

Dr Leighton Wells

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Position

Associate Lecturer, Exercise Science / Exercise Physiology

School of Health Sciences · Western Sydney University · Academic Level A · REF1941O

Qualifications

Criterion 1

Qualifications in either Exercise Science/Sport Science/Exercise Physiology and/or a willingness and commitment to enrolling in a doctoral qualification.

Deakin awarded my PhD in Sport Science in February 2026, following completion in December 2025. The thesis, Triathlon Coaching Practices: Optimising Training Load Processes and Communication, was submitted in just over three years, with three peer-reviewed papers published during candidature. Independent examiner Professor Stephen Seiler of the University of Agder wrote: "I conclude that this thesis is an original scientific contribution that meets or exceeds international standards for the Doctor of Philosophy in sport science. I recommend its approval without reservation."

Earlier qualifications include a Master of Applied Sport Science (Deakin, 2022), a Bachelor of Science in Biology (Deakin, 1998), and graduate certificates in computing and international business.

Registration and accreditation

Criterion 2

Meets Professional registration/accreditation requirements where relevant.

The application for ESSA Accredited Sport Scientist Level 1 is currently on hold. I am eligible and willing to complete the process for this role. Current credentials include AusTriathlon Development Coach and TrainingPeaks Level 2 Coach, alongside a Working with Children Check and full Australian work rights.

Teaching, curriculum and assessment

Criterion 3

Demonstrated teaching experience in exercise science, including quality and innovative teaching at tertiary level, including ability to facilitate learning in small and large groups, and experience in using contemporary methods of curriculum design, development, delivery, and assessment.

At Deakin, teaching every trimester since 2022 has spanned eight exercise and sport science units: HSE103 Exercise Prescription and Delivery, HSE104 Research Methods and Data Analysis in Exercise and Sport, HSE105 Principles

of Sport Coaching, HBS109 Introduction to Anatomy and Physiology, HSE204 Motor Learning and Skill Acquisition, HSE208 Integrated Human Physiology, HSE302 Exercise Programming and HSE304 Physiology of Sport Performance. This includes a full-time contract in T2 2025, with lectures, seminars, practical and laboratory classes, online delivery, assessment and marking. In HBS109, my practical classes bring together nursing, medical, occupational therapy and exercise science students.

Victoria University's intensive block model adds a different teaching setting. Alongside delivery, I carried full unit-chair responsibilities for SSC2000 Sport Coaching Systems and Technology in 2025 and AHE3114 Sport Physiology in 2026. For AHE3114, this covered both deliveries of the entire unit during Dr Alice Sweeting's leave, including unit news, student support, all marking, self-moderation and grade release.

Teaching ratings have been 100% positive in HSE103, HSE105, HBS109, HSE208, HSE302 and HSE304 at Deakin. The latest HSE208 result, in T2 2026, followed the same result in T3 2025; every SSC2000 Student Evaluation of Teaching item at VU was 100% strongly agree. The written comments explain what students value: "Really good at helping work through the practicals and the seminars" (HSE208, T2 2026), and "You have a great presence in the classroom, and your ability to connect research with real world sporting scenarios made the learning experience that much more valuable." (AHE3114). Colleagues also sought class cover four times across four units in T2 2026; I accepted the two requests I was free to take.

For SSC2000, I contributed to curriculum development and proposed and delivered an endurance sport technology session drawn from my research. Students built a training week in TrainingPeaks, using physiological evidence and an athlete's history and circumstances to explain their choices. This required them to interpret the data, recognise uncertainty and justify a professional decision. For AHE3114, the role also included latitude to edit teaching content.

Outreach

Criterion 4

Demonstrated experience in design, development, delivery and review of Outreach activities across all levels of education.

At Deakin Open Day in 2023, 2024 and 2025, my race bike, smart trainer, screen and Apple TV running Zwift gave prospective students a practical example of exercise science beyond the laboratory. Riding for about five hours each day, including repeat sprint efforts, I demonstrated technology used by athletes from novice to elite level.

Through Regional Rising, which I co-founded, I contributed to the design and delivery of STEM and digital-literacy programs for students in North West Victoria, including STEM4Sunraysia. Through Pivot Summit, I also brought global technology speakers to regional Australia, including Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak.

Coach education required a different treatment of the research. For invited presentations with AusTriathlon and TrainingPeaks at the Queensland Academy of Sport, I adapted it for high-performance, performance and development coaches, including Olympic-level coaches. A subsequent AusTriathlon national webinar on training load and communication was open to its coaching membership. Published articles extended that reach: a research-based series for an international triathlon coaching business, and a TrainingPeaks-commissioned article based on my 2026 Frontiers paper.

Alongside these activities, I mentor early-career coaches in applied practice.

Community and industry partners

Criterion 5

Willingness to build relationships with the community and industry partners.

Pivot Summit secured more than \$1 million in sponsorship under my leadership as founder, including Deakin University's major sponsorship, negotiated directly with Vice-Chancellor Professor Jane den Hollander AO. Runway, the startup incubator and accelerator I co-founded with two others, raised \$1.25 million through the Victorian Government's LaunchVic program. Board service with Technology Geelong and marketing and product roles across ASX, NASDAQ and NYSE listed companies, including Marketing Director at Dexion, add to those industry connections.

Through Summit Triathlon Coaching, I coach athletes in Australia and internationally. TrainingPeaks approached me to write for its coaching audience and has a standing invitation for an article on the intervention paper when published. In 2025, I introduced AusTriathlon's Head of Coach Education to Deakin's Associate Head of School (Partnerships) to explore coach-education opportunities, then handed over the discussion with context on both sides.

Research

Criterion 6

Evidence of the achievement or capacity to progress research from inception through output.

How coaches use training-load evidence and communication in practice was the focus of my doctorate. That work now includes four published first-author peer-reviewed papers and a fifth, a pilot evidence-based coach-education intervention, in second-round review with the International Journal of Sports

Science & Coaching. The 2026 Frontiers in Sports and Active Living paper analyses 34,731 training sessions from 95 age-group triathletes in 25 countries. The doctoral research was also presented at the European College of Sport Science's 30th Anniversary Congress in Rimini in 2025.

The TrainingPeaks article, Queensland Academy of Sport presentations and AusTriathlon webinar took that research to practising coaches.

The doctoral studies used quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods research designs, with SPSS and NVivo for analysis. Current research assistant work at Deakin involves a resistance-training and altitude study: lifting-technique instruction, 3RM testing, recruitment, laboratory protocols and honours-student mentoring. As an invited co-author, I am writing the literature and scoping review. A further collaboration with Professor Stephen Seiler, Professor Marco Cardinale and Palo Galko is developing three papers on AI-assisted research methods in sport science.

Supervision

Criterion 7

Demonstrated experience, or potential capacity, in the supervision of honours or higher degree level research students.

In 2025, I co-supervised a Master of Applied Sport Science candidate whose research examined menstrual-cycle symptoms and perceived performance in female triathletes. The thesis is now being prepared as a journal manuscript, and the candidate has asked me to read it and advise on the approach. At honours level, I currently mentor a student within the resistance-training and altitude study. This sits alongside ongoing mentoring of early-career coaches in applied practice.

Research teams and grant proposals

Criterion 8

Willingness to work in cross discipline and discipline specific teams in the preparation of research grant proposals.

Funding experience so far comes from education and innovation: securing and acquitting local, state and federal government grants, more than \$1 million in sponsorship, and the \$1.25 million LaunchVic grant raised by Runway's three founding directors, of whom I was one. Within academia, I am still building a grant record and have not held an ARC or NHMRC grant.

The current AI-assisted research methods collaboration spans sport science, research methodology and information technology, with Professor Stephen Seiler in Norway, Professor Marco Cardinale in Qatar and Palo Galko in Australia. That combination of disciplinary collaboration and funding experience is what I would contribute to research grant teams at Western.