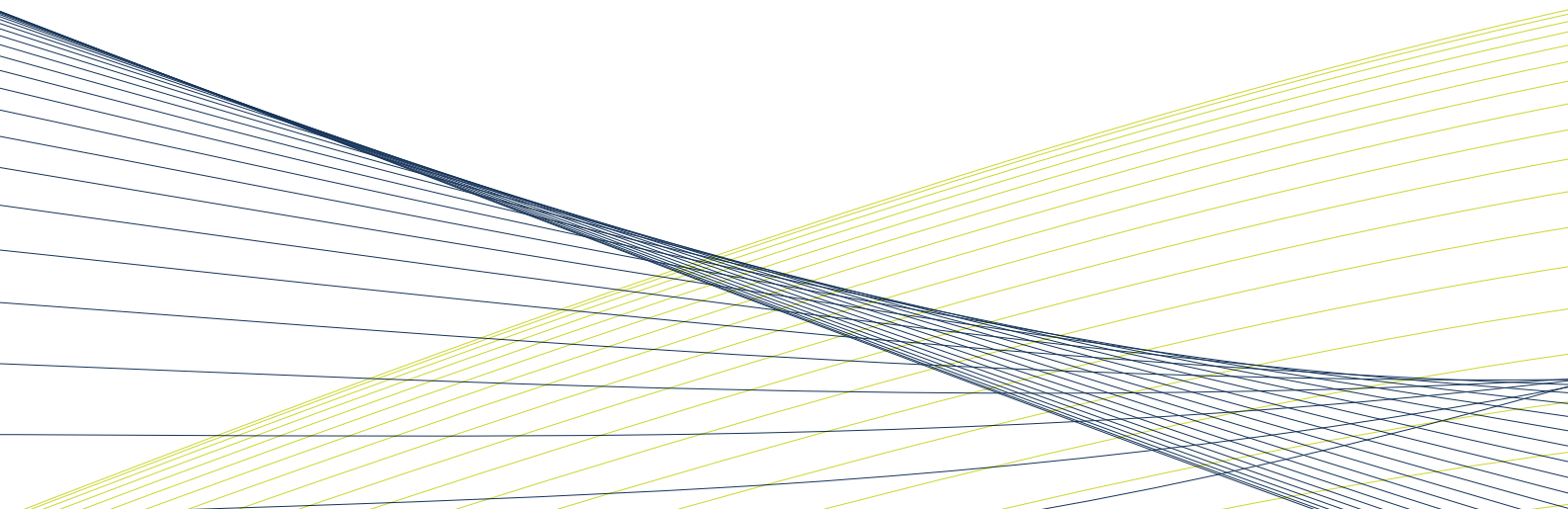




Level 4 Coaching Certificate

Professional Practice in Sport Coaching





Introduction

In today's busy and competitive coaching marketplace, coaches are expected to provide cutting edge practice that's informed by current research. The Level 4 Coaching Certificate learning programme enables coaches to explore and evaluate contemporary thinking with colleagues from across rowing, equestrian disciplines and other sports. A key strength of the programme is the informal networks that are developed through the process, which help coaches to bring diverse and creative approaches to problem-solving and everyday decision-making. This makes for a rich learning mix and provides a unique environment to inspire coaches in their quest to excel.

Background

British Rowing and British Equestrian have partnered with the University of Stirling to deliver the Level 4 Coaching Certificate qualification, including a Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) in Professional Practice in Sports Coaching. This partnership allows us to offer both components at a lower price than a standalone Postgraduate Diploma.

The course consists of a bespoke programme that's been developed specifically for both sports. The syllabus of professional education is intended for high-performing coaches who have already completed the Level 3 Senior Club Coach, or an equivalent qualification which can be discussed on application.

Enrolment takes place annually (dependent on numbers of applicants).

Key people

Stephen MacDonald – Academic Course Leader

As the Academic Course Leader for the MSc and PgDip in Sport Performance Coaching, I will be your principal contact at The University of Stirling. I oversee the running of the course, and amongst other things, ensure the content remains current and relevant, that the University quality assurance processes are adhered to and that students receive the appropriate support. I am an experienced and active coach, coach educator and mentor with over 30 years of practical experience, coaching in Adventure Sports Coaching and Performance Coaching domains. Before my appointment at Stirling in December 2017, I had spent the previous ten years coaching the dynamic sport of canoe slalom at both club and national level.

I am currently Programme Director for:

- MSc Sport Performance Coaching
- PG Diploma Sport Performance Coaching - Level 4 Coaching Certificate.

In addition to teaching at Stirling, I coach canoe slalom as a volunteer with my local club, work as a coach educator for British Canoeing and mentor several performance coaches. I am also a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.



Loretta Williams - Programme Manager

As Programme Manager, I work with colleagues from British Equestrian and Stirling University to ensure we deliver a programme we are all proud of. In particular I support British Rowing coaches through the Level 4 aspects of the course, providing guidance ahead of 360 feedback, observations at your club and the final VIVA panel discussion. Together we then discuss your feedback and reflections following the 360 reports and observations of coaching practice. I act as a panel member on Rowing and Equestrian VIVAs.



Sarah Harris - Head of Learning, Education and Development

I lead on coach learning, education and development at British Rowing. I work closely with Loretta to ensure the Level 4 programme runs smoothly. I also sit on the interview panel and support the coaches through the programme as another point of contact.



Gordon Burton

After starting out as a rower then a coach educator and mentor with British Rowing, I went on to lead UK Sport's high performance coaching programmes across the full range of Olympic and Paralympic sports. I support the programme in a coach developer role. This will include visiting you in your coaching environment, observing coaching practice and providing professional discussion. I enjoy working in partnership with individuals to explore how you can achieve your goals.



The Level 4 Coach

Level 4 coaches are visionary and knowledgeable decision-makers who display exceptional skills, behaviours and the highest professional and ethical standards. They advance the development of themselves and others, lead cutting-edge programmes or a specialist part of an existing programme, and make a positive impact on sport performance and behaviour.

Performance capabilities of a Level 4 coach

There are eight capabilities and behaviours we look for in a Level 4 coach, and these are the measures we will assess at your final panel presentation and professional discussion. The final panel is explained later in this guide.



A Level 4 coach should be able to ...

1. Build and maintain effective long-term working relationships
2. Create and sustain a supportive learning environment that's aligned to the needs of participants and the coaching context
3. Empower and challenge participants and themselves to exceed in what they believe they can achieve
4. Use an integrated approach to synthesise information, solve problems and manage change
5. Generate strategies and make effective decisions in a dynamic and uncertain environment
6. Demonstrate exceptional communication skills and adapt these to the needs of the participants and the context
7. Be self-aware, self-reflective and drive for continued self-improvement
8. Demonstrate a positive impact on the behaviour and performance of participants

Who is the Level 4 Coaching Certificate for?

For coaches to be successful at this level, they need to...

- Develop as highly motivated, active learners
- Be able to work autonomously and manage their own learning process
- Take responsibility for identifying their own learning needs and aspirations

When we refer to 'rowers' in this guide, we are including indoor, river and coastal rowing.

You do not have to be working in a high-performance environment to be considered a high-performing coach or to be eligible for the Level 4 programme. For example, you might be primarily working with adults in a participation environment, or with children or young athletes.

Entry requirements

To apply to study for the Level 4 Coaching Certificate, you will be required to...

- Hold a Level 3 Coaching Certificate or recognised equivalent qualification, such as World Rowing / other federation coaching qualifications or suitable postgraduate diploma.
- Demonstrate that you've been a high-performing coach in a specific environment for a minimum of five years and display high-performing characteristics aligned to the Level 4 criteria
- Provide two references who are able and prepared to verify your expertise and experience

ALUMNI

"The course raised my awareness of the underpinning theory of how I wanted to coach. It reaffirmed belief that the way I want to approach my coaching is evidenced in research and provided support for pro socio behaviours and sport for change."



Hannah Vines

As part of the application process, it will be necessary to demonstrate that you can...

- Provide a range of evidence of on-going professional development and of your current high-performing coaching practice
- Employ an athlete-centred approach to your coaching
- Hold an ambassadorial role in rowing

You are encouraged to identify a mentor to support you with specialist, sport-based, technical development.



Coaching environments

Your high performing coaching activities can take place in one or more coaching contexts or environments. For example fixed or sliding seat, river or coastal, indoor or on-water rowing, participation programmes or High Performance.

Of course any of these contexts can be within able-bodied or pararowing programmes. The aim of the Level 4 programme is to help you enhance the environment within which you coach to enable your athletes to develop and strive, whatever context and whatever level or ability of your rowers.

The qualification and course

The British Rowing Level 4 Coaching Certificate qualification includes the opportunity for coaches to gain a Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) in Professional Practice in Sports Coaching, and is designed to support and credit learning within the workplace.



ALUMNI

"The course helped me to recognise what my strengths were as a coach and a true sense of self – what my values were and what things were important to me and how that impacted on how I coached my athletes. This helped me to change some behaviours but also to build on things that I hadn't previously recognised as strengths.

Challenges were faced within my coaching environment to make changes but the network of coaches on the programme both within and outside the sport was a real benefit of the course and provided great support.

Really positive experience and 100% believe it made me a better coach."

Rachel Hooper

Forming an integral part of the Level 4 Coaching Certificate qualification for high performing coaches, the PGDip element has been created around work-based learning (WBL) modules that are focused on the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to develop professional practice, as well as the ability to manage academic learning.

Using a range of work-based learning situations, the PGDip course will enhance your knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking skills that are of importance to professional practitioners in sports coaching. You will have regular interaction with subject experts who facilitate learning opportunities via lectures, seminars, tutorials, subject-specific forums and student conferences. You will operate in a learning and assessment environment that emphasises how theory and empirical research is applied to stimulate a solution-focused approach to the real issues relevant to sports coaching.

This approach enables you to explore coaching practice through the rigour of academic learning, blended with the experience of coaching. The structure of the programme provides the opportunity to develop critical thinking about coaching and to impact on personal coaching behaviours.



You can choose to add on a third year of study in order to gain a Masters qualification with the University of Stirling. This would be at an additional cost by separate arrangement between you and the University.

Awarding bodies

British Rowing will be the awarding body for the Level 4 Coaching Certificate qualification, while the PGDip element of the course will be awarded by the University of Stirling. You must complete the PGDip component before you can be awarded the Level 4.

Course outline and commitment

The programme runs over two years, with the course commencing in autumn 2025 and concluding with a final panel presentation in November 2027.

The University of Stirling Post Graduate Diploma meets the needs of busy coaches working in the industry, the programme is offered part-time over two years (with options to extend to three), fully online with no need to come to campus, and with recorded lectures and content to allow students to dovetail learning with their own schedules. This is complemented by online face to face check-ins by webinar and individual tutor support.

The University continues to support the development of adaptive expertise, professional judgement, and growth in the coaches we work with, through the programme aims:

- To develop coaches who are evidence guided, critical problem solvers in the dynamic context of sport coaching.
- To develop appreciation of relevant theoretical concepts in sport coaching and the ability to critically apply these to real-world coaching applications .

As this is a post-graduate level programme, applicants will need to be prepared to dedicate the time needed to study in order to gain the most benefit from the learning.

Learning support from the University of Stirling

The University of Stirling has a history of guiding students, from a variety of backgrounds, through postgraduate study. As such, there is genuine recognition that many learners undertaking the Sports Performance Coaching PgDip, do not come from traditional academic backgrounds. and the course has been designed in a way to support students in transitioning to an unfamiliar learning context. Furthermore, with applied backgrounds in coaching and coach development, the core teaching staff understand the need for course content to feel relevant and accessible.

In addition to this cooperative environment, students have access to the wider study support services at the University and will also benefit from a number of additional opportunities to help adjust to the academic environment. As an example, there are study skills sessions including how to think critically, how to reference academic work and how to draw upon research to support a presentation. Finally, there is a strong personal tutor system at the University of Stirling, to which every student has access. This provides foundations for the wrap-around care and guidance that sets the University of Stirling apart.

Postgraduate Diploma modules

The following eight modules are covered during the PGDip programme:

1. The coaching process

The coaching process is far from simple and yet coaches engage successfully in it every day in their work with and for athletes and participants.

This module examines the coaching process, what coaches do, and the impact of their work on athletes and participants. Integrating research, theory and personal practice, you'll explore:

- day-to-day activities of coaching (including coaching behaviours)
- interpersonal coaching relationships
- why coaches work as they do
- how coaching is conceptualised

The module aims to provide you with the opportunity to examine what coaches do and the reasoning behind their actions and to critically analyse models of the coaching process. You'll engage with up-to-date research, theory and concepts to explore and critically reflect on what you do when coaching and why.

2. Coaching Concepts

Coaching Concepts considers the formation of coaching knowledge and various aspects of what it means to function as an effective coach, leading to coaching expertise.

You'll explore:

- the development of coaching knowledge
- aspects of effective coaching
- the coach and their ethics
- the formation of coaching expertise
- the role of decision-making in progress towards coaching mastery
- the cognitive expertise required to impact the coaching process

You'll engage with up-to-date research, theory and concepts to explore and critically reflect on what you do when coaching and why. To encourage the application of coaching theory into a coaching practice, your assignments will be directly related to your own context.

3. Understanding Performance

This module is about enhancing your decision-making and problem-solving abilities as a sport coach by using objective methods. We will explore the practical use of sports science methods relating to the objective measurement and analysis of performance demands in your sport.

In this module you'll:

- Explore the demands of your sport.
- Develop your critical understanding of measurement and analyses of performance data.
- Enhance your decision-making processes as a coach through more objective methods.
- Consider the ethical basis of using data in sport.

Case studies will also be presented to illustrate how theory is applied to coaching practice.

4. Coaching as Learning

Sport coaching and the development of coaching expertise have traditionally focused on the 'what' rather than the 'how' of the coach's skills and knowledge.

This module aims to develop your critical understanding of the pedagogical process and provide an underpinning for your coaching practice.

You'll explore:

- theories of learning;
- informed and integrated approaches to pedagogy in devising, managing and implementing coaching practice;
- a range of views and concepts related to the application of innovative pedagogy;
- opportunities to enable you to apply and reflect upon pedagogy and the conditions within which athletes learn;
- the creation of positive learning environments.

You'll engage with up-to-date research, theory and concepts as means to explore and critically reflect on what you do when coaching and why.

5. Planning for Sport Coaching

This module will enhance your knowledge, skills and understanding of 'nested' planning at the macro, meso and micro-level in your coaching context. We will critically explore sports management models, long-term athlete development, periodisation and individual session planning.

You will:

- Develop a deeper understanding of your coaching context through exploring complex systems approaches to planning.
- Create plans to enhance your coaching practice within your context.
- Critically apply evidence-guided theory to your coaching practice.

Case studies will also be presented to illustrate how theory is applied to coaching practice.

6. Identifying and solving problems in sport Coaching

The sport coaching environment can be complex and dynamic, with coaches under pressure to bring innovation into their practice. This can lead to a reliance on what may have previously worked rather

than considering what the most important problem to be solved is.

This module is about enhancing your skills in identifying and solving problems in your coaching context. We will explore project management, research and evaluation methods to do so. You will:

- Explore methods to observe your coaching context and the demands of your sport.
- Learn to identify problems, gaps and questions that merit further investigation.
- Identify and critically explore methods of data collection, interpretation and analysis.
- Learn to practically synthesise data (report, verify, validate, and evaluate your findings).

7. Understanding performers: Psychological Perspectives

Understanding the people coaches work with is invaluable to enable them to make the performance better.

This module will provide you with an in-depth examination of key psychological concepts useful for coaches to assist them in understanding and enhancing performance.

Integrating research, theory and personal practice, you'll explore:

- foundational concepts for understanding performers (and people)
- skills and tools to enhance performance

You'll engage with up-to-date research, theory and concepts as a means to explore and critically reflect on how you understand the people you work with.

Content delivery will include recorded lectures, textbook extracts, journal articles, sport-specific materials, web sources and module co-coordinator-designed materials. They'll be combined with videoing and self-reflection of your coaching practice and discussion of scenarios, problems and issues.

8. Creating engaging practice

Creating effective practice is, perhaps, the ultimate goal of the sport coach. This module gives you a practical understanding of key principles of skill acquisition and practice design. This will facilitate skill and performance development through the creation of engaging sessions.

Integrating research, theory and personal practice, you'll explore:

- skill acquisition
- design and structure of practice
- the goals of practice sessions
- delivery, planning and review of practice

You'll engage with up-to-date research, frameworks and concepts, and draw together several strands from the MSc programme, including pedagogy and creating empowering coaching climates.

A key feature of the module is in-depth class discussions, allowing you to develop your understanding alongside your colleagues. Together, these will let you explore and critically reflect on your own practice design.

'In person' away days

Twice per academic year there will be an opportunity to bring our Level 4 student coaches together in order to further support you to embed the learning from the online delivery, and to share and discuss theories and concepts you will learn about with your colleagues. These will be arranged in collaboration with the University of Stirling and our partners at British Equestrian and will take place in November and March of each academic year.

Level 4 Coaching Certificate

The British Rowing Level 4 Coaching Certificate includes the following elements:

A reflective log

You'll be expected to keep a reflective log over the period of the programme. Its purpose is to record the impact of personal development on your coaching practice. The log will combine your reflections on how the PG Dip learning has helped personal development, feedback from two 360 reviews, two field-based visits, and input from your technical mentor. The log this can take the form of a written journal or audio reflections as examples and will be drawn upon for the final panel submission.

360 reviews

You will be provided with a unique link to an online questionnaire, which you will be able to share with athletes, peers and support staff. You are given the opportunity to complete the 360 feedback review twice in any one year (but must complete a minimum of two) and the feedback will be discussed collaboratively with your Level 4 Mentor.



ALUMNI

"For someone who left school with just a handful of GCSEs then

40 years later jumping onto a Masters level academic program, the Level 4 is tough but it is also very rewarding. The exposure to some contemporary coaching practises challenged most of the core beliefs that as a traditional rowing coach I might have held dear and subsequently has reshaped my thinking and behaviour around how I coach. So much so that whereas two years ago I thought I knew it all, now I realise I don't and every session and every interaction teaches me something. I will not gain financially from taking the Level 4 but I have gained as a coach and more importantly as a person."

Tim Morris

The purpose of this questionnaire is to elicit anonymous feedback from your participants/athletes/ peers and coaching team in order to generate some discussion and to help develop an action plan for personal development.

There will be a minimum of two opportunities during the programme for you to complete a 360 review and the feedback will be discussed with you by a L4 mentor in order to help inform and shape your personal development action plan.

Field-based visits

You'll receive two field-based visits from an expert coach developer appointed by British Rowing. They will observe you during a coaching session, which will then be followed by a one-to-one discussion to review and reflect on the coaching. This is not a technical knowledge or skills review, but instead it is to review and enhance your coaching practice. Field-based visits are carried out early in year one and towards the end of year two.

Final panel

The panel is an opportunity for you to share your experiences and learning through the PGDip and for the panel to hold a further professional discussion with yourself.

To prepare for the session you should plan a 20-30min presentation which looks at two case studies from your time on the programme highlighting

through these case studies your learnings from the programme.

Ahead of the panel we ask you to share your summary reflections from your coaching log to provide context for the panel. This can be done as a written summary (no more than 1,000 words) or a short audio/video recording (max five minutes).

Mentoring

Mentors have proven to be extremely valuable to Level 4 alumni in previous years so you will be encouraged and supported to identify at least one mentor to work with through your Level 4 journey. Your mentor could be someone from within your own member body to provide technical sport guidance, or someone who you could discuss coaching and share ideas, thoughts and challenges with, or could be someone to support your academic learning. You could even work with a mentor for each of those areas if that's what you feel you need. If you have mentors in mind when you apply, you can identify them in your application form, but this will also be discussed and explored in more detail during the British Rowing Level 4 induction day in September.



Application process and costs

How to apply

Application forms will be shared with coaches who express an interest following the course sense-making webinar in spring 2025.

The closing date for applications is 11.59pm on 30 May 2025, following which we will contact you to offer a date for a professional discussion, and outline next steps.

For more information regarding this programme, please contact British Rowing:

Loretta Williams - Programme Manager: loretta.williams@britishrowing.org

or the LEAD Team: education@britishrowing.org

Course costs

Course fees for the Level 4 Coaching Certificate qualification, including the Postgraduate Diploma, total £6,500, which will be split into two annual fees. The first-year payment of £3,250 is due in September 2025, with the second payment of £3,250 due in September 2026.

Applying for a student loan

If you commit to completing the MSc in Sport Performance Coaching before starting the programme, you can apply for a student loan for the full three years of study. For this, you would first need to contact the Programme Director at the University of Stirling, Stephen Macdonald, to discuss your intention to complete the MSc, and then contact the relevant Home Nation student loan awarding agency

England: <https://studentfinance.campaign.gov.uk/>

Northern Ireland: <https://www.studentfinanceni.co.uk/>

Scotland: <https://www.saas.gov.uk/>

Wales: <https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/>

Programme

YEAR 1	
Spring 2025	British Rowing and University of Stirling Level 4 sense-making webinar
end May 2025	Application deadline
September 2025	British Rowing Level 4 induction day
September to January 2026	Semester 1: The Coaching Process
September 2025	Face-to-face cohort away day
January - March 2025	1st 360 review and field based visit
January to April 2026	Semester 2: Coaching Concepts Semester 2: Understanding Performance
May 2026	Face to face cohort away day
April 2026 to July 2026	Semester 3: Coaching as learning Semester 3: Planning for sport
YEAR 1/YEAR 2	
September 2026 to January 2027	Semester 4: Identifying and solving problems Semester 4: Psychological perspectives
November 2026	Face-to-face cohort away day
YEAR 2	
January 2027 to April 2027	Semester 5: Creating engaging practice
January - March 2027	2nd 360 review and field based visit
March 2027	University of Stirling graduation
November 2027	British Rowing Level 4 final panel interviews

Recommended reading list:

Cassidy, T., Potrac, P., & Rynne, S. (2023). *Understanding Sports Coaching* (4th ed.). Taylor & Francis.

Lyle, J., & Cushion, C. (2017). *Sport coaching concepts : a framework for coaching practice* (Second edition.). Routledge.

Jones, R. L. (2006). *The sports coach as educator: re-conceptualising sports coaching*. Routledge.

You don't need to buy brand-new. Second-hand bookstores and your local library can be a cost effective option.

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