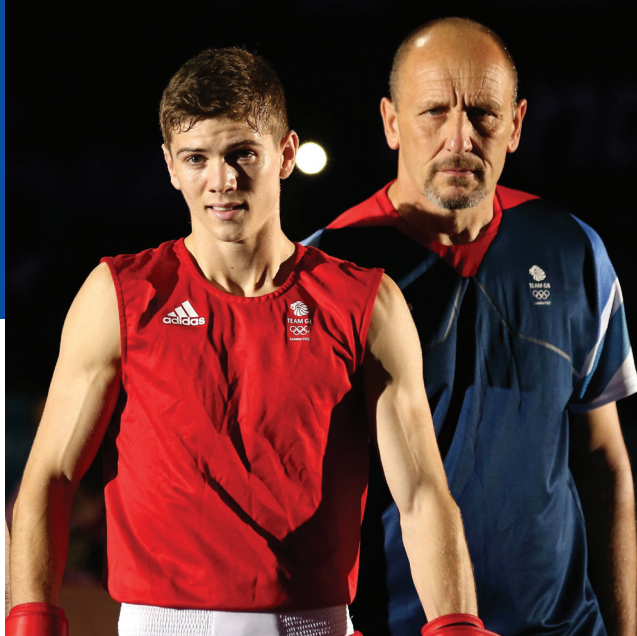




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UK SPORT COACH DEVELOPMENT TEAM & EIS PERFORMANCE PATHWAYS

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Pathway Coaching Position Statement

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What it means for us...

The production of this statement was founded on the desire to help progress appropriate practices and approaches to not only athlete development, but the professional development and preparation of coaches to work with these high potential athletes.

For us, UK Sport and the EIS, this is a declaration of our views, our beliefs, and our position on the nature of pathway coaching and how coaches should be supported. This position statement means a source of shared language and common ideas from which to bridge the sizeable gap between the current state of our sporting landscape and our aspirational vision of coaching as the UK's competitive advantage. As a result, it is not an end point but an evidence-based departure point - the start of a conversation internally and with sports – and a direction of travel towards learning, doing things better, and championing the role and domain expertise of the pathway coach

With this vision the bar is high, but **for us**, this statement means a stable ground from which to ask the question what do we need to do differently? Providing us with clarity and direction for the development of domain expert coaches and coach developers of the future. **For us** it will mean a heightened emphasis on pedagogical knowledge and developmentally appropriate 'ologies', coupled with an elevated importance placed upon critically considering the experiences (curriculum) required for athletes to learn, develop, and fulfil their potential.

We accept the responsibility that comes with taking a position, and as a consequence the essential requirement to ensure, as central agencies, our approaches and practices are coherent with the ideas within the position statement. In the future, you will see a specific targeted approach to performance pathway coach development and the associated professional development of an appropriately skilled community of coach developers. We now ask you to consider what it could mean for you.

What it could mean for you...

We will all agree, to develop inspired and inspiring athletes, coaches play a pivotal role, and therefore it is necessary to challenge your own thinking about how you go about understanding and developing coaching expertise in the pathway. As highlighted above, the position statement represents our views, beliefs, and position on the matter. It isn't intended as a set of prescriptions or instructions, and neither are we telling you what to do or how to do it. However, it is intended to provoke. **For you**, we hope the position statement is a series of considerations and a call to action.

For you, this could mean an opportunity and a catalyst to critically reflect on your current approach to coaching and coaches in the performance pathway. Considering the position statement:

- **How do you recruit, deploy, and appropriately develop coaches to be effective in creating experiences for athletes to learn, develop, and fulfil their potential?**
- **How you might recognise the value and importance of expert coaches and coaching throughout the developmental journey towards the podium?**
- **What opportunities are presented to both your performance and coach education departments when considering the required professional development, training, and qualifying of coaches to be effective in pathway roles?**

For many of you, by wholeheartedly considering the position statement, this may trigger a fundamental rethink of your own practices and approaches, however, what an exciting journey ahead that would be - after all, if coaching is to become the UK's competitive advantage, **what has got us here, will not get us to where we need to go.**



INTRODUCTION

In seeking to develop coaching as the UK's competitive advantage, the UK Sport Coaching Team and the English Institute of Sport's (EIS) Performance Pathways Team identified a pressing need to produce a rigorous and expert informed position statement about the nature of performance pathway coaching and how these coaches should be supported.

The specific aims of this statement are to offer an evidence-based position from which to articulate the differences between coaching elite level athletes and those who are aiming to reach this level of performance. In delimiting the intentions of this statement, we propose that '**performance pathway coaching**' refers to the phase of athlete development that takes place approximately four to eight years before the individual is capable of podium placing on the senior world stage.

Critically, there is also an implicit assumption that athletes at this stage of their development have both the appropriate motivational orientation to seek elite levels of performance and also the potential to get there.

It is hoped that this statement will inform decisions on patterns of athlete and coach support up to and beyond the Paris and Los Angeles Olympics and Paralympics, the Beijing and Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics, and other major championships.



“*The specific aims of this statement are to offer an evidence-based position from which to articulate the differences between coaching elite level athletes and those who are aiming to reach this level of performance.*”



BACKGROUND

The current situation is that across elite sport, the majority of support for coaches and coaching sits at the highest levels of athlete performance and as a result the coaches of developmental athletes have received comparatively little support financially or developmentally. As a result of this, many coaches see the coaching of athletes in the performance pathway as a vehicle for career development towards coaching 'elite athletes'.

To highlight the point, reflecting on the start of his coaching career **Steven Gerrard** commented:



The 18s (Academy) was the right age group because it still gives you a bit of a spotlight with the coverage it gets but it is a place where you can make a lot of mistakes and grow and learn. Every manager and coach I have spoken to has said I will make loads of mistakes, and your first job is better to be away from the cameras. The other offers I got, it would have been learning on the job at the deep end and I probably wasn't ready for those jobs. I might have been but I didn't want to take any risks, especially when there is no timescale or plan of where I want to be in a certain time, so the 18s made sense.



(Hunter, 2017)

The result of these cultural and financial pressures is that we often see senior coaching and sports science practice being cascaded to developmental levels. This position statement seeks to articulate that this practice is both inappropriate and limiting to the progress of athletes.

Further, we seek to make suggestions about how the coaches of athletes in the performance pathway should be supported to both develop their practice and propose the structural changes necessary to encourage outstanding talent development coaching practice, with the ambition that coaching becomes the UK's competitive advantage.



METHOD

This statement has been formulated following consultation with topic expertise from four speakers (*Professor Keith Davids, Professor Dave Collins, Professor Chris Cushion and Dr Bob Muir*) who were invited to explore the following two questions:

- 1 *There is a view that coaching athletes who have already attained an elite level of performance and those seeking to reach this level is different. Please address and discuss as appropriate.*
- 2 *How might performance pathway coach development be approached?*

The invited subject experts engaged in dialogue with a panel of performance directors, coach developers, senior coaches, pathway managers¹ and representatives of Project Connect² at a consultative meeting held on October 20 and 21, 2019. Each individual speaker presented, providing a stimulus for facilitated discussion amongst the panel, leading to the raising of further questions and continued dialogue between panel and speaker. Further input from both panel and speakers was sought following the initial drafting stage and comments were taken into account in the final draft.

Both UK Sport and EIS are very grateful for their expert input and advice, which builds on many years of experience in team and individual sports. UK Sport and the English Institute of Sport are however solely responsible for these conclusions.

What are the differences between coaching those who have already attained an elite level of performance and those seeking to reach this level?

Across Olympic and Paralympic sport there are clearly significant differences between domains, pathways, and the needs of world-class performer. As a result, we will necessarily see differences between domains and there can be no uniform approach to coaching practice.

However, the process through which a coach might support performance development may prove to be very similar. We propose that there are a number of clear 'boundary markers' (*cf. Lyle & Cushion, 2017*) that delineate differences between the nature of coaching practice at the senior elite level and in the performance pathway.

These differences can be seen on the **socio-political**, the **local** and **individual level**.

¹ Anna Stembridge (*Cardiff Metropolitan University and Team Bath*), Greg Baker (*Para Table Tennis and UK Performance Coaching Association*), Jayne Ellis (*British Wheelchair Basketball*), Neil McCarthy (*Pentathlon GB*), Sam Bradley (*GB Hockey*), Sara Symington (*England Netball*), Stuart Pickering (*EIS*) & Toni Minichello.

² Project Connect is a team of coach development officers who work together to support pathway coaches in Home Country Talent Programmes with representatives from Sport England, Sport Northern Ireland, sportscotland, Sport Wales and UK Coaching.



At the **socio-political** level, the programmes that support pathway athletes typically receive lower levels of funding than those of senior elite performance. In addition, coaches at this level will likely be remunerated at lower levels and be seen as lower status in the eyes of National Governing Bodies, sports and wider society. Consequently, this creates a level of upward pressure and mobility, motivating many coaches to coach athletes of high performance, rather than seeking to advance their practice in their current context.

At the **local level**, the context of coaching athletes in the performance pathway can also be seen as different across a number of critical interactions. The ‘pathway’ coach is likely to have fewer contact hours to help support an athlete, they are unlikely to be operating within a full-time performance context, very often spending more time out of the performance environment than within it. This generates a number of challenges for the coach and their ways of working that are less prevalent in the senior elite coaching context.

In addition, there is likely to be a broader group of stakeholders that impact on an athlete’s performance development including parents, home coaches, part-time support services etc. In this sense we can see the coach as the orchestrator of multiple inputs, rather than simply being engaged in a one on one coach-athlete relationship (Bjorndal & Ronglan, 2018).

“ At the **individual level**, there are profound differences in the nature of performance development. These differences can be seen as a result of the increased complexity and dynamic nature of developmental processes. ”

The performance development of athletes at this stage typically takes place in a non-linear manner (Gulbin, Weissensteiner, Oldenzel & Gagné, 2013; Collins, MacNamara & McCarthy, 2016; Hardy et al., 2017). These processes are biopsychosocial in nature, potentially posing a greater range of challenges (though importantly, not necessarily *more* challenging) for coaches seeking to work with performance pathway athletes.

As a function of these hyper-dynamic developmental processes, coaches at this level are less likely to be able to claim attribution for significant development of future performance. However, the rewards for engaging in pathway coaching are obvious in that performance improvement is likely to be gained more quickly than at the senior level.

The consequence of this is that the coaches of senior elite athletes can be seen as **refining** a previously developed level of performance, whereas performance pathway coaching can be seen as attempting to **define** a future level of performance potential and athletic identity.

In essence, the nature of coaching pathway athletes isn’t simply quantitatively different, but instead a qualitatively different endeavour. As such, the coaching of pathway athletes, cannot and should not be seen as the watering down of the coaching of elite athletes, it should be approached in an entirely different manner.



How should Performance Pathway Coaches be Supported?

Given the nature of the above position, it would appear critical that the overall status of a pathway coach needs to be raised both financially and socially. In the financial sense, pathway coaching should necessarily hold some level of parity with senior coaching.

In addition, the organisations represented by this statement see the professionalisation of pathway coaching practice as a pressing and immediate concern. This would see the promotion of a workforce that hold chartered professional status.

Taking the position that the roles are different, it seems appropriate that the way in which coaches are recruited should be shaped by the nature of the differences between coaching domains. Whilst we do not believe that the roles are completely different to the extent that you need an entirely different population of coaches to fulfil each role, it is necessary that at appointment a coach holds the necessary knowledge, skills and capabilities competencies to fulfil the role.

There is a core and differential base of conceptual knowledge necessary for coaches working in the performance pathway. An underacknowledged domain of knowledge across all coaching practice is pedagogy. Whilst it should be a key knowledge base for all coaches at every level, there is an even greater need for coaches in the pathway domain given the aforementioned increased complexity of the coach's role, and pedagogical knowledge should be a highly prevalent element of the indicative content of any coach development support.



In addition, pedagogical knowledge is critical in enabling the coach to work with the hyper-dynamic nature of developmental processes, coaches need to have significant knowledge of developmentally appropriate 'ologies' across disciplines.

As an exemplar, a coach who understands the psycho-social impact of relative age (McCarthy, Collins & Court, 2016) and knows how the motivational orientation of an athlete may influence training (Ryan & Deci, 2000), along with a deep pedagogical knowledge and understands how the different factors interact, they can shape training sessions appropriately to meet the long-term needs of their athletes.

These knowledges need to be supported by a conjectural skill or a level of critical thinking that serves to support the further development of knowledge and the interaction with these knowledges and practice. Critical thinking appears to be of increased importance given the preferences that coaches have for gaining knowledge (Stoszowski & Collins, 2016). This is especially relevant given the increased number of unfiltered knowledge sources for coaches through social media.

In order to support the development of pathway coaches in the Olympic and Paralympic system, we propose the need to establish a specialist workforce of pathway coach developers³. The work of these developers should be focused on working with coaches in context, employing integrative approach to curriculum to develop applied pedagogical knowledge, critical thinking, appropriate deployment of 'ologies' and other appropriate elements of coaching practice.

³ In referring to a 'coach developer' we make reference to a specific job role focused on the support of coaches in context, both in a pedagogical and helping capacity. The role is therefore necessarily distinct from mentors or educators.



SUMMARY

This position has sought to articulate the differences between performance pathway coaching and coaching senior elite athletes. We typically see the coaching of pathway athletes as a simple process of ‘watering down’ the coaching of senior elite performers, or worst, replication.

This has often led to the cascading of coaching practice that is commonplace at senior elite level down to development domains, and consequently, beginner coaches have frequently been appointed to coach developmental athletes as an opportunity to develop their career to perceived higher status roles.

We contend that this practice is wholly inappropriate and a transformation in perspective is required to effectively support the next generation of Olympic and Paralympic athletes, realising the ambition of coaching becoming the UK’s competitive advantage.

We have positioned the differences between the two roles being that of the senior international coach ‘**refining**’ previously developed performance characteristics and the role of the performance pathway coach as ‘**defining**’ those future characteristics.



“ This has often led to the cascading of coaching practice that is commonplace at senior elite level down to development domains. ”



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Professor Keith Davids is Professor of Motor Learning at the Centre for Sports Engineering Research. Keith graduated from the University of London and gained a PhD at the University of Leeds in Psychology and Physical Education. He has previously held Professorial positions in the UK, New Zealand, Australia and Finland. Keith's research programme investigates sport performance, skill acquisition and expertise enhancement in sport and how to design learning, training and practice environments to successfully achieve these outcomes. He specialises in ecological dynamics, a theoretical framework, combined of concepts from ecological psychology and dynamical systems theory. His research seeks to investigate affordances (*opportunities for action*) as constraints on emergent coordination tendencies in athletes and sports teams. These key ideas have been implemented in a Nonlinear Pedagogy which is informed by Keith's work on motor learning design in sport. Keith collaborates on research in sport, physical activity and exercise with colleagues at universities in Spain, Portugal, France, Netherlands, Iran, Macedonia, New Zealand, Australia and Finland. A large proportion of his scientific and practical research has been undertaken in collaboration with the New Zealand South Island Sports Academy, the Queensland Academy of Sport, the Australian Institute of Sport, Diving Australia, Cricket Australia, GB Cycling and the English Institute of Sport.

Professor Dave Collins has over 350 peer reviewed publications and 60 books/chapters. Research interests include performer/coach development, expertise and peak performance. Dave hold qualifications from the BPS, BASES and HCPC, plus professional qualifications in Teaching and Strength and Conditioning. As a psychologist, he has worked with over 70 World or Olympic medallists plus professional teams and performers. Previously as PD of UK Athletics Dave directed the programme which progressed the team from 24th to 5th (*World then Olympic*). The established medal haul makes Dave one of the most successful PDs of recent times. Current applied assignments include football, rugby, ski & snowboard and motorsport, plus work with non-sports organisations. Past attendance at 11 Olympics plus numerous World and European Championships and professional sports have provided useful experiences. Dave has coaches at national level in three sports, is a 5th Dan Karate, Director of the Rugby Coaches Association and iZone Performance, Fellow of the Society of Martial Arts, ZSL and BASES, Associate Fellow of the BPS, and experienced PE teacher/teacher educator and an ex Royal Marine.

Professor Chris Cushion completed his PhD, an ethnography of the coaching process in elite youth football in 2001. He was appointed a lecturing position in Sports Coaching and Performance, and progressed to Senior Research Lecturer in Coaching and Performance; being appointed as the pathway leader for the MSc in Sports Coaching. In 2006, Chris was appointed as Course Director for the BSc Sports Coaching and Teaching/Research Group Leader for Coaching at Leeds Metropolitan University. Chris has a wide interest in coaching being involved as an external reviewer in the UK Coaching Certificate endorsement process and a range of coaching related consultancy projects for both the public and private sector. Within sport and industry, his clients include Chelsea F.C., Fulham F.C., Bath R.F.C., Tottenham Hotspur F.C., The Football Association, Sport Universal (*Amisco*) Sport Coach UK, Skills Active, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, OPTA, Elite Analysis, Sport Scientific and Sports Hub. Chris is actively involved in coaching practice being a UEFA qualified football coach. He has extensive experience in sport from participation to performance coaching in the UK and the United States including 10 years work in professional youth football for a range of clubs. These included Norwich City F.C., Brentford F.C., Queens Park Rangers F. C. and Fulham F. C.

Dr Bob Muir is a Senior Lecturer in Sport Coaching. He leads the Football Association Post Graduate Diploma in Coach Development and acts as a consultant for several other professional and Olympic sports to facilitate situated coach learning and professional development programmes. Bob joined Leeds Beckett University in 2005 as the first academic appointment in subject area of Sport Coaching to lead the newly validated foundation degree in sport coaching. Shortly after arriving, Bob led the development of a new BSc (*Hons*) degree in Sport Coaching. In 2006, Bob was awarded the Dean's prize for excellence in assessment learning and teaching. Since then, Bob has been centrally involved in the design, development and leadership of several undergraduate and post-graduate programmes including the MSc Sport Coaching, the PG Certificate in Coach Education and most recently the bespoke PG Diploma in Coach Development for the senior coach development teams within the Football Association and Professional Footballers Association. A senior men's professional basketball coach for over 20 years, Bob worked with the Leeds Carnegie and the Teesside Mohawks men's national league basketball teams enjoying several successful seasons winning six national league titles, five national league playoff championships and seven national cup titles. Drawing on his extensive experience in coaching and coach education, Bob has spent the last 10 years working alongside England pathway, national team, Olympic and Paralympic coaches to develop a situated 1to1 coach learning and professional development strategy. In 2018, Bob completed his PhD by drawing on his experiences of implementing his strategy with over 50 high-performance coaches across 12 sports. The study illustrated 'how' coach learning and development can be more meaningfully embedded in coaches' everyday practice contexts. Key features of this work included the use of audio/video feedback as a stimulus for reflection, provoking uncertainties and disruptions in practice, close cooperation and collaboration between the coach and coach developer, and iterative cycles of reflective dialogue, during which, concepts, theories and frameworks could be drawn on as 'thinking tools' to enhance coaches' resources, reasoning and actions.



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