

**Cardiff School of Sport**  
**DISSERTATION ASSESSMENT PROFORMA:**  
 Empirical <sup>1</sup>

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**CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**  
**Prifysgol Fetropolitan Caerdydd**

**CARDIFF SCHOOL OF SPORT**

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

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**2014-5**

**An investigation of the transition of athletes from performance to elite level in  
athletics: A case study of Cardiff Met athletes**

**(Dissertation submitted under the Sports Development area)**

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**20023020**

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE TRANSITION OF**  
**ATHLETES FROM PERFORMANCE TO ELITE LEVEL IN**  
**ATHLETICS: A CASE STUDY OF CARDIFF MET**  
**ATHLETES**

Cardiff Metropolitan University  
Prifysgol Fetropolitan Caerdydd

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that impact upon the ability of Cardiff Met athletes to transition from performance to elite level in athletics. In-depth semi-structured interviews were on conducted on two group of four participants. The first group of four were athletes who had made this transition to elite level successfully. The second group contained four athletes who had, so far, been unsuccessful in transitioning to elite level in athletics. The interviews were then transcribed and the data thematically analysed in the form of a table. The findings of this study revealed that Cardiff Met University can be seen to provide the platform for athletes in athletics to make the transition to elite level successfully. These opportunities included: Access to high quality facilities, access to high quality coaches, an elite/professional training environment and the chance to dedicate more time to training. The findings also demonstrated that student-athletes are susceptible to a wide variety of pressure upon entering higher education. These pressures included: Social pressures, pressure from coach to focus on training, pressure from family to focus on work and pressure associated with managing both work and training load. However a key finding that emerged from this study was that all of the elite athletes received some sort of financial backing, whereas none of the athletes in the performance group received this form of support. This indicated that funding may be one of the main factors that enables an athlete to transition from performance to elite level in athletics.

# **CHAPTER 1**

# **INTRODUCTION**

## 1.0 Introduction

Sports Development is a process that aims to establish effective opportunities, systems and structures in order to encourage all people and areas to participate in sport and recreation or to improve their sports performance to their desired level (Collins, 1995). Siedentop (1994) outlined that Sports Development has three main goals: Public health, educational goals and elite performance goals. However an important and mass-disputed issue that has surrounded sports development has been which of these three goals to focus on in relation to government sporting policies (Green and Houlihan, 2005; Hylton, 2013). Public policy has been defined as: “Policies that originate within, or are dependent upon the resources of, the state” (Houlihan, 2005:165). The two biggest contributing factors to the change in focus of sport policy within the UK has been the introduction of the National lottery in 1994 and the conservative governments Sport: Raising the game policy document, which was published in 1995 (Green and Houlihan, 2005; Girginov, 2008). These further underlined the awareness within governments of the importance and potentially beneficial impacts of elite sporting success (Green and Houlihan, 2005; Hylton, 2013).

The Sports Development Continuum provides a useful insight into how the Sports Development process should be and has been used as a guideline to help shape Government sports policies in recent years (Houlihan and White, 2002; Hylton, 2013).

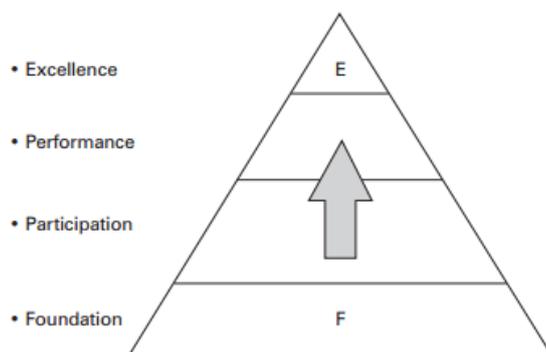


Figure 1.1 The traditional sport development continuum.

Figure 1. The traditional Sports Development Continuum (Hylton, 2013. P.5)

This Sports Development model views the sports development process as hierarchical, with foundation at the base of the model, followed by: participation, performance and excellence (Houlihan and White, 2002; Hylton, 2013). The focus at foundation level is on the learning of skills that can be seen to underpin most sports, the next level of participation focuses more on opportunities to participate in sport (Houlihan and White,

2002). The second half of the model is where athletes who train and compete regularly can be found (Hill, 2007). Furthermore athletes who have competed at regional/county level can be found at the performance stage and athletes who have competed at national level can be found at the top of the pyramid, at the excellence stage (Collins, 1995; Houlihan and White, 2002; Hill, 2007). However Hill (2007) states that sporting excellence can be defined as both elite athletes/ groups, as well as those who manage to achieve their own best possible performance at any level.

Once a sport policy document, for example game plan (2002), has been published by the UK government/Department for culture, media and sport (DCMS), it's then up to UK sport to allocate funding and set targets for sport National governing bodies (Grix, 2009; Hylton, 2013). Leading up to the Beijing Olympics in 2008 athletics received the most funding from UK sport, however despite this financial support they came away from the games with four medals and failed to achieve their medal target, this resulted in their funding being cut and allocated elsewhere (Grix, 2009). There may be a number of different factors that contributed to this lack of success in elite athletics in the UK. The UK athletics website (2007) states that: "Elite junior to elite senior is very poor, we have a massive dropout rate and a large talent pool wasted." This failure of elite junior athletes to transition to elite senior level is supported by research which looked at the success of athletes at world junior athletics championships, it was found that 60-90% of the athletes who medalled at these championships failed to continue this success at senior level (Dick, 2003; Zelichenock, 2005; Foss, 2013). This may be one of the reasons for UK athletics limited international success at senior levels, it's therefore important to understand why so many UK athletes are struggling to make this transition to elite level in the sport of athletics.

There has been a vast amount of research into the topic of career transitions and specifically the transition to elite level in sport (Stambluova, 1994; Wylleman & lavallee, 2004). Research has also highlighted a number of factors that impact upon whether this transition to elite level sport is successful for an athlete (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, Spink, 2008; Finn; rMckenna, 2010). The majority of research within career transitions has focused on an athlete's transition out of sport and the impact of this transition on an athlete's life (Butt and Molnar, 2009; Park, Lavalley and Tod, 2013). However this is not a transition faced by many elite junior athletes.

A common transition that is faced by elite junior athletes is the transition to university (Riemer, Beal and Schroeder, 2000). Research into the life of a student-athlete has been

well-documented in recent years (Kane & Hollean, 2008; Bengston & Johnson, 2010; McNamara & Collins, 2010). However there is limited research on the impact that this transition into higher education has on athlete's ability to make a successful transition to elite level. This research gap presents an interesting area for investigating and could provide useful findings that may be used to explain the current trend of limited success on the international stage in UK athletics. Therefore this paper will look to investigate the transition of Cardiff Metropolitan University athletes, in the sport of athletics, from performance to elite level and the factors that affect whether they are successful in this making this transition.

# **CHAPTER 2**

# **LITERATURE REVIEW**

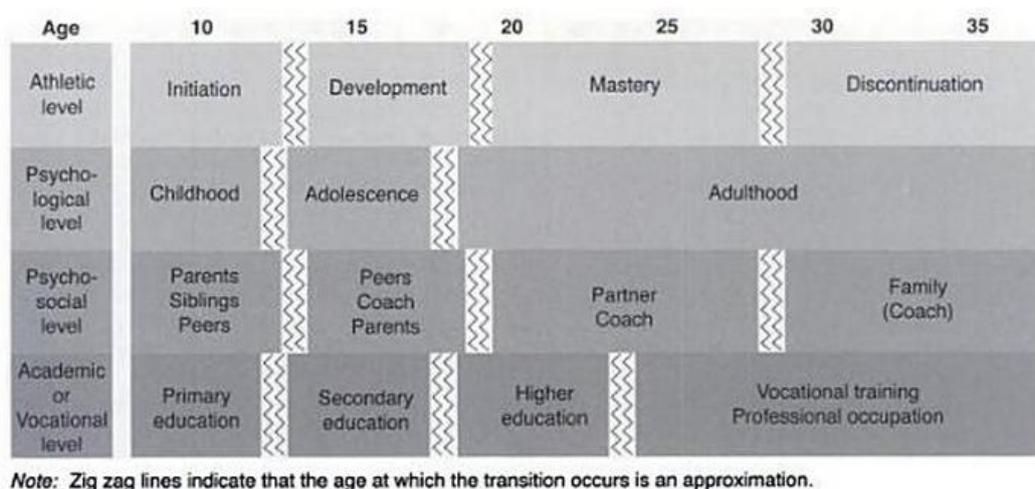
## 2.1 Defining Career transitions

During their sporting careers athletes can be seen to progress through different stages of development and transitions, both within and out of sport (Bloom, 1985; Cote, 1999; Stambulova, 2000). These career transitions have been described as periods of both voluntary and involuntary events that take place during an athlete's sporting life, which can be categorized by a number of different demands, such as lifestyle and competitions, and athletes must cope with these effectively if they are to achieve continued success in their sport (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Research into careers transitions in sport has highlighted two different types of transitions: normative and non-normative. Normative transitions have been described as predictable transitions, which are expected to occur, for example transitioning to elite level in sport (Schlossberg, 1984; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Non-normative transitions are described as unpredictable transitions, such as a career-ending injury's (Schlossberg, 1984; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Orlick and Sinclair (1993) also found there to be two forms of career transitions in sport, however they noted these to be positive and crisis transitions. They stated that positive transitions are transitions which can be solely carried out by the athlete themselves, whereas crisis transitions require an athlete to seek psychological support. These pieces of research highlight the different types of transitions that an athlete is subject to during their sporting careers.

Competitive sport has been defined as any sporting activity where both training and participation are time consuming and where the level of performance is at a relatively high standard (Coakley, 1983). Research into the transition to elite level in sport has acknowledged the time consuming element that accompanies high-performance sports, with the transition into elite level sport highlighted as an integral developmental period in an athlete's career, during which time they can be seen to dedicate more time to their sport and as a result training load/volume increases and training itself becomes more specific (Bloom, 1985; Pearson & Petipas, 1990; Cote, 1999). This reinforces the importance of understanding the factors that can impact whether an athlete's transition to elite level is successful and underpins the aims of this research.

## 2.2 Models of Career transitions

In an attempt to understand the factors that contribute to successful career transitions in sport a number of models have been constructed. Wylleman & Lavallee (2004) created the developmental model of normative transitions in athletes. This model consists of four



stages, they are; Athletic, psychological, psychosocial and academic (see Figure 2. Below).

Figure 2. Wylleman & Lavallee's (2004) developmental model of normative transitions faced by athletes.

The athletics level, seen at the top of Figure 1., outlines the four stages/transitions that athletes are susceptible to as their sporting careers progress. These stages are based on the work by Bloom (1985) who found the athletic stage to consist of three stages, they are: Initiation, development and mastery. The initiation stage involves the learning of basic skills within the sport at a young age, this is followed by the development phase which involves the athlete progressing/developing their skills through adolescence, next is the mastery stage during early adulthood which involves an athlete perfecting their skills and performing at their optimum level (Bloom, 1985; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Finally the fourth stage of discontinuation, seen in Figure 2., has emerged through recent research within career transitions in sport and refers to the drop out/career termination stage at the end of an athlete's sporting career (Taylor & Ogilvie, 2001; Wylleman *et al.*, 2000).

The psycho-social level in the model focuses on the changes that an athlete is faced with, at a social level, as their sporting career evolves (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Bruner *et*

*al.*, 2008). These include changes in coaches and changes in relationships with family members and peers. Furthermore the fourth layer focuses on the academic transitions that an athlete may be faced with, such as the transition to higher education/university (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Bruner *et al.*, 2008). This development model is similar to the Sports Development Continuum (See figure 1.) as it also views sport as a developmental/stage progressive process, with skills development progressing through each stage (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Hylton, 2013). Therefore both of these models could provide a useful guideline for future government elite sports policies.

Stambulova (1994, 2000) proposed a similar six-stage model which focused on the development of career transitions in elite athletes. This model was based on the career transitions experienced by elite Russian athletes and focused on a variety of specialisations. The six-stages included in this model are: The beginning of sports specialisation, transition into intensive training, transition to high-achievement/senior level, transition from peak of career to end of career and finally the end of an athlete's sports career (Bruner *et al.*, 2008; Stambulova, 1994). The second stage of this model is where the transition into elite sport can be found, accompanied with the increase in training intensity and time dedication (Coakley, 1983; Bloom, 1985; Cote, 1999; Bruner *et al.*, 2008). This model provides an interesting insight into the development of career transitions in elite athletes. In terms of elite sports development this model highlights a number of areas where government's sports policies could look to focus their attention, in an attempt to achieve their targets within elite sport.

### 2.3 Transitioning to Elite level – Challenges Faced by Athletes

The factors that impact upon an athlete's transition to elite sport has been widely researched. Bloom (1985) looked at why so many athletes struggle to make this transition to elite level successfully, he found that athletes often struggle to cope with the increase in time dedication and training volume that accompanies this step up to elite sport. Furthermore other issues that athletes reported to struggle with were the personal/family sacrifices that had to be made in order to be successful and the lack of free time available to them (Bloom, 1985). This research is evidence of the types of sacrifices that an athlete must make in order to reach the elite level. Research by Ol-denzel *et al.* (2003) looked at the level of impact that non-athletic factors can have on career transitions in sport, they found that within Australian sport only 50% of athletes make a successful transition to elite level. This research also found that illness, financial problems and low self-confidence all can have a negative impact on the athletes ability to make this transition successfully. This

further reinforces the impact that non-athletic factors can have on an athlete's ability to make a successful transition to elite level. This is supported by recent research into career transitions which has moved towards a more all-round-holistic development approach when looking at talent development in sport (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler & Lavalley, 2004). The need for this approach is reinforced by Wylleman and Lavalley (2004) development model of normative transitions (Figure 2.)

Bussman & Alfermann (1994) conducted a study involving female track and field athletes. They found that highly ranked junior athletes were more likely to stay in the sport through to senior level, than those who were ranked lower at junior level. However this contradicts the current trend in athletics in the UK, highlighted in chapter one, of elite junior athletes failing to transition to elite senior (UK Athletics, 2007). This is supported by research that found the percentage of athletes that are successful in transitioning to elite level to be around 17% (Vanden Auweele, De Martelaer, Rzenwnicki, De Knop, & Wylleman, 2004). This failure to make a successful transition to elite sport reinforces the need for appropriate development of elite junior athletes instead of the current norm, which is to focus on achieving 'early success' and specialisation at a young age (Abbott, Collins, Martindale & Sowerby, 2002). This is evidence of the difficulty of predicting how successful an athlete can be at senior level, at an early age, because this success often does not translate to senior level (UK athletics, 2003; Zelichenock, 2005; Dick, 2013; Foss, 2013).

Research has found that Elite athletes are faced with a variety of challenges during their careers, these challenges can be: Mental (Financial, team selection, training group), personal (diet and injury), Leadership (Coach) and team issues (Jones, Mahoney, Gucciardi). Young athletes who participate in elite sport have found it to be challenging both physically and psychologically (Hollander, Myers, Leunes, 1995). Further challenges young athletes have reported are injury and athlete burnout (Perason, Petipas, 1990; Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004). This is evidence of the issues associated with elite sport at a young age. Athletes have been found to face a variety of different transitions during their career, as well as lifestyle changes that can disrupt their current training intensity or their training quality (Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011). Friendship plays an important role in sports participation, specifically school friends, therefore changing schools/ transitioning between schools can be seen as one of the main reason for the high drop after compulsory education (Wylleman et al., 2002). Research by Bruner *et al.* (2008) found that Compared to Canadian athletes English athletes career transitions are influenced considerably more

by outside of sport factors. This is further evidence of the impact of non-athletic factors on an athlete's development, seen in figure 2. (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

#### 2.4 Transitioning to elite level – Characteristics of a successful transition

Oakley and Green (2001) noted 10 characteristics which they found to be the biggest contributing factors on an athlete's ability to make a successful transition to elite level, these included: Good quality facilities, relevant talent identification, lifestyle and financial support. Similarly, Durand-Bush and Salmela (2002) identified three key areas which they found to be beneficial in the development of highly talented athletes, these were: The athlete's own environment (Parents, coaches etc.), personal factors (academic studies, job etc.) and investment/commitment (Seriousness/ dedication to the sport). This piece of research underlines the impact that an athlete's own decision making, such as deciding to focus on their studies more than their sporting endeavours, can have on their ability to transition to elite sport. Furthermore this is evidence of the type of factors that are present in the third and fourth layers of Wylleman & Lavallee's (2004) development model of career transitions (Figure 2.), as this research the impact that both academic demands and relationships with parents/peers (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). Research by Degal (2002) also found that athletes require a certain level of financial funding, if they are to progress to elite level in sport.

A correlation has been found between the quality of these four factors; the level of coaching development, number of coaches available, athletic support and facilities available, and international sporting success (UK Sport, 2006). The impact of expert coaches upon an athlete's development has been described as critical, with research stating that they have the ability to improve both an athlete's training environment and their performance (Voss *et al.*, 1983; Colbey, 2001). The involvement of these expert coaches has been found to be most beneficial during the later stages of an athlete's development, for example the adolescence stage outlined in Figure 2. (Bloom, 1985; Cote & Hay, 2002). Positive relationships with these coaches, as well as with peers and family members have also been found to benefit an athlete ability to make the step up to elite sport (Bloom, 1985; Sanderson, 2003).

Jeroh (2005) found that athletes require a professional training environment in order to be successful in sport. This is evidence of the beneficial impact that an elite training environment can have on an athlete's development (Hill, 2007). Commitment and persistence have also been found to be of critical importance for the development of more

advanced skills and continued progression through the transitions within the sporting environment (Bloom, 1985; Gould *et al.*, 2002; Van Rossum, 2002). Research has found that an elite athletic career includes 10 years of building up experience to be able to perform at an elite level and then between 5 and 10 years of competing at the elite level (Ericsson *et al.*, 1993; Wylleman *et al.*, 2004; Sosniak, 2006). This shows the level of dedication need by athletes to make the step up to elite sport successfully.

### 2.5 Transitioning into higher education: The student athlete

One factor highlighted in Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) development model of career transitions is the transitions made by an athlete an academic level, such as the transition into Higher education. Research has shown that athletes find handling the demands of high performance sport, as well as academic education difficult (Kane & Holleran, 2008; Bengston & Johnson, 2010; Mcnamara & Collins, 20120). Bengston & Johnson (2010) found that athletes often struggle to cope with both academic and high performance demands effectively because higher education systems do not acknowledge their sporting endeavours. Wylleman & De Knop (1996) found that student-athletes were under more pressure than other students because they were required to succeed in two areas, academic and performance. Research has further reinforced the time dedication needed by student-athlete to be reach elite status in sport, by highlighting the lack of free time available to student-athletes to take part in student/social activities (Anderson, 2002; Giacobbi *et al.*, 2004; Skinner, 2004). Miler and Kerr (2002) found that in order to be successful academically, socially and in sport student-athletes must be prepared to make compromises along the way.

Research has also highlighted the importance of student identity, to student- athletes, for example athletes who dedicate the majority of their time to training may be seen as 'one-dimensional' and as a result feel isolated by their peers (Mcperson, 1980; Killeya-Jones, 2005). Therefore it is important that student-athletes find a balance between social freedom, academic demands and training (Giacobbi, 2004). Research has also found student-athletes to be subject to a variety of transitions within the university environment, such as adapting to university accommodation, relationships with peers and making university teams (Wylleman *et al.*, 1998; Giacobbi, 2004). Furthermore additional pressures from coaches and family have also been found to impact the student-athletes ability to transition to elite level, often with their coach pressuring them to focus more on their competitive sport and their family pressuring them to focus on their academic side of university (Mcnamara & Collins; Giacobbi, 2004). Skinner (2004) found that all student-

athletes view time management as critically important in their hopes of achieving success both academically and in sport. Another important factor that contribute to an athlete's ability to transition to elite level is the funding available to them. Bengston and Johnson (2010) found that as well as poor time management, limited funding/scholarship support meant that athletes struggled to progress in their sport. This reinforces the importance of support being provided to athletes, either through government sports policies or through university support. This presents an interesting area for investigation.

## 2.6 Summary

There has been a wide range of research conducting within the area of career transitions faced by athletes in sport (Bloom, 1985; Stambulova, 1994; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), however there has been limited research into this transition within athletics. This gap in research is even more relevant for investigation with recent failures within UK athletics well-documented (Grix, 2007). Furthermore research regarding the life of a student athlete has also been conducted, however again this is limited. The UK athletic website (2003) reported that there was a lack of athletes making the transition from elite junior to elite senior level, athletes at this junior level can be seen to be at the adolescence stage outlined in Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) development model of normative transition (Figure 2.). During this stage athletes often transition into higher education, therefore this transition could be seen as a potential reason for this poor transition rate within athletics. This presents an interesting area for research. This paper will look to investigate the transition of Cardiff Metropolitan University from performance to elite level and the factors that impact whether they are successful in achieving this step up to elite level.

# **CHAPTER 3**

# **METHODOLOGY**

### 3.1 Introduction

The aim the current research was to understand the factors that contribute to a successful transition to elite level in athletics. This therefore required participants who had not yet managed to make the transition successfully, as well as participants who had been successfully in transitioning to elite level. In order to understand the potential factors that may impact this transition it was important that participants that meet these criteria were given the opportunity to explain their own experience of the factors that may impact this transition in athletics. It was therefore decided that a qualitative research design would be the most effective method for this piece of research. Qualitative research generally aims to describe and understand social trends/issues (Flick, 2007). Furthermore this method of research enables the researcher to be able to analyse participant's experiences, opinions, as well as how they interpret the world around them (Mason, 2002; Flick, 2007).

Mason (2002) explains that effective qualitative research must look to establish explanations rather than offer simple descriptions and these explanations produced from the research should be able to offer a certain degree of cross-contextual generalisation. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) offered a definition of the term 'qualitative' itself;

"Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consist of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible...They turn the world into a series of representation, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to self (p.3)."

The qualitative method used for this piece of research was interviews, specifically semi-structured interviews. Gratton and Jones (2010) explain that semi-structured interviews use a structured set of questions, however the researcher may choose to change the order of these questions or probe for further answers as and when they feel necessary. One of the key advantages of using interviews in research is that they allow participants to explain their own experiences and talk about these in as much depth as they choose to (Kumar, 2005; Gratton and Jones, 2010). Flick (2011) explains that both the validity and reliability of qualitative data are largely determined by the skill set of the researcher, this highlights the importance of practice and can be seen as one of the main reasons for the pilot study that was conducted. The next section will explain how the research for this study was carried out and outline what steps were taken by the researcher to ensure reliability and validity.

### 3.2 Participants

There were eight participants selected to take part in this study. These eight participants were split into two groups and interviewed. One of the groups consisted of four athletes who had competed at county/regional level in athletics, but had so far been unsuccessful in transitioning to elite. The other group consisted of four athletes who had competed at national level and therefore successfully made the transition to elite level in athletics. All participants were required to be currently attending Cardiff Metropolitan University and have competed at the necessary level in athletics to be eligible for selection.

Therefore a purposive sampling technique was adopted to ensure that both groups were represented equally (Dawson, 2009). The snowball sampling was also used this technique involved highlighting initial participants for study and then with the help of these participants, further participants suitable for the study were found (Dawson, 2009; Gratton and Jones, 2010). This ensured that the participants involved in this study were both appropriate and relevant. Therefore the researcher will use his own knowledge of the sport of athletics to select these initial participants and then adopted the snowballing technique to further establish relevant athletes for study.

Flick (2007) highlighted that samples within qualitative research are often small but focused. This small sample size allows the researcher to probe for more detailed answers and analyse the data collected in more thorough detail (Gratton and Jones, 2010). Interviews were therefore the most effective form of data collection for this piece of research because they enabled the participants more freedom in their answers and allowed them to convey their own experiences and motives to the researcher in depth and detail (Donoghue, 2010; Gratton and Jones, 2010).

### 3.3 Procedure

Prior to conducting any interviews on the participants a pilot study was carried out. Gillham (2005) stated that piloting is useful because it allows the researcher to practice the interview process and the data analysis procedure. Oppenheim (1992) highlighted the importance of using participants that are similar to the participants used in the study itself, in order to make the pilot more realistic and beneficial, this is known as a judgement sample. Furthermore the person participating in the pilot study was made aware that they were taking part in a pilot interview, which allowed them to be more critical of the process and areas for improvement were highlighted (Oppenheim, 1992). The participant chosen for the pilot study was an athlete who had represented her local athletics club for a number

of years and was currently studying at Cardiff Metropolitan University, this resulted in some useful data collected. As a result of the pilot study it was decided that more probes should be added to questions within the interview guide. This added to the conversation style of the semi-structured interview and enabled the researcher to probe for more detailed information (Dawson, 2009; Bradford and Cullun, 2011).

Gratton and Jones (2010) state that there are two types of probes used by researchers, these are: Clarification probes, which allow the researcher to seek clarification at any point, and elaboration probes which are used to seek a more in-depth answer from the respondent. Both of these types of probes were added to the interview guide following the pilot study.

It was also decided that before starting the recording a few introductory questions should be asked of the participants to ensure they feel comfortable and help to establish a rapport with the participant (Hannabus, 1996). Furthermore following the pilot study it was decided that participants should also be given a chance to read through the interview guide before beginning the interview process, this enables the participants to understand the types of questions that they will be asked and ensure that they are comfortable with them (Gratton and Jones, 2010).

Gratton and Jones (2010) highlighted the importance of informed consent in qualitative research, explaining that participants must be aware that participation in the study is voluntary and they must give written consent to show that they are happy to participate. The participant consent form for this study can be found in Appendix C and this gave the participants information about what the study involved and what was required of them. Mason (2002) stated that the in-depth and personal nature of qualitative research means that participants often open up to the researcher about very private and personal matters and this information should be kept confidential at all times. Participants were reassured of their confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study, which encouraged them to discuss issues in an honest and open manner and therefore resulted in valid data being collected (Kumar, 2005).

Furthermore often with qualitative research ethical issues arise whilst undertaking the research and therefore it is important to deal with these effectively (Mason, 2002; Simon and Cullen, 2011). Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research, with the private information and data collected that may have identified participants not being published (Kvale, 2007). Gratton and Jones (2010) explained that participants should be made

aware of the anonymity of their information and data and informed that there are no correct answers to the questions being asked, this information was given to participants prior to the interviews commencing. This ensured that the data collected was both valid and reliable.

The interviews used in this study were semi-structured and lasted for between 20 and 30 minutes, and loosely followed a list of structured questions (as discussed in the following section). The Interview Schedule is attached at Appendix D. Silverman (2006) explained the importance of using open-ended questions within interviews, stating that the aim is to develop a thorough understanding of the participant's experiences and open-ended questions allow participants to go into as much detail as they feel necessary, providing richer data for analysis. Open-ended questions are also useful because they can direct the participants towards particular themes that are relevant to the research (Kvale, 2007). The most used method for recording interview data is an audio recording (Bradford and Cullen, 2011). Consequently a Dictaphone was used to record each of the participant's interviews, this enabled more of a rapport to develop with the participants which encouraged them to respond in more detail (Gratton and Jones, 2010). Furthermore these audio recordings of the interviews allowed the researcher to play the interview back and ensure that they did not miss any information given by participants (Ely *et al.* 1991). However Gratton and Jones (2010) also highlighted the negative impact that recording interviews can have on participants, and expressed the importance for the researcher to make it a priority to establish a relaxed environment for participants to counteract this.

### 3.4 Interview Guide

The use of an interview guide is beneficial because it ensures that all of the topics/sub-topics relevant to the research are discussed during the interview (O'Donoghue, 2010). Semi-structured interviews were used in this research, which allowed the researcher to ask questions from the interview guide in whatever order he felt necessary (Gratton and Jones, 2010). This gave the interviews a conversation style flow and enabled the researcher to base their next question upon the answer given by the respondent (Dawson, 2009; Bradford and Cullen, 2011). Furthermore Sparkes (2014) explained that the semi-structured interview guide gives the respondent more flexibility and therefore gives them the opportunity to describe their opinions and feelings in more detail as well as allowing them to discuss any issues which had not previously been considered by the researcher. The interview guide used for this research consisted of mostly open-ended question because they ensured that interview remained focused and relevant throughout, whilst

also giving the participant the chance to talk openly around the theme mentioned within the question (Kvale, 2007; Dawson, 2009). Therefore the interview guide used in this study used a combination of these two types of questions. The interview guide used in this research can be found in appendix D.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The qualitative method of thematic analysis was chosen to analyse the data collected in this study. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a process that aims to reduce, organise and describe the data. The main aim of thematic analysis is to identify themes within the data collected, this differs from content analysis because the themes are chosen based upon on the data that is collected (Ezzy, 2002). This highlights the importance of accurately transcribing the data collected from the interviews. Polit and Beck (2014) express the need for the recording of every piece of information shared by the respondent, in order to ensure no relevant information is missed.

The data analysis process in this study involved putting the raw data produced from the interviews into a table (Appendix A), and categorising this raw data into relevant themes. A key advantage of this method of qualitative analysis is that it is able to highlight similarities and differences across sets of data (Sparkes, 2014). This is particularly important for this piece of research because it allows the data collected from the group of elite athletes and the group of performance athletes to be compared and contrasted. The data was then presented in the discussion in the form of text and quotations.

| Elite respondents | Raw Data  | Interpretation   | Theme                    |
|-------------------|---|--|--------------------------|
| A                 | So University is a big, massive step up for me because I went from training, or being able to train like twice, three times a week to training six times a week | University impact, increase in training volume, increase in time dedicated to training | University opportunities |
|                   | Being part of an elite training group. Really that is a massive step up from what I had at home.  | University impact, elite athletes/environment, difference to previous environment      | University opportunities |

Example of the Data Analysis table (Full version in Appendix D)

# **CHAPTER 4**

# **DISCUSSION**

## 4.0 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that impact Cardiff Metropolitan University athletes, in the sport of athletics, and their ability to make a successful transition from performance to elite level. Through in-depth qualitative analysis of the data collected from the interviews, conducted on elite group of athletes and a group of performance athletes, a number of key themes emerged, such as: University opportunities, Pressure/time management and funding. The next section discusses the importance of these themes in relation to relevant literature and compares and contrasts the experiences of both groups of athletes, in the hope of establishing the factors that contribute to an athlete's successful transition to elite level in the sport of athletics.

### 4.1 University Opportunities

Upon analysis of the data collected in the interviews conducted in this study, a reoccurring theme mentioned by all participants, in both the performance group and the elite group, were the opportunities available to them now they're at attending Cardiff Met University. This transition into higher education is acknowledged in Wylleman & Lavalle's (2004) development model of normative career transitions (Figure 2.). One of the opportunities mentioned by the athletes was that are now able to dedicate more time to training:

*"So University is a big, massive step up for me because I went from training, or being able to train like twice, three times a week to training six times a week."* (Participant A, elite group, Transcript 1)

*"I find everyone a lot more focused, are a lot more dedicated to the sport. I am training a lot more than what I would do at home...there is a good vibe at university."* (Participant E, performance group, Transcript 5)

This increase in time dedicated to training described the athletes, since joining Cardiff Met, has been highlighted by researchers as a key factor in the transition to elite level in sport (Bloom, 1985). Both participants also indicate an increase in their training volume, which research has shown must be introduced if an athlete is to make this step up to elite level, with an increased focus on specialisation also found to play an integral part in an athlete's development (Pearson & Petipas, 1990; Cote, 1999). These statements can also be seen to demonstrate both commitment and persistence by the athletes which have been shown to facilitate the development of more advanced skills, further aiding the development and progression of athletes (Bloom, 1985; Gould *et al.*, 2002; Van Rossum, 2002). These statements by participants A and E support Wylleman and Lavalle's (2004) development

model of normative transitions (Figure 2.) as they describe progressing to the mastery stage, outlined within the athletic level of the model, upon entering higher education. This is evidence of how this model is both applicable and relevant to the development of athletes in the sport of athletics.

Another important opportunity that both groups of athletes described having available to them, since joining Cardiff Met, is the access to high quality coaches:

*“When I joined Cardiff Met I started training with a new coach. He is actually the head coach of Welsh Athletics, so I would definitely say that since joining Uni I have access to high quality coaches.”* (Participant D, Elite group, Transcript 4)

*“My coach here is far more experienced with high level athletes, than my coach at home.”* (Participant F, Performance group, Transcript 6)

This access to high quality coaches has been outlined as an important element of provision within elite sports development (Hylton, 2013). With research suggesting high quality coaches are of critical importance to an athlete’s development, and that athletes at a later stage in their development require these expert coaches to perfect/master their skills in order to make it to elite status (Voss *et al.*, 1983; Colby, 2001; Mcdonald, 2011). This is supported by research carried out by UK Sport (2006) which also found there to be a correlation between high performance and the quality of coaching development. Furthermore this can be seen as evidence of the beneficial impact that elite sports policies, such as playing to win (2008), have had on the development of coaches in the UK. However not all participants reported having regular access to these high quality coaches. Participant H, of the performance group, explained:

*“For me my coach he isn’t actually employed by the university as an athletics coach, he is involved with the university set up but he isn’t fully employed so his time is relatively limited.”* (Participant H, performance group, Transcript 8)

Trankle (2004) reinforced the need for coaches to dedicate extended periods of time to their athletes in order to aid their development and progression. Cote *et al.* (1995) further explained that the personal characteristics of an athlete’s coach can play a decisive role in whether an athlete is able to transition to elite level. This may therefore explain why this athlete in particular has failed to transition from performance to elite level. High quality facilities and athletics support have been found to be beneficial to an athlete’s progression (UK Sport, 2006). Participants within both groups reported the impact that the facilities at Cardiff Met had upon them as an athlete:

*“At Cardiff Met Uni you have great facilities which you’ve got to make the most of”* (Participant H, performance group, Transcript 8)

*“The facilities here enable me to...after a race, do contrast bath soaks. The facilities here enable me to do that whereas again at home it’s something you couldn’t do”* (Participant A, Elite group, Transcript 1)

Sport facilities are another important provision within elite sports development (Hylton, 2013). Research by Cole (1975) found that facility development in Australia was one of the main contributors to their success in elite sport in recent years. Participant H reports the importance of using the facilities available at Cardiff Met effectively. Oakley and Green (2010) support this, highlighting that good quality facilities give athletes the opportunity to progress effectively. Furthermore Participant A refers to the support that he receives to aid training, such as ‘Contrast baths’, this is an example of a form of athletics support outlined by UK Sport (2006) as being beneficial to talent development. The provision of high quality facilities is one of the main aims of elite sports development (Hyton, 2013) and these statements by athletes in both groups are evidence of the beneficial impact that they can have on the development of elite athletes. This may be a result of recent London, 2012 driven initiatives focusing on the development and maintenance of high quality facilities (McDonald, 2011). Participants also found the elite training environment at Cardiff Met to be beneficial, stating:

*“It has given me the opportunity to train like a full time athlete and be around other elite sports people”* (Participant D, elite group, Transcript

*“Everyone is quite focused on what they do...and what goal they set out and want to achieve It’s good to mix with all these different athletes”* (Participant E, performance group, Transcript 5)

Hill (2007) explained that to achieve elite sporting success athletes must surround themselves with other elite athletes. This is supported by Jeroh (2005) who found that athletes require a professional training environment in order to be successful in sport. Durand-bush and Salmela (2002) further reinforced this point, stating that highly talented athletes continued success is reliant upon their own training environment, including their coach and athletes that they train with. However again athletes within both the performance group and elite group reported training within an elite environment, therefore this factor may not be a critical factor in the transition of athletes to elite level in athletics.

The establishment of an elite training environment and mixing with other elite athletes is one of the main aims of talent development schemes such as the World Class Performance programmes (British athletics, 2014). The athletes in this study all report finding being around other elite athletes at Cardiff Met beneficial. This may therefore present an area for focus within future elite sporting policies and an avenue for future links between institutes of higher education and British Athletics, or other sporting bodies.

#### 4.2 Funding

The issue of funding within sports development has been widely acknowledged, however this has largely been at a participation and community level (Hylton, 2013). Digel (2002) conducted an analysis of the factors involved in effective elite sports systems at an international level, he found that adequate funding and talent identification schemes/pathways were required to aid talented athlete's development. Participant B, of the elite group stated:

*"2012 I got my first lot of funding, so I was put on Welsh athletics Academy for sports aid which was basically talent identification and since then I have been kept on Welsh athletics funding"* (Participant B, elite group, Transcript 2)

This athlete explains that he has been involved in a talent identification scheme and has also received financial funding. Baker *et al.* (2012) describes talent identification as a process of identifying/recognising athletes who have the potential to excel in their sport. Talent identification can be seen as one of the main motives behind elite sporting policies such as Playing to win (2008) and the fact that this athlete has been involved in a talent identification scheme may be one of the main reasons for his successful transition to elite level in athletics.

Research by Hollings *et al.* (1991) suggested that student-athletes often struggle to maintain financial security, which can force them to choose between their sporting career and a paid job. Evidence of this financial struggle was demonstrated by participant E, of the performance group, who described athletics as 'not cheap' and that receiving financial funding to help with training costs would be 'ideal' (Transcript, 5). Furthermore a key difference that emerged for the data collected was that a number of athletes within the elite group reported being on scholarships at the university:

*“I’m also on the scholarship programme at the University so this has allowed me to fund transport to competition which I wouldn’t normally have the money to go to”* (Participant D, elite group, Transcript 4)

Bengston and Johnson (2010) described this support from universities as vital for athletes wishing to progress to elite level, however they also acknowledged the number of scholarships available to student-athletes is limited. This is in contrast to participant E, of the performance group, who explained that he did not receive any such funding from the university but acknowledged that if he did it would certainly help with ‘transport costs’ (Transcript 5). Therefore a key difference between the two groups, which emerged through analysis of the data, is that the athletes in the elite group all reported receiving funding in some way or another, whereas athletes in the performance group had to rely on self-funding. This may be one of the main reason why the athletes in the performance group have, so far, been unsuccessful in transitioning to elite level in athletics. Consequently this brings to the fore a potential area for future elite sporting policies, with the benefits of funding evident in this research.

#### 4.4 Pressures and Time management

Research has reported that athletes are susceptible to a variety of different pressures during their athletics career (Eccles, Tenenbaum, Calmeiro, 2014). Athletes in both groups reported experiencing a variety of pressures now they’re in higher education, including: Pressure from their coach to focus their time on training, pressure from family to focus on academic demands, pressure from peers to go out and socialise and the general pressures and demands of both work and training. One athlete stated that “There is definitely a pressure to go out” (Participant A, elite group, transcript 1). This statement highlights at type of social pressure that athletes may be subject to.

*“Training always comes first- that is my priority so a social life can kind of...it’s not that much of an issue”* (Participant B, elite group, transcript 2)

*“I’d go out maybe a training session would not be so affective”* (Participant H, performance group, transcript 8)

This is an example of how differently athletes within the elite group manage their time at university compared to athletes in the performance group. Participant B states that training is always his ‘priority’ and therefore doesn’t view these social pressures as much of an ‘issue’ to him. Orlick and Partington (1988) conducted research with a group of Olympic athletes, they found that this commitment and ability to remain focused on training despite

distractions was one of the main reason for the athlete's success. Participant H, of the performance group, explains that he gave in to this social pressure to go out, stating that training as a result would not be 'affective'. This may therefore be a reason for his failure to transitioning to elite level in athletics and can be categorised as poor time management (Skinner, 2004). This reinforces the need for athletes to remain focused in higher education and manage these social distractions effectively (Orlick & Partington, 1988; Gould *et al*, 2002).

Bengtson and Johnson (2010) explained that a current issue within the higher education system is that they assume all students are studying full time, which consequently makes athlete development difficult. The athletes reported the impact that these academic demands of university have had on their ability to train. Participant F, of the performance group, explained that the work he is given at university is 'quite time consuming' and results in him having 'less time to train' (Transcript 6). This therefore can be seen to have a negative impact of the quality of his training, with him having less time to dedicate towards it (Ericsson *et al.*, 1993;) Wylleman & De Knop (1993) explained that it is important for student-athletes to be successful in both the academic domain and in their sporting endeavours, and the effective time management of these two areas has been found to benefit an athlete's development to elite status. This reinforces the importance of time management for student athletes, which Skinner (2004) explained can be critical to an athlete's development. The importance of time management was acknowledged by a number of the athletes. This is supported Participant A of the elite group who describes balancing academic work and training as 'fairly easy' (Transcript 1). This is evidence of effective time management within the elite group of athletes and may be why this athletes has transition successfully to elite level.

Other pressures mentioned by athletes were pressures from coaches and family members. For example participant C, of elite group explained that:

*"They say to obviously focus on your academics first because academics always comes before your sporting ambitions."* (Participant C, elite group, Transcript 3).

This highlights some of pressures that student athletes receive whilst training at university. Furthermore participant B of the explained that coach often tells him to "miss lectures if it's convenient" (Transcript, 2). Both these statements are evidence of other factors that may impact an ability to transition to elite level, with Sanderson (2003) suggesting that a positive and supportive relationship with coach and parents can be beneficial to academic

and sporting success. This links to the importance of time management for student-athletes (Skinner, 2004). This evidence of the relevance of Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) development model of normative transitions, (Figure 2.) Introduced in chapter 2 because the model acknowledges the influence of both parents and coaches on an athlete's development, with the coach having an increased influence during higher education.

# **CHAPTER 5**

# **CONCLUSION**

## 5.0 Conclusion

The introduction, in chapter 1 of this paper explained that in recent years there has been limited success for UK athletics on the international stage, culminating in only four medals at the Beijing Olympics in 2008 (Grix, 2014). Furthermore UK athletics (2007) reported that there seems to be a reoccurring theme within athletics in Britain, with elite junior athletes failing to progress to elite senior level. Wyllmen and Lavallee (2004) outlined that the transition into higher education for some athletes occurs at a similar period in an athlete's life. Therefore this study aimed to investigate the transition of Cardiff Met athletes from performance to elite level in the sport of athletics and understand the factors that impact upon whether this transition is successful.

## 5.1 Main Findings

The extensive literature review in chapter 2 brought to the fore a number of factors that could potentially play a part in the successfulness of this transition to elite level within athletics. Factors such as: high quality coaches, high quality facilities, training environment, inter-personal relationships, effective time management of training and academic demands, talent identification schemes and funding (Oakley & Green, 2001; UK Sport, 2006). Upon reflecting on the data collected in this research three key themes emerged, they were: University opportunities, funding and pressures and time management.

All athletes reported having an increase in opportunities now they are at Cardiff Met. These opportunities include: increased time dedicated to training/specialisation, access to high quality coaches, access to high quality facilities and an elite/professional training environment. This can be seen to support research into the career transitions outlined in the literature review in chapter 2 (Bloom, 1985; UK Sport, 2006) because all of the elite athletes reported benefitting from these factors. However all participants within the performance group also reported having access to these opportunities, and benefitting from them. This suggests that there are other factors preventing athletes in the performance group from transitioning to elite level. This is also evidence of the impact that elite sports development policies in the UK, such as playing to win (2008) and Game Plan (2004), have had on the development of opportunities and provisions that are available to elite athletes. A number of these opportunities stated by participant also support Wyllmans and Lavallee's (2004) development model of normative career transitions, such

as entering the mastery stage of skill development upon entering higher education and the influence of the coach/family.

A key difference that emerged between the two groups of athletes was the allocation of funding. Within the group of elite athletes, all of them reported receiving financial support through either talent development schemes or through scholarships at the University. In contrast, none of the athletes who were in the performance group gave an indication that they received any financial funding/support. Research found that financial support can be just what an athlete needs to make the step up to elite sport (Bengston & Johnson, 2010;). The results from this study support these findings and underlined the need for financial support for talented athletes looking to progress to the elite level in athletics. These findings may prove useful to British athletics and in the development of future elite sports development policies, with further investment in elite sport required in athletics.

Another important factor that was outlined by participants was the pressures that they were subject to in the University environment and the impact that this had on their sporting endeavours. Research outlined that students are required to manage both their academic demands and training demands effectively in order to continue to progress as athletes (Orlick and Partington, 1988; Skinner, 2004). This study supports this research because participants in the elite group reported finding managing these two areas 'fairly easily' (Participant A, Transcript 1), whereas participants in the performance group suggested that they struggled to manage the two and as a result had 'less time to train' (Participant F, transcript 6). The management of social pressures between the two groups also differed with participants of the elite group outlining that training is always the 'priority' (Participant B, Transcript 2), whereas athletes in the performance group indicated that they often gave in to these social pressures and found that training wasn't as 'affective' (Participant H, transcript 8) as a result. The management of these pressures has been found to be crucial in an athlete's continued progression within higher education. Both groups also reported similar pressure from coaches and parents, outlined in chapter 2 (Wylleamn & Lavalley, 2004). Elite sport development policies may not be able to impact these directly, however this research offers them an understanding of other factors that impact the transition in athletics.

Upon reflection, Cardiff Metropolitan University can be seen to provide the platform for athletes in athletics to make the transition to elite level successfully, with a wide range of opportunities and provision available to them. However, crucially limited funding in athletics can be seen to be preventing talented athletes from progressing to elite level. It is

also apparent from this research that athletes must manage a variety of different pressures effectively if they are to continue their progression in the sport, with time management playing an important factor. This research has highlighted potential reason for UK athletics limited success on the international stage and reasons for the poor transition rates of elite juniors to elite senior (UK athletic, 2003). Therefore future elite sports development policies should focus their attention on offering funding opportunities towards talented junior athletes.

## 5.2 Critical Reflection

This study has provided UK athletics with potential explanations for their limited success at elite senior level, on the international stage and offers given them an insight into the types of factors that impact and athletes ability to transition to elite level, upon entering higher education. Furthermore this study has also provided Cardiff Met University with detailed and rich data about the impact that they have had on a number of highly talented performers in the sport of athletics.

A strength of this study is that the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews used, allowed for a conversational-style flow in the interviews, which encouraged participants to give more detailed answers (Kumar, 2005; Gratton & Jones, 2010). Furthermore the inclusion of probes in the interview guide allowed the researcher to press participants for more detail about topics that were relevant to the study (Donoghue, 2010; Gratton and Jones, 2010). This further improved the quality and relevance of the data collected. A limitation of this study is the limited experience of the researcher, however inclusion of a pilot study in this research minimised the impact that this could have on the research and enabled the researcher to practice the qualitative research process (Flick, 2007; Gratton and Jones, 2010).

## 5.3 Future applications for research

Following this research, future study could look at the impact of higher education in other sports, such as football. This could potentially produce useful data for cross-reference between sports. Research has also been conducted into the role of sports psychology in career transitions for athletes (Wylleman & Lavalle, 2004; Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007), future research could therefore focus on the psychological factors involved in the transition from performance to elite level in athletics. These findings may further enhance our understanding of the factors involved in this transition in athletics and could offer UK athletics further insight into talent development in the UK. Another avenue for future

research is to look specifically at the impact of an elite sports development sports policy, such as *Playing to win* (2008), on the sport of athletics. This could bring to light any areas in which these types of initiatives have been particularly successful in, as well as highlighted areas of focus for future elite sports policies.

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# **APPENDICES**

# **APPENDIX A**

# **DATA ANALYSIS TABLE**

Data Analysis

| Elite respondents | Raw Data  | Interpretation  | Theme                         |
|-------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|
| A                 | So University is a big, massive step up for me because I went from training, or being able to train like twice, three times a week to training six times a week   | University impact, increase in training volume, increase in time dedicated to training  | University opportunities      |
|                   | Being part of an elite training group. Really that is a massive step up from what I had at home.  | University impact, elite athletes/environment, difference to previous environment   | University opportunities      |
|                   | In 2012 I was given Sports Aid...At the time I did not feel any pressure at all, like I had already warranted the year before to be given that money.   | Financial support, no pressure attached to this, felt it was earned   | Funding                       |
|                   | It enabled me to travel to race rather than going to where the club would take me...I bought kit, spikes and whatever   | Funding benefits, improved access to competitions, helped with kit and equipment  | Funding                       |
|                   | From my experiences its top drawer really. The environment especially, the training environment is set up in a way to get the best out of athletes and you are obviously encouraged to achieve your best. Again that is massively different to how my experience was at home. | Sporting environment at Cardiff Met, elite/professional environment, positive impact on performance, different to previous environments | University opportunities      |
|                   | More time to train and higher standard of coaches.  | Increase in time available to train, high quality coaches   | University opportunities      |
|                   | The fact that I now have an elite or professional coach has really impacted, I think on my performance...big time.  | High quality coaches, elite environment, positive impact on performance   | University opportunities      |
|                   | I find balancing university work and training fairly easy. I found balancing school work and training unbelievably hard. I felt that school put so much pressure on you to do   | Time management, work impact, increase in free time at university, pressure at school to focus on studies                               | Pressures and time management |

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
|   | so much work that I did not have time but at university I found that's fairly easy   |  |  |
|   | The facilities here enable me to...after a race, do contrast bath soaks. The facilities here enable me to do that whereas again at home it's something you couldn't do.  | High quality facilities at university, different to previous environments.   | University opportunities                     |
|   | I was invited to go to it but I felt as if I was at a level above it and it was to develop younger athletes...it was pretty pointless...it was not beneficial  | Didn't find talent development scheme beneficial   | Funding                                      |
|   | A lot of my friends, at first, don't understand why I can't come out and socialise and why when I am not training that I want to relax   | Peer pressure to go out and socialise, training made this difficult  | Pressures                                    |
|   | Like everybody, apparently, is going out. When you feel that you are the only guy who is not going out it's a bit rubbish.   | Pressure to go out, peer pressure, feeling left out  | Pressures                                    |
| B | Making me take it a little bit more seriously...coaches are a lot stricter...helped and aided with discipline  | University impact, high quality coaches  | University opportunities                     |
|   | You can now train in the day, you can train whenever you are free really whereas back home it was training twice a week...there was no time for it   | Free time, different to previous environment, increase in training volume, increase in time dedicated to training, university impact | Time management and university opportunities |
|   | Given me more opportunity than I expected there to be, like you have got BUCS...its mainly just free time, being able to train at convenient times, training at a better intensity rather than training when you are tired | University impact, higher level competitions, different to previous environments, improvement in quality of training                 | University opportunities and time management |
|   | We train six days a week which is usually nearly two hour session...I trained twice a week for an hour and a half back home  | Increase in training time, different to previous environments  | University opportunities                     |
|   | I have so much more  | Free time  | Time   |

|  |   |   |                                      |
|--|---|---|--------------------------------------|
|  | free time on my hands...at the minute but I can see it affecting me in the third year when I actually have to work  |   | management                           |
|  | My mum wants me to concentrate on training...I usually get told to miss lectures if it's convenient   | Family pressure, pressure from coach  | Pressures                            |
|  | You get the whole backing team from the Welsh Athletics. You do get treated like a professional athlete since coming to university  | Funding, support, professional training environment at Cardiff Met, impact of uni | Funding and university opportunities |
|  | Being able to train through the day and then going straight into physio...able to get physio on demand  | Funding, support, impact of uni, sports therapy                                   | Funding                              |
|  | Ive become more of an endurance based 400m runner   | Training more specific  | University opportunities             |
|  | I am now more determined to train and actually enjoy going to training whereas at home I couldn't be bothered   | Different to previous environments, training more specific/motivating             | University opportunities             |
|  | I have been on the development day of Welsh athletics and also been on sports aid days, which help to develop athletes  | Funding, talent development scheme  | University opportunities             |
|  | 2012 I got my first lot of funding, so I was put on Welsh athletics Academy for sports aid which was basically talent identification and since then I have been kept on Welsh athletics funding   | Funding, Talent development   | Funding                              |
|  | It has helped me with the travel and being able to afford to go to bigger competitions and so getting a better personal best...On my first year of funding I did find it quite hard dealing with the pressure of being expected to compete in competitions...its much better being on funding – I can get to see doctors, physios | Benefits of funding – equipment, travel and kit, dealing with pressure/expectance | Funding                              |

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|   | straight away   |  |  |
|   | Especially with spikes and stuff as they are not cheap...it has helped massively  | Benefits of funding  | Funding                                      |
|   | Its easy to travel around knowing that you have the money behind you  | Benefits of funding  | Funding                                      |
|   | It seem more professional but more laid back at the same time...the environment I have come from is a lot less professional   | Professional training environment at Cardiff Met, different to previous environments | University opportunities                     |
|   | More organisation in your life so you know what you are going to be doing before you turn up for a session  | Professional training environment  | University opportunities                     |
|   | I would kind of say that it is inclusive to all abilities that get the same treatment but it is down to an individual coach whether they want to focus on elite               | Professional training environment, all-inclusive environment at the same time        | University opportunities                     |
|   | They don't agree with some of the decision I make and how I prioritise athletics over a social life   | Social/peer pressure   | Pressures                                    |
|   | I'm not one for going out that much...your friends try and pressurise you into it every now and then  | Social/peer pressure   | Pressures                                    |
|   | Training always comes first- that is my priority so a social life can kind of...it's not that much of an issue  | Social/peer pressure, prioritise training  | Pressures                                    |
| C | Around five or six years I have been involved in athletics  |  |  |
|   | It's much easier to juggle time. Time management skills...it's helped with that. Whereas in secondary it would be two whole days at school and then go down to the track at 7 | Improvement in time management, university improved training schedule                | Time management and university opportunities |
|   | Every student gets a student loan so you put more money to go towards abroad, on trips...last year I went to America  | Student loan has been beneficial   | Funding                                      |
|   | This will be the first year I have been put on the Welsh Athletics  | First year on Welsh Athletics funding scheme   | Funding                                      |

|  |  |  |                          |
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|  | funding scheme   |  |                          |
|  | I have applied for grants elsewhere and I have received so money from some grants  | Has applied for financial help                                   | Funding                  |
|  | I can now get treatment for free so I don't have to worry about putting up money... is a pretty big benefit just so you don't have to keep digging into your own pockets | Sports Therapy/facilities have improved since joining university | University opportunities |
|  | Yeah, and to buy kit... everything pretty much   | Funding has helped with purchasing kit for training              | Funding                  |
|  | Every day bar Saturday... I have been training one extra day into my training regime now but it's more intense and I have got a bit more serious about the sport.        | Increase in training time/volume                                 | University opportunities |
|  | My coach is the national sprint coach for Welsh Athletics, so yeah I would say that I do have a high quality coach   | Has access to high quality coaches now at university             | University opportunities |
|  | It does get a bit stressful at times as I can get a bit lazy and I can leave work to the last minute   | Leaving work to last minute                                      | Time management          |
|  | They say to obviously focus on your academics first because academics always comes before your sporting ambitions  | Family pressure to focus on work                                 | Pressures                |
|  | Its normally 'get on with it and then go and do your work', so I have to be self-dependent on myself   | Coach unsupportive of academic demands                           | Pressures                |
|  | You can't be half-hearted in this sport. You have got to be fully in or out... I don't really have a social side   | Social pressure to go out  | Pressures                |
|  | You get the odd times when some of your friends will try and get you out, but you have to stick true to your guns  | Social pressures to go out from peers                            | Pressures                |
|  | I wouldn't say it's not about participation, its more on performance... they want good results for   | Professional sporting environment at university                  | University opportunities |

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|   | the uni...I would say it's more performance focused  |  |  |
|   | At school it was more focused on that you need to get into sport to be healthy   | More focus on high performance at university   | University opportunities                     |
|   | You get physio once a week and then straight after a race we get, we are entitled to use the ice baths...as I have been put on scholarship   | Scholarship gives athletes access to free sports therapy   | Funding                                      |
|   | Yes, I have been involved in...talent development, Welsh development scheme...they just tell you a bit more of how of how to get better at your sport  | Talent development schemes   | University opportunities                     |
| D | It has affected it in a huge way...all positive. I now have a lot more free time to train and access to a number of high quality facilities...my training has also become more specific                      | Free time has increased, training more specific, high quality facilities available at the university     | Time management and university opportunities |
|   | It has given me the opportunity to train like a full time athlete and be around other elite sports people...this has given me valuable experience of what it is like to compete at high profile competitions | Increase in time dedicated to training, high quality competitions available to athlete now at university | University opportunities                     |
|   | I train 6 days a week which is usually about 3 hours a day   | Large amount of time dedicated to training   | University opportunities                     |
|   | Yeah its increased massively because I've got work to do and also have training, so I need to manage when I do my work   | Managing training and work load important  | Time management                              |
|   | When I came to Cardiff Met I found myself dedicating more time to athletics training   | Increased time dedicated to training now at university   | University opportunities                     |
|   | When I was 16 I received a £1000 grant from Lloyds Tsb local heroes scheme, for the last 2 years been on the Welsh academy funding programme   | Received funding since an early age  | Funding                                      |
|   | They've both benefitted me massively...both the funding schemes,   | Benefits of funding, also on scholarship at the university   | Funding                                      |

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|  | I'm also on the scholarship programme at the University so this has allowed me to fund transport to competition which I wouldn't normally have the money to go to                                       |  |                          |
|  | They've also allowed me to fund transport to purchase equipment such as running spikes, trainers and blocks   | Benefits of funding, access to more kit and equipment  | Funding                  |
|  | It has been very beneficial to me, just being around elite athletes in other sports   | Elite training environment at the university has benefitted the athlete                          | University opportunities |
|  | I would definitely say that the Uni provides the platform to step up to the elite level in sport and I feel I have benefitted from that environment   | Impact of university in transition to elite level  | University opportunities |
|  | Time management is key and it's really important you do give yourself sufficient time to complete Uni work  | Importance of time management  | Time management          |
|  | When I joined Cardiff Met I started training with a new coach. He is actually the head coach of Welsh Athletics, so I would definitely say that since joining Uni I have access to high quality coaches | New coach at university, access to high quality coaches  | University opportunities |
|  | Since being with my new coach I have competed at a number of elite competitions   | Impact of high quality coach on athletes performance   | University opportunities |
|  | Since joining the Uni I have been able to have regular access to physio's and ice baths   | Improved access to facilities/sports therapy since joining university                            | University opportunities |
|  | I have been involved in a county development programme...and the Welsh national development programme   | Talent development schemes   | University opportunities |
|  | It's difficult when they ask me to go out for their birthday and everything and I have to say no because I'm racing   | Social pressures to go out from peers  | Pressures                |
|  | There is definitely a pressure to go out, more so in the first year, but that is often  | Social pressures to go out and impact that this can have on an athlete's development/performance | Pressures                |

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|  | the difference between athletes who improve at uni and the athletes that don't |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|

| Performance Athletes | Raw Data  | Interpretation   | Theme                          |
|----------------------|---|--|--------------------------------|
| E                    | I find everyone a lot more focused, are a lot more dedicated to the sport. I am training a lot more than what I would do at home...there is a good vibe at university | Professional training environment at the university      | University opportunities       |
|                      | I train when I really want to and coming here I train with everyone else so there probably not much free time. It's kind of a full-time thing                         | Lack of free time and time dedicated to training         | Time management                |
|                      | There is a wider range of competition, as taking part in competition's I wouldn't normally do   | More competitions to compete at since joining university | University opportunities       |
|                      | I train or try to train when I can, depending on university work, six times a week  | Time dedicated to training and impact of work            | University opportunities       |
|                      | Yes increased, the number of athletes I train with...At Cardiff you have the ones who are at the very top, the middle ones and the ones that are doing it for fun     | Different levels of athletes at university               | University opportunities       |
|                      | If you have a part time job you have to go to balance that if you want to do athletics full time  | Difficult to manage part-time job and training           | Time management                |
|                      | I am mostly here for an education   | Focusing more on academic side,                          | Time management and University |

|  |  |   |                          |
|--|--|---|--------------------------|
|  | rather than the athletics. At Cardiff Met Uni you have great facilities which you've got to make the most of...my family want me to enjoy good sport as well as my education   | has access to high quality facilities   | opportunities            |
|  | It's a good boost for those who are just running at club level, or at elite level but are just running for a club but you could come forward for an elite coach who could push them forward and enhance their athletics, capabilities. | Professional training environment and elite athletes at university and benefits of this to athletes at all levels | University opportunities |
|  | Everyone is quite focused on what they do...and what goal they set out and want to achieve   | Professional training environment at the University   | University opportunities |
|  | It would be ideal for competition fees, travelling cost...it would be ideal  | No funding received but acknowledges how beneficial it could be   | Funding                  |
|  | It's not cheap so having some funding to go towards it would be ideal  | Benefits of funding and cost of athletics   | Funding                  |
|  | If you do want to socialise and go out I suppose it does have a slight impact on your athletic ability   | Social pressure to go out and the impact that this can have on an athlete's performance                           | Pressures                |
|  | They want to go out and you do feel pressure to go out and enjoy with them.  | Social pressure to go out   | Pressures                |

|   |  |  |                          |
|---|--|--|--------------------------|
|   | .  |  |                          |
| F | when I moved to university as I was moving to a new city I changed coach   | Change of coach at university  | University opportunities |
|   | Yes, definitely and a lot more access to the track because back home the track was run by a local sports centre facility so we can only get on it when it was open and when they deem it viable for us to use whereas here I am able to get almost permanent access to a track or a gym. | Improved access to facilities at University                              | University opportunities |
|   | It has given me the opportunity to compete at a much higher level, at a much more pronounced level, for instance, competing at the BUCS Championship and other matches like that and the varsity athletes I would not normally compete against as my club is quite a small town.         | Impact of university on athletics, access to higher quality competitions | University opportunities |
|   | Before I came to Uni I probably only trained two to three times a week. So at least double the amount of training I do.  | Increase in time dedicated to training at university                     | University opportunities |
|   | My coach here is far more  | Access to high quality coaches at  | University opportunities |

|  |   |   |                          |
|--|---|---|--------------------------|
|  | experienced with high level athletes, than my coach at home... At the university there are a lot of high level athletes   | University and elite training environment                                     |                          |
|  | Being around that level of athlete makes you try and improve your standing, so you try and keep up with them instead of being a big fish in a small pond, like I was back in my old club                                      | High standard of athletes at university and an elite training environment     | University opportunities |
|  | it is starting to have a bit of an impact as I have got my dissertation and other pieces of work like that that are quite time consuming and take a lot of effort it means I often have a lot less time for training          | Importance of time management and impact of academic demands                  | Time management          |
|  | He does occasionally but as he has got quite a lot of athletes, he tries to work around all of us   | Coach occasionally acknowledges academic demands                              | Pressures                |
|  | Yes, because it gives you that little bit more freedom not to have to worry about if you say you got a race, as we are in Cardiff, in Birmingham and then Sheffield then you have not got to worry about paying for transport | Doesn't receive funding but acknowledges beneficial impact that it could have | Funding                  |
|  | Don't cost too much but there   | Benefits of funding   | Funding                  |

|   |   |  |                          |
|---|---|--|--------------------------|
|   | overall price of all of them together totals up to be quite a high amount, so it would definitely help with that sort of thing.   |  |                          |
|   | There is a bit in the first year and some of the athletes exert this, I know multiple fresher's this year in our group that should be going out at various times              | Social pressure to go out  | Pressures                |
| G | Massively, I don't know if it's been for the good or the bad. I think uni's given me opportunities to compete against people of better standard                               | University given athlete the opportunity to compete at high level competitions | University opportunities |
|   | It has given you the chance to compete against and train with some of the best athletes in the country  | Able to train with elite athletes  | University opportunities |
|   | Before we did not have a lot of time on different days back home so I would train like three times a week   | More time available to train now at university                                 | University opportunities |
|   | I think with the right time management and if our coach has intentions in the right place you can sit down and come up with a training programme which is suited to your work | Importance of time management and coaches involvement                          | Time management          |

|   |   |   |                          |
|---|---|---|--------------------------|
| H | Yes it's been a big part of my life. It's kind of been weird because I have been training more than I was training when I was back home   | Increase in training dedication since joining university  | University opportunities |
|   | Probably have not got my parents breathing down my neck saying "yes you should not be going out on this night as it may affect your training two days later", so I have to listen to mum calling in my head, so yeah I'd go out maybe a training session would not be so affective. | Pressure from parents to focus on academic side of university   | Pressures                |
|   | I would definitely say that there is more time. I would say that um also that there are a lot more things I am doing as well, so I am not just doing, I am not just thinking I am an athlete whilst I am at university I am also thinking I am a student                            | Increase in free time, important to focus on academic side as well as training                            | Time management          |
|   | So for me my coach he isn't actually employed by the university as an athletics coach, he is involved with the university set up but he isn't fully employed so his time is relatively limited  | Coach isn't flexible with training times, places a greater importance of managing university and training | Time management          |
|   | Good having strength  | Training has become more  | University opportunities |

|  |   |   |                          |
|--|---|---|--------------------------|
|  | conditioning guys on board so for the last two/three years I have not had that much strength training conditioning, so this year it's been good.  | specific since joining university   |                          |
|  | There is not a limited amount of resources around university at all.  | Large amount of resources available at university   | University opportunities |
|  | Obviously your lectures are there, in place, you can't really change them   | Managing training around lectures   | Time management          |
|  | In terms of like my focus on actual athletics training or my focus on other things I am focused on all of them but I am not fully focused on just one, so to get to the next level I will probably have to take away a few of the other things if I want to really progress with the athletics. | Increased focus on training at university, still needs to improve focus to progress to next level | University opportunities |
|  | I would not say that I have been funded, funded   | Hasn't received funding   | Funding                  |
|  | Maybe I was going out too much is what I think I am saying but this year I haven't really gone out as much um I've been a little bit more focused on training and as a result have PB'd, Personal Best, for the first time in a few years. So   | Social pressures to go out and impact of this on performance                                      | Pressures                |

|  |   |                                      |           |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|-----------|
|  | maybe that's a reason.  |                                      |           |
|  | I think it can be but it really depends on the friendship group you are in, for instance, if I was in, if in my training group everyone was an athlete at the university I think the pressure would not be so great to go out | Social pressure from peers to go out | Pressures |

**APPENDIX B**

**PARTICIPANT**

**INFORMATION SHEET**

Dear Participant,

During my final year at Cardiff Metropolitan University I will be undertaking research for my dissertation into the transition of Cardiff Met athletes from performance to elite, and the factors which impact whether this transition is successful.

The reason you have been asked to take part in this piece of research is that you study or have studied at Cardiff Met and have also had relevant experience at the performance or elite level of sport. Your experience of this transition will provide useful data to be analysed.

The procedures of this investigation are as follows:

You will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview, which will take place in one of the interview rooms on campus. You will only be asked questions that are relevant to this piece of research, and have the right to withdraw at any point during this process. The interview will involve mainly open questions that aim to produce detailed insights into the factors that influence the transition of Cardiff Met athletes from performance to elite. Once the data received from the interview process has been collected, themes that appear throughout the answers given in the interviews will be established and the data will be presented in the final dissertation in the form of text and quotations which describe the experiences of the participants (anonymously). The interview will remain anonymous and the answers that you have produced will only be seen by the researcher themselves. You have the right to decline taking part and if you have any issue or questions regarding this piece of research then please do not hesitate to contact me or my dissertation supervisor.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Dewi Hammond

Researcher: Dewi Hammond – [st20023020@outlook.cardiffmet.ac.uk](mailto:st20023020@outlook.cardiffmet.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Melissa Anderson - [manderson@cardiffmet.ac.uk](mailto:manderson@cardiffmet.ac.uk)

**APPENDIX C**  
**BLANK INFORMED**  
**CONSENT FORM**

# PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: An investigation of the transition of athletes from performance to elite level in athletics: A case study of Cardiff Met  
Name of Researcher: Dewi Hammond

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Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 25/04/14 for this evaluation study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that it is possible to stop taking part at any time.
3. I also understand that if this happens, our relationships with CMU, or our legal rights, will not be affected.
4. I understand that information from the study may be used for reporting purposes, but that I will not be identified.
5. I am happy to take part in this case study.

---

Name of Participant

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Name of researcher: Dewi Hammond

---

Signature of researcher

Date

**APPENDIX D**

**EXAMPLE INTERVIEW**

**GUIDE**

### Introductory Questions

- Do you have any questions regarding the information that you have been given?
- Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
- What year of study are you in at Cardiff Metropolitan University?

### Section A:

How long have you been involved in athletics and what got you into it?

- Years?
- What age?

What are your experiences in athletics?

Probes:

- Achievements
- Time
- athletics club
- Representation
- Your Experience at school?

How has University affected your athletics?

- Increase or decrease in free time?
- Pressure to go out?
- What opportunities has it given you?

What experience do you have in other sports? Did these stop when you took up athletics?

- Has it always just been athletics?
- How has this impacted your life as an athlete?
- Specialisation at uni?

Have you ever received any external funding? i.e Through sponsorship or a Sporting Body

Probes: How has this impacted your athletics?

- If yes – How has this benefitted you?
- If no – How do you think you would benefit if you did receive funding?
- Equipment cost and transport

How would you describe the sporting environment at Cardiff Metropolitan University?

- Is it different from Previous environments – i.e Previous places of education
- How has this impacted your performance?
- Focus on elite?
- Beneficial being around other athletes/training groups

How much time do you dedicate to athletics training a week?

- Has this changed since joining university? Why?
- How important is time management?

Can you describe the impact that your university work/studies has on your training capabilities?

- How do you manage the two?

- First year – more time?
- Train around essays?
- What about those around you?
- Any family pressure to focus on work? Does coach acknowledge work load and take necessary measures?

Have any of your family been involved in athletics?

- To what standard?
- Has this played a role in your involvement in athletics?

Do you have access to high quality coaches?

- How this impacted your performance?
- Has this changed since joining Uni?
- How has this impacted training?
- Has your training become more specific?

Could you tell me what sort of support you receive to aid training?

- Physio?
- Ice baths ?

Have you been involved in any talent identification schemes or Talent development programmes? What were these? i.e National development programmes etc.

- Do you feel you would have benefitted from one?

Would say the majority of your friends take part in athletics or another sport?

- What do your friends who don't do athletics think about your athletics commitments
- How do you manage training and social side of university life?
- Is there pressure to go out? Does this impact the amount of time you train?