



# Coaching and Coach Education in Gaelic Games: A Baseline Report.

# Coaching and Coach Education in Gaelic Games: A Baseline Report.

This study was undertaken under the auspices of the National Games Development Committee under Chairs Ciaran MacLoughlin (until February 2021) and John Tobin (March 2021 -) and Director of Coaching and Games Development, Shane Flanagan.

The research study was led by the GAA's Strategy, Insights, and Innovation Manager, Dr. Peter Horgan and supported by an expert advisory panel. The advisory panel was composed of representatives of the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations, as well as leading researchers in coaching, education, sports management, economics, and statistics from Universities and Institutes of Technology across Ireland and overseas. It is the first time that such a panel has been created, and the study would not have been completed without their effort and expertise. Their contribution to this study has been invaluable. Details of each member of the advisory panel is available in Section 10 of this report.

The study authors would also like to acknowledge the input of the Coach Education Workgroup, composed of coach education leads at provincial and regional level, and coach developers who brought their expertise in coach education to bear on the project. The authors would like to thank the volunteers of the Games Development personnel across the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations for their support in circulating the initial survey so widely. This contributed enormously to such a significant response rate.

There are special thanks due to the coaches who participated in the study. Without your contribution this ground-breaking study would never have come to pass. That this study was conceptualised, implemented, and completed in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic makes the contributions of all of the above additionally significant. Finally, this report is dedicated to all of the coaches across all of our codes who have worked so tirelessly for many years to ensure that a love of our games is passed from generation to generation. This effort epitomises the old Irish saying 'Ní neart go cur le chéile'

Is muide

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# Section 1

Introduction



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Aims of this study

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Coaches are key drivers of participation and performance within Gaelic games. There is evidence that players who experience good coaching are more likely to continue participating in sport throughout their lifespan and develop sport-specific and psycho-social competencies to a greater extent. It is therefore important to have a clear understanding of the coaching environment, and the work that coaches do.

The aim of this research was to collect population data about the coaching workforce across all levels of Gaelic games participation to inform coach development policy, implementation, and management at National, Provincial, County, School and Club levels. The following questions guided this research:

1. Who are the coaches of Gaelic games, and what is their level of involvement in coaching?
2. What are the practices of Gaelic games coaches in fulfilling their role, currently and into the future?
3. What are Gaelic games coaches' experiences of coach education?
4. What are Gaelic games coaches' learning aspirations and development needs?

## 1.2 Method

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This project involved a combination of qualitative (semi-structured interviews) and quantitative (web based survey) research methods.

### Phase One

The first phase involved the development of the Gaelic Games Coach Survey and was completed in April/ May 2020.

Firstly, a review of previous surveys conducted in Australia, Britain, and Norway was completed. In addition, the Study Advisory group provided guidance on the research questions, appropriate themes, and formulation of the survey. The survey was developed and then trialled on 100 practicing coaches to determine the validity of the questions and evaluate the on-line delivery method.

## Phase Two

The second phase involved the circulation of the web-based survey that was developed in Phase 1. The survey was issued in May/June 2020. Coaches from all Gaelic Games sports at all levels of participation were invited to complete the survey. The survey was circulated through:

- Direct email to qualified coaches' databases of the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations
- Direct email to all club secretaries in each Association
- Direct email to all Games Development Personnel, and Coach Developers in each Association

In addition, a promotional campaign was designed with members of the GAA Communications department including:

- GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Association websites
- Print and digital media via press launch
- Social media
- Key influencing coaches and coach developers were targeted for circulation amongst their colleagues.

In total, 11,569 valid questionnaire responses were received. Of this number, 10,647 respondents coached in the previous 12 months and were noted as active, with 922 coaches deemed inactive.

## Phase Three

Coaches who had completed the survey were asked to consent to being available for further research. A selection of those who provided consent were contacted to take part in virtual focus groups. In total, eight virtual focus groups were conducted during October/November 2020. Their profiles are consistent with the online survey sample.

the focus group questions were developed to mirror the sections of the survey, and were adapted based on the initial survey findings.

## Report Structure

What follows is a summary of the findings from Phases 2 and 3 of this study. Findings are presented in different sections as follows:

- **Who are the coaches of Gaelic games?**
- **What do we know about the coaching experiences of our coaches?**
- **What do we know about the coaching practices of our coaches?**
- **What do we see as our coaching futures?**
- **What do we know about the coach education experiences of our coaches?**
- **What do we know about the future coach education intentions of our coaches?**
- **What are the key recommendations from this study to improve policy and practice?**







## Section 2

Who are the coaches of Gaelic Games?





# 2

## Who are the coaches of Gaelic games?

The Gaelic games coaching workforce is made up on a complex mix of individuals, who have equally complex coaching experiences unique to their code, their location and their personal situation. The findings presented in this section reflect this complex mix, focusing on the coach’s age, gender, and where our coaches coach.

### 2.1 Coach Age and Gender

Figure 2.1 shows the breakdown of active coaches by age. While respondents were from across the spectrum of the age profiles, the two age cohorts with the most responses were 35 – 44 (36.1%) and 45 – 54 (39.1%). While this might have been expected as individuals within these age cohorts may no longer be competing in sport, there were also a significant number of responses in the age ranges that might be considered prime ages for also playing Gaelic games – age 17 – 24 (5%) and 25 – 34 (10.5%).

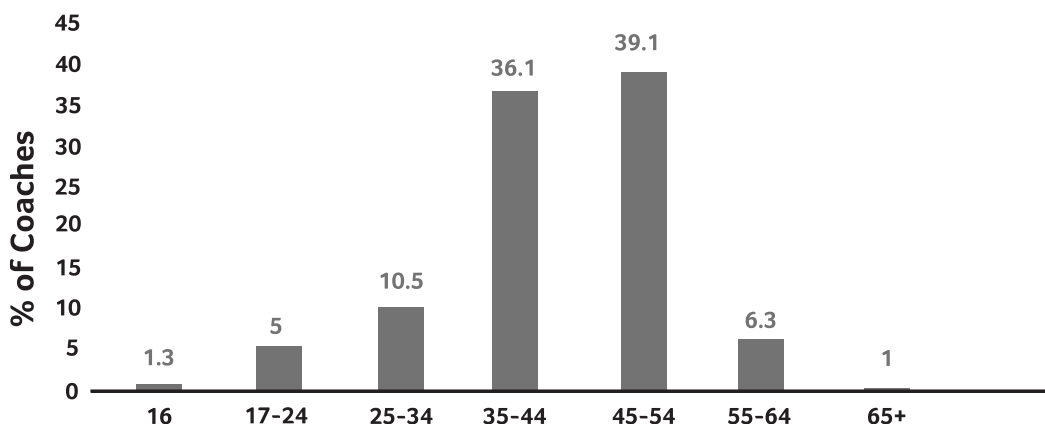


Figure 2.1 : Respondent coaches by age in years

Almost 80% of respondents (79.9%) were male. Investigating this further, Figure 2.2 shows the breakdown of active coaches by age and gender. There is a significant difference in the age of male coaches compared to female coaches, with data showing that 65.5% of female coaches are under the age of 44 compared to 50.4% of male coaches.



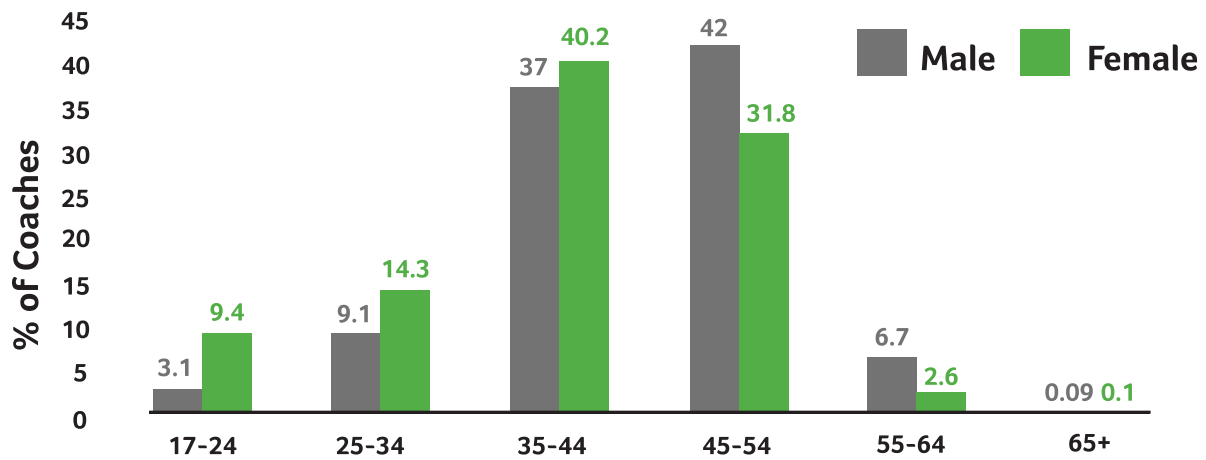


Figure 2.2: The Age of Coaches (in years) by Gender

With just over 20% of respondents being female, the relative lack of female coaches within Gaelic games was commented upon within the focus groups. Coaches spoke about the importance of female role models for young female players:

*'I would like to see more female coaches involved because I think then the girls that are playing U16/18 look and see 'alright she is a coach, I might become a coach'. What they see a lot of times is male coaches but they don't real have any roles models so I would just love to see more female coaches.'* (Coach 13)

*'I managed to get a few girls from our minor team to come in and help me with the coaching...I had several other ladies that used to play at a senior level...It was great for the little girls to see their heroes from the local senior team.'* (Coach 32)

In addition, participant coaches identified several strategies that they had employed in order to recruit female coaches:

*'...a big focus area for our club is encouraging women to get more involved...so that there is more representation across the whole club and having a big focus on 'one club'. There are more women getting involved in the coaching...but there is still a preponderance of men'* (Coach 13)

*'...from a girls team perspective there are not enough women involved and we try to get any of the moms, or aunts or any kind of female influence because if they haven't played, they are more nervous to put their hand up to learn how to do the coaching'* (Coach 30)



## Priority Recommendation

The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should investigate further the responses of the female coaches of this study to better understand the experiences of being a female coach in Gaelic games. This investigation will allow for more specific recommendations to be developed to better recruit, train, and support female coaches.

## 2.2 Where do our respondents coach?

The breakdown of respondents per county is presented in Figure 2.3. While there was a healthy response from all counties, there was a higher proportion of responses from the more populated counties, Dublin, Cork, Galway, Meath, and Kildare being the highest. When considered as a proportion of the number of clubs in each county Dublin again comes out highest, with Kildare, Meath, Galway, and Kilkenny rounding out the top 5 counties.

It should be noted that the figures for Ulster counties may have been impacted by the furlough scheme in operation at the time of the questionnaire circulation.

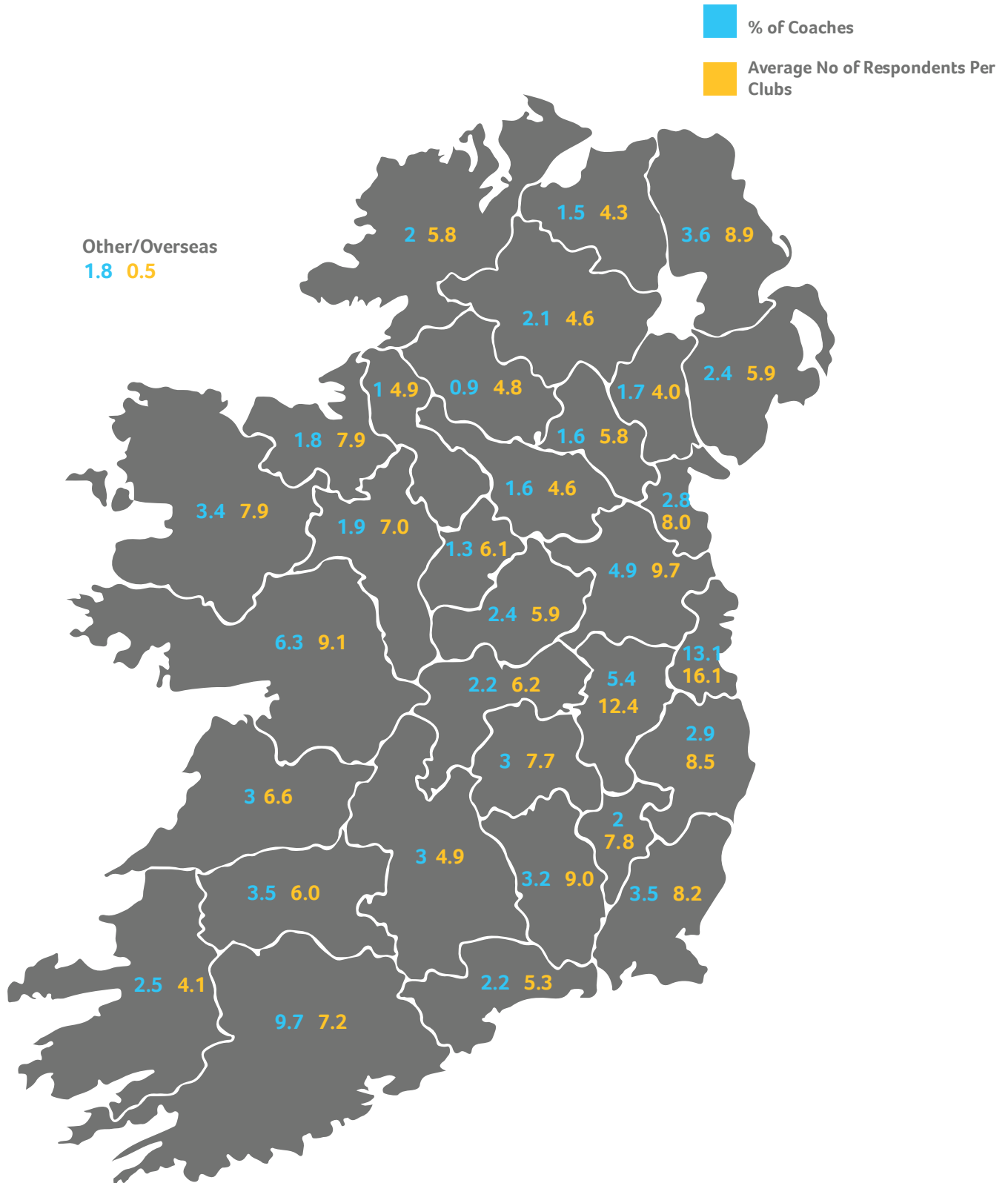


Figure 2.3: Responses from Coaches according to Counties

## 2.3 In what capacity do we coach?

Figure 2.4 illustrates the breakdown of coaches according to the area in which they currently coach. As might be expected, coaches are most likely to coach in a club (90% of respondents), however, the primary school is the second highest site of coaching for our cohort (25.3%).

The talent identification and development area, as represented by underage development squads and inter county activity, is now a significant area of activity for coaches (19.5%), followed by the post primary school (13.7%). Inter County underage, i.e., under 17/18 and 20/21 (10.5%), Third level (5.9%) and Inter County adult (4.8%) were smaller but significant areas of operation for our coaches.

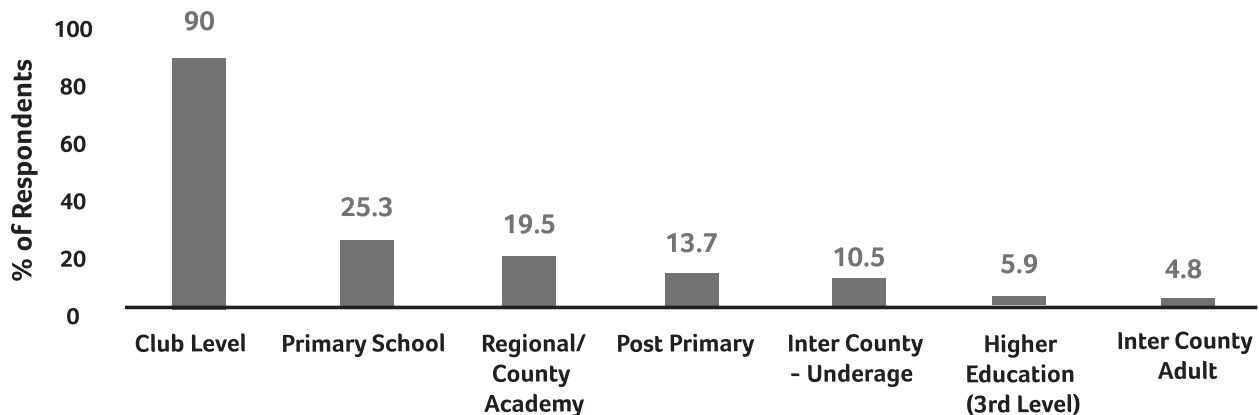


Figure 2.4: Percentage of respondents coaching in each area

Findings indicate that coaches of Gaelic games are actively coaching across multiple areas at the same time. Almost 40% of coaches (39.8%) have coached in more than one area in the last 12 months. As illustrated in Figure 2.5, more than one in five coaches (22.4%) have coached in two domains in the last 12 months, with a further 9.2% having coached in three domains. This indicates that while club level coaching is the predominant area for coaches, that a significant number of coaches coach both with the club and in other areas.

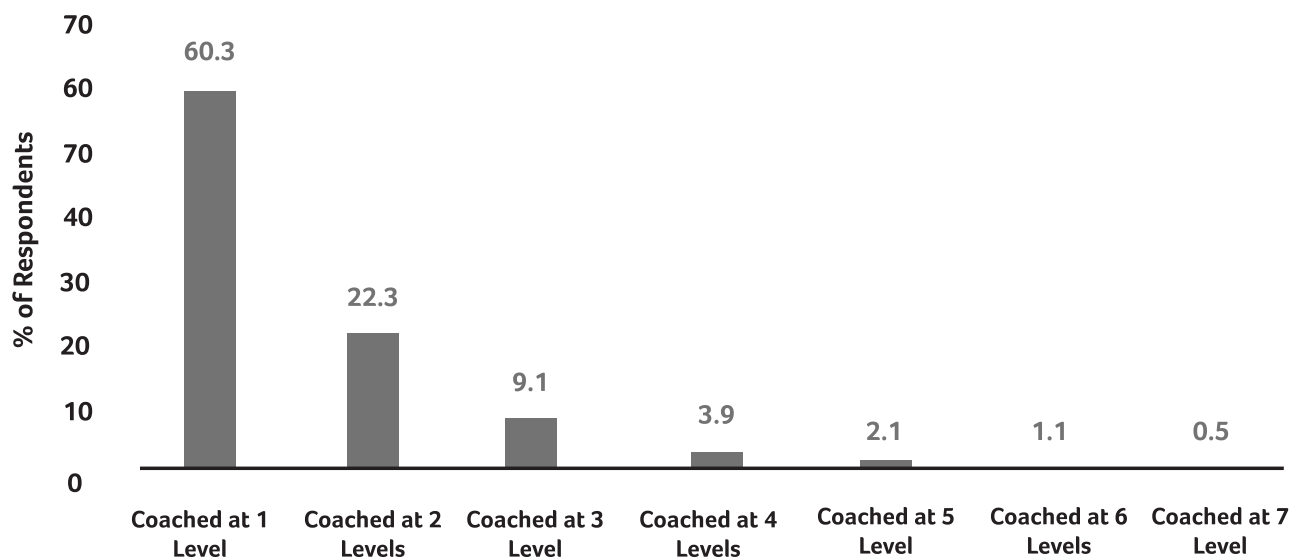


Figure 2.5: The number of areas coached by each coach in 2019/2020



## 2.4 What do we know about our coaches as players?

Playing experience is often identified as a significant driver of future coaching practice and can be considered one of the broader sources of learning that coaches might bring to their role, certainly when beginning to coach.

Figure 2.6 presents the playing experiences of the entire active coach set. While the majority of respondents had significant experience of playing Gaelic games into adulthood, a substantial number of coaches have little to no playing experience of Gaelic games. This is seen from the number of coaches that never played Gaelic games (6.8%), played up to the age of 12 only (5.8%), or played until their teenage years only, stopping before they were 18 (13.4%).

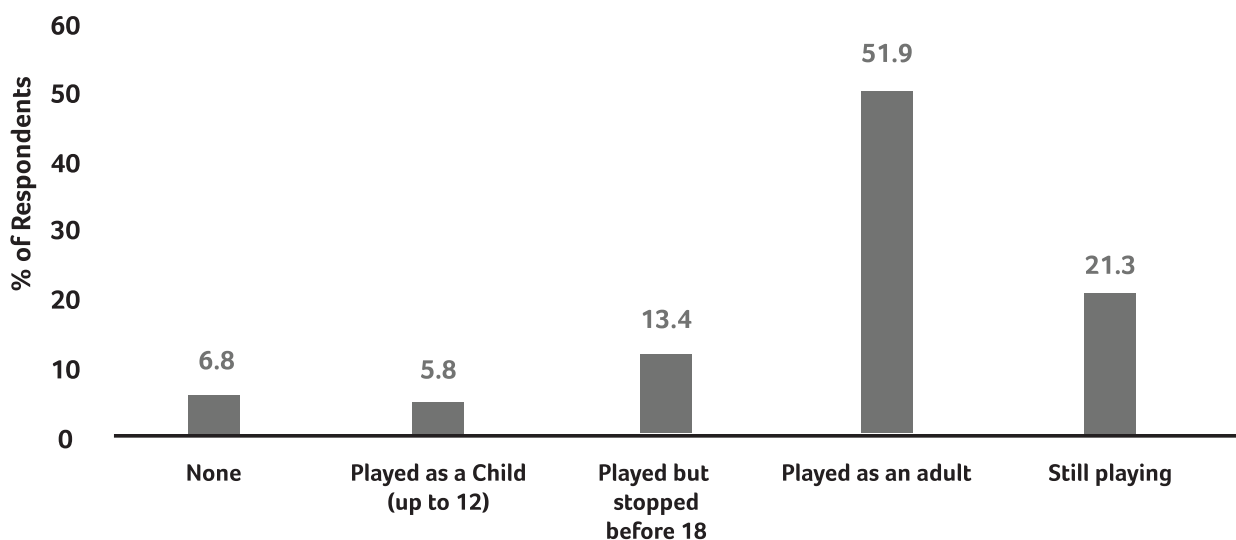


Figure 2.6: Playing experience of Gaelic games coaches

Investigating this further, Figure 2.7 demonstrates that a higher proportion of female coaches have no playing experience compared to male coaches. Of those coaches who have experience of playing Gaelic games, a higher proportion of female coaches stopped playing by the time they reached the age of 12. A higher proportion of male coaches had played as an adult but are no longer playing. Interestingly, a higher proportion of female coaches are still playing compared to male coaches.

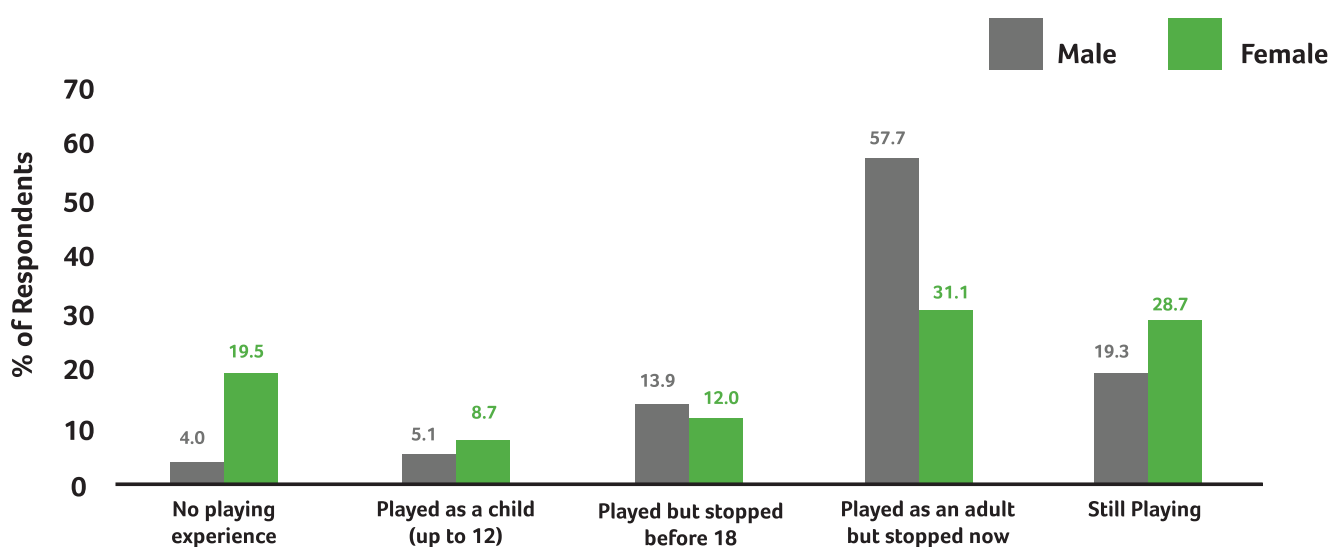


Figure 2.7: Playing Experience of Gaelic games coaches by Gender



## Priority Recommendation

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The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should analyse the trends of our coaches and adjust coaching and coach development programmes appropriately.

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The Club coaching officer should keep a record of all coaches in the club and ensure that there is a sufficient balance of ages and genders involved in coaching within the club.

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The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should ensure that playing opportunities are available to all players across the Gaelic Games Player Pathway regardless of playing standard.



THE SPORT FOR FEMILES,  
THE GAME FOR FULL,  
THE PLACE FOR COMMUNITY

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# Section 3

What do we know about the coaching experiences of our coaches?



# 3

## What do we know about the coaching experiences of our coaches?

Gaelic games coaches have demonstrated significant commitment to their sport over a long number of years. They have dedicated substantial time to coaching our games and fulfil many roles – both coaching and non-coaching related. The findings in this section are related to the experiences that coaches have had in these roles, and how the coaches came to begin coaching.

### 3.1 For how long have we been coaching?

Figure 3.1 describes the coaching experience of Gaelic games coaches. As illustrated, 11.5% or one in nine of the respondents have been coaching for 20 years or more. A further 24% of respondents reported having more than 10 but less than 20 years' experience, and 28.5% more than 5 but less than 10 years' experience. Of equal importance is the finding that over one in ten respondents (10.2%) have less than two years coaching experience.

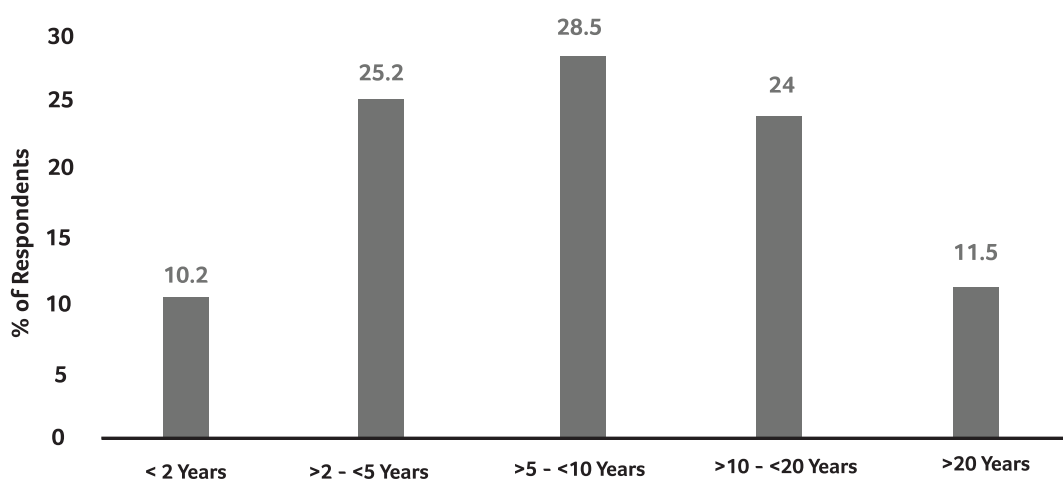
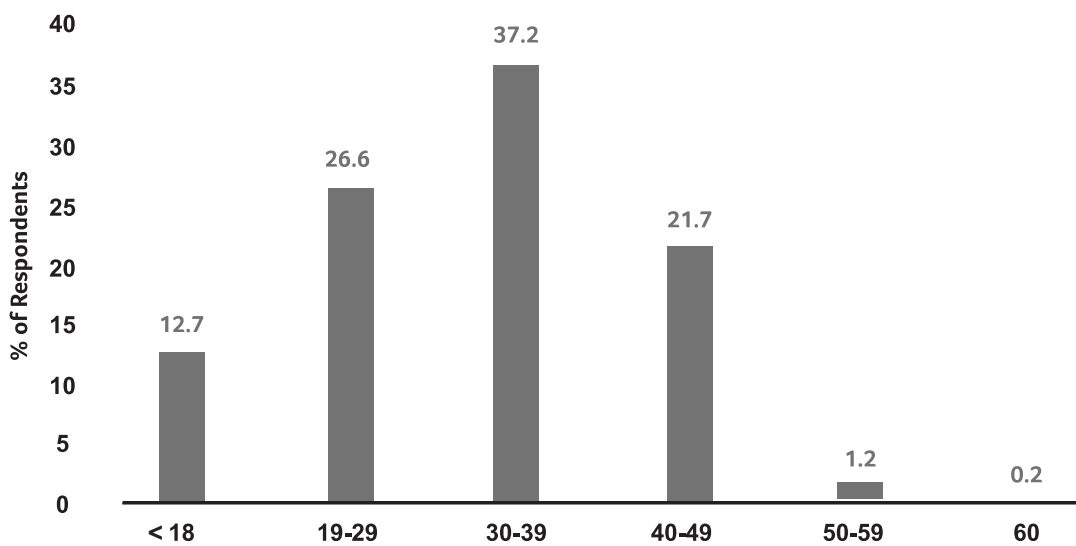


Figure 3.1: Coaching experience of Gaelic games coaches

### 3.2 Beginning to Coach

The data for the age at which coaches began to coach is shown in Figure 3.2. Approximately 1 in 4 coaches (26.6%) begin to coach in their twenties, with a further 37.2% of coaches beginning to coach between the ages of 30 – 39, while 21% of coaches begin within their 40's.



**Figure 3.2: Age range at which respondents began to coach**

Coaches were asked to identify the three key reasons that they began to coach (see Table 3.1). The data shows that there is an age related component to the motivation to coach. Using a colour coded system from Green (least popular response) through Orange (moderately popular responses) to Red (most popular responses), those coaches that began coaching in their 20's report different motivations from those coaches that began coaching in their 30's, 40's or 50's.

Younger coaches did not have a particularly strong single motivation (as would have been designated as red), but there were three major motivators for this age group: 'Sport is important to me/Maintain involvement', 'Club needed coaches to take a team' and 'I could do a better job than others'.

Those coaches who begin to coach at later ages have one definitive motivator – that their 'Children started to play'. Lesser motivators were related to a 'Sport is important to me/Maintain involvement' and 'Club needed coaches to take a team'.

**Table 3.1: The top three reasons chosen by coaches for beginning to coach**

Motivation to Coach	Age started coaching					
	<18	19 - 29	30 - 39	40 - 49	50-59	60+
Club Needed Coaches to take a team	37.4%	40.5%	36.2%	37.3%	43.0%	42.9%
Family Members inspired me to coach	30.3%	18.6%	11.6%	8.9%	9.4%	14.3%
Do a better job than others	30.3%	34.1%	18.2%	13.2%	20.3%	14.3%
Inspired by former coaches	27.9%	24.0%	10.5%	5.2%	3.1%	14.3%
Sport is important/Maintain involvement	27.7%	41.0%	36.5%	19.0%	15.6%	42.9%
Children Started to play	21.2%	21.6%	71.2%	85.3%	67.2%	28.6%
Told I'd be a good Coach	20.1%	17.0%	10.1%	8.4%	9.4%	0.0%
Coaching Career	17.6%	11.2%	2.4%	0.9%	1.6%	0.0%
Next best thing after competing	10.7%	15.1%	12.4%	5.0%	2.3%	14.3%
Teaching Post	8.0%	25.5%	2.6%	1.0%	0.8%	0.0%
Other	7.5%	4.8%	3.2%	3.4%	8.6%	14.3%
Pressured into it	6.7%	7.4%	7.4%	7.7%	12.5%	0.0%

The process of beginning to coach was also the subject of discussion within the focus groups. Several coaches mentioned their rationale for beginning to coach with the participation of the coaches' children central to the discussions:

***'The reason I started was my two daughters play and I got involved again. I was out of it for a few years but I came back again as my two daughters were playing.'* (Coach 15)**

The importance of being asked – either formally or informally – to assist was also highlighted:

***'I would never have put my hand up, but I was asked to do this. And once I was asked, I was thrilled to be involved.'* (Coach 1)**

***‘My children started playing. My son and my daughter started playing at the same time. I was on the side of the pitch just watching and somebody said, ‘won’t you just throw out a few balls to those girls there’ and that was how it started.’ (Coach 33)***

For many coaches, the process of beginning to coach was a progressive one, from being asked to help out with portions of sessions initially, before taking on further responsibilities:

***‘I have been doing it for two or three years. I started out on the side-lines just watching and then just helping out with cones, tying shoelaces and now I have suddenly become the guy who is organising everything in the U8’s.’ (Coach 11)***

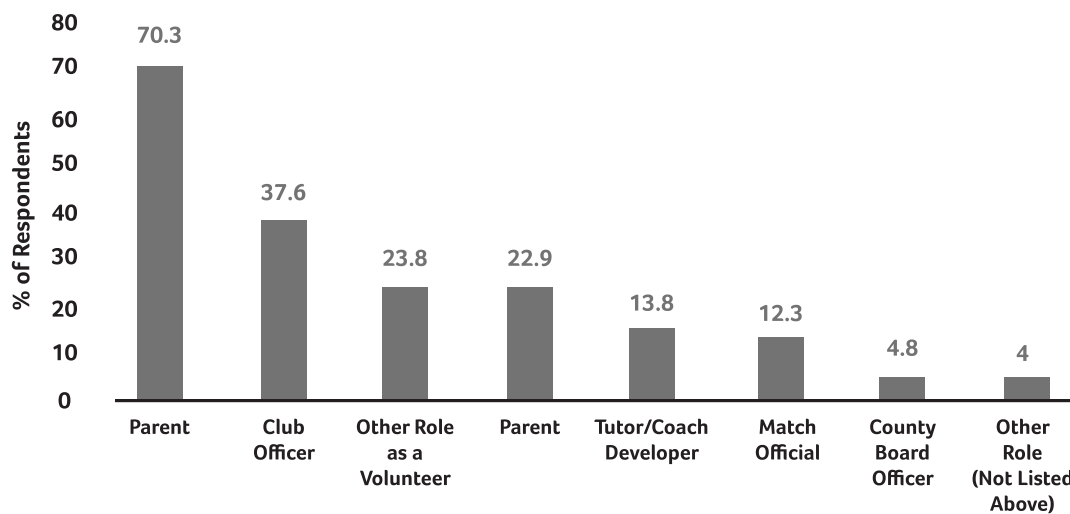
While coaches coaching their own children is a significant entrance point for new coaches, focus group members also identified issues that might arise from this practice, questioning whether such coaches will engage with other coaching groups, outside of their own child’s involvement:

***‘People tend to coach their child and it is hard to get them to... go back into a younger age group... it is hard to get them to start coaching outside of a child of their own. So that is something we really struggle with quite a bit actually.’ (Coach 14)***

An over reliance on parent coaches might be a short term solution, as such parents tend to follow their own children, certainly up to a particular age, and then drop out from coaching.

### 3.3 What are our non-coaching roles?

Participants were asked about other roles that they fulfil within Gaelic games. Here, coaches had the option to choose as many roles as applied to them. From Figure 3.3, it is evident that coaches do not just coach, but have several roles within their sport(s). Over 70% of the coaches in the survey are also parents of participants; just over 1/3 of respondents are also club officers (37.6%), 22% describe themselves as a player, with the number of match officials and tutors/coach developers almost equivalent at 13.8% and 12.3% respectively.



**Figure 3.3: Other non-coaching roles undertaken by Gaelic games coaches**





## **Priority Recommendation**

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Recruitment and training of coaches should be targeted at all club members and not exclusively at former players and parents.

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Clubs should ensure that those coaches that begin to coach are retained, either in coaching or non-coaching roles.

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The Club coaching officer should establish the background and needs of all coaches within the club, particularly those coaches who might be beginning to coach. Training and support programmes should be targeted depending on the experience of each coach.





## Section 4

What do we know about the coaching practices of our coaches?





# 4

## What do we know about the coaching practices of our coaches?

Gaelic games coaches are involved in the development of players across the full breadth of participation. The findings in this section relate to who our coaches coach, which codes do we take part in, how often do we coach, and what do we do for our training and games.

### 4.1 Who do we coach?

Coaches were asked to identify the age group of participants who they coach. Figure 4.1 shows how the number of respondents coaching at a particular age group increases from nursery (18.6% of respondents) up to under 13/14 (34.5%), before beginning a decrease towards the adult age groups. Under 20/21 represents the age cohort with the fewest respondent coaches. Slightly more respondents coach at adult level (23.7%) than at under 17/18 (22.2%).

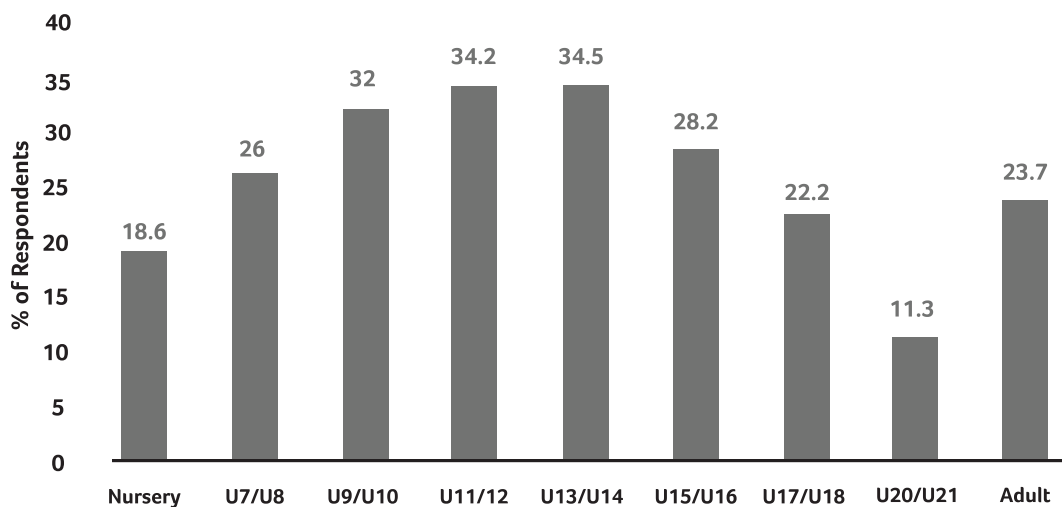


Figure 4.1: The age group coached by participants

When we consider the level of experience of each coach against the group that they coach, Figure 4.2 demonstrates that those least experienced coaches were more likely to coach at the youngest age groups. The percentage of coaches reporting fewer than 2 years coaching experience decreases from 'Nursery' in each successive age cohort to 'Adult'. The opposite effect was observed for the most experienced coaches, with the number of coaches with > 20 years' experience increasing within each age group, culminating with highest percentage at the 'Adult' level.

Looking closely at the child domain, the percentage of coaches with fewer than 5 year's coaching experience is significant: 41.3% at nursery, 45.3% at under 7/8, 42.4% at under 9/10, and 31.3% at under 11/12. At the opposite end of the player pathway, 83.9% of respondents coaching in the adult category have more than 5 years coaching experience.



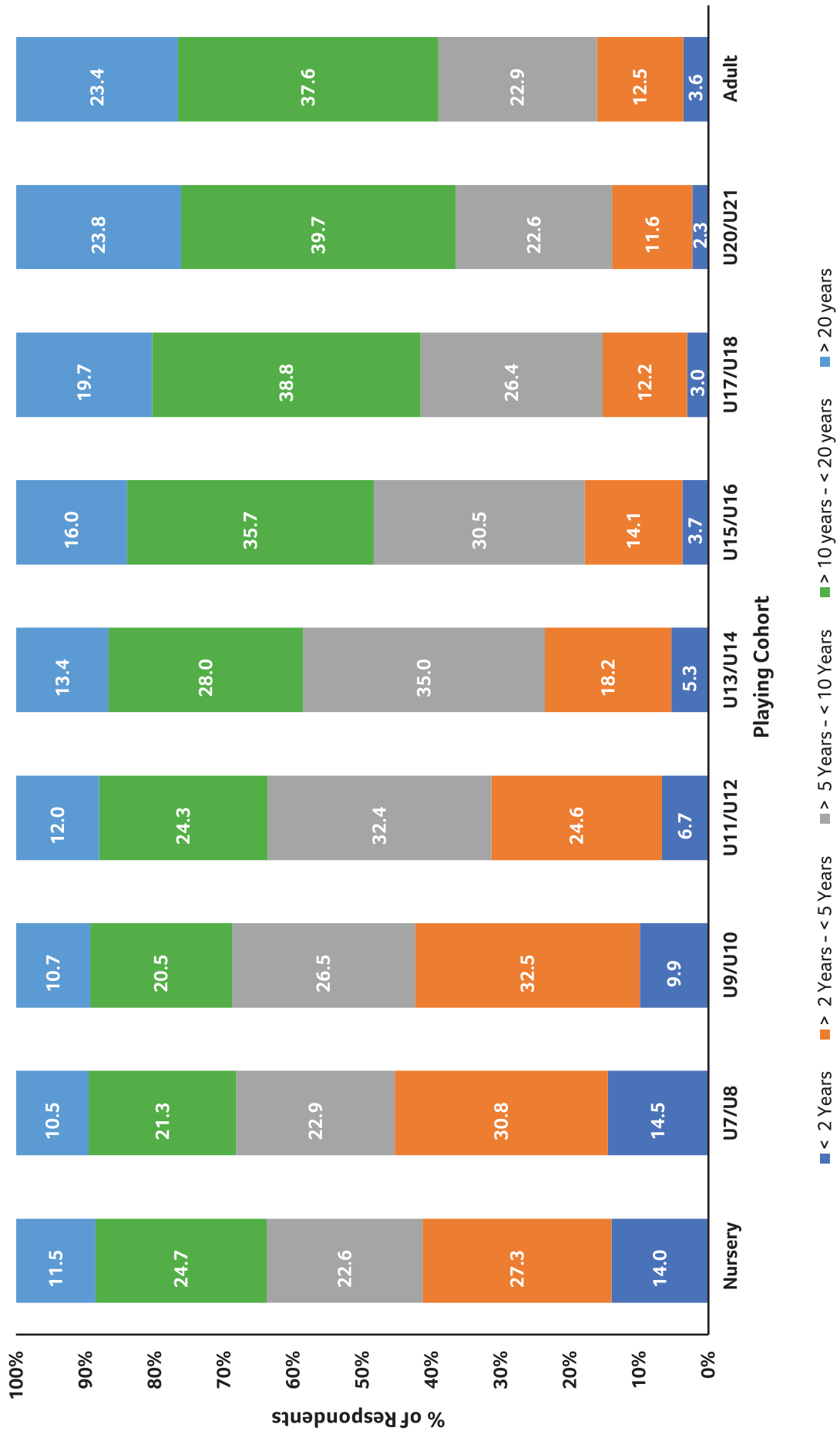


Figure 4.2: The coaching experience (Years) of those coaches operating in each age cohort

## 4.2 What codes do we coach?

As illustrated in Figure 4.3, Gaelic football (62.6%) was the dominant code coached by the respondents to the survey. Hurling was the second highest response at 38.2%, with Ladies Gaelic Football third (26.8%), followed by Camogie (22.7%), Handball (1.8%), and Rounders (1%).

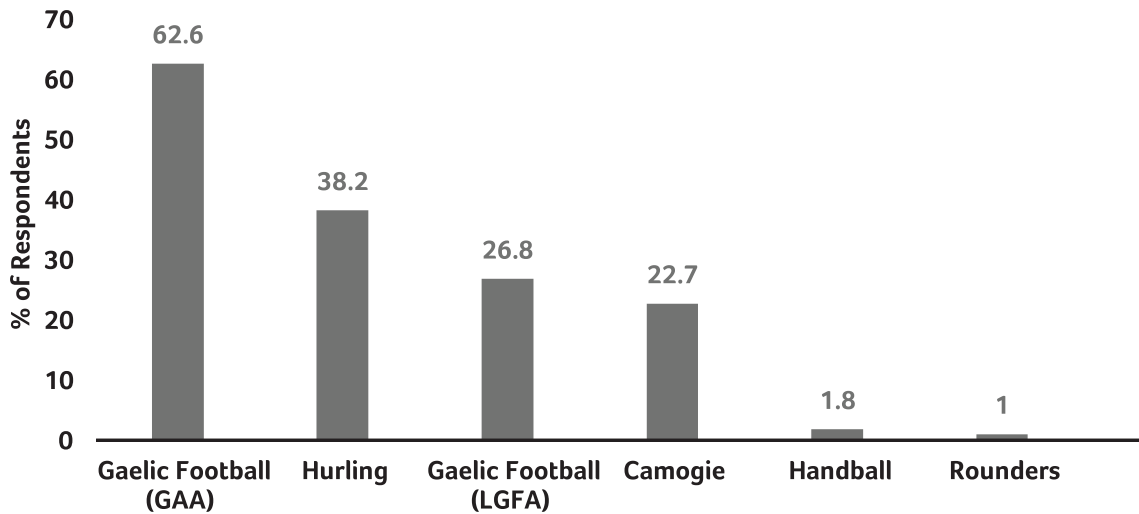


Figure 4.3: Gaelic Games Codes Coached during 2019/2020

An interesting pattern begins to emerge when we look at the combination of codes coached by our respondents. A significant number of coaches (39.8%) have indicated that they coached more than one code in 2019/2020. As outlined in Table 4.1, just less than half of Gaelic football coaches (49.1%) only coach Gaelic football and no other code. The equivalent figure is just above one third for Ladies Gaelic Football (37.7%) and Camogie (35.5%), and just less than one third for Hurling (28.3%).

For those coaches who coach multiple codes, data indicates that Gaelic football coaches were more likely to coach Hurling (36.2%) than any other code. A similar picture is presented for Hurling coaches, who are more likely to coach Gaelic football (59.4%) than any other code. In Camogie, there is a greater link to Hurling with 44.2% of Camogie coaches also coaching Hurling. While Ladies Gaelic football coaches are more likely to coach Gaelic football (48%) than any of the Hurling codes (Hurling 21%, Camogie 27.8%).

Handball and Rounders provide an interesting study. Handball coaches are almost evenly split between those who coach Hurling also (43.6%) and Gaelic football (48.9%), with smaller numbers coaching Camogie (26.6%) or Ladies Gaelic football (19.7%).

Even though the overall number of Rounders coaches is smaller, over three quarters of Rounders coaches (76.4%) coach Gaelic football, more than half coach Hurling (56.4%), with significant numbers coaching Ladies Gaelic Football (44.5%) and Camogie (36.4%).

	Gaelic Football (GAA)	Ladies Football (LGFA)	Hurling	Camogie	Rounders	Handball
Gaelic Football (GAA)	-	48.0%	59.4%	32.3%	76.4%	48.9%
Ladies Gaelic Football(LGFA)	20.6%	-	14.7%	32.8%	44.5%	19.7%
Hurling	36.2%	21.0%	-	44.2%	56.4%	43.6%
Camogie	11.7%	27.8%	26.2%	-	36.4%	26.6%
Rounders	1.3%	1.7%	1.5%	1.7%	-	7.4%
Handball	1.4%	1.3%	2.0%	2.1%	12.7%	-
No Other Code	49.1%	37.7%	28.3%	35.5%	8.2%	26.1%

Table 4.1: Likelihood of coaches to coach other Gaelic games codes

### 4.3 How often do we coach?

Figure 4.4 illustrates the number of times per week that coaches are active. When asked how often they coach, two to three sessions per week a majority of coaches are active on multiple days per week (78.3%). Two to three sessions per week is the most common response (57.7%), although almost one in five coach (19.2%) coach on 4 – 6 occasions per week, with a smaller number (1.4%) coaching every day.

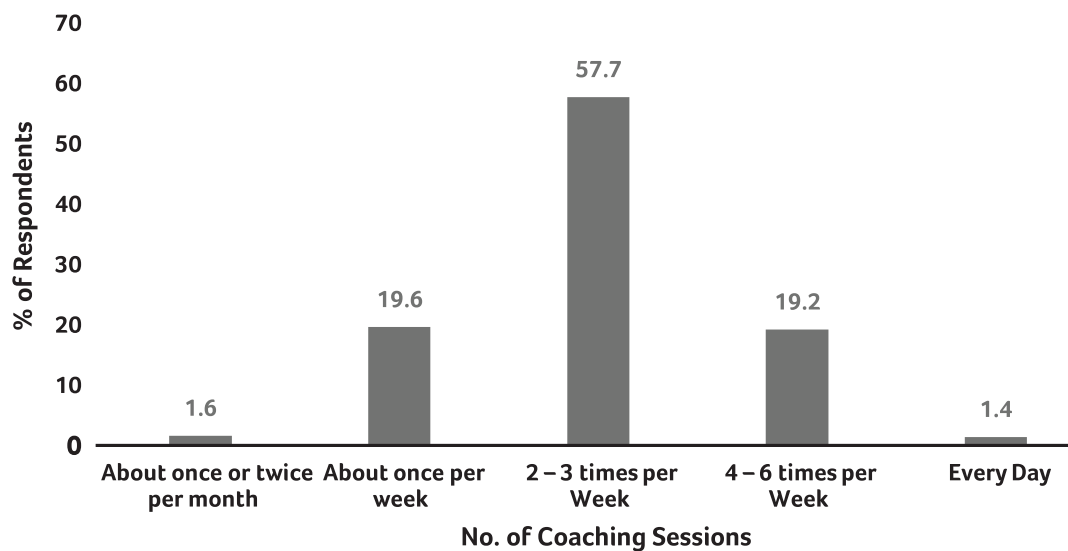


Figure 4.4: The frequency of coaching practice (Number of Sessions)

## 4.4 When we coach, what do we do?

When it comes to the practice of coaching, coaches were asked to estimate the amount of time per week that they allocate to several aspects of coaching: Preparing Sessions, Delivering Sessions, Reviewing Sessions, Travelling to Sessions, Communicating with Players, Communicating with Coaches.

Figure 4.5 presents the findings of these questions. The most popular response for each element was 'Up to one hour per week' except for Delivering Sessions, for which '2 – 5 hours per week' was the most popular (61.3% of respondents).

In the case of Preparing Sessions, Reviewing Sessions, Travelling to Sessions, Communicating with Players, and Communicating with Coaches, the second most popular response was '2 – 5 hours per week'. For 'Delivering Coaching Sessions', the second most popular response was 'Up to 1 hour per week' indicating that coaches devote a considerable amount of time on a weekly basis to all aspects of coaching. This is unsurprising given that the majority of coaches' coach on multiple days of the week.

A significant minority of coaches indicated that they did not 'Review Sessions' (20.4%) or 'Communicate with Players' (23.2%). Currently, we do not have the data to show the reasoning for these remarks but it is something to investigate further.

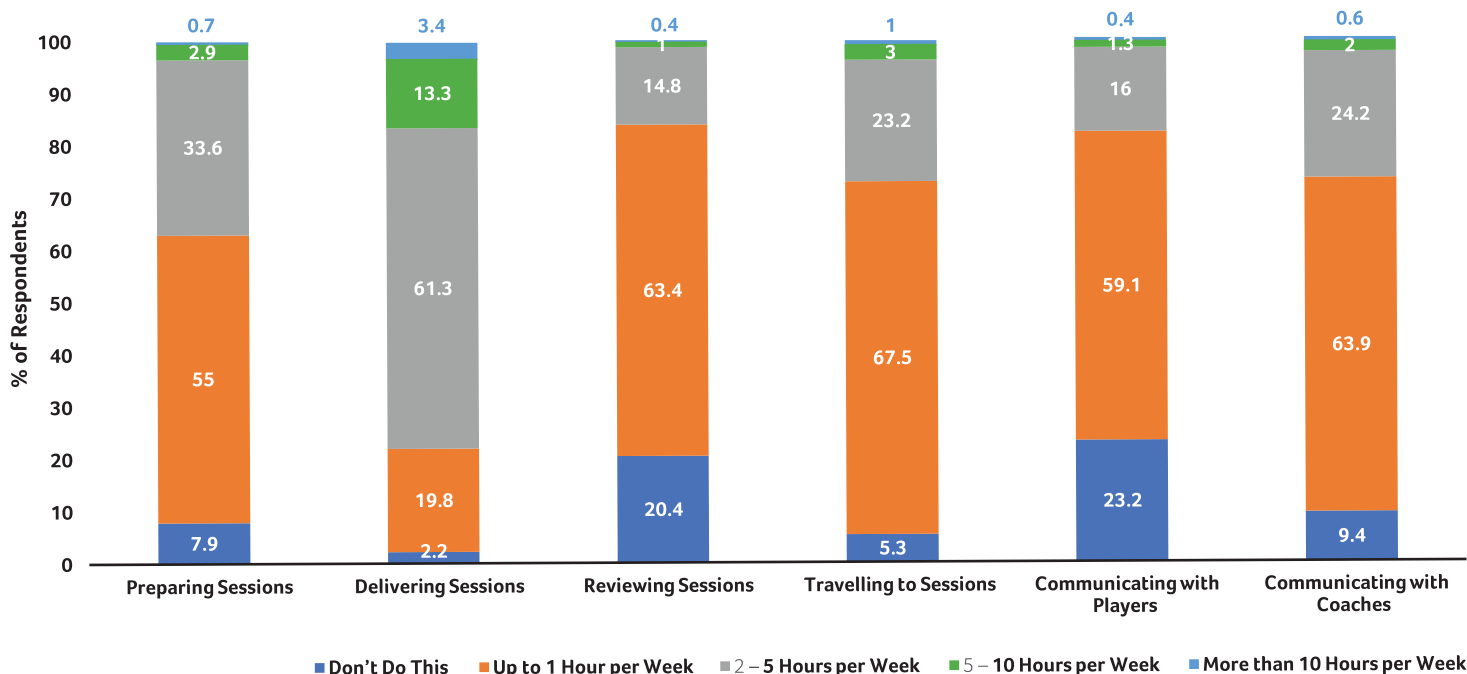


Figure 4.5: The number of hours per week spent undertaking coaching activities

The importance of a coaching group being on the same wavelength, and collectively working towards the implementation of an appropriate coaching programme for their team was considered important, though not always possible:

***'...good preparation is vital. We have three coaches, and we can do more tactical work we also have another session if there were only 2 of us it would be more drills, and games.'***  
(Coach 23)

The importance of carving up the coaching responsibilities was also seen as key to the focus group participants; firstly, to ensure that there was a variety of voices involved in coaching sessions, but also to provide additional support to any individual player:



***‘What I often observe is that while you may have three or four individuals on the sideline with a team, but one person is basically doing everything. They’re doing a warmup, picking a team, making all of the decisions on substitutions. The other people don’t seem to have a defined role. I don’t know whether it is a case that the other individuals feel that they don’t have the knowledge to do it, or whether there is one individual that is trying to dictate and do everything. My experience in the latter case is that it’s detrimental.’ (Coach 34)***

***‘I prefer to have as many people as possible helping, because the more people that you have, especially at underage the more time that you have to spend on individuals and give a little bit of one on one coaching.’ (Coach 32)***

Several of the coaches describe attempting to implement games based coaching within their own sessions, with concern expressed about the expectations placed upon coaches to know or understand what are considered to be more advanced activities:

***‘You learn most from the games, and whether you win or lose. In my view, you can throw out all the cones you want around the field and make it look spectacular. But if it’s not games based, and games based scenarios I think that you’re wasting your time. I think that some coaches might be complicating training because they think that is what you have to do, to throw cones all around the field.’ (Coach 27)***

Coaches were concerned about the holistic element of their role, expressing concern for their players as individuals and people as much as for their proficiency at Gaelic games:

***‘...coaches are getting involved in a lot more than just the skills element of it. Especially with older age groups, you need to be more aware of players mental state, whether they are up for a game or not up for a game. Sometimes it’s the last thing on their mind even though they are turning up for training. So sometimes you have to be very aware of everything else that is going on with players.’ (Coach 28)***

***‘...being involved with the under 17 team this year. You’re dealing with 16 or 17 year olds, hormones all over the shop and all that. On a more serious note, some of them lads have difficult backgrounds and you’re dealing with that as well. They might not be at training for a certain reason and you start to learn to deal with these types of situations, and throw your arm around them and go look it, is there anything that you can do?’ (Coach 27)***



## Priority Recommendations

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Clubs should conduct an annual coaching audit to establish the volume of coaching engaged in by coaches with a view to providing maximum coaching support to their teams’, while also preventing overload of coaches.

## 4.5 When we have games, what do we do?

Coaches were asked to identify the amount of time that they spend on a weekly basis Attending Games (Own Team), Reviewing/Analysing Games, Travelling to/from Games, Communicating with Players, Planning/Co-ordinating, Games/Competitions, and Communicating with Coaches.

Figure 4.6 shows that the majority of respondents indicated that they spend either 'Up to one hour per week' or '2 – 5 hours per week' on each element of their game related activities. The most time consuming element of the game related activities was 'Attending Games (Own Team)', comprising '2 – 5 hours per week'. For the majority of coaches, similar amounts of time were allocated to 'Travelling to/from games' (51.8%). 'Up to 1 hour per week' was the most popular response for 'Reviewing/Analysing Games' (53.2%), 'Communicating with Players' (62.3%), 'Communicating with Coaches' (61.3%), and 'Planning/Co-ordinating Games/Competitions' (49.4%).

Responses indicated that a significant minority of coaches did not 'Review/Analyse games' (23%). As with the coaching activities, we currently lack the data to allow us to go beyond speculation, however, it is worthy of further investigation.

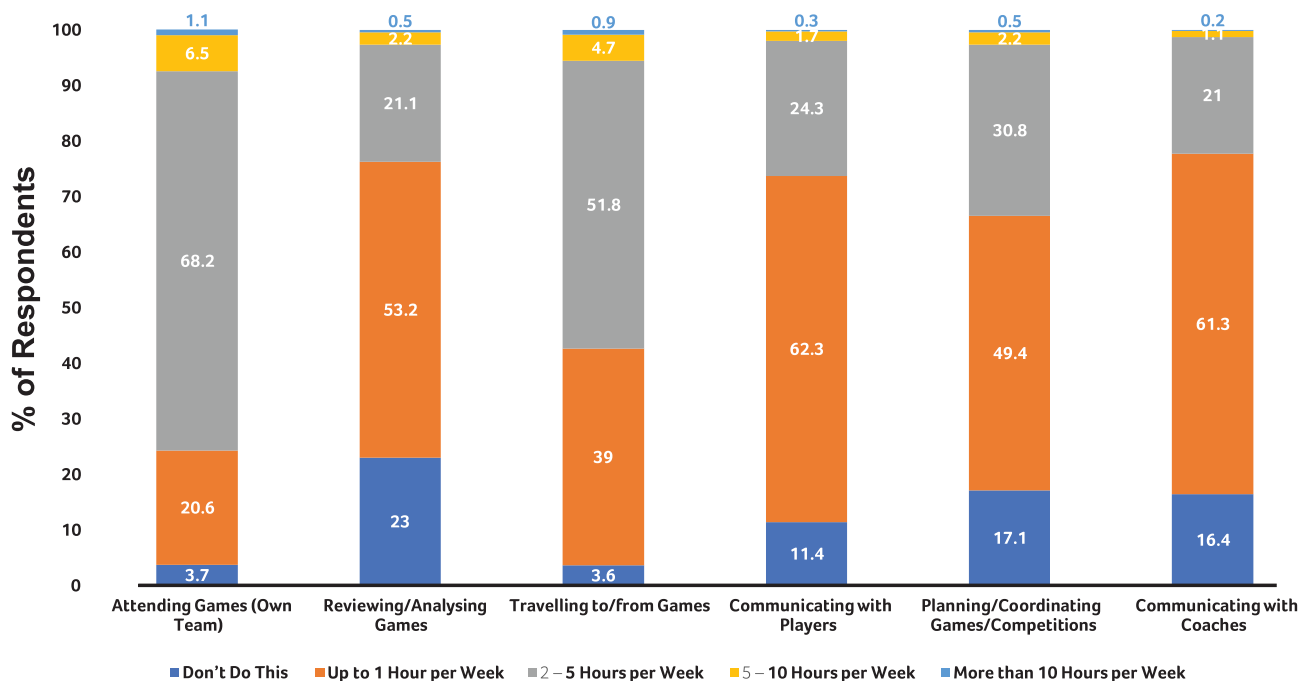


Figure 4.6 The number of hours per week spent on game related activities.

The demands of being a coach were the subject of discussion within the focus groups. Several coaches identified the volume of time committed to coaching as significant, indicating the various coaching practice activities that take place around the coaching session or game:

***'One of the things I found was that it is a full time job, on top of your job. In a sense, training two nights a week, making sure everybody are going to be where they are, booking pitches, you have the fixtures, you have to play a game Saturday evening you have to arrange that. Then there is equipment, you are there half an hour before everybody else you are there a half an hour after.'***  
(Coach 16)

The conditions that coaches operate under, the time commitments and the pressures to perform led to widespread debate during each of the focus group sessions on the coach's philosophy, why they coach, and identifying the purpose of sport and coaching:

**the first question the parents will ask the kids is 'did you win?' It is the first thing that is always said, 'did you win?' Do the parents ever ask the kids something like 'did you have a good game' or 'how did you get on?' It's always 'did you win?' (Coach 15)**

In spite of the pressurised reality of being a coach, the issue of the coach's' motivation and their coaching philosophy was a hot topic within the focus groups. Several of the participants felt that the pleasure and sense of satisfaction derived from seeing players progress provided a balance for the time and pressures experienced:

**'The weak under 13's this year might be the club chairman or secretary in 30 years' time and if you dismiss them now, they're gone from the GAA whereas the more games in the different levels the better.'** (Coach 26)

**'...player retention is a lot of it, especially when you're starting them off at nursery level. If they're still coming week after week, and the following year they are back again, I view that as a success. Keep them interested at that age and keep it fun for them.'** (Coach 27)



## Priority Recommendations

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Coaches should be recognised for the vast amount of time that they commit to coaching and games activities. The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should devise strategies to recognise this commitment.

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Reflecting on active coaching practice can be an effective learning opportunity for coaches. The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should investigate how coaches' active practice can be recognised as a learning opportunity.

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The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should investigate further the volume of time spent on coaching and games activities to establish what coaches do, and why they consider some activities important.







# Section 5

How long do we intend to  
continue coaching?



# 5

## How long do we intend to continue coaching?

That Gaelic games coaches are committed to their sport and to their coaching is reinforced by the coaching futures that are foreseen by our respondents. The data in this section reflects on how our coaches see their coming years involvement in Gaelic games, and what potential opportunities and challenges they might face.

### 5.1 How long do we intend on continuing coaching?

When asked to identify the length of time that they intend to continue coaching, 92.5% of coaches identify that they intend on coaching for at least 12 months, with the most popular response being more than two years (63.1%), see Figure 5.1.

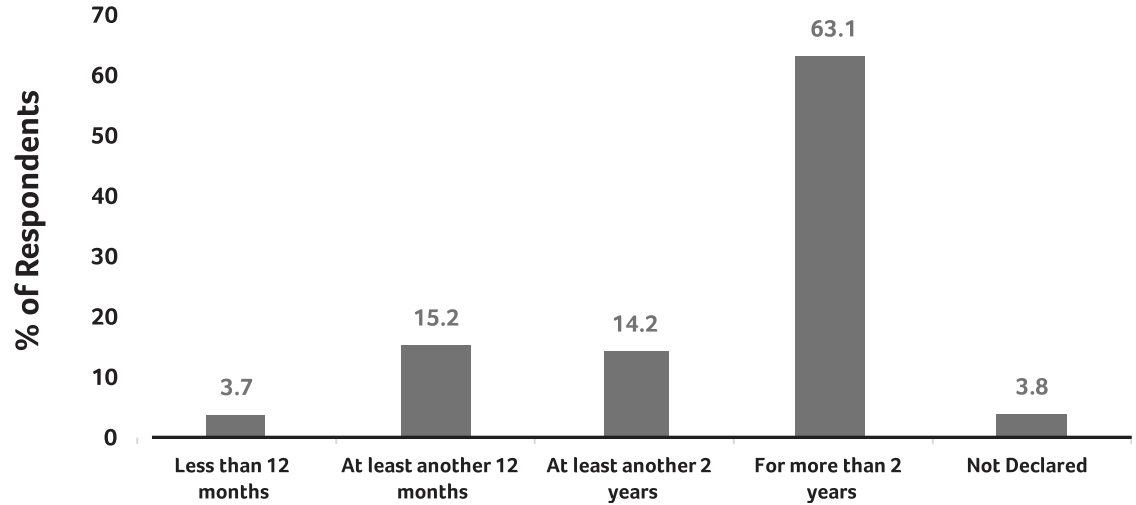


Figure 5.1: The duration (years) that participants intend to continue coaching

Figure 5.2 illustrates the commitment to coaching based on who is being coached. Coaches who operate at Child, Youth, and Adult level simultaneously (80.1%) or Child and Adult simultaneously demonstrate the strongest desire to continue coaching for more than two years.

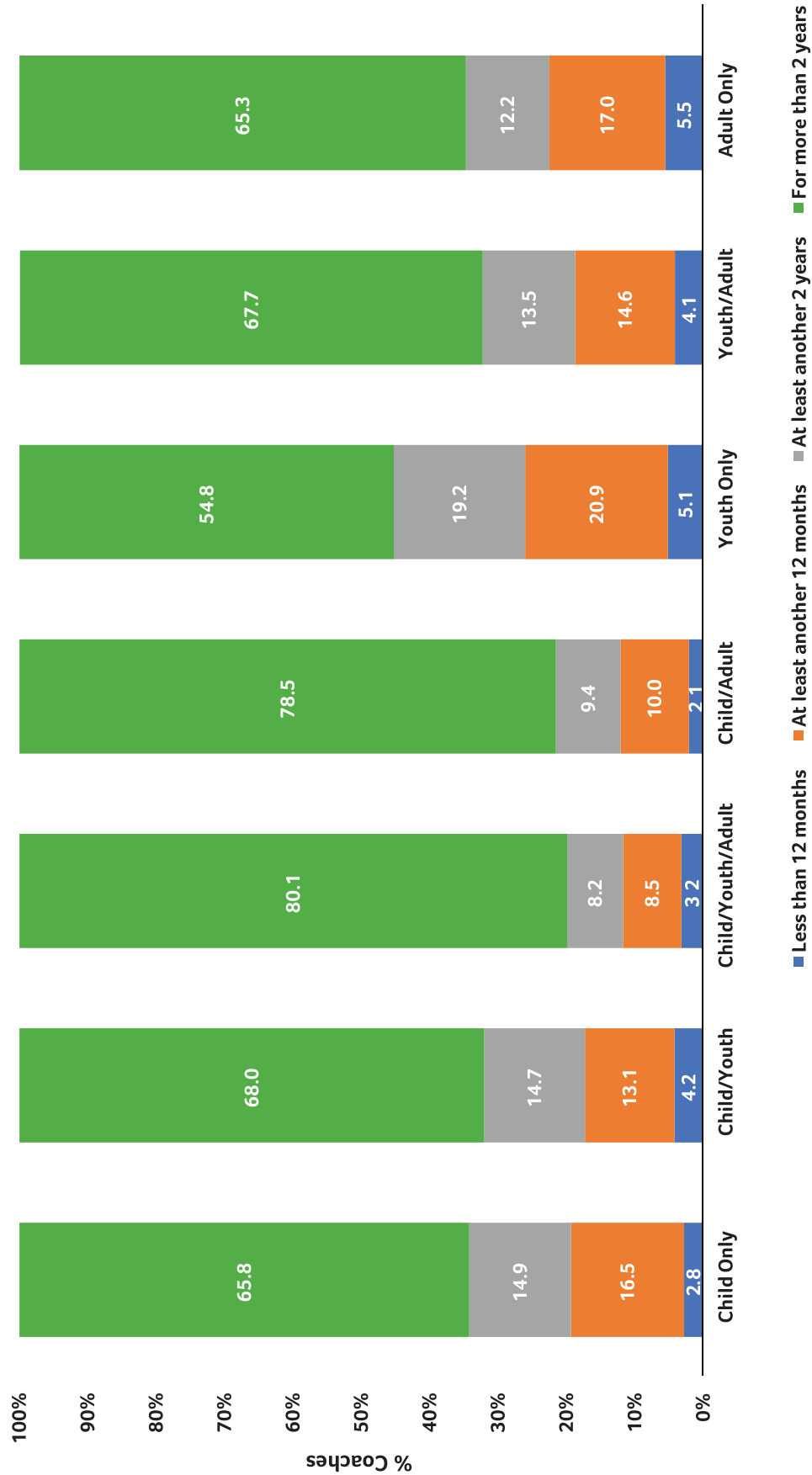


Figure 5.2 : Commitment to coaching by the domain of activity

When coaches of one group only are considered, there is a similar response from the Child only (65.8% intend on coaching for more than 2 years) and the Adult only (65.3% intend on coaching for more than 2 years) groups. However, there is a significant difference in the Youth only group. In that group, the intention to coach for more than 2 years is down to 54.8%. Interestingly, those coaches who are less likely to commit (only continuing coaching for less than 12 months) operate at Adult only (5.5%) or Youth only (5.1%).

Figure 5.3 shows the commitment to coaching according to the coaching experience of the coach. It is clear that those coaches with the most coaching experience demonstrate the strongest commitment to continuing to coach. Commitment to coach increases for all coaches with 10 or more years of coaching experience.

It was almost unanimous that coaches who took part in the focus groups wish to continue to coach, often using humour to deflect from the sincerity of their intentions.

***'I hope to be still coaching. It's harder to get out of these jobs than get into them. Every year I say that I'll give it a break next year but then you get the winter rest and you're mad to get back going again.'* (Coach 27)**

***'I'm hoping to stay for the team for a number of years. You tend to stay with them until about under 15 when you take them on. It's like a lifetime sentence!'* (Coach 30)**

Focus Group participants spoke about the rewards that come from coaching, and how these provide motivation to continue to coach.

***'The buzz of it, I love it...I will be there for another 10 years if they keep me there! I love the buzz to it! I love when it a child masters a certain skill and the excitement on their faces and they come back to you and tell you 'see what I did, look I can do that now, I can do that now'. This type of thing, so me I be there for a good while yet I hope'* (Coach 15)**

For some coaches, perhaps those that were most experienced, they felt that they may be able to contribute to other areas. For those coaches with significant experience of coaching adult teams the wish to support other coaches:

***'I found the pressures at senior, that I was getting too old for this stuff now. What I would like to focus on is the underage and what I'm really doing now is a bit of mentorship with the coaches here and I'm finding that more enjoyable without the pressure of having to win. Mentorship is what I'd like to do now, overseeing coaching with a club that I'm involved with and anyone that wants to ask me questions I'm there to try to answer them and help them out really.'* (Coach 31)**

Or younger players, was their goal:

***'I might only have two or three years left in me with senior football. I'd like to get involved with underage within the club, going back down and help some of the coaches coach some of the younger teams. Especially with an emphasis on skills and then working on the tactical and the team play and just trying to help those players make that adjustment to senior football as easily or as smoothly as possible when they are ready to do so when they are 17 or 18. That's my plans for the next few years.'* (Coach 34)**



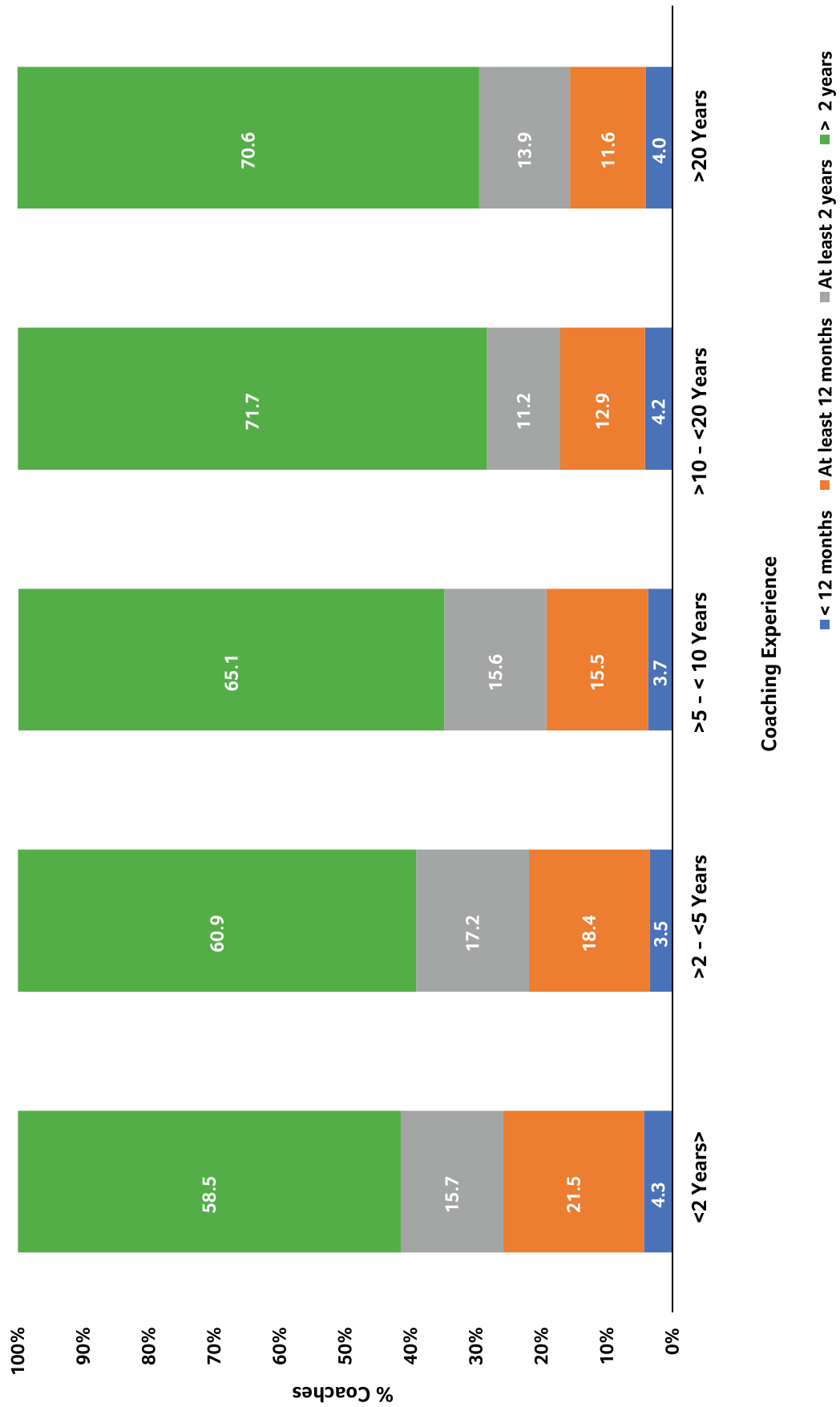


Figure 5.3: The intention to continue coaching (in Years) according to the combination of cohorts coached

## 5.2 What are the opportunities for coaches?

As illustrated in Figure 5.4, coaches felt that the promotion of sport as part of a healthy lifestyle represented the most significant opportunity for sports coaching in Gaelic games, with 74.2% ranking this as one of their top three responses. Using Gaelic games to support community cohesion was the second most popular choice (55.1%), followed by 'Better coaching qualifications' (49.4%), and 'Increased interest in Gaelic games generally' (42.3%). Interestingly, more opportunities for paid coaching positions were not considered a significant opportunity for coaches, being mentioned by only 7% of respondents.

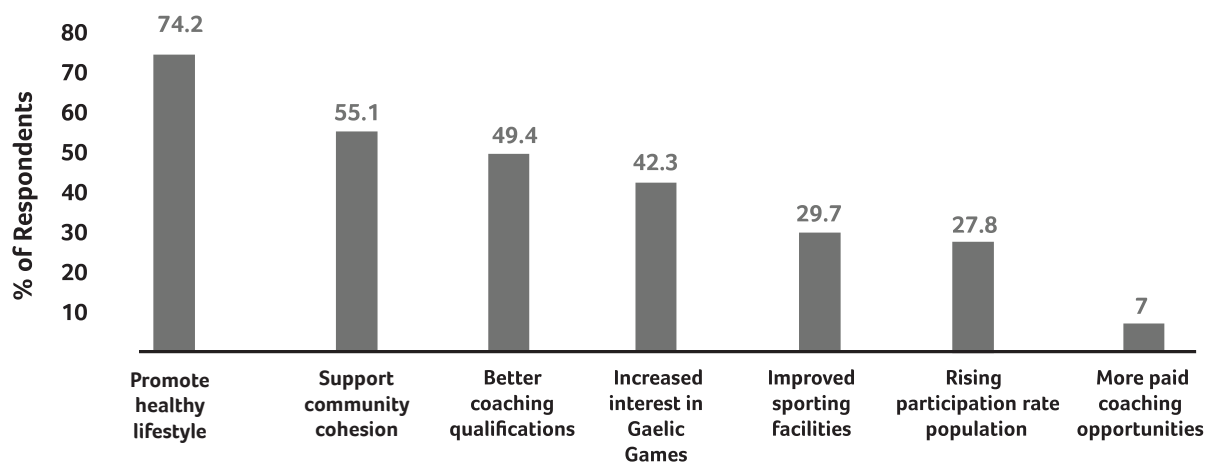


Figure 5.4: Opportunities for coaches

For focus group participants the opportunity to involve the entire community, or to support community development was considered a significant prospect for Gaelic games:

***'You talk about creating a positive environment for the kids that you have under your tutelage or what have you, it is also about creating positive environment for the parents and the coaches and everybody in the community. Because the GAA in my lifetime is probably the biggest community involvement I have ever had. It is really quite a fantastic thing and I think for that reason I want to stay in. We do have a very big social scene in the club and that is really growing and I think the coaching and being able to have conversation about football with your mates and hurling as well as you kind of grow old and your children and everybody being involved together, I think that is what will keep me in' (Coach 14)***

## 5.3 What are the challenges for coaches?

In trying to better understand the challenges faced by coaches, respondents were categorised into whether they were Child, Youth, or Adult coaches. Table 5.1 presents this data. Using a colour coded system from Green (least popular response) through Orange (moderately popular responses) to Red (most popular responses), it is possible to identify that 'Balancing coaching with other demands' is the most popular response, regardless of who is being coached.

While scheduling of competitions was a factor across all domains, it was most prominent with Youth coaches (40.29%). For Adult coaches, 'Costs associated with coaching' at 47.44% and 'Getting support from other coaches' (40.94%) were the most significant challenges.

**Table 5.1: Challenges faced by coaches according to whether they coach Child, Youth, or Adult players**

Challenges effecting Coaching of Teams	Child Coaches	Youth Coaches	Adult Coaches
Balancing coaching with other demands	73.8%	71.8%	69.8%
The scheduling of competitions	29.9%	40.2%	27.9%
Increased bureaucracy	27.0%	28.7%	17.1%
Falling participation rates	26.3%	29.8%	15.1%
Poor Games/Competition programme and structure	24.3%	31.1%	26.8%
Getting support from other coaches	19.6%	15.7%	40.9%
Getting support from my club/school	16.0%	17.4%	2.6%
The need to be qualified/garda vetted	14.8%	12.7%	12.2%
The quality of facilities	12.1%	12.3%	11.9%
Other	10.5%	9.1%	11.7%
Affording the costs attached to coaching	6.4%	8.5%	47.4%
Club uses external coaches so limited opportunity	1.3%	1.6%	6.7%

Focus Group participants identified several challenges that face coaches of Gaelic games into the future. Firstly, support from the club, and the broader Gaelic games family:

***'As a coach, you're looking for backup from the club itself, you're looking for good mentors, good team of mentors that you're working with. You need the buy in from the players, the parents, it's a whole cooperative thing.'* (Coach 28)**

Secondly, the technical nature of the games, especially for those without a strong history of playing the games:

***'I don't know if I'll be involved with the underage side of things next year if there is someone with more technical knowledge than I have. I have no problems handing it over but if the club is stuck again for a manager, I'd probably just go for it and take it. But I definitely going to stay involved with coaching the kids as my daughter is still involved there so I'll probably keep going.'* (Coach 32)**

And thirdly, the opportunity to coach needs to be there:

***'Firstly, I have to improve and learn more so I'll try to keep doing that as much as possible. Then the opportunity has to arise, because I'm at under 14 and I would like to go up to other age groups and I probably will after this. I have managed for a short time the senior team last year when they got into a spot of bother.'* (Coach 33)**

## 5.4 Why might we stop coaching?

Table 5.2 outlines the reasons provided by those coaches who wish to stop coaching. Only 2.5% of respondents indicated that they did not wish to continue coaching. Of those coaches that have indicated that they intend on stopping coaching, 'Loss of Motivation' (36.4%), 'Work Commitments' (32.2%), and 'No longer having enough time' (31.4%) were the most significant reasons identified. Again, financial considerations were not significant factors for coaches, with 8.8% of coaches that intend on stopping coaching identifying that they 'Cannot afford the costs.'

**Table 5.2: Opportunities for coaches**

	% of Respondents
<b>Loss of motivation</b>	<b>36.4</b>
<b>Work commitments</b>	<b>32.2</b>
<b>No longer have enough time</b>	<b>31.4</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>26.8</b>
<b>Not enough support from club/school/county</b>	<b>23.4</b>
<b>Family commitments</b>	<b>21.5</b>
<b>Want to give more time to participating in sport</b>	<b>12.6</b>
<b>I cannot afford the costs</b>	<b>8.8</b>
<b>Children no longer play</b>	<b>8.0</b>
<b>No Progression opportunities</b>	<b>5.7</b>
<b>Want to give more time to coaching other sports</b>	<b>3.1</b>
<b>Declining or poor health</b>	<b>1.9</b>
<b>Moved/Intending to move house/location</b>	<b>0.8</b>

As before, it was decided to subdivide the reasons that coaches have identified for stopping coaching according to both the age group of players that they are coaching (according to the Child, Youth, or Adult domains) and per the code that they are coaching. Data for each of these is presented within Tables 5.2 and 5.3 respectively.

When considered according to coaching domains, 'Loss of motivation' remains the most popular reason to stop coaching across all domains. For coaches of Child players, increased 'Family Commitments' (27.4%) and 'Work Commitments' (26.6%) are the next most significant factors. There is a slight difference for Youth and Adult coaches where 'Work Commitments' and 'No longer have time' are the next two factors (equal second in the case of Youth coaches, with 'No longer have time' more prevalent in Adult coaches than 'Work Commitments').



**Table 5.3: Reasons provided by those coaches who wish to stop coaching according to whether they coach Child, Youth, or Adult players.**

Reasons why coaches are going to stop	Child	Youth	Adult
Lost Motivation	42.7%	37.7%	42.2%
Family Commitments have increased	27.4%	21.9%	23.4%
Work Commitments have increased	26.6%	35.5%	34.4%
No Longer have time	25.8%	35.5%	37.5%
Not enough support from club/school/county	22.6%	24.6%	31.3%
Other Reasons - Not Listed	22.6%	24.6%	31.3%
Want to give more time to participating in sport	10.5%	14.2%	12.5%
Cannot Afford Costs	8.9%	9.8%	14.1%
Children no longer play	8.9%	8.2%	4.7%
Want to give more time to non-Gaelic Sports	4.8%	1.6%	1.6%
External Coaches block progression to Senior Team	3.2%	6.6%	4.7%
Declining/Poor Health	2.4%	2.2%	1.6%
Moved/Intend moving to a new house/location	0.8%	0.0%	1.6%

When investigated according to the code coached, the picture is broadly similar, however there are some interesting differences. Once more 'Loss of Motivation' is the most significant factor across codes, especially so for Camogie coaches. 'Work commitments' are less of an issue for coaches of Ladies Gaelic Football, however, for each code the various responses that indicate that time is a factor are significant.

It must be noted that only one Rounders coach indicated they were going to stop coaching and cited 'Loss of Motivation' and 'Lack of Support from club/school/county' as the reasons for this, and that only six Handball coaches indicated they were going to stop coaching and the percentages are calculated on this basis.

**Table 5.4: Reasons provided by those coaches who wish to stop coaching according to which code they coach.**

Reasons for stopping coaching	Gaelic Football	Ladies Gaelic Football	Hurling	Camogie	Handball
Lost Motivation	36.1%	38.9%	38.6%	49.1%	33.3%
Work Commitments have increased	34.0%	23.6%	31.3%	31.6%	50.0%
No Longer have time	32.6%	30.6%	36.1%	33.3%	33.3%
Other - Not Listed	28.5%	26.4%	28.9%	21.1%	16.7%
Family Commitments have increased	21.5%	20.8%	16.9%	22.8%	33.3%
Not enough support from club/school/county	21.5%	19.4%	26.5%	19.3%	50.0%
Want to give more time to participating in sport	11.1%	18.1%	7.2%	19.3%	16.7%
Children no longer play	9.0%	6.9%	6.0%	3.5%	0.0%
Cannot Afford Costs	8.3%	8.3%	9.6%	10.5%	16.7%
Want to give more time to non-Gaelic Sports	4.9%	1.4%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%
External Coaches block progression to Senior Team	4.2%	6.9%	3.6%	12.3%	0.0%
Declining/Poor Health	1.4%	1.4%	3.6%	0.0%	16.7%
Moved/Intend moving to a new house/location	0.0%	1.4%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%

When discussing reasons for stopping coaching, focus group participants cited reasons around their own personal health, rather than time commitments:

***'The biggest consideration for me is personal health.'* (Coach 10)**

***'Regarding keeping going – If anything would stop me keeping going, health is one that has been mentioned already and also if I felt it consumed me too much.'* (Coach 7)**

***'It's like a drug, we'll all be coaching until we pass away or whatever. I suppose, it's a combination of everything.'* (Coach 28)**

Other focus group participants identified that they only intend on stopping coaching, when they either no longer enjoy it:

***'I love training the underage teams, I enjoy some of the older teams as well depending on the dynamic there. When it is fun, it is just mighty craic especially when it is not serious. I will stay going for as long as I am allowed while it is like that'* (Coach 16)**

***'As long as I am enjoying it, the team, the players that are there, again it is all about the players, if there happy and you will know if they are happy with what I'm doing.'* (Coach 22)**

Or when they feel that they are no longer able to contribute:

***'For me, the biggest thrill I get out of it is to see guys that are kind of ordinary pushing on and developing. It does happen and it's great to see it. The only reason I won't stop is if I felt I wasn't contributing enough to the group.'* (Coach 8)**

Though again, humour was part of the discussion:

***'I hope to stay at it anyway, and as I said it's sometimes harder to get out of these jobs than to get into them. I look forward to whatever next year brings and it will be challenging again.'* (Coach 27)**



## Priority Recommendations

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Clubs are encouraged to create coach sustainability strategies for each of the age groups coached i.e., coaches of children, coaches of youths and coaches of adults (as their reasons for coaching and time spent coaching seem to differ and therefore separate strategies would be beneficial) – these strategies should include support programmes for coaches.

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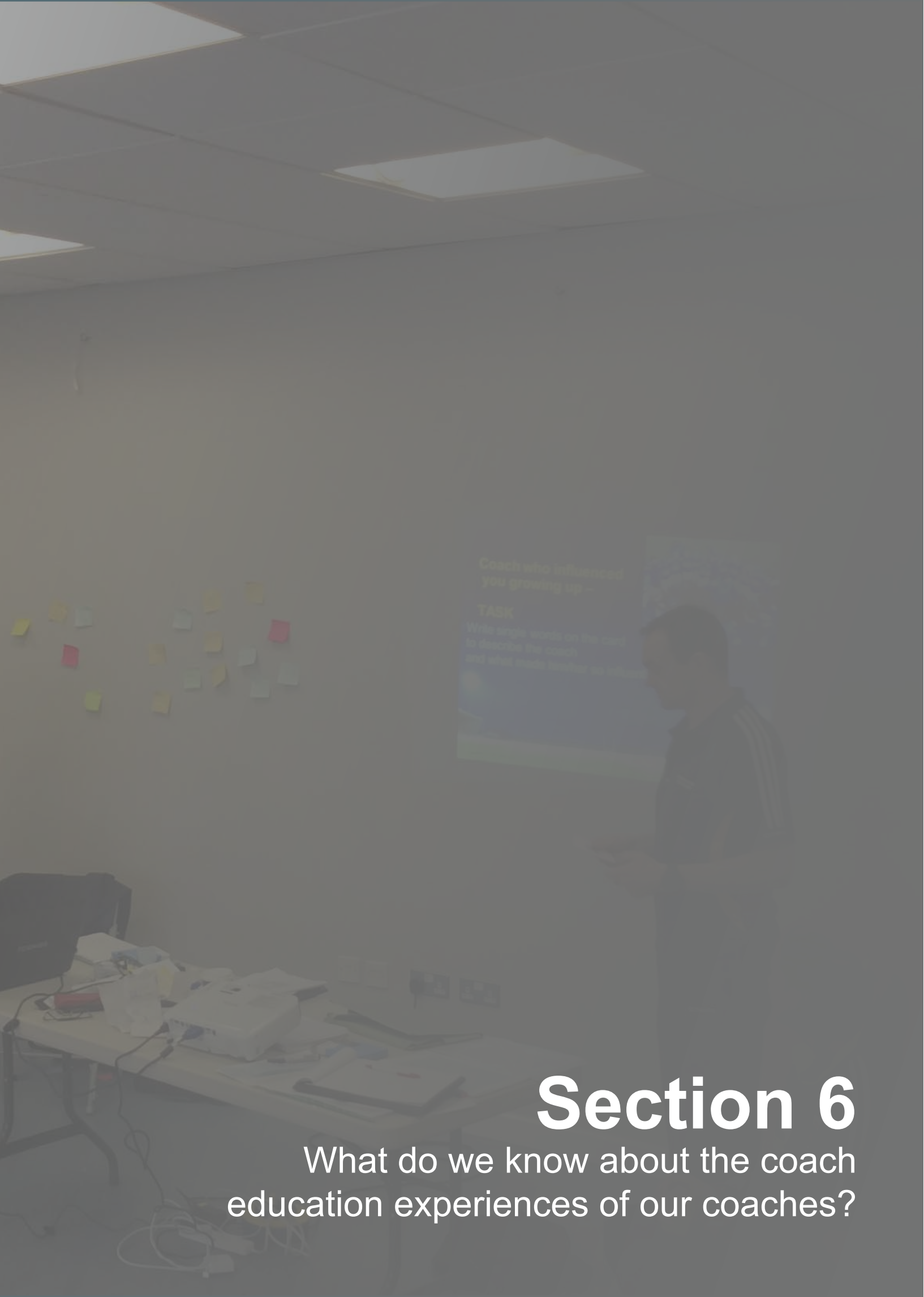
A competition season review to be undertaken with concentration being on coaches and coaching as well as players.

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Coaches should be empowered to progress health, wellbeing, and community development initiatives as part of their coaching activities. This may involve an expansion of the Healthy Clubs Project to cover all codes and all ages of players within those codes. The expansion to also include the health and well-being of coaches.







# Section 6

What do we know about the coach education experiences of our coaches?



# 6

## What do we know about the coach education experiences of our coaches?

In recent years there has been a significant increase in the provision of coach education programmes and the importance attached to them. This can be attributed to two key factors; the increasing accountability of coaches for their actions in contemporary society, and the desire among many practitioners and coach educators for coaching standards to be improved. In Gaelic games, there is a significant history of engagement in coach education, both prior to, and since the inception of the various coach education courses. This section provides information on the respondent’s experiences of coach education to date.

### 6.1 What coaching qualifications do our coaches hold?

As illustrated in Figure 6.1, overall, 91% of coaches have a valid qualification to coach in Gaelic games. The Foundation Award/Introductory Award was the most popular qualification (40.2%); however, an almost equal number of coaches had achieved the Award 1/Level 1 (39.5%). Of those coaches who hold a valid qualification, 11.6% have a qualification at Award 2/Level 2 which reflects the highest qualification currently available across the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations. More worryingly, one in eight coaches (8%) did not hold any coaching qualification.

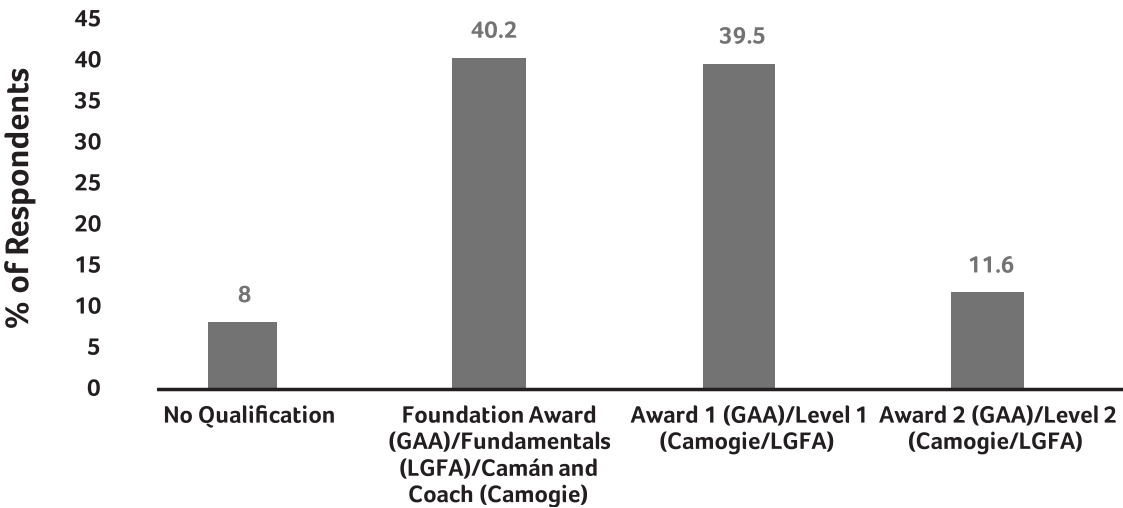


Figure 6.1: Level of coaching qualifications held

When broken down by the different age groups, it is apparent that the various introductory awards offered by the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations are the dominant qualification for coaches for coaches within the nursery, under 7/8, and under 9/10 age groups. For all further age cohorts, the Award 1/Level 1 is the dominant qualification (See Figure 6.2).

Those coaches with no coaching qualification appear relatively consistent across age groups, until you come to the ‘Adult’ cohort, where the number of coaches without a qualification increases.

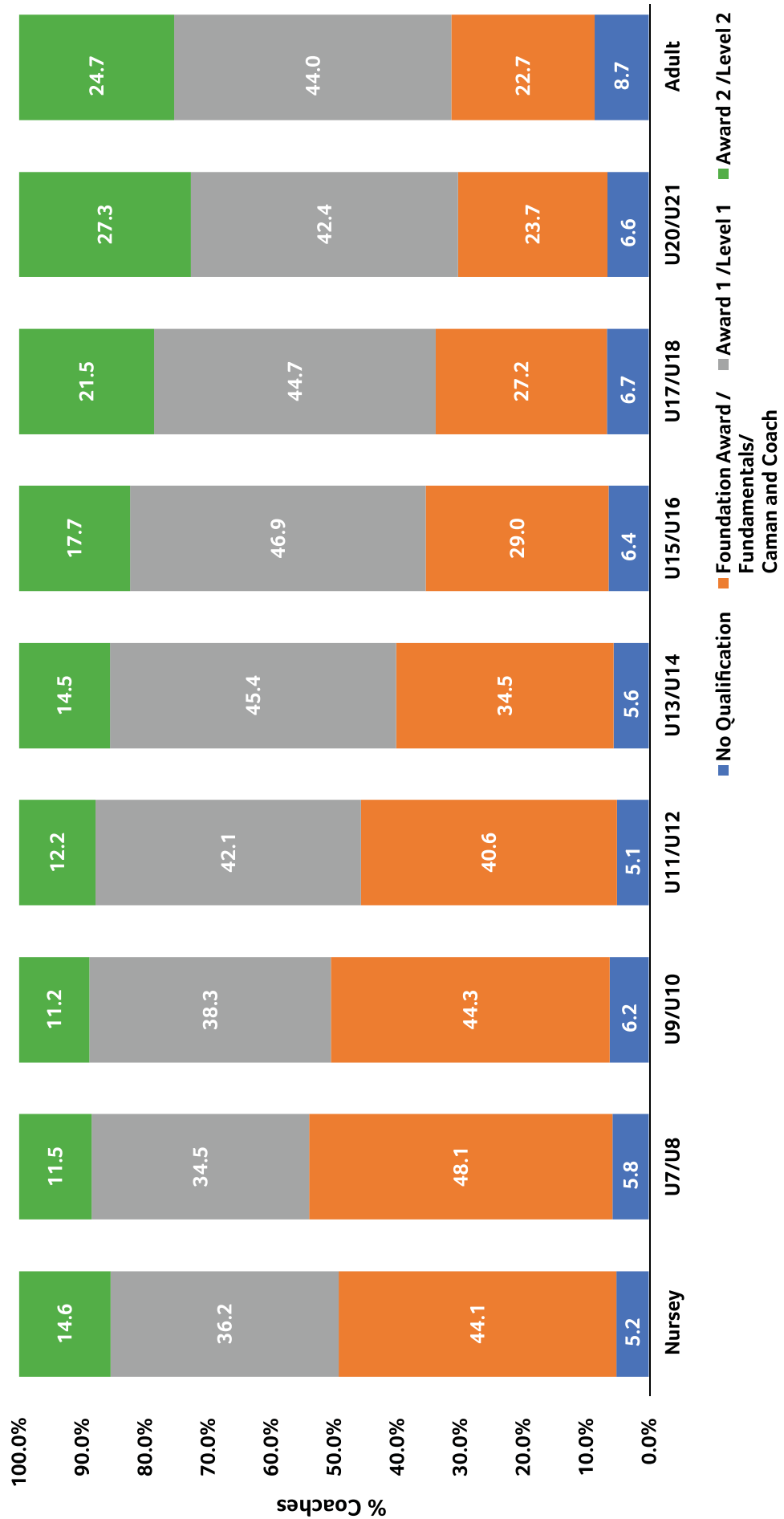


Figure 6.2: Coaching qualification held by the age level of team coached

## 6.2 What type of learning opportunities have coaches engaged in during 2019/2020?

When broken down by the different age groups, as per Table 6.1, The most popular learning opportunities that have been engaged in by Gaelic games coaches during 2019/2020 are related to informal and interpersonal opportunities. The most popular response was ‘Observing another coaches session’ (78.3%), followed by ‘Feedback from my players’ (63.3%). Of the more traditional learning opportunities, ‘Workshops’ (52.7%), ‘Webinars’ (52.2%), and ‘Coaching Courses’ (48.3%) were the most popular responses.

Table 6.1: Learning opportunities engaged in during 2019/2020.

Coach Education Opportunities availed of in 2019/2020	% of Respondents
Observed another coach’s session	78.3
Feedback from my players	63.3
Coaching Workshop – GAA/LGFA/Camogie	52.7
Coaching Webinar - Gaelic Games	52.2
Coaching Course – GAA/LGFA/Camogie	48.3
Another coach observed my session	40.6
Worked with mentor	35.4
Acted as a mentor for another coach	32.6
Worked with Coach Educator	27.4
eLearning Course – Gaelic Games	25.8
Coaching Course – Other Sport	19.6
National/Provincial/County coaching conference	16.2

Focus Group participants spoke about the benefits of engaging with the coach education system and attaining qualifications, of how it functions as a launch pad for coaching practice, and provides a grounding in what they consider the fundamental elements of coaching:

***‘In terms of the coaching, the Foundation and the first awards are definitely a very good platform to get. And even the communication involved with meeting up with other coaches. (Coach 4)***

***‘I think when we came in and done the Foundation level and the Level 1 is was a good enough grounding to get you in the door, it gave you an understanding of maybe how to set up a session, how to prepare a session, how to deal with kids, some tactics, some drills and you have a few things in your locker that you could move on with’ (Coach 11)***

There was an emphasis placed on the course tutor, and their ability to deliver the programme:

***‘I’ve been to a few different courses and really what you get from it varies massively depending on who does the coaching as well. I don’t know from the different courses that I’ve had in particular there were two girls (tutors) that stood out and they were fantastic. You gain so much more from a course with them than I’ve done with any of the other courses. I really think it depends on who is giving the training as well.’ (Coach 30)***

The importance of clubs being organised and approaching coach development from a strategic perspective was highlighted by several coaches:

*‘...we don’t have a lot of coaches qualified, and it is something that we’ve been trying to do. In fairness we have a top juvenile chairman in the club and he’s trying to drive people to get involved, to do these courses, starting off at a nursery or whatever age. So, I think it’s important for parents that are not from a GAA background if they want to get involved, to try to get them involved to do these courses. Because you’re just going to go back to the same people to coach these teams.’ (Coach 27)*

*‘...get your Foundation or your Level 1, and that’s important you have to do them, but we found that what we actually got out of some of the coaching courses, that we got three coaches that we knew were really, really top class, and we’re delivering the message that we, in terms of development and everything else, wanted’ (Coach 2)*

## 6.3 Reasons for not engaging in further coach education’

Coaches were asked about the reasons that they might not have engaged in coach education more recently. From Figure 6.3, we can see that over half of respondents mentioned time related factors, with 55% specifying ‘Lack of time’ and 45.3% identifying ‘Work/life balance challenges’ as reasons that they have not engaged in coach education more recently. Course information (7.7%), availability (17.9%) and flexibility (12.4%) were less significant factors.

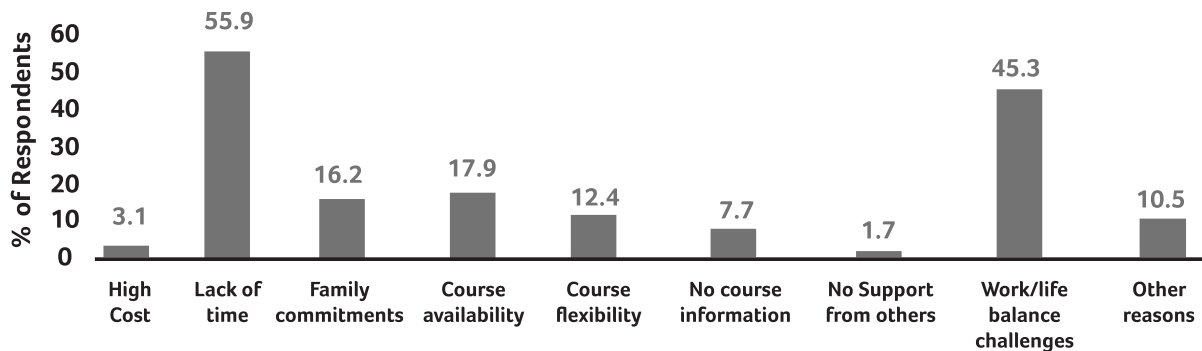


Figure 6.3 Reason for not engaging in coach education in recent years.

In investigating the rationale for not undertaking coach education, it was clear that the ‘Other’ option was a significant factor. Across the ‘Other’ options, there were four main categories of responses.

Firstly, for many coaches, COVID-19 has interrupted their progress, either through a lack of availability of courses, the cancellation of planned courses, or courses that had begun being unfinished at the time of the survey.

Secondly, for other coaches, they had achieved the highest level of qualification currently available (Award 2/Level 2) and the absence of an Award 3/Level 3 programme has ensured that they cannot progress to a higher level.

## Priority Recommendations



The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should ensure that their coach education programmes are organised in a fashion to encourage coaches to attend given the work/life balance challenges identified by respondents.



Thirdly, many coaches indicated that they have undertaken other coach education, not resulting in a qualification, such as workshops and seminars that take place at County, Provincial, or National level. For many coaches, these workshops provided a more focussed learning opportunity, rather than the elongated format of higher level courses. Other coaches indicated that they preferred the workshop/seminar approach due to poor experiences in the formal coach education system (either through poor delivery, or a perception that the content is not relevant).

The fourth category related to those coaches that felt that they didn't require any further qualifications, whether because they felt that their current level of qualification was sufficient, or they considered that their other playing and coaching experiences have provided them with sufficient knowledge, experience, and expertise to coach.

During the focus group discussions, it was highlighted that for some, coach education was a box to be ticked, and that many coaches were not predisposed to attending coach education outside that which has been mandated for them:

***'All the information is out there, but a lot of other Coaches don't bother with it. They think once I've the garda vetting done and I've the safeguarding or whatever else basic courses I have to do then I away to Coach because I've played it before I know everything.'* (Coach 7)**

While 'No course information' was not a prominent response in the survey section, one focus group participant queried why the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations were not more proactive in advertising their coach education options:

***'I'm confused as to why I don't know what's out there. Okay, well, I don't understand why when I when I said yes, I'm totally up for this, I'll get stuck in, why I wasn't then automatically given a menu of training going: "Look, this is what's available to you, pick and choose what you feel you need to upskill on". You know, it shouldn't be up to the person who is standing up and going, "Yeah, I'd help" to go looking for that stuff. It should be, "look, this is great that you're here. These are the things that are available to you".'* (Coach 1)**

Others were critical of the scheduling of programmes, and making them attractive for the coach to attend:

***'In terms of the one or two that I have done, you know, the safeguarding course and stuff from a mom of three children who were all involved in sport and music and dancing and etc, etc, etc. being told by email, I think it was, on Thursday that your safety course is on Saturday: it doesn't work. You know, it just doesn't work for parents. That's not acceptable.'* (Coach 1)**

Others still were concerned with some of the course content, and whether it suited their needs:

***'Where I struggle personally is, I find very little information on tactics and playing styles and stuff like that. That is an area for me personally I have a big gap. It is difficult to find that, to me it feels like it is almost passed down as folklore from generation to generation'* (Coach 14)**

## 6.4 What learning experiences do we consider important?

Coaches were asked to identify the relative importance of the various learning opportunities to their coaching practice. Each learning opportunity was presented to the coaches, and they indicated whether the opportunity was considered 'One of the most important', 'I have used it but it has not been that important' or 'Not at all important/I haven't used it'. Overall, as shown in Table 6.2, the most popular response to 'One of the most important' was 'Working with or observing other coaches' (79.7%). 'Internal reflection' (78.4%) and 'Testing and experimenting with my own ideas' (67.6%) were popular responses, followed by 'Coach education courses that I have attended' (56.4%).

Table 6.2: Importance of the learning opportunity as described by respondent coaches

Resource	One of the most important	Have used it but not that important	Not important at all
Working with or observing other coaches	79.7%	17.6%	2.7%
Reflecting my own and others coaching practice	78.4%	19.1%	2.6%
Testing and experimenting with my own ideas	67.6%	28.3%	4.1%
Coach Education courses I attended	56.4%	30.7%	12.9%
Working with a mentor	45.5%	29.2%	25.3%
Things I learned in my work life	43.2%	41.3%	15.5%
Seminars, workshops, conferences	35.6%	43.9%	20.5%
Materials in books/magazines	33.6%	50.5%	15.9%
Materials from websites or blogs	27.5%	50.3%	22.3%
Sport specific web pages	26.5%	47.9%	25.7%
Online learning courses, eLearning	24.3%	47.3%	28.3%
Social media	19.3%	42.8%	37.9%
Discussion forums or text groups on coaching and sport	19.1%	41.9%	39.1%

To further analyse the forms of learning that were considered important by coaches, the data were sub-divided according to the age of the particular coaches. Again, using a colour coded table, where green represents less important experiences and red the more important experiences, it is noticeable that 'Working with/Observing other coaches' remains the most popular response, peaking in the 25 – 34 and 35 – 44 age groups.

Other learning experiences display a greater age related effect, with 'Working with a mentor' being most prominent in the younger age groups and diminishing in importance with increasing age. Equally, it is interesting to look at whether the areas where technology or social media are more important for coaches of a particular age group. It is clear, that 'Sport specific webpages' 'Social Media' and 'Discussion forums/ Text groups' were more prominent in the pre-44 age groups than the post-44 age groups. While still not major factors in the learning experiences of coaches, it will be interesting to see if these data change over the coming years.

Table 6.3: Importance of the learning opportunity as described by coaches of different ages

Learning Opportunities	17 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	Aged 65+
Working with/Observing other Coaches	63.9%	71.1%	71.8%	69.5%	59.7%	49.1%
Reflecting on my own and others coaching practice	61.3%	71.1%	70.0%	68.3%	63.0%	49.1%
Testing and Experimenting with my own ideas	52.6%	63.9%	61.6%	56.3%	51.8%	40.0%
Coach Education Courses I attended	41.7%	38.9%	50.2%	49.7%	46.6%	40.0%
Working with a mentor	41.3%	42.0%	41.2%	35.7%	31.6%	16.4%
Things I learned in my work life	26.4%	40.9%	37.9%	36.6%	41.8%	36.4%
Seminars, Workshops, Conferences	26.2%	27.0%	31.9%	30.0%	30.8%	24.5%
Sport-specific web pages	22.9%	24.4%	24.3%	21.0%	19.0%	13.6%
Social Media	21.4%	19.7%	19.2%	13.7%	9.5%	4.5%
Blogs	17.5%	23.1%	25.3%	22.5%	21.5%	20.9%
Discussion Forums or text groups on coaching and sport	17.4%	16.3%	17.3%	15.1%	13.7%	11.8%
Online learning courses e-learning	16.8%	20.7%	22.6%	19.7%	16.6%	11.8%
Materials in books/magazines	16.5%	27.6%	30.7%	30.6%	30.4%	30.9%

Focus Group participants identified several learning opportunities that they considered important for them. As per the survey results, the opportunity to observe other coaches, whom they considered proficient was seen as an important step for all coaches:

***‘We had (a former Inter County player) over our minors this year and I went down to watch his training sessions and it was all games based training and intensity. And do you know what, I learned more from watching his training sessions than I had over the last 5 years doing courses. It was mind blowing really intense, but it was thinking outside of the box. It was game based and there was so much time on the ball, and if I’m being honest the courses are great but most of us would say that we don’t have a whole lot of time. So even if we had some videos on game based and that type of stuff, because the older that the lads get still have to do the basic skills, but it would be great to have videos of the game based stuff and have it on tap at any time’***  
(Coach 26)

Reflecting previous comments, the formal coach education courses were prominent in the discussions:

***‘The LGFA foundation course was really excellent. I did the Level one and it was really, really good. And the coaches and the presenters were really good. And I learned a lot from that as well’*** (Coach 2)

In addition, further to that the programme of workshops that are delivered at County level especially were referenced several times:

***‘Over the last 10 years when I was trying to develop my skills as a coach, there was any number of workshops organised in Dublin that people could attend and the dates and schedules were generally released, they were run from January to March and they were published around November the previous year so you could apply in advance to have your name on them. As I was developing as a coach over the years, I found them to be beneficial and I always attended quite a few of them.’*** (Coach 34)

Several clubs have taken responsibility for their own coach development, and on a proactive basis created bespoke coach learning opportunities which were highly valued by the participants

***‘One thing that we did in our club there about two years ago, we did a coach the coaches, whereby one of the coaches that had done the minors took a lot of the 6/7/8/9/10’s coaches aside for an hour and went through 4 or 5 drills and as other coach said there are fellas there that hadn’t played before. So, they learned a lot, they knew why they were doing the drills as well. We tried it, it was something different and it worked very, very well. It gave a lot of those coaches that didn’t have a background in the sport, they understood the few drills and it picked up their confidence a lot more.’ (Coach 26)***

One participant took it upon themselves to re-start their playing career to improve their proficiency at coaching:

***‘I started playing myself this year in January before COVID started in the junior team here. Just to try to pick it up again.’ (Coach 32)***

Equally, the need to be open minded about your learning choices was highlighted, with materials from non-GAA sources, other sports, and social media referenced, especially for content that the coaches felt was lacking from GAA sources:

***‘if you really want to improve, you’ve got to do your private workshops and go to private workshops, or look at other sports or look at the sort of manuals or software that are there, even Twitter and things like that are brilliant’ (Coach 4)***

***‘Specifically, around Gaelic Football and Hurling, I have to look quite hard for resources available. I have done the level 1 and I have done the foundation for Hurling and Football. I use a lot of it, if I am looking for drills or small sided games, I use a lot of soccer resources which are readily available on the internet and YouTube and then try and apply them to Gaelic Games’ (Coach 14)***



## Priority Recommendations

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Using the new Foireann membership system the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should analyse the trends of the demographic details of coaches attending the various coach education initiatives and adjust programmes appropriately.

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Clubs should conduct an annual coaching audit to establish the coach education engagement by coaches within their club.

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Given the engagement of coaches in a wide variety of learning opportunities, the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should reformat their coach education programmes to give credit for those learning opportunities engaged in by coaches.

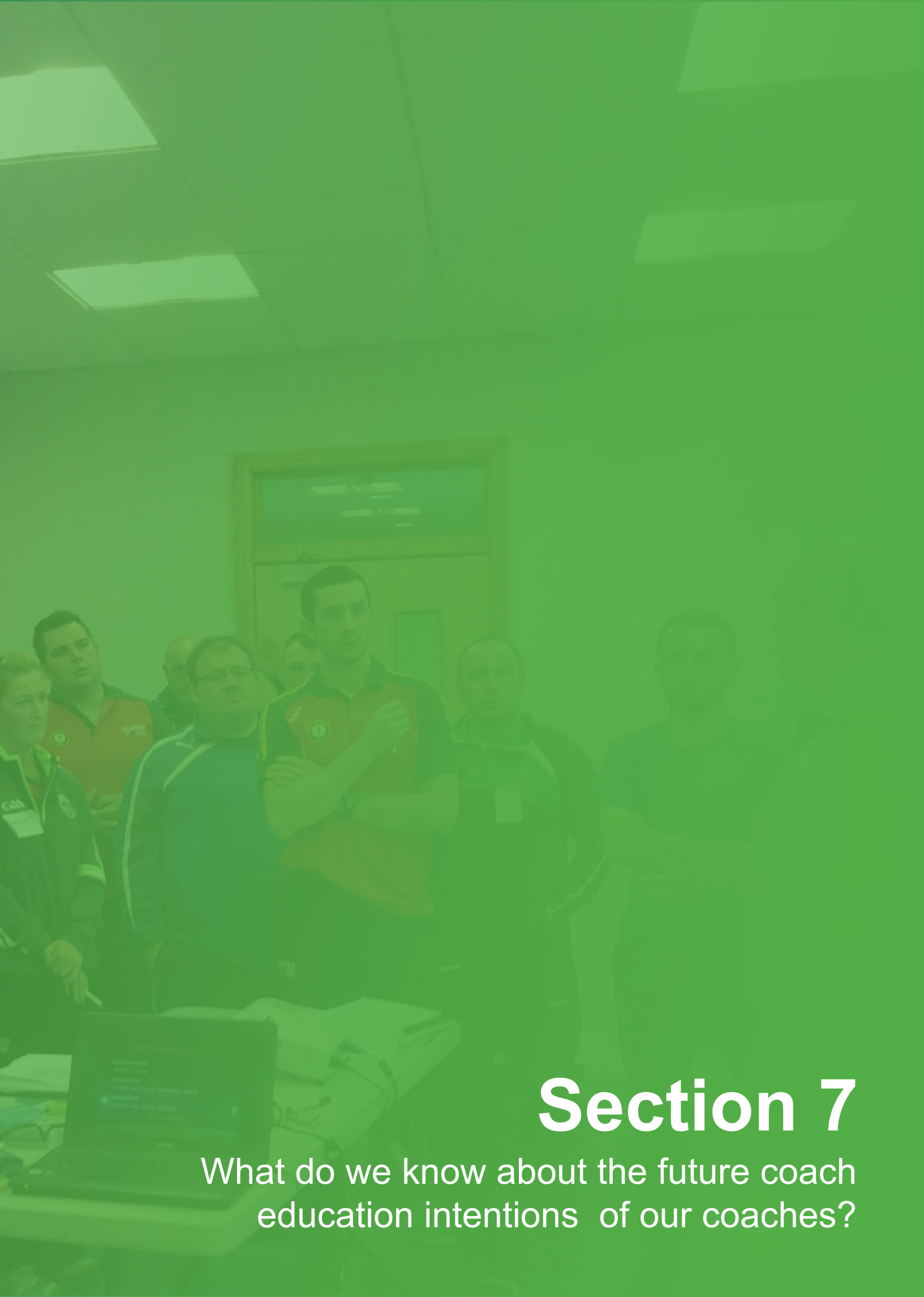


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# Section 7

What do we know about the future coach education intentions of our coaches?



# 7

## What do we know about the future coach education intentions of our coaches?

As identified in the previous section, coaches of Gaelic games have devoted considerable time to their own learning and development. As part of this study, coaches were also asked about their coach education intentions, and what type and form of coach education they would like to engage in over the coming years. Section 7 presents the results of this analysis.

### 7.1 How likely are our coaches to engage in learning into the future?

Figure 7.1 highlights that respondents to the survey were very highly predisposed to future learning, with 94.6% considering it either ‘Extremely Important’ or ‘Somewhat Important’.

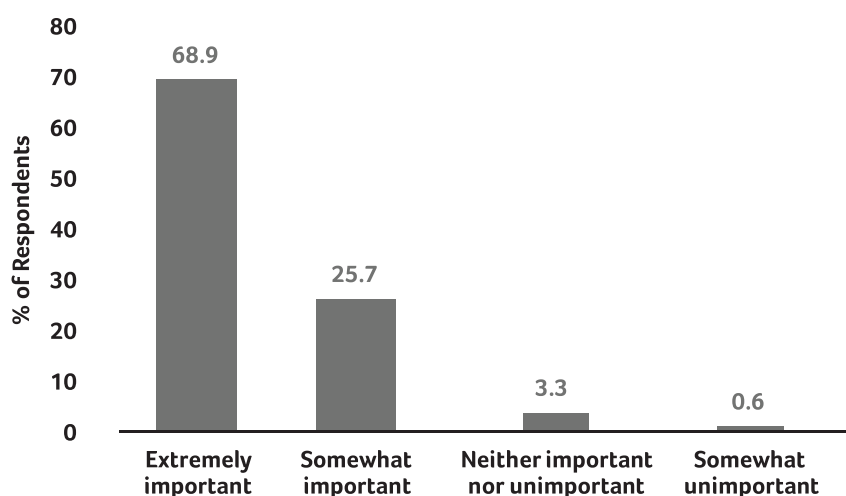


Figure 7.1: The importance of future learning to coaches

Focus Group participants felt that improving as a coach and engaging in learning to support that improvement was of significant importance, and that many of their coaching colleagues were of the same mindset:

***‘The coaches that I meet, talk to, and see and chat to online and what not, they are there for the right reasons and massive push to do what is right for the kids or any age group, to get better. There are loads and loads of people who want to get better. (Coach 12)***

***‘I’m into learning so I would love the opportunity to do more coaching, training and upskill so I can help the kids.’ (Coach 1)***

Club organisation and the appointment of a dedicated coach development officer was one route to the promotion of better coaching practice, and learning within a club:

*‘I think the best way I see around that (better coaching standards) is that you have a dedicated person within the club who is overseeing the coaching roles in the club and is actually willing to oversee it and is willing to feedback honestly as regards what they see. I think within clubs if you ask people on committees, they are well able to give you an assessment of the coaching levels and what they think of it but they don’t feed that back and there is no proper round table discussion in clubs as regards where are we going with coaching, what we are getting out of coaching, are the u10’s and 12’s being coached same way as the u14’s, is there going to be going to be a huge shift when they move up to u14’s, is that going to make a difference, is the ethos okay?’ (Coach 17)*

That coaches have demonstrated an eagerness to engage in future learning is extremely important for the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations, as evidence from other contexts indicates that coaches “wanting” to engage in learning seems to be a prerequisite to helping them learn.

## 7.2 What type of learning would we like to engage in?

Coaches were also asked about the type of learning opportunity that they might wish to engage in, the format of the programme, and the proposed content. From Figure 7.2, it can be identified that Courses (61.6%), Workshops (58.2%), and Webinars (52.5%) were most popular types of learning opportunity that coaches wished to undertake in the forthcoming 12 months.

More informal learning opportunities, such as mentoring (31.8%) and communities of practice (19.7%), and nonformal opportunities, such as attending conferences (25.5%), have been identified widely as potential learning opportunities to be offered to coaches, however they were at the lower end of requests from this cohort.

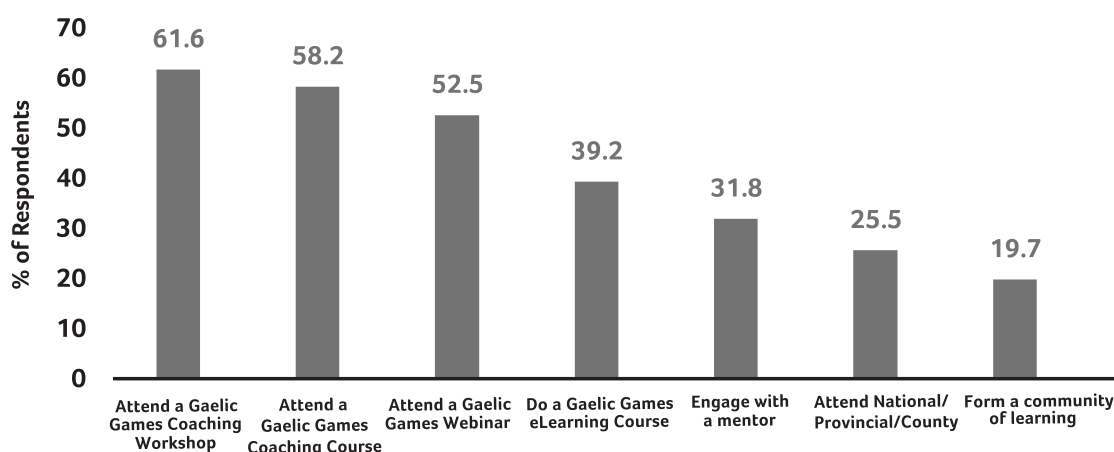


Figure 7.2: Likelihood of attending certain Coach Learning Opportunities in the next 12 months

The type of learning opportunity that coaches wish to attend in the next 12 months varies depending on the level of coaching experience of the coach (See Table 7.1). The results show that coaching courses remain popular across all experience levels. However, those coaches with the least coaching experience express higher interest in attending coaching courses than their more experienced peers. Indeed, the interest in attending coaching courses decreases through each of the experience categories.

Workshops were also a popular response, though this time the most inexperienced coaches (less than 2 years’ experience) were less likely to choose this option than their most experienced colleagues. ‘Webinars’, ‘Forming a Learning Community’, and ‘Attending National/ Provincial/ County conference’ saw the opposite response to coach education courses, with the likelihood of attending a coach education webinar increasing across each category of experience.

**Table 7.1: Coach education opportunities requested by coaches according to their coaching experience**

Learning Opportunities	< 2 years	>2 - < 5 years	>5 - < 10 years	>10 - < 20 years	>20 years
Gaelic Games Coaching Courses	57.1%	55.1%	50.0%	48.3%	41.6%
Gaelic Games Coaching Workshops	43.6%	47.8%	49.4%	48.8%	46.1%
Gaelic Games Coaching Webinar	38.3%	39.5%	44.1%	45.7%	48.2%
Gaelic Games eLearning course	37.4%	35.6%	32.6%	29.9%	24.7%
Engage with a Mentor	27.9%	26.6%	26.9%	26.2%	21.6%
Attend the National/ Provincial/ County GAA Coaching Conference	11.5%	15.4%	20.0%	26.8%	31.5%
Form a community of learning	11.3%	14.1%	16.7%	18.7%	19.3%

Within the focus groups, the topic of additional supports beyond the formal courses was referenced several times, with the emphasis that while ongoing learning was important, committing to a full course might not suit coaches at that particular time. The use of technology, and online learning opportunities was highlighted:

***‘There is a huge opportunity to do that online. People have gotten used to the online learning in the last while and to have a variety, a huge variety, I know that there are some resources there at the minute but you have to dig stuff out. They’re ok up to a point but if you see an online video you can get the gist of it very quickly.’ (Coach 28)***

***‘I think with videos of game scenarios you would learn a lot in my view. Because where do you learn most as a player and that’s from playing games. You can do all the drills you want but when you play games you make mistakes and that’s when you can coach. Games based scenarios are where you’re going to learn the most and if you can get more videos, and everything is online now so there would be no problem with that. I do think that I agree with, more videos. More analysing.’ (Coach 27)***

For many coaches, opportunities to learn further about the technical aspects of the game, and how to develop these through different activities was of interest, especially for those who had already completed some elements of the mainstream coach education programme:

***‘You do the Foundation, maybe three years previously, and maybe if there was something even online, just to upskill, something simpler even, instead of having to do another Foundation course, but something that they would have to do online, you know, as in maybe skills and drills’ (Coach 5)***

The social aspect of coaching, whereby coaches engage with and learn from each other in real life situations was a key element of the focus group discussions.

***‘I want to learn. I would like to learn from other coaches as well. It’s all very well doing courses online but as other coach mentioned there you go to matches and you see other coaches, you meet other managers and get involved in other groups and you’re learning all of the time. I think I’d like to continue learning and see where that brings me’ (Coach 33)***

***‘Some coaches, in fairness could do with going to see some underage intercounty lads training. I’d love to go myself to see, to watch under 18’s coaches training at different times at the county level. It would help to bring you on and would help the other coaches that are involved with you.’ (Coach 28)***

Coaches within a club were also seen as a support for each other, with the opportunity to use technology to share information and practices with colleagues within the club:

*'In our club, one of the things, there was a gap in our club, we don't have a social club and so there was a space missing for coaches to come together. One of the things that we did was we set up a Slack website so it was a portal where we asked coaches to share, drills, sessions, have you found a link on this, if you found a podcast and trying to create like a bit of a virtual community where we pull it all together and we can dissect it' (Coach 11)*



## Priority Recommendations

The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should develop a wide variety of learning opportunities, such as workshops, webinars, conferences, mentoring, and eLearning to suit the needs of coaches.

The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Association should provide education to Games Development personnel and County Officers on the various coach development opportunities that are available for all coaches.

## 7.3 What content would you like to engage in?

When considering the content of the future learning opportunities, coaches identified a broad range of topics that they wished to engage with, as presented in Figure 7.2

**Table 7.2: Content requested by coaches to be undertaken in the next 12 months.**

Future Coach Education Content	% of Respondents
Player Development	59.8
Sport Specific – Techniques, skills, tactics, team play	56.3
Skill of Coaching	48.3
Planning of training and competition	43.2
Leadership and Communication	42.2
Physical Fitness	33.8
Health and Lifestyle	29.1
Performance Analysis	28.1
Code of conduct, bullying, harassment	27.8
Nutrition and Hydration	27.0
Management	26.2
Psychology	25.7

Of interest here is that the most popular choices amongst participants was for 'Player Development' (59.8%), Sport Specific Techniques, Skills, Tactics, Team Play' (56.3%), and the 'Skills of Coaching' (48.3%).



This data were further analysed to establish the impact of coaching experience on the choices expressed, with findings presented in Table 7.3. While overall the most popular responses were prevalent regardless of coaching experience, there were some differences identified. The ‘Sport specific things’, ‘Skills of coaching’, ‘Planning of training and competition’, and ‘Code of conduct, harassment, bullying’ were all more popular choices with the less experienced coaches in comparison to their more experienced peers.

Alternatively, sports science related opportunities – ‘Performance analysis’, ‘Psychology’, and ‘Physiology, anatomy, biomechanics’ were more popular responses as coaches became more experienced.

**Table 7.3: Content elements requested by coaches according to their coaching experience**

Course Content	Coaching Experience (Years)				
	< 2 years	2 - < 5 years	5 - < 10 years	10 - < 20 years	20+ years
Player Development	50.0%	53.7%	54.1%	49.6%	43.3%
Sport Specific things (techniques, skills, tactics, team play)	48.6%	49.9%	48.2%	48.4%	44.1%
Skill of Coaching	46.9%	44.9%	40.7%	39.0%	35.6%
Planning of training and competition	41.5%	40.1%	37.7%	35.3%	28.0%
Leadership and communication	37.7%	36.2%	35.8%	36.3%	35.1%
Code of Conduct, bullying, harassment	30.5%	27.5%	22.4%	21.6%	18.4%
Health and Lifestyle	28.2%	26.1%	25.1%	23.4%	22.9%
Physical Fitness	28.1%	29.3%	31.6%	28.2%	24.1%
Nutrition and Hydration	22.8%	20.9%	25.4%	23.7%	22.0%
Management	21.0%	21.5%	22.0%	24.8%	21.7%
Performance Analysis	19.5%	20.0%	24.0%	28.3%	28.7%
Psychology	18.3%	19.2%	21.8%	24.8%	26.0%
Disability Awareness	18.2%	14.8%	12.6%	11.6%	11.8%
Physiology, Anatomy, Biomechanics	9.1%	10.4%	12.7%	13.9%	14.8%
Other content	1.0%	0.9%	0.8%	1.2%	1.3%

Focus group participants were extremely exercised when considering the types and content for any future learning that they wished to engage in.

Player development was the highest rated response within the survey. It was also referenced by focus group participants as a key opportunity with one coach giving an example from their own club of the approach that they have been taking:

***‘The player pathways...we have been working on this on the minute, we have been working on it from the point of developing the players but also we are very conscious of the drop off rate, not losing players because maybe they don’t have certain skills. We have been doing the research on it and Googling and see what others are doing, I think something like that the GAA can help clubs with, in term of how can we address players dropping off? How can we develop players?’ (Coach 11)***

Issues related to the context that the coaches were coaching were considered especially important. The concept of learning opportunities specific to the age group being coached was a recurring theme.

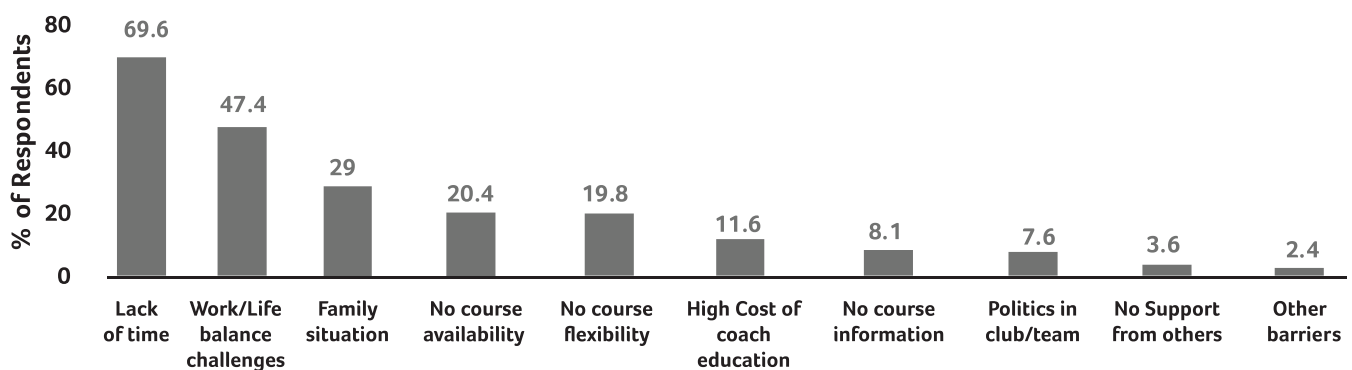
***‘Some more age specific kind of courses, you know, are needed, targeted at nursery coaches, for example, so it’s a nursery workshop or a course specific for them, you know...what you’re doing in a nursery, what you’re doing with under 13s or under 15s is very different. So, I think if you’re hitting those ages, more specific, the better.’ (Coach 5)***

As well as age groups, the gender of the players and how coaching might have to be adapted for boys or girls was considered important:

***‘I’m used to dealing with a lot of age groups, but it’s only in the last few years that I’m involved with girls. They’re as competitive as the boys as well, but there is a different approach that you need to take with girls and they are different to the boys in relation to it. I suppose a lot more social and everything. There is plenty of chit chat going on around training. I suppose to be able to gear the coaching or training sessions to age groups, that are age appropriate for the different levels.’ (Coach 28)***

## 7.4 What might impact on coaches engaging in learning in the future?

Figure 7.4 presents the factors which might impact on coaches engaging in learning in the future. ‘Lack of Time’ (69.6%), and ‘Work/Life Balance Challenges’ (47.4%) were the most significant barriers to engaging in future coach education. A small but significant number of respondents felt that coach education courses were not available (20.4%), nor flexible to suit their needs (19.8%).



**Figure 7.4: Barriers to future coach education engagement.**

Interestingly, within the focus group there was little consideration for barriers to learning as the participants were positively disposed to future learning, and in their discussions focused on ways of making further learning available to coaches rather than focusing on the barriers that coaches might face. Consistent with the survey results, the issue of time commitments was raised, however participants also made recommendations that could assist coaches:

***‘I’d love to see more online stuff available on tap instead of running level 1 and level 2 courses where you have to be here for five consecutive nights, or you have to be here on specific nights. Modern day life in 2020, when we get back to modern day life, it is constant going, so you don’t really have time to be putting away 3 hours on a specific night for a course. I’d love if there was a database set up with videos and explanations of the more practical stuff, I guess. Instead of sitting down and talking through a drill. Watch a video for five minutes and you’d get it explained with five or six players involved. And that’s how you develop fellas, to get them understanding how it works.’ (Coach 26)***

Ultimately, the importance of coach development in the recruitment and retention of coaches was at the heart of the issue for the participants future learning needs:

*'I just think the more development a coach gets the more they'll enjoy it. The better you get at something anyhow, the more you'll enjoy it. If you leave coaches stranded and don't help them, that's where you'll see them dropping out. If the coaches keep getting better, and they see their sessions getting better, that's where the improvement. Definitely, they'll be coming earlier, and putting more thought into their sessions. Coach development is just as important as player development really. If you don't put the time into that, you'll have just as much coach dropout as player dropout.'* (Coach 4)



## Priority Recommendations

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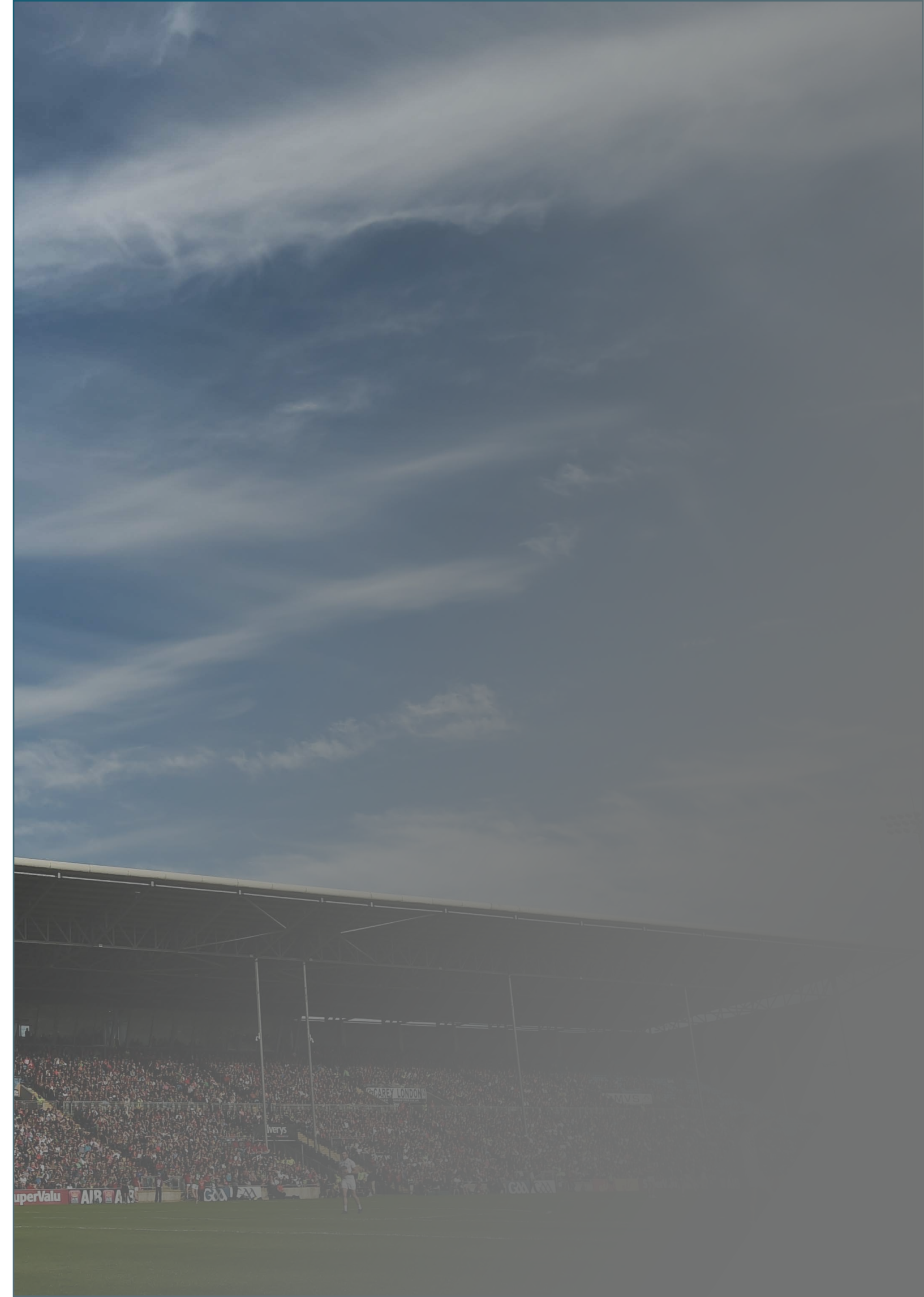
Clubs should develop a coach development plan for the coaches within their club. Such a plan would identify the various learning opportunities that will be made available to coaches over the course of each year.

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The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should provide learning opportunities for coaches that reduce the barriers to future learning identified. Such opportunities should be local, variable in format, and supported by a dedicated officer within the club.

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The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should operate a 'Just in Time' approach to coach education, whereby a wide variety of learning content for coaches to engage is available in various formats for coaches to engage in. Coaches should be able to choose their own learning path, based on their own interests and requirements at a specific time.







# Section 8

What are the implications for policy and practice Policy and Practice?





## 8

# What are the implications for policy and practice?

Effective policy development is a key function of the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations. Such policies must be robust, critically considered measures that are capable of being implemented on an Association-wide basis. The policy development environment within which each Association operates is becoming increasingly complex, uncertain, and unpredictable. In addition, significant inter-connections and inter-dependencies exist across the sporting, cultural, economic, and political domains on a national and international basis. It is therefore crucial that policy decisions are based upon sound evidence derived from a wide variety of sources.

The report gives information on the state of coaches, coaching, and coach development within Gaelic games in 2020. 11,569 coaches took part in the survey, of whom 10,647 were active coaches. In addition, eight focus groups, comprising 35 coaches attended a series of virtual focus groups staged during the study. It is important to note however, that the number of respondent coaches varies by code and by County. This section outlines several considerations for policy and practice that arise from conducting this study and the recommendations contained therein.

## 8.1 Governance and Structure

Data from several focus groups reflected the need to identify key individuals within clubs, with a remit for coaching and coach development. In the GAA at national, provincial, and county level there are Games Development Committees and while the County Coaching Officer is a member of the County Management Committee, their role is less defined. In LGFA and Camogie, the County Development Officer fulfils a similar role. Equally, at club level, the role of the Club Coaching Officer is not referenced within the club constitution. Independently, several provinces and counties had outlined the role of a Club Coaching Officer, however we believe that it is incumbent on each Association to define the role of the County Coaching Officer/Development Officer and formalise the creation of the Club Coaching Officer role, to be a member of the club executive.

It is self-evident that the varied nature of clubs will impact on the sheer volume of tasks associated with the role. However, we believe that each club should become a centre for the development of coaches (in much the same way that clubs are crucial for player development), and that clubs should devise a coach development plan for their coaches. The role of the coaching officer would therefore be as a champion for coaches and coach development within the club.



## Policy Recommendations

The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should enshrine the role of the County and Club Coaching/Development Officer (as appropriate) into the Official Guides and Club Constitutions.

The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should draft a role descriptions for both the County and Club Coaching/Development Officer (as appropriate) and provide sufficient supports/training resources for members to fulfil these roles.

## 8.2 Coaching

The results of the survey suggest that the outlook for coaching in Gaelic games is generally positive, although there are some issues which coaches feel could be significantly improved upon.

The level of commitment provided by coaches is significant, both in terms of the time committed to coaching and games activities on a weekly basis, and the intention to continue coaching. The commitment of coaches in terms of time is impressive, particularly in view of the high proportion of voluntary coaches in the survey. Over three quarters of respondents coach on multiple days per week, with fewer than 2% of respondents involved in coaching less than once a week. The cohort of Gaelic games coaches is an experienced one, with 89% of respondents having coached for two or more years. Indeed, 64% of respondents have coached for five or more years.

Commonly, coaches are not just coaches. A significant number of coaches also fulfil additional roles within their clubs and counties. Combined with family and working commitments, this often means that coaches are forced to choose which activity they prioritise. A high proportion of coaches also deliver across more than one code, and more than one age group within their coaching.

There is little evidence to suggest that the workforce is likely to shrink significantly in the near future, though this is no reason for stakeholders to become complacent. Coaches frequently spoke of the time requirements involved, and how other life commitments might reduce their ability to coach. Club officials and administrators should be aware of the findings regarding the multiple team involvement of coaches, and the significant time commitment required. Further study of the life course of coaches should be considered.

All of this data leads us to have concerns for the longevity of coaches due to the ever increasing workloads. We suggest that initiatives, such as the Healthy Club model, might be beneficial to coaches in identifying supports within the club, while also maintaining their own wellbeing.



## Policy Recommendation

Those charged with coaching and coach development within the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should engage with the GAA Healthy Club programme to ensure that the needs of coaches are incorporated into the programme.

## 8.3 Beginning to Coach

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Traditional pathways into coaching are very much in evidence, with one in five of all respondent coaches still active as players whilst they coach. This is a common way in which sports clubs identify and develop potential coaches. The most common reason identified for beginning to coach was that the coach's children began to participate in Gaelic games (54%). Data from the focus groups indicated that the most important entry point into coaching was being asked to help out, as they were attending coaching sessions in any case as their children were taking part.

An interesting finding in this cohort was that a significant minority of coaches (26%) had little to no playing experience in Gaelic games before they started coaching Gaelic games.

There are certainly interesting theories as to why this might be the case. There is no doubt that the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations have been very successful over the years in recruiting young people into playing Gaelic games. The links with primary schools has often been identified as key in this regard. This is reflected in the finding that only 6.8% of all respondents had no Gaelic games playing experience. However, significant numbers of coaches dropped out of playing Gaelic games at a young age (5.8% as children and a further 13.4% as teenagers). Across sport, the causes of drop out are wide and varied. However, the opportunity to participate in sport is a key concern. Earlier in this report we recommended that each Association continue to develop initiatives which allow for participation by as wide a community of players as possible. This is worthy of significant further study, as the implications for coaching and coach development are significant.

## 8.4 Coach Development

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The subject of coach development is a major feature of this study, with a wide range of views being expressed both in the survey and in the focus groups. A huge proportion of coaches (almost 92%) have a valid coaching qualification, and almost three quarters (71.2%) wish to progress to a higher level of qualification within the next 12 months. Time related factors were identified as the most significant reasons for not attending coach education since their last qualification was achieved, and also the most barrier to achieving higher qualifications.

Coaches reported that they engaged in a wide range of learning opportunities, and respondents have provided significant guidance on the form, format, and content of future learning opportunities in which they wish to engage. Those with responsibility for coach development must incorporate these data within future planning for coach development.

One theme to emerge from the focus group discussions was that of coach developers providing support to active coaches, with many of the coaches suggesting that this would be a very positive contribution to coaching development. Most felt that it was the role of GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations to develop and implement such a scheme, and there were good examples from individual clubs of how this had been done to good effect.

We believe that there is significant value in coach development. Through engagement in the various learning opportunities that are supported by the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations, coaches can further their interest in coaching but also stimulate their curiosity towards improving their own coaching practice. Each Association is to be commended for the broad nature of the learning opportunities available to coaches. Coaches have told us that they have and wish in the future to engage in a broad variety of learning opportunities. It is important that those people that dedicate themselves to improvement as a coach through practice and education should be recognised. While coaching qualifications alone are not a guarantee of coaching performance, we believe that officials at club, school, and county level have an obligation to ensure that coaches are appropriately experienced and have attended the appropriate learning opportunities prior to taking coaching roles. We believe that recommendations presented earlier in this report provide a grounding for this work.

Overall, this report has provided an insight into the practices and development of coaches. We believe that this research will contribute further to our understanding of coaches, coaching, and coach development. We recommend that the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations incorporate research into their ongoing programme development processes to ensure that accurate, relevant, and up-to-date information is incorporated into such programmes.



## Policy Recommendations

**Policy Recommendations** The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should ensure that further research is incorporated into the development of future coaching and coach development programmes.

## 8.5 The Role of Research in Gaelic Games

Sporting organisations have often been criticised for lacking the evidence on which to base such strategic and operational decision making. Governing bodies of sport, county/district councils, and community/voluntary sector organisations are now required to provide baseline data on clubs, facilities, volunteers, and coaches to justify, using evidence, the most effective areas to develop projects and allocate resources.

The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations are no different. In the past, each Association has engaged in research, though largely in an ad hoc manner. We believe that an overarching approach to policy development and research that is grounded in the Association's Mission and Values, that informs decision making and results in impactful change and improvement at all levels of the organisation is required

'We believe that the deployment of resources specifically dedicated to policy development and research will ensure that research and evaluation will:

- inform and guide policy development
- support improved programme implementation through evidence informed practice
- provide coordination of the systems and processes necessary to ensure that policy development and research is enhanced across Gaelic Games
- promote a culture in which there is a commitment research to promote the process of learning and in which individual learning can be transferred into organisational learning
- provide data which enables the strategic monitoring of progress against the high level targets identified within the Associations strategic plans, and
- evaluate the impact of policy and practice of to improve the development and delivery of Gaelic games with a view to improving the effectiveness of investment/ interventions in the future.'



## Policy Recommendations

**The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should engage in the creation of a policy development and research strategy to ensure that all future policy development is undertaken in an evidence-based manner, to increase the efficacy of policy and practice**

## 8.6 Conclusion

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The report confirms the critical contribution of coaches to the participation and development of Gaelic games across all codes and genders. The workforce is relatively young, well-educated, ambitious, and is prepared to devote considerable time to coach on a voluntary basis. Coaching and coach development is important to our coaches. The report provides an overview of the characteristics of these coaches to inform the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations and their partners in their role of providing meaningful support to their members.

It is incumbent on each Association to consider the findings of this report and the recommendations identified. Integrating all of the above is a huge challenge. However, this report enhances the value of coaches, coaching, and coach development across the Associations. The recommendations are intended as guides to further enhance this value. Good coaching and coach development, delivered by the right people, at the right time, will provide every county and club with the means to ensure that the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations will continue to be a key driver of sport and voluntary activity, which will flourish for generations to come.





## Section 9

What are the key recommendations from this study to improve policy and practice?





# 9

## What are the key recommendations from this study to improve policy and practice?

The following recommendations have been identified by the study advisory group as a result of the findings presented. These recommendations were identified within the body of the report, but are collated here and responsibility for each recommendation is identified.

### Governance and Structure Recommendations

Recommendation	Responsibility	Benefit of doing this
The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should enshrine the role of the county and club coaching/development officer (as appropriate) into the Official Guides and Club Constitutions.	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	The role of the Club and County Coaching Officer is central to the successful roll out of recommendations within this report. Enshrining the roles in the Association's Official Guides and Constitutions ensures that the each will have responsibility for coaching and coach development at club and county level.
The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should draft role descriptions for both the county and club Coaching/Development officer (as appropriate) and provide sufficient supports/training resources for members to fulfil these roles.	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	
The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Association should provide education to Games Development personnel and County Officers on the various coach development opportunities that are available for all coaches.	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	Games Development personnel and County Officers are key sources of information and influence within Games Development. Ensuring that they are aware of and supportive of the suite of coach development opportunities will enhance the promotion and availability of such programmes.

### Coaching

Recommendation	Responsibility	Benefit of doing this
The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should investigate further the responses of the female coaches of this study to better understand the experiences of being a female coach in Gaelic games. This investigation will allow for more specific recommendations to be developed to better recruit, train, and support female coaches.	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	There is an under-representation of female coaches in Gaelic games. A better understanding of the pathways into coaching, and the barriers to being involved as a coach will assist each Association in providing bespoke opportunities for recruitment, training, and support for female coaches.
Those charged with coaching and coach development within the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should engage with the GAA Healthy Club programme to ensure that the needs of coaches are incorporated into the programme.	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	The Healthy Club programme help GAA clubs explore how they support the holistic health of their members and the communities they serve, contributing to their overall health and wellbeing. Given the commitments to coaching referenced by participants in this study, the health and wellbeing of coaches should be a significant priority.

Recommendation	Responsibility	Benefit of doing this
The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should ensure that playing opportunities are available to all players across the Gaelic Games Player Pathway regardless of playing standard.	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	Many of our current coaches participated in Gaelic games as children or teenagers but dropped out prior to adult participation. There is an understanding that a variety of playing opportunities can reduce such drop out. The Gaelic Games Player Pathway provides for such opportunities.
Recruitment and training of coaches should be targeted at all club members and not exclusively at former players and parents.	Club Coaching Officer	There are many routes to beginning to coach, as identified by participants in this study. Current and former players are, and will continue to be, a significant source of coaches. However, often there are non-playing club members who would have the capacity and ability to undertake coaching roles if they were asked to do so.
Clubs are encouraged to create coach sustainability strategies for each of the age groups coached i.e., Coaches of children, coaches of youths and coaches of adults (as their reasons for coaching and time spent coaching seem to differ and therefore, separate strategies would be beneficial) – these strategies should, include support programmes for coaches.	Club Coaching Officer	Coaches have identified that they commit significant time to planning, delivering, and reviewing coaching and game activities. Coaches have also identified that time commitments and the impact on family and work life are significant issues. Clubs can help coaches to manage their coaching and non-coaching commitments to ensure that coaches can remain active.
Coaches should be recognised for the vast amount of time that they commit to coaching and games activities. The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should devise strategies to recognise this commitment.	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	Many of the rewards for coaches are intrinsic – seeing players progress or achieve things that they previously could not is an emotional experience for many coaches. However, the Associations should also find a method of saying “Thanks!” to our coaches as a means of validating their commitment to our games.
‘The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should investigate further the volume of time spent on coaching and games activities to establish what coaches do and why they consider some activities important.’	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	Preventing the burn out of coaches through ever increasing time dedicated to coaching should ensure that coaches have a better balance between coaching and non-coaching elements of their lives and have a longer lifespan as a coach.
Clubs should ensure that those coaches that begin to coach are retained, either in coaching or non-coaching roles.	Club Coaching Officer	Those coaches that may not be able to commit to coaching roles can be retained as active volunteers in other roles within the club, ensuring that their experience and expertise is not lost to the club.
Coaches should be empowered to progress such health, wellbeing, and community development initiatives as part of their coaching activities. This may involve an expansion of the Healthy Clubs Project to cover all codes and all ages of players within those codes. The expansion to also include the health and wellbeing of coaches.	Club Coaching Officer	As well as impacting on the health and wellbeing of the coach, coaches can also have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of their players. Coaches in this study have identified that activities to improve the health and wellbeing of their players provides a significant opportunity for them in the future.

## Coach Development

Recommendation	Responsibility	Benefit of doing this
The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should provide learning opportunities for coaches that reduce the barriers to future learning identified. Such opportunities should be local, variable in format, and supported by a dedicated officer within the club.	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	Participants in this study demonstrated an extra-ordinary willingness to learn and develop themselves as coaches. Equally, they identified barriers to future learning. By providing opportunities for learning that account for these barriers, the Associations will make it easier for coaches to progress their coaching practice,
The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should develop a wide variety of learning opportunities, such as workshops, webinars, conferences, mentoring, and eLearning to suit the needs of coaches.	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	Coaches have also identified that they have engaged in a wide variety of learning opportunities in recent years. Ensuring that a varied set of learning opportunities are available to coaches will allow coaches to choose a personalised learning pathway.

Recommendation	Responsibility	Benefit of doing this
The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should operate a 'Just in Time' approach to coach education, whereby a wide variety of learning content for coaches to engage is available in various formats for coaches to engage in. Coaches should be able to choose their own learning path, based on their own interests and requirements at a specific time.	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	By allowing coaches to choose their own learning pathway and ensuring that learning opportunities are available when required by coaches you try to ensure that coaches can access materials not only at a time and place of their choosing, but also when the need arises.
Reflecting on active coaching practice can be an effective learning opportunity for coaches. The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should investigate how coaches' active practice can be recognised as a learning opportunity.	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	Participants on this study have identified how trial and error is often a significant tool in their development. Through recognising this reality, while also encouraging other coaches to reflect on their practice, the Associations can bring learning and practice closer together.
Clubs should develop a coach development plan for the coaches within their club. Such a plan would identify the various learning opportunities that will be made available to coaches over the course of each year.	Club Coaching Officer	Clubs are rightly recognised as centres for player development. They can also serve as centres for coach development. Clubs can develop a sustainable and self-sufficient coaching model through being the conduit for their own coach's development. Developing a plan for coach development will also demonstrate the commitment from the club towards its coaches.

## Information and Research

Recommendation	Responsibility	Benefit of doing this
The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should engage in the creation of a policy development and research strategy to ensure that all future policy development is undertaken in an evidence-based manner, to increase the efficacy of policy and practice	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	Ensuring that policy is fit for purpose is a key element of the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations. Through increased awareness of evidence in the policy development and implementation processes, the Associations can increase their efficacy and also the transition from policy to practice.
The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should ensure that further research is incorporated into the development of future coaching and coach development programmes.	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	This is the first time that the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations have partnered in such a research project. Such collaboration, and detailed information, will be very beneficial to future projects.
The GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations should analyse the trends of our coaches and adjust coaching and coach development programmes appropriately	GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations at National Level	Through understanding the 'who' of our members, the GAA, LGFA, and Camogie Associations will be better able to target support, materials, and programmes ensuring better uptake and continued engagement with worthwhile programmes.
The Club coaching officer should establish the background and needs of all coaches within the club, particularly those coaches who might be beginning to coach. Training and support programmes should be targeted depending on the experience of each coach.	Club Coaching Officer	Equally, if clubs have a better understanding of who their coaches are, their backgrounds, and experiences, they will be better able to provide support to those coaches, while also targeting recruitment campaigns on under-represented groups.
The Club coaching officer should keep a record of all coaches in the club and ensure that there is a sufficient balance of ages and genders involved in coaching within the club.	Club Coaching Officer	
Clubs should conduct an annual coaching audit to establish the volume of coaching engaged in by coaches with a view to providing maximum coaching support to their teams, while also preventing overload of coaches.	Club Coaching Officer	Coaches in this study have identified that they dedicate a significant amount of time on coaching and games activities. An annual audit of coaches and coaching practices within each club would ensure that clubs avoid an over-reliance on particular coaches, while coaches can avoid burnout or over committing themselves.

Recommendation	Responsibility	Benefit of doing this
Clubs should conduct an annual coaching audit to establish the coach education engagement by coaches within their club.	Club Coaching Officer	Ensuring that coaches are up to date on their requirements to coach (safeguarding qualification, vetting, and coaching qualification) will help to ensure that all players within the club are provided with an appropriate playing environment. Clubs can also recognise and reward those coaches that seek to progress their learning.
A competition season review to be undertaken with concentration being on coaches and coaching as well as players.	Club Coaching Officer	Many clubs review their playing season, with a review of match results often a primary concern. Incorporating a concentration on coaches and coaching will ensure that annual reviews can be more holistic and also give due recognition to an extremely valuable resource within the club.



## Dr Peter Horgan

Dr. Peter Horgan is the Strategic Insights and Innovation Manager for the GAA, with responsibility to lead, develop, and implement a systematic approach to policy development and research within the Association. Previously, he was the Education Officer, with responsibility for the development and implementation of the GAA coach and coach developer education programmes. Peter's research interests lie in the development of coaches and coach developers. Previously, he has coached at club, university, and Inter County academy level across Hurling/Camogie, Gaelic football and Ladies Gaelic football.

## Dr Richard Bowles

Dr. Richard Bowles is a Physical Education Lecturer within the Faculty of Education in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. His research interests include the impact of external personnel on the teaching of PE in primary schools, the use of self-study approaches in teaching, teacher education and sports coaching, and the facilitation of coaches' learning within communities of practice. He is also a coach developer with the GAA and LGFA. His coaching experience spans age-groups from Under 6 club nursery programmes to adult inter-county Gaelic football teams, and a current coaching responsibility involves the development of a coaching plan for the underage section of his local ladies' football club.

## Dr John Considine

Dr John Considine is a Lecturer in Economics at the University College Cork Business School. John has published widely on economics, including the economics of sport. As a player, John represented his club, Sarsfields, and Cork at all grades, winning an All-Ireland Senior Hurling title and All-Star Award in 1990. As a coach, John has been involved at club, university, and Inter County level, coaching the Cork Minor Hurling team to the All-Ireland title in 2001 and the U.17 Hurling team to the All-Ireland title in 2017.

## Dr Paul Donnelly

Dr Paul Donnelly is lecturer in Sports Development and Coaching at the University of Ulster's School of Sport in Jordanstown. He is also currently the Chair of the Camogie Association National Development Plan Implementation Committee and Vice-Chair of Play NI, an agency with responsibility for the development and promotion of children and young people's play. He is also currently the Chair of the Camogie Association National Development Plan Implementation Committee and Vice-Chair of Play NI, the development and promotion of children and young people's play. From the St Pauls club in Belfast, Paul is a former Antrim Senior Hurler, and is currently manager of the Antrim Minor Hurling team.

## **William Harmon**

William Harmon is the development officer with specific remit for coach education with the Ladies Gaelic Football Association. Within this remit, William has responsibility for the development of the LGFA coach and coach developer programmes. William is currently researching communities of practice in Gaelic games as part of his MSc at the Munster Technological University (MTU). As a coach, William has coached the IT Tralee Senior Men's and Ladies teams, the Milltown/Castlemaine Senior Football team, the South Kerry Senior Football team, the Laois Senior Footballers, and is currently coach to the Kerins O Rahillys Senior Football team. William has also served as the Coaching Officer for his club, Firies, over the last 3 years.

## **Hayley Harrison**

Hayley Harrison is the lead Coach Education Officer for the GAA, Coach Developer Programme Leader & Head of High Performance Coach Support at Sport Ireland Coaching. She is also an ICCE Master Trainer & Global Expert in Coach Development. As an athletics coach, Hayley has coached athletes to Olympic Games, World & European Championships and at the last count, there were 95 national senior titles amongst athletes past and present & 24 national records (including relays) amongst them. In Gaelic games, she has been performance athletic coach to Tipperary and Laois Senior football teams.

## **Dr Seamus Kelly**

Dr Seamus Kelly is an Assistant Professor in the University College Dublin School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Sports Science. His research focuses on various aspects of coach and manager development. He has previous professional and semi-professional playing experience in soccer and has played both hurling and football with Offaly. He has coaching experience in soccer and the GAA.

## **Dr Áine MacNamara**

Dr Áine MacNamara is Associate Professor in Elite Performance at the School of Health and Human Performance in Dublin City University where she has led the development of the Professional Doctorate in Elite Performance. Áine's research has focused on the broad area of talent development processes across performance domains. Áine has consulted with the GAA and LGFA on their coach development and talent development systems, developing the Turas Programme with Leinster GAA.

## **Prof. Bryan McCullick**

Prof Bryan McCullick is is Professor and Coordinator of HPE Teacher Education Programme at the University of Georgia. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in Elementary School Physical Education, Approaches to Sport Pedagogy, Research Literature in Coaching & Coaching Education. In 2008, Bryan was a Visiting Scholar in the Department of Sports Studies and Physical Education at UCC, where he was an Adjunct Professor in the College of Arts and Celtic Studies from 2010-19. He served as a Fulbright Specialist Scholar in 2012 with the GAA, where he assisted in a renovation of their coaching education program.

## **Padraig McGourty**

Padraig McGourty is a Lecturer in Statistics and Information Technology in the Department of Health and Nutritional Sciences, at the Institute of Technology, Sligo. Padraig is currently Chairperson of the Connacht GAA Games Development Committee and a member of GAA's National Games Development Committee. Padraig is a qualified GAA coach developer and has a keen research interest in coach education, coach development and coach mentoring. He is also a coach with the Leitrim Senior Football team.

## **Niall Williams**

Niall Williams is the Coach Education and Development Co-ordinator for the Camogie Association, where he has responsibility for the development and roll out of the coach and coach educator development programmes. Niall completed the MSc. Coaching Science in Sport programme at University College Dublin. As coach, Niall has coached the Kilkenny Senior Camogie team, Westmeath Senior Ladies Football team, and the Meath Senior Hurling team.

