

**Cardiff School of Sport**  
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**CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**  
**Prifysgol Fetropolitan Caerdydd**

**CARDIFF SCHOOL OF SPORT**

**DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS)**

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FACTORS AFFECTING PROGRESSION IN SPORT: A  
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IDENTIFICATION AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FACTORS  
AFFECTING PROGRESSION IN SPORT: A FOCUS ON RURAL  
COMMUNITIES

# Cardiff Metropolitan University Prifysgol Fetropolitán Caerdydd

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## **Abstract**

The primary objective of this study is to identify and critically analyse the factors that are affecting progression in sport in rural areas, focusing on the rural county of Ceredigion situated in Mid Wales. Existing research by Sport England (2007) and Eime et al. (2008) suggested that rural geographical locations have lower participation rates in sport and physical activity than their urban counterparts, suggesting that participation could potentially be affected by further barriers.

The literature review discovered that the environment that people live in can determine whether they participate, as suggested by Kavangha et al. (2005). It highlighted that the key barriers to participation could be location, transport, access to service and the lack of and standard of facilities. It was also found that the vast majority of talented athletes discontinued competing (Abbott et al. (2002), which suggested that performers with potential were in need of greater support from NGB (National Governing Bodies), Sport Councils and Sport Clubs.

A qualitative approach was used to gather information, using semi structured interviews with four athletes/swimmers who had represented Wales between the ages of 16-18, but who had failed to progress any further. The aim of the interviews was to discover what barriers the performers faced and if these obstacles ultimately affected their progression in sport.

The findings of the research discovered that the performers experienced a range of barriers secondary to their rural location. Lack of access and scarcity of facilities, along with poor public transport, the distance performers were having to travel combined with the cost of fuel were the key findings of the research, as was previously suggested by Appropriate Facilities (2012), Sporting Equals (2013) and Active Places Cymru (2012). Furthermore it emerged that performers felt at a disadvantage to their urban counterparts with the performers suggesting they did not have access to highly qualified coaches, only volunteer coaches. These findings suggest that the locality of a performer, in this case a rural setting, can ultimately affect their progression in sport.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Overview**

This chapter contains a brief explanation of the aims of the study, the process of the study and the importance of the study.

## **1.2 Aims**

There has been a vast amount of research into the barriers affecting progression in sport, e.g. Charlton (2012) and Green (2012), yet there has been limited research concentrating solely on rural Mid Wales. UK Sport (2012) state that “Equality is about recognising and removing the barriers faced by people involved, or wanting to be involved in sport”. Abbott et al. (2002), stated that “the vast majority of young people identified as talented do not go on to elite or even sub-elite careers.” This study aims to establish whether performers from rural areas are affected during their career due to the potential barriers brought about by their geographical location.

## **1.3 Process**

There has been previous research into the analysis of barriers that affect participation rates in different locations. However there is limited research into what these barriers are and how they have affected international performers from rural locations, or on how they have impacted on their careers. The study will involve a qualitative research method, interviewing participants who have represented Wales between the ages of 16-18 and who were situated in Ceredigion whilst performing. Employing qualitative research methods will enable the interviewees to express their thoughts and feelings towards the barriers that they felt affected their progression, whilst also suggesting what can be done to remove these obstacles to progression. The results will be critically analysed against the review of literature and similarities and differences will be identified.

#### **1.4 Importance of Study**

The research has the potential to inform Clubs, Sport Councils and NGB of the requirements of performers in rural areas and can help them to identify the issues and develop a support system in order to facilitate the needs of rural competitors.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

## **2.1 Overview**

This chapter contains the analysis and review of literature that has been researched. The key themes discovered from the review were how there was a substantial lack of facilities available to rural performers and how identifying their talent is difficult due to the lack of talent identification initiatives in their area. It also looks the importance of athlete support.

## **2.2 Urban Rural Differences**

Within rural communities there are barriers that could affect participation rates in physical activity and ultimately affect the progression of a potential performer. Bastra et al. (2012), states that a barrier is “Something that for some reason or another prevents a person from taking part”. Charlton et al. (2012) adds that some of these barriers could be “high cost, lack of or poor facilities, lack of time, fear of injury or that people are simply not interested”, (p.16). However urban and rural settings are geographically different with Scott (2007) defining urban as “a town or city that is free-standing, densely occupied and developed with a variety of shops and services,” whilst stating rural areas can “range from small settlements on the fringe of large towns and cities to remote villages and hamlets and from ‘green belt’ agriculture to areas of extensive arable farming or grazing”. This implies that both geographical areas have different barriers that hinder the opportunity of a performer. For example research from Sport Northern Ireland (2010) stated that “A medium-sized city can be far more facilitative of participation than a rural or urban area”, which would suggest that it is easier to participate urban areas.

Kavangha et al. (2005) suggests that “The environment that people live in may also be an important determinant of physical activity participation” p.2. A survey conducted by Sport England in 2007 agrees, its findings indicate that “Two thirds of local authorities with the lowest participation rates were in fact rural areas”. Eime et al. (2008) research proposed that “participation is lower in rural compared to metropolitan areas”. However Wages et al. (2008) research contradicts that of Eime et al. (2008) and Sport England (2007), as he suggests that “rural counties, had, on average, higher participation rates”. Research conducted by Ceredigion

County Council in 2008-2009 on rural participation in sport and active recreation points out that in rural counties such as Ceredigion, Powys and Carmarthenshire there are higher participation rates than urban areas such as Caerphilly, Newport and Merthyr. The research indicates that all of these counties are just above the national average of around 48%. This research agrees with Wages et al (2008), as the rural areas of Ceredigion, Powys and Carmarthenshire have far higher rates than the urban areas of Caerphilly, Newport and Merthyr. The issues with specific areas of low participation levels was highlighted in 2006 when the Welsh Assembly government introduced the Climbing Higher policy, part of which stated “Additional investment in specific areas will be identified in order to target hard to reach audiences and reduce physical and social barriers”, suggesting that the government had identified that some areas were affected more than others.

### **2.3 Participation**

Although studies show that there is not a significant gap in participation rates between urban and rural communities, it seems clear that there is an issue regarding the increased barriers faced in rural areas. This is highlighted by Sport England’s £10million investment in 2009 to “get more people participating in sport in rural communities”. The purpose of investment was to help fund sport projects in rural areas. One example of how the money was used was in Newquay, which was granted £1.675 million for “The Sports Hub, a new sports centre which will provide high quality sporting facilities to over 15,000 people living in a rural area marked by high levels of deprivation.” Sport England (2009). Richard Lewis (2009), chairman of Sport England stated that “the project will help in tackling barriers to participation in rural communities, by delivering sustainable opportunities to thousands of people”. He adds that “those who live in rural areas deserve to have access to high quality schemes and facilities”. Such a significant investment from Sport England could imply that rural areas have more barriers that hinder opportunity and participation.

## **2.4 Barriers**

From the work of Scott (2007) it has been established that the geographical areas are different and suggests that diverse barriers to participation are likely to occur. Green (2012) states that “potential barriers can be sectioned into four categories, these being, cultural, economic, motivational and physical” p23. Green (2012) goes on to describe the four categories, stating that “Cultural barriers contain direct conflicts with codes, customs and conventions or values inherent in an activity. Economic barriers refer to the financial side of participation, the perceived cost, affordability and value of the service provided. Motivational barriers take into account the perceived absence of value in participation and to the participant’s self-image. Physical barriers will take into account activities and services that are being provided, the location of the facility in question and the physical access to these facilities” p23. Charlton et al. (2012) suggests that some of the barriers include lack of time, fear of injury, high cost and the lack of or condition of the facilities. Allender et al. (2006) agrees with this suggesting high cost and poor access to facilities were key barriers. Suckling et al. (2009) adds that transport and motivation are key barriers to participation whilst Payne et al. (2010) states “the barriers of cost and transport to activities are most prominent and must be dealt with in order to overcome participation levels”.

### **2.4.1 Facilities**

Highlighting the work of Charlton (2012) on the lack of/or condition of facilities available, research recently conducted by Appropriate Facilities (2012) for Sport Wales, discovered that “many sports facilities were built in the 1970s and 1980s and are in a dilapidated condition requiring significant investment to refurbish or renew. They are not attractive to potential new participants and their associated higher running costs are an additional drain on scarce resources“. This suggests a lack of appropriate facilities for participants which could impact on participation rates. Appropriate Facilities (2012) research is supported by Bogopa (2004) who states that “many existing facilities in rural areas, although accessible, are often limited by the physical constraints imposed by the design and age of the building. These factors dictate the number of and the diversity of activities that can take

place". Sporting Equals (Accessed Online 01/02/2013) agree in stating that in rural areas a "Lack of facilities is a major barrier to good quality sport provision and in some areas accessing good quality facilities will be easier than others."

The standard of the facilities available is an important issue; in some circumstances the facilities are not available. Research from Active Places Cymru (2012) compared a search of a 10 mile radius of sport facilities in both Glamorgan (CF24 4RP) and Ceredigion (SY25 6HG). The results showed that within the Glamorgan radius there were over 200 sports facilities available, including public and private centres and clubs, whilst in the Ceredigion radius there were only 15 opportunities. These search results demonstrate the lack of opportunity in rural communities and the scarcity of facilities and clubs available to participants and performers in these communities.

#### **2.4.2 Transport**

The work of Payne et al. (2010) that suggested transport issues must be dealt with is also highlighted in Sport England's Framework (2004), which states "Barriers to participation in sport vary. Lack of transport is often the biggest issue in rural areas". This suggests that the geographical location in which a performer lives can impact on their progression and participation as they have further to travel than their urban counterparts. Active Places Cymru (2012) research would suggest that the lack of facilities means that rural performers have to travel further, therefore it is important that transport links are improved and accessible. This is highlighted by the Welsh Assembly Government (2011) which stated that they must begin "working with local authorities to address the problem of transport to facilities, particularly in rural areas and for target groups". The Commission for Rural Communities (2009) also stated that a solution to participation would be to "Improve transport/accessibility to compensate for the centralisation of services".

#### **2.4.3 Technology**

Research conducted by the Sport Council of Wales (2004), suggested that "video games and computer game can have a negative impact on physical activity

levels". Therefore, it can be argued that technological advancements now have the potential to hinder participation. According to Ofcom "viewers watched an average of three hours and 45 minutes of television a day last year, a 3 per cent increase on 2004". Research by ScienceDaily (2006) concluded that "The more time a person spends watching television the less time they have to be physically active", suggesting that the rising number of hours people watch TV for will affect participation rates. Desler (2007) states that "Of course technology is a must in our lives, but since the computer has become a routine part of life and almost every house has one, it can make people into far more than just 'couch potatoes', as they spend more time on the computer than being active outside". This implies that the use of technology and computers may impact on potential participants being active.

Given this 3% increase, with technological advancements, in another eight years the numbers could rise further. Ofcom (2011) states that "*digital television* in UK households in 2011 stood at 93.1%" and that "Digital TV will change region by region, ending in 2012". The terrestrial channels now broadcast in excess of over 50 television channels and 24 radio stations which could increasingly hinder participation rates. On the 20th of November 2012 the European Union approved the laying of cables that will bring super-fast speeds to rural areas. With faster internet connections, there is the potential for this to be a further barrier to participation, with people preferring to stay indoors on their personal computers rather than being outside participating in sport.

A Labour Government survey from 2005/2006 that takes into account what activities people perform in their free time, suggests that "sport and exercise is the eighth most popular activity to perform, with reading, watching TV, eating out and listening to music all preferred". This suggests that sport and exercise is losing the competition for individual's free time with the majority of people preferring to partake in other pastimes. With the increase in technology and a wider range of access to digital TV and super-fast broadband it can be presumed that sport and exercise may continue to decrease in popularity. However games consoles such as the Wii, Wii Fit and Xbox Kinect enable individuals to enjoy physical activity from their own homes. Therefore people may choose to play on these consoles

rather than going out to participate. This indicates that there is competition for free time and that the majority of people would prefer to partake in other activities rather than sport and exercise.

#### **2.4.4 Economic**

In 2001 the Sports Council of Wales stated that “urban areas face the possibility of exclusion due to low incomes, unemployment and poor public transport systems,” suggesting that even if the facilities and opportunity are available, potential participants may still not be able to take part due to financial difficulties. However, according to the Welsh Local Government Association (2008) “eight out of nine rural councils are in a worse situation in terms of income than the Welsh national average” ATL (2008) , whilst “one in five households in rural areas across the UK, including 700,000 children, live below the official poverty line”. ATL (2008) states that the “majority of factors due to poverty and deprivation are similar for urban and rural dwellers”. The Northern Ireland Assembly (2010) stated “people from lower and higher social economic positions tend to be physically active in different ways”. They continue that “Individuals from higher social economic positions tend to be more positively associated with leisure time activity whilst higher levels of work-related physical activity have been highlighted amongst individuals from lower socio-economic positions.” (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2010). This implies that a person’s financial situation may effect participation.

Economically the substantial increase in fuel prices is a significant factor. The Welsh Assembly Government (2011) stated that transport to facilities in rural areas was a problem and the rise of fuel prices could increase this. According to Petrol Price (2012) in the last “7 years petrol has seen an increase of roughly £0.30p per litre”. AA (2013) states the average fuel price is now approximately £1.38p per litre. This increase affects people in urban and rural areas, but as Sport England Framework (2004) suggested, those in rural areas have further to travel and the increase in price will affect them more.

#### **2.4.5 Personal Circumstances**

The issue of personal circumstances is highlighted by former Prime Minister Tony Blair (1996) who stated “We believe that people should be able to rise by their talents, not by their birth or advantages of privilege. We understand that people are not all born into equal circumstances, so one role of state education is to open up opportunities for all, regardless of their background”. Charlton et al. (2012) states that personal circumstances have the potential to impact on participation, “Personal circumstances include physical and mental capabilities, health, level of educational attainment, work and family commitments and level of disposable income”. For example, a wheel chair user could experience access issues with local facilities. An example of this would be having an access ramp and specially qualified staff available if they wanted to swim. In many local leisure centres in Ceredigion the gym is situated on the second floor with no available lift. Therefore access for the disabled is difficult and could deter potential participants. Opportunities for disabled individuals may be limited and not advertised. Advertisements may not be widespread outside of the facility and for many disabled people the opportunity for participation is reduced. However, it is important to note that disabled people only represent a small percentage of the overall population.

#### **2.5 Talent Identification**

“Identifying talent in athletes and developing that ability to its fullest potential is a central concern of sport scientists, sports coaches and sports policy makers” (Baker, 2011). This suggests that more needs to be done by sports policy makers, in order to identify potential athletes in remote areas. If a performer has been able to navigate their way through the potential barriers there is still the issue of getting their talent noticed by Clubs, Coaches, NGB and Sport Councils. As the research from Active Place Cymru (2012) states, “there are a severe lack of facilities in many areas”. Taking this into account it suggests that the lack of clubs and coaches will prevent a performer being noticed. For example, there is no running track in Ceredigion: how is a potential 100m runner going to get identified if he/she does not have the correct facilities to show off their skills. This is where the

barriers of transport and location come into effect. In some cases it is just not possible to travel 80miles for a race, therefore meaning that people in a rural area without a running track are at a severe disadvantage to those in an urban area with a running track. Sport New Zealand (2010) state that it is important to have “development pathways to ensure sports have the right detection, development and tracking mechanisms in place to give athletes the best possible chance”. This demonstrates that detection of performers is vital and that geographical location can affect this.

With the 2012 London Olympics there has been a big emphasis on finding future talent with initiatives such as Sporting Giants (2007), Girls4Gold (2008), Pitch to Podium (2008), Tall and Talented (2009), Fighting Chance (2009), Paralympic Potential (2009) and Power2Podium (2011). An issue with these initiatives is they do not specifically target people in remote rural areas. For example, Power2Podium held a weekend in October 2011 for potential athletes at Loughborough University. The issue with this is that athletes had to pay for transport, hotels, and possibly take time of work. Obviously this is an issue for both urban and rural areas. However, in most rural areas there is little public transport which would require athletes to get lifts or pay for taxis. For the scheme to be more effective it could have been set up in more locations over the UK or possibly have a road show element which would help them attract potential participants. However, as research from Active Places Cymru (2012) discovered, there is a severe lack of top facilities available, therefore such initiatives would be hard to execute in such mediocre facilities. In some cases it is not viable to run a scheme to identify talent in rural areas, as the population base is small.

## **2.6 Athlete Support**

“The vast majority of young people identified as talented do not go on to elite, or even sub-elite, careers” (Abbott et al. 2002). This suggests that athlete support could be an important factor to consider. After being identified, the performer is in need of support, be this from family or friends, NGB, Sport Councils or Clubs. Athlete support is highlighted by the UK Parliament (2012), who state that it is “vital to work closely with a federation’s national performance manager, ensuring

that individuals with potential are given the opportunity to train and, where appropriate compete at the highest standards". Bailey (2007) states that recent years have "witnessed a radical change in both policy and practice related to the development of our most talented young people in schools, supported by significant financial investment". p1, suggesting that financial investment is having a positive impact on talent support.

A potential issue could be that people from rural areas face a huge challenge in travelling to training camps, competitions and team events as they can at times live so far away from where it is taking place, as suggested by Sporting Equals. UK Sport (2012) state that they "embrace the spirit of all equalities legislation and is committed to eradicating any form of unfair discrimination". They go on to state that "Equality is about recognising and removing the barriers faced by people involved, or wanting to be involved in sport". This implies that wherever a potential performer is located geographically they should have an equal opportunity to other participants.

In Wales, the Welsh Athlete Support system focuses on providing financial and sporting assistance to Welsh Athletes that have the potential to deliver success at the next Commonwealth Games. Whilst Welsh Athletics (2012) aims to "provide appropriate support systems for their highest performing athletes and to ensure there are suitable competition opportunities throughout the four year cycle towards Glasgow 2014". This is done through a panel from the Senior Management of Team of Welsh Athletics. The panel reviews athlete performance, tracking whether they are fulfilling potential and are progressing well. Welsh Athletics (2010) criteria for athletes support states that "The athlete's geographical location will be considered". This demonstrates that they have an understanding that there are issues to consider in terms of athletes location and that their support systems take this into account. The UK Sport Equality and Diversity Strategy was established in 2010 and continues until 2013. Its purpose was to recognise that "to give support to an athlete requires an understanding of his or her needs which can be affected by a number of factors including background, gender, sexuality or religion. "

## 2.7 Summary

It can clearly be seen that different geographical location suffer from a variety of different barriers that hinder opportunity and can ultimately affect progression, as highlighted by Kavangha et al. (2005). The work of Eime et al. (2008) and Sport England (2007) identified that rural areas have lower participation rates, suggesting that there are more barriers in these areas, however this disagrees with a study from Ceredigion County Council, which discovered that in Wales, rural counties in fact had higher participation rates. Research from Appropriate Facilities (2012), Active Places Cymru (2012) and Sporting Equals has suggested that one of the main barriers is the lack of or standard of facilities whilst Payne et al. (2010) and the Welsh Assembly Government (2011) highlight transport issues in rural areas. Transport issues can further can be affected by the economic situation of the performer, with the AA (2012) highlighting the increase in petrol prices, which could effectively prevent a performer from competing. It is important that these barriers are eliminated to allow everyone an equal opportunity as stated by UK Sport (2012). The key issue in rural areas is the lack of talent identification, as previously noted, the majority of the schemes and initiatives running up to the London 2012 Olympics were based in urban areas as they were more populated and had the potential to discover new performers. The barriers forementioned such as transport and economic would suggest that many performers would simply not be able to get to the locations where the initiatives are taking place, hindering their opportunity for success. However once identified the correct support system must be put in place for the performer to enable them to continue to perform. As Abbott et al. 2002 stated "The vast majority of young people identified as talented do not go on to elite, or even sub-elite, careers". Therefore Clubs, Sport Councils and NGB must ensure they are doing everything possible to keep the performers in the sport and to help them reach their potential.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**METHOD**

### **3.1 Overview**

This chapter contains an overview of the method used and how it was chosen along with an explanation of the process. It also explains how and why this specific sample group was chosen.

### **3.2 Research**

Smith (2010) states that “Research is the gateway to new discoveries” whilst Gratton (2005) suggests “Research is a systematic process of discovery and advancements of human knowledge”. Baxter et al (2001) agrees with Gratton (2005) stating that it is a “systematic inquiry or investigation into a subject in order to discover facts and principles”. Therefore the purpose of research is to answer a specific research question. In this case the question being the identification and critical analysis of factors affecting progression in sport: a focus on rural communities. Hussey (1997), states that there are different purposes to research “it could be to generate a new knowledge, provide solutions to a problems or even to explain a new phenomenon.” In the case of this research question the purpose is to generate new knowledge and discover the potential issues and also to seek to provide solutions to these issues. Smith (2010, p8) states that there are two different types of research methods, these being quantitative and qualitative research.

Smith (2010) goes on to describe Quantitative as “A deductive position that emphasises quantification in collection and analysis of data through the process of precise numerical measurement” p8, whilst he describes Qualitative as “An inductive position that emphasises an understanding of human behaviour through methods such as interviews, observation, focus groups, surveys and/or case studies” p8. The method being used for this investigation will be the qualitative method as it will allow the investigator to “capture meanings or qualities that are not quantifiable, such as feelings, thoughts and experiences” (Gratton, 2005, p30). Given the purpose of the study the qualitative method is the method needed to produce the best outcome.

### **3.3 Methods**

There are many data collection methods that can be used in order to aid an investigation. In terms of qualitative the two most common methods are interviews and questionnaires. For the purpose of this research question, the interview method will be used. Smith (2010, p202) states that an interview is “An approach that requires a face-to-face talk in order to generate data”. For the purpose of this investigation interviews seem the logical approach as they enable the researcher to collect and extract the maximum information. Other methods were considered such as questionnaires, however this method would not extract enough information and would not allow the research to probe the participants and ask them to expand on their answers. “Interviews enable participants to talk about their own experiences in their own words and elaborate on any areas of particular interest or importance” (Gratton, 2005). This suggests that interviewing the participants is the correct method choice.

### **3.4 Process**

The interviews will be semi structured, which “involved the interviewer developing a series of question that is in the general form of an interview guide. This procedure offers the interviews some degree of flexibility in the interview structure” (Smith, 2012, P5). This method allows the interviews to get more information from the participant as they will not be following a fully structured interview which is a “Data collection procedure that involves the interviews asking all participants exactly the same questions in order, with the aid of a rigid interview guide” (Smith, 2010, p205). Using the semi structured method rather than the structured method will allow for probing, which is where “The researcher can gain additional information from the respondent through using particular techniques.” (Gratton, 2005). This will allow the interviews the chance for unexpected data to come to light that may not be possibly in a structured interview. The analysis approach being used in this research will be inductive analysis. Gratton (2005, p37) describes this type of analysis as “Interpretive, qualitative, develops a theory and involves questions such as ‘why’ and how”. It also states that it follows a “Flexible research design that may be continually adapted”. The pattern of the research is

to collect the data, then analyse it and develop a theory and explanation of the data. Therefore the approach must be inductive.

As the interviews will be transcribed, a content analysis will be used in order to categorise the main concepts and themes that are produced from the interviews. This could be specific barriers or reasons for not continuing to participate that are often mentioned by each of the participants. According to Holt (2008), content analysis is a “method of data collection that takes information from the content of things like newspaper, magazines, television programmes or recorded conversations.” (p.246). Gratton (2005) agrees with Hold (2008) stating that it is “The collection and analysis of information from communications” (p284). The issue with content analysis is that it involves the researcher determining the results. Gratton (2005, p 185) states that a disadvantage of this could be “the misunderstanding of meaning associated with such a text and so on”.

### **3.5 Sample**

As suggested by Eime, R, et al (2008) and Sport England (2007) rural areas could suffer from more barriers to participation than urban areas. Therefore it is important to target athletes and swimmers from specific rural areas in order to gain an insight into the barriers that they may be facing. The area under investigation in this study is Ceredigion, a predominantly rural county situated in Mid Wales. “The population consists of every individual case that possesses the characteristic that is of interest to the researcher.” (Gratton , 2005). The sample of the population under study will be 4 Welsh athletes and swimmers. The criteria for selection is that they that have performed for Wales at international youth level, between the ages of 16-18. The participants must have been living in Ceredigion at the time they were training and participating. Limited research has been conducted into the factors that affect progression, with the findings of Appropriate Facilities Wales (2012), clearly highlighting the lack of facilities available to performers from rural areas. Therefore this process aims to discover new facts and enhance knowledge of the barriers that potential Welsh athletes and swimmers face in rural areas.

As the study is very specific and only focuses on an extremely small percentage of Ceredigion it is important that the right sampling method is chosen. For this study the method used will be the 'Key Informant' method. Gratton (2005) states this method is where "individuals are chosen on the basis of specific knowledge that they possess" p113. This study involved Welsh Athletes from rural areas in a small county in West Wales; consequently there will be a narrow population range that match the criteria for this analysis. For this reason this excludes other methods such as random sampling which involves "every member of the population having an equal probability of being selected" (Gratton, 2005, p111).

### **3.6 Reliability and Validity**

"Reliability is a prerequisite for any successful research project" (Gratton, 2005). To ensure the reliability of results it is vital that the participants are ensured of anonymity and also that there are no right or wrong answers. Subject bias involves participants trying to give the answer they think the researcher wants to hear, therefore causing unreliable results. Validity is defined by Smith (2011, P. 205) as "A concept concerned with the integrity of the conclusion generated from the research". It can be categorised into internal and external validity. Smith (2011, p69) states internal validity "Provides the researchers with a level of confidence that the independent variable causes a change in the dependant variable" whilst external validity "Concerns the degree to which the conclusions in the research study would hold for other persons in other places and at other times". Therefore for the research to be consistent all participants must be subject to the same interview guide under the same conditions, which is a semi structured interview. Executing the same procedures in the same order for each participant will ensure that the research is valid and would be the same if it was conducted again by another researcher. None of the questions will be asked in a way which will direct the participant into giving a certain answer that is desired by the interviewer. This will avoid any demand characteristics. Cardwell et al. (2009) claims that demand characteristics are "those elements in a research situation that lead participants to behave in accordance with what they perceive the research situation demands of them." (p. 530).

Smith (2011, p203) states that a pilot interview is “A procedure that involves pre testing of research methods in order to identify weaknesses in data collection approach”. A pilot study was conducted and during the pilot interview it was discovered that some of the questions asked were not clear to the participants and they were difficult to interpret, hence effecting the interview process. Listening back on the pilot interview it was discovered that subject bias was involved and the interviewer, not knowingly so, was hinting towards answers when probing the participant, affecting the reliability of the study. The process and results of the pilot interview led to a change of the interview guide to structure the questions in less complicated matter and also helped to ensure the researcher now understands that the probing questions must not subconsciously give the participants the answers he/she wants to hear and ultimately affect the results of the interviews.

Prior to the interviews beginning the participants will have to sign a consent form and a participant information sheet to ensure they understand what they have agreed to take part in. The participants will be informed by the interviewer before the interview of who will have access to the recordings and transcripts of the interview - if they are concerned by this they will not be pressurised in any way to go ahead with the interview. To keep their information confidential and ensure that the participants cannot be identified, it may be necessary to assign numbers to the participants or use pseudonyms. It is important that any documents that link the participants to any pseudonyms or numbers are kept in a separate location to the recordings and transcripts. McNamee (2007) states that “it is vital to identify who has access to the data and where it is kept”. Participants will be informed of this information beforehand. The participants will all be asked an identical set of questions, which will be asked in the same style to ensure the reliability and validity of the research. The interview guide will be as flexible as possible, this will allow probing and the opportunity to question the participants some more if it is needed, depending on the response they give.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**DISCUSSION**

## 4.1 Overview

This chapter contains a critical analysis of the information collated from the four interviews that were conducted. The material will be compared and analysed against the information and key themes that were discovered in the review of literature. Throughout the interviews the following themes continued to reappear, a lack of facilities, transport to competitions and training venues and the distance the participants had to travel in order to access top facilities. An emerging theme during the interview procedure was the lack of coaches in rural areas, with three of the participants highlighting that they mainly had contacts with volunteer coaches and rarely had access to highly qualified coaches.

## 4.2 Facilities

It had been suggested from Charlton (2012) that the 'lack of' and 'conditions of' the facilities available could be a potential barrier to participants in rural areas. This agreed with the work of Appropriate Facilities (2012) who had also suggested that many sport facilities were in poor condition and were in need of significant investment to refurbish or renew them. During the interviews the participants were also critical of the 'lack of' and 'standard of' facilities. Participant A stated that *"You're at a direct disadvantage, just due to the facilities"* and went on to state that *"The pool we trained in was, obviously, 25m and it was in pretty poor condition; but there was no 50m pool available in our county"*. His comments suggest that the pool he/she had access to was not up to standard. Participant B added that *"We had a 25m pool, which we trained in, which was 16 miles away from me, but the standards of those facilities weren't as good as those in bigger cities, such as Swansea or Cardiff"*. The participant is suggesting that larger cities and urban regions have better facilities than rural areas; which could suggest that Sport Northern Ireland (2010) were correct in stating that "A medium-sized city can be far more facilitative of participation than a rural or urban area," as they could possibly have access to better facilities. Participant C states that *"We only had a field track, a 400m track and that was just grass; and it was all lumpy and so it was really rubbish"*, whilst participant D states *"I used to train on the field of my secondary school which had a rough 400 metre grass that was uneven and full of*

*bumps*". This would imply that the standard of facilities available to the athletes was far from satisfactory. There is no comparison between a 100m athlete training on a bumpy grass track to an athlete training on a top, flat, rubber, all weather surface. Participant C also stated that *"the village where I live there was a treadmill in the leisure centre but there was only one; so if that was in use and the weather was bad, you couldn't actually train"*. In Richard Lewis (2009), chairman of Sport England stated that "those who live in rural areas deserve to have access to high quality schemes and facilities". Sport England has clearly noticed the issue of facilities in rural communities and have put in place an initiative to try and target the problem. The information on facilities gained from these interviews suggests that Sport Wales also need to look into the area and improve facilities and access in rural communities.

Research from Active Place Cymru (2012) had discovered that within a 10 mile radius in rural Ceredigion, (where the interviewees lived), there were only 15 accessible sporting opportunities, as highlighted by the participants who commented that they had few facilities available to them. All the participants have highlighted the fact that the conditions of the facilities were not acceptable, agreeing with Charlton (2012), Appropriate Facilities (2012) and Bogapa (2004,) who all alluded to the fact that facilities in rural areas are often limited by the design and age of the buildings. This would correspond with both Participants A and B who declared that they trained in a 25m pool, with the design of the building actually making it impossible to increase the size of the pool. Therefore this implies that significant investment is required to improve the qualities of the amenities available, as suggested by Appropriate Facilities. Participant C stated *"The closest running track really was Carmarthen, which is an hour away, whilst participant D added "Nearest one was in Carmarthen which is around forty miles"* Athletes are agreeing with the work of Active Places Cymru (2012), the nearest running track is located well outside the 10 mile search radius, with Participant D stating the nearest available facility was 40 miles away, with Participant C adding that it was an hour's drive away. The comment from Participant D stating that the nearest running track was 40 miles away, was astounding; however participant B states that *"Swansea was the closest 50m pool and that was 80-odd miles away"*

whilst participant A stated *“We didn’t have any 50m pools in our county, let alone in our town”*.

Therefore all participants have highlighted the issue of the lack of facilities and the distance that they have to travel to access top class facilities, with the distance they have to travel ranging from 40-80 miles. The participants have agreed with the research from the literature review, with all stating that the facilities they had access to in rural areas, were indeed not up to standard and the amenities that they needed to use to train in were simply too far away as suggested by Active Places Cymru (2012). This also agrees with Sporting Equals (2013) who had stated that in rural areas the lack of facilities were a major barrier and in some areas accessing good facilities would be easier for others. Furthermore this is highlighted by Active Place Cymru (2012), as their research from the postcode CF24 4RP in Glamorgan discovered that urban dwellers had over 200 sports facilities available to them, compared to the 15 in rural Ceredigion.

### **4.3 Transport**

Sport England’s Framework (2004) states that *“Barriers to participation in sport vary. Lack of transport is often the biggest issue in rural areas”*. Whilst Payne et al. (2012) stated that *“the barriers of cost and transport to activities are most prominent and must be dealt with in order to overcome participation levels”*. These statements both suggest that transport issues can affect participation and progression in sport. Therefore it was vital to interview the participants on this topic to gain an insight into their thoughts. As Active Place Cymru (2012) concluded that there were on 15 sports opportunities available, it is clear that participants had to travel long distances in order to access facilities, which of course will affect the participants and their family financially. Participant A stated *“It also cost a lot of money because we had to travel quite a lot to go to competitions.”* Whilst B added that *“Travel cost a lot of money”* and participant D adding *“The fact that petrol is so expensive is obviously an issue and makes taking part so much more difficult for athletes who live in villages like mine”* These statements would be consistent with Sport England (2004) and Payne et al (2012)

in suggesting that one of the main barriers faced by athletes was the distance to be travelled and cost of transport.

PetrolPrice (2012) stated that petrol prices had increased roughly £0.30 over that last 7 years whilst the AA added that in 2013 petrol prices were now standing at roughly £1.38 per litre. Whilst transport has been noted as a key barrier it is clear that the increases in fuel price will affect participation. Participant A states that *“Petrol prices went up as well and that made it a lot harder, it basically doubled the price of a tank. So that was pretty hard.”* These comments indicate that participating got harder due to the increase in fuel price. Participant D states that with regards to his/her parents *“it must have cost them a lot in petrol, but I was lucky that they could afford it.”* This demonstrates that both participants noticed the increase in petrol prices, however participant D does not suggest that it was an issue for the family. In 2012 the Northern Ireland Assembly (2012) suggested that people from lower and higher social economic positions tend to be physically active in different ways and that higher social economic positions tend to be more positively associated with leisure time. This would therefore signify that the fuel prices can have a substantial effect on participants, although those participants from higher social economic positions such as participant D do not tend to find this aspect as much of a barrier as those from lower social economic positions, such as participant A. However participant D does go on to state that *“Increasing cost of fuel and the time commitment needed by my parents had an increasing impact on my ability to compete and train.”*, which would oppose the view for the Northern Ireland Assembly and suggests that all socio economic groups can be affected by a rise in fuel prices. Participant A also points out that *“There were a lot of expenses to do with the car, like petrol money, tyres, etc. It all mounts up eventually.”* This participant had previously stated that there was not a 50m pool within his county, therefore he has to travel more than someone who lives in an urban area. For example, an urban performer could travel by public transport, walk or cycle to the facility at no or little cost, whilst participant D can only travel by car and the cost is significantly higher when compared to the urban performer.

An emerging theme in the area of transport was how the participants felt after travelling. Due to their geographical location they often had to travel much further than other participants, for example Participant A stated that to get to Swansea was 80 miles, whereas a competitor from Swansea would hardly have to travel at all. Participant D states *“I always arrived tired from having travelled so far in the car where others had just got up and got there in a few minutes. Everything was that much more difficult and took longer.”* Whilst participant C adds *“Because it’s two hours away for us to travel in the morning, so you’re tired already, and we had to pay for that”*. Participants C and D have highlighted the fact that their location was having an effect on their performance, with them arriving tired for competitions due to so much time spent in a car travelling - clearly not the ideal preparation for a competition. Participant D goes on to state that *“Once I turned up for an event – 80 miles away, to find that it had been cancelled and no-one had told me, so for me a total waste of a day”*. This suggests that competitors were not being informed of cancellations to events with the distance they had to travel not being acknowledged. Q12 in the interviews process asked:

*Q12: When you started to travel longer distances to train and compete did anyone talk or ask you if you had any problems or issues relating to the increased demands?*

The response from participant A was *“No, not at all. We weren’t asked by anyone really, about if we had any issue”*, B added *“No, not really.”*, participant C states that *“I wasn’t asked at all. I guess it would have been nice if my family were asked and given financial support, but they weren’t at all.”* whilst participant D adds that *“Not really, once or twice my coach asked me if I was available and could my parents bring me to training or events, but there was never any real interest and I think that the fact of living so far away was largely ignored, providing I could turn up on time.”*

This response to this question is interesting as it demonstrates that none of the participants were asked if the distance they had to travel was an issue and if they needed any financial support, as highlighted by participant C who said *“it would have been nice if my family were asked and given financial support”*. In 2011 the

Welsh Assemble Government acknowledged that, “They must begin working with local authorities to address the problem of transport to facilities”. This issue seems to have been highlighted by all the participants, who clearly suggest that improved access to facilities and improved transport links would have improved their performance. This is also suggested by The Commission for Rural Communities (2009) who stated that a solution to improving participation levels would be to “Improve transport/accessibility to compensate for the centralisation of services”.

#### **4.4 Athlete Support**

Abbott et al.2002 has suggested that the majority of talented youngsters do not go on to elite or even sub elite careers. As the research question involves identifying the barriers that are affecting progression it is vital to look at how athlete support impacts on progression. UK Parliament (2012) stated it is essential to ensure that individuals with potential have the opportunity to train and to compete at the highest standard, suggesting that all performers no matter where their geographical location is, should be supported and given an equal opportunity. All the performers involved in this research have stopped competing, therefore it is imperative to look retrospectively at the support they were given, to understand if this was a significant issue. A key factor affecting progression has already been discovered - the location of the athlete and the transport links in place, as highlighted by participant C who stated that *“People living in Cardiff, for example, could just go to NIAC at UWIC, but I had nothing and as I said earlier, about bad weather, if it was raining then I couldn’t go out and train, but they could. So I was at a disadvantage. As UK Parliament (2012) stated that geographical location should not affect performers, it is clear to see that participant C feels that he/she was not supported compared to urban performers. The issue of facilities comes into support, as performers from urban areas are in essence given more support as they have the facilities available to them, whilst rural athletes are given little support in order to access facilities. Participant D states that, “I think in the end it just took up too much of my time in travelling”. This would suggest had he been better supported then travelling time could possibly been reduced. Participant D goes on to compare himself/herself with urban competitors and states that” Because they get access to good facilities and proper coaching on a regular basis*

*I always felt that I was disadvantaged and simply had to try harder to make the team selection*". Both participants C and D state that they felt at a direct disadvantage to their urban counterparts due to the lack of facilities and coaches available to them. This would suggest that they are not being treated equally as they both feel urban participants had a better chance of success. This implies that the correct support systems were not in place to assist these performers and that they were not treated equally. This also agrees with Abbott et al (2002), as none of these talented performers went on to elite or sub elite careers. This is not suggesting that if they had access to the best coaches and facilities they would have been elite athletes, but merely signifying that with better access to coaches and facilities and with an improved support system in place, this could have assisted the performer in their progression. Bailey (2007) suggested that financial investment may have a positive impact on supporting talent, this would imply that had the performers been invested in financially to help them cover the costs of petrol, car repairs, etc. then it could possibly have had a positive impact on them.

As previously stated, the participant's location was a key issue, with them having to travel further than other competitors. Participant C and D have already stated that they were tired at times due to the time they spent travelling and at times they often had to stay overnight in a hotel before an event. UK Sport (2012) has stated that they want to embrace the spirit of equalities and are committed to eradicating unfair discrimination; however surely these performers are being discriminated against due to their geographical location and are not getting an equal opportunity compared to their urban counterparts. This is not to suggest that there is not unfair discrimination in urban areas. The performers stated that they were at a disadvantage to others due to their location; suggesting they must have felt discriminated against and that they were not provided for effectively. Participant A stated that for "*Competitions you had to find your own way there, unless you were competing internationally, where you'd have to drive to a point and then catch a bus from there.*" Whilst participant C adds "*If there was a competition down in Cardiff and it was really early in the morning, then we'd have to pay for our overnight accommodation there*". This confirms that they were not supported successfully and that for the majority of the time the competitors had to find their own way to competitions, or they had to meet the team bus in a location that was

still too far away. Participant C adds that they had to pay for their own accommodation, although he/she does go on to state that whilst away representing Wales this was paid for. During the interview process all participants highlight continuously the fact that they were reliant on their parents, with participant D stating *“There wasn’t much financial support for travelling so I was reliant on my parents for help in this area”* participant C adding *“My parents had to take time off work to take me to training etc.”* The support of the parents was second to none, as demonstrated by participant C when asked:

*Q: If your parents weren’t available, for example if both your parents were ill or if the car had broken down, did you have any other options?*

To which the participant responded, *“No, they would just ask someone else to do it instead.”* This demonstrates how important the parental support system was to these individuals and that without the parents being willing to take time off work and fund their children, then they would most likely have dropped out much sooner. Welsh Athletics (2010) stated that *“The athlete’s geographical location will be considered”*. However the interview process has discovered that this was not the case and they were not supported sufficiently enough, with their main source of support being from their parents. However the participants did highlight the fact that Ceredigion County Council had provided some limited funding.

*“Our local council gave out money, small grants, to anyone who competed internationally, to try to help finance their training, but the cheques only went up to £50, which in terms of training would pay for one month’s worth of training and that’s it.” (Participant A)*

*“All I can remember is being given £200 or something like that from Ceredigion Council. I’m not actually sure what it was for. I think we had to pay for our own kit as well, but I don’t remember how much that was. We had to pay for the cost of shorts, the jacket and the tracksuit.” (Participant C)*

*“Got a couple of donations of £100 each from my local school and Ceredigion County Council for representing Wales to spend on kit.” (Participant D)*

The funding available was minimum, however the participants do state that it was helpful and assisted in paying for kit, however participant A does add that it was not enough to help cover costs. The majority of the information from the interviews would suggest that they were not financially supported for training and going to competitions. However, when they were representing Wales they were funded, Participant A states that, *“But for competitions you’d expect either to travel or pay for your own accommodation, unless you were competing for an international team when they would pay for us.”* Participant C adds that *“One year we went to Italy and the other we went to Ireland, but then the accommodation was all paid for by the athletics club”* and participant D states *“When I was representing Wales, the Welsh Athletics Association paid for the accommodation and international travel. At other times then my parents had to pay.”* This demonstrates support systems were in place and the performers were funded when they were away competing at international level, however the concern from the performers was in the events leading up to selection they were financially unsupported. However participant A goes on to state that, *“Interestingly with me, they offered me a flat in Swansea to cut out the travelling aspect, so then I could train continuously in Swansea”*. This would imply that Swim Wales have taken into account the geographical location of the performer and are offering the best possibly opportunity of a chance to move to where the top training facilities and coaches are located. In this case that participant turned down the opportunity stating that *“but due to my age and that I was going to do “A” Levels that didn’t seem like a viable option for me. So they did offer it but they didn’t take into account my age and my education.”* Therefore the participant was provided with support in this case, however he/she did not feel Swim Wales had taken into account his age and education, suggesting that the support systems in place need to be flexible in order to suit individual performers and their needs.

#### **4.5 Coaches**

The issue of a lack of top class coaches in rural areas was an emerging theme that was not researched during the review of literature and continued to appear during the interviews. The analysis of literature had established the there was a lack of facilities available to performers and according to participant A, this lack of

facilities resulted in the lack of top coaches *“The bigger better coaches would rather stay around the higher-populated areas with the bigger clubs and the clubs were bigger because they had better facilities, in Swansea and Cardiff and places like that”*. This implies that top coaches have less interest in coming to rural areas and coaching at poor facilities. The issue of coaching again meant that the participants thought they were being treated unfairly as rural performers, and possibly discriminated against as they only had access to volunteer coaches. Participant C states that *“Because people closer to Carmarthen and Cardiff had access to the track and the coaches etc. so they were treated differently from someone like me.”* And participant D adds *“Because they get access to good facilities and proper coaching on a regular basis I always felt that I was disadvantaged and simply had to try harder to make the team selection.”* Participant D goes on to state that *“It would certainly have been a lot easier to have access to a coach and to train with others of similar ability”*. These statements speak volumes of how the performers feel they were mistreated and under supported. The UK Parliament (2012) wanted to ensure that individuals are given the potential and opportunity to train at the highest standards. However it is highly unlikely that rural performers will have this opportunity, as they are restricted in terms of the facilities and coaches that are available to them. Nevertheless it is important to note that UK Parliament made this announcement in 2012 and therefore this will have had no impact at all on the performers that were interviewed, as they are no longer competing. It does suggest that Parliament has noticed that rural areas tend to struggle more with progression and that it is trying to improve the system.

The coaches that the participants claimed to have access to were all volunteer coaches, with participant A stating, *“We had volunteer coaches, which didn’t really help. If you compare a volunteer coach to a £30,000 a year paid coach from Swansea, for example, there’s just no comparison at all with the quality of training.”* and B adding *“Harder to remain competitive, especially because where I lived we didn’t get access to the facilities and coaches”* and finally C stating *“We didn’t have any professional coaches, only volunteer coaches and the club was run by the voluntary coaches, and they weren’t really qualified.”* Participants A, B and C clearly feel strongly about the fact that they had volunteer coaches who

possessed minimal skills and experience compared to the higher qualified coaches at the best facilities. This issue of a lack of coaches has been noticed by Sport Wales who introduced the Coaching Strategy 2010-2016. Its purpose was to “increase the number of active coaches in Wales and to support them properly if we are to become a healthier and more successful sporting nation”; they went on to state that “all coaches must be qualified to a level appropriate for his or her role”. This strategy demonstrated that Sport Wales have noticed that coaching is an issue and targeting this concern will help Wales become a nation of champions. However participant C does note that *“When we had training weekends, we did have access to coaches, but they weren’t frequent enough for us to actually be beneficial”*. This would suggest that there was access to the coaches, but due to their location and transport issues the access was not viable.

#### **4.6 Other Themes**

An interesting theme that came up during the interview with participant D was technology and access to the internet, and he stated that *“Even things like buying running shoes was difficult as the nearest shops are a 40 mile round trip away and the internet was so slow there was no chance on doing it online”*. This demonstrates the a further barrier was technological, with the participant finding it extremely difficult to buy kit due to the distance to the nearest shops and the fact that the internet connections were so slow it made it impossible to shop online. However in 2012 the EU gave approval for councils to lay cables that will bring super-fast internet to rural areas. This participant was performing in 2008, when internet speeds in rural areas were renowned for being slow, with terrible access and poor connection speeds. With this new super-fast access it can be presumed that this will soon be a barrier of the past and soon rural performers will be able to access the internet in order to buy kit.

Education was another theme that came up briefly with all the participants noting that their competing did affect their education. Participant A noted that *“Teachers always said to me that I spent too much time in the pool and no time doing homework, so my education was affected quite a lot as well.”* Whilst participant C states *“We had to take time off school to compete, so I guess I missed out on*

*some of my education etc. and we had to catch up on everything we missed, because the school didn't really like it.*" And finally participant D adds *"I think it would have been easier if I didn't have such distances to travel, then I would have had more time to spend on my schoolwork"*. The general consensus tends to be that due to distance they had to travel, they had to take time out of school in order to get to locations, with participant A stating that teachers were commenting that he spent too much time swimming and not enough time doing his/her school work. If the support of the performers had been improved then this may not have been a problem. It is possible that Swim Wales and Welsh Athletics expect the participants to change their plans to fit in with the organisations, rather than themselves altering their arrangements in order to suit and help the performers. Injury was another theme that occurred with participant C, with this theme also linking into transport and athlete support. Participant C states that *"I stopped because I had an injury, I think it was while I was in Ireland, where I did something to my ligaments; and then I travelled for more than an hour for my physio every week and that wasn't supported by anything. So then I guess I stopped because the physio wasn't close to home"*. The performer's claims he/she had to travel an hour to access the physiotherapist that she was assigned. This a clear sign that the support systems in place were generic for everyone. It can be assumed that the organisation only paid for one physiotherapist and this was the one for all athletes to use, no matter their location and how far they have to travel. Participant C highlights this as one of the reasons for quitting the sport, when asked:

Q: *So would you say with your ligament injury, the lack of support you received afterwards – you say your physio was an hour's drive away – if the physio had been 20 minutes away, would it have helped and do you think you could have carried on a bit longer?*

Participant C replied

*"Yes, I think it would, because it stops you, and because you think "What if it's going to happen again?" Then you have to travel an hour every week; and it was my Mum who had to take me there and wait for me, and pay for it and everything like that. So it was putting her out a bit. "*

It could be suggested that if he/she had been asked this by Welsh Athletics at the time she was competing, then they may have concluded that she was travelling too far and it would be simpler for them to arrange physiotherapy for her closer to home. This clearly demonstrates that rural performers were not effectively supported and the service was centralised for urban performers.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**CONCLUSION**

## 5.1 Limitations

The results of the study have helped to increase knowledge of the factors affecting progression in rural sport, however there are some limitations to the study. Firstly how the interviews are analysed could be seen as a limitation. Content analysis was used as stated in chapter III; one of the disadvantages of this method being that the researcher could misunderstand the meaning of the associated texts, in this case within the interview transcripts. Secondly, the reliability of the study could be questioned due to the sample size used. If more interviews had been completed then the consistency of the study would have increased, as the results would be simpler to replicate, as suggested by (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Another issue is the participants - the sample was *“4 Welsh athletes and swimmers that have performed for Wales at international youth level, between the ages of 16-18. The participants must have been living in Ceredigion at the time they were training and participating”*. However, one of the participants had been competing two years prior to the other three, suggesting that the participant may have faced different barriers to the other three and vice versa.

## 5.2 Further Study

To improve this study it is vital to improve and produce more reliable and valid results. This could be achieved by using more participants to increase the reliability of the results or by having a stricter sample, for example all participants must have been representing Wales between the years of 2008-2010. The issue with this study is there was an age range set for the sample, but not a date for when they were participating. The study has discovered the barriers that are faced by rural performers, however a further study would be interesting to cross examine these barriers with urban performers, thereby ascertaining which barriers they faced during their time competing and to discover if there are similar barriers to progression for those in urban geographical locations.

### 5.3 Conclusion

The findings of the literature review discovered that there was not a significant difference in participation rates between rural and urban locations, however Kavangha et al. (2005) suggested that the environment people live in can determine participation. Research by Scott (2007) established that rural and urban areas were significantly different, urban areas being densely occupied and developed whilst rural areas range from small settlements to remote villages; it therefore seems feasible that there could be different barriers affecting rural areas. Charlton et al (2012), Suckling et al. (2012) and Green (2012) highlighted the different barriers that could be associated with participation including facilities, transport, location and access to services being mentioned. The findings also discovered that being identified as 'talented' can be more difficult in a rural area, with Baker (2011) stating that identifying talent was a concern and Abbott et al. (2002) adding that the majority of talented athletes do not go on to sub elite or elite carers. The review also indicated that athlete support was essential in maintaining the performer's career, with Bailey (2007) suggesting that financial investment can have a positive effect on supporting talented athletes.

The results of the interview process discovered that the athletes had similar views to the themes encountered in the literature review. The general consensus was that there was a severe lack of resources available to participants and the quality of facilities was not up to the standard requirements of a junior international performer, compared to their views on urban resources. The issue of transport was also highlighted, with the performers stating their concern at the distance they were travelling and the time it took. They also emphasised the effect of increases in fuel price. In terms of support, the interviewees stressed that the performer's key source of support was from their parents, who paid travel expenses and accommodation and ultimately had the responsibility of transporting them around the country to training and competitions. A key emerging theme from the research process was the lack of qualified coaches available to the performers, with all of them highlighting the fact that they only had access to volunteer coaches, whilst higher qualified coaches were situated in more urban surroundings with access to top class facilities.

The main source of support for the performers came from their parents, who had to be available for long lengths of time. For example participant C states he/she had to travel 40miles to training, this could take up to three hours of the parents time in commuting and waiting for the training to finish and cost in excess of £20 per training session, implying that the financial pressure on the parents was substantial. The interview process highlighted that without the support of parents the performers would not have been able to compete. It is recommended that NGB's and coaches screen performers with potential and facilitate any issues that could affect their progression, e.g. relying on parents to take them to and from training. The correct support systems need to be in place in order to facilitate the performers, such as, covering the costs of petrol to enable easier access to the top facilities, qualified coaches and covering accommodation costs to ensure the participants are in prime condition to compete. To maximise the individual athlete's potential of progression the identified barriers need recognising and addressing.

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