

Assembly 10 May 2019

EXAMS and SPORT

The Telegraph Education: By Camillah Turner, Education Editor

Parents should not stop children playing sport in the run up to exams because it has no impact on results, a new study suggests.

Taking part in competitive team games in the run up to GCSE and A-level exams will have no negative effects on a teenager's grades, according to research commissioned by The Headmasters' & Headmistresses' Conference (HMC).

The study analysed the GCSE results of 1,482 male and female students from 19 independent schools and examined the effect that participation in sports such as badminton, cricket, hockey, netball, rugby and tennis had on their results.

Professor Peter Clough, head the Psychology department at Huddersfield University who carried out the research, found that contrary to what some parents believe, "sport involvement does not appear to have any negative implications" on results.

He told The Daily Telegraph: "Overall, taking part in sport appears to have a lot of positive impact. There is no evidence that people involved in sport get any worse GCSE results.

"But they are happier, psychologically healthier, less anxious and more resilient and robust. Taking part in sport on a regular basis is not doing them any harm and it is doing them good."

Prof Clough's study found that there is a significant relationship between involvement in sport and mental toughness, as well as a positive association between sport and mental wellbeing.

"These findings strongly suggest that students revising for their GCSEs or A-levels should not abandon sport," he said.

"Balance is important, and sport plays a vital role in preparing them for the pressures of the exam room. It can even help some young people thrive when in stressful situations."

The study also examined whether participation in other extra-curricular activities, such as music and drama, had any effect on exam results.

It found that these activities had neither a positive nor a negative direct effect on academic performance. But they did not have the same advantages as sport in terms of improving wellbeing and mental toughness.

The profile of "super performers" was also examined in the research. These students - who were the very top academic performers - played a lot of sport as well as achieving the highest grades in their class.

The HMC represents 289 of the UK's most prestigious independent schools, including Eton College, Harrow School and Winchester College.

David Elstone, headmaster of the Hymers College in Hull and chair of HMC's sports sub-committee, said that it is "understandable" that parents will worry about their children taking time out of revision.

But he added: "My 34 years' experience as a teacher and head tells me that sport significantly boosts the confidence, resilience and performance of young people in the classroom. I am delighted that this is borne out by Professor Clough's research."

Mr Elstone said that he encourages all his pupils to continue playing sport in the run up to exams as it is good for teenagers to have a balance of activities. He added that incorporating physical activity into a revision timetable encourages discipline with time management.