

# *Distinctions in practice within coaching in Scotland*

Article

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## **Distinctions in Practice within Coaching in Scotland**

David Tee, Jonathan Passmore & Hazel Brown

### **Abstract**

*This research sought to identify distinctions in the practice of coaches within Scotland. A survey design was adopted, with a snowball sampling strategy generating 74 responses. The data from coaches within Scotland, compared with that from respondents in other European nations, suggest that: a greater proportion of the Scottish coaching community are male, that coaches commonly evaluate at the end of every meeting and also seek feedback from commissioning managers as well as clients, that there are numerous approaches to coaching and also to continuous professional development that are less widely adopted in Scotland, that the reputation of the coaching provider is often an important factor for those commissioning coaching and that there are preferences for certain coaching models when presented with particular client issues. Recommendations are made for future analytical research to identify causal factors for any phenomena that can be cautiously determined from this data set.*

**Keywords:** *coaching, Scotland, Europe, national distinctions*

This is the second in a series of reports within *The Coaching Psychologist*, each one using data to explore distinctions in practice within each of the home nations within the United Kingdom where sufficient data were gathered.

Coaching psychology has been framed as bringing scientific research methods to enlighten our understanding of all practice within coaching (Passmore, 2010). One method for classifying research methods by purpose, proposed by Collis and Hussey (2014), is detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1: Research types by increasing level of sophistication**

Research purpose	Description
Exploratory	Research conducted into a research problem or issue when there are very few or no earlier studies to which we can refer for information about the phenomenon. The aim is to gain insights and familiarity with the subject area for more rigorous investigation at a later stage.
Descriptive	Research which describes phenomena as they exist. Descriptive research goes further than exploratory research, since it is used to identify and obtain information on the characteristics of a particular phenomenon.
Analytical	Also known as 'explanatory' research, this goes beyond merely describing the characteristics to analysing or explaining why/how it is happening. It aims to understand phenomena by discovering and measuring causal relations among them.
Predictive	Predictive research goes even further yet. It forecasts the likelihood of a particular phenomenon occurring in a given scenario. It aims to generalise from the analysis by predicting certain phenomena on the basis of hypothesised general relationships.

This present coaching psychology research has a descriptive purpose. It forms part of the wider pan-European study (Passmore et al., 2017) commissioned by the European Coaching and Mentoring Council (EMCC) and led by Henley Business School. As a descriptive study, it began with no assumptions or hypotheses. Instead, the researchers sought to generate quantitative data to obtain information on the characteristics of coaching practice across and within European nations. The researchers assert that this descriptive data can be a helpful precursor to the generation of analytical and predictive research studies, allowing coaching psychologists to create grounded hypotheses and hone in on relevant participant populations with particular characteristics. Whereas coaching practice in Wales was

considered in *TCP 14(1)* (Tee, Passmore & Brown, 2018), this paper switches the focus to Scotland.

## **Scotland**

Given the global readership of *The Coaching Psychologist*, this paper will offer a very brief overview of Scotland. Scotland is one of four nations within the United Kingdom (UK), bordered by England to the south, the Atlantic Ocean to the north and west and the North Sea to the East. It acquired the territories of Shetland and Orkney from Norway in the fifteenth century, although inhabitants of Shetland still regard themselves as Norse rather than Scottish to this day (Fanthorpe, 2017). The 1707 Act of Union saw Scotland join what would ultimately become the UK, with an independence referendum in 2014 resulting in the majority of voters opting to retain this arrangement. Scotland covers 30,090 square miles and registered a population of 5.3 million in the most recent (2011) UK census.

Similar to Wales, Scotland has an active coaching community, but not yet to the point where there is a Scotland-specific professional coaching body or research journal. The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) provides a distance-learning coaching qualification and numerous private training providers run professionally accredited training programmes (Passmore, Brown, Peebles Grajfoner et al., 2018). Of the professional coaching bodies active in Scotland, the Association for Coaching (AC) has the highest level of national membership, reporting 350 Scottish members (ibid.).

The wider pan-European study sought to capture current practice across and within European nations, both to identify emerging norms and trends as well as to recognise and celebrate diversity of practice. Readers interested in overall trends are encouraged to access the full European report (Passmore et al., 2017). This paper concentrates more on the latter aim: to report distinctions in practice within Scotland, as compared with the rest of Great Britain (GB) and Europe. Therefore, whilst the data set for the full range of Scottish survey responses is detailed within Passmore et al. (2018), this present paper is focusing specifically on those response

patterns that distinguish Scotland’s coaching community from the other participating nations.

**Method**

A brief overview of the method will be provided here. As this paper draws on the same descriptive data set as the Wales paper, to avoid issues of excessive duplication, readers are directed to Tee et al. (2018) for a full description of the method.

Henley Centre for Coaching and the EMCC jointly designed the survey instrument, then set up partnerships with approximately 100 organisations, each of which committed to sharing the research link with their members or to publishing details of the research on their website. Specifically for Scotland, the questionnaire was electronically distributed, initially through research partner universities and professional coaching bodies within the nation, but with a ‘snowball’ sampling strategy deployed to encourage respondent numbers. A list of the survey questions pertaining to coaching is provided in Table 2. Other questions covered related topics, such as mentoring and supervision. Respondents took a mean time of 25 minutes to complete.

Table 2: Survey questions.

Which coaching and mentoring bodies are you a member of?
What is your highest non-coach/mentor training qualification?
What is your highest coaching/mentoring qualification?
How many years have you practised as a coach/mentor?
What types of coaching do you engage in?
What portion of your working time is spent delivering coaching?
What rate do you charge corporate clients on average per hour?
What methods do you use to reflect on your practice?
How often do you receive formal coaching supervision?
How many hours of CPD should coaches undertake each year?
How do you keep up-to-date in your coaching practice?

What coaching models do you use in your coaching practice?
From your experience, which model works best with the following presenting issue: (a) career change? (b) workplace stress? (c) improving presentation skills? (d) persistent checking of e-mails outside of work?
How do you evaluate the impact of your coaching?
Who do you gather evaluation feedback from in your coaching?
What measures do you use to evaluate your coaching?
When you enter into an agreement to deliver coaching, who do you contract with most frequently?
Who do you believe is the <b>primary</b> client when you are delivering corporate/organisational coaching?
What aspects are explicitly included in your contract with the <b>individual</b> ?
What aspects are explicitly included in your contract with the <b>organisation</b> ?
Do you share your ethical code with individual clients?
How do you share the ethical code with individual clients?
What should happen in the following situations? (a) A coach pays a fee to an individual to gain a coaching contract with an organization. (b) A coach enters into a sexual relationship with a client during a coaching assignment. (c) A coach fails to report to the appropriate authorities a client who is using low-level drugs outside of work. (d) A coach fails to report the actions of a client who has disclosed commercially sensitive information which has affected the value of the company.
When commissioning coaching, what are the most important factors?

All data from coaches who identified as operating within Scotland were included. The overall survey generated responses from 46 European nations, with a mean response rate of 60.67 ( $SD=108.35$ ). Scotland, with 74 respondents, produced the 11<sup>th</sup> highest response rate of the participating nations. However, the researchers

acknowledge that this is still a relatively low figure, meaning that any inferences or tentative conclusions that might be drawn from the data must be treated with an element of caution. The mode age range for Scotland was 50-64. Gender data is discussed below.

### **Findings and discussion**

Responses for Scotland, the rest of GB (consisting of England and Wales: UK was not used as, excepting Question One, distinct Northern Ireland data are not available) and the rest of Europe (excluding the UK) are provided for each of the discussed survey items. In total there were  $N=74$  respondents from Scotland,  $N=858$  from 'Rest of GB' (labelled RoGB) and  $N= 1859$  from 'Rest of Europe' (labelled RoE).

#### **1. You are more likely to encounter a male coach in Scotland than elsewhere**

Table 3: Gender (%)

	Scotland	RoGB	RoE
Male	42	38.5	40
Female	58	61.5	60

As with every other nation in the wider survey, the majority of respondents in Scotland identify as female. However, Scotland registered the highest proportion of coaches that identify as male (42%). This results in a gap between genders of only 16%, compared with 20% for RoE and 22% for RoGB. The reason for the higher proportion of male coaching practitioners within Scotland is not clear. A repeat of this survey in a few years from now might indicate whether the narrowing of the gender imbalance in Scotland continues and whether it will be echoed in any of the other European nations.

#### **2. Scottish coaches are more likely than other respondents to evaluate at the end of each meeting**

Coaching psychology research has often considered issues around efficacy (Athanasopoulos & Dopson, 2018; Bozer & Jones, 2018). Within this survey, respondents were asked to identify how they evaluate the impact of their coaching, with seven main options (plus an 'Other' category) provided. Of these, 10.4% of Scottish respondents selected the 'Periodically, on a random sample of individual clients' option (compared to 2.5% in RoE and 1.3% in RoGB). Whilst there is no certainty that all respondents, in Scotland and elsewhere, were adhering to the technical understanding of randomisation used within research, these data suggest the Scottish coaching community is at least four times as likely to opt for this broad strategy as other practitioners.

Scottish respondents also registered the highest score for formally evaluating at the end of every meeting compared to RoGB and RoE, and a higher figure for informally evaluating at the end of every meeting compared with RoGB (over 7% - with a less than 1% difference to RoE).

Table 4: How coaches evaluate the impact of their coaching (%)

	Scotland	RoGB	RoE
When asked by the organisational client	2.1	1.4	2.5
Periodically, on a random sample of individual clients	10.4	1.3	2.5
Formally – evaluation form at end of every meeting	27.1	11.7	7.9
Informally, at end of every meeting	31.3	24.0	32.2
Formally, evaluation form at end of every coaching assignment/contract	20.8	45.2	27.4
Informally, at end of every coaching assignment/contract	6.3	12.9	21.2
I have not formally evaluated my work in the past twelve months	2.1	1.8	2.7
Other	0.0	1.6	3.6

As a consequence, Scottish coaches reported being the least likely to wait until the end of the coaching assignment before either formally or informally evaluating the impact of their work.

Further data from those coaches in Scotland that adopt a random sampling strategy might reveal whether they share a commonality in client sector or organisation,



source of coaching training or some other factor that might explain this preferred approach. An opportunity also exists for coaching psychology researchers interested in issues of efficacy to determine whether these differing evaluation strategies might confound data on the impact of coaching interventions.

### **3. Scottish coaches are most likely to seek feedback from commissioning managers**

When asked which sources of evaluation feedback they used, 43.7% of coaches in Scotland selected one of the options involving the commissioning manager. This contrasts with 32.5% of coaches in Europe and 26.6% in the rest of GB. So, although the client remains the most likely source of feedback across all three categories of respondent, Scottish coaches are more likely to next seek further feedback from the commissioning manager than they are from the client’s line manager. This ordering of feedback sources happens to be more in keeping with RoE than with fellow coaching practitioners across the remainder of GB, where the line manager is ranked the second most likely source.

Table 5: Sources of evaluation feedback (%)

	Scotland	RoGB	RoE
The individual client	31.3	46.3	45.4
The individual client and the line manager	12.5	17.1	13.4
The individual client and the commissioning manager	22.9	12.4	14.4
The individual client, commissioning manager and line manager	20.8	14.2	18.1
Yourself (self-reflection feedback)	10.4	8.9	6.0
I do not gather feedback	2.1	0.4	1.3
Other	0.0	0.7	1.3

Another distinction reveals itself for Scottish coaches: they are the most likely of the three categories of respondents to rely on self-reflection to determine their evaluation of their coaching, with just over 1 in 10 opting for this approach. Arguably, the 2.1% of Scottish respondents who opted for ‘I do not gather feedback’ could be added to the 10.4% who use self-reflection (pushing the figure up to 12.5% or 1 in 8), unless these coaches genuinely do not ever reflect on their own practice.

#### **4. The experience of the coaching provider is given noticeable significance as a factor in commissioning coaching in Scotland**

Respondents were asked to weight 100% of available marks across five important factors that would be considered when commissioning coaching. As Tee et al. (2018) discussed, there was a marked emphasis on the importance of the individual coach's experience as the determining factor within Wales (attracting 83%). Looking at the Scotland data, a single equivalent dominant factor does not emerge, with each of the five options attracting at least 14%.

Table 6: The most important factor when commissioning coaching (%)

	Scotland	RoGB	RoE
Price	14	3.8	10.3
Professional qualifications of the individual coach	14	15.9	25.2
Member of a professional body	14	2.7	9.5
Experience of the coach	29	74.0	40
Experience of the provider	29	3.8	14

What is noticeable is that, for three of the five options available ('Price', 'Member of a professional body' and 'Experience of the provider'), Scotland has higher values than RoGB and RoE. Compared to these other two responder categories, the most pronounced differentiator is the importance given to the coaching provider's experience (as opposed to the experience of the individual coach), which is weighted 15% higher than in RoE and 25.2% higher than in RoGB. Further research may reveal whether this comparatively higher weighting is driven by provider reputational issues within the Scottish coaching market or some other factor.

For the other two options Scotland has rated higher than RoGB and RoE, the size of the gap in values for both 'Price' and 'Member of a professional body' are smaller compared to 'Rest of Europe' than they are for 'Rest of GB'. This may suggest that geographic proximity to fellow practitioners in England or Wales is not the dominant factor in determining norms for this aspect of Scottish coaching practice.

#### **5. There are many approaches to coaching that are least likely to be encountered in Scotland**

In common with RoGB and RoE, Scotland recorded 'Behavioural/Goal focused coaching' as the highest scoring coaching approach. However, it only registered a score of 55.4% in Scotland, compared with 72.3% for RoGB: a 16.9% difference in value. Looking further at Table 5, we see this 'lowest score' outcome repeated multiple times, with Scottish coaches reporting that they favour the following approaches less often than either RoGB and RoE: neuro-linguistic programming, cognitive behavioural coaching, gestalt coaching, motivational interviewing, psychodynamic coaching and existential coaching. In fact, if the 'Other' data are considered, Scotland scored the lowest in eight of the eleven available categories.

Table 7: Models used in respondents' coaching practice (respondents could select more than one option) (%)

	Scotland	RoGB	RoE
Behavioural / Goal-focused coaching (GROW Model)	55.4	72.3	59.3
Solution-focused	40.5	37.5	42.4
Transactional Analysis	24.3	34.7	19.6
NLP	23	33.4	29.8
Cognitive Behavioural Coaching	21.6	29.0	30.6
Other	13.5	16.3	18
Gestalt	10.8	15.8	12.8
Transpersonal	9.5	6.8	6.5
Motivational Interviewing	9.5	15.2	16.2
Psychodynamic	6.8	10.1	7.5
Existential	2.7	4.1	8.1

The only approach for which Scotland scored the highest was 'Transpersonal', but this was with fewer than 1 in 10 respondents selecting it, so it does not represent a dominant approach to practice amongst the Scottish coaching community. The remaining two options ('solution-focused' and 'transactional analysis') will be considered in the next section.

For the eight coaching approaches where Scotland registered the lowest score, the mean lower likelihood of these being used is 4.9% compared with RoE and 6.7% compared with RoGB. Given that these approaches include both the most and least popular coaching models, follow-up qualitative data from the survey respondents may have been insightful in identifying possible causes for this phenomenon.

## **6. There are distinctive preferences for working with certain presenting topics**

Table 5 showed that Scotland was most likely to use a transpersonal coaching approach and least likely to use eight of the other listed approaches, leaving only 'solution-focused' and 'transactional analysis' as scoring second (behind RoE and RoGB respectively). However, there do seem to be distinct clusters of coaching issues where these two approaches are particularly favoured within Scotland.

The survey contained four questions, each containing a presenting issue and asking respondents which coaching model they would use. The choices were the same as those detailed in Table 5 (excluding the 'Other' category). The presenting issues were as follows:

- (1) Career change
- (2) Workplace stress
- (3) Improving presentation skills
- (4) Persistent checking of emails outside of work

The 'headline' responses were largely consistent across Scotland, RoGB and RoE, with popular approaches such as 'cognitive behavioural' and 'behavioural' coaching attracting high scores: readers are again referred to Passmore et al. (2017) for the full set of figures.

Beneath these headlines, there is something distinct about the pattern of responses from Scotland. It was the most likely to opt for a 'transactional analysis' approach to the first two presenting issues. It was over 4% more likely to use this model with career change issues compared with both RoGB and RoE; it was 8% more likely than RoE to use this model with workplace stress issues.

For the remaining two presenting issues, Scotland was the most likely nation to use a 'solution focused' approach. The differences were relatively minor for the e-mails presenting issue (1.9% against RoE and 3.7% against RoGB), but more pronounced

with the presentation skills issue (8.2% higher than RoE and 10.7% higher than RoGB).

So, whilst Scotland ranked only second amongst the three respondent groupings for use of ‘solution focused’ and ‘transactional analysis’ coaching approaches, there do seem to be clusters of coaching issues where this nation is most likely to favour deploying these two approaches. This ‘clustering’ around certain client issues is interesting: it may be worthwhile exploring the full data set to see where coaches in other European nations exhibit a distinct preference for a certain approach for any given presenting topic. Such a mapping of issue-approach relationships across nations might be a useful catalyst for future analytical research.

**7. Conferences, qualifications and courses are used more widely elsewhere as methods for staying up-to-date**

Respondents were asked how they kept up to date in their coaching practice and were able to select as many of nine available options as were applicable.

In a similar pattern to Scotland’s preference for certain coaching approaches, the data set for this survey item suggest that Scotland is distinct in having the lowest scores for the majority of the listed options: a full seven out of the nine available. The only two exceptions where Scotland did not respond in the lowest numbers were ‘Participating in coaching webinars’ and ‘Reading coaching research’, where it placed itself second (behind RoE and RoGB respectively).

Table 8: How respondents keep up to date in their coaching practice (respondents could select more than one option) (%)

	Scotland	RoGB	RoE
Attending coaching conferences	44.6	56.1	49.7
Participating in coaching webinars	36.5	33.3	42.5
Attending short courses in coaching skills	37.8	45.45	45.6
Attending additional formal coaching training qualifications	21.6	28	40.7
Attending professional networking events (e.g. ‘coaching clubs’ etc.)	40.5	42.85	44.7
Attending a peer coaching group	36.5	48.5	40.9
Attending a coaching specific graduate program at a University/business school	1.4	6.45	8.1

Reading coaching books	58.1	64.1	68.4
Reading coaching research	50	52.75	48.9

If the response scores for Scotland are compared with the combined scores for RoGB and RoE, then the largest distinctions are for 'Attending a peer coaching group' (36.5% for Scotland, 44.7% elsewhere), 'Attending a coaching conference' (44.6% for Scotland, 52.9% elsewhere) and 'Attending additional formal coaching training qualifications' (21.6% for Scotland, 34.4% elsewhere).

There may be a straightforward explanation for these distinctions: there is a concentration of the Scottish population around the 47 miles of the M8 motorway that separates its two major cities, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Of course, other European nations also have populations concentrated in certain regions, so this cannot be the full explanation. Nevertheless, the three highest distinctions are all for options that are geographically situated (conferences, courses and peer coaching groups), so may involve large commitments in terms of travel time and finance for any coaches wishing to participate but who are located outside the M8 corridor. Such an explanation would be supported by looking at the two options where Scotland is not rated third (reading research and participating in webinars) and at its highest rated option (reading books): none of these three methods for staying up to date are geographically constrained.

### **Conclusions**

This article has purposefully focused on areas of distinction for the coaching industry in Scotland, compared with the other European nations that took part in the wider study. It is worth restating the importance for caution in drawing any conclusions, given the response rate from Scotland. In addition, many questions were asked in the survey and any examination of the full report will identify numerous areas of convergence in practice: one such example of commonality might be how the data suggest coaches in Scotland and elsewhere would respond if they discovered their client was engaging in low level drug taking.

The research responses from coaches in Scotland suggest they are less likely to use many of the listed coaching approaches or continuous professional development activities, they are more likely to evaluate after each session compared with other nations, they have a greater propensity to solicit feedback from the commissioning manager and that the experience of the coaching provider (as opposed to the individual coach) is given greater significance than elsewhere. Finally, men form a larger minority of the coaching population in Scotland compared with the rest of GB and Europe.

As Passmore et al. (2017) state, one of the intentions behind the original study was to identify and celebrate such diversity of practice within each of the responder nations.

Furthermore, for coaching psychologists seeking to identify topics for analytical or predictive research concerning the Scottish coaching industry, even a tentative understanding of how it might differentiate itself at present can point to research questions and hypotheses built from these descriptive data. Finally, these cautious findings may allow coaches, individually and collectively, to examine the status quo in Scotland and how they wish to shape their direction of evolution as a community of practice for the coming years.

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