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## Enhancing Coaches' Learning, Mobility and Employability in the European Union



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

### Report#3

# The context and motivations for the collection and application of sport coaching workforce data in 5 European countries

April 2016

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## 1. Introduction

An increasing trend in the United Kingdom (UK) has been to argue for, and attempt to use, more detailed coaching workforce data to inform sport coaching system and programme development (e.g. Lynn & Lyle, 2010; North, 2009; Sports Coach UK, 2008, 2012; Winder & Townend, 2010). There have also been similar pockets of research activity internationally notably in Australia (Dawson, Wehner, Phillips, Gastin, & Salmon, 2013) and Canada (Reade et al., 2009) although their connection to the policy process is less clear.

Recently there have been a number of UK centred proposals to the Europe Commission to explore the possibilities of opening up these methodologies to European countries and beyond, from Leeds Beckett University as part of its partnership with the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE), the European Coaching Council (ECC), and other European partners. This includes the 2011 Preparatory Action in the Field Of Sport bid *CoachNet*, written up in a final report by Duffy, North, Curado, and Petrovic (2013), and the 2014 Erasmus + bid *CoachLearn*, of which this project forms a part<sup>1</sup>.

As a result of early investigations related to the CoachLearn project it became clear that the UK context and motivations for the development and application of specific research methodologies, and the collection and use of coaching workforce data were fairly unique. This meant that some important assumptions underpinning recent successful bids with regard to coaching workforce data methodologies and their application across Europe required further examination.

This paper explores the context and motivations for, and applications of, the collection and use of coaching workforce data in five European countries: Finland, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, and the UK to determine whether a common methodology and tools to underpin coaching workforce data collection is relevant, useful, and viable. In undertaking this work the paper faces into comparative issues concerning centralised 'good practice' frameworks, evidence based decision making, performance management, research and research methodology, which could inform wider debates both inside and outside sport.

## 2. The rise of evidence based policy and decision making

As a result of social, political and economic changes in 1980s and 1990s, and a push towards more efficient and effective methods of organising and running state institutions through ideas such as 'new public management' (Diefenbach, 2009; Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd, & R. Walker, 2005), there has been an increasing interest in evidence based policy and decision making linked to research, data collection and evaluation across the European Union (Karlsson, 2004).

The European Commission has stated a desire to ensure that policy making and decision making are underpinned by 'robust evidence, impact assessment and adequate monitoring and evaluation' as

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<sup>1</sup> This project is one part of a larger European Union Erasmus + project CoachLearn which has led to research work exploring good practice around European level coaching systems, coach education and development, the recognition of prior learning and work-based experience, and coaching workforce data collection and use.

part of its goals in further ‘building’ of society and economy (European Commission, 2015, p. 1)<sup>2</sup>. There has certainly been considerable investment in research across the Commission’s programmes (the funding of this study is a small example). The very recent announcement (late 2015) of a new seven member high level scientific advisory group, an enlarged secretariat in DG Research and Innovation, and the investment of six million euros for research through *Horizon 2020*, has signalled an important commitment to evidence based or informed decision making moving forwards (European Commission, 2015; Wilsdon, 2015).

In the UK, ideas about new public management have been important since the 1980s – with many regarding the UK as a ‘lead case’ (Hood & Dixon, 2015). However, the impetus behind more recent moves towards an evidence based approach to policy and decision making are often associated with the 1997-2010 Labour national government that developed and circulated a number of highly influential policy documents at the start of its first term. This included the White Paper *Modernising Government* (Cabinet Office, 1999), *Professional Policy Making for the Twenty First Century* (Cabinet Office, 1991), and *Better Policy Making* (Bullock, Mountford, & Stanley, 2001).

The Modernising Government White Paper suggested: *“This government expects more of policy makers. More new ideas, more willingness to question inherited ways of doing things, better use of evidence and research in policy making and better focus on policies that will deliver long term goals”* (p.16). Officials were asked to become familiar with the language of ‘research utilisation’, ‘getting research into practice’, and ‘knowledge transfer’. Alongside these proposals there has also been significantly more emphasis on target setting, performance management, and audit cultures (Diefenbach, 2009) which have also impacted on research practice.

With the change of government in May 2010, Prime Minister Cameron reiterated the call for evidence-based decision-making in the public sector (Schweber, Lees, & Torriti, 2015). Our data suggests this approach is less of a priority than under the previous administration.

### 3. Evidence based decision making in sport

In a European Commission sport context there has inevitably been reference to the evidence based movement. *The 2007 European Commission White Paper for sport* suggests a ‘move towards evidence-based sport policies’, ‘underpinned by a sound knowledge base’, ‘quality data’, for improved strategic planning and policy-making in the area of sport (European Commission, 2007, p. 11). This includes ‘data on volunteering’ which presumably includes sport coaching. The White Paper also advocates the sharing of best practice with regard to research and research methodology. The 2011 European Commission ‘communication on sport’: *Developing the European Dimension of Sport* suggests a need for evidence-based policy-making in the field of sport to provide sport policy with ‘a sound evidence base’, ‘comparable EU-wide data’ again presumably about issues such as sport volunteering and coaching (European Commission, 2011, p. 8). The 2014-2017 European Union ‘work plan for sport’ also aims ‘to work towards evidence based sport policy’ (European Union, 2014). At the European level we have not been able to find details of the extent and nature

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<sup>2</sup> There has been some debate recently about the European Commission’s approach to evidence based policy and decision making (e.g. Wilsdon, 2014; Wilsdon & Doubleday, 2015) but this appears to have been resolved by recent announcements (Wilsdon, 2015).

of investment in sport evidence based approaches and research. However, we can provide details of initiatives directly linked to sport coaching.

The 2007 European Network of Sports Science, Education and Employment (ENSSEE) *review of the EU 5-level structure for the recognition of coaching qualifications* discussed the use of research in the development of a European wide qualification framework, advocating more future research, including 'a need to research and collate up-to-date and valid statistics concerning the coaching workforce in the EU' (ENSSEE, 2007, p. 8). The International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) driven International Sport Coaching Framework also makes considerable reference to the use of research both to inform the development of the Framework but also for the future development of coaching and its workforce (ICCE, ASOIF, & LMU, 2013).

In the UK there has been extensive investment in sport evidence based policy and decision making. This includes specific initiatives for sports participation (Rowe, 2009), school sport (Smith & Leech, 2010), and high performance sports in terms of the 2012 Olympic Games (RAND, 2007). For example, with government sanction, Sport England (the main delivery agency for participation sport in England) developed a *Framework for Sport in England* which indicated the 'need for robust baseline data on participation rates, better understanding of barriers to participation and more information on local demographics linked to participation' (Sport England, 2004, p. 19). This led to the development of the *Active People Survey*, a £5 million survey of sport participation levels in England, that was presented 'unprecedented' in scale and 'world leading' (Rowe, 2009, p. 97). This was supported by a range of other evidence based initiatives including additional surveys and an attempt to push evidence based 'insight' approaches into sports federations.

The favourable conditions mentioned above, as well as some strong leadership for sport coaching at the UK national agency level in the late 1990s/early 2000s<sup>3</sup>, pushed the evidence based approach onto the coaching policy agenda. Relevant documents included the 2001 UK Vision for Coaching (UK Sport, 2001), the 2002 Coaching Task Force Final Report (DCMS, 2002) and the 2008 UK Coaching Framework (Sports Coach UK, 2008). Evidence based activities were asked to provide an 'accurate picture of coach recruitment and recruitment' and a 'cross sport national register of competent and qualified coaches' (UK Sport, 2001), and more ambitiously, 'an ongoing research and development programme into participant and coach pathways, coaching quality and expertise, and coaching interventions, programmes and resources' (Sports Coach UK, 2008) to meet a range of political, strategic and operational concerns.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport's £28 million (€36 million) funded *Coaching Project* established the following programmes or strands: Community Sports Coaches, the UK Coaching Certificate (UKCC), the Coach Development Officers, *and research* (North, 2010). A programme of research was developed including the Sports Coaching in the UK series (MORI, 2004; Sports Coach UK, 2011; Townend & North, 2007), as well as many other studies (e.g. Bailey et al., 2010; Cushion et al., 2010), with the first author of this article brought into manage this programme as a new national level dedicated coaching research role. The UK Coaching Framework also identified considerable

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<sup>3</sup> Notable contributors include Baroness Sue Campbell who established the National Coaching Foundation (now Sports Coach UK) and was a government advisor and House of Lords Peer during this time, and Patrick Duffy former chief executive of Sports Coach UK (who sadly passed away in 2014).

resource for research with a significant investment being undertaken on understanding the size and shape of the coaching workforce (North, 2009).

#### 4. Recent European coaching initiatives and the evidence base

The European Commission supported *European Coaching Council* (ECC) has a stated mission to support 'the development of coaching across Europe by providing clear reference points for education, development, qualification, and employment of coaches' working with a range of European partners including national sporting agencies, international and national sports federations, coaches' associations etc. Within its remit is the 'identification, promotion, and implementation of best practice across Europe' and the 'collation and publication of research data on coaching and coach activity across Europe'<sup>4</sup>.

Taken together, the push towards an evidence based approach described above, the ECC and its objectives, and the fact that the ICCE and ECC recently moved their current base to Leeds in the UK, provided appropriate conditions for the identification and sharing of *best practice* around evidence based decision making in sport coaching. This was recently formalised in a successful 2014 bid to the European Commission to support the *CoachLearn project*. CoachLearn seeks to enhance sport coaches' learning, mobility and employment through the development of a European Sport Coaching Framework to act as a recognised reference point across the EU for the development of coach education programmes and coaching systems<sup>5</sup>. One of the key programme objectives was to develop 'an accurate representation of the nature of the sport coaching workforce in the five participant countries' and to 'develop suitable guidance and practical tools' to support future application of this kind of work across European sport coaching organisations. The five countries were Finland, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands and the UK.

There were two important working assumptions underpinning the workforce elements of the CoachLearn project. First, that very few European countries collected coaching workforce data to inform evidence based policy and decision making. This was based on data collection undertaken through the European Commission *CoachNet* project (Duffy et al., 2013) which suggested research had only been undertaken in Finland and the UK. Second, that the data collection methodologies successfully employed in the UK during the 2000s (e.g. North, 2009; Winder & Townend, 2010) would provide an important solution, perhaps *the* solution, to the research and evidence based gap identified in the previous study. The CoachLearn project proposed exploratory work in the five European counties but it was a stated interest of the European Commission Sport Unit, and the ECC, to extend the application of these methodologies further across the European Union.

#### 5. Critical understandings

Before progressing further, it is important to note that both evidence based policy and decision making and 'good practice models' promoted centrally and implemented locally have been criticised/questioned within the research literature.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.icce.ws/ecc/european-coaching-council.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.coachlearn.eu/index.html>

For example, there is a body of work that positions research evidence as a modest partner amongst a range of different knowledge types informing policy and practice. For example, decision making was found to be informed by ideology, political rhetoric and expediency, practitioner expertise and judgement, evidence from the local context, and the perspective of those who might be affected by the decision (e.g. Briner, Denyer, & Rousseau, 2009; Simmons, 2015; Warwick, 2015). Evidence is seen to be useful for defining the issues to which policy should attend, captures the attention of policy and decision-makers (but only if presented succinctly), and is useful for testing outcomes – but otherwise plays a modest role in decision making processes (Simmons, 2015).

There is another body of research outside (e.g. Diefenbach, 2009; Goldenberg, 2006; Murray, Holmes, Perron, & Rail, 2007; Murray, Holmes, & Rail, 2008) and now inside sport (e.g. Silk, Bush, & Andrews, 2010) that critically challenges evidence based approaches. It is situated in a wider critique of new public management and higher education and research funding, policy and practice which is associated with particular socio-economic forms e.g. neo-liberal capitalism and managerialism, meta-theories e.g. scientific positivism, and methodologies e.g. randomised controlled trials or more prosaically quantification, and regulatory regimes of funders, journal editors etc. Evidence based policy as it relates to research is seen as the latest incarnation of this politicised, covert, and unhelpful approach.

Although the links between these ideas and the practicalities of evidence based approaches as we have experienced them in a sport organisation context can sometimes appear a little tenuous<sup>6</sup>, it is worthwhile noting some of the more general points. This research suggests that particular management practices, research purposes, meta-theoretical assumptions (positivistic) and methods (quantitative) present a very *narrow, reduced, restrictive* and *controlling*, view of sport and coaching organisation, management, and participation, and a knowledge that relates to it (Diefenbach, 2009; Silk et al., 2010). We are warned then about particular ideas and practices underpinning evidence based approaches.

Finally, there is a body of research that has questioned the efficacy of centralised good practice models implemented locally within a European context – notably those driven by the use of Anglo-Saxon (UK and US) systems as is the case in the current research (e.g. Brockmann, Clarke, & Winch, 2008). Specifically, the European Qualification Framework (EQF) provides a common European system to facilitate the recognition of national and/or sectoral qualifications between institutions and countries covering general and adult education, vocational education and training as well as higher education (European Commission, 2008). Its main aim is to promote lifelong learning and enhanced mobility for learners and workers across Europe.

Within the context of the EQF, Brockmann et al. (2008) analysed the vocational education and training (VET) systems in England, Germany and the Netherlands. The results suggests there were some interesting tensions between the development and aspirations for the EQF (which was seen as

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<sup>6</sup> Irrespective of the socio-political context of knowledge generation in higher education, the implied importance and impact of academic research by Silk et al. (2010) seems overstated to us in a policy and practitioner context. The latter stakeholders have only recently it appears started to embed research knowledge in a sporting context, and then use their professional judgement to weigh it up against other knowledge forms. When commissioned, undertaken and used a great deal of research works to other agendas, meta-theories and methodologies than those suggested by Silk et al. (2010).

arguable closest to the English National Qualifications Framework), and the realities of VET in the three countries and notably in Germany and the Netherlands. Specifically, the EQF was seen to be promoting a 'skills based system' closest to that in England, but was very different to the 'knowledge based' system in Germany and the Netherlands. The research argues that 'without taking into consideration the diverging understandings' of key concepts underpinning EQF, it remains questionable whether the aims of the EQF, such as enhancing transferability and comparability, can be fulfilled' (Brockmann et al., 2008, p. 561).

During the course of the delivery of the CoachLearn project it became clear that not only had the Duffy et al. (2013) study underestimated the amount and variety of existing research activity amongst European sport coaching agencies, but that the context, motivations and methodologies used in the UK were probably not that appropriate to meeting the requirements of other European partners. This paper seeks to follow up on these initial findings – to understand what research activity is being undertaken in the context of sport coaching across the 5 European nations, and how this can be understood in terms of different contexts, and motivations.

## 6. Methodology

### 6.1 Participants

The research participants were sporting organisations in five European countries (Finland, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, and the UK) represented through their official policies and documents, and nine expert officers. The organisations were: the Finnish Olympic Committee (Finland), the Deutsche Olympische Sportbund (DOSB), the Coaches Academy Cologne of the German Olympic Sports Confederation or *Trainerakademie* (both Germany), the Hungarian Coaching Association (Hungary), the Netherlands Olympic Committee & Sport Federation or *NOS\*NSF* (the Netherlands), and Sports Coach UK (UK). The nine expert participants were directors and/or senior programme managers in sport and sport coaching with many years of experience working in high performance, coaching system development, coach education and development, and coach representation. There were six males and three females.

### 6.2 Instrumentation

Only one research instrument was designed for the study. This was a semi-structured interview guide exploring the context, motivations, research questions, research approaches and tools, analytical approaches, data use, and future plans concerning coaching workforce data in the five countries.

### 6.3 Procedure

There were two basic elements to the research design. First, a review of policies on research and data collection, as well as the collation and analysis of all research reports and raw data relating to the coaching workforce in each of the countries. 22 documents were collected in total and key approaches and data extracted into the results section. Second, interviews, both face-to-face and over Skype, were conducted during the period March 2015 to April 2016. Each organisations' expert representatives were interviewed a minimum of three times. The first interview involved the administration of the research instrument where most of the data was collected. These lasted from

30 minutes to 1 hour 40 minutes and were audio recorded for later analysis. The second interview concerned filling any gaps in data collection from the first interview based on the emerging conceptual scheme. The third interview was a more informal discussion in which a profile of each country situation was provided back to the interviewee and a discussion was undertaken to ensure it was representative and authentic of their situation. The interviewees also helped with the translation of the policy and research documents mentioned above. The exception to this process was the DOSB whose contacts corresponded by email only.

#### 6.4 Analytical method

The research utilised a theoretical adaptive approach to inform data collection and analysis (Layder, 1998). The context for the study was the promotion of a particular approach to sport workforce measurement. Thus theory 1 (T1) suggested this approach would be useful in the five countries based on experiences in the UK. In discussion with the research participants outside the UK a number of questions emerged – ‘what do you do in your country?’, ‘would the promoted methodology be useful? This elicited a number of responses: ‘in our country we do things slightly different for these reasons’. Thus, an adaptively generated theory 2 (T2) was developed that suggested an exploration of the contextual factors, and motivations for the choice of particular approaches to workforce data collection. These questions were then presented back to the research participants and their responses recorded. This were categorised used a thematic coding approach similar to that proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). This produced adaptively generated theory 3 (T3, the final theory presented in the paper) suggesting particular configurations of contextual and motivational factors influence workforce measurement arrangements (these are presented in the results section). Original documents, interviews, phone/skype calls, and emails provided the information required to adaptively develop the underpinning theories and categories. The theories were sketched as rough drafts and questioning frameworks by the lead author and checked for sense by the research group at each stage.

### 7. Results

The results from the study are presented in the following sub-sections: research and data collection activity, contextual conditions for data collection, and motivations for collecting and using coaching workforce data.

#### 7.1 Research and data collection activities

The results suggested research and data collection activity related to sport coaching across the five participant countries, although the profile of the activities varied in each (Table 1). The most frequently mentioned type of research targeted specific coaching populations - typically because of their link to specific strategic interests - using bespoke research designs. For example, professional coaches in Finland were targeted because they were seen as the priority group in terms of quality improvements, high performance coaches in the Germany as a result of relatively poor recent Olympic performances, coaching association members in Hungary linked to the service provision of the Hungarian Coaches Association, performance development and high performance coaches (linked to) in the Netherlands, and coaches from target equity groups in the UK e.g. woman and black and minority ethnic groups linked to current sports development strategy.

Panel surveys were also a popular data collection approach. They were seen as offering reasonably representative insight into coaches’ issues whilst being cost effective. Finland, the Netherlands and the UK targeted a panel of coaches - around 500-2,000 in each country over a period of one to four years. In Germany and Hungary there was a state based registration/licencing system of sport coaches which provided regular data on registered/licenced coaches. In Germany and the UK there also appeared to be a comprehensive programme on higher education research on sport coaching although not necessarily targeted at workforce management directly. In the UK, as per the introduction, there was particular emphasis on data collection through national level household sample research including at least three dedicated surveys since 2000. There has also been extensive data collection through individual sports in the UK using a specific and targeted data collection exercises including with athletics, badminton, equestrian, gymnastics, lacrosse, rugby league, squash and triathlon. Outside the UK there has been no or very little equivalent research activity. None of the other four countries have used a national level household approach. A small number of sports in Finland and Germany had undertaken sport specific workforce audits.

**Table 1: Research and data collection activity on sport coaching in the 5 countries**

|   | Finland  | Germany  | Hungary                                       | The Netherlands   | United Kingdom   |
|---|--|--|---|---|--|
| Coach registration and/or licensing system - national level                                       | No system  | <b>State based system</b>  | <b>State based system</b>                     | No system   | No system  |
| Coach registration and/or licensing system - sport level  | Some sport specific systems                              | <b>State based system</b>  | <b>State based system</b>                     | Some sport specific systems   | Some sport specific systems                                |
| Coaching workforce population ‘household’ research - national level, based on sample              | No activity  | No activity  | No activity                                   | No activity   | <b>Extensive activity</b>                                  |
| Coaching workforce population research (sport specific or regional/local level, based on sample)  | Some sport specific activity                             | Some sport specific activity   | No activity                                   | No activity   | <b>More extensive sport specific activity</b>              |
| Coaching workforce population research - specific population groups e.g. high performance coaches | <b>Surveys of professional coaches</b>                   | <b>Surveys of high performance coaches</b>   | <b>Coaching association membership survey</b> | <b>Survey of performance development and high performance coaches</b> | <b>Survey/research focused on specific minority groups</b> |
| Coaching workforce panel research   | <b>Extensive activity</b>                                | No activity  | No activity                                   | <b>Extensive activity</b>   | <b>Extensive activity</b>                                  |
| Other research which provides an insight into the coaching workforce                              | Participation survey provides insight into coach numbers | Club survey provides insight into coach numbers<br><b>Comprehensive research programme in HE</b> | No activity                                   | Club and graduate survey provides insight into coach numbers          | <b>Comprehensive research programme in HE</b>              |

Note: bold suggests method important

## 7.2 Contextual factors impacting on coaching workforce data collection and use

The results suggest some interesting contextual variations between the five countries in terms of evidence based approaches and sport coaching workforce data collection and use. With the exception of Hungary, where the lack of an evidence based approach across public administration has already been identified (OECD, 2015), a political commitment to, culture of, and dedicated structures for evidence based policy and decision making was noted across all countries particular related to health care, but also social policy and crime. In Finland, Germany and the Netherlands these commitments/cultures were beginning to permeate into discussions about sports policy and programmes, notably where the latter had connection to health and social issues. The most developed systems for evidence based approaches were identified in the UK based on investments made in the late 1990s and 2000s across public services and in sports - although there was some evidence of this momentum diminishing in recent years.

**Table 2: Contextual factors impacting on coaching workforce data collection and use**

|   | Finland  | Germany   | Hungary   | The Netherlands   | United Kingdom   |
|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| Political commitment to/culture of/structures for evidence based policy and decision making and performance management in public administration | <b>Evidence based approach emerging in health, and being discussed in sport</b>                | <b>Evidence based approach important in health, crime and emerging in sport</b>   | No strong commitment to evidence based policy and practice  | <b>Evidence based approach important in health, and social welfare and by association in sport</b>                | <b>Evidence based approach important in all sectors including sport and sport coaching although less under current administration</b>                                    |
| Effective management in sports organisations and their programmes   | <b>Evidence based approaches increasingly a feature of sports organisation decision making</b> | <b>Evidence based approaches increasingly a feature of sports organisation decision making</b>  | Sports organisations regulated by sports law with governance an important part of this but this is not being translated into systematic evidence based approaches | Evidence based approaches are increasingly used in sports organisations although it remains 'piecemeal'           | <b>Evidence based approaches are now seen as central to decision making in sport organisations pushed by the 'insight' revolution</b>                                    |
| National/regional/local structure for sports coaching administration  | Structures at national high performance level, 11 institutes, and 21 academics                 | Structures for high performance coaching at national levels, federal structure, and sports federations and Olympic training centres administer below this | Structures for high performance/ competitive sports at national level including Hungarian Coaches Assoc. Sport federations have most interaction                  | 'Light touch' administration at national level. Most interaction managed by the federations and local authorities | <b>UK Sport, Sport England and Sports Coach UK have national level roles related to coaching. Sports federations are also important. Some local authority management</b> |
| Infrastructure to collect data  | Limited resource for coaching research managed   | Network of agencies cooperate to organise coaching  | No extensive resource for or activity related to sport  | Growing infrastructure related to sports research some of which engages   | <b>National sports agencies have dedicated research function – UK Sport, Sport</b>   |

|  | Finland   | Germany   | Hungary           | The Netherlands   | United Kingdom  |
|--|---|---|-------------------|---|---|
|  | through Ministry of Education and Olympic Committee | research e.g. BMI, DOSB, BISP & ITA. Often duplication Some sports coaching research commissioned/ activated. | coaching research | with coaching e.g. Olympic Committee, NOS*NSCF, and 'Sports Services Centre' Concerns about duplication | <b>England and Sports Coach UK Federations increasingly recruiting research/ insight managers</b> |

Note: bold suggests factor important

The broader political commitment to/cultures of evidence based decision making in the four countries (excluding Hungary) was also impacting on sports organisation governance and management. Unsurprisingly, the most obvious impact has been in the UK where the major sport agencies - UK Sport, Sport England and Sports Coach UK – buoyed by considerably public investment, and a new customer focused 'insight' approach to strategy and operations, have placed considerably emphasis on evidence based approaches and research data. Sport federations in the UK have also been expected to provide underpinning evidence for the policies and programmes when bidding to sports agencies for funding. Many UK federations now allocate resources for the development of research capacity. Universities and private suppliers have mobilised to provide the information required to a new set of clients. The picture is not one of unadulterated evidence based approaches – but in sports planning and bidding at least it has had a very important impact.

There also appeared to be notably changes in Finland, Germany and to a lesser degree the Netherlands. Finland and Germany pointed to recent policy and strategy decisions that had increasingly emphasised the role of evidenced based approach, for example, the 'State Sports Council' in Finland and a review of high performance sport in Germany. The Netherlands were also undertaking a strategic review for period 2017 onwards, but suggested evidence based approaches remained 'piecemeal' in sporting organisations. In Hungary, sports law requires sporting organisations to comply with effective governance and management but there was little indication that this extended to being evidence based in a sporting context.

Another contextual factor which was thought to be important was the structure of sports administration structures for coaching across the countries. In Finland, Germany, Hungary, and the Netherlands there were reasonably strong structures for high performance coaching at the national level – typically connected to each country's Olympic association. However, structures for children, performance development and recreational coaching was typically devolved to sports federations or federal, state, regional or local level structures in these countries. For example, in the Netherlands the NOS-NCF described their administration of coaching at the national level as 'light touch'. This again can be contrasted with the situation within the UK where there was dedicated national agencies for high performance coaching (UK Sport), and separately, children, performer development and recreational coaching (Sport England and Sports Coach UK). National level structures for the different categories of coaching was thought to be important to understanding the influence on the types of data collection activity undertaken.

Related to this, the final contextual feature concerns the infrastructure to collect research information. In a sport coaching context, the UK again appeared to have invested more with regards to infrastructure. The main UK agencies have dedicated research teams and have commissioned/undertaken research that concerned sport coaching. Indeed, out of the five countries studied only the UK appeared to have a dedicated sport coaching lead organisation with a research function. Germany and the Netherlands have recently increased capacity for research through Bundesinstitut für Sportwissenschaft (BISp) and Nederlands Instituut voor Sport en Beweging (NISB) with these organisations have a wide remit including coaching. There is also research capacity in Finland through the Ministry of Education and the Olympic committee although no projects are committed currently concerning coaching. Hungary appeared to have very little research capacity directly related to sport coaching other than that available through the Hungarian Coaches Association.

### 7.3 Motivations for collecting and using workforce data

The research suggested the profile of motivations for collecting and using workforce data varied between the five countries (Table 3). The most important motivation concerned conducting research to gain a clearer picture of coaches' experiences and issues with a view to using the information to inform coach education and development programmes. What experiences were coaches encountering in day-to-day practice, for example? How could this information be used to build new coach education and development programmes? This motivation was often linked with a panel survey approach, for example, in Finland, the Netherlands and the UK.

Other motivations were also important to some of the participant countries. For example, the evaluation of existing coaching programmes was central in Germany and the Netherlands (indeed all programmes had an evaluation component) and in the UK (although not for all programmes). A number of countries established bespoke or one-off research projects to investigate specific coaching groups such as professional coaches, high performance coaches and, for example, black and minority ethnic to provide insight because these groups had been strategically prioritised. Data collection around coaching licences was important to those countries that had a state licence. Finally, in the UK an important motivation in the early to mid-2000s was to collect information on the size and shape of the coaching workforce to highlight the political, strategic and operational value of sport coaching – although this motivation has diminished as the data has been collected. Finland, Germany, Hungary, and the Netherlands did not see this a strong motivation because the value of the sporting workforce was already reasonably well established.

**Table 3: Motivations for collecting and using coaching workforce data**

|  | Finland   | Germany   | Hungary  | The Netherlands   | United Kingdom   |
|--|---|---|--|---|--|
| To highlight the political, strategic and operational value of sport coaching  | Not a strong motivation – politicians already aware of importance of sporting workforce                 | Not a strong motivation – there is some political recognition of sport coaching especially high performance coaches (although it could be higher) | Not a strong motivation – sport coaches politically recognised and valued especially at high performance level and community level linked to licence | Not a strong motivation – politicians already aware of importance of sporting workforce                 | <b>Important motivation in the past i.e. 2000s related to DCMS Coaching Project. Data required to show reach of coaching. This issue has diminished now the research has been done</b> |
| To understand the characteristics of a particular coaching community with a view to it being an instrument of sport policy | <b>Important motivation - related to the development of professional coaches</b>                        | Minor motivation - in relation to high performance coaches  | Not a strong motivation given resources available  | Minor motivation - in relation to performance and high performance coaches                              | Minor motivation - in relation to equity and inclusion agenda  |
| To understand coaching experiences and issues to inform and manage the education and development of coaches                | <b>Important motivation – main reason for panel survey is to inform coach education and development</b> | <b>Important motivation – extensive programme of research to inform coach education and development especially at high performance level</b>      | Minor motivation – survey of HCA members used to inform coach education and development  | <b>Important motivation – main reason for panel survey is to inform coach education and development</b> | <b>Important motivation – numerous studies commissioned and undertaken in 2000s and 2010s</b>  |
| To regulate and quality assure the coaching workforce  | Not a strong motivation currently   | <b>Important motivation – state registration/ licensing system in place</b>   | <b>Important motivation – state registration/ licensing system in place</b>  | Not a strong motivation – some sports have developed QA systems to monitor safety                       | Not a strong motivation currently  |
| To evaluate the effectiveness of state/agency programmes   | Not a strong motivation   | <b>Important motivation – evaluation is built into all programmes</b>   | Not a strong motivation  | <b>Important motivation – evaluation is built into all programmes notably at local level</b>            | Minor motivation – evaluation is an important feature of some coaching programmes  |

Note: bold suggests motivation important

## 8. Discussion

At the outset of the CoachLearn project it was assumed – based on preliminary evidence - that European countries were not collecting data on their sport coaches, and that a set of methodologies developed in the UK related to national level household surveys and sport specific audits, would help to address this gap. These assumption faced directly into wider issues around the reach and value of evidence based approaches, and European wide centralised good practice models being promoted uncritically to other nations (e.g. Brockmann et al., 2008; Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007).

The UK centred approach assumptions were tested with reference to four additional European countries – Finland, Germany, Hungary and the Netherlands. The results suggest that three countries – Finland, Germany and the Netherlands were actively collecting information from their coaches, and there was some activity in Hungary linked to their state licencing scheme and the Hungarian Coaches Association. The results also questioned the idea that the promoted UK methodologies would relevant, useful and viable in a non-UK context any more than the methodologies they were already utilising.

Similar to Girginov, Toohey, and Willem (2015) study of evidence based practices in sports participation organisations the research identified very different approaches to coaching workforce data collection in the five countries. The results suggest that each countries sport coaching research activity and choice of methods were firmly anchored in contextual conditions and motivations that were unique to their country. In each country a map of contextual conditions and motivations were discerned that suggested the selection (or otherwise) or particular research approaches (Table 4). For example, in Finland a benign though far from established established contextual condition for evidence based approaches, led officers to utilising basic survey and panel survey techniques to identify key experiences and issues amongst specific coaching groups to inform coach education. Beyond this there was very little data collection and use. Similar contexts and motivations were identified in Germany and the Netherlands – although there were generally different research targets and the German system has yet to utilise a panel approach.

In the UK – notably in the 2000s - a very different set of contextual arrangements were in place. Evidence based decision making was central to public administration and was resources – a situation that extended into sports administration including sport coaching. There was also a political imperative to show the reach and value of sport coaching – not as obvious in the other four countries. This suggested the adoption and use of a particular methodological approach based on household surveys. Considerable sums were invested – over €600,000 – over three surveys spanning five years. This investment was incomparable to resources available to other countries in the study (outside the administration of licencing arrangements). However, for these countries this resource heavy approach was not as required.

**Table 4: Context and motivation for the collection and application of sport coaching workforce data in the 5 countries**

|   | Finland  | Germany   | Hungary  | The Netherlands   | United Kingdom   |
|---|--|---|--|---|--|
| Contextual conditions                     | Evidence based approaches both at public administration and sporting level becoming more important<br>Moderate resources for sport research          | Evidence based approaches both at public administration and sporting level becoming more important<br>Growing infrastructure for sport research   | No strong commitment to evidence based approaches<br>Very limited resources for sport research | Evidence based approaches both at public administration and sporting level becoming more important<br>Growing infrastructure for sport research   | Evidence based approaches in public administration and sport increasingly embedded in areas such as planning and bidding<br>Extensive infrastructure for sport research including specific resources for coaching research |
| Motivations                               | Evidence collected on coaching to support coach education and development programmes, and specific coaching populations notably professional coaches | Evidence collected on coaching to support coach education and development programmes, and specific coaching populations notably high performance<br>Evaluation of programmes also important | Evidence collected to support programmes of Hungarian Coaches' Association                     | Evidence collected on coaching to support coach education and development programmes, and specific coaching populations notably performance development and high performance<br>Evaluation of programmes also important | In 2000s to show reach and value of sport coaching for political purposes<br>More recently research targeted to support coach education and development programmes   |
| Preferred research targets and methods    | Panel survey of coaches<br>Survey of professional coaches  | Licensing system<br>Survey of high performance coaches<br>Comprehensive programme of HE research  | Licensing system<br>Survey of coaching association members                                     | Panel survey of coaches<br>Survey of performance development and high performance coaches   | In 2000s – national household surveys<br>Now - panel survey of coaches   |
| Reason for questioning promoted UK method | No obvious need for top-line figures<br>Could not justify resources required to proceed with UK approach   | No obvious need for top-line figures<br>Could not justify resources required to proceed with UK approach<br>Sport specific information provided through licencing scheme                    | Limited resources to proceed with any of the research approaches                               | No obvious need for top-line figures<br>Could not justify resources required to proceed with UK approach  | National household survey approach served 'political' purpose.<br>Panel surveys, sport specific, and population specific surveys now more useful and financially viable  |

## 9. Conclusions and recommendations

The study investigated sport coaching workforce data collection in five countries – Finland, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (UK).

The results suggest the countries used different measures and methods. The methodologies are often targeted at other groups e.g. clubs and coaching information inferred from it. One country had no sport coaching workforce data.

The UK based sport coaching workforce data collection methodology – based on national level household surveys and detailed data collection within specific sports - that underpinned the CoachLearn bid application was found not to not reflect, or be only a partial solution, to the remaining four countries' data collection contexts and requirements.

Data collection requirements were heavily shaped by contextual factors such as a tradition of evidence based decision making in the country and sports organisations, and available research infrastructure. This was also clearly linked to capacity and resource. Requirements were also shaped by motivations for collecting and using coaching workforce data such as to highlight the political importance and reach of coaching, and to understand the coaching experiences and issues to inform and manage coach education and development.

A range of alternative data approaches were identified and deemed useful. These included registration and licencing systems, specific 'one-off' targeted surveys of particular groups e.g. high performance coaches, and panel surveys.

Any future intervention by the European Union, the International Council for Coaching Excellence or European Coaching Council, will need to understand the particular contextual and motivation conditions for data collection in a specific country, and offer a range of aligned methodologies, templates and services.

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