

# Coaching and Coach Education in Portugal

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The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of coaching and coaching education in Portugal. In Portugal, sport coaching is traditionally considered a part-time vocation. There has been a growing concern of the Portuguese authorities to increase the standards of quality for sport coaching. Following the 1974 revolution there were profound alterations in how coaching and coach education are regulated. The legislative changes in coach education occurred mainly due to the harmonisation of the qualifications in the European Union. More recently, the responsibility for coach certification has moved from the different sports federations to a national sports organization that has created four grades of coach education. Coach education in all grades requires a general and a specific curricular component as well as an internship supervised by an accredited mentor. The academic formation is now well regulated. However, some sport federations are resistant to this academic certification process because they fear losing their exclusive control of their coach certification.

**Keywords:** European Union coaching, formal education, coach development

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of coaching and coach education in Portugal. A Portuguese sociocultural perspective is provided to frame the evolution of coach education in the broader context of coaching and coach education in the European Union (EU, 2014).

In the past few decades there has been a growing concern of the Portuguese authorities responsible for defining and regulating sports coaching. There has been an increased emphasis on defining standards for coaching quality as well as connecting these standards to the European coaching framework. The pathways of coach education in Portugal were decisively influenced

by the political regimes, with the turning point clearly established in the 1974 revolution. Since the state was incapable of ensuring the implementation of the necessary coach education following 1974, legislation was created to give powers to public or private sport entities to develop their own coach education programs. However, in the following three decades there was no significant progress and the quality of coach education was not acceptable.

More recently, and following the guidelines stated by the Aligning a European Higher Education Structure in Sport Science (AEHESIS, 2006) and the European Network of Sport Sciences in Higher Education (ENSSHE),

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a new vision of the sport coaching profession was established in Portugal. Complying with the EU directives, the process of coach education, in terms of technical and scientific expertise, and also in terms of organizational and management skills, has been increasingly valued in Portugal.

## Sport and Coaching in Portugal

Portugal is a small country with a population of 10 million inhabitants. It is located in South-Western Europe, on the Iberian Peninsula westernmost country of mainland Europe bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the west and south and by Spain to the north and east. For much of 20th century (1933–1974) Portugal was under an authoritarian and conservative regimen until April 1974, when a bloodless left-wing military coup, known as the Carnation Revolution restored democracy. Since 1985 Portugal has belonged to the European Community and is the 51st largest economy in the world.

The previous regimen never assigned great importance to sport other than as a form of discipline, or to prepare young people for military service, thereby promoting obedience to the regimen. Those responsible for sport practice in schools was mainly attributed to the military through an organization of fascist nature named *Mocidade Portuguesa* (Portuguese Youth). The most popular sports during the regimen period were soccer and cycling. Soccer continues to be the most popular sport. FIFA World Players of the Year Luís Figo and Cristiano Ronaldo are among the numerous examples of world-class soccer players from Portugal. Also in soccer coaching names like José Mourinho, André Villas-Boas, Fernando Santos, Carlos Queiroz and Manuel José are noted worldwide.

Today sport is an important part of Portuguese society. For example, there are three daily sports newspapers and a considerable amount of television coverage. However, only 5% of the population participate in organized sport (Pordata, 2016). Furthermore, Portugal is included in the group of European countries with the fewest Olympic medals won. Nevertheless, the total number of medals won by Portuguese athletes in the most important sporting competitions, European or international, between 1997 and 2009 grew approximately 260% (Portugal Instituto do Desporto, 2011).

With democracy and the influences of globalization Portuguese society has become more conscious of the importance of sport for all people, and as a result has assigned greater importance to coaching and coach education. The government has created the General Direction of Sports with an education department for the purpose of supporting national sport federations in organizing courses to improve coach education.

The Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth is the organism that governs sport. In 2012 there were 68 sports federations and approximately 11,000 sports clubs. The total number of athletes participating in organized sport was 524,167, mostly in soccer (153,357, 29.2%). Female

participants account for only one-third of the total sport participants. This difference is even more evident in coaching with a total of 20,090 coaches of which only 2,398 are women (11.9%) (Pordata, 2016). A study completed with 2,910 coaches across 41 sports showed that for most Portuguese coaches (81.9%) coaching was not their primary work (Almeida, 2001). Nearly half (48.0%) of the coaches had completed a college degree, and of these 60% were physical education teachers.

Public financing for sport has grown since 1996, particularly during the 2005–2008 Olympic cycle, in which federations and other sport entities benefited from an annual average of 43 million euros. In 2011, due to the economic crises around Europe that affected Portugal in particular, funding for sport decreased considerably. In 2014 public financing decreased to 30 million euros (Pordata, 2016).

## The European Qualifications System

The EU consists of 28 member states. Within the EU the principles of a mutual recognition of qualifications and free movement of labour have been central to its growing social and economic cooperation in different areas, including coaching education (Duffy et al., 2011)

There has been a significant move toward professionalization of coaching in Europe (in almost all sports) in the past few years with over 50,000 coaches now working in paid employment. However, given the social and community based nature of coaching, there is also an increasing number of volunteer coaches. Volunteer coaches are still the largest group of coaches in Europe (ENSSEE, 2009).

The education structure for coaches in Portugal is now closely related to coaching roles and classification of competence used in the European coaching framework (see Figure 1).

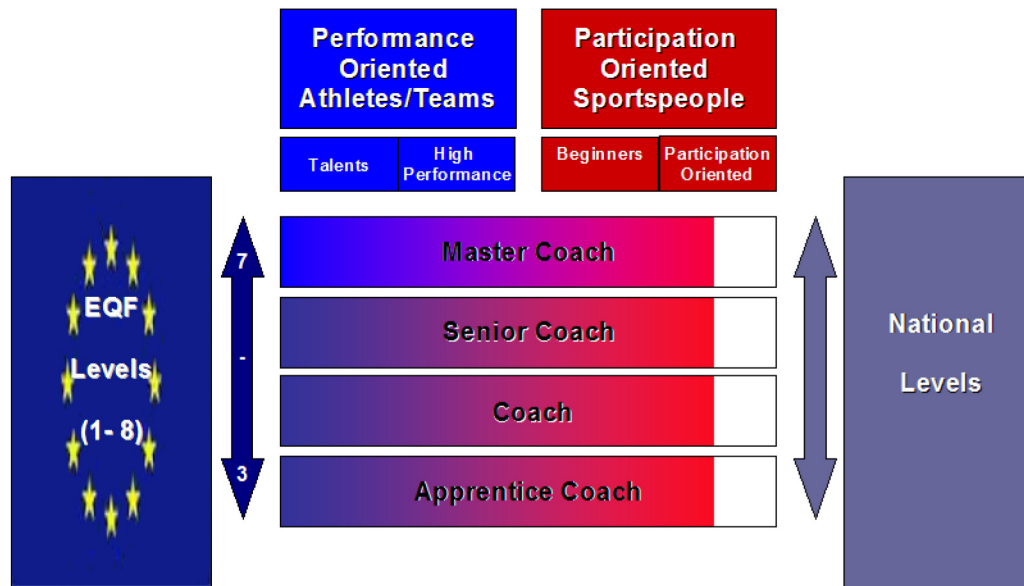
Three main streams of coach education are recognized: through Vocational, Federation and University. A framework for the mutual recognition of qualifications and competence between the three educational streams was suggested, based on the classification of coaching roles and competence. Implementation of the framework will vary between countries due to the unique needs and structure of sport in each member state.

## Coach Education in Portugal

### Coaching Context

Over the past 40 years coach education in Portugal has evolved through many different systems and training processes. In 1978 The National Institute of Sport was created with the responsibility of training sports coaches, with the exception of Physical Education (PE) teachers.

Given the vastness of coaching needs across the Portuguese sports system the goals of the original state-



**Figure 1** — Coaching in Europe: The way forward (ENSSEE, 2009)

run coach education program proved difficult to achieve. Hence, in 1991 the training of sports coaches was passed to the sport federations who created their own coach education curriculum and delivery structure. As a consequence, three or four coaching levels were created while the boundaries of each coach level were not well defined according to their aims, context of practice or content (Mesquita, Resende, Graça, Rosado, & Fernández, 2009).

However, neither the original nor the revised model of coach education appeared to meet the needs of the growing labour market for sport coaches in Portugal (Rosado, 1999). The diverse education models used across the sports federations varied access to coach education, content, and duration of training (Fernandes, Tenreiro, Quaresma, & Maças, 2011).

In 1999 the Portugal Sports Institute created two expert committees to produce two regulatory proposals for coaching and coach education. As a result a draft of a new law was produced, as well as a coach certification manual, the approval of coaching courses, training and regulatory frameworks for mentoring, and general training manuals. The material and the frameworks that underlie them were subject to the Sport Supreme Council opinion, discussed with the Coaches Portuguese Confederation, associations and sports federations in public sessions geared for this purpose. These models have emerged with the recommendations of ENSSEE.

Finally in 2008 access to and provision of sports coaching activity was limited to coaches who earned a coach certificate (*Cédula de Treinador Desportivo*—CDT) (IDP, 2010). As a result, the national government now regulates access to education and training, curriculum, the level of teachers, monitoring, funding and licensing. The government also delivers financial support to education providers, clubs and participants based on

direct costs of coach education and the number of participants. Grants are delivered under the condition that the coach education is part of the qualification framework and that there is a learning outcomes approach. Quality inspections and the accreditation of educational providers must be demonstrated. In Portugal there are provisions for quality assurance organized by certification of the training providers and assessment and validation of sport qualifications.

Coach education qualifications are part of a qualification framework based on learning outcomes. The sport framework is based on occupational and professional profiles developed with branch organizations, employers and employees in the sport sectors. The implementation of the learning outcome approach is not limited to the description of the qualification frameworks developed. It also includes methods of assessments, the curriculum, validation mechanisms and freedom to develop individual pathways.

In 2012 a new law was created to regulate coach education. It was determined that the stages of practitioner development is an important element for the definition of coaching skills required to train athletes at different levels of development. All sports federations must now provide a framework that links athlete development to coach grades.

### Coach Grading System

There are four coach education grades. The coach education courses have a vertical layout in line with the increasing performance of athletes, revealing an education continuum that evolves from grade one through to grade four. This development is noticeable in the form of increased complexity of the coaching content as well as in the amount of hours required to complete each

grade. The initial level courses are designed to prepare coaches to work with young athletes who are starting in the sport or for coaching as an assistant in high performance sport (Resende, Sarmiento, Falcão, Mesquita, & Fernández, 2014).

This grading system establishes a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications. With this approach it is essential to consolidate coach education with the basic needs of each sport in Portugal to ensure standards to qualify professionals and allow for progression to the highest coaching level. The grades recognize both academic training and professional experience providing the possibility of achieving excellence in coaching through different pathways. However, all coaches must perform a curricular component, complete practical exercises with a mentor responsible for supervising them and continue in-service education throughout their coaching career. This means that, for each grade, the coach candidate should perform and be approved in general coaching concepts, sport-specific coaching and then earn a positive assessment while coaching a full sport season.

The mentored practical experience allows for learning in context and recognizes the increased importance of this component of coach education. With this system, the coach can use the theoretical knowledge to support the professional competence that emerges from dealing with athletes in training sessions and competition. The main goal is promote both curricular and practical experience in a way that stimulates reflexivity by the coach and the mentor. With this approach the coach education system promotes sharing of experiences between coaches with different levels of experience and assigns credits of lifelong education to coaches who shape the professional practices of other coaches. A summary of the timetable and different components of each grade is shown in Table 1.

The general component includes content based on scientific disciplines that support the coach work with fundamental knowledge to facilitate coaching while respecting fundamental human values. The sport specific component is based on specific knowledge required to coach a particular sport.

To generalize the possibilities to organize coaching education courses and ensure quality as broadly as possible, the government has implemented benchmarks and a minimum curriculum to be performed in the general component. For the sport specific component all sports

federations are responsible for developing the content and standards. They also are responsible for defining the coach profile for the specific component in each grade. In this way any federation, association, academic institution or particular sport entity can propose a coach education course.

The stage component is compulsory in all grades and must be performed across an entire season. During the stage component the coach must be mentored by another coach who has earned a similar or higher grade.

Each grade has a general objective and identifies activities to be performed, knowledge to be learned, and coach competencies. The competencies are used as an overarching concept within the national qualification system as recognized capacity to mobilize knowledge, skills and attitudes in contexts of work, professional development, education and personal development (EU, 2013).

**Key Components for Each Grade.** Coaching activities are the main tasks to be realized for each coach in the different grades. Organize, direct and evaluate training sessions, manage the sportspeople and the equipment facilities needed for the training while ensuring a safe environment are the primary activities in grade one and two. In grade three and grade four the activities to be performed include being able to manage the career of competitive sportspeople, direct the performance of other coaches, and coordinate sport science experts and all people related to the sports organisation.

At grades three and four, the coach responsibilities and activities are extended to the most important functions in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship. Coaches should be able to lead multidisciplinary technical teams, coordinate regional and national selections, and coordinate ongoing in-service coach education. A coach at these grades should also be aware of the development and implementation of sport policies.

**Coach Knowledge.** General coaching knowledge is content from the various sciences that support sports training like the biological sciences, the social sciences or the pedagogical and didactics sciences. This starts with the fundamentals and grows to a greater achievement in the sport specialization of the coach.

In addition to general coaching knowledge, knowledge of 'what to do' brings together a set of procedures to be realized by the coach, like ensuring the application of fundamental teaching skills (explanation, demonstra-

**Table 1 Timetable and Components of Coach Education for Each Grade (IDP, 2010)**

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
General component	41h	63h	91h	135h
Sport Specific component	40h	60h	90h	135h
Stage component	One season	One season	One season	One season
Total	680h	920h	1280h	1770h

h = hours

tion, observation and correction), implementing high-level training, and selecting and optimising the essential components of sports performance.

Finally, knowledge of how to behave as a coach is an important element across all of the grades in coach education. Establishing the proper way to behave within the sport system enhances the sport spirit and encourages a sense of responsibility while acknowledging the practitioner's autonomy. Key themes in 'knowing how to behave' as a coach include ethical professional practices and adopting appropriate attitudes and behaviours. This focus area also addresses coach initiative, how to manage people and processes through performance evaluations, and lifelong learning.

Although the coach education system varies depending on the practitioner context (sport and developmental stage of athletes), the coach education framework reflects a linear and hierarchal organization of coaching levels assuming a sequence from entry stages to high performance. This association between coach education and athlete's competition level places inexperienced coaches in the early stages of athlete development (Resende et al., 2014).

## Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to share an overview of coaching and coach education in Portugal, which has been strongly influenced by the EU coaching framework. The current coach education structure in Portugal features four levels (grades), and recognizes the influence of formal education along with acknowledging the role of coaching experience while promoting coaching qualifications (ENSSEE, 2007; ICCE, ASOIF, & LMU, 2014). Each grade requires completion of general and sport specific coaching components followed by practice in real contexts under mentored supervision. Together this provides a comprehensive approach to ongoing and progressive coach education across a coach's career.

However, the sport landscape varies widely between different sports which impacts the design and delivery of coach education. In an implementation phase the National Program of coach education faced some resistance especially from influential sport federations such as soccer. There is concern for the economic impact of losing control of coach education and some sport federations believe that coach education in the academic sector is too theoretical.

Nevertheless, the growing qualification exigency with more hours dedicated to coaching courses, the practicum stage as fundamental to achieve the certification, the stimulation of the mentoring process and lifelong education are crucial steps for improving the quality of coaching in Portugal. Current coach education programmes allows for reflection across intensifying levels of competence, as well as methods and evaluation systems that are consistent with coach education research-based guidelines (Cassidy & Kidman,

2010; Cushion, Nelson, Armour, Jones, Standford, & O'Callaghan, 2010).

The future challenge will be implementation of the coach education system across all sports. In fact at this moment only the general component has been implemented up to grade three. The sport specific component of the coach education framework—the federation's responsibility—has yet to be fully created. Only a few sport federations have done this work and only for grades one and two. Another challenge for the coach education system is to formally organise and define the mentorship aspect of the system, and training of coach developers who are needed to deliver the coach education (ICCE, ASOIF, & LMU, 2014). The profile of coaching and coach education in Portugal has evolved greatly and research is needed to evaluate the impact of current approaches to building an effective coach workforce in Portugal.

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