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Formal coach education programmes: perceptions from coaches

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Fulfilling the pivotal role of the sports coach, within the complex and dynamic field that is sport, demands imaginative, dynamic and thoughtful coaches. Formal coach education programmes are often seen as the essential avenue in the development of competent, qualified coaches. Such programmes are believed to contribute to the essential content and pedagogical knowledge required by a coach. However, conflicting evidence suggests that many coaches actually disagree with the content of current programmes but, out of necessity to gain certification for employment, continue to support them via course attendance. This may reflect the power the national governing bodies currently hold, in that coaches have much to lose by contesting the programme. Such concerns about the nature of the programmes do not make them redundant but do pose the question of where current coach education programmes are falling short in the eyes of the aspirant coach. The aim of this research was to investigate the perceived strengths and weaknesses of formal coach education programmes, from the perspective of coaches themselves.

With approval from the University's ethics committee, 12 focus group interviews were conducted, involving a total of 116 paddlesport coaches. All participants provided informed consent. A total of 684 min of discussion took place. Each discussion was guided by two questions: (1) What are the strengths of the current coaching scheme? (2) What are the weaknesses of the current coaching scheme? Each focus group was transcribed verbatim and subjected to a two-stage inductive analysis as outlined by Cote' et al. (1993: *The Sport Psychologist*, 7, 127 – 137).

The emergent themes were grouped into three key areas: (a) strengths, (b) weaknesses, and (c) combined strengths and weaknesses. The coaches indicated two main strengths: (1) programme credibility and (2) experience. Three key weaknesses of the current programmes were (1) lack of coaching process content, (2) role of coaching levels, and (3) lack of mentoring. Two final themes emerged representing strengths and weaknesses: (1) programme structure and (2) programme content.

The key finding indicated the coaches believe in the need for a shift within coach education programmes away from the current emphasis on a coach's technical capabilities in their respective sport to an emphasis on the pedagogical demands of coaching. Such information may enable those responsible for the development of coach education programmes, both nationally (e.g. UKCC) and internally within national governing bodies to understand previously reported inadequacies in the preparation of coaches.