



**Coaching in the UK: Public Perceptions
Statistical Report
October 2017**

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Author: Beth Thompson and John Mcilroy

UK Coaching
Chelsea Close
Off Amberley Road
Armley
Leeds LS12 4HP

Tel: 0113-274 4802

Fax: 0113-231 9606

Email: coaching@ukcoaching.org

Website: www.ukcoaching.org

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Summary

UK Coaching commissioned YouGov to survey 20,000 adults and 1,000 children in 2017. The primary aim of the survey was to explore the participant experience of receiving coaching and the experience of being a coach. The survey also asked members of public their views of coaches and coaching in general.

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

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

Key findings

- The majority of UK adults believe that coaches have a positive influence on people's personal and professional lives, as well as that they are effective at increasing physical activity and promoting emotional health and wellbeing.
- Overall the UK public thought that great coaching was constructive, friendly and approachable.
- Generally, the words or phrases used to describe a "coach" and "coaching" were positive. Commonly associated words were fit and healthy, knowledgeable, encouraging and enthusiastic, training, fitness and teaching.
- Whilst these are all positive words, these themes and perceptions of coaches were also identified as a potential barrier to taking part in coached activity amongst participants.
- Although nearly three quarters of the general public believe that sports coaches are trustworthy, over a quarter do not.

Introduction

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

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

This report presents the findings from the general public section of the YouGov survey. It explores public perceptions of coaches and coaching and the public's level of interest in receiving coaching.

Separate reports are available for:

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

Methodology

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

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

Sample sizes:

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

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

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

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

Public Perceptions of Coaching

Overall, public perceptions of coaching were extremely positive, with a majority of UK adults agreeing that coaches can have a positive influence on people's personal and professional lives.

Perceived effectiveness of coaches

Around three-quarters of UK adults agreed that coaches help to increase the physical activity of participants (73%); 61% agreed that coaches promote emotional health and well-being; and 61% agreed that they are effective at having a positive influence on people's personal and professional lives.

Table 1.1: Perceived effectiveness of coaches

Effectiveness	% Agree	% disagree
Increasing the physical activity of participants	73	2
Promoting emotional health and personal wellbeing	61	6
Having a positive influence on people's personal and professional lives	61	4
Contributing to society, through employment and volunteering	50	6
Bringing people from different communities together	46	8

Base: all adults. Excludes don't know and neutral responses.

Those who had received coaching in sport and physical activity in the past twelve months were more likely to think that coaches were effective at promoting physical fitness than those who had not received coaching.

Perceptions of great coaching

Members of the public were asked what they thought made a great sport or physical activity coach. Overall, the UK public thought that great coaching was constructive, friendly and approachable.

Around two in five UK adults believed that a great coach is someone who gives constructive feedback (42%), is friendly and approachable (40%), and improves people's skills/ability

(39%). This suggests that although the public agree that coaching is about improving skills and ability, it is also important that they do it in an approachable manner that suits the needs of different people.

Table 1.2: Perceptions of great coaching

Perceptions	%
Give constructive feedback and corrections	42
Are friendly and approachable	40
Improve peoples' skills/ability	39
Are qualified	35
Treat all participants as individuals	33
Build good relationships and rapport	32
Create a warm and welcoming environment	29
Are highly skilled in the sport/activity	25
Listen to participants	22
Maintain high levels of safety	20
Know the rules of the game	17
Have previous experience of coaching	15
Are confident	15
Get good results (i.e. win matches/games)	11
I'm not sure, I don't know anything/enough about coaching	18

Base: all adults. Respondents could select more than one option, therefore percentages do not add up to 100%.

Exploring the data by gender, it was especially important to women that coaches are friendly and approachable; and it was slightly more important to men that they know the rules of the game and get good results.

Words used to describe coaches and coaching

Members of the public were asked what words or phrases came to mind when they thought of a sports “coach” or “coaching”. Whilst UK Coaching has broadened the definition of coaching, to include any sport or physical activity, the word “sports” was used in this question to distinguish between coaches outside of the sport and physical activity sector (i.e. business coaches).

The words most commonly used to describe a coach suggest someone who is fit and healthy, knowledgeable, encouraging and enthusiastic. The key words used to describe coaching include fit, but also training, fitness and teaching.

Whilst these are all positive words, these themes and perceptions of coaches were also identified as a potential barrier to taking part in coached activity amongst participants.

Table 1.3: Key words used to describe coaching and coaches

Words used to describe coaches	Words used to describe coaching
Fit	Fit
Encouraging	Training
Confident	Fitness
Active	Teaching
Friendly	Motivation
Knowledgeable	Encouraging
Support	Support
Enthusiastic	Encouragement
Skilled	Football
Fitness	Fun

Base: all adults.

Those who had received coaching were extremely positive about coaches. The most common words used by those in receipt of coaching were 'motivating', 'knowledgeable' and 'inspirational'. Those who had not received coaching were still positive, but used different words to describe coaches, such as 'committed', 'competitive' and 'athletic'. Less positive words used were bully and aggressive.

Trustworthiness

Members of the public were asked how much they trusted people working in a variety of roles, including sports coaches. Although a majority of the general public believed that sports coaches were trustworthy (71%), only 6% thought they were very trustworthy.

Compared to other roles, sports coaches were considered less trustworthy than nurses, teachers, police officers and social workers; but far more trustworthy than bankers and journalists.

Table 1.4: Trustworthiness of different professions

Professions	% Very/quite trustworthy	% Not very/not at all trustworthy
Nurses	96	4
Teachers	90	10
Police Officers	82	18
Social Workers	75	25
Sport Coaches	71	29
Bankers	30	70
Journalists	22	88

Women were more likely than men to think sports coaches were trustworthy, as were those aged under 65.

Those who were more active (either through physical activity or receiving coaching) were more likely to think that sports coaches were trustworthy.

Discussion

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

Overall, the UK public has a very positive perception of coaches and coaching. Not only does the public believe that coaches help to increase the physical activity of participants, they also believe that coaches promote emotional health and well-being, and have a positive influence on people's personal and professional lives.

At the heart of UK Coaching's 2017-2021 Strategy is a commitment to raise the profile of coaching, to ensure that coaches are not only recognised and valued for the benefits they bring to individuals, but they are also recognised and valued for the benefits they bring to the communities they serve and to wider society. The findings from the Yougov survey are encouraging, but there is much more to do. UK Coaching will strive to promote coaching, to ensure that coaches are trusted and have parity with other valued professions, such as nursing and teaching.