

## Understanding Level 5 Sport Student's Perspectives of the Barriers to Progression and Attainment

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**Abstract :** This paper is a mixed methods investigation into the perceived barriers to attainment and progression. Initially entry level data was analysed to identify some of the key characteristics of the student cohort- for example entry route, age and ethnic background. Secondly, a phenomenological case study of the lived experiences of 15 level 5 sport and exercise students was conducted. It aimed to understand the complexities of success in higher education, far beyond entry qualifications, indices of deprivation and POLAR characteristics, to offer a first-hand account of student perceptions and interpretations of the barriers they face in progression, retention and completion on their programme. Using focus groups and interviews with students from a range of indices we offer a set of rich case studies exploring the interpretations of our students' lived experiences and challenges. Findings demonstrate a complex set of circumstances that centre on managing workload, use of support services and aspirations of students that conflict with university priorities. Conclusions centre on the role of academic and pastoral support, assumptions about priorities of students and practical interventions to support achievement.

**Keywords :** access and participation, higher education, progression and retention, barriers

**Conference Title :** ICEHE 2023 : International Conference on Education and Higher Education

**Conference Location :** London, United Kingdom

**Conference Dates :** July 24-25, 2023