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**The International Sport Coaching Bachelor Degree Standards of the International Council  
for Coaching Excellence**

Lara-Bercial, S., Jimenez, A., Abraham, A., Bales, J., Colmaire, P., Curado, J., Dieffenbach, K., Ito, M., Mokglate, O., Nordmann, L. & Rynne, S.

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## **Abstract**

Sport coaching is at a pivotal moment in its short history. The publication of the International Sport Coaching Framework by the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) in 2013 has drawn attention to coaching world-wide and fostered a step change in the way coaching systems are understood and built. Within this evolving context, higher education institutions are increasingly playing a greater role in the education and development of coaches in many countries. One way in which they are doing so is through the delivery of partial or full sport coaching degrees. ICCE recognises this emerging landscape. In this article we present an introduction to the newly developed International Sport Coaching Bachelor Degree Standards. The Standards are the culmination of a 12-month process of cooperation and consultation between an expert group and the coaching community at large. They aim to respond to the needs of higher education institutions and serve as an internationally accepted reference point to aid the development of bachelor coaching degrees that prepare coaches to effectively support athletes and participants.

## **The International Sport Coaching Bachelor Degree Standards of the International Council for Coaching Excellence**

Sport coaching is at a pivotal moment in its short history. The publication of the International Sport Coaching Framework (ICCE, ASOIF & LBU, 2013) has drawn attention to coaching world-wide and fostered a step change in the way coaching systems are understood and built. The Framework defined coaching as ‘a process of guided improvement and development in a single sport and at identifiable stages of development’ (p. 14) and positioned coaches as key actors in the ever growing and more demanding sporting landscape. The expectations placed upon coaches are greater than ever as sport participation and competition has expanded to new populations, sport disciplines and countries. So are the opportunities. Sport coaching plays a significant role not only in the development of elite athletes, but notably in the promotion of physical activity for all. This latter role of sports coaches has the potential to greatly contribute to national and international health prevention and promotion agendas and strategies and is being paid increasing attention world-wide. In addition, sport coaches also deliver against inclusion agendas in areas such as disability, gender equality, immigration and community cohesion. The figure of the coach is central in 21<sup>st</sup> century society.

As the role of the coach evolves and coaching progresses along the road to professionalisation, a growing number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) around the world have started to offer and deliver Sport Coaching Bachelor Degrees (hereon Coaching Degrees). As the world-wide co-operative body leading and supporting the development of coaching, ICCE recognises the new landscape in which coaching and coaches operate and welcomes these very positive developments. ICCE therefore wishes to support the development of fit for purpose Coaching Degrees through the provision of the International Sport Coaching Degree Standards

(hereon the Standards). While at all times respecting the national idiosyncrasies of different countries, the leadership role of national education and coaching agencies, the vital role played by national and international federations, and, of course, the institutional autonomy of HEIs around the world, the Standards aim *to provide an internationally accepted reference point for those HEIs wishing to contribute to the development of the coaching workforce world-wide.*

### **The Standards Development Process**

In developing the Standards, ICCE put in place a three-phase process (Figure 1) to ensure adequate levels of stakeholder representation and transparency. During the first phase, an expert working group, led by Professor Alfonso Jiménez of Coventry University (UK), which contained a mix of coaching stakeholders<sup>1</sup>, was formed. Following the formation of the group, an initial consultation to ascertain the need for the ICDS was held during ICCE's Global Coach Conference in Vierumaki in August 2015. Subsequently, and over a period of four months that included six meetings and nine versions of the document, the expert working group developed the Consultation Draft of the Standards. In the second phase, a wider group of experts containing over a hundred representatives of all stakeholder types, were asked to review the Consultation Draft and provided relevant feedback to the expert working group. Based on this feedback, the group developed the final version of the Standards. In phase three, the final consultation draft was distributed again amongst the wider group of experts to ensure their feedback had been understood correctly and where possible and appropriate added to the current document.

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<sup>1</sup> Independent Group Chair: Alfonso Jiménez – Professor of Exercise Science and Health, Centre for Applied Biological and Exercise Sciences, Coventry University (ESP & GBR) Technical Officer: Sergio Lara-Bercial – Manager for Strategy & Development, ICCE; Senior Research Fellow, Leeds Beckett University (ESP & GBR). Members at large: Dr Andy Abraham: Principal Lecturer, Leeds Beckett University (GBR); Dan Jaspers: former Coach Education Manager, ISAF (GBR); John Bales: President, ICCE (CAN); Dr José Curado: President, Treinadores Portugal (PRT); Dr Kristen Dieffenbach: Associate Professor, West Virginia University (USA); Dr Lutz Nordmann: Director, Trainerakademie, Köln (GER); Dr Masamitsu Ito: Associate Professor, Nippon Sport University (JPN); Olivia Mokgatle: South African Sport Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC) representative, (Director for National Standards & Reviews, Council on Higher Education) (ZAF); Pascal Colmaire: Coach Education Manager, World Archery (CHE); Dr Steven Rynne: Senior Lecturer, University of Queensland (AUS)

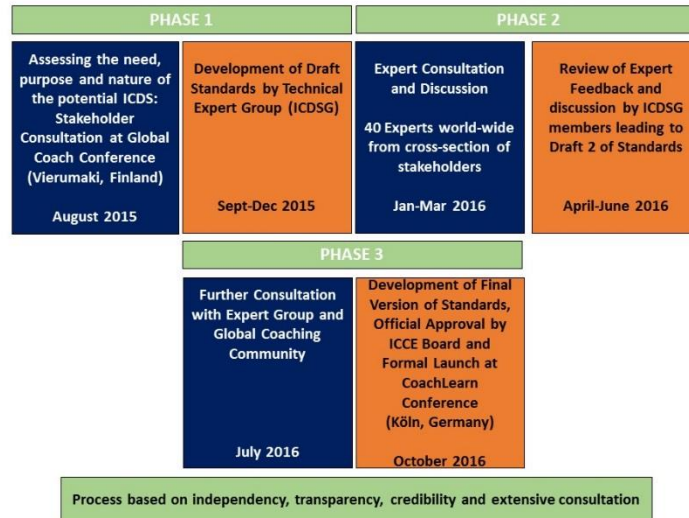


Figure 1. International Coaching Degree Standards Development Process

### The Nature of the Standards

The Standards are envisaged as complementary to the guidance provided by the relevant and pertinent national and regional organisations with jurisdiction over higher education institutions in each country. The Standards are intended to respect and work alongside the leadership provided by international and national sport federations and national coaching agencies. They are not a substitute for any of the above, and therefore, need to be read in the context of existing relevant policies. The Standards are thus a flexible, non-compulsory set of guidelines for the development of high quality, suitable curricula and delivery programmes to develop the next generation of coaches. In bringing the Standards to life, specific national and local contexts and domains of practice need to be appreciated and respected. There will be different best-fit models based on specific situations and requirements, and all of them may deliver the required learning outcomes and coaching competencies in different ways. It is our aspiration to have the Standards become the common thread running through the various models.

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## The International Coaching Degree Standards

2 The table below offers an overview of the Standards

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <p><b>Bachelor's Degree General Qualification Criteria:</b> Graduates are in possession of advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories, principles, routines and applications. Graduates have the capacity to engage in diagnosing, creating expectancies, recognising and reacting to field of application, predicting &amp; planning, work in complex non typical settings, manage uncertainty, self-regulation through reflection and self and awareness.</p>  |  |   |
| <p><b>Professional Title</b><br/>Sport Coach (at Bachelor Level) - SCBL</p>  | <p><b>Professional Purpose</b><br/>To provide high quality sport experiences which meet the needs of the participants/athletes and institutions</p>  | <p><b>Professional Role</b><br/>A SCBL plans, leads, delivers and reviews sport coaching sessions and seasons. This includes, where necessary, planning for and leading participants and athletes into organised competitions. The SCBL may work independently or as part of a team. Depending on professional experience, the SCBL may be able to play a leading role in the overall programme. Likewise, where appropriate, SCBL may also play a role in the management and development of less experienced coaches, coaching assistants and pre-coaches.</p>   |
| <p><b>Primary Functions</b> - A SCBL will typically be able to fulfil six primary functions:<br/>           1 - Set a relevant vision, goals and strategy/plan for the programme/participant/athletes<br/>           2 - Create an effective environment for the fulfilment of programme/participant/athlete goals<br/>           3 - Build positive relationships with all stakeholders (i.e. participant/athletes, club officials, parents, etc.)<br/>           4 - Conduct appropriate practices and where appropriate select and prepare for appropriate competitions<br/>           5 – Make informed decisions related to programme/participant/athlete training and performance in a dynamic environment<br/>           6 - Reflect on one's own performance and embrace a lifelong learning attitude to the profession to strive for continuous improvement</p> |  |   |
| <p><b>Bachelor's Degree in Sport Coaching Profile</b></p>  |  |   |
| <p><b>Qualification Profile</b><br/>The SCBL holds an undergraduate degree comprising a relevant number of units of learning and credit points. These units of learning are made up of learning outcomes which are expected to be able to prepare SCBL to fulfil the primary functions and achieve the skills and competences and underpinning knowledge.</p> <p><b>Faculty Profile</b><br/>It is envisaged that the faculty must be composed of professors and lecturers with a solid footing in both academia and practical coaching. Where this is not possible, efforts should be made to ensure that there is a suitable balance of staff with either an academic or practice orientated profile.</p>   | <p><b>Degree Workload Profile</b><br/>A bachelor's degree is an undergraduate academic degree awarded by colleges and universities upon completion of a course of study lasting usually three to four years (depending on institution and academic discipline). In general, it will involve the completion of a concrete number of academic credits (ranging from about 360 credits for 3-4 year degrees in UK universities; between 180 to 240 credits for other European countries, called ECTS; 120 to 130 credits for US institutions; etc.). As a result, a typical annual academic load for a FT student ranges from 120 UK credits, to 60 ECTS or 30 US credits. An academic credit represents formal learning done in class plus independent study or research and preparation done for study courses.</p> | <p><b>Technology Requirement</b><br/>Technological advances, subject to resourcing, must contribute to enhancing the learning and professional capacity of SCBL.</p> <p><b>Practicum Profile (Coaching Experience)</b><br/>A SCBL is expected to learn in a variety of forms and environments. Research shows the importance of on-the-job learning for the development of coaching expertise. To this purpose, it is expected that a comprehensive practicum period will be completed prior to graduation. The way this practicum is conducted may vary between institutions and countries, but the practicum must prove that it adequately prepares the SCBL for the role and domain the coach is being trained to do. The practical internship included in the undergraduate programme, as long as it was accomplished in a sports coaching setting or equivalent, is eligible as "minimum professional/coaching experience". Appropriate supervision, mentoring and a verified statement from the employer or coaching supervisor will be compulsory.</p> |

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## **Expected Outcomes**

It is expected that the development of the Standards will support:

- The creation of an optimal match between Coaching Degrees and the needs of coaches, athletes and the labour market.
- The comparison and translation process between existing Coaching Degrees from different countries.
- The mapping and complementarity of Coaching Degrees to other existing coach education and development routes.
- Greater cooperation between HEIs and other coach education providers such as national and international federations.
- Recognition of prior learning between different coaching qualifications at degree level.
- A greater exchange and cooperation between academia and practitioners for the benefit of athletes and participants.
- The quality assurance process of existing Coaching Degrees.
- In countries where there is no clear regulatory framework for coaching practice, the Standards may positively influence policy development.
- The raising of the profile and recognition of Coaching Degrees and Coaching majors.
- The development of student and faculty professional profiles.
- The overall process of professionalisation of sport coaching.



## **ICCE Evaluation and Endorsement of Sport Coaching Degrees**

The Standards are non-compulsory and flexible guidelines HEIs can use independently for the purpose of self-assessing their existing coaching degrees or to plan the development of new ones. However, for HEIs wishing to formally undertake an analysis of the current provision, ICCE will develop a formal evaluation and endorsement process. ICCE will work with such institutions to review their courses, award an endorsement status at the relevant level, and provide recommendations for further development of the degree. This evaluation and endorsement process is not a substitute for existing endorsing protocols led by the national higher education council or the national lead coaching agency. In fact, this process may be redundant for some HEIs. In other countries where there is no clear regulatory framework for coaching practice, the Standards may influence policy development. Ultimately, it is for each HEI to decide on the potential value of engaging in the ICCE's voluntary evaluation and endorsement process. If your institution would like to explore this option, please contact the ICCE at [ICDS@icce.ws](mailto:ICDS@icce.ws)

### **Closing Remarks**

Sport coaching has evolved greatly in the last few decades. The roles and responsibilities of coaches in different domains are ever expanding. We owe it to coaches and their athletes and participants to provide them with the best possible education to fulfil their roles adequately. HEIs have a substantial part to play in this process. The International Sport Coaching Degree Standards offer an opportunity for institutions already delivering coaching degrees to review and where necessary adapt their programmes. For those considering the possibility of delivering coaching degrees in the future, it represents a starting point. In any case, HEIs are encouraged to consider the context and culture within which they operate, and to take them into account when

reading and using this document. Institutions are also encouraged to liaise and cooperate with national education and coaching agencies as well as national and international federations. This will ensure their degrees are aligned with the requirements of such organisations and complement and strengthen the existing national and international efforts to improve the education of coaches.

The coaching profession and the ways in which coaches are educated and developed will continue to evolve. The Standards are a live, working document which will need to be organically and formally reviewed and updated. Monitoring their adoption and implementation will be central to this process. ICCE will carry out a formal review of the Standards every four years starting in 2020 after the celebration of the XXXI Olympiad in Tokyo. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries at [ICDS@icce.ws](mailto:ICDS@icce.ws)

*To download the full version of the Standards, please visit [www.icce.ws](http://www.icce.ws)*