

Sport coaching as a ‘profession’: challenges and future directions

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Abstract

The strategy of the International Council for Coach Education (ICCE) has placed the development of sport coaching as a profession at the core of the mission of the organisation. The authors examine the basis for this aspiration against criteria associated with established professions, taking into account the unique features of sport coaching. It is concluded that, at a global level, sport coaching does not meet a number of the traditional hallmarks of a profession, primarily due to its current position on key descriptors such as purpose, knowledge base, organisation and ethics. In addition, the lack of fit of traditional ‘right to practice’ provisions within the established professions is identified as problematic. Sport coaching status categories include volunteer coach, professional coach, and the preparatory category of pre-coach. It is suggested that sport coaching should define its future identity as a blended professional area, operating within the wider field

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of sport and physical activity. A series of actions is proposed to advance the international agenda, as part of an on-going process of professionalization. The implications for the future research and strategy of ICCE are also identified.

Keywords: sport coaching; professions; status categories; blended professional area

The emergent concept of sport coaching as a profession

Within a global context, sport plays a significant role in the generation of economic activity and in the provision of services to spectators, participants, communities, athletes, coaches, administrators and the corporate sector (Maguire, 1999, 2005; Maguire et al., 2002). Increasingly, Governments see sport as an important element of their policy frameworks (Australian Government, 2010; Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2002; Government of Ireland, 1998; Green & Houlihan, 2005; Houlihan, 1997; President's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition, 2011; Sport and Recreation South Africa, 2011). In some cases, legislative frameworks have been established regulating the operation of sport (Chaker, 1999; Government of France, 2000; Kikulis et al., 1992; Parrish, 2003; Republic of South Africa, 1998, 2007). More recently, the European Union has issued both a White Paper and an official communication on sport which sets out the proposed objectives for sport within a wider social, economic and cultural framework (European Commission, 2007, 2011). At a global level the influence of the Olympic movement gathers pace, while sport has also been identified as a vehicle to achieve the millennium goals of the United Nations (Beutler, 2008).

Within this context, sport coaching fulfils an important social function as part of the wider sport service sector across the globe (Lyle, 1999, 2002). Anecdotal evidence suggests that millions of adults deliver coaching sessions to sport participants on a regular basis, with up to 1.5 million people engaged in coaching in the UK every year (North, 2009). While the vast majority of these coaches are volunteers, a situation that is reflected in the majority of countries in the world, the existence of a substantial body of part-time or full-time paid coaches has been verified in a number of nations. For example, Australia has recently reported 27,900 full-time coaches, while the figure for the United States is 217,000 (Duffy, 2009). Within the UK, there are an estimated 36,537 full-time coaches and 230,765 part-time coaches (North, 2009).

In Germany, there are more than 500,000 people with legal licenses at the German Olympic Sports Confederation (its membership consist of 27.5 million individual members in over 91,000 clubs). Over 7.5 million people are involved in assisting sporting activities on a voluntary basis. In the sport clubs alone some 2.1 million voluntary workers carry out 538 million hours

of work per year without pay. This corresponds to a net domestic product of € 8.1 billion (German Olympic Sports Confederation 2010; Muckenhaupt, 2010). Within this context, there are approximately 260,000 licensed coaches in the fields of participation-oriented sport and performance-oriented sport (Breuer 2009; Digel & Thiel 2010; German Olympic Sports Confederation 2011). In the area of high performance there are approximately 1,000 employed coaches and more than 3,000 coaches working with emerging high performance athletes, employed within national federations and at the regional level (Nordmann & Sandner, 2009).

The scale and social significance of sport coaching as a paid, part-time paid and full-time paid pursuit has led to the inevitable examination of its position as a professional area of activity (Campbell, 1993; Chelladurai, 1986; Duffy, 2010; Lyle, 1986, 2002; Lyle & Cushion, 2010; Taylor & Garret, 2010; Woodman, 1993). In the earlier years of these analyses, there was a strong degree of advocacy on the need for core coach education programmes that brought a stronger scientific and professional orientation to sport coaching. This perspective reflected the position of two of the authors (Campbell, 1993; Woodman, 1993), who were responsible for the creation of core coach education programmes in the UK and Australia respectively. The creation of such nationally led programmes has also been supported in a range of strategic and policy publications around the globe, reflecting a broad canvas of support for the proposition that sport coaching is meritorious of a position alongside other professions (Coaching Association of Canada, 2011; European Coaching Council, 2007; National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2008; sports coach UK, 2008; UK Sport 2001).

Following on from the pioneering work done in Canada, Australia and the UK, there has been an increasing trend to develop large scale programmes for the education and accreditation of coaches (Mallet, 2010; Trudel, Gilbert & Werthner, 2010). Some of these initiatives occurred within a context where there has been a stated need or intention for coaching to become more strongly established as a profession (Government of Canada, 2002; sports coach UK, 2008). In other cases, coaching was accorded a central place in the sport systems of, for example, Eastern Europe, Russia and China, with a strong emphasis on the scientific principles of athlete development and degree level education of coaches (Dasheva, 2011; Lyle, 2002). The potential impediments facing the emergent profession were highlighted by Chelladurai (1986) who questioned the feasibility of sport coaching following the path of more established professions such as law and medicine. Challenges were also highlighted by Lyle (2002), where the characteristics and boundaries of sport coaching were laid out in detail. More recently, Lyle and Cushion (2010) collated an insightful range of contributions from authors around the globe on professionalisation and practice, where a range of key issues and theoretical perspectives led the authors to conclude that 'this academic field is beginning to look beyond cultural differences' to a point where 'findings are beginning to be aggregated within a set of conceptual understandings

that suggests a more cohesive field' (Lyle & Cushion, 2010, p.251-252). In the same publication, the lead author of this paper cited the adoption of the Rio Maior Convention (European Coaching Council, 2007a) as evidence of a greater activation of national and international organisations around a more common framework of understanding while 'recognising sport specific variations, as well as diversity of need among paid and unpaid coaches in the different nations and continents of the world' (Duffy, 2010, p.vii).

The trend to focus more strongly on the position of sport coaching as a profession had been prompted internationally with the creation of the International Council for Coach Education (ICCE) in 1997 and the adoption of the Magglingen Declaration at a general assembly meeting involving twenty nine countries (ICCE, 2000). This Declaration outlined the challenges facing coach education and development, highlighting the need to ensure that the vital role of coaching was recognised by governments, sport and the wider community. The Declaration emphasised the importance of coach education and stressed the need for clarity in the identification of coaching competencies. The Declaration also highlighted the need to promote standards of ethical behaviour and the need for mechanisms for monitoring compliance. The final element of the Declaration advocated the need to work towards the establishment of coaching as a profession, with the clear implication that such status had not yet been achieved. Indeed, the Declaration highlighted one of the key dilemmas inherent to such an aspiration by stating that coach education and development should seek to be inclusive, engaging of all sectors of the community regardless of race, gender, culture, disability, sexual orientation or religious practice (ICCE, 2000). The extent to which such inclusivity, including the continued engagement of large numbers of volunteer coaches in varied social contexts, is congruent with the *modus operandi* required to establish coaching as a profession is an issue that remains to be addressed.

Advocacy to move in the direction of coaching as a profession gathered new pace within Europe after the adoption of the Magglingen Declaration and in the context of the convergent policies of the European Union. Supported by a European Commission funded project, the European Coaching Council (2007) proposed the introduction of a licensing system for coaches as part of the move towards a regulated profession. Notably, this proposed development was positioned within the wider professional area of sport and physical activity. The need for further work on defining coaching as a professional area of activity was also highlighted, taking 'account of experiences in other relevant areas and the emerging legislative frameworks within the European Union' (European Coaching Council, 2007, p.24).

The recent publication of the ICCE strategy (ICCE, 2010, p.4) has added further impetus to the debate, with the development of coaching as a profession at core of the mission of the organisation:

To lead and support the global development of coaching as a profession and to enhance the quality of coaching at every level in sport, guided by the needs of members, federations, nations and key partners.

The core sentiment of this mission mirrored the earlier aspiration of the UK Coaching Framework to establish coaching as a professionally regulated vocation, which notably stopped short of suggesting that coaching could become a full blown profession (sports coach UK, 2008). Despite the momentum that is evident to varying degrees at national, continental and global levels, the extent to which sport coaching has moved any closer to the status of a profession has not been quantified. Indeed, there is an absence of hard data from different countries and sports which would provide any firm basis upon which to evaluate the progress that has been made to date. Recent research published in the United Kingdom (North, 2009) has provided an important template for the collection of such data and reveals a picture in which only 3 per cent of the total coaching workforce is in full time employment in coaching, while a further 25 per cent are in part-time paid coaching employment. The remainder of coaching workforce are, therefore, operating on a volunteer basis. Notably, only slightly over 50 per cent of all coaches in the study held some form of coaching qualification from their national federation.

The UK analysis offers a somewhat pessimistic representation of the status of sport coaching as a remunerated occupation, given that the majority of those involved do not get paid and almost half do not hold any form of qualification. While it is evident that such data reflect the length of the journey to be travelled by sport coaching in the UK if it is to achieve the status of a profession, this is only a representation of the picture in one country. Other contexts reveal a more robust position, which is underpinned either by legislative provision and/or a stronger position for coaching in the workplace (Government of France, 2000; Portuguese Council of Ministers, 2008). In the United States, where there is no national system for the education and qualification of coaches, there exists a significant tradition and infrastructure for the employment of coaches attached to education institutions at the secondary and tertiary levels. Even here, viable career options are limited (National Association of Sport and Physical Education, 2011), while the utilisation of the national standards for coaching has not been as strong as might have been anticipated (Brylinksy, 2011).

In recent years, international federations have become more interested in the creation of structures to support member nations in the education and qualification of coaches. The International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) has introduced a Coaches Education Certification Scheme, which has been mapped against the European Framework for the Recognition of Coaching Competence and Qualifications (Duffy et al., 2010a). Many other international federations have also made significant progress in the development of coach education programme (for example, Badminton World Federation, 2011; Crespo, 2009; Federation Equestre

Internationale, 2003; International Rugby Board, 2011; International Table Tennis Federation, 2007; International Tennis Federation (ITF), 2009). Here again, a varied landscape emerges, with some sports focusing on the development of coaches for paid employment, although the major impetus at international level would appear to be on the development of volunteer coaches, often in countries where limited infrastructure exists to develop and deliver such support.

In the case of soccer the *Union des Associations Européennes de Football* (UEFA) has developed a graded system of licences which are deemed to provide coaches with increasing capacity to operate at different levels within the professional game, while making provision for those that coach in a voluntary or part-time capacity (UEFA, 2011). The preparation of coaches in the sports of tennis and golf is geared toward employment, albeit with a recognition that such coaches operate in a context where the voluntary engagement of coaches is a supporting, if not central, feature (ITF, 2009; Professional Golfers' Association, 2011). Despite the emphasis on licensing in some sports, the extent to which it provides the basis to suspend or exclude would appear to remain limited, an issue that has important implications for the status of coaching as a profession.

A significant contribution to the development of coaches through international cooperation has been made by Olympic Solidarity which provides financial support for coaches to undertake education programmes in a range of locations around the globe (Olympic Solidarity, 2011). This support, which exceeds \$20 million in each quadrennial, has been a significant catalyst in the promotion of engagement on coaching between international federations, national federations and national Olympic committees. Also at the international level, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has identified the need to educate coaches in anti-doping issues (World Anti-Doping Agency, 2011), while UK Sport has initiated a project to support the development of coach education systems at the community level in developing nations as part of the London 2012 legacy programme (UK Sport, 2011).

Within such a varied global landscape, where sport and country differences are so evident, the scale of the challenge facing ICCE and other organisations in the field of coaching is brought sharply into focus. In order to achieve progress, ICCE has established two working groups that have been tasked to: i) more specifically identify the elements of a global framework for the recognition of coaching competence and qualifications and ii) identify the steps required to lay the foundation for the recognition of coaching as a profession (ICCE, 2010). Within this context, there is a clear need to conduct a robust assessment of the current position; to chart the issues to be addressed and to clarify the rationale and terminology associated with the intended way forward. A key question in this regard is whether sport coaching fits the conventional models of professionalism that have been developed to date. In order to consider this question, it is first necessary to establish the emergent conceptual framework for sport coaching and to critically examine a number of, as yet, unresolved issues.

The current position

Recent years have seen the emergence of a consensus on the sport coaching terminology employed in the European Framework for the Recognition of Coaching Competence and Qualifications (European Coaching Council, 2007). This fledgling consensus was first reflected in the Rio Maior Convention (European Coaching Council, 2007a) and has generated significant interest since that time. This interest has been translated into application in the case of a number of countries (Meuken, 2008; Nordmann, 2008; Portuguese Council of Ministers, 2008; sports coach UK, 2008), as well as international federations (Duffy et al., 2010a). The European Framework has also provided a key point of reference in the development of a global framework (ICCE, 2010), jointly led by ICCE and the Association for Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF).

The principle features of the European Framework were derived from the application of a methodology to curriculum development as part of a project funded by the European Union (Petry et al., 2008) that included 'professional areas' of sport coaching; health and fitness; physical education and sport management. Within this project, known as AEHESIS (Aligning a European Higher Education Structure in Sport Science), a four year process of model curriculum development was undertaken which included literature reviews; expert input and consultative meetings, culminating in a report at the end of each year and a final process of dissemination (Petry et al., 2008). In the case of sport coaching, a formal review of the 1999 European Framework for Coaching Qualifications (European Network of Sport Science in Higher Education, 1999) was also undertaken, supported by a six-step methodology that was applied across each of the professional areas covered by the project.

In the Review, the professional area of sport coaching was associated with 'coaching people within a sport', thus recognising the principle of sport specificity and re-inforcing the pivotal role played by national and international federations in the education, deployment and regulation of coaches within their sport (European Coaching Council, 2007, p.15). Sport coaching was defined as 'the guided improvement, led by a coach, of sports participants and teams in a single sport and at identifiable stages of the athlete/sportsperson pathway' (European Coaching Council, 2007, p.5). Within this context, two standard occupations were identified: participation-oriented and performance-oriented. In each case, there were two further sub-divisions. Included within the participation-oriented standard occupation were coach of beginners (child, junior, adult) and coach of participation-oriented sportspeople (child, junior, adult). The performance-oriented standard occupation included coach of talent identified/performance athletes (child, junior, adult) and coach of full-time/high performance athletes. While the sub-divisions within the standard occupations were not provided with a clear label at the time, more recent analysis has referred to four

coaching domains (Duffy et al., 2010a).

The identification of two standard occupations and four coaching domains marked a departure from a uni-dimensional view of sport coaching, which had aligned expertise and qualifications to a performance-oriented paradigm (European Network of Sport Science and Higher Education and Employment, 1999). The need for such a shift had first been signalled by Lyle (2002) and subsequently became a strong point of focus in the work of the European Coaching Council (2007) and the AEHESIS project (Petry et al., 2008). This shift in thinking was also reflected in academic work on the nature of coaching excellence and expertise. Trudel and Gilbert (2006) suggested that the education of coaches should be more strongly oriented towards the context in which coaches operate. Reflecting this more segmented approach, Côté, Young, North, and Duffy (2007, p.4) proposed that the definition of coaching excellence be multi-faceted in nature and 'should describe the competences that coaches require when interacting with athletes of various competitive levels and in various sporting contexts' as well as being referenced against the 'correlates of excellence' among teachers.

The work of the European Coaching Council (2007) also focused on the process by which coaches develop their expertise, reflected in the identification of progressive coaching roles. Referring to the work of Ericsson Krampe and Tesch-Romer (1993) and Berliner (1994), the European document described four stages of coach development; early; middle; late; innovate. These stages were translated into four roles (apprentice; coach; senior coach; master coach) that could be applied across the two standard occupations and the four coaching domains. Notably, it was suggested that coaching roles could be carried out in volunteer; part-time and paid contexts. While this approach recognised the reality of coaching in many countries, it did not come to grips with the inevitable variations in motivation; hours of practice and remuneration associated with coaches operating in each of these contexts. It would appear, therefore, that a gap in the European work relates to the status of the coach, an issue that will be addressed later in the paper. Figure 1 summarises the key terms utilised by the European Coaching Council (2007), with the inclusion of the term coaching domain (Duffy et al., 2010a).

The European Coaching Council (2007) also proposed a move away from the direct equation of coaching roles and coaching qualifications, recognising the need to map competences against the specific requirements of context dependent roles. In this regard, the need for sport and country specific application was also highlighted and a detailed set of reference points was provided. These reference points reflected an early view of the core building blocks of coaching expertise and included the identification of tasks, activities and competences associated with each of the coaching roles across the four coaching domains.

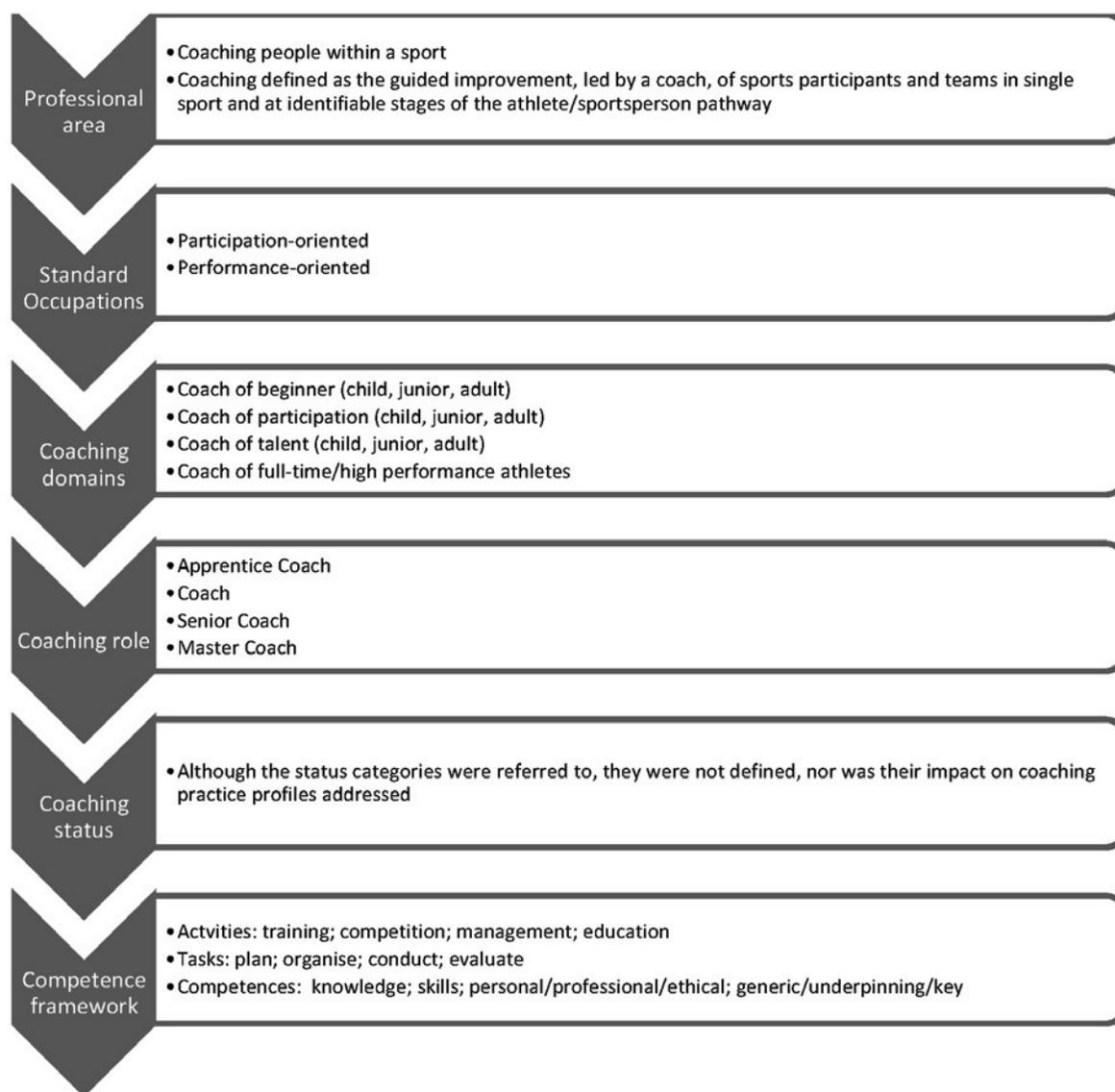


Figure 1. Core concepts (adapted from the European Coaching Council, 2007 and Duffy, Petrovic, Crespo, 2010a)

This ‘competence framework’ has provided a useful point of reference, although there is a clear need for a more robust and evidence-based model of coaching expertise and development. For example, Côté and Gilbert (2009) have suggested that professional knowledge; inter-personal knowledge and intra-personal knowledge are central to coaching expertise. The potential application of such classifications across the coaching domains and in different sport and country specific contexts requires further work and will inform a more informed definition of coaching expertise and the ‘practice’ categories that contribute to the development of such expertise. This further research work will be central to advancing the position of sport coaching, particularly when the stringent criteria associated with traditional professions are taken into account.

Traditional models of the professions

To date, the primary focus in the debate on sport coaching as a profession has been positioned against traditional models of the professions, with a growing recognition that direct comparison may not be appropriate (Taylor & Garret, 2010). In the past, this has resulted in comparisons being made with medicine, law, teaching and other professional areas. Given the context outlined above, where it has been seen that sport coaching is primarily delivered on a volunteer basis around the globe, there is a need to recognise that traditional models of the professions may not be appropriate for some sections of the diverse range of groups engaging in sport coaching in a global context.

Such a re-examination provides the basis for a more rigorous analysis of how sport coaching might deliver high quality experiences at the front-line, underpinned by professional standards and recognising the unique features of an activity that at once engages enthusiastic parents and committed life-long paid professionals. This approach is built on the premise that sport coaching comprises an inter-related set of standard occupations, roles, domains and status categories that are linked through a common purpose and social function. In the section that follows, a synopsis of literature relating to the criteria associated with the professions is provided, which will provide the basis for assessing the indicative status of sport coaching. Key elements of this synopsis mirror a parallel analysis on sport development in which the second author of the current paper is involved, reflecting the common ground that needs to be addressed within the broader professional field of sport and physical activity (Hylton & Hartley, 2011).

Criteria associated with the professions

Recent analyses in the wider literature have recognised the complexity associated with defining the professions. Khurana (2010, p.1) viewed a profession as a ‘process of an interacting network of institutions and people, not a checklist of attributes’. Professions may themselves also, at an operational level, develop further specialist groups and may be subject to rationalisation, re-stratification or re-professionalisation (see for example, Becher, 1999; Broadbent et al., 1997; Brock et al., 1999; Pickard, 2009). Yet, in facing the important task of distinguishing a ‘profession’ from other groups, almost all the literature on the nature of a profession tends to focus upon a set of knowledge, skills, attributes and values. Williams (1998, p.18) is typical of this common approach when he suggested that to be a profession a discipline should have:

a defined scope, stating that the profession’s purpose and goals, qualifications for education, experience and professional development, a code of conduct to guide what should, or should not, be done under given circumstances, recognised certification that requires maintenance and standards that are consistent with peer groups.

Members of a profession have some degree of exclusivity. They enjoy a range of privileges as well as a monopoly on providing a particular public service. In addition, the members of a profession merit social and more importantly, legal recognition, which legitimizes their authority and autonomy, and are are paid a salary commensurate with a particular level or role in that profession (Lindop, 1982; Sockett, 1985; Warrior, 2002; Wilensky, 1964;). Such exclusivity and restrictive membership can attract critical attention in the areas of power, diversity, access in training, career development and exclusionary sub-cultures (Edwards, 2006; Kennedy, 1992; Sommerlad, 2003, 2009). This criterion of exclusivity has particular implications for sport and coaching and will be returned to later in the paper.

The Australian Council for the Professions (2004, p.1) has focused on ethics and social responsibility in its definition of a profession as:

A disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards and uphold themselves to and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills, in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to exercise this knowledge and these skills in the interests of others. Inherent in this definition is the concept that the responsibility for the welfare, health and safety of the community shall take precedence over other considerations.

Cruess, Johnston and Cruess (2004, p.75) also identified some of these components in defining a profession as ‘an occupation whose core element is work based on a mastery of a complex body of knowledge and skills’ where science, learning or art is used ‘in the service of others, and members are ‘governed by a code of ethics’ and ‘profess a commitment to competence, integrity and morality, altruism and the promotion of the public good within their domain’. There is some kind of ‘social contract between a profession and society’ which grants the profession a ‘monopoly over the use of its knowledge base’ as well as autonomy and the ‘privilege of self regulation’ (Cruess et al., 2004, p.75). Earlier work by Burbules and Densmore (1991) identify a profession by autonomy and:

a clearly defined, highly developed, specialized and theoretical knowledge, control of training, certification and licensing of new entrants; self-governing and self-policing authority, especially with regard to professional ethics and members show a commitment to public service.

Professionals are also expected to understand, follow and apply an ethical code of practice framed within and regulated by the profession (Hall, 1969; Larson, 1997). Professional Codes of Ethics are often based on deontology principles and virtue ethics (Hartley & Robinson, 2006). Deontology focuses upon uncontestable rights and duties in the areas of welfare, harm, autonomy

and equality associated with being human. Welfare and harm can refer to physical, psychological, emotional and economic harms and can apply to the integrity and spirit of a sport contest. Virtue ethics recognises a community of practice and shared values in a club, team, organisation or profession (Hartley & Robinson 2006). There are opportunities for inter-disciplinary enquiry in coaching degrees, coach education and continuous professional development (CPD), using philosophy, sociology and law in understanding and challenging the normalisation of inappropriate behaviour in for example, violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and bullying all of which may occur in sport and coaching contexts. Simply having a code of ethics is not sufficient to be regarded as a profession. The ability of a professional to make difficult ethical decisions, drawing on intellectual, research and policy domains is often tested in the face of considerable pressures in the workplace. Normally a degree of autonomy and some system of support or supervision are expected, which rely upon considerable resources and established processes.

Hardman, Jones and Jones (2010, p.357) use virtue ethics and argue that sport coaches are centrally located in the moral development of participants, where sport practices:

require attention to the pursuit of particular kinds of goods that necessarily demand the exercise of judgements that are of a moral nature and, thereby, provide its practitioners with the opportunity to cultivate certain kinds of moral virtues.

Notably, Stirling (2009) found that 78% of sport coaches had witnessed emotional abuse and 68% had witnessed bullying, with 68.3% believing they would benefit from further education on emotional abuse and 67.1% would benefit from further education on bullying. In addition, 69.2% identified a need for further education on 'irresponsible coaching', 68.1% on risk management, and 68.8% on violence. Initial coach education and systematic long-term CPD in the areas of legal and ethical aspects of sport coaching are essential to support the professionalisation of sport coaching.

A professional body has the power to temporarily suspend and/or expel a member from the profession (Barker, 2010; Perkin, 1985; Warrior, 2002). This requires considerable authority, expertise, significant resources and a degree of impartiality and independence from the other functions of a professional body. Can sport coaching provide the equivalent of, for example, the General Medical Council in the United Kingdom, which has all of these characteristics? Alongside this provision, the kind of membership of organisations such as the Medical Defence Union or the British Medical Association is very costly, but is expected to provide significant legal expertise and representation.

A profession is thought to have a 'crucial social function' doing something for society, providing a recognised service to the public or clients, often personal and confidential (Barker,

2010; Sockett, 1985, cited Warrior, 2002, p.58). Being a member of a profession is often associated with an altruistic attitude, a concern for public welfare, personal responsibility, commitment and intrinsic values (Lindop, 1982; Patton, 1994; Smith & Westerbeek, 2004; Vollmer & Mills, 1962; Warrior, 2002). Hall (1969) cited Hylton, (2010), includes in a profession 'common professional culture of norms, symbols and values.' This has strong links with Virtue Ethics (Hardman et al, 2010). It is assumed that the public have a certain degree of trust in a profession, although this can change in different eras and contexts.

Professions are also characterized by a high degree of skills, drawing on intellectual and specialised knowledge and expertise (Barber, 1965; Kresjler, 2005; Larson, 1997; Vollmer & Mills, 1962). Of particular significance to sport coaching in this debate, the development of the expected level of knowledge and competence usually involves a university degree, often followed by a post-graduate qualifications and lengthy, expensive, and supervised training, both generic and in recognised specialities, as in medicine, surgery and law. The profession will normally set requirements for certain areas to be included in university undergraduate degrees and post-graduate courses. In order to remain licensed to practice, members of a profession are expected to maintain appropriate standards and keep up to date. This is normally through a range of recognised continuous professional development courses, with an allocation of points per seminar/course by the professional body (Williams, 1998).

Established professions include medicine, dentistry, architecture, law, pharmacy, engineering, surveying and accountancy. Some of the authors of this paper, in a contribution to the on-going discussions around sport coaching as a profession, recognised that this debate was also in train in other areas as well (Duffy et al., 2010). Occupations which have considered the possibility, desirability or challenges of becoming a profession include management, sport management, sport development, executive coaching and public relations (Duffy, 2009; Edwards, 2006; Hawkins, 2008; Hylton, 2010; Mills, 1994; Reed & Anthony, 1992; Rostrok, 2009; Smith & Westerbeek, 2004; Soucie, 1994). It would be useful in networking with relevant professions and bodies in sport and physical activity, to learn from those who are or have been on similar journeys to seeking partial or full recognition as a 'profession' and indeed to draw upon or commission research into such experiences.

Indicative status of sport coaching

The foregoing analysis, though not exhaustive, provides an important basis upon which to assess the current status of sport coaching against a number of criteria. This approach is taken in the full knowledge that significant limitations remain in the consideration of sport coaching as a profession, some of which have recently been summarised by Taylor and Garret (2010). They argue

against the use of defined lists of characteristics and advocate a focus on ‘an evolving ideology that helps mould and guide practice and interaction.’ The same authors also highlight ‘the inherent lack of clarity surrounding coaching, in terms of its own absence of definition, identity and conceptual boundaries’ They also posit that unity and integration within sport coaching is a difficult proposition, given the different starting points of the various sports, as well as the influence of ‘commercialism, market interaction and state regulation (Taylor & Garret, 2010, p.101).

Bearing these limitations in mind, the case in this paper is built on an emerging international consensus on the need for greater clarity on what sport coaching is; how it operates; what education and qualifications are required for different roles and what are the building blocks that can be identified to create a more common language and discourse across sports and countries. This process will provide the basis for a greater degree of consensus on a collective ‘professional identity’, a term adapted by the current authors and which was most recently deployed by Hylton and Hartley (2011) in looking at the professional status of sport development, where the diversity of volunteer and paid roles was recognised.

Such an approach also supports the identification of the tangible steps that might be taken to further advance a process of professionalization in sport coaching (Hylton & Hartley, 2011; Taylor & Garret, 2010). Notably, an analysis that addresses the core criteria associated with the professions provides the basis for sport and country specific responses, while laying the foundation for a more common platform between sports and countries. This approach will, it is argued, facilitate the development of a stronger and more precise sense of professional purpose, identity and standards at an international level through the activities of the ICCE. This process might also assist in moving beyond a situation where coaches are being ‘recognised’ for what they do to a more tangible sense of this work being truly ‘appreciated’ in a way that has meaning for the coach and the sport within they operate.

Table 1 presents the indicative status of sport coaching in an international context against the traditional criteria associated with the professions. The indicative status has been derived from the review of literature outlined in the previous section; the on-going work of ICCE, including the consultations undertaken as part of its strategy development; as well as the observations of the authors across a range of countries and contexts. The authors of the current paper have also drawn on the analysis of Taylor and Garrett (2010, pp.99-117) which provides a detailed assessment of how coaching measures up against the ‘quintessential characteristics or attributes’ of professional groups: knowledge base; organisation and a set of ethics. A dimension has also been added to these three headings, relating to social function and purpose. The comprehensive treatment of issues relating to professionalization and practice compiled by Lyle and Cushion (2010) and linked to the wider processes of the European Coaching Council and ICCE by one of the current authors (Duffy, 2010) has also helped to guide our analysis.

Table 1. Indicative status of sport coaching against the traditional criteria associated with professions

Criterion and rating	Indicative status within sport coaching
<p>Purpose: Defined purpose and ‘crucial’ social function, taking responsibility for the welfare, health and safety of the community it serves.</p> <p>Status: moderate–strong</p>	<p>Emerging consensus on the core purposes of sport coaching across two standard occupations and four domains, aligned to participant need and stage of development. Acting in the interests of others is core to the emerging definition, with a social function across sport participation; child development; talent development and high performance. ‘Crucial’ social function not established and connections with the wider field require development.</p>
<p>Knowledge base: Defined body of knowledge and skill, derived from education, training and research.</p> <p>Status: moderate</p>	<p>Sport specific and practitioner ‘on the job’ knowledge is strongly emphasised, with increasing links to education and research. Emerging consensus on coaching expertise, with significant research still required. Boundaries with sport science, physical education, performance management and other related areas still in development.</p>
<p>Knowledge base: Education, certification, qualifications at degree level and post graduate level</p> <p>Status: weak</p>	<p>Varied position on education, certification and qualifications across sports and countries. Degree level qualifications in coaching are not the norm, although many coaches hold degrees in related or other fields. Cross-referencing sport coaching education with undergraduate level starting to emerge in some countries, but very little on post-graduate CPD and specialist career progression as in medicine/surgery or endorsement system by a professional body</p>
<p>Organisation: Exclusive group with privileges, a ‘right to practice’, social and legislative recognition, paid employment status.</p> <p>Status: weak</p>	<p>Varied position on exclusivity and recognition across the different coaching status groups. High inclusivity and low social recognition among volunteers. High exclusivity among paid professionals in high performance sport. Low legislative recognition, with some exceptions. Mixed status with many variations on paid, part-time and volunteer roles, often with fragmented career/development pathways</p>
<p>Organisation: License to practice with on-going continuous professional development.</p> <p>Status: weak</p>	<p>Low level of licensing, with variations between sports and countries and some notable exceptions. No provision or resourcing of an independent body to discipline, suspend, expel/take away licence to practice.</p>
<p>Organisation: Interacting network of people and institutions.</p> <p>Status: weak–moderate</p>	<p>Evident at an operational, sport specific level. Limited between sports unless a coordination mechanism exists (such as a lead national organisation). Weak at the level of coaches’ associations. Limited in interaction with the wider profession of sport and physical activity. International sport coaching network developing through ICCE, ECC and international federations.</p>
<p>Ethics: Culture of norms, symbols and values that promote trust.</p> <p>Status: moderate</p>	<p>Sport and country specific differences remain high, with varying degrees of trust and confidence.</p>
<p>Ethics: Autonomous and ethical decision making by practitioners.</p> <p>Status: moderate</p>	<p>Front-line coaching involves a high degree of decision-making, with a growing recognition in the coaching literature of the importance of decision-making (and for an analysis see Lyle and Cushion, 2010). Ethical framework for decision making within coaching, as well as enhanced focus on such decision making in the development of coaches, is required</p>
<p>Ethics: Self regulation</p> <p>Status: weak</p>	<p>Viable coaches’ associations slow to emerge. Sport specific regulation is varied and includes ‘the voice of the coach’ to varying degrees. Right to sanction not well developed.</p>

In presenting the indicative status, the authors are proposing a framework that may assist in guiding the future focus of ICCE on the issue of professionalization, while highlighting the need for application and further research on a sport, country, continental and global basis. This analysis is also informed by a perspective that increasingly recognises the unique characteristics of long term coach development and which prompted one of the authors to recently present to the effect that formal coach education, CPD and experiential learning are variously contributors to a lifelong process of balancing the ‘science of coaching’ with an evolving ‘art of coaching’, with the suggestion that the knowledge criterion for coaching may have a different profile, then, than other professions in any event (Dick, 2011).

Table 1 highlights a varied and relatively weak profile of sport coaching against the traditional criteria associated with the professions. The core purpose and social function of sport coaching is deemed to have a moderate profile on the basis of the established position of coaches within many contexts, as well as the emerging conceptual framework identified earlier in this paper. However, despite the widespread engagement of coaches across the sporting landscape, it would be difficult to make the assertion that coaching is seen as a crucial function across the globe, on a par with areas such as teaching and medicine, either by policy makers or the public at large. In the majority of countries, career pathways for coaches remain limited, notwithstanding important exceptions in some sports and countries.

The organisation of sport coaching is deemed to be weak by comparison with the established professions, with no widespread application of a ‘right to practice,’ sparse legislative arrangements and fragmented career structures. This scenario is further reflected in sporadic and inconsistent approaches to the licensing and registration of coaches, supported by structured processes for continuous professional development. There are few instances where suitably resourced and independent bodies have the power to discipline or remove coaches from their role. This lack of organisation at a professional level is somewhat counter-balanced by a wide-reaching network of national and international federations, supported by a range of national and international organisations. It is these networks that have been at the forefront of establishing a more coherent approach to coaching, with a clear need for further development and consolidation within and between sports and nations.

Despite this organisational context, the operation of sport coaching is driven by a set of norms, standards and values that are embedded in day-to-day practice. While there are undoubted instances of poor practice, most sports have established clear rules and regulations on the rudimentary aspects of coaching behaviour as part of the codification of their sports. As part of the dynamic nature of the coaching environment, coaches typically make decisions on an on-going basis, albeit with a need to further enhance the evidence and ethical base for such decisions. However, despite the self responsibility at the level of the sport and the coach, the

absence of a self-regulatory process that deals with inappropriate actions on the part of coaches remains a very serious limitation. Notwithstanding the many positive experiences provided by coaches, the need to address cases where coaches abuse trust and fail to respect the integrity of the participants whom they coach remains a top priority if the professional area is to command a position of respect and trust. In order to more systematically challenge breaches of ethics, there is a need to further deepen our commitment to research informed practice. In this respect, research on power, sub-culture and risk by, among others Brackenridge (2001) provides a useful point of reference and there is clearly a need for wider international discussion and research in these areas as part of the balanced assessment of the current position within sport coaching. In this vein, the draft coaching charter developed by Dick (2010) provides an important potential mechanism to operationalise the rights and responsibilities of coaches wishing to be deemed professional in and through their behaviour and practice.

While the overall profile against the traditional professions is deemed to be weak, much of this profile is precipitated by the sheer scale and diversity of coaching in a wide range of sports across the globe. This level of penetration and inclusivity is a great strength, notwithstanding the reality that many groups remain under-represented in both sport participation and coaching. The challenge, however, is to face up to a realistic assessment of what sport coaching is, what it is not and what it wishes to be in the future. Such an assessment will provide the basis for creating a professional identity which is faithful to the essence of sport coaching and will help to strengthen its social function.

Challenges for sport coaching

From the consideration of the characteristics of the traditional professions in the previous section, it is apparent that there are a number of significant impediments to the positioning of sport coaching alongside such models. Is the professional model that is used in these other professions right for coaching? Does it best serve the coaches, the athletes and the sport community? Coaching has evolved in very different ways from the regulated professions. In many countries, there can be very early entry into coaching activities, with high school-aged youth assuming coaching roles in the introduction of young children into sport, and late entry by athletes who may continue to compete until their late 30s and 40s and then decide to coach, and by parents who assume volunteer coaching roles for their children's' teams.

A first, and fundamental, barrier to a direct comparison with other professions relates to the right to practice, as outlined by Findlay and Corbett (2002, p.25):

As a profession, coaching has not established an exclusive “right to practice” and thus exists in a world far removed from professions such as accounting, medicine, engineering, law and nursing. In these professions, an individual must be a member of the professional body in order to practice the occupation.

As has been illustrated in the previous section, the established professions fiercely protect and differentiate themselves from non-professionals, and in fact create a monopoly where only members of the profession can practice. This monopoly – the exclusive right to practice - allows the profession to set and enforce standards of practice, while preventing anyone else from undertaking the functions of that profession. But is this a feasible or desirable approach in sport coaching, where many sport programmes rely on volunteer coaches to provide access to sport, especially for children?

Volunteer coaches provide a workforce that allows communities and clubs to offer sport programmes at a low cost, and those coaches are often highly committed, undertake coach training, and may progress to working with advanced athletes. Their core education, however, may be in entirely different fields than sport, and they often do not have the university degree in coaching required for a profession. Also, former professional athletes have often sacrificed the opportunity to study at university in order to develop their expertise and achieve excellence in sport and are lacking in these professional qualifications, but they are often considered preferred candidates for paid coaching jobs. The balance between formal qualifications and practical experience in the field would seem to be significantly different in coaching than the other professions, that have neither volunteers nor the opportunity for the prime candidates for future jobs to spend ten plus years acquiring experience in the unique environment of elite sport instead of in academic study.

In the regulated professions, practitioners usually complete a university degree as required by the professional body and then proceed with entry-level employment and completion of the other requirements of that profession (work experience/articling/medical residency etc, examinations, code of ethics and membership in the professional body). There is a need for additional research on how this compares to coaching, and how prevalent the exceptions are. There are no doubt, significant differences among countries and sports. The former eastern European socialist countries had followed a model very similar to the other professions, with university degrees leading to entry level coaching jobs, but in many cases are now turning to volunteer coaching as a larger proportion of the total coaching workforce. For example, in Bulgaria, it is estimated that 32 per cent of the coaches are full-time, 45 per cent part-time and 23 per cent volunteer (Dasheva, 2011), while France has made provision for compulsory qualifications in the case of paid coaches (Government of France, 2000).

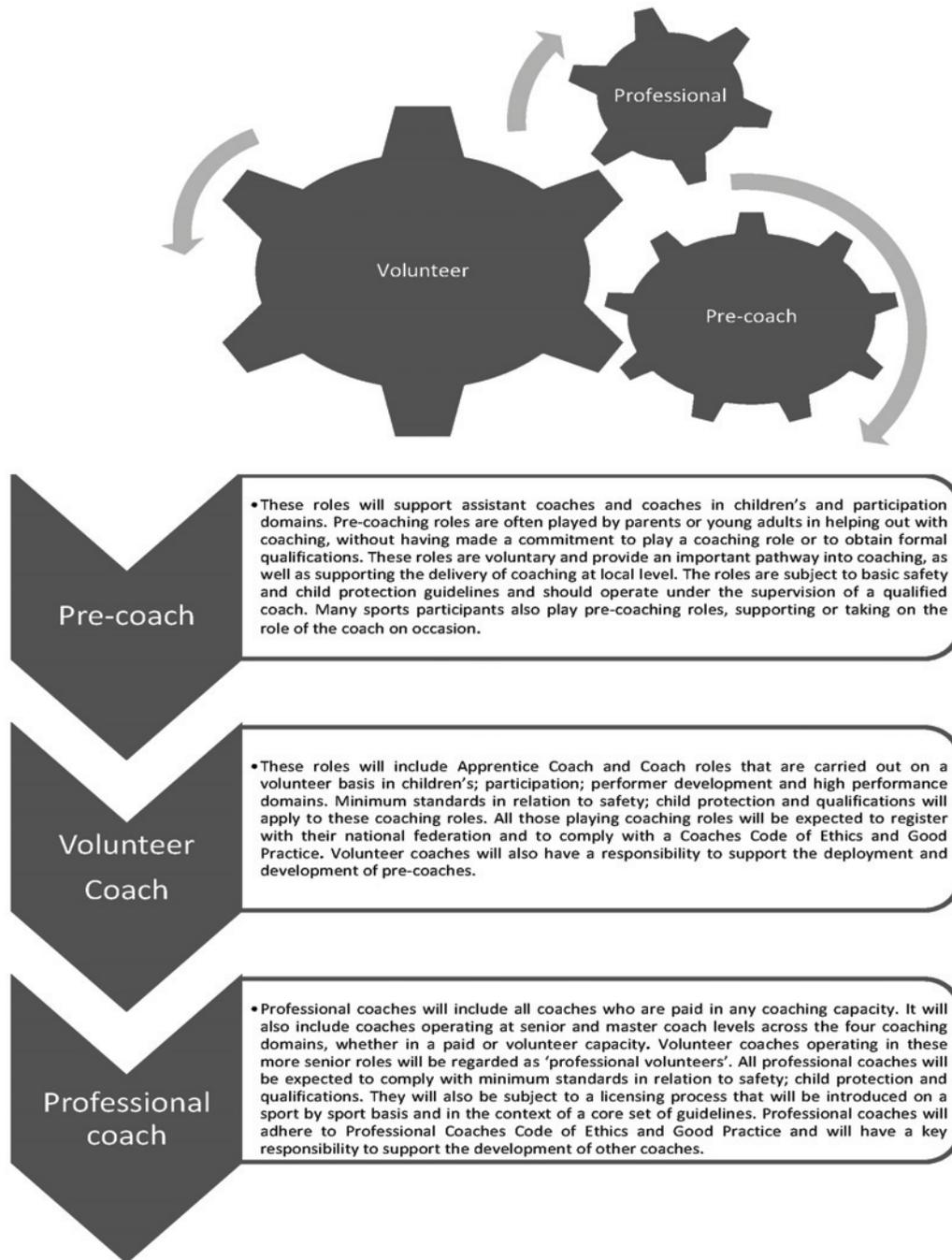


Figure 2. A blended model of professional identity in sport coaching (adapted from SASCOC, 2011)

In looking at the overall coaching terrain – it is apparent that there are wide variations across the standard occupations, coaching domains; roles (pre-coaching; assistant coach; coach; senior coach; master coach); status (full-time, part-time and volunteer), qualifications (degree in

coaching; certification in coaching) and experience levels of the coaches. In this context, rather than trying to separate and differentiate the professional coach from the non-professional to protect the 'exclusive right to practice', a *blended model of professional identity* is suggested. Such a model, currently under discussion in South Africa recognises the existence of discrete yet inter-related coaching status categories; professional, volunteer and pre-coaching (South African Sport Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC), 2011). This approach suggests that the professional coach ought to play a leadership function in terms of role modelling and in support of coaches in the earlier stages of their development. The discrete nature of status categories provides a basis upon which the roles, responsibilities, practice profiles, qualification and registration/licensing requirements can be more clearly articulated. Crucially, this approach moves away from 'one size fits all' to a recognition of the different motives and deployment circumstances of coaches. An additional advantage is that sport and country specificity may be accommodated, given the propensity in some cases to rely entirely on paid coaches, whilst in others the balance is strongly towards volunteer input. Figure 2 illustrates the suggested model.

The diagram, by using the analogy of a set of gears, depicts the interdependency among the different coaching status categories. Rather than differentiating and separating themselves from the other groups, the professional coaches take the responsibility to lead the system, to articulate with the volunteer coaches and through them the pre-coaching volunteers. Instead of working to the day when only professionals can practice coaching, this model positions the professional coach as the public advocate for sport and coaching, with the responsibility to encourage people to take on pre-coaching and volunteer coaching roles; to act as a coach developer and to improve the standards of those roles as part of a fully functioning system and to widen, rather than restrict, involvement in sport participation and coaching. Interestingly, the 'blended' concept might also assist in exploring how coaches often call on the qualifications and expertise gained from related areas to underpin their coaching philosophy, skills and style.

This approach would lead us more towards an approach of professionalism, which all coaches regardless of their status can aspire to, rather than a regulated profession. Suitable qualifications, adherence to codes of ethics, disciplinary procedures and continuous professional development can all be defined and set as requirements suitable for the status categories of coach, depending on the role and coaching domain within which they operate. Crucially, among professional coaches, the right to practice would be contingent upon the attainment of a defined and rigorous level of expertise and qualification. Equally, the scourge of unrealistic expectations and/or lack of clarity concerning the requirements to undertake volunteer and pre-coaching roles can be more conclusively addressed.

A further issue relates to the term profession. In the previous section, the criteria and characteristics associated with established professions were identified. In reviewing these

developments, it is not clear at all that sport coaching per se qualifies as a profession in and of itself. For example, primary teachers or doctors are regarded as professionals within wider professional field of teaching and medicine respectively. The teaching profession is broadly concerned with promoting the education of the school-going population, while the medical profession is to intervene to support the health of the nation in a range of different clinical contexts.

By way of comparison, sport coaching is part of a wider sphere which aims to engage the population in sport and physical activity through a variety of modes in both recreational and competitive contexts. Duffy and Dugdale (1994) argued that the broader field is 'physical activity,' while more recently the European Union has used the term sport to cover both formal sport and health enhancing physical activity (European Union, 2007). In this context, it is somewhat ambitious to suggest that sport coaching in itself can aspire to be a stand-alone profession. Clearly, the intersections between the role of sport coaches and others operating within the field and in related fields is substantial and should be further explored (for example, performance managers and directors; team managers; sport administrators; physical education teachers; sport scientists; mentors; fitness coaches and instructors; sport leaders and 'animateurs'). Dick (2011) has suggested that over the course of time, coaching pathways tend to cluster around five main trajectories: practitioner roles; practitioner specialist roles (such as children, talent, disability); educator roles; leadership roles (such as head coach) and synthesiser roles (such as performance management), which provides a useful basis upon which to consider professional development and career opportunities.

The dilemmas identified within this section, while challenging, open the possibility of a new, clearer and more confident identity for sport coaching as a blended professional area, operating within a broader community of sport and physical activity professionals. The final section of the paper suggests some actions that might be taken in an international context to further develop this opportunity.

Future directions for sport coaching as a blended professional area

Building on the analysis outlined in this paper, a series of actions are suggested to guide the future direction of sport coaching as part of a process of professionalisation. The criteria associated with the traditional professions are used as a point of reference in Table 2 to position these actions, with appropriate variations suggested based on the unique nature of sport coaching and the preferred option of creating a strong professional identity within a blended model.

The presentation of these indicative actions at an international level provides the basis for further

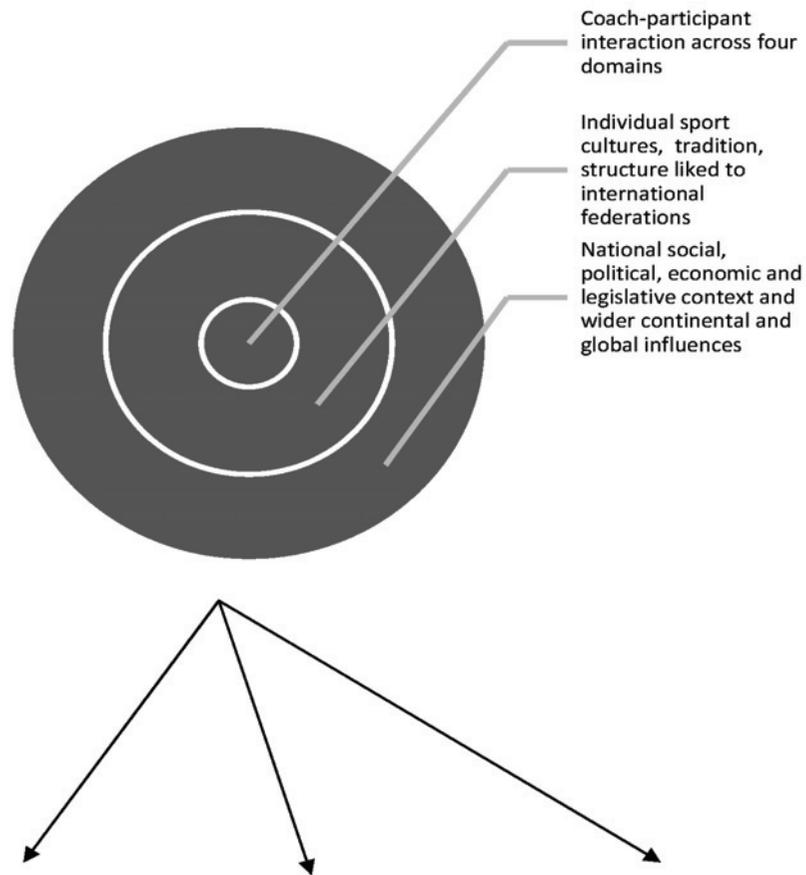
dialogue and development, as well as a reference point for sport and country specific application. Within ICCE, it is intended that the indicative actions will inform the on-going work of the organisation, as well as providing a clear direction on possible areas for further research and development. As with Table 1, content has been generated by the authors through their work across a range of countries and contexts; from the review of literature and from the ICCE strategy and related discussions.

Table 2. Future directions for sport coaching as a blended professional area

Criterion	Indicative actions at international level
<p>Purpose: Defined purpose and ‘crucial’ social function, taking responsibility for the welfare, health and safety of the community it serves</p>	<p>Create an agreed International Sport Coaching Framework, building on the Rio Maior convention and with the engagement of leading organisations and international federations around globe; position this work within the wider field.</p> <p>The International Sport Coaching Framework should define sport coaching, standard occupations, domains, roles and status categories.</p> <p>A strong publications and communication strategy should be put in places, including the development of an International Sport Coaching Framework (a detailed technical document) and International Sport Coaching Handbook (a document with core messages for federations, coaches and the public) for reference and adaptation by each sport and country.</p>
<p>Knowledge: Defined body of knowledge and skill, derived from education, training and research</p>	<p>Further develop research on coaching expertise and development as they relate to different sports, domains, roles and status categories. Refine education and training programmes to reflect a research-informed and applied body of knowledge.</p>
<p>Knowledge: Education, certification, qualifications at degree level, experience and code of conduct</p>	<p>Define the education, certification and qualifications that are appropriate for the roles; domains and status categories within sport coaching.</p> <p>Collect data on post-graduate qualifications, CPD and specialisms/career progression in sport coaching.</p> <p>Identify countries which have developed a system of endorsement by professional bodies of sport coaching under-graduate courses (where appropriate identify examples from other related areas).</p> <p>Develop and adopt a Code of Ethics for Sport Coaching.</p>
<p>Organisation: Exclusive group with privileges, a ‘right to practice’, social and legislative recognition</p>	<p>Define the alternative to ‘right to practice’, for example the ‘right to earn pay as a coach.’</p> <p>Promote the development of appropriate regulation at federation, national, international level.</p> <p>Promote appropriate legislative arrangements for the regulation of sport coaching as a blended professional area.</p> <p>Explore expertise and resources needed to provide an independent disciplinary body (such as the General Medical Council in the UK), which deals with disciplinary matters, suspensions/expulsion etc.</p>

Organisation: License to practice with on-going continuous professional development	Define thresholds for registration and licensing. Provide guidance on continuous professional development. Define responsibility of professional and volunteer coaches in supporting the education and professional development of other coaches.
Organisation: Network of people and institutions	Build on ICCE network and seek to formalise engagement of key stakeholders as part of a more collaborative approach. Networking with the broader professional area and with other closely-related professions such as physical education teaching, health-related exercise professionals, and government/policy makers, particularly in the areas of definition of the field and its sub-categories, CPD and advocacy around social/public function/value.
Ethics: Culture of norms, symbols and values that promote trust	Develop an International Sport Coaches' Charter, building on the consultative draft developed by Dick (2010) and amenable to country and sport specific adaptation. Draw upon research and practice in relevant institutions to inform initial training and CPD in legal and ethical aspects, to include law, sociology and sport ethics. Recognise the role of power, sub-cultures and risk at individual and organisational levels (as in Brackenridge 2001) as they relate to the implementation codes of practice and challenging inappropriate behaviour. Establish core and CPD themes such as safeguarding children and risk management on a more consistent basis. Integrate anti-doping education into core and CPD programmes for coaches, working closely with the World Anti Doping Agency
Ethics: Autonomous and ethical decision making by practitioners	Such decision making should be promoted through each of the provisions outlined in this paper, particularly through research, education, professional development and the implementation of the Code of Ethics for Sport Coaching.
Ethics: Self regulation	Support the development of coaches' associations and/or the full integration of the 'voice of the coach' into decision making relating to coaching at all levels. This may include the creation of alliances or confederations of coaches associations Establish an authoritative mechanism where sport coaches can advise and guide the development of coaching on a global basis (a coaching senate or coaching advisory mechanism).

These actions represent a significant challenge for sport coaching at an international level. More importantly, however, the primary challenge relates to the ways in which individual sports and nations will further progress their coaching systems and the professionalization of coaching in line with the respective needs of participants and coaches in different contexts. The advantage of international dialogue and points of reference is that different sports and countries can proceed



Identity categories		
<u>Profession</u>	<u>Blended professional area</u>	<u>Voluntary service</u>
High proportion of paid coaches. High adherence on purpose, knowledge, organisation and ethics, comparable to established professions.	Majority of unpaid coaches, with substantial number of paid roles. Commitment to professionalization and the targeted further development of purpose, knowledge, organisation and ethics.	High proportion of unpaid coaches, with few if any paid roles. Commitment to service, standards and the value of volunteering for its own sake. No concerted agenda on professionalization.
International reference points		

Figure 3. 'Professional identities' as a function of sport and national influences and supported by international reference points (adapted from Bronfenbrenner , 1979; Carlson, 1993 and North, 2009)

with greater confidence in the knowledge that there is an increasingly robust and shared international framework. Within each of these sports and countries, it is possible to employ the dimensions identified in this paper to assess the current position in the process of professionalization.

In this regard, adapting the ecological approaches taken by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Carlson, (1993), as well as the coaching workforce scenarios identified by North (2009), the position or 'professional identity' of each sport or country might be charted on a continuum that includes Profession, Blended Professional Area and Voluntary Service as outlined in Figure 3 and recognising the unique characteristics, traditions and structures that prevail in each case. A key advantage of this approach is that it recognises the many individual contexts that operate in sport coaching – from the coaching domains, roles and status categories at the front-line, through sport and country specific differences. It is this heterogeneity that has bedevilled efforts to move the debate on sport coaching as a profession forward. The case, therefore, is that at the international level (and in many sports and many countries), the dominant identity for the professional area should be 'blended,' while recognising the existence of 'profession' and 'voluntary service' identities.

The classification outlined in Figure 3 provides the basis for each sport and each country to consider the professional identity category that is most appropriate for their circumstances. At the same time, a clearer and more widely accepted set of reference points will assist in the convergence, sense of common purpose and action advocated in this paper.

The direction suggested above will be strengthened by a realisation that many questions remain, requiring further research and analysis internationally, as well as sport and country specific application. These questions include:

- a. What is the culture and tradition of the sport/country?
- b. What are the deployment profiles and identity categories within the sport/country?
- c. What is the role of sport coaches associations and how does this role relate to national/international federations?
- d. What is the difference between qualifications/national occupational standards and a licence to practice?
- e. Do we and can we have the independence, resources and expertise to provide a body which has the powers to discipline, suspend or expel a member of the profession? Could/should national and/or international faculties or institutes of coaching carry out this function?
- f. Would such a body recognise or interact with the different identity categories outlined in this paper?
- g. Are we in a position to provide an informed response to the question from aspirant

coaches: 'What is my career progression, salary (if any), training CPD and specialisms in sport coaching'?

h. Is there a threshold number among pre-coaches; volunteer coaches and professional coaches which is enough to sustain all three groups in the long-term in a given sport, nationally and internationally? If so what is it?

i. Would and should a professional sport coaching body endorse and influence, through review and approval, under-graduate and post-graduate courses in sport coaching?

j. What can we learn from research into established professions and from those who have engaged in professionalizing or licensing sport coaches?

k. Taking account of national and international economic conditions, how can we pool our resources and partnerships across federations, universities, lead national organisations and other agencies to support coach development across the globe and to enhance CPD in less developed topics such as legal and ethical aspects of sport coaching?

While this list is not exhaustive, it highlights that the current paper is part of a journey and not an end point, prompting the need for clear further research and action. ICCE and its partners should work actively with researchers and others to address the actions outlined in Table 2 and the above questions as deemed appropriate in national, international and sport specific contexts.

Conclusion

This paper has suggested the need for a shift in focus at an international level to consider sport coaching as a blended professional area, operating within the broader field of sport and physical activity. Such a stance should recognise that sport and country specific differences exist as they relate to the professional identity of sport coaching. A key implication is that the ICCE would re-consider the wording of its mission to reflect this shift in emphasis. The fixed objective of the 'development of coaching as a profession' would be, therefore, be amended to a more focused objective of 'blended professional area' which recognises the respective roles of professional coaches, volunteers and pre-coaches, supported by a process of professionalization.

The adoption of a position of leadership by ICCE and its partners would provide a clear template for adaptation according to the different needs of each sport and country. This direction of travel should be supported by the intensification of a research agenda that is rooted in the emerging professional identity and which has the objective of making a difference to coaches and the participants they coach; the development of such coaches; their career pathways and the

coaching systems within which they operate. The work of ICCE and its partners should provide robust reference points which support and complement the unique operation of sport coaching in different sports and countries. Over time, further common ground will support the coherent evolution of sport coaching to play an even more meaningful role in guiding the improvement of hundreds of millions of children, players, athletes and participants across the globe.

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