

Distinctions in Practice within Coaching in Wales

David Tee, Jonathan Passmore and Hazel Brown

This is intended as one of a series of reports within *The Coaching Psychologist*. Each report will provide an overview of research conducted on coach and mentor attitudes and practices coaching within each of the home nations within the United Kingdom where sufficient data were gathered. This forms part of the wider 45 nation study (Passmore, Brown, Csigas et al., 2017) commissioned by the European Coaching and Mentoring Council (EMCC) and led by Henley Business School.

Wales

Given the global readership of *The Coaching Psychologist*, it is worth initially providing a very brief overview of Wales. Wales is one of four nations within the United Kingdom (UK), bordered by the Irish Sea to the west and England to the east. Sixteenth century laws saw it constitutionally join with what would ultimately become the UK, although the establishment of a devolved Welsh Assembly in 1999 has resulted in increased autonomy in recent decades. Wales is a relatively small European nation of 8,023 square miles, much of the centre of which is mountainous, resulting in the population (3,063,456 in the most recent UK census) being predominantly located along the north and south coastal zones.

Wales and coaching

Although the response rate for the present study (the third highest across the 45 nations) suggests an active coaching profession within Wales, it does not yet have any Wales-specific professional coaching body, nor any dedicated coaching practitioner or research journal. Similarly, none of the eight universities in Wales currently offer an MSc coaching qualification. However, University of South Wales (USW), the sixth largest university in the UK, does have a fledgling coaching unit: this features a number of doctoral candidates, the provision of postgraduate certificate and diploma programmes in conjunction with the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) and the hosting for the last five years (co-hosting with Academi Wales since

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2017) of the Annual Welsh Coaching Conference each March, attracting 200 delegates.

The various professional coaching bodies have some presence within Wales. The EMCC has a North Wales regional group and the Association for Coaching (AC) runs a co-coaching group in South Wales. The SGCP does not presently have a peer practice group running within the nation. Where membership information for professional bodies is in the public domain, the AC has 85 members in Wales (Passmore, Brown & Tee, 2018) and the SGCP has four registered coaching psychologists listed in Wales (as of February 2018). Several non-affiliated regional groups, such as the West Wales Coaching Collaborative, also operate.

The study

The purpose of the study, undertaken by Jonathan Passmore and Hazel Brown in collaboration with EMCC and the wider European coaching and mentoring industry, was to deepen understanding of coaching and mentoring attitudes and practice across 45 different European nations, as well as to identify and celebrate the diversity in approach across these regions. Passmore et al. (2017, p.12) identify this diversity as a strength, advocating an avoidance of any desire to impose a global rigid framework onto the coaching industry.

This survey was conducted against a backdrop of sustained growth in coaching across Europe and the wider world: Garvey, Stokes and Megginson (2018, p. xiv) point to a range of reports in recent years indicating the continuing increase in use of coaching as a developmental interval (cf. Sherpa Coaching, 2016; ICF Global Coaching Study, 2016). In terms of the number of practising coaches, Europe is the leading region, with the International Coaching Federation (ibid., p.7) suggesting it holds 42% of the global coaching population (with North America second at 33%). Details of the findings across Europe can be found in Passmore et al. (2017). This present study focuses in depth on the specific findings for Wales.

Method

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A questionnaire was designed by the researchers in conjunction with the EMCC. The survey was publicised through established coaching federations and management bodies, as well as online through social media interest groups. In total, approximately 100 organisations committed to sharing the research link with their members or to publishing details of the research on their website. Specifically for the Wales subset of the respondent population, the questionnaire was electronically distributed, initially through research partners within Wales, but with a ‘snowball’ sampling strategy deployed to encourage respondent numbers. It featured 26 topics and took a mean of 25 minutes to complete. There were 150 respondents, with a mode age of 30-49, 64.4% of whom identified as female.

Results

Responses for Wales, the rest of Great Britain (Scotland and England: UK 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 survey items. The full survey solicited responses to 26 survey items. For reasons of brevity, only a subset is reported here where Wales has produced a distinct response that differentiates it from other nations.

In total there were $N=150$ respondents from Wales, $N=782$ for the rest of Great Britain and $N= 1859$ for the rest of Europe. The responses are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Survey results

	Wales	Rest of Great Britain	Rest of Europe
Which coaching and mentoring bodies are you a member of?			
None	85	267	628
AC	34	262	62
Other	14	86	428
EMCC	12	139	211
SGCP	3	69	11

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ICF	2	71	638
ISCP	0	12	13
APECS	0	42	11
WABC	0	7	30
Percentage of working time spent delivering coaching			
0%	0.9	2.3	1.0
5%	29.9	16.3	8.1
10%	35.0	24.4	168
20%	17.1	14.0	21.9
30%	6.8	14.2	17.8
40%	5.1	7.9	86
50%	1.7	10.1	8.9
60%	3.4	4.0	5.7
70%	0.1	3.2	4.6
80%	0.1	1.5	3.7
90%	0.1	1.7	1.6
100%	0.1	0.5	1.2
Fee rates for corporate clients per hour (p/h)			
Internal coach/no charge	52.1	11.6	9.2
<€50 p/h	26.1	1.6	5.2
€51-100 p/h	2.5	10.8	15.5
€101-199 p/h	10.9	15.5	26.9
€200-399 p/h	5.9	21.5	19.1
€400-599 p/h	0.8	9.4	4.3
€600-799 p/h	1.7	2.1	1.2
€800-999 p/h	0.0	1.8	0.4
>€1000 p/h	0.0	0.4	0.1
Which methods do you use to reflect on your practice? (respondents could select more than one option)			
Self reflection	80.6	69.8	70.3
Peer network	67.3	56.0	53.7
Read coaching books	53.3	61.0	62.2
Read coaching research	43.3	50.4	42.8
Self support	31.3	31.0	23.9
Formal supervision with qualified supervisor	28	43.6	30.5
Mentor	10.6	14.4	21.7
Co-mentoring	10.6	10.4	11.1

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Which models do you use in your coaching practice? (respondents could select more than one option)			
Behavioural/Goal-focused (e.g. GROW)	74.7	62.6	59.3
Solution-focused	33.3	41.1	42.4
Transactional Analysis	32	30.8	19.6
Neuro-linguistic programming	30	29.9	29.8
Cognitive Behavioural	24.7	27.4	30.6
Motivational interviewing	16	12.0	16.2
Gestalt	9.3	16.5	12.8
Psychodynamic	6.7	10.1	7.5
Transpersonal	4.7	9.2	6.5
Existential	1.3	4.8	8.1
Other	14	16	18
Which topics are explicitly included in your contract with the client? (respondents could select more than one option)			
The responsibilities of the different parties involved	79.3	68.6	68.6
What is confidential information and not to be shared outside	73.3	67.8	65
What is coaching?	72.7	66.6	61.8
What would not be confidential and could be shared by the coach outside the sessions with appropriate agencies	64.7	49.6	32.2
The cancellation arrangements for a session	60.7	53.5	57.7
How the client will evaluate the value of the coaching	52	47.8	35.6
How the client can complain about the coach	41.3	35	22.1
When commissioning coaching, what are the most important factors?			
Experience of the coach	83.0	47.0	40.0
Professional qualifications of the individual coach	17.0	14.4	25.2
Experience of the provider	0.0	18.3	14.0
Price	0.0	10.8	10.3
Member of a professional body	0	9.7	9.5

Reflections and areas for further investigation

As well as seeking to gain an understanding of trends and preferences in the coaching community across Europe, the purpose of the overarching research was to also allow insights into variances in practice within individual nations. Focusing on the survey data for Wales and contrasting it with the rest of Great Britain and also the rest of Europe, a number of themes emerge.

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1. The majority of respondents do not belong to a professional coaching body

57% of Wales respondents were not members of a single coaching professional body. This contrasts with 28% of respondents from the rest of Great Britain (GB) and 31% from Europe. The professional body with the largest membership (AC: $N=34$) is also the one with the most active regional group, so it may be that membership is largely driven by the opportunity to meet, support and share best practice with fellow members of the coaching community. The AC has also had a presence at regional events, such as the Annual Welsh Coaching Conference, for many years, so membership may also be partially driven by a perception that professional bodies need to be visible and actively engage with the Wales coaching community.

Given the role that these professional bodies seek to play, the very low engagement levels mean there are many coaches that are not, for example, bound by codes of ethical conduct or required to evidence their ongoing investment in professional development in order to renew their membership. Such factors may arguably have an impact on the quality or the quality assurance mechanisms present within coaching in Wales.

2. Practising coaches in Wales typically spend less of their working time coaching

Only 5.4% of Wales coaches spend over 40% of their working time coaching. In contrast, 30% spend 5% of their time coaching and 35% spend 10% of their time coaching. Compared to the results for GB and Europe, this suggests that those who coach in Wales spend a much lower mean amount of their working life engaged in coaching than their counterparts in other nations.

It would be of interest to research further as to the reasons why the time spent coaching in Wales is lower. Further data may reveal whether this is determined by personal choice on the part of the coach, the level of demand for coaching services in Wales, competing considerations for the practitioner's working time or some other factor.

3. Corporate client coaching in Wales attracts lower fee rates

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78.2% of coaches in Wales either coached within their own organisation, for no charge or for a charge of below €50 p/h. The ability to disaggregate the data to separate the number of respondents who worked as internal practitioners would be useful in gaining an understanding of the financial investment that corporate clients are willing to invest in external coaching provision. Nonetheless, given that organisations in the rest of GB, as well as Europe, are also building internal coaching capacity, this survey data suggests a distinct difference in the market rates for coaching in Wales compared to the mean investment willing to be made across Europe. Further research could explore why coaching may be undervalued in Wales, what the perceived and actual benefits are reported to be by commissioners and users of coaching services and what role, if any, the limiting beliefs of coaches in Wales may play in keeping fees uncommonly low.

4. Coaches in Wales disproportionately invest in reflective practice

The survey data suggest that the three main tools for reflective practice are the same across Wales, GB and Europe, even if the ordering may alter: self reflection, peer networking and reading coaching books. However, in terms of the percentage of coaches that report using each method, for the two highest rated practices (self reflection and peer networks), the Wales percentages are at least 10% higher than those reported for both GB and Europe in both instances.

For the peer networking result (67.3%), further research could determine the extent to which this is conducted virtually or face-to-face. If the latter, it may indicate geographic concentrations of coaching practice not found in other nations. Future research could also explore why Wales coaches see such uncommonly widespread value in self reflection as a tool for enhancing practice.

5. There is a disproportionate use of behavioural/goal-focused models in Wales

Although behavioural/goal-focused models are reported as the most widely used across Wales, GB and Europe, with solution-focused coaching being ranked second in all three territories, the extent of the preference is more pronounced in Wales. The

gap in percentage scores suggests a 41.4% preference for goal-focused approaches, contrasted against 21.5% in GB and 16.9% in Europe.

This domination of behavioural and goal-focused approaches in Wales may partially explain why Wales rates the lowest for the number of practitioners that use gestalt, psychodynamic, transpersonal or existential approaches in their coaching work, compared with GB and Europe. The ethos of this research was to capture and celebrate the diversity in coaching cultures across Europe: the data for Wales suggests it takes a lead in homogeneously adopting goal-focused approaches to coaching.

6. Coaches in Wales are thorough in their contracting with clients

The survey asked respondents the extent to which they explicitly cover certain topics when contracting with clients. Seven discreet topics were listed, ranging from what is treated as confidential through to session cancellation arrangements. For all seven topics, Wales coaches responded as being more likely to explicitly cover these in contracting than did GB or Europe coaches.

A Wales coach reported a mean increased likelihood to cover the contracting topics of 7.9% compared with GB coaches and 14.4% compared to Europe coaches. Given the earlier discussed findings about increased engagement in reflective practice techniques, these data suggest that Wales coaches do engage in much of what the literature advocates as best practice, despite the majority of them not being affiliated to any encouraging or enforcing professional coaching body. Further research could explore what might drive such conduct within Wales.

7. Experience is key in Wales

Respondents were asked to state the important factors when commissioning coaching, with five options being available. For GB and Europe respondents, all five options were selected to varying extents. In significant contrast, respondents from Wales only selected two of the five options, with 'Experience of the provider', 'Price' and 'Membership of a professional body' all rated as 0%.

For the options that were chosen by Wales respondents, 17% stated that 'Professional qualification of the individual coach' were important (compared with 14.4% for GB and

25.2% for Europe). However, 'Experience of the coach' was rated as important by 83% (contrasted with GB: 47%, Europe: 40%). This set of responses is probably the most stark differentiator, setting Wales apart from the other 45 responder nations.

It may be that price is not considered an important factor because the survey data suggests the financial investment made for coaching is much lower in Wales, so this becomes less likely to act as a barrier to access. It may also be that there is transactional relationship between commissioners of coaching not considering membership of a professional body important and coaches not therefore experiencing a financial incentive to join these bodies.

Conclusions

The 'State of Play in European Coaching' research elicited response from thousands of coaches across Europe, with survey items exploring a range of different aspects of coaching practice. Whilst the full dataset points to many areas of convergence in practice between coaches in Wales and their counterparts in other European nations (an example might be the prevalence of engagement with coaching supervisors – see Passmore, Brown & Tee, 2018 for full results), this paper has purposefully sought to highlight aspects of the data that point to distinctions that might capture the uniqueness of current norms in the Wales coaching industry.

The research findings point to a nation where coaches typically coach for a small proportion of their working time, would not expect to attract significant fees for their work, are not inclined to belong to professional coaching bodies and whose worth is often judged by the amount of experience they have as coaches. Nevertheless, they might uncommonly be expected to actively engage in a range of reflective practices and to demonstrate conscientious best practice in aspects of their craft such as thorough contracting. Finally, they exhibit a marked bias towards behavioural/goal-focused approaches when coaching clients.

These findings provide data for new insights into the diversity of coaching industry norms from nation to nation, but are only descriptive in nature; seeking to capture what is happening within Wales. Further legitimate research might inquire into the causes, motivations, enabling and restraining factors, be they at individual, organisational or

societal levels, which might be shaping these responses and creating the differences in preference and emphasis in how coaching is carried out in Wales.

Correspondence

David Tee

Director, University of South Wales Coaching Centre

E-mail: david.tee@southwales.ac.uk

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