

Women in High Performance Coaching

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Anita White wrote an article entitled “Women Coaches Problems and Issues” in the National Coaching Foundation newsletter in 1987. The quote is sadly still applicable today.

” If we really believe in sport for all, then women should have a fair share of the sports world, and that means more than just playing or competing...we need more women coaches to provide role models for young women and girls. If girls see women actively involved as coaches, then they may be more likely to stay involved for longer. We need more women featuring prominently in influential positions. Girls and women are more likely to aspire to become coaches if there were more women coaches about.

***Today’s male dominance of coaching tends to exclude tomorrows women coaches
There is no doubt that it will not be easy to reverse the trend towards male domination of coaching. The first step is to make people aware of the issue and convinced of the need to do something about it.***

We need to examine our own beliefs and attitudes, to be honest with ourselves about our prejudices.”

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Introduction

World Rugby set out its ambition for women's rugby in November 2017 in its plan focussing on "Accelerating the global development of women in rugby 2017 – 2025". One of its key objectives is to develop inspirational leadership on and off the field.

In August 2018, a review was commissioned by World Rugby to:

- Develop a more in-depth understanding of the status of women in high performance rugby coaching roles globally;
- Investigate the challenges and opportunities to increase the numbers and or percentages of women coaching (women and men's teams) at a high-performance level;
- Identify good practice programmes or strategies in place within rugby and other sporting codes that have been successful in developing high performance women coaches; and
- Provide recommendations and suggestions for consideration to accelerate the development of women in HP coaching.

The following report addresses the key findings compiled by Carol Isherwood who was contracted to lead this project. In completing this report Carol; surveyed a sample of unions and regions, held 21 individual interviews, undertook extensive desk research, sought feedback from 40 representatives who attended the World Rugby Annual Training and Education Conference and incorporated feedback from representatives who attended a two-day High-Performance Coaching Forum.

NB. For this report high performance coaches are defined as coaches appointed to work at national level senior or age group teams and or coaching at the most senior level of the union's domestic competition.

Women in High Performance Coaching

The first thing to note is that rugby is not alone in the challenge of getting more women into high performance coaching positions. The research undertaken has highlighted that other sports are facing similar issues. This negates the sentiments viewed by some, that women's rugby is still young, and there is simply a need to wait for the game to evolve a little further, and players to retire, before there will be a truly diverse coaching representation. Anita White's article written in 1987 reveals that the lack of women in coaching roles was an issue over 30 years ago. The data across sports shows that little progress has been made since then.

Why does it matter?

The World Rugby vision is a sport for all - true to its values. Therefore, rugby leadership on and off the field should reflect this. Women make up over 25% of rugby playing population, they should be represented in all areas and at all levels of the game. Having woman involved as high-performance coaches is the right thing to do. In addition to this core principle, there are many reasons to increase the number of women in coaching leadership some of which are listed below.

- Young women want and need strong, confident female and male role models
- Women who are coached by women are more likely to take up coaching than women who are coached by men
- Women who commit as players need to be given better opportunities to stay in sport as a career post retirement.
- Diversity improves organisational performance. Diverse leadership teams are more co-operative and imaginative in their work and problem solving, the quality of decision making is better. This logically applies as much to “coaching teams” as to other leadership teams.
- Women are well placed to understand the psychological and social pressure female athletes may experience. (Though this shouldn’t limit women to only coach women and vice versa) The presence of women and different traits, qualities, life and leadership experiences they bring might also help prevent situations arising with “bullying” environments recently alleged within some sports at an elite level.
- “Promoting gender equality demonstrates corporate social responsibility to our commercial partners.” Marisol Casado Chair, IOC Gender Equality Review Project (2018).

Research Methodology

In order to gain a greater understanding of the issues both within rugby and across all sports that may be leading to the under-representation of women in HP coaching roles., a range of research methods were deployed. This included both quantitative and qualitative research.

- **Union and Regional Association Survey** – A survey was developed in September 2018 and distributed to the top 15 women’s unions and six regional associations. Surveys were completed by four out of the six regions and 11 out of the 15 unions. There was a total response rate of 71%.
- **Training and Education Conference** (Oct 2018) - A specific workshop was held with 41 trainers and educators from unions and regions.
- **Twenty-one qualitative Interviews** – Individual interviews were held with a range of coaches, high performance directors and key people within rugby, plus additional interviews were conducted with leaders from other sports and specialists in diversity in sport.
- **Women into High Performance Coaching Forum** – A two-day workshop was held with 12 representatives from different regions, roles and backgrounds; all with a knowledge of high performance and / or coaching and developing diversity in sport.
- **Desk research** – A review of existing reports, articles and research which could provide greater insight into women in coaching and to seek any case studies and good practice where countries and sports have aimed to address the issues.

This report is, therefore, the product of a thorough and broad range of research and insight from World Rugby’s stakeholders. It provides a comprehensive picture of the environmental factors facing women coaching rugby at a high-performance level.

Key Findings from the Unions

- **100% of the responses felt the lack of women coaching at a high-performance level was an issue**
- **Amongst those unions surveyed, the Hong Kong Rugby Union is currently the only union that has a women head coach of a senior national women's team (15s or sevens)**
- **While the majority of unions said there were coaching targets in place, there were very few specific strategies to address the lack of women coaching at a high-performance level**
- **There are currently 75 women involved in a high-performance coaching role across 14 unions (33 of which are part of the USA Rugby's targeted approach)**
- **Most women in high-performance coaching positions are coaching at top club/provincial level or national domestic league level**
- **Only a few women hold positions as head coaches at a national age group level**
- **Of the women working in high-performance coaching roles, the majority are in an assistant coach capacity**
- **Two of the unions surveyed have no women at all involved in high performance coaching**

Barriers and Challenges experienced by Stakeholders

All stakeholders were asked what they saw the critical challenges are to increase the numbers of women in high performance coaching roles. There was a long list of varied reasons put forward for the lack of women progressing into high performance roles.

It became evident that the challenges and barriers influencing the lack of women in High Performance coaching roles are complex and inter-linked and to address them requires similar sophisticated, integrated and holistic solutions.

Dr Nicole LaVoi, a leading academic on women's coaching based at the Tucker Centre for Research on Girls & Women in the USA, uses an Ecological Systems Theory (EST) model to provides a framework to categorise the challenges facing women coaches. The concept is that a coach is nested within a system of relationships and structures. There are multiple dynamic influences at an individual, interpersonal, organisational and societal level that ultimately impact on the coach. More details on the EST model can be found in the Appendix to this report. For the purpose of this review the feedback from stakeholders on the challenges and barriers has been aligned to the EST model. It needs to be noted however, that many of the barriers and challenges put forward, cross over the four areas and all influence each other.

Societal and Organisational Barriers

Lack of Role Models

The lack of women coach role models from grass roots level upwards reinforces perceptions that rugby coaches are male

“There is a lack of diversity in the coaching resource...the lack of female coaches at a grass roots level and along the pathway reinforces perceptions that coaching is a male leadership role”

Lack of employment opportunities

There are insufficient deployment opportunities for women at the highest levels of the game which means women who wish to become high-performance coaches cannot get the experience to meet the role profile criteria

“There are limited opportunities to allow for full time female paid coaches. It is not perceived to be viable as a sole career. Coaches have few opportunities to keep this as the focus on their career pathway due to limited finances to support paid positions”

Organisational Practice in the Recruitment Process

There exists at times an unconscious hiring bias within rugby organisations. Views and perceptions of key decision makers often place more value on experience in the men's game, and do not see the women's game or women coaches as being at the same level.

“Men are often employed on their potential, women on their experience...”
EY Head of Global Talent Women's Rugby Leadership conference 2017

Competition for Paid Roles.

As a result of the increased competition for paid roles, women are being appointed in to less roles at the high-performance level. In the professional era men see the opportunities to coach female teams as a career stepping stone. These opportunities are not as easily afforded to women.

“There is massive competition for paid coaching roles and few women have the experience to compete with male coaches for these roles “

“Men at times leverage “women's roles” to gain experience to then cross back over to the men's game...However it doesn't work the other way, you won't see a women coaching a men's international side (or very rarely) so by this logic women have only half of the opportunities and then a significant % of those are going to men to increase their experience”

“In an age of the unrelenting pursuit of the podium, results-based funding, and “the best person gets the job,” males benefitted disproportionately from the new jobs created by the increase in women's participation as athletes. In intercollegiate sports, the number of coaching jobs in women's sport has more than doubled in the last 4 years, but the percentage of female coaches has fallen sharply – from an estimated 60% in the 1960's to 40% in the 1980's to the 19% reported last year.” (Kidd, B, 2013)

Players perception of women high performance coaches

There is often a perception amongst players that male coaches are better than female coaches. Because women coaches may lack international playing or coaching experience there is an

expectation that they 'can't' coach. Good coaches have rounded skills not just technical tactical skills taken from the field of play.

"Players lack experience with female coaches. This affects how women coaches are respected and accepted"

"From a playing perspective, players want the best coach possible. Often than may not seem like the female option, because they lack international playing or coaching experience (if this hasn't been accessible previously). To look at this holistically we are going to need to do some thinking about pre-existing challenges that female athletes have around male vs female coaches. In my experience, men with international experience with an accent are instantly respected, but women need to prove it before they have it."

Individual and Inter-personal Challenges

Women Coaches Lack Confidence

There is a perception that women lack confidence; This lack of confidence impacts on whether or not they put themselves forward for roles, whether they attend coaching courses which are dominated by men, and or whether they recognise their own skills and competencies make them a suitable candidate for a role.

"Research shows that women have to feel they can meet 100% of stated criteria on a role profile whilst men will apply if they feel they can do 60% of role"

*Desvaux, Devillard-Hoelinger & Meaney (2008) cited in Sport Coaching UK factsheet (2015)

Limited Informal Networks Exist for Women Coaches

Women coaches do not have as well established formal or informal networks and peer support as male coaches do.

"Due to the lack of women coaching at a national coach level, elite coaching networks tend to be male dominated and are perceived to be inaccessible to women coaches"

Role stereotypes exist around what is acceptable for women who work in high performance

Gender stereotypes still exist. In some cultures, women are still more likely to have their ability to commit to high performance coaching questioned by others if they have a family. Linked to this comment is that often there are different expectations of women, allied with their own choice in valuing their time with children and partner

"There's no obvious route for a young woman to go into coaching, and so few examples of women enjoying rewarding coaching careers that even those who really want to be coaches plan something else for their futures. Gender should not be the main factor in hiring a coach, but we're missing a lot of great coaches when we turn so many outstanding females away."

Beth Ali – Director of Inter-collegiate and High-Performance Sport, University of Toronto, (Cited in Kidd, B. 2013)

Case Studies & Good Practice

As part of developing this report several organisations and individuals were contacted to gather a range of views and opinions on good practice interventions. This report highlights two case studies from within rugby and three from external organisations to illustrate the possible solutions and actions which could be taken.

RFU – The Female Coach Leadership Development Programme

The RFU have established a specific action plan within their wider coaching programme to support female coaches progress along the coaching pathway and to provide an ongoing supply of high performing female coaches. The programme is a three-tiered approach which involves:

- Recruiting six women per year into the RFU level 4 coaching award
- Recruiting twelve coaches per year into the RFU level 3 coaching award and
- Recruiting 100 women per year (the 100 club) into formal education programmes to complete the England Rugby Coaching award.

For the 100 Club, the RFU ensures courses have 50% female tutors and a minimum number of women on the course. All coaches at RFU levels 3 and 4 have a clear education, development and deployment plan suited to their capabilities and potential. This is a joint project led by RFU Coaching Department and Women's High-Performance Team.

USA Rugby Women in Coaching Initiatives from Community to High Performance

The Training and Education staff at USA Rugby have specific training quota targets set to align female coaching numbers to the percentage of women playing at a geographical level. They have developed a range of support programmes, including women only coaching courses to drive an increase in the number of female coaches. At a high-performance level there is a programme for both men and women coaches called Project Soar. Coaches on this programme have access to a digital curriculum, series of webinars, summits and shadowing opportunities. Coaches on Project Soar are deployed where possible to national age group positions. The programme is aligned to a long-term coach development programme which has set criteria for entry and specific delivery at each level from foundation through talent, performance to elite & master. The USA has deliberate succession planning underway to appoint women into high performance coach positions where ever possible.

There are a couple of unique practical coaching and professional development opportunities in the USA which assist with high performance coach development. The first is the NCAA rugby programme that offers very well remunerated full-time coach employment opportunities. The second is the presence of an independent professional association for women rugby coaches called the Women's Rugby Coaches & Referees Association (WRCRA). Established in 2017, WRCRA is the professional organization for women's rugby coaches and referees from all levels of play. WRCRA provides members with resources, training, mentorship, networking and access to professional pathways. WRCRA works with a wide range of organizations such as, USA Rugby, Rugby Americas North, Atavus, the Female Brain Project and The Alliance of Women Coaches. The WRCRA conducts an annual national gathering and monthly webinars.

Collaborative International Leadership Scholarship Programme for Female Elite Coaches

A programme is currently under development led by a group of International Federations in

conjunction with the Women's Sport Leadership Academy (WSLA) in response to the recent IOC gender equity review published in April 2018. The IOC review contains a recommendation that there should be a balance in gender representation at the Olympic Games. The IOC have raised concerns regarding the low percentage of women coaches selected by national federations. At both the London and Rio games, only 11% of the coaches were female. The ICCE programme will be a collaborative effort across 5 or 6 International Federations (IFs). The sporting codes currently being considered for the first intake of the programme are Rowing, Hockey, Gymnastics, Triathlon and Rugby. The concept is that each IF would nominate 5 female coaches to be involved in an 18-month programme. The programme requires the national federations to deploy the coaches in authentic HP roles, whilst undertaking a holistic professional development programme. It is proposed that the programme be funded jointly by the IOC and the International Federations.

Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) Women's Coaching Internship Programme

As part of the CGFs commitment to gender equality a Women's Coaching Internship Programme was launched at the Gold Coast games in 2018. The aim of the programme was to build women's coaching capacity across the Commonwealth. National Commonwealth Games Associations in partnership with their National Sport Organisations were invited to fully integrate an aspiring female coach into their Gold Coast coaching team. The CGF reserved 20 quota positions and travel grants for the programme. The New Zealand Olympic and Commonwealth Games Association worked with NZ Rugby to nominate Victoria Grant to be part of this internship programme. Victoria went on during the year to be the head coach for the NZ Youth Olympic Team which recently won a gold medal at the Youth Olympic Games.

SCORE (Strengthening Coaching with the Objective to Raise Equality)

A European wide project led by the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation and supported by the Erasmus Sports Programme saw the development of a best practice toolkit for national sporting organisations and coaches. The toolkit provides detailed information, templates and resources aimed at improving organisational practice to increase the number of employed and volunteer female coaches in the coaching workforce.

Solutions and Recommendations

To provide solutions for effective and sustainable change, the following recommendations are put forward for consideration.

1. Agree high-level ambitions and targets for the programme of work

For World Rugby to commit to changing the current state it is important to develop and agree on some high-level aspirations or goals. The following statements have been developed after discussion with those in attendance at the recent high-performance coach forum about what success would look like in women's rugby.

- By 2025 it will be normal for women to be appointed into head coaching positions at a high-performance level.
- Women will see themselves and be seen by others as just "coaches" not female coaches.

- At the 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup women will make up at least 40% of coaching teams including head coaching roles.
- The makeup of coaching teams both men and women's programmes will be more diverse. There will be a greater prominence of women coaching both male and female teams.

2. Develop a best practice toolkit/resource for member unions to assist with addressing challenges and barriers to increasing the number of women coaches

A helpful rugby specific toolkit along the lines of the SCORE resource could assist with many of the societal and organisational challenges listed. The guide could summarise the findings in this review and outline examples of good practice policies, interventions in developing and recruiting women in coaching. The tool kit would help fast track unions ability to address barriers to women who aspire to coach at a high-performance level

3. Use the 2019 World Rugby High Performance Academy to focus on Women's Rugby - enable additional positions to be available to include women coaches within the coaching work stream

The Competition and Performance Division within World Rugby facilitates a High-Performance Academy on an annual basis aimed at improving the capability of targeted men's high-performance programmes. It has been suggested by CAP that the 2019 Academy should focus on women's high-performance programmes. In addition to providing a high-quality professional development opportunity for the current male coaches of the national women's teams, the Academy could also be used to create an opportunity for unions to identify talented female coaches to attend and gain valuable experience and access to ongoing support networks.

4. Support the development and inclusion of Rugby as a foundation sport in the developing WISLA /IOC Leadership Programme for Female Elite Coaches

There is a need to talent ID and fast track women with potential leadership in high performance coaching. Whilst still to be confirmed, an opportunity for talented women rugby coaches to participate in this global high-profile cross sporting code professional development opportunity would be incredibly valuable.

5. Establish a global database and virtual network of women currently involved in high performance coaching with the aim of supporting ongoing development and tracking career progress

There is a need to create peer support networks for women. This review has enabled World Rugby to understand the depth of women currently coaching at a high-performance level. In effect this group of identified women has the potential to become a global talent pool that could be connected and supported. It is recommended that World Rugby look to collect details from those interested to become part of a new virtual support network.

6. Work with Regions and Unions to identify and promote role models aimed at lifting the profile of women in High Performance Coaching

Visibility of women in coaching at all levels was recognised as a potential barrier for others to consider a career in coaching. Profiles of coaches should feature regularly in all Global, Regional and Union level communication channels. Women rugby coach role models can be developed and incorporated into ongoing promotional activities.

7. Ensure appropriate regional training targets and KPIs are set for inclusion of women in all programmes. Review existing programmes and resources to ensure no barriers exist for women who wish to gain qualifications to coach at the highest level

One of the perceived barriers to women applying for roles is a lack of confidence in their background, qualification and experience. There may be a need to introduce more women only coaching courses or set specific diversity targets for training. The Rugby America's North long-term strategic plan has set a target for 2020 that 40% of all non-player roles will be filled by women. This plan targets training and education initiatives to enable this to happen.

8. World Rugby to consider targeted HP investment into unions to deploy women into authentic high-performance coaching roles as full members of national level coaching teams.

There is an urgent need to create more deployment opportunities at a high-performance level to give women coaches full time practical coaching experience. Investment into assistant coaches could be incorporated into the wider World Rugby high performance investment programme

9. Develop an intensive coach deployment/internship opportunity linked to the WRWC 2021 on a similar basis to the Commonwealth Games Federation Coach Internship

Create an intensive integrated internship opportunity for a group of 12 female coaches alongside the appointed national team coach. Creating an opportunity to be part of a world cup campaign could be potentially game changing in terms of fast tracking experience at an international competition level.

10. Investigate and establish diversified investment partners to underpin the work required

Whilst funding exists within existing budgets to implement some of the suggested solutions there will be a need to investigate additional sources of income to be able to progress with the development of some key initiatives.

This project and associated findings have significant implications at a global, regional and national level. World Rugby needs to work through the feasibility of the recommendations above and then prioritise actions for the short and medium term.

“as we’re making all these amazing strides in society, in terms of increasing our social awareness, and making efforts towards ideas like diversity and equality, and just sort of creating this more inclusive world... somehow sports should be an exception. It’s this idea, for some people, that sports should almost be this haven, where its ok to be closed-minded...like a bubble for all our worst ignorance.

So, when I see arguments- or even jokes- that we shouldn’t have female head coaches in the NBA because of “locker room” situations or whatever...I guess it just reminds me that, for as much progress as we’ve made as a league over these last few years...we still have a way to go. Because let’s be real: There are pushes now for increased gender diversity in the workplace of pretty much every industry in the world. Its what’s expected. More importantly – its what’s right. And yet the NBA should get a pass because some fans are willing to take it easy on us ...because we’re sports?

I really hope not.

***I hope the NBA will never feel satisfied with being forward-thinking ‘for a sports league’
Let’s strive to be forward-thinking for an industry of any kind”***

An Open Letter About Female Coaches written by Pau Gasol, Male NBA Player May 11, 2018

Appendices

Appendix One: Bibliography

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Fostering Innovation through a Diverse Workforce Forbes Insights (2016)

Appendix Two: Detail of surveys, 1-1 interviews and forum attendees

Region and Unions Survey Responses

The following Regional Associations and Unions responded to the survey.

Regions	
Oceania Rugby	Rugby Africa
Asia Rugby	RAN
Unions	
Australia	Japan
Canada	New Zealand
England	South Africa
Fiji	Spain
Hong Kong	USA
Ireland	

1-1 Interviews

Name	Role
Baroness Sue Campbell	Director Women's Football, The FA
Pauline Harrison	ICCE project Lead and FAB / WSLA women's network and leadership projects
Patricia Gonzalez	Technical Development Manager, Women's Football, FIFA
Dr Leanne Norman	Reader in Sports Studies, Leeds Beckett University, UK
Nicky Ponsford	Head of Women's Performance RFU; Rugby Europe Board Member
Nigel Melville	RFU – Director of Professional Rugby; Previous CEO US Rugby
Emilie Bydwell	General Manager of Women's High Performance – USA
Meaghan Howat	Director Rugby Sevens Operations Rugby Canada
Cate Sexton	Head of Women's Rugby Development NZRU
Jilly Collins	Head of Women's Rugby
Giselle Mather	HP Coach: England; Tyrells XVs Premiership; London Irish
Anna Richards	HP Coach, Hong Kong Sevens head coach and NZ, Japan
Amanda Bennett	HP Coach, Wales, England and Saracens, previous UK Sport Head of Governance. Currently consultant on diversity in Sport and Chair: European Women's in Sport
Kenny Forehand & Katie Dyke	Training and Development USA Rugby
Lucy Faulkner	FAB / WSLA women's network and leadership
Alana Gattinger	Canada, Manager of Senior Men's team
Kerrissa Heffernan	Founder US Women's Rugby Foundation & WRCRA coaches and referees' network, Rugby Coach, and Director, Global Sports Leadership, Brown University, USA.
Rochelle Clarke	Ex International and current coach in men's and women's rugby. One of coaches on RFUs coach development L4 programme.
Kathy Flores	Former US Women's Head Coach
Jock Peggie	Training Manager, World Rugby
Peter Horne	General Manager High Performance, World Rugby

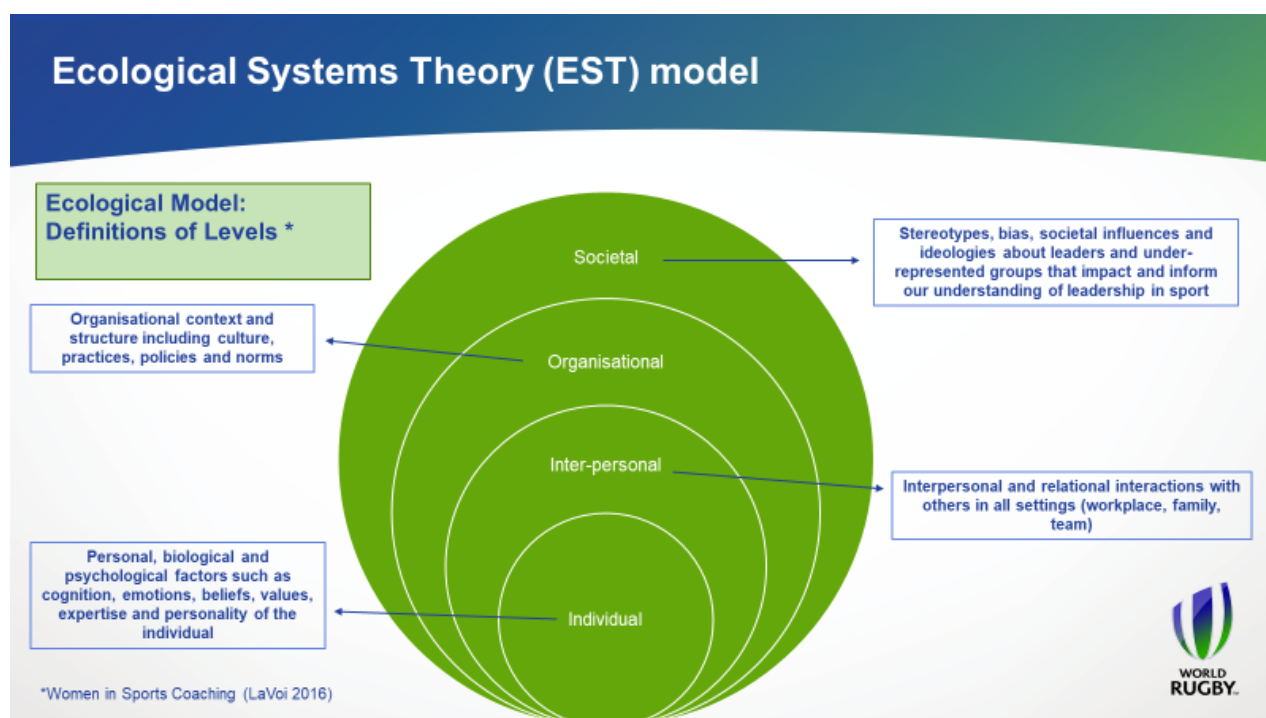
Forum Delegates, 7th -8th October 2018, London

Name	Role
Isabel Perez	Vice-President Federación Española de Rugby, Former HP coach
Jo Hull	Hong Kong Rugby Union Women's Performance Manager & Head Coach
Helen Buteme	Head Coach Uganda National Women's team
Giselle Mather	HP Coach: England; Tyrells XVs Premiership; London Irish
Nicky Ponsford	Head of Women's Performance RFU; Rugby Europe Board Member
Emilie Bydwell	General Manager of Women's High Performance - USA
Jason Lewis	World Rugby Regional service Manager; Former Welsh Women's Team
Amanda Bennett	HP Coach, Wales, England and Saracens, previous UK Sport Head of Governance. Currently consultant on diversity in Sport and Chair: European Women's in Sport
Jock Peggie	Training Manager, World Rugby

Appendix Three: Models and current research into barriers and challenges

Ecological Systems Theory (EST) model, *Women in Sports Coaching (LaVoi 2016)*

The ecological model developed by La Voi states there are four spheres of influence that impact on women in coaching. The model is illustrated below:



Organisational Practice in the Recruitment Process, (Norman, L 2017)

Research demonstrates that structural processes marginalise women from positions of power

- Informal appointment processes
- Male-centric organisational values
- Isolated and unsupported working conditions
- Lack of value and acceptance ascribed to women's contribution to sport
- Inaccessible development opportunities
- More commonly, these underlying processes are difficult to identify and consequently hard to challenge.