Fully funded 3-year PhD studentship

School of Human and Behavioural Sciences, Bangor University

Closing date: **Friday 28th April**

**Language matters: a comprehensive analysis of attentional**

**focus for proprioception and target aiming**

Supervisor: **Dr Vicky Gottwald**

Applications are invited for a three-year fully funded PhD studentship within the School of Human and Behavioural Sciences, Bangor University. The studentship covers the full cost of tuition fees for PhD students, plus a maintenance stipend (approx. £17,668 per annum for 3 years) as well as a generous research allowance. The studentship will commence with a preferred October 1st, 2023, start date.

**Project**

There is now robust literature demonstrating the benefits of an external focus of attention for motor accuracy and economy, when performing actions that are target oriented or involve a salient movement effect. However, Gottwald et al. (2020) provide evidence to suggest that an internal focus or ‘somaesthetic awareness’ may facilitate performance when pertinent afferent information for task success is proprioceptive in nature and subsequently congruent with attentional focus. This has significant implications for sport, rehabilitation, and medical domains where the nature of instructions provided to athletes or patients can influence performance, preventative medicine and / or rehabilitation metrics. The proposed series of studies aims to a) test the findings of Gottwald et al. (2020) in an ecologically valid setting; b) employ sophisticated, interdisciplinary apparatus to understand the physiological and neurophysiological mechanisms underpinning these attentional focus differences; and c) employ mixed-methods quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a richer understanding surrounding the ‘what, why, when and how’ of instructions for motor learning and performance.

**Supervision**

Vicky Gottwald is a skill acquisition researcher and member of the Institute of Psychology for Elite Performance (IPEP) at Bangor University. Her research interests are well aligned with her passion for sports coaching, and she is particularly interested in coaching instruction. More specifically, the way in which verbal instruction can direct an athlete's attention and consequently, either enhance or impede motor learning and performance. Similarly, Vicky has an interest in talent identification and development; specifically, with regards to enhancing the practice environment for optimal performance. Vicky is the Talent Identification and Transfer lead for the Welsh Institute for Performance Science (WIPS: <https://www.swansea.ac.uk/sports-science/astem/wips/>); a three-way partnership between Sport Wales, Wales’s leading academic sport scientists and relevant industry partners to support multi-disciplinary, world-leading, applied performance science projects that enhance the performance of Welsh athletes and businesses.

**Requirements**

Essential Requirements

* A Masters level degree in sport and exercise sciences, cognitive (neuro-) science, psychology, or cognate disciplines. We will also consider students with exceptional (1st Class Honours) undergraduate degrees
* Ambition

Desirable Qualities

* Experience with quantitative and qualitative data analysis
* Statistical and coding skills (in languages such as Python, MATLAB, or R)

**Research Environment**

Most recently, 100% of our research has been rated as world-leading or internationally excellent by the REF-2021 committee, placing us in the UK top-5 research institutions in sport and exercise science. The School of Human and Behavioural Sciences is an exciting new School that is the product of a recent merger between two exceptional and research-orientated Schools: the School of Sport, Health & Exercise Sciences and the School of Psychology. Our research is defined by four research institutes ([link](https://www.bangor.ac.uk/human-behavioural-sciences)), which the PhD student will be welcome to join: Institute for Psychology of Elite Performance (IPEP), Institute for Applied Human Physiology (IAHP), Institute for Cognitive Neuroscience (ICN), Institute for Human Development & Wellbeing (IHDW). Our School offers postgraduate researchers an excellent research environment, with a large community of PhD students and research-active faculty, regular lab meetings, seminars, student conferences, visiting speakers, and events targeted at broader professional development. There are extensive facilities and dedicated technical staff for conducting behavioural and psychphysiological research.

Bangor University is situated among the breath-taking landscape of North Wales. Bangor is a friendly and affordable university city, perched on the Irish Sea and with its back against Snowdonia National Park. There is easy access to beautiful mountains, lakes, rivers, and beaches while maintaining good transport links to some of the UK’s larger cities, including Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, and London. Bangor University is an equal opportunity employer and welcomes applications from populations who are underrepresented.

**Residency requirements**

This studentship is primarily aimed at UK students. However, those who are interested, but are from outside of the UK, should contact Dr Vicky Gottwald to discuss the conditions for the funding of international students.

**General information**

PhD students are expected to contribute to teaching in the school. The school provides excellent training in teaching and many students achieve a nationally recognised professional teaching qualification whilst completing their PhDs. The initial appointment for the position will be for a period of one year, with an extension of 2 years after positive evaluation of capabilities and compatibility. The appointment must lead to the completion of a PhD thesis.

Further information: Informal enquiries about the studentship and more guidance should you want to prepare a more detailed proposal should be directed to Vicky Gottwald (v.m.gottwald@bangor.ac.uk).

**How to Apply**

All application must be received through our online application system: <https://apps.bangor.ac.uk/applicant/>

Applications must contain the following documents:

1. **Covering letter**: Include your motivation for applying for this studentship, aspirations beyond conducting a PhD, and any reasons that you feel you are particularly suited to undertaking this project.
2. **References**: All applications require two academic references to be submitted in support. Candidates must approach referees themselves and include the references with their application.
3. **Curriculum Vitae:** This should be no longer than two pages. Where appropriate, this should also include proof of English Language Competency (7.0 IELTS minimum).
4. **Research Proposal:** ~2-3 pages including a clear description of the research questions, hypotheses, the approach to collecting and analysing data, and a proposed timeline for all elements of the research and writing up.

**General enquiries:** For general advice about how to apply and eligibility please visit the Bangor Doctoral School Website (<https://www.bangor.ac.uk/doctoral-school/>)