

Safeguarding Education in Athletics:

A comparative evaluation of training effect in three modes of entry-level safeguarding training delivered by UK Athletics

Summary Report

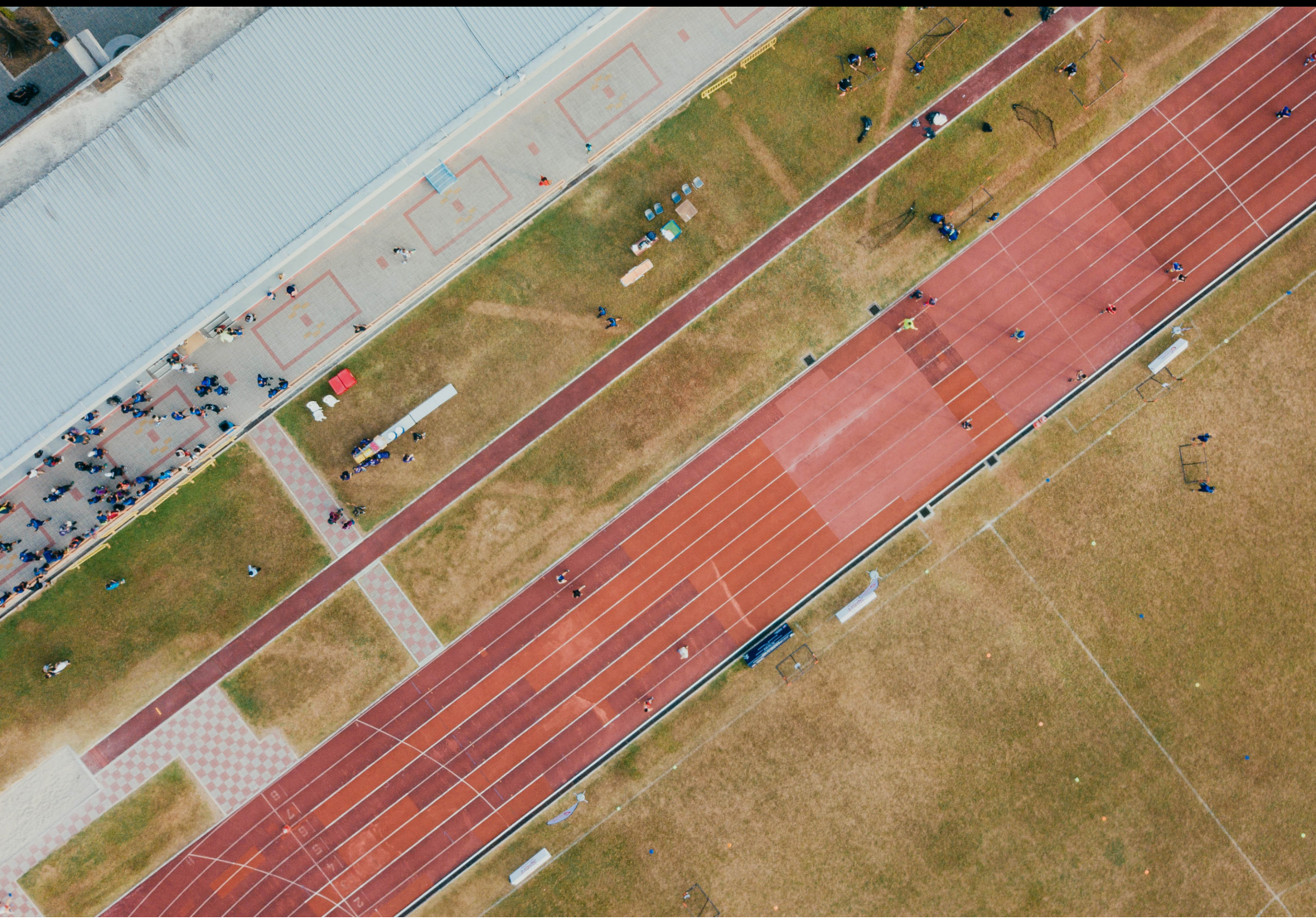
Prof. Mike Hartill, Dr Axel Kaehne, Dr Tom Simcock, Dr Laura Purdy, Dr Fiona Johnson, Dr Michelle Jones, Julie Feather & Dr Melanie Lang

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Edge Hill
University

CPSS
Centre for
Child Protection
& Safeguarding
in Sport

EPA
Unit for
Evaluation &
Policy Analysis



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Evaluation team

Prof Mike Hartill¹

Dr Axel Kaehne²

Dr Tom Simcock²

Dr Laura Purdy¹

Dr Fiona Johnson¹

Dr Melanie Lang¹

Dr Michelle Jones

Julie Feather³

¹ Centre for Child Protection & Safeguarding in Sport, Edge Hill University

² Evaluation & Policy Analysis Unit, Edge Hill University

³ Department of Social Work & Interprofessional Education, Chester University

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This is a summary of the [full report](#) provided to UK Athletics and Sport England

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1. Introduction

1.1 Safeguarding Training in Sport

Since the establishment of the *Child Protection in Sport Unit* (CPSU) and the publication of national *Standards for Safeguarding Children in Sport* (CPSU, 2003), safeguarding training has become part of the sporting landscape in the UK and a central element in the UK's strategy for safeguarding in sport.

The current version of the national standards states:

Everyone in contact with children has a role to play in their protection. They can only do so confidently and effectively if they are aware and have the necessary understanding and skills. Organisations providing sporting activities for children have a responsibility to provide learning, training and development opportunities for staff and volunteers.

(CPSU, 2018, p.12)

The sport sector has to balance obligations to the welfare of athletes and coaches with resource allocation considerations and the needs of a diverse, part-time and geographically widespread volunteer coaching workforce.

Alongside traditional face-to-face training courses, technology-based approaches, such as online modules and Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) offer flexible and cost-effective ways to deliver safeguarding training. There is a need for robust evidence as to what constitutes best practice in the field. In this context, in 2020 UK Athletics commissioned Edge Hill University to evaluate the efficacy of alternative training modes.

1.2 The evaluation

The evaluation team and project steering group initially agreed an evaluation based on a two-way comparison between *Blended* training which involved a face to face course, supplemented with online materials, and wholly *Online* training in the form of a self-guided module. However, shortly after the project commenced, the COVID pandemic resulted in all UKA's 'face-to-face' training events being cancelled or postponed.

UKA quickly evolved their 'face-to-face' training module into a tutor-led *virtual* offering, via their online platform. In the uncertain climate of COVID-19, some face-to-face training events were able to go ahead from September 2020, and the evaluation adapted to compare *three* modes of delivery. We describe these as:

1. **Online:** a pre-configured, self-guided online training module navigated independently by the learner. This course represented the pre-existing form of safeguarding training within UKA (and its constituent national bodies).
 2. **Face-to-Face:** A Face-to-face Safeguarding Training module developed for the evaluation which was a tutor-led, physical (or actual) classroom with multiple learners. This was a blended course with a self-guided online element.
 3. **Virtual:** A newly developed *virtual learning environment* (VLE) training offer modelled on the Face-to face course. This combined 'live' tutor delivery and peer interaction in an online, multiple-learner, classroom environment. Similar to the face-to face course it also included a self-guided online element.
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2. Methodology

To develop an appropriate evaluation framework, a preliminary scoping exercise was undertaken. This involved extensive literature reviews followed by semi-structured interviews with eight coach education tutors and five key stakeholders engaged in the design, development and delivery of safeguarding training.

A comparative *pre-post* design was used to evaluate the three training modes. A scale to measure confidence in *understanding*, *recognising*, and *responding* to safeguarding concerns, was developed, and data was collected at two points, at *baseline* (shortly prior to training) and at *post-training* (within a 1-week window following the delivery of the training).

Two outcome domains were evaluated:

1. Participant Learning:

The central evaluation question was: *which mode of delivery has the largest impact on the confidence of training participants* across three areas of safeguarding training *understanding*, *recognising*, and *responding* to safeguarding concerns? This was assessed by an online questionnaire implemented with a sample of training participants shortly before and shortly after training, across all three modes.

2. Participant Reaction:

The evaluation also assessed programme satisfaction, learning conditions, methods and approaches and subjective impact of the training. This was assessed in the post-training survey, and in post-training interviews conducted with a purposive sample of volunteers who had undertaken the VLE or face-to-face training.

These data collection approaches allowed for quantitative and qualitative data analysis, in order to capture the effect of training within each delivery mode.

3. Context: Stakeholder perspectives

Preliminary scoping of the social, cultural and organizational context of safeguarding training in UKA was undertaken through qualitative (semi-structured) interviews with key stakeholders.

Three contextual factors emerged over the last decade to define the field of safeguarding in sport.

- Equipping the workforce to deliver safeguarding effectively has come to be viewed as of critical importance among stakeholders, although among the volunteer workforce there is variation in the value learners place on this content
 - The learning process has undergone a significant transformation through the onset of online learning which again, has been accelerated by the COVID pandemic.
 - Effective safeguarding education remains critically dependent on expertise developed by the CPSU whilst specific content continues to develop.
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4. Evaluation of training effect: Pre- post-training survey data

4.1 Participants

The evaluation compared the effects of training across the three delivery modes: Virtual (N=40), Face-to-Face (N=40) and Online (N=43).

Differences between the three cohorts in terms of demographic composition (gender, age and ethnicity) were minimal: Online and Face-to-Face training cohorts had slightly more males than females, and the Face-to Face cohort was more ethnically diverse.

In all training cohorts, most participants had not previously undertaken safeguarding training, although a higher proportion of those in the online training cohort had experienced training previously (47%), compared with those in the Face-to-Face (30%) and Virtual (25%) groups.

4.2 Training outcomes: Post-training ratings of training satisfaction and impact

In the post-training survey, participants were asked to rate their training on five-point scales according to:

- Their level of satisfaction with training,
- Extent of their learning,
- Impact of training on their role in athletics,
- Their ability to translate training into practice,
- Improvements in their knowledge,
- Extent their knowledge was expanded and challenged,
- Motivation to apply their learning in athletics.

Ratings given by participants were very positive in terms of their perception of the training, across all categories, and this was the case within all three cohorts. There was, however, a consistent pattern of somewhat lower ratings from the Online cohort. In the majority of cases this did not reach statistical significance. A one-way ANOVA showed the Face-to-Face cohort had higher scores than the Online cohort for whether participants perceived the course had increased their knowledge of safeguarding.

Table 4.1. Post-training ratings of training satisfaction and impact

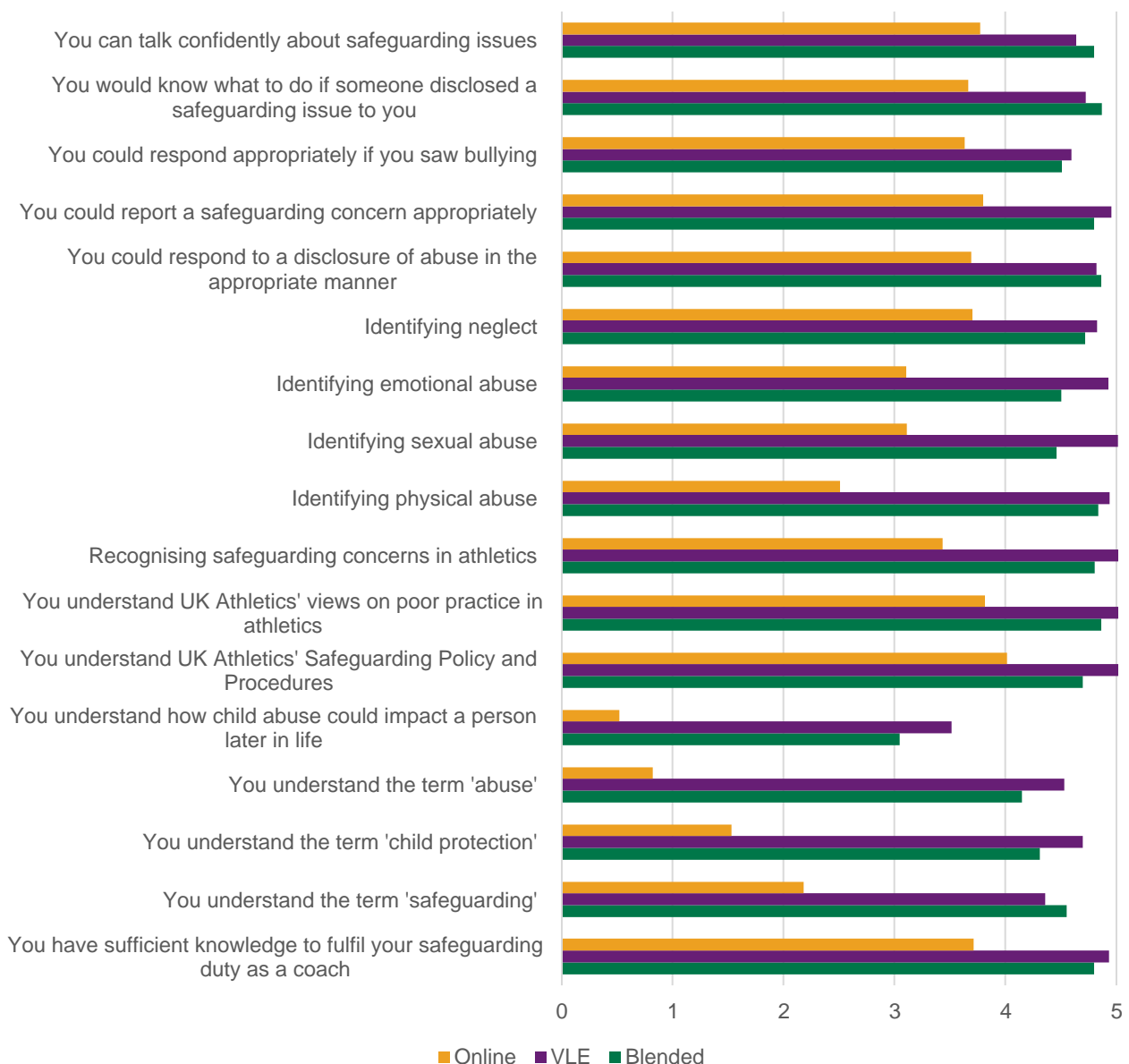
	Virtual (N=40)	Face- to-Face (N=40)	Online (N=43)
Satisfaction with the training (% Very / Completely satisfied)	82	75	70
Learning from training (% Agree / Strongly Agree)	87	90	83
Impact on the participant's role in athletics (% Very / Extremely likely)	79	64	51
Translation into safeguarding practice (% Very / Extremely Confident)	74	70	68
Increased knowledge of safeguarding (% Agree / Strongly Agree)	89	94	82
Challenged and expanded safeguarding knowledge (% Considerable / Great extent)	62	70	61
Motivation to apply safeguarding learning (% Agree / Strongly Agree)	89	100	88

4.3 Changes in safeguarding-specific confidence across the training cohorts

Within the survey, 17 questions measured confidence relating to key safeguarding-specific competencies.

Changes in safeguarding-specific confidence attributable to the training were measured by comparing pre- and post-training confidence ratings. Changes in scores for each of the confidence items are shown in Figure 4.1. Numeric steps represent the change in each item between pre- and post-training as measured against the baseline mean for each cohort.

Figure 4.1. Change in Z score between pre- and post-training for each training cohort by question



Increases in confidence were seen for all items and all training cohorts. Wilcoxon Signed Rank test showed significantly greater increases in confidence for the Virtual and Face-to-Face cohorts, compared with the Online training.

4.4 Changes in confidence *understanding, recognising, and responding to safeguarding concerns.*

A factor analysis identified three components to the 17-item confidence scale, which could be characterized as confidence in:

- *responding to safeguarding concerns* (9 items)
- *understanding safeguarding issues* (4 items), and
- *recognising safeguarding issues* (4 items).

The Online cohort exhibited a higher level of confidence than the Face-to-Face or Virtual cohorts at baseline (pre-training) for all of the domains, although a One-Way ANOVA showed that this was only statistically significant for the *Understanding of safeguarding issues* component.

The effect of training on confidence across the training cohorts was examined for each of the three confidence domains.

4.4.1 Understanding of Safeguarding Issues

There was a significantly higher baseline position for the Online cohort in terms of trainees' *understanding of safeguarding issues*. There was no significant difference in confidence levels found between the cohorts at post-training. The difference between pre-training and post-training was significantly different for the Virtual and Face-to-Face cohorts, but not the Online cohort.

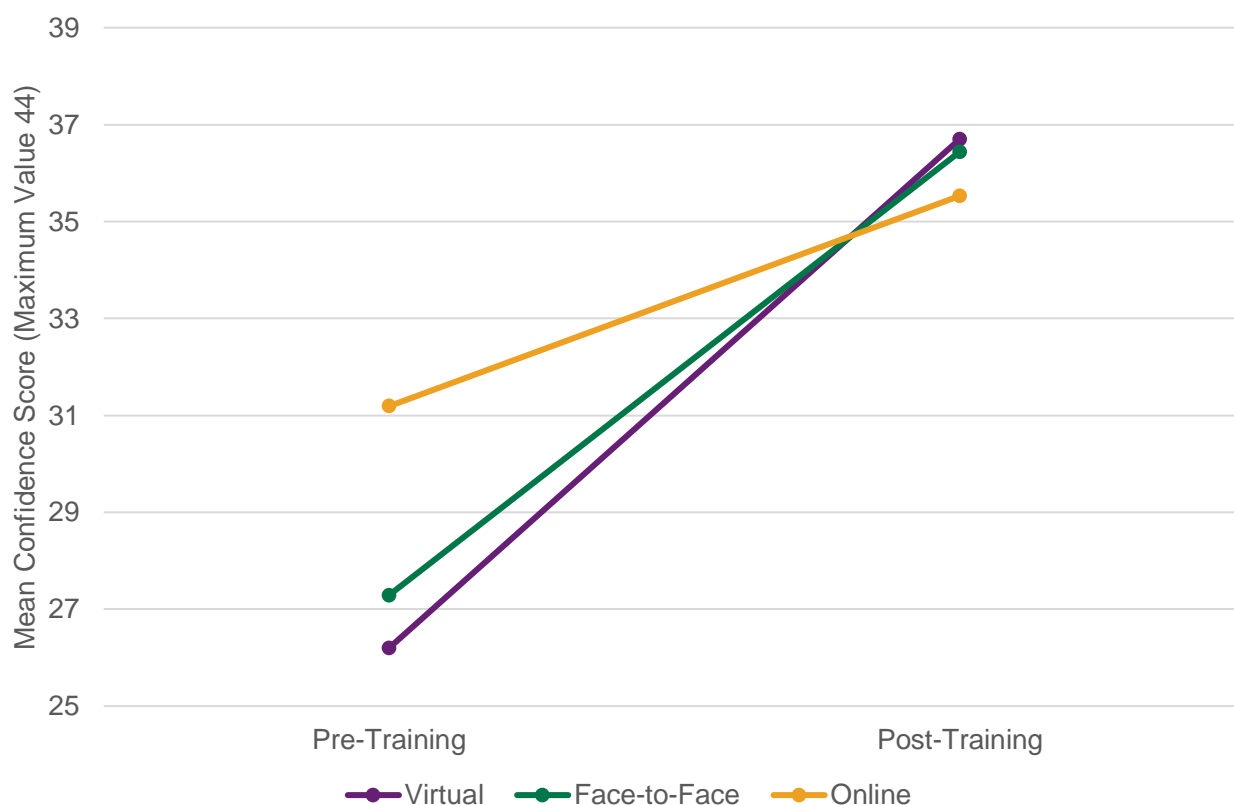
Figure 4.2 Mean change in confidence in *understanding* safeguarding issues by cohort



4.4.2 Recognising Safeguarding Issues

The Online cohort had slightly higher pre-training confidence in *recognising safeguarding issues* than the other cohorts, but this was not statistically significant. There was no difference in mean confidence level between the cohorts at the post-training level. All three cohorts increased their confidence score significantly between the pre- and post- training.

Figure 4.3 Mean change in confidence *Recognising safeguarding issues* by cohort



4.4.3 Responding to Safeguarding Concerns

There was a marked increase in the confidence in *responding to safeguarding concerns* amongst participants in all three types of training. There was no significant difference between the cohorts at the pre-training level, and no significant difference in mean confidence level between the cohorts at the post-training level. All training cohorts experienced a significant increase in score.

Figure 4.4 Mean change in confidence *responding to safeguarding concerns* by cohort



4.5 Knowledge of Safeguarding

During their training, participants had to pass two in-course multiple-choice assessments to complete the training. To provide initial findings on the potential effect of the training type on knowledge retention, the survey included 10 items from these two assessments, across a broad domain of safeguarding issues.

Table 4.2. Mean safeguarding assessment score by cohort

Cohort	Mean	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Virtual (VLE)	9.2	7	10
Face-to-Face	8.9	5	10
Online	9	7	10

There was no significant difference between the cohorts in the average scores, indicating that there was no impact of training type on the retention of safeguarding knowledge provided in the training courses.

4.6 Summary of Questionnaire Findings

- Participants from all training cohorts underwent increases in all safeguarding-specific confidence domains (*responding, understanding, identifying safeguarding concerns*) between pre- and post-training.
 - All increases were significant, except for the *understanding* element of confidence for the Online cohort, where no significant difference was found between pre- and post-training.
 - The starting point or pre-training position for the Online cohort is higher than the Face- to-Face or VLE cohorts across all three safeguarding domains. All three cohorts indicate very similar levels of confidence following training, across all three domains.
 - There was no significant difference found at post-training for confidence levels across all three cohorts and components of confidence.
 - The total training effect for the Online cohort is substantively less than the effect for Face-to-Face and VLE across all three domains.
-

5. Participant perceptions of UKA Safeguarding Training: Qualitative analysis

5.1 Participant interviewees

To explore the perceptions and experiences that were captured by the survey data, qualitative interviews were carried out with a convenience sample of UKA safeguarding course participants. A total of 9 interviews were carried out. All interviewees had undertaken Face-to-Face or Virtual safeguarding training and at the time of the interviews, all but one had also completed the supplementary UKA online safeguarding module, either prior to or following their Virtual /Face-to-Face training.

5.2 Themes emerging from the trainee interviews

Analysis of the interview transcripts identified a range of factors potentially influencing the trainee experience of the UKA safeguarding training.

5.2.1 Individual-level factors

Participants acknowledged substantial differences in experience and perceptions of safeguarding among learners prior to training:

Through the course I realised how much out of touch a lot of people are of safeguarding. There seems to be a lot of people who didn't know much about it beforehand. [P2]

Individual learning style and preferences were seen as important factors in an individual's experience of training:

Personally, I'd go face-to-face... I think it's just a better environment for me personally 'cause I learn and...feel more immersed in it, I take in more and I listen more in that environment. [P9]

5.2.2 Online learning benefits and drawbacks

Accessibility, convenience and flexibility: Learning through an online, self-guided module was perceived to be more convenient in terms of location, timing and pace of learning:

You can do it in your own time, you don't necessarily have to like travel somewhere which I think is sometimes unnecessary. [P8]

It was nice... I can do it at my own pace, and I can then stop, reinforce the knowledge that I'd learnt, go back... and just move around a little bit. [P6]

Participants felt the depth of their engagement with the subject matter in the self-guided online module might be lower:

Face-to-face... you're forced to think deeper about the questions in the topic, whereas online...it's more, what do I need to do this as quick as possible to pass the course. [P9]

The only thing online is the fact that you don't get that interaction with other people." [P8]

5.2.3 Face-to-face and Virtual learning benefits and drawbacks

Peer interaction: Participants referred to a deeper engagement with the material that was encouraged by interacting with others on the course.

You're forced to think deeper about the questions in the topic. [P9]

Because we were all from different backgrounds... there were different scenarios and different examples that came out of people's experiences. So that was interesting. [P5]

Tutor support: Having the guidance of a tutor was perceived to be a substantial benefit of both Virtual and Face-to-Face training in comparison with the self-guided module. Tutors were valued for bringing knowledge and 'expertise' [P8] to the discussion, speaking from personal experience, and facilitating discussions to prompt a deeper consideration of the issues.

It was motivational having him, you know, a leader like that. [P5]

They can further elicit information from you and make you think deeper about the topic which is beneficial. That's what they bring, that expertise to actually just kind of assist and talk through it a bit more and actually I suppose [pause], kind of intervene in some ways [P8]

Participants identified the potential for awkwardness or personal distress making engagement with sensitive subject matter as a potential drawback of group teaching around safeguarding issues

One person almost dropped out of the conversation, but you don't know when you're dealing with safeguarding – what peoples' experiences are [P1]

5.2.4 The learning environment

Accessibility of technology was discussed by learners. No major difficulties either with the online module or the Virtual classroom were identified, although some trainees were unfamiliar with using the chat function within the virtual classroom

The chat box... was the technology that's probably new. If I use Zoom for work..., I don't really use the chat box in that setting either. [P2]

Course Timing: Several participants referred to the timing of the safeguarding training, at the end of a long day of training, meaning time was too short, and participants too tired to give the course the attention it required.

The face-to-face...we only had a day for the coach training as well, so it was kind of a little bit rushed at the end. It kind of gives the impression that it didn't matter as much, if that makes sense. [P7]

It was difficult to get your brain from one to the other. It needed perhaps just a little bit more space to then change the tone [P1]

5.2.5 Impact and outcomes

Participants were uniformly positive about the effects of the training on their safeguarding knowledge and skills. Bringing their knowledge up to date and into the athletics context was valued by participants with prior experience of safeguarding

I found it quite useful because there were some bits where, I mean I didn't

realise what could be counted as abuse and stuff like that [P4]

I think it just brings back, cements knowledge, consolidates previous knowledge, reminds you of things and keeps you up to date on things which I think, with the topic of safeguarding, isn't a bad thing. [P8]

...it made me reflect back on to athletics again. So, the basics of child protection I know, basics of child welfare I know - but it enhanced it by placing it in context of what we were doing... [interviewee, P1]

For all the interviewees, coaching activities had been substantially curtailed during the COVID pandemic, and so their opportunities to put their learning into practice were limited.

5.2.6 Advantages of a blended approach

Most participants expressed a preference for a blended approach which combined self-guided and interactive elements, both to accommodate individual learning styles and to provide opportunities to consolidate learning through multiple training instances.

I'd like to see stuff online, read about it online as pre-work and then go to a face-to-face thing for an hour or so or whatever and then do the stuff that you can't do online and do some of the more discussion based stuff. ... So probably some kind of blended approach of all of this stuff is probably the way to go really. [P3]

I am a person that likes the visual as well, but I also like to learn from the written word and be able to look at it again and look at it again. So I'm both, you know? I'm both. Yeah, a combination is good [P5]

5.3 Summary of Interview findings

- Regardless of participants' prior experience of safeguarding, there was a high level of acceptance that safeguarding training should be embedded within all UKA coaching courses to ensure a minimum level of safeguarding awareness.
 - Participants were, in general, very positive about the content, coverage and delivery of the training they received, both the online module and the tutor-led training experiences.
 - Each training mode had its own benefits and drawbacks. Many participants appreciated the convenience of the online module, which allowed a choice of time, place and pace of their learning, while also valuing the deeper engagement provided by the interactive classroom approaches.
 - The opportunity to engage and reflect by discussing, questioning and sharing experiences with peers was perceived to create a more meaningful learning opportunity.
 - The input of tutors was also valued for their higher level of knowledge and experience
 - Most participants favoured training programmes that included both self-guided and interactive (peer and tutor engagement) elements.
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6. Conclusions and Key Findings

Participants on the UKA safeguarding training, regardless of delivery mode, experience increases in confidence in safeguarding-specific knowledge, whilst levels of course satisfaction and achievement of learning outcomes are also high across all modes.

In all training modes, there were statistically significant increases in confidence across the three dimensions of *understanding*, *recognising*, and *responding*. On these measures, then, we do not recommend one form of training over another. However, increases in self-perceived confidence were higher among the tutor-led cohorts compared to the Online cohort, particularly in *understanding* safeguarding.

Key Finding 1:

Post-training increases in self-perceived confidence were significant in all three training modes, with a less pronounced effect for the Online cohort.

Key Finding 2:

Increases in confidence were particularly strong in tutor-led training for learners with little or no prior training.

Interview data with a sample of Virtual and Face-to-Face learners supported survey findings and added further insights. Participants were, in general, very positive about the content, coverage and delivery of the training they received. Many appreciated the convenience of the online module, and the benefits of learners being able to choose the time, place and pace of their learning.

Key Finding 3:

Learners valued the convenience and flexibility of online safeguarding training resources.

The benefits of peer engagement and collaboration provided by the tutor-led (Face-to-Face and Virtual) approaches were highly valued by trainees as was the guidance and leadership of tutors. The opportunity to engage and reflect by discussing, questioning and sharing experiences was perceived to create a meaningful learning opportunity, through the exchange of ideas and the co-creation of knowledge. This is also supported by our review of literature. However, it should be noted that the Online cohort did not participate in interviews.

Key Finding 4:

Learners who experienced tutor-led safeguarding training valued opportunities for contextualized discussion and peer-collaboration.

In addition to the above, we also make some further observations.

First, scheduling of safeguarding as the final element of the day (within Face-to-Face training) was unavoidable due to COVID restrictions, however this timing may be problematic in terms of learner fatigue and the importance it *appears* to assign to safeguarding. This is something that training providers should consider in planning their safeguarding training, especially within a broader programme of coach education.

Second, quality assurance processes are essential for effective education/training, compliance, and maintenance of standards. This is particularly important where training is delivered by staff who are not safeguarding professionals. Where such processes do not already exist, we recommend that training providers within sport introduce appropriate quality assurance measures.

Third, this evaluation did not extend to the translation of knowledge into practice and safeguarding outcomes. The extent to which the, largely volunteer, workforce within sport is able to put safeguarding knowledge into practice is crucial and would provide important strategic information for the sector. Future evaluation and/or research studies might include this aspect in relation to training efficacy.

Finally, in evaluating safeguarding training the sport sector should consider measuring the return on investment provided by safeguarding training and assessing its long-term impact on children/vulnerable adults/athlete welfare and the wider sports community.

Conclusion

In this comparison of introductory safeguarding training for athletics, a significant learning effect was found in all three cohorts or modes of training (Online, Virtual, Face-to-Face). This effect was weakest in the Online cohort. In addition to the stronger learning effect found within the two tutor-led cohorts, tutor-led training was particularly effective where understanding of safeguarding was low or weak.

We found that self-directed (online) training is effective, but that tutor-led training ('virtual' or 'face-to-face') provides a dynamic, contextualised learning environment where the opportunity to discuss anxieties or ask questions is of importance to, and valued by, learners.

We conclude that a programme of safeguarding training that provides multiple learning pathways offers the most appropriate and effective approach and that tutor-led safeguarding training is a necessary and important feature of a robust safeguarding programme for the sport sector. We also suggest that tutor-led training is important for the embedding of safeguarding within 'normal' coaching practice and wider sports culture.

7. Recommendations

Following analysis of all data, we make the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Training providers should establish multiple training/learning pathways that provide both tutor-led training and self-guided online training.

Recommendation 2: Training for learners with little or no prior knowledge or experience of safeguarding in sport should include tutor-led training.

Recommendation 3: Training providers should ensure regular assessments of established training programmes to monitor fidelity of programme delivery and compliance with standards of delivery.

Recommendation 4: Future evaluations should explore application of learning to practice and the extent to which self-efficacy translates into improvements in safeguarding behaviour and performance.

Recommendation 5: Training providers should consider measuring the return on investment from safeguarding training and assessing its long-term impact on children/vulnerable adults/athlete welfare.

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