



# Coaching in the UK

Participant Survey

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UK Coaching will ensure that it has professional and ethical values and that all its practices are inclusive and equitable.

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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 participant section of the survey.

## Key findings

- An estimated sixteen and a half million people in the UK have received coaching in sport and physical activity, in the last five years.
- Over nine-million adults have received coaching in the past twelve months alone (18% of the adult population).
- Women are more likely to receive coaching than men.
- The majority of those receiving coaching are from higher social grades, significantly higher than their representation in the UK population.
- Overall, those who receive coaching report a very positive experience. The vast majority say that they enjoy being coached; they feel their coach motivates them, encourages and supports them; and would recommend their coach to others.
- Three quarters (74%) of coached participants rated their last coached session as good. Only 1% rated their last session as poor.
- The vast majority of participants had confidence and trust in their coach.
- Participants report positive benefits of coaching beyond improvement in skills and performance, including improvement in physical health and mental well-being.
- Those in receipt of coaching were much more likely to rate their physical or mental health as excellent or good, compared to those not in receipt of coaching.
- Those in receipt of coaching had “stickier” sport and physical activity habits than those not in receipt of coaching: they were more likely to do more sport and physical activity; have increased their activity levels since the previous year; and would like to do more sport or physical activity in the future.

- Most participants did not think it was important that their coach was similar to them in terms of gender, age, background, but rather they valued their experience, people skills and reputation within the community.
- Over half of those no longer in receipt of coaching said they might be encouraged to return to a coached session in the future (55%). However, a substantial proportion (45%) said they would not be interested in receiving coaching again.
- Amongst those who have received coaching in the past, but not within twelve months, the cost of coached activity was regarded as the biggest barrier for returning to coaching. Reducing the cost of sessions might encourage them to return.
- Among those who have never received coaching and are not interested in doing so, their top reason is that they prefer to exercise on their own, followed by a feeling that coaching is not for people like them.

There are some variations in the data and this will be explored in further detail in future publications.

## 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 participant section of the YouGov survey. It includes participants who have recently been in receipt of coaching and those who have received coaching at some point in the past.

This is the first statistical release of findings. Following this report, a number of thematic papers will be published, exploring specific areas of interest in greater detail.

Separate reports are available for:

- The coaching workforce
- Children and young people who have received coaching
- The general public

## 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).

## Coached-participation

In the last twelve months over nine million adults received coaching in sport and physical activity, representing 18% of the adult population. An estimated sixteen and a half million people have received coaching in the last five years.

**Table 1.1: Participants in receipt of coaching**

Last time received coaching	Number	% of population
In the past 12 months	9,318,158	18
In the past 2 years	2,588,377	5
In the past 3 years	2,070,702	4
In the past 5 years	2,588,377	5
Total in the last five years	16,430,552	32
Longer than five years ago	14,453,300	28
Total	30,883,852	60

*Base: all those who have received coaching at any point in their lifetime.*

*Population figures are based on ONS mid-year population estimates (18+) in the UK.*

Examining only recent recipients of coaching (those who received coaching within the previous twelve months), there are home country variations, as shown in the table below. Wales has the lowest proportion of adults in receipt of coaching (15%), compared to England, Scotland and Northern Ireland (18% respectively)

**Table 1.2: Coached-participation by home country**

Home country	Number	% of population
England	7,800,000	18
Wales	373,000	15
Scotland	787,000	18
Northern Ireland	257,000	18

*Base: all those who have received coaching in the previous twelve months*

*Population figures are based on ONS mid-year population estimates (18+) in the UK.*



## Regional data

London has the highest proportion of people receiving coaching among the English regions (22%), compared to 15% of adults in the North West.

**Table 1.3: Coached-participation by home country**

Home country	Number	% of population
North East	380,000	18
North West	853,040	15
Yorkshire and Humber	683,725	16
East Midlands	599,045	16
West Midlands	724,752	16
East of England	963,233	20
South East	1,276,759	18
London	1,496,695	22
South West	796,557	18

*Base: all those who have received coaching in the previous twelve months. The regional total might not add up to the total in table 1.1 above, due to rounding.*

*Population figures are based on ONS mid-year population estimates (18+) in the UK.*

## Profile of coached-participants

Examining the demographic profile of those who received coaching in the previous twelve months, the majority were female (62%) compared to male (38%).

The majority of those receiving coaching were from higher social grades (68%), significantly higher than their representation in the UK population (57%). The proportion of adults in receipt of coaching from BAME backgrounds is slightly higher than the national average (17% compared to 14%).

Nearly a third of those in receipt of coaching said they had a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last twelve months or more (31%), compared to around 20% nationally. Younger adults (18-34) were more likely to receive coaching than older adults.

**Table 1.4 Profile of coached participants**

Coached participants	%
Male	38
Female	62
18-24	18
25-34	21
35-44	18
45-54	14
55-64	13
65+	16
White	83
BAME	17
Physical or mental health condition	31
No physical or mental health condition	61
Higher social grades	68
Lower social grades	32

*Base: all those who have received coaching in the previous twelve months*

### Experience of receiving coaching

Those in receipt of coaching were overwhelmingly positive about their experience. Overall, three quarters of participants (74%) rated their last session as good and only 1% rated it as poor<sup>1</sup>.

**Table 1.5: Participants ratings of coaching received**

Rating	%
Good	74
Neutral	25
Poor	1

*Base: all those who have received coaching in the previous twelve months*

Exploring their experience of coaching in further detail, participants reported overwhelmingly positive responses across all factors. Four out of five participants (83%) said that their coach

<sup>1</sup>A ten point scale was used. 'Good' was any rating between eight and ten. 'Poor' was any rating of three or lower. The neutral score of four to seven was recorded by 25% of coached participants.

motivated them to do better and over three-quarters (77%) said that they enjoyed being coached.

Across all these factors there was very little disagreement, with the remaining participants giving neutral responses.

**Table 1.6: Experience of receiving coaching**

Experience	% Agree	% Disagree
My coach motivates me do be better	83	1
My coach encourages me to come back	78	2
I enjoy being coached	77	3
Coaching meets individual sport and physical activity needs	77	2
My coach pushes me to do more	77	3
My coach listens to me	72	3
My coach supports me to achieve my individual goals	71	3

*Base: all those who have received coaching in the previous twelve months. Excludes neutral responses*

There are some variations in the data, particularly in terms of age and gender. This will be explored in further detail in future publications.

### **The benefits of coaching**

Coached participants were asked to consider the benefits of coaching. The vast majority felt that coaching helped them to improve various aspects of their health, beyond just skills and performance: 84% believed that the coaching they received helped to improve their fitness; 82% said it helped them to improve their physical health; and 71% their mental health and well-being.

**Table 1.7: Benefits of coaching**

Benefits	% Agree	% Disagree
The coaching I receive helps to improve my skills/performance	86	1
The coaching I receive helps to improve my fitness	84	2
The coaching I receive helps to improve my physical health	82	2
The coaching I receive helps to improve my mental health and well-being	71	4

Base: all those who have received coaching in the previous twelve months. Excludes neutral responses.

Next, participants were asked to rate their own physical and mental health. The findings were compared between those who were in receipt of coaching in the last twelve months; those who participated in sport and physical activity in the previous 12 months; and those who had never received coaching. Those who were in receipt of coaching were more likely to rate their physical health as excellent or good, compared to those who participated in sport and physical activity in the previous twelve months and those who had never received coaching.

Furthermore, those who were in receipt of coaching did more sport and physical activity each week; had increased their levels of activity since the previous year; and were more likely to want to do more sport and physical activity in the future, compared to others.

**Table 1.8: Benefits of coaching by participant group**

Benefits	Coached last 12 mths %	Participated last 12 mths %	Never received coaching %
Rated own physical health as excellent or good	37	32	22
Rated own mental health and well-being as excellent or good	49	48	46
Done more sport and physical activity in the last 12 months	23	16	12
Would like to do more sport and physical activity	36	33	25
Time spent in sport and physical activity (minutes per week)	220	188	157

Base: all those who have received coaching in the previous twelve months.

## Participant views of their coach

Participants' positivity about the coaching they received continued when asked to consider their coach. The overwhelming majority (85%) reported that they had confidence and trust in their coach, with 82% agreeing that they would recommend their coach to others. Three quarters of participants (75%) said they had a good relationship with him or her.

Across all these factors there was very little disagreement, with the remaining participants giving neutral responses.

A smaller proportion of participants said they felt part of a team or community through being coached (57%) and less than half (42%) said that coaching gave them access to social opportunities.

**Table 1.9: Participant views of their coach**

Participant views	% Agree	% Disagree
I have confidence and trust in my coach	85	1
I would recommend my coach to others	82	1
I have a good relationship with my coach	75	2
Through coaching, I feel part of a team or community	57	11
Through coaching, I have access to a range of social opportunities	42	21

*Base: all those who have received coaching in the previous twelve months. Excludes neutral responses.*

## Choosing a coach

The survey asked participants the most important things they looked for when choosing a coach. Participants were most likely to select a coach based on the coach's experience (72%), personal and people skills (70%) and qualifications/training (65%).

**Table 1.10: Considerations when choosing a coach**

Choosing a coach	%
Experience	72
Personal and people skills	70
Qualifications and training	65
Someone who can understand me	57
Good reputation	42

Base: all those who have received coaching in the previous twelve months. Respondents could select more than one option, therefore percentages do not add up to 100%.

Overall, participants thought that it was more important that a coach understands them (57%, table 1.10) than it was to have the same characteristics as them, such as personality, gender, age, life experience and background (table 1.11).

**Table 1.11: Further considerations when choosing a coach**

Choosing a coach	%
Has a similar personality to me	11
Is the same gender as me	7
Is a similar age to me	6
Has a similar life experience to me	4
Is from a similar background to me	3

Base: all those who have received coaching in the previous twelve months. Respondents could select more than one option, therefore percentages do not add up to 100%.

## Great coaching

Participants who received coaching were asked what they thought made a great sport and physical activity coach. The findings included a combination of technical coaching skills and social skills. The ability of a coach to give constructive feedback and corrections was the most common response, followed by being friendly and approachable. Getting good results, such as winning games and matches, and knowing the rules of the game, were not seen as important to participants.

**Table 1.12: Participant views of great coaches**

<b>Great coaches</b>	<b>%</b>
Give constructive feedback and corrections	53
Friendly and approachable	50
Improve skills and ability	44
Qualified/trained	39
Create a warm and welcoming environment	39
Treat all participants as individuals	38
Build good relationships	36
Have previous experience of coaching	20
Get good results (ie win matches/games)	12
Know the rules of the game	12

*Base: all those who have received coaching in the previous twelve months. Respondents could select more than one option, therefore percentages do not add up to 100%.*

## Participants no longer in receipt of coaching

Over seven million people (14% of adults in the UK) reported that they received coaching in the last five years, but not in the last 12 months.

Over half of those no longer in receipt of coaching said they might be encouraged to return to a coached session in the future (55%). However, a substantial proportion (45%) said they would not be interested in receiving coaching again.

Reducing the cost of sessions was the most common factor cited that might encourage people to take part in sessions in the future (34%), followed by providing sessions at more convenient times (19%) and introducing more fun into coached-sessions (13%).

Improving the quality of coaching was cited by only 6% of respondents.

**Table 1.13: What would attract people back into coached sessions**

Factors	%
Reduce the cost of sessions	34
Provide sessions at more convenient times for me	19
Introduce more fun	13
Introduce more social activities	8
Improve the facilities	8
Provide more sessions	7
Improve the quality of coaching	6
Reduce the number of competitions or events	3
Introduce more competitions or events	3
Not interested in receiving coaching again	45

*Base: all those who have received coaching in the past five years, but not the previous twelve months.*

*Respondents could select more than one option, therefore percentages do not add up to 100%.*



## Participants who had never received coaching

Of those who had never received coaching in the past, the vast majority (74%) said they would not be interested in doing so in the future. Asked why they would not be interested in receiving coaching, most said that they preferred to exercise/play sport on their own or thought that coached sessions were not for people like them.

The cost of coached-sessions was cited by around a quarter of respondents (24%) as the main barrier.

**Table 1.14 Reasons why they are not interested in receiving coaching**

Reasons	%
They prefer to exercise/do sport on their own	35
They think it is not for people like them	29
It costs too much	24
They don't need a coach for their sport/activity	21
They don't have time	13

*Base: all those who had never received coaching. Respondents could select more than one option, therefore percentages do not add up to 100%.*

## 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.

A substantial proportion of the adult population take part in coached activity each and every day. Over sixteen million adults have received coaching in the last five years, with over nine million in the last twelve months alone. The potential impact of coaches on individuals, communities and society is significant. Consistent with other research, this survey has shown that women are more likely to engage in coached activity compared to men (62% and 38% respectively). This suggests that increasing the opportunity for participants to take part in more coached-activity, may help to increase female participation in sport and physical activity more generally.

It is interesting to note the higher proportion of BAME groups and people with physical or mental health conditions that receive coaching, compared to their representation in the national population. Overall, this demonstrates that coaching is an inclusive activity that has the potential to engage with groups that are typically underrepresented in other types of sport and physical activity.

Participant experience of coaching is overwhelmingly positive. Most people who received coaching said that they enjoyed it, that their coach motivated them to do better and to come back, and helped them to achieve their individual goals. Three quarters of participants (74%) rated their last coached session as good and only 1% of participants rated their experience as poor. In addition, the vast majority of participants had confidence and trust in their coach.

The survey has shown that receiving coaching is a positive and enjoyable experience. It has also shown the benefits of coaching, beyond what might be expected, such as improvement in skills and performance. The vast majority of participants said that coaching helped them in other ways too, including improving their physical health and mental well-being. Those in receipt of coaching were much more likely to rate their physical or mental health as excellent or good, compared to those not in receipt of coaching. Furthermore those in receipt of

coaching appear to have more “sticky” sport and physical habits: they are currently more active; they have increased their activity levels since the previous year; and they would like to do more sport or physical activity, than those not in receipt of coaching.

What is also interesting to note from this research is that participants are much more likely to prefer a coach that understands them, than a coach who is similar in terms of gender, age or background. This highlights the importance of prioritising the attributes of the coach in relation to their understanding of participant needs, rather than their demographic profile. UK Coaching is seeking to address this through the development of a new Coaching Behaviours Framework.

A large proportion of adults in the UK have received coaching in the past, but not within the previous twelve months. Over half of those participants said they could be encouraged to return to coached-activity if the costs were reduced and the sessions were provided at more convenient times. These factors should be considered when planning and delivering coached activity.

The majority of participants that had never received coaching, said they would not be interested in receiving coaching in the future. Whilst many said that they preferred to exercise alone, others did not think that coaching was for “people like them”. UK Coaching is committed to changing public perceptions of coaches and coaching, to ensure that public perceptions are more in line with the real experience of coached participants, and that coaching is seen as relevant and accessible to all members of the community.