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## Guide to Football Research for Students

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# Rough Guide to...Football

## Pre match

This Rough Guide is divided into a series of football-friendly sections. We **Warm Up** by considering the breadth and complexity of football development before looking at our view of **Tactics** – how we think you can make the most of the football resources on the internet and beyond. We then consider the **Players** to understand where football research has come from before entering the **Pitch** to get to grips with the resources we've identified for your consideration.

## Warm up

Offside, onside, over the line, foul, no foul, handball, bung, no bung...the arguments and discussions about football appear endless. Our national sport is everywhere, it dominates our newspapers and television screens, it infuses our language, and it keeps some of us awake at night. It is a source of meaning and identity for huge numbers of people. Such is its apparent influence that many of those involved with sports organisations see football as the ideal medium for the development of individuals, groups and communities. Consequently, many agencies use football as an intervention device, hoping that the sport will foster togetherness, inclusion, equality, empowerment, reduced crime or improved health. At the same time, those organisations responsible for the sport in its various guises – professional and amateur clubs, the Football Association, the FA Premier League, educational institutions – are busy developing footballers to play the sport in competitive settings.

However, despite the enthusiasm which football generates, using the sport as a tool for development is actually a pretty complicated business. Hundreds of organisations are busy using football to meet their own ends, and unfortunately some of these ends can be contradictory. Professional clubs for example, in their quest to find and develop the next Wayne Rooney, may have very different values and priorities to community groups who are trying to build the confidence of marginalised young people. Similarly, amateur clubs with a focus on performance may struggle to find common ground with organisations attempting to empower people with disabilities. These kinds of conflicts are common in the 'football family', and as a consequence football development is a hotly contested arena. There are fall outs, fights, squabbles and plenty of people who don't talk to each other any more. And that's just within the FA.

This isn't to say that some good doesn't come from the work of the organisations involved, and of course the same kinds of problems arise in all sports development settings. It's just that football is such a dominant part of our culture, and has such a long and complicated history, that it is important to understand the vested interests and micro politics of the sport before one can come to any

genuine conclusions about its potential as an effective tool for social intervention or sports development.

## **Tactics**

This rough guide is designed in order to help us to learn about the power play and organisational manoeuvres that have shaped the sport in its current form. Understanding football critically – through the lenses of such fields as sociology, social psychology, management theory and politics – can help to consider how effective the sport is in development terms, and how it might be organised and delivered differently in the future to ensure greater success.

The guide is therefore a gateway to academic analysis of the sport. It focuses on theoretical and policy analysis from social science perspectives. It does not, currently, consider natural science questions or applications. So if your interest is in physiological, biomechanical or psychological domains, this site may be of only limited use – although obviously we think it's still worth reading on...

The guide works by pointing you in the direction of resources in three different contexts:

1. Published academic texts. These are books or peer-reviewed journal articles in the public domain. In the guide we cite these as references (eg, Cikler, 1997), and you are then invited to locate and consider the original version. Full reference details – together with reviews of selected texts – are held in our unique [Football Bibliography](#). This recently updated document is an expansive guide to literature on football and can be used as an efficient short-cut when pursuing a range of football themes.
2. The [www.sportsdevelopment.org.uk](http://www.sportsdevelopment.org.uk) library. This houses a range of key policy and evaluation documents, published by the major government and sports agencies. You can download these documents or read them from the site.
3. The web sites of academic research centres, football portals, magazines and fanzines dedicated to the beautiful game. While care should be taken to distinguish the appropriateness of these resources for the purposes of academic essays and critique (ie don't try to present articles from websites as academic sources), we will discover that many of the individuals involved in the field will write for both intellectual and popular audiences.

## **Players**

Although there has long been a market for football writing, it is only relatively recently that biographies, annuals and club histories have been joined on the shelves by more serious, rigorous considerations of the sport and its impact on

society. This shift can be traced, for the most part, to the crises that beset the sport in the 1980s, and to the battles over how best to run a sport that had lost its way to the extent that the government at the time, led by Margaret Thatcher, was considering direct regulation of the game.

Heysel, Bradford, Hillsborough, together with the media-enflamed panic over hooliganism, created international embarrassment for Thatcher's administration. Her reaction was to threaten the apparently insipient football authorities with a range of draconian measures, some of which had the potential to bankrupt the sport at professional level (see King, 1998). The publication of the Heysel and Taylor Reports, however, calmed these stormy waters, and opened up the opportunities for state and corporate investment.

In the wake of this came the gradual professionalisation and commercialisation of the major football organisations, for better or for worse (see Conn, 1997). At the same time, a range of new voices were heard for the first time, prepared to stand up for their versions of the national sport. Most often these were supporters, unwilling to see their clubs go to the wall or fall prey to opportunistic business interests. In the late 1980s, independent supporters groups mushroomed at the same time as fanzines began to make an impact on match days and beyond. A national organisation, the Football Supporters Association (FSA), was formed to represent the views of fans at the highest levels. Although printed fanzines are now in less obvious circulation, internet fan sites have since proliferated. An indication of the broad interests of these publications can be drawn from the independent magazine, *When Saturday Comes* ([www.wsc.co.uk](http://www.wsc.co.uk)).

Up until this time, give or take the paternalistic interest of the odd Oxford anthropologist (eg Morris, 1980), the focal point for the academic analysis of football had been the University of Leicester. Here, inspired by the sociologist Eric Dunning, researchers had developed studies of spectator violence. A series of successful papers led to the formation of the Sir Norman Chester Research Centre, where Dunning and his colleagues, particularly Murphy and Williams, carved a niche in football research. The archives of the Centre are still available at the newly styled *Centre for the Sociology of Sport* ([www.le.ac.uk/sociology/css/](http://www.le.ac.uk/sociology/css/)), which continues some football-based research today.

However, from the early 1990s onwards, football began to gain more credibility. Newly built or refurbished stadium hastened the 'gentrification' of the sport, and the increase in sports media outlets gave football – and its more radical commentators – opportunities to spread the word further. BBC Radio 5 led to 6.06 led to Danny Baker led to Danny Kelly and, somehow, to David Mellor. Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch* led to Arthur Smith's *An Evening With Gary Lineker* led to films and television dramas and comedies. Replica shirts led to retro shirts led to *Philosophy Football* ([www.philosophyfootball.com](http://www.philosophyfootball.com)).

At the same time, interest from within academia began to simmer. Rogan Taylor, who had been the driving force behind the FSA, established a research interest at the University of Liverpool ([www.liv.ac.uk/footballindustry/](http://www.liv.ac.uk/footballindustry/)), while established cultural studies scholars such as Alan Tomlinson and John Sugden (now both at the Chelsea School at Brighton University) began to write about identity in the English and Northern Irish game. Other career sociologists, Gary Armstrong, Tim Crabbe and later Richard Giulianotti began to apply new techniques and bring different dimensions to empirical studies and investigations, and a body of knowledge was fast developing.

And then, of course, *Football Came Home*. Football's increasing popularity, brought home rather forcibly by Euro 96, confirmed to the Labour Party that the sport was worthy of government attention. In some respects, this can be seen as an appeal to populism. Tony Blair exchanging headers with Kevin Keegan or Alex Ferguson may have become a fairly consistent election tactic, but beneath the spin were genuine concerns by Labour politicians about the state of the game.

These concerns relate to five main aspects of the sport:

1. The ways in which the Football Association managed and regulated the game as a whole. Many saw the FA as responsible for the cynical manipulation of the sport by commercial interests; the degrading of such iconic competitions as the FA Cup; poor financial management and the variable performance of the national team. There were also fears about the extent to which the 92-member FA Council was representative of all interests in the game.
2. The ways in which clubs were owned, organised and managed. The advent of the FA Premier League heralded a shift in club ownership, with the supporters often disenfranchised and marginalised as a result. The demise of Wimbledon FC is of particular note in this context, but there is a long list of examples of football clubs being consumed by the unsavoury appetites of developers and business interests.
3. The extent of corruption and insider dealing within the sport. Agents, the bung culture, bribery and betting frauds were all causes for concern, alongside the representation of professional footballers in the media as self-regarding, self-abusing sex addicts. Not a good thing.
4. The extent to which all communities were represented in all aspects of participation, spectatorship and administration. The first target here was the position and inclusion of women, but this soon extended to ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.
5. The notion that professional clubs in particular, and football clubs in general, could and should do more for their communities. This relates to both football development (the education of predominantly young footballers) and community development (the use of football as a social intervention).

Since this time, policy and academic work on these aspects has proliferated. The first impetus for this was the commissioning by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) of the *Football Task Force*. The Task Force was the stimulus for further papers, texts and books, many of which called for the Football Association to improve their governance of the sport. Frustration with the intransigence of the FA in this respect led a succession of Ministers of Sport to apply pressure to the national governing body. This has only recently culminated in the FA Council sanctioning a review process led by Lord Burns, and a commitment by the FA to embrace new governance procedures and democratic representation.

## **The Pitch**

Our guide is therefore designed as a window into the research, policy and debate that has been generated around these themes in the past 20 years. We have restricted our attention to those texts and documents which we think have something to say about football development or community development, broadly defined. While we have excluded some texts on this basis, we may well have been wrong or we may have simply overlooked articles or books which are of great relevance. If you feel this is the case, please do let us know so that we can improve this gateway.

In order to simplify your entry to the football research 'pitch', we've put some metaphorical cones down in order to divide it up into the following sections:

1. The Football Association and the governance and regulation of the sport
2. Football and social inclusion
3. Football development and 'football in the community'.
4. The search for football excellence

### **1. The FA, governance and regulation**

Until recently, understanding the politics of the Football Association, its structure and the work of its various departments has been something of a challenge. The FA itself has, for many years, been deluged with enquiries from students asking for help with information or networking, and has found it difficult to cope because of the sheer quantity of requests. Now, however, the FA have developed their own resource especially for students in further and higher education:

<http://www.thefa.com/TheFA/ContactUs/Postings/2006/09/ResearchResource.htm>

While this is already proving to be immensely useful, we need to remember that the information presented here is essentially 'apologetic', in that it is produced by the FA itself and does not analyse or critique the work of the organization. To begin a more critical evaluation of the FA, we could consider the work of such influential journalists as Ed Horton (1997), David Conn (1997, 2005) or Tom

Bower (2004). We could, alternatively, start with the reports of the Football Task Force:

Department of Culture, Media and Sport, (1998) *Eliminating Racism from Football*, (London: DCMS)

Department of Culture, Media and Sport (1998) *Improving Disabled Access* (London: DCMS)

Department of Culture, Media and Sport (1998) *Investing in the Community* (London: DCMS).

The interplay between the Football Association, the FA Premier League, professional clubs and supporters groups, alluded to in each of these texts and reports, has been the inspiration for much of the work of the Football Governance Research Centre (FGRC) at Birkbeck ([www.football-research.org](http://www.football-research.org)). Inspired by management theorists, most notably Jonathan Michie and Christine Oughton, and informed by its support for a variety of supporter-led campaigns, FGRC now embraces research which considers a wide range of issues relating to power, ownership, legality, politics and economics in the professional game. The FGRC site contains downloads of major outputs and reviews of a series of influential texts produced by Michie, Oughton and Sean Hamill.

The FGRC has for some time been closely aligned with campaigns to foster 'mutualism' in relation to club ownership. In other words, it has helped to encourage supporters to attempt to take ownership of their club in order to run the organisations in a more democratic, more open and more effective manner. New forms of ownership structures also help supporters to resist take-overs by those perceived as 'hostile' to the long term interests of the club and its local communities. These values reflect many of those in other sectors who champion the virtues of 'social enterprises', check out our [Rough Guide to Sport and Social Enterprises](#) for some useful comparisons.

In the context of football, and to a lesser extent those other sports with spectator interests (for example rugby union, rugby league and cricket) the chief advisory body for those interested in new forms of ownership has been Supporters Direct ([www.supporters-direct.org](http://www.supporters-direct.org)). This government backed initiative has assisted the development of over 100 Supporters Trusts, some of which have gone on to gain overall control of their club – with varying degrees of success. Much of the work of the FGRC suggests that clubs with some element of supporter-ownership are more likely to embrace community development and social inclusion campaigns, contrasting their long term, social goals with the more profit-oriented objectives of PLCs or privately owned organisations.

Continued pressure from a range of journalistic and academic sources, alongside the musings of left wing think tanks (see for example the [Institute for Public Policy Research's \(2004\) Trust in Football](#) publication), and – eventually – the heavy leaning of the Minister for Sport, forced the Football Association to acknowledge a case for change in governance procedures. The FA Board

commissioned Lord Burns to conduct a structural review, the [Conclusions](#) and [Proposals](#) of which are available on this site, alongside a useful [comparative document](#) which looks at governance procedures in a range of UK and international NGBs. Details of the FA's responses to the Burns Report – some of which represent major changes to the organisation - can be found at [www.TheFA.com](http://www.TheFA.com).

Within a year of the publication of the Burns Report, the FA Premier League received the Report of the Quest Inquiry (otherwise known as the Stevens Report). This [Report](#), and its [Conclusions](#), concerned apparent financial irregularities in the transfer market. The work of Lord Stevens and Lord Burns are often confused but it is important to recognise their distinctive aims and the fact that they were commissioned by, and reported to, different organisations.

## **2. Football and Social Inclusion**

Despite its enormous popularity, football is not in a position to claim that it has a sparkling history in relation to social inclusion. The 'club'-based nature of the sport, together with the male, white, aged, middle-class hegemony of the governing body, has restricted access to the sport for a range of communities in the past century and a half. Racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination have abounded in the sport, and many authors argue that despite the advances of the past 30 years the legacy of many historic attitudes is proving hard to shift.

The transformation of football that followed the chaos of the mid-1980s opened up debate on many of these issues, and a host of texts has followed as a result. A cursory glance through our [Football Bibliography](#) will reveal the level of interest that academics have demonstrated in terms of histories and critiques relating to gender, ethnicity and disability. This work has, in turn, influenced practice, with all of the major football agencies engaging in campaigns aimed at enhancing social inclusion in the sport.

Much of this work is summarised in the Football Task Force Reports, but two campaigns of particular note are [Kick It Out](http://www.kickitout.org/) (<http://www.kickitout.org/>) and [Football Unites Racism Divides](http://www.furd.org/) (<http://www.furd.org/>).

In terms of evaluations and critiques, the best introductory papers are held at the [Centre for the Sociology of Sport](http://www.le.ac.uk/sociology/css/) ([www.le.ac.uk/sociology/css/](http://www.le.ac.uk/sociology/css/)). A series of fact-sheets, originally produced for the Sir Norman Chester Centre, include:

- Black Footballers in Britain
- Racism and Football
- Women and Football
- A Brief History of Female Football Fans
- Football and Families

Other substantive work in this context includes Welch, Spracken and Pilcher's (2004) work for the Campaign for Racial Equality, [Racial Equality in Football: A Survey](#), whilst Tacon's (2005) *Football and Social Inclusion* (available on the FGR site) is a useful overview of the potential of the sport to connect to the broader policy agenda outlined in our [Rough Guide to Sport and Social Inclusion](#).

### **3. Football development and football in the community**

This section considers resources that can inform our understanding of two different but inter-related aspects of contemporary football. By football development, we mean activity related to the amateur game – what the FA calls the 'national game'. By football in the community, however, we mean the impact of professional clubs on their local populations. As we will see, there are many overlaps between these two realms, but different organizations tend to dominate in each sector.

The amateur game is in a state of some turmoil. The FA's (2003) [Football Trends](#) demonstrates the apparent demise of the adult, 11-a-side game, and the concurrent growth of small-sided football, typically in indoor, commercial settings. At the same time however, the youth game is exploding. The FA estimate that 4,360,000 young people are currently participating in the sport – an incredible figure, especially when one considers that organized football for the Under 12 age groups is a relatively recent phenomenon. Brackenridge et al's (2007) *Child Welfare in Football* shows how a variety of societal factors have helped create an environment where adults now organize, administer, referee and coach children's football in more ways than ever before. Gone are the days of jumpers for goalposts, instead we have shiny new leagues, kits, goals, referees, branded equipment and crowds of excitable parents.

The FA has, in various ways, supported what many consider to be a hugely impressive transformation of the sport through the work of its Football Development Officers (FDOs). A largely-graduate workforce of FDOs is now in place across the country, managed by a network of county and regional managers who report to the FA's National Game division. The [FA's student resource](#) is an effective gateway to information on the work of the division, and its impact on coaching, women's football, club development (in particular through the Charter Standard system), volunteering and social inclusion. Additionally, however, a series of informative guidebooks map out the FA's ethos and approach, and many of these have been written by Les Howie, one of the key thinkers in the National Game division's inner circle (see Howie, 2004, 2004a, 2004b).

A key element of the FA's strategy has been the promotion of mini soccer, the 5, 6 and 7-a-side version of the full game. Mini soccer was introduced in the 1990s to enable children under 11 to enjoy a more child-centred sport, offering them

more touches of the ball, more creativity and greater opportunity to develop their skills. However, mini soccer has been grasped enthusiastically by the voluntary sector, with thousands of clubs now boasting competitive teams in the Under 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 age groups. Many of the matches featuring such teams are watched by crowds of parents, friends and relatives, creating what some perceive to be a pressurized environment. Concerns about parental behaviour and its impact on child welfare have been detailed in some depth in Brackenridge et al's (2007) work, and commentators from a wide range of agencies now appear to acknowledge that the adult input into children's football can be problematic.

Some organizations have become so concerned with the adult run, high pressure, 'low-risk/low-skill' leagues that they have set up their own alternatives. The most prominent of these is in the form of a campaign, [www.giveusbackourgame.co.uk](http://www.giveusbackourgame.co.uk)) created by Cirencester-based coach and writer Paul Cooper. The campaign came to prominence in early 2007, and was supported by the Daily Telegraph. It aims to help bring football back to children, to allow them more control over the sport, and to make the game more playful and enjoyable. *Giveusbackourgame* espouses small sided matches, refereed by the children themselves, emphasizing equality, skill and enjoyment. Elsewhere, Birmingham City Council have, for the past 8 years, run a highly successful alternative football programme for children, called *Strikes*. Thousands of children each year enjoy child-centred coaching and competition at the City's network of leisure centres (see [www.strikessoccer.co.uk](http://www.strikessoccer.co.uk)). In Dorset, *Soccervation* ([www.soccervation.org](http://www.soccervation.org)) is an independent provider, again offering a child-centred approach and competition. While this range of provision is of great interest, there is as yet no research which evaluates these programmes or examines their approaches or ethos. A useful starting point for a dissertation, we would suggest.

If football development is then, a complicated and contested arena, much same can be said of football in the community. Although it could be argued that professional football clubs have always connected, in a variety of ways, with their local communities, the formalized *Football in the Community (FITC)* programme has only been in existence since 1979. At this point, the Sports Council established FITC schemes at a selection of football league and rugby league clubs, and whilst some of these were viewed as a success (see Ingham, 1981), limited funding saw only a few stutter on until 1985, when the Professional Footballers Association ([www.givemefootball.com](http://www.givemefootball.com)) became involved. The PFA saw the programme as an ideal way to secure employment for its members who had retired from the professional sport, and invested monies to secure new initiatives, mostly in the North West. At the same time, the Sports Council in the London and South East attempted to revive FITC by entering partnerships with local authorities – the successful Millwall FITC programme was, for example, created in this context.

By the early 1990s, FITC had expanded across the country with the help of additional funding from The Football League and the Football Association. By the mid-point of the decade, all professional clubs hosted at least one full-time FITC officer, with some schemes growing dramatically.

Despite this success, the situation on the ground was not always rosy. Many clubs did not contribute financially to their FITC programmes, choosing instead to simply receive funding from external agencies and act as 'host' to the initiative. The commitment of these clubs to the schemes was often questioned as a result. The aims and objectives of the schemes were often unclear, and in some cases almost contradictory. Some were focused on youth engagement, others on commercial soccer schools and holiday programmes, others on the search for prospective new players. Few were able to generate data in order to demonstrate their success in any of these fields.

The substantive academic work on FITC reflects this rather mixed picture. The Football Task Force Report, [Investing in the Community](#), for example, details a range of examples of good practice, whilst at the same time expressing concerns about the coherence of FITC schemes and their connections with local communities in greatest need of support. Otherwise, the most in-depth study of FITC has been carried out by Brown et al (2006). The [Football and Its Communities: Final Report](#) was the outcome of a 3 year project funded by the Football Foundation ([www.footballfoundation.org.uk](http://www.footballfoundation.org.uk)), the charitable arm of the major football agencies. Although Brown and Gavin Mellor were then at Manchester Metropolitan University, they have since moved with co-author Tim Crabbe to establish an independent research consultancy called *Substance*. *Substance* has recently published another study of some interest in association with EA Sports Research, focusing on the connections between football, identity and fandom. [Football: An All Consuming Passion](#), is available on this site, but the *Substance* pages are themselves worth monitoring ([www.substance.coop](http://www.substance.coop)).

The other review of note is Neil Watson's (2000) analysis of FITC initiatives. Watson had been the inspiration behind the Leyton Orient FITC programme (now the [Leyton Orient Community Sports Programme](http://www.locsp.org/) - <http://www.locsp.org/>). He has since been the lead at the national [Positive Futures](#) programme. The major evaluations of Positive Futures have, of course, been carried out by Tim Crabbe and his team – the individuals now behind the success of *Substance*.

In addition to these reports, some more introductory, discursive papers are available at the Centre for the Sociology of Sport's [resource pages](#), particularly amongst the Singer and Friedlander Illustrative Review articles. These papers cover a period from 1997 to 2002, and include a range of community/development themes, including:

- Refereeing
- The role of agents

- Soccer Schools
- Football in the Community
- Medicine and injuries

#### 4. The search for excellence

Despite several upgrades, services and revamps in the past 20 years, the English system for developing young football players appears to be yet to fire on all cylinders. Instead, a host of teething problems, and an ongoing uncertainty about how best to drive this particular monster, leave it spluttering on in a rather unsatisfactory manner.

Up until 1997, the question of *who* might drive the system was of considerable importance. Professional clubs had, traditionally, enjoyed limited contact with young players until their mid to late teenage years, with the state school sector effectively responsible for coaching and development. The English Schools Football Association ([www.esfa.co.uk](http://www.esfa.co.uk)) therefore had great status in the sector. In the early 1980s however, the FA also entered the fray by opening its *National School of Excellence* at the Lilleshall National Sports Centre.

While the FA could claim some successes from Lilleshall – Michael Owen and Sol Campbell were amongst a series of graduates who went on to international success – the professional clubs were becoming increasingly twitchy about the FA's involvement. At the same time, some independent research (see for example Andrew Parker's work, published in 1996, 1998, 2000 and 2001), was asking serious questions about the impact of professional club cultures on the welfare of young players.

In 1997, the FA published its *Charter for Quality*, which proposed the replacement of the former Youth Training Scheme (YTS) for young footballers with a new structure of licensed FA Academies at 40 professional clubs, with the remaining Football League clubs operating FA Centres of Excellence. The proposals were accepted, eventually, by all parties, and a system of accredited, quality assured, sustainable Academies is now in place. The Academies are now overseen by the FA Premier League (<http://www.premierleague.com/fapl.rac?command=forwardOnly&nextPage=enComAcademyLatestRes>), with the Football League (<http://www.football-league.premiumtv.co.uk/page/Home/0,,10794,00.html>) essentially responsible for the more stream-lined Centres of Excellence.

There are currently 42 FA Academies, in receipt of funding which allows them to develop a greater range of services than the 50 FA Centres of Excellence, most of which are associated with clubs in the Football League. The majority of these organisations offer development programmes for children from the ages of 8 to 18, with 'Scholarships' or 'Modern Apprenticeships' offered to those aged 16 and over as the most significant stepping stone towards a professional contract.

The financial volatility of the professional game means that the future of the Academies and Centres is constantly under review by club owners, although the system has yet to be subjected to any rigorous external scrutiny. Instead, a limited range of academic sources has attempted to evaluate the success of the new system, with Monk and Russell's (2001) critique of educational attainment, and Daniel's (2004) assessment of recruitment and retention strategies amongst the most substantive evaluations.

While the [EYES \(2004\) Report](#) offers useful comparative data on elite athlete systems across Europe, there appears to be no independent research which assesses the long term impact of the FA Academies or Centres of Excellence. Although access to professional clubs can sometimes be problematic, investigating the work of FA Academies and Centres of Excellence would appear to be fertile territory for researchers at all levels.

It could be that analysis from other disciplines could inform such investigations. For example, for over 10 years Tom Reilly has been compiling cutting-edge natural science evaluations of the factors that affect footballing excellence. The Science and Football Reports (eg 1986, 1993, 1997, 2002) contain reviews of talent identification systems, match analysis, psychological interventions, coaching systems and nutrition. Other notable contributions include the work of Hemmings and Parker (2002) on group cohesion; Waddington, Roderick and Parker (1999) on injuries; and Simmons and Paul (2001). Interestingly, Craig Simmons had been the main sports scientist at the FA's National School.

In closing this section we would like to point out that despite the many opportunities that exist for research in the area of football excellence, our discussion has been focused on the male game. Even more opportunities exist for the analysis of systems and experiences in performance and excellence settings for both women and people with disabilities – two realms which appear to us to have been entirely overlooked by academic research to date.

We look forward to you contributing to this body of knowledge in the very near future...