

Career Guidance for Sports Coaches

Insights from research and European benchmarks

CARE – Career Advancement, Resilience and Employability of Sport Coaches



VARALA



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CARE – Career Advancement, Resilience and Employability of Sport Coaches

- CARE is a small-scale pilot project that explores how career guidance can better support sports coaches in today's changing working life.
- The project focuses on understanding coaches' career situations and collecting feedback from coaches and sport organisations. Its purpose is to build a foundation for practical recommendations and for larger future work on career guidance in sports coaching.
- The project is implemented by Urhea (National Olympic Training Center Helsinki), Varala Sports Institute, Umeå University, and two sports clubs, Tampereen Pyrintö and Labod Bled Skating Club. In addition, the project is carried out in cooperation with other sports clubs in Tampere, Umeå and Bled.



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Why look at coaches' careers?

Coaching careers are diverse and constantly changing

- Coaching work is often part-time, project-based and fragmented
- Careers involve frequent transitions between roles and organisations
- Learning happens mainly largely through everyday work, but is not always visible or recognized

Key question: **how can coaches build sustainable careers in a fragmented and changing working life?**



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What does the literature say about career guidance?

- The literature describes career guidance as **lifelong support**, not a one-time service or a single career decision.
- Modern career guidance focuses on developing **career management skills**
 - For example: self-reflection, adaptability, decision-making and long-term planning.
- At the same time, research highlights major challenges: guidance systems are often fragmented, unevenly accessible and weakly coordinated, especially for adults and people with non-linear careers.

Key implications for coaching

- Coaching careers reflect many of the challenges identified in the literature.
- Learning is strongly embedded in everyday coaching practice, but this learning is not always recognised or connected to longer-term career planning.
- Without appropriate support, coaches may struggle to understand how their skills relate to future opportunities or how to manage transitions between roles, organisations or employment situations.



How are coaches' careers supported in existing frameworks?

The CARE project conducted a benchmark to examine how coaches' careers are described and supported in existing European sport coaching frameworks.

What works well

- Strong focus on learning and competence development
- Clear role descriptions and progression expectations
- Learning through practice widely recognized

What is limited

- Career planning and transition support
- Explicit focus on career management skills



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What is missing from a career perspective?

Core gaps identified in the benchmark

- Across frameworks, responsibility for career navigation is placed largely on individual coaches.
- Career management skills are expected rather than actively supported, and transitions are treated mainly as outcomes of learning.

👉 This creates a gap between strong learning structures and weak career support, especially in a labour market where coaching careers are fragmented and uncertain.



What can we learn from other fields?

Comparisons with teaching, healthcare and national lifelong guidance systems show similar patterns. Even in well-developed systems, career guidance for professionals is often limited or indirect.

Cross-sector insights

- Teaching: clear career structures, weak individual guidance
- Healthcare: strong systems, high transition demands, limited guidance
- Lifelong guidance systems show that responsibility and coordination matter

👉 A key insight is that explicit career guidance requires clear responsibility and coordination. It does not emerge automatically from learning systems or competence frameworks alone.



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Core message from literature and benchmark

Strong foundations – weak career support

- European sport coaching frameworks already provide a solid foundation for developing coaching competence.
- Existing coaching frameworks focus on coaching practice and competence development, while career planning, transitions and career management skills remain weakly addressed.
- The main challenge is the lack of clearly defined responsibility and coordination for supporting coaches' careers, especially during key transition points.

Why this matters

- For coaches' career sustainability: clearer career support strengthens long-term employability and helps reduce career drop-out
- For clubs and employers: better commitment, more effective use of existing competences and more stable coaching staff
- For the coaching profession as a whole: sustainable and attractive career pathways help retain expertise, improve quality and support the long-term development of sport systems

