By doing this there can be a move away from simply “one size fits all” information delivery (Knight et al., 2016). Instead, researchers can identify preferred forms of information delivery through initial data collection in their chosen environment, as well as gaining inspiration from other information delivery methods from previous studies.

A final consideration is that past interventions have not always had buy in or support from organisations (Dorsch et al., 2021). Past interventions have not received endorsement from the organisations they are being held for and have hence failed to capture the desired engagement from parents (Thrower et al., 2019). Coaches, other members of staff at the chosen environment, and the chosen organisation as a whole need to be informed of the benefits of offering effective parental support. By doing this successfully, this would encourage changes to occur within the organisation when concerning the approaches they take to developing the development of sport parenting support. A way of doing this would be to apply a methodology that allows for the researcher to fully embed themselves within the environment, as opposed to simply observing an environment from the outside. Working within elite sporting environments can help encourage the cultural changes required in order to ensure parents have adequate support moving forward and that there is a potential to minimise the demands that parents face.

2.4. Aims of the current thesis and research questions

Recognising the limitations of previous interventions, the purpose of the current study was to use action research to design, deliver, and evaluate a parenting support intervention with an elite youth rugby academy environment. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What information or support do parents' need to be optimally involved in their son's rugby career at the age of 17-18 years.
- 2) How should such support and information be provided to parents?
- 3) What are parents' perceptions of a support programme provided to them to facilitate their involvement in their son's rugby career?
- 4) Based on the evaluation of a support programme for rugby parents, what should future interventions consider?

These research questions specifically aligned with the different elements of an action research approach, providing a targeted insight into the process of developing, implementing, and evaluating a parent support programme in the context of elite rugby.

Chapter 3:

Method

3.1. Philosophical Underpinnings and Methodology

A research paradigm is a basic belief system and theoretical framework with assumptions about: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). An ontology is the study of being and refers to the nature of our beliefs about reality (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Scotland, 2012) and tends to take the form of either realism or relativism in a study (Dieronitou, 2014). Realism carries the belief that there is one truth, that it cannot change and that the correct use of objective measures can obtain this truth (Fletcher, 1996). Relativism however contrasts to realism and states that there are multiple realities and that the truth in these realities are constantly changing and evolving (Fletcher, 1996). Meanwhile, an epistemology refers to how the knowledge can be created, obtained, and delivered (Cohen et al., 2000). Or in other words, it describes the relationship the researcher has with their research. This generally takes the form of either an objective approach or a subjective approach (Cohen et al., 2000; Dieronitou, 2014). An objectivist approach involves staying impartial during an investigation, meaning that the researcher is detached from the participants in the study (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This epistemological approach is therefore more suited to realism. A subjectivist approach contrasts the objectivist approach and instead encourages the researcher to interact with individuals in the study and the surrounding environment (Toma, 2000). A subjective epistemology is often linked with a relativist ontology (Dieronitou, 2014) as when paired, they offer the researcher an opportunity to fully embed themselves inside an environment which has multiple realities.

The current study was approached from an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivists employ a relativist ontology where a single phenomenon may have multiple interpretations or meanings, which goes against the belief that the truth can be determined by a process of measurement. Specifically, within the context of this study, it was recognised that there is not a singular problem being observed which has a singular solution. Rather, the study sought to gain a holistic and nuanced understanding of the environment being observed. Exploring an elite rugby environment and attempting to gain a comprehensive understanding of the parent-child relationships present, required me as the researcher to be open to the idea that the reality is constantly changing and evolving. Furthermore, the current study adopted a subjective epistemology, recognising that I as

the researcher was obtaining data that was subjective, influenced by individual experiences as well as my own interpretations.

Each paradigm is based upon its own ontological and epistemological assumptions and therefore different paradigms inherently contain differing ontological and epistemological views (Scotland, 2012). These differing assumptions of both reality and knowledge underpin the chosen research approach, which is reflected in the methodology and the methods (Scotland, 2012). The methodology describes how the data collection links to the philosophical underpinnings of a study and guides the researcher in deciding what type of data is needed and which data collection tools will be most appropriate for the purpose of the study (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Aligned with an interpretivist approach, I adopted a qualitative methodology, specifically action research, to conduct the current study. Qualitative research opposes the traditional experimental approach and instead opts to explore the multiple truths in front of the researcher by using pattern analysis to offer an explanation (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

3.2 Action Research

Action research, which is also known as Participatory Action Research (PAR), community-based study, co-operative enquiry, action science and action learning – is an approach commonly used for improving conditions and practices in a range of environments (Lingard et al., 2008). It is a research approach that enables the examination of a social situation, which is carried out by individuals involved in that situation to improve their practice and the quality of their understanding along with capturing the essence of the philosophy underlying the action research approach (Winter et al., 2001). Educational action research has also been a form of action research seen in previous studies (Adelman, 1993). This form of action research allows researchers to investigate educational environments with the aim of improving educational practises and has been used across a number of studies following on from Lewin's original work using action research (Adelman, 1993; Nolen & Putten, 2007). Another form of action research is known as organisational action research. This form of action research is used to investigate practical and sometimes pressing issues within organisations and communities, as it offers a set of practices that allows researchers to do this effectively (Koshy et al., 2010; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This study had the aim of improving practises with a professional sporting organisation, through use of an action research process. Therefore, organisational action research was used in order to meet the aims of the study and meet the needs of the environment that was being investigated.

One of the main strengths of action research is that it attempts to generate solutions to practical problems and has the ability to empower researchers by getting them to engage with research and the subsequent development or implementation activities (Meyer, 2000). Moreover, action research also allows for engagement in collaborative relationships and the opening of new communicative spaces where dialogue can develop and flourish (Koshy et al., 2010; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Therefore, action research is an emergent process that cannot be pre-determined. It is a constantly developing process which deepens the researchers understanding of the issues to be addressed and develops their capacity as co-inquirers both individually and collectively (Koshy et al., 2010; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Given the focus of the current study was to identify the need of parents within a specific setting and subsequently develop an approach, informed by parents and the ever-changing environment, to support parents that fit within that environment, action research was deemed an appropriate methodology.

3.2.1. Models and Types of Action Research

There are two broad groups of action research, which McNiff and Whitehead (2011) describe as almost dynasties or clans. The first group is referred to as interpretive action research and there are numerous examples of researchers who have carried this form out in practice (Elliot, 1991; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). This form of action research includes the researchers who believe that the ideal way to carry out research is to have an external researcher to observe and report of what all the other practitioners are doing. This is the most common form of action research across all areas of study (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). The second form of action research is known as self-study or living theory action research and has been a more recent development (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). This form contrasts with interpretive action research and instead encourages the practitioner to offer their own explanations for what they are doing. This form of action research is more relevant for studies in which the researcher is fully embedded with a selected environment to solve the presented problems. This is because only the primary researcher has the nuanced views that can be acquired through this process and views held by an external researcher may not be as accurate.

The differences between the outsider (interpretive) and insider (self-study) groupings are not always clear as some researchers find themselves positioned between the two. Due to these two approaches of action research, it is common for the use of the word “theory” to differ between the two groups (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Interpretive researchers propose their theories in a

propositional form about what is happening for other people whereas self-study researchers show theories as an embodied and living form based around what is happening for them. For this study an outsider approach was used. Although I achieved my goal of becoming an embedded researcher withing the academy, I was still using an outsider approach as I was not a member of staff at the academy.

No matter which approach to action research utilised, there are common elements that underpin action research. For instance, all action research models contain a cyclic structure which usually contains a planning stage for an intervention, an action stage which includes the intervention, and a reflection stage which aims to evaluate the intervention that has taken place and plan for the next one. McNiff and Whitehead (2011) illustrated this cycle in a simple action-reflection cycle (see figure 3.1).

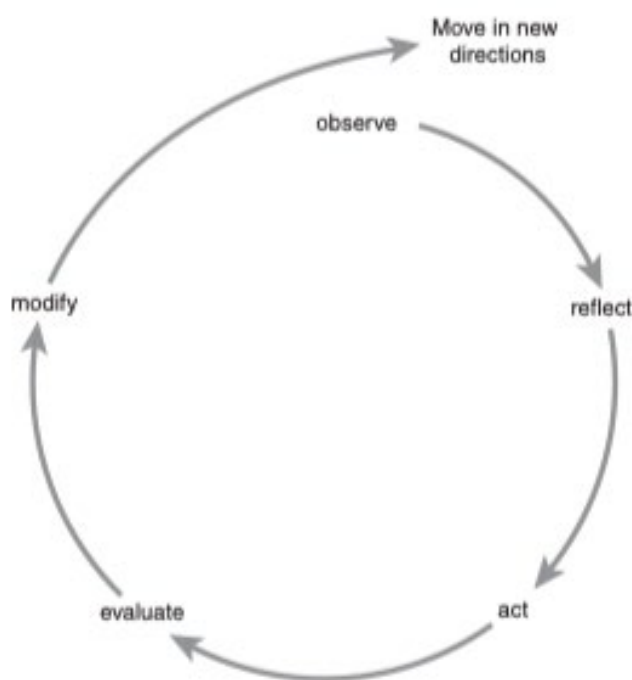


Figure 3.1: Action-Reflection Cycle (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011)

This structured form of action research aims to be a disciplined and systematic process. This simple cycle was developed to aid researchers and enable them to turn what can be a complex process into a simple set of questions (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). The “observe” phase of the cycle refers to the researcher taking stock of what is going on and the “reflect” phase includes identifying a concern and thinking of a possible way forward (an intervention). The observation

involves the researchers asking the questions “What is my concern?” and “Why am I concerned?”. When reflecting on what they have observed, the researcher then asks the question “How do I show the situation as it is and as it develops?” According to the model, the researcher should then “act” by trying out the intervention and monitoring how the action unfolds by gathering data to show what is happening. The action process involves the researcher looking at their reflections and asking “What can I do about it? And “What will I do about it?”. This action then leads the researcher to “evaluate” progress by establishing procedures for making judgements about what is happening and testing the validity of the claims to knowledge. The validity can be checked by the researcher and the evaluation can take place with the researcher asking, “How do I check that any conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate?”. Finally, before the findings can be used to move the research area into new directions, the intervention should be modified according to what the evaluation unveils. This involves the researchers asking themselves “How do I modify my ideas and practices in light of the evaluation?”. Throughout this study, these questions were kept at the front of my mind when considering the aims of each stage of the action research process (See section 3.3).

This cyclic structure has influenced most action research models. For example, O’Leary’s Cycles of Research (figure 3.2) portrays action research in this way (Koshy et al., 2010). This model shows action research as an experiential learning approach where the goal is to continually refine the methods, data and interpretation considering the understanding developed in each earlier cycle.

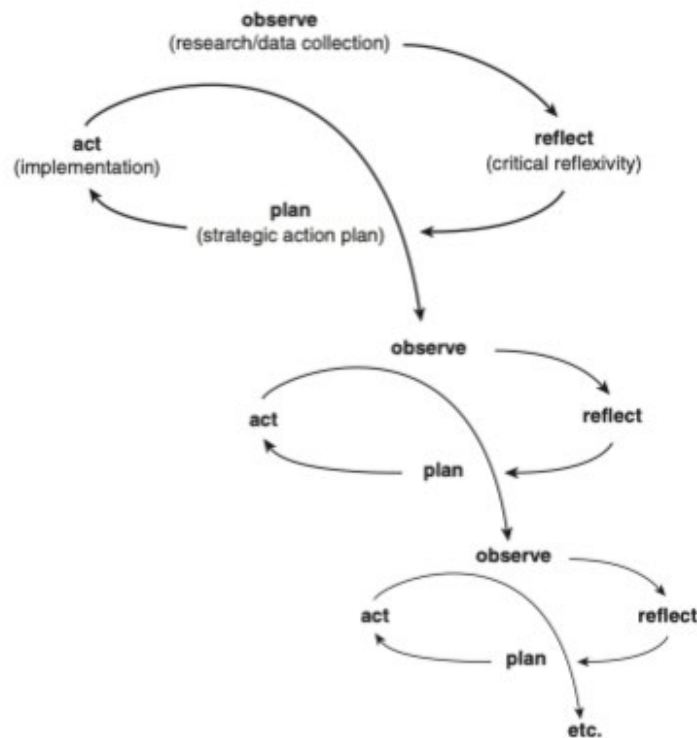


Figure 3.2: O'Leary's cycles of research as cited by (Koshy et al., 2010)

The Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) action research spiral (see figure 3.3) again illustrates the cyclical structure of action research. This form of action research is described as “participatory research” and the spiral itself involves a self-reflective cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Koshy et al., 2010). The contents of the cycle are similar to previously mentioned models. It starts with planning a change the researcher wants to make. The action and observation phase then allows the implementation of an intervention, as well as the consequences of the change, to take place. The reflection phase allows for the processes and consequences from the action phase to be evaluated for an effective replanning to take place. In contrast to other models, the action research spiral is not recommended as a ridged structure (Koshy et al., 2010). This offers the researcher more flexibility as in reality, the action research process may not be straightforward, and the researcher may need to adapt their own spiral to suit the needs of their investigation.

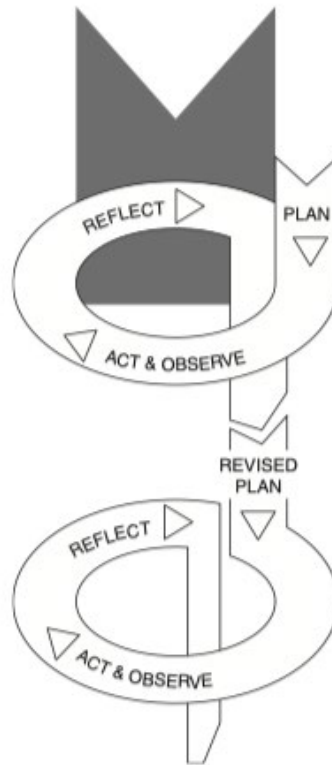


Figure 3.3: Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) Action Research Spiral

Adding to Kemmis and McTaggart’s work, Elliot’s (1991) Action Research Model was devised. This model shares many features of Kemmis and McTaggart’s work and is also based on Lewin’s original model of action research (Elliot, 1991; Koshy et al., 2010; Lewin, 1946). Elliot (1991) drew heavy inspiration from Lewin’s model of action research (see figure 3.4). However, it was argued that the general idea should be allowed to shift throughout the action research process. Reconnaissance should involve analysis along with fact finding and should also take place in the “spiral” of activities throughout the process, rather than just the beginning (Elliot, 1991). It was also argued that the implementation of the action step is not always straightforward, and the researcher should not proceed with the evaluation of the effects of an action until they have monitored the extent to which has been implemented.

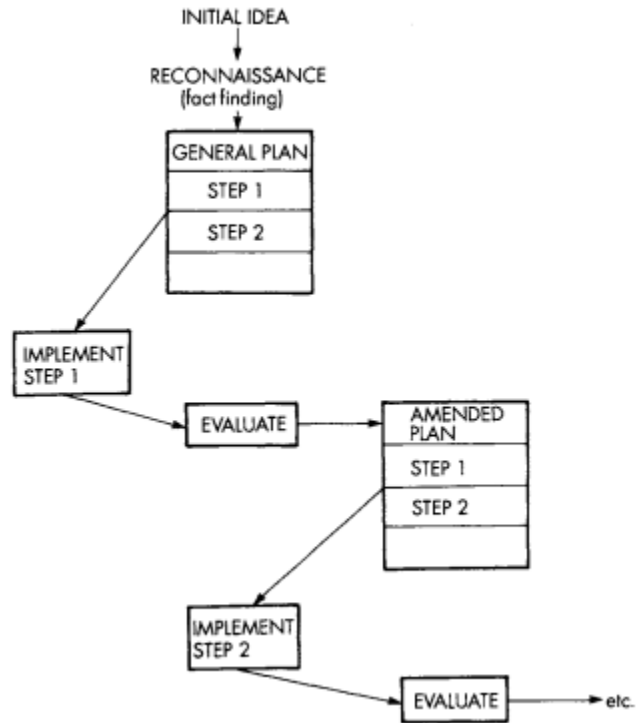


Figure 3.4: Kurt Lewin's model of action research as interpreted by Kemmis (Elliot, 1991; Kemmis, 1980)

Elliot (1991) took these considerations and formulated an improved model of action research which takes the suggested amendments into account (see figure 3.5).

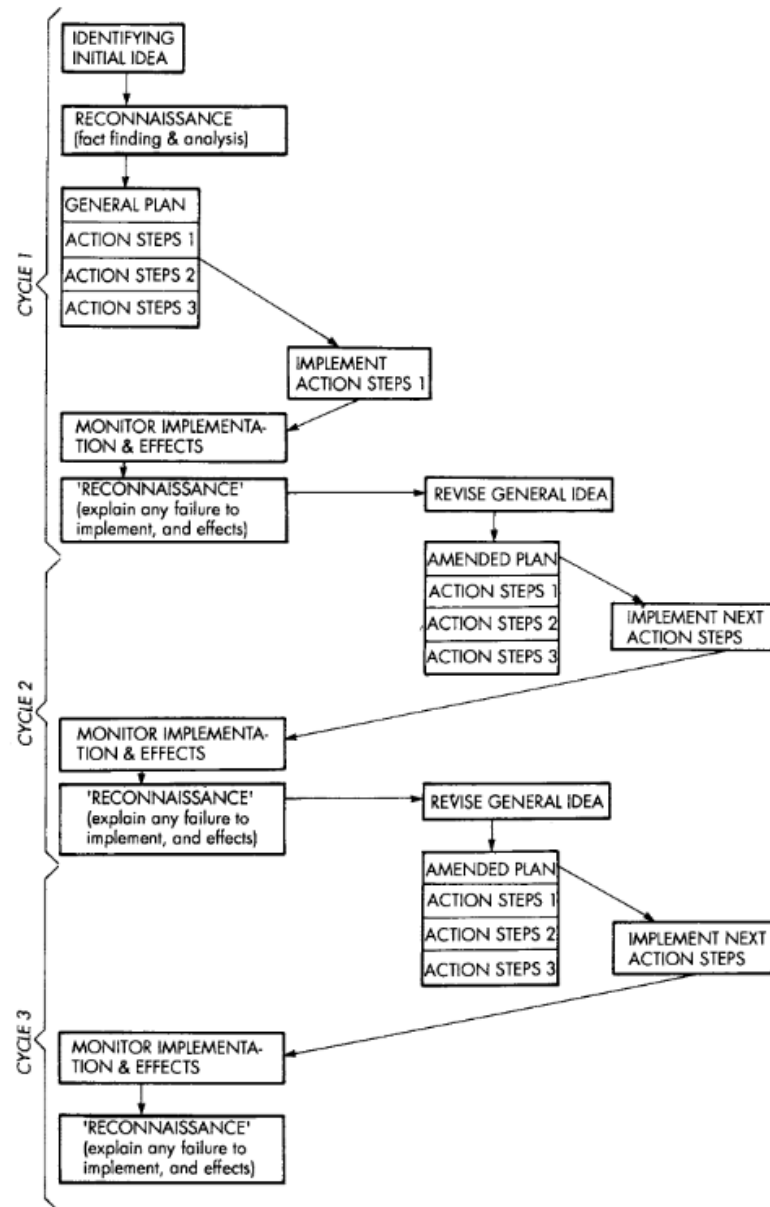


Figure 3.5: A revised version of Lewin's model of action research (Elliot, 1991)

Within Elliott's model, identifying the general idea refers to the current state of affairs and the situation that needs to improve. When selecting the general idea, there are two main criteria which need to be considered: it impinges on the relevant field of action and it is something that one would like to change or improve on (Elliot, 1991; Koshy et al., 2010). As indicated by the model, the reconnaissance needs to include both fact finding and fact analysis. This involves describing fully the nature of the situation and explains what has been found by addressing critical factors of what has been found, as well as how they affect the state of affair (Elliot, 1991). The planning stage can also be broken down into several steps to create an effective and reliable

investigation. A statement of the general idea, the factors that are going to be modified, the negotiations one has had before the proposed course of action, the resources needed, and the ethical framework are to all be disclosed before the commencement of the action steps (Elliot, 1991). These planning steps are required in most credible scientific studies as part of the methodology to confirm the validity of the study and whether the study is ethical or not (Burke, 2016). During the action stage in this model, the researcher needs to utilise techniques which: provide evidence of how well the course of action is being implemented, shows the reader both the unintended and intended effects of the intervention, and enables the reader to see the situation from multiple angles (Elliot, 1991). After the implementation and the effects of the intervention have been monitored, a second reconnaissance can take place. This reconnaissance is carried out to explain both the overall effect of the intervention and any failures that may have occurred. This is similar to other reflection or modification stages in different models of action research (Kemmis, 1980; Koshy et al., 2010; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Once any amendments to the plan have been made, according to the second reconnaissance stage, a second cycle can take place along with a revised general idea and improved action plan.

3.2.2. My Action Research Process

When discussing my own research process, it is first important to establish my own previous research experience and how this could have affected the research process. It is almost important to discuss the complexities of the environment that is being discussed.

3.2.2.1. Researcher Background

Throughout this study, I naturally had a large role in the planning, delivery and analysis of the action intervention that was delivered. As I was responsible for the completion of all steps of the research process, it is important to highlight my own past experiences in the research area and discuss how these could have affected the research conducted. I am a 23-year-old male of British background. I am not a parent and I have not played rugby, as such I was unfamiliar with the complexities of this environment prior to entering it. However, before commencing this study, I completed a Bachelor of Science degree in Sport and Exercise Science. During this degree, I gained a basic understanding of sport psychology, and sport parenting research area. I had previously conducted a third-year dissertation exploring the influence of parents' behaviours on youth sport experiences. My dissertation project allowed me to almost dip my toes into the research area and start to appreciate the complexities that come with sport parenting, from the point of view

of both the parents and the children. This, combined with my basic understanding of the sport parenting research area, ignited my interest in delving deeper into sport parenting and contributing to the field in the form of my own intervention.

Despite this previous experience, at the beginning of this study, I was very much a novice in conducting research, particularly using an action research approach and as a sport psychology practitioner. Being a novice researcher brought with it some drawbacks to the research process. For example, one drawback of being a novice researcher was that I was unable to deliver the information that was desired by the parents in the action intervention. To solve this, I drew on experts to deliver pertinent information during the intervention in an informative and enjoyable format. This allowed me to be an observer of the sessions that were being run as part of the intervention, and hence led to more immediate reflections from myself and the participants to be collected as part of the data collection. Another drawback to me being the lead researcher was my lack of knowledge in the research area. Although I had a basic understanding of sport parenting, I lacked the true depth in knowledge compared to true experts in the field. By delving into the research area further, I was able to remedy this to some extent as I was able to add to my knowledge of sport parenting. I do feel however that my inexperience in the field came with a big strength, as I was able to enter this study with no previous biases. When commencing this study, I came in with few pre-conceptions of sport parenting literature, especially around the planning and delivery of sport parenting interventions. By starting the data collection with this lack of bias, I was able to identify the true needs of the parents present at the rugby academy, without forcing upon them previous ideas of what is needed for sport parents.

3.2.2.2. Research Context

Understanding the research context is also key to understanding how and why this study was needed and subsequently how it was implemented. The study took place in an elite rugby academy, with the U18 team who participate in the Premiership Rugby Under 18s League. The players at this stage of the academy were aged between 17 and 18. Players in the under 18s team have mostly gone through the under 16s stage of the academy, with some coming from other elite rugby academies in the United Kingdom. When a child reaches this age, added pressures are present in their lives outside of sport, which include academic stresses as their A-level exams approach and as they start to prepare for potential university applications. Combining this with the added stress present at the academy, which includes pressure around participating in elite level

rugby fixture and end of season selection process. This process entails the academy selecting which players they want to take onto the senior academy and which players they wish to cut from the rugby club. If selected, players can move into the senior academy and have opportunities to play professional rugby for the club. If dropped, players leave the academy and can peruse alternate routes into senior rugby, such as through university. What also needs to be taken into account is the training schedules of the players and what this schedule means for the level of parental support that is required in order for this to take place. The players train twice a week for the academy team and play a match on some weekends. In addition to this, the players will also train and play matches for their school teams during the week. As most of the players attend private schools in the area, playing rugby for their schools also holds a great level of importance as the standard of rugby is incredibly high. With various training sessions and fixture to attend, this naturally adds to the commitments that parents are required to take on. These include providing travel as well as other needs the players have, such as nutritional needs. With these added pressures considered, it can help understand the needs of the parent as they strive to provide optimal support for their children.

3.2.2.3. The Action Research Model

For this study I completed one cycle of an emended version of action research (figure 6), which took elements from Elliot's (1991) Action Research Model, the Action-Reflection Cycle (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011), and the Action Research Cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Inspiration was taken from these models as they offered the clearest stages for the progression through the action research process, whilst also allowing for flexibility for me to manoeuvre and adapt my approach to suit the needs of the environment. Similarly, to other models, the cycle I used started with a reconnaissance stage, which aimed to explore the needs of an environment. The reconnaissance stage involved acquiring data from the environment being investigated, and the analysis of that data. Once the reconnaissance has been completed, a planning stage took place. By using a combination of the findings of the reconnaissance stage and previous sport parenting interventions, an evidence-based intervention could be planned.

As I quickly discovered, it was important that the model I followed allowed for flexibility when shifting between stages. These are represented by the dashed arrows in the model. In this instance, there was some bouncing between the reconnaissance and planning stages as it was important to gain as much of an understanding as possible of the needs of the environment and the previous work in the field. As this knowledge was acquired, naturally the plan for the intervention

was altered. After the planning was finalised, the action intervention was rolled out to the participants. To gain insights into what is needed by the participants, and therefore optimise the action intervention to suit the needs of the participants, feedback was collected whilst the intervention was being carried out. This feedback in turn lead to changes being made to the plans for the rest of the intervention. Using the feedback and moving a stage back to improve the planning of the intervention is again represented by a dashed arrow in the model. When this feedback has been collected, adaptations can be made to the intervention. To gage the effectiveness of the intervention that was carried out, an evaluation stage followed the intervention. This included another stage of data collection and analysis. Leading on from the evaluation stage, recommendations are made for future researchers in the field. These recommendations consider previous work in the field as well as the findings discovered by my own action research cycle.

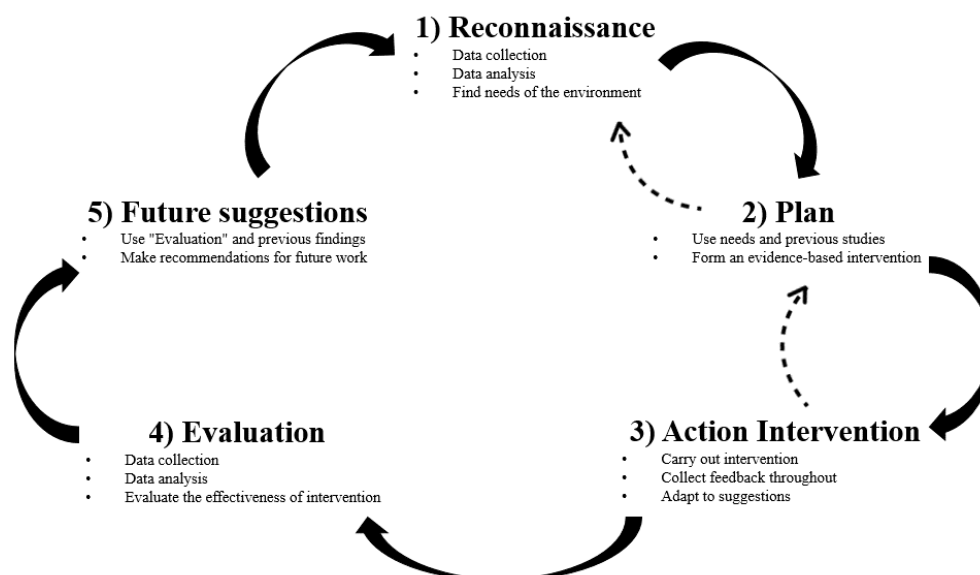


Figure 3.6: Emended Action Research Model

3.3. Procedure

3.3.1. Stage 1: Identifying Initial Idea and First Reconnaissance

The first stage of this action research-based study was carried out to gain an understanding of what parents needed to maximise their involvement and support for their child. Specifically, it was recognised that insights needed to be gained from parents, members of academy staff, and through spending time within the environment. As such, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with individuals deemed to be “information-rich”, observations at training

and matches, and informal conversations with individuals associated with the academy as well as academic experts in sport parenting.

3.3.1.1. Interview Participants and Procedures

The parents of the academy under 18s team (gender and aged varied) and the staff working at the academy (gender and age varied) were involved in this stage of data collection. Samples were taken from these two demographics to gain an understanding of the needs of parents at an elite rugby academy. The sample only included participants who consented to being part of the study by reading the information sheet (see Appendix A) and filling out the consent forms (see Appendix B). The consent forms came with information sheets explaining the purpose of the study, why they have been selected for this study and what would happen if they chose to take part in the study. These consent forms, as well as the information letters, were distributed to the parents and members of staff through the academy via email.

Semi-structured interviews were organised via text message or email and were conducted online using zoom. Interviews were conducted in order to gain a detailed insight into the participants' views on the questions asked. Interviews at this stage of the procedure lasted an average of 49:53 (49 minutes and 53 seconds), with a range between 31:03 and 1:10:03. A semi-structured interview starts with a set of questions but allows the interviewer to ask additional questions to follow up on answers given by the interviewee (Kallio et al., 2016). By following up on the answers given, a deeper and more detailed understanding of what the participants feel and their opinions on the situations they are being asked about (Sharp & Hodge, 2011). Before all interviews participants were briefed on the aims of the study, promised anonymity unless a criminal offence was disclosed, and reminded that they were free to withdraw from the interview or skip a question at any time. Interview guides for all participants were designed before the start of interviews by first thinking of what information needs to be obtained from the interview. Once this was established, questions were designed gain information around the desired subject areas.

A total of 10 parents (male=4, female=6) took part in the interviews during this reconnaissance phase. All parents had children currently included within the U18 academy squad. The parents interview guide (see Appendix C) started off with introductory questions which discussed their son's rugby experience to date as a whole and their experience of following them through this journey. The transition questions then followed a chronological breakdown of their child's rugby journey exploring when their child first started rugby, when their child entered the

early academy stage (DPP) and when their child first transitioned to the senior academy (PDG). The first of the main questions then asked the parents what they thought the role of parents should be in a young rugby players journey. They were also asked specifically how they support their child from home and when within the academy environment (both at training and at matches). The questions then lead on to what the parents desired from a support programme directed at parents. They were asked what support they found most useful to them, and what support they would have found useful but did not receive. The parents then recommended both the format they would find most helpful and who they would want the information to be delivered by, before concluding the interview with summary questions.

Staff interviews were carried out with three of staff at the academy (2 male, 1 female). In order to ensure confidentiality, only I am aware of the roles of these members of staff. The staff interview guide (see Appendix D) explored three areas: their experience of working with the academy, what support they think parents need and what support is currently provided, and what they would like an intervention to look like. The introductory questions for the staff asked them for a quick overview of their previous work in the field and how their experience at their current rugby academy differed from ones they have worked at previously. The transition questions asked the members of staff how their job allowed them to interact with the parents of the players at the academy. The main questions then covered their perceptions of the role of a parent and what guidance and support the academy currently offers to help parents support their children. Their view on a potential support programme was then discussed.

3.3.1.2. Observations and Informal Interactions

Observations occurred in situations where parents, players and members of staff were present. These included one introductory zoom meeting, four matchdays, three training sessions, and any informal interactions in and around the academy. The in-person discussions that occurred at matches and training sessions followed a pattern of questioning the participants for the desired information to contribute to the study, before retroactively taking notes on what occurred in the discussion. Combined, these instances equated to approximately 15 hours of observations. Potential drawbacks to this method of data collection could be that parents may adapt and alter their real behaviours in front of the researcher to show themselves in a different way to how they are behaving without an observer present. To gain a full understanding of any problems present when concerning parenting in sport within this specific context, both formal and informal

interactions with the participants of the study were taken. By using informal interactions to collect additional data, researchers can gain even more insight into the environment they have embedded themselves into (Urquhart, 1997). The interactions that were noted down as field notes, which were guided by the aim of getting an understanding of the needs of the environment, specifically concerning parent support. This meant noting down the types of content that parents would desire from a parent support programme, as well as the format of the information delivery. These findings were used to supplement the data from the interviews in the reconnaissance stage and confirm the importance of the themes identified through the data analysis.

3.3.1.3. Data Analysis

After the interviews have been carried out, the transcripts were analysed using content analysis (Miles et al, 2018). This process was used to establish the key themes from the data collected at the reconnaissance stage. The process started by familiarising myself with the data by reading through the transcripts, questionnaire responses and field notes. This then led to the use of “descriptive coding” in the reconnaissance stage to establish key reoccurring themes to find out what was wanted in a support programme. As these key themes were yet to be determined before the data analysis, inductive content analysis was used in order to discover these overarching themes (Knygas, 2020). The raw data collected from the interviews, observations and informal interactions funnelled into overarching themes, which in turn gave inspiration for the content and format of the information delivery.

3.3.2. Stage 2: General Plan

Once the data were analysed, and an initial evaluation of the elite youth rugby environment had taken place, an action intervention was designed. The process of formulating this intervention took inspiration from both previous studies in the field which aimed to improve parental support, as well as the findings acquired by the data analysis. When designing an intervention, it is crucial that there is a specific aim and purpose. In this case, the aim was to answer the needs of the reconnaissance stage and provide parents with information which would help them support their children and themselves through the under 18s season at the rugby academy. Fulfilling these aims should aid the enjoyment and the progression of the under 18s rugby squad, both as rugby players and as young people away from sporting activity.

Based on both the needs of the current under 18 squad parents and recommendations from previous literature, the format of the intervention was in-person workshops. These workshops took

place in person to give parents a more interactive experience whilst also allowing them to meet other parents and the members of staff at the academy and create a closer sense of togetherness. To be more convenient for the parents taking part in the programme, the sessions were held at the same time and location as the training sessions in which their sons were participating. This meant that parents could drop off their children, and then head straight into the meeting to socialise with other parents before the content delivery started. Another purpose of doing this was to optimise attendance.

Interactive workshops where discussions and discourse can take place have been shown to have a greater effect on the learning and retention of new information (Vincent & Christensen, 2015). Therefore, each session aimed to strike a balance between information delivery by an expert in the field and interactive activities where parents were able to discuss ideas and answers to prompts and questions that were presented to them. The slides used in each of the sessions were sent to parents afterwards, to give them access to the information for when it may be required. Having an alternate way to access information post intervention has been shown to improve information retention (Dorch et al, 2017). From analysing the data collected during the reconnaissance stage of the action research process, there were four sessions planned, which aimed to cover all content requested (see section 4.2 for further details). These sessions were titled: Introduction to the under 18s team, Under 18s team to future pathways, Injuries, and Parenting During Emerging Childhood.

3.3.3. Stage 3: Implementation of the Action Intervention

Throughout the action intervention, it was important to find ways to gain feedback to make sure that the sessions were being well received by the participants. This was done using various data collection methods. Whilst at the sessions field notes were taken before, during and after to gain a sense of how each session was being received by parents. By taking field notes after the sessions finished, it allowed for immediate feedback to be obtained and gave parents the opportunity to give recommendations on the spot as well as ask for the opportunity to give further thoughts through a questionnaire response. These feedback questionnaires were sent out the day after each session was run in to ensure that any ideas the parents had on the sessions was still fresh in their minds.

The first session took place on the 17th of February 2022 and contained three parts – which generally focused on providing an introduction to the U18 programme and the transition to this

age group. The parent attendance for this session was 25. The session first started with all the parents conversing and with the Senior Academy Manager (SAM) the academy going around and introducing himself to everyone and thanking them for coming. This behaviour from the SAM was replicated before the other sessions of the support programme. After this, the SAM held an introduction. After the introduction, the current academy sport psychologist then introduced themselves. They then went over the aims of the session which was to identify challenges that both the parents and players will come across this season and develop solutions which can help them overcome these challenges. After the content was covered in this section, by a combination of information delivery and interactive group discussions, the education training consultant (responsible for liaising between the academy and the schools in the local area) then started their section. After the session ended casual conversations between parents and staff took place, as well as the signing of consent forms of parents who wished to take part in the data collection procedure for stage three of the action research process.

After a three-week interval, the second session took place on the 10th of March 2022 and was attended by 19 parents. This session was partly taken by the sport psychologist, who detailed some of the obstacles to transitioning into the under-23 team at the rugby club by using video interviews with two new members of the under-23. The SAM also took parts of the session to explain the specific details around the selection process for the under-23s team and the importance of parents encouraging the players during this process.

Following another three-week interval, the third session took place on the 31st of March 2022. This session was attended by 23. The session was started by some quick updates from the director. The sport psychologist then highlighted the aims of the session, before the academy physiotherapist provided parents with a more in-depth information around how the academy deals with injuries. The sport psychologist also covered the importance of psychological support during injuries and how parents can contribute to supporting their children when they are injured.

The final session took place on the 7th of April, just one week after the previous session. In contrast to the other sessions, an agenda was sent out via email which went over all the content that was to be covered and who was going to deliver it. Parent attendance for this session was 29. The session started with the director introducing all the speakers before the strength and conditioning coach started the content. The next section was then led by the Professional Development Manager (responsible for helping the players with their educational needs, including

university related needs) at the academy. The final part of the session was delivered by Professor Camila Knight, who was also the study supervisor, and was an interactive discussion. A quick conversation with the members of staff involved with this session also took place, with potential ideas for the future of the programme discussed.

3.3.4. Stage 4: Evaluation and Second Reconnaissance

The evaluation stage of the intervention ran throughout the action phase, as feedback questionnaires were sent out to all the parents who attended each of the session. This amounted to a total of 20 responses (session 1=11, session 2=5, session 3=1). These were followed up by quick interviews from parents who indicated that they had time, to gain a deeper understanding to some of the questionnaire responses that were given. This totalled at five interviews after the first session and two interviews after the second session. The questions started with asking the parents if they found the session helpful. They were then asked which parts of the session they found most enjoyable, most useful, and most confusing. Parents were then able to give their recommendations for future sessions and give their consent to participate on a quick follow up interview over the phone to discuss their answers.

After the intervention was completed, there was a week wait between the last session and the starting of the data collection of the evaluation stage. This was done to allow the parents to have time to absorb the new information delivered to them and implement it into the way they support their children. Firstly, another round of interviews and questionnaires were conducted with both parents and member of staff. These were carried out within a month of the support programme finishing in order for the participants to give a fresh and accurate response to all the questions.

3.3.4.1. Interview Participants and Procedures

This round of interviews was guided by another interview guide (see Appendix E) designed in the same way as interviews from the reconnaissance stage, by identifying the desired areas of information before designing questions to meet this demand. Interviews at this stage of the procedure lasted an average of 45:16, with a range between 37:43 and 56:20. There were nine parents involved (male=5, female=4) in this round of parent interviews. Questionnaires, asking the same questions as the interviews, were also filled out by parents (anonymous). The introductory questions asked the parents how their son has been doing at the academy up to the present and what it has been like going along with their son on this rugby journey. Moving on to the main questions, the aim of this section of the interview was to find out the participant's thoughts on the

overall logistics of the programme, the delivery of the sessions, and the impact the support programme had on their feelings and behaviours. They were asked how they found the support programme as a whole and their overall feelings on the four sessions together (or how they found the sessions they attended). Parents were then asked about the logistics of the sessions, including if they found the time and location of the sessions appropriate and how they felt about all the speakers involved at each session. Before going into each individual session, the parents were asked what they had taken away from the sessions as a collective and how they think the sessions will impact their rugby academy journey going forward. After this, questions were then asked about each individual session including what they took from the session, what impact the session had on their thoughts/feelings/behaviours, and what aspects of each session they didn't like. To conclude the interview parents were then asked if the programme had influenced their thoughts regarding parental involvement in rugby and any recommendations they had for future support programmes, including content based and logistic based recommendations.

Staff interviews also took place at this stage of the process, guided by an interview guide (see Appendix F) with two members of staff taking part (both female). The interviews started by asking the members of staff about any previous experience they have had around parental support programmes in their field of work. The transition questions of the staff interviews asked the staff how they are involved with the process of intaking new players through the enrolment process of the academy. They were then asked how they had found the last few weeks during the delivery of the support programme and as the players are preparing to transition from the under 17s to the under 18s team. The main section of these interviews followed a very similar format to the main section of the parent interviews. This included asking how they found the programme as a whole and what they thought of each individual session.

3.3.4.2. Questionnaire Participants and Procedures

A questionnaire was also sent to parents as an alternative option of giving their thoughts on the support programme. This was completed by four parents and took an average of twenty minutes to fill out. The questionnaire started by asking parents if they attended the support programme and what motivated them to do so. Questions centring around each individual session were asked. These included asking if they learned anything from the session, if the session had influenced their parenting in anyway, what they liked about the session, and if there was anything that could be improved. Once each session was covered, the parents were asked for their overall

thoughts on the support programme and if there was any additional information that should be included in a future support programme. Parents were then asked about their thoughts on the logistics and format of the sessions, including the times the sessions were delivered and any alternative forms of information delivery. The questionnaires then concluded by asking parents if they had any additional thoughts they wished to share.

3.3.4.3. Staff Overview Meeting

Following completion of the intervention, a review meeting also took place with the lead researcher, the SAM, the sport psychologist, Prof Knight and the academy admin. This ran for approximately an hour over zoom. The meeting started with a discussion around how the support programme had gone from everyone's point of view, which was overwhelmingly positive. The main sense from the staff involved with the call was that they saw the benefits of running a parent support programme and had therefore decided to continue with plans to run more at the academy in the future. Following this, there were some suggestions made about how future programmes could potentially be improved. These included sending out agendas before the sessions started and planning more frequent but shorter sessions that would cover one particular focus.

3.3.4.4. Data Analysis

As with the data collected during the reconnaissance stage, the transcripts were analysed using content analysis (Miles et al, 2018). The process started by familiarising myself with the data by reading through the transcripts, questionnaire responses and field notes. Content analysis was used to gain an accurate view of the recommendations that parents gave after attending the programme. There were two types of coding utilised during this stage of data analysis, with evaluation coding being used to categories the types of recommendations given for future programmes and magnitude coding being used to state whether or not the recommendations were positive or negative. As with the reconnaissance, the key themes were yet to be determined before the data analysis, inductive content analysis was used in order to discover these overarching themes (Knygas, 2020). The raw data collected from the interviews and questionnaires were refined into categories of recommendations that parents had for future parent support programmes.

3.3.5. Stage 5: Reflection and Future Considerations

Once the evaluation stage of the action research process was completed, a reflection stage took place. This step of the action research cycle involved using the findings from the evaluation stage to decide on the effectiveness of the intervention and develop recommendations for future

researchers. This involved using the findings in the data analysis, and combining these with previous literature, to develop recommendations for future research. By doing this, more guidance can be given to those hoping to optimise how they can produce a more effective intervention for their studies.

3.4. Methodological Rigour

Creating an action research project that is methodologically rigorous has been stated to be a complex process. On the one hand remaining impartial to the subjects of an investigation has been an integral part of more traditional research practices for a long period of time. However, action research completely contradicts this view; the way in which action researchers embrace an environment in order to find the needs of said environment is encouraged as it is crucial to identify and solve these needs (Elliot, 1991., Koshy et al., 2010). With these differences considered, one critique of action research is that it simply cannot be seen as synonymous with legitimate applied practices (Gilbourne, 2000). However, to counter this argument, Evans et al (2000) stated that action research is a valid methodological approach. Their view of action research is one of inclusion, meaning that it is not overdependent on a single methodological protocol and instead looks to accommodate variety of different approaches. They also state that a variety of needs to be met for action research to be carried out effectively. These needs include solving practical problems, having an intervention, having a cycle of critical reflection, empowering the participants involved, employ recognisable research methods, communicate findings to researchers and being conducted within an ethically acceptable framework (Elliot, 1991; Evans et al., 2000; Kemmis & McTaggart 1998; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Elliot, 1991). This therefore implies simply planning, acting, and reflecting upon a phenomenon does not constitute action research being used. Once the essential needs for action research are met, it can take place in a methodologically rigorous manner.

Chapter 4: Results

Following the structure of the action research process, results will be presented stage-by-stage in chronological order. The structure of the results chapter follows: a) stage one: reconnaissance, b) stage two: plan, c) stage three: action intervention, and d) stage four: evaluation.

4.1. Stage 1: Reconnaissance

Analysis of the information obtained from interviews, observations, and information discussions during the reconnaissance phase led to the development of 5 themes centred around the information and areas they desired support. These were, academy-parent communication, handling the step up to the under 18s team, information on post academy pathways, support through injuries, and parenting during emerging adulthood. Further, through the data collected during the reconnaissance phase, ideas regarding how such support could be provided were also identified. Specifically, participants suggested that support through the delivery of workshops would be useful and provided specific insights into when and how they felt these should run.

4.1.1. *Desired Information*

4.1.1.1. *Academy-Parent Communication*

Having effective communication between the academy and the parents of the players was one area of concern discovered in the reconnaissance phase. Knowing who to contact when parents are presented with different obstacles was information that was seen as important for the parents. Having open and honest communication around the players' development was also stated as a potential area of content by the parents.

4.1.1.1.1. Knowing who to contact. Information regarding communication between the academy and parents was highlighted as a key area that parents perceived would be beneficial – specifically early in the season as U17 parents transition for instance, it was made apparent that parents would benefit from knowing who to contact and how to contact them to ensure they could access the necessary information for the U18 seasons. By having access to contact information of various members of staff at the academy, it was felt that finding information from the appropriate source would become a lot easier:

What might be interesting as well, when you join, whether you get important contacts... because if you don't know, you're always going to the top person or the management. It

would be good to have the contacts. Whether it's physio, forward coach, back coach, physio, nutrition, pastoral care. Whatever it might be (Parent 9).

Staff also agreed with this sentiment and voiced the need for parents to get to know members of staff and in turn, gain information on how best to contact them:

I think in an ideal world it would be great to get the staff in to meet the parents, and everyone just to give a little brief five minutes just to say hi... If you want to contact me these are my details. So they feel part of it and put some faces to the names of the team I think would be really useful (Staff 2).

Overall, it appeared that parents and staff felt that having clear and easy to access routes of communication into the academy, parents would be able to find out more about their children's rugby experience and therefore be in a better position to offer the right kind of support to their child.

4.1.1.1.2. Open and Honest Communication. Further, it was perceived that there was a need for open and honest communication between the academy staff, parents, and players to increase the likelihood of success for all involved. In suggesting why such communication would be useful, some parents drew on comparisons to experiences at other academies:

We were part of another academy development programme with my son and we saw other parents then perhaps where there was a bit of miscommunication. They thought their children were going to be, you know, the next Alun Wyn Jones... they weren't being communicated with enough or not having that early honesty (Parent 4).

Other parents also echoed this sentiment, as they showed a need for feedback on how their son was progressing with their rugby. For example, when discussing the amount of honest communication, they had with the academy up to that point and whether there was a desire for more, Parent 3 stated, "I'd say it's probably more, not brutal feedback but more honest around if you're son is able to do this (the academy process)." This open and honest communication would allow for greater clarity from the parents' point of view as to how their children are progressing through the academy, and therefore allow them to manage their and their children's expectations.

Some parents also found that there was a lack of understanding from the parents' point of view as to what is required from both them and their child in order to succeed at the academy. This was perceived as challenging because without knowledge of what is required from the academy,

parents found it difficult to best support their child's rugby efforts. It was recommended by parents that these messages should be set out by the director of the academy:

So the director is the sort of figurehead of the academy programme. So I think it's important that the club ethos and message about and the expectations comes from the director, early doors. I know he's there, he's there most training sessions that I've been to (Parent 4).

By understanding what is required of the academy, parents could have more clarity as to what is required by their child when at the academy. This knowledge would only be achieved through open and honest communication and was hence a recommended area of information for the parents.

4.1.1.2. Handling the Step Up to the Under 18s Team

Through my observations, as well as comments provided from parents and staff, it was apparent that parents would benefit from further guidance and information regarding what players were likely to experience throughout the season and how they could support them during this time. For instance, an academy staff member explained when talking about information and support parents might need:

So, any major transitions that we expect to happen so, as I said, to becoming a full-time player, maybe transitioning from the Academy to the first team, injury, non-selection. That sort of thing. More educational workshops and building a peer-to-peer support network between the parents would be useful things to do as well (Staff 2).

Parents indicated that they wanted to help their children to the best of their ability and that they have always shown eagerness and enjoyment from helping and being present during the process. When asked how they aim to enhance their child's sporting experience by helping their child get the most out of the academy process and get the best out of their ability, Parent 3 stated that their behaviours were aimed around being:

A good sports parent, probably by demonstrating the behaviours that you would want to see... just really to reinforce those messages that it's their game, they need to enjoy it ultimately and if they just have people shouting at them all the time they're just not going to enjoy it (Parent 3).

There were some parents within the data collection during observation which also voiced their desire to be aided on the step up to the under 18s team. One parent stated that their son, "struggled with the step up" into the under 18s team and despite their desire to help, they felt relatively

powerless as they couldn't relate to what their son was going through due to not having played sport at a high level themselves.

4.1.1.3. Information on Post Academy Pathways

Another desired area of information for the parents was on the transition the players will make from the end of the under 18s season as they prepare to venture into senior rugby. The key area of content that was identified as a need was giving parents information on the next steps after the players' junior careers.

4.1.1.3.1. Potential Post Academy Routes. Parents and members of staff from the data collection (both in interviews and field notes) suggested that a desired area of information was content and based around the potential routes that the players can take after they leave the academy. One parent said that communication with the academy around development has been good, but they felt that there wasn't going to be much communication around future pathways after the academy. Parent 5 stated, "Coming back to your question, it's on the way up very good. But at some point the academy is going to have to say yes or no. Once they say no, really, that's their role over and done with".

There was a general understanding that only a select few players will be taken into the next stage of the senior academy team and offered a professional contract. The rest would have to find alternatives to continue playing rugby and developing in an elite environment. Staff felt that there could be more clarity as to what steps are available for the players after the academy:

It gives the parents a really clear thinking process about what the process is. So, for example, last year, at the end of the summer, after we'd finished our, our academy league games happened in May and there were two or three parents that I spoke to, who were really unsure about, should my son go off to university now, or could they do university... actually that advice should have been given much, much earlier and so it's about equipping them with the knowledge and giving them stuff sooner. Rather than waiting until the situation arises because by then it could be too late. It could be causing them anxiety or what have you (Staff 1).

Having access to knowledge of the potential routes into senior rugby outside of the academy at an earlier stage of the season would allow the parents and players to plan their next steps after the under 18s season.

4.1.1.3.2. Encouraging a Dual Career. As well as wanting to go over the rugby specific aspects of the transition, participants also stated the importance of promoting a “dual career” approach to developing the players. This means encouraging organisation and commitment to their ventures outside of the rugby environment, which promotes their holistic development. It was stated that a dual career should be encouraged by both parents and the academy:

We encourage a dual career so that they're not just playing rugby full-time, so they have an opportunity to go out and try different work experiences... So learning those life skills. Their career will end at some stage; it's inevitable, it has to, but they understand how they can transfer their rugby skills to other work/life skills as well. So that's something that we can do (Staff 2).

Parents also had this sentiment, with one parent stating their solutions for what may happen if their son was to be dropped from the academy. This statement indirectly alluded to the importance of encouraging a dual career:

Talking about the future. All you can do is talk about the future and talk about scenarios. You've got to be honest... What happens if you're not selected? What are you going to do? What's your plan B? What's your plan C? And just being open and honest. Having a single objective outcome would mean if you miss it you're a little bit buggered. If you're open and honest about this could happen. Great if it happens, fantastic. If it doesn't, what are you going to do? That's the only way that you can deal with it (Parent 5).

Showing the parents the importance of their children having alternative options for careers outside of rugby would in turn put the players in a much more secure position. This is because they now have another career option to peruse if they are deselected from the academy. By doing this, there could potentially be less stress and anxiety around the deselection process at the end of the season as viable alternatives to continuing through the academy process are in place.

4.1.1.4. Support through Injuries

Another common concern that came up in data collection was dealing with injuries. Parents felt that they needed information from the academy, specifically around how to best recover from the injury, so they can support their child through this set back. Parents also desired knowledge on how to best support their child through an injury from an emotional point of view.

4.1.1.4.1. Information on Injuries. Participants also highlighted that there was a need for information surrounding the injury process that the academy use when a player is injured.

Participants indicated that the information given to them was minimal when a player experienced an injury, and parents felt they were left in the dark regarding their son's rehab. As Parent 9 explained when discussing when they wanted information from the academy, "Definitely injuries. My son had an ankle injury and yes, we didn't really know where to go or what to do with it within the academy physios." Staff also agreed that an increase in communication to parents regarding injuries, both with regards to how they can support their child and also during a period of injury was important:

So helping them prepare for what it would be like if their son was to get injured, or if they don't get selected...I think it's quite a big loss for the parents as well. They've suddenly got this big hole of: I've given up ten years of my life into my child's sport and now they've been dropped. I think a lot of emphasis is put on helping the child, but actually it needs to look at the parents as well (Staff 2).

Further to this, one parent discussed their concerns surrounding the amount of support and information offered to them, specifically surrounding concussions:

Well obviously as a parent it's a bit, its, well I try and get him to get the right medical advice and do the right thing. I mean you know, you read about concussions, you don't have I suppose any support from them (the academy). The academy haven't given us any, I don't know, info. What's the safeguarding? What's the duty of care for the academy to be giving us information on concussion? We don't receive anything (Parent 2).

Having access to information on injury rehabilitation would give parents a greater insight into some of the setbacks their children face when they are injured. By being given this information, parents would be able to help their child through the injury and rehabilitation process.

4.1.1.4.2. Emotional Support Through an Injury. As well as being made aware of the specifics of the injury and rehabilitation process, parents and staff also stated that emotional support and how parents can best offer it to their child when recovering from an injury was also required information. Along with the information on how to support their child, it was also recommended that support should be given to parents as some may struggle seeing their child go through the physical and mental struggles of injury rehabilitation. One parent discussed how the process of recovering from an injury can effect both the parent and the player:

He had a major, major concussion but obviously he's had to take the time out. The time out, he's had an ongoing hip injury for a while, hip issue or muscular around his hip and

he's done hamstring. You know when they're not playing, you see how it affects them, you know... They're thinking, you can see, they're thinking the same. When's this going to end, sort of thing (Parent 7).

Considering this requirement, it was recommended that perhaps parents communicating with one another around this issue could be the best solution to the problem. During observations, a member of staff stated, "Parents exchanging ideas and then having a two-way communication between staff and parents, I think that would be really good".

4.1.1.5. Parenting During Emerging Adulthood

Parents also acknowledged that as children move towards the later of their teenage years, their needs of support from their parents also change. This change requires parents to be guided towards to appropriate ways in which to support their children through this transition. This included being informed on the changing role of the parent and encouraging the development of independence with their child.

4.1.1.5.1. The Changing Role of a Parent. Throughout data collection, participants acknowledged that the role of parents changed, and they were aware they needed to be involved in different ways in their child's life but not all were sure how they should do this. Most participants stated that they had already started the process of taking on more of a background supporter role in their child's sporting life, but some were less sure how to do this or whether what they were doing was correct – as such information regarding their role at this time was perceived to be valuable. As Parent 9 explained:

It's just communication and feeling involved. I can appreciate they want the kids to grow up at 17/18-year-olds, but at 17, they're still a minor, not an adult. So, there's certain things that parents need to be involved in legally. So, I appreciate when they're 18, then the parents don't have to be involved. It's just communication really... They need to give the parents the information to support them (Parent 9).

By informing parents of how their role has changed, from being highly involved to being more of a background supporter, parents are then able to emend their behaviours to fit the needs of their child.

4.1.1.5.2. Developing Independence. Within this recognition of the changing role of parents, there was a further desire for a more specific focus on independence. Namely, how parents could remain involved and supportive while helping their child to develop independence.

Participants stated that although they found natural opportunities to promote the development of independence, they would like information and guidance as to how they can do this further. This was stated when Parent 4 said, “you know, we’re not control freaks, we don’t, we don’t need to know the details, as I said, it’s important to build independence. But some of them are only seventeen and eighteen. There needs to be a balance”.

Leading on from this there was also an indication that striking a balance between allowing their children to demonstrate their independence whilst also not standing off too much and still showing their investment in their son’s young careers was desirable. One parent said that parents can help encourage the discipline required to develop independence:

I think structure, discipline. You’ve got to echo what the coaching system is teaching them, and it is teaching them independence, self-motivation and all those things. It’s very easy not to do that. Are you the one that gets him up out of bed or does he get himself out of bed? Are you the one that washes his clothes, or is he the one that washes his clothes? Does he get his kit ready? Do you have to remind him to remember everything (Parent 10).

By effectively using parenting techniques to promote the growth of independence in their child, parents can prepare their child for the challenges that face them after they leave the under 18s stage of the academy.

4.1.2. Provision of Support

Participants were provided with an opportunity to indicate how they might like support or information or the means through which they thought it would be most useful. From these insights one member of staff succinctly stated the need for an effective information and guidance process to be put in place:

The parents go through a transition and journey as well as the players and again the reason for the interest in this is to try and coach the parents through this because ultimately its going to help the athletes through the journey as well with the transition...We need to be able to educate and support them as best we possibly can... We’re going to climb this mountain together. Coaches are going to do their bit, parents are going to do their bit, players are going to do their bit, we’re going to support the team rather than the individual (Staff 3).

Further, through my observations, I gained important insights regarding when and how it might be appropriate to deliver support.

4.1.2.1. Delivery approach

Data indicated that interactive face-to-face sessions were the most desirable means through which to provide support parents. This was because it would allow for parents to interact with one another and with members of staff at the academy, as Parent 6 said, “What would be nice is if the coaches hung around afterwards or something, so you get to have a chat and just show your face and say hello”. Further, from informal conversations that took place on match days, when I made suggestions regarding a support programme and what that might look like parents generally agreed that in-person delivery would be best. Numerous reasons were provided for this, including giving parents the opportunity to “network with” and discuss “parental experiences” with other parents, as well as meet members of staff at the academy and ask any questions they would have about the upcoming season and beyond. For instance, when discussing how they might like to access support, Parent 2 explained, “I suppose communication with other parents and some way to access them because, especially with Covid people doing, they’re not really mixing... So that’s sort of facilitating communication with parents who want it.” Similarly, staff shared thoughts around the benefits of running a face-to-face intervention as opposed to an online one:

So, I think generally people are better face-to-face. They can talk, they can interact in a much more, I guess natural way... I think putting people in little focus groups to discuss stuff, and break out rooms and all this sort of stuff is just so contrived, and people are really, in my opinion, fed up of it now. Because of Covid it's been done to death. I think if these groups can grow much more organically, they're going to be much more powerful, because people are going to engage in them in person (Staff 2).

Designing a support programme that takes place through in person sessions would therefore allow for parents to meet members of staff and other parents, whilst also offering parents with a more desirable alternative to the online meetings that had become the norm due to the COVID pandemic.

4.1.2.2. Timing and location of support

When discussing when parents might best like to access support, participants were unanimous in their suggest that any information or guidance sessions should take place at the same time and location as the boys’ training sessions. This was seen as ideal as parents would already be at the sessions after dropping their child off, therefore increasing convenience for parents and

the members of staff at the sessions. It was a very common feeling amongst parents that if the sessions are to be held in person, having the sessions at training sessions would be desirable, as Parent 9 explained, “If you were going to do face to face meetings, then yes, defo”. Another parent, parent 6, also desired the time and location of the sessions to be parallel to training sessions, “Particularly if you're travelling to get there. It's not like we drop them off and go back home. You're filling time. Either that or you end up waiting for an extra half an hour, forty-five minutes, or something.” By holding in person sessions at the same time and location as the training sessions, parents will have an opportunity to learn valuable information rather than just waiting in their cars and waiting for the training sessions to end.

4.2. Stage 2: Plan

Drawing on the themes identified through the reconnaissance phase, a parent support programme was developed. The programme was guided by the data from the participants, as well as previous literature and the experiences of my lead supervisor and the sport psychologist working at the academy. Aligned with the reflections of the participants, the overarching aim of the support programme was to provide parents with insights regarding the son’s upcoming U18 journey and how they could support their child during this period. Further, the sessions also sought to provide parents with information and advice that would enhance their experience during this period.

Based on the initial findings, it was apparent that four key areas needed to be considered. Interestingly, they were all broadly related to transitions – those into and out of the programme, as well as the non-normative transition of injury, and how parents could best support their son in relation to these. From these themes four sessions could be planned and carried out to deliver information on all of the themes focused upon 1): The transition from lower academy to U18s, 2) The transition from U18s to Future Pathways, 3) Handling Injuries, and 4) Autonomy Supportive Parenting (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1*Content Themes with Planned Delivery and Evidence of Need*

Session Title	Session Section	Information Covered	Format Plan	Planned Speaker	Evidence of Need from Reconnaissance	Evidence of Need from Literature
The transition from lower academy to the Under 18s team	Introduction	Parents given clear layout of the season ahead Honest depiction of progress of players and the selection process	Information delivery talk with Q and A	Senior Academy Manager Educational lead	Open and honest communication	Cavallerio et al. (2021) Richards & Winter (2013)
	Handling the Transition to the Under 18s Team	Identify what the players will experience in this transition “Holistic Athlete Transition Model”	Model shown on slides Information delivery talk with Q and A Group discussions	Sport Psychologist	Understanding and aiding player experience during the step up	Wylleman et al. (2013) Wylleman (2019)
	Meet and Greet	Make parents aware of communication routes	Interactive session to allow for communication	Senior Academy Manager Educational Training Consultant	Knowing who to contact	Kramers et al. (2022) Harwood et al. (2010)

The transition from U18s to Future Pathways	Handling the Transition from the Under 18s to Future Pathways	“Holistic Athlete Transition Model”	Casual meet and greet after the session	Sport Psychologist	Encouraging a dual career	Wylleman et al. (2013)	
			Model shown on slides			Information delivery talk with Q and A	Wylleman (2019)
			Encourage dual career and holistic development away from rugby			Group discussions	Dubios et al. (2015)
	The Pathway to the Senior Academy	Selection/deselection process and induction into the senior academy	Video interviews with senior academy players	Sport Psychologist	Potential post academy routes	Brand et al. (2013)	
			Information delivery talk with Q and A	Senior Academy Manager	Open and honest communication	Kovács et al. (2022)	
	The Pathway to University Rugby	Potential routes into university rugby after the academy	Talk on university options and the steps required for application	Professional Development Manager	Potential post academy routes	Elliot et al. (2018)	
						Tekavc et al. (2015)	
						Debois et al. (2015)	
Injuries and the Rehabilitation Process	Injury and Rehabilitation Process	Go over injury/rehabilitation process and what the players	Information delivery talk with Q and A	Academy Physio Sport Psychologist	Information on injuries	Cavallerio & Wadey (2021)	

	Emotional support through an injury	are going through. Highlight importance of parents and support system	Information delivery talk with Q and A	Sport Psychologist	Emotional support through an injury	Wayment (2020)
Autonomy Supportive Parenting	Reminder of the HAC Model	Changing role of the parent	Group discussions Information delivery talk with Q and A	Sport Parenting Expert (Prof. Camilla Knight)	The changing of the role of a parent	Wylleman et al. (2013) Wylleman (2019)
	Parenting Through Emerging Adulthood	Autonomy supportive parenting techniques	Group discussions Information delivery talk with Q and A	Sport Parenting Expert (Prof. Camilla Knight).	Developing Independence	Tamminen & Holt (2012) Holt et al. (2009)
		Parenting during emerging adulthood	Group discussions			Holt et al. (2021) Kaye et al. (2021)

4.2.1. The transition from lower academy to the Under 18s team

For the first session, it was thought that it would be best to have an introductory session for the parents. This session not only aimed to introduce parents to the support programme, but also aimed to introduce them into the under 18s environment as a whole. To do this effectively, the session was split into three sections: the introduction, handling the transition to the under 18s, and meet and greet. This session touched on several themes from the reconnaissance phase. These included: knowing who to contact, open and honest communication, understanding and aiding player experience during the step up, and understanding the requirements of the academy.

4.2.1.1. Introduction

An introduction to the session was planned to be run by the Senior Academy Manager. This was done because the Senior Academy Manager is incredibly knowledgeable of the expectations of the academy, as they are in charge of this stage of the academy process, and they are a familiar face to all of the parents in attendance. The aims of the introduction were to identify key members of staff at the academy for the parents, and to establish the aims expectations of the academy for the upcoming season. This section aimed to offer the “open and honest communication” that parents from the reconnaissance stage desired and is highlighted in the literature (Cavallerio et al., 2021). By ensuring that the communication between the academy and parents was effective, this session aimed to leave parents informed about what would be happening at the academy over the season and therefore avoid feelings of powerlessness.

4.2.1.2. The Transition to the Under 18s Team

To gain a complete understanding of how best to handle the transition into the under 18s team, two speakers were involved with this section. The Sport Psychologist would first lead a talk around informing parents of the psychological challenges that the players are presented with when taking on this transition. Secondly, the Education Training Consultant would then speak to parents about the expectations of the academy and how best to handle the transition.

4.2.1.2.1. Sport Psychologist Section. For the part of the session which addressed dealing with transitions, it was important to identify what the player will be going through during this phase of their development. This then led to discussing what transitions are involved when stepping up to their final year of junior rugby. Specifically, drawing on the Holistic Athlete Career (HAC) Model (Wylleman et al, 2013; Wylleman, 2019), parents were introduced to the various

transitions a sports person goes through as they develop through their sporting career, from childhood to sporting retirement. The HAC model breaks down these transitions into five levels: Athletic, Psychological, Psychosocial, Academic/Vocational and Financial. With a particular focus on the age that the players are currently at (17/18), parents were guided through the model by the sport psychologist as they are an expert in the field.

4.2.1.2.2. Education Training Consultant Section. To ensure parents and the academy were on the same page as to what is expected of the players for the upcoming season, the final part of this session was planned to focus on the upcoming season and associated expectations within and beyond rugby. The content was also aimed at helping parents to think about how they could foster a mentality of holistic development towards their children. They were also informed of the academy aims to develop the players as not just players, but young people too. For this information to be best received by the parents, it was delivered by the academy director and educational lead with them addressing the rugby orientated expectations and the expectations away from rugby respectively.

The importance of this information is underpinned by the literature, which shows that it is important for elite youth sport environments to have clear and realistic expectations of both athletes and parents. When these expectations are unrealistic, it may have negative consequences on athlete and parent well-being (Agnew, 2017). The requirements clubs have towards children and parents as well as the quality of communication have been considered as club-related stressors by parents (Kovács et al, 2022). Club-related stressors were linked to higher parental anxiety caused by the uncertainties and conflicts that arise regarding parents' relationship with their children's clubs. Therefore, by clearly stating the expectations of the academy to parents, it could be an effective strategy of both making sure that the parents are well informed, and minimizing the adversities faced by parents and players.

4.2.1.3. Meet and Greet

Once the content delivery was finished for this session, a more casual meet and greet was planned. This was planned to offer parents and staff an opportunity to get to know each other in a more casual setting. By doing this, parents are also able to be more knowledgeable of the members of staff at the academy and therefore have greater knowledge of who to contact for different situations that the parents and players may come across. Strengthening the communication between parents and staff within a sport programme can help sport parents better support their

child (Kramers et al, 2022; Harwood et al, 2010). Therefore, by making parents more aware of communication routes in the academy and who to contact for different situations, communication between parents and the academy can be strengthened and parents can better support their child.

4.2.2. The Transition from U18s to Future Pathway

The second session of the support programme was planned to focus around informing and preparing parents for the next transition in the players' lives, namely the transition from the under 18s team to future pathways beyond the academy. These include the path to the senior academy (up to the under 23 age group) and university rugby programmes. As with session one, the plan was to run the session in three sections: handling the transition from the under 18s to future pathways, the pathway to the senior academy, and the pathway to university rugby. The plan for the second session also aimed to cover three of the themes from the reconnaissance. These included: potential post academy routes, encouraging a dual career, and open and honest communication.

4.2.2.1. Handling the Transition from the Under 18s to Future Pathways

The first part of this session was planned to be led by the Sport Psychologist at the academy and was focussed around informing parents of some of the emotions that the parents and the players may be going through at this time. Emotions can be complex as big life events in the players lives will be taking place during this transition, including children potentially moving away from home and the selection/deselection process. A reminder of the HAC model was to be included to reiterate to parents the importance of supporting their children through all aspects of their development (Wylleman et al, 2013; Wylleman, 2019). The plan for this session was to cover how parents can aid the players and help them successfully transition into adulthood when leaving the academy. By further promoting this idea, parents were given the tools to allow their children to actively pursue a dual career and ensure they are given the chance to develop themselves holistically on all levels of the HAC model.

4.2.2.2. The Pathway to the Senior Academy

To deliver this information effectively, it was anticipated that it would be important to outline all potential pathways the players could take after the under 18 season. This meant covering several possible outcomes including the senior academy (under 23s) and university rugby. When addressing the potential step up into the senior academy, video interviews of some of the players were planned to show parents the challenges that this transition involves. These videos would

address what struggles they experienced when stepping up and how their parents were important in supporting this. These videos were to be accompanied by talks from the Senior Academy Manager and Education Training Consultant, who would offer a layout for the options available to the players.

As well as talking about the potential routes after the under 18s season, this part of the session would also inform parents of the formal review process. This was to take place at the end of the season and inform players if they have made it into the senior academy. From previous studies, there can be relationship between trait anxiety and the “deselection” process and therefore programs should consider that deselection from elite sport programmes may be associated with risks of mental disorders (Brand et al., 2013). Main parental stressors related to their children’s sports career, include deselection (the fear of performance expectations and their negative consequences) and feedback (about how well parents are informed by the club about their children's development) (Kovács et al., 2022). This part of the session was therefore planned to inform parents of the deselection process and player feedback at the end of the season to enable parents to prepare themselves and their children for this stressful process.

4.2.2.3. The Pathway to University Rugby

When informing parents of the university rugby route, it was deemed important to have a speaker who was knowledgeable about the programmes available to the players and the university application process. As such, it was planned that the Development manager, who is responsible for communications with the BUCS super league rugby teams, would run this part of the session. Specifically, the plan was that the development manager would make parents aware of the university rugby route and the application process that the players have to go through when applying for university. It was anticipated that receiving this information would encourage parents to invest more time in discussing with their child to understand their changing perspectives toward sport, school, and potentially a dual career. An understanding in this regard may help parents develop more appropriate methods for encouraging future pathways in and beyond sport (Elliot et al., 2018). In turn, this part of the session also aimed to encourage the development of a dual career. Being encouraged to have a dual career involves encouraging elite youth sport athletes to be developed holistically and not just in a sporting sense (Tekavc et al, 2015). In recent years, there has been a real emphasis on the importance of young athletes having a “dual career” as it is

important to hold a developmental and holistic perspective when considering athlete development (Debois et al., 2015).

4.2.3. Injuries and the Rehabilitation Process

Based on the data, it was decided that the third session of the support programme would focus on injuries. Specifically, this session was developed to inform parents of the rehabilitation process that the players go through when recovering from an injury and how to best support them through this process. To achieve this, the session was split into two sections examining the injury and rehabilitation process and emotional support through an injury. This session aimed to cover two of the themes from the reconnaissance phase which were getting information during an injury and emotional support through an injury.

4.2.3.1. Injury and Rehabilitation Process

It was organised that the first part of this session, around the injury and rehabilitation process, would be run by the academy physiotherapist. As the academy physiotherapist has the most accurate understanding of the academy process regarding injuries, and because of their vast medical knowledge, it was felt that they would be the most appropriate person to take this part of the session. The information covered during this section would cover the process the academy goes through when a player is injured and the subsequent rehabilitation process. This process involves not only preparing them for the return to training, but also preparing them for selection and performance. Sport parents have been found to feel “powerless” when their medical and sporting knowledge is lacking as they feel unable to support their child through injuries (Cavallerio et al, 2022). Therefore, by informing parents of these processes, it was hoped that feelings of powerlessness can be avoided as parents are well informed regarding what their children will experience if injured. At the end of this part of the session, parents would be encouraged to ask questions to the physiotherapist around the process.

4.2.3.2. Emotional support through an injury

The second part of the session, regarding emotional support through injury, was planned to be conducted by the sport psychologist. This content was covered by the sport psychologist as their expertise on the emotional and mental support of rugby players would allow them to best articulate any recommendations for parents and answer any questions from the parents should they arise. When referring to emotional support, it is important to note that the session was planned to make parents aware of the emotional difficulties an injury can pose of both the player and them as

parents and how to best support both parties through this. Emotional support can lead to fewer negative psychological reactions, more sport-injury related growth, and greater intentions to report future injuries (Wayment, 2020). As these consequences are clearly desirable, a section on emotional support through injury was appropriate for this support programme. The information in this part of the session was centred mainly around showing parents how vital building a support system around their child is when recovering from injury. Although the academy offers a great support system, through various members of staff and other players in the squad, parents and other family members have the potential to become a key role in the support system. The format of the information delivery again encouraged interactive group discussion amongst parents.

4.2.4. Autonomy Supportive Parenting

The final session in the planned support programme was to be centred around autonomy supportive parenting. This included highlighting to parents the importance of developing the independence of their children as well as specific techniques that parents can use to achieve this. The session was planned to be split into two main sections, these being a reminder of the HAC model and parenting through emerging adulthood, and how to help develop independence. By carrying out this session successfully, two of the themes from the reconnaissance could be addressed, namely the changing role of a parent and developing independence.

4.2.4.1. Reminder of the HAC Model

To start off this session, it was felt that a reminder of the HAC model was required for the parents. Prof. Camilla Knight took this part of the session. This was done for two reasons, one being because the academy sport psychologist was unavailable for this session. The second reason was that Prof. Knight is a leading name in the field of sport parenting and is therefore well suited to delivering the information in this session. A reminder of this material can help refresh the parents' knowledge of what their children are going through at this stage of their development. Drawing on Prof. Knight's expertise, it was then planned that parents would be shown how independence would be beneficial within and across these transitions, therefore highlighting the changing role of the parent at this stage of development.

4.2.4.2. Parenting Through Emerging Adulthood

The information which we aimed to deliver in this session was a vital need for the parents. Having the knowledge of what is required from a parent when developing autonomy and independence was greatly requested by parents. In previous studies, it has been shown that

autonomy-supportive parents allowed their children to be involved in decision making. This reportedly resulted in healthy and open bidirectional communication, as well as parents being more able to read their children's emotions (Holt et al, 2009). It has also been shown in previous studies that parents and coaches can help encourage the fostering of independence in the players (Tamminen & Holt, 2012). Previous studies have therefore shown the importance of leading parents towards adopting an autonomy supportive parenting style, especially during this stage of emerging adulthood (Holt et al, 2021; Kaye et al, 2021). Given the importance of this information, it was deemed appropriate that Prof. Knight would again deliver this given her expertise. Her expertise was to be used for the session in order to include valuable information on specific autonomy supportive parenting techniques, along with more general sport parenting advice, to be conveyed to parents whilst also maintaining the interactive format that was desired.

4.3. Stage 3: Action Intervention

Through this stage of the action intervention, data was collected through use of questionnaires and field notes taken at each of the sessions. The results of this stage of the action research project will be presented in session order. A review, drawing heavily on observations and reflections and supplemented with questionnaire data is provided regarding each section of the intervention below, as well as what was done in response to the feedback from parents.

4.3.1. The Transition from lower academy to the Under 18s team

4.3.1.1. Introduction

Parents came in with good spirits and appeared eager to learn. Each parent was greeted by the Senior Academy Manager of the academy. When talking to parents, they indicated that they appreciated this as it made them feel valued and seen; it demonstrated to them that the academy sees the importance of the parents to the players' development. Parents were also made to feel welcome by being offered a cup of tea or coffee. Combined, this appeared to cultivate a great atmosphere of togetherness, and parents indicated this after the session. The Senior Academy Manager then started the session with a talk centred around welcoming the parents to the support programme and going over the expectations of the academy. These expectations included parents and players "buying into the process" that the academy will be going through over the next season and asking the parents for commitment towards the support programme over the upcoming sessions.

4.3.1.2. Handling the Transition to the Under 18s Team

4.3.1.2.1. Sport Psychologist Section. The sport psychologist then introduced themselves to the group before starting their section of the session with a group discussion task. They asked parents to identify any problems they have come across so far when preparing for the step up to the under 18s team. Some of the identified problems included: managing time, the physicality of U18s game, injury, communication (coach to parent) and dealing with pressure. The pressure discussed was rugby specific and included matchday pressure, doing well in the league and pressures surrounding deselection. All of these identified problems were then taken by the sport psychologist and related to the HAC model. By showing the parents this model and relating the problems they had just discussed back to the model, the parents at the session began to see a clearer picture of what their children would start to experience in terms of transitions and barriers they would have to overcome over the next season.

4.3.1.2.2. Educational Training Consultant Section. Once the handling of the transition section finished, the educational lead at the academy held a talk centred around time organisation and managing different aspects of their lives away from rugby. The main theme in this part of the session was based around the statement of “fail to plan, plan to fail” as well as the expectation of the academy to allow players to become the best they can be, both on and off the pitch. One particular part of this section was very well received by the parents. This was the “stress bucket” analogy which gave parents a good representation of how to deal with the various stressors presented to the players (Brabban & Turkington, 2002). He made the parents understand that different taps feed in the bucket (rugby, education, social life etc.) and that they need to be careful that this bucket does not overflow. Therefore, there is a need for effective and healthy ways to drain the bucket (such as rest and relaxation). To aid this, parents were presented with a wall planner that only the players are allowed to add things to at home. The wall planner was greatly received by the parents as they now felt that their children were able to get a better hold on all the stressors they would face over the next year, in rugby and beyond.

4.3.1.3. Meet and Greet

After the session finished, all in attendance had a chance to sign consent forms to allow them to contribute to the data collection and give their recommendations for future sessions. A casual meet and greet between staff and parents then took place which gave parents the chance to discuss the support programme and the upcoming seasons in general with members of staff and

other parents. During this meet greet, hot drinks were served, which further encouraged parents to stay.

4.3.1.4. Session One Feedback

Fourteen participants completed the session feedback questionnaire, which was sent out immediately after the session, with 12 finding the session helpful overall. Parents who took part in the session felt that the content covered was relevant and useful to them with many saying that the time management advice and ways of helping the players handle the transition were the most useful. The format especially was commended by the parents, with one in particular praising the discussion sections of the sessions:

I myself suffer with quite extreme anxiety and find some situations really challenging, my anxiety was quite high during the meeting as I can get very anxious about 'what might happen' however I'd like to say that the fact everyone was given chance to speak if they wished but not directly asked/ 'put on the spot' was a huge relief to me and I'd just like to give brownie points for that.

There were however some recommendations that were given by the parents who took part in the questionnaires, mainly centred around the logistics of the session. These logistical recommendations included being clearer about the timings of the sessions. One Parent from the questionnaire responses said, "I had no idea the session was going to last that long - it would have been good to have had an agenda with approximate time slots". Having clearer presentation slides and speakers was also another recommendation as another parent stated, "Make it clear, have slides that can be read, train the presenters in engaging with the audience and speaking clearly." Also, having tables placed in groups to encourage more group discussion was recommended from another parent, "Maybe having some round table so the parents can talk face to face rather than to the side". After receiving this valuable feedback, changes were made to the rest of the sessions with the hope of ensuring the sessions were a positive experience for the participants involved.

4.3.2. The Transition from U18s to Future Pathway

The second session of the support programme covered the shift from the under 18s team to the different pathways that will be available to the players. As well as this information, the session also covered parental strategies for supporting children's psychosocial development within and beyond elite sport. The pre-session events of greeting and casual conversation between parents remained, with the tables put in groups for easier discussion and a more sociable environment.

There was unfortunately one major change that this session had to undertake from the plan. As the Professional Development Manager was unavailable for this session, “The Pathway to University Rugby” section could not be delivered during the second session. This was moved to the fourth session of the programme so that the Professional Development Manager could deliver the content to the parents.

4.3.2.1. Reminder of HAC Model

To start the session, the sport psychologist did a recap of the HAC model with the slides a lot clearer than in the session. Based on observations made by myself at the session, the parents enjoyed this recap and gained further understanding around the fact that all transitions, especially at this age in a young player’s life, can be challenging.

4.3.2.2. The Pathway to the Senior Academy

The session then led on to video interviews featuring members of the senior academy. In these interviews, the players described the various challenges they have met during their time at the senior academy with particular focus on the initial step up. Following these interviews, parents came together to discuss what problems they imagined the boys would go through should they step up to the senior academy. One parent did raise the question of whether this information was relevant for now even at this early stage when the players have not even begun the under 18s season. This question was answered by the Senior Academy Manager of the academy who stated that making them (the parents) aware of these things is crucial as developing this knowledge can help all players prepare in advance for the obstacles coming their way. They also added that if delivered in a year’s time, this information will arrive too late. It was also noted that there were some similarities with this transition and the transition that the boys were going through whilst the programme was being held (the step up to the under 18s team).

4.3.2.3. Handling the Transition from the Under 18s to Future Pathways

After this discussion, another then followed centred around the RFU champion characteristics. These are a list of qualities, which the RFU sent to all academies, that detail what it takes to become a successful young rugby player. There were four that were given special focus: highly self-aware, detail/ process orientated, effective emotional management, rest/recovery. From these four qualities, parents were tasked with coming up with ways their children have demonstrated these qualities. From this instruction, parents showed great enthusiasm and engagement as they discussed in groups for answers. After talking to some groups, I reflected that

their experience and understanding of what their children were going through aided them in answering the task. They stated that the players had demonstrated great self-awareness by being their own toughest critics and that parents should encourage reflection of performances after matches. The players also showed their attention to detail with their own processes by setting themselves daily routines and handling the various pressures they face, which meant they had to show great time management and independence. The players' rest and recovery were seen to be of great importance by parents as well, with them also acknowledging that both physical and mental recovery was necessary for them to succeed. Finally effective emotional management was also demonstrated by the players in specific match situations and outside of matches when managing the expectations and the emotions they bring about.

4.3.2.4. The Pathway to the Senior Academy Continued

To finish the session, the Senior Academy Manager touched on specific process the academy goes through at the end of the under 18s season. They highlighted the importance of making this a "shared experience" and understanding the player challenges. Doing this means that parents can help them through the process. This part of the session then led on to the welcoming of the new parents from the current under 16s team. The Senior Academy Manager encouraged forming an atmosphere which allows parents to support each other and highlighted that the parents attending the programme will have the new role of being the more experienced parents of the group next season and should therefore facilitate togetherness. The specific selection guide of the academy was then covered. It was emphasised that being dropped does not mean that the player's career is over and that there are numerous alternative routes (to be explored in session 4). During this process, it was stated that networking and parents supporting each other should be encouraged. The Senior Academy Manager stated that being open to deselection is important and too much focus on getting a pro contract can lead to players and parents losing sight of what's important, which is benefiting from the high-class programme the academy offers.

After this information, the meeting finished with another more casual mingling with parents again being able to ask members of staff any questions. From these conversations, parents voiced their appreciation for the information delivered. Both parents and staff seemed to be in agreement that networking amongst each other and creating a sense of community will allow individuals to help each other through tough challenges, such as the previously mentioned deselection process. There were also some parents who seemed to welcome their new role of

welcoming in new parents, with one stating the transition from “newcomer to welcomer” was to be encouraged. I reflected that this eagerness to comply to the guidance given by the support programme could show that the information delivery is being welcomed and well received by parents.

4.3.2.4. Participant Feedback

Parents were again able to give feedback on the session through an online questionnaire. Five participants took part this time, with a similar theme again taking precedence as all who filled out the survey found that the session overall was helpful and that the interactive parts of the session were the most enjoyable. When asked what information they found confusing, there was one case of a participant again wondering about the pertinence of this information at this stage, with one parent stating, “I didn’t find any of it confusing, but I did feel we were being given information that seems a long way off, as we are still in the current season.”

The pertinence of the information at the current time was also raised during the sessions, with the importance of having access to this session early being highlighted. Nevertheless, this feedback is important when considering the overall framing of information. When considering the format of the session, there was also a parent who suggested that having the senior academy players present at the session would be beneficial and more enjoyable for participants in the support programme. This particular parent stated, “It would have been nice to see and listen to some of the older boys rather than a pre-recorded video interview”. This was in considered during the planning of this session and although it was preferred logistically it just did not work for this session.

4.3.3. Injuries and the Rehabilitation Process

For the third session, focused on injuries and the rehabilitation process, there was again a welcome from the Senior Academy Manager as well as casual conversation between those in attendance. The session aims were laid out for the parents which included understanding the injury protocol at the academy and the return to performance (RTP) process, including what parents and players face during this process.

4.3.3.1. Injury and Rehabilitation Process

After the introduction of the session, the club physiotherapist described to the parents the “injury process” the academy goes through when dealing with a player injury. This included explaining the difference between being fit to train and being fit for selection. This requires players being ready to perform for the team and not just be able to train, both physically and mentally. It

was explained to parents that this extra caution helps prevent re-injury and increase player safety and well-being. The physiotherapist also assured the parents that this caution was in the best interest of the academy and the players, and that open communication is always available to parents.

There were a few questions from parents following this section. I felt at the time that the eagerness of parents wanting to learn more shows that they are engaged with the content of the sessions and the interactive format. Inviting conversation and interaction is important feature of the support sessions. Parents asked what the markers were for the players when they were going through the rehab process, which were identified as weekly physical tests the players go through to track their progress. The next question was asking how the academy knows when the players are ready to resume rugby. It was emphasised that progress is not just tracked on paper and players are also asked how they feel before putting them back into rugby activity. After asking if the players are aware of this process, the physiotherapist assured that the players are aware of the process and that they are informed and supported throughout. The final question from this session was based around selection worries, which is an understandable concern for both parents and players. The physiotherapist understood these concerns but again reaffirmed that allowing for more time for recovery can increase longevity without injury. They also mentioned that there is a minute management system in place during games and players will get opportunities when they are ready.

4.3.3.2 Emotional Support Throughout an Injury

The next section of the session, led by the sport psychologist, started with a group discussion around injury experiences. It was stated that injuries can be challenging and isolating for the child and that a good sport parent will support their child through injury by acknowledging that players will go through shifts in emotional state, and this can be difficult to process. As part of the discussion, parents suggested that it is important to emphasise that this isn't the end of the world and it's just part of the rugby experience. There were also some concerns shared by parents, particularly around the pressure of competition in the squad and seeing other teammates who have previously been injured lose out on opportunities. This could potentially cause problems during the rehab due to players wanting to rush back. Patience was again encouraged in response to this as rushing back from injuries does not help. The Senior Academy Manager also added that if injuries happen, this isn't the end of the rugby journey and there will still be opportunities for the players to continue with rugby through the different pathways. I felt that this intervention from the

Senior Academy Manager was timely as across all stages of the action research process, parents have shown great levels of respect towards him. By getting this senior figure involved with the content delivery, it legitimised the content being delivered in the eyes of the parents, as seen in their engagement.

The sport psychologist then delivered content around what they referred to as the “rehabilitation game”. This went over some important methods for encouraging a healthy and successful rehabilitation. These were: accessing the mental state of the player, understanding the injury process, setting SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time specific) goals, exploring their athlete identity, and developing a support system. Before talking about building a support system, the final steps of preparing to return to play were discussed. The fear of re-injury was stated to be completely normal, and the parents were given some techniques that the players could use. These include writing/saying statements of affirmation, feeling confident when returning to play, visualisation of feeling strong/completing skills and using music to regulate emotions. I felt at the time that this was a very important point of the session as although parent discussions were important for engagement, information on ways parents can encourage mental development from their children was also important.

Building a support team was explained as vital because injury can lead to a loss of community and social support can help the rehab process. The parents were encouraged to help the injured player seek out and accept support as young boys may be reluctant to do this out of fears of being seen as weak. It was also acknowledged that a player being injured can be tough on parents emotionally and using other to share the load and take pressure off the parent was also recommended. A question arose about whether a support system could be set up by the academy in order to help injured players keep their sense of belonging in the squad. Going to watch the team play and staying connected with the squad that way was recommended. The Senior Academy Manager also jumped in and said that there would be a new training group forming over the summer of injured players. A parent also made the point that an injury could be turned into a great learning opportunity as they can observe players playing in their position and keep their rugby brain switched on. This discussion was extremely promising as there is now a dialogue between the parents and staff around how to best support the players. I felt incredibly proud that the support session designed as a result of my research could facilitate such important steps towards supporting injured players at the academy.

4.2.3.3. Session 3 feedback

The immediate reactions following the end of this session was overwhelmingly positive, with all in attendance enjoying the session. Parents who talked with me found the information from the session incredibly useful and reassuring to have. The open discussions in this session were also the most fruitful and free flowing so far, which is potentially down to a greater rapport being in place between the parents in the group. The academy physiotherapist was especially popular with many of the parents asking for more information on their work and how the players progress through injuries. I was incredibly happy with this as this again shows parent interest in the content being delivered.

Despite the high attendance however, there was only one feedback questionnaire response to this session. When asked what part of the session they found the most enjoyable, they had particular praise for the physiotherapist speaker, “(I enjoyed) all of it but I think when the academy physiotherapist spoke she was very informative, and the information was clear to understand and helpful”. From the questionnaire responses and the informal interactions immediately after the session, there were no more content related, format related or logistical recommendations from parents and members of staff.

4.3.4. Autonomy Supportive Parenting

The fourth and final session of the support programme not only had autonomy supportive parenting to cover, but also had the go over the university rugby route that was missed out from the second session. There was also some strength and conditioning content that needed delivering from the academy. The Senior Academy Manager started by introducing the three speakers present at the session which included the strength and conditioning coach, the development manager at the academy, and Prof. Camilla Knight.

4.3.4.1 GPS Technology

The first part of the section was not part of the planning stage and was centred around the new GPS technology that the players have started using. This took place to inform parents of the new GPS technology the academy was using and was put into the session by the Senior Academy Manager. In order to ensure that this content would not interfere with the sport parenting content to be delivered in the session, it was put at the beginning of the session. I reflected at the time that the strengths of action research became apparent at this point as I was allowed to remain flexible

and adapt my support session to suit the needs of the environment. In this case parents needed to know about the new technology, so it was included in the session.

The strength and conditioning section of the session was led by one of the Strength and Conditioning coaches at the academy and the Senior Academy Manager. The coach thanked the parents for their investment in the system and went on to cover the numerous benefits of having the system on board. These included allowing the academy to further understand the physical demands that are being put onto the players. This in turn allows the academy to further support the players and ensure that they aren't over training and that their wellbeing is being protected. There were a couple of logistical questions asked by parents which in turn were answered. The Senior Academy Manager then reaffirmed that using this new GPS technology is incredibly beneficial to encourage "training smarter" and the more this technology is used, the more the academy can help.

4.3.4.2. Pathway to University Rugby

After this section the Professional Development Manager, who is responsible for helping the players apply for and get into university, covered the various university routes available to the players. They started this by firstly stating that it is "important to be predictive rather than reactive" and by doing this, a path where both education and rugby are allowed flourish can be found. The BUCS super league path was discussed to great length, where it was assured that the academy will help any players who wished to pursue the further education route by helping them apply to elite BUCS super rugby programmes. The deadlines for the submission of the university applications were set out and dates where players will have to make a final decision on what path they will be taking were given. It was reassured to parents that no matter which path is selected there will be ample opportunity for the players to build up a dual career. Parents were then encouraged to start discussing future plans and prepare for the potential eventualities.

Parent questions then came in response to this information. Most notably, a parent asked about the situation where the player may want to go to university but also take time out before going. The Senior Academy Manager of the academy then strongly suggested doing a gap year. Doing a gap year would help further analyse the player and give them another year of development. The Senior Academy Manager also stated that the university rugby system is a great safety net for those who won't make it into the next stage of the academy. As previously mentioned, the Senior Academy Manager is a well-respected figure within the academy. Therefore, by suggesting this to parents, I sensed that his influence on this point would lead parents away from parents pressuring

their child towards just professional rugby. It would instead encourage greater discourse between parents and player around their future. However, this could not be confirmed until the evaluation stage of the action research process.

4.3.4.3. Parenting Through Emerging Adulthood

Prof. Camilla Knight then took her section of the session, which began with the theme of parenting during emerging adulthood. It was emphasised parents still play a crucial role during the emerging adulthood stage of the child development as they can help their child step into adulthood. The role of a parent at this stage is to prepare the child for adulthood by encouraging independent decision making and to lead the child towards becoming more responsible. A discussion was then led which asked parents how the role of a parent has change and how they are able to navigate these changes. The parents answered with logistical responsibilities they still have (such as driving and feeding their child). There was also an acknowledgment from the parents that their role has changed to more of an emotional supporter and that there has been a shift from them being responsible for everything to sharing responsibility of looking after their child. I reflected that this went along with some of the parent interview responses from the reconnaissance stage of the action research process. Some of these parents wanted to help encourage the development of independence, but also felt that they still held some important responsibilities, hence highlighting a period of transition and a need for guidance.

Emerging adulthood was highlighted as a period of identity change and it is important that parents can provide opportunities to explore, make mistakes, provide support, allow them to explore and take ownership. When addressing the role of parents during this phase, it was stressed that too much contact at this point, between parents and children, can slow down the onset of adulthood. Despite this however, athletic interest from the parents has been shown to be beneficial and sporting parental involvement is closely related to sport satisfaction. Throughout this process, parents were told that parent-child communication is key to success as the parent transitions from a leader to a supporting role and they start to employ this support through autonomy supportive parenting.

Specific methods in which parents can develop autonomy supportive parenting were then covered. Giving the child the perception of control was described as a good way to promote autonomy and examples were given to the parents. An example of this was asking the child for a conversation about their future steps, but letting the child choose when and where they want to do

the talk. When giving children autonomy, patience was stressed as key and that parents should avoid controlling behaviour. Responsive support, meaning that parents ensure that their child is understood, validated and cared for, was also recommended for the parents. This also includes attending to and supporting the goals and needs of the child. In order to complete autonomy supportive parenting effectively, parents were told they also need to optimise involvement. This involves parents taking care of themselves by using others in their own support network and communicating with other parents with the goal of helping each other through this process. Specific strategies were also given to parents which included: planning for change, discussing what their son might want from them in the future, talking to people who have gone through the same experience, and drawing on their support network.

4.2.4.4. Participant Feedback

Although there was no feedback questionnaire for immediately after this session because it was not needed to make changes to the next sessions (as this was the last one), feedback was still gathered through those in attendance through informal conversations and a more detailed self-reflection in the case of Prof. Knight. Although the content was thought to be relevant by the speaker, there was some struggle when trying to balance information delivery and allowing parents to be interactive and hold discussions. As with previous sessions, there were also some timing difficulties, and this was duly noted in the self-reflection:

I would have liked the parents to have more opportunity to share some of their strategies that are working and to problem solve about what is to come soon... The session felt rushed though and I did have to cut discussions shorter than anticipated and remove videos that would take time because the components prior to my part took longer than anticipated. Going forwards it would be useful to have a clearer idea of the exact amount of time available for this part (Prof. Camilla Knight).

When speaking to parents after the session had finished, they thoroughly enjoyed the session. The parents who spoke to me after the session had concluded that they found the information covered in the session highly relevant to them and especially enjoyed the university routes content and the guidance on autonomy supportive parenting. This feedback was replicated by the reflections of Knight as well, as parents had talks with her about their experience of the session and how they found it:

At the end of the session 10 parents independently came up to thank me for the session and comment on how useful the content was. Specifically, parents indicated that it was really talking to their current experience with their child and they could see what their child was experiencing and what was to come... The parents liked understanding how their over involvement might impact on the transition to adulthood and in repositioning their role around helping their child become an adult we took some of the focus of sport alone. Parents felt there were some good tips that they could take forwards and just remember different approaches to try and achieve certain outcomes (Prof. Camilla Knight).

4.4. Stage 4: Evaluation

From the evaluation stage, parents were able to give their thoughts on the support programme as a whole. From this data, I was able to gain an overall sense of how the parents felt the support programme went, as well as their motivations for participating. Parents also revealed what they learned from the programme and recommendations they had for future programmes, concerning the content, format, and logistics of the support programme.

4.4.1. Overall Perception

From the interviews and questionnaires completed after the programme finished, all the collected responses showed that the parents found the support programme enjoyable and informative. For instance, when asked about content covered and the speakers in the sessions, Parent 8 stated, "No complaints. They were all good and came across well. I got a sense of what they were trying to get across. I was fully into the sessions. I remember what each session was. I definitely learned something from them." When giving reasons for why they found the programme enjoyable, parents stated that the face-to-face delivery made the sessions very enjoyable as it allowed for interaction between parents, as Parent 2 shared. "Well, I think I like the interaction... the speakers said chat amongst yourselves, and I thought that was good, because then you're not under pressure to have to talk in front of everyone." The participants also felt that the information covered in the programme was helpful and the programme felt more enjoyable and rewarding as a result of this. Participant 6 explained, "It's easier to see now and of what's going to come this next year, so the other things I thought were really helpful was knowing... But all of that information was really super helpful." Ensuring the information delivered was tailored to the parents' needs meant that the parents are now more prepared to face the season ahead than they were before attending the programme.

4.4.2. Motivation for Participation

The biggest reason for parents feeling motivated to participate in the programme was to show support to their child. They felt that just by participating and being engaged, they could show to their child that they are invested in helping them on their rugby journey. Parent 7 shared, “The motivation was to support my son... And there was also a sense of obligation to show support.” Furthermore, by attending, parents could also learn new ways to support their child and acquire new knowledge which they hoped would help them through the U18 programme, as Parent 3 explained, “We're interested in what's going on trying to get as much information about what we can do and it's good.”

A second source of motivation for the parents was being able to meet other parents and members of academy staff. Due to the COVID pandemic, some parents felt isolated. Having the sessions in person and as a big group facilitated parents’ connections and provided an opportunity to share their struggles with one another. This was seen as particularly desirable because, as Parent 2 explained, “When you see these parents, you only ever see them on the side of the touch line when their children. Their boys are on so you can’t really have a discussion on things other than the game.” By forming a network, parents could make connections with each other and form a sense of community with one another.

Becoming more aware of their children’s experience from this part of their rugby journey was also a source of motivation for the parents in attendance. This included wanting to be aware of what would be happening at the academy this season as well as what the players will be going through outside of the rugby environment, including educational and social changes. One parent had been away from their child (who lived at boarding school) for a long time and saw the programme as an opportunity to be more involved and aware of what is going on with their son:

Well, obviously, you know being far away. Literally, we have not had the opportunity to be a part of any of our son’s life over the last two years. So this was our first time to be able to come and watch and see what goes on (Parent 4).

A number of parents at this academy have limited contact with their children due to the players being at boarding schools. By attending the support programme, parents hoped to gain a greater understanding of what their child is going through at this stage of their development.

4.4.3. What did parents learn?

Parents were asked what exactly they learnt from the support programme. As seen in the matrix (Table 4.2) there were seven main areas of information parents discussed. Of those seven, none of them were seen as a negative part of the programme by any of the parents. This means that none of the information covered in the programme was perceived as irrelevant by the parents. All of the main learning points were received positively from the parents as they felt that all the information covered fitted into the programme.

Table 4.2*What did parents learn from the support programme?*

	++	+	+ -	-	--
Parental Support	P1/P2/P3/P8	P4/P5/P6/P13			
Future Pathways	P4/P5/P9	P1/P2/P3/P6/P7 /P8/P10			
Parent-Child-Academy Communication	P4/P5/P7	P1/P2/P3/P6/P8 /P13			
Role of the Parent	P2/P3/P8/P13	P6	P1/P7/P9		
Academy Support	P1	P2/P3/P4/P5			
Encouraging Independence	P4/P5/P8	P2/P3/P6			
Injury Support	P2/P3/P4/P5/P9	P6/P13	P7		

Note: ++: Very positive coding. Content was a perfect fit for the programme. +: Positive coding. Content fitted into the support programme well. + -: Mixed coding. Conflicted views of how the information fits in. -: Negative coding. Content did not fit in the support programme. --: Very negative coding. Content was completely out of place in the support programme.

4.4.3.1. Parental Support

A key takeaway that parents got from the programme was the parental skills and ways in which they can be an effective source of support for their child during the under 18s season of the academy process. Although they have always tried to offer support to their child, the participants in the support programme were happy to learn of specific ways they can help their child. One parent went into detail about what they had learned around support their child after a match:

So the other thing I thought was really helpful was knowing how to respond to him post-match. What to say and what not to say. I mean I'm not one of these parents who knows a massive amount about rugby so my son has probably come off lightly, in that respect, because I'm not asking him 'or what about that? What about that? What about that?'... And so, knowing how best to respond to him post-match that's really useful (Parent 6).

Additionally, one parent who attended the programme felt more equipped to best support their child, whilst being reassured that the academy can also aid in the support of the children when they do not have all of the answers:

We try to be as prepared as we can to help him and support him as much as we can. But you know we don't know it all. It's nice to get different perspective from say the experts at the academy because I think they are well supported in that respect, but they're safeguarded the people there to look after their welfare (Parent 3).

As seen here, parents also learned of the ways in which the academy can offer support for them personally over the upcoming season as well. Along with learning new support strategies, the parents from the data collection felt grateful that their feelings and emotions were acknowledged by the academy and therefore reassured that there is support available for them.

4.4.3.2. Future Pathways

Parents also enjoyed learning of the future pathways available to the players once they exit the academy. In particular, the information delivered from the development manager was greatly received by the parents as they were made aware of the potential university destinations available to the players and how they will be supported through the process:

The pathway session was probably the most useful to mention it, but yeah certainly the information that we've got from the last session about pathways and about the links that the academy houses with certain universities. That's going to massively help and

understanding that it's not necessarily the end of the road, if that contract isn't there in March (Parent 6).

Having clarity regarding the next step in their child's rugby journey allowed for parents to plan the next step with their child. This included starting to have conversations with their child around their future to ensure that the next transition away from the academy is smooth:

The university process and guiding my son, I mean we had a conversation this morning as we're going to school. Just to talk about well what could he do. What universities he could apply for. Then the option is open for him to (Parent 7).

4.4.3.3. Parent-Child-Academy Communication

Leading on from having conversations with their child about the future pathways, parent-child-academy communication was also identified by parents as an area of importance. The programme was perceived to facilitate the communication between the academy and the parents, which was at times at an unsatisfactory level before the programme according to Parent 4, "We didn't always know what was happening. The communication was not through us sometimes ... The communication is amazing now you also stepped up to a new level yeah so yeah." This communication, along with encouraging openness between parents and players, allowed for parents to gain a complete understanding of what is going on at the academy. One parent went into detail about how they initially struggled communicating with their child, but now have effective communication as a result of the programme:

Understanding that before I went into those sessions, I had it that if my son wasn't communicating. That somehow, I wasn't being effective as a parent. And what I left (the support programme) with was a greater confidence that actually, the communication around certain things could happen. In many different environments. There's no particular way that it has to go, you know I found that a massively like huge release. Relieving yes, I found it very relieving (Parent 7).

Overall, it appears the programme has shown parents ways to communicate with their children. As a result of this, there is a weight lifted off parents as they now feel equipped to communicate with their children. By doing this, the programme has allowed parents to support their child to the best of their abilities as they are now fully aware of how the academy works and how their son is getting on.

4.4.3.4. Role of a Parent

When addressing what they learned about the role of a parent at this stage of a player's rugby development, there were some mixed reviews by the parents who took part in the data collection. Some parents received this information positively and acknowledged that because of the programme, they had been encouraged to become a more well-rounded parents in a supportive role. One parent recommended this content in the programme and said that the programme as a whole should be encouraged in the future:

It's certainly given me a different perspective. Just you know, we've added a few tools in the toolbox, so to speak. So it's definitely been productive and I definitely recommend that everyone does if they can, do it again. Going into next season. Even if it was the same content I'd probably go again. To kind of you know refresh myself (Parent 8).

However, in contrast to this, some parents found that their perception of the role of a parent did not change because of the support programme. This was down mainly to the fact that these parents already saw themselves as a source of support and already encouraged the development of independence at this stage of the child's development. One parent did still value the information that was delivered around the role of a parent, despite already encouraging independence and offering support in that way:

I think with our parenting style. We've had the kids do their laundry from 11. Take responsibility for their actions from an early age, you know. Deal with failure and have very, very open conversations about success and failure. So I don't I don't think that it's fundamentally changed me as a parent. However, it (the programme) has unquestionably provided access to information and techniques that are massively valuable (Parent 7).

Although this feedback suggested that some parents felt that the role of a parent was unnecessary information, there was a sense of clarity amongst the parents as they had been made aware of their important supportive parent role as a result of this programme.

4.4.3.5. Academy Support

By participating in the programme, parents were also made aware of what support the academy offers to both their sons and the parents themselves. The parents acknowledged the efforts of the academy for putting their efforts into running this programme as a positive sign, as Parent 13 stated, "I attended all sessions because I saw it as an opportunity to support my son and to get an understanding of his rugby pathway... I thought these sessions were very important and I'm thankful that you ran these sessions." One parent even indicated that by showing this sort of effort

and honesty towards selection, it enables the players and parents to fully enjoy the academy process:

I like the openness and honesty about selection: You can play rugby and enjoy it but know that if you don't get a contract out of the Academy, because you have to be fairly exceptional to do that. You've got to be really good. But if you don't get a contract out of the academy, you can still carry on playing Rugby and go to university and mature and mature and grow (Parent 5).

In addition to this, academy support to the parents went beyond the content covered in the programme. This was due to the academy being more transparent with the parents when concerning the logistical details of the upcoming season, including giving parents key dates and details of upcoming events. The programme allowed for a complete community to be formed between the academy and the parents. The sharing of key dates and events through the season and the ability to build a sense of community was seen as a form of academy support:

Because the lads are all there a tight knit group. There was a lot of competition and they're all mates in a, which is nice. But it's for us as parents, you know we're interested in what's going on. We're trying to get as much information about what we can do and it's good. The sessions support us in that way (Parent 2).

By offering this kind of support and knowledge to the parents, the academy can ensure that parents remain well informed and supported through this stage of the academy process.

4.4.3.6. Encouraging Independence

Throughout the support programme, particularly in session four, parents learned information regarding supporting the independence of their child. Parents explained that following the programme they have been increasing the number of tasks they expect their children to complete, including packing their bags for rugby activities, planning their schedule on the wall planner received during the support programme, and even cooking meals:

I was being overprotective... but it's better making them (mistakes) earlier on and learning from them as early as he could... Even little things like what gets ready for what days, but an emphasis on him to you know not constantly be reminded (Parent 8).

They also learned different autonomy supportive parenting techniques, including allowing their children to make mistakes and learn from them as opposed to being overly protective and shielding them from activities they will need to complete in the future. Parents explained that they had

already seized upon opportunities to demonstrate their autonomy supportive parenting by having conversations with their child about their future away from the academy when the child wanted to discuss this – these conversations related to rugby performance, school life, or future plans after the under 18s season at the academy. As a result of one of these conversations, a player is now more likely to consider the university rugby option after opening up in their own time, as Parent 8 said, “After that talk he is now probably more likely to get into university, which is positive. There's various options and areas. It all comes down to whatever he wants to do”. By allowing the players to have control over their decisions, parents can better encourage the development of autonomy in their children as they prepare to enter early adolescence.

4.4.3.7. Injury Support

The final category of information parents recalled learning about was regarding injury support. The parents were very impressed by the attention to detail the academy has when helping their injured child recover from an injury. Parents also appreciated that the academy are patient when dealing with injury rehabilitation and felt reassured that if their child was to get injured, they would not be rushed back to competitive rugby before they are absolutely ready. One parent felt that they held very “old fashioned” views on injuries, and playing through them, but the programme showed them that rest and rehabilitation is important:

You know you just get on and play. He (the son) broke his finger. We asked, ‘well do you want to play?’ He said yeah so he just tapes up finger up and gets on and plays. We're a bit old fashioned like that. Whereas now we know we're probably doing more damage to him and I understand the process better than before (Parent 5).

Parents also learned about their role in helping their child through the rehabilitation process, which can be mentally taxing on the injured player. By learning various ways to help their child through this process, parents can offer a key source of emotional support, as stated by Parent 13, “I learned how to support my son with his injury, recovery and also the pressures an injury places on my son mentally... About being more supportive and sympathetic now I have a better understanding of the injury recovery process.” With this additional knowledge now available to parents, players are now better placed to carry out effective rehabilitation from injuries that they may pick up over the season.

4.4.4. Content Recommendations

As seen in the table on content parent recommendations (Table 4.3), most of the feedback given by parents was positive, meaning that the content covered in the programme was recommended to be a part of potential future programmes. There were a lot of crossovers between the information parents learned through the programme and what they recommended for future programmes. This included the future pathways information, autonomy supportive parenting, parent-child communication, injury support, and understanding player experience.

Table 4.3*Parent Recommendations (Content)*

	++	+	+ -	-	--
Pathways	P4/P5/P6	P1/P8/P9/P10			
Autonomy Supportive Parenting	P2/P3/P4/P5/P8/P9	P1/P6/P7			
Academy-Parent Comm		P4/P5		P6	
Parent-Child Communication	P7/P10/P13	P6			
Injury Support	P4/P5/P9	P6			
Understanding Player Experience		P6			
Academy Structure				P6	

Note: ++: Very positive coding. Content was strongly recommended for future programmes. +: Positive coding. Content was recommended for future programmes. + -: Mixed coding. Conflicted views recommending this content. -: Negative coding. Content could be covered in more detail in future programmes. --: Very negative coding. Content was missing from the support programme.

4.4.4.1. Autonomy Supportive Parenting

The most popular recommendation for future programmes was the autonomy supportive parenting information from the fourth session of the programme, with six parents being categorised as very positive in their recommendation of the content. Parents were quick to compliment the tips they had learned and implemented from the session whilst also recommending that the content be delivered in future sessions:

They've got this very professional environment that they arrive at and perform in. But with the independence talk was really important for us. What we explained to him was you're not expected to mature and get your habits right straightaway (Parent 5).

Delivering this information was of great importance and with parents also making recommendations that this information should be part of future support programmes, they have been shown to see the importance of it too.

4.4.4.2. Academy-Parent Communication

There were however a couple of points of feedback that were negatively coded, meaning that this content was either missed by the programme or needed some more clarity for the parents to be able to absorb the information. The first of these came under the “academy-parent communication” theme. One parent in particular felt that there was a lack of feedback given directly to parents when concerning the development of their child’s progress:

I know that they give feedback to the players, continually throughout the process. But one thing that I'm really craving actually a sit down with one of the coaches to say... compared to other players and compared to where he needs to be, this is where he's at. This is what he needs to do. Just so that I'm aware, as well as my son because they don't always tell you the whole story (Parent 6).

They felt that there was a lack of communication with the academy in terms of their child’s development, both as rugby players and as people. By offering parents feedback on how their child is doing at the academy, they can be reassured that their commitment is worthwhile and that their child is developing their rugby ability.

4.4.4.3. Academy Structure

In the academy structure section of the content related parent recommendations, one parent wanted more clarity on the structure of the academy. There was some slight confusion with the

terminology used when naming the various stages of the academy, which made some of the content delivery confusing for this particular parent:

A number of people were referring to the senior academy or the seniors as the over 18. So post session there was a few of us that were getting a little bit confused as to which year group they were talking about (Parent 6).

By clarifying the stages of the academy with parents, it can make the information delivered clearer. This particularly applies to the transition material as being clear with the stage the player is at in their development would make it easier for parents to understand what they are going through.

4.4.5. Format Recommendations

Format-related recommendations were also made by the parents (Table 4.4). These were centred around how the sessions were conducted and how the information in the sessions was delivered.

Table 4.4*Parent Recommendations (Format)*

	++	+	+ -	-	--
Face-to-Face	P7/P8	P1/P2/P3/P4/P5/ P6/P10/P13			
Speakers	P4/P5	P6/P8	P2/P3/P7/P9		
Interactive with Parents and Staff	P2/P3/P7	P4/P5/P6/P8/P10 /P13			
Online Option				P4/P5/P6/P7/P9/ P10/P13	
Presentation Slides		P8			P7

Note: ++: Very positive coding. Format was strongly recommended for future programmes. +: Positive coding. Format was recommended for future programmes. + -: Mixed coding. Some positives and some drawbacks to the format. -: Negative coding. Format was not part of the programme and should be in future programmes. --: Very negative coding. Format was executed poorly.

4.4.5.1. Face-to-Face and Interactive with Parents and Staff

Overall, there was a lot of positive feedback regarding the face-to-face format of the programme. It was revealed that parents would recommend this face-to-face format for future programmes because they found this form of learning very effective, and they found the sessions far more engaging than the online sessions they had become accustomed to due to the COVID pandemic:

You know there's people that we can contact as well, which we've known about it...That's a good thing with zoom as well. We did have a few meetings. But these sessions, you sort of got to meet different people over them (the sessions) and at least you put names to faces. I know who's who (Parent 3).

By having the sessions in person, parents were also able to form a relationship with other parents and members of staff they had not previously met. This interaction with parents and staff was encouraged by the format of the sessions in two ways. By having discussions about the content covered in the session, this encouraged parent engagement and interaction. When asked about the benefits of learning in person, Parent 8 said, “For me, if you know you are sat down in the car park anyway. And I’d much, much rather be taking all that information learned stuff for myself. I always prefer face to face at all times.”

Also, at the end of sessions, a more informal setting allowed for parents to further interact with each other and staff by asking questions around the sessions and about what is going on at the academy in general. The group discussion format was recognised and appreciated by the parents:

You don't want too much being spoken up by the speakers, in my opinion. With those times to break out with a bit conversation around the tables and stuff that was done at the right time of the session to keep everyone engaged (Parent 8).

4.4.4.2. Online Option

Despite parents generally liking the face-to-face delivery, another format recommendation that came from the parents was having an online option available. Although attendance was high throughout the programme, there were parents who were unable to attend some of the sessions. The academy draws a lot of its players from local private and boarding schools, and thus there are some parents who live a great distance from the academy. These parents, therefore, were unable

to attend all the sessions. One set of parents were international parents and were only able to attend the final session as it coincided with the holidays. These parents thoroughly enjoyed the final session but regretted being unable to attend the other three sessions. They felt that a live online option would be superior to simply sending out slides after the session for people who cannot go in person:

Having the slides it's you know, obviously it's lovely and it's good to read, but it's not nearly as effective when you're actually listening to a talk. You know that a lot more information goes around them, so I don't know if any others in the future could perhaps if you do them again be online (Parent 4).

By offering a live online option, long-distance parents can still learn the vital information that was delivered in the support programme whilst also being able to contribute to discussions and interactive tasks with the other parents.

4.4.4.3. Speakers

Another category of feedback that came from this stage of data collection was centred around the speakers. The parents were very complimentary of the speakers' knowledge of their subject areas. This expert knowledge was well received by the parents as they found that the delivery of the information, which could sometimes be confusing, was better coming from someone experienced in the field. For example, one parent stated their pleasure towards the speakers and the information they delivered. When talking about the Professional Development Manager, Parent 5 said "He was very good exactly what we wanted to hear. You know, he was concise and well presented. He wasn't overselling those universities and you didn't get the feeling that he was marketing those universities." Moreover, having different speakers for different areas of information, rather than just one speaker covering everything, was a desired format and therefore recommended for future programmes:

Yeah I thought they were really good very clear... and approachable so it wasn't overly formal. It was formal enough to know that what you're getting is high quality and professional but it didn't feel like you couldn't ask questions or that it was trying to be too high brow it was pitched really well and it was very easy to understand (Parent 6).

Nevertheless, there was some criticisms of some of the speakers and potential recommendations for speakers at future programmes - namely the volume of delivery and alignment of points.

Particularly, one parent recommended that speakers should be more confident in their delivery and content in order to convey the information more effectively:

Some of the people who were speaking were more worried about speaking. I don't think they'd necessarily all thought through what the content of what they're saying and then how that was going to apply to further things. Whereas in my view, on a number of occasions guests spoke to salvage the situation because it wasn't landing with people okay. So, I would have thought that a really smart thing to do would be to make sure everyone's aligned with what's being delivered (Parent 7).

Despite some parents mentioning that there were some drawbacks to the speakers, they acknowledged that the speakers' experience in their fields was still a welcome addition to the programme. However, ensuring all speakers at the sessions are aware of what is happening at each session would lead to information delivery being more concise and contextualized.

4.4.4.4. Presentation Slides

A final recommendation was concerning the presentation slides that were used during the sessions. In the first session especially, the slides were very unclear for a number of participants and this was highlighted in the initial evaluation survey. This sentiment was echoed by a parent during the evaluation interviews:

I would say that if you are looking to enhance that in any way, an incredibly simple thing to do would be to get everybody who's going to be delivering presentations to those parents to do very fundamental things which are ensure people can read the f***ing slides. I mean I just don't get. But when people say "oh this table is a bit small you probably can't read it," I feel like standing up and chanting take it off the f***ing screen then it's like why would you do that? (Parent 7).

By rehearsing sessions in advance and ensuring the slides are clear for all to see, parents in attendance will be able to see visualizations of the information more clearly. This would hopefully lead to parents being able to absorb the information more effectively.

4.4.6. Logistical Recommendations

The final form of recommendations that the parents gave after the completion of the support programme were logistical recommendations (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5*Parent Recommendations (Logistics)*

	++	+	+ -	-	--
Time & Location		P1/P2/P3/P4/P5/P6 /P7/P9/P10			
Organisation			P9	P2/P3	
Agenda				P2/P3/P7	
Timing of Information			P7/P8		

Note: ++: Very positive coding. Logistical choices strongly recommended for future programmes. +: Positive coding. Logistical choices recommended for future programmes. + -: Mixed coding. Logistical choice received mixed feedback. -: Negative coding. Logistical choice had complications and needs improving. --: Very negative coding. Logistical choice was completely out of place in the programmes

4.4.6.1. Time and Location

There was one logistical choice for the programme that was greatly received by the parents. This was the time and location of the sessions. In accordance with the initial reconnaissance stage of the action research process, the sessions were run parallel to the players' training sessions, at the same time and location. Parents who attended the sessions supported this choice and recommended that it be part of future programmes. Parent 6 said, "With him (the son) training, we as parents are already there so this is probably the best time for sessions. Hundred percent. It would be silly to do it different time." This was because parents enjoyed the convenience and stated that holding the sessions alongside the training sessions made them more likely to attend the programme as they would already be present after dropping their children off for training. Parent 2 stated that, "It makes sense dropping them off your order there any way at the very edge is perfect really." This sentiment was echoed by all the parents.

4.4.6.2. Organisation

Some parents, however, voiced their frustrations with some of the organisation of the sessions. Parents struggled to keep up at points as some sessions were delayed and rescheduled due to other events at the academy. This was stated as a concern for parents as they struggled to plan their lives around the changing of the dates of the sessions. These parents had a lot to organise, including organising lift shares, looking after other children, and getting time off work:

You don't you don't always get lots of notice about stuff... The timings on weren't always great. Remember yeah when you got we're both working parents... Things were changing it last minute, but you've got other kids and families and friends to juggle when organising things (Parent 3).

By ensuring that sessions in future programmes do not change date, attendance could be higher as parents will be able to properly organise their other affairs and thus be able to attend sessions.

4.4.6.3. Agenda

Parents also recommended that pre-session agendas should be a part of future programmes. This would involve sending out an overview of what is to be covered in the session along with when and where the session is to be held:

When you send the invites for parents, you can tell them what the sessions will be. A breakdown of the session... So you know what you will be listening to when you get there, you know sort of know what you're going to be talking about (Parent 2).

By doing this, parents will be able to have a better understanding of what information is to be covered in the session. Access to this information could result in more parents attending as they would see the value of the sessions and the content that is delivered in them. This idea was also echoed by members of staff at the academy, and other speakers at the session, who felt that having agendas sent out before sessions would be received positively by parents and therefore seen as helpful. Prof. Knight also stated that, "It seemed that there was great attendance at this session, speaking to the director it seemed that sending out an agenda in advance so that the parents knew what to expect was helpful."

4.4.6.4. Timing of Information

A final logistical recommendation made by the parents was the timing of the delivery of some of the information. There were some concerns around the timing of the information around the university pathways, as parents felt that there was a great amount of time between the delivery of the session and the university deadlines that were stated. It was the recommendation of these parents that this information should be delivered closer to the point of university application deadlines:

Yes, this info is helpful, and the reason being is that they're going to start their uni applications in a few months time. Certainly during the summer, they will be going to look at universities. I'm guessing they (talks about future pathways) won't start to happen until post Christmas. In about a year from now, you know do that conversation then I'd say (Parent 7).

By delivering this information early, it could allow parents and their children to plan their future steps towards university, should that be their choice of pathway. Future programme however could consider refreshing and reminding parents of this information when university deadlines come closer. There was also one parent who recommended that some of the information could be delivered after the under 16s season. This would be appropriate as the step up from the under 16s to under 17s team was seen as a bigger step up for them and therefore needed more supported to help make that step. When Parent 8 was asked about this, they said, "Certainly, we need to be aware of that some of it would have been good to have last summer I think when I first transition."

Running a more longitudinal support programme could allow for information to be delivered at appropriate times in the season.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Reflection

In line with the action research cycle, this chapter comprises stage five of the process. The purpose of this discussion and reflection stage is to acknowledge what happened during the action research process, reflect on my experiences, and give recommendations for future researchers who wish to explore the possibility of using action research to develop a support programme for sport parents.

5.1. Thoughts on the Research Process

This part of the discussion will be centred around my experiences during the action research cycle. I will be looking to relate what happened with this cycle to previous research and therefore reflect on successes and shortcomings during this study.

5.1.1. The Action Research Process

The decision to choose action research as the methodology for this study has been incredibly fruitful, due to the numerous strengths that action research holds, and how each of the strengths relate specifically to the needs of this research project. For example, identifying the needs of the parents was vital for the success of this research. Action research allowed me to gain an accurate understanding of the needs of the participants by conducting data collection during the initial reconnaissance stage. This data was then combined with previous studies in the field to start developing an action intervention, as per the guidance provided for previous action research studies (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Koshy et al., 2010; Elliot, 1991). Moreover, through being present in the environment, something which is encouraged in action research studies (Koshy et al., 2010; Reason & Bradbury, 2008), I was further able to gain an insight into the parents' needs. This further supported the ability to develop an effective support programme that worked for these parents.

Another strength of action research is the ability to analyse and critique the intervention that has been formulated. The intervention that was delivered was analysed throughout and with a final evaluation stage, which was a further strength of action research that I found to be particularly useful in the current study (Kemmis, 1980; Koshy et al., 2010; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). By encouraging researchers to have a critical mind set when evaluating their own work, more detailed and nuanced recommendations can be made for future researchers. This benefits future researchers two-fold. Firstly, any researchers hoping to start a new cycle in the action research process, within the same environment as the aforementioned action research project, will have a plethora of advice

on how to improve upon the process in the next cycle. Secondly, researchers who are embarking on their own first cycle will also have access to guidance on how to best utilise action research to gain the best results within their chosen environment.

The flexibility which is integrated within the action research process also allowed me to amend previous steps when data suggested that change was appropriate. An example of this occurring was when immediate feedback during the action intervention suggested some changes to make the sessions more enjoyable and useful for the parents. The suggestions facilitated the optimisation of the programme and ensured parents' experiences were enhanced from that point onwards. Therefore, by using the strengths of the action research method to my advantage, I was able to produce an intervention that was well suited to, and well received by, the parents in attendance.

5.1.2. High Attendance Throughout

Leading on from achieving parent satisfaction, another occurrence that struck me during the programme was the attendance. For each session at the programme, attendance was high and parents were fully engaging in the content being delivered and the interactive group discussions that they were set. Retention rates were also high as parents continued to attend more sessions once they had been to one. This contrasts with several previous parent interventions in which researchers have struggled with acquiring and maintaining attendance throughout their delivery (Thrower et al., 2017; 2019, Azimi & Tamminen, 2020). It is important to consider and reflect upon why this may have happened within my particular study and why it contrasts with previous evidence-based interventions. It could be conceived that the action research process, which explicitly sought to integrate the ideas and needs of the target audience and included changes in response to parent feedback, was beneficial here. In previous research, with the exception of Thrower et al., (2018), programmes of work have typically been designed/developed based on research and/or the researcher's ideas of what will work rather than a specific understanding of what the target population may find useful (Burke et al., 2021).

Further, the intervention was tailored to a very specific and relatively small population. As such, the targeted numbers were relatively small but content and engagement was explicitly focused on this group. Finally, the high attendance could also be linked to the previously mentioned parent enjoyment and satisfaction. The parents at the academy showed a great thirst for knowledge and a desire to help their child. To determine whether this was influenced by how well

suited the content was to their needs, due to the reconnaissance stage, more action research needs to be conducted in different sporting environments.

5.2 Learning from the Evaluation Stage

In the evaluation stage, feedback on the support programme was given by the parents. It is important to reflect upon these findings and add context to them, in the form of previous literature. By doing this, I can identify whether other researchers have found similar outcomes of their own studies.

5.2.1. Parental Satisfaction

Ensuring that the parents of the academy both enjoyed the programme and found it informative was crucial for success. Previous research has shown that parents are an essential part of their child's support system and in most cases, they also show a real desire to demonstrate support (Tessitore et al., 2021; Knight et al., 2017). This was also the case within my study. They demonstrated their desire to support their children through their thirst for knowledge and enthusiasm when attending the sessions in the support programme. Through data collection at the reconnaissance and evaluation stages of the action research cycle, parents showed desire to gain information and learn about two key areas which they held in great importance. The first of these priorities was to gain information on how to improve their parental support to best support their children going forward into the under 18s season. The other was to gain knowledge on the academy process, in particular having access to key contacts and having reassurances that their children are being adequately supported by the academy as they head into this challenging stage of their development. As a result of this programme, parents felt that they left with a better understanding on both fronts. Therefore, parents left this support programme feeling valued as the academy showed that they understood the importance of parents by running the support programme – something which has been recommended in previous research (Newport et al., 2021).

5.2.2. Content Feedback

As previously stated in the evaluation stage of the action research process, all the content covered in the sessions were seen by parents as relevant and useful to aiding their parenting experience over this stage of their child's development. A number of the topics have been well received by parents in previous studies, including helping parents improve their parental support skills. For instance, as with the current study, previous studies have shown that parents have benefitted from receiving information on parenting skills (Lisinskiene & Lochbaum, 2019;

McMahon et al., 2018; Thrower et al., 2017; Burke et al., 2021). Further, previous research has also suggested the value in providing parents with information on future pathways and the deselection process (Dubois et al., 2015; Brand et al., 2013; Kovács et al., 2022), supporting a player through injuries (Gould, 2019; Kroshus et al., 2018), and autonomy supportive parenting (Holt et al., 2009; Burke et al., 2021). The importance of delivering information relating to these particular areas were reaffirmed by this study and may point to some general or global areas of information that may be beneficial for all parents whose children are involved in competitive sport. Nevertheless, despite there now being a substantial body of evidence regarding the usefulness of these topics to parents, more examples of how to share this knowledge across different sports would still be beneficial.

Although most of the feedback concerning the programme content was positive, there was some mixed feedback regarding the content informing the participant of the role of a parent during this stage of their child's development. As children enter the emerging adulthood stage of their development, the role of the parent naturally changes. To fit this new adapted role, parents typically have less direct influence on their children's actions and allow them to make their own decisions, whilst also embodying a supportive figure in the background (Kanters et al., 2013; Tamminen & Holt, 2012). From the evaluation stage, it was found that some parents felt they already had knowledge of how to best support their children at this stage of development. Parents believing that they have no need for the information that is being delivered has also been an issue which hinders the success of other interventions in the past (Thrower et al., 2019). From most past findings, recommendations have been made to deliver information around the evolving role of a parent as a child goes through their sporting journey (Harwood & Knight, 2016). When considering this, it is important for researchers to incentivise future programmes by covering information that parents find useful and making clear to the parents in attendance the benefits of having this knowledge, as stated in previous evaluations of sport parenting.

5.2.3. Format Feedback

The parents thoroughly enjoyed the fact that sessions were held in person. Parents also stated that the interactive parts of the sessions, including group discussions, were the most enjoyable parts of the sessions. Holding sessions in-person and having an interactive format has been seen as desirable by parents in previous studies (Burke et al., 2021; Lisinskiene & Lochbaum, 2019). However, the particular desire for this programme to be delivered in person was enhanced

as a result of the COVID pandemic, which had prevented parents from spending time with each other. On reflection, parents enjoying the format of the sessions were in large part down to the successful reconnaissance and planning stages. From the reconnaissance, there was a successful identification of the need for in person and interactive support sessions. Following this within the planning stages, I explicitly set out the sessions to be held in-person and to have interactive group discussions amongst the parents around the content that was being delivered.

However, in contrast to the majority, a small number of parents showed a desire for there to be an online option available for parents. This would be in the form of a live online meeting that runs at the same time as the in-person meeting, so that parents who are unable to attend the sessions in person are able to receive the information. Online programmes for parents have been successful in the past (Tamminen et al., 2020; Thrower et al., 2019). To date, the effectiveness of hybrid programmes that run both in-person and online has not been evaluated, although it has been recommended as a potential mechanism through which to increase parents' attendance at programmes (Burke et al., 2021). In the current study, the benefit of hybrid programmes may be particularly high because some of the players reside at boarding schools and as such their parents are not present during the term time, with some living abroad or in other parts of the country.

5.2.4. Logistics Feedback

For the support delivery to be as accessible and convenient as possible, the sessions of the programme were put on at the same time and location as the training sessions that the players were participating in. Previous in-person support programmes have also ensured that information delivery occurs at an appropriate time for the participants (Thrower et al., 2017; Azimi & Tamminen. 2020). The reverse of this has also been apparent in previous studies, with programmes having relatively low attendance due to parents seeing the sessions as inconvenient (Breitenstein et al., 2014; Thrower et al., 2017). The choice to hold the support session parallel to the training sessions was welcomed by the parents.

While the times that the sessions were put on were convenient, parents did state that being sent an agenda of the upcoming session before hand would be of great benefit to them. Parents from this study showed their wishes to have the plan, and the objectives of, the session sent to them in advance. This has been done in previous studies, with past researchers ensuring that their participants have been informed of what content is to be covered in advance of running support sessions (Smoll et al., 2011). On reflection, this was an area of the reconnaissance that I missed as

I failed to ask the participants in the first stage of the action research process if they desired pre-session agendas sent out.

5.3. Suggestions for Future Parent Programmes and Applied Implications

Based on the feedback from my participants, combined with my reflections, there are now several suggestions that can be considered by future researchers – particularly for researchers who find themselves in either of the following scenarios. The first of these scenarios would be for a researcher who would hypothetically be taking this specific study to the next cycle of the action research process. The second of these scenarios would be a researcher who is starting out on their own action research project in a new sporting environment.

5.3.1. Next Cycle of this Process

When moving onto the second cycle of an action research project, it is important to take the findings from the first cycle to guide the second cycle of the research process towards a more successful outcome (Koshy et al., 2010; Elliot, 1991). From the findings of this study, there are some clear elements of improvement which can be used for future support programmes at this elite rugby academy. The first way in which this support programme could be improved would be to add an online option, or at the very least an alternate source of information delivery for parents who are unable to attend the in-person sessions. By offering alternate methods of information delivery to the parents at the academy, the vital content that is delivered within the support programme can be accessed by more parents. Subsequently, leading to more parents having access to the tools and information required to support their child.

A pre-session agenda being sent out to parents would also be a recommendation for a future attempt at running a support programme for this academy. This agenda should state what information is to be covered in the upcoming session and the objectives of the session. Sending an agenda out before sessions in future support programmes would allow parents to make informed choices regarding their attendance and also know what to expect at the session.

A final element of the support programme I would recommend adjusting would be the timescale of the programme and when certain information is delivered. Future sessions should be organised and delivered at the appropriate times during the season, so that parents are able to consume certain areas of information when they are needed most. To achieve this, a more longitudinal action research process should be carried out. A more longitudinal study would offer a future researcher an opportunity to further embed themselves into the environment, potentially

gain a greater understanding of the needs of the environment, and therefore have more opportunities to refine any future support programmes to suit the needs of the environment.

5.3.2. Academics Starting a New Cycle

Away from specific guidance for potential next steps for this specific study, there are a number of suggestions for researchers conducting new interventions with parents. Along with the sentiments of previous researchers, I believe that action research is an effective methodology and can therefore be used to develop future interventions in sport psychology, and particularly sport parenting (Thrower et al., 2017; 2019). To successfully carry out an action research project, future researchers need to be able to utilise the strengths of the methodology. A strength of action research that I saw was beneficial and could have extended further, was that it allows the researcher to fully embed themselves with an environment to formulate and implement practical solutions to the problems at hand. Another element of action research that is important to acknowledge is that action research is an emergent process that cannot be pre-determined. This is perhaps the most important recommendation for future research – embracing the freedom of remaining flexible and proactive when conducting the research to enable you to adapt research to the needs of the environment being studied.

When starting a new action research cycle, it is important to gain as much high-quality data as possible during the reconnaissance stage. By gaining this data and developing a greater understanding of the environment and the needs of the participants, it will set researchers on the right path towards developing and delivering a successful action intervention. An effective reconnaissance stage could potentially be further enhanced by introducing a “pre-reconnaissance” stage to the action research cycle. This would include researchers allowing themselves a period of time when they are purely aiming to embed themselves into the environment as an observer and get accustomed to the cultural norms of the environment. By doing this, the researcher can get to know the members of the environment and become more comfortable collecting data with them when the reconnaissance comes around. This could be seen as a more desirable approach by some researchers, as opposed to jumping straight into data collection without first embedding themselves with the environment.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research Directions

A potential drawback to this study was the time frame over which the study had to take place. The action intervention only had a two-month period (between February and April of 2022)

in which to run, and all the information had to be delivered to the parents in this time-period. The timing of information delivery is an important area to consider because different information will be more relevant to parents at different times in the season (Vincent & Christensen, 2015). A specific example from this study would be information on the university process. Although it was felt that having information on the university application process early would still be useful to parents, given the opportunity it would be more appropriate to offer this information closer to the application deadlines. On reflection, having the opportunity to perform a more longitudinal study over a longer period of time would allow for more sessions to be developed and for pieces of information to be delivered at more appropriate times for the parents. Future researchers should consider this when starting out on their own action research process and ensure they work with organisations to express the beneficial of delivering a programme over a prolonged period of time.

Another element of this study that needs to be reflected on is the environment that was investigated and the sample that was used. The environment that was observed during this study was an elite rugby academy, specifically the parents of the under 18s squad. This is a very specific environment and it needs to be considered whether or not the findings from this study are transferable to other sporting environments. Previous studies held across multiple environments have struggled with attendance and engagement, considering the number of parents they aimed to support is greater than the parents that were targeted for this study (Thrower et al., 2017; Burke et al., 2021). Taking these previous findings into account, questions arise around whether the specific and focussed nature of the environment of this study is in fact a strength rather than a limitation. By having a more specific environment to target, the support programme was able to be tailored more specifically to the exact needs of the environment in question, and not more general needs of a wider environment. The ability to conduct research in this more specific way may have resulted in the programme having a higher attendance and engagement as the parents felt that the programme was more tailored to them. In order to determine the validity of this statement, more action research is needed in other sporting environments in order to test the effectiveness of the process in other specific settings.

Although I was able to obtain a good understanding of the needs of the parents through data collection with the parents and staff at the academy, players are also a big part of the elite rugby academy setting. From previous studies, it's apparent that players know what they want from their parents and when these needs are met, the children feel more satisfied with their parents'

behaviours and therefore feel that they are being better supported (Harwood et al., 2019). As a result of this, researchers have included children in their study, both as part of data collection and with their attendance to session (Harwood & Swain, 2002; Lisinskiene & Lochbaum, 2019; Azimi & Tamminen, 2020). Ensuring that children's perceptions of their parents' support match what the parents are aiming to achieve with their support is also important for the success of parental support (Knight et al., 2017; Harwood et al., 2019). Within the current study, I did not include the needs or views of players. However, if I had included players from the academy during the reconnaissance stage, the needs of players could have been identified and addressed in the intervention stage. In addition to this, getting feedback from players during the evaluation phase would have enhanced our understanding regarding whether parents' enhanced knowledge and support was actually perceived/transferred to their children. Considering this, future action research interventions concerning parenting in elite youth sport environments should consider factoring the players into their data collection in order to grasp a better understanding of the environment being studied, and to better understand the effects that any potential action research intervention may have.

5.5. Conclusion

Despite sport parenting being a relatively new area, there is a wealth of knowledge as to how parents can best support their child through their sporting journey. However, in order to further affirm this knowledge, more interventions need to be designed and delivered to parents in sporting environments. To determine the effectiveness of using action research to develop interventions in a sport parenting setting, more action research studies need to be conducted.

Looking back at the results of this process, I would conclude that I was mostly successful in finding and addressing the needs of the elite youth rugby academy environment that was the target for this study. Furthermore, recommendations that have been made can potentially help future programmes, both within similar environments and into other sports. Considering the content that was delivered, parents did not display a need for being taught how to behave around their children within the sporting environment, but instead showed a desire for knowledge that would help them become more effective sport parents. These content areas included learning about future pathways available to players after the academy process, autonomy supportive parenting techniques, academy-parent communication, parent-child communication, supporting a player through injury and rehabilitation, and understanding player experience.

The format and logistics also came into the recommendations from parents. I learnt that in this environment, parents generally wish for in-person and interactive support sessions that are set at the same time and location as the player's training session. This was because parents felt that this was the most engaging format and the most convenient to attend. Improvement could have been made to this support programme however, by offering the parents an online option of information delivery and by sending out agendas containing the learning objectives of sessions before they occur. By taking the recommendations made from this study, concerning the methods used, the results collected and my personal reflections, future researchers can gain an understanding of the experience of designing, implementing, and evaluating an action intervention in a sporting environment.

Appendices

Contents

Appendix A: Parent Information Sheet

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Appendix C: Parent Interview Guide: Reconnaissance Stage

Appendix D: Staff Interview Guide: Reconnaissance Stage

Appendix E: Parent Interview Guide: Evaluation Stage

Appendix F: Staff Interview Guide: Evaluation Stage

Appendix A

Parent Information Sheet

Parent Information Sheet
(Version 1.1, Date: 25/10/2021)

Project Title:

Parenting in sport: Developing and evaluating the effect of an action intervention to enhance parental support in youth rugby.

Contact Details:

Lead Researcher: Mohan Bains ([REDACTED])
Supervisor: Prof. Camilla Knight (c.j.knight@swansea.ac.uk)

1. Invitation Paragraph

You are invited to participate in this study, which is part of an MSc research degree-. The purpose is to gain an understanding of the experiences of parents and the support that parents need or would have found beneficial to enhance their involvement in their son's rugby journey. Subsequently, based on these insights, the aim is to develop a parent support programme, which will be implemented and assessed with the parents of players in the U17 programme.

2. What is the purpose of the study?

The overarching aim of this project is to develop, implement and evaluate a parent support programme. Specifically, we will answer two questions; What are the parent support needs within youth rugby? And what impact does a parent intervention have on parents and children involved in youth rugby?

3. Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are the parent of a young person who is engaged at [REDACTED] Rugby in the under 17 or 18 squad. As such, you have specific insights into parenting children who are involved in rugby and hopefully have lots of experiences you could draw on. You are also extremely well positioned to reflect on your experiences to date to identify what support would have been useful as you were progressing through this journey. Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without any risk or need for explanation. There will be no penalty for withdrawal.

4. What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be required to read this information sheet and fill out an online link demonstrating your agreement to take part. If you consent to take part, then at a later date you will be contacted to be given the opportunity to engage in one-to-one interviews and/or focus groups. In these interviews/focus groups you will have an opportunity to discuss your experiences of supporting your child in rugby, what information and support was useful and what additional insights would have been beneficial. Additionally, information gained informally through conversations at matches or around the academy will be noted as field notes to provide some direct insights into the experiences of parents. Subsequently the information you provide us will be used to develop workshops and sessions pertaining to parenting young rugby players, which we will deliver to other parents of [REDACTED] parents and subsequently evaluate.

5. What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

You will not experience any physical risks or discomfort. No psychological risks are anticipated. However, the recollection of negative emotions can cause stress. If there are any areas that you do not wish to discuss or questions that you do not wish to answer you are able to decline at any point.

6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is hoped that from your engagement in this study you will have an opportunity to reflect on your experiences with your son and gain an understanding of just what you have done to help your son. Additionally, the discussions prompted during the interviews/focus groups may provide insight into how to better manage and cope with the stressors and demands you experience while also gaining insights into how you can maximise your positive involvement in your child's rugby life. Overall, the insights that you provide will be extremely beneficial to the next groups of parents coming through the system as they will receive a support programme based on the insights that you have shared.

7. Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information gathered during this study will be kept strictly confidential, unless a criminal offence is disclosed, or it is deemed that you are at risk of harming others or yourself. All data from the interviews and/or focus groups will be stored securely. It will be labelled without a name or with a false name. Only the members identified above have access to the data (which is stored securely) and are able to identify the participants. The procedures for handling, processing, storage and destroying data will be compliant with the Data Protection Act (1998) and Swansea University guidelines. No members of the academy (outside the research team) will be aware of what information is provided from any parent, or which parents decide to take part in the study. Your information will only be shared between the research team of Mohan Bains, Dr Camilla Knight and Dr Denise Hill- (Please see below for further information).

8. What if I have any questions?

If you would like any further information, please contact Mohan Bains or Camilla Knight on the information above. Please also note that the project has been approved by the College of Engineering Research Ethics Committee at Swansea University. If you have any questions regarding this, any complaint, or concerns about the ethics and governance of this research please contact the Chair of the College of Engineering Research Ethics Committee, Swansea University: coe-researchethics@swansea.ac.uk. The institutional contact for reporting cases of research conduct is Registrar & Chief Operating Officer Mr Andrew Rhodes. Email: researchmisconduct@swansea.ac.uk. Further details are available at the Swansea University webpages for Research Integrity. <http://www.swansea.ac.uk/research/researchintegrity/>.

Many thanks for reading this letter

Data Protection and Confidentiality

Your data will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR). All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. Your data will only be viewed by the researcher/research team.

All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer file on the computers of Mohan Bains and Dr Camilla Knight. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Your consent information will be kept separately from your responses to minimise risk in the event of a data breach.

Please note that the data we will collect for our study will be made anonymous, including data collected from interviews and focus groups, thus it will not be possible to identify and remove your data at a later date, should you decide to withdraw from the study.

The lead researcher will take responsibility for data destruction, and all collected identifiable data will be destroyed on or before October 2027.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The data controller for this project will be Swansea University. The University Data Protection Officer provides oversight of university activities involving the processing of personal data and can be contacted at the Vice Chancellors Office.

Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this information sheet. Standard ethical procedures will involve you providing your consent to participate in this study by completing the consent form that has been provided to you.

The legal basis that we will rely on to process your personal data will be processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. This public interest justification is approved by the College of Engineering Research Ethics Committee, Swansea University.

The legal basis that we will rely on to process special categories of data will be processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes.

How long will your information be held?

We will hold any personal data and special categories of data until no later than October 2025.

What are your rights?

You have a right to access your personal information, to object to the processing of your personal information, to rectify, to erase, to restrict and to port your personal information. Please visit the University Data Protection webpages for further information in relation to your rights.

Any requests or objections should be made in writing to the University Data Protection Officer:-

University Compliance Officer (FOI/DP)
Vice-Chancellor's Office
Swansea University
Singleton Park
Swansea
SA2 8PP
Email: dataprotection@swansea.ac.uk

How to make a complaint

If you are unhappy with the way in which your personal data has been processed you may in the first instance contact the University Data Protection Officer using the contact details above.

If you remain dissatisfied then you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: -

Information Commissioner's Office,
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire,
SK9 5AF
www.ico.org.uk

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (Parent)

(Version 1.1, Date: 25/10/2021)

Project Title:

Parenting in sport: developing and evaluating the effect of an action intervention to enhance parental support in youth rugby.

Contact Details:

Lead Researcher: Mohan Bains ([REDACTED])

Supervisor: Prof. Camilla Knight (c.j.knight@swansea.ac.uk)

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated 25/10/21 (version number 1.1) for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my medical care or legal rights being affected.

3. I understand that sections of any of data obtained may be looked at by responsible individuals from the Swansea University or from regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in research. I give permission for these individuals to have access these records.

4. I understand that data I provide may be used in reports and academic publications in anonymous fashion.

5. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant Date Signature

Name of Person taking consent Date Signature

Researcher Date Signature

Appendix C

Parent Interview Guide: Reconnaissance Stage

Parent Interview Guide

I appreciate you coming along today and giving up your time to take part in this study. I know that you are really busy but your insights are hugely appreciated.

This interview is part of a study to learn more about the experiences of parents within youth rugby and particularly trying to identify what support you have needed and think would be beneficial for other parents. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without any risk. If there is a question that you do not want to answer, that is fine. All information shared today is confidential. There are no wrong or right answers to the questions that I am about to ask. Please try to answer all questions honestly and truthfully. Do you have any questions before we start?

Introductory questions

- 1) Before we get into the main questions, could you tell me a little about your son and his rugby experience to date (as a whole)?
 - Pick up (jot down notes if needed) on all the key aspects of the journey. Everything that stands out you need to make sure you then follow up on. When talking about the journey there will be lots of highs and lows and you want to ask how their child responded to this and also how they experienced as parents.

- 2) What about you? What's it been like going along with your son? How has your experience been?
 - a. What have been the best bits for you as a parent?
 - b. What have been the most challenging/toughest parts for you as a parent?
 - c. How have you tried to manage the challenges?

Transition questions

Thinking more about the specifics of your experiences as a parent, can we talk a little more about this?

1. When your child first started in their rugby journey, what was that like for you as a parent?
 - What support or guidance did you find to be useful?
 - Anything else that would have been useful?

2. When your child first started in the DPP/early academy journey,
 - What was that like for you as a parent?
 - What support or guidance did you find to be useful? Anything else that would have been useful?

3. Then what about when your son transitioned into the PDG/Senior academy, what was that like for you as parent?
 - What support or guidance did you find to be useful?
 - Anything else that would have been useful?

Main Questions

- Thinking about your involvement as a parent, what do you think the role of parents should be in a players rugby journey?
 - What has led you to these thoughts?
 - Has anyone supported you to enable you to be involved in the ways that you want?
 - Is there anything that would be helpful to enable you to fulfil the roles that you want to fulfil?

- Thinking about your involvement specifically at home – what do you think parents should be doing to help players in rugby?
 - What has led to these thoughts?
 - What support would be useful to facilitate this?

- Thinking about your involvement specifically in relation to training – what do you think parents should be doing to help players in rugby?
 - What has led to these thoughts?
 - What support would be useful to facilitate this?

- Thinking about your involvement specifically in relation to matches – what do you think parents should be doing to help players in rugby?
 - What has led to these thoughts?
 - What support would be useful to facilitate this?

Thanks so much for your insights so far, now thinking about the specifics of developing a support programme for parents.

- Overall, what support, guidance, or information have you received that has been most useful to you as a parent?
 - Why has this been so beneficial?
 - Could this support be improved at all?
 - How do you think this could be optimised for other parents?

- What support, guidance, or information do you think would have been useful that perhaps you did not receive at all or in sufficient amount?
 - Why would this be beneficial?
 - How you like this support to be shared?

- In what format would you most prefer to receive support/information as a parent?
 - Why would this format be preferable?
 - Is there anything that you think should be avoided?

- Who would you like to receive support/information from?
 - Why would this be preferable?
 - Is there anyone who should be avoided? Shouldn't provide insights? ?

Summary Questions

- Overall, thinking about everything you've discussed so far, what support has been most useful?
- What support would you have found most beneficial?
- How do you think support could best be provided?
- What consequences do you think support might have for parents?
- Do you have anything else you would like to share?

Many thanks for your time, I really appreciate it. Would you be happy for me to follow up again if I need to follow up on any of the ideas?

Demographics

Just before we finish, just for my demographic information, could I just ask (if you haven't got this info):

- What is your relationships to the child?
- How old is your child?
- How long have they been involved in rugby?
- What is your family structure (number of parents in house, other siblings etc)
- What are you and your partners (if appropriate) jobs
- What is your age?
- What is your own experience of sport?

Appendix D

Staff Interview Guide: Reconnaissance Stage

Staff Interview Guide

Introduction statement: Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in the study. Your insights will be really helpful for the development and carrying out of the parent support intervention.

These are the key themes that we'll be looking to go over in this following interview:

Their experience of working with [REDACTED] so far (Generally and specifically dealing with parents)

What they think parents need

What's currently provided

What they'd like an intervention to look like

All information shared today is confidential, unless there is a criminal offence is disclosed or there is deemed to be a risk for either yourself or others. There are no wrong or right answers to the questions that I am about to ask. Please try to answer all questions honestly and truthfully. Do you have any questions before we start?

Introduction Questions

What has been your previous experience in your field of work?

- What is your academic background?
- What other academies have you worked with previously?
- How has your experience at [REDACTED] differed from other academies/ places of work?

Transition Questions

Could you tell me a little about your role at the academy experience to date (as a whole)?

- How has your experience at [REDACTED] differed from other academies/ places of work?
- Who do you interact with and deal with on a day-to-day basis?

Interacting with the parents.

- How have you/ the academy helped parents when their children are initially chosen to be part of the DPP?

- How have you/ the academy helped parents through the different stages of the Bears academy? (DPP to senior academy)
- How have you/ helped parents of new players for the senior academy through the transition?

Main Questions

Thinking about your involvement in elite rugby, what do you think the role of parents should be in a player's rugby journey?

- What has led you to these thoughts?
- How has the academy supported parents to enable them to be involved in a facilitative and positive way?
- In what ways do you feel the academy could better support parents in dealing with children who are in the academy?

How can the academy better equip parents on how to support their children through the academy process?

- How can the academy help parents support their children at home?
- How can the academy help parents support their children in relation to training?
- How can the academy help parents support their children at home in relation to match days and match preparation?

Thanks so much for your insights so far, now thinking about the specifics of developing a support programme for parents.

Overall, what support, guidance, or information has the academy given to parents that has had a positive effect on/ reaction from parents?

- Why has this been so beneficial?
- Could this support be improved at all?
- How do you think this could be optimised for other parents?

What support, guidance, or information do you think would have been useful that the academy has yet to deliver?

- Why would this be beneficial?
- How do you think this support would be best shared?

In what format would you most prefer the support/information to be delivered to parents?

- Why would this format be preferable?
- Is there anything that you think should be avoided?

Summary Questions

- Overall, thinking about everything you've discussed so far, what support for parents has been most useful?
- What other support do you feel will be beneficial for parents in the future?
- How do you think support could best be provided?
- Do you have anything else you would like to share?

Demographic Information

What is your age?

What is your job title at the academy?

How old are the players that you work with at the academy?

What is your own experience of sport?

Appendix E

Parent Interview Guide: Evaluation Stage

Parent Interview Guide

I appreciate you coming along today and giving up your time to take part in this study. I know that you are really busy but your insights are hugely appreciated.

This interview is part of a study to learn more about the experiences of parents within youth rugby and particularly trying to identify what support you have needed and think would be beneficial for other parents. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without any risk. If there is a question that you do not want to answer, that is fine. All information shared today is confidential. There are no wrong or right answers to the questions that I am about to ask. Please try to answer all questions honestly and truthfully. Do you have any questions before we start?

Introductory questions

- 1) Before we get into the main questions, could you tell me a little about your son and how he has been doing at the academy up to this point?
 - What have been some of the highlights?
 - Have there been any especially challenging moments?

- 2) What about you? What's it been like going along with your son? How has your experience been?
 - a. What have been the best bits for you as a parent?
 - b. What have been the most challenging/toughest parts for you as a parent?
 - c. How have you tried to manage the challenges?

Transition questions

Thinking more about the specifics of your experiences as a parent, can we talk a little more about this?

- When your child first started in the DPP/early academy journey, what was that like for you as a parent?
 - What support or guidance did you find to be useful?
 - Anything else that would have been useful?
- How have you and your son found the transition from the U17s team to the U18s team?

- What have been some of the struggles you have come across and how have you overcome them?

Main Questions

- 1st Session
 - Did you find the session informative?
 - Have you been able to apply any of the knowledge learnt from this session?
 - Was there any confusion with the information delivered in the session?
 - What would you change about this session when it's delivered in the future?

- 2nd Session
 - Did you find the session informative?
 - Have you been able to apply any of the knowledge learnt from this session?
 - Was there any confusion with the information delivered in the session?
 - What would you change about this session when it's delivered in the future?

- 3rd Session
 - Did you find the session informative?
 - Have you been able to apply any of the knowledge learnt from this session?
 - Was there any confusion with the information delivered in the session?
 - What would you change about this session when it's delivered in the future?

- 4th Session
 - Did you find the session informative?
 - Have you been able to apply any of the knowledge learnt from this session?
 - Was there any confusion with the information delivered in the session?
 - What would you change about this session when it's delivered in the future?

- After attending the parent support sessions, and thinking about your own involvement as a parent, what do you think the role of parents should be in a players rugby journey?
 - What has led you to these thoughts?
 - Has anyone supported you to enable you to be involved in the ways that you want?
 - Is there anything that would be helpful to enable you to fulfil the roles that you want to fulfil?

Thanks so much for your insights so far, now thinking about the specifics of developing a support programme for parents.

- Overall, what support, guidance, or information have you received that has been most useful to you as a parent?
 - Why has this been so beneficial?
 - Could this support be improved at all?
 - How do you think this could be optimised for other parents?

- What support, guidance, or information do you think would have been useful that perhaps you did not receive at all or in sufficient amount?
 - Why would this be beneficial?
 - How you like this support to be shared?

- In what format would you most prefer to receive support/information as a parent?
 - Why would this format be preferable?
 - Is there anything that you think should be avoided?

- Who would you like to receive support/information from?
 - Why would this be preferable?
 - Is there anyone who should be avoided? Shouldn't provide insights?

Summary Questions

- Overall, thinking about everything you've discussed so far, what support has been most useful?
- What support have you found most beneficial?
- How do you think future support could best be provided?
- Do you have anything else you would like to share?

Many thanks for your time, I really appreciate it. Would you be happy for me to follow up again if I need to follow up on any of the ideas?

Demographics

Just before we finish, just for my demographic information, could I just ask (if you haven't got this info):

- What is your relationship to the child?

- How old is your child?
- How long have they been involved in rugby?
- What is your family structure (number of parents in house, other siblings etc)
- What are you and your partners (if appropriate) jobs
- What is your age?
- What is your own experience of sport?

Appendix F

Staff Interview Guide: Evaluation Stage

Staff Interview Guide

Introduction statement: Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in the study. Your insights will be really helpful for the development and carrying out of the parent support intervention.

These are the key themes that we'll be looking to go over in this following interview:

Their experience of working with [REDACTED] through the programme (delivering/ observing/ communicating with parents)

What they thought about the structure/logistics of the sessions

What they thought about the content covered in the sessions

Any recommendations for future programmes

All information shared today is confidential, unless there is a criminal offence is disclosed or there is deemed to be a risk for either yourself or others. There are no wrong or right answers to the questions that I am about to ask. Please try to answer all questions honestly and truthfully. Do you have any questions before we start?

Introduction Questions (if needed)

Have you had any previous experience around parent support programmes in your field of work?

- If yes, where did these take place? What was the content was covered in them based around? What do you think was gained from those particular programmes?
- If no, can you think of any situations where running a support programme could have offered helpful information?

Transition Questions

- When a new intake of players comes through the DPP/early academy, what is your role in the enrolment process as a member of staff at the academy?
 - What support or guidance do you offer to both the players and the parents?
 - Is there any other support that you believe would be useful to give at this point in the players' rugby journey?

- How have you found the last few weeks as you and the academy prepare for this group of U17 players to transition to the U18s team
 - How have you personally helped parents and/or players through this transition?
 - What have been some of the struggles you have come across and how have you overcome them?

Main Questions

Thanks so much for your insights so far, now thinking about the specifics of developing a support programme for parents.

- Now we are going to talk about the support programme specifically and how you found it.
 - Which sessions did you attend? (If they missed any, what prevented them from coming?)
 - What about the sessions you didn't attend? What prevented you from attending?
 - What logistical changes do you feel would make the sessions more accessible for yourself and other members of staff?

- What were your overall feelings of the four sessions together?
 - What were you hoping from the sessions before taking part in them?
 - What were the key things you learned/ took from the sessions?
 - What parts of the sessions didn't you like?
 - Do you feel that there was any information missing from the sessions?

- What about how the sessions were delivered?
 - How did you feel about each of the speakers?
 - How did you find the structure of the session? (mixture of interactive and informative) Did we strike a good balance?
 - Are there any alternate formats/ methods of delivery that you feel could be explored? If so, why?

- Overall, do you feel that the parents have taken anything away from the sessions as a collective?
 - Have you seen/heard of any of the parents applying the knowledge they've learnt across the sessions?
 - Have you had a chance to have conversations with the players and/or parents about what was covered in the sessions? What was discussed?

Now we're going to look at each individual session in more detail and discuss how you thought they went and anything you'd recommend for future programme.

- 1st Session (if they attended)
 - What do you feel were the most important takeaway points from this session? (Do not prompt to answer unless they really cannot remember)
 - What impact has the session had on your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours?
 - What aspects of the session did you not like so much? Why?

- 2nd Session (if they attended)
 - What do you feel were the most important takeaway points from this session? (Do not prompt to answer unless they really cannot remember)
 - What impact has the session had on your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours?
 - What aspects of the session did you not like so much? Why?

- 3rd Session (if they attended)
 - What do you feel were the most important takeaway points from this session? (Do not prompt to answer unless they really cannot remember)
 - What impact has the session had on your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours?
 - What aspects of the session did you not like so much? Why?

- 4th Session (if they attended)
 - What do you feel were the most important takeaway points from this session? (Do not prompt to answer unless they really cannot remember)
 - What impact has the session had on your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours?
 - What aspects of the session did you not like so much? Why?

- Thinking about the set of workshops together, has it influenced your thinking regarding parental involvement in rugby?
 - How have your thoughts about the role of a parent changed as a result of the sessions? What has led you to these thoughts?
 - Going forward, how have the sessions enabled parents to enable them to fulfil their role?
 - Is there anything that should be added into future sessions in order to enable this?

Summary Questions

- Overall, thinking about everything you've discussed so far, what support for parents has been most useful?
- What other support do you feel will be beneficial for parents in the future?
- How do you think support could best be provided?
- Do you have anything else you would like to share?

Demographic Information

What is your age?

What is your job title at the academy?

How old are the players that you work with at the academy?

What is your own experience of sport?

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