



**Coaching in the UK: The Coaching Workforce  
Statistical Report  
October 2017**

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## Summary

UK Coaching commissioned YouGov to survey 20,000 adults and 1,000 children in 2017. The primary aim of the survey was to explore experience of receiving coaching and the experience of being a coach.

The survey incorporated a broader definition of coaching, to include anyone involved in or receiving coaching across the whole sport and physical activity sector.

This report presents the findings from the coach section of the survey.

## Key findings

- Nearly fourteen million adults have coached sport or physical activity at some point in their lifetime (a quarter of the UK population).
- There are over three million active coaches in the UK that have coached sport or physical activity in the previous twelve months alone (6% of the UK population).
- Overall, the coaching workforce is diverse in terms of gender (46% female compared to 54% male), ethnicity (22% BAME compared to 78% white) and physical/mental health (26% with a physical/mental health condition compared to 65% without).
- Lower social grades and people over the age of 45 are underrepresented in the coaching workforce.
- More than half of active coaches started coaching before the age of 25 and most started coaching whilst still participating in sport and physical activity.
- Most people described their role as a type of “coach”, whereas many others described their role as a “helper”.
- Coaches coach in a range of environments, but most commonly in sports clubs, community settings and schools.
- The majority of coaches coach less than three hours a week, mostly on a voluntary basis. One in five coaches do not coach on a regular weekly basis.
- More than half of coaches do not have a formal coaching qualification.
- Coaches identified the cost of training/qualifications and balancing work/home life as the top barriers facing coaches in the UK.
- Most coaches reported a positive experience of coaching and believed that their coaching made a difference to their participants.

- Only around half of all coaches felt proud to tell others they are a coach and felt recognised for the contribution they make to helping others.
- There is a large pool of coaches no longer actively involved in coaching. These people may be less physically active as a result. Their decision to stop coaching is largely due to lifestyle factors, rather than coaching system factors.

There are some variations in the data and this will be explored in further detail in future publications.

## Introduction

In 2017 UK Coaching commissioned YouGov to undertake the largest ever survey into coaches and coaching. A nationally representative sample of 20,000 adults and 1,000 children were surveyed about their experience of receiving coaching and their experience of being a coach. The survey also asked the public about their perceptions of coaches and coaching in general.

This is the first major piece of research to encompass a broader definition of coaching, which includes anyone involved in or receiving coaching across the whole sport and physical activity sector. It recognises that participants receive coaching in a range of different settings and that coaches play a number of different roles, from coaches in sports clubs, to community activators and helpers, PE teachers, and exercise and fitness instructors. All contribute towards an active nation.

This report presents the findings from the coach section of the YouGov survey. It includes active coaches, those who have recently coached sport and physical activity; and inactive coaches, those who have coached at some point in their lifetime, but not in the past twelve months.

This is the first statistical release of findings. Following this report, a number of thematic papers will be published, exploring specific areas of interest in greater detail.

Separate reports are available for:

- Adult participants who have received coaching
- Children and young people who have received coaching
- The general public

## Methodology

YouGov conducted a survey of 20,688 UK adults aged 18+ in August 2017. The results are weighted to be representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

The survey was administered online, using a questionnaire distributed to members of the YouGov panel of 800,000+ individuals. An email was sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample according to the sample definition, inviting them to take part in the survey.

Sample sizes:

- All participants: 20,688
- Coached participants: 3,788
- Coaches: 1,350
- Children and young people (aged 7-17): 1,047

In order to explore all forms of coaching, 'coaching' has been defined for the purposes of this research as: "Coaching, instruction, training or tuition in ANY sport or physical activity. This can include any environment, such as formal sports club settings as well as informal community settings. It can include any sport or physical activity, including recreational or competitive sport, exercise, fitness, gym, dance, etc."

Below are the definitions for various terms used throughout the reports:

- Active coaches: people who have coached in the past twelve months.
- Inactive coaches: people who have coached in the past five years, but not in the past twelve months.
- Coached-participants: people who have received coaching in the past twelve months.
- BAME: Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (used to refer to members of non-white communities in the UK).
- Social grade: defined by the Market Research Society as a series of demographic classifications based on the occupation of the head of the household. The categories are classified as follows: AB: upper middle and middle class; C1: lower middle class; C2 skilled working class; DE: working class and non-working class. For the analysis, they have been grouped into higher grades (ABC1) and lower grades (C2DE).

## Coaching in the UK

The survey revealed that nearly fourteen million adults have coached sport or physical activity, at some point in their lifetime. This represents over a quarter of the adult population (27%). There are over three million “active” coaches, who have coached in the past twelve months; and over ten million “inactive” coaches, who have coached at some point in the past, but not in the last twelve months.

The table below presents the total number of people in the UK who coached, instructed, trained, taught or led any sport or physical activity, in any environment, to children or adults.

**Table 1.1: Incidence of coaching in the UK**

Last time coached	Number	% of population
In the past 12 months	3,106,053	6
In the past 2 years	1,026,783	2
In the past 3 years	1,018,192	2
In the past 5 years	1,003,621	2
Longer than 5 years ago	6,977,455	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,132,204</b>	<b>27</b>

*Base: all those who have coached at any point in their lifetime.*

*Population figures are based on ONS mid-year population estimates (18+) in the UK.*

The data above suggests that there has been an annual turnover of coaches entering and leaving the workforce each year, of around 1 million.

It is interesting to note the large pool of coaches who are no longer actively involved in coaching. Coaching has a dual benefit: not only does it help to increase activity levels amongst participants; it also increases the activity levels of coaches themselves. As a result of no longer being involved in coaching, these ten million inactive coaches may be less physically active. This will be explored in further detail during future publications.

## Active Coaches

Examining only “active” coaches (those who coached within the previous twelve months), the survey found over three million active coaches in the UK, 6% of the adult population. There are home country variations, as shown in the table below. England has the lowest proportion of coaches, compared to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

**Table 1.2: Active coaches by home country**

Home country	Number	% of population
England	2,608,967	6
Wales	173,967	7
Scotland	306,106	7
Northern Ireland	99,860	7

*Base: all those who have coached in the last 12 months. The total for all home countries does not equate to the total in table 1.1 above, due to rounding. Population figures are based on ONS mid-year population estimates (18+) in the UK.*

### Regional data

Within the regions of England the proportion of active coaches varies from 5% in the North East, Yorkshire and West Midlands, to 8% in London.

**Table 1.3: Active coaches by region**

Region	Number	% of population
North East	105,555	5
North West	341,216	6
Yorkshire and The Humber	213,664	5
East Midlands	224,642	6
West Midlands	226,485	5
East	337,132	7
South East	496,517	7
London	544,253	8
South West	309,772	7

*Base: all those who have coached in the last 12 months. The total for all regions does not equate to the total in table 1.1 above, due to rounding. Population figures are based on ONS mid-year population estimates (18+) in the UK.*

## Profile of active coaches

Examining the demographic profile of active coaches, the survey revealed a more diverse workforce in terms of gender, ethnicity and physical/mental health than previous research has suggested.

The survey found that just under half of those who coached in the previous twelve months were female (46%); around one-fifth were from BAME backgrounds (22%) compared to the national average of 14%; and around a quarter had a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last twelve months or more (26%), compared to around 20% nationally.

Those from lower social grades were underrepresented in the coaching workforce: 35% compared to a national average of 43%. The majority of active coaches were aged under 45, with one in five (20%) under the age of 25.

**Table1.4: Profile of UK active coaches**

Active coaches	%
Male	54
Female	46
18-24	20
25-34	22
35-44	23
45-54	15
55-64	11
65+	10
White	78
BAME	22
Physical or mental health condition	26
No physical or mental health condition	65
Higher social grades	65
Lower social grades	35

*Base: all those who have coached in the last 12 months.*

There are significant variations in the data, for example, depending on the environment and the level of the coach. This will be explored in further detail in future publications.

## Age started coaching

The majority of active coaches started coaching before the age of 25 (55%), with a small proportion starting over the age of 40 (14%).

**Table 1.5: Age started coaching**

Age	%
16 and under	16
17-21	24
22-25	15
36-30	13
31-40	18
Over 40	14

*Base: all those who have coached in the last 12 months.*

Exploring the reasons why coaches first became involved in coaching, almost a quarter of active coaches said they started coaching whilst still playing (23%). Most coaches started coaching as a result of already participating in sport or physical activity in some capacity, and often within their local community.

**Table 1.6: Reasons first became involved in coaching**

Reason	%
Began coaching other participants whilst still playing	23
To support my local club/team	22
To stay involved in sport or physical activity	22
To contribute to my local community	19
Progressed from volunteering	18
As a result of child's involvement in the sport	17
Career development	16
I was inspired by my own coach	14
Other	13

*Base: all those who have coached in the last 12 months.*

*Respondents could select more than one option, therefore percentages do not add up to 100%*

## Coaching roles

Coaches were asked to select a job title that best described their coaching role. A wide variety of job titles were selected, from helpers, school teachers and fitness instructors. Many coaches selected more than one option. Most people described their role as a type of “coach” (39%) and a quarter described their role as a “helper”.

**Table 1.7: Coaching job titles**

Job titles	%
Activator/Facilitator	10
Sports Leader/Leader	10
Helper	25
Trainee Coach	6
Assistant Coach	14
Coach	18
Advanced/Senior Coach	5
Head Coach	5
Performance Coach	4
Specialist Coach (e.g. positional, skills)	5
PE teacher	8
Teacher (outside school)	8
Fitness or Exercise Instructor	9
Personal Trainer	6
Other	12

*Base: all those who have coached in the last 12 months.*

*Respondents could select more than one option, therefore percentages do not add up to 100%*

There are some variations in the data, particularly in terms of demographic characteristics and employment status. These will be explored in further detail in future publications.

## Coaching environment

The majority of active coaches reported that they coach within sports clubs, community groups and school sessions (total 66%). A small proportion coach within further or higher education, or within a sports institute.

**Table 1.8: Where coaching takes place**

Place	%
Sports club	27
Community group, youth group or similar	14
School sessions (as part of PE)	14
School sessions (e.g. outside PE, Active Schools)	11
In an outdoor urban space (park or playground)	9
In an outdoor/countryside setting (river, forest, etc.)	9
Private leisure centre, gym or health club	9
Private sessions with my own clients	8
Local Authority leisure centre	8
Further or Higher Education sessions	4
Sports Institute or similar	3

*Base: all those who have coached in the last 12 months.*

There are some variations in the data, particularly in terms of demographic characteristics. These will be explored in further detail in future publications.

### Coaching hours

In a typical week, coaches were most often coaching for one to two hours (35%). Of those, most were coaching in a volunteer capacity (52%). Over a quarter of coaches were coaching over 10 hours per week (27%), and half of those were also volunteers.

It is interesting to note, that 20% of coaches reported no regular hours in a typical week, suggesting that they coach on a more ad-hoc or sessional basis.

**Table 1.9: Coaching hours in a typical week**

Hours	%
No regular hours	20
1-2 hours	35
3-5 hours	14
5-9 hours	4
Over 10 hours	27

*Base: all those who have coached in the last 12 months.*

Active coaches working at least one hour per week provide around 15 million hours of coaching per week. Of which:

- 57% coach in a voluntary capacity, providing around 5.2 million coaching hours per week.
- 24% coach in a paid capacity, providing around 5.3 million coaching hours.
- 18% coach in both a paid and volunteer capacity, providing around 4.5 million hours per week.

Overall, paid coaching hours account for 53% of all coaching activity and volunteer hours account for 47%.

There are some variations in the data, particularly in terms of demographic characteristics. These will be explored in further detail in future publications.

### Coach qualifications

Over half of active coaches reported that they do not have any formal coaching qualifications (58%). The majority of those with a qualification said they were qualified at levels 1 or 2.

**Table 1.10: Type of qualification**

Qualification	%
No qualification	58
Activator/leader qualification	6
Level 1 (or equivalent)	10
Level 2 (or equivalent)	8
Level 3 (or equivalent)	5
Level 4 (or equivalent)	3
HE/FE Degree or Diploma	5
Other	4

*Base: all those who have coached in the last 12 months.*

There are some variations in the data, particularly in terms of where coaching takes place. These will be explored in further detail in future publications.

## Understanding participants

Active coaches were asked to what extent they felt they understood the specific needs of different aged groups. Overall, coaches were most likely to report that they had a good or some understanding of adult participants aged 18-50 (74%). They were less likely to report that they had a good or some understanding of pre-school children (43%), younger children (58%) and older adults (59%).

**Table 1.11: Coach understanding of different age groups**

Participant age groups	% good or some Understanding	% little or no understanding
Older adults (50+)	59	41
Adults (18-50)	74	27
Young people (14-17)	67	32
Older children (10-13)	66	34
Younger children (5-9)	58	42
Pre-school children (0-4)	43	57

*Base: all those who have coached in the last 12 months.*

Likewise, active coaches were asked the extent to which they felt they understood the specific needs of different groups of people. Overall, coaches were most likely to report that they had a good or some understanding of people new to sport and physical activity (68%); women or girls (67%) and BAME groups (66%).

They were less likely to report that they had a good or some understanding of those with a long term illness or health conditions (43%) and physical disabilities (44%).

It is also interesting to note that coaches with any kind of coaching qualification were more likely to report that they understood different participant groups, compared to those without qualifications. This will be explored in further detail in future publications.

**Table 1.12: Coach understanding of different groups**

<b>Participant groups</b>	<b>% good or some understanding</b>	<b>% little or no understanding</b>
People new to the sport/physical activity	68	32
Women or girls only groups	67	33
People from black and minority ethnic groups	66	33
People from low income groups	62	38
People who are inactive/infrequently active	60	39
Talented players/high performance athletes	46	54
People with a learning disability	45	55
People with a physical disability	44	56
People with a long-term illness or health conditions	43	57

*Base: all those who have coached in the last 12 months.*

There are some variations in the data in the above two tables, particularly in terms of gender. These will be explored in further detail in future publications.

### **Experience of coaches**

Active coaches were asked a series of questions regarding their experience of being a coach. The majority of coaches felt that their coaching made a difference to their participants (78% agreed, with only 4% disagreeing with this statement). However, only half of coaches said they felt proud to tell others they are a coach or felt recognised for the contribution they make to helping others.

**Table 1.13: Experience of being a coach**

Experience	% Agree	% Disagree
I feel that my coaching makes a difference to my participants	78	4
I look forward to coaching	68	7
Coaching keeps me physically active	67	9
I would recommend coaching to a friend or colleague	64	5
I have the right resources/equipment to coach effectively	63	12
I am able to deliver the style of coaching that I aspire to	62	9
I have a choice in deciding when and where I coach	58	20
I have sufficient opportunities to coach in my chosen sport/activity	56	13
I am recognised for the contribution I make to helping others through coaching	52	16
I feel proud when I tell others I am a coach	52	8
I would like some help from others when I coach	44	21
I feel part of a network or community of coaches	40	27
It's hard to balance coaching alongside my other commitments	39	34
Working as a coach, I sometimes feel alone or isolated	23	47

*Base: all those who have coached in the last 12 months.*

*The table excludes neutral responses.*

There are some variations in the data, particularly in terms of qualification level. These will be explored in further detail in future publications.

### **The challenges coaches face**

Active coaches were asked what they thought were the main barriers or challenges facing coaches in the UK. Almost two in five (38%) said that the top challenge for coaches was the cost of training and qualifications. This was followed by balancing work/home life (37%). A third also said that lack of investment in facilities and equipment was a barrier.

**Table 1.14: Challenges of coaches**

Challenges	%
The cost of training/qualifications	38
Balancing work/home life	37
The voluntary nature of coaching/lack of pay	32
Lack of investment in facilities and equipment	30
Dealing with parents (behaviour or interference)	28
Behavioural issues of players/participants	24
The length of time it takes to undertake qualifications/training/CPD	23
Lack of support from employers, clubs or national governing bodies	22
Declining participation rates	16
Lack of opportunity to take additional training/CPD	15
Lack of experienced or qualified coaches	14

*Base: all those who have coached in the last 12 months.*

### **Future coaching activity**

Finally, active coaches were asked if they would like to spend more time coaching in the future: 42% said they would. However, the majority of those currently coaching said they would not or were not sure if they wanted to spend more time coaching (30% and 28% respectively).

## Inactive Coaches

There are over ten million inactive coaches in the UK. Inactive coaches are those that have coached at some point in their lifetime, but not within the previous twelve months. This section focuses on the most recently active of those inactive coaches: those who coached within the previous five years, but not the last twelve months (around three million adults in the UK)<sup>1</sup>.

### Profile of inactive coaches

The table below shows the profile of inactive coaches: those who had coached in the previous five years, but not the last twelve months. The majority of inactive coaches (65%) were of higher social grades, which is a higher proportion than the UK population overall (57%).

The data shows that inactive coaches were younger, with nearly a third aged 18 to 24. There is a higher proportion of inactive coaches aged 18-24 than active coaches of the same age group (20%, table 1.3), suggesting that young people may be most likely to stop coaching.

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<sup>1</sup> Due the size of the survey and the size of the population, questions were restricted to those who had coached within the past five years, rather than at any point in their lifetime.

**Table 1.15: Profile of inactive coaches**

Inactive coaches	%
Male	56
Female	44
18-24	31
25-34	24
35-44	17
45-54	12
55-64	8
65+	8
White	79
BAME	21
Physical or mental health condition	26
No physical or mental health condition	65
Higher social grades	65
Lower social grades	35

Base: all those who coached within the past five years, but not the past 12 months.

### Qualifications of inactive coaches

Over half of inactive coaches reported that they do not have any formal coaching qualifications (55%). The majority of those with a qualification said they were qualified at levels 1 or 2.

**Table 1.16: Qualifications of inactive coaches**

Qualification	%
No qualification	55
Activator/leader qualification	7
Level 1 (or equivalent)	12
Level 2 (or equivalent)	12
Level 3 (or equivalent)	5
Level 4 (or equivalent)	3
HE/FE Degree or Diploma	4
Other	3

Base: all those who coached within the past five years, but not the past 12 months.

### Age started coaching – inactive coaches

Over a quarter of inactive coaches (27%) began coaching before they were aged 17, compared with only 16% of current coaches. This further highlights that inactive coaches tend to be younger and suggests the younger the starting age, the more likely they are to stop coaching.

Overall, more than two thirds (69%) of inactive coaches started coaching before they were 26 years of age.

**Table 1.17: Inactive coaches – age started coaching**

Age	%
16 and under	27
17-21	28
22-25	14
36-30	9
31-40	11
Over 40	10

*Base: all those who coached within the past five years, but not the past 12 months.*

### Reasons for stopping coaching

Inactive coaches were asked why they had not coached within the previous twelve months. One in three (34%) said they felt they no longer had enough time to coach, while one in five (18%) moved away from the area and 12% felt they were getting too old.

Although the cost of training/qualifications was cited as the top challenge for active coaches in the UK, only 8% of inactive coaches cited this as their reason for no longer coaching.

**Table 1.18: Reasons why they had not coached in previous twelve months**

Reasons	%
I no longer had enough time	34
I moved away	18
I felt I was getting too old	12
I got injured	10
I fell out of love with coaching	9
Qualifications and training were too expensive to keep up to date	8
There was too much responsibility being a coach	7
I didn't get enough support from my club/organisation	6
Problems with parents or participants	6
There were not enough participants to keep the session going	6
My child stopped playing the sport	6
Problems with other coaches/the club/employers	4

*Base: all those who coached within the past five years, but not the past 12 months. Respondents could select more than one option therefore, percentages do not add up to 100%.*

There was no clear consensus on what made coaches stop coaching, however a significant proportion seem to have stopped coaching as a result of external factors, such as not having enough time or moving away, rather than system related issues.

### **Back to coaching**

A quarter of inactive coaches (26%) said they would like to return to coaching in the future. However, nearly one-half (44%) said they would not be interested in coaching again in the future. A similar proportion (29%) were not sure.

When they were asked what might encourage them to start coaching again, nearly a third said nothing would encourage them to get back into coaching; 14% said payment for sessions; 13% said payment of expenses; and 13% said training to update their skills.

**Table 1.19: What might encourage inactive coaches to start coaching again**

<b>Encouragement to start coaching again</b>	<b>%</b>
No, I don't want to get back in coaching	31
Payment for delivering sessions	14
Training to update or refresh my skills	13
Payment of expenses	10
Time off or support from my main employer	9
Opportunities to try a different sport/activity	9
Access to new learning opportunities	8
Help or support from others (i.e. parents or volunteers)	8
Getting "back into coaching" sessions	7
Support from a coach developer or mentor	7
Other	4

*Base: all those who coached within the past five years, but not the past 12 months. Respondents could select more than one option therefore, percentages do not add up to 100%.*

## Discussion

This report presents the findings from the largest nationally representative survey conducted of coaches and coaching in the UK. It was the first research to include a broader definition of coaching, recognising changing government policy and the wider work of UK Coaching, supporting coaches across the whole sport and physical activity sector. The survey has set a new baseline of data, which will enable UK Coaching and the wider sector to monitor and measure progress. It is hoped that the survey will be repeated on a regular basis.

The size of the coaching workforce is significant: nearly fourteen million people have coached sport and physical activity in their lifetime, and over three million people have coached in the last year alone. Overall, the survey has revealed that the coaching workforce is much more diverse than previous research has suggested, with a more representative proportion of women, BAME groups and people with physical or mental health conditions. There are some variations in the data and UK Coaching will be exploring the findings in greater detail and undertaking sub-group analysis in the near future.

The survey has shown that coaching takes place in a range of environments across the sports and physical activity sector: from sports clubs to community centres; and from schools to sports institutes. Coaches work in a wide variety of roles, from specialist and performance coaches to helpers and facilitators of physical activity. But what's in a name? Coaches dedicate around 15 million hours each week to helping others achieve their goals and all play a vital role in supporting an active nation.

Most coaches report a very positive experience of coaching, they look forward to it and want to spend more time coaching, it keeps them physically active and they would recommend coaching to a friend. However, whilst most coaches feel that their coaching is making a difference to their participants, only half of coaches said they felt recognised for the contribution they make to helping others. UK Coaching is committed to raising the profile of coaches, to ensure that they are valued, rewarded and recognised for the hard work they do each and every day, helping others to reach their individual sport and physical activity goals.

Most coaches only coach a small number of hours per week and most work in a voluntary, unpaid capacity. One in five coaches do not work regular hours in a typical week. Many coaches struggle to find sufficient opportunities to coach and they do not have much choice in deciding when and where they coach. Others, on the other hand, find it hard to balance

their coaching commitments with their work and home-life. This suggests that there might be a disparity between the availability of coaches and relevant employment/deployment opportunities. UK Coaching will explore this in further detail, examining the supply and demand for coaching at a local level.

The biggest challenge raised by coaches was the cost of training and qualifications. This may be part of the reason why over half of active coaches do not have any formal recognised coaching qualifications. The findings from the participant section of the survey show that coached participants value qualifications, citing it as one of the most important considerations when selecting a coach. Following the recommendations in the Coaching Plan for England, UK Coaching is developing a new strategy for learning to ensure that learning for coaches is inexpensive and accessible to all. Alongside UK Coaching's Coaching Behaviour Framework, new learning is being developed to further support coaches so that they can better understand and meet the needs of different participant groups.

The survey has revealed a large pool of coaches (over ten million) who are no longer actively involved in coaching and thus may be less physically active as a result. Whilst many of those inactive coaches are not interested in returning to coaching, their decisions to stop coaching are largely based on lifestyle factors, rather than coaching system factors. There is a clear similarity to participation in sport and physical activity more generally - sometimes life just gets in the way.

UK Coaching will be exploring how it can better support coaches over the life-course and during life-changes, providing new and easier opportunities for those who want to, to stay involved in coaching. UK Coaching recognises the dual benefits of coaching. Not only does coaching help to increase activity levels amongst participants, it also increases the activity levels of coaches themselves. As this research has shown, coaches make up a large proportion of the adult population, which is likely to have a significant impact on activity levels more generally.