

# SPORT-RELATED CONCUSSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Practical Framework for Safer Higher Education Sport

MAY 2026

**BUCS CONCUSSION WORKING GROUP**

*Supporting universities, students' unions and sport providers  
to create concussion-conscious environments.*



## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

This publication provides general guidance relating to the management of sport-related concussion within higher education settings. It is intended to support universities, students' unions, sport providers and student leaders in developing safer participation environments.

This document does not constitute medical advice and should not be relied upon as such. Institutions and individuals should continue to follow applicable UK Government, NHS, NICE and National Governing Body guidance.

For the full disclaimer and latest supporting guidance, please visit: <https://www.bucs.org.uk/get-involved/concussion-advice.html>

This publication accompanies the paper, "A Best Practice Model for the Management of Sport-Related Concussion in UK Higher Education" produced by the BUCS Concussion Working Group

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BUCS Concussion Working Group (2026).

Sport-Related Concussion in Higher Education: A Practical Framework for Safer Higher Education Sport.

Developed By

British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) in collaboration with the BUCS Concussion Working Group.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This publication sets out a Best Practice Model for the management of sport-related concussion (SRC) within UK higher education.

Developed through the BUCS Concussion Working Group, it provides practical recommendations for:

- HE institutions,
- students' unions,
- sport providers,
- welfare teams,
- accommodation services,
- coaches,
- student leaders.

The guidance aligns with:

- UK Government concussion guidelines,
- existing medical guidance,
- and emerging evidence from the higher education sector.

## THE CORE PRINCIPLES

Return to Learn must be prioritised alongside Return to Play.

Higher education students live in an environment where there are opportunities to provide support in management and recovery from Sport Related Concussion, different to children and young people, and to adults in the workplace.

15 practical recommendations are provided across six stakeholder groups to support:

- safer participation,
- better reporting,
- improved recovery support,
- and healthier sport cultures.



# WHY THIS MATTERS

**Concussion is common in higher education sport**

27% of surveyed student-athletes reported concussion within the previous 12 months

1.4 concussions per match in BUCS Super Rugby

20% of all injuries in BUCS Super Rugby are concussion-related

More than half reported a previous history of concussion

**Concussion affects more than sport participation. Students may experience:**

- headaches,
- fatigue,
- difficulty concentrating,
- memory disruption,
- emotional changes,
- sleep disturbance,
- reduced academic performance,
- and social isolation.

**For universities, concussion is not only a sporting issue: it is a wellbeing, academic and duty-of-care issue.**



# WHAT MAKES HIGHER EDUCATION DIFFERENT?

**Students are not only athletes. They are simultaneously:**

- learners,
- residents,
- teammates,
- committee members,
- and members of wider campus communities.

This creates unique responsibilities for institutions.

**Universities must consider:**

- academic adjustments,
- attendance expectations,
- accommodation welfare,
- peer support,
- alcohol culture,
- independent living,
- and safe return to study.

**Concussion recovery is not only about returning to sport.**

Students may need support to:

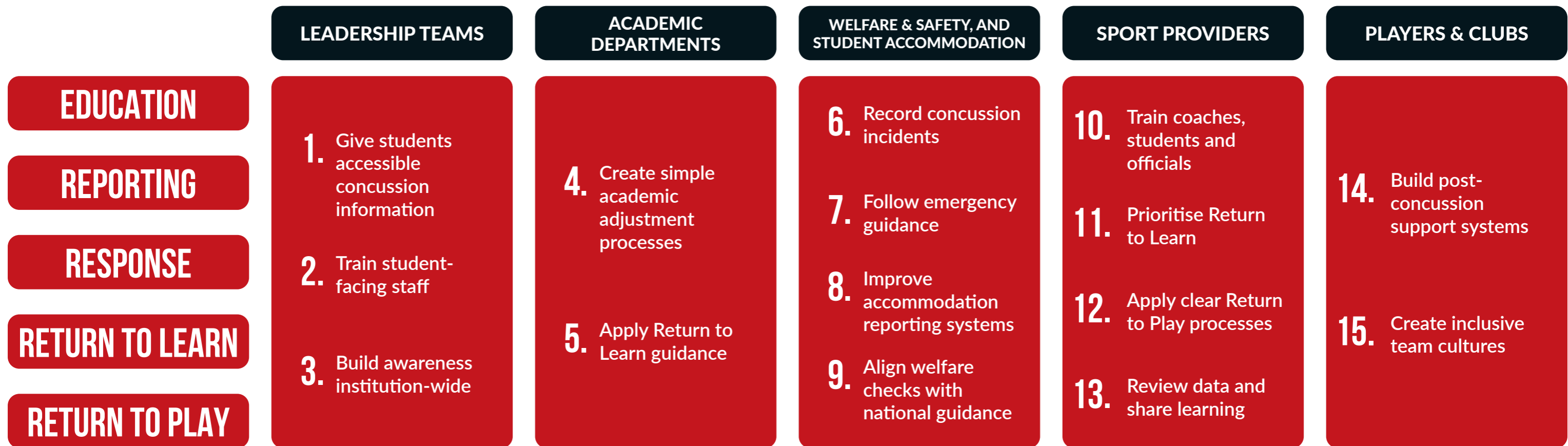
- reduce screen time,
- manage lectures and coursework,
- attend teaching gradually,
- and balance recovery with academic pressure.
- Return to Learn should always come before Return to Play.

# THE BEST PRACTICE MODEL

This model is designed to be:

- practical,
- scalable,
- achievable,
- and adaptable across different institutional contexts.

As such, the framework is composed of fifteen practical recommendations broken down by five stakeholder groups that can lead on the provision of support to students for those recommendations.





# LEADERSHIP & INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

**Leadership Teams: Institutions set the culture.**

## 1. Give students accessible concussion information

Provide clear education and track engagement.

## 2. Train student-facing staff

Support recognition of concussion and understanding of Return to Learn and Return to Play processes.

## 3. Build awareness institution-wide

Embed concussion awareness into:

- sport,
- induction,
- events,
- campaigns,
- and relevant teaching.

### Good Practice Examples

- Student awareness campaigns (especially new students)
- Mandatory club committee education
- Departmental / School / Faculty briefings
- Utilisation of existing digital learning modules
- Awareness weeks and activations



# ACADEMIC SUPPORT & RETURN TO LEARN

**Academic Departments: Academic recovery is part of concussion recovery.**

## Recommended Actions

### **4. Create simple academic adjustment processes**

Students recovering from concussion may need rapid, flexible academic support.

### **5. Apply Return to Learn guidance**

Adjust academic demands where possible.

- This may include:
- reduced screen exposure,
- phased attendance,
- extensions,
- modified workloads,
- rest breaks,
- and flexible deadlines.

**It is vital that academic colleagues are aware of a Sport Related Concussion in one of their students. A student may appear physically well while still experiencing cognitive symptoms.**

# WELFARE, SAFETY & ACCOMMODATION

**Welfare and Accommodation: Concussion recovery extends beyond the field of play.**



## Recommended Actions

### 6. Record concussion incidents

Capture impacts on:

- wellbeing,
- study,
- and participation.

### 7. Follow emergency guidance

Recognise and escalate red-flag symptoms appropriately.

### 8. Improve accommodation reporting systems

Accommodation teams should understand concussion-related welfare risks.

### 9. Align welfare checks with national guidance

Students may require monitoring and support during the first 24 hours.

#### The First 24 Hours Matter

Students with suspected concussion should not:

- drive,
- cycle,
- consume alcohol,
- or be left alone.

# SPORT PROVIDERS

**Sport Providers: Everyone has a role in recognising concussion.**

## Recommended Actions

**10. Train coaches, students and officials**

Build concussion awareness and emergency confidence.

**11. Prioritise Return to Learn**

Academic recovery must come before team selection.

**12. Apply clear Return to Play processes**

Use consistent protocols across all sports and levels.

**13. Review data and share learning**

Use reporting to improve institutional practice.



## Practical Ideas for implementation:

- Concussion Champions
- Matchday protocols
- Welfare escalation pathways
- Central reporting systems
- Return to Play verification systems



# PLAYERS, CLUBS & CULTURE

## Players and Clubs: Culture shapes behaviour.

Students are more likely to report concussion and follow recovery guidance when:

- they feel supported,
- they remain socially included,
- and wellbeing is prioritised over performance.

### Recommended Actions

#### 14. Build post-concussion support systems

Use:

- buddying,
- welfare check-ins,
- named contacts,
- and clear communication pathways.

#### 15. Create inclusive team cultures

Reduce pressure to “play through” concussion.

Promote:

- respect,
- precaution,
- healthy leadership,
- and non-alcohol-centred inclusion.

It is vital that Students should not feel that reporting concussion means losing their place, identity or belonging within a group that they are part of.

# THE STUDENT JOURNEY

## The Student Concussion Journey

**Suspected  
concussion**

**Remove  
from activity  
immediately**

**Medical  
assessment**

**Across every stage:**

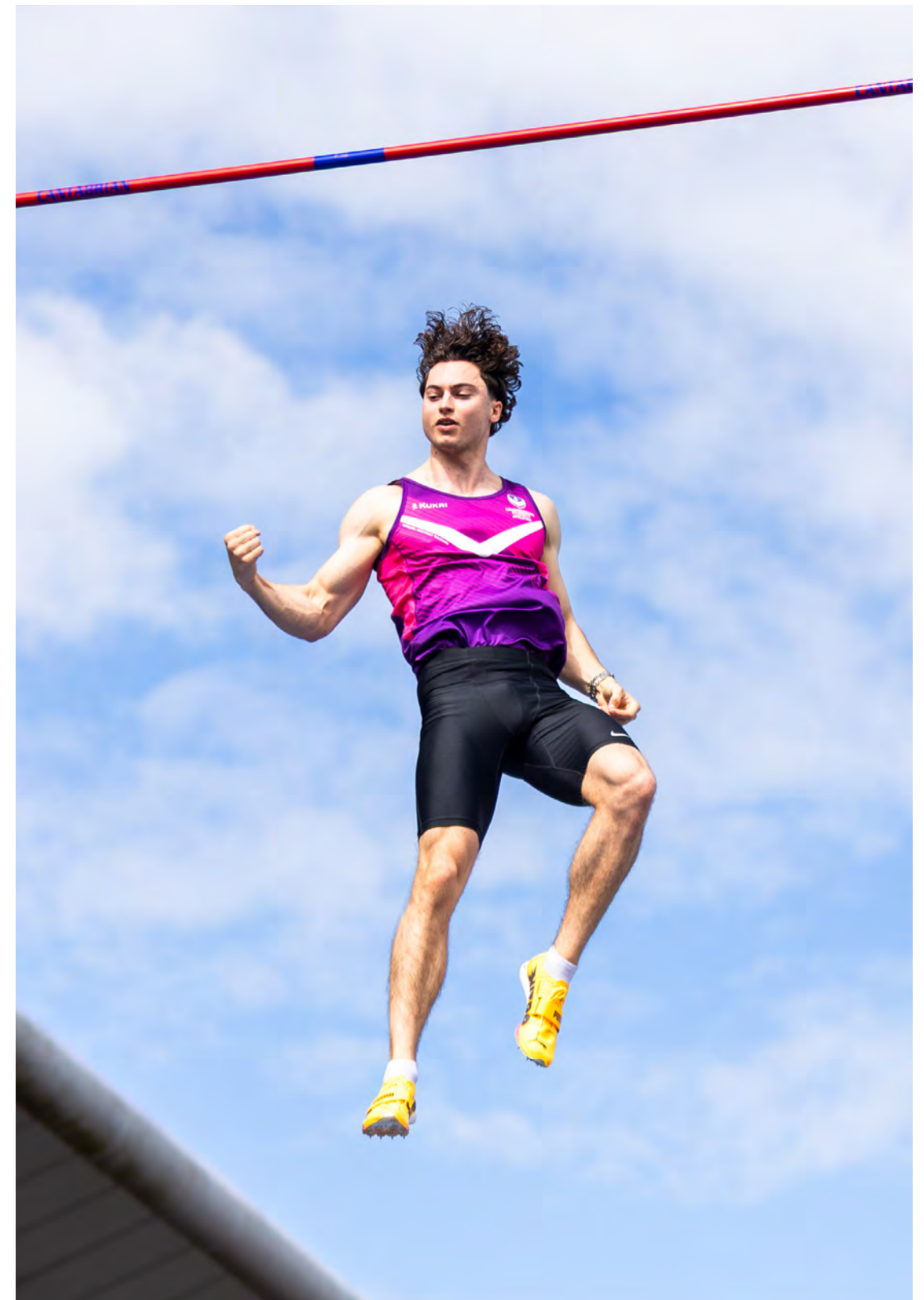
- *communicate clearly,*
- *prioritise wellbeing,*
- *and avoid isolation.*

**Initial 24-hour  
support and  
monitoring**

**Return to Learn**

**Graduated  
Return  
to Play**

**Full return to  
participation**





# CREATE YOUR SPORT RELATED CONCUSSION IMPLEMENTATION TOOLKIT

**The key questions for Institutions to answer in assuring their care for students with sport-related concussion.**

## **Leadership**

- Do students know how to recognise concussion?
- Is training available across the institution?

## **Academic Support**

- Can students access rapid academic adjustments?

## **Welfare**

- Are concussion incidents recorded consistently?

## **Sport**

- Are Return to Play (RTP) protocols applied across all sports?

## **Culture**

- Would students feel safe reporting symptoms?



# SPORT RELATED CONCUSSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

## A Shared Responsibility

Creating concussion-conscious environments requires collaboration across:

- HE institutions,
- students' unions,
- clubs,
- coaches,
- welfare teams,
- and students themselves.

This publication is intended as the beginning of an ongoing sector-wide commitment to safer participation, healthier cultures and better supported student experiences.

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# RESOURCES

Further Support and Resources are readily available through a range of sources, the below is not an exhaustive list.

## Sources of Information

### **NHS & NICE Guidance**

[Head injury and concussion - NHS](#)

[Concussion | NHS inform](#)

[Acorn - After concussion return to normality](#)

[Head injury: assessment and early management | Guidance | NICE](#)

### **Assessment Tools**

Concussion Recognition Tool [The Concussion Recognition Tool 6 \(CRT6\) | BJSM](#)

International Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport [Concussion in Sport Group, 6th Consensus Statement Amsterdam, October 2022 | BJSM](#)

### **Charities and Campaign Groups**

The Brain Charity [About The Brain Charity - Support for neurological conditions](#)

Child Brain Injury Trust [Home - Child Brain Injury Trust](#)

Concussion & CTE Foundation (UK) [Homepage | Concussion & CTE Foundation UK](#)

Head for Change [Head for Change | Brain Health & Injury Support in Sport](#)

Headway: the Brain Injury Association [Headway - the brain injury association](#)

The Jeff Astle Foundation [The Jeff Astle Foundation | Brain injury in sport](#)

Love of the Game [Love of the Game](#)

UK Acquired Brain Injury Forum [Concussion, Sport and Brain Injury - UKABIF](#)

### **Education and Awareness**

#### **Pan-sport Resources (UK)**

UK Government Guidelines [UK-wide Concussion Guidelines for Grassroots Sport](#)

Children's Trust [Concussion in children and young people | The Children's Trust](#)

Concussion Legacy Foundation (UK) [What is a Concussion? | CLF UK](#)

Headway: the Brain Injury Association [Concussion guides | Headway](#)

Sportscotland [Scottish sports concussion guidance - sportscotland](#)

UK Coaching [ukcoaching/duty-to-care/safe-to-practice/concussion/](#)

#### **Pan-sport Resources (International)**

Calgary online concussion course; [Concussion: prevention, detection and management](#)

US Centers for Disease Control and Training [CDC Youth Sports Coaches: Online Concussion Training](#)

CDC [Online Training for Health Care Providers | HEADS UP | CDC](#)

#### **Sport-specific Resources (Note this list is not exhaustive)**

British Basketball [basketballengland.co.uk concussion-guidelines-2025](#)

British Cycling [British Cycling - Concussion Guidelines.pdf](#)

British Equestrian [britishequestrian concussion](#)

British Gymnastics [british-gymnastics safe-and-fair-sport concussion-guidance](#)

British Judo [britishjudo head-injury-protocol](#)

British Softball Federation [britishsoftball.org concussion](#)

British Taekwondo [British Taekwondo Concussion Education](#)

England and Wales Cricket Board [ecb policies concussion](#)

England Rugby [englandrugby player-welfare headcase-e-learning](#)

Football Association [englandfootball concussion-guidelines](#)

Gaelic Athletic Association [gaa ireland concussion](#)

Rugby League [Rugby League Medical Grassroots Concussion](#)

Scottish Rugby [scottishrugby concussion-hub](#)

Swim England [swimming concussion-guidance-documents](#)

Volleyball England [volleyballengland Concussion Guidelines](#)

Welsh Amateur Boxing Association [WABA Concussion Guidance](#)



# IF IN DOUBT, SIT THEM OUT.

SUPPORTING SAFER STUDENT SPORT ACROSS HIGHER EDUCATION.

2026

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