The UK Youth Sport Coaching Workforce Report

Ruth Brazier[1, 2], Sergio Lara-Bercial[1,2,3], Megan Hill[1,2], Gary Hodgson[1,2], and Barnaby Sargent Megicks[2, 4]

1 Centre for Sport Coaching, Leeds Beckett University

2 ICOACHKIDS

3 International Council for Coaching Excellence

4 Department of Sport & Physical Activity, Practice in Coaching & Teaching Research Group, Edge Hill University

Abstract

Research shows that the coaching workforce in most countries is composed of a blend of volunteers, part-time and full-time paid individuals (Moustakas & Bales, 2022; UK Coaching, 2023a). However, the exact make up of this workforce across the youth sport[1] participation spectrum is not well understood. While previous studies have sought to understand the coaching landscape, very few studies have focused specifically on the youth sport landscape. Given the societal importance of youth sport, and the positive contribution that coaches make (Lara-Bercial, Bales, et al., 2022), this is an area that needs further attention. Using a mass survey methodology, this study aimed to create a detailed picture of the current landscape of youth sport coaching in the UK. Findings show some similarities to previous workforce audits. For example, youth sport coaching is primarily a voluntary activity (62%) – yet opportunities to access paid positions have grown. Moreover, findings also show that the youth sport workforce is not a homogenous entity. This signals the need for further research to gain an accurate understanding of the needs and wants of coaches individually, and in their specific working environments, before implementing any recruitment or development programmes.

[1]Throughout this paper we use the term 'youth sport' to refer to activities in which the participants are under the age of 18, in line with UN definitions.

Key Words

Coaching Demographics; Coach Recruitment and Development; Youth Sport; Coaching Children

Introduction: The Importance of Youth Sport Participation

The benefits of regular physical activity and sport for young people are widely recognised, including health, physical, cognitive, emotional, moral and social benefit (Lara-Bercial & McKenna, 2022a, 2022b; Won et al., 2023). Importantly, being physically active through childhood increases the likelihood of long-term participation and activity through the life course (Kjønniksen et al., 2009; Sport England, 2023). Thus, early positive experiences of sport and physical activity are crucial. Against this backdrop, organised sport participation is recognised as a primary way to get young people active. However, youth sport drop-out is a challenge globally and has been a consideration within research for many years. Emmonds et al. (2023) explored current participation rates across Europe, highlighting that sport participation tends to peak between the ages of 10-14, with a significant drop occurring after these ages. While youth sport drop-out cannot be attributed to one single factor, research has suggested a range of factors such as enjoyment, social support, club and organizational environments and physical growth and maturation as potential reasons behind these drop-out figures (Crane & Temple, 2015; Emmonds et al., 2023). Thus, while early positive experiences have already been highlighted as crucial, it is also important to acknowledge the importance of *continued* positive experiences of sport throughout childhood and adolescence.

Understanding the Coach's Role in Achieving Positive Outcomes in Youth Sport

Coaches are a key factor in achieving early and continued positive experiences in youth sport (Lara-Bercial et al., 2017). As one of the central figures in young people's sporting lives, coaches have a responsibility for supporting children to enjoy and remain engaged in sport, to get the myriad positive benefits of participation. However, coaches can also be one of the main causes why young people may drop out of sport (Lara-Bercial et al., 2023). Despite their importance, not enough is known about the UK children's coaching workforce, and this paper addresses this gap. We aim to understand who these coaches are, the contexts they work within, what their role entails. Moreover, we seek to explore whether the conditions surrounding their education, development and practice are conducive to the

total fulfilment of the promise of sport for young people. We begin by considering existing literature which considers the role of the coach.

The responsibilities associated with coaching are varied and wide-ranging. For example, the definition used in the European Sport Coaching Framework (Lara-Bercial et al., 2017) states that:

> "Coaching is a process of guided improvement and development in a single sport and at identifiable stages of development. This definition emphasises coaches' ongoing nurturing and educational support of participants and the notable signs of progress expected as a result of that experience."

Sport England's (2016, p.7) definition of coaching involves "improving a person's experience of sport" through offering "specialised support and guidance", and includes roles such as 'helper', 'host', 'activator' and 'teacher' under the coaching umbrella. This broad definition means that many people involved in sport and working with young people can categorise themselves as coaches, and/or the work they do as coaching. Cote et al. (2007) offer a deeper description of the coaches' role, and importantly suggest different definitions for those working with different age groups. For example, coaches working with children (age ~6-12) should ensure their participants have fun, can sample a variety of activities and other sports, and take on broader organisational roles such as organising social activities and teaching life skills (Cote et al., 2007). Through the adolescent years, the focus may shift more towards balancing competitive outcomes with intrinsic motivational goals and should emphasise personal mastery to avoid the negative social stigma associated with this age group (Cote et al., 2007). As well as the age of the participants, the context in which they participate may also influence the role of the coach. For example, within the talent development space, where young people may compete more regularly and with higher stakes, the coaches may focus more on long term athletic development, competition and managing multiple stakeholders (Sargent Megicks et al., 2022; Till et al., 2022; Till & Baker, 2020).

Given the variety of definitions of coaching, attempts to understand who the coaches are have understandably produced different results. For example, UK Coaching (2023a), using Sport England's broad definition of who is a coach, have recently conducted mass quantitative surveys aiming to explore the make-up of the coaching workforce. Their most recent survey identified that the coaching workforce is largely White (80%), male (55%) and non-disabled (77%). When considering coaches who undertake recognised qualifications, Sport England (2016) found that there is a stark under-representation of people from minority ethnic backgrounds (5%), women (17%), those with a disability (2%) and people from lower socio-economic groups (25%). Comparing these statistics highlights the difficulty in truly understanding the UK coaching workforce. As identified previously, there are a variety of definitions for coaching, which often differ between organisations and coaching context. Thus, understanding who the coaches are can be challenging without a clear and unified definition of coaching. Of specific relevance to this paper, it is also important to note that the existing surveys paint only an overall picture of the coaching workforce – to date, no demographic studies of this type have focused solely on the youth sport coaching workforce in the UK. Nonetheless, these audits provide a valuable overview to begin to understand the coaching workforce.

A further issue related to coaching is to better understand the context in which they work (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). Within the UK, coaching has largely been driven by voluntary engagement. According to the latest figures from Sport England (2016) 74% of coaches are fully voluntary, 14% work in a part-time capacity, and only 12% of coaches make their living from coaching as a full-time occupation in England. Recent research suggests that professionalisation within sports coaching – defined as a process of systemic improvement, which includes more access to paid positions – appears to be growing in Europe (Moustakas et al., 2022). However, research from Rankin-Wright et al. (2017), which focused specifically on the children's coaching workforce, identified that youth sport coaching across Europe still tends to be voluntary or part-time in nature. Crucially, this report identified that youth sport coaching is often seen as an entry point for coaches. Thus, less experienced coaches tend

to work with youth participants, before 'progressing' to work with adults and gain more access to paid positions.

In addition to exploring who coaches are and their context, it is also crucial to understand what entails quality coaching. Evidence suggests that positive coaching practices and behaviours are more likely to link to early and continued positive experiences for young people in their chosen sport. For example, Côté & Gilbert (2009) offer an expertise perspective, suggesting that coaches should hold a combination of professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, as well an understanding of their coaching context to develop competence, confidence, connection and character-related outcomes. Practical coaching organisations use their own definitions of effective and positive coaching. For example, UK Coaching use the acronym 'PEOPLE' to describe good coaching as person-centred; empowering; organised; positive; learning; engaged (UK Coaching, 2018). Moreover, global movement 'ICOACHKIDS' (Lara-Bercial et al., 2022), through a narrative review of the literature, identifies 10 golden rules for coaching children specifically, which includes for instance 'be child-centred', 'be holistic' and 'make it fun and safe'. While there is no singular definition of 'good' coaching, generally, coaching can be viewed in a positive light when it is driven by the wants and needs of the participants within the defined context, often referred to as 'athlete-centred' coaching (Kidman & Lombardo, 2010).

Importantly, good coaching can be the difference between young people remaining in their chosen sport and choosing to stop participating. While it is clear that youth sport drop-out is a complex, and multi-factorial phenomenon (Emmonds et al., 2023), research indicates that coaches can positively influence young people's willingness to stay involved. Research by Lara-Bercial et al. (2023) suggests that there are multiple dimensions that influence drop-out, which may affect young people in different ways depending on a variety of factors including household income, age, gender or perceived competence. However, some consistent factors included 'no-one helped me stay', 'didn't think I was good enough' or 'not enough playing time' (Lara-Bercial et al., 2023). All of these could be challenged

by coaches who prioritise relationships with participants and give everyone a chance to learn and develop at appropriate rates (Lara-Bercial et al., 2023). Therefore, it is vitally important that coaches are, in turn, supported to develop these tools and behaviours. However, before putting in place mechanisms to support coaches, it is imperative that we understand who the coaches are and what context(s) they work within, so that we can understand what type of support they may require.

Situating this Research

The importance of youth sport, and the crucial role of the coach in contributing to positive outcomes in youth sport is well documented (Lara-Bercial et al., 2017; Sport England, 2017). However, there are still some key areas relating to youth sport coaching which have not been explored in as much depth. First, most previous work has considered the entire coaching population as a homogenous entity, and has not specifically considered the youth sport coaching workforce in isolation. Moreover, demographic data that has been collected has often been limited in scope and intersection. In these instances, factors such as age, gender, ethnicity and qualifications have been considered in isolation. Because of this, there is a tendency to lack segmentation and exploration of differences within and between coaching populations. Instead, coaches are often presented as a homogenous entity, with little understanding of differences between them. Against this backdrop, this research aimed to gain an up to date, and finer grain picture of the youth coaching workforce in the UK. Gaining a more nuanced understanding of who the coaches are, and their varied backgrounds and experiences is paramount to be able to better recruit and support coaches so they can learn how to create high-quality environments for young people to stay and thrive in sport.

Methodology

The data used for this paper is part of a larger body of research, which included an online survey, interviews and focus groups with coaches in an attempt to better understand the youth sport coaching workforce. Given the nature and purpose of this paper, only survey data is used. The quantitative survey was hosted and distributed online using QualtricsXM (2021). The survey comprised of 27

questions, in two different formats: Likert-scale ratings, and multiple-choice. The questions focus ranged from coaches' demographic backgrounds to their personal sporting history, their educational background, their employment status, and the nature of the environment they coach in. Example questions and formats include:

- Indicate how important each of the following factors was in getting you into coaching (Likert-scale ratings (not at all important – extremely important) of a wide range of topics, with ability to add additional factors if necessary)
- Do you think you are at risk of stopping coaching in the near future (multiple choice question, yes or no)

The survey was created bespoke for the study by the research team and included two rounds of expert reviews until the final survey was confirmed. Ethical approval was granted through Leeds Beckett University.

The survey was distributed online in 2022 using existing coaching networks and was also shared extensively on social media. The study was open for completion by anyone aged 16 years or older who was coaching in the UK at the time. Anyone who self-identified as an 'active coach' were eligible to complete the survey, and there were no restrictions based on the activity or sport that they were involved in. Participants were provided with a study information sheet and were asked to provide informed consent to take part in the study prior to survey completion. Data collection was open for a four-week period to maximise the possible sample size, and several distribution rounds were made. In total, 1,420 coaches responded to the survey. The survey analysis was conducted using SPSS 27 software and comprised of 2 stages. Stage 1 obtained descriptive statistics of all scaled data. Stage 2 conducted a comparative analysis of all independent groups against all possible variables attempting to unearth significant differences in the coaching workforce.

Results and Discussion

This section presents and simultaneously discusses the findings of the study, to ensure clarity and conciseness. It is split into two sections. First, we outline the individual demographic findings of the survey: '*Understanding Youth Sport Coaches*'. Table 1 presents a demographic breakdown linked to employment status, to better understand who coaches and in what capacity. The results from this table are discussed across different demographic variables. Second, we present the findings from the survey which relate to the coaching context in which the survey respondents worked: '*Coaching Contexts in Youth Sport'*. Table 2 presents a breakdown of the different types of coaching roles that people undertake, again linked to employment status, to understand what coaching looks like in different sectors of the workforce. We then discuss the results from this table across the different contextual variables. The data has been condensed for presentation purposes.

Throughout this results and discussion section we aim to do two things. First, we aim to provide an overview of the current state of the UK youth sport coaching workforce, by presenting and discussing some broad and general statistics. Second, we aim to provide a finer-grain picture of the UK youth sport workforce, by picking out significant findings relating to specific demographic groups and/or coaching contexts. In doing so, we aim to provoke thought, promote questions, and potentially challenge what we think we know about the UK youth sport coaching workforce. Where appropriate, we highlight areas that require further research to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon in question.

Table 1: Demographic Breakdown of Survey Respondents

	Gender (%) (n=1397)			Disability (n=1406)			Age-Band (n=1376)						Ethnicity (n=1399)					Coach Qualification (n=1401)					
	Male	Female	NA	Yes	No	Prefer not to say /Do not know	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	White	Asian/Asian British	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	Mixed/ Multiple Ethnic Groups	Other	0	1	2	3	4	Other
Volunteer	71.0	28.9	0.2	10.0	88.0	2.0	5.7	8.3	26.2	31.0	17.3	11.4	94.5	1.5	1.5	1.8	0.6	8.5	28.4	44.1	12.2	3.4	3.5
Volunteer with expenses	62.3	36.4	1.4	14.9	81.5	3.7	5.9	9.1	20.5	24.2	22.8	17.4	90.0	2.3	4.1	2.7	0.90	5.0	20.7	45.9	19.4	5.4	3.6
Part time	42.6	56.8	0.6	10.6	85.6	3.7	8.7	17.5	21.7	23.9	20.1	8.1	92.8	2.8	1.6	1.9	0.9	2.2	10.3	46.1	27.0	10.3	4.1
Full Time	66.3	32.7	1.0	14.2	82.4	3.5	9.0	23.0	28.0	22.5	15.0	2.5	93.1	1.5	1.0	3.5	1.0	2.5	3.4	27.5	41.2	21.1	4.4
All	62.5	36.9	0.6	11.5	85.6	2.8	6.9	12.6	24.6	27.1	18.5	10.3	93.2	1.9	1.9	2.2	0.8	5.6	19.4	42.4	20.9	7.9	3.8

In total, 1,420 coaches completed the online survey. Of these, 84.1% were coaching in England, 7% in Scotland, 4.7% in Wales and 3.8% in Northern Ireland. Most respondents coached a single sport (81.2%) with fewer coaching multiple sports (18.8%). Most coaches had previously played their sport at some level (92.6%), and the majority (57.7%) reported that they played at a grassroots or recreational level, while 37.4% had competed at a semi-professional or high standard. Finally, 4.9% competed at a professional or Olympic level. This finding is important when considering coach recruitment – given that most coaches are/were themselves participants, encouraging current athletes to undertake entry level coaching qualifications before they finish playing and to gain some experience of coaching may be an effective recruitment tool for when they decide to stop or even years after when their children become involved.

When considering gender and coaching, the results show a positive trend in relation to previous workforce research. This study found that overall, 62.5% of coaches were male; 36.9% of coaches were female, while 0.6% preferred not to say. This compares positively to previous research from North (2009) and Sport England (2016) which reported 31% and 17% women coaches respectively. However, they are not quite as positive as UK Coaching (2023a) most recent survey, which found that 44% of coaches are women. This may be due to the broader definition of coaching used in the UK Coaching research and the nature of their sampling, which included anyone who had coached in the previous 12 months. Moreover, there is an interesting trend when gender and age are considered in combination (see figure 1):

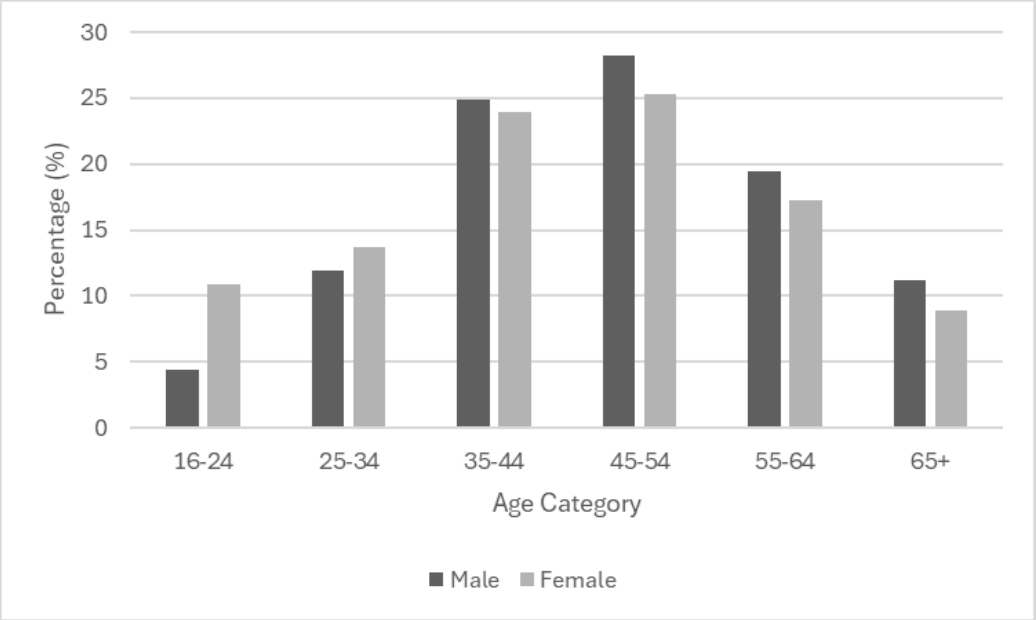

Figure 1: Age and Gender of Coaches surveyed

Notably, figure 1 shows how women outnumbered men in the younger age-groups (16-24 and 25-34). Specifically, in the youngest age category (16-24), women more than doubled their male counterparts. While previously studies have collected data regarding the gender of coaches and the age of coaches, these have so far been reported as standalone figures (North, 2009; Sport England, 2017; UK Coaching, 2023a). Because of the different ways of reporting data (i.e. as standalone figures rather than as intersecting factors), there are different potential conclusions to draw from the present data set. For example, we could read this as a shift in attitudes, with coaching becoming more accessible and acceptable for women of younger ages to take part in. Equally, it could be argued that this shows a worrying drop-out trend among female coaches, who may struggle to continue coaching into later adulthood (Norman, 2021). Nonetheless, these findings show that more needs to be done to ensure that young female coaches can continue to coach into their late thirties and beyond (Norman, 2021).

In addition, the data also shows that women coaches outnumber male coaches in the part-time employment status category (56.8% to 42.6%). In all other categories (full-time, volunteer with expenses and volunteer) men outnumber women. Previous studies have not considered employment status and gender in combination; however, this could be an indication that gendered roles within

society still influence women's ability to engage in coaching. For example, if women are expected to take on more household responsibilities, including raising children, then their willingness to engage in voluntary coaching with no financial reimbursement, and/or their ability to accept full-time positions with unsocial hours may be limited (Hinojosa-Alcalde et al., 2023; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). Further research into women's motivations towards, and experiences of, youth coaching is recommended to fully explore these findings.

When considering the inclusion of other demographic groups, less positive trends emerge when compared to the population at large. For example, only 11.5% of coaches who responded to the survey stated that they had a disability. Compared to the general population, where 23% of working adults have a disability (Kirk-Wade, 2023), our statistics suggest that coaching perhaps remains inaccessible or unattractive for people with disabilities. Moreover, 93.2% of coaches identified as White, showcasing a lack of ethnic diversity among coaching populations. Like disability statistics, coaching appears to be less diverse than the general population, where 82% of people belong to a White ethnic background (Office for National Statistics, 2021). When compared to previous research, which considered the coaching workforce in its entirety, these youth coaching statistics are also less positive. For example, UK Coaching (2023a) reported that 23% of coaches identified as having a disability, and 80% of coaches identified as White. When considering the diversity of the youth sport coaching population, it is important to consider further research which explores the barriers and potential solutions to this imbalance in more depth. While some research has been conducted exploring the experiences of coaches from ethnic minority backgrounds (see for example Norman et al. (2014) and Rankin-Wright et al. (2019) the experiences of disabled coaches have been largely overlooked. A scoping review by Griffo et al. (2019) showed that only 2.1% of sports coaching articles published between 2005 and 2015 considered disability, with the vast majority focusing on athletes with disabilities rather than coaches. Even less common is work of this type that has been specific to the youth sport space (Griffo et al., 2019).

The final aspect considered is the qualifications coaches held. Most coaches held a level 2[2] qualification (42.4%) with level 1 (19.4%) and level 3 (20.9%) significantly behind. The fact that level 2 qualifications are the most prominently held qualification (more than doubling level 1 or level 3) could be influenced by coaching standards and legislation. In most cases, a level 2 qualification is the minimum standard for coaches to lead sessions and work unsupervised (see for example UK Coaching, 2023b). Thus, there seems to be a relationship between existing legislation and what qualifications youth coaches take. Moreover, just under 4% of all coaches reported holding a non-National Governing Body (NGB)[3] qualification relevant to coaching, including Further (FE) and Higher Education (HE) qualifications, while 5.6% of coaches stated that they held no qualifications. Compared to UK Coaching's most recent workforce audit (2023a), in which 50% of coaches reported having no qualifications, these statistics show a more promising picture relating to the knowledge base of youth sport coaches. Importantly, this is inconsistent with previous research by Rankin-Wright et al. (2017) who identified that youth coaches are often less experienced and less qualified than those who work with adults in sport. However, the specific context of each piece of research must be considered – while the UK Coaching audit reports on 'those who have ever coached' this current study only surveyed 'active coaches'. This may explain the disparity between the qualification statistics, as people with no qualifications may not remain active in coaching. However, these findings do merit further consideration and exploration into the professionalism and standards present and demanded within the youth sport workforce.

As expected, the proportion of coaches who work part-time or full time rises in conjunction with qualification levels. Of the part-time coaches, 83.4% held a level 2 qualification or higher, while 89.8%

[2] Coaching qualifications in the UK tend to be structured in hierarchical levels – with level 1 being the entry to coaching in your chosen sport, and 4 being the highest qualification. For the purpose of this paper we are using the same tiering of qualification levels (1 being entry and 4 being the highest), while acknowledging that some sports may use different terminology.

[3] National Governing Bodies (NGB) are the institutions responsible for administering and organising coach education for individual sports in the UK

of the full-time coaches held a level 2 qualification or higher. For most youth sport coaches, a level 2 qualification appears to be the entry point into the paid workforce. This is perhaps unsurprising when considering that UK coaching's guidance to be an independent coach is to have a recognised level 2 qualification, alongside relevant criminal records checks, safeguarding and first aid qualifications (UK Coaching, 2023b). Additionally, the proportion of coaches with 'other' qualifications (e.g. FE and HE qualifications) rose with employment status (3.5% of volunteers compared to 4.4% of full-time employees). However, the fact that 5.9% and 12.5% of full-time and part-time coaches respectively, report having either entry-level or no qualifications at all still show a need for further work and development of the coaching workforce. Of particular importance would be work which explores what youth coaches want and need in relation to training, to ensure that the workforce is enabled, motivated and empowered to be qualified and trained to an appropriate level. By looking at this in conjunction with demographic and contextual factors (e.g. are there different training needs and wants between men and women coaches, or level 1 and level 2 coaches), this work would add further understanding of the youth sport coaching workforce as a heterogeneous population, and support NGB's, clubs and organisations to better recruit, retain and develop their workforce.

Coaching Contexts in Youth Sport

Table 2: Coaching Contexts of Survey Respondents

	Coaching context (n=1405)									Hours Coached (Weekly) (n=1406)			
	Community/ Grassroots	Performance Youth	Local Authority -led	School Based	Non-for-profit Org	Private coaching company	Private 1to1	Representative youth	Other	1-3	4-9	10-14	More than 15
Volunteer	80.3	7.3	0.8	2.4	5.0	0.5	0.8	0.6	2.4	29.7	51.5	12.3	6.5
Volunteer with expenses	66.7	14.4	0.0	1.4	6.8	2.3	0.5	2.7	5.4	18.9	49.6	18.9	12.6
Part time	46.3	16.3	3.4	5.6	6.6	5.0	7.2	4.7	5.0	16.3	31.6	26.6	25.6
Full Time	35.8	18.6	2.0	9.8	7.4	8.8	4.4	5.4	7.8	2.9	5.4	8.8	82.8
All	63.9	12.1	1.4	4.1	6.0	3.0	2.7	2.6	4.3	21.05	39.97	16.07	22.90

Our data suggests that youth sport coaching remains a largely voluntary activity. Overall, 62.1% of coaches were volunteers. Of these volunteers, 15.6% received some form of compensation (e.g. travel expenses), while 46.5% did not. Of the remaining 36.9% of coaches who received payment, 22.5% did so on a part-time basis, and 14.4% of coaches worked on a full-time basis. This is in contrast with previous studies. For example, Sport England (2016)[4], reported that 74% of coaches were fully voluntary, while 14% worked in a part-time capacity and 12% of coaches were in full-time employment. Looking even further back to North (2009), of all coaches only 3% were employed full time, with 21% working part-time and 76% coaching as volunteers. Our findings potentially point towards a growing professionalisation of the youth sport landscape, with increasing numbers of coaches being employed on a part-time or full-time basis. However, when considering that the definition of professionalisation does not just include paid jobs, but also increased regulation, having national coaching registers and defined laws related to coaching (Moustakas et al., 2022), this claim is perhaps more questionable. Indeed, it would be interesting to explore in more depth the 'quality' of these jobs, for example, salary levels, what sort of contracted hours or seasonal work coaches are required to undertake, as well as the associated regulatory and licensing requirements.

Findings also indicate a shift in the coaching landscape, in terms of new and different coaching contexts in which youth sport coaches operate. For example, coaching contexts still include traditional avenues which carry similarities to North (2009), where the most frequent environments included: sports club; school or college/FE; private sport facility; leisure centre/local authority. However, additional coaching contexts, including youth performance spaces (12.1%), private coaching companies (3%) and 1-to-1 coaching (2.7%) are more prominent within this data set. This not only goes some way in the pursuit of building more comprehensive data sets as called for by Moustakas et al. (2022), but also further emphasises that there are a range of access points into coaching roles

[4] Although more recent research has been conducted by UK Coaching (2023), it cannot be directly compared to this data set because coaches were able to state that they were both volunteers and paid coaches.

across all contexts outlined, with growth in opportunities to access paid positions (North, 2009). As the coaching market changes and there are potentially more opportunities to generate income in self-employed coaching roles, there is further need to investigate this novel element of the professionalisation and regulation of the workforce (Moustakas et al., 2022). This may be particularly important as it applies to private companies or self-employed 1-to-1 coaches who may not be subject to external organisational standards and regulations. This shift towards a more dynamic market with an elevated number of self-employed coaches has been recognised in policy documents and coaching degree standards (Lara-Bercial et al., 2022). This highlights the need to include entrepreneurial skills in coach education curricula in response to this changing and dynamic market.

Also of note, are the average hours coaches work per week. Within this survey, coaches were asked to indicate how many hours per week they dedicated to coaching (these figures include all elements of coaching, for example, planning and reviewing sessions, associated administrative duties, meetings, travelling, organising equipment). Unsurprisingly, there is a relationship between employment status and number of hours worked – full time coaches were more likely to do more than 15 hours a week (82.8%), compared to part-time coaches (25.6%), volunteers with expenses (12.6%) or without expenses (6.5%). The most common answer among all coaches when asked about their coaching hours was between 4-9 hours (39.97%). When considering volunteer coaches (with and without expenses), who make up most of the youth sport workforce (62.1%), their average time dedicated to coaching each week merits further discussion. A substantial proportion of volunteers dedicated significant amounts of time to coaching. For volunteer coaches with and without expenses they were most likely to dedicate between 4 and 9 hours per week to coaching (49.6% and 51.5% respectively). However, almost 1 in 5 (18.8%) of volunteers without expenses dedicated 10 or more hours per week to coaching. Volunteers with expenses dedicated even more time to coaching, with almost 1 in 3 (31.5%) spending more than 10 hours a week coaching. Indeed, volunteers who received expenses were just as likely to spend 10-14 hours per week coaching (18.9%), as they were to spend 1-3 hours per week (18.9%). Given the amount of volunteer hours, it is clear that the economic contribution of youth sport

coaches in the UK is substantial. Taking into account minimum wage in the UK, we estimate that the value of these volunteer hours amounts to nearly £3 billion per year[5]. It is important to recognise the significant contribution of coaches to the UK economy, and the value that they add to the sport and physical activity sector.

Importantly, it appears as if coaches (especially volunteer coaches) are increasingly expected to do more hours and bear more responsibility. Compared to North's (2009) workforce report (which used similar parameters in measuring all hours dedicated to coaching both 'on' and 'off' the grass), only 12% of volunteer coaches did more than 5 hours per week, with the majority (53%) doing between 1 and 3 hours per week. To contextualise this, we return to the definitions of coaching provided earlier in this paper: Sport England's (2017, p.7) definition involved "improving a person's experience of sport" through offering "specialised support and guidance", and Cote and Gilbert's (2009) expertise perspective, suggesting that coaches should hold a combination of professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, as well an understanding of their coaching context to develop competence, confidence, connection and character-related outcomes. Given the data presented in this paper, in which the majority of the workforce are voluntary (62.1%), largely qualified to Level 2 level or below (67.4%) and are contributing significant amounts of time to coaching, questions must be raised about how feasible it is for these coaches to offer 'specialised support' or combine 'professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge' to support their participants – to fulfil the promise of youth sport.

The demands placed on coaches raise further questions about what support is offered to the workforce. Research shows that coaches experience a range of stressors, including those directly related to their role, about their participants and parents, the organisation(s) that they work for, and

[5] This figure is a conservative estimate. Based on North's (2009) total figures, if 62.1% of coaches are volunteers (using the figure from this data set) we estimate there are 600,000 volunteer coaches in the UK. Using an estimate of an average of 8 hours a week, at £12 per hour over 52 weeks = £2.9 Billion

potential conflicts and incidents of bullying or discrimination, which require a range of coping strategies that include problem solving, information seeking, negotiation, and perhaps most worryingly of all, escape (Potts et al., 2019). Moreover, volunteers are often making sacrifices, including time, money/finance and in some instances, missing opportunities for career earnings to coach (Edwards & Kulczycki, 2022). While many coaches seem willing to make such sacrifice due to motivations to contribute positively to the lives of young people, contribute to their welfare and instil positive values through coaching in youth sport (Busser & Carruthers, 2010) this still raises questions about whether this is right or fair. We argue that further research needs to be conducted to better understand what motivates youth sport coaches to dedicate such time and personal resource to their coaching (and indeed what barriers they may face). Moreover, we need to better understand how demographic and contextual information may influence these motivations and barriers. We argue that we need to further research the types of support and learning that coaches currently access, but also need to access to continue to develop. Again, this needs to be understood in the context of different demographic backgrounds and coaching environments.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study sought to provide an up-to-date detailed picture of the current landscape of youth sport coaching in the UK. When compared to previous workforce audits (North, 2009; Sport England, 2016; UK Coaching, 2023), some positive changes in the demographic make-up of the coaching workforce are observed. For example, an increase in the number of women involved, an increase in the opportunities for full-time and part-time coaching roles, and a change in the coaching contexts that might make coaching more accessible to more people. However, questions still remain about whether these demographic changes are sustainable and representative of a more inclusive environment, and indeed whether or not changes in remuneration status and coaching contexts point to an increase in the professionalisation of coaching (Moustakas et al., 2022).

This research also highlights some areas which merit further consideration. First, the data set raises interesting questions about the demographics of the youth coaching workforce, particularly as it relates to women in coaching. Of specific note is the fact that women outnumber men in the younger age groups (ages 16-34). It is recommended that further research is undertaken to better explore whether these figures highlight a promising shift in the gendered landscape that has traditionally surrounded coaching, or whether women still drop-out of coaching at higher rates than men in the older age-groups because of the gendered nature of coaching and society at large (Hinojosa-Alcalde et al., 2023; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). Second, it is recommended that further research is conducted into the training needs and wants of coaches, exploring these across different demographic and contextual boundaries. It is important that coaches are offered personalised learning experiences (Stodter & Cushion, 2017) to ensure that they are adequately supported, and in turn can ensure that positive outcomes in youth sport are achieved. However, as evidenced in this research, there is great diversity across the youth sport coaching workforce, and youth sport coaches seem to be doing more than previous research indicates. Thus, further insights into how differences between coaches (e.g.

demographic background, coaching context, employment status, qualification level) influence their needs regarding education and support is vital to ensure appropriate support is offered.

While this research has provided useful insights into the children's coaching workforce (those who coach anyone under the age of 18, in line with UN definitions of child), it is acknowledged that some limitations exist. First, while the sample size (1,420 coaches) offers us a wide base to analyse, it cannot claim to fully represent the estimated 3.1 million people who actively coach (Sport England, 2016). Moreover, due to the scope of the survey and method of dissemination (through partner organisations and via social media), it is possible that those who were likely to see and respond to the survey are those who are 'invested' in coaching, because they follow specific organisations on social media, define themselves as coaches, and are willing to take the time to discuss their coaching role. This possible bias towards invested coaches could perhaps skew the results. Capturing the details of coaches who are less invested, for example, who may not define themselves as a coach, remains a challenge of this type of research. A final limitation is the breadth and generalisation of the data collected. While this is also a strength of the work, it is recommended that NGBs and other organisations that recruit, develop and deploy coaches should consider this type of audit in their specific context to get a real feel for who their coaches are and what they need.

In closing, this paper has explored the children's coaching workforce and provided greater clarity as to who the coaches are, their educational background, what their roles entail, and the contexts they work within. These findings prompt a greater understanding of the children's coaching workforce and raise several implications for practice and future research. For practitioners and employers, it is important to understand who coaches are and their roles and responsibilities in their context. Only then we can begin to offer specific support to meet their needs. Moreover, organisations should explicitly consider recruitment, employment and retention policies to ensure a more diverse range of coaches are entering the workforce, and are encouraged to stay. Meanwhile, future research should explore the training needs and wants of coaches and coaches' motivations and barriers, in each case

considering differences in demographics, coaching context and coaching role. This body of research would ensure that the children's coaching workforce is better understood, supported and qualified to ensure youth sport continues to positively contribute to the physical, social and mental well-being of children in the UK.

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