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COACHING

# Women in Sport Coaching Research

Where do things stand in Ireland?

December 2020



# Introduction & Background

## Introduction to Women in Sport

In 2005, Sport Ireland established the Women in Sport (WIS) programme to focus on providing financial resources to encourage more females to participate in sport and physical activity as well as to promote gender equality throughout sport. In 2018, a review of the WIS programme was conducted with the objectives to:

- Develop an enhanced understanding of the current landscape for women's involvement in all areas of sport,
- Identify common barriers and opportunities for women in sport, and
- Make recommendations to inform the development of future policies and programmes relating to strengthening women's involvement in sport.

From the learnings of the review, Sport Ireland launched its Policy on Women in Sport in 2019 which emphasizes four key target areas to support female advancement within sport and lifelong physical activity. The four target pillars are: Coaching and Officiating, Active Participation, Leadership and Governance, and Visibility. This report focuses specifically on the Coaching target area.

## Introduction to the Research

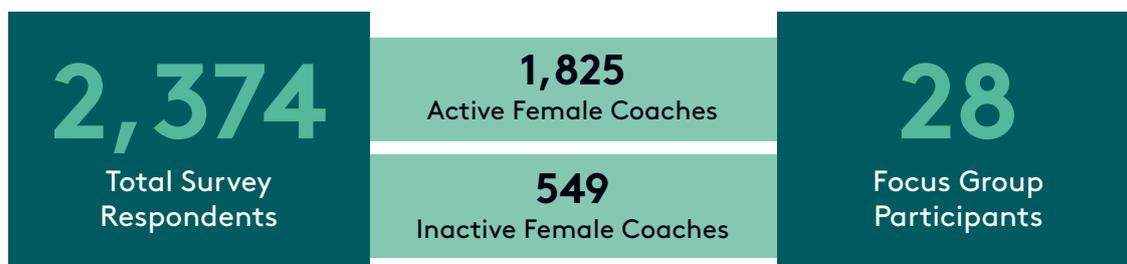
In Ireland, there is limited information available on the coaching experience of females and the impact this has on their involvement in coaching. Based on this knowledge gap, Sport Ireland undertook its first ever study exclusively targeting active and inactive female coaches across all sports on the island of Ireland. The specific aims of the research were to:

- 1 Develop a more in-depth understanding of the status of females in coaching roles on the island of Ireland
- 2 Investigate the challenges and opportunities to increase the numbers of females coaching across all sports and at all levels; and
- 3 Use the feedback to develop good practice programmes, resources or strategies that NGBs and LSPs can use to recruit, retain, develop and progress female coaches.

An online survey was launched in June 2020 which was divided into two sections, one focused on active female coaches and the second on inactive female coaches (defined as not coaching in the previous six months). Six follow-on focus groups were held in November 2020 to explore, in more detail, issues pertinent to active and inactive female coaches. An overview of the research participants and key emerging findings from the study are provided overleaf.

## Profile of the Research Participants

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## Research Findings

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Following a thematic analysis of both survey responses and focus group data, nine themes emerged. These are depicted below and explored in the following pages:





## Theme 1: Coaching Network

An overriding finding from the study was the need to better develop coaching networks. 58% of active female coaches indicated that they would like to observe other coaches in their sport and felt that not being part of a coaching network hampered their advancement opportunities.

Whilst 70% of active female coaches who responded to the survey identified that they had an effective coaching network to assist them, of those who did not, 86% indicated they would like one.

# 70%

Of active female coaches said that they had an effective coaching network to assist them



# 86%

Of active female coaches who did not have an effective coaching network indicated they would like one

Female coaches emphasised the benefits of accessing a coaching network to offer support to coaches and enable shared learning. They highlighted that a coaching network would be particularly helpful for new female coaches or mentors in enabling them to build and develop positive relationships with others who have key experience and expertise.

One focus group with elite level female coaches described how they can feel isolated in their development and would benefit from a network of similar coaches for support and learning.

Female coaches also identified that this coaching network could be based within the coach's own sport, though most recognised the added benefit of utilising those outside of their sport.

The focus groups found a commonality in relation to issues faced by female coaches, irrespective of the sport – this may not have been evident prior to this consultation.



*“From my point of view (when I was previously coaching), no, there was no network, but I have found since with a new sport organisation, there is a big network that you can go and we do have coaches forums and things like that. Which is great when you get together and just talk about different training styles and what works and what doesn’t work. I do think it’s beneficial.”*

Inactive Coach 5

*“It’s a case of, you meet these people, your friends, and then you have conversations more informally than, This is your support network and that’s what they’re there for, which is good, but I think something more structured would be helpful, especially if you’re looking at new coaches or mentors, and might not have those relationships already established.”*

Experienced Coach 2

*“I think in network, absolutely, you have maybe two functions to it, a support function and an education function. Like furthering our knowledge and learning from everybody else’s knowledge, I think that can be beneficial bringing in experts in different fields because there is a commonality there as well if it’s in physiology, whatever, psychology, all those different domains. I think there could be a part to it in that way as well.”*

Elite Coach 4

*“I suppose moving forward we need a network of women who are in because we’re all doing different sports. I think it would be useful to have a network that we can work from.”*

Elite Coach 2





## Theme 2: Barriers to Progression

68% of active female coaches are coaching at a competitive club level, 40% at a recreational or casual club level and 25% at school level. The majority are coaching teens and children, with 67% coaching 13-17-year-olds and 63% 4-12-year-olds. Active female coaches identified several challenges they faced when coaching including:

- Time constraints i.e., personal time balancing including work, family, or sporting commitments
- Sexism and gender related issues
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of NGB and Club support and
- Parental Factors

Active female coaches who did not plan to continue coaching next year or were unsure if they would coach in the following year also cited the following as primary reasons:

- Club issues
- Personal impact
- Parental impact

Furthermore, despite a large percentage of active female coaches indicating that they coached at a competitive level, many did not have ambitions of becoming a high-performance coach. This was due to advancement challenges, job role requirements, self-awareness, courses and personal influences.

### BARRIERS TO PROGRESSION FOR FEMALE COACHES

#### PERSONAL FACTORS

Family circumstances, age (too old/young), confidence, work or education or other sporting commitments

#### JOB ROLE REQUIREMENTS

Travel, relocation, time, politics within the sport, pressure to succeed, challenges with parents

#### ADVANCEMENT CHALLENGES

Lack of opportunities to upskill and progress and limited number of jobs available

#### FINANCIAL IMPACT

Large investment required to progress, cost of courses and training is prohibitive

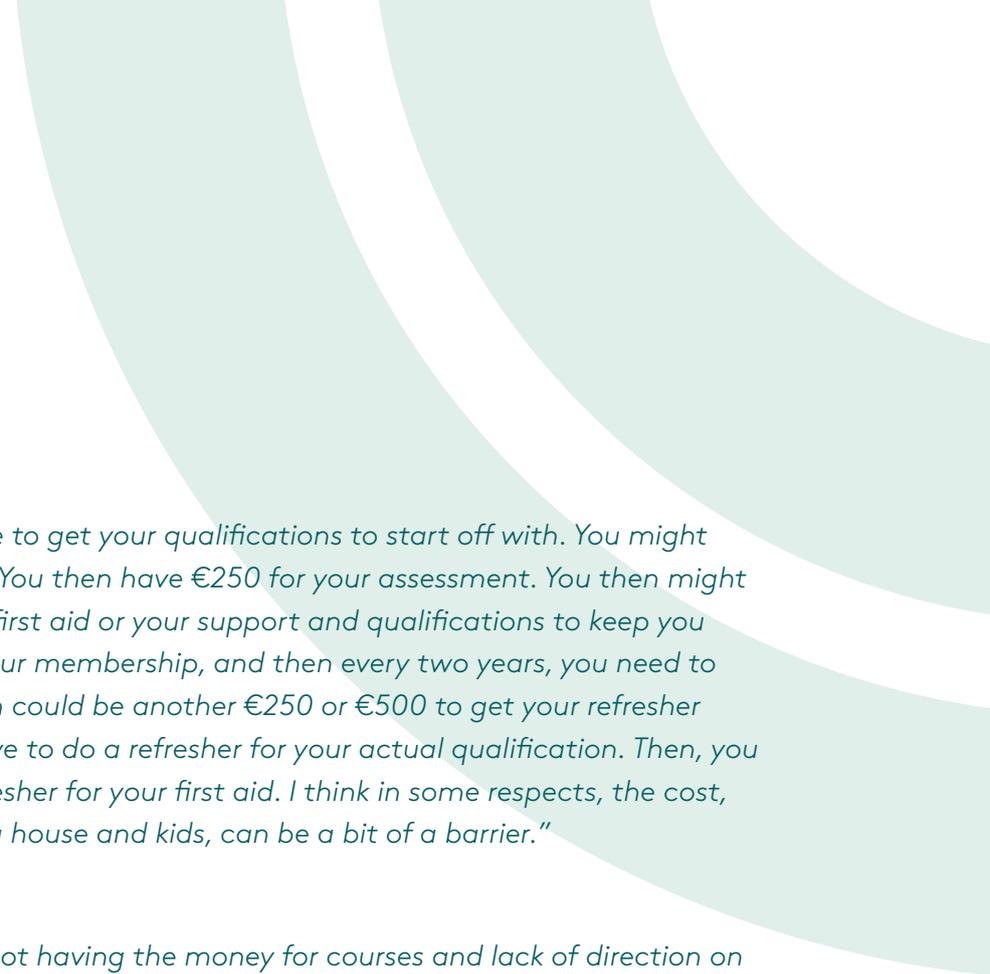
#### GENDER RELATED ISSUES

Sexism, bullying, feeling undervalued and disrespected.

#### NGB/CLUB SUPPORT

Lack of coaching network/coaching community, lack of mentors, inflexible course structures and limited availability or time to complete courses





*"It is actually quite expensive to get your qualifications to start off with. You might have €250 for your training. You then have €250 for your assessment. You then might have another €250 for your first aid or your support and qualifications to keep you up to date. You then have your membership, and then every two years, you need to do a refresher, which is again could be another €250 or €500 to get your refresher done because you might have to do a refresher for your actual qualification. Then, you might also need to do a refresher for your first aid. I think in some respects, the cost, particularly when you have a house and kids, can be a bit of a barrier."*

Inactive Coach 2

*"Not having a mentor, and not having the money for courses and lack of direction on how to achieve status of national coach."*

(Survey Respondent)

*"Time, I'm still an athlete myself so hopefully down the road I'll be in a position to coach/support athletes at a high level"*

(Survey Respondent)

*"I've spent thousands of Euro getting my qualification. Everything is self-funded, and self-supported and driven. I do it because I love it, I wouldn't do it if I didn't. No one's making me do it, but there's definitely no one, it has to be myself pushing all the time, and that it feels a bit like coming at you from all angles, because you don't really have anyone driving you to do it, and then you're also giving up your resources for it."*

Experienced Coach 4

*"Balancing roles. As a coach of disability sport, I would find it difficult to balance both elite coaching and my current role in disability sport."*

(Survey Respondent)

*"Not being from Dublin is a massive problem in the coaching bubble that seems to exist in my sport."*

(Survey Respondent)



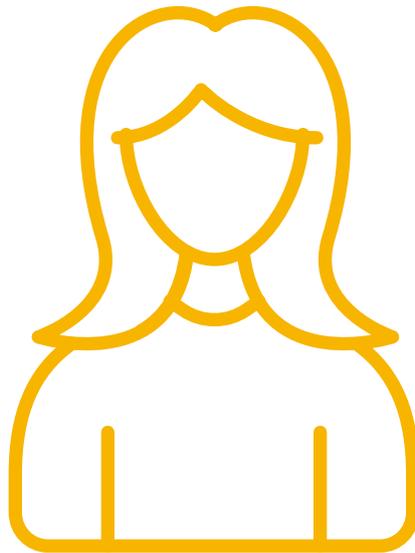


## Theme 3: Role Models & Mentors

Research participants noted the variation of having female role models and mentors available and visible. Most found value from having a mentor who was either male or female, but emphasis was placed on the particular benefits of having a female mentor within a sporting context. They noted the importance of female role models in encouraging and inspiring a pathway in coaching for other females.

# 66%

Of active female coaches had a female coach in their own sporting experience



# 50%

Of active female coaches identified that having a female coach themselves influenced their decision to start coaching



*"I had changeable mentors over the path of the eight years I was coaching. Initially, it would have been the two female coaches that were in the age group ahead of me. I would have looked to them, but then after that, I was looking for best practices around the club. I found another mentor that was male. He was of a developmental style as well. I looked to him for guidance and all that kind of stuff. I also got involved as well in mentoring, I was also mentoring age groups behind me."*

Inactive Coach 4

*"I think for my sport, there is not enough emphasis on the female end of it and then when you do look at the professional female element of it, all of the coaches and managers are male. When you look at the other international teams, they're all men. I suppose that it is hard for my sport, there isn't that many females involved in the coaching element of it and there isn't as much out there for the girls to see as in other sports where obviously, the females are a lot less than the males are. It's about seeing things being publicised for them to actually say, "I could be like them."*

New Coach 1

*"A lot of it was working and talking to other coaches getting to know what worked for them or what didn't work for them as opposed to maybe the course itself, but the support has been there for us. Aside from that, something I found very beneficial has been mentorships. I've been really lucky to have had good female role models who have developed into mentors and friends."*

Elite Coach 4

*"I had two very strong female role models who were both coaches. One seems to be able to turn a hand at any sport she could coach. Another teacher in my school who would've coached us in various sports as well. I think seeing those role models, it never led me to believe that it was males that were only my coaches. I was very lucky and from talking to other female coaches in some ways, it's a little bit of a unique experience that a lot of my coaches were female across different sports that I played. Not a lot of people said that when I was speaking to other coaches in a course I did last year."*

Elite Coach 1





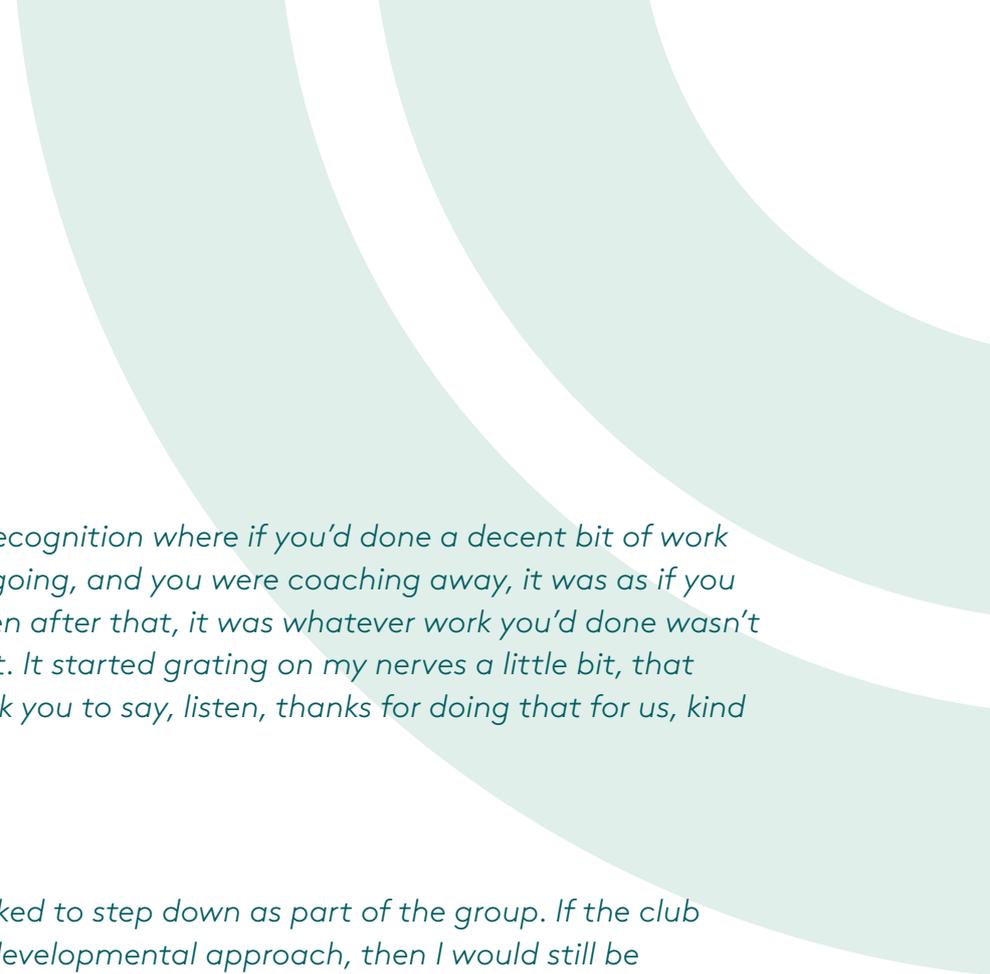
## Theme 4: NGB and Club Support

A lack of NGB and Club support was a prominent challenge faced by female coaches, they noted challenges with the following:



Female coaches identified that there could be more NGB and Club support offered and that such support could be better. Active female coaches would like to be supported with funding to attend coaching courses, opportunities to progress within their club or sport, recognition, access to a coaching network, skills and knowledge to develop athletes and additional coaches and volunteers. Elite active coaches also identified they would like to be supported with international learning opportunities.





*“Then to a lesser degree, recognition where if you’d done a decent bit of work to get something up and going, and you were coaching away, it was as if you got kicked to the curb. Then after that, it was whatever work you’d done wasn’t really of any use or interest. It started grating on my nerves a little bit, that there was not even a thank you to say, listen, thanks for doing that for us, kind of thing.”*

Inactive Coach 2

*“Mine was about being asked to step down as part of the group. If the club had supported me in my developmental approach, then I would still be coaching, but because they didn’t handle it right then, that’s why I’m not coaching.”*

Inactive Coach 4

*“As I said, the website isn’t great, so you need to keep the relationships of yourself or put them yourself. I wish there would be a little bit more support, and especially the support or the communication between NGB and our region and then to us. There’s somewhere it doesn’t really work.”*

Experienced Coach 2

*“I get 100% support, but part of the issue with all clubs is recruitment. It’s the very same people doing the very same job. We’re trying to do it at a local level. Maybe the NGBs could have a role within perhaps a national campaign to get more people out volunteering so that they know what the amount of work that is involved in coaching need to be at that level rather than simply at local level every week. Trying to tap people on the shoulder.”*

New Coach 2





## Theme 5: Personal Commitment

69% of elite female coaches spend over 9 hours a week on coaching related activities whilst non-elite active female coaches spend on average 8.4 hours a week on coaching and related roles. For many active female coaches, coaching consumes all of the free time they have which, over time takes a toll on other aspects of their life. In their main coaching role, most active female coaches are volunteers (65%) with no paid expenses, while 27% receive payment for coaching.

**8.4**

Average number of hours per week spent by active female coaches on coaching and related roles.

**65%**

Of active female coaches are volunteers in their main coaching role with no paid expenses.

**27%**

Of active female coaches received payment for coaching and related roles.

Both active and inactive female coaches highlighted they faced various challenges regarding the level of personal commitment and time balancing required when coaching. Coaches identified the following personal commitment factors:





*“It really was going to be tough to coach 16 hours a week with the paperwork and work full time on top of that. I opted out then.”*

Inactive Coach 3

*“For me, it was the Irish team took up all of my free time. There is my club team and then we had the national team. It was coaching and concentrating on coaching all the time. There was no going away with friends for weekends and that kind of stuff.”*

Experienced Coach 1

*“It was passing in the wind as I say between trying to fit it in. I just did it because I had a huge love and a drive first that I fitted in wherever I could and yet like others, sometimes, things dropped, like missing out on communions or confirmations or family events because the sport came first or even going on holidays. There was a lot of that as well.”*

Player to Coach 2

*“I think that the better the kids or the athletes get, the more time it takes up as well. I’ve maybe gone from your recreational competition again, now you’re doing your national competition again, and your training camps, and then you have to organize whatever international job that you’re doing. Suddenly, you look at the year because we plan all our years at the start of the year and estimate dates and suddenly see all the weekends go. ...You definitely get into a mindset where all the lines are blurred.”*

Experienced Coach 3

*“I have to be honest. Within this group, I find it difficult sometimes to juggle. I work full time as well. Pre-COVID, I’ll be out five nights a week coaching with juveniles and a senior group that we take as well. Coming home Friday night at eight o’clock, and I’m up then again at eight going coaching at nine again. Then sometimes, we’d have an all-day competition Sunday. It actually consumes me at times. One of the things that we did see with COVID was it was nice for us as coaches to be able to step back from that and not have that intensity of competition.”*

New Coach 2





## Theme 6: Coaching Culture

Active female coaches had varied coaching experiences with 45% coaching individual athletes and 42% coaching team only groups. 80% coached one sport, 79% coached two sports, 71% coached three sports and 63% coaches 4+ sports. Most coached mixed gender athletes/teams.

**45%**

Of active female coaches coached individual athletes

**42%**

Of active female coaches coached team only groups

**63%**

Of active female coaches coached mixed gender athletes/teams

Despite several female coaches noting that they received respect from male athletes in a coaching situation, many female coaches faced challenges and had more negative experiences because of their gender or age in other coaching related roles, particularly when dealing with male parents, male coaching colleagues and males in positions of management or administration. Female coaches cited negative experiences related to:

- Inferior treatment from male parents, male coaches, male club administrators
- Bullying for being a female coach
- Seen as less knowledgeable
- Overlooked by male peers
- Not being taken seriously as a female
- Disrespected
- Stigma of being a female
- Having to prove yourself
- Male and female athletes question experience
- Overlooked due to age or not as respected as older coaches

### SEXISM

Gender related issues from male parents, male coaches and male club administrators.

### STIGMA

Stigma of being female, having to prove yourself, male and female athletes question experience

### BULLYING

Seen as less knowledgeable, overlooked by male peers, not taken seriously & disrespected.

### AGEISM

Overlooked due to age and experience, not as respected by older coaches





*"I'm working solely with male athletes and I've never maybe very rarely had an issue with a male player in terms of being a female coach but it can more often comes from a male member of the management team or a male member of the executive committee or even just a supporter."*

Elite Coach 1

*"When I started coaching at national level which would be probably 25 years ago now, there wasn't another female involved and that was it, and they (male coaches) were always trying to-- to say knock you is probably the wrong word, but to have a little bit of a chip."*

Player to Coach 1

*"I think the thing I've noticed is that the more successful you are, the more people try and take you down and you really need to develop a thick skin. I think you can have these male coaches that maybe are less experienced than you but do an awful lot more talking than you and they get listened to more."*

Elite Coach 2

*"The accountability mechanisms aren't really working in my view. That would be experiences as an athlete definitely. Education is a big, big one. I think some people because this has been culturally accepted for such a long time, they don't understand their behaviours. As a female, if you're calling out the behaviour, either you're hormonal or you're emotional, there's something wrong with you when you call it-- It has to be a more of a public message of calling out the behaviour. I think there could be interesting formats. I guess when you're in the situation of being attacked or something, et cetera, it's very, very difficult to call out the behaviour in that specific situation. I think if there's more education around those it makes people more aware of their behaviours. When you're in the situation, it's really hard to do anything other than neutralize it or move away or whatever."*

Elite Coach 4

*"I would genuinely say no (being equal to male coaches in the club) and I think it's because a lot of our male population have never been exposed to female coaches, to girls in sport. I hear the girls saying when they played the sport in school, "The boys won't pass to me because I'm a girl." I think you do get looked at differently from the male population in the club and the female population in the club from my personal experience."*

New Coach 1

*"I've never had an issue with athletes. They've always been very open and receptive. The issues have more been maybe sometimes with, well not directly then, sometimes committee members or people like that or other male coaches as well."*

Elite Coach 4





## Theme 7: Confidence

Of the 1,825 active female coaches who responded to the survey, most enjoyed coaching and had moderate to high levels of confidence in their ability to coach.

**80%**

Of respondents rated their ability to coach as either good or very good

**94%**

Of respondents said they enjoy or really enjoy coaching

**44%**

Of respondents rated themselves as moderate confidence

**43%**

Of respondents rated themselves as high confidence

Based on their response to confidence levels, respondents were asked to explain the reasons for their rating. Five key themes emerged that influenced respondent's confidence levels including:

- The level of knowledge and skills they had
- The level of feedback they received from athletes, parents, and other coaches
- Their achievements, triumphs, and successes
- Areas for development in their coaching abilities
- The level of experience they had i.e., seasoned, or new coach

### KNOWLEDGE

Continuous learning, coaching development, strong technical & coaching skills.



### FEEDBACK

Input from athletes, parents, other coaches and kids to learn competencies.



### ACHIEVEMENTS

Results and placings, goal attainment, successful teams.



### DEVELOPMENT

Could gain more experience, exposure to diverse coaching experiences, new training.



### SEASONED VS NEW COACH

Low experience were less assured, had lower qualifications, lacked skills & knowledge.



Whilst overall, coaches noted they were confident in their coaching practice, confidence levels fluxed in other situations. Low levels of confidence were noted in the following scenarios:



*"You're a lot more comfortable when you're in that situation (coaching). For me anyway, I'm a lot more confident it's when you're maybe sitting across a boardroom or you're having discussions with male coaches that it can drop down a little bit more."*

Elite Coach 1

*"Recently, my club that I am part of was looking for a new coach. I just didn't have the confidence to go for it. I knew that there was a lot of older men within the club, that can be quite difficult. I didn't want to put myself in a position that would knock my confidence."*

Coaching Males 1

*"You might be in a more political scenario or with other male coaches or yes, in different discussions, then the confidence at times goes downwards simply because you can get a direct negative feedback or sexist comments or things that come straight at you. Obviously, it knocks your confidence slightly. Yes, it can knock back two or three sometimes. Sometimes you can get an email and it can go right down to two again (confidence level) but you pick yourself up and go again."*

Elite Coach 4





## Theme 8: Reengagement of Inactive Coaches

Of female coaches who have stopped coaching:

- **60%** stopped for time related reasons of trying to balance work, family and coaching
- **43%** stopped for personal reasons such as moving house or pregnancy
- **30%** stopped for club related reasons such as management issues



When asked if they intend to resume coaching 41% said yes and 43% said maybe. Many coaches would return if a NGB or club were to reach out and personally invite them. Encouragers to return to coaching include:

- NGB and club support
- Acknowledgement and appreciation of coaches
- Flexibility with coaching qualifications and upskilling





*“More encouragement from my club, less stringent re-qualification requirements, a friendlier, more hospitable female work environment. The biggest reason I am reluctant to go back to instructing is the social environment in where I worked - it reeked of machoism. A more inclusive, friendly environment would’ve been more enticing.”*

Inactive Coach 4

*“I’d love there to be some refreshers (courses) on where the training manual comes because I know for my sport, for example, has moved on a bit in five years. I do keep up with what everything is, but I’d love to see a refresher course, an opportunity. I’d love to go back and I have six people that’d love to go back in coaching two or three sessions a week.”*

Inactive Coach 3 (16 years coaching experience)

*“I got exhausted and exasperated by it. It just felt like you’re pushing yourself all the time and getting nowhere and getting no recognition for any of the achievements that you’ve done in coaching from the club.”*

Inactive Coach 3

*“I moved counties and did look around to get involved. There didn’t seem to be much of an appreciation of the fact that you had so many years coaching under your belt, and you might’ve been bringing forward new ideas and like that too, “Well, no, we don’t want those ideas because this is the way we’ve always done things.” There was no openness to a new approach.”*

Inactive Coach 1

*“I just feel they could do more for reaching out to people, female coaches.”*

Inactive Coach 3





## Theme 9: Learning Structures

Most active female coaches who responded to the survey held a coaching qualification and just over two thirds sought to complete their next qualification. Just over a fifth of respondents were unsure if they would complete their next coaching qualification.

**88%**

Of active female coaches hold a coaching qualification

**61%**

Of active female coaches look to complete their next coaching qualification

**21%**

Of active female coaches are unsure if they will complete their next coaching qualification

Active female coaches who responded to the survey had completed coach education and development courses in a variety of settings including online and practical, face-to-face workshops.

**84%**

Of active female coaches attended practical workshops

**27%**

Of active female coaches attended a coaching network

**35%**

Of active female coaches attended webinars

**51%**

Of active female coaches attended coach education/achieved qualification

**29%**

Of active female coaches attended an online course

**51%**

Of active female coaches attended local courses



Learning structures were identified as a key barrier to progression for coaches with respondents highlighting the need for improved course flexibility and improved availability and accessibility of courses. Similarly, learning structures such as availability and accessibility of continued professional development opportunities were identified as important influencing factors to encourage inactive female coaches to resume coaching.

Active female coaches were also asked what they would like to be supported with. They identified the following:



*"The safeguarding course gets booked up about six months in advance. It is a hard course to get, and that is the first course you need before you can get on the pitch with the kids. It's a two and a half to three hours online. They're limiting the number of people allowed on the Zoom class. Which from a classroom end, I get because when they're in a classroom, people are talking. When they're on Zoom, they're not. They're releasing courses very late at the moment. They haven't upped their numbers, but the charge is still the same as what it was when it was being held in a hall that had to be rented. Which I just think now with our time through COVID is actually to get more courses out there for people to get them to do it."*

New Coach 4

*"I might end up traveling or to the sports campus for an entire weekend of a Friday night, Saturday, Sunday to do courses perhaps over two or three weekends. I do find that quite demanding. I've often just had to up sticks for the weekend to attend courses."*

New Coach 2

*"Unfortunately, our national governing body, it hasn't progressed any further than the level one in coaching. They just haven't completed level two or level three, whatever their presentation problems were or whatever. We cannot advance within the country here to level two or level three within our own sports. Therefore, if you want to gain an experience like that, you have to go out of Ireland and that's what I did as well."*

Elite Coach 3





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