

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: York St John University		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 24 Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism		
Title of case study: Increased recognition of perfectionism as a public health risk		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008 - 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Andrew Hill	Professor in Sport and Exercise Psychology	September 2014 - present February 2009-August 2012
Dr Daniel Madigan	Senior Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Psychology	September 2016 - present
Dr Sarah Mallinson-Howard	Senior Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Psychology	September 2016 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>This case study demonstrates how research produced at York St John University resulted in increased recognition of perfectionism as an important public health risk. As a result of this research, perfectionism is now (1) included in the curriculum of BTEC Sport and Exercise Science, the largest Further Education sports course in the UK, for the first time, (2) is part of multiple national and international mental health and wellbeing education programmes and (3) has been added as one of the key focuses of a new Department for Education student mental health taskforce.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<u>Motivation, Performance, and Wellbeing Research Group (MPAW)</u>		
<p>MPAW is one of the largest groups in the world dedicated to the study of perfectionism in sport, dance, and exercise. The group was established by Professor Hill and Professor Hall (now retired) at York St John University. The group consists of five YSJU academic staff and their research students (currently six doctoral students), as well as a wider network of former research students in academic posts at other universities (Newcastle University, Leeds Beckett University, and London School of Economics and Political Science). The group has produced 83 research papers, 11 edited book chapters, and 84 national and international conference presentations on the topic of perfectionism since 2014.</p>		
<p>The main focus of the group's research has been to challenge the common misconception that perfectionism is beneficial for athletes, dancers, and exercisers. Subsequently, their work has expanded to challenge this misconception in other domains, notably in education. The research of this group has shown that rather than being beneficial, perfectionism has numerous negative consequences, that it is increasing, and that it is especially problematic for mental health and wellbeing.</p>		
<p>The research of the group has also been funded by the Wellcome Trust, Swedish Research Council for Sport Science, Higher Education Academy, National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE), HigherHY, Harold Hyam Wingate Foundation, Goalball UK, and the</p>		

European Commission/Framework 7. The research is highly cited, receives large amounts of media coverage, and a touchstone for researchers, practitioners, and policy makers.

Advancing research in sport, dance, exercise and beyond

Members of MPAW were among the first to publish research examining perfectionism in sport and exercise psychology, and are the largest producers of research in this area according to the SCOPUS database. Some of their earliest and most novel work demonstrated that perfectionistic athletes are at increased risk of burnout, and this has subsequently been extended into other groups (students and office workers [3.1; 3.2; 3.3]. These findings are particularly important given the inclusion of burnout in the International Classification of Diseases (11th revision; World Health Organization, 2018). Their research has adopted novel approaches to the study of perfectionism and burnout, including sophisticated statistical analyses to model explanatory psychological processes [3.1], testing novel models of perfectionism in sport for the first time [3.2], using innovative and difficult methodological designs [3.4], and conducting the first ever meta-analysis of perfectionism and burnout in sport, workplace, and education settings [3.3]. More recently the group published the first meta-analytical review of the consequences of perfectionism for athletes [3.5] and, in doing so, highlighted many other adverse mental and physical health outcomes of perfectionism. Finally, and perhaps most notably, the group published a substantial birth-cohort study that showed, for the first time, that perfectionism is increasing among young people, and has been for the last thirty years [3.6].

The research of the group has highlighted that perfectionism is a public health risk, and that it is essential that people are aware of the dangers of perfectionism and seek to address it. This case study reflects the group's success in raising awareness of the health risks of perfectionism in sport, exercise, and other life domains, especially education.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [3.1] Hill, A. P. (2013) Perfectionism and burnout in junior soccer players: A test of the 2 x 2 model of dispositional perfectionism. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 35, 18-29. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.35.1.18>
- [3.2] Jowett, G. E., Hill, A. P., Hall, H. & Curran, T. (2013) Perfectionism and junior athlete burnout: The mediating role of autonomous and controlled motivation. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 2, 48-61. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029770>
- [3.3] Hill, A. P. and Curran, T. (2016) Multidimensional Perfectionism and Burnout: A Meta-Analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 20, 269-288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868315596286>
- [3.4] Madigan, D. J., Stoeber, J., & Passfield, L. (2016). Motivation mediates the perfectionism–burnout relationship: A three-wave longitudinal study with junior athletes. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 38, 341-354. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.2015-0238>
- [3.5] Hill, A. P., Mallinson-Howard, S. H., & Jowett, G. E. (2018). Multidimensional perfectionism in sport: A meta-analytical review. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 7, 235-270. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spy0000125>
- [3.6] Curran, T. and Hill, A. P. (2019) Perfectionism is increasing over time: A meta-analysis of birth cohort differences from 1989 to 2016. *Psychological Bulletin*, 145, 410-429. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000138>

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Impact pathways associated with three impacts

Impact pathways have been engagement with journalists in written and digital media, media production companies, producers of educational resources, organisations/scholarly societies and policy makers.

Examples include [articles](#) in theconversation.com (republished in over 150 news outlets around the world and read over 500k times); a [TED Talk](#) based (delivered by Dr Curran, an alumni of MPAW) based on **[3.6]** (2.5 million views); written press (e.g., Guardian, Telegraph, Metro) and radio interviews (BBC Radio 5live); BBC article and accompanying online video ("[The dangerous downsides of perfectionism](#)" and "[When perfectionism goes too far](#)" viewed over 12k times); a cover story for New Scientist magazine ([Issue 3242](#)); consultancy for a television programme on perfectionism hosted by Davina McCall broadcast on the W Channel ("[The Davina Hour](#)"); direct delivery of workshops (e.g., NHS, Scottish Gymnastics, Mental Health Foundation); and invited talks (e.g., Universities UK, Westminster Insight, and the Department of Education).

Specific impact pathways for three impacts are identified below along with the description of the impact.

Impact 1: Perfectionism added to the BTEC Sport and Exercise Science curriculum

As a direct consequence of the group's research, perfectionism was included for the first time in the curriculum for the BTEC Sport and Exercise Science, the largest Further Education sports course in the UK. Perfectionism is now included on the curriculum of one of the mandatory units for all awards. The inclusion of perfectionism and its link to the BTEC unit author's knowledge of MPAW research has been confirmed by testimonial **[5.1]**. The updated curriculum has been in use since September 2016 (in the previous iteration of this curriculum [2010] perfectionism was not included). Consequently, since its introduction, a total of approximately 8,300 BTEC students per year have undertaken the course with this updated content **[5.2]**.

Impact 2: Perfectionism added to national and international mental health and wellbeing programmes

Perfectionism has now been incorporated into the curricula of several national and international mental health and wellbeing education packages. This includes the "Student Wellbeing Toolkit" from Epigeum **[5.3]**, a large provider of online courses designed to support universities in teaching, research, and wellbeing. The toolkit equips students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to manage wellbeing issues they face across their university experience. Based on series of research talks and consultancy, a module on perfectionism was created for the toolkit ("Am I good enough?"). The toolkit was launched in June 2020 and has so far been used in nine institutions in the UK and six institutions in Australia. The inclusion of perfectionism in the toolkit and direct link to MPAW research has been confirmed by the senior commissioning editor at Epigeum **[5.4]**.

Perfectionism has similarly been integrated into the work of the NACE. NACE is a charity aimed at improving provision for more able learners, driving whole-school improvement, and raising achievement. The charity has over 1,000 partner schools nationally and internationally. As a consequence of consultancy with NACE and commissioned research, addressing perfectionism has now be integrated into the support they provide for student and teacher wellbeing. The inclusion of perfectionism and the link to MPAW research has been confirmed by the CEO of NACE **[5.5]**.

One final example of this type of impact is the work with the Brilliant Club. The Brilliant Club is an award-winning university access charity that works across the UK to increase the number of pupils from underrepresented backgrounds progressing to highly-selective universities. It also delivers the Seren Network Conference on behalf of the Welsh Government which is a national network of schools to support the most able students (over 150 schools and colleges and over 3000 students). Perfectionism has been added to the professional development

programme/strand of the Seren Network Conference with integration of resources developed by MPAW into practice the main focus (worksheets, lesson plans and an animated video [“The perils of perfectionism” viewed 9k times], [5.6]). The inclusion of perfectionism in the professional development strand of Seren Network Conference and link to MPAW research has been confirmed by the education and development director at the Brilliant Club [5.7].

Impact 3: Perfectionism identified as a risk factor for student mental health by a new government taskforce

The most notable impact of the research has been on the formation and aims of a new government taskforce created by the Department for Education (DfE). The taskforce, known as the Education Transitions Network, which is supported by leading education organisations (e.g., UCAS, Universities UK, Office for Students), will develop measures to support students as they start university with the aim of addressing mental health problems. The taskforce has explicitly identified perfectionism as a wellbeing risk factor that needs to be addressed [5.8]. The inclusion of perfectionism as a risk factor was preceded by a visit from the DfE to York St John University, where they met with Professor Hill, and a subsequent visit and talk by Professor Hill at the DfE focused on MPAW research [5.9]. Correspondence from the chair of the new taskforce confirmed the link between the research of MPAW and the inclusion of perfectionism as a risk factor to be addressed by the taskforce [5.10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [5.1] Testimonial: Assessment associate and unit writer, Pearson Education.
- [5.2] Report: Pearson Education “Providing Access to High Quality Career Focused Education: BTEC Nationals (2016 - RQF) Results October 2019.”
- [5.3] Epigeum “Being “Well, Living Well” toolkit; available <https://www.epigeum.com/courses/support-wellbeing/being-well-living-well/>
- [5.4] Testimonial: Commissioning editor, Epigeum.
- [5.5] Testimonial: Chief executive officer, NACE.
- [5.6] Media: MPAW/YSJU perfectionism animation. Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ix6m4vD9KD8>
- [5.7] Testimonial: Education and development director, Brilliant Club.
- [5.8] Details of new governmental taskforce (Education Transitions Network). Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-creates-new-student-mental-health-taskforce>
- [5.9] Correspondence: Chair of Education Transitions Network taskforce (DfE talk).
- [5.10] Correspondence: Chair of Education Transitions Network taskforce (focus of taskforce).