

Patterns in UK Coach Learning

Julian North
Melina Timson-Katchis
sports coach UK



Coach Tracking Study

- ✦ Explore coaches' history and factors influencing entry into coaching
- ✦ Explore coach development in terms of education, qualification and experience
- ✦ Identify the changing career profile of coaches
- ✦ Understand the impact of coach education and support services

Coach Tracking Study

- ✚ Four year tracking/panel study
- ✚ Qualitative and quantitative approaches:
- ✚ Year 1
 - 20 coaches participated in 2 semi-structured face-to-face interviews
 - 1,264 postal and targeted web based survey
- ✚ Year 2 (now underway)
 - Follow up qualitative interviews with same coaches
 - Focus groups
 - Follow up survey

Qualitative Sample

✚ Purposeful sampling

✚ 20 coaches:

- Gender: 11 male, 9 female
- Age: 22-63 years; mean 42 years
- Sports: 18 sports; team & individual
- Coaching experience range: <1-33 years; 10 coaches with over 10 years experience
- 9 volunteers, 3 part-time/sessional and 8 full time
- Level coached: 6 (inter)national, 6 club, 8 mixed

Coach Learning

Experiential Learning

Sporting Experiences

- Insider Knowledge, seen as an advantage
- Used mostly in early stages due to lack of knowledge / experience

Coaching Experiences

- Largely trial & error
- Facilitated by reflection
- Hampered by lack of feedback

Wider Life Experiences

- Life (e.g., parenthood)
- Career (non-coaching)

Learning from Others

Other Coaches

- Observing other coaches
- Mirror what they do & adapt to own situations
- Cross-fertilisation of ideas

Mentors

- Club or NGB
- Facilitate reflection
- Provide mechanism to observe and interact with other coaches
- Cross-fertilisation

Coach Education

Outcomes

- Provide networking platform
- Cross-fertilisation
- Facilitate self-reflection
- Technical knowledge

Quality Determinants

- Access & Information
- Tutor / Coach Educator
- Organisation

Experiential Learning: Sporting Experiences

- 👤 Coaches' early practice reflected their own experiences
- 👤 How to skills...
 - Coached how they would have liked to be coached
 - Examples from their role models: emulated what they liked; avoided what they didn't
- 👤 What skills...
 - Knowledge of sport – technical/tactical also important

"I was left on my own to get on with things and I just basically tried to remember all the things that my coach had done and tried to remember things that I'd done as a parent and I just started coaching"

Experiential Learning: Coaching Experiences

Learning by doing

- 🧑 Trial and error
- 🧑 Learn by mistakes....

"Exposure to coaching, to different types of people and knowledge. Knowing theoretically is not the same as knowing by doing... you can't shortcut experience, but if you listen and learn...for me it accelerated my learning"

"All my coaching to a certain extent, is trial & error"

Experiential Learning: Coaching Experiences

Athlete feedback and reflection identified as important

- Athlete feedback often only source
- Reflection important, but reflection skills identified as undeveloped in novice coaches

"All my coaching to a certain extent, is trial & error"

"This is how I learned what to do and how, by watching and really looking at things, but first I had to learn what to watch for and how to do it, looking beyond the surface and breaking things down..."

"I think earlier in my development I wasn't reflective, everything I did was two dimensional but now I think things are three and four dimensional, now I am more questioning and more reflective and it really has made a difference"

Experiential Learning: Coaching Experiences


"I get on with my coaching and learn as I go, what else can I do? The problem is what if what I'm learning isn't what I should be learning, how do I know that?"

"All my coaching to a certain extent, is trial & error"

"There's simply no feedback, I would like to get more feedback from senior coaches. Without feedback it's difficult to know what to do sometimes"

Many coaches in a feedback vacuum; the need for high quality mentors is obvious...


Experiential Learning: Wider Life experiences

-  Interpersonal / communication skills developed through:
- Other career (their day job!)
 - Parenthood

Being a parent has helped a lot, having that experience, I've drawn from that... remembering how I tried to behave with them and tried to interact with them and it helps me with coaching

Work taught me how to make reasonable assessments, establishing what is required, what is going on and planning accordingly so it was just a case of doing the same with coaching

Learning from others: Other Coaches

 Sharing experiences with other coaches provides a valuable insight into knowledge and practice

 Observing other coaches also provides valuable information

Watching somebody instruct somebody else is very good. I often have lessons myself and even after I'm done I'm still there watching them instruct someone else and dissect how their instruction with them and me differed

When you start coaching you're like a caterpillar then you become a chrysalis and then a butterfly... the more people you come into contact with the broader your knowledge base, the further your development

I listened to other coaches, watched them... you take a bit of that one and a bit of this one... you try things out, "massage them" a bit... this is how you get cross-fertilisation of ideas

Learning from others: Mentors

- ✦ Mentoring identified as important...
 - for developing coaching knowledge and practice
 - Advice and information on planning their development

"I got a fantastic mentor from the [GB] so I fell on my feet there really... She was my mentor and would come and watch me coach on a wet and windy night and mentor me and she was very important in my development... at times she was more of a facilitator, my motivation comes from me but she allowed me to develop, I can turn to her for advice on anything, with planning it all she's just there giving me good information and things I should be doing...she was the key all the way through"

Coaches' Qualification Profiles:

👤 1 x Level 1

👤 5 x Level 2

👤 7 x Level 3

👤 4 x Level 4

👤 1 x Level 5

👤 2 x Unqualified

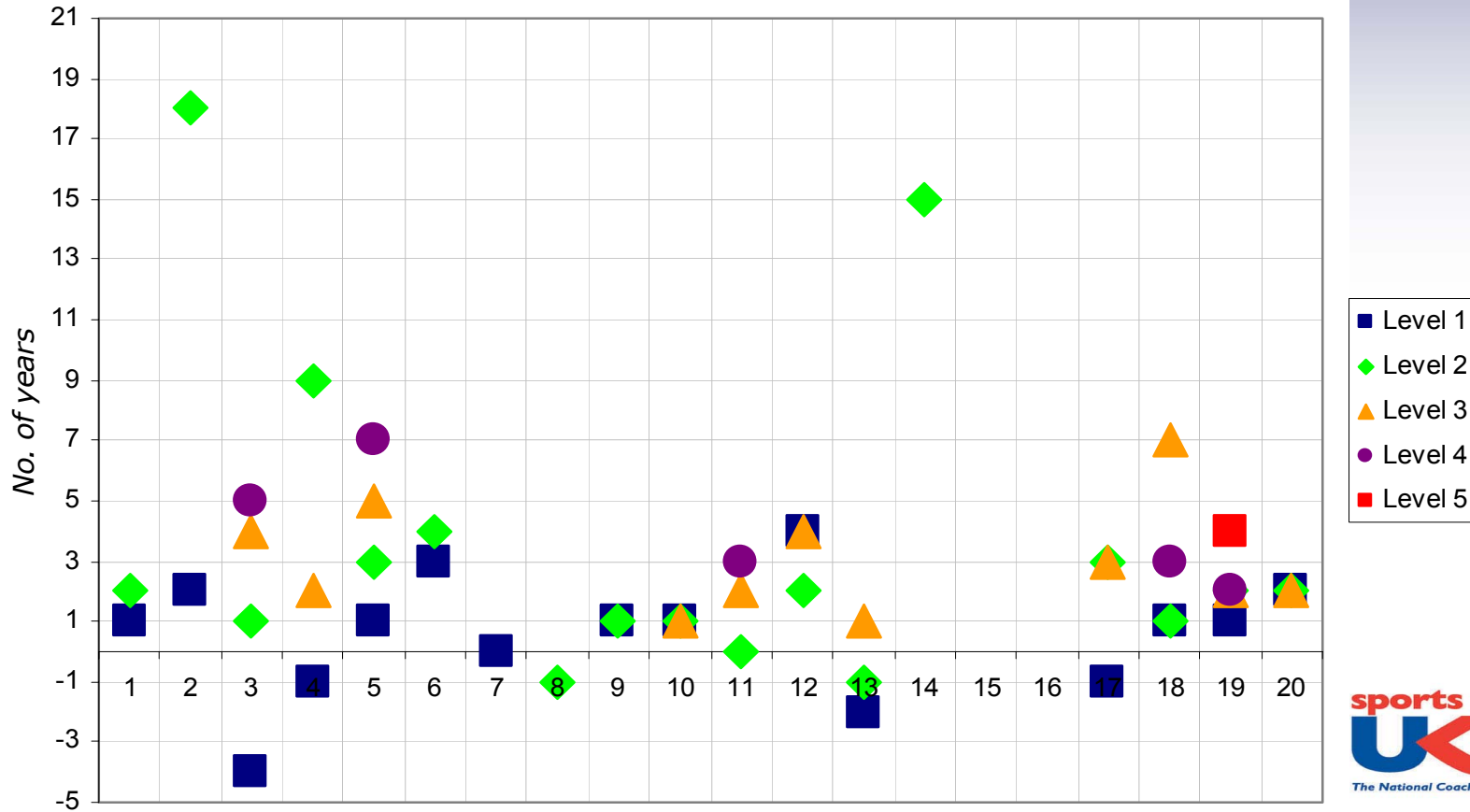
👤 7 completed first qualification prior to starting coaching

- 2 specifically sought coaching as a career
- 2 did it at university
- 1 did whilst still competing
- 2 did it in order to take up coaching (opportunity already came up)

👤 *Remaining did first qualification within 3 years of coaching*

Coaches' Qualification Profiles:

Coach Qualifications vs. Coaching Years



Coach Qualification: Outcomes

- 👤 Qualifications – particularly lower levels – had greater impact on coaches with limited:
 - Sport-related education
 - Experiences of sport

"Level 1 and 2 was fantastic so packed with information, really made you think about things... there was so much information coming in, different types of information, new information"

"For me doing the award was excellent because even though I played the sport I only played in one particular position so I couldn't actually coach other positions and the course filled those gaps for me..."

Coach Qualification: Outcomes

 An important outcome of qualifications is

Networking:

- Learning network (e.g., exchange ideas, get feedback)
- Business network (e.g., find out about more coaching opportunities)

"Whether you like them or not, you do come away having absorbed something; but if nothing else courses can be good in terms of confirming that you are not way off the mark"

"I really liked the sports coach UK workshops because of the mix of people, it makes you feel like part of a bigger fraternity, it's an enormous benefit to be with coaches from other sports because of the different attitudes and experiences and its great to hear all about them..."



Better Coaching...Better Sport

Coach Qualifications: Quality Determinants

✦ Quality is a *"hit & miss"* affair

- Inconsistent quality of tutoring
- Organisation
- Content

✦ Making Sense of it all

- *What to do and when to do it??*

It all depends on the tutor... I've experienced both, if the tutor is good the course is great, if not it can be a real waste of time

The issue is that there are too many courses out there and some are a waste of time but with good ones you cannot fail to learn but how do you make the decision what to do and what to avoid

Getting the information is very tricky... the information is out there but its not readily available and sourcing that can be so time consuming, it slows down your development as a coach and this can cause big problems: athletes and coaches need to be in sync, if an athlete develops faster than the coach, then soon they will outgrow their coach...

Developing Coaching Practice



As coaches develop coaching practice changes

- Early coaching: focus on **coach**
- Later coaching: focus on **coaching recipient**

Initially I concentrated on my own coaching, what I did and how I did it and at that stage as a coach I don't think I was really aware of what the player was doing; the more competent you become, the more able you are to coach with the athlete in mind

Developing Coaching Practice



Suggested Learning stages:

- Early stage: Getting Information
 - Passive learning, no reflection
 - Emulating other coaches
- Later stage: Making sense of information / knowledge
 - Critical reflection

Initially I started off very rigid in my delivery, I didn't know how to utilise everything I knew, it was quite staccato and very controlled, it was a bit of a jumble at first...I was gleaning information for wherever possible but I didn't know how to use it, plan and adapt in any way

Developing Coaching Practice



Confidence

- Increased knowledge increases confidence
- Increased confidence increases critical thinking

I now feel confident enough to challenge what more senior coaches say whereas at one time I would have huddled in a corner... I'm a lot more confident in what I'm doing at the moment

Quantitative Sample

- ✚ Postal and targeted web-survey
- ✚ Sample: 1,264 UK coaches
 - Gender: 74% male, 26% female
 - Age: mean 38 years
 - Sports: 44 team and individual; football 30%
 - Experience: < 5 years 35%, 11 years or more 37%
 - Qualification: 87% qualified, 34% Level 1, 31% Level 2, 22% Level 3, 10% Level 4/5

Learning: Year 1 Quant Results

- ✦ **Experiential/self-directed learning**
 - Coaching practice, school, work, parenting, sporting experience, reading, reflecting, on-line learning, DVDs/videos/CD Roms,
- ✦ **Learning from others**
 - Advice from family/friends, mentoring, observing coaches in and out of sport, observing coach as a player
- ✦ **Coach education and qualifications**
 - Qualifications, 1-1 TNA, coaching conferences, workshops

Use of learning experience since began coaching (%)

Coaching Practice (putting your skills into practice)	93
Experiences as an athlete/player/participant	89
Coaching Qualifications – Governing Body or UKCC	86
Working with/observing coaches from your sport	85
Reading coaching books, magazines and journals	83
Reflecting on past coaching	76
Working with athlete(s)/player(s)/participant(s)	76
Workshops / training events / courses	72
Watching DVDs, Videos, CD-ROMs	70
Advice from family / friends	64
Working with a coach mentor	60
Working with / observing my own coach when I was player	58
Working with / observing coaches from other sports	57
Coaching conferences	56
Online learning	56
Non-coaching related education i.e. university	53
Experience at work outside coaching (your day job!)	53
Experience of being a parent	45
1:1 Training Needs Analysis with a Coach Developer	25
Other	3

N=1,242

Rating of learning experience (% very important)

Coaching Practice (putting your skills into practice)	82
Experiences as an athlete/player/participant	70
Coaching Qualifications – Governing Body or UKCC	62
Working with/observing coaches from your sport	62
Reading coaching books, magazines and journals	60
Reflecting on past coaching	57
Working with athlete(s)/player(s)/participant(s)	52
Workshops / training events / courses	45
Watching DVDs, Videos, CD-ROMs	44
Advice from family / friends	43
Working with a coach mentor	39
Working with / observing my own coach when I was player	37
Working with / observing coaches from other sports	34
Coaching conferences	30
Online learning	29
Non-coaching related education i.e. university	27
Experience at work outside coaching (your day job!)	26
Experience of being a parent	24
1:1 Training Needs Analysis with a Coach Developer	20
Other	63

N=1,242

Beginner and Experienced Coaches (Top 5s!)

Use	
Beginner Coach (1-2 years)	Experienced Coach (10-11 years)
Coaching practice (putting your skills into practice)	Coaching practice (putting your skills into practice)
Experiences as an athlete/player/participant	Coaching qualifications - Governing Body or UKCC
Coaching qualifications - Governing Body or UKCC	Reading coaching books, magazines and journals
Reading coaching books, magazines and journals	Working with athlete(s)/player(s)/participant(s)
Working with/observing coaches from your sport	Experiences as an athlete/player/participant

Rating	
Beginner Coach (1-2 years)	Experienced Coach (10-11 years)
Coaching practice (putting your skills into practice)	Coaching practice (putting your skills into practice)
Working with a coach mentor	Working with athlete(s)/player(s)/participant(s)
Working with athlete(s)/player(s)/participant(s)	Working with a coach mentor
Experiences as an athlete/player/participant	Reflecting on past coaching
Working with/observing coaches from your sport	Working with/observing coaches from your sport

Comparative Winners	
Beginner Coach (1-2 years)	Experienced Coach (10-11 years)
Workshops/training events/courses	Experience at work outside coaching (your day job!)
Coaching conferences	Reflecting on past coaching
Experiences as an athlete/player/participant	Working with/observing coaching for other sports
On-line learning i.e. Internet	Experience of being a parent
Coaching qualifications - Governing Body or UKCC	Working with athlete(s)/player(s)/participant(s)

Conclusions

- ✦ Reinforces from a UK context, with a large sample of coaches in all pathways, the results from other studies and possibly more....
- ✦ Experiential learning, and self-directed learning are most important...
 - Wider life experiences seen as important
- ✦ Learning from/observing other coaches/mentors is very important
- ✦ Coach education and qualifications also have an important role to play...
 - In fact, this role may have been underplayed!

Conclusions

- ✦ Early stages of coach development:
 - Focus on the coach
 - Information gathering
 - Confidence building

- ✦ Later stages:
 - Focus on participant
 - Using a wide range of information sources
 - Critical reflection/confidence/creativity

- ✦ Qualitative and quantitative back-up

Next Steps

- ✦ Undertake full analysis of qualitative and quantitative data sets
- ✦ Look at collaborative work with other coaching researchers

Thanks

jnorth@sportscoachuk.org

