THE DIGITAL FUTURE OF COACHING REPORT

#SHAPETHEFUTURE

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EXEC SUMMARY

We surveyed coaches with the explicit aim of understanding their use of, and interaction with, digital tools

1 57% of coaches surveyed said they already do, or would be happy to, use a digital tool in their coaching sessions

2 63% of coaches surveyed agreed that a coach specific, social media network, would be beneficial.

3 56% of coaches surveyed said they use digital technology to connect with other coaches.

4 76% of coaches surveyed would engage more in their own development if it was all done through one digital tool or platform.

5 20% of coaches surveyed are not using any form of digital tool in their coaching.

FINDINGS

There is positivity towards digital tools from within the workforce. **1**

How easy (or hard) digital tools are to use 'on and off the field/court/water' is critical for their long-term integration into daily practice for coaches. **2**

There is already a perceived digital inequality gap within the workforce. This gap is created by two key factors; the variation in digital literacy in coaches, and the ease of access coaches have to digital tools. **3**

Coaches prioritise the use of digital tools to connect with and share knowledge, ideas and their development with other coaches and mentors **4**

Coaches use digital tools more for their developmental needs than they are directly using them in their practice and delivery. **5**

Until coaches feel that digital tools are easy to use enough that they can be integral and not additional to everyday practice, there will always be a limit to how much the sector adapts a digital approach. **6**

There is a need to structure the digital landscape in a way that makes it easy to navigate and understand. There is also a need for a leadership body to provide guidance on where to find high quality tools and how to use them effectively. **7**

RECOMENDATIONS

1 Those developing digital products for coaches need to be considerate of the range of digital literacy of their users. Relevant training support and resources must be inclusive. This will be vital if we are to close the potential digital literacy gap already in the workforce and in ensuring it doesn't expand further.

2 Develop the digital infrastructure across clubs and active spaces. This will in turn allow coaches to use digital tools consistently, now and in the future.

3 Reflect on the findings of the digital survey to inform the development of the Coaching Plan 2.0, and any subsequent strategic actions.

4 Prioritise closing the apparent digital inequality gap, specifically around digital literacy levels and ease of access to digital tools.

5 Consider a blended approach to a digital future, where digital tools enhance the real-life connections and relationships across the sector.

6 Provide the workforce with a pathway through the plethora of digital resources. A centralised resource to support coaches as they navigate the range of choices available to them would be helpful.

7 The self-directed and non-linear nature of coach development - done via interaction with other coaches, and online resources – will require a radical reinvention of how we think about coaching qualifications and levels of coach development. It is apparent that an expanded conception of coach development is needed to effectively quality assure and promote informal and peer-to-peer learning.

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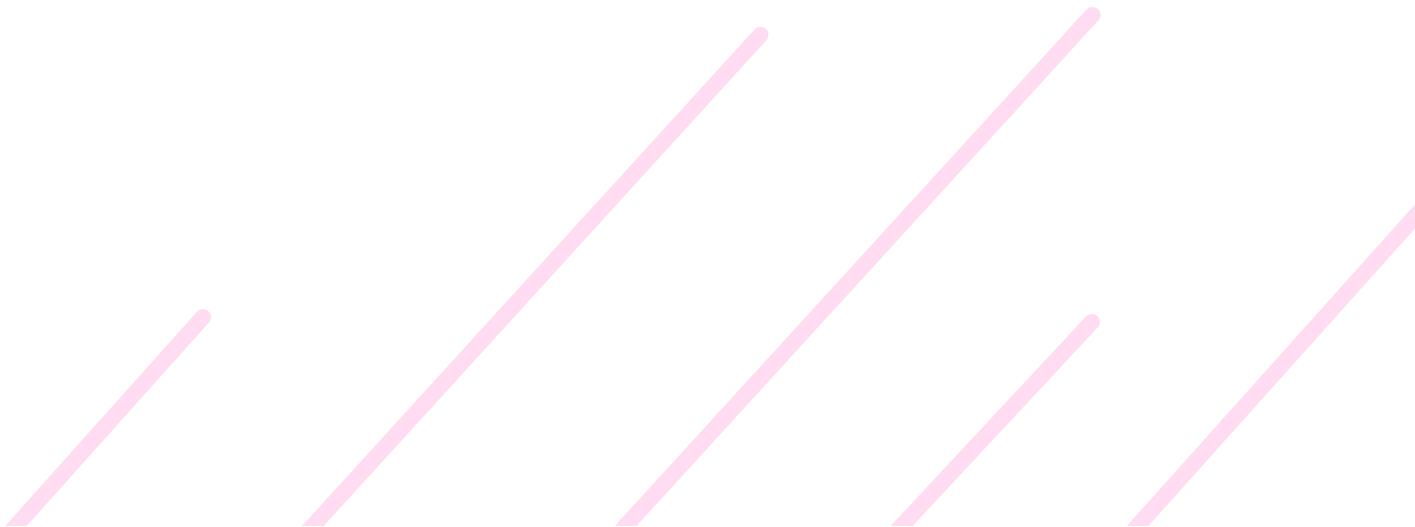
INTRODUCTION

Digital is here. So, this is not so much a report about a digital future, but instead a pulse check on how, where, why and when coaches employ digital tools to support all that they do in their myriad of roles. Exacerbated by the pandemic, this is the time to support coaches as they return to play.

The recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic brings a desire to rebuild and reinvent a more vibrant, relevant, and sustainable sector than ever before. At the heart of our sector is the coaching workforce – a valuable asset – whose people will make 'the rebuild' of the sport and physical activity sector possible. However, the Great Coaching Comeback Report (UK Coaching, 2021) has highlighted that a third of coaches report a 'lack of confidence' and a 'fear of a reduction in their skill sets' as major issues on their return to practice. Moreover, pre-pandemic research (UK Coaching, 2019) found a third of coaches did not have the resources they need to perform their roles effectively, and almost half had no mentor or person they could turn to for support in their coaching.

That same report also found that over half of coaches had no formal coaching qualification due to the various barriers (time, cost, accessibility) they face.

As a supplement to this previous work, our findings revealed that:

- **76% of coaches said they would engage more in their own development if it was through one single digital tool

- 57% of coaches said they would be happy to, or already do, use digital tools in coaching sessions

- 83% of coaches said it is vital that any digital tool is simple and easy to use 'out in the field' and works without the need for connection or data

It could be argued that a digital revolution in coaching is already happening in the way that we think about coach development, coaching practice, and workforce support. A consensus is forming within our community that digital tools can have a significant and positive impact on many of the issues coaches have identified. In a similar way to other sectors, digital tools are being used in sport coaching and physical activity provision to increase the confidence, competency, efficiency, effectiveness, connectedness, and innovation of practitioners. This shift started before Covid but has been accelerated by the pandemic. The success of app-based solutions to coaching problems such as Coach Logic, Hudl, Game Changer and SportsPlan, as well as apps like Strava, Anadea and Coachub show a real appetite for digital tools to complement and enhance the way coaches (and their athletes and participants) operate.

As digital tools become increasingly part of coaches' everyday lives, it is vital that we put the voice of the coach at the heart of how to build and integrate digital tools into our sector. To do this, we ran a consultation with coaches from across the landscape to hear what they actually want and need. This report details what we found. It highlights the voices, concerns and current experiences of using digital tools. It also outlines the desires of our coaching workforce, offering insight from the coaches themselves on the problems they face and their ideas for solutions in a new digital future.
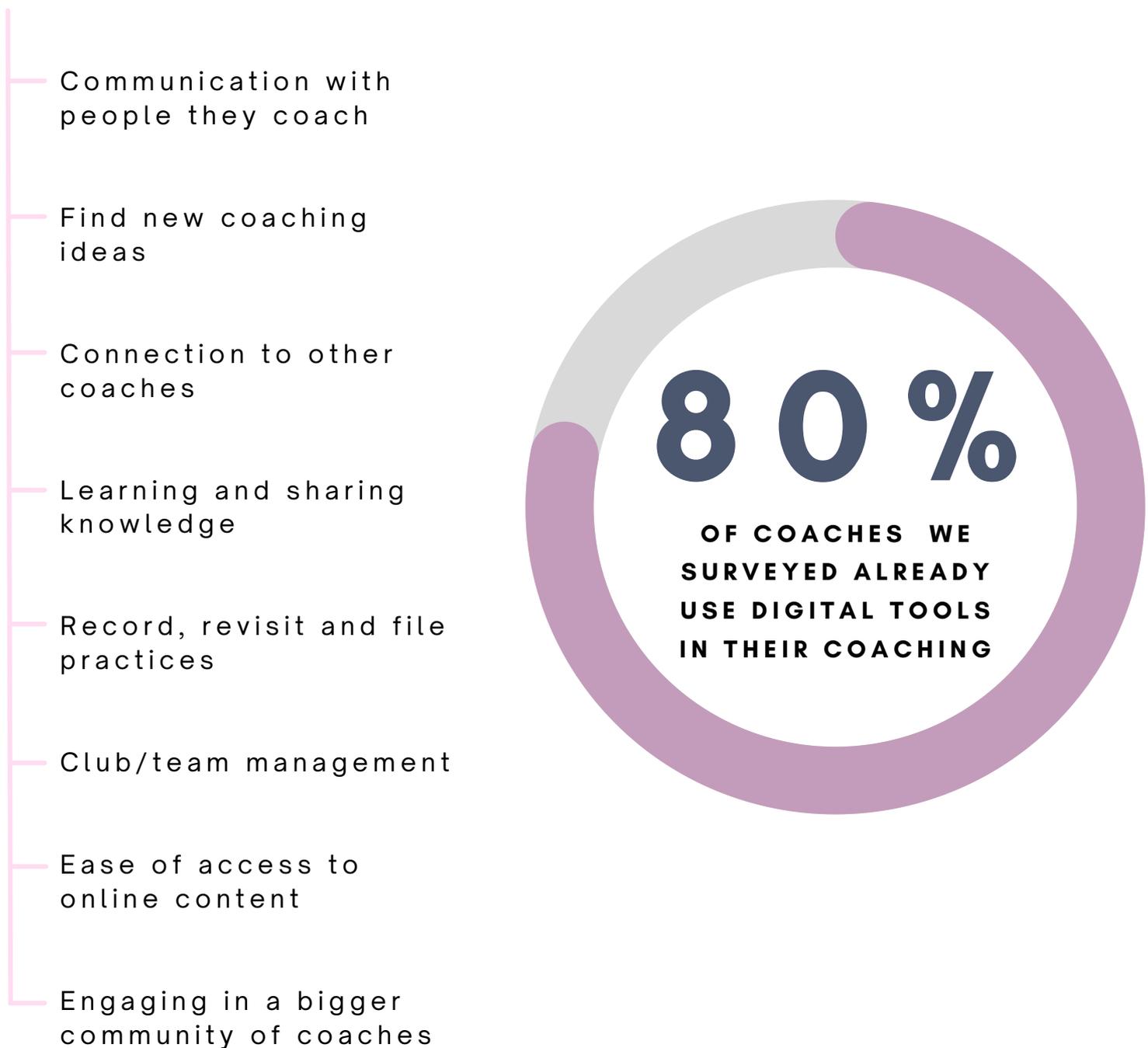
KEY DATA

THE DIGITAL FUTURE OF COACHING IS HERE NOW

THE RESULTS SHOW THE REASONS WHY COACHES USE DIGITAL TOOLS:

- Communication with people they coach

- Find new coaching ideas

- Connection to other coaches

- Learning and sharing knowledge

- Record, revisit and file practices

- Club/team management

- Ease of access to online content

- Engaging in a bigger community of coaches

80%

OF COACHES WE SURVEYED ALREADY USE DIGITAL TOOLS IN THEIR COACHING

(In order of most common to least common)

COACHES ATTITUDES TOWARDS A DIGITAL FUTURE

76%

OF COACHES SAID THEY WOULD ENGAGE MORE IN THEIR OWN DEVELOPMENT IF IT WAS THROUGH ONE SINGLE DIGITAL TOOL

57%

OF COACHES SURVEYED SAID THEY ALREADY DO, OR WOULD BE HAPPY TO, USE A DIGITAL TOOL IN THEIR COACHING SESSIONS

MONTHLY AMOUNT COACHES WOULD BE WILLING TO SPEND ON A DIGITAL TOOL THAT DELIVERED THE KEY FEATURES ON THE PREVIOUS PAGE

83%

OF COACHES SAID IT IS VITAL THAT ANY DIGITAL TOOL IS SIMPLE AND EASY TO USE 'OUT IN THE FIELD'

TOP FIVE FEATURES

Analysis revealed the top five ways that coaches currently use digital tools for. For clarity, the percentages shown below communicate how often coaches identified each feature in their top five. (e.g., 56% of coaches listed 'connected to others' in their top five).

56% CONNECTING TO OTHER COACHES

53% DISCOVERING NEW GAMES TO USE

**45%** RECORDING AND ANALYSING VIDEO

44% STRUCTURING THEIR DEVELOPMENT

38% PLANNING AND REFLECTING ON SESSIONS

CONNECTIVITY IS KEY

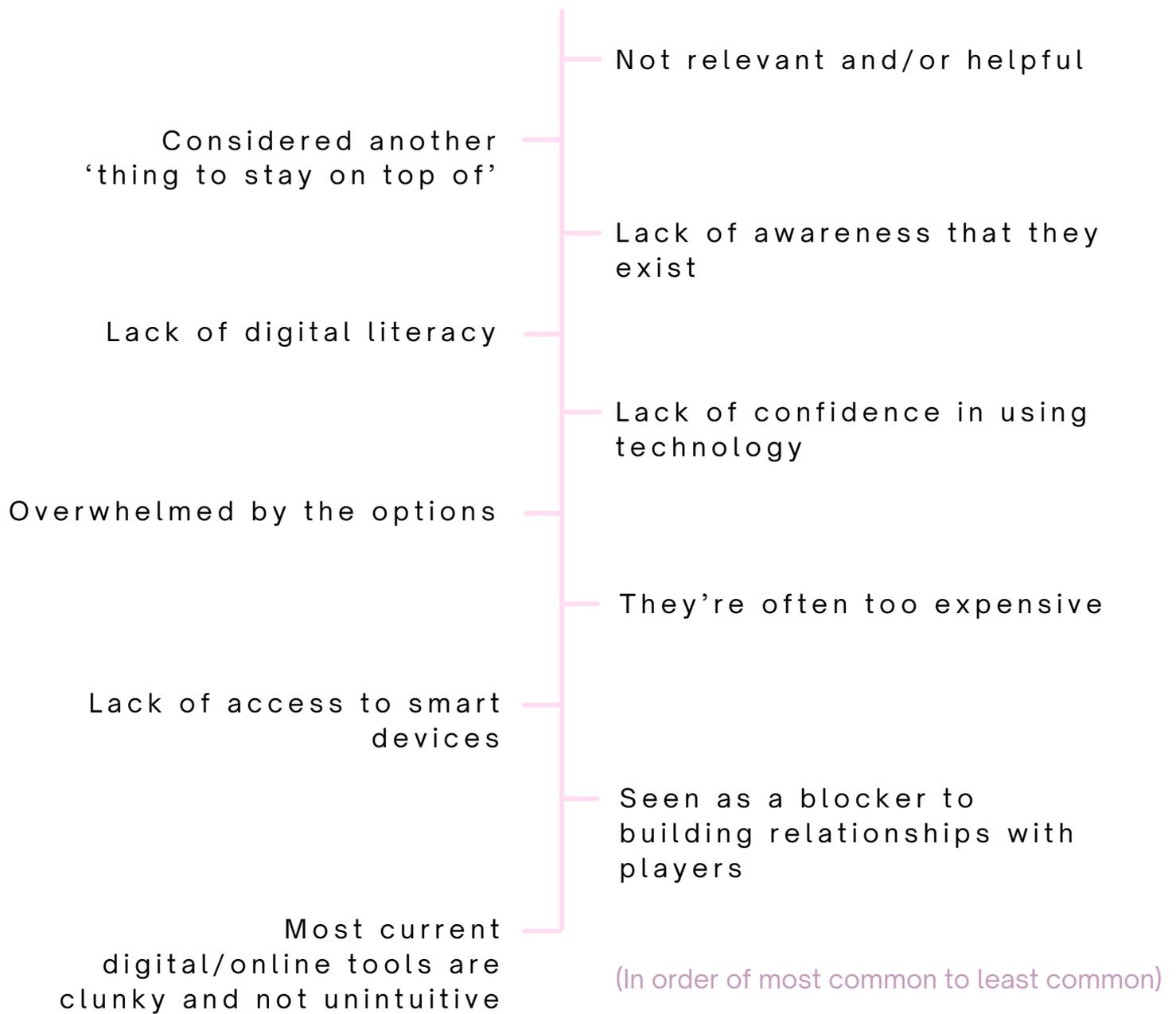Above all, coaches want connection to other coaches and expert coaches.

Coaches identified that a coach-based social network would be beneficial to them and spoke in detail about the need for a platform for facilitating real life peer-to-peer connections. Coaches recognised that a digital platform couldn't completely replace real life connection but did have the potential to increase the diversity, quality, and number of people it was possible to connect with.

Not sure
7.7%

Not beneficial
4.6%

Very beneficial
38.3%

Maybe beneficial
24.7%
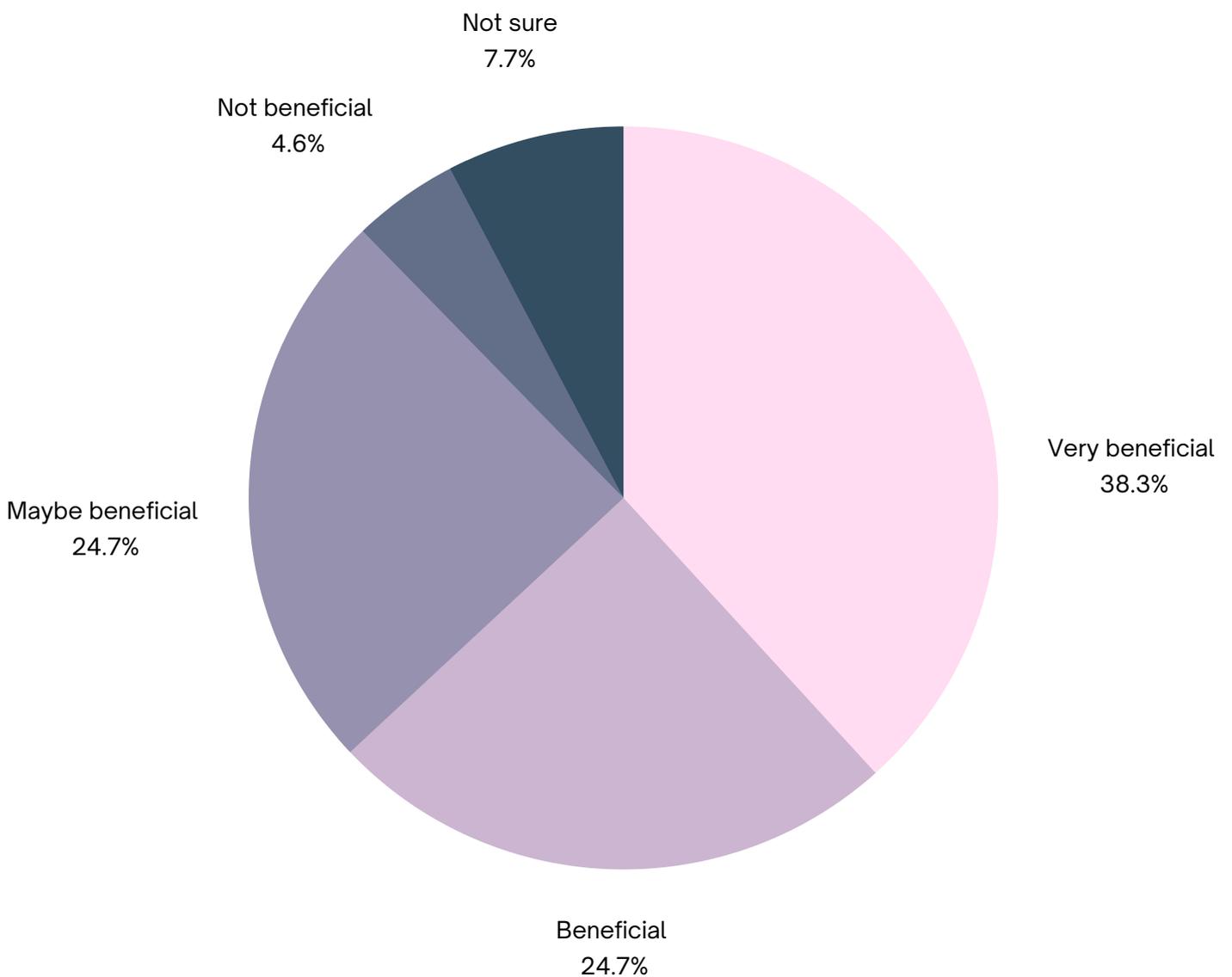
Beneficial
24.7%

HOW BENEFICAL COACHES WOULD FIND A COACH SPECIFIC SOCIAL NETWORK

HOWEVER, 1 IN 5 COACHES DON'T USE DIGITAL TOOLS

HERE ARE THE REASONS WHY:

Not relevant and/or helpful

Considered another 'thing to stay on top of'

Lack of awareness that they exist

Lack of digital literacy

Lack of confidence in using technology

Overwhelmed by the options

They're often too expensive

Lack of access to smart devices

Seen as a blocker to building relationships with players

Most current digital/online tools are clunky and not unintuitive

(In order of most common to least common)

CASE STUDY
RHYS WILLIAMS

THEIR SETTING

- Status: Volunteer coach
- Location: London/Essex
- Qualification: RFU Level 2
- Sport: Rugby
- Settings: After school clubs, club rugby, development pathways

HOW THEY FEEL ABOUT DIGITAL TOOLS IN THEIR COACHING

Delivery: Currently using paid online content sites for rugby practices, and other online forums to find and connect to a wider community of like-minded coaches to share practice, knowledge, and ideas.

Development: Formal qualifications and coaching badges were the first port of call, because the wealth of online content and informal learning approach was not evident. However, now informal, proactive, and self-directed learning has taken over and centres around podcasts, books, and online video content; it is much more a part of their practice. Further development includes engagement with a mentor, use of social media to engage with others' ideas, practices, resources and crucially, watching others coach.

WHERE NEXT FOR DIGITAL TOOLS IN COACHING?

- Relatable: The best content won't be recordings of perfect practices done by coaches in elite contexts that go well every time. They will be relatable to the grassroots contexts and explore the challenges faced by coaches and how to continually adapt practice according to context.

- Master coaches: A digital tool that can democratise the frequency and quality of access to master coaches and coach developers is needed.

- Developing a full toolkit: Coach development of the future needs to speak as much to the relational, personable, and emotional skills a coach needs as well as the technical and tactical knowledge, so a coach can build up a toolkit that is specific to their authentic self and their coaching context and style.

- Navigating the volume of resources: The number one priority is to support coaches, navigate the number of coaching resources available on the internet, find it, understand how it relates to them, understand what is credible and what is not and ultimately structure the exploration and application effectively.

- Low cost/no cost: any new tool needs to be low cost or no cost to ensure it does not deepen the inequity already seen among the workforce and heighten the barriers to coach development provision.

WIDE RANGING CHOICE

DIFFERENT DIGITAL TOOLS USED (SOFTWARE AND HARDWARE INCLUDED) BY THE 392 RESPONDENTS WHO TOOK PART IN THE SURVEY

Listening to coaches showed that at present the coaching landscape is awash with different tools ranging from bespoke, high tech, coaching specific solutions right through to people using YouTube and WhatsApp.

Most coaches are piecing together their own digital tool kits made up of what they have access to and feel comfortable using and seek out the learning opportunities online that they feel able to engage with regardless of quality.

The landscape of digital support for coaches - especially when it comes to development journeys - is sprawling and often complex to navigate. This does not have to necessarily infer a negative experience as some coaches told us, but help would be welcome.

This seemingly endless and often unregulated online and digital world of coaching practice and coaching development opportunities leads to three clear issues according to data from the survey.

1. WHO YOU KNOW

if you are a coach without a big network or 'coaching friends' it is often the case that people feel excluded from online networks of discussion and learning.

2. KNOWING WHERE TO LOOK

those coaches less comfortable on digital platforms or those who do not know where to find resources are being left behind.

3. JUDGING QUALITY

less confident coaches, particularly volunteer or novice coaches - struggle to know what to trust and what they should see as beneficial to their development.

TOP FIVE WATCH OUTS

Here is what the coaches who responded said that we as a sector need to think of most when shaping the digital future of coaching.

1 DATA PROTECTION / CHILD PROTECTION

coaches spoke with caution about keeping their own, and their players', data safe. Coaches also flagged the difficulties in safeguarding children effectively when recording, storing, and sharing videos and photos of them.

2 COST BEING A BARRIER

coaches were explicit in that any digital support should have no cost or very low cost, as cost acts as a barrier in the way of people engaging in coaching in the future.

3 USABILITY

coaches were almost unanimous that for any tool to be fully integrated into their on field and/or off field practice it has to make coaching more efficient and more effective, rather than be another tool to engage with or something that will take up more time.

4 INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

coaches spoke clearly on the need for any social networks or online forums where coaches come together needs to be designed to ensure everyone feels included.

5 INTERFERENCE IN RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

coaches were cautious of the impact introducing digital tools into coaching practice would have on their ability to keep sessions engaging. This could potentially form a barrier to creating the meaningful relationships they need with their players.

CASE STUDY SUE COULING

THEIR SETTING

- Status: Paid and volunteer coach and coach educator
- Location: Anglesey
- Qualification: Advanced water sea kayak coach and performance coach
- Sport: Canoeing
- Settings: Performance and participation

HOW THEY FEEL ABOUT DIGITAL TOOLS IN THEIR COACHING

Delivery: Digital tools perform three key roles in their coaching: 1. Communication between other coaches and athletes, 2. Video reflections, 3. Delivering blended learning courses for courses. Some elements of a coach development journey are delivered online.

Development: Online coaching degree programmes are the main way that their development intersects with online tools. As well as this access to an e-library of resources is a useful and efficient way of finding new ideas and engaging with new areas of coaching without heavy time or cost investment. Another use for digital tools - specifically WhatsApp groups and Zoom calls - was establishing and running coaching conversation groups that are bound by shared identity or shared context rather than geography, in this instance a Women in Coaching group.

WHERE NEXT FOR DIGITAL TOOLS IN COACHING?

- Reduction and refinement: There is a significant need for the consistency and clarity around digital tools to be addressed. For them, a positive digital future would include a few key and agreed platforms that are easy to manage and communicate over and that are consistent in their approach and functionality.

- Number of options: There is a need to reduce the number of options and platforms upon which coaching support, conversation and development happens as at present it is too complicated and confusing to keep track of every platform.

- Management of resources: A way of aggregating and storing online resources from various spaces into one central area, so they can be organised and easily accessed and shared.

- Quality control: There is a need for the myriad of resources online to be somehow quality assured. Coaches need support in knowing whether resources and support are quality or not.

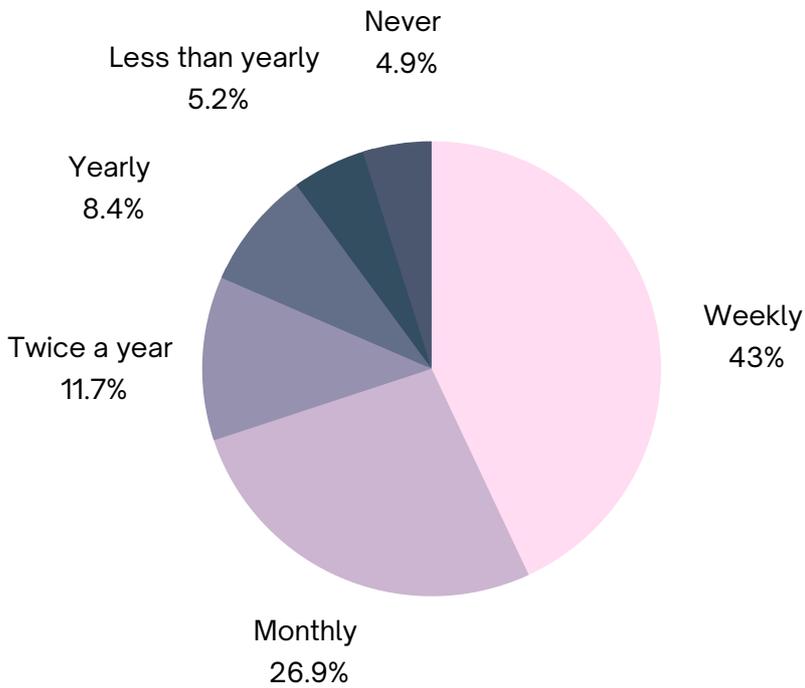# A DEEP DIVE INTO DIGITAL TOOLS AND COACH DEVELOPMENT

The data have shown that many coaches use digital tools and technologies in some form or another in their practice for several reasons. Whilst coaches did identify that they used tools to enhance their delivery - specifically video analysis apps and club management software - most of the digital usage in coaching is to enhance learning and development.

As a result, we also investigated what development looks like now for coaches from across the workforce. We asked about the nature of the development they do, the regularity of development moments, how they manage it, and what they would like to do that they don't already.

We also explored the challenges they currently face in accessing and engaging with both online and in person development opportunities. The results shown below present a series of barriers that we feel can in large part be broken down through placing increasing amounts of formalised development opportunities online, in tandem with rethinking the development pathways and mentoring support given to coaches.
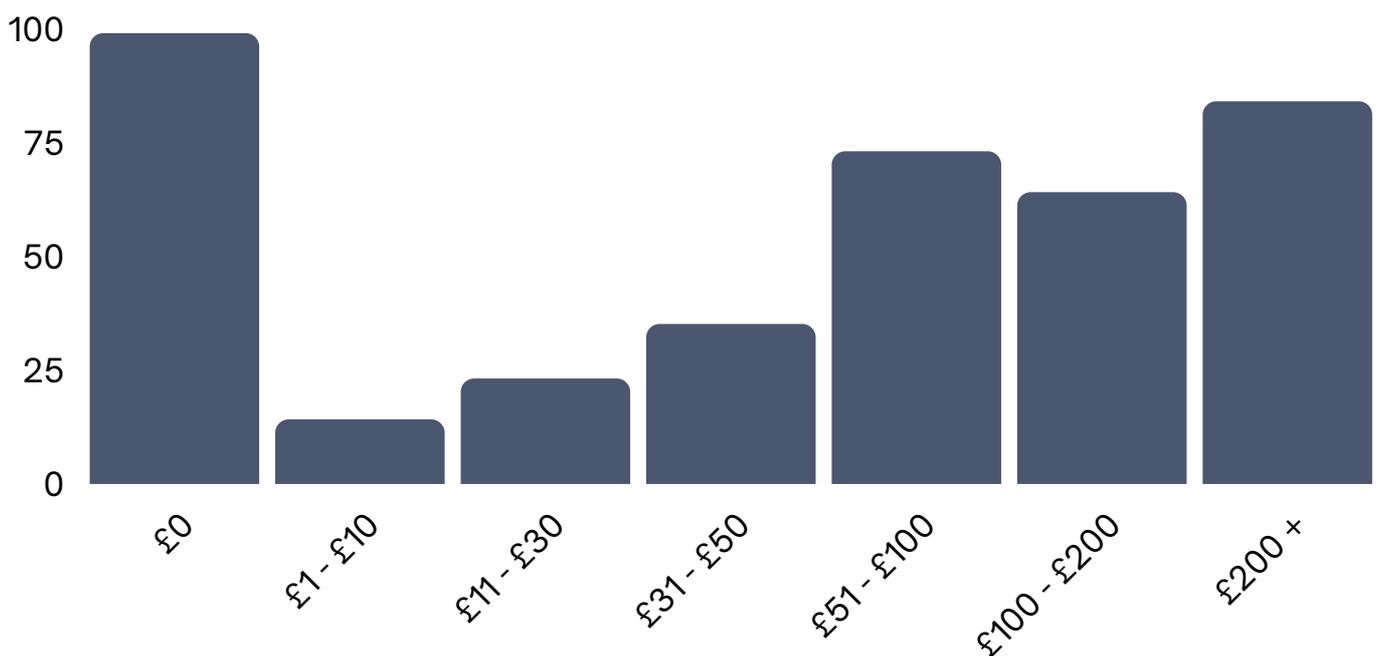
WHAT DEVELOPMENT LOOKS LIKE NOW

Never
4.9%

Less than yearly
5.2%

Yearly
8.4%

Twice a year
11.7%

Weekly
43%

Monthly
26.9%

REGULARITY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CURRENTLY

76%

OF COACHES WISH THEY HAD MORE ACCESS TO LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

HOW MUCH COACHES CURRENTLY SPEND ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ANNUALLY

WHAT CURRENT DEVELOPMENT LOOKS LIKE

% of respondents
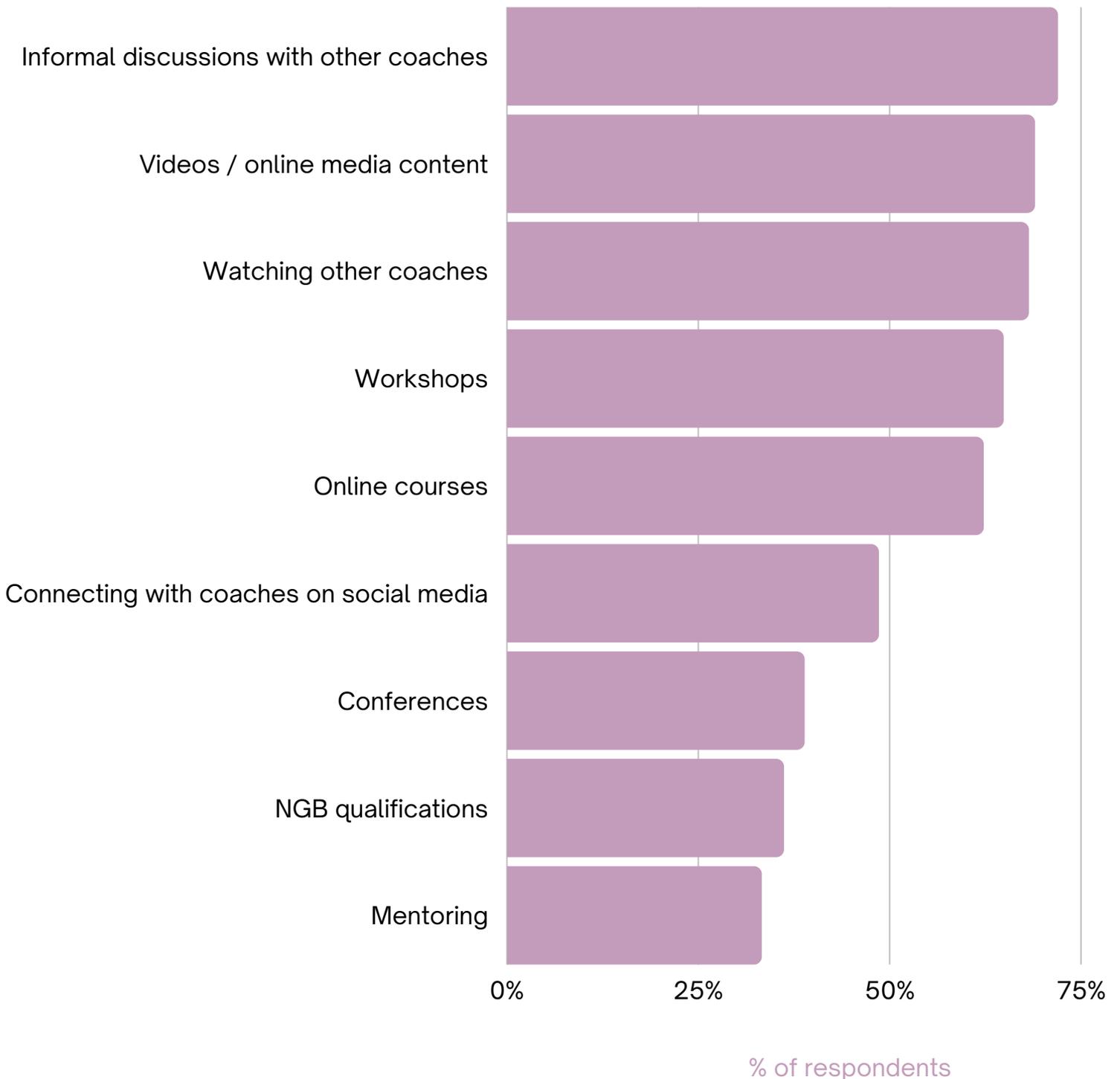
HOW COACHES WANT TO DEVELOP

WE ALSO ASKED COACHES, HOW THEY WISH TO DEVELOP, AND WHAT ADDITIONAL CONTENT/KNOWLEDGE/EXPERIENCES THEY WOULD LIKE TO ADD TO CURRENT COACH DEVELOPMENT PROVISION:

% of respondents
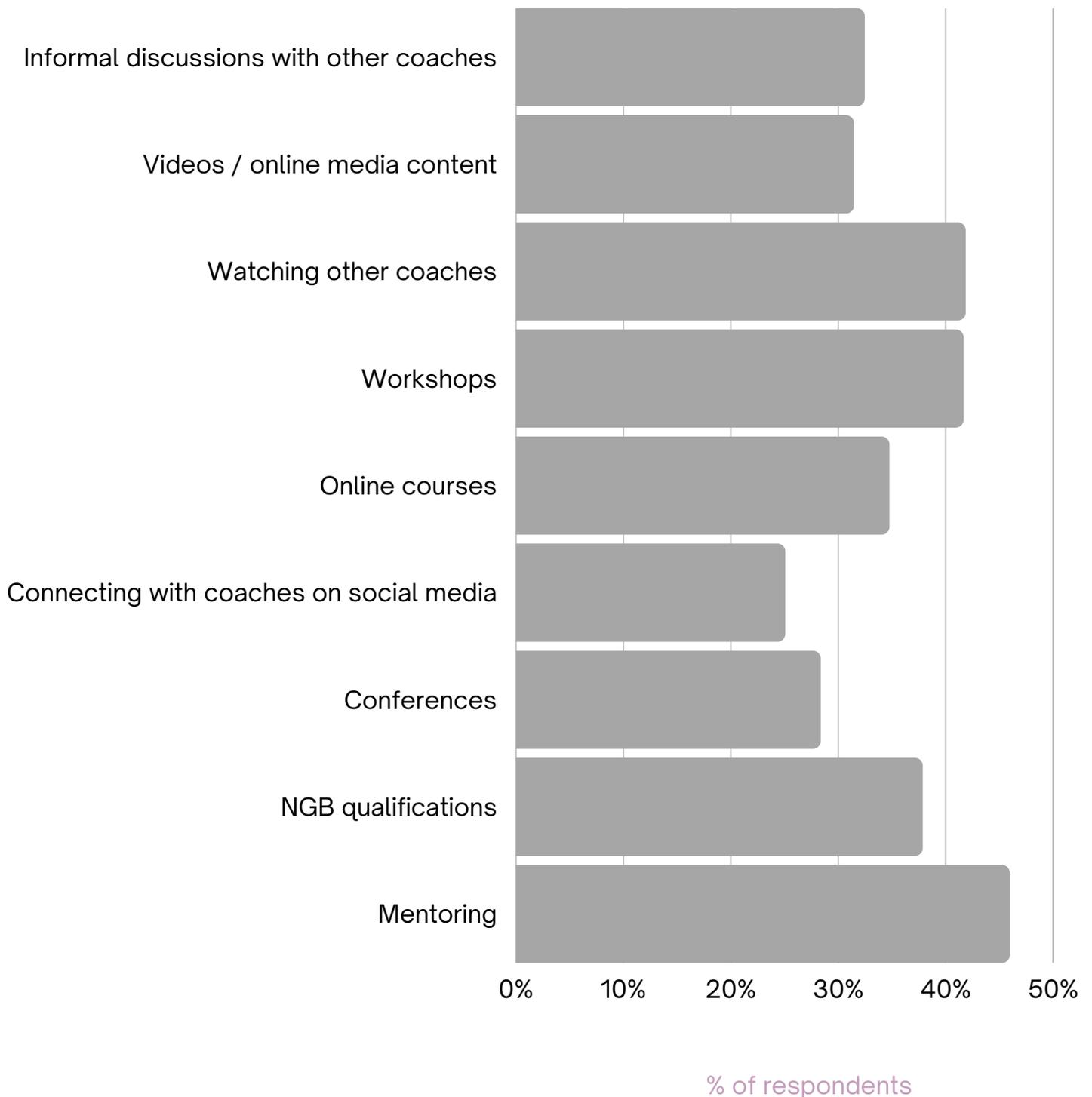
WHAT COACHES WANT MORE OF

Based on what coaches said about what they already do and what they would like to do to develop themselves, the big areas of focus are as follows:

MENTORING, CONNECTION WITH OTHER COACHES AND WATCHING OTHERS COACH

NGB AND COACHING BODY QUALIFICATIONS

VIDEO AND SOCIAL CONTENT

WORKSHOPS (ONLINE AND IN PERSON)

TOP FIVE
BARRIERS

Here is what coaches said about the reasons why they don't do as much coach development as they would like to.

1 TIME

59% of coaches said they were too busy and didn't have time to do development

2 COST

42% of coaches said development opportunities were usually too expensive

3 TRAVEL DISTANCES

22% of coaches said in person development opportunities were often difficult to travel too

4 THE SPORADIC NATURE OF CPD

21% of coaches said that coaches development was too sporadic and confusing

5 FINDING DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

21% of coaches said they were unsure where to find quality development opportunities

CASE STUDY SCOTT MOORE

THEIR SETTING

- Status: Head coach and owner of CEL Sports
- Location: Leicestershire
- Qualification: ECB Level 2, FA Level 1, Sport Coaching Level 3
- Sport: Rugby, football, cricket, multi-sport
- Settings: Clubs, schools, fitness gym, holiday camps

HOW THEY FEEL ABOUT DIGITAL TOOLS IN THEIR COACHING

Delivery: Digital forms a central part of delivery. NGB online resources - particularly the iCoach Cricket app - are used to find new ideas for session delivery and practice design.

Development: Currently doing self-directed learning online using social media to navigate various resources and as a gateway into further alternative sports and NGBs to learn about and grow multi-sport knowledge.

WHERE NEXT FOR DIGITAL TOOLS IN COACHING?

- Principles and fundamentals: An innovative digital and online tool would not only focus on the specifics of a session or of a sport, but also the key principles and fundamentals of movement, to enhance coaches as broader practitioners.

- Usable session plans: Session plans and practice designs should be more user friendly, more easily, downloadable, shareable and be more interactive, engaging and contain video content.

- Coach feedback integration: A positive progression on the digital resources already out there would be to add the functionality for coaches to feedback on how sessions and practice went, what worked, what did not work and why. This will provide resources with more real-world context and encourage collaborative innovation on practice design from across contexts.
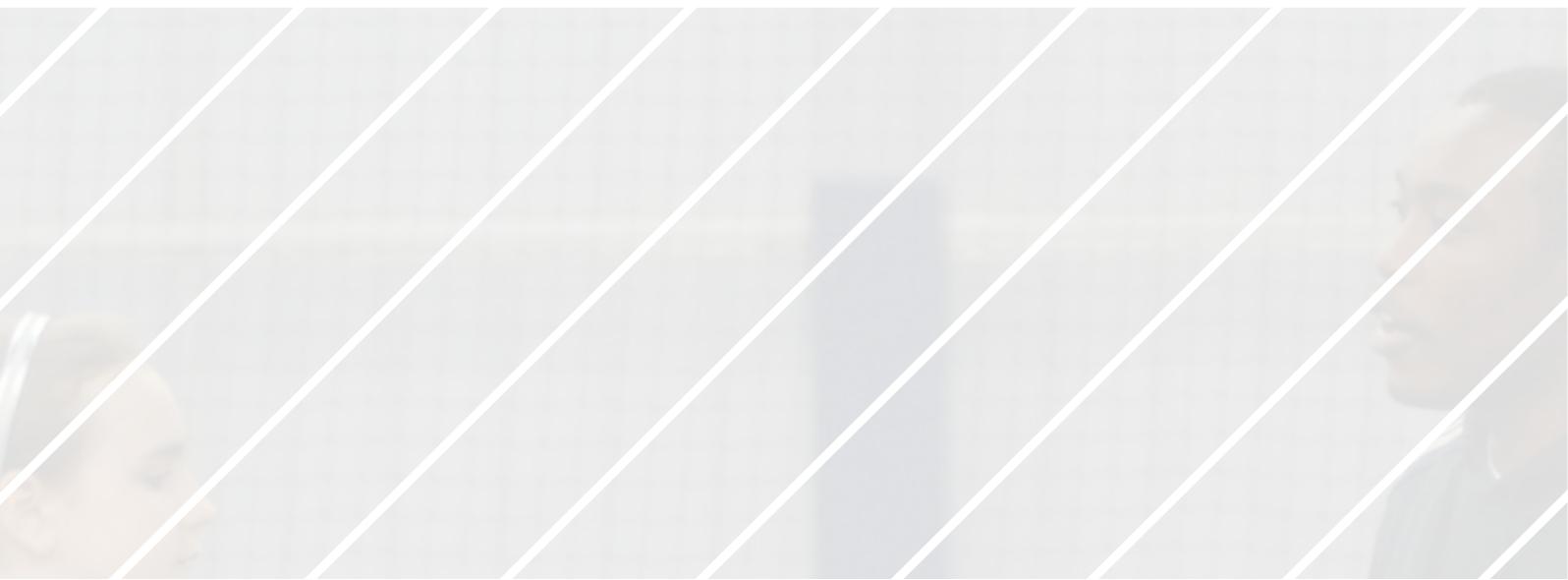
FINDINGS

1. THERE IS POSITIVITY TOWARDS DIGITAL TOOLS WITHIN THE WORKFORCE, BUT THIS POSITIVITY COMES WITH CAUTION

There is a broadly positive attitude among the coaches we surveyed towards the integration and application of digital tools into their practice and development. This was true more so of software solutions than hardware devices, although not exclusively.

However, this general feeling of optimism and openness to digital tools comes with two points of significant caution from coaches irrespective of qualification level, setting or status.

- Adding to the confusion: Coaches felt an increase in the number of apps, digital tools, and online solutions to engage with and integrate into their digital tool kits would be a hindrance rather than beneficial.

- Barrier to relationship building: Many coaches spoke of their caution around using technology in their coaching as they felt it does, or at least has the potential to, get in the way of creating and nurturing meaningful relationships with those they coach.

2. HOW EASY DIGITAL TOOLS ARE TO USE 'ON AND OFF THE FIELD' IS MAKE OR BREAK FOR THEIR LONG-TERM INTEGRATION

Coaches from across the sector were equivocal and unanimous in their conviction that any digital tool - particularly software base solutions - need to be designed with user experience as paramount.

Coaches expressed that the lack of suitability and useability within real world practice of many digital tools currently*, and the limitations of internet signal and robust digital hardware within many coaching settings, is making full integration difficult.

Key things to consider for future design, according to coaches included:

- Ability to be used without data or Wi-Fi signal
- Usability on the pitch and potentially in bad weather
- Simple user interfaces that save time and do not add to planning and reflection time
- Video being a central part of the experience
- Integration with third party platforms and social media platforms coaches already use

There were some apps that coaches spoke of very highly in terms of usability, user experience and the ease in which they could integrate them into both their on and off field practice.

3. THERE IS ALREADY AN APPARENT INEQUALITY GAP WITHIN THE WORKFORCE, SPECIFICALLY AROUND DIGITAL LITERACY, ACCESS TO TOOLS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELEVANCE AND LANDSCAPE OF TOOLS

Through hearing from the hundreds of coaches that responded to the research it was evident that there already exists a divide between those benefiting from and utilising digital tools and those unable to engage in them. As a result, it is apparent that there is a section of the workforce being disproportionately hindered in developing themselves as coaches and evolving their delivery.

The data show that 20% of coaches we surveyed were not using digital tools at all in their coaching. The reasons for this lack of engagement and difficulties faced can be themed in the following four ways:

- Digital literacy: The lack of digital literacy** some coaches hold them back from engaging with tools, resources and online spaces that may well enhance their practice.

- Access: Many coaches reported not knowing where to look for online resources as well as the expense of online resources and digital tools being a significant barrier to them. This was especially true of coaches who were either voluntary or not attached to a professional or semi-professional club.

- Inclusion: Some coaches reported feeling that some online spaces (e.g., 'Coaching Twitter Circles' and other coaching discussion forums) were becoming increasingly exclusionary by virtue of being overrepresented by a minority of identities and coaching contexts.

- Confidence: There is a significant section of the workforce who do not feel confident in using digital tools (software specifically) and more specifically integrating them into practice.

- Relevance: Current online resources are more relevant and applicable to some coaching settings more than others. I.e., coaches that work in invasion sports are more likely to find content and tools that work in their contexts, than adventure sports or multi-sport community coaches for example.

*** Digital literacy - having the skills you need to live, learn, and work in a society where communication and access to information is increasingly presented through digital technology like internet platforms, social media, and mobile devices.*

4. THE PRIORITY FOR COACHES IS USING DIGITAL TOOLS TO CONNECT WITH AND SHARE LEARNINGS WITH OTHER COACHES AND MENTORS

Above all else what was learnt from the coaches was that their priority is not the digital tools themselves, rather purely what they can do for connecting them to others, in a more structured and user-friendly way that what is currently available. There was some feeling that digital tools can be the facilitator of such connections, but it is the real-life opportunities to access mentors and peers. This was particularly true for volunteer coaches.

Where coaches did feel digital tools could help with this was in creating initial connection to others, as well as diversifying and increasing the access to different coaches from different contexts, sports, and geographies.

5. COACHES ARE USING DIGITAL TOOLS MORE FOR THEIR DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS THAN THEY ARE DIRECTLY USING THEM IN THEIR PRACTICE AND DELIVERY

There is some use of digital tools by coaches happening in coaching sessions currently. However, this is largely reserved for real time video analysis with athletes and visualising and demonstrating practices. Moreover, there is a section of the workforce actively using digital technologies to manage their teams, clubs, and communities from communication, planning and logistics perspectives.

However, many coaches using digital tools are doing so to facilitate their development as a coach. The three ways coaches use online spaces and tools to develop themselves are:

- Networking and discussing ideas with other coaches

- Social media content for practice ideas

- Formal online learning spaces (such as NGB resource hubs)

6. UNTIL COACHES FEEL THAT DIGITAL TOOLS ARE INTEGRAL AND NOT ADDITIONAL TO PRACTICE, AND THAT THEY ARE EASY TO INTEGRATE INTO THEIR EVERYDAY COACHING LIVES, THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A LIMIT TO HOW MUCH THE SECTOR ADAPTS A DIGITAL APPROACH

One of the most prevalent reasons coaches gave for not using digital tools, or not seeing themselves using digital tools in the future, was the perceived lack of relevance to their specific coaching practice. This took two more detailed forms:

- The specificity and quality of content: The coaching content on various apps and online resources is not relevant to specific coaching settings, or at least not perceived as better than what coaches already have or can find through other means.

- Application and functionality: A significant number of coaches often felt that digital tools could not enhance their practice or make it more efficient in any way. Many coaches felt digital tools were 'another thing to do and would just over complicate things' rather than seeing how they could make their coaching lives easier.

7. THERE IS A NEED TO STRUCTURE THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE FOR COACHES IN A WAY THAT MAKES IT EASY TO NAVIGATE AND PIECE TOGETHER THEIR 'DIGITAL TOOLKITS' EFFECTIVELY. THERE IS ALSO A NEED FOR A LEADERSHIP BODY TO PROVIDE GUIDANCE ON WHERE TO FIND HIGH QUALITY DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES, TOOLS AND LEARNING FORUMS

From the survey it is clear that digital tools already play an important role in the day to day lives of coaches from across the sector. However, as noted in the body of the report the digital landscape is a wide ranging landscaping of choice that sometimes can be difficult to navigate. Coaches are finding it difficult to piece together a digital toolkit that works effectively for all their coaching needs. Moreover, they are embarking on self-directed learning journeys through online resources and forums without being fully equipped in some cases to judge quality or piece together key messages, and then in turn apply to practice without ongoing support.

It is apparent that there is a need for a leadership body within the sector (e.g., UK Coaching, CIMPSA, Sport England) to provide a structure that can guide, support, and reassure coaches they are online and are on a positive development pathway. Moreover, it was articulated by many coaches that a trusted and easy to find gateway to digital tools and online resources is needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. PROVIDE ADDITIONAL TRAINING TO COACHES TO SUPPORT THEM DEVELOP THEIR OWN DIGITAL LITERACY

20% of the coaches who took part in the research reported did not use technology at all. Therefore, it is apparent that there is a significant section of the workforce who are partially or fully digitally illiterate.

Our recommendation is for those developing digital products for coaches are considerate of the range of digital literacy of users, those developing coaches also provide relevant training support and resources to ensure they are digitally inclusive. This will be vital if we are to close the potential digital literacy gap already in the workforce and in ensuring it doesn't expand further.

2. DEVELOP THE DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE ACROSS CLUBS AND ACTIVE SPACES THAT WILL IN TURN ALLOW COACHES TO USE DIGITAL TOOLS CONSISTENTLY

There is a need to think on a large scale across clubs and sport and leisure facilities about building a digital infrastructure that can effectively support the use of digital tools within coaching practice and in coaching settings. Investment in the smart connectivity of those spaces for now and for the future is needed and may require partnership with organisations in the technology and communications sectors to achieve.

Our recommendation is to factor digital infrastructure into the long-term investment and partnership strategy of Uniting the Movement and delivering on the Coaching Plan 2.0.

3. CONSIDER THE FINDINGS AND THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THIS REPORT WITHIN THE WIDER COACHING PLAN 2.0 WORK AND THE SUBSEQUENT ACTION PLAN THAT RESULTS

Given the complex and sprawling landscape of digital and online learning opportunities, and coach development in general, there is a need to integrate the findings from this survey, and other such data sets (UK Coaching, Children's Coaching Collaborative - Sport England as two examples) to avoid the challenge of multiple interested parties developing digital solutions without the end in mind. The end in mind must be the coach-digital interface and access to excellent resources that ultimately benefit all stakeholders in uniting the movement.

Our recommendation is to factor in a dissemination event with key stakeholders to support an integrated strategy that attends to multiple stakeholders planning for Uniting the Movement and delivering on the Coaching Plan 2.0.

4. WHEN CONSTRUCTING ANY NEW STRATEGY OR PROGRAMME, PRIORITISE ENSURING THAT THE DIGITAL INEQUALITY GAP IS NOT EXACERBATED

Whilst digital technology is evidently already a part of the coaching experience at large, relatively speaking we are at the advent of its integration, and there are plenty of ways we as a sector are yet to harness the potential of new technologies.

Given this relative infancy guidance and work still to do in this area, our recommendation is that strategic developmental oversight, partnership, and investment decisions as well as design processes all need to actively prioritise ensuring that the way digital tools and technologies are built and rolled out remove barriers to use and integration. This focus needs to be specifically on removing barriers to access, ensuring online spaces are representative of the diversity of coaches' identities, experiences, and setting.

5. CONSIDER A BLENDED APPROACH TO A DIGITAL FUTURE, WHERE DIGITAL TOOLS ENHANCE THE REAL-LIFE CONNECTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS THE SECTOR

It is clear from the data that increasing the quality, diversity, and number of connections a coach can foster with other coaches and with potential mentors is the number one priority. This also extends to coaches wanting to enhance the quality of relationship and number 'touchpoints' with their athletes outside of session time.

Our recommendation here is to concentrate on investing in the development of digital tools and technologies that enhance the diversity and quality of connection between coaches and other coaches, coaches and mentors and coaches and their athletes.

6. PROVIDE THE WORKFORCE WITH PATHWAYS THROUGH THE PLETHORA OF ONLINE RESOURCES THAT CAN AID COACH DEVELOPMENT, AS WELL AS DIGITAL RESOURCES AND CENTRALLY AGGREGATE TOOLS TO ENSURE INDIVIDUALS KNOW WHERE TO LOOK AND HOW TO JUDGE QUALITY

The current digital landscape is chaotic and difficult for coaches who do not have existing networks or digital confidence to identify the tools available to them and construct an effective digital toolkit that works for their practice.

Our recommendation to tackle this is threefold:

- Aggregate tools in a central and trust place: Develop easily discoverable online 'front door' for the range of digital delivery tools that can operate as a constant point of return and trust for coaches (e.g., UK Coaching Coaches Club). This 'front door' needs to aggregate tools and resources, and describe their pros and cons, give coaches a chance to report on their application for other coaches to make decisions on their suitability for their setting as well as detail on how they can be used and applied. Crucially this online space also needs to provide a safe and moderated forum for coaches to connect and discuss the tools and their application.

- Utilise mentors to guide: The data suggests this is as beneficial for the expert coaches' development as it is for developing coaches, and repositioning coach development as a cyclical and collective learning endeavour - that is informal and long term, but still with some structure. 'The results presented in the current report are suggestive of the potential to create a network of 'master coaches' that can become mentors to coaches and help them navigate the digital landscape, apply tools, connect them into online forums and discussions and support in finding and applying online resources. The watch out in this is that it cannot be done solely online or done over a digital platform, it needs to be fundamentally concerned with real-life in situ mentoring that is long term and contextual.

- Create accredited development pathways: Work to create aggregated development resources that structure developmental themes and that are easy to access, work through and apply, whilst also providing the space to explore and discuss in a shared learning experience with other coaches. It is vital that these pathways are accredited, or at least endorsed and organised by a centralised and trusted body.
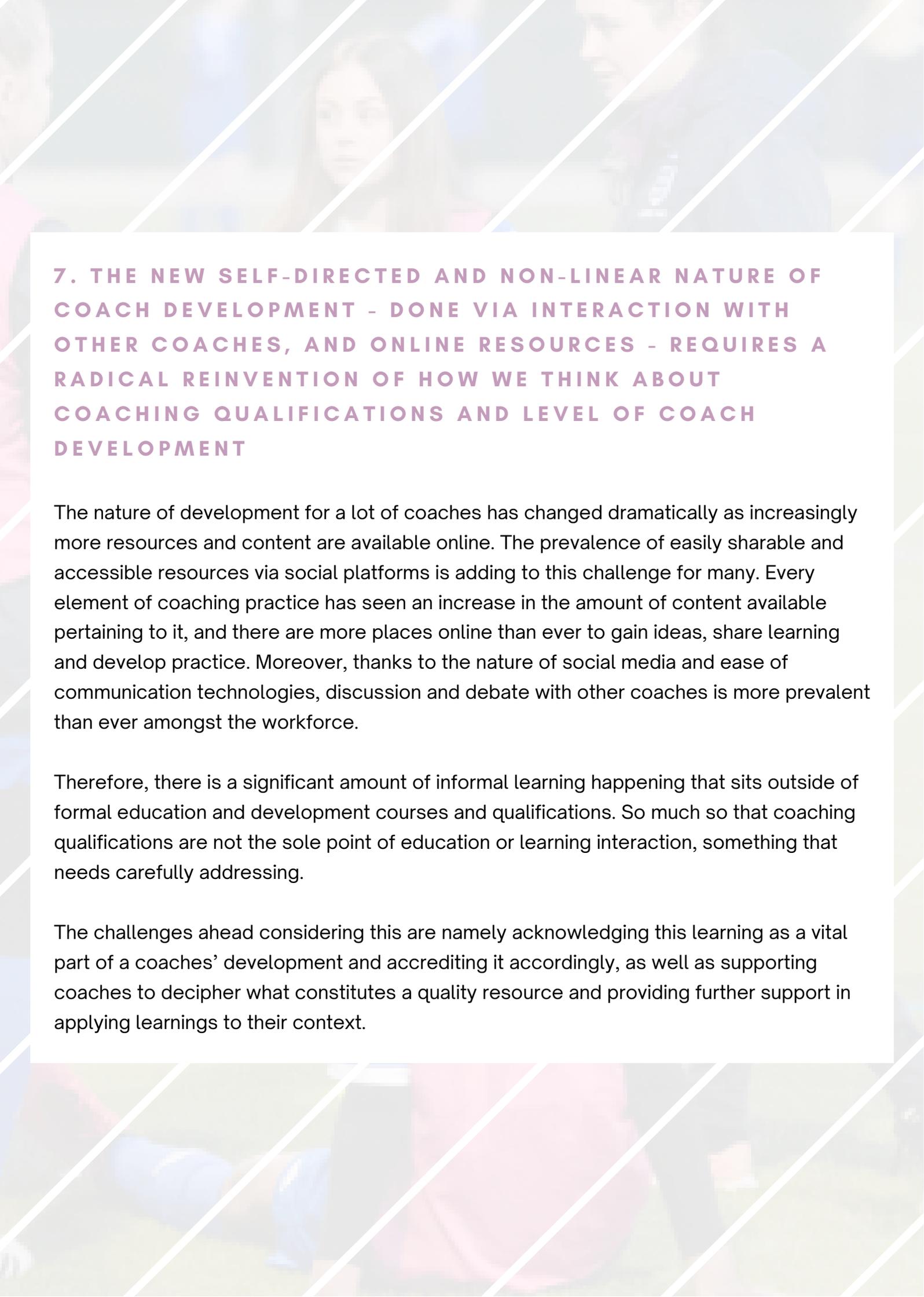
7. THE NEW SELF-DIRECTED AND NON-LINEAR NATURE OF COACH DEVELOPMENT - DONE VIA INTERACTION WITH OTHER COACHES, AND ONLINE RESOURCES - REQUIRES A RADICAL REINVENTION OF HOW WE THINK ABOUT COACHING QUALIFICATIONS AND LEVEL OF COACH DEVELOPMENT

The nature of development for a lot of coaches has changed dramatically as increasingly more resources and content are available online. The prevalence of easily sharable and accessible resources via social platforms is adding to this challenge for many. Every element of coaching practice has seen an increase in the amount of content available pertaining to it, and there are more places online than ever to gain ideas, share learning and develop practice. Moreover, thanks to the nature of social media and ease of communication technologies, discussion and debate with other coaches is more prevalent than ever amongst the workforce.

Therefore, there is a significant amount of informal learning happening that sits outside of formal education and development courses and qualifications. So much so that coaching qualifications are not the sole point of education or learning interaction, something that needs carefully addressing.

The challenges ahead considering this are namely acknowledging this learning as a vital part of a coaches' development and accrediting it accordingly, as well as supporting coaches to decipher what constitutes a quality resource and providing further support in applying learnings to their context.

METHODS, RESPONDENTS AND PARTNERS

METHODS

The digital future of coaching research as a UK and Ireland wide consultation with coaches from across the coaching landscape.

392 coaches from England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Ireland took part and shared their voices as part of the research.
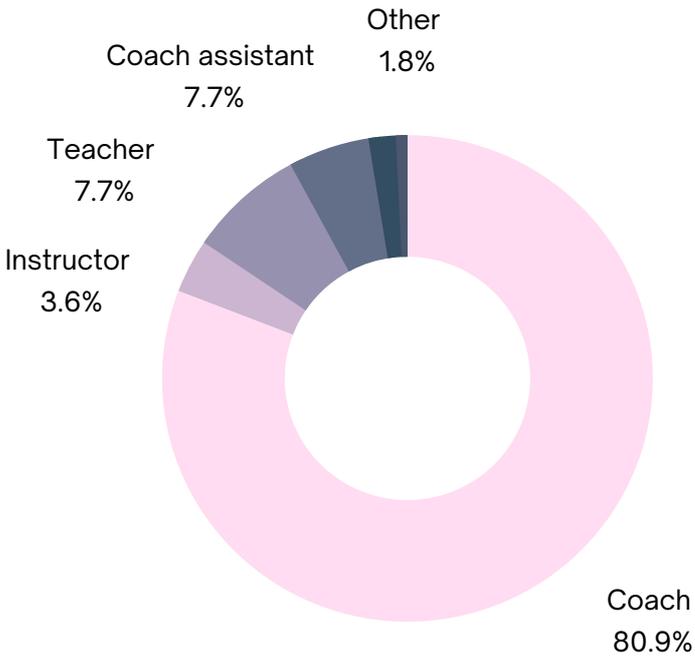
The research consisted of a digital online survey that was open for three weeks and a series of semi-structured interviews with a diverse range of coaches.

To ensure the research included the experiences of as mainly people as possible and platformed the experiences of those coaching voices less heard we used the broadest definition of 'coach' possible. We actively encouraged anyone who considered themselves a coach and asked anyone who supported people in an active setting to participate.
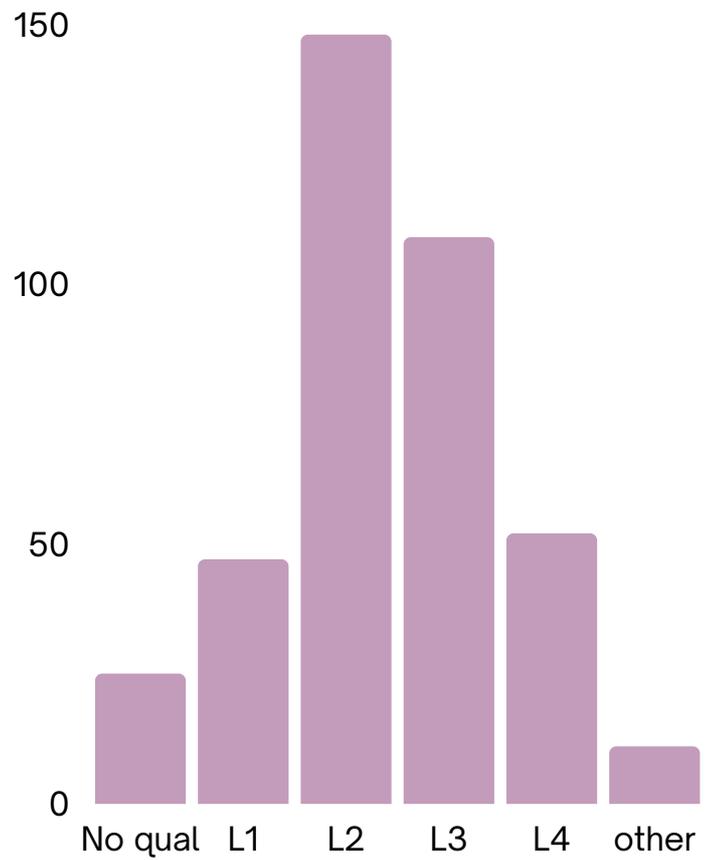
We engaged with multiple national and local partners, coaching organisations and professional bodies, sports and physical activity clubs, coach developers and influential voices in the coaching sector to disseminate the opportunity to get involved in the research, and ultimately reach as many coaches as possible.
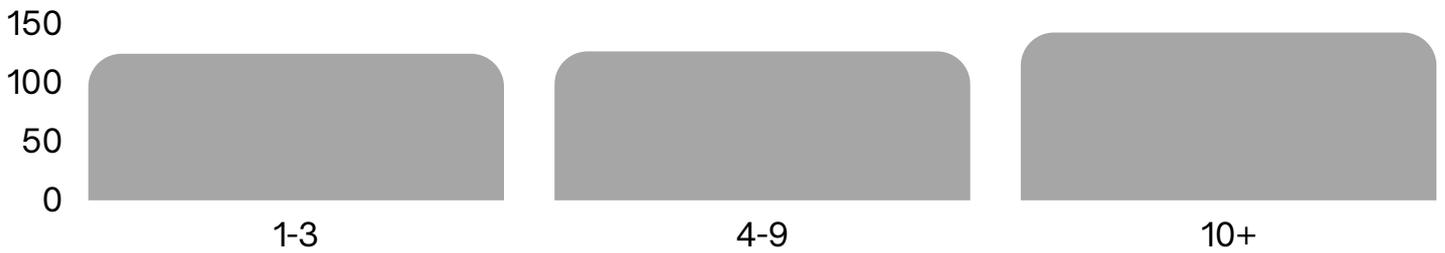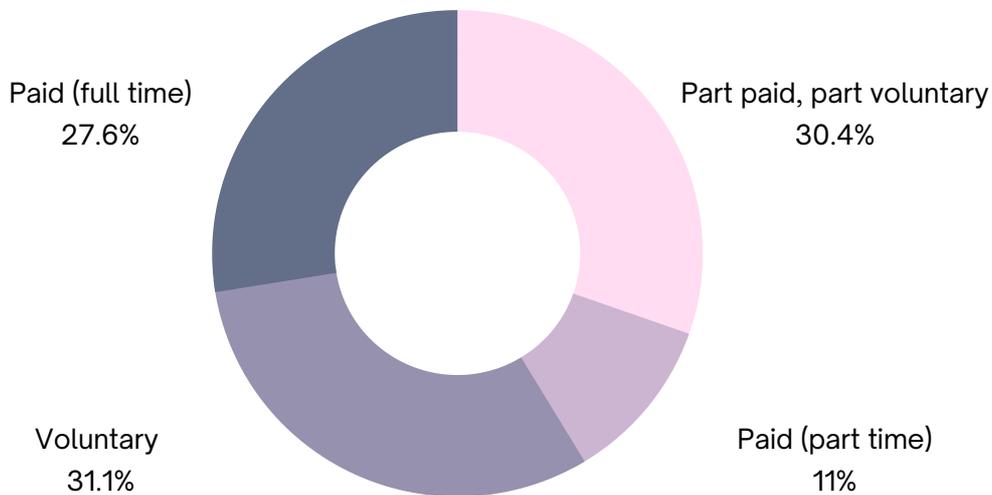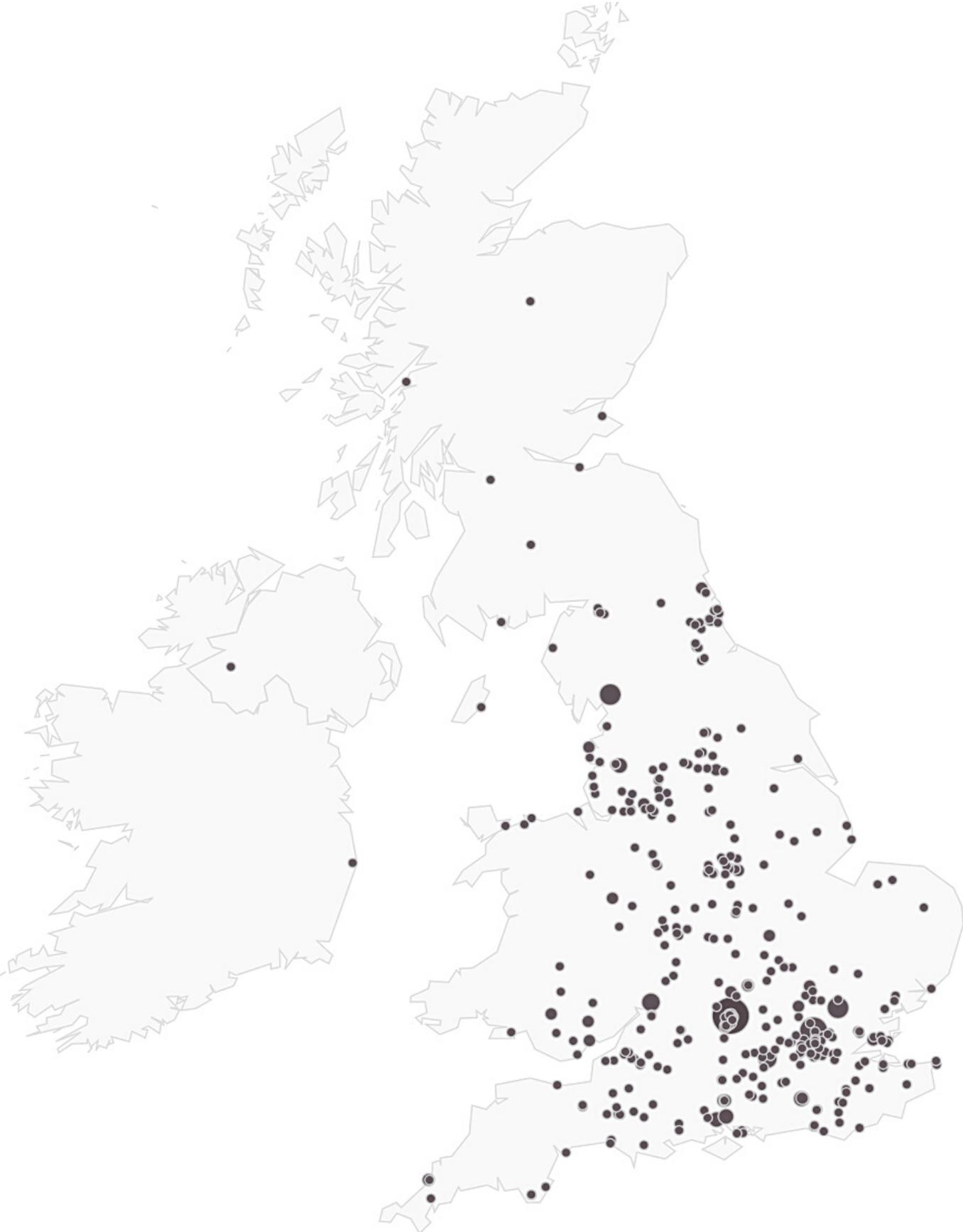
COACHES

ROLES

- Other 1.8%
- Coach assistant 7.7%
- Teacher 7.7%
- Instructor 3.6%
- Coach 80.9%

QUALIFICATIONS

Categories: No qual, L1, L2, L3, L4, other
Y-axis: 0, 50, 100, 150

HOURS COACHED PER WEEK

Categories: 1-3, 4-9, 10+
Y-axis: 0, 50, 100, 150

- Paid (full time) 27.6%
- Part paid, part voluntary 30.4%
- Voluntary 31.1%
- Paid (part time) 11%

PAID V VOLUNTARY

LOCATIONS - POSTCODES

We spoke to coaches from all corners of the UK.

LOCATIONS - DEPRIVATION

Against the Index of Multiple Deprivation here is the breakdown of which quintile of deprivation respondents lived in. Quintile 5 - least deprived, Quintile 1 - most deprived.
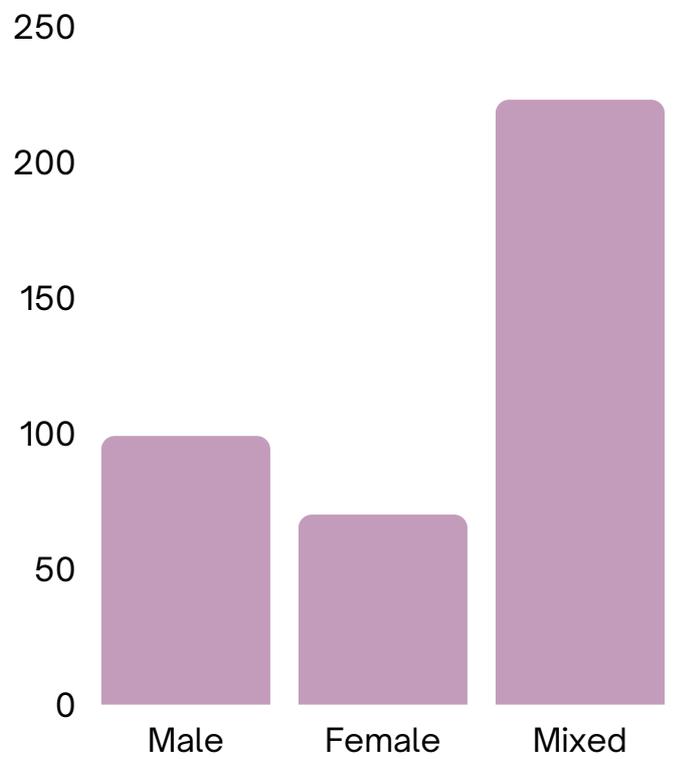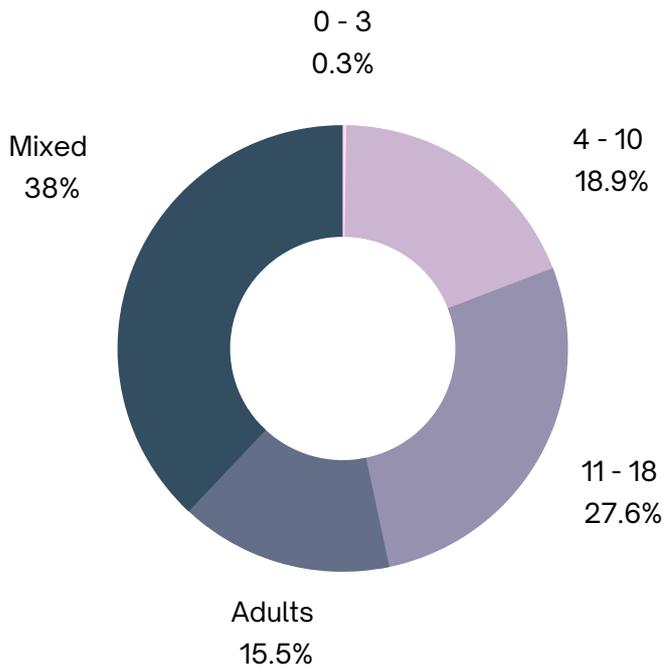
IMD QUINTILE FIVE

76.5%

IMD QUINTILE FOUR

18.8%

IMD QUINTILE THREE

3%

IMD QUINTILE TWO

1.3%

IMD QUINTILE ONE

0.3%

SETTINGS

AGE PREDOMINANTLY COACHED

- 0 - 3: 0.3%
- 4 - 10: 18.9%
- 11 - 18: 27.6%
- Adults: 15.5%
- Mixed: 38%

GENDER PREDOMINANTLY COACHED

- Male
- Female
- Mixed

COMMUNITIES COACHED

- People with disabilities
- Areas of high deprivation
- Elite athletes
- BAME communities
- LGBTQ+ communities
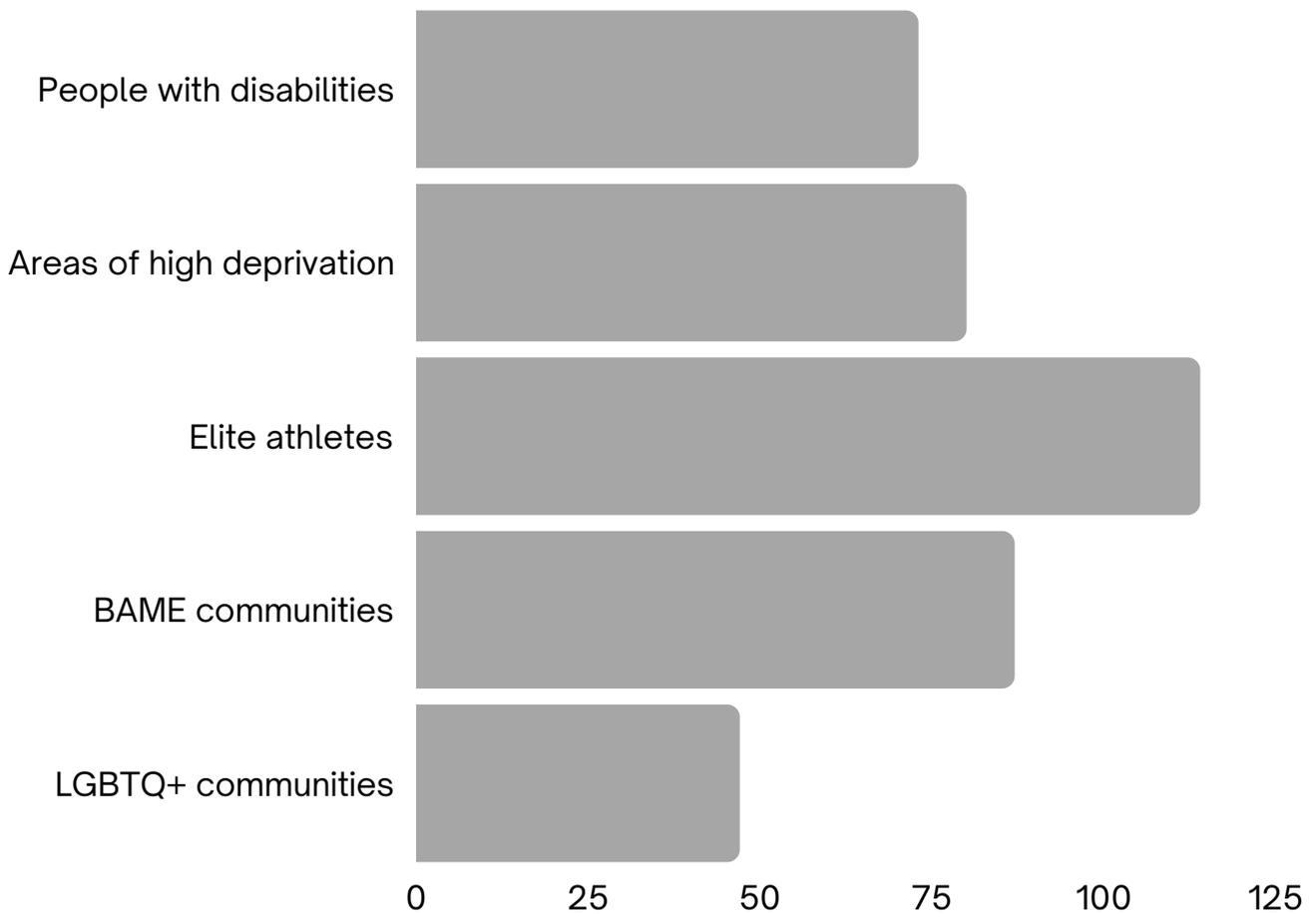
PARTNERS

BOING KIDS

SPORT ENGLAND

UK COACHING

SPORTING PEOPLE