DCU Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath Dublin City University

Making the most of Mentoring: An examination across student-practitioner cohorts in a Gaelic Games Tertiary Education Environment.

By

Paul O'Brien, BSc, MSc

Supervisor: Dr Robin Taylor

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Student Declaration

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I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Elite Performance (Sport) is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and have conformed to the regulations on the use and declaration of Generative AI, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. I hereby certify that no Generative AI tools have been used in the creation of the thesis.

Print Name: Paul O'Brien

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Abbreviations

AMQ	Athlete Mentoring Questionnaire
DCU	Dublin City University
ELT	Experiential Learning Theory
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GPA	Gaelic Players Association
LLP	Legitimate Peripheral Participation
LMX	Leader Member Exchange
MMN	Multiple Mentor Network
MMR	Mixed Methods Research
PA	Performance Analysis
PC	Programme Coordinator
POS	Perceived Organisational Support
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SIC	Senior Inter County
SMM	Shared Mental Models

Abstract

The central purpose of this thesis was to gain a deeper understanding of formal mentoring programmes in a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment. This was achieved through a series of studies with varying mentor and mentee combinations across a range of cohorts, namely student-athletes, coaches and performance analysts. Chapter Two, highlighted the potential mentoring has to address a gap in learning in the volunteer sporting setting, while also identifying Social Exchange Theory as an appropriate theoretical lens through which to view mentoring.

Chapter Three was the first of three empirical studies, where a mixed method approach was adopted to investigate dyadic peer mentoring of Student-Athletes as they transitioned from second to third level education alongside a sporting transition from junior to senior athletes. Findings indicated programme design and programme coordinator support was crucial. Chapter Four, adopted a qualitative research design to explore mentoring of performance analysts. The findings identified the importance of triadic relationships in mentoring, due to individual mentors being unable to fulfil all the needs of the mentees. Chapter Five builds on this triadic mentoring of performance analysts, a multiple mentor network was employed for the development of coaches, which was researched using a multi-method design. The findings illustrate the importance of trust in relationships and the balance between informal and formal mentoring. Chapter Six, provides practical guidance for programme coordinators in designing and delivering mentoring programmes. The chapter identifies conditionality as a key consideration for all decision around mentoring due to the complexity of sporting environments. Finally, Chapter Seven summarised the thesis, highlighting the need for further research into mentoring in sporting environments and some final overarching implications for practice.

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On a personal level, I would like to acknowledge the support across all my education that my ma and da have provided. Equally two of the great educators in my life, Br. O'Connell and Jim Boggan who instilled a love of Gaelic Games in me at an early age that has become a lifelong pursuit.

Finally, I wouldn't be completing this thesis or other activities I enjoy without the support of Jacinta. It was very enlightening to hear her recently describe to a friend what I was researching, which was actually what I had done at masters level five years ago. This illustrated not her disinterest in my studies, but the freedom she affords me and her unquestioning support. I owe her, Harry, Danny and the soon to arrive AN Other (in great GAA fashion) a lot of time in the months and years ahead.

Go raibh maith agat!

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 My professional environment

Throughout this professional doctorate I have been, and continue to be, the Head of Gaelic Games at Dublin City University (DCU). Alongside this professional role I also wear many hats through my passion and vocation of involvement in Gaelic Games. Much of the empirical research in this thesis is in areas I wish to make a difference to and improve both personally and professionally. I currently hold roles as a coach and a performance analyst at different levels in Gaelic Games and operating across these levels affords me different perspectives when considering the findings from the cohorts under investigation here and their application to other levels and environments.

DCU is a third level institution which is recognisable nationally as one of the leaders of Gaelic Games at third level. This is a result of the importance in which the 'student experience' is held by the management of the university. DCU Sport has a vision to 'deliver an exceptional sporting experience that connects, inspires and transforms our DCU community', alongside a mission to 'be Ireland's leading sporting University distinguished by our people, places and programmes'. DCU Sport has the largest Gaelic Games programme in Ireland with over 1000 student members annually and 27 teams across the four Gaelic Games codes (Camogie, Gaelic Football, Hurling and Ladies Football) operating in national competitions. The competitions nationally at third level range from the senior cups; Ashbourne Cup (Camogie), Fitzgibbon Cup (Hurling), O'Connor Cup (Ladies Football) and Sigerson Cup (Gaelic Football), to participation level competitions. The senior competitions are typically played by student-athletes who have competing commitments with multiple teams (Club, county and college) concurrently (while not always having adequate cooperation from managers), which present demands on them. The participation teams, within the sector are really important for the maintenance of identity, ensuring friendships and continued

involvement for sport when away from home. Being set in a university, engagement with undergraduate students is a key aspect of my professional role. This is at a challenging time for students and their identity as Gaelic games players, with a recent report on Gaelic Games participation showing dropout figures during adolescence of 60% (McKay et al., 2025). While a continued fall in the 18 -20 year old age range was evident, the exact decline in numbers and reasons for this decline, was indeterminable due to low participation rates of this cohort in the study (McKay et al., 2025). This cohort is affected nationally by ongoing disengagement form Gaelic Games and thus continuing to provide opportunity for involvement and continued identity for students as they move to a tertiary environment is crucial. My professional role affords me the opportunity to positively impact Gaelic Games with this cohort of students through the implementation of various games programmes and leadership opportunities. I viewed the opportunity to engage in doctoral research as an opportunity to build upon my knowledge developed through master's study in the fields of sports psychology (Ulster University) and performance analysis (SETU Carlow) and build a body of evidence to inform practice in my setting to help develop the programmes and leadership opportunities currently available to students.

I view my professional role not purely as a job but somewhat as a vocational pursuit as I can work in an environment I am extremely passionate about which provides me with opportunities to be involved in the development, shaping and nurturing of different types of individuals. Furthermore, being able to learn from my professional environment, alongside my other personal involvements in Gaelic Games means that completing this thesis has been an enjoyable pursuit.

1.2 My research philosophy

Considering the context of the investigation being carried out in the form of a Professional Doctorate rather than a typical PhD and situated in my own primary working

environment, this influenced the philosophy underpinning this research. The decision to undertake a Professional Doctorate, rather than a traditional PhD was a desire to directly impact my practice, as a priority above abstract theoretical research. The Professional Doctorate affords the opportunity to blend practice and research, with an emphasis on applied research to contribute to practice and policy (Neumann, 2005). The design and intention of the Professional Doctorate emphasises practicality and the implementation of research which is immediately impacting practice outcomes (Neumann, 2005). This stimulated an immediate problem-solving approach against the problems I face in my professional role.

As a result, a pragmatic approach was employed to provide practical solutions (i.e., mentoring programmes) to workplace problems experienced by people (i.e., DCU Dóchas Éireann members) in social contexts (i.e., Tertiary Gaelic Games environment) (Giacobbi et al., 2005). Pragmatism provides a lens for the generation of knowledge focused on optimal output in practice (Cruickshank & Collins, 2017). It facilitates an evidence-informed approach, focusing on what works in practice, guided by empirical evidence, rather than rigid adherence to certain ontological or epistemological assumptions (Jenkins, 2017). The knowledge created is produced in the context of application and involves those practicing in that environment, making the findings relevant and actionable (Horner, 2016).

The discussions which extend across the thesis illustrate how a pragmatic paradigm was adhered to, ensuring the facilitation of knowledge across domains (Goldkuhl, 2012). Thus, supporting those reading the work to apply the knowledge generated to their own environments from micro level to macro level (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). The presentation of the findings should help practitioners to understand what may work in their context, providing tools to contextualise the findings (Cruickshank & Collins, 2017). A pragmatic approach was utilised to address some of the issues with the useability of sport research, with both my professional

and research hats on, in developing evidence-informed information (Cruickshank & Collins, 2017).

Through a pragmatic approach, I combine both theory and my professional practice in an integrated manner through cycles of reflection and action, aimed at assisting the participants of the research, thus positioning them as co-constructors of knowledge (Horner, 2016). Co-construction aligns with the aims of pragmatism, as it integrates theory and practice through democratic enquiry (Horner, 2016) and emphasises context and interaction (Morgan, 2007). The process of knowledge co-construction through democratic enquiry allows solutions to be created through the shared process of research and practice interacting (Parsons, 2021). The intention of this co-construction of knowledge through active engagement, enquiry and action cycles is achieved by those who are actually experiencing the problems, ensuring the solutions generated are socially robust (Horner, 2016). This co-construction enhances the validity of the research as it is only valued by participants if it is positively transformative from their perspective (Horner, 2016).

Furthermore, being an 'insider' researcher helps facilitate a pragmatists desire to solve problems (Goldkuhl, 2012). As being embedded in the context allows the researcher an intimate awareness of the problems within the environment under investigation (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). This awareness of the problems along with a desire to seek solutions to the practical realities of the shared situation, resonates with a pragmatic outlook (Chhabra, 2020). When operating within the field, researchers move between various roles in an iterative and ever-changing manner (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). My positionality within the research influences the research as it is not possible to be completely removed from the social process under investigation (Holmes, 2020). My positionality as an 'insider' had positives and negatives throughout the data collection and interpretation process (Holmes, 2020). An 'insider' shares similar characteristics to the group they are studying, albeit with some level of

detachment (Greene, 2014). My familiarity with, and experience in, the environment under investigation and my relationships with many of those within the research was helpful in affording expansive dialogue as a result of strong rapport, thus making connections and understanding meaning coherently (May & Perry, 2022).

However, this could also be restrictive as participants may be hesitant to comment on specific situations due to misunderstanding the differences between my role as a professional and a researcher in their eyes (Purdy, 2014). Additionally, being an 'insider' produced other ethical challenges I needed to overcome throughout the research process, such as impression management, where my role in the hierarchy of the club could lead to misinterpretation of fear thus not representing participants accurately (Chavez, 2008). This was further challenged by the need to bring an external perspective to the process; thus an 'outsider' (i.e., my supervisor) assisted throughout the process (Holmes, 2020). He was an 'outsider' to the tertiary Gaelic Games environment yet had extensive experience in another sport and as a researcher in sport. This 'insider' and 'outsider' perspective was seen as a resource in the collection and analysis of data, as without this insight there is potential for weakened theoretical sensitivity leading to reduced quality of findings (May & Perry, 2022).

My decision to research mentoring in a tertiary education environment across different cohorts has stemmed from my own personal and professional experiences of Gaelic Games. From a personal perspective I am heavily involved in Gaelic Games with a lifelong involvement as a player, coach and administrator at different levels of the organisation from club to county, through to secondary and tertiary education settings also. These personal views interact with my professional role, as the Head of Gaelic Games in DCU, where I am tasked with delivering a Gaelic Games programme in a tertiary education environment with conflicting demands of performance, participation and leadership development. I believe in the pursuit of the best version of an entity in its setting, with pragmatism championing equity and

empowerment (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). In DCU, I operate within the political landscape of the institution, while maintaining the positive elements of the external ethos of Gaelic Games, which has materialised in a 'way of doing things'. This 'way of doing things' is largely based upon my own interpretations and ideological views, along with some internal measures, however this research has given me the opportunity to understand if programmes are functioning effectively and improving the lived experience of students (Goldkuhl, 2012). This personal axiology aligns to a pragmatic approach in using what works from other environments in my DCU setting, rather than strict adherence to Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) methods or rigid university policy (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). My experience which have been mostly positive has shaped my desire to facilitate others experiencing similar rewards where possible and reflexivity was needed to ensure I have not (and do not) project my own personal values onto others without their permission. My axiological position emphasises what actually works in practice in the specific environment, while maintaining a moral compass and adapting accordingly to changes in the environment. Within this professional role in DCU, my lifelong involvement in Gaelic Games at various levels and my role as a researcher, it has been impossible to completely detach myself from some of my inherent biases, but I have acted towards carefully considering them, becoming aware of them and acting appropriately in a research context. Thus, biases arose from both my personal and professional involvements in Gaelic Games.

Awareness of my role within the research and the interaction that has on all aspects of the research, required an understanding of reflexivity. Reflexivity, the act of critically reflecting on the researcher's role and influence upon the research process, is considered as one of the most significant 'sensibilities' and defining features of research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Reflexivity is crucial within a pragmatic paradigm as it enables an active process of inquiry and problem-solving in context (Holmwood, 2014). This reflexivity facilitates critical

engagement with my assumptions and my relationships with participants, thus ensuring an ability to comprehend the implications within and beyond my domain (Woodley & Smith, 2020). Throughout the process, I actively engaged in interpreting data through the lens of my own cultural membership, social position, and ideological commitments, as well as my scholarly knowledge (Braun et al., 2019). This required reflexivity to reduce personal bias and reflect openly on the data collected. This was a dynamic process aimed at facilitating change within my context and beyond (Holmwood, 2014).

This reflexivity was on an individual and collaborative level with a 'critical friend' (i.e., my supervisor). My personal reflexivity comprised an examination into the research topic and its constant evolution in the workplace, alongside my own biography and positioning within the area of research. Thus, my positionality impacted on the rapport and relationships with all research participants (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Being aware of my own influence on the research, I heavily leaned on my supervisor for collaborative reflexivity. As an outsider and 'critical friend', he helped to reduce and challenge my biases when interpreting and disseminating my findings and discussions (Tracey, 2010). However, reflexivity should not be viewed solely as a challenge, it has been argued an awareness and adoption of a reflexive stance should be viewed positively (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Reflexivity supported my pragmatic stance through constant evaluation, adaption and refinement of my approach to the evolving problems encountered as Head of Gaelic Games (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Ensuring my visibility with different hats on throughout the research process and being open with participants in acknowledging my personal reflexivity was viewed as a strength (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This reflexivity can further contribute to the selection of appropriately robust research methods, as it allows for flexibility of methods in addressing the nuances of the environment aligned with the research question (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

My pragmatic stance afforded flexibility to employ different research methods across the different empirical studies (Cruickshank & Collins, 2017). Thus, different research methods were used to answer the research questions across the three empirical chapters. In the Student-Athlete study (see chapter Three), a mixed methods design was employed, namely through the Athlete Mentoring Questionnaire (AMQ) and focus groups. This convergent parallel design was utilised to remove restrictions associated with merely using one design type and allowing the quantitative data to direct the qualitative data collection and vice-versa to fully interrogate the complex phenomenon in question (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). While a solely qualitative approach was used with Performance Analyst's (see chapter four), however additional protagonist (coach) focus groups were conducted, to allow for external perspectives on the mentoring process. The flexibility within the pragmatic approach was further emphasised as a multi methods approach was utilised to understand the mentoring of the student-coaches (see chapter five), as reflective journals were used to direct the interviews in that empirical study. My 'insider' positioning of possessing similar characteristics to participants, helped build rapport and relationships during both data collection, with participants typically welcoming the opportunity to interact and share their experiences with someone with a vested interest in their development (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

1.3 Thesis Objectives

To address the problems faced in a Gaelic Games tertiary education context in relation to supporting the development of students, the following objectives were identified;

1. Through a literature review identify a suitable approach to support learning in a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment (see chapter two).
2. Explore the impact of peer mentoring on the development of Student-Athletes in transition in a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment (see chapter three).

3. Explore the impact of mentoring on neophyte Performance Analysts operating in a performance team (see chapter four).
4. Explore the utility of a multiple mentor network (MMN) as a means for developing coaches (see chapter five).
5. Identify practical considerations for the delivery of mentoring programmes in sporting environments (see chapter six).

1.4 Thesis Outline

This thesis will explore the opportunity for mentoring in a tertiary education Gaelic Games environment, through a progressive experimentation with different populations receiving various types of mentoring in their own field of practice.

Chapter Two sets out to identify an appropriate learning tool to support learning in a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment. It includes an exploration of the challenges associated with learning and how various approaches to learning or practitioner development are not linear. It posits Mentoring as learning tool which can be beneficial (alongside other experiential learning methods) for practitioners on their development journey. The chapter also delves into the considerations required considering the volunteer nature of Gaelic Games and outlines how the thesis is framed through Social Exchange Theory (SET). Considering the wide scope of domains explored in the literature across this chapter, an integrative research approach was used to combine perspectives and apply them within my domain (Snyder, 2019).

Consequently, Chapter Three begins the empirical investigation in the process of mentoring with different populations, by investigating mentoring with Student-Athletes. Chapter Three employed a mixed methods research (MMR) design to identify the impact of dyadic peer mentoring with the population and explore programme design. The population under investigation were first year Student-Athletes who were transitioning on a dual front of both academic and sport, while the mentors were alumni or final year students from DCU, who

exhibited a certain set of characteristics. The quantitative AMQ was used alongside focus groups with both mentors and mentees, to understand the experiences of the mentees. The results indicated that the dyadic mentoring relationships had a positive impact on psychosocial and instrumental mentoring functions, while from a programme design perspective, there were important considerations around dyad matching, training for mentoring, and support during the mentoring process.

Subsequently, in Chapter Four, another dyadic mentoring programme was designed to support neophyte Performance Analysts, but the gap in experience between mentors and mentees was much bigger than the previous peer relationship in chapter three. Qualitative focus groups were employed to understand the experiences of neophyte Performance Analysts. Considering the difference in population it became apparent that dyadic mentoring alone was not sufficient for developing Performance Analysts, as they required support from more varied sources. While some similar findings arose as the Student-Athlete cohort (see chapter three), the importance of significant others in the process were identified too, with the Performance Analysis (PA) mentor suitable for the provision of support around task specific items, while the support of the coach or manager in the mentees primary operating environment was seen as a crucial part of the process as they were able to provide context and sport specific support, which the PA mentor was unable to. These findings highlighted implications for the successful implementation of mentoring through context specific considerations. Namely, dyadic mentoring alone was not appropriate for the cohort in terms of the support they require, instead requiring a MMN for effective development of neophyte practitioners as they are operating in diverse and evolving environments where multiple perspectives and supports are welcomed.

As a result, Chapter Five encompassed the exploration of a MMN for the development of coaches. The change of programme design was reflected in a change of research design to a multi methods approach, incorporating both reflective journals and semi-structured

interviews. The findings of this empirical study identified the key role the Programme Coordinator (PC) regarding programme design, recruitment and ongoing support for mentors and mentees. The findings also illuminated the benefits of a MMN in catering for the varied needs of mentees and the varying capabilities and capacities of the mentors, positing mentoring as a valuable in-situ experiential learning alternative to some traditional coach education methods.

The findings of the three empirical studies form the basis for Chapter Six, which is delivered in the form of practical considerations for those facilitating mentoring as a tool for development in sports organisations. The findings are presented in a manner which allow PC's, or similar, to develop their own capabilities to deliver 'best fit' mentoring practice in their setting. Consequently, the conditionality needed for mentoring is explored throughout this chapter, with an 'It Depends' lens utilised in the following areas; the role of PC expertise, the ongoing fluctuating needs of participants, navigating resource allocation and measurement challenges, where mentoring fits organisationally and harnessing an informal mentoring culture. In conclusion, Chapter Seven summarises the thesis, acknowledging the work undertaken, the learning garnered, and its limitations alongside offering recommendations for sports organisations to challenge assumptions around mentoring and the requirement for further research.

Chapter 2: What's the score? Considerations to support learning in a Gaelic Games context.

2.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter One, this chapter focuses on identifying an appropriate tool to support learning in my setting. This chapter utilised an integrative research approach which allowed the synthesize of research from different domains and apply it within my Gaelic Games tertiary education environment (Snyder, 2019). This approach facilitated the critique of some mature topics in their own right (e.g., social exchange theory, mentoring, challenges for student-athletes, mentoring in a coaching domain, etc), but when combined within the Gaelic Games Tertiary Education environment, they are very much an emerging domain (Snyder, 2019). Initially, the chapter explores the challenges associated with learning in complex sporting environments, before identifying the important role that experiential learning can play in navigating the complexity. Following this, mentoring is proposed due to its potential to overcome some of the issues prevalent with learning in sport. Mentoring and its utility across various domains is explored, critically considering its functions, benefits and criticisms. The rationale behind the application of SET as a theoretical framework for the research is provided, considering the volunteer nature of Gaelic Games and the willingness of potential mentors to assist others embarking on a journey similar to their own.

2.2 The importance of learning

As a result of the complexity and multi-faceted nature of sport, learning is more complex than it may be in other domains (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). Consequently, the developmental experiences of practitioners in sport are complex but crucial for effectiveness in dynamic environments (Kolb et al., 2014; Yardley et al., 2012). This journey is influenced significantly by the interplay between the learners individual knowledge and contextual factors (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). The ability and desire to learn is an important prerequisite for the process of development in all fields and is crucial to ensuring the capability to adjust to

fast changing environments (Kolb & Kolb, 2012). Reflecting this, the developmental experiences of practitioners have been categorised into different models. Benner's (1984) model, which can be suited to neophyte practitioners in sport, outlined five stages (i.e., novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert), but it has been critiqued for ambiguity around which stages specific in-situ learning methods can be most impactful during the journey (Field, 2004). This role of in-situ learning was espoused through Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and Lave and Wenger's (1991) Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LLP). Kolb's (1984) model for experiential learning outlines three stages of practitioner development, acquisition, specialisation and integration. With in situ learning (e.g., reflection and observation) harnessed in and across the specialisation and integration stages (Kolb & Kolb, 2012). High quality learning is likely to integrate experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting (Kolb & Kolb, 2012). While, LLP is more explicit about the embeddedness of learning within social activities, where engagement with others and the environment builds across time (Fuller et al., 2005). LLP allows an understanding of how novices make progress as they engage with others in their environment who have more experience (Fuller et al., 2005). This context where the learning occurs, has a significant bearing on the likelihood of the learning experience being a positive one (Fuller et al., 2005). 'Expansive' environments allow for diverse learning opportunities, value learning and provide affordances for process over results, while 'restrictive' environments limit scope through poor sharing cultures, withholding of information and scaled opportunities (Fuller et al., 2005; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). Therefore, the environment can impact on the dynamic learning process, where the cycle can be more of a spiral, as the learner navigates the complexity of the learning in the environment (Kolb & Kolb, 2012).

With this in mind, an organisation culture has a significant role to play in terms of learning. Collaborative organisational cultures afford opportunities for sharing and supportive

conversations (Fuller et al., 2005; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). This organisational culture is important as it helps to create a conversational space or psychological safety for the learner (Kolb & Kolb, 2012). This allows the cultivation of reflective practice and meaningful conversation to create shared meaning and understanding (Stambulova & Johnson, 2010). However, these benefits can be inhibited if policy frameworks are restrictive and there is an over-emphasis on measurable outcomes, short term benefits or meeting external expectations, thus hindering unplanned learning (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). As such, a diverse and wide variety of learning opportunities are important for practitioners (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005).

2.3 Types of learning

In sport, learning has been evidenced in a variety of different ways, encompassing formal (e.g., NGB accredited coaching courses, university degrees), non-formal (e.g., conferences, workshops) and informal (e.g., community of practice, ad-hoc interactions with peers) learning (Nelson et al., 2006). Formal learning is defined as structured, mediated and often mandated (Walker et al., 2018). Formal education provides a minimum standard and helps protect against potentially harmful practices (Nash & Sproule, 2011). This type of learning is valuable for those in the initial stages of their practice, while acting as validation for more experienced coaches (Nash & Sproule, 2011). One of the strengths of formal learning is providing a theoretical framework and primary knowledge base to allow practitioners strong underpinnings to further explore areas and develop understanding (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). Furthermore, formal learning supports practitioners to develop and interrogate foundational beliefs, allowing for more reflective and critical informal learning opportunities (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). However, as learning for sports practitioners, is a contextualised activity, many formal learning opportunities are viewed as low impact, as information can be presented uncritically with little opportunity for sufficiently critical

reflective practice (Nelson et al., 2006). Due to formal learning often occurring in short blocks, limiting opportunities to integrate new knowledge into the practitioners performance domain, therefore, lacking contextual sensitivity (Chesterfield et al., 2010).

Non-Formal learning is defined as structured and mediated, with engagement initiated by the practitioner (Walker et al., 2018). Non-formal learning (e.g., conferences or workshops) can be designed to address the specific needs of practitioners on contemporary issues and delivered by respected and field leading experts (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). Non-formal learning has been found to build upon, and therefore compliment, the theoretical concepts of formal learning (Walker et al., 2018). However, challenges with non-formal learning include the delivery of content to ensure learning for all (Walker et al., 2018). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the application of knowledge from non-formal sources can be uncritical, often 'mimicking' experts without sufficient critique or discussion (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). Consequently, the full potential of non-formal learning is not capitalised upon, as it can facilitate social interactions leading to potential informal learning opportunities (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016).

Finally, informal learning is defined as unstructured, unmediated engagement with development activities that are often initiated by the practitioner and situated in their practice (Walker et al., 2018). The strengths of informal learning link to its contextual relevance and accessibility and ability to apply information in real time (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). It has also been helpful in the development of softer skills required in sporting environments, which may not be developed through formal courses or books (Greyson, 2011). Informal learning that occurs unconsciously through practice can build tacit knowledge (i.e., implicit knowledge accrued in context) bases for practitioners (Nash & Sproule, 2009). To be effective, informal learning requires significant social interaction (Stozskowski & Collins, 2016), which can foster mutual support, idea sharing, reflective discussion, and sounding boards (Nash & Sproule,

2009). A further strength of informal learning is it is practitioner-initiated, empowering them to take ownership of their learning (Walker et al., 2018). However, this can also be a weakness if a practitioner is not motivated or fearful of seeking these learning opportunities (Butterworth & Turner, 2014; Nash & Sproule, 2011). There are also instances where knowledge is applied uncritically as it is seen as emanating from an expert source of knowledge (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). Additionally, if learning is occurring within a suboptimal environment, it may lead to reinforcing ineffective methods and uncritically accepting the traditions or social norms of that environment (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). There is also a likelihood of information overload or the potential to filter information inappropriately, accepting damaging information at the expense of more valuable information (Nash & Sproule, 2009; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). Engaging in informal learning can help develop procedural knowledge, but not declarative knowledge, which may be better gained through formal modes of learning, thus the criticality required for wider practitioner development may be curtailed (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016).

Thus, simply choosing one learning type over another is not optimal for a sports practitioners learning. A combination of formal, non-formal and informal learning offers a holistic and comprehensive approach to development (Nash & Sproule, 2011), as each learning mode offers distinct benefits and addresses the range of a practitioners developmental needs over time (Walker et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important when designing learning opportunities for practitioners to understand which learning mode is more suitable under existing conditions and when it should be used (Walker et al., 2018). A blended approach to learning, facilitates the declarative theoretical underpinning of formal modes to engage in contextual critique and effective processing of in situ formal learning as a result of understanding underlying principles (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). As such, practitioners often acquire new knowledge by various learning modes but lack the critical justification for

such knowledge and understanding of the effective application of this knowledge, querying if meaningful learning has occurred, reinforcing the need for practitioners to engage with all learning types (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016).

A practitioners view of learning is also important to consider. A practitioners epistemology means they may view certain learning opportunities as insufficient to support their varying needs (Olsson et al., 2017). Epistemology is the study of knowledge, namely what it is, how it's developed and how we know what we know (Borge, 2015; Quennerstedt, 2013). Embedded in practice, epistemology is also concerned with how knowledge is acquired and implemented in specific environments (Jones et al., 2016). A practitioners epistemology can be characterised along a continuum from naïve to sophisticated, with a naïve epistemology viewing knowledge as simple, specific and handed down (Grecic & Collins, 2013). A more sophisticated epistemological stance views knowledge as complex, uncertain and context dependent (Crowther et al., 2022). Consequently, to progress practitioners along the continuum from naïve to sophisticated, variety in learning opportunities to recognise and explore practice with others has been identified as a means of developing more effective strategies and more reflexive thinking (Cope et al., 2021). For example, as experiential and contextually based learning has been advocated ahead of other formal options, mentoring is a relational and contextualised education method with significant potential for impact (Bailey et al., 2019).

2.4 The role of experiential learning

Due to competing influences (e.g., social media, analysis; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016) within a practitioners social milieu, information and opportunities for learning appear in various forms (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). Interactions within this social milieu can include peer discussions, informal networks and communities of practice, where practitioners can collaborate and learn from others experiences (Nash & Sproule, 2009; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). Furthermore, sport learning literature has shown that a high value is placed on

unmediated experiential learning through interactions with others in the field (Leeder & Cushion, 2020; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). However, if the demands of the practitioners environment don't align with existing learning opportunities there is likely to be a disconnect between knowledge and situation, where the developing practitioner is receiving support in areas others think are relevant rather than what the practitioner needs (Lewis et al., 2018). Consequently, highly relevant and authentic in-situ learning can more clearly align with a practitioners environment (Nash & Sproule, 2009). With the immediacy of in-situ learning and its applicability to test and understand outcomes underpinning faster learning (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). This learning in an authentic context allows practitioners to interpret their experiences within their actions (Nash & Sproule, 2009). With the ongoing interpretation of one's problem solving and adaption facilitating a constant evolution of the practitioners knowledge and learning based on their evolving environment (Nash & Sproule, 2011).

Interestingly, sports practitioners have acknowledged a preference for in-situ learning as it affords them control over their progress (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). It also provides the learner with autonomy for self-directed and transformational learning, which has been shown to facilitate accelerated development and deeper understanding of their practice (Butterworth & Turner, 2014). Such in-situ learning can be explored through ELT. ELT defines learning as the transformational process of creating knowledge through experience (Kolb et al., 2014). ELT views learning as dynamic and multi-faceted, requiring thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaving within an environment to create meaningful learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2012). Essentially constructing knowledge and meaning through emphasising the process of experience and experiencing (Yardley et al., 2012). ELT is portrayed as a typical cycle or spiral of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and action, in a recursive manner responding to specific situations (Kolb & Kolb, 2012). ELT is located within broader social learning theories due to the importance placed on interpersonal interaction and the importance of the context of those

interactions (Yardley et al., 2012). Thus, the learning is viewed as bi-directional where learners influence environments and vice-versa (Yardley et al., 2012). Considering the importance ELT places on the role of self, others and the environment (Kolb & Kolb, 2012), a consideration of a range of tool that can support learning is warranted which acknowledges the complexity of how these learning types all interact.

2.5 Mentoring as an experiential learning tool

As such, mentoring is a tool which can support the perceived needs of developing practitioners (Sawiuk et al., 2024). This can be achieved by positioning learning in the contextualised working environment of the mentee, where greater understanding of contextually specific learning needs can be identified (Bailey et al., 2019). Since its conception, the similarities across mentoring definitions appear to be; a) relationships are intended to help mentees achieve their potential; b) mentoring should incorporate career assistance, psychosocial support and role modelling; c) there is an element of reciprocity in the relationship where the mentor receives benefits; d) there is a human element to the interactions; and e) they occur with an inexperienced mentee benefits from a more experienced mentor (Bozeman & Feeney, 2008; Eby et al., 2007; Jacobi, 1991, Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). In a sporting context, mentoring has been defined as "broadly involving processes of support, guidance, and advice, with a more knowledgeable or experienced 'other' facilitating the development of a neophyte practitioner" (Leeder, 2020, p. 10). While lacking reference to role modelling, which was identified as a key facet of mentoring (Anderson & Shannon, 1995), the most relevant definition of mentoring that applies across different contexts and to this research is:

> A process for the reciprocal, informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face to face and over a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have

greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor), to a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé). (Bozeman & Fenney, 2008, P. 469)

2.5.1 Mentoring across domains

Mentoring was originally situated in organisational psychology in business (Kram,1980; 1983; 1988). Subsequently, mentoring has been used across many domains, including academia and healthcare. Whilst at its core, mentoring is similar across all domains it exhibits different characteristics depending on the unique context (Ragins et al., 2007). In a business setting, mentoring has utilised a traditional dyadic structure of imparting career focused knowledge downwards (Ragins & Verbos, 2017), with benefits including improved job performance, job satisfaction and promotions (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). This approach to mentoring has often operated within hierarchical structures with information flowing downwards (Ragins et al., 2007). This led to mentoring being valued for what it can afford (career advancement), rather than what it could potentially facilitate (i.e., mutual growth and relational dynamics; Ragins & Verbos, 2017). With these relationship often limited by hierarchical structures, lacking the relational function, meaning less focus on psychosocial functions (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Contrastingly, in an education environment, successful mentoring relationship are typically peer based, rather than between a professor and a student, (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). Mentoring here often differs from mentoring in organisations, as it is more holistic, with a focus on collaboration, problem solving and critical thinking with the aim of facilitating deeper thinkers and an ability to balance the various challenges within academic pursuits (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). Mentoring in tertiary education environments has been designed to help the transition for underrepresented groups (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021), such as student-athletes (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). A key aspect to the success of mentoring programmes in academic settings is the scale and who is providing support through building relational

connections (Jacobi, 1991). Mentoring in the healthcare domain, has also been proven to be successful in assisting in a highly stressful environment, with mentor characteristics particularly important due to the highly specialised and challenging nature of the domain (Tobin, 2004). The characteristics of the healthcare mentor include teacher (imparting technical skills), sponsor (supporting progression), counsellor (a sounding board for mentees own solutions), agent (removing barriers to progression), role model and confidante (i.e., providing support in ethical dilemmas; Tobin, 2004). While all these domains benefit from career and psychosocial function of mentoring, the exact balance between these functions varies depending on the environment and across individual dyads (Ragins et al., 2007).

2.5.2 Mentoring Functions

As mentoring has become frequently used as a learning strategy for practitioners, it has been acknowledged that those mentored accrue an array of psychosocial and instrumental (career) function benefits, through the contextualised learning process (Kram, 1988). Depending on the formality or informality of the mentoring relationship the focus can lean more towards instrumental or psychosocial, yet the exact balance varies across relationships (Chao et al., 1992). Additionally, the organisational context also impacts the balance of the functions afforded to mentees (Kram, 1988). While I will subsequently explain the differences between instrumental and psychosocial functions, it is important to note that they are not mutually exclusive and they interact with each other depending on the context of the mentoring and the dynamics of specific dyadic relationships, including the developmental stage of the relationship and the mentor/mentee (Kram, 1988). The distinction between functions can often be challenging as the separation between functions can become blurred through meaningful human interaction and interpretation (Beres, 2010). See Table 2.1 for functions split by type.

Table 2.1 *Instrumental & Psychosocial Functions*

Instrumental Functions	Psychosocial Function
Protection – Mentor shields mentees from making untimely or inappropriate errors or may assist with difficult task or assignments.	*Role modelling* – Mentor provides a positive example in their primary roles and across multiple situations.
Challenge – Mentors encourages mentees to explore new strategies or techniques and provide feedback on the performance.	*Friendship* – Mentor and mentee engage in social interaction outside the immediate domain that results in mutual affection.
Coaching – Mentor shared knowledge of the field and how to successfully navigate requirements. Mentor may share teaching ideas or suggest ways to accomplish a task.	*Acceptance and Conformation* – Mentor provides support and trust as the mentee develops. Mistakes are recognised as part of learning and growth. Mentor in non-judgemental and respects the person despite differences.
Exposure and Visibility – Mentor encourages the mentee to engage in various activities.	*Counselling* – Mentor acts as a sounding board for the mentee to discuss anxieties and ambivalences that might impact performance. Disclosures are kept confidential.
Sponsorship – Mentor identifies and supports opportunities for mentees.	

Instrumental mentoring is focused on facilitating the mentees professional development as a practitioner in their domain (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Instrumental functions aim to help mentees learn specific technical skills, which will help with career advancement (Fowler & O'Gorman, 2005). Mentors typically provide instrumental support through coaching (i.e., direct instruction on formal and informal processes of an activity; Fowler & O'Gorman, 2005), challenging tasks (i.e., providing mentees with technical tasks that will stretch their current knowledge or skills; Chao et al., 1992) and protection (i.e., shielding mentees from adverse elements within an organisation; Fowler & O'Gorman, 2005), while also providing sponsorship, agency, exposure and visibility for career advancement (Kram 1980; Kram &

Isabella, 1985). These instrumental supports can help the mentees career advancement, more so than peers who are not mentored (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Ragins et al., 2007). While mentors can further benefit from instrumental mentoring through increased status and support from subordinates, alongside increased respect from peers and superiors (Kram, 1988).

Psychosocial functions are relational, focusing on the mentees personal growth, self-worth and well-being (Kram, 1988; Kram & Isabella, 1985). Psychosocial functions typically develop in strong relationships that move beyond the environment of the mentoring and focus on the mentee holistically (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Psychosocial functions are linked to the individual, rather than a mentors position or influence within an organisation (Ragins et al., 2007). These functions includes role modelling, where mentors serve as an example of high standards regarding attitudes, values and behaviours (Chao et al., 1992). Mentors also offer counselling support, on both a professional and personal level, acting as a non-critical sounding board to broadening understanding (Tobin, 2004). However, potentially the most impactful support is friendship, which can develop as a result of respect and trust, facilitating the relationship to strengthen in a bi-directional manner (Tobin, 2004). Mentees can benefit in numerous ways from effective psychosocial mentoring, such as enhanced self-confidence (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021), alongside life satisfaction, well-being and balance (Kram & Ragins, 2008), affecting mentors and mentees on a personal level, as these functions extend beyond the context of the mentoring (Kram, 1988).

Relational mentoring which leads to a greater level of psychosocial functions rather than instrumental functions is likely to exist in relationships with longevity, where trust has been developed (Chao et al., 1992). This move from instrumental or psychosocial functions comes as relationships transition into peer relationships or friendships (Ragins et al., 2007). It has also been identified that psychosocial functions are more prevalent in informal mentoring relationships, which develop organically because of a shared connection or mutual willingness

to interact, rather than within formal programmes, due to structure, matching and motivation (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). The friendship support in the psychosocial function, can allow for easier development in other functions, as it helps to break down barriers and uncertainty within relationships (Kram, 1988). It is crucial however, that relationships comprise of both instrumental and psychosocial functions, as receiving only one support, means the mentee has a supervisor or a friend rather than a mentor (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007).

2.5.3 Issues with mentoring

While mentoring is perceived to be beneficial and a transformative experience, it is important to consider challenges with the approach to learning. Mentoring can fail for a variety of reasons which could stem from the mentor, the mentee, the dyad dynamics or the environment of the mentoring (Kram & Ragins, 2008). In terms of the mentor, issues surrounding their motivations to mentor can impact their effectiveness (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). The skills and capabilities of mentors also has a baring on their ability to support mentees, as they may lack the communication skills or empathy to engage effectively (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Mentors needs to understand the capacity of their mentees and their ability for independent learning, as they can be overprotective of mentees and hinder their development (Tobin, 2004). Unfortunately, there may also be a sinister side to mentoring, where mentors may purposely exploit or undermine mentees for political or personal reasons, leading to neglect, deception or intentional exclusion (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). Mentees can also be the reason for mentoring being unsuccessful, due to a lack of openness or willingness to accept support (Chao et al., 1992), personality type (Ragins & Cotton, 1999) or the mentees perception of the mentor being unable to contribute significantly to their development (Ragins et al., 2007).

Beyond the role of mentors and mentees in mentoring being ineffective, programme design and the environment can also be problematic. It has been identified that informal

mentoring relationships typically provide significantly more psychosocial function and slightly more instrumental functions (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Formal mentoring relationship are typically time bound and thus shorter in duration, leading to some benefits being limited due to insufficient time to materialise (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). At times, formal programmes can be unsuccessful due to poor matching processes, lack of mutual identification and interpersonal connection (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Additionally, ill-defined roles and unclear expectations can lead to suboptimal relationships (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). Furthermore, the hierarchical nature of the relationship can be detrimental, as wide gaps between mentors and mentees related to their position within an organisation can constrain growth (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). Finally, considering the benefits of the relationship solely through the lens of the mentee, can limit the bi-directional benefits that can accrue from mentoring (Ragins & Verbos, 2017). The final factor is the organisation, and the context mentoring is occurring, which can impact on the above three factors (i.e., mentors, mentees, programme design). The value placed on mentoring in an organisation has the potential to enhance or limit its effectiveness (Kram & Ragins, 2008). The organisations norms and expectations also have the potential to curtail mentoring (Kram & Ragins, 2008). The organisations measurement of success can limit the impact of mentoring, as if the measurement for success is too focused on the instrumental side, the wider psychosocial benefits of mentoring may not be valued and thus may not accrue (Ragins & Verbos, 2017). Therefore, a more holistic view of measuring the effectiveness of mentoring should encompass both the instrumental and psychosocial functions (Ragins et al., 2007; Ragins & Verbos, 2017).

2.5.4 Mentoring in Sport

Mentoring is widely advocated as an important tool for learning in sport, both within formal programmes and informally across organisations (Bailey et al., 2019). Mentoring is a means of knowledge transfer and harnessing the experience within sports, through guidance,

observation and collaborative reflection (Jones et al., 2009). Consequently, mentoring in sports coaching has been researched extensively (Jones et al., 2009; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021). Mentoring has aimed to develop adaptable and progressive coaches (Olsson et al., 2016), in a process done *with* rather than *to* mentees, focusing on their developmental needs (Jones et al., 2009). Beyond coaching, mentoring has been used for the development of athletes across sports, facilitating their development technically and holistically (Hallmann et al., 2023). Support from a mentor has shown to be beneficial for athlete well-being, with benefits for self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth and fostering relationships (Sandardos & Chambers, 2019). Mentoring has been shown to support psychosocial functions, being complementary to other support programmes, as mentoring can be delivered by someone outside their primary sporting environment, who isn't solely concerned with performance gains (Sandardos & Chambers, 2019).

Despite the evident advantages of mentoring in sporting environments, it should not be delivered without appropriate considerations, as it has been described as an ill-defined activity, lacking clear conceptual clarity (Bailey et al., 2019). It's use at times has been challenged as merely reproduction of institutions agendas (Sawiuk et al., 2018), used as a form of social control (Zehntner & McMahon, 2019), and being influenced by micro-political dynamics such as self-preservation or information withholding (Fraina & Hodge, 2000). These risks are from mentors who are potentially acting with poor intentions, while there are also risks for mentors acting with the best of intentions. There is often assumptions that good practitioners will make good mentors and thus receive limited training (Leeder et al., 2024), leading to lack of clarity around role expectations (Bailey et al., 2019; Griffiths & Armour, 2012). These issues can be further hampered by programme design with dyad mismatches, limited engagement and scheduling difficulties impeding relationships (Griffiths & Armour, 2012; McQuade et al., 2015).

While the above dangers, may paint mentoring as an unhelpful tool, the aim of this research is to explore mentoring across various cohorts in Gaelic Games. The context of the investigation is a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment, considering the strong volunteer ethos prevalent in Gaelic Games, SET is seen as a valuable lens through which to view study.

2.6 Gaelic Games Environment

The games of Camogie, Gaelic Football, Hurling and Ladies Football encompasses the Gaelic Games family of sports which are played in Ireland and abroad (Lane et al., 2017). The GAA was founded in 1884 with the objective of administering and managing the activities of the indigenous Irish field sports (DeBurca, 1999). Gaelic Games are a central part of Irish identity and culture, catering to all levels of society, through approximately 500,000 playing members and 100,000 coaches (Gavin et al., 2024). It has been a key social, cultural, and political thread in the fabric of Irish society since 1884, with a community-driven, volunteer ethos in over 1600 clubs across all of Ireland and over 450 internationally (Jackman et al., 2024). These clubs operate as civic entities affording strong parish and county based identities, with an impact extending beyond the basic aim of promoting Gaelic Games (Lane et al., 2017). Community identity and inclusion are among the core values of the organisations, which promote the health and well-being of members and the wider community (Lane et al., 2017).

The identity aspect of Gaelic Games is fundamental to the organisation, it is a unique manifestation of the relationship between sport and nationalism (Cronin, 1999), advocating for the unity facilitated through sport, to be a vehicle to drive a sense of national identity and pride (DeBúrca, 1999). Cronin (1999) hypothesised that this interrelationship between nationalism and sport enhances identity and subsequently this has permeated down to county and parish level across Ireland, where the GAA facilitates a strong identity within communities. Immersion in the culture of the GAA enables a strong sense of social identity, affording

opportunities for self-fulfilment as a result of the development of strong social bonds allowing for generosity and altruism, without consideration for the negative cost personally incurred and a willingness to help other within your community (Liston, 2015).

This community focus of the GAA and its abiding amateur ethos, distinguishes it from other sporting organisations worldwide and leads to an 'urge to community' (Tovey & Share, 2003). From the most recent 2022 census, volunteering in Ireland is at 14%, with rates steady alongside the last census in 2006, however as volunteering falls in many domains (i.e., charity, religion and politics) it has increased in sport (Central Statistics Office, 2022). These census figures aligned to the GAA being the largest voluntary association in Ireland means it represents a significant sphere for these opportunities to volunteer, which are often based on trust and reciprocity (Liston, 2015). In the face of increasing individualisation, the willingness to volunteer in a Gaelic Games setting endures, as the relationships between individual and the GAA endures (Liston, 2015).

To adopt the phrase 'urge to community' (Tovey & Share, 2003), the willingness across clubs to volunteer permeates across communities and provokes strong identities for those who volunteer, along with the thoughts, emotions and the actions it inspires (Liston, 2015). One of the key aspects of the GAA and volunteerism thriving is the fact that volunteers are celebrated and supported, provided opportunity for empowerment, progression, rewarded and afforded status within their communities (GAA, 2022b). The importance of the role of the volunteer is explicitly stated in 'Aontas 2026 – Towards one GAA for all', with the volunteer viewed as 'the organisations greatest asset', with the GAA setting out to provide them support in their roles and additional personal development opportunities (GAA, 2022b). While Ireland nationally becomes more urban, along with the resulting challenges to traditional volunteer roles around connection and community, the GAA are working towards safeguarding a sustainable community based and volunteer led association (Liston, 2015).

It has been acknowledged that support to Gaelic Games at third level has been suboptimal, with the tertiary education environment, being identified as areas for future development and enhanced engagement, as leadership capacity can be developed in these settings (GAA, 2022b). The importance of community is enshrined in Gaelic games and in continued communal reciprocity (Liston, 2015) and ensuring these values can be maintained in a tertiary education environment is paramount for wider national success.

2.7 Social Exchange Theory

Considering the nature of mentoring and the Gaelic Games environment, SET is a useful theoretical frame for understanding the interactions that take place within mentoring relationships. SET is a framework which can be used to explore relationship across environments (Cropanzano et al., 2017), offering considerable flexibility and variety (Ahmed et al., 2023). This flexibility within SET makes it suitable for complex sporting environments. It is suggested that all social interactions involve an exchange of goods, both material and non-material (Homans, 1958). These goods can be classified into two dimensions economic (tangible) and socioemotional (symbolic) (Foa & Foa, 1980). In contrast to economic exchanges, where the exchange cost is transactional and defined (Blau, 1964), social exchange involves a series of interactions that generate obligations, which may not always be measurable (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Individuals engage in social exchange if the benefits outweigh the costs of the interaction (Homans, 1961). All exchange relationship are interdependent (Blau, 1964), bidirectional (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and involve the exchange of intrinsic and or extrinsic rewards (Blau, 1964).

One of the basic tenets of SET is that relationships evolve over time into trusting loyal and mutual commitments (Blau, 1964). Therefore, the relationship between a mentor and mentee can be described as a social exchange between two individuals (Hallmann et al., 2023). If relationship accrue rewards, people will continue, however if there is burdening costs

associated with relationships, they may disengage (Homans, 1961). It is about one's own perception of this cost-benefit analysis and your own view on this. It may be a conscious weighing of pros and cons, but it is often more subconscious (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). However, sometimes even if there are substantial costs involved and the reward seems less tangible, they can be overcome, if there is a feeling of connection to a community (Doherty, 2009). This mental cost-benefit analysis is rooted in reciprocity, with exchanges both transactional and relational (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). To do so, parties must abide by certain rules of exchange, such as reciprocity and norms (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

2.7.1 Reciprocity

A key characteristic of SET is the concept of reciprocity, a state in the relationship in which both parties are benefiting while expending the same costs (Foa & Foa, 1974). Reciprocity is the principle that individuals are motivated to repay (reciprocate) the supports they receive from others, emerging from mutual obligation, trust and respect within social relationships (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). While a balanced (or neutral) reciprocal state is unlikely to occur in a social exchange, it is also uncommon that only one side is burdened with all the cost of the relationship while the other side receives the benefits (Hallmann et al., 2023). Reciprocity suggests that individuals return the favour they have received, be it a tangible or intangible, to maintain an equilibrium in terms of balance and fairness in their interactions with others (Mitchell et al., 2012). Someone helps you and you feel obliged to return the favour, it is somewhat targeted. Someone is more inclined to reciprocate specifically to a person or organisation they've experienced a positive exchange with (Czekanski & Turner, 2014). Reciprocity is evident in volunteer settings as the reciprocal exchange requires interdependence and cooperation, thus lacking overt bargaining for individual gain (Ahmed et al., 2023). Reciprocity is typically viewed in two terms, 'reciprocity as belief' and 'reciprocity as norm' (Gouldner, 1960).

Reciprocity as belief, or 'folk belief', is linked to karma and one's personal interpretation that assisting others will lead to a return in kind either directly from that same person or from another person in the future (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). There is an element of this being a potential *'paying back'* for what an individual has received previously or a *'paying forward'* for future generations, described as a *'universal justice'* (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This is the idea of a 'just world' (Ahmed et al., 2023). This type of reciprocity is healthy as it is built on underlying good intentions and fairness, reducing the likelihood of destructive behaviours (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). 'Reciprocity as norm' is more explicit and refers to the social expectation that one should repay the favour and that a certain level of disapproval or loss of trust may exist if reciprocation is not present (Cropanzano & Micthell, 2005). This social consequence of not reciprocating may not be as healthy as the underlying reasons behind 'reciprocity as belief', as people navigate their decisions on the cost-benefit of helping others and the overriding emotions for doing so (Ahmed et al., 2023).

Within a Gaelic Games setting, there is potential for both 'reciprocity as belief' and 'reciprocity as norm' to interact. It can be difficult to detach an individual's personal beliefs from those that are constructed with the norms of the environments they interact in. Ahmed et al. (2023), identified that it is acceptable for differences to exist and their intention to reciprocate, with various factors impacting on this. As a result of the strong connection to community prevalent in Gaelic Games, it is likely that 'reciprocity as norm' may be evident and that social pressure is subconsciously or implicitly exerted on people to help others or 'urge to volunteer'. There is interaction on 'reciprocity as belief' too, as a person's personality can be shaped by the environments they engage with. With the Gaelic Games ethos of volunteerism interacting with their own beliefs as a person. Essentially, the two can interact within Gaelic games settings, with the actions and decision making in the social exchange more important than the internalised reasons behind such decisions on the individual level.

2.7.2 Leader Member Exchange and Perceived Organisational Support

Two concepts grounded in SET are leader member exchange (LMX) and perceived organisational support (POS) (Wayne et al., 1997). LMX refers to the quality of the relationships that exist between an individual in an organisation and a manager within an organisation (Wayne et al., 1997). The quality of this relationship is dictated by the level of mutual trust, respect, emotional support and fair exchange of resources that exists within one-to-one relationships (Czekanski & Turner, 2014). POS relates to an individual's perceptions of the wider entity on an organisational level rather than on an individual level. POS has been described as conceptually similar to organisational commitment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). POS is defined as an individual's perceptions on the degree to which the organisation values their contribution and their own individual needs within the collective (Wayne et al., 1997). This perception does not relate to a view held on an individual but more the culture of the organisation. It is a 'personification' of the values espoused by the organisation (Wayne et al., 1997). This POS is essentially organisational commitment and has a strong relational construct (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

POS is something that is evident within Gaelic Games, as the volunteer ethos and community commitment apparent to the club or wider organisation. This is evidenced in terms of the scale of volunteering and supporting a greater entity. In sport settings, both LMX and POS can interact with social exchange in practice. It is fair to say that players are willing to commit as a result of both, their affinity to the club and its place in the community (POS), and their willingness to impress an individual because of their investment of time in them (LMX). This interaction of both LMX and POS, shows how SET can be strong in the Gaelic Games environment and how an unbalanced reciprocity relationships can develop, where an individual is willing to burden significant costs.

2.7.3 Exchange Orientation

The obligation or desire exists for mentors to provide guidance, alongside the organisation providing access to resources to support practitioner development. These could be described as effective commitment, which is a genuine emotional attachment or connection to 'leader' or 'organisation' (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This effective commitment is a result of healthy relationships in terms of POS and LMX but can be contrasted to a potential element of normative commitment. Normative commitment relates more to a sense of obligation and an onus to reciprocate actions due to loyalty because of what they themselves have received (Czekanski & Turner, 2014). Whilst there is a healthy impact of this normative commitment, it may lead to negative feelings if the burden in the social exchange is deemed to be unbalanced (Doherty, 2009). While there are many positive elements of the volunteer ethos which pervades in the GAA, it is important not to overly rely on the positive intentions of the person with a high exchange orientation. As, there could also potentially be a dysfunctional element to this willingness to commit, in the form of overpowering feelings of obligation to an organisation (Rutti et al., 2013). The understanding of LMX and POS, along with how they interact with each other, within a volunteer sporting setting is fundamental to understanding how SET can thrive in such settings.

For the relationship to have a bi-directional transaction, something has to be given and something returned (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), however as the norms and rules highlighted above interact, they will dictate ones willingness to incur costs in exchange because of the impact of these external norms. The volunteer nature prevalent within Gaelic Games and the willingness to support others within one's own community presents a situation where the people may be willing to engage in what might appear to be a cost to themselves. People are often viewed along a continuum of 'high exchange orientation' (those who readily reciprocate) to 'low exchange orientation' (those who reciprocate considerably less) making the SET cost-

benefit equation different for everyone (Ahmed et al., 2023). Some appear to incur costs within a relationship that may never be repaid, as individual relationships are different due to individual differences, varying experiences and dissimilar situations (Rutti et al., 2013). Consequently, no relationship will create the same set of expectations (Rutti et al., 2013). In a volunteer Gaelic Games setting, people high in exchange orientation are common, thus being less concerned with tracking the accruement of obligations and less likely to care if the benefits of exchange are not reciprocated from mentees (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). There is likely to be a certain level of compassion and empathy present in interactions, where the good of others is essential, even at the cost of ourselves (Ahmed et al., 2023).

2.8 Conclusion

Considering the need to develop practitioners in a Gaelic games tertiary education environment, mentoring is a tool that can support learning and development. Mentoring has been beneficial to practitioners in many domains through knowledge transfer and personal development. The volunteer nature of the Gaelic Games tertiary education environment presents mentoring as an appropriate learning tool to holistically develop neophyte practitioners across both instrumental and psychosocial functions. The Gaelic Games setting that creates a sense of social identity, promoting volunteerism and that 'urge to community' means there is inherently a reciprocity evident due to interdependence and cooperation. This reciprocity, where practitioners are motivated to help others based on support that they previously received affords opportunities to implement mentoring programmes. So, this research as outlined in Chapter One, aims to look at formal mentoring programmes in the Gaelic Games tertiary education environment, through the lens of the mentoring literature, SET and the volunteer GAA setting. The rationale for chapter three is based on the unique challenges faced by student-athletes who must navigate a demanding dual career environment, and the need to evaluate tailored support programmes designed to facilitate their transition on both a

sporting and academic front. The rationale for chapter four is to address the considerable gap in existing literature regarding professional development for Performance Analysts. The rationale for chapter five is to address some suggested limitations in traditional coach development methods in a Gaelic Games setting, through the exploration of MMN as a potentially more expansive education tool.

Chapter 3: A Friendly Face in a Competitive Space: The Impact of Mentoring on Student-Athletes in Gaelic Games

3.1 Introduction

A mentoring programme was trialled to address a perceived lack of relational support available to students as they enter DCU. A dyadic mentoring programme, developed in a manner which capitalised upon some of the principles of SET was explored to understand it's utility in supporting the development of high achieving student-athletes. It's near-peer design and link based on county of birth, provided a suitable structure to explore mentoring with a cohort whose needs can differ from the general student population.

3.1.1 The Needs of Student-Athletes

The participants of this chapter are Gaelic Games student-athletes, who are pursuing dual careers, primarily as third-level students, whilst trying to attain high-performance level in an amateur organisation. Yet, their training load meets much of the literature of professional and Olympic sports (Whelan et al., 2025). There are a high number of Gaelic Games student-athletes who enter DCU every year, from various parts of Ireland. They have already achieved success in their home counties at underage level (Under 17 or Under 20). As they transition from secondary education environment to a tertiary education environment, alongside a sporting transition from underage to senior athlete, they face varying and conflicting demands, which require additional support. Therefore, student-athletes are a unique population who have additional needs to the general university population (Hendricks & Johnson, 2016). Due to their dual role, high performing student-athletes can struggle with identity issues, identifying largely as athletes first therefore finding it difficult to balance study and sport. (Comeaux, 2010; Geary et al., 2021; Hendricks & Johnson, 2016). As a result of this commitment to their athletic pursuits, availability of time and time management skills have been identified as a key barrier for student-athletes (Hendricks & Johnson, 2016; Pink, et al., 2018). With such challenges

being more prevalent as student-athletes transition into first year (Bjornsen-Ramig et al., 2020; Kelly & Dixon, 2014; MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Consequently, tailored induction and support programs for this population may be required due to broader student entry programs being insufficiently focused to fulfil the needs of student-athletes (Kelly & Dixon, 2014; MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Therefore, due to the importance of student-athletes interacting with the college environment (Hendricks & Johnson, 2016) peer support has been suggested as a valuable tool considering the benefits of socialisation during transition (Budgen et al., 2014; MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Consequently, peer mentoring is a tool which may facilitate the successful transition of student-athletes into the tertiary education Gaelic Games setting.

3.1.2 The Gaelic Games Environment

Although Gaelic Games are amateur sports there is an increasing level of professionalism at senior inter county (SIC) level (Geary et al., 2021). Due to the amateur nature of Gaelic Games, all players will have full-time jobs subsequent to education, meaning that the weighting of the term student-athlete, lies heavily on the term student, as they need to gain qualifications in the tertiary environment. Despite several positive opportunities of playing at SIC level, there are several consequences. For example, SIC players mental well-being is below that of the general population and they are investing up to 31 hours per week into their sporting pursuits (Kelly et al., 2018). Furthermore, the Gaelic Players Association (GPA) have highlighted the demands on student-athletes across codes (Rodgers, 2019). The findings suggested that 54% of student SIC players regularly felt overwhelmed by their dual career, while 78% reported feeling stressed at least once a month (Rodgers, 2019). Academically, 35% of SIC players had to repeat a college exam, while 11% had to repeat an entire academic year (Rodgers, 2019). With such a percentage above the academic year repeat rate of 6% reported by the Higher Education Authority (HEA, 2021). The demands of training and preparations are

significant for the student SIC player, as they typically attend third level institutions in urban centres, yet their SIC commitments remain in their county of birth. The commute to training can be substantial, over 90 minutes travelling in each direction for the majority, with 69% travelling from college to training at least three times a week (Rodgers, 2019). The impact of SIC commitments on their social life was also a concern, with 81% taking part in less social activities than their peers and negatively impacting their college experience (Rodgers, 2019). Consequently, student-athletes are susceptible to physical and psychological burnout, due to being misunderstood and identity foreclosure (Geary et al., 2021; Rodgers, 2019). Furthermore, during transition to third level a student's social capital (second level education and community status) and sporting identity can be threatened, increasing reluctance to engage in support services (Budgen et al., 2014).

Unfortunately, Rodgers (2019) highlighted that help seeking behaviours in this cohort of student-athletes are typically low, often waiting until 'crisis point' to address issues rather than proactively seeking support. With issues related to communication with SIC managers and their understanding of the challenges of being a student-athlete being highlighted as further concerns (Rodgers, 2019). As a result, the GPA have implemented several programmes (e.g., Beo360 and Leadership Legacy Programme) with SIC players to try to assist with these issues, focusing on career, education, personal development, and wellbeing (Rodgers, 2019). When consulted, SIC players highlighted the demands on student-athletes with transitioning player's exposure to high training load, playing in multiple teams, exhausting travel and academic commitments (Rodgers, 2019). This led to suggestions that student-athletes could learn from more experienced teammates (Rodgers, 2019). However, these support programmes are only open to SIC players, yet some transitioning student-athletes may not have reached that status, even though they are subject to similar demands and consequences. It is suggested that those trying to 'make it' to that SIC level are trying to do so without the supports available to GPA

members and are thus further disadvantaged. Thus, third level institution and county-based mentoring may assist transitioning student-athletes.

3.1.3 Social Exchange Theory

As explored in detail in Chapter Two, SET emphasises a series of interactions that are interdependent and contingent on the actions of another person (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). With all social interactions involving an exchange of goods, both material and non-material (Homans, 1958), with such transactions having the potential to generate high-quality relationships (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Therefore, the relationship between a mentor and mentee can be described as a social exchange between two individuals (Hallmann et al., 2023). Individuals engage in social exchange if the benefits outweigh the costs of the interaction (Homans, 1961). A key characteristic of SET is the concept of reciprocity, a state in the relationship in which both parties are benefiting while expending the same costs (Foa & Foa, 1974). While a reciprocal state is not likely to occur in a social exchange, it is also uncommon that only one side is burdened with all the cost of the relationship while the other side receives the benefits (Hallmann et al., 2023). Mentees can receive numerous benefits from mentoring relationships. Mentors may receive benefits from contributing to their profession and intrinsic rewards from personal investment in an individual (Gillham et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2009), learning to refine their instructional methods and new techniques (Gillham et al., 2015).

3.1.4 What is Mentoring?

Mentoring has been defined as a process where a more experienced and knowledgeable person (mentor) acts as a role model, providing developmental guidance and support to a novice (mentee) (Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999). Within sport, mentoring research, has been conducted in the administration setting (Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999), coaching (Chambers, 2015; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021) and strength and conditioning (Gillham et al., 2015).

Mentoring relationships are typically viewed as either formal or informal in nature. Formal mentoring is when a third party facilitates pairing based on certain characteristics or protocols (Ragins et al., 2000). To facilitate this, specific methods for dyad matching have been outlined in the literature (i.e., practitioner assigned, choice-based and assessment based; Hoffmann, 2019). Consequently, the suitability of dyads is a critical factor in successful mentoring with Hoffmann (2019) stating that compatibility is not the same as similarity. Age and gender should not be an issue but on occasion it can be due to power dynamics (Smith et al., 2016). Such importance placed on dyad matching, points to the possibility of exploring the benefits of team or institution alumni mentoring (Bjornsen-Ramig et al., 2020; Comeaux, 2010). In comparison, Ragins et al. (2000) described informal mentoring as relationships that develop organically, through a desire to help or seek help. Therefore, informal mentoring relationships are characterised by high levels of trust and chemistry which can develop organically (Hoffmann, 2019). As such, informal mentoring can flourish because the relationship grows within a non-intimidating and familiar environment for mentees (Sandardos & Chambers, 2019). Consequently, researchers have highlighted one of the strengths of informal mentoring surrounds the friendship function, where the deconstructed hierarchy allows for healthy friendships (Park et al., 2017; Sandardos & Chambers, 2019).

3.1.5 Mentor Qualities

Softer skills such as empathy, emotional intelligence and trust have been identified by mentees as key characteristics of high functioning mentors (Blimper Jr 2017; Park et al., 2017; Sandardos & Chambers, 2019). Crucially, these characteristics allow for the creation of safe spaces for mentees (Sandardos & Chambers, 2019), which allows for mentors to deliver constructive criticism and challenge mentees (Smith et al., 2016). Additionally, active listening, amongst other socialisation strategies were identified as a crucial factor in enhancing relationships (Carter & Hart, 2010; Hoffmann et al., 2017; Sandardos & Chambers, 2019).

Interestingly, the strongest mentoring relationships were successful because of the development of a friendship function (Hoffman et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017).

3.1.6 Benefits of Mentoring

Specifically, mentoring has been investigated in tertiary sporting environments with student-athletes (Bjornsen-Ramig et al., 2020; Comeaux, 2010; Park et al., 2017). Of note was the need to create awareness for academic success and making mentees aware of the various academic supports available (Hendricks & Johnson, 2016). Mentoring support during the transition phase from secondary to tertiary education academically as well as sporting transition from junior or age grade sports to senior level was vital (Bjornsen-Ramig et al., 2020; Kelly & Dixon, 2014). While on the sport-specific side, mentors can be crucial to mentees attaining a higher level athletically (Hoffmann, 2019), with mentees identified as developing at a faster rate physically if they trained alongside mentors operating at an elite level (Hoffmann et al., 2017). Furthermore, mentors play an important role in liaising with coaching staff, thus reinforcing team messages and deconstructing communication barriers (Hoffmann et al., 2017). Mentors can experience a deep allegiance to the mentee, developing due to an affinity to a team or community (Hoffmann & Loughead, 2019). Peer mentoring with both mentor and mentee on the same team has been shown to be successful (Carter & Hart, 2010). Furthermore, the mentor can be an important bridging person between a young developing athlete and a team coach (Hoffmann & Loughead, 2016a).

3.1.7 Barriers to Mentoring

Consequently, mentees felt that peer mentors who "walk the walk, rather than simply talking the talk*"* were important (Hoffmann et al., 2017, p. 140). However, being a good player or a good coach doesn't necessarily translate to being a good mentor, the characteristics required can be different (Kelly & Dixon, 2014). Several issues have been associated with formal mentoring of athletes including mentor mismatches, mentee neglect, time management

issues and competition for playing time (Hoffmann, 2019). The issue of playing time was further exacerbated in the peer mentoring context, as conflict can arise around playing position and time as the performance gap in the dyad narrows (Hoffmann, 2019).

3.1.8 Programme Design

Appropriate programme design is integral to successful mentoring. Comeaux (2010) assessed a successful formal mentoring programme between student-athletes and faculty members which consisted of weekly meetings, whose success was attributed to deliberate dyad matching and participant training. It was further posited that support from the PC and additional support network were needed for mentors, as it was felt that mentors cannot be expected to be all things to their mentees and themselves need support in their development to facilitate relational mentoring ensuring mutual benefits to both parties (Comeaux, 2010; Hoffmann, 2019). Furthermore, the importance of task clarity and goal setting at the beginning of relationship has been identified (Comeaux, 2010). Consequently, to further ensure dyad success, delineated boundaries and clear expectations are required to protect the process and the individuals (Comeaux, 2010). Considering the benefits of informal mentoring, due consideration for the facilitated matching within a planned mentoring programme is important in tertiary education environments, which facilitate the strengths of the informal relationships being maintained (Hoffmann, 2019). As such, this formal programme aimed to maintain many of the strengths of informal mentoring, allied to a deliberate matching process. Initial training, followed by ongoing mentor and mentee support is pivotal. Utilising mentors as signposts for mentees is crucial, thus educating them on the availability of supports within a sports organisation or university is important (Bimper Jr, 2017).

The research to date has looked at mentoring with matching based on a single criterion, where mentors from an academic faculty supported mentees (Bimper, 2017; Comeaux, 2010) or athletes without an academic background (Boroumand et al., 2017; Hoffmann, 2019;

Hoffmann et al., 2017). This chapter aims to address this through a matching process which supports the student-athletes holistically. Therefore, considering the need to support Student-Athletes within a Gaelic Games landscape and the potential benefits of mentoring identified throughout the literature, this chapter aims to explore the impact of dyadic mentoring with Student-Athletes in a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment. The chapter also aims to explore the importance of programme design.

3.2 Methods

Considering the context of investigation, a pragmatic approach was employed to provide practical solutions to contemporary problems experienced by people in social contexts (Giacobbi et al., 2005). Pragmatism focuses on what works in practice, guided by empirical evidence, rather than rigid adherence to certain ontological or epistemological assumptions (Jenkins, 2017). Pragmatism offers a flexible and outcome-oriented approach to understanding, in this sense, diverging from positivist and constructivist positions, rejecting the qualitative and quantitative divide, positioning both as valuable to unpacking real-world problems (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Thus, a MMR design was chosen for investigation. As the PC, I was a co-constructor of knowledge with the participants (Giacobbi et al., 2005); a process facilitated through immersion within the Gaelic Games tertiary education environment in this study. In my role as both PC and researcher, I was an 'insider' to the environment under investigation, while my supervisor acted as an 'outsider' to the Gaelic Games tertiary education environment with extensive experience in another sport and as a researcher in sport. This 'insider' and 'outsider' perspective was seen as a resource in the collection and analysis of data, as without this insight there is potential for weakened theoretical sensitivity leading to reduced quality of findings (May & Perry, 2022).

MMR allows for offsetting of the limitations of individual research designs and allows for validity through triangulation (Sparkes, 2015). This triangulation was completed by the

insider/outsider nature of the research team and by using qualitative data to inform quantitative data and vice-versa simultaneously. The validity of the findings was enhanced as the triangulation assisted understanding both the theoretical literature along with the mixed methods experimentation to allow for a greater knowledge of mentoring (Pashaie et al., 2023). The MMR design utilised the objective nature of the quantitative data to check for relationship strength, and the subjective nature of the qualitative data to explore the nuances of experiences. Consequently, the qualitative focus groups are the primary method used with the quantitative data contributing to a convergent parallel design. This convergent parallel design entailed collecting both the quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously at each collection point of the research process, analysing both data sets independently, but interpreting the results together to gain a rich understanding of how the different data interacts (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The convergent parallel design was utilised to remove restrictions associated with merely using one design type and allowing the quantitative data to direct the qualitative data collection and vice-versa to fully interrogate the complex phenomenon in question (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017).

3.2.1 Participants

A purposeful sampling approach was employed for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). Embedded in a purposeful sampling approach is the ability to compare experiences identifying similarities and differences in the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants in this study consisted of 62 student-athletes who were mentees and 41 mentors. I deemed the sample to be information-rich in relation to the aims of the study on student-athlete experiences of mentoring and the specificity of their own experiences in this phenomenon (cf. Malterud et al, 2016). Therefore, we suggest there is sufficient ‘information power’ (Malterud et al., 2016). Mentors were identified in the four field codes of Gaelic Games (Hurling, Camogie, Ladies Football

and Men's Football), mentors were all either DCU Alumni or DCU final year students, who had the same county of origin as their mentee (e.g., Dublin, Kilkenny, Mayo, Wexford). At the time of the research, all mentors represented their counties senior team in their code. Mentors were contacted by the PC, where the programme concept was outlined in detail, with opportunity for questions provided. The mentees were all first year students transitioning to tertiary education in DCU and transitioning to SIC teams on the sporting side. Further to some of the concerned figures outlined in the introduction of this chapter, for people who are already SIC players, the cohort in this research are trying to attain that level and may be even less resourced than GPA members. Some mentors mentored more than one mentee. Some mentees were already on SIC panels, while others had yet to reach senior status.

3.2.2 Procedure

Once approval was granted through the DCU ethics committee, mentees were selected from students who were on the DCU Performance Sports Programme during academic years 2021/2022 (Cohort One) and 2022/2023 (Cohort Two). The PC deliberately matched dyads, considering relevant sport, county, and academic course. While, also relying on mentoring literature across different disciplines, where many programmes have failed due to poorly matched dyads (Hoffmann, 2019; Sandardos & Chambers, 2019). Mentors were contacted with the opportunity to select from suitable mentees that matched the criteria of being from their county and being on the programme. Mentors could choose one, more than one or no suitable mentee, aligned to previous literature for student-athletes (Comeaux, 2010). Mentees where then informed that a mentor had expressed a desire to work alongside them and were they happy for the relationship to be facilitated.

Training for mentors consisted of an online video, outlining the programme, potential engagement methods and skills required. Mentees also received an adapted version of the online video. Both were provided with information on the mentor-mentee relationship and

ways in which it could function effectively. The online video included research and context informed information, details of the dyad matching process, initial meeting, benefits and ways of mentoring, and the challenges of mentoring. Individually, mentors and mentees were given specific information that was pertinent about the person they were in a relationship with. Mentors and mentees were subsequently contacted on an individual basis by the PC to allow for questions and to ensure understanding of the video. This afforded both mentors and mentees a micro understanding of their role in their dyads. As per the details in the online videos, the exact nature of the initial meeting was left up to the dyad to decide. This freedom around engagement type was used with the aim of allowing for the strengths of informal mentoring to accrue (Sandardos & Chambers, 2019). The PC contacted participants throughout the programme and was accessible for ongoing support and supervision as required. This was required as mentors were engaged for exhibiting the requisite cultural capital (in terms of their status as SIC players) yet still needed to be supported in areas where they had deficiencies (cf. Leeder et al., 2019). Furthermore, mentor training rarely extends beyond episodic workshops (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021) and does not guarantee meaningful and positive mentoring relationship but can help to provide role clarity (Sawiuk et al., 2024), thus the need for ongoing PC support.

3.2.3 Instrumentation

From a quantitative perspective, the AMQ (Hoffmann & Loughead, 2019) was used for data collection at three points; pre programme (start of academic year), mid programme (post semester one exams) and post programme (post semester two exams). The AMQ is a questionnaire designed to measure mentees' perceptions of six (Mental Guidance, Coach Relations, Task Instruction, Career Assistance, Role Modelling, Friendship) peer athlete mentoring functions (Hoffmann & Loughead, 2019). The reliability of the AMQ has been previously interrogated using a series of statistically robust analysis (Hoffmann & Loughead,

2019). A reliability analysis was conducted on the six function AMQ, with the Cronbach's alpha (α) = 0.968, suggesting that the items are highly reliable and consistently measure mentees perceptions of the athlete mentoring functions. The response rates to the AMQ were high with 56/62 (90%) completed pre programme, 59/62 (95%) completed mid programme and 60/62 (97%) completed post programme.

Qualitatively, focus groups were used as the means of data collection, this method allows for the gathering of high-quality information in a timely manner, facilitating interaction among the group about the phenomenon, sharing similarities and differences (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Nine focus groups were held with mentors (*n*=2) and mentees (*n*=7). The focus groups took place online through zoom, with 39 participants. Interview guides were created with reference to the literature and research context. The focus groups lasted between 27 - 39 minutes. The audio recordings of the focus groups were transcribed verbatim before analysis.

3.2.4 Data Analysis

All quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics were produced to illustrate the differences in the AMQ at the three collection points. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. An ANOVA was used to explore difference between pre, mid and post programme. Additional ANOVA's were run on split files as participants were grouped to analyse differences across the following variables; a) alumni versus final year mentors, b) teammates versus non teammates and c) year intake.

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was employed to analyse the qualitative data (Braun et al., 2019). I actively engaged in interpreting data through the lens of my own cultural membership, social position, and ideological commitments, as well as my scholarly knowledge (Braun et al., 2019). However, I used reflexivity to reduce personal bias and reflect openly on the data collected. Furthermore, as an 'insider' to the environment under investigation, my

supervisor acted as an ‘outsider’ to the Gaelic Games tertiary education environment with extensive experience in another sport and as a researcher in sport. This ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ perspective was seen as a resource in the collection and analysis of data, as without this insight there is potential for weakened theoretical sensitivity leading to reduced quality of findings (May & Perry, 2022). A six-phase analysis process was used. Firstly, familiarisation with the data took place, this engagement was trying to draw connections between data and existing literature to allow for direction of future coding (Braun et al., 2019). Secondly, generation of codes within NVivo. The coding phase in RTA is about focused attention, to make sense of data systematically and rigorously (Braun et al., 2019). Then, in depth searching for themes within the codes took place to assist in the construction of an insightful narrative around the data, where the knowledge of my supervisor was utilised. Then there was considerable back and forth between myself and my supervisor in reviewing, defining, and naming themes before the production of the final report. Rigor and trustworthiness were addressed via ‘a critical friend’, where my supervisor challenged interpretation through a process of critical dialogue (Smith & McGannon, 2018). This process was not designed to achieve a consensus but encourage reflexivity and reduce bias, through the exploration of alternate explanations and perspectives (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

3.3 Findings

The means and standard deviation for pre programme, mid programme and post programme for AMQ are presented in Table 3.1. There was a statistically significant difference at the $p<.05$ significance level across timepoints for five of the six AMQ functions; Mental Guidance ($F(2,172) = 4.811$, $p= 0.009$), Coach Relations ($F(2,172) = 3.698$, $p= 0.027$), Career Assistance ($F(2,172) = 4.072$, $p= 0.019$), Role Model ($F(2,172) = 14.227$, $p= <0.001$) and Friendship ($F(2,172) = 6.390$, $p= 0.002$). There was no significant differences across measurement points for Task Instruction ($F(2,172) = 1.763$, $p=0.019$) which would be

considered sport-specific support. Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni methods showed significant differences between pre- and mid-programme measurements for Mental Guidance (p = 0.009), Coach Relations (p = 0.030), Career Assistance (p = 0.018), Role Model (p = <0.001), and Friendship (p = 0.004). Significant differences were also found for Mental Guidance (p = 0.084), Role Model (p = <0.001) and Friendship (p = 0.012) between pre- and post-programme measurements. There were no significant differences between mid – post programme for any AMQ function.

Table 3.1: *Means & Standard Deviations of Mentoring functions through AMQ (ALL)*

Function	Pre Programme		Mid Programme		Post Programme	
	Mean	±SD	Mean	±SD	Mean	±SD
Mental Guidance	4.05	2.16	4.95*	1.22	4.71^	1.37
Coach Relations	4.27	2.26	5.09*	1.18	4.90	1.49
Task Instruction	4.18	2.23	4.75	1.25	4.64	1.52
Career Assistance	4.03	2.14	4.89*	1.21	4.63	1.48
Role Model	4.85	2.43	6.30*	0.80	6.13^	1.10
Friendship	4.15	2.18	5.17*	1.28	5.05^	1.44

(*) Indicates significant difference between pre and mid programme results at the p<.05
(^) Indicates significant difference between pre and post programme results at the p<.05

In Table 3.2, a further ANOVA was conducted and there was a statistically significant difference for final year mentors across timepoints for five AMQ functions; Mental Guidance (F(2,65) = 5.310, p= 0.007), Coach Relations (F(2,65) = 3.594, p= 0.033), Career Assistance (F(2,65) = 5.715, p= 0.005), Role Model (F(2,65) = 9.739, p= <0.001) and Friendship (F(2,65) = 3.648, p= 0.032). There was no significant differences for final year mentors for the Task Instruction function. The only statistically significant difference for alumni mentors across timepoint was for the role model function (F(2,104) = 5.076, p = 0.008). There was no significant differences for alumni mentors for the other five functions. For final year mentors, post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni methods showed significant difference between pre- and mid-programme measurements for Mental Guidance (p = 0.007), Career Assistance (p = 0.008) and Role Model (p = <0.001). Significant differences were also found for Career Assistance (p = 0.028) and Role Model (p = 0.002) between pre- and post-programme

measurements. Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni methods only showed significant differences for alumni mentors between pre- and mid-programme measurements for Role Model ($p = 0.011$) and between pre- and post-programme measurements for Role Model ($p = 0.036$). There were no significant differences for final year or alumni mentors between mid – post programme for any AMQ function.

Table 3.2: *Means of Mentoring functions through AMQ by Mentor Type*

Function	Pre Programme		Mid Programme		Post Programme	
	Alumni	Final Year	Alumni	Final Year	Alumni	Final Year
Mental Guidance	4.23 ±2.1	3.78 ±2.3	4.74 ±1.3	5.30* ±1.1	4.61 ±1.4	4.87 ±1.3
Coach Relations	4.40 ±2.2	4.08 ±2.4	4.95 ±1.2	5.32 ±1.2	4.73 ±1.6	5.18 ±1.3
Task Instruction	4.35 ±2.1	3.94 ±2.4	4.68 ±1.3	4.90 ±1.2	4.51 ±1.7	4.86 ±1.2
Career Assistance	4.26 ±2.1	3.70 ±2.2	4.72 ±1.2	5.17* ±1.2	4.43 ±1.7	4.96^ ±1.1
Role Model	5.10 ±2.3	4.48 ±2.6	6.19* ±0.9	6.49* ±0.7	6.04^ ±1.7	6.27^ ±1.0
Friendship	4.23 ±2.1	4.03 ±2.4	5.15 ±1.4	5.19 ±1.2	4.97 ±1.6	5.18 ±1.1

(*) Indicates significant differences between pre and mid programme results at the $p<.05$
(^) Indicates significant differences between pre and post programme results at the $p<.05$

Table 3.3 shows the differences between teammates and non-teammates, the starting means for teammates were higher across all categories at pre programme levels and stayed higher at post programme measurement. Another ANOVA was conducted and there was a statistically significant difference for mentors who were non-teammates across timepoints for five AMQ functions; Mental Guidance ($F(2,96) = 3.989$, $p = 0.022$), Coach Relations ($F(2,96) = 3.899$, $p = 0.024$), Career Assistance ($F(2,66) = 3.888$, $p = 0.024$), Role Model ($F(2,96) = 12.989$, $p = <0.001$) and Friendship ($F(2,96) = 5.898$, $p= 0.004$). There was no significant differences for non-teammate mentors for the Task Instruction function. There was no statistically significant difference for teammate mentors across timepoint for any of the AMQ functions. For non-teammate mentors, post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni methods showed significant differences for between pre- and mid-programme measurements for Mental Guidance ($p = 0.020$), Coach Relation ($p = 0.019$), Career Assistance ($p = 0.020$), Role Model ($p = <0.001$) and Friendship ($p = 0.003$). The only significant difference for non-teammates between pre- and post-programme measurements was Role Model ($p = <0.001$). There were

no significant differences for non-teammate mentors between mid – post programme for any AMQ function.

Table 3.3: *Means of Mentoring functions through AMQ by Playing Relationship*

Function	Pre Programme		Mid Programme		Post Programme	
	Teammates	Non	Teammates	Non	Teammates	Non
Mental Guidance	4.56 ±1.8	3.63 ±2.3	5.15 ±1.0	4.82* ±1.3	5.02 ±1.2	4.46 ±1.4
Coach Relations	4.89 ±1.9	3.77 ±2.4	5.24 ±1.1	4.99* ±1.2	5.43 ±1.2	4.48 ±1.6
Task Instruction	4.79 ±1.9	3.70 ±2.4	4.99 ±1.0	4.58 ±1.4	5.07 ±1.2	4.29 ±1.4
Career Assistance	4.53 ±1.8	3.63 ±2.3	4.91 ±0.9	4.87* ±1.4	4.88 ±1.2	4.43 ±1.7
Role Model	5.63 ±1.8	4.21 ±2.7	6.33 ±0.7	6.28* ±0.9	6.30 ±0.8	5.98^ ±1.3
Friendship	4.80 ±1.8	3.62 ±2.3	5.25 ±1.0	5.11* ±1.4	5.50 ±1.1	4.69 ±1.6

(*) Indicates significant difference between pre and mid programme results at the p<.05
(^) Indicates significant difference between pre and post programme results at the p<.05

Table 3.4 illustrates that mentees who were on the programme in cohort one (2021/2022) showed improvement from pre to mid and from mid to post programme, while for mentees who were registered on the programme in cohort two (2022/2023) they showed improvements from pre to mid but this improvement was not evident from mid to post programme. This can be partially attributed to a planned disengagement of support from the PC to assess my role in the process. A final ANOVA was conducted and there was a statistically significant difference for cohort one mentors across timepoints for three AMQ functions; Coach Relations ($F(2,91) = 3.559$, $p= 0.032$), Role Model ($F(2,91) = 8.655$, $p= <0.001$) and Friendship ($F(2,91) = 4.331$, $p= 0.016$). The only statistically significant difference for cohort two mentors across timepoint was for the role model function ($F(2,78) = 5.797$, $p = 0.004$). For cohort one mentors, post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni methods showed significant differences for between pre- and mid-programme measurements for just Role Model ($p = 0.001$). While, significant differences were also found for Coach Relations ($p = 0.046$), Role Model ($p = 0.001$) and Friendship ($p = 0.024$) between pre- and post-programme measurements. The only significant differences for cohort two mentors between pre- and mid-programme measurements for Role Model ($p = 0.005$), with no significant different across any

function for pre- and post-programme measurements. There were no significant differences for cohort one or cohort two mentors between mid – post programme for any AMQ function.

Table 3.4: *Means of Mentoring functions through AMQ by Cohort*

Function	Pre Programme		Mid Programme		Post Programme	
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
Mental Guidance	4.15 ±2.2	3.94 ±2.1	5.00 ±1.4	4.90 ±1.0	5.04 ±1.2	4.31 ±1.5
Coach Relations	4.26 ±2.3	4.28 ±2.3	5.16 ±1.3	5.00 ±1.0	5.29^ ±1.2	4.44 ±1.7
Task Instruction	4.19 ±2.2	4.18 ±2.3	4.74 ±1.4	4.75 ±1.1	4.99 ±1.4	4.22 ±1.6
Career Assistance	4.12 ±2.1	3.94 ±2.2	4.80 ±1.3	4.99 ±1.1	4.79 ±1.4	4.44 ±1.5
Role Model	5.00 ±2.4	4.68 ±2.5	6.39* ±0.9	6.20* ±0.7	6.40^ ±0.8	5.80 ±1.3
Friendship	4.21 ±2.2	4.09 ±2.2	5.18 ±1.3	5.15 ±1.3	5.30 ±1.2	4.75 ±1.7

(*) Indicates significant difference between pre and mid programme results at the p<.05
(^) Indicates significant difference between pre and post programme results at the p<.05

RTA was employed to analyse the qualitative data (Braun et al., 2019) and four themes were identified with a total of nineteen subthemes. The findings are outlined throughout the narrative, with additional data shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: *Themes, Subthemes and participant quotes*

Theme	**Sub Theme**	**Raw Data Codes**
Scheme Design	Other Mentors	It wouldn't be as formal as such but we would be chatting at training and stuff. Talking about different things and he'd give me advice on stuff. (Alan)
		We would travel a lot together from Mayo and to trainings on Fridays and then back up again on the Sundays so I spend like a lot of the week with her and we do like a lot of gym sessions together (Claire)
	Prior Relationship	I actually knew my mentor which helped because I'd say it would be different if you didn't know them, it might be harder to start conversations and stuff (Peter)
		I trained there with her last year with the camogie team and she was in our school aswell. (Grace)
	County Link	Because we play similar positions and we're obviously playing in the same county and all, he can kind of help me understand the way the county runs aswell as DCU. (Eddie)
	Scheme Improvements	It might be better to have you're your mentor as a fourth year as they are still in the college and even if they're still on the team with you, you would have more contact with them and they're more up to date (Edwina)
		Maybe going forward it might be an idea of mentors to meet together and talk about how they engage with their mentees and take pointers from each other (Ailing)
Mentoring Process	Initial Engagement	Laid out that he's always there if I need anything … he knew lads if I needed notes or something like that. (Tommy)
	Engagement Types	They all are friends, so if I am talking to one, I kind of know what is going on with the other two aswell as such, without them having to reach out to me. (Aisling)
		In the gym so it was kind of beneficial for the both of us to have

		someone else in the gym to get gym work done (Ciara)
	Formal v Informal	It's definitely more natural and kind of like informal because you both have the same interest (Damien)
	Relationship Developing	I wouldn't have questions every day of the week or stuff like that like … if I can do it on my own I'm perfectly fine with that but if I did have any questions I would obviously go to him. (Eoin)
		he engagement levels with me and [mentee] are far far higher than between me and the other two because we are on the same team … we deal with the same experiences the whole time. While, I don't fully know what [mentee] has going on with herself, so that engagement is a little bit less because we don't have that (Aisling)
	Friendship	Me and [mentee] would have a friendship aswell, as she is from the club and we play club football and club camogie together… Me and [mentee] is probably transitional compared to the other two girls aswell. I wouldn't be calling it a friendship just yet, still kind of mentor, mentee kind of relationship. (Aisling)
Mentors	Mentor Characteristics	She is just friendly with everyone. She doesn't stick to one or two people like. She goes around to everyone … And she is just nice and very level headed I think. She doesn't let her Ego get the better of her. (Mags)
		She's so kind of down to earth and like humble, modest you know … , you wouldn't really know what she's like but like the standard that she you know can play at … and really nice to chat to and stuff. (Edwina)
	Role Models	The way he's always carried himself, he's very mature and he doesn't come across as someone that is still very young and you don't really come across someone who has a bad thing to say about him (Ross)
	Mentor Prior Experience	Talking about his own experiences and what worked for him, and going off him. (Eoin)
		He fell behind with assignments then which affected his football so he said if you can get that done you won't have to worry about any of it so just basic advice (Enda)
	Benefits to Mentors	Leadership is definitely not natural. So it was great to kind of know that about myself at least and pin point one of my weaknesses (John)
	Education Support	He was just telling me to manage it around his schedule with training and coming up to Christmas and all that sort of stuff. Because there was a lot of work that had to be put in. (Eddie)
Benefits to Mentees	Transition to College Life	She just gave me a bit of advice on how to balance cause it is like the primary course is a bit of a heavy timetable so like how just like balance training and like county training and college training (Ursula)
	Social Life	[mentor] is just saying to me it is just as important to me as football is and college and to just get the balance and it's something you shouldn't just cut out completely …Just like knowing when to go out or when not to. Or if you have training the next night you are not going to be going out (Fiona)
	Sporting Feedback	Yeah like if I'm playing wing back or whatever or even midfield or like in a training match or whatever he'll tell me what run I should make or could make after the training session… kind of giving you constructive criticism, really honest (Lee)
		He watched it back and he rang me and just had a long enough chat about it and it was good because he watched that game there was a recording of it and he just kind of had a chat about what went well and what went wrong and what I can improve on in certain things. (Larry)
	Coach Engagements	It helped yeah, like usually I would've been able to go to all the sessions before, because they would've been at different times, like getting in touch with coaches and saying what to tell them. Like so they know that we're still training away, even if we're not at training.

(Alan)

3.3.1 Scheme Design

The theme *scheme design* consisted of four subthemes, *other mentors, prior relationships, county link* and *scheme improvements*. Under the subtheme of *other mentors*, mentees talked about past mentoring experiences, and the strength of them due to how they naturally developed; " I know him so long and I'm very comfortable chatting" (Michael).

Engagements with senior players within mentees own club was an area where informal mentors appeared, "Just a couple of the senior lads, they'd bring you into the senior group … the captain and maybe the stronger players would take you aside and give you pointers specific to your game" (Trevor). Teachers also offered continued support to students, "I wouldn't have known it was like that, but I can see there were a few of my teachers who helped me in that way, but at the time, I would have felt we were just chatting" (Liam).

Both the mentors and mentees awareness of their counterpart was explored in the subtheme of *prior relationships*. Some of the dyads already had established relationships because of being club mates or the mentee joining the SIC panel at a young age,

> Yeah, so [mentee 1] and [mentee 2], they are obviously from my club so I already have a fairly close bond with them. And then [mentee 3] I knew that I'd have a relationship with her going forward as I knew she was being called into the [county] (Aisling).

While for others there was an initial awareness of the other person. Every one of the mentees knew their mentors because of their status as a SIC player, "I didn't know my mentor, I knew of him" (Trevor). However, some didn't know of their mentees at all, "I actually wouldn't have known much about them as they are from the other end of the county to me" (Charlie).

The dyad being matched according to their county of birth was an element of the scheme design which was acknowledged positively within the subtheme of *county link*. For example, "It just helped that we had those similarities as well, like so we bond more and it is

easier to talk" (Colette), and "I think it was a good idea to put us with people from [county] and like the way [mentor] choose us, it was easier to like contact them" (Ann).

Both mentors and mentees reported on what they felt could be developed in the scheme though the subtheme of *scheme improvements*. Mentors outlined how important the introductory video was in understanding their role, "I thought the presentation sent on before was very helpful" (John) and there was also evidence that there was learning gained from other mentors "I picked up a couple of things from this conversation alone, maybe things I can bring back now to [mentee]" (John). It was hoped this could be part of the scheme in the future, "maybe going forward it might be an idea for mentors to meet together and talk about how they engage with their mentees" (Aisling). Dyads which had an initial meet face to face saw the benefit of this, "the fact I got to meet [mentor] in person, that's a huge thing, adding face to face at the start could take the awkwardness out of it" (Peter).

3.3.2 Mentoring Process

The theme *mentoring process* consisted of five subthemes, *initial engagements, engagement types, formal versus informal, relationship developing* and *friendship*. Dyads engaged differently in terms of their *initial engagement*, some meeting in person, while others engaged via text or call. Some mentees had trepidation about the initial meeting: "There would have been an initial bit of awkwardness at first, kind of getting to know each other" (Trevor). This wasn't the case for all due to past familiarity, "I think it was good to link up with someone that you knew already because sure I wasn't afraid to ask her anything" (Grace). Furthermore, mentors were aware that the initial meeting could be challenging for their mentee, "how was it for them to meet someone they've never met before" (Cora). This led to mentees gaining confidence by engaging in adult conversations, "I had to grow up a bit and take the first step and just kind of get over that first boundary" (Katie).

Under the subtheme of *engagement type*, it became evident that some relationships were at times restricted to electronic means, “we did a zoom call and we were meant to meet up for coffee, but the way it ended up was that we couldn’t get the availability at the same time” (Lee). This reliance on technology was identified as a barrier to a more meaningful relationship developing, “If you want to build up the friendship you’d need to meet up and talk over coffee” (Katie). However, there were other dyads that interacted considerably more and had a strong connection, “they came to me with some stuff, around exams and stuff like that. They do my course as well, so I think the way you assigned us couldn’t be any better” (Mattie). Furthermore, some relationships created a gym culture of passing down knowledge: “I actually done two gym sessions with [mentor] before Christmas because last winter, he got massive in the gym in terms of size in the gym … he just showed me the ropes and that helped big time” (James).

Both mentors and mentees talked about their relationship being casual and natural under the subtheme of *formal v informal*. This approach to the relationship was welcomed by mentees, “it was very natural, it wasn’t forced or anything” (Damien) and “if there is no laughing or joking, if it’s more like a business interaction, it just seems very official and not really too intriguing to connect with each other” (Ross). While mentors expressed their view that they welcomed informal engagements, “I suppose I thought it was more formal but then things went on it became more informal” (Mattie).

This informal nature of the engagements had an impact on how the relationship developed over time, this was explored under the subtheme of *relationship developing*. The support was often present yet not overwhelming for the mentees, “I was happy enough, he didn’t disappear after the first conversation. He wasn’t hounding me or wasn’t on my back either. I just knew he was there if I needed anything” (Tommy). This support was particularly welcomed around exams, “he was an extra guy to lean on I suppose if I needed help” (Stephen)

and as the mentees adapted to college life. “Especially towards the start it was helpful but since the first few weeks of college I haven’t spoken to him as much because I wouldn’t have had as many questions and stuff” (Eoin). Mentors also recognised a reduction in engagement levels yet acknowledged the informality of casually engaging:

> They haven’t come to me that much. I don’t know if that is because they don’t actually need it or they don’t really have questions. I’d be more like talking to them at training regularly, but it would be fairly informal rather than direct messages (Grainne)

This leads into the relationship becoming more like a friendship which was identified under the subtheme of *friendship*. Mentees and mentors had varying responses when asked if their relationship was a friendship. The answers were split but there were factors which contributed to a growing friendship including trust and interaction level:

> Yeah there definitely is trust there because I’ve met him a good few times now it would’ve started off about what I’m doing, am I in the gym and about nutrition and stuff, but then towards the end of it, it was just general chat, what am I doing, when am I back in college and my plans for the Summer. Its nearly a friendship at this stage but he’s still giving me plenty of advice. (Peter)

While playing on the same team was a strong indicator of a relationship being a friendship, “me and [mentee] have a close relationship, she is from the same club as me, so it’s a unique relationship we have, you could nearly say she is one of my really good friends” (Aisling), while for others it felt a friendship was growing:, “with county starting possibly just going home on journeys is a lot of time that it could but at the minute it is probably more just mentor mentee kind of relationship” (Cora).

3.3.3 Mentors

The theme *Mentors* consisted of five subthemes, *motivation to mentor, mentor characteristics, role models, mentor prior experience* and *benefits to mentors*. The *motivation*

to mentor was multifaceted, with final year and alumni mentors open and willing to help a mentee. Mentors indicated the matching process linking them with someone from their home county was important; "when I heard that I would be helping [county] lads who started where I was as well and they both do [course], so I thought I could definitely guide them" (Mattie).

An additional motivation was their own experiences as fresher students, "I feel there definitely would have been a few questions I would have had myself, where having a mentor would have helped and made the transition easier" (John). While another spoke about how having an informal peer mentor helped them transition and thus they were willing to replicate this, "I actually had good support, I lived with [name] and she was very good for me and I definitely think I found first year a lot easier" (Cora).

This was further emphasised in the subtheme of *mentor prior experience*, where the mentor used their own experiences to assist the mentees. This was apparent with mentors, "I am just kind of using my experiences, maybe what I struggled with" (Henry) and mentees:

> He wasn't reserved, he went straight into the last couple of years and exactly what he's been doing, down to a tee. Just what I need to do to get to where he is, which was an eye-opener, just the amount of effort he's been putting in. (Peter)

The subtheme of *mentor characteristics,* provided an insight into the capability of mentors. Mentors highlighted how their family circumstances and profession guided them, "I am used to being a teacher, I know about taking responsibility for students or being there to help lads" (Charlie) and "that sort of leadership and role comes naturally to me. I don't know if it is because I am from such a big family" (Aisling). Mentees described the mentors as approachable, humble and personable. This was further emphasised, "he is really down to earth kind of a fella and he's really easy to talk to and you feel like you're on the same level" (Ursula).

This was further expanded within the subtheme of *role models*, and its relationship to sporting performances. "He is a role model for me anyway, because he is still a young player,

but he has achieved stuff that I want to do in the near future" (Colette). Furthermore, mentees viewed balancing of different aspects of life as impressive, "he is definitely someone to look up to the way he is able to manage it all and still perform on the pitch" (Darragh).

In the subtheme of *benefits to mentors*, the mentors talked about developing their leadership qualities, enhancing their communication skills, and learning about themselves throughout the programme. "Leadership is definitely not natural. So it was great to kind of know that about myself at least and pin point one of my weaknesses" (John) , this was echoed Aisling:

> It has kind of given me the confidence to lead by example and offer that type of guidance to others. Whereas even beforehand I even find with the [county] panel that I have taken on the role with a few other girls that are there and are coming into the panel and put myself out there too them, more so than I would have in previous years.

3.3.4 Benefits to Mentees

The theme *benefits to mentees* consisted of five subthemes, *education support, transition to college life, social life, sporting feedback* and *coach engagements*. The subtheme of *education support* identified how mentors assisted mentees on the academic side. The support was subtle, and it helped when the mentor studied the same academic course, "it is handy enough whenever I am stuck on anything, she is always there to help" (Grace), but it equally was not a barrier if they studied a different course, as mentors acted as signposts, "[mentor] just made me aware that there is extra help available" (Michael). Interestingly, the fact that there was so much focus on the academics surprised some, "I know this is a GAA thing, but with me and [mentee], we very rarely speak about hurling. It is more about college, assignments or whatever" (Henry).

The subtheme of *transitioning to college life* explored the challenges of balancing a dual career alongside moving away from home. "The main thing I got would have been

balancing the college and the county and starting up because in first year he would have had the same workload, and he gave me what he did" (Eoin). The mentors helped alleviate some of the unknowns "It was good because I hadn't a clue what to expect in college" (Brian) and "you don't want to come across as this eejit who knows nothing about [city]" (Aisling). Furthermore, the travelling involved in being an inter county player surfaced: "You have to plan out when you're going to eat, sort out lifts or whatever down to [county] so basically just be organised and don't be leaving it last minute and giving me tips on prepping my food" (Damien).

Mentors also assisted mentees in understanding the balance of being a student and socialising, which was explored under the subtheme of *social life*. Mentors encouraged the mentees to enjoy their third level experience "He was always asking was I getting out with the lads much and he was encouraging it" (Eoin). The mentor emphasised the reason for this, "I was just telling him to make an effort to go out after freshers games. As I know for a fact the friends you have three or four years later are a result of those nights out" (Charlie).

Within the subtheme of *sporting feedback*, it became apparent that some relationships had no discussions around the mentees development technically or tactically, "me and [mentor] would be training with each other all the time, but like he doesn't really discuss that a lot" (Liam). However, with some relationships there was strong engagement in this area with considerable depth and honesty:

> We'd have a conversation about what we would have done tactically in that session and what we can do better. We are able to talk from the perspective of two different positions. She talks to me from the perspective of the defender, where the forwards need to do this better, and I am able to talk from the forwards perspective. (Emily)

A major challenge for third level Gaelic games players is playing on multiple teams and this was explored in the subtheme of *coach engagements*. The players are exposed to

demands from multiple managers with limited understanding of the players commitments with other teams, “you’re sort of torn between them and you’re thinking “what do I prioritise? or where am I going to go? and I know she’s helped me out, with what she did when she was playing” (Emily). These multiple team demands have led to injuries, “when I did pick up the injury and that I was doing too much, he was straight in with, ah you need to know when to say no and not to take too much on” (Peter).

The mentors were able to give considerable advice around engaging with coaches and how to broach difficult conversations:

> Talk to [college manager], talk to [county manager] as I know that was one thing that I actually did wrong, and I did suffer the consequences of it. So, I actually gave her my personal perspective on what happened to me just to maybe encourage her a bit more and I think she really did take it on board. (Cora)

The mentors at times were using their own experiences of communicating with specific managers to guide the mentees in their conversations, “I would have based it off when I was in college and how we dealt with it. So that is just the advice I gave” (Grainne) and this enabled the mentees to have these conversations:

> I’ve had the same managers as her from when she was in college too, so she understands how they both work now and that they’re both understanding when you talk to them. And she was telling me what to say and how to go about it. (Emily)

3.4 Discussion

Several important discussions points arose from the results on the role of the PC in mentoring programmes, the gap around the task instruction function and peer mentoring types, which can help evidence-informed decision making in mentoring programmes.

3.4.1 Programme Coordinator

The role of the PC is to recruit mentors and mentees, train mentors and manage programme expectations and delivery (Sawiuk et al., 2024). However, this role and its influence on mentoring relationship in sports has received sparse attention (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021). Much of the mentoring research across all domains has focused on the dyadic relationships between mentors and mentees but that triadic relationship including the PC is an important area which can considerably impact the functioning of the dyad.

Here, the role of the PC can be separated into recruitment and ongoing support. The recruitment of mentors has been described as haphazard in sports coaching (Chambers, 2015). The identification of mentors and their recruitment in this programme was based objectively on their place of birth and playing experience. Such an approach has been both positive, due to accessibility (Hoffman, 2019), and problematic, as it was deemed to be mere geographical convenience (Cushion, 2014). However, the ethos of Gaelic Games generates a profound sense of loyalty amongst their membership and to place (Hughes & Hassan, 2015). The PC also identified mentors meeting the stated objective criteria on a subjective level, believing they embody a desired set of dispositions and attitudes aligned to DCU and the performance sports programme delivered (cf. Leeder et al., 2019).

The ongoing support of the PC to both the mentors and mentees appeared important. As the PC, I engaged with the mentees regularly in the university setting allowing for the identification of social, sporting, or academic challenges, to ensure that they are actively interacting with their mentor to allow for specific, and timely, support to be provided. The PC can provide instructional scaffolding to promote interdependency of the dyads (Vinson & Parker, 2019), but understanding the level of scaffolding that is required on a meso and micro level is crucial for effective functioning of dyads (Vinson & Parker, 2019), thus ensuring the benefits of informal mentoring relationships accrue within a formal scheme. Within this study,

my predetermined withdrawal of support in my role as the PC to mentors after the mid programme point for Cohort Two led to a decrease in mentoring function scores from mid programme results to post programme results (see Table 4 above). My withdrawal of support was in the form of the removal of periodic communication with the mentors around known pinch points for the mentees around the DCU academic calendar and their schedule of Championship games in their sport. This decrease in scores would be contrary to what was seen in Cohort One and dissimilar to previous research which indicates that effective mentoring relationships strengthen with longevity (Hoffmann et al., 2017). This is emphasising the role the PC collaboratively has in the process. This can be viewed as anointing the PC with the role of 'long-arm mentor' who fulfils a panoptic supervisory role supporting the mentor rather than the mentee (McQuade et al., 2015).

The PC has a pivotal role in ensuring that cross dyad engagement can be a form of social support. The mentors highlighted the social support they can provide each other and learning off each other about their experiences engaging with their mentees, suggesting that semi-formal workshops for mentors to share their experiences could be beneficial. In a student-athlete – academic faculty mentoring programme, the PC offered optional support sessions where mentors could share their challenges and seek the support of colleagues to find creative and practical solutions to shared difficulties (Comeaux, 2010).

3.4.2 Task Instruction

The mentors within this programme all showed enthusiasm when the suggestion of mentoring high potential players within their own county was suggested. The affiliation between mentor and mentee was consistently raised by mentors regarding their willingness to engage (Hoffmann, 2019). Furthermore, student-athletes have been found to be motivated in supporting others well-being as it satisfied their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deal & Camiré, 2016). Surprisingly , the instrumental functions of task instruction

and mental guidance showed non-significant improvements. The psychosocial supports on preparation to perform, alongside their social and academic development rated considerably higher. This aligns with the motive of supporting others well-being (Deal & Camiré, 2016), but it could be viewed that the less pronounced support on the sport-specific side is a negative cost to mentors, as it comes at the expense of challenging their own place on teams (Homans, 1961).

While the mentors in this scheme are all established SIC players, they are not seasoned campaigners and have only recently navigated the transition from underage to senior player themselves. Thus, some are potentially not assured of their starting positions within their teams. The issue of playing time was more evident in peer mentoring situations, as the performance gap is often narrower (Hoffmann, 2019). There is also the element of competing for similar positions which has been shown to pose problems with social support within team dynamics (Cope et al., 2011). The initial eagerness from mentors to assist mentees showed a willingness to support high status newcomers for the future benefit of their teams but the lack of significance in the mentoring functions over time for the teammate mentors rather than non-teammate mentors shown in Table 3, suggests that willingness to help plateaued in line with mentees narrowing the performance gap. This could be considered the point of reciprocity in the social exchange where, for the mentor, in line with SET, the costs begin to outweigh the benefits (Foa & Foa, 1974). This aligns with research in a tertiary education setting where mentors were less inclined to support high status newcomers than low status newcomers who played their position (Boroumand et al., 2017). However, research in individual sports shows that mentors could be willing to support high performing mentees despite them being competitors as there are considerable benefits to accrue to the mentor (Boroumand et al., 2017). This could be deemed a form of relational mentoring, where the relationship is two way, with opportunities for mutual learning and growth (Ragins, 2016).

Finally, one of the mentees (a forward) outlined how their mentor (a defender) helped them with their technical and tactical aspects of their game. This aligns with the findings in team sports that mentors are more inclined to support high status newcomers who played in different playing positions to them than high status newcomers who played in the same position (Boroumand et al., 2017). Considering this potential conflict from a playing perspective, it would be useful for PCs to consider if they value greater psychosocial or instrumental (sports specific) benefits for mentees, when they are considering dyad matching.

3.4.3 Peer Mentoring

Based on the results from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective final year mentors appear to be more effective than alumni mentors. Feedback from mentees in cohort one of the programme, where there were considerably more alumni mentors than final year mentors, highlighted that face to face time was limited with alumni mentors and this was a barrier to developing strong relationships. Mentees also emphasised how important final year mentors were because they understood current processes in DCU and were better able to signpost on academic issues. Furthermore, as some of the final years were playing alongside their mentees, they travelled to training together, thus spending considerable time in each other's company. It is also apparent that the final year mentors were able to give a sensible perspective on balancing their college social lives. Even though playing at SIC has been shown to negatively impact student's college experience (Rodgers, 2019), this has been managed appropriately. The peer mentor has been able to act as a non-judgemental signpost for addressing issue for mentees, described as 'silly little things' but helpful in stopping significant issue from developing. This is important as help seeking behaviours in this cohort are often low, allowing 'crisis point' to unfold rather than proactively seeking support (Rodgers, 2019).

Peer mentoring has been evidenced to be effective in sports coaching as there is a narrower epistemological gap between mentor and mentees (Olsson et al., 2017). Epistemology

can be characterised along a continuum from naïve (i.e., knowledge is simple, specific and handed down) to sophisticated (i.e., knowledge is complex, uncertain and context dependent) (Crowther et al., 2022; Grecic & Collins, 2013). Thus, this narrower epistemological gap means the peer mentor can provide effective contextualised support due to the relevant tacit knowledge they possess from experience navigating similar everyday problems (Nash & Collins, 2006). In terms of future identification of mentors, mentees indicated they would adopt roles as mentors themselves, to further reduce the mentor-mentee epistemological gap and allow for continued shared experiences at the same level. In line with previous research, this data suggests that those who received positive mentoring experiences are more likely to be good mentors themselves in the future (Arnold et al., 2021; Budgen et al., 2014). This is not to suggest that alumni mentors cannot be effective, the role of the PC to help facilitate the relationship at different stages may be important here, thus educating Alumni mentors of current available supports within the university is important (Bimper Jr, 2017). These alumni mentors can also be important as they may be more established and view the mentees as less of a threat. Consequently, different types of mentor may be needed to allow the relationships to be successful.

3.4.4 Limitations

Despite the insights that have been gained from this study, it is not without limitation. No data was recorded to indicate if the scheme had any impact on academic progression or performance. Furthermore, all participants were students of the same third level institution (DCU), however the students played Gaelic Games across fifteen different counties, all at varying level of national competitiveness. The planned PC withdrawal of support during semester two for cohort two could also be considered a limitation, due to the impact this had on cohort two and the contrasting support they received. A further limitation of the study was the lack of exploration of the experiences of the mentors within the study. Exploring this in

future would be welcomed by researchers and would add considerably to understanding the experiences of mentors within dyads.

3.5 Conclusion

Findings indicate that peer mentoring is an effective tool to assist student athletes as they transition in both a sport-specific and academic context. The findings show that mentoring can support the needs of student athletes on both an instrumental and psychosocial side. Considering the evidence that the instrumental support was not as impactful as the psychosocial support, we believe there is transferability for similarly run programmes across different sporting contexts, however a simple copy and paste implementation is likely to be suboptimal, as it fails to consider context specific nuances (Collins et al., 2022). Several key themes were identified for future practice. Firstly, the role of the PC has been identified as crucial to ensure effective dyad functioning. Mentor and mentee recruitment, initial training and understanding the required level of ongoing support the dyad needs, should be considered carefully by the PC. Secondly, the programmes responsibility resting within the athlete's primary team may allow for further support and development on the task instruction side, assisting with team dynamics and functioning. Thirdly, peer mentoring does appear to be effective so the closeness of the dyads in age, performance and career paths may allow for greatest coherence.

In terms of future research, it is worth further exploration of the role of the PC, which has been started in a sporting environment (Sawiuk et al., 2024), but requires further investigation across different sporting environments. An analysis on the role of the PC in working with and around barriers to optimise practice (cf. Taylor & Collins, 2021), is suggested and explored in Chapter Six. Exploring the possibilities of cross organisation mentoring of student-athletes is also worthy of exploration, as where the mentoring support rests may dictate whether the support leans more toward a psychosocial or sport-specific focus. This collaborative approach from expert areas may assist the student-athletes in a balanced manner.

In conclusion, the results of this research have implications for practitioners, namely coaches and organisation to explore options to facilitate connections between existing players and underage talent who are experiencing transition in different areas. Following the success here of dyadic mentoring in supporting student-athletes in DCU, as they transition on an academic, sporting and social perspective, we are suggesting that dyadic mentoring should be explored with other cohorts within the same Gaelic Games tertiary education environment. Consequently, a similarly designed programme with neophyte Performance Analysts is explored in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four: How does mentoring measure up across cohorts? Mentoring as a learning tool for neophyte Performance Analysts

4.1 Introduction

Following on from the success of the peer mentoring programme implemented in Chapter Two with Student-Athletes, a similar programme design is utilised in this chapter, to support the development of neophyte Performance Analyst. PA is a sports science discipline that is growing rapidly and is a key support in the preparation of performance teams in DCU. The aim of the chapter is to identify if similar dyadic mentoring can be effective for Performance Analysts. While the mentors and mentees in the previous chapter could be considered peers, there is a considerable gap in experience and knowledge between mentors and mentees among this cohort.

To date, within sport, mentoring research has been conducted across administration (Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999), coaching (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021; Sawiuk et al., 2017) and strength and conditioning (Gillham et al., 2015). Furthermore, mentoring has been investigated in tertiary sporting environments with student-athletes (See Chapter Three; Comeaux, 2010). However, there has been no exploration of mentoring of Performance Analysts (referred to as Analysts hereafter).

The relationship between a mentor and a mentee can be described as a social exchange between two individuals (Hallmann et al., 2023). Consequently, central to SET is the concept of reciprocity, a state in the relationship in which both parties are benefiting while expending the same costs (Foa & Foa, 1974). While a reciprocal state is not always likely to occur in an exchange, it is uncommon that one side is burdened with all the cost of the relationship with no benefits (Hallmann et al., 2023). Mentees can receive numerous benefits from mentoring relationships, whilst mentors can benefit from professional and intrinsic rewards through

personal investment in an individual and learning to refine their instructional techniques (Gillham et al., 2015).

Mentoring relationships are viewed as either formal or informal in nature. Formal mentoring is when a third party facilitates pairing based on certain characteristics or set protocols (Ragins et al., 2000). Such importance placed on dyad matching, points to the possibility of exploring the benefits of team or institution alumni mentoring as recommended in the literature (Comeaux, 2010). In comparison, Ragins et al. (2000) described informal mentoring as relationships that develop organically, through a desire to help or seek help. Hence, informal mentoring relationships are characterised by high levels of trust and chemistry (Hoffmann, 2019; Hoffmann & Loughead, 2016b). Considering the recognised benefits of informal mentoring, due consideration for the facilitated matching within a planned mentoring programme is a must for administrators in tertiary education environments, capturing the strengths of the informal relationships (Hoffmann & Loughead, 2016b).

4.1.1 Developing Analysts

PA is a sports science discipline, which involves systematic analysis of sporting performance with the objective of providing valuable input to direct the coaching process and improve performance (O'Donoghue, 2015). Consequently, effective PA should provide coaches with information that adds to what they can see for themselves (Bampouras et al., 2012). If mentoring is to be effective with analysts, it is important to consider the skillsets required to be an effective analyst. Martin and colleagues (2021) defined an analysts role as integrating and translating objective, reliable and relevant data to co-create knowledge, allowing for the creation of learning opportunities for relevant stakeholders to enhance decision making. Furthermore, they summarised the roles and responsibilities of the analyst to include a) defining roles and establishing relationships, b) conducting needs analysis and service planning, c) system design, d) data collection and reliability checking, e) data management, f)

analysis, g) reporting to key stakeholders, h) facilitation of feedback, and i) service review and evaluation. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to assess the impact of a mentoring programme and track the experiences of analyst (mentees) and mentors across the intervention in a Gaelic Games tertiary education setting.

Reflecting McKenna et al. (2018), albeit in a different sport, this study focuses on the development of neophyte analysts. Cognisant of this, the programme aims to build the following skills and capacities in the student analysts:

1. Contextual awareness. Analysts need to develop skills such as empathy and micro-political literacy (Martin et al., 2021). Gaining an understanding of the learning capacity or understanding levels of the players or coaches they are engaging with, effectively what is their "PA age". In coaching, it was identified that mentoring can play a crucial role in helping developing coaches to navigate complex environments, tolerate complexity and become practitioners (Sawiuk et al., 2017). Furthermore, they identified positive mentoring relationship as crucial in navigating political landscapes in sport.
2. Building relationships. Analysts should be supported in trying to build strong relationships with coaches and players. The power dynamic and the status of the coach can affect the functionality of the relationship (McKenna et al., 2018), yet a strong coach-analyst relationship has been identified as a key factor for successful analysts (Wright et al., 2014). Hoffmann and Loughead (2019) identified developing coach relations as one of the key functions of mentoring, achieved through an understanding of context and social norms.
3. PA and sport expertise. Sports specific knowledge and analysts with a coaching or playing background in sport were identified as desirable (Wright et al., 2014). However, it is not a pre-requisite if the analyst approaches their role with a desire to learn the sports' intricacies. Sawiuk and colleagues (2017) highlighted that coach mentors from

other sports were beneficial as they could assist with more non sport specific support, allowing for effective processes.

4. Technical expertise. An understanding of how to operate video analysis software is crucial for analysts. Mentoring has been identified to help with task specific improvement with mentees (Hoffmann & Loughead, 2016b).
5. Professional behaviours. Time management, communication skills, presentation skills, reflective practice and ethical practice are all behaviours an analyst must develop (Martin et al., 2021), along with showing good judgement, interpreting data and responding to contextual situations (Wright et al., 2014). Mentoring with university students has shown to help with time management skills and goal setting (Comeaux, 2010).

4.1.2 Considerations for PA Development: An Irish context

In an Irish context, Martin et al. (2018) identified that 70% of coaches use PA regularly to inform the content of training and 91% highlighted its importance in affecting change. At higher performance levels, many teams and individuals have specific PA support but at development levels, a coach-analyst conducts considerable PA. The role of PA in the coaching process was identified as critical, as 86% of coaches valued it as 'important to essential' and 94% of coaches desired more PA. Typically, cost, time invested, technical expertise and national governing bodies misunderstanding of PA, were highlighted as barriers to PA. In a Gaelic Games context, research showed usage levels below other Irish sports, with PA used by 51% of Gaelic games coaches, who used both notational analysis and match video (Martin et al., 2017). In the intervening period, PA has gathered further momentum in Gaelic Games and has become a crucial component of team preparation (GAA, 2022a). This chapter aims to explore the impact of mentoring as an educational tool for neophyte analysts in a Gaelic Games tertiary environment.

4.2 Methods

Considering the context of investigation, a pragmatic approach was employed as an attempt to provide practical solutions to contemporary problems experienced by people in social contexts (Giacobbi et al., 2005). Pragmatism focuses on what works in practice, guided by empirical evidence, rather than rigid adherence to certain ontological or epistemological assumptions (Jenkins, 2017). Pragmatism offers a flexible and outcome-oriented approach to understanding, in this sense, diverging from positivist and constructivist positions, rejecting the qualitative and quantitative divide, positioning either or both as valuable to unpacking real-world problems (Creswell & Clark, 2017). As the PC, I was a co-constructor of knowledge with the participants (Giacobbi et al., 2005); a process facilitated through immersion within the environment. My experience and qualifications in both PA and coaching contribute to the credibility and applicability of the findings. On the PA side, I have completed a masters in Sports Performance Analysis, am an accredited Level 3 GAA Performance Analyst and work as a practitioner at SIC level. While on coaching side, I have 15+ years' experience coaching at all levels in the GAA, have qualifications to Award Two level and I am also a coach education tutor. As an 'insider' to the environment under investigation, I utilised my supervisor as an 'outsider' to the Gaelic Games tertiary education environment, he possessed extensive experience in another sport and as a researcher in sport. Reflecting Chapter Three, this 'insider' and 'outsider' perspective was seen as a resource in the collection and analysis of data, as without this insight there is potential for weakened theoretical sensitivity leading to reduced quality of findings (May & Perry, 2022). Consequently, a qualitative research design was employed, with multiple focus groups the primary method of data collection, as it allows for a greater understanding of the PA process, an area where quantitative design is more regularly utilised to measure actual sporting performance. The subjective nature of the qualitative data was used to explore the nuances of the interactions of and between participants.

4.2.1 Participants

A purposeful sampling approach was employed for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest due to their knowledge and experience (Palinkas et al., 2015). Embedded in a purposeful sampling approach is the ability to compare experiences, to identify similarities and differences in the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants in this study consisted of 13 student analysts (mentees), six mentors and six coaches. Mentors were identified in the four field codes of Gaelic Games (Hurling, Camogie, Ladies Football and Men's Football). Mentors were contacted by the PC, where the programme concept was outlined in detail, with opportunity for questions provided. Coaches were also contacted, where their role in the development of the analyst was outlined and how the assistance of the mentor has the potentially to enhance the PA provision available to their team. The student analysts and the coaches were all involved in teams across the four Gaelic Games codes in the same third level institution for a full season, lasting six months. Coaches led performance teams and had substantial experience of coaching Gaelic Games.

In line with evidence suggesting the benefits of mentors coming from different sports (Sawiuk et al., 2018), the mentor and mentee in each relationship were not necessarily from the same sport. Some mentors mentored more than one mentee. The mentees had limited experience, with five having no prior experience in PA. Further biographical information on mentors and coaches can be found in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 respectively. Participants are given pseudonyms in the findings to protect their identity.

Table 4.1: *Mentor biographies*

Pseudonym	PA Experience	Accreditation Level (GAA PA)	Related Academic Qualification
Amy	5 – 10 years	Level 3	MSc
Laura	5 – 10 years	Level 3	MSc
Eoghan	5 – 10 years	No Qualification	PhD
Paul	5 – 10 years	Level 3	MSc
Eoin	5 – 10 years	Level 3	MSc
Aaron	5 – 10 years	Level 4	MSc

Table 4.2: *Coach biographies*

Pseudonym	Coaching @ Performance Level	Experience in PA role	Inter County Coaching Experience
Liam	10+ years	No	Yes
Neil	5 – 10 years	No	No
Des	10+ years	No	Yes
Jimmy	5 – 10 years	Yes	No
Pat	5 – 10 years	No	Yes
Mick	5 – 10 years	Yes	Yes

4.2.2 Procedure

Mentees were identified through e-mail, seeking expressions of interest to work with high-performance teams as student analysts. Dyads were deliberately matched with the PC central to the process, in a method which most closely aligned to 'practitioner-assigned matching' in the literature (Hoffmann, 2019). This incorporated careful consideration of the individuals involved in terms of their skills (mentors) and needs (mentees), while referring to mentoring literature, where programmes have previously failed due to poorly matched dyads (Hoffmann, 2019; Sandardos & Chambers, 2019). When the mentor was confirmed, I contacted the mentee to outline who their assigned mentor was. Training for the mentees consisted of a face-to-face workshop, which explored the skills required in PA, and information on the mentor-mentee relationship, along with how dyads can function effectively (Presentation available at Appendix 11). Mentors received training in the form of an online workshop, outlining the

programme and skills required, including research and context informed information, details of the dyad matching process, initial meeting suggestions, benefits of mentoring and the challenges of mentoring. Mentors were also giving specific information about their mentees and the teams they were assigned to. Mentors were subsequently contacted on an individual basis to allow for questions and to ensure complete understanding. This was followed by a process of connecting the mentors with the mentees. As per the details in the mentee workshop and mentor workshop, the exact nature of the initial meeting was left up to each dyad to decide, as a result engagement across dyads were a mixture of both face-to-face and online interactions, this freedom around engagement type was used with the aim of allowing for the strengths of informal mentoring to accrue (Sandardos & Chambers, 2019). Dyads engaged regularly throughout the course of the six-month season, with some dyads meeting weekly, while others met less frequently, depending on how the relationships developed. To ensure effective functioning of dyads, I periodically (monthly) contacted all participants throughout the programme to assist with any issues.

4.2.3 Data collection

Qualitatively, focus groups were used, allowing for the gathering of high-quality information in a timely manner, facilitating interaction among the group about the phenomenon, sharing both similarities and differences (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Three separate focus groups were held with mentors, mentees and managers/coaches, all being conducted post programme. Participants in all focus groups were asked open ended questions, with the researcher probing throughout to gain further depth in responses. Questions directed at both mentors and mentees included a) tell me about your initial engagement with your mentor/mentee? b) has your relationship developed, and if so how and why? c) in which areas has the mentoring support been helpful? d) outline a practical impact of the mentoring support? and specifically for mentors e) why were you willing to become a mentor? While coaches were asked about the

impact in terms of practice analysts were making. The inclusion of a focus group with the managers/coaches was to gain insight into the development of the mentees as an analyst within their own environment. The focus groups took place online through Zoom, with a total of 16 participants from the three cohorts: mentors (four), mentees (six) and managers/coaches (six). Three focus group interview guides (Appendix 12, 13, 14) were created with reference to the literature and research context. The focus groups lasted between 33 – 63 minutes. The audio of the focus groups were transcribed verbatim before analysis.

4.2.4 Data Analysis

RTA was employed to analyse the qualitative data (Braun et al., 2019). I actively engaged in interpreting data through the lens of my own social position, theoretical assumptions, and ideological commitments, as well as my existing scholarly knowledge (Braun et al., 2019). However, I did use reflexivity to reduce personal bias and reflect openly on the data collected. A six-phase analysis process was used. Firstly, familiarisation with the data took place. This engagement was trying to draw connections between data and existing literature to allow for direction of future coding (Braun et al., 2019). Secondly, generation of codes within NVivo. The coding phase in RTA is about focused attention, to rigorously make sense of data (Braun et al., 2019). Then, in depth searching for themes within the codes took place to assist in the construction of an insightful narrative around the data. Then there was considerable back and forth reviewing, defining, and naming themes before the production of the final report.

4.3 Findings

Through RTA (Braun et al., 2019) six themes were identified with a total of eighteen subthemes. The findings are outlined throughout the narrative, with additional data shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: *Themes, subthemes and participant quotes*

Theme	Sub Theme	Participant Quotes
Programme Design	Initial Engagement	The workshop initially and knowing them around campus, so mine was a lot of face to face, knowing them that way, so was easier on my behalf there meeting them. It didn't really feel that awkward. (Amy)
	Programme Coordinator	If you forced me and [mentee] together to a meeting or a call or something I would have felt obligated or more obligation on me to actually keep reaching out and keep pushing if that makes sense? (Eoghan)
	Prior Experience	when you look at the other groups who had a year under their belt, they performed much better this year, if you draw a comparison between the two year. (Amy)
	Future Directions	Peer to peer support will be really important. I'm sure we'd all be willing to come back and support but even like next year just bringing people with us essentially because obviously we'd have the most experience out of all of them (Vincent)
Mentoring Process	Mentor Skills	If they say something that's a bit negative or something that can be improved on you don't take it to heart because its just like just like a chat. (Ray)
	Mentor Availability	I probably should probably reached out myself more so than relying on someone else it's just when you're in the middle of college and trying to get work done (Patricia)
		So it is not a case, that I wouldn't have wanted to help but at the time you asked me and the timeframe was particularly busy. (Eoghan)
	Engagement Type	He was watching matches and our interactions and then feeding back on that. Then when we met it was formal and we were analysing [games] together again so it was like bringing the two together (Denise)
Benefits of Mentoring	Benefits to Mentees	Example of the dashboard that we were going to send, he gave us some other things that we could add to it and those specific things like sources score and stuff he showed us how he had done that and previous template (Denise)
	Willingness to Mentor	I was thinking of when I was in their shoes in [college] and I had a mentor in [name]. (Amy)
	Benefits to Mentors	I think just to see them develop was good. And I suppose with [mentee], seeing her hopefully developing this string to her bow. (Amy)
Interactions with management Team	Embeddedness	I suppose them being so young and only learning their trade a small bit aswell that it gave a clear direction of what we're actually looking for. I think knowing exactly what we are at is hugely important for them to be able to deliver what we are after. (Mick)
		I used one of our management team, [name], to link in with them a good bit, to be able to filter out stuff before it was put in front of the players. (Pat)
	Player Engagement	As a management team at the end of the year when we did a review, I think we underutilised him, we didn't use him enough, in terms of in front of the team. (Liam)
	Autonomy	There was so much trust from minute one which is just something you wouldn't really expect and simply I didn't expect comparing it to home club, where it took a while for them to buy into the process (Shane)
		Think yourself rather than having everything prescribed, this is what we want, this is how we do it, do X, Y and Z and send it to us. You're able to go actually analyse games yourself (Patricia)
Analyst Input	PA Duties	So they were doing presentations themselves. It wasn't just here is the information and do what you want with it. It was more involving them. (Laura)
	Half Time Role	In-game analysis was kind of like we gave it to them at half time cause they'd have specific things or you obviously don't want to overload them with information at half time. Two or three things maybe we'd go and there was once or twice where we spoke at half time (Patricia)
	Decision Making	The players were so well armed, they knew what we wanted off them and they knew how they could break down teams. (Jimmy)
		It was great for that kind of intrinsic feedback for yourself just to say you've actually had an impact on how that game was played. (Vincent)
Developing as an analyst	Feedback	So she felt that she was having a direct input into what was happening and she could see it. (Liam)
		The players came and said, that one of the positives they found was the video analysis was kept short and snappy and that it was relevant. (Des)
	Areas for Improvement	Just constant interaction across all stakeholders and troubleshooting. (Neil)

4.3.1 Programme Design

There were areas explored around what optimum programme design entails. The subtheme of *initial engagements* identified the importance of face-to-face interaction at the programme outset, 'Mine was just e-mails at the start. But if I was to do it again, I'd definitely meet face to face and create that connection from the start' (Laura) and for that interaction to include coaches, 'I could have met them with the manager and see what their views and their philosophy was and what they wanted to get out of the PA' (Laura).

The importance of interactions with various stakeholders was further emphasised in the subtheme of the *role of the PC*. The PC was seen as an integral mechanism when assisting poorly functioning dyads and ensuring engagement, 'if forced together [by PC] to a meeting or a call, I would have felt more obligation on me to actually keep reaching out and keep pushing if that makes sense' (Eoghan).

The subtheme of *prior PA experience* highlighted how any experience is beneficial in the analysts development, 'Having been around the year before he knew the players, he was familiar with the management team and it really helped' (Liam), contrasted with 'He came to us with no Gaelic games experience and very little understanding of the game. So, it was like you'd to teach him everything from scratch' (Neil).

Within *future directions of the programme*, one mentor highlighted that PA is not an environment for learning on the job as you need systems in place to work optimally, 'It is so fast paced when you are involved in a team that sometimes it gets very frustrating if people are not catching up as quick as you'd hope' (Des). The opportunity for new analysts to work alongside a more experienced peer was identified,

> I'd feel an apprenticeship or someone underneath him would be good next year. So there wouldn't be a big hole left in two years time, as he has a lot of knowledge. A

person to pass the knowledge on year to year, so if there was a PA continuity plan. (Liam)

4.3.2 Mentoring Process

The subtheme of *mentors' skills* identified the process of mentoring as non linear and a learned skill, 'you use skills that you see other people doing' (Amy) and 'leaning on my profession, in terms of lecturing, in that sort of ilk' (Eoghan). Honesty was identified as crucial by mentees, they welcomed honesty from mentors in reviewing their work as they were operating in high performance environments. 'We were bringing stuff to him, and he'd review it, he knew he could be honest. And we didn't take offence' (Denise). The mentors also quietly challenged the opinions of the mentees 'he makes you think in fairness, which is good' (Ray) and 'I think bouncing ideas off each other is how people learn' (Shane).

The subtheme of *mentor availability* brought up contrasting responses. Mentors wanted to be supportive to mentees, but availability was problematic, 'not covering myself in glory, I was probably just too busy and happy enough to just let it drift' (Eoghan), while mentees also recognised this 'it's not to say that they can't be good mentors, it's just that they could be unbelievably busy in everything else, that this will take a low priority' (Patricia). In contrast, access to mentors was evident in the highly functioning dyads, 'he was on campus, and we could meet him week on week' (Ray).

The subtheme of *engagement type* identified how engagements were both formal and informal in nature, describing engagement as follows, 'for some of it there was a goal but then more informal at the matches it was a chat' (Denise). While the relationship was driven from both sides, 'if we wanted to meet, he'd always make time or before we presented anything we'd always make sure we get [content] to him before we presented, so it was two way' (Ray).

4.3.3 Benefits of Mentoring

The subtheme of *benefits to mentees* showcased sharing of technical information (task instruction) in dyads was evident, 'he showed us templates he had, which we brought into ours' (Denise). Mentees also outlined support afforded in utilising technology, 'I used Nacsport and Sportscode but never really Hudl to do analysis, so we spent time going through dashboards and then what kind of ways we could bring them in' (Denise). The importance of coach relations was emphasised in the focus groups, 'Definitely for me from the previous year he built relations between us and the management' (Patricia).

The subtheme of *willingness to mentor* identified an altruistic nature present in mentors. Some mentors mentioned previously receiving informal mentoring which aided their own careers and were thus willing to help others, 'the [PA] community is so helpful in terms of helping each other or sharing ideas. We were in their footsteps, so if you could give back in any way' (Laura).

While the subtheme of *benefits for mentors*, illustrated how they could learn from mentees, as they were closer in age to athletes they'd engage with in their own professional practice, 'The very fact that the mentee is 20/21, just how to engage with people of that age' (Eoghan). Mentors also highlighted new ways of thinking and access to new technology as ways they learned from mentees.

4.3.4 Interactions with Management Teams

In a subtheme of *embeddedness*, there was surprise at how some PA's were fully integrated into management teams was identified. Analysts were afforded support from specific coaches, which led to them being valued and aiding decision making. 'I found it very beneficial this year that [coach] was the link. It gave [Analyst] an idea of what we were thinking as managers too.' (Pat). This was also highlighted by mentors,

> They were appreciated and [manager] was very influential in that. They had that link. If they were doing the work and not getting appreciated or not getting value for it. I don't know if the same enthusiasm would be there to produce document, reports or do analysis. (Amy)

Within a subtheme of *player engagements*, it became evident that analysts were a useful bridge between management and players,

> I do feel a lot of the players nearly enjoyed engaging more with him than the management team because there wasn't that barrier. We are probably closer to being their dads than their brothers. [Analyst] was a friend and they probably could engage with him a bit better. Something we possibly didn't utilise enough. (Liam)

While the analysts also gained confidence and energy from engaging directly with players too,

> I found myself more motivated to get through a mountain of work on opposition or a game we just played, and I felt like the players are very accepting of any kind of feedback, whether it be positive or something to work on. (Vincent)

Mentees identifying how important the coach-analyst relationship was explored in the subtheme of *autonomy*. This was highlighted by trust levels, 'I think to be honest they trusted me' (Patricia) and 'you're kind of given the license to, not fail, but make mistakes and test things out' (Shane). Furthermore, a mentor was equally surprised by the approach of a coach operating in a high performance environment affording autonomy to analysts, 'I think [Manager] became more open to PA this year and letting the lads do it' (Amy). There was further autonomy afforded in delivering presentations 'we were given ownership to provide them presentations' (Denise).

4.3.5 Analyst Input

The functions carried out by analysts were outlined within the subtheme of *Analyst duties*. Analysts conducted roles including, in game notational stats, post-game analysis and opposition analysis, among other duties. They craved further responsibility to complete the analysis cycle 'the only other thing to consider is the [videoing], we were relying on match footage to be uploaded by someone else, rather than do it all yourself' (Vincent).

Some analysts were given the responsibility to communicate directly with player, which was explored in the subtheme of *half time roles*, 'in crunch situations, like the semi-final of [competition], we're down by 5 points and you're the one to come onto the pitch and give the messages' (Shane), while other communicated with management as 'gatekeepers' of the information 'they knew what they wanted to say at half time, and those targets had been agreed in an analysis meeting, so we knew and they knew what they were trying to get from it' (Denise).

In the subtheme of *decision making*, coaches highlighted instances where the analysts input directly affected decision making,

> There was a defensive puckout strategy, that we were tracking. And we changed our tactical set up, as we got feedback during the year and we started getting huge success. It was instant feedback. When we met the players at half time we were able to say, they've only won 30% of their puck outs and we could put it down to our tactical tweak or set up. (Liam)

> A good example is [opposition], they communicated we were winning puck outs on one side and not winning the other, we kept hitting them to one side. And when we got the message in, we started winning all our puck outs. (Pat)

Coaches emphasised how important the information was for session planning 'we'd build out sessions based on the numbers of the previous game' (Mick). However, some coaches

felt that the PA's didn't know how valuable their input was, 'I don't think they realised until very late in the year that the information they were giving was impacting our decisions' (Mick).

4.3.6 Developing as an analyst

Within the subtheme of *feedback,* coaches provided an excellent indicator on the improvement and evolving role of analyst, indicating that they added value and highlighted improvements in their professional practice. For example, in-game support was lauded 'The way they communicated to me on the side line was excellent… They made it very simple. They had a cheat sheet, where I could quickly scan the numbers and know exactly what was going on' (Pat). While post-game support was also highlighted positively, 'having them in the team meetings and having them present, strengthened their confidence and presentation skills, they needed to stand in front of a room of county players and get a message across' (Des), which was echoed by the analysts, 'I think the big thing personally was confidence, in presenting' (Shane) and 'when presenting you don't want to sound like you don't know what you're talking about' (Vincent).

This progress was not evident for all analysts, which was evidenced within the subtheme of *areas for improvement*, as students who were in their first year of PA support were not as accomplished in terms of clarity 'if you were giving lads certain specific numbers, you'd be wondering are they actually right?' (Neil), thus highlighting the varying success of this mentoring programme.

4.4 Discussion

Findings suggest positive development of the analysts, positing mentoring as a useful educational tool. In comparison to coaches acting as 'gatekeepers' of information between analysts and players (Bampouras et al., 2012), there was considerable opportunity afforded to the analysts to deliver to players, despite the high stakes nature of their environment. This opportunity afforded is a result of trust earned, and relationships grown by the analysts, both

benefits of fostering positive relationships (Nelson et al., 2023). This development of trust led to improvements in practice for many of the functions of PA (Hughes and Franks, 2007); a) providing immediate feedback, evidenced by the provision of information to coaches at half time, b) evaluating specific aspects of performance, illustrated with their provision of video supports, c) evaluating specific aspects of performance, shown by measurement of key performance indicators and d) assisting coaches with selection mechanisms, evidenced by providing individual information and opposition analysis.

Furthermore, dyadic mentoring was successful as a development resource. However, the analysts also indicated that interactions with coaches, players, peer analysts and external mentors influenced their development, suggesting triadic or multiple mentoring approaches may be more successful in this context. This accessing of support from various sources aligns with the development of neophyte sports scientists operating in high performance environments (Gillham et al., 2015). Furthermore, findings highlight areas for improvement and areas for sustained focus to ensure formal mentoring programmes can support the development of analysts. The nuances within the findings indicate that if applied thoughtfully, they can guide evidenced-informed practice across contexts (Taylor et al., 2023). Therefore, simply replicating mentoring programmes in different environments may not be advisable, as the conditional knowledge acquired within this setting may not apply in other settings (Collins et al., 2022). Consequently, PCs should apply their own Professional Judgement and Decision Making to ensure their intentions for impact are met (Martindale & Collins, 2012). For example, there are several key stakeholders who all contribute towards the need for a flexible design. It is suggested that analysts need to gain experience in the field and acquire it quickly, inserting analysts with no experience in a results driven environment is not optimal. The importance of contextual awareness, technical capability and sport expertise were identified as crucial for analysts (Martin et al., 2021; Nelson et al., 2023). The in-situ mentoring support that

was provided to the analysts in this programme helped develop the intangible skills required to be an effective PA, which are difficult to acquire through traditional educational methods (Nelson et al., 2023), alongside acquiring task specific professional skills.

From a formal mentoring perspective, the PC has a crucial role in mentor selection, ensuring their accessibility and availability are crucial for individual mentees (see Chapter Three). Subsequently, initial matching should be considered carefully against the context of the intervention (Collins et al., 2022). Purposeful matching and training have been evidenced previously (see Chapter Three; Comeaux, 2010; Hoffmann, 2019), however initial training alone is inadequate and continuous support for mentors from the PC is required. Often in formalised mentoring programmes the PC recruits mentors based on a subjective approach selecting individual who they feel embody a desired set of dispositions and attitudes (Leeder et al., 2019). Training can be difficult to apply properly as so many of the relationships are unique, but this is where the PC can provide role clarity.

Making multi-disciplinary sports management teams aware of their part in the growth of the analyst is crucial to their functioning, whilst generating a mutually beneficial social exchange (see Chapter Two). While most coaches in this research are aware of the importance of PA in the coaching process and its impact on performance, there are some who are still to fully embrace PA. Consequently, stakeholder misunderstanding on the role of PA in the coaching process has been identified as a considerable stressor for both analysts and coaches (Martin et al, 2023). Therefore, continued efforts to address this collaborative understanding around the co-creation of knowledge is crucial, as we progress from traditional dyad through to triadic and beyond to multiple mentor relationships. The role of the PC is also one that is frequently mentioned in making sure all stakeholders are aware of PA impact, which aligns with literature, as the role of the PC scaffolding sports science supports was seen as critical (Gillham et al., 2015). The PC has a challenging task providing development opportunities for

analysts operating within a result driven environment, achieving this coherence requires clear understanding of the programme across all stakeholders (Taylor & Collins, 2021).

When considering the findings in this chapter a MMN may best facilitate the development of neophyte analysts. This has been suggested previously in coach education literature (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021; Olsson et al., 2017). The MMN in this context included formal mentor(s), peer student analysts, team coach or manager, external mentors and the PC. Consequently, a MMN approach can reduce the probability of dysfunctional mentoring (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021), advancing beyond one-dimensional traditional dyadic relationships and potential micro political issues (Sawiuk et al., 2017). This breadth of support can help in the development of analysts with the varied challenges they encounter (Martin et al., 2023), and support learning pathways tailored towards the individual (Knowles et al., 2001; Nelson et al., 2023). Previously, the utilisation of a MMN was advocated within sports coaching practice (Sawiuk et al., 2017). Such an approach also appears beneficial to analysts as; (a) different mentors can provide different assistance based on needs, from helping with relationships to technical knowledge (Mezias & Scandura, 2005), (b) analysts are part of multi-disciplinary sports science teams, thus interacting with others requires considerable skill sets (Bampouras et al., 2012), (c) the peer network of developing analysts can also be a significant resource for each other as they explore similar yet different challenges within their teams and (d) the level of interaction of analysts with coaches means they can be significant performance supports (McKenna et al., 2018).

Crucially, the coach-analyst relationship appeared to be central for successful PA provision (Martin et al, 2021: McKenna et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2023; Wright et al., 2014). The coaches assisted integrating analysts into the team environment, affording them trust and responsibility. As evidenced in the findings, coach relations was an area where mentors provided guidance to mentees. Some mentees discussed how advice on approaching problems

and communication, helped them develop strong relationships with coaches. This type of social development supports analysts as they navigate the challenges of providing value in performance environments (Nelson et al., 2023). Consequently, to ensure analysts are utilised and valued, organisations should ensure that coaches are aware of their role in the development of analysts. There appears to be significant social exchange taking place between coaches and analysts, with both POS and LMX in operation (see Chapter Two). POS is manifested by the coaches willingness to support the development of the burgeoning analysts as they are a member of the same club, while the analyst desire to support the coach who is showing faith and interest in them illustrates both POS and LMX. Many of the coaches invested considerable time engaging with the analyst, as they felt they were an integral part of the coaching process (Groom et al., 2011). Such an approach has significant benefit for coaches as a competent analyst can add value, particularly in terms of opposition analysis. This finding draws parallels with Andersen et al. (2021), who found utilising a collaborative approach to PA and knowledgeable others enhances overall learning and group dynamic. This findings also interacts with concepts of SET, as the coaches felt investment of time into the analyst, provided them support, thus they would reciprocate with analysis that was impactful (see Chapter Two). For example, analysts in this research, typically spent more time analysing opponents than coaches, thus, the analyst could be deemed the most knowledgeable individual and therefore scaffold the learning to aid the players' (Andersen et al., 2021). A more integrated link between coaches, mentors, and analysts at the outset of the programme may further facilitate cohesion and coherence in this area, with stakeholders using shared mental models (SMM) amidst their competing agendas (Collins et al., 2022).

Finally, suggestions arose in the findings on how to tailor the programme to provide additional learning opportunities for neophyte analysts. Mentoring managed to help in the development of the social skills required by analysts, which are often overlooked during formal

PA education but are crucial for success (Nelson et al., 2023). Both mentees and coaches proposed the idea of current mentees becoming mentors in the future (similar to Chapter Three and Five). In line with previous research, findings suggest that those who received positive mentoring experiences are more likely to be good mentors themselves in the future (Arnold et al., 2021). Peer mentoring has been evidenced to be effective in coaching as there is a narrower epistemological gap between mentor and mentees (see Chapter Three; Olsson et al., 2017), this peer mentoring approach could be deemed worthy of consideration to enhance effectiveness, as the mentee-mentor gap was considerable for this programme.

4.4.1 Limitations

The collection point at the conclusion of the programme, while rich in terms of data sourced from three different populations, has limitations regarding the comparability to a pre programme or mid programme collection point to gather information on development over time of mentors and mentees. While the additional data collection point of the focus groups with coaches were included in this research, the inclusion of similar (or questionnaires) on the perceptions of players, may have contributed in gaining further understanding of the analysts input, as they are in fact the end users of the information.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to explore the process and relationships of a formal mentoring programme for neophyte analysts, building upon the findings of Chapter Three. Specifically, this chapter sought to explore experiences of analysts operating within a Gaelic Games tertiary education setting. Six main themes were generated which provided additional insights into the realities of a formal mentoring programme for analysts.

First, mentoring can be used to develop analysts. Like coaches, analysts educational development is individualised and requires ad hoc learning pathways tailored towards the individual's needs (Knowles et al., 2001; Nelson et al., 2023). Second, programme design is

crucial, with an awareness of the nuances within the programme required to ensure success, due to the complex and dynamic setting that analysts operate in (cf. Olsson et al 2017). Third, the coach-analyst relationship appears central for successful PA provision, as coaches have the opportunity to integrate analysts into their management team structure to enhance coaching delivery. A direct coach-analyst link was instrumental in the provision of quality PA. A more integrated link between all contributors can further facilitate considerable cohesion and coherence (Collins et al., 2022). Finally, we suggest that a MMN might be best suited for developing PA's. A MMN has been suggested in previous literature (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021; Olsson et al., 2017) as they can be used to provide individualised support to mentees, providing more of what they need and less of what they don't need, engaging with mentors in a needs driven approach (Mezias & Scandura, 2005). In summary, this chapter identifies several factors which are important for the implementation of a formal mentoring programme with developing analysts, which may be useful for various organisations across various sports, in both PA and other sport science domains. The chapter builds on the findings of Chapter Three, as it identifies the gap in knowledge and experience within the dyad was too wide for this particular cohort. The chapter also illustrates that traditional dyadic mentoring may not be the solution in all settings, thus this chapter suggests the potential to explore the efficacy of MMN with a cohort with a variety of demands, which sets up the MMN programme design which will now be explored in Chapter Five with coaches.

Chapter 5: A pick and mix approach: An exploration of a multiple mentor network for developing coaches

5.1 Introduction

Having explored dyadic mentoring across Chapter Three and Four, it was apparent that informally mentees were engaging with a broader range of stakeholders to support the development of the required skills and knowledge to operate effectively in their context. The findings in Chapter Four in particular prompted consideration of how the programme and PC could more deliberately support mentees through engagement with a broader stakeholder group of mentors. Consequently, this chapter explores a mentoring programme designed from a MMN perspective.

5.1.1 Coach Learning

Sports coaches have been shown to learn in a variety of different ways, encompassing formal (e.g., NGB accredited coaching courses), informal (e.g., ad-hoc interactions with peer coaches) and non-formal (e.g., annual coaching conferences) learning (Nelson et al., 2006). There has been considerable critique of formal education for coaches, in that they lack contextual sensitivity (Chesterfield et al., 2010), and influence or even indoctrinate a coach's thinking (Nelson et al., 2006). A coach's personal epistemology means they may view these formal coach education opportunities as insufficient to support their varying needs (Olsson et al., 2017). A coach's epistemology can be characterised along a continuum from naïve to sophisticated, with a naïve epistemology viewing knowledge as simple, specific and handed down (Grecic & Collins, 2013). A more sophisticated epistemological stance views knowledge as complex, uncertain and context dependent (Crowther et al., 2022). Furthermore, coach learning literature has shown that coaches place value on unmediated experiential learning through interactions with other coaches (Leeder & Cushion, 2020; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). Consequently, the provision of freedom and less formal opportunities for coaches to

recognise and explore their coaching with others has been identified as a means of developing more effective coaching strategies and more reflexive thinking (Cope et al., 2021). For example, as experiential and contextually based learning has been advocated ahead of other formal options, mentoring is a relational and contextualised education method with significant potential for impact (Bailey et al., 2019). As such, coach mentoring is a tool which can support the perceived needs of developing coaches (Sawiuk et al., 2024). The role of the mentor in progressing a mentee's epistemology along a continuum from naïve to sophisticated can help balance the mentee's current desire for concrete answers with a more conditional consideration of options for action (Olsson et al., 2017). This can be achieved by positioning the learning in the contextualised working environment of the mentee, where greater understanding of contextually specific learning needs can be identified (Bailey et al., 2019).

5.1.2 Mentoring and Multiple Mentor Networks in Coaching

Benefits of mentoring in a sports coaching context include, broadening perspectives, access to a critical friend (Jones et al., 2009), increased instrumental and psychosocial support (Schempp et al., 2016), increased self-reflection, and increased commitment to enhancing effectiveness as a coach (Nash, 2003). Mentoring of sports coaches has been positioned as a pedagogical approach, which may address criticisms of formal coach education, due to its ability to support the experiential learning of coaches in a contextualised manner (Ives et al., 2023; Leeder & Sawuik, 2021). Mentoring can address these criticisms as the mentor scaffolds the mentees development, through appropriate instruction, resources, guidance, challenging and questioning (McQuade et al., 2015). However, this is not without challenge, as the identification of mentors who are knowledgeable and possess an appropriate amount of social, cultural, and symbolic capital (through experience, standing in community and qualifications) to obtain the respect from their mentees has proven difficult (Jones et al., 2009). Following the identification of suitable mentors, their training has been shown to be haphazard due to ill

devised episodic training and naïve interpretation of mentoring in action (Leeder & Cushion, 2020; Sawiuk et al., 2024). The reason for mentor's willingness to engage in the mentoring process varies ranging from enhancing career progression prospects (Sawiuk et al., 2018), through to a moral compass aligned to care for, and to help others (Ives et al., 2023).

Traditionally, dyadic approaches to mentoring have been adopted, where dyads are matched in anticipation that one mentor will provide all the desired support for the mentee (Sawiuk et al., 2017). However, such an approach has been critiqued for its reliance on the knowledge of just two people (Sawiuk et al., 2024). Consequently, MMN have been identified to address these issues in other domains, as mentees can utilise support from various sources depending on the type or amount of support required (Chapter 4; Higgins & Kram, 2001).

The concept of MMN (or Developmental Networks) were originally posited during the original introduction to mentoring theory (Kram, 1985). In sport, it has been suggested that mentees should access a variety of mentors, including cross sport and non-sport mentors (Sawiuk et al., 2017). MMN consist more broadly of individuals who actively take an interest in the development of proteges career and provide them with direct assistance (Sawiuk et al., 2017). This approach gives the learner the opportunity to learn from multiple sources and consider what to apply from the various mentors (Sawiuk et al., 2017). Thus, positioning the mentee central to the learning rather than being marginalised, with knowledge constructed with, not through, people (Cope at al., 2021). This concept can address the suppression of the learner's involvement in learning in traditional coach education models by positioning them as co-constructors of a curriculum, thus affording them the freedom to learn in their context, while being cared for by experienced others

(Cope et al., 2021). The implementation of a MMN in sports coaching can help overcome some of the inherent micro-political problems, such as panoptic relationships that control mentees or indoctrinate them into organisational methods and values (Zehntner & McMahon,

2019). Diversification of mentors within a MMN can help spread the source of knowledge beyond one overall knowledge source (Sawiuk et al., 2017). In addition, non-sport and cross-sport mentors were suggested to provide holistic support to the mentees (Sawiuk et al., 2018). Mentors are also protected by not needing to fulfil every need for their mentees as they can signpost to others (Sawiuk et al., 2017).

5.1.3 Programme Design

Much of the criticism that is directed towards formal coach education (Cope et al., 2021), and of traditional dyadic formal mentoring (Jones et al., 2009; Sawiuk et al., 2017), suggests that an opportunity to adopt hybrid models of coach education could be beneficial. The selection of mentors who also coach in multiple different environments can protect mentees against programmes which try to institutionalise mentees to specific agendas (Sawiuk et al., 2017) and/or subtly align mentees with culturally accepted coaching models (Leeder & Cushion, 2000; Zehntner & McMahon, 2019). It is often the case that mentors are selected to prepare mentees for a formal assessment, rather than promoting positive coaching pedagogies and learning opportunities in practice (Sawiuk et al., 2024). Mentoring with an aim of delayed gratification regarding the development of coaches, alleviates the need to justify the success of mentoring programmes through the provision of measurable outcomes for funding purposes (Sawiuk et al., 2018). Contextually bound mentoring requires specialised coaching expertise and contextual sensitivity (Griffith & Armour, 2012), and it could be argued that heightened awareness and sensitivity is required when the mentees are likely to transfer their coaching to multiple environments. The global or macro understanding for the wider or long-term needs of mentees, in this regard could lie with the PC. Most formal mentoring programme's delivery is likely to depend on a PC. However, the PC is typically overlooked in the literature, affording merely ill-defined episodic support rather than serving as an integral component of dyadic relationships (Sawiuk et al., 2024). While, attending PC-led mentoring training may assist in

establishing role clarity, it does not ensure meaningful mentoring relationships (Sawiuk et al., 2024), thus rather than initial or irregular support, it is believed that ongoing PC support is fundamental to the success of mentoring. According to Ives et al. (2023), deformalising training within formal mentoring fosters trust between mentors and mentees. Although, this mentor training seldom goes beyond episodic workshops (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021), the PC's ability to facilitate relationships across programmes offers the chance for mentors to develop collaboratively in-situ. The PC can observe interactions between mentors and mentees in the field and their isolated coaching practices, enabling the provision of feedback. Thus, the PC must have sufficient declarative knowledge and understanding of the context of the programme to support mentors and mentees to use their knowledge appropriately. This requires a PC to use their professional judgement and decision making, using conditional knowledge on the basis that the interaction of knowledge and context forms the basis for optimal interventions (Collins et al., 2022). Through professional judgement and decision making, the PC should be able to progressively weaken dependence for mentees on certain mentors as their epistemology develops (Olsson et al., 2017), leading both mentors and mentees to different roles as their relationships develop.

5.1.4 Gaelic Games Coaching Landscape

Gaelic Games are a central part of Irish identity and culture, catering to all levels of society, through approximately 500,000 playing members requiring approximately 100,000 coaches (Gavin et al., 2024). The indigenous Irish sports of Gaelic games have been a key social, cultural, and political thread in the fabric of Irish society since 1884, with a community-driven, volunteer ethos in over 2500 clubs across all of Ireland and internationally (Jackman et al., 2024). To date, research in Gaelic Games has focused on performance supports such as physiology characteristics, physiotherapy and PA (Boyle et al., 2023), however recently coaching research has become more prevalent (Gavin et al., 2024; Moran et al., 2024). Despite

this growth in coaching research, much of it has focused on coaching as opposed to coach development (Gavin et al., 2024). The GAA, along with the Camogie Association and Ladies Gaelic Football Association, recently conducted research into the state of coaching and coach education in Gaelic Games (Horgan et al, 2021). The report highlighted that the existing coach qualification system is inadequate and does not fit the needs of coaches in practice (cf. Cope et al., 2021). Specifically, it was noted that much of the coach education provision does not suit the learner, instead serving the agenda of the educator (i.e., top-down decisions from the organisation: Stodter & Cushion, 2019). Additionally, among respondents, mentoring was identified as a learning opportunity, with 35% of coaches being mentored and 32% acting as mentors to others (Horgan et al., 2021). Additionally, coaches identified observing and working with other coaches (79%), collaborative reflection (78%) and working with a specific mentor (45%) as some of the most important activities to support learning (Horgan et al., 2021), All of which are informal activities which could potentially be done with a mentor. Recommendations that stemmed from the report included; creating a sustainable coach support programme, more collaborative reflection opportunities and needs based learning opportunities (Horgan et al., 2021).

Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the experiences of mentees in a MMN, within a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment. The primary purpose was to identify the effectiveness of a MMN for student-coaches, while the secondary purpose was to explore the impact of programme design.

5.2 Methods

Considering the context of investigation, a pragmatic approach was employed to provide practical solutions to contemporary problems experienced by people in social contexts (Giacobbi et al., 2005). Pragmatism adheres to an evidence-informed approach, focusing on what works in practice, guided by empirical evidence, rather than rigid adherence to certain

ontological or epistemological assumptions (Jenkins, 2017). Pragmatism offers a flexible and outcome-oriented approach to understanding, in this sense, diverging from positivist and constructivist positions by focusing on what works in practice and can be empirically justified (Jenkins, 2017). As both the PC and the primary researcher, I was a co-constructor of knowledge with the participants (Giacobbi et al., 2005); a process facilitated through immersion within the DCU Gaelic Games tertiary education environment in this study. My positionality as the PC within the research influences the research as it is not possible to be completely removed from the social process under investigation (Holmes, 2020). However, rather than being seen as risking bias, this was seen as a resource in the collection and analysis of the data, due to my understanding of the context (May, 2011). Consequently, a multi-methods research design was employed. This design utilised two forms of qualitative data, namely reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. The methods employed show differences to the methods utilised in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, as the nature of the population under investigation required a subtle change in approach. Multiple data collection points were used to assess changes in participants perceptions over a season, thus adhering to the pragmatic research philosophy.

5.2.1 Participants

A purposive sampling approach was employed for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). Embedded in a purposive sampling approach is the ability to compare experiences identifying similarities and differences in the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). Again, my role as an 'insider', was supplemented by my supervisor acting as an 'outsider', this helped avoid the selection bias associated with purposive sampling. The sample size was not viewed as a limitation, due to the sample being information-rich in relation to the aims of the study on mentor-mentee experiences and the specificity of their own experiences in this phenomenon,

suggesting there is sufficient 'information power' across the sample (Malterud et al., 2016). Participants in this study consisted of four student-coaches who were mentees and six mentors, with varied skill sets and experiences as mentors and coaches. Mentors were identified in the four field codes of Gaelic Games (Hurling, Camogie, Ladies Football and Men's Football), mentors were all involved in coaching or held performance roles in the institution (See Table 5.1 below). All mentors and mentees appear as pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Mentors were contacted by the PC, where the programme concept was outlined in detail, with opportunity for questions provided. The four mentees were all student-coaches managing or coaching teams in DCU Dóchas Éireann GAA Club, who all exhibited a desire to progress as coaches. The programmed facilitated mentors mentoring more than one mentee, and mentees engaging with more than one mentor.

Table 5.1: *Mentors Biographies*

Pseudonym	Gender	Coaching Experience	Professional Career	Mentoring Experience
Laura	Female	5 – 10 Years	Sports Development	Yes
Colm	Male	5 – 10 Years	Other	Yes
Mick	Male	10+ Years	Sports Development	No
Declan	Male	1 – 5 years	Teaching	Yes
Anne	Female	5 – 10 years	Teaching	No
Phil	Male	10+ Years	Teaching	Yes

5.2.2 Programme Design

The programme resided within DCU Dóchas Éireann GAA club, with teams playing at various levels from participation to performance. Following approval from the DCU ethics committee, (which covered issues around anonymity, and data security), and participant recruitment outlined above, and initial training was delivered. Training for mentors and mentees consisted of an in-person information and networking session at the outset outlining; the programme, potential engagement types, skills required and potential programme outcomes. Presentation slides are in Appendix 18. Mentors and mentees questions and to ensure

understanding. As per the details in the in-person meeting, the exact nature of the next meeting was left up to each dyad to decide; this freedom around engagement type was used with the aim of allowing for the strengths of informal mentoring to accrue (Sandardos & Chambers, 2019). As PC, I subsequently contacted participants throughout the eight-month programme and was accessible for ongoing support and supervision. This was required as mentors were recruited due to exhibiting the requisite cultural capital (i.e., the cultural value embodied in an asset [the mentor]; Throsby, 1999) yet still needed to be supported in areas where they had deficiencies (cf. Leeder et al., 2019). In this instance the cultural capital of mentors, as espoused by Bourdieu (Leeder & Cushion, 2020), was used to positively influence the behaviours of mentees. The status of the mentor helped for initial mentee 'buy in' to the mentors status as a coach, however additionally the mentor needed the PC in the development of their mentoring skills. This was required as literature has indicated that mentor training rarely extends beyond episodic workshops (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021), and does not guarantee meaningful and positive mentoring relationship, but can help to provide role clarity (Sawiuk et al., 2024), thus the need for ongoing PC support.

5.2.3 Procedure

Online reflective journals (see Appendix 19, 20, 21) were collected monthly, through Google Forms, throughout the eight-month programme and used to understand the experiences of mentors and mentees. The focus of the journals varied at different collection points, this was guided by the PC's observation on the functioning of the relationships and using my 'insider' knowledge as a guide for the development of the questions (e.g., how did they find the initial meeting? Has your coaching practice changed since September? If so, how and why?). These reflective journals acted as a stimulus to explore the nuances of experiences during the semi-structured interviews, providing participants the opportunity to outline their subjective experiences (Schutz et al., 2003). Due to the potential for the effectiveness of reflective journals

to be limited by the self-interpretation or perspective on the experiences by participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), semi structured interviews were used to add qualitative depth to the data collection. These interviews were guided by reflective journal entries to make sense of experiences and interpretations.

A total of twenty interviews took place face to face in a quiet room convenient and familiar to all participants. My positionality as an 'insider' embedded in the environment had positives and negatives for the interview process (Holmes, 2020). The familiar setting and my pre-existing relationship with participants helped with understanding of colloquial language and recognition of non-verbal cues in participants. However, this was contrasted by the challenges of bringing an external perspective to interviews, as existing relationships had the potential to restrict exploration of sensitive topics that an 'outsider' may have probed further with openness considering the absences of future interactions (Holmes, 2020). A total of twenty interviews were conducted with mentors (n=8) and mentees (n=12), with the mentor's interviews taking place mid and post programme, while the mentee interviews had an additional data collection point pre programme, to ascertain their coaching experience, programme outcomes and perspective of mentoring. Interview guides (See Appendix 22, 23, 24, 25, 26) were created with reference to the literature and research context, as well as the information provided in the reflective journals. The interviews lasted between 22 – 76 minutes, (mean = 38 minutes). The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim before analysis.

5.2.4 Data Analysis

RTA was employed to analyse the reflective journals and interviews (Braun et al., 2019). I actively engaged in interpreting data through the lens of my own cultural membership and social position in DCU Dóchas Éireann GAA club, as well as my evolving scholarly knowledge (Braun et al., 2019). This required the use reflexivity to reduce my own personal

bias and reflect openly on the data collected. In addition, as an 'insider' to the environment under investigation, the support of my supervisor in acting as an 'outsider' to the Gaelic Games tertiary education environment with extensive experience in another sport and as a researcher in sport, helped through this reflexive process. This 'insider' and 'outsider' perspective was seen as a resource in the collection and analysis of data, as without this insight there is potential for weakened theoretical sensitivity leading to reduced quality of findings (May & Perry, 2022).

A six-phase analysis process was used. Firstly, familiarisation with the data took place. This engagement was trying to draw connections between data and existing literature to allow for direction of future coding (Braun et al., 2019). Secondly, generation of codes using qualitative software analysis, which helped simplify the organisation process (QSR NVIVO-12 (2020, R1). The coding phase in RTA is about focused attention, to make sense of data systematically and rigorously (Braun et al., 2019). Then, in depth searching for themes within the codes took place to assist in the construction of an insightful narrative around the data. Then there was considerable back and forth reviewing, defining, and naming themes before the production of the final report. This was not a straightforward process, where regression during the process was evident, as the codes, subthemes and themes interacted (and clashed) in the search for discernible findings on mentoring, grounded in both the data and existing literature (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2024). Rigor and trustworthiness were addressed via 'a critical friend', where the already mentioned supervisor, challenged interpretation through a process of critical dialogue (Smith & McGannon, 2018). This process was not designed to achieve a consensus but encourage reflexivity and reduce bias, through the exploration of alternate explanations and perspectives (Smith & McGannon, 2018), again, embracing the combination of the analysis being grounded in the data and against existing theory to deepen interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Thus, a challenge was presented with what to report in

the findings and what not to report (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Consequently, it was determined to present findings in a manner that allows for flexibility in interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2024).

5.3 Findings

Through the data analysis, three themes were identified with a total of twelve subthemes. These are highlighted in the subsequent narrative, with further breadth illustrated in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: *Themes, subthemes and data from participants*

Theme	Sub Theme	Participant Quote
The protagonists in mentoring	Mentor characteristics	[Declan] was very relatable in everything he was saying and he had experienced nearly the exact same thing I am experiencing now. (Ciara)
		You would never know that he is so accomplished in his field because he just makes you feel like he's just an ordinary fella. (James)
	Mentee characteristics & how they learn	His humbleness strikes me, just wanting to learn and willing to learn he is very teachable. (Phil)
		Getting different pieces of advice and having different chats with the people who've coached me, senior players, chatting to them lads about their experiences of different setups and picking up little nuggets. (Declan)
		I would view in the GAA there is a lot of out of context information regarding games and drills. (Phil)
	Relevant others	It's massively important in terms of building good female coaches that they have them role models. (Laura)
		I felt [peer coach] had a better tactical knowledge from being involved in elite sport environments but after talking with [Colm], I felt that I had the same if not better, I deserve a seat at the table, but I lacked a bit of confidence in my knowledge. I started to have more of a say and back myself. (James)
	Perceptions of others within scheme	It's something I'm trying to work on, to bring these people down a peg in my estimation because I hype people up. Yes, they're specialised but also a lot of that stuff isn't rocket science. A lot of other factors go into why these people go into these positions, it's not just their expertise in this or that. (James)
		These [mentees] are critically minded, they're curious and I'm impressed with their want to learn. (Phil)
The development of a programme	Optimum programme design	I like that every pairing has autotomy to build their relationship whatever way works for them. Relationships are tricky and if you put too many constraints on it, it could cause conflict, as you're forcing people together. (Declan)
		It can get very over baring when it's formal and I think informal communication is the way to go as it allows honesty and openness. (Mark)
		It's again what's realistic, what's relevant in the setting? (Phil)
	Engagement type	He brought out his tactical pad and went through a few different ideas, to do with the problems we had. (James)
	Barriers to mentoring	Looking back on it, I'm probably a little bit annoyed at myself for not taking more of a lead in it. (Laura)
		Scheduling issue as the reason for the relationship not developing. (Mark)

		In the GAA where there is an over scarcity mindset its going to be impediment to the mentorship model. (Phil)
	Developing an informal community	That kind of community in ladies football is growing out, which we didn't have before. (Colm)
		The general feedback I've gotten from a lot of GAA coaches is they're not that open to sharing ideas. (Phil)
		I don't think there's any need to be hiding anything because it's not top secret stuff it's the same stuff done in a different way. (Colm)
The process of mentoring	Non-linearity of relationships	Our conversations started initially with football and tactics and they went onto life stuff and all this, which was great. (James)
		I'm not naive to think that I would have necessarily clicked with everyone because we are all different. (Phil)
		[Anne] is a female role model in coaching but you can tell she's been there done that and I want to gain as much as I can from her. (Ciara)
	Mentoring in action	When we were going through tactics and problem solving with [Colm] there'd be a few things where I'd be like 'no that wouldn't work in my context' but to be honest I like that because it makes me think about the problem more. (James)
		I noticed that Monday before the final they were a little bit insecure in their decisions and what they were looking for was justification for their decisions, that support of having someone to be able to bounce your decisions off can be a massive support. (Colm)
	Navigating challenge in coaching	It's what's most relevant and useful at a particular time, if a match is coming up, and they just have acute scenarios that they need a quick fix too, that completely makes sense that they were getting this off [Colm]. (Phil)
		It's all experiential learning. You need to be put in those situations, whether you make the right decisions or wrong decision. (Declan)
	Impact on participants	He me think about my technical model, my game model, even my management teams, basically reinvestigate my thoughts and current beliefs. (Phil)
		I see a change in [Niall]. I'd see less ego based decision making that was there early in the year. (Declan)
		I remember saying in the first interview that results are a big thing to me and they still are. But, I feel like my self-esteem as a coach isn't tied up as much as it used to be with the results because you could be getting a lot out of the team and still not winning. (James)
		Definitely around communication. Buzzwords, instead of going on a big spiel about heads up football, just 'meercat'. (James)

5.3.1 The Protagonists in Mentoring

The theme of the protagonists in mentoring consisted of four subthemes, *mentor characteristics, mentee characteristics and how they learn, relevant others* and *perceptions of others within scheme*. This theme explores the role of protagonists involved in the process and moves beyond looking at mentoring solely as a dyadic relationship, acknowledging the role of significant others in the mentoring process.

The subtheme of *mentor characteristics* encompassed a variety of traits, but some common ones were being approachable, respected, honest and knowledgeable, "both very

modern and progressive coaches, and [Phil] brought a scientific approach," (James), along with honesty, "[Anne] is to the point and will say it as it is instead of trying to sugar coat it" (Ciara). While mentors had different motivations for mentoring, they were largely guided by altruistic reasons, such as past experiences “I have had great mentors, so I know the power of having great mentors, so it was just to pay that forward” (Phil) and “when I started off coaching I found it quite difficult to get any support locally” (Colm).

Through the subtheme of *mentee characteristics and how they learn*, mentees were described as curious, caring, hardworking and teachable. The impact this had on the process was outlined by Phil, “[his] reciprocity was so evident, he is so enthusiastic, that I’m enthusiastic about it, so you feed off that”. The mentees also had different motivations for their involvement in coaching, along with different levels of experience, which impacted upon the subsequent mentoring process. This motivation and experience impacted how mentees acquired coaching knowledge, which was namely through uninterrogated avenues such as books, social media, other coaches they’ve both observed and played under, “little nuggets from those lads that I’ve tried to take to my own coaching, as I think success definitely does leave clues, if you can absorb what they’re saying” (James). The problematic issue of contextually redundant formal coach education was highlighted as a coach learning source, which only satisfied Gaelic Games coaches to an extent, “they’re great for someone who is starting out but I do think [other mediums] give more niche advice” (James). James further emphasised this as the mentoring process developed:

> If you have a set curriculum of how you develop coaches, are you not making the same type of coach? Therefore, developing the same type of players and you’re losing creativity. So, that’s what I liked with [Colm], he wasn't telling me what to do he was giving me ideas and then I could act on that and then maybe ask a couple of question or maybe figure it out myself (James).

The subtheme of *relevant others* demonstrated how the protagonists of mentoring extended beyond those directly involved in the relationship, highlighting how mentoring can affect relationships within, across, and outside of specific dyads. Role models both positive and negative shaped interactions from both the mentor and mentee standpoint. Both mentors and mentees directed what they desired to afford or receive from their interactions based on their own past experiences interacting with others. Additionally, mentors felt that the role of the PC in prompting connection and suggesting activity types was important, "this conversation will re-spark me to engage" (Colm) and they sought feedback from the PC on how their individual dyadic relationships were going in comparison to others, to ensure better practice. The mentoring process also helped shape the mentee's interactions with their peer coaches and those they were working alongside in practice (across DCU Dóchas Éireann GAA Club), as it helped mentees navigate difficult situations, "[mentor] guided me in dealing with a difficult conversation with one of my [peer] coaches" (Niall). While, the notion of learning from peers was further emphasised, "I found [peer coach] was very good tactically, so I even learned from him, just because he would be able to see things quicker" (Ciara).

How protagonists perceived and subsequently interacted with each other was framed in the subtheme of *perceptions of others within programme*, there was a sense of humility in how the participants viewed themselves, one mentee described an initial apprehension, "I felt that this guy's high up, he mightn't have time for some fella to be asking stupid questions, based on the position that he held" (James), this was later deemed to be an inaccurate initial impression as their relationship developed. Mentors were further impressed with mentees desire to learn, "these guys want to be critically minded and they're curious, very impressed with their drive, want to learn and curiosity" (Phil).

5.3.2 The Development of a Mentoring Programme

The theme of the development of a mentoring programme, explored the facilitators and

inhibitors of mentoring programmes and consisting of four subthemes, *optimum programme design, engagement type, barriers to mentoring* and *developing an informal community*. In the subtheme of *optimum programme design*, participants talked about the benefit of the flexibility within the programme and the formal-informal balance:

> The relationship that I have with [James] has grown from the informality and the one with [Mark] probably could've grown a bit more if there was a small bit more formality to it, even if it was just a box to be ticked where we would've been forced to make more time for each other. (Colm)

The initial face-to-face meeting format helped break down boundaries, "the [introduction] meeting was great, it was a light fun introduction to each other and the programme" (Declan) and importantly allowed for everything to get a sense of each other "it created a sense of relaxation and a comfort with mentors" (Mark). Despite its strengths, there were still areas for improving the programme, more regular formal engagement points for sub optimal dyads was suggested, along with further workshop formats to further expand informal networks, "there's value in having formal touchpoints, that would've facilitated me and [Declan] into situations where you'd have more conversations" (Colm). A mentee also suggested the idea of current mentees being mentors in future years, "a student coach acting as a mentor would be even more relatable to mentees next year" (James), solidifying the sustainability of the programme.

The subtheme of *engagement type*, illustrated the breadth of activities that mentors and mentees engaged in. Different mentees utilised different forms of engagement to engage with their mentee, helping to maintain informality, and provide mentees with an insight into the range of environments coaches operate in. Activities such as both ad hoc and structured meetings, phone calls and messaging were all seen as beneficial and were described as "opportunities to bounce off him" (Declan) and "a sounding board" (Niall). Furthermore,

mentors provided mentees with an open door to training sessions, along with both team and management meetings. It was apparent that hands-on practical opportunities to engage with mentors demonstrated how the scheme can support mentees, with some mentees relishing in the practical nature of engagements. For example, "I said whatever I'm doing, you can shadow me, they took me up on bits and pieces I would've given them context why we were doing things" (Colm). However, other mentees lack of confidence meant some opportunities were accepted by some mentees but not always utilised, as mentees felt they were imposing, "he never took me up on it, he thought that was imposing" (Colm) and:

> At the start , I asked him did he want me to come down and watch [his] sessions, but he said no, and I invited him to come to ours, [but] he didn't. I know he doesn't really do much of the coaching, but I still think it would've been good to see us as a coaching team, you know deal with the different sections and react to different things. (Declan)

Consequently, there was evidence of *barriers to mentoring*. Mentor availability, clashing schedules and uncertainty about relationship leadership were common. The role of the PC in steering relationship to address barriers was identified, "since Christmas I was more conscious to be proactive rather than wait for mentees to be proactive" (Colm). Subsequently, due to the MMN layout, not all mentors were utilised by all mentees, "I haven't felt the need to go to [Laura] cause I've really enjoyed what I've been doing with [Colm & Phil]" (James).

Within the subtheme of *developing an informal community*, the culture of protecting intellectual coaching property, which has the potential to hinder mentoring was discussed. The mentors identified an existing Gaelic Games coaching culture of protection of ones methods and ideas, which can lead to distrust and scepticism, "there is a scarcity mindset in GAA coaches sharing ideas" (Phil) and;

> The GAA community, when it comes to managing or coaching, I found could be very protective of what they do and their systems are very much their own. People were very

reluctant to help, because I felt, they felt they were opening up their secrets to everybody (Colm).

Participants talked about how within a safe environment, coaches were interacting more frequently and collegially and the benefits this brings to the club; “a culture is developing, they are meeting each other on the side of the pitch and relationships are building rather than coaches working in silos” (Laura), and “This time last year, if any of the student coaches passed me in the corridor I wouldn’t know them, whereas now there’s just more of a community feel. Some of that has been organic, because of this process” (Colm).

5.3.3 The Process of Mentoring

The theme of the process of mentoring, explored the nature and impact of mentoring. This theme consisted of four subthemes, *the non-linearity of relationships, mentoring in action, navigating challenge in coaching* and *impact on participants*. The subtheme of *the non-linearity of relationships* showed how previously discussed perceptions and initial interactions shaped future interactions. Compatibility influenced relationships, as a mentee highlighted that differences in coaching philosophy (i.e., what they value and how they coach) regarding coach-athlete relations and tactical approaches, meant he steered away from a particular mentor. While another mentor also had differences with the same mentee but decided to challenge himself to engage with the different viewpoint, “After the first meeting, I actually didn’t know how it would go. We had a different outlook on what football was about and why we both wanted to do [mentoring programme], we’d different ways of approaching it” (Declan). This is contrasted by other dyads seeing themselves as similar and attracted to each other, “I see myself in [Mark], it’s exciting because it almost puts you back when you’re 20 and you’re learning. So many dots are getting connected and I can see that with him” (Phil). These initial issues were hurdled, “it can be nerve wracking meeting someone you don’t know for the first time and meeting them weekly but then it becomes normality and it’s like meeting a friend”

(Mark). Mentors were cognisant of this initial reluctance from mentees, "[Niall] probably got more comfortable with me and the whole concept of the programme, when we got to know each other a bit more, it was easier" (Declan), yet with the programme design it wasn't always necessary for mentees to develop relationships with mentors they didn't connect with to meet their needs. This was evidenced by the female mentee gravitating towards the female mentors and developing strong connections there, with mentors considered to be strong role models. Ciara outlined how within Gaelic Games female coaches can feel intimidated, "being a female coach in a male dominated industry can sometimes make you feel like you're not qualified".

Under the subtheme of *mentoring in action* participants explored what the process entailed. Highlighting mentee growth through interactions, Phil outlined "I gave him some resources and he came back the next day with really articulate questions. That was really impressive and that got me excited, and it gave me energy and I veered towards [James] during this process". This highlighted how two-way interactions (i.e., mentor providing input, mentee responding) created an environment that enhanced engagement. Participants further highlighted the value of good questions, different perspectives, disruptive thinking, and reflective practice on mentees developing. This was emphasised by the following, "he's helped me develop that critical thinking side of things, rather than learn and regurgitate what he's told me, he's giving me tools to solve my own problems if that makes sense" (James). This approach was further highlighted by mentors, "I didn't want to turn it into I'm a drill or game provider. I wanted them to try think about issues what was happening within their own teams" (Colm).

The subtheme of *navigating challenge in coaching*, illustrated how understanding contextual problems was part of the learning process. The opportunity to tease out mistakes, such as poorly designed training sessions and communication with players, within the mentoring process was helpful to mentees in not ruminating on mistakes, "At the start, I didn't understand the temperament and personalities of some players. I probably done things the

wrong way, but simple things like just by talking through these scenarios, then improving your coaching and communication as a result" (James). The mentors also assisted with outlining how some processes that afforded quick wins might not always bring deeper learning, thus challenging short term success, "it's a bit greyer than that, when you're young you just want yes or no, you don't want to hear it depends, it's just tell me. But it does depend, there's context" (Phil). Mentees navigating their own beliefs on development versus winning, was also assisted by drawing on different mentors. This was highlighted by Phil outlining interaction with a mentee, "if I was looking at a bar chart of deep principles to more superficial type of tactics, from before to after Christmas, the line on the graph will be gone down on principles to more tactics", highlighting the mentee's desire to get results focused answers closer to competitive games, where engagement was almost every day in lead up to a final with another mentor on results focused support.

Under the subtheme of *impact on participants*, mentors illustrated how mentees challenged them, "it forced me to think more critically about my own practice and the decisions I'm making" (Declan) and;

> "he had enough knowledge to ask really good questions, that would make me think very hard about how I would want to articulate my answers to him so, I learned just as much as him because I learned how to refine my thoughts and mastering my own delivery." (Phil)

Mentees gained really tangible benefits, with their thinking and perspective being significantly challenged, "my critical thinking aspect of design and trying to solve problems, trying to get players to solve their problems themselves, that has definitely changed" (James) and this change was noticed by the mentors as they observed a shift in the mentees outlook on coaching broadening rather than tactically focused, "he's definitely improved, he's more aware of the holistic approach rather than being all technical and tactical football, he was very much

tactically driven at the start" (Colm). Mentees highlighted subtle changes to their communication and the use of buzzwords, learning simple communication principles and creating more collaborative team environments.

5.4 Discussion

The data in this study suggests that a MMN can support the development of student coaches (cf. Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021; Olsson et al., 2017). The MMN approach in this setting helped reduce the probability of dysfunctional mentoring (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021), advancing beyond one-dimensional traditional dyadic relationships (see Chapter Four) and potential micro political issues (Sawiuk et al., 2017). A MMN has the benefits of mentees being able to decide where they acquire information depending on the diversity of the mentors available.

5.4.1 The Protagonists and Programme Design

There are two critical points to consider. First, the concept of mentee abandonment has been identified previously in mentoring literature (Chapter Four; Fraina & Hodge, 2020), the likelihood of this can be reduced through the MMN. However, there is the opposite effect of a mentor being underutilised, resulting in the mentor feeling abandonment that is usually experienced by mentees. Second, a potential pitfall of the MMN is mentees seeking much of their support from individual mentors, this can be addressed through an understanding of the mentees needs. Thus, the cultivation of strong relationships has been considered vital for successful mentoring programmes, as it is effectively a relational activity (Bailey et al., 2019).

These concerns can be addressed through the PC. To understand the appropriate long- and short-term actions required for optimal programme delivery, the PC must use professional judgement and decision-making, aligned with a sophisticated epistemology (Crowther et al., 2022). An appreciation that mentoring within a MMN is not limited to the interactions between individual dyads and interactions within individual dyads can impact across dyads. Consequently, the PC has a challenging task providing support to mentors and mentees to

ensure the programme is functioning effectively. Achieving this coherence requires an understanding of the interactions between individuals and awareness of their needs at different times (emphasising the importance of the PC as highlighted in Chapter Three and Chapter Four). When trying to ensure this effective functioning on a micro or meso level, the PC must encourage both mentors and mentees to critically consider their roles and relationships within their respective contexts (Corsby et al., 2022). The need to address previous concerns around lack of role clarity for mentors and mentees can be addressed by the PC (Bailey et al., 2019). The PC can provide instructional scaffolding to promote interdependency of the dyads (Vinson & Parker, 2019), but understanding the level of scaffolding that is required on a meso and micro level is crucial for effective functioning of dyads (Vinson & Parker, 2019). Without this PC support, practice may be solely based on internal assumptions of what the perceived actions of a mentor or mentee should be (Bailey et al., 2019). Highlighting the importance of the face-to-face training at the outset. At a micro level, the PC may facilitate a workshop on reflective practice, to aid individual dyad functioning. At a meso level, the PC may try to facilitate the learning gained by mentees to other coaches within the program on an informal basis.

From a formal mentoring perspective, the PC has a crucial role in mentor selection, ensuring their accessibility and availability are crucial for individual mentees (see Chapter Three for optimising dyad matching). The PC having a widespread network within the organisation can be crucial in identification of mentors and establishing relationships which can facilitate the functioning of the programme (Sawiuk et al., 2024). The concept that mentoring is a relational activity can be supported by the PC's keen awareness of the mentee needs, including the fact that some may require access to a particular kind of mentor while others may require something completely different (Bailey et al., 2019). Subsequently, initial matching should be considered carefully against the context of the intervention (i.e., the characteristics and parameters of a specific mentoring environment; Collins et al., 2022). This

matching in a MMN may be deemed less important, as the mentees have access to several mentors, but it requires ongoing linking and coordinating to ensure that the changing needs of the mentees are addressed. Often in formalised mentoring programmes the PC recruits mentors based on a subjective approach, selecting individuals who they feel embody a desired set of dispositions and attitudes (Chapter Three and Chapter Four; Leeder & Cushion, 2020). The PC must be cognisant within a MMN programme to identify mentors with different characteristics, to ensure that the varying needs of mentors are catered for. Training can be difficult to apply properly, as relationships are unique, but this is where the PC can provide role clarity.

In terms of future identification of mentors, mentees indicated they would adopt roles as mentors themselves, similar to the willingness of Student-Athlete mentees to adopt future roles as mentors in Chapter Three. This can allow for a reduced epistemological gap (the difference in knowledge and belief systems between mentors and mentees; Light, 2008), thus affording continued shared experiences at a similar level. In line with previous research and findings with Student-Athletes in Chapter Three, this data suggests that those who received positive mentoring experiences are more likely to become mentors themselves in the future (Arnold et al., 2021). Peer mentoring has been evidenced to be effective in coaching as there is a narrower epistemological gap between mentor and mentees, with the peer mentor providing effective psychosocial support (Olsson et al., 2017). Similarly in Chapter Three, the smaller gap between final year students and alumni mentors posited the benefits of peer mentoring above wider gaps. It has also been shown that within a supportive framework or programme, mentees feel a level of security with the mentor, accepting that mentors are acting in their best interests (Bailey et al., 2019).

Furthermore, involvement in a formal mentoring programme can facilitate the development of informal mentoring networks as both mentees and mentors involved identified the benefits of growing their informal network and engaging with others critically. This aligns

with how coaches can learn from multiple different sources building their declarative and conditional knowledge, through sharing, and critical reflection and discussion (Olsson et al., 2017). This informal network can allow for collaborative learning as coaching is effectively a socially constructed activity (O'Dwyer & Bowles, 2021). Participants highlighted how the formal programme helped to address some of the secrecy that can materialise within coaching environments in the protection of intellectual property (Sawiuk et al., 2018). Breaking down these barriers and sharing openly, allows organic relationships to grow, with the mentees providing peer support to other coaches at their existing level (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). Informal mentoring has been previously evidenced to be more impactful and long lasting than formal programmes (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021), thus well executed formal programmes can help to create more sustainable informal cultures within organisations. The leap towards knowledge sharing in volunteer settings is yet to become a common cultural practice (Walsh, 2014), but the deep-seated volunteerism at the heart of Gaelic Games environments could facilitate these programme becoming cultural embedded.

5.4.2 The Process of Mentoring

Within programme design there is a need to consider how mentors support the individual needs of their mentees. The data highlights areas for improvement and areas for sustained focus to ensure formal mentoring programmes can support the development of coaches across several different levels. The nuances within the findings (i.e., different engagement types by dyad, varying type of support required at different stages of season) indicate that if applied thoughtfully and understood from a contextual perspective (i.e., who, where, why, what), the findings here can assist in supporting evidenced-informed practice for coach education programmes at various levels and sports (Taylor et al., 2023). Therefore, simply replicating mentoring programmes in different environments is unlikely to be effective, as the conditional knowledge acquired within this setting may not apply in other setting (Bailey

et al., 2019; Collins et al., 2022). Similarly, a successful mentoring programme with student-athletes in Chapter Three, replicated with a PA cohort in Chapter Four showed different findings. However, again the role of the PC is important here, as the mentee may continue to seek knowledge and learning in areas where they 'want' information but identifying gaps and what the mentee 'needs' is important to ensure the curriculum is expansive. This aligns with previous research, where mentoring was viewed as responding to mentees needs in a responsive rather than an initiatory manner (Bailey et al., 2019). Although mentees have a role in determining their own needs, there is a risk that this could restrict learning, as many coaches struggle to make sense of the complexities of coaching on their own (McQuade et al., 2015). Thus, mentors must determine what extra support mentees require beyond their own interpretation (Bailey et al., 2019). In line with traditional coach education methods, mentees may simply expect the answers to their needs from mentors, and this provision of supports may suffice at the beginning of a relationship (Olsson et al., 2017). Yet, these developing coaches need to move from the reproduction of behaviours exhibited by those they perceive as experts (i.e., a naïve epistemological view) and increase their critical thinking and questioning of their own practice (i.e., a sophisticated epistemological view; Crowther et al., 2022). Thus, the PC can assist in creating awareness in mentors upon building relationships sufficiently so they can progressively weaken this type of support for mentees as they become more of a collaborator or consultant (Olsson et al., 2017).

The in-situ mentoring support in this programme appears to provide more relevant coach development than traditional educational methods (Nelson et al., 2006). Mentors observing mentees in their own environments provided a greater understanding of their contextually specific learning needs (Bailey et al., 2019). Through coherent interaction between mentees, mentors and PC, a MMN can support learning pathways tailored towards the individual across time (cf. Nelson et al., 2006). The data suggests epistemological development

of coaches, positing mentoring as an educational tool that can work alongside other coach education tools. There will always be different epistemological gaps between mentors and mentees and facilitating appropriate interactions at different stages of mentee development can ensure learning at appropriate pace.

Across the season the proximity of competition impacted upon the type of mentoring engagement which ensued. This was previously seen in the Chapter Three with student-athletes, as they required more support around exam time and when balancing multiple teams at in the same period. The essence of mentoring rests in facilitating interactions towards learning within a complex environment through a non-linear process (Bailey et al., 2019). Competition scheduling is an environmental factor which needs to be considered when designing programmes. A focus on long-term coach development can be superseded during periods close to competitive fixtures and it is suggested coaches can change their epistemological positions at will (Crowther et al., 2022). During early sections of the year (before competitions intensified) engagements between mentees and mentors were progressive in nature, with a focus on long term development for the mentees. However, during periods of intense competition the mentees sought support that was going to make an immediate and positive impact on results. This suggests that the timing of mentoring programmes is important, if lasting impact is to accrue. Mentoring can operate on a continuum of long-term development or short-term focus at certain periods. This staggered development is not unusual, as mentees can progress or consolidate at different times, as development is neither uniform nor continuous (Olsson et al., 2017). In fact, it has been suggested that coaches can hold different epistemological beliefs across different contexts (Crowther et al., 2022), while the data suggests here that coaches can hold different epistemological beliefs within a season based on competition structures. A more sophisticated epistemology is evident from mentees when time allows and winning is not an immediate focus, but mentees can revert to a more naïve outlook

when immediate winning becomes important, and they want more directive support. It has been found in a Gaelic Games setting that maintaining a clear athlete focused ethos was challenging for coaches within a competitive team environment (O'Dwyer & Bowles, 2021).

5.5 Practical Caution

We suggest the data indicates that MMN can be a useful educational tool for developing coaches in a Gaelic Games tertiary education setting, when all parties understand the intentions of the programme. Due to the practical nature of coaching and mentoring, MMN can lead to considerable experiential learning for coaches (Sawiuk et al., 2017). We believe there is transferability for MMN beyond the context of this current study, but replicating such an intervention is likely to be suboptimal (see Chapter Six for some of these practical considerations). There are critical factors that are consistent across contexts which need to be factored in (Bailey et al., 2019), such as participant recruitment and ongoing support. Mentoring programmes need to be bespoke and contextualised, to allow for mentees to learn in their own environment, at their own pace and for their own needs. The findings of this research can have implications for organisations and teams on several levels; micro (e.g., individual dyadic mentoring), meso (e.g., creating sustainable informal mentoring opportunities) and macro (e.g., organisation or PC considerations).

5.6 Future Research

Future research would support further understanding around this complex and multi-layered topic. No participant observations were undertaken to indicate if the scheme had any impact on the coaching behaviours of the coaches, where data triangulation could potentially allow a further lens for our interpretation. Firstly, we need to further explore the role of the PC and a potential planned removal of support from the PC (similar to the planned withdrawal of engagement by the PC seen in Chapter Three), to gain further understanding of the importance of their input. Secondly, this research was conducted in a Gaelic Games tertiary education

environment, there is scope to recreate this research on an individual club level and a county board level, to see its transferability to other Gaelic Games settings. Thirdly, the dearth of coaching research on females in Gaelic Games has been identified (Gavin et al., 2024), further exploration of mentoring as a coach development tool for developing female coaches is required, as it may help alleviate some of the barriers to females which are prevalent with existing coach education opportunities (Lewis et al., 2018). Furthermore, all participants were from DCU Dóchas Éireann GAA club, so there are potentially restrictions due to inherent cultural aspects of that club, which should be considered when transferring findings.

5.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the experiences of mentees in a MMN, within a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment. The primary purpose was to identify the effectiveness of a MMN for student-coaches, as opposed to a more traditional dyadic mentoring programme seen in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, while the secondary purpose was to explore the impact of programme design. Coach development is a nuanced process; thus, consideration needs to be given to various factors to ensure mentoring can be an effective coach education tool. The findings highlight that a MMN can be more beneficial mentoring model than standard dyadic relationships. However, critical consideration (i.e., where and who) is needed when applying a MMN , thus a PC has a fundamental role in planning, designing and implementing a formalised MMN programme. Recruitment of mentors in line with the needs of the mentees is important and the PC understanding how these needs change over time, along with how mentees may need to access different mentors is required. Finally, it's evident that mentoring can be an effective addition for developing coaches, alongside other coach development opportunities in a Gaelic Games environment considering the volunteer nature of the organisation(s) and the willingness of volunteers to engage in a social exchange of resources for the betterment of others within their social context or organisation.

Considering the evidence presented across the different cohorts of individuals receiving mentoring in the empirical chapters, I am now going to present some practical considerations for those tasked with implementing mentoring in their organisation. The subsequent Chapter Six takes the learning from the various populations, developmental needs, programme designs and contexts to assist in the chronic and acute factors in delivering mentoring programmes.

Chapter 6: More method and less magic: Considerations for mentoring in a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment

6.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter Two and explored across the subsequent chapters, mentoring is typically a process of support, where a more knowledgeable "other" facilitates the development of a neophyte practitioner (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021). Indeed, it is suggested that those who have received mentoring, are likely to accrue an array of psychosocial and instrumental development benefits (Hoffmann et al., 2017). This mentoring can be informal (i.e., organic, frequent and ongoing interactions with other practitioners, without oversight from an organisation; Cushion, 2015) or formal (i.e., controlled by organisations, through structured and monitored mentorships; Sawiuk et al, 2018). Consequently, the benefits of mentoring, and its potential to situate learning in context has led to its application in sporting settings (Bailey et al., 2019). Yet, it has suffered from a lack of conceptual clarity (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021). Recently, Bailey et al. (2019) began to address this with a framework for practice emphasising the relational aspects of interactions, context, flexibility and adaptability of mentoring, alongside the ontology of mentoring as pivotal towards its success. Nevertheless, there is an acceptance that mentoring, in its many forms, is positive for practitioner development in sport (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021). Despite the benefits of well-designed and led formal mentoring programmes (Comeaux, 2010), the reality of practice is less straightforward. Generally, literature has treated mentoring in practice as an uncomplicated and one-dimensional dyad, presenting a naïve portrayal of the process (Sawiuk et al., 2017). Culminating in a limited view of what tends to happen as opposed to the rich possibilities of what can happen (Jones et al., 2009). Thus, the presentation of mentorship in practice fails to capture the true complexities and realities (Cushion, 2015).

A limited body of research has begun to highlight the complexity and challenges of mentoring. For instance, traditional dyadic mentoring has been critiqued for their one-dimensional nature (Groom & Sawiuk, 2018; Sawiuk et al., 2017). With unbalanced power relationships within dyads potentially limiting reflection, learning and creativity due to a tacit acceptance of the mentors' way of doing things (Zehntner & McMahon, 2019). Furthermore, formal mentoring programmes have been identified as potentially problematic and less conducive to the development of strong relational mentoring relationships (Hoffmann, 2019). Indeed, formal programmes have been conceptualised as a form of social control, where organisational agendas override meaningful learning (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2020). With there being a fine line between mentor and tormentor, leading to issues of toxic mentors, toxic proteges and toxic environments (Jones et al., 2009). Such considerations can help shape how mentoring might look in a specific context, by working with and around barriers to optimising practice (cf. Taylor & Collins, 2021). With significant mentoring literature focusing on supporting coaches (Hoffmann, 2019), there is a need to be cautious over a prescriptive approach to practical application, instead embracing its complexity and the need for a nuanced consideration of what might work where (Bailey et al., 2019; Collins et al., 2022). Therefore, the aim of this chapter to provide considerations for those that lead mentoring programmes in sport (i.e., Programme Coordinators; PC), to navigate practice effectively in their environment, learning from the Gaelic Games tertiary education environment of this research.

6.2 Methods

This chapter adopts a pragmatic approach, recognising that complex social phenomena such as mentoring in Gaelic Games tertiary education contexts are best understood through flexible, context-sensitive methods. As such, narrative synthesis allows for the integration and interpretation of diverse evidence, providing practical insights into real-world mentoring practice (Popay et al., 2006). Narrative synthesis is used as a form of storytelling, to create a

narrative about mentoring in the context of Gaelic Games tertiary education environments to inform policy and decisions within, and beyond, this domain (Popay et al., 2006). Narrative synthesis aligns with a pragmatic research philosophy from a methodological perspective, focusing on adding meaning and valuable insights (Rogers et al., 2009), aligning with a pragmatic approach of focusing on real-world applicability (Cruickshank & Collins, 2017). Narrative synthesis permits a flexible approach to combining studies, while also affording both a feasible and appropriate manner for exploration of non-sequential and independent findings (Rodgers et al., 2009).

The process of the narrative synthesis included four components (Popay et al., 2006; Rodgers et al., 2009): a) Developing a theory of how formal mentoring programmes work in a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment. b) Developing a preliminary synthesis based on the findings of the three empirical chapters in this thesis against existing literature in their particular domains. c) Exploring the relationships between the three studies in the Gaelic Games tertiary education environment then beyond into mentoring across student-athletes, performance analysts and coaching literature, and d) Constantly assessing the robustness of the synthesis. These four components are not undertaken sequentially, but in an iterative manner (Rodgers et al., 2009). This process is not simply a summary of the literature but helps build a coherent understanding of mentoring as I engage with the data (Popay et al., 2006). The inclusion of studies beyond the context of the three studies in this thesis, was designed to improve trustworthiness, robustness and minimise bias, moving beyond simplistic summaries of research findings towards a more reflective approach (Rodgers et al., 2009).

My familiarity with, and experience in, the environment under investigation was helpful in making connections and understanding meaning coherently (May & Perry, 2022). Comparing and contrasting the findings of the three studies on mentoring in the Gaelic Games tertiary education environment against mentoring studies in different contexts, allows for a strong

understanding of mentoring to assist those charged with implementing programmes (Popay et al., 2006). This subsequently, presented a challenge with what to report in the considerations and what not to report, to ensure the positioning of this chapter as a valuable resource in unpacking real-world problems for practitioners when implementing mentoring programmes (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Consequently, findings were presenting to allow for flexibility in interpretation, embracing a combination of the analysis being grounded in the data and against existing theory to deepen interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2024). The presentation of the findings should help practitioners to understand what may work in their context, providing tools to contextualise the findings (Cruickshank & Collins, 2017).

6.3 Findings

6.3.1 Developing Programme Coordinator Expertise

The findings highlight the importance of the PC and suggest that a PC needs to demonstrate expertise to support four key stakeholders: themselves, mentees, mentors, and others within performance environments (e.g., coaches, sport science staff). As such, the PC should know what the needs of the mentees are and what resources (e.g., funding, available mentors, training capacity) the institution must address these needs (see Chapter Three and Five). Mentoring should encompass a needs-driven approach, where specific developmental needs of the mentee are identified to ascertain the type of mentoring required to meet these needs (see Chapter Two). A PC with a sophisticated epistemology (e.g., viewing knowledge as complex, uncertain and context dependent; Crowther et al., 2022) would strive to create independent autonomous mentees that require depleting resources as they develop (Grecic & Collins, 2013). Previous research has identified that the PC does not need to have all the answers to deliver the required support to both mentors and mentees immediately but can gradually develop this expertise over time (Olsson et al., 2017). The PC should sufficiently scaffold relationships to ensure that they are functioning effectively. This scaffolding requires

a PC to understand what mentoring style the mentor should employ with the mentee (McQuade et al., 2015). Thus, the mentors could move between different mentoring styles (e.g., directive, interactive or responsive) based on the changing needs of the mentee and the environment (Jones et al., 2009). Consequently, the PC is the 'long-arm mentor', fulfilling a panoptic supervisory role supporting the mentor rather than the mentee (McQuade et al., 2015) and encouraging mentors to change their support type accordingly (see Chapter Five). As identified in Chapter Three and Five, the PC should be aware of what mentoring functions the mentor can afford the mentee, whether they are more instrumental or psychosocial. An understanding of the balance of what support the mentee needs requires PC expertise and will rarely be formulaic. See Table 6.1 for how the supports might span across both functions.

Table 6.1: *Examples of Supports a Mentor can provide a Mentee across domains*

	Student – Athlete	Coach	Sports Scientist
Psycho Social Support	Support provided in relation to adapting to the challenge of a change in living arrangements.	Someone to lean on in terms of dealing with the intricacies of one to one player feedback.	Assisting a sports scientist on the contextual consideration of a particular team.
Career Development Support	Providing game specific feedback to athletes through the use of video technologies.	Affording feedback on a coaching session to the mentee and engaging in collaborative discourse on session design and delivery.	Signposting the mentee to new research and pertinent information around the delivery of their role.

Mentors and mentees can be part of a wider environment interacting with others who may or may not be assisting in their own development (see Chapter Four). Consequently, a PC needs to be aware of the positive and negative impacts of these interactions, reflecting on these factors through the lens of their specific environment, this can be different for student-athletes (Chapter Three), performance analysts (Chapter Four) or coaches (Chapter Five). Importantly, as previously identified this information should always be viewed as contingent, as it is

contextualised and new challenges in the environment can be navigated by combining new and existing knowledge to help make sense of practical problems (Bailey et al., 2019; Collins et al., 2022). This conditionality is based on the premise that knowledge will apply and work well in real-life settings but only under certain circumstances (Collins et al., 2022), which is evident across the different cohorts in this thesis. Thus, expertise does not involve working from one isolated episode to another but rather against 'nested', short-, medium and long-term goals using a blend of analysis and intuition (Cruickshank & Collins, 2016). Therefore, the PC should have an overall intention for impact and be flexible in their choice of method in the face of complex and dynamic characteristics of their environment (Collins et al., 2022).

This understanding of mentees, mentors and environment should allow the PC to move towards a greater understanding of their own role in the process (see Chapter Three). An effective PC will provide guidance as needed, operationalising their declarative knowledge, aligned with contextual expertise, to understand what support is needed and what impacts on its delivery (Cruickshank & Collins, 2016). Thus, diligent considerations are needed to formulate the best approaches (i.e., various methods in various ways for various purposes) (cf. Cruickshank & Collins, 2016). Consequently, the PC needs to know the type of mentoring programme required and can utilise the information at hand to implement an optimal programme.

6.3.2 Type of Mentoring

As originally stated in Chapter One, this thesis has aimed to understand the impact (both qualitatively and quantitatively) of types of mentoring programme, highlighting the importance of programme design. Consequently, I have highlighted the importance of the PC ensuring they use the right structure for the mentoring programme in their context. For comparison, a student-athlete in a moderately resourced institution will need different support to a student-athlete in a highly resourced scholarship programme within an institution (cf. Taylor et al., 2022). It will

be different again for the burgeoning sport scientist working within a high-performing intervarsity team compared to an institution's participation teams. Importantly, the mentoring style has some stable elements (dyadic interactions) and the mentees' developmental needs have stable elements (i.e., psychosocial support). However, there are also unknowns and complexities that need to be carefully considered (see Chapter Four and Five).

As identified across this thesis, mentoring can be largely described as dyadic (see chapter three), triadic (see Chapter Four) or multiple (see Chapter Five) in nature. Dyadic mentoring is a process where a more experienced and knowledgeable person acts as a role model, providing developmental guidance and support to a novice (Weaver & Chelladurai, 1999). These dyadic relationships can be successful under the right circumstances (see Table 6.1), but every dyad is unique and as a result interactions can differ across dyads (Jones et al., 2009). In Chapter Four, the needs of the mentee required support that one mentor alone could not effectively fulfil, thus triadic mentoring was viewed as an alternative. In practice for analysts in Chapter Four, they may receive technical support from a more experienced analyst, but require further support with psychosocial and contextual aspects. With this support provided by someone who understands the environmental culture of the specific institution (e.g., a head coach or manager). The mentee at the centre should be able to benefit from this triadic support. MMN's can have significant impact, going beyond these dyadic or triadic relationships, where no mentor can have all the knowledge a mentee needs (Sawiuk et al., 2017).

A MMN consists of more than three individuals who actively support the development of a mentee, with each supporting a different function of the mentees needs (Cope et al., 2021). As seen in previous chapters, different cohorts within sport will have different needs, thus requiring different support types. Instrumental functions enhance a mentees career development in areas like education, exposure (i.e., encouraging engagement in various

activities), protection (i.e., shielding mentees from making errors or assisting with difficult assignments) and task support, while psychosocial functions consist of more human interactions such as role modelling and friendship (Kram, 1988). For example, a student-athlete mentee requires psychosocial support such as role modelling and friendship, provided by a peer mentor (see Chapter Three), while for coach mentees the career function may be more important than task instruction (see Chapter Five). While, as identified in Chapter Four a student performance analyst developing contextual awareness and building relationships are crucial, which may come from a mentor embedded in the context rather than mentor support from an external analyst. Of note however, as previously identified MMN's are more complex to establish but may address concerns around mentee neglect and abandonment (Fraina & Hodge, 2020), while addressing micro-political problems (e.g., mentors within the same educational setting; Zehntner & McMahon, 2019) and issues for mentors regarding the demands on their time (Sawiuk et al., 2017). Therefore, positioning the needs of mentees at the centre of the decision-making process around programme design is crucial.

6.3.3 Measuring Mentoring

As explored in Chapter Two, the most valued learning is likely to be situated in the practitioners own environment, where learning is a collaborative process, where knowledge is co-constructed through various interactions and explorations (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2014). Importantly, as discussed in Chapter Two, solely utilising one form of learning (e.g., Formal, Informal, Non-formal) rarely equips sports practitioners for the realities of dynamic sporting environments. While measurement of formal learning is quantifiable (Nelson et al., 2006), informal or non-formal learning can be highly complex phenomenon making measurement difficult (Taylor & Collins, 2021). This makes the measurement of mentoring within, and across, environments complex.

This complexity in measuring non-linear interactions cannot be at the expense of watering down programmes to meet set criteria for measurement, as organisations potentially amend the desired outcomes of programmes to meet rigid measurement criteria. In maintaining the in-situ scenario-based mentoring and the difficulty associated with measuring these interactions, mentees can equally be afforded earlier opportunities to formulate their own beliefs and assess options about the methods and techniques they are developing, without the constraints of attaining targets (cf. Grecic & Collins, 2013). The earlier presentation of these bespoke and contextualised opportunities will allow mentees to take resources and apply them in a way that delivers peak impact or performance in their context for their needs (Olsson et al., 2017). The earlier this occurs the quicker mentees can further explore their own philosophy, epistemology and the why in their own context (Grecic & Collins, 2013). This exploration of one's own philosophy and how it interacts with a variable context is important, but it cannot be measured effectively and attempting to measure could be an inappropriate use of resources. Therefore, suggesting that the mentees perceptions and experience are critical considerations for the PC. Mentoring is not something done to the mentee and a clear mentee centred approach should be supportive of the mentees independence and their specific needs (cf. Taylor & Collins, 2021).

Little empirical evidence exists to evaluate the effectiveness of mentoring as a coach development tool, due to the transitionary and informal nature of mentoring interactions it is difficult to gauge how it contributes to long-term learning (McQuade et al., 2015). In a coaching context, there is a tenuous connection between mentoring and fundamental changes in coaching practice (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2020). While the use of the Athlete Mentoring Questionnaire (AMQ) (Hoffmann & Loughead, 2019) in measuring mentoring functions for athletes (see Chapter Three), is limited in so far as it helps describe the aspects covered within the mentoring relationship, rather than measure their effectiveness. Thus, the need to align the AMQ with

qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups or field observations adds value (see Chapter Three). This concept of greater qualitative clarity in research on mentoring will allow for nuanced understanding of findings across different sporting contexts (Gavin et al., 2024). Equipping PC's to comprehend findings in their own setting and apply this knowledge to inform evidence-informed programmes in their environment (cf. Gavin et al., 2024).

Mentoring programmes are often controlled by tertiary educational institutions or organisations, where mentorships are structured and monitored through the obtainment of objectives (Sawiuk, et al., 2018). This presents difficulty in accurately assessing mentoring in sporting environments. Competency-based models provide a measurable but essentially deceptive portrayal of practice requirements (cf. Collins et al., 2015), due to the complex nature of sporting environments, they are too simplistic. Thus, reiterating the importance of the PC using their expertise in the measurement process. This expertise may be suited to dynamic sporting environments, going beyond the definition of competence to evaluate and facilitate capacities for more elaborative and adaptive thinking, judgement and growth (Collins et al., 2015). Unfortunately, this lack of consistent measurement is compounded by mentoring programmes being compromised to include these measurable outcomes. Frequently, the format and mode of delivery of mentoring programmes are dictated by the institution in line with providing measurable outcomes for funding purposes (Sawiuk et al., 2018). A humanistic flexibility is required to avoid programmes becoming overly corporate and too structured (Sawiuk et al., 2018). Funding is required but it cannot compromise practice. This essentially leaves us with a situation where mentoring programmes that are measurable appear ineffective, but they are ineffective due to compromising on what is needed for mentoring to comply with the measurement criteria.

PCs must be able to apply their expertise to ensure all stakeholders are aware of the long-term benefits of mentoring and that the benefits are not immediately measurable (see

Chapter Four and Five). In sporting environments, it can be difficult to maintain long-term vision, purpose or identity alongside the demand for immediate results (Taylor & Collins, 2021). This is true of mentoring and its long-term perspective, where there is a challenge in understanding effectiveness and the extent of overall 'output' of the programme in terms of short-term measures (cf. Taylor et al., 2022). PCs need to be flexibly future focused when it comes to measurement. The bespoke value of mentoring and learning outcomes for the mentorship cannot be compromised by over formalising the measurement or the actual mentoring process (Sawiuk et al., 2018).

6.3.4 Mentor Recruitment, Matching and Ongoing Support

The PC is responsible for identifying and supporting appropriate mentors to carry out their roles throughout the mentoring process. Recently, this has been described as haphazard (Sawiuk et al., 2024), with much of the literature in sport neglecting mentor recruitment and training, often assuming their prowess as a practitioner can sufficiently transfer to a new role as a mentor (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2020). This has led to organisations employing a subjective approach to the recruitment, selecting mentors who they believe embody certain dispositions and attitudes (Leeder et al., 2019). Consequently, organisations tend to inherently trust their mentors to 'do the right thing' without support (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2020). These assumptions regarding mentors intentions and abilities is where PCs can encounter issues. Thus, assuming the identification and subsequent recruitment of mentors conducted by the PC is with the best intention (see Chapter Three and Five).

Mentors have been described as the 'right sort of people' with an affinity for a team or wider organisation (Sawiuk et al., 2024). To make effective choices, the PC needs to have a holistic understanding of the desired outcomes for mentees, so they can assign mentors who can support these outcomes. This requires mentors to possess certain social, cultural and symbolic capital to obtain respect (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021). For example, mentees highlighted

mentors reaching a certain playing level (see Chapter Three) or coaches with achievements (see Chapter Five) as important for accelerating initial engagements. Crucially, these mentors who act as role models must have the functional impact to provide learning opportunities to motivate and inspire their mentee (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021). However, just because someone is a role model or a high performing practitioner doesn't mean they can transfer their expertise or experience to mentees (see Chapter Four). Additionally, as seen in Chapter Three and across other literature, there are challenges for student-athlete mentoring where competition for playing time between mentor and mentee can cause an issue (Boroumand et al., 2017; Hoffmann, 2019). Potentially leading to mentors withholding information (Ives et al., 2024). To combat this, cross-sports mentors have been suggested, with mentees feeling less threatened and judged (Sawiuk et al., 2017), which were utilised here in both Chapter Four with analysts and Chapter Five with coaches.

In terms of sustainability, the perceived impact of the mentoring programme can influence the recruitment of new mentors (see Chapter Five). Similarly to Hoffmann and colleagues (2017), mentees that had positive experiences felt they were suited to subsequently taking on roles as peer athlete mentors (see Chapter Three) and peer coaches (see Chapter Five). This peer or near-peer mentoring can be effective because of the tightened age, experience and epistemological gap resulting in strong humanistic connections and shared understanding (see Chapter Three). This willingness of mentors to support mentees is crucial, before identifying appropriate similarity between mentors and mentees can help the PC in the matching process (see Chapter Three and Four). Mentoring can be further enhanced when viewed as a relational activity and reciprocity becomes a cornerstone of interactions (Bailey et al., 2019). In Chapter three, it has been found that, mentors identify with mentees whom they perceive as younger versions of themselves, however compatibility should not be confused with similarity (Hoffmann, 2019). Contrastingly in Chapter Three, there should be

commonalities between mentors and mentees, while in Chapter Five the importance of the mentor bringing an appropriately diverse skill set to address the developmental needs of the mentee was identified. Across the cohorts in this environment, this matching process is crucial in ensuring the success of the scheme. In formal mentoring, several methods of matching have been identified; practitioner assigned matching, choice-based matching or assessment-based matching (Hoffmann, 2019). Considering discourse around formal versus informal mentoring and the benefits of maintaining the human element, assessment-based matching could prove overly mechanistic in many sports settings. However, depending on the environment the appropriate use of practitioner assigned matching or choice-based matching is worth considering for the PC (see Chapter Three). Assigned matching is goal-driven; however, this removes the voice of the mentee from the process (Hoffmann, 2019). In contrast in Chapter Three with Student-Athletes, choice-based matching gives mentors and mentees an input into those they'll be working with on a human level, leading to higher quality mentoring relationships (Hoffmann, 2019). This may be time demanding initially, but can save time later for the PC as they have engaged willing parties from the outset.

Conducting a comprehensive matching process in tandem with initial training addresses role clarity concerns, builds initial rapport and provides awareness of the availability of ongoing support (see Chapter Four and Five). As previously identified by Jones and colleagues (2009), a PC should avoid being overly mechanistic in this process of recruitment and training maintaining the humanistic element that is crucial to relationship success (see Chapter Five). Nevertheless, PC's should be cautious in the assumption that mentors arrive ready-made for mentoring due to overestimating the transferability of their experiences as practitioners to their new role as a mentor (see Chapter Four). With such a view leading to limited training opportunities being afforded to mentors (Leeder et al., 2019). The PC plays a fundamental role in training and supporting mentors and mentees. This requires assisting the mentee to navigate

their development as an athlete, analyst or coach, while the mentor comprehends their practice as a mentor (Collins et al., 2012). This process for mentees aims to bring them along the epistemological continuum in terms of their relativistic thinking as a practitioner, encouraging critical thinking and embracing in-situ learning (Collins et al, 2012). This navigation for the practitioner needs to be supported appropriately by the mentor, as confidence could reduce at times as the mentees try to continue on their developmental journey in a non-linear fashion (Collins et al., 2012). The PC must also attempt to create an awareness for mentors that, while wanting to openly share best practice, they must be aware of the capacity for growth of the mentees at their stage of development (cf. Collins et al., 2012). It could be said for mentors that, while wanting to share best practice, they should be pleased to promote better practice. Therefore, building this awareness around epistemological gaps into training, so both mentors and mentees can gain an understanding of each other's current positioning, could be beneficial. Consequently, mentors have highlighted the need for greater professional development (Bailey et al., 2019). However, mentor training rarely extends beyond episodic workshops and doesn't guarantee meaningful and positive mentoring relationships (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2020). Therefore, training may help to provide consistency and role clarity (Bailey et al., 2019; Sawiuk et al., 2024). Additionally, embedding both mentors and mentees into the training process together may allow for strong relationships to emerge by placing them both in a learning phase (see Chapter Five).

When considering training for mentees and mentors, first impressions can either delay or impinge the mentor-mentee relationship, from both sides, particularly with naïve mentees and those fearful of being exposed or undermined (Olsson et al., 2017) or with mentors lacking role clarity (Bailey et al., 2019). Thus, there are merits for the PC to conduct the training for mentors and mentees together face-to-face in a non-threatening environment, as the PC can use their expertise in bringing the mentors and mentees together (see Chapter Five). This combined

emphasis on developing mutual clarity through the exploration of the purpose of the relationship and understanding each other's role is essential (McQuade et al., 2015) and supports the PC to understand the varying needs of all stakeholders. Positioning mentors as learners may help to unearth the reciprocal benefits of learning (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021), and in doing so allows for the development of an informal network of support for mentors (see Chapter Five). With these networks being identified as opportunities for mentors to signpost mentees to other potential mentors in areas they lack knowledge (see Chapter Five; Sawiuk et al., 2017).

Finally, across all cohorts in this research, the PC should continually support all parties to ensure effective functioning of their relationships. The PC should encourage mentors to critically reflect on their current beliefs, practices and perceptions throughout their mentoring practice (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021). Supporting the mentor through greater understanding of their role and the specific needs of the mentee (see Chapter Five). Therefore, the PC needs a widespread network within the organisation to support the programmes functionality (Sawiuk et al., 2024), allowing them to understand which mentors, mentees or relationships need on-going support and scaffold accordingly (see Chapter Five). If the identification, matching and training of mentors and mentees has been effective, this support may not be needed for some relationships (see Chapter Three). This can be challenging for the PC in prioritising varying relationships at different stages, but by helping all stakeholders understand where they fit in the overall system, they are more likely to engage (cf. Collins et al., 2022).

6.3.5 Strategic Overview

Adding to the conceptualisation of the role of the PC, operationalising effective mentoring programmes requires a strategic overview (Sawiuk et al., 2024). Strategy is the alignment of potentially unlimited aspirations with necessarily limited capabilities or resources (Taylor et al., 2022). Mentoring programmes are likely to be limited by budget (Sawiuk et al.,

2024), restricted by volume of appropriate mentors, as seen in Chapter Four, while also constrained by the capacity and availability of stakeholders (Taylor et al., 2022). Thus, mentoring is constrained and contextually bound by many organisational factors (Sawiuk et al., 2024). To navigate these constraints, a nested (i.e., at a macro, meso, and micro level) understanding and integration of different strategic levels is likely to be a critical feature of a PC's effective decision making regarding their intention, and opportunity, for impact (cf. Taylor et al., 2022).

The operationalisation of this shared nested understanding among multiple stakeholders and the extent to which different inputs are systematically combined is crucial for top-down and bottom-up understanding and integration (Taylor & Collins, 2021). This nested integration of strategy depends on bi-directional open communication and the ongoing search for divergent views (Taylor et al., 2022). All too often this is not the case, ineffective environments are characterised by a lack of integration, and incoherence in culture and short termism (cf. Henriksen and Stambulova, 2017). Thus, integration needs to demonstrate coherence with all stakeholders engaging in a coordinated manner towards the achievement of a clear strategic vision (Taylor & Collins, 2021). Given the regular competing agendas within sporting organisations, the process of achieving coherence ideally requires integrated practice across a broad group of stakeholders (Collins et al., 2022). This is evident with mentoring programmes which are not immune from the tussles of stakeholders with contradictory agendas (Sawiuk et al., 2018). In sporting and education environments, the ability to develop and promote coherence is an important feature of practitioner expertise (Taylor & Collins, 2021). This requires the PC to oversee the overall organisational strategy to support effective functioning of mentoring.

Once the PC is clear on the strategic aims, they must embed this into the organisation and embody it (see Chapter Five). As previously identified (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021) and seen

in Chapter Five, mentoring can be used as a vehicle to hand down knowledge, maintain culture, support talent and secure future leadership. However, a lack of integration and coherence across organisations can pose problems for implementation of large-scale programmes (McQuade et al., 2015). This needs a paradigm shift away from upper echelon strategy development, followed by lower echelon delivery (Taylor et al., 2022). To operationalise this the PC must feed down to the mentor, who in turn feed down to the mentee but this needs bi-lateral vertical and horizontal engagements, because the needs of the mentee must be understood by those making decisions and providing support (see Chapter Five).

Operationally, the mentor should lead the agenda during interactions, before gradually progressing to a mentee directed relationship (Olsson et al., 2017). Support is then reduced when mentee competence increases, fostering the learners autonomy and independence (McQuade et al., 2015). As this develops, the more flattened structure of mentoring relationships is a plausible explanation for the emergence of meaningful psycho-social mentoring functions (see Chapter Three; Hoffmann et al., 2017). With friendships becoming more pronounced as the relationship evolves and epistemological gaps dividing mentors and mentees become less apparent (see Chapter Three; Hoffmann et al., 2017), allowing for meaningful relational mentoring to occur (Bailey et al., 2019). This may require PC input on the ground, as relationships need to be bi-directional, encouraging a culture where mentees respectfully question authoritative knowledge to challenge taken for granted assumptions and develop (see Chapter Five; Zehntner & McMahon, 2019). Whilst top-down agendas provide a bandwidth for activity, more attention should be paid to the interaction between bottom-up and top-down processes (Taylor et al., 2022). In Chapter Five, the embeddedness of the PC, was critical in the generation of knowledge (through engagement with mentors and mentees, to help understand their role, when to intervene and when to allow organic growth. This means seeing the ‘bottom-up’ as more than delivery of strategy and instead emphasising flexible working

practices (cf. Taylor et al., 2022). It has been suggested that an effective way of operationalising this is through the development of SMMs (Taylor & Collins, 2021).

SMMs have been proposed to promote optimal practice in various sporting environments (Taylor & Collins, 2021). SMMs refer to the overlapping mental representations of knowledge by practitioners, which in turn support greater team effectiveness (Taylor & Collins, 2021). The PC must use their expertise and understanding of the environment to build and disseminate their SMM (see Chapter Five). Importantly, a SMM may be centrally orchestrated by the PC or evolved through deliberate interactions with and through mentors and mentees (cf. Richards et al., 2017). For example, a PC can action feedback loops and communication channels which provide flexibility and course correction (cf. Taylor et al., 2022). These constant feedback loops and ongoing communication channels were evident in Chapter Five, allowing for greater understanding of mentees current needs and the supports mentors need in delivery. This may help to navigate some of the barriers and pressures of sporting and education environments, with long term planning being supported through coherent messaging up and down the programme, based on a strategic and nested agenda (cf. Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017). As seen in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, the PC's leadership in influencing others and focussing on the achievement of shared goals, is crucial to the success of this (Cruickshank & Collins, 2016). Succinct leadership and expert practice in interpersonal roles (i.e., a PC) in sport and education does not involve working from one isolated episode to another but rather against 'nested', short-, medium- and long-term goals using both systematic analysis and contextual intuition (Cruickshank & Collins, 2016). Thus, establishing a clear understanding of the macro systems agenda, the specific conditions of operation in an organisation at the meso level and how that impacts daily practice at the micro level is valuable (see Chapter Three; Taylor et al., 2022). Table 6.2 illustrates how this might look for the PC across different mentoring types. The PC needs to consider the norms of the

culture and funding at a macro level (Taylor et al., 2022) and then down to the complexity of individual relationships at a micro level. For example, at a macro level there may be an awareness that formal mentoring can be successful, but for true organisation wide success, that informal mentoring can thrive organically at a micro level because of the systems that are in place.

Table 6.2: *Examples of the PCs role in implementation of mentoring programmes*

	Macro	Meso	Micro
Dyadic Mentoring	Identifying the need for mentoring for a specific cohort to address a deficit and understanding that it can be addressed by one person due to the organisations culture	Ensuring a best practice matching process is in place to ensure that the dyads have greatest chance of success from outset.	Ensuring that mentors are aware of specific pinch points for the mentees when support may need to be more directive.
Triadic Mentoring	Ensuring organisation wide stakeholder understanding of the role of mentoring and education.	Ensuring that the curriculum of support available to the mentee is individualised towards their current environment and the support that can be afforded by their mentor and the other practitioner.	Arranging a formal meeting with the three stakeholders to ensure that they are aware of their interdependency to ensure that they all support each other for success.
Multiple Mentoring	Understanding that the needs of mentees cannot be fulfilled by an individual mentor due to the nature of their needs	The role out of innovative training programmes and initial meetings to ensure that mentoring relationship begin in a positive manner.	Awareness that a particular relationship isn't working due to personality differences and understanding to cut losses and promote another dyadic relationship.

6.3.6 Establishing Informal Networks

A strategic ambition of this top-down bottom-up mentoring within an organisation is to allow organic informal mentoring to be part of the organisations culture. Establishing informal networks is contradictory in essence, but creates environments where mentor and mentees can flourish. As mentioned above, with all aspects of mentoring holding onto the strengths of informal mentoring within formal schemes, as overly formalising schemes stunt the development of rapport and hinders relationship building (Jones et al., 2009). This largely comes down to how powerful and intentional experiential learning is (see Chapter Two). When conducted with student-coaches, coaches learn through regular interactions, observations, and

listening, along with individual or collective reflection on their own practices (Nash & Sproule, 2011). This experiential learning can come in the format of unmediated learning, where feedback from peers or mentors, allowing a coach to critically reflect on their existing practice (see Chapter Five; Olsson et al., 2017). This opportunity to engage with larger pools of knowledge, share ideas and probe the rationale behind these ideas can enable the mentee to extend their declarative knowledge base as well as what they can do with this developed knowledge (see Chapter Five; Olsson et al., 2017). Yet this type of environment where these interactions occur must be curated, potentially by the PC of a formal programme through their SMM (see Chapter Five).

There are coaches and athletes who have benefited from informal mentoring, coaches are likely to have received some amount of informal mentoring experiences throughout their athletic and coaching careers, yet only labelled them as mentoring retrospectively after they recognised what the interactions were and how they had influenced them (McQuade et al., 2015; see Chapter Five). Thus, as shown across Chapter Three and Chapter Five, if the PC within an organisation provides practitioners an understanding of what mentoring is, how it benefits the mentee, the mentor and the wider organisation, the more likely they are to engage effectively in an informal manner. The development of this awareness of mentoring and its potential role in individuals growth can help in building an organisational culture where supportive relationships are valued and successful (Hoffmann, 2019).

In line with SET (see Chapter Two), it is likely that informal mentors will receive intrinsic rewards and be more personally invested in mentee development than formal mentors (Jones et al., 2009). Thus, the PC should be able to assist stakeholders to understand the benefits they can accrue, then facilitate appropriate interactions with those more experienced people within the organisation as they navigate their own development (Stoszkowski & Collins, 2014). POS is important here and the perceptions both mentors and mentees have of the organisation

and how collective engagements benefits them individually (Cropanzano & Micthell, 2005). This broader picture was evident in this particular cohort, a willingness to support the concept of 'the club' (see Chapter Three and Five; Wayne et al., 1997). As outlined in Chapter Three, this POS can flourish in a volunteer Gaelic Games setting, with POS and LMX being particularly evident in the decision of both mentees and mentors to engage when dyads were formed based on county of birth.

It has been shown that formal MMN programmes can allow for the sharing of information and networking to develop within the organisation beyond those exclusively involved in the programme, ensuring organisation wide knowledge sharing, positive interaction and growth (see Chapter Five). Crucially, this initial PC oversight is essential so that people understand what effective mentoring looks like. It is apparent, that if left unchecked, informal networks that rely on socially constructed approaches to learning, may provide the opportunity for the reiteration of outdated, ineffective and potentially harmful practices, if knowledge is simply transferred without critical dissection (Stoskowski & Collins, 2014). Thus, the PC may look to create sustainable informal mentoring within their organisations, understanding its role within the larger organisation and minimising the harmful informality.

6.4 Conclusion

In practice, no single mentoring model can account for the way that (individual) development flourishes within an environment (e.g., A Gaelic Games tertiary education environment). As outlined by Bailey et al. (2019), there is no uniform model to follow. It has been acknowledged that mentoring is used differently in different settings and for different purposes (Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021). Currently, there remains a lack of research on mentoring in sport which focuses on programme design features, but more specifically who designs and implements these programmes in practice (Sawiuk et al., 2024). Therefore, this chapter's emphasis on framing considerations for the PC, (who may or may not be a full-time employer,

have appropriate experience or have access to budgets) highlights the important decision-making process a PC must undertake to optimise the effectiveness of mentoring programmes within and across practitioner groups. This PC (or equivalent role) must therefore be adaptable in their approach (i.e., it depends; Collins et al., 2022) to the utilisation of mentoring alongside other appropriate learning tools for the development of people in sport.

Summary points;

- **Developing PC Expertise** - The PC must demonstrate expertise alongside significant others in the environment. The PC should be able to balance the resources available with the needs of the mentees to employ a mentee centred environment. They should have an overall intention for impact, the complex and hyperdynamic nature of sporting environments and organisations makes it increasingly unlikely that any one approach will be appropriate to every situation.
- **Types of Mentoring** – Different cohorts (e.g., coaches, student-athletes, performance analysts) within sport require different support types (instrumental and psychosocial) and all support may not come from one source. Thus, programmes ranging from dyadic relationship to MMNs can address concerns around poorly designed mentoring programmes. Positioning mentees' needs at the centre of the decision-making process is essential in identifying the right type of programme to employ.
- **Measuring Mentoring** – Measuring mentoring within and across environments is complex. It can be difficult to accurately assess their effectiveness. Competency-based models provide too simplistic a portrayal of practice requirements. Therefore, PCs must use their expertise to map long-term benefits of mentoring, alongside short-term institutional measures to ensure effectiveness.
- **Mentor recruitment, matching and ongoing support** – The PC has an ongoing and embedded role which cannot be understated in the recruitment, matching, training and

ongoing support of mentors and mentees. Understanding of mentoring and role clarity are at the very centre of this support and helping to build and sustain positive mentor mentee relationships.

- **Strategic Overview –** On a strategic level, mentoring must have clear aims, which must be embedded in the organisation across all levels. Mentoring can be a powerful learning tool to hand down knowledge, maintain culture and support talent. However, a lack of integration and coherence across organisations can pose problems for programmes. The development of SMMs can help promote optimal practice in various sporting environments.
- **Establishing Informal Networks** – The curated creation of organisation wide informal mentoring, can facilitate establishing positive organisation culture. However, going straight to informal networks without an understanding of mentoring principles, may lead to ineffective mentoring.

It is hoped that these considerations can support thoughtful consideration regarding the effective implementation of a successful mentoring programme in contexts, beyond the Gaelic Games tertiary education environment of which this research was situated. Clearly, scalability of the considerations against an individual's contextual resource is crucial here, however their consideration can support a clearer understanding of the what, how, who and why of mentoring. This is helping to position mentoring as an experiential learning tool that can be used across a variety of contexts in sport. These considerations are designed to be a practical take away for those looking to broaden the learning options available to practitioners in sport. As already alluded to throughout this chapter, the role of conditionality and some final thoughts on limitations, future directions and my own practice are explored in Chapter Seven.

Chapter 7: Next Ball! Conclusion, Future Research and My Practice

7.1 Conclusion

Across the preceding chapters, this body of work has explored the role mentoring can play in the development of practitioners in a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment. This exploration has been conducted through the following progressive objectives:

1. Completion of a literature review to identify a suitable approach to support learning in a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment (see chapter two).
2. Exploring the impact of peer mentoring on the development of Student-Athletes in transition in a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment (see chapter three).
3. Exploring the impact of mentoring on neophyte Performance Analysts operating in a performance team (see chapter four).
4. Exploring the utility of a MMN as a means for developing coaches (see chapter five).
5. Identification of practical considerations for the delivery of mentoring programmes in sporting environments (see chapter six).

Through adopting a pragmatic lens this thesis has added considerable insight to mentoring in sporting contexts. As outlined in Chapter Two, learning in sporting environments can be complex and often learning is best situated in the practitioners environment (Leeder & Cushion, 2020; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2016). Considering the findings across the subsequent chapters, mentoring is a tool which can help the developmental journey of practitioners in a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment. Considerations around programme design, in particular where responsibility for the programme lies in terms of desired outcomes on instrumental or psychosocial sides is of importance. While matching and training opportunities require a deep comprehension of the mentoring process and the need to carefully evaluate the epistemological gaps between mentors and mentees.

However, positioning mentoring as the only learning tool for the development of practitioners would be limiting. In light of the conditionality regarding programmes illuminated across this thesis, there are considerable factors to be considered by those responsible for implementing mentoring programmes (cf. Collins et al., 2022). The importance of the PC is highlighted throughout and their fundamental role across mentoring relationship in affording scaffolding, promoting shared mental models and understanding of a nested approach for mentoring should not be undervalued. This thesis builds upon the mentoring literature with student athletes (Hoffmann & Loughead 2016a; 2016b) and coaches (Jones et al., 2009; Leeder & Sawiuk, 2021), while providing the first exploration of mentee performance analysts. It is also importance to not solely look at these populations in isolation, and learning lessons from other populations also warrants consideration.

7.2 Future Research

This research provides an insight into the utility of mentoring in a Gaelic Games tertiary education environment. It is imperative that this initial body of research is built upon across national, county and club settings. Across earlier chapters, future research suggestions were provided specific to that chapter, the suggestions here are on mentoring on a more global level where possible.

In terms of specific future research, Chapter Three was focused on developing players as they transitioned on both an academic and sporting level at the same time, it is worth exploring the utility of mentoring at different stages of the Gaelic Games player pathway. The GAA player pathway as outlined in (GAA, 2019), and the network that is available across clubs, secondary schools and counties, similar holistic mentoring programmes are worth exploring to see if they can have a benefit at different stages of the pathway.

Furthermore, exploration of the efficacy of a MMN across coaching domains would help gain an understanding of how mentees needs are addressed over time through access to a

MMN and identifying best practice for mentor recruitment and training. This could include, but is not limited to, coaches within county academy squads, juvenile and adult inter-club networks, with cross code MMN's worthy of further exploration. While this research does include female participants, female exclusive research in the coaching and PA domains would be welcomed. This would help contribute further to the growth of research into females in sport in Ireland (Jackman et al., 2025). Such research would continue to build on the foundational research in a Gaelic Games setting here and help position mentoring as a learning tool across all Gaelic Games settings, as has been advocated across this thesis.

Across all the cohorts, further observational methods for exploration behaviour change are advocated, to get a greater understanding on the change in practice that mentoring is having on practitioners in a Gaelic Games setting. These additional methods are important, as little evidence connects mentoring to positive changes in practitioner practice. The difficulty outlined in Chapter Six around the measurement of mentoring programmes, is worth further exploration, where researchers/practitioners should consider all options available to try and fully understand the benefits of mentoring programmes. Mentoring has been identified as strengthening as relationship build trust with longevity (Chao et al., 1992), it is suggested to use more longitudinal methods to explore the impact of mentoring over longer time periods. Doing this in line with observational methods (i.e., procedure, planning, process; Taylor et al., 2023) to determine change in practice may be beneficial in gaining a rounded understanding of mentoring.

Findings across this thesis has mainly focused on the mentees and the benefits that they accrue. The motives of mentors and the benefits that they accumulate from engagements with mentees is worth further exploration. This may assist in identification of suitable mentors for programmes, while also assisting in addressing their training requirements. While negative mentoring relationship and dysfunction were not present in the cohorts of this thesis,

researchers should investigate the negative outcomes and instances of mentoring dysfunction that have been found in other mentoring relationships (Zehntner & McMahon, 2019), with the aim of negating them.

This thesis has positioned SET as a useful theoretical framework to understand research in a Gaelic Games setting. It is suggested that researchers give consideration for the use of SET within Gaelic Games settings to understand the unique volunteer setting and the motivations of members. The use of SET may allow for greater understanding of the role and impact of the GAA on communities.

7.3 My practice

As outlined in Chapter One, my life is immersed in Gaelic Games, with the difference between the professional and personal often blurred. Completing this thesis as a Professional Doctorate, I have attempted to blend my professional capacity and my researcher capacity across the duration of this body of work. I would consider myself a practical person, with the ability to implement and execute plans, thus the professional aspect of this research is where I have got most satisfaction.

When considering the practical impact of this thesis on my role as Head of Gaelic Games in DCU, the research here has been a 'starting point' for the introduction of mentoring programmes. This thesis has provided the foundations for constant improvements of development programmes across Gaelic Games in DCU. The programmes that are outlined across this body of work have all continued to evolve from their first iteration, through evolving enquiry and critical analysis.

The student-athlete mentoring programme, which is soon to be in its fifth year, now consists of mentors who originally were mentees on the programme when they started in DCU, highlighting the importance of sustainability which was highlighted in this thesis. It has been a valuable addition to the DCU Performance Sports Scholarship Programme. The learnings

from the PA cohort merged with the findings from the MMN which existed for coaches has helped in compiling a needs-driven programme for both analysts and coaches. This needs-driven approach had led to a diverse education programme which has included mentoring, access to formal qualifications and in house workshops amongst other activities. These various types of engagements have led to the development of a learning culture within the club, where people have sought various opportunities that suit their stage of development and their own needs. As advocated in Chapter Six, informal mentoring relationship have started to develop across the club, this has not been widespread but those who are engaging are reaping the benefits. It has been enriching to see some of the students analysts and coaches who started on our mentoring programme progress on as practitioners beyond the DCU setting.

As outlined, the line between the professional and personal involvement in Gaelic Games is often blurred, but there are benefits, as my curiosity in this area has led to me bringing informal mentoring into my own local club and amongst the network of coaches I frequently engage with. I am using the guidance outlined in Chapter Six to influence other Gaelic Games environments beyond just my work setting. I was recently provided with the platform to present some of the findings of this thesis to over eighty full time coaches for Leinster GAA (see Appendix 27), which has led to further discussion and understanding of the broader implications of mentoring in diverse settings. I have a broader knowledge base and bring a more critical lens to some of my engagements in my various Gaelic Games encounters. As a practicing hurling coach at both underage and adult level and as performance analyst, I feel that I have heavily leaned on both peer mentors and seeking out more experienced practitioners in the last two years particularly. I have really tried to embrace the possibilities of in-situ learning and accepted that ‘I don’t know what I don’t know’ but have sought out support in these unknowns.

I feel through the body of work presented in this thesis, along with my development in my professional role as Head of Gaelic Games in DCU and my many volunteer roles, that the Professional Doctorate journey has been one which has been enlightening.

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Appendix 1 – Plain Language Statement – Mentee Participants – Student-Athlete

Plain Language Statement (Mentee Participants)

'The Investigation of a Peer to Peer Athlete Mentoring Programme'

Introduction to the Research Study

The research title for this study is 'The Investigation of a Peer to Peer Athlete Mentoring Programme'. The primary investigator Dr. David Passmore, DCU School of Health & Human Performance who will work with Paul O'Brien the Head of Gaelic Games DCU. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of a mentoring programme of 1st Year and 2nd Year students who are also Inter County GAA players. The findings of the research will be used to enhance subsequent provision of the programme and inform other potential mentoring programmes.

Requirements for Volunteers

Participation is completely voluntary. If you initially decide to take part, you can subsequently change your mind and withdraw at any stage up until submission of the research report. Participants will be asked to complete both Athlete Mentoring questionnaire (AMQ) and three semi-structured interviews before, during and after the programme, about your experience of the mentoring programme. The three interviews will last a maximum of 45 minutes each.

Data Protection & Privacy

The identity and information shared by participants will be protected in the research by anonymising the participants with a pseudonym, eg. Mentee 1, Mentor 1. Confidentiality can only be protected within the limitation of the law. Interviews will be conducted in person with a Dictaphone for recording or through with Zoom (recorded downloaded). Data collated will be anonymised and will not include any personal information or anything that will allow for a person identity to be deciphered. Data will be used and protected within the limitation of the law. Data collected will be stored on a password protected Google drive and will be held for one year after the graduation (Approx 3rd Quarter 2024) of the primary investigator in line with University GDPR regulations, after which time the date will be destroyed by the primary investigator. The primary investigator and supervisor will be the only people with access to the audio and written data, which will be stored on an encrypted password protected computer.

Statement that involvement is Voluntary

Involvement in this research is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any stage up until the results are published. Involvement in this research does not present any health risks beyond everyday life. Results of the research will be made available to you upon request. There will be no impact on your participation in the DCU Student-Athlete mentoring programme if you do not wish to be part in the research. Participants will not receive any additional benefits in lieu of their involvement in this research.

Contact Details

If you have any further questions about the research you can contact:

Supervisor Dr David Passmore david.passmore@dcu.ie 087 9373750

Researcher Paul O'Brien paulobrien.gaa@dcu.ie

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel: 01-7008000, e-mail: rec@dcu.ie

Appendix 2 – Plain Language Statement – Mentor Participants – Student-Athlete

Plain Language Statement (Mentor Participants)

'The Investigation of a Peer to Peer Athlete Mentoring Programme'

Introduction to the Research Study

The research title for this study is 'The Investigation of a Peer to Peer Athlete Mentoring Programme'. The primary investigator Dr. David Passmore, DCU School of Health & Human Performance who will work with Paul O'Brien the Head of Gaelic Games DCU. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of a mentoring programme of 1st Year and 2nd Year students who are also Inter County GAA players. The findings of the research will be used to enhance subsequent provision of the programme and inform other potential mentoring programmes.

Requirements for Volunteers

Participation is completely voluntary. If you initially decide to take part, you can subsequently change your mind and withdraw at any stage up until submission of the research report. Participants will be asked to complete two semi-structured interviews during and after the programme, about your experience of the mentoring programme. The two interviews will last a maximum of 45 minutes each.

Data Protection & Privacy

The identity and information shared by participants will be protected in the research by anonymising the participants with a pseudonym, eg. Mentee 1, Mentor 1. Confidentiality can only be protected within the limitation of the law. Interviews will be conducted in person with a Dictaphone for recording or through with Zoom (recorded downloaded). Data collated will be anonymised and will not include any personal information or anything that will allow for a person identity to be deciphered. Data will be used and protected within the limitation of the law. Data collected will be stored on a password protected Google drive and will be held for one year after the graduation (Approx 3rd Quarter 2024) of the primary investigator in line with University GDPR regulations, after which time the date will be destroyed by the primary investigator. The primary investigator and supervisor will be the only people with access to the audio and written data, which will be stored on a encrypted password protected computer.

Statement that involvement is Voluntary

Involvement in this research is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any stage up until the results are published. Involvement in this research does not present any health risks beyond everyday life. Results of the research will be made available to you upon request. There will be no impact on your participation in the DCU Student-Athlete mentoring programme if you do not wish to be part in the research. Participants will not receive any additional benefits in lieu of their involvement in this research.

Contact Details

If you have any further questions about the research you can contact:

Supervisor	Dr David Passmore	david.passmore@dcu.ie	087 9373750
Researcher	Paul O'Brien	paulobrien.gaa@dcu.ie	

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel: 01-7008000, e-mail: rec@dcu.ie

Appendix 3 – Informed Consent Form – Student-Athlete Study

Dublin City University Informed Consent Form (Participants)

'The Investigation of a Peer to Peer Athlete Mentoring Programme'

Investigators: Dr David Passmore and Mr. Paul O'Brien

This is a consent form. It is accompanied by the Plain Language Statement (PLS), which provides all the relevant information on the research. If you decide that you would like to take part in this research study, you will need to confirm your consent.

Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the PLS

I confirm that I will take part in interviews, focus groups and complete questionnaires as requested over the duration of the research. I am aware that the interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded.

Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

I understand participation in this study is voluntary and it is at my discretion as to whether I participate in the research. I may withdraw, without prejudice, from this study up until the results have been published.

Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations

Dublin City University will protect all my personal information. However, confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations. My identity will be protected with the use of a pseudo name for each participant. Data will be saved in a password protected secure file and I know it will be deleted after five years.

I understand that I have been asked not to discuss the content of the focus group discussion, or the identity of its participants with anyone. I acknowledge that while the researcher has asked all focus groups participants to maintain confidentiality in the above manner, the researcher cannot guarantee that individual participants will adhere to this request.

I understand if I have any concerns about the way the research is being conducted I can contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000

Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question:

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)	*Yes / No*
I understand the information provided	*Yes / No*
I understand the information provided in relation to data protection	*Yes / No*
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study	*Yes / No*

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions *Yes / No*

I am aware that my interviews/ focus groups will be audiotaped *Yes / No*

Signature:

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this Consent Form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participants Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Appendix 4 – Interview Guide – Mentee Participants – Student-Athlete Study

Interview Guide for Mentee Focus Group

So I outline to start off with that I am grateful for their responses to the AMQ and for the I appreciate them giving time to this focus group. Some brief talk around their DCU sport, their county activity and their studies. Outline that these Focus Groups are designed to improve everyone's experiences and improve them as Student Athletes. I want to hear about what is working for some people and what is not working for others. Only by being honest about their experiences that we get to work towards improving the overall programme for them and others. I do not want to hear what you think I want to hear I want to hear an honest appraisal of your experience.

Questions:

Tell me about your first meeting/engagement with your mentor?

Did you know each other prior to the meeting?

In terms of structure of the mentoring programme could you have been linked in better or known more in advance?

What was the setting, social media, in person, coffee/dressing room?

What were your initial impressions?

Did they do or say anything in particular that impressed or didn't impress you?

How has your relationship with your mentor developed since over the last six months?

Who leads the relationship is it you or your mentor? Who is the more proactive?

How often do you engage with each other?

Are engagements more formal or informal?

What different engagements have you had and which has been most beneficial and least beneficial?

What does your mentor do that you like? What characteristics do they have which make them a good mentor or a bad mentor?

Examples of situations if possible

In what area has your mentor helped you?

- Mental Guidance
- Coach Relations. Have they helped with balancing being involved in multiple teams? How?

- Task Instruction. Have they helped with any aspects of your playing in terms of technical, tactical or physical assistance? How?
- Career Assistance. How have they helped you out from a DCU college perspective? Have they signposted you in many ways?
- Role Model. Do you view them as a role model? What do they do that impresses or inspires you? Do they do anything you wouldn't be impressed with?
- Friendship. Would you consider them a friend? Have you engaged with them on advice around non sporting and no academic matters?

For you what are the positive or negative outcomes of having a mentor?

Did you previously have a mentor like figure and how do they compare with this peer DCU mentor?

Is there anything else that we have not covered here that you want to mention?

Appendix 5 – Interview Guide – Mentor Participants – Student-Athlete Study

Interview Guide for Mentor Focus Group

So I outline to start off with that I am grateful for their participation as mentors and I appreciate them giving time to this focus group. Some brief talk around their county activity and their studies/work. Outline that these Focus Groups are designed to improve everyone's experiences and improve them as mentors. I want to hear about what is working for some people and what is not working for others. Only by being honest about their experiences that we get to work towards improving the overall programme for them and others. I do not want to hear what you think I want to hear I want to hear an honest appraisal of your experience.

Questions:

Why were you so willing to become mentor?

Social Exchange Theory

Have you yourself had a mentor in any walk of life?

Did you feel you'd be a good mentor, if so why?

What tools were you using in deciding how to support your mentee?

Were there elements you were nervous about being a mentor (role model)?

Tell me about your first meeting/engagement with your mentee?

Did you know mentee in advance of programme or heard anything about them?

In terms of structure of the mentoring programme could you have been linked in better or known more in advance?

Is there any additional training or support needed?

What was the setting, social media, in person, coffee/dressing room?

What were your initial impressions of mentee?

Did they do or say anything in particular that impressed or didn't impress you?

How has your relationship with your mentee developed since over the last four months?

Is there awkward engagements and if so how can we overcome these?

Who leads the relationship is it you or your mentee? Who is the more proactive?

How often do you engage with each other?

Are engagements more formal or informal?

What different engagements have you had and which has been most beneficial and least beneficial?

What does your mentee do that you like? What characteristics do they have?

Examples of situations if possible

Do they energise you?

In what area have you worked with mentee on?

- Mental Guidance
- Coach Relations. Have you helped them in balancing being involved in multiple teams? How?
- Task Instruction. Have you helped them with any aspects of their playing in terms of technical, tactical or physical assistance? How?
- Career Assistance. How you helped out from a DCU college perspective? Have you signposted them in any ways?
- Role Model. Do you view yourself as a role model? Are you aware that they view you as one, reference AMQ.
- Friendship. Would you consider them a friend? Have you engaged with them on advice around non sporting and no academic matters?

For you what are the positive or negative outcomes of being a mentor?

What benefits have you got out of it?

Do you feel it has developed you as a player/person

Has it been a good reflective tool for you?

Is there anything else that we have not covered here that you want to mention?

Appendix 6 – Athlete Mentoring Questionnaire (AMQ) – Student-Athlete Study

Athlete Mentoring Questionnaire (AMQ)

Instructions: Using the following scale, please circle a number from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to indicate your level of agreement with each of the statements regarding your PEER ATHLETE MENTOR. There are no right or wrong answers, so please answer each question as honestly as possible. The statements are written in the present tense, but simply pretend that they are written in the past tense if your mentoring relationship occurred in the past.

My peer athlete mentor…

MG1. Provides advice to help me concentrate in my sport.

MG2. Provides advice that helps the mental side of my game.

MG3. Suggests strategies to assist with mental preparation for my athletic pursuits.

MG4. Guides me psychologically through high-pressure situations in sport.

CR1. Assists me in having positive sport-related interactions with my coach(es).

CR2. Advises me on how to have constructive communication with my coach(es) in the sport setting.

CR3. Suggests how I can work effectively with my coach(es) to benefit my performance.

CR4. Provides advice about managing performance-related feedback I get from my coach(es).

TI1. Gives me advice concerning the technical side of my game.

TI2. Suggests tactical strategies that I can use in my sport.

TI3. Instructs me on how to develop my sport skills.

TI4. Shares his/her knowledge about how to execute certain techniques more effectively.

TI5. Corrects me from a technical or tactical standpoint when required.

TI6. Provides me with constructive criticism about my game.

CA1. Helps me make choices about my career as an athlete.

CA2. Teaches me about the "politics" within my sport that can impact my advancement as an athlete.

CA3. Recommends people in the sporting community who can assist me in my athletic career (e.g., trainers, nutritionists, sponsors, recruiters).

CA4. Discusses opportunities I should consider to advance through the sporting system.

CA5. Supports me in planning my general career objectives as an athlete.

RM1. Serves as a role model for me.

RM2. Sets a good example for me to follow.

RM3. Shows me what ideal behaviors look like.

RM4. Acts in a way that is impressive to me.

RM5. Carries himself/herself in a way that I respect.

RM6. Exhibits behaviors and attitudes that I identify with.

RM7. Displays values that I relate to.

F1. Counsels me in non-performance related matters.

F2. Serves as a sounding board for me to discuss any personal struggles.

F3. Interacts with me through different mediums (internet, text message, phone).

F4. Shares his/her personal stories and moments with me.

F5. Has conversations with me where we both share personal stories.

F6. Serves as a trusted friend.

F7. Offers feedback on my non-performance related concerns.

F8. Bonds with me over similar interests.

Appendix 7 – Plain Language Statement – Mentee Participants – PA Study

Plain Language Statement (Mentee Participants)

'The Development of Performance Analysts through a Mentoring Programme'

Introduction to the Research Study

The research title for this study is 'The Development of Performance Analysts (PA) through a Mentoring Programme. The principle investigator Paul O'Brien, DCU Head of Gaelic Games under the supervision of Dr. Robin Taylor, DCU School of Health & Human Performance. The purpose of this study is to investigate the development of student performance analysts working with elite level teams, while receiving support from experienced PA practitioners who will act as mentors. The findings of the research will be used to enhance and further develop the subsequent revised provision of the programme and inform other potential DCU GAA mentoring programmes.

Requirements for Mentee Volunteers

Participation is completely voluntary. If you initially decide to take part, you can subsequently change your mind and withdraw at any stage up until submission of the research report. Participants will be asked to complete two semi-structured focus groups during and after the programme, about your experience of the mentoring programme. The two focus groups will last a maximum of 45 minutes each and will take place either face to face or online (should covid protocols require).

Data Protection & Privacy

The identity and information shared by participants will be protected in the research by anonymising the participants with a pseudonym, eg. Mee1, Mor1, Coach1. Confidentiality can only be protected within the limitation of the law. Focus Groups will be conducted in person (or on Zoom) with a Dictaphone for recording. Data collated will be anonymised and will not include any personal information or anything that will allow for a person identity to be deciphered. Data will be used and protected within the limitation of the law. Data collected will be stored on a password protected Google Drive and will be held for one year after the graduation (Approximately 3rd Quarter 2024) of the primary investigator in line with University GDPR regulations or after 5 years, after which time the date will be destroyed by the primary investigator. The primary investigator and supervisor will be the only people with access to the audio and written data, which will be stored on an encrypted password protected computer.

Statement that involvement is Voluntary

Involvement in this research is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any stage up until the results are published. Involvement in this research does not present any health risks beyond everyday life. Results of the research will be made available to you upon request. There will be no impact on your participation in the DCU Student Performance Analyst programme if you do not wish to be part of the research. Participants will not receive any additional benefits in lieu of their involvement in this research.

Contact Details

If you have any further questions about the research you can contact:

Supervisor	Dr Robin Taylor	robin.taylor@dcu.ie	
Researcher	Paul O'Brien	paulobrien.gaa@dcu.ie	087 9154748

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel: 01-7008000, e-mail: rec@dcu.ie

Appendix 8 – Plain Language Statement – Mentor Participants – PA Study

Plain Language Statement (Mentor Participants)

'The Development of Performance Analysts through a Mentoring Programme'

Introduction to the Research Study

The research title for this study is 'The Development of Performance Analysts (PA) through a Mentoring Programme'. The principle investigator Paul O'Brien, DCU Head of Gaelic Games under the supervision of Dr. Robin Taylor, DCU School of Health & Human Performance. The purpose of this study is to investigate the development of student performance analysts working with elite level teams, while receiving support from experienced PA practitioners acting as mentors. The findings of the research will be used to revise and enhance subsequent provision of the mentoring programme and inform other potential mentoring programmes within DCU GAA Club.

Requirements for Mentor Volunteers

Participation is completely voluntary. If you initially decide to take part, you can subsequently change your mind and withdraw at any stage up until submission of the research report. Participants will be asked to complete two semi-structured focus groups during and after the programme, about your experience and impact of the mentoring programme. The two focus groups will last a maximum of 45 minutes each.

Data Protection & Privacy

The identity and information shared by participants will be protected in the research by anonymising the participants with a pseudonym, eg. Mee1, Mor1, Coach1. Confidentiality can only be protected within the limitation of the law. Focus Groups will be conducted in person with a Dictaphone for recording. Data collated will be anonymised and will not include any personal information or anything that will allow for a person identity to be deciphered. Data will be used and protected within the limitation of the law. Data collected will be stored on a password protected Google drive and will be held for one year after the graduation (Approximately 3rd Quarter 2024) of the primary investigator, or after 5 years, in line with University GDPR regulations, after which time the date will be destroyed by the primary investigator. The primary investigator and supervisor will be the only people with the passwords to access the audio and written data, which will be stored on a Google Drive via an encrypted password protected computer.

Statement that involvement is Voluntary

Involvement in this research is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any stage up until the results are published. Involvement in this research does not present any health risks beyond everyday life. Results of the research will be made available to you upon request. Participants will not receive any additional benefits in lieu of their involvement in this research.

Contact Details

If you have any further questions about the research you can contact:

Supervisor Dr Robin Taylor robin.taylor@dcu.ie

Researcher Paul O'Brien paulobrien.gaa@dcu.ie 087 9154748

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel: 01-7008000, e-mail: rec@dcu.ie

Appendix 9 – Plain Language Statement – Coach/Manager Participants– PA Study

Plain Language Statement (Coach Participants)

'The Development of Performance Analysts through a Mentoring Programme'

Introduction to the Research Study

The research title for this study is 'The Development of Performance Analysts (PA) through a Mentoring Programme'. The principle investigator Paul O'Brien, DCU Head of Gaelic Games under the supervision of Dr. Robin Taylor, DCU School of Health & Human Performance. The purpose of this study is to investigate the development of student performance analysts working with elite level teams, while receiving support from experienced PA practitioners who will act as mentors. The findings of the research will be used to enhance subsequent provision of the programme and inform other potential mentoring programmes.

Requirements for Coach Volunteers

Participation is completely voluntary. If you initially decide to take part, you can subsequently change your mind and withdraw at any stage up until submission of the research report. Participants will be asked to complete one semi-structured focus groups after the programme, about your receipt of PA services from the Student Performance Analyst. The focus Group sessions will last a maximum of 45 minutes.

Data Protection & Privacy

The identity and information shared by participants will be protected in the research by anonymising the participants with a pseudonym, eg. Mee1, Mor1, Coach1. Confidentiality can only be protected within the limitation of the law. Focus Groups will be conducted in person with a Dictaphone for recording. Data collated will be anonymised and will not include any personal information or anything that will allow for a person identity to be deciphered. Data will be used and protected within the limitation of the law. Data collected will be stored on a password protected Google drive and will be held for one year after the graduation (Approximately 3rd Quarter 2024) of the primary investigator, or after 5 years of collection, in line with University GDPR regulations, after which time the date will be destroyed by the primary investigator. The primary investigator and supervisor will be the only people with access to the audio and written data, which will be stored on an encrypted password protected computer.

Statement that involvement is Voluntary

Involvement in this research is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any stage up until the results are published. Involvement in this research does not present any health risks beyond everyday life. Results of the research will be made available to you upon request. There will be no impact on your role as a coach/manager in DCU Dóchas Éireann GAA club, if you do not wish to be part of the research. Participants will not receive any additional benefits in lieu of their involvement in this research.

Contact Details

If you have any further questions about the research you can contact:

Supervisor Dr Robin Taylor robin.taylor@dcu.ie

Researcher Paul O'Brien paulobrien.gaa@dcu.ie 087 9154748

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel: 01-7008000, e-mail: rec@dcu.ie

Appendix 10 – Informed Consent Form – PA Study

Dublin City University Informed Consent Form (Participants)

'The Development of Performance Analysts through a Mentoring Programme'

Investigators: Mr. Paul O'Brien & Dr Robin Taylor

This is a consent form. It is accompanied by the Plain Language Statement (PLS), which provides all the relevant information on the research. If you decide that you would like to take part in this research study, you will need to confirm your consent.

Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the PLS

I confirm that I will take part in focus groups as requested over the duration of the research. I am aware that the focus groups will be audio recorded.

Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

I understand participation in this study is voluntary and it is at my discretion as to whether I participate in the research. I may withdraw, without prejudice, from this study up until the results have been published.

Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations

Dublin City University will protect all my personal information. However, confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations. My identity will be protected with the use of a pseudo name for each participant. Data will be saved in a password protected secure file and I know it will be deleted one year after the completion of the primary researcher's studies. I understand that I have been asked not to discuss the content of the focus group discussion, or the identity of its participants with anyone. I acknowledge that while the researcher has asked all focus groups participants to maintain confidentiality in the above manner, the researcher cannot guarantee that individual participants will adhere to this request.

I understand if I have any concerns about the way the research is being conducted I can contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000

Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the PLS

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question:

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)	*Yes / No*
I understand the information provided	*Yes / No*
I understand the information provided in relation to data protection	*Yes / No*
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study	*Yes / No*
I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions	*Yes / No*
I am aware that my focus groups will be audiotaped	*Yes / No*

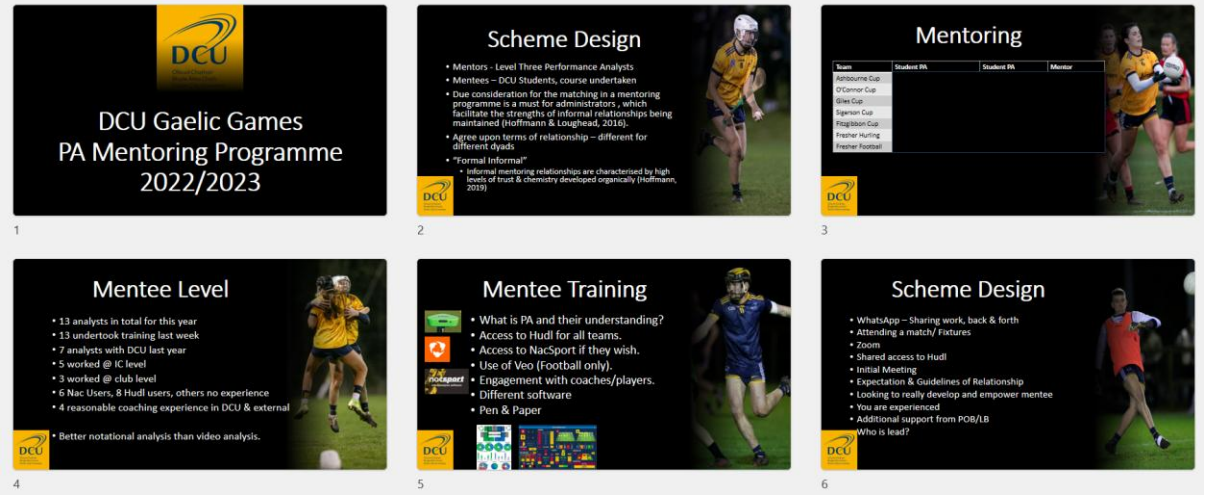
Signature:

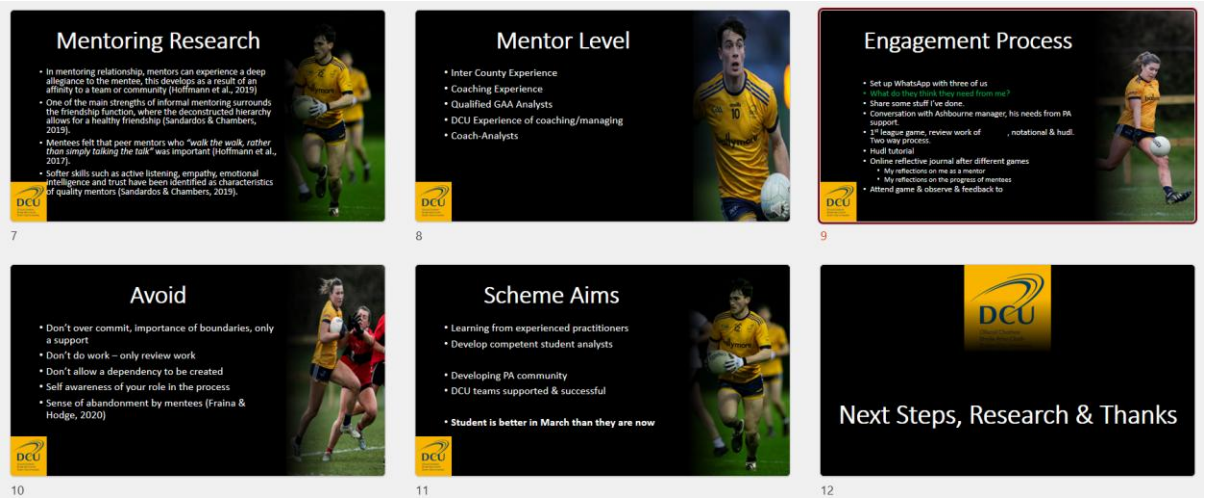
I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this Consent Form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participants Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Appendix 11 – Mentor/Mentee Training Presentation – PA Study





Appendix 12 – Interview Guide – Mentees – PA Study

Interview Guide for PA Cohort Mentee Focus Group

So I outline to start off with that I am grateful for their engagement and I appreciate them giving time to this focus group. Some brief talk around their DCU sport, their county activity and their studies. Outline that these Focus Groups are designed to improve everyone's experiences and improve them as Analysts and people who'll be involved going forward. I want to hear about what is working for some people and what is not working for others. Only by being honest about their experiences that we get to work towards improving the overall programme for them and others. I do not want to hear what you think I want to hear I want to hear an honest appraisal of your experience.

Questions:

Do you feel the PA programme & support was a success?

Do you feel you've improved as an analyst this year?

Any particular areas you've improved on?

- In Game Analysis (Notational)
- Post Game Analysis (Notational/Video)
- Training
- Opposition Analysis
- Individual Player
- Season Analysis
- Meetings & Communication Methods

How or where do you feel you added value to your team?

How can we improve the programme?

Additional supports needed?

Difficulties balancing with other commitments?

Engagements with coaches?

Were you valued?

Tell me about your first meeting/engagement with your mentor?

Did you actually function as a mentoring dyad?

If not is there a reason why?

Social Exchange Theory – outline it and get them to think of the relationship in these terms.

Did you know each other prior to the meeting?

In terms of structure of the mentoring programme could you have been linked in better or known more in advance?

What was the setting, social media, in person, coffee/dressing room?

What were your initial impressions? Was there awkwardness

Did they do or say anything in particular that impressed or didn't impress you?

How has your relationship with your mentor developed since over the last six months?

Who leads the relationship is it you or your mentor? Who is the more proactive?

How often do you engage with each other?

Are engagements more formal or informal?

What different engagements have you had and which has been most beneficial and least beneficial?

What does your mentor do that you like? What characteristics do they have which make them a good mentor or a bad mentor?

Examples of situations if possible

In what area has your mentor helped you?

- Mental Guidance
- Coach Relations. Have they helped you in terms of communication with coaches/players?
- Task Instruction. Have they helped with any aspects of your PA practice in terms of any technical aspect? How?
- Career Assistance. How have they helped you out from a future jobs? Have they signposted you in many ways?
- Role Model. Do you view them as a role model? What do they do that impresses or inspires you? Do they do anything you wouldn't be impressed with?
- Friendship. Would you consider them a friend? Have you engaged with them on advice around non sporting and no academic matters?

For you what are the positive or negative outcomes of having a mentor?

Did you previously have a mentor like figure and how do they compare with this peer DCU mentor?

Is there anything else that we have not covered here that you want to mention?

Appendix 13 – Interview Guide – Mentors – PA Study

Interview Guide for PA Cohort Mentor Focus Group

So I outline to start off with that I am grateful for their participation as mentors and I appreciate them giving time to this focus group. Some brief talk about the DCU teams and their performance in Championship. Outline that these Focus Groups are designed to improve everyone's experiences and improve them as mentors but also the service provision to our teams. I want to hear about what is working for some people and what is not working for others. Only by being honest about their experiences that we get to work towards improving the overall programme for them and others. I do not want to hear what you think I want to hear I want to hear an honest appraisal of your experience. I also frame that I am undertaking my research under the framework of social exchange theory.

Questions:

Why were you so willing to become mentor with DCU team?

Social Exchange Theory

Have you yourself had a mentor in any walk of life or particularly PA?

Did you feel you'd be a good mentor, if so why?

What tools were you using in deciding how to support your mentee?

Were there elements you were nervous about being a mentor (role model)?

Tell me about your first meeting/engagement with your mentee?

Did you know mentee in advance of programme or heard anything about them?

Did you have any engagement with the manager of the DCU team?

In terms of structure of the mentoring programme could you have been linked in better or known more in advance? Some dyads didn't function, whose fault was this?

Is there any additional training or support needed?

What was the setting, social media, in person, coffee/dressing room?

What were your initial impressions of mentees? Ability to be a good PA?

Did they do or say anything in particular that impressed or didn't impress you?

How has your relationship with your mentee developed since over season?

Is there awkward engagements and if so how can we overcome these?

Who leads the relationship is it you or your mentee? Who is the more proactive?

How often do you engage with each other?

Are engagements more formal or informal?

What different engagements have you had and which has been most beneficial and least beneficial?

What does your mentee do that you like? What characteristics do they have?

Examples of situations if possible

Would you like to work with them in a team you're involved in externally? Would you recommend them to a team looking for PA support?

Do they energise you?

Where had they deficiencies?

In what area have you worked with mentee on?

- Mental Guidance
- Coach Relations. Would you have helped them in terms of engagement with the team manager or coach?
- Task Instruction. Have you helped them with any aspects of their PA in terms of videos, notational analysis
- Career Assistance. Have you helped them out with other GAA opportunities? Have you signposted them in any ways?
- Role Model. Do you view yourself as a role model or a professional they'd aspire too? Are you aware that they view you as one, reference AMQ.
- Friendship. Would you consider them a friend? Have you engaged with them on advice around non PA matters?

For you what are the positive or negative outcomes of being a mentor?

In terms of SET, did you manage to get benefits from it?

Did you learn anything from a professional perspective from your mentee?

Do you feel it has developed you as a player/person

Has it been a good reflective tool for you?

Is there anything else that we have not covered here that you want to mention?

Appendix 14 – Interview Guide – Managers/Coaches – PA Study

Focus Groups with Managers of teams who received PA support

Purpose of this focus group is to get an understanding from you on the PA support afforded to your teams this year.

I am going to explore the following areas

1. Your general impressions of your Analyst(s)
2. What went well, what did they do well
3. What did not go well and why
4. What needs to be changed for next year

Data will be used to improve the programme and also as a secondary back up for research I am doing, there have been other focus groups with the analysts and their mentor supports.

What were your general impressions of your analyst…

Their personality

Adding value to your set up

Apprehension with them due to them being inexperienced

What were your views on the support (if any) they received from their mentor, to the best of your knowledge?

What went well in terms of the support

- Practice
- In match statistics
- Post game statistics
- Post Game Video
- Opposition Analysis
- Team meetings
- Expertise
- Professional Behaviours
- Technical Expertise
- PA & Sport Expertise
- Building Relationships
- Contextual Awareness

Give examples where appropriate

What did not go well

Give examples where appropriate

Coach as analyst, how much did you do? Reasons behind this load

Suggestions for improvement next year

Organisation form the GAA office

Additional training

Injured players

Platforms available

Player involvement

Videoing of games

Appendix 15 – Plain Language Statement – Mentee Participants – Coaches Study

Plain Language Statement (Mentee Participants)

'The effects of a mentor on the coaching practice and behaviours of student coaches in Gaelic Games'

Introduction to the Research Study

The research title for this study is 'The effects of a mentor on the coaching practice and behaviours of student coaches in Gaelic Games'. The study is led by Dr. Robin Taylor, DCU School of Health & Human Performance, and Paul O'Brien, the Head of Gaelic Games DCU. The purpose of this study is to investigate the development of student coaches starting their coaching journey, while receiving support from mentors with significant experience coaching at all levels in Gaelic Games. The findings of the research will be used to enhance and further develop the subsequent revised provision of coaching & Gaelic Games in DCU.

Requirements for Mentee Volunteers

Participation is completely voluntary. If you initially decide to take part, you can subsequently change your mind and withdraw at any stage up until submission of the research report. Participants will be asked to complete both a reflective online journal and three semi-structured Interviews before, during and after the programme, about your experience of the mentoring programme. The interviews will last a maximum of 45 minutes each and will take place either face to face or online (should covid protocols require). The reflective journal will be submitted on a monthly basis and each completion should be completed in under 10 minutes.

Data Protection & Privacy

The identity and information shared by participants will be protected in the research by anonymising the participants with a pseudonym, eg. Mee1, Mor1. Confidentiality can only be protected within the limitation of the law. Interviews will be conducted in person (or on Zoom) with a Dictaphone for recording. Data collated will be anonymised and will not include any personal information or anything that will allow for a person identity to be deciphered. Data will be used and protected within the limitation of the law. Data collected will be stored on a password protected Google Drive and will be held for one year after the graduation (Approximately 3rd Quarter 2024) of the primary investigator in line with University GDPR regulations or after 5 years, after which time the date will be destroyed by the primary investigator. The primary investigator and supervisor will be the only people with access to the audio and written data, which will be stored on an encrypted password protected computer.

Statement that involvement is Voluntary

Involvement in this research is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any stage up until the results are published, expected date Q3 2024. Involvement in this research does not present any health risks beyond everyday life. Results of the research will be made available to you upon request. There will be no impact on your studies in DCU or coaching in the DCU Dóchas Éireann GAA Club if you do not wish to be part of the research. Participants will not receive any additional benefits in lieu of their involvement in this research.

Contact Details

If you have any further questions about the research you can contact:

Supervisor Dr Robin Taylor robin.taylor@dcu.ie

Researcher Paul O'Brien paulobrien.gaa@dcu.ie 087 9154748

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel: 01-7008000, e-mail: rec@dcu.ie

Appendix 16 – Plain Language Statement – Mentor Participants – Coaches Study

Plain Language Statement (Mentor Participants)

'The effects of a mentor on the coaching practice and behaviours of student coaches in Gaelic Games'

Introduction to the Research Study

The research title for this study is 'The effects of a mentor on the coaching practice and behaviours of student coaches in Gaelic Games'. The study is led by Dr. Robin Taylor, DCU School of Health & Human Performance and Paul O'Brien, the Head of Gaelic Games DCU. The purpose of this study is to investigate the development of student coaches starting their coaching journey, while receiving support from mentors with significant experience coaching at all levels in Gaelic Games. The findings of the research will be used to enhance and further develop the subsequent revised provision of coaching & Gaelic Games in DCU.

Requirements for Mentor Volunteers

Participation is completely voluntary. If you initially decide to take part, you can subsequently change your mind and withdraw at any stage up until submission of the research report. Participants will be asked to complete both a reflective online journal and two semi-structured Interviews during and after the programme, about your experience of the mentoring programme. The interviews will last a maximum of 45 minutes each and will take place either face to face or online (should covid protocols require). The reflective journal will be submitted on a monthly basis and each completion should be completed in under 10 minutes.

Data Protection & Privacy

The identity and information shared by participants will be protected in the research by anonymising the participants with a pseudonym, eg. Mee1, Mor1. Confidentiality can only be protected within the limitation of the law. Interviews will be conducted in person (or on Zoom) with a Dictaphone for recording. Data collated will be anonymised and will not include any personal information or anything that will allow for a person identity to be deciphered. Data will be used and protected within the limitation of the law. Data collected will be stored on a password protected Google Drive and will be held for one year after the graduation (Approximately 3rd Quarter 2024) of the primary investigator in line with University GDPR regulations or after 5 years, after which time the date will be destroyed by the primary investigator. The primary investigator and supervisor will be the only people with access to the audio and written data, which will be stored on an encrypted password protected computer.

Statement that involvement is Voluntary

Involvement in this research is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any stage up until the results are published, expected date Q3 2024. Involvement in this research does not present any health risks beyond everyday life. Results of the research will be made available to you upon request. There will be no impact on your existing coaching position in the DCU Dóchas Éireann GAA Club if you do not wish to be part of the research. Participants will not receive any additional benefits in lieu of their involvement in this research.

Contact Details

If you have any further questions about the research you can contact:

Supervisor Dr Robin Taylor robin.taylor@dcu.ie

Researcher Paul O'Brien paulobrien.gaa@dcu.ie 087 9154748

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel: 01-7008000, e-mail: rec@dcu.ie

Appendix 17 – Informed Consent Form – Coaches Study

Dublin City University Informed Consent Form (Participants)

'The effects of a mentor on the coaching & behaviour of student coaches in Gaelic Games'

Investigators: Mr. Paul O'Brien & Dr. Robin Taylor

This is a consent form. It is accompanied by the Plain Language Statement (PLS), which provides all the relevant information on the research. If you decide that you would like to take part in this research study, you will need to confirm your consent.

Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the PLS

I confirm that I will take part in Interviews (and Online Reflective Journals) as requested over the duration of the research. I am aware that the interviews will be audio recorded. I am aware that the programme coordinator may at times be observing activity and taking field notes during course of the research.

Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

I understand participation in this study is voluntary and it is at my discretion as to whether I participate in the research. I may withdraw, without prejudice, from this study up until the results have been published. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations Dublin City University will protect all my personal information. However, confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations. Confidentiality of the information provided to the researcher(s) cannot always be guaranteed. Information can only be protected within the limitations of the law, i.e. it is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions. Data will be retained in accordance with the Registry requirements applicable to the PhD programme. All personal data will be destroyed as soon as those requirements have been met.

I understand that I have been asked not to discuss the content of the Interviews discussion, or the identity of its participants with anyone. I acknowledge that while the researcher has asked all focus groups participants to maintain confidentiality in the above manner, the researcher cannot guarantee that individual participants will adhere to this request.

I understand if I have any concerns about the way the research is being conducted I can contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000

Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the PLS

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question):

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)	Yes / No
I understand the information provided	Yes / No
I understand the information provided in relation to data protection	Yes / No
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study	Yes / No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions Yes / No

I am aware that my focus groups will be audiotaped Yes / No

Signature:

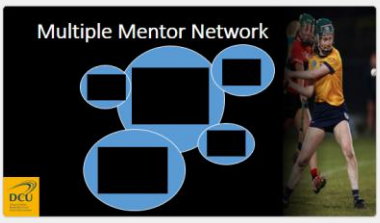
I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this Consent Form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participants Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Appendix 18 – Mentor/Mentee Face to Face Training Presentation – Coaches Study

1



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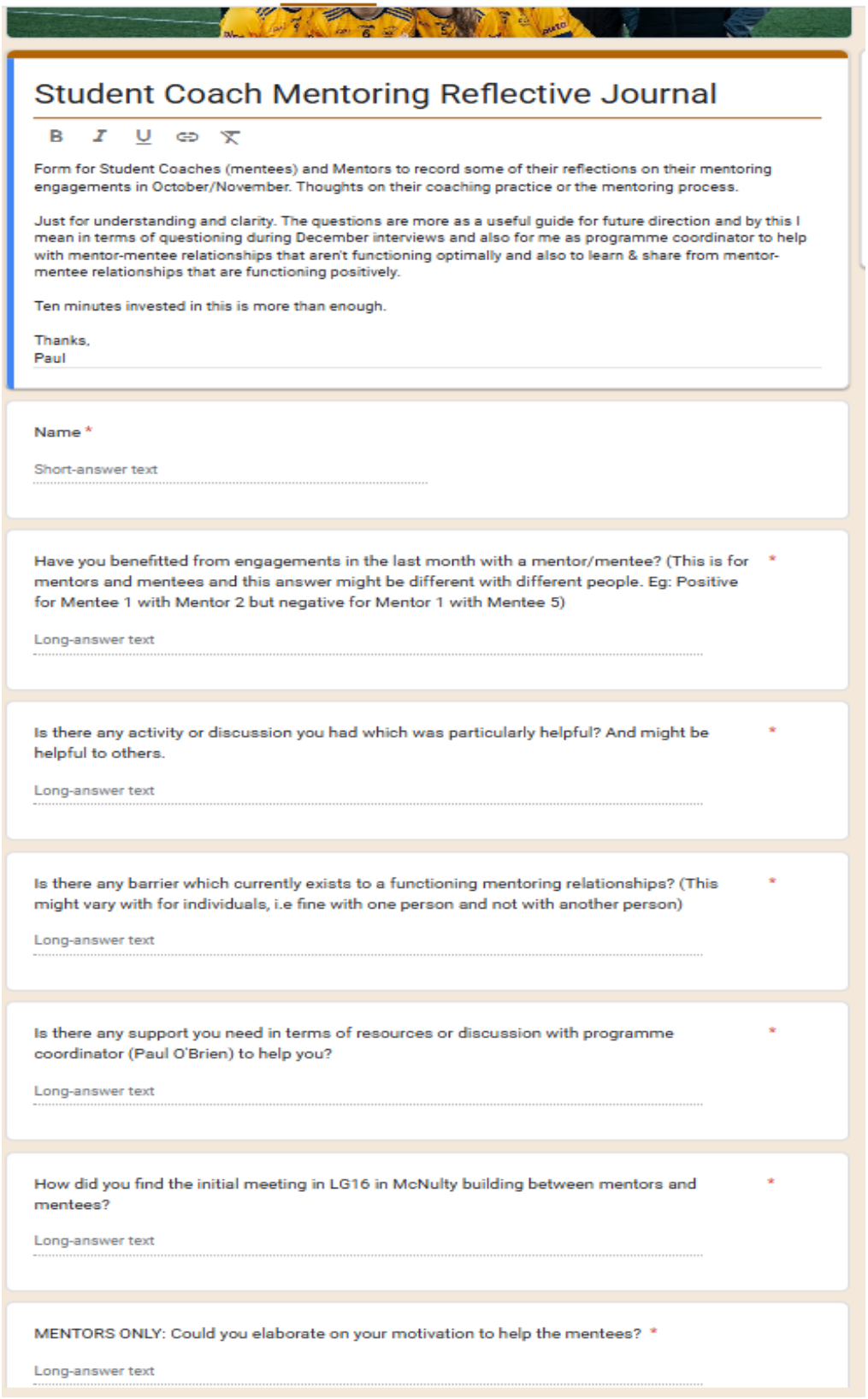
Appendix 19 – Reflective Journal #1 – Coaches Study



Student Coach Mentoring Reflective Journal

Form for Student Coaches (mentees) and Mentors to record some of their reflections on their mentoring engagements in October/November. Thoughts on their coaching practice or the mentoring process.

Just for understanding and clarity. The questions are more as a useful guide for future direction and by this I mean in terms of questioning during December interviews and also for me as programme coordinator to help with mentor-mentee relationships that aren't functioning optimally and also to learn & share from mentor-mentee relationships that are functioning positively.

Ten minutes invested in this is more than enough.

Thanks,
Paul

Name *

Short-answer text

Have you benefitted from engagements in the last month with a mentor/mentee? (This is for mentors and mentees and this answer might be different with different people. Eg: Positive for Mentee 1 with Mentor 2 but negative for Mentor 1 with Mentee 5) *

Long-answer text

Is there any activity or discussion you had which was particularly helpful? And might be helpful to others. *

Long-answer text

Is there any barrier which currently exists to a functioning mentoring relationships? (This might vary with for individuals, i.e fine with one person and not with another person) *

Long-answer text

Is there any support you need in terms of resources or discussion with programme coordinator (Paul O'Brien) to help you? *

Long-answer text

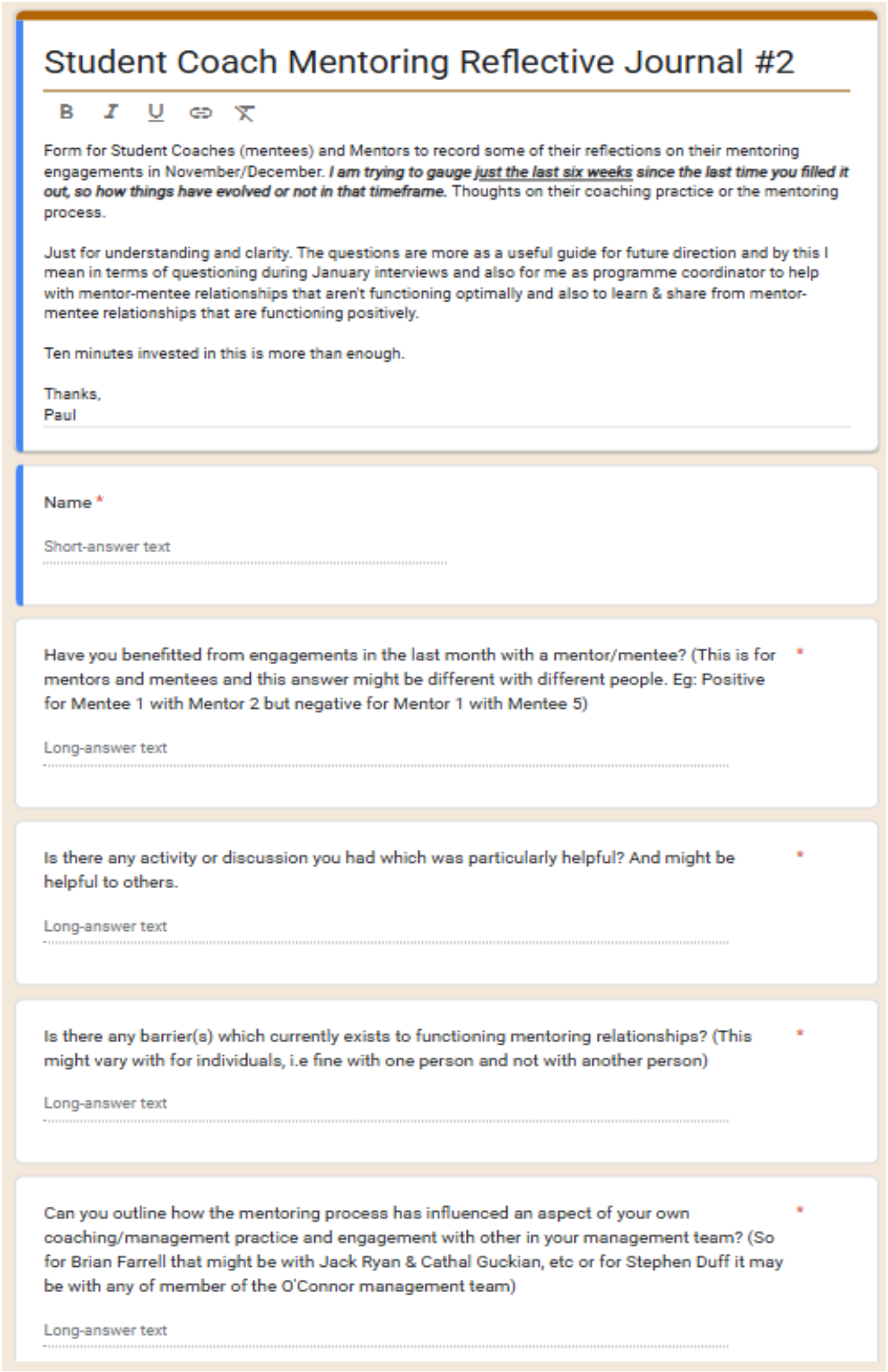
How did you find the initial meeting in LG16 in McNulty building between mentors and mentees? *

Long-answer text

MENTORS ONLY: Could you elaborate on your motivation to help the mentees? *

Long-answer text

Appendix 20 – Reflective Journal #2 – Coaches Study



Student Coach Mentoring Reflective Journal #2

Form for Student Coaches (mentees) and Mentors to record some of their reflections on their mentoring engagements in November/December. ***I am trying to gauge just the last six weeks since the last time you filled it out, so how things have evolved or not in that timeframe.*** Thoughts on their coaching practice or the mentoring process.

Just for understanding and clarity. The questions are more as a useful guide for future direction and by this I mean in terms of questioning during January interviews and also for me as programme coordinator to help with mentor-mentee relationships that aren't functioning optimally and also to learn & share from mentor-mentee relationships that are functioning positively.

Ten minutes invested in this is more than enough.

Thanks,
Paul

Name *

Short-answer text

Have you benefitted from engagements in the last month with a mentor/mentee? (This is for mentors and mentees and this answer might be different with different people. Eg: Positive for Mentee 1 with Mentor 2 but negative for Mentor 1 with Mentee 5) *

Long-answer text

Is there any activity or discussion you had which was particularly helpful? And might be helpful to others. *

Long-answer text

Is there any barrier(s) which currently exists to functioning mentoring relationships? (This might vary with for individuals, i.e fine with one person and not with another person) *

Long-answer text

Can you outline how the mentoring process has influenced an aspect of your own coaching/management practice and engagement with other in your management team? (So for Brian Farrell that might be with Jack Ryan & Cathal Guckian, etc or for Stephen Duff it may be with any of member of the O'Connor management team) *

Long-answer text

Appendix 21 – Reflective Journal #3 – Coaches Study

Student Coach Mentoring Reflective Journal #3

Form for Student Coaches (mentees) and Mentors to record some of their reflections on their mentoring engagements since Christmas. ***I am trying to gauge just post Christmas since the last time you filled it out, so how things have evolved or not in that timeframe.*** Thoughts on their coaching practice or the mentoring process.

Just for understanding and clarity. The questions are more as a useful guide for future direction and by this I mean in terms of questioning during March interviews and also for me as programme coordinator to help further into next year into continuing to evolve this.

Ten minutes invested in this is more than enough.

Thanks,
Paul

Name *

Short-answer text

Have you benefitted from engagements since Christmas with a mentor/mentee? (This is for mentors and mentees and this answer might be different with different people. Eg: Positive for Mentee 1 with Mentor 2 but negative for Mentor 1 with Mentee 5) *

Long-answer text

Is there any activity or discussion you had which was particularly helpful? *

Long-answer text

From a coaching perspective has the programme changed your coaching behaviours and practices or your management style? (This is for both mentors and mentees) *

Long-answer text

Is there any particular thing in terms of your coaching or management that is evidently different now then it was in September? *

Long-answer text

Appendix 22 – Interview Guide – Mentees Pre Programme – Coaches Study

Semi Structured Interview Guide – Pre Programme

Question	Potential Areas for further Probing
What is your motivation behind coaching one of the DCU teams? Future coaching ambitions?	Involved because of interest in coaching, aligning with academic course, social aspect, coaching down the line
Where have you got your coaching knowledge from? Tell me about the best coach you've had…. Tell me about the worst coach you've had…	Expected areas playing experience, social media, ICGG course, summer camps with kids (explore difference with adults/peers) Explore naïve views on drills etc Explore if their knowledge has taught them what to do and what not to do On their best/worst coach explore the impact they have on their coaching philosophy
What areas do you feel you need to upskill most on? What areas of coaching or management do you feel you are competent? Do you have a coaching philosophy?	Expect to get a lot of stuff, ask WHY do they think that. Expect very little from them on coaching philosophy but will look to ask them thoughts on winning vs developing, team culture, tactics, games v drills
What are your expectation of the support Mentors can give you? Do you have anyone who has acted in such a mentor role for you in any aspect of life (and coaching specifically)?	I don't want to tell them, I expect some bland answers around this, hopefully the previous section on their strengths & weaknesses above will allow to flesh this out

Appendix 23 – Interview Guide – Mentees Mid Programme – Coaches Study

Interview Guide for Coaching Cohort Mentee – Mid Programme

So I outline to start off with that I am grateful for your participation as mentors and I appreciate giving your time to programme & interview. Interviews are designed to improve everyone's experience. I want to hear about what is working for some people and what is not working for others. Only by being honest about your experiences that we get to work towards improving the overall programme for them and others. I do not want to hear what you think I want to hear I want to hear an honest appraisal of your experience.

On an individual level I may refer to a point may in your November or January reflective journal.

Questions:

Tell me about your first meeting/engagement with your mentee?

Did you know any of mentors in advance of programme?

In terms of structure of the mentoring programme could you have been linked in better or known more in advance? (Workshop & POB outline) Some dyads didn't function, whose fault was this?

Is there any additional training or support needed?

What was the setting of first meeting?

What were your initial impressions of mentors?

Did they do or say anything in particular that impressed or didn't impress you?

How has your relationship with your mentor(s) developed over the three months? *Note this will be different for different mentors*

Why have some relationship went better than others?

Who leads the relationship is it you or mentor(s)? Who is the more proactive?

How often do you engage with each other?

What different engagements have you had and which has been most beneficial and least beneficial?

Barriers to development and how to overcome?

Is there trust in relationship or apprehension?

Discussion around the differences of formal vs informal mentoring

Where is your relationship on the formal v informal spectrum?

Benefits/disadvantages of both

From a coaching perspective & DCU perspective what would an optimal scheme look like?

What does your mentor do that you like/dislike? What characteristics do they have?

Examples of situations/conversations/thinking if possible

Would you like to work with them in a team you're involved in?

Do they energise you?

Has there been aspects where you have not agreed with their viewpoint and how did this interaction go?

Personality differences

Do they have characteristics that you strive to have?

Benefits to you as a mentee and your current and future coaching practice?

Are there benefits?

Has your thinking been challenged?

Has it made you engage with others differently from a learning perspective?

Do you view mentors as role models?

Have you developed a friendship with any of them?

Have any of them been helpful in terms of your coaching futures?

Have you received support in terms of dealing with players in a management capacity?

Have you developed in a coaching capacity or in terms of tactical awareness?

Have they influenced your understanding of your coaching philosophy or 'why you coach'?

Appendix 24 – Interview Guide – Mentors Mid Programme – Coaches Study

Interview Guide for Coaching Cohort Mentors – Mid Programme

So I outline to start off with that I am grateful for your participation as mentors and I appreciate giving your time to programme & interview. Interviews are designed to improve everyone's experience. I want to hear about what is working for some people and what is not working for others. Only by being honest about your experiences that we get to work towards improving the overall programme for them and others. I do not want to hear what you think I want to hear I want to hear an honest appraisal of your experience.

On an individual level I may refer to a point may in your November or January reflective journal.

Questions:

Why were you so willing to become mentor with DCU team?

Have you yourself had a mentor(s) in coaching?

Did you feel you'd be a good mentor, if so why?

What tools were you using in deciding how to support your mentee?

Were there elements you were nervous about being a mentor?

Tell me about your first meeting/engagement with your mentee?

Did you know mentee in advance of programme?

In terms of structure of the mentoring programme could you have been linked in better or known more in advance? (Workshop & POB outline) Some dyads didn't function, whose fault was this?

Is there any additional training or support needed?

What was the setting?

What were your initial impressions of mentees? Ability to be a good coach?

Did they do or say anything in particular that impressed or didn't impress you?

How has your relationship with your mentee developed over the three months?

Why have some relationship went better than others?

Who leads the relationship is it you or your mentee? Who is the more proactive?

How often do you engage with each other?

What different engagements have you had and which has been most beneficial and least beneficial?

Barriers to development and how to overcome?

Is there trust in relationship or apprehension?

Discussion around the differences of formal vs informal mentoring

Where is your relationship on the formal v informal spectrum?

Benefits/disadvantages of both

From a coaching perspective & DCU perspective what would an optimal scheme look like?

What does your mentee do that you like/dislike? What characteristics do they have?

Examples of situations/conversations/thinking if possible

Would you like to work with them in a team you're involved in?

Do they energise you?

Personality differences

Benefits to you as a mentor?

Are there benefits or is it just another add on?

Has your thinking been challenged?

Has it made you engage with others differently from a learning perspective?

Appendix 25 – Interview Guide – Mentees Post Programme – Coaches Study

Interview Guide for Mentees – March 2024

So I outline to start off with that I am grateful for your participation as mentees and I appreciate giving your time to programme & interview. Interviews are designed to improve everyone's experience. I want to hear about what is working for some people and what is not working for others. Only by being honest about your experiences that we get to work towards improving the overall programme for them and others. I do not want to hear what you think I want to hear I want to hear an honest appraisal of your experience.

On an individual level I may refer to a point may in your most recent reflective journal.

Questions:

How has your relationship with your mentor(s) developed since Christmas? *Note this will be different for different mentors*

Following on from conversations/interviews with Programme Coordinator at Christmas have any different activities taken place?

Have relationships changed in this period compared to first semester?

What impact did they have?

Did they change the relationship(s) in any way?

Has there been any engagements where there has been disagreement and what was the outcome of them?

Is there any particular aspect of you mentor(s) make up that you have inserted into your practice?

Over the course of time have you seen any change in your own practice?

Would you say you are the same coach now as you were in September?

Have they improved in any particular area? Explain

Have they regressed in any area or an area has not developed? Explain

Have you noticed anything different about what they ask you about?

Examples of situations/conversations/thinking if possible

Has your thinking and methods been challenged?

Do you feel you've gaps that need addressing

Has it made you engage with others differently from a learning perspective?

Has it impacted your coaching in a practical way?

Has is changed your wider perspective on coaching?

Is there anything you'd recommend for the programme going forward?

From a student coach perspective what does an optimal scheme look like?

What else do you need to help on your coaching journey?

Personnel – Mentors & Mentees

Adapting structure

Activities

Future coaching ambitions

Have you future ambitions?

What do you see your coaching journey like going forward?

Appendix 26 – Interview Guide – Mentors Post Programme – Coaches Study

Interview Guide for Coaching Cohort Mentors – March 2024

So I outline to start off with that I am grateful for your participation as mentors and I appreciate giving your time to programme & interview. Interviews are designed to improve everyone's experience. I want to hear about what is working for some people and what is not working for others. Only by being honest about your experiences that we get to work towards improving the overall programme for them and others. I do not want to hear what you think I want to hear I want to hear an honest appraisal of your experience.

On an individual level I may refer to a point may in your most recent reflective journal.

Questions:

How has your relationship with your mentee developed since Christmas?

Following on from conversations/interviews with Programme Coordinator at Christmas have any different activities taken place?

Have relationships changed in this period compared to first semester?

What impact did they have?

Did they change the relationship(s) in any way?

Over the course of time have you seen any change in your mentees?

Have they improved in any particular area? Explain

Have they regressed in any area or an area has not developed? Explain

Have you noticed anything different about what they ask you about?

Examples of situations/conversations/thinking if possible

Benefits to you as a mentor?

Has your thinking been challenged?

Has it made you engage with others differently from a learning perspective?

Has it impacted your coaching in a practical way?

Has is changed your wider perspective on coaching?

Is there anything you'd recommend for the programme going forward?

Personnel – Mentors & Mentees

Adapting structure

Activities

Appendix 27 – Leinster Coach Developers Community of Practice Slides 12/06/25

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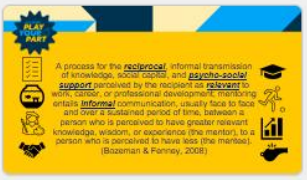

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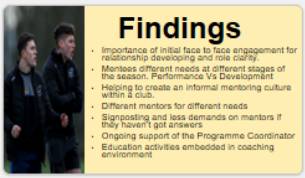

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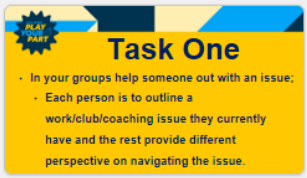

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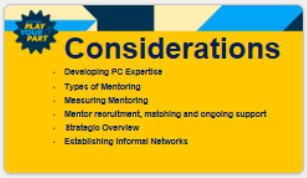

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