

# SAFE Sport: Standardising Safety and Emergency Preparedness Across RCSI Sports and Societies

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## Introduction

The SAFE Sport programme was introduced by RCSI Student Services as an enhanced, formalised evolution of existing safety training for student-led sports and societies. Recognising the need for greater consistency, accountability, and alignment with institutional and national standards, the initiative was designed to upgrade informal safety practices into a structured, certified framework. SAFE Sport reflects RCSI's strategic commitment to wellbeing, leadership development, and excellence in co-curricular engagement, ensuring every student activity is underpinned by robust safety preparedness.

## Outcome

The SAFE Sport initiative has significantly enhanced the quality, safety, and professionalism of student sporting and co-curricular activity at RCSI. To date, the programme has achieved 100% attendance at the Captain and Chairperson sessions, with over 100 students completing certified SAFE training. By next year, at least 200 qualified first responders will be active across RCSI's sports and societies, ensuring that every event or fixture has trained safety personnel on site.

The initiative has fostered a stronger culture of accountability and preparedness. Through the introduction of a formalised tracking system on the Student Life HQ platform, Student Services can monitor training completion, identify certification gaps, and verify that qualified responders are present at every activity. The platform also supports compliance reporting, future planning, and recognition through automatically issued digital badges.

Evaluation and feedback have been highly positive. Post-training surveys revealed a substantial increase in students' confidence to respond to emergencies, alongside improved understanding of institutional safety protocols. Participants highlighted the practical value of the certified training and the reassurance it brings to both team members and spectators.

The SAFE Sport programme has also contributed to leadership development and employability by providing students with recognised qualifications and evidence of applied safety competence. The certification's portability enhances graduates' professional profiles, particularly for those entering health, sport, or community-focused careers. The programme's sustainable design ensures ongoing quality enhancement. Certifications remain valid for two years, with renewal built into the annual training calendar. Future phases will include developing bespoke in-house training materials using RCSI expertise and expanding blended delivery to maximise accessibility.

Through its structured, collaborative, and data-informed approach, SAFE Sport has embedded safety as a shared institutional value, contributing tangibly to RCSI's mission to support student wellbeing, leadership, and excellence within and beyond the classroom. The formalisation of the SAFE Sport programme has delivered measurable benefits across the RCSI community, enhancing not only student safety and confidence but also operational efficiency, institutional compliance, and the overall student experience. Key benefits include:

- Students have experienced significant gains in both personal and professional development. Completion of certified modules and in-person training provides students with credentials that enhance employability, particularly in health, sport, and leadership-related fields.
- Students now receive consistent, accredited safety training that empowers them to recognise, prevent, and manage incidents effectively during sporting and society events.
- The structured training has strengthened students' leadership skills, fostering responsibility and confidence in emergency situations.
- The blended training model ensures equitable access for all students, regardless of sporting level or background.
- Students from diverse clubs and societies now share a unified understanding of safety standards, promoting collaboration, peer support, and collective accountability across the RCSI student community.
- The introduction of the tracking system has simplified monitoring and compliance management, allowing staff to track certifications, identify training needs, and plan future sessions efficiently.
- Consistent safety coverage at events and activities has reduced the likelihood of incidents and enhanced the University's risk management framework.
- The initiative strengthened cooperation between Student Services, Health & Safety, EDI, and other internal departments, fostering a shared culture of care and accountability.
- Staff feedback indicates greater confidence in student preparedness, resulting in reduced administrative burden during event approvals and incident management processes.
- The initiative supports RCSI's strategic pillars of wellbeing, inclusion, and excellence in student engagement, directly contributing to the University's educational and civic mission.
- By embedding a certified, accredited safety framework within cocurricular activities, RCSI demonstrates sectoral leadership in student safety and emergency preparedness.
- The formalised approach provides clear evidence of compliance with health and safety regulations, institutional policy, and sectoral best practice.
- Collaboration with external bodies, such as the IRFU, and the integration of national standards strengthen RCSI's external relationships

## Initiative

The SAFE Sport programme was designed and launched by RCSI Student Services following extensive consultation with students, RCSI departments, and external partners. The primary goal was to establish a sustainable and standardised safety training framework for all sports and societies, ensuring compliance, confidence, and competence among student leaders and members.

The initiative evolved through structured collaboration. Student feedback gathered through the Student Engagement Partnership (StEP) programme played a central role in shaping the content, tone, and delivery format of the training. Key internal stakeholders, including the Sports Coordinator, Society Coordinator, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Office, Health & Safety, Porters, and Marketing, contributed to the development and integration of the training model, ensuring relevance and alignment with institutional policy. Externally, RCSI partnered with the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) to deliver certified, high-quality first responder training that meets national standards.

The resulting framework comprised three interlinked tiers:

1. **In-Person Engagement:** Mandatory training sessions for all Captains and Chairpersons provided enhanced operational and safety briefings. Attendance was formally tracked to ensure compliance, and sessions focused on emergency decision-making, communication, and institutional protocols.
2. **Online Learning via Moodle:** Six online modules were developed to provide consistent, accessible training for all committee members. Topics included Concussion, Online Safety & Data Protection, Health & Safety, EDI, Safeguarding, and an overview of the Club & Society Handbook. Each module integrated RCSI-specific policy and concluded with a short quiz to assess understanding.
3. **SAFE In-Person Training:** Targeted towards high-risk sports and other key student groups, this component (delivered in partnership with the IRFU) provided certified, practical pitch-side responder training. Participants learned skills including Basic Life Support, concussion management, spinal injury response, and emergency action planning.

Challenges included aligning training schedules with busy student timetables and ensuring consistent participation across a diverse range of clubs and societies. These were addressed by embedding mandatory attendance requirements, offering flexible online components, and providing certification incentives such as digital badges.