



**Evaluation of sportscotland's support  
for coaches and coaching  
Executive Summary  
for  
sportscotland**

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

**sportscotland** commissioned ekosgen and re:creation consulting to evaluate the support it provides for coaches and coaching under the three programmes: coach infrastructure, coach education and coach development. The evaluation aimed to understand how the blend of **sportscotland's** interventions contributes to ensuring there is a coaching workforce equipped with a set of critical behaviours that will deliver a world class coaching system in Scotland.

The research methods included a survey of coaches who had received support and qualitative consultations with **sportscotland** staff, Scottish Governing Bodies (SGBs) and other stakeholders. Additional qualitative research was carried out with a small sample of coaches through on-line Liveminds group discussions.

### Coach infrastructure

**sportscotland's** planned approach and support framework (Coaching Scotland) is aimed at building successful systems and processes for coach education and development in Scotland. Findings from the research highlighted that **sportscotland's** leadership role in shaping policy and providing strategic direction, is both highly valued and critical to ensuring the success of the sporting system in Scotland. **sportscotland** is successfully contributing to achievement of Active Scotland Outcomes through its planned approach to coach education and development.

Partners' buy-in to the framework is also critical and the system works best where there is alignment between partners' strategies and **sportscotland**. There is scope to further align these activities and **sportscotland** is ideally positioned, with the skills and credibility to drive this collaborative approach.

Collaboration and partnership working between **sportscotland** and UK sporting organisations is also important. It facilitates shared learning and good practice and demonstrates **sportscotland's** strategic approach and commitment to review and adapt its practice.

The Coaching Network facilitated (and financially supported) by **sportscotland** provides a valuable link between SGBs and **sportscotland**. It is an important strand of **sportscotland's** planned infrastructure, and has the potential to deliver more benefits. Further clarity and support would ensure Coaching Network staff can align SGB plans with national priorities and so further contribute to the achievement of national outcomes.

In terms of the leadership role of **sportscotland**, the Coaching Scorecard is a support tool for the Coaching Network and can provide a picture of SGB activities that support coaching education and development. There is scope to develop it to capture even more information. For example focusing on quality and impacts of what is delivered. This would help to drive quality improvement along with increased activity. There is also potential for the Scorecard to be applied more consistently across SGBs. The research findings recommend that it becomes a mandatory part of the investment process. This tool or something similar may also be of value to other partners, such as local authorities who have a role in coach support and development.

**sportscotland** has contributed well to Outcome 4 of the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework through its planned approach and support of the coaching workforce. This has been achieved by: adopting an inclusive approach across the organisation; working to increase coaching opportunities for those from under-represented groups; and demonstrating strategic leadership on equalities.

However, more needs to be done to address on-going barriers for under-represented groups, and realise a step-change in reducing under-representation amongst Scotland's coaches.

## Coach education and development

The UKCC education subsidy is very effective in reducing cost as a barrier to coaches participating in learning and development. Without it, it is likely that fewer coaches would be able to take part. Focusing on coaching levels 1, 2 and 3, with a higher level of subsidy available for Level 2, is an effective use of available funding as it encourages progression. There is scope to consider how the subsidy could best be deployed to also help **sportscotland** achieve objectives around equalities and inclusion with a more targeted approach. For example, it could be targeted at those who need it most and so encouraging greater participation from under-represented groups.

The CPD workshops are highly valued. The content could be further developed to capture shifts in current and emerging practice. It is a strength that the content is developed by external experts and this should be made clear to coaches, SGBs and clubs. The workshop format, which brings together coaches from different sports is beneficial as coaches can learn from peers across and within different sports. It moves the development away from the specifics about the sport to generic, transferrable skills and helps focus coaches' minds on the people they coach and not the sport itself.

Smaller, or less well-resourced sports tend to be more reliant on **sportscotland** coach development support than larger sports who often deliver their own CPD. Coaches from smaller sports report greater satisfaction with **sportscotland** resources. The generic content is most impactful where it provides a complement to an organisation's sport-specific offer. This currently tends to be smaller SGBs. Larger organisations and SGBs that have the capacity to deliver a wider-range of content have reported some duplication with what **sportscotland** delivers. A more targeted approach in the design and delivery of CPD could address these issues.

**sportscotland** and partners recognise that some coaches can find it difficult to take part in learning and development. It is important that barriers are addressed in order to improve coaching performance across Scotland, in all sports and in different settings. Time commitments and other pressures are amongst a range of potential barriers that can mean coaches are not able to take part, or take part to the extent that they might want to. The cost and logistics of getting to and from development activities can also be a challenge and, as expected, it is a particular issue for coaches in more rural and remote areas.

There is an opportunity to further increase awareness amongst the coaching population about the CPD opportunities offered by **sportscotland** and communicate what is available more effectively. There is a clear role for SGBs and local authorities in this awareness raising. Further work will be required to gain a clearer understanding of the barriers faced by people who have not engaged at all and the extent to which less tangible issues such as lack of confidence to take part may be playing a role.

The **sportscotland** website is a useful resource and provides a lot of information, and could be enhanced further by ensuring information is simpler to access. A more streamlined offer, clearly articulated through the website and other channels, would be more effective.

**sportscotland** have tested a combination of digital support tools and resources as part of the Coach Connect CPD programme. These were designed to complement class-room based learning and promote the application of learning. The approach has had some success in encouraging greater engagement with coach development opportunities. For example the **sportscotland** app has been successful in keeping coaches engaged, and providing timely, up-to-date information on CPD opportunities while the Facebook group has enabled further exchange of knowledge. There is an

opportunity to further enhance the use of digital technology to connect coaches in learning and facilitate quality discussion and knowledge exchange.

There are currently just over 23,000 people delivering 'Active Schools' in Scotland with many already working in a coaching capacity or, through Active Schools, might be interested in moving in to coaching. This large, geographically spread cohort, presents a significant opportunity to increase the number of coaches. There is also an opportunity to provide targeted education and development support through Active Schools.

## Impact on coaching practice

**sportscotland**'s support and interventions across education, development and infrastructure have together contributed to sustained behavioural changes. The blend of interventions have resulted in the coaches building the soft skills, coaching techniques and critical behaviours required for a world class coaching system. Coaches are applying the new skills and knowledge at every stage in their coaching practice, from planning to communication and delivery. They are more likely to set goals to improve their coaching which demonstrates reflection on and understanding of their development needs. This is likely to help them unlock their own potential and those of the people they coach.

For some coaches there can be barriers to applying the learning in the 'workplace'. These are primarily around lack of time and lack of follow-up support to apply in practice what they have learnt in theory. For some, colleagues and senior coaches discouraging or at least not encouraging change is also a factor. There is an opportunity then, to explore solutions that will reduce these barriers. For example, possibly building manager or peer engagement into the design of training. Importantly though, many coaches report that their coaching workplace is supportive and has responded positively to their new ideas and ways of working. There has been some cascading of the learning to colleagues, largely 'on-the-job' which can be very effective. This could be further enhanced and there is an opportunity for **sportscotland**, clubs and partners to assist coaches to transfer their new knowledge. It is also important that coaches understand the practical application of their learning in all aspects of their coaching. **sportscotland** could build this more consistently into the design of the CPD and share their approach and learning with partners.

The changes in behaviours as a result of **sportscotland**'s CPD have improved the quality of the coaching provided by participating coaches. More coaches rate their skills more highly now than prior to the **sportscotland** support. Key improvements are around better coaching skills and techniques; more motivational and engaging sessions; and being more responsive to participants needs. Coaches also report feeling more confident and that they make better decisions.

The expected retention rate of coaches who apply the learning is higher than for those who have not applied the learning. This means that the new ways of working are likely to be sustained.

There are signs that athletes are benefiting from the improvements to the coaching. Coaches report better recruitment and retention of sport participants. They also report that it is leading to more motivated, enthusiastic sport participants who are better able to concentrate and engage with the coached sessions. SGBs consulted during the study reported these as benefits they had observed and would expect to see flowing from the changes in coach behaviours.

## Under-represented groups

There is a great deal of policy focus on improving levels of physical activity and sports participation as part of the toolkit for tackling health inequalities in Scotland. **sportscotland** has a role to play in this although it is not solely **sportscotland**'s responsibility. All key stakeholders including SGBs, local

authorities and other partners need to work together to tackle discrimination and inequality by providing inclusive coaching opportunities and enhancing access.

Significant **sportscotland** resource and commitment at all levels has made inroads into engaging more people from under-represented groups but there remains a lot of work to do and there is no short term solution. The mix of approaches taken and driven by **sportscotland**, including communication, research and targeted activities all work well when combined. However, it is important that **sportscotland** and partners continue to take account of the different needs and barriers for under-represented groups if barriers to participation are to be removed.

**sportscotland** has a good understanding of the barriers that people can face both to participating in sports, and also, to getting involved in coaching. There is recognition that by encouraging people from under-represented groups to participate, the pipeline of coaches is likely to become more diverse. The objective must be to further embed equalities considerations across all planning and strategy development in **sportscotland** and partners. There are already good examples of where equalities have been applied as a cross-cutting theme for example in Coach Connect and Coaching Talent. These should be built on and the learning shared internally to **sportscotland** staff and externally with partners.

On the whole, support from **sportscotland** has helped many coaches more aware and knowledgeable of equalities issues and this, for some, has translated into practice. There is evidence that coaches may require additional awareness raising and support if sport across Scotland is to become fully inclusive. This will require a collaborative approach between **sportscotland**, SGBs, local authorities and wider partners. And, as is already the case, continuing to draw on organisations that work in the field and have specific knowledge and expertise of the needs of under-represented groups. There is also scope for partners to better understand what equalities data is available and how it can be used to inform and drive progress against the equalities agenda.

There are signs of some barriers to participating in **sportscotland** support for some groups. People from disadvantaged communities are less likely to apply for the UKCC education subsidy and this will be having a detrimental impact on access to quality coaching for sport participants, or potential sport participants in these areas. To improve access for these coaches, it will be important to identify and understand the existing barriers. There is an opportunity for a more targeted approach to coach education subsidy, along with a continual commitment to ensuring coach education is accessible by all.

## Recommendations

ekosgen have developed a set of 25 recommendations, to be considered and led by **sportscotland** drawing on partners as required. The recommendations clearly place **sportscotland** as the strategic leader for developing coach learning and support provision. A summary is provided here:

- To drive coaching development, the Coaching Scorecard could be enhanced to gather information around quality of what is being delivered by SGBs. Linked to this, the Coaching Network could be further supported and empowered, to ensure their knowledge and experience is used more fully. Workforce data for planning is critical and a more robust evidence base should be developed. This will improve understanding of the pipeline of potential coaches, their training needs and the numbers of coaches working at different levels.
- The **sportscotland** offer is comprehensive but can be challenging to navigate. More clarity around the offer, the potential benefits and routes in will help. This could be achieved by streamlining what is provided and ensuring effective approaches and channels of

communication of the provision. A streamlined offer must be coach-centred, driven by what coaches need in terms of content but also delivery mechanisms and locations to make it as accessible as possible.

- Inclusion of under-represented groups and people with protected characteristics is a priority for **sportscotland** and they should explore this in relation to encouraging wider participation in sport as well as diversifying the coaching workforce. To make progress, more work with the coaches, to improve their understanding of diversity and the barriers to inclusion for different groups is recommended. To widen access to coaching qualifications, it will be important to better understand and address the barriers to applying for the UKCC subsidy for under-represented groups. This might include targeting the resources available through the subsidy to achieve widening access objectives.

Going forward the recommendations can inform discussion; engagement with partners and the future direction of **sportscotland**'s support for coaches and coaching.

## For more information

A full evaluation report and three learning notes accompany this executive summary. All documents can all be accessed from the **sportscotland** website: [www.sportscotland.org.uk](http://www.sportscotland.org.uk).