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COACHING

# Women in Coaching Interactive Toolkit

Recruitment, Development and  
Retention of Female Coaches



#Women  
InSportIRE

Welcome to Sport Ireland's Coaching Toolkit to support organisations in their planning for recruiting, developing and retaining women in coaching.



# Welcome

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Welcome to Sport Ireland's Women in Coaching Toolkit to support organisations in their planning for recruiting, developing and retaining females in coaching. The toolkit has been developed as part of the work of Sport Ireland under the Coaching and Officiating pillar of its Policy on Women In Sport and in response to research conducted on women in coaching in Ireland.

All sports organisations are encouraged to use this toolkit on a regular basis. It should become the constant reference for all organisational planning relating to the coaching workforce (staff or volunteers) in sport. There is no one sport in Ireland that cannot benefit from understanding more on recruiting, developing or retaining women in coaching.

We know that there are less women coaches in Ireland than men and that the percentage of women coaching versus men declines as the level of sport increases. The information included in this toolkit can support organisations as they look to change this trend. It is not a case of 'let's fix the women to get more women coaching'. Like society, the culture of a sports organisation is vital and how inclusive and welcoming its environment is for all coaches to thrive and develop can be the determining factor in achieving equal numbers of women coaches across all levels in all sports.

The benefits of having more women coaching in sport is well discussed within this toolkit and I welcome the suggested actions dotted throughout to help organisations as they continue their work in this space.

I would like to thank the various staff involved in the development of this toolkit including Nora Stapleton, Sport Ireland's Women in Sport Lead and Vicki Guy, Sport Ireland Coach Education Development Officer, as well as input from Sport Ireland Coaching, the Marketing and Communications Unit and guidance and support from the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Working Group.

**John Treacy**

Chief Executive  
Sport Ireland

# Welcome

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Sport Ireland Coaching is committed to increasing diversity in coaching and to broadening the coaching base to include more women from grassroots to high performance.

This interactive and innovative Coaching Toolkit is designed to signpost practical ways forward for Sports Bodies, and their strategic leads, to overcome the barriers to participation and progression for women coaches and to encourage, support and drive organisational change. The Toolkit will assist in the recruitment, development and retention of more female coaches at every level of their sport by creating an environment where all coaches flourish.

Organisational culture and reference to it is mentioned throughout the toolkit. Using the toolkit an organisation can start the change process by looking within its own sport and questioning its culture. If carried out positively the steps sport makes towards gender equality may, over time, have an effect on how women are perceived in society.

Finally I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this Coaching Toolkit, particularly Nora Stapleton, Sport Ireland Women in Sport Lead, and Vicki Guy, Sport Ireland Coach Education Development Officer, for their work in driving and developing this important resource.

**Michael McGeehin**

Director of Sport Ireland Coaching

# Foreword

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Welcome to Sport Ireland's Coaching Toolkit to support organisations in their planning for recruiting, developing and retaining women in coaching. The toolkit has been developed as part of the work of Sport Ireland under the Coaching and Officiating pillar of its Policy on Women In Sport and in response to research conducted on women in coaching in Ireland.

This toolkit has been developed by Nora Stapleton, Sport Ireland's Women in Sport Lead and Vicki Guy, Sport Ireland Coach Education Development Officer, as well as input from the Sport Ireland Coaching Unit and guidance and support from the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Working Group.

It is modelled on World Rugby's 'Women in Coaching Toolkit' (World Rugby, 2020) and is derived from the 'SCORE Gender Equality In Coaching Interactive Toolkit', developed with support from UK Coaching. This document is published under licence from ENGSO which asserts their right to be identified as the AUTHORS of the 'SCORE Toolkit' in accordance with the Berne Convention and the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

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Sport Ireland would like to thank Professor Leanne Norman (Professor of Sport & Sociocultural Studies, Director of the Research Centre for Social Justice in Sport & Society, Leeds Beckett University) for her advice in the development of this toolkit.

## The Coaching Development Programme for Ireland

The Coaching Development Programme for Ireland (CDPI), formerly the National Coaching Development Programme (NCDP), aims to facilitate the development of coaching and coach education in Ireland. The programme is overseen and managed by Sport Ireland Coaching and operates in partnership with National Governing Bodies and other agencies to develop an internationally recognised coach education system. There are over 60 National Governing Bodies engaged in the programme, training and certifying 25,000 coaches each year on 130 different accredited Coach and Instructor awards. Since its inception in 1993, over 222,000 people have been trained and certified as coaches through the programme. In 2020 a review of the CDPI was conducted.

The CDPI currently consists of two "Frameworks", each of which set out core common knowledge and competencies for coaches, instructors and leaders working across different sports, activities and environments.

They are: - Sports Coach Development Framework  
- Adventure Sport Instructor and Leader Framework

The frameworks include the skills required by the Coach and Instructor Developers who lead and support the development of coaches and adventure sports instructors.

It is envisaged that this toolkit can support and complement the CDPI while understanding that some of the actions implemented by the NGB may fall outside of the CDPI remit and NGB awards.

# Terminology/Glossary of Terms

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The below glossary on terminology used in this document was provided by Sport Ireland Coaching and is in line with the International Council for Coaching Excellence.

- **Coaching** is a process that provides guidance, feedback and direction to enable participants or performers to achieve their goals in their chosen sport/physical activity.
- **Coaches** are the qualified persons who plan and deliver sports training, by applying demonstrable skills and knowledge, for performance, recreation or healthy goals in a safe manner.
- An **instructor** facilitates skill development to allow independent participation in the activity or participation under minimal supervision.
- A **leader** leads or guides participants in safe and enjoyable participation in sports and activities. While a leader equips participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to allow safe participation in that activity, they do not intentionally develop skills and knowledge to allow independent participation in the activity.
- A **qualified coach, instructor or leader** has demonstrated that they have met defined standards of knowledge, skills and practice.
- A **Coach Developer or Instructor Developer** leads the education and training of coaches or instructors and supports them as they learn and develop.
- **Athlete/Player** – for the purposes of this document, this term is used to describe the active participants in the sport, e.g. the athletes/players on a team, in a training group, etc.
- **Community of Practice** – A community of practice is a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.
- **Wall of Support** – List of options and actions an organisation could apply to their Coaching structures for their coaches and coach developers to support and enable them in their practice (See Appendix 1, Wall of Support for Coaches).
- **Co-coaching** can be a two-way learning opportunity; working in pairs/triads, participants can take turns as a Coach and as an Observer to learn, provide feedback and gain multiple perspectives.
- The role of an **assistant coach** might involve the following; supports the head or main coach, ensures that equipment and facilities are maintained, performs administrative duties, has a role in coaching the team/athlete. Assistant coaches can also schedule and supervise practice sessions and organize team events.
- **Shadowing** involves observing a coach in their job to gain a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of that coach. Coaches and trainee coaches often use shadowing opportunities to get a taste for a particular job that they might be considering.
- **Coaching internships** can provide an environment in which developing coaches are able to learn their craft through a hands on, immersive experience. Successful coaching internships can support the coach to become a high-performance coach by being immersed in a high-performance culture, and working alongside elite coaches and athletes on a daily basis.

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# Introduction



## WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

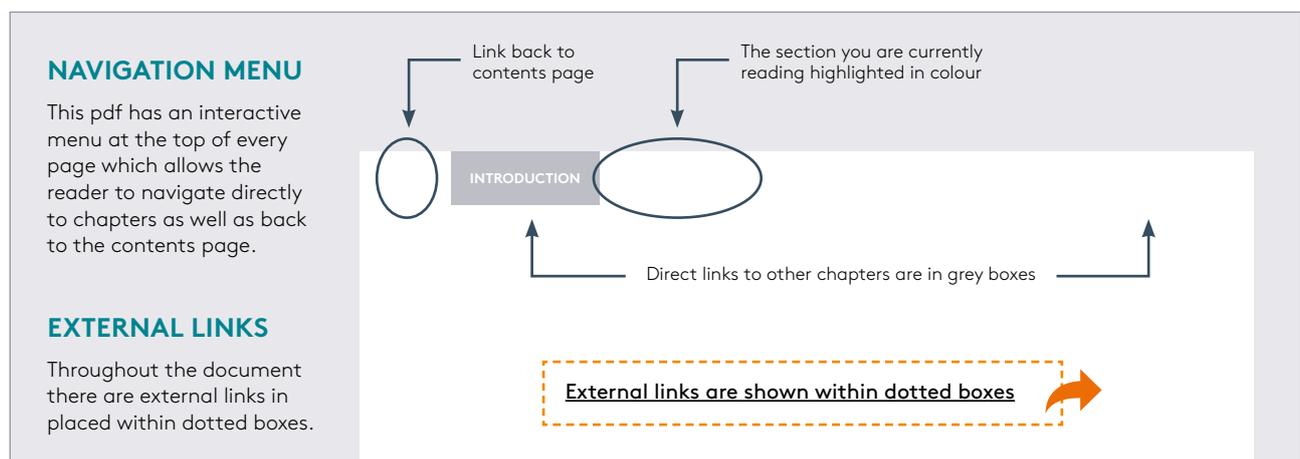
All sports organisations are encouraged to use this toolkit on a regular basis. It should become the constant reference for all organisational planning relating to the coaching workforce (staff or volunteers) in sport. There is no one sport in Ireland that cannot benefit from understanding more on recruiting, developing or retaining women in coaching.

The main user of this toolkit is expected to be the strategic lead within an organisation tasked with overseeing the development and implementation of plans for recruiting, developing and retaining coaches in sport.

This toolkit and the key messages within it will also help CEOs, Board members, Performance Directors and other senior managers who play a vital and essential role in ensuring their sport caters equally for all coaches.

The following outlines the roles of those in sport in relation to women in coaching and the sporting environment.

- **Key leaders and decision makers (CEOs, Directors, Board members)** – to lead the cultural environment in which women feel valued and equal in sport, to drive change in their organisation to get more women into coaching and support the growth and effectiveness of these coaches; to assist in raising awareness and understanding of the current landscape and issues, set targets and aspirations, allocate resources and support achievement in these areas.
- **High Performance Directors and Heads of Coaching** – to support development of strategies, succession planning and take proactive steps to identify, develop, deploy and employ women at High Performance (HP) levels; to develop and sustain a pipeline of female coaches to support enjoyment, progression and wellbeing of all participants.
- **Coach Developers and development staff** – to identify, recruit and develop female coaches through specific interventions which enable access to qualifications, experience and deployment/employment into coaching roles for women at all levels; to allow women to thrive within sport and to develop a diverse, effective and sustainable coaching database. For the purpose of this toolkit, it is anticipated that Coach Developers will be the first point of contact for female coaches looking to enter and/or progress as a coach within their NGB and it is the NGB's responsibility to ensure the Coach Developers are trained, supported and ultimately available to coaches.



## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT



*"It is not the way we say we get things done, such as strategies, policies or procedures. We need to examine how we really get things done: the values, rituals, shared assumptions, the traditions, the perceptions, the unwritten rules, the stories that circulate within our NGB. These create our organisational cultures... The pace of change in the make-up of the coaching profession is slow because it is an issue of cultural change, of deeply embedded ideas and behaviours within sport that have been so long in the making, they have become normalised..."*

(L. Norman 2017)

### The following points are extremely important to note.

- The toolkit consists of four key chapters and should be read in conjunction with [Sport Ireland's Women in Coaching Research Report](#). This way the reader will understand the content and its relevance based on the research of female coaches.
- Chapter One on Planning is considered vital to any further actions the organisation might undertake in relation to developing plans for women in coaching.
- The relevance of Chapters Two, Three and Four depend on the specific needs of the organisation and allows the reader to move between them depending on the plans they are putting in place.
- Dotted throughout each chapter are suggested actions that may support or contribute to plans the organisation might put in place. The user should save these actions and merge them into their own plans or use them as conversation pieces in planning meetings with others when discussing women in coaching.
- The toolkit is only useful if the person reading it is serious about creating plans/actions to improve how their organisation supports female coaches.
- The toolkit will only be effective if there is full organisational support from the Board to staff and volunteers who are clear on their aims and objectives, and want to provide an environment where female coaches flourish.

## WHY MORE WOMEN IN COACHING IS BENEFICIAL

A diverse coaching team will relate to a broader reach of athletes and help with retention. Whilst some athletes may work better with male coaches, others with female, or just with those with a similar background. The more diverse the coaching team, the more athletes will be accommodated. The benefits of gender equality in coaching can be summarised in five key areas:

- **More choice:** More coaches equals more choice which equals greater participant satisfaction.
- **Additional skills:** Participants and coaches have access to a wider skill set.
- **Untapped resources:** More inclusive recruitment practice will reduce shortages in club coaching.
- **Cultural change:** Equality within the coaching environment can ensure the culture of sport and coaching is welcoming to all genders.
- **All welcome:** When female coaches are present and visible, it emphasizes the message that females are welcome.
- **Economic benefit:** For example, in 2018 the economic value of sports volunteering in Ireland was approximately €1.5 billion per year, should the average industrial wage be applied to this unpaid work. In the case of volunteer coaching, additional coaches provide an economic benefit to the team/club with their time and expertise.

Research shows that same sex role models positively influence self-perceptions (Chalabaev, Sarrazin, Fontayne, Boiché, & Clément-Guillotin, 2013). Below is a collection of points made by various experts in their field as to why having more women in coaching is beneficial to a sport.

- They challenge stereotypes about gender and leadership and offer diverse perspectives, insight and advice to their athletes (L. Norman, Rankin Wright, & Allison, 2018).
- Having gender diversity in role models is important because it challenges outdated gender stereotypes about females in leadership (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012).
- Research conducted by long-standing organisation “the Girl Scouts” in the USA, 2002, found that girls want and need female role models. LaVoi likened this to the effect of former female athletes who become coaches and are close to their athletes in age and have experienced many of the same issues (Women in Sport Coaching, 2016).
- It was found that when males have experience of seeing females as competent athletes or players within the sporting sphere, they’re more likely to respect them in the other areas of their lives, at work, as friends and in intimate relationships (L. Norman, 2015).
- Women advocate for their own needs, programs, and athletes. When women are “out of sight, out of mind,” meeting their needs does not get prioritized. Conversely, when there is a critical mass of women decision-makers, the issues which previously went unaddressed can become priorities (Clark, 2012).
- If females see other females coaching they may think about coaching as a legitimate and viable career. Just by being more visible in their role they may inspire other females to pursue and emulate their achievement (Clark, 2012).

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Organisational culture and reference to it is mentioned throughout this toolkit. Many women face cultural barriers on a daily basis. This affects how they are perceived in society and in sport. If carried out positively, the steps sport makes towards gender equality may, over time, have an effect on how women are perceived in society.

An organisation can start this change process by looking within its own sport and questioning its culture.

- Does the sport proactively welcome women? If so, how?
- What is the perception of your sport? Is it 'a sport for men' or 'a sport for all'?
- Are clubs supportive and do they have proactive measures in place to make women feel equally as valued in coaching?
- How many women work in the development of your sport?
- How many women are in senior management roles and/or on the Board?
- How is your sport publicised externally? Are images of men playing and coaching in sport predominantly used or is it 50/50 female to male imagery?
- What policies and processes are in place that support and protect coaches? (For example, employment, health, anti-discrimination, anti-harassment/bullying policies).

Knowing your organisation and, if necessary, changing its culture and profile is not a short-term fix but recognising where women are under-represented or report poorer experiences in coaching in your organisation is a good starting point for making those changes.

As discussed in other parts of this toolkit, the approach your sport takes towards promoting the value of female coaches and proactively welcoming female coaches to develop is of paramount importance. This is discussed in greater detail on page 57.

### KEY POINTS



Full organisational and Board support required to successfully implement actions that will support the recruitment, development and retention of female coaches.



Planning is key. Short, medium and long-term goals.



The Head of Coaching (or equivalent) is ultimately responsible for implementing plans for women in coaching, but can delegate as appropriate.



What is the culture in your sport? Are male and female coaches valued equally?

## SPORT IRELAND POLICY ON WOMEN IN SPORT

Women in Sport is central to the work of Sport Ireland. Since 2005, the Sport Ireland 'Women in Sport' Programme has funded a wide range of initiatives delivered by National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) to further the agenda of gender equality in sport.

Following an extensive project throughout 2018, Sport Ireland published its new Women in Sport (WIS) Policy in March 2019. The policy outlines Sport Ireland's vision for women in sport as one where females have an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential, while enjoying a lifelong involvement in sport. Sport Ireland is committed to increasing females' sustained involvement in sport as coaches, volunteers, club members, athletes, advocates, leaders, and participants from grassroots to the podium. Through the WIS Policy, Sport Ireland identified four key areas, which have emerged as current gaps and future opportunities for women in sport.

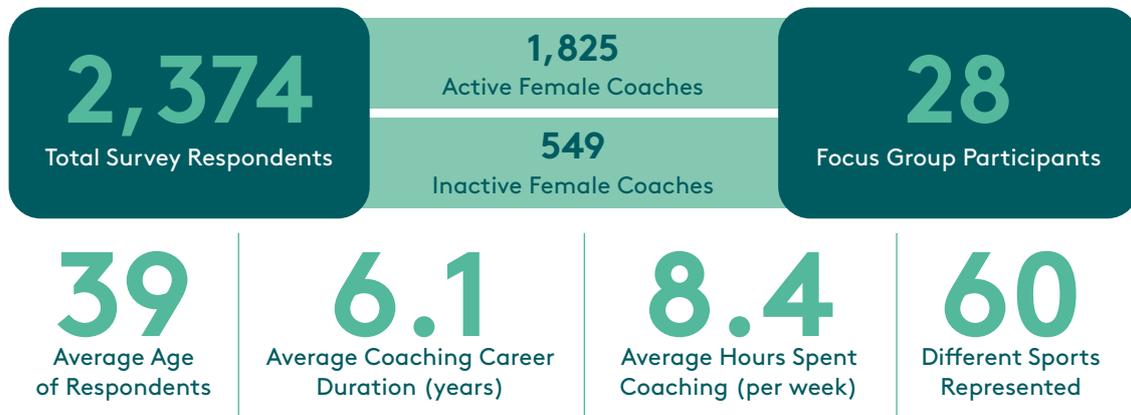


To address these target areas, Sport Ireland is focused on achieving objectives assigned to each.



## WOMEN IN COACHING RESEARCH

In June 2020, Sport Ireland released its first ever Women in Coaching survey. This survey aimed to gather the most up to date information from active and inactive coaches/instructors in Ireland on their coaching experiences in order to help inform the development of future plans, programmes and initiatives for female coaches in the country.



### RESEARCH FINDINGS

Through analysing the results of the survey and follow up focus groups, Sport Ireland aimed to:

- Develop a more in-depth understanding of the status of women in coaching roles on the island of Ireland,
- Investigate the challenges and opportunities to increase the numbers of women coaching across all sports and at all levels,
- Use the feedback to develop good practice programmes, resources or strategies available for NGBs and LSPs to utilise, that will lead to successful recruitment, retention, development and progression of women in coaching.

Following a thematic analysis of both survey responses and focus group data, nine themes emerged. These themes are outlined in more detail in the [Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Report 2021](#) and are depicted below:



Figure 1 – Themes identified in the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Report 2021.

**Resulting from this analysis and additional research on women in coaching, Sport Ireland have developed this Coaching Toolkit. The information contained is aimed at supporting those who recruit, develop and support women coaches.**

## FEMALE COACHES IN IRELAND

The data on coaching numbers across Ireland is an approximate figure. Databases with coaching numbers tend to contain every coach ever accredited, rather than active coaches. However, using what we can from statistics provided by National Governing Bodies and surveys such as the Irish Sports Monitor, we know that there are fewer female coaches in sport than male coaches. As the coaching levels increase, the percentage of female coaches decreases. Hence the reason coaching is a key target area under the WIS Policy.

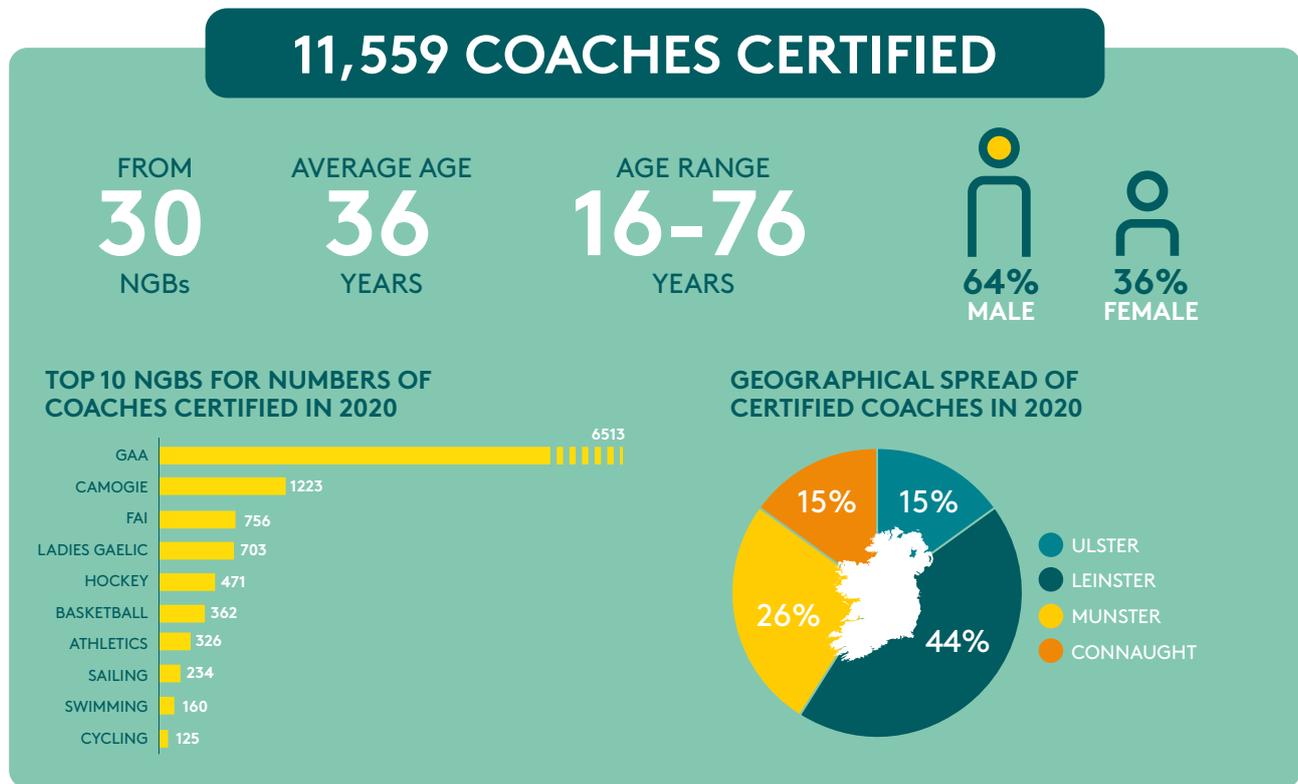


Figure 2 – Data showing the number of certified coaches from Sport Ireland Coaching Annual Report 2020

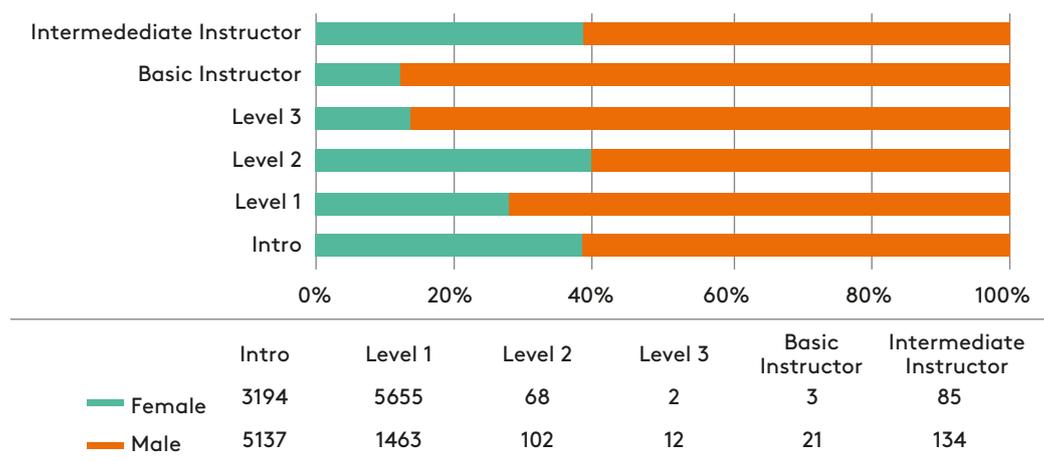


Figure 3 – A gender breakdown of certified Coaches/instructors from Sport Ireland Coaching Annual Report 2020.

[View Sport Ireland Coaching Annual Report 2020](#)



# CHAPTER 1 Planning

# 1





## DEVELOPING A PLAN TO INCREASE THE QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF FEMALE COACHES

Planning is essential when looking to make any improvements, changes, or develop new initiatives/ programmes in your organisation. To implement effective and sustainable plans, you should be able to answer the following questions:

 <p><b>Where are you now?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Review Where You Are At</b> – Audit your current environment in relation to female coaches including the organisational culture.</li> <li>• <b>Raise Awareness</b> – Communication and consultation with all stakeholders brings them on the same journey.</li> <li>• <b>Barriers and Challenges</b> – Understand the barriers and challenges women in coaching experience in your sport.</li> <li>• <b>Problem Identified</b> – What problem/s are you trying to solve?</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Where do you want to be?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Set Goals</b> – Goals define the general intentions and ambitions of the organisation in relation to women in coaching.</li> <li>• <b>Identify outcomes</b> – What does success look like for the organisation in 5 years time?</li> <li>• <b>Targets</b> – Set realistic and meaningful targets for your sport.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>How are you going to get there?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Full Organisation and Board Support</b> – All plans need to be fully supported by everyone in the organisation but especially the Board.</li> <li>• <b>Take Action</b> – What are you going to do? What programmes/initiatives will you implement?</li> <li>• <b>Gap Analysis</b> – Identify the gaps between what you want to achieve and what you already have.</li> <li>• <b>Scoping and Researching</b> – What can you learn? Who can you learn from?</li> <li>• <b>Take Responsibility</b> – Recognise what you need to do to make this change.</li> <li>• <b>Work Collaboratively</b> – Who else in the organisation needs to be involved in the planning, development and delivery of strategies and tactics? Connect and integrate to maximise resources and reduce duplication. Is there an opportunity to collaborate with other sports who have the same goal?</li> <li>• <b>Plan in Action</b> – How are you going to do this?</li> </ul>

**By working through this toolkit, it will allow you to establish a plan for your organisation and decide on what is important and attainable for you to implement the suggested actions.**

## WHERE ARE YOU NOW?



Unless you know what you have, how do you know what you need to change or where you want to be?

### AUDIT YOUR CURRENT COACHING WORKFORCE/PERSONNEL

Firstly, you need to agree who you class as a coach. For some sports, the terminology will mean an instructor is defined as a coach. Everyone in your sporting organisation should be clear on this. For the purpose of this toolkit, Sport Ireland Coaching and the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) defines coaching as ‘a process that provides guidance, feedback and direction to enable participants or performers to achieve their goals in their chosen sport/physical activity’.

Gathering data is an essential element that supports planning in sports organisations. Sports should ensure all data can be analysed by gender as well as other marginalized identities (e.g. race, sexuality, age, class, ability, parenthood, and ethnicity). Answering the following questions will be useful as part of your coaching audit. The audit will identify trends in your coaching personnel that may help future planning. It may help identify how your findings fit against the other sports or against your sport in other countries.

#### Examples of questions to use in a Coaching Audit

- How many female coaches are actively coaching in your sport?
- What percentage of your coaches are female?
- Who are they coaching?
- What level of team/athlete are they coaching?
- Where are they coaching?
- What qualifications do your female coaches have?
- What percentage of women attend your coaching courses and workshops?
- How many female coaches are paid; how many are voluntary?
- How many female coaches are inactive?
- How many women with a disability coach in your sport?
- How many women of ethnicity coach in your sport?
- What is the age profile of coaches in your sport?

*“What is clear from the data is that far more barriers than supports exist for women coaches—particularly for women with systematically marginalized identities (e.g., race, sexuality, age, class, ability, parenthood, and ethnicity)”*  
(LaVoi, 2016)

### IDENTIFY THE DEMANDS OF THE SPORT

Identify what the demands of your sport are to gain a better understanding of what type of coach and what type of coaching skills and approach are needed to achieve the desired outcomes in your sport. In this exercise consider the Technical & Tactical elements of your sport, the personal and emotional needs of athletes in your sport, the personal and emotional needs of the coach and the environmental influences that support your coach.

### Questions to consider in your sport for example:

- Do your coaches use their own personal equipment or do they use club/organisational equipment? Does this become a financial barrier?
- Compile a list of all tasks needed to be done before, during and after a session. Does it become unrealistic to expect one coach to complete these?
- Time constraints of tasks and what is the real value of time needed to organise, host and deliver the session or programme?
- Locations – does your coach have to travel far for games and training sessions?
- What are the physical, mental and societal demands of the sport on your coaches, e.g. competition, recreation or other.
- Family/life away from the sport vs the sport. Is there a balance so the coaches do not burn out?

## CONSULTATION WITH YOUR COACHES

Speak to female coaches in your sport. Unless you understand your audience, you will not be able to provide what they need.

- Why do they coach?
- What do they enjoy about coaching your sport?
- What challenges have they faced as a coach?
- What would they change about your sport?
- It is equally important to speak with females who have stopped coaching. Why have they left coaching? Is there anything your sport could have done to retain them?

**By speaking to women who no longer coach, you will start to build a picture of what barriers/ challenges your sport puts in place. Ask yourself if coaching pathways in your sport are genuinely accessible, or if they unintentionally make it harder for women to be involved?**



## BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

In March 2021, Sport Ireland released its first report on Women in Sport Coaching Research. This report summarised analysis from the Sport Ireland ‘Women in Coaching’ survey and the follow-on focus group discussions in December 2020. The research looked to understand barriers and challenges females face in coaching. It is highly recommended that anyone reading this toolkit make themselves familiar with the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching report and the information contained in it. Sports should look to address these barriers if they are to develop gender equality when it comes to coaching in their sport. Fig 4 below outlines the top five challenges females in Ireland experience when coaching.

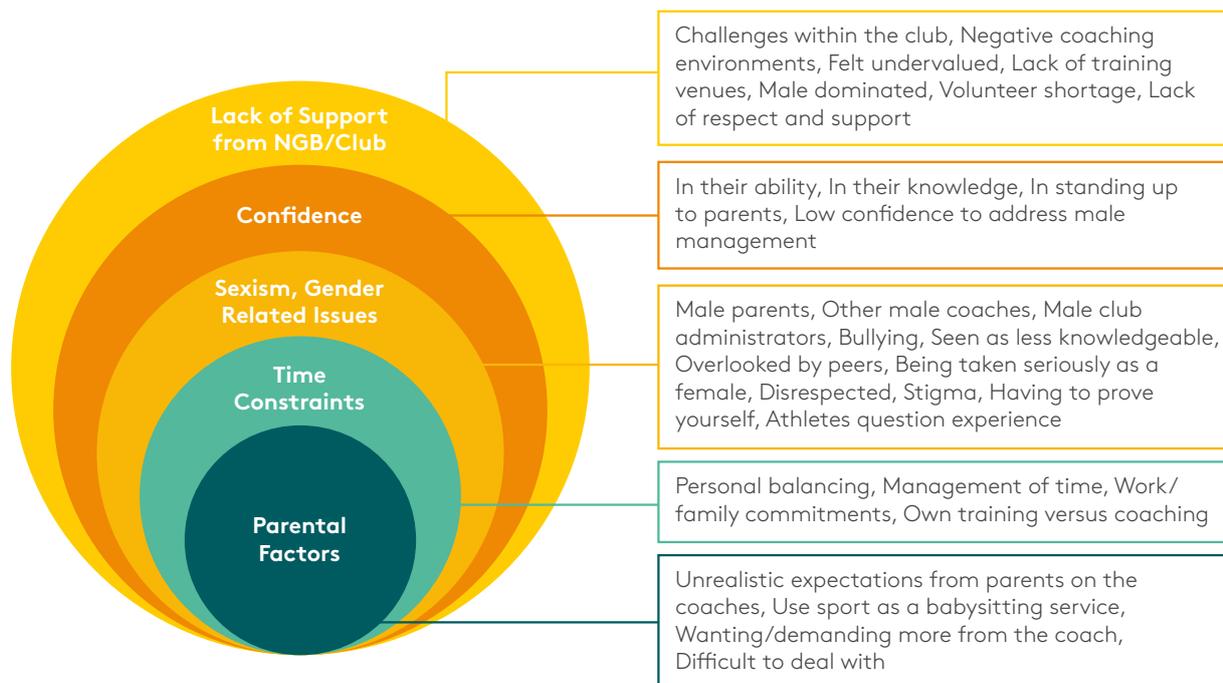


Figure 4. – Barriers from Sport Ireland’s report on Women in Sport Coaching research report 2021.

[View Nicole M. LaVoi and the Tucker Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sport](#) 

It is important for sports to understand what barriers and challenges women coaches face in their sports in order for them to see what measures need to be taken to appropriately recruit, develop and retain them. Sports should speak to women that have dropped out of coaching to understand why they stopped and what your sport could have done differently to retain them.

**By using the suggested actions and helpful documents from this toolkit, you will have discovered ways to overcome or address the barriers and challenges that females experience in coaching and have a clear idea of resources and contacts to call upon for more in-depth knowledge and a clear pathway to create solutions.**

*“Women coaches – no matter where they coach – face a multi-level and complex set of barriers, and depending on their intersectional identities, they may face layered oppression and marginalization.”*

LaVoi

## IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM/S

As part of the initial scoping exercise, it is important to identify what is 'the problem'? This will be based on the audit. For example, there may be some systemic issues or practices that are proving most detrimental to women's advancement as coaches. They might be the problem and therefore, that will be where the work is needed.

### ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- If your sport does not collect gender in its coaching data, edit any admin processes to ensure going forward all data can be sorted by gender. This will help to identify if/when specific actions are required to address women in coaching in your sport.
- Consult with stakeholders via surveys and focus groups; women coaches (active and inactive), coach developers, male coaches, administrators.
- Ensure questions that relate to differences amongst women, e.g. ethnicity, disability, age etc. are included in data collection and surveys. Sports often only collect data separately and so are not tackling the problem intersectionally. Women of colour and/or women who are disabled will experience more complex issues than White women.
- Create a Coaching Audit Template for your sport that collects the information suggested.
- Consult and research other sports or your sport in other countries for resources.
- Communicate to all members, staff and Board that your sport are consulting with women coaches in order to develop a plan for increasing coaching numbers and supporting the development of coaches.
- Issue an annual survey for coaches asking some of the questions outlined in this toolkit. Discover the coaches' motivations, barriers and challenges to coaching.
- Create small focus group sessions with coaches to better understand them. These focus groups could be segregated into coaches of different levels, e.g. those coaching children, those coaching adults, those coaching at an elite level.



## WHERE DO YOU WANT TO BE?



Once you have an understanding of your current landscape, the make-up of your current coaching numbers from a gender perspective, and have identified the problem/s, the next step is to outline where you want to be and why? This should set out the organisation's aspirations for women in coaching.

### GOALS

One of the most important parts of planning is setting goals. It is a way of focusing the implementation of the plan and a tool to monitor the project as it rolls out. In working through the next three Chapters of this toolkit, each of the three areas of recruiting, developing and retaining coaches should be planned and have short, medium and long-term goals.

Goals can be somewhat abstract and big picture. They provide a wide, overarching target for the organisation to set their eyes on as a whole. Goals define the general intentions and ambitions of the organisation in relation to women in coaching. For example, the goals for your sport might include:

- That all females feel valued, supported and have confidence coaching in your sport.
- That your sport leads the way when it comes to female coaches at high performance level.
- That female coaches are visible through all levels of the sport, in all clubs.

### TARGETS

Sports should set realistic targets, and ensure they are meaningful to their organisation. Setting unrealistic targets may disengage your existing coaches and create programmes that are not meaningful or sustainable in the long term. However targets and goals should be inspirational to show leadership and a commitment in this area for developing more female coaches. Choose targets that you are comfortable can be attained with achievable changes to your existing coaching system. For example, sports might identify the following targets:

- Women as volunteers and/or employed coaches should be 40% of the coaching workforce by (insert date).
- Female coaches should be 30% of Provincial and National team coaches by (insert date).
- Females will comprise of minimum 40% of Coach Developers or Tutor Trainer numbers for delivering coaching courses/workshops.
- Increase coaching numbers on coaching courses by (insert %).
- Increase number of female coaches at Level 2 (insert %).

Organisations should also consider the following areas and establish objectives and targets under each where applicable.

- Skill set – What does a coach need in your sport to match the demands of your sport? What does it take to be a good coach in your sport and can you set a target to achieve this?
- Supports - What supports do you need to offer to meet the demand of your sport?
- Culture - What indicators will show the sport is inclusive and welcoming for female coaches?

### ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Establish a Women in Coaching Working Group in your organisation for your coaching project to guide, support and help define the goals and targets.
- Work with others in the organisation, including those responsible for coach development where applicable, to set goals and targets.
- Set goals that are not just focused on increasing numbers but also the standard of coach versus the demands the sport requires of the coach.

## HOW ARE YOU GOING TO GET THERE?



Organisations should identify the gaps between what they want to achieve and what they already have; this is known as a gap analysis. This includes any organisational staff if applicable. Have staff the capacity and skills to implement the plan? If a volunteer led organisation, have the volunteers and clubs the capacity to implement the plan?

### ORGANISATIONAL AND BOARD SUPPORT

For any plan to work, it needs to be fully embedded and supported by the entire organisation, including the Board and any committees underneath with responsibility for coaching or elements that support coaching.

### SCOPING OUT AND RESEARCHING

What can you learn? Who can you learn from? Don't reinvent the wheel. Chances are that whatever you develop as a sport to recruit, develop or retain coaches, already exists in another sport for you to copy and/or tweak as required.

- Your own sport - What projects with a gender equality focus has your sport run in the past? Can you learn from the findings?
- Other sports - What coaching projects have been run in other sports (in any country) in the past few years that you could learn from? What sports have demonstrated cultural change to make women feel more welcome in the organisation and can you replicate?
- Desk research - What research have you found to increase your knowledge and help build the case for more programmes/initiatives for women in coaching? For example, the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Report.
- International research - What programmes have been run in your sport in other countries or by your sport's international governing body?

### > SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Design a template for the organisation that can be used to outline your plan.
- Communicate to all stakeholders to make them aware that your sport is developing a plan for increasing coaching numbers and supporting the development of coaches.
- Ensure the scoping out and researching phase is factored into the action plan.
- Review your coaching pathway to ensure it represents female coaches and make it visible to them. For example, female images used, increased communication and circulation of information regarding coaching courses, etc.
- Provide regular updates to the Board of your organisation, including an; Introduction Brief (to explain the plan you are developing and why), Project Plan Brief (to present your action plan for women in coaching once developed), plus midway and conclusion updates as required.
- For large organisations, stressing the importance to other staff and Development Officers of the information in this toolkit is vital. Host a staff webinar to outline your Action Plan for Women in Coaching, include them in the development of it or simply make them aware of the key points highlighted in this toolkit or in the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report.
- Establish a Women in Coaching Action Plan for your organisation.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF MALE SUPPORT IN DRIVING THE RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION OF FEMALE COACHES

Male advocates, sponsors and champions are needed in sport to support and drive changes in process, policy and awareness, to ensure that women have real access to roles at the highest level to benefit sport as a whole.

When you look at your current coaching workforce, are your male coaches sufficiently aware and confident to support their female peers developing as coaches within the game?

*“It is important that the sports organisation advocates for its entire coaching workforce to support and welcome women as coaches. Unfortunately bullying and harassment in sport is commonplace, even more startling is the sexist behaviour exhibited by male coaches towards their female peers.”*

(L. Norman, Rankin Wright, & Allison, 2018)

### ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- The United Nations (UN) launched an international campaign #HeforShe which resolves to promote gender equality by raising awareness among men so that they can play a role in supporting women. This campaign and its sentiments could easily translate into coaching.
- Helping men to understand their role through campaigns and education, for example, Canadian Women and Sport, ‘What is Your Role?’ and Tucker Centre ‘Be an Ally’ (which are referenced in the Case Studies section).



## CREATE YOUR ACTION PLAN



By working through the previous pages, you are well on your way to creating an action plan for women in coaching in your organisation. The following information is useful to remember as the plans are finalised.

### SETTING AND MEASURING OBJECTIVES

Once a core goal is set, setting business objectives is the next step towards fostering a clear understanding of how to reach the desired outcome. The main difference between objectives and goals is that objectives are precise actions or measurable steps individuals and groups take to move closer to the goal. They are specific targets that typically have a time-bound schedule or timeline for completion.

[See example of a Basic Action Plan Template](#)



### FUNDING YOUR COACHING PROGRAMMES/INITIATIVES

Through the Sport Ireland Women in Sport Programme, funding is available to National Governing Bodies and Local Sports Partnerships to develop programmes/initiatives for women in sport. These programmes/initiatives may target women and girls in coaching. There are also Sport Ireland Volunteer funding schemes which could target the same group, for example, Dormant Account Funding.

Consider collaborating with other sports or LSPs to develop or run coaching programmes/initiatives for female coaches. This can open up new avenues for funding or save on resources.

It is worthwhile exploring national, regional and international funding support which can help you achieve your aims.

### PARTNERSHIPS

Forming coalitions both within the organisation and outside of the organisation/club, can be very important (e.g. with groups/organisations that have specialised remits to do with race or ethnicity). These groups can support and guide you with their level of expertise.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION

It is vital in any plan to have monitoring and evaluation in place right from the start. Your audit will have identified the position your organisation is in before the plan starts. You may need to amend your current methods of data capture and tracking to ensure you start to collect the right information annually, so you can analyse whether your actions are making a difference. Ensure you collect and analyse qualitative information e.g. questionnaires for participant feedback after coaching courses/workshops, as well as just quantitative information, e.g. the numbers of people who attend courses and achieve qualifications (male and female).

It would be useful for organisations to put in place systems to track the number of women who progress into coaching after attending coaching courses.

### IDENTIFY MEASURABLE MILESTONES

Set goals at the start of the plan to ensure it stays on track against the agreed plan. Set short, medium and long-term goals to build an overall change within the coaching workforce. Suggested actions mentioned throughout this document can be used to help create the plan and its goals.

### MEASURING SUCCESS

What will success look like? Plans should include a numerical target that can be measured, e.g. increase in number of female coaches attending coaching courses/workshops, additional female coaches at an elite level, 4 regional female coaching networks established.

### MEASURING IMPACT

It is important to recognise that the work you start to do in this area may not have any measurable impact until 12 months/two years/five years later but it is important to set your measurements in place from the start, so you can report on your achievements and learn from the plan as it goes along.

### LEARN FROM WHAT DOESN'T WORK, AND CHANGE IT

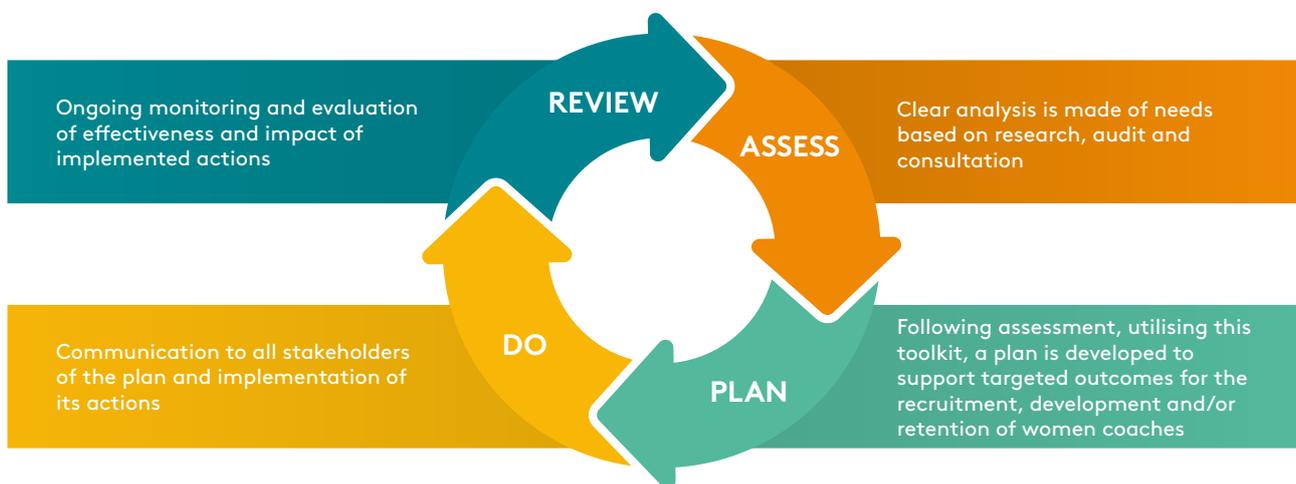
Ongoing monitoring also helps you recognise what actions have been put in place that are not working. Learn from these mistakes and look to rectify them – how could you amend the approach to make it work?

[See sample evaluation template](#)



### ASSESS – PLAN – DO - REVIEW

Ensure you review and re-plan on a regular basis as part of your planning cycle.



## KEY POINTS TO PLANNING STAGE

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Ensure you review and re-plan on a regular basis as part of your planning cycle.

### COMMIT

Commit to developing a plan for women in coaching in your sport and ensure you have full support from your organisation and Board before progressing.

### RESEARCH

Do your research; Where are you now? i.e. how many coaches have you got, how many are female? What are their motivations for coaching? What barriers/challenges do they experience or encounter?

### TARGETS

Decide on targets/goals for the organisation; Where do you want to be?

### ACTIONS

Use the rest of this toolkit to fill in how you are going to get there.

### EVALUATE

Monitor and evaluate

### REVISE

Assess-Plan-Do-Review



## CHAPTER 1 – PLANNING

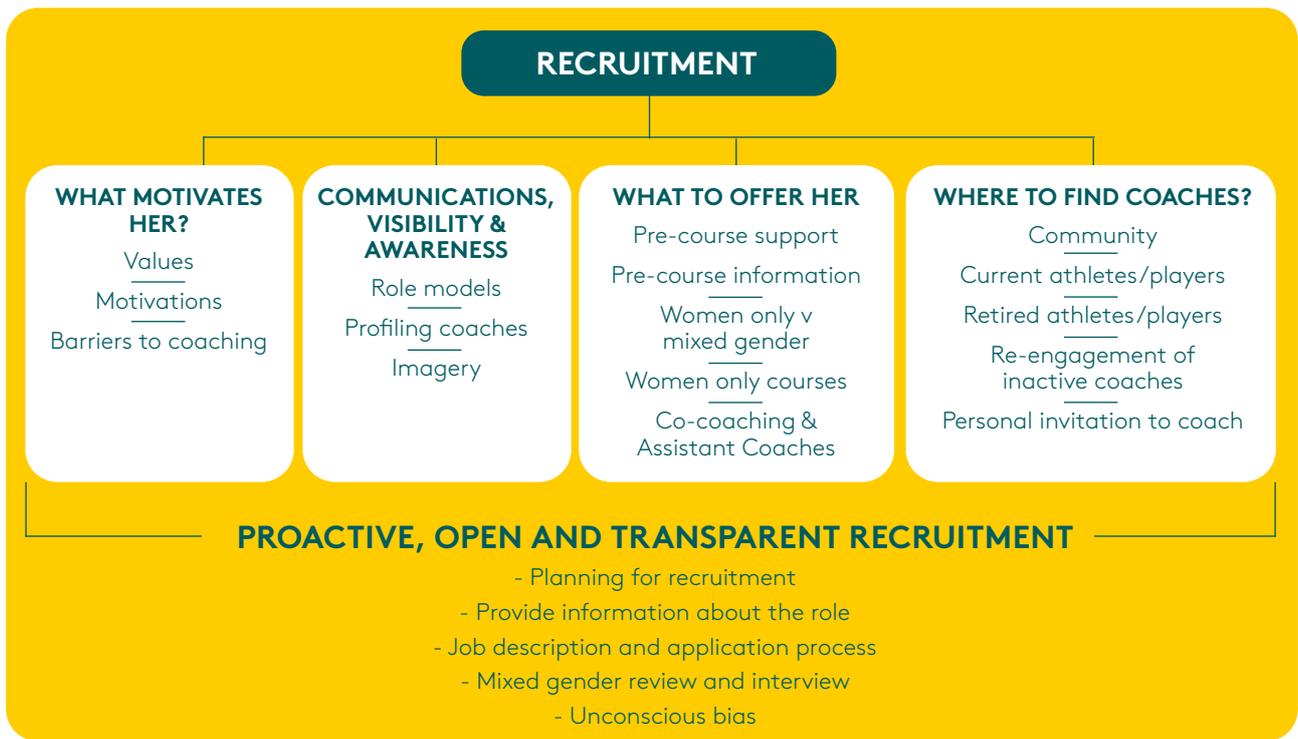
### SUGGESTED ACTIONS SUMMARY

- If your sport does not collect gender in its coaching data, edit any admin processes to ensure going forward all data can be sorted by gender. This will help to identify if/when specific actions are required to address women in coaching in your sport.
- Consult with stakeholders via surveys and focus groups; women coaches (active and inactive), coach developers, male coaches, administrators.
- Create a Coaching Audit Template for your sport that collects the information suggested.
- Ensure questions that relate to differences amongst women, e.g. ethnicity, disability, age etc. are included in data collection and surveys. Sports often only collect data separately and so are not tackling the problem intersectionally. Women of colour and/or women who are disabled will experience more complex issues than White women.
- Consult and research other sports or your sport in other countries for resources.
- Communicate to all members, staff and the Board that your sport is consulting with women coaches in order to develop a plan for increasing coaching numbers and supporting the development of coaches.
- Issue an annual survey to coaches asking some of the questions outlined in this toolkit. Discover their motivations, barriers and challenges to coaching.
- Create small focus group sessions with coaches to better understand them. These focus groups could be segregated into coaches of different levels, e.g. those coaching children, those coaching adults, those coaching at an elite level.
- Establish a Women in Coaching Working Group in your organisation for your coaching project to guide, support and help define the goals and targets.
- Work with others in the organisation, including those responsible for coach development where applicable, to set goals and targets.
- Set goals that are not just focused on increasing numbers but also the standard of coach versus the demands the sport requires of the coach.
- Design a template for the organisation that can be used to outline your plan.
- Establish a Women in Coaching Action Plan for your organisation.
- Communicate to all stakeholders to make them aware that your sport is developing a plan for increasing coaching numbers and supporting the development of coaches.
- Ensure the scoping out and researching phase is factored into the action plan.
- Review your coaching pathway to ensure it represents female coaches and make it visible to them. E.g. female images used, increased communication and circulation of information regarding coaching courses, etc.
- Provide regular updates to the Board of your organisation, including an; Introduction Brief (to explain the plan you are developing and why), Project Plan Brief (to present your action plan for women in coaching once developed), plus midway and conclusion updates as required.
- For large organisations, stressing the importance to other staff and development officers on the information in this toolkit is vital. Host a staff webinar to outline your Action Plan for Women in Coaching, include them in the development of it or simply make them aware of the key points highlighted in this toolkit or in the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report.

CHAPTER 2

# Recruiting Women Into Coaching





## INTRODUCTION

Coaching is a central component of sport and it is important that you have a diverse coaching workforce that can meet the needs of each one of your participants. This Chapter will explore the topic of Recruitment and suggest ways in which organisations can recruit more women to coaching.

## WHAT MOTIVATES HER?

### VALUES

Understanding the values that women have in sport is important to recognising their motivations. There are two types of motivation, intrinsically motivated, which involves performing an action because you enjoy it, and extrinsically motivated, which involves engaging in a behaviour in order to gain reward. Understanding these motivations can help in your recruitment strategy.

Recent research from Sport Ireland on Women in Coaching has identified themes that motivate women to take part in coaching:

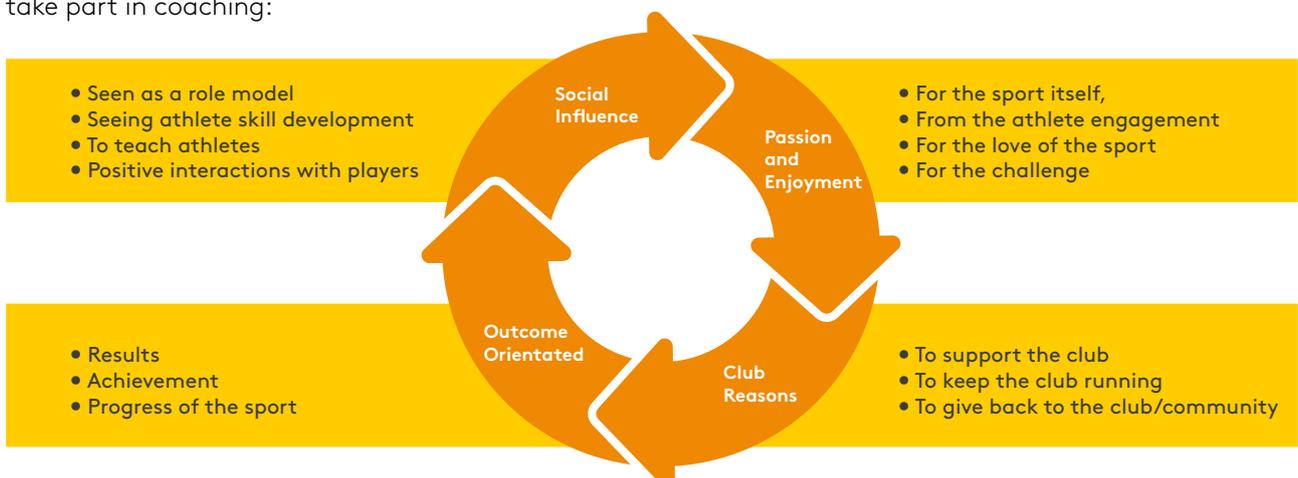


Figure 5 What motivates women to take part in coaching, Women in Coaching Research Report 2021.

## BARRIERS FOR WOMEN COACHES

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The barriers and resulting challenges faced by women coaches are discussed in detail in Chapter 1 Planning. Readers should reflect back on the information provided in Chapter 1 but also consider how they apply from a recruitment point of view.

Go to [Chapter 1 - Barriers and Challenges](#)

### SUGGESTED ACTION

- Discover the values and motivations women coaches in your organisation have. One on one conversations, focus groups and questionnaires can all support this action.
- Discover the barriers and challenges that women coaches in your organisation experience (using similar methods as mentioned above).

## VISIBILITY AND AWARENESS

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How is your sport viewed by the general public? What is your organisational culture? Sport can be a gendered activity which is heavily biased towards men. If your sport is mostly coached and played by men and your marketing reflects this, how can you expect it to appeal to women? Alternatively, maybe your sport is predominantly female but yet it's still difficult to attract female coaches. The following information may support how you market coaching to women and actions throughout for you to try.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Organisational culture and reference to it is mentioned throughout this toolkit. Knowing your organisation and, if necessary, changing its culture and profile is not a short-term fix but recognising where women are under-represented in your organisation is a good starting point for making those changes.

Sports can start this change process by looking within its own sport and questioning its culture. Try using the following questions to explore the culture within your sport.

- Does the sport proactively welcome women? If so, how?
- What is the perception of your sport? Is it 'a sport for men' or 'a sport for all'?
- Are clubs supported and proactive measures in place to make women feel equally as valued in coaching?
- How many women work in the development of your sport?
- How many women are in senior management roles and/or on the Board?
- How is your sport publicised externally? Are images of men playing and coaching in sport predominately used or is it 50/50 female to male imagery?
- What policies and processes are in place that support and protect coaches? (For example, employment, health, anti-discrimination, anti-harassment/bullying policies).

## VISIBLE COACHING PATHWAY

Throughout this document you will read about how women like to have information. They like to be aware of their options and what to expect before getting involved. It is no different when it comes to the coaching pathway. Most sports will be able to outline the various steps involved as coaches progress along the coaching pathway, however, at times this information can be hidden away on websites and hard to access. Taking the time to revisit your coaching pathway, editing it to make it visually appealing and promoting it so that it is clear to all coaches can be a valuable exercise. Ensure that images of female coaches are contained in or alongside the pathway so that female coaches can see they are included.

## HIGHLIGHT ROLE MODELS

A role model is often described as a person who serves as an example of the values, attitudes and behaviours associated with a role.

In sport and coaching, people tend to identify most with “someone like me”. It is vital that you not only celebrate and promote your high performance female players and coaches, but also the women who coach at a local community level. Being acknowledged by your sport and promoted as a role model is very powerful. A role model is likely to stay in coaching if they feel their coaching is valued.

Coaches are accessible role models to sports participants. They motivate people to play sport, be active and keep coming back. The latest report from Women’s Sport Foundation, ‘Coaching through a Gender Lens: Maximizing Girls Play and Potential’ found that girls with female coaches were more likely to say their coaches were, positive role models, good listeners and people the girls could count on. (N. Zarrett, C. Cooky, & P.T Veliz, 2019)

View [Rowing Ireland’s ‘Showcasing Our Role Models’ initiative](#)



## USE YOUR EXISTING FEMALE COACHES AS ROLE MODELS

Online content is extremely popular, convenient and accessible. Promote women as coaches in your sport to create role models and inspire other women and girls to start coaching. Use active women coaches (from intro to experienced level) and get them to explain what coaching involves. What they enjoy about coaching and why they are involved. Interviews and quotes from these coaches can help encourage others to get involved. Use images and quotes from existing female coaches on all marketing and promotional material.

## CASE STUDIES OR PROFILING

Develop case studies to tell a story and get a message across in a way that people can identify with. Use pictures of the female coach and use her story to help create an emotional link with the reader, with such content as:

- How did she get into coaching?
- Who does she coach/has she coached?
- Why does she coach?
- What is the best part of coaching for her?
- Did she overcome any challenges in becoming a coach or developing as a coach?

View [Sport Ireland’s Coaching Profiles](#)



## USE OF IMAGES AS A MARKETING TOOL

Images can be very powerful so ensure any information, adverts and articles reflect the women you are aiming to recruit. Look at the images you currently use. What message might they send to women? Do they convey a sense of welcome?

Spending time and budget to build up a bank of positive images of women coaching and participating could pay dividends in the long term and help your sport market itself as one that welcomes and values women in all aspects of your sport.

### ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Set up a Women in Coaching page on your sports website to tell stories and promote female coaches.
- Use the questions proposed above to examine the culture of your sport. This is an exercise that your Women in Coaching Working Group (if set up) might complete.
- Promote female coaches in your sport to create role models and inspire others to coach. E.g. through short interviews and videos.
- Utilise existing promotional opportunities by ensuring gender balance (i.e. on podcasts, interviews, on social media/website) so that women are highlighted.
- Add images of female coaches to all coaching resources and all promotional material.
- Develop club guidelines for recruiting female coaches using information in this toolkit to guide and advise clubs.
- Ensure your sport has a visible Coaching Pathway graphic that visually shows females on it so that it is explicit that female coaches are welcome in your sport'.

View [Ladies Gaelic Football Association Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Toolbox](#)



## WHAT TO OFFER HER

### PRE-COURSE SUPPORT

Providing a pre-course information evening/webinar can support the recruitment and development of female coaches (i.e. this action could be used through all levels of your coaching pathway). These sessions can outline what the course will involve, what coaches can expect when they attend and sometimes even provide a first introduction to other coaches on the course. These steps can help ease any nervousness or apprehension a coach might have about getting involved.

After the course, look to signpost and support coaches into active coaching roles and continue the support through mentoring, peer support and ongoing, continuous professional development opportunities

### PRE-COURSE/EVENT INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATING WITH COACHES

A further barrier for women accessing learning events is not knowing what to expect when they attend the event/workshop. By providing sufficient information about the event/workshop/programme, you are more likely to have more female coaches register for it. This information can be made available through your normal promotion channels, i.e. on the website, Eventbrite page, social media, etc. but think also about sending out personalised emails with information inviting them to attend, and supply the following:

- Date, time, cost and location of the event.
- The schedule of events including a breakdown of classroom- based learning, practical exercises and assessments taking place.
- Who is the event suitable for, i.e. what level coach? (State beginners or no knowledge of the sport if applicable).
- What the learning outcomes will be.
- Information about when the 'downtime' and on-course breaks are.
- Who is leading each session (with contact details and bio of the person if possible).
- What clothing and equipment is needed.
- Details of accommodation (if relevant).
- Who else is expected to attend the event.
- Who to contact about logistical information.
- Ensure female images are included on all promotional/marketing material.

**Another point to note is to ensure all communication regarding coach development reaches female coaches. At times the historical set up of sport has meant that coaches of female teams/ athletes, and/or female coaches, sometimes simply do not receive the information coming from the Governing Body or Local Sports Partnership. Ensure your sport and clubs have appropriate communication and promotional channels in place so that information is spread down through all your members.**

### ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Host an info webinar for anyone interested in attending coaching courses. Ensure the host is friendly and alleviates any apprehension someone might have about signing up. Provide follow up contact details for someone to ask further questions, which they may have been too shy to do at the info session.
- Look at how you advertise coaching courses, have you included enough information that ensures the female coach knows exactly what to expect if attending?
- Create a Communication Checklist using the above points when developing marketing material to promote coaching courses/workshops.
- Commit to contacting all female attendees post-coaching course to follow up on their coaching journey.

## WOMEN ONLY VERSUS MIXED GENDER LEARNING EVENTS

Traditionally, in a lot of sports, more men are coaches than women, therefore the likelihood is that coach development learning events can be attended and delivered mainly by men. Being outnumbered in an environment can be uncomfortable for some people and may impact on their learning experience or completion of the training/session.

Monitor your attendees at these learning events and take the time to proactively invite women coaches to the session. The benefits of male and female coaches learning together can include:

1. Sharing different approaches to coaching.
2. Learning from each other's own personal experiences.
3. Reducing the instance of gender-based negative attitudes as relationships can be developed in a neutral environment where everyone is learning together.
4. Building the visibility and credibility of female coaches.
5. Developing the networks for female coaches.

Female-only learning events can be beneficial but good practice would be to run on request from the women coaches themselves. Running separate events for male and female coaches may only serve to increase the gender gap and exacerbate negative attitudes towards women as coaches. Presuming that women coaches want separate women-only coaching courses without asking their views could have a negative impact. A blended approach to mixed versus female only events seems to work best.

## WOMEN-ONLY COURSES

Many sports provide women-only courses. These are useful as a first step onto the coaching ladder, removing the unease some women have which prevents them joining existing courses. Confidence levels can be enhanced during these courses which may lead to women progressing further on the coaching ladder.

Women-only courses may also be beneficial to ethnic minority groups with cultural differences. Researching and understanding the barriers female coaches face in your sport can help identify where such approaches are relevant.

[View Swim Ireland's Women in Coaching initiative](#) 

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Trial a women only workshop/course and gather feedback from participants to support future planning.
- Put extra measures in place to try to ensure gender balance on mixed gender courses, e.g. targeted promotion to women.
- Investigate if women don't enjoy mixed-sex coaching events in your sport. What are the reasons if so? Is it the environment that is created during these events/coaching courses or how they might be treated by fellow attendees?

## CO-COACHING AND ASSISTANT COACHES

Co-coaching is a way of recruiting women into coaching. Working with another coach may have greater appeal, especially for coaches with time constraints, feeling nervous, or that they are not suitable for the role.

Co-coaching, or being an assistant coach, can provide a great opportunity for new coaches to find out what coaching entails and see if it is for them without committing right from the start. Providing a first step into coaching is useful in allowing women to build up their confidence slowly and recognise that they do have the necessary skills.

Organisations should also be aware of challenges co-coaching can present if it burdens the other coach, i.e. they end up mentoring or feeling like they must train the co-coach. It is worth providing guidance to current coaches on how to delegate coaching responsibilities to others, and how to work with other coaches in their group.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Put together a 'Co-coaching Plan' to share with clubs. This plan can be very simple and outline to clubs the concept of co-coaching, and encourage them to use it with their coaches.
- Add the term 'Co-Coaching' and 'Assistant Coaches' to modules or content on your coaching courses so that coaches become familiar with it as an option.

[View Co-Coaching/Assistant Coaching Session/Training Plan](#) 

## WHERE TO FIND COACHES

### Community

- If you want more women coaching at a community level, then looking at parents, grandparents, relations, players, organisers and teachers within your clubs, universities, colleges and schools is very important. All those involved in sport, or who have a family member playing sport, are potential coaches. Many women will not put themselves forward but a “tap on the shoulder” may help them believe they can do it. Speak to these women and girls. They may not only wish to get involved themselves but also know their community and can act as influencers in getting more people active and motivated.
- Young Leaders, Transition Year pupils and other students are excellent coaches for younger age groups and should be encouraged to get involved.

### Re-engagement of Inactive Coaches

According to the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report, 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 an 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.

### Current Athletes/Players

- Athletes/players of any age can make great coaches. Don't forget about the underage athletes who can coach younger age groups, e.g. U18s coaching the U10s.
- It is beneficial for any level of athlete/player to do a coaching course and to get coaching experience. Most athletes find it can help their own performance or playing ability by coaching others. Athletes/players can support/assist with underage or other teams/athletes in their clubs. Some may act as player/coach for the team or training group. Many current athletes/players have more confidence in their ability to coach while still involved in the sport themselves.
- Elite athletes/players can sometimes find it hard to make time for coaching, however, as an elite athlete, they are at their most confident in terms of their knowledge of the sport and what they are doing in training to make them better. Getting involved in coaching at this time can be hugely beneficial in preparing them to move into a coaching role when they retire from competing.
- Injured athletes/players are worthwhile coaching options while they try to return to their sport, e.g. those who have an ACL injury or other long-term injuries.

### Retired Athletes/Players

- Not all athletes/players want to coach when they finish playing or competing but many will give it a go. Do not just expect individuals to nominate themselves. Relevant club members should approach them to get involved.
- Not all players will step into coaching immediately. Some will want a break from the sport but then would love to get back involved. Those looking for new coaches should reach out to retired players/athletes each year to encourage them back into the sport.

View [Ladies Gaelic Football Association Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Toolbox](#)



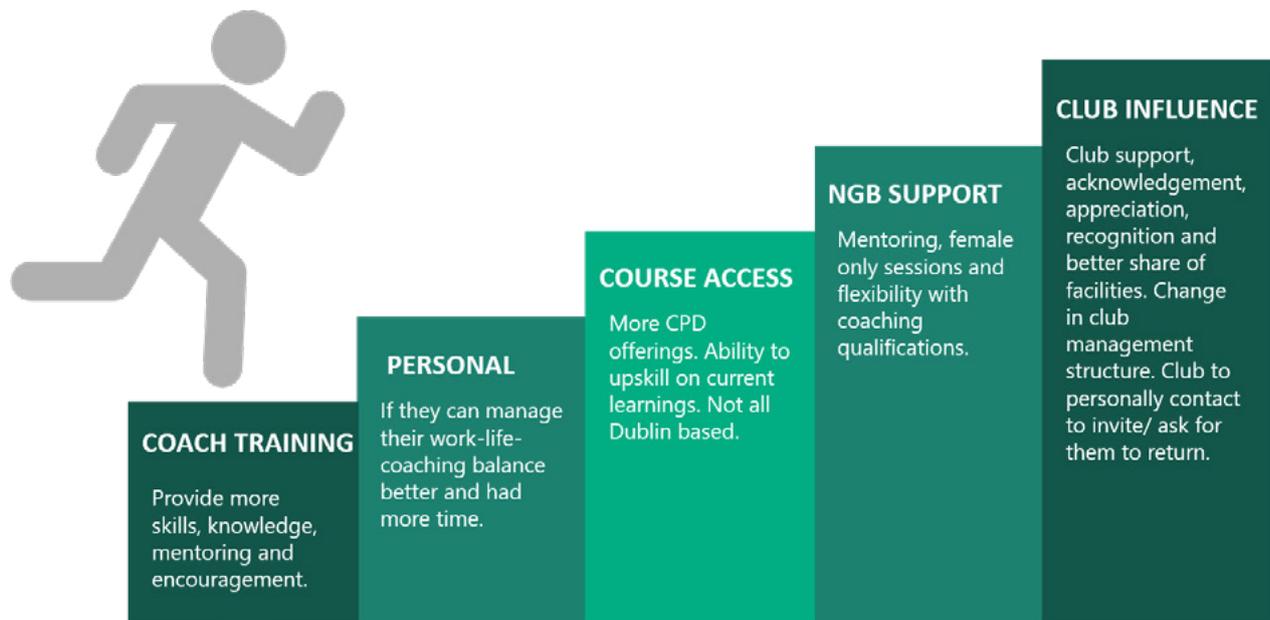


Figure 6. Information provided by female coaches outlining what would help them return to coaching (Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report 2021).

## PERSONAL INVITATIONS TO COACH

- Women who are successful in sport or coaching have often talked about the ‘nudge’ received to push them to try something new. Being invited to try something provides women with a sense of belonging and support which promotes a sense of self-confidence to give it a go.
- Encourage clubs to proactively seek out women to start coaching. Ensure clubs understand that a tap on the shoulder, a phone call, an email, are all more beneficial than a generic club message looking for coaches.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Put together a set of guidelines for clubs on how they can recruit more female coaches or invite back inactive coaches. Use some of the examples in this toolkit and from the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report.
- Provide a subsidy for current players to do coaching courses at reduced costs to encourage/entice them to give coaching a go.
- Encourage clubs to reduce membership rates for any current players who are also coaching.
- Create a specific coaching programme for elite athletes in your sport to prepare them for transitioning into a coaching role post-retirement. (Organisations interested in this topic should contact their Sport Ireland Coaching representative to discuss further).
- Helping in any way counts. Have a list of things people can help with to ease them into the role of coach. For example, setting up the training area, administration, social media, gear repairs, helping during a session, planning sessions and task creation, mentor roles, etc.

View [Strategies for Increasing Female Coaches in Youth Sport \(Tucker Centre\)](#)



## PROACTIVE, OPEN AND TRANSPARENT RECRUITMENT

While a lot of the recruitment of women coaches may be into volunteer roles, or may involve recruiting females to coaching for the first time, there will be opportunities higher up in the organisation where the recruitment process requires more consideration. The following information discusses this recruitment process and considerations for sports and/or organisations.

What to consider:

- 1. Application process**
- 2. Policy**
- 3. Monitoring**

### PLANNING FOR RECRUITMENT APPLICATION PROCESS

Paid coaching roles should have a transparent application, shortlisting, interview and feedback process in place to ensure all candidates are given a fair chance of being successful. All-male, closed coaching networks and recruiting from within at this level are no longer acceptable when considering the merits of a gender equal coaching workforce. In addition, only considering internal candidates will not always provide the best person for the job.

A proactive, open and transparent process of recruitment will not only ensure that sports are getting the right person for the job, but it will demonstrate fairness and good practice to your participants and stakeholders. Some of the major barriers to women gaining roles at a high performance level are linked to recruitment processes – these can apply to the community coaching as well. The need for governing bodies, sports providers, academies and clubs to have proactive, open and transparent recruitment is reflected in the guidance below. It is especially important when recruiting for roles at a high performance level.

If we are to address the lack of women coaching at higher levels of sport, It is important that key decision makers within sport are aware of the guidance below and apply best practice when making coaching appointments.



## PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT THE ROLE

Women want details prior to applying for a coaching role or taking their first step into coaching. This can be done by:

- Posting information on your website.
- Promoting information through various social media channels (add a hashtag # so you can monitor interest and field questions).
- Linking with women's clubs and coaching networks to advertise the post.
- Word of mouth: inform your existing coaches and players and get them to talk to their own social circle.

## JOB DESCRIPTION (OR ROLE PROFILE) AND APPLICATION PROCESS (IF RELEVANT)

Research has shown that women look at a job description and will not apply unless they can do 100% of the role, whilst men will apply if they feel they can do 60%. This is known as the confidence gap. This also leads to the seven-year rule, where men roughly apply for a job seven years before they are ready, and women apply seven years after they are ready (Sandberg, 2013).

Rather than long application forms, welcome letters of application, which allow women to highlight their achievements and experience, and phone calls where prospective applicants can talk through the role and have a person to person discussion about their suitability for the role.

It is important that you add a point of contact with an email address and phone number and advise that this person is available to discuss the role further.

## WORDING IN JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND ADVERTS

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Research showed how changing the wording in the job description can reduce the unconscious bias towards male recruitment. Importantly, the research showed that the changing of words did not lead to a reduction in males applying (L. Norman, 2015).

The links below provide further information in how to review and change your job descriptions and adverts to reduce gender bias and widen your talent pool:

- [How to take gender bias out of your job ads](#)
- [10 Ways to Remove Gender Bias from Job Descriptions](#)

Glassdoor reported in 2014 that the diversity of an organisation is one of the five key factors that attract/deter people from applying. Promoting diversity in all communications will attract more interest from skilled people (How to Build a Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Program, 2020).

## MIXED GENDER REVIEW AND INTERVIEW PANELS

The starting point for women being represented more equally in coaching is for sports organisations to aim for gender equality on their senior management team, the Board and committees. These are the key decision-makers in the sport and should be role models for the rest of the organisation. Greater representation by women at decision making level should allow for greater representation throughout the workforce, including coaching.

Ensuring more women are present on review and interview panels will make an already tense situation less intimidating for female applicants, and the diversity will bring a different viewpoint to the decision-making process.

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

It is crucial for decision-makers to recognise the possible impact of “unconscious bias”, which affects us all in recruiting new staff. People tend to recruit people who look and think like them. Awareness and positive action to limit unconscious bias in recruitment is therefore important in ensuring access to roles for women. A diverse interview panel can also help limit issues of unconscious bias.

*“Ultimately the reason for a lack of women having the top jobs is because the people hiring for these jobs tend to hire in their own image – hence a lack of diversity in the men’s and women’s game. The aim is to ensure the same opportunities are present for both men and women in both the men’s and women’s game, but it seems to be one rule for one and not the other. Should every coach in the men’s game be a man? No. Should every coach in the women’s game be a woman? No. Both sides of the game should be open to the best coach. That, at the moment, is not the case.”*

(Vicky Huyton, Female Coaching Network, 2019)

### ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Ensure your organisation has a transparent recruitment process in place whereby all application shortlisting, interviews and feedback stages have both women and men on the panel.
- Women want details prior to applying for a coaching role or taking their first step into coaching. Put measures in place in your organisation to ensure this information is available and easily accessible to those interested.
- With all job descriptions, provide contact details of someone whom women can contact to discuss the job and seek more information before applying.
- Review and change your job descriptions and adverts to reduce gender bias.
- Ensure women are present on all review and interview panels.
- Introduce a gender policy that helps ensure women make the list of shortlisted candidates for interview. E.g. if five interviews are taking place, at least two females must be included.



## KEY POINTS TO RECRUITMENT STAGE

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Ensure you review and re-plan on a regular basis as part of your planning cycle.

### MOTIVATIONS & VALUES

What motivates females in your sport to become or develop as a coach?  
Do you understand her values?

### BARRIERS

What barriers/challenges do they experience or encounter at the recruitment stage? Have you got solutions to these barriers?

### VISIBILITY & AWARENESS

How do you market coaching to her? How do you promote female coaches? Is coaching in your sport appealing to women? Do you know where to find coaches?

### STAFF V VOLUNTEERS

Considerations for staff recruitment for a coaching role. Is your process fair and transparent?

### ACTIONS

Use the Suggested Actions in this toolkit to influence current practices and develop programmes/initiatives to recruit coaches.

### EVALUATE

Monitor and evaluate

### ACTIONS

Assess-Plan-Do-Review

## CHAPTER 2 – RECRUITMENT

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS SUMMARY

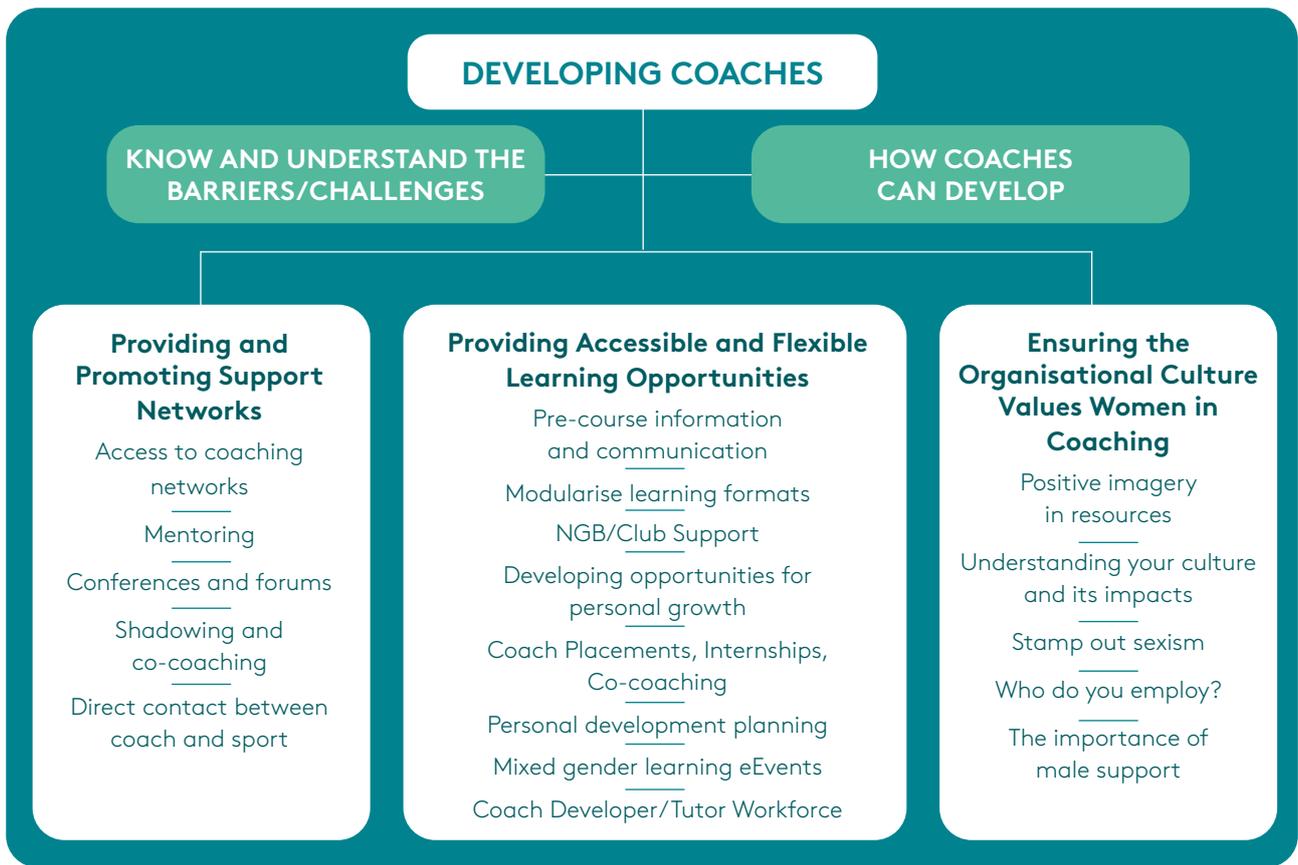
- Discover the values and motivations women coaches in your organisation have. One on one conversations, focus groups and questionnaires can all support this action.
- Discover the barriers and challenges that women coaches in your organisation experience. One on one conversations, focus groups and questionnaires can all support this action.
- Set up a Women in Coaching page on your sports website to tell stories and promote female coaches.
- Use the questions suggested in this toolkit to examine the culture of your sport. This is an exercise that your Women in Coaching Working Group (if set up) might complete.
- Ensure your sport has a visible Coaching Pathway graphic that visually shows females on it so that it is explicit that women coaches are welcome in your sport<sup>1</sup>.
- Promote women coaches in your sport to create role models and inspire others to coach. E.g. through short interviews and videos.
- Utilise existing promotional opportunities by ensuring gender balance (i.e. on podcasts, interviews, on social media/website) so that women are highlighted.
- Add images of women coaches to all coaching resources and all promotional material.
- Develop club guidelines for recruiting women coaches using information in this toolkit to guide and advise clubs.
- Host an information webinar for anyone interested in attending coaching courses. Ensure the host is friendly and alleviates any apprehension someone might have about signing up. Provide follow up contact details for someone to ask further questions, which they may have been too shy to do at the info session.
- Look at how you advertise coaching courses, have you included enough information that ensures the coach knows exactly what to expect if attending?
- Create a Communication Checklist using the information outlined in the toolkit when developing marketing material to promote coaching courses/workshops.
- Commit to contacting all female attendees post-coaching course to follow up on their coaching journey.
- Trial a women only workshop/course and gather feedback from participants to support future planning.
- Put extra measures in place to try to ensure gender balance on mixed gender courses, e.g. targeted promotion to women.
- Investigate if women do/don't enjoy mixed-gender coaching events in your sport. What are the reasons if so? Is it the environment that is created during these events/coaching courses or how they might be treated by fellow attendees?
- Put together a 'Co-coaching Plan' to share with clubs. This plan can be very simple and outline to clubs the concept of co-coaching, and encourage them to use it with their coaches.
- Add the term 'Co-coaching' and 'Assistant Coaches' to modules or content on your coaching courses so that coaches become familiar with it as an option.

- Put together a set of guidelines for clubs on how they can recruit more women coaches or invite back inactive coaches. Use some of the examples in this toolkit and from the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report.
- Provide a subsidy for current players to do coaching courses at reduced costs to encourage/entice them to give coaching a go.
- Encourage clubs to reduce membership rates for any current players who are also coaching.
- Create a specific coaching programme for elite athletes in your sport to prepare them for transitioning into a coaching role post-retirement.
- Helping in any way counts. Have a list of things people can help with to ease them into the role of coach. For example, setting up the training area, administration, social media, gear repairs, helping during a session, planning sessions and task creation, mentor roles, etc.
- Ensure your organisation has a transparent recruitment process in place whereby all application shortlisting, interviews and feedback stages have both women and men on the panel.
- Women want details prior to applying for a coaching role or taking their first step into coaching. Put measures in place in your organisation to ensure this information is available and easily accessible to those interested.
- With all job descriptions, provide contact details of someone whom women can contact to discuss the job and seek more information before applying.
- Review and change your job descriptions and adverts to reduce gender bias.
- Ensure women are present on all review and interview panels.
- Introduce a gender policy that helps ensure women make the list of shortlisted candidates for interview. E.g. if five interviews are taking place, at least two females must be included.

# CHAPTER 3

# Developing Coaches





## BARRIERS TO COACHING

Barriers impact on women in all aspects of their coaching life. How can your sport overcome these barriers and support women to develop as coaches?

Go to [Chapter 1 - Barriers and Challenges](#)

## BARRIERS TO PROGRESSION

As part of the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report, coaches identified the following as barriers to progression in their coaching career.

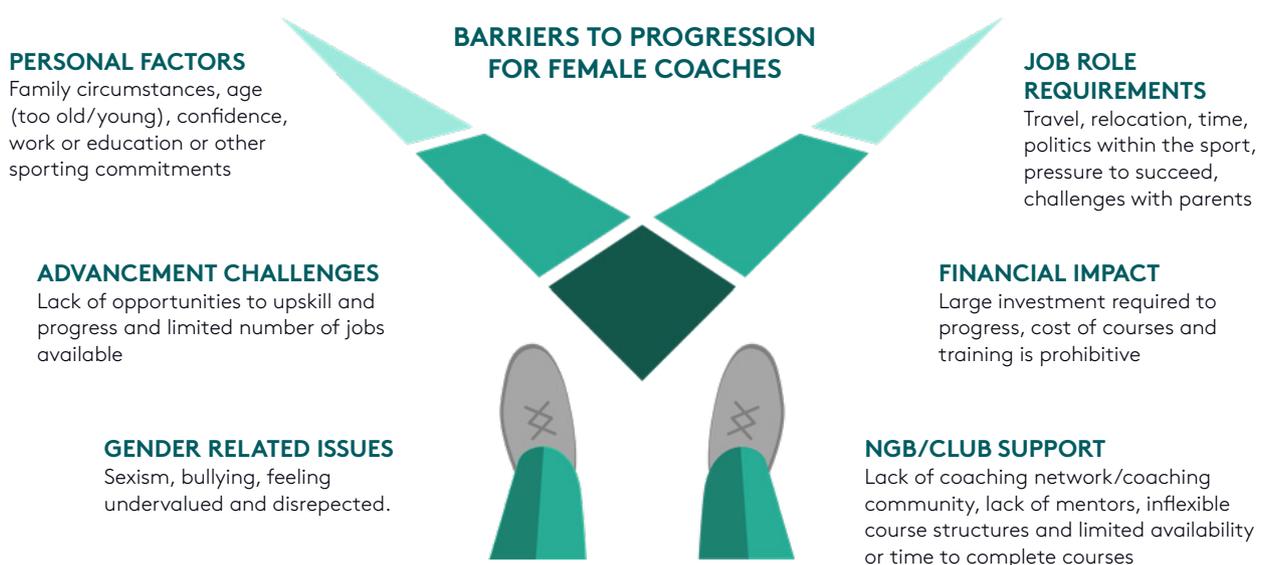


Figure. 7 Barriers to progression provided by female coaches in the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report 2021.

## HOW CAN COACHES DEVELOP

How a coach learns depends very much on their own personal approach to learning. There are many ways a coach can develop their skills, for example:



Developing and supporting women coaches can be categorised under three areas;



## PROVIDING AND PROMOTING SUPPORT NETWORKS

An overriding finding from the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching report was the need to better develop coaching networks. 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. 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.

The coaches identified the following as benefits of a coaching network:

- Offers support to coaches and enable shared learning.
- Helpful for new female coaches or mentors in enabling them to build and develop positive relationships with others who have key experience and expertise.
- 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.

### ACCESS TO COACHING GROUPS/NETWORKS

Coaches benefit greatly from having support networks around them. Women value having access to support; this can either be one to one or in a group environment, within their own sport, or with other sports. Ways to develop women could be through access to online (or in-person) coaching groups or networks, conferences, forums, mentoring, shadowing, co-coaching and direct contact by the NGB or club. These can be mixed gender but the feedback suggests that female only networks yield a greater sense of support without judgement. Female coaches believe they can open up more, discuss coaching challenges and provide information to one another more comfortably when it is a female only group. However, that doesn't mean they should be restricted from mixed gender networks or events. A combination seems to be the best approach.

#### Who benefits from a coaching network?

- Coaches from targeted leagues/competitions.
- Coaching networks and support structures in clubs, whereby the club coaches support and learn from one another.
- Anyone which is part of a coaching network benefits from a sense of support from their sport or organisation who set up and invited them into the network.
- High Performance Coaches (or those earmarked to progress).
- Coaches from different sports who get the chance to network together.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Write a set of guidelines encouraging clubs to establish coaching networks, or opportunities for coaches to connect, network and learn from one another within the club. For example, monthly coaching forums online or in the clubhouse where certain topics are discussed.
- Establish a coaching network for all female coaches in your sport. For example, this may involve four online forums a year where they hear from a guest speaker. It also means the sport has a contact group when sending out the latest information on coach development and other news.
- Link up with another sport and establish a joint coaching network. This can provide an opportunity for coaches to be exposed to different ideas and concepts when it comes to coaching.

## MENTORING

Mentoring is widely acknowledged as an increasingly more powerful and important aspect of developing people in sport, including leaders, officials and coaches.

There are a variety of definitions of what mentoring is. Across all the different definitions, mentoring is characterised by an intense 'caring' and 'guiding' quality. A key principle of mentoring coaches is that the coach remains at the centre of their own development and the mentor supports as required. A mentor doesn't claim to have all the answers, but seeks to work with the coach to help them find the answers themselves.

According to the Sport Ireland coaching report, 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.

*"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."*

(Focus Group Participant, Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research, 2021)

As outlined under the Barriers for Progression, key issues for many women in coaching include confidence (in certain situations), gaining practical coaching experience (especially at a high performance level), and access to informal and formal networks. Having a mentor who can help check, challenge, advise and support a female coach, can be a really powerful tool in addressing the issues and often opening doors to people and opportunities.

While the benefits of mentoring are widely acknowledged, it is important to note that not everyone can be a good mentor, especially if they haven't received any training. For example, the male Head Coach in a club might be a fantastic coach, but it doesn't mean that he is a suitable mentor. Successful mentoring programmes include an element of mentor training whereby individuals understand how to build the relationship with their mentees and support them rather than tell them. Mentors can also come from other sports, rather than within your own sport all the time.

### ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Write a set of guidelines for clubs encouraging them to try and establish mentoring between their experienced coaches and others.
- Establish a women in coaching mentoring programme in your sport. Coaches can nominate themselves via an application form. The sport provides opportunities for all coaches to meet and learn while also pairing them with a mentor.
- Collaborate with other sports to create joint mentoring programmes.
- For those who are just starting their coaching journey – prior to any course starting, appoint a mentor to work with a small group of interested women, doing some pre-course work and mentoring the whole group, before, during and after the actual course. This is cost effective and has the added benefit of starting to develop a peer mentoring group which can transition into a wider network for the female coaches.

- Coaches with potential to progress to the next level or who are aiming to coach at HP level, will benefit enormously from having a mentor for a period of time.

[View Coaching Association of Canada's 'Building an Effective Mentorship Programme'](#)

[View Coaching Association of Canada Mentorship Guide \(Mentee\)](#)

[View Coaching Association of Canada Mentorship Guide \(Mentor\)](#)

[View Coaching Association of Canada Mentorship Guide \(Administrator\)](#)

[View a full range of mentoring resources from the Coaching Association of Canada](#)

## CONFERENCES AND FORUMS

Face to face networking and learning events are important. Though technology increasingly saves us time, social gatherings foster quality relationships and meaningful exchanges. Building relationships and a sense of belonging are both important values to women.

As we increasingly recognise the importance of diversity in coaching, it is also important to recognise that female coaches should not just engage with other female rugby coaches in an exclusive network. Female coaches want to learn from other coaches (of both genders), in other sports and other countries.

At times, providing access to an event, e.g. Women in Coaching Conference, where women can meet other women who they have something in common with can help develop their self- confidence and build networks of ongoing support.

[View Basketball Ireland: Women in Coaching Forum](#)

[View Mountaineering Ireland: Women with Altitude Conference](#)

[View Rowing Ireland: Women in Coaching Networks](#)

[View Rowing Ireland: Women into High Performance Coaching Pathway](#)

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

- Review all conferences and events against the bullet points listed above to ensure a diverse range of speakers and deliverers thus resulting in a more inclusive and welcoming environment.
- Host an annual Women in Coaching Conference in your sport.
- Host a coaching conference for coaches of female teams (mixed gender but all involved with similar teams).
- Host online coaching workshops for women coaches.
- Host online coaching workshops for coaches of female teams.
- Offer to pay for coaches to attend International coaching workshops/courses. This also highlights how much you value and support the coach if their sport is willing to invest in their upskilling.
- Ensure all promotion and communication for conferences and events is welcoming and appealing to women, i.e. females are visible and pre-event information is sufficient.

**SHADOWING/OBSERVING OTHER COACHES & CO-COACHING**

Shadowing/co-coaching can provide a great opportunity for new coaches to find out what coaching entails and see if it is for them without committing right from the start. Providing a positive first step into coaching is invaluable in allowing women to build up their confidence.

Likewise, shadowing, observing or co-coaching at the higher level will not only build knowledge and experience, but it will also expose women coaches to the often closed networks of high performance and elite coaching. 58% of female coaches surveyed in Ireland said they would like to observe other coaches in their sport as part of their development (Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report).

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

- Encourage clubs to use a 'shadowing/co-coaching' initiative when looking to support female coaches in their club. Coaches could be paired with coaches of slightly more experience in the club.
- Offer a 'shadowing/co-coaching' programme to coaches with potential to coach at higher levels. They could be paired up with the representative (National, Provincial, County) teams/athletes in your sport.
- Put together a 'Co-coaching Plan' to share with clubs. This plan can be very simple and outline to clubs the concept of co-coaching, and encourage them to use it with their coaches.
- Provide opportunities for coaches to observe one another. This might be in the same sport, or cross sport collaboration.

**DIRECT CONTACT BETWEEN COACHES AND THE SPORT**

Having direct contact in place between your sport and your coaches will help you identify more readily what development your coaches need/want. It will also help you identify which of your coaches are still actively coaching, which will help your ongoing coaching monitoring.

Keep in touch through regular emails and newsletters to update the coach on developments within your organisation and opportunities available to them. Conducting surveys can provide direct feedback, supplying you with insight into what your coaching population needs or wants to develop them and retain them within sport.

By showing you value your coaches input and feedback, you are fostering a sense of belonging and support which is vital to a coach.

### ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Create an annual Women in Coaching survey for your sport as a way of providing a mechanism for female coaches to provide feedback.
- Host a number of focus groups each year to further explore feedback. Focus groups might target different levels of coaches, e.g. Beginner/foundation, coaches of adult athletes/teams, coaches of kids, coaches of teens, etc.
- Host a number of club coaching events, e.g. all female coaches in the club are brought together to discuss club support structures, etc.

## PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE AND FLEXIBLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

### PRE-COURSE/EVENT INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATING WITH COACHES

A further barrier for women accessing learning events is not knowing what to expect when they attend the event/workshop. By providing sufficient information about the event/workshop/programme, you are more likely to have more female coaches register for it. This information can be made available through your normal promotion channels, i.e. on the website, Eventbrite page, social media, etc. but think also about sending out personalised emails with information inviting them to attend, and supply the following:

- Date, time, cost and location of the event.
- The schedule of events including a breakdown of classroom-based learning, practical exercises and assessments taking place.
- Who is the event suitable for, i.e. what level coach? (State beginners or no knowledge of the sport if applicable).
- What the learning outcomes will be.
- Information about when the 'downtime' and on-course breaks are.
- Who is leading each session (with contact details and bio of the person if possible).
- What clothing and equipment is needed.
- Details of accommodation (if relevant).
- Who else is expected to attend the event.
- Who to contact about logistical information.
- Ensure female images are included on all promotional/marketing material.

Another point to note is to ensure all communication regarding coach development reaches the female coaches. Ensure your sport and clubs have appropriate communication and promotional channels in place so that information filters down through all your members.

### ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Examine your communication and promotional methods when advertising coaching workshops and events. Do you use language that would encourage females to sign up?
- Create an email contact database of all relevant female coaches and send a bespoke email to them promoting the event and including the information provided above.
- Create a Communication Checklist using the above points when developing marketing material to promote coaching courses/workshops.

## MODULARISE LEARNING IN DIFFERENT FORMATS

Traditionally, coach education training programmes take place in blocks. These training events often take coaches away from their homes and families, sometimes overnight and for many days. Some coaches may view this time away from their home lives as a barrier to developing their coaching skills. Women still remain, on the whole, primary carers for their children and other family members, so time away creates logistical problems which cannot only make it difficult to attend the event, but also can create stress which could affect their ability to concentrate on their learning and achieve their potential. These learning events could be modularised and delivered a day at a time over a longer period, with elements of learning delivered online. As technology develops, the number of different formats in which learning can be delivered is growing all the time. As such, individual learners are able to identify the ways in which they best learn, and can access learning.

Face-to-face contact, as previously mentioned, is still important to coaches, but modules can be delivered online which complement a specific learning programme by remaining both responsive and personalised. Webinars and online forums can still provide interaction while reducing the need for travel and going to the expense of booking costly venues.

### ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Think about how you currently deliver training to your coaches. Does the format of the delivery of the course suit their lifestyle and timing commitments? How often do you check if your training courses are effective?
- Always record webinars and online workshops. Circulate these with your coaches so that those who were unavailable can watch back at a time that suits them.
- If recording coach education webinars, release the audio format via podcast. This way coaches can listen to it while driving, exercising, etc.
- Vary the location for training, for example, bring the workshop to the club rather than all the time regional, etc. Make it easy for coaches to attend.

[View Sport Ireland Coaching Blended Learning Guidelines for NGBs](#)



## NGB AND CLUB SUPPORT

A lack of NGB and Club support was a prominent challenge faced by coaches outlined in the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Report. They noted the following challenges when surveyed:



Figure 8. Information provided by female coaches outlining challenges they face in coaching (Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report 2021).

It's important that organisations are aware of challenges faced by females in their own sport so that they can take measures to address them. This point reiterates the importance of creating surveys and focus groups with coaches to understand their motivations for coaching, but also the barriers and challenges they face.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Ensure the Women in Coaching Action Plan developed by the sport has measures in place to address the challenges mentioned above.
- Create an annual Women in Coaching survey for your sport as a way of providing a mechanism for coaches to provide feedback.
- Issue a statement from the organisation outlining the value placed on female coaches or create a campaign for the organisation and clubs to celebrate women in coaching.
- Review your own organisations' pricing structure for coaching courses.
- Establish events to recognise and reward women coaches where applicable.
- Write a set of guidelines for clubs suggesting ways in which the clubs can ensure coaches are supported, developed and feel valued, including for example:
  - Equal access to training facilities and equipment.
  - Improved communication practices within the club to all coaches.
  - Fair and equitable budgeting practices with all training groups.
  - Fair and equal representation of all coaches/training groups at club meetings.
  - Subsidised costs for those attending coaching courses.
  - Establish a coaching network in the club.
  - Host a coaches awards/recognition night in the club.

[View Swim Ireland's Women in Sport Coaching and Mentoring Programme](#) 

[View Sport Ireland's Women in Coaching Survey](#) 

## DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES THAT ALLOW PERSONAL GROWTH, NOT JUST FOCUSING ON TECHNICAL AND TACTICAL SKILLS

Coaching is wider than just knowing, and being confident in, the technical and tactical aspects of a sport. A coach engages regularly with people and is often seen as a leader requiring exceptional leadership skills and qualities. As such, they need to be confident in their own interpersonal and relationship-building skills.

Look at providing learning opportunities, particularly for female coaches, which:

- Develop self-confidence
- Build networks
- Develop self-reflection skills
- Promote the coach's wellbeing (physical and mental/emotional)

[View Athletics Ireland's Forerunners Leadership initiative](#)



However, achieving 'traditional' coaching qualifications and accessing training is important for female coaches for a number of reasons. 88% of female coaches surveyed in Ireland hold a coaching qualification with 61% looking to complete their next coaching qualification. As well as the benefit to their coaching ability by completing a coaching qualification, the following are also reasons why they seek accreditation:

- They have a sense of achievement which develops their self-confidence, i.e. they position themselves at a certain level, equivalent to other coaches.
- It helps them build essential skills that can lead to leadership and/or employment opportunities.
- It provides evidence that they are qualified and safe to coach.
- They can then evidence their coaching achievements to other coaches and athletes.

Unfortunately, many female coaches feel they need to be able to prove their level of coaching to gain the respect of their peers and participants. This topic is explored further in this chapter when we discuss the importance of the organisational culture.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Establish additional CPD training for coaches that focuses on the bullet points listed above.
- Link up with other sports to create joint bespoke programmes focusing on the bullet points listed above. Learning opportunities for coaches from different sports can increase the knowledge gained.

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Spending time with coaches individually is important to identify what development they need. This is very much sport dependent and resources available. Developing a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) and Personal Development Plan (PDP) with them will help them feel valued and supported, as well as providing a log of what development opportunities are needed and being accessed.

Although the TNA and PDP will be completed by individual coaches, it can also be done in groups, with either a leader facilitating the group or peer-to-peer support.

[View UK Coaching - A Guide to Using Training Needs Analysis and Personal Development Plans](#)



**SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

- Explore how your sport can make Training Needs Analysis (TNA) and Personal Development Plans (PDP) the norm, as well as accessible for female coaches to learn more about it.
- Host a webinar with female coaches on TNAs and PDPs (perhaps only applicable to coaches at a certain coaching level).

**COACH PLACEMENTS, INTERNSHIPS AND CO-COACHING**

By linking coaches together with other coaches in sports, or clubs, you can provide hands-on experience of what coaching entails at any level.

Likewise, placements or internships at the higher level will not only build knowledge and experience in the female coach, but it will also expose them to the often closed networks of high performance and elite coaches, whilst building the credibility of women coaches among other coaches, management and players. This exposure and experience will prove invaluable in building a woman's confidence, to push her to apply for higher-level coaching jobs when they arise. It is also what clubs/employers are looking for (equal to or more than qualifications). So experiential learning is key and providing opportunities to accrue experience is vital for coaches to progress.

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

- Put together a 'Co-coaching Plan' to share with clubs. This plan can be very simple and outline to clubs the concept of co-coaching, and encourage them to use it with their coaches.
- Make the decision to establish an 'Internship/Placement Initiative' with your high performance teams/athletes for women coaches. The initiative will probably work best if it has an application process attached, a set timeline for duration of the placement/internship, etc. and clear roles/responsibilities for both the coach, the Head coach and the NGB. E.g. all National teams/squads have a woman coach included.

**PRO-ACTIVE IN THE SUPPORT YOU PROVIDE**

Keep in touch regularly with your coaches and be interested in their development. Try to ensure they know who is available to support them. Provide them with access to networking opportunities both inside and outside sport. Advocate the importance of attending these events.

If women coaches lack confidence to attend it's usually as a result of the environment they're entering rather than their coaching ability. The need for a 'nudge' to attend events can be easily overcome by personal support from the organisation. However, a better approach is to build confidence into your structure and systems rather than reacting when you have coaches with no confidence, i.e. give them experiential learning, provide opportunities to accrue experience, ensuring inclusive environments.

A central online network of your female coaches, mixed with face-to-face events, will ensure that a two-way line of communication continues and you have a better understanding of the development needs of your coaches and they feel supported and part of the sport.

## ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Develop a mailing list for all female coaches so that information can be shared directly with them.
- For large organisations, stressing the importance to other staff and development officers on the information in this toolkit is vital. Host a staff webinar to outline your Action Plan for Women in Coaching or to simply make them aware of the key points highlighted in this toolkit or in the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report.

### MIXED GENDER LEARNING EVENTS (LEARNERS/DELEGATES ATTENDING)

Traditionally, in a lot of sports, more men are coaches than women, therefore, the likelihood is that coach development learning events can be attended and delivered mainly by men. Being outnumbered in an environment can be uncomfortable for some people and may impact on their learning experience or completion of the training/session.

Monitor your attendees at these learning events and take the time to proactively invite women coaches to the session. The benefits of male and female coaches learning together can include:

- Sharing different approaches to coaching.
- Learning from each other's own personal experiences.
- Reducing the instance of gender-based negative attitudes as relationships can be developed in a neutral environment where everyone is learning together.

Female-only learning events (with the exception of networks/forums) are beneficial but good practice would be to provide all options and on request from the women coaches themselves. Running separate events for male and female coaches may only serve to increase the gender gap and exacerbate negative attitudes towards women as coaches. Presuming that female coaches want separate women-only coaching courses without asking their views could have a negative impact. A blended approach to mixed versus female only events seems to work best.



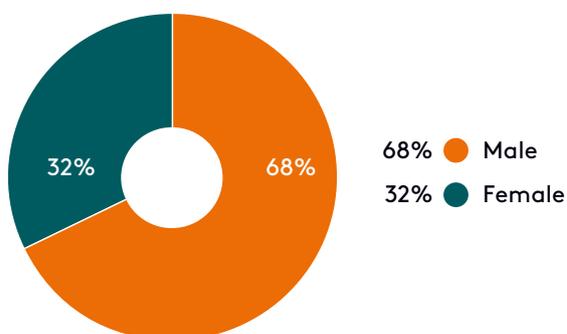
## THE COACH DEVELOPER/TRAINER WORKFORCE

As with coaching, Coach Developers and training workforces can be predominantly male. Developing, deploying and promoting female Coach Developers or trainers at learning events may help encourage female attendance.

A mixed gender team of deliverers at a learning event will provide diversity in how the content is being delivered, which will create a more effective learning environment for all coaches. As you can see from some recent Sport Ireland reports and recent academic research on Irish coaches (Barrett, Sherwin & Blackett, 2021) which recommended increasing the number of female tutors on coach developer training courses as males still make up the majority of those delivering coaching courses.

31 coaches attended Coach Developer training in 2020. These coaches came from 15 different NGBs. The male/female breakdown is identified in the pie chart below.

### COACH DEVELOPER PROGRAMME ATTENDEES



Sixteen tutors were trained to deliver Coaching Children modules in 2020 (88% female, 12% male and another sixteen tutors were trained to deliver the Physical Literacy module (56% male, 44% female).

Sport Ireland Coaching delivered a Coach Developer CPD webinar in December 2020 to 43 Coach Developers from 10 different NGBs (72% male, 28% female).

### COACH DEVELOPER CPD ATTENDEES

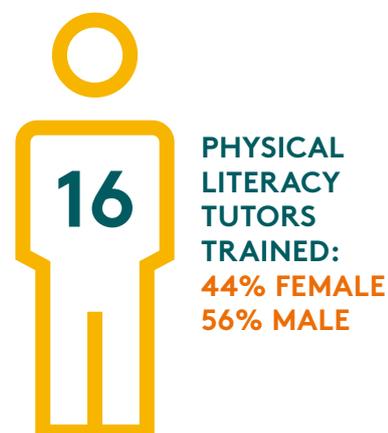
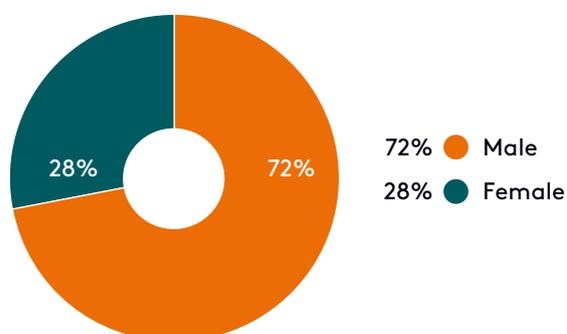


Fig 9. Sport Ireland Coaching Report 2020 showing the gender breakdown of Coach Developers

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

- Audit your current Coach Developers, tutors, trainers, to discover the gender breakdown within your organisation. As well as gender, consider the breakdown of various differences; age, ethnicity, disability, beginner, intermediate and advanced, length of coaching experience, etc.
- If there are significantly less females, explore the possibility of hosting a workshop to upskill female only Coach Developers.
- Examine your communication and promotional methods when seeking to recruit new Coach Developers. Do you use language that would encourage females to sign up?
- Proactively ensure that there is a minimum number of female Coach Developers involved in every coaching course/workshop that the organisation runs.

## ENSURING THE ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE VALUES WOMEN IN COACHING

### POSITIVE IMAGERY IN DEVELOPMENT MATERIALS AND INCREASE PROMOTION

Women need to see that they are valued in the organisation for whom they coach. To that end, images of women, alongside men, playing and coaching sport should be used in all your publications, and promotional and educational resources. Female role models within your sport should be promoted and celebrated.

If you used more images of women than men, would men stop wanting to be coaches? The answer is very likely no, but it could have a significant impact on how women perceive coaching (and your sport) and would encourage them to get involved.

Promoting your coaches will make them visible to your members. This can be done by 'Coach of the Month' acknowledgements. Weekly coaching profile pieces on your website interviewing the coach.

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

- Review all your coach education material to ensure there is a gender balance on all images used.
- Review the coaching section of your website to ensure there is a gender balance on all images used.
- Discover ways of promoting female coaches in your sport, e.g. a weekly blog on your website profiling a new coach each week.
- Establish 'Coach of the Month' awards within the organisation'.

### UNDERSTANDING YOUR ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND ITS POSSIBLE IMPACT ON WOMEN SPORT COACHES

Many women face cultural barriers on a daily basis. This affects how they are perceived in society and in sport. If carried out positively, the steps sport makes towards gender equality may, over time, have an effect on how women are perceived in society.

Sports can start this change process by looking within their own sport and their culture.

- Does the sport proactively welcome women?
- What is the perception of your sport? Is it a sport for men, or a sport for all?
- Are clubs supported and proactive measures in place to make women feel equally as valued in coaching?
- How many women work in the development of your sport?
- How many women are in senior management roles and/or on the Board?

- How is your sport publicised externally? Are images of men playing and coaching in sport predominantly used?
- What policies and processes are in place that support and protect coaches? (For example: employment, health, anti-discrimination, anti-harassment/bullying policies.)

Knowing your organisation and, if necessary, changing its culture and profile is not a short-term fix but recognising where women are under-represented in your organisation is a good starting point for making those changes.

As discussed in other parts of this toolkit, the approach your sport takes towards promoting the value of female coaches and proactively welcoming female coaches to develop is of paramount importance.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- A self-assessment of your workforce/staff can be beneficial to discover if a gender balance exists.
- Ensure all coaching material equally reflects female and male coaches in its imagery and portrayal so as to normalise women coaches.
- Run annual surveys to discover the public's view of the organisation.

## STAMP OUT SEXISM AND GENDER RELATED ISSUES

According to the Sport Ireland research, 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



Figure 10. Negative experiences cited by coaches in the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report 2021.

Whilst we must respect the importance a woman places on attaining qualifications and attending training courses as a way of developing their own self-confidence, it is the work of the NGB, clubs and other areas in sport to not tolerate a culture of sexism which often exists within coaching, whereby a female coach is not valued as highly as a male coach. A female coach should not have to prove herself to be respected by others.

*“It is not the way we say we get things done, such as strategies, policies or procedures. We need to examine how we really get things done: the values, rituals, shared assumptions, the traditions, the perceptions, the unwritten rules, the stories that circulate within our NGB. These create our organisational cultures... The pace of change in the make-up of the coaching profession is slow because it is an issue of cultural change, of deeply embedded ideas and behaviours within sport that have been so long in the making, they have become normalised...”*

(L. Norman, 2017)

### ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Try and discover through workshops, surveys and discussions if women coaches in your sport have ever experienced issues relating to gender and sexism mentioned in this resource. That way you can take proactive measures to address it.
- Establish and promote a women in coaching awareness week, targeting males in sport and their attitude towards female coaches.
- Ensure all coaching material equally reflects female and male coaches in its imagery and portrayal so as to normalise women coaches.
- Add a segment to coaching courses that highlights the fact that women coaches can feel disrespected and disregarded due to their gender. This may create an awareness and self-consciousness to all those on the course.
- Host a staff webinar to outline your Action Plan for Women in Coaching or to simply make them aware of the key points highlighted in this toolkit or in the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report.
- Use Codes of Conducts or ‘zero tolerance policies’ in the organisation, or encourage the use of them in clubs, to help overcome sexism or gender related issues cited by women coaches.
- Host club workshops to provide feedback to clubs on challenges stated by women coaches and ways of improving them in the club.

### WHO DO YOU EMPLOY?

If your sport is lucky enough to be in a position to hire sport/coach development officers, it is important to ensure females feel comfortable in applying for these roles and welcomed into the organisation as valued as any other coach. Quite often, females working in sports that traditionally would have been considered more male dominant, have reported feeling isolated, disrespected and judged as being a poor coach because she is a female. Sports should work hard to ensure all staff value one another and treat each other with respect.

### ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- A self-assessment of your workforce/staff can be beneficial to ensure a gender balance exists.
- Host a staff event such as, team building, a values workshop and unconscious bias training.

## KEY POINTS TO DEVELOPMENT CHAPTER

### HOW

Find out how coaches want to be developed and put structures in place to provide this

### SUPPORT

Providing and promoting support networks  
Providing accessible and flexible learning opportunities

### CULTURE

Examine the culture in your sport. Takes steps to ensuring females feel welcomed

### ACTIONS

Use the Suggested Actions in this toolkit to influence current practices and create programmes/initiatives to develop coaches

### EVALUATE

Monitor and evaluate

### REVISE

Assess-Plan-Do-Review



## CHAPTER 3 – DEVELOPING COACHES

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS SUMMARY

- Write a set of guidelines encouraging clubs to establish coaching networks, or opportunities for coaches to connect, network and learn from one another within the club. For example, monthly coaching forums online or in the clubhouse where certain topics are discussed.
- Establish a coaching network for all female coaches in your sport. For example, this may involve four online forums a year where they hear from a guest speaker. It also means the sport has a contact group when sending out the latest information on coach development and other news.
- Link up with another sport and establish a joint coaching network. This can provide an opportunity for coaches to be exposed to different ideas and concepts when it comes to coaching.
- Write a set of guidelines for clubs encouraging them to try and establish mentoring between their experienced coaches and others.
- Establish a women in coaching mentoring programme in your sport. Coaches can nominate themselves via an application form. The sport provides opportunities for all coaches to meet and learn while also pairing them with a mentor
- Collaborate with other sports to create joint mentoring programmes.
- For those who are just starting their coaching journey – prior to any course starting, appoint a mentor to work with a small group of interested women, doing some pre-course work and mentoring the whole group, before, during and after the actual course. This is cost effective and has the added benefit of starting to develop a peer mentoring group which can transition into a wider network for the female coaches.
- Coaches with potential to progress to the next level or who are aiming to coach at HP level, will benefit enormously from having a mentor for a period of time.
- Review all conferences and events to ensure a diverse range of speakers and deliverers thus resulting in a more inclusive and welcoming environment.
- Host an annual Women in Coaching Conference in your sport.
- Host a coaching conference for coaches of female teams (mixed gender but all involved with similar teams).
- Host online coaching workshops for women coaches.
- Host online coaching workshops for coaches of female teams.
- Offer to pay for coaches to attend International coaching workshops/courses. This also highlights how much you value and support the coach if their sport is willing to invest in their upskilling.
- Ensure all promotion and communication for conferences and events is welcoming and appealing to women, i.e. females are visible and pre-event information is sufficient.
- Encourage clubs to use a 'shadowing/co-coaching' initiative when looking to support female coaches in their club. Coaches could be paired with coaches of slightly more experience in the club.
- Offer a 'shadowing/co-coaching' programme to coaches with potential to coach at higher levels. They could be paired up with the representative (National, Provincial, County) teams/athletes in your sport.
- Put together a 'Co-coaching Plan' to share with clubs. This plan can be very simple and outline to clubs the concept of co-coaching, and encourage them to use it with their coaches.
- Provide opportunities for coaches to observe one another. This might be in the same sport, or cross sport collaboration.

- Create an annual Women in Coaching survey for your sport as a way of providing a mechanism for female coaches to provide feedback.
- Host a number of focus groups each year to further explore feedback. Focus groups might target different levels of coaches, e.g. Beginner/foundation, coaches of adult athletes/teams, coaches of kids, coaches of teens, etc.
- Host a number of club coaching events, e.g. all female coaches in the club are brought together to discuss club support structures, etc.
- Examine your communication and promotional methods when advertising coaching workshops and events. Do you use language that would encourage females to sign up?
- Create an email contact database of all relevant female coaches and send a bespoke email to them promoting the event and including the information provided above.
- Create a Communication Checklist using the points in the toolkit when developing marketing material to promote coaching courses/workshops.
- Think about how you currently deliver training to your coaches. Does the format of the delivery of the course suit their lifestyle and timing commitments? How often do you check if your training courses are effective?
- Always record webinars and online workshops. Circulate these with your coaches so that those who were unavailable can watch back at a time that suits them.
- If recording coach education webinars, release the audio format via podcast. This way coaches can listen to it while driving, exercising, etc.
- Vary the location for training, for example, bring the workshop to the club rather than all the time regional, etc. Make it easy for coaches to attend.
- Ensure the Women in Coaching Action Plan developed by the sport has measures in place to address the challenges faced by females (e.g. a lack of support by NGB/club).
- Issue a statement from the organisation outlining the value placed on women coaches or create a campaign for the organisation and clubs to celebrate women in coaching.
- Review your own organisation's pricing structure for coaching courses.
- Establish events to recognise and reward female coaches where applicable.
- Write a set of guidelines for clubs suggesting ways in which the clubs can ensure coaches are supported, developed and feel valued, including for example:
  - Equal access to training facilities and equipment.
  - Improved communication practices within the club to all coaches.
  - Fair and equitable budgeting practices with all training groups.
  - Fair and equal representation of all coaches/training groups at club meetings.
  - Subsidised costs for those attending coaching courses.
  - Establish a coaching network in the club.
  - Host a coaches awards/recognition night in the club.
- Establish additional CPD training for coaches that focuses on personal growth rather than just technical/tactical skills.
- Link up with other sports to create joint bespoke programmes focusing on the personal growth. Learning opportunities for coaches from different sports can increase the knowledge gained.
- Explore how your sport can make Training Needs Analysis (TNA) and Personal Development Plans (PDP) the norm, as well as accessible for female coaches to learn more about it.

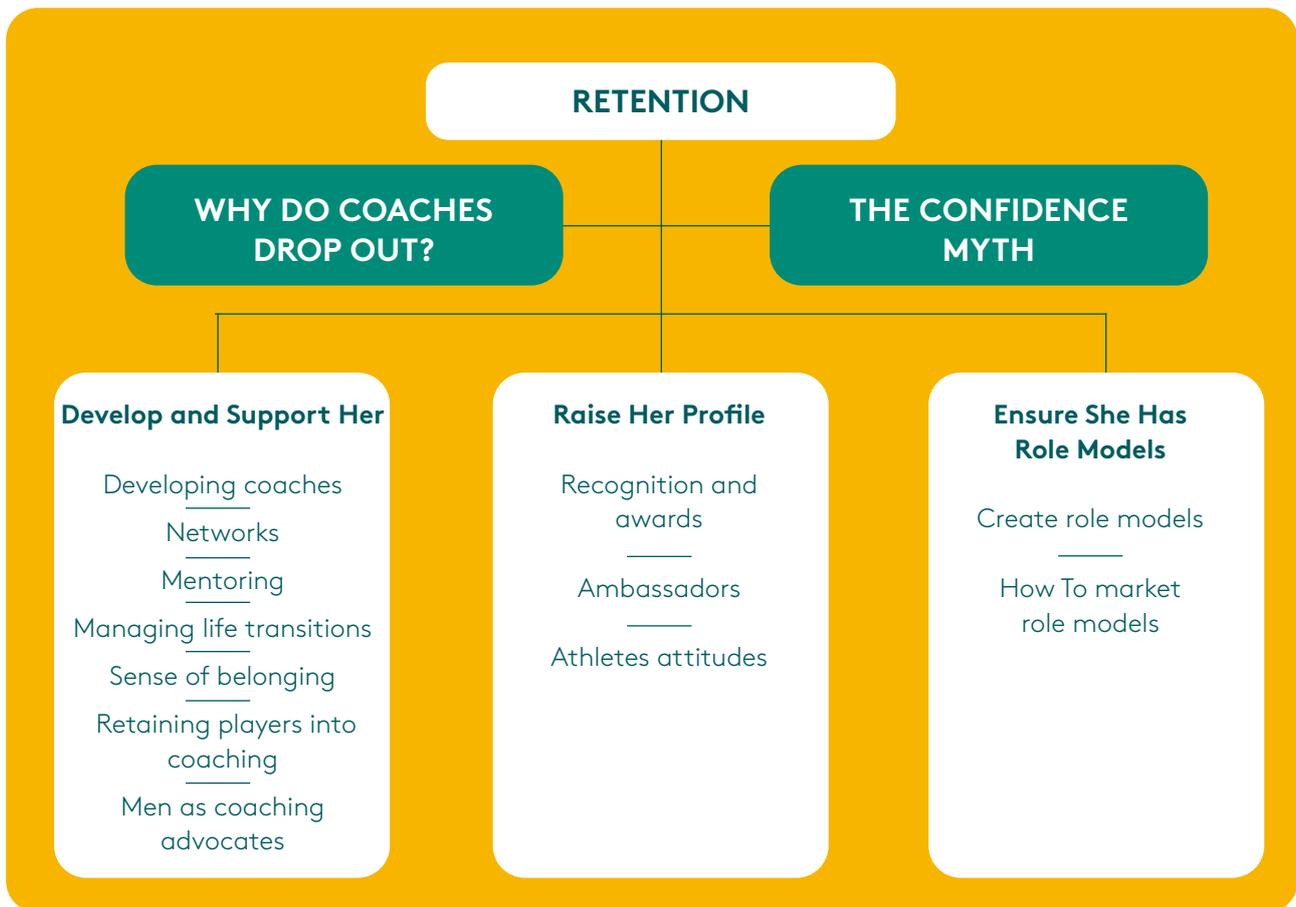
- Host a webinar with female coaches on TNAs and PDPs (perhaps only applicable to coaches at a certain coaching level).
- Make the decision to establish an 'Internship/Placement Initiative' with your high performance teams/athletes for women coaches. The initiative will probably work best if it has an application process attached, a set timeline for duration of the placement/internship, etc. and clear roles/responsibilities for both the coach, the Head coach and the NGB. E.g. all National teams/squads have a women coach included.
- Develop a mailing list for all women coaches so that information can be shared directly with them.
- For large organisations, stressing the importance to other staff and development officers on the information in this toolkit is vital. Host a staff webinar to outline your Action Plan for Women in Coaching or to simply make them aware of the key points highlighted in this toolkit or in the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report.
- Audit your current Coach Developers, tutors, trainers, to discover the gender breakdown within your organisation. If there are significantly less females, explore the possibility of hosting a workshop to upskill female only Coach Developers.
- Examine your communication and promotional methods when seeking to recruit new Coach Developers. Do you use language that would encourage females to sign up?
- Proactively ensure that there is a minimum number of female Coach Developers involved in every coaching course/workshop that the organisation runs.
- Review all your coach education material to ensure there is a gender balance on all images used.
- Review the coaching section of your website to ensure there is a gender balance on all images used.
- Discover ways of promoting female coaches in your sport, e.g. a weekly blog on your website profiling a new coach each week.
- Establish 'Coach of the Month' awards within the organisation.
- A self-assessment of your workforce/staff can be beneficial to discover if a gender balance exists.
- Run annual surveys to discover the public's view of the organisation.
- Try and discover if women coaches in your sport have ever experienced issues relating to gender and sexism mentioned in this resource. That way you can take proactive measures to address it.
- Establish and promote a coaching awareness week, targeting males in sport and their attitude towards women coaches.
- Add a segment to coaching courses that highlights the fact that women coaches can feel disrespected and disregarded due to their gender. This may create an awareness and self-consciousness in all those on the course.
- Host a staff webinar to outline your Action Plan for Women in Coaching or to simply make them aware of the key points highlighted in this toolkit or in the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research Report.
- Use Codes of Conducts or 'zero tolerance policies' in the organisation, or encourage the use of them in clubs, to help overcome sexism or gender related issues cited by women coaches.
- Host club workshops to provide feedback to clubs on challenges stated by women coaches and ways of improving them in the club.
- A self-assessment of your workforce/staff can be beneficial to ensure a gender balance exists.
- Host a staff event such as, team building, a values workshop and unconscious bias training.

# CHAPTER 4

# Retaining Coaches



Photo credit: Sportfile



## WHY DO COACHES DROP OUT?

According to research gathered from the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Survey, coaches who dropped out of coaching cited the following reasons:

- 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, challenges within the club, coach environment within the club, felt undervalued, lack of respect and support.

Keeping female coaches in sport is built around providing opportunities that engage and excite them in an environment that values them, recognises their contribution and supports them to develop.

Many of the things that help women develop as coaches will also be the things that retain them in coaching – so a number of the principles below will have already been outlined in more detail in the previous Chapter on Development.

### ➤ SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Gather data to understand how long your coaches stay coaching your sport. Is there a difference between men and women? Are there any patterns around the age at which a coach starts or drops out of your sport, or the level they drop out at.
- Issue a questionnaire or encourage clubs to use an 'Exit Questionnaire' to collect feedback from coaches who exit/decide to stop coaching in their club.

## THE CONFIDENCE MYTH

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The narrative around confidence and females lacking confidence in coaching is often mentioned. However, contrary to belief, most active female coaches who responded to Sport Ireland's Women in Coaching survey said they had moderate to high levels of confidence in their ability to coach.

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

**In summary, coaches in general are confident in their coaching ability, but feel a lack of confidence when confronted by male administrators or other coaches.**

**These points are important to note in order to support or influence if organisations are to be successful in retaining female coaches in their sport.**

## DEVELOP AND SUPPORT HER

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### DEVELOPING COACHES

In order to retain women in coaching, organisations need to ensure they develop them. Chapter 3 of this toolkit discusses this point in detail and so readers should refer to that chapter for tips and guidelines that can support their actions for retaining coaches in sport.

Go to [Chapter 3 Developing Coaches](#)

### PROVIDING AND PROMOTING SUPPORT NETWORKS

An overriding finding from the Sport Ireland Women in Coaching report was the need to better develop coaching networks. 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. 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..

The coaches identified the following as benefits of a coaching network:

- Offers support to coaches and enables shared learning.
- Helpful for new coaches or mentors in enabling them to build and develop positive relationships with others who have key experience and expertise.
- Elite level women coaches described how they can feel isolated in their development and would benefit from a network of similar coaches for support and learning.

View [Triathlon Ireland's Women into High Performance Coaching Pathway](#) 

## ACCESS TO COACHING GROUPS/NETWORKS

Coaches benefit greatly from having support networks around them (Women's Sports Foundation, 2019). Women value having access to support; this can either be one to one or in a group environment, within their own sport, or with other sports. Ways to develop women could be through access to online (or in-person) coaching groups or networks, conferences, forums, mentoring, shadowing, co-coaching and direct contact by the NGB or club. These can be mixed gender but the feedback suggests that women only networks yield a greater sense of support without judgement. Female coaches believe they can open up more, discuss coaching challenges and provide information to one another more comfortably when it is a female only group. However, that doesn't mean they should be restricted from mixed gender networks or events. A combination seems to be the best approach. Anyone who is part of a coaching network benefits from a sense of support from their sport or organisation who set up and invited them into the network.

### Who benefits from a coaching network?

- Coaches from targeted leagues/competition.
- Coaching networks in clubs (support structure too), whereby the club coaches support and learn from one another.
- High Performance Coaches (or those earmarked to progress).
- Coaches from different sports who get the chance to network together.

View [Rowing Ireland's Women in Coaching Network initiative](#)



### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Write a set of guidelines encouraging clubs to establish coaching networks, or opportunities for coaches to connect, network and learn from one another within the club. For example, monthly coaching forums online or in the clubhouse where certain topics are discussed.
- Establish a coaching network for all female coaches in your sport. For example, this may involve four online forums a year where they hear from a guest speaker. It also means the sport has a contact group when sending out the latest information on coach development and other news.
- Link up with another sport and establish a joint coaching network. This can provide an opportunity for coaches to be exposed to different ideas and concepts when it comes to coaching. Have you got networking initiatives/opportunities for women in coaching? E.g. An annual conference for coaches? An annual conference/forum for female coaches?
- Set up a Women in Coaching group on LinkedIn and/or Facebook. Use it as a platform to promote female coaches, share interesting stories, coaching tips/guidelines, coaching books to read, etc.

## MENTORING

Mentoring is widely acknowledged as an increasingly more powerful and important aspect of developing people in sport, including leaders, officials and coaches.

As detailed in the Development section, providing coaches with a mentor, helping them develop a small group of peer mentors, and linking them to wider networks of coaches, both male and female, gives them access to support when they need it. This will help women coaches be resilient and assist when they may need advice, support and encouragement to stay in the game (Women in Sport Coaching, 2016).

According to the Sport Ireland Coaching Report, 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.

*“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.”*

(Focus Group Participant, Sport Ireland Women in Coaching Research, 2021)

As outlined under the Barriers for Progression, key issues for many women in coaching include confidence (in certain situations), gaining practical coaching experience (especially at a high performance level), and access to informal and formal networks. Having a mentor who can help check, challenge, advise and support a female coach, can be a really powerful tool in addressing the issues and often opening doors to people and opportunities.

View [Coaching Association of Canada’s ‘Building an Effective Mentorship Programme’](#) ➔

View [Coaching Association of Canada Mentorship Guide \(Mentee\)](#) ➔

View [Coaching Association of Canada Mentorship Guide \(Mentor\)](#) ➔

View [Coaching Association of Canada Mentorship Guide \(Administrator\)](#) ➔

View a [full range of mentoring resources from the Coaching Association of Canada](#) ➔



## UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF LIFE TRANSITIONS ON COACHES

The life transitions that women go through take many forms and can have an impact on their coaching. Think of those life-changing moments and how women could be supported to stay in coaching, or to take a break and return with confidence. Many of these life transitions affect men as well (although women still carry out the majority of the caring duties) so systemically considering these life events within your sport will help both women and men to stay involved in coaching.

Below is a list of life transitions that some coaches may face. An organisation (and club/schools) should be aware of these transitions and plan how coaches can be supported to stay in coaching, or how they can manage time away from coaching responsibilities and then return in a sensitively managed way.

Moving house	Moving city/country
No longer fit to participate	Disability (of self or partner caring for a child or other family member)
Having children (pregnancy or adoption)	Divorce
Caring for children or family member	Change of jobs or retirement
Menopause	'Milestone' birthdays
Death of a loved one	Children leaving home
Children growing up (moving to a higher playing age or going from primary to post primary)	Teenage coaches going to college, or college coaches graduating and entering the workforce

At the outset, managing transition means identifying what short-term support can be given or offered. Organisations can develop guidelines for clubs and schools on supporting coaches through transitions. You can also add tips and guidelines to coaching course modules for coach developers/tutors to incorporate into their work. This information can be shared with coaches when on coaching courses so that managing life transitions and their role as a coach becomes normalised and accepted. Having actions like this in place will show you value your female coaches.

In addition

- What provision do you make for flexible working?
- Do you support and promote co-coaching or team coaching to share the commitment needed from all your coaches?
- Do you provide leave from international or national tours?
- Do you allow family visits while your coaches are on tour?

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

- Develop a set of guidelines for clubs on how to support coaches through life transitions. This might include the follow suggestions:
  - Offering the coach time off,
  - Encourage a 'back to coaching' programme/workshop. All clubs host a back to coaching week where they promote recruiting coaches and inviting past coaches to re-engage.
  - Increase the number of coaches per team so that not all the responsibility falls on the female coach.
  - Make part-time coaching an ok thing, e.g. A new mom may not be able to commit two evenings away from home so it's ok to coach one evening a week.
- Add content to coaching workshops/modules to highlight life-transitions and the impact it can have on coaches, and ways for the coach/club to manage these, and support the coach.

**SENSE OF BELONGING**

Keep in touch with your female coaches and keep them involved in coaching surveys, local and national networks and ask for feedback on how you, as an organisation, are doing in supporting coaches. All coaches feel valued when they belong to a group, when they feel they contribute to coaching programmes/education and their position is recognised. Organisations should also find ways of encouraging clubs to do the same.

Receiving payment for the work done also instills a sense of belonging and reward for a job well done. Clubs and sports are aware that it is no longer OK to pay male coaches and not pay female coaches (as was the case in the past for many women coaches).

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS**

- Run an annual survey for female coaches. Publish results/findings and show one or two key actions that the organisation wants to implement based on the coaches' feedback.
- Send a virtual Christmas card to all coaches thanking them for the time they give to volunteering/coaching.
- Encourage clubs to run annual surveys with their coaches seeking feedback on how the club can support them.
- Encourage clubs to run 'Coaching Social Nights' (or similar) for coaches to bond, get to know one another and feel a sense of belonging to the club.
- Ensure the organisation, and advise clubs where necessary, that fair and transparent payment processes (where they exist) occur for all coaches regardless of gender.

[View The Irish Judo Association Coaches Forum](#)

**RETAINING PLAYERS INTO COACHING**

Players have lots of experience and knowledge of the sport. Retaining them when they retire is a great opportunity to not only increase coaching numbers, but also possibly finding coaches who have potential to excel to elite levels of coaching. Organisations should seek ways to retain players in other areas of the game once they've decided to stop participating.

When targeting players coming to the end of their careers to be future coaches, organisations should consider that some might need time away from a big commitment, especially if they have been playing at an elite level. It is useful to speak to athletes before they retire, maintain contact with them, and where feasible, develop a personal plan for their re-integration into the sport as a coach. This may involve a support role first with less commitment.

Many potential coaches have been lost over the years because of a failure to follow up with ex-players and encourage those with the motivation and appropriate skills for coaching back into the sport. This is also applicable to other roles within sport such as officiating, refereeing, support services (e.g. strength and conditioning, medical), management and administration. Other factors to consider regarding elite players transitioning into coaching:

- They end up coaching at a level they were not ready for. If they fail, this can damage their confidence and desire to coach.
- They started coaching too soon after retiring from competing and burn out.
- They started coaching their peers and found it hard to differentiate between friend and coach.
- There isn't a pathway or programme in place to fast track them into coaching, i.e. the only option is to start at the bottom and work their way up.

### ► SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Develop a 'Player to Coach' Transition programme for elite athletes. This programme might involve steps such as:
  - Running a coaching course for players interested in coaching.
  - Setting up coaching opportunities for players to assist with underage squads/athletes, provincial squads, development teams, schools/3rd level team/athlete training, etc.
  - Help the potential coach to develop a personal development plan for their coaching career.
- Support clubs to transition players to coaches. This might be providing tips to clubs such as:
  - Offer to pay for athletes/players to attend a Foundation Level coaching course and link them up to help with underage athletes/teams in the club.
  - Encourage all senior athletes/players to help train the youngest age group monthly.



## MALE COACHING ADVOCATE

In a lot of sports, men make up the majority of the coaching numbers. They therefore have an important role in advocating for more women coaches and to support women coaches. Men involved in sport have an influence on:

- Participants they coach (girls and boys, women and men).
- Mothers and fathers of children they coach.
- Women/men within their social circle.
- Women coaches in their clubs or organisation.

Advocates can also be male role models in sport and coaching and can use their media status to promote the value of coaching to women and the value of women in coaching.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Develop a campaign or 'call to action' for men to join in and support women coaches, e.g. 'Male Champions of Female Coaches'. Create a week in the year where this tagline is used and all men are urged to find ways of championing women they know in coaching.

View the [Tucker Center's 'Be An Ally of Girls and Women in Sport'](#)



## RAISE HER PROFILE

### PUBLIC RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

Recognising the work your coaches do is important, it can be what motivates them to continue. Recognition can take many different forms, but it does not have to be complicated or costly. The simplest is to say thank you. This can be linked to events and/or via social media.

- Presentation of certificates for training or qualification can be made at local community events, with articles on websites, social media or in newspapers.
- Receiving nominations and awards for your coaching is a very exciting way for women coaches to be recognised by your sport, your industry or other women.

Consider having a dedicated annual award for a woman coach who has achieved great results. There are two points of view here. Firstly, having a women-only award would raise the profile of women coaches in general and would easily help to identify women coaching role models who can be promoted through your communications channels. On the other hand, this may appear to marginalise or set women coaches aside from their male peers, which could lead to separating your coaching workforce by gender (why shouldn't women be able to win your 'Coach of the Year' award?)

Both points of view have merit and it depends largely on where women are within your sport. Often, sports bodies will start with separate men's and women's coaching awards. Then, over time and as more nominations appear, this can be merged into a single award. The objective should be to have a coaching award that receives equal nominations for both men and women coaches.

In both cases being nominated, regardless of winning, can build self-esteem for the coach and start to create those positive role models that coaching needs. The publicity it can produce can be priceless and can help raise the profile of women coaches.

Build in sufficient time and resources to:

- Investigate the various awards that can be linked to coaching.
- Decide how coaches should be nominated and by who.
- Generate publicity around the nomination.
- Proactively support the nomination of female coaches.
- Monitor the number of nominations you receive and the winners from each category.

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Have a way (e.g. social media/website) of congratulating all coaches who attend your coaching events (workshops and courses).
- Analyse your current recognition and award events to ensure a fair gender representation.
- Establish a 'Female and Male Coach of the Year' award if women are not reflected in current awards.
- Profile female coaches on your website, e.g. interview them and post on your social media channels.

## AMBASSADORS

Creating Ambassadors or establishing an Ambassador programme with female coaches can be a very effective way of making that coach feel valued while also contributing to the wider organisational goals and plans. Ambassador programmes tend to have the following elements:

- An application process to select the Ambassadors.
- Ambassadors understand their expected role and responsibilities when they sign up, e.g. commit to selected training as outlined, commit to attending events, commit to helping to promote the sport, commit to establishing events/initiatives themselves.

View [Canoeing Ireland's Bridge the Gap Ambassador programme](#) 

## ATHLETES ATTITUDES

Until it becomes normal to see female coaches equally in the coaching space with teams and athletes, there is a need for organisations to continue to promote the value of women in coaching. This promotion is sometimes necessary with the athletes themselves.

Taking proactive measures to educate athletes can be beneficial.

View the [Tucker Centre 'We want a male coach' initiative](#) 

## CREATE ROLE MODELS

A role model is often described as a person who serves as an example of the values, attitudes and behaviours associated with a role.

In sport and coaching, women tend to identify most with “someone like me.” It is vital that you not only celebrate and promote your high performance female players and coaches, but also the women who coach at a local community level. Being acknowledged by your sport and promoted as a role model is very powerful. A role model is likely to stay in coaching if they feel their coaching is valued.

Coaches are accessible role models to sports participants. They motivate people to play sport, be active and keep coming back. Therefore, it is also important that you support and promote your coaches if you want to retain your players. The latest report from Women’s Sport Foundation, ‘Coaching through a Gender Lens: Maximizing Girls Play and Potential’ found that girls with female coaches were more likely to say their coaches were positive role models, good listeners and people the girls could count on. (N. Zarrett, C. Cooky, & P.T Veliz, 2019).

[View Rowing Ireland’s ‘Showcasing Our Role Models’ initiative](#) 

## HOW DO YOU MARKET ROLE MODELS?

Show the value you place on your female role models – promote them to the world!

### CASE STUDIES AND PROFILING

Develop case studies to tell a story and get a message across in a way that people can identify with. Use pictures of the female coach and use her story to help create an emotional link with the reader, with such content as:

- How did she get into coaching?
- Who does she coach/has she coached?
- Why does she coach?
- What is the best part of coaching for her?
- Did she overcome any challenges in becoming a coach or developing as a coach?

The idea is that the women reading this story can relate to this coach and think “I’m like her, I can do that.” As such, always follow this case study with details on what next steps the reader can take to get into coaching. Make the access to further information as easy as possible. If possible, direct her towards a person to speak to.

[View Sport Ireland examples of profiling coaches](#) 

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Profile and promote female coaches on your website via case studies as outlined above.
- Share profiles/case studies with other media outlets who could be interested in promoting the coach even further.
- Set up a Women in Coaching page on your sports website to tell stories and promote women coaches.

## USE OF IMAGES AS A MARKETING TOOL

Images can be very powerful so ensure any information, adverts and articles reflect the women you have coaching in your sport. Look at the images you currently use. What message might they send to women? Do they convey a sense of welcome, being valued and feeling like they belong in the sport?

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Utilise existing promotional opportunities by ensuring gender balance (i.e. on podcasts, interviews, on social media/website) so that females are highlighted.
- Add images of women coaches to all coaching resources and all promotional material.
- Spend time and budget to build up a bank of positive images of women coaching and participating and help your sport market itself as one that welcomes and values women in all aspects of your sport.
- Write up guidelines for clubs to outline the importance of promoting female coaches and using images of female coaches on their websites and social media.



## KEY POINTS TO RETAINING CHAPTER

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### HOW

Understand why coaches drop out of your sport

### SUPPORT

Providing and promoting support networks  
Understand the impact of life transitions on coaches, and how to navigate  
Keep in touch with coaches and keep them involved  
Men as advocates

### PROFILE

Recognise, promote and profile coaches  
Create role models

### ACTIONS

Use the Suggested Actions in this toolkit to influence current practices  
and create programmes/initiatives to retain coaches

### EVALUATE

Monitor and evaluate

### REVISE

Assess-Plan-Do-Review

## CHAPTER 4 – RETAINING COACHES

### SUGGESTED ACTIONS SUMMARY

- Gather data to understand how long your coaches stay coaching your sport. Is there a difference between men and women? Are there any patterns around the age at which a coach starts or drops out of your sport, or the level they drop out at.
- Issue a questionnaire or encourage clubs to use an 'Exit Questionnaire' to collect feedback from coaches who exit/decide to stop coaching in their club.
- Write a set of guidelines encouraging clubs to establish coaching networks, or opportunities for coaches to connect, network and learn from one another within the club. For example, monthly coaching forums online or in the clubhouse where certain topics are discussed.
- Establish a coaching network for all women coaches in your sport. For example, this may involve four online forums a year where they hear from a guest speaker. It also means the sport has a contact group when sending out the latest information on coach development and other news.
- Link up with another sport and establish a joint coaching network. This can provide an opportunity for coaches to be exposed to different ideas and concepts when it comes to coaching. Have you got networking initiatives/opportunities for women coaches? E.g. An annual conference for coaches? An annual conference/forum for women coaches?
- Set up a Women in Coaching group on LinkedIn and/or Facebook. Use it as a platform to promote female coaches, share interesting stories, coaching tips/guidelines, coaching books to read, etc.
- Develop a set of guidelines for clubs on how to support coaches through life transitions. This might include the follow suggestions:
  - Offering the coach time off.
  - Encourage a 'back to coaching' programme/workshop. All clubs host a back to coaching week where they promote recruiting coaches and inviting past coaches to re-engage.
  - Increase the number of coaches per team so that not all the responsibility falls on the women coach.
  - Make part-time coaching an ok thing, e.g. A new mom may not be able to commit two evenings away from home so it's ok to coach one evening a week.
- Add content to coaching workshops/modules to highlight life-transitions and the impact it can have on coaches, and ways for the coach/club to manage these, and support the coach.
- Run an annual survey for women coaches. Publish results/findings and show one or two key actions that the organisation wants to implement based on the coaches' feedback.
- Send a virtual Christmas card to all coaches thanking them for the time they give to volunteering/coaching.
- Encourage clubs to run annual surveys with their coaches seeking feedback on how the club can support them.
- Encourage clubs to run 'Coaching Social Nights' (or similar) for coaches to bond, get to know one another and feel a sense of belonging to the club.
- Ensure the organisation, and advise clubs where necessary, that fair and transparent payment processes (where they exist) occur for all coaches regardless of gender.

- Develop a 'Player to Coach' Transition programme for elite athletes. This programme might involve steps such as:
  - Running a coaching course for players interested in coaching.
  - Setting up coaching opportunities for players to assist with underage squads/athletes, provincial squads, development teams, schools/3rd level team/athlete training, etc.
  - Help the potential coach to develop a personal development plan for their coaching career.
- Support clubs to transition players to coaches. This might be providing tips to clubs such as: Offer to pay for athletes/players to attend a Foundation Level coaching course and link them up to help with underage athletes/teams in the club. Encourage all senior athletes/players to help train the youngest age group monthly.
- Develop a campaign or 'call to action' for men to join in and support female coaches, e.g. 'Male Champions of Female Coaches'. Create a week in the year where this tagline is used and all men are urged to find ways of championing women they know in coaching.
- Have a way (e.g. social media/website) of congratulating all coaches who attend your coaching events (workshops and courses).
- Analyse your current recognition and award events to ensure a fair gender representation.
- Establish a 'Female and Male Coach of the Year' award if women are not reflected in current awards.
- Profile female coaches on your website, e.g. interview them and post on your social media channels.
- Profile and promote female coaches on your website via case studies and interviews.
- Share profiles/case studies with other media outlets who could be interested in promoting the coach even further.
- Set up a Women in Coaching page on your sports website to tell stories and promote women coaches.
- Utilise existing promotional opportunities by ensuring gender balance (i.e. on podcasts, interviews, on social media/website) so that females are highlighted.
- Add images of women coaches to all coaching resources and all promotional material.
- Spend time and budget to build up a bank of positive images of women coaching and participating and help your sport market itself as one that welcomes and values women in all aspects of your sport.
- Write up guidelines for clubs to outline the importance of promoting female coaches and using images of female coaches on their websites and social media.

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