

Sporting groups face struggle for coaches, study finds

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Australian sport faces a looming shortfall in experienced coaches as the workforce ages and less people are entering the system, a Deakin University study has found.

In a first for Australian sport, researchers with Deakin's Centre for Exercise and [Sports Science](#) have examined the true nature of the Australian [coaching](#) workforce. They have found that more than 40 per cent of coaches are aged over 50 years and that more than half have less than 10 years experience.

"That we are seeing a drop in the number of next generation coaches is concerning for the future of Australian sports," said Deakin sports coaching expert Dr Andrew Dawson.

"As the population is growing so too is the growth in [sports participation](#) across the board. However, the number of new coaches coming into the system is not matching that growth. Couple this with an ageing workforce, and many coaches not staying beyond 10 years, and we could see sports organisations struggle to meet the demand for coaching services especially at the grass roots level where good quality coaching is seen by community sport organisations as integral to their viability and success," he said.

"If we are to ensure the future of sport in Australia, we need address the issues that are highlighted in our study and better support and nurture the enthusiasm, dedication and experience of at all levels of the performance

spectrum.

"In particular, we need to find better ways to develop the volunteers (the mum and dad coaches) who are the backbone of sports in this country. The recent focus on coach development has been on the performance of our elite and professional coaches but this research reveals there is a much bigger problem emerging in the long-term development of Australia's coaching workforce."

The *Profiling the Australian Coaching Workforce* study involved interviews with 40 coaches and a survey of 1374 coaches from the grassroots of community and schools sport through to the [professional level](#). The results provide an insight into the work coaches do, what motivates them, the rewards and costs of being a coach and what they believe are their developmental needs that will enhance their role and the performance of the athletes they train.

"As many as 659,000 coaches are working at all levels within the Australian sport system and each week they influence the lives of more than seven million Australians," Dr Dawson said.

"We found that the coaching workforce is made up of a diverse and dynamic group of dedicated individuals who give up their personal time and money to develop themselves and the athletes they coach.

"Overall, coaches enjoy their work. They began coaching because they wanted to give something back to their sport and continue to coach because of the intrinsic rewards such as seeing their athletes develop and succeed.

"However, coaches did cite the stress of coaching can take a toll on their health and personal finances."

The results of the study highlighted a number of significant barriers to becoming a coach and few incentives to continue coaching.

"Key barriers to continuing coaching included the administrative demands and conflicts with key stakeholders such as administrators and parents," Dr Dawson said.

"Many of the issues the coaches highlighted could be addressed through national, state and community sport organisations providing better support for coaches to help them cover the financial costs of travel and further education and development, including opportunities to develop non-traditional coaching skills in areas such as leadership, counselling, conflict resolution and business development."

Dr Dawson said that what is missing is a nationally coordinated approach to coach development that is across the whole sport system.

"Two decades ago, Australia's coach education system was considered world class, but since the mid-1990s national sport policy changes led to coach development becoming decentralised and managed by each sport resulting in a gradual fragmentation of coach development in key areas such as mentoring and socio-cultural, ethical and health issues that are common among coaches across all sports," he said.

"The world leaders in long-term coach development are Canada and the UK who provide support for national, state and community sport organisations that is evidence-based and considered world's best practice. If we are serious about performing better in sport at all levels of participation, it is time we made coach development a national priority."

Download a copy of the full report [here](#).

Provided by Deakin University

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