

# PhD Opportunity

## Bridging the Gap: Investigating the Professional Landscape of Applied Performance Analysts in Sports Performance Analysis

### Supervisory team:

**Director of Studies:** Dr John Francis, School of Sport and Exercise Science, University of Worcester

**Supervisors:** Prof Don Vinson, School of Sport and Exercise Science, University of Worcester

**Research Group:** [Coach Developer and Performance Analyst Research Group](#)

### The PhD Opportunity:

As the discipline of sports performance analysis experiences unprecedented growth and diversification, the role of the applied performance analysts emerges as a key component to aid coaches, athletes and stakeholders' decision making (Martin et al., 2023). This expansion has led to the emergence of new roles and responsibilities, highlighting the dynamic nature of the discipline (Butterworth, 2023; Francis et al., 2023). However, despite this period of change, a notable gap exists, the absence of a dedicated professional body to support the discipline and the development of its partitioners (Martin et al., 2021). This applied performance analyst-focused approach is pivotal in addressing practical challenges encountered by the professionals in the field.

Currently, there is limited knowledge regarding the development pathways and experiences of applied performance analysts (McKenna et al. 2018), particularly in navigating the intricate realities of working in elite sport environments. Many of these experiences remain hidden or are limited to small sample sizes (Mulvenna and Viner 2024). However, within this landscape, aspects of relationships, trust, power, politics along with dealing with technical challenges emerge as critical factors influencing the professional journey of applied performance analysts (Nelson et al. 2023; Francis et al, 2015). Therefore, gaining more in-depth account of applied performance analysts experiences would not only shed light on its occupational culture within the discipline but also highlight and educate how to navigate its complexities.

In light of the challenges facing sports performance analysis, we seek PhD students with a keen interest in exploring the intricate ecosystem of the discipline and the role of the applied sports performance analysts. Moreover, through examining the developmental pathways of these practitioners, we aim to shed light on broader

trends and implications for the discipline as a whole. Understanding how these analysts acquire and refine their skills offers insights into emerging industry standards, informs educational initiatives, and contributes to the overall enhancement of sports performance analysis practices.

Specifically, we aim to investigate how applied sports performance analysts develop the skills, competencies, and experiences necessary to navigate working in elite sports. Guided by an experienced supervisory team, successful candidates will adopt a mixed methods research design with an interdisciplinary focus, blending insights from sport, education, and business. Together, we will work towards establishing a best practice resource that informs effective strategies and methodologies in sports performance analysis.

### References:

Butterworth, A. (2023). *Professional practice in sport performance analysis*. Routledge.

Francis, J., Molnar, G., Donovan, M., & Peters, D. M. (2015). Trust within a high performance sport: A performance analyst's perspective. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 33(Supplement 1), 47–48.

Francis, J. W., Kyte, J., & Bateman, M. (2023). The role of the analyst: comparative analysis of applied performance analyst job advertisements in the UK and Ireland (2021-2022). *International Journal of Performance Analysis in Sport*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24748668.2023.2299178>

Martin, D., O Donoghue, P. G., Bradley, J., & McGrath, D. (2021). Developing a framework for professional practice in applied performance analysis. *International Journal of Performance Analysis in Sport*, 21(6), 845–888. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24748668.2021.1951490>

Martin, D., O'Donoghue, P. G., Bradley, J., Robertson, S., & McGrath, D. (2023). Identifying the characteristics, constraints, and enablers to creating value in applied performance analysis. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541231180243>

McKenna, M., Cowan, D. T., Stevenson, D., & Baker, J. S. (2018). Neophyte experiences of football match analysis: a multiple case study approach. *Research in Sports Medicine*, 26(3), 306–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15438627.2018.1447473>

Mulvenna, C., & Viner, A. (2024). The use of reflective conversations as a professional development tool—a narrative exploring the experiences of a performance analyst working in semi-elite football. *Reflective Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623943.2024.2314013>

Nelson, L., James, N., Nicholls, S., Parmar, N., & Groom, R. (2023). The importance of appearing trustworthy in the workplace: performance analysts' perspectives. *Sport, Education and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2023.2288844>

**Application Process:**

To begin the application process please go to <https://www.worc.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/applying-for-a-phd/>.

**The Interview:**

All successful applicants will be offered an interview with the proposed Supervisory Team. You will be contacted by a member of the Doctoral School Team to find a suitable date. Interviews can be conducted in person or over Microsoft Teams.

**Funding your PhD:**

For information about Doctoral Loans please visit: <https://www.worc.ac.uk/study/fees-and-finance/doctoral-loans.aspx>

During your PhD you can access the Research Conference Support Scheme to support the costs of presenting your research at an external conference.

**Research at the University of Worcester**

Research is central to the University's mission to make a difference in everything that we do. We are committed to delivering excellent research which extends the boundaries of human knowledge but which also improves people's lives by enabling better health outcomes, improving food security, developing environmentally sustainable solutions for crop production and socially sustainable solutions to our ageing population, enhancing public knowledge and understanding of the past and present.

The University hence focuses its research around five high-level challenges facing society, locally, nationally and globally:

- [Human Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [Sustainable Futures](#)
- [Digital Innovation](#)
- [Culture, Identity and Social Exclusion](#)
- [Professional Education](#)

The success of our research is reflected in our continuous improvement in external research assessment processes. In the most recent Research Excellence Framework, REF 2021, the University saw a near 50% increase in the scale of its research and 12% increase in quality, building on its performance in REF 2014 when it was the UK's most improved university in terms of Research Power, a combination of scale and quality.

**Research Degrees at Worcester**

Our research students are central to our overall mission for research. They are working at the cutting edge of their disciplines and driving forward the quality of our research whilst enriching our research culture. We are looking to increase our research student numbers as a strategic imperative.

Our commitment to our students is reflected in the results of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2023 in which we ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> for overall research student satisfaction nationally. Key to our success in this area is the Doctoral School, a focal point for all our research students.

It provides:

- day-to-day support for our students, both administrative and practical, through our dedicated team.
- a Research Student Study Space with both PCs and laptop docking station.
- a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme for students and their supervisors.
- a programme of student-led conferences and seminars.

### **Research Group**

The Coach Developer and Performance Analyst Research Group focuses on contributing to the professional education and role development of these emerging professions. The group draws on a range of educational and social psychology theories to facilitate sport coaches' and performance analysts' learning. Often generating collaborative research with some of the UK's most influential National Sport Organisations (e.g., UK Sport, UK Coaching), National Governing Bodies (e.g., The Football Association, British Rowing) and professional clubs (e.g., Severn Stars, Wolverhampton Wanderers), this research group also seeks to shape how sport coaches' and performance analysts' roles evolve with the ever-changing nature of contemporary sport.

### **Widening Participation**

As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although most candidates will have an undergraduate and/or a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.

**For further information or an informal discussion about this project, please contact Dr John Francis [j.francis@worc.ac.uk](mailto:j.francis@worc.ac.uk)**

