

## England Athletics inform ABAC of major easing of Athletics Club Coach exam criteria.

**The story so far.** The UKA coach development and licensing programme has received large sums in grants over the last decade. Initially Sport England set a KPI for the numbers of top level coaches. This target was never met and thereafter no further KPI's related to coaching have been set by Sport England despite its substantial funding for coach development. Over the last 5 years ABAC has produced a number of Fact Files on coach numbers.

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**Fact File 8.** In 2011 ABAC published its Fact File 8 which attempted to reconcile actual numbers. Here is the conclusion from that Fact File.

*The conflicting data on the number of athletics coaches may be summarized thus:-**Official claims:**  
70,000 coaches–SportsCoachUK (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 totalled 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.***

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

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**Fact File 20.** ABAC revisited the question of coach numbers in 2013. Here is what Fact File 20 stated.

**Definitive coach numbers.** All the following information has been supplied by Sport England.

**2008.** UKA's 4 year funding plan for 2008-2012 to Sport England contained the target of **increasing** level 3 coach numbers by **3000** and **increasing** level 4 by **400**.

*In 2008 the official number of active licensed coaches with grades 2, 3 and 4 were **5104**.*

*Therefore the **target number** of coaches for the Olympic year of 2012 was **8504**.*

*The increase in coach numbers was, according to the funding plan "**This is where our investment in coach education and coach development will be focussed.**"*

**2013.** In response to an FOI request from ABAC Sport England reported that in March 2013 the number of level 2, 3 and 4 coaches who have renewed their licenses is **2496**. In the last 3 years the new coaching scheme has created **449** new club coaches.

*Therefore the **actual number** of coaches in 2013 is **2945***

**Concluding remarks.** UKA received Lottery funding for coach related projects over the period April 2009 to March 2013 totalling more than £16 million. During this period coach numbers were **targeted to rise to 8504**. **Instead they have fallen to 2945**

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**Fact File 22. New data.** Following receipt of athletic coach numbers last month from Sport England and their publication in FF 20, ABAC requested a more detailed breakdown of numbers by category. This information was received from SE's in-house solicitor, Scot Pugh, on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2013 and represents a clearer picture of the decline in coach numbers from 2008.

Due to the limited information sent on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2013 FF 20 required some interpretations and calculations to be made. The latest information does not require any processing and provides clear data.

**Coach numbers.** Here are the coach numbers for 2008 and end 2012. See FF20 for coach grade definitions for both the present and previous courses.

	<u>2008</u>	<u>2012</u>	
Level 2	3597	2253	
Level 3	1250	988	
Level 4	439	327	
New Club Coach (=Level 2.5)	<u>0</u>	<u>355</u>	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5286</b>	<b>3568</b>	(25.79% drop)

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**Numbers of Athletic coaches 2010 to 2016.** Following an information request by an MP on the DCMS select committee Sport England provided the following information.

The number of athletics club coaches practising in 2011 was 137; the total became 271 in 2012; 381 in 2013; 489 in 2014; and 789 in 2015.

To put it another way the numbers of athletics club coaches qualified year on year from the 2010-2011 season (when the new qualifications started) were: - 2011 - 137, 2012- 110, 2013-110, 2014-108, 2015-300.

To check the validity of the 2015 figures ABAC has conducted a survey of track and field clubs to provide a more accurate number for athlete club coaches created in 2015. Initial analysis indicates that the figure of 300 overstates the numbers and that the actual number of new coaches in 2015 is less than 2014. **Clearly UKA and England Athletics are unable to produce sufficient coaches from the present coaching qualification structure.**

**Major revisions now introduced.** ABAC has previously identified the major factors limiting the creation of new athletics' club coaches. These are:-

- The insistence that coaches are to be competent in all disciplines. (In many cases individuals only wish to specialise in one event and it is known that many individuals are just not prepared to take the multi-discipline course.)  
<http://www.britishathleticsclubs.com/?p=599>
- The irregularity and frequent cancellation of courses.
- The time involved in preparing and logging post course coaching experiences.
- High cost of participating in and attending courses.

After a 5 year campaign by ABAC there are signs that England Athletics are finally acknowledging a failed project and are looking to simplify licensing criteria. The fact that they are addressing at least some of ABAC's recommendations is to be welcomed. England Athletics is now in direct dialogue with ABAC. This is a step in the right direction. Finally they are listening. Here is an email sent to ABAC Chairman, Bill Laws, outlining key new changes.

You replied on 30/05/2016 09:41.

Dear Bill,

I thought it may be helpful to highlight some key changes which we have made to delivery of the UK Athletics' coach education courses in the three years since the publication of the ABAC report. For example, British Athletics have removed the diary element from within the coach level courses as this was seen as a barrier to completion. Candidates are now required to complete a small amount of homework between the course dates and an online knowledge test.

England Athletics and the National Council have also reduced the cost of coach education for those working with affiliated clubs as significant discounts have been applied, especially to coach level

courses. Those who have completed Athletics Coach also have access to the online progression modules for free.

Kind regards

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**Comment.** These changes are to be welcomed. They will no doubt fast track a number of coaches who have attended courses but not completed the log component. However as with most things the devil will be in the detail and we await more information on the homework content.

It should be recognised that there are potential pitfalls with this easing of content. As an analogy imagine sitting oral and written tests for a driving licence and then being given a licence without actually have driven on a public road. Not a sensible plan. Equally by eliminating practical evidence of coaching competence there is a distinct possibility that coaches will be practising who do not have the correct skills or sufficient expertise.

Furthermore an online test of knowledge may present a problem as verification that it is truly the work of the applicant will be difficult to achieve.

Many moons ago the route to a licence involved proving coaching competence to a level 4 specialist and top rank coach. Many excellent coaches came through this route.

**Recommendation.** ABAC recommends that a competence check be re-introduced. As part of a new and improved format England Athletics should pay for highest grade coaches to evaluate and sign off new club coaches. After all at a 100 a year that would not be too onerous.

ABAC. 31st May 2016