Welcome

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the second edition of the Applied Coaching Research Journal, Transforming Lives Through Coaching. The first edition was successfully launched by our patron, HRH Princess Anne at the UK Coaching Research Conference in Manchester in February 2018.

The journal is aimed at anyone interested in coaching research; coaches and coach developers, policy makers and system managers, students and academics. It attempts to provide ideas, inspiration, advice and solutions, with the intention that it will promote the best of coaching research and transfer knowledge to practitioners.

The articles in this edition have sound research methodologies and evidence with storytelling techniques. We are sure that you’ll find them aspirational and in some cases suggest solutions and a call to action.

Our aim as an editorial team is to build on the successes of the first edition by ensuring that this edition has variety and maintains the high quality of submissions to keep you informed, stimulated and engaged. Furthermore, the intention is to raise awareness and provoke thought and discussion around potential future research questions and topics. We hope that the journal will be used to either develop or substantiate good practice, or build on and improve existing coach education and development endeavours.

If you would like to help shape the future of coaching, please join us at our next research conference on 19 February 2019, at Pride Park Stadium, home of Derby County FC. Our focus at the conference will be on coach experience and well-being, as well as innovation and learning. Further details can be found at the end of this journal. We hope to see you there!

If you have any feedback about this journal, please contact the research team at researchteam@ukcoaching.org, or for further information about UK Coaching, please check out our new website: www.ukcoaching.org

On behalf of the editorial team,

Dr Wayne Allison,
League Managers Association and UK Coaching Board Member
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Beth is Head of Insight and Learning at UK Coaching and has 20 years of research experience in client and agency roles. She joined UK Coaching in July 2016 and is responsible for managing the Research team, as well as a newly established Learning and Development team. She previously worked in government social research for NHS England and the Department for Work and Pensions. Prior to this, Beth worked in the private sector as a Management Consultant, conducting research studies for a range of public and private sector organisations. She also worked as a Research Fellow and Lecturer at the Applied Criminology and Policing Centre at the University of Huddersfield. Outside of UK Coaching, Beth is a dance teacher and group exercise instructor.

**Dr Wayne Allison**  
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Wayne is currently the Technical Director of the League Managers Association. He previously worked as the Coach Inclusion and Diversity Manager at the FA and prior to that as the organisation’s Coaching Research Manager, responsible for providing the underpinning knowledge of research to inform policy to support and enhance coach education and development. Wayne is a former professional footballer who holds the full range of UEFA coaching qualifications, including the UEFA Pro Licence, and has also been on the coaching staff at several professional clubs. Wayne has a PhD in Sport Exercise Science and Coaching and is co-author of Advances in Coach Education and Development: From research to practice. Wayne joined the UK Coaching Board as a Non-Executive Director in November 2017.
Louisa Arnold  
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Louisa is the Coaching Lead for Kent Sport, a county sports partnership (CSP) in the South East. Prior to starting the role in 2010 she worked in a variety of sports development environments including school sport and local authorities, developing coaching and participation initiatives. As the Regional Lead for a female coaching project (Project 500: More Women, Better Coaching), Louisa has seen how research can not only demonstrate impact but also inform future work and support funding applications. In both roles as a sports development professional and a volunteer netball coach, Louisa finds research most valuable when it is clear, concise and practical.

Paul Greaves  
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Paul is Lecturer of Sport at Sheffield Hallam University and has 18 years of industry experience within both education and national governing bodies. By the age of 24 Paul had established and developed one of the leading performance trampoline clubs in Great Britain, which also provided extensive grass-roots recreational activity in Yorkshire and Derbyshire. Paul has coached some of the UK’s top trampoline gymnasts including the current Olympic silver medallist, Bryony Page. In addition to this, Paul has also worked with Olympic freestyle skiers James Machon and Ellie Koyander, providing acrobatic technical support. His passion now lies within coach education, training and development.

Professor Ben Oakley  
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Ben is a Professor at The Open University where he established their online and distance learning sport and coaching programmes in 2007. His role is primarily as an academic writer and creator of online films, audio and study material that explains sport, coaching, practice and theory in ways which engage diverse audiences. He has edited and written a number of books, articles and free online material. Before working in higher education he was Olympic coach for the then new sport of windsurfing, employed by the national governing body to develop athletes, coaches and club competition.
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Ann-Marie is a Research Officer within the Insight and Learning team at UK Coaching. Her main interest is within qualitative research. Ann-Marie is also a Registered Nutritionist.

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Chris is a Project Manager at UK Coaching. He oversees the design, delivery and evaluation of various projects and has played an active role supporting the development of this journal. He has a BA (Hons) in Sport and an MSc in Sport and Exercise Psychology, and has experience of working within higher education in both lecturing and practitioner, based roles.
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Graham is the National Elite Coaching Manager for Gymnastics Australia. His experience includes research and design of a National Strategy for Talent Development; and the design, delivery and evaluation of coach education. He is a founder member and director of the UK Strength and Conditioning Association Inaugural Board.

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Lisa is the Research Manager at UK Coaching. She joined UK Coaching in January 2018 and has 10 years of experience undertaking qualitative and quantitative research within sport.

Jake Wright
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Through his role as Communications and Press Officer, Jake helps to raise the profile of coaching and coaches in the UK through interviews; disseminated as (digital and print) articles, podcasts and videos. He is also part of the wider team that continues to grow our online presence, contributing to the organisation’s aim of become the UK’s leading authority on coaching.

Dr Alex Twitchen
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Alex is a Senior Lecturer in Sport Coaching Practice and Learning at the Open University. He has over 25 years of experience as a football coach, coach developer, teacher and lecturer working with players, coaches and students in many different contexts.
Here’s to New Perspectives

Welcome to the second edition of the Applied Coaching Research Journal. We are delighted to share another collection of peer reviewed articles from a range of organisations and institutions.

This edition explores coach learning from a variety of different perspectives, and considers how online and face-to-face interventions can influence a coach’s development in both the short and long term.

A key challenge for those involved in the development of coaches is providing appropriate and engaging opportunities that encourage individuals to invest time, energy and often their own money into ongoing professional development. In many cases the first experience of learning is through formal education, which qualifies a coach to deliver “safely” a particular sport or activity. How effective are these courses at “fostering a culture of self improvement”? The Coaching Plan for England suggests that many coaches, particularly those from under represented groups, struggle to engage in ongoing learning. There is also evidence to suggest that coaches obtain qualifications to meet minimum deployment standards and then stop engaging in learning opportunities.

Consistent with the ambition set out in the Coaching Plan for England, that coach education should
embrace technology and foster an improvement culture, Prof Ben Oakley and Dr Alex Twitchen from the Open University review a free online distance learning course, Exploring Sports Coaching and Psychology.

StreetGames aims to make sport more widely available for disadvantaged young people and to maximise the power of sport to change young lives and change disadvantaged communities. Rus Smith and Dr Kath Leflay share their findings of an evaluation of StreetGames’ Coach-Mate Connector programme in the West Midlands, which attempted to support people from underrepresented groups to get involved in coaching.

Pete Vallance talks to Pete Sturgess, The FA’s National Lead Coach for 5–11 year olds, to understand his personal journey. It demonstrates how mentoring and experiential learning influenced his development as an elite coach and his contribution to creative coaching.

In line with the interdisciplinary nature of coach development, Dr Adam Kelly, Craig Williams and Mark Wilson, from Birmingham City University and the University of Exeter, discuss the use of a unique approach to talent identification using a locking wheel nut analogy. The article suggests that this model could be used by coaches to develop a greater understanding of the talent identification process and to work with players to develop their individual strengths and weaknesses.

On behalf of the editorial team I do hope you will enjoy this second edition and in closing I would like to remind you to register your interest on the UK Coaching website for the second Applied Coaching Research Conference taking place in 2019.

To see what we got up to last year, please have a look at the video below.

Louisa Arnold, Kent Sport
Evaluation of the Coach Mate Connectors Programme

Rus Smith and Dr Kath Leflay
Street Games and University of Wolverhampton.

Abstract
This article presents the key findings from the evaluation of the Coach Mate Connectors Programme, developed by Street Games in the West Midlands. The programme was developed to improve access to coach development opportunities, particularly for under-represented groups. This research has particular relevance for the implementation of the UK wide Future of Coaching Strategy (2016-2025) and the Coaching Plan for England, which highlighted the need to diversify the coaching workforce. An independent evaluation was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the programme. Several key strengths to the programme were identified. Of particular benefit to those coaches involved in the programme were: one to one mentoring; 'little and often' interventions; an inclusive approach to coach development and coach developing+, which incorporated wider support and career advice.

Background
Volunteers and coaches play an important role in providing sporting opportunities within the community and tackling inactivity, an aim at the heart of the UK wide Future of Coaching Strategy (2016-2025). Good coaching not only provides physical and mental benefits for the people that participate, it also benefits individual coaches in terms of personal development and well-being. In addition, research has suggested that effective coaching impacts positively on social, community and economic development. With the many benefits of coaching in mind, there is a desire to transform how good coaches are identified and how they are supported in order to grow and strengthen the coaching workforce.

The ambition to devise creative models to attract and engage a more diverse audience in coaching opportunities presents a challenge for providers of coach education and coach development. Diversifying the coaching workforce was identified as an important factor to ensure that people from all communities can participate: “to be coached by people who are empathetic to their needs and reflective of their social environment.” This is an approach that has often been referred to as ‘people like me’. Organisations were asked to consider a number of potential barriers when planning for coach education and development, such as: cost; lack of mentoring and opportunities for continual professional development; the format of assessments; and perceptions of the value of one off training opportunities. Tackling these barriers is essential if the vision for a more inclusive coaching workforce is to be realised.
Another key area of work identified in the Coaching Plan for England was improving the standard of coaching. In this area two strategic approaches were suggested:

1) To foster an improvement culture
2) To transfer learning into practice

The Coaching Plan for England emphasised the need for long term coach development models that include formal training opportunities alongside mentoring support, the establishment of communities of practice to encourage peer support, and digital learning and development.

Plans to change the way that coaches are assessed were also mooted, with a suggested shift towards direct assessment in a delivery context, rather than assessment with peers on a training course.

The Coach Mate Connectors Programme

The Coach Mate Connectors Programme was developed by Street Games to test new ways of engaging volunteers and coaches in long term developmental opportunities. The programme was delivered in areas with high levels of social deprivation and aimed to attract a more diverse coaching and volunteer workforce. Coach Mate Connectors was targeted primarily at young volunteers and coaches aged 16-25 who were at various stages of their coaching journey. They were grouped as follows: 'newbie', 'done a little and on the ladder', 'working towards or doing a qualification', and 'the ongoing journey'. This was important, as the Coach Mate Connectors Programme recognised that the developmental requirements are likely to vary across different stages of the coaching journey.

The 'connectors' in the project were locally trusted coach developers, who worked in the West Midlands network. Each connector worked with a cluster of individuals that were based locally to them with the aim of forging a positive working relationship and providing support at each stage of the coaching journey.

In order to tackle the common barriers that were identified in the Coaching Plan for England, the support offered through the programme was local to the volunteers and the coaches, and it incorporated formal and informal learning with self-reflection, as well as digital support to develop ongoing formative learning. The programme was developed and piloted in the West Midlands during 2016-2017.

This article presents the key findings from the evaluation of the programme, particularly focusing on the elements of the programme that participants highlighted as impactful, in terms of their development as a coach. These findings could be of interest to organisations with responsibility for coach development.

Aims of the Coach Mate Connectors Programme

The key aims of the programme were:

- To develop an inclusive and long term model of coach development that provides a positive coaching experience for young coaches and volunteers in areas of deprivation.
- To break down barriers to accessing qualifications through offering local training and support.
- To use one-to-one mentoring to help coaches build reflection and resilience.
- To utilise digital support individually and in clusters.
- To enhance the capability of the professional coaching workforce.

Evaluation

The Coach Mate Connectors Programme was independently evaluated by the University of Wolverhampton. Thirty coaches involved in the scheme in the Midlands area were contacted via email or over the phone. Of those, fourteen agreed to be interviewed for the research (male n= 8, female n= 6, white n=8, BAME n= 6 and disability n=2). Semi-structured interviews were used to collect rich qualitative data from the coaches about their experiences and the support they have received from the programme. All of the coaches had engaged in the programme during a six-to-twelve month period in 2016-17.

Results

Getting started

Coaches reported that local opportunities were important, particularly when getting started. Locating training and support in areas and venues that the coaches were familiar with, and that they could access easily, removed a barrier to their involvement. Coaches referred to their locality as being "safe", accessible, familiar, and within their comfort zone. For many of the coaches involved,
taking the first step was daunting and the first point of contact was significant in keeping them on board. Some coaches reported that they had felt excluded from educational opportunities previously, which made them more reluctant to engage in any form of training. A warm welcome, that was relaxed, informal and personal, was seen as important in breaking down this barrier.

**Little and often support**

Little and often support involved smaller elements of support over a longer period of time. It combined formal learning, such as qualifications, with mentoring and work-based in situ support, digital communication, a platform for peer sharing practice, and access to digital and shared resources. This support was offered weekly, with the option of daily interaction if any specific needs were identified. The average duration of the programme was three to six months, from start to finish.

**Meet the coaches - Karen**

Karen, aged 37 comes from a Traveller family background and already had interest in health and belly-dancing when she became involved with the programme. A lack of confidence and juggling child care had previously hampered her plans to be a coach. The programme ‘opened the door’ for her to access opportunities at her own pace and in a flexible way. She is now a coach and involved with leading well-being activities in Wolverhampton.

> “The delivery was absolutely great. The deliverer was very humble, very confident, very respectful, very motivated indeed, and helped us with any queries, any problems, anything we wanted to know.” (Karen, aged 37)

A number of coaches discussed the benefits of the ‘little and often’ approach to the programme. They reported that it allowed progression to occur over a longer period of time and ensured that coaches didn’t feel ‘thrown in at the deep end’. This was particularly important for ‘newbies’ who felt that the little and often support gave them the confidence to continue to the next stage of their journey. All of the coaches interviewed reported that one-to-one support had improved their confidence. Although this programme might take slightly longer than a conventional coach education course, there was consensus amongst those involved that it built confidence and a more solid foundation on which to develop further.

> “It might take a bit longer but you get much more out of it from the support.” (Leanne, aged 21)

> “I’m totally confident. When you’re ready, they give you the confidence boost.” (Karen, aged 37)

Little and often support was also important to more experienced coaches who benefited from support ‘on the job’ and the transition to other roles, such as mentoring and course delivery. The support was complemented by regular connection through digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, Skype and Facebook Live. This allowed connection with their peers and mentors in a community of practice type environment.

> “It helped me develop confidence and helped me develop in terms of how I process information with the session going on.” (Leroy, aged 27)

During the evaluation, it was important to consider how the coaches compared the support they had received through the programme, to other programmes with little or no follow up support. Coaches that had previously attended other coaching courses highlighted a number of disadvantages with traditional ‘block delivery’ courses. They felt that those courses did not provide much opportunity to apply their learning, particularly if the qualification was in a new sport for them. In addition, once the course was over, they felt cut off from any ongoing or future support.

> “With a qualification (block delivery) because I knew nothing other than what I learnt on that course…. once you’ve finished the qualification they sort of wipe their hands of you.” (Ryan, aged 20)

> “I did a Level 2 qualification and I was there for three weekends. Since I’ve finished the course I’ve not heard from them. I haven’t really done much with it. As soon as I was qualified I didn’t even know like where to begin, whereas with this programme I was straight into employment.” (Lucas, aged 20)

In comparison, another coach discussed how she was able to draw together knowledge she had gained from formal course delivery, with the feedback she had received from her mentor in a range of coaching contexts.
“I think it makes more sense, so instead of doing it on a course and not knowing how to relate it back to different sessions, with the two courses mixed together I’ve been able to make more sense of it. Instead of turning up with the knowledge from the course and thinking ‘what am I supposed to do with this?’ It’s confidence and experience.” (Leanne, aged 21)

One-to-one support and mentoring
The one-to-one support and mentoring was seen as instrumental to the programme’s success. Feedback from their mentor allowed coaches to focus on their specific areas of need, and at a time to suit them. This feedback was often delivered in their place of coaching or work.

Meet the coaches – Leanne
Leanne, 21 from Smethwick found it hard to gain full time employment in the sport sector after completing her degree. She delivered in three roles within disability coaching, schools and social care work. After the programme, Leanne developed her coaching and by linking qualifications and her prior experience, she was successfully appointed to a full time role with Dudley Inclusive CIC as a deliverer for disability sport and respite activities for adults.

Building up rapport and trust with a Coach Developer/Mentor was important in the mentoring relationship and made the coaches feel they could ask for help.

“On a one-to-one basis you can say and focus on what I kind of need help on.” (Mark, aged 20)

“The support I’ve received is fabulous, just fabulous. It’s improved my teaching as a whole and it isn’t boring.” (Jason, aged 19)

“If there’s a course with loads of people, I wouldn’t be one to kind of ask my question so it’s nice to have a relationship with someone you kind of feel comfortable asking those questions to.” (Leanne, aged 21)

Another perceived benefit of the programme was the chance to be observed, supported and assessed in context. Being supported and assessed while delivering to peers was regarded as inauthentic and unrealistic. Working with a mentor or assessor in context allowed the coaches to relate theory to practice and to ‘make more sense of it’. It also allowed them to have support with other aspects of their role, such as behaviour management, which would not occur in a controlled environment.
"With the assessments, he's made it so he came here and it was much more to do with what you're doing and your session. Instead of just doing it on a course then not knowing how to relate it back to different sessions, the two are mixed together and I've been able to make more sense of it. It makes a massive difference because on some of the courses it's not realistic, everyone kind of behaves well."

(Leanne, aged 21)

'With the traditional courses it was very much skills focused, but then you would just be in a controlled environment...it wasn't authentic. Whereas with this programme, what they've done is do them in our place.” (Leroy, aged 27)

Inclusive coach education
Coach education has specific parameters or guidelines to address individual needs. However, sometimes individual needs are not disclosed, or are only identified part-way through a programme of delivery. It is only through building relationships with individuals, that any barriers to learning can be identified and suitablely addressed.

Meet the coaches – Michael
Michael, aged 19, is currently at college studying sport leadership and he has just passed Level 2 of a multi sports coaching qualification. Michael has learning difficulties and all his life has needed additional support for literacy and understanding. Little and often input over time has allowed him to build confidence and find his style. Michael was allowed to utilise technology with an app to dictate and evidence knowledge. The use of technology and an awareness of his specific learning needs allowed Michael to demonstrate knowledge in an alternative way, aiding his development and removing barriers. Michael has since been offered work in a school as a coach, as well as going to Uganda on an exchange programme.

Two of the coaches in the sample had a disability, and for them the support they received had been particularly beneficial. Both of those individuals reported that the programme had taken their specific needs into account and had ensured that they could access the same opportunities as everyone else. The one-to-one support had allowed them to identify their developmental requirements and work towards overcoming the specific barriers that they faced.
One coach had learning difficulties that meant he found it difficult to read and write. In order to ensure that the environment catered for his specific needs, his mentor ensured that formal delivery and any follow up resources were more visual. This allowed him to participate fully in the training and practice confidently as a coach.

“I’ve got some learning difficulties so my biggest challenge is when things are written down. When I first met them I told them that I struggle with reading and spelling. A lot of the support I’ve had is less writing and more visual stuff. Being with this programme is absolutely brilliant. I want to become a coach even more now.” (Michael, aged 19)

Another coach first became involved with the programme after volunteering at a sports session for participants with intellectual disabilities. He knew that he wanted to work in sport but was unsure of how to progress as a coach, particularly as a full-time wheelchair user. He was aware that “there are a lot less disability coaches” than able-bodied coaches, but whilst involved in this programme he was able to start accessing training opportunities and support. He is currently working towards a HND in Sport Coaching and Development in order to develop his skills further.

“I originally started volunteering for about two and a half years and then I was put in touch with Street Games and went on a dodgeball activators course. That was about a year and a half ago now and then they put me on the multi-skills Level 2. The programme has given me confidence to say ‘look, I have a disability but I’ve still got the coaching knowledge’. It’s been fantastic as it has given me the same opportunities to develop a coaching badge and to get involved in sport.” (Sukhvir, aged 19)

**Coach Developing+**

In conventional coach education settings, there is limited opportunity for the coach to access support in other areas of need that might sit outside the remit of the training. Coach Developing+ (plus) aims to combine coach specific training with wider social factors to aide ‘life after’ learning, and support longer term relationships between coaches and mentors.

**Meet the coaches - Donovan**

Donovan, aged 42, is a dad, originally from Jamaica, who came to the UK to start a better life for his son. He has received support to help him start a football team and for good projects in West Bromwich. Donovan is passionate about making a difference in his community and has benefited from the support offered by the programme. In his words: “they help us help people. They support us and this community.” He aims to keep promoting positive development and education through coaching. Donovan is hoping to offer the Level 2 multi-skills training to his under-16s football team and outreach work to ensure the sustainability of the club.

Consistent with the aim of providing ongoing and progressive coach development, having continuous contact with the programme enabled the coaches to learn about other opportunities that were available to them.

“If they hadn’t opened the door for us I wouldn’t have the broad imagination that I’ve got now. This is just amazing. There are so many opportunities after that my head gets clouded. The amount of emails, numbers, connections and links. It’s just so overwhelming.” (Karen, aged 37)

For Karen, the connections afforded by the programme were important, and although seeing the vast amount of opportunities available appeared overwhelming at first it further fuelled her enthusiasm for coaching. There was a clear sentiment that the coaches felt valued and that their mentor believed in them. This in turn boosted their confidence particularly with regard to getting out of their comfort zone and taking on new opportunities.

“I remember when he told me ‘Karen you’re going there to help teach at the fitness academy. I know you can do it.’ When I was in the waiting room I had to take a deep breath and even though the boss was there I thought, ‘remember what he said’. ‘Karen, you can do it.’ I’m shy and a bit of a hermit lady, but even when you feel your cheeks go red you’ve still got to take that breath and think ‘I can do it’.‘” (Karen, aged 37)

“Recently he’s pointed me in the direction of different work like a couple of sessions of handball at a secondary school near me.” (Leanne, aged 21)
It was also clear that other areas of support were required in order to allow volunteers and coaches to further progress. Financial support, in particular, was seen as a major benefit of the programme. Those coaches who wanted to set up a club did not know where and how to access funding opportunities. One coach explained the importance of the support he’d received from the programme and the impact it had on the community.

“They created links and gave us the opportunity to educate through sport, helping us with funding and stuff like that. We have an initiative that we try to tackle where kids go hungry during summer.” (Donovan, aged 42)

Mentors were also used by the coaches for careers advice and help with applications and interviews. From the perspective of a long term development approach, this level of support was essential in allowing coaches to progress to the ‘life after’ the programme.

One coach had decided to take a change in career direction and had sought support from his mentor. Although his training and initial support was around sport-based sessions with young people, he had developed transferrable skills that allowed him to pursue a career in the fitness sector, working with older adults.

“I’m actually still teaching but instead of teaching kids I’m teaching old people, delivering fitness sessions. I’ve learnt transferrable skills and it’s helped me fit in with my new job role.” (Lucas, aged 20).

As well as developing coaching specific competencies, the one-to-one support was also cited as being important in learning how to present yourself correctly in order to create a positive impression to potential employers. One coach discussed the advice she had been given by her mentor:

‘If the time you are supposed to be there is seven, then he would say that you need to be there at six. He showed me how to present myself correctly so the company respects you. I’m absolutely glad I’ve done this and I just want to go on.” (Karen, aged 37)

Conclusion
The Coach Mate Connectors Programme made it easy for people from a wide range of backgrounds to become involved in coaching. The hands-on and personalised approach at a local level helped to break down some of the barriers associated with traditional coach education. Factors such as varied usage of technology, communication groups and initial one-to-one support sessions,
were highlighted as important hooks in getting individuals involved in the first instance. The provision of training opportunities that were local, accessible and familiar, were deemed essential.

The programme emphasised the importance of ongoing improvement and recognised that gaining a qualification was the start rather than the end point of an individual’s coach education journey. A learning culture was created where coaches were not only supported through a qualification but where they were also supported in accessing opportunities to put their skills into practice, to build confidence and to develop networks in the process.

The additional support the coaches received in terms of accessing opportunities helped them to make clear connections between the training they received and potential career pathways. Although there may be opportunities to be assessed and supported on a course that follows a traditional delivery pattern, these opportunities may be relatively limited and may not reflect the environment an individual works in.

Being supported and assessed in their workplace allowed coaches to tailor their skills to a particular environment and to their client group. Ongoing mentoring throughout the coaching journey played a central role in the success of the pilot programme. This has shaped how Street Games now run the Level 2 Doorstep programme, where every learner has a combination of coach education, coach development and mentoring in their context.

The personal and familiar approach of being able to ask for advice, being observed, being encouraged, and being pushed at the right time, allowed individuals to reach their potential at their own pace. The development of a sustained working relationship with a mentor was also important for the development of the coaches, particularly those who had specific needs. Overall the pilot programme offered an accessible, flexible and long term approach to coach development, which in turn helped produce competent, confident and appropriately skilled coaches. They felt supported and were able to set clear career goals.

Learning from challenges
Whilst the benefits of the programme have been outlined in this paper, the programme did face some challenges that will need to addressed to support future developments. A key challenge faced by the programme was the change of circumstance of some individuals (due to relocation or new employment, for example), which impacted on their time and availability. This could be resolved by widening the programme to other areas, and signposting those individuals to other coach mate connectors.

References


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Reflections on a Conversation with a National Coach: The Learning Path from Novice to Expert

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Abstract
This article explores how a national coach engaged effectively with their professional development and implemented learning opportunities into a coaching context. It evaluates the effects of formal, informal and experiential learning on their progression from novice to national coach and their contribution to creative approaches to coaching. The learning journey of Pete Sturgess, The Football Association’s (FA) National Lead Coach for The FA Foundation Phase (children from 5–11 years), is used as a case study and reviewed in relation to applicable coach development research. As well as a recognised expert in The FA’s Foundation Phase, Pete is a renowned England and FIFA Futsal Instructor, a Coach Educator and has been heavily involved in developing the England DNA resources (which outline the playing and coaching philosophy of England football teams).

Introduction
“I still remember his name now - Nathan. He was in my son’s U11s grassroots team and I was doing some work, coaching them. He turned around to me one night and said 'Pete, this is boring!' And I just thought - you know what, you’re right.”

There are many learning opportunities in the pathway to becoming an expert coach. But can we always identify them? Or do we value some forms of learning more than others? I, and others, subscribe to the view that learning isn’t linear. It is diverse, messy and often unexpected. Yet many of our formal coaching courses are based on progressing sequentially from the lowest qualification to the highest. In a quest to explore the effects of different types of learning on a development pathway, I interviewed, in 2016,
one of The FA’s leading national coaches, Pete Sturgess, renowned for his work in what The FA terms the Foundation Phase (children from 5–11 years).

The social nature of learning means that we often develop through our interactions with others, gaining insight from their experiences. This article brings together reflections on my conversation with Pete Sturgess and follows his progression from his early coaching days to his current position as a leading national coach, discussing his learning journey alongside coach development research.

Applicable coach development research
To help make sense of Pete’s learning, some coach development models are briefly described here so that they can be applied to aspects of his learning path.

Werthner and Trudel (2006) define three main types of learning that coaches engage with: mediated learning (formal qualifications and courses), unmediated learning (independently driven, where the coach chooses the type of information to consult), and internal learning (time spent in reflection). Drawing on Moon’s (2004) work, the former can be understood by a ‘building a brick wall’ metaphor, during which the learner assimilates knowledge through an approved programme of content and is later assessed on the knowledge acquired. This seemingly linear pathway towards expertise has been criticised for failing to prepare coaches for real-life contexts.

In contrast to a linear path, Moon (2004) promotes the idea of a network in which learning is flexible, unmediated and continuous, based on a learner’s ever-changing cognitive structure (ie their knowledge and emotions). This view supports models of experienced-based learning, such as Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle (Figure 1), which advocates a cyclical process in which the learner continuously reassesses their knowledge through experience, observation, conceptualisation and experimentation. The success of experiential learning centres on the learner’s ability to invest time in ‘reflective practice’ in order to help convert experience into expertise. As Gilbert and Trudel (2006) suggest, “10 years of coaching without reflection is simply one year of coaching repeated 10 times.” Studies have shown that appropriate reflective practice has a positive impact on coaching development, equipping practitioners to build their knowledge, initiate change, link theory to practice and prepare for the ambiguity of the coaching environment.

Sturgess’ early coaching career
As a talented young footballer, Pete Sturgess quickly rose through his local clubs, playing county standard for Staffordshire, then Football Combination league for Oxford, before joining several non-league teams such as Halesowen Town and twice playing in the first round of the FA Cup. At the age of 35 he began to transition into coaching at Rushall FC, recalling that “whilst still playing, I wanted to put on the kind of sessions that I wanted as a player, even though I was the coach”. This suggests that his experience as a participant influenced the decisions he made later in his coaching style and strategy. When reflecting on his strengths as a coach, Sturgess admits that, “if I’ve got a choice between technical detail and enjoyment, I still choose enjoyment”, suggesting that his overriding focus is on player engagement to underpin learning.

Despite having played to a high level, Pete recognised that he was still a novice in his coaching pedagogy, demonstrating that the key element to coaching effectiveness is an openness to learning and a recognition that past experience as a participant does not qualify the coach as an expert in the game. His use of reflective practice demonstrates that practitioners need to access their tacit knowledge (the type of knowledge, often from experience, that is difficult to verbalise). This helps develop a deeper understanding of their practice.

Pete’s experience of being told that his coaching session was boring, by Nathan, was a pivotal moment in his development. Instead of reacting negatively, he used the episode to stimulate deep reflection to reassess and adapt his approach to
coaching, thereby using what Kolb (1984) refers to as ‘abstract conceptualisation’ (learning from the experience) in order to change his practice4. Pete refers to the event as an epiphany:

“From that moment on I stopped working from a standpoint where I’ve got all the answers, I’ve got all the power. I’ve got all the knowledge and [realised that] unless I begin to reflect and respect the young people in front of me and try to meet their needs as well as the needs of football coaching, this ain’t gonna work!”

Pete’s subsequent fascination in creative session design prompted a willingness to review his coaching practice, which soon became based on a player-centred approach. This approach centres on understanding a player’s developmental needs and designing an environment accordingly: one that allows the player to take individual ownership over their learning and challenge the information they are being given, thereby resulting in more meaningful learning. This pivotal learning episode in Pete’s pathway (courtesy of Nathan) resulted in a lifelong passion to become an expert in The FA’s Foundation Phase, demonstrating the vital importance of reflection-on-action to coach development6.

Experiences of formal education
During this time, Pete completed coaching qualifications, suggesting that as a novice coach he valued a formal development pathway for the career progression it offered. However, he found that these courses did not cover the information he sought regarding athlete/coach relationships:

“There were still elements of it that didn’t fit with me. Just the formality of it... it didn’t seem to build the kind of contact or connection with players that you might need in order for them to listen to you and improve, so I tried to develop my own style.”

Pete’s dissatisfaction with the course content supports findings that formal education programmes are inadequate in preparing students for the unpredictable nature of everyday coaching2. During linear progression dominated by formal education, the coach’s role is a relatively passive one as they are only required to reproduce their accumulated knowledge during an assessment task4. This may explain why Pete was frustrated during these courses because he was unable to fully engage with the content. “The way the courses were structured, the assessment drove everything and you wouldn’t ask a question and you wouldn’t challenge anything.” Therefore, despite providing learners with knowledge, the system as described in Moon’s ‘brick wall’ metaphor fails to take individual learning into account, and so the development opportunity is limited2.

Pete’s enthusiasm for learning saw him return to education and complete a degree, followed by a PGCE teaching qualification and, later, a Master’s degree in Sports Coaching. He became a lecturer in sport and recreation at Stafford College for six years, alongside a five-year coaching position at Walsall FC, and later was appointed as Assistant Director of Development for 7–14 years at Derby County FC. These roles cemented Pete’s interest and expertise in the Foundation Phase.

He undertook extensive independent research in this age group, sourcing learning opportunities that matched his interests, which suggests a preference for unmediated learning. He professes, “because of my fascination with the child, most of my development around creating a playful environment or a creative environment has come from further reading”. As Pete created these learning opportunities for himself, it can be argued that the meaningfulness of the learning, and therefore the effectiveness, was high1. However, he still recognised the need to combine his unmediated learning with formal qualifications and he completed his UEFA ‘A’ licence in 2001. So, despite his learning preferences, he was still aware of the regulatory expectations of the coaching profession, in which formal coach education is the social norm for those that want to progress.

In 2002, Pete was made redundant, yet he took this setback as an opportunity to establish his own coaching business. When discussing these three years of self-employment, Pete describes the pressure of his position. “I knew that if the kids didn’t come back I couldn’t put bread on the table and so I had to make the environment as fun and enjoyable as possible.” This pragmatic reality was the second driving force in the creation of Pete’s player-centred coaching philosophy, which acknowledges where the player is in their technical and physical development as part of the process of deciding the best way to help them improve.

Three years later, Pete became The FA Regional Football Coach for Yorkshire, which led to an unexpected opportunity of taking on the additional role of managing the England Futsal Deaf Squad for two seasons, taking them to the European and World Championships. Futsal is a FIFA-approved indoor format of five-a-side football, played on a hard court with a smaller, weighted ball. This was another
significant learning experience in Pete's coaching career, as it drew his attention to an emerging game (in England) that was beyond his current level of competence and forced him to adapt his coaching approach and communication style to deaf players. Pete relates that "it gave me a chance to be really out of my comfort zone. I was learning how to coach players who can't hear, but also teaching them a game I was pretty new to". His willingness to try new coaching situations and expand his skill set supports findings that expert coaches are prepared to step out of their comfort zone and investigate new and different ways of coaching.9

From coach to developing people

In 2008, Pete was approached by The FA to take on the role of Head Coach of the England Men’s Futsal Senior Squad. In the same year he also became Lead National Coach [developer] for the Foundation Phase.

In the role of Head Futsal Coach he spent time cultivating the athlete/coach relationship through developing his interpersonal knowledge of the players. He soon established a reputation of being an effective and approachable communicator. This supports evidence that “athletes experience positive psychological outcomes such as increased competence and motivation when coaches exhibit behaviours that are instructive, encouraging and supportive”10. This can arguably be seen in the uplift that Pete achieved with the team, who at the time of his arrival had played 45 games, of which they had lost 44. His first goal when he took the role was to “get the players to believe they could win a match”. Under his leadership, the team achieved a spectacular jump up the FIFA world rankings, from 106 to 56 in one calendar year, suggesting that coaching focused on relationships and rapport can play a vital role in team performance.

Mentoring is also a particularly effective tool in coach development through consistent guidance and encouragement11. Whilst Pete didn’t have an official mentor, he sourced his own support: Mico Martic, a renowned international Futsal Coach. When Pete took over the England team management, he asked Mico to work alongside him in the role of guest coach, thereby embarking on an ‘apprenticeship of observation’, which added depth to his learning, through observing a more experienced coach 7. The success of Pete’s eight seasons with the team demonstrates the importance of learning with others and the significance of evolving from an independent mindset to an interdependent one9. A key take-away message being that Pete sought out the right person to help him at the right time.

Pete has clearly shown a preference for actively seeking out opportunities for his development pathway. For example, he attended a UEFA Futsal symposium in Santiago, which was delivered in
Spanish. He recalls the challenge of forcing himself to approach people who could speak both languages to help him:

"I'm not the most forthcoming of people so for me to do that was a big step. I'm actually quite a shy person, but I thought I've got to do this for my own career and for the enhancement of futsal in England, so I think those uncomfortable periods were actually the best learning experiences I could have had."

This experience adds strength to the idea that some effective coaches turn challenging situations into learning opportunities. Furthermore, when Pete realised that language could be a potential barrier to deeper learning (due to the lack of high-level futsal material in English), he learnt to read and speak Spanish, demonstrating that a keen willingness to learn and an openness to collaboration are important criteria for experiential learning.

Another learning opportunity that Pete undertook was a trip to the north of Spain to spend a week shadowing a futsal club whose first team was fed by an academy. The pathway they had established greatly interested him and he spent time studying the stages of development they had put into place, recalling that "I thought as a model of development I need to know more about this". The impact of this experiential learning has been significant as it forced Pete to evaluate the current levels of futsal exposure in English development programmes and informed the agenda he has championed through the Foundation Phase DNA resources. As a result, futsal is now being introduced to football players at a younger age, demonstrating how transfer can occur once new ideas are trialled - similar to Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle.

Finally, moving on to his concurrent role as FA Lead National Coach for the Foundation Phase. This role established him as an expert on this age group, and within two years he created the Youth Module 1 Award that is still in use today. This position forced him to critically analyse his own learning and use it to refine and articulate his coaching philosophy, which focuses equally on character and connection alongside technical and tactical development. He recounts: "I was at a point in my coaching career and I wanted to galvanise everything that was important to me." The material on the FA Youth Module 1 Award was inspired from Pete's previous experiences of coaching, combined with his intuition that the current formal learning material wasn't appropriate or relevant to how coaches should interact with young players. He combined his ideas about player centredness, open communication, relationships, creativity and developmentally appropriate practices. If we apply Moon's (2004) ideas on learning we can view his development as a process of changing conceptions (the cognitive structure) and not simply accumulating knowledge.

Pete's commitment to challenging existing information and actively seeking out research to inform his own ideas highlights the value of unmediated learning and demonstrates that "effective coaches are lifelong learners committed to personal growth". He challenged the limitations that he found in his early formal learning and eventually was able to create a course that addressed those issues.
Conclusion
Reviewing Pete’s coaching journey alongside relevant research has illustrated three key conclusions:

1. An important element of coaching effectiveness is an openness to learning.

Whether a coach starts from being an ex-athlete or is a relative novice to the game, it is important to be aware of the different learning available and to seek out new opportunities that suit their character and context. Pete’s learning path has particularly demonstrated the power of informal and unmediated learning, as he found that initially getting things wrong on the field motivated him to be self-regulated in his learning, and actively seek new and better ways of coaching.

2. Learning becomes more meaningful if a coach spends time reflecting on their experiences and making appropriate adjustments.

It was Pete’s willingness to reflect on his experiences that was the catalyst for changing his coaching practice. His approach to accepting new challenges, such as the FA futsal roles, is an example of transitioning to a new context and being able to select the best coaching approach depending on the needs of the players in front of him. He was able to transition between different roles in his career because he continuously evaluated the needs of the athletes and the activity, reflecting on his ability to meet those needs and then taking steps to improve his knowledge and coaching practice.

3. Actively collaborating with others is important for expanding the depth and breadth of professional development.

Pete’s eventual philosophy of designing an environment that encourages creativity was influenced at several key stages by his experiences, his research and his connections. By cultivating professional relationships with more experienced practitioners and actively engaging in collaborative social learning, Pete discovered new perspectives and practices, which greatly enhanced his professional development.

In summary, this conversation with an experienced practitioner has shown that if a coach is willing to continuously develop their knowledge, to adapt their coaching style according to their experiences, and to actively engage in collaborative learning, then their coaching career is more likely to be an effective one, with the potential to impact not just their own development but that of others.

References


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How Might Online Distance Learning Contribute to Coach Development?

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Abstract
The UK wide Future of Coaching Strategy (2016-2025) and the Coaching Plan for England (Sport England, 2016) identified the need to embrace technology and to foster an improvement culture which provides accessible digital learning to better support the development of coaches. This article reports data on 19,100 unique visitors to a free open access course targeted at active coaches over an eleven-month period in 2017/18. It examines their online behaviour and their responses to course surveys and other online feedback spaces. The research focuses on an analysis of: i) the demographic profile of those motivated to enrol on the course, ii) evidence of the topics and online functions that most engaged participants, and iii) how the participant’s learning experience contributed to their development. The evidence from this study indicates how carefully structured digital forms of learning can benefit the continuous development of coaches, when blended with a wider range of learning opportunities.

Introduction
“The best coaches do not know it all. In fact...they never stop learning, never stop asking questions, and always are looking for ways to improve” (O'Sullivan, 2013).

Traditional models and systems of coach education have focused almost entirely on formal coaching qualifications at different levels (eg Level 1, 2 or 3) and most ignore the value and importance...
of the learning that takes place between levels of certification. Furthermore, in a survey of 322 UK coaches across 52 sports/activities, Thompson (2018) suggested that while the most popular learning environment is face-to-face interaction, such as workshops and tutorials (82% of respondents), surprisingly, online learning (66%) featured ahead of one-to-one coaching or mentoring (56%). When the main challenges and barriers to learning were explored the most common response was the cost of training, cited by 54% of respondents, followed by the inconvenience of the locations and timings. Consequently there does appear to be a role for technology-enhanced learning, since both cost and accessibility can be significantly offset through online delivery. Yet, as Cushion and Townsend (2018) report: “There is a pressing need for an evidence base concerning how technology is currently used in coach learning.” That includes its impact and how it might be integrated with formal and informal learning opportunities in periods between qualification levels.

Recognising this opportunity there have been calls from UK Coaching (2017) and Sport England to embrace technology and to foster an improvement culture which provides, “high quality, ‘on demand’ digital learning and development solutions for coaches so that they can learn and improve more easily.” There is also a growing recognition that it should be easier for people from a more diverse range of backgrounds to become coaches and develop their talent and potential to coach. Arguably online delivery may help achieve both more accessible forms of coach learning and open up opportunities to develop a wider coaching community that is more representative of society in general.

The aim of this article is therefore to discuss how a popular, free, online distance learning course, called Exploring Sports Coaching and Psychology, might contribute to the development of coaches when set in the context of what is known about their learning.

The aims of the study were to:

i) identify the demographic characteristics of participants attracted to this course,

ii) explore evidence of what topics and online functions engaged participants the most,

iii) discuss how participant’s learning experience contributed to their development as a coach.

Drawing on this research, the paper discusses effective online learning design and the place that online distance learning might play in the wider landscape of coach learning.

**What is known about technology-enhanced coach learning?**

It is now widely recognised that informal learning experiences, including some provided online, contribute more to the development of coaching knowledge and practice than formal coach education courses. However, a challenge in reviewing what is known about technology-enhanced coach learning is the range of tools and modes it encompasses (eg podcasts, wikis, blogs, virtual learning environments, social media). The term ‘blended learning’ is often used to describe a mix of learning opportunities in which face-to-face interaction and online material are mixed. A common finding of those promoting blended learning are the reported increased accessibility of online course materials, enabling users to access resources multiple times and at their own pace or time. A further learning design observation in Kori et al’s (2014) review is that the use of prompts, guiding questions, and comment gives structure and sets limits to learning, helping critical thinking and reinforcing new knowledge.

Despite the promise of technology-enhanced learning there has been minimal research that explores the impact this mode of delivery might have on a sport coaches’ development and why it might usefully enhance their learning. Stodter and Cushion’s (2016) research into face-to-face coach learning illuminates the potential mechanisms through which learning takes place in an online environment. Their framework describes the filtering processes coaches use whereby “individuals adopted, adapted and rejected elements of their experiences, leading to uneven learning in apparently similar situations.” They describe that coaches “cherry pick” certain aspects of their learning to apply to their practice. Since coaches are different, the same coach development opportunity is likely to have a different impact on the individual coaches that experience it.

Their framework views coach learning as an individual as well as a social process in which relationships such as working with other coaches are an important influence. They suggest that coaches construct revised knowledge through two main filter mechanisms.
1. The biography filter: coaches approached and understood learning experiences through the lens of their existing beliefs, knowledge and coaching practice; in other words, their biography influenced their perspective on new ideas.

2. The context filter: sometimes coaches did not try something due to a perception that it might not fit the situation or coaching context in which they worked – they didn’t see it as being relevant to their context.

Two further influences were identified. One way that knowledge was more likely to be trialled was if coaches could see, often with video or text, someone else using a coaching concept. They used the term, “seeing is believing”. For example, one coach in their study recalled: “[if] I can see it working and it being relevant for the player and enjoyable, I can get my head round that and I think right well, let’s give that a go.” The second influence in the process was “experimentation”. Here, coaches tried out ideas with athletes and if they felt comfortable using it and reflected positively on the outcome they were more likely to use or adapt the idea in some way. By drawing on this framework it may be possible to better understand how structured online learning can impact on coach development.

Research into coach learning is still evolving, but indicates that:

- a mix of experiences are valuable (eg Stodter and Cushion, 2016)
- appropriate mentoring and reflection can be influential (eg Knowles et al., 2001)
- the evidence base for technology-enhanced learning is limited and fragmented and partly reflects the range of tools and modes used (eg Cushion and Townsend, 2018)
- more emphasis on critical analysis, creativity, decision making and problem solving helps coaches make sense of complex coaching practice (eg Nelson et al., 2006)
- enhanced critical thinking is likely to contribute to the coach learning filtering process (eg Bailey et al., 2018).

Method
Participants on the course were asked to complete pre- and post-course online surveys. Each survey comprised a combination of Likert scale, multiple choice and open questions. Completion of pre- (n=321) and post-course (n=163) learner surveys were complemented by analysis of course reviews on OpenLearn and Facebook. Data on page visits and timings were provided by Google and Adobe analytics.

Description of the course
A brief outline of the characteristics of the Exploring Sports Coaching and Psychology course is required to better understand the nature of the learning experience. The course uses multi-sport examples, it is free and unsupported open learning. It is made up of 70 webpages organised into eight study sessions with an estimated study time of 9-15 hours in total. The course has been recommended by UK Coaching (UKC) and organisations such as the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) and British Canoeing (BC) have adopted it as part of their CPD offer to coaches. The course is continually available and was initially launched in June 2017. Learners who enrol on the course undertake a number of online quizzes. If they pass these assessments they receive a printable certificate and a digital badge which they can share online. Digital badges represent a coming together of games culture and traditional badges often issued by clubs and societies; a digital badge has, Ostashewski and Reid (2015) claimed, become “an online visual representation of an accomplishment or skill.”

Key findings

Learner characteristics

The demographic profile of learners provides a picture of those who are more inclined to study this type of online course to gain reward and recognition (i.e. the digital badge). Most participants were in the 26-55 years age range (67%) with a male to female ratio of 2:1; 55% did not have a degree and were in full or part-time work [type of work not declared] (81%). Ten per cent of participants declared a disability. This represents a relatively diverse population attracted to this course which partly realises the aspiration to broaden the coaching workforce and ensure that this workforce is appropriately supported.
Respondents could select more than one answer to describe their reason for undertaking the course with: ‘personal interest’ (81%), ‘professional development’ (67%) and ‘relevant to my work’ (40%) dominating. This suggests coaches’ motivations are closely associated with a desire to develop and improve their coaching practice.

A strong influence on why people take a course is how they are directed to it and Google Analytics can help determine this through tracking the URL via which they arrive at the course opening page. The majority arrive through three main routes:

- Recommendation via a range of other websites (46%).
- Through social networks (14%) (e.g. Facebook and Twitter).
- Through a search engine (31%).

Data confirmed three main organisations recommending the course (UKC, PGA and BC). Both canoeing and golf participants cited the motivation of CPD ‘points’ being awarded for completion of the course. Clearly for some this was a key factor in taking the course.

**Learner engagement**

There are two sets of data that signify different levels of learning engagement. Firstly, the unique visitors (19,100) to the course in 11 months since June 2017 indicates high levels of traffic visiting and browsing the resources and material (unique visitors refers to the number of distinct individuals requesting a page(s) from the website). Secondly, an accurate picture of detailed learner engagement is the number who have enrolled (n=3,100), thereby showing interest in completing and obtaining a digital badge.

Insight into when participants accessed and engaged with the course was analysed by comparing course website visit data across two randomly selected weeks, from the 11-month period since June 2017. Visit numbers per hour were aggregated for each day across the two weeks and then an average number of visitors per hour was calculated for each day. This analysis revealed a regular rhythm of peak visitor numbers midweek with comparatively little traffic at weekends. Equally, early to mid-morning through to mid-afternoon was the most popular time of the day for participants to access the course followed by a smaller peak in the evenings. Figure 1 shows the pattern of visitor numbers for two representative Wednesdays and Sundays of the weeks analysed.

![Figure 1 Average course website visitor numbers by hour across weekday (Wednesday) and weekend (Sunday) in mid-December (2017) and late-April (2018).](image-url)
This pattern of activity suggests that participants clearly had a preference for accessing the course during the traditional working day and avoided weekends and to a lesser extent the evenings. This is contrary to when most traditional coach education courses take place, which is during the weekends and evenings. These findings suggest that online learning can provide a more flexible and convenient mode of delivery that allows individuals the opportunity to learn at a time which suits them and accommodates their wider commitments and responsibilities.

To explore which parts of the course were most popular, unique visitor number data were analysed. Specifically, the number of visitors to each of the 70 pages was used as an indication of the level of interest in each section (page) of the course. Box 1 shows the top seven page titles using this approach.

**Box 1: Seven section page titles showing higher than average visitor numbers relative to other pages**

- What conversations do coaches and psychologists have?
- What does fun mean in children's sport?
- Why being born in May has its advantages
- What drives international athletes?
- Sport Psychologists explain their work
- How much can we trust what journalists say?
- A fresh look; coaching commandments

A wide range of factors contribute to the popularity of different pages (eg study order, text content, video elements, and links to assessment). Page titles that were framed as questions appeared to be popular. Using a question to frame a section also provided a clear structure for the section – a distinct narrative focus and purpose. A further learning design consideration is the amount of time participants spend on the course pages per visit: 80% spend less than two hours, while 37% spend less than one hour. The content therefore needs to be structured in small manageable chunks (less than one hour of study time) to accommodate this dipping in and out of the course.

Engaging learners is a central and acute issue in much distance learning, since often there is no tutor to guide learners through material. The content has to be accessible, clear and has to capture attention to sustain learners’ interest. Learners were asked what their preferred types of learning activities were, with the most commonly cited being:

- watching videos (95%) and
- getting feedback via quizzes/tests (90%).

This is reinforced from course review comments such as: “The use of different educational means – quizzes, articles, videos, journal articles - was very useful in facilitating learning” (L1). It appears variety in appropriate tasks and activities helps sustain engagement.

The durations of activities are also important. Internal Open University research has demonstrated that participant retention on short courses is partly related to use of video clips that are less than three minutes. However, the use of clips alone has modest value for learners. Learner comments suggested one aspect of the design of video use was particularly important: “Videos and discussion follow up was a really useful facility” (L2). Before watching a video the online text tells the participants what to focus on – active watching – and afterwards there is a commentary about what ‘experts’ (the course team) thought as they watched the video (ie the discussion follow-up referred to by participant L2). This design feature helps to reinforce and shape participant’s understanding and aligns with Kori et al.’s (2014) findings.

**Discussion: the impact on coaching practice**

It is recognised that expressions of attitudes to a course cannot straightforwardly be equated with learner development and impact, but attitudes to learning is used here to stimulate discussion in the context of the filtering process described by Stodter and Cushion (2016).

The overwhelming majority of those completing the post-course survey had a positive learning experience with “interesting” (94%), “thought provoking” (81%) and “stimulating” (70%) being the three most commonly agreed terms used to describe their learning. Further sign of overall satisfaction was the 96% who agreed that “I would recommend
The only negative comments related to part of the quiz functionality when using mobile devices and the limitations of some of the quiz questions. For example: "Sometimes the quiz answers you had to type in were a little too specific" (L3).

There is a need to consider some of the other statements that learners made about their learning experiences. For example, the following three statements directly frame the learning in terms of their new knowledge beyond formal Level 2 courses and positive change.

"The course covers topics that never came up in my Level 1 or 2 coaching courses for cricket, nor in any post-Level 2 CPD, so very valuable." (L4)

"Really interesting and engaging course. Lots of bite size information for the busy amateur to manage their time. I learnt so much, it reaffirmed lots and I’ve made some positive changes!" (L5)

"I’m a Level 2 gymnastics coach and have begun to realise how little we are taught on the other courses. This is opening my eyes to a world of things I ought to know." (L6)

This ‘change’ theme suggests that in relation to the Stodter and Cushion (2016) filtering framework, the course, especially via video clips, is able to model effective practice exemplars through a ‘seeing is believing’ approach. Case studies can demonstrate effective planning and interpersonal skills, while video scenarios can enhance decision making and problem solving skills. These are likely to stimulate the possibility of later experimentation in practice in the coach’s own context. Most effective coach learning is described as taking place in situ alongside or within coaching practice. Online distance learning such as this is unlikely to be in situ, nor is it studied in a remote classroom. As demonstrated earlier it occupies, typically, a midweek learning episode before most coaches continue their practice in the evening or weekend.

A feature of this 9-15 hours of learning, studied midweek, is the possibility that if consistent concepts and critical analysis of coaching practice are reinforced by opportunities for personal reflection, some slight adjustments to a coach’s beliefs and their ‘biography filter’ may occur. For example, comments such as this: "The course has been fascinating, and has helped me to think about my own coaching beyond a plan for the next session with the under-6s on Saturday morning!" (L7). This suggests introspection and thinking about practice more broadly beyond the next coaching episode.

A final theme to emerge was the accessibility of credible research insights into coaching. As Bailey et al. (2018) suggest, there is a great deal of online content available; navigating and
critically evaluating the surfeit of information can be difficult for those with time constraints or a limited knowledge of what might be valuable. Online distance learning with high quality control mechanisms has the potential to act as a curating function, in assembling appropriate evidence-based material in an accessible manner, particularly if reinforced by a range of learning activities with a critical lens. For example, these comments address this theme:

“I am a secondary school PE teacher and coach some elite young athletes in my spare time. It is great to find current and relevant research/information.” (L8)

“A lot of the material was new to me and very applicable to my coaching. The way that it is set up means that you can dip into the sections that you are most interested in even if you do not complete the whole course.” (L9)

There is some evidence of modest impact on practice through some of these participant comments. To aide experimentation of some the coaching ideas in practice and passing through Stodter and Cushion’s (2016) ‘context filter’, it is likely that this course would be most effectively used in conjunction with other learning and, in particular, mentoring relationships. In this way, the strength of the course –its engagement and stimulating of new ideas – could be discussed with others, allowing deeper reflection as part of any participant filtering process.

Conclusion
Insights from this analysis mainly relate to the learning design, namely:

• A variety of tasks and the use of prompts, guiding questions, and comments gives structure, helps critical thinking and reinforces new knowledge.

• The short time duration (ie <2 hours) of peoples’ online learning episodes, suggests information should be structured in short bite-sized chunks, with consideration given to engaging headings possibly framed as questions.
Activities that stimulate reflection are more likely to be effective. Learners’ preferences were for viewing short videos (ie <3 minutes), with a clear task focus and an ability to compare their thinking with that of the course team. This can support ‘seeing is believing’ in helping to influence coaching practice. In addition, quizzes encourage participants to think about what they know, with feedback on whether their interpretation is appropriate.

In conclusion, a variety of learning opportunities, with online distance learning as a component part, has the potential to impact coaching practice. Courses such as the one evaluated here could be integrated into a formal qualification programme or could contribute to ongoing development and help to fill the space between qualifications. The scale and reach of online distance learning, and its accessibility to diverse populations, may also allow organisations to free up their resources and time to develop other learning opportunities.

References


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Developing a Football-Specific Talent Identification and Development Profiling Concept – The Locking Wheel Nut Model

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Abstract
Whilst talent identification and development are often used interchangeably, they are different constructs; talent identification can be described as the process of recognising current participants with the potential to achieve expertise in a particular sport, whilst talent development can be considered as providing the most appropriate learning environment to realise potential. A one-dimensional approach to identifying and developing talented players within a sport can produce inaccurate decisions and inadequate support, since eventual expertise is not solely dependent on one standard skill set. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach addressing the environmental, psychological, sociological, physiological, technical and tactical predictors should be applied. Performance profiling has been identified as an effective method to support player development, and is widely applied within professional football academies in England since the implementation of the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) in 2012. Working on a simple analogy, a locking wheel nut has a patterned indent alongside a key, which matches this unique outline, thus only when the correct key is inserted will the nut be able to be wholly efficient. Subsequently, this notion is applied to the proposed profiling concept of the ‘Locking Wheel Nut Model’ (LWNM). This is supported by empirical research outcomes, that present what characteristics support both the talent identification and development processes in elite youth football from a fully integrated interdisciplinary perspective.

Introduction
According to Williams and Franks (1998), key stages in the talent development process begins with detection. This identification of talented youth football players often initiates a pathway into a professional football academy, where they are signed and become part of a singular club’s
programme and philosophy. Football academies in England provide specialist training programmes established and funded by professional football clubs, with the primary objective of developing players towards the professional level. Between the ages of 8 and 16 years, young players join an academy part-time. Then at aged 16 years, those players who show continued progress are selected to undertake a two year full-time youth training scheme known as an academy scholarship. In the elite youth football development pathway, upon completion of the scholarship, players either sign a professional contract or are released. Over 90% of players who join an academy fail to make it as a professional. Therefore, it is in each individual academy’s interests and responsibility to provide their elite youth football players the maximum opportunity to develop and reach their potential.

Traditionally, talent identification environments within academies would perform player selection and progression verdicts based on subjective analysis. However, it is now widely accepted that the use of opinions alone can result in misjudgements and inaccurate decisions. Thus, over the recent years, the use of science-based support systems offering a greater multi-dimensional approach to talent identification have been implemented within elite youth football. For example, tools and specialist practitioners, such as sport scientists, strength and conditioning coaches, performance analysts, sports psychologists, and nutritionists, have been developed and employed to support technical coaching staff to identify and develop talented individuals that have potential to progress into professional football players.

Early research surrounding talent identification in youth football involved a multidisciplinary methodology to assess what distinguished elite and sub-elite youth football players. For instance, Williams and Franks (1998) revealed potential predictors of talent in youth football by breaking down sport science strands including physical, physiological, psychological and sociological characteristics. During further investigation, Reilly et al. (2000b) used 31 (16 elite and 15 sub-elite) young players matched for chronological age (aged 15 to 16 years) where physiological, psychological and technical variables were assessed. These tests included anthropometric and physical fitness, psychology questionnaires, and anticipation and football-specific skill tests. They revealed the most influential discriminating factors in favour of elite players included agility, sprint time, ego orientation, anticipation skill, leaner, possessed greater power, and were more tolerant to fatigue.

Holt and Dunn (2004) advanced knowledge regarding player development following an initial investigation with English and Canadian youth players. They produced a qualitatively derived theoretical model that indicates characteristics including discipline, commitment and resilience, which, together with positive social support, facilitates the successful transition from youth to professional level. In a supplemental investigation, Holt and Mitchell (2006) enhanced the model through integrating hope theory, which revealed players with high hope had a greater chance of achieving professional status. Toering et al. (2009) support the role of self-efficacy when discriminating elite and non-elite players in a study of elite youth Dutch players. Van Yperen (2009) also attempted to distinguish elite and non-elite players, revealing goal commitment, engagement in problem-focused coping behaviours, and social support seeking successfully differentiated players who reached professional level and those who did not. Similarly, presented through Gagne’s (2009) Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent, Mills et al. (2012) transcribed interviews with 10 expert development coaches, who were qualified at UEFA ‘A’ or UEFA ‘Pro’ Licence level, to attempt to identify factors perceived to influence the development of elite youth football academy players. Interestingly, drawing from the six interrelated higher-order categories that represented the characteristics perceived to manipulate player development, Mills et al. (2012) revealed psychological characteristics have a significant influence. For instance, four of the six categories were psychological qualities including resilience, goal-directed attributes, intelligence and awareness, together with sport-specific attributes and environmental factors.
As the governing body for football in England, The FA is responsible for formulating and implementing current developmental strategies for coach education and the national training programme. Using a multidisciplinary approach, The FA has adopted the ‘Four Corner Model’ (FCM) into its syllabus, which considers the four segments of technical/tactical, physical, psychological and social factors. This approach to talent development facilitates a player-centred approach by identifying specific characteristics that relate to each of the four segments, allowing the coach or practitioner to identify certain weaknesses which create individual learning objectives to assist player development. It outlines a range of factors that may need to be addressed if a young player is to reach their potential. This simplistic framework has the appropriate theoretical context and simplicity for both clubs and coaches to apply to their practical environments. Although isolated age-specific investigation is not uncommon, combined research considering the whole development pathway within each of the four corners is limited.

The Premier League’s EPPP arguably has had a far more influential role of the application, investment, construction and assessment of the academy structure in England. The EPPP aims to improve youth football development in England by proposing to modernise talent identification and recruitment including research in such areas as physiological parameters, relative age effects, psychological profiling, motivation, decision making, technical ability, and attainment rate. The six initial fundamental principles of the EPPP included: 1) increasing the number and quality of home-grown players 2) create more time for players to be coached 3) improve coaching provision 4) implement a system of effective measurement and quality assurance 5) positively influence strategic investment 6) seek significant gains in every aspect of player development. They aimed to do this through four main capacities: coaching, classification, compensation and education. As part of the EPPP, academies are reviewed every three years and categorised between 1 and 4, with categorisation the result of an independent audit. It is claimed that the implementation of the EPPP has reformed academies multidisciplinary approach through the development of their training programme and a holistic coaching approach.

Notable rule changes from the previous system is the abolition of the 90-minute rule, where clubs could only sign players aged under-18 if they lived within 90 minutes travel of the training facility, and the implementation of fixed tariff for transfers of players under-18, which replaces the independent tribunal compensation system. For example, players aged 9 to 11 years have a fixed fee of £3,000 per year spent at an academy, and £12,500 to £40,000 per year spent at an academy (depending on category) for players aged 12 to 16, with additional fees for appearances in the club’s first team. As a result of increased revenue for the Premier League clubs, there is a rise in the transfer fees paid for players. Due to the increasing expenditure on players, larger clubs have begun sourcing talented players at a young age by buying them from fellow academies. By doing so, it may be suggested the top clubs will eventually have the best youth players, with future hope of them becoming skilled enough to help their team reach their optimal goals of trophies, European qualification, or sustaining higher league status. Therefore, professional youth development systems spend years and large sums of money attempting to develop players, or in many cases, to gain financial profit from future transfer fees.

Thus, developing a player capable of playing in the Premier League can be profitable for Category 3 academies or lower league football clubs, by selling them to Category 1 and 2 academies or Premier League and Championship clubs respectively. Consequently, this not only sustains the smaller club’s youth academy, but in many cases the entire football club. Furthermore, the larger clubs benefit from having the best youth players in the country which, if they become top professionals, have been bought at a cut down price. Additionally, producing young players that eventually make a professional club’s first team can escalate the price, particularly due to the Bosman Ruling. As a result, the LWNM
seeks to illustrate the current environmental, psychological, sociological, physiological, technical and tactical youth football development techniques applied in English academies to support a greater holistic approach to talent identification and development.

**Methods**

Data was collected across one football season within a male professional football academy (n=98; aged 8 to 16 years). Data collection methods included:

- the participation history questionnaire
- psychological characteristics for developing excellence questionnaire (PCDEQ)
- socioeconomic postcode data
- physical performance
- anthropometric measures
- relative age
- technical tests
- match analysis statistics
- perceptual-cognitive expertise (PCE)
- match simulations.

Two coaches, as trained assessors (UEFA Pro, ‘A’, or ‘B’ Licenced alongside either the FA Advanced Youth Award or the FA Youth Award) from each age group (under-9 to under-16), were asked to rank their players from top to bottom in relation to current ability from a holistic perspective. This produced a linear classification of perceived high-performing players down to their low-performing counterparts, with each age group then split into thirds. This created a group of ‘high performers’ who represent the top third, and a group of ‘low performers’ who represent the bottom third. This enabled a distinct comparison between the high performers and low performers within each age group, with the middle third discarded from the study (n=34).

Due to the differing results between age groups as a result of their chronological age, such as older players generally having had more time playing, and subsequently have higher hours of engagement, data was standardised using Z-scores within their respective age group, to allow an unbiased grouping of players. The assumptions were tested by examining high and low performers using a two-tailed independent sample t-test. The t-test is used to compare the values of the means from the high and low performers, to test whether it is likely that the samples from the populations are different. Results found 24 significant factors that differentiated high and low performers (Figure 1) from 54 collective measures (Kelly, 2018). Subsequently, an interdisciplinary talent identification concept is presented here using a locking wheel nut analogy.

**The Locking Wheel Nut Model (LWNM)**

Locking wheel nuts were originally invented to prevent alloy wheel theft as a result of an individualised key required to manipulate its release. These were created to replace a generic lug nut, which is easily deployed through their specific design. Working on a very simple principle, each locking wheel nut has a patterned indent alongside a key which matches this unique outline, thus only when the correct key is inserted will the nut be able to be operated. This locking wheel nut analogy is applied to illustrate the talent identification process in elite youth football. This is a result of applying the methodology and visual design of the locking wheel nut. This recognised the concept of an individualised approach while observing critical requirements to achieve expertise within the academy studied.

It is important to understand where the player fits within the LWNM, through identifying and categorising individual strengths and weaknesses through player profiling. Conversely, without all the relevant information, the coach may not

![Figure 1: The Locking Wheel Nut Model – the influencing characteristics for high performance (Kelly, 2018)](image-url)
have the precise ‘key’ to support optimum talent identification and subsequent development. Following successful recruitment within an academy setting, a coach acts as a key to support each player’s holistic development through targeting individual strengths and weaknesses that are illustrated from a fully-integrated multidisciplinary perspective. Within the LWNM, the environmental factors surround the psychological, sociological, physiological, technical and tactical disciplines, as Figure 1 illustrates.

The LWNM has been developed through identifying the discipline-specific characteristics, which have been identified as influential factors in the talent identification process in an English football academy. Subsequently, within each of these disciplines, there are characteristics and measures for coaches and practitioners to consider when identifying potential elite youth football players. The four environmental factors might be viewed as creating the foundation for the opportunity to engage in higher-level football.

A ‘user friendly’ concept
There have been a number of attempts to distinguish the talent identification and development processes. The LWNM supports MacNamara and Collins’ (2014) proposal of moving beyond prescriptive models, through providing a user-friendly framework relevant to the applied environment. Additionally, the LWNM also maintains Butler and Hardy’s (1992) early theory and application of performance profiling in sport, together with the support for coaches and practitioners to understand their footballers’ attributes across several aspects.

Gulbin and Weissensteiner (2013) suggest that there is a gap that is constantly growing between theory and practice in talent identification and development. They argue this is due to limitations, inconsistencies and contradictory contentions from literature, which result in stakeholders’ scepticism regarding the usefulness of current research. Additionally, Cushion et al. (2012) suggest that it can take at least 10 years before research is applied to coaching practice. They argue coach education remains ‘fixed’ while research continues to evolve. Similarly, researchers often fail to generate clear guidelines for practitioners to simplify the practical enactment. Pankhurst and Collins (2013) also believe there is lack of coherence in the understanding of talent development systems and processes between key stakeholders and researchers, and a deficiency of research into the importance of this relationship.

Therefore, the aim of the LWNM is to adopt a ‘user friendly’ approach while implementing contemporary data from reliable and valid methodologies. Moreover, from a football viewpoint, the LWNM contributes to the current FA ‘four corner model’ that is commonly applied within football organisations and academies in England, which was initially created by Williams and Reilly (2000) almost two decades ago. Additionally, the model presented here also has the advantage of incorporating influential talent identification characteristics within each discipline. Consequently, the LWNM may assist coaches and practitioners alike regarding the significant factors that support superior overall performance from within each discipline, therefore creating a greater
understanding of the talent identification process within an academy environment.

From a talent development perspective, this model may also support a coach or practitioner, and subsequently their players, through gauging current performance from an interdisciplinary viewpoint to facilitate the opportunity to develop individual strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, this model applies an individualised approach, similar to Gulbin and Weissensteiner’s (2013) 3D-AD ‘beehive’ conceptual model of expertise. Furthermore, it may be considered each player’s patterned indent on the LWNM regarding each of these factors may differ depending on what activity the player is engaging in, whilst also highlighting how one player can look very different from another within the same age group (Figure 2). Consequently, the LWNM provides a flexible, user-friendly concept in support of an applied talent identification and development process in elite youth football.

An ‘interdisciplinary’ approach
By identifying an individual player’s locking wheel nut profile, a coach or practitioner is firstly able to begin to consider whether the potential athlete possesses the relevant characteristics required to engage in an elite youth football setting. Secondly, professional staff within an academy environment are able to illustrate strengths and weaknesses within each discipline, thus facilitating the ability to create an individualised support programme, such as incorporating football-specific technical and tactical strategies, alongside performance analysis, physiotherapy/sports therapy, sport science, strength and conditioning, psychology, and education and welfare support, where required.

As a result, not only does the LWNM offer a fully integrated multidisciplinary approach to talent identification, it also highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the talent development process (Figure 3). The term ‘interdisciplinary approach’ has been applied to this model, as a consequence of the research from each discipline combining and working in conjunction to develop and apply a shared conceptual framework, that integrates discipline-specific concepts and methodologies to address a common research focus.
LWNM profiling template
Following the illustration of specific developmental activities within the environmental section that surround the LWNM, coaches and support staff are encouraged to identify a player’s potential developmental strengths and weaknesses inside the LWNM. This is completed through marking an individual’s potential within each discipline on a Likert scale (1 = poor to 10 = excellent), that can be supported using both subjective and objective measures (Figure 4). Once these characteristics have been identified, through applying supporting research driven factors (Figure 1), they can get drawn together to identify the player’s ‘locking wheel nut’ to illustrate their profile (Figure 2) to support an interdisciplinary approach to talent identification (Figure 3). Space for notational comments are also available within the model to provide relevant feedback (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The Locking Wheel Nut Model – a player profile template
Conclusion
The purpose of a player development pathway is to realise the most effective methods to support young players to maximise their potential. MacNamara and Collins (2011) suggest many approaches to talent development have become flawed by an “ill-conceived conception”, such as a generalisation concerning the ability to perform as an ‘elite’ player within a chronological age group. Consequently, little consideration may be given towards the multiple factors that contribute to the eventual achievement of elite status as a senior professional. Since the objective of talent development should be to identify and then develop young players towards the future performance capacity of professional athletes, attention should logically turn to those attributes required to manage the route of development. Therefore, this rationalised thinking could be applied whilst using the LWNM, through focusing on the characteristics that an individual has regarding their capacity to learn and develop, as opposed to concentrating on what the coach already knows and how the player is performing at a particular time during their development.

References


Contact
Dr Adam Kelly – Adam.Kelly@BCU.ac.uk
Q&A with Dr Laura Gale

from the Cluster for Research into Coaching (CRiC) at Manchester Metropolitan University

Conducted by Dr Lisa Whitaker
UK Coaching

COULD YOU TELL ME A BIT ABOUT YOURSELF?

I am a Lecturer in Sports Coaching in the Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). My research addresses the everyday working realities of community sport coaches, with particular attention given to the personal, emotional and socio-political features of practice. I work with local authorities and private community coaching providers in the east and west of England. Prior to becoming involved in research, I completed an undergraduate degree in sports coaching and performance, followed by a PhD in understanding community coaches’ experiences of everyday coaching practice at the University of Hull. My most recent work includes: (1) surviving austerity in community sport; (2) exploring trust and distrust in community sports coaching; (3) mentoring in community sports coaching and (4) the interplay between emotion, identity and workplace relations in community sports coaching.

SO, WHAT IS THE CLUSTER FOR RESEARCH INTO COACHING (CRiC)?

The CRiC draws on the expertise of MMU academics working in coaching pedagogy, coach education, the sociology of coaching, and performance analysis coaching to stimulate and support a sports coaching community. The cluster aims to generate critical approaches to coaching to establish a repository for the outcomes of coaching research, and to provide opportunities and encouragement to early career and postgraduate researchers. A significant focus of the CRiC’s work is to support and advise coaching practitioners and coaching associations in all sports and related activities. In addition, CRiC organises a biannual coaching conference in conjunction with Cardiff Metropolitan University and the University of Worcester.
WHAT ARE THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CRIC?

The CRiC was established in late 2012 in order to encourage, enable and disseminate research into sports coaching among academics, practitioners and policy agencies.

Our key objectives are to:

- generate a broad community of researchers interested in sports coaching
- encourage novel and, where appropriate, critical approaches to sports coaching research
- engage with, and support, coaching practitioners, coaching associations and policy agencies from all sports and related activities
- provide opportunities and encouragement to early career and postgraduate researchers in the field of sports coaching
- publish high-quality research and publications that are impactful and accessible to a variety of audiences.

WHO IS PART OF THE CRIC AND WHAT RESEARCH TOPICS ARE A PARTICULAR FOCUS?

There are five core members of the CRiC (see below) and the current overarching research areas of the group cover:

- professionalism and politics
- elite coach education and mentoring
- the coach as a community practitioner.

TEAM MEMBERS

Dr Bill Taylor

Dr Bill Taylor is a Senior Lecturer in Sports Coaching at MMU. His research interests are varied and include: the conceptualisation and critical deconstruction of professionalism in sports coaching; the professional learning of coaching practitioners; coaching in the ‘risk society’ and the growth of defences practices; and the use of critical sociology to examine coaching practice and coach education. His sporting links include UK Coaching, the English Football Association, England Hockey, British Canoeing, British Judo, Sports Council, English Institute of Sport and Sport England. Bill was a co-editor of Moral Panic in Physical Education and Coaching. His most recent work explores elite hockey players’ experiences of video-based coaching and elite sports coach mentoring programmes.
Petra Kolić

Petra Kolić is an early career researcher, currently completing her PhD study on the experiences of coaches, coach educators and coach education managers within elite coach education on the UKCC Coach Level 4 award. For the purpose of this project, she has collaborated with UK Coaching, British Canoeing and British Judo. Her passion for sport stems from her career as a youth elite figure skater and coach. In her research, she aims to understand how stakeholders (eg coach and athlete, coach and coach educator) act and interact, how they think and feel about these processes, and why they do so in certain ways. She draws on ethnography as a qualitative methodology that allows her to conduct longitudinal research in coaching environments, and explore participant perspectives from formal and informal encounters that include observations, interviews and naturally occurring conversations.

Dr Ryan Groom

Dr Ryan Groom is a Senior Lecturer in Sports Coaching and Programme Leader for the MA/MSc Exercise and Sports degrees at MMU. He is also a lead tutor on the MA Coaching Studies degree. As a practitioner, he has over 10 years’ experience working in elite football, analysing team and individual player performance. He has staffed 42 full England international matches, over 100 English Premier League games, 30 UEFA Cup matches and two League Cup finals. Ryan has worked on a number of funded research grants in sports coaching, including projects for Sport England (Volunteering Insight), the English Football Association (Quality Assurance in Coach Education), Canoe England (Workforce Audit), and the English Institute of Sport (Performance Analysis in Elite Sport). Ryan is co-editor of Research Methods in Sports Coaching and Learning in Sports Coaching. He has published widely on learning, education, mentoring, performance analysis and organisational change in sports coaching.
Alexandra Consterdine has lectured for 15 years in a variety of further education institutions within the UK, teaching across a range of sport science courses. In 2014, she completed an MSc in Exercise and Sport at MMU, graduating with a distinction, and then spent two years lecturing at MMU as an Associate Lecturer within the Department of Exercise and Sport Science. Currently, she holds a GTA position at MMU and is three years into a PhD project on the sociological exploration of power in high-performance sports. As a CRiC research student member, she has actively presented at various national and international conferences and her published research papers include the micro-politics of coaching.

Ian Britton's PhD focused on investigating how video-based performance analysis feedback is used by coaching teams within an elite team sports environment. In particular, the work adopted an ethnographic approach to study the interactions and behaviours that occurred, during video-based feedback sessions, between different members of the coaching team and also the coaching team and the athletes. This work was only made possible due to the network of sports that utilise the English Institute of Sport (EIS), to help support their high-performance programmes and elite athletes. It was through the EIS that he was able to provide performance analysis support to teams and gain access to the video-based feedback sessions, to collect data for his PhD study.
WHAT ARE THE KEY SUCCESSES OF THE CRiC GROUP?

Conferences: the CRiC has successfully held four international conferences (the fifth happening in 2019) and held the first CRiC Coaching in the Community Conference in April 2018.

Publications: CRiC researchers publish world-leading and internationally renowned research, assessed through the Research Excellence Framework (REF) within the areas of sports coaching practice, sports coach education, the history of sports coaching, child protection and the use of video-based feedback in sports coaching. They have published books and special editions for journals. In addition, we have a member of CRiC on the editorial board for Sports Coaching Review.

Funding: The group has attracted research council funding.

Members of CRiC are also still active practitioners in the field.

LAURA, YOU ORGANISED THE FIRST COACHING IN THE COMMUNITY CONFERENCE EARLIER THIS YEAR IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE CRiC. HOW DID YOU THINK IT WENT?

Yes, on Wednesday 25 April 2018, MMU (Cheshire Campus) and Buckinghamshire New University hosted the first Coaching in the Community Conference in partnership with the CRiC. Organised by Dr Ben Ives and myself, this event built on a strong history of conferences previously delivered by the CRiC. We were very happy with the event and received positive feedback from the delegates. For us, the day provided an important and much-needed platform for academics, coach educators, policy makers and practitioners to come together to share and debate research, critical experiences and expertise in relation to the development of community sports coaching. Particular attention was paid to exploring:

- the everyday realities of community coaching practice
- coach education and mentoring
- developing community coaching practice.

The significance of these discussions were grounded in the generation of new and original knowledge, in relation to the experiences and development of community sports coaches, who are increasingly being used to deliver schemes to achieve a variety of sporting and non-sporting policy priorities. To follow the research and discussions from the day, follow us on Twitter @CRiC_2018 and @mmucric
Coaching in the Community is playing an increasingly important role. Community coaches have been tasked with doing more than focusing on sport development alone. Instead, they are also charged with using sport and leisure activities to deliver social policy outcomes (e.g., reducing crime, developing pro-social behaviour, overcoming social isolation and exclusion, rebuilding communities, developing healthy lifestyles, and raising educational aspirations and attainment) by working with target populations (e.g., disaffected youth, unemployed, disabled). The importance of coaches engaging under-represented groups in the community has received significant attention in recent public Sport England reports. It was fantastic to hear about the research that is specifically trying to explore and understand those realities of practice for community sports coaches who are trying to deliver various different schemes on the ground level.

The day was a great success, with a strong community feel. The presenters and delegates shared some rich insights into the current landscape of community sports coaching; in particular, illuminating the (micro)political, emotional, uncertain and contested dimensions of working life in community coaching contexts. We felt as though we were able to expand our knowledge together and hopefully, by doing that, we can further grow and stimulate the interest and research into community sports coaching.

There are plans to run two future events. Dr Ben Ives and I have plans to build on the success of the day through both a follow-up conference in 2019 at Buckinghamshire New University, and the development of an edited book into community sports coaching due for publication early next year. The CRiC also has a biannual conference that is held in conjunction with Sports Coaching Review to be hosted by the University of Worcester in 2019.
Managing and Developing Community Sport (Wilson and Platts, 2018) provides an overview of the theory and practice of community-level sports management and development. The textbook provides a historical, sociological, political and contemporary overview of community sport, and explores how the way in which sport and physical activity, which is developed and managed in the community, can meet the needs of communities.

The book is divided into three sections:

- Part I: Contextualising community sport and physical activity, which introduces the reader to this landscape.
- Part II: Contemporary issues in community sport and physical activity, which outlines the key issues and challenges faced by those who work in community sport, at various levels and contexts.
- Part III: Functions and operations in community sport and physical activity, which explores the leadership and management features that are required for effective community leadership and management.

Although the book should ideally be read in its entirety, each chapter is stand-alone. This makes it easy to read each chapter as and when one desires. Each chapter provides case studies of ‘real life’ examples, helping the reader to understand not only the underlying theory, but also ‘best practice’ in approaching sport and physical activity in the community. Each chapter includes review questions which allows the reader to reflect on their learning throughout.

Although this textbook is mainly intended for sports management practitioners or students, it can also be useful for community coaches. For example, what might be of interest is the chapter on
community coaching, which discusses the concept of a ‘community coach’, considering the various contexts in which they may work with children, adolescents and adults. It explores the political ideology and policy around community sports coaching. It also examines the coaching skills, knowledge and attributes required in developing participation in various community settings, making it useful for an individual who intends to work at a community-level, as a community coach.

The authors also use case studies to illustrate contrasting environments and participants, so that the reader can understand how a ‘shared philosophy’ should be adopted as a community coach. This allows the reader to reflect on their own coaching practice to better understand how to develop this shared philosophy, and to be more supportive and inclusive. It considers how coaching philosophy can be adapted when coaching different groups, taking on the role of a ‘social performer’.

“A coach working in several different contexts will succeed by developing a social identity that is fluid, flexible and extremely adaptable.”

A second chapter of interest is around community cohesion through sport and physical activity, which may be applicable for coaches wishing to take on community development roles. It provides insight into how various approaches can be used to provide accessible and affordable opportunities for sports participation. The chapter provides the reader with an understanding of how sport and physical activity can be used to improve community cohesion, and critiques the notion that sport and physical activity can improve social inclusion. In addition, it provides a real-life case study example of the different approaches to reducing social exclusion, including ‘doorstep sports clubs’ developed by Street Games.

A chapter which may be useful for managers in designing community sports programmes is ‘Monitoring and Evaluation’. The chapter covers what monitoring and evaluation is, why it is needed, the type of monitoring and evaluation that should be done, and how it can benefit community sports programmes in the context of government health priorities. The chapter includes a section on developing a logic model, which would be essential for those managing community projects, as it can often be difficult to demonstrate the link between their activities and outcomes for funders. This section helps the reader to understand what and when to evaluate. Although aimed at managers, this chapter may also be of benefit to coaches who deliver community sports programmes, to demonstrate the impact of their work.

One chapter within the textbook makes several assumptions about the reader. However, overall the text is user-friendly and easy to navigate, making it an accessible resource for sports management practitioners, community-level coaches, and students who intend on working in community-level sport. Some of the theoretical concepts are repeated at times across chapters making it repetitive in parts, but it serves to embed the learning.
Do you want to shape the future of coaching?

Join us for our second Applied Coaching Research Conference on 19 February 2019 at Derby County FC.

If you would like to join us, please register your interest at:
www.ukcoaching.org/about/our-research-conference
If you would like to get involved in this journal as an author, peer reviewer, or editor, please get in touch via email: researchteam@ukcoaching.org

We are currently seeking submissions for our next edition, coming out in Spring 2019.