

**ID: 112****Strategy, Leadership and Stakeholder Management in Sport****A New Element Of 'TRANSFER' That Football Academies Need To Embrace****Green, Michael, Robert; Kay, Alex**Hartpury University, United Kingdom; [michael.green2@hartpury.ac.uk](mailto:michael.green2@hartpury.ac.uk)**1.0 Aim & Research Questions**

The aim of this study was to explore the key transferable skills developed by individual players within academy football environments. The study focused on three distinctive phases (transitioning 'in', 'through' and 'out') and covered the two-year apprenticeship period where players exist as academy 'scholars'. Accordingly, the research question emerged to propose a theoretical model that identifies the acquisition of key employability skills within elite professional football academies.

**2.0 Theoretical Background & Literature Review**

At any given moment there are 12,000 aspiring players within the Elite Player Performance Pathway (EPPP) system, yet less than 1% will ever sign a professional contract. The Premier League also revealed that 97% of former academy players aged 21 to 26 failed to play a game in the Premier League. These statistics demonstrate the reality of trying to become a professional footballer and a review into EPPP, revealed a need for "Player Aftercare" in order to support those 'released'. At present, the system can leave players traumatised, with research documenting the damaging mental health impacts (e.g. depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts).

An inspection of talent development literature (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002) suggests that achieving excellence is a complex process that appears contingent on an intricate blend of innate and environmental factors. In England, elite youth football is characterised by a highly pressurised climate for success, Richardson et al. (2004) suggest that young players encounter a variety of interpersonal challenges that might affect their development. Accordingly, recent investigations have focused on stressors and coping strategies (Reeves et al., 2009), dealing with transition from academy to first-team (Finn & McKenna, 2010), and how fear of failure impacts performance and development (Sagar et al., 2010). Furthermore, athletes often fail to give credit to the lessons and skills acquired through their sporting career. This may result from myopia and foreclosed identity where athletes are incapable of seeing how the characteristics that made them successful in sport will make them successful in other career pathways.

**3.0 Research Design, Methodology & Data Analysis**

A social constructionist orientation created the opportunity to investigate and analyse concepts from multiple perspectives and personally constructed realities. The research utilised semi-structured interviews with 15 former football academy athletes who subsequently joined varying academic courses at University. The inclusion criteria involved the need for players to have followed the scholarship programme for 2 years between the ages of 16-18 and then released by clubs graded category 1 or 2 by the EPPP system. Subsequently, transcripts were analysed in line with grounded theory coding techniques (Holton, 2010) providing clear, sequential guidelines for conducting qualitative research and precise strategies for managing the analysis phases of inquiry.

**4.0 Results, Findings & Discussion**

The results identified four key transferable skills, **(I)**nterpersonal, **(D)**ependability, **(E)**nterprising, and **(A)**daptability were prevalent across all transitional phases for scholars

within professional football academies. The themes which emerged helped shape the following theoretical model:

- **Interpersonal**
  - Communication*: The need to communicate with different members of staff.
  - Teamwork*: Through understanding the emotions of other players.
  - Emotional Intelligence*: The ability to manage emotions to relieve stress, overcome challenges and defuse conflict.
  - Respect*: To treat staff, players, opposition, officials with consideration and value.
- **Dependability**
  - Commitment*: Clear dedication to training, games and the standards of a professional environment.
  - Attitude*: The ability to develop opinions when working in a challenging environment.
  - Responsibility*: By being accountable for personal actions or team duties
  - Behaviours*: Personal conduct in relation to time management and social media posts.
- **Enterprising**
  - Curiosity*: The inquisitive interest levels in technical, physical and tactical evolutions.
  - Education*: Engagement with academic and coaching qualifications.
  - Planning*: A capacity to look ahead by thinking and exploring other career options.
  - Networking*: The ability to create relationships with individuals.
- **Adaptability**
  - Flexible*: A willingness to learn and understand the need for change in positions or team formations.
  - Sacrifice*: Being able to give up something valued (moving home, friends) for the sake of other considerations.
  - Resilience*: The ability to overcome difficulties e.g. staff turnover, poor form, relegation.
  - Leadership*: Taking ownership of targets and accepting roles to influence the team.

## 5.0 Conclusion, Contribution, Implication

The identification of key transferable skills is significant given each year over 11'000 players are released from academy football in the UK. The research contributes a clear theoretical framework which identifies themes that enable the following:

- Provides the foundation for an educational toolkit which can be delivered within sessions to educate players on transferable skills gained.
- Ensure a focus is placed on 'positive' mindsets for players being released in how skills can be used to pursue other career opportunities.
- Highlights the need to reframe welfare attitudes and player aftercare ensuring these are placed at the core for academy scholars.