

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Leeds Beckett University		
Unit of Assessment: 24 – Sport and Exercise Science, Leisure and Tourism		
Title of case study: Improving gender equity within sport coaching workforces		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008 - Present		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Prof Leanne Norman	Professor	2008 - present
Dr Faye Didymus	Senior Lecturer	2013 - present
Dr Alexandra Rankin	Research Officer	2015 - 2018
Dr Mariana Kaiseler	Senior Lecturer	2014 - present
Dr Nicola Clarke	Senior Lecturer	2015 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Despite the increase in participation of women in sport, women remain acutely underrepresented as sport coaches at all levels of the profession. Research undertaken at Leeds Beckett University's Carnegie School of Sport has been used to reform sport organisational thinking and strategic approaches towards improving gender equity within the UK sport coaching workforce and European policy. The research has produced the evidence for European organisations to promote gender equity as a strategic priority, underpin national interventions towards creating a more equitable coaching workforce, and specifically, has shaped the strategic approaches of The English Football Association (The FA) in their support of women coaches, leading directly to a change in organisational thinking towards supporting underrepresented coaches and subsequently, a greater number of qualified women.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>In 2014, the EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Youth and Sport proposed new strategic actions for 2014-2020 for Europe to challenge gender equality in sport. One of the four identified key objectives was to improve gender equality in sport coaching. The need for action too at a national level was highlighted and subsequently, in 2015 and 2016, Sport England (on behalf of the UK government) published both the Coaching Plan for England as well as the Sporting Future strategies. Within these policies, greater gender equity and diversity within the UK coaching professions was identified as a priority and action point for all government-funded national governing bodies. Despite this, a lack of long-term and deeper-diving interventions hinder efforts to bring about sustainable change in both representation and equitable experiences amongst coaches. Research undertaken at Leeds Beckett University (LBU) has played a major role in addressing these problems. Specifically, the research has contributed in the following ways:</p>		
Demonstrating the contribution of structural factors influencing women's experiences as sport coaches and the value of diversity within a UK sport coaching context		
<p>Almost 90% of existing research in this subject area originates from North America and has used quantitative or liberal sociological theories. For the first time, Norman [1] has identified a number of key UK organisational processes and cultural practices that have contributed to a lack of gender equity within the coaching system, which have in turn impacted women's professional experiences. Utilising qualitative research underpinned by critical sociological thinking for the first time in this subject area, the research represents a critical shift from focusing on individuals to understand the part that organisational structures play in creating (in)equitable coaching cultures [2]. These are the first studies of their kind internationally in this area.</p>		
Adopting novel multidisciplinary approaches to reconceptualising the 'problem' and impact of poor gender equity in sport coaching		
<p>A second contribution of the research has been to develop novel multidisciplinary approaches to address the lack of gender equity within the UK coaching system. Using these approaches,</p>		

Norman and colleagues have been able to demonstrate the salient environmental factors that are most likely to lead to inequity amongst sport coaches. This research has drawn on multi-methods using psychological, sociological, and management theories [3]. For example, the research, utilising both psychological quantitative as well as sociological qualitative methodological approaches has demonstrated that isolation is the key stressor for women coaches [4]. Recruitment of women is also often solely a focus for many sports organisations. However, LBU research, using critical sociological and management theories, has evidenced that retention and progression of women coaches are equally important yet problematic.

Evaluation and improvement of national governing body interventions to improve gender equity in sport coaching

LBU research has evaluated UK sport organisational interventions and informed the structure, content, and delivery of initiatives to improve gender equity within coaching workforces. Examples include: a) British Cycling's Ignite Your Coaching (Sport England funded; LBU led evaluation) whereby a mentoring and networking scheme has been established across the UK to support the retention and progression of women cycling coaches [5]; b) the English Football Association's Elite Mentoring and National Specialist coaching programmes (English FA funded, LBU led evaluation), which establishes paid programmes of employment for (Black and Minoritised Ethnic) women coaches to gain experience working in elite football [2]; c) UK Coaching's Changing the Culture series and practitioner programme (UK Coaching funded; LBU led workshops), which represents the first UK programme of its kind. The culture change series involved: workshops in partnership with 12 sporting national governing bodies to address organisational change to support greater equity in their coaching workforces; between-module mentoring and support; a 'buddy system' to connect governing bodies and share practices; and follow up support three months post-programme. The content of the workshops drew on LBU's empirical sociological and psychological research [6], and the evaluation was led by Kaiseler and colleagues using multi-stakeholder interviews, surveys, and performance profiles.

3. References to the research

Selected outputs represent original research conducted by LBU academics in Carnegie School of Sport. They are published in esteemed international journals and have been independently peer-reviewed by experts. Output 2 was produced from funding from The English Football Association (£15,000).

- [1] Norman, L. (2008). The UK coaching system is failing women coaches. *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching*, 3(4), 447-464. DOI: 10.1260/174795408787186431
- [2] Norman, L., Rankin-Wright, A.J., & Allison, W. (2018). "It's a Concrete Ceiling; It's Not Even Glass": Understanding Tenets of Organizational Culture That Supports the Progression of Women as Coaches and Coach Developers. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 42 (5), 393 – 414. DOI: 10.1177/0193723518790086
- [3] Norman, L., & Rankin-Wright, A.J. (2016). Surviving rather than thriving': Understanding the experiences of women coaches using a theory of gendered social well-being. *International Review for Sociology of Sport*, 53(4):424-450. DOI: 10.1177/1012690216660283
- [4] Didymus, F., Norman, L., Hurst, M., & Clarke, N. (2020). Job stressors, strain, and psychological wellbeing among women coaches. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 0(0), 1-9 DOI:10.1177/1747954120974345
- [5] Norman, L. (2010). Bearing the burden of doubt: Women coaches' experiences of gender relations. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 81(4), 506-517. DOI: 10.1080/02701367.2010.10599712
- [6] Norman, L. (2012). A crisis of confidence: Women coaches' responses to their engagement in resistance. *Sport, Education & Society*, 19 (5), 532-551. DOI:10.1080/13573322.2012.689975

4. Details of the impact

LBU research has been instrumental in improving gender equity in sport coaching by:

1. Shaping The English Football Association's national strategy for women in football coaching leading to a restructuring in The FA national coach development department, a change in coach programme delivery, and an increase in numbers of qualified women in employed coaching positions

Since 2016, LBU's research has significantly shaped the women in coaching pillar of the five-year English Football Association Gameplan for Growth (2017-2020). Within the FA's national strategy, the numbers of and diversity amongst women football coaches has become a priority. Only 8% of active coaches working in football are women. LBU research (funded by The FA for £75K) has led to a total restructure of the national coach development department for both men and women's football across England. Based on LBU's research, The FA have created a new team of 16 coach developers whose sole remit it is to recruit and develop female coaches and / or Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic coaches (men and women). The FA's Head of Women's Coach Development, Audrey Cooper, states that:

"[LBU] research has had a huge impact. We have completely reshaped our coach development team across grassroots football and we have completely restructured our department to have a real razor-sharp focus on getting more women into coaching, and more Black and Asian coaches into football (male and female), and that's across the women's game and across the men's game in England. Across the whole of the game, the percentage of females is 8% that are working in football from a coaching perspective. We now have 16 people that are dedicated to addressing that underrepresentation... The research with Norman and her team really talked to the need for us to address that underrepresentation" [A].

Through the Gameplan for Growth and subsequent change in the type and content of coaching support programmes, The FA have reported an increase in both the numbers as well as the progression of women coaches. Since the beginning of 2017, over 5000 more females are now qualified as football coaches. The FA have also increased the number, and subsequent uptake, of individual coach bursaries by women coaches. Since this change, 204 female coaches have received financial assistance to complete their UEFA A, B and Pro qualifications. This has led to a doubling in numbers of women qualified at A Licence (the second highest coaching award). This qualification is significant because only UEFA A Licensed (or above) coaches are permitted to be employed as head coaches in professional clubs. Audrey Cooper states that this change in support was a result of LBU's research:

"As another contribution of the research, we have changed the programmes we offer and the work I do because of that shift in thinking. We have proactively sought those UEFA B Licence qualified coaches that we think have got huge potential to support them and get them ready to be ready to take and to have an A Licence. This links to the second piece of research led by Norman et al. Football clubs said there was a shortage of women with an A Licence qualification and yet, it is a requirement for clubs to have head coaches that are A Licence qualified. So, we've addressed that and doubled the number of females who have an A Licence in order for clubs to meet the regulation. We're also surrounding our female coaches who have qualifications, or who do not have qualifications, with dedicated support to be the best they can be in women's football" [A].

In relation to the *diversity* of women coaches, LBU's evaluation of the FA's Elite Mentoring Programme (including Black and Minoritised Ethnic women coaches) and National Specialist Coach Programme has led to significant changes in programme approaches and delivery by the Coach Diversity and Inclusion Manager, Abdul Fazal [B]. Our research has led directly to the development of a training curriculum that scaffolded coaches to be social agents of change and critical thinkers. The FA have moved away from an approach of just increasing the numbers of coaches to a focus on *inclusion*, on creating the right environments to enable coaches to feel a sense of belonging, and a focus on positive working environments. This shift in thinking has meant a greater emphasis on stakeholder relationships and emphasis on the provision of next-step support for coaches' careers. The research demonstrated the gap

between qualification and coaching experience for minority coaches. Therefore, The FA have now established a Coach Development Group for the mentees and a Club Placement Programme with 13 professional football clubs that provide work-based placements for underrepresented coaches. Following their participation in the reimagined elite mentee programme, some of the mentee coaches have since been appointed to senior decision-making roles in football. Abdul Fazal, the Coaching Diversity manager at The FA, cites this significant shift in strategic approach as a result of the LBU research:

“I’ve developed my thinking, and we’re developing coaches into being agents for change, and some of them being catalysts for change. I can name five of the mentee coaches that have gone on from the programme to be in influential footballing positions now. What the research told me, was that these coaches can be transformational if we give them those skills and [develop] an environment for them in which they could truly be their authentic self. I use the research as a reference. The research guided me into the programmes that I think have been really successful now, like the Club Placement Programme. So, some of the information that the research provided was, “what’s the next career step for (minoritised) coaches?”. So, I built bridging programmes; I thought that was really the most powerful and most impactful thing that we did as a result of the research. What we really needed was a support programme to get them ready for the A licence, to develop a ready list of coaches. So, I developed a Coach Development Group, and then what I was realising was that what the coaches want is the experience and the exposure, so I developed the Club Placement Programme, in which now we’ve got 13 football clubs (providing placements for underrepresented coaches)” [B].

2. Providing the evidence for national sport organisational interventions to improve gender equity in coaching

The evidence from the programme of research at LBU has also been used by other national governing bodies. LBU research has directly informed a change in organisational practices of national governing bodies (NGBs) including the Rugby Football League (the NGB for Rugby League in the UK), British Cycling (the main NGB for cycle sport in Great Britain, with a total membership of 165,000 cyclists), and The Lawn Tennis Association (the NGB of tennis in Great Britain).

Through the ‘Changing the Culture Series’, the 12 NGBs involved in the programme reported making a number of operational changes. These changes included the initiation of formal women in coaching action groups and programme in two NGBs, an initiation of an organisational review of the diversity of the tutor workforce for one NGB, initiation of a review into the resources available to existing women coaches in one NGB and a review of coach education in another NGB to ensure it is fit for purpose for women coaches, the creation of a network of change champions for gender equity in coaching for one NGB, an increase in awareness and confidence to engage across departments and the Board to put gender equity on the strategic agenda in three NGBs, and an increased understanding of organisational culture, organisational change, and unconscious bias in coach recruitment for all 12 NGBs [C]. LBU research has also been cited as evidence by British Cycling as part of their Women’s Strategy to combat the problem of a lack of clear developmental pathways for, and retention of, women coaches. Consequently, British Cycling initiated a network-based female cycling coaching programme based on the research by LBU [D]. Evaluation of the initiative by LBU evidenced that women mentor coaches reported greater engagement with the organisation and expressed greater desire to stay coaching. The increase in women mentor coaches through the programme has contributed to a rise to 23% of the UK cycling coaching workforce being women (compared to 17% national average in other sports).

At a global governing body level, LBU research has informed World Rugby’s 2017-25 Women in Rugby strategic plan from World Rugby. World Rugby have set the target of a minimum of 40% of all elite coaches to be women at Rugby World Cup 2025. At both the Rugby World Cup 2017 and the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, only FOUR women globally, were represented in coaching roles in total. In response, in 2018, World Rugby undertook a review of the status of women in high performance coaching, citing LBU research and advised by Norman as the only researcher consulted for the review [E]. From this, Norman worked with World Rugby to

inform their High-Performance Women Coaching Rugby Toolkit, designed to create a robust framework and pathway for unions and regional associations to improve their recruitment, retention, and progression of female rugby coaches. LBU research was the most cited work within the toolkit [F]. As a result of the World Rugby review and subsequent toolkit which identified coaching experience as a barrier for women seeking employment as found by LBU research, World Rugby launched a transformational Rugby World Cup 2021 Coaching Internship Programme, providing talent identified female coaches with a unique 12-month placement opportunity with a team competing at the World Cup in New Zealand. Consequently, six national associations have each appointed a female coach intern to their management teams ahead of the 2021 World Cup, more than doubling the number of women at international events since the Rio Games and 2017 World Cup.

3. Providing the evidence for European policy to promote gender equity in sport coaching

The research of Norman and her team has provided the evidence for European Council recommendations to member states and has been included in European Council-funded organisational toolkits, to improve gender equity in European sport. For example, one of the European Council's objectives for 2020, as included in their Gender Equality in Sport Proposal for Strategic Actions 2014 – 2020 [G], was that women should have more support to become qualified coaches and that gendered stereotypes within coaching should be challenged. This recommendation cited LBU research in the policy documents of the European Union's strategic proposals for improving gender equality in sport as evidence of the need for member states to improve coach education and national coach qualification frameworks to increase the professional development (and thus progression) of women coaches. LBU's research on the improvements needed for coach education for women coaches and Norman's invitations to advise the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement in Sport (EPAS) (in 2014 and 2015) has also provided the basis of the recommendations for the European Council Expert Group on Good Governance (in sport) and into the work of the Estonian presidency of the Council in 2017. Norman was invited to author the European Council's gender mapping analysis of European coach education schemes [H].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[A] Testimonial from Audrey Cooper, Head of Women's Coaching Development at the English Football Association

[B] Testimonial from Abdul Fazal, Coaching Diversity and Inclusion Manager for the English Football Association

[C] UK Coaching 'Changing the Culture' series evaluation report describing the impact of the programme on NGB practice

[D] British Cycling: Ignite Your Coaching (women coaches' development) strategy: website citing the LBU research. Available:

<https://www.britishcycling.org.uk/coaching/article/20160405-Ignite-your-coaching--Join-a-new-women%E2%80%99s-development-network-0>

[E] World Rugby 2018 High-Performance Women in Coaching Review informed by LBU research and in consultation with Norman. Available:

[https://resources.world.rugby/worldrugby/document/2020/05/06/e8e11f34-68f7-4ccd-913b-93ab1b7c506b/Women in High Performance Coaching Report.pdf](https://resources.world.rugby/worldrugby/document/2020/05/06/e8e11f34-68f7-4ccd-913b-93ab1b7c506b/Women%20in%20High%20Performance%20Coaching%20Report.pdf)

[F] World Rugby High-Performance Women in Coaching Toolkit. Informed significantly by LBU research. Available:

[https://resources.world.rugby/worldrugby/document/2020/05/07/fcd591f0-f2dc-4c85-8ce9-822858e2eefa/21300 World Rugby Women in Rugby Toolkit DDv7.pdf](https://resources.world.rugby/worldrugby/document/2020/05/07/fcd591f0-f2dc-4c85-8ce9-822858e2eefa/21300%20World%20Rugby%20Women%20in%20Rugby%20Toolkit%20DDv7.pdf)

[G] European Council Gender Equality in Sport Proposal for Strategic Actions 2014 – 2020

[H] European Council Mapping of and analysis of education schemes for coaches from a gender perspective. Available: <http://eose.org/ressource/mapping-and-analysis-of-education-schemes-for-coaches-from-a-gender-perspective>