

# HIGH PERFORMANCE CONFERENCE

Warsaw 2019

## Achieving Gender Equality in High Performance Coaching in Athletics in Europe

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Founder of the Female Coaching Network  
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## Introduction

The **Female Coaching Network (FCN)** was founded in 2014 by British Track and Field Coach Vicky Huyton. The FCN is independent of federations, governance and is currently unfunded. Its vision is *"a more diverse workforce of coaches across all levels, in all sports, from all countries"* with a mission *"to raise the profile of, the standard of and the opportunities for female sports coaches around the World."*

Having worked and volunteered in athletics for a number of years, Vicky was invited to be a part of the UK Athletics Women's Coaching Advisory Group in 2010. This led to co-delivering a number of annual 'Women in Coaching Conferences' as well as the co-creation of the UKA Female Coach Legacy Program following the London Olympic Games in 2012. All of this in order to support women coaches wanting to progress to the elite levels of the sport.

As a result of Vicky's own experiences of a number of barriers to coaching in high performance athletics alongside her work with UKA, the idea of creating a supportive online platform for women with similar experiences was born. In February 2014, the Female Coaching Network website was created.

Since then, the network has grown to over 50,000 coaches worldwide through social media, the website and weekly newsletter. Vicky has personally interviewed over 300 female coaches from around the World, appeared in a variety of international media including BBC, CNN, ESPN and Sky and consulted with a number of sporting organisations. All of this with the aim of providing women coaches a louder voice.

The FCN is now *"The Leading Global Community of Female Coaches Who Support, Drive and Influence Real Change in Sports Diversity."*

Vicky's aim as founder of the FCN is to spread the message of the importance of equal opportunities in coaching and sports leadership, as well as facilitating the discussion within sporting organisations of the benefits of an equal coaching workforce.

**Email:** [info@femalecoachingnetwork.com](mailto:info@femalecoachingnetwork.com)

**Website:** [www.femalecoachingnetwork.com](http://www.femalecoachingnetwork.com)

**Twitter:** @FemaleCN

**Instagram:** @femalecoachingnetwork

**Facebook:** Female Coaching Network

## Background - Female Coaches

Female coaches are a statistical minority in nearly all sports, at all levels across the Globe and because of this, they often endure and experience a number of a multitude of mental and physical barriers.

It is well documented that these barriers can have an adverse affects on the well-being of these coaches with outcomes such as alienation, feeling highly visible, subject to scrutiny, having to over-perform to gain credibility, feeling pressure and suffering an increased risk for gender discrimination in the forms of sexual harassment, wage inequities and limited opportunities for promotion.

In 2018, the FCN, in partnership with Leeds Beckett University (UK) conducted a study into the occupational well-being of female coaches globally, with the aim of understanding the well-being of different groups of women rather than approaching the group as one homogeneous group. The results showed that 64% of coaches classed themselves as having poor or very poor levels of psychological health, 55% stating their work-life balance was between average or very poor and interestingly 70% of those who took part in the research had no children.

To understand the origin of the gender imbalance in coaching, we have to go back over 100 years to the beginning of the rationalisation of sports. In the late 1800's and early 1900's, many sports had, for the first time, official rules written and governing bodies formed to ensure the adherence to these rules. Many, if not all of the decisions made were made by men and all within the limitations of the cultural attitudes of the time.

A representation of the impact of this rationalisation of sport on the gender balance of coaching is Netball. Played by over 20 million people, the sport is most popular in countries such Australia, New Zealand and the UK where professional leagues exist. It was a sport created by women in the early 1900's as an adaptation to basketball. This adapted game allowed women to accommodate for the restrictions they had in the way of their clothing (i.e. long skirts, bustle backs, nipped waists and button up shoes) which made dribbling and moving with the basketball almost impossible. 'Ladies Basketball' as it was known prior to 1901 had its first governing body formed in 1927, the 'Australia Women's Basketball Association', rationalised by women and has since traditionally been dominated by female players, coaches and leadership. A stat collated in 1997 indicated the percentage of male netball players across the Globe was 0.7% of total playing population.

## The Impact of Professionalism of Coaching in Sport

Over the last 60 years, there has been a continual changing landscape of sports coaching, moving from an almost exclusively voluntary role to becoming, in some sports, one of the highest paid jobs in the World. This change from 'amateur' to 'professional' has however, had a negative impact on the gender balance in coaching.

One of the best examples to demonstrate this, is the explanation of the after effects of the 1972 U.S Federal law - Title IX.

Title IX is a civil rights law (still in existence today) which was passed as part of the Education Amendments in 1972. The purpose of which is:

*"No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."*

The positive impact on the number of women and girls taking part in sport was immense with an increase of 1,079% between 1972 and 2010.

The impact on the number of female head coaches however, was not so positive. The percentage of women coaching women dropped from 90% to below 30%. Today, only 40% of women's teams have a female head coach, with only 20% of all head coaches for athletes of both genders.

The cause of this; before 1972, women's sports coaching positions were voluntary, whilst men's sports coaching positions were paid and male coaches tended to stick to the paid roles in men's sports. Once women's sport became equally funded and coaching positions became professional, it was the men who took the new paid coaching positions and 'pushed out' the volunteer female coaches.

For more information on Title IX and the impact it has had on women coaches, please visit the following link: <https://wecoachsports.org/advocacy-resources/title-ix-advocacy/>

## Gender Equity and Equality are now Central Concerns for Sports Federations

Gender equality is a big topic in the world of business, education, politics and sport around the World. Organisations are now beginning to realise that gender equality benefits everyone and not just the individual man or woman. Inequality between genders stunts economic growth, hinders development and decreases the size of the talent pool available. It is a local, national and global problem. According to the World Economic Forum, if women had the same lifetime earnings as men, global wealth would increase by \$23,620 per person on average. That equates to a total of \$160 trillion world wide.

Sports federations are now beginning to realise the importance of gender balance not only on the finances of their sport, but also on its image and success. Formula 1 for example, has made a huge step forward in creating an equal platform for men and women. Since the sports take over by media company Liberty Media in 2017, they have made some big profile changes in the way the sport treats women and the opportunities available for them to work as engineers, leaders and drivers.

In 2018 they removed the traditional 'Grid Girls' and in the same year published their 'Gender Pay Gap Report' which included stats of how many women worked in the sport (28%) as well as their commitments to improving this.

Their commitments include:

- \* recruiting a number of women to senior and middle management positions
- \* promoting Formula 1 in schools encouraging more girls to take part in challenges
- \* regularly reviewing their reward structures
- \* updating recruitment policies and practices

To read the full report, click here: <https://www.formula1.com/content/dam/fom-website/manual/Misc/GenderPay/F1GenderPayGapReport.pdf>

## Examples of Current Policies and Projects around the World Aiming to Address Gender Imbalance:

### **European Athletics: Women Leaders Project**

<https://www.european-athletics.org/athletics-community/women-leaders/news/index.html>

### **EU Commission for Sport: Gender Equality in Sport Strategic Actions**

[http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/sport/events/2013/documents/20131203-gender/final-proposal-1802\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/sport/events/2013/documents/20131203-gender/final-proposal-1802_en.pdf)

### **IOC: Gender Equality Review Project 2018**

<https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/News/2018/03/IOC-Gender-Equality-Report-March-2018.pdf>

### **British Athletics - Women on Track Project**

<https://www.britishathletics.org.uk/news-and-features/women-on-track-opens-at-city-hall-with-special-reception/>

### **FIFA - annual Equality and Inclusion Conference**

<https://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/what-we-do/fifa-conference-equality-and-inclusion/index.html>

### **Australian rules Football - Women's Coaching Academy**

<https://www.afl.com.au/news/2018-10-18/aflw-cowan-to-head-up-the-coaching-academy>

### **National Collegiate Athletic Association - Women's Coaches Academy (USA)**

<https://wecoachsports.org/programs-events/wca/>

## Commitments to Gender Equality are not Necessarily Turning into Results at the High Performance End of Sport

In the lead up to the Rio Olympic Games in 2016, an organisation called 'Women on Boards' completed a study to find out if sports organisations really understood the positive impact of equality and the percentage of organisations which demonstrated equality at board and governance levels. Unfortunately, they found most organisations and federations were below par when it came to women on boards and the gender pay gap.

Here is a summary of findings:

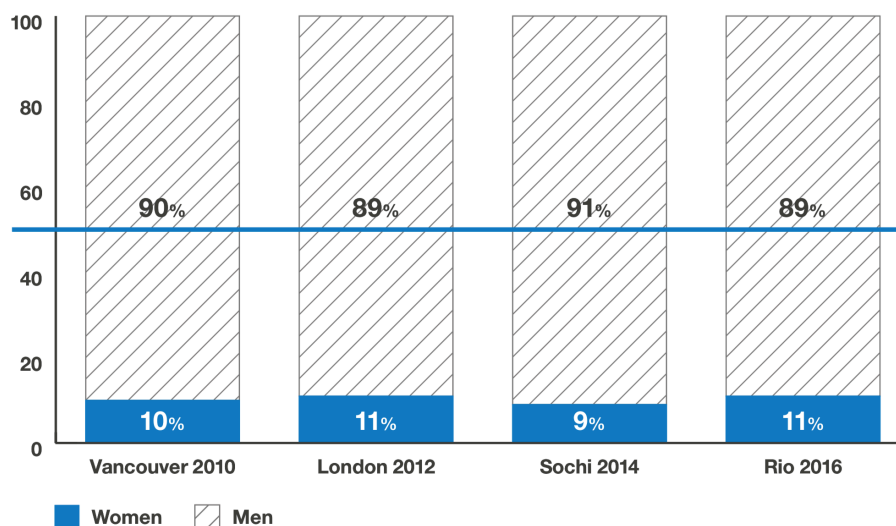
- Only Tennis recorded a significant increase in the percentage of female board members, but it was coming off a base of zero percent in 2014. Taekwondo, Aquatics, Boxing and Wrestling all recorded a slight increase in the percentage of female board members.
- At country level, 20 National Olympic Committees recorded a five per cent or greater loss in the number of women on their boards, while 28 improved by more than five per cent. Again, many of the top performers came off a zero base
- Only Malawi, Australia, Bermuda, Norway, New Zealand, Kiribati, Samoa and Tuvalu have more than 40 per cent women on their national Olympic boards and committees. The USA has 31.3 per cent females and the UK has 26.7 per cent.
- In Paralympic sports, only the boards of Table Tennis, Basketball, Curling and Boccia recorded an increase in the number of women on their boards.

For the full report, click here: [https://www.womenonboards.net/womenonboards-AU/media/UK-PDFs-Research-Reports/2016\\_Gender-Balance-in-Global-Sport.pdf](https://www.womenonboards.net/womenonboards-AU/media/UK-PDFs-Research-Reports/2016_Gender-Balance-in-Global-Sport.pdf)

From a coaching specific point of view, the International Olympic Committee published their 'Gender Equality Review Report' in 2018. It was found that in the last 4 Olympic Games (summer and winter) only an average of 10% of the accredited coaches during the Games were women.

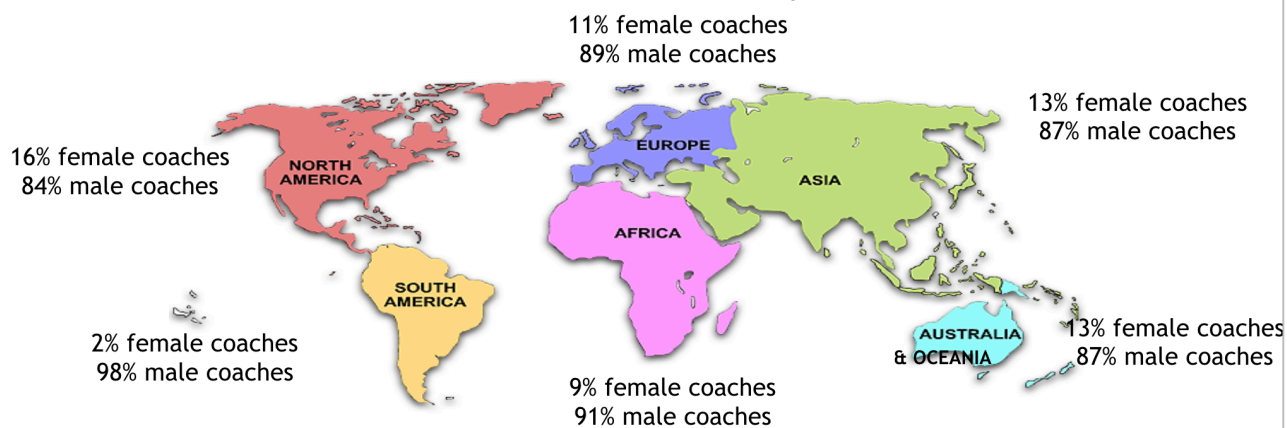


Table 4: Accredited Coaches at Olympic Games



Percentages of accredited coaches at the Rio Olympic Games 2016 per continent

### Ratio of male and female coaches per continent



**SOURCE:** International Council for Coaching Excellence



This is of course not just an issue at the Olympic Games, but across the board in high performance sport. Here are just a few examples:

**International Women's Soccer:** 20% of National Teams with female head coach

**Women's Tennis (WTA):** 9% of female athletes in top 200 have female coach

**Athletics in Britain:** 2% of top 50 athletes in all disciplines with a female coach

**Australian Football AFLW:** 0% of teams with female head coach, only 2 female coaches in 3 seasons

**Canadian Sport:** 9% of National Coaches are women

*\*It is the aim of the FCN to undertake further research on these stats*

A lack of female coaches are not just an issue within the Olympic Games or sports leagues across the Globe, this trend is also reflected in the speakers and presenters at many high performance conferences. Below is a small example of recent high performance athletics conferences in Europe:

Conference	Number of presentations	Male Speakers	Female Speakers
European Athletics Coaches Club, Berlin - August 2018	28	17	2 (only 1 a coach)
IFAC, UK, January 2019	30	15	4 (although no female athletic coaches)
European Polevault and High Jump Symposium, Germany November 2018	18	14	0
European Discuss and Hammer Throwing Conference, Sweden, November 2018	?	6	0

Whilst the pool of female coaches to chose from is smaller than that of male coaches, those that are qualified and experienced enough to present and share knowledge are being ignored.

## Why do we need more women coaches?

One question often asked is 'why does it matter what gender the coach is, surely we should just recruit the *best person* for the job". That is a statement I think we can all agree on. The problem however arises when *the best person* for the job is not given the opportunity to take the role.

According to the *Tucker Centre for Research on Girls and Women in Sport* (U.S.A), the following conclusions have been identified as the grounds for needing more female coaches in sport in general:

- same sex role models positively influence self-perceptions
- having women as coaches challenges outdated stereotypes about gender and leadership offering a diverse perspective
- making women less visible in leadership roles can lead to less women getting leadership roles
- when men experience women as competent athletes, players or sporting leaders within their own sporting sphere, they are more likely to respect women in other areas of their lives
- women coaches advocate for other women & help grow the number of women in the coaching profession
- women coaches matter to other women because they can provide advice about how to navigate around traditionally dominated workplaces
- women seeing other women coaching see coaching as a legitimate and viable career

These benefits are also reflected in sports statistic around the World. Whilst female head coaches are low in numbers, they are high in success rate. Here are just a few examples of the success rate of female head coaches:

**International Women's Soccer:** 97% of all tournaments won with a female head coach

**Women's Tennis (WTA):** 2017 3/4 Grand Slams won by a player with female head coach

**Australian Football AFLW:** 1 of only 2 female head coach in its history won the first ever league title. There have been no female head coaches since.

**Gymnastics:** most successful female gymnast of all times coached by female coach

*"In Belgium, it's very very rare for an elite athlete to be coached by a woman. But for me, I can't imagine anyone else guiding my career...Sport needs more coaches like her and I hope her example encourages other women to do what she does, to know they can succeed at the highest level. After all just look at Wayde van Niekerk and Sydney McLaughlin, two stars of our sport and both are coached by women."*

**Cynthia Bolingo** - Belgium 400m athlete,  
Silver Medal at European Indoor Championships 2019.

## Barriers to High Performance for Female Coaches

In order to support the increase of female coaches at the high performance level of sport, it is important to understand the barriers that female coaches specifically face. In 2012, the paper “Barriers and Supports for Female Coaches; an ecological model”, was published by Nicole M. LaVoi and Julia K. Dutove of the *Tucker Centre for Research on Girls and Women in Sport, USA*. In this paper, the results of three decades of study into the barriers women face in sports coaching are shared. Within the results the appalling statistics within global sport of the lack of diversity in coaching are identified (for example, non-white men and women coaches represent only 7.2% of all coaching roles within the top Division 1 of the NCAA) as well the potential causes for such barriers.

Whilst barriers identified can be complex and dynamic, it is important to understand the factors involved and whose responsibility the causes of each factor should be. Below, we have simplified the model into a table and included our own thoughts of who the responsibility of each barrier should fall on:

	Barrier Factors	Responsibility
Individual	Lack of confidence, lack of assertiveness, lack of self-efficacy, stress / burnout, non-heterosexual identity, personal ambition, skill, knowledge, own well-being	Coach themselves
Interpersonal	Athlete preference, old boys club, bullying / harassment, competition from other coaches, connecting with coaches, family well-being	Federation and coach
Organisational	Low pay, time commitment, tokenism, , decision making, unclear career path, travel, male delivered coach education, training, feedback, administration and policies, limited mobility	Federation
Sociocultural	Masculine hegemony, homophobia, gender norms, gender stereotyping, leadership stereotype, gender role assumptions, marginalisation	Federation and Society

**SOURCE:** Barriers and Supports for Female Coaches; an ecological model.  
Nicole M. LaVoi and Julia K. Dutove

To read the full research paper, please email: [info@femalecoachingnetwork.com](mailto:info@femalecoachingnetwork.com)

## Examples of Barriers Experienced by Female Coaches in High Performance Athletics Coaching

*"It is difficult if you have a family. It is hard to find that balance. When I'm home, I find I'm sometimes guilty about leaving the athletes I coach. Then I also feel guilty when I'm at work because I feel I am missing time with the children at home. It is a constant struggle and a lot of women give up. I am lucky in that I have the right partner and I couldn't do it without his support."*

**Caryl Smith Gilbert**

(previously coached Andre de Grass and Michale Norman, USA)

*"To continue to accelerate within my profession, the pressure to be away from home increases. This is a continuous struggle for me and I am sure many female coaches and sport leaders,"*

**Carla Nicholls**

(Olympic Development Lead, Canada)

*"It wasn't only this comment but around this time I came to the realisation that coaching university, elite club athletes and raising a family was taking its toll and I wasn't doing any of those things as well as I could have. I decided to take a one year leave from university coaching. I only coached a couple athletes outside that program. I needed time to reflect on how I could make this situation better and often when faced with a dilemma it is difficult to fix it while immersed in it. I stayed full-time at the university as an instructor and doubled my teaching workload to make up for not coaching the team in order to maintain my salary."*

**Vickie Croley**

(Former Coach to Olympic Medallist Damien Warner, Canada)

*"Three times I was invited to apply for a programme by my NGB, and on doing so three times I was turned down. I applied for a temporary part time role – I received a standard letter. "Sorry you don't have enough experience" I've been coaching since 2002, I am a Level 3 Performance Coach who puts herself in the position of learning as frequently and as innovatively as I possibly can, yet I don't have enough experience. Do me the favour of actually looking at ME before you decide I'm a waste of space and then employ from within. Result – never again will I trust an invitation or apply for a role, there are only so many times you can be made to feel useless."*

**Cathy Walker**

(Level 3 Performance Coach, UK)

Female Coaching Network

*"You know what I didn't think about it until everybody told me I was the first one, first female and the first black person. Up until then I hadn't really thought about it. For probably for the first year I actually thought oh my gosh, such a lot of a pressure but then I just decided, that you know what, I'm just going to relax, I'm just going to be the best I can be and hopefully that will be enough. There is, an expectation, there is a little bit of pressure on you, what I don't want to do is, I don't want them fail in this job to make it difficult for the next female that comes along. You've always got that in the back of your mind which you probably shouldn't do but you do. If I fail then they might think, 'well we're never going to employ a women again because of what happened with Paula!' Which is really not a nice feeling."*

**Paula Dunn**

(Head of the British Paralympic Athletics Team)

*"When governing bodies advertise coaching roles, they already know who they want for the job. This makes it impossible for new people to break into that system and get coaching positions. If I kick up a fuss, I miss out on opportunities as I will be effectively treated as a whistleblower."*

**Louise Capicotto**

(Throws Coach, UK)

*"When I was an ambitious coach in my twenties, I struggled a lot with gaining respect from older male coaches. To my face and behind my back some at my club would question my ability and whilst attending conferences and programmes my opinions would often be ignored or interrupted. Whilst I was stubborn and stuck to my aims of reaching the high performance levels, it was very tough and personally difficult for me to progress and to feel as though I 'fit in'."*

**Vicky Huyton**

(Track Coach, UK)

*"I don't think I have experienced discrimination from an administrative perspective but sometimes I feel there is a little bit of an old boys club with the other coaches."*

**Kathy Butler**

(Olympian and Performance Endurance Coach, USA)

## What we can do in Athletics in Europe?

Achieving across the board gender equality in sport requires clear timelines for action, within identified responsibilities and follow-up monitoring and evolution. It is essential to understand and contextualise the coaching experiences within athletics. In order to create effective and meaningful plans, we must gather the voices of women at various points of their coaching career and contextualise coaching experiences within the sport and national federations.

With this in mind, in partnership with the *Carnegie Research Institute of Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure, Leeds Beckett University*, the FCN would like to propose a unique and ground breaking piece of research which will provide national federations with a set of specific, practical recommendations and examples of good practice to support the progression of more gender equal coaching workforce.

**Project Name:** Achieving Gender Equality in High Performance European Athletics Coaching

### Summary of Proposed Research:

The aim of the present study will be to map who makes up the athletics coaching workforce across Europe, understand the experiences of current high performance female athletics coaches, and gather intelligence as to the organisational processes and practices towards achieving gender equality within national athletics federations as well as European Athletics (EA) as an international federation itself. Data will be collected via short workforce audits, interviews with a sample of female coaches across Europe, and interviews with organisational representatives.

### Research Aims:

1. To undertake a benchmarking exercise and collate statistics from all national athletic federations in Europe as to the numbers and distribution of their male and female coaches at all stages of the coaching pathway.
2. To collect and analyse the different experiences of female high performance athletics coaches within a sample of European athletic NFs. This is for the purpose of understanding their coaching pathways and what facilitated and hindered progression at the different stages of their careers and lives, their experiences of working within their respective NF and other affiliations such as clubs, what gender and equality means to them, and what can be done (or is being done) within their respective NF to advance gender equality in high performance athletics coaching.

3. To contextualise the experience of female coaches within the broader culture and landscape of their NF to understand their relationship to the organisational contexts in which they work and to understand what gender and equality mean at an organisational level. This will be achieved through collecting the perspectives of national athletic federation representatives, as well as the perspective of European Athletics representatives themselves as an international federation within the sport.
4. To promote examples of good practice and strategies towards achieving gender equality within high performance athletics coaching to generate new insights that can be used by NFs and European Athletics to improve organisational processes in the promotion of gender equity in the leadership, coaching and management of athletics.

The findings will form the basis of a set of specific, practical recommendations and examples of good practices for NFs and European Athletics towards progressing a more gender equal coaching workforce from competing through to higher levels of coaching.

**This research is yet to be agreed on by European Athletics and Member Federations as a whole.**

**If you would like a copy of the Research Proposal - please email:  
[info@femalecoachingnetwork.com](mailto:info@femalecoachingnetwork.com)**



## Moving Forwards

In order to move forwards with the successful increase of female coaches in high performance athletics across Europe, the FCN suggests the following:

### 1. Research

Conduct the research as mentioned above in order to gain a true understanding into the current situation of gender coaching balance throughout Europe. The results of this research will be made available to all member federations and be used to share examples of good practice and specific, practical recommendations for all.

**Timeline:** On agreement, this research will take approximately 8 months.

**Cost:** €250 per federation

### 2. Federation Education Workshops

As addressed in the *'Ecological model of Barriers and Supports for Female Coaches'*, it is important to understand which barriers are the responsibility of the federation, club or the individual. The FCN can provide a number of workshops to support the creation of action plans for federations to support the development of their female coach workforce.

**Timeline:** Beginning September 2019, dates to be arranged at a time suitable for federation.

**Cost:** tbc

### 3. Coach Education Workshops

As addressed in the *'Ecological model of Barriers and Supports for Female Coaches'*, it is important to understand the role that each individual coach plays in the perceived barriers to progression into high performance sport. The FCN offers workshops to support personal development for female coaches.

**Timeline:** Beginning October 2019, dates to be arranged at a time suitable for coaches.

**Cost:** tbc

### 4. General Support

The Female Coaching Network is on hand to support all member federations via email, phone call or one on one meetings. If you have anything specific you need support with or would like to learn more about, please contact Vicky on the information below.

**Timeline:** Now

**Cost:** tbc

If you are interested in any of the above workshops, presentations or ideas, please contact:

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