

# Women and Coaching

A guide to developing your female sports coaching workforce

Since 2000 the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) has delivered targeted workforce development programmes to encourage and enable more women to become involved and develop as sports coaches.

In collaboration with other organisations that have run similar programmes nationally, we make the following recommendations about growing, retaining and sustaining your female coaching workforce.

Many women have started coaching in recent years but supporting their progress up the coaching ladder still provides a challenge. This is highlighted by a particular absence of female coaches at performance and elite level, a trend mirrored in relation to women in leadership positions within the sports sector.

Whilst there are also issues for male coaches, more women than men cite recurring barriers that prevent them from becoming qualified to coach sport in the UK. The latest research from sports coach UK<sup>1</sup> shows that as little as 1 in 4 women are involved in coaching sport.

In response to this, the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation's 'Women into Coaching' (WiC) programmes have been running for eight years and during that time have funded over 300 women (in London) through the training process to become practicing and qualified coaches (up to United Kingdom Coaching Certificate (UKCC) Level 3).

## Why the need for more female coaches at all levels?

WSFF recognise the important role that female coaches play in developing female athletes, role models and mentors. Female coaches can make a big difference in increasing female participation by inspiring women and being positive role

models, as well as helping some women to feel more comfortable in a sporting environment, which can still be seen as an exclusively male preserve.

## Our guide to developing your female coaching workforce:

Having completed the Women into Coaching programmes, WSFF teamed up with sportscotland, Tees Valley Sport and the WiHLSC North West Partnership led by GreaterSport to 'pool' their experiences and learning from the various workforce development programmes.

Whether you are a governing body of sport or an individual club, we recommend the following practical solutions. Many of the recommendations are also relevant to engaging men in coaching.

## Planning to deliver coach education and growing your workforce?

### 1. Take a flexible approach to Coach Education and Development providing choice if possible

#### Timing

Statistics show that women still bear the bulk of domestic responsibilities. By scheduling coaching courses at times convenient for women with young children or those caring for elderly relatives, courses become more accessible

I coach because I am passionate about sport, being an athlete myself. I enjoy helping others to learn and achieve success and I gain great satisfaction from facilitating this. I also enjoy learning, which coaching allows me to do.'

Rowing coach, 2008, WiC2

<sup>1</sup> Sports Coaching in the UK II, 2007 sportscoach UK

tothem. For example, weekend-only (not evenings) courses work for some women.

The courses may take longer to complete but will allow women to organise childcare.

### Childcare provision

Our experience clearly showed that women with young children did not choose to use registered childminders even though funding was offered. They would not attend a course if their relatives / friends could not mind their children. Making crèche facilities available at the course venue could enable those women with young children to attend. Alternatively, offer activities for children and their relatives alongside the coach education sources.

### Programming

Women often not only have to plan their own time but also that of their children and many have a range of priorities to juggle. Recognising this and working with providers who understand the needs of women and engaging these women in the planning process will increase the likelihood that the women can fit the demands of a coaching qualification into their routine and will help increase uptake and minimise course drop out rates.

Intensive courses, for example, may work for some women and girls whilst for some having modules spread out over an extended period of time allowing them to fit it around their lifestyle, whilst at the same time gaining practical experience and building confidence in between, would be beneficial.

## 2. Ensure accessibility of courses

### Location

The distance to and from the course venue can impact on uptake and drop out rates amongst women and girls. Our experiences showed that course retention rates were higher for those women who 1) travelled shorter distances to the course venue and 2) had transport to and from the course organised for them i.e. minibus.

### Venue

The physical accessibility and quality of the venue will impact on uptake and retention. Women like to feel safe and secure and some coaches may have personal physical conditions, which need to be taken into account to ensure all have access and can play a full part in sessions.

### Tutors

Some women have certain cultural and religious beliefs that need to be considered when appointing tutors. Unfortunately there is still feedback of sexist attitudes amongst tutors and fellow course attendees. This can be addressed

through the training of tutors and careful selection of tutors working with specific groups.

## 3. I coach because ...take time to understand what motivates women to get and remain involved in coaching

Many women are attracted to coaching and motivated to coach because they want to encourage and help others. This should be used to inform the way opportunities are marketed if we want to encourage more women and girls into the workforce.

What motivates women and girls to coach can differ from the reasons why men coach. In our experience, the majority of women say that they coach because they want to help others improve / develop and encourage children and their enjoyment of / participation in sport.

## 4. Manage expectations

Minimise course drop out rates by running coaching 'taster days' to allow women and girls to see what is actually involved. Some women can be 'put off' at the early stages of their qualification because they are unaware of what coaching actually involves and the commitment required by the trainee coach. Taster sessions will also help build their confidence when women can see that coaching is something they can do and succeed in.

## Retaining coaches whilst they complete their qualification /training....

## 5. Develop tailored support for Coaches based on need

Lack of confidence in their own abilities and depth of knowledge of their sport can prevent some women from getting involved and progressing in coaching.

Having more-qualified and experienced coaches on hand to mentor trainee coaches will boost retention rates amongst women and girls.

Mentoring can happen on a formal or informal basis and have a sport specific or more generic, lifestyle based focus. This needs to be adapted to suit the coach.

Select mentors based upon their wealth of coaching and life experiences ... and their availability to devote time to developing others. To get the best from your mentors, ensure their development is monitored too (encourage peer mentoring) and that they access further training and development.

Fasting and Pfister's 2000 research into gendered coaching styles suggests that female performers prefer female coaches because of their 'feminine' coaching style which is characterised by 'empathy, communicative competence and willingness to cooperate'.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Fasting, K., & Pfister, G. (2000). Female and male coaches in the eyes of female elite soccer players. *European Physical Education Review*, 6, 91-110.

## **6. Identify where segregation can enhance inclusion?**

Creating a learning environment that is supportive and secure will encourage more women and girls to participate. Some women and girls feel intimidated by learning in predominantly male groups. Women-only sessions can make coaching accessible to all women of all faiths and cultures.

## **Sustaining and developing your female workforce**

## **7. Create safety in numbers – together we achieve more**

### **Networking**

By encouraging women and girls who are completing a coaching qualification and those who have recently qualified to create a network, women and girls will be encouraged to continue and progress as coaches. These formal or informal networks can offer support, advice and information about coaches and coaching. This 'community' can be useful for distributing information about funding for coach education, paid and voluntary coaching vacancies etc.

Organising regular events at which high level female coaches are invited to discuss their development and their challenges along the coaching pathway to becoming an elite level coach can help to sustain less experienced coaches highlighting that they are not the only ones facing the challenges of developing as a coach.

### **Raise the profile**

As a result of there being so few high profile female coaches there can be a perception that coaching, either in a voluntary or paid capacity, is not a 'suitable' vocation for women.

To change this perception it is important to promote existing female coaches and the benefits of becoming a coach to women.

For example, develop a website which has case studies and personal testimonies about female coaches, up-to-date information on the development of coaching and forums for women and girls to exchange ideas and information.

Encouraging employers to see the benefits of supporting their employees to develop as coaches in terms of developing transferable skills is also key.

## **Want to know more?**

Contact [liz@wsff.org.uk](mailto:liz@wsff.org.uk) for further WSFF information on developing your female sports coaching workforce

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Supported by:



Thanks to the following organisations for their assistance in creating this resource:

**Women into Coaching – London** (programmes 1 and 2)

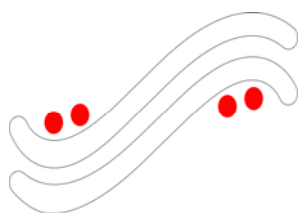


Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation – Zoe Calder – Project Manager. Victoria House, Bloomsbury Square, London, WC1B 4SE. Tel. 020 7273 1740 / [www.wsff.org.uk](http://www.wsff.org.uk)

The WiC 2 programme funding was used to give over 200 women across London the opportunity to gain coaching qualifications up to NVQ level 3 in eight sports, including badminton, basketball, cricket, football, gymnastics, rowing, rugby league and swimming. Also included was a professional qualification in developing / delivering community sports programmes and Sport Leaders UK community and higher sports leaders courses.

Additionally, successful applicants had access to a personal mentor to support their coaching development. Following successful completion of the programme, WSFF assisted beneficiaries to find education and employment opportunities. The full cost of all courses, travel to and from courses and childcare was fully subsidised.

**Women into Higher Level Sports Coaching (WiHLSC) North West**



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Women into Higher Level Sports Coaching (WiHLSC) was run by a partnership steering group including County Sport Partnerships, National Governing Bodies, SkillsActive, WSFF, sports coach UK, FE and HE institutions from across the North West and hosted and operationally managed by Greater Manchester Sports Partnership Ltd., Project Manager Leigh O'Regan.

Funded through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) by the European Social Fund (ESF) WiHLSC

gave over 300 women the opportunity to gain UKCC Level 2 or Level 3 coaching qualifications and access wider coach education and development experiences, all fully supported by a personal mentor.

As with WiC, beneficiaries were offered the full cost of courses, travel and childcare expenses.

Generic Mentoring was key to the success of the programme. Each beneficiary was supported to develop their own Personal Development Plan (PDP) to guide their progress and were encouraged to consider their options including setting up their own business, applying for full and part-time jobs in coaching and progressing in a voluntary/paid capacity within existing posts. The project also linked with the Coaching North West pilot. A number of coaches gained employment as a result of the programme whilst others simply felt more confident in coaching at their local club.

Sports involved included Athletics, Basketball, Cricket, Cycling, Football, Hockey, Kayaking, Netball, Swimming, Squash, Rugby League and Rugby Union. The breadth of the partnership allowed for the sharing of practice between sports.

Further info on the work in the North West please contact Sarah Pickford, North West Regional Equity Officer (Women & Girls Sport and Physical Activity) Tel: 0161 2231002 Mobile: 07962 567457 or [sarahp@greatersport.co.uk](mailto:sarahp@greatersport.co.uk)

**sportscotland**

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**Women in Coaching Programme, Scotland**

This is a pilot initiative for female coaches living or coaching in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Tayside & Fife and the Scottish Borders - to support the development of 30 female coaches per year for 3 years in the 5 sports of Gymnastics, Netball, Hockey, Swimming and Tennis.

The programme aims at addressing the under representation of female coaches. It is a scholarship programme where each coach will create and undergo a personal development plan supported by a dedicated mentor / life coach. The Scottish Governing Body will also support the coach in terms of technical skills.

The women engaged in the programme will be offered business mentoring and membership in their local Women into Business Network provided by Scottish Enterprise. Through the Women's Business Network they will have access to workshops and networking. They will be offered the opportunity to develop their business skills, financial skills, time management, presentation skills and other areas that will benefit the participants should they choose to become self employed.

Successful coaches will be funded a maximum of £1500 per annum for 3 years and will be supported by trained mentors.

**Tees Valley Sport Women into Coaching Programme**



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Tees Valley Sport's Women into Coaching programme encouraged local women to 'get off the sidelines' and gain a NVQ Level 2 qualification in Activity Leadership. The free course gave them all the skills and knowledge needed to take the first steps into a career in coaching and activity leadership, whilst support was given throughout to help provide paid employment opportunities and further coaching qualifications.

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