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‘You don’t need a degree to get a coaching job’: investigating the employability of sports coaching degree students.

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‘You don’t need a degree to get a coaching job’: investigating the employability of sports coaching degree students.

Though highly popular, degree-level sports coaching qualifications are in their infancy, and it remains that ‘an individual intending to become an accredited coaching practitioner can only do so by undertaking their sport’s national governing body (NGB) coaching award(s)’ (Nelson et al., 2006 p.254). Consequently, little is known about the development of HE sports coaching students’ employability. This study critically investigates sports coaching students’ degree-study motives, development of employability skills and perceptions of career prospects as graduates. Survey data and follow-up interviews from two U.K. post-92 universities reveal tensions between liberal and vocational philosophies of university education and concerns about the graduate labour market. Critical incidents and missed opportunities in students’ development of key skills for coaching during and outside of university are also discussed.

Keywords: higher education; graduate employability; skills; identity; professionalisation

Introduction

The global provision of university sports coaching degree programmes has expanded significantly over recent years. Indicative of this growth, 245 higher education (HE) sports coaching courses were available in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2009 (Turner & Nelson, 2009), when only 26 institutions offered something similar in 2001 (Lyle, 2002). Such an increase has been attributed to strengthening perceptions of sports coaching as an intellectual endeavour and as a legitimate vocation (Bales, 2006; Jones, 2006), which has underpinned growing student demand for sports coaching degrees (Mallett, Rynne, & Dickens, 2013). This rapid expansion has also been enabled by radical post-war institutional and cultural change, including a trend toward democratisation and scientisation (Schofer & Meyer, 2005), which resulted in the move from an elite to a mass system of HE (Trow, 1973). Comparatively, mass HE has diversified the student population and produced graduates in a wider array of subjects (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006); however, it has also been accused of over-educating students, leading to poorer returns on their investment in a degree (Dolton & Vignoles, 2000), as well as increasing competition for jobs by supplying more graduates than demanded by the labour market, and thus contributing to graduate underemployment and doubts among young people about the value of HE (Branine & Avramenko, 2015).

The ascendance of neoliberal practices and discourses have been heavily implicated in this changing HE landscape (Schofer & Meyer, 2005; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) and beyond, including in fields closely related to sports coaching such as Physical Education and Initial Teacher Education (J. Evans, 2014; J. Evans & Davies, 2015; Macdonald, 2014). As an organising framework for social life,

neoliberalism espouses economic liberalisation through free markets, political deregulation, privatisation and individual competition (Macdonald, 2011). The implications of this ideology in HE has included:

institutional stress on performativity...on strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurance measures and academic audits (Olssen & Peters, 2005 p.313).

Similarly, a neoliberal discourse of coach competence pervades many national and international coach development frameworks, leaving little room in National Governing Body award courses for coaches to 'generate alternative views, knowledge or practices' outside of those sanctioned by coach education (Denison, Mills & Konoval, 2017 p.780). Consequently, Denison et al. (2017) recently argued that coach education has contributed to the production of a largely docile and uncritical but productive workforce of practitioners.

Sports coaching maintains a blended professional identity around the world, with the clear majority of coaches being volunteers. Even so, Duffy *et al.* (2011) noted increasing numbers of part-time and full-time paid coaches in Europe, Australasia and North America, including an estimated 36,537 full-time and 230,765 part-time coaches in the UK. This trend corresponds with a drive towards professionalised, qualified and accountable national coaching workforces in several territories (Turner & Nelson, 2009). Indeed, set against national sport policy making, sports participation and international competitive success have been strongly linked to the provision of paid coaches (De Bosscher, De Knop, Van Bottenburg, & Shibli, 2006). For instance, a national report on the UK coaching workforce found an increase in coaching hours of 178% was needed to meet planned targets for athlete participation as well as performance, requiring more part-time and full-time paid

coaches (North, 2009). Despite these trends, there is a dearth of critical scholarship on the employability skills necessary to become a coach, nor those developed among graduates of HE coaching courses (Turner & Nelson, 2009), which acted as stimuli for this study.

A clear consensus on the meaning of employability is lacking, although it is often expressed in instrumental terms that assume, as if by common sense, it is universally understood (Harvey, 2001). In this vein, Hillage and Pollard (1998) described employability simply as the ability to get and keep employment, and Harvey (2001) outlined a widely held view that sets of technical, discipline-specific and broadly transferable attributes or skills are required to gain and retain employment. However, Holmes (2013) proposed an alternative conceptualisation, one in which a person must not only possess a set of attributes or skills, but also fluently embody them ‘in ways that lead others to ascribe to them the identity of being a person worthy of being employed’ (p.549). Here, Holmes (2013) distinguishes employability as a form of self- and social identity from more traditional discourses of employability as the mere possession of a set of skills. Despite this, the *possession* analogy remains most pervasive, and many institutions draw upon it in their development and promotion of curricula and pedagogies that will purportedly result in graduates possessing certain skills considered essential to future employment (Boden & Nedeva, 2010).

Being considered employable and replete with work skills logically puts a graduate at an advantage in the eyes of employers who increasingly want new employees to ‘hit the ground running’, without having to be supported through costly additional training or extensive supervision (Tariq & Cochrane, 2003). Accordingly,

degree qualifications are often viewed as a proxy for a number of general work skills necessary across various disciplines (Gilbert, Balatti, Turner, & Whitehouse, 2004; Lowden, Hall, Elliot, & Lewin, 2011). For example, Purcell *et al.* (2005) suggested that a degree may be assumed to indicate ‘above average literacy and numeracy, the ability to engage in and complete challenging tasks that involve problem-solving and communication skills – and implicitly, the potential to learn and develop as innovative career staff’ (p.21). What is not clear is how relevant these generic skills are considered to be in the context of sports coaching.

There are few studies of university coach education (Roberts & Ryrie, 2014), and of those available most do not explicitly consider links between pedagogy or curriculum design and employability skills (e.g., Cronin & Lowes, 2016; Jones & Turner, 2006; Morgan, Jones, Gilbourne, & Llewellyn, 2013). Turner and Nelson’s (2009) rare case study of university coach education did find that it can positively impact student coaches’ intellectual and applied capabilities including declarative knowledge and critical thinking skills. The key role of tutors in facilitating effective learning during the degree was particularly highlighted, as were student perceptions of the difficulty of securing a coaching job and of governing body qualifications being essential to accessing the industry. However, Turner and Nelson (2009) provided only surface-level discussion of the development of employability through the programme, and the authors themselves acknowledged the limitations of obtaining the retrospective snapshots of a small sample of graduate coaches from only one HE institution.

Considering further a theme raised by participants in Turner and Nelson’s (2009) work, the ‘degree route’ is still not fundamental to the global or even more

local professional regulation of coaching, as it is in many other disciplines (Duffy et al., 2011). Instead, coaches have most frequently been reported to learn to coach through informal apprenticeships of experience and observation of other coaches (Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003), and by attending short governing body courses and workshops (Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2006). Although some university courses are now formally recognised and endorsed by national sport organisations (Roberts & Ryrie, 2014), it generally remains that ‘an individual intending to become an accredited coaching practitioner can only do so by undertaking their sport’s national governing body (NGB) coaching award(s)’ (Nelson et al., 2006 p.254). This suggests that assumptions made about the employability of graduates in other disciplines, particularly functionalist views that technically focussed, vocational rather than generalist HE will lead more directly to employment may not be mirrored in the domain of sports coaching. Thus, if their learning and experiences of university are to be optimised, sports coaching students’ motives for entering HE and their career aspirations and expectations beyond graduation need to be more clearly understood (Turner & Nelson, 2009).

Positive and negative implications have been identified in relation to the archetypal route of learning through practical experience, observation and NGB qualifications (see Cushion et al., 2010). More specifically, concerns have been raised about the uncritical perpetuation of traditional coaching methods through informal experience, which can arise from socialisation into a subculture whose practice is more often based on beliefs than research evidence (Cushion et al., 2003). Formal coach education has also been criticised for its lack of depth and decontextualised delivery, for its failure to develop reflective and critical thinking skills, and for its

inclusion of passive and simulated, rather than active and realistic learning modes (Cushion et al., 2010; Nash & Sproule, 2009). Indeed, formal coach education delivered by NGBs has been ‘widely criticised by scholars and coaches alike’ (Nelson & Cushion, 2006 p.175), though here too there is a need for research to keep pace with an evolving suite of industry qualifications on offer. Even so, questions have been raised about the ability of NGB qualifications to match the potential for a more ‘powerful holistic educational package’ offered by universities (Turner & Nelson, 2009 p.24). Yet, this claim may be premature when we know little about the experiences of graduates of sports coaching degrees, nor can we assume that such a statement will apply to all coaching-related degrees. Indeed, even the variable titles of available coaching degrees (e.g., BSc Sport Coaching; BA Sport Coaching and Development; BSc Equine Sport Science and Coaching; BSc Community Sport Coaching; BSc Sports Performance and Coaching) hint at the heterogeneity of programme curricula on offer, which will naturally shape the emphasis given to the development of different skills (Cronin & Lowes, 2016). These considerations further underline the need to extend Turner and Nelson’s (2009) exploratory work, with a keener focus on the mechanisms of skills development in different programmes of study.

In beginning to address the need for critical inquiry in HE coach education outlined above, we consider the work of Pierre Bourdieu to be a useful interpretive frame (Naidoo & Williams, 2015). Just as Brown (2005) argued of physical education and school sport, Bourdieu’s relational constructs of habitus, field and capital enable us to consider a *cultural economy* in HE coach education through the practices and preferences of student coaches as a socio-occupational group. Bourdieu conceived

habitus to be schemes of dispositions internalised from the social context, which guide social action, but not always through a calculated adherence to established ‘rules’ (Bourdieu, 1990). Moreover, *fields* are arenas of social relations, places of conflict and competition, in which actors’ activities ‘revolve around the acquisition and development of specific types of “*capital*”, which are defined as particular resources that are invested with value’ [emphasis added] (Naidoo & Williams, 2015 p.211). Thus, Bourdieu’s concepts can support the development of insight into HE coach education which begins to address broader concerns that coach education lacks ‘micro-political consciousness and a social criticality’ (Cushion, 2011 p.166).

The coaching industry has steadfastly maintained NGB coaching qualifications as the hoop to be jumped through if practitioners are to work in certain contexts (Piggott, 2011; Werthner & Trudel, 2009). Thus, coaching qualifications can be understood as a form of legitimised institutionalised cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), affording pre-emptive rights to opportunities in the labour market. Indicative of the anti-intellectualism noted by Nind (1985) in the change-resistant culture of 1980’s British industry (cf. Taylor & Garratt, 2010), sports coaching is in the perplexing situation of being a highly popular degree route, whilst the legitimacy of such qualifications is simultaneously questioned by the very workplace that undergraduate students are studying to enter. At the same time, however, Andrews and Higson (2008) have cautioned that the rapid expansion of HE, catalysed by globalisation and neoliberal agendas, may have placed a strain on the ability of universities to develop appropriately skilled graduates. Specifically, Boden and Nedeva (2010) suggest there has been a weakening of standards as universities compete to recruit students and be ranked favourably in league tables.

Given that ‘higher education is likely to take an increasingly central role in the education of coaches at all levels’ (Taylor & Garratt, 2008 p.7), particularly as more and better qualified coaches are required to meet the demand for coaching (McCullick, Belcher, & Schempp, 2005), university sports coaching degree programmes should be subject to critical scrutiny. Therefore, the aims of this study were to investigate who attends sports coaching degree programmes, their reasons for enrolling, perceptions about content and delivery, intentions for and expectations about the transition to employment following graduation, and what impact, if any, undertaking such courses has on their employability.

Methods

Participants

Participants were students studying BSc Sports Coaching, BA Sport Development with Coaching and BSc Applied Sport Science with Coaching degrees at two large UK post-92 universities. Like most UK HE institutions offering sports coaching degrees, taught content varied between these programmes but generally included core modules related to research methods, sport science, pedagogy and applied coaching modules (Cronin & Lowes, 2016). The programmes were more distinctive from year two onwards, with a clearer focus on, for example, applied practice and talent identification topics on BSc Sports Coaching, physical education and sport policy topics on BA Sport Development with Coaching, and biomechanical assessment and human physiology topics on BSc Applied Sport Science with Coaching. One university delivered their programmes over three years, using mostly ‘core’ modules.

The other institution ran a four-year degree and offered more optional modules, giving students the chance to specialise more, for instance, in sport psychology. Typically, delivery of all these degree programmes involved a combination of mass lectures, smaller group seminars, activity-based practical sessions, work placements and independent study

Data Collection

Following a similar study of sport science graduates by Sleaf and Read (2006), data were generated using a mixed-methods design that incorporated a questionnaire and follow-up qualitative semi-structured interviews with students from the programmes described. After Hesse-Bieber (2010), the approach adopted can be described as qualitatively driven, in that emphasis was given to understanding how sport coaching students made sense of employability within a multi-layered view of the nuances of their social world. The approach can also be described as a sequential mixed-methods design because quantitative data were collected and analysed in phase one of the study before the qualitative data were generated and interpreted in phase two. Consequently, the study benefitted from the quantitative strength of generating large volumes of contextual information about the participants, allowing comparisons to be made across categories. It also benefitted from the strengths of qualitative methods in providing rich insights into the contexts in which these participants act, scrutinising the meanings and interpretations they make of their lives and experiences (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Valuably, this enabled the study to move beyond simply describing trends in student employability to exploring the deeper processes that regulated and shaped sports coaching students' identities and experiences.

To combine qualitative and quantitative methods, and their underlying assumptions, is not without challenges. Indeed, debates over their compatibility has been characterised as a paradigm war spanning 50 years (Denzin, 2010). However, across this period, it has also been argued that, rather than becoming lost in a debate unlikely to be resolved soon (Greene & Caracelli, 2003), attention should instead be given to taking advantage of the useful features of each in combination (Merton & Kendall, 1946). Combining methods was advantageous to address the purposes of this study, because it could develop ‘richer detail than either method can generate alone’ (Fuentes, 2008 p.1592). Indeed, closed or scale-based questionnaire questions, used in isolation, may not capture important detail related to the research question, though it has also been suggested that their ability to ensure anonymity at the point of data collection enhances the trustworthiness of the data (Atkinson, 2012).

The combination of methods in this study meant questions in the follow-up interviews could be informed by the findings of the questionnaire, enabling elaboration and clarification of the initial data. For instance, scale-based questions about the extent to which various work skills were developed at university from the questionnaire informed the need to probe areas where there was a trend of perceived strength or weakness in the interviews. Thus, rather than being positioned as ‘second best’ to the questionnaire, or simply a means to triangulate its quantitative findings (Hesse-Biber, 2010), the sequential design was essential to refine the focus of the interviews, to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena of greatest interest for the aims of this study.

The Work Skills Questionnaire (WSQ) was adapted from Sleaf and Read (2006). The revised WSQ incorporated Likert-scale, multiple-choice and more open-

ended questions that investigated employment aspirations and degree study motives, and assessed three dimensions of work skills development: Personal Skills, Business Skills, and Interactive Skills. Respondents rated the perceived importance of each work skill and the degree to which each learning context was perceived to support individual work skill development (e.g., lecture/seminar, work placement, independent study). Questions concerning the amount of development of each work skill were answered on a three-point scale (developed a lot; developed a little; not developed at all), those focused on the perceived importance for future employment were answered on a similar scale (use a lot; use a little; not use). Following institutional ethical approval, and after giving informed consent, the questionnaire was administered in university teaching rooms, during timetabled lectures towards the end of the academic year. The 456 respondents who volunteered to complete the questionnaire were reminded that anonymity was assured and that they were free to withdraw or not complete the questionnaire without penalty or disadvantage. The response rate was 59.30% of all sports coaching students at the two institutions. 22.59% of students were in their first year of undergraduate study, 36.62% were second-year students, 34.65% were third-year students, and 6.14% were fourth-year students. The mean age of participants was 20.87 years, with 33.77% identifying as female and 66.23% identifying as male.

Following the questionnaire, a purposive random sample (see Teddlie & Yu, 2007) of nine students were selected from those undertaking their final year of study (year three or year four) and who had volunteered to attend follow-up interviews. Final-year students were deemed best able to provide insights into employability experiences across the whole undergraduate journey. Six were male and three were

female. On average, these participants were 21.22 years old. Follow-up interviews were semi-structured in nature, in that certain topics (e.g., degree study motives, career aspirations etc.) were identified by the research team for discussion in advance, but without planning specific questions (Patton, 2002). This gave the researchers freedom to construct questions in more natural, conversational ways, adapting to the circumstances of the interview, as well as to probe, explore and check the responses given, adding further depth to the information gained (Purdy, 2014). The interviews were split into four sections that focussed on participants' backgrounds, degree study motives and experiences, work skills development, degree evaluations and career aspirations. Broadly, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital catalysed the development and analysis of the interviews, following other studies of employability (Redmond, 2006), because his thinking offers a sound lens through which to understand what is valued and not valued as forms of currency (capital) in a setting (field) where access and social position is struggled over. Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in a private, quiet room at a time convenient to each student. Interviewees were reminded that information provided would be anonymised, that they should give their honest opinions, and that no right or wrong answers were expected (Turner & Nelson, 2009). Each interview was recorded on a digital voice recorder before being transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Following Sleaf and Read (2006), descriptive analysis of the quantitative questionnaire data was undertaken including the calculation of frequencies, percentages and means.

A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive thematic analysis was used to interpret the interview data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This approach responded to the purposes of the study by allowing a deductive comparison of the data to existing ideas and concepts (e.g., habitus, capital and field etc.) while remaining open to the recognition of new themes and ways of understanding derived from the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A consistent process during analysis was agreed and then followed, which involved multiple readings of each transcript to ensure our familiarity with the texts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

First, each author identified codes by manually highlighting and labelling extracts of text where one meaningful idea or piece of information was evident. Some codes maintained the wording or concepts expressed by the respondent, while others were informed by the researchers' awareness of relevant concepts and theories (Braun & Clarke, 2012). For example, the authors considered the data's fit with different conceptual definitions of employability, such as Holmes (2013) distinction between employability as a form of self- and social identity, and more traditional discourses of employability as the possession of a set of skills. Notes and memos related to the extracts were added to the transcript margins acknowledging relationships, patterns and comparisons between codes. For instance, the second author noted against a section of transcript eight referring to the student's perception of needing a degree to access better paid positions: 'this point contradicts what is said earlier (p.6) about not being motivated by money.' Each author then created tentative categories, which were formed from groups of related extracts and codes with similar meanings. These were named according to an abstracted concept that captured the substance of the category (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Following separate analyses, the authors exchanged their transcripts, complete with notes, memos and codes for critical comparison before meeting to further discuss interpretive themes. This involved questioning and clarifying our analysis together. Each of us was a ‘critical friend’ to the others (Smith & Sparkes, 2006), our shared purpose being to ‘encourage reflexivity by challenging each other’s construction[s] of knowledge’ (Cowan & Taylor, 2016 p.508). As Smith and McGannon (2017) recently summarised, the strength of this co-productive practice was the exploration of different interpretations of the data, in order to develop our analysis, rather than to seek a forced consensus. In search of further critique, our preliminary analysis was then shared with a wider group at each institution, which included member reflections with students from the group who had completed the interviews as well as discussing our interpretations and their implications with academic colleagues (Smith & McGannon, 2017). As Wolcott (1994 p.42) explained, we wished to engage in a wide ‘dialogue about interpretive possibilities’, so that multiple perspectives and alternative insights could be considered. Finally, the research team met to review the feedback from participants and colleagues, scrutinising our work to ensure it represented a plausible and sophisticated analysis that addressed the purposes of this study (Braun & Clarke, 2012). We present this analysis below, using pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of students. Further demographic information relating to the questionnaire respondents is discussed first, before interpretations of their perceptions and experiences relating to degree-level study and employability are considered.

Results and Discussion

Students' Coaching Backgrounds

On average, participating students had 3.17 years \pm 2.17 years of practical coaching experience, showing few had much involvement in coaching before starting their degrees, which follows Cronin and Lowes' (2016) findings with student coaches from another UK institution. Most students (40.12%) held a UK Coaching Certificate Level One (UKCC; or equivalent) formal coaching qualification, with 29.17% having no formal qualifications at the time of study; 25.44% had a UKCC (or equivalent) Level Two, 4.61% had a UKCC (or equivalent) Level Three, and 0.66% had a UKCC (or equivalent) Level Four. At the lower levels these findings are broadly similar to Nash and colleagues' (2013) report on the UK coaching system; although, the much wider range of coaching experience among their respondents (between 3 and 38 years) likely contributed to the greater proportions of coaches in their sample with UKCC (or equivalent) Level Three and Level Four qualifications.

The most frequent sports coached were soccer (50.88%), basketball (6.14%), netball (5.04%), rugby (3.95%) and cricket (1.97%). The popularity of these sports for young coaches, reflecting tastes grounded in a habitus shaped by lifelong processes of socialisation, mirrors a traditional diet of team games in UK Physical Education (PE) curricula (Vandermeerschen, Vos & Scheerder, 2016). However, such a strong focus on 'traditional sports' has been criticised in schools, in particular for its lack of relevance to subsequent participation habits of adults (K. Green, Smith, & Roberts, 2005). This points towards a different consideration for this discussion: what should be the balance between the specialised technical knowledge required to coach specific sports and the promotion of broader intellectual skills, qualities and knowledge at university? As Cronin and Lowes (2016) point out, each additional sport or activity

introduced to students requires basic instruction on relevant rules, safety, techniques and tactics. This leaves less time, in the traditions of Newman's liberal university education, for the cultivation of the intellect. Thus, as Blackmore (2001) outlines for other subjects in the humanities and social sciences, critical debate is required that focusses on the role of higher education in sports coaching - a debate we hope to stimulate.

Initial Degree-study Motives

The most frequently reported motives for applying to university were to develop a broader range of skills and knowledge (26.80%) and because students perceived that a degree was necessary to enter their chosen career (26.42%). Other degree-study motives were developing specialist skills and knowledge (22.32%), improving employment prospects more generally (19.05%), in order to change their career options (3.73%), other (1.12%), and because an employer requested/required them to do it (0.56%).

In the interviews, despite concurrent concerns about limited job opportunities specific to coaching (see below), students discussed anticipating a graduate earnings premium (Britton, Dearden, Shephard, & Vignoles, 2016), which acted as a key motive for enrolling on their degree course. As Luke explained, elaborating on his decision to enrol at university rather than follow the more traditional route of practical experience and NGB qualifications, he had initially expected a degree would ease his access to more senior work roles after graduation:

I knew that I could just go into coaching and do some stuff with the [National Governing Body] if I wanted, but I knew that at the end of the day if you wanted to get into a higher position, where you're earning more

money, you need a degree. I looked at a degree as a means of me being able to do what I need to do.

This point was mirrored by others:

Because I wanted to be a coach, it (having a degree) could possibly lead me up to a higher place on a coaching environment – rather than just being a coach; you could be the head coach. If you have a degree it kind of puts you on that pedestal to go out and get a paid job straight away. (Andrea)

A degree will definitely enhance it (employment opportunities), a hundred percent, because you see a lot of jobs now it's all graduate students, or we want graduates with a 2:1 degree or something like that. (Tim)

I always thought that if I got a degree just now, five years down the line, even if it wasn't something I wanted to do, I would have a degree that would open up other doors for me. (Ben)

These applicants approached university with a functionalist ideology of technocratic rationality, where the means were anticipated as if common sense and natural (e.g., acquire a university degree), and the ends were unproblematically defined (e.g., get a higher-level job; earn more money). This pursuit of educational qualifications, despite only a 'vague sense that it would "lead to something"', has been described as a kind of instrumental credentialism (Tomlinson, 2008 p.53), one tied to the realisation that employers use them to exclude unsuitable applicants for jobs (Bourdieu & Boltanski, 1978). In agreement with this perspective, even where jobs in coaching were known to be scarce, student applicants pursued a degree in this field, perceiving it would offer them a positional advantage in the graduate employment stakes.

Initial expectations about the impact of a coaching degree on future income were grounded in the recognition of a general trend for higher levels of educational attainment to lead to higher career earnings. However, this thinking lacked a more critical consciousness of the substantial variation in graduate earnings due to a range of factors, even between graduates from the same institution, studying the same subject (Britton et al., 2016). Such logic seemed to be perpetuated by a kind of family

habitus (Coakley, 2006), strongly shaped by parental expectations that incorporated developmental goals for their child (e.g., gain a job) and identified the types of activities believed to be helpful in achieving these goals (e.g., get a degree):

I've always wanted come to university and do something; it's never been an option not to. My parents have always been 'you've got to'... and I think I got a lot from school. When I was at school, they used to do a thing called Aim Higher, for kids who would have the grades to get to university, but the parents had not been... so they thought we needed that push there. (Kim)

There was a desire to achieve a qualification; I've always been taught that that is the route for me, whether that be from parental influence or throughout my education, that's always been the next step... (Ben)

Parents, particularly from working class backgrounds and those who had not themselves experienced HE, have previously been found to view gaining a degree as critical to their child's future success (Reay, David, & Ball, 2005), and research has also shown that teachers have a strong influence on decisions about university (Davies, Qiu, & Davies, 2014; Dunne, King, & Ahrens, 2014; Maringe, 2006). However, as Reay (1998) notes, higher education choice-making is intricate and multifactorial, and therefore 'needs to be analysed in relation to all of these influencing fields within which students are differentially positioned' (p.528). Thus, the impact of social networks on the decision making of (prospective) coaches who choose to enrol in higher education offers an interesting area for further study.

Dealing with Debt and Graduate Aspirations

Although they all studied on a full-time basis, 38.01% of students also reported volunteering as coaches. 32.13% held non-coaching part-time jobs, with some being paid, part-time coaches (18.10%). Few held full-time coaching (1.66%) or full-time non-coaching jobs (1.06%). In recent years, there has been a rapid increase in students

turning to part-time work to deal with the financial hardship accompanying degree-level study (C. Evans, Gbadamosi, & Richardson, 2014). This can bring difficulties when trying to balance work and study, particularly where students are also committed athletes, which many of the participants in the present study were (Cosh & Tully, 2014; Curtis & Shani, 2002). Interestingly, only 15.03% of students believed that actively studying for a coaching degree had helped them to gain part-time employment during their time at university; practical experience (30.91%) and holding industry qualifications (e.g., UKCC Level One; 28.04%) were considered the most significant drivers of in-degree employability.

Considering the future, 44.60% of participants described undertaking their coaching degree with the aspiration of becoming a secondary-level PE teacher. 26.14% wanted to be full-time coaches, 5.76% primary school teachers, 3.84% strength and conditioning coaches, and 3.12% performance analysts, among a range of other less frequently reported sport and non-sport related jobs. Large proportions of sport students in Turner and Nelson (2009) and Slep and Read (2006) also wanted to become PE teachers, which underlines the importance for graduate progression and future employability, as well as for the proper preparation of practitioners (Jones, 2006), of coaching degree curricula including a substantive focus on sport pedagogy and practice.

Within six months of graduation 21.45% of students hoped to be working as full-time coaches, while 19.57% anticipated to be coaching on a voluntary basis, with 15.95% predicting they would be coaching part time, and 14.48% expecting they would continue to further study. 28.55% of respondents expected not to be involved in coaching, in full-time, part-time or voluntary roles, immediately after graduation.

Most of the interview participants expressed concerns about the labour market, with Andrea stating:

I just don't see a coach having many opportunities after university.

Indicative of this perceived lack of graduate coaching opportunities, which becomes another theme of this discussion, Luke said:

There isn't that much money to be made or full-time coaching opportunities in Britain that are worthwhile, I think. So, many people see this [degree] as a way into P.E. teaching... I think everyone looks at coaching as a way to get into post-grad or something else, because it's a plan B - it was a plan B for me and it was a plan B for a lot of other people that I've spoke to that have done this course. I never had an ambition to specifically commence sports coaching; it was all because I couldn't get into P. E. teaching right away, so I came into coaching, because I knew it would possibly allow me to get into that area.

Exact figures are unavailable, but reports on the UK coaching workforce acknowledge a lack of employment opportunities (McIlroy, 2015; North, 2009), finding between 3.0% and 10.0% of coaches are employed full-time, with between 21.0% and 23.0% being paid on a part-time basis. Sleaf and Reed (2006) also found that a relatively small proportion of sport science graduates (23.0%) ended up working in sport-related occupations.

Probing the reasons relatively few coaching students expected to go on to work in their field of study after graduation, some explained that the varied modules included within their degrees had altered their aspirations. For example, Kieran described how their initial intention to become a PE teacher had changed:

Towards the end of first year into second year we'd seen all the disciplines surrounding sports coaching: strength and conditioning, biomechanics, psychology, and I just felt that it was just quite multi-disciplin[ary], there's so many different avenues to be going down... So, that's kind of why I changed.

It was also clear that some students who first enrolled with the idea of becoming a teacher, did so because they perceived sports coaching was an easier way to gain the necessary first degree to access a postgraduate teaching qualification than other first degree routes (especially sports science). In fact, students from both universities alluded to the initial assumption that sports coaching would be a more straightforward degree route. Liam explained his early expectations:

I thought it would be a lot more simple, a lot more. I didn't realise that it's in the depth it is now... And people always went 'Oh you're doing sports coaching, that must be quite easy'.

It may be, as anxiety has increased about the rising financial pressures of university (Wilkins, Shams, & Huisman, 2013) and with a growing proportion of jobs requiring graduate-level qualifications (F. Green, Felstead, Gallie, & Henseke, 2016), that university applicants are seeking to minimise risk and maximise their odds of 'success' by choosing degree programmes that are perceived as easier (Troiano & Elias, 2014). In turn, the marketisation of HE encourages universities to compete to recruit these students by promising high grades and easy workloads (Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009), which again promotes curricula and pedagogy focussed on the development of narrow technical competence over broader and more complex intellectual skills at university.

Further research is needed to explore the decision making of pre-students in sports and coaching fields. Moreover, the tensions and challenges navigated by tutors and university leaders in the light of these findings need to be better understood. We suggest that universities should frame student expectations clearly through detailed information and transparency (Kandiko & Mawer, 2013), whilst also being wary of pretence to a false dichotomy between liberal and vocational university education

where there is room and need for the rigorous inclusion of both (Carr, 2009). Indeed, we agree with Archer and Davison (2008 p.8) that ‘universities need to equip students with “deep” intellectual capabilities *and* a battery of applied practical skills which make graduates more “work-ready”’ [emphasis added].

In-degree Professional Development

During their degrees, students reported completing a wide variety of what has been conceptualised as formal and non-formal professional coach development (Nelson et al., 2006), offered either by their university as an extension of the programme of study or externally by another organisation (e.g., sport governing bodies). Most popular were introductory, sport-specific UKCC (or equivalent) Level One coaching qualifications (25.77%), or a UK Coaching workshops (25.00%), such as Safeguarding and Protecting Children or How to Coach Disabled People in Sport. Some participants progressed to a UKCC (or equivalent) Level Two 15.58%, but few completed a UKCC (or equivalent) Level Three 0.38% and no one advanced to the UKCC (or equivalent) Level 4 during their degree. Other professional development encompassed governing body workshops (e.g., The Football Association Emergency Aid Course; 15.38%), other (e.g., coaching seminars; 14.42%) and fitness-related qualifications (e.g., boxercise instructor; 3.46%). Most in-degree professional development was undertaken during first year (44.93%) or second year (36.52%), with less completed in years three (17.40%) and four (1.15%).

Like Tomlison’s (2008) study with students from a range of subjects at a pre-92 university, sports coaching students at post-92 universities in the present research held a conflicted view of their degree as a ‘positional good’, a commodity to open up

opportunities in the labour market, but which was limited by a general lack of such opportunities, fierce competition for jobs upon graduation and the weak industry credibility of coaching degrees. In other words, a degree was considered ‘weak currency’ by sports coaching students, possibly because they ‘possess all their value only within the limits of the academic market’ (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 507).

Consequently, most students interviewed talked of the need to add to their degree credentials with practical experience and NGB qualifications:

It’s all well and good to say I did the same degree as everyone else, but... if you pick up the [NGB] badges and you have this university degree it’s just, it really bodes well for you for seeking employment. (Kieran)

I’ve done a lot of coaching and I’ve got experience and stuff. I feel pretty prepared, but I still feel like I need to get more coaching badges... I think if you just had the degree and went to a job interview, compared to guys who’ve got a [NGB] coaching license, I think he [sic] would always get it rather than you. (Liam)

For instance, Luke described being unsuccessful when interviewing for post-graduate training as a PE teacher due to the high number of indistinct applicants from similar degree programmes:

The thing about undergraduate degrees, I think... it’s very hard to tell me apart from anyone else. I think that’s where I lost out in the P.E. interview. There was me and sixty other people for this course, sixty other people from different sports-related degree courses.

Indeed, students emphasised the ‘need to develop a narrative of employability that encompassed experiences and achievement outside of their degrees’ (Tomlinson, 2008 p.57). This corresponds to what Rudd and Goodson (2017) describe as the regimes of performativity, accountability and standardisation that accompany neoliberal policy making in higher education, here also tied to increasing professional regulation and accompanying regulatory technologies of sports organisations, which judge and compare coaches, and incentivise adherence to a culturally-scripted

character of identity – in this case having sufficient industry experience and industry qualifications. For example, Ben reflected with confidence that he had undertaken extensive volunteering and other practical experience, as well as gaining several industry qualifications:

On my CV, when you compare that to some other people on the course, they might have similar grades - distinction - I've got all this host of different [industry] qualifications and experience that will set me apart... that might stand me in good stead for my career.

Thus, as we discuss further, opportunities within the programme of study to enhance their curriculum vitae (CV) were highly valued by students, particularly where learning was situated in 'real-world' contexts and there was a chance to engage in career networking.

The Perceived Importance and Development of Work Skills

Following Slep and Read (2006), results relating to students' work skill development are initially grouped into three areas: personal skills; business skills; and interactive skills, before a selective discussion is presented.

Interactive skills were identified by students as being the most important work skills. 76.30% of students thought they would be used a lot in future employment.

Communication, teamwork and leadership were considered very useful by almost all students, with *interpersonal skills* also being ranked highly. Being able to make a *logical argument* and *negotiation* were thought of as relatively less useful for future employment. Table 1 shows student perceptions of the extent to which interactive work skills were developed at university.

****Table 1 near here****

Personal skills were also considered important, with 71.74% of students conceiving they would be used a lot in their future careers. *Timekeeping, commitment, reliability, determination, self-confidence, drive, initiative, self-presentation,* and *problem solving* were considered likely to be most useful by a clear majority. Whereas, *flexibility, self-awareness, creativity, risk taking* and *numeracy skills* were anticipated to be relatively less useful for students' career goals. Table 2 shows student perceptions of the extent to which personal work skills were developed at university.

****Table 2 near here****

Business skills were considered least likely to be useful overall. Only *planning/organising* and *working with information* were considered by more than 75.00% of respondents to be very useful. In contrast, a higher number of students ranked *entrepreneurial skills, financial knowledge* and *commercial awareness* to likely be of no use in their future employment. Table 3 shows student perceptions of the extent to which business skills were developed at university.

****Table 3 near here****

Overall, students were either *reasonably satisfied* (62.89%) or *very satisfied* (32.44%) with their work skill development at university, while a relatively small proportion of students were *not very satisfied* (4.22%) or *dissatisfied* (0.44%) with how their work skills had been developed during their coaching degree. A comprehensive discussion of the comparative value of individual skills for sports coaches is beyond the scope of this paper. So, the balance of our selective discussion in this section is given to experiences noted for their value in developing work skills, as well as those skills positioned as important in the literature of coaching, but seemingly devalued by student coaches or not developed as well at university.

Students discussed the importance and development of several key skills linked in the literature to notions of good or effective coaching practice. More specifically, dominant conceptualisations of coaching as a dynamic, social endeavour were reflected in the primacy given to *communication* and *teamwork* skills (Hall et al., in review; Potrac, Nelson, & O’Gorman, 2015). Similarly, *leadership* was seen as a key skill that students developed, corresponding to the coach’s influential position in the sporting landscape (Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2010). *Self-confidence* was also recognised as being crucial to effectively enact the leadership role of the coach for positive athlete outcomes (cf. Maleté & Feltz, 2000). Alongside these skills, what can be classified as a set of transferable graduate competencies were identified as being well developed at university: *timekeeping*, *reliability*, *commitment* and *determination* (Andrews & Higson, 2008).

Examples of critical incidents for the development of these skills were identified. These were descriptions of events and experiences that were personally meaningful or revelatory in terms of work skills development (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005). Students' most meaningful experiences were found to be related to interactions with tutors, to tasks undertaken in seminars and for assessments, and to participation in work experience or industry placements. Discussing important interactions with tutors, Liam described the impact of receiving positive feedback following a practical assessment on his increasing *confidence*:

The assessor came over... I'm standing there thinking, 'Oh, I'm not very confident'. He said 'No, you are, you're delivering it well. Your clear information is coming across to the [participants].' He said 'No, you should be really pleased, well done.' I thought maybe I actually am. From then on, I felt a little bit better about my delivery.

This chimes with existing research exploring the impact of tutor feedback on student self-efficacy, highlighting the importance of supportive feedback relating to 'hands-on' learning that is both frequent and detailed (Colbeck, Cabrera, & Terenzini, 2001). Moving beyond a simple description of events (Butterfield et al., 2005), the interviews elicited further insights into the beliefs and expectations that underpinned why feedback from tutors was valued, such as from Ben:

You're being taught by experts in the field... I think getting that, you know, expertise, which you wouldn't be able to get anywhere else other than the university environment; having knowledge of their field, being experienced, having credibility. So, you know, we can see that they've implemented research or they've been out in the field and they've practiced within that environment.

Thus, analogous to descriptions of lecturer practitioners in nursing (Fairbrother & Ford, 1998), coaching students most valued interactions were with tutors who had both academic and practical credibility, otherwise forms of legitimate knowledge and recognised membership of the coaching and academic communities (i.e. social and

cultural capital; Bourdieu, 1986). Indeed, tutors who could model the translation of taught theory in practice, drawing on their own experiences as practitioners, were specifically extolled by several students. In order to effectively inform their own professional preparation and ongoing development, the credibility and effectiveness of tutors in sports coaching higher education are worthy of further investigation, the analysis of which might usefully be framed by notions of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977).

Work skill development was also explicitly linked to tasks undertaken in seminars and for assessments. For example, Ben discussed the benefits, for the development of *logical argument* skills, of engaging in seminar debates:

This year we had to do a debate, so it was totally different to anything that we'd ever done before. It wasn't just reading articles, written-down notes, it made you have to erm, to sort of construct an argument out of the research and the data. It's definitely my highlight of the [seminars]... I just think it was brilliant.

Likewise, considering the development of *communication* and *interpersonal* skills,

Chris described the impact of a group assessment:

...on the psychology module, where we delivered a pitch... where we had to almost imagine we were setting up our own sports psychology business, and pitch that as if we were pitching a tender to UK Sport... I think that's really helped.

Critically, and in contrast to the instrumental credentialism of their initial degree-study motives, final year students had come to most highly value tasks where the first priority was to promote meaningful learning (Carless, 2017). Indeed, activities tended to be judged favourably when they authentically mirrored elements of real-life professional practice, were rich in feedback, and helped to build confidence, all of

which reinforce recent recommendations for productive task design in higher education (Carless, 2017).

The final major theme concerning meaningful work skills development at university was engaging in work experience or industry placement. Students reflected regularly on the benefit of placements for the development of their *interpersonal*, *communication* and *pedagogical* skills. For instance, Ben recalled the value of working in a school during a placement module:

I definitely feel that one of the highlights was working with young children - you need to be patient. You can't just snap at them or anything like that. It's just another way of dealing with things, another way of looking at things...that's definitely helped.

And Kieran discussed the importance of experimenting with pedagogical theory in real-world situations:

It's good to test these theories in practice throughout the placement modules... being able to reflect: well this didn't work, I could try it again or I could change what I've done.

Moreover, Kim and Ben explained how engaging in successive rather than isolated placements helped them to become more self-aware over time, for example, in tracking their development of confidence:

When we were doing [the placement module] in second year, when I went into a school, we were just observing. I was quite intimidated by kids of 16 [years old]; I was only three years older than them, four years older. I didn't feel that I was ready to teach them, but this year I feel a lot more confident by doing another placement in schools. (Kim)

I felt like CPD was useful, because you can see your progress. Like, when you set yourself targets and then you go out and do them, then you can see... like reflect on them at the end. (Ben)

Chris also related how he had made valuable connections during his placement, which enabled him to undertake further professional development alongside his degree and engage in broader networking within the industry:

The placement was (for) ten weeks... but I ended up doing it for three months, or something like that, because I valued it... I developed a rapport with the active skills coordinators... He got some funding, so me and eight others got to do this fitness instructor qualification... That allowed me to create a relationship with a business that did personal training.

In fact, several students talked about their work placement module leading to beneficial development opportunities or directly to employment.

The findings add to existing support for the inclusion of placement modules in sport programmes (Fleming, Martin, Hughes, & Zinn, 2009; Sleaf & Reed, 2006), and to wider views of their positive benefit for graduate employability (Edwards, 2014). Furthermore, our data reinforce that placements can support networking opportunities, connecting students to potential employers (Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick, & Cragolini, 2004; Helyer & Lee, 2014), and effectively act as an extended interview and induction process for subsequent jobs. However, a trend towards more bite-sized modules and semesterisation in university degrees poses challenges when trying to embed coherent, linked and longitudinal work-based experiences (Blackwell, Bowes, Harvey, Hesketh, & Knight, 2001). Yet, as the present data show, iterative experience, enabling reflection on development over time, and promoting connections between their studies and the workplace, appears to be an important part of students' emergent identity development in the process of *becoming* an employable graduate (Holmes, 2013). Consequently, universities should ensure effective workplace learning is embedded in sports coaching programmes, which reflects the changing nature of employment by incorporating a range of experiences authentic to different graduate employment situations (Helyer & Lee, 2014).

The questionnaire data also revealed that some work skills with relevance to coaching were not valued as highly overall by students or identified as having been

developed as effectively at university. Interestingly, these work skills can be characterised as deeper, more sophisticated intellectual capabilities, especially when compared to less complex skills such as *timekeeping* (Johnson, 1997). Firstly, students expected the skills of *logical argument* and *negotiation* to be relatively less useful for future employment compared to other interactive skills. Moreover, a concerning number considered *logical argument* (16.85%) and *negotiation* skills (30.34%) not to have been developed at all during their studies. This was despite the use of *logical argument* been connected to important processes of interpersonal influence in coaching (Potrac, Jones, & Armour, 2002; Potrac, Jones, & Cushion, 2007), most notably where coaches use persuasive informational logic to promote, for example, athlete behaviour change (Rylander, 2015). Along these lines, coaching has been portrayed as a fundamentally *negotiated* and contested activity (Potrac & Jones, 2009). Thus, student coaches should be adequately prepared to engage (implicitly and explicitly) in mediating interactions with athletes (and others) over time and towards a range of outcomes; from shaping the boundaries of their own coaching roles (Jones, 2000), or choosing the colour of a gymnast's performance attire (Poczwardowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2002), to deciding on the focus of practise activities and competition tactics (Camiré, Trudel, & Forneris, 2009).

The questionnaires also showed that *flexibility*, *creativity* and *self-awareness* and were less highly valued, and considered among the least developed personal skills of coaching students. Yet, engaging effectively with the unavoidably emergent nature of the coaching process, and in mediating interactions with athletes, requires *flexibility* and *creativity* (Collins, Carson, & Collins, 2016). For instance, Vallee and Bloom (2005) linked the coach's use of creativity to the design of effective training

sessions that challenge and stimulate athletes intellectually, and Bowes and Jones (2006) highlighted the importance of coaches' adaptability and ingenuity when operating at the 'edge of chaos'. Furthermore, in spite of challenges constraining the complementary skill of *self-awareness* (Millar, Oldham, & Donovan, 2011; Hall & Gray, 2016), being able, for example, to recognise and thus regulate the expression and impact of their emotions on others is imperative if student coaches are to deal well with the various setbacks and challenges they encounter in the course of their social roles (Wagstaff, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2013).

In contrast with the questionnaire data, final-year students frequently recounted examples during the interviews of how higher education had, in fact, helped them to develop the skills noted above. For example, Kieran illustrated how he had developed *logical argument* skills:

I feel like I can support an argument. I could use that academic side to prove why I was doing what I was doing and the rationale behind that.... There's an answer or an argument or a rationale for everything at university. They [tutors] say 'why?' They expect you to know why you've done it or what your rationale is behind it.

This corresponds to Ben's earlier quote when he discussed the benefit of engaging in debates during seminars. Further, Tim and Liam described how, over the course of their degrees, their own coaching practice had become progressively less constrained by highly-structured session planning as they now tried to be sensitive to the emergent context and how best to creatively adapt their practice to achieve more effective outcomes. Finally, alongside vignettes from other students already included above, Chris specifically highlighted modules focussed on coaching pedagogy and reflective practice for their impact on his *self-awareness*:

The ability to reflect and critique practice - the [practical] modules (have) been particularly effective for that in terms of gaining an idea of what your philosophy is

as a coach, because I'll be honest, coming into university, I didn't have a philosophy. I did have a philosophy, but I wasn't aware of what it was. I think that ability to critically reflect and then consider how that's impacting on your practice that was really beneficial... understanding my own philosophy and whether that's something I'm actually carrying out or whether it's just something I think I'm doing and I'm actually not.

The discord between questionnaire and interview responses may be explained by the more challenging, progressive and time-consuming nature of developing deeper intellectual capabilities (Hargrove, 2013). While students from the final year of their degree programmes readily provided examples of how metacognition and creativity had been developed, students from earlier years, when responding to the questionnaire, might not yet have encountered aspects of the curriculum explicitly focussed on the development of these work skills. Even so, the findings reveal gaps in students' understanding of the complexity and sophistication of the coaching process. It is essential that HE is 'faithful to the everyday micro-reality of coaching' so that student coaches are supported to develop a 'critical awareness of exactly what their role involves and what they need to know to succeed within it' (Jones & Turner, 2006 p.185). Thus, universities should ensure, as Bowes and Jones (2006) argued for coach education more generally, that they avoid reductive conceptualisations of coaching as a linear sequence. Instead, students should be exposed to more authentic conceptions of coaching's fundamental complexity and relational nature so that they are better prepared for the realities of practice (Bowes and Jones, 2006).

The main barrier to the development of employability reported by students was the size of their cohorts, particularly the impact this had on experiential learning opportunities. When asked about their least effective learning experiences, most interview respondents from the largest of the degree programmes complained that the

size of their cohort meant they had limited time to lead coaching sessions. For example, Luke explained:

When we're in the hall doing ten-minute coaching - ten minutes just isn't enough. You can't do anything in ten minutes. You haven't got time to really progress...

Others agreed that sharing short blocks of practical time, in one type of environment (a sports hall) and coaching only their peers was unrealistic and of limited benefit to the development of skills such as *communication*, *leadership* and *flexibility*.

Elaborating on his development of pedagogical skills, Luke said:

I feel like I develop a lot more outside (of university), when I'm there... rather than a ten minute sitting in the practical session. I'd take out the ten minute [practicals]... I felt like I that wasn't beneficial for me; maybe take it into different environments rather than just being in a sports hall all the time. Take it so you're learning in different environments.

NGB coaching qualifications have received widespread criticism for their limited impact due, for example, to decontextualising the learning by requiring learners to coach their peers rather than relevant athletes (e.g., Cushion et al., 2003; Mallett, Trudel, Lyle, & Rynne, 2009; Nash & Sproule, 2012). Indeed, without appropriate contextual detail, such approaches are 'unlikely to adequately prepare candidates for the diversity of coaching practice' (Nelson & Cushion, 2006 p.181). Instead, as Cronin and Lowes (2016) recently detailed, well supported naturalistic coaching experience, embedded within degree programmes, may be an effective way for students to develop key skills such as the flexibility to work in dynamic social contexts (Cushion et al., 2003).

Conclusion

We acknowledge the limits of isolating skills which overlap and are necessarily used in combination. For example, being highly skilled in *planning and organising* sessions would seem largely redundant for practitioners without the associated *time-keeping* skills to follow these plans through and the *flexibility* to adapt them in response to the emergent coaching context in practice (Saury & Durand, 1998). We also recognise that coaching roles are not homogenous although some skills may be of similar value in different domains, a premium may be placed on others in certain coaching contexts. Moreover, like Jones and Turner (2006), we are aware that our qualitative data were drawn from a small group of eager final-year undergraduates and may not be generalised to the larger population of questionnaire respondents, nor to all coaching graduates in the UK. Consequently, further work is needed to determine the role of higher education in the professional preparation of sports coaches, work that is sensitive to the diversity and complexity of both the work skills needed by coaches for different coaching context and the learning environments offered by different universities and levels of study.

Against the backdrop of globalisation and neoliberalisation of HE, the current landscape of sports coaching is one of increasing competition for jobs, which has raised questions among young people about the value of HE. This study underlines a number of specific challenges that coaching graduates face in entering the field as neophyte practitioners, particularly in relation to gaining employment as a coach in relation to the currency of sports coaching degrees. It has highlighted tensions that require dialogue between the coaching industry (e.g., governing bodies) and HE institutions to resolve the role that universities should play in coach education. At the same time, the present findings support Turner and Nelson's (2009) belief that

university can offer a powerful educational package, one which can equip students with skills for employment that go beyond the 'usual suspects' of industry qualifications. Given policy ambitions for growth in the participation and performance of athletes, degree graduates seem to be an underutilised resource, which could be better harnessed through the further integration of industry and university coach education.

The findings of this study suggest that undergraduate university coach education programmes should be grounded in experiential, practice-based learning opportunities, which connect students to graduate employment contexts and provide frequent interactions with tutors, so that inexperienced student coaches build their capacity and confidence to embody diverse work skills. Echoing the work of Potrac et al. (2000), we have argued that student coaches should also be educated as intellectuals, capable of criticality and reflexivity, and of integrating theory and practice, and therefore of learning throughout their professional lives. In these respects, future research in this area should explore the interpretive experiences of students as they attempt to move into industry, and of tutors as they try to develop and articulate forms of capital to facilitate their work, as well as how they wrestle with how to structure and deliver curricula, compete to recruit students, and then prepare them to be effective practitioners (among other things). Understanding these issues is of critical importance to the appropriate positioning of higher education in the ongoing professionalisation of sports coaching.

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Table 1 Interactive work skills developed at university

| Interactive work skills | Developed a lot (%) | Developed a little (%) | Not developed at all (%) |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Communication | 59.29 | 37.83 | 2.88 |
| Teamwork | 55.13 | 42.41 | 2.46 |
| Leadership | 52.34 | 45.21 | 2.45 |
| Interpersonal | 36.16 | 55.36 | 8.48 |
| Logical Argument | 26.16 | 56.98 | 16.85 |
| Negotiation | 17.30 | 52.36 | 30.34 |
| Other | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |

Table 2 Personal work skills developed at university

| Personal work skills | Developed a lot (%) | Developed a little (%) | Not developed at all (%) |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Time Keeping | 49.23 | 42.83 | 7.95 |
| Commitment | 48.90 | 47.58 | 3.52 |
| Self-confidence | 48.34 | 45.47 | 6.18 |
| Determination | 45.15 | 47.36 | 7.49 |
| Initiative | 44.67 | 49.78 | 5.56 |
| Reliability | 40.84 | 49.23 | 9.93 |
| Drive | 38.05 | 50.00 | 11.95 |
| Self-presentation | 36.81 | 52.11 | 11.09 |
| Problem Solving | 35.02 | 60.57 | 4.41 |
| Creativity | 31.63 | 57.91 | 10.47 |
| Flexibility | 29.96 | 53.96 | 16.08 |
| Self-awareness | 29.58 | 58.50 | 11.92 |
| Risk-taking | 20.18 | 54.48 | 25.34 |
| Numeracy | 9.76 | 35.92 | 54.32 |
| Other | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |

Table 3 Business skills developed at university

| Business work skills | Developed a lot (%) | Developed a little (%) | Not developed at all (%) |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Planning / Organising | 57.21 | 39.69 | 3.10 |
| Researching Skills | 54.87 | 42.48 | 2.65 |
| Prioritising | 41.33 | 50.44 | 8.22 |
| Working with information | 37.14 | 54.59 | 8.28 |
| Drawing conclusions | 33.11 | 58.89 | 8.00 |
| Networking Skills | 27.27 | 47.01 | 25.72 |
| Work Culture | 25.72 | 49.45 | 24.83 |
| IT Ability | 13.33 | 44.89 | 41.78 |
| Financial Knowledge | 12.39 | 28.98 | 58.63 |
| Entrepreneurial Skills | 9.71 | 38.41 | 51.88 |
| Commercial Awareness | 6.91 | 60.55 | 32.55 |
| Other | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |