



Evolve & Thrive

Athlete Transition Programme

Helping athletes navigate transition,
rediscover their identity and thrive
beyond sport



Launching in June 2026



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The Evolve & Thrive Programme came at just the right time. It connected me with a group of like-minded athletes from various sports, all navigating their own version of this transition.

It's been powerful and reassuring to hear and share stories with people who truly understand what it means to leave behind the structure, identity, and intensity of professional sport.

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Geva Mentor CBE,
Evolve & Thrive Participant and Former
England Roses Netball Player

Get ready to Evolve & Thrive:

Supporting your transition from professional sports



The challenge of transition

A sports career can end in an instant, and for many athletes, that's when the real challenges begin. More than 70% of sportspeople have that decision made for them by the end of a contract, deselection from an elite squad, or a serious injury, and over half experience financial or mental health struggles within five years of retiring - which is why the Evolve & Thrive Programme was created.

What Evolve & Thrive offers

The nine-month Evolve & Thrive Programme will enable you to explore who you are, who you want to be post professional sport, and what you need to kick start the next phase of your life. Identity, purpose, transition, wellbeing, networking and much more will be explored alongside like-minded people, creating space for reflection while also providing practical learning that can be applied immediately.

- 1 1-2-1 Mentoring
- 2 Group-based Masterclasses
- 3 'Switched On' Community access
- 4 Bursary worth up to £1,000

15 fully-funded places for eligible athletes



1-2-1 Mentoring: Your journey - supported by the best

Mentoring is a central part of Switch the Play's work, which is why it is an integral element of the Evolve & Thrive Programme. Over the past 10 years, we have worked with more than 350 athletes, welcoming new sportspeople each month, and have helped transform their personal and professional journeys in lasting, meaningful ways.

Mentoring is a collaborative, supportive relationship aimed at personal and professional growth. Unlike coaching, it often involves sharing experience and providing direction. By asking thoughtful questions and creating space for reflection, our mentors will share their experiences and offer insights from their professional, personal and sporting journeys.

How Mentoring works:

Supporting your personal and professional journey

Our mentors embody key qualities that help create a supportive, insightful and transformative mentoring experience:

1. Prepared and adaptable:

They tailor their approach to meet the unique needs of each mentee.

2. Curious and attentive:

They let the mentee take the lead, listening with empathy and offering thoughtful, insightful guidance.

3. Promote a safe space

They build trust, show empathy, and engage in open, non-judgmental conversations.

4. Embrace silence:

They allow space for reflection, recognising that thoughtful pauses are valuable for insight and clarity.

5. Ask open-ended, thoughtful questions:

Using 'What' and 'How' to encourage exploration and clarity, whilst avoiding leading or 'Why' questions.

6. Maintain confidentiality:

They respect privacy, sharing information only when there is a safeguarding concern.

7. Unconditional positivity

Through empathy, compassion and non-judgmental conversations, mentees feel genuinely supported and valued.



Together, these qualities ensure that mentoring is a supportive, insightful, and transformative experience, helping you grow both personally and professionally.

Group-based Masterclasses:

Growing together through shared experiences

On the Evolve & Thrive Programme group-based learning sessions we create an interactive, collaborative environment where you can learn, reflect and grow together. Whilst inspired by the supportive, reflective space of our 1-2-1 mentoring sessions, these group sessions have a unique energy, driven by shared experiences and peer interaction.

In these sessions you'll explore a range of personal and professional development topics, including:

- **Self-awareness and reflection:**

Understanding strengths, values and areas for growth.

- **Effective communication:**

Learning to express ideas clearly, listen actively and engage in constructive dialogue.

- **Collaboration and teamwork:**

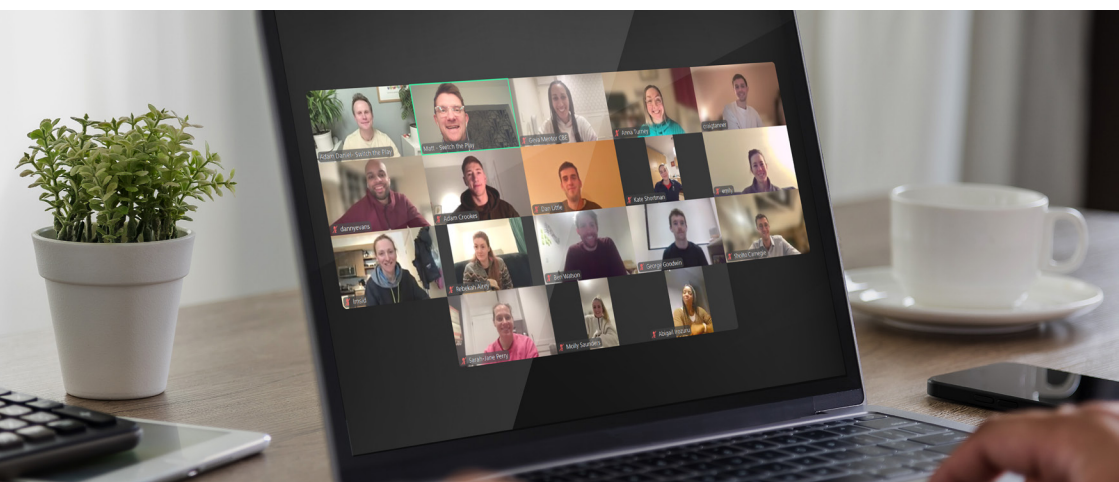
Working with others to solve problems, share insights and develop collective solutions.

- **Developing a robust growth mindset:** Developing strategies to overcome challenges and embrace change.

- **Decision-making and problem-solving:** Practising thoughtful approaches in a supportive environment.

- **Leadership and influence:** Exploring ways to lead with empathy, confidence and clarity.

Through a combination of guided coaching questions, group discussions, interactive exercises, and peer feedback, you will be challenged to think critically, reflect deeply, and apply your learning in practical ways. By the end of each session, you leave with actionable insights, new perspectives and a stronger sense of connection with your peers and purpose.



2026 Schedule

What	When	Location
Virtual kick-off An introduction to the programme where you'll meet your group, get familiar with how everything works, and set yourself up for the journey ahead.	Thursday, 18th June	Zoom
In Conversation: Athlete Experience with Q&A	Wednesday, 24th June	Zoom
In Conversation: Evolve & Thrive Mentor Experience with Q+A	Tuesday, 30th June	Zoom
In Conversation: Athlete Experience with Q&A	Monday, 6th July	Zoom
In Conversation: Evolve & Thrive Mentor Experience with Q+A	Tuesday, 14th July	Zoom
Overnight Connection Experience A chance to slow down, connect as people, not just athletes, build trust, meet your mentors, and begin exploring your values and what matters most for what comes next.	Sunday, 26th to Monday, 27th July	In Person
Deep Dive Session: Self Awareness Create space to better understand yourself, how you think, what drives you, and what may be shaping your choices more than you realise.	Tuesday, 8th September	Zoom
Deep Dive Session: Self-Leadership Explore how you show up when it matters, and how to take greater ownership of your thinking, decisions and direction.	Tuesday, 20th October	Zoom
Mid-Programme Re-Connection A chance to reconnect, reflect on how things are evolving, and hear directly from business leaders about what stands out in hiring, and why your athletic background is more valuable than you think.	Tuesday, 8th December	In person
Deep Dive Session: Relationship Management Strengthen how you connect, communicate and influence, so you can build relationships that truly support your next chapter.	Wednesday, 20th January	Zoom
Final Workshop A reflective session to bring the programme to a meaningful close.	Tuesday, 16th February	Zoom
Graduation Celebration Celebrate the completion of your Evolve & Thrive journey! Reflect on your progress, share experiences with the group, and celebrate your growth and achievements, whilst looking ahead to what's next at our final celebratory get-together.	Sunday, 14th March to Monday, 15th March	In person

The Evolve & Thrive Bursary

Your next steps beyond the Evolve & Thrive Programme

Gaining all the tools, skills and insights from the programme is just the beginning. Athletes can access the Evolve & Thrive Bursary, providing up to £1,000 to support the next stage of their journey, whether that's advancing your career, earning new qualifications, or further developing your skills beyond sport.

What the Evolve & Thrive Bursary can support

The bursary is designed to support a wide range of opportunities to help you grow both personally and professionally, including:

- Further professional or vocational training – gain practical skills that prepare you for the next stage of your career
- Formal qualifications – pursue certifications or courses that enhance your expertise and open new doors
- Continued Professional Development (CPD) – build on your existing knowledge and develop new capabilities
- Networking and career development opportunities – connect with professionals and organisations that can help you achieve your long-term goals.

Commitment and eligibility

To make the most of the Evolve & Thrive Bursary, athletes must be actively engaged with Switch the Play support services as a 'Switched On' member and maintain a minimum of 80% engagement across the programme, including through workshops, 1:1 sessions and agreed development activities.



How to apply

Once accepted onto the Evolve & Thrive Programme, you'll receive a link to an online bursary form to outline your opportunity, costs and supporting documents for pre-approval of funding. This can be completed at any time during the programme or upon graduation.

‘Switched On’ Community Access

Your gateway to peer support and inspiration

‘Switched On’ is Switch the Play’s flagship programme designed for current or retired athletes who would like support navigating changes during and after their professional sports careers.

This all-round development and wellbeing service is designed to help athletes thrive both professionally and personally, whilst equipping them to navigate the inevitable transitions and challenges throughout their sports journey:

- 1 Personalised discovery:** They tailor their approach to meet the unique needs of each mentee.
- 2 Coaching and mentoring:** Six sessions with an experienced coach or mentor to guide personal and professional growth.
- 3 Psychological Care Pathway:** Up to six fully funded psychotherapy sessions for additional mental wellbeing support.
- 4 Learning and development programmes:** Immersive opportunities to build skills and enhance personal development.
- 5 Career pathways support:** Insight days with industry experts to explore potential career options beyond sport.
- 6 ‘Switched On’ Hub:** A central platform with transition support content, videos and podcasts.
- 7 Athlete community access:** Opportunities to connect with peers, share experiences and receive mutual support.

Ready to Evolve & Thrive?

If you’re interested in joining our new Evolve & Thrive Programme, launching in June 2026, we’d love to hear from you. Simply scan the QR code and fill out the short application form.

If you have any more questions about Evolve & Thrive, please contact our Athlete Services Director, Matt Lock:
matt.lock@switchtheplay.com.





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The Evolve & Thrive Programme, along with the Switch the Play team, has opened my eyes and helped me navigate both the challenges I've faced and those still to come. More than anything, it's the sense of connection and genuine support among everyone involved that's made the biggest difference.

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Molly Saunders,
former professional rugby player for the
Exeter Chiefs, Wasps, Harlequins and
Worcester Warriors



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