

PhD Opportunity

Sport Coaching, Positive Youth Development
and Vulnerable Young People

Supervisory team:

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

The PhD Opportunity:

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Vulnerable young people are currently facing unprecedented challenges from the pressures which come with social media misuse, unstable family environments and the decline of traditional communities of support (Camiré et al., 2022). In some cases, these factors, alongside many others, have led to behavioural problems in educational and other settings. Traditionally, efforts to address youth behavioural issues have followed a deficit reduction approach, where problems are identified, and funding is allocated for research to develop interventions. However, these interventions have proven costly and only moderately successful (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Recognizing the limitations of this approach, there is a call for a paradigm shift towards an 'asset-building' approach, which emphasizes promoting positive youth development alongside reducing problematic behaviours. This shift envisions youth who are not just free of negative behaviours but are also fully equipped to engage productively in society. This perspective advocates for fostering youths' potential for optimal development rather than merely addressing deficits.

Various definitions of optimal youth development have emerged among researchers, focusing on enabling young people to lead fulfilling lives and become contributing members of society. The Personal Assets Framework (PAF; Côté et al., 2022; Côté et al., 2014; Côté et al., 2020) seeks to help leaders within youth sport development systems better understand the interacting mechanisms influencing athlete development for the immediate (i.e., real time), short-term (e.g., single school year) and long-term (e.g., multiple school year) benefit of the participants. The short-term benefits are characterized by the four Cs (i.e., personal assets) of athletes' competence, confidence, connection, and character. By engaging in sport environments that facilitate the acquisition of the 4Cs over multiple seasons, the PAF posits that athletes can acquire the long-term outcomes of participation, personal

development, and performance (i.e., 3Ps). The PAF potentially offers sport contexts a more salient approach than other Positive Youth Development (PYD) systems (e.g., Lerner et al., 2014) because of its focus on processes and outcomes that are derived and supported by sport research.

The PAF was, in part, informed by the perspective of PYD which is an inherently strengths-based concept insofar as it considers young people from the perspective of their potential to become, rather than considering them as problems to be fixed (Holt et al., 2017). Concomitantly, the PAF seeks to understand, first and foremost, what might potentially inform the interrelationship of the gears, rather than focusing too fixedly on the deficits in the system. Despite such a positive perspective, research concerning PYD has highlighted the need to better understand the mechanisms and processes which lead to the 4Cs and, resultantly, the 3Ps (Holt et al., 2017). Furthermore, Vella et al. (2011) argued there was a substantial research-to-practice gap in terms of how the mechanisms, such as those illustrated within the PAF, might be operationalized in real-world youth sport contexts. More recent research contributing to addressing this gap has found PYD and the PAF to be an appropriate lens through which to view positive youth sport experiences in community sport (Vierimaa et al., 2017), successful clubs (Erikstad et al., 2021) and disadvantaged groups (McDonough et al., 2013).

Various studies emphasize how coaches can significantly impact youths' sports experiences, whether positively or negatively. Smith et al. (1979) were pioneers in examining youth coaches' behaviours, discovering that well-liked coaches exhibited more technical instruction, reinforcement, and mistake-contingent reinforcement behaviours. A more recent intervention by Smoll et al. (1993) revealed that trained coaches, who increased positive reinforcement and technical instruction while decreasing punishment and control behaviours, were better liked by athletes. They fostered a more enjoyable atmosphere and promoted greater team unity compared to untrained coaches. Other studies (e.g., Martin et al., 1999; Salminen & Liukkonen, 1996) found that youth prefer coaches who employ child-involved democratic coaching styles. Peterson (2004) underscores that youth development programs like sports can positively shape individuals, yet the personal qualities of group leaders are crucial for their success.

In partnership with Redgate Sports, we are seeking a PhD candidate to explore the role of the coach in facilitating PYD for vulnerable young people. Redgate Sports is a Worcestershire based Charity delivering sport programmes combined with mentoring and wellbeing support to children aged 7 to 16yrs. The children supported by Redgate are children who often struggle to be involved in sport because of the life challenges they have faced or are facing. A child in the programme may be in the care system, have a special educational need (SEN), or be vulnerable in some other way. Some of the children have played very little sport and need help to start; others are very sporty and need help to get going again.

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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 3rd 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 on this project, please contact Professor Don Vinson (d.vinson@worc.ac.uk)