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## The changing nature of professional football academy coaching in England: The EPPP and developments in practice

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Synopsis:

Abstract:

Set in the context of perceived failures of English football clubs to produce indigenous talented young footballers capable of playing first team football in the English Premier League during recent times, The Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) was devised in 2011 (FA Premier League), and is currently being implemented nationwide across all professional English football academies. It sets out to 'modernise' and nationally benchmark the youth academy system of professional football clubs, whereby players, coaches and staff will be regularly audited and inspected against a series of key criteria by an external body, International Standards Organisation.

Such developments in English professional football represent something of a cultural shift, with new policies having potential implications for the expectations placed on the role of the academy coach. Academy coaches are expected to systematically engage in activities beyond the practice of coaching players in training sessions and games. More detailed and expanded administrative work to evidence, and measure the outcomes, of their practice is required. In this regard, the elite academy football coach's work is becoming intensified, more discrete within an increasingly complex division of labour (Malcom, Pinheiro & Pineta, 2014), and the coach is becoming more accountable through increasing surveillance (Taylor & Garrett 2010) of their work. As such, the EPPP could be explained as part of the extension of neo-liberal managerialism in the burgeoning sports coaching profession (Taylor & Garratt, 2010, 2013), in parallel with reforms in other, more politically weighty areas of society such as health and education. That is, academy coaches and their activities are becoming increasingly subject to the measurement of their performance to evidence 'value for money'.

This study draws on a set of 10 informal semi structured interviews with coaches from 2 professional football club academies to understand how coaches are managing the changing demands of their role in light of the policy priorities of the EPPP. In particular, the study will examine how coaches 'perform' in their working environment, which can only be adequately understood by locating this within the relations between academy coaches and other stakeholders such as parents, players, fellow coaches and academy staff.

Findings suggest that professional football academy coaches are experiencing an intensification and expansion of their workload with little change to the structure of their working environment. As such, coaches are dealing with extra stress and pressure in attempting to ensure they meet club requirements set out by the EPPP. Analysis suggests that coaches are therefore adopting 'performative' (Ball, 2003) roles in order to maintain their position and the categorisation of their professional football club academy. In doing so, coaches are engaging in falsified and inauthentic activity.

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