Dr Leighton Wells

Response to the five essential criteria

Lecturer, Sport and Exercise Science (Level B, Teaching Focused)
La Trobe University · Job 571137

01

1. PhD or PhD close to completion, appropriate for the discipline of Sport and Exercise Science and the advertised role.

I completed my PhD in Sport Science at Deakin University in December 2025, having submitted in three years and 28 days, and graduated in February 2026. The thesis, Triathlon Coaching Practices: Optimising Training Load Processes and Communication, examined how coaches prescribe, measure, monitor and manage training load, and how they communicate with athletes. It drew on four connected studies: a national survey of triathlon coaches, in-depth interviews, an analysis of 34,731 training sessions from 95 age-group triathletes, and a coach-education intervention.

Professor Stephen Seiler, an endurance-training researcher at the University of Agder, Norway, was an independent examiner of the thesis. His report states: "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." He described Adaptive Contextualised Informed Practice (ACIP), the coaching approach I proposed in the thesis, as my "perhaps most novel contribution", adding: "While the idea of coaches striving to be both evidence-based and mentally flexible in their training guidance is not new, sometimes clearly conceptualizing a construct and putting a label on it can drive the field forward."

The PhD produced three first-author peer-reviewed papers, in the International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, the International Sport Coaching Journal and Frontiers in Sports and Active Living. My Master of Applied Sport Science (Deakin, 2022) produced a fourth. A fifth paper, reporting the education intervention, is in second-round review. I presented the training-load findings at the European College of Sport Science Congress in Rimini in 2025.

The research covers physiology and training load, measurement and data, coaching practice and how evidence reaches the people who use it. Those are also the areas I teach.

02

2. Ability to teach and lead curriculum design in areas related to general sport science, physical activity and health.

Since 2022, my teaching at Deakin University has spanned eight exercise and sport science units. HBS109 and HSE204 were added in 2026.

- 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
- HSE304 Physiology of Sport Performance

Teaching has continued every trimester since 2022, in seminars, practical and laboratory classes, and online, with marking. That included a full-time contract in T2 2025.

Several of these units sit within the areas La Trobe names for this role. HSE103 and HSE302 teach physical activity and health, and the Exercise Programming curriculum includes strength and conditioning for older adults, postpartum women and people returning from injury. HSE104 Research Methods and Data Analysis, together with the 34,731-session dataset from my doctorate, gives a practical base for sports analytics. In a current Deakin resistance-training and altitude study, I teach lifting technique and run strength testing. That practice supports strength and conditioning content.

My curriculum design work is at unit level. At Victoria University in 2025, I contributed to the design of SSC2000 Sport Coaching Systems and Technology, and the unit chair delegated its coordination to me: student communication, seminar updates, self-moderation and grade release. I proposed and delivered a session drawn from my research. Students built a training week in TrainingPeaks and explained each choice using physiological evidence and the athlete's history and circumstances. The task asked them to interpret data, recognise uncertainty and justify a professional decision. In 2026 I also coordinated both deliveries of AHE3114 Sport Physiology, a role that included latitude to revise teaching content (see criterion 5).

At La Trobe I would bring that unit-level experience to curriculum work with the colleagues who lead its programs, starting from the learning outcomes and building the cases, data and tasks around them.

03

3. Demonstrated effectiveness in teaching delivery and engagement in curriculum development, with a commitment to excellence in teaching.

Student evaluations recorded 100% positive ratings in six Deakin units: HSE103, HSE105, HBS109, HSE208, HSE302 and HSE304. HSE208 recorded that result in T3 2025 and again in T2 2026. At Victoria University, every Student Evaluation of Teaching item for SSC2000 was 100% strongly agree.

Students' written comments describe what they valued. One HSE208 student wrote: "Really good at helping work through the practicals and the seminars." A Victoria University student in AHE3114 wrote: "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."

My approach to teaching starts with two questions: are students engaging with the material, and does their work show that the learning outcomes are being met? I use student feedback, assessment evidence and discussion with colleagues to answer them and improve the next delivery.

My engagement in curriculum development is clearest in SSC2000, where I updated seminar content and proposed and delivered the TrainingPeaks session described under criterion 2.

04

4. Excellent verbal and written communication skills, including the ability to interact effectively with people from a diverse range of backgrounds.

Explaining the same science to different audiences is a large part of my work. In HBS109 Introduction to Anatomy and Physiology, practical classes bring nursing, medical, occupational therapy and exercise science students together in one room.

Coach education calls for a different treatment. AusTriathlon and TrainingPeaks invited me to present my research at the Queensland Academy of Sport in December 2024, adapted for development, performance and Olympic-level coaches. AusTriathlon then asked me to deliver a national webinar on training load and communication, open to its coaching membership. TrainingPeaks commissioned an article from my 2026 Frontiers paper for its international coaching audience. For researchers, I presented the doctoral findings at the European College of Sport Science Congress in 2025, and sport-science and coaching journals regularly invite me to review manuscripts.

Prospective students need something else again. At Deakin Open Days in 2023, 2024 and 2025, I rode for about five hours a day to demonstrate the training technology athletes use, from novice to elite level.

Written communication began in industry. I wrote manuals and made help videos for scientific instruments as a technical writer at Varian. Later, as Marketing Communications Manager at GBC Scientific Equipment, I managed the team producing them for a wider range of equipment. I also coach athletes in Australia and internationally, where each plan has to fit the athlete behind the training: their background, schedule and goals.

05

5. Demonstrated ability to work as a member of a team in a co-operative and collegial manner.

Most of my teaching depends on colleagues and shared responsibility. In 2026 I coordinated both deliveries of AHE3114 Sport Physiology at Victoria University while its unit chair was on leave, covering unit news, student support, all marking, self-moderation and grade release. In one 2026 Deakin trimester, three colleagues asked me four times to cover classes across four units at short notice. I took the two requests I was free for, three HSE304 sessions and one HSE103 session, and could not take the other two because I was already teaching.

Research works the same way. In the current Deakin resistance-training and altitude study, I recruit participants, teach lifting technique, run strength tests and laboratory protocols, and mentor an honours student. Safety, timing and protocol adherence are shared responsibilities, so communication with investigators and laboratory staff has to be clear and timely. 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 candidate earned a High Distinction.

Before academia, I spent more than twenty years in technology and commercial roles, from junior positions to senior executive and board roles, managing budgets, diverse stakeholders and competing project timelines. I work best in teams where people communicate early, share responsibility and make it easy for colleagues to ask for help.