BIRMINGHAM CITY University

Research for Athlete and Youth Sport Development Lab

RAYSD Lab

As someone whose life has been changed by the transformative power of sport, I've seen first-hand how talent can flourish when young people are given the right environment, the right support and the right belief.

That is why I am proud to champion the work of Birmingham City University's Research for Athlete and Youth Sport Development (RAYSD) Lab - an initiative that reflects both who we are as a university and who we aspire to be for our communities.

The Lab's person-centred approach, commitment to equity, and willingness to collaborate - internationally with organisations like FIFA or domestically with non-profits like SACA - reflect what BCU stands for. This is research that is making a difference: shaping better pathways, informing policy, and ensuring every young person has the chance to fulfil their potential.

I chose to become BCU's Chancellor because it is a university that believes in people and isn't afraid to drive forward change. The RAYSD Lab embodies that spirit. Its mission to create fairer, more inclusive youth sport environments aligns perfectly with our strategy and with my own belief that barriers need to be broken down so all young people can thrive.

Ade Adepitan MBE
Chancellor, Birmingham City University

Welcome to the Birmingham City University Research for Athlete and Youth Sport Development (RAYSD) Lab

Established in January 2024, the RAYSD Lab serves as a central hub for our work in evaluating organisational structures in youth sport and enhancing athlete development. Over the past decade, our research team has collaborated with a range of regional, national, and international partners. With almost £1m in funding achieved, we are committed to driving impactful research that shapes more inclusive, effective, and developmentally appropriate sporting systems.

The launch of the RAYSD Lab coincided with an exciting milestone for BCU Sport — our move to the new campus at the iconic Alexander Stadium. As one of the UK's leading athletics venues and the largest of its kind in the country, the stadium offers a world-class base for our lab. It also hosted the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, and we are proud to be contributing to its legacy through research, community engagement, and developmental initiatives across Birmingham and beyond.

Athlete development and youth sport play a crucial role in promoting positive youth development. Our work not only supports the growth of future elite athletes but also champions lifelong participation in sport and the personal development of young people. At the heart of our mission is collaboration — we are committed to working side-by-side with our partners to realise the full potential of youth sport as a vehicle for individual and social growth.

The BCU RAYSD Lab is delighted to be working with a range of leading national and international organisations, including FIFA, the Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB), England Squash, and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB). These partnerships are central to our mission — driving meaningful, evidence-based change in policy and practice to positively transform youth sport systems.

One notable example of our impact is the establishment of the South Asian Cricket Academy (SACA) in January 2022. Stemming from our research on the under-representation of British South Asian players in men's professional cricket, SACA provides tailored high-performance support to help players reach the professional level. As of August 2025, 18 players have progressed into First-Class County contracts, with two earning international honours. The initiative, now ECB-funded, is a key strategic response to the recommendations of the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC), further reinforcing cricket's commitment to inclusion.

Throughout 2024 and 2025, our work has been widely disseminated through over 40 peer-reviewed publications in international journals, multiple global conference presentations, and extensive media coverage. Many of these research projects have been conducted in collaboration with prestigious institutions around the world, including Queen's University and the University of Toronto (Canada), Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Spain), University of Maia (Portugal), University of Paris (France), and Tor Vergata University of Rome (Italy).

We are grateful for your interest in our lab. Whether you are an organisation looking for expert research support, or a prospective postgraduate student interested in athlete development and youth sport, we welcome the opportunity to collaborate. Please get in touch to explore how we can work together to make a lasting impact.

To find out more, please visit **www.bcu.ac.uk/raysd-lab**

Professor Adam Kelly
Director of Research for Athlete and Youth Sport Development (RAYSD) Lab
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RAYSD Lab

Birmingham City University's Research for Athlete and Youth Sport Development (RAYSD) Lab aims to learn together with partners through living our guiding values and principles.

1. Use a person-centred approach

- Put children and human rights first
- Provide a safe environment
- Understand and value diverse perspectives
- Build a personal and professional rapport
- Reflect on holistic development across the lifespan
- Seek long-term sustainability

2. Encourage collaboration and co-creation

- Develop organisational and partner relationships
- Recognise and value individual and group identities
- Discuss goals and expectations
- Consider relevance and practical applicability
- Create a shared vision and co-design studies
- Demonstrate innovation and creativity

3. Embrace learning

- Show vulnerability and humility
- Be willing to learn and constantly improve
- Stay open minded
- Support each other and emphasise mutual respect
- Celebrate achievements
- Engage in reflexivity

4. Commit to scientific rigour

- Follow ethical integrity
- Remain transparent, open, and honest
- Conduct high quality research
- Ensure partners can meaningfully benefit
- Adopt evidence-informed approaches
- Evaluate the limitations of research

RAYSD Lab

Our Vision

Collaborate with industry partners to help create evidence-informed organisational structures and more equitable youth sport settings so every young person can achieve their potential.

Our Mission

Positively transform athlete and youth sport development by:

1) Developing equitable approaches
2) Advancing knowledge
3) Working with key partners and informing policies
4) Being international change makers.

Alexander Stadium

BCU's presence at the Alexander Stadium has created outstanding facilities and opportunities for our Sport students, allowing them to learn alongside real athletes in a professional sporting environment.

The University has developed spaces in both the East and West stands at the Stadium to house our specialist laboratories and other facilities, including bespoke learning spaces to offer our students the very best experience for their course.

The stadium includes an environmental chamber, biomechanics lab, and physiology labs alongside equipment including anti-gravity treadmills, all in a space which our academic staff have helped us to design.

The RAYSD Lab is proudly based at the iconic Alexander Stadium, providing a world-class home for our research, community engagement, and development initiatives that continue its lasting legacy across Birmingham and beyond.

www.bcu.ac.uk/alexander-stadium

Strategy and Plan:
RAYSD Lab 2030

Strategy

1. Consider the wants and needs of key partners

- Develop a working model and guidance for a knowledge mobilisation approach
- Build positive and sustainable relationships
- Provide key partners with regular updates
- Think about how information is shared with key partners

2. Develop a research agenda and dissemination plan

- Create a detailed plan of research projects including timelines, milestones, and resource allocation
- Publish in peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters
- Present at [inter]national conferences
- Share stories through media outlets

3. Outline a funding strategy

- Develop a sustainable funding strategy
- Identify relevant funding through grants and awards
- Consider collaborative funding opportunities with professional clubs and governing bodies
- Apply for internal funding opportunities

4. Live the BCU RAYSD Lab values and principles

- Attend weekly meetings and communicate regularly
- Share good practice examples
- Be visible online
- Participate in continuous professional development (CPD)

Plan

1. Showcase impact through policy making, research dissemination, attaining funding, and storytelling.
2. Develop the next generation of leading researchers in the field of athlete development and youth sport.
3. Maintain and establish working relationships with key industry and research partners.
4. Employ a values driven and sustainable culture that is regularly reviewed.
5. Design, implement, and evaluate a knowledge mobilisation process for sport.
6. Demonstrate high impact for Unit of Assessment (UoA) 24 at the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029.

Meet the RAYSD Lab team

Professor Adam Kelly

- Professor of Sport and Exercise at BCU
- Director of Research for Athlete and Youth Sport Development (RAYSD) Lab
- Course Leader for Professional Doctorate in Sport (DSport)

Dr Alex McAuley

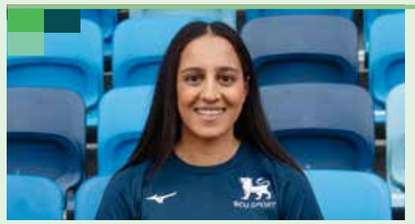
- Postdoctoral Researcher in Athlete Development and Youth Sport at BCU
- Deputy Director of Research for Athlete and Youth Sport Development (RAYSD) Lab
- Lecturer in Sport at Northern Regional College, Northern Ireland

Achuthan Shanmugaratnam

- PhD Research Scholar at BCU
- Research Assistant at FIFA
- Project Title: *Giving Every Talent a Chance? A Longitudinal and Mixed-Methods Evaluation of the FIFA Talent Development Scheme*

Johann Lux

- PhD Research Scholar at BCU
- Research Assistant at FIFA
- Project Title: *Building Talent Development Ecosystems: A Global Analysis of National Football Associations and the FIFA Talent Development Scheme*



Hina Shafi

- PhD Research Scholar BCU and Research Assistant at SACA and Take Her Lead
- Director of Cricket East and Co-Founder of SupportHERS' Collective
- Project Title: *Talent Identification and Development of British South Asian Women and Girls in Cricket*

Omar Green

- PhD Research Scholar at BCU and Research Assistant at SACA and ACE
- Director of Serenkids, ECB Coach Developer, and Talent Pathway Cricket Coach
- Project Title: *How Do Recruiters Identify and Select Talented Cricket Players?*

Kevin Braybrook

- PhD Research Scholar at BCU
- Course Leader for BSc (Hons) Football Studies and MSc Football Performance at Solent University, England
- Project Title: *The Lone Woman in Men's Football Settings*

Daniel Jackson

- PhD Research Scholar at BCU
- Clinical Specialist Physiotherapist in the NHS
- *Project Title: Physical Capacities, Training Loads, and Injury Risk Reduction Strategies in Professional Non-League Football*

Gabriele Morganti

- PhD Research Scholar at San Raffaele Open University of Rome, Italy, in collaboration with BCU
- Certified Italian Swimming Federation Coach
- *Project Title: The Talent Development Ecosystem in Italian Football*

Elie Rambaud

- PhD Research Scholar at the University of Paris, France, in collaboration with BCU
- Sport Scientist at Olympique Lyonnais Academy
- Project Title: *Estimating High Potential in a Top-Level Football Academy*

Project spotlight
Global project on talent development in football

Building off the global talent development ecosystem report in 2021, 'Increasing global competitiveness – An analysis of the talent development ecosystem' and its recommendations (i.e., calls to action) to enhance global competitiveness, FIFA launched the Talent Development Scheme (TDS). By providing strategic guidance, funding, and expertise, the TDS helps Member Associations (MAs) to fulfil their potential and increase global competitiveness. Each MA is supported with tailor-made strategies and resources thereby considering the unique national context, with the shared objective of giving every talent a chance.

In collaboration with the FIFA TDS, our Global Projecton Talent Development in Football (GP-TDF) explores how national football associations around the world design, implement, and evaluate systems and processes to develop youth players. Conducted in close alignment with FIFA's TDS, our project aims to globally capture good practices, generate new insights from diverse football perspectives, and develop practical tools that support more effective, equitable, and evidence-informed approaches to talent development at a global scale.

Our team – led by Professor Adam Kelly, and PhD students Achuthan Shanmugaratnam and Johann Lux – plays an active role in supporting the TDS through a focus on two core areas, alongside other supporting activities and projects. First, we co-develop practical resources with high-performance football experts to address pressing questions from the field. These tools help MAs make informed decisions where no universal model exists. Second, we conduct global research to better understand the talent development landscape and provide insights that can shape future policy and practice. Recently, we gathered data from over 150 FIFA MAs on how they find, train, and play their top talents in the country. These insights will guide both FIFA's strategic direction and the efforts of MAs looking to strengthen their talent development systems. Regardless of a country's size or success in football,

FIFA believes there is a demand for all football nations to construct effective systems and approaches for talent development to increase global competitiveness and reach their full potential. This key collaboration with FIFA's TDS forms a comprehensive stream of research and knowledge that supports national football associations in both men's and women's football to build stronger and more effective talent development systems. Our work supports and aligns with these shared ambitions from FIFA by investigating the global football talent development landscape, generating key insights, and maximising collective intelligence to help FIFA MAs strengthen their systems and ultimately give every talent a chance.

Project 1: Giving every talent a chance? A longitudinal and mixed-methods evaluation of the FIFA Talent Development Scheme

Led by PhD student Achuthan Shanmugaratnam and Professor Adam Kelly, this project investigates the long-term impact of the FIFA TDS on the global football talent development landscape. Using a longitudinal and mixed-methods approach, the research explores how national football associations engage with and are influenced by FIFA's TDS programmes and services. The project aims to understand the current global football talent development landscape, examine the relationship between FIFA's implemented development programs and the global talent development landscape, and evaluate the broader effectiveness of FIFA's TDS in shaping equitable and sustainable talent pathways worldwide.

Project 2: Building talent development ecosystems: A global analysis of national football associations and the FIFA Talent Development Scheme

Led by PhD student Johann Lux and Professor Adam Kelly, this project explores how national football associations design, implement, and evaluate their talent development initiatives. Through a series of interconnected studies, the project investigates how national football associations define priorities, implement initiatives, and operate within diverse contextual environments. One core study captures over 600 projects submitted by FIFA MAs under the TDS, offering a unique global dataset to examine how different national football associations conceptualise and operationalise talent development. Together, these studies aim to contribute to an evidence-informed framework that supports more coherent, adaptable, and context -sensitive approaches to national talent development to create a more equitable talent pathway structure and selection process, ensuring fair opportunities for all players to achieve their potential.

Project spotlight
The BESTA cricket project

In September 2018, we embarked on a collaboratively funded project (Birmingham City University, Warwickshire County Cricket Club, and Essex County Cricket Club) to enhance our understanding of how ethnicity, specifically British South Asian (BSA), influences talent identification, selection, and development in male cricket. These findings have been pivotal in informing policy and practice in cricket, such as supporting Azim Rafiq during his parliamentary hearing on racism in cricket, featuring on many news outlets and documentaries, informing the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC) report (and the England and Wales Cricket Board's [ECB] response), and, importantly, impetus for the creation of the South Asian Cricket Academy (SACA).

SACA is a UK-based initiative aimed at increasing the representation of BSA cricketers in the professional game, and is playing a key role in the ECBs response to the ICEC report. Established in 2021 by Dr Thomas Brown, with the support of Professor Adam Kelly and Birmingham City University, SACA was founded in response to the aforementioned research highlighting the significant underrepresentation of BSA players in First-Class County professional cricket — despite high participation rates at both the recreational and academy levels. The purpose of SACA is to provide a structured pathway for talented South Asian cricketers who have been overlooked by traditional county academies. The programme offers high-performance coaching, competitive match opportunities, and access to sports science and conditioning support, helping players bridge the gap to professional contracts. It also works closely with county clubs to showcase players and advocate for a more inclusive talent identification process. Since its launch, one of SACA's key achievements has been helping a remarkable 14 players secure professional county contracts, including Jafer Chohan who subsequently went on to represent England at international level — demonstrating that many South Asian cricketers possess the ability to compete at the highest levels when given the right opportunities.

SACA and Birmingham City University continue to break down barriers in cricket by partnering with the sport's national governing body and a number of leading United Kingdom charities, in order to make the game more accessible for players from Black and Asian backgrounds. Having already demonstrated its commitment to inclusion in the game with its pioneering work with the SACA, Birmingham City University plans to expand its influence by launching a new research project backed by the ECB. As well as Birmingham City University, the ECB, and SACA, the project also involves Take Her Lead and the African Caribbean Engagement (ACE) programme — two charities who work to provide more opportunities in cricket for underrepresented groups across the UK. The aim of the initiative is to create more equal cricket talent systems that support young black and Asian athletes across the UK, especially females.

The initiative, named the 'BESTA Project', is one of the driving projects for the Research Lab for Athlete and Youth Sport Development (RAYSD Lab) at BCU, which launched in January 2024. Chevy Green, Director of Programmes for ACE, said: "We want to create environments where young people can be themselves in a space that accepts them. It's great to be part of this project to diversify talent pathways to include more South Asian and African Caribbean cricketers, as well as other unrepresented groups. The BESTA project builds on the work of Dr Thomas Brown, whose research led to the creation of the highly impactful SACA programme.

Project 1: Talent Identification and Development of British South Asian Women and Girls in Cricket

Led by PhD student Hina Shafi and Professor Adam Kelly, this project aims to deepen the understanding of the talent identification and development process in female elite youth cricket, with a particular focus on the recruitment and retention of BSA cricketers in England and Wales. The study seeks to uncover the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of BSA female players in elite cricket compared to recreational levels. Recent research by the ECB in the Talent Pathway Action Plan revealed a consistent decline in ethnic diversity as players advance through the girls' pathway. This points to a critical need for interventions at transition points within the pathway to ensure better representation. This demographic imbalance is also reflected at the professional level, where BSA players make up only 3.1% of the overall professional player base. The goal of this project is to develop strategies and inform policy changes that will help BSA women achieve their full potential in cricket.

Project 2: How Do Recruiters Identify and Select Talented Cricket Players?

Led by PhD student Omar Green and Professor Adam Kelly, this project aims to enhance our understanding of the youth cricket talent pathway and support coaches in player identification and selection processes. The research will outline any existing issues within the pathway and propose solutions to create more equitable opportunities for all players. Additionally, the project seeks to develop tools for coaches to approach identification and selection with a holistic perspective. The study builds on the findings of the ICEC report, which highlighted that the current talent pathway is neither fair nor just. The report recommends a comprehensive overhaul of the structure to make it more meritocratic, inclusive, accountable, transparent, and consistent. Furthermore, this project aligns with the objectives of the Making Cricket a More Inclusive Report, aiming to develop and implement best practices for player recruitment processes across England and Wales. Through this project, the aim is to learn together to create a more equitable talent pathway structure and selection process, ensuring fair opportunities for all players to achieve their potential.

Other RAYSD Lab projects

The RAYSD Lab collaborates with regional, national, and international partners to advance research and practice across all areas of athlete development and youth sport.

1. The Football Gene Project

Working in collaboration with Premier League and football league academies, the Football Gene Project investigates the association between genetic polymorphisms and football-specific phenotypes by synthesising existing research, conducting experimental studies on genetic testing and trait associations in England academy players, and exploring practical implications for talent development—ultimately aiming to enhance genetic literacy, promote talent inclusion, and establish best practice guidelines in the responsible use of genetic information in football.

2. The Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB) Relative Age Solutions Project

The KNVB's Relative Age Solutions project tackles the well-documented geboortemaandeffect—where children born earlier in the year are more likely selected in youth football—by moving from awareness to action through a structured, three-part research initiative.

3. Estimating High Potential in Olympique Lyonnais Academy

In collaboration with the University of Paris and the National Institute of Sport, Expertise, and Performance (INSEP), this project aims to estimate potential and map developmental trajectories within a top-level football academy by challenging traditional selection biases (e.g., relative age, biological maturity, training age) through innovative, interdisciplinary methods—ultimately creating a more equitable, evidence-based approach to talent identification, performance monitoring, and long-term player development.

4. Birthday-Banding and Talent Development in England Squash

In partnership with England Squash, this project explores the effectiveness of a novel 'birthday-banding' strategy designed to reduce relative age effects and promote equitable talent development across the England Squash Talent Pathway, combining quantitative analysis of athlete birth quarter distributions with qualitative insights from coaches to inform future policy and practice.

5. Relative Age Effects in England Rugby

This project, in collaboration with England Rugby, investigates the impact of relative age effects (RAEs) across male and female rugby union pathways—from grassroots to international level—highlighting entrenched age-based selection biases, gender-specific trends, and the need for targeted interventions to support more equitable talent identification and talent development.

6. The Talent Development Ecosystem in Italian Sport

In cooperation with San Raffaele Open University, this project investigates how cultural, contextual, and environmental factors shape athlete development and career trajectories in Italy, using a mixed-methods approach to examine recruitment patterns, regional inequalities, and the lived experiences of athletes and practitioners within the Italian sport system.

7. Talent Identification and Development in an English Professional Rugby Union Club

In partnership with Worcester Warriors Rugby Union Club, this project employed a mixed-method, multidisciplinary approach to investigate talent identification and development within an English Premiership rugby academy, identifying key physical, perceptual, and environmental factors that influence player selection, development, and progression, while offering practical insights and an evidence-based framework for coaches, practitioners, and policy makers in youth rugby pathways.

8. Selection and Progression in the Basketball England Talent Pathway

Working alongside Basketball England, the primary aim of this study was to explore the influence of relative age, gender, and playing time on selection at youth levels and the successful progression into senior national teams.

9. The Lone Woman Coach in Men's Football Settings

This project explores the experiences and learning opportunities of lone women coaches in men's football environments and, drawing on these insights, designs and evaluates a male allyship workshop aimed at promoting gender equity and informing inclusive coach education and policy across men's football settings

10. Sports Science and Medicine Practice in Non-League Professional Football

This project explores the physical capacities and workloads of players in non-league football to address the current gaps in sports science and medicine at this level, aiming to inform evidence-based strategies for injury risk reduction, performance enhancement, and player longevity in a resource-constrained, semi-professional environment.

Testimonials from **university partners**


(1)


(2)


(3)


(4)


(5)


(6)


(7)


(8)


(9)


(10)


(11)


(12)

Dr Adrien Sedeaud (1)

Sport Scientist at the National Institute of Sport, Expertise, and Performance (INSEP) and Deputy Director of the Institute for Biomedical Research and Sports Epidemiology (IRMES), France

"This pioneering collaboration represents a significant step forward in redefining how talent is identified and nurtured in football. By challenging long-standing selection biases and embracing a truly interdisciplinary approach, the project is laying the foundation for a fairer and more accurate assessment of player potential. Its innovative methods not only support long-term development but also offer practical solutions to coaches and decision-makers seeking to build more inclusive and effective talent systems."

Dr Diogo Coutinho (2)

Assistant Professor at the University of Maia, Portugal

"I have worked alongside Professor Adam Kelly for several years on various projects. In particular, our Special Issue on Sports Science in Children was both inspiring and rewarding. His ability to unite people, encourage collaboration, and lead with innovation is truly impressive. The project set a new benchmark for translating youth sport science into impactful, real-world practice."

Professors Elvira Padua (3) and Bruno Ruscello (4)

Università Telematica San Raffaele Roma, Italy

"The research visit of our PhD student, Gabriele Morganti, has represented an important opportunity for academic exchange and professional growth. During his time at Birmingham City University, Gabriele benefited from a high-quality research environment and the expert supervision of Professor Adam Kelly. We are confident that such initiatives play a key role in promoting international research cooperation and in supporting the development of early-career researchers."

Professor Jean Côté (5) and Dr Jennifer Turnnidge (6)

Professor (Jean) and Health Education Researcher and Consultant (Jennifer) at Queen's University, Canada

"Over the recent years, we have had several opportunities to collaborate with Professor Adam Kelly and his team. We have co-authored book chapters and articles, making each project a rewarding and collaborative experience. The research and partnership initiatives Adam leads in athlete development are innovative and have meaningful impacts on youth sport and youth development."

Professor Joseph Baker (7) and Dr Kathryn Johnston (8)

Professor (Joseph) and Senior Research Associate (Kathryn) at the Tanenbaum Institute for Science in Sport, University of Toronto, Canada

"For years, our research group has enjoyed working with the RAYSD Lab at Birmingham City University. This research group is quickly growing into one of the strongest hubs for sport talent research in the UK."

Professor Kevin Till (9)

Professor of Athletic Development, Co-Director of the Centre for Child and Adolescent Physical Literacy, and Programme Lead for Doctor of Professional Practice in Sport at Leeds Beckett University, UK

"I've had the pleasure of working alongside Professor Adam Kelly, including RAYSD Lab projects focused on talent development and relative age effects in rugby. The research team is outstanding — pushing boundaries and driving impactful research across multiple areas of athlete development and youth sport. Their work continues to influence practice and shape thinking in meaningful ways across the youth sport sector."

Dr Matthew Reeves (10)

Reader in Human Development and Performance at the University of Lancashire, UK

"It has been a real pleasure collaborating with the RAYSD Lab team. Their commitment to meaningful, applied research in athlete and youth sport is outstanding, and their work continues to make a valuable contribution to both academic knowledge and applied practice."

Dr Paolo Riccardo Brustio (11)

Associate Professor at the University of Torino, Italy

"Collaborating with Professor Adam Kelly and the RAYSD Lab has been a real pleasure. Their work is defined by outstanding scientific rigor and a truly innovative approach to athlete and youth sport development. I deeply value the insight and professionalism the team brings to every project."

Professor Sergio Jiménez Sáiz (12)

Professor at Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Spain

"From the very first moment we connected, collaboration with the RAYSD Lab has been exquisite, resulting in high-impact journal articles, book chapters, and a special issue on Talent Identification and Development in Youth Sport led by Professor Adam Kelly. His role as a Research Associate at Universidad Rey Juan Carlos has made working with the RAYSD team both seamless and deeply rewarding."

Industry testimonials

Dr Thomas Brown (1)

Co-Founder and Managing Director of the South Asian Cricket Academy (SACA)

"I'm excited to be working with the RAYSD Lab and contributing to the BESTA Project. It's a privilege to collaborate with such a talented group - people who not only bring valuable expertise, but who are also well-placed to influence real change in cricket. By building on the existing research, we have a real opportunity to address key knowledge gaps and move closer to our shared goal: making cricket the most inclusive sport in the country."

Kate Burke (2)

Lead Player Development Scientist at England Rugby

"We have long sought to navigate the complex world of talent development, and more specifically, the challenges of relative age effects. Professor Adam Kelly has been an invaluable guide on this journey. His passion for improving the experiences and opportunities available to young people shines through in his research. Throughout our work together, he has been professional, objective, and a true ally in helping us address this critical topic."

David Court (3) and Alun Powell (4)

Head of Player Identification and Pathway (David) and National Talent Manager (Alun) at the England and Wales Cricket Board.

"We have been working alongside Professor Adam Kelly for several years, during which time he has supported us in deepening our understanding of the talent identification and talent development processes in cricket. Throughout our collaboration, he has demonstrated exceptional passion and expertise in this field, always striving to enhance the experiences and opportunities for the stars of the future."

Dr Callum Irving (5)

Learning and Exchange Lead at the FIFA Talent Development Scheme

"As the Learning and Exchange Lead at the FIFA Talent Development Scheme, I have worked closely with Professor Adam Kelly, whose expertise has been instrumental in shaping our evidence-informed and practically relevant technical guidance for global delivery. Johann and Achu have also led crucial work in monitoring the progress and impact of the scheme, generating valuable insights into its implementation. Their efforts have captured good practice, translated it into practical tools for field teams, and strengthened our collective learning to enhance the effectiveness of the TDS worldwide."

Mark Jeffreys (6)

Chair of England Squash

"It has been great to work with Professor Adam Kelly, especially the research we carried out together around birthday-banding within the sport. It has also been great to see the other work published to see where there are potential lessons to learn from. The work carried out by the RAYSD Lab has been fantastic in helping sports like ours to make effective and informed decisions about our talent pathway and how we develop young people."

Guy Rippon (7)

Head of Foundation and Community at Aston Villa Football Club

"Talent identification and development are increasingly competitive fields for professional football clubs, and it is important that we are connected with our talent pathway and elite programmes. We are active in the space of identifying and educating a new generation of coaches with the RAYSD Lab, with their research into this subject providing valuable insights for our students of today and coaches of tomorrow."

Bruce Suraci (8)

Academy Head of Coaching and Development at AFC Bournemouth

"Professor Adam Kelly and I have collaborated for many years - first in the elite talent sector within soccer academies in England, and later in establishing the Football Gene Project. Together, we worked with a scientific group to explore how genetic information can be used to enhance talent development, contributing to several publications in the field. This project has been an outstanding example of innovation and collaboration, producing impactful insights that are helping to shape the future of talent development in sport."

Jan Verbeek (9)

Researcher at the Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB)

"Working with the BCU RAYSD Lab has been invaluable for the Dutch FA (Royal Netherlands Football Association). Our collaborative research project has provided an impactful overview of potential solutions to mitigate relative age effects, helping us create to better understand how to make more equitable opportunities for young players to develop. This partnership has been instrumental in shaping a fairer football environment for all."

RAYSD Lab in action

FIFA Talent Development Scheme Americas Regional Workshop, Asunción, Paraguay

The Performance Lab for the Advancement of Youth in Sport (PLAYS), Queen's University, Kingston, Canada

Cricket Network Research Annual Conference, Loughborough, England

FIFA Talent Development Scheme Africa Regional Workshop, Casablanca, Morocco

FIFA Global Football Division Expert Seminar, Doha, Qatar

National Coaching Conference (NCC) for the Football Association of Indonesia (PSSI), Jakarta, Indonesia

Since the launch of the RAYSD Lab in January 2024, we have shared our research through a wide range of international platforms and events (as of December 2025):

42

Peer-reviewed articles and book chapters

30

Conference presentations and keynotes

29

Media appearances and related articles

The TIDES Society affiliation

The BCU RAYSD Lab is proud to be affiliated with the international Talent Identification and Development Environments in Sport (TIDES) Society. Several members of our team are active contributors to the Society, including Professor Adam Kelly, who is a founding member.

With over 100 members representing more than 20 countries, the TIDES Society serves as a global hub for high-quality discussion, research, innovation, and collaboration in the field of athlete development. Its mission is to advance and disseminate knowledge surrounding the identification, selection, and development of talent across sporting domains.

To fulfil this mission, the TIDES Society offers a platform of opportunities for its members, including international networking, collaborative research projects, monthly webinars, position statements, journal editorials, and the organisation of its inaugural global conference.

Notably, the TIDES Society have recently launched the Routledge Talent Identification and Development Environments in Sport, led by Professor Adam Kelly, Dr James Dugdale, Dr Matthew Andrew, and Dr Matthew Reeves, offering researchers and interest-holders essential readings relating to the fields of talent identification and talent development in sport. More information is available here: **www.routledge.com/tides**

The RAYSD Lab is excited to collaborate with the TIDES Society and its global network of researchers and practitioners to help shape the future of talent identification and talent development in sport on an international scale.

Professional Doctoriate in Sport

Advance your skillset and knowledge in athlete development and youth sport.

The Professional Doctorate in Sport (DSport) is aimed at individuals working in sport who are seeking to advance their skillset and knowledge within their related discipline.

- Expand your understanding of research and how it informs practice in a multi-professional community.
- Generate new knowledge or make novel applications of knowledge to enhance your specialist field of study.
- Join our world-leading research for athlete and youth sport development (RAYSD) lab.

For more information, contact:
Professor Adam Kelly:
adam.kelly@bcu.ac.uk
or visit **www.bcu.ac.uk/dsport**.

Work with the RAYSD Lab

The RAYSD Lab is committed to working in partnership with industry leaders to co-create evidence-informed organisational structures and develop more equitable youth sport environments, ensuring that every young person has the opportunity to realise their full potential.

We strive to positively transform athlete development and youth sport by:

- Developing inclusive environments and equitable approaches.
- Advancing research and knowledge through high-quality, impactful scholarship.
- Collaborating with key stakeholders to inform policy and shape best practice.
- Driving international change through global partnerships and innovation.

Together, we aim to build a fairer and more inclusive future for youth sport, both in the UK and around the world.

To find out more about the RAYSD Lab, our research team, and our ongoing projects, please visit our website **www.bcu.ac.uk/raysd-lab**

If you're interested in collaborating with us or exploring how you or your organisation can get involved, we'd love to hear from you. Feel free to contact the RAYSD Lab directly at: **Adam.Kelly@bcu.ac.uk**

RAYSD Lab