

Developing Coaches – Success Story

Club: Benchmark Gymnastics Club

Club contact: Aisha Walters, Owner and Head Coach

Benchmark is a large recreational club that has been running for 10 years. The workforce is a mixture of full-time and part-time staff as well as volunteers. Their current coaching team consists of 16 gymnastics coaches, two dance teachers and one strength and conditioning coach.

The club delivers general gymnastic sessions for children up to 16 years-old as well as sessions for babies, and parents and toddlers. The general gymnastics classes are focussed on floor and vault, but the club also uses air products as training aids along with more traditional equipment. Recently, they have started a display team who go and do external displays and many of the club's coaches also work in schools organising competitions.



What do you believe makes a great coach?

“A great coach is a professional with excellent technical knowledge that can understand the needs and motivations of their gymnasts and is able to help them maximise their potential in a safe and empowering way.”

Why do you mentor and develop your coaches?

“Benchmark is all about development and the sport is used as a means to do this. Therefore, we are dedicated to developing our coaches to be the best versions of themselves that they can be. By doing this we create knowledgeable and confident coaches. These types of coaches teach safely and have a positive impact on the children they coach, and this is our main objective. If we don't do this, we have the potential of an unsafe environment and we stunt growth in the individuals, children and by default, the club.”

How do you mentor and develop your coaches?

“When developing our workforce our starting point is always to set goals and gain an understanding of where they want to be. We make it clear that stagnation is not an option.

For a new trainee coach booked onto a forthcoming course they are allocated a mentor and one-on-one sessions are set aside for them to meet, discuss and teach.

We hold staff training days, and this can be led by an external company or, depending on the area being covered, we might seek to build a coach's confidence by having them prepare and lead a training session. For example, a coach recently chose to use a performance related bonus to do a CBT Diploma and in doing so felt there were areas of crossover that would benefit the coaches and so is putting together a workshop to communicate this.

We lay out a structure to reinforce good practice with weeks such as no support weeks, where no support is allowed in a session to reiterate the need for safe progressions and for coaching at the appropriate level. We have skills week once a term where a more experienced coach is paired with a less experienced coach for the latter to work alongside and see how more advanced skills are taught.

When a coach is booked onto a course the club take on all the work involved in organising gymnasts for both the course and assessment.

We seek to maximise everyone's strengths and build on their weaknesses. An ex-teacher who is excellent in the pastoral aspect of coaching can then run a workshop based on their area of strength and the whole team benefit from it."

What are the barriers to developing coaches?

"The requirement to do all four pieces on a course. We focus on floor and vault as these are the pieces a general gymnast will compete on. Bars and beam also severely restrict the venues available as we are limited on storage space if we do not have a dedicated facility. This means when a coach is booked onto a course, they can only attend the sites we have these pieces (one site) and we have to change the structure of that session to ensure these pieces are used.

Whilst we love the new Preschool structure, we have parents who want to do Preschool coaching and go on to work in our daytime parent and toddler classes but have no desire or confidence to take a Level 1 in another discipline first. Nor do they have the availability to be mentored in an evening session to gain the Level 1 in another discipline

Providing gymnasts make obvious sense but it does cause a barrier for the younger coaches who do not drive and are attending a course that is difficult to get to.

The length of time it takes to become qualified and the cost are obvious boundaries that we work hard to help resolve.

As the coach education structure continues to develop, particularly introducing courses specifically aimed at recreational clubs, it is hoped these barriers get removed to allow more people to access coaching opportunities."

What would you do differently in the future?

"We have evolved as a club and made systems up as we encountered issues. We would have allowed more staff training time into the calendar and more mentoring from the outset of the club."

How much money have you spent on developing your coaches?

"We pay for specialists to come in and do training. An example of this was Kirk Lindley who we had in this academic year to run a workshop on what an excellent coach looks like to others (parent, children, colleagues, boss, etc). We also had a first aid company design two-day gymnastics-specific first aid course and paid for all staff to attend this. We paid staff to attend a Sense workshop to help get a better understanding of how to work with those with hearing or visual impairments.

If we feel a qualification is one that will benefit the club or is in line with our ethos, we have at times paid for this. For example, we have just agreed to pay for a coach to do the Love To Move programme.

Performance related bonuses are given out to coaches based on agreed goals, this may not be qualification based but, for example, working on having better rapport with the gymnasts, etc.

We have at times either paid for coaches' qualifications or loaned them the funds to do the course based on their circumstances.

We also run Intro to Courses for our new Leadership Academy."