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WOMEN IN RUGBY COACHING TOOLKIT

A World Rugby resource to support the recruitment, development and retention of more women in coaching

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT	3
ASSESS & ANALYSE	11
PLAN	15
RECRUITMENT	23
DEVELOPMENT	30
RETENTION	39
CONCLUSION	48
FURTHER RESOURCES	49
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	54

INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

01

INTRODUCTION

As rugby's global reach continues to grow, an effective and diverse workforce is essential to the game's success. Increasing the number of women involved across the sport supports the growth of the whole game and inspires the next generation of players, coaches, administrators and fans.

This toolkit aims to support the whole rugby ecosystem to **recruit, develop, and retain** more women coaches at every level of the game. World Rugby launched its first Women In Coaching Toolkit in 2020, and this second edition builds on that foundation, with the latest guidance to support all stakeholders in increasing the number of women coaching rugby. Through effective planning, targeted initiatives and strong collaboration, coaching pathways can be strengthened and developed for the better.

WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

Real lasting change in sport happens when organisations actively champion progress. This toolkit is designed for a broad range of stakeholders across rugby, including senior decision-makers. It covers the most crucial areas of coach education, development, deployment and retention.

Although aimed at increasing the number of women coaching in the game, these principles can also be applied to other roles across broader workforce pathways development in rugby.

All stakeholders in rugby have a role to play in empowering more women to thrive within the game – and in developing a diverse, effective and sustainable workforce.

Unions:

Work with clubs, regions, provinces and education organisations to develop a sustainable pipeline of women coaching, supporting them to progress and stay in rugby.

Senior leaders and decision makers:

Drive change in their organisations to get more women into coaching and support the development of the coaching workforce. Leadership are key in increasing awareness of the current landscape and challenges, setting targets, allocating resources and providing senior support to ensure successful outcomes.

High-performance directors, heads of coaching and training and education managers:

Support the development of clear initiatives to enable change and succession planning. They can also take proactive steps to identify, develop and employ women across the coaching pathway including at high-performance level.

Licensed Trainers and Educators:

Develop women coaches through the delivery of World Rugby or Member Union Coach Education Courses at all levels of the game.

THE GLOBAL COACHING LANDSCAPE AND ECOSYSTEM

Across the sporting landscape, there is continued recognition of the need to implement targeted initiatives to further increase the number of women in coaching. Below are some examples from other sports.

The **International Olympic Committee (IOC)** implements a wide range of programmes and activity to increase the number of women in coaching. Find more information about the IOC's coaching initiatives here

In March 2026, **FIFA** announced new regulations that mandated female representation in team leadership across all its competitions:

"...each team participating in FIFA women's competitions, shall ensure that their head coach and/or at least one of the assistant coaches be female, that at least one of the medical staff be female, and that at least two officials seated on the team bench be female. This applies to all youth and senior tournaments, national team competitions, and club competition"

Find more information about these regulations here.

The National Football League (NFL) hosts an annual Women's Forum in the United States to connect women currently working in college football into the NFL and its teams. Since 2017, over 250 women have had career opportunities in NFL roles. Find more information about the Forum here.

WORLD RUGBY INITIATIVES

Following a low number of women coaching at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games and Women's Rugby World Cup 2017, World Rugby implemented several strategic initiatives to increase the number of women in coaching, with an initial focus on the high-performance level. These included:

- Specialist coaching consultancy and expertise deployed to work with World Rugby's Member Unions
- The creation of virtual learning, development and networking communities made up of women coaching in the game
- The development and launch of the first edition of the Women in Coaching Toolkit in 2020
- **Supporting 25 women coaches** in rugby to participate in the Women in Sport High-Performance Pathway Programme (WISH), a leadership and training programme run by the IOC in collaboration with International Federations, National Olympic Committees and the University of Hertfordshire (UK)
- A coaching internship programme that placed women coaches directly into high-performance national team environments and competitions, at Women's Rugby World Cup 2021 (played in 2022)
- A high-performance academy that **supported the development of 43 women coaches** across both 7s and 15, including four internship programmes and an accredited coach programme at Women's Rugby World Cup 2025
  - The programme was supported by Gallagher between 2023-2025, becoming the Gallagher High-Performance Academy. It provided a fully immersive global development and leadership programme, with the mission of increasing the prominence of female coaches.

These initiatives alongside the wider accelerated growth and development of the women's game saw a direct impact on the number of women in coaching.

8%
of coaches were women at Women's Rugby World Cup 2017, Ireland

15%
of coaches were women at Women's Rugby World Cup 2021, played in 2022, New Zealand

32%
of coaches were women at Women's Rugby World Cup 2025, England

50%
of coaches were women across HSBC SVNs World Series in 2024/25

Following the implementation of World Rugby's high-performance coaching initiatives across 2018-2025, World Rugby, in partnership with Leeds Beckett University, commissioned a research project to evaluate and review them.

The research found:

95%

of coaches felt participating in World Rugby's coaching programme(s) enhanced their **leadership** approach, techniques, and strategies[1]

100%

of coaches felt participating in World Rugby's programme(s) enhanced their **coaching** knowledge, techniques and strategies[1]

However, findings also highlighted that there was still a lack of clear pathways for women into coaching and to the elite level of the game - and that this remained a key barrier.

1 Norman, L., Stodter, A., McGoldrick, M., Marks, K., and Vickers, B. (2025). *Understanding the impact of World Rugby women in high-performance coaching programmes.* World Rugby.

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WORLD RUGBY'S TRAINING AND EDUCATION PORTFOLIO

World Rugby provides training and education opportunities for a wide range of participants across all areas of the game.

It supports its member Unions by providing a blended learning portfolio of online learning modules and face-to-face courses across seven strands and in multiple languages.

World Rugby Passport offers a range of online learning modules covering different aspects of coaching. It also provides details of face-to-face courses and accreditations offered within member Unions and Regional Associations.

Some member Unions deliver their own suite of Coach Education Courses, many of which have equivalence to World Rugby courses.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of women attending World Rugby face-to-face courses and in the number of women being trained and licenced to deliver World Rugby courses within their member Unions.

Click here to learn more about Passport

Representation of Women in World Rugby Training and Education face-to-face certification/accreditation

Introduction to Coaching – 15s (Level 1)
- 2019: 13%
- 2026: 21%

Introduction to Coaching with Activate 15s (Level 1)
- 2019: *course had not yet launched
- 2026: 19%

Introduction to Coaching Sevens – 7s (Level 1)
- 2019: 16%
- 2026: 22%

Introduction to Coaching Sevens with Activate - 7s (level 1)
- 2019: *course not yet launched
- 2026: 24%

Developing your Coaching - 15s (Level 2)
- 2019: 5%
- 2026: 19%

Analysis and Preparation for Coaching (Level 3)
- 2019: 2%
- 2026: 12%

Percentage of World Rugby's Licenced Coach Trainer and Educator workforce that are Women
- 2019: 7%
- 2026: 16%

GETTING STARTED WITH THE TOOLKIT: CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING YOUR PLAN

To increase the quantity and quality of women coaching in rugby, organisations should:

- Take proactive steps to ensure that women can access qualifications
- Enable women to gain practical coaching experience, with clear entry points
- Ensure women have access and support to apply for coaching roles from community to high performance levels
- Support women to thrive and stay in these roles

This toolkit maps out **five specific areas** that will help organisations create clear strategies and action plans to increase the number of women in coaching across the game:

Assess & analyse → Plan → Recruit → Develop → Retain

These five areas provide a practical, step-by-step framework for building sustainable pathways for women coaches across rugby.

ASSESS & ANALYSE

02

ASSESS & ANALYSE

1. What is the current status of the coaching pathway and landscape?

Assessing the current landscape is essential before designing and implementing any initiatives to increase the number of women coaching. This ensures that time and resources are used effectively.

What is the current situation?
To create a plan to drive tangible change, organisations should identify the gaps between what they want to achieve and what they already have in place. This is known as a ***gap analysis.***

Where can you find best practice examples?

- What women and girls' development projects, or those with a gender equality focus, has the organisation run in the past? What were the learnings and outcomes?
- What can be learned from projects delivered by other rugby organisations or in other sports, locally, nationally, regionally and globally?
- What can you learn from other organisations outside of sport? Many organisations have created women's leadership and career development initiatives. These could provide useful learnings which also apply to women in coaching.

Recommended Action

Analyse the current coaching workforce – unless you know what you have, how do you know what you need?

1. What is the **total number of active coaches** in the organisation's pathways at all levels of the game?
2. **How many – and what percentage – of these coaches are women?**
   a. What level of teams are they coaching?
   b. Where are they coaching – school, club, age-grade pathway?
   c. What level of coaching qualifications do they hold?
3. How many roles/positions are **paid**, and how many are **voluntary**?
4. **What is the total number of coaching qualifications completed in the last year?**
   a. How many of these qualifications and what percentage were taken by women?
5. What is in place to monitor these data points year-on-year to help identify growth or issues? Track both numbers and percentages of women against the overall data.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Many women face cultural and social barriers that can affect participation, progression and representation. These barriers can also be present within rugby. Taking positive steps to improve gender equity within sport can help ensure that opportunities are accessible to all and support a more inclusive culture.

Senior leaders and decision makers play a vital and important role in supporting the recruitment, development and retention of women coaching in rugby. They can act as advocates, sponsors and champions in supporting and driving change in order to increase the women's access to coaching pathways and possible career opportunities.

Across all rugby organisations, and at all levels of the game, the rugby ecosystem can start or continue to make positive change to drive a cultural shift.

These are some key questions organisations should ask themselves:

Is there a **welcoming and inclusive environment** for women and girls within your organisation?

Do women **hold senior leadership roles** and/or committee, board or council positions within your organisation?

Are there women working across your organisation to **grow and develop the game**, including within coaching structures at all levels of the sport?

What is the **perception of rugby** in your country? Is it generally accepted that women and girls play the sport?

How do you **promote rugby externally** to stakeholders and audiences, such as fans or sponsors?

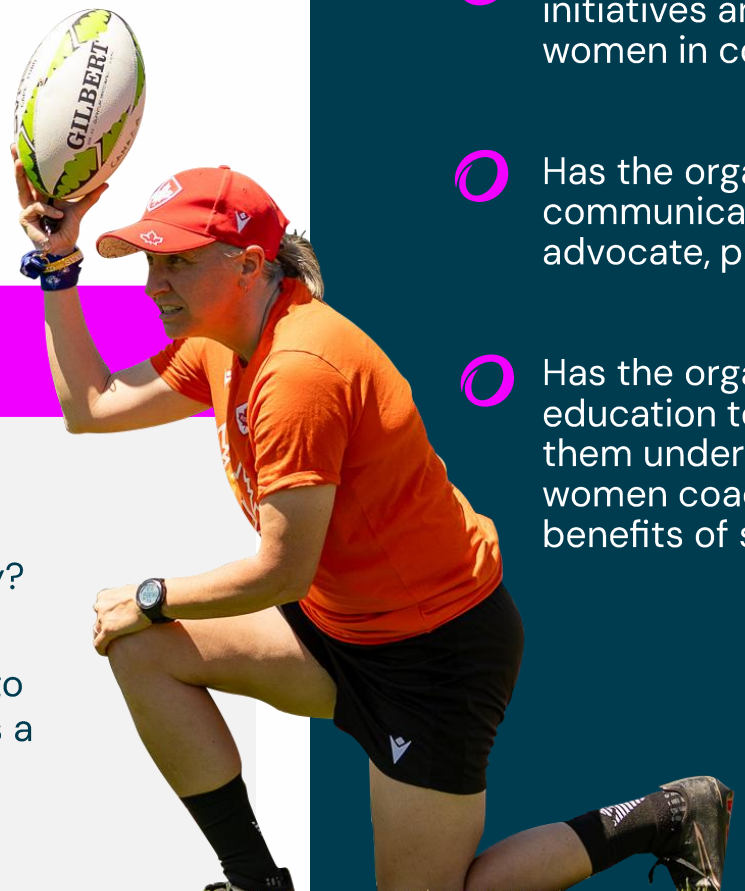
Do you use imagery of women and girls involved across all parts of the game, for example, showing women coaching rugby?

3. CONSULTATION & ENGAGEMENT:

Understanding the lived experiences of women coaches across different pathways is important. What are the barriers they face and how could they be better supported to thrive in the game?

Consulting with women who stopped coaching and are no longer involved helps organisations to understand why they stepped away from a coaching role.

This will help to identify any consistent barriers, as well as potential support mechanisms to increase the number of women taking up, and staying in, coaching.



Example questions to ask women coaches in your pathways:

- Why do you coach?
- What do you enjoy about coaching rugby?
- What challenges or barriers have you faced as a coach?
- What could be done to better support you as a coach?

Recommended Action

How could your organisation drive awareness of the importance of women coaching in rugby?

- Has the organisation incorporated specific initiatives and targets to grow the number of women in coaching in its strategic or action plans?
- Has the organisation launched any social media or communications campaigns that celebrate, advocate, promote and profile women coaching?
- Has the organisation delivered training and education to men coaching in the game to help them understand the context and challenges for women coaches, as well as highlighting the positive benefits of supporting women in the game?

PLAN

03

PLAN

What does the organisation want to achieve, what does the future look like?

Having analysed the current coaching landscape, what are the strategic goals that the organisation wants to set to keep growing the number of women coaching across rugby?

And crucially, ***what are the actions and initiatives that will help achieve these?***

It is important to set goals that can be attained through achievable changes to existing coaching systems. For example, an organisation may set an initial target around the percentage of women completing coaching qualification courses. Once achieved, they could start to work towards a more aspirational goal.

This section highlights some key actions that can help organisations implement their plans to recruit, develop and retain more women in coaching. These are:

- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Funding
- Profile and Promotion

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION:

- It is vital in any project to establish a monitoring and evaluation process from **the start.**
- A clear starting baseline must be identified **before** the project starts to be able to review and audit it.
- An organisation may need to amend how they currently **capture and track data** to ensure they can record data over the course of the project's specific timelines.
- Collecting consistent data helps to demonstrate that the project is making **tangible and positive change**.

i. Understand the current situation and what data is available:

An organisation should look to:

a. **Research** what data is available around women in coaching, e.g. coaching qualification rates, active coaches

b. **Consider** how data capture could be woven into ways of working, if there is not yet a way to gather these statistics

c. **Explore** digital systems or technology platforms to help track key statistics, such as:
   i. Number of women completing coaching qualifications
   ii. Number of women are moving into coaching roles
   iii. Overall number of women involved in coaching structures and pathways in the organisation

ii. Identify measurable goals and outcomes:

a. **Set** goals at the start of the project to ensure it stays on track against the agreed delivery plan. These can be short, medium and long-term goals with a series of targets, e.g.:
   Increase the number of women completing coaching qualifications by 10% by Year 1 and 25% by Year 3.

b. **Include** a numerical target within any goals and outline how any change will be achieved, e.g. what are the resources and people needed to help achieve the goal?

c. **Remember** that outcomes may not have any immediate measurable impact – it could take months or even years. However, it is still crucial to set clear measurements from the start, so results and learnings can be clearly reported on during and at the end of the project.

iii. Demonstrating impact:

a. Have you agreed clear reporting timelines for the project, including set points to capture and analyse data which demonstrates progress against the defined goals?

b. Will findings and outcomes be shared with the organisation's senior leadership and wider colleagues to raise internal awareness of the project?

c. How could the organisation drive public awareness of the project e.g. has content been shared on the organisation's online platforms? Have there been any public releases?

d. Are there opportunities to capture key learnings and successes from the project that are turned into case studies to share with the organisation's networks and stakeholders?

iv. Learn from what doesn't work, and change it:

a. Ongoing monitoring also helps to identify any activity which may not be working. Learn from these and look to rectify them – how could the approach be evolved to achieve the intended outcomes?

v. Plan, Do, Review:

a. Organisations should regularly review programmes and initiatives as part of their ongoing planning cycles

Recommended Action

Ensure both qualitative and quantitative information is collected and analysed.

- **Qualitative information** is typically descriptive and provides insight about people's feelings, opinions or experiences e.g. questionnaires for participant feedback after courses
- **Quantitative information** is more measurable, in the form of numbers or statistics, e.g. the numbers of people who attend courses and achieve qualifications

2. FUNDING YOUR COACHING PLAN

Additional external funding can help organisations to resource their women in coaching initiatives, enabling them to deliver more activity on a larger scale. There are a wide range of potential funding sources available to consider exploring, including:

Commercial Partnerships & Sponsorships:

Commercial partnerships are a chance to build beneficial relationships with companies that want to support social impact through sport. Collaboration with a rugby organisation can provide them with brand visibility and association with the sport's positive values. In the context of women in coaching, this would relate to supporting gender equity by creating opportunities for women in rugby, and in turn increasing participation and workforce numbers.

Local or National Government:

Many government or national sports agencies are focused on developing women's participation in sport and supporting workforce projects. Funding may be available to help resource initiatives around women coaching in rugby

Individual Donors

Some individuals may give voluntary donations without expectation of direct return. They are often motivated by shared values, belief in an organisation's mission or a desire to make a difference.

Not for Profit/Charity Organisations:

These organisations may wish to partner with an organisation to achieve shared goals (e.g. social inclusion, gender equity) and may see rugby as a valuable tool to leverage broader social change.

Regional and international agencies:

Unions in particular may also be eligible for funding from regional or international agencies to support programmes for developing women coaches. Some examples include:

- UN Women
- Erasmus+
- Women Win
- Olympic Solidarity

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Recommended Action

Organisations should map out potential funding sources in their local, national or regional area for which they may be eligible.

There may be brands, companies or industries which have previously supported other sports, especially coaching initiatives. Industries that have set up their own career development or leadership initiatives for women may also be aligned with a rugby organisation's objectives and activity.

World Rugby has created a bespoke digital **Fundraising Toolkit** to help rugby organisations, with guidance and templates on how to approach fundraising and successfully unlock new sources of investment. It covers:

- Strategic fundraising planning
- Applications and proposals
- Mapping out potential donors
- Demonstrating impact
- Building relationships with donors

You can access the toolkit here

3. PROFILE, PROMOTION AND POSITIONING OF WOMEN IN COACHING

To grow the number of women in coaching pathways, it is important to drive visibility and awareness of women already involved in the game. Coverage, promotion and storytelling helps to reach broader audiences, reinforcing that women are actively involved in coaching and potentially inspiring others to start their coaching journey. Key visibility activities include:

A dedicated webpage

with profiles, images and stories of women in coaching.

A social media campaign

with regular content posted on women in coaching.

Commissioning photography

to increase the number of images of women in coaching – this helps to create an image bank which can be used across wider materials and activity.

Communications, PR and media

campaigns that tell stories of women in coaching to both existing rugby fans and engage wider audiences across lifestyle, society and culture.

Empower and support women coaches

to boost their own public profile as a coach, if they feel comfortable doing so, including reposting or promoting their content.

Organisation digital and physical assets

and materials featuring imagery of women in coaching – this could range from websites, coaching resources to sponsorship sales presentations.

Make information on coaching easy to find

to ensure people can find details about coaching pathways, career and development opportunities. For example, ensure website links are included on press releases and social media posts; and ensure contact information for coach developers or course leaders is clearly listed.

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Recommended Action

PROMOTE AND INCREASE THE VISIBILITY OF WOMEN IN COACHING

REVIEW

the organisation's digital platforms and social media channels – are women coaches actively profiled and promoted in imagery and written content?

MEASURE

the cadence and regularity of any media coverage on women coaches – is this equitable compared to promotion of other elements of the game?

ENGAGE

with current women coaches and coaching networks to identify powerful stories, then share these across formal communications and digital channels to raise awareness of women in coaching.

EDUCATE

the whole rugby ecosystem on the opportunity to promote women in rugby across their own platforms and channels e.g. individual club or team social media channels or websites.

RECRUITMENT

04

RECRUITMENT

This section aims to provide information to support the effective recruitment of women into the rugby coaching workforce at all levels.

Understanding what motivates people to coach

Each individual has different motivations for becoming a coach and brings with their life experiences with them, from inside and outside of sport.

Understanding these motivations can help an organisation with its recruitment strategy to increase the number of women in the coaching pathway.

How to recruit successfully based on people's motivations:

Motivations			
Belonging	**Purpose & Achievement**	**Autonomy**	**Expertise**
Ensure they feel part of something and a valued member of the team	Make it clear what they are here to do and celebrate achievement	Give them the space to make decisions and take ownership	Provide them with opportunities to learn, improve, and be the best they can be

Adapted from: Drive, The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us - Daniel H. Pink, Canongate Books, 2011

1. CREATING POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTS TO ATTRACT, INCREASE AND RETAIN WOMEN COACHING IN THE GAME

The following activities could help to recruit and retain more women in coaching:

Offering targeted initiatives to encourage women to participate in coaching

- Provide the opportunity for women-only coaching courses. Find more information on the next page.
- Extend a personal invitation to an individual coach. Personal encouragement to explore a new opportunity can be a powerful factor in someone's decision to take part. It can help individuals feel welcomed, valued and more confident to try something new.

'You can't be it, if you can't see it': making women in coaching standard practice

- Visible and easy to find role models are a powerful marketing tool that can help inspire more women to get into coaching.
- What visibility initiatives could help profile women coaching in the game?
  - Has your organisation profiled women coaches on its social media channels?
  - Are there coaching profiles and news stories about women in coaching on your website?
  - Is information on coaching courses and qualifications easy to find online?

Make it accessible for women to get involved: timings, locations, environments

- Are coaching courses and qualifications held at suitable times and accessible by women who may still be playing rugby i.e. not at a time when women's rugby teams usually train/practice or play matches?
- Are there suitable facilities at training and match locations for women such as toilets and changing rooms?

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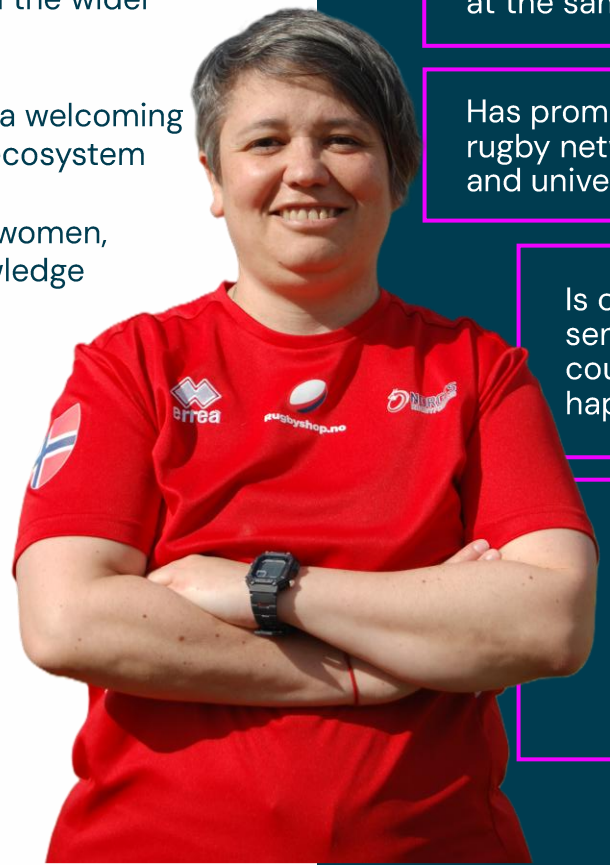
2A. WOMEN-ONLY COACHING COURSES

A supportive coaching environment helps people thrive and perform at their best. In some contexts, **organising and hosting coaching courses targeted specifically at women:**

- Can be more appropriate given the wider cultural and social context
- Provides a good way to create a welcoming entry point into the coaching ecosystem
- Allows coaches to meet other women, building their confidence, knowledge and network within coaching
- Consider using courses like the Rugby Leaders Award (non-contact or introduction to contact) which precedes World Rugby Level 1 Coaching, to create a safe and informal environment and soft entry point.



2B. FULL INTEGRATION INTO STANDARD COACHING COURSES

Equally, increasing women's participation and representation within standard coaching courses is important. Shared learning environments, where women and men develop alongside one another, can benefit all coaches on their development journeys.

These environments create opportunities to learn from different experiences and perspectives, share knowledge, and increase the visibility and profile of women coaches alongside their male counterparts. Organisations could consider:

Have proactive efforts been made to ensure there are multiple women attending the course(s) at the same time ?

Has promotional information about the course(s) been sent directly to any existing women in rugby networks e.g. current women coaches, social media community groups, women's club and university teams?

Is clear 'what to expect' information sent to participants ahead of the course, so they understand what will happen and how the course will run?

Could women be connected with mentors before the course who can provide support and check in with them afterwards?

After the course has finished, is clear information sent out to participants to signpost how they can continue their professional development, access ongoing mentoring and peer support, and apply for potential coaching roles and career opportunities?

Consider how digital communication can help with this i.e. WhatsApp knowledge sharing groups, social media accounts, digital newsletters and emails

3. BUILDING THE COACHING TALENT PIPELINE

Across all coaching pathways, organisations should recognise the parts of the game where coaching talent is most likely to emerge. Targeted initiatives to drive awareness of the routes into coaching are essential to build pathways and talent depth.

Everyone involved in the grassroots and community game represents potential coaching talent - from current players and organisers to volunteers, teachers and parents. It's important to recognise that while some groups, such as teachers, may not have technical rugby expertise, they often bring valuable wider skills - strong communication, experience working with young people and an ability to create positive learning environments - all of which can significantly enhance the player experience.[1]

Recommended Action

Building engagement and awareness across the rugby ecosystem to increase the coaching talent pipeline

- Identify current women coaches to act as advocates and champions – working with them to identify and motivate other women who may be interested in moving into coaching
- Design promotional campaigns and communications to attract current players to coaching courses and qualifications
- Host introductory sessions within clubs, academies and education settings to grow awareness of coaching pathways and opportunities for personal and professional skills development
- Consider promoting coaching to young women and girls to help them start their coaching journey early, supporting their development and building their confidence
- Ensure both physical and digital coaching materials feature imagery showing women coaching, demonstrating they are a part of the game at all levels
- Create specific opportunities for teachers- they already have the skill to work with children and may just need guidance to build up their technical rugby knowledge

4. BUILDING THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE COACHING TALENT PIPELINE

As an organisation's coaching pathway grows from the grassroots and community game, it's equally important to consider how the pathway will be developed at the high-performance level.

Coaches in the community game are also potential high-performance coaches, provided they receive the right support and opportunities.

Recommended Action

Developing talent for high-performance coaching roles

- Elite player groups provide a key potential source of future coaches, given that they will have an excellent understanding of performance environments and strong technical knowledge.
- Organisations should develop initiatives that support and engage elite players to take coaching courses, obtain qualifications and gain direct experience alongside their playing commitments, that supports individuals to develop their coaching skills and experience before their own playing career has finished
- Whilst elite players are a valuable potential talent pool, organisations should also consider how to support those coaches already in the pathway to progress

5. ACCESSIBLE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUITABLE RECRUITMENT PROCESSES

To ensure a transparent and equitable process, make sure everyone in the coaching ecosystem has good awareness of coaching career opportunities, whether voluntary or paid. This ultimately helps organisations to attract applications from a broad talent pool.

It also demonstrates good practice and governance, as well as enhancing an organisation's reputation among a wide range of stakeholders. Organisations should proactively ensure women in coaching have good awareness of coaching opportunities and are considered equitably alongside their male counterparts.

Recommended Action

Ensure transparent and equitable recruitment processes are in place

- Review where career opportunities are promoted i.e. are roles advertised on social media channels or websites; is it clear how people can apply for the role?
- Consider proactive approaches to drive awareness of career opportunities to women in coaching i.e. have roles and role information been circulated to known women coaches to share on, known women in coaching networks and communities, clubs, academies and educational organisations?
- Ensure career opportunities are advertised both internally and publicly – fresh talent moving into an organisation can bring new ideas and skillsets
- Review application, shortlisting, interview and feedback processes to ensure all candidates experience a fair and transparent recruitment process
- Consider interview formats – will candidates have the opportunity to meet in person? Are interview times flexible around wider career or family commitments?
- Ensure women are part of the review and interview process – this demonstrates to candidates that women are represented at the organisation's senior decision-making level, and a more diverse hiring panel will likely ensure different viewpoints as part of the candidate selection process
- Regularly review and evaluate who is applying to advertised roles – this will help organisations analyse the demographics, types of candidates and any applicant trends, providing learnings for future recruitment and promotion of roles

  This data should be used in wider coaching workforce monitoring and evaluation data as referenced in Section 2 'Plan'.

DEVELOPMENT

05

TARGETED SUPPORT TO DEVELOP WOMEN IN COACHING

There are four key elements to ensuring women coaches are supported appropriately:

- Accommodating different learning styles
- Providing and promoting support networks
- Providing accessible and flexible learning opportunities
- Ensuring coaches have the support and time they need to succeed

1. ACCOMODATING DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES

It is important to remember that everyone has their own personal approach to learning and learning styles.

By offering a variety of learning formats, resources and delivery methods, organisations will be able to support a broader range of people and their individual needs.

Within coaching there are several ways coaches could be supported to develop their technical, leadership and personal skills. For example:

- Working with a mentor
- Reading coaching journals and academic research
- Coach observations
- Co-coaching
- Internships, apprenticeships and placements
- Training needs and personal development planning
- Undertaking coaching qualifications
- Workshops - in person and online
- Communities of practice / peer learning groups
- Attending seminars / conferences / webinars
- Follow social media profiles of coaches and organisations
- Exchange opportunities
- Coaching practice and self-reflection
- Appraisals, reviews and seeking feedback from others

2. PROVIDING AND PROMOTING SUPPORT NETWORKS

i. Mentoring:

Mentoring is widely acknowledged to be a powerful and important aspect of developing people in sport, including leaders, officials and coaches. A key principle of mentoring coaches is that the coach remains at the centre of their own development and the mentor supports as required. A mentor doesn't claim to have all the answers works with the coach to help them find the answers themselves.

A mentor can help with and make an impact in several ways:

- Build confidence
- Help check, challenge, advise and support
- Share learnings and expertise from their own career journey
- Advise on wider political and leadership elements across the game
- Connect their mentee into broader networks and make introductions

Organisations may not be able to place a mentor with every coach at all times – but should consider what mentoring support could be implemented where feasible. It can be invaluable for a coach to build a professional relationship with a mentor who recognises the individual support they need. Below are some suggested mentoring initiatives:

- Pair up those who are early on in their coaching journey with more experienced coaches (men or women) to help accelerate development and learning.

- Appoint a mentor to work with a small group of coaches undertaking a coaching qualification. The mentor can provide pre-course support and continue working with the group before, during and after the course.
  - *This approach is cost-effective and helps establish a peer-mentoring group that can grow into a wider coaching network.*

ii. Access to online coaching groups / networks

Digital platforms, including social media channels, can provide an effective way to connect women in coaching to wider coaching networks and online communities, locally, nationally and internationally. Organisations should consider how they could:

- Signpost to digital training and education resources that could support individuals in their personal development.
- Establish online communities and networks for their coaching workforce, both women only and mixed, to connect, share learnings, and keep up to date on coaching resources and opportunities.
- Collaborate with wider sports to connect women coaching in different sports. Coaches can benefit from hearing about wider experiences and skillsets outside of rugby.

iii. Conferences and forums

In-person learning and networking events are important in supporting a coach to build quality relationships and meet others who have had similar experiences. It also facilitates direct learning opportunities, meaningful exchanges and development of self-confidence. Organisations should pay particular attention to the number of women attending these events and consistently review:

- Are there targeted communications, encouraging women in coaching to attend, and driving awareness of events and development opportunities?
- Are women featured on the agenda as speakers / panellists or those delivering sessions?
- Are a specific number of event places reserved specifically for women?

iv. Consistent communication and engagement

Organisations should consider how and when they are communicating and engaging with their coaching workforce. Regular communication will not only drive engagement with the workforce but also help to gather context and feedback which can shape the design of future coaching initiatives.

Communication initiatives could include:

- Regularly publishing content about women coaches and future opportunities on social media.
- Sending regularly scheduled emails or newsletters providing updates on latest training, education and development opportunities
- Conducting surveys to gain direct insights and feedback from those in coaching

2. PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE AND FLEXIBLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

i. Development opportunities that allow personal growth, not just focusing on technical and tactical skills

Accessing training and education and obtaining formally recognised coaching qualifications is important for coaches. It enables them to build self-confidence and essential skills that may lead to employment opportunities. In many cases, coaching qualifications are a pre-requisite for coaching opportunities as part of an organisation's governance and safeguarding measures. This is to ensure qualified coaches are coaching at all levels of the game.

However, coaching is wider than just knowing and being confident in the technical and tactical aspects of rugby. A coach engages regularly with people and is often seen as a leader requiring exceptional leadership skills and qualities. As such, they need to be confident in their own interpersonal and relationship-building skills.

Organisations can look to provide learning opportunities which:

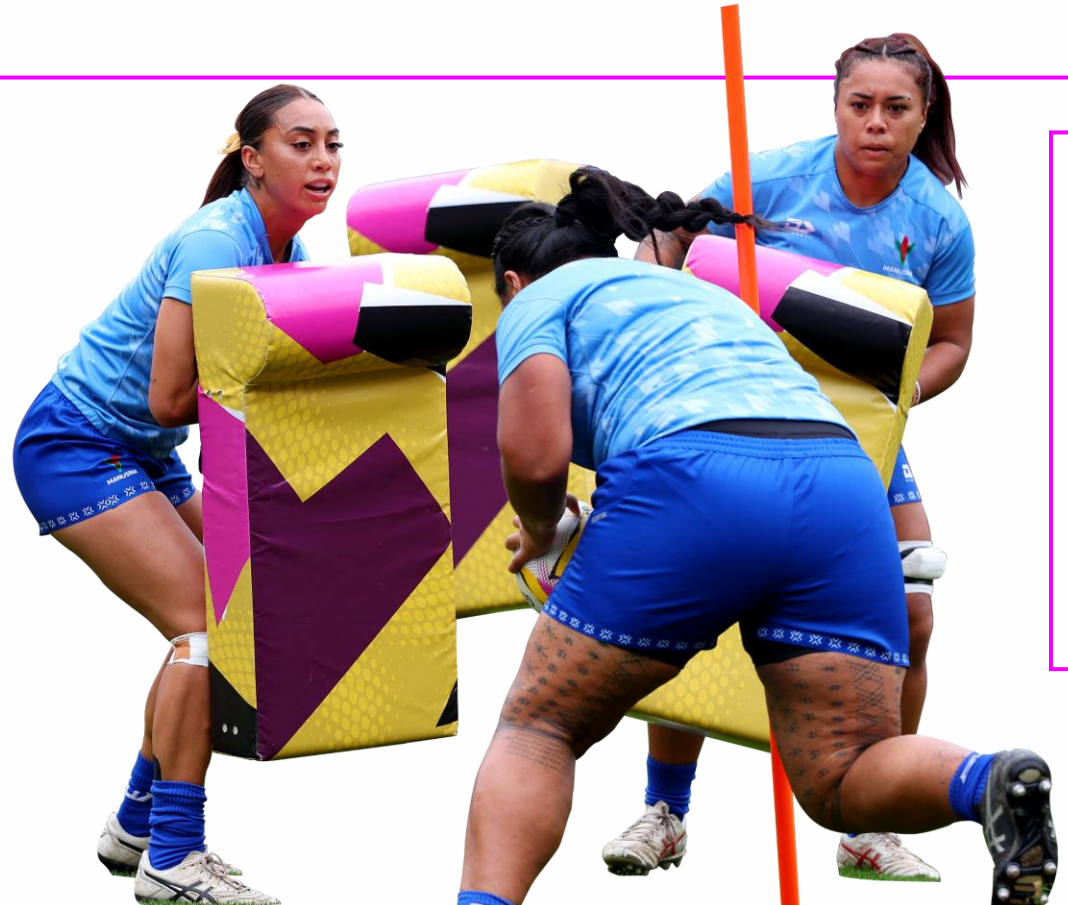
- **Develop self - confidence**
- **Build networks**
- **Develop self-reflection skills**
- **Promote the coach's wellbeing** *(physical and mental/emotional)*

ii. Coach placements, internships or co-coaching

Connecting coaches across the pathway gives individuals the chance to gain direct experience and insight from different coaching environments. Co-coaching is a valuable opportunity for women who are newer to coaching, helping them understand what coaching involves, build confidence, gain practical experience and develop their skills in a hands-on setting.'

Likewise, placements or internships within high-performance environments will not only build knowledge and experience but also help coaches to establish wider relationships at the high-performance level.

It also helps them to build credibility and visibility amongst coaches, management and players. This exposure is invaluable to help build confidence and establish relationships in advance of possible career opportunities that may arise in the future.



iii. Personal development planning

Spending time with coaches individually is important to identify what development they need. Developing a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) and Personal Development Plan (PDP) with them will help them feel valued and supported, as well as recording what development opportunities they need or are accessing. This support mechanism is not about telling a coach what to do but guiding them to self-discover and develop their own plan.

Although the TNA and PDP will be completed by individual coaches, it can also be done in groups, either with a leader facilitating the group or through peer-to-peer discussion and support.

iv. Deliver learning and development opportunities in a variety of formats

Traditionally, coach education training programmes and activity take place across set blocks of time. This training activity can often take coaches away from other work or family commitments and may involve overnight stays or extended periods away from home.
Organisations can reduce these barriers in several ways to provide more flexible learning and development opportunities, including:

- Could coaching programmes and activities be delivered a day at a time across multiple sessions over a longer period of time versus in one concentrated block?
- What elements of the programme could be delivered virtually through online training? Virtual training and activity reduces the need for travel and budget required for venues and accommodation
- Consideration should be given to how virtual activity can remain interactive and personalised to best support each individual's development

v. The Educator / Trainer / Mentor Workforce

As with coaching, women are often underrepresented in the educator, trainer and mentoring workforce. Developing, deploying and promoting women educators, trainers and mentors at learning events and programmes could encourage more women to attend.

A mixed-gender team of deliverers at learning events can also help create a more inclusive learning environment, with a diversity of perspectives, experiences and approaches represented in how content is delivered..

3. ENSURING COACHES HAVE THE SUPPORT AND TIME THEY NEED TO SUCCEED

Coaches, particularly at the high-performance level, may have limited time to focus and reflect upon their own coaching due to competing demands of managing other coaches, designing coaching programmes and balancing other responsibilities and commitments alongside rugby.

Organisations should consider how they can better support coaches by reducing administrative burden where appropriate, for example through dedicated operational or administrative support. Creating protected time for reflection and professional learning can enable coaches to engage more consistently in reflective practice and identify their own development needs.

Alongside this, it is important that coaches have clarity regarding their role and responsibilities, ensuring they are clear. At the high-performance level in particular, organisations should be mindful of the cumulative demands placed on coaches and avoid unnecessarily expanding their remit beyond leadership and coaching responsibilities where appropriate. Where additional operational or strategic responsibilities are required, organisations should ensure that there is the appropriate provision of financial and specific broader employee resource support in place to deliver these wider tasks and responsibilities e.g. Team Manager.

RETENTION

06

SUPPORT AND CONNECTION

Retaining women in coaching requires organisations to provide opportunities that engage and excite them in an environment that values them, recognises their contribution and supports them to develop. Providing appropriate support mechanisms will help coaches be more resilient and assist when they may need advice, support and encouragement to stay in the game.

i. Understanding the impact of life transitions on women rugby coaches

The life transitions that women may go through, such as pregnancy and caring responsibilities, can have an impact on their coaching. Think of those life-changing moments and how women could be supported to stay in coaching or if taking a career break, to return with confidence.

Life transitions may also include:

- Fertility treatment
- Pregnancy (including pregnancy loss)
- Menopause
- Changes in family or caring roles.

These transitions do not affect all women in the same way, and support should be flexible, individualised and responsive rather than based on assumptions.

Supporting women through these periods is critical to retention, progression and the long-term sustainability of the coaching workforce, particularly at senior and high-performance levels.

Each organisation will have its own policies or approach as to how significant life transitions are supported. These should ensure the coach can take time off and return to her post when it is appropriate to do so.

Clear, transparent and well-communicated policies help give coaches confidence that taking time away will not negatively impact their role, status, or future opportunities. Where formal policies are limited by national legislation or resource constraints, organisations should still strive to demonstrate flexibility, empathy and best practice in how decisions are made and applied for supporting women in coaching.

At the outset, managing transition means identifying what short-term support can be given or offered. This may be all that is needed, or it may be the first step to a more long-term situation.

Early, open and supportive conversations—led by the coach and based on trust—can help identify appropriate adjustments, temporary changes to workload, or alternative ways of remaining connected to the coaching environment.

If the non-coaching gap is in months rather than weeks, the coach should continue to be included as part of the organisation and the coaching set-up e.g. management team. without feeling pressured. Inclusion may take many forms, such as:

- Access to information
- Optional attendance at meetings
- Professional development opportunities
- Being kept up to date on team developments
- Informal check-ins

—always guided by the coach's preferences and circumstances.

If the coach is to take a long-term break, organisations should discuss with them the best way to keep them involved and in touch. Reassurance is important; the coach should not feel guilty about putting themselves or others before their rugby in these situations.

Reinforcing that taking time away is accepted, supported and respected helps reduce feelings of guilt, anxiety or loss of confidence, which are common barriers to returning to coaching. Where possible, organisations should also consider structured return-to-coaching support, such as phased returns, re-induction, mentoring, or co-coaching arrangements, to help rebuild confidence and capability.

1. Transitioning players into coaching pathways

Organisations can further strengthen their coaching numbers and depth by working with current players, especially those coming to the end of their playing careers. Given their playing commitments, potentially alongside wider non-rugby commitments, organisations should:

- Identify players who have the potential and desire to move into coaching and ensure they are aware of the coaching pathway, as well as the learning and development support and opportunities in place
- Ensure players have rest and time away from rugby if desired, especially if they have retired from the elite/international level
- Support individuals with personal development plans as they reintegrate into the game within the coaching pathway
- Maintain regular contact with individuals so they feel supported in their coaching journey

The above can also apply to other workforce roles within the game and highlighting these career pathways to players. They could also take up opportunities in management and administration, technical roles such as strength and conditioning, medical and analysis, as well as refereeing.

2. The role men can play as advocates

Whilst there has been positive progress in growing the number of women coaching, men still make up the majority of the coaching workforce. As a result, men can play an important role in advocating for and supporting women to enter coaching and, crucially, to remain in coaching pathways. Advocacy and allyship can take many forms, for example:

- Encouraging players they coach or fellow women coaches to participate in coaching qualifications and coach development opportunities
- Providing access to team training sessions for women coaches to gain direct professional development and experience
- Ensuring women coaches within their organisation are aware of coaching roles and encouraging women to apply for these opportunities
- Challenging sexist behaviours
- Publicly advocating and speaking about women in coaching to broader audiences, particularly where men hold prominent coaching roles in high-performance environments and attract coverage from rugby/sport media and broadcast

3. Public recognition and awards

Recognising the work the coaches do is important and motivational, particularly if an organisation is able to do so publicly as this helps to raise the visibility and credibility of coaches. This recognition can be to whichever scale is feasible to deliver for the organisation.

Some examples include:

- A social media channel post celebrating a coach's achievements
- A recognition award or presentation of certificates for training or qualifications at in person events
- Written articles and interviews with coaches on websites, social media or in print media.

Organisations should look to factor in sufficient time and resources to:

Investigate the various awards that can be linked to coaching

Decide how coaches should be nominated and by who

Generate publicity around the nomination

Proactively support the nomination of women coaches

Monitor the number of nominations you receive and the winners from each category.

4. POLICIES AND PROCESSES

The occupational wellbeing of your coaches is of paramount importance. Not only because it relates to the good health and wellbeing of your coach, but also because it impacts retention and engagement. The policies you put in place show that you respect your coaching workforce and want to protect and support them.

Clear, transparent and consistently applied policies also help to reduce ambiguity around expectations, decision-making authority and accountability. This is particularly important for women coaches who may be entering environments where they are under-represented, newly appointed to senior roles, or navigating informal cultures and unwritten rules.

Policies and employment laws differ from country to country, but the focus of this section is on recognising the importance of valuing your diverse workforce and highlighting your organisation as one that promotes that value.

As the global governing body, World Rugby encourages organisations to establish minimum standards of duty of care and wellbeing for coaches, while ensuring compliance with national legislation, and taking into account culture and available resources.

Organisations should look to consider if:

- Their policies, behaviours and leadership practices actively demonstrate inclusion, fairness and psychological safety
- Give coaches confidence that their wellbeing is protected alongside performance expectations
- They are an organisation that both men and women want to coach for

COACHING WORKFORCE HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Organisations should consider what is the expectation of their coaches, ensuring coaches are not working every day, 365 days a year and taking into account that volunteer coaches are likely to have other job commitments alongside their rugby coaching.

Are expectations:

- Clearly communicated
- Reviewed regularly
- Realistically aligned with the nature of the role

...particularly where coaches are balancing multiple professional, personal or caring responsibilities.

At high-performance level, the expectation of coaches and the environment can be challenging and not always conducive to delivering high performance.

Proactively managing workload, providing recovery time, and recognising that coach wellbeing is directly linked to athlete performance and team culture can all contribute positively to sustained high performance.

Organisations should review how they proactively manage and monitor their "duty of care" for their coaches and wider workforce. Expectations around availability, the amount of time away from home and work-life balance should be realistic in order to encourage women to apply for senior-level roles.

Organisations are increasingly recognising the importance of prioritising duty of care, wellbeing and the overall health of their workforce. Rugby must stay ahead in these areas, as they affect all staff and players. One of the challenges for coaches in high-performance roles is the risk of burnout. It is important to address this cultural challenge in the medium to long term.

Organisations should seek to move beyond informal support and embed wellbeing into governance, leadership behaviours, performance review processes and resourcing decisions.

PROTECTION, SAFETY AND WORKPLACE CULTURE

Coaches must also be protected and supported in their role, irrespective of the level at which they coach. Organisations should look to ensure they have an anti-bullying/harassment policy in place to protect coaches from players, parents, and other coaches.

In addition to formal policies, organisations should actively promote psychological safety, creating an environment where coaches feel able to raise concerns, challenge decisions, and report inappropriate behaviour without fear of negative consequences.

Reporting mechanisms should be **confidential, independent, and trusted**, with clear signposting to where coaches should go to raise concerns, if they feel comfortable doing so.

Recommended Action

Check your organisation's policies are up to date and accessible, including clear signposting to ensure they are visible.

EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS FOR PAID COACHES

For paid coaches, organisations should consider providing the following (where applicable in the relevant country):

- Fixed term or permanent employment contracts
- Pension Schemes
- Maternity/paternity/adoption leave policy
- Health benefits

Provisions should be clearly communicated, consistently applied, and supported in practice—particularly around pregnancy, return to coaching, or caring responsibilities. This helps ensure that coaches are clear on the terms and conditions of their employment, including those on short-term contracts, and the expectations of their role.

FLEXIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE WORKING PRACTICES

Organisations should consider the provisions they are making for flexible working. Flexibility may be required at different life stages, including pregnancy, menopause, caring responsibilities, or periods of increased non-rugby workload.

Some organisations support and promote co-coaching or team coaching to share the commitment needed from all coaches. Shared leadership and team-based coaching models can reduce isolation, support workload management, and create more sustainable environments, particularly in high-performance settings.

When coaches are deployed on international or national tours, some examples of good working practices include:

- Offering **rest and recovery periods** planned and protected following major competitions or extended travel, rather than treating them as discretionary or informal
- Allowing **family visits** while coaches are on tour
- Where possible, **actively enabling family** connection during extended tours and competitions, recognising the positive impact this can have on wellbeing, performance, and retention—particularly for coaches with dependants

CONCLUSION

Thank you for taking the time to explore this toolkit. We hope you have found it to be a practical and valuable resource, providing ideas, guidance and inspiration to support your work.

Increasing the number of women coaching rugby is a shared responsibility that requires commitment, collaboration and sustained action from every part of the rugby community.

While every organisation's journey will be different, the principles and approaches outlined in this toolkit are designed to help stakeholders identify opportunities, overcome barriers and create environments where women coaches can thrive.

By investing in the recruitment, development, deployment and retention of women coaches, we strengthen not only the coaching workforce, but the future of rugby itself.

We encourage you to use this toolkit as a starting point for meaningful conversations, informed decision-making and continuous improvement. **Together, we can build a more diverse, inclusive and sustainable coaching landscape that benefits everyone involved in the game.**

FURTHER RESOURCES

07

RESOURCE: DEVELOPING YOUR COACHING PLAN FLOWCHART

Where are we now?

Audit
Current workforce and landscape

Consult
- Women
- Clubs
- Coaches
- Internal Stakeholders

What gets in the way?

Where do we want to be?

Outcomes
- What does success look like in 4-6 years?
- Key objectives

Targets
Key Performance Indicators

Monitoring & Evaluation
Relevant and regular tracking of key performances Indicators

How are we going to get there?

Plan
- Gap analysis
- Insight
  - Your Union
  - Other Unions
  - Other Sports
  - Business
- Understanding our game
- Understanding coaching and women in coaching
- Barriers and Challenges: Possible solutions

Retain
- Support and connection
- Pro-active development
- Profile and recognition

Recruit
- What motivates people?
- Promote coaching to women
- Pro-active open and transparent

Develop
- How coaches develop
- Supporting women coaches' development
- Support networks
- Accessible and flexible learning opportunities
- Valuing women in the workforce

Recommended Action

Continue to review and adjust what you are doing across these four areas, as your initiatives progress.

WOMEN INTO HIGH-PERFORMANCE COACHING

Positive actions for decision-makers to increase the number of women coaches at a HP Level

Coaching Roles at a HP Level

- Unions / Clubs – demonstrate pro-active leadership in identifying, developing and recruiting female coaches
- Consider potential talent among both elite players and existing coaches
- Transparent recruitment processes:
  - Invite women to apply
  - Provide unconscious bias training for those involved in recruitment
  - Women on interview panels
  - Positive action – interview women where they meet criteria
  - Provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates
- Flexible employment e.g. co-coaching, awareness of time away from home and family commitments etc

Develop Advocates & Supporters within the System

- Men who are coaches and leaders
- Women players

Qualifications

- Set targets for % of women coaches in the workforce
- Pro-active recruitment and access onto courses and CPD
- Ensure, where possible, that there are a number of women on coaching courses, so they are not the only woman in the room
- Connect the women on courses to develop peer support and communities of practice
- Contact & support – pre, during and after the course

Experience – Develop competence, confidence and credibility

- Individualised development plans
- Support development / employment into coaching roles
- Develop, signpost and support women to experiential opportunities
- Apprenticeships: internships: placements

Role Models

- Develop stories and profiles of women coaches
- Celebrate and promote women coaches

Networks

- Develop support and learning groups – women only and mixed
- Access to political and decision makers network
- Access to the informal networks within rugby

Mentors

- Allocate potential HP coaches a mentor
- Develop peer mentoring groups with other high-performance coaches
- Develop and connect coaches to communities of practice

WOMEN's RUGBY | WORLD RUGBY

AN INTRODUCTION TO WORLD RUGBY'S PASSPORT PLATFORM

World Rugby provides Training and Education opportunities for a wide range of participants across all areas of the game.

Whether you are a...

Player | Parent | Coach | Match Official | Medic/First Aider | Administrator

...there are programmes specifically designed to help you to learn and develop in your role.

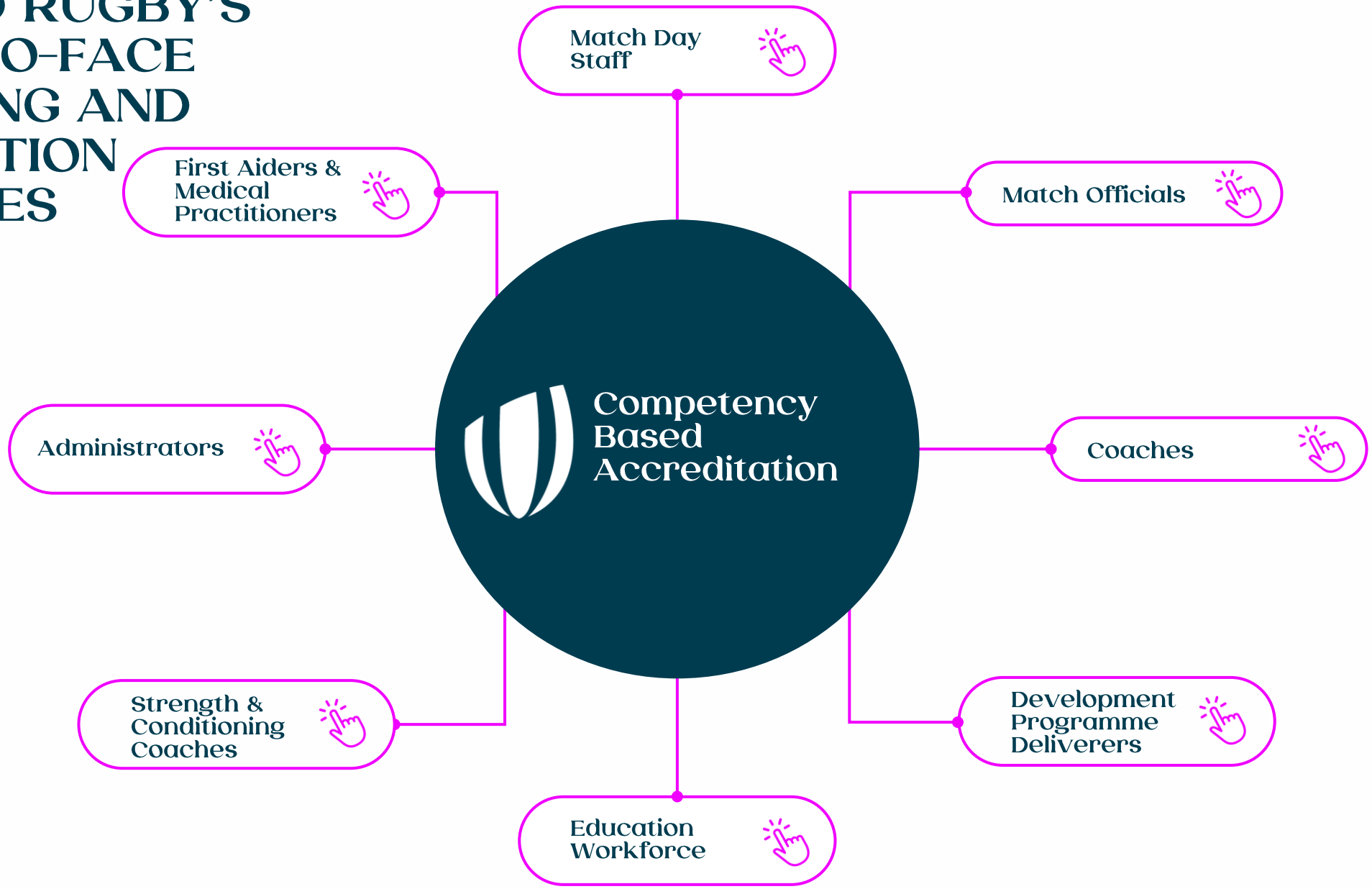
World Rugby supports its member unions by providing a blended learning portfolio of online learning modules and face-to-face courses across seven strands in multiple languages. If you wish to find out more about training courses on offer, including how to register, please contact your union or your local World Rugby Regional Training Manager

2,278,293 Passport certificates awarded since July 2011

43 Number of face-to-face courses available. Including **x12** coaching related courses available

45 Total number of online courses available, including **x11** number of coaching related courses available

WORLD RUGBY'S FACE-TO-FACE TRAINING AND EDUCATION COURSES



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