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The Children Sport and Physical Activity Workforce in the UK Part 2 Report

Coach Learning and Development: The Training Needs and Preferred Learning Contexts of the Children's Coaching Workforce



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Executive Summary

This report contains the findings of the second part of 'The Children Sport and Physical Activity Workforce in the UK' study. This research has been commissioned by UK Coaching to inform the wider work of the Children's Coaching Collaborative (CCC). The findings presented here are taken from a series of qualitative interviews and focus groups conducted with 22 active coaches of children¹, all of whom had been invited to participate after answering the quantitative survey which informed part 1 of the report. Of these 22 coaches, there are some key demographics to take into consideration:

- 14 men and 8 women took part in these interviews. This mirrors the wider coaching landscape whereby 62% of coaches are men.
- There is an even split between coaches working in grassroots and youth performance spaces (11 each). This is a different pattern to the youth coaching landscape, where 64% of coaches work in grassroots settings and 14.6% work in youth performance or youth representative. However, this is reflective of the purposive nature of the sample for this research.
- In terms of payment, 16 of the 22 coaches were completely voluntary (received no compensation or expenses). This is a slightly higher proportion than reported in the survey, where 47% of coaches were completely voluntary, 16% of coaches received compensation, 23% were part-time and 14% were full-time.

The coaches discussed a wide range of topics, including:

- The value of coaching
- The issues they encountered in their coaching roles
- Their training and development needs
- Their preferred learning contexts

The report is structured around these four key topic areas, before concluding with some actionable recommendations for the CCC.

The Value of Coaching

All coaches involved in the focus groups stated that coaching added value to their lives. This mirrors the finding from the survey where 92% of coaches stated that coaching had a positive or very positive impact on their lives. For some, working with children and making a difference in their lives was itself an enjoyable aspect of their role. Others discussed the ways in which they developed their transferable personal and professional skills. For some, a lifelong love of their sport and the opportunity to continue to be involved after finishing playing was of primary importance. Finally, the idea of 'giving back' to the local community was also a key driver for some coaches – especially those who were active participants as children, who want the next generation to have the same opportunities they did. A specific aspect of 'giving back' linked to increasing diversity and working with those who may traditionally have less opportunity in sport – for example girls or young disabled people. This final point was especially apparent among coaches who themselves were from these backgrounds.

Issues with Coaching Roles

Despite the value that coaching added to their lives, it was apparent that coaches encountered some issues with their coaching role. Promisingly, these issues were less widespread than the

¹ For the purpose of this research, children are understood as any individual between the ages of 0-18, in line with UN definition.

aforementioned positives of coaching, with some coaches reporting no issues with their role. However, it is still important to take stock of these comments.

The first major issue was the excessive demands of the role for voluntary or part-time coaches. In the main, these coaches felt overworked and undervalued. It is well recognised that the coaching workforce is largely voluntary, with 47% of coaches receiving no compensation and a further 16% only receiving travel expenses. In a linked issue, many coaches felt that there were very few opportunities to progress in coaching with regards to full-time employment. Thus, many of the coaches who feel undervalued as a volunteer, do not feel as if there are avenues to progress to paid employment within their sport, even if they wanted to.

Other issues linked to a lack of support, at both a local level (e.g. having a coach to share the workload) and a regional or national level (e.g. having sufficient mentoring and guidance from their NGB). Another issue at a local level was that some coaches encountered conflict with other coaches due to different values – this was often due to the values of child-first coaching clashing with adult-centric values, such as over focusing on performance, results and winning. The final issue was linked to a lack of diversity among coaches, with some women and disabled coaches feeling isolated in their roles. Moreover, the accessibility of facilities for coaches with disabilities was also brought up as an issue.

Training Needs

The coaches highlighted a range of areas that they would benefit from learning more about to be more child-centred. Most of these topics are generalisable across sports rather than sport-specific X's and O's. For instance, many coaches wanted to know more about the physical and psychological development of children. There was also a desire to better understand how to differentiate in sessions – some of this linked to ability and how to cater for beginners and more advanced athletes in the same session, while some of this linked to including young people with disabilities into sessions. Importantly, coaches identified a range of skills that they would like to develop further. These include communication, planning, reflecting and observation skills. The final area of generic information they wanted to develop was linked to medical and safeguarding training to ensure the children they worked with were happy, healthy and safe in their care.

There were some coaches who desired more sport specific knowledge, such as drills, sessions and ideas which directly linked to their sport or activity. Interestingly, this request was less common than the previously presented skills, knowledge or behaviours which may be applicable across sports. In fact, the majority of coaches had a huge appetite to learn from other sports. There was a sense that this approach to learning could expand coaches' horizons and could expand their knowledge base in positive ways.

Preferred Learning Contexts

Preferred learning context refers to the ways in which coaches would like to learn. Importantly, it was clear that there was not a one-size-fits all approach to learning that can be prescribed. There was a range of discussion which covered the 'type' of learning, which includes formal learning courses (e.g. those run by respective NGBs); mentoring, networking and communities of practice; and individual learning which coaches completed in their own time. It was clear that formal learning courses are more highly valued by coaches at the beginning of their learning journey, or for those working in performance contexts (or aspiring to do so). In addition to this, all coaches found value in both mentoring and networking. While mentoring is often understood as receiving support from someone perceived to have more knowledge or experience than yourself, networking is usually defined as peer-to-peer support. There was a great appetite for both avenues, although networking

was seen as more realistic or accessible, as coaches felt they had greater access to those they considered 'peers' compared to those they considered to be 'experts' to mentor them. Finally, individual learning covers a range of activities, but refers to anything that the coaches can do in their own time. For example, webinars, reading books or articles, watching videos, listening to podcasts, using social media or conducting research were all given as examples of coaches individually learning and developing.

There was also discussion about the mechanism of delivery, including online, in-person, or a blended approach. The positives of online learning included the accessibility, being able to do it in your own time and not having to travel. The positives of in-person learning included more interaction, the ability to clarify and ask questions, and the ability to network with others. Importantly, almost all the coaches involved in this phase were advocates for blended learning, in that they enjoy the ease and accessibility of online learning, but do not want to lose out on the perceived depth of face-to-face interactions.

Finally, coaches highlighted a range of motivations and barriers to learning, which were applicable across learning contexts. First, the ways in which opportunities were advertised was key. Often, word of mouth was the most powerful advertisement for learning opportunities. Moreover, social media and mailing lists were also important and used often by coaches. Second, the timing, cost and location of certain events were of paramount importance to whether coaches could engage in opportunities. This particularly differed between the volunteer/part-time and full-time coaches, as full-time coaches had more time to dedicate to development and were more likely to receive organisational financial support. Finally, coaches discussed the ability to decipher what learning opportunities would be beneficial for them. Some coaches recalled negative experiences where the learning they undertook was not as they expected, due to misrepresentation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this phase of research, there are a range of key recommendations for the CCC in developing learning opportunities for coaches:

1. Promote the positive aspects of coaching
2. Offer a broad range of support through training and education
3. Ensure opportunities are tailored and reflective of a diverse coaching population and participation contexts
4. Offer generic training which improves coaches' ability to be child centred
5. Use learning from across different sports and contexts
6. Use a blended approach to learning
7. Encourage (and organise) mentoring, networking and communities of practice
8. Ensure promotion is clear and accurate
9. Consider how opportunities are shared and promoted

Conclusion

In summary, the findings from this phase of research confirm that there is an appetite for child-first coaching. However, coaches of all demographics need support in order to feel like they can truly coach in child-first ways. This report has outlined a variety of ways in which the CCC and partners may better offer support to the coaching workforce, in order to increase their ability to put the child first.

It is important to consider both what content and knowledge coaches are being offered, and also how it is being offered and shared. Adopting a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to succeed, so a

breadth of opportunities are important to enable as many coaches as possible to engage. Moreover, it is important to differentiate what is offered to different segments of the coaching population. Similar to the CCC's vision to centralise the voice of the child, it is important in this phase to centralise the voice of the coach in order to continue to understand what they require to better support the young people they work with.

1. Introduction and Background

This report has been commissioned by UK Coaching, as part of the research surrounding the Children's Coaching Collaborative (CCC).

This report is the second part of 'The Children Sport and Physical Activity Workforce in the UK' report. The first part was delivered in July 2022, and was informed by a large scale quantitative survey to which over 1400 coaches responded. The part 1 report gave a broad overview of the children's coaching workforce, including demographics, motivations and barriers to coaching and training needs.

The data that informs this part 2 report is taken from a series of qualitative interviews and focus groups, conducted with people who are active coaches of children. The interviews and focus groups were set up as a follow up to a quantitative survey, in order to find out more about their development needs. Specifically, the discussions considered the 'training needs'² and 'preferred learning contexts'³ of coaches. In order to gain a depth of understanding, coaches who had answered the survey were invited to take part in a focus group to discuss these topics in more depth.

This report is structured in the following way:

- Section 2 details the research methodology
- Sections 3-6 cover the key findings emerging from the research
- Section 7 provides key recommendations for UK Coaching and the CCC
- Section 8 briefly concludes the report

² 'Training needs' refers to what coaches feel that they need to know more about, and includes content knowledge and coaching skills.

³ 'Preferred learning contexts' considers the ways in which coaches would like to learn, including the location, style of learning and length of time.

2. Methodology and Procedure

2.1 Background

This research builds upon the previously completed survey. Coaches who completed the survey were invited to take part in focus group discussions in order to get a greater depth of understanding of some of the issues which emerged in the survey. Some coaches took part in a 1-to-1 interview with the researcher, while others took part in a focus group discussion with the researcher and up to three other coaches. This was based on the preference of the coach. The same questions were asked regardless of the format.

2.2 Participants

The survey showed significant statistical differences between men and women; between coaches who were voluntary or paid; and between coaches who worked in grassroots compared to performance spaces. The focus groups were therefore segmented in this way to better understand why these differences may occur. In total, 22 coaches took part in this phase of research. Some key considerations (all of the following statistics are taken from the survey and part 1 report):

- 14 men and 8 women took part in these interviews. This mirrors the wider coaching landscape whereby 62% of coaches are men.
- Of the 22 coaches, only 2 coached multiple sports. This mirrors the wider coaching landscape where 81% of coaches coach a single sport only.
- There is an even split between coaches working in grassroots and youth performance spaces (11 each). This is a different pattern to the youth coaching landscape, where 64% of coaches work in grassroots settings and 14.6% work in youth performance or youth representative. However, this is reflective of the purposive nature of the sample for this research.
- In terms of payment, 16 of the 22 coaches were completely voluntary (received no compensation or expenses). This is a slightly higher proportion than reported in the survey, where 47% of coaches were completely voluntary, 16% of coaches received compensation, 23% were part-time and 14% were full-time.

For a full breakdown of the participants please see the table overleaf. To protect the anonymity of the individuals, any identifying features have been removed:

Table 1: Overview of Participants

No.	Context	Sex	Paid/Vol	Sport Type	Qualification	Years Coaching
1	Grassroots	F	Vol	Team	L2	15
2	Grassroots	F	Vol	Individual	L2	11
3	Grassroots	F	Vol	Team	L1	2
4	Grassroots	M	Vol	Team	L2	8
5	Grassroots	M	Vol	Team (disability specific)	L2	26
6	Grassroots	M	Vol	Individual	L2	4
7	Grassroots	F	Paid FT*	Team and Individual	L2 (in both)	22
8	Grassroots	F	Paid FT	Individual	L3	35
9	Grassroots	M	Paid PT	Team	L2	8
10	Grassroots	M	Vol**	Team and Individual	L2 (in both)	25
11	Grassroots	M	Paid FT	Individual	L3	6
12	Youth Performance	F	Vol	Team	L2	7
13	Youth Performance	F	Vol	Individual	L3	25
14	Youth Performance	F	Vol	Individual	L2	12
15	Youth Performance	M	Paid PT	Team	L4	26
16	Youth Performance	M	Vol	Individual	L3	15
17	Youth Performance	M	Vol	Individual	L3	10
18	Youth Performance	M	Vol	Team	L2	6
19	Youth Performance	M	Vol	Individual	L3	40
20	Youth Performance	M	Vol	Individual	L2	10
21	Youth Performance	M	Vol	Individual	L2	3
22	Youth Performance	M	Paid FT	Team	L4	35

*Participant 7 works full-time in a sport development and coaching role, relating to her team sport. She also coaches a different individual sport in a voluntary capacity.

**Participant 10 coaches two sports, one team based and one individual. He is a volunteer in both instances.

3. The Value of Coaching

All coaches involved in the focus groups stated that coaching added value to their lives. This mirrors the finding from the survey where 92% of coaches stated that coaching had a positive or very positive impact on their lives. There were a variety of reasons given for this feeling, including working with, and developing children; developing self; continuing in their sport; supporting their family, friends or community; and increasing diversity in their sport. It is important the CCC is aware of these positive aspects of coaching so that they can support coaches to maximise their enjoyment, and potentially, encourage others to begin their coaching journey.

3.1 Developing Children

There was a sense among coaches that working with children was in and of itself, an enjoyable aspect of coaching. Importantly, supporting the development of children was a key aspect of this enjoyment. The feeling of making a difference in children's lives was a key driver for many of the coaches.

the positive side of it is what you get back, you can't quantify what you get back from the kids (3)

I describe as developing people. Yes, they happen to be very good at [sport], but its helping people develop. Learn about themselves (16)

I coach because they're the ones who put in the hard work in, not me. I'm just giving them the tools to be able to improve and it's up to them to sort of do that. (1)

I love seeing the smiles on the faces. Whether they're winning or losing, it doesn't matter to me, at U10s its about development (4)

Promisingly, this group of coaches clearly showed attitudes that aligned with 'child-first' coaching, as their primary focus was on the development of the children rather than winning or losing. Not a single coach in this sample mentioned winning as a primary motivator. While this may not be reflective of the wider coaching population, as coaches who opted-in to this research may be more inclined to be 'child-first', this is nonetheless a promising finding.

3.2 Developing Self

In addition to developing children, there was a sense among many coaches that coaching gave them opportunities to develop themselves in a variety of ways.

a lot of the skills that you develop as a coach are absolutely applicable to that professional environment (16)

it's always about learning and challenging and finding something new (5)

I actually went on a two-week professional coaching course with [NGB] to Barcelona where we worked with a professional coach. That was phenomenal. (12)

It is clear that coaching allowed individuals to develop valuable skills which are useful in other contexts, whether the coaches worked in grassroots or performance spaces. It is important that this is recognised by the CCC. Because a lot of the children's coaching workforce are voluntary, it is

important to highlight the tangible benefits that coaches receive, beyond financial compensation – with self and professional-development being a clear benefit of coaching.

3.3 Continuing Involvement in Sport

Moreover, many coaches stated that coaching added value to their lives because it allowed them to continue in a sport they loved, beyond or in addition to playing.

I have a genuine love for the sport and being involved in different ways (9)

It's a good level. It's important me to continue to be involved (2)

This factor is an important aspect to consider. Given that we know sports participation decreases with age, coaching can be understood as a good way to remain involved and still reap the social and mental benefits that come from active involvement. From the survey, the biggest number of respondents came from the 45-54 category (27.1%) and the 35-44 band (24.5%). Although the CCC may not be actively involved in the recruitment of coaches, aiming recruitment practices at athletes who are transitioning out of playing may be a fruitful avenue to explore for those who may be responsible.

3.4 Supporting Family, Friends and Community

A further reason given for the value of coaching was the sense that the coaches were 'giving back' through supporting their family, friends or community.

I love doing it and will continue to as yeah, as long as I keep enjoying it, I've got a son, he's 10 and plays [sport] and [sport] as well ... It's kind of paying back because I came through the club as a junior around, was coached and looked after and now as chairman, that's for me the value and the important bit is you know just it is whilst it is sustaining the club for the future (10)

the reason why I got into coaching because my daughter plays as well... she started playing at about 6. She's now 19, so she's a good role model figure for other girls that play (4)

Many of the coaches had themselves been active participants as children, and recognised the impact their coaches had on their lives. Therefore, the ability to have the same impact on the next generation of children (including their own) was an important factor for many.

3.5 Increasing Diversity

A further aspect of 'giving back' was about increasing diversity and opportunities for young people who may be under-represented.

I want to give the girls what I didn't have when I was younger (1)

You get people in a wheelchair, they say '[sport] is the best thing they've ever done'. That's empowering, that's a powerful statement (5)

I had to get into coaching because when she [daughter] got to that age at under 10s, there was nothing there for girls (4)

This was especially apparent among coaches who themselves were from under-represented groups, mainly women or disabled coaches, or for coaches who had children who belonged to these groups. For example, coach 1 is a woman coaching in a predominantly male sport, coach 5 is himself a

wheelchair user, and coach 4 speaks about the barriers his daughter faced at a young age when playing a traditionally male sport. This attitude was not as evident among coaches who may not have had that lived experience. While this is not surprising, as we know lived experience shapes people's outlook and values, it is potentially important for the CCC to consider how coaches can be better encouraged to recognise and understand the value of increasing diversity in sporting spaces.

4. Issues with Coaching Roles

Despite the value that coaching added to their lives, it was apparent that coaches encountered some issues with their coaching role. Although this was less widespread than the positives (with some coaches reporting no issues with their role), it is still important to take stock of these comments. These ranged from issues with other individuals, the expectations around their role or with the coaching landscape more broadly.

4.1 Overworked and Undervalued

Significantly, there was a feeling among some that their coaching role was excessively demanding. This was especially apparent among the volunteer coaches who received no compensation for their work. Moreover, some part-time coaches also felt overworked, as the financial compensation they received only covered the hours they were physically coaching, and did not take into account the planning and reflecting time that is needed to be a competent coach. Importantly, volunteer coaches were more likely to consider quitting due to this issue.

I would say I'm 50/50 [whether I continue coaching] ... I'm voluntary, I feel sometimes we're undeveloped, I'm undervalued, and I do a lot and I and when I've spoken to other coaches in our league, there's a lot of responsibility and it's actually a lot more than a lot of people think. It isn't just turning up for an hour... it's like a whole job in itself and that for me is the negative side of it (3 volunteer)

I don't have much time, like all of us... We've got so much to juggle and so much to do. (12 volunteer)

It has been hideously unbalanced and demanding and I was kind of thinking about stopping coaching (2 volunteer)

However, when discussed further, some voluntary coaches did not necessarily feel that being paid for the work they do would be the only solution. Instead, feeling appreciated and valued would have gone a long way to improve their sense of wellbeing in their role.

... it's about more than money, it's that unappreciation that is the one thing that's making me question following the coaching route. (3 volunteer)

While full-time coaches did not have this same feeling of being 'overworked' and 'undervalued' they still understood the difficulties that voluntary or part-time coaches faced.

when you're talking about coaches being appreciated, if you're a voluntary coach, lots of people think that means by financially rewarding them and it doesn't. It's about making them feel valued and important and supported (8 full-time)

there's a responsibility for us as certainly as the governing body for [sport] that those coaches feel totally supported (22 full-time)

It is well recognised that the coaching workforce is largely voluntary, with 47% of coaches receiving no compensation and a further 16% only receiving travel expenses. While the CCC cannot control this aspect of the coaching landscape, it is important to be aware of the repercussions of this fact. Although financial recognition is important, it is equally crucial to consider how coaches feel valued and supported in their role. This could include support with training, education and development which the CCC is able to provide.

4.3 Lack of Progression

Linked to the above discussion, a further issue for coaches was the fact that there are very few opportunities to progress in coaching with regards to full-time employment. Thus, many of the coaches who feel undervalued as a volunteer, do not feel as if there are avenues to progress to paid employment within their sport.

The main measuring stick of quality of coaches is based on playing experience.... that devalues the people who are putting investment into their coaching education because people like that [former professional with no coaching experience] can get a full-time role but can the rest of us? (9)

I just wanted to be a full-time coach and I think for maybe I don't know, 15 years I pushed and pushed and pushed trying to create and carve out some form of, you know, full time hours alongside a job that I enjoyed (15)

This frustration matches the findings from the survey, where only 14.4% of coaches are full-time employed in their role. This is an important fact to consider, as the majority of the 'workforce' are indeed voluntary or part-time, the expectations and thinking around training and development need to be structured accordingly.

4.3 Lack of Support

One of the ways in which coaches stated they could feel more appreciated is through a better support system. This was true whether coaches were voluntary or part-time, but less true for full-time coaches.

the downside is that we don't seem to have the correct level of support (17)

Like it's a bit demoralizing sometimes doing it on my own all the time, you know? (6)

But [NGB] only have one coaching officer, so just one person. So it's really difficult for that person to meet the needs of all the coaches. (15)

Importantly, 'support' was conceived both at local level – for example having a co-coach to share the workload – but also at a regional or national level – for example receiving mentoring and guidance from the NGB. While 'local level' support may be harder to provide from a CCC perspective, it is important to consider how coach developers, organisations and NGBs can be educated to better provide coaches with the requisite support.

4.4 Conflict

Conversely, some coaches also felt that 'conflict' occurred with other coaches, in particular when values or philosophies clashed.

[opposition coaches] their outcomes are rather adult enforced ... 'battle' is probably the wrong word, but ... Yeah, kind of a lot of pushing and nudging to say, well, look we haven't got a full team. You haven't got a full team. Let's mix players up and make sure that we get some form of game that the kids can learn from. But they're worried about recording the score and official things, and I'm like, let's forget that. Forget that (10)

Yeah, I mean. We [coach and co-coach] had a few conflicts... I kind of felt that he got very possessive over the children that he deemed to be a bit more talented (1)

Importantly, some coaches believed that these contradictions were down to levels of education and understanding of the children's sporting environment. It was perceived that too many adults need to better develop their understanding of child-centred coaching, rather than trying to mirror adult sporting contexts.

There is the difference between a grassroots coach who's studied coaching and, you know, done it as a career versus a grassroots coach who's done a level one or level two and does it alongside a totally unrelated job. I suppose it takes a lot more understanding (10)

I think part of the training of coaches in the future, particularly those who work with the youngest players should include a broader perspective. You're only worried about your fixture at the weekend, but the work that you do and the environment you create has got so many more repercussions. You know, particularly if you're working with very young children because their attitudes and dispositions are really formed quite early, certainly towards physical activity and sport. I'm not sure coaches realize how critical and important a role that they play (22)

This is an important aspect for the CCC to consider, as supporting more coaches to understand the positives of a child-first approach to coaching could ease this sense of conflict.

Moreover, some coaches also felt a sense of conflict with their respective NGB or organisations. This was largely due to a perceived lack of understanding of the reality of the everyday coaching role.

still have a bit of loggerhead with the [NGB] because you can do your level 1 and your level 2, but they don't have any relevance whatsoever to the [disability specific format of the game] ... There's no pathway (5)

there is an element of frustration and that's maybe directed at the governing body. We're being asked to do more. So now we have you know we have all of our minimum operating standards and we have to understand our whole range of different things and I'm fortunate as a teacher I know a lot of those things but as a coach it's an additional burden to what I enjoy doing. (15)

Although this may be beyond the remit of the CCC, as this sense of conflict was aimed at sport specific NGBs, understanding this frustration is nevertheless important. Understanding what is realistic for a majority voluntary workforce is paramount to avoid further frustration.

4.5 Lack of Diversity

Another issue that many coaches felt was that there was a lack of diversity among the coaching workforce. In particular, gender and disability were referenced, with a lack of female coaches and a lack of disabled coaches.

but we do need more female coaches (4)

don't be scared to push on a few doors because they will open eventually. It might be five years later, but as females in particular ... unless we feel like we can do the job, we're not going to go for it. Whereas a guy would. (13)

it would be asking for such high expectations of adults that were coaching with absolutely no knowledge whatsoever of what it was to be in the chair in the first instance. (5)

It is important for the CCC to ensure that training and development opportunities are equally accessible for coaches of all backgrounds. This may include representation, ensuring that different type of coach developers, coaches and participants are visible. It is also important to consider the accessibility of information, for example the use of subtitles and alternative communication methods for coaches who may have different communication needs, or the availability of information in different languages.

4.6 Accessibility

Finally, an issue arose specifically with the notion of accessibility with regards to facilities. Some coaches talked about this generally, in terms of the facilities not being up to standard or not being available to get the most out of their coaching role.

We've got no real facilities (6)

A challenge is just having the facilities as well to be able to bring more children through and perhaps spend more time with them (14)

However, of specific importance is the way in which facilities proved to be a hindrance to coaches with physical disabilities.

I tried to continue to coach in mainstream, but getting on to grass pitches in the middle of winter just didn't seem to fit very well (5 – wheelchair user)

While coach5 was the only coach who took part in this phase of research who reported having a physical limitation, the survey shows that 11.4% of coaches reported having a long-term health condition, impairment or illness. While not all those coaches may have a physical limitation, it is important to consider how inclusive and accessible the coaching landscape is for coaches with different needs.

5. Training Needs

The coaches who were involved in this phase of research identified a range of areas that they felt they would benefit from learning about, which in turn would support them to be more child-centred. The vast majority of these topics were those which are generalisable across sports, including the development of children, generic coaching skills and medical and safeguarding training. There were also some things identified which were more specific to individual sports or families of sports. Similar to the survey results, there were some differences between the segments of coaches (e.g. men and women, voluntary or paid, years of experience) which will be highlighted throughout the discussion.

5.1 The Development of Children

Understanding the development of children was often raised as something which coaches would like to understand better. There was a feeling that better knowing the stage of development of the child, will allow the coach to better tailor their coaching to the needs of their participants – which is a crucial element of child-centred coaching. Coaches felt that there was a need across both physical and psychological development. Importantly, there was no significant differences between different types of coaches who wanted this type of knowledge, with those from all contexts, different experience levels and both voluntary and paid coaches asking for this support. It may therefore be important to consider what type of information is relevant for what type of coach and provide different levels of information which are targeted at different types of coaches.

5.1.1 Physical Development

All coaches recognised that the children they work with are undergoing prominent physical changes as they age. They were also very aware that children will undergo growth and maturation at different rates. However, many of the coaches said that a better understanding of physical development was paramount.

I think that physiology, maturity and understanding the child and young person's body and development is something that coaches don't get or don't know enough of ... even things down to hydration and nutritional needs (13)

one year to the next they can change because you know their going through changes, they're growing, they've got aches and pains... but it's understanding the different ages that the kids are going through and what cycles they're going through (16)

And there's more physical training side of things. What's good practice? What isn't good practice? What's going to benefit people in the long term? What could potentially injure people long term? (11)

[coaches assume] they can't do strength and conditioning cause they've not had puberty yet. Well, yeah you can. It's just you're not going to load them with big weights. (13)

I think more awareness of spotting maybe, where they've been perfectly happy using the equipment but because of a growth spurt or an injury they might not be So yeah, it is really important to understand the physical side of things (2)

Importantly, coaches were able to understand that physical development has many linked issues in sport, such as strength and conditioning, nutrition and hydration, injury prevention and equipment.

By developing their understanding of these areas, they felt they would be better equipped to be child-centred coaches, as they would be better able to manage their expectations and work to the needs of the child.

5.1.2 Psychological Development

Similarly, understanding the psychological development of children was also highlighted as an important issue to know more about.

what happens with the teenage brain is as important and as crucial to know more about as well as that very young developing brain (22)

I want to get into the sports sciences and the psychology and all those little bits and pieces (5)

As with physical development, it was recognised that understanding psychology and brain development had links to many coaching scenarios, be it concentration and focus, developing resilience and behaviour.

And if they're crying in a corner, you know, I don't know how to deal with that (3)

If you've got a big group of children that are different children, what different techniques have you got to manage them? And looking at creating a culture where failure is allowed because children are not used to that ... how you deal with failure and how you use failure as a positive, you know we've lost by one goal, OK, how can we look at this game and see what we can do next time? (8)

The ability to keep the focus and keep them busy (18)

Clearly, there is an appetite among coaches to better understand children and their developmental stages, be it physically or psychologically. This is important for the CCC to consider in setting up their training resources. Having a focus on child development would be hugely beneficial to coaches, and importantly, closely link to their ability to become more child-centred.

5.2 Differentiation

Coaches also felt that they could be better supported by knowing more about differentiation, and how to cater for different needs within one session. Some of this was about catering for different abilities within the session, perhaps based on the experience level or talent of the children in front of them:

I've got a new girl coming along tonight, but I've got five kids that play [sport] for [country]. So my challenge as a coach, I'm passionate about having fun and engagement, especially the ones that are new to it. But I've got to challenge these five who play for [country] in a different way (12)

Other coaches recognised the need to differentiate based on specific needs of their participants. In some instances, this may be because they are working with children who have specific disabilities or learning needs. For other coaches, they were working with mixed gender, or children of the opposite sex, so having a better understanding of the different needs of different young people was paramount.

perhaps some education on what it is like to be either a teenage girl or a teenage boy, depending. So like for me, I wouldn't know what it's like to be a teenage boy

... if you're a coach and you coach the opposite gender, I think it's important to have some insight into that (1)

Women, menstruation in sport, which is something that, [as a man] it never crossed my mind (6)

I mean, obviously, increasingly we're seeing children with autism or you know attention deficit disorder or whatever it might be. So really understanding how you can make the sport accessible to them (2)

Yet the stark reality of it is, if you're in the mainstream club, you're going to have within a group of 15 kids, you're going to have one or two kids in there with some sort of impairment. Anything on the autistic spectrum to a moderate learning disability, to hearing impairment or whatever, you know, a kid with a visual impairment that doesn't necessarily mean to say that they wear black, dark sunglasses all the time, but they might not see two yards in front of them. And I don't think a lot of coaches pick that up. (5)

Again, what I find challenging as an inexperienced coach is how do you include special needs given that some special needs evidently might not be able to do physically some of the stuff, but you don't want to discriminate, so that's a whole field there (3)

Understanding the differences between participants is paramount to being a child-first coach. Being able to differentiate practice to suit the needs of a range of young people was a priority for this group of coaches, so it is important for the CCC to provide tips and inspiration as to how this can be done effectively. Largely this request came from coaches working in the grassroots domain. This may suggest that it is more likely that a wider range of children will attend sessions in the grassroots environment, than in a talent development context. Therefore, it may be useful to target this type of training to coaches working in this environment.

5.3 Coaching Knowledge and Skills

Perhaps the biggest area of learning identified by the coaches revolved around coaching knowledge and skills that they themselves could develop.

5.3.1 Making Sport Fun

Promisingly, there was a big focus on 'making sport fun', with coaches seemingly keen to continue to develop in this area.

As a coach, you need to make your sessions fun as well as serious ... especially at community and grassroots level. If you don't make fun, you don't get players (4)

I'm always open to learning more ways to create more fun... Like what silly little games can we play? But I think sometimes it's also knowing your audience, but actually just little tricks, just loads of little fun, little tricks that you could teach them and keep them engaged... Open to any more drills or suggestions or anything. Perhaps this is even where we can bring in other sports because what drills do other sports use (1)

I think we've got a wider responsibility to make sure that those first experiences are so positive, so encouraging and motivating that whether they stay with

[sport], they're always motivated to be active and to keep fit and to enjoy other sports, even if it's not [sport] (22)

Making sport fun, and understanding fun from a child's perspective, is seen as a key development point for coaches who want to be child-first.

5.3.2 Communication Skills

The ability to communicate with a variety of audiences, using a range of techniques, was also a major talking point among coaches. The main audience is of course the children themselves.

I'm looking for more, those soft skills ... the soft skills to me are how you would communicate to a 10-year-old (17)

I was wondering whether actually the first step for volunteer coaches or for parents or whatever it might be, could even be a generic course which has nothing to do with the sport. The single most important thing to get started with is, how do you communicate with your kids or your players? (10)

Some children are happy just to be spoken to. Some children need the animation. (13)

Coaches recognised the importance of communicating with the young people you coach. Importantly, communicating often means 'speaking to', which can reinforce adult-child power relations, as the adult coach drives the focus of the communication. The CCC should encapsulate broad ideas of communication into their resource hub, including speaking, listening and non-verbal communication to ensure coaches are truly child-first.

Some coaches also recognised the importance of communicating with other parties, namely the child's parents.

I think it's managing families and parents as well and being realistic with them because I think parents are the best thing since sliced bread if I engage with them. If I don't engage with them, they're going to be a complete pain ... We've got to be on side with them because they are the biggest influences on that child's life (13)

having spoken to the parents I did share some of my philosophy with them and say, look, it's not just me saying this, here is research or stuff that's been presented that lines up with it. So yeah, that was a really good meeting. (10)

Too often, coaches avoid interacting with parents, which can lead to conflict in some cases (as identified by participant 13). It is important for the CCC to consider how coaches are encouraged to communicate with parents, be it explaining their coaching philosophy, or outlining their expectations for the parents.

5.3.3 Planning and Reflecting

Another core skillset identified was planning and reflecting. Interestingly, this related not just to an individual session, but long-term player development and a better understanding of self.

And I think I need to know how to plan more efficiently. I think I know need to know how to be better at creating learning journeys for players which are sustainable (9)

I want to create a really good, like, syllabus (12)

[I was asked] are you coaching to your values right now? How do you feel about that? I was like oh my Lord, what are my values? How does that work? How you know? How do I feel? How do the kids feel? What? Which bits that teaching them? So that course developer, and those reflective questions were phenomenal. (12)

I don't think there's a lack of knowledge or content available. I don't think that's the issue. I think almost helping coaches to think and reflect more critically and more analytically about all the content that's out there, is probably more vital (22)

For these coaches, planning and reflecting on an individual session was less of a priority than understanding the ramifications of long-term planning, and deeper reflection about the quality of content and questions about one-self. The coaches who discussed this in more depth were coaches who were largely working in talent development environments, or were aspiring to. Moreover, they all had a relatively high amount of coaching experience, or worked in environments where they would teach young people (participants 9 and 12 were both qualified PE teachers). Therefore, their experience with planning individual sessions was great. However, for less experienced coaches (who may have been less inclined to take part in this phase of research), support with planning and reflecting on individual sessions may be just as beneficial. It is recommended that the CCC develop resources to support coaches with a spectrum of planning and reflecting, from an individual session to personal philosophies and values and target this across different types of coaches and contexts.

5.3.4 Observation

The final skill identified by this group of coaches was the ability to observe.

If you've got a child in front of you that's just come to your club, what are you going to do? You're going to assess? Are they shy? Are they confident? Have they got a friend there already? Can they throw a ball? Can they catch a ball? Can they run? Can they move around? What are they? And you kind of assess that by observing (8)

because of your observation, can ask those really specific strategic questions to help kids learn (13)

Understanding observations as a critical skill in coaching is an important aspect in relation to child-first coaching. Supporting coaches in strategies for observation, and better understanding what, who and how to observe will support more coaches to work with children in relevant ways.

5.4 Medical and Safeguarding

The final generic area of training that coaches commonly asked for was more information to support them in understanding medical and safeguarding issues, to ensure that the children they worked with were safe.

the safeguarding, particularly with certain age groups and more information around that for me is and training on how to deal with issues (3)

I think perhaps more education around injuries and perhaps prevention, and early recognition of injuries in youth players ... coaches need to be more aware of it, cause obviously the younger the child, the more they still have to develop. I know

there's a lot of research out there saying that the earlier a child specializes in a sport, the more at risk of injury they are. (1)

There is nothing there, I can see for mental health in children. I want to learn more about mental health, especially in the younger generation of players ... It's always seems to be the higher age group brackets says 16s up with, but never the young ages (4)

Ensuring the players you coach with are happy, healthy and safe is an important aspect of child-first coaching. Being able to effectively support players who may be going through a range of issues, be it related to a physical injury, mental health issues or are vulnerable in other ways is crucial for coaches to understand. This was a more common request for coaches working within the grassroots context. Those working in talent development environments may well have the support of specialist safeguarding staff. Therefore, providing more informal training around these areas, specifically tailored to the grassroots context, or pointing coaches in the right direction to learn more, is a crucial part of the role of the CCC.

5.5 Sport Specific Knowledge

Naturally, there were also some coaches who craved more sport-specific information to help them in their context.

a result of my development journey education, I do not have In depth tactical knowledge of game systems [within sport] (9)

more ideas and more drills to mix things up and offer a bit of variety for your coaching specifically around [sport] techniques (14)

You type in [sport] coaching sessions practices into Google. You might get one or two period. That's it. There's not a lot of specific information out there about [sport]. (5)

Interestingly, this request was less common than the previously presented skills, knowledge or behaviours which may be applicable across sports. While it may be beyond the remit of the CCC to provide sport specific information, it may be worthwhile to showcase where sport specific information can be found if coaches so desire. Where the CCC may be able to support is by providing more knowledge around disability formats of specific games – such as the request from coach 5 – which may be lacking across the board.

5.6 Cross Sport Learning

Importantly, aside from the sport specific learning identified above, there was a huge appetite for coaches to learn from other sports. There was a sense that this approach to learning could expand coaches' horizons and could expand their knowledge base in positive ways. This reinforces the idea that, while sport-specific knowledge is useful, skills and knowledge that are transferable across contexts are the most sought-after skills among this group of coaches.

I think there's always something that we can learn from other sports, I don't really follow [sport] coaches but I'm fascinated by teachers, professionals. (22)

They would always say these were so much more productive because they were a mixture of sports ... I just think we can all learn so much. All coaches can learn a lot from other sports. (18)

I think cross sport learning is really beneficial ... coaching is coaching, it doesn't matter what your sport is (12)

Knowledge sharing... it's just that example of where the sports are coming together so much (3)

And I remember going this is just brilliant because ... today, [coach from sport A] going to be able to tell me this and [sport B] can tell me this. And you start these really good professional conversations ... A more multisport approach, I think it could be really useful (8)

I'm open to any more drills or suggestions or anything. Perhaps this is even where we can bring in other sports because what drills do other sports use ... you can sort of relate different skills to different sports, it could actually help children with like grasping the concept (1)

Perhaps more than anything else, it was clear that coaches wanted to broaden their horizons and learn a range of content from different contexts. This is an important factor for the CCC to consider, in promoting information which may be rooted in a certain sport, but is clearly transferable across contexts. Coaches from all contexts, backgrounds and experience levels were keen to develop this kind of knowledge.

6. Preferred Learning Contexts

This section will discuss the 'preferred learning contexts' that the coaches discussed, which covers the ways in which they would like to learn about the aforementioned topics discussed in section 5. Importantly, it was clear that there was not a one-size-fits all approach to learning that can be prescribed. This section will be structured in the following way. First, it will tackle the 'type' of learning, including formal learning courses; mentoring; networking and communities of practice; and individual learning. Then it will cover the mechanism of delivery: online; in-person; blended. Within each section, a range of strengths and weaknesses of each approach to learning will be discussed. The final section will cover motivations and barriers to learning, which may relate across learning contexts, but are important to consider in their own right.

6.1 Formal Learning Courses

Naturally, when discussing learning contexts, a number of coaches thought about their experiences of formal learning courses. These courses are usually designed and delivered by their respective NGBs and are often seen as requirements for progression in your chosen sport. While coaches recognised the value of these types of courses, the more experienced coaches tended to have a more negative perception of this type of learning. Interestingly, all of these coaches also worked in a grassroots context, so may also be more critical if they perceive that higher levels of formal coach education are more geared towards performance spaces.

I'm not interested in going any further up the coaching ladder. I'm not interested in level 3-4 or whatever. There's, you know, they're primarily written for working in the performance space or you know (10 – coaching for 25 years)

[after I did my level 2] I was nowhere near to be able to do my Level 3. You know, a decade off doing that. But I had done the one the below. So I was just stuck (9 – coaching for 8 years)

just seems at the moment like the coaching courses are almost like a money-making thing ... in [sport] the courses are just technical, and it doesn't teach you any other skills. You know, I feel that my coaches come back literally knowing nothing (8 – coaching for 35 years)

There was more support and appreciation for formal learning courses, from coaches at the beginning of their learning journey, who may have less experience than others.

I really liked when I did the level one coaching course with the [sport], it was run by, I forget the names, but it was run by [NGB] and they were really well run (3 – coaching for 2 years)

I liked about the level two, I can make up stuff to do now, and I know more about what the kids that are capable of and you know, you can push them a little bit more because you can think of other things that you can give to them. (6 – coaching for 3 years)

It was recognised that the quality of formal courses often depended on the quality of the tutor. Their knowledge of education, teaching and learning were often talked about as being the most important factor in their ability to inspire coaches.

there was a really experienced tutor who knew how to structure and scaffold teaching and learning. So I think that's important how to build new learning on to

previous learning and I think you can only do that if you get to know the group.
(22)

When I did the [sport 1] qualification, the tutors really understood the assessment process. But when I did the [sport 2] one, they didn't understand the assessment process and it was very disjointed (7)

The different perceptions based on experience are interesting to consider. While formal education courses are not the remit of the CCC, the coaches' perceptions of them are important to consider. First, experienced coaches working in grassroots spaces may not see the value in them – therefore, what can the CCC provide for these coaches to make them feel supported? Second, less experienced coaches did tend to value them – perhaps the CCC could mirror this type of learning for less experienced coaches? And finally, it is clear the experience of the tutor was crucial. If the CCC run face-to-face or online live learning, it is important to ensure the educator is high quality. Importantly, while formal coaching qualifications are important to progress into part-time or full-time employment in the coaching sector, these findings suggest that other formats of learning are equally, or in some cases more valuable, than formal courses.

6.2 Mentoring

Perhaps the most impactful form of learning identified was the idea of 'mentoring', in which coaches would have someone to support them in their own coaching context. Often this was understood in the context of receiving support from someone perceived to have more knowledge or experience than yourself.

I had a coaching mentor, so he was there to support us, to challenge us, to look at our values. And it was a really interesting journey. I absolutely loved it and I think I've learned so much and it's really, really helped improve my coaching. (12)

The thing that's made the biggest difference from me in that environment is actually a mentor... somebody who can take the mirror and hold it up to you and say this is what you actually look like. I know what you intend, but this is what you come across as. It's sometimes uncomfortable, but it's extremely useful. (16)

The advanced coach program I think probably meets my needs more, which is a replacement of the level 3 and 4, but more of like a two-year mentorship program. It is much less, like module structure driven, but you have a mentor for two years. (9)

While the majority spoke of mentoring in terms of sport specific support, one coach had positive experiences of mentoring through other avenues, and being able to link it back to his sporting context.

professionally I had a mentor from an organization called Network of Black Professionals and I was assigned the CEO of some company. So you know that they knew nothing about [sport] and nothing about teaching. I got a great deal out of that ... it helped my ability to lead, to motivate, to support, to amplify. (15)

It is clear that the ability to learn 'on the job' from other experienced professionals was a useful area of development for coaches no matter the experience level. Interestingly, some coaches acknowledged that acting as a mentor was equally valuable for your own coaching.

And I think you know, you learn just as much as a mentor as being a mentee. It's fab. Those conversations are brilliant. So I think it's the variety (13)

I've been doing some mentoring with some coaches through [NGB] ... they'll talk about issues or things they're struggling with and that kind of brings it back to me think. That's similar things or how do I deal with that and kind of picking their brains. (10)

While it may be beyond the remit of the CCC to organise mentoring and provide coach mentors for individuals, this finding is worth keeping in mind. It may be that as part of the 'tools, tips and inspiration' pages, the CCC share the value of having a mentor, or indeed being a mentor. Moreover, coaches could be encouraged to reach out to their NGB or other coaches in their own club to set up their own mentoring. Mentoring could alleviate some of the issues around a 'lack of support' identified in section 4.3. Similarly, networking and communities of practice may also have the same effect.

6.3 Networking and Communities of Practice

Similar to mentoring, many coaches discussed the idea of networking with other coaches as being a useful support mechanism. Differently to mentoring, where the relationship was perceived as teacher-learner, networking and communities of practices were conceived of as peer-to-peer support. Thus, more coaches felt that this type of support would be more accessible for them.

there's very little that can replace proper networking in person. (19)

The most useful part of it was the discussion groups with coaches from other sports. (21)

we used to do talent breakfast and they were almost a community of practice, so there was a facilitator. There was a topic of discussion, but people from swimming to shooting to whatever sport it was sharing their experiences under the guise of talent. And I think you could do that and you could even turn that into tactical knowledge and tactical execution but still be generic (15)

I'm a great believer in networking ... we have this similar issue. How can we support each other? How can we learn? (3)

things that have been running in the local area energized me, which is the [location] coaching network, they've been great in terms of being able to access a much wider range of learning rather than just the [sport] courses. (2)

Many coaches also felt that this could be facilitated by bodies such as local authorities, NGBs, or indeed UK Coaching.

You know, maybe you have a national coaching day where people from UK Coaching could facilitate meetings ... you could then have your network groups in various parts of the country facilitated by either a senior coach from a sport or somebody who's employed by UK sport and they would, that would be great. And then back that up with smaller groups that have particular themes perhaps (21)

This may or may not be within the remit of the CCC. However, it was clear that all coaches, no matter their sport, experience or qualification level, found that networking and learning from one

another was a valuable way of learning and developing. If the CCC could find a way to facilitate this, be it in person or online, it is likely that coaches would find benefit from this.

6.4 Individual Learning

The final type of learning that was widely mentioned can be categorised as 'individual' learning. This type of learning covers a range of activities, but refers to anything that the coaches can do in their own time to develop, that does not need external drivers (such as mentoring or networking) but may not be formally recognised as learning (such as NGB courses). For example, webinars, reading books or articles, watching videos, listening to podcasts, using social media or conducting research were all given as examples of coaches individually learning and developing.

There's quite a lot of good podcasts. (8)

I've joined a lot of Facebook groups for, you know, [sport] and players corner. (7)

... it's great because it kind of brings it to life. So you go and read that chapter, which is no time at all. And then you have a webinar on it where you can all chat (13)

So anything that's visual ... short bursts of video. Between three to five minutes. It's just that short burst of something just to get them interested. Like ... A lot of them are just playing on your mind like different scenarios. (17)

anything that I think will progress me if I can engage in it, then I will. So for instance, I use social media, podcasts, YouTube during, I don't know, when I exercise or late in an evening that type of stuff, more than formalised courses (15)

I'm just curious. One article might mention something. I'll go down another article looking at that. That'll mention something else, and I will end up somewhere else completely different. (11)

I know podcasts are very popular. [NGB] has got its own podcast channel if you like. So we see the power of short videos, podcasts, lots of articles. (22)

And I'm a bit of a twitterer I look at look at stuff on Twitter and see stuff, articles and discussions and stuff that come up on there. I like that stuff (10)

This type of learning may be most aligned to what the CCC are able to provide coaches. It is important to provide a range of formats to appeal to a variety of coaches, including articles, videos and podcasts. It is also clear the social media is utilised by coaches to find information out – considering how the CCC use social media will be imperative.

6.5 Blended Approaches to Learning

Due to recent adverts in technology, we have seen a rise in online learning. When asked about their thoughts about this, the coaches responses were naturally mixed. Some valued the flexibility offered to them through online learning, as they can do it from their own home

I'm happy online learning. I don't have a problem usually with that. And that seems the most practical way to do it really I think (6)

I don't think we can get away from, you know, the video calls because it's, you know, in terms of convenience in terms of reach, you know, they're far more beneficial. (15)

since COVID, our committee meetings have been by zoom. As it is we have a coaches meeting on Thursday of this week for ourselves. A zoom or a team meeting, would work. Work well (14)

it was really quite simple. It was online. It said easy. It was quite informative. So something easy and accessible for those really important things. (13)

Some issues with online learning included conflicting information and the lack of interaction with people, to ask questions or clarify anything.

Definitely some sort of articles and online stuff that I occasionally browse through, but that's where a lot of the conflicting ideas come up. (11)

The recertification, it's all done online. Which is a silly bit like. It's the same thing more or less, same questions every year, nothing changes. And yes, tick a few boxes, congratulations, you now passed. (4)

However, coaches still recognised the value of in-person interaction.

there's very little that can replace proper networking in person. (19)

I mean me personally, I like the face to face and interaction as well as physically standing next to somebody (14)

Importantly, almost all the coaches involved in this phase were advocates for blended learning, in that they enjoy the ease and accessibility of online learning, but do not want to lose out on the perceived depth of face-to-face interactions.

I've done integrated online and face to face. I actually think that's a real good move, step forwards and now it's been forced by COVID but I actually see a lot of benefits with that because you get a wider group of network and you're not stuck with the same region and it brings in new ideas (3)

mainly predominantly online courses, but with them perhaps some face to face or interaction with the person presenting the call, just that like questions and clarification (1)

These findings are crucial for the CCC. Having a mixture of approaches to learning can benefit a wider range of coaches. For example, utilising the convenience of independent, online formats (e.g. creating an article), as well as hosting some live webinars or discussion groups around the same topic would allow coaches to engage in different ways. If possible, occasionally hosting in-person sessions would also be beneficial for coaches.

6.6 Motivations and Barriers to Learning

Finally, these coaches discussed a range of factors which either motivate them to engage in learning and development opportunities, or present a barrier to them. Conversation revolved around: how opportunities are advertised; the time, location and cost of the opportunity; and being clear around the focus and quality of the session. All of these factors could be both a motivating factor, or a barrier, depending on the coach.

6.8.1 Information Sharing

First, the way in which opportunities were shared was seen as important. One key way in which coaches tended to find out about opportunities was through contact with other coaches, either through people they know personally, or influential coaches on social media.

I did it because it came from [fellow coach] you know. (12)

I actually follow key coaches on Instagram. And they post videos, they post excerpts and then I follow the trail (19)

I think from social media I see a lot and so like I'll follow like UK coaching and different people (8)

that coach network, it's recommendations, social media (15)

I've found out about [opportunities] through the governing body or other coaches, so my existing network, if you like, of like-minded coaches (16)

Other ways coaches found out about learning opportunities was through mailing lists, which they find themselves on as licenced coaches with their NGBs.

I'm a member of the [NGB] Coaches Association, which provides sort of insurance towards coaching. And they also send emails about training and development. (1)

so I'm just seemed to be on emailing lists and I just go through them and if there's something that catches my eye. (2)

Both of these avenues of information sharing – direct contact and organic word-of-mouth sharing – need to be considered by the CCC. It is recommended that coaches are encouraged to 'sign up' and opt in to receiving emails about development opportunities delivered by the CCC. Moreover, it is worth strategically thinking about recruiting 'champions of child-first coaching' and getting them on board to share within their networks and on social media. Using both approaches is crucial, as a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to work, as some coaches preferred one or the other. Moreover, while coaches did go out of their way to search for specific information, there was a limit to how useful this was.

there's a limit to how much you go and hunt down things on the web. (21)

also, the danger with social media can be that it's like a rabbit hole. You go down and there's so much you could learn. But then if you're doing a 2-hour course and then halfway through, you're like, actually, I already know this. (8)

I mean, and the emails are good, but I don't know if you're like me. My e-mail inbox sometimes is flooded. And I just think ohh, just delete the whole lot. (3)

6.8.2 Time, Cost and Location

Predictably, the timing, cost and location of certain events were of paramount importance to whether coaches could engage in opportunities. This particularly differed between the volunteer/part-time and full-time coaches. Understandably, coaches who were voluntary or part-time had to balance their learning and development with work and other commitments, and so often found more challenges with their time.

Saturday or Sunday out of the question. I'm either coaching or having a day with family (4)

My diary is already full for four weeks generally. (17)

the biggest issue I think I have, and this is sad to say, is like time. (9)

the weekend courses invariably happens to be at the same time as when you're normally supposed to be running your session. (2)

Umm, but I think it's the timing that I think is more important. So everything seems to be that 7 to 9 that 8 to 9 slot on an evening when you've just done a full day, you've got three evenings of coaching as well. You might have a competition at the weekend and then I've got to fit in another two hours, you know, to do training. (15)

Moreover, the cost of some learning opportunities put some coaches off. Again, this was especially important for volunteer coaches who have to pay for opportunities themselves, and are unlikely to receive organisational support to pay for them.

When I was doing my level 2, I was a volunteer, and I remember they offered ad hoc one hour workshops they were doing. That cost £35. Yeah, ridiculous. Never did any of them. (9)

I'd be loathe to pay too much money towards the training cost because I'm not getting anything out of it and I'm sort of losing money (1)

But it's 80 quid and then if I go to that, that means I can't go to a sports psychology one that they're advertising later. (2)

Moreover, location for some coaches was a barrier, depending on where they lived and their access to transport.

It's actually quite hard to get on the on the coaching courses. They tend to get booked up and the nearest one to here is usually 70 or 80 miles away. (6)

things that have been running the local area energized me ... anything a bit further away is much more challenging. I probably wouldn't go to them (2)

Given all of the above challenges, coaches were open that the increase in online or blended learning, informal learning that they can access in their own time, or material that was free to access, has greatly increased their ability to engage with training and development opportunities. Moreover, offering face-to-face training at different times (e.g. early morning as well as evenings and weekends) ensures more people can engage and fit it around their work schedule.

So these kinds of things where there's no cost or a minimal cost or you know the I'm assuming these sort of things are actually relatively cheap to deliver. I think these are completely revolutionized learning for me (2)

organisations actually do lots of webinars and things like that, which is brilliant. And so long as you're available between 12:00 and 1:00 and that's it, you know, that's the downside is when things are available, isn't it. I work from home so for me it's easy to engage in these sorts of things (5)

actually during lockdown, I've done more and more Microsoft Teams or zoom calls about different have done a lot of different things (8)

it was really quite simple. It was online. It said easy. It was quite informative. So something easy and accessible for those really important things. (13)

So again, going back to the talent breakfast, I think they were 7:15 to 8:15am and they were face to face. And I went to five of them, and every one of them had 30 plus coaches. Now I know this was pre COVID and we may well have changed. But I think timings really important (15)

something in the morning that kind of just kicks your day off is a really, really good thing from a mental point of view. (16)

It is vitally important that the CCC considers these barriers and motivations when strategically planning their approach to learning. Having a variety of approaches will be key, especially considering the specific barriers that volunteers may face.

6.8.3 Identifying Quality

The final aspect that coaches talked about was the ability to decipher what information and learning opportunities would be beneficial for them. Some coaches recalled negative experiences where the learning they undertook was not as they expected, due to misrepresentation on the NGB's part. The likelihood in this event of engaging in future opportunities was negatively impacted.

it was potentially not delivered in the best way ... It was such an open title 'keeping players healthy'. But it was definitely not aimed at the grassroots level. I'll be honest, I was a little bit disappointed cause I felt it could have been done better... you've booked onto the CPD, you think it's going to be really useful. And then it's maybe not quite what you expected it to be. That may be a bit of misinformation, or it's not explained well enough or was there not enough detail (1)

Other coaches spoke more generally about trying to figure out what sort of information is going to be 'good'.

But it's the quality. How do you determine what is the good stuff? What's the stuff worth having? I think labelling is critical. So how things are actually labelled will make a difference as to whether people will pick it up and run with it. (5)

Definitely some sort of articles and online stuff that I occasionally browse through, but that's where a lot of the conflicting ideas come up. (11)

Learning and training that is created by UK Coaching (or NGB's) should ensure coaches of the quality being delivered, as it is research informed and delivered by experts in their field. It is important however that resources that are perhaps externally located are vetted for quality. Moreover, it is vitally important that training is properly labelled, perhaps with specific tags around the content, context (e.g. grassroots vs youth performance) the type of coach it's aimed at, or the type of sports it may be useful for. This would help coaches decipher what is useful for them and crucially retain their trust and keep them coming back for more learning and development.

7. Recommendations

There are a host of recommendations which emerge from this report. These will be summarised in this section, with actionable points for the CCC to consider. In some instances, these may be things the CCC are already doing – in these cases this report provides further evidence that they should continue with this approach. In other cases, this may be new information for the CCC to begin doing.

7.1 Promote the positive aspects of coaching

Importantly, it was clear that coaching added value to coaches lives, be it because of the intrinsic love of the activity, the ability to support children, the ability to develop ones' self, or the sense that you are able to give back to your community or people who may have less opportunity in sport. It is recommended that the CCC continue to promote these positive aspects of coaching. This will hopefully either support more coaches to stay in their respective roles, or encourage more people to come into coaching.

7.2 Offer a broad range of support through training and education

Although coaching was largely a positive endeavour, coaches did experience some issues with their role. While most of these are outside the control of the CCC, it is clear that some tension arises from encountering other coaches who may not hold similar, child-first, values. Offering a broader range of coaches informative, educational and accessible information could go some way to easing this tension. Therefore, it is recommended that the CCC aims to target as wide a range of coaches as possible, to ensure as many coaches as possible are embodying child-first values. Considering how information reaches and convinces coaches who may be reluctant to adopt child-first approaches is critical.

7.3 Ensure opportunities are tailored and reflective of a diverse coaching population and participation contexts

In order for coaches to engage in training, and feel a sense of belonging, they need to feel like they are represented. Ensuring that a range of people are represented in any training material is crucial. This includes seeing coach developers, coaches and participants from different backgrounds – including men/boys and women/girls, people with disabilities, people from diverse ethnic backgrounds and others. Moreover, it is crucial to ensure that everyone can access it equally – for example, including subtitles on videos. By having a more diverse training catalogue, more coaches will feel a sense of belonging – a more diverse coaching workforce is crucial to encouraging a more diverse participant base.

7.4 Offer generic training which improves coaches' ability to be child-centred

Coaches were keener to see 'generic' training – i.e. information that could be applied across sports and contexts – rather than sport-specific information. Importantly, coaches felt that they wanted a better understanding of the development of children (physical and psychological) and how to better develop their own coaching skills. They felt that the combination of these two areas in particular, would support them in being more child-centred. Moreover, coaches wanted to learn more about medical and safeguarding processes and practices and differentiation. When designing material around these areas of learning, it is important to differentiate between different types of coaches. The level of information a beginner, grassroots coach may need will be different to the needs of a full-time professional working in the youth development sector.

7.5 Use learning from across different sports and contexts

Linked to the above point, coaches were actively keen to learn from contexts different to their own. Therefore, it is important to find inspiration from a range of sports and activities. It may be worth strategically selecting different types of coaches from a range of sports which may not often get as much attention, or have as much resource as others. However, in doing so, it is important that training resources are carefully presented so it is clear that the information being shared is not sport specific. See recommendation 7.8 for more information.

7.6 Use a blended approach to learning

It was clear the coaches valued a blended approach to learning. That is, using both online formats that coaches could access at their own convenience, and also having some face-to-face interaction to allow for questions, clarification and networking. Importantly, this second aspect could be either online (e.g. tutor led webinars, discussion groups) or in person (e.g. workshops, seminars, networking events). Offering coaches a range of options is crucial to allow as many as possible to engage in what the CCC has to offer.

7.7 Encourage (and organise) mentoring, networking and communities of practice

Coaches spoke of the value of being mentored, acting as a mentor, and being part of a community of practice. The CCC should be aware of the values of this approach to learning. First, it is recommended that the CCC encourage coaches to seek this out in their own time. For example, sharing the above learning could motivate coaches who feel unsupported to seek out a mentor from their own club or sport. Secondly, the CCC should, where possible, organise this type of learning. This could take the form of organising networking events in specific locations or online. Moreover, the CCC could recruit 'child-first champions'. These champions could then be responsible for mentoring others in their environment and sharing the values of child-first coaching.

7.8 Ensure promotion is clear and accurate

As previously discussed, different coaches require different knowledge that is relevant to their context, children and experience level. While the CCC should offer a range of learning, it is important that it is clear exactly who or what each learning is intended for. For example, it should be clear:

- Whether the learning is more appropriate for grassroots, youth performance or other environments
- Whether the detail is aimed at beginner or more experienced coaches
- Whether the information is relevant across all sports, specific families or types of sports (e.g. team games or individual sports), or is sport-specific
- Whether there is anything else specific the coach should know about

In relation to the last bullet point, there could be times where more information is relevant. For example, some coaches requested learning how better to understand members of the opposite sex and the impact of puberty on them. If specific training is designed around the impact of puberty on adolescent boys or girls, it should be clear whether that is specifically designed for coaches of the opposite sex, or whether it is designed as a more generic training course.

7.9 Consider how information is shared and promoted

The final recommendation considers how people can find out about the CCC and the values of child-first coaching. As evidenced, the extent to which coaches will actively search for information is limited. It is much more likely that they will find information after being directed there, whether

through social media, an influential coach or through a direct email. It is important that the CCC utilises all of these communication methods. Encourage people to sign up to mailing lists, have a strategic and well-informed social media campaign, have 'child-first champions' who will share information within their networks and on social media campaigns. It may also be worthwhile considering how other partnerships with other organisations (e.g. NGB's) may be fruitful, if they uphold the same values as the CCC.

8. Conclusion

In summary, the findings from this phase of research confirm that there is an appetite for child-first coaching. However, coaches of all demographics need support in order to feel like they can truly coach in child-first ways. This report has outlined a variety of ways in which the CCC and partners may better offer support to the coaching workforce, in order to increase their ability to be child-first.

It is important to consider both what content and knowledge coaches are being offered, and also how it is being offered and shared. Adopting a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to succeed, so a breadth of opportunities are important to enable as many coaches as possible to engage. Moreover, it is important to differentiate what is offered to different segments of the coaching population. Similar to the CCC's vision to centralise the voice of the child, it is important in this phase to centralise the voice of the coach in order to continue to understand what they require to better support the young people they work with.