

A COST EFFECTIVE CPD PATHWAY TO BESPOKE POSTGRADUATE ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS FOR SPORTS PRACTITIONERS

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To access higher level academic knowledge and qualifications relevant to vocational advancement, coaches and teachers of specific sports need affordable bespoke courses bridging between the courses of the coaching accreditation schemes and sport-specific postgraduate academic courses. The purpose of this project was to establish a model for delivery of on-line continuing professional development (CPD) to coaches and teachers thereby providing a pathway to higher qualifications with direct benefit to their coaching and teaching. The model includes bridging courses delivered on-line that enable participants to enter the diploma level of academic masters programmes with advanced prior learning (APL) status in lieu of the 60 credit points obtained at postgraduate certificate level. This reduces the cost of obtaining a Masters degree by one third.

KEY WORDS: on-line learning, coach education, continuing professional development.

INTRODUCTION: Many coaches and teachers seek to obtain higher qualifications related to their vocational practice. Reasons include:

1. to develop a foundation of knowledge that can be applied to enhance effectiveness as a coach/teacher.
2. to enable transition from grassroots to performance coaching
3. to advance their qualifications and enhance their career prospects – in some cases to create a vocational career path rather than being voluntary of part-time coaches.
4. to increase their options in relation to career development.

Sports governing bodies are supportive of universities' offering courses that extend coaches knowledge and skills beyond those obtained through their own accreditation infrastructure. An example is the Swimming Teachers Association (STA). While the desirability of offering higher level academic courses is recognised, there are barriers to successful implementation, however. These barriers include:

1. price sensitivity of the coach and teacher market: although they would like to have the additional knowledge and qualifications coaches cannot afford to pay large sums for it.
2. although desirable, postgraduate level qualifications are not essential for advancement along coaching career paths.
3. for most, attainment of the awards does not guarantee high 'upstream' financial returns to offset the costs of gaining the award.
4. running courses at postgraduate certificate level are relatively labour intensive for universities. Given the current austere funding environment and the associated shortage of lecturing resource, universities cannot afford to introduce labour intensive courses with small profit margins.
5. associated costs of developing on-line courses in terms of authors' time, conversion of material for on-line delivery, and establishing the delivery and administration infrastructure. Thus course price must be set to recover these costs in addition to offsetting the costs of running the courses.
6. There is a 'gap' between the academic courses and the CPD courses obtained through the accreditation infrastructure of the sports associations. The elements of this 'gap', on the side of the coach or teacher include:

- a. unfamiliarity with the academic 'style' of delivery including the language used, scientific and/or pedagogical terminology.
- b. unfamiliarity with the methods of academic assessment.
- c. a fear of 'postgraduate' university study given that many do not have experience with university education at undergraduate level.
- d. a 'gap' with regard to the content. The foundational knowledge gained through the sports association CPD may not be sufficient to enable ready understanding of the new material.

The elements of this 'gap', on the side of the university include:

- e. the courses are designed independently and do not link well with the CPD knowledge and skill base developed through the sports association award infrastructure.
- f. there is no 'training' to develop familiarity with academic style, academic objectives and expected outcomes, and assessment.
- g. the courses may be too 'theoretical' with nebulous links between the theory and coaching practice.

The purpose of this project was to establish a model for delivery of on-line continuing professional development (CPD) to coaches and teachers thereby providing a pathway to higher qualifications with direct benefit to their coaching and teaching. In so doing, it was recognised that the model needed to overcome or, at the very least, minimise the barriers outlined above.

METHODS:

Development of the CPD courses: A team of university lecturers with complementary expertise and shared interest in swimming have developed on-line courses in swimming for swimming coaches and teachers with support from the Education and Culture Lifelong Learning Program 2007-2013 Leonardo da Vinci. The team comprised Hafthor Gudmundsson (University of Iceland), with expertise in coaching, Lillian Madsen and Jorn Dam (University of Copenhagen) with expertise in pedagogical approaches, Brian Marshall (University of Reykjavik) with expertise in coaching, training, and psychology, Ingi Einarsson (University of Iceland) with expertise in coaching, training and coaching swimmers with disabilities, and Ross Sanders with expertise in swimming technique and strength and conditioning. Selection of group members with expertise in coaching and a history of involvement in swimming teaching and coaching reduced the problems associated with the various elements of the 'gap' outlined in point 6 above. The support from the Leonardo da Vinci scheme avoided the issue of development costs. Further, the funding enabled courses to be developed with advanced 'user friendly' features. These included visual aids and reflective activities that maximise the didactic effectiveness and enjoyment of the courses. One of the partners was a private company, CAPDM Ltd, who developed the sophisticated delivery infrastructure and administration system thereby avoiding a burden on the University of Edinburgh resources outlined in point 5 above.

Together the team produced 16 courses covering specific topics relating to swimming proficiency, teaching and coaching, and training planning.

The 'cost effective' delivery model

A postgraduate programme at the University of Edinburgh normally consists of 180 credit points comprising three 20 credit point courses to gain the postgraduate certificate, three 20 credit point courses following the certificate courses to gain the postgraduate diploma, one of which is a research methods course. Students can then elect to do a dissertation to obtain a masters degree. This comprises a 10 credit point dissertation proposal and a 50 credit point dissertation.

The new model complies with this usual programme structure but differs in one key aspect. Coaches and teachers may enter at the Diploma level of the programme with Advanced Prior Learning (APL) status by completing 9 of the CPD courses which correspond to the three

certificate level courses in terms of content and learning outcomes. Thus the certificate level courses and these 9 CPD courses have been designed deliberately to ensure this correspondence. They have also been designed in terms of style to be 'coach friendly' and to provide a comfortable transition between the CPD offered by the sports associations and the academic courses at Diploma level, addressing the issues of familiarity and confidence indentified in point 6. Additionally, the need for both the certificate level postgraduate courses and the corresponding CPD courses to address both the academic standards and the need to relate to practice, is reflected the wording of the learning outcomes.

Table 1: The University of Edinburgh postgraduate certificate in swimming science courses, corresponding CPD courses required for APL and the common learning outcomes

UE Course	CPD Courses	Learning Outcomes
Biomechanics of Swimming EDUA 11262	Basic Water Confidence and Front Crawl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the mechanical principles underlying movement in the water. Apply the principles to analyse and evaluate differences between good swimming technique and poor swimming technique. Drawing on research, evaluate which aspects of a learner's technique need correcting and which can be left unchanged as harmless features of an individual swimmer's style. Recognise and understand the factors that help or hinder a learner's progress. Apply scientific principles in the analysis of swimming technique to identify ways of improving performance. Evaluate critically methods by which performance can be improved
	Introduction to Backstroke, Breaststroke, and Butterfly	
	Starts, Turns, and Race Strategy	
Strength and Conditioning for Swimming	Introduction to Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate an understanding of the physiological principles of training that underpin strength & conditioning. Demonstrate an appreciation of the theory of training and evaluate how this informs the design and delivery of strength & conditioning programs for athletes. Develop the ability to source and utilise resources providing up-to-date research and theory in the field of strength & conditioning. Demonstrate an understanding of the process of identifying physical demands, designing appropriate training interventions and selecting appropriate modes to assess and monitor physical capacity.
	Components of the Training Program	
	Training the Individual	
Instructional Methods in Teaching Swimming	Pedagogical Approaches and Communication Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand what the core skills/elements of water literacy are and how they relate to future development/competence in a wide range of swimming skills and strokes. Evaluate pedagogical and instructional approaches to teaching the main content of learning programmes for participants from non-swimmer up to early club level. Drawing on research, understand the complexity of the swimming teaching environment and how elements such as effective organisation and diverse forms of communication contribute to the effectiveness of the teaching/learning and progress of the learner. Apply the above three areas of knowledge and understanding in order to structure and present suitable and effective learning opportunities and practice situations for participants at different stages of learning and/or ability in the range of content relevant to learn to swim programs.
	Structuring Programmes for Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD)	
	Class, Group and Individual Teaching for Maximum Learning	

On-line distance learning courses are normally priced at approximately £1100 per course. However, the CPD courses can be completed through Coachesinfo.com at £25 pounds per course. This means that APL to the Diploma level courses can be gained for £225 instead of £3,300.

Establishing a market:

To ensure that the CPD courses are recognised by relevant sports associations and that their members would be encouraged to complete the courses with the possibility of progressing to academic diploma and masters awards, the model has been presented to the World Swimming Coaches Association (WSCA) and the Swimming Teachers Association (STA). Further, students who have successfully completed CPD courses will be encouraged by these associations and by Coachesinfo Ltd to further their education by enrolling for the University of Edinburgh Diploma in Swimming Science.

RESULTS:

The CPD courses are now available through Coachesinfo.com. Automated records are kept of the successful completions of the courses. Award of CPD certificates follows successful completion of the on-line quiz associated with each course. Students can print their own certificate. Both WSCA and STA have endorsed the courses and the CPD certificates have the WSCA (default) or STA logo (if they are STA members).

The University of Edinburgh will launch the postgraduate courses in Swimming Science in September 2012.

CONCLUSION:

Although enrolments to the courses have not yet commenced it is believed the model presented overcomes or minimises many of the barriers to progression from traditional sports association driven coaching and teaching accreditation courses to higher level academic courses. A 'coach friendly' pathway has been established that is in tune with the needs of the coaches and teachers of specific sports. While this development has been based on courses for swimming coaches, the model can be applied broadly to meet the needs of coaches and teachers in a wide range of vocations, not just sport. In addition to the advantages afforded the participants, the model is effective in avoiding the workload associated with training students at certificate level while ensuring that those entering with APL at Diploma level are knowledgeable, ready for advanced academic learning and comfortable with the expectations of the academic learning environment, and adept at applying theory to their coaching practice.

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