



**FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF WALES  
CENTRE FOR FOOTBALL RESEARCH**

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2025 / 2026**



The Football Association of Wales Centre for Football Research is affiliated with the Welsh Institute of Performance Science ([WIPS](#)). WIPS is a three-way partnership between Sport Wales, Wales' leading academic sport scientists and relevant industry partners that aims to produce multi-disciplinary, world-leading, applied performance science projects that enhance the performance of Welsh athletes and businesses.



WELSH INSTITUTE  
OF PERFORMANCE SCIENCE  
SEFYDLIAD GWYDDORAU  
PERFFORMIO CYMRU



University of  
South Wales  
Prifysgol  
De Cymru

*sportwales*  
*chwaraeon cymru*



I am grateful to Professor Brendan Cropley, the FAW's High-Performance leadership team, and our external partners, with special reference to the Welsh Institute of Performance Science, for supporting us to develop the insights required to drive the development and performance of our players, coaches, and practitioners across our player pathway and national teams.

In the last year, we continued to prioritise the creation of research informed evidence that could directly impact our current high-performance strategy under the following themes and through the associated example projects:

### 1. Talent Identification Retention

**TALENT IDENTIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FEMALE FOOTBALL PLAYERS AND THE INFLUENCE OF GROWTH AND MATURATION**

### 2. Person Centred Support Services

**DEVELOPING PERFORMERS' MENTAL WELL-BEING TO ENHANCE PERFORMANCE: THE ROLE OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE, NEEDS SATISFACTION, AND SELF-REGULATION**

### 3. Effective Pathways for Progression

**THE RELATIVE AGE EFFECT AND TRANSITION RATES ACROSS A NATIONAL SOCCER PROGRAMME IN MALE AND FEMALE YOUTH TO SENIOR PLAYERS. A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS**

### 4. The Coaching System

**THE GROWTH OF THE 'COACH-ANALYST': PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE PERFORMANCE ANALYST WITHIN INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL.**

These themes (pillars) are not mutually exclusive. They interact as we continue to investigate key strategic areas with the aim of better understanding the effectiveness of our player pathways in the male and female games. The wider goal here is to create an ecosystem that enables sustained success in qualifying for, and competing at, major tournaments. Thus, we understand the need to generate and leverage research to design effective talent identification systems, provide players with world class environments and support, and ensure our coaching staff are empowered to drive performance and create a strong connection between players, staff, and the Red Wall.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to our Centre for Football Research and look forward to supporting the continuation of our world-leading research in the coming year.

Diolch,

**Dr David Adams**

Chief Football Officer  
Football Association of Wales

# FAW CENTRE FOR FOOTBALL RESEARCH: ABOUT



## CENTRE AIMS

- ① To facilitate cooperation between the FAW, WIPS, and all universities in Wales to enhance the breadth and scope of research driven insights in sport.
- ② To engage in high quality, innovative research across a range of fields, including: coaching, talent identification and development, sports science, performance, player and community health, management and leadership, officials, and the growth of the game.
- ③ To identify and foster the means by which the Centre can meet emerging research opportunities with the goal of generating funding for research activities.
- ④ To disseminate the knowledge generated by the Centre via seminars, conferences, publications, electronic media, and through the WIPS Research Steering Group.

## CENTRE MISSION

The FAW Centre for Football Research is affiliated with the Welsh Institute of Performance Sciences (WIPS) and is a collaborative partnership between the University of South Wales (Sport and Exercise Research and Innovation Group) and the FAW.

The mission of the Centre is to engage in high quality research and innovation, generate research funding, and to develop research collaboration that supports the FAW in the achievement of its High-Performance Strategy. In doing so, the Centre aims to provide research driven solutions that facilitate the development and performance of players, coaches, and performance staff across Wales and internationally. Further, the multidisciplinary research conducted by the Centre seeks to inform best practice in player welfare, coach education, participation, and health-related factors.

# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

This year, the Centre focused on maintaining momentum while navigating the financial and staffing challenges experienced by many UK Higher Education Institutions. Linked to this issue, the Centre's Senior Research Assistant, Dr Alan McKay, saw out his fixed-term contract in March 2026, moving into a role at Loughborough University. Over his two and a half year tenure, Alan has been instrumental in driving the Centre's business, building and sustaining its network, supporting and completing projects, representing the Centre at external events, and ensuring the translational impact of the Centre's work. I'd like to extend a huge thank you to Alan and wish him all the best!

In response to these evolving demands, the Centre has drawn on the support of WIPS, leaning on its expert Research Steering Group to help complete and disseminate projects in a timely fashion. Further, the Centre modified its strategic approach to the development and support of new projects, with a focus being placed on those deemed to have significant potential for the FAW's priorities.

Despite the situation, it is pleasing to report the progress of the Centre as it has continued to record several key achievements and subsequently support the FAW's High-Performance strategy. For example, this year has seen an increase in the number of Centre supported projects being published in international, peer-reviewed journals or as book chapters and industry reports. Further, the Centre has expanded its network through a collaboration with the Slovakian FA, allowing the sharing of ideas and data concerning youth physical development and performance. Additionally, the Centre has been able to maintain a holistic focus by undertaking diverse projects ranging from *understanding the impact of mental well-being on player, coach, and practitioner performance to the relationship between heading and brain function.*

Looking forward, the Centre is in the advanced stages of securing funding through the Welsh Government's SMART Partnership programme. If successful, the Centre will lead a dedicated project focusing on the integration of player psychological development into the FAW's international pathway. Further, the Centre will continue to support a healthy number of postgraduate research students undertaking PhDs – these individuals are driving significant innovation through their work.

I am excited to lead the Centre in the coming year and work to maximise collaborations and opportunities to truly support the FAW's mission.

## **Professor Brendan Cropley**

Head of the FAW Centre for Football Research  
University of South Wales



## 2025/2026 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **8 new research projects** supported
- Collaborations with **8 UK Universities, 2 UEFA National Associations,** and **UEFA**
- Continued support for **7 PhD students**
- Grant applications submitted British and European funders to support ongoing activity
- WIPS collaboration has provided access to an expert **Research Steering Group**
- **6 peer-review publications; 3 national/international conference presentations; 2 book chapters; and 1 industry report.**



# EXAMPLE PROJECTS

## COMPLETED-ONGOING -SUPPORTED

### 2025/2026

The growth of the 'coach-analyst': Perceptions of the changing role of the performance analyst within international football

**ESTHER WILLS, PROF BRENDAN CROPLEY, DR ALAN MCKAY, TOBY NICHOLS**  
FAW, USW, LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY, CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

An exploration of international game demands, focusing on intensity and further contextualisation

**DAN NISBET, DR RYLAND MORGANS**  
AL AHLI SAUDI FC, FAW, CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Applying machine learning to detect integrated football performance indicators

**SEJIN YOO, PROF BRENDAN CROPLEY, DR DAVID ADAMS, ESTHER WILLS, DR GEMMA ROBINSON, DR LEE BALDOCK, DR MABROUKA ABUHMIDA**  
USW, FAW, CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

An exploration of injury risk factors related to hamstring, adductor and abductor strength and asymmetries

**DR IAN BEZODIS, GARETH WALTON, DR DAVID BRUNN**  
CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, FAW, SLOVAKIAN FA

Understanding physical load/overload and associated injury risk for female youth footballers during maturation

**SEAN CONNELLY, PROF LIAM KILDUFF, PROF JON OLIVER, DR KATE WILLIAMS, DR ALAN MCKAY**  
FAW, SWANSEA UNIVERSITY, CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, USW, LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY

Developing performers' mental well-being to enhance performance: The role of reflective practice, needs satisfaction, and self-regulation

**PROF BRENDAN CROPLEY, DR LEE BALDOCK, DR ALAN MCKAY, PROF DAVID SHEARER, RICHIE WILLIAMS, DR ANDY MILES, PROF ZOE KNOWLES**  
USW, LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY, FAW, CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

Talent identification of international youth female football players and the influence of growth and maturation

**AMY FARROW, DR NAOMI DATSON, DR RYLAND MORGANS**  
MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, FAW, CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Context matters: The environmental and sociological factors associated with talent identification in youth male international football players

**DANIEL EVANS, DR MATTHEW ANDREW, DR RYLAND MORGANS**  
MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, FAW, CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

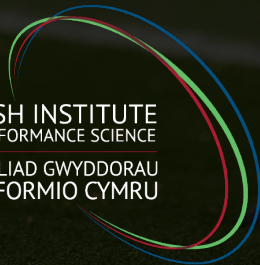
# SPOTLIGHT ON PROJECTS

“ ”

WHEN THE WORLDS OF SCIENCE AND FOOTBALL COLLIDE, BREAKTHROUGHS HAPPEN. RESEARCH IS THE PLAYBOOK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES FACED BY ALL ACTORS OF THE GAME  
UEFA, 2024



WELSH INSTITUTE  
OF PERFORMANCE SCIENCE  
SEFYDLIAD GWYDDORAU  
PERFFORMIO CYMRU



University of  
South Wales  
Prifysgol  
De Cymru

sportwales  
chwaraeoncymsu

# THE RELATIVE AGE EFFECT AND TRANSITION RATES ACROSS A NATIONAL SOCCER PROGRAMME IN MALE AND FEMALE YOUTH TO SENIOR PLAYERS. A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS

## PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS

Dan Nisbett; Dr Ryland Morgans, and colleagues

Research peer-reviewed and published in *Biology of Sport*. Click [LINK](#) for manuscript



## AIMS

This study aimed to: (1) investigate the prevalence and magnitude of the Relative Age Effect (RAE) across a national team programme; (2) assess the transition rates from youth to senior international level, and (3) examine the influence of birth quartile distribution on transition. 1518 male and 487 female soccer players from a national soccer association were examined.

## INSIGHTS AND OUTCOMES

A **significant RAE** (a phenomenon where athletes born earlier in the selection year are over-represented due to developmental advantages) **across most**

**age groups** in the national soccer programme was found. However, this effect was not significant for U16 male and female, and U19 female teams.

Senior national teams exhibited the most significant RAE, with **males born in the first half of the year 2.27 times more likely to be selected** than those in the second half, and **females 1.5 times more likely**. Further, longitudinal analysis revealed that the over-representation of older players in senior teams has consistently escalated over the last 30 years, likely due to early specialisation, professionalisation, and systemic biases in talent identification.

Overall, the transition from youth to senior international levels was found to be quite low, but **females transition at a significantly higher rate (30%) compared to males (20%)**. This disparity may reflect differences in competitive depth, structural differences that allocate more time to technical development in female academies, and later competitive stratification in the women's game.

**Males born in the first quartile (January–March) had the lowest overall transition rate to the senior team (17%)**. This is likely due to early selection advantages limiting long-term development because physically mature males face reduced competitive challenges and higher dropout rates as their peers catch up. Conversely, **females born in the fourth quartile (October–December) had the lowest transition rate (25%)**, but their success rate remained notably high. This indicates that women's development structures may be better at retaining late-born talent.

Finally, **consistent playing opportunities** (cap accumulation) **are critical for advancing to the senior squad**. Each additional youth team appearance increases the likelihood of progressing to the senior team by 19.4%.



## SPOTLIGHT ON PROJECTS: THE RELATIVE AGE EFFECT AND TRANSITION RATES ACROSS A NATIONAL SOCCER PROGRAMME IN MALE AND FEMALE YOUTH TO SENIOR PLAYERS. A LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS

### PROJECT IMPACT

As RAE persists and carries over into elite, senior football, systemic interventions are required to combat selection bias and ensure equitable opportunities. Recommended strategies include rotating selection dates, implementing bio-banding (grouping players by biological maturity), and prioritising technical skill development over short-term match results.

The highest transition rates occurred in late-adolescent groups (U21 for males, U19 for females), highlighting the difficulty of early talent identification. Thus, talent development pathways must prioritise long-term development. National organisations should focus on providing consistent competitive match exposure rather than fast-tracking physically mature youth players who may not be ready for senior levels.

Because the RAE manifests differently across genders, and because playing time impacts male and female transition rates at different scales, national talent pathways need tailored, gender-specific approaches to properly identify and retain talent.

# “WHAT CAN YOU SEE? WHAT CAN YOU HEAR?” THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A BEHAVIOUR- BASED MENTAL TOUGHNESS FRAMEWORK WITHIN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FOOTBALL

## PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS

Dr Alan McKay; Prof David Shearer; Prof Sheldon Hanton; and Prof Brendan Cropley

Research peer-reviewed and published in *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*. Click [LINK](#) for the research paper

## AIMS

Using a practitioner-researcher approach, a behaviour-based mental toughness (MT) intervention, designed to support the development of players' MT and coaches' abilities to integrate MT development into their working practices, was built into a 7-day U15 international camp. The primary aim of this research, therefore, was to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and the behaviour-based approach.

## INSIGHTS AND OUTCOMES

The intervention successfully fostered psychological growth - evidenced by a **statistically significant increase in the players' overall MT (Mental Toughness Index) scores from the start to the end of the international camp**. Further, the intervention helped enhance coach understanding of MT and their role in its development. Specifically, the **coach education element of the intervention was reported to have successfully demystified MT**, redefining it as a "clarity of mind" to make correct decisions under pressure rather than an unteachable trait. Participating **coaches reported feeling more confident in their ability to actively facilitate MT development and found it easier to integrate psychological tracking** alongside physical and tactical metrics.

Having a practitioner (McKay) embedded in the camp to "check and challenge" coaches during training preparation and debriefs proved highly effective. This support prompted coaches to reflect on their coaching behaviours, **leading them to become more autonomy-supportive** and to give players the necessary space to identify solutions and learn from their mistakes. Additionally, the coaches realised that their own behaviours set the standard for the players. By consciously role



modelling MT behaviours (MTbs), such as admitting to and recovering from a team selection error, or maintaining emotional composure on the sideline, coaches successfully demonstrated that MT involves embracing fallibilities and learning from them.

Players felt that coaches clearly communicated both fundamental off-pitch MTbs (e.g., taking responsibility for recovery) and on-pitch performance MTbs (e.g., staying composed). Through positive reinforcement in training and collaborative video review sessions, **players developed a better understanding of the decision-making processes behind executing these behaviours**, making them less afraid to make mistakes and **better equipped to perform under pressure**.



# SPOTLIGHT ON PROJECTS: “WHAT CAN YOU SEE? WHAT CAN YOU HEAR?” THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A BEHAVIOUR-BASED MENTAL TOUGHNESS FRAMEWORK WITHIN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FOOTBALL

## PROJECT IMPACT

Rather than relying on unplanned moments or reacting to behavioural issues as they arise, practitioners and coaches should proactively embed MT development strategies into their routine session planning.

In time-limited elite sports environments, attempting to change deep underlying cognitions is often impractical. Interventions should instead focus on a behaviour-based approach that targets observable actions (what coaches can “see and hear”) to help players display the desired MTBs and focus on controllable processes during high-pressure situations.

To effectively build MT in your squad, integrate specific, observable MTBs directly into your everyday session planning rather than treating psychology as an afterthought. Use your team's existing language to define what these behaviours actually look and sound like on the pitch, and take advantage of quick, informal moments, like bus journeys or brief training debriefs, to reinforce them without disrupting your schedule.

Crucially, redefine MT for your players not as an absence of weakness, but as the ability to embrace vulnerability, learn from mistakes, and focus on the process of making good decisions under pressure.

# THE POTENTIAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE COACHES IN EUROPE



## PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS

Matheus Galdino (supported by Dr David Adams)

Click [LINK](#) for associated research manuscript  
UEFA Research Grant Funded 2025

coaches explicitly believe in themselves regarding their capacity to develop players, coach and lead teams, and successfully undertake managerial responsibilities. **Higher self-efficacy beliefs were associated with women who had played the game competitively, had invested in their coach education, and had been positively influenced by social support networks in- and outside the game.**

Second, reflecting on their **career outcome expectations**, participating female coaches reported the importance of fervent support from their family members, the football players who they have coached, as well as their colleagues working in the game for achieving their career goals (or moving towards goal achievement). However, **the accumulation of more coaching hours and additional coaching qualifications appeared to significantly lower participants' career expectations.** This potentially highlights continued systemic issues (e.g., inequality; gender-bias) and stigma within the game, reducing female coaches' perceptions regarding the suitability of coaching as a sustainable career pathway.

Finally, in terms of their own **career goals**, a direct relationship between present and future coaching activity was identified. Specifically, **participants who had spent more years coaching women's football tended to foresee their future career in the women's rather than the men's game.** Likewise, **participants who had spent more years coaching men's football tended to preference their career advancement within the men's rather than the women's game.** Ultimately, participants consistently highlighted how their career perceptions and decisions had been / were associated with their interpersonal support, which had helped them to navigate the multitude of barriers thought to hinder progression and longevity.

## AIMS

The primary aim of this project was to reshape the perspectives around women coaching football in Europe through the acknowledgement and identification of positive avenues for their career development. Guided by Bandura's social cognitive career theory, the study applied a statistical analysis on a unique dataset generated from surveying 1,010 female coaches across Europe.

## INSIGHTS AND OUTCOMES

First, while analysing the respondents' degree of confidence about their own skills and performance as a football coach, it was observed that female



## SPOTLIGHT ON PROJECTS: THE POTENTIAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE COACHES IN EUROPE

### PROJECT IMPACT

This research highlights critical implications for National Football Associations, emphasising the urgent need to address systemic inequalities, as accumulating coaching hours and qualifications paradoxically lowers female coaches' career expectations.

To combat this and foster a sustainable career pathway, Associations must actively cultivate strong interpersonal support networks, which are crucial for coaches to navigate barriers and achieve their career goals. Further, promoting player-to-coach transition pathways and investing in targeted coach education can significantly enhance female coaches' self-efficacy in leadership and player development.

Recognising that present coaching environments strongly influence future career trajectories, with coaches in the women's and men's games tending to foresee advancement within their respective domains, Associations can tailor specialised development pathways. Ultimately, applying these insights will drive the project's primary impact: reshaping perspectives around women coaching football in Europe by establishing positive, actionable avenues for their career development.

# CONTEXT MATTERS: THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH TALENT IDENTIFICATION IN YOUTH MALE INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL PLAYERS

## PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS

Daniel Evans; Dr Paul Ford; Prof Mark Williams; Prof Warren Gregson, Dr Ryland Morgans; and Dr Matthew Andrew

PhD Research Programme

## AIMS

The aims of this PhD are to: (1) critically evaluate existing evidence on the environmental and sociological factors that influence talent identification and development in elite youth male football; (2) characterise the distribution and configuration of key factors across players within the youth male football talent pathway; (3) examine the longitudinal influence of environmental and sociological factors on players' developmental trajectories across the pathway; and (4) identify which environmental and sociological factors are most strongly associated with progression and success within elite youth male football.

## INSIGHTS AND OUTCOMES

**Study 1 - Environmental and Sociological Predictors of Talent in Football: A Systematic Review.** A systematic review of existing research was performed according to PRISMA guidelines to critically evaluate current understanding of environmental and sociological factors of talent identification and development in male football. Database searches returned 3,010 relevant manuscripts for review.

Findings revealed a number of relevant factors associated with talent development, including **hours in practice, family structure and support, coach-athlete relationships, relative age effect, and birthplace effect.** Consequently, this review has identified key trends, limitations, and gaps in the literature, providing an evidence-informed foundation for future research to inform national association policy across regional and national development pathways.

**Studies 2-4 – Talent Map.** Data collected has focused on capturing the environmental and



sociological characteristics associated with talent identification and development within the FAW. This approach enables a detailed mapping of the current talent landscape and facilitates the examination of players' developmental histories across pathways.

To date, data have been collected from ~290 male youth players (U13–U19) across regional and national squads using validated self-report questionnaires. Data will be analysed across three interconnected studies. First, the distribution and configuration of key environmental and sociological factors within the pathway will be characterised, providing a talent map of youth male players. Second, longitudinal analyses will examine how these factors relate to players' developmental trajectories over time. Finally, analyses will explore which environmental and sociological factors are the most powerful predictors of success in elite youth football.



## SPOTLIGHT ON PROJECTS: CONTEXT MATTERS: THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH TALENT IDENTIFICATION IN YOUTH MALE INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL PLAYERS

### PROJECT IMPACT

This project will have significant impact on how talent is identified, developed, and evaluated across the FAW's youth pathway. The project will provide the FAW with an evidence-based understanding of how environmental and sociological factors shape player progression, enabling decisions to move beyond narrow performance snapshots toward more context-specific models.

By identifying which specific contextual factors are associated with progression, the FAW could refine pathway structures, selection timelines, and eligibility criteria to improve both efficiency and equity in talent identification. Further, mapping the national "talent landscape" will allow the FAW to assess whether access to high-quality development environments is distributed equitably across regions, academies, and demographic groups, potentially informing targeted investment, regional support strategies, and national pathway alignment, helping to reduce premature attrition of potentially elite players and strengthen the overall depth of the talent pool.

Finally, the project has the potential to position the FAW as a learning organisation that bases talent policy on robust longitudinal evidence rather than tradition or short-term performance metrics.

# TALENT IDENTIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FEMALE FOOTBALL PLAYERS AND THE INFLUENCE OF GROWTH AND MATURATION

## PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS

Amelia Farrow; Dr Georgina Stebbings; Dr Lorenzo Lolli; Dr Matthew Weston; Prof Warren Gregson; and Dr Naomi Datson

PhD Research Programme

## INSIGHTS AND OUTCOMES

This project is currently ongoing and comprises two primary components, a systematic scoping review and longitudinal testing battery.

The systematic scoping review addresses the first project aim and will provide a comprehensive synthesis of existing research relating to physical development and performance in youth female football players, which is an area that remains underexplored. Currently, the review is in the screening stage following initial searches, which returned 11,344 articles. Completion of this stage will enable data extraction and synthesis, which will help to identify key trends, gaps and methodological approaches to inform future research and applied practice within the pathway.

The longitudinal testing battery involves players enrolled in the FAW Women's and Girl's Pathway and is designed to track physical development across three competitive seasons (2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28). Players will undergo repeated assessments using physiological and gym/field-based performance tests, up to 3 times per season, to monitor changes in neuromuscular performance, speed and aerobic capacity in relation to age and maturation status. To date, 130 participants have been assessed, with ongoing recruitment expected to expand the cohort by a further ~160 players through the Girls' National Academi.

A key focus of the project is the integration of maturation status within performance monitoring. By categorising players relative to peak height velocity (PHV), into pre-, circa-, and post-PHV maturity groups using validated maturity offset equations, the project enables a more precise understanding of developmental differences.



## AIMS

The aims of this project are to: (a) critically examine the literature surrounding talent identification and development research in women's football, identify key limitations and gaps in understanding, and propose directions for future research and practice; (b) quantify the between-session reliability of a physical testing battery and growth and maturation measures in elite female footballers; (c) longitudinally monitor changes in physical performance and growth and maturation over the course of two competitive seasons; and (d) assess the relationship between relative maturity status and physical performance outcomes in elite female footballers.



## SPOTLIGHT ON PROJECTS: TALENT IDENTIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FEMALE FOOTBALL PLAYERS AND THE INFLUENCE OF GROWTH AND MATURATION

### PROJECT IMPACT

When completed, this project will support future practice across the FAW Women and Girls Pathway in relation to talent identification and development.

By accounting for both biological and chronological age of female players, our research will enable the FAW to continue to develop a fair and effective pathway that is cognisant of growth and maturation to support talent retention, long-term player development and inform more appropriate training, testing and monitoring practices across the pathway.

Results from this project are also expected to identify further opportunities for research and development within the FAW Women and Girl's pathway.

## PUBLICATIONS (JOURNALS, BOOK CHAPTERS, REPORTS)

Nisbet, D., ..., & Morgans, R. (2026). The relative age effect and transition rates across a national soccer program in male and female youth to senior players. A longitudinal analysis. *Biology of Sport*, 43, 439-448.

<https://doi.org/10.5114/biolsport.2026.154941>

Ashdown, B., ... McKay, A., et al. (2026). The evolving role of performance analysis in football: Integrating the observation of psychological behaviours. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 1-12.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541261431223>

Galdino, M., Martin, S., Cropley, B., & Adams, D. (2026). Motherhood and coaching from grassroots to elite football. *UK Coaching Applied Research Journal*, 9(2). [Link](#)

Smothers, N., ..., & Cropley, B. (2026). Exploring high-performing, effective leaders, and the high-performance environments they create: Constructing a framework to improve leadership in Further Education. *Journal of Adult & Continuing Education*.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/14779714261425013>

Lloyd, R. S., Moeskops, S., Cropley, B., Faigenbaum, A. D. (2026). Coaching young athletes. In R. S. Lloyd & J. L. Oliver (Eds.), *Strength and Conditioning for Young Athletes: Science and Application*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Routledge.

McKay, A., Shearer, D., Hanton, S., & Cropley, B. (2025). "What can you see? What can you hear?" The implementation of a behaviour-based mental toughness framework within international youth football. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2025.2592616>

Nichols, T., McKay, A., & Cropley, B. (2025). *Assessing the efficacy of the proposed head of coach development role change: A Delphi study*. Report submitted to the Premier League 12<sup>th</sup> October 2025.

McGuire, R., Metcalfe, R., Kilduff, L., Waldron, M., McNarry, M., Buchanan, N., Cropley, B., & Drawer, S. (conditional acceptance). Beyond the session plan: Adaptive planning in youth football academies. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*.

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Cropley, B. (February 2026). FAW Centre for Football Research: Informing world-class coach education through research informed evidence. Presented at UEFA Share Event, Newport, Wales.

Cropley, B., Baldock, L., McKay, A., & Shearer, D. (October 2025). Supporting soccer coach thriving: An applied well-being and Performance Intervention for Elite Coaches. Presented at Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) Annual Conference, Montreal, Canada.

McKay, A., Shearer, D., Hanton, S., & Cropley, B. (October 2025). The implementation of a behaviour-based mental toughness framework within international youth football. Presented at Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) Annual Conference, Montreal, Canada.

## RESEARCH FUNDING

Cropley, B., & Shearer, D. (2026). Taith funding awarded. £3000 travel bursary to network with UEFA and The Swiss Federal Institute of Sport.

Cropley, B., Shearer, D., & McKay, A. (under review). SMART Partnership funding application. £150,000 – Welsh Government match funded.



# FAW CENTRE FOR FOOTBALL RESEARCH

Thank you to all of those who have contributed to the FAW Centre for Football Research this year and to the WIPS Research Steering Group who have supported our research projects.

If you are interested in connecting with the Centre to find out more about our research, or if you would like to get involved, please do not hesitate to contact us:

<https://faw.cymru/faw-centre-for-football-research/>

## HEAD OF CENTRE

**Professor Brendan Cropley**

Professor of Sports Coaching University of South Wales

[brendan.cropley@southwales.ac.uk](mailto:brendan.cropley@southwales.ac.uk)

## FAW CHIEF OF FOOTBALL

**Dr David Adams**

Chief of Football  
Football Association of Wales

[dadams@faw.cymru](mailto:dadams@faw.cymru)



WELSH INSTITUTE  
OF PERFORMANCE SCIENCE  
SEFYDLIAD GWYDDORAU  
PERFFORMIO CYMRU

University of  
South Wales  
Prifysgol  
De Cymru

*sportwales*  
*chwaraeon cymru*