

**An Exploration Into Coach Experiences Of The England DNA – A  
New Initiative Outlined By The Football Association**

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## **Abstract**

The current study has two main aims. Firstly, the predominant aim of this research is to identify the experiences of FA Skills coaches working within the EDNA framework. Secondly, this hopes to contribute to the understanding and knowledge of English coaches working at the foundation phase (ages 5-11) of participation by providing recommendations for future dissemination of the initiative. The main purposes of this study were researched using an Interpretive Description methodology, adopting semi-structured interviews to collect the findings. A total of nine participants (7 males, 2 females) were interviewed across four English County FA's, located in three separate geographic regions.

The semi-structured interviews were able to outline 6 main categories in the findings: 1) Being an FA Skills Coach; 2) Developmental Philosophy; 3) Embedding DNA within Sessions; 4) Impact of EDNA; 5) Benefits and Challenges of EDNA; 6) Future Enhancement. The main findings detailed how coaches regarded the initiative as a positive impact on coaching as it provided a vision and framework for coaches to follow. However, the participants also stated how CPD must become more accessible and relatable to a grassroots audience if it is to achieve 'buy-in'.

The core findings of this study provide an insight into coaches working full-time for The FA, with the responsibility of delivering the EDNA framework. This study has also highlighted areas that need greater focus in order to educate coaches on the benefits of the initiative. Future research must continue to establish English football coaches as a focal point if The FA is to improve the professional development of this cohort.

## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed .....

Date: 22/08/2017

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# **Chapter One**

## Introduction

## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

The main objective of this chapter is to introduce the background information to the English Football Association, the FA Skills Programme, the ‘England DNA’ (EDNA) and the main elements that comprise the initiative. Then, the overall aims of the research will be presented alongside the predominant objectives. In addition the reasons for conducting this research project will be outlined. To finalise the chapter, the structure of the thesis will be briefly discussed and summarised.

### **1.1 Aims and Objectives of the Research**

The main aim of this research is to identify the experiences of FA Skills coaches working within the EDNA framework. In the meantime, adopting a focus on benefiting both young and more experienced coaches in creating, developing and extending the EDNA philosophy for the ever-evolving game. Primarily, this hopes to contribute to the understanding and knowledge of English coaches working at the foundation phase (ages 5-11) of participation by providing recommendations for future dissemination of the initiative.

In order to meet the predominant research aims, four concrete objectives can be outlined:

- i) To provide an insight into FA Skills coach experiences and understanding of the EDNA initiative.
- ii) To identify and analyse the importance of FA Skills coaches in the dissemination of the EDNA.

- iii) To communicate the challenges and future recommendations of FA Skills coaches to FA Regional Managers and FA Skills Team Leaders.
- iv) And in relation to objective iii), to present key findings that will inform an Executive Summary.

Although the objectives and format of the study confine the focus towards the specific criteria of FA coaches at the foundational level, this may have a limited influence towards an elite audience. More precisely, the lack of research evident in this area of coaching will allow the study to provide more depth and address issues on a more representative scale of the suggested topic area.

## **1.2 Background to the English Football Association**

The Football Association, simply known as The FA, is the governing body for football in England. Since its introduction in 1863, The FA's role has evolved and expanded in order to influence different contexts of the game. Historically, The FA had no involvement in the grassroots game, with amateur and professional levels operating separately from one another (Goldblatt, 2006). The term 'grassroots' depicts the amateur levels of the game, mostly concerned with the organisation of football outside of a professional set-up. The FA's function was purely to organise domestic competitions and select a national side to compete against other international teams. However, in recent years the organisation has become more conscious of the need to develop football at the grassroots level, in the meantime adopting a more methodical approach to link the amateur and professional game. Although still concerned with managing elite facilities such as Wembley Stadium and the National Football Centre at St George's Park in Burton-on-trent, The FA has

developed an emphasis to support the grassroots game in England. This can be identified through initiatives such as ‘A Charter for Quality’ (1997), ‘Raising our Game’ (2009) and ‘The Future Game’ (2010) (Dyke, 2014), which were all designed to improve the standards of amateur football over the last two decades. Additionally, the ‘FA Coach Mentoring Programme’ (2013/14) and ‘The FA Coaching Research Strategy’ (2013-2017) are two of the most recent initiatives aimed at grassroots coaches. These programmes have targeted coaches, clubs and players, all in an attempt to modernise the FA’s outreach to both amateur and professional standards (O’Gorman, 2010).

The implementation of a number of programmes and initiatives over the last few years has culminated in the ‘FA Chairman’s England Commission Report’, published in May 2014 and becoming the organisation’s most high profile backing of improving grassroots provision in the country. The commission found that the past 20 years has shown a steady decline in English football; with a lack of playing opportunities at the top level for home-grown players (Dyke, 2014) and under performance in international competition comprising the key components of the report. More specifically, the report of 2014 outlined the major issue that coaching and coach development had not yet reached a satisfactory level and impact; in the meantime ensuring that this would become a central part of The FA’s research (Dyke, 2014).

### ***1.2.1 The FA Skills Programme***

The FA Skills programme was introduced in 2007 in order to provide specialist coaching in primary schools and support for Charter Standard football clubs (FA Skills, 2016). Funded by Sport England, the organisation hopes to give

each child an opportunity to get active by learning new football techniques. With the aim “to develop better and more technically gifted football players” (FA Staff, p.1), the programme has also developed on average 6,000 participation coaches per year since its introduction. Initially, the main aim of The FA Skills Programme was to improve the technical skills of one million children aged 5 to 11 by 2010 (Tesco Magazine, 2007). Instead, FA Skills (2016) have stated that the programme has provided over 8 million playing opportunities to date, with a long term aim to provide 1.2 million coaching opportunities per year.

### **1.3 The England DNA**

The EDNA is the Football Association’s vision statement and strategy with the purpose to “define the England identity for the future” (Bradbury, 2014, p.1) and act as a start point for the creation of a world-class approach to coach and player development in the men and women’s game (Ashworth, 2014; Keegan, 2014). It is also a statement of the values and standards associated with the development of English players at every level of the game, both on and off the pitch. The introduction of the EDNA is an explicit strategy intended to introduce particular ideas and concepts to personnel within the organisation, based upon five core elements (Who we are’, ‘How we play’, ‘How we coach’, ‘The future England player’, ‘How we support’) (Bradbury, 2014) which can be seen in figure 1. Whilst the initiative is a ‘whole sport’ approach, FA coaches are being exposed to the programme first hand with the aim of applying the identity, playing strategies, coaching strategies, player development and support systems to the foundational levels (ages 5-11) of participation.

Therefore, it is fundamental that all staff in a role promoting the sport have the necessary skills and professional development they require (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2015). This is predominantly shown by the EDNA Coaching Fundamentals (see Appendix 5) and the ‘Age-Phase Priorities’, which aim to inform and educate English coaches on the exclusive ‘Love the ball, Love the Game’ idea put forward by The FA. The EDNA Coaching Fundamentals, specifically designed by an EDNA leadership group, outline a set of guiding principles for coaches to focus on in each of the age-phases. With regards to the Foundation Phase, the 12 core principles (see Appendix 5) aim to develop creative players in and out of possession. This is fundamentally guided with a game-based format and an emphasis on a greater connection between coaches and players.

The quote “it is crucial for us as the FA to make sure the DNA is not simply regarded as a project solely for the benefit of the national teams, but rather one that can be adapted and applied by any coach in whatever setting” (FA Education, 2015, p. 3) confirms the wide-scale vision of the initiative. Although providing a definition of a football identity to follow, The FA explains that the EDNA will be an ever-evolving process alongside the established core values and principles (Allison, 2016; Ashworth, 2014). Hence, this shows the importance of exploring the impact of the initiative since its recent introduction in December 2014. . This is summed up by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (2015) in stating that “high quality coaching can be the difference between building a sporting habit for life and putting someone off sport for life” (p. 30).

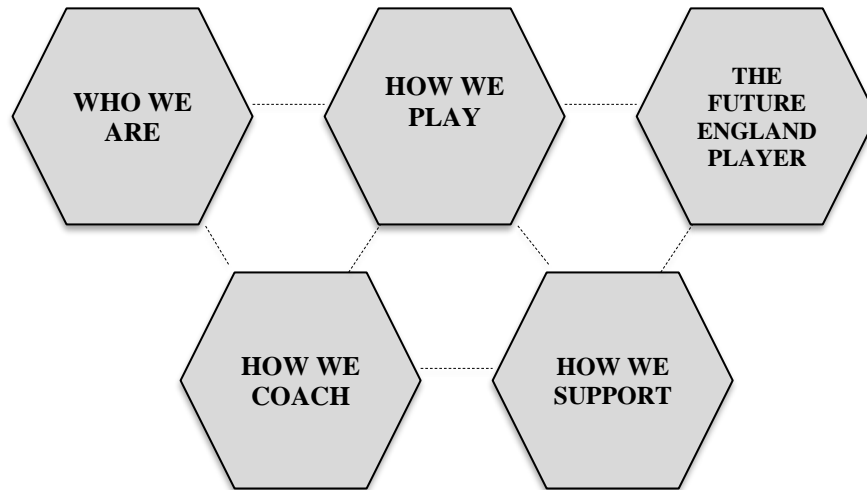


Figure 1: England DNA Model (FA Education, 2015)

#### 1.4 Personal Rationale and Expectations

*“In England you teach your kids how to win, in Spain and Portugal they teach their kids how to play”*

(José Mourinho in Whitehouse, 2013a, p. 63).

Having read numerous newspaper articles, online blogs and books dealing with England’s national football failings, I seemingly stumbled across the above quote. Rather than the common cliché to blame the many managers and head coaches for the national team’s disappointing performances in major international competitions, this quote by José Mourinho forced me to think differently about the crisis in English football. It forced me to ask questions such as; have we been coaching our kids incorrectly for all this time? Is the issue actually at the grassroots level? Or do we need to start doing things differently in order to begin to produce players and coaches of a high quality? It shows that the problems run much deeper than just the national set-up. An international side that has failed to qualify for the

semi-finals of a major tournament since 1996 and most recently even failing to qualify for the 2008 European Championship finals. For someone who is particularly passionate about the development of coaches and players at the grassroots level, the introduction of the EDNA is an opportunity for me to find out whether coaches are willing to alter their styles based on a national initiative.

In regards to the personal expectations of the project, I hope to create a piece of research that contributes to the understanding of coaches working at a youth, grassroots standard. Due to the exclusive nature of the initiative (introduced at the FA Coaches Conference in December 2014), no known research has targeted the topic area as yet. Therefore, I am fascinated to discover first hand the real-life experiences of FA coaches working within the EDNA framework, whose aim it is to educate the thousands of coaches working in amateur clubs throughout the United Kingdom. Hence, creating a project that will hopefully benefit a wide-scale of coaches makes the research experience all the more valuable.

## **1.5 Thesis Structure**

The structure for this thesis is illustrated in figure 2.

Chapter 1 (Introduction) aims to briefly introduce the background information to the Football Association and the England DNA initiative. This chapter also outlines the main aims and objectives of the research, in the meantime providing an initial justification to why this particular study has been formulated.

Chapter 2 (Review of Literature) focuses upon previous literature related to the topic area. The main intention of the review is to channel a critique towards



previous research specific to the proposed project in hand. Therefore, identifying how the FA came to introduce the EDNA and the key elements that comprise the initiative. The chosen research questions and objectives developed for this study will be explained in accordance with current gaps in the literature.

The third chapter (Methodology) aims to explain the philosophical position, research paradigm and methods adopted for this particular study. The methodology also addresses the specific processes involved in participant sampling, data collection and data analysis. Due to the study using an interview-based technique, the relevant ethical issues are also discussed to conclude the chapter.

Chapter 4 (Research Findings) is concerned with identifying the key themes and topics in relation to the completed interviews and subsequent transcripts. The findings will be displayed in conjunction with the two predominant research objectives and discussed in thorough detail.

The discussion (chapter 5) critiques and analyses the findings against both previous and contemporary research. This section depicts both similarities and differences in relation to other studies, also displaying the uniqueness of the findings. Additionally, chapter 5 synthesises between the key themes developed and discusses the effect it may have on previous literature and future research.

In chapter six (Conclusion), the results of this particular thesis are summarised. Additionally, conclusions are made upon the specified research objectives. The final chapter also discusses the contributions this study has on research, and also the limitations associated with the thesis. To finalise, a personal reflection from the researcher will outline how the process went alongside directions for future research.

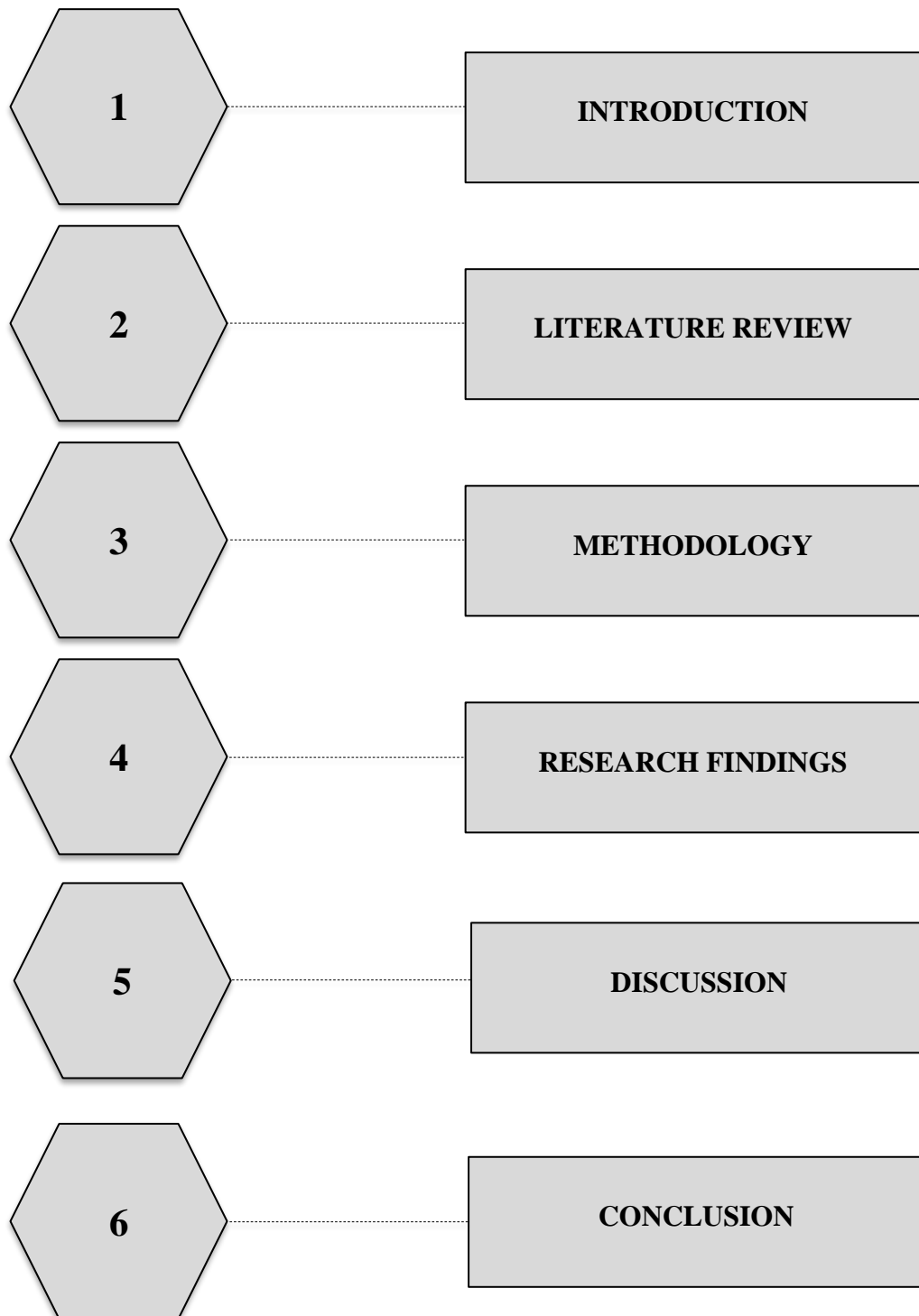


Figure 2: Thesis Structure

## **Chapter Two**

### Review of Literature

## **Chapter 2 – Review of Literature**

This particular review of literature will critically discuss how previous studies into the coaching phenomenon have been conducted. Primarily, this chapter will look to analyse how prior research has been formatted and used to the benefit of football coaches. Additionally, the review will aim to pinpoint the relevant studies that have contributed to the approach chosen for this specific project. Whilst it remains a notion that coaching literature has progressively developed over recent times (Cushion & Jones, 2006), it can still be argued that there is a comprehensive amount of work to be done in order to fully investigate the social complexity of coaching practice (Nelson et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the perceived lack of literature for coaches in comparison to other professions, such as teaching, has provided a lack of support and guidance for their education (Gilbert & Trudel, 2006; Stephenson & Jowett, 2009). Therefore, the focus of this review is not to provide a universal outlook of all coaching research thus far, preferably, the intention is to channel a critique towards the relevant literature and provide a rationale for the proposed topic.

It is necessary to state that the ‘England DNA’ as put forward by The Football Association is not only an intervention, but has instead been influenced by a whole range of former policies, concepts and theories in relation to this particular domain. The review will elaborate on what has already been mentioned in the introduction and focus upon the gaps in current research. This chapter will identify precise areas in which research can be further developed, in the meantime providing a platform to engage analytically with the objectives and research questions proposed for this study.

## 2.1 Grassroots Football in England

To begin with, it is necessary to contextualise the role of grassroots football in England and the literature surrounding this area of the sport. As mentioned in the introduction, grassroots football is concerned with the organisation of football outside of the professional game. It is the level of the game that is mostly concerned with youth and junior football (under 18 years of age) and amateur football (local, non-league, feeder league football). As mentioned prior, The FA had no involvement in the grassroots game, with the amateur levels being ignored due to the heavy reliance on the professional side of football (Goldblatt, 2006). However, in its more recent years the organisation has restructured in order to affect more contexts of the game, more specifically to develop an approach to link the grassroots and elite game. Due to the national team's frequent under performance in major international competitions, The FA's approach was modernised in 1997 to introduce a number of policies and initiatives ('A Charter for Quality', 'Raising our Game', 'The Future Game', 'The FA Coach Mentoring Programme', 'The FA Coaching Research Strategy', 'England DNA') that could enhance the national grassroots game (O'Gorman, 2010). These particular refinements can be identified within 'The Future Game' (2010) document, which described the main vision "to train, develop, qualify and support more innovative coaches, who are excellent teachers of the game" (FA Learning, 2010, p. 7). While the literature examining these policies is minimal, Potrac's (2014) study of the 'Grassroots Mentoring Programme' is one that is particularly unique and takes prominence in the development of the research on the EDNA.

While football-specific research is a fairly new development, academic research tends to overlook the grassroots level of the sport. Instead, research has

opted to take a focus upon the elite side of the sport when looking at the roles of both coaches and players (O’Gorman, 2010). Any recent literature in the sport has attended to elite coaching philosophies and processes (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Nelson et al., 2013; Wang & Straub, 2012), structures of professional youth academies (Stratton et al, 2004) and coaching behaviours of professional top-level youth soccer coaches (Partington & Cushion, 2013; Partington et al., 2014). Furthermore, The FA’s previous approach to research is summed up by Allison (2016), who explains that any research conducted by the organisation was minimal and “outsourced to only a few selected researchers and Higher Education institutions” (p. 5) and managed as isolated projects. However, as explained by Dyke (2014) in ‘The FA Chairman’s England Commission Report’, research will begin to target areas of coaching and coach development with a focus on increasing the number of highly qualified coaches (Allison, 2016). This is further supported with Allison’s (2016) notion that The FA has taken the responsibility to examine the key aspects of the coaching system, in the effort of producing football-specific research for both grassroots and elite audiences.

Additionally, apart from the studies put forward in this chapter (Brackenridge et al, 2004; Cleland, O’Gorman & Bond, 2015; O’Gorman, 2010; Potrac, 2014), very minimal work has been published in relation to the impact of policy on grassroots football in England. Also, Lusted and O’Gorman’s (2010) investigation on English grassroots football develops the notion that policy makers lack the necessary awareness and responsibility when implementing initiatives at this level of the game. Therefore, Cleland et al’s (2015) description that:

The sheer number of participants, coaches and officials participating in the grassroots game presents challenges for the FA to implement change or tackle deeply embedded norms... For example, one County FA may have four or five football development professionals to oversee in excess of 2,000 clubs and their associated personnel (p. 554).

O’Gorman (2010) further supports this particular concept by outlining that grassroots football is the most important level of the game in this country, in which the foundations for the professional game are built in regards to producing future playing talent. While the literature examined explains how support for grassroots coaches has only been recently implemented and in turn, policies may lack the competence to affect the intended target groups (Lusted & Gorman, 2010), Dyke (2014) and Allison (2016) display how The FA’s contemporary approach will begin to target the national game on a more representative scale. In regards to the scope of this project, the term ‘grassroots’ will be used when relating to youth, amateur participants currently in the foundation phase (aged 5-11).

## **2.2 Introduction to Sport Policy Implementation**

In regards to the main aspects of this project, the focus on the EDNA as an initiative means that the literature review must develop an emphasis towards previous research on sport policy and sport initiatives. However, football-specific research examining the development and education of coaches is particularly scarce (Armour, Griffiths & De Lyon, 2016) when compared to the more developed professions such as teaching. Therefore, in order to gain a greater understanding of the policy process and a better insight into practitioner experience, it is imperative

that the review examines similar studies outside of football and sport for that matter of fact. Nonetheless, the chapter will begin with an analysis of similar research projects within the associated domain of football and more generally, sport, which have looked at the experiences of key stakeholders in relation to the introduction of a new initiative.

### ***2.2.1 Importance of Stakeholders' Perceptions***

Firstly, whilst Houlihan (1997) puts forward the notion that there are a number of academic resources available to researchers concerned with comparative aspects of sport policy, North (2016) develops the belief that there is a lack of literature for practitioners interested in the characteristics of coach education and development. More specifically, North (2016) describes how research in this area is guided by both *descriptive* and *prescriptive* work; with the former based principally on practitioner experience and the latter a foundation to facilitate the thinking behind coach education and development. This can be seen in Potrac's (2014) study on gathering the subjective experiences of mentors delivering The FA Grassroots Club Mentor Programme. Although the main purpose of the study was to provide a 'descriptive' account of the mentors' experiences (concerns, questions, reactions, coping strategies) of the newly introduced programme, the research also utilised a 'prescriptive' approach detailing how The FA can best guide the coach educators' and mentors' engagement with coaches and clubs for the future (Cale & Abraham, 2016). This links very closely to the project on the EDNA, as Potrac's (2014) study sets out to "generate rich insights into the mentors' understandings of their participation in the scheme" (p. 2). Similarly, Cleland et al. (2015) examination on referees' views of The English FA's 'Respect Campaign' develops a rationale that no



research has focused on the experiences of these individuals in relation to the initiative. Cleland et al's (2015) examination is formulated on the basis that referees have remained particularly under-researched in the context surrounding the development of football (Colwell, 2000). Although football-specific research examining policy has been described as scarce (Armour et al, 2016), the studies put forward by Potrac (2014) and Cleland et al (2015) are able to support the objectives created for the study on the EDNA. Both investigations utilise a qualitative approach with individual mentors and referees, in the meantime being able to gather the understandings of the participants and depict whether the programmes had influenced change in their specific contexts.

Furthermore, De Bosscher (2011) challenges the concept of output evaluation of sport policy assessment, arguing that this is a one-sided approach and studies must begin to apply a multidimensional approach to the measurement of the effectiveness of elite sport policy. Although a multidimensional approach will not be utilised for the study on the EDNA, De Bosscher (2011) creates the notion that a sport policy does not have to be evaluated in terms of attained goals, however can instead be examined on the particular processes and effects of an initiative. This is supported through Elliott and Drummond's (2014) study of codes of conducts in youth sport environments, which examines the attitudes and perceptions of the key stakeholders towards the campaign. Nevertheless, while the investigations put forward by Potrac (2014) and Cleland et al (2015) share similar intentions to Elliott and Drummond (2014) in a sporting sense, Thorne, Kirkham and MacDonald-Emes (1997) provide the concept that qualitative research approaches are able to develop the knowledge required for practice within the health disciplines. Therefore, Benn et al's (2008) study on the UK Safer Patients Initiative (SPI) agrees with the notion put forward by

Thorne et al (1997), with the main focus of the investigation on understanding participant perceptions. The gathering of participant perceptions in this case is developed in order to examine the effectiveness of the programme at a local level and in turn, form the basis of future research in this area. In this sense, North's (2016) conceptions of the 'descriptive' and 'prescriptive' approaches to policy research can be identified in Benn et al's (2008) study. A rationale is developed to understand participant insights into SPI, whilst the more 'prescriptive' attitude is focused on enhancing practice through future research, as explained earlier by Thorne et al (1997). Therefore, although the aforementioned studies are concerned with contrasting disciplines, they all hold the key stakeholders responsible to gaining a greater understanding into the effectiveness of the policies and initiatives in question.

Specifically, by adopting FA Skills coaches as the participants for the investigation on the EDNA, this study agrees with the significance of key stakeholders' views on the dissemination of a policy (Benn et al, 2008; Elliott & Drummond; Thorne et al, 1997). This can also be identified with Doucette, Bulzacchelli, Gillum and Whitehill's (2016) notion that "stakeholder involvement in the early phase of policy development is of value to participants" (p. 503) as implementation studies help to increase adoption and improve the outreach of the policy.

### ***2.2.2 Existing Research on Football Policy***

Moreover, although the studies put forward by Potrac (2014) and Cleland et al (2015) display a contemporary view on examining football-specific policies, none have been more far-reaching than the work of Brackenridge et al (2004). This work

has been able to adopt a participant-centred approach where the thoughts and opinions of these key stakeholders have influenced change at a national level. Additionally, the research carried out by Brackenridge and company (2004) allowed CRB checks to become a required criterion for all grassroots junior football clubs, ultimately displaying the extent and impact of the study at the participation levels in England (Brackenridge, Pitchford, Russell & Nutt, 2007). This study proves that capturing the experiences of key stakeholders can inform the implementation and development of a whole-sport initiative. Donaldson, Leggett and Finch (2012) clarify two main reasons to why this is essential: 1) respondents can identify potential benefits of the policy and 2) provide insights into the organisation and operation of the initiative.

In addition, Elliott and Drummond's (2014) examination indicates that the efficacy of the 'Respect Campaign' was influenced by wider social and cultural constraints and in turn, suggests that policy makers should implement a 'top-down' method in order for the initiative to affect more people at the grassroots level. This can also be identified in Cleland et al's (2015) investigation of the 'Respect Campaign'; "The FA has sought to implement the campaign in what may be traditionally described as a 'top-down' fashion through the existing infrastructure of the National FA to County FA's and local associations and clubs" (p. 554), displays how this particular approach to implementation aims at exposing the meaning and objectives of the policy on a much larger scale (O'Gorman, 2011). While the literature surrounding the effectiveness of a 'top-down' approach remains limited, The FA has adopted a very similar method in introducing the EDNA:

The idea is that, over the next few years, we will be able to radiate out the DNA in various different forms so the content is specific and focused for different groups at whatever level they are working at. Crucially, there will be a version for every aspect of the game (Ashworth, 2014, p. 15).

As explained by Ashworth (2014), the EDNA is the start point for the creation of a world-class culture to elite player and coach development; however, the above quote links closely to the ‘top-down’ notion suggested in the studies mentioned prior (Cleland et al., 2015; Elliott & Drummond, 2014; O’Gorman, 2011). Although aimed at producing winning England teams, the initiative hopes to make an impact upon coaches and players at a grassroots level.

### **2.3 Contextualising the England DNA**

Initially, it is critical to understand the main elements of the EDNA initiative as put forward by The FA, the components and ‘building blocks’ that will comprise the programme and also the significant history that has led the organisation to developing such an intervention. The notions put forward by Steel (2013) and Whitehouse (2013) outline the need for a ‘cultural shift’ in the way the game is coached and played at all levels, describing how the previous methods of The FA have left England way behind its international counterparts in these respective areas. Similarly, Cleland et al (2015) describe the challenges The FA face in battling against the “deeply embedded cultural norms” (p. 554) at the grassroots level in England. As a result, the overall England DNA statement depicts the ‘distinct and recognisable identity’ for all England national football teams, ranging from the development squads through to the senior team in both the men and women’s game (Ashworth, 2014). Alongside the general statement mentioned earlier in creating and

sustaining a world class approach to coach and player development (Keegan, 2014), the initiative aims to develop a consistency in approach for the range of protagonists (e.g. coaches, players) fundamentally built upon the core components of values and behaviour (Ashworth, 2014).

Although it is important to develop an understanding of how the EDNA is aimed at the higher levels of participation, it is also important to contextualise how the initiative will be used in this study and aimed at the foundational levels of participation in the hope of one day creating ‘winning England teams’ (Bradbury, 2014). With the aim of challenging the notion that policy makers lack the necessary awareness of the grassroots game (Lusted & Gorman, 2010), the EDNA is constructed similarly to the ‘Respect Campaign’ in that certain policy tools reinforce the programme in order to create a clearer pathway for people at this level. The five core elements (‘Who We Are’, ‘How We Play’, ‘How We Coach’, ‘The Future England Player’, ‘How We Support’) as shown in figure 1, have been introduced through wide media coverage, FA national coaching conferences and as of August 2016, will be embedded within the revised ‘Level One’ and ‘Level Two’ coaching courses (FA Staff, 2016). While both initiatives seem to employ the described ‘top-down’ approach, the ‘Respect Campaign’ and EDNA support Howlett’s (2000) view that similar organisations introduce policy instruments in order to affect larger objectives of particular programmes. Equally, the ‘Respect Campaign’ is a ‘policy instrument’ aimed at improving the behaviour towards referees and in turn, contributing to an overall increase in the retention of referees from the grassroots level (Cleland et al, 2015). The EDNA is used similarly as a programme that will aim to impact the standard of both players and coaches operating at the foundation phase, with the ultimate goal of producing better players for the national teams.

## 2.4 Establishing a Central Philosophy

Broadly speaking, the England DNA aims to provide the overarching objective of creating a central philosophy to the national teams, shortened through Ashworth's (2014) notion of a 'distinct and recognisable identity' whether that is coaches or players. The idea of a 'central philosophy' is further suggested by Crocker (2014a), who explains that the success of the initiative lies in the implementation of concepts, ideas and statements into action; in the meantime defining "how England teams will play and look in the future" (Crocker, 2014a, p. 23). It is important to understand the positives of establishing a central philosophy (Davies, 2013), supported through the belief that the "articulation of a philosophy is a prerequisite to good practice, as it provides direction and focus" (Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2009, p. 55). More specifically to this individual project and the proposed questions within it, the perceptions and experiences of the FA Skills coaches involved will primarily allow an insight into the explicit methodologies being utilised and applied in practice.

Moreover, the 'out-dated' viewpoint (Whitehouse, 2013b) maintained a 'long ball philosophy' proposed by Charles Hughes, in which long and lofted passes were the focal point to the English FA's coaching manual (Davies, 2013). As Whitehouse (2013a) advocates in *The Way Forward*, The FA would educate their coaches on a direct style of football, which would ultimately "ruin the future of English football for years to come" (p.16). This is contrary to the exclusive viewpoint established by Peacock and Spacey (2014), who identify the new principles based around the *thought process* and *decision making* of players; two major components that will be analysed further in this particular review. Therefore, this stance on the new EDNA completely eradicates Charles Hughes's 'long ball' and 'direct' vision that was based

around the sheer physicality and brute strength of individuals (Steel, 2013). Instead, the DNA suggests a contrasting approach, which will detail a focus towards a possession-based style driven by the technical superiority of the players involved in the system (Micciche & Sampson, 2014). Additionally, the proposed intervention will have a direct influence on the coaching approaches of certain individuals, designed to develop players in a differed format and following altered guidelines. Therefore, the central philosophy will allow the project to further discuss and critique the changing standpoint of the English FA and its values held towards the ‘identity’ of the game. Precisely, an exploration into the personal experiences and individual philosophies of the selected coaches will begin to display their perceptions (Strean, 1998) of the changing blueprint of The FA, aligned to the philosophical position assumed for the research project.

## **2.5 Coaching Philosophy**

The EDNA coaching fundamentals (as seen in Appendix 5) underpin the ‘How we Coach’ element of the coaching philosophy. The content provided summarises the FA’s long-term vision to “Inspire, empower and support coaches to become excellent developers of creative players, teams and the game” (Bartlett, 2015, p. 60). In relation to this particular project, “a coaching philosophy is a set of values and behaviours that serve to guide the actions of a coach” (Wilcox & Trudel, 1998, p. 41), particularly their personal justifications to why they coach as they do (Cassidy et al, 2009). Additionally, Kidman and Hanrahan (1997) formulate the similar view that a coaching philosophy is comprised of the values and beliefs that direct ones coaching, two critical components that the EDNA is based upon. Although the term ‘philosophy’ is often used in everyday life, the definitions remain

very alike in referring to a particular world view or approach (Jones, Hughes & Kingston, 2008). It has been stated that competent coaches will frequently reflect upon these beliefs in order to monitor their professional practice (Schempp, McCullick, Busch, Webster & Mason, 2006). However, recent publications have shown that ‘philosophy’ has been used out of context in soccer, in the meantime failing to identify the true principles of such an important aspect (Grech, 2015). In the context of this section, the term will be used more precisely to depict the significance of the coaches being studied, contrary to the last section which aimed to create an overview of the central stance of the EDNA.

Valle and Bloom (2005) suggest that research examining coaching philosophies has mainly focused on the higher echelons of football. This is further supported by Wang and Straub (2012) who state that practitioners are particularly interested in investigating the successful methodologies of high-achieving elite coaches. Consequently, the rationale put forward by Wang and Straub (2012) aims to study the approaches and characteristics of coaching elite athletes. The virtual success of these philosophies can primarily be judged through the athlete or team’s performances in competition (Horsley, Cockburn & James, 2015; Vallee & Bloom, 2005); allowing in some respects the opportunity to metaphorically ‘measure’ the extent to which the methodologies are being applied to practice (Horsley et al, 2015). Alternatively, while the previous studies mentioned (Horsley et al, 2015; Vallee & Bloom, 2005; Wang & Straub, 2012) present a justification towards the quality of research specific to the field of elite football coaching, some researchers have concluded that participation and performance coaching are distinct from one another (Lyle, 1999; Nash, Sproule & Horton, 2008). This is followed up by Smith and Cushion (2006) who propose an altered rationale for their intended study, based on



the belief that the professional youth soccer coach has been an area of neglect over the past two decades. Correspondingly, the proposed study of the EDNA shares a similar concept in gaining a greater insight into the methods of youth soccer coaches at the foundational level; in the meantime profiting a slightly wider selection of coaches. Smith and Cushion (2006) highlight the need for research to become more attentive to this specific domain in order to begin analysing what constitutes a successful youth football coach and contribute to an area of coaching research that is currently a very limited source of knowledge (Cushion, Ford & Williams, 2012).

Whilst the importance of developing a coaching philosophy has been discussed in this section, the significance of the intended target audience has been critically analysed through the perceptions of previous literature (Cushion, Ford & Williams, 2012; Horsley et al, 2015; Smith & Cushion, 2006). Further to this particular discussion and as mentioned prior, The FA aims “to radiate out the DNA to different levels of the game – making sure content is specific and focused for different groups” (Ashworth, 2014, p. 15), nevertheless agreeing with the second research objective put forward for this project in dealing with the more representative side of the game. Similarly, although Wang & Straub’s (2012) objective was to focus on the methodology of a leading elite coach, they also had a purpose in discussing the implications of how other coaches, further down the pyramid, could ultimately apply the findings to their own practice. Not only does the foundation to the study on Anson Dorrance fit in accordance with the proposed research objectives discussed previously, however it complements the notion created by Ashworth (2014) in developing a ‘top-down’ structure that will crucially create a version for every aspect of the game, whether that may be professional standards or a more grassroots and introductory level of football. Therefore, although ‘non-elite’ coaching philosophies

are less easy to judge (Horsley et al, 2015), the concepts suggested through the relevant literature will allow us to engage critically with the research objectives; depicting how an initiative such as the EDNA initially intended for elite coaches and teams will ultimately affect other participation levels.

## 2.6 Playing Philosophy

As briefly outlined in the introduction of this particular thesis, the EDNA is the start point for the creation of a world class approach to coach and player development (Ashworth, 2014; Keegan, 2014), comprised of a new detailed coaching and playing philosophy (Crocker, 2014a). Consequently, the latter of the two becomes a particular body of knowledge that we must engage in, in order to fully understand the implications this has on the perceptions of the coaches being studied for the investigation. The development of a *Playing Philosophy* section is also guided through the notion offered by Nash et al (2008), suggesting that in the United Kingdom (UK) “although the coach has a crucial role to play, much of the emphasis is generally on the performer” (p. 539). However, literature surrounding this area of football is often non-academic and instructional, normally in the form of coaching manuals (O’Gorman, 2010). For example, The FA’s ‘*The Future Game: Grassroots*’ outlined a vision that “the innovative coach of the future will be skilled at designing practices which provide the appropriate blend of challenge and learning that the players in their group require” (The Future Game, 2010, p. 3).

The aforementioned sections on *Contextualising the England DNA* and *Establishing a Central Philosophy* outlined the necessity for The FA to create a new style of play for national players, detailing how the preceding ‘long ball methodology’ (Davies, 2013) resulted in the stagnation and ultimately the failure of

the England national side for years to come (Whitehouse, 2013a). It is therefore imperative to understand what strategies of play had been in place beforehand, resulting in the culmination of the EDNA programme. The views put forward by Steel (2013) and Whitehouse (2013b) in the preceding sub-categories state that through a flawed and misguided philosophy, English football has failed to develop players capable of competing at the top level of the modern game. The general '3 pass optimisation rule' (Davies, 2013, p. 21; Hughes, 1990) significantly impacted the style of play adopted by English national teams, in the meantime allowing players to be developed based on this direct style (Whitehouse, 2013b). Whitehouse (2013b) suggests that these conditions required goalkeepers and defenders to have the ability to "hit 60 yard balls into the opposition half" (para. 6) underpinning the poor quality of coaching in youth development.

Whilst the EDNA's playing philosophy does not initially target the grassroots level, O'Gorman (2011) suggests that the top-down approach to implementing new sports policies will lead to questions of how they will be delivered at different participation levels. "We believe the team that can control the game the best and dictate opponents with the ball will be the team with the best chance of being successful" (Micciche & Sampson, 2014, p. 28), clearly defines the new and exclusive approach adopted by The FA towards an effective playing philosophy. Peacock and Spacey (2014) further support this view in explaining that England teams will now have the intention of intelligently dominating possession, ultimately with the main objective of progressing the play and penetrating the opposition at the correct moments (Bradbury, 2014). The timely transition towards a possession-based methodology derives from the conception that successful European and international teams have adopted a similar approach (Micciche & Sampson, 2014). This is in stark

contrast to Hughes' (1990) vision that, 'the strategy of direct play is far more preferable to that of possession football. The facts are irrefutable and the evidence overwhelming'. However, Micciche and Sampson (2014) state that Germany averaged 55% of possession in their successful FIFA World Cup campaign of 2014, further supported through Real Madrid's 52% average in winning the UEFA Champions League the same year. Not only do these statistics display the successes of a possession-based attitude; nevertheless they display the necessary requirements in order to be competent in the contemporary elite game; meanwhile opposing Hughes' (1990) conception in '*The Winning Formula*' of creating more goal-scoring chances by playing a fewer number of passes.

Although this section has been able to detail the significance of the changing methodology of the English FA over the past three decades, we must also engage with the foundational standards, which fit in line with both research objectives for this project. In order to understand and further analyse the questions put forward, the English FA have identified a need to purposely target the grassroots game in recent times, particularly through the introduction of '*The Future Game*'. Although '*The Future Game*' philosophy was introduced as a guideline, nonetheless it pointed towards the needs of the modern game for coaches, players and teams (Whitehouse, 2013a); encouraging young grassroots players to create chances with clever and creative play (FA Learning, 2010). Additionally, this particular playing philosophy actively encouraged the individualistic player (FA Learning, 2010), grounded upon the concept that all young players can exhibit skills in varied ways, contradicting Wade's (1967) prior belief that English football teams should be treated and developed as an 'organic whole' and the team's shape took precedence over the individual (Whitehouse, 2013a). Whilst '*The Future Game*' would appear to be a

significant initiative aimed at developing coaches and players at the grassroots level, no research has purely focused on gathering coach experiences in relation to the programme. For example, Potrac's (2014) study of the 'Grassroots Club Mentor Programme' seeks to promote The FA's *Future Game* philosophy, however does not go as far to investigate the effectiveness of the programme at the participation levels. By critically engaging with the recent proposals by The FA, we begin to see how a subtle possession-based approach at grassroots level may positively impact the development and playing style of the England national teams (Davies, 2013).

## **2.7 Talent and Player Development**

'Talent development' is fast becoming one of the most significant aspects in world football, with the predominant feature of nurturing players contributing to the professionalization of the sport (Roderick, 2006). The term 'talent development' looks closely at specific athletes "showing potential to achieve high levels of proficiency" (Morley, Morgan, McKenna & Nicholls, 2014, p.218). Therefore, this particular segment of the review interlinks with the components of 'The Future England Player' and 'How We Support', which complete the core elements of the England DNA; aspects which have ultimately risen to prominence over the past decade (Morley et al., 2014). However, the English game's reputation has been somewhat brought into scrutiny since the country's failings and under-achievements at the 2010 and 2014 FIFA World Cup's respectively, with talent development being the focal point of the recent shortcomings of international football. This can be identified through the notion that coaches have a powerful influence on children's experiences in youth sport (Sullivan, Paquette, Holt & Bloom, 2012) and are therefore the most crucial element in the talent development process

(Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde & Whalen, 1993). Consequently, the principal focus of this section will critique the role of both elite and participation coaches in nurturing players, due to coaches playing a ‘central’ role in impacting the development of players in youth soccer (Cushion, Ford & Williams, 2012).

In accordance with the two predominant questions proposed for this project, it is essential to begin with the critique of participation coaches due to their direct relation with youth participants operating within the foundational levels of development (Cross & Lyle, 2003; Horsley et al., 2015). A main argument presented recently has been the incompetence and ineffectiveness of grassroots football in England, which has directly affected the development of young football talent (Pope, 2014). As explained in the FA Chairman’s England Commission Report, this country “lags behind in the quality and quantity of grassroots training facilities” (Dyke, 2014, p. 3). This has obstructed many individuals the opportunity to achieve the highest standards of progression within the sport. Young participants in England are therefore lacking the necessary technical and tactical competence to adequately compete with foreign imports, due to the fundamental and ‘critical’ problems with grassroots facilities in England (Pope, 2014). Hence, without the sufficient technical and tactical intelligence imperative for the modern game, English players will not be able to rival foreign counterparts on the elite stages of participation (Whitehouse, 2014).

In comparison, it can be identified that the talent development models and philosophies of international counterparts are far more beneficial and accessible to young participants in football. This is the case in Germany, where the DFB’s (German equivalent to The English FA) talent development programme provides youngsters with the necessary technical and tactical skills from an early age (James,

2013). This particular initiative, introduced in 2003, has the main objective of employing full-time coaches to facilitate the expansion and improvement of young German football players. Both players and coaches are afforded top-class, leading facilities (Whitehouse, 2013a), an aspect uncommon in English development schemes. In addition to the advanced facilities provided in German football, the standard of coaching for children aged 8-14 is of a much higher quality. James (2013) describes how the 1,000 DFB coaches who lead the development of the individuals must hold a 'UEFA B' (FA Level Three) License, further adding to the necessary quality fundamental to the young players' training programmes. This is a consistent factor of all the leading nations in Europe, with Germany's 6,934, Italy's 2,281 and Spain's 15,423 'UEFA A' and 'UEFA Pro' license coaches making advanced coaching more accessible to youngsters, in comparison to the undersized 1,395 of England (Bennett, 2014). The subsequent inconsistency of producing exceptional coaches has not given talented players the opportunity to receive essential and knowledgeable tuition. Therefore, the past twenty years have displayed a decreased number of home-grown individuals playing at the top level of the game in England (Bullough & Mills, 2014).

Specifically, when comparing the German talent development structure to that of England, it is clear to see that the DFB have been more efficient and proactive over the last decade when producing talent (Whitney, 2013). Consequently, the Bundesliga (German Premier Division) now exhibits one of the best youth development systems in the world, due to many years of investment and strategy (Whitney, 2013). The analysis of international equivalents such as the DFB has highlighted the inability of the English FA in their previous efforts towards youth development. The main notion being that accessibility to top quality coaching and

support within England is insignificant in comparison (Bullough & Mills, 2014). Hence, we begin to see the ultimate objective of the England DNA, which hopes to address these particular issues and provide coaches with specific technical and tactical requirements at the foundation phase of participation (Ashworth, 2014).

In addition to the technical and tactical foundations of current English youth participants at the grassroots level has been the enlargement of a winning over performing mentality. In the meantime, losing focus of the long-term development of players in regards to tactics, physical relevance and psychology (Power, 2014). This is further supported by Bullough and Mills (2014), whom attribute the increased purchasing power and short-term win at all costs culture of English football as the root cause of talent development problems. However, recent literature has created an emphasis on how the English FA has counteracted previous incompetence through the construction of an adapted philosophy “to produce technically excellent and innovative players, with exceptional decision making skills” (FA Learning, 2010, p. 4). Also, the development of an athlete-centred approach (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2003) can be identified through Dempsey’s (2014) idea that youth development should have an emphasis on promoting participation, player enjoyment and life-skills, instead of a focus towards winning. These particular views created by Power (2014) and Dempsey (2014) towards youth development remain consistent with the elite level, that although important, winning should not be a main focus until the ages of 16 and above (Dewsnip, 2014). Accordingly, the EDNA aims to expose its youth national sides to international competitions, where a variety of appropriate challenges will replicate real-game scenarios of the future (Glynn, 2014). Although being exposed to competition, in which success and failure become a fundamental aspect, the DNA begins to see winning as a by-product of the game. Thus at the elite



level, attention will be diverted to the performance of the participants, with the understanding that “winning isn’t the be-all and end-all” (Crocker, 2014b, p. 3) towards their overall development. Although explained by Okwonga (2008) that a heavy emphasis on winning may negatively impact the imagination, creative freedom and enjoyment for participants, the substantial elements of match orientation and competition allow players to stay up to date with the contemporary game (Power, 2014).

## **2.8 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the sub-categories (*Existing Research in Sport Policy, Grassroots Football in England, Contextualising the England DNA, Establishing a Central Philosophy, Coaching Philosophy, Talent and Player Development*) presented within the critical analysis allow us to engage analytically with the 5 core elements put forward in the EDNA (‘Who We Are’; ‘How We Coach’; ‘How We Play’; ‘The Future England Player’; ‘How We Support’). The relevant sections have also been able to pinpoint the changing philosophy of the English FA; remaining consistent with the notion that football coaching is an extremely under-researched area (Stephenson & Jowett, 2009). The theories put forward allow us to understand the potential impact of the DNA at the foundational levels of participation; supporting the belief that coach perceptions should be investigated at a variety of performance levels (Smith & Cushion, 2006). Therefore, the lack of literature concerned with examining the impact of policy shows that more must be done in order to benefit the grassroots population of coaches (Gilbert & Trudel, 2006).

## **Chapter Three**

### Methodology

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

The study in question has two predominant aims. Firstly, to explore FA Skills coaches' experiences of the EDNA initiative associated with its recent introduction in 2014 and secondly, to investigate how the English FA's national ideas and recommendations for extending this strategy beyond the national teams can be applied to the foundation phase of participation. In regards to the topics presented within this particular area of research, foundational theories and modern day research have provided a very limited source of knowledge for coach experiences (Cushion et al., 2012). As mentioned, although coaching literature has gradually developed over recent times, more work needs to be done in order to capture the social complexities of coaching practice (Nelson et al., 2013). Subsequently, the position taken in this research project acknowledges that reality is constructed through the understanding of the participants, developed through their social interactions and experiences in the field of interest (Coe, 2012; Nelson, Groom & Potrac, 2014). More specifically, the interpretive approach is categorised through the interchange between researcher and contributor, which will ultimately form the foundations to the knowledge created in this study (Thorne, 2008). Thus, this section will detail and contextualise the choice, design and implementation of the chosen research methodology.

### **3.1 Research Philosophy and Paradigm**

To begin with, it is necessary to define the significance of the philosophical position undertaken for this particular research project. It is also imperative to understand the various ways in which this will affect the methods designed to conduct the research. *Research Philosophy* can be summarised as the development of

the research background and knowledge alongside its nature in practice (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). In addition, the concept of a *Research Paradigm* can be regarded as a basic belief system or worldview through which one can make sense of the social world (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Guba and Lincoln (1994) also emphasised that the consideration of paradigms precedes the consideration of which methods to adopt for the intended research (Lor, 2011). While a paradigm is generally viewed as a complex issue, it is summarised as the values attributed to guiding how the overall research will be conducted (Gliner, Morgan & Leech, 2009); not only with the chosen methods for the project but in “ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105).

As previously explained, the main purpose of this research is to gain an understanding into the experiences of the individuals in a social context. Thus, the nature of the study is maintained through the interpretive paradigm. In regards to the ontological (the nature of reality) assumptions aforementioned, it must be acknowledged that this particular paradigm assumes multiple realities that are co-created and often complex (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Additionally, the issue of ontology links closely to the subjective epistemological (theory of knowledge and relationship between the inquirer and the known) (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) position anticipated for the investigation, in which reality and meaning are created through the interchange between researcher and participant in their particular discipline (Thorne, 2008). Due to the project focusing on an overall initiative (EDNA) introduced by an organisation (The FA), the perceptions and personal experiences of the coaches relevant to the study support the significance of assuming such an approach to research. As these particular authors depict (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), research paradigms guide how a researcher creates

particular questions and selects the consequent methodology appropriate for the area of study (Schempp & Choi, 1994).

### **3.2 Interpretive Description**

Accordingly, the foundation of the study was built within an interpretive framework. Weber (2004) creates the notion that interpretivists see the researcher and what is being researched as inseparable, acknowledging the intentional process of making sense of the world on behalf of the researcher (Lor, 2011). This is further supported and summarised by Woolcott (1990) who states “I do not go about trying to discover a ready-made world; rather I seek to understand a social world we are continuously in the process of constructing” (p. 149). Therefore, this paradigm enabled me to create a deeper understanding of the subject in a social context, contrary to the traditional positivist approach which serves to measure aspects of sporting performance (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004).

As stated by Hunt (2009), interpretive description is “a qualitative research methodology aligned with a naturalistic orientation to inquiry” (p. 1284). This approach assumes that reality as we know it is constructed through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). In much simpler terms, the emphasis of an interpretive approach is based around understanding subjectively the individual experiences of the contributors, instead of an objective explanation to which a positivist approach would be generally built upon (Grix, 2004). Consequently, this allowed individuals the flexibility to propose individual ideas, thoughts and feelings towards the intervention and in the meantime provides fruitful information for other coaches to learn from (Wang & Straub, 2012); associated with the general aims and objectives of this study in dealing with the

foundational levels of participation. This can be further supported by Jones, Armour and Potrac (2004) with their notion that personal experiences, philosophies, social and cultural contexts all challenge the traditional conceptions of the coaching process and ultimately display an effect on individual coaching practices (Strean, 1998).

To summarise, this section has detailed the philosophical approach for the study. By implementing an interpretive approach to the investigation we begin to see the potential benefits to research. Whilst Lincoln and Guba (2000) state that no method can deliver on ultimate truth, the interpretive stance allows us to predominantly understand the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Therefore, the following sections will detail both the possible advantages and limitations to interpretive description as a paradigm, in the meantime attending to the overall design and implementation of the chosen research methods.

### ***3.2.1 Benefits of Interpretive Description***

Briefly mentioned in the prior sections, interpretive approaches have become a fairly new acquisition to coaching research (Jones et al., 2004), supported through the notion created by Potrac, Jones and Nelson (2014) in explaining how this paradigm should be considered when investigating topics within the sports coaching domain. However, it is important to provide a justification to why an interpretive stance was taken for the present study on the EDNA and the potential benefits involved in utilising this methodology. Although Lincoln and Guba (2000) create a notion that no method can deliver on ultimate truth, the fact that this study is concerned with participant experiences means that a flexible methodology had to be employed.

Additionally, Hunt (2009) provides the conception that interpretive description holds the participants accountable for their individual realities, which are essentially socially and experientially based (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Equally, the view created by Chesterfield, Potrac and Jones (2010) rationalises the application of interpretive description in the particular field of coaching, in describing the multifaceted nature and complexities associated within this domain (Nelson et al., 2013). Thus, the adoption of this methodology would ultimately allow the necessary flexibility for participants to express their own individual experiences of the initiative (Shaw, 2001), coupled with the complexities that have constructed their own coaching approaches to date. Similarly, the notion produced by Hunt (2009) also outlines the essential aspects of such an approach to research, with the interpretive paradigm concentrated on developing ‘themes and patterns’ (p. 1285) through the new subjective viewpoints of the contributors. However, crucial to the research project, the adoption of an interpretive approach also took into account the dissimilarities and distinctions between the selected participants. Consequently, this acknowledged that each participant’s experience is unique to them and more specifically, recognised the reality that coaches will construct and develop their own knowledge in their individual field of work (Nelson et al., 2013).

As put forward by Jones and Gratton (2015), sport is for many, a social phenomenon that is unable to be researched utilising a positivist approach. Jones and Gratton’s (2015) notion that “the positivist approach is clearly well suited for research into aspects of sport such as biomechanics, anatomy or other disciplines more aligned with the natural sciences” (p. 22) allows us to identify the prior methodologies used for research regarding sport, which developed an emphasis towards the ‘measurable’ and ‘quantifiable’ aspects of sport and coaching

performance. Therefore, although a relatively new approach to the sport and coaching sciences, interpretive description offers an effective alternative to investigating the experiences of key stakeholders (Jones & Gratton, 2015; Potrac et al., 2014), in which social aspects begin to play a more significant role in their field of expertise. Subsequently, the notion that the interpretive perspective is built on the foundation that the social world is complex (Jones & Wallace, 2005) justifies the chosen methods for this investigation.

### ***3.2.2 Limitations of Interpretive Description***

Additionally, while it is important to understand the strengths of employing interpretive description, it is also crucial to engage with the possible implications and drawbacks of this approach to research. As stated earlier on in this section, social research has only recently engaged with this particular paradigm, due to the heavy emphasis on conducting research utilising a positivist approach guided through objective accounts. Hence, the possible limitations begin with the lack of literature for employing an interpretive approach to research, and for that matter of fact, sport in general. Subsequently, this leads to the belief that the interpretive approach offers a limited number of resources compared to the “hundreds or thousands” (Hunt, 2009, p. 1289) that other methodologies can offer. Alongside this, interpretive description is also considered a lengthy process that demands a substantial amount of time to analyse the data in the depth required (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011).

Moreover, an additional implication provided by the use of Interpretivism is the ‘emotional nature’ (Potrac et al., 2014, p. 36) of this particular methodology. Whilst Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose that interpretive researchers will adopt



hermeneutic approaches to their investigations in order to interpret the experience of others (Potrac et al., 2014); Callary, Rathwell and Young (2015) state that the interpretive approach also includes a ‘double hermeneutic’ (p. 64), which directly affects the understanding of the researcher. The double hermeneutic outlines the “researcher trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their experiences” (Callary et al., 2015, p. 64; Smith, 2011); which in turn implicates the investigation in hand. In addition, the complexity of this particular process is considered by Smith and Osborn (2008) who acknowledge that participants often struggle to convey their experiences and individual opinions. Consequently, although interpretive description is fundamentally built upon the realities created by the participant, the final decision of what data is relevant to the study lies with the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Thorne, Kirkham & O’Flynn-Magee, 2004). Also, the levels of interpretation and sense making recognised by Callary et al (2015) and Smith (2011) are further examined by Lee-Treweek (2000), who suggests that this type of research must attend to individual and personal needs of the contributors. Therefore, researchers must be open to altering their own concepts and ideas due to the specific context of the research (Callary et al., 2015); thus also making a decision of what emotions to show during the investigation (Potrac et al., 2014; Purdy & Jones, 2013). This was an aspect taken into consideration for this particular study, in order to not influence the responses of the participants and reduce the credibility of the research.

### **3.3 Methods**

In regards to creating an explorative study, the rationale has provided a justification towards the adoption of an interpretive description research design. More specifically, the notion that reality is complex and subjective (Nelson, Cushion & Potrac, 2006) agrees with the view put forward by Chesterfield and company (2010), which depicts the multifaceted nature of coaching and how reality is created in a variety of complex ways. Thus, the key elements of naturalistic inquiry (Hunt, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) would provide the overarching foundations to the completed study, in describing how research was ‘subjective, interactive and co-constructed’ (Potrac et al., 2014, p. 34) by both the researcher and the participants.

Through the contextualisation of the philosophical and epistemological position undertaken for the investigation in the preceding sections, this study was based on a smaller scale qualitative research format. Qualitative research being a “form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret the world in which they live” (Holloway, 1997, p.2) and ultimately make sense of their individual experiences. These considerations informed the final research design, which was fundamentally built upon gathering information from a variety of perspectives. Firstly, the objectives were primarily targeted at congregating information from the participants, whilst also containing elements of an exploratory nature into the exclusive EDNA initiative. This particular research design would also allow for the exploration into how the EDNA had directly affected the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Therefore, the following section will provide a detailed rationale of the chosen methods and techniques used to carry out the investigation.

Additionally, Brackenridge et al’s (2007) framework for investigating Child Protection in youth football develops a strong notion in supporting the ideas of key

stakeholders to policy implementation. This can be seen in their four-point 'Activations States' framework that focused on: 1) Voices; 2) Knowledge; 3) Feelings; 4) Action (Brackenridge, 2002). Whilst this study used both quantitative and qualitative research methods, the more interpretive elements (e.g. interviews, focus groups, observations) of the investigation, as outlined in the four-point framework, allowed for key stakeholders to map out their views and experiences of the policy in question (Child Protection) (Brackenridge, 2002; Brackenridge et al; 2007). The benefits of this particular method was two fold; on one hand this allowed the researchers to gain a more advanced understanding of participant experiences, whilst on the other hand the valuable contributions of the key stakeholders ('change agents') would assist the development of the Child Protection strategy (Brackenridge, 2002).

### **3.4 Participants and Sampling**

As mentioned prior, the selected research design sets the foundations for the study to be built upon. Initially, the chosen paradigm and philosophical stance of the investigation would generate the anticipated participants, methods and procedures. The next stages allowed for the participants to be chosen in line with the overall research objectives, coupled with the interpretive approach for the project. Hence, it is important to point out the significance of selecting an appropriate sample to investigate due to the explicit nature of the EDNA initiative. This can be seen through the concept put forward by Thorne (2008), who identifies that the researcher must rationalise and justify why the selected participants will provide valuable information to the study. Subsequently, Potrac et al (2014) sustain the view constructed by Thorne (2008) in outlining how interpretive researchers consider the

experiences of key stakeholders. Thus, due to the very specific phenomenon in question (The EDNA) the sample held accountable for their experiences was particularly small; in the meantime narrowed down to a population who could offer a valuable contribution to the investigation (Smith, 2010). This in turn would allow for beneficial responses to the research questions chosen for the current study.

In regards to the application of the research design, it becomes clear that sampling is a complex issue within qualitative-based studies (Coyne, 1997). As discussed in the literature, qualitative research offers two possible types of sampling: one being purposive sampling, the other being theoretical sampling (Coyne, 1997; Curtis, Gesler, Smith & Wasburn, 2000). In line with the argument above, purposive sampling is the most suitable for the present study, due to the “sample selection being driven by a theoretical framework which guides the research from the outset” (Boeije, 2009, p. 36). To expand on this and further support the notion put forward by Potrac and colleagues (2014), the sample was purposefully selected in accordance with the research objectives for the study, attending to the views of the key stakeholders in the EDNA initiative. Thus, the individuals (as shown in Table 1) selected to contribute through the process of purposive sampling met a carefully selected set of criteria. These criteria would allow participants to provide beneficial information to the study (Patton, 1990) and share their experiences about the issues that ultimately construct the research topic (Boeije, 2009; Coyne, 1997).

More specifically, purposive sampling was used in order to select a particular research population (Boeije, 2009), which in this case were FA Skills coaches. Although qualitative research is generally represented by a small sample, the FA Skills coaches hold a key stake in the development of the EDNA programme. However, in most cases the ‘whole’ population who have experienced the

phenomenon will not be accessible and a particular subset must be selected (Thorne et al., 2004). Therefore, purposive sampling concentrates on selecting information-rich participants (Patton, 2002) whose perceptions are valued highly and can ultimately demonstrate credibility to the overall research project (Thorne, 2008). Primarily, FA Skills coaches operate on a full-time basis within the foundational levels of participation (ages 5-11) and can display first-hand their experiences of the phenomenon in question.

Within the present study, a total of nine participants (7 males, 2 females) were interviewed (as shown in Table 1) between January 2016 and May 2016, across four English County FA's located in 3 separate geographic regions. A Regional Manager supported access to these particular associations, in the meantime giving permission to interview the chosen participants. As the current study aimed to focus on the individual experiences of FA Skills coaches, the participants offered a range of qualifications in the specific domain. The English FA proposes four compulsory qualifications in order to become a top-level coach: FA Level One, FA Level Two, FA Level Three ('UEFA B License') and 'UEFA A License' (Equivalent to Level Four) (Stephenson & Jowett, 2009), with the 'UEFA Pro License' exclusively limited to elite, professional standards. However, participants in this investigation were narrowed down to individuals who held a minimum of the 'FA Level Two' qualification and in conjunction, were members of the 'FA Licensed Coaches Club'. The justification of the selection of Skills coaches holding a minimum of the 'FA Level Two' qualification can be identified through the concepts put forward by Thorne et al (2004), which principally aim at gathering a specific criteria of participants who can strengthen the integrity of the research. Additionally, in regards to the guidelines of anonymity, the names of the coaches have been changed for the

study. However the qualifications gained by each participant have been maintained (in Table 1) in order to contextualise their level of coaching.

**Table 1: Summary of Participants**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>FA Qualifications</b>	<b>FA Skills Coach Experience</b>
<b>Tim</b>	Male	UEFA B License, FA Youth Award (Modules 1,2 & 3).	5 months
<b>Patrick</b>	Male	UEFA B License, FA Youth Modules 1&2.	9 years
<b>Adam</b>	Male	UEFA B License, FA Youth Modules 1&2.	2 years
<b>Harry</b>	Male	UEFA B License, FA Youth Modules 1&2.	7 months
<b>Christian</b>	Male	UEFA B License, FA Youth Award (Modules 1,2 & 3), FA Goalkeeping Level 2, FA Qualified Referee.	4 years
<b>Katie</b>	Female	UEFA B License, FA Youth Modules 1&2, FA Coaching Disabled Footballers.	3 years
<b>Nicholas</b>	Male	FA Level Two, FA Youth Modules 1&2.	1 year
<b>Jacob</b>	Male	FA Level Two, FA Youth Award (Modules 1,2 & 3).	3 years
<b>Natalie</b>	Female	UEFA B License, FA Youth Award (Modules 1,2 & 3), FA Goalkeeping Level 2.	6 years

### 3.5 Procedure

This particular section details the procedure used for the investigation.

### ***3.5.1 Making Contact with Participants***

After permission was given by the Regional Manager to begin the research, the selected participants were each sent an introductory email (see Appendix 1) to invite them to take part in the study. Initially, the participants were also sent an information sheet (see Appendix 2) that explained the research objectives, their individual role, and the guarantee of confidentiality alongside the right to withdraw from the investigation at any given time. Once the participants had agreed to take part in the investigation, a suitable date and venue was agreed in order to complete the necessary interviews. Before the interviews could commence however, each participant was given an informed consent form (see Appendix 3) to complete, date and sign. The consent forms outlined the requirements, objectives and procedures of the study and reassured the participants that all data collected would remain confidential to the principal investigator.

### ***3.5.2 Data Collection***

In relation to the implementation of the research methods specific to this study, it is important to justify the techniques for data collection. As one of the most significant stages in the research process, data collection must be selected critically and competently in line with the main aims of the investigation. Firstly, the ideas put forward in the preceding sections have outlined the traditional positivist approach in sports coaching (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004; Potrac et al., 2014); however Purdy (2014) proposes the emergence of a range of methods towards this area of interest. Moreover, as the current study is based upon an interpretive approach, the use of interviews was fundamental to formulating a valuable study. This particular method was assumed through the critique of previous analyses that have used in-depth

interviews, with a main notion being that this chosen process is most effective when investigating the complexities and multifaceted nature of coaching (Chesterfield et al., 2010). Purdy (2014) consolidates the view created by Chesterfield et al (2010), in analysing how interviews provide the “potential for understanding and gaining a ‘rich’ insight into a person’s perspective” (p. 161); an aspect critical to this investigation on coach experiences.

Also fundamental to the overall research design was the completion of an individual pilot interview with an FA Skills coach. The pilot interview was used in order to test the relevance and appropriateness of the proposed questions (Sagar, Lavalley & Spray, 2009), thus adapting the interview guide accordingly to suit the needs of the investigation. The notion that participants are crucial to the expansion of the chosen topics (Nelson et al., 2013) supports the significance of an initial pilot interview as it added to the knowledge base of the author in modifying the planned questions. The coach’s feedback after the interview was central to finalising the interview guide used for the nine selected participants.

Precisely, the study consisted of a series of one-to-one semi-structured interviews, lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. All interviews were tape recorded using a Dictaphone and an additional digital device. As explained by Purdy (2014), these types of interviews allow for the exploration into the participants’ opinions and beliefs in regards to the phenomenon in question. This can be characterised through the development of an effective semi-structured interview guide, which permitted participants to provide depth and insight into their perceptions of the EDNA programme, and more importantly their own unique stories of the initiative thus far. Attributable to the style of the research design and qualitative nature of the investigation, the importance of the information drawn from the investigation was



crucial to the depth and validity of the analysis presented. Subsequently, in line with the main aspects of a semi-structured format, the contributors were probed to expand and clarify certain statements (Nelson et al., 2013) in order to clearly convey their ideas (Smith, 2010). Additionally, by probing any interesting areas that had arisen, Gratton and Jones (2010) state that this form of interviewing adds to the interviewer's understanding of how the initiative in question may have influenced new approaches to coaching. Furthermore, central to the interviews was the factor of creating a comfortable environment for the participants, in the meantime motivating the individuals to share their valuable knowledge and experiences with the interviewer (Patton, 1990).

### ***3.5.3 Interview Guide***

Also pivotal to the research project was the development of an effective semi-structured interview guide. A semi-structured interview was completed with each coach individually, in order to allow him or her to provide depth and insight into their distinctive experiences (Sagar et al., 2009) of the EDNA programme. An interview guide was constructed prior to the interviews taking place and was used as a flexible guideline to ask key questions specific to the study (Arskey & Knight, 1999). As explained in the earlier sections, the concept of the interview guide was constructed around previous studies in the same field of interest. Therefore, the standard of questions was formatted in regards to the work put forward by Stephenson and Jowett (2009), Wang and Straub (2012) and Smith and Cushion (2006). Subsequently, these studies have influenced the current approach due to the authors implementing an open-ended question format. Thus, this particular format provided participants with the opportunity to feed back their own opinions, views

and feelings on the selected topic. Whilst the questions put forward for the present study had been influenced by previous approaches, the issues and subjects drawn upon were modified according to the initiative in question.

The interview guide was divided into five sections (see Appendix 4), alongside both pre-interview and post-interview discussions. The pre-interview discussions were used as an opportunity to remind the participants of the overall research objectives, the format of the interview and to confirm full confidentiality. This particular section also aimed to create a relaxed and informal environment for the participants, in order for them to share their experiences in an open manner. Prior to the interviews commencing, participants gave their verbal consent for the discussions to take place.

Initially, the first section of the interview was entitled *Demographic Information and Background* and aimed to ask questions about the participant's coaching career (e.g., "What are your coaching experiences to date?" "How did you become an FA Skills coach?" "Outline your present role as a Skills coach"). This particular section was used to build a rapport with the participants whilst also giving them their first opportunity to discuss their relevant experiences.

The second section, entitled *Coaching Philosophy*, aimed to find out more about the specific coaching approaches used by the participants. Questions asked included: "What is your coaching philosophy?" "How would you say this particular philosophy has evolved?" and "Why do you think your philosophy has evolved since starting with The FA?" in an attempt to discover more about the participant's individual beliefs.

Moreover, the next section began to identify the development and progressions of the participants. The participants were asked to describe the main influences on their development as coaches, whilst also examining the main contributors to their specific coaching approaches. Questions included: “What have been the main influences on your development as a coach?” “What have been your most inspirational moments as a coach?” “Have these moments altered your particular style to coaching?” The third section aimed to familiarise the participants with their own developments, before moving onto the main purpose of the study.

The fourth section (*England DNA*) aimed to establish the coach’s experiences of the EDNA initiative since its introduction in December 2014. The aim of these questions was two fold: firstly to examine the specific experiences of the coaches in regards to the EDNA and secondly, to discover the impact the EDNA had on the coaching of the participants. All questions asked were open-ended and probed the participant to share their individual experiences of the initiative (e.g., “How were you first introduced to the EDNA initiative? Where? When?” “What are your main experiences of the EDNA?” “How would you say it has affected your coaching with 5-11 year old participants?” “Would you say the initiative has impacted your coaching?”).

The final section (*Future Expansion*) aimed to discover the personal opinions of the participants in relation to the EDNA programme. These questions were used as an opportunity to examine the personal thoughts and feelings of the participants, in order to suggest how the initiative could be enhanced for the grassroots level (e.g., “What are the benefits of the DNA?” “What have been the main limitations or challenges of the EDNA?” “How can it be enhanced at the foundational level of

participation?” “What support do coaches need in order to enhance their delivery of the DNA?” “Do you think it can be effective at the grassroots level?”

Although the interview guide displays a certain order of questioning in relation to the topics presented, each interview was approached flexibly and questions were asked freely during the discussions. Finally, after the recorded interview had concluded, participants were given an opportunity to ask any questions in regards to the study whilst also being informed on the next stages of the research process. The post-interview discussions were of a very informal nature and gave the coaches a chance to feed back their feelings of the interview.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and predominantly analysed using an inductive thematic analysis, in contrast to solely exercising a deductive analysis. Thus, an inductive approach allowed for the “improvisation, creativity and flexibility” (Boeije, 2009, p. 13) in the analysis process, generating previously unknown data to the investigation and complementing the overall research objectives. The application of this specific technique was used in order to highlight interesting features and patterns gathered from the participants’ interviews (Sawkill, Sparkes & Brown, 2013). Also significant to interpretive description is the consequence of establishing exclusive and crucial further categories (Smith & Cushion, 2006), which showcased the individual experiences of the participants.

Whilst an inductive analysis constructed the main features of this particular process, deductive elements also came into action. The use of inductive analysis generated new theories in regards to the phenomenon being studied, supported

through Taylor's (2014) concept that this type of analysis is "recursive and iterative" (p. 182) concerned with the questioning and interpretation of new data. In contrast the deductive aspects can be characterised through a specific and systematic process, allowing the information to be collected both effectively and efficiently (Saury & Durand, 1998). Additionally, in terms of this particular investigation, the qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews was essentially guided by the five selected categories mentioned previously (Demographic Information and Background, Coaching Philosophies, Coach Development, England DNA, Future Expansion).

In relation to this study, the opening stages were used as an opportunity to read over the transcripts a number of times and begin to generate initial codes from the data. These particular annotations identify an aspect of the data that appears significant to the researcher and is used as information "that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). These raw-data quotes captured distinct concepts from the interview transcripts, with basic units labelled accordingly (as seen in Figure 3).

The next phase began to organise the original codes into themes and categories, essentially analysing the raw data quotes and combining them to create a central theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sagar et al., 2009). However, as explained by Braun and Clarke (2006), themes should be clear and distinct from one another and therefore the overarching themes were reviewed and refined appropriately. This meant that some themes emerged together, whilst others were separated or disbanded completely. The overarching themes were then named accordingly; in order to ensure that they were a true representation of the original transcripts and information

provided by the participants. The final phase was completed with a narrative account of the selected themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Smith, 2008).

**Patrick - Coding**

(9) /was in the first batch of 66 skills coaches in 2007

(20) /deliver the primary teachers award

(24) /support local clubs working with 4 clubs a season

(26) /making environment better for both coaches and players

(32) /every child matters it's a real child centred approach

(37) /challenge every person in that group

(46) /key stage to get them engaged

(56) /Pete Sturgess big influence on the way I have changed

(72) /dna introduced by dan ashworth at st george's park

(86) /historically we've done a lot of technique work

(87) /trying to put them in game-like situations

(88) /early 2000's it was about stop stand still this is the technique

(90) /coaching now links to the dna

(94) /always a reason to why we're delivering something

(97) /get that golden thread all the way through

(101) /everybody should be on the same page

Figure 3: Participant Example of Initial Codes

### 3.7 Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is often interrogated, thus issues of credibility are at the forefront in these types of studies (Shenton, 2004). Nonetheless, Shenton (2004) describes that the concepts of validity and reliability in qualitative research are addressed in different ways, in comparison to positivist approaches. Interpretive studies are based on naturalistic work, therefore the value of the final outcomes are based on the interactions between the participants and the researcher (Shenton, 2004; Thorne & Darbyshire, 2005). Although Lincoln and Guba (1985) have addressed the issues of 'credibility, transferability, dependability and

confirmability' (Shenton, 2004, p. 64), Thorne and colleagues (2004) state that the analytic decisions made by the researcher will contribute to the overall trustworthiness of the study. Consequently, in this particular study, trustworthiness was established in the research process through the adoption of the recommended steps in order to guarantee the quality of the findings (Thorne, 2008).

Additionally, Caelli, Ray and Mill (2003) suggest that the complexities of the research process and analytic process must be made identifiable in order to create a credible study. Subsequently, before the interviews were able to commence in the current study, a pilot interview was carried out in order to refine and specify the intended questions. This allowed the principal researcher to confirm the content of the interviews whilst also developing an approach to questioning that would eliminate the influence of bias (Thorne, Kirkham and MacDonald-Emes, 1997). Moreover, in regards to both the data collection and the analytic process, the author's own perceptions of youth development and the EDNA were not included in any of the questions. Therefore, in line with the main aspects of an interpretive methodology, the researcher was able to create meaning and knowledge (Thorne, 2008) through understanding the participants' individual experiences. The openness and flexibility of the research process has therefore contributed to the overall quality of the procedures and outcomes of the study (Emden & Sandelowski, 1999; Thorne, 2008).

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

In terms of creating an ethical and principled investigation, a number of significant factors were taken into consideration before the study was able to commence. These included anonymity, participant confidentiality and informed

consent (Ransome, 2013). Participants were informed on the nature of the interviews (see Appendices 1 & 2), how the data would be presented and their right to withdraw from the investigation at any given time. Also, the project was granted institutional ethical approval prior to the participants being contacted.

Moreover, when relating specifically to the aspect of anonymity and confidentiality, the participants to the investigation were thoroughly briefed and notified that all their information would remain private to the author. Ultimately, to effectively implement this particular consideration, the names of the coaches have been changed (see Table 1), successfully remaining within the anonymity guidelines.

To finalise the initial ethical procedures, the participants, categorising their agreement to voluntarily contribute to the study, provided informed consent and permission. Once consent had been received from the coaches, the interviews were arranged according to the suitability and availability of the participants.

### **3.9 Summary**

Overall, this chapter has been able to critique and justify the chosen methodology for the current study on the EDNA initiative. In terms of creating a competent, ethical and effective investigation, the chosen approach to research was assumed through the assessment of previous literature, alongside relevant reading in the designated topic area. Consequently, the epistemological and philosophical foundations for the present study recognise that knowledge was constructed through the primary experiences of the participants (Coe, 2012). Ultimately, the aims of this study were addressed through the use of interpretive description. The notion that the interpretive perspective acknowledges the complexity of the social world (Jones &



Wallace, 2005) contextualised the overall research design and methods chosen to conduct the study. Hence, both the semi-structured interviews and more inductive elements of the procedure display the criticality of the interchange between researcher and participants in fulfilling the research objectives.

**Chapter Four**  
Research Findings

## **Chapter 4 – Research Findings**

This chapter is concerned with identifying and reporting the key themes from the data analysis (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2010). As described by Thomas et al (2010), “these themes or subthemes must be supported with data from the interviews” (p. 390). Using the domains and subthemes identified (see Table 2 for domain and component themes), the findings are presented in accordance with the multiple sources they have been derived from. The research findings in this thesis are presented in the form of a detailed narrative within a number of distinct categories (Being an FA Skills Coach; Developmental Philosophy; Embedding DNA within sessions; Impact of EDNA; Benefits and Challenges of DNA; Future Enhancement) ultimately working in line with the four main objectives of this study; i) to provide an insight into FA Skills coach experiences and understanding of the EDNA; ii) to identify and analyse the importance of FA Skills coaches in the dissemination of the EDNA; iii) to communicate the challenges and future recommendations of FA Skills coaches to FA Regional Managers and FA Skills Team Leaders and iv) to present key findings that will inform an Executive Summary.

As explained in Chapter 3, the purpose of this study was to investigate the coaches’ subjective experiences of the EDNA framework. Although focusing on a single initiative, the study didn’t intend to evaluate the effectiveness or successes of the EDNA, instead, the objective of the study was to gain a rich insight into the participants’ experiences of the programme. In addition to gaining rich insights into the initiative, a further goal of the study was to develop an understanding of the day-to-day impact of the EDNA and suggestions on how it could become more beneficial for the future. In this case the findings demonstrate the coaches’ views and

experiences of the EDNA to date, which supports and challenges the notions surrounding the initiative. Whilst this chapter will identify the main findings in relation to the four objectives stated, the findings begin by gaining a clearer understanding of the FA Skills role and the individual coaching philosophies involved.

**Table 2: Domains and themes for FA Skills coaches' experiences of the EDNA**

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Being an FA Skills Coach	Targets in promoting girls football 5-11 year olds, creating environment for kids to enjoy
Developmental Philosophy	Key thing is for person to be motivated Every Child Matters: Creating a positive environment
Embedding DNA within sessions	Plan Do Review Love the Ball, Love the Game: Trying to put them in game-like situations 70% ball rolling time
Impact of EDNA	Confirmed to us what should have been done Don't feel the DNA has changed my coaching style Reinforcing what we already did
Benefits and Challenges of DNA	Benefits of EDNA: Players more comfortable on the ball Golden Thread: Challenges of EDNA: Not appropriate to grassroots players Incorporating into every session is unrealistic People's buy-in
Future Enhancement	More CPD events and more material More exposure Grassroots version that is more appropriate for players Potentially more online resources

### 4.1 Being an FA Skills Coach

This particular domain focuses on the role of the FA Skills coach and aims to create a clearer picture of the environment the selected coaches work within. The main aspects of the role included; working with 5-11 year old participants, delivering the Primary Teachers Award (PTA) and targets in promoting football to girls.

To begin with, the coaches were generally in agreement that the FA Skills role covered a wide spectrum and was particularly associated with introducing 5-11 year old participants to football. This can be identified with Adam <sup>1</sup>(15) describing:

*<sup>2</sup>So 5-11 is the specific group we work in and we kind of hit that age in a number of ways. So the main one would be going into schools and work with classes and their teachers. It's a mixed role in terms of exposing children to football for the first time and also working with teachers to upskill them with their delivery of PE.*

The above statement conveys the general response given by the majority of participants in describing the FA Skills role. All participants mentioned the task of delivering the PTA within schools and introducing football to 5-11 year olds. However Christian (17) provided a different outlook on the role and explained: "It's quite vague. We run after school centres, skills centres, train teachers and coaches in clubs and deliver CPD events". Although referring to the role as "quite vague", this particular quote also displays the variety of tasks involved as an FA Skills coach. This is further emphasised by Harry (31) who describes:

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<sup>1</sup> Please note numbers in brackets are line numbers derived from the individual interview transcripts.

<sup>2</sup> Please note that all italicised/indented paragraphs are direct quotes from the participants.

*The skills centres are based around both the introductory levels and also people that have played football for a longer period... so really mixed levels and abilities and trying to put them into the right environment and point them into the right direction.*

In outlining the main aspects of their job, all participants acknowledged the importance of delivering the PTA in upskilling primary school teachers with their delivery. However, in regards to promoting girls football, Jacob (19), Harry (102) and Tim (21) recognised the significance of developing girls-only centres within the Skills programme. This can be identified with Tim (21) explaining:

*After the Women's World Cup in Canada in 2015 we've been set different outcomes and targets for promoting girls football. Can we do after School clubs, lunch clubs? Can we invite the novice girl and try and get them into a grassroots club? Open access for Skills Extra programmes for girls and girls-only skills centres.*

## **4.2 Developmental Philosophy**

The second domain has been selected in order to convey the individual philosophies of the selected coaches. As highlighted by Kepčija (2016), the winning vs. development debate has become a “hot topic” (p. 48) among key stakeholders. Therefore, this domain acknowledges the developmental philosophy of the FA Skills coaches and aims to create a distinction between this particular approach and that of creating a ‘Winning England’ by 2022. Considering FA Skills coaches are operating at the foundation phase of participation, Kepčija’s (2016) notion that a ‘winning is

king' (p. 48) approach can be detrimental to future success seems relevant for this particular section of the findings.

A development over winning philosophy was employed by all coaches and considered to be crucial when working with 5-11 year old participants. Although this seemed to be the general approach of the participants, the views put forward by both Natalie and Katie displayed their experiences as female coaches within the sector. While discussing her particular approach, Natalie (27) described (Q: What would you say your coaching philosophy is for the 5-11 age groups?):

*Really it's about development. My philosophy will be wholly based around the player's development to create an environment in which they can try their best, make mistakes and learn from them. That's the main environment I try create within my sessions is to allow players to challenge themselves to be the best they can be.*

This clearly displays the environment in which FA Skills coaches aim to create with their delivery. The general vision created by the participants was to establish a challenging environment for the players to develop, however one which Nicholas (27) describes as "fun and enjoyable". When asked the same question Katie (32) commented:

*Massively just creating a positive environment. Umm technical and tactical information aside just putting children into an environment where they feel safe enough to try things and express themselves with the football and their group of peers...I think for me being a female as well when I play football or coach football it's hugely down to confidence...and that's what I think back to because I want to create that for other people, for young people whether*

*that's boys or girls or children with disability. I want them to feel as comfortable as I did because that's how I believe I can help other people become the best they can be.*

#### **4.2.1 Every Child Matters**

The above statement displays how past experiences had ultimately contributed to the approach Katie now uses within her delivery. Consequently, a consistent finding across the interviews was the student centred approach adopted by the coaches. Patrick (32) stresses the importance of this particular approach to the FA Skills programme whilst also suggesting the impact of an “every child matters” system on player development:

*As an overarching philosophy which links to the programme is every child matters. It's a real child centred approach with everything that we do. It would vary in a school. If I'm with 30 children over 6 weeks I'm probably not going to get to know every child as well...we like to challenge and get to know them as much as possible. But that's the main philosophy is a child centred approach to try and challenge every person in that group.*

Although each participant offered a wide-range of experiences within the football and sport sector, the player centred approach was a continued theme across the findings. When asked to discuss his overall coaching philosophy (Q: so could you give an outline as to your background and principles that guide your coaching?), Nicholas (32) explained:

*So realistically making them enjoy the sessions and want to continue to play football in whatever capacity really is the main principle behind it. On an*



*individual basis, I'd say I like to have a student centred approach. A player centred approach which looks at players becoming more autonomous as they grow older and grow as players.*

This was also a determining factor within several of the coaches' delivery, particularly Adam (60) who suggests how his past experiences in America and academy football in England have ultimately influenced his philosophy as an FA Skills coach. He states:

*You see the limelight as a young coach in working with the best players, whereas now for me it's about whatever group you give me, particularly within 5-11's, that 5 year old comes back next week that's better than getting someone a contract at a club.*

In summary, this section has detailed the participants' emphasis on enjoyment and development within their FA Skills sessions. A philosophy based around the children's enjoyment was a reoccurring factor amongst all the interviewees, whose roles are built around the introductory levels. Despite Harry (76) mentioning the overall targets of the EDNA in "creating a winning England", all the coaches highlighted how a developmental philosophy was imperative in getting the best out of their participants. Finally, an approach surrounding the 'Every Child Matters' initiative as explained by Patrick is evident within many of the participants' overall philosophies. Katie, Patrick, Nicholas and Adam all provide examples of how this particular attitude towards player development is showcased within their coaching practice.

### 4.3 Embedding DNA within Sessions

This section has been created in order to identify the main aspects of incorporating the main elements of the EDNA into the participants' practice. Many of the coaches outlined the necessity to embed the new EDNA framework within their sessions and highlighted the importance of the coaching fundamentals (see Appendix 5). The main findings have created a subsequent section for this particular domain that focuses on the more technical elements of practice (Love the Ball, Love the Game); however the importance of the 'Plan, Do, Review' strategy was discussed in detail by many of the coaches. To begin with, Adam (82) explained:

*I think it should be embedded within all sessions we do. When we plan there's certain elements in my planning that I think, how does this link into the DNA? Because if we are going to spread this and make it consistent it needs to be embedded and embraced by the coaches really, and that starts with us.*

Likewise, both Natalie and Katie agree with the view put forward by Adam, and express the advantages of planning in advance. For example, Natalie (66) states:

*In terms of our age group we have been given guidelines that we should use to structure our sessions, in terms of the plan, do, review strategy, so it's important to incorporate lots of ball contact time with the younger players of course.*

This quote by Natalie suggests how the elements involved within the 'Plan, Do, Review' strategy have allowed her to incorporate more technical qualities for participants within sessions. In addition, Katie (35) supports this notion by explaining (Q: How would you say your philosophy and your approach as a coach has changed since joining the FA Skills team?)

*Umm the importance of planning and preparing. So now more specifically in this role it is a lot of time kind of varying session plans and making sure you're catering for every individual rather than doing it on the spot...yeah just being slightly more prepared...umm but also more specifically the hexagons which are useful that you can involve in your planning and making sure you are using them.*

### **4.3.1 Love the Ball, Love the Game**

As suggested earlier, the coaches involved within this study all described a mindset aimed at developing individual participants. This became a concurrent factor between all the participants, mostly in regard to developing players who can be comfortable when on the ball. For coaches like Tim (29), this can be identified within his practice:

*If I'm doing 5-11 year olds I'd say it's about connecting with the ball, getting lots of time on the ball. Love the ball, love the game type. After Key Stage 2 looking at 1v1 and 2v2 then getting them into games to enhance their development.*

The above statement displays Tim's approach to creating game-like situations within his practice, however, The FA's philosophy of 'Love the Ball, Love the Game' was present within the majority of the coaches who took part in the study. This particular view on the philosophy was also shared by Harry (103) who explains:

*Getting them used to the elements of loving the ball loving the game and trying to come through the different age groups. Actually if you're starting at a younger age you may begin to love the game a little more and move*

*through the age groups and stay in the game...it gives you a basis of what we want our England players to look like and you almost get free reign on the sessions you help to create. We are setting the foundations of what they're going to become and how they're going to learn from a young age.*

This specific quote by Harry acknowledges the impact of the EDNA on his practice, specifically suggesting how the “elements of loving the ball loving the game” are embedded within his delivery to 5-11 year old participants. Whilst some participants (such as Harry) considered the direct impact of the new philosophy on their practice, others offered mixed views and related back to their own approaches to developing players. Jacob (75) puts forward:

*Umm going back to my philosophy about allowing the kids to have a lot of contact time with the ball...the idea around that and giving kids a love for the game and letting them fall in love with the ball is something I use on a day to day basis...so developing players who are comfortable in different positions and players to be more comfortable on the ball in various situations. We want players to kind of work out and problem solve by themselves. I suppose that's what the DNA talks about.*

Although Jacob proposes the idea that allowing players to have more contact time with the ball is an element within his own philosophy, he ultimately agrees with the approach offered by Tim in developing game-like situations. The FA's changing approach to creating comfortable football players was evident within the participants' answers and an interesting topic which seemed to emerge in all of the interviews. On one hand, Christian (91) suggests how the DNA framework has contributed to a more competent approach: “you can use it as a guideline as such. So

before I had a high activity time but now I can look at the 70% ball rolling time and can now say I am meeting that". Whilst the 70% ball rolling time element was apparent in many of the interviews, the discussion with Patrick outlined many interesting factors, particularly due to his 10 years with the FA Skills team. In regards to embedding the EDNA within his sessions, Patrick (86) suggested:

*Historically we've done a lot of technique work. Umm but now we're trying to put them into situations now we're it actually looks like the game. So it used to be when I done my coaching badges early 2000's it was about stop, stand still, this is the technique I'm going to pass it 10 yards over here. Well now we're talking about how does it look in the game? Why do we need to make that decision and how do we use that technique? And I think that's what's bringing out now in my coaching is to link that to the DNA and how does that actually fit rather than that's how you pass it.*

Experiences such as those offered by Patrick, who has been part of the FA Skills team since it emerged in 2007, show a direct relation between how the EDNA is now embedded within coaching sessions. Whilst participants such as Harry, Christian and Jacob put forward the aspects of 70% ball rolling time and creating game-like situations, Patrick's views point towards a certain shift in the approach used by coaches since the DNA has been introduced.

#### **4.4. Impact of EDNA**

When asked to identify the impact of the EDNA, this stimulated an interesting discussion amongst individual participants. Whilst all the participants recognised the main aspects and vision of the EDNA, the findings displayed a mixed

impact on their overall thoughts of the initiative. The coaches were able to identify some of the main aspects of the coaching fundamentals (see appendix 5) within their sessions; however, the overall impact of the initiative displayed a variety of answers. For example, Katie (82) described (Q: What would you say the main experiences of the DNA have been? How would you say you've been able to implement it within your sessions?):

*If anything it was reinforcing what we already did and we kind of said that with the skills coaches. Everything on there is what we were trying to do just kind of telling us you're on the right track kind of thing. It was more of a visual tool which we could share and use with other coaches to show this is what we do and how we've been doing things.*

Responses such as those shared by Katie emphasise how the EDNA framework hasn't changed her overall approach to coaching. This was the general feeling amongst several of the participants, particularly Jacob (82) who reveals "it helped me sort of reaffirm what I was doing was right". Whilst Katie states that the coaching fundamentals have already played a part in the FA Skills coaches delivery; the initiative has merely established that the coaches are "on the right track". Similarly, Natalie (74) shared this particular view offered by Katie and stated:

*Personally, if I'm being honest with you, I don't feel that the DNA has changed anything within my coaching style or coaching sessions massively. Yes it does give you a format and certain things to look at when coaching your sessions but on an individual basis it's difficult to say that the DNA has had an impact or changed the way I do things within my session.*

The quote above depicts the general view of many of the participants towards the overall impact of the EDNA initiative. Although Natalie quotes how the initiative has provided a general format to structure coaching sessions, the impact of the EDNA upon her individual delivery has been minimal. In addition, other participants such as Christian (82) displayed a more reflective account of what the EDNA is aiming to achieve. He clarifies:

*In terms of the training we've got it hasn't actually changed my coaching much, I think it was stuff we were already doing. But it's nice when we're training other coaches and doing their in-service that here is a philosophy, here is something that is set out in nice bullet points and easy to read. Before it was a little bit more off the cuff, this is what I'm doing and this is why I'm doing it. But now we have a sheet to read off and is a connection of things. So in terms of helping other coaches it's a lot better.*

Moreover, despite mentioning that the EDNA initiative hasn't changed his coaching, Christian explains the importance of the programme when delivering CPD events to other grassroots coaches. This is recognised through a more structured format in order to relay information to amateur coaches on the developing philosophy of The FA. As previously mentioned in the 'Love the Ball, Love the Game' section, coaches explained how the initiative depicts the message to enhance technical capabilities of younger players. Thus, Tim's (75) assessment of the programme explains:

*It gives it more of a guideline. So some players may be more advanced than others but we must always look at each individual being challenged... We can see that the children are benefiting over weeks 1-6. You can see decision*

*making gets better and their confidence with each other also. And also on the PTA side of things with the teachers, they can deliver similar types of practices. We can create a bigger pool of players that can become more athletic.*

The views put forward by Tim create a similar stance to those of Christian, in describing the positive impact on CPD (Continuous Professional Development) events. In addition, the guidelines and structure of the EDNA framework has allowed coaches to enhance the efficiency of feedback to grassroots coaches, in the meantime supporting the vision of The FA. This is further supported through Tim's opinion that 5-11 year old participants are improving within the initial weeks of practice, specifically by enhancing the knowledge of primary school teachers in their delivery of the PTA.

#### **4.5 Benefits and Challenges of the EDNA**

Another emerging category from the findings was the benefits and challenges associated with the EDNA initiative. All coaches were able to explain both advantages and challenges with the framework towards their coaching.

##### ***4.5.1 Golden Thread***

As suggested within the findings so far, coaches have displayed their willingness to contribute to the overall development of 5-11 year old participants by: enhancing the technical capability of participants; enhancing their practice with the 'Plan, Do, Review' format and contributing to the CPD of other grassroots coaches. In relation to this particular section, coaches were able to identify the EDNA's concept of the 'Golden Thread' that aims to link all phases of development together



through a systematic and methodical philosophy. This can be identified with Patrick (172) who says (Q: Would you say it's just as important to implement the DNA at the foundational phases?):

*Yeah I think the way we talk about the Golden Thread and how it has to be a Golden Thread that runs all the way through. Well it has to start at this age group because we want that pyramid of players that we are producing that have that Golden Thread. We've got a broader base of people to select at that foundation phase and now a broader phase at the youth development phase, and that will eventually have a bigger pool of people to select at a national level.*

In regards to the EDNA initiative, Patrick's idea of the 'Golden Thread' is associated with producing more players for the next developmental phase. Whilst Patrick (97) explains the motto of "the only thing that changes is the size of the shirt", Nicholas (101) also reveals how the EDNA "provides a link between the grassroots and elite levels". Therefore, both these coaches identify how the programme has provided a vision in order to produce more players for the elite game, who are ultimately able to take their technical capabilities onto the next stage of their pathway. Conversely, Jacob (92) suggests an alternate view on the benefits of the DNA (Q: What would you say are the benefits of the DNA for you as a coach?):

*Umm...I think thinking more sort of holistically it's nice to have everyone trying to do the same thing. Thinking of the FA Skills Programme you know we've got coaches in every county, so rather than Lancashire doing it one way, Somerset doing it another way and Kent doing it another way, it's kind*

*of everyone singing from the same hymn sheet. I think that is certainly a benefit umm and trying to kind of create a philosophy for the national game I suppose. I think that's important because it seems to have worked for other countries successfully, that's a nice idea.*

Although Patrick and Nicholas' ideas of the 'Golden Thread' are associated with developing more players for the elite side of the game, Jacob offers the benefit of all FA Skills coaches working towards the same goal. Moreover, the 'national game' was a consistent theme in Jacob's interview, who frequently related the DNA framework to the grassroots level of the game and the impact it would have on coaches working at this particular standard. Equally, this notion was backed up by Christian (100) who states: "it's great to have an organised connection" when working with both players and other coaches.

#### ***4.5.2 Challenges of the EDNA***

The main findings from the interviews also acknowledged the challenges and limitations of the current EDNA framework. When the coaches were asked to describe any challenges they have faced when dealing with the new initiative, two main challenges were consistent throughout the interviews. Firstly, coaches explained how the EDNA has struggled to get the appropriate 'buy-in' from grassroots coaches and secondly, how they believed the framework was not initially targeted at their participation level. This can be identified with Harry's (114) example (What would you say the challenges are and the limitations of the DNA so far?):

*Umm, I think the challenges are getting people to buy into it. Umm I think that everyone has their own beliefs and you're going to get a lot of coaches with their own beliefs that aren't willing to change what they're doing. And also understanding what the DNA looks like if they are going to do this in a particular way.*

This particular quote suggests how the initiative has faced certain challenges around persuading grassroots coaches to alter their practices. This is further supported through Nicholas' (109) idea that "allowing people to understand the benefits of the programme" can ultimately impact coaching approaches and provide more 'buy-in' to the framework. Additionally, Adam's (124) view on 'buy-in' agrees with those put forward by both Harry and Nicholas:

*I think a further challenge will be around getting people's buy-in, because I think some people are set in their ways. Particularly the exposure we get to other coaches, I like to watch games and grassroots games a lot of coaches are still driven by winning and I don't think you will fully eradicate that. Again it was a random under 10's you hear some things from the sidelines, you know these people mean well but in terms of where we're heading there's a long way to go and a challenge of how many people can you effect 'cos not everyone wants to be.*

The above example provided by Adam suggests the lack of current buy-in by other grassroots coaches and also suggests how an over-emphasis on 'winning' still remains a problem at this level. Whilst these limitations are suggested by the majority of participants, coaches such as Harry, Nicholas and Adam state that once enough 'buy-in' to the initiative has occurred, then we will begin to see an overall

impact. As suggested earlier, coaches also expressed how the EDNA was not initially targeted for the grassroots level. Jacob (101) states:

*I think it wasn't originally tailored to our age group is my main gripe of it. I felt like when it was introduced to us the England DNA was very much for the elite player and maybe down to the lowest development phase, so from 12 and above. I felt like they then tried to fit it for the foundation phase and sometimes it struggles to do that...It was an after-thought perhaps...Having us incorporate the DNA into every session we do is a little bit unrealistic.*

Conversely, Nicholas (122) suggests the EDNA was “initially targeted at the national level” and poses the question of: “what about the thousands of children that will not go onto play for England?” This particular view that the DNA was formatted to the elite level remains consistent with many of the coaches, specifically Natalie (86) who proposes:

*It's not appropriate to grassroots players so that does create a mixed message. Things do get lost in translation from the elite squads through to grassroots so that's definitely a concern for me. Yes there is a format and technical elements we should look at with grassroots players but I do feel that it was initially targeted for the national teams and only recently been introduced to grassroots players. Working with beginners especially, it is a challenge to incorporate the technical elements that the DNA suggests.*

Moreover, Jacob, Nicholas and Natalie develop the concept that the DNA was initially targeted for the national squads and has therefore implicated the role of the FA Skills coaches operating at the foundation phase. Whilst the examples above have created this notion, both Christian and Katie provide a further challenge

towards the equal time in ‘planning, doing and reviewing’ for grassroots coaches. This can be identified with Christian’s (110) idea towards this aspect of the EDNA (Q: What do you think the challenges are of the EDNA?):

*Another one is the equal time in planning, delivering and reviewing your work. The vast majority of coaches are dads delivering at their kids’ football. So if you are delivering for an hour on a Saturday morning, then will they use the equal time to plan and reflect on these sessions? If they haven’t had the correct training then the majority will not be reflecting properly. So maybe it’s very good for majority of coaches but I think at the bottom levels it will be going above people’s heads.*

#### **4.6 Future Enhancement**

This domain describes the range of suggestions put forward by the FA Skills coaches in order to enhance the EDNA. The main proposals included three predominant themes; more CPD events, more observations and a grassroots revision of the DNA framework. All coaches commented on the need to enhance CPD in order to affect the success of the DNA. This can be identified with Tim (95) stating (Q: what support do you need as coaches in order to implement the DNA into schools?):

*I’d say yes more CPD. So where we initially had the South West regional where we can come back and collate some findings as a whole group will be difficult. Going into schools is also difficult as teachers are not confident or interested because that’s not their expertise or forte. Giving them more*

*knowledge of how to plan PE sessions and in terms of more support it could be a case of team leaders coming to watch us.*

Whilst Patrick (134) also suggests “to give coaches enough CPD and support”, Tim’s view establishes a critical link between the FA Skills coaches and the primary school teachers they come into contact with. By ultimately enhancing the delivery of the FA Skills coaches, Tim proposes that the knowledge and delivery of the primary school teachers will also be positively affected by the EDNA framework. In addition, Katie’s (121) view on enhancing the initiative supports the use of CPD, however also recommends the use of online platforms to influence the practice of grassroots coaches (Q: so what support do you think coaches need to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the England DNA?)

*I would obviously say the CPD, but potentially more online stuff that isn’t as time-consuming for parents or grassroots coaches, or even us if we can get online and watch something instead of travelling and paying for it. Perhaps having a few more kind of visual ideas of how to put the DNA into your sessions as such.*

This is a reoccurring theme amongst many of the interviewees, whom suggest the importance of implementing more observations to improve knowledge of the initiative. Furthermore, Harry (120) creates a similar view by explaining how “more CPD events and putting more material out there” will enable coaches to visualise and apply the DNA to grassroots settings. When asked a similar question to Katie, Patrick (140) responded (Q: Okay so like you say the CPD and support coaches need, what would you say specifically as skills coaches the support you need to enhance their knowledge and your knowledge of the DNA?):

*I think more exposure to it umm, from a national level in terms of what Pete as national 5-11's what he would look for in that foundation phase, I think some of us would need to see it brought to life. Not just a piece of paper or PowerPoint slide but how you actually see him deliver with the kids, what sort of things he would do umm....so if you've got kids that are striving ahead how he would challenge them further.*

These particular views were consistent among the coaches, who explained how observing more experienced coaches would ultimately impact the delivery of amateur coaches. Additionally, Jacob's (125) similar stance can also be identified with his quote: "for a lot of us it's about being able to view a session that has the DNA running through it". Patrick's acknowledgement of the DNA being "brought to life" agrees with the ideas put forward by Harry, Katie and Jacob in creating a more practical education for grassroots coaches. Besides the advancement of CPD and visual tools, coaches also recognised that the revision of the EDNA into a grassroots format could eventually affect the success of the initiative at more representative levels. This idea can be seen in Nicholas' (132) discussion (Q: Okay, and what do coaches need in terms of support to be able to understand the DNA better?):

*Accessibility to the DNA. I know it's going to be part of the education process and that's a major positive I think. Coaches coming into the new Level 1's and 2's will be able to see the DNA from the offset of their coaching careers. It will most likely guide their practices at these initial stages so that's the best support they can get I think in making the philosophy more understandable. But yeah making the DNA more understandable and relatable at the grassroots level can only have a positive impact on the thousands of coaches working at this level.*

Whilst Nicholas explains the positive impact the new FA Level One and FA Level Two qualifications could have on the grassroots levels, he also acknowledged that the EDNA needs to become more “understandable” and “relatable” at this standard. Jacob (134) describes: “I don’t know if it necessarily needed to be branded as the DNA” when associating the framework to the amateur levels and this can also be identified with Natalie’s (96) position on the initiative (Q: and how do you think the DNA can be enhanced at the foundational levels of participation, so looking at more where you think the DNA can be bettered to the grassroots level?):

*I think there needs to be less focus on the 70% ball rolling time. This has to be age appropriate as this stat is aimed at the England team and not grassroots level. Like I said with beginners we can’t always aim at the 70% ‘cos we really go into every session not knowing what to expect from certain individuals. Umm it has to be appropriate to the players and the environment you are working in otherwise it will not work. Umm and to sum up I’d say to enhance it a grassroots version that is more appropriate for the players, one that grassroots coaches can relate to their sessions because it is difficult to see how the current version is aimed at beginners.*

Although other coaches such as Jacob and Nicholas describe the need for the DNA to become more understandable for grassroots coaches, Natalie goes as far to suggest a “grassroots version” of the initiative. Moreover, all coaches state that they believe the framework will eventually be successful at all levels of participation providing modifications occur. For example, Harry believes that successes on an elite level will ultimately create further successes at the grassroots level. This view can be identified by both Nicholas and Adam stating that the EDNA must “evolve” with the contemporary game. In addition, Adam (118) explains:



*In my opinion it needs to be an evolving thing. We can't sit here and necessarily say this is the England DNA. Of course we know this is the plan for the next 3, 4 years but the game evolves, the game changes. I think you look it's been 3, 4 years it was the Spanish way or it's the German way. I think England are trying to develop the English way.*

#### **4.7 Summary of Research Findings**

In summary, the findings have been separated by 6 domains (Being an FA Skills Coach; Developmental Philosophy; Embedding DNA within Sessions; Impact of EDNA; Benefits and Challenges of DNA; Future Enhancement), which have covered a variety of themes (as seen in Table 2). The findings have been able to identify the main aspects of the FA Skills role, whilst also depicting the variety of experiences of the EDNA initiative put forward by the participants to the study. The main findings display how coaches support and challenge the impact of the initiative at the grassroots level; however, what remains consistent is each coach's target to help the framework become a success at the foundation phase.

## **Chapter Five**

### Discussion

## **Chapter 5 – Discussion**

The rationale behind this study was defined by two main aims. The first was to explore FA Skills coaches' subjective experiences of the EDNA initiative and secondly, to investigate the participants' suggestions on how the framework's future dissemination can be applied to the foundation phase of participation. Although all the coaches recognised the need for the initiative to evolve over time, generally, the participants of the study accepted the EDNA as a positive influence. This finding displayed how the main aspects of the framework have provided a better structure for young players to develop. The more experienced members of the study however, proposed a more reflective account into the impact of the EDNA on their approach to coaching young grassroots football players. Nonetheless, the subjective outlook present in the study demonstrated how each coach regarded their development and application of the initiative in unique ways. Whilst the current study puts forward an exclusive account of the recently introduced EDNA, previous studies have also acknowledged the complexity of the coaching process (Chesterfield et al., 2010; Partington & Cushion, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to describe and analyse the significance of the findings in relation to previous studies.

To begin with, one of the most consistent findings across all of the interviews was the FA Skills coaches' view on the development of young players. Although the EDNA clarifies the objective to create a 'winning England' team by 2022 (Bradbury, 2014), it was interesting to see that all of the coaches maintained a focus to the foundation phase and player development would always take precedence over winning. It was clear to see that all interviewees shared the same outlook of what types of players they should aim to develop, a similar finding in Armour et al's

(2016) comparison between CPD provisions. Armour et al (2016) report that all the interview respondents aimed to create players who were “innovative, creative, technically skilful, thinkers” (p. 34). Typically, many studies have highlighted the notion that success in sport is attributed to winning (Cumming, Smoll, Smith, & Grossbard, 2007; Kepčija & Johnson, 2009), however Kepčija (2016) suggests that when this view is applied to amateur and youth settings, it can be “detrimental and hide future failure behind current success” (p. 48). When asked questions such as “What would you say your coaching philosophy is for the 5-11 age group?” and “Could you outline your coaching philosophy for me, a background to what guides your coaching and the principles involved within it?”, the findings challenged those of the predetermined notion that success in sport should be solely recognised as ‘winning’ (Cumming et al., 2007). Instead, the findings that emerged from the interviews can be linked to the notion put forward by Dempsey (2014), that the youth environment should be driven by the promotion of participation, player enjoyment and life-skills. Commenting on her particular philosophy to coaching Natalie (27) explained “really it’s about development. My philosophy will be wholly based around the player’s development to create an environment in which they can try their best, make mistakes and learn from them”. The methods used by both Natalie and Katie are supported by Jones et al’s (2013) view of an ‘athlete-centred’ approach, which aims to focus on the long-term development of players. Although certain coaches acknowledged the need for youth players to improve in England, their personal coaching philosophies were guided by the progression of their participants.

Furthermore, all coaches expressed an approach that was driven and sustained by the continued participation of their players. The main themes that emerged from the findings displayed a necessity to create a positive and comfortable

environment, one in which players are motivated to play for the enjoyment of the game. This was summarised by Patrick (32) who explains the “overarching philosophy which links to the programme is every child matters, it’s a real child centred approach with everything that we do”. Whilst Romar, Sarén and Hastie (2016) suggest that “the traditional role of the sports coach has been to enhance athletes’ physical, technical and strategic skills” (p. 380) in preparation for competition, the current study proposes the idea that a more ‘player-centred’ approach is more effective when working with younger age groups. By challenging the common notion, the FA skills coaches identify how utilising ‘player-centred’ methods are able to improve the individual capabilities and decision making of the participants involved in their coaching sessions. This can be seen with Tim (75) stating “we can see that the children are benefiting over weeks 1 to 6, you can see decision making getting better and their confidence with each other also”.

In addition, it was clear to see within the findings that the participants associated a ‘problem-based’ format with the EDNA initiative when asked questions such as “So what would you say your main experiences as a coach have been in terms of implementing the DNA into your coaching?” Jacob (79) displays a similar view to those of Patrick and Tim in this respect, outlining how he “wants players to kind of work out and problem solve for themselves”. This view created by the participants can be supported with Kidman’s (2005) notion that athlete ownership is comprised of empowering athletes to make decisions and providing the opportunity to “make choices, develop higher levels of motivation, and learn how to develop solutions” (Romar et al., p. 380). Whilst the interviewees outlined their individual philosophies to progress participants through the developmental phases, the aspects of ‘player-centred’ and ‘athlete-centred’ coaching were consistently associated to the

initiative, supporting Bartlett's (2015) vision that EDNA content should "inspire, empower and support coaches to become excellent developers of creative players, teams and the game" (p. 60).

The creation of game-like situations was evident within the research findings and used by all of the coaches present in the study. As explained by Slade, Button and Cochrane (2015), modern trends have shown a shift towards Game Centred Learning (GCL) approaches (Light, 2013), which can be inevitably associated to the Teaching Games for Understanding (TGFU) model. Describing how his coaching philosophy has developed Christian (43) says "I just think I've gone more to the realism side of things...but when you think about it you think well actually how is this relevant to a game and how does it fit in and make sure everything is more realistic". In addition, Adam (45) creates a similar concept by commenting "but maybe now bringing the sessions back to very basic templates, very game realistic and trying to make everything look like a game". These two specific examples highlight a very similar stance to that of Slade et al (2015) in adopting both GCL and TGFU formats for their coaching sessions, however these findings also display how FA coaches adhere to the EDNA coaching fundamentals (Appendix 5), such as *to deliver realistic game-related practices and use games whenever possible in training*. Although certain studies associate the use of GCL and TGFU to the development of game sense and intelligence (Slade, 2010), the scope to which the coaches utilise these models varied across the findings. Whilst participants such as Christian explained how this model creates more structure for his sessions, Harry (40) stated how a games approach can "show decision making" and allow players to play with more freedom.

However, a consistent finding across the discussions was the aspect of creating an environment based around fun and enjoyment for youth participants involved with the FA Skills programme. Similarly, studies such as those put forward by Pope (2006) and Slade et al (2015) also challenge the traditional concept that games were only used at the end of practice. Instead, the FA Skills coaches present in this investigation display an emphasis towards embedding games within sessions and move away from the common notion that technique can only be developed through individual drills (Slade et al., 2015). Therefore, the current study displays how the FA Skills coaches experiences have been guided by certain elements within the EDNA framework, all in an attempt to produce players who are more 'comfortable' on the ball and are motivated to play football for the love of the game.

While the coaches' experiences of the EDNA initiative were mainly positive, some coaches present in the study also detailed how the programme has provided certain challenges and limitations towards practice. One of the main challenges to emerge from the data analysis was the view that the EDNA wasn't initially targeted for a grassroots audience. Elliot and Drummond's (2015) examination of policy in sport is detailed through a 'top-down' structure, which aims to ultimately expose more people to the initiative at a grassroots level. More specifically, Cleland and colleagues' (2015) examination of the 'Respect Campaign' describes The FA's idea of also adopting the 'top-down' structure, aimed at exposing the policy to a larger audience. However, as noted previously, a frequent finding across the interviews created the notion that the EDNA is not particularly relevant to the grassroots level of participation. For example, two of the experienced coaches were more straightforward with their answers towards how the initiative has been less effective at the foundation phase. This can be identified with Natalie (86) saying that "it's not

appropriate to grassroots players so that does create a mixed message. Things do get lost in translation from the elite England squads through to grassroots so that's definitely a concern for me" and Jacob stating how he feels the grassroots audience was perhaps an "after thought" of the programme. By challenging the strategy put forward by Ashworth (2014) to "radiate out the DNA in various different forms so the content is specific and focused for different groups" (p. 15), the FA Skills coaches in the current study express how the initiative has a range of limitations when adopting the framework for certain youth participants. Although none of the participants state that the grassroots level should solely be the main priority of the programme, they all express an opinion that this particular participation level has been somewhat neglected in the design of the framework.

Additionally, another issue that emerged from the data analysis was the influence of culture and the lack of 'buy in' currently associated with the EDNA initiative. This precise theme is evident within many studies related to the impact of policy in sport, particularly the investigations put forward by Cleland et al (2015), Elliott and Drummond (2014), Fenoglio and Taylor (2014) and Potrac (2014) that are linked to the grassroots level of practice. However, recent investigations (e.g. Potrac & Jones, 2009; Purdy & Jones, 2011) have also depicted the significance that coaches attribute to gaining the 'buy in' from key stakeholders (Potrac, 2016). Firstly, Elliott and Drummond's (2014) investigation on codes of conduct stated how "a campaign's effectiveness is mediated by wider social and cultural antecedents" (Cleland et al., p. 554). Coaches in the current study pointed towards a lack of 'buy-in' to the initiative at the grassroots level, with many stating that the historical culture of English football has had a direct influence on coaches' perceptions and attitudes towards the EDNA. Equally, Fenoglio and Taylor's (2014) study on the



‘Give Us Back Our Game’ (GUBOG) campaign specified how the programme was “rigid and relies upon the adult deliverers and onlookers to use common sense as they emphasise children’s enjoyment, fun and engagement” (p. 192). For example, when the researcher asked questions such as “What do you think the current challenges are of the EDNA?” and “How do you think the DNA can be enhanced at the grassroots level?”, responses such as those by Adam (124) categorised that “a further challenge is getting people’s buy-in because I think some people are set in their ways...and I don’t think you will fully eradicate that”. This view created by many of the interviewees is consistent with the opinion proposed by Cleland and colleagues (2015) in their study:

Whilst the capacity for the FA to act on poor behaviour to match officials would appear to be significant in terms of knowledge, expertise and resources available to the governing body, the sheer number of participants, coaches and officials participating in the grassroots game presents challenges for the FA to implement change or tackle deeply embedded cultural norms (p. 554).

Although Cleland et al’s (2015) study is focused upon impacting behaviour towards match officials working at a grassroots standard, a similar view is adopted by FA Skills coaches in the current study. The main notion that the “sheer number of participants, coaches and officials” (Cleland et al., 2015, p. 554) operating at this participation level will be problematic is supported with Christian’s (115) quote that “at the bottom levels it will be going above people’s heads”. In addition, Potrac’s (2014) examination of the Grassroots Club Mentor Programme established a similar interpretation in that the experiences of the coaches were predominantly positive; however, the initiative also came with certain cultural issues. Quotes such as those put forward by Christian detail the problems FA Skills coaches face when delivering

CPD events to amateur coaches and clubs on the aspects of the DNA. In comparison, this notion formulated for the present study is also identified by Potrac (2014) who states that “some of the mentors experienced a variety of tensions and challenges both directly in their dealings with club officials, mentee coaches, county FA officials, as well as indirectly from some of the parents’ reactions to the coaching practices of the mentees” (p. 2). As all coaches included in the study explained how they were experiencing certain limitations of implementing the DNA to grassroots clubs, it emphasises the need for The FA to eradicate the short-term win at all costs culture that currently exists in youth football (Bullough & Mills, 2014; Fenoglio & Taylor, 2014).

Furthermore, along with many investigations focusing upon the personal experiences of football coaches, the aspect of CPD emerged as a predominant theme from the interviews. While the coaches all mentioned that CPD should be embedded within the initiative in some kind of form, three particular areas were categorised by the participants (exposure; observations; grassroots revision of the EDNA). For instance, Christian’s response to the researcher’s question of “what support do you think coaches need in order to get the DNA out there?” is comparable with Nash’s (2003) argument that CPD veers towards a focus upon the ‘what’ of coaching rather than the ‘how’ (Armour et al., 2016). Christian’s (129) idea that “what they need is exposure to it...seeing the DNA on a website isn’t going to help people, they need to have support over a number of weeks” is evident in other coaches’ interviews, who feel that the framework will achieve greater success when amateur coaches understand how to implement the DNA into coaching sessions.

Secondly, alongside the participants’ common view to expose amateur coaches to more elements of the EDNA, was the concept of observing experienced

coaches to inform and improve practice. Katie's (121) suggestion that the EDNA could provide "more online stuff that isn't as time consuming for parents or grassroots coaches...perhaps having a few more kind of visual ideas of how to put the DNA into your sessions as such" introduces the concept of accessibility and agrees with Nash's (2003) idea. Alternatively, contemporary studies have also presented the idea that coach education should involve coaches observing mentors and more experienced practitioners to expand their knowledge and understanding of the working environment (Stephenson & Jowett, 2009). This is evident within the experiences of the FA Skills coaches as Patrick (56) explained: "if you look at someone like Pete Sturges...he's the top of where we are in terms of 5-11 so we try steal things from him that make us better. He's been a big influence in the way I have changed, he's got a real understanding of the kids which has made a big influence in the way I deliver". While this quote links to Nash's (2003) concept for covering the 'how' of coaching, Patrick's particular experiences of the EDNA have been predominantly influenced by watching more experienced coaches. Ultimately, the current study displays how Stephenson and Jowett's (2009) perception of observations has had an impact on the development of FA Skills coaches working within the EDNA framework.

Finally, while research examining the impact of CPD is relatively small, it is a common notion that traditional approaches to coach education "lack relevance and context-specific knowledge" (Armour et al., 2016, p. 31). With regards to the 'Plan, Do, Review' strategy outlined in the EDNA framework, coaches reported that it was a significant challenge for amateur coaches to spend an equal time planning, doing and reviewing coaching sessions. Similarly, previous studies have also drawn upon the limitations to implementing reflective practice, as it is time consuming and

frequently used in the incorrect manner (Knowles, Tyler, Gilbourne & Eubank, 2006). This particular view was summarised by Nicholas (132) who stated that the EDNA should be made “a little more understandable and relatable at the grassroots level”. Although aspects such as reflective practice can result in more self-aware coaches (Giges, Petipas & Vernacchia, 2004), the participants of the current study in question suggested how grassroots coaches would be unable to understand the framework completely as it currently lacks relevance to their level of practice. Therefore, while reflective practice should remain an important aspect of coach education (Knowles, Borrie & Telfer, 2005), this study agrees with the theory that when CPD doesn’t meet coaches’ individual needs, “they simply ignore the new CPD material” (Armour et al., 2016, p.31).

### **5.1 Practical Implications**

As explained, while the coaches present in the study reported that their experiences of the EDNA initiative were predominantly positive, the participants explained a number of challenges and limitations. Therefore, this precise project has implications at a number of participation levels. Firstly, it is a common notion that there is a lack of literature concerned with the social complexity of coaching practice (Nelson et al., 2013), thus the findings from the current study must be discussed and applied when related to this particular conception. Also, the findings of this study could potentially have important implications for the EDNA initiative and how it is applied within FA coach education courses and CPD material.

To begin with, research to date has neglected the role of coaches in comparison to other professions, and has therefore provided a lack of support and guidance for their education (Gilbert & Trudel, 2006; Stephenson & Jowett, 2009).

Gilbert and Trudel's (2006) statement that the lack of support for novice coaches links to the overall objectives and methodology utilised in the present study. It was recognised that an interpretive stance was an effective method to gain rich insights into the experiences of the key stakeholders (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). This can also be seen in Potrac's (2016) investigation of the Grassroots Club Mentor Programme, which outlines how provision for amateur coaches can be improved with the sharing of "mentors' and coach educators' stories as narrative resources" (Potrac, 2016, p. 83; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). A predominant finding of note was the large scope of the FA Skills role, which covered delivery of the PTA, a range of grassroots coaching programmes and local CPD events for amateur coaches. Thus, this investigation displays how the importance of the FA Skills coaches experiences of the EDNA may influence and subsequently improve the practice of other coaches operating at the grassroots level. Ultimately, The FA could consider one of the predominant implications of this research to be how the initiative is aired out to the amateur levels.

As discussed earlier, the findings reported how coaches believed that the EDNA was not initially targeted for a grassroots audience. Consequently, coaches believed that CPD was not applicable to this standard and instead was focused towards a more elite audience. Nevertheless, as mentioned by Erickson, Côté and Fraser-Thomas (2007), coach education would be more effective if it was adapted to meet the specific requirements for coaches and the results from this study highlighted the importance of informal learning experiences, such as observations. Indeed, coaches expressed a wish to hear other practitioners' experiences in order to further develop their learning of the EDNA vision.

Although none of the coaches present in the study criticised the vision of the EDNA, these suggestions on the revision of the framework could eventually target coaches based on their developmental stage. Consequently, the view that coach education programmes are a crucial element of a coach's knowledge base and advancement (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2002), links to the key implication of how The FA can implement the EDNA's core elements into coach education programmes at both county and national level. Given these initial findings, national governing bodies (NGBs), such as The FA, may also wish to consider how individuals' thoughts, feelings and actions can influence positive change, so that these factors could be optimised in future coach education programmes.

## **5.2 Summary**

In closing, the study in question provides a foundation for future research to investigate the impact of initiatives such as the EDNA. Due to the specificity of the current study, exclusive concepts and explanations have been formulated in relation to the findings. However, as explained within the discussion, the findings have both supported and contradicted previous research in the same field of interest. For example, the practical implications outlined display the need for CPD to become more accessible and relatable to a grassroots audience. This particular finding supports the notion that although research examining CPD for football coaches is notably scarce (Armour et al., 2016; Stephenson & Jowett, 2009), a common explanation is that the existing formats of coach education fail to meet the specific needs of many coaches. While it was recognised that the main elements of the EDNA were being embedded into the coaches' practice, limitations do remain in the effect it can have at youth, amateur levels of participation.

## **Chapter Six**

### Conclusion

## **Chapter 6 – Conclusion**

In conclusion, in order to achieve the main aims of the project, the thesis was directed by two main aims. Firstly, to explore FA Skills coaches' experiences of the EDNA initiative associated with its recent introduction and secondly, to investigate how FA Skills coach recommendations can allow the initiative to be further developed at the foundation phase. The overall outcomes of the current study support and further the conceptions put forward in previous studies (Cleland et al., 2015; Cushion, Ford & Williams, 2012; Cushion & Jones, 2006; Knowles, Borrie & Telfer, 2005; Nelson et al., 2013; O'Gorman, 2010; Potrac, 2014; Stephenson & Jowett, 2009) on coach experiences to policy implementation. Therefore, the evidence generated from this investigation should inform The FA with examples of how coaches are applying the EDNA philosophy to the foundation phase. Consequently, the ideas and suggestions gathered from the interviews can advise The FA on how to enhance the EDNA framework within coach education programmes for the future.

The advantages of the study are formed through the foundational values of the investigation; mainly in creating a unique study that could target a large cohort of coaches working at a grassroots youth level in England. In order to meet the two predominant purposes, an interpretive methodology was chosen for the investigation in which knowledge was created through the interchange between the researcher and the participants (Thorne, 2008). In addition, the specified nature of the study diagnosed significant factors to the future development and enhancement of the EDNA initiative for coaches; an area that is currently absent from contemporary research (Cushion et al., 2012). By adopting an interpretive stance, interviews were able to generate rich insights into coaches' first-hand experiences of the EDNA



framework. Thus, participants were able to propose exclusive concepts of how the initiative was being applied to practice since its introduction in 2014, whilst also supporting and challenging predetermined notions.

Due to the exclusive nature of the initiative, no prior research has considered the EDNA philosophy. Thus, the predominant purpose of the current study was to provide an insight into FA Skills coach experiences and understanding of the framework in question. The main findings that emerged detailed how coaches regarded the initiative as a positive impact on coaching, as it provided a vision and framework for coaches to use as a guideline. All coaches expressed the significance of the EDNA Coaching Fundamentals in developing a more ‘player-centred’ approach in their day to day delivery of the FA Skills Programme. Working in line with The FA’s EDNA philosophy, coaches were able to report that this particular approach has been able to improve the individual capabilities and decision making of younger participants. As stated by Slade et al (2015), modern trends have displayed a shift towards GCL approaches and this was evident in the research findings as all participants supported the creation of game-like situations in their practice.

The second objective of the study was to identify and analyse the importance of FA Skills coaches in the dissemination of the EDNA. Subsequently, this study concluded that participants acknowledged the importance of implementing the ‘Plan, Do, Review’ strategy to CPD programmes as well as their own practice. Also, as findings were collected and analysed, it became apparent that the Skills coaches were implementing The FA’s philosophy of ‘Love the Ball, Love the Game’ within their delivery.

The third objective of the thesis was to present key findings that would inform an Executive Summary as seen in Appendix 6. Consequently, the final objective of the study was to communicate the challenges and future recommendations of FA Skills coaches. The core findings that emerged from the interviews in regard to these two final objectives categorised the advancement and accessibility of CPD, in order to make the EDNA more relatable to a grassroots audience. These included observations, online resources (through EnglandDNA.com) and generally more accessible events for amateur coaches to attend and ‘buy-in’ to the philosophy. Additionally, although the participants acknowledged the importance of the ‘Plan, Do, Review’ strategy, they also discussed its limitations for grassroots youth coaches who cannot spend equal time between the three elements.

Ultimately, the precise utilisation of the EDNA initiative looked to support the rationale presented by previous research (Cleland et al., 2015; Potrac, 2014; Stephenson & Jowett, 2009) in helping inform governing bodies, such as The FA, of problems English grassroots coaches are presented with in the contemporary game. A predominant finding of this research detailed how coaches wanted more ‘relevant’ resources and expressed a wish to hear from FA coaches who utilise the EDNA daily. Whilst Allison (2016) states that the EDNA will be ever evolving, one of the key implications of this research for The FA is to consider the extent to which the EDNA is applied to grassroots football on coach education programmes.

### **6.1 Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

While the study has proposed some key findings to the experiences of coaches involved, it is also critical to engage with the limitations of the current study. The strengths of the study can also be viewed as limitations due to the specification

of the EDNA initiative. This particular initiative may only be accustomed to the criteria of English football instead of a general context applied to a variety of sports (e.g. rugby, cricket, tennis etc.). Due to the limited resources of the current study and chosen methodology, the ‘whole’ population who had experienced the phenomenon were not accessible (Thorne et al., 2004) and therefore a specific subset (selection of FA Skills coaches) of grassroots coaches were selected. Furthermore, Quested, Appleton and Duda (2016) suggest that these methods could be strengthened with objective observations of coaches, in order to clarify if the EDNA has had an impact on approaches to coaching.

Although the specified characteristics of the study detail a focus towards the EDNA programme, The FA must continue to invest in football-specific research to add value to its coach education and development programme. Through the implementation of the initiatives to coach education programmes (Stephenson & Jowett, 2009), the concepts of the EDNA will further knowledge of both novice and more experienced coaches in this country. However, future studies with greater resources must begin to examine the application of coaches working at a variety of levels, contrary to the current study, which uses the samples of coaches solely working at the foundation phase. While the EDNA was introduced in December 2014, the time frame for coaches to report their experiences was comparatively small. Thus, it would be useful to undertake a similar study in the future in order to discover whether the EDNA has had a greater impact on coaches at the grassroots standard.

## 6.2 Personal Reflections

As explained in the Introduction (Chapter One), the research topic was an area that I was drawn to because of personal interest. Although examining The FA's 'Future Game' initiative at undergraduate level provided me with some good insight into FA Licensed Coaches views, this project allowed me to gain greater knowledge of how the EDNA has impacted coaches working directly for The English FA. As FA Skills coaches are a distinct group working full-time within schools and Charter Standard clubs, it was fascinating to discuss all things football and the outreach of their work with young players and grassroots coaches.

Whilst my undergraduate studies provided an experience of the research process, it was clear to see from the offset that the scale of this project would be far superior to anything that I had previously experienced. Upon reflection, my initial feeling at the beginning of the process was that the participants would be cautious with their responses; categorising only the benefits of the programme due to being employed full-time with the organisation. However, as the interviews progressed (both pilot and semi-structured) and I became more self-assured and poised with my questioning, the participants were able to provide more direct answers and feelings towards the impact of the EDNA. It was then clear to see that the coaches involved in the study shared a similar passion of mine towards the education of both coaches and young players beginning their careers in football.

Overall, this particular experience has not only upskilled me as a researcher, it has taught me to approach situations with an open mind. The design of this research project focussed on giving all participants the opportunity to express their feelings on an exclusive and contemporary topic area. Subsequently, the coaches

captivated my attention with some enthralling discussions; each participant in their own individual way and some more open than others. However, what did remain consistent were the Skills coaches' views to invest all their efforts in developing young people who play for the love of the game.

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## **Appendices**

## **Appendix 1 – Introductory Email to Participants**

Dear *Participant*,

I hope you are well.

I have spoken with (name) who has kindly passed on your email addresses after agreeing to partake in the proposed study. I am a Master's by Research student with the University of Gloucestershire and my study will be looking at the experiences of FA Skills Coaches since the 'England DNA' initiative has been introduced.

I have attached a participant's information sheet, which outlines your individual role during the study. It's important you understand that there are no wrong answers and I am fascinated to hear your unique experiences as an FA Skills Coach!

I will be in touch over the next few days in order to organise a suitable date and time for the individual interviews.

If you have any questions regarding the research then please feel free to send me an email and I will get back to you as quick as I can.

I look forward to meeting you.

Kind regards,

George Neocleous

## **Appendix 2 – Participants Information Sheet**

### **Principal Investigator**

George Neocleous

Faculty of Applied Sciences, University of Gloucestershire

Oxstalls Campus, Oxstalls Lane, Longlevens, Gloucester, GL2 9HW

georgeneocleous@connect.glos.ac.uk

Dear Participant,

You have been selected to participate in the proposed study; **‘an exploration into coach experiences of the England DNA – a new initiative outlined by the Football Association’**. The study will look to examine the affect of the ‘England DNA’ initiative on coaching experiences; therefore your contributions as an FA Skills Coach will be of great value to the research investigation.

Your contributions will comprise of two main responsibilities:

- 1) Participating in a 30-45 minute (max) one-to-one interview discussion with the principal investigator.
- 2) Completing the consent form provided by the researcher on the day of the interview.

The informed consent form developed for this particular study details the format and role undertaken for the interview process; mainly regarding the application of confidentiality. Whilst your contributions to the study will be of great importance and significance, it must be noted that the discussion will be informal and you are able to conclude the discussion at any given time.

I look forward to meeting with you for the proposed interview time.

Yours Sincerely,

George Neocleous

### Appendix 3 – Informed Consent Form

<b>Title of Study:</b>	<b>An exploration into coach experiences of the England DNA – a new initiative outlined by the Football Association</b>	
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	George Neocleous Faculty of Applied Sciences, University of Gloucestershire Oxstalls Campus, Oxstalls Lane, Longlevens, Gloucester, GL2 9HW georgeneocleous@connect.glos.ac.uk	
Do you understand that I have asked you to be a participant in this research study?	Yes	No
Do you clearly understand the guidelines for the interview before commencing?	Yes	No
Do you understand that all personal information and data collected will remain under strict confidentiality throughout the research process?	Yes	No
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any given time, without consequence and that your information will be withdrawn?	Yes	No
Do you understand that I will be using information provided to formulate an area of study?	Yes	No

**I can confirm that I agree to be a participant for the selected research project**

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4 – Interview Guide

Topics	Questions	Probes
<b>1. Demographic Information and Background</b>	What are your coaching experiences to date?	
	How did you become an FA skill coach?	
	Outline your present role	Age groups? Settings?
<b>2. Coaching Philosophy</b>	What is your coaching philosophy?	
	How would you say this has evolved?	Why?
<b>3. Coach Development</b>	What have been the main influences on your development?	
	What have been your most inspirational moments as a coach?	Have they altered your approach/style?
<b>4. England DNA</b>	When was your first exposure/introduction to the England DNA?	How? Where?
	What are your main experiences of the DNA?	
	How would you say the DNA has impacted your coaching?	
<b>5. Future Expansion</b>	What are the benefits and challenges of the DNA?	In your coaching context?
	How could the England DNA be enhanced at foundational levels?	Can it be effective at grassroots level?
	What support do coaches need?	E.g. CPD

**Appendix 5 – England DNA Coaching Fundamentals**

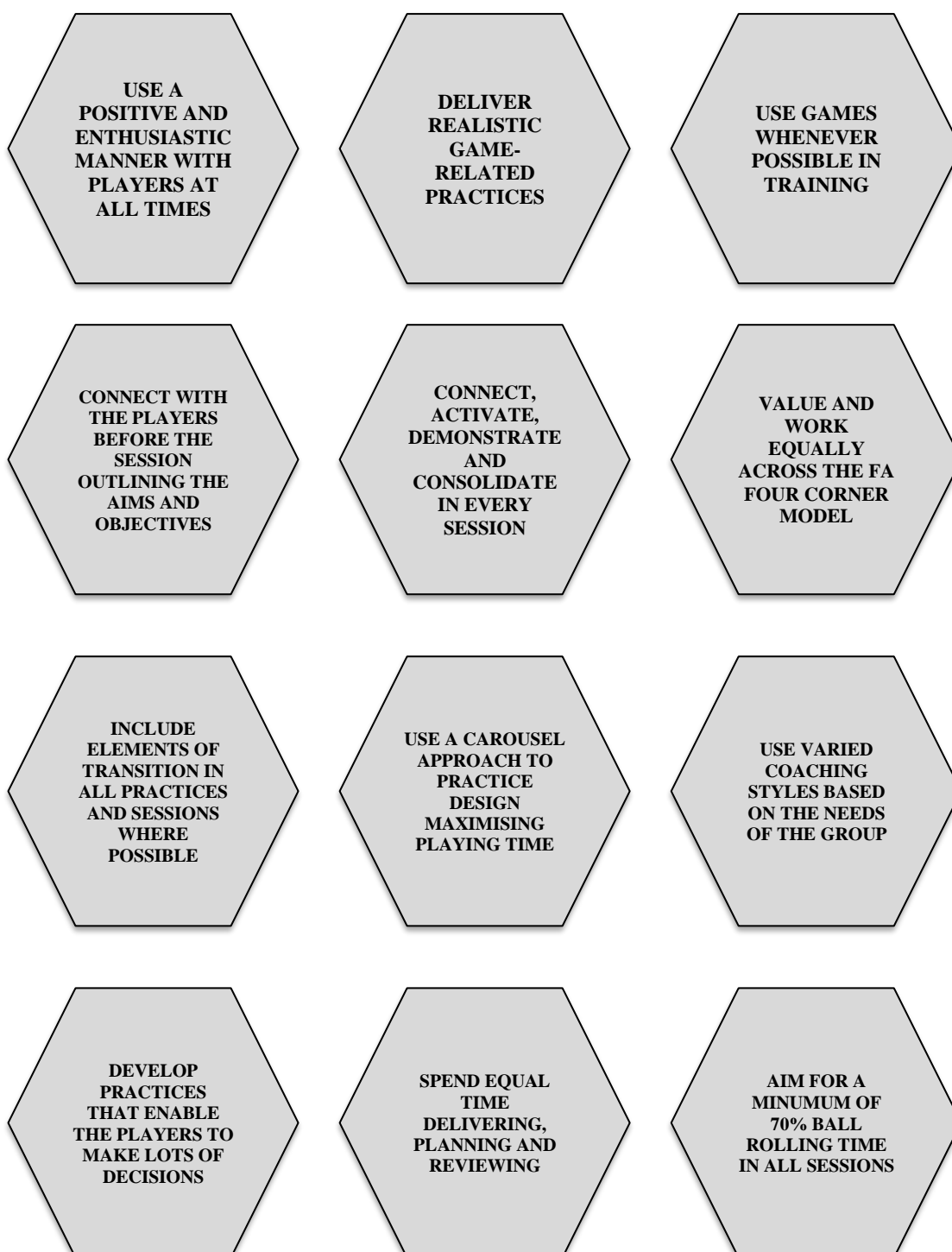


Figure 4: England DNA Coaching Fundamentals (Bartlett, 2015, p. 58)

## **Appendix 6 – Executive Summary**

### **Background Information**

The ‘England DNA’ was launched in December 2014 by the Football Association and served as a vision statement and strategy with the purpose to “define the England identity for the future” (Bradbury, 2014, p.1). It was designed as an explicit strategy to introduce particular ideas and concepts to personnel within the organisation, based upon five core elements: 1) ‘Who we are’; 2) ‘How we Play’; 3) ‘How we Coach’; 4) ‘The Future England Player’; 5) ‘How we Support’.

### **The Purpose of the Research Study**

The four main research objectives addressed by the project were:

- i) To provide an insight into FA Skills coach experiences and understanding of the EDNA initiative.
- ii) To identify and analyse the importance of FA Skills coaches in the dissemination of the EDNA.
- iii) To communicate the challenges and future recommendations of FA Skills coaches to FA Regional Managers and FA Skills Team Leaders.
- iv) And in relation to objective iii), to present key findings that will inform an Executive Summary.

### **Method of Gathering and Analysing Findings**

The foundations of the study were built around an interpretivist framework. This allowed for the researcher to gain a greater understanding into the first-hand experiences of the subject and participants in question. The study consisted of a series of one-to-one, semi-structured interviews lasting up to 45 minutes.

Data was collected from a total of nine participants (7 males, 2 females) between January 2016 and May 2016. These participants were based across four English county FA’s located in three separate geographic regions and were employed as full-time FA Skills coaches.

The qualitative data was then analysed using an inductive thematic analysis which allowed six key topics to emerge from the findings; 1) Being an FA Skills Coach; 2) Developmental Philosophy; 3) Embedding DNA within sessions; 4) Impact of EDNA; 5) Benefits and Challenges of DNA; 6) Future Enhancement.

### **Overview of Main Findings**

- A development over winning philosophy was employed by all coaches.
- Female coaches attributed past experiences as the main reason behind their present day coaching.
- The FA's philosophy of 'Love the Ball, Love the Game' was present within 6 of the coaches' interviews.
- Participants acknowledged the importance of the 'Plan, Do, Review' strategy, however discussed its limitations for grassroots coaches who cannot spend equal time between the three elements.
- All coaches expressed the significance of the EDNA coaching fundamentals to their practice.
- Findings displayed a mixed impact on participants' thoughts of the initiative.
- Two main challenges were evident in the findings. 1) Participants believed the EDNA would struggle to get buy-in from grassroots level and 2) participants believed that the framework wasn't initially targeted at the grassroots level.
- Participants suggested EnglandDNA.com could be used more actively to promote sessions and CPD.

### **Future Directions and Recommendations**

- Utilise EnglandDNA.com as an accessible online resource for coaches to observe sessions delivered by FA coaches. EnglandDNA.com can also be used as a resource



to share coach and coach educators' stories as narrative resources.

- The implementation of the EDNA to coach education programmes (e.g. FA Level One, FA Level Two, FA Level Three) will further knowledge of coaches at the grassroots level.
- The FA must continue to invest in football-specific research to add value to its coach education and development programme.
- Also suggested that qualitative methods could be strengthened with objective observations of coaches (Quested, Appleton & Duda, 2016).