

2011 British Athletics Facts

ABAC Fact File 8

Coach Numbers

1. Background. Determining the number of qualified and active coaches in athletics is not easy due to the lack of official statistics. ABAC commissioned top athletics statistician, Rob Whittingham, to separate fact from fiction.

2. Definitions

a) Athletics Leader & Leadership in Running Fitness

These qualifications are provided by UK Athletics based on one day courses with no assessment. These are not qualifications which permit unsupervised coaching of athletes but these groups are misleadingly included in many coach totals.

b) Coaching Assistant

This qualification, introduced in 2009, equates to the old level 1 coach. There is no assessment of individuals in order to obtain this qualification. Holders of this license cannot coach without an Athletics Coach being present. Coaching Assistant numbers should not be included, as they currently are, in coach totals.

c) Athletics Coach

This qualification, introduced in 2009 matches the old level 2 and above coach grade. It is this group of individuals who are real coaches.

3. Determining accurate coach numbers. The first point of reference for this survey was the web pages of "Sports Coach UK". This government funded body states there are almost 70,000 athletics coaches in the country. Since this total is more than the number of track and field athletes in the country it cannot be correct. It may contain every PE teacher in the country, but only a small percentage of these coach athletics and most of these have no formal athletics accreditation.

The second website to be examined was the UKA's Power of 10. A little over a year ago the website started to publish coach information and initially had a box for coaching level. attained This level was never shown and within a few days the box itself was removed. The latest count of 'coaches' on the website is 21,000 up from 18,000 a year ago. Close examination reveals that these figures are highly exaggerated.

The first item of importance is that 11,000 of the 21,000 coaches listed have no club affiliation. Apart from a very small number of roving coaches, it is extremely unlikely somebody can coach track and field athletics without being associated with a club. Also "self coached" athletes who have no coaching qualifications are included. For example, does Dwain Chambers really hold a coaching qualification and has he been CRB checked? additionally some parents who coach their children are shown as coaches even though they have no formal coaching qualifications

However the most damning information comes from the clubs themselves.

A group of London clubs checked their coach web pages and found them to be 80%+ inaccurate. As a result a small number of clubs have been studied in detail to verify the accuracy of the Power of 10 data with the following results

Club A	23 coaches on Po10 –	actual 5 coaches and 2 helpers
Club B	15 coaches on Po10 –	actual 2 coaches, 1 is not shown
Club C	26 coaches on Po10 –	actual 8 coaches
Club D	35 coaches on Po10 –	actual 3 coaches
Club E	47 coaches on Po10 --	actual 1 active coach

The Power of 10 Clubs' Coaches data for these 5 clubs lists 146 coaches. This survey has verified that in reality only 19 coaches are active in these clubs. Whilst the sample is small the conclusions are obvious. **The data promulgated by UK Athletics is only approx. 13% accurate.** Put another way by a club official contacted during this study

'The club coach figures listed on Power of 10 are total fiction.'

For evidence we contacted England Athletics. In recent years ABAC have held meetings with England Athletics and have asked about coach numbers. The last number given over a year ago was 12,500 'coaches', of which about 25% were Athletics Coach level. Despite requests for accurate figures about active coaches, England Athletics have no information and have no mechanisms in place to produce this number.

4. Latest initiatives

The final question concerns the effectiveness of the new coaching courses established by UKA in 2009 following the scrapping at short notice of the previous system. How effective has the new system been in boosting coach numbers?

Our investigations have indicated that from March 2009 to March 2010 fewer than 20 individuals gained the new 'Athletics Coaches' qualification.. It is unlikely that the number of new 'Athletics Coaches' produced from Jan 2010 to August 2011 exceeds 200. With many experienced coaches leaving the sport in this period it is reasonable to conclude that the number of coaches is actually decreasing. One club has reported that they had gained 1 coach and lost 2 during this period.

5. Conclusions

The conflicting data on the number of athletics coaches may be summarized thus:-

Official body claims:

70,000 coaches –Sports Coach UK (Ref 1)
21,000 coaches – Power of 10
12,500+ coaches – England Athletics

The ABAC survey has shown the Po10 figures are only 13% correct. Applying this to their claimed number of coaches results in a realistic figure of 2,730 active coaches

As a parallel check Rob Whittingham examined over 500 club websites and totaled their lists of active coaches. From this data his best estimate is around 3,000 active coaches. So we conclude the realistic and truer figure to be:

2,730 active athletics coaches in the UK – ABAC

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Ref. 1. "Sports Coaching in the UK 111" published by Sports Coach UK, Jan 2011