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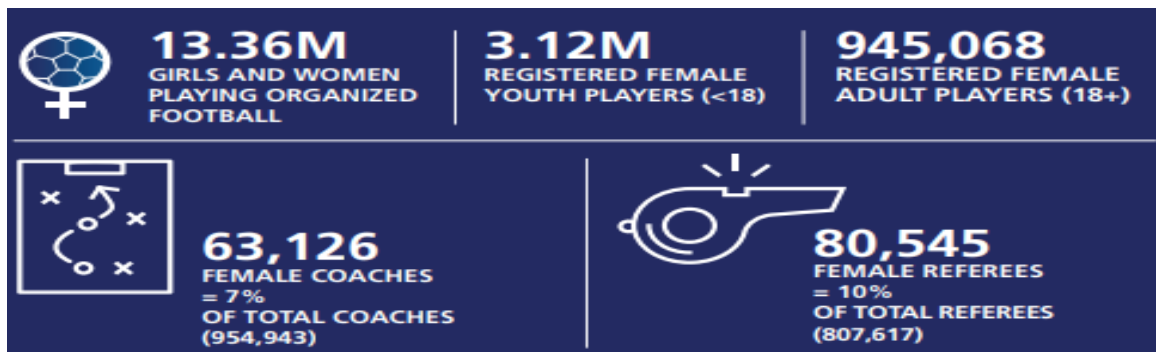
## AN EVALUATION OF A MENTORING PROGRAMME TO SUPPORT HIGH-PERFORMANCE

### WOMEN COACHES

#### Challenges for Women Coaches

Sport has historically been a context of constraint for women as both athletes and coaches, restricting agency and choices (Theberge & Birrell, 1994). However, sport can also be a site for transformation, as shown with increased participation and opportunities for women across multiple sports (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). Women's lack of presence and political voice at high-performance levels is concerning for the potential impact on women at all stages of leadership and participation inside sport and the wider context. Sport plays a significant role in Western society in reinforcing gender distinctions, marginalising femininity, and promoting masculinity, and thus perpetuating unequal gendered relations (Saavedra, 2009).

Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in the interest of football (soccer) worldwide for women (see figure 1). As a result, UEFA (Union of European Football Associations; 2017) reported that football is the number one participation team sport for women in various countries including England, Norway, and Germany. However, whilst there is a growth in the number of women playing football, the same growth has not been mirrored with women coaches. Whilst FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association) reported in 2019 that England had the highest number of women coaches (3520) in Europe, there are still only nine women coaches for every 91 male coaches in England. The gap is even more noteworthy when considering qualified coaches as demonstrated by there being approximately



10,033 UEFA B qualified male coaches in England, compared to only 301 UEFA B qualified

women coaches. This translates to a lack of women coaches in high-performance roles with only 13 being head coaches/managers currently at Barclays FA (The English Football Association) WSL (Women's Super League) and FA Women's Championship clubs in the UK (The FA, 2020).

### **Figure 1**

*Number of women involved in football worldwide from the Women's Football Member Association's Survey report 2019 (FIFA, 2019).*

### **Women's Experiences of Social and Educational Coaching Environments**

Beyond the statistics, research that has been conducted with women coaches has found that they frequently feel under-valued, isolated, and discriminated (Norman, 2008; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2016; Schlesinger & Weigelt-Schlesinger, 2012). The feelings of exclusion can stem from the perceived informal 'closed' social networks within coaching. This is important as coaches use their social support to gain knowledge, sustain self-esteem, increase sense of mattering, and assist with career development (Norris et al., 2020). Therefore, closed networks create an environment that can be restrictive for many women who wish to progress to a high-performance setting through lack of opportunities and an informal appointment system that favours men (Norman, 2008). Senior women coaches based in the UK have discussed the difficulty of developing and maintaining coaching relationships because of the perceived hostility of coaching environments and networks dominated by men (Norman, 2014). This leads to women feeling removed from the coaching community and as though they have to 'prove themselves' as coaches to a greater extent than their male counterparts, reducing their intentions to develop or continue in the profession (Norman, 2010).

Coach education programmes can play an integral part of the journey for a coach to feel belonging, develop as a coach, and remain in the coaching profession (Erickson et al., 2007).

Education programmes should aim to provide positive social environments for learning that creates equal opportunities for women coaches to enhance their skills, progress in coaching roles, and feel part of the coaching community. However, this is often not the case for women as coach education provisions tend to be dominated by men with course tutors often demonstrating a predisposition towards associated male attributes, orientations, and characteristics (Lewis et al., 2018). Therefore, a challenge that exists for sports organizations – if they wish to retain and develop their women coaches – is to ensure women feel a sense of belonging and inclusion within the profession and organization.

In response to the deficit of women coaches in football, the FA have created various initiatives to upskill women coaches to enable women to progress within the coaching community. This chapter will provide an evaluation of one of those initiatives – the ‘Elite Coach Menteeship Programme’ – in order to share good practice and lessons learned in relation to establishing and delivering programmes designed to support the career development of high-performance women coaches. To begin with, the menteeship programme is outlined, including its purpose and context. Next, the research evaluation process is highlighted, encompassing the objectives and methods used to collect data, followed by coaches’ experiences of the programme. The chapter closes with some recommendations and implications for coaches, other sports organizations, and national governing bodies (NGBs) to effectively develop diversity and inclusion initiatives, and improve gender equity.

### **FA Elite Coach Menteeship Programme**

The challenge remains in sporting environments to develop diverse and inclusive initiatives that support under-represented populations, including women. To try and provide women coaches with additional skills and experiences in high-performance settings, the FA created the Elite Coach Menteeship Programme. This section will provide an overview of the programme.

## **Purpose and Context**

As part of the FA's commitment to enhancing the diversity of the coaching workforce in England, the primary intention of the Elite Coach Menteeship programme was to address the under-representation of women, and Black, Asian, and Minoritised Ethnic (BAME) coaches at the elite level in football. Women and BAME coaches continue to be significantly under-represented at the top levels of men and women's football. The chairman of FA's England Commission Report from 2014 highlighted a need for long-term investment to redress this imbalance (The FA, 2014). The report stated that the FA aimed to create further opportunities to ensure that more women and BAME coaches obtain relevant qualifications and gain essential experiences to challenge for high-performance coaching and technical roles in football. It is important to address this imbalance to provide role models for future generations. To help create further opportunities for women coaches, the FA allocated funds towards initiatives with the primary intention of addressing the under-representation of BAME male and women coaches at the elite level. Introduced in 2016, the menteeship programme offered employment at the FA for one year, to a select group of talented women and BAME football coaches. The role provided coaches with opportunities to work within different FA departments and experience placements with national and regional coaches in high-performance, talent development, and grassroots environments.

## **Elite Menteeship Programme Overview**

The Elite Coach Menteeship Programme was developed for women and BAME coaches to experience formal and informal learning opportunities and a range of placements to gain exposure to elite experiences within the game of football. The coaches became full-time employees of the FA for a twelve-month period and completed internal placements (e.g., national and international camps), additional learning opportunities (e.g., gaining additional qualifications), and employability workshops (e.g., presenting, interview skills, and developing curriculum vitae). In the first cohort of coaches and subsequently since, four coaches a year

completed five internal work-based placements in eight-week blocks: Regional Physical Education and Coaching in Education Co-Ordinator (PE), County Coach Developer (CCD), Youth Coach Developer (YCD), Regional Coach Developer (RCD), and National Coach Developer (NCD). Whilst on these placements, coaches worked alongside a placement lead to complete a variety of relevant activities.

Each placement offered different opportunities for coaches to develop their knowledge, skills and experience. The PE placement encompassed coaches helping to develop FA resources and courses as well as supporting teachers, those within initial teacher education, and coaches in delivering football activities within curriculum and extra-curriculum time. Secondly, the coaches' role during the CCD placement was to support FA tutors on local and national courses, deliver in-service programmes for local FA accredited clubs, and help develop coaching resources. YCD involved coaches supporting in-club continuous personal development and mentoring, and providing regional and on-site coach support to professional club coaches. The RCD placement involved supporting the delivery of FA Level 1, 2, and FA Youth Module qualifications regionally. Finally, the NCD placement included observing and contributing to UEFA B, A License, and Pro License courses. Coaches were also encouraged to continue any existing coaching commitments alongside the programme where possible, to allow coaches to apply their learning in a practical setting.

### **Research Programme**

The programme of research was one of three integrated projects led by Leeds Beckett University under a broad title of the "Evaluation of the changing experiences of women football coaches" commissioned by the FA for three years. The following will highlight the aims and objectives of the research and the methods used to collect data.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The purpose of the research was to track the women coaches' experiences who had been accepted on the Elite Coach Menteeship Programme (i.e. cohorts 1, 2, and 3) over the

first three years of the programme and report on the coaches' and key stakeholders' experiences. The aims of the project were:

- ❖ To understand, follow, and evaluate the changing experiences of three cohorts of women football coaches participating in the FA Mentoring Programme.
- ❖ To analyse the perspectives of the key stakeholders involved in the provision of the FA mentoring programme.
- ❖ To evaluate the provision of the menteeship programme in collaboration with key stakeholders and women coaches.

## **Methodology**

The research commenced in autumn 2016 and ran for three years: year 1 (2016/2017, cohort 1), year 2 (2017/2018, cohort 2 and stakeholders) and year 3 (2018/2019, cohort 3 and stakeholders). To evaluate the programme and collect the experiences of the coaches, interviews were conducted with coaches over a three-year period and key stakeholders during the second and third years. Women coaches from all three cohorts (age range = 26-31; see demographic information, table 1) were interviewed at three points during each menteeship scheme: at the start, mid-point, and end of the programme. The purpose of the interviews were to understand the coaches' current position in football, their experiences of the programme, their expectations of the programme, and the perceived impact of the programme on their coaching. Follow-up interviews were also conducted a year after the completion of the menteeship scheme with coaches from cohorts one and two to track their subsequent experiences and career progression.

### **Table 1**

#### *Coach Characteristics*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Disability</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Cohort</b>
Annabel	British Asian	Non-disabled	UEFA B	One
Alice	Black British	Non-disabled	UEFA B	One
Kaylee	White British	Non-disabled	UEFA B	Two
Sasha	White British	Non-disabled	UEFA B	Two
Steph	White British	Non-disabled	UEFA B	Three

*Note.* Coaching qualification accurate at time of first interview.

### **Research Findings**

This section provides an overview of the key findings from the research as evidence for the future programme recommendations that concludes this chapter. Together, the four findings present the coaches' experiences of their work-based placements and how these experiences were shaped by: coaches' relationships with key stakeholders; coaches' expectations of the programme; and how coaches' perceived the programme was viewed by significant stakeholders.

#### **Coaches' Experiences of Work-Based Placements**

Overall, the women coaches reported positive feedback across all of the placements and believed they gained valuable knowledge, skills, and experiences from engaging in the observation, design, and delivery of football coach-tutor and mentor-related work. There was a unanimous agreement among the coaches that the NCD placement and national camps significantly exceeded expectations. It was cited that this was because it offered unique and powerful learning experiences and the trust that was demonstrated by the placement lead enabled the coaches to take an active role during the placement:

*Alice: Probably national coach developers [was the best] because we got to live the ... [experience], it was just let them get on with it. That's probably the best one.*



*Steph: Yeah, it [national camps] was an amazing experience. It was tiring but it was so good! Like, I'll remember it forever, if you know what I mean, once in a lifetime [experience].*

Coaches acknowledged the benefits of taking part in a variety of placements to help widen their understanding of working in different environments. However, some coaches questioned if having such a wide range of placements gave them the best career development and expressed a preference to have a more bespoke approach. Coaches discussed that allowing more choice and inclusivity in the placement selection may be more beneficial for their development:

*Alice: So for me, they [FA] couldn't understand at the beginning that I didn't want to do national coach [NCD], I wanted to do further education [PE]. The programme should have allowed me to delve a little bit deeper into it [PE] and really got to grips with it. So it didn't ... it gave me holistic development but it didn't give me exactly what I wanted.*

*Katie: So, for example, on my CV, as an elite coach mentee, I'll highlight the coaching stuff, I won't highlight the school stuff because they don't see too much value in it if I'm going for a head coach position with a ladies team.*

The opportunity to engage in a variety of placements for a significant length of time was made possible by the one year employment offered by the programme. However, a challenge of the full-time nature of the programme, was that the women coaches across all cohorts mentioned the difficulty balancing the FA menteeship role and existing coaching commitments at their clubs. In particular, Sasha highlighted that finding the time to be able to commit to both roles was challenging:

*So from the club's perspective they're like, "well, we've got you as a coach but you can only do one night a week?!" So that affects my coaching context, and, if I'm honest, I'm at a bit of a crossroads now where I'm like, right, I need to either give up some of the*

*stuff I'm doing on placement so I can fit this in, or I need to find another club that will allow me to be flexible. So, it's just difficult to get that, you know, which one do you focus on? . . . For me there's no point in me doing this programme if I'm not coaching two, three times a week...*

Overall, all of the placements seemed to be beneficial to the coaches and were facilitated by the unique full-time employment the menteeship programme offered. Yet, there were discussions about whether the programme could be more bespoke to align with the women coaches' chosen career path within football.

### **Coach-Stakeholder Relationships**

Most of the coaches' experiences with the internal stakeholders (e.g., mentors, placement leads, and programme manager) were positive. Coaches highlighted that if the relationship with the stakeholders were positive, the benefits gained from the placement increased. This was principally because the coaches were made to feel valued, an included member of the department team, and were trusted with more responsibility. Kaylee described how one placement lead provided her with more freedom and respect:

*They [placement lead] gave me a lot of freedom to do what I wanted, so I was able ... because I already had an existing relationship with them, I was able to do more in terms of the delivery, and I guess they respect and they trust me.*

However, Alice highlighted that this was not always the case:

*It isn't necessary for me to be there [placement], so like meetings and stuff, or courses that I've been delivered, some aspects where it's just, okay, I want to get involved but you're not really let be involved. Yes, there's two [placements] ... from January to June, I worked with really good people who were really nice, helpful, but there were little bits of it, just looking back, [placement lead] didn't fully trust me...*

A lack of communication about the broader purpose of the programme was perceived to influence the relationship between some of the coaches and placement leads. Annabel discussed how she felt the relationship with some of the placement leads was strained because of the perception that the coaches would eventually take over their job:

*And that's always an issue, because everyone's scared, everyone's very insecure about their own skill set, that they'll be like "Oh am I going to lose my job if she's better than me and she's more experienced than me?" So we just piped down in the corner, "tell her to make the tea and coffee" ... but I don't do that.*

Highlighting the importance of relationships with peers to woman coaches' experiences, the individual coaches' busy schedules meant that sometimes, the time coaches were able to spend together was limited because of the programme schedule. A consistent theme from cohort three was for more communication and connection with the other coaches in their cohort. For example, Steph highlighted that this would potentially provide opportunities to share experiences of the placements and learn from each other:

*So, like, we're [coaches] meant to have, we were meant to have like meetings quite frequent throughout the year but we haven't really ever had them and, if we have, they're like, they're not meetings to talk about your stuff, they're more meetings like ... So, for example, we'd have a date booked in and it's not really a meeting, it's more like we're doing the presentation workshop that day, so you don't really have a chance to speak about anything because as soon as you arrive, obviously you're doing the workshop. And I think it's a bit of a shame because we haven't had one really, all year, where it's just been about let's all meet up, have a good time together, and actually just chat about how everything's going.*

This findings suggest that relationships with stakeholders (notably peers and those in mentoring roles) significantly influenced the coaches' satisfaction with and perceived benefits from the programme. In contrast, a lack of trust and/or communication in these key relationships had a

detrimental effect on coaches' experiences of the programme and at times, led to feelings of isolation.

### **Coaches' Expectations of the Menteeship Programme**

The main expectation highlighted pre-programme by all three cohorts of coaches was the opportunity to work in high-performance settings within football, both during and post-programme. This was preferably full-time and at a higher level than they were coaching at before they entered the programme:

*Kaylee: I think the main part of it [the programme] is employability, because it said, I remember on the booklet that we got, that the aim of it is to become more employable within football at a higher level. So I'm hoping that I'm going to be employable now at [women's] championship level. If I get that then I guess that's a success...*

In part, these expectations arose from the marketing and pre-course materials shared with coaches during the recruitment stage of the programme. For example, coaches perceived the reference to 'elite' in the title of the programme differently. Some interpreted this wording negatively because they felt it doesn't promote the right message, raised coaches' expectations of the programme, and caused uncertainty about the overall purpose of the programme:

*Sasha: In terms of [expectations] I'm not [sure] ... it's really because it's called an elite coach menteeship. So does that mean we're expected to become elite coaches by the end? I don't know. I'm not sure.*

Both coaches and stakeholders questioned whether the coaches were meant to become elite by the end of the programme. There was a feeling that using this word was misleading in creating expectations that this programme would immediately lead to a role at elite level. At times, this caused frustrations for coaches, some of whom had left paid roles to complete the menteeship, and expressed concerns that there was no 'exit strategy' post-programme. One such coach was Steph, who was unsure of her next steps after the menteeship programme:

*If they could add on something at the end a bit more, about like the exit strategies, I think it would be even more empowering for people. So, like they're going to see me now, go from six years' full-time to ... I don't know what I'm going to do really. And that's probably not motivational to people, seeing someone like that in those roles. Because people are leaving full-time roles for this, aren't they?*

The different interpretations regarding the programme was not confined to the title but included the objectives. The prospectus set out that: *"The long-term aim is to create the opportunity for more BAME male and women coaches to challenge for employment in elite men's and women's football."* However, the coaches felt there was a lack of clarity on whether the programme was in place to develop women coaches holistically with a view of progressing into elite roles in the long-term, or to help them gain employment in a high-performance setting as the next step in their career. Sasha, who was more focused on self-development, thought the programme had exceeded expectations because of the different experiences encountered during the placements:

*[The menteeship programme has] exceeded my expectations even more, if that makes sense? So, and it's just been kind of like a stair, like a staircase kind of, you know, can I do the next one? Okay, can I do the next one and just gradually get to that point? And I think that's basically what the programme largely is, you come very low and then gradually you climb the stairs at the end of the programme.*

In contrast, Alice felt that her expectations of gaining employment in a high-performance setting post-programme had not been fulfilled:

*If you call me in one year or in 18 months' time when I've got the job I want then the programme's been useful, but if we have the conversation and I'm out of football or nowhere near where I want to be then it isn't. . . So, it's ... I know other guys [coaches]*

*are probably thinking the same thing, actually they are thinking the same thing, they're thinking what's the point of the programme if you're not being shortlisted. The whole point was to shortlist us. If the issue is females and BAMEs representation, we're still not being represented because we can't get jobs, and if we can't the people that are similar to us in terms of ethnicity, they definitely won't. So it hasn't changed anything.*

During her follow up interview, Kaylee discussed applying for employment post-programme and her frustrations of not being offered interviews, despite her skills and experiences:

*Ultimately the best person is going to get the job, and I don't think sometimes, when I've applied for jobs in the men's game or the boy's game, I don't believe that I'm not good enough to get an interview, the amount of jobs I apply for, because what skills have other people got above me for what was required ... maybe a foundation for the boy's team? . . . Do they have a better understanding of player development, what experience? Boy's maybe, but do they manage players better, are they a better coach? How do you know until you've had an interview with someone? . . . It's got to be [gender], that's got to be the only reason, what else is there that stands in the way? If I'm ticking their requirements on a piece of paper, they might as well have a box that says "Are you female or male?"*

In summary, these findings suggest that initiatives designed to address the under-representation of women coaches would benefit from clarity regarding both the short- and long-term programme aims. Without this, women coaches in this study experienced frustration and questioned the effectiveness of the programme. Notably, Kaylee's experience of applying for coaching roles following the menteeship also highlights the limitations of the programme in addressing wider socio-cultural inequalities that individuals may face, and supports Banwell, Kerr and Stirling's (2020) recommendation to build organizational change objectives into future mentoring initiatives.

### **Coaches' Perceived Stakeholder Programme Perceptions**

The coaches emphasized the importance of the perception of the programme from stakeholders both internally (e.g., mentors, placement leads, programme manager, organization) and externally (e.g., football clubs, other coaches and organizations). For example, coaches perceived that the FA demonstrated that the programme was highly valued through a rigorous application process, significant financial investment into programme resources, and the provision of opportunities to access coaching environments at the elite level (national and international training camps):

*Kaylee: I think they [FA] did a good job in terms of bursaries and things. You also don't want people just passing the qualifications. You want to make sure they're actually good enough to be promoting females and then giving them something, and then they're actually doing that. So, I guess I quite like the fact that obviously our role, I guess it's a prestigious role, but the fact that we had to apply for it.*

The time and resources put in by the FA was important to increase the positivity and effectiveness of the programmes visibility:

*Alice: At this present moment in time, I believe it [menteeship programme] is important, yes. It has a massive opportunity to impact the game in a positive way. How it's done . . . because the stigma attached with it can enhance or be detrimental to your career, because you're in the spotlight.*

However, some coaches were apprehensive as to whether the programme was seen by others only as a diversity tick-box exercise, and as a consequence felt a sense of responsibility to perform both in their role and upon graduating from the programme, due to the perceived additional attention on their careers. The concern that the programme was performed for perfunctory purposes to serve a bureaucratic expediency were accentuated by the perceived lack of diversity within the organization:

*Annabel: There are women coaches, but there's no one that looks like me" I was like, "Where do I belong? Do I belong anywhere? ... Yes, [I think I've just been a tick-box] and*

*that's always been my concern. . . . If you think, out of 800 people, I was the only one that looked like me. That is scary... that is a scary statistic.*

This suggests that an unintended consequence of the high-profile nature of the programme was to reinforce the commonly reported experience that women coaches feel an additional pressure to prove themselves to be competent in their role (Norman, 2010). Overall, the coaches appreciated the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and experience through the programme, and were keen for the extent of their learning to be highlighted both internally and externally to the organization, in order to reduce any negative perception of the programme as a 'hand out' or tick box exercise.

### **Programme Evaluation**

We would like to take this moment to thank the FA for allowing us to conduct this research. It is brave for an organization to take on research that requires them to look at themselves critically and 'lift the lid' on the culture and processes within the organization to expose any gaps between the aspirations for programme participants and the reality of how participants experienced the programme. It is important to note that the matter of diversity and inclusion is not confined to sports and the following recommendations can be related to organizations in the wider context.

### **Recommendations**

The coaches and stakeholders involved in the Elite Coach Menteeship Programme recognised the positive steps of creating an initiative such as this and the FA's willingness to tackle the issue of under-representation of women and BAME coaches in the UK. Arising from this are recommendations for organizations to effectively develop diversity and inclusion initiatives. These recommendations are useful for the FA, other sports organizations, and NGBs to consider when constructing effective initiatives to support women coaches and create a genuine level playing field. Further, the recommendations are useful for coaches of the menteeship programme as changes have been implemented as a direct result of the research



findings (see operational lessons learnt), providing future coaches with a more efficacious experience.

### ***Clarity of Programme Objectives***

When developing initiatives to enhance diversity and inclusion, a critical aspect to consider is the clarity of the strategic objectives (Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007). A lack of clarity from the organization and internal stakeholders can be a significant concern for the coaches, leading to unrealistic expectations and questioning of the overall intention of the programme. The lack of clarity of 'elite menteeship' in practice led to expectations of employment in an elite setting and questions as to whether the programme was positive or a 'tick-box' exercise that provided a detrimental effect on the perceptions of women coaches. While there was an appreciation that the FA is taking 'positive action' in implementing a programme to develop women coaches, and is one of the few organizations in the sector to do so, this incredulity came in part from the fact that the programme capacity was only four coaches for each cohort and that none of the coaches have since been employed by the FA, despite the FA investing significant sums of money in their development. There is concern that this poses a message to the outside world that these coaches are 'not good enough.'

Clearly defining 'success' and creating a greater sign-on and ownership of the programme across the organization is more likely to lead to positive outcomes (Doyle & George, 2008). Organizations should consistently revisit and evaluate the purpose and intent of diversity and inclusion programmes to ensure that the objectives are clear and the approach and content is reflective of those aims (Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007). For example, some of the coaches highlighted that they were unsure what the overall purpose of the programme was and so were unsure of the effectiveness of the programme. One of the challenges with creating a diversity and inclusion programme of this nature is evaluation. The risk with using solely quantitative (e.g., numbers and figures) measures is that it only tells one part of the story (Rankin-Wright et al., 2016): the diversity piece. Unless organizations recognise the dual role that the programme

can play in not just increasing numbers, but also in building a culture of inclusiveness, the programme is unlikely to affect sustainable longer-term change. Organizations should ensure that there are quantitative and qualitative (e.g., individuals experiences) criteria to measure the effectiveness on both diversity and inclusiveness dimensions, thereby increasing the opportunity to reduce the statistics around under-representation (Snow & Hambrick, 1980).

Moreover, consistent improvement and enhancement of the programme, to ensure it meets the short- and longer-term outcomes, will help to further upskill women coaches, providing them with increased opportunity of employment in high-performance football. Overall, while there is common ground between internal and external stakeholders and a willingness to tackle the issue of under-representation of women in organizations, there often seems to be no common vision on how the interventions translate into outcomes. According to the coaches and internal stakeholders, this often comes from a lack of communication between the organization and internal stakeholders. Therefore, organizations must incorporate different systematic means of measuring progress in diversity integration, ensuring that the results of evaluation and assessment are shared with all constituencies, as well as taking accountability for ensuring progressive change (Doyle & George, 2008). A lack of clarity and communication means that, while people recognise and support the need for interventions such as this, there are very different views around measuring the efficacy of the programme.

### ***Organizational Culture towards Inclusion***

A major discussion point from the coaches was the culture of the organization towards inclusion. Inclusion is about creating belonging, connection, and enabling participation and contribution (Roberson, 2006). Hence, there is an argument that there is an important success criterion around the extent to which the coaches are valued for their diversity of thinking and embraced within the organization. This can help promote collaboration and increase the perceptions of women coaches within and outside of the organization. If the predominant organizational culture is reflected in departments and teams working in silo, this can culminate

with a low level of collaboration across the organization (Roberson, 2006). This can lead to a lack of awareness of the opportunities the programme presents in enabling coaches to contribute to challenge the thinking in the organization and bring diversity to the conversation. This is important as cultural awareness is required for diversity and inclusion programmes to succeed (Miller, 1998).

Whilst it was acknowledged that the FA had taken positive steps towards increasing diversity and inclusion, it is important that a programme such as this does not operate in isolation and is embedded within the organization (Kanter et al., 1992), leading to systemic behavioural and cultural change. On occasion, programme participants experienced exclusion which undermines the very purpose of these programmes. For example, the lack of communication about the broader purpose of the initiative to the programme leads, often led to coaches not being fully included in the placement, meaning they did not feel organizational belonging. This links to the evaluation of such programmes. Organizations often focus on diversity and increasing the numbers but do not derive the full benefits of the programme as they fail to build inclusion. Inclusion unlocks the benefits of diversity and without inclusion, an organization will not achieve the desired programme outcomes and the longer-term benefits that diversity brings (Stevens et al., 2008).

### ***Programme Ownership***

Previous organizational research demonstrates that change initiatives often fail due to the absence of sponsorship and lack of sign-on from key stakeholders (Ang, 2018; Rao & Kelleher, 2003). Although the menteeship programme has been running for a few years, there is still a significant degree of resistance from some stakeholders within the organization. The coaches perceived that part of this was stakeholders believing that the coaches would eventually take over their job. The resistance towards the initiative emanates in the form of questioning why this programme exists. A stakeholder described how ongoing internal resistance can take up a significant percentage of time. Internal stakeholders who have not

been consulted effectively about the purpose of the change programmes, often perceive that they have a lack of ownership in acquiring the programme outcomes, which can impede change.

A programme of this nature may benefit from more visible executive sponsorship that sets out a clear vision to ensure the programme achieves what was intended (Ang, 2019). Including a diversity and inclusion programme in wider communications and marketing strategies (both internally and externally) would increase visibility. Further, including stakeholders in the design and implementation of the programme could also lead to a more collaborative approach between departments and other initiatives within the diversity and inclusion programme. Sharing the initiative would help give women a platform to develop themselves and progress in the organizational hierarchy, whilst also giving the organization a key role in solving this perennial issue (Ang, 2018). A positive organizational culture often provides a sense of security and stability (Sopow, 2006). With regards to the FA menteeship programme, it was acknowledged that it has the potential to be 'world leading'. However, this will only happen if there is commitment to take a collaborative approach both internally and externally. This programme is an example of a powerful initiative that could be even more impactful if a best practice change management approach was applied.

### ***Variety vs Bespoke Approach to Placements***

An area that produced differences in opinions between the coaches was the structure of the programme. Some of the coaches acknowledged the potential value of completing a variety of different workshops to gain experiences and knowledge in a diverse range of areas, but also questioned whether this approach optimised their development. Coaches were relatively clear about their career aspirations, so the opportunity to choose their preferred placements would create greater clarity for both coach and stakeholders. Therefore, a more bespoke approach that greater aligns the placements with the coaches' personal goals and assists them in getting employment post-programme may be more beneficial (Gravenhorst et al., 2003). Consequently,

this approach would create the opportunity to build a personal development plan that could form part of a comprehensive feedback process which could incorporate the coaching competency framework. The coach would leave the programme having achieved clear outcomes, have a better understanding of potential gaps between their current stage of development and desired goals, and have the potential to deliver an increased return on investment. This can be directly associated back to the clarity of the objectives. If the aim of the programme is to develop women's skill base, then a variety approach may be more beneficial. However, if the aim is focused on employment, a bespoke approach may be more effective. The structure should adapt to and not undermine the vision of the programme (Kotter, 2007).

### ***Operational Lessons Learnt***

Changes have already been made by the current programme manager for future cohorts of coaches following recommendations provided by the research. The first step that has been taken is to develop a marketing and communications strategy to increase the visibility of the programme across the organization to try and increase collaboration across FA departments. This will be helpful in engaging people in understanding the coaches' journeys and to mainstream the programme within the core activities of the organization (Roberson, 2006). Time has also been spent before the inductions speaking to the coaches and building relationships with each one of them, such as getting to know their aspirations and concerns. A new induction process has been developed with a range of internal stakeholders invited to take part (e.g., placement leads) to increase collaboration, implement improved planning processes to minimise overlap with camps, and provide other additional learning activities. In response to feedback from the women coaches who participated in the research, it was felt they were left unsupported once they left the programme, but options are now being considered to create an alumni community. This is important to ensure a sense of connection, integration, and belonging for coaches through higher-quality working relationships (Norris et al., 2020).

## **Concluding Thoughts**

Women who pursue careers in coaching, and other sectors, are still under-represented and under-valued (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2016). Organizations, such as the FA, are creating initiatives to try and reduce this imbalance and increase representation. However, the coordination of these programmes by stakeholders and organizations can heavily impact on the effectiveness and perceptions of women and BAME coaches. If programmes are not designed and implemented effectively, this can have a detrimental effect on inclusion and perceptions of women coaches. For equality programmes to run effectively, clear communication is key. It is recommended to provide internal communication from the organization to the internal stakeholders to clarify the purpose of the programme and reduce any perceived threats between the stakeholders and coaches. External communication to enhance programme visibility is also vital to increase the positive perceptions and value of the programme by upskilling and providing experiences to women coaches at elite levels. To ensure the programme is consistently developing and providing the best support for women, constant reflections in relation to the approach and aims are required.

Overall, the FA have taken significant steps towards tackling the issue of under-representation of women coaches in the UK but there are still substantial improvements that can be made to support women in organizational settings. Programmes designed to enhance diversity and inclusion are being developed and are important to enhance equality but should systemically include diversity and inclusion within their culture to create opportunities for all to reach high-performance levels.

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