PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE PORTFOLIO

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Liverpool John Moores University for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Sport and Exercise Psychology.

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**Abstract**

This portfolio provides an account of the development activity of a trainee sport psychologist on the Professional Doctorate in Sport and Exercise Psychology at Liverpool John Moores University. Detailed through a series of applied case studies, research activity and reflections the portfolio will outline how the author has developed and acquired the competencies required to achieve the qualification.

The portfolio contains three applied case studies and one case study focused on teaching and training. The applied case studies provide an account of the types of applied activity that have been undertaken throughout training and document the competencies associated with delivering effective consultancy. Case study 1, focuses on supporting a young athlete experiencing transition between football clubs using an existential psychology informed counselling approach. Case study 2 is focused on providing support for an adolescent footballer during rehabilitation from injury and adopts an acceptance and commitment therapy approach and case study 3 details the use of a holistic ecological approach (HEA) to support a professional football coach to integrate and develop psychological qualities in young players. The teaching and training case study details the delivery of psychoeducational workshops delivered across U12-16 age groups in a professional football club academy.

The portfolio also includes three research components that are each focused on the talent development environment (TDE). The first is a systematic review and thematic synthesis of qualitative case study research on TDEs and aimed to synthesise findings of existing research and identify features that underpinned effective TDEs. Study 1 is a case study on the TDE within the academy of a professional football club and presents stakeholder perspectives on the

TDE. Study 2 uses creative non-fiction vignettes to present an ethnographic perspective on the TDE of the football club.

A series of reflective writings will provide the reader with insight into the personal, professional and philosophical development of the trainee throughout the programme. It is anticipated that the contents of this portfolio will provide a rich and in-depth account of applied practice and research activity that has taken place and will generate knowledge and insights that may be useful for other sport psychology practitioners working or aspiring to work in professional football environments.

## Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

## Acknowledgements

To my wife, Jodie I could not have done this without you. Thank you for all of your love and belief in me throughout this journey. I might not always be on time, but I get home in the end.

I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to Dr Martin Eubank and Dr Martin Littlewood for your expert guidance and supervision but more importantly kindness and patience throughout this process. And to Dr Mark Nesti your influence on my thinking and development has been instrumental in me becoming the practitioner I am today, thank you.

Reaching this point would not have been possible without the encouragement, support and guidance of so many people in my personal and professional life – thank you.

# Professional Doctorate in Sport and Exercise Psychology

## Practice Logbook – Daniel Ransom

**Note:** A cross section of my practice logbook is presented in the interests of space. I will present examples of the activity that I have engaged in during my time on the professional doctorate to give an insight into my training activity. Throughout the duration of my training, I have been employed full time to deliver sport psychology support in a professional football club academy. I have also worked as a consultant, contracted to a professional rugby union club for over three years and have worked with several clients in private practice in golf, darts and rugby league. I have presented at a number of conferences including the Isokinetic Medical Conference, British Psychological Society Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology annual conference and delivered invited presentations and guest lectures for Team Denmark, the Norwegian Football Federation and several UK universities.

| Professional Standards (incl. CPD) | | | | | |
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| **Client details** | **Location** | **Date(s)** | **Nature of the activity** | **Contact Hours** | **Placement Host details (if applicable)** |
| | LJMU | 1/6/17 | Professional Doctorate Induction Day. | 5 | LJMU |
| | Home | 4/6/17 | Rollo May podcast "The curse of freedom" – 45 minute podcast discussing existential philosophy, psychology and the application to psychotherapy. | 1 | |
| | MUFC | 5/6/17 | Reading – Being a Sport Psychologist – Chapters 1-3 | 3 | |

| | LJMU | 1/6/17 | Supervision – Meeting with Dr Mark Nesti – discussing diaries for meeting with Tony Strudwick at MUFC. | 0.5 | | LJMU |
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| | LJMU | 8/7/17 | Prof Doc – Planning training module – more in depth look into planning training in SpExPsy. | 5 | | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 9/6/17 | Professional Networking – Skype with Chris Lynch of Malaysian Institute of sport discussing holistic development of elite athletes. | 1 | | |
| | LJMU | 16/6/17 | Prof Doc – Ethics & Reflection in SpExPsy | 5 | | LJMU |
| | Home | 18/6/17 | Reading – Existential Counselling in Practice – Emmy Van Deurzen Systematic Review paper – SEPR Eubank & Tod (2017). | 2 | | |
| | Home | 18/6/17 | Prof Doc – Plan of training & Gantt | 5 | | |
| | LJMU | 22/6/17 | Prof Doc – Research & Systematic Review day. | 5 | | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 22/6/17 | Supervision meeting – Mark Nesti – Discussing giving feedback to management in applied settings. | 1 | | LJMU |
| | Home | 24/6/17 | Prof Doc – Plan of training, Gantt & SWOT analysis. | 7 | | |
| | Travelling | 29-30/6/17 | Reading – Kristoffer Henriksen PhD thesis, Henriksen et al. (2013) paper, Larsen et al. (2017) philosophy paper, Keegan (2010) philosophy paper. Being a Sport Psychologist – Philosophy chapter (Keegan, 2016). | 10 | | |
| | Bayer Leverkusen | 30/6-1/7/17 | Bayer 04 Campus visit – CPD. – Conference style event around performance and development hosted by Bayer Leverkusen. | 16 | | |
| | LJMU | 5/7/17 | Prof Doc – Philosophy, models and approaches in SpExPsy | 5 | | LJMU |

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| | LJMU | 5/7/17 | Supervision meeting – Martin Littlewood LJMU – Discussing organisational and cultural work in professional football. | 1 | LJMU FEx |
| | MUFC | 6/7/17 | Supervision meeting – Tony Strudwick, Les Parry & Mark Nesti. Overview of training plans. | 1.5 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 6/7/17 | Prof Doc – Consultancy philosophy and models. | 2 | LJMU |
| | London | 18-19/7/2017 | MUFC – Predictive Index: Becoming a PI practitioner training course. | 16 | Predictive Advantage |
| | LJMU | 20/7/2017 | Supervision – Meeting with Dr Martin Littlewood reflecting on PI course and its application and usefulness in practice. Also spent time reflecting on organisational challenges, and navigating these proactively yet sensitively in order to be effective as practitioner. | 1 | LJMU |
| | Home | 9/8/17 | Supervision - Phone call with Dr Martin Littlewood to discuss incident which occurred earlier in the day. Discussed the importance of ethical standards and decision-making processes, record keeping and reflection. | 45 mins | LJMU |
| | Home | 9/8/17 | Writing up case notes and incident report of the incident at Shrewsbury School – this involved writing up a record of the event, followed by a critical discussion of the decisions that were made. | 2 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 10/8/17 | Supervision – Meeting with programme leader Dr Martin Eubank to discuss yesterdays incident. Similar to Dr Littlewood, Dr Eubank | 30 mins | |

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| | | | highlighted the importance of keeping accurate records and encouraged me to reflect on this experience in order to maximise learning and development. Emphasised the importance of referring back to BPS & HCPC guidelines when writing up records and accounts. | | |
| | LJMU | 10/8/17 | Prof Doc – Doing Intake in Sport Psychology Consulting. Outlined importance of intake in order to provide effective service. Explored how intake methods can vary and must be congruent and connected to consulting philosophy. | 5 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 11/8/17 | Safeguarding training and meeting. - Meeting with Jane Cooper (Head of Safeguarding at MUFC Academy) about upcoming Oakham Tournament where I will be tour leader. Refresher of academy safeguarding protocols and outlined my responsibility as safeguarding lead on the tour. Effective communication outlined as key to ensuring safety throughout the tour, remove elements of ambiguity and ensure everyone is clear about when and where things will be happening etc. | 1.5 | MUFC |
| | Leeds | 18/8/17 | Professional Networking/CPD - Meeting with Simon Hartley, performance coach at Yorkshire County Cricket Club – discussing demonstrating effectiveness in high | 3 | LJMU/MUFC |

| | | | performance settings. Discussed need to evolve, and ensure foundations that are laid are not neglected or 'unpicked'. Particularly when a changeover of staff and players had strong influence over the culture and 'managing' standards and expectations. | | |
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| | Travelling | 23/8-30/8/17 | AL – Reading Albert Camus – The Outsider – Challenging read, a philosophical take on the pressures of social norms and conventional thinking. | 6 | LJMU |
| | Home | 3/9/17 | Prof Doc Interventions Presentation – Planning and researching for presentation. Stambulova (2010) chapter on using metaphors in career consulting and Lindsay *et al.* (2010) TSP paper on using client generated metaphors provided theoretical underpinning and applied perspectives to inform presentation. | 4 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 12/9/17 | Prof Doc Interventions Presentation – Planning and researching for presentation. Stambulova (2010) chapter on using metaphors in career consulting and Lindsay *et al.* (2010) TSP paper on using client generated metaphors provided theoretical underpinning and applied perspectives to inform presentation. | 3 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 14/9/17 | Prof Doc – Day covering applied interventions in SP. I presented on use of metaphors in 1-2-1 consulting. Other presentations covered | 6 | LJMU |

| | | | mindfulness, integrated approach, holistic/personal development. Reflecting on presentation I felt as though I struggled with the 'role play' as this made me feel uncomfortable. I would have been better served sticking to what I had already planned to do, instead of trying to adapt it to the role play scenario that was manufactured. Also found the mindfulness presentation very interesting, I can see how this may be useful for some people, however I'm cautious about some of the claims about its effectiveness in a broad range of contexts. | | |
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| | Home | 16/9/17 | Reflection – spent time reflecting on impact of coach reaction and feedback to performance, this struck me as a something that needed to be broached, whilst also being cognisant to this potentially being perceived as overly critical, particularly in the early phase of working more closely with this particular coach. | 1 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 18/9/17 | Supervision – meeting with one of workplace supervisors (LP) to discuss observations from weekend, and how this might be approached in non threatening way. Also TS suggested that "show" rather than "tell" approach may be useful. | 1 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 28/9/17 | Prof Doc – Day with health psych group. Discussing individual progress, practice activity and case studies. Interesting listening to the health | 6 | LJMU |

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| | | | psych course, clearly different environments and applications of psychology. Differing ontological, epistemological and theoretical perspectives and approaches to doing psychology between the groups. HPsych guys operating very much on a medical model of identify and prescribe, which is likely influenced by limitations of working in health settings, whereas sport psych group generally speaking adopting broader long term approaches to applying psychology. - Potential reflective piece may help to explore this further. | | |
| | MUFC & EFC | 30/9/17 | MUFC & Supervisor Meeting – Spent the day at Finch Farm (EFC Training Facility) for fixtures between Everton Academy and Manchester United academy. Opportunity to engage with U16/18 teams following referrals for support and observe these players in action. Meeting with Dr Martin Littlewood to discuss recent applied work and challenges in relation to dealing with referrals. | 7 | MUFC |
| | N/A | 16/10/17 | CPD – Networking – 1 hour Skype with Christian Luthardt, Sport Psychologist at Bayern Munich. Discussed challenges of implementing psychology in professional football and gaining buy-in from key stakeholders. Also focused on working alongside | 1 | LJMU |

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| | | | coaches to help create some awareness of the context they are creating. And working with players to "create habits" for players to take ownership. | | |
| | Staffs University | 18/10/17 | CPD – Staffs Performance Psychology Conference. Workshops on "Nuts & Bolts of Doing Sport Psychology" with Professor Chris Shambrook & Joe Dixon. And "Mental Health in Sport" with Dr Sarah Kelly & Helen O'Connor. Keynote at the end of the day by Dr Pete Lindsay on problem solving in Sport Psychology. | 7 | LJMU |
| | Home | 19/10/17 | Supervision - 1 hour phone call with Dr Mark Nesti to discuss recent activity. | 1 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 23-25/10/17 | Talent Development Environment Event – Dr Kristoffer Henriksen, Dr Carsten Larsen over from University of Southern Denmark to share research and practice ideas around talent development practices. KH & CL presented to academy staff their research, and discussed how similar research may conducted to help develop our practices at MUFC. | 16 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 26/10/17 | Prof Doc – Applied Practice presentations. MMcG presented on developing growth mindset. Critical debate around the content, delivery and translation of psychological information to audience. | 6 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 2/11/17 | Prof Doc – Practitioner Growth & Development. Morning session led by Dr David Tod on practitioner | 6 | LJMU |

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| | | | development. Afternoon session spent recapping DSportExPsy assessment requirements. | | |
| | LJMU | 20/11/17 | Supervision – Meeting with Dr Martin Littlewood & Dr Mark Nesti – discussing pros and cons of psychological profiling in sport. Challenged some of my views around profiling if it is used in an appropriate way. Encouraged me to write some reflections about profiling to clarify my thinking around this. | 2 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 23/11/17 | Prof Doc – Contact day focusing on Sport Psychology, Performance & Well-Being and Performance Lifestyle. Guest speakers from LJMU, Table Tennis, GB Boxing & GB Taekwondo. – See Reflections. | 6 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 29/11/17 | Supervision – Meeting Dr M Littlewood. Discussing feeding back to clients and the options available – I shared some written feedback that I had provided to players, and Martin shared some of the documents he has produced for individual clients. – See Reflections | 1.5 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 5/12/17 | CPD/Networking – Skype Ingo Goetze (Bayer Leverkusen) reflecting on shared challenges of working in Professional Football. | 1 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 7/12/17 | Prof Doc – Guest Lecturer – Professor Moira Lafferty on the use of video and metaphors in conultancy, doing intake and working | 6 | LJMU |

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| | | | remotely to support clients. – See reflections. | | |
| | MUFC | 8/12/17 | Supervision – Meeting with TS & LP at workplace, discussed recent progress and gave positive feedback on the job I've been doing. LP asked for additional support on project working with professional players out on loan. | 1.5 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 4/1/18 | Supervision – Meeting with Dr Mark Nesti to discuss ethics proposal for research projects. | 1 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 7/1/18 | CPD – Meeting with Dr Kristoffer Henriksen (University of Southern Denmark) to discuss using ATDE & ESF modes (Henriksen, 2010) in research. | 1 | Marriott Hotel, Liverpool. |
| | MUFC | 8/1/18 | Supervision – Meeting Tony Strudwick to discuss research project timeline and key participants to interview. | 1 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 8-9/1/18 | CPD – Reading resilience literature to inform development of workshops for academy Enrichment Day. Galli & Gonzalez (2015) Resilience in sport SLR. Fletcher & Sarkar (2012) Resilience in Olympic Champions, Sarkar & Fletcher (2014) Ordinary Magic, Extraordinary Performance paper. | 6 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 10/1/18 | Supervision – Phone calls with both Dr Mark Nesti and Dr Martin Littlewood to discuss recent applied work and cases. | 2 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 11/1/18 | Supervision – 1-2-1 meeting with Dr Martin Littlewood, discussed | 1.5 | LJMU |

| | | | approaches to service delivery within professional environment, and importance of cultural fit and fit with the needs and requirements of the client groups (in this case different age groups). | | |
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| | LJMU | 15/1/18 | CPD – Writing abstract for Isokinetic Conference (June '18) – involved discussions with supervisors about suitable topic and content. | 2 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 24/1/18 | Supervision – Meeting Dr Mark Nesti, focused on providing feedback to clients and applying principles from ACT and existential psychology in practice. | 1.5 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 25/1/18 | Prof Doc – first day of calendar year – focussing on referral and working with clinical psych/mental health specialists in applied work. Reading of SEPR case study (Rotherham et al. 2016) and Roberts *et al.* (2016) article on mental health and sport psychology. | 6 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 31/1/18 | Supervision – Joint supervision meeting with Dr Mark Nesti & Dr Martin Littlewood, discussions included reflection on role in action during applied practice, working in professional sport and models of practice e.g. FT/PT/Consultant/Ad hoc support and how this can influence your role. | 3 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 7/2/18 | Supervision – Meeting Dr Mark Nesti – reviewing research proposal and ethics application. | 1.5 | LJMU |

| | LJMU | 14/2/18 | Supervision – Final review of ethics application Dr Mark Nesti. | 1 | LJMU |
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| | LJMU | 21/2/18 | Supervision – Call with Dr Mark Nesti, focused on clinical psychology referral processes and working alongside allied professionals. Arranged meeting with Richard Tahitinen, PhD student and clinical psychologist. | 1 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 22/2/18 | Prof Doc – Narrative Therapy session delivered by Dr David Tod. Focused on application of narrative therapy in practice, considering strengths and limitations of this approach. | 6 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 22/2/18 | Supervision – meeting with Dr Martin Eubank. Update on progress on Prof Doc, discussed reflection "how to" and meta reflections as an approach to link reflections together and demonstrate/evidence progression. | 1 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 1/3/18 | Supervision – Call with Dr Martin Littlewood, discussed applied scenario related to being asked to deliver workshop on team identity at first team level. Discussed how this might best be done, the potential benefits and disadvantages of that could occur. | 1 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 3/3/18 | Supervision – Dr Martin Littlewood, debrief of team identity workshop. Reflecting on challenges and significant moments. Being prepared key, doing some prior "homework" on the group proved excellent way of showing the group of senior players | 1 | LJMU |

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| | | | a level of respect and demonstrated both high degrees of professionalism and humility. Key personal qualities for effective sport psychologists. | | |
| | LJMU | 13/3/18 | Supervision – Meeting Dr Martin Littlewood, discussing upcoming key note presentation at National Sports Conference Malta. Received feedback on drafts and session plan for workshops with talented athletes in Malta. | 1 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 20/3/18 | CPD – MHFA course at Old Trafford. | 4 | MUFC |
| | LJMU/MUFC | 21/3/18 | CPD – BASES Webinar – Dr Adam Gledhill on Psychology and Injury. | 1 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 22/3/18 | Supervision – Meeting with Dr Martin Littlewood & Dr Mark Nesti. Discussing recent applied experiences, specifically focusing on getting buy-in and engagement from senior staff and athletes who give credibility to your work. | 1 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 21/3/18 | Supervision – Skype meeting with Dr Kristoffer Henriksen and Dr Carsten H Larsen (University of Southern Denmark) – received feedback and critique on working document for research project. Highlighted some methodological issues that I had not been aware of and provided some guidance on writing for publication. | 1 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 22/3/18 | Prof Doc – Session led by Dr Martin Littlewood and supported by Dr Martin Eubank. Session built around the "life cycle" a framework for guiding appropriate level of psychological support – with a | 3 | LJMU |

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| | | | particular focus on delivering organisational psychology support, developing team culture etc. Range of practical activities were used to demonstrate how this work can be carried out in practice. Being uncomfortable, and embracing these moments was discussed as a key factor in practitioner development. ML shared some reflections and applied experiences where uncomfortable moments needed to be confronted in order to "do the job", and doing so provides opportunities to learn and grow as a practitioner. Again practical activity was used to challenge us to be creative and come up with an idea to engage a group/team to discuss a psychology topic – interesting to see how this played out among the group. | | |
| | MUFC | 5/4/18 | MUFC – Multi-disciplinary staff meeting to discuss information sharing to support mental health issues. Meeting with academy Doctor Dr Dave Perry and HoSafeguarding Jane Cooper (HCPC Reg.). Discussing current procedures for referrals and information sharing related to MH issues. I was able to present some literature (Case studies) outlining how the sports psychologist can support medics/clinical psychology work. Key outcomes from meeting were | 2 | LJMU |

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| | | | importance of consistent messaging and transparent communication between stakeholders. Dr Perry to liaise with external service providers (E.G. CAMHS) and feedback relevant information to the necessary stakeholders within the club. | | |
| | LJMU | 10/4/18 | Supervision – Skype meeting with Dr Mark Nesti and Dr Martin Littlewood discussing recent case involving player experiencing homesickness following transition. Directed reading around cultural adjustment models, and migratory transitions research. Emphasis placed on providing holistic support for the individual, making it clear that the focus of the work is on supporting the individual, and performance issues of secondary importance. | 1 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 12/4/18 | Supervision – Meeting with placement supervisor Dr Tony Strudwick discussing plans for next season and contract arrangements for 2018-19 season. | 1 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 16/2/18 | Supervision – phone calls with both Dr Mark Nesti and Dr Martin Littlewood to discuss recent experience where I was approached by a player for support at half time during a game. Discussed my response to this and my reflections on this post-event. | 2 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 19/4/18 | Prof Doc – Session led by Dr Pete Lindsay. Day focused on application of psychology in practice. Specifically | 4 | LJMU |

| | | | focusing on developing performance cultures. Developing a greater understanding of how we "do" sport psychology and how this is influenced by the environments we are in, and also our own individual life constraints can influence or limit our practice. Supervision meeting with Dr Martin Eubank to receive feedback on a reflective account. Feedback positive and identified areas where professional practice literature could be included to strengthen the account. | | |
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| | LJMU | 27/4/18 | Supervision – Meeting Dr Mark Nesti and Dr Martin Littlewood. Focused on use of personality profiling to support applied work in making psychology visible within the organisation. Mock profiling feedback with Martin, his feedback to me was positive, highlighted my confidence and clarity in explaining the profile and its potential uses. Discussed and received feedback on ongoing case supporting player on transition/homesickness issues. Feedback on case so far positive, highlighted congruence between my approach and professional philosophy. | 2 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 30/4/18 | Professional Standards & Ethical Considerations. – Meeting with | 2 | MUFC |

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| | | | Academy Doctor Dr Dave Perry to discuss MDT case conferencing for long term injured players. Discussion focused on sharing of information between practitioners. I suggested that I would look for guidance on HCPC website as the regulator of both physiotherapists and psychologists and feedback my findings to the wider MDT. | | |
| | LJMU | 14/5/18 | Supervision – Meeting with Dr Martin Littlewood to discuss recent case study focused on transition. Discussed the use of cultural adjustment curve to make the work visible and accessible for relatively young client. Discussed presentation for Isokinetic conference in June 2018 focused on Practical Application of Sports Psychology in Professional Football. | 2 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 15/5/18 | Supervision – Meeting workplace supervisor Dr Tony Strudwick receiving feedback on work over the last two years. Feedback positive, advising me to continue to innovate and push the boundaries in developing psychology provision. Reinforced importance of finding the right balance between being ambitious and not "pushing too early" recognising times to be driven and at times patient. | 1 | |
| | LJMU | 17/5/18 | Prof Doc – group session focused on monitoring and evaluation in sports psychology. Discussion focused on | 3 | LJMU |

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| | | | "What" is it we are evaluating, e.g. change in variable, or the process of consultancy, and the "how" discussing pros and cons of different evaluation methods. We discussed the importance of congruence and alignment between philosophy and approach to needs analysis and monitoring and evaluation methods used. | | |
| | | 15/5/18 | Supervision – meeting with Dr Martin Eubank. Meeting focused on submission timeline and structuring submissions to demonstrate competence across the key roles. Also focused on challenges associated with working in professional sport and creating awareness of the role and scope of work for psychologists in sport. | 1 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 16/5/18 | Supervision/Networking – initial contact and discussion with John Marchant (CPsychol, HCPC Reg. Sport Psychologist), former head of sports psychology at the Scottish Institute of Sport to arrange peer support network including myself and others working in professional football. | 2 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 23/5/18 | CPD – Online Conference – Sports Parent EU.<br>Viewed online conference led by Dr Camilla Knight, Prof Chris Harwood, Dr Kristoffer Henriksen and colleagues on how sports psychologists can work with and support parents of talented athletes. | 5 | LJMU/Online |

| | | | http://www.sportparent.eu/ | | |
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| | LJMU | 25/5/18 | Supervision – Morning with Dr Martin Littlewood & Dr Mark Nesti to review progress and recent work. Present latest version of presentation for 2018 Isokinetic Conference in Barcelona. Feedback on presentation highlighted need to make messaging more explicit for audience who may not have the same background in psychology as LJMU colleagues. | 3 | LJMU |
| | FC Barcelona | 2-4/6/18 | CPD – Attending and presenting at 2018 Isokinetic Conference at Camp Nou, Barcelona. Meeting and collaborating with colleagues from LJMU, FC Bayern Munich, FC Copenhagen, Everton FC and The Premier League to discuss approaches to delivering sport psychology in professional sport. | 30 | LJMU/MUFC |
| | LJMU | 22/6/18 | Supervision – Meeting Dr Mark Nesti to reflect on conference experience in Barcelona and discuss collaboration and CPD networking with colleagues working in Germany and Denmark. | 2 | LJMU |
| | LJMU` | 29/6/18 | Supervision – Dr Mark Nesti & Dr Martin Littlewood, meeting to discuss ideas for a potential LJMU Football Exchange Performance Psychology Conference to celebrate 20 years of Science and Football at LJMU. | 2 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 29/6/18 | Prof Doc – joint session with cohort two, the morning session included | 6 | LJMU |

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| | | | brief introductions to peers and feedback from BPS DSEP Mental Health Day. Importance of continuing CPD and personal development key factor in developing a level of competence and confidence in being able to work effectively with a broader remit of work. I also presented an overview of Isokinetic presentation to the group, discussing the development of explanatory transition model for use in applied work. Feedback generally very positive.<br><br>PM session led by Dr Mark Nesti on working with professional teams and athletes. Importance of self awareness, and personal qualities key to success. | | |
| | Warrington | 6/7/18 | Networking CPD – Meeting with John Marchant, CPsychol, HCPC reg., following introduction by Dr Mark Nesti. Discussed work in Olympic and Professional Sports, similarities and differences, supporting athlete wellbeing and mental health and barriers to referral in professional sports. | 3 | Warrington, UK |
| | LJMU | 9/7/18 | Supervision – Dr Martin Littlewood and Prof Zoe Knowles. Meeting to discuss potential conference idea, CPD and professional development for sports psychology professionals. Dissemination of information relevant to applied practitioners | 1.5 | LJMU |

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| | | | highlighted as a key consideration in order to offer something different to a traditional academic conference. | | |
| | LJMU | 16/7/18 | Supervision – Dr Mark Nesti – meeting to discuss progress on prof doc and qualification requirements, set some submission targets. | 1.5 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 21/7/18 | Supervision – Dr Mark Nesti – meeting to discuss ongoing case study, feedback positive and focused on the importance of the service delivered/offered having a level of congruence with the severity of the presenting issues, e.g. a deeply personal issue requires an approach that is respectful of this and able to accommodate the broader concerns that athletes present. | 2 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 21/7/18 | Networking – meeting with Yorkshire CCC staff, head coach, physio and fitness coach, discussions included importance of psychology at senior level that is able to offer value to athletes who already possess proficient psychological skills, staff emphasised importance of recognising that athletes still have challenges that regular members of the public have, *but* must still deliver high level performances. | 2 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 23/7/18 | Networking CPD – Neil Roach (HCPC Reg. Sport Psych). 1.5 hour skype meeting to discuss psychology support for injured players, this is an area Neil has extensive experience. Discussion highlighted importance of | 1.5 | MUFC |

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| | | | a thorough intake in order to ensure key information is not missed or overlooked. | | |
| | MUFC | 26/7/18 | Networking CPD – Dr Fleur-Michelle Hope – HCPC Reg. Clinical Psychologist. Discussed role and scope of sport psychology in working alongside clinical psychologists to support clients. Key message coming from the discussion centred on the importance of open communication between practitioners, each of whom have different skill sets and expertise, but by working together effectively this can enhance the effectiveness of the support available to athletes. | 1.5 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 31/7/18 | Supervision – Meeting with Neil Hough – Head physiotherapist MUFC Academy, discussing psychological responses to injury and role of multi-disciplinary team in providing a holistic support package. | 1 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 24/8/18 | Supervision – Dr Martin Littlewood, meeting to discuss ongoing case study and my approach to managing the case. Feedback from ML highlighted professional responsibility to client is of paramount importance, therefore I could be confident that my approach and actions in managing the case were appropriate and well considered. | 1.5 | LJMU |

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| | MUFC | 26/8/18 | Networking CPD – Neil Roach (HCPC Reg. Sport Psych). 1.5 hour skype meeting to discuss psychology support for injured players, feedback on ongoing case study player demonstrating lack of engagement and autonomy – but also in situation and environment that puts limits on how autonomous and independent athletes/people can be. | 1.5 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 5/9/18 | Supervision – Dr Mark Nesti, meeting to discuss ongoing case study and my approach to managing the case. Feedback from MN centred on my role as practitioner in providing support by demonstrating presence and empathy. This in itself is key to the success of the work when adopting an existential approach to psychology. | 2 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 26/9/18 | Supervision – Dr Martin Littlewood | 2 | LJMU |
| | | 27/9/18 | Prof Doc – Training update and presentations on Professional Development research projects. Joint session with cohort two, opportunities to share reflections and experiences and gain feedback from peers. | 6 | LJMU |
| | St George's Park | 3/10/18 | PFA Mental Health Conference – SGP. "Injured Two". One day conference on mental health in professional football. Presenters included key figures in player care and mental health support from Premier League, The Football League and FA discussing | 7 | MUFC/Private Practice |

| | | | strategies for developing effective support systems to manage mental health issues when they arise.<br><br>Break out work with other delegates discussing case studies and how to respond to acute onset of mental health issue/crisis. Key message centred on need to develop thorough Emergency Action Plan (EAP) to inform decision making. | | |
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| | MUFC | 10/10/18 | Supervision – Dr Mark Nesti, meeting to discuss upcoming CPD presentation to MUFC medical dept. | 1 | LJMU |
| | MUFC/LJMU | 11/10/18 | Supervision – Dr Martin Littlewood, dry run of CPD presentation and feedback. Highlighted need to ensure consistent messaging and clarity around aims of presentation. | 1 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 19/10/18 | Peer Supervision – Christian Luthardt FC Bayern Munich discussing applied practice issues in professional football. Shared resources related to performance profiling across academy age groups. | 1.5 | Private CPD activity. |
| | Liverpool | 25-26/10/18 | ACT Course – Dr Ross White & Dr Ray Owen. | 16 | Private CPD activity. |
| | LJMU | | Supervision – Dr Martin Littlewood & Dr Mark Nesti | 2 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | | Supervision – Neil Roach (HCPC Reg.) | 1 | Private CPD activity. |
| | LJMU | | Supervision – Dr Mark Nesti | 1 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 1/11/18 | Supervision – Dr Martin Littlewood | 1 | LJMU |
| | Skype | | Supervision – Dr Martin Eubank - Skype | 1 | LJMU |

| | Hathersage, Derbyshire | 14-15/11/18 | Spotlight Accreditation Course. – CPD activity led by Dr Pete Lindsay and Dr Tim Pitt. Two day workshop focused on the Spotlight Profiling tool and application in practice. | 16 | Private CPD activity. |
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| | LJMU | 29/11/18 | Prof Doc – Professional Practice focus for the day's sessions with Dr Eubank, Neil Roach and Chris McCready. Interactive role play to stimulate reflection on professional practice skills, approaches including case formulation, monitoring and evaluation. | 6 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 5/12/18 | Supervision – Dr Mark Nesti & Dr Martin Littlewood. | 3 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 5/12/18 | CPD Activity – Academy Performance Dept meeting. Review of department aims and objectives, discussion about my role and achievements in the first half of the season. New areas of work outlined for second half of the season which included mentoring and taking greater responsibility for interns programme and planning for expansion of department next season. | 3 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 17/12/18 | Supervision – Meeting with Dr Mark Nesti, supervision meeting focused on applied case studies, we discussed application of counselling based approach to psychology and the principles that underpin this approach. Challenges to adopting this type of approach in fast paced football setting (Nesti, 2010) were discussed and how this can be | 2 | MUFC |

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| | | | managed through ensuring feedback to client is managed appropriately and regularly. | | |
| | LJMU | 17/12/18 | Supervision – Dr Martin Littlewood, feedback given on how I can demonstrate not only achievements and milestones but the personal qualities and professional skills that I possess. This included reviewing my "Spotlight" personality profile with Dr Littlewood and discussing the information relating to my preferred behavioural style and approach to decision making. | 2 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 10/1/19 | Supervision – Dr Mark Nesti. Meeting at LJMU to discuss prof doc submissions and receive feedback on recent case studies. Discussed critical evaluation of consultancy and the challenges of evaluating counselling approaches to practice.<br><br>Meeting with Dr Martin Littlewood and Dr Nesti to discuss collaborating on projects with Team Denmark, University of Southern Denmark and Erasmus project on mental health in football. | 3 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 10/1/19 | Supervision – Dr Martin Eubank. Discussed submission process and research projects. Collaborating with existing project led by Dr Tom Mitchell at LBU is an option for study 2 of doctorate providing all ethical approval has been granted by LBU. This will be explored further in | 30 minutes | LJMU |

| | | | meeting with Dr Mitchell and Dr Martin Littlewood on 15/1/19. | | |
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| | Private | 22/1/19 | Supervision & CPD – Neil Roach (HCPC). Meeting with Neil Roach to discuss ongoing case study, receive feedback and gain second opinion. Useful questions and discussion around needs analysis and being thorough in this stage. E.G. it is important to ask even simple questions of individual and medical team in this case to double check your information is correct and not merely an assumption. We discussed how this wasn't a reflection of uncertainty or inexperience, but instead demonstrated professionalism and diligence. | 1.5 hours | Manchester, UK |
| | LJMU | 24/1/19 | Supervision – Dr Martin Littlewood, discussion with Martin about current cases and research projects for Professional Doctorate. We also reflected on learnings from FA assessment centre last week and how the feedback can be used constructively to focus my ongoing development needs. For example, it has been identified that a broader range of experiences will be beneficial going forward, including greater managerial and/or strategic work experience going forward. | 1 | Phone. |
| | LJMU | 31/1/19 | Prof Doc – Monthly contact day @LJMU. Meeting with three cohorts of candidates, discussion focused on key learning experiences to date | 6 | LJMU |

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| | | | from candidates. Second session focused on philosophy of practice, theories and approaches and the importance of alignment or "golden thread" running through each in order to ensure practice is congruent and consistent. | | |
| | Liverpool | 19-20/3/19 | ACT Course Intermediate – Dr Ross White & Dr Ray Owen. | 16 | Private CPD activity. |
| | MUFC | 2018-Present | Monthly clinical supervision – Dr Andrew Bethell from Changing Minds UK. | 40 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 2017-Present | Ongoing supervision with Dr Martin Littlewood. | 1 hour per month | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 15-16/11/22 | Supervision and training in motivational interviewing – Dr Stephen Rollnick | 16 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 2/4/23 | Risk Assessment Training. | 3 | MUFC |
| | IMG Academy, FL | 10-11/4/23 | Knowledge exchange visit @ IMG Academy, Florida. Dr Duncan Smith, Dr Greg Young and colleagues from Mental Conditioning team. | 6 | MUFC. |
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| Consultancy | | | | | |
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| Client details | Location | Date(s) | Nature of the activity | Contact Hours | Placement Host details (if applicable) |

| | MUFC | 12-14/6/17 | MUFC – Planning and preparation for 2017-18 season. | 21 | MUFC |
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| | MUFC | 14/6/17 | Workplace Supervisory meeting – Tony Strudwick & Les Parry – discussing role and objectives for new season and research into Talent Development Environments. | 1 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 19-21/6/17 | MUFC – Planning and preparation for 2017-18 season. | 21 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 23/6/17 | MUFC – booked onto Predictive Index course – Meeting with Dom O'Hara LTA, planning tour and tournament activities. | 8 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 26-28/6/17 | MUFC – Planning tour and tournament activities for 2017-8 and developing resources. | 21 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 3-4/7/17 | MUFC - Planning and preparation for 2017-18 season. Pre-season testing U18&23s. | 14 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 6/7/17 | Supervision meeting – Tony Strudwick, Les Parry & Mark Nesti. Overview of training plans. | 1.5 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 7/7/17 | MUFC - Planning and preparation for 2017-18 season. | 7 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 10-14/7/17 | MUFC - Planning and preparation for 2017-18 season. Academy training commencing. Meeting with U13-14 staff group to discuss plans for pre-season. Reviewed tour & tournament plan and evaluation document for performance dept management. – Meeting with NR (coach) to bring together ideas for pre-season psychology work and team building activities. Performance Profiling, goal setting, team building | 28 | MUFC |

| | | | and team values and identity will be key themes. | | |
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| | MUFC | 17/7/2017 | MUFC – Planning activities for upcoming tours and tournaments. | 7 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 21/7/17 | Meeting with workplace supervisors to give feedback on PI course. Specifically, to discuss how best to use the software within the academy. | 3 | MUFC |
| | MUFC - Mount Snowdon | 22/7/17 | MUFC – U12 Snowdon Challenge. Accompanied U12 group walking up and down Snowdon. Fantastic experience for all involved, great opportunity to build rapport with new players and see players experience both a physical and psychological challenge. | 10 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 24-26/7/17 | MUFC – meeting with academy coaches planning practical activity for academy players. Delivered "Medicine Ball Challenge" activity with two groups of academy players to bring psychology to life and make visible for players. Feedback meeting with Tony Strudwick on Wednesday was positive and constructive and provided some thought provoking insights. | 21 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 27/7/17 | MUFC – Spent the day with U12 group, observing training and meeting with coaches. In the afternoon, I led a feedback session on what we had all learnt from climbing Mount Snowdon. This exercise was designed to encourage players to think about their | 7 | MUFC |

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| | | | experience, and how this may have helped them to learn more about themselves – and how these lessons may be transferred to their journey in football. | | |
| | MUFC - Sheffield, UK | 31/7-4/8 | MUFC – Attended Youdan Tournament. Providing psychological support to U14 group – lead group sessions on effective performance evaluations and performance profiling, and conducted 1-2-1 meetings to review player profiles. | 40 | MUFC |
| | MUFC – Shrewsbury School | 9/8/17 | MUFC – Shrewsbury School training camp U12-14  – lead group sessions on effective performance evaluations and performance profiling, players U12/13 completed performance profile as first phase of performance review. | 2 | MUFC |
| | MUFC – Shrewsbury School | 7-9/8/17 | MUFC – Shrewsbury School training camp. Attended training camp to support coaching staff and players. Incident occurred with academy player which was referred on to academy doctor regarding concerns for young person's mental health. See reflection for in depth account. | 24 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 11/8/17 | Safeguarding training and meeting. - Meeting with Jane Cooper (Head of Safeguarding at MUFC Academy) about upcoming Oakham Tournament where I will be tour leader. Refresher of academy safeguarding protocols and outlined my responsibility as safeguarding lead on the tour. Effective | 1.5 | MUFC |

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| | | | communication outlined as key to ensuring safety throughout the tour, remove elements of ambiguity and ensure everyone is clear about when and where things will be happening etc. | | |
| | MUFC | 11-12/8/17 | MUFC – Organising schedules, itineraries and information packs for travelling staff to Oakham Tournament. | 14 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 14/8/17 | MUFC – U15 – lead group sessions on effective performance evaluations and performance profiling, players completed performance profile as first phase of performance review. | | |
| | MUFC – Oakham Tournament | 15-17/8/17 | MUFC – Tour Lead for Oakham Tournament. Different challenge requiring me to effectively lead a group of 22 players and staff. Reflection on this event required me to demonstrate different skill set than I would typically be required to do in my day-to-day role. See reflections for in depth account. Tournament ran smoothly and all players and staff returned safe and well. From performance perspective, I think this type of tournament requires a different skill set from coaches too, the intensity, and turnaround between fixtures is a challenge for all involved. | 32 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 6/9/17 | MUFC – Return from academy break, series of meetings with coaching staff re the programme and timetable going forward. | 8 | MUFC |

| | | | PM – Meeting for all FT academy staff at Old Trafford covering philosophy, values, aims and presentations by department heads outlining how each department contributes to the effective functioning of academy. | | |
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| | MUFC | 7/9/17 | MUFC – Meeting with HA (coach) to discuss how confidence can be developed during practice. We identified the importance of creating an appropriate motivational climate where players are encouraged to take risks, positive feedback and reinforcemet and the use of video footage to provide examples, and evidence of players demonstrating confidence and experiencing success. | 40 mins | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 11/9/17 | MUFC – Meetings with NW (U15) & NR (U16) to recap summer programmes, and discuss how this has gone, individual players discussed with regards to progress. | 1 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 11/9/17 | MUFC – Meeting with KB (U13) to recap summer and discuss current work with U13 group. Discussed changes in my role and programme for the year, and how this will now mean I spend more time working with coaches as opposed to players. | 1 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 12-13/9/17 | MUFC – First week of new programme, spending time around full time boys, observing sessions and supporting coaches in delivering sessions. Aim is to continue to build relationships and rapport with older | 14 | MUFC |

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| | | | boys and the respective coaches with whom I will be working closely with this year. | | |
| | MUFC | 16/9/17 | MUFC – U16 PL Cup vs Arsenal. (L 2-1). Attended U16 game, observed pre-match meeting, the game and post-match debrief. "Too much of sport operates under the tyranny of the result," - Quite an apt statement for this situation. My observations highlighted a gap in knowledge and skill set for planning and delivering team meetings (pre and post match) effectively. Including both the content and delivery (including time and tone) of key messages. | 4 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 18/9/17 | Supervision – meeting with one of workplace supervisors (LP) to discuss observations from weekend, and how this might be approached in non threatening way. Also TS suggested that "show" rather than "tell" approach may be useful. | 1 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 18/9/17 | MUFC – Support coaching sessions, also discussed player progress with NR, he made several referrals and we discussed how we might be able to work together to support individuals.However seemed to be underlying belief that issues could be fixed by offering techniques to player. This remains an area that I must work hard on to challenge some of these beliefs. | 7 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 21-27/9/17 | MUFC – Ongoing dialogue with coaching staff re. Providing support | 36 | MUFC & LJMU |

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| | | | for individual players. Work ongoing with TS to put together and organise visit for guests from University of Southern Denmark to discuss research projects related to Talent Development Environment. Meeting with medical department to discuss ongoing monitoring and support for injured players.<br><br>Also spent time working at home in preparation for joint prof doc session with health psychology group. Prepared selection of photos to update group on recent training activity and case study example from my practice to share with the group to get feedback on. | | |
| | MUFC & EFC | 30/9/17 | MUFC & Supervisor Meeting – Spent the day at Finch Farm (EFC Training Facility) for fixtures between Everton Academy and Manchester United academy. Opportunity to engage with U16/18 teams following referrals for support and observe these players in action.<br>Meeting with Dr Martin Littlewood to discuss recent applied work and challenges in relation to dealing with referrals. | 7 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 2-7/10/17 | MUFC – Delivery of sports psychology provision.<br>Working on Player Review and Assessments,<br>Meetings with age group coaches to | 35 | MUFC |

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| | | | discuss application of psychology into coaching. | | |
| | MUFC | 9-13/10/17 | MUFC – Delivery of Sport Psychology provision, observations and meetings with coaches about player progress and implementing psychology into coaching sessions. Visit from Russel Earnshaw and Peter Walton (England RFU U18 coaches). Discussed coaching and implementing psychology into practices, key take home messages were around creating learning environment that empowers athletes to make decisions and thus implicitly develops important psychosocial skills. Meeting with Performance Dept colleagues discussing and outlining review process for 12-16 academy players. | 35 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 16-17/10/17 | MUFC - Delivery of Sport Psychology provision, observations and meetings with coaches about player progress and implementing psychology into coaching sessions. | 14 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 23-25/10/17 | Talent Development Environment Event – Dr Kristoffer Henriksen, Dr Carsten Larsen over from University of Southern Denmark to share research and practice ideas around talent development practices. KH & CL presented to academy staff their research, and discussed how similar research may conducted to help develop our practices at MUFC. | 16 | MUFC |

| | MUFC | 23/10/17 | MUFC – Academy Enrichment Day – delivered four workshops from CARD model focused on Confidence. Details of sessions can be found on PMA. Workshops with U15, 14, 13 & 12 squads. | 6 | MUFC |
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| | MUFC | 30/10/17 | MUFC – Rest & Review week. Reduced training schedule within academy to allow staff to meet and review players recent progress. Meeting with TS & LP to agree on what player performance reviews would include. Decided that player reviews should be shaped and led by players. Performance Profile Wheels and Individual Goal Setting activities that players had completed throughout pre-season phase would form the basis of the review – coaches to review these and have discussions with players around these documents and current progress. | 1.5 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 30/10/-1/11/17 | MUFC – Rest & Review week. Series of MDT meetings led by each age group lead coach and relevant support staff to discuss individual players and progress. Invited and attended meetings for every age group. This has led to a number of requests for individual support. | 24 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 3-5/11/17 | MUFC – Assessing requests for consultancy received at the back of MDT meetings. Series of meetings | 24 | MUFC |

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| | | | with coaches to request additional information about players and specifics of the requests.<br><br>Developing content for upcoming Enrichment Day focusing on "Accountability & Ownership". | | |
| | MUFC | 7/11/17 | MUFC – Academy Enrichment Day.<br><br>Delivery of four workshops focusing on Accountability & Ownership. Sessions delivered to U13,14,15 &16 age groups. Session details recorded on PMA. Each session involved collaborating with lead coach to incorporate elements of Accountability and Ownership into practical session. | 8 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 8-10/11/17 | MUFC - Delivery of Sport Psychology provision, observations and meetings with coaches about player progress and implementing psychology into coaching sessions.<br><br>Meeting with TS & MF to discuss psychological profiling. TS requested additional profiling information on all PDP (U18-23) and MANUSS (FT academy) players. This has come from board who are wanting extra information on player potential before making financial commitments. Produced mock PP to TS for approval – Example can be submitted as part of portfolio. | 24 | MUFC |

| | MUFC | 13-15/11/17 | MUFC - MUFC - Delivery of Sport Psychology provision, observations and meetings with coaches about player progress and implementing psychology into coaching sessions. Meeting Jane Cooper to discuss ethics and consent for conducting Psychological Profiling with U16 players. Mentoring of HA to complete AYA coursework on developing psychological skills through coaching. | 24 | MUFC |
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| | MUFC | 17-18/11/17 | MUFC – U18 Personal Development workshop delivery with CMc (Player Care). Collected PI profiles from U16 players. Academy fixtures vs Manchester City. | 16 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 21-22/11/17 | MUFC - Delivery of Sport Psychology provision, observations and meetings with coaches about player progress and implementing psychology into coaching sessions. – Also conducted further PI profiling with U16 squad, and prepared for and gave feedback on profiles. | 16 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 25/11/17 | MUFC – Psychological Profiling Info summarised and collated for Senior Management at the club in preparation for contract decisions – See reflections on this. | 8 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 27-29/11/17 | MUFC - Delivery of Sport Psychology provision, observations and meetings with coaches about player progress | 24 | MUFC |

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| | | | and implementing psychology into coaching sessions | | |
| | MUFC | 1-3/12/17 | MUFC - Delivery of Sport Psychology provision, observations and meetings with coaches about player progress and implementing psychology into coaching sessions. Meetings with individual players. | 24 | MUFC |
| | Saudi Footballer | 5/12/17 | Individual Client – Saudi international football request for consultancy and initial meeting. Decision made not to take on this request for ongoing support due to language barriers – See reflections for further info. | 1.5 | Manchester, UK |
| | MUFC | 5-6/12/17 | MUFC – Individual meetings with age group coaches to recap on accountability theme and how this is being applied in their practice. Assessing requests for consultancy from medical team. | 16 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 13/12/17 | MUFC – Loan player "Back to Base" Day. Conducted 1-2-1 interviews with loan players, notes from interviews to be used to provide feedback to LP to inform how we best support loan players. – All players made aware of this prior to interview and assured feedback would be at thematic level and anonymous. | 10 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 14-16/12/17 | MUFC – Loan player "Back to Base" Day. Conducting thematic analysis of notes from interviews and writing up feedback for Performance Dept Management. | 10 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 18-20/12/17 | MUFC – Academy Rest & Review. | 24 | MUFC |

| | | | Series of MDT meetings led by each age group lead coach and relevant support staff to discuss individual players and progress. Invited and attended meetings for every age group. Preparation for PDP Psychological Profiling. Meeting with TS & MF to decide on measures used, and then create online forms to collect data. | | |
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| | MUFC | 20-23/12/17 | MUFC – Profiling PDP players, data collection and analysis of SOC Scale, SMTQ psychometrics. U17 fixture vs Birmingham City. | 24 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 2-6/1/18 | MUFC – Completing loan "Back to Base" report for LP. Working on U15 individual learning plans in prep for players returning from Xmas break and planning workshops on Resilience for Enrichment Day w/c 8/1/18. | 36 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 8-12/1/18 | MUFC – Supporting coaching staff to design sessions, completing observation of individual player following referral from coaching staff, planning and preparing for 5x resilience workshops for Enrichment Day. Delivered workshops on Resilience for U12, 13, 14, 15, 16 age groups. | 36 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 13/1/18 | MUFC – Travel and attend fixtures away at Sunderland. Observations of selected U16 and MANUSS players. | 8 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 15-20/1/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. 1-2-1 | 36 | MUFC |

| | | | consultancy with individual players, and work with coaches on planning holistic ecological approach work with teams. Supporting coach session planning and travel and observation of academy fixtures. | | |
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| | MUFC | 22-27/1/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. 1-2-1 consultancy with individual players to support rehab and return to play. Working with coaches to plan and deliver holistic ecological interventions to support player development. Meetings with education and welfare departments to plan parent education delivery. | 36 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 29/1-3/2/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Providing 1-2-1 consultancy with individual players to support rehab and RTP. Working with coaches to plan and deliver holistic ecological interventions to support player development. Planned and delivered parent engagement workshop for U15 & 16 parents. Provided overview of my role and the psychology provision that is in place, engaged in critical debate around parent role in supporting talent development. | 40 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 5-10/2/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Providing 1-2-1 consultancy with individual players to support rehab and RTP. Working with coaches to plan and deliver | 40 | MUFC |

| | | | holistic ecological interventions to support player development. Review and feedback from parent engagement sessions taking place. Planning group sessions for next week enrichment evenings. U15 Fixture away at Manchester City Wednesday evening. | | |
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| | MUFC | 14/2/18 | LJMU – Lecture for MSc Sport Psychology programme. Discussing professional practice, demonstrating your effectiveness, working with youth athletes and challenges encountered in professional football. | 2 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 15-16/2/18 | MUFC - Delivery of psychology provision. MDT meetings with medical team to provide updates on progress of injured players. | 10 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 19-24/2/18 | MUFC - Delivery of psychology provision. MDT meetings with lead coaches and support staff at each age group. Review meetings following case conference style, discussed progress of individual players, a number of requests for individual player support received. These will be followed up individually with the lead coaches. | 36 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 26/2-3/3/18 | MUFC – Delivery of psychology provision. U12 MDT meeting to discuss player progress. Planning for enrichment day involved meeting with age group coaches to get input on topics to be covered and meeting with CMc (Player Care) to ensure psychology and personal | 30 | MUFC |

| | | | development workshops deliver complimentary and consistent messages. | | |
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| | MUFC | 5-10/3/18 | MUFC – Delivery of psychology provision. Supporting coaching staff to create conditions that develop psychological skills inline with academy psychology strategy. Following referrals from MDT meetings, discussions with coaches were organised to discuss how we could work together to address the issues raised. | 36 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 10-12/3/18 | Consultancy – planning 2x workshops for talented athletes at National Sports School Malta and 50minute keynote presentation titled "Creating Conditions for Talent to Flourish". | 16 | Home |
| | MUFC | 12-14/3/18 | MUFC  - Delivery of Psychology provision. Providing individual consultancy support to players. Supporting coaches to plan, do and review activities to develop psychological skills in practice. | 16 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 15-17/3/18 | Consultancy – National Sports School Malta – Delivered 2x workshops to talented athletes focusing on "Sports Journey". And delivery of keynote presentation at National Sports School Conference. | 18 | Malta |
| | MUFC | 19-21/3/18 | MUFC – Delivery of Psychology Provision. Providing individual consultancy support to players. Supporting coaches to plan, do and review activities to develop psychological skills in practice. | 18 | MUFC |

| | | | Attended MHFA course at Old Trafford and BASES webinar. | | |
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| | MUFC | 26-31/3/18 | MUFC  - Delivery of Psychology provision. Providing individual consultancy support to players. Supporting coaches to plan, do and review activities to develop psychological skills in practice. Individual work with injured players supporting RTP. **See reflection.** | 38 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 3-7/4/18 | MUFC  - Delivery of Psychology provision. Providing individual consultancy support to players. Supporting coaches to plan, do and review activities to develop psychological skills in practice. Planned and delivered 4x educational workshops based on psychology strategy alongside CMc (Player Care). Referral and meetings with H of Safeguarding Jane Cooper to discuss transition related work with an academy player. Meeting Dr Perry, JC and parents of KMS to discuss progress following mental health issues. Parents happy for us to liaise with external service providers to ensure we are able to complement the support he is receiving outside of the academy. | 38 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 9-14/4/18 | MUFC – Delivery of psychology provision. Providing individual consultancy support to players. | 36 | MUFC |

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| | | | Supporting coaches to plan, do and review activities to develop psychological skills in practice.<br><br>Specifically, assessing requests for consultancy and doing intake with individuals referred for psychology support. Referrals included, individuals experiencing homesickness, individuals experiencing illness and individuals adjusting to diagnosis of illnesses in addition to players self-referring for performance support.<br><br>5x MDT meetings to discuss player progress and progression. Number of additional requests for support received. | | |
| | MUFC | 14/4/18 | MUFC – Supporting team on match day. Provided brief contact intervention for athlete who requested support during HT of a game. | 4 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 16-21/4/18 | MUFC – Delivery of psychology provision. Providing individual consultancy support to players. Supporting coaches to plan, do and review activities to develop psychological skills in practice.<br><br>Providing 1-2-1 consultancy for selected players. Ongoing cases supporting transition adjustment and anxiety. | 38 | MUFC |

| | MUFC | 23-28/4/18 | MUFC – Delivery of psychology provision. Providing individual consultancy support to players. Supporting coaches to plan, do and review activities to develop psychological skills in practice.<br><br>Providing 1-2-1 consultancy for selected players. Ongoing cases supporting transition adjustment and anxiety.<br><br>Working on proposal for MDT support for injured players. Stakeholder meetings with allied practitioners to get input from respective disciplines on how this might look. Draft document produced and passed onto Dr Perry (Academy doctor for feedback). | 38 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 30/4-4/5/18 | MUFC – Delivery of psychology provision. Providing individual consultancy support to players. Supporting coaches to plan, do and review activities to develop psychological skills in practice.<br><br>Providing 1-2-1 consultancy for selected players. Ongoing cases supporting transition adjustment and anxiety.<br><br>Working on proposal for MDT support for injured players. Preparation for and attendance at MDT meetings to "handover" players | 36 | MUFC |

| | | | to next age groups. Presented working document and guidelines for confidentiality between practitioners. | | |
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| | MUFC | 7-11/5/18 | MUFC – Delivery of psychology provision. Providing individual consultancy support to players. Supporting coaches to plan, do and review activities to develop psychological skills in practice.<br><br>Providing 1-2-1 consultancy for selected players. Ongoing cases supporting transition adjustment and anxiety.<br><br>Parental engagement programme. Prepared and presented to academy parents on topic of transition. Cultural Adjustment Curve adapted into football specific model outlining potential phases during transition for schoolboy to full time player. | 36 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 14-19/5/18 | MUFC – Delivery of psychology provision. Providing individual consultancy support to players. Supporting coaches to plan, do and review activities to develop psychological skills in practice.<br><br>Providing 1-2-1 consultancy for selected players. Ongoing cases supporting transition adjustment and anxiety. | 38 | MUFC |

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| | | | Preparation for MDT meetings, collating information to feedback to wider MDT team. | | |
| | MUFC | 21-25/5/18 | MUFC – Delivery of psychology provision. End of Season MDT review meetings. Flow of work for pre-season and potential new cases received. Requests will be assessed after follow up meeting with individual coaches to gain further information. | 36 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 18-24/6/18 | MUFC – Delivery of psychology provision. Close season work, included completing end of season report for academy management team. Evaluation processes included review of documentation produced throughout the season, referring back to psychology strategy objectives and KPIs. Feedback from colleagues and players used to inform evaluation and end of season report.<br><br>Ongoing work preparing 2018 19 strategy and seasonal plan. Consultation with colleagues at the club to inform on going development of strategy. | 36 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 26-29/6/18 | MUFC - Ongoing work preparing 2018 19 strategy and seasonal plan. Consultation with colleagues at the club to inform on going development of strategy. | 25 | MUFC |

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| | | | Series of meetings with new Head of Performance Support to discuss role and provision for new season. Focus on agreeing on expectations and outlining success factors for the role. Performance Support placement students induction day, this involved meeting with students to discuss their involvement over the coming season and discuss expectations around their involvement. | | |
| | MUFC | 2-5/7/18 | MUFC – Delivery of MUFC psychology provision. Profiling of all U18 & 23 players in conjunction with wider medical and sports science teams. Players completed Predictive Index behavioural assessment as part of holistic performance profiling.<br><br>U15/16 players return for pre-season training. Prepared handover information for new coaching staff, basic info such as name, date of birth, positions played added to document to support new coaching team. | 35 | MUFC |
| | FEx | 9/7/18 | FEx- Performance Psychology Conference 2019. Meeting with planning committee to discuss ideas, timeline and actions moving forward. | 1.5 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 10-14/7/18 | MUFC – review of PI assessments completed by u18 & u23 players. Key information collated into working document for HoPS with recommendations for further review for profiles that show strongly | 30 | MUFC |

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| | | | expressed needs over the four drives.<br><br>U15/16 MANUSS programme support. Meeting with boys to discuss support provisions in place at the club.<br><br>Continuation of preparation for academy summit in Hong Kong in August 2018. Meetings to discuss activities, risk assessments and projects for players and staff to engage in to support holistic development of players. | | |
| | MUFC | 16-21/7/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy teams.<br><br>1-2-1 consultancy with U18/16 academy players. Following up on individual development plans from 2017 18 season.<br><br>Tour planning for upcoming Hong Kong tour, risk assessments and scheduling of activities ongoing with support from wider academy staff. | 38 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 23-27/7/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy teams.<br><br>1-2-1 consultancy with U18/16 academy players. Following up on | 35 | MUFC |

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| | | | individual development plans from 2017 18 season.<br><br>Ongoing discussion with Academy management team to discuss processes for supporting concerns with player wellbeing and "sub-clinical" mental health concerns. Provided feedback on BPS DSEP Mental Health day to provide information on the current landscape in relation to supporting mental health in sport and exercise psychology. | | |
| | MUFC | 2/8/18 | MUFC – MDT meeting called by Dr Perry to discuss concerns over long term injured player. Medical, Safeguarding, Education, Player Care and Psychology staff present. | | |
| | MUFC | 4-7/8/18 | MUFC – U15/16 pre-season training camp at Lilleshall National Sports Centre. Delivered team identity and team building workshop and activities during the training camp.<br><br>Supported coaches and support staff during training.<br><br>Providing proactive and re-active 1-2-1 support for players on tour.<br><br>Feedback report sent to Academy Operations Manager. | 28 | | MUFC |

| | MUFC | 11-19/8/18 | MUFC – Hong Kong Jockey Club Academy Summit, Hong Kong. U15/16.<br><br>1-2-1 consultancy with U18/16 academy players.<br><br>Personal and Leadership development lead during tour to Hong Kong. Included planning, leading and evaluating leadership and development activities throughout the tour. | 60 | HKJC & HKSI |
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| | MUFC | 22-25/8/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy teams.<br><br>1-2-1 consultancy with U18/16 academy players.<br><br>Meeting with Dr Dave Perry to discuss potential mental health related concerns. | 28 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 27-30/8/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy teams.<br><br>De-brief and tour evaluation meeting with Hong Kong tour staff to identify key experiences to keep and areas for improvement for future tours.<br><br>U16 Staff meeting to discuss roles and input with new head coach. Each | .20 | MUFC |

| | | | department member given opportunity to outline their role and how this can be utilised best throughout the season.

Ongoing 1-2-1 consultancy with individual players. | | |
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| | MUFC | 3-8/9/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy teams.

121 psychology support for select individuals. Meetings with coaches to discuss provision and support throughout the season.

Parent meetings. All support staff introduced to age group parents | 36 | | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 10-15/9/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy teams.

MDT Review week. All age group staff meeting to discuss player progress and identify areas for additional support.

Appointed as Wellbeing Coordinator for U12s group, involved logging issues and convening appropriate staff groups to meet when concerns about player wellbeing are raised.

Enrichment Day – 3x educational | 40 | | MUFC |

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| | | | workshops planned and delivered. Introduction/Re-introduction to Performance Psychology & Goal Setting/Action Planning focus in workshop. | | |
| | MUFC | 17-18/9/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy teams.<br><br>U15/16 Enrichment Workshops – 2x educational workshops planned and delivered. Introduction/Re-introduction to Performance Psychology & Goal Setting/Action Planning. | 16 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 24-29/9/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy teams.<br><br>Reviewing referrals from MDT review meetings, where appropriate follow up meetings arranged with coaching staff and/or individual players.<br><br>121 psychology support for select individuals. Meetings with coaches to discuss provision and support throughout the season. | 40 | MUFC |
| | Warrington, UK | 25/9/18 | Private Practice – Initial meeting with LM (Golf), fifteen year old female golf player and her dad. Discussed my approach to practice, ethics, boundaries and confidentiality. Some | 1.5 | Private Practice |

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| | | | initial exploration of why psychology support was being sought out. | | |
| | WWRLFC | 27/9/18 | Private Practice – Meeting with Head of Performance at Warrington Wolves to discuss potential consultancy opportunity to provide psychology support to the academy teams. This involved outlining some of my previous experience in professional sport, and discussing my professional philosophy and approach to practice – specifically about the importance of the environment and its influence on development and performance. Follow up meeting arranged with Head of Youth the following week. | 1.5 | Private Practice |
| | MUFC | 1-6/10/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy teams.<br><br>Reviewing referrals from MDT review meetings, where appropriate follow up meetings arranged with coaching staff and/or individual players.<br><br>121 psychology support for select individuals. | 40 | MUFC |
| | WWRLFC | 1/10/18 | WWRLFC – Meeting with Head of Youth to discuss potential support for academy teams. Discussed my approach to practice, what WWRLFC were looking for in a psychology provision and how this might be achieved. Positive messages | 1.5 | WWRLFC |

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| | | | throughout the meeting where I was invited to join the performance team subject to further contracting discussions. | | |
| | Warrington, UK, Private Practice | 4/10/18 | Private Practice – Intake meeting with LM (Golf), discussing client background and history, key events, milestones and achievements. Clarifying goals for support. | 1.5 | Private Practice |
| | MUFC | 8-12/10/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams.<br><br>121 psychology support for select individuals. | 40 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 11/10/18 | LJMU – guest lecture on ASP programme at LJMU discussing importance of placement experiences for developing craft knowledge and skills. | 2 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 15-20/10/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams.<br><br>121 psychology support for select individuals.<br><br>Health & Safety and Risk Assessment training completed. In-house safeguarding training completed (2 hours) at Old Trafford. | 40 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 22-24/10/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending | 24 | MUFC |

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| | | | training and games to support academy players and teams.<br><br>121 psychology support for select individuals.<br><br>In-house safeguarding training completed (2 hours) at Old Trafford. | | |
| | MUFC | 29/10-3/11/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams.<br><br>Rest and review week – MDT review meetings for all academy age groups to devise individual action plans.<br><br>121 psychology support for select individuals.<br><br>Planning and delivery of academy Enrichment workshops focused on controlling the controllables. (U12-14 Workshops) | 40 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 5-10/11/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams.<br><br>Rest and review week – MDT review meetings for all academy age groups to devise individual action plans.<br><br>121 psychology support for select individuals. | 40 | MUFC |

| | | | Planning and delivery of academy Enrichment workshops focused on controlling the controllables (U15 & 16 workshops). | | |
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| | MUFC | 12-13/11/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams.<br><br>Academy wellbeing meetings to discuss individual cases with wider medical and safeguarding colleagues. | 16 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 16-17/11/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams. | 16 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 19-24/11/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams.<br><br>Individual support sessions for PDP players. Delivered parent engagement workshop to age group parents to update on current support provisions available.<br><br>Multi-disciplinary case conferencing meeting held to discuss support provision for player who will be joining the club in the coming weeks, who since signing has experienced a significant injury. Psychology, Medical, Player Care, Safeguarding and Player Liaison staff present. | 42 | MUFC |

| | | | MANUSS specific parent workshops. | | |
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| | MUFC | 26/11-1/12/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams. | 40 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 3-8/12/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams.<br><br>Meeting with academy management to discuss future development of psychology provision within the academy. | 40 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 10-12/12/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams.<br><br>Attended MANUSS social event and personal development event to continue data collection for ATDE research project. | 24 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 17-22/12/18 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams.<br><br>Rest and review week, preparation for and attending MDT review meetings for academy age groups. Requests for consultancy from coaches to be reviewed. | 40 | MUFC |

| | MUFC | 2-4/1/19 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Reviewing requests for consultancy following December MDT meetings.<br><br>Planning and preparation for players returning from Christmas break. This involved planning for individual consultancy and group delivery on upcoming Enrichment day. | 24 | MUFC |
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| | MUFC | 7-12/1/19 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams.<br><br>Meeting with KB (U14) to discuss requests/referrals at his age group.<br><br>Individual consultancy and planning for enrichment day.<br><br>5x workshops planned and delivered inline with academy psychology strategy. Focus of the workshops was on effective evaluation. A tiered approach was taken to designing the sessions, with progressively more challenging learning outcomes developed through the academy age groups to reflect developmental and age appropriate differences. | 40 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 14-16/1/19 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending | 24 | MUFC |

| | | | training and games to support academy players and teams. | | |
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| | Private Consultancy | 17/1/19 | The FA – Assessment Day for Senior People & Team Development Role (Performance Psychology) @ The FA. Three tasks were a team facilitation task focused on performance evaluation, 1-2-1 coaching with goalkeeping coach and lifeline presentation to discuss key learning experiences to date. Critical reflection on this experience in reflective diary. | 5 | St Georges Park, Burton |
| | MUFC | 18-19/1/19 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams. | 12 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 21-23/1/19 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams.<br><br>Meeting with Neil Roach 22/1 to discuss ongoing case, formulation and gain second opinion from Sport & Exercise Psychologist with experience in supporting injured athletes.<br><br>Ongoing case with medical department required follow up meeting with Dr Perry to gain further relevant information about the | 24 | MUFC |

| | | | medical tests that have been carried out with the player thus far. | | |
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| | Private Consultancy | 24/1/19 | Yorkshire County Cricket Club – Meeting with Richard Damms (Head of Academy) and Sport Psychologist Dr Mark Nesti to discuss potential provision for academy programme. Positive outcome to the meeting, Richard has asked me to work on a proposal for the provision. | 3 | Headingley, Leeds |
| | MUFC | 28-30/1/19 | MUFC – Delivery of academy psychology provision. Attending training and games to support academy players and teams.<br><br>Parent Engagement programme resumed, prepared and delivered two sessions for academy foundation phase (U9-11) parents. Sessions provided an overview of performance psychology provision through the academy pathway and some discussion and guidance around www.sportparent.eu resources. | 24 | MUFC |
| | Manchester | 31/3/2019 - Present | Sale Sharks – ongoing consultancy for Sale Sharks. Time limited consultancy role supporting academy manager and management team, Senior mens team players and director of Rugby. Recruited Sport Psychologist to support Sale Sharks Womens team. | 1 x day per month | Sale Sharks |

| | | | **Research** | | |
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| **Client details** | **Location** | **Date(s)** | **Nature of the activity** | **Contact Hours** | **Placement Host details (if applicable)** |
| | LJMU | 22/6/17 | Prof Doc – Research & Systematic Review day. | 5 | LJMU |
| | Travelling | 29-30/6/17 | Reading – Kristoffer Henriksen PhD thesis, Henriksen et al. (2013) paper, Larsen et al. (2017) philosophy paper – reading in preparation for DSportExPsy research projects. | 10 | |
| | Home | 29/9/17 | Research Activity – working on systematic review project. | 8 | Home |
| | Home | 19/10/17 | Prof Doc – working from home on reflections and planning for study one. Supervision - 1 hour phone call with Dr Mark Nesti to discuss recent activity. | 8 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 23-25/10/17 | Talent Development Environment Event – Dr Kristoffer Henriksen, Dr Carsten Larsen over from University of Southern Denmark to share research and practice ideas around talent development practices. KH & CL presented to academy staff their research, and discussed how similar research may conducted to help develop our practices at MUFC. | 16 | MUFC |
| | Home | 28-29/10/17 | Further reading of K Henriksen and C Larsen research in preparation for Study 1. Re-reading various chapters from both authors PhD Theses and associated publications. Henriksen *et* | 20 | LJMU |

| | | | al. 2010, 2011a, 2011b, Larsen *et al.* 2012, 2013. | | |
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| | Home | 4-6/11/17 | Working on research proposal to submit to TS and research team. Meeting to discuss project with Dr Nesti. | 24 | LJMU |
| | Home | 24-26/11/17 | Final Draft of proposal completed and submitted to Tony Strudwick, Dr Mark Nesti & Dr Martin Littlewood for comment and feedback. | 24 | LJMU |
| | Home | 7/12/17 | Call with Dr K Henriksen to discuss research proposal and receive feedback on project from external advisor. | 2 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 14/12/17 | Research meeting with Dr Tony Strudwick, Dr Mark Nesti to discuss details of project, agree on timeline and likely participants. | 1 | MUFC/LJMU |
| | Home | 18-19/12/17 | Reading wider talent development research in preparation for ethics proposal and literature review. Work of Martindale *et al. (*2005, 2007), Stambulova & Alfermann (2007), Collins, Macnamara & McCarthy (2016), Collins & Macmamara (2017), Gledhill *et al.* (2017) and others. | 14 | LJMU |
| | Home | 23/12/17 | Writing up draft of ethics proposal to submit to Dr Mark Nesti and LJMU research ethics committee. | 7 | LJMU |
| | Home | 28-31/12/17 | Writing up and completing first draft of literature review and ethics application for Study1. | 28 | LJMU |
| | Home | 5 & 6/1/17 | Writing up and completing first draft of literature review and ethics application for Study1. – Reading Chapters from Smith & Sparkes | 14 | Home. |

| | | | (2016) Qual. Research in Sport & Ex. Book. | | |
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| | LJMU | 7/1/18 | CPD – Meeting with Dr Kristoffer Henriksen (University of Southern Denmark) to discuss using ATDE & ESF modes (Henriksen, 2010) in research. | 1 | Marriott Hotel, Liverpool. |
| | LJMU | 11/1/18 | LJMU – Writing methods sections of research and ethics application. | 4 | LJMU |
| | Home | 18/1/18 | LJMU – Working on Prof Doc research, and research meeting with Niels Feddersen (LJMU PhD Student) to discuss research methods and data collection. | 8 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 25/1/18 | LJMU – Writing research methods sections. | 2 | LJMU. |
| | LJMU | 31/1/18 | LJMU – Continuation of methods writing and reading around this topic. | 3 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 6/2/18 | LJMU – Completing write up of ethics application and research proposal. | 8 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 12/2/18 | LJMU – Revisions to application following feedback from Dr Mark Nesti. | 4 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 19/2/18 | LJMU – Final ethics application submitted for review. | 1 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 24/2/18 | LJMU – Research project introduction and methods sent to Dr K Henriksen and Dr C Larsen for feedback. Document edited to conform to publication format. | 2 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 19-25/3/18 | LJMU – Research ethics application amendments and re-submission. Feedback highlighted some concerns | 12 | LJMU |

| | | | regarding insider status, number of papers used to guide amendments. | | |
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| | MUFC | 12/4/18 | MUFC – Meeting to discuss research proposal to explore "playing up and down age groups". Early discussions outlined areas of interest may be, the decision making process, stakeholder perceptions and players experiences. | 1 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 16/4/18 | LJMU – ATDE ethics application approved. | - | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 24/4/18 | Data collection started. Observations of MANUSS training and first interviews scheduled. | 8 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 8-10/5/18 | Interviews and observations conducted for ATDE research. | 4 | LJMU/MUFC |
| | MUFC | 18/6/18 | Interviews and observations conducted for ATDE research. | 4 | LJMU/MUFC |
| | LJMU | 28/6/18 | Supervision – Meeting with Dr David Tod to discuss SLR (Meta-Study) procedures. Feedback highlighted importance of developing a strong research question as this informs the research strategy and methods for the review. | 1 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 28/6/18 | SLR – Data search, extraction and preliminary review of returned papers. Forward and backward searches of reference lists and citations of key papers to identify further papers.<br><br>Inclusion and exclusion criteria applied to returned papers to identify suitable research papers for review. | 4 | LJMU |

| | HKJC | 11-18/8/18 | ATDE – Observations of Academy Summit tour. | 60 | MUFC |
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| | HKJC | 15/8/18 | ATDE – Interviews 2x MANUSS players | 4 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 4/9/18 | ATDE – Interviews with MANUSS players. | 4 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 14-19/9/18 | ATDE – Observations of MANUSS inductions and training. | 35 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 8/10/18 | Transition Paper – Meeting with Nick Wadsworth & Rob Morris to discuss submission of research paper to Sport in Society Special Issue, | 2 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 16/10/18-07/3/20 | ATDE – Observations of MANUSS activity and training. | 300 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 10-12/12/19 | ATDE – Observations of MANUSS activity at BUSINESS – project designed to give boys insight into how business environment operates and create awareness of transferrable skills. Session with MD of the company on importance of goal setting. | 3 | MUFC |
| | Liverpool LJMU | 15/1/20 | Research Meeting - @Finch Farm, Dr Martin Littlewood, Dr Tom Mitchell, DR & Lewis Charnock. Discussing research project exploring player perceptions of TDE. Discussed use of TDEQ-5 as tool to collect data, including pros and cons. Next steps on process, to arrange meeting with Nick Cox to discuss potential participation of MUFC in wider research programme. | 2 | Liverpool |
| | Manchester | 31/3/20-1/12/21 | SLR Research activity and writing up. Period spent focusing on SLR | | NA |

| Client details | Location | Date(s) | Nature of the activity | Contact Hours | Placement Host details (if applicable) |
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| | | | research. Ongoing supervision from Dr Martin Eubank. | | |
| | Manchester | 04/1/22-30/5/22 | Empirical Paper 1 writing. | | |
| | Manchester | 01/09/22-01/6/23 | Empirical Paper 2 writing. | | |

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| | | | **Dissemination** | | |
| **Client details** | **Location** | **Date(s)** | **Nature of the activity** | **Contact Hours** | **Placement Host details (if applicable)** |
| | Bayer Leverkusen | 30/6-1/7/17 | Bayer 04 Campus visit – CPD. – Conference style event around performance and development hosted by Bayer Leverkusen. Participated in panel discussions on doing Sport Psychology in Professional football with colleagues from Bayer Leverkusen, Celtic FC. Also participated in series of roundtable discussions with aforementioned colleagues and director of Performance at Cirque du Soleil and Performance Coach from Yorkshire CCC. | 16 | |
| | LJMU | 14/9/17 | Presentation and questions from peers on use of Metaphor in Sport Psychology Counselling. | 0.5 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 28/9/17 | Planned and delivered brief presentation to DSportExPsy and DHealthPsy peers to update on recent research and applied practice activity. | 1 | LJMU |

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| | LJMU | 30/10/17 | LJMU Lecture – L6 Science & Football lecture focusing on Doing Sport Psychology. | 2 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 25/11/17 | MUFC – Psychological Profiling Info summarised and collated for Senior Management at the club in preparation for contract decisions – See reflections on this. | 8 | MUFC |
| | Etihad Stadium | 30/11/17 | UCFB – Guest Lecture at UCFB Etihad Campus on delivering Sport Psychology in Prof Football. Focus on applied skills and development as practitioner. | 2 | UCFB |
| | LJMU | 30/11/17 | LJMU – Keynote lecture for UG programmes titled: "From LJMU to the biggest football club in the world: What does it look like?" Slides available for portfolio. | 1.5 | LJMU |
| | LJMU | 4/12/17 | LJMU – Guest lecture Science & Football L6. Organisational Culture in Professional Football. | 2 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 3/1/18 | MUFC – Produced performance profiling report to give feedback on psychometric testing. | 6 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 12/1/1/8 | MUFC – Enrichment Day, 5 x workshops with academy age groups on resilience. | 7 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 15/1/18 | Isokinetic Medical Conference – writing and submission of abstract to present in Barcelona June '18. Write and submit abstract for keynote presentation in Malta at National Sports Conference March '18. | 4 | LJMU |

| | MUFC | 24/1/18 | MUFC – created feedback report for individual player and followed this up by meeting with player to discuss the feedback. | 2 | LJMU |
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| | MUFC | 3/2/18 | MUFC – Delivered and facilitated parent engagement workshop. Provided overview of my role and facilitated some discussion amongst parents on parent role in TD. | 1 | MUFC Aon |
| | MUFC | 12/2/18 | MUFC – Enrichment Evening during half term programme. Planned and delivered two workshops to recap resilience block. Involved practical activity with medicine balls and debrief recapping features of resilience, sources of support to develop resilience and key skills for resilience. | 2 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 14/2/18 | LJMU – Lecture for MSc Sport Psychology programme. Discussing professional practice, demonstrating your effectiveness, working with youth athletes and challenges encountered in professional football. | 2 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 14/2/18 | MUFC – U9 Academy Induction. Prepared and presented overview of my role and psychology provision for parents of incoming academy players. | 1 | MUFC |
| | NSS Malta | 15/3/18 | Consultancy NSS Malta – 2 x workshops delivered to sports scholars at the NSS. Workshops titled "The Sports Journey" – activities included identifying features and milestones that may form part of the sports journey, and identifying | 3 | NSS Malta |

| | | | resources, barriers and key skills that will be needed throughout the journey. | | |
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| , | NSS Malta | 16/3/18 | NSS Conference "Preparing Student Athletes for Transition". Keynote presentation titled "Creating Conditions for Talent to Flourish". Informed by ATDE and ecological psychology theory and research, presentation discussed the environmental and cultural factors that underpin successful talent development. Other speakers included Dr Adele Muscat (Sport Psychologist) & Mr Joseph Acquilani (Counselling Psychologist). | 6 | Radisson Blu Hotel, St Julian's, Malta. |
| | MUFC | 4-5/4/18 | MUFC – Enrichment Day – Educational Workshops. Continuation of resilience theme – workshops recapped the concepts and identified key resources for resilience. | 5 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 20/4/18 | MUFC – Enrichment Day – Educational workshops with focus on summarizing CARD topics covered across the season to date. 4x workshops 12, 13,14,15. | 5 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 30/4/18 | MUFC – Presented feedback on HCPC confidentiality guidelines to wider academy sports science and medicine colleagues in preparation for player handover meetings. | 1 | MUFC |
| | MUFC | 10/5/18 | MUFC – Presented to parents on supporting players through transition. Positive feedback from | 1 | MUFC |

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| | | | parents related to raising awareness of likely phases players could go through. | | |
| | FC Barcelona | 4/6/18 | Isokinetic Conference 2018. Presentation titled : "Delivering Sports Psychology for Performance *and* Wellbeing" at worlds largest sports medicine and science conference. | 1 | LJMU/MUFC |
| | LJMU | 9/7/18 | FEx – Conference planning meeting Dr Martin Littlewood & Dr Zoe Knowles to discuss Performance Psychology Conference in 2019. | 1.5 | LJMU |
| | MUFC | 24/7/18 | MUFC - Ongoing discussion with Academy management team to discuss processes for supporting concerns with player wellbeing and "sub-clinical" mental health concerns. Provided feedback on BPS DSEP Mental Health day to provide information on the current landscape in relation to supporting mental health in sport and exercise psychology. | 1.5 | MUFC |
| | HKJC/MUFC` | 16/8/18 | MUFC – Presentation at Hong Kong Jockey Club focusing on psychology and talent development. Delegates included 30+ local teachers and coaches. Followed by Q&A. | 2 | MUFC |
| | LJMU | 11/10/18 | LJMU – Level 6 ASP placement lecture. Delivered presentation on applied placement module focused on development of craft skills through placement experiences. | 2 | LJMU |

| | MUFC | 16/10/18 | Academy Medical Dept CPD programme – Delivered CPD session for medical and wider sports science colleagues at MUFC on the current landscape of mental health in elite sport. Session highlighted latest research, definitions of mental health, mental health continuum and how the intense, all-encompassing nature of elite sport cultures impacts on athletes sense of self and wellbeing. | 1.5 | MUFC |
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| | University of Bolton | 22/10/18 | UoB Research Conference – Keynote presentation titled "Sport Psychology: A science or an art?" – delivered keynote presentation to open University of Bolton In house research conference to discuss the importance of research informed practice in professional sport. Focus of the presentation was to highlight the role that craft skills and knowledge have in applied practice but emphasising the importance of a scientific underpinning to your work in order to ensure you're offering a service that athletes and organisations can trust. | 2 | University of Bolton |
| | LJMU | 6/11/18 | LJMU ASP Field trip to Manchester United. Delivered presentation and workshop for level six applied sport psychology students at AON training complex. Focus of the session was to highlight applied practice skills in relation to delivery of sport | 2 | LJMU/MUFC |

| | | | psychology content for young athletes. Key themes were the importance of being creative in developing sessions to ensure they don't resemble school (Littlewood, Nesti & Luthardt, 2018), and pitching content in an appropriate way for the audience, for example young athletes do not necessarily need an academic lecture style delivery. | | |
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| | MUFC | 23/11/18 | MUFC Parent Engagement Programme – Delivered two presentations to academy age group parents to discuss the role of the parent in talent development, and how we aim to develop psychological skills and qualities in young people throughout the academy programme. | 2 | MUFC |
| | University of Bolton | 27/11/18 | Lecture for final year students focused on applied sports psychology practice. | 2 | University of Bolton |
| | MUFC | 4/12/18 | MUFC Parent Engagement Programme – Delivered two presentations to academy age group parents to discuss the role of the parent in talent development, and how we aim to develop psychological skills and qualities in young people throughout the academy programme. | 2 | MUFC |
| | University College of Football Business | 7/12/18 | Lecture for final year students focused on applied sports psychology practice. | 2 | UCFB |
| | MUFC | 28/1/19 | MUFC Parent Engagement Programme – Delivered two | 2 | MUFC |

| | | | presentations to academy age group parents to discuss the role of the parent in talent development, and how we aim to develop psychological skills and qualities in young people throughout the academy programme. | | |
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| | Copenhagen | | Invited presentation for Team Denmark titled: **S**port Psychology and Talent Development: What does it look like across the talent pathway? | 1 | Private Practice |
| | Trondheim | | Invited presentation delivered with Dr Mark Nesti for Norwegian Football Federation. Sport Psychology in English Premier League Football: Academy to First Team. | 1 | Private Practice |
| | Solihull | 2-3/12/19 | BPS DSEP Conference – delivered keynote presentation alongside Dr Mark Nesti titled Supporting the staff as performers in elite sport: Conditions and Considerations. Also delivered presentation on Case Study 2 from my portfolio. | 16 | LJMU |
| | Manchester | 13/11/20 | Manchester United Medical Conference keynote presentation titled: Psychology support for the adolescent player; working in a multi-disciplinary team. | 1 | MUFC |
| | Online | 25-28/5/20 | FLAME Conference – Delivering Sport Psychology in a Premier League Academy. | 12 | FLAME Project |
| | Birmingham | 24/10/22 | University College Birmingham – Sport Performance Conference. Keynote presentation: Integrating Psychology in Sports Medicine | 1 | UCB |

| | Preston | 2019 - Present | Guest Lecturing – 2 x annual lectures on the MSc Sports Rehabilitation programme. | 20 | | University of Central Lancashire |
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**Reflective Diary**

A series of reflective diary entries are presented to demonstrate my development and competencies across the key areas of Ethics and Professional Standards, Consultancy, Research and Dissemination. Throughout my training I have adopted and amended two main reflective approaches as a way of consolidating my learning from experiencing (Knowles et al. 2014). Throughout my training I adopted the Gibbs (1998) cycle as a more structured approach to reflective practice. And I have also used Driscoll's (2007) what, so what, now what model of reflection as my approach to reflecting became less formulaic.

**References:**

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Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by doing* (1st ed.). [London]: FEU.

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**Ethics and Professional Standards**

| CPD/Supervision | |
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| What, So what, What next… | After being introduced by my supervisor Dr Mark Nesti, I arranged a meeting with JM (CPsychol, HCPC Registered Sport and Exercise Psychologist) to discuss the application of psychology in professional football. John had recently taken on a role with a football club in Scotland and was keen to discuss ideas on how the role might develop. Prior to meeting we had exchanged emails to come up with a rough agenda for the meeting to get the most out of the conversation. |

The meeting lasted three hours, we began giving a brief overview of our roles, interests and the importance of confidentiality and trust, before moving onto the topics we had outlined prior to meeting. The topics included developing a service provision that is aligned to the philosophy of the organisation, creating consistent and common language, working with wider staff group to embed psychology into the work of other practitioners e.g. coaches, sports science and medicine staff, being accountable for and evaluating the effectiveness of your work, and our role in supporting mental health and wellbeing of players and staff. Throughout the meeting we shared experiences and perspectives related to the topics above, often finding agreement in our thinking. John shared some experiences from working in Olympic and Paralympic sports that I found both interesting and useful, particularly around the need for all staff to monitor the effectiveness of and be accountable for their work. In line with Fletcher and Wagstaff's (2009) observation that "With the increasing financial investment at government level, *NSOs are becoming more accountable against key performance indicators" (p.429), this highlights an important message for practitioners working in academy football in England given the vastly increased financial investment in academy systems since the introduction of the Elite Player Performance Plan (Nesti & Sulley, 2014). Another useful insight from working at numerous "Games" centred on the importance of paying attention the environment and culture created for athletes. The importance of creating a support team with prior experience of attending games was given as an example of a factor that can influence the athletes ability to perform, experience of attending games gives an advantage of being able to anticipate and deal with the

inevitable organisational pressures that attending an international competition brings (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009; Chandler *et al.* 2016).

We also discussed the importance of the environment and culture in being a key factor in supporting performance and development. A key take home message was the importance being accountable for and evidencing the effectiveness of your work, which I feel should be a key consideration for all professionals who are serious about their work. Seemingly, the funding system for Olympic/Paralympic sports has contributed to professionals working in these contexts to be more familiar with this approach, in contrast to professional football where these ideas may represent unfamiliar territory for some. In professional football, it seems there is a reluctance from some staff to engage in documenting and being accountable for their work, this is perhaps reflective of the insecurity which pervades work in the professional football industry (Gilmore et al., 2018). In addition, the increased professionalisation and monetary investment in professional football, particularly in academy environments in the UK (Relvas et al., 2010) has likely contributed to increased anxiety among some staff with regards to evidencing and accounting for their contribution to the development of young players. Somewhat paradoxically, the increased investment and subsequent desire for accountability in football clubs, may be resulting in a greater resistance to do so, as staff become more aware of the potential consequences of being accountable for their work. Our discussion on this topic highlighted the importance of demystifying these issues, and creating greater awareness of the benefits of documenting and being accountable for your work among staff in order to minimise the sense of threat this can bring.

| | One example is the opportunity to manage upward, providing information to senior staff can result in further investment for academies and staff. |
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**References:**

Chandler *et al.* (2016). Personal qualities of effective Sport Psychologists: Coping with organisational demands in high performance sport. *International Journal of Sport Psychology, 47*, 297-317.

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**CPD - Practitioner Growth session with Dr David Tod.**

**What happened:**

David introduced a session on practitioner growth, outlining from his experience as a practitioner and researcher the ways that practitioners change over time, starting out being more solution focused and keen to help, to becoming more authentic and developing own

consultancy style and approach as experience grows. He began the session by giving two case studies from his own early career experiences, asking the group to consider how they might have approached each case, making clear that in his opinion there are few right and wrong ways to do sports psychology outside of the clear ethical codes. The cases were:

1.  19 year old professional rugby player who was returning from long term injury and expressing some fear about returning and potential re-injury. David described some of the cultural factors associated with NZ rugby such as the masculine culture and the recent professionalisation of the sport and how for the first time rugby was a legitimate way for players to earn a living as professional athletes.

2.  A young and attractive female triathlete came to work with David after experiencing a range of performance issues including difficulties with coach and pressures to make the step up to the next level of competition. At the beginning of the second session the athlete placed a handwritten letter on the table which read "Thank you for loving me, this is the first time I've felt loved, please don't hurt me".

After discussing some ideas about how we might have approached each case, DT described what he did in each of these situations. In case 1, he approached situation by checking whether the player had been given the all clear from the medical team, after being told by the athlete that he had, he suggested to the athlete that he trained with such intensity that he tried to "break" the knee. Discussing with athlete the pros and cons of this approach. The athlete decided to take this suggestion into the next training session, and thankfully the knee held out and the intervention seemed to have a positive outcome for the athlete. DT described feeling anxious and uncertain after the consultation e.g. What have I done, what if this goes wrong? Etc. And upon reflection noted how the masculine culture of RU and his experiences within it had influenced this quite macho suggestion that in effect the player should just get on with it.

For case 2, DT described how he had initially been taken by surprise by the letter, however he had enough knowledge of ethics to recognise that this was an issue. He initiated dialogue with the client and walked her to a counselling service down the hall and in effect referred her on to counselling to support her with potential issues which fell outside of his expertise. He continued to support her from a sports psychology perspective and the broader issues (related to family) were not brought into their working relationship. Upon reflection DT highlighted issues with transference and counter transference and the power imbalance and dynamic between psychologist and client may contribute to such experiences.

**Thoughts and Feelings:**

I was intrigued to hear about how different people were approaching the cases. When introduced to case 1, I attempted to look back at my own experiences of doing sports psychology for any similar cases I have seen and think about how those athletes have experienced significant injury. Looking back at those I realised that each experience was different and affected the individual in different ways. Context and background is so important. Without this extra information I found it a challenge to suggest what I would do with the case other than listening to and normalising their experience in an effort to support the athlete ability to confront the reality of their situation. I felt that this approach was something that resonates with me, there is potential for long term benefits and not simply a short-term fix e.g., anxiety management techniques. I felt uncomfortable with some of the narrower solution focused approaches that were being suggested, on reflection I found both the lack of context and information a challenge to be able to offer effective consultancy ideas (Keegan, 2016), but also the 'fit' between offering 'quick fix' solutions and what I already knew about the deeply personal experience of being injured (Nesti & Littlewood, 2011).

With case 2 there was an immediate feeling of surprise at the way the case unfolded, which I would imagine was a lesser version of what DT would have experienced when faced with this situation in real life. I also felt intrigued by the case and immediately thoughts of transference and countertransference came up. The case seemed to resonate with some of the sport psychology counselling literature I'd read previously (Andersen, 2000; Katz & Hemmings, 2009). I was intrigued because this seemed a rare case and began to think of other ways that transference may play out in professional football setting such as perhaps being perceived as a parental figure or even older brother for some or friend. When thinking about the task and suggesting how to deal with the scenario I listened in to some of the other conversations and suggestions people were giving. The majority of these I felt were sensible such as ensuring boundaries are clearly set and remind the client of the nature of the working relationship and professional boundaries, rules and ethical codes to protect both parties etc. I also felt that with these suggestions there was an implication that the client was to blame, for misinterpreting the relationship or crossing the boundaries. I instead opted to think more critically about the role of the psychologist and the contribution, conscious or unconscious that they make to situations like the one described in case 2. How do we communicate with clients? Respond to vulnerability? What messages do we send with our body language and expressions, do these things change depending on the type of client we have in front of us? These were some of the issues I felt would need to be considered and addressed in this situation with a supervisor or colleague. DT made an interesting point about how we try to make people like us, such as being attentive, empathic, smiling and being friendly and open, and how these kinds of behaviours are commonplace in a counselling and psychology settings but perhaps not so common in competitive, elite sport environments. This for me highlighted the importance of developing self-awareness and reflecting on yourself in action in order to develop greater understanding

of how we operate in practice and the implications this may have for our clients and ourselves (Knowles et al 2014).

**Conclusions and Action**:

Exploring the case studies and the diversity in the way people were responding to each case really highlighted that there is no correct way to do sports psychology, and in fact most of the suggestions people gave were plausible and could be supported by research and theory. It may just be that the options we have at our disposal can be plotted along a continuum of more to less helpful, but not necessarily black and white, right and wrong. The exercise also placed emphasis on the importance of context, and the need to develop an understanding of the athletes context, and background that they bring with them to the consultation. Developing this understanding throughout the intake and needs analysis process will inform the subsequent choices and decisions we make along with the athlete/client (Keegan, 2015). In addition to understanding the athletes context, it is vitally important to develop self-awareness and an understanding of what I as the psychologist bring to the consulting arena. As the main tool of service delivery we are always going to influence the relationships we have with clients, but developing a greater awareness of the biases we have, the way we communicate and respond towards our clients and so on is necessary so that we are aware of how we may be influencing the people we work with. Who we are is inseparable from how we operate as psychologists so we must endeavour to continually reflect and learn from our experiences and how these experiences influence what we do.

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**Ethical Decision Making**

*What happened:*

Player X (aged 17) sent a message at 6.30am asking if we could speak as his 'my mental health isn't good, I won't be in today', we exchanged messages and agreed that he would call me once his parents had gone out, he then called me shortly after. During the conversation Player X said that he didn't feel like he could/wanted to come in today. X said the felt he had been being bullied and he felt he wasn't respected by his teammates. X felt it had going on for long time but had gotten better but recently picked up again. X clarified that these weren't big things but they were small things that add up over time, and coming in everyday to that environment was difficult for him. I enquired further about what he meant specifically about his mental health being not good, and X described feeling low, not wanting to do things and come into work and that this had got worse recently. I explained to X that it was normal practice for boys who call in sick to come in to be assessed by the doctor.

I explained that I thought it would be important to run through some questions with him in order to get a better idea of the situation. I re-introduced the PHQ-4 screening tool verbally, and explained the scoring system (X has had previous experience of this from our bi-annual screening) before running through the items with him, X scored 2,2,2,3. When I explored the

reasons behind each score with him, X described how these scores reflected how he felt at football and not how he felt when he is not at football. I asked whether X had spoken to anyone else about how he was feeling, he said that he had spoken to his mum and some of his friends about this in the past but not anyone else recently. I explained that I had some further questions to explore, and that this was not something to be concerned about. I then asked whether X had been having any thoughts about harming himself or about taking his own life. Initially X responded by saying that he had not, before then saying yes he had experienced some suicidal thoughts in recent months but that he wasn't going to do that, it was just something that he had thought about. I explained that this was quite common for people to experience these thoughts and that just because people have these thoughts it doesn't mean they want to do it, I thanked him for his honesty. X then revisited the question and disclosed that he had also self-harmed, by cutting himself recently. I asked if he could tell me more about that and X said that he had cut himself on the forearm a few times and that it had started a month or two ago. I asked whether anyone else was aware of this, X said no this was the first time he had spoken about it, and that he didn't want to worry his parents with this. I explained that because we needed to keep X safe, I would need to speak to the doctor about this and that because of his age I might also need to speak to STAFF (safeguarding). I asked X whether he was okay with this, which he confirmed that he was and that he understood. I went on to ask X about his plans for the day ahead and he said that he wasn't sure other than coming in to see the academy doctor, we agreed that he would come in to meet the doctor at 3.30pm so that he could come in after the other players had left the training ground. I asked whether there was anyone else at home with him or whether he would be alone. X said that his dad would be at home with him today as it was half term (he is a teacher). I then recapped the conversation with X, summarising the key points we had discussed to check his understanding, before outlining what we had agreed in terms of next steps. X confirmed that he would arrange his own transport and come in to meet

with the doctor and myself at 3.30. I finished the conversation by reminding X that he could call or text at any time throughout the day if there was anything else that he wanted to talk about or that he remembered after our conversation. I tried to reassure X that had been courageous in speaking to me about this and reaching out, and this was something that he could take pride in that he was beginning to take control of the situation and had started the process of making things change for the better.

Following the conversation, I made the decision to talk to the academy doctor and escalate the concern as per the MU Advanced Psychosocial Support (MAPS) process. The decision was made due to the nature of the disclosures made by X, specifically suicidal thoughts and engaging in self harm and the player being under 18 years of age. My decision making was also influenced by the challenges of gauging the level of concern/risk over the phone with only limited information available. I spoke to the doctor and shared my concerns with him, he agreed that he would like to meet for a consultation with X and would be free at 3.30pm to meet him. Following speaking to the doctor, I spoke to the safeguarding manager and made a restricted disclosure in order to enquire about the limits on confidentiality in relation to sharing concerns due to the players age and to make STAFF aware of the allegations of bullying.

*Thinking and feeling:*

I initially felt concerned by both the nature and timing of the text message I received. After exchanging a few messages, I was keen to talk to X directly to get more information about the situation. I felt it was important to get more information in order to be able to more accurately appraise the level of risk and inform subsequent decisions. Prior to the conversation with X I

was able to refer back to a checklist that had been developed by colleagues at the club and clinical psychologists about how respond to mental health emergencies. Speaking to X I felt reassured by the fact that X said that he was at home and communicating and was not in immediate danger. I was then able to rely on my skills as a practitioner to engage X in a dialogue about the situation and processes we have at the club. I felt confident in my ability to engage X in dialogue and conduct a short intake and assessment process (Keegan, 2015). I utilised a range of counselling skills including active listening, reflections and summarising to ensure that X had the opportunity to speak, feel listened to and his experiences validated (Katz & Hemmings, 2009). I felt competent in my knowledge about the types of questions and topics to explore in order to more accurately assess or appraise the situation including enquiring about the onset, duration and severity of the challenges X was experiencing. The processes that we had established at the club were instrumental in giving me some clarity and direction in how to respond, for example over the last three seasons we have conducted bi-annual psychology and wellbeing screening with players. Part of the screening included the PHQ-4 (Kroenke et al. 2009) an ultra-brief screening tool for anxiety and depression. Using the PHQ-4 provided me with a structure to explore specific mental health related questions with X and then explore each item further. Whilst my approach to psychology would not typically involve using a lot of psychometric or measurement tools (I subscribe to a more subjective view of human experience and reality), I recognised that in these uncertain and anxiety provoking situations (Bickley et al. 2016) a degree of objectivity that using a screening tool provides can be helpful for making ethical and defensible decisions. For example the scores that X reported signalled to me that there was a level of concern that required making a referral to the club medical and safeguarding staff and there was legitimate reasons for doing so. I then discussed the process for doing this with X and we came to some agreements on next steps that included him coming

in to see the academy doctor later that day and discussing the situation with the safeguarding team.

*Evaluation:*

When compared to earlier experiences, I would have felt much more anxious around asking specific questions regarding mental health and suicidal thoughts. However, the benefit of experience and learning has helped me to feel much more competent in these challenging scenarios. I felt that I had a solid foundation of professional skills and psychological knowledge that I relied on to manage the situation carefully and professionally. In addition, the processes that had been developed at the club gave me a sense of confidence that there were processes to follow to effectively respond in this situation. In making the disclosure to the academy doctor I felt confident and assured that the appropriate course of action had been followed and that I had acted in the best interests of X. Whilst undoubtedly a difficult situation to navigate I am now more confident in my ability to appropriately respond in such scenarios and have greater confidence in the processes that we have established. I have no doubt that without this there would have been a much greater level of concern and anxiety in me and within the system without having established clear processes for appraising risk and sharing psychosocial and wellbeing related concerns.

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| Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Training | |
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| What happened? | I attended a two-day workshop focused on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) led by Dr Ross White (Clinical Psychologist and Reader in Clinical Psychology at the University of Liverpool) and Dr Ray Owen (Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Health Psychologist working in the NHS). The focus of the workshop was on the core skills for delivering ACT and the two days included a mixture of theory underpinning ACT and the skills and processes involved in applying ACT with clients. There were several opportunities throughout the two days to engage in role play activities to practice the skills being taught and receive feedback from peers.<br><br>Day one began by explaining the underpinning principles of ACT, importantly that this approach recognises the ubiquity of human suffering but is focused on helping clients to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives despite the inevitable challenges that life presents. Having read various books and articles on ACT I felt comfortable in my knowledge of the key principles but felt it would be important to engage in more formal training and education in the application of ACT in order to further develop my skills as a practitioner. I felt connected to the principles that guide ACT, in particular the focus on values-driven behaviour which resonated with |

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| | my beliefs around the importance of meaning and authenticity for living in a purposeful and rewarding way. Additionally, reflecting on my work, training and education, the athletes and the clients I work with are frequently faced with challenges that are unavoidable such as performance pressures, injuries and de-selection (Nesti & Littlewood, 2011) and the athletes are faced with a need to continue moving forward despite these setbacks and challenges if they want to succeed in their sport. |
| What were you thinking & feeling? | Prior to attending I was looking forward to receiving some formal training in ACT, I felt I had a good understanding of ACT from a theoretical perspective, but I felt some uncertainty about whether this "self-teaching" was enough. In some ways, perhaps for a sense of personal and professional integrity, I felt that I needed further training in the approach in order to feel authentic when operating using ACT with clients. As the workshop progressed, I felt a growing confidence in both my understanding of the approach and my ability to apply this in practice. It was rewarding to find that my self-teaching had been a good foundation and there was little information presented that I was not already aware off at some level. There were several opportunities to practice the skills we were developing in role play activities, these too were rewarding as I was able to practice in a relatively safe environment before working with real clients. I also felt a sense of confidence in my skills as a practitioner from being able to work with and observe others such as clinical psychologists during the activities, which helped me to recognise some of my own skills and qualities as a practitioner. More specifically, the role play activities |

enabled me to reflect on my development so far, and I felt a sense of competence as a practitioner particularly in being able to communicate in a user-friendly way to clients (in the role play activities), listen, engage and respond in a fluent manner.

At the end of the two days I felt an increased confidence in using ACT in relation to having consolidated my understanding of the underpinning theory and had numerous opportunities to practice the skills associated with the approach. I left the two days looking forward to being able to incorporate some of the ideas presented over the two days in my own practice. In particular I felt the "sweet spot" exercise (Wilson & Sandoz, 2008), was something that would be particularly useful in my work with athletes, and in an elite sporting environment where there is often scepticism about psychology and psychologists (Nesti, 2004), beginning by encouraging them to recall and describe a positive and fulfilling experience might present a less-threatening way to begin consultancy. Often clients enter into a consulting relationship filled with anxiety and uncertainty about that this may entail (van Deurzen, 2002), and allaying some of these anxieties and perhaps misconceptions could be achieved through the sweet-spot exercise and discussing positive experiences as opposed to painful ones.

I felt I connected personally with the guiding principles of ACT, and as such felt a desire to be true to myself throughout the course in order to help myself take the most from this learning experience. As we were guided through an exercise using the ACT matrix I identified that I

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| | believed it was important to be authentic and engaged, but that there was also some apprehension around what others might think and my relative inexperience compared to some of the others in the room. Completing the task presented me with a dilemma, to silence myself suppressing my desire to fully engage or to recognise these feelings and make a choice to commit myself fully to the workshop despite the apprehension. I found the matrix activity and experience useful in challenging me to be more fully myself, in the same way that I would challenge clients to be; I felt this need for congruence stimulating and this helped me to make an active choice to throw myself into the activities and the remainder of the workshop. |
| Evaluation – What was good/bad? | Delivery from both presenters was very good, they provided clear, consistent messaging to demystifying the ACT approach. I felt this was an influential factor in allowing me to feel confident in applying ACT in my own practice. The delivery was also tailored to the different backgrounds of the delegates in the room, as there were a number of people from a sport psychology background, it was useful to have some examples used in the activities that related to sport, this helped to create a sense of inclusivity and personally I felt this sent a message that our work and role is being recognised by allied practitioners.<br><br>Practical activities were a necessary evil, in the sense that they were at times uncomfortable and "clunky". Despite this, the opportunity to apply ACT processes in safe environment allowed for some valuable learning experiences. Engaging in the activities allowed me to observe others |

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| | modelling professional practice behaviours, the types of questions asked and questioning styles. In addition to the benefits of observing, it was useful to receive feedback from others on the course about my own delivery style. Overall, despite some clunky experiences, the activities were useful and rewarding, in context some uncomfortable feelings are to be expected and appropriate given that I was trying some new techniques in an artificial context. |
| Analysis: What sense can you make of it? | Reflecting on the workshop has highlighted important relationship between congruence, confidence and competence. Initially drawn to the workshop out of a personal interest and connection to values based approaches to psychology, ACT appealed as I felt it represented a way to apply the sometimes vague or abstract ideas associated with broader psychological approaches such as an existential perspective (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015). |

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& T. Bein (Eds.) Mindfulness and the therapeutic relationship. New York:

Guilford Press.

| CPD/Ongoing Supervision – Neil R (HCPC Reg.) | |
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| What happened? | I have been engaging in supervision and discussion with Neil R (HCPC registered Sport and Exercise Psychologist) following a recommendation from a physiotherapy colleague who has previously referred players to Neil. Our discussions have focused on the application of psychology when working with injured players, which as an area of interest for Neil and often forms part of the work I deliver. |
| | I drafted a semi-fictional case-study to guide some of our discussion, and to gain feedback from Neil on his perceptions of the salient information to consider and be aware of when working with such cases. Our discussion highlighted the importance of conducting a thorough intake process in order to gather as much information as possible to inform your understanding of the case. Echoing Keegan's (2015) warning that failure to undertake a thorough intake process is likely to result in poor outcomes for the client and practitioner, the discussions with Neil highlighted that making assumptions during intake is to be avoided by taking a detailed client history. Doing so will be invaluable and inform any needs analysis and subsequent work that takes place with a client (Keegan, 2015). I perceived this to be of particular importance given my role as "an insider" at the club, being embedded as a member of staff means I have been able to develop some awareness and understanding of the players in the academy, their history, and background |

and so on. Whilst having some understanding of the players' backgrounds can be advantageous and could speed up intake and needs analysis processes, there is also a real danger that this information, and the perceptions of the other staff I work with could lead to me making assumptions and cloud my judgement when conducting intake. Working in professional sport, missing vital information during intake is likely to have a negative influence on the effectiveness of my work; and result in a poor service for the clients I am being employed to support.

Additionally, delivering a poor service is likely to be recognised and viewed negatively by others within the environment could have serious implications for job security and continued employment (Eubank, Nesti & Cruickshank, 2014).

A further topic we discussed and debated was around the return to play phase during rehabilitation and our role in working alongside medical and coaching staff. Neil proposed that returning to play at a lower level/standard should be avoided and strongly discouraged. It was proposed that returning to play at a lower level could inadvertently lead to increased anxiety for the performer due to a perceived increase in expectation to perform at a lower level.

Engaging in this dialogue with Neil has reinforced the importance of being diligent and conscientious when conducting intake to avoid overlooking vital information. This was particularly salient for me given the amount of 'information' that is available to a psychologist working within a sporting organisation or system. It has challenged me to more explicitly take time to

| | conduct thorough intake in order to better understand their experiences or perspectives as opposed to blindly accepting the dominant narratives or perceptions of others into the consulting relationship. |
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| | In addition, the notes and reflections we have shared on the semi-fictional case will serve as a useful aid and resource to inform the types of questions asked and information to look for when conducting consultancy on cases with injured athletes. |

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**Working with allied practitioners**

As part of my role, it seems expected that I would be available to support players who are injured and work alongside the medical team to support players' recovery. Working with and supporting athletes who are injured is a key task for many sport psychologists (Brewer, 2001). Throughout my academic training and education I have read with a number of case studies or vignettes detailing the type of support that sport psychologists may provide to injured athletes (E.G. Wadey & Evans, 2011), however much of this focuses on the detail of 'what' is done and often describes the types of intervention that psychologists employ. As a new member of staff, delivering a new service at the club, much of my time has been spent contracting and working

towards achieving some sense of role clarity both for myself and other staff members. Working with injured players seems like an area where sport psychology input may be a valuable contribution to the academy, however during conversations with the medical team several questions have been raised about the practicalities of how this work can be done most effectively. For example, when should psychology support be offered or introduced? How will information be shared between practitioners? What information should be shared and how much? Whilst all reasonable questions to explore, I noticed a sense of uncertainty among some staff about how psychology support could be integrated into existing working practices.

*So what?*

Delivering effective and ethical practice is a primary objective for practitioner psychologists (*British Psychological Society*). Reflecting on the issue highlighted here, there is a gap between what is detailed in the academic literature and the practical realities of delivering sport psychology support to injured athletes within a professional sports organisation. Legitimate questions regarding 'how' to do this work effectively have been raised that require further consideration. It is important to properly consider these issues to ensure effective and ethical practice; to create a positive and professional impression for psychology and to demonstrate professionalism for me personally. These are particularly important given the relatively new introduction of psychology and my position at the club. Failing to do so could have negative implications for how psychology (and me as a practitioner) is perceived. I recognised the need to properly establish an understanding of how psychology support could be included as part of a holistic approach to supporting injured players in order to prevent challenges occurring at a later date.

*Now what?*

Clarifying our approach to integrating psychology as part of the support provided to injured players needed collaboration and agreement with other staff including the academy doctor, lead and senior physiotherapists. I decided to draft some ideas about how I thought psychology may be able to contribute to supporting players ahead of a discussion with other staff. As part of the process I looked to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) to better understand the regulatory stance on confidentiality and working with allied practitioners. The HCPC (2015) standards gave me greater confidence in understanding what is expected of practitioners in relation to providing the highest standards of ethical practice, particularly as the HCPC is the regulatory body for both psychology and physiotherapy. The following excerpt from the HCPC (2018) confidentiality guidelines provided clarity over expectations for practitioners.

"Care is rarely provided by just one health and care professional, and sharing information within the multidisciplinary team or with other organisations or agencies is often an important way of making sure care can be provided effectively. Most service users will understand the importance of sharing information with others who are involved in their care or treatment and will expect you to do so"

I feel the reality of applied practice is captured more accurately in the HCPC guidelines than is found in academic literature and as such I feel more confident and equipped to go into conversations with colleagues about effective multidisciplinary practice and our ethical and regulatory responsibilities. I feel this reflects a growing confidence and maturity as a practitioner as I navigate the realities of applied practice with an awareness of how organisational and contextual factors may influence practice as a practitioner psychologist. It felt like a breakthrough moment and helped to create a shared platform for further discussions about how staff could work together to support injured players.

*Update:* in a series of subsequent meetings, we were able to agree a way forward for how psychology support could be integrated into players rehabilitation. For example, we agreed some basic 'inclusion' criteria relating to the time the player was likely to be injured for, the nature of the injury, the age/stage of players and the injury history of the player. Working with the medical team to come to an agreement on this was helpful for managing expectations around what was achievable and appropriate in offering sport psychology support.

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| Prof Doc session | |
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| What happened? | Professional Doctorate contact day with attendees from cohorts 1, 2 and 3. The morning session was delivered by Karen Flockhart, a clinical |

psychologist working in the NHS who has recently submitted a QSEP Stage 2 portfolio after undergoing sport and exercise psychology training under Dr Mark Nesti. And the afternoon session delivered by Tom Young, a sport and exercise psychologist who is self employed and runs the consultancy Cognite.

Session one focused on similarities and differences between working in clinical and sports psychology with an emphasis on the common grounds in relation to applying psychological theory, research, and knowledge to support positive change in clients. I felt this was important to recognise, as we are after all training to become registered as practitioner psychologists. The session then moved on to discuss the boundaries and grey areas that exist between sport and clinical psychology (Gardner & Moore, 2006), considering questions such as "What signs might suggest it is time to refer on?", "What situations or scenarios might we consider referring on?", and "What does onward referral look like?" Discussing and debating these types of questions gave opportunities to discuss cases or situations where attendees might have encountered or been involved in challenging cases and receive feedback on actions taken.

Session two focused on reflections and lessons from the journey Tom had taken so far, focusing on his training and post-qualification experiences. We discussed challenges facing the industry and some more general barriers to applying psychology. Specifically, we we debated the

| | effectiveness of training in sport and exercise psychology in preparing early career practitioners to "go it alone" as independent practitioners in a competitive industry where many motivational speakers, gurus and performance coaches operate in similar spaces. My reflection this was that we have an opportunity to develop great knowledge and understanding throughout our training but must also expand on this by developing our abilities to "sell" what we offer and finding ways to translate our psychological knowledge to the intended audiences better. We also discussed the opportunities to overcome barriers to applying psychology by embracing technological advancements, considering how people want to receive information in an increasingly digital world and using these opportunities to make psychology more tangible, or at least visible. |
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| What were you thinking & feeling? | During session one I sensed a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety about our (Sport and Exercise Psychologists) role in relation to mental health, wellbeing and effectively dealing with cases where this type of concern may arise. The level of anxiety that this can create is not uncommon in sport where individuals can experience anxiety and concern about their role and how best to manage complex cases (Bickley *et al.* 2016). I have been fortunate in my role to work alongside my supervisors, medical doctors, safeguarding managers, teachers, and clinical psychologists all of whom have been influential in guiding my understanding of how to effectively appraise and manage risk; and work collaboratively as part of a multidisciplinary team in responding to challenging cases (Bickley *et al.* 2016). It is these experiences that I feel have enabled me to feel more |

comfortable with uncertainty and complexity than I did previously. Having been involved in complex case management I feel I have developed an understanding of the importance of sharing risk and decision-making responsibility, particularly when there may be concerns about an individual. A useful principle I have encountered in my work with young people is that "risk trumps confidentiality". Whilst clearly there are several factors to consider when making an ethical decision such as breaking confidentiality and making a disclosure, there are several other ways I feel we can gain perspective on concerns we may have about an individual, such as anonymised discussion or restricted disclosure with supervisors and critical friends. Engaging in this type of professional supervision along with consulting research and evidence bases can help us to make sense of our actions and decisions we make in these situations (Knowles *et al.* 2014).

Discussion about the duty of care to our clients was also something I found interesting and felt some elements of the discussion reflected the individuals' motives for engaging in psychology as a profession, in particular a desire to help, support or even save others. I felt this became apparent when discussion turned to referring clients on to clinical services either through a private referral or NHS services. The decision to refer on may often be challenging (Roberts, Faull & Tod, 2016); and despite how we may care for our clients we have a professional obligation to work within our boundary of competence and refer on where necessary. As an

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| | example, we discussed referring a client on to NHS services and the challenges that exist with accessing these services due to waiting lists. There appeared to be a great deal of concern about the potential ramifications if someone was unable to access services immediately and where responsibility would lie, particularly if any issues worsened whilst waiting for access to mental health services. I responded to these concerns by highlighting that I felt our professional responsibility would be fulfilled once concerns had been shared and a referral to someone more appropriately qualified had been made, and any future developments would not be our responsibility. I am aware that my perspective here may seem somewhat cold and detached, but this does not mean that I do not care for or empathise with the challenges people encounter, rather I am aware that there are limitations on our ability to make the world a fair and just place. Simply we cannot be responsible for everything and everyone. |
| Analysis: What sense can you make of it? | Experience in encountering challenging cases and scenarios is a key factor in developing competence and confidence in one's ability to manage more effectively with them in the future. I feel my experiences have contributed to having a different perspective on these cases than some of my peers. That is not to say that I do not find them challenging and daunting, but more that I am aware that such cases are inherently challenging and daunting, and that we must be able to make decisions despite these uncomfortable feelings. From my own experience I have found the guidance of supervisors, Ethical Codes of Conduct and professional practice guidelines invaluable resources in guiding decision making and |

helping to find clarity in challenging scenarios and are resources that I will continue rely on in the future.

Additionally, my feelings about our professional responsibilities, and the responsibility we have to clients when referring on is most strongly influenced by my professional philosophy and broader view of the world. My professional philosophy is influenced by existential philosophy and psychology literature, which has been considered by some as being pessimistic in outlook but can also be regarded as a more pragmatic approach that reflects the true realities of human existence, both positive and negative (van Deurzen, 2002). The existential perspective is explicit in acknowledging that human freedom is unavoidably constrained by external limitations or boundaries ranging from our mortality, the social, economic, or political givens of our times, to the 'huge tide of accident' surrounding our lives (Cooper, 2015). The perspective resonates with me as it addresses the breadth of human experience, and does not focus solely on positive aspects, or paint an idealistic picture of life; a criticism often labelled at psychology in elite sport environments (Nesti, 2004). Acknowledging the limitations that surround our existence is a key factor in being able to begin to move forward despite these boundaries (Cooper, 2015). In relation to handling challenging situations in practice, considering the limitations that exist is a useful way for me to make decisions and make sense of the options available. To clarify, this is not a process of absolving oneself of responsibility, but making clearer the

| | things you are responsible for and able to control to better inform decisions and actions. I feel this is what has enabled me to think more clearly and less emotionally about how to deal effectively with challenging scenarios such as the one discussed in the session. |
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**Consultancy**

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| Reflecting on my role in the consultancy process. | |
| What happened? | I met with Robbie, a player who I had been supporting throughout his rehabilitation from a significant injury, to check in with his progress. Robbie was frustrated with the speed at which rehab was moving. A continued part of our work together had been to manage expectations and develop an awareness and willingness to accept the boundaries that imposed on Robbie's ability to do everything as he wanted to. These challenges arose because of the determination Robbie had for returning as soon as possible, and in the best possible condition. The motivations and character Robbie showed was often lauded by other staff within the club, and rightly so because this demonstrated immense maturity for someone of 17 years old, but what was not always seen was the psychological challenges that this type of striving and intensity could bring. |
| | As we began to discuss recent progress Robbie was quick to air his frustration at not progressing to the next phase of the rehab expressing this further when saying "I don't know what more I can do". When I challenged him to describe further, he described how after coming through the strength building phase, he felt that he had "built a solid foundation" and that progress would now come much faster now that this phase was complete. The metaphorical language used by Robbie around 'building' presented an opportunity to work within his metaphorical landscape (Lindsay et al., 2010) which has been seen as an effective way of developing rapport between client and practitioner (Sims, 2003). Robbie and his parents had recently had a house built, which gave |

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| | another opportunity to explore and extend the 'building' metaphor. I challenged Robbie to describe the stages that houses are built in, allowing us to explore the different steps that occur, and align this to the steps in a rehabilitation journey. Through further dialogue we were able to move fluidly between the present and the future and back again, for example exploring potential consequences of rushing through the building phase, which may become exposed when the roof was being put on. Bringing these ideas back to Robbie's current situation we were able to reinforce the importance of patience and ensuring that each stage is completed correctly before moving on to the next one. We finished by clarifying what this meant for Robbie, specifically that it would require patience and work to try and keep focused on completing each rehabilitation session and each day at a time; and that in doing so he would have to accommodate some short-term frustration in order to get closer to the longer-term objective of returning to fitness in the best possible condition. |
| What were you thinking & feeling? | Early in the meeting, and in similar meetings with Robbie, I felt a sense of tension or conflict between my own desire to be useful and helpful to the client, and my beliefs, philosophy and approach to practice. Specifically, this centred on the discomfort and frustration that Robbie was expressing at his situation, which I found challenging because he was such a diligent and hardworking individual. There was a temptation to try and say something helpful or profound to alleviate some of the frustration he was experiencing. I knew this was not possible as this type of experience is deeply personal and not something that can be simply taken away. In addition, I was aware that attempting to do so may have gone against the agreements we had made at the start of the |

| | consultancy relationship, when discussing my approach with the client. Encouraging Robbie to talk to me, and not the other way round, created space for Robbie to describe his experiences, which in turn created the path to move forward in the session. |
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| | I felt as though adopting the client's metaphorical language was helpful in reducing the emotional intensity of the dialogue. Encouraging clients to talk imaginatively about their experiences through metaphor is proposed as an effective way of "Helping people face up to their circumstances without being demoralized by them" (Sims, 2003, p. 532). The emotion that Robbie initially expressed seemed to paralyse the discussion, but drawing on the metaphorical language he used led the dialogue to flow much easier, and eventually reorient the focus towards the future and the tasks that lay ahead. The engagement from Robbie throughout the session was positive, I felt that the use of the metaphor was a less threatening way to discuss a personal experience, which is often a difficult task for young men. |
| Evaluation & Analysis - What was good/bad? What sense can be made of this.. | I feel it is positive that I was aware of the tension I felt around wanting to 'help' Robbie, and the conflict that acting on this would have created in being congruent with my philosophy and the agreements made at the start of consultancy. Being aware enabled me to choose the course of action that was taken, instead of being led by emotion. I feel this reflects my growing maturity as a practitioner and demonstrates good self-awareness.

I am confident that remaining congruent with my philosophy and beliefs contributed to the success of the encounter with Robbie. The engagement that was fostered through exploring the metaphorical language led to positive |

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| | outcomes in the session, which began with frustration and ended with a renewed focus on what was important and the tasks that Robbie was wanting to overcome. I feel the key factor in the success was the engagement and active role that Robbie played in the session, it is possible that adopting a 'solution focused' or sophist approach (Corlett, 1996) may not have resulted in Robbie being so active and engaged in the session. It is equally possible that utilising a sophist approach may have fed into the frustration and exacerbate the sense of 'helplessness' that Robbie began the session with. |
| What would you do next time? | I feel it is important to reflect on and recognise the motivations one holds for supporting clients, how this aligns to our professional philosophy and perhaps most importantly the decisions we make and the behaviour we engage in during practice. Inevitably this will bring about tension, but I feel that learning to "sit with" and accommodate this tension when it arises as opposed to trying to remove it immediately by acting on emotional impulses, helps us to become better practitioners and be more like the practitioners we want to be. I am increasingly confident that as psychologists we must practice what we preach. |

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| Respecting and protecting the client. | |
| What happened? | Marco is a 16 year old footballer who had recently experienced a significant injury shortly after signing a four year contract. The session took place in the medical treatment room, with the door left half open to comply with club safeguarding policies. In a meeting one week after undergoing surgery to repair some of the damage caused by the injury, we were interrupted by the senior member of staff who came into the room to introduce Marco to a high profile first team player. Whilst I am sure the move was intended to raise Marco's spirits; the interruption prompted the head physiotherapist and a member of recruitment staff to enter the room too. The dialogue was now stalled, and I made an effort to make sure the session notes were not visible to the people that had entered the room. The dialogue between the player and the others in the room turned to the process of rehab, and physio began to talk about the hard work that lay ahead for Marco. At this point Marco appeared to become upset and tearful and the rest of the staff in the room offered some words of encouragement and well wishes before leaving. After they left my dialogue with Marco resumed, I asked him about what had prompted him to become upset. He felt that that this was because of the situation he was in, he was afraid he might not get back to the same level he was at before the injury, and he might not reach the level he felt he was capable of. He went on to discuss how he was finding it a challenge coming to terms with where he is now versus where he thought he was going to be or could have been had he not got injured. We were then interrupted again by the sporting director who walked into the room with another first team player to introduce to Marco. By this point Marco was visibly |

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| | upset, we had been discussing some very challenging and personal experiences, and he didn't lift his head to speak to the player. Again, some words of encouragement were offered by the senior staff member and first team player and Marco was offered a tissue by the physio who had also re-entered the room. After they had left, we returned to discussing the challenges between the current situation and where he was expecting to be after signing for the club, I attempted to reinforce the importance of making the best of the current situation to give the best opportunity to rehab well. We spent time discussing the resources both internally and around Marco that would be helpful during the time ahead, re-emphasising the importance of being able to utilise a range of resources to make the most of the present situation. Marco was travelling home to Croatia the next day, so we planned to meet again in the new year. |
| What were you thinking & feeling? | On being interrupted initially, I felt a little uncomfortable as there were notes on the table that we had been using during the session. I quickly made the decision to collect the notes and ensure they remained covered in order to respect Marco's privacy. As more people entered the room, I felt disappointed that it was assumed to be okay to do this, I got the impression that the presence of the first team player "trumped" the right to privacy and confidentiality. In addition, I felt a sense of uncertainty in how best to handle the situation, given the power imbalance between myself, the sporting director and the head physio; and the conflict this created in my professional ethics. These uncomfortable feelings exacerbated significantly when Marco began to get upset following the comments by the physio. I felt some of the comments made were overly pessimistic and insensitive, the physio continued to talk about the challenges |

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| | that lay ahead even though this was upsetting Marco, and in the presence of senior staff and the first team players. What I found particularly challenging was the continued intrusion on Marco's privacy, I feel this demonstrated a lack of respect for him at a time when he was extremely vulnerable. I would question whether it would have been deemed acceptable to intrude on a consultation between a doctor/physio and patient where the patient was as "physically exposed" as Marco was "emotionally exposed" during this consultation. |
| Evaluation - What was good/bad? | In the context of professional football, an environment that can be particularly unpredictable, there are a number of challenges that a practitioner must be aware of and navigate with great care (Eubank, Nesti & Cruickshank, 2014). In this example it is the presence of a notable power imbalance between practitioners in the workplace. For example the senior staff member occupies a role typically comes with a strategic influence and power over how the organisation operates (Littlewood, Richardson & Nesti, 2018); the head physiotherapist manages a department of highly qualified professionals; whereas my role is comparatively much less secure and little legitimate or positional power in the organisation. Legitimate power refers to the influence of social norms that is derived from an individual's position within a social structure (Raven, 2008). Factors such as these highlight very real constraints that impact on the work, and potential effectiveness of sport psychology practitioners in professional football. In the current example, I feel these dynamics negatively influenced my behaviour as a professional and practitioner, I allowed these factors to dissuade me from being firmer in challenging the other staff on interrupting the session. However, it can also be |

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| | questioned whether doing so would have been the best course of action in the moment.

Reflecting on my behaviour during the session, despite being disappointed at not being firmer, I feel I demonstrated professional skills and qualities in protecting Marco's right to privacy and confidentiality by ensuring all notes were moved out of view and staying out of the dialogue with the other members of staff. The door to room was left half open to ensure safeguarding policies were adhered to, further demonstrating professional practice knowledge and skills but it is possible that the door being open may have led people to assume that they were able to enter the room. It is also possible that a different meeting room may have helped to ensure that the meeting remained private and deter interruptions. I feel this again highlights some of the specific challenges that are inherent in sports psychology work compared to other psychology disciplines (Eubank & Tod, 2017). Reflecting on the cultural perceptions of psychology in professional football and that fact that psychology is often a regarded as a lesser priority than other support services (Nesti, 2018), it is unsurprising that challenges exist in relation to sourcing suitable meeting facilities inside football club training grounds. As a learning experience, this has highlighted the importance of being vigilant to these specific challenges, and where possible taking steps to mitigate risks associated with working in settings where formal consulting rooms are not always available. |
| What would you | After reflecting on this experience, I decided to meet with the head physio to discuss our arrangements for psychology consultations with injured players. I explained that I felt it was important to create an environment that ensured |

| do next time? | players felt safe, respected and able to discuss their experiences openly and that it was challenging to do this in a shared space such as the treatment room where people are often in and out. The head physio was understanding and open to the suggestion of scheduling in 1:1 psychology sessions as part of the weekly plan for players such as Marco that would enable me to book/reserve private meeting space ahead of time. Undoubtedly a challenging experience professional and personally but I feel better prepared for future scenarios such as this. |
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| Working in a multidisciplinary team | |
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| What happened? | A multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meeting was called by Academy Doctor and included Professional Development Phase (PDP) physiotherapy team, Youth Development Phase (YDP) physiotherapy team, a representative from the sports science department who specialises in end stage rehabilitation and conditioning, the U18 lead coach and me. |
| | Chaired by the doctor, the PDP physiotherapy team gave update on progress and indicated some milestones for player in coming weeks - indicating that progress was generally positive, and that the player was expected to commence the next stage of rehab in 7-10 days where he would begin full weight bearing running outdoor. This was regarded as a significant milestone for the player and one that the physiotherapy team and player have been working towards for some time. |
| | Despite the rehabilitation heading generally in the right direction, there were also some concerns about the player, The lead physiotherapist for the U18 squad described some of the avoidance behaviours he felt the player had perhaps engaged in, including illness behaviour (presenting as ill when the medical team felt this may have a psychosomatic basis), non-specific reporting of knee pain during rehab sessions, both of which resulted in missing days of training - at this stage there was also some questioning as to whether this could be anxiety related, given the next stage of rehab was approaching. Other types of behaviour categorised as potential avoidance behaviour included leaving early, not |

attending feedback meetings with the rest of the squad (performance analysis). It was also noted that he had been "throwing himself in to education work" which was typically seen as a positive thing, but it was felt that spending extended time at school may be a sign that he is avoiding being at the training ground. The physiotherapy team also described some up and down days in terms of motivation and engagement which had potentially slowed progress. YDP physiotherapy team gave details about previous injury history and that up and down days were typical for him and had been this way from 9 years old. This was supported by the academy doctor who, whilst agreeing and acknowledging this was typical in long term injuries, felt this was something we should try to address in order help the player return from injury sooner, and to help prepare for the reality of full-time training where expectations are much higher than at the youth development phase.

The U18s coach also discussed their concerns for player going forward in relation to managing expectations about the level of competition for places in the U18 squad. He also discussed re-integrating within the group, and some potential challenges with this due to the harsh nature of professional football environments, for he felt teammates were less than forgiving of mistakes now than at younger age groups, meaning the player would need to be prepared for this and get up to speed quickly. Discussions between the group centred on a phased entry to the group, whereby he could join in with certain activities during the end phases of rehab to try and bridge this gap. One suggestion by the coach was for the player to join upcoming overnight stay at an away fixture to spend

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| | some time in football environment again and begin to spend more time around the squad.<br><br>Considering the concerns highlighted by the medical staff and the head coach; and the hard work ahead of player in terms of rehab and conditioning I suggested that we try to formalise psychology input by adding a fixed feature in the weekly schedule that is dedicated to psychology support. I explained that adding a fixed time in the schedule would ensure that the player is able to access regular psychology support with a view to working on the concerns raised and help prepare the player for the forthcoming challenges. |
| What were you thinking & feeling? | As a multi-disciplinary team, we had previously met to outline boundaries of confidentiality between allied practitioners, guided by documentation and recommendations Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2018). The process set up to help manage challenging cases was built on a team formulation approach (Johnstone, 2018), where MDTs collaborate to develop a shared understanding of a client's behaviour or presenting challenge. Having had opportunities to take part in more and more of these team formulation-based discussions, I felt an increasing confidence with the approach to multi-disciplinary working than I may have done previously. Utilising the experience, knowledge and skills of staff I feel we were able to consider factors including the players history, recent experiences and likely future challenges to come up with a psychologically informed support plan. |

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**Individual Client – The wrong fit?**

*What?*

I have recently taken on a new individual client following a discussion with a physiotherapist who contacted me enquiring about my availability. The client is professional rugby league players and after initially being introduced via the physiotherapist we agreed to proceed as a private client. During our intake meeting, J discussed wanting to engage with psychology support to help manage his emotions after a series of discipline issues during the season that had occurred when he had lost his cool. J had worked previously worked with a coach on this issue with limited success and was looking for a solution to the challenges he was experiencing. During the initial meeting I found it challenging to manage the pace of the dialogue. J was keen to work quickly to find what he described as the 'right strategies or techniques' to help him control his emotions. I noticed periods of tension in the meeting when I attempted to slow the meeting down and explain the processes that underpinned effective practice – I explained the importance of carrying out intake, needs assessment and working together to agree on a way forward before coming up with a plan towards achieving the outcomes he was looking for. The consultancy process (Keegan, 2015) didn't seem to matter too much to him, and J continued to come back to 'strategies or techniques' that he could use and apply in the moment. I explained

to J that my beliefs about effective practice and commitment to doing a good job meant that I didn't want to rush straight to providing solutions without properly considering the different options available to us. As the conversation went on it felt like were going round in circles and was not progressing too much. Towards the end of the conversation I attempted to summarise where we were and reflected back J's goal or desire to improve his ability to manage his emotions and explained the steps we could take to move the process forward in future sessions. We agreed that I would write a summary of the conversation with some potential next steps and share back with J. I sent over some notes a few days later and never heard from J again.

*So what?*

I noticed quite early in the initial conversation that our styles and approach did not seem to align. As I explained the rationale for my approach to consultancy and the reasons for following a clear consultancy process, I sensed J's frustration and desire for solutions to the problem he was facing. I attempted to counter J's desires with logic and reason – a common trap that helping professionals can often fall into (Rollnick et al. 2020); but instead of coming alongside me, my attempts were met with resistance. I had perhaps failed to recognise the emotion driven response in the client as a resource to work with and had instead turned our dialogue into an arm wrestle. Nonetheless, my beliefs about consultancy and my approach to practice seemed incompatible to what J was looking for. The desire to jump straight to intervention and techniques did not align with my professional philosophy that is centred on supporting the development of the person and not solely providing symptomatic relief (Corlett, 1996). Moreover, missing steps in the consultancy process would have gone against my beliefs and values about the role of sport psychology (Pocwardowski et al. 2004).

*Now what?*

In the end this consultancy experience may be deemed a failure in the sense that it did not progress beyond an initial consultation. However, I believe it has helped me to more clearly understand my approach to practice and the 'distance' I am willing to stretch. In future I would like to think that I would address the 'elephant in the room' earlier in the process and name the frustration or competing agendas as opposed to continuing to fall into the trap of persuading the client (Rollnick et al. 2020) to come alongside and adopt my approach. Doing so would enable me (and the client) to address the issue head on and perhaps come to a different outcome. At the minimum it may have led to me being able to work with J to find a practitioner with a better fit to meet his expectations.

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| Brief contact intervention | |
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| What happened? | I went into the dressing room for the half time team talk and took a seat at the back of the room to listen to the coach's feedback. During the feedback I noticed Robin shaking his head when a message was directed at him. After the |

coach had finished talking Robin walked over to me and said, "I don't feel myself, I can't concentrate, I've got some things going on at home, personal stuff and I can't concentrate". I proceeded to say "Okay, that's not a problem, this happens, is this something that you want the coaches to know about?" Robin replied saying "No, but Jeff (Player Welfare) and people like that do, do you have any tips on concentration?" With the players preparing to leave for the second half I gave some advice on maintaining concentration emphasising the importance mental skills such as self-talk to try and keep focus on his job, and making a real effort to communicate and organise teammates as a strategy to stay focused on the game - I suggested we arrange to chat properly after the game when we have more time. As the players left the changing room, I left quickly to avoid conversations with the coaching staff, but was followed by the assistant coach who asked, "What is up with Robin?". I replied saying "Nothing really just asking for some advice on concentration techniques". I walked away and took my seat behind the dugout for the second half. I watched the second half and listened to the coaches questioning "what was up with Robin today" in response to any mistakes or errors. Following the game, I managed to speak to Jeff who had attended the game and mentioned that Robin had mentioned that he was aware of the personal issues that were ongoing. Jeff gave a brief overview of some of the issues Robin was dealing with involving, parents, moving houses, agents, and negotiations with the club. I spoke to Robin as he was preparing to leave and congratulated him on finding a way to get through the second half and perform well and checked he was okay. I arranged to meet with him before training on Monday.

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| What were you thinking & feeling? | Initially taken by surprise, in my experience so far it was rare to be approached at half-time during a game and in front of the rest of the staff. I remember being acutely aware of the time and being no more than a few minutes away from kick off. I thought of the brief contact intervention literature and felt there was little I could do at that moment to support the broader issues that may be going on at home. My assessment of the situation was that providing some practical solution focused advice was all that was possible given the time constraints and context we were in. I felt my knowledge of psychological skills techniques such as self talk and directing attention to task relevant information was sound, and I was able to provide some practical advice in the moment. I was also conscious of the public nature of the conversation we were having in front of the rest of the dressing room and felt it was best to leave with the players to avoid what I felt would be inevitable questions from the rest of the staff if I stayed in the dressing room with the other staff. I also thought it was important to be seen by Robin to leave with everyone else too in case there were any concerns that I would relay the information about his personal issues to the rest of the staff. As I heard the assistant coach call my name as we walked towards the pitch, I had a very short time to think about how I would respond and felt saying nothing would have created a bigger issue and chose to downplay the incident by responding in the way that I did and telling the assistant coach that I'd been asked a question about concentration. |
| Evaluation - What was good/bad? | I was pleased with how calmly I handled the situation; this was the first time I had been approached so publicly during the middle of a game. I feel I demonstrated some core consultancy skills by attempting to normalise the concerns that Robin presented and allay some of the concerns he may have been |

experiencing. I attempted to clarify what Robin was asking me for, in the knowledge that time was limited. I felt it was important to be able to offer something practical in the immediacy of the request for support, having a sound understanding of key psychological concepts and skills enabled me to be able to provide some succinct advice that was underpinned by theory and research. Being aware of the public nature of the approach, I feel I acted inline with British Psychological Society code of ethics (2014) principle of Respect and Standard of privacy and confidentiality (standard 1.2), by prioritising the clients right to confidentiality in checking whether he would like the information to be shared with the coaching staff. More specifically, in line with standard "*1.2 (iii) Restrict the scope of disclosure to that which is consistent with professional purposes, the specifics of the initiating request or event, and (so far as required by the law) the specifics of the client's authorisation*" I feel I acted appropriately and professionally in responding to the assistant coach's question; and my response represented a restricted disclosure for professional purposes. My role as a member of a multi-disciplinary support staff requires me to build and maintain effective working relationships with several stakeholders, in professional football often the most important relationships are those with coaching staff (Nesti, 2010). Additionally, the dressing room is regarded as the inner sanctum, where few members of staff are admitted on match days. I feel that making the decision to provide a restricted disclosure safeguarded my ability to be accepted inside the dressing room environment, and ultimately remain available to provide support for players. Additionally, despite initially feeling uncomfortable and apprehensive about what I felt were inevitable questions from coaches about my work, I feel that being approached

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| | for support so publicly sends a positive message to the other staff that players are valuing the work I am doing and the services I offer. In a broader sense I feel that being visible in supporting players helps to normalise the work of psychologists among both staff and players and demystify some of the misconceptions that can often exist. |
| Analysis: What sense can you make of it? | Experiencing such a time-pressured opportunity to provide support has challenged me to think about my professional philosophy and the nature of sports psychology work. Specifically, I feel this experience highlights the need to be adaptable to the context you are working in and the needs of the client. The question "who is being served?" (Andersen, 2005) is central consideration for all applied sport psychologists, and on reflection I feel my actions demonstrated an ability to assess and respond to the needs of the client quickly and professionally in a pressurised situation. My professional philosophy is built on the belief that my role is to support the athlete to navigate the unavoidable challenges that life (inside and outside of sport) presents, and values related to the importance of autonomy and personal responsibility. Guided by principles from existential psychology and psychotherapy, I typically engage in dialogue with clients to explore the challenges they are experiencing and their abilities to influence the situations they find themselves in. In the present example, adopting this approach would have been inappropriate and ineffective given the time constraints, it is likely that Robin would have walked away from the conversation feeling misunderstood or even confused. Recognising the contextual limitations meant I needed to be flexible in my approach to ensure the client is being served, and not my own needs. I am aware of the importance of being congruent with my philosophical beliefs |

| | and approach, but also aware that this may not always be the most appropriate way in every circumstance. I do however feel I demonstrated authenticity and congruence with my approach in recognising that there were broader issues influencing Robin's experience and arranging a follow up meeting to begin the process of a more thorough needs analysis. I feel this demonstrated empathy and genuineness, that I was listening to him and recognised that he was not simply asking me for advice on psychological skills for concentration, but he was sharing that he was experiencing challenges in other areas of his life. |
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**Demonstrating Effectiveness – What is a measure of your worth?**

*What?*

As part of a peer supervision group that meets every couple of months, members are invited to propose topics for the group to discuss or explore. Often these are related to challenges or cases that the individual might be experiencing. One of the members wanted to discuss how we demonstrate our impact as sport psychologists. Their club had recently employed a new sporting director and they were experiencing a 'pressure to measure' and show the impact of

the work they were doing. A contentious issue in sport psychology that is fraught with challenges (Lane, 2012). We discussed the different approaches or schools of thought in psychology and their relationship with measurement (see Tenenbaum et al. 2012). As a group we discussed the different ways that psychologists can show their impact or demonstrate their effectiveness and the 'momentum towards measurement' that exists in sport more broadly. Nesti (2011) made a call for sport psychologists to focus more on meaning than measurement and through my own supervision with Mark, I have been influenced by these lines of thought. I am passionate about my work being meaningful and was challenged by the idea of spending time and energy in trying to evidence the impact of our work – it seemed illogical to me, the more time we spent trying to evidence impact the less time we would have available to do impactful work! I felt frustrated for my colleague who was seemingly being pressurised to produce 'numbers' to evidence their impact.

*So what?*

I was challenged to think more about my own work and how I demonstrate effectiveness and my beliefs about what good sport psychology service delivery looks like. It was frustrating to hear about the pressures people were experiencing to demonstrate impact and to me showed a lack of awareness or understanding from the leaders within their environment about psychology and how this differs from other natural sciences (Nesti, 2011). I also felt incredibly fortunate that in my role there is a greater understanding of what sport psychology and sport psychologists can offer. That said, reflecting on my own work and the importance of being able to demonstrate effectiveness I explored how I could answer that question if it was posed to me. I began to think about what is meaningful, both to me and to the organisation or people who employ me. Reflecting on the broader objectives of the academy it became clear that our primary objective is to maximise the development of young people and support the progression

of players towards the senior level. Narrowing down this primary objective for the academy was useful – now I was clear on what was meaningful to the organisation I could begin to demonstrate how I (and psychology) contributed to the primary objective. Doing so helped me to crystallise my ideas that (to me) demonstrating effectiveness is not about measuring impact or output but is instead about being able to evidence or demonstrate our contribution or input to the broader objectives or goals.

*Now what?*

I have become much clearer on how I believe psychology contributes to the organisation I am working for. In turn I feel solid and comfortable in being able to articulate how I would go about demonstrating my contribution and effectiveness. And I have also recently agreed to be interviewed as a participant in a research study on this topic with Postdoctoral researcher further demonstrating my confidence and clarity on this topic. Going back to the original discussion in the supervision group, this topic was raised again at a future meeting and I offered a somewhat controversial contribution in asking 'who is being served' when time is being spent on measuring impact and collecting data? For me, it is not the athlete, it is perhaps the organisation but most likely the practitioner themselves. It is ironic that as psychologists', people often choose to adopt an avoidant approach of working with numbers instead of people.

Update:

Some months later I was asked to present at a conference and the topic of measurement came up again. I was asked a question about the use of cognitive testing and diagnostics – whilst I am not against these practices in and of themselves, I questioned the motives behind engaging in these activities and whether this was being done in the interests of the athlete or the practitioners themselves.

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**A case for clinical psychology?**

*What happened?*

During the first psychosocial support forum that included sport psychology, academy doctor, safeguarding, education staff, the players' coach and a clinical psychologist a concern was raised around a young player who appeared to have lost weight and was potentially overexercising. The forum was the first of a new season following an off-season break. An initial team formulation discussion to make sense of the information available to the group was held (Johnstone, 2018). During the initial team formulation, a working hypothesis was put forward in that the challenges experienced by the young player appeared to stem from previous feedback given about the importance of being physically fit in order to gain an extension to their registration. The concern raised by staff centred on the players intake of food on a recent training camp versus the level of physical activity being undertaken. I was allocated as the case lead and tasked with contacting the parents to get further information to inform how we moved forward. I arranged a telephone conversation with parents to continue the processes of needs analysis (Keegan, 2015) and share our initial observations and concerns with parents. At this

stage there was a degree of concern about the young player involved and the potential that this may be a case that required direct clinical psychology input. The clinical psychologist involved in the forum offered a calm and professional perspective, clarifying that there wasn't enough information to make that assumption just yet. Their assessment of the situation helped to ease the anxiety felt by the people in the room and the system – a common response in organisations where there is a heightened level of concern (Bloom & Farragher, 2011).

The perspective of the parents added valuable insight to feedback into the forum, that included changes in behaviour such as an increase in training/physical activity away from the club and changes to his diet, as well as providing insight about the types of information that the young player had been accessing online and in documentaries. Other information involved getting more specific anthropometric (height and weight) data from the sports science team. After feeding this information back to the forum, the level of concern decreased, and we were able to develop a shared formulation and understanding of the presenting issue. Developing a shared understanding meant that a coordinated and coherent action plan and intervention could be developed (Johnstone, 2018). We were able to understand that the player had recently undergone a growth spurt and despite losing a small amount of body mass this wasn't deemed to be a cause for concern. He had received feedback at the end of the previous season about the importance of staying fit – the player had experienced several small injuries in the previous season. And had taken an interest in training and nutrition after watching a popular Netflix documentary and had made some changes to his diet. Viewed alongside the original information this new information provided a clearer picture and explanation of what may have been going on for the player. We proposed that perhaps the player had misunderstood the meaning of 'fit' but needed to check this with the player himself. The coach had a further discussion with the player to share his observations about him appearing to be doing extra

training and that he had spoken to his parents about changes in his diet. In doing so the player gave the feedback that he was working hard to be as fit as he could for the start of the new season. We concluded that the player had perhaps misunderstood the coaches feedback about being fit, when perhaps what the coach meant was available or free from injury. In a follow up conversation to formulate the development plan for the new season the coach clarified his feedback and reassured the player that the volume of work he was doing in the programme was enough and additional training away from the club wasn't necessary. The panel on the forum agreed to monitor the player from a distance over the next few months and we were satisfied that there was no further action needed at this time.

*Evaluation & Analysis:*

When the case was initially presented as a concern by the coach there was a suggestion that there may have been issues with eating and or overexercising. The potential that this may have been a more serious issue created a level of concern among staff that required further exploration. The case highlights the importance of conducting a thorough needs analysis that involves gathering all the relevant information (Keegan, 2015) in order to make informed decisions about what do next. This appears as relevant in team formulation as it does to practicing psychology in an individual context (Johnstone & Dallos, 2014). Additionally the decision to adopt a 'hands off' approach and not intervene directly meant that the level of concern or anxiety wasn't escalated and reverberated into the system (Bloom & Farragher, 2011) or passed on to the player. Taking more of a supervisory consulting approach (Harwood & Steptoe, 2018) where I (with the help of colleagues) supported the coach to work with the player meant that we were able to better understand and then address the concern without creating any unnecessary anxiety in the young player. I now feel much more confident in taking this approach and supporting others to work in a more psychologically informed way. Perhaps

earlier in my journey I may have experienced more pressure or felt more inclined to take over any issues of a 'psychological nature'. I feel a similar maturity is reflected in the approach to psychology at the club, it feels as though there is a good awareness of how to use the psychosocial support forum evidenced in the coach bringing the case in the first place. Furthermore, there is an alignment between the principle that psychology support should be proactive and developmental and look to optimise the environment. Decisions made here were proactive and supported the coach to have conversations with the player and were not reactive (or overreactive) to the initial concerns that were raised, something that I feel reflects the confidence in the processes we have in place.

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**Research & Dissemination**

Dissemination – Isokinetic Conference

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| **What happened?** | At the Isokinetic Medical Group Conference hosted by FC Barcelona, I was invited to give a 15-minute presentation on "Delivering Sport Psychology for Performance *and* Wellbeing" as part of a symposium titled "Youth to Senior: Performance & Wellbeing". Organised by Dr Martin Littlewood, the four presenters were each given different but related topics to cover. Throughout the planning of presentation, I consulted regularly with Dr Littlewood to discuss my ideas and ensure the content met the brief given. The day before the symposium the four presenters met to give feedback on each other's presentations and align key messages. On the day of the presentation, I observed several more experienced presenters in the morning session, paying particular attention to their style of delivery, layout, and flow of their presentations. I identified the importance of body language, clarity of oration and demonstrating enthusiasm as key messages to incorporate into my presentation in the afternoon. I arrived 15 minutes early to familiarise myself with the setup of the presentation room. After being introduced by the chair I delivered my presentation, which lasted only slightly over 15 minutes. |
| **What were you thinking & feeling?** | I felt well prepared having spent several days developing the content for the presentation and having been in regular contact with Dr Littlewood. Feedback and guidance throughout the preparation helped me to feel confident in what I was to deliver as only few minor amendments were recommended. On the day of the symposium, I felt a mixture of preparedness, excitement and some nerves. I knew some vastly experienced colleagues from LJMU were presenting in the morning session and decided that it would be good to attend and observe the sessions and see if I could glean any insights for my presentation. Doing so also enabled me to familiarise myself with the setup in |

| | the room. I felt more relaxed after seeing others present and identifying some tips to take forward for my presentation. Immediately before the afternoon session I began to experience some signs of anxiety, such as an increased heart rate and a dry mouth. In an ironic way, I felt amused by this experience and reasoned to myself that at least this demonstrated that I cared. I continued to take sips of water and directed my attention towards the presenter on stage. By the time I was being introduced my awareness of somatic anxiety symptoms had all but disappeared. I delivered my presentation feeling confident throughout, paying attention to the audience helped me to feel more relaxed when noticing their nods and signs of acknowledgement. After the presentation I felt a sense of enjoyment and felt as though I wanted to do it again, I think this was a key factor in my sense assuredness and confidence when taking questions at the end of the session. |
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| **Evaluation - What was good/bad?** | Regular communication and feedback from Dr Littlewood were instrumental in my sense of confidence and preparedness for this experience. As a member of my supervisory team, I feel we have developed a working relationship and rapport, built on respect, trust, and genuineness. These ingredients, and the effective working relationship between trainee and supervisor, feature prominently in the professional training literature as being key factors in neophyte practitioner development (Tod, Hutter & Eubank, 2017). In addition, recommending me to present at the conference served as a more concrete reminder of the confidence that Dr Littlewood had that I would be able to represent the school and university positively, which I am sure was instrumental in enabling me to work through the nerves that I experienced prior to presenting. I feel this serves to highlight the importance of having a mentor |

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| | figure were receiving feedback and guidance, as opposed to making you feel insecure or inadequate, makes you feel empowered as an early career practitioner, which is reflective of my professional approach to practice when working with clients (Van Raalte & Andersen, 2000). My awareness of the importance of congruence and authenticity as ingredients for successful sports psychology work (Lindsay *et al.*, 2007) is growing throughout my time on the professional doctorate, through engaging both with clients and supervision. Reflecting on the experience highlighted the importance of looking outside of one's own operating domain to observe or learn new ways of working that could be translated back into your own practice (Hutter *et al.*, 2017). By spending time observing presenters from other disciplines of sports science I found myself able to focus more specifically on the style of delivery as opposed to focusing on or critically appraising the content of the presentations. Doing so enabled me to identify some useful strategies to adopt and use in my own presentation. To develop further for future conference and dissemination activity I feel it will be important to continue to prepare thoroughly in a similar vein to how I had prepared for the Isokinetic Conference. When I draw comparisons to having presented to Prof Doc peers earlier in the programme having felt like I prepared poorly, the importance of being prepared and warning against complacency is stark. |
| **What would you do next time?** | Ensure I prepare adequately for future presentations and give myself enough time to plan and gain feedback on initial versions as this was something I found helpful in helping me to feel confident and prepared. In addition, I feel it will be important to continue to pay attention to the style and tone of my delivery |

| | as this was something I felt differentiated between those presenters who came across well and those who did not. |
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| What Happened? | I had been given a brief to provide a 20 minute presentation to the rest of the group (Prof Doc peers) on an intervention of my choice. The task brief was as follows: |
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| | *"You have been asked to give a presentation to a coaching group (imagine the rest of the group are the coaches) with whom you work in your organisation (pick one) about a psychological intervention you're going to use with individual athletes or the team to help you progress towards a particular aim/goal you're collectively working on (you need* |

*to decide what that aim/ goal is). In the 20 minute presentation, you need to i) describe the planned intervention and how it works/will be delivered, and ii) how you will monitor and evaluate the impact of the intervention."*

I chose to focus on the use of metaphor to promote client understanding and engagement in 1-2-1 sports psychology consulting (Stambulova, 2010, Lindsay *et al.* 2010). Instead of creating a hypothetical scenario I chose to focus on a case from my work. I prepared the presentation in two parts, part one involved me delivering some information via PowerPoint, and part two was more interactive and included an activity and discussion about how we could deliver, monitor and evaluate the proposed intervention. Part one was delivered very quickly, perhaps a sign of being nervous delivering to my peers, but also delivered poorly. I stood at the front of the room, presenting the material I had prepared to the group. For the second half of the presentation, I sat around the table with the group and introduced the activity, facilitated discussion and answered questions that the group had. Part two seemed to flow much better, I found myself engaging and connecting more with the group and the feedback provided at the end reflected this. The feedback included the notable differences in part one vs part two, the group commented that I seemed much more comfortable in part two over part one, more specifically my delivery was much more composed in part two and there was less use of filler words e.g. Um, er, etc.

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| Thoughts and Feelings? | I felt conscious of myself during part one of the presentation, I felt clumsy. The words did not seem to flow, I felt hurried in a way I felt restricted. Experiencing these feelings was uncomfortable and frustrating because I was confident that the material I had prepared was good, yet the way I delivered it would likely have meant that some of the impact was lost. I found myself being distracted by the PowerPoint, trying to remember what words went with which slides, what would come next, how much time I had used, so much so that I paid little attention to the audience. The experience shared similarities with other "beginner" experiences described by Rønnestad and Skovolt (2003) in relation to counselling and psychotherapy training and development, where the trainee practitioner is confronted with doubt and questions over their abilities. In sport psychology, Lindsay *et al.* (2007) described how early career practitioners can become preoccupied by internal dialogue and experience frustration, self-doubt and increased hesitance. With such volume of "cognitive noise" (Tod *et al.* 2009)it makes sense that I was unable to attend fully to the group and deliver in a fluent and confident manner. |
| | In contrast, the part two of the presentation felt different, I felt more relaxed and comfortable; this more collaborative approach felt much more me. The 'noise' that had distracted me earlier seemed to quieten, I felt engaged with the group and the session flowed. Feedback from the group reinforced these feelings, they had picked up on me being less comfortable in part one and much more comfortable in part two. I think I knew this; but the immediate feedback and realisation that this was so |

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| | visible to the group awakened me to the need to pay more attention to me and the environment I create – and not just the content of my presentations.<br><br>I think delivering to my peers was also a factor in this experience, it is common to experience anxieties around evaluation from peers (Tod *et al.* 2009), and this was perhaps a factor in me choosing to 'play safe' and deliver in a more traditional "academic" or direct teaching style (Skinner, 2005). It seems ironic that adopting a 'safer' approach led to worse 'performance'. Part two was more reflective of the approach I had grown to adopt in my work teaching young athletes, which is collaborative, interactive and had moved away from using PowerPoints. However adopting the two approaches 'side-by-side' and gaining critical feedback from peers was a powerful learning experience, which has stimulated me to think more critically about my role as a teacher. |
| What next? | Moving forward I plan to pay greater consideration in my role as a teacher and consider what approaches fit best with my values and philosophy. The importance of being congruent has been highlighted in 'flashing lights' through this experience, and finding an approach that fits me will be important if I'm going to be effective and comfortable in what I do. On reflection, the unease which I've experienced is a normal and necessary part of development (Rønnestad & Skovolt, 2003); and a sign that there is work to do to figure out what 'fits' me. |

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| Dissemination – Working with key stakeholders. | |
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| **What happened?** | Research into talent development highlighted distinctions between psychological characteristics of excellence (PCE) and psychological characteristics of developing excellence (PCDE) (MacNamara, Button, and Collins, 2010a, 2010b); and emphasises the importance of deliberately embedding the development of the psychological characteristics needed to reach the elite level in talent development practices. I felt it was important to ensure that the psychology programme I deliver was aligned to the philosophy and working practices of the academy, to bridge the gap between traditional sports psychology that can often be seen as isolated; to a more ecologically informed approach to sports psychology that attempts to embed sports |

psychology interventions and principles into the talent development environment (Larsen *et al.*, 2014). A central feature of the academy philosophy is to encourage players to be active agents in their development journey, the ability to self-manage and be responsible is highly regarded by staff working in professional football (Cook *et al.* 2014).

Tasked with delivering five workshops on the theme of "Desire" for the U12 to U16 age groups, (Desire is one of the concepts outlined in the academy psychology strategy and demonstrating desire and commitment is regarded as an important characteristic for academy players at the club). The previous year had been an introduction to the programme, where psychological concepts were introduced, defined, and identified at different age groups. Reflecting on and evaluating the programme highlighted a need to bring these abstract concepts to life in a more practical way, for example instead of discussing what desire and commitment is, how can we focus more on the skills and abilities underpin being able to demonstrate these concepts? To embed the psychology programme into the wider academy programme I met with the academy manager to discuss linking the psychology workshops to the process for creating individual development plans that we were required to do by the Premier League to comply with the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) (Premier League, 2011). We discussed how putting the players at the heart of this process was important to encourage them to become active in their own development and foster motivation and commitment. We agreed that we would begin this process by asking the boys to consider their outstanding qualities and areas they would like to work on, and I would facilitate an interactive

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| | workshop on goal setting and action planning, during which the boys would begin to create their own individual development plans based on their outstanding qualities and areas for development. The course of action was agreed to ensure the academy psychology programme was embedded in the wider academy development practices and inline with the academy philosophy. |
| **What were you thinking & feeling?** | I felt it was important to ensure that my work, and the psychology programme was visible to the academy manager and wider academy. Reflecting on the previous years work highlighted a need to bridge the gap between psychology and the rest of the academy practices which I felt would help to give my work greater impact. Meeting the academy manager to discuss this approach also gave me an opportunity to demonstrate my professionalism and desire to ensure my work is impactful. Being able to spend time to discuss my ideas provided an opportunity to highlight wider influence of my work could have at the academy and its practices. Studies in Danish professional football settings have advocated this ecological approach as an effective way of developing a culture that promotes the psychosocial development of its participants (Larsen *et al.* 2014), and promoting greater cultural coherence (Henriksen, 2015). The support from the academy manager to try to link the psychology programme to the wider development practices gave me confidence that my work was being valued and supported by senior staff. The support from the academy manager also gave me a sense that my work was progressing and evolving within the academy, which I feel is important given that support from senior figures within an organisation or club is regarded as |

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| | a pivotal factor in the long-term success of psychology work in professional sport (Eubank, Nesti & Cruickshank, 2014; Larsen *et al.* 2014; Nesti, 2010). |
| **Evaluation - What was good/bad?** | Sharing my reflections on the previous years of the psychology programme and being explicit in demonstrating that I was engaging in evaluation and reflection enabled me to demonstrate to the academy manager that I was invested in my work. I feel this was important in gaining the support I was looking for to further increase my influence in the wider academy practices. |

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| Mixed Age Group - Medicine Ball Activity. | |
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| What happened? | Phase one of the academy psychology programme is "Introduction to Psychology". After discussion with colleagues it was decided that we would give each group a practical activity for the first session of the season. The content and format for the session was planned in advance, after consultation with colleagues from Bayer Leverkusen who had introduced me to the activity. Players were requested to bring in medicine balls from their athletic development kits for the activity. Shortly before the session the space we were going to use was taken up by the U18s who were to use it for training. After speaking with the HoP we decided to use the academy classroom as an alternative, and quickly set about moving furniture and preparing the space. The boys were waiting outside the classroom as I approached with the spare medicine balls. On entering the room they took a seat around the screen, perhaps assuming that it would be a formal classroom style activity. I took names on the |

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| | board to record times and asked the boys to find a partner and stand opposite each other with a medicine ball, I asked the boys to identify the theme for the day, which they responded correctly identifying "Desire" and "Pushing your limits" as the themes myself and coaching staff had been referring to throughout the day so far. Instructions for the task were given and players began the task with times being recorded when the medicine balls were put down. After everyone had completed the first round of the activity the boys were asked to take a seat in front of the screen. As the activity had taken slightly longer than anticipated I decided to remove one of the videos I had planned in order to save time. I spent a few minutes probing for feedback on the task, with limited responses from players. I then spoke with players about Roger Bannister, giving some detail on the first four minute mile before playing a short video giving some further information about the achievement and the spark this created for others to go on and complete sub-four minute miles. I then related this change of belief to the players academy journey and the recent first team debuts for academy players and how this might serve to reinforce their own belief that becoming a Manchester United player is possible. We then completed the medicine ball activity again with 17 out of 21 players beating their first time. I initiated a short discussion at the end of the session, referring to the aims of the session and the importance of not putting limits on our own achievements. The HoP then related the activity back to the class of 92, and the culture, values and beliefs of Manchester United as a club. |
| What were you | Prior to the session I felt confident even though I'd not delivered this activity before, shortly before the session began I had to improvise and find an |

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| thinking & feeling? | alternative space and spare medicine balls. At the time I was a little frustrated about the lack of communication about use of space, but this was also something I should have clarified. As the session began I felt a little unprepared and uncertain about how best to begin the session. However this soon settled as the session progressed - and I'm confident this wasn't visible to the boys. The probing questions before the video felt a little uncomfortable, perhaps I could have planned some questions beforehand that would have elicited more in-depth answers and responses from the boys. On reflection, the questions I asked could have been clearer and more specific. The presence of a camera and senior management in the room may have also contributed to players also feeling slightly uncomfortable due to fear of evaluation. I also felt as though the link from the Roger Bannister video and the example of academy graduates making debuts was a bit clunky and could have been made stronger. Towards the end of the session I was conscious that it had taken longer than anticipated to complete, and felt as though I was rushing through the summary - which is a vital part of the learning process. As Tony was speaking and relating back to the class of 92 and the club culture I felt pleased that he had done this as it added emphasis to, and really clarified the key learning points for players. |

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| Evaluation & Analysis - What was good/bad? | I thought the practical activity worked really well and gave the boys a different experience of "doing psychology". The practical activity engaged the boys in the session and I felt they were intrigued about what the session was about. In a relatively short period of time it allowed for a live demonstration of the power of psychology and the influence beliefs can have on our behaviour. This type of experiential learning provides an opportunity to "hook" players who may otherwise find it difficult to make the link between psychology, behaviour and performance. The set up of the activity also promoted good engagement from the boys, creating an element of competition, albeit whilst making the point that the competition was against themselves meant the boys pushed themselves and resulted in the activity going well. However, it is also possible that some boys may have felt uncomfortable in a task that favours those who are physically stronger/more developed than others. It is important to consider and be aware of the narratives that may be reinforced in sport environments, and how this may be misused or misunderstood (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). For example, perhaps the most widely acknowledged narrative that exists and is perpetuated in elite sport is the performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2006); which centres on the importance of winning, being the best and a single minded dedication to sport success as *the* way to progress in elite sport. A number of negative implications can arise from this narrative, such as athletes identity and self-worth being fused with their achievements in sport. For young athletes this may result in overemphasising the importance of winning over development or an ego orientation over mastery orientation. I attempted to address these issues by being explicit that the message I was attempting to get across was about |

challenging ones individual limits and barriers to success, and not about competing with and beating the person next to you. I recorded individual targets as a way of trying to guide the boys to focus on competing with their own personal times as opposed to others. It is also acknowledged that professional football environments typically place importance on concepts such as mental toughness and associated factors such as being competitive and committed (Cook *et al.* 2014), being aware of this I felt it was important for coaching and support staff to be briefed and invited to the session. Doing so ensures staff are aware of the messages being delivered and can reinforce these in an appropriate way. I felt this was an indirect way of connecting and influencing the wider staff team, something that I feel is an essential part of the role given the power and influence that coaches in particular have over young people and the level of credibility afforded to the work of psychologists (Nesti, 2016).

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| Sport Psychology Practitioners Workshop, FC Bayern Munich | |
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| What happened? What were you thinking & feeling? | I was invited to attend a sport psychology workshop by a colleague at FC Bayern Munich, where a range of practitioners working in professional football clubs could come together to share ideas and learn more about what each other was doing in their respective organisations. At least this was what I assumed the workshop would involve, however in reality the experience turned out to be very different.<br><br>The growing concern about the coronavirus meant that several people dropped out, which meant that now only five sport psychology practitioners were due to attend. Prior to the event we were asked to share some challenges/concerns that we were experiencing that could be used to provide some structure to the workshop. Each attendee was then given a topic to facilitate a discussion on during the workshop. I was a little unsure about what was expected around "facilitation" during the workshop, perhaps influenced by the "badge" of the organisation I was representing and what others may have been expecting from me because of this. My session was scheduled for the second day which gave me an opportunity to see how the sessions on the first day developed before shaping my session more fully. Having experienced lots of round table discussions with peers on the professional doctorate programme, I was confident that a group of psychologists could debate and discuss topics for long periods without the need for a rigid agenda! |

The first session began with short introductions about who we were, the work we did and a brief insight into our professional philosophies. We were then introduced to the Meisner repetition exercise, a technique used in acting classes to help actors connect with the present moment and the person in front of them react spontaneously to that person (see City Academy, London, 2016). Used as an ice breaker, the exercise involved standing opposite a partner repeating phrases, with one person leading the exchanges that the other person had to repeat in first person e.g. "Your arms are folded" / "My arms are folded". When observing others, I found the emotions that people were displaying, observing, and subtly responding to were incredibly powerful and the interactions between the two people grew from an awkward exchange to something resembling a dance. My experience taking part in the exercise was equally as powerful. If the exchanges of the first pair resembled an elegant dance, my experience felt extremely clumsy as though I was being pushed and pulled around a dancefloor. The exchanges started at a more personal level than the first pair, with my partner beginning with a statement about my emotions. The exchanges began with "you feel awkward" or something similar, to which I felt a resistance to internally, as I didn't feel this way, but I felt as though the partner wanted me to feel this way. The exercise continued in this way with exchanges such as "you feel confused", and "you are tense" which initially I did not feel but felt as though this was what my partner wanted me to feel. I felt as though I was being pulled and pushed around in the exercise, and although I did not feel those emotions on reflection, I recognised that this created some resistance and the more they wanted me to feel a certain way, the more I felt this resistance. In the moment, I felt frustrated and after the exercise I felt as though the exercise had gone terribly, especially compared to the first pair which seemed so natural

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| | and elegant. I felt out of my comfort zone and quite vulnerable in front of my peers, which was not something I was expecting to happen when the workshop was proposed initially. We then joined as a group to share some reflections on the experiences we had during the exercise with each other. |
| Evaluation - What was good/bad? | A major positive from the experience was the variety and intensity of emotions and experiences that I had throughout the workshop. There were times where I felt comfortable, confident and competent; for example despite some uncertainty about what people were expecting in relation to "facilitation" I was confident that I could adapt and plan my session at short notice and didn't feel the need to be as structured as I may have done earlier in my development journey, where it is common for early career practitioners often find comfort in structure (Tod, Anderson & Marchant, 2009). Equally there were times where I felt vulnerable and uncomfortable, which may be considered a negative as there is often an (inaccurate) assumption that we should feel confident and assured in the work that we do (Tod *et al.* 2009). However, on reflection, I felt this was a real positive as it allowed me to become more aware of the areas I am comfortable and shined a light on the areas or situations that I am less comfortable in. Though in truth, I think I already knew the areas I was uncomfortable feeling vulnerable but stepping out of my comfort zone reinforced this to me. The experiential nature of the Meisner exercise was also a powerful way of bringing to life the importance of building a genuine connection between two people. Creating this connection is an essential component of our work in psychology and is often regarded as the catalyst that allows growth or change to occur (Buber, 1970), but can sometimes be seen as a vague or abstract concept. However, the experiential exercise brought this to life and created a lived experience of what this looks like when it goes well and when |

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| | it goes badly. This also served to highlight the importance of lived experience and emotions in promoting learning. |
| Analysis: What sense can you make of it? What would you do next time? | I believe a major factor in the experience was the difference between expectation and reality. On reflection I assumed that the workshop would be a kind of "knowledge transfer" where people would share information about what they do, which would have been useful, but superficial in comparison to what took place. The reality was a much more personally reflective and demanding experience, unlike anything I have experienced at a conference or "public" workshop before.<br><br>The small numbers within the group, meant that each participant had to commit themselves fully to the activities to make the workshop a success. Larger numbers may have allowed participants to be less engaged, which would likely have resulted in a less impactful experience. In short, I think the small group created a space for a form of peer supervision that was both challenging and safe, which is essential for encouraging real and personal learning to take place (Sharp, Hodge & Danish, 2019). I feel that throwing myself into the workshop as an active participant as opposed to an interested observer meant that the experience was much more demanding but ultimately rewarding. I was required to step out of my comfort zone and experience some uncomfortable feelings, e.g., during the Meisner exercise, which I may not have done had I only partly engaged. Whilst uncomfortable at the time, I feel that reflecting on the emotions that I felt allowed me to learn more about myself and my work (Knowles *et al.* 2014). Firstly, the experience of feeling "pushed and pulled" allowed me to recognise and become more aware of how clients may feel or experience 1-2-1 work. Experiencing these emotions myself was a stark reminder of the importance of empathy and being aware of the emotions |

that others may be experiencing; particularly when working with developing athletes or people who are "new" to working with psychology.

The second key learning from the workshop was that I needed to step out of my comfort zone more to continue to learn and develop. Going into the workshop I was confident in my knowledge and that I would be able to offer a valuable contribution to the workshop, however stepping out of my comfort zone and showing more of "me" helped me to become more aware of my limits and expand them. Ultimately being uncomfortable helped me to learn more about myself and how I may have been resistant to being uncomfortable in other areas of my life/work. The first two learnings would not have been possible without paying attention to and reflecting on the emotions that occurred, and so a third lesson from the experience is the importance of capturing and consolidating learning through reflective practice (Knowles *et al.* 2014). A key feature of the workshop was the inclusion of periods for reflection and providing feedback after each session. The value of this has enabled me to become more aware of my areas of strength, and more importantly the areas of myself that I need to develop further to continue learning.

Going forward I am going to continue to engage in the working group that attended the workshop with a renewed focus on developing myself. Continuing to seek out learning experiences that require a personal commitment will challenge me to develop myself further, in addition to continuing to develop my knowledge through traditional CPD events such as conferences. Following the workshop, I am committed to showing more of "me" in my work and stepping out of my comfort zone more often in pursuit of the things I believe in.

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**Delivering CPD session in Womens Football**

*What?*

I was recently invited to contribute to a CPD event for the staff of a professional women's football team competing in the WSL. I was asked to deliver a session on working with talented but challenging players and supporting transition between youth and senior level. The Head of Performance cited the number of young (16–19-year old) players involved in the senior team training and transitioning to the first team environment was increasing and as such the staff might benefit from a section on this topic. After accepting the invitation to contribute I worked on developing the session but encountered some challenges along the way. Predominantly my experiences have been in the mens and boys football and much less in the womens game and

though I had been invited to contribute I did not want to come across as an expert in a setting I was less familiar with. Coupled with this I found that much of the transition related research in professional football was conducted in mens or boys football settings (e.g. Morris et al. 2016) where key factors in transition such as the context, sources of support and barriers to transition may be very different (Morris, 2021).

*So what?*

Being authentic, representing who I am and what I believe in is important to me. I value transparency and respect (as noted in my systematic review) and so I was conscious of not wanting to 'play the expert' in an unfamiliar setting. Further, I was keen to respect the client (or in this case client group) by not simply 'copy and pasting' things that I had learnt from my experiences in, or the research carried out in male football settings. When planning for the session I decided to adopt a more collaborative approach and use the first part of the workshop to get insight from the staff that were attending to help shape the session. I prepared some content for later in the session to share with staff after taking time to engage and work with their experiences. From previous experience I have learnt the importance of aligning my philosophy and approach to practice with the suitable methods of delivery – in education aligning objectives with appropriate methods is linked to better outcomes (Biggs, 2012) – and in practice this makes for a more authentic and enjoyable experience for me! Van Deurzen (2002) talks about inauthenticity as like wearing clothes that don't fit and that is something I have experienced in the past!

*Now what?*

I planned the session in two halves the first to collaborate with participants to better understand their experiences and challenges of working with young players transitioning into the senior environment in a sort of 'live' needs analysis. I felt this served two purposes, one to provide context and examples that I could work with later in the session, but secondly to name and discuss the types of challenges that the staff group were experiencing and begin to better understand how different their colleagues viewed and approached these challenges. This was potentially a risk due to the unstructured nature of the session, but one I was prepared to take. The second half of the session focused on sharing some content around adolescent development (Carr, 2006) and frameworks for working effectively as a staff team with players (Bickley et al. 2019). For example, some content focused on the changes that take place in the brain impacting on emotions and behaviour (Blakemore, 2019) that may go some way to explaining some of the challenges that had been discussed. Before discussing how we might work with the examples provided in the first part of the session using team formulation or 'elephant spotting' type approaches (Ong, McGregor & Daley, 2018). Feedback provided after the session was positive and the staff appreciated the opportunity to work with 'real life' scenarios as opposed to simply listening to theoretical content. I am now more solid in my approach to my approach to group delivery and aware of my preferred styles and how this links to my professional philosophy. It was pleasing to be invited back to contribute to future CPD events later in the season.

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**Doing applied research**

*What?*

As part of my studies, I have been conducting research within my work setting. Research activity has involved interviewing a range of different participants and then also conducting observation of the day-to-day activity as part of an ethnographic study. Conducting interviews was relatively straightforward and I felt comfortable and confident doing this – it also had the added bonus of enabling me to practice some key counselling skills such as listening, paraphrasing, use of pause etc. (Katz & Hemmings, 2009). However I have found conducting observation to be more challenging – particularly around what to observe, gauging what is meaningful, what information to detail and what information is superfluous or questioning

whether I am looking for things that are not there! I am also conscious of the potential negative perceptions that people may have of observation or 'being observed' (Martin et al. 2020). It is proving to be more challenging than I first anticipated.

*So what?*

I am acutely aware of some of the misconceptions and stigmas that exist around sport psychologists in professional football environments (Nesti, 2010). It feels compounded by the scepticism that exists regarding academics or academic research in these environments too (Nesti & Sulley, 2014). I found myself feeling conscious of the role I was playing during observation and not wanting to appear too academic (Parker, 1995). Reflecting on these challenges, it is probable that I am spending too much time observing myself than I am the environment and interactions I am there to study! I engaged with my supervisors to discuss these challenges and reached out to Dr Carsten Hvid Larsen (University of Southern Denmark) who was advising on the project and had conducted similar projects in other professional football clubs. It was reassuring to be able to discuss these experiences with my supervisors, if only to realise that these concerns were not my own but had been experienced by others too. And on a practical level, Dr Larsen shared and guided me through an observation template that he had used in previous studies to help me to organise my observations and interpretations more clearly. And Dr Martin Littlewood directed me towards reading that might assist me with better understanding the realities of conducting ethnographic research.

*Now what?*

Having engaged with my supervisors to discuss these experiences and gone away to read further I am more comfortable with being uncomfortable – and understand that these feelings were a normal part of conducting observational research. It has served as a reminder of the

importance of engaging in supervision and reaching out to mentors when things become challenging. Through additional reading I now feel more aware and prepared for the ethical e.g. (Ferdinand et al. 2007), moral and practical challenges (Champ et al. 2020) that conducting ethnographic research presents. Taking a step back and reaching out for support has helped me to 'see the wood from the trees'.

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**Consultancy Case Study 1**


**Supporting Transition in Professional Football**



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1.      Introduction to Client

Client A is a fifteen-year-old academy player at Winter United Football Club (WUFC) and has recently signed from another professional club in the UK, in a move that meant Client A had to move away from home and into family accommodation provided by WUFC.

1.1      Contextual Information

At the time the request for consultancy was received Client A had been signed at the club and moved away from home and into family accommodation for approximately four weeks. Client A had moved over 120 miles from home and was living away from family for the first time. Additionally, Client A had moved to the school that is partnered with the club to provide education for the boys involved in the club's full-time programme for high potential players. Client A was signed mid-way through the season following a trial earlier in the year; the administration involved with signing players from other professional clubs meant that approximately six months had passed between being offered a place at the WUFC academy and making the move to the club.

1.2      Family social/cultural status and support networks

The player was currently living in host-family accommodation, travelling back home on Saturday morning/afternoon following fixtures to spend Saturday evening at home with family and returning to the host-family accommodation on Sunday evenings. His parents are married and Client A has an older sister and younger brother living at home. His parents appear caring and supportive, driving 480 miles each weekend to watch the weekend fixtures, take Client A home and drop him back off at the host-family accommodation. A dedicated member of the player liaison team works closely with the host-family accommodation providers to monitor young player's adjustment to the club. In addition, the club has a full time member of staff

based at the partner school to provide educational and pastoral support to players on the full-time programme.

1.3     Presenting difficulties and background information relevant to consultancy.

Concerns about Client A's emotional wellbeing and adjustment to moving away from home were raised by Client A's mum with the academy safeguarding manager. I was contacted by the safeguarding manager to discuss the potential for providing Client A with some psychology support. I agreed to meet with both the safeguarding manager and Client A's mum to discuss the request. At the meeting Laura expressed some concern about Client A's wellbeing and low mood, suggesting that she felt he was homesick. On a recent drive home, Client A disclosed that he "hated" being at the club and being away from home and became emotional and upset during their conversation. Laura also felt that he had not been his usual self on the pitch, not showing the same energy and enthusiasm that he had done previously. When asked about how I might be able to help, I gave a brief synopsis of my professional philosophy and beliefs around consultancy. Specifically that the person and performer are inextricably intertwined. With the amount of change and uncertainty following the move, it is no wonder Client A may appear less enthusiastic on the pitch, and so my first priority would be to attempt to better understand Client A's experiences to be able to provide support. Doing so would require me to build and maintain a working relationship founded in mutual trust and respect, and for this reason it was vital that Client A was given a choice about whether he would like to work with me. I asked Laura to discuss the possibility of working with me with Client A and get back to me with his decision. The following day Laura called to inform me that Client A had agreed to giving our work together a try, and we arranged our first meeting for later that week.

2.       The Contracting Process

Being contracted by the football club to provide sports psychology services for players, coaches and parents at the club, meant that costs were not discussed with the client or parents. Verbal contracts were made in relation to confidentiality, time and structure. It was agreed that information shared by Client A would remain strictly confidential, disclosure would only take place when agreed by Client A, or if there were concerns for his safety or any disclosures that included information that could be considered illegal. After consultation about the importance of trust and respect, all parties (myself, Client A and the players mother) were in agreement on these conditions of confidentiality. At the time consultancy was requested, 12 weeks of the season remained, we agreed that 12 weeks represented a suitable time frame to work together, with ongoing reviews of progress taking place throughout this time. It was also agreed that the date and time of each subsequent meeting would be decided at the end of each consultation.

3.       Rationale for theoretical orientation and approach taken

The presenting issues went beyond the performance enhancement remit that may typically be associated with sports psychology work (Brady & Maynard, 2010). The challenges Client A was experiencing could be understood in relation to experiencing change, uncertainty and anxiety about the experiences he was having after making the decision to move away from home. In order to effectively support Client A through this experience, a theoretical perspective and approach that adequately accommodates the complex lived experiences of the whole person is required. One theoretical perspective that views human experience in a holistic manner is the existential approach, an approach that prioritises understanding an individuals' subjective reality and the meaning they ascribe to their experiences (Kierkegaard, 1992; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015). The existential approach also provides an alternative conceptualisation of anxiety, viewing anxiety as a central feature of human experience that is

concerned with the possibilities and limitations of one's existence and not simply an unpleasant emotion that is experienced before competition (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015). More specifically, the existential approach contends that anxiety is ever present in our lives (Schneider & May, 1995), and must be confronted in order to successfully grow, develop and move forward in life (van Deurzen, 2002). Failure to do so can lead to what the existentialists refer to as neurotic anxiety (May, 1977), resulting in avoiding and rejecting responsibility to make choices and positively influence the direction ones live goes in; a phenomenon referred to as "stunting" the development of the personality (Buber, 1970). Using a counselling based approach to support the development of the whole person requires the psychologist to demonstrate a number of key personal qualities; namely, authenticity, empathy and presence (Nesti, 2004). The ability to demonstrate these qualities effectively and make a genuine connection with the client that is key to the success of any work between the psychologist and client (Fromm, 1994) when adopting an existential approach. As an approach that seeks to better understand the subjective experiences of individuals, and places emphasis on the importance of meaning and developing an effective working relationship, the existential approach represents a suitable foundation from which to formulate a plan for psychological support that is able to attend to broader life concerns and issues that go beyond performance enhancement.

4.      Nature and context in which consultancy took place

Consultancy primarily took place at the football club training ground, in meeting rooms, open cafe areas and outside walking in the grounds. Other consultations took place in meeting rooms at the club's partner school. Consultancy meetings were conducted as 1-2-1 meetings; the busy nature of the football club training ground influenced the need to vary the context in which meetings took place (Nesti, 2010). This also allowed for greater congruence between the approach taken and my behaviour in practice, I would provide Client A with options to choose

from and decisions to make about when and where meetings would take place, which is consistent with the philosophical foundations of existential approaches to psychology (Cooper, 2016).

In addition, the decision to vary the meeting contexts was also influenced by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2014) ethical principles, specifically to safeguard and respect the right to confidentiality and privacy and minimise the risks of consultations being overheard by other players or staff at the club.

5.      Assessment Process and Needs Analysis

The assessment and needs analysis process included interviews, informal chats, and stakeholder analysis (Keegan, 2015). As the request for consultancy came from the safeguarding manager and Client A's mum, the first contact started the stakeholder analysis process. In this initial discussion I was able to glean important contextual information about the amount of time spent away from home. Typically, Client A was only able to visit for less than 24 hours each week, and this was his first experience of being away from home. Information about the family unit, close relationships with both parents and sister were deemed to be important. It was also apparent that Client A's football had played a significant role in the family's usual activities, with the whole family regularly attending Client A's games.

After agreeing to meet Client A and his mother to discuss and clarify the contracting process, a 1-2-1 interview process with Client A began. Entering into dialogue with any client for the first time is likely to provoke feelings of anxiety (van Deurzen, 2002); working with a young person it was particularly important to accommodate this anxiety and normalise their experience through demonstrating the principles of respect, presence and personality

(Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015). Doing so is fundamental in being able to develop a relationship of sufficient quality to be able to offer any sort of effective support (Nesti, 2004). In recognition that entering consultancy may be anxiety provoking, the assessment and needs analysis processes were formally conducted over three sessions but were ongoing informally throughout the remainder of the case. Pertinent information relayed by Client A during the interview process included describing joining the club as a dream move, and prior to arriving he had been excited and looking forward to it. However, he was now experiencing feelings of loneliness, a strong sense of alienation from the family in the new environment and school, a general feeling of uneasiness at "not being at home" in the family accommodation the club provided, and not feeling a part of the team. In addition, he now felt that as a new player moving to a bigger club this meant that he needed to impress both teammates and staff and was feeling frustrated that he was not producing the levels of performance he knew he was capable of. These frustrations where exacerbated when making comparisons to his previous club, where Client A felt that people there knew what levels of performance he was capable of producing. Client A described feeling confused about why he was feeling the way he did, because he felt he should be enjoying it. Relations at home had also become strained, Client A viewed his time at home as being a break from football but felt that all anyone else wanted to talk about was football.

Themes from the needs analysis could be summarised as difficulties associated with adjusting to change, this included adjusting to changes in identity, change in environment both inside and outside of training environment and perceived changes in expectations. Both anxiety and isolation pervaded the challenges Client A was experiencing, with Client A frequently expressing a perceived increase in pressure, doubts about whether the move was the right decision, and feelings of loneliness. We agreed that working together to support Client A would

focus on improved relationships with people at club, including team mates and staff, and improved relationships at home, where Client A also felt his relationships had become strained.

6.      Case Formulation

Client A presented with difficulties in adjusting to the club following a move from another professional club. This move represented a significant and life-changing move for a young person who had no previous experience of moving between professional clubs or moving away from home. Throughout the needs assessment, it was apparent that many of the identified challenges were related to the situation Client A now found himself in and had little control over. Migratory (Richardson et al., 2012) and cultural transition (Ryba, Stambulova & Ronkainen, 2016) have received attention in the sport psychology literature. Though much of this work focuses on older and more experienced athletes, there were some similarities between this work and the experience Client A was describing and living. Similarities included an initial excitement prior to migration, and then following the move, making comparisons between "there" and "here", "then" and "now", and uncertainty, loneliness and confusion around the meaning of sport in terms of the athletes' career and broader lives (Ryba et al., 2016). In order to better understand the complexities associated with cultural adjustment and supporting individuals during this time, I made reference to literature grounded in social anthropology and cultural adjustment theory (Winkelman, 1994). A temporal theme was a consistent feature of the migratory transition and cultural adjustment literature both in sport and across wider contexts, where it is proposed that individuals experience pass through a number of phases/stages when adjusting to a new culture. The similarities between the experiences Client A was reporting and the migratory transition and cultural adjustment literature, and in particular the temporal theme provided a framework from which to build a support plan to guide work with Client A. Adapted from Oberg's (1960) conceptualisation of culture shock, and the

typically discussed Honeymoon, Culture Shock, Adjustment and Adaptation phases (Winkelman, 1994), the Acculturation Curve (figure 1) was developed as a resource and guide for support.

**Figure 1.** Acculturation Curve.



Acculturation Curve of Transition in Professional Football.

Recent recommendations for supporting athletes during migratory or cultural transition highlight the usefulness of temporal or phased models in providing succinct and understandable overview of the transition process and the developmental challenges and tasks for transitioning athletes (Ryba et al., 2016). However, the highly subjective nature of these experiences should be acknowledged when providing support for athletes during this time. In the present case study, using the Acculturation Curve provided a general map for consultancy, but the information and detail provided by Client A during consultancy provided a more detailed overview of the terrain, lived reality and route that would be followed.

Client A was now in a different phase in his existence at the new club in comparison to the more mature, acculturated phase he was in at his previous club. The combination of the physical and psychosocial changes being experienced - such as moving away from home, joining a new school, joining a new club and sensing a change in identity, from feeling secure to now feeling extremely insecure and uncertain - go some way to explaining why Client A was finding this experience challenging. From a theoretical perspective, these experiences can be understood by using concepts from existential psychology such as anxiety, meaning and isolation. The existential account of anxiety presents anxiety as a central feature of the ontological condition (May, 1977), and is experienced as a consequence of ones freedom to make choices and be responsible for those choices (May, 1977). In the present case, the fact that Client A had decided to join the club, was finding the move challenging, and that there remained an option to choose to return home may explain the general uneasiness and uncertainty he was experiencing about his decision and his future with the club. The concept of meaning is emphasised by existentialists as a central concern for human beings (Heidegger, 1962), and for many performers sport provides a source of meaning and is central to their identity (Balague, 1999), particularly for young aspiring footballers (Mitchell *et al.*, 2014). In Client A's case, his identity and source of meaning has been challenged and threatened by moving to a new club, going from being an established and prominent figure at his previous club, to now having to establish himself among a new group of teammates and peers. Existential isolation, regarded as another fundamental aspect of the human condition (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015), may give insight into the feelings of alienation and loneliness. Client A described despite being surrounded by people at school and the football club. The recognition that loneliness is a common experience for migrating athletes (Schinke *et al.* 2011) adds support to the explanation presented. Taken together, experiencing existential anxiety, isolation and a challenge to identity and meaning represent typical features of a boundary situation or critical moment

(Nesti & Littlewood, 2011). Boundary situations are described as profound or significant experiences in ones life that lead to changes in the way an individual views themselves and the way in which they view and live their lives (van Deurzen, 2002). Reflecting on their applied experiences providing psychology support in professional football, Nesti & Littlewood (2011) describe these experiences, which can be both positive or negative, as critical moments - examples of where these moments frequently occur include moving or being moved on to a new club, experiencing significant injury or being selected to play at a higher level. Whilst undoubtedly challenging, critical moments present opportunities for growth and the development of greater self knowledge (Nesti, 2010). By adopting an existential counselling-based approach to sport psychology, the role of the psychologist is to support the individual in facing up to the anxiety that accompanies critical moments and aims to help the individual be more fully themselves (Nesti et al., 2012).

In the context of the present case, supporting the individual to confront and face up to the anxiety they are experiencing is particularly important, given that the anxiety and uncertainty being experienced is linked to their lived experience and is not something that can be taken or managed away (Nesti, 2004). More specifically, the fact that Client A is a new member of the club and in a new environment is something that cannot be changed - this means that an approach that views anxiety as an inevitable and unavoidable feature of human experience; and seeks to help an individual embrace the complexities of life, and not attempt to simply fix, overcome or manage away problems is required. An existentially informed approach to psychology may be regarded as compatible, where the principle aim of psychology work is to better understand human life and experiences, not simply to fix problems that people encounter (van Deurzen, 2002). For this reason the goals for the work focused on supporting Client A to embrace the challenges associated with moving to the club by being more himself, specifically

through focusing on improving relationships with with new teammates and staff at the club, and improving relationships at home.

## 6.1. Rationale for Goals

Goals for the work were developed through collaboration and dialogue with the client. We discussed how the main challenge, being away from home and adjusting to a number of new environments simultaneously, could not be easily overcome or taken away. We used the Acculturation Curve as an explanatory tool to highlight some of different phases that people may experience as they move from one environment or culture to another. Discussion around the curve served to highlight that at his previous club, Client A was in a different phase of his existence there, and this had developed over time. That phase was characterised by feeling as though "he knew everyone and they knew him", and generally feeling more relaxed, comfortable and having little pressure to prove yourself. In contrast, he was now experiencing pressure to impress and prove himself in addition to feeling isolated. Engaging in dialogue around the acculturation curve and creating a visual representation of the distance between where Client A found himself now and where he might like to be, provided an opportunity to discuss what might need to happen in order to move from an introductory phase to a more mature phase. Throughout consultancy, and when discussing what might need to happen, the dialogue focused on values and what was important to Client A, as this was something that provided an explanation for why Client A was experiencing the move in the way that he was. In relation to consultancy goals, reflecting on and clarifying values was a vehicle for developing committed action consistent with what Client A felt was important to him. Consequently, the consultancy goals developed collaboratively, were related to the values of feeling connected to others and making family proud. The goals of improving relationships with new team mates and staff at the club and improving relationships with family at home

represented areas that Client A felt would help him to move towards what the values he held, and importantly; to enable him to feel more at home at the new club.

7.      Development of Professional Relationship

Throughout the consultancy I attempted to develop and maintain the professional relationship in two broad ways, firstly through consistently demonstrating personal qualities associated with effective sports psychology consultancy, such as honesty, empathy and trustworthiness (Chandler et al., 2014), and secondly, through demonstrating professional skills such as listening, communication and congruence between my actions and philosophical approach. This facilitated my service delivery competence; summarised as the effective application of psychological theory through the use of appropriate skills (Tod, Andersen & Marchant, 2009).

Early in the contracting phase of the relationship I made conscious attempt to explain and clarify my beliefs and professional philosophy to Client A and his mother, which I feel not only reflects a level of professionalism but demonstrates qualities of openness and honesty. A further example of this can be found when agreeing and clarifying boundaries of confidentiality and explaining the reasons for this, I feel this explicitly outlined my commitment to respecting Client A from a personal and professional perspective. In order to maintain an effective relationship, I attempted to demonstrate respect and act in a congruent fashion with principles underpinning an existential approach throughout the consultancy. I strived to make it clear that my role was to support Client A to make sense of his experiences, as it would be impossible to manage them or take them away, and to support him to come to his own decisions about how to move forward, as ultimately this way his experience and his life. I attempted to achieve this and create a sense of empowerment through collaborative exercises and dialogue during consultancy sessions, handing over the responsibility for choosing his own courses of action,

even down to presenting options for when and where our next sessions could take place and handing over the responsibility to choose.

Ultimately, I feel it is striving to be more congruent and authentic that underpins the development of an effective professional relationship; as getting closer to authenticity and congruence between your beliefs and actions in practice highlights key personal qualities and professional skills. Adopting an inauthentic stance and incongruent approach in practice is likely to be uncomfortable for the practitioner; van Deurzen (p.23. 2002) describes these experiences as feeling as though one is "trying on clothes that don't fit me - they don't suit me - they are not comfortable"; which is likely to be noticeable to the client and undermine the relationship and any subsequent success of the work together.

8.      Discussion of Consultancy Development

Consultancy took place formally over seven sessions that ranged from 30 to 90 minutes each. In addition to the formal consultancy sessions, a number of informal discussions took place throughout the consultancy, which is reflective of the more ambiguous time and space boundaries that exist in sport and exercise psychology work when compared to other sub-disciplines of psychology (Eubank & Tod, 2018). Typically these informal discussions took place around the training ground between training sessions the client was taking part in, and while often brief, they gave opportunities to check-in with Client A from a general well-being perspective and also to reinforce the actions Client A had decided on. However whilst there may be professional and ethical challenges associated with these looser boundaries (Eubank & Tod, 2018, these shorter interactions were instrumental in demonstrating genuine empathy, an intrinsic quality of personality of the person behind the psychologist (Nesti, 2004), which is

regarded as a key ingredient for a successful working relationship in psychological work (Spinelli, 1989).

As Client A was under the age of 16 the first session included both Client A and his mother in order to comply with the safeguarding policies in place at the football club, BPS guidelines for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children (BPS, 2014); and to adhere to BPS and HCPC ethical standards. The first session focused on providing a clear and transparent overview of my professional philosophy, clarifying expectations (both what the client could expect from me, and what I would expect of the client), outlining what some of the consultancy activity might entail e.g. trying to get a better understanding of what is going on and then to work to support Client A to make some decisions about how to move forward; and explaining and agreeing on boundaries and limits of confidentiality. Meeting these conditions during the first session was a priority to enable the mother (legal guardian) and Client A to provide genuine informed consent. During the meeting Client A and his mother decided that they were happy to proceed, and that future sessions would follow a 1-2-1 consultancy format.

Sessions two and three were focused on carrying out a needs analysis, which inline with the existential psychology approach could be described as clarifying and developing a greater understanding of the challenges being experienced by the client (van Deurzen, 2002). Dialogue with Client A centred on creating an awareness of "what" specifically was challenging about his current situation. During these discussions, "everything" was described as being challenging. This lack of clarity about what the problem(s) was/were may be seen as indicative of the level of distress being experienced in the current situation, where everything about the situation was perceived as being difficult. Engaging in a process of collaborative dialogue, consisting of Client A providing descriptions of his current situation and experiences, and

careful exploration of the implications, consequences and interpretations of these descriptions, created a context to co-develop a greater understanding of the presenting issues (van Deurzen & Adams, 2010).

The understandings co-created during sessions two and three highlighted specific challenges related to being away from home and now adapting to numerous new environments. Comparisons between how thing were at the old club and the experiences Client A was now having at WUFC were made frequently, which suggested this was a real concern for Client A. For this reason, and to facilitate further insights, the acculturation curve was introduced to guide dialogue during session four. The curve was used to identify differences between "there" and "here", before exploring how Client A's experiences at his previous club had developed and changed over time and challenging Client A to consider how this might relate to his current situation. The temporal framework on which the acculturation curve is built served as an important resource for instilling a sense of hope that things could change over time, by appealing to the future-orientated nature of human being (Cooper, 2016). Specifically, discussions focussed on the experiences that had been accumulated at the previous club to get to a stage where he had felt so comfortable, and whether there was a possibility that this might occur over time at his current club. Beginning to think about the future and alternatives to the present brought attention to existential ideas around freedom, choice and the ability to create ones future (Sartre, 1958). Presenting Client A with the opportunity to conceive an alternative future directed the consultation to the choices he would have to make in order to create it. Referring to the goals we had discussed previously provided a framework to decide on specific actions that Client A would take in order to try and change his situation. He identified that in order to improve relationships he would need to invest by making an effort to interact more with teammates, both in the full-time programme and those outside the full time programme to

build his social network. He felt that interacting with teammates would need to go beyond just talking about football in order to really get to know people. In relation to improving relationships at home, Client A acknowledged that previously he had avoided spending time with family for two reasons; to negate having to talk about what was going on at football, and because of the difficulty in only having short periods of time with them and having to return to WUFC the next day. Actively choosing to spend more time with family, in spite of the difficulty of having to leave again was regarded as a better alternative and means to improve the relationships at home.

Sessions five and six focused on consolidating the ideas brought out in previous dialogue around meaning, purpose and choice. Re-visiting meaning and purpose served to remind Client A of why he was prepared to try and stay at the club despite the distress this was causing. According to Spinelli (1994) experiences of distress often occur as a result of the anxiety that accompanies choice. Reflecting on their experiences working in professional football, Nesti & Littlewood (2011) suggest that connecting to meaning acts as a resource that enables athletes to successfully confront the anxiety and difficulties associated with transition and change, which ultimately leads to personal growth. Reconnecting with meaning and purpose also directed dialogue to the goals and actions that had been chosen by Client A, sessions were used to reflect on the progress that was being made. Client A discussed how he had experienced carrying out the actions he had chosen, and I encouraged further reflection on how these actions were working for him and challenged him to consider alternatives. One such reflection from Client A highlighted the importance of being authentic in the way he committed to getting to know and build relationships with others; more specifically he felt that making a 10/10 effort to interact and build better relationships "wouldn't be me", suggesting that this would feel forced, false; or perhaps inauthentic. Scaling was used as a way of monitoring progress in the

areas Client A had identified as being important; scaling has been put forward as an effective strategy for monitoring progress in psychological work and has been widely used in different approaches and settings (Pitt et al., 2015; Rollnick et al., 2020). During sessions we would refer to the goals and actions he had chosen, and he would be asked to rate where he felt he was on a scale between one and ten. Between sessions four and six progress was rated at 3/10 in session four across all of the goals, increasing to 7/10 by the end of session six.

Session seven took place during the last week of the season and at the end of the week client A would be returning home for an extended break with family. Coupled with the positive progress Client A felt he was making; this seemed a logical end point for formal consultancy. At the beginning of the consultancy process the end of the season was identified as a potential end point for consultancy, this was considered to be a suitable time frame to conduct consultancy and review progress. During this final session we recapped our work together using the acculturation curve as a framework to discuss the processes inherent in social or cultural adaptation (Ryba et al., 2016). Reflecting back on experiences at the beginning of consultancy enabled Client A to recognise the changes and progress that had occurred over time. Drawing out the processes and actions that had contributed to change was a key method for facilitating a sense of autonomy. Reinforcing Client A's positive action and engagement in the consultancy process served to create a positive outlook on the future and further develop a sense of empowerment that he was able to positively influence his future. Reviewing the consultancy process in this way acted as both a reminder of the work that had already been done and clarified Client A's role in creating a positive experience going forward. At the end of the consultation, it was agreed that we were both happy with the progress that had been made and that we would take a break from meeting formally. I explained that I would still be available for support when the new season commenced if Client A was to request it, and that my role at

the club meant we would have various informal opportunities to meet and discuss progress and any need for support throughout the forthcoming year.

9.      Critical Evaluation of Consultancy

I was pleased with the progress being made throughout the support and the level of engagement from Client A. Given the personal nature of the presenting issues I felt it was important to adopt an approach that seeks to understand the complexity of human experiencing, not interpret or objectify, despite challenges that adopting an existential counselling-based approach with young people may present (Scalzo, 2010). I believe recognising this was fundamental to developing a genuine working relationship and created the foundation for any subsequent success; furthermore, I feel this demonstrated a commitment to working alongside Client A in a respectful, collaborative fashion consistent with the expectations that had been agreed in the contracting process, and the principles of existential approaches to psychology. Scalzo (2010) comments on the tendency for adults to approach therapeutic work with children and young people in very narrow fashion in attempt to guide and lead work towards a sense of "truth". For example directing the dialogue towards pre-determined ideas or solutions that the practitioner may believe to be correct or effective. Approaching psychological work or therapy in this way would be at odds with the philosophical underpinnings of existential psychology approach (Nesti, 2004) and can undermine the development of trust, understanding and ultimately an effective working relationship (Scalzo, 2010; van Deurzen, 2002).

Littlewood et al. (2018) described the challenges associated with adopting broader psychological approaches with younger or less experienced people when discussing his experiences working in professional football, with these challenges often stemming from the reliance on the young persons ability to verbalise and communicate their experiences

effectively. Entering into dialogue with a psychologist is often threatening for a new client (van Deurzen, 2002) and with Client A being an adolescent I was aware that dialogue may be challenging. One of the ways I attempted to work through these challenges was by using the acculturation curve as a tool to help Client A to represent their experience in a symbolic way. Metaphorical or symbolic expressions are often useful for helping clients describe and therefore come to understand experiences that may otherwise be difficult to verbalise or explain (Cooper, 2015). During our sessions, myself and Client A created an individualised version of the acculturation curve, outlining key experiences and features of the phases Client A had gone through. Feedback from Client A highlighted that this was a useful exercise for helping him to become more aware of and make sense of the challenges he was experiencing. Using activities and resources, such as the acculturation curve for the purpose of supporting the client to develop greater awareness and understanding, provides a practical and accessible route into discussing and applying the principles of existential psychology, which have been critiqued elsewhere as being somewhat vague, esoteric and impractical (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015). I feel that my approach and actions during consultancy demonstrate ability to recognise the needs of clients, in this case a young person, and be adaptable in my approach, whilst remaining congruent with the underpinning principles of my chosen theoretical approach to practice.

Client A engaged with support throughout the consultancy period, he was an active participant during sessions and openly shared the difficulties he was experiencing, demonstrating a level of vulnerability that is rare in professional football environments (Roderick & Schumacker, 2017). I am confident that this reflected the level of rapport and trust that we were able to develop, and in turn reflected the skills I demonstrated in order to empathise, reassure and validate Client A's experiences throughout our work together. I am confident that a genuine empathic and caring relationship underpinned the success of our work and contributed to

creating an environment where Client A felt secure enough to share his experiences and access support. At the time of writing Client A remains at the club and will begin a two year scholarship in the coming months. Given the near 90% failure rate within academies (Anderson & Miller, 2011), Client A's continuing progression may be regarded as a marker of success. Other indicators of Client A's successful integration in to WUFC include an increase of over 100% in match minutes in Premier League academy fixtures in the current season versus the first season at the club, and perhaps more importantly in relation to Client A's goals for the consultancy he is now settled in the host family accommodation, and sharing with a team mate at their request.

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**Consultancy Case Study 2**




**"We can't find anything wrong": Psychological support during sports rehabilitation**




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1.      Introduction to Player

James (J) is a sixteen-year-old academy player at Lockside Town Football Club, and has been injured for twelve weeks after reporting shin pain to the medical team. At the time of initiating consultancy J was under the management of the club medical department, and rehabilitation progress had stalled.

1.1     Contextual Information

J has been with the academy for the last eight seasons, after signing as an under 9 player (the youngest age group where boys are allowed to register with professional football club academies). At under thirteen level J was invited to join the club's full time training model, after being identified as a high potential player. At the end of under fourteen level, J was offered a scholarship to remain with the club until at least the end of under eighteen level. Scholarships are not typically offered until the under sixteen year. During the previous season, J missed approximately ten months following a leg fracture. Approximately seven months had passed since returning to participation and then reporting with shin pains, this included the off-season and pre-season periods. The pre-season included several tours and training camps interspersed with rest periods. At the time the shin pain was reported, J had recently been involved in a tournament and accumulated a heavy physical load (both in terms of training and match minutes) over a short period of time.

1.2     Family social/cultural status and support networks

J is on the full-time programme at the academy and attends the club's partner school. In addition to being regarded as a high potential player at the club, J is the full-time programme head boy, a prestigious role at the club with additional leadership responsibility. Away from

the club, J lives at home with his mother, stepfather and sister. The family appear supportive and engage well with club staff and the clubs parent engagement initiatives.

1.3    Presenting difficulties and background information relevant to consultancy.

J reported an injury following a game approximately 12 weeks prior to consultancy beginning. Information from the medical team detailed how the issue was initially diagnosed as being load related, as J had experienced an increase in training and competition volume in the weeks leading up to the injury being reported. However, following a period of rest, conservative management and progressive rehabilitation, progress was stalling when reaching around 70% of J's maximum speed (measured using GPS monitoring system). During these higher intensity rehab exercises the pain experience was unmanageable for J.

A number of medical investigations took place in order to identify the aetiology and provide an explanation for the pain J was experiencing. In addition to the physical assessments conducted by the physiotherapists, three scans were carried out, but no clear diagnosis could be made. I was approached by the academy doctor to discuss the potential for exploring psychological support with the player. The doctor questioned whether there may be a psychological component to J's situation given the absence of a biomedical explanation, and the players recent injury history.

2.    The Contracting Process

Contracted by the football club to provide sports psychology services for players, coaches and parents at the club meant that costs were not discussed with J. Verbal contracts were made in relation to confidentiality, time and structure. It was agreed that information shared by J would remain strictly confidential. Disclosure would only take place when agreed by J, or if there

were concerns for his safety or the safety of others, or if any disclosures included information that could be considered illegal. These agreements were then documented in the feedback notes provided to the client after the initial consultation. It was also agreed that the date and time of each subsequent meeting would be decided at the end of each consultation.

3.      Nature and context in which consultancy took place

Consultancy primarily took place at the football club training ground, in meeting rooms and an open cafe area. Consultancy activity was mostly conducted as 1-2-1 meetings, apart from a group meeting involving the doctor and lead physiotherapist. More informal consultancy activity took place outside on the training pitches during breaks in the rehab sessions that I was invited to attend and observe by J. The less formal nature of psychology work in sport (Eubank & Tod, 2017) can be regarded as a barrier to effective practice, however in the present case informal interactions were regarded as being beneficial, and at times used deliberately to develop rapport and put the young client at ease. In addition, these informal encounters were mostly used to reinforce and remind the client of key points, agreements and information discussed in the formal 1-2-1 meetings.

Additionally, utilising both formal and informal approaches in consultancy was influenced by recognising and reflecting on the needs of the client. Experience of supporting young people in professional football environments has emphasised the importance of being able to connect with, and put young people at ease in order to achieve successful outcomes. This is particularly important when working with young clients, as it is recognised that engaging in psychology or therapeutic work can provoke anxiety (van Deurzen, 2002), particularly in young people (Scalzo, 2010).

4.      Assessment Process and Needs Analysis

Assessment and needs analysis processes included interviews, informal dialogue, observation and stakeholder analysis (Keegan, 2015), alongside medical examinations carried out by the club's medical team. Working as an 'insider' at a football club means that information about potential client's and their history is more readily available than in a typical consultancy arrangement. Nesti (2012) discussed the challenges of working as an insider in professional football, commenting how individuals' at first team levels may not 'open up' easily, however in the more stable academy environment (Richardson *et al.* 2013) this may be less of a challenge, particularly if the psychologist has been in post for some time. In the present case, I had been providing psychology support for the academy for the previous three seasons and had developed a professional relationship with J over that time.

Initial dialogue with the academy doctor was useful for gaining information about the case, and working hypotheses and concerns held by the medical team. During the meeting the doctor provided some relevant background information describing the presenting physical complaint, the length of time out injured and current and recent rehabilitation progress. The medical team had been unable to diagnose a physical issue to explain the pain being experienced by J. Supported by the results of the medical examinations, it was suggested that the presentation may have a psychological aetiology. The meeting with the doctor was followed up with an initial discussion with J to explore his willingness to engage in psychology support, and after verbally agreeing, a follow up meeting was arranged with J.

The initial meeting with J continued the assessment and needs analysis process as well as clarifying boundaries of confidentiality and agreeing expectations. J had previously engaged with 1-2-1 psychology support during the previous season following a leg break, however

conditions and agreements were reaffirmed. J was asked to "tell me about what's been going on" as a way of getting a description and insight into his current situation. Opening the dialogue in this way was a way of providing J with an opportunity to tell their story; using open questions in this way is regarded as an effective way to better understand a story and the person telling it (Katz & Hemmings, 2009). Having previously worked with J in a psychology capacity meant that the needs analysis dialogue could be more focused on the current situation, as there was already some prior knowledge of the client history and demographic information. An existing relationship and an awareness of some prior information, both from previous experience of working with J and the discussion with the doctor, made it particularly important to get a detailed description of the 'here-and-now' experience. Focusing on J's current experience, as opposed to past experiences can help focus the dialogue and facilitate greater understanding of the situation for the client and psychologist (Cooper, 2016). Drawing on phenomenological methods and asking J to describe their experience in everyday language, allows for an insight into what is really going on for them, and is regarded as an empirical approach to gaining insight into subjective experiencing (Nesti, 2011), which is a key feature in existential counselling (Nesti, 2004). Dialogue focused on 'what' was being experienced by J, as opposed to looking for 'why' or 'explaining', which may also help clients to feel empowered to take an active role in the session or encounter (Nesti, 2011). During the initial session, J was able to articulate what was being experienced, describing his situation as "like shin splints, pains in my shins that get worse as the session goes on", whilst acknowledging that scans have shown "not much". When prompted to describe how he was managing this experience he described how when he started to feel pain in his shins he would "ease off, see how it is" when asked what he was doing here, he described "evaluating, slowing down, testing it out".

The intake and needs analysis process was facilitated through the trust (Nesti, 2004) built from the existing relationship, and demonstrating personal qualities and such as presence and empathy (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015); and use of counselling skills such as reflecting back, active listening and paraphrasing, all of which are regarded as key ingredients in effective counselling practice (Katz & Hemmings, 2009). Needs analysis was regarded as an active process (Keegan, 2016), ongoing throughout the case with J. Examples of this included observation of rehabilitation sessions that provided additional information to inform the formulation. During one of the early sessions I was invited to attend by J, I observed how he would sit on the ground between exercises. When questioned about this in a subsequent 1-2-1 session, J described how he was "resting and taking the weight off my shins", this was behaviour that could be interpreted as a protective function and added support to a working formulation that had anxiety at its core.

5.      Rationale for theoretical orientation and approach taken

The player's background and information I encountered during the initial assessment and needs analysis phases led me to surmise anxiety may be an underpinning factor in J's presentation. In the context of J's personal injury history, an anxiety response to the threat of re-injury may be considered both normal and functional. Such a position requires a theoretical orientation and approach that recognises that anxiety is a universal feature of human experiencing, and that anxiety in itself neither positive nor negative (May, 1977). Existential psychology views anxiety as essentially neutral; and proposes that it is how people react to anxiety, rather than how anxiety is experienced that determines whether the impact is positive or negative (Nesti, 2004). From an existential psychology perspective, anxiety is considered as inevitable, unavoidable and ultimately useful, anxiety is related to a desire to grow and develop and is

therefore not something that should be removed or managed away through psychological techniques aimed at symptomatic relief (Corlett, 1996; Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015).

Consistent with the outlined theoretical position and the assumptions of existential psychology in relation to anxiety, acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is a third-wave cognitive approach to therapy that promotes the value of non-judgmental awareness and acceptance of one's internal state, over attempts to control or change it (Hayes et al., 2006). More specifically, ACT aims to support individuals to become more psychologically flexible, through developing greater awareness of how they relate to difficult or challenging experiences (such as anxiety); and consciously allowing thoughts, feelings and emotions to be part an individuals present moment experience, whilst actively choosing to engage in value-driven behaviour (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2011). ACT seeks to promote movement towards greater non-judgmental awareness and acceptance of thoughts and emotions, and movement away from experiential avoidance. A revised account of the Fear Avoidance (FA) model (Crombez et al., 2012), a biopsychosocial perspective describing how individuals experiencing pain can become trapped in a cycle of pain-avoidance. The authors of the FA model advocate movement towards value-driven behaviour and away from experiential avoidance as a way of supporting functional recovery, increasing positive affect and reducing suffering in individuals experiencing chronic pain (Crombez et al., 2012). Similarities between chronic pain and the presentation in the current case include the continued presence of pain and ongoing disruption to daily goal pursuit, in this case the ability to train and perform physicality activity beyond 70% of J's normal capacity. An approach informed by ACT provides a framework to operationalise the recommendations made by Crombez *et al.* (2012) and adopt a more holistic approach to supporting individuals experiencing pain, beyond the biomedical approach of focusing on structural damage or abnormalities.

Similarities between the underlying principles of existential psychology and ACT, in particular the neutral/non-judgemental perspective on anxiety, and the value placed on promoting authentic/value-driven choices and behaviour creates an opportunity to apply principles of existential psychology in a more structured way. As a more explicitly philosophical approach to psychology, the existential approach has often been regarded as an abstract approach that is difficult to apply in practice (Ronkainen & Nesti, 2015), however it is possible that ACT offers a framework that would enable practitioners to access and apply existential psychology ideas more readily. Such a framework could appeal to practitioners working with younger or less experienced clients who may find unstructured dialogue and traditional existential counselling challenging to engage with or follow (Nesti, 2004). Equally, early-career practitioners looking to apply psychology may find comfort in more structured approaches (Lindsay et al., 2007; Tod, 2007), however the structure that ACT offers is also a potential drawback in that it may restrict and narrow the dialogue that is central to the existential approach (Nesti, 2004).

The way that anxiety is conceptualised in existential psychology as an ever-present emotion and the aim of ACT in supporting people to deal more effectively with challenges, as opposed to managing them away offered a suitable lens through which to make sense of and approach the challenges J was experiencing. The fit between the philosophical approach, theoretical underpinning and the chosen therapeutic model connects with the client history and presentation, and creates a coherent and consistent foundation from which to conduct effective consultancy (Keegan, 2015).

6.      Case Formulation

J was referred for support by the medical team after progression during rehabilitation sessions had stalled. After initially reporting with shin pain, a series of medical investigations found no

physical explanation for the pain that was preventing further progression. J had missed three months of football and this, coupled with the lack of progress was a concern for both the player and the medical team. As a high potential player, evidenced by early contract offers and being on the full-time training programme and international call-ups, it was likely that there was greater expectation on J than most other players of his age. Additionally, in the previous season, J had experienced a trauma, in a leg break that resulted in missing 10 months of football.

In the buildup to reporting shin pain to the medical team, there had been an increase in the physical load experienced by J in terms of training and match exposure, which may have explained the initial experience of shin pain. It is argued that although pain may be differentiated from injury, it may be considered as a marker of injury (Hunt & Day, 2019), and thus as an unpleasant sensation may be perceived as a threat and evoke an emotional response such as feelings of anxiety (Howe, 2004).

J's recent injury history may also be considered as a risk factor for increased anxiety around injury and result in hypervigilance towards potential threat (Crombez *et al.* 2012). Existential perspectives on anxiety may consider this anxiety to be related to the threat of re-injury and potential loss of possibilities or opportunities that may lie in ahead in the future (May, 1977); which may make a high potential player particularly susceptible to this type of experience. Consistent with the assumptions of the Fear Avoidance (FA) model (Crombez et al., 2012), an explanatory model describing how pain-avoidance behaviour can contribute to the maintenance of pain experience, anxiety increases an individual's level of self-consciousness and impacts on attentional processes, resulting in an increased sensitivity to threat. More specifically, research focused on professional rugby player's pain-related anxiety and attentional processes demonstrated that anxiety leads to an increased focus toward pain related threat, coupled with

difficulties in disengaging from the potential threat (Bardel et al., 2013). In the present case, pain experienced by J presented a threat to their ability to perform, and ultimately the stability of their identity as a footballer. Considered in context, having already missed a significant period of football experiencing anxiety in response to pain and the threat of re-injury makes sense for someone who is expecting (and expected) to have a bright future in the game. The resulting impairments to attentional processes may explain the continued experience and awareness of pain, directing attention to the pain and pain site in order to 'evaluate' and 'test it out', and supports the formulation that anxiety is an underpinning mechanism in J's presentation. In addition, increased attention to the pain site is likely to be a contributing factor in perceiving pain in this area, ultimately leading to an increased awareness and reporting of pain (Crombez *et al.* 2012); which is maintaining the issue and preventing progress in rehabilitation.

In summary, consistent with the hypotheses presented in the FA model (Crombez *et al.* 2012) the threat of re-injury appears to have contributed to experiences of anxiety, leading to a hypervigilance towards potential threats such as pain. An increased vigilance towards threats, increases the likelihood of J noticing painful stimuli/sensations (Bardel *et al.* 2013), which in turn reinforces the process of being hypervigilant towards threat. The process described and developed from the FA model (outlined in Figure 1) results in the continued awareness and reporting of pain.

Figure 1. Pain awareness and reporting - maintenance cycle.

## 6.1. Rationale for Goals

Goals for consultancy were developed in collaboration with J, in keeping with the assumptions of existential (and other counselling based) approaches to psychology which promote the value of working collaboratively alongside the client (Cooper, 2015). Through dialogue, agreements were made that the focus of the support would be on a reduction in perceived pain and discomfort and a subsequent increase in training volume and intensity. A reduction in the perception of pain was a subjective measure, however this is reflective of the highly subjective nature of the pain experience (Hunt & Day, 2019). Increases in training volume and intensity were objective markers, tracked using a global positioning system (GPS), which is a monitoring tool used in sports science to measure the external physical loads experienced by athletes (Mujika & Castagna, 2016). During dialogue with J, it became apparent that a return to training and return to play were key motivators, but also a source of frustration as progress towards these objectives was limited. In order to develop consultancy goals, the dialogue focused on

clarifying what needed to happen for progress to occur, more specifically J identified that a reduction in the perception and reporting of pain would be a key objective to enable training load to increase.

7.      Development of Professional Relationship

Working in a full-time sport psychology role within the football club, and spending time with players in and around the training facility, travelling to fixtures and attending camps and tours means relationships with players and staff are able to develop organically over time (Nesti, 2010). The working relationship with J had been developed over the last three seasons in my role at the club; throughout this time, I was responsible for providing psychological support to the squads J was a member of, and as such the focus here was to further develop the existing professional relationship.

Despite the opportunities that being embedded within an organisation/team may present, for example being able to develop a sense of familiarity, rapport and potentially reduce client anxieties around psychology, it may also result in blurring of professional boundaries. Experienced practitioner reflections emphasize the importance of adopting appropriate and flexible behaviour, and balancing being approachable whilst maintaining your professional identity, "because once you lose that your credibility is shot" (Arnold & Sarkar, 2015). In professional football, this could be described as being 'a part of the team but apart from the team'; this relates to the importance of developing an effective relationship with players whilst maintaining appropriate boundaries, and also to the importance of maintaining the kind of "emotional distance" that enables psychologists to provide support in a calm and composed manner, in a culture and environment that is typically volatile and emotionally charged (Nesti, 2010). In order to achieve this, it was important to demonstrate professional and ethical practice

with J, by, for example, being explicit about the boundaries of confidentiality, clarifying expectations, agreeing consultancy goals and providing J with concise and accurate feedback following sessions. In addition to demonstrating professional and ethical practice, it was important to demonstrate personal qualities associated with effective sports psychology practice, there is a body of literature in sport psychology (e.g. Chandler et al., 2014), and in mainstream psychology (e.g. Norcross, 2011) that regard the characteristics of the practitioner/therapist as being fundamental ingredients in effective service delivery, regardless of the therapeutic approach or model chosen (Norcross, 2011).

In many sport settings, humour is seen an effective way of developing rapport and gaining acceptance (e.g. Arnold & Sarkar, 2015; Pack *et al.* 2018). In professional football balancing professionalism with "banter" has been regarded as key to developing buy-in from players (Nesti, 2010). During consultancy, the professional relationship with J was further developed through displaying personal qualities such as a sense of fun as humour in the interactions throughout the consultancy. Examples included participating in games/challenges with the physiotherapist and J during breaks in the rehabilitation sessions. From a professional skills perspective, congruence between my behaviour e.g. challenging J to take responsibility for, and make his own choices, and be an active participant in the consultancy reflected the agreements made during the contracting phase. The process of becoming more comfortable in your work with clients, has been described in research with experienced practitioners as a "way of being" with a client and is regarded as central to fostering client engagement (McCormick & Meijen, 2015), I attempted to facilitate this awareness through the use of regular supervision meetings, engaging in dialogue with my supervisor about 'how to do consultancy with someone who you already know'.

8.      Discussion of Consultancy Development

Consultancy took place over an eight-week period from the initial request for support from the medical team to J returning to training. During the consultancy period, six formal consultancy meetings took place, supplemented by informal discussion in and around the training facility as well as before, during and after rehabilitation sessions. It is important to note that J invited me to attend and observe rehabilitation sessions, and as the consultancy progressed J would regularly ask if I "was coming outside". I feel this level of proactive engagement was reflective of the quality of working relationship that had been developed.  Consistent with the widely recognised view that the quality of relationship between the client and practitioner is fundamental to the success of any therapeutic work (Norcross, 2011), the use of less formal interactions away from the traditional "consulting room" could facilitate opportunities for more authentic interactions between the client and practitioner. It could also be argued that these less formal interactions may help to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and applied practice skills that often befall early career practitioner psychologists (Hilton & Johnston, 2017), by creating situations where the practitioner must demonstrate and rely on interpersonal skills as well as theoretical knowledge, all of which are considered important for successful sport psychology consulting. When discussing existing research on the qualities of effective practitioners, Tod and colleagues summarised "the findings indicate that effective practitioners can be defined by what they know, what they can do, and who they are as individuals" (2017, p. 134).

Consultancy sessions one and two focused on intake and needs analysis. Boundaries and expectations were discussed and agreed. Agreements were made about the roles' each would play in the consultancy process, more specifically that we would act as "co-pilots", working together to figure out the way forward. This collaborative approach demonstrates a level of

congruence between philosophy and method (Lindsay *et al.* 2007), adopting an existentially informed approach requires the practitioner to work alongside the client, as opposed to taking a position of power and passing over knowledge to them (van Deurzen & Arnold Baker, 2018). Making these agreements enabled me to describe and explain my professional philosophy, whilst also providing J with an insight into what to expect from working together in order to provide informed consent. During the initial session, we began to explore how psychological factors such as handling emotions and remaining committed to overcoming setbacks were important in injury rehabilitation. After discussing the role that psychology support could play during rehabilitation, J decided that he would be willing to continue with psychology support with a view to supporting his return to participation.

Needs analysis took place through an exploration of J's rehabilitation experiences, through the use of *what* and *how* questions J was encouraged to describe his current situation, rather than attempt to explain. Gaining insight into J's subjective experience was a key objective in order to begin to understand how the challenges were being experienced and maintained, particularly when the absence of a medical explanation is considered. As an example one of the opening questions in the needs analysis phase was "Tell me about what has been going on for you?", this prompted J to describe his frustration at not being able to find "much" on the various scans in addition to describing experiencing shin pain as rehabilitation activities progressed in intensity. Needs analysis dialogue continued to explore the pain experience focusing on collecting more information about when and how the onset of pain occurred, and how any changes in the shin pains were perceived or occurred over time. J was able to clearly articulate how the pain, described as "like a dull ache", would get progressively worse as sessions went on, and occurred more often on longer duration running exercises. Scaling was introduced to give an indication of the level of pain J was experiencing, over recent sessions pain was rated

at 2/10 at the lowest and 8 or 9/10 at the highest point, 5 or 6 was rated as the point at which pain became unmanageable.

Further dialogue focused on understanding how pain was being managed, in response to the question "What do you do when you start to experience pain?", J described how he would "ease off to see how it is", elaborating further when probed he described that he would begin physically "slowing things down". When challenged to describe what he was doing here, J described that he was "testing it out" and "evaluating". Dialogue with J went on to explore the function of this behaviour, we came to the agreement that this could be considered as protective, in that the processes of easing off and slowing down were undertaken to prevent "making things worse". It can be argued that engaging in this process makes sense given J's injury history and the situation he now finds himself in. Despite being understandable, the protective function of the way J described managing pain shares some similarities with the concepts of psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance, which occurs when an individuals behaviour offers a temporary relief from discomfort, often at the expense of longer term valued ends (Hayes *et al.* 2011). When discussing these processes, the potential for an increase in the perception and reporting of symptoms when checking and evaluating the pain site was acknowledged by J.

Session three focused on discussing the tentative formulation that was developed using the information J had provided during the needs analysis phase. The model outlined in figure 1 was discussed through dialogue with the player, in particular the impact that 'slowing down, checking and evaluating' may be having on the perception and reporting of pain. The use of metaphor can provide opportunities to facilitate therapeutic change, by providing a lens through which to view and understand complex phenomena (Kopp, 1995). Reflecting on the use of

ACT in sport psychology, Bennett and Lindsay (2016) suggested metaphors can be used as an effective method to support disengagement from thoughts (Hayes *et al.* 2011). The description of "easing off" and "slowing down" provided an opportunity to work within J's metaphorical landscape. This has gained support in sport psychology practice (Lindsay et al., 2010), as noticing, exploring and adopting client's use of metaphorical language has been associated with fostering empathy and strengthening client/practitioner rapport (Sims, 2003). Further expansion of the metaphorical landscape led to understanding that slowing down for J was not "hitting the breaks" but more "easing off the gas", using the client generated language led to discussion around the use of an accelerator pedal as a metaphor to explain how J was managing his behavioural response when experiencing discomfort or pain, in a way that made sense to the client. The next phase explored J's perceptions of what might occur if he "put his foot on the gas" instead of "easing off". Two potential outcomes were discussed, 1) that putting his foot on the gas would lead to breaking down (and an injury being diagnosed), and 2) that he would progress without breaking down, J felt that each of these outcomes would ultimately lead to positive outcomes.

Before progressing with the next phase of consultancy I sought permission from J to discuss the formulation with the academy doctor and head physiotherapist. I explained that I believed it would be important to check with the medical team that the formulation and potential next steps were appropriate and did not create undue risk from a medical perspective; and gave J an opportunity to think through and develop their willingness to consider this as a course of action. It was agreed that the formulation would be shared during session four with J, the academy doctor, head physiotherapist and myself all present. During this meeting the medical team agreed to begin testing the hypothesis during the next rehab sessions, but that should the pain progress beyond what J perceived as a 6/10, this should be reported and the session stopped. I

felt it was important to get the support of the medical team to reassure J that the team were confident that there was no medical concern preventing him from progressing. During the meeting it was also acknowledged and agreed that progression would not be easy and straightforward; going against the protective function of easing off would be a challenge and would likely require some support and reassurance from those around J, and some practice and effort from himself. Midway through the session the doctor and physiotherapist left, and the session continued, with a focus on promoting greater psychological flexibility by targeting the ACT process of "Do What Matters" (Harris, 2009), more specifically the clarification of values and committed actions. The ACT matrix was used as a framework to support dialogue around value clarification and committed action, whilst simultaneously developing greater awareness and willingness to accommodate a level of physical and psychological discomfort during the proceeding phase of the consultancy and rehabilitation journey.

Consultancy continued with regular informal discussions before, during and after rehabilitation sessions following invitations to attend from J, this created valuable opportunities to reinforce and remind him about the value-driven committed actions that had been agreed. The accelerator pedal metaphor also proved useful in being able to check in with J about how he was progressing whilst also prompting him towards value driven behaviour and goals. Being invited to attend sessions also gave opportunities to observe J, a notable observation was that J would sit on the ground during the recovery breaks between exercises. During session five this behaviour was explored, with a particular focus on developing a shared understanding of the function of sitting down between exercises. I broached the subject by asking for permission to share my observation and exploring what J thought "what was going on here". Dialogue revealed that the practice was designed to "take the weight off my legs", behaviour that could be seen as having an anxiety-mediated protective function. J recognised that this was at odds

with putting his foot on the gas, and this may give space for additional "checking" on the shins. To move away from the anxiety-driven avoidance behaviour and towards value-driven behaviour strategies were agreed; these included the introduction of externally focused mindfulness exercises and active recovery strategies between exercises. To enable the recovery strategies to be supported by the physiotherapist, J agreed to share information about the strategies. The agreed strategies were introduced and practiced in the consultancy meeting before being adopted during the rehabilitation sessions that followed.

## 8.1    Evaluation of Impact

Data from the GPS monitoring system showed that total distance covered during rehab sessions increased from 36% of J's highest recorded scores (collected from match data prior to injury) to achieving 76%, and then a new high score for total distance over the next three sessions. Additionally, max speed measures showed increases from 75% of J's recorded max speed to 86% before eventually recording a new max speed. During this time the strategies co-developed throughout consultancy were reinforced during informal discussion and consultancy dialogue before, during and after rehabilitation sessions. Subjective ratings for level of pain were also collected during this time showing a steady reduction in the level of pain being experienced, from what J perceived as 5/10 level of pain to 1/10. The subjective markers of progress were supported by the objective data that was available from GPS data which clearly highlighted an increased capacity to produce physical output. After recording new high scores for both total distance and max speed (over and above the new high scores recorded during rehab), which meant J was able to be discharged from physiotherapy and return to training, a final consultancy meeting was arranged to review and evaluate our work. J was pleased that the objectives set out at the beginning of consultancy had been achieved, and that our work together had been a success.

9.     Critical Evaluation of Impact & Consultancy

The work with J can be considered a success for a number of reasons. Firstly, the objectives set out at the beginning of the process were clearly achieved, and progress was tracked throughout the consultancy period using objective and subjective markers (See appendix 1.). These markers clearly highlight the significant progress J made. On the one hand we are able to see a reduction in the perception and reporting of pain (movement away from subjective suffering), and on the other an increase in the volume and intensity in the training J was able to tolerate (movement toward valued ends), followed by a successful return to training. I feel that success in this instance was underpinned by effectively co-constructing clear consultancy aims/goals, which helped to direct the work towards J's 'preferred direction of travel' (Cooper & Law, 2018). The development of collaborative goals reflects my beliefs that people are purposeful, possess free will, and are able to make choices and take action to achieve things that are important to them; which are also fundamental principles of existential psychology and the ACT approach. Moreover, there is strong support within the wider psychotherapy literature that goals developed between the client and practitioner lead to more positive outcomes (Tryon & Winograd, 2011).

The current case presented a complex challenge to navigate in order for J to return to training. Various medical explanations for what was preventing progress had been exhausted, and as such a number of stakeholders were involved and invested in J's rehabilitation. Whilst working alongside a wider medical team may arguably bring challenges, for example in relation to confidentiality, I feel the expertise and support of the wider staff (e.g. Doctor and Physiotherapy team) should be considered a resource to support the work of the psychologist. This represents a shift and development in the delivery of sport psychology services where working in a multidisciplinary team was previously considered to a source of conflict (Reid et

al., 2004). Though discussing the influence that coaches can have on psychological work, Nesti wrote that "failure to acknowledge this, and work with, instead of against it, is to increase the odds against the sport psychologist being able to carry out his function properly" (p. 171. Nesti, 2010), this could also relate to the influence of other support staff, particularly senior medical professionals. Research focused on the experiences of experienced sport psychologists emphasised the importance of developing effective relationships with colleagues in order to be able to deliver different types of sport psychology support (McDougall et al. 2015). Reflecting on the current case developing effective relationships with colleagues in the medical team was a key feature of the success of the case. Furthermore, this highlights the facilitative role that wider staff can play if invited to contribute to the process of psychological support – psychology support doesn't exist in a vacuum or solely in the relationship or interactions between the psychologist and client. However collaborating with colleagues in this way required me to consider issues of confidentiality and respecting J's boundaries; I sought to address these by implementing measures to protect J's autonomy and right to confidentiality. This was achieved by building in "cooling off periods" to consider his decision on whether to share information with the medical team, and inviting J to meetings were any information was shared. I feel this helped to promote collaboration, demonstrating congruence with an existentially informed approach, and reflected the values I hold around the importance of respect, honesty and transparency.

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**A Holistic Ecological Approach to Sport Psychology and Talent Development**

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# Table of Contents

1.      Introduction to Client

David (D) is a UEFA 'A' licensed football coach currently working full time as the lead coach for Action City FC (ACFC) under 14-academy team. The academy has been awarded category 1 status by the Premier League, which is the highest tier of the academy system and is awarded when clubs meet a range of strict criteria relating to coaching programmes, education and welfare, sports science and medical provisions, staffing and facilities (The Premier League, 2011). At the beginning of consultancy, D had been employed full time as the U14 lead coach for 4 months, having previously been employed part-time as an assistant coach for over 10 years.

1.1      Contextual Information

Promotion from assistant to lead coach gave D increased responsibility for the U14 programme. Responsibilities include coordinating the individual development plan (IDP) of each player and working alongside a wider multi-disciplinary team (MDT) of staff employed by the club to support the development of academy players. D was now responsible for leading the six-weekly MDT review process to discuss player progress and creating and monitoring player IDPs. These new and increased responsibilities required D to quickly develop a greater understanding of the roles and functions of the MDT members. One of these roles included my role in delivering the psychology support within the academy, and the function of the provision.

1.2      Presenting difficulties and background information relevant to consultancy.

During a scheduled MDT review meeting, D raised concerns about the development of Ben (B) a player in the U14 age group (aged 13), citing issues with the player's application and ability to reflect and understand when he was playing well or not. More specifically, during recent weeks B had been visibly emotional, shown frustration and disengaged during games

when things have not been going well and when things *have* been going well, which D found difficult to comprehend. Examples include being upset when a teammate has scored goals, and he has not, despite being instrumental in creating chances for himself and the teammate who scored the goals. During the meeting D described how he perceived B to view his performance solely in terms of scoring goals, and showed little understanding and awareness of the factors that contribute to a positive performance. The potential longer-term impact on B's development was a concern for the coach; he felt that disengaging, being "selfish" and not "running and working for the team" would hinder the player going forward when teammates would be less forgiving, as well as limiting B's potential to positively impact games. D described B as a seriously talented player, who had the ability to do things that other boys his age were not able to do and the potential to go on to become a full time player with the club in the coming years.

In summary D's concerns related to B's ability to recognize, evaluate and reflect on his performances in a balanced way. D felt that this was leading to some difficulties in managing emotions and disappointment, which resulted in B disengaging during training and games. D felt that he had tried to address the challenges himself, but with limited success, and was now looking to support from the psychologist to find a way forward.

2.      The Contracting Process

A formal written contract with the club to provide sport psychology services to players, staff and parents meant that verbal contracts were made with D regarding confidentiality, time, and structure. D agreed that relevant information from our work would be shared with staff in the wider MDT to support the development of B, with the added proviso that any information shared would be agreed first by D. The agreements on sharing relevant information with MDT staff were made after discussing principles of a holistic ecological approach to sport

psychology consulting (Larsen et al., 2013); an approach that emphasizes the importance of utilizing the influence of key figures within an individual's environment to support an intervention. Other agreements included identifying dates and times to meet, working two weeks ahead. Agreements that where made were then documented in emails sent to D.

3.      Rationale for theoretical orientation and approach taken

The case focused on supporting a coach working in professional football in a talent development role. Talent development is widely accepted as being a complex process where multiple factors interplay to support the transformation of talent into elite-level performance (MacNamara, Button & Collins, 2010a). The way in which the varied factors interact to support talent development is unclear despite a wealth of research into this area (Côté, Lidor & Hackfort, 2009). In response to this, researchers have oriented their focus away from individual athletes and on to the environment in which talent development occurs (e.g. Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler, 2010a). Building on Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) ecological systems theory, which centers on the interaction between an individual and the environment as the stimulus for human development and change; the Holistic Ecological Approach (HEA) was adopted to apply these ideas to develop talent in sport (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a). The HEA focuses on the people, processes and context of a specific talent development environment in order to explain and support development, moving away from a focus on the individual in isolation (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a). The rationale for this shift, and for drawing on a HEA in the current case study can be found in the critique of commonly held reductionist approaches to sport psychology, which according to Henriksen (2010) too often focus on the individual and as a result fail to take into account the influence of a wide range of environmental factors.

In the current case, both D and B operate in a busy and demanding environment. Other individuals in the environment include teammates, both older and younger, other coaches, and a range of support staff, which inevitably influences the experiences each individual has. With so many individuals involved, it makes little sense to take D's challenge as a request to work with B in an isolated manner. In addition, the effectiveness of individual 1-2-1 work can be challenged further when B's age is considered, as there is at present limited evidence on the effectiveness of delivering sport psychology services directly with young athletes (Foster et al., 2016). Adopting a HEA in the current case also aligned to both my personal philosophy of practice and the philosophy of the academy. A HEA approach is aligned with my belief that individuals exist, operate in, and are influenced by, the environment. Ecologically focused sport psychology work also guards against the 'problem' from being placed inside the individual; a criticism that has been directed towards more individually focused psychological work (Johnstone, 2018). It is both comprehensible and inevitable that young players will experience challenges when navigating a demanding development system; a HEA recognizes this as a normal process influenced by the demands of the system, as opposed to resulting from an individual's inability to 'deal with' challenges. As such, this approach normalizes performance and development challenges, and first looks to address shortfalls in the system and processes influencing the individual, before any isolated intervention. In keeping with the academy philosophy which aims to preserve childhood and prevent premature professionalization, a HEA would normalize and take greater responsibility for the performance challenges B is experiencing, and not attribute the 'problem' to B. Focusing instead on the environment would align with the academy philosophy by not unnecessarily exposing individual players to professional support services at a young age.

4.      Nature and context in which consultancy took place

The work took place in the academy environment to meet the foundational principle outlined by Larsen *et al.* (2013), who recommended that ecological interventions should take place in the athletes natural setting and not in the practitioner's office. This meant that various locations were used in the academy environment to conduct consultancy, including the training pitches, coaches meeting rooms and the academy cafe areas. Building on the principle that work should acknowledge that the individual is embedded within an environment, any intervention should also look to involve others within the environment (Larsen *et al.* 2013) For this reason the present case study involved working with a number of stakeholders; this included work with D, B, Steven (another coach worked who had previously worked with B), and B's father.

Another decision consistent with a HEA was to not to take the approach from D as a request to work directly with the player. The decision reflects a commitment to optimizing the environment around the athlete, through supporting the development of the coach. As a result, the work included working directly with D, in a supervisory consulting role to support D to work with B (see Harwood & Steptoe, 2018), and working alongside D and B's father. A supervisory consulting role allowed for a collaborative approach to developing consultancy goals that were targeted at supporting the development of individuals (D and B) and optimizing the development environment (Larsen *et al.* 2013).

5.      Assessment Process and Needs Analysis

Regular MDT review meetings at the club provide an opportunity for staff to share information on the progress and development of players. These meetings may be seen as a blend between a stakeholder analysis, focus group (Keegan, 2016) and the early stage of a team formulation; a process whereby a team of professionals work together to develop a shared understanding of

an individual's challenges (Johnstone & Dallos, 2014) in light of the individual's current context, relationships, past history and life events (Johnstone, 2018). Meetings typically include representatives from coaching (D), physiotherapy, psychology, sports science, safeguarding, personal development and education, which allows for a range of perspectives to be shared and discussed when reviewing a players' progress. The range of expertise and experience encourages an individuals' development to be considered from a holistic and psychologically sophisticated perspective. Team formulation is now common practice in clinical psychology (Johnstone, 2018), and in a sport context may be particularly useful when working with children and adolescents in a developmental role. Effective team formulation can help to make sense of an individuals' development or performance challenges and prevent problematizing the person. The understanding developed from the formulation can then form the basis of any subsequent development plan (Johnstone, 2018).

Information from the MDT formulation meeting included an account of the current development challenges, including the behaviours that D was finding problematic. These behaviours included B becoming emotional and frustrated during training and games, in situations where things were challenging and situations when things were going well. This was believed to be impacting on his application and effort, which was supported by members of the support staff. Other relevant information presented by the group included B's standing in the group. Despite being a strong performer, other staff felt that he could often be on the periphery of the group and that his current behaviour may isolate him further. As a strong performer throughout the previous age groups, it is possible that B may not have been adequately prepared for the current challenges. B's age and history of past successes may also have contributed to maintaining the issue through amassing a limited repertoire of experiences to be able to evaluate in a balanced way. Previous attempts at supporting B using ecologically informed

methods were reported to have been successful, adding further support for these methods in the current case.

Following on from the MDT meeting an individual meeting was arranged with D to continue the needs analysis and gain insight into how D was experiencing challenges with the behaviours shown by B. Following up outside of the MDT meeting was designed to create a space where D could talk more openly about his own experiences and challenges. As a new full-time member of staff, it was possible that D may have been less comfortable sharing personal reflections or challenges in a group setting. The 1-2-1 meeting with D highlighted some important information to be considered, in particular that D had not previously worked with a psychologist and was unsure about how this would work in practice e.g. whether the best approach would be for the psychologist to work with individuals or whether an integrated approach would be more effective. D was open to developing his understanding and awareness of how psychology could be implemented into his work, and this was agreed as an objective for the consultancy.

6.      Case Formulation

D has recently started a new role as a full-time coach at the club; new responsibilities include overseeing the ILPs for each of the players in the age group that he coaches. A regular MDT review process provides opportunities for player development to be discussed, and during this process B was identified as experiencing some development challenges that D was unsure of how to approach. D believed the challenges had a psychological component, but a lack of previous experience in working alongside a psychologist meant that he was unsure about how to proceed. As a result the first consultancy goal was to work alongside D to develop his understanding and awareness of how psychology could be implemented into his work.

Currently 13 years old, B is regarded as a high potential player at the club. He has been registered with the club since U9 level, the earliest point at which players can register with professional clubs (The Premier League, 2011). During the past five years B has enjoyed a great deal of success and consistently been regarded as a stand out performer during this time, though previous coaches have considered his behaviour to be challenging, potentially resulting from an intense focus on outcomes, and the way in which B manages emotions and disappointment. D and previous coaches also described how some of the behaviours B was expressing e.g. being selfish and motivated by achieving outcomes had been key to the success that he had experienced so far throughout his development journey. From U9-13 level the format of game has also changed from being played at 4v4, 6v6, 7v7, 9v9 to the full 11-aside version of football, which may mean that the individual skills and characteristics that underpinned success in the smaller versions of the game are now less effective in the full-size game, which requires greater team play. The changes that have occurred as a result of going from small sided to 11-aside football, present an understandable challenge for someone who has achieved success playing in a different way.  It is possible that both past successes, and being outcome focused in achieving those successes, have contributed to the development and maintenance of behaviours being expressed by B in response to the challenges he is facing. Few challenges during the development journey may also mean that B has been unable to develop the skills to deal effectively with disappointment or challenge, and the narrow bank of experiences may also have limited B's ability to view himself and evaluate his performances in broader, more balanced ways. As a result, the remaining consultancy goals were focused on B. The goals were to reduce the disengaging behaviours and promote an increase in prosocial behaviours such as running for the team, and to improve B's ability to evaluate his own performance more effectively.

6.1.     Rationale for Goals

Consultancy goals were developed following the needs analysis and case formulation phases of consultancy and were aligned to a HEA to practice and my professional philosophy. More specifically, goals were developed through collaboration with D and the MDT, which reflected my beliefs about the importance of collaborative working, and the principles of a HEA by recognizing the influence of broader environmental factors (Larsen *et al.* 2014). Furthermore, the goals which focused on developing the coach, the player, and the environment were oriented towards supporting long term holistic development, as opposed to simply a "quick fix". A thorough case formulation allowed goals to be developed from the working model that took into account research, theory and the context around D and B, such as their current and past experiences, life events and social circumstances (Johnstone, 2018).

Goal one, which focused on D, was developed after considering relevant information from needs analysis and case formulation. With little previous experience of working with sport psychology it made sense that an approach to develop knowledge and understanding in this area would reduce uncertainty about how to move forward and would address a factor that may have been maintaining the issues in the case. Additionally, taking an approach to develop D's knowledge and involve him in the consultancy process reflected my beliefs about collaboration and empowerment. Goals two and three were focused on B and aimed to address the behaviours that were being displayed in response incidents during games and maintaining the issue, to promote a protective factor in developing the skills to be able to evaluate in a more effective and balanced way. Developing consultancy goals that were effectively targeted towards 'two clients' further demonstrated a commitment to holistic development, and a move towards optimizing the environment, and not just fixing a problem (Larsen *et al.* 2013).

7.	Development of Professional Relationship

A professional relationship was developed and maintained by the processes that were implemented and by the skills (see Tod, Anderson & Marchant, 2009) and personal qualities (see Chandler, Eubank, Nesti & Cable, 2014) that I attempted to demonstrate. A recent review highlighted how delivering effective sport psychology services are underpinned by both *what* the practitioner does (professional practice skills) and *who* the practitioner is (personal qualities and characteristics) (Woolway & Harwood, 2020). Additionally there is growing support, both in mainstream psychology disciplines (Hilton & Johnston, 2017) and in sport psychology for *how* the practitioner delivers their services as being a central ingredient for 'getting in', 'staying in' and delivering effective practice (Woolway & Harwood, 2019).

Processes that contributed to the development and maintenance of the working relationship included clarification of boundaries and expectations (Keegan, 2015). A meeting with D to clarify these agreements was then documented and followed up via email, which demonstrated an ability to be personable and professional and created the foundation for the work that followed. As D had no previous experience of working alongside a psychologist, it was important to agree and make clear what could be expected in order to reduce any uncertainty. Additionally, this displayed qualities of empathy and understanding by being sensitive to and responding to the client's individual circumstances. Human qualities such as these have been identified as essential for developing the kind of working relationship that allows effective psychological work to take place in traditional counselling settings (Fromm, 1994) and in sport psychology (Nesti, 2004).

Another key process that I feel contributed to developing an effective working relationship was drawing on the formulation to inform decision making throughout consultancy. This ensured

that decisions and actions were consistent with the working model used to make sense of the case. It is possible that action aligned with the formulation may have helped to create a sense of understanding, trust and confidence in the process; all of which have been highlighted as positive outcomes of formulation informed practice in clinical psychology settings (Redhead, Johnstone & Nightingale, 2015). Drawing on and utilizing formulation throughout consultancy has recently been identified as a recommendation for *how* to enhance the effectiveness of health psychology training and practice (Hilton & Johnston, 2017).

8.      Discussion of Consultancy Development

Consultancy took place over a three-month period, from the initial MDT player review meeting, through a further two six-week training cycles, separated and concluded by further MDT review meetings. The initial MDT meeting effectively began the consultancy process and the needs analysis phase. D shared concerns and provided a detailed account of his perceptions on B's progress, and the MDT provided relevant information to the case and the player's background, history and current context. The breadth of the information, expertise and experience provided by the MDT evolved from a form of stakeholder analysis (Keegan, 2015) to a team formulation process (Johnstone, 2018) of co-constructing a working understanding of the behaviours shown by B. A team formulation approach also aligned with a HEA to talent development, by drawing on the expertise and knowledge of the stakeholders in the athletes environment (Larsen, 2018). Notes were taken throughout the MDT meeting to record the information relevant to the needs analysis and case formulation. Information included the recent increased responsibilities for D, limited understanding of how to work with a psychologist and subsequent uncertainty about how to proceed. In addition to detail about B's current behaviour and concerns, information relating to development history, parental influences, and social circumstance was also raised and discussed by the MDT.

The next phase began with a follow up meeting with me and D following the initial team formulation. It was important to meet with D individually to discuss ethical issues around the boundaries and limits of our work, clarify expectations, and explain more about the professional philosophy and approach to practice that would underpin any work together. An individual meeting took place to minimise the uncertainty that D was experiencing about how to move forward, in anticipation that recognising this would create the foundation of an effective working relationship.

Systems theory (Patton & McMahon, 2006) and literature on trauma-informed systems (Bloom, 2011) recognizing the interrelatedness of the individual, the environment, and how each functions provided further theoretical support for the decision to work closely with D. The aim was to reduce anxiety and uncertainty in the system about how to work best with one of the club's most talented but challenging young players. Creating consistency between what is *said* and *done* in the environment around B was identified as a key factor in encouraging a change in his behaviour; during this discussion the rationale for the approach was introduced to D by discussing the HEA and athletic talent development environment model (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a). Discussing the benefits of a HEA, which included avoiding "problematising" B, enhancing the development environment, and upskilling D, led to clarification of the goals for the case and the developments D would like to see in B.

Phase three, began with an individual meeting with D, where the work was progressed to discuss the initial formulation and the methods that would lead to the goals that had been agreed previously. A cultural leadership framework, developed from the work of Edgar Schein (1990) on organizational culture and leadership, and translated into sport psychology practice by Henriksen, Storm & Larsen (2017), was introduced to D as a framework that could be adopted

during the case to guide our work together. A cultural leadership framework seeks to use the influence of leadership figures within an environment to shape and promote culturally endorsed behaviours among group members. The framework was used to plan activities that would promote and create opportunities for a change in B's behaviour (see Appendix A). More specifically, the framework that was co-developed with D clarified the changes in behaviour that he was looking to see. It also outlined the opportunities within the environment that would allow and encourage the specific behaviours to occur, and detailed the leadership behaviour that D and other significant influencers within the environment would show to recognize and reinforce the changes in behaviour when they happened. The next steps in the consultancy were to share the cultural leadership plan with B's father to elicit support from another key influencer, and then with the player himself. During the meeting with the player's father, it was explained that his support would be a key factor in any subsequent success, and he was asked not to share the details of plan with B until D had the opportunity to discuss it with him. When D then followed up with B, the cultural leadership plan had already been given to him by his father. Despite the deviation from the initial agreement with the father, B was positive about the prospect of the development plan and agreed that he would be willing to engage with the activities designed to help him improve.

Phase four focused on supporting the planning, conducting observations and providing feedback on activities D was delivering to support B. A supervisory consulting approach (Harwood & Steptoe, 2018) was adopted in this way to ensure that the activities D was designing were informed by, and congruent with the formulation and the cultural leadership framework. Specific observations were carried out during the consultancy at a macro-level, to observe the training environment, the activities and processes that D was implementing, and at a micro-level to observe the interactions between D and B pre, post and during breaks in the

activities (see Holder & Winter, 2017; Martin, Winter & Holder, 2020). Being embedded within the organization enabled me to support these activities in a natural way, and the cultural leadership framework and agreements that had been made within this, gave a focus and direction to the observations and feedback, consistent with the recommendations for effective observations in applied practice provided by Martin *et al.* (2020). The processes during phase four were intentional efforts to ensure alignment between the agreed plans and behaviours in practice, which is a key factor in effectively adopting HEA to practice (Larsen *et al.* 2013).

Phase five involved group level psychology education that aimed to develop players' (and B's) understanding of how to evaluate individual and team performances effectively, which aligned to the third consultancy goal. Group level evaluation workshop activities were carried out as part of the academy psychology strategy to develop players' knowledge and skills, in recognition that developing players can acquire these skills progressively over time (Macnamara, Button & Collins, 2010b). Delivering education in this way avoided singling out B for unnecessary individual intervention work. Practical evaluation exercises were also a feature of the groups development programme, and involved using video feedback to evaluate and review performances. Consistent with recommendations for effective HEAs to talent development (Larsen *et al.* 2013), these sessions gave D opportunities to model effective evaluation skills, help to guide players through the process and positively reinforce players who demonstrated evaluation skills. More specifically for B, the practical evaluation sessions provided opportunities to put into practice the skills that had been introduced in the education workshop, with an awareness that these skills were a part of his individual learning/development plan.

The final phase of the consultancy focused on reinforcing, monitoring and reviewing B's

progress. D continued to plan training and development exercises that were aligned to the development goals, these included exercises within training sessions/games and in the periods before and after. Examples included asking B to identify performance goals before games and challenging him to reflect on his progress during the half-time break, and after the game had finished. Other strategies D employed included modifying the size of training areas and giving B roles within exercises that would challenge him to work hard and unselfishly for his team (for examples see Harwood & Anderson, 2015). Monitoring took place throughout the process, with regular reflective discussions between D and B, and meta-reflective discussions between D and myself. Discussions focused on what D identified as key learning moments during the process; for example, D shared how during a team review session, B identified that he had made mistakes during the first half, and that he had begun to disengage, but after recognizing this at half time he was able to "get back into the game". D felt this demonstrated significant progress in B's ability to step away from disengaging behaviour and evaluate his performances during the game and after. MDT review meetings were a more formal opportunity to review progress; during the meeting D was able to update the staff team about the progress he felt B had made and gain the perspectives of other support staff. Collectively the staff agreed that they had seen positive changes in the way that B behaved and reacted during games; more specifically that they had not witnessed any of the emotional displays that had formed the basis of D's concerns at the initial MDT meeting. It was agreed that the ability to evaluate effectively and regulate responses to setbacks should remain a development focus for B, and that the details of the work that had been carried out would be shared with the next coach who would be taking responsibility for the team in the following season.

9.      Critical evaluation of consultancy and impact.

A significant challenge encountered during the case related to monitoring and evaluating effectiveness in a case adopting a HEA that took place in a complex talent development environment (Henriksen *et at al.* 2010). The case included several stakeholders, and a range of activities (derived from the formulation) were designed and employed to facilitate development and change in the player's behaviour. Despite the thorough formulation, and targeted development activity that it generated, the broad nature of working in this way created a complex interaction between variables that is far removed from a simple cause-effect relationship. To work through these challenges, a process approach to evaluation and monitoring was undertaken, an approach recommended for evaluating complex interventions (Moore *et al.* 2015). Process evaluation approaches can be used to assess the quality of implementation, taking a broader perspective on *how* an intervention was delivered as opposed to whether it was successful or not (Moore *et al.* 2015). In sport psychology, Anderson *et al.* (2002) recommended the use of case studies as a way to evaluate the consultancy process. A case study approach to evaluating effectiveness would align with a HEA, by recognizing that complex approaches require an approach to evaluation that is able to capture the complexities of real world applied practice (Anderson *et al.* 2002) and draws on multiple sources to inform the evaluation. In order to critically evaluate the current case, this evaluation section will focus on the processes of engaging stakeholders and gaining feedback, case formulation and choosing an intervention.

Using scheduled MDT meetings as formal opportunities to review progress meant that monitoring and evaluation was a live process ongoing throughout the case, and stakeholders were given opportunities to contribute to ongoing monitoring. On reflection, this could have been improved by holding case specific review meetings at more regular intervals than six

weekly MDT meetings. That said, informal discussions to monitor and review progress occurred regularly between myself and D, which is reflective of the sport psychology role embedded within an organization (Larsen *et al.* 2013). Feedback provided by D was a useful source of information to inform the evaluation of the case. D commented on his experience of being involved in the case; aligned to the first consultancy goal this highlighted a shift in his thinking and demonstrated an increased understanding of how to apply HEAs to talent development and psychology.

*"Knowing this boy had exceptional talent I had attempted several tactics to both push and cajole him into doing this [run more for the team]. Proving unfruitful I chose to bring Danny in to try and help me alleviate this problem. Through continued work together my ideas around the involvement of parents had changed somewhat, considering we should involve them perhaps a little more than the club had previously in situations like this".*

Positives from the process were also highlighted when commenting on the impact on B;

*"This was a good experience and Danny had shown his real value to the MDT and the player. B did begin to run more though not necessarily all the time, we did get some improvement and especially off good possession within the team".*

Additionally, considering D's lack of previous experience of working with a psychologist, the fact that he is now able to recognize the value that psychology can offer to the MDT and wider system may also be considered a strength of the case. The goals of HEAs are to support the development of the individual, and the development of a psychologically informed environment (Larsen *et al.* 2013).

Conducting a thorough formulation is a key factor in delivering effective sport psychology practice (Keegan, 2015). Developing an understanding of the presenting problem in relation to the client(s) history, current circumstances and the context around them, ensures subsequent decisions are informed by and specific to individual cases; and helps to avoid a scattergun approach to practice (Johnstone, 2018). In the current case, the formulation process included team formulation, which involved using information from the MDT to create and share an understanding of the presenting issues (Johnstone, 2018). Developing formulations for individuals also considered the influence of the context in which the formulations took place. The breadth of the formulation process reflected a growing maturity in my abilities as a practitioner, demonstrated by an openness to MDT working and the approach to practice taken following the formulation. It is common for trainees to experience a need to demonstrate their competence to others (Christensen & Aoyagi, 2014). As such it is possible that anxieties associated with this may dissuade trainee practitioners from engaging in MDT work, stemming from a fear that this may reveal shortcomings in their knowledge or skills to work with a particular problem. Effective formulation helped me to overcome these issues, by developing my understanding of the people involved in the case and identifying the factors maintaining the issues, this gave me confidence that the decision to adopt a HEA, and to work with and through the coach (D) was an appropriate course of action.

Littlewood, Nesti & Luthardt (2018) presented a life cycle model to describe the stages of development that service delivery may typically go through, moving through introduction, growth, maturity phases before going on to extend or decline. This model may also be applied to practitioner development, and to the individuals we work with, in relation to their experience of working with sport psychology. Reflecting on my development helped me to recognize the growth towards maturity that I have experienced as a practitioner, giving me greater confidence

to 'hand control' to others (e.g. D) and operate in a supervisory consulting role. Similarly, being aware that D was in an introductory phase of working with a psychologist presented an opportunity to adopt this role and support the development of both the coach and the player in the case. I believe that the collaborative approach taken during the case was a significant factor in developing an effective relationship with D, as this was both supportive and empowering.

Overall, the challenges encountered within the case can be attributed to the complexities of working inside a talent development environment where many different stakeholders are present (Henriksen *et at al.* 2010a; Larsen *et al.* 2013). The volume of people and the range of factors influencing the experience of the individual, makes engaging all the relevant stakeholders and ensuring that a clear and coherent message is delivered to developing athletes a challenge, particularly in increasingly busy development environments in professional football (Littlewood *et al.* 2018). In the case, this was highlighted when the player's father was asked to support the process, then went against what had been verbally agreed by showing the development plan to the player before the coach had an opportunity to explain the rationale for the project. It is possible that more formal contracting processes with key figures involved in supporting a case using a HEA may address such issues in the future, by being more explicit about the expectations of everyone.

In summary, I feel the positive outcomes from the case can be attributed to the "golden thread" of HEA principles from the formulation to the choice of intervention and the decisions/actions that followed. I feel this thread created a sense of clarity and coherence, which according to Keegan (2015) is likely to have a positive influence on the consultancy process as a whole and ensures decisions made throughout the consultancy process are defensible.

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Appendix A. Cultural Leadership Framework.

## Cultural Leadership in Action          (Henriksen et al., 2017).

| Behaviour: Commitment to learning and developing... | What the system demands... | Cultural Leadership... |
|---|---|---|
| Examples... | What space do we need within the system to allow for the desired behaviours to occur?... | What do we (as leaders within the environment) need to do to facilitate or encourage these behaviours?... |

**Consultancy Contract & Report**

The following section contains a copy of the job description outlining key responsibilities for my contracted role as 'Academy Performance Psychologist', a breakdown of my working week as agreed with my line manager at the beginning of the season and a copy of an end of season report that I was tasked with producing and presenting back to the Head of Performance services performance services colleagues as part of an end of season review.

## ACADEMY PERFORMANCE PSYCHOLOGIST JD – DANIEL RANSOM

*The post, line managed by Performance Support Manager is to operationalise the delivery of the Academy Psychology Strategy for U12-18 age group players, staff and parents. The post holder will be responsible for the design, deliver and evaluation of performance psychology delivery at these age groups. In addition, the post holder will work closely with all other staff in the academy performance department to contribute to the development, delivery and monitoring of the academy performance strategy.*

## THE ROLE:

### To design, deliver and evaluate the academy psychology strategy for U12-18 age group players, staff and parents:

- Primary focus is to better prepare young players transitioning to higher levels to face the inevitable challenges and demands that elite professional football presents.
- Apply the principles of psychology & personal development to improving performance, creating and maintaining a high performing culture for talent development.
- Engage and deliver an ongoing meaningful parent/guardian/host family interaction and education curriculum in line with the parent strategy.
- Work alongside coaches and support staff to promote the development of psychological skills by integrating this into the technical and tactical coaching program.
- Provide psychological support and education through workshops and in confidential 121 sessions for all academy players and parents in age groups u12-u18 as required.

### Work closely with all other staff in the academy performance department to contribute to the development, delivery and monitoring of the academy performance strategy.
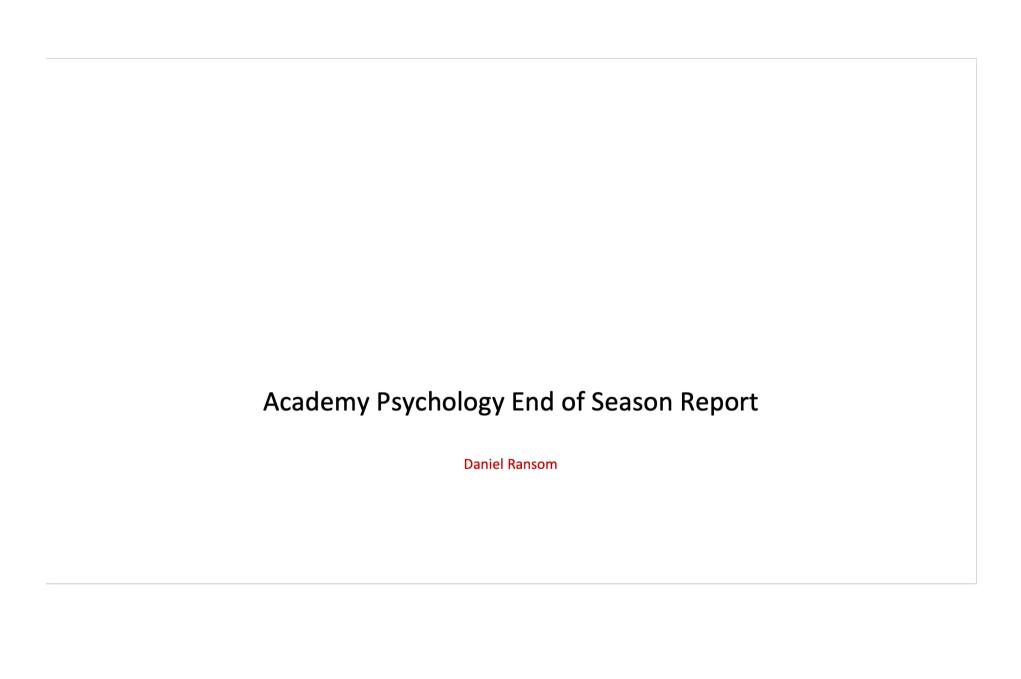
- Liaise with all members of the performance, sports science and medicine department to support all elements of player development.
- Support the development and monitoring of multi-disciplinary individual learning plans for all academy players u12-18.
- Report and review where appropriate at the phase meetings to the academy manager and head of phases on the development and progression of all academy players registered with the club.

### Other responsibilities associated with the role.

- To take part and contribute to all mandatory training where appropriate and keep up to date with current research/literature and ensure compliance with regulatory bodies and Premier League requirements.
- Complete admin tasks as required to fulfil the role including updating the PMA.
- Provide genuine care for each player as an individual striving to develop a rapport and relationship based on mutual trust and club values and the academy philosophy.
- Undertake other duties as directed by the head of performance, academy manager or the technical board.

# | Elite Performance Department

Individual Service Delivery – Working Week Daniel Ransom

|  | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **AM** | **Feedback from weekend games & session planning with age group coaches.** | **Feedback from weekend games & session planning with age group coaches.** | **Group & Individual 1-2-1 session planning & record keeping .** | *Prof Doc LJMU* | **Reflective Practice Support MANUSS training.**<br><br>**(Group Delivery on Enrichment Day)** | **U16 & 18 Fixture/ Support age group training/ Fixtures. (Group Delivery on Enrichment Day)** | |
| **PM** | **Support MANUSS/ Transition training.**<br><br>**4-5pm Small Group/Individual Player Support.** | **Support MANUSS training.**<br>**4-5pm Small Group/Individual Player Support.** | **Group & Individual 1-2-1 session planning & record keeping.** | *Prof Doc LJMU* | **Session planning & record keeping**<br><br>**(Group Delivery on Enrichment Day)** | **U16 & 18 Fixture/ Support age group training/ Fixtures. (Group Delivery on Enrichment Day)** | |
| **EVE 5.00-7.00pm** | **1-2-1 Support for Injured players & Support age group training.** | **Support age group training/fixture** | **Support age group training/fixture** | *Prof Doc LJMU* | | | |

# Academy Psychology End of Season Report

Daniel Ransom

# Contents:

- Overview of programme activity, aims and objectives.

- Summary of key headlines and achievements.

- Update on individual development work

- Current project update

- Personal evaluation and reflections

- Recommendations

# Psychology Programme U12-18

## Aims and objectives

Objectives agreed at the start of 2017/18 season:

- Create a common 'psychology' language among players, staff and across development phases.
- Create a framework for performance education and support.
- Design, deliver and evaluate psychology enrichment programme.
- Inform the development of a consistent profiling, monitoring and evaluation of psychological performance attributes.

# Performance Education

## Enrichment Programme

Headlines:

- 73 Psychology performance education activities logged and evaluated on PMA across U12-16 age groups – linked to C/A/R/D model.
- 3295 minutes/54 hours of formal psychology performance education activity.
- All u12-16 players completed self assessment and performance profiling (Butler & Hardy, 1992) during phase 1 & 2.

| Week: | Aim: | Theme: Accountability |
|---|---|---|
| 1 – Workshop | Introduction to concept | Intro to Accountability – What this looks like on the pitch… |
| 2 – Football Activity | Application | Individual/Positional Role & Responsibilities. |
| 3 – Football Activity | Application | Reacting positively to mistakes/confusion |
| 4 – Football Activity | Application | Player led game/activity |
| 5 – Workshop | Review of concept | What have we learnt about being accountable? |
| 6 – Rest & Review week | Coach CPD relating to next block. | Identifying strategies & factors that contribute to developing C/A/R/D. |

| Phase 1: Summer – Introduction to CARD programme. & Performance Profiling | Phase 2: Confidence | Phase 3: Accountability | WINTER BREAK | Phase 4: Resilience | Phase 5: Desire | Phase 6: Recap and Evaluation. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

# Supporting Individual Development

## 6 Weekly MDT Reviews

Attendance at U12-16 MDT review meetings to review and update on individual development work.

Useful forum for sharing information and informing workload.

A number of opportunities to engage in MDT support work have emerged from the meetings. This is an approach that can be developed and implemented further next season.

Example of MDT & Holistic Ecological Approach taken to supporting development working alongside coaching staff.



| Behaviour | System Demands (What do we need to ensure is in place to help achieve?) | Leadership/Staff Demands (What do we need staff to be/do?) |
|---|---|---|
| Become more engaged with rules. | • Ensure clear rules are agreed with the whole squad. Ensure these are framed positively i.e. this is what we agree to do – not simply a list of do nots.<br>• Agree clear standards and expectations with Adam, ensure he is fully aware of these & discuss benefits of engaging with the rules.<br>• Communicate regularly with parent(s) to promote buy-in & support. | • All staff adhere to agreed standards and expectations.<br>• Promote high standards of behaviour as minimum expectations for all – tough on the behaviour not on the person.<br>• Praise, reinforce and reward players when standards/expectations are met.<br>• Regular review and feedback with AB and parents to update on progress. |
| Demonstrate positive reactions to losing possession. | • Feedback on current reactions.<br>• Clear information on what a positive reaction looks like.<br>• Access to best practice clips of attacking players demonstrating positive reaction. | • Set clear goals with player about reacting positively.<br>• Encourage, reinforce and praise when positive reactions are made.<br>• Provide AB with regular feedback. |
| Demonstrate "teamwork" behaviours. | • Ensure clear rules are agreed with the whole squad.<br>• Access to best practice clips of attacking players demonstrating team work and unselfish behaviours. | • All staff adhere to agreed standards and expectations regarding team work.<br>• Encourage, reinforce and praise when team work is shown.<br>• Provide AB with regular feedback. |

Holistic Ecological Approach.                    Adapted from Henriksen, Storm & Larsen, (201 7)

# Supporting Individual Development

## 1-2-1 Support

Individual consulting formed another key role. issues raised at MDT meetings and player individual learning plans informed some of this work.

Over 25 individual referrals for confidential 1-2-1 work followed up and conducted throughout season. Content included working on concentration, dealing with injury and return to play, performance anxiety, transition and adjustment to change, training mentality, attitude and broader life issues.

Additionally, individual and small group work was undertaken with U16 players in preparation for transition to professional development phase.
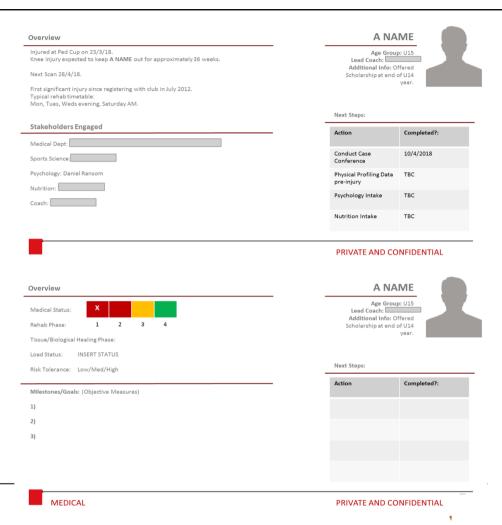


6    Source:

# Current Projects...

## Sports Science & Medical MDT Project

It has been recognized that there is a need for a more formal approach to providing multi-disciplinary support to injured academy players. Excellent communication between key stakeholders and support service providers will go someway to ensuring academy players receive the highest quality, holistic support expected at Manchester United.

Stakeholders from various departments met to discuss terms of reference and appropriate information to be shared.

Bespoke MDT Rehab section being created by NAME on PMA to house information and track progress through rehab inline with new GDPR requirements.
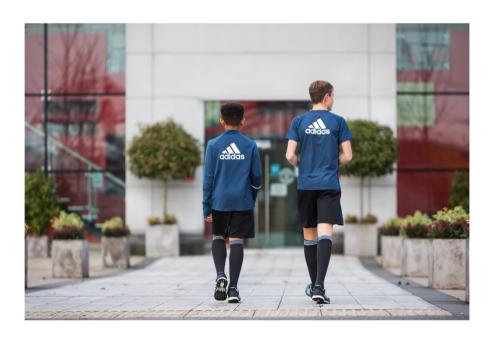
**Overview**

Injured at Ped Cup on 23/3/18.
Knee injury expected to keep A NAME out for approximately 36 weeks.

Next Scan 28/4/18.

First significant injury since registering with club in July 2012.
Typical rehab timetable:
Mon, Tues, Weds evening, Saturday AM.

**Stakeholders Engaged**

Medical Dept:

Sports Science:

Psychology: Daniel Ransom

Nutrition:

Coach:

### A NAME

Age Group: U15
Lead Coach:
Additional Info: Offered Scholarship at end of U14 year.

**Next Steps:**

| Action | Completed?: |
|---|---|
| Conduct Case Conference | 10/4/2018 |
| Physical Profiling Data pre-injury | TBC |
| Psychology Intake | TBC |
| Nutrition Intake | TBC |

**Overview**

Medical Status: | X | | | |

Rehab Phase: 1 2 3 4

Tissue/Biological Healing Phase:

Load Status: INSERT STATUS

Risk Tolerance: Low/Med/High

**Milestones/Goals:** (Objective Measures)

1)

2)

3)

### A NAME

Age Group: U15
Lead Coach:
Additional Info: Offered Scholarship at end of U14 year.

**Next Steps:**

| Action | Completed?: |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

MEDICAL

# Current Projects...

## MANUSS

Specific performance and development programme for MANUSS players. This includes:

-Weekly observation and feedback on MANUSS players in training and games. Feedback discussed with coaches and players.

-Supporting coaching staff with MANUSS training each week.

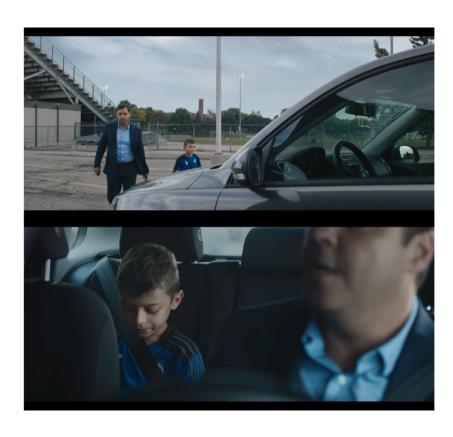-Regular 1-2-1 development sessions with U15/16 MANUSS players informed by individual learning plans.

# Current Projects...

## Parent Engagement

Ongoing project working alongside education and player care departments to design and deliver comprehensive strategy for parent engagement.

4 x pilot parent workshops were delivered and evaluated during the 2017-18 season.

Content and delivery planning for 2018-19 season underway. Content to be consistent with academy psychology strategy.

# Personal Evaluation and Reflections

The following themes emerged following critical reflection.

| Enrichment Programme | Growing with Players | Working with Coaches | Proactive development of Psych Attributes |
|---|---|---|---|

Longer sessions during enrichment days have allowed for more diversity in activities and delivery style - resulting in greater engagement from boys.

Modular approach of focusing on one attribute per enrichment block worked well in developing understanding of concept, however feedback highlighted that C/A/R/D often overlap in the real world. A focus on real world examples and skills to develop attributes could be an alternative approach.

U14,15 and 16 boys are entering into their third season of psychology support - in order to grow with these boys and keep them engaged the programme will require greater focus on practical uses of psychology.

Feedback from U16 players highlighted a desire for more practical application of psychology.

Debate raised about "accountability" whether this is too abstract for young players.

There has been good examples of coach-psychology collaboration to support player development throughout the season.

This could be further developed by scheduling regular progress update meetings with individual age group coaches - these would sit outside of 6 weekly MDT meetings and focus on supporting the coach to develop psychological attributes in players.
Also provides greater evidence of engagement and impact.

MDT reviews have been useful for highlighting potential players for additional support, however this is often reactive.

Adopting a more proactive approach will prevent psychology being related to solving problems or issues.

Regular involvement in coach CPD events would help to stimulate debate and share best practice on how to develop psychological attributes in practice.

Recommendations
for 2018-19 season

# Recommendations for future projects

MANUSS transition preparation project.
- Adjustment challenges for players joining MANUSS programme mid-year, suggesting lack of awareness and preparation for the challenges that joining the full time programme brings.
  Recommendation that a project be developed and trialled to help prepare players joining the programme adjust as smoothly as possible. One strand could involve 1-2-1 work for players in the build up to and throughout the first six months of joining the programme.

Profiling.
- Continue to develop profiling projects including PI, SMTQ and SOC alongside collaborative project with analysis department to track psychological performance in games.

Coach CPD.
- Regular involvement in coach CPD events to promote awareness, discussion and best practice around developing psychological attributes through coaching.

Research
- Conduct research into playing up/down age groups. Early questions and considerations include: What evidence supports/refutes this practice? How do we come to these decisions & what information do we have to support decision making? How can we prepare and support players and parents to get the most out of playing up/down age groups? How is progress monitored and evaluated?

Evidencing engagement and Impact.
- Create process for recording and monitoring engagement with coaches and requests for individual work. E.G. Traffic light system Red = Request not actioned, Amber = Support work in progress, Green = request assessed, completed/resolved.
- Record evaluation and feedback from stakeholders to demonstrate impact.

**Teaching and Training Case Study**


**Delivering Sport Psychology Workshop Series in a Professional Football Club Academy**



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## 1. The Client Group

The client group comprised of five separate age group teams from a professional football club academy. The teams were under 12 (school year 7), under 13 (school year 8), under 14 (school year 9), under 15 (school year 10) and under 16 (school year 11). Each of the age group teams were part of the youth development phase of a Premier League Category 1 academy, which meant that the football club was required to deliver a holistic development programme including age-appropriate psychological education and support (The Premier League, 2011). The all male age group teams varied in size ranging from a minimum of 14 players to a maximum of 24 players in each team. The length of time that individual players across the squads had been a part of the academy programme varied from less than 1 full season to 8 seasons. In addition, the groups also had different levels of experience of sport psychology education, with the youngest (U12) group having only ever experienced two sport psychology workshops during their time at the club, whereas the older (U15 & U16) groups had experienced regular sport psychology education as part of their academy experience over the previous three seasons. In line with Premier League requirements, the academy had a developmental programme of psychology education focused on developing knowledge and understanding of a range of psychological concepts and skills aligned to the academy philosophy and values. The programme is structured to progressively develop the boys' knowledge and understanding of sport psychology through each year of the youth development phase.

## 2. Assessment of Client Group Needs

Several methods were used in order to better understand and appraise client group needs in relation to the demands they face as developing athletes (Gardner & Moore, 2006). The

methods used included informal and formal discussion with academy staff, including the Head of Academy, Academy Education team and academy coaches to conduct a stakeholder analysis (Keegan, 2015). Analysis of club documents (e.g. Academy Philosophy and Academy Psychology Strategy), consultation of the football specific literature base, and the use of reflective practice (Knowles et al., 2014) were additional methods used to understand and assess the needs of the various groups and the academy programme.

To begin a stakeholder analysis, a meeting with the Head of Academy (HoA) was arranged prior to the beginning of the season. This gave an opportunity for the HoA to have input into the development of the psychology education programme for the forthcoming season. Engaging with key stakeholders such as the HoA and being able to demonstrate skills and qualities such as an ability and willingness to collaborate has been regarded as an important factor in gaining support from senior staff who look to employ sport psychologists (Woolway & Harwood, 2019). Notes were taken during and after the meeting to record the input from the HoA. The importance of developmentally appropriate content for the sessions was emphasised in order to engage the boys. In line with this, the HoA was also explicit in sharing his views that sessions should have a practical focus as opposed to a theoretical one. From experience, the HoA felt that psychology education workshops that were practically focused and engaging were more effective than theoretical or "school-like" workshops; these views are consistent with those provided by Nesti (2010) who discussed best practice recommendations for delivering psychology education in professional football settings at first team and academy level. Age group coaches also emphasised the importance of "fun not theory" in order to get the most from the boys during the sessions, echoing the messages from the HoA.

Stakeholder analysis continued by consulting the Head of Education (HoE), an experienced and qualified teacher responsible for ensuring the academy fulfils its obligation to support the educational attainment of all players. The purpose of meeting the HoE was to better understand the educational level of the boys within the age groups, and meet the requirements for stage one of the teaching cycle Wilson, 2014)., which can be broken down into five stages; initial assessment, planning of learning goals, delivery, assessment of learning, and evaluation (Collaborating with the HoE was vital for ensuring that the planning, development and delivery of the workshops was informed by a teaching professional. Developing a better understand the educational level of the participants was a key factor in attempting to ensure activities that are planned are inclusive, and provide the appropriate level of challenge for learners, which are key principles outlined by The Department for Education. The HoE explained that within each age group there would be significant differences in the educational level of the participants, with some being low performing students educationally, and others who are high performers within the same group. The challenge to meet the needs of individual learners is one of the many factors that makes teaching and learning "considerably more complex than they first appear" (Skinner, 2005, p. 17), and as such this challenge formed a key task that was identified in the needs assessment phase.

Analysis of club documents was another method used to assess client group needs. Records of the previous workshops carried out at the academy highlighted the varied level of sport psychology education experience between the groups (as highlighted in Section 1.). When coupled with the varied educational level, this reinforced the need to establish, define and differentiate learning objectives across the age groups. Further analysis of club documents, more specifically the academy psychology strategy, identified the 'CORE' (competitiveness, ownership, resilience and expression) psychology concepts the club were looking to educate

players on; and the framework used by the club to differentiate learning objectives across different age groups. Built on the original use of action verbs to write learning objectives, Anderson & Krathwohl (2001) presented a revised version of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives, which the club had adopted to help establish player learning goals (see Appendix 1). Having established learning goals for each age group (related to the verbs outlined by Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) provided clear guidance about club's expectations for meeting player learning needs.

Reflective accounts from my own and others' experiences also provided a rich source of information to better understand the needs of the different client groups. Foster et al. (2015) aimed to explore sport psychologists' experiences of working with children and young people and identified a range of factors for practitioners to be aware of. This included the importance of relating to youngsters and maintaining engagement, which echoed the information gleaned from the stakeholder analysis. Further research exploring experienced practitioners' successful consultancy experiences when working with young athletes Henriksen *et al.* (2014) identified three best practice recommendations; 1) there should be a focus on developing a holistic skills package, 2) sports psychology work should acknowledge the influence of the environment, and look to include significant others e.g. peers, coaches and parents in the education process, and 3) work should be focused on the long term development of the young person. Specifically related to working in professional football, reflections on my own experience highlighted the importance of creating a non-school like environment for maintaining engagement with young footballers.

In summary, the information collected during the needs analysis process highlighted a wealth of important information to consider in order to meet the needs of the players/learners and the

football club. The 'CORE' psychology concepts detailed in the academy psychology strategy provided a range of potential topics that could be covered as part of the curriculum. Records of previous sessions showed that resilience had not yet been covered, and this concept was chosen as a topic to focus on for the education sessions. Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) provided a framework to differentiate learning objectives among the different groups and achieve the goals of ensuring sessions were planned to accommodate individual differences in both level of educational attainment and experience of sport psychology education. Accommodating these differences during planning and delivery ensures sessions are inclusive and appropriately challenging (Department for Education, 2014). Ensuring sessions were developmentally appropriate, engaging and fun was supported by research (e.g. Foster *et al.* 2015), and staff within the academy.

### 3. Teaching and Training Programme Structure and Content

The teaching and training programme structure was informed by the academy psychology strategy and the framework for player learning objectives (see Appendix 2). The framework for learning objectives is informed by the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy; the taxonomy is proposed to promote more effective teaching and learning by 1) helping the teacher plan and deliver appropriate instruction, 2) inform the development of appropriate assessment tasks and strategies, and 3) create alignment between instruction, assessment and learning objectives (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The use of the revised taxonomy of learning objectives builds a scaffolded structure for learning, an approach that seeks to progressively support learners towards stronger understanding and greater independence (Bruner, 1986). As a result, the youngest learner groups' (U12 and U13) objectives were derived from step one and two of the taxonomy, with a focus on 'Remembering' and 'Understanding'. The objectives for the more experienced and older under 14 group incorporated steps 1 and 2, and included step three -

'Applying'. Finally, the oldest and most experienced groups' (U15 and U16) learning objectives incorporated steps 1-3 and went further to include steps 4 and 5 with a focus on 'Analysing' and 'Evaluating'. In order to ensure inclusivity due to the differences in learners' level of education and experience, and to allow for the level of challenge to be increased, step 6 of the taxonomy 'Creating' was not applied to the under 12-16 academy age groups, however this meant that more challenging objectives could be developed to meet learner needs.

The content for the programme was directed by the academy psychology strategy and focused on the concept of resilience. The strategy is informed by a holistic ecological approach to sport psychology and talent development, a perspective that looks beyond the individual and acknowledges the broader influence and role of the people, processes and context around the athlete on their development (Henriksen, 2010). In order to be congruent with the holistic ecological perspective, a broader definition of resilience was used to inform the development of content. Resilience was defined as "a dynamic process encompassing positive adaption within the context of adversity" (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000, p. 543), which occurs as a result of an interaction between positive psychological factors, resources and environmental factors (Galli & Gonzalez, 2015). Defined in this way, resilience is seen as an interactive process between the individual, the people around them and the environment; it is something that can be developed and is not some innate psychological characteristic. Conceptual clarity allowed for the following learning objectives to be developed:

- U12 – To be able to remember key components and definitions of resilience, and to be able to identify examples and sources of resilience.
- U13 – To be able to identify examples and sources of resilience, and to describe how different factors contribute to resilience.

- U14 - To be able to identify examples and sources of resilience and begin to explain how different factors impact on resilience both positively and negatively, demonstrated through examples.

- U15 - To be able to identify examples and sources of resilience, and to explain how different factors impact on resilience both positively and negatively, demonstrated through examples. To be able to reflect on personal experiences to differentiate between helpful and unhelpful strategies for being resilient.

- U16 - To be able to identify examples and sources of resilience, and to explain how different factors impact on resilience both positively and negatively, demonstrated through real life examples. To be able to reflect on personal experiences to differentiate between helpful and unhelpful strategies for being resilient and assess current use of resilience strategies.

## 4. Programme Delivery

The sport psychology teaching and training sessions were delivered as part of the academy enrichment programme, which takes place during the first weekend of each six-week training block. The enrichment programme is protected time within the academy calendar for performance support departments (e.g. Psychology, Athlete Lifestyle, Nutrition & Performance Analysis) to deliver performance education and development sessions to players. The U12-16 groups have a 60-minute sport psychology education session scheduled as part of the enrichment weekend, and access to a classroom, pitch and breakout space within the academy. Prior to each session the room was prepared with removing tables and rows of chairs to a more open layout in order to try and create a more relaxed atmosphere than a traditional classroom, in keeping with previous recommendations (Nesti, 2010). Additionally, as the psychology education programme was not part of a formal education curriculum, and was not taking place in a traditional educational setting e.g. a school, this created an opportunity to

create a non-traditional atmosphere and adopt a range of teaching modes such as adopting more of a facilitating than a lecturing style in a bid to engage learners (Skinner, 2005).

All sessions began by agreeing some basic terms of engagement (e.g. that the session would not be a lesson in the traditional sense and that players would be required to play an active role in the session, and importantly that people would be respectful to each other). U12, 13 and 14 players were given a post-it note when entering the room and asked to answer the question 'What is resilience?' and stick their answers on to the wall at the front of the room. This introductory activity was designed to give a brief insight into the level of understanding of the concept within the groups and allow for any adjustments to the session to be made in response to individual needs.

The U12 session continued from the introductory activity with a discussion around the definitions of resilience that the players had provided, with the aim of promoting learning through interaction, reasoning and argument (Dillion, 1994). Consistent with best practice recommendations (Henriksen *et al.* 2014), in addition to developing knowledge and understanding of resilience, the discussion activities also served a secondary holistic development purpose in encouraging the development of discussion and communication skills. A definition of resilience was provided to the group to provide clarity along with some further information and ideas about resilience and reflected a more traditional direct mode of teaching (Skinner, 2005). A final plenary activity was used to both consolidate and assess learning; players were split into small groups (5 players per group) and given a series of statements related to resilience that had to be separated into either true or false categories. Discussion with each group during the activity enabled any questions and inconsistent answers to be addressed.

The U13 and U14 sessions followed a similar format to the U12, with the introductory activity, discussion and debrief, followed by a period of direct teaching to define and provide additional information around the concept of resilience. To scaffold up from the U12 session, an additional activity was introduced to target the higher-level learning objectives. Players were shown a video that told the story of some "famous failures" that eventually achieved great success (sport examples included Michael Jordan and Lionel Messi). The U13 group were challenged to work with a partner to identify and describe factors that may contributed to resilience and subsequent success before being invited to feed back to the group. The U14 group were separated into five groups, with each group given a different example from the famous failures video to focus on. The groups were challenged to identify factors contributing to resilience and subsequent success, and to explain via a short group presentation how these factors may have impacted on their journey positively and negatively. Both sessions concluded with the plenary activity, where players had to identify true/false statements related to resilience.

The U15 and U16 sessions began with the true/false statement activity that had been used in the previous sessions. Beginning with this activity provided an initial increase in challenge compared to the younger groups, reflecting the more advanced developmental and educational stage of these groups, whilst still allowing them to achieve the lower order learning objectives. A period of direct teaching followed, including additional material emphasising the interactive nature of resilience (Galli & Gonzalez, 2015). Both groups were shown the 'famous failures' video, engaged in a discussion activity, and then asked to feed back in groups to explain how different factors may have influenced the concept of resilience in the examples shown. The final U15 activity required the players to reflect on and document their standout resilience experience, before differentiating between internal and external resources/strategies that were

helpful in enabling them to be resilient. The same activity was extended with the U16 group to include an appraisal of their use of strategies/resources, the aim of which was to enable players to assess and develop greater awareness of the strategies they currently use and identify those strategies or resources that may be currently underutilised.

## 5. Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes were assessed in several ways and influenced by multiple factors, such as the importance of creating a 'non-school' like environment, the age and stage of players and the learning objectives for each session. Assessment tasks are activities undertaken by learners to confirm whether learning outcomes have been achieved (Biggs & Tang, 2007); as a result alignment between the learning outcomes and assessment tasks is a key consideration when selecting assessment activities (Biggs, 2012). That is to say, the assessment activities chosen should be able to assess the stated outcome of the learning and provide feedback to learners against the intended outcomes. Another key factor that influenced the selection of appropriate assessment activities was the method of teaching, as different teaching methods are typically associated with certain approaches to assessment (Skinner, 2005). For example, traditional direct teaching methods are commonly followed by summative assessment exercises that seek to test understanding (Skinner, 2005). In order to achieve greater congruence between the learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment activities, a range of assessment tasks were used depending on the level of coherence between the assessment activity and the aforementioned factors.

To create a more relaxed non-school like environment, formative assessment took place throughout the sessions. Undertaken in this way, assessment is regarded as a tool *for* learning as opposed to simply an assessment *of* learning (Wilson, 2014). Formative assessment was

used in order to facilitate and assess learning, provide feedback and modify the level of challenge depending on learner needs. Examples of this included the introductory activities undertaken by all groups, the 'post-it note' where players were asked to define resilience, and the 'true/false statements' activity. In addition, the 'true/false statements' activity used with all groups (U12, 13 and 14 as a plenary activity and U15 and 16 as an introductory activity) enabled lower order learning outcomes related to 'remembering' and 'identifying' to be achieved and evidenced (photographs of these activities were taken to evidence learning (see appendix 3). Each session also included periods of direct teaching, which in addition to delivering information also allowed for on-going assessment of progress and learning via oral questioning. Questions used during direct teaching aimed to check learner understanding and created opportunities to probe, paraphrase and reflect responses that players gave. Probing, paraphrasing and reflecting are skills developed throughout professional training in psychology (Katz & Hemmings, 2009) skilful use of these techniques allows learners to demonstrate that they can successfully achieve learning outcomes related to 'identifying' and 'describing'. In keeping with traditional direct teaching assessment (Skinner, 2005), learning was also assessed through worksheet exercises that followed later in the session (see appendix 4).

Discussion tasks were also used during the sessions to facilitate learning and create opportunities for players to achieve learning outcomes related to 'describing' and 'explaining'. Assessment during these tasks took the form of observation and oral questioning. Observations were carried out by moving between groups and listening into the discussions that were taking place, questions were then used to direct the dialogue towards the learning outcomes if they were not already being achieved. There are challenges with assessing learning in this way; with large numbers it may be difficult to adequately assess all learners during the session, and the reliability of observation assessment may also be called into question (Martin et al., 2019).

Worksheet and written exercises are commonly used to assess learning at "describing" and "explaining" levels and following discussion tasks (Skinner, 2005). However, given the sessions were not part of a formal education curriculum and with the goal of ensuring that sessions did not "feel like school", the decision was made not to assess the "explaining" and "describing" outcomes again in this way.

Higher order learning outcomes were assessed more formally using written exercises in the form of worksheets. The outcomes relating to "differentiating", "reflecting" and "assessing" were only applicable to the oldest (U15 and U16) groups, with the rationale for adopting more traditional assessment activity being that the more mature groups would be most receptive to these tasks. More formal and individual assessment tasks were also considered to be the most appropriate way to promote and assess learning and understanding related to the more challenging learning outcomes (Skinner, 2005). Worksheets (see appendix 4) were designed to focus specifically on learning outcomes and were completed individually by players. Spending time with and posing questions to players (in particular those who had not been active contributors to discussion activities) supported the process. The worksheet activities also provided opportunities for players to evidence achievement across lower order learning outcomes. Seen in this way the worksheet exercises had multiple uses for the U15 and U16 groups. Firstly, the worksheets provided an opportunity to encourage independent thinking and learning, secondly to assess learning and progress, and thirdly to act as a plenary exercise and consolidate learning at different levels of challenge.

Finally, the use of introductory and plenary exercises within all sessions allowed for progress in the players' understanding to be evidenced. Introductory exercises created a benchmark for each individual at the beginning of the session and enabled an individualised and inclusive

approach to teaching to be adopted. Photographs of the activities also allowed for the players' initial level of understanding to be evidenced prior to teaching. Plenary exercises were then used to consolidate learning and evidence progression. Capturing the 'before' and 'after' stages in photographs allowed for learning and progression to be documented without adopting a formal assessment strategy.

## 6. Critical Evaluation

The processes of conceptualisation, planning, delivery and evaluation provided several opportunities to reflect on my abilities and competencies in teaching and training. One such competency is the ability to critically evaluate, which is also the final component of the teaching cycle (Wilson, 2014). To critically evaluate the teaching programme, key stages of the teaching and learning undertaken will be discussed, with an emphasis on the successful and less successful aspects of the learning provision. The successful and less successful elements will be drawn from the different feedback methods used, and critical self-reflection.

All sessions were observed by the age-group coaches, which provided opportunities to gain feedback from individuals' who had been part of the stakeholder analysis process carried out when developing the programme. Feedback from coaches highlighted success in being able to engage the players by creating a relaxed and informal learning environment. Coaches commented on the use of space, specifically that rearranging furniture and removing tables meant that "it didn't look or feel like a classroom which was a good thing". Personal reflections also supported this view; I experienced a sense of surprise in the players when they entered the room and it was not in the typical layout, players would ask where they were supposed to sit and question what they were going to be doing in the session. Reflecting on this led me to conclude that changing the environment created a sense of intrigue in the players and had a

positive impact on their engagement. Skinner (2005) discussed the importance of creating congruence between the approach to teaching, learning outcomes, assessment and the learning environment and suggested that particular room layouts may be more suited to specific methods and approaches to teaching. For example, when looking to facilitate discussion tasks, a room set-up that promotes interaction and allows people to make eye contact is a simple but integral ingredient in achieving success when utilising these methods (Skinner, 1994).

Engaging in critical reflection throughout the planning, delivery and evaluation led me to view the long-held debate on traditional vs progressive approaches to teaching (Bennett, 1976) as a polarised simplification of the nuances that underpin effective teaching. Much like the debate on client vs practitioner led approaches and philosophies in sports psychology (Poczwardowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004), it is the congruence between beliefs, aims, models of practice (or modes of teaching) and the techniques and methods used that underpins effective practice (Skinner, 2005), not simply a progressive vs traditional approach trade-off. Consistent with my philosophy of practice, I believe in promoting holistic development through a collaborative approach, and value the autonomy of the individuals I work with. As such, my beliefs and action around teaching and learning reflect this. I attempted to adopt an approach to teaching that reflected those beliefs and included elements of both progressive and direct teaching when planning in order to achieve different learning outcomes. Evidence of this can be seen in the introductory activities undertaken with each group; the activities were designed to gain insight into the level of understanding of resilience and create a benchmark from which to progress. Terminology, language and examples used by players during these activities provided anchors to refer back to and foster engagement and demonstrate a collaborative way of working from the outset of the sessions. This meant that the questioning and discussion activities that followed could utilise the terminology and language used by players and be

directed towards individual learners who could share their knowledge with the group, and those who required additional probing to develop their understanding.

Further critical reflection on the process of designing and delivering the sessions led me to consider the success of the programme in aligning outcomes, activities and assessment. Constructive alignment aims to align outcomes, teaching methods and assessment methods, and is regarded as an effective way of designing and assessing learning (Biggs, 2012). Using this framework to inform evaluation and reflections on the programme highlighted areas for development in the way that some of the learning outcomes were assessed. Learning outcomes derived from Bloom's Taxonomy were defined during planning, and suitable teaching and assessment methods were then identified. Reflecting on this highlighted a reliance on questioning and feedback activities for assessing learning outcomes at the "describe" and "explain" levels of the taxonomy. Over reliance on these methods raises questions about both my role as a teacher/facilitator and the efficacy of the methods in meeting the needs of individual learners'. One criticism of these methods lies in the potential for quieter individuals to be overlooked, which poses challenges for assessing their learning. I attempted to address these challenges by probing and directing questions towards individuals who appeared quieter during discussion tasks. Intuitively this seemed to be an effective way of addressing the challenges with quieter individuals. However, on reflection it is also possible that this may have had an adverse effect on the flow of the activities, turning discussion into "teacher-led" question and answer (Dillon, 1994), and inadvertently placed additional pressure on individuals who may already have been uncomfortable with speaking in front of their peers. I believe this highlights my relative inexperience in formal teaching and training and has motivated me to further develop my knowledge and skills in this area to bring greater variety in the teaching and assessment methods I employ.

Feedback from players was collected both during and after sessions. Comments on the exercises and activities were noted during the session and players were invited to speak on camera about the sessions after they had finished. Players commented on the activities and were mostly positive, though there was a reluctance from some in the U14, U15 and U16 sessions to present back to the group, with comments such as "do we have to present" and "I hate presenting". Whilst these comments may seem extreme, I believe they may have been borne from individuals' lack of experience and level of confidence in presenting as opposed to the activity per se. In keeping with my beliefs about the importance of holistic development and recommendations provided by Henriksen *et al.* (2014), presenting is a valuable and transferrable skill and is an activity I would continue to use in the future despite the reluctance some players showed towards engage. Post-session feedback from players was positive, with boys demonstrating an understanding of the session content and confirming that sessions had been enjoyable. On reflection, the lack of anonymity may have been a barrier to achieving honest player feedback, and future evaluation will look to better balance the desire to make feedback less formal and school-like whilst also allowing for anonymity.

## 7. Suggestions for Future Development

The critical evaluation of the teaching and training programme has resulted in identifying several areas for development. The suggestions for future development relate to both my role as a teacher/trainer and the processes of planning, delivering, and evaluating teaching and training.

A lack of formal training in teaching and training was highlighted through engaging in critical evaluation. An over-reliance on certain teaching and assessment methods highlights a need to

further develop my knowledge and skills in this area. Further training and specific continuing professional development activity relating to teaching and training will enhance my development in this area. More specifically, areas for my development that would improve the overall effectiveness of the teaching and training programme centre on increasing the variety of teaching activities and assessment methods that I am able to utilise. I also feel that my inexperience in formal teaching and training may have influenced the way in which sessions were evaluated, I was reluctant to use formal evaluation forms as I did not feel this was compatible with the aim of making sessions feel informal and relaxed. In hindsight, the evaluation of the teaching sessions could have been improved by adopting more creative methods such as the use of interactive technology (Robinson & Aronica, 2015), e.g., Mentimeter or Google Forms; this would have enabled player feedback to be collected anonymously but with an element of fun and interactivity.

In a form of meta-reflection, reading and re-reading the case study as a whole highlighted a need to increase the volume of the "players voice" in the planning, delivery and evaluation of the teaching programme. The initial needs analysis that was carried out to inform the development of the programme did not include any players, as getting access to them was not possible in the time available. The omission of the player voice in the needs analysis represents an oversight that would be addressed in the future, as the contribution of the "end user" in informing the development of the programme would offer an alternative and important perspective on what the programme could or should look like. The addition of player perspective to the needs analysis would add to the existing information and inform each subsequent stage of the teaching cycle (Wilson, 2014) – which could lead to future programmes looking markedly different to the programme described here. Adopting a more co-constructed approach to teaching and learning would align with my broader approach to sport psychology

delivery and consultancy, where I see my role as being collaborative and empowering. Furthermore, the evaluation of the programme would have an increased focus on the player's experiences to add to the information from coach feedback and observations, and my own reflections. A more balanced approach to collecting and triangulating information to evaluate the programme would create greater congruence between my aims of, and approach to, working with and alongside clients (Keegan, 2015).

In summary, the teaching and training programme that was designed and delivered highlighted an ability to successfully plan and deliver a programme that had congruence in the aims, learning outcomes and the methods of delivery and assessment. Clearly defined and scaffolded learning outcomes provided opportunities for the level of challenge to be adapted to meet individual learner needs (Bruner, 1986). Future programmes would look to incorporate a wider variety in teaching and assessment methods and include greater input from the learner in both the conceptualisation and evaluation of the programme.

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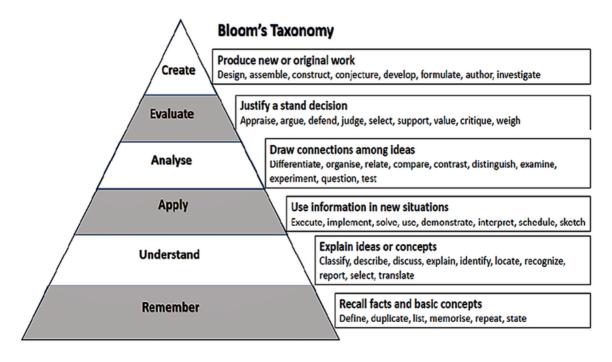Keegan, R. (2015). *Being a Sport Psychologist*. Palgrave Macmillan.

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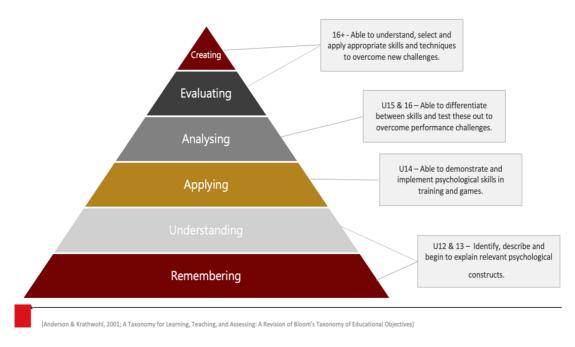
**Appendices:**

**Appendix 1.** Bloom (1956) taxonomy.



**Bloom's Taxonomy**

| Create | Produce new or original work |
| | Design, assemble, construct, conjecture, develop, formulate, author, investigate |
| Evaluate | Justify a stand decision |
| | Appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, critique, weigh |
| Analyse | Draw connections among ideas |
| | Differentiate, organise, relate, compare, contrast, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test |
| Apply | Use information in new situations |
| | Execute, implement, solve, use, demonstrate, interpret, schedule, sketch |
| Understand | Explain ideas or concepts |
| | Classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate |
| Remember | Recall facts and basic concepts |
| | Define, duplicate, list, memorise, repeat, state |

**Appendix 2.** Psychology Strategy, Framework for player learning objectives.

**GUIDING FRAMEWORK FOR PLAYER ACTIVITY OBJECTIVES.**



Creating — 16+ - Able to understand, select and apply appropriate skills and techniques to overcome new challenges.

Evaluating

Analysing — U15 & 16 – Able to differentiate between skills and test these out to overcome performance challenges.

Applying — U14 – Able to demonstrate and implement psychological skills in training and games.

Understanding

Remembering — U12 & 13 – Identify, describe and begin to explain relevant psychological constructs.

(Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives)

**Appendix 3.** True/False Resilience Exercise.



ANYONE CAN BE RESILIENT

BEING RESILIENT MEANS YOU GIVE UP WHEN SOMETHING GETS TOUGH

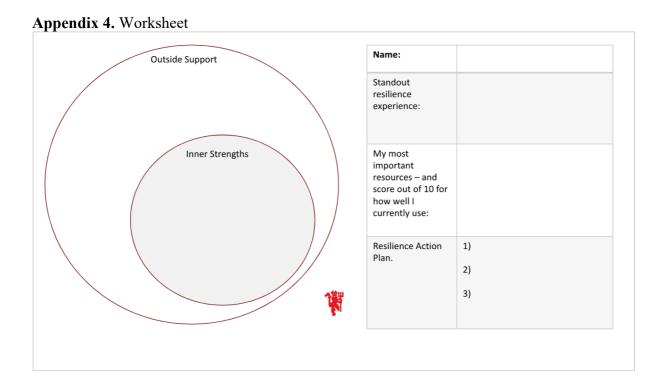FAILURE HELPS US TO BECOME RESILIENT

RESILIENCE IS FIXED

ACCEPTING AND TAKING ON CHALLENGE IS PART OF RESILIENCE

FAILURE HAPPENS IF YOU AREN'T RESILIENT

RESILIENCE CAN BE DEVELOPED

RESILIENCE IS GETTING ON WITH THINGS ON YOUR OWN

RESILIENCE IS ABOUT LOOKING FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO ACHIEVE

USING SKILLS AND RESOURCES HELPS YOU TO BE RESILIENT

YOU HAVE EITHER GOT RESILIENCE OR YOU HAVEN'T

RESILIENT PEOPLE LOOK FOR DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES

SOME PEOPLE ARE BORN MORE RESILIENT

**Appendix 4.** Worksheet



Outside Support

Inner Strengths

| Name: | |
| Standout resilience experience: | |
| My most important resources – and score out of 10 for how well I currently use: | |
| Resilience Action Plan. | 1)<br><br>2)<br><br>3) |

<center>**Teaching Diary**</center>

## 1. Introduction:

The ability to effectively disseminate psychological knowledge or information to different audiences is considered a key role for practitioner psychologists working across a range of settings. Despite this expectation, formal training in teaching and learning is not an explicit requirement in the training of budding practitioner psychologists. Instead, my experience of developing this competency area has been through gaining experience, supervision, reflection and refinement of these skills. I will document this journey through providing a commentary on my teaching and training development from the beginning of my professional doctorate to the time of writing, drawing on personal reflections and experiences to bring to life. The commentary will focus on two different audiences; young people and peers/fellow professionals.

## 2. Early teaching experiences:

Prior to enrolling on the professional doctorate, I had gained experience delivering to a range of different audiences including university students, youth athletes, sports coaches, and peers in the form of presentations as part of my previous university education. I deliberately chose the term "delivering" over "teaching" as I felt this better reflected my approach at this time, which had been to deliver information and hope that people learned something. I had yet to fully consider my own role as a teacher in supporting learning, which I was then confronted with after enrolling on the professional doctorate.

| What Happened? | I had been given a brief to provide a 20-minute presentation to the rest of the group (Prof Doc peers) on an intervention of my choice. The task brief was as follows: |
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*"You have been asked to give a presentation to a coaching group (imagine the rest of the group are the coaches) with whom you work in your organisation (pick one) about a psychological intervention you're going to use with individual athletes or the team to help you progress towards a particular aim/goal you're collectively working on (you need to decide what that aim/ goal is). In the 20-minute presentation, you need to i) describe the planned intervention and how it works/will be delivered, and ii) how you will monitor and evaluate the impact of the intervention."*

I chose to focus on the use of metaphor to promote client understanding and engagement in 1-2-1 sports psychology consulting (Stambulova, 2010, Lindsay *et al.* 2010). Instead of creating a hypothetical scenario I chose to focus on a case from my work. I prepared the presentation in two parts, part one involved me delivering some information via PowerPoint, and part two was more interactive and included an activity and discussion about how we could deliver, monitor and evaluate the proposed intervention. Part one was delivered very quickly, perhaps a sign of being nervous delivering to my peers, but also delivered poorly. I stood at the front of the room, presenting the material I had prepared to the group. For the second half of the presentation, I sat around the table with the group and introduced the activity, facilitated discussion, and answered questions that the group had. Part two seemed to flow much better, I found myself engaging and connecting more with the group and

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| | the feedback provided at the end reflected this. The feedback included the notable differences in part one vs part two, the group commented that I seemed much more comfortable in part two over part one, more specifically my delivery was much more composed in part two and there was less use of filler words e.g., Um, er, etc. |
| Thoughts and Feelings? | I felt conscious of myself during part one of the presentation, I felt clumsy. The words did not seem to flow, I felt hurried in a way I felt restricted. Experiencing these feelings was uncomfortable and frustrating because I was confident that the material I had prepared was good, yet the way I delivered it would likely have meant that some of the impact was lost. I found myself being distracted by the PowerPoint, trying to remember what words went with which slides, what would come next, how much time I had used, so much so that I paid little attention to the audience. The experience shared similarities with other "beginner" experiences described by Rønnestad and Skovolt (2003) in relation to counselling and psychotherapy training and development, where the trainee practitioner is confronted with doubt and questions over their abilities. In sport psychology, Lindsay, Breckon, Thomas & Maynard (2007) described how early career practitioners can become preoccupied by internal dialogue and experience frustration, self-doubt, and increased hesitance. With such volume of "cognitive noise" (Tod, 2010) it makes sense that I was unable to attend fully to the group and deliver in a fluent and confident manner.<br><br>In contrast, the part two of the presentation felt different, I felt more relaxed and comfortable; this more collaborative approach felt much |

| | more me. The 'noise' that had distracted me earlier seemed to quieten, I felt engaged with the group and the session flowed. Feedback from the group reinforced these feelings, they had picked up on me being less comfortable in part one and much more comfortable in part two. I think I knew this; but the immediate feedback and realisation that this was so visible to the group awakened me to the need to pay more attention to me and the environment I create – and not just the content of my presentations. |
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| | I think delivering to my peers was also a factor in this experience, it is common to experience anxieties around evaluation from peers (Tod, 2010), and this was perhaps a factor in me choosing to 'play safe' and deliver in a more traditional "academic" or direct teaching style (Skinner, 2005). It seems ironic that adopting a 'safer' approach led to worse 'performance'. Part two was more reflective of the approach I had grown to adopt in my work teaching young athletes, which is collaborative, interactive and had moved away from using PowerPoints. However, adopting the two approaches 'side-by-side' and gaining critical feedback from peers was a powerful learning experience, which has stimulated me to think more critically about my role as a teacher. |
| What next? | Moving forward I plan to pay greater consideration in my role as a teacher and consider what approaches fit best with my values and philosophy. The importance of being congruent has been highlighted in 'flashing lights' through this experience, and finding an approach that fits me will be important if I'm going to be effective and comfortable in what I do. On reflection, the unease which I've experienced is a normal |

| | and necessary part of development (Rønnestad & Skovolt, 2003); and a sign that there is work to do to figure out what 'fits' me. |
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Early experiences such as the one described confronted me with the need to further examine my approach to teaching and training. More specifically to consider, the way that I wanted teaching to look and feel both for me and the participants/learners. I went on to adapt the way that I planned teaching/workshop sessions to include a focus on how I wanted to teaching and learning to look and feel – and my role in influencing and creating that. It challenged me to reflect on my philosophy of practice too, and consider how my beliefs about people, development and change/learning could transfer from 'doing psychology' to teaching. I consider my role in practice is to work alongside clients and support them to make active choices and decisions to face experiences and challenges they encounter. On reflection, this is incompatible with a direct teaching approach (Skinner, 2005) and the default 'PowerPoint delivery' mode.

| What Happened? | For the first educational workshops of the season and following reflection and evaluation of the previous seasons programme, I changed the way that I planned the workshops. New planning included a more explicit focus on the environment, learning outcomes and the methods and activities I would use in facilitating the achievement of the learning outcomes. A major decision that I had taken following the reflection and evaluation was to move away from PowerPoint delivery, and only use presentation software as a resource when necessary and appropriate, and not uncritically as the default approach. For this session, I completed and printed the session plan before the workshop and arranged the furniture |
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| | in the room into a horseshoe shape to encourage greater interaction and move away from a classroom feel. The workshop included no audiovisual (AV) or presentation element, and so was totally reliant on the interaction and engagement between the participants and me. The workshop included a number of practical activities interspersed with periods of discussion on the activities that was guided by me and concluded with each individual identifying some of their key skills and development goals for the season.<br><br>The workshop went very well, the atmosphere was relaxed, and the players were engaged and attentive throughout (which cannot be underestimated with a group of 13-year-old boys). |
| Thoughts and Feelings? | Prior to the session I was a little apprehensive about how the workshop would go without having any presentation material to fall back on. I recognised this was a move away from the traditional classroom-based approach to delivering workshops (for a description see Steptoe, Barker & Harwood, 2016). However, I felt that this was necessary to become more congruent with what I believed in. This form of anxiety has been described as a normal and unavoidable experience when making decisions to move away from one (inauthentic) way of operating to another more authentic approach (Nesti, 2004).<br><br>As a result of the questioning, reflection, and choices I made, my role had gone from being a 'deliverer' of information to teacher and facilitator. This approach immediately felt more 'me' and aligned with my beliefs about supporting change. As a facilitator I saw my role as being to create opportunities for people to acquire and develop knowledge, and not to try |

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| | and impart information or knowledge on other people in a passive way. Despite the initial apprehension, I felt calm and composed in the session, and I think that this influenced the group too as it created a sense of calm and composure in the room, which makes sense when considering the concept of parallel processes whereby the behaviour of individuals is reflected in the behaviour of systems or environments (see Bloom, 2011). I would describe the feeling among participants as a feeling of intrigue, the participants didn't know what was going to come and setting up the session in this way may have challenged some of their beliefs about what was expected from them. Even by the age of 12, the boys will have developed an understanding of the norms and expectations for behaviour in a formal classroom. I felt that changing layout of the room and not having a presentation on a screen altered the dynamic within the room – and sent a message that we would be working together and had a positive influence on the participants and the workshop.<br><br>The more I have thought about it, I think having a presentation on the screen as people come in (regardless of the content within it), sends an overt message that I am leading and directing the session. |
| What next? | I think the experience has given me greater clarity and confidence in continuing with my new approach to planning and delivering workshops.<br><br>It has also encouraged me to be more creative in developing the content and activities for educational workshops, in the knowledge that there will be moments where I am unsure and anxious, but this is not a bad thing – it is a sign that I am connecting with things that are important to me. My |

| | challenge is to listen to that anxiety, and not be dissuaded from doing things that I believe in. |
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Reflecting on my early teaching experiences enabled me to progress in my thinking and approach to teaching and training. The progression shared similarities with the phases that trainee practitioner psychologists move through, from starting out as a "lay helper" (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013) before beginning on a path towards becoming more congruent and individualised in their approach (McEwan, Tod & Eubank, 2019). Reflecting on my teaching and training experiences required me to negotiate tensions between how I was as a teacher and how I wanted to be. To develop a sense of integrity and become more informed in my approach to teaching, I sought to further develop my understanding of the teaching cycle (Wilson, 2014) and the processes that contribute to effective teaching (Skinner, 2005). Doing so reinforced the importance of congruence between the learning environment and the teaching approach as an important factor in effective teaching (Skinner, 2005). As a result I was able to better understand why some of my early experiences had been less effective, whilst also giving me greater confidence that through the steps I had taken I was learning and developing as a teacher.

**3. Later teaching experiences:**

Throughout the professional doctorate experience, my own teaching practice, and the opportunities I have had to observe others has influenced my approach to teaching and training. A memorable experience related to this was being invited to present at a multi-disciplinary sports science conference, where I had opportunities to observe people from other disciplines present. Observing people present material I was unfamiliar with enabled me to focus on the way that the presenters delivered as opposed to focusing on the content. Despite being unfamiliar with the subject I found some presentations quite dull and others very engaging,

which reinforced to me the importance of engaging your audience with personality. Nesti (2004) wrote about the importance of personality and being able to engage and connect with people at a human level as being fundamental for sport psychologists; I found this to be relevant to teaching others, particularly when looking to adopt a collaborative approach.

| What Happened? | As part of the academy staff CPD programme, I was asked to deliver a one-hour CPD session on creating environments for talent development. The topic aligned with the focus of my professional doctorate research, and so I felt comfortable and familiar with the content, which gave me an opportunity to focus again on "how" I wanted to deliver and engage the academy coaches. In the weeks before the session I had opportunities to observe other staff development sessions, to gain a better understanding of how the sessions were typically run and how people interacted and behaved in them. Doing so informed the initial assessment and planning stages of the teaching cycle (Wilson, 2014), and allowed me to develop a workshop that was tailored to the learner group. Following the observations, I became aware that the staff would typically sit with others who they worked closely with on a daily basis e.g., U15 & 16 coaches would sit together, and the sports science staff would sit together as a separate group. I also noted how the staff were mostly being asked to listen in the sessions as opposed to being active participants in them. I recognised that my more collaborative approach to delivery was different and would require something different from the staff. Prior to the session I arranged the room into small circles to promote interaction between the participants and align the environment with the teaching approach |

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| | (Skinner, 2005). Under each chair I placed a post-it-note with the name of a famous footballer from England, Spain, Germany, Italy, France, or Brazil. After sitting down the staff were asked to get into find the other players from "their country" and sit in these new groups. The activity was designed to mix the staff together, promote interaction and learning between staff who may not work closely on a regular basis; and send an early, overt message that the session would require an active commitment from everyone. The session went well with staff interacting and engaging well with the activities. I was able to move between the groups facilitating discussions and asking probing questions, and participate in the learning activities, as opposed to only directing them. One negative that I experienced using this approach was trying to ensure the activities didn't take too long, and that the session did not run over. I had prepared a one-page summary sheet that included the key messages from the session to give to staff at the end of the session. Time meant that the conclusion of the session was a little rushed, but I felt confident that the summary sheet provided enough information to give a clear synopsis of the key messages. |
| Thoughts and Feelings? | I was apprehensive before the session, as my role with the staff group had changed slightly from "colleague" to "workshop lead". I am often aware of my desire to not take on an "expert" role, particularly with people who I work closely with. Having observed how the other staff development sessions (delivered by people external to the club) had been delivered, I was confident that I did not want to lecture the staff. I felt as though I managed to balance periods of direct teaching with periods of peer |

learning and interaction well. Switching between these modes can be a challenge (Skinner, 2005), which I experienced when trying to manage the time. However, I feel that I was able to overcome this through both what I did, and how I did it. The introductory activity to arrange staff into new groups was fun, but also reaffirmed that we all had a common interest and knowledge about football. I believe that creating an atmosphere of fun, and working together demonstrated elements of my personality, and how I like to work. The planning involved in the creating the activities and ensuring that there was a summary sheet of key messages demonstrated a level of organisation, professionalism, and an ability to understand and "fit" within an environment that Chandler *et al.* (2016) highlighted as being key to effective sport psychology practice. Additionally, being authentic and not adopting a different position to what people were accustomed to seeing of me (e.g., expert vs collaborator) helped me to engage the staff during the session. In psychotherapy literature it has been argued that people are likely to become aware when a practitioner is not being authentic (e.g., van Deurzen, 2002) and therefore the relationship and any subsequent success may be significantly harmed as a result (Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2018). From previous experience, I think that delivering the session in a way that conflicted with my beliefs around teaching and learning, would have impacted negatively on me during the session; and it is possible that the staff would also have found a direct teaching approach challenging. Adopting a lecture style may have seemed incompatible with the messages about working together that were promoted during the session.

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| | In pedagogy, this type of congruence has been referred to as constructive alignment, where there is a 'golden thread' and compatibility between outcomes, teaching methods and assessment (Biggs, 2012).<br><br>I believe that through the planning and delivery of the session, my approach to working in way that aligned with my philosophy was proactive and intentional. I believe this helped to create a relaxed learning environment, which contributed to staff engaging in the session in more active ways than I had observed in other sessions that had been delivered. On reflection I was pleased with how the session went, and that I had delivered in a way that felt comfortable with, despite the challenge that delivering development sessions to colleagues presents. |
| What next? | The experience has reinforced to me the importance of being congruent with my beliefs and emphasised the importance constructive alignment to create a coherent and effective teaching and learning experience (Biggs, 2012). Perhaps more important are the fundamentals of being organised and prepared; having the opportunity to observe other staff development workshops ensured that the workshop I planned and delivered was tailored to the specific learner group, which is considered a key goal when designing teaching and learning (Skinner, 2005). Going forward it will be important to continue to be planned and intentional when creating learning environments and experiences to engage learners and ensure that the needs of the learner group are considered as much, if not more than the workshop content. |

I believe my understanding of how to plan and deliver teaching and learning experiences has developed throughout the professional doctorate journey. A key development has seen me broaden my focus to consider the stages of teaching cycle (Wilson, 2014), and align the teaching process with my professional philosophy when designing and delivering teaching. Evidence of this can be seen in the teaching and training case study, and accompanying appendices that document the processes I have followed.

| What Happened? | I planned the sessions for the enrichment programme following consultation with the Head of Academy, Head of Education and academy coaches. The feedback centred on the importance of engaging the players and creating a non-school like environment. I used the teaching cycle and concept of constructive alignment to inform the planning. The sessions included discussion tasks and group activities to achieve the learning outcomes related to developing understanding around the concept of resilience. As the activities required players to work together, I considered how best to arrange the room to facilitate this and achieve the aim of creating a non-school environment. I made use of the available space to create a large "horseshoe" shaped soft-seating area and a series of small round-table areas for small group activities. The layout was markedly different from the usual theatre style set up found in the room. As players entered the room for the workshop sessions, lots of players were surprised by the layout and intrigued about the session, asking questions about why the room was like this, where they should sit, what the session would be about and what they would be doing in the session. The sessions began with this sense of intrigue, which I believe fostered |
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| | the engagement of the players and set the tone for the rest of the sessions. The feedback following the workshops highlighted the positive impact that the room layout had on the general atmosphere of the sessions. |
| Thoughts and Feelings? | I felt confident going into the workshop sessions, likely because of having gone through thorough conceptualisation and planning stages (Wilson, 2014). Also having clear learning outcomes for each of the workshops helped me to feel confident that the activities planned would achieve the learning outcomes. Without clearly defined learning outcomes, I think I would have felt more uncertain about the workshops. When the players entered the room, and I sensed the intrigue and interest from them, starting the session felt easy, as though I had already captured the groups' interest. The activities that followed also seemed to flow easily, and I think the layout of the room contributed to this, although easy to overlook it is now even more clear matching the room layout to the type of activities can either help or hinder the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Skinner, 2005). Feedback from the coaching staff who observed the workshops referenced the informal and relaxed atmosphere, which I feel contributed to the success of the workshops and reflected that I had successfully created the learning environment that I had set out to. |
| What next? | The processes of design, delivery and evaluation of the teaching and training case has helped me to develop a more rounded understanding of teaching and training. Thorough planning helped me to create a workshop and learning environment that I was comfortable in and helped me to feel confident. Reflecting on my earliest teaching experiences, few of the |

stages of the teaching cycle (Wilson, 2014) were fully considered, if at all; however, utilising the cycle has helped me to become both more competent and confident as a teacher. Going forward the teaching cycle will continue to be a resource that I use to plan, deliver, and evaluate teaching activity. As detailed in the teaching and training case study, through engaging in reflective practice I have been able to uncover 'blind spots' in my skillset related to stages of the teaching cycle that I may otherwise have been unaware of (Knowles *et al.* 2014). A key area to develop will be my reliance on discussion activities and question and answer assessment. I believe this over reliance has stemmed from my philosophy and preferred way of working – however it will be important to recognise that there may be times where my preferred approach may not be the most effective or appropriate.

Examples of times where a different approach may be required include; when operating under time pressures or if employed to deliver a specific education syllabus that cannot be delivered in a collaborative and informal way. Perhaps more specifically, where a topic may be being introduced to a learner group for the first time or the content has clear right and wrong answers. It will be important to continue to refine my preferred approach to teaching, whilst also ensuring I do not neglect developing skills and abilities to enable me to adopt other approaches where necessary.

My teaching and training development has shared many similarities with the sport psychology professional training journey, from starting out as unskilled and unaware (Kruger & Dunning, 1999) to encountering and learning from uncomfortable and challenging experiences to develop greater competence (Tod, 2007). Practitioner development has long been a topic of interest in sport and mainstream psychology literature, and a number of models of development have been created (e.g. Rønnestad and Skovolt, 2003), that describe common stages that practitioners may move through on the development journey (Tod et al. 2017). I have gone from being self-conscious with a high volume of cognitive noise (Tod et al. 2009) that prevented me from teaching effectively; to navigating challenges that enabled me to discover my teaching philosophy and an approach to teaching that is congruent with that philosophy. Discovering an approach to teaching that aligns to my professional philosophy as a psychologist has helped me to become more aware of my behaviour in different settings and roles, and how this influences the way I work. Ultimately, I feel I have been able to become more consistent in my approach to working as a psychologist, with the knowledge that I must recognise where my preferred approach may need to adapt to situational and task demands; and I must continue to develop my skills in teaching and training in order to effectively adapt to those demands.

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**Systematic Review**



**Factors contributing to effective talent development environments in sport: A**

**systematic review and thematic synthesis.**

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**Abstract:**

Recent progress in talent development research in sport has seen a movement towards studying talent development environments (TDEs) as a way of increasing knowledge in relation to developing talent. Over the last 10 years there has been a growth in the number of TDE case studies. The purpose of this study was to conduct a systematic review and thematic synthesis of existing qualitative case study research to identify features of TDEs that contribute to developing and maintaining effective talent development environments and talent development. Fifteen studies were reviewed and subject to a thematic synthesis, five higher-order themes were identified as features of effective talent development environments 1) Effective relationships between multiple stakeholders, 2) Varied development programme and activity, 3) Clear development principles, 4) Organisational and cultural coherence and 5) Organisational awareness. These features are presented and discussed in relation 'what' and 'how' effective TDEs function to successfully develop talented athletes. Additionally, a new concept of 'organisational awareness' related to an awareness of strengths, limitations and opportunities at an organisational level is proposed as new feature of effective TDEs . Applied recommendations are provided and encourage organisations practitioners to proactively consider both 'what' they do in relation to talent development and 'how' they want to approach it.

**Introduction:**

Successful progression from junior sport to elite senior sport often resembles a challenging and unpredictable journey (Stambulova, Pehrson & Olsson, 2017) that many athletes fail to complete (Van Yperen, 2009). With approximately 4 out of 5 elite junior athletes being unsuccessful in the pursuit of reaching senior elite level (Vanden Auwelle *et al.* 2004). This reflects the importance, but also the challenge and complexity of effectively supporting the development of talent and the realisation of potential (MacNamara, Button & Collins, 2010). Despite considerable research in this area, there has been little agreement (Côté, Lidor & Hackfort, 2009) and much change in the way that the talent development process has been viewed and understood (Stambulova, Ryba & Henriksen, 2021).

Over the last 20 years, researchers in talent development have acknowledged and embraced complexity, evidenced by the changes of direction and development of new lines of enquiry in talent development research (Stambulova *et al.* 2021). In an effort to develop greater understanding around talent development, research has focused on the individual and their practice history (e.g. Araujo & Davids, 2009), the influence of different stakeholders such as coaches, parents and peers on athlete development (e.g. Martindale, Collins & Abraham, 2007; Harwood & Knight, 2015), before taking a broader, more holistic perspective (Stambulova *et al.* 2021). Recent developments in the research area have seen attention shift from viewing the developing individual as an athlete to viewing the athlete as a whole person; from researching discrete aspects of talent development to viewing the individuals' development through a more holistic lens; and recognising that development occurs within a specific context (Stambulova *et al.* 2021).

The shift in thinking around talent development has led to an increased focus on the environments in which talent develops (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017). Research in this area has shown that some environments are better at developing talent than others (Henriksen, Larsen & Christensen, 2014; Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler, 2010a). A number of elite sporting environments have been studied in an effort to better understand what separates successful and less successful talent development environments in a range of sports, including Sailing (Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler, 2010a), Track and Field (Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler, 2010b) Kayaking (Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler, 2011) and Professional Football/Soccer (Larsen, Alfermann, Henriksen & Christensen, 2013). The diversity of the talent development environment research also extends across a range of countries and sporting cultures, including Denmark (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a), Norway (Aalberg & Sæther, 2016), Portugal (Domingues, Cavichiolli & Goncalves, 2014) and Canada (Seanor *et al.* 2017). Despite the growth and diversity of research in this area, there has yet to be a review of the literature to bring together the findings of individual studies of successful talent development environments. Building on findings from individual studies, it is anticipated that a systematic review and synthesis of the research findings in this area would help to provide greater confidence and clarity about what separates successful and less successful talent development environments. Such knowledge can then be used to inform sporting governing bodies and best practice guidelines.

Conducting a systematic review of the talent development environment literature will help to provide some answers to the call made by Rees *et al.* (2016) for researchers to develop a clear understanding of what is known and what is thought to be true regarding the development of sporting talent. It is necessary to provide greater clarity due to the volume of literature and often conflicting opinion regarding the development of talent in sport (Stambulova *et al.* 2021).

Additionally, the increasing investment of time and resource by sport governing bodies, and organisations in sporting talent development programmes represents an investment that requires a return (Rees *et al.* 2016), a return that can be supported through the development of clear and concise best practice recommendation developed from the current study. Of greater importance is the investment made by individuals and young people pursuing a career in elite level sport and the impact that a less optimal development environment and experience may have on an individuals' career trajectory (Stambulova *et al.* 2021). The potential long-term costs associated with less optimal development experiences (e.g. impacting on an individuals' development, mental health and wellbeing, Henriksen *et al.* 2020; Kuettel & Larsen, 2019), means it is essential that clear best practice guidelines are made available to decision makers and staff working in elite sport development environments. The review will synthesise and document what is known about the features of successful talent development environments in elite and professional sports.

To date, the research findings on sports talent development environments have not been systematically reviewed and synthesised to bring together findings of individual studies and offer new interpretations of the research area. The purpose of the present study is to examine the products of the several qualitative case studies of talent development environments in elite sport. The study seeks to add to knowledge and extend current understanding about talent development environments by identifying features that contribute to developing and maintaining effective talent development environments. Using a thematic synthesis approach, the aims of the present study are to (a) systematically review and synthesise qualitative case study research focused on talent development environments in elite or professional sport, and (b) identify features of talent development environments that contribute to developing and maintaining effective talent development environments. It is anticipated that the findings will

support sport governing bodies, sport organisations and individuals working directly with developing athletes to create effective talent development environments.

**Methods:**

The study is reported in line with the ENTREQ reporting standards statement to enhance transparency in reporting of qualitative research (see Tong et al., 2012).

*Approach to the systematic review*

A thematic synthesis was selected as an appropriate method to bring together the findings of multiple primary studies in the talent development environment research, to generate new knowledge and differentiate what is known about effective talent development environments from what is thought to be known. A thematic synthesis is a systematic and comprehensive approach to identifying, analysing and making sense of the findings from individual research studies in order to identify consensus, develop new analyses, and propose new interpretations of the research area beyond those developed from individual studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

Thematic synthesis is an appropriate 'tried and tested' method that follows a transparent process to develop new hypotheses from existing studies in a systematic way (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Thematic syntheses use qualitative methods to analyse and synthesize findings of qualitative studies, adopting methods from thematic analysis. The reflexive thematic analysis process (see Braun et al., 2019) requires coding of the text from primary studies, organising codes to develop descriptive themes, followed by further analyses and interpretation of the descriptive themes to develop new analytical themes and interpretations beyond those available from individual studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

The present study is located within an interpretive paradigm and underpinned by ontological relativism (i.e. where reality is multiple and life is experienced subjectively) and epistemological interpretivism, where meaning and knowledge are developed through interpretation (Smith & McGannon, 2017). Therefore, the knowledge generated in this study is relative to the experiences of the research team and the historical, cultural and temporal circumstances at the time of writing. The interpretive nature of thematic analysis ensures a fit and congruence between the methodology and the ontological and epistemological positions stated.

The following question guided the study: 1) What features have researchers identified that contribute to developing and maintaining effective talent development environments in sport?

*Inclusion/exclusion criteria*

The inclusion criteria of the studies were: (1) The articles had to be published in peer-reviewed academic journals, (2) the articles were available in English, (3) the research had to focus on real time talent development environments and the people operating in them at the time (i.e. athletes, coaches, support staff and not retrospective), (4) the studies had to be case studies, (5) articles had to be empirical and (6) studies were qualitative research. The inclusion criteria were developed after considering the competencies of the primary researcher in relation to languages, and considering characteristics of existing research which could be broadly distinguished as either real time or retrospective research. It was decided that focusing only on real time research of specific environments would provide a more in-depth insight into effective talent development environments; as opposed to including retrospective studies on talent development environments and studies that had a generic focus on talent development environments.

*Keywords*

The following keywords were used to conduct searches of electronic databases, 'Talent develop*' or 'Sporting develop*'or 'athlet* develop*' and 'Environ*' or 'Cultur*'or 'Ecolog*'and 'Sport*' or 'Athlet*'.

*Electronic search*

PsycINFO, SPORTDiscus and Web of Science were identified and selected as relevant electronic databases to conduct searches. Searches were limited to English language only, began in March 2020 and ran until 7th May 2020, and weekly automated searches were initiated to update results with any recent publications after the initial search. Database searches returned 2322 studies after applying filters to limit searches to qualitative studies, peer reviewed only, and English language and removing duplicates the titles, abstracts and key words of the 710 studies were scanned and 56 were retained for further analysis. Full texts of the 56 studies were reviewed and the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied by the lead author, any discrepancies were referred to a second author (CHL) to review independently against the inclusion/exclusion criteria; this resulted in 15 studies being included in the final sample. An overview of the search strategy is detailed in the PRISMA flow diagram (Appendix 2).

*Other search strategies*

Additional articles were identified through forward and backward searching of the references and citations of key publications in the topic area and contacting a leading author to enquire about additional studies. An additional 4 studies that met the inclusion criteria were identified.

*Data extraction*

Data was extracted from the methods and results sections of the included studies. Key features of the articles were documented in a spreadsheet (e.g., sample characteristics, location of the study, sport type, methodology, data analysis). The data extraction template was developed after consulting a colleague with significant experience in conducting systematic reviews.

*Critical appraisal*

Given the diverse epistemological and ontological positions that can be adopted in qualitative research, the appropriateness and usefulness of standardised criteria for appraising study quality can be questioned (Sparkes & Smith, 2009; Tod, Booth & Smith, 2021). In a recent article discussing the utility of critical appraisal in sport and exercise psychology, Tod *et al.* (2021) discussed several conceptual issues, challenges and approaches to conducting effective critical appraisal. Issues included the use of standardised checklists and generic criteria that fail to distinguish between different types of qualitative research and the unintended consequences of scoring studies. Consequently, a non-foundational approach (Sparkes & Smith, 2013) was taken to critically appraise the articles included in the review. A non-foundational approach has been used as an alternative means for critical appraisal and pursuing research credibility (for example see Tod et al., 2019), where the research aims, and researcher values are aligned to develop appraisal criteria.

Following the approach advocated by Tod (2019), that investigators should seek to use critical appraisal criteria and tools that are tailored and appropriately applied to the types of evidence being examined, the features of ethnographic and case study research were examined (Molnár & Purdy, 2017). Consequently, several values considered to be important for conducting ethnographic and case study research were identified by the primary researcher (see Table 1).

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Aligned to a relativist perspective (Smith & Deemer, 2000), the values identified; *Interesting, Honest, Thorough, Impactful,* and *Ethical* were then used to develop the critical appraisal criteria (see Table 2). Five criteria used to critically appraise the studies included in the review were: 1) *appropriate case selection, 2) transparency, 3) prolonged engagement, 4) adds to existing knowledge and 5) ethical approach.*

*Appropriate case selection* focused on the appropriateness of the case as an interesting and successful talent development environment to study. *Transparency* referred to the use of detailed descriptions and the level of critical insight used by authors to support their interpretations. *Prolonged engagement* focused on the level of engagement the researchers had with the environment under study, both in terms of time spent and the methods used. *Adds to existing knowledge* centred on how authors were able to extend current knowledge with the potential to impact practice. Finally, an *ethical approach* referred to the extent to which researchers demonstrated a commitment to ethical practice.

In order to appraise the studies using the critical appraisal criteria developed, studies were rated using a traffic light system as either red, amber or green ratings, which equated to a rating of poor, satisfactory or good respectively (see *Table 3. Critical Appraisal Results)* as opposed to scoring studies (Noyes *et al.* 2021). A traffic light system was used in recognition that a non-foundational approach to conducting a critical appraisal is subjective and can change depending on the context, time and person conducting the appraisal (Smith & McGannon, 2017). The purpose of the critical appraisal, and utilising colours instead of scores, was to help the reader to understand and recognise the strengths and limitations identified in each study by the primary researcher, and not to exclude papers based on meeting a "quality score" threshold. The approach taken to the critical appraisal and the criteria that was developed provided a

systematic and transparent method to reflect upon and communicate the strengths and limitations identified.

*Table 1 – Research Study Values.*

| Value | Description |
|---|---|
| Interesting | Case selection is appropriate, and case study captures and retains interest of the reader. |
| Honest | The case study is transparent and includes detailed descriptions to support interpretations. |
| Thorough | Prolonged engagement by the researchers in the environment under study. |
| Impactful | Case study adds to existing knowledge of talent development. |
| Ethical | Case study and researchers demonstrate an awareness of and commitment to maintaining high ethical standards. |

*Table 2 – Critical Appraisal Criteria.*

| Appropriate case selection | Focused on the appropriateness of case selection as an interesting and engaging environment to study for those interested in talent development. |
|---|---|
| Transparency | Referred to level of critical insight and use of detailed descriptions used by authors to support interpretations. |
| Prolonged engagement with case | Focused on the level of engagement the researchers had with the environment under study, both in terms of time spent and methods used. |
| Adds to existing knowledge | Focused on how authors were able to extend current knowledge with the potential to impact practice. |
| Ethical approach | Referred to the extent to which researchers demonstrated a commitment to ethical practice. |

*Data analysis*

Data was analysed using a reflexive approach to thematic analysis (Braun *et al.* 2019). After an initial familiarisation process, individual studies were analysed, and codes were applied and

documented alongside the data extracts in a spreadsheet. Similar codes and corresponding data extracts were collated to allow for further analysis and interpretation of the meaning behind them, which led to the development of themes; this represented an inductive orientation to the construction of themes (Terry *et al.* 2017). Checking and sense-making of themes to ensure appropriate data representation was an iterative process, led by the first author with regular discussions with the research team to review progress. A thematic map (Appendix 3.) was also developed to support the analytic process, explore the relations between themes and check that the themes told a coherent story of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Definitions of each theme were created and discussed with the research team to ensure conceptual clarity, before theme names were decided. The final stage of the analysis process was the writing of the report. Revisiting the research question, themes and data extracts during the writing phase was an opportunity to check that themes told the story of the data and answered the research question, whilst allowing for any final adjustments (Braun *et al.* 2019).

**Results:**

Table 3. Overview of included studies and critical appraisal results.

| Author Names | Study Name | Year of Publication | Appropriate Case Selection | Transparency | Prolonged Engagement | Adds to Knowledge | Ethical Approach |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler | A successful sailing milieu | 2010 | | | | | |
| 2) Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler | Successful TD in track and field | 2010 | | | | | |
| 3) Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler | A successful TDE in Kayaking | 2011 | | | | | |
| 4) Larsen, Alfermann, Henriksen & Christensen | Successful talent development in soccer: The characteristics of the environment | 2013 | | | | | |
| 5) Lee & Price | A national sports institute as a learning culture. | 2016 | | | Single semi-structured interviews. | | Small pool of participants. |
| 6) Domingues, Cavichiolli & Goncalves | Talent development and ecology of practice in a professional club | 2016 | | | | | |
| 7) Aalberg & Saether | The talent development environment in a Norwegian top-level football club | 2016 | | | | | |
| 8) Seanor, Schinke, Stambulova, Ross & Kpazai | Cultivating Olympic champions: A trampoline development environment | 2017 | | Limited presentation of data. | Single interviews and guided walks limited depth of engagement. | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9) Flatgard, Larsen & Saether | Talent development environment in a professional football club in Norway | 2020 | Uncertainty around the choice as a successful TDE. | | 40 hours of observation and 2 single interviews. | Second study of Norwegian football club in recent years. Also based in the same city. | |
| 10) Storm, Christensen & Ronglan | Successful talent development environments in female Scandinavian Handball" Constellations of communities of practice… | 2020 | | | | | |
| 11) Junggren, Elbaek & Stambulova | Examining coaching practices and philosophy through the lens of organizational culture in a Danish high-performance swimming environment | 2018 | | | 30 hours of observation and interviews limited depth of engagement. | | |
| 12) Galatti, Cote, Reverdito et al. | Fostering elite athlete development and recreational sport participation: A successful club environment | 2016 | | Limited data presented to support researchers' interpretations. | | Limited inclusion of actual data to support claims may limit what the study can add to knowledge. | Despite gaining ethical approval dual role of researcher as a head coach may be considered an ethical challenge. |
| 13) Henriksen, Storm, Kuettel, Linner & Stambulova | A holistic ecological approach to sport and study: The case of an athlete friendly university in Denmark | 2020 | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14) Ryom, Ravn, During & Henriksen | Talent Development in Football—A Holistic Perspective: The Case of KRC Genk | 2020 | | | 7 Single SS interviews carried out and unspecified amount of time carrying out observation. | | |
| 15) Larsen, Storm, Arve Saether, Pyrdol Christensen & Henriksen | A world class academy in professional football: The case of Ajax Amsterdam | 2020 | | | | | |

**General Findings**

A total of 15 articles were reviewed for the study and included in Table 3. All 15 included case studies were published between 2010-2020, with 11 (73.33%) being published after 2015. Of the 15 included studies, 8 studies focused on team sport development environments, 4 studies focused on environments that developed athletes for individual and team sports, and 3 studies focused on environments that looked to develop athletes for individual sports. The studies focused on talent development environments in a range of sports that included; track and field, kayaking, sailing, handball, basketball, swimming, trampolining, football/soccer. The latter received the most attention from talent development environment researchers accounting for 6/15 included studies (40%). Studies were conducted in a number of countries, these included Australia, Canada, Spain, Portugal, Netherlands, Belgium, with 9 studies (60%) carried out in Scandinavian countries - Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Theoretically, the majority of included studies adopted a theoretical approach aligned to, or developed from, Henriksen *et al.* (2010a) holistic ecological approach, an approach that has roots in Bronfenbrenner's social ecological theory (1979) and systems theory (Patton & McMahon, 2006). All included articles were qualitative case studies, with a traditional ethnographic approach that included participant observation, interviews and analysis of documents used in 13/15 (86.66%) of the studies; one study was carried out using a hermeneutical approach that included collecting data through guided walks and semi-structured interview, and one study collected data from single semi-structured interviews.

**Thematic Analysis Findings:**

After conducting a thematic analysis of the 15 articles included, 19 lower order themes and five higher order themes were developed from the dataset (see Table 4). A description of the higher order themes is provided below, alongside a description of the meaning of each theme.

Examples will be provided directly from the literature to add richness and promote greater transparency into the development of themes. The five higher order themes were 1) Effective relationships between multiple stakeholders, 2) Varied development programme and activity, 3) Clear development principles, 4) Organisational and cultural coherence and 5) Organisational awareness. The themes have been organised into two categories, one relating to "*what* happens" in successful talent development environments and the other relating to "*how* it happens". Organising the themes in this way guides the reader to consider both what happens and how things happen as being central to successful talent development environments. Presenting in this way adds an additional layer of synthesis to the findings of individual studies. Key examples of the integration of the 'what' and the 'how' contributing to successful talent development will be provided in the discussion section.

*Table 4.* Thematic Analysis Results.

| Lower Order Themes: | Higher Order Themes: | Categories |
|---|---|---|
| Relationships with senior athletes as role models<br>Connection between youth and senior environments/teams<br>Positive/Strong relationships between athletes and coaches | Effective relationships between multiple stakeholders | What happens in successful talent development environments… |
| Athlete training groups<br>Coordinated coaches and coaching practices<br>Individual Development Approach<br>Developmental approach to training and competition<br>Development of psychosocial skills | Varied Development Programme and Activity | |
| Belief in long term development process<br>Guiding principles for development<br>Commitment to holistic development<br>Support for dual careers | Clear Development Principles | How it happens… |
| Cooperation, Collaboration & Cohesion<br>Coherent organisational culture<br>Sense of connection<br>Resourced and organised | Organisational and Cultural Coherence | |
| Maximising available resources<br>Organisation focused on improvement<br>Awareness of barriers to development with strategies to address barriers. | Organisational Awareness | |

**What happens?**

The following higher order themes have been categorised into *what* happens in successful talent development environments, 1) Effective relationships between multiple stakeholders, 2) Varied development programme and activity.

*Effective relationships between multiple stakeholders.*

Developing and maintaining effective relationships featured consistently in the articles reviewed, this included the relationships between different athletes. Relationships between developing athletes and their teammates/peers (Larsen *et al.* 2020), relationships between developing athletes, proximal role models (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a, Henriksen *et al.* 2010b) and senior athletes (Storm, Christensen & Ronglan, 2020) were identified as important relationships to develop and maintain. Several benefits were outlined related to developing relationships between athletes, proximal role models and senior athletes including providing models for developing athletes to learn 'how' to train, prepare and compete like senior athletes, being able to observe and learn technical and sport specific skills and fostering psychosocial outcomes such as increased motivation and confidence.

Effective relationships between developing athletes and coaches (Lee & Price, 2016), and between athletes and wider support staff (Larsen *et al.* 2013; Henriksen *et al.* 2020) were also identified as key interpersonal relationships in successful talent development environments. It is possible that the relationships between athletes and coaches and between athletes and wider support staff create conditions that enable developing athletes to benefit and learn from the array of expertise that exists among staff working in talent development as well as providing an important source of social support (Henriksen *et al.* 2020). Effective relationships between coaches were also identified as a feature of successful talent development environments, this

included coaches working in coaching teams (Henriksen *et al.* 2010b) and coaches and staff working together as a team to support development (Larsen *et al.* 2020). A high degree of cooperation and effective relationships among talent development staff may be seen as a factor that facilitates effective talent development.

*Varied development programme and activity*

A variety of development activity and diverse development programmes was found across the dataset. Activity taking place in successful talent development environments included athletes working in athlete training groups (Henriksen *et al.* 2010b) that were supportive (Ryom et al., 2020) and enabled athletes to engage in different "communities of practice" (Storm *et al.* 2020). Developing athletes could experience being able to train alongside, and learn from, senior athletes/role models (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a), train with peers of a similar standard and from an elite level (Storm *et al.* 2020), and train with other athletes (older, younger, more senior) looking to develop similar skills (Ryom *et al.* 2020). This served to encourage teammate partnerships (Seanor *et al.* 2017). A varied development experience was not only designed to develop technical and sport specific abilities, but as a proactive approach to promote psychosocial development through exposing athletes to different environments, contexts and levels of challenge (Storm *et al.* 2020).

Similarly, a coordinated approach to coaching and coaching practices gave developing athletes opportunities to work with different coaches (Henriksen et al. 2010a; Seanor et al. 2017); and specialist coaches provided additional variation in athletes development programme allowing athletes to benefit from detailed sport specific skill development (Larsen *et al.* 2020). Coaches working in teams, with clear roles and shared principles (e.g. Henriksen et al. 2011) meant athletes could benefit from working with different coaches (with different skillsets and

knowledge bases) whilst also ensuring a coordinated and coherent development experience. Working in coaching teams had an additional benefit of developing coaches for the future whilst safeguarding the development principles of the environment; in turn contributing to a coherent and stable organisational culture.

An individual development approach was also evident in the studies included in the review. Athletes having an individual plan (Lee & Price, 2016), emphasising long-term individual development over short-term success (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a) were features of this approach. Prioritising individual development over team development (Larsen *et al.* 2020) and having stakeholders working together to provide individual solutions for athletes (Henriksen *et al.* 2020), meant that athletes within successful talent development environments and systems received individualised and bespoke development experiences.

The approach to training and competition in successful development environments varied across environments, with some having an emphasis on the importance of fun (Seanor *et al.* 2017), and others placing emphasis on testing and competition (Henriksen *et al.* 2011) as attempts to proactively create motivational climates. Although the approach to training and competition varied across different studies/environments, within environments the approach to training and competition appeared consistent and coordinated in sailing this meant that training and development experience was always prioritised over competition (Henriksen et al. 2010a). Furthermore, in a study on talent development environments in Scandinavian Handball the U18 head coach also acted as the assistant coach of the senior team, allowing for consistency of messaging between senior and junior environments, whilst also preparing athletes for the expectations of and transition to the senior environment (Storm *et al.* 2020). A proactive and deliberate approach was also taken for the development of psychosocial skills, both explicitly

(Larsen *et al.* 2013) through targeted activity to develop specific attributes such as self-awareness and discipline; and in other environments implicitly through the varied experiences included within talent development environments such as exposure to senior athletes and senior training environments (e.g. Storm *et al.* 2020).

**How it happens**

The following higher order themes have been grouped to describe *how* work goes on in successful talent development environments, 3) clear development principles, 4) organisational and cultural factors and 5) organisational awareness.

*Clear development principles*

Having clear development principles describes the shared understanding among stakeholders about the way that development is done in a particular talent development environment. A principle found across the dataset was a belief in the long-term development process, and a "slow and steady" approach (Seanor *et al.* 2017) to developing talent. Within talent development environments this meant that there was a focus on the *process* of development and success being viewed in terms of athlete development and progression (Junggren, Elbaek & Stambulova, 2018), not short-term performance outcomes such as winning (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a). Training and competition are seen as vehicles for athlete development (Ryom *et al.* 2020), and it is in the interests of the long-term development of the athlete that decisions are made about what coaches, support staff and the athlete themselves do in training and competition (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a; Ryom *et al.* 2020).

Another guiding principle that successful talent development environments upheld was a belief in holistic development. A whole person approach to development underpinned the work that

took place, with an emphasis on developing the person behind the athlete to support their development and achievements in sport and non-sport domains (Junggren *et al.* 2018). A belief in holistic development meant that objectives for development went beyond developing sport specific attributes, for example, a focus on developing discipline, work ethic and personal responsibility (Larsen et al. 2013). Other holistic development foci included the importance of athletes developing autonomy (Henriksen *et al.* 2011), individual responsibility (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a), and promoted athletes as active participants in their own development (Storm *et al.* 2020) who can effectively manage themselves as both people and athletes (Henriksen *et al.* 2020). Supporting dual-careers of athletes was also regarded as important (Henriksen *et al.* 2020), and identified as an additional principle that guided the work of successful talent development environments.

*Organisational and cultural coherence*

From the articles reviewed a range of organisational and cultural factors were identified as being integral to how effective talent development environments functioned. A coherent organisational culture was identified in a range of studies as being important for a successful talent development environment (e.g. Larsen *et al.* 2020; Ryom *et al.* 2020). A coherent organisational culture referred to having clarity around the philosophy and objectives within the environment (see also, clear development principles), having consistency and coherence between the philosophy and methods within the environment (Aalberg & Saether, 2016), and coherence between espoused and enacted values (Junggren *et al.* 2018) between what is said and done in the environment.

A further organisational and cultural factor identified from the articles was a high degree of *cooperation and collaboration* among stakeholders. There was a commitment to working

together (Henriksen et al. 2010b) and an integration of efforts by those working in these environments (Henriksen et al. 2011). Additionally, there was willingness to collaborate, a recognition that 'stars are made by many' (Seanor *et al.* 2019), and an openness and flexibility to create a development experience that worked for the benefit of the developing athletes (Lee & Price, 2016; Henriksen *et al.* 2020). An additional factor identified was *connection*; this referred to a sense of connection at organisational and interpersonal levels (Storm *et al.* 2020). Connection at an organisational level, included an effective connection between youth and senior teams/departments (Galatti *et al.* 2016; Flatgard, Larsen & Saether, 2020) this may be considered as a key factor for creating a successful talent development environment as a result of the potential development opportunities this creates. Connection an interpersonal level referred to a sense of connection and belonging between stakeholders (Domingues et al., 2016). A sense of family (Henriksen *et al.* 2010b, Larsen *et al.* 2013) and community (Larsen *et al.* 2020) created closeness and connection that allowed for effective cooperation and collaboration between stakeholders in successful talent development environments.

On a practical level, being *resourced and organised* was an additional organisational and cultural coherence factor that contributed to the effective functioning of talent development environments. Having a clear organisational structure (Galatti *et al.* 2016) and being resourced and able to provide necessary support were highlighted (Henriksen *et al.* 2020), this may be understood as being organised and resourced 'enough' so that this does not create a problem or barrier to developing talent as opposed to having abundant resources. For example, there was variation in the level of resources, with some researchers identifying 'modest' level of resources (Flatgard, Larsen & Saether, 2020) and others identifying environments as being 'well resourced' (Aalberg & Saether, 2016), the level of resource was seen as less important than working to maximise available resources (Galatti *et al.* 2016). Examples included

maximising the use of available human and material resources to support the developing athletes (Seanor *et al.* 2017, Flatgard *et al.* 2020).

*Organisational Awareness*

Organisational awareness, referring to a sense of being aware of strengths, opportunities and limitations at an organisational level was identified as a theme that contributed to talent development environment success.

A commitment to being an *organisation focused on improvement* was evident in the articles reviewed; this related to developing an elite mentality and promoting high standards among stakeholders (Henriksen *et al.* 2011). A further example of organisational awareness can be found in the development a learning culture and focus on improvement at an organisational level (Aalberg & Saether, 2016) where opportunities for growth and development are sought not just in individuals but in the working practices, methods and processes at organisational levels. Furthermore, a commitment to living and promoting values such humility (Flatgard et al., 2020) openness, sharing knowledge (Seanor *et al.,* 2017; Ryom *et al,.* 2020) and investing in developing the coaches and staff (Galatti *et al,.* 2016) all signalled that the organisations focused on improvement and maximising available opportunities. Examples of this included inviting coaches and athletes from other (sometimes competing) sporting organisations (e.g. Ryom et al., 2020) into their environments to exchange knowledge, share ideas and learn through interacting with people outside of their organisations. Being open to this represents an awareness of the strengths and opportunities for development that exist within their own environment.

Another key element of organisational awareness related to being aware of limitations or barriers to development that exist and proactively working to address these. Examples included being aware of the impact of having lesser resources than other development environments but investing greater efforts into developing relationships between stakeholders and creating a supportive environment that may create a different type of competitive advantage (Flatgard et al., 2020). Other examples include being aware of potential barriers that may exist when working in culturally diverse environments and proactively taking steps to create an inclusive environment that provides opportunities for athletes from a variety of backgrounds by developing greater cultural sensitivity among staff (Ryom et al., 2020). And finally, organisational awareness was represented in being aware of the expectations and demands to develop players for the future but regarding this is as a responsibility and key part of the organisations identity as opposed to being seen as a source of pressure or threat (Larsen et al. 2020).

**Discussion:**

The aim of the study was to systematically review and synthesise qualitative case study research that focused on talent development environments in elite or professional sport, in order to identify features of these environments that contributed to its success in effectively developing talent. A total of 15 studies met the inclusion criteria, all published within the preceding 10 years, highlighted the need to pause and review this developing area of research. Following a thematic analysis of the literature, five higher order themes were developed to capture 'what goes on' and 'how it goes on' in talent development environments: *Effective relationships between multiple stakeholders, Varied programme of development activity, Clear development principles, Organisational and cultural coherence* and *Organisational awareness.* Additionally, a novel critical appraisal criterion was developed by the primary

researcher to assist researchers in reviewing the quality of qualitative case study and ethnographic research. The systematic review advances knowledge in several ways. These include but are not limited to; bringing together and consolidating findings of individual studies from a range of sports and contexts, offering a framework to help individual stakeholders, organisations and policy makers better understand what makes talent development environments effective, and introducing a new concept of organisational awareness into the discourse around effective talent development environments.

The first way in which the results of this study add to existing knowledge is by bringing together and synthesising the findings from a broad range of qualitative case studies exploring talent development environments. The review includes studies on a range of sports, such as kayaking (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a) track and field (Henriksen *et al.* 2010b), soccer (e.g. Larsen *et al.* 2013) and handball (Storm *et al.* 2020), and from a variety of countries and contexts including Denmark (Junggren *et al.* 2018), Norway (Flatgard *et al.* 2020), Spain (Galatti *et al.* 2016), Canada (Seanor *et al.* 2018) and Australia (Lee & Price, 2016). Synthesising the findings of individual studies in this way has created a clearer understanding of what features of effective talent development environments are found consistently by researchers in this field across different sporting contexts and cultures. Providing increased clarity increases confidence in what is known about effective talent development environments, answering the call made by Rees *et al.* (2016) to make clearer what is thought to be known and what is known about effective talent development.

Secondly, the results of the study add to knowledge by offering a framework to understand both "what happens" in successful talent development environments, and 'how it happens" in order to contribute to its success. Advancing beyond a descriptive level allows stakeholders,

organisations and policy makers to understand and operationalise *how* successful talent development environments are developed and maintained. Synthesising the literature in this way to create knowledge that underpins the development of best practice guidelines is one of the key objectives when conducting a systematic review (Lichtenstein, Yetley & Lau*,* 2008). Consistent with the current scholarly positions on talent development (see Stambulova *et al.* 2021), the results demonstrate that developing talent is a complex endeavour. As an example, the theme 'effective relationships between multiple stakeholders' highlights both the breadth of different stakeholders involved, and the key relationships (e.g. athlete-athlete, athlete-coach and relationships between sections within an organisation e.g. youth section and senior section) that are required to be developed and maintained in a successful talent development environment. However, when considered alongside the theme "Clear development principles" it is possible to explain *how* relationships, and ultimately an effective and functioning talent development environment is maintained. Having clear development principles provides a template for the expectations, standards and behaviours of those within the environment. A shared understanding of the principles that underpin the development approach e.g. valuing athletes autonomy and responsibility (Ryom et al. 2020), provides clarity and direction for how the individual stakeholders within the development environment are expected to act, and creates a foundation for stakeholders to work more effectively together; thus facilitating a more consistent and coherent experience for the athlete. The findings provide further explanation and support for previous research that has identified that athletes are best developed in environments where different parts of the environment are integrated (Relvas *et al.* 2010), where there are coherent messages and where support is available from different stakeholders (Harwood & Knight, 2015; Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017; Knight, 2016; Martindale & Mortimer, 2011).

A further way that the results of the review adds to knowledge is by proposing a new concept of *Organisational Awareness* into the debate around effective talent development environments. In the current study *Organisational Awareness* is defined as a sense of awareness of strengths, opportunities and limitations at an organisational level. By viewing organisations as a complex, living systems a new perspective on what makes effective talent development environments can be attained. If organisations – and in particular those that include numerous and diverse stakeholders, like talent development environments – are viewed as living systems (Senge *et al.* 2004), where individual parts of the system are interconnected, interact with and influence every other part (Bloom & Farragher, 2011); then similar cognitions, affects and behaviour seen in individuals may develop and be mirrored in the way that the organisation functions and behaves and vice versa (Bloom, 2011). Translated from the individual context and applied to organisations, the mirroring of ways of thinking and behaving is referred to as a parallel process (Bloom, 2011). The concept of a parallel process has been used to describe how in environments where individuals are operating under high levels of ongoing stress, the organisation may go on to exhibit parallel problems such as being hyper-aroused and crisis-driven, particularly if the threats experienced by people are not acknowledged (Bloom, 2011). However, in the context of talent development environments where individuals are developmentally focused, it is proposed that awareness of strengths, limitations and opportunities in individuals is mirrored at an organisational level in a positively oriented two-way parallel process. For example, in environments where people are developmentally focused and supportive, it is likely that the organisations may also reflect a focus on improvement; and this will be reflected in individuals who then also feel able to focus on their own improvement and growth. And if organisations seek out opportunities for learning and development, so too will the individuals that operate there. Viewed in this way, organisational awareness enables talent development environments to function optimally by

being aware of, and maximising strengths, being attentive to and limiting the impact of potential barriers, and mindful of, and pursuing opportunities for development.

This review included studies from a range of different sporting contexts including individual, team, professional and non-professional sport. Of the 15 studies included, 9 were conducted in Scandinavian countries; as a result, it may be argued that the similarities in culture and world view in these countries and a tendency to downplay difference (Agergaard & Sorensen, 2010) may limit the breadth of findings. In a meta-study of talent development environment research produced after the inception of the present study, Feddersen et al. (2021) argue that this may account for some of contradictions found in the literature, for example where participants describe an inclusive environment yet also describe excluding stakeholders who hold opposing views (Henriksen *et al.* 2010b). Continuing to study a broader and more diverse sample of talent development environments outside of Scandinavia may add alternative perspectives and insight into what features contribute to successful talent development environments.

The results of this systematic review should be considered in relation to the methods employed in the review and in individual studies. The review is focused on successful talent development environments, previously defined in the literature as those environments with a successful record of developing successful junior athletes into elite senior athletes (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a). Additionally, in many of the studies included in the review, researchers had identified the organisations or clubs as successful prior to undertaking the research. As a result, findings of individual studies and the subsequent review may be subject to confirmation bias (Schumm, 2021), where findings are more likely to be viewed as positively contributing to effective talent development. For example, it is possible that a skewed and idealised sense of coherence may have developed in the literature as an unintended consequence of these methodological issues.

In this review, coherence between what is said and done has been highlighted as a feature of effective talent development environments. That is not to say that all organisations believe in and adopt the same approach to development, or that they are consistent all the time. Feddersen *et al.* (2021) highlighted discrepancies in studies that may challenge the notion of coherence, however we would argue that in practice, where talent development environments are seen as complex living systems, effective talent development environments achieve coherence more of the time, and not all of the time. In order to continue to develop understanding of what makes effective talent development environments future research using neutral or negative case studies would address some of the limitations associated with pre-selecting successful environments and add greater strength and support for what is known about effective talent development which has been identified as a priority for sporting talent development researchers (Rees *et al.* 2016).

The results of the study have a number of applied implications relevant for those working in talent development. Primarily, the results of the study highlight the distinction between "what" is done, and "how" something is done. Sport psychologists working in talent development environments may be uniquely positioned to encourage discussion and consideration about 'how things are done'. Using their psychological expertise and professional skills, sport psychologists can encourage greater critical reflection on how talent development practices and environments may impact on the thoughts, emotions and experiences of the athletes and other stakeholders operating there and the implications for talent development. Creating effective talent development environments does not appear simply to be the result of what goes on but is instead underpinned by *how* the development activity takes place and working relationships among key stakeholders are developed, nurtured and maintained. In individual contexts where the goal is to support growth and development including sports coaching (Becker, 2009),

education (Sammons *et al.* 2018) and psychological support in sport (Chandler *et al.* 2014) and non-sport domains (Hilton & Johnston, 2017), it is recognised that successful outcomes are not achieved solely as a result of what you do, but the way that you do it. Adopting this approach at an environmental level, sport governing bodies, organisations and clubs would be encouraged to critically consider *how* they want to do development, and proactively pursue their chosen approach in order to create a coherent talent pathway and performer development experience (Webb, Collins & Cruickshank, 2016). Such decisions are likely to be informed by the type of sport e.g. whether transition to senior sport occurs at an early age, the characteristics and skills required for success in particular sports e.g. physical dominance or technical skill, as well as the values and beliefs about development held by particular organisations.

Adopting a more holistic, ecological approach to creating talent development environments would enable organisations and individual stakeholders to be more intentional about creating coherent environments that support the development of talented athletes (Webb *et al.* 2016). It is envisaged that an explicit focus on *how* a particular organisation wants to operate, would help to guard against the unintended consequences that a less optimal talent development environment can create, e.g. negatively impacting on athlete mental health and wellbeing (Henriksen *et al.* 2020). Preliminary support for ecologically informed policy and practice recommendations has been identified as a useful and impactful approach, in a review that aimed to examine the impact of Bronfenbrenner's Theory on mental health policy and practice (Eriksson, Ghazinour & Hammarström, 2018).

**Conclusion**

The aim of the current review was to create knowledge to support sport governing bodies, organisations and those individuals working directly with athletes to create effective talent

development environments. Reviewing studies from a range of sports and contexts has allowed us to appraise and consolidate what is already known and develop new knowledge about effective talent development environments. We have identified themes found in the literature to describe *what* features are present in effective talent development environments, and provided a framework to explain *how* effective talent development environments are developed and maintained. In addition, we have proposed a new concept of organisational awareness and positioned talent development environments as "living systems"; we hope that this stimulates discussion and encourages organisations and individuals to consider whether there is an awareness of the strengths, limitations and opportunities within their environments. Moreover, the findings of the study highlight the importance of congruence between the philosophy, methods and behaviours within an environment, and we encourage talent developers to consider how they can achieve this within their environments to create a coherent development experience for the developing athlete. Future research that focuses on negative or neutral case study examples would further extend knowledge about effective talent development environments and address some of the methodological issues that have been identified in this research area to date.

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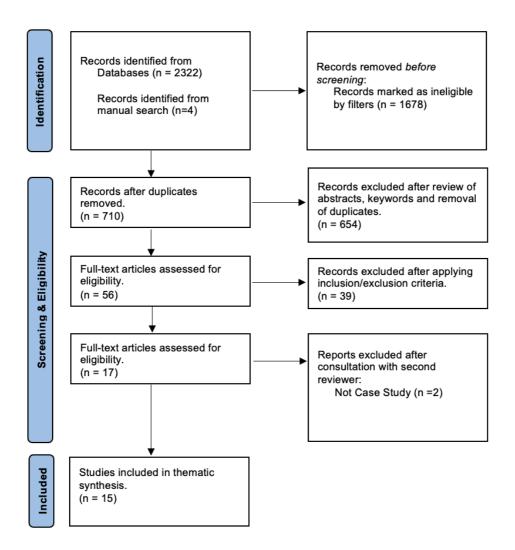
**Appendices:**

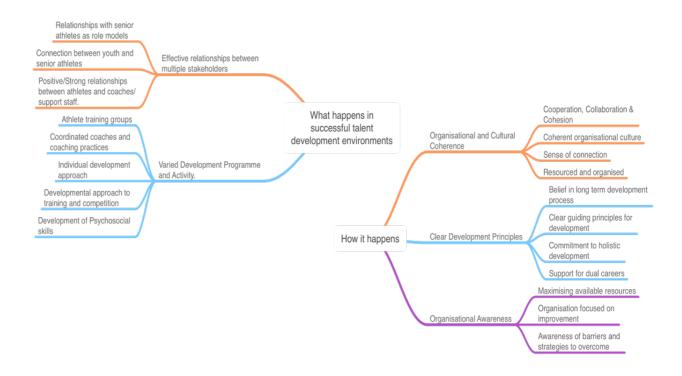**Appendix 1:** Enhancing transparency in reporting the synthesis of qualitative research: ENTREQ Checklist (Tong, *et al.,* 2012)

| Item | Guide and Description | Report Location/ Page no. |
|---|---|---|
| Aim | State the research question the synthesis addresses | Introduction / 281 |
| Approach to searching | Indicate whether the search was pre-planned (comprehensive search strategies to seek all available studies) or iterative (to seek all available concepts until they theoretical saturation is achieved) | Methods / 283 |
| Inclusion criteria | Specify the inclusion/exclusion criteria (e.g. in terms of population, language, year limits, type of publication, study type) | Methods/ Approach to Systematic Review / 282 |
| Data sources | Describe the information sources used (e.g. electronic databases (MEDLINE, EMBASE, CINAHL, psycINFO), grey literature databases (digital thesis, policy reports), relevant organisational websites, experts, information specialists, generic web searches (Google Scholar) hand searching, reference lists) and when the searches conducted; provide the rationale for using the data sources | Electronic Search / 283 |
| Electronic Search strategy | Describe the literature search (e.g. provide electronic search strategies with population terms, clinical or health topic terms, experiential or social phenomena related terms, filters for qualitative research, and search limits) | Electronic Search / 283 |
| Study screening methods | Describe the process of study screening and sifting (e.g. title, abstract and full text review, number of independent reviewers who screened studies) | 283 / Appendix 2 *PRISMA flow diagram* |
| Study characteristics | Present the characteristics of the included studies (e.g. year of publication, country, population, number of participants, data collection, methodology, analysis, research questions) | Table 3 - *Characteristics of included studies* |
| Study selection results | Identify the number of studies screened and provide reasons for study exclusion (e.g. for comprehensive searching, provide numbers of studies screened and reasons for exclusion indicated in a figure/flowchart; for iterative searching describe reasons for study exclusion and inclusion based on modifications to the research question and/or contribution to theory development) | Appendix 2 - PRISMA flow diagram |
| Rationale for appraisal | Describe the rationale and approach used to appraise the included studies or selected findings (e.g. assessment of conduct (validity and robustness), assessment of reporting (transparency), assessment of content and utility of the findings) | Critical Appraisal / 284 |
| Appraisal items | State the tools, frameworks and criteria used to appraise the studies or selected findings (e.g. Existing tools: CASP, QARI, COREQ, Mays and Pope [25]; reviewer developed tools; describe the domains assessed: research team, study design, data analysis and interpretations, reporting) | Critical Appraisal / 284-286 |
| Appraisal process | Indicate whether the appraisal was conducted independently by more than one reviewer and if consensus was required | Critical Appraisal / 284-286 |
| Appraisal results | Present results of the quality assessment and indicate which articles, if any, were weighted/excluded based on the assessment and give the rationale | Table 3 / 288-290 |

| Data extraction | Indicate which sections of the primary studies were analysed and how were the data extracted from the primary studies? (e.g. all text under the headings "results /conclusions" were extracted electronically and entered into a computer software) | Thematic Synthesis. All data from study results. |
|---|---|---|
| Software | State the computer software used, if any | None used |
| Number of reviewers | Identify who was involved in coding and analysis | Two / 283 |
| Coding | Describe the process for coding of data (e.g. line by line coding to search for concepts) | Reflexive Thematic Analysis / 286-287 |
| Study comparison | Describe how were comparisons made within and across studies (e.g. subsequent studies were coded into pre-existing concepts, and new concepts were created when deemed necessary) | Findings mapped to Thematic Map – Appendix 3. / 287 |
| Derivation of themes | Explain whether the process of deriving the themes or constructs was inductive or deductive | Inductive process – Table 4/ 292, *Thematic Map,* |
| Quotations | Provide quotations from the primary studies to illustrate themes/constructs, and identify whether the quotations were participant quotations of the author's interpretation | Results - *Quotations and all sources given* |
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**Appendix 2:** Prisma Flow Diagram – Search Strategy.

**Appendix 3:** Thematic Map.

**Empirical Paper 1**

**A qualitative exploration of the Talent Development Environment in an English Premier League academy: Preparing players for the extraordinary**

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**Abstract:**

The study has provided new insights into talent development environment research as the first empirical study of the talent development environment in the academy of an English Premier League football club. As part one of a two-part set of empirical studies, the study aimed to develop understanding of how the broader environmental factors influence effective talent development. Drawing on the holistic ecological approach, the perspectives of a range of 'in-situ' stakeholders were taken using semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis was conducted to examine these perspectives and to identify factors contributing to an effective talent development environment. Resulting from the analysis several themes were identified; 1) Strong and coherent organisational culture, 2) Organisational awareness, 3) Perception of effectiveness, 4) Sense of connectedness, 5) A holistic long term development approach, 6) Integration of efforts, 7) Varied football development programme and 8) Preparing players for the extraordinary. New features of effective talent development environments are presented in the current study 'Organisational awareness', 'perception of effectiveness' and 'preparing for the extraordinary' for the first time. Finally, the study presented a shift away from viewing talent development environments as 'successful' and instead considers 'effectiveness' as a key factor to help stakeholders in talent development to align talent development practices with the objectives of talent development.

**Introduction:**

Advancing knowledge related to talent development (TD) in sport is a key objective for sport governing bodies, sport directors, coaches and a range of practitioners tasked with supporting the development of talented athletes (Rees *et al*. 2016). As TD programmes and pathways become more organised and professional, there is increased scrutiny on working practices and on those working in TD environments. For example, in professional sports such as football and rugby, it is now established practice for academies of professional clubs to go through formal auditing processes designed to increase and uphold standards in TD. With findings of these audits having implications for funding, access to competitions and the reputation of clubs (Relvas et al., 2010), there is a need for organisations and practitioners to employ effective TD programmes and practices.

Researchers have employed a range of methods to gain insight in to and better understand what makes an effective TD environment. Studies have focused on perspectives of coaches (e.g. Martindale, Collins & Abraham, 2007; Mills et al., 2014), parents (e.g.Côte, 1999; Knight, Berrow & Harwood, 2017) and athletes themselves (e.g. Gledhill & Harwood, 2019; Mitchell *et al.* 2021); as well as studying TD environments retrospectively (e.g. Martindale, Collins & Daubney, 2005) and 'in situ' (e.g. Ryom *et al.* 2020). The body of work has increased understanding and awareness of key issues in TD such as the importance of practitioners adopting a long-term development perspective (Martindale, Collins & Daubney, 2005), a recognition that athletes experience many transitions throughout the development process (Wylleman & Rosier, 2016) and benefit from different development environments at different development stages (Van Rossum, 2001). Furthermore, research has highlighted that prospective elite athletes develop in environments that proactively take a holistic approach to

developing specific psychological skills (MacNamara, Button & Collins, 2010a, 2010b) and psychosocial competencies (Larsen, Alfermann & Christensen, 2012).

In recent years the number of studies focusing on TD environments has increased as attention has shifted away from individual and onto the environments in which talented athletes develop (Henriksen 2010). And it has been suggested that some environments are better at developing talented athletes than others (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a, 2010b). Adopting the holistic ecological approach (HEA) (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a, 2010b) as an integrated perspective and method to study TD environments has led to the identification of several common features of successful TD environments. Features include 1) an integration of efforts, 2) training groups with supportive relationships, 3) proximal role models, 4) support of sporting goals by the wider environment, 5) support for the development of psychosocial skills, 6) training that allows for diversification, 7) focus on long-term development and 8) a strong and coherent organisational culture (Henriksen. 2010). And the list of features has continued to expand as environments in different contexts and sports have been studied and now includes features such as cultural awareness, accommodating diversity and an openness to new ideas (Ryom et al., 2020). Given the broad variety of the features previously identified, it may be questioned as to whether all features are relevant and present in different sport environments.

In a recent review, Feddersen *et al.* (2021) highlighted a number of methodological (e.g. pre-defining environments as successful ahead of study), and conceptual (e.g. how success is defined) issues to challenge assumptions about what makes an effective TD environment. Critically, the idea that success, defined by the number of elite athletes developed is equated to positive features and a positive development experience for young athletes has been challenged (Feddersen *et al.* 2021). Adopting a more neutral and open approach that focuses on

understanding how an environment optimises learning and development of the current athletes may provide an alternative lens through which to view the effectiveness of a TD environment. Additionally, conducting research that is focused on the experiences of the participants (e.g. athletes, coaches and support staff) at the time of study, as opposed to retrospectively, may be a more useful way to understand the effectiveness of a TD environment. Helping to address some of the concerns raised by Feddersen *et al.* (2021) related to identifying and studying environments solely based on the number of athletes previously developed in that environment.

When considered together, the body of TD environment research highlights that reaching elite level sport and developing talented athletes is a complex and non-linear endeavour (Güllich, Macnamara & Hambrick, 2022). And there are challenges relating to the translation and application of this information across contexts and sports in a practical and impactful way given the differences that exist across sports and sporting cultures (Baker, 2022). It is possible that research that is sport specific and even organisation/club specific may address some of these challenges; and provide knowledge and solutions that are more contextually informed and therefore better able to impact practice within TD systems within a specific sport or sporting organisation.

In sports such as professional football where the TD pathway extends over many years (for example in England clubs typically run academy programmes from U9 to U21 age groups), even those players who are developed within one club are likely to have experienced a number of different TD environments within a single club e.g. when progressing through the foundation development phase, youth development phase and into the professional development phase (Relvas *et al.*, 2010). When considered alongside TD models such long term athletic development (LTAD) framework (Bayli, Way & Higgs, 2013) and the developmental model

of sport participation (DMSP) (Côte, Baker & Abernethy, 2007) further questions may be asked about the usefulness and applicability of generic features of effective TD environments at different stages of development. Highlighting a gap in current understanding of what effective TD looks like at different ages/stages of development and in specific contexts and sports.

In professional football, clubs in the top leagues across Europe and around the world invest heavily in TD programmes (Relvas *et al.* 2010). In England, where there are 92 professional clubs there is strong competition and pressure for clubs to run effective development programmes that is not seen in other sporting contexts. The introduction of the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) (The Premier League, 2011) designed to increase standards in TD practices with the aim of increasing the number of home-grown professional first team players has increased the level of expectation on clubs and individuals (Nesti & Sulley, 2014; Dowling *et al.* 2018). Clubs are required to meet requirements relating to facilities, staffing, and funding along with other wide-ranging criteria set out in the EPPP in order to gain access to games programmes, tournaments and receive additional funding (The Premier League, 2011). As a result there are significant implications for failing to meet these requirements for clubs and club staff. It is possible that this additional stress may have negative implications for TD practices and lead to a less optimal or effective TD environments. Potential negative impacts include overlooking long term athlete development needs in favour of short-term success such as winning at junior level, or an over focus on talent identification over TD (Larsen *et al.* 2020), resulting in selection biases such as the relative age affect (Baker et al., 2003). The implications of these influences are particularly pertinent given the poor relationship that exists between athletes' success at junior level and success senior elite level (Barth et al., 2022). In order to better support practitioners working in TD in professional football, further football specific

research is required to generate knowledge with increased potential to positively impact TD practices in professional football settings.

The purpose of the study is to provide novel insight into a TD environment in English professional football, a context that has so far been overlooked in athletic TD environment research. In doing so, it is anticipated that findings will add to the debate about features of effective TD environments whilst also generating practical insights for practitioners working in a unique and increasingly challenging context. The study is part one of a two-part set of empirical studies exploring the talent development environment of an academy programme in the English Premier League; drawing on the holistic ecological approach (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a), the aim of this study is to develop understanding of how the broader environmental context influences effective TD in an English Premier League academy setting. The first study (Part one) seeks to extend current understanding by first considering the in-situ perspectives of a range of different stakeholders operating inside the club to gain insight into their perspectives of the TD environment. The second study (Part two) will add an ethnographic perspective for a greater critical consideration of the features of the TD environment to add to the stakeholder perspectives. In summary, the current study aims to examine stakeholder perspectives on the talent development environment within the youth development phase of a Premier League category one academy and identify features contributing to effective talent development environments.

**Methods:**

The study was designed as part one of a two-part set of empirical studies to explore and examine the complexity of a single-bounded case (Hodge & Sharp, 2016). The boundedness of the case was delineated by a focus on a specific development programme within one

professional football club, studied over a specific time frame. As an intrinsic case (Stake, 2005), the present study provides insight into a specific sporting organisation with a demonstrated history of developing senior elite footballers and can uncover unique environmental factors influencing talent development. The study is positioned within a realist ontology (we contend that TD environments are structures that exist and function independently of our experience) and a postpositivist epistemology (in acknowledgement that we can grasp an imperfect understanding, we aim to provide an accurate portrayal of stakeholder perspectives on the TD environment; Smith, 2019).

*Case*

The club was founded in the North West of England in the late 1800s, with the senior men's team going on to become one of the most successful professional clubs in English professional football. The first youth programme was created in the late 1930s and has continued to form the clubs present day academy. The academy (referring only to the male academy for the purposes of this study) runs development programmes from under-9 to under-21 age groups. The senior men's team competes in the English Premier League, the U-21 team competes in the Premier League 2 Division 1, and U-18 team competes in the U18 Premier League North; whilst the academy has been recognised as a Category One academy, the highest grading awarded by the Premier League as part of the Elite Player Performance Plan (The Premier League, 2011). The academy typically has approximately 200 young players registered at any time, and over 85 permanent members of staff are employed in a variety of roles including coaches, sports scientists, analysts, physiotherapists, doctors, psychologists, education and safeguarding to support player development. The present study focuses on the youth development phase full-time (FT) programme, made up of select players from U14-16 who attend the clubs partner school and the staff who work directly in the delivery of the FT

programme. Regarded as one of the world's foremost football academies, with a long-standing record of developing senior elite players for the senior team and the wider professional game in England and in Europe; the academy has consistently ranked highly in independent productivity ratings tracking the development of players from club academies in England and in Europe (Football Observatory 2021).

*Research Methods and Instruments*

Data was collected via semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders including players, coaches, physiotherapists and support staff involved in the FT programme to gain an array of perspectives on the talent development environment.

*Interviews*

Semi-structured interview guides were developed and informed by the athletic talent development environment (ADTE) and environment success factor (ESF) models born out of the HEA to studying talent development environments (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a). Additional research adopting a HEA to studying other professional football development environments (e.g. Larsen et al., 2013) was also used to inform the development of the interview guides. Seven interviews were conducted, and all took place at the academy training facility. Interviews lasted between 38 and 90 minutes. Three players, the lead coach of the FT programme, the education officer, a senior physiotherapist and the head of coaching were interviewed for the study. Interview questions covered a range of topics of interest within the HEA (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a) from the macro environment to the microenvironment, relations within the environment and the processes and working practices that occurred within the development environment. Example questions or prompts included: What does this environment value or

think is important? In terms of your daily involvement, what can be said of the role of older players in the club? Tell me about what you learn in this environment".

*Research team, Rigor & Procedure*

The research team consisted of experienced and early career researchers with experience in conducting qualitative research, expertise in the field of TD and in applying the HEA to conducting research in football contexts, in addition to extensive knowledge of academy football in England. The primary researcher (DR) was also employed by the University (LJMU) to deliver sport psychology services for the club alongside conducting research in the academy. Steps taken to protect the integrity and add rigour to the research process included completing a research diary, engaging in supervision, and regular debrief with the research team and supervisors in what Spall. (1998) called peer debriefing, a form of reflective practice undertaken throughout the analytic process to consider the potential impacts of researcher influence. Rigour is also added to the research findings by the in-depth contextual knowledge of the primary researcher and research team, contributing to a more informed interpretation of the data and adding credibility to the findings.

Aligned to the postpositivist approach a coding reliability thematic analysis was undertaken to analyse interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2019) guided by the six steps outlined by Braun, Clarke & Weate (2016). The first step involved reading and reading data and making notes about points of interest in order to achieve familiarization. Step two was coding the data in a systematic and thorough process, this involved tagging all data relevant to the focus of the research. An abductive approach to coding was taken, in acknowledgement that the researchers already possessed knowledge of previous research findings in this area whilst also allowing for new ideas and concepts to be found (Gibbs, 2007). Steps three to five made up the core analytic

work and included organising codes with similar or shared meaning into candidate of lower-order themes, followed by reviewing and revising those themes to identify higher-order themes. Clustering lower-order themes to create higher-order themes allowed researchers to capture broader meaning of the data and a richer, more nuanced portrayal of the data beyond specific individual ideas. Higher-order themes were reviewed and revised to check the themes "fit well" both with the data and in addressing the research question. Themes and interpretations of the developing findings were discussed by the research team with members acting as critical friends, where multiple perspectives and alternative understandings of the data could be discussed and considered (Smith & McGannon, 2017). A thematic map was developed to review the analysis and exploring relationships between themes. Themes were then defined with a narrative description detailing the essence of each theme before final theme names were decided upon. The final stage of the analytic process was writing up the report, including direct quotes and presenting data to provide an in-depth picture of the case narrative (Creswell, 2012).

**Results:**

The present study aimed to examine stakeholder perspectives on the talent development environment within the FT programme of a Premier League category one academy; and identify features contributing to effective talent development environments. In the resulting analysis several features of effective talent development environments were identified, consistent with previous findings in this area (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017) along with new features that are presented and proposed to contribute to the effectiveness of the TDE presented in the current case. The following features will be presented and discussed; 1) Strong and coherent organisational culture, 2) Organisational awareness, 3) Perception of effectiveness, 4) Sense of connectedness, 5) A holistic long term development approach, 6) Integration of

efforts, 7) Varied football development programme and 8) Preparing players for the extraordinary.

*Strong and coherent organisational culture*

Characterised by a coherence between artefacts, espoused and enacted values in previous research (Henriksen *et al.* 2010a), a strong and coherent organisational culture was evident in the current case. Consistent accounts of the values, beliefs and behavioural expectations within the environment were provided by multiple stakeholders, detailing the values of *responsibility, discipline, respect,* and *humility.*

Player 1 detailed notions of respect, responsibility and humility when describing what is important at the club: *"Always being respectful whilst you're wearing the uniform and the badge, help everyone around you that's on the same journey as you… you're following on from other people's footsteps I think trying to get where they've got to".*

Beliefs about the importance of *holistic development* and *pastoral care* were identified as being central to the success of the TDE. Staff 1 described the emphasis placed on pastoral care from senior staff *"I think they've driven the pastoral support, putting the boy first before being a footballer, them as an individual as well as a footballer, they decided that the main focus of the programme will be on the pastoral support and that the football would follow".*

The history of both the programme and the football club appears to be important for creating the sense of coherence between what is said and done and acts as a guide for the behaviour of players "following in the footsteps" of others and for the staff working in the programme. Staff 2: *"When I left for 20 something years and came back, it was still there you know, that that*

*philosophy, those principles, those, those values I suppose of how you should bring players up, it has got to be a fun, happy, creative, player friendly environment"*.


*Organisational Awareness*

Coined by Ransom (2023), organisational awareness (OA) refers to a sense of being aware of strengths, opportunities and limitations at an organisational level and was identified as a factor that contributed to TD environment effectiveness. In the current study, OA was demonstrated by a recognition that the programme was demanding in several ways, including football programme demands, educational demands and lifestyle demands such as moving away from home and that staff should be vigilant to the potential impact of these demands.


*"constantly taking the temperature I think I was always conscious of always taking the temperature each day and the temperature each day was different, never the same temperature I'd have a session in my pocket and look at them, and think no that has to go back in the pocket Kris, that's going to be no good for today."* (Staff 2)


Other examples of OA were demonstrated by an awareness of the high level of resource available at the club left unchecked may have unintended consequences for young player motivation and has the potential to undermine the value of humility.


*"Boys on the programme have had two trips and I've intentionally put it at two opposite ends of the scale because they've had a trip which was five star and that experience of being a CLUB player. And at the opposite end we're going to London we're staying in a youth hostel, we're going training with Team GB sprinters which sounds great but to get an idea of training within*

*an amateur spor, and what levels they've got to go to without the resources our boys have got to again, give them a sense of reality"* (Staff 3).

OA allowed the club staff to be responsive, adapt the programme and to proactively address limitations in the programme that are identified as a consequence of OA.

*Perception of effectiveness*

A general perception of the environment as an effective TDE was evident among participants. Multiple markers of effectiveness were identified and contributed to a sense of effectiveness as a TDE, these included individual success stories and the progression of individual players. "*I think it is looking at the past as well and the different players come through like Christie, Owens, Andre I think it's been really successful over the years… which is why it has kept going strong"* (Player 2)*.*

In addition to individual progression, the 'track record' and the 'number' of players progressing from the programme to full time 'jobs' in the game was regarded as 'very high' and contributed to a sense of the environment being an effective TDE.
"*If you measure your success on the number of players that have gone through the programme and gotten a job in the game it is very high. 90 something percent I think and most of the kids have gotten jobs in the game… And then if you add in Walsh and Lawrence you've got three in the last 10 years that are properly in the first team squad playing in the Champions League"* (Staff 2).

Identified by both players and staff, the educational and personal development focus of the programme was also viewed as a marker of effectiveness.

*But there are other measures of success I would think that's to do with all the other stuff has to do with I would call life skills all sorts of life skills and these things aren't measurable"* (Coach 3).

*"There's players that come through that they might not have gone all the way to 23s, or the first team but they done well in the school levels and found all the good clubs"* (Player 3).

The perception of effectiveness was described by players as contributing to greater 'confidence' and 'belief' that they too could go on to 'follow in the footsteps' of others who had been a part of the programme, whilst also fostering a sense of trust in the staff and programme.

*Sense of connectedness*

A multi-layered sense of connectedness was identified through the analysis, including a sense of connectedness or 'brotherhood' between the boys on the programme *"we're always together, it's like you're a family, you're one, it's like you're a collective"* (Player 1), developed formally through initiatives like the 'Head Boy' system to create responsibility for boys to look out for one and other and encourage peer support; and also informally through shared experiences and a social activities programme. "*We've all got to help each other if it's getting difficult or we're getting tired we've just got to get each other through the days and then we'll all progress"* (Player 3).

Other layers of connectedness were to the club, the programme and the legacy left behind by previous players, *"as I moved through the ranks, I took what they gave me and then passed it on. So like the new people that joined, I just tried my best to make them feel welcome and*

*hopefully the people that I passed it on to take that and when they're older when new people come in, they can do the same"* (Player 2). Player 1 also described the connectedness that players felt to those who had gone before them *"When I was in year 9 that locker was Andre's and when I was in Year 10 it was Ratcliffe's and year 11 and I moved to locker one because I was one of the oldest ones",* creating a sense of being able to follow the path of their role models. Players also talked about being to learn from older players about *'How they go about what they do'*, Player 2 explained *"you look at what the older ones do, not copy them but follow one from what they've done"*. Coaches also offered perspectives on how the high regard with which the programme is held within the club helps to players to feel connected to the club. *"I think all the boys buy into the fact that all the staff at the club are invested in them and are involved in it. I think that creates a profile for the programme and makes the boys feel special"* (Coach 3). Players reinforced this view and described how being a part of the programme "It makes you feel like you have a value" and is *"a big achievement because not a lot of people get this opportunity it's a big achievement and something I can keep working on"* (Player 3).

*Holistic long term development approach*

A holistic long term development approach (HLTDA) where there is a focus on developing the person as well as the footballer, where opportunities for learning are maximised and individual development is prioritised was a feature of the current case. Players and coaches discussed the emphasis placed upon developing the person and the footballer, using examples such as an additional education programme that enabled boys to engage in leadership training and the Duke of Edinburgh awards.

*"The additional activities we get to do, it helps you to develop as a person, like this year going to COMPANY on like a leadership course, stuff like that develops you all round not just your football"* (Player 1).

In addition to supporting boys to develop qualities such as leadership, players and coaches also recognised the importance of the 'life lessons' that can be gained through the programme. Player 2 described the benefits of being in the programme, *"Yeah just teaches you about life and about the qualities you need. How to go about life. Develops you as a person as a young man"*. Some of these lessons were inherent in the programme such as being required to be organised and work effectively with different people, but other opportunities for additional development were sought out to maximise opportunities for players to learn broader 'life lessons'.

*"for the meal I gave the boys 20 pounds each in the restaurant, put them on tables of four and it sounds daft but I made them take care of the bill. So each table had to get their bill and the boys had to factor in, right so you've got 20 pounds to spend. If you want anything more than 20 pounds you can add money yourself that's fine. But they've had to think about the tip at the end. And again something other boys might never have thought about before. How do I how do I take care of them? How do you get the waiter or waitresses attention?"* (Staff 1).

The commitment to a HLTDA can also be seen in the opportunities sourced to support the development of individuals e.g. *"One of the boys has already said he wants to do social media, so he's going to be working with the social media department"* (Staff 4). The impact of adopting a HLTDA was summarised by player 1:

*"I was a good person when I came but I learned to be an even better person. I learned to give, learned to teach and give advice to other people. Like the oldest gave advice to me, now I'm giving advice to younger lads"*.

*Integration of efforts*

Working in collaboration with parents, the clubs partner school and external stakeholders represented an integration of efforts to support players' development. Parents were considered a key stakeholder and resource in supporting players' development, both formal and informal approaches were undertaken to develop relationships and maintain communication with parents. Informally tea and coffee afternoons were held every Friday before parents collected their sons from school, and regular formal feedback meetings were held to keep parents informed of the boys' progress. Club staff would also visit parents at home to ensure parents and the club could work together effectively:

*"One thing that Paul does as a big personal touch, which is about core values really he'll go to the parent's homes. But I think it's a massive thing so families feel that link, that connection to the club"* (Staff 2).

The club also had a member of staff based at the school to support the partnership and create a visible presence and accessible link between the club and school.

*"I asked the school to treat almost treat their training as one of their options blocks so that if the boys chose to do geography in school they would never choose to take them out of a geography lesson to do the detention with them or to get them caught up on their subject"* (Staff 3).

Described above, Staff 3 provided an example of how club staff worked with the school to come to an understanding about how they could balance educational and football demands. In summary, an integration of efforts was seen as beneficial for development so that *"the boy knows that gap between home, school and the club is bridged"* potentially creating a more stable and cooperative development environment for young players.

*Varied football development programme*

In the current study a varied football development programme was a key feature of the TDE. A 'best with best' approach where mixed age group players trained together underpinned the programme. Programmes were tailored and varied to individual players' development needs and with variation at a programme level ensured that players within the programme were exposed to different experiences and challenges as part of their development.

Players and staff discussed the 'best with best' approach as a feature central to the success of the programme, that the approach created learning experiences and presented different challenges to the players regardless of age that contributed to their long-term development.

*"Playing with older players every day that really helps me a lot as a player and as a person. I learned how to deal with things quicker because I was with older people, so they didn't take anything. So I learned about that very quickly and my standard of football improved very quickly because the people older than me demanded more of me."* (Player 2).
*"You could be in year 7 training with someone in year 11 that's the challenge that is poses. If you're a younger player that actually makes you a better player and even if you're an older player it makes you better because you have to learn how to get people through it if they're not at your stage"* (Player 1).

The best with best approach where players may be training with others who are two to three years above or below their own age challenged players to develop football specific skills, whilst simultaneously challenging them to develop broader skills such as the ability to be a positive role model or ensure they are able to 'manage their own motivation' or 'training mentality'. Staff 4 described additional benefits to this approach:

*"The players just thrive off looking at the best technical player at 16 when they're 13 or 14 they look at the best technical player at 16 and its touchable and they want to get there so the gap or the learning gap from 14 to 16 seems really attainable for the learner".*

Development activity within the programme had variation to meet the needs of individuals and to create new learning experiences for players. Coaches described a '*fluidity*' and '*variety within the programme'* to help find the right level of challenge for individual players.

*"A lot of the under 16s play the under 17 games, some of them play in the under 18s games, one of the under fifteens plays in under 18s and trains with the under 18s at times some of the 14s train and play with the fifteens. So, there's always like this complete fluidity between the between the training"* (Staff 3).

Players described the value that the variety within the programme and different experiences had on their development:

*"So you just have to vary your playing style really. So like play smart when you are playing against older people the faster people stronger than you play smart, be wise and think about what you're doing"* (Player 1).

*Preparing players for the extraordinary*

The theme relates to a recognition that the programme and being a player at the club is not a 'normal' experience for typical boys of this age; and an acknowledgement that there is a need to prepare players for extraordinary demands. Coaches described needing to find a balance between preparing players for the future demands, whilst also retaining a sense of hard work and humility that are key values of the academy and full-time programme.

*"It's not a normal experience to be at a club that's probably the top three in the world. It's not normal you know there's kids all over the world that'd want that so once you get into your mindset, that is not a normal experience it is an extraordinary experience then it does put a different perspective on it doesn't it? So if it's not normal how can you make it in some ways normal?"* (Staff 3).

Staff also recognised that progressing to play first team football at the club would mean players face 'extraordinary demands' that are present at few other clubs and subscribed to the idea that these demands should not be a surprise to players when they encounter them.

*"Jamie at 16 you know on Wednesday night he played against FCB in the Champions League in front of 70,000 people and took it in his stride… because he's been exposed to all these different experiences at the Academy it's almost like he needs to feel numb to them"* (Staff 1)

Coaches described how the programme needed to be structured in a way that enabled players to experience abnormal situations as normal and feel as though they are capable of meeting these extraordinary demands. The experiences that players are progressively exposed to throughout their development prepare players to 'feel numb' to the demands that may otherwise seem extraordinary.

*So you kind of got to get a balance between the two… I mean, these kids have just got to feel like that's normal. I can still perform on this stage so you've almost got to have a feeling of yeah, I belong here"* (Staff 1)

Linked to the varied football development programme, the club aimed to create 'steppingstones' for players to help them acquire experiences and skills to prepare them for future challenges. Examples of these steppingstones included a gradual exposure to playing in competitive environments throughout age groups, playing in increasingly bigger stadia, and in front of increasing numbers of spectators and gradual exposure to club media.

**Discussion:**

The study sought to identify features contributing to effective talent development environments through examining stakeholder perspectives on the TDE in the FT programme of category one academy of a Premier League club. Adopting a case study approach, an in-depth analysis of player and staff perspectives identified features that contributed to the effectiveness of the TD environment. Following a thematic analysis, the following features contributing to the effectiveness of the TDE in the current case were identified; *1) Strong and coherent organisational culture, 2) Organisational awareness, 3) Perception of effectiveness, 4) Sense of connectedness, 5) A holistic long term development approach, 6) Integration of efforts, 7) Varied football development programme* and *8) Preparing players for the extraordinary.*

The findings of the current study support the findings of previous research in this area, whilst also further advancing the scope and relevance of findings to the professional football domain. More specifically, findings reinforce the importance of a strong and coherent organisational culture, an integration of efforts, diverse and varied development programme and a holistic long term development approach found in previous research (e.g. Henriksen *et al.* 2017). Moreover, findings advance the scope and relevance of TDE research in professional football, by adding further insight in to a unique and under researched setting and builds on existing research in this context (e.g. Larsen *et al.* 2020; Ryom *et al.* 2020). In a further advancement

of knowledge, 'organisational awareness' previously only discussed as a theoretical concept (Ransom, 2023) is substantiated by the findings of the current study as a feature of an effective TDE in empirical research for the first time.

The first way the current study contributes to knowledge about effective TDEs is by adding further support to the findings of previous research in this area. Recent efforts have been made to summarise (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017) and review existing literature to better understand characteristics of effective TDEs (Ransom *et al.* 2023). Several common features have been identified that are represented and supported in the findings of the current study namely a *strong and coherent organisational culture*, adopting a *holistic long term development approach*, an *integration of efforts* and a *varied development programme*. These features reflect and share similarities with the features of effective TDEs consistently found in a range of individual sport (e.g. Henriksen 2010a, 2010b) and team sports (e.g. Larsen *et al.* 2013) TDE: an *integration of efforts, training groups with supportive relationships, proximal role models, support of sporting goals by the wider environment, support for the development of psychosocial skills, training that allows for diversification, focus on long-term development and strong and coherent organisational culture* (Stambulova, Ryba & Henriksen, 2021). Further, whilst some features are not directly represented e.g. *proximal role models* they are present in expanded features e.g. *sense of connectedness,* reconceptualised to more accurately captured the personal connection and sense of following in the footsteps of the older players than the term 'role model' conveys. In another example, *support of sporting goals by the wider environment* is captured in the broader feature of *an integration of efforts.* Features not present in existing literature but presented in the current case study such as *Organisational awareness, perception of success* and *preparing players for the extraordinary* are presented as features unique to a TDE that is part of a world leading football club with a long-established and

successful talent development system. The findings of the current study further support the efficacy of previously identified features as essential ingredients for effective TDEs, adding to the confidence and potential for these findings to influence policy and practice. This is of relevance considering the significant and growing investment being made in developing talent (Rees *et al.* 2016).

In addition, the findings of the current study extend what is known about effective TDEs in the context of professional football. The findings of the current study relate specifically to the youth development phase ages (13-16 years) and as such provide specific insight to this phase of development that may assist and guide TD practices and address development challenges associated with this stage. Previous TDE research in professional football settings have primarily focused on professional development phase age groups (U17-21), case studies based at Ajax (Larsen *et al.* 2020), Rosenborg (Aalberg & Sæther, 2016) and Ranheim (Flatgard, Larsen & Sæther, 2020) football clubs focused on the U19 teams and the U17 team at AGF (Larsen *et al.* 2013). As such the usefulness of existing football specific TDE findings for the youth development phase ages can be questioned. In a recent case study examining the TDE of Belgian club KRC Genk (Ryom *et al.* 2020), there was a broad focus on the whole academy (U7-21 age groups) as a TDE; and whilst novel features such as cultural awareness and sharing of knowledge were proposed, how relevant these findings are for specific phases of development is unclear. And as previously discussed, the distinct priorities and focuses at different stages of development (Côte, Baker & Abernethy, 2007) and at different development phases in football academies (Nesti & Sulley, 2014) mean what constitutes an effective TDE for nine and nineteen year olds may be vastly different. As such, generating knowledge specific to the context of the youth development phase is important given the complexity of a development stage where young players are experiencing multiple sport and non-sport

transitions (Morris, 2021; Wylleman, Reints & De Knop, 2013). Consistent with the findings of transition research carried out in professional football (Røynesdal, Toering & Gustafsson, 2018) we posit that an environment where there is a strong and coherent organisational culture, and an integration of efforts would help to develop a shared perception of transition demands; and contribute to an effective TDE that facilitates the development and transition of middle adolescent athletes. Consequently, the findings of the current study have potential to inform TD practices at the youth development phase in professional football academy settings.

Knowledge and understanding about effective TDEs is further extended in the current study by adding empirical support for the concept of organisational awareness (OA). Developed from a review of existing TDE case study research, OA has been proposed as a concept whereby an awareness of strengths, limitations and opportunities are reflected at an organisational level (Ransom, 2023). In the current study, examples of OA were reflected in the proactive approach to programme design in recognition that having a high level of resource may not create optimal conditions for developing motivated, humble and rounded athletes. Additionally, OA was highlighted in 'taking the temperature' of the environment as a way of paying attention to how the demands of the programme may be impacting on players and responding accordingly to this. The impact of OA in contributing to an effective TDE can be understood when TDEs are viewed as living or 'complex adaptive systems' (CAS) (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007). From this perspective, parts of the system are seen as interacting and interdependent, where individual parts of the system (e.g. people) work both independently and interdependently on tasks whilst contributing to the collective objectives of the system (Turner, Baker & Morris, 2017); in this case supporting the development and progression of talented athletes. In summary, OA enables TDEs and the staff working in them to function optimally by recognising

and maximising strengths, being mindful of and limiting the impact of potential barriers and being attentive to and pursuing opportunities for development (Ransom, 2023).

*Is the case an effective talent development environment?*

In a recent systematic review one major critique of the talent development environment research centred on issues surrounding the selection of environments that are studied (Feddersen *et al.* 2021). It was argued that pre-selecting 'successful environments' ahead of study may lead a range of methodological and conceptual issues resulting in potential confirmation bias. In the current study, steps were taken to address these concerns including focusing on a bounded case (Hodge & Sharp, 2016); homing in on the full-time programme in the youth development phase as opposed to a broad focus on the academy as a whole allowed for a specific and in-depth study of this area of the programme. In addition, there was a shift away from looking at 'success' towards considering 'effectiveness' as a TDE, in recognition that success viewed through the number of athletes developed may not equate to effectiveness of the TDE or even a positive and healthy experience for young athletes (Henriksen *et al,* 2020; Feddersen *et al.* 2021; Stambulova et al., 2021). Considering effectiveness over success was required given the undoubted success and 'track record' that the club had in developing players.

The objective in talent development and youth sport differs from elite level adult sport, with the ultimate goal of supporting the individual development and progression to the next levels of sport, and not to win competitions, matches or achieve peak performance (Larsen et al. 2020). The case presented here displays several features that align with the overall objective in talent development and demonstrates its effectiveness as a TDE. There is a focus on holistic long-term development and a commitment to developing the person as well as the footballer that is reflected in the words of participants and the activity that goes on in the programme.

Practically, the group of players involved in the programme is made up of boys of mixed ages, meaning they are not selected to form a team they are selected as individual players. The 'best with best' approach that underpins the programme is seen as a vehicle to facilitate the development of individual players as well as creating a sense of belief and motivation in young players. In line with the goal of talent development to support player progression to the next levels of sport, there was both an awareness and active approach to provide 'stepping stones', experiences and opportunities for boys to develop skills that prepare them for future challenges. Taken together, these examples are markers of the programme's effectiveness as a TDE and demonstrate an alignment and compatibility between what goes on in the programme and the objectives of talent development systems. It is possible that this perspective and some of the features outlined here may be considered as part of a guide for considering the effectiveness of other TDEs.

*Conclusion*

The present case study provided an in-depth exploration of the perspectives of multiple stakeholders on the effectiveness of a TDE. Taken 'in-situ' the detail shared here offers practitioners and researchers an opportunity to 'see inside' the TDE of an elite professional football club (Sharpe & Hodge, 2016) and translate what they have seen to their own context (Tracy, 2010). The study provided support for existing findings in TDE research as well as advancing the potential for TDE research findings to be applied in professional football academy settings and the youth development or 'mid-adolescent' ages. Empirical support for the concept of 'Organisational Awareness' was provided with practical examples of how this concept contributes to an effective TDE. Finally, the present study illustrates how a shift away from considering successful TDE to effective TDE may present new opportunities for aligning talent development practices with the objectives of talent development.

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**Empirical Paper 2**


An ethnographic study of the Athletic Talent Development Environment in an English Premier League academy.

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**Abstract**

The study is part two of a two-part set of empirical studies on the talent development environment of a Premier League football club academy programme. The aim of the study was to identify features of the talent development environment that underpinned its effectiveness. The first author adopted the position of an insider-researcher ethnographer over a 27-month period to study the full-time programme within the youth development phase. From over 4000 hours of observation, a thematic analysis of observation data was conducted, and the environment success factors (ESF) model was used to frame the research findings. Three creative vignettes titled 'To those whom much is given much is expected', 'It should never be a surprise' and 'A band of brothers' were produced to document the central features of the environments organisational culture and bring alive the key features underpinning the environments effectiveness. The findings highlighted the importance of a strong organisational culture upheld by cultural leaders and the presence of proximal role models to create confidence, inspiration, and sense of aspiration for current academy players. Initiatives to connect current academy players with proximal role models are suggested as simple yet impactful strategies for creating an effective talent development environment. Recommendations for sport psychologists working in talent development are provided that include the importance of adopting approaches and models of practice that are compatible with the objectives of talent development.

**Introduction**

Understanding issues in talent development has been of interest to sport psychology researchers for many years. Researchers have followed a number of lines of enquiry to better understand factors related to the identification and development of talent; research has included a focus on the innate characteristics of young athletes, their development and practice histories, the roles of parents and coaches (Baker, 2022) before moving the focus to studying the environments in which talent develops (Henriksen 2010). Identifying features of effective talent development environments has generated knowledge that may assist practitioners in proactively creating environments that support the development of talented athletes. This broader perspective reflects a movement in sport psychology towards more 'context-driven sport psychology' practice, which recognises that sport psychology and talent development practices take place within a broader social and cultural context that is both influenced by and influences the people within it (Storm & Larsen, 2020). It can be argued that adopting a context-driven or context-informed approach may underpin effective service delivery, as practitioners are encouraged to look beyond and explore opportunities for development outside of the individual, thus opening new possibilities for learning and development to take place (Schinke & Stambulova, 2017).

In order to generate the kind of knowledge that enables practitioners to adopt a context-driven approach and to develop insights that have the potential to impact practice, appropriate research and research methods are required. Ethnography has been put forward as an approach for studying phenomena in context, and as such offers researchers the opportunity to develop new forms of knowledge and understanding (Krane & Baird, 2005). Ethnography is an approach that involves researchers immersing themselves within a setting to develop in-depth understandings of language, interactions, working practices and subcultures of specific settings (Maitland, 2012). Most commonly, ethnographic research involves prolonged, direct

immersion in an environment to grasp how members live, interact and view life, and has been employed extensively to study sport and exercise settings (Atkinson, 2011), including boxing (Wacquant, 2004) and body building (Monaghan, 2001), and in talent development settings to explore coach-athlete relationships and the influence of organisational culture on athlete development (Champ et al., 2020a; Devaney et al. 2018).

Additionally, ethnographic methods have been used by a number of researchers to study talent development environments. In a systematic review of case study research on talent development environments, ethnographic methods were used in 13/15 studies included; with findings contributing to and further developing knowledge about the features of effective talent development environments (Ransom 2023). Key findings from the review included the importance of developing and maintaining effective relationships between multiple stakeholders, creating varied development programmes and experiences, having clear development principles, and a sense of organisational and cultural coherence within a talent development environment (Ransom 2023). The findings of the review also highlighted considerable variation in the level of engagement that researchers had in the environments studied. The level of engagement varied by the amount of time that researchers had spent in, and immersed themselves within the environment, ranging from just 30 hours to over 300 hours. The roles adopted by researchers also varied, with some adopting purely observational roles, participant observer roles, and others 'fully immersed' as participants in the environments being studied. Questions may be asked about the credibility of findings from studies claiming to use ethnographic methods when such varied application of these methods exists. For example, is it possible to gain in depth understandings of a culture or sub-culture in 30 hours of observation? Or what impact does being a participant observer vs being fully immersed have an a researchers 'access' to a culture or environment?

There are several ways that ethnographic research can be carried out, making ethnography a method that can be flexible and adaptable depending on a particular research question or setting (Atkinson, 2016). Ethnographers may operate from a number of positions when collecting data, including insider vs outsider positions, where insider researchers are situated within the environment under study whereas outsider researchers are not positioned directly in the environment (Atkinson, 2016), and may be described as 'outsiders looking in' (Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013). Other more nuanced positions are also available to researchers, each with distinct differences between what data and information the ethnographer may be able, or have permission, to access (Atkinson, 2016). As such, it is important that there is a level of transparency regarding the ethnographer's position to allow readers to consider strengths, limitations and implications of the findings produced from ethnographic research. In professional football contexts, there is often a level of scepticism and perhaps reticence to give access to academic researchers (Nesti, 2010), and to date there has been limited publication of practitioner-researcher ethnographies in elite sport more broadly (Champ *et al.* 2020b). As a result there are often significant gaps between academic research and applied practice (Devaney *et al.* 2018).

To promote greater transparency and rigour when adopting ethnographic methods to study talent development environments, a two-part set of empirical research studies has been presented to explore the talent development environment within the academy of an English Premier League Football Club. The current study is positioned as 'Part two' of the two-part set. Part one focused on the stakeholder perspectives of the TDE, developed from a thematic analysis of semi-structured interview data. The current study (Part two) seeks to present an ethnographic perspective on the TDE informed by observations, reflections and field notes of the first author, who has been immersed in the club's academy environment over a three-year

period adopting the position of an insider practitioner-researcher (Champ et al., 2020b). It is proposed that insider-practitioner research enables us "understand the cognitive, emotional and/or psychological precepts of participants as well as possess a more profound knowledge of the historical and practical happenings of the field" (Chavez, 2008, p. 481). As such, research of this type enables applied practitioner-researchers to further develop our understanding of the social contexts in which they operate through the research conducted (McLeod, 1999), and can help to address the distance that exists between academic research and applied practice in elite sport (Devaney *et al.* 2018). The current study uses insider-researcher ethnography to examine the talent development environment of an English Premier League Football Club academy and to identify features of the environment contributing to its effectiveness as a talent development environment.

**Methods**

*Research Paradigm*

This research is situated in a social constructionist interpretive paradigm, where meaning is derived from interpretation (Sparkes & Smith, 2009) and knowledge is considered significant when regarded as meaningful (Smith & McGannon, 2017). Moreover, the research conducted was underpinned by beliefs that there are multiple social realties, a relativist ontology and a subjectivist epistemology, where knowledge is created through social interaction. Ethnography approached from a social constructionist perspective means researchers do not approach the research setting from an objective position, but instead emphasise and acknowledge that the assumptions, experiences, beliefs and knowledge of the researcher will shape the research process and output (Keane, 2014). As such, the insider position of the researcher is considered a strength that adds significant value and uniqueness to the research presented here, and in the

interests of transparency an account of the researcher's biographical positioning and dual role within the environment being studied is provided below.

*Biographical Positioning*

The first author (from here onwards, 'I'), arrived with a number of personal experiences and identities to the research setting. These included being an early career sport psychology practitioner, a doctoral candidate and researcher, a former academy footballer and a 'council-estate' kid from a northern working-class city in the UK. I acknowledge that each of these identities will have influenced what I observed, and gave attention to, within the football club, how I felt and experienced my time conducting research, and what I have reported in this study (Cornbleth, 1990). For example, my own experiences of playing, being coached and working within professional football academy environments is likely to have shaped my perceptions of what 'good' or 'effective' coaching/development looks like and influenced what I paid attention to.

My role as a doctoral researcher had particular importance to me when I considered my journey from becoming the first member of my family to attend university to then pursuing a doctoral degree. However, I feel my working-class background has had benefits in connecting with and building relationships with young players and academy staff, many of whom coming from similar backgrounds. In the context of (club) (a more detailed overview of the club is provided in research study Part-One), developing relationships and connecting with stakeholders was key given the relative infancy of sport psychology within the academy (I was the first person employed in such a role by the club) and the perceptions that existed of conducting 'research'. Many doctoral research projects had been completed by staff at the club, mainly focused on

sport science/physiology topics at senior level, which had led to some scepticism about the appropriateness and application of carrying out research within an academy setting.

*Data Collection*

Data collection took place between November 2017 and March 2020. During this time I occupied a dual role; I was an insider within the academy and combined my role as a researcher with that of being a sport psychology practitioner. In my practitioner role (that I commenced in June 2016) I was responsible for delivering sport psychology support to academy players (U12-18), support staff and parents. Having been initially contracted for 3 days per week, this was quickly extended to working full time hours across 5 days per week alongside pursuing a professional doctorate.

Over a 27-month period, spending over 4000 hours within the academy environment, I collected data using a variety of methods associated with ethnographic research, which included observation, reflections, informal interviews and field notes (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). I accumulated more than 350 pages of field notes within a reflective journal, that served as a means of documenting my observations (Bryman, 2016) after each occasion I was present (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). The field notes were descriptive, chronological, and contained key details about activities that had taken place and been observed. The purpose of these observations was to develop a deep understanding of the setting, culture, interactions and activities that took place there-in (Cushion, 2001). Field notes of these observations were combined with personal reflections to promote greater critical reflection (Maharaj, 2016). Reflections detailed my interpretations on what had taken place and considered alternative meanings of events I had observed, as well as how I had come to understand their meaning. Reflective writing is a process that facilitates practitioner researchers

to make sense of their world and the ideas and assumptions that are attached to the role of an insider (Denzin, 2002).

*Data Analysis and Representation*

The initial step in data analysis involved extracting the data that was documented in the field notes and reflective log. I then conducted an interpretive thematic analysis on the raw data, following six steps outlined by Braun et al. (2016) (for a fuller account of the six steps of thematic analysis see part 1). An inductive approach was taken to generating and grouping themes, consistent with the social constructionist underpinnings of ethnography (Atkinson, 2016). The holistic ecological approach (HEA) put forward by Henriksen (2010) was used as a framework to make sense of the data, using the HEA guided analysis towards the environmental factors that underpinned the effectiveness of the FT programme as a TDE; the primary focus of the study. More specifically, the Environment Success Factors (ESF) model (Henriksen, 2010, 2010a, 2010b) was used to help organise and make sense of the data. The ESF model is designed to help explain how environmental factors combine and contribute to an environment's effectiveness. Central to the ESF model is organisational culture, which is comprised of three levels, namely 'cultural artefacts', 'espoused values' and 'basic assumptions' (Schein, 1990). The ESF model has been used to explain successful environments in a range of individual (e.g. Henriksen *et al.* 2010a, 2010b) and team sport environments (e.g. Larsen et al., 2013).

In the final step, a series of creative vignettes were developed to bring to life the organisational culture that is at the heart of the talent development environment and underpins its effectiveness. Creative non-fiction is not used to make up events, rather to use techniques of fictional writing (e.g. compsite characters, metaphors, colloquial/vernacular language) to

create evocative and thought-provoking texts in order to resonate more deeply with readers (Smith, McGannon & Williams, 2016), whilst still describing a situation as accurately as possible (Champ *et al.* 2020a). The content of the creative vignettes grounded the analysis of over 4000 hours of observation and engagement with key stakeholders in the talent development environment, clearly demonstrating significant embeddedness in the context being studied. The use of fictional writing is growing in popularity in sport and exercise psychology to share experiences more holistically and connect with more diverse readers audiences than may be possible when using traditional academic or scientific writing styles (Krane et al., 2014).

*Research Quality and Methodological Rigour*

A relativist ontological approach (Sparkes & Smith, 2009) to research quality was adopted. Smith and McGannon (2017) argued that the foundations of research quality lie in member reflections, critical dialogue and its contribution to knowledge. The primary author (DR) engaged in member reflections throughout the data collection period, that involved periodically (e.g. at the mid and end points of each season) sharing reflections and research findings with members of the football club academy and the research team to explore emerging data and examine interpretations of the data (Smith & McGannon, 2017). Engaging with critical friends and the research team to further challenge and question interpretations of the data throughout the process was carried out to add further dimensionality and reflexivity to the interpretive work (Champ *et al.* 2020a). It is hoped that this research is judged on whether it makes a meaningful contribution to sport psychology and talent development environment research; the unique position of the primary author means that no other researcher would have been able to gain access to this environment for such an extended period of time to generate the insights presented in this study.

*Ethical Considerations*

Ethnography researchers have extensively documented the types of ethical challenges associated with ethnographic methods (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Atkinson, 2016). For example, gaining informed consent and ensuring participant confidentiality are some of the key ethical challenges for those occupying an insider practitioner-researcher role (Champ *et al.* 2020b). Ethical approval for the study was sought and approved by Liverpool John Moores University ethics board and specific guidance was sought from Ferdinand et al., (2007) work on the ethical responsibilities of ethnographers. All individuals within the study have been anonymised with pseudonyms, and any information that may be used to identify individuals has been changed or removed to ensure confidentiality (Brewer, 2000). However, given the dual role of practitioner-researchers it is possible that the identity of the organisation being studied could be identified despite the use of a pseudonym. In being aware of my responsibility to protect the confidentiality and interests of participants at all times, despite issues of confidentiality not being raised by the organisation, additional steps were taken to protect the identities of individuals. This included the decision to represent the data through the use of creative vignettes, which allowed for additional layers of anonymity. Furthermore, I ensured that the research participants were clear about the research objectives and their anonymity, and I consulted with stakeholders engaging in member reflections at different stages of the study (Champ *et al.* 2020a).

**Results and Discussion**

Three creative vignettes are presented that aim to give the reader an insight into the organisational culture that underpins the talent development environment of the FT programme of the academy. Organisational culture is a central feature of the ESF model (Figure 1) that seeks to explain the factors that underpin an environments effectiveness as a TDE. The

narratives presented are connected in that they represent the basic assumptions, espoused values, and artefacts of the TDE that was studied over 27 months of practitioner-researcher engagement.
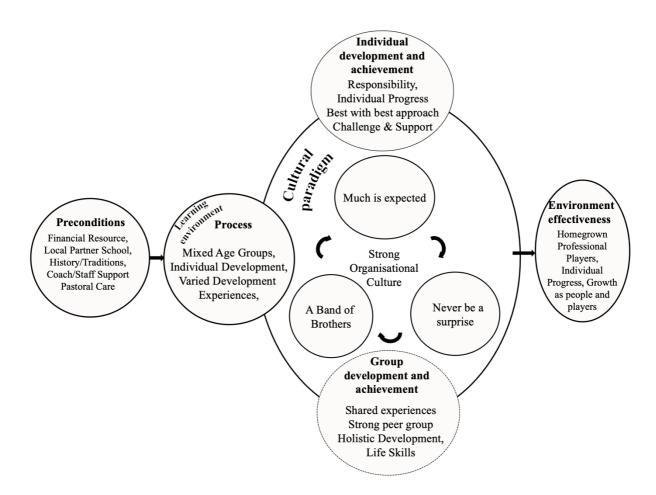


*Figure 1*. Environment Success Factors Model – Key organisational and cultural factors underpinning the effectiveness of the TDE.

**Narrative 1: To those whom much is given, much is expected…**

The following narrative details a scenario where coaches on the FT programme were faced with a challenge regarding how to manage a situation where the players had not arrived on time ready to train.

Coaches Jon and Charlie were waiting on the indoor training pitch for the players to arrive, having set up the practices ready for todays session. A few minutes passed before they were joined by Barry an experienced coach within the academy who asked where the boys were and what time the session was due to start. "10 minutes ago Baz, the boys have arrived late from school so we're just waiting for them to get changed and get going" replied Jon. A few more minutes passed before a few of the younger boys started to arrive on to the training pitch in ones and twos. When asked about why they were late and where the other boys were the responses were a sheepish and vague – the boys weren't giving much away. The boys that had arrived began practicing with the footballs while Jon, Charlie and Barry began discussing what to do next, Jon leant on Barry for advice and asked what they should do as time was passing by. Barry suggested that Charlie go to the dressing room and round up the other lads and they would speak to the boys all together. When the boys arrived, Barry asked everyone to come together and take a seat on the training pitch, he led the way and sat on the ground. "What is going on boys, why are you late? Barry's question was met with silence before he directed it to Michael, the head boy of the programme. What followed was a vague account of the boys being a few minutes late for the mini-bus and an argument about who should have gone to collect the kit from the kitroom. Barry asked the boys to think about the poster displayed in their changing room that read 'To those whom much is given, much is expected' and what was meant by that. The conversation went back and forth with the boys sharing their thoughts before Barry summarised "Being involved in this programme is a privilege, you boys are in a privileged position that your team mates, that the other boys at the club, that boys up and down the country, that boys all around the world in fact would love to be in… it is a wonderful opportunity to be a part of this programme and you have a responsibility to yourselves and to the staff here who have been here waiting and setting up, to make the most of the opportunity. And to you older boys, Michael, Tommy, Aayden, Drew, you have a responsibility to the younger boys to set the standard, you are role models whether you like it or not you are role models… these boys look up to you. So, remember to those whom much is given, much is expected". The boys went off to train and after the session the coaches met in the boot room and began talking about the session Charlie commented "in fairness, the lads were right at it once they got started, it's a shame they wasted so much time to begin with" After a pause Barry responded, "It wasn't wasted, those little life lessons are as much a part of the job as the football sessions we're developing young men – and anyway they're probably knackered it's been a busy few weeks". The coaches nodded in agreement before the conversation drifted.

**Analysis**

The first narrative highlights the type of challenge that coaches and staff working in a professional football academy, and youth sport more broadly, may encounter when working with young athletes that can often be talented but challenging (Bickley et al., 2016). The boys in the FT programme are at an age that coincides with the transitional period of adolescence, where young people are experiencing significant biological, psychosocial and cognitive development (Carr, 2006). During this phase it is common for coaches to experience frustration at the behaviour, attitudes and decisions of the young people they work with (Bickley et al. 2016). However, the development that takes place during this adolescent phase also presents an opportunity for coaches, support staff and academies to support young athletes to develop and learn a range of psychosocial skills and abilities, including how to manage complex emotions and make independent decisions (Ong, McGregor & Daley, 2018).

A strong and coherent organisational culture has been consistently identified as a central feature of effective talent development environments (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017) Organisational culture acts as a guide for behaviour, helping members to understand what is acceptable and not (Schein, 2010). Having a clear sense of what is acceptable and not is key to being able create an environment to effectively support the psychosocial development of young athletes. Adopting Schein's (1990) position on organisational culture, Barry used the cultural artefacts (the poster in the players changing room) to remind players and staff of the basic assumptions (e.g. that players should demonstrate responsibility for their actions and maximise their opportunity) and espoused values (e.g. older players should act as role models) of the programme. As an experienced and long-serving coach, Barry used this opportunity and his position as a cultural leader (Schein, 2010) to reinforce how young players are expected to

think, feel and act key in a way that was coherent with the basic assumptions of the organisational culture.

The narrative also highlights the importance of organisational culture for guiding staff behaviour in a talent development environment. The use of cultural embedding mechanisms (Schein, 2010) by Barry, e.g., choosing to view the scenario as a learning opportunity as opposed to an opportunity to punish or narrowly focus on the impact on the football session, also served to reinforce to the other coaches the importance of taking a long term holistic development perspective and remind them of their responsibility to support players' psychosocial development. The approach taken served to reinforce and preserve the beliefs and assumptions underpinning the organisational culture, whilst demonstrating an age-appropriate and developmental approach to supporting adolescent athletes that acknowledges 'adolescents are not mini-adults' (Ong, McGregor & Daley, 2018).

**Narrative 2: It should never be a surprise**

The club has an impressive record of promoting academy players to the senior team, and since its inception the FT programme within the academy has seen a number of graduates progress into the first team. There is a sense of pride and excitement within the academy whenever an academy player makes that step into the first team, and it is common to hear staff recounting stories and memories about the players' formative years. The following narrative centers on a discussion among academy staff following the senior debut of an academy graduate.

It was the morning after a midweek European game and the morning after Will had made his first senior appearance for the club. A group of academy staff were sitting having breakfast in the canteen at the training ground talking about the previous nights game. A coach commented on how well Will had performed, how 'he'd taken it all in his stride like he was meant to be

there' and another talked about how 'he didn't seem at all fazed by it'. Conversations continued in this vein throughout the day and during a later conversation Paul one of the most experienced coaches in the academy said, "It's even more impressive when you think it was the first time he'd played at the stadium". Other senior staff including coaches and members of the academy management team within the academy were also present and initially challenged Paul's comment, to them it seemed implausible that an academy graduate had made his senior team debut at the club's stadium without ever playing a competitive game there before. Paul, who had seen numerous academy players make the step up to the first team, offered some of his experience "to be a young player at this club is quite special, it is unique there is something here that other clubs don't have and that is a history of our players playing in the first team, yes Will might not have played there before but some of his mates have, and some of their mates have and some of their mates have – so you see they have reference points, they are almost in touching distance, so for Will its not a surprise for him get into our first team, knowing him he's probably been expecting it to come before now, our job is to make sure it is never a surprise to play in our first team". Staff listened intently to Paul whilst he shared his take on things, and debate ensued about how to ensure players are adequately prepared to take their opportunity when it comes.

Several months later, a meeting was held between academy staff to review the programme and the types of experienced that the club offered young players. The circumtances surrounding Will's debut was raised the senior staff leading the meeting, and staff were encouraged to reflect on whether given the choice, they would have a young player debut having never played a competitive fixture at the club's main stadium. The discussion highlighted the importance of learning from experience and seeking out opportunities to maximise the learning opportunities that the programme offered young players. During this meeting a member of the academy management team reminded the staff of Paul's previous comment – 'that our job is to make sure it is never a surprise to play in our first team' before adding that 'we have a responsibility to create a programme that sets players up to succeed'.

## Analysis

A consistent feature of successful and effective talent development environments is the presence and connection to proximal role models (e.g., Henriksen et al., 2010a, 2010b, 2011;

Seanor *et al.* 2017; Storm et al., 2020). Several positive outcomes are proposed related to the presence of proximal role models, including providing prospective elite athletes with a model of how to prepare, practice and perform in elite sport environments (Storm et al. 2020). A range of psychosocial benefits are also proposed, including supporting prospective athletes' motivation by 'having someone to aspire to' (Henriksen et al. 2011) and giving prospective athletes confidence and belief that 'it is possible' to achieve success in their sport (Henriksen *et al.* 2010b). In the narrative presented, Paul described the impact that proximal role models within the club may have had on Will, whilst reinforcing the need for the club to ensure young players have the confidence that they can be successful. Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory offers a rationale for why proximal role models may support the self-efficacy and confidence of younger athletes who are able to successfully transition to senior level. Bandura proposed that self-efficacy is underpinned by four principal sources of information; past performance, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological states. Will had seen a number of players successfully transition before him, including players that he had trained and played with and against, and it is likely that seeing other players successfully make the step to the first team acted as vicarious experiences that supported his own self-efficacy to make the step. Additionally, previous experiences of playing with and against these other players may also act as foundation of past performance success to support Will's own confidence in his ability to be successful. Self-efficacy has previously been used to explain successful transition outcomes in professional football settings (Morris, 2021; Morris, Tod & Eubank, 2016).

The importance of a long-term development approach and aligned methods within the development system that explicity prepares athletes for success at senior level has long been established (Martindale et al., 2007). In other studies exploring effective TDEs in professional football, the long term development of individual players is prioritised over short term or team

success (Ryom et al. 2020; Larsen et al. 2020). The priority of preparing players for future success is highlighted in the narrative above in the recognition that this is a strategic goal for academy staff. The 'slow and steady' long term development approach (Seanor et al. 2017) requires strategic planning over several years to provide young players with the experiences and learning opportunities to develop 'step-by-step' to meet future challenges (Martindale et al. 2007). The reflective approach demonstrated by academy staff following a success enabled them to identify a gap in Will's development journey, and make improvements to the programme for future players. An openness to learning from experience and striving to improve on weaknesses at a programme or development system level demonstrates organisational awareness (Ransom 2023), another feature of effective TDEs.

**Narrative 3: A Band of Brothers**

The FT programme is designed to accelerate the development of high potential players in the youth development phase (U13-16) of the academy. Entry to the programme is by invitation only, and as such the programme has a sense of prestige among academy staff, academy players and parents. The successes of previous players adds to this, and the third narrative focuses on the day-to-day interactions and relationships between players on the FT programme within the academy, and the connection to the players that have gone before them.

David, Tom, and Patrik walked out from their digs (host family accommodation) at around 8.30 and although looking like they'd not long since woken they were already bantering back and forth. Dressed in their matching school uniforms, each with a club rucksack thrown over their backs they walked on in the direction of the school. As they turned into the street that the school was on the three boys stopped at the corner and waited, to be joined a few minutes later by Aaymen and Max dressed in their matching school uniforms and club rucksack thrown over their shoulder. "What took you so long, we've been waiting here ages" shouted Patrik as they arrived. "It was Aaymen taking about 20 minutes to sort his hair out as usual" replied Max as

the boys continued on towards the school. Although Max was the youngest of the five players as an U14 (Aaymen and David U15s, and Tom and Patrik U16s), he seemed to be a key part of the group, in the middle of the action trying his best to wind the other boys up. Depsite a cursory headlock en route, the other boys seemed to accept and take him in as part of their group. As the 5 boys arrived at the school, they were greeted by another 6 boys who were waiting for them outside, in the same matching school uniform and club rucksacks thrown over their shoulders.

As lunch time approached the club mini-bus and driver Karl were waiting outside the school gates to take the boys to the training ground for the afternoons training session. As the boys arrived and piled onto the mini-bus Max darted into the front seat to be joined by Michael. Despite it only being a short 10-minute journey to the training ground, the two front seats were important as this put Michael and Max in charge of the music. As the bus arrived at the training ground, the boys quickly jumped off and headed to the changing room specifically reserved for players on the FT programme. This changing room was theirs, and one that the other players in the academy aspired to be in. A short time later the boys were out to train, arriving out on the training pitch on mass, but at this point a small group of boys Michael, David and Max split off to join the youth team training session that was about to begin and were greeted first by Andre and George who had previously been a part of the FT programme before transitioning into the youth team. And for the next few minutes these five players passed the ball around between each other, chatting and laughing before the session began in earnest. And the two training groups trained side by side for the next 90 minutes.

After training the boys on the FT programme re-joined the minibus and Karl to head to a local shopping centre and games arcade. Each half term the boys on the programme had a social activity as a treat and opportunity to spend some time with each other and some club staff in a informal setting. As the players and Karl arrived, they were greeted by a couple of coaches, an analyst, the education officer before heading off to bowling and have some food. Some 11 hours after meeting for school, they boys were back on the mini-bus and heading home with Karl doing the rounds to drop groups of boys off back at their digs.

**Analysis**

The holistic ecological approach to talent development is built on the belief that the environment in which talent develops is integral to the development that takes place (Henriksen, 2010). The environment itself is influenced by past, present, and future goals, is made up of multiple levels e.g., macro, meso and micro levels (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), and has a range of different stakeholders and individuals operating within it. The third narrative depicts the diversity of the TDE and the different domains that the young players operate in, including host family accommodation, the clubs partner school, the clubs training facility and the different training groups young players may be involved in. Joining the FT programme presents young players with a number of transitions e.g. becoming a member of a new and exclusive programme, joining a new school and in most cases moving away from home and into a host family. There are several well documented challenges related to transitions that may be experienced at an athletic, psychological, psychosocial and academic/environmental levels (Richardson *et al.* 2013; Wylleman *et al.* 2013; Wylleman & Rosier, 2016). The relationships between players within the programme appear to be strong and supportive. It is possible that the shared experience of experiencing the transition into the programme develops a sense of connection and understanding between the boys. The bond between the players appears to be a strong source of social support, wihch has been identified as a key factor in successfully navigating transitions in sport (Morris et al. 2016).

The players in the programme must also navigate changes in identity, reflected in their matching school uniforms, club issue bag and moving into their own changing room in the academy. Identifying with their involvement in the programme may lead to a number of outcomes, both positive and negative. For example, a number of studies show that identity narrowing can have negative consequences for athlete wellbeing if athletes get de-selected (e.g.

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Stambulova et al., 2009) or experience critical moments such as severe injury (Nesti *et al.* 2012). However, it is also possible that identifying with involvement in the programme may lead to increased motivation and commitment to succeed (e.g. Pummel, Harwood & Lavallee, 2008). The relationships between the players in the programme transcend their chronological age groups e.g. U14, U15, U16 in a way that is not typical, as most often boys would be friends with other boys in their age group teams. As such it is possible that their involvement in the programme and the 'best with best' approach may help to prepare players for future transitions to higher levels when traditional one year age groups are disbanded. As seen with Max, it seems likely that having existing relationships with players in other age groups may help to support and prepare players for these future transitions.

The transitional demands placed on players within the programme appear to be recognised by the club staff. The social activities programme demonstrates a commitment to creating opportunities for players and staff to socialise and further develop the kinds of relationships that may support players progression (Morris *et al.* 2016). Additionally, the time and resource allocated to this demonstrates the value placed on pastoral care and ensuring the players in the programme have an enjoyable experience alongside their football development.

**General Discussion & Applied Implications**

This study was part-two of a two-part set of empirical research studies exploring the talent development environment of the full-time programme within the youth development phase of an English Premier League Football Club academy. This study (Part two) used insider-researcher ethnography to better understand and identify key features of the TDE that underpinned its effectiveness. Although there has been a growth in research exploring TDEs over the last ten years (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2023), these are typically presented with a

combination of semi-structured interview data and ethnographic data. This approach can be limited and the ethnographic contribution unclear depending on the level of engagement and access afforded to researchers. This is a particular challenge in professional football environments where there can be a reluctance to allow access to outsiders and academics (Nesti, 2010). The current study offers a unique insight and perspective on a TDE in professional football due to the dual role held by the first author as a practitioner-researcher. Carried out over a continuous 27 month period, the direct and prolonged immersion of the practitioner-researcher offers a novel contribution to the TDE literature, grounded in over 4000 hours of engagement in the TDE, the findings offer an in depth perspective on one of the worlds' leading talent development systems.

In this paper, we have presented an insight into the organisational culture of a world-leading TDE. We adopted the ESF model as a framework to guide the analysis and represent findings, a model that has been used extensively in TDE research to help explain why TDEs are effective and successful (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2023). Furthermore, our study extends knowledge and understanding of what underpins effective TDEs and may assist sporting directors, academy directors, sport psychologists and other practitioners working in talent development. The use of the ESF model has an explanatory function, and guides readers to consider how the organisational culture of the TDE supports effective talent development. The first creative vignette highlights the role that experienced staff and coaches can play as cultural leaders (Storm & Svendsen, 2022), in shaping and maintaining a coherent organisational culture. The role of cultural leaders appears significant for guiding the behaviour of developing players and also other staff members. In the vignette presented, Barry acted as a cultural leader and reinforced the values and basic assumptions of the environment to both players and colleagues. Although Barry did not formally hold a more senior position in the organisation than the other

two coaches, he utilised his experience and contextual knowledge to uphold the key cultural principles. Academy directors or those in leadership positions in talent development systems may want to consider who the cultural leaders are within their respective environments, and dwraw on those with the contextual knowledge and experience to positively support and maintain the organisational culture in their environment. Looking beyond formal organisational charts and management hierarchies may help to identify individuals to support the development of a coherent organisational culture at different levels of the organisation. Recent research has shown that environments with different approaches to talent development within the same sport can develop international elite athletes (Storm et al., 2022). It is perhaps the coherence and consistency within the approach and organisational culture that creates the kind of psychological safety, stability and clarity that is essential for creating a learning environment (Henriksen *et al.* 2014).

The findings presented in this study add further support for existing TDE research findings that highlight the importance of proximal role models, adopting a long-term development approach and supportive relationships between players and staff within a TDE (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2023; Storm et al., 2020). The psychosocial benefits that these features create have been outlined and include; increased confidence, motivation, sense of belonging and feelings of support. The psychosocial benefits outlined may also facilitate talent development by supporting and preparing players for transitions (Morris *et al.* 2016) and future challenges. The presence of proximal role models in particular appears to have a strong influence on the talent development environment, and engenders motivation and self-belief in players' as well as supporting the technical development by training alongside older and more advanced players (Henriksen *et al.* 2010b; Storm *et al.* 2020; Larsen *et al.* 2020). Conversely, the absence of proximal role models has been identified in previous research as a barrier to effective talent

development (Henriksen *et al.* 2014), and in professional football settings the impact this may have on players' motivation and belief that they can successfully transition from academy to first team has been highlighted (Flatgard et al., 2020). As a consequence, those working in talent development environments might consider how to create or preserve connections to proximal role models. Researchers have proposed ideas such as formal and informal mentoring systems between junior and senior athletes (Morris *et al.* 2016), shared training facilities (Seanor *et al.* 2017), and opportunities to practice alongside senior athletes (Henriksen *et al.* 2011). In professional football, and in relation to the level of financial investment that clubs are making in their academy programmes (The Premier League, 2022), ensuring there are connections between academy players, academy graduates and senior players may be one of the most cost effective yet impactful strategies clubs could employ.

Our study extends the use of ethnography in sport psychology research and has generated new, context-driven knowledge that may assist other practitioners and sport psychologists working in talent development and professional football. Recent developments in sport psychology research and practice have emphasised context-driven sport psychology practice as a cornerstone of effective service delivery (Stambulova & Schinke, 2017). The methodology employed in this study and the findings presented have enabled us to provide context-driven knowledge in a setting that is typically difficult to access (Nesti, 2010) and where gaps between academic literature and the realities of applied practice exist (Devaney *et al.* 2018). Given that we have emphasised the importance of a coherent organisational culture for an effective TDE, we contend that sport psychology practice delivered in talent development contexts should reflect the overarching objectives in talent development and be focused on supporting the long-term holistic development of young athletes. This means that psychology support should be delivered in a way that is age-appropriate and recognises the biological, psychological and

cognitive development stage of the athletes. Psychologists working in talent development settings may benefit from reflecting on their professional philosophy, models of practice, and the methods and interventions they employ (Poczwadowski, Sherman & Ravizza, 2004), and considering how compatible and aligned these are to supporting the long-term development of young athletes. For example, it may be argued that particular approaches, models of practice and interventions may be more or less aligned to 'Sophist' (e.g., technique-driven) or 'Socratic' (e.g., in pursuit of personal growth) philosophies (Corlett, 1996). If the objective in talent development is to support the long-term holistic development of young people, then the congruence between this objective and the models of approaches, models and interventions used by sport psychologists may be examined and challenged.

*Limitations*

Ethnographic research, like many other approaches to conducting qualitative research may be challenged based on generalizability (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). In this study, the environment under study has been presented as a unique talent development environment with a history and track record that is worthy of study. We were explicit that achieving generalizability was not an objective as each context is different, however we have presented ideas and themes that are consistent with previous talent development environment research (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2023). Similarities with the findings of previous research suggest that the findings of this study may be generalisable to other similar contexts, in particular professional football academies in England that operate under the same rules and regulations and must meet the same criteria and standards laid down by The Premier League (2011). There are a limited number of practitioner-researcher ethnographies in elite sport (e.g., Devaney *et al.* 2018; Champ *et al.* 2020a, 2020b), and as the first solely ethnographic study in TDE research of its kind, other studies using ethnography may help us to better understand whether the findings are unique or are shared

across different settings and sports. The insights shared in this study are primarily based on the perspective and reflections of the first author, and as such it is possible that others may have reached and framed their conclusions differently (Champ *et al.* 2020a). However we believe the level of access afforded to an insider practitioner-researcher makes this study have a meaningful contribution to sport psychology and talent development environment research.

**Conclusions**

As part of a two-part set of empirical research papers, the current study aimed to identify key features of the TDE that underpinned its effectiveness. Using insider-researcher ethnography, the first author studied the full-time programme in the youth development phase of an English Premier League club academy over a 27 month period. The environment success factors (ESF) model (Henriksen, 2010) was used to frame and present the findings and three creative vignettes were developed to take the reader into the environment and give an insight into the organisational culture. The narratives 'To those whom much is given much is expected', 'It should never be a surprise' and 'A band of brothers' highlighted the importance of a strong organisational culture upheld by cultural leaders, having proximal role models that prospective athletes can connect with and developing supportive relationships among players and staff for an effective TDE. The context-driven knowledge that has been created may assist a range of stakeholders in creating effective TDEs and we have suggested identifying cultural leaders and connecting youth athletes to proximal role models as strategies that are financially cost free yet impactful. Context-informed recommendations for sport psychologists and sport psychology practice in talent development environments are also provided. Recommendations for sport psychologists include examining the relationship between philosophy, approaches and models of practice and the objectives of the contexts or setting they are working in.

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**Research Commentary**

The research commentary presented here will give an insight into the research journey I have been on throughout the professional doctorate. I will look to provide a candid reflection on my experience of navigating the research process by following the chronological route I have taken to complete the research components, beginning with the process of identifying research topics and questions to explore, creating a research team or network of support, and ending with the process of conducting and writing up the research components. I will refer to my reflective diary and include quotations to 'bring to life' my experiences at different points in the process and to provide an insight into my development as a researcher.

My early experiences of approaching research on the doctorate centred on identifying topic areas and research questions to explore. I was keen to find topics and questions that had relevance to me and to my role working in a professional football club academy. I wanted to research something that could meaningfully impact my practice and support my development as a practitioner in the setting I worked in. I also became increasingly aware of how demanding the doctorate programme would be and the volume of work involved in order to successfully achieve the qualification alongside working in a full-time role. Reflecting on this, I made the decision to focus on talent development environments (TDE) as a research area that has been an expanding over the last 10 years (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2023). Moreover TDE research had relevance to my work setting, aligned to my professional philosophy and was of interest to my employer and as such opened opportunities to conduct research inside the setting I was working in. Excitedly, I began to move ahead with how I would go about completing the research components and arranged to meet Dr David Tod (formerly of LJMU) who had been leading the teaching around the doctoral research process on the programme. It quickly dawned on me that I had significant gaps in my knowledge about conducting research to the level

expected. This level of uncertainty was new to me, having felt quite comfortable in my previous academic programmes. Through a series of meetings with David, I knew I had to update my knowledge around the process of conducting research from better understanding research paradigms and theoretical orientations to then aligning these with research questions and appropriate methods in order to produce 'D-level' work.

After clarifying the focus of my research activity, I began the process of applying for ethical approval for my empirical studies. Feedback from the University ethics committee was also useful for helping me to consider more deeply the ethical implications of conducting insider research as part of the process. I was challenged to consider how my role as a practitioner-researcher and how to effectively communicate the aims of the research and gain consent in an ethical way whilst maintaining the integrity of conducting the research (Ferdinand et al., 2007). I also benefitted from creating a research team and support network to help guide me through the process as both supervisors and 'critical friends'. From an LJMU perspective I was fortunate to be able to learn from Dr Mark Nesti, Dr Martin Eubank and Dr Martin Littlewood, and through my applied work I had met Dr Carsten Hvid Larsen (University of Southern Denmark) who had extensive experience of conducting TDE case study research and had also carried out studies in professional football settings. Being able to learn from the experiences of these esteemed academics helped me to feel more confident about the process I would take to carrying out my research, relieving some of the uncertainty and doubt I had experienced at the beginning of the process.

*"After meeting Carsten and discussing my research ideas I felt much more confident and clearer about how to go about conducting my research – leaning into his experience was invaluable and it feels like I have some 'tracks to run on' now and the fact that he is keen to be involved in the project feels like a huge step forward".*

After gaining ethical approval I began collecting data as an insider researcher alongside my role providing sport psychology support within the academy. I found the process illuminating, collecting field notes and reflecting on the things that I was seeing in the environment helped me to develop a greater insight and understanding of how the TDE operated. It was also demanding on both time and emotion to manage the dual role (Champ et al., 2020a, 2020b), but it was satisfying to observe and then step back to reflect on and challenge my assumptions about TDEs. The opportunity to interview stakeholders within the environment as part of my research also yielded new insights about the features that underpinned the TDE and the club as a whole. Given the typically fast paced nature of professional football environments (Nesti, 2010) it is rare to get the opportunity to sit down and have extended periods of dialogue, but the interviews afforded me the opportunity to gain insights from individuals that may not otherwise have been possible. Whilst there are challenges that exist between research and practice in sport psychology (Champ et al. 2020b), from a personal perspective I feel that engaging in research activity had a positive impact on my ability to build new relationships and develop context-specific knowledge (Storm & Larsen, 2020) that has been able to directly influence my practice.

My research journey took a different route from March 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic bringing a halt to my 'field work' my focus shifted back to the systematic review that had been ongoing in the background. My systematic review and thematic synthesis of TDE case study research aimed to bring together and synthesise findings of existing research and identify features that underpinned effective TDEs. Initially, I had planned to complete a qualitative meta-study, but after a series of supervisory meetings decided to reimagine the study as a thematic synthesis. I simply did not feel as though I had the mental capacity or sufficient knowledge of research methods to undertake such a task. If I'm honest the journey had ground

to a halt, perhaps for the first time in my life I wasn't sure I was up to the task. Fortunately, I was able to lean on the support of the network of staff mentioned above and peers on the programme for guidance on approaches to completing a systematic review – this again reinforced to me the importance of supervision and peer supervision in sport psychology research and practice. After reimagining the study as a thematic synthesis I felt the clouds lift and I could see the way forward again. I felt more confident and engaged in the process, this approach connected with my motivations for doing research – to do research that has the potential inform my practice. Whilst I may not be passionate about 'hard core' research methodology, I do have the upmost respect for those that are after finding myself somewhat lost and disorientated in this world. In order to ensure I completed a rigorous and defensible systematic review, I developed a study protocol in line with the PRISMA-P Statement 2015 that would act as a roadmap for the completing the study (and prevent getting lost along the way).

Throughout the research journey I was also required to examine my own values and beliefs and consider how these impacted on the research process. I had to reflect on my ontological and epistemological positions, in basic terms my beliefs about the nature of reality and beliefs about how knowledge is understood and generated (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). My belief is that there are multiple realities and people experience the world subjectively. As a consequence I acknowledge that (from my perspective) there is not an objective reality when it comes to peoples experiences instead these experiences are relative and as such I subscribe to ontological relativism. Furthermore, stemming from the belief that people experience the world subjectively, I subscribe to a subjectivist epistemology and believe that the way we understand and develop knowledge about people is also subjective and cannot be captured objectively. It is my belief that knowledge is co-created between people through social interaction. As such

the researcher also brings their knowledge and experience to the process of generating knowledge. Taken together, my research is situated within a social constructionist, interpretive paradigm. Developing my understanding of research paradigms and the different ontological and epistemological positions was liberating and enabled me to approach conducting research in a more authentic way. It gave me the freedom to acknowledge my role as an active part of generating knowledge was still grounded in a research paradigm and that research did not have to be conducted from an 'objective distance', free from my own experiences, values and beliefs.

Developing my knowledge about research paradigms, theoretical orientations and research methods and the importance of alignment between these areas helped me to develop a greater sense of competence as a researcher. I felt more confident in being able to articulate and defend decisions that I was making and discuss these with supervisors. With greater knowledge I felt better able to demonstrate rigour and credibility in my research, and I was able to move away from broad trustworthiness criteria paralleled to quantitative concepts of reliability and validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) towards a non-foundational approach (Smith & Sparkes, 2013) that has greater alignment and coherence with the underpinnings of a relativist approach. Adopting a non-foundational approach allowed me to communicate with the reader the values that I held about conducting research and align these values with research criterion (Smith & Deemer, 2000). For example, as I have discussed research that has the potential to impact practice is valuable to me so the value of being 'impactful' was translated to become the criteria of 'adding new knowledge'. Along with other criteria I was then able to appraise research on whether it added new knowledge and appraise research in a way that aligned with my values and beliefs as a researcher and was coherent with the principles of a relativist approach.

In addition to developing my knowledge around research methods, my research journey also enabled me to develop my understanding of the TDE research area. Having read and immersed myself in the existing research I felt more knowledgeable about the topic area and able to see the similarities, differences and gaps in the existing literature base. Throughout the phases of completing data analysis and writing up my studies, I felt better able to position my studies alongside the existing research and elaborate as to what my research could add to knowledge in the TDE literature base – a key component of 'D level' research. For example, resulting from the thematic synthesis I proposed the concept of 'Organisational Awareness' (OA) as a new feature of effective talent development environments. OA refers to a sense of awareness of strengths, limitations and opportunities at an organisational level. Although not identified specifically in any one individual study, by synthesising the data across studies the concept of OA was born. I doubted whether I was experienced enough/smart enough/academic enough to coin new terms or concepts but after discussion with supervisors I felt reassured that I was allowed to contribute something new to the discourse around TDE; and that OA may have the potential to grow with further elaboration and research. I began to feel more like a doctoral level researcher.

*"Having been so uncertain at times during the process of completing the systematic review I wasn't sure about whether I was ready to introduce my own ideas but after speaking to Martin about my idea and explaining it to him, with the rationale and examples of similar concepts in clinical psychology it felt great to get some positive feedback and know that my ideas made sense. It is a strange feeling to reach the point where I feel like I have something new to add to the research area".*

Writing up my empirical studies gave me the opportunity to say more about TDEs and further enhance my contributions to the TDE discourse. Presenting my empirical studies in two parts, part one representing stakeholder perspectives on the TDE at the football club and part two an ethnographic perspective on the TDE also allowed me to diversify my writing style. The use of creative nonfictional vignettes in study 2 demonstrates my growing confidence and progression as a researcher with the move away from the more traditional approaches I had adopted when presenting findings in previous studies. I also believe that presenting the case study in two parts allows readers to differentiate between the perspectives of stakeholders and my own observations and interpretations thus demonstrating credibility and transparency – something that I had and others had noted as a limitation of existing TDE case study research (Feddersen *et al.* 2021).

Having the TDE as a consistent research topic for the systematic review and two empirical papers has enabled me to develop an in depth understanding of my chosen topic area. It was important to me to carry out research that had the potential to impact on practice and on my development as a practitioner. I chose to research an area that aligned with my professional philosophy and beliefs about how psychology (and psychologists) can effectively support people. For example, I believe that the environments in which people operate can have an impact on a person's behaviour, well-being and performance and one must consider the impact of the context or environment in order to deliver effective sport psychology support. Moreover, the services that we deliver should be context-informed (Storm & Larsen, 2020) and look to both support individuals and optimise their environments. Conducting research into TDEs has given me greater confidence and conviction in my approach to delivering sport psychology and I feel has enabled me to develop into a more rounded practitioner. For example I took great pride from an experience where a colleague introduced me by saying 'Dan is a psychologist

but he is much more than just that'. I also feel that my applied work has complemented and added value to the research process, I have been able to gain access to an environment that may not have been accessible or open to being studied were it not for my role as a practitioner and my interpretations of the data are richer for it. I believe my research activity, whilst in its infancy has foundations to build on or perhaps a route to follow for further research that can make a valuable contribution to sport and exercise psychology.

In summary, the research journey on the professional doctorate has been incredibly challenging with periods of doubt and uncertainty along the way but ultimately a challenge that I needed in order to develop my knowledge and myself. Through the process I have grappled with the complexities of research paradigms, the concepts of ontology and epistemology and the different research methods that are available. Though still a work in progress, I feel I am now a more informed, knowledgeable and confident researcher as a result. Engaging in the process has enabled me to develop a clearer understanding of the beliefs and values I hold about doing research and the types of research that I enjoy doing, something I wasn't sure I would be able to say at points along the way. Importantly to me, I believe I have been able to produce research that has the potential to impact on and bridge gaps between research and practice; and I am confident that I am a better practitioner as a result.

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**Reflective Practice Commentary**

**Preface:**

Early in my professional doctorate experience I presented to my peer group on the use of metaphors in sport psychology practice; more specifically I talked about the "journey" metaphor to engage and encourage clients to reflect on and discuss challenging experiences. Looking back on my own journey on the programme, it is with some irony that I now realise how different my expectations were from reality. The professional and personal growth that has taken place has been more profound than I could ever have imagined.

*"Don't aim at success. The more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue"* (Frankl, 1992).

**Introduction:**

The following meta-reflective commentary will be a broadly chronological account of my professional (and personal) development story. According to Stelter (2014), by telling stories about ourselves and the experiences that we are involved in, it is possible to better understand the way we sense, think and act; and it is through this process that our experiences become *meaningful*. Bringing together key experiences, past-reflections and providing 'reflections on these reflections' will allow me to provide the reader with an open, honest and authentic insight into the training and development I have experienced from beginning to end. Engaging in critical reflection and pausing to consider questions such as 'what does all this mean?' has been recommended as a helpful way for practitioners nearing the end of formal training to make sense of the learning and development

they have experienced (Knowles, Katz & Gilbourne, 2012). Telling this story will enable me to share with you, the sense I have been able to make of these experiences.

**Early Stages (0-12 months)**

I began the programme eager to complete the journey to becoming a 'fully-fledged' sport psychologist; having enjoyed success at undergraduate and masters level I felt ready to take on this final stage of training and 'complete my badges'. I had already been fortunate enough to gain some experience in applied roles and had benefited from supervision from LJMU staff in the years that preceded starting the programme. Prior experience had given me a level of confidence going into the programme, and a sense that I was in a good position to formalise my learning and development. Having waited over a year for the programme to receive approval from the BPS and HCPC, there was also an eagerness to 'get going' once the enrolment started.

The scale of the task that lay ahead to successfully complete the journey, was not immediately apparent. The assessment components seemed straightforward, although the path to completing them was less clear. I had at times experienced feelings of doubt and uncertainty in my previous academic challenges and had successfully overcome these through remaining calm and level-headed. My approach was to remain calm and use the plan of training to help me plot the way forward. The plan of training helped me to better understand what needed to be done, and I set out a range of milestones and checkpoints that I felt would keep me on track – looking back on this it was totally unrealistic given the level of work required and the commitments I had in my applied work. Whilst this provided me with some comfort at the time, on reflection I gave much less

attention to *how* I would reach these checkpoints; and the investment and commitment completing the assessment components would require of *me*.

*My approach at this time was somewhat superficial, I had set out a plan that gave a sense of order and this worked, for a time. However, I feel this was similar to a mental skills training intervention that aimed to provide a form of symptomatic relief from uncomfortable thoughts and feelings (Corlett, 1996). It is only now, that I recognise that what was required was a much deeper exploration of where these uncomfortable thoughts and feelings were coming from, and an approach to facing them that was more aligned with my personal philosophy. Nevertheless, the more superficial approach that was taken initially gave me a sense of security, before the darker clouds of frustration, doubt and uncertainty began to return.*

Throughout the initial 12 months of the programme, the face-to-face contact days were an opportunity to discuss topics related to the key roles such as ethics and professional standards, and stages of the consultancy process. Discussions that ensued among the group were a form of peer reflection, a process that can facilitate learning among sport psychology trainees (Huntley & Kentzer, 2013). The discussions with peers were enjoyable, and I felt as though I was able to make a positive contribution to the group. The sessions challenged me to think about my work and the way that I was doing it; and confirmed to me that I had a good base of knowledge about *doing* sport psychology. A combination of supervision and practical experience that I had already gained enabled me to develop this knowledge and I felt in a strong position. I enjoyed being part of the contact days, it felt good to be a part of something and investing in myself and my development. Had I explored these feelings more closely at the time, I may have recognised that I was spending

more time on the things that I enjoyed, and less time on the things that I found uncomfortable and challenging. The contact days were great, but I would feel frustrated that I had added little to the "word count". The preoccupation with tangible progress was indicative of my approach to completing the doctorate at this time; I wanted to get it done. I would often find myself with mixed emotions, for example enjoying the contact days, but frustrated that I was not making tangible progress.

In my applied work, I was busy in my role at the club and investing energy in wanting to make this a success. And the club had committed to renewing the contract that I was employed under for a further 12 months, whilst it was positive that this had been renewed and perhaps a sign that I was making a positive contribution the fixed term nature of the contract was a challenge for me. I found myself being eager to please and felt a subtle pressure to show my value – a common experience among early career practitioners (Tod, Hutter & Eubank, 2017). Looking back, I think the insecurity of the fixed term contract exacerbated these feelings and had a negative impact on my practice and my progress in completing the doctorate. At this time, I would have echoed the words of others in that working in professional football environments 'feels precarious' (Gilmore, Wagstaff & Smith, 2018). In a practical sense I found myself taking on cases that perhaps did not require my direct intervention in order to show willing and build relationships with the coaches who were requesting my support. Over time this became increasingly frustrating as I knew that this way of working did not align with my professional philosophy and beliefs about delivering sport psychology – it is my belief that people do not exist in isolation, we are influenced by our environments and so psychology support should look to support individuals whilst also addressing the environments they operate in. I knew that my work was only going to have a limited impact if

I was not able to influence the environments that the young players I was working with were in. Critical reflection led me to realise that this incongruence was not only frustrating but potentially damaging, taking on the work may have had some short-term benefit of appeasing coaches but delivering work with limited impact had the longer term potential of undermining my effectiveness as a practitioner. It was time to change. Applied Case Study 3 provides an example of how I adapted my way of working to become more aligned with my professional philosophy and demonstrated a shift in my approach to be a bit braver! The case study details how I worked to support a coach to integrate psychology into their work in a way that supported both the player and enhanced the environment.

**Middle Stages**

As my training progressed, I continued to move towards a more congruent way of working this coincided with feeling more established in my role at the club. Though there were still moments of uncertainty and insecurity I was becoming more open to working with and learning from others. In my reflective diary I detailed discussed feeling threatened and 'anxious' about my own knowledge and experience when the club invited a consultant clinical psychologist to deliver a CPD workshop.

*"The workshop laid this bare, and the enthusiasm with which the topic was received by my colleagues likely contributed to my sense of anxiety and concern about my own knowledge base. On reflection I noticed that I had fallen into the trap of comparing the myself negatively with the consultant clinical psychologist and highlighted some anxieties I had about my own knowledge and experience".* Reflective diary extract.

Reflecting on the emotions I felt gave me the catalyst to further my own knowledge and experience and I began to reach out and engage with other psychologists. I took on additional CPD activity in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) at introduction, intermediate and advanced levels to further develop my knowledge and skills. I began to more actively engage in peer supervision groups investing time in developing myself.

I had also become more comfortable and accepting of the fact that I did not need to know everything and have all the answers. Challenging and complex cases (as detailed in the reflective diary) brought home the importance of working collaboratively with other professionals including medical and mental health professionals. The club eventually engaged a clinical psychology provision to support our approach to managing complex and challenging cases, and after initially feeling threatened by the consultant clinical psychologist I now looked forward to the days when they would be around at the club, I was learning so much and finding new ways of working that 'fit' with how I believed psychology could be done. We introduced a new multidisciplinary wellbeing forum – Man Utd Advanced Psychosocial Support (MAPS), consisting of representatives from clinical psychology, sport psychology, medical, player care, education and the academy leadership team to help develop a more psychologically informed approach to supporting young players (See figure 1).

*Figure 1. Purpose of MAPS – Wellbeing Forum.*



The opportunity to work alongside and gain additional supervision from a clinical psychologist helped me to develop greater awareness of how a psychologist can support people and systems to operate more effectively. I was challenged to develop my consultancy skills and supported to develop more in-depth formulations using the 5 P's (Johnstone & Dallos, 2014). Although I was already familiar with the 5 P's model, my initial formulations were superficial and through working with a clinical psychologist I was able to learn to add greater depth and consider how a broader range of factors may have been influencing the presentation. Additionally setting up the MAPS forum introduced me to the concept of team formulation (Johnstone, 2018), whereby a team of allied professionals work together to make sense of an individual's presentation to develop a shared and more holistic understanding of their needs. The shared understandings are then used to

inform subsequent support or development plans and often include both individual and system level recommendations. Team formulation approaches are becoming more common and developing into a key process in sport psychology settings (Ong, McGregor & Daley, 2018) and again aligned with my philosophy about the importance of working with people and environments. I believe team formulation approaches can have tremendous value in sport psychology settings where there is still some scepticism about what psychologists do; team formulation allows us to 'show our workings' and bring other practitioners into the process of supporting others in a psychologically informed way. I believe that this approach has enabled my colleagues to better appreciate the expertise that psychologists bring to supporting the young people we work with, whilst also reminding people that the psychologist isn't responsible for everything that is psychological. Developing the first 'Academy Psychology Strategy' also helped me to clarify the approach to psychology that was being taken in the academy and communicate this to other stakeholders within the club. I think this has been a key factor in being able to develop psychology and establish my role in the academy, the document has acted as a road map for my work and helped me to demonstrate to others the work that I do. The strategy document has since been updated numerous times but includes details such as the aims and objectives of the psychology programme, the methods and tactics that would be employed and shows the scope of work that psychologist is involved in (see figure 2.).

*Figure 2. Psychology Scope of service*



### ACADEMY PSYCHOLOGY: SCOPE OF SERVICE

| | Parent Engagement | Agreed Development Plan (ADPs) | CORE Development Prog | Induction | Transition Preparation | Loan Prep & Support | Psychometric Profiling | Screening | Coach & MDT Support |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| U9-11 | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| U12 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| U13 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| U14 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| U15 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| U16 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| MANUSS | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| U18 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| U21 | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| MU Loan | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

During this phase I was also diversifying my applied experiences into other sports. I took on a consultancy role in professional Rugby Union, I was keen to challenge myself in a different sport and in a different type of role. The nature of a consultancy role with limited contact time was new and this gave me an opportunity to further refine my contracting skills as part of the consultancy process (Keegan, 2015). Managing expectations was important given the time I was able to commit and the resource the club was able to commit. I was also keen to ensure that I operated in a way that was congruent with my philosophy and felt that I had the freedom to be firm about this given my full-time employment in football. In comparison to my earlier reflections about insecure work conditions, I now felt in a position to be more forceful about operating in a way that was consistent with my beliefs and values. Fortunately, the senior staff agreed that the role should focus on

working primarily with the coaching team to try and integrate psychology into the environment through them. And we agreed on processes that would be adopted to manage requests for direct player facing support or intervention and ensured that these were communicated clearly to staff. It was agreed that requests for player facing work should come through the multidisciplinary review process in order to provide some structure and provide staff with some guidance on how they could work with psychology. Through this experience I was able to appreciate the importance of contracting and clarifying expectations at the outset of the consultancy process for effective service delivery and continue to invest time in these processes in any new applied opportunities.

Throughout the middle phase I was also finding greater clarity in my approach to dissemination, teaching and training. Early dissemination experiences were relatively traditional e.g. delivering presentations and material to groups of people in a one-way direction. I had a number of opportunities to develop my approach including guest lecturing, presenting at conferences and delivering CPD activity for coaches/staff in my work setting. Reflecting on these experiences I was able to recognise that I needed to find my own 'style', I didn't particularly enjoy the traditional approach to presenting and adopting an 'expert position'. I was fortunate to be able to learn from other more experienced practitioners and observe their styles.

*"I observed several more experienced presenters in the morning session, paying particular attention to their style of delivery, layout and flow of their presentations. I identified the importance of body language, clarity of oration and demonstrating enthusiasm as key messages to incorporate into my presentation in the afternoon"*

In the reflective extract above, I discussed observing Professor James Morton (LJMU) present at the Isokinetic Medical Conference and found that by observing someone from a different discipline

I was able to pay more attention to the delivery style and approach than to the content. I attempted to try and incorporate some of what I had learnt into my presentation later that same day and reflected on having a more enjoyable experience as a result of greater clarity about 'how' I wanted to deliver. In my teaching and training case study and diary I detailed how my approach to dissemination was becoming more aligned with my philosophy and values. I began to pay particular attention to how I wanted teaching and training activity to be experienced by the participants and reflect the value that I placed on working collaboratively with clients. I also believe that knowledge is co-created between people, and I began to think more critically about how to create environments to encourage interaction and engagement. I became less reliant on 'content' and more comfortable with using my own knowledge, experiences and skills to create learning experiences. Overall, these developments reflected a growth in confidence and ability to facilitate learning and development experiences; and coming alongside the people I was working with felt more congruent with my philosophy and values. There was also an alignment with my research activity on talent development environments (TDE), with the research activity extending my knowledge about the importance of creating environments for learning this directly impacted on my practice in different settings. I found that these developments were demanding, this approach required much more of *me* as a practitioner and required me to be more vulnerable, take risks and be prepared for things to go wrong or head in different directions but I was prepared to do so in order to be the type of practitioner that I believed in and wanted to be.

During this phase of the programme, I was also fortunate enough to expand my peer support/supervision network. I got to know and then became friends with Christian, a sport psychologist at FC Bayern Munich through our shared experience working in football. This relationship allowed us to challenge each other and act as a sounding board for new ideas and work

that we were doing at our respective clubs. Having an awareness of the intricacies of effectively applying psychology within a professional football club meant that Christian could act as a critical friend and support me to practice with cultural awareness and contextually appropriate way (Storm & Larsen, 2020). Through my friendship with Christian I also joined a network of sport psychologists working in football across several European countries; since 2019 we have been meeting several times a year to support our ongoing learning and create development opportunities that are relevant to our applied experiences. Members of the group take turns in hosting the meetings and facilitate sessions on topics that the group suggest. From a personal perspective I have found my involvement in the group to be incredibly rewarding and beneficial for my development. The group represents a safe space to share experiences, reflect and learn from each other which is essential for personal learning (Sharp, Hodge & Danish, 2019), as discussed in my reflective diary I have experienced some of my most impactful learning experiences from working with this group. The reflective extract below details some of the learnings I took from a workshop that I participated in with the group.

*"Going into the workshop I was confident in my knowledge and that I would be able to offer a valuable contribution to the workshop, however stepping out of my comfort zone and showing more of "me" helped me to become more aware of my limits and expand them. Ultimately being uncomfortable helped me to learn more about myself and how I may have been resistant to being uncomfortable in other areas of my life/work. The first two learnings would not have been possible without paying attention to and reflecting on the emotions that I experienced."*

The developments that took place during this stage, including an increased coherence between my beliefs and behaviours and an increased sense of competence are reflective of the professional development experiences of other sport psychologists (Tod, Andersen & Marchant, 2009).

However I think the essence of the middle stage of my professional doctorate experience is captured in the extract above – it was about discovering or perhaps unlocking 'me' as a person and practitioner. During this stage I feel it was less about developing technical skills or acquiring subject knowledge and more about discovering who I was as a practitioner and what I brought to my role as psychologist.

**Later Stages**

The later stages of my professional doctorate journey have coincided with further personal and professional growth that has been rewarding but meant that this 'leg' of the journey has taken longer than I perhaps would have envisaged or liked! My responsibility and workload increased, which on the one hand suggested that my work was having a positive impact and was valued by others, but on the other hand created a challenge to find a sense of balance in my professional and personal life. At this stage I was comfortable with my development as a practitioner and although I was keen to complete the formal training to help find a better balance in my life, I was grateful for the journey that I had been on to get to this point, which was a shift from where I started from on the programme.

My applied work was also continuing to evolve, I was being given additional responsibility and asked to lead on a number of new projects. For example, I was tasked with developing a psychologically informed return to training framework following the COVID-19 lockdown, here I was required to use my knowledge of psychology to influence working practices at a broader organisational level. Titled 'ReUNITED', the framework provided staff with a periodised approach to reintegrating players back into training and adopted a gradual approach. Broken down into three phases; 'Reconnect', 'Reflect' and 'Restart' (see figure 3), specific psychological

objectives were aligned to each phase to provide academy staff with a framework to support players returning to training that was informed by relevant psychological literature and theory.

*Figure 3. Re-UNITED Framework, Phases 1-3.*

**Phase 1: Reconnect**

Focus:
Reconnecting at player-player, player-staff, staff-staff and individual-environment and establish new ways of working.

Purpose:
Following a period with limited social interaction, formal education and training, returning to training may present challenges for players and staff. A period of reconnection will help to reduce anxiety and uncertainty in individuals and the system.

Tactics:
- Provide opportunities for social interaction and connection.
- Create low pressure environment, with emphasis on enjoyment, freedom, creativity.
- Check & challenge to align with reconnect principles.

**Phase 2: Reflect**

Focus:
To check in with players, find out more about where they've been, where they want to go and how we can help them get there. Embed new ways of working.

Purpose:
By providing players and staff an opportunity to adjust to new training environment and return to training, we can begin to reflect on where boys are in the development journey from a more stable position.

Tactics:
- Facilitate opportunity for player reflection and feedback on their experiences.
- Begin conversations about the future and what this may look like.
- Training activity & intensity to inc. inline with development needs.

**Phase 3: Restart**

Focus:
To restart individual development programmes aligned to the outcomes of stage two. Preparing for, and restart of competition and fixtures.

Purpose:
Restart development programme, following period of adjustment and feedback. Helping to guard against premature and erroneous judgements. Psychological periodization model ensures an informed and risk managed approach to RTT.

Tactics:
- Training activity informed by individual needs.
- Group training programme aligned to playing style/game model.
- Preparing for and return of fixtures.

During this stage I also led the first Academy Mental Health Awareness Month delivered in collaboration with colleagues at FC Bayern Munich and SL Benfica. A month of activity that included educational workshops, exhibitions and knowledge exchanges between staff at the partner clubs aimed to raise awareness of the importance of promoting and supporting positive mental health and wellbeing. The projects provide an insight into how my role had developed and the opportunities that I was being given to embed psychology into the working practices of the academy at an organisational level. Working in this way is further evidence of the distance travelled in the direction of congruent practice and delivering psychology that lives beyond the direct interactions and interventions of the psychologist.

**Summary: The present day**

Looking back on my professional doctorate journey, I am writing this summary with a mixture of emotions. I have a sense of relief, disbelief, tiredness, excitement and optimism all rolled into one. It has been 'one hell of a journey' but one that has had the most profound impact on who I am as a person and as a practitioner. I have been able to navigate through periods of uncertainty and frustration towards a position of confidence and contentment with the progress I have made. I can honestly say I would not trade the lessons I have learnt from the difficulties and path I have taken for a faster or smoother ride! There has undoubtedly been struggles and challenges along the way but I am better for it – it is through these critical moments that we are able to develop self-knowledge, new perspectives on life (Jaspers, 1970); and new ways of living (van Deurzen, 2002). I have learnt about myself, my doubts, my insecurities, but I have also learnt about my values, what I am passionate about and believe in and who I am - far more than I could ever have imagined when starting out. I am excited to embark on the next stage of my career and look forward to the experiences that lie ahead.

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