



Creating a coaching culture at Sport England

Jane Meggison-Hill spent 18 months creating a fantastic in-house coaching programme at Sport England. In response to coronavirus, she quickly transformed face-to-face elements into successful virtual sessions. Coaching skills, she says, have never been more vital.

Jane Meggison-Hill is passionate about coaching and its potential to transform leadership and management. As the Learning & Development Manager at Sport England, she spent more than a year creating and curating a brilliant blended coaching programme, which she launched in January 2020. And then of course, coronavirus changed everything. At that point, she says, coaching skills had never been more vital and she was determined the programme should continue.

A huge part of the programme was already delivered digitally, with eLearning modules, videos, webinars and podcasts. Two face-to-face workshops were quickly rethought and relaunched online. The feedback, for both the original programme and the redesigned virtual one, has been fantastic.

It's an ongoing journey to create a coaching culture at Sport England, with action learning sets and plans for self-directed coaching groups amongst participants. What really shines through is Jane's dedication and attention to the learning experience. Read on to find out why and how she created a coaching programme, what the programme includes, and the results she has achieved.

“The functionality and flexibility of the Charity Learning Consortium’s Moodle platform is great. It allows us to include a range of content in our coaching programme, all delivered via the LMS. This includes eLearning modules, videos, webinars, Ted Talks, podcasts, blogs and virtual workbooks. Ultimately, this means we can deliver an engaging, fully blended programme that is changing the culture at Sport England.”

Why coaching?

Feedback from annual employee engagement surveys was generally that leadership could be more effective at Sport England. Jane recognised that having a coaching culture is a great way of improving the quality of leadership and management in any organisation. She wanted line managers to adopt a coaching leadership style, and for that to filter through to the rest of the organisation, for coaching conversations to happen at and across all levels.

“I knew developing our line managers’ coaching skills could have a positive impact on all their relationships, not just with their direct reports, but with their manager, peers and external partners. Having great conversations leads to strong relationships, which are so beneficial to an organisation, so that was my starting point. My aim was to create a coaching culture,” she explained. “I want everyone to help build a culture at Sport England where coaching conversations happen as the norm.”

Creating the programme

The aim right from the start was to create a fully blended programme. Sport England had done some coaching training before, which was two days in the classroom and nothing else, and that just hadn’t worked. Equally, Jane didn’t want to just offer some prework, a face-to-face session, and optional follow-up resources. “People leave face-to-face courses with the best of intentions, but if they go back to a culture that doesn’t

support them, and they have no way of practising and nobody to encourage them, then they just fall back into their usual way of working. It’s really hard to get that learning transfer and real behavioral change. That’s why I was so keen to have a blended approach, that allows people to go on a learning journey and really embed new behaviours.”

The five-month programme she created includes facilitated sessions as well as self-directed learning and action learning sets. Participants are encouraged to have a coaching buddy on the programme, practise coaching each other and keep a record of sessions in a coaching log book.

In between modules, delegates are asked to ‘meet’ at least once with their buddy and carry out at least one coaching session with a direct report. Virtual resources are always accessible, designed to be available in the flow of work. At the end of the programme, self-sustaining coaching groups, formed from participants, will hopefully keep everyone active and interested in developing their coaching skills.





Initially, the programme was based on a blend of face to face and virtual. The virtual elements were a real mix of media, including videos, eLearning modules, webinars, podcasts and questionnaires, all delivered on the RoadMap Moodle learning management system (LMS) provided by the Charity Learning Consortium.

Jane has been hands on, curating and creating content, using a real mix of free TED Talks, blogs, videos the organisation already had, off-the-shelf coaching modules and content created in house. She used specialists to help create bespoke content and facilitate the whole programme. And she appears in a couple of videos too - introducing the programme to the organisation and demonstrating a coaching conversation.

The impact of coronavirus

Much of the blended programme had originally been designed to be delivered digitally so, when the crisis hit, Jane was quickly able to adapt it to become fully virtual.

“I was so pleased to have an established LMS platform at the start of lockdown. It meant that, with minimal distribution, we could continue to deliver the Line Manager as Coach programme and didn’t have to cancel any workshops. Delivering virtually was a step change, but we didn’t have to start from scratch!”

The programme’s two face-to-face workshops were adapted to be delivered in a virtual classroom. The first - an introduction to coaching - originally took place at a tennis centre. Participants were introduced to the principles of the [inner game of tennis](#) and then coached one another in basic tennis techniques on

court. That was impossible to replicate online. Using virtual classrooms, the facilitator still used ‘the inner game’ as a key theme, with an individual exercise to demonstrate how your mental approach can affect outcomes. This was as well received as the face-to-face sessions had been.

The second face to face workshop used actors and a [forum theatre](#) approach, which transferred amazingly well into a virtual classroom. Physical workbooks and aids were also quickly offered online via the LMS at Sport England, branded iLearn.

“When we delivered it for the first time virtually, I was just blown away at how well it worked, and I felt like we probably got 95% of the value doing it online compared with face to face. You do miss the coffee and lunch conversations, and the personal interaction - which is important when it comes to coaching. Because of that, in an ideal world, I’d still deliver these sessions face to face, but they have transferred amazingly well online.”

Action learning sets - which were originally going to be delivered according to cohort preference - have also now been offered virtually. The groups for these have been kept intentionally small, as Jane has found that smaller groups work best online. Again, she feels they have achieved almost equal value from delivering these digitally rather than face to face. These have been so successful, in fact, they’ll probably stay online only.

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I’m really passionate about the power of coaching. It’s one of the best skills that line managers and leaders can have in their toolkit, especially in the current situation, because it helps facilitate good conversations. One of the challenges of coronavirus is moving all conversations online. Coaching is a way of helping everyone manage that transition much better.

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Line Manager as Coach programme details:

- **Module 1:** Introduction and overview, including a welcome video. Bite-sized eLearning provided by [Coaching Culture](#) is also on offer.
- **Module 2:** Bookable via the LMS. Originally face to face, now an online workshop, with an online flip book and coaching diary.
- **Module 3:** Content is virtual and self directed and includes a questionnaire, bespoke podcasts, videos that Sport England already had, TED Talks and information about the [GROW model](#).
- **Module 4:** Originally a face-to-face experiential workshop, this takes a forum theatre approach, with actors demonstrating scenarios. This has transferred brilliantly into a virtual classroom.
- **Module 5:** Includes eLearning and a bespoke webinar to help participants overcome coaching hurdles.
- **Module 6:** Online action learning sets. These are facilitated sessions, capped at five people per group.
- **Module 7:** An online, multimedia module, offering advanced tools, resources and exercises on topics like transactional analysis and development coaching.
- **Module 8:** Coaching groups. At the time of writing, these groups haven't started, but they will be online only and facilitated by participants themselves so they become self-sustaining.

Results

All participants are surveyed before they start and after they finish. So far, two cohorts (of between nine and 12 participants) are completing the original face-to-face programme. A further two cohorts (again, of nine to 12 delegates) are completing the virtual-only one. Feedback is still being collated, but has been really positive.



Participants are asked questions about how comfortable they feel coaching their teams and how regularly they do that. Jane is excited to see how much those markers will have been improved, and also to see if there are any different outcomes from delivering virtually. Feedback, like the samples below, show that the programme is popular and that it's changing behaviour:



“The Line Manager as Coach programme is excellent! I would highly recommend it. It has really helped me to think about my own management and leadership style.... I’m now applying this learning more and more regularly and have noticed increased engagement from others as a result. Although this is predominantly about the line manager toolkit, the techniques you learn and put into practice will help with other relationships e.g. with partners and even outside of work.”

“I loved it. It’s been one of the best things I’ve done at Sport England...It has definitely made me behave differently and it’s achieving results already”

Jane is understandably thrilled to see these outcomes: “I’m really proud of the coaching programme at Sport England,” she says. “It’s given people a learning journey and people are telling us that it has changed the way that they both lead and manage people, which was my ultimate aim, so that is hugely rewarding.”



Jane’s top tips for a coaching programme

- Groups of no more than 10-12 people work best in online classrooms. Smaller groups work best to encourage discussion, so use break out rooms as much as possible. Any more participants becomes challenging in terms of participation
- Test your programme with a pilot group first. If you can engage an enthusiastic group of managers, who are already supportive of a coaching approach, to help design and then pilot the programme, they will be advocates within their departments and help promote the programme to others
- A fully blended programme isn’t just face to face with a pre-course and cursory follow up. Design a fully blended programme, and a learning journey, right from the start
- Virtual coaching programmes can work brilliantly, and make everything accessible to everyone in their flow of work



Jane Meggison-Hill is the Learning & Development Manager at Sport England, which funds projects and organisations, large and small, that help people to get active. Sport England has three offices: London, Loughborough and Bisham Abbey. Of its 300 employees, approximately 100 have line management responsibility. Before coronavirus, around 100 people worked remotely.