

**ACTIVE**  
AT OXFORD



UNIVERSITY OF  
OXFORD



**Helping students get active**  
**A guide to the Sports Participation**  
**Campaign for Oxford Staff**



# Sport and physical activity

## Why it matters

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Studying at Oxford is a unique and rewarding experience in one of the world's leading centres of academic excellence.

However, Oxford life can also be very demanding, and student welfare is an increasing concern for many colleagues across the collegiate University.

A growing body of evidence suggests that students who take part in sport are better equipped to cope with stress, are happier, and can even earn more after graduating.

Sport and physical activity can play an important part in students' lives - offering opportunities to meet new people, feel a sense of community

and belonging, and to enjoy the full Oxford experience.

Active at Oxford launched during Michaelmas term, and is designed to get more students, active – and to help them balance sport and study.

The campaign was supported by the van Houten Fund under the oversight of the Strategic Sports Sub-Committee, which reports to the University's Education Committee.

This short leaflet provides information about the campaign, as well as some suggestions about how colleagues across the University might help students to get active.

**Taking part in sports and physical activities is actively encouraged at Oxford, and can have a positive impact on student health and welfare.**

"Sport has played a notable role in Oxford's history, and it remains an important part of many students' lives today.

"There are huge benefits to sport and physical activity, with some fantastic clubs and opportunities across the University for students.

"There is always a way to balance sports with studying, and we actively encourage students to get active while they are here."



**Martin Williams**  
Pro Vice-Chancellor  
(Education)

### **Why sport works for me - a student's view**

"Doing sport definitely taught me to manage my time better, and playing handball helps me to reduce my stress level.

"It gives me a fresh perspective once I return to college to continue working.

"Winning the Varsity Cup has given everyone in the team an incredible boost of confidence so I can honestly say that it is worth doing any kind of sport to compliment your university experience."



**Kinga Nesselfield**  
Classics student, Lady Margaret Hall  
Chosen sport: Handball

Read more testimonials about the importance of sport at: [sport.ox.ac.uk/testimonials](https://sport.ox.ac.uk/testimonials)

# Supporting evidence

A growing body of evidence highlights the value of sport and physical activity on mental and physical health and wellbeing.

## Sport and physical activity contributes to improved mental health



**1 in 4<sup>1</sup>**

People suffer from a mental health issue each year in the UK

Active students have a greater sense of belonging at their university than inactive students<sup>3</sup>

## Active students can be more employable and earn more

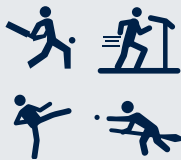
A 2013 study found that:<sup>2</sup>

- The average salary of graduates who played sport at uni was almost 20% more than those who did not
- 94% of employers agree active students demonstrate good employability skills



## There is something for everyone

From casual to elite, there really is a sport or physical activity for everyone at Oxford:



More than:

**200**

College Clubs

**84**

University Clubs

## Active students show improved levels of personal wellbeing

A 2018 study found that active students show improved scores for:



- Life satisfaction
- Feeling worthwhile
- Happiness
- Anxiety

<sup>1</sup> [www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health](http://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health)

<sup>2</sup> [www.bucs.org.uk/page.asp?section=18560&sectionTitle=Value+of+Sport](http://www.bucs.org.uk/page.asp?section=18560&sectionTitle=Value+of+Sport)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bucs.org.uk/news.asp?itemid=27839&itemTitle=Physical+activity+holds+key+to+improving+student+mental+health+%96+new+study&section=8&sectionTitle=News>

## Our students' views:

A survey conducted for the campaign in June 2018 found that:

- **93 percent** of students 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that there are mental health benefits to taking part in sport and physical activity
- **One in four (24%)** stated that they didn't take part in any type of exercise during term time
- **One in four (26%)** had experienced members of staff discouraging them from taking part in sport

# How can you help?

Balancing sport and physical activity with academic work can be a challenge. The following suggestions could help to support students looking to get active:

**Flexibility** - Active at Oxford communications highlight the need for students to be organised, and to communicate effectively with tutors and supervisors should there be a conflict between sport and study. Colleagues offering flexibility - and open communications - in the event of timetable conflicts will help students to manage their time more effectively.

**Encouragement** - a survey conducted in Trinity term 2018 revealed that one in four Oxford students felt that sport is not actively encouraged. Discussing the potential benefits of getting active, and encouraging students to take part in sport in a responsible way, could help to change these perceptions.

**Promoting active lifestyles** - competitive sport is just one way to get active. Students can add a little exercise to their routines without any negative impact on their studies. Whether it's taking up jogging, or even walking between study breaks, there are multiple ways of getting active.

**Direct students to our campaign pages** - we have created a great deal of content and advice to help students get active:

Please direct your students to: [ox.ac.uk/ActiveatOxford](https://ox.ac.uk/ActiveatOxford)



# Case study

## A student's view

"In Michaelmas and Hilary, I play football twice a week with the college first and second teams in league.

"The first team is a decent level of football, but anyone can pile into seconds and third team games! In the summer term, despite not being very good, I play second team cricket which is a really nice way to spend an afternoon, and I am a keen college rounders player!

"Getting involved in team sports is obviously a great way to meet people, and I have met most of my close friends at university through football.

"Moving about in the fresh air is the best way to shake off the library cobwebs and clear my head of the essay question I can't answer!

"Sometimes I have had to miss games because I have labs or tutorials. A few times I have had to miss a second team game due to a looming deadline. However, I think you can always set up your routine around non work commitments, whether that means working slightly later in the evenings, earlier in the mornings, or binge watching Friends less! Sport is also such a good study break, and I often do my best work after an hour of five-a-side.

"If you're worried about not being good enough, don't be! College sport is inclusive for all. If you're concerned about it affecting your work, have a look at your current timetable. You may have to give up never working after dinner, but the benefits of sport will definitely benefit you."

**Jacob Kearney**

St Edmund Hall, Biomedical Science, 3rd year



# Case study

## A tutor's view

"Studying at Oxford can be a very intense experience.

"Any form of regular physical exercise can be a real help in giving students a break, and an opportunity to switch off for a short time, so that they can come back refreshed. As with any extra-curricular interests though, students need to be able to manage the commitments they take on and not over-commit, but those organisational skills can be a very valuable part of what a student learns at Oxford.



"Students who take part in high-level sport also have to demonstrate dedication to their training which often carries over into other areas of their life – so they have the self-discipline and the competitive nature that drives them to work hard and excel academically as well.

"It can be difficult to keep up with the demands of the course alongside team training sessions, and I've seen students sometimes struggle – particularly at the start of their time here – because of having unrealistic expectations of how much they can fit into a week. There are times when I've had to discuss that in a frank way and encourage them to drop something in order to achieve a more realistic timetable. However, the situation can often be improved significantly simply by figuring out how to be more organised and planning ahead in a way that will allow them to carve out enough time for both academic and extra-curricular.

"Jacob is realistic about the demands of his course – it is a significant workload and he knows that he will sometimes have to prioritise studies over other activities that he might perhaps prefer to be doing. But the fact that he is quite active on the College's sports teams helps him to be a more rounded individual, and to stay healthy and happy which obviously also has a positive impact on his studies."

**Professor Robert Wilkins**

Associate Professor in the Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics  
and American Fellow in Physiology at St Edmund Hall

# Helping students get Active at Oxford

Oxford has a proud sporting history, and evidence shows that exercise can help students to improve their mental and physical wellbeing. Sports participation can leave students better equipped to cope with stressful periods, and create more rounded and employable graduates.

We have consulted with both staff and students during the planning of this campaign to get the messaging right, and to promote extra-curricular activities in an appropriate and responsible manner.

**For more advice on helping students get active, please visit visit:**

**[ox.ac.uk/ActiveatOxford](https://ox.ac.uk/ActiveatOxford)**



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