



WOMEN IN SPORTS SCIENCE

**A PROFILE OF LEADING
IRISH RESEARCHERS**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

00 Foreword

Leading Irish Researchers

01 Dr Áine MacNamara
02 Dr Carla McCabe
03 Prof Catherine Blake
04 Dr Catherine Norton
05 Dr Cíara Losty
06 Dr Denise Martin
07 Dr Eimear Dolan
08 Prof Fiona Wilson
09 Prof Kate Pumpa
10 Dr Katie Liston
11 Prof Kirsty Elliott-Sale
12 Dr Laura-Anne Furlong
13 Dr Lisa Ryan
14 Dr Niamh Kitching
15 Dr Niamh Ní Chéilleachair
16 Dr Patricia Jackman
17 Dr Paula Fitzpatrick
18 Dr Paula Rankin
19 Dr SarahJane Cullen
20 Prof Sharon Madigan
21 Dr Siobhan O'Connor
22 Mrs Tandy Haughey

FOREWORD

DR AOIFE LANE

Head of Department
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Women in Sports Science: A Profile of Leading Irish Researchers is both an overdue personal acknowledgment and a timely collective reminder of the incredible women working on the island of Ireland and internationally to carry out and disseminate research across the many disciplines of sports science; from physiology and biomechanics to psychology and social sciences. As is often the case across sport settings, women are underrepresented as authors, and as members of editorial boards in sports science research. At the same time, women researchers do more research, and indeed higher quality research on women and act as important role models for students and early career researchers. I value all male allies, of whom there are many, but firmly believe that women researchers, as with women coaches, athletes, leaders etc, are fundamental to efforts to level the playing field across sport. I am delighted to support this simple but important celebration of women in sports science research and wish to thank all of the 22 women profiled for supporting this initiative. I look forward to iterations across other disciplines and sport sectors and indeed, future editions with many new faces. To finish, please direct your plaudits for this work to Cherianne Taim, our incredible SHE Research PhD student, supervised by Dr Niamh Ní Chéilleachair and Dr Ciarán Ó Catháin. Well done Cherianne, it was a pleasure to support you on this project.



CHERIANNE TAIM

PhD Candidate
N-TUTORR Women in Sports Science Project Lead
Sport and Health Sciences, TUS
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I am beyond excited to see this booklet come to life, a passion project crafted with a vision to raise the profile of women in sport science and to inspire the next generation of aspiring women researchers. Over the past three years of my PhD journey, I have had the privilege of collaborating with exceptional Irish women in sport - athletes, practitioners, academics/researchers, and administrators. The talent, passion and dedication I've witnessed among these female trailblazers are truly awe-inspiring. Yet, I remain aware of the gender disparities that continue to exist within our field. This booklet stands as a testament and celebration of the remarkable accomplishments of women researchers in Ireland. It is our hope that this booklet will serve as a source of inspiration and encouragement for young girls and women who aspire to carve a meaningful career in sport science. I invite you to delve into these pages, filled with stories of resilience, wisdom and sheer brilliance.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the women in sport who have paved the way for us, and to those who continue to inspire us today. To the women profiled in this booklet, thank you for generously sharing your stories and valuable wisdom.

DR ÁINE MACNAMARA

Dublin City University

School of Health & Human Performance

Associate Professor in Elite Performance;

Chair of the Professional Doctorate in Elite Performance (Sport)



Can you give us an insight into your role?

I joined the School of Health and Human Performance at Dublin City University (DCU) as an Associate Professor in Elite Performance in 2020 following spells at the University of Central Lancashire (2010-2020) and the University of Limerick (UL) (2003-2010).

I am the Chair of the Professional Doctorate in Elite Performance and I feel really privileged to lead this program because of the quality of colleagues and candidates I get to collaborate with – all with a shared ambition to impact practice and policy in sport. As such, I like to think that people's motivation to come on board is because they want to make people better and this diversity drives us to look for interdisciplinary solutions to challenges.

This also means that my day-to-day role fluctuates between teaching, research and applied practice – this is really important to me as it means that our research is immediately pushing boundaries in sport and being tested and trialled by practitioners on the ground.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

I graduated from UL as a Physical Education and Irish teacher and really enjoyed a few years teaching and coaching young people – I have always been motivated by learning and helping people become better. This drove me to return to postgraduate study to try and understand more about the processes and practices that influence performance. I was really lucky to study at the University of Edinburgh with Prof Dave Collins who has been a huge influence on my career and challenged me to think critically about sport science and coaching. The interdisciplinary nature of this area of research, as well as the genuine ability to make a difference to both policy and day to day practice is what really excites me about my work. This means that all our work – research and teaching – is a collaborative process driven by the need to find solutions to real world problems.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

I think the main lesson that I have learned over my career is the importance of being critical and sceptical – in sport, especially performance sport, it can be too easy to jump onto the next big idea but the most important lesson I have learned is the importance of interrogating ideas and being open to change. I am really lucky to work with an incredible team of colleagues in an atmosphere that fosters this criticality – we challenge each other, and each other's work, and that drives innovation and insight. In sport, I have often found myself as the only female in the room but I have never found that to be a disadvantage – I think it is important to be confident in your ability and status and surround yourself with colleagues and peers that are both supportive and challenging.

DR CARLA MCCABE

Ulster University
School of Sport
Lecturer in Sport & Exercise Biomechanics



Can you give us an insight into your role?

I am a Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Biomechanics at Ulster University. As discipline lead, I am responsible for curriculum planning, module delivery (teaching), assessments and general administrative duties. In my role as the Biomechanics Lab Director, I am responsible for providing world-class facilities with state-of-the-art technologies for research and teaching purposes. I am the School of Sport Postgraduate Tutor which involves recruiting, monitoring and supporting PhD Researchers' progress towards a successful completion. My specific research interests are focused on the biomechanics of swimming with a view to optimise performance. The most enjoyable aspect of my job is the day-to-day variety and the opportunity to bridge the gap between science and the application of new knowledge to practitioners.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

As a former competitive swimmer, I had my first exposure to sport science whilst attending an Irish training camp. I was intrigued by the physiological and anthropometric tests, and how the data was interpreted by scientists. As a teenager who was 'sporty' and keenly interested in science, I realised this career option would be the perfect fit for me.

My 'ah-ha moment' came when the national swimming coach divided the sprint and distance swimmers into specialist groups and began to describe the technical differences. As a sprinter, this was news to me! I came away from that camp curious to know more, but couldn't find any literature to support his comments. This curiosity remained with me throughout my undergraduate years, until it became the title and focus of my PhD thesis!

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

My experience as a female biomechanist within a male-dominated discipline has largely been positive. That's not to ignore the many instances in which I have experienced the historic 'boys club' culture within academia and in an applied setting.

My advice for young girls wishing to pursue a career in sport science is: if you feel like you or your expertise is not being valued or respected, move on; it's their loss. Build your own team and network of like-minded people around you. Have the courage to reach out, connect, and collaborate with willing partners - there are plenty of individuals around the world who want to pursue similar research interests. It is up to you to create and take advantage of the opportunities that exist in this 'most accessible world'. Be the driver of your own vehicle.

PROFESSOR CATHERINE BLAKE

University College Dublin
School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Sport Science
Dean and Head of the School



Can you give us an insight into your role?

My current role is Dean and Head of a multidisciplinary school, which includes Public Health, Physiotherapy, Performance Science, Sport Management, Clinical Dietetics and Occupational Safety and Health. We have over 1200 students enrolled in 2023 and there is never a quiet time, with year round clinical placements and research students.

The Dean part of the job is concerned with academic governance of the education programmes, while the Head of School role is about management and leadership of a school of over 120 employees. I am lucky to work with some great people from the administrative, technical, faculty, clinical and research staff. I also work closely with talented postdoctoral researchers. My research spans both elite and community level sport as well as topics in health ranging from obesity, frailty/hip fracture, pain, stroke and spinal cord injury. I have always worked in teams and find that part of my job most fulfilling.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

I grew up in rural Co. Galway so the central role that sport plays in the social fabric of the community and in identity has always been clear to me. I was interested in rehabilitation as a career path, so studied Physiotherapy at University College Dublin (UCD) after school. This allowed me to work in the UK, Australia and Ireland, gaining lots of experience in sport injuries, trauma and orthopaedics, paediatrics/aged care, neurology, cardiac and respiratory care in hospital and community settings. Exercise physiology, exercise prescription, conditioning, motivation and behaviour change have been the pillars of practice through my career. After 10 years working in public and private clinical practice, I moved to UCD and I'm here ever since. Research really interests me and I particularly like numbers and statistics, even going so far as to do a Masters in Statistics. My most rewarding engagement in research includes sport injury epidemiology/prevention and the application of exercise in rehabilitation and health promotion.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

I think that a practical education in sport and exercise is really valuable, no matter what direction you take in your career. The transferable skills that you gain including communication, problem solving, project management and people management are priceless, in the same way as technical, research and analytical skills. From my own experience, I know that feeling competent and confident in your own skillset is very valuable. It is important to remember that this is partly down to your own perceptions and self-belief. Having a community around you is also important, so seek out mentors and supporters. We all are learning all the time, no-one has all the answers and no-one is perfect. You and your opinion are equal to everyone else. Be open to opportunity, but at the same time, ensure that your time and expertise are valued and rewarded.

DR CATHERINE NORTON

University of Limerick

Department of Physical Education & Sport Sciences

Associate Professor in Sport & Exercise Nutrition



Can you give us an insight into your role?

Before I joined the University of Limerick (UL), I spent time providing performance nutrition supports to elite athletes as the lead performance nutritionist at Munster Rugby. This fulfilled a lifelong ambition to work in professional sport. I returned to education to complete my PhD in 2014 (nutrition solutions to age related muscle mass loss; lessons from sport) and subsequently joined UL as an academic in 2016. I teach nutrition, dietetics and related skills across the under- and post-graduate programmes at the Physical Education and Sport Sciences (PESS) Department, UL; physical education, sport sciences, and sports performance. My research broadly aims to optimise peoples' food knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours to support better health and performance. I work across different populations including patients, aging, students, the corporate sector and elite athletes. My research interests merge when I consider how environmental factors (built spaces) influence food choices and behaviours for all these different groups.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

While I was studying human nutrition & dietetics in Dublin in the '90s, I had a light-bulb moment when I realised I could marry my love of sport with my love of food, in what was an emerging discipline – sports nutrition. At the time, there were no identifiable courses or career opportunities in performance nutrition. In hindsight the different roles throughout my career have made me the academic/ practitioner I am today. I am all about food and how it impacts human health and performance. My passion for this discipline fuels my enthusiasm for teaching and researching in this space.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

For many years female athletes have relied on nutrition advice, training protocols, and injury guidelines based on research conducted with men, for men, and by men. The absence of females is pervasive across much research but the discrepancy is particularly pronounced in sport science. The 'shrink it and pink it' approach is not good enough. There are programmes, researchers and institutions that are looking at sport sciences through a more inclusive lens. We do not yet know if we need sex specific recommendations for training/nutrition. Get involved in helping us find out!

DR, CIARA LOSTY

South East Technological University, Waterford
Department of Sport and Exercise Science
Lecturer in Applied Sport and Exercise Psychology



Can you give us an insight into your role?

I am really interested in applied research which focuses on evidence-based solutions in applied sport psychology. The studies I am involved in often create knowledge through research to improve evidence-based practice and enhance an athlete's performance experiences. My responsibilities really vary, from lecturing, managing courses, applying for funding, administration, and supervising students.

Everyday is different. I have pre-planned meetings with research students scheduled into various days. Working with actively researching students, I must review and revise their chapters and articles. I have time set aside for answering emails and just general administration. I often have collaboration meetings with other co-supervisors to discuss ideas and future funding applications. I also lecture and am the programme lead for the MSc in Applied Sport and Exercise Psychology, so I deal with student queries daily, prepare classes and in class activities. I enjoy the interaction with the researchers and students, problem solving, which enhances both our understanding of the topic we are working on. Being an active researcher allows me to explore diverse perspectives, discover valuable resources, and create well-informed applied research. Reading, reviewing, and discussing projects really helps me to stay on top of current issues, new research, and developments in sport psychology. I really enjoy when the student takes ownership of a project and begins to drive their project and immerse themselves into it.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your "ah-ha moment"?

Moving into the research space was a bit of a slow burner for me. I was confident working in applied sport psychology and working as a lecturer, but I did not have the same belief in myself to work as a researcher. The 'ah-ha moment' came for me when I was asked to collaborate on a PhD project and work together within a multi-disciplinary research team. I learnt so much from working with colleagues, enterprise partners, national governing bodies of sport and other sport scientists. I feel like I have honed my supervisor and researcher skills by working with others, so much so when I am now developing projects, I would not hesitate to reach out to colleagues to collaborate.

I recently completed research into female jockeys. Horse racing is one of the only sports in the world where males and females compete alongside each other, however female jockeys represent a small minority within the horse racing community and have a unique career trajectory. I am interested in identifying research that specifically examines the unique events of female athletes to promote women's sport participation and promoting parity in opportunities, particularly in male dominated sports such as horse racing. Beyond simply including women in our research studies, I would like to see the championing of female athlete/jockey-specific research to inform evidence-based sport psychology practice.

Graduating from my own doctorate was a huge milestone, I had studied part-time, and it was a long and winding road to get to the end point. I graduated with my 8-week-old son sitting in the audience, it was a wonderful time and now a wonderful memory. Watching my students graduate with their family and friends watching on is incredibly rewarding. I feel a huge sense of pride having been a part of their research journey.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

Finding a mentor and working within a team is a great way to develop your skills. No matter where you are in your research career, the best way to sharpen your skills is to learn through observation. Finding a mentor and working closely with co-supervisors who possess the traits you think are most impactful can really help you develop your own confidence and resilience. I have a key group of people who I collaborate with and learn from. Observing and learning from other leaders who effectively handle different scenarios is a great way to develop your skills.

Emotional intelligence is a critical factor for women pursuing research careers, as it equips them with the tools necessary to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics and overcome unique challenges that they may face. By intentionally cultivating self-awareness, empathy, and effective communication skills, we can build strong professional relationships, collaborate efficiently, and foster a supportive research environment.

DR DENISE MARTIN

Atlantic Technological University, Galway
Department of Sport, Exercise and Nutrition
Lecturer in Sports Performance Analysis



Can you give us an insight into your role?

My role as a lecturer is varied, including teaching and assessing students, supervising researchers, engaging with external partners and considering new courses or research which meet their needs. A typical day could have some teaching time along with meetings with researchers, students, colleagues and collaborators aimed at moving projects forward.

My research focuses on a few areas within data and sport. In the sports performance analysis discipline, I am interested in investigating professional practice and the role analysts play in helping create insight and learning from performance data. I lead a team of researchers who are collecting data to explore the match play patterns in Gaelic Games, helping to understand the importance of different elements of the games to creating scores and positive outcomes. This is particularly important in women's sport as these athletes and teams often do not have data to help benchmark performance. I am also leading research on digital transformation in sport and how data and technology can support sports business, participation and performance.

The most rewarding aspect of my role is to support and nurture the growth of students and researchers, seeing them become confident and independent and taking their place in the world. It is also to see our research making an impact on sport locally, nationally and internationally.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

I have always seen myself a scientist in some sense. After a degree in Biochemistry and teacher training, I began my career as a science teacher but realised I was getting more joy from coaching school teams than the classroom. I left to do a Masters in Sports Science with a view to working in sports development. In the course of the Masters I discovered the emerging discipline of sports performance analysis. It was new and innovative and I was fortunate to get the opportunity to work in the newly formed Sports Institute Northern Ireland as their first performance analyst.

An applied sports analyst needs to be embedded in the sport they are working in which means attending training to film and provide feedback, but also a lot of behind the scenes analysis of data. Being embedded means the analyst is more likely to judge the context and provide the right feedback to the right person at the right time. It meant that I shared some amazing moments on team buses into big stadia, in dressing rooms and training camps preparing for major competitions. I was fortunate to be involved with many wonderful athletes and teams in Irish Athletics, Rugby, Gaelic Football and Hurling. A large part of professional practice in sport analysis is designing learning environments for athletes, so my progression to lecturing was a natural next step. There was a lot I felt I wanted to pass on to the next generation of sports analysts and a lot of research I wanted to do. Lecturing was also much more family friendly than performance sport which is definitely not 9 to 5.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

Performance sport is a highly political, competitive environment, not for the faint hearted, but the reward of seeing athletes you have supported succeed at national and international level makes it worth the hard work. Some advice for women or indeed anyone entering professional practice in performance sport:

1. Applied sports science is sometimes ahead of published research. It is critical to understand the evidence for practice in your field, but also be open to borrowing ideas from other fields or sports and trying new things.
2. Some organisations want their sports scientist to be able to deliver in multiple disciplines, primarily to save money. Sometimes this works but it is critical to understand the limits of your competence and stay in your lane.
3. Sports science practitioners are expected to deliver to a very high standard and contribute to a positive environment for athletes. Whatever your discipline, negotiate a service level agreement which details what will be delivered, how, when, to who and how much of your time that will take. Make sure you under-promise and over-deliver.
4. Invest time in understanding your environment. Empathy and contextual awareness are critical to successful applied practice, soak in your environment, the culture, the power dynamics. The people with titles are not necessarily those with the most 'soft' power.
5. Confidence in applied practice comes from being prepared. Know your field and know the data to hand. Discuss it with the coaches as they will help with interpretation. You are not expected to know all the answers, or any of the answers at times, you are just one part in the performance jigsaw.
6. There is a very good chance you may be better informed than more senior practitioners, or those who would lead you to believe they are the oracle. Be respectful and careful in how you manage that dynamic, but have confidence in yourself, believe in your training and follow your gut instincts.

This could probably be summed up by being self-aware and aware of the performance ecosystem in which you work, which can only be achieved by taking time to reflect on your professional practice.

DR EIMEAR DOLAN

University of São Paulo, Brazil
Applied Physiology and Nutrition Research Group;
Center of Lifestyle Medicine, Faculty of Medicine
Research Fellow



Can you give us an insight into your role?

I study the interaction of exercise and nutrition on musculoskeletal health across diverse populations, from clinical groups to elite athletes, with a focus on bone metabolism and energy availability. It's hard to describe a typical work-day as every day is different. I lead a team of 10 post-graduate students and spend a lot of time in meetings with them or project collaborators - planning projects, analysing and interpreting results and attempting to resolve the multiple problems that seem to crop up on a daily basis! Sometimes I am in the exercise physiology lab conducting tests and collecting data. Other days I am in the biochemistry lab analysing samples. I also spend a lot of time on my computer, writing research articles and preparing presentations and classes for conferences or university courses. I love to write, and find great satisfaction in sitting down to write-up a research project, particularly one that may have taken a lot of time, effort and sometimes sweat and tears, to complete. The most rewarding part of my job is working with my research group - there is nothing better than seeing someone grow and learn, and it is a privilege to play a part in their journey. Getting to travel to conferences in beautiful locations is a major bonus of my job!

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

Throughout school I loved science subjects and I also loved sport, so the decision to study sport science was an easy one. I enrolled on a PhD program in Dublin City University (DCU) directly after finishing my undergrad, where I studied the influence of weight cycling on health and performance in horse-racing jockeys. After this, I took some time-out to consider what I wanted to do next. I went to Thailand to teach English and to travel and explore. It was an amazing experience, but I remained obsessed with research throughout. One particular moment always stands out to me. I was sitting on an idyllic beach in the South of Thailand, editing a paper draft on a copy I had printed at an internet cafe and I just knew that this was what I wanted to do with my life. Travel has always been a major part of my life, and my current role allows me to combine this love with my love for science and research. I am based in Brazil, I work with people from all over the world, and I frequently get to travel to conferences where I can interact with amazing scientists. I also love the freedom and flexibility that comes with my job. It is full-on and can be stressful, but I get to choose my projects, choose my hours and to study topics that I personally find fascinating.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

My advice for aspiring sport scientists is to have a clear vision for your career, be realistic and remain open to change. I try not to think too much about job titles or metrics, and instead to focus on what I want from my job. For me, this is flexibility, leading projects that excite and challenge me, and mentorship. For you it may be entirely different and that's fine. Be realistic. Loving your job does not mean that you will feel motivated, fulfilled and excited every moment of every day. There will be times that are boring, stressful and demoralising. Some days you may be treated unfairly. Some days you may screw up. But getting through the tough times is much easier if you are focused on the bigger picture and believe in what you are doing. Don't be afraid to change course. We can't always predict where life will take us, but that's ok. Make decisions based on what feels right for you, and don't be afraid to move on if things don't work out, or if you're entering a new life-phase and your priorities have shifted.

PROFESSOR FIONA WILSON

Trinity College Dublin

Discipline of Physiotherapy, School of Medicine

Professor in Physiotherapy



Can you give us an insight into your role?

My research interests are pain and injury in athletes with a focus on back pain and brain health. I have a particular emphasis on the female athlete. My sports of interest are rowing and rugby but I work across sports. My core responsibilities as a professor are my research programmes and teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate level. I also work with international sports governing bodies including World Rowing to support athlete health through policy management and research. My days vary hugely. I travel a lot to international meetings which is a privilege of my job. This allows me to connect with international colleagues to advance our shared research. When in Dublin, my focus will be on teaching and developing my research. Exercise is always an important part of my day. I really enjoy interacting with students. Mentoring has a huge impact on our careers so I value that part of my role hugely as it is allowing me to help shape the future of our profession.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

I initially wanted to study medicine but struggled with A-Level physics. I was sporty as a kid but didn't have opportunities like girls have now, so my focus was on swimming, ballet and gymnastics. But I adored watching sport with my dad who was very sporty. When I failed to get the results I needed for medicine, my dad suggested that I study physiotherapy which would suit my sport bias. It had not really been on my radar before then. That was a really good choice for me.

I am really excited to see the emphasis on women's sport that is currently the focus. I have been in my profession for over 30 years and have been calling out for this through that time. I actually never thought we would get there. I also like that we now have a strong focus on athlete safeguarding. Moving away from viewing athletes as a commodity. Working with high performance teams and with club and community athletes has always been something I enjoyed. A stand-out is always when an athlete who has been struggling with a complex injury returns to performance and full training after I have worked with them. That never ceases to bring joy.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

I think that the landscape is now much more inclusive for women and girls. It was a boys' club when I joined. The male physiotherapist would always be picked before the female to work, particularly with men's' teams. Female physiotherapists were always held to a higher standard which I found frustrating. I just kept going and found mentors. Male allies really helped and I'll always be grateful to them. Women and girls need to remind themselves that they have every right to be there, recognise and call out discrimination when they see it, seek good mentors to support them.

PROFESSOR KATE PUMPA

University College Dublin
School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Sport Science
Professor of Sport and Exercise Physiology



Can you give us an insight into your role?

My career combines teaching and research at a university with sports nutrition practice in team sports. Working in both sport and higher education enables me to solve 'real world problems' I identify in my nutrition practice, through research supported by my university. For example, the female rugby athletes I worked with in Australia, would work 'normal jobs' during the day, then train for rugby late into the night. Getting sufficient quality sleep was a big issue, so we investigated the use of a protein supplement high in tryptophan to enhance their sleep quality (which it did). I can then implement those findings straight back into my nutrition practice, enhancing my athletes' training, recovery and health.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your "ah-ha moment"?

I studied nutrition and exercise physiology at university, purely because I loved sport and food. I completed a PhD at the Australian Institute of Sport (right time, right place rather than good planning), and it was there I knew I was in the right industry. Having a PhD gave me the flexibility to work at a university solving problems through research and educating the next generation of sport scientists/dietitians/physiologists, but also opened up doors to working in professional sport. I had my "ah-ha" moment when I got my first professional role as the sports dietitian at Leinster Rugby. The travel, excitement, people (and winning the Heineken Cup) made me feel like 'I was living my best life'.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

To survive working in the sporting industry you need to be confident, back yourself, and stand up for yourself. Always view yourself as a valued member of the team. Know your specialisation inside out, and provide factual, evidence based commentary that contributes to the team's objectives. Be passionate about what you study at university (nutrition, physiology, sport science, strength and conditioning), and take every volunteering/internship presented to you throughout your studies – right from first year. Networking is your key to gaining employment in this industry. Sports want to employ people who are passionate, have a solid university education, but the practical experience to hit the ground running. It is definitely an industry that employs on reputation.

Sport brings out the best and worst in people. It is a profession in which the 'highs' are high, and the 'lows' are low. It can be brutal hours, unstable income and stressful, but when you are part of a great high performance team, the work environment is fantastic. Combining academic and sporting work has given me a stable income (university work), but also the ability to work across a range of sports (where income is not always guaranteed season to season). Academic work is really flexible, and most universities encourage employees to maintain industry experience.

DR KATIE LISTON

Ulster University
School of Sport
Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences of Sport



Can you give us an insight into your role?

My research interests centre on the theme of identity. My doctoral thesis examined Irish elite sportswomen's experiences in traditional male-associated sports. It was one of the first to focus on gender/women in Ireland. Since then, I have explored gender equality, national identity, pain and injury, women's sports, sports policy, sport migration, globalisation, the history of Ireland in international sport, sport for development and peace, media-sport, and online hate. I don't have a typical day, as I combine research, teaching and administration duties. I generally find there to be two parts of the work day that are most enjoyable: one, engaging with students who are interested in and committed to learning more and, two, having the headspace (usually early mornings before phones and emails begin to ring and ping) to put research ideas to good use, by way of dissemination, impact and engagement with stakeholders.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your "ah-ha moment"?

Easy. My own sporting career was my ah-ha moment. I saw how courageous women (and some men) had paved the way in the 1970s and 1980s for my involvement in elite sport in the 1990s and 2000s. I observed the lower status of women's sports and the denigration of women. But I was also very interested in social change and putting good ideas into practice for the benefit of people and communities. I left a permanent job to return to university to study social science and, from there, was introduced to the sociology of sport. I was encouraged by my university lecturers to continue this journey. Though I never had aspirations to become a lecturer, I followed my head and heart and here I am. My own PhD supervisor predicted that I would be able to see, feel and touch generational change if I remained patient. He was right about that and a lot of other things too! The most rewarding moments in my academic career to date have involved progress in relation to women's sports in Ireland, but also helping students to have their own ah-ha moments too.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

Never be afraid to ask for a meeting. The worst that can happen is that someone says no or doesn't reply. Take responsibility for driving your own educational journey. Even if you don't feel ready for the driver's seat, you're now in it so grab the wheel and go for it.

Listen carefully to those who have already worn the path. They will have nuggets of wisdom from which you can learn. And, when you do listen, pay special attention to what they are not saying. It's the silences that are the most revealing, especially about and from women operating in male-dominated spaces like sports science.

And, lastly, always leave the field of sport science as you would like it to be left for you: build relationships, project it in a professional manner, do only the best quality work, and be supportive to those who share their time with you.

PROFESSOR KIRSTY ELLIOTT-SALE

Manchester Metropolitan University Institute of Sport, UK
Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences
Professor of Female Endocrinology and Exercise Physiology



Can you give us an insight into your role?

I have always been obsessed by how ovarian hormones profiles affect women, both from a sport and health perspective. I love the complexity and constantly evolving nature of these profiles throughout the female lifespan. These profiles are challenging from a research design perspective, so it's fair to say that I am also very interested in research skills, especially methodological considerations and scientific writing.

My role at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) is research focussed; to conduct high-quality research, to facilitate other staff's research, and to translate research into impact for sport and health. A typical day for me involves meetings (e.g., PhD students, sporting organisations), editing/writing manuscripts, presenting (to academics or athletes). The best part of my work day is working with people – people are at the heart of everything I do.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

When I was at secondary school, I wanted to be a PE teacher as I had an amazing PE teacher who inspired my love of sport. I accidentally applied for Sport Science in one university – I had applied for PE in all of my other choices – and when I went to visit the university offering sport science, I knew immediately that this is what I wanted to do. So a mistake on a form, changed my life forever! Once I had finished my degree, I knew that research was 'my thing', so I applied for and received a PhD position. Throughout my degree, I had a natural affinity for physiology, so my PhD was in exercise physiology and women and the rest is history!

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

Personally I have never encountered any bias towards me as a woman in sport. I have always believed that my work would speak for itself and this has been the case. I have always worked hard, but efficiently, and this has allowed me to realise all of my career goals (i.e., becoming a professor and working with elite female athletes). I have not been afraid to put my family first, which had meant that I worked part-time for almost a decade. I see my career as a marathon - not a sprint - as I don't think that it possible to 'have it all' straight away. I have great male and female colleagues and collaborators.

DR LAURA-ANNE FURLONG

Loughborough University
School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences
Fellow in Biomechanics



Can you give us an insight into your role?

My research focuses on muscle and tendon mechanics of the lower limb during stretch shortening cycle activities such as running. My work is varied – currently I am focusing more on research activities so I am doing a lot of data analysis, writing up papers, and identifying future research funding. I am an Associate Editor for the *Journal of Applied Biomechanics* and this involves managing papers through the peer review process – finding reviewers, collating feedback, and assisting the Editor-in-Chief in what manuscripts are published or not. I also supervise several PhD students so I work with them to complete their theses and also help them plan their future careers in academia or industry; this is one of the most fulfilling parts of the job.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

I always loved science and maths in secondary school but wasn't keen on the non-human parts of the science curricula, so while I knew I wanted to do science at university, I knew there were parts of a general science degree I wouldn't have enjoyed. Sport science allowed me to do all my favourite parts of science and maths, applied to humans and sports performance. In particular, I loved biomechanics so I completed my cooperative education placement with the sports biomechanics group at Cardiff Metropolitan University. This cemented my decision to pursue a PhD after my degree. Helping students reach their own 'ah-ha' moment, whatever that means for them and their career path, are some of the most rewarding moments in my job.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

Enjoying what you do and surrounding yourself with great people are two key lessons I've learnt in my career. If you enjoy your work and have great people to have a cup of tea with, bounce ideas off, and who support you, it won't feel like hard work. There is no denying sport science is male-dominated, and biomechanics particularly so. Therefore, building your own networks and creating your own opportunities is very important. Networks can be informal or formal but they're a critical support in terms of getting your name out there, learning from others' experiences, getting reassurance you are on the right track, and simply helping you get where you want to be. If you want to contact someone – do it. Send an email or a message on LinkedIn. The worst that will happen is nothing, but imagine what the best outcomes could be!

DR LISA RYAN

Atlantic Technological University, Galway
Department of Sport, Exercise and Nutrition
Head of School of Science and Computing



Can you give us an insight into your role?

My main research interest is in the area of sports concussion/mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) with a particular focus on sex-based differences in concussion presentation and recovery, concussion education and the potential role of nutrition in concussion management. Since moving to Atlantic Technological University, Galway (formerly Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology; GMIT) in late 2015, I have established nine programmes in the sport, exercise and nutrition area(s) which generated the development of a new department which I now lead. I am also currently acting as Head of School.

From a research perspective, I am currently principal investigator for five European projects and also have a number of national projects and therefore have a team of research staff that work with me to deliver on these, as well as eight PhD students and three research MSc students. I often get asked what a typical day looks like... but there is no such thing. For me, that is what makes the role so enjoyable. Most of my research collaborations are international therefore I spend a lot of time travelling and I love those experiences. It is a cliché but I genuinely love what I do, the variety of my day to day means that I am certainly never bored and I also get to research answers to questions that I'm both interested in but also that have a real value on improving athlete safety and welfare.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

From a very young age I played sport to a high level and I was fascinated about how you could support your body through nutrition to improve performance. This led me to pursue a degree and PhD in nutrition and while studying I took on voluntary opportunities in sports clubs to work as their nutritionist (something that was not very common in Ireland at the time!). Though nutrition has always been my main area, while working in Australia, I saw the significant impact that concussion was having on Australian Football League (AFL) athletes and, when I moved home to Ireland, noticed how little it was being spoken about (this is thankfully changing). This led me to pursue a MSc in Sport and Exercise Psychology to complement my existing expertise so that I could delve into the behaviours and cultures that may need to change to support concussion management.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

I love being involved in sport and exercise science because it is an area that both excites me and drives me. There are so many different avenues that you can research and study and so much left to develop in our field. A particular passion of mine is advocating for the role of women in all aspects and areas of sport. When I started off, there were relatively few female role models. I forced myself to take on opportunities with sports teams and in many places I have worked, I have been the only female present. A challenge for me at the start was thinking that my opinion was not valuable and that my voice should not be heard. Those that know me, know how far from the truth that now is!! To young girls and women starting off I would say, if you don't see a female in a position in sport where you would like to be, why not become that female for someone else to look up to. Do not be scared to put yourself forward for opportunities and, if there are few female role models in that particular area, seek out a male mentor to support and guide you. The role of mentors in sport and exercise science is very important and something that should be actively developed to support all in their future career paths.

DR NIAMH KITCHING

Mary Immaculate College
Department of Arts Education and Physical Education
Lecturer in Physical Education (Primary)



Can you give us an insight into your role?

I teach Physical Education to Bachelor in Education (BEd) students who, when graduated, qualify as primary school teachers. Classes can be indoors or outdoors and include both theory and practical elements. The second part of my work involves mentoring student teachers, including observing them in primary schools on school placement and watching them leading a class over a period of time. The students at Mary Immaculate College (MIC) are fantastic so both my teaching and school placement work is very enjoyable. The third part of my work is research. I'm on research leave at the moment and my project involves exploring primary school children's sporting identities. I love reading and writing about sport and sports practices, so this is my favourite part of my job.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

Firstly, I wouldn't consider my work as sport science in the traditional sense, more sport sociology or Physical Education. I ventured along this path when I started my undergraduate career in Physical Education in the University of Limerick (UL). I'm most interested in explaining social and cultural aspects of sport – things that permeate through sports practices that in the past went unsaid or hidden, e.g. constructs such as gender. The most rewarding aspect of my job is mentoring the success of others, be they student teachers or postgraduate students.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

In my experience, many girls and women in education have internalised perfection, or being an all-rounder. I would tell my younger self that it's ok to make mistakes, and not to worry about what other people think. If there is something in life or education that you find interesting, that motivates you, invest your time in it and worry later about trying to please other people.

DR NIAMH NÍ CHÉILLEACHAIR

Technological University of the Shannon, Athlone
Department of Sport and Health Science
Senior Lecturer in Sports Science with Exercise Physiology



Can you give us an insight into your role?

My role allows me to have the best of both worlds whereby I teach undergraduate students and am actively involved in research. As a result my days vary a lot week to week. In my teaching role I work mainly with 4th year students lecturing physiology and overseeing final year dissertations. I love the opportunity to engage with this group of students as they work towards the completion of their degree. My main research interests are of an applied sports science nature with a focus on performance physiology and female physiology in the context of health and performance. My research allows me to work with, and learn from, fantastic researchers both nationally and internationally. A large part of my research role involves supervising PhD students. Mentoring my postgraduate students is a really rewarding part of my job as I work with them to achieve their goal of PhD completion. Outside of my academic role I am also an applied physiologist and have worked with elite athlete across a range of sports over the years. Working with athletes as they train and perform at an elite level is always exciting and gives me the opportunity to identify areas where research could make a real difference.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

I always loved sport growing up and in secondary school, I was invited to a multi-sport training and sports science weekend. At the event, we got to work with, and hear from, a range of sports science professionals and see the University of Limerick's sports science facilities. It was the first time I realised that sports science was a career option and I knew then that it was what I wanted to do. At the time I couldn't imagine a better option! I have also had the privilege of watching athletes train and compete at the highest level. Watching what the human body can achieve is fascinating for me and continues to inspire me to want to learn and discover more about how we can help athletes in the context of their health, well-being and performance.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

My key piece of advice is to go for it, there is a seat at the table for everyone and there are so many opportunities and avenues in sports science. I would say go for opportunities that present themselves to you, but also seek out and create your own opportunities. Don't let fear turn you off putting yourself forward for opportunities, if you apply yourself you can do the job as well as the next person! Build a network for yourself of people who support you and that you can learn from. Set yourself apart from others by engaging in things outside of your course requirements, such as coaching, helping with ongoing research projects or completing internships.

DR PATRICIA JACKMAN

University of Lincoln, UK

School of Sport and Exercise Science

Associate Professor in Sport and Exercise Psychology



Can you give us an insight into your role?

My role has a wide range of responsibilities. I am my School's Director of Research, which means I'm responsible for strategically and positively influencing research practice and culture within the School. I teach students on undergraduate and postgraduate modules and supervise students at undergraduate, Masters, and doctoral levels. My own research focuses on several areas, with common themes including: (1) the psychology of excellent performance in sport; (2) flow and pleasure in physical activity; and (3) mental health promotion, including in and through sport and physical activity, as well as in postgraduate researchers. Alongside this, I deliver sport and exercise psychology services and work with individuals, groups, and organisations. I have delivered psychology services in over 20 sports, working with athletes and coaches from grassroots to elite, international levels.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

In my youth, I wanted to learn all I could about how to become a better athlete. At secondary school, I knew I wanted to study a sport-related degree. Originally, I thought biomechanics would be the discipline that would most interest me. However, in the second year of my degree, I was randomly assigned an essay on flow experiences on our sport psychology module. This gave me a new lens to understand sport – and my own athletic experiences – and ended up being central to my undergraduate, masters, and doctoral research. I owe a lot to my mentor, Gerry Fitzpatrick, who gave me great support and encouragement when I became interested in sport psychology.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

To start, I would say, be curious! You should squeeze all you can out of your time at university - ask questions, read (including beyond the discipline), spend time in the labs, connect with people in the field, volunteer, get experience, help out with research, and find ways to expand your horizons and make yourself stand out from the thousands of others with a degree just like you. Finding yourself peers and/or mentors who can support you and who can engage in constructive, reflective conversations with you is also vital. Being adaptable is also key. It's rare that your work will unfold like it says it should in the textbook so it's important to accept, adapt to, and reflect on the complexity of real-world sport science.

DR PAULA FITZPATRICK

South East Technological University, Carlow

Department of Science and Health

Lecturer in Sport Science; Research Director within HealthCORE

Performance Physiologist, Sport Ireland Institute



Can you give us an insight into your role?

As a lecturer in South East Technological University (SETU) Carlow, I am lucky to have a diverse range of responsibilities including teaching sports nutrition and exercise physiology, working with community groups such as older adults, along with research planning and supervision. My current research interests include:

1. Physiological demands of elite female sport
2. Performance nutrition interventions in female sport
3. Body composition in female sport
4. Strength training in older adults

As a performance physiologist in the Sport Ireland Institute, I work as part of a multi-disciplinary team across a range of sports including boxing and women's hockey, preparing athletes for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. My role involves physiological testing, monitoring, and planning heat, altitude, sleep and recovery strategies for training and competition in various environmental conditions.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

I have always had a love for sport and was always interested in ways to improve athletic performance. I've also always been fascinated by how the body works. So, combining these interests led me to develop a passion for sport science.

I am passionate about translating scientific information into tangible advice for athletes to improve. I feel particularly privileged to balance working as a practitioner working with high performance athletes, competing at the top of their game, alongside my career in academia, in which my research contributes to evidence-based practice for athletes.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

Sport science is a very broad area with lots of potential career avenues. My advice to anyone aspiring to pursue a career in sport science would be to seek experience and advice from as many sources as possible. Working in sport science can be a challenging environment. Preparation and experience fosters confidence and resilience to overcome any potential challenges. I believe a key ingredient in overcoming these challenges is the strength of the team around you. I have been influenced by people, and immersed in environments, that have shaped my perspective, personally and professionally. I feel very fortunate to work in a collaborative environment, surrounded by colleagues and mentors that inspire resilience in the face of the failures, doubts and dilemmas that inevitably arise throughout a career in sport science. Learning from those established in the field of sport science is a great way to build experience and confidence at the start of your own career.

DR PAULA RANKIN

South East Technological University, Carlow
Department of Health and Sport Sciences
Head of Department



Can you give us an insight into your role?

I am currently Head of Department of Health and Sport Sciences at South East Technological University (SETU) Carlow Campus. We deliver undergraduate programmes in Athletic Therapy, Sport and Exercise Sciences and Strength and Conditioning and we have a thriving research group comprising of our primary investigators, Masters and PhD students and postdocs. My main research interests are in the area of exercise recovery, nutritional support and intervention and the female athlete. My work days are very varied as I have responsibility for operational aspects of our department as well as more strategic projects. The most enjoyable aspect of the role is working with enthusiastic people who are passionate about their discipline area and who are supportive of students in their studies.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

Back in the eighties, there was little opportunity to study sport science, and like many with an interest in sport I completed an undergraduate degree in Physical Education. While I loved my undergraduate study, I realised that my passion was in sport science rather than physical education and I went on to complete a postgraduate Masters in the UK. I was fortunate enough to gain fantastic experience in University College Cork (UCC) and University of Limerick (UL) before taking up a lecturing role in Carlow, and I never left!

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

In the past girls and women were far too accepting of differences in the treatment of girls and women in sport and sporting careers, though from my perspective I think a lot of it was poor awareness and unquestioning adherence to the norm. Thankfully this is changing.

Be confident in your knowledge, skills and abilities; network, find role models and push the boundaries.

DR SARAHJANE CULLEN

Dublin City University

School of Health & Human Performance

Associate Professor in Sport & Exercise Physiology

Performance Physiologist, Sport Ireland Institute



Can you give us an insight into your role?

I feel so lucky to have a job that does not feel like work. Every day is so different. I could be preparing or delivering lectures, or meeting with students or colleagues about teaching and learning related tasks. I am involved in many athlete related research projects so I could be reviewing papers, meeting with students, colleagues or industry partners to discuss current projects, exploring ways to implement findings and supports, developing new projects, applying for funds to support these or even attending conferences. I could also be found testing an athlete in the lab or developing support resources. But what I love most is interacting with others. That is really what it is all about. Enhancing the experiences of others and learning from each other.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

I always loved sport and science so sport science seemed the perfect combination. I've been lucky enough to cross paths with some hugely influential and inspirational people throughout my journey, that I would most definitely not be where or who I am now without them. They challenged and supported me at many different stages whilst providing me with unique opportunities and experiences to learn and grow. Embedding myself in all the opportunities I was provided with really opened my eyes to how varied and unique a career you could create for yourself.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

Make yourself stand out from others. Work towards good grades, but also get involved in as much as you can to build your expertise, skillset and confidence. Exploring many different specialisations will allow you to find the area you are passionate about and that always shines through. You should grab any opportunity presented to you, but create your own opportunities too. Do your best job each time and let people start to see who you are and what you are capable of. Be persistent and don't be afraid to challenge yourself and learn from experiences. Get out there and start meeting with others in the field of sports science... it is a very special community to be part of.

PROFESSOR SHARON MADIGAN

University of Limerick

Department of Physical Education & Sport Sciences

Adjunct Professor

Head of Performance Nutrition, Sport Ireland Institute



Can you give us an insight into your role?

I am the head of Performance Nutrition, helping with the delivery of nutrition support to elite athletes in Ireland across a range of sports. I work as part of a multidisciplinary team within the institute and within sports as part of the service team around high-performance athletes and coaches. I have been involved in the preparation of elite athletes over six Olympic Cycles. Other roles include partnerships with industry and research, mentoring intern students, and research project development within the high-performance sports environment.

Areas of interest:

- Energy deficiency and its relationship with injury, illness, bone health and performance
- Vitamin D and athletic performance
- Vitamin D and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
- Gut health and sports performance
- Nutrition and sleep in elite sport
- Female health and performance

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

I have been very lucky to have many experiences and roles in my career. I have sought out opportunities that are diverse. I think it's crucial not to pigeonhole yourself early in your career and get a broad base of experiences. I really value a mixed model of work which is harder but does keep me interested and I think it keeps you relevant.

Fundamentally health and wellbeing and engagement in relationships are very close to my core values and these values drive my passion.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

Build your network and encourage each other. It's important to bring others with you. I have a number of mentors that I have had through my career, and we support each other. We are comfortable in calling out each other and maybe providing a reflection mirror for each other. You have to give as well as receive in these relationships, it cannot be a one-way street.

Never underestimate the value of all your experiences, whatever they are. Connecting with people and communication are important skills and they must be developed. Anything that develops your skills in these areas is so useful.

DR SIOBHÁN O'CONNOR

Dublin City University
School of Health & Human Performance
Associate Professor in Athletic Therapy and Training



Can you give us an insight into your role?

My role as an Associate Professor is a really varied one, and no two days are the same which I really enjoy. I could spend a few hours in the morning in meetings advising on research projects I am leading that include varied topics like improving concussion education in community sports, developing injury reduction programmes in Ladies Gaelic football to the benefits of exercise in menopause and finishing up with designing an intervention to improve mental health help-seeking in farmers. Then throw in some anatomy or injury prevention lectures, programme meetings and grant writing and my day can be almost over! I would consider myself an injury surveillance, prevention, and wellbeing researcher, and I am lucky enough to have some fantastic collaborators from Ireland and across the globe. My research mainly centres around developing multi-disciplinary applied research that paves the way for enhanced healthy behaviours and participation in exercise, particularly in underserved and under-researched groups like women, community sports and high-stress occupations. The most fulfilling part of my role has to be mentoring our fantastic early career researchers and students in Dublin City University (DCU). I also have to say the excitement of the first look at the results of a research project we have spent a long time on and are passionate about, and figuring out how these findings will actually impact how we practice, and support patients, athletes and workers never gets old and is always enjoyable.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

I initially decided to do a degree in Athletic Therapy and Training because when I realised there was a profession where I could work in sports and with teams as a full-time job, I couldn't believe it and immediately put it down on my Central Applications Office (CAO) form. After graduation I initially focused my clinical career on working with and researching elite sport and high-level athletes, which I really enjoyed. But as I developed my research profile and saw the tangible impact my research could make to improve health and wellbeing across the wider society in community sports, women, and high stress occupations, it really made me passionate about bringing high-quality research to improve practices and care in the under-served and under-researched.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

The biggest lesson I have had is never let fear of failure or imposter syndrome stop you, if you are saying no solely because you think you are not good enough, stop, reflect, and re-consider and say yes! I think as women, especially in a traditionally male-dominated field, we expect ourselves to have to be far superior to everyone else to have a chance of succeeding but that is not the case. So put yourself forward, even if you are nervous about the outcome, you won't regret it.

MRS TANDY HAUGHEY

Ulster University
School of Sport
Senior Lecturer in Coaching and Sports Development



Can you give us an insight into your role?

My role as a Senior Lecturer within the School of Sport has a very varied focus. From a teaching perspective I deliver at undergraduate and postgraduate level across six programmes. With regards to research, I am actively engaged in research from an applied in practice context supporting community partners to grow, develop and sustain an active lifestyle. My core responsibilities currently are course director for our undergraduate sports coaching and performance programmes, Athena Swan* champion for the school and a new role of Wellbeing lead. A typical day for me, well there isn't one really as I could be delivering a coaching process session to our final year cohort, moving to a mentoring meeting with a staff member who has just started on their Aurora* journey, to visiting a student in their work-based learning module and then leading a focus group or one to one interview for one of our current research projects. The variety of what I can be doing in a day is what I enjoy and makes my job exciting and challenging.

What inspired you to pursue a career in sport science? Can you describe your “ah-ha moment”?

From a young age I always knew that something with a sport focus was going to be my career of choice. Back in the late 80's studying Physical Education to GCSE and A Level wasn't something that you could do, so gaining a place at Ulster University as an undergraduate student (1991 -1994) was the moment for me that I knew really what 'Sport Science' was. I was one of the few students who found biomechanics exciting and focused on this area from an injury prevention perspective. Time as a PE teacher, Sports Development Officer and a Coach Training Development Officer supported me in making the decision I wanted to pursue a career in Higher Education. I gained a lecturing position in 2005 with a focus on coaching science, with my current passion understanding the importance of how learning occurs to support the development of high performing coaches across the life course.

What advice would you give to young girls and women who aspire to pursue a career in sport science?

Considering this question has made me reflect on where I am in relation to my career and that you need to have the ability to be comfortable in who you are. Be a reflective practitioner and 'lean into the rumbles' to support you in gaining a better understanding of what and why certain situations arise. Always look at yourself and the journey that you are on considering your personal and professional development and being open to listening with intent to what is happening around you.

For me from a 'Personal Development' perspective, there is an understanding that I need to improve myself and increase my consciousness in being an active practitioner. From a 'Professional Development' perspective, it is critical to gain a greater understanding of culture and the environment you are in as this has a major impact upon morale and how you best navigate and integrate values into development of the team (teaching or research) that you are working with. Finally, always have a Career Plan to continue to be active in how you lead and inspire others to go on a journey with you in your selected area within the field of 'Sports Science'.

*The Athena Swan Charter is a framework which is used across the globe to support and transform gender equality within higher education and research; Aurora is a leadership ignition journey, inspiring women to aspire and achieve leadership positions within higher education.

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