

Chris Kirkland joined us and talked about his life in sport. He reflected on the challenges of working with young people like himself who are obsessed with sport (or another professional/elite route) and are therefore not that interested in school.

He shared that he regrets that he didn't work harder –what if things hadn't worked out for him? He now talks to young people about the importance of getting their education, regardless of their aspirations, and his tips for teachers and careers advisers are to find out what interests them, ask them how they want to learn and treat them like adults. Be positive to inspire them. A key message to students is that there will always be someone better than them, but they can always be the one working hardest.

In his career he has been surrounded by teachers, coaches, kit men, teammates and managers who have been people he could go to with issues and have taken the time to talk to him. They wanted to encourage him and for him to succeed. Sometimes that was giving him more time, offering extra opportunities etc. There were some teachers who said that a career in football was never going to happen; the desire to prove them wrong was a strong motivator. He experienced these two approaches in the dressing room; either put an arm around a person, or give them a push in order to be successful on the field.

He talked about his challenges with poor mental health, anxiety and addiction and wishes that he had asked for help sooner.

Following Chris's talk there was an open Q&A session where we talked about the importance of making talking about mental health a positive thing, some interventions and programmes that are available to university students, trainee teachers and as CPD to help people offer support (and seek it themselves) and also some of the barriers and concern students face.

Chris said that his social media is open and he is happy to be approached for questions.