

The response

“Life skills are by definition the skills that allow people to meet the demands of everyday life,” says Simon Williams, Life Skills Manager at LFE.

“So what we’re doing in conjunction with clubs is providing apprentice players with those skills, in addition to football. We cover a wide range of topics [from finance to social media to equality, among other topics], and mental health is definitely a big part of what we do.

Ongoing mental health and wellbeing training now has to be delivered to all academy players of all ages and to staff. That means players, from U9-U23, should have the opportunity to acquire essential tools for the future.

“All of the programme has mental health connotations,” says Simon.

“We talk about life skills as supporting people in a broader sense which could be mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually. They support performance for football, relationships at home, in the classroom and anywhere elsewhere it’s needed.”

“The Mental Health Charter required LFE to evaluate mental health provision and define a strategy that built new interventions and activities. As a result of going through this process, LFE is now in a stronger position to support academy players, employees and other stakeholders.”

Birmingham City player

Dealing with change

Every part of the programme is tailored to challenges that players might face. So one very important subject is dealing with transition.

“Dealing and coping with transitions is vital,” says Simon.

“For example, this could include making sure players are equipped to deal with having an injury while training or preparing a dual career. Can you deal with not being selected to play – or more positively, playing up with the first team, or moving to the Premier League? Perhaps it’s managing transitions at home too, such as parents splitting up.”

The programme uses active teaching approaches that appeal to young players. For example, the personal development workshop asks players to make a table from lots of different materials.



“It’s fun, but then afterwards we discuss how you need more than one leg for a table,” says Simon.

“You can’t just rely on football to maintain your wellbeing. You need further personal development and other ‘legs’ too, like friends, family and additional interests. You can make the football ‘leg’ however strong, but you need other support too.”

Practical support now

As well as acquiring tools for the future, apprentices can access practical support for what they’re facing today. Players aged 16 or over have access to a confidential wellbeing line funded by The Professional Footballers’ Association (PFA) from where they can be directed to a nearby professional counsellor coordinated by Sporting Chance.

Simon adds that mental health is also embedded in 12-weekly one-to-ones with apprentice players.

“LFE conduct one-to-one reviews and ask questions such as ‘what does mental health mean to you?’ Or ‘what’s anxiety?’ And we also check they know exactly where to go if they need support.”

