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# The Children Sport and Physical Activity Workforce in the UK

## Part 1 Narrative Report

Commissioned by



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## Introduction

The Children's Coaching Collaborative (CCC) brings together organisations with complementary skills and networks to work collaboratively on initiatives for the benefit of children and young people in sport. Unfortunately, research investigating the specific characteristics of the children's coaching workforce is scarce. Gaining a more rounded and nuanced understanding of who the coaches are, their varied backgrounds and experiences, and their needs and wants is paramount for the CCC to offer them adequate levels of support and prioritise forthcoming work in this area.

This 'narrative' report is a condensed version of the full part 1 report, which was delivered to UK Coaching in July 2022. It is designed to highlight some of the key findings from the full report. It is important to note that the data contained in this report is a small sub-section of the entire data set collected from the large scale-survey ran in early 2022.

## The Survey

The coach survey contained four sections:

- **Section 1 – About You:** this section included 16 questions related to the coaches' demographics, their personal sporting history, their educational background, their employment status and the nature of the environment they coach in.
- **Section 2 – You and Coaching:** this section contained 5 question concerning the coaches' motivations to coach, their likelihood of stopping coaching, the barriers to achieving their coaching goals, and the impact of coaching on their lives.
- **Section 3 – The Children You Coach:** this section asked 4 questions related to the demographics of the children coaches work with and their goals in sport.
- **Section 4 – How Can We Support You?:** the final section of the survey contained 2 questions on the priority areas for coaches' development and their preferred learning opportunities.

## The Sample

A total of 1,420 coaches responded to the survey. The vast majority of coaches worked in England (84.1%) with smaller representation from Scotland (7%), Wales (4.7%) and Northern Ireland (2.8%). All respondents were active coaches of children<sup>1</sup>.

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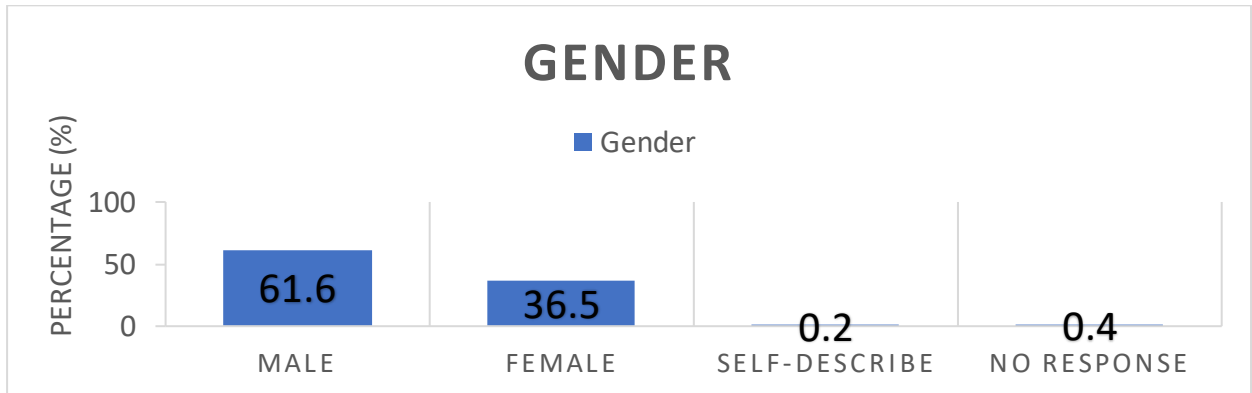
<sup>1</sup> 'Children' are defined as anyone aged 0-18, in line with UN definitions.

# The Findings

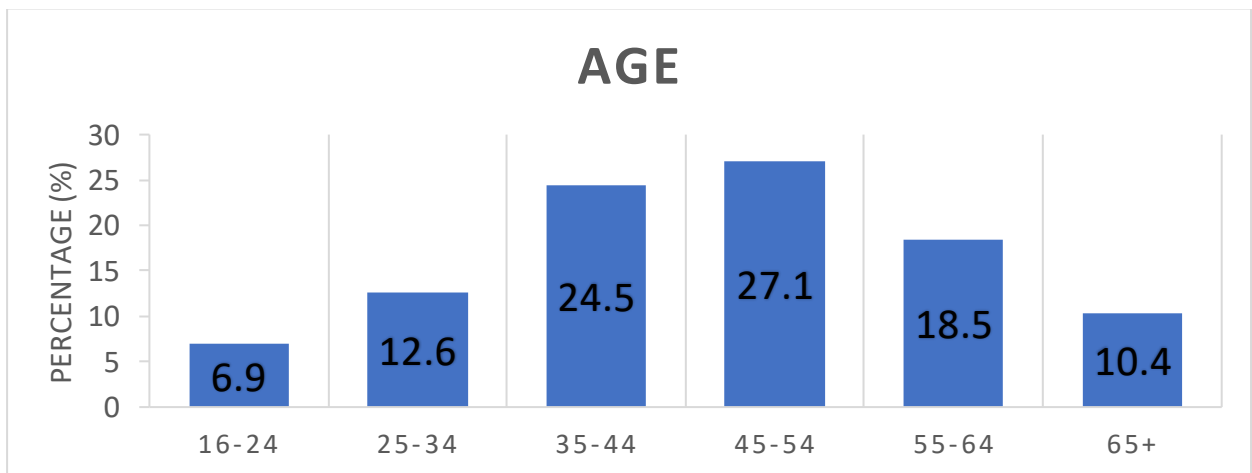
## Section 1 - About You

The first section of the survey asked the coaches about a range of demographic information, some of which can be seen below.

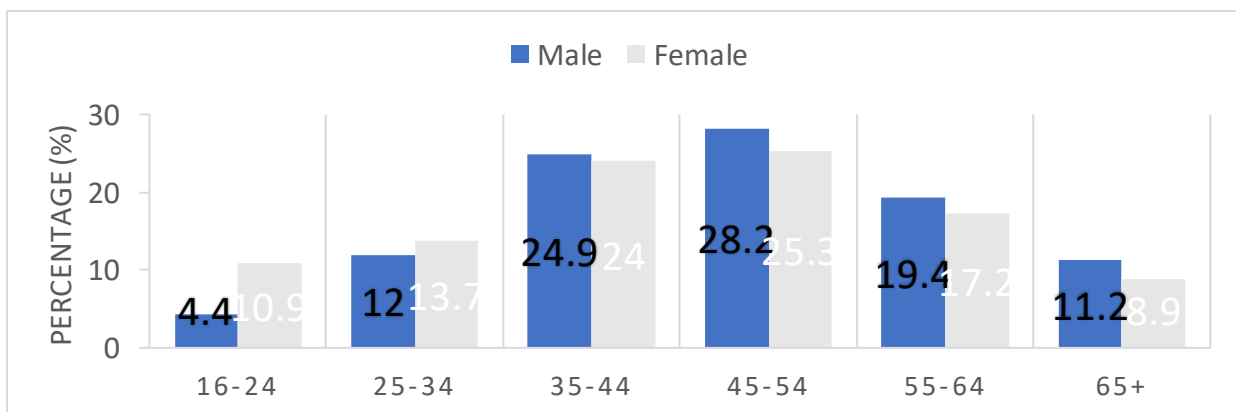
**Gender:** The majority of coaches identified as male (62%)



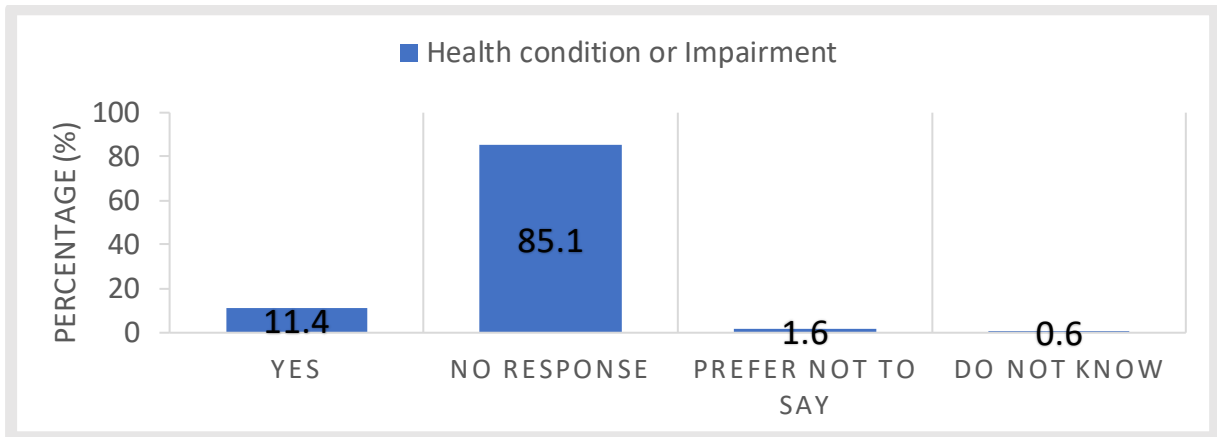
**Age:** The biggest number of coaches came from the 45-54 (27.1%) and 35-44 (24.5%) categories.



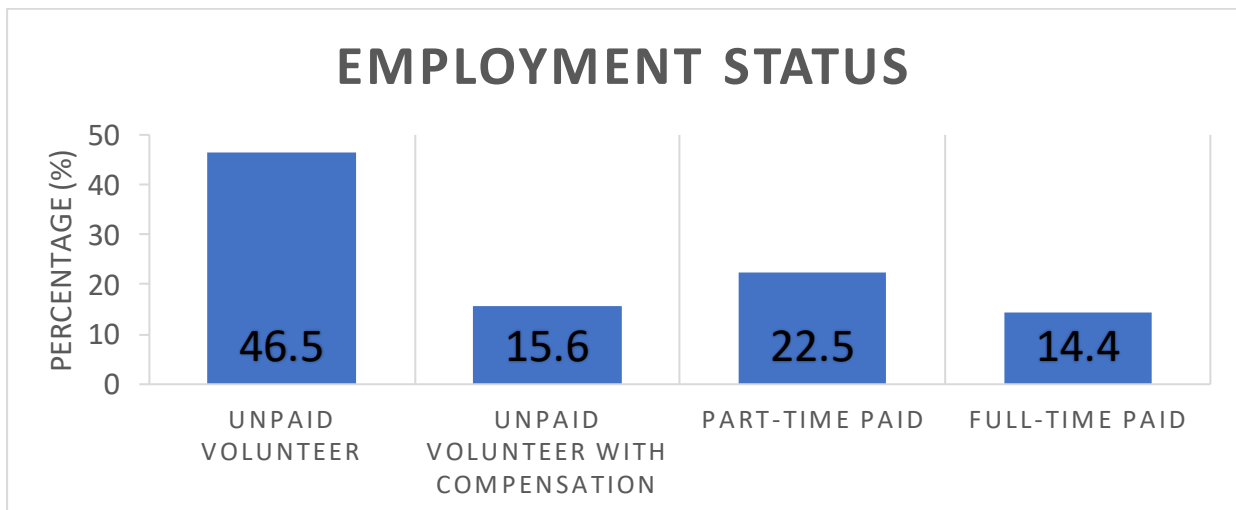
**Gender and Age:** Interestingly, female coaches are more heavily weighted at the younger end of the age spectrum. This could show that coaching is becoming more accessible for female coaches, as more young women are entering the workforce at a younger age.



**Disability:** A minority of coaches reported having a long-term health condition, impairment or illness (11.4%). However, given 1 in 10 coaches identify in this way, it is important that the coaching landscape takes this into account to ensure an accessibility of opportunity.



**Employment Status:** The majority of coaches (62.1%) were volunteers. From these, 15.6% received some sort of compensation or expenses, whereas 46.5% did not. By contrast, 36.9% of coaches were remunerated, 22.5% on a part-time basis, and 14.4% full time



## Section 2 - You and Coaching

This section asked coaches to discuss their motivations for coaching, any barriers they faced and whether they were at risk of dropping out of coaching.

### Motivations to coach:

The highest-rated motivations to coach were 'I want to help develop and grow my sport' (89,2%), 'I want to remain involved in my sport' (88,9%), and 'I want to do something for my community' (84.6%).

Interestingly, a significant amount of coaches (73.8%) indicated that the positive contribution to their mental wellbeing made by coaching was an important motivation to coach.

On the other hand, just under half of coaches (49.6%) said that 'My children or other family members play the sport and I want to support them' was a key motivating factor.

At the other end, only 11.1% of coaches rated 'I like competing and pitting myself against other coaches/teams' as extremely important.

Likewise, only 15.2% of coaches rated 'I want to progress through the ranks and become a professional coach' as extremely important.

MOTIVATIONS TO COACH	Not at all important	A little bit important	Quite important	Extremely important
My children or other family members play the sport and I want to support them	34.2	16.5	18.9	30.4
I want to progress through the ranks and become a professional coach	47.0	20.9	16.9	15.2
I want to do something for my community	2.0	13.5	39.5	45.1
I want to help develop and grow my sport	2.0	8.7	30.1	59.1
Coaching provides a top-up to my wages	68.1	13.3	10.6	8.1
I want to remain involved in my sport	2.6	8.5	33.9	55.0
I like competing and pitting myself against other coaches/teams	40.6	29.6	18.7	11.1
Coaching helps me develop new skills I can use outside sport	9.9	24.8	37.9	27.4
Coaching helps me stay in good physical shape	17.7	36.5	31.1	14.7

Coaching contributes to my mental wellbeing	6.1	20.1	40.1	33.6
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### *Coach Drop Out*

Worryingly, nearly 1 in 4 coaches (22.2%) feel that they are at risk of dropping out of coaching in the near future:

- The most important risk factor for dropout was ‘Lack of time to balance coaching with work/family/other hobbies’ (64.8%)
- In addition, 59.9% of coaches rated ‘a general lack of support from club/school/governing body/parents’ as an important risk factor associated with drop out
- Warranting further investigation, 46.1% of coaches rated ‘not feeling accepted or welcome by the existing culture in the club/school/community/governing body’ as an important risk factor associated with drop out
- Finally, and surprisingly, financial rewards were not generally seen as a risk to drop out, with 46.4% stating it was not a factor at all.

<b>RISK OF COACH DROPOUT</b>	Not at all important	A little bit important	Quite important	Extremely important
If my own children/family members stop participating	53.9	14.3	16.2	15.6
Lack of time to balance coaching with work/family/other hobbies	16.5	18.1	31.7	33.7
Not feeling capable to do the job well	29.9	25.6	31.5	13.0
Not feeling accepted or welcome by the existing culture in the club/school/community/governing body	34.4	19.5	25.6	20.5
A general lack of support from club/school/governing body/parents	22.8	17.3	34.2	25.7
Coaching is not financially rewarding/secure as a hobby or job	46.4	17.0	20.9	15.7
General stress generated by coaching	22.8	29.0	29.6	18.6

## Barriers

Despite the overwhelmingly positive feelings towards coaching, coaches identified the following barriers as most important in relation to their ability to reach their coaching goals

- Lack of time due to other commitments (work, family, etc.) (49.6%)
- Not enough coaches to help me deliver the sessions (44.2%)
- A broad mix of abilities, motivations or ages in my sessions (39.9%)
- A general lack of support from my club/school/community/governing body (38.4%)
- Community issues that impact on the children (for example, high unemployment, street crime, gang violence, low income, etc.) (38%)

BARRIERS	Not at all important	A little bit important	Quite important	Extremely important
My lack of knowledge of certain important coaching topics	29.7	37.0	24.9	8.4
Lack of coaching experience on my part	42.4	33.6	16.6	7.3
Not enough coaches to help me deliver the sessions	30.3	25.5	28.7	15.5
Not feeling accepted or welcome by the existing culture in the club/school/community/governing body	48.2	20.4	18.2	13.2
A broad mix of abilities, motivations or ages in my sessions	29.1	31.0	27.3	12.6
Disruptive children	39.8	35.1	17.2	7.9
Lack of material resources at my club/school/community	31.9	31.5	23.7	13.0
A general lack of support from my club/school/community/governing body	33.9	27.7	24.1	14.3
A mismatch between my goals and the goals of other stakeholders (club/school/community/participants)	38.3	30.4	21.9	9.4
Lack of time due to other commitments (work, family, etc)	21.5	28.9	34.7	14.9
Community issues that impact on the children (for example, high unemployment, street crime, gang violence, low income, etc)	33.7	28.3	23.1	14.9



### Section 3 - The Children You Coach

This section explored coaches' priorities and objectives for the children they coached. Collectively, these findings show a healthy appetite for child-first coaching. For example:

- 98% of coaches rated 'to develop a lifelong love for sport and physical activity' as a medium or high priority
- 97.1% of coaches rated 'To increase their mental wellbeing' as a medium or high priority
- 92.4% of coaches rated 'to ensure equal participation' as a medium or high priority
- 90.3% of coaches rated 'To allow them to express their views and opinions about what they like and dislike about sport and what they want to get from taking part' as a medium or high priority
- Conversely, 70.8% of coaches rated 'To win trophies/medals' as a **low or no priority**.

COACHING PRIORITIES	Not a priority	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority
To develop their sport-specific technical skills and tactical knowledge	1.1	7.5	42.0	49.4
To improve their physical wellbeing and levels of fitness	0.4	3.7	29.4	66.4
To help them progress towards elite performance levels	13.5	32.8	36.4	17.3
To win trophies/medals	27.0	43.8	24.4	4.8
To develop a lifelong love for sport and physical activity	0.2	1.8	17.5	80.5
To have fun	0.3	0.9	9.7	89.1
To ensure equal participation	1.4	6.2	25.6	66.8
To develop a healthy lifestyle	0.5	4.2	29.5	65.8
To develop as a person and pick up valuable life skills	0.6	2.5	21.2	75.8
To increase their mental wellbeing	0.3	2.5	25.6	71.5
To keep them away from "getting into trouble" in their community	9.8	24.6	31.1	34.4
To allow them to express their views and opinions about what they like and dislike about sport and what they want to get from taking part.	1.2	8.5	37.6	52.7

### Section 4 - How Can We Support You?

The final section explored coaches' development needs, to better understand how they can be supported. The coaches ranked the following areas for development as 'high priorities':

- Safeguarding and protection of children in sport (69.2%)
- How to make sport and physical activity fun (65.5%)
- Promoting personal growth of children through sport (64%)
- Building positive relationships with children and parents (59.9%)

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT/LEARNING	Not a priority	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority
The technical and tactical skills of my sport	4.3	16.9	39.7	39.1
Age-appropriate fitness development methods	4.0	12.0	40.7	43.3
Child development (physically and psychologically)	1.4	8.2	34.4	56.1
Best coaching strategies to maximise learning	2.0	6.1	35.5	56.5
How to make sport and physical activity fun	1.7	7.5	25.4	65.5
Building positive relationships with children and parents	2.2	6.6	31.2	59.9
How to prevent children dropping out of sport	1.8	8.7	32.4	57.1
How best to create supportive environments for all girls	4.4	11.0	31.2	53.4
Increasing children's motivation	2.1	6.3	32.2	59.4
Creating inclusive environments and sessions for participants of all abilities/disabilities	3.4	8.7	30.3	57.6
Safeguarding and protection of children in sport	2.3	9.4	19.1	69.2
Promoting personal growth of children through sport	0.6	6.1	29.2	64.0
Talent Identification and Development Methods	7.7	26.8	41.3	24.2
Planning seasons and sessions	5.4	16.3	40.9	37.4
Developing your club (structure, finances, promotion, etc)	9.0	21.3	37.1	32.5

Finally, coaches were asked how they would like to be supported. The most popular answer was face-to-face conferences or workshops, although on the job mentoring and self-paced online courses were also popular avenues of support. Importantly, these findings show that there is not a single one-size-fits-all approach to development, and that coaches may need support in a range of different ways

<b>PREFERRED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES</b>	Do not prefer	Prefer slightly	Prefer a lot	Prefer a great deal
Face to Face conferences/workshops	8.4	22.1	36.3	33.3
Online conferences/workshops	13.2	36.7	34.5	15.6
Printed content/materials	11.7	34.7	34.9	18.6
Web/App-based content/materials	11.8	33.5	36.0	18.7
Online courses led by a tutor	13.0	36.4	33.7	16.9
Self-Paced online courses	11.6	29.8	35.3	23.3
On-the-job mentoring	10.5	28.3	34.8	26.5
Coaching discussion groups	10.2	33.4	35.4	21.0

## Comparative Data

Importantly, the results showed some significant differences between segments of the coaching population. This section will explore some of these differences.

### *Male vs Female Comparison*

The analysis indicates that men and women coaches show differences in the factors which motivate them to coach. Men were much more likely to be influenced by the following reasons:

- My children or other family members play the sport and I want to support them
- I like competing and pitting myself against other coaches/teams
- Coaching helps me develop new skills I can use outside sport

Women were more likely to be motivated by the following factors:

- I want to progress through the ranks and become a professional coach
- Coaching provides a top-up to my wages

Employment status was also found to be different for male and female coaches.

- Male and female coaches are equally distributed in full-time and volunteer with expenses positions.
- Female coaches are more frequent in part-time positions (57.1% vs 42.9%)
- Male coaches more prominent as volunteers without expenses (53.5% vs 36.8%).

Moreover, men and women had different reasons for potentially dropping out of coaching.

- Men were more likely to drop out 'if my own children or family members stop participating'
- Women were more likely to drop out due to a 'lack of time to balance coaching with work/family/other hobbies'

In terms of sports coaches, within our sample:

- Sports like Rugby League (95.7%), Rugby Union (91.5%), Cricket (88.9%), and Football (88.2%) were predominantly coached by male coaches.
- Conversely, Netball (100%), Equestrian (94.7%), Gymnastics (86.0%), and Swimming (65.2%) were coached primarily by female coaches.
- The proportion of male coaches working with female only groups was much higher (32.0%) than the proportion of female coaches working with male only groups (4.6%).

### *Employment Status*

The employment status of appeared to be influenced by a number of factors:

- Although 75% of community and grassroots coaches are volunteers, this context is where most paid opportunities are with 35.8% of all full-time paid coaches, and 46.3% of part-time paid coaches working in community and grassroots sport.
- The vast majority of coaches with no qualifications or Level 1 worked as volunteers (approx. 85%). Holding a Level 2 appeared to be the threshold to enter the paid labour market with 27.5% of full-time and 46.1% of part-time coaches holding this qualification.

The development preferences and coaching goals of coaches were also influenced by their employment status:

- Full time paid coaches rated “How to make sport fun” and “How best to create supportive environments for all girls” lower than all other coaches.
- Unpaid volunteers rated “To develop their sport-specific technical skills and tactical knowledge” and “To help them progress towards elite levels of performance” lower than other coaches
- Full-time paid coaches rated “To win trophies/medals” and “To increase their mental wellbeing” significantly higher than volunteers

In addition, the perceived barriers to achieving their coaching goals also differed based on employment status:

- Unpaid volunteers rated “Not enough coaches to help me deliver the sessions” higher than all other coaches.
- Conversely, full time paid coaches rated “A general lack of support from my club/school/community/governing body” significantly higher than other coaches.

#### *At Risk of Drop Out vs Not at Risk of Drop Out*

The data shows that 1 in 4 coaches (22%) are at risk of drop out. There are significant differences in these coaches’ motivating factors and barriers, compared to those who are not at risk of drop out.

Coaches who were NOT at risk of dropout were more likely to report that the following factors motivated their decision to coach:

- I want to progress through the ranks and become a professional coach
- I want to do something for my community
- I want to help develop and grow my sport
- I want to remain involved in my sport
- Coaching helps me develop new skills I can use outside sport
- Coaching helps me stay in good physical shape
- Coaching contributes to my mental wellbeing

Conversely, coaches AT risk of drop out rated the following barriers to achieving their coaching goals higher:

- Not enough coaches to help me deliver the sessions
- Not feeling accepted or welcome by the existing culture in the club/school/community/governing body
- Disruptive children
- Lack of material resources at my club/school/community
- A general lack of support from my club/school/community/governing body
- A mismatch between my goals and the goals of other stakeholders (club/school/community/participants)
- Lack of time due to other commitments (work, family, etc)

Notably, the relative importance of dropout factors was also influenced by coaches’ employment status:

- Unpaid volunteers without expenses rated “If my own children/family members stop participating” and “Not feeling capable to do the job well” higher than all other coaches

- Conversely, full time paid coaches rated “Not feeling accepted or welcome”, “A general lack of support”, “Coaching is not financially rewarding”, and “General stress generated by coaching” higher than all other coaches

## Conclusions

In summary, the findings offer an overview of the current coaching workforce as predominantly volunteer, male, white, middle aged, and able-bodied. Notwithstanding this, a growth in part and full-time positions is welcome as is the increasing proportion of female coaches in the younger age-groups.

The study also shows the highly altruistic motivations of children's coaches linked to the development of their communities and sports, as well as a strong disposition towards child-centric objectives. However, coaches clearly identified the main barriers to achieving their goals generally related to lack of time, support and resource. Worryingly, for nearly a quarter of coaches, these barriers put them at risk of dropping out of coaching.

With regards to their developmental needs, coaches highlighted safeguarding, making sport fun, promoting personal growth, and relationship-building as most important. Face-to-face conferences and workshops, on-the-job mentoring and self-paced online courses emerged as the preferred choices to help coaches plug their knowledge and practice gaps.

Importantly, the findings confirm the heterogeneity of the coaching workforce, its shifting and dynamic nature, and the need to avoid considering them as a single group. Key demographic and professional factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, employment status, coaching context, coaching qualifications, coach age, coaching experience, sport, number of hours per week, and level of participation as an athlete, all impact on coaches' reasons to coach, potential to stop coaching, coaching objectives, barrier to achieving coaching goals, development priorities, and preferred learning options.

In closing, this diversity calls for lead coaching organisations and national governing bodies of sport to, whilst trying to find affordable, manageable, and broad "catch as many as possible" solutions, to also develop opportunities specific to certain populations of coaches. Further research to allow each organisation and NGB to enhance their understanding of the needs and wants of their coaching population is highly encouraged.