

# Distinctions in coaching practice between the Island of Ireland and the Rest of Europe

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*This research paper sought to identify distinctions in the coaching practice between coaches in the Island of Ireland (Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) and those in the rest of Europe by reviewing and analysing the Irish coaching data provided by The State of Play in European Coaching & Mentoring (2017) and The State of Play in Irish Coaching (2018) research reports. The paper also draws a number of useful conclusions and recommendations for coaching psychology practitioners and coaches in general to improve their coaching practice and for accreditation bodies to further promote the professional development of coaching.*

*A survey design was adopted, with a snowball sampling strategy generating 133 respondents. Eight surveyed aspects of coaching practice produced distinctive responses from coaches within Ireland compared with respondents from other European nations: They are more likely to be members of a professional coaching body; spend a higher amount of their working time engaged in coaching; tend to command higher hourly fee rates from corporate coaching assignments; are more likely to use formal supervision with a qualified coach; make greater use of the cognitive behavioural and psychodynamic methods; are slightly more thorough in the range of topics they cover when contracting; are less likely to share their code of ethics with their coachees; and believe that the coach's experience and his/her professional qualifications, as opposed to price or membership of a professional body, are the most important factors when people commission coaching support.*

*Recommendations are made for future analytical research to identify causal factors for these distinctions.*

**Keywords:** *Coaching, Ireland, Europe, national distinctions.*

## Introduction

The fields of psychology research and the practice of coaching are converging (Grant, 2015). This growing alignment provides the opportunity to increase the science and rigor of coaching, and grow the applied science of psychology (Allen, 2016). According to Grant and Palmer (2002) coaching psychology is a process for enhancing well-being and performance in personal life and work domains, underpinned by models of coaching grounded in established adult learning or psychological approaches.' (Grant & Palmer, 2002). Furthermore, Passmore (2010) frames coaching psychology as bringing scientific scrutiny and research methods to enlighten our understanding of all practice within coaching.

Within these conceptualisations of coaching psychology, this research is intended as one of a short series of articles reviewing the results from the large scale European Coaching and Mentoring study (see Passmore, Brown, Csigas & the European Coaching and Mentoring Research Consortium, (2017)). The articles aim to provide an overview of distinct contemporary coaching models and

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practices in each of the United Kingdom home nations and the Republic of Ireland (Tee, Passmore, & Brown, 2018a; Tee, Passmore, & Brown, 2018b).

## Study

The State of Play in European Coaching and Mentoring study was undertaken during a twelve-week period, between March and May 2017. The study gathered 2,791 valid responses from 45 European countries. Thirteen countries had more than fifty participants completing one or more of the six research streams within the survey. The majority of participants were female (61%).

The purpose of this research was to deepen understanding of coaching and mentoring attitudes and practice across different European nations, as well as to identify and celebrate the diversity in approach across these regions. Passmore et al. (ibid.) identify this diversity as a strength, advocating an avoidance of any desire to impose a rigid global framework onto the coaching industry.

The study compiled 113 valid responses from the Island of Ireland. This included 94 from the Republic of Ireland and 19 from Northern Ireland. This report focuses on the combined data from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland due to the small sample size in Northern Ireland (which is part of the United Kingdom). This approach also reflects the fact that many coaches work with clients in both jurisdictions (Passmore, Brown, Byrne et al, 2018). Similarly to the European results, the majority of respondents were female (54%). Also worth noting that 59% of participants were over 50 years of age; 38% had been practicing coaching for less than 3 years; and 73% do pro bono coaching on a regular basis with 24% of respondents spending between 4-6 pro bono coaching hours per month.

Details of the findings across Europe can be found in Passmore et al. (2017). In light of the research aim to identify any diversity in practice within specific nations across Europe, this research article focuses on the specific findings for the Island of Ireland and compares them with the European results.

## Research method

The aim of the pan-European research study (Passmore et al. 2017), was to extend beyond traditional institutional networks and the main European languages (English, French, German and Spanish), to provide a more inclusive research study, recognising the equal value of all European countries, languages and cultures, and of the different professional bodies and institutions.

The survey items were designed by the researchers in collaboration with the EMCC. Twenty-six aspects of coaching practice were explored using closed questions and a range of scales, all designed to generate solely empirical data. The survey was launched on 1 March 2017 in 31 languages, ranging from English, Spanish, French and German, to Hungarian, Catalan and Serbian. The survey was publicised through established coaching federations and management bodies, as well as online through social media interest groups. Participants took an average time of 25 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Full details of the method for the pan-European study are provided in Passmore et al. (2017), with a summary of the 'Island of Ireland' data results provided by The State of Play in Irish Coaching report (Passmore, Brown, Byrne et al, 2018). This research paper provides an analysis of The State of Play in

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Irish Coaching data results and how they compare to those of their European counterparts (labelled in the following tables as Rest of Europe or 'RoE'), exploring the implications and making suggestions for further research.

## Results and discussion

### Irish coaches are well educated and likely to be members of a professional coaching body

The survey data indicates that Irish coaches are well educated with 96% of respondents qualified at graduate level or higher and 69% qualified at postgraduate or doctorate level. The data also shows that while 85% of respondents from the island of Ireland belong to a professional coaching body only 64% of the RoE do. The data also indicates that it is not uncommon for Irish coaches to belong to more than one professional body. This could be for a number of reasons; business development, networking, sharing best practice with fellow members of the coaching community, continuous professional development, or the relatively cheap price of joining as a non-accredited member (from €110 to €215 for a 12 month membership) one of the professional coaching bodies. Table 1 below provides an overview of the professional bodies that the Irish coaches who participated in this study belong to.

**Table 1: Membership of professional coaching bodies**

Professional coaching body	Island of Ireland	RoE
Association for Coaching (AC)	43	357
European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC)	42	368
None	21	1010
International Coaching Federation (ICF)	18	729
British Psychological Society - Special Group in Coaching Psychology (BPS SGCP)	8	83
Other	8	540
International Society for Coaching Psychology (ISCP)	3	24
Association for Professional Executive Coaching & Supervision (APECS)	1	54
Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC)	0	38

The professional bodies with the largest membership in Ireland are the Association for Coaching with 350 members in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and 256 in Northern Ireland (NI); the International Coaching Federation with 176 members in ROI; and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council with 100 members in ROI and NI combined (Passmore, Brown, Byrne et al, 2018).

Further research could explore why so many coaches across Europe are not members of any of the professional coaching bodies, and therefore, whether they adhere to a professional code of conduct or ethics, and the extent to which they invest in their professional development as these factors are

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likely to have a negative impact on the quality of their coaching as well as the credibility of the coaching industry across Europe.

The response from non-EMCC members (66%) attests to the success of efforts to promote the survey widely across a number of professional bodies, institutions and organisations.

### **Irish coaches spend more time coaching than their European counterparts**

The results suggests that Irish coaches spend a higher amount of their working time engaged in coaching than their European counterparts. 64% of Irish coaches (in comparison to 54% in RoE) spend between 20-50% of their working time coaching. Only 1.4% of the Irish respondents spend 100% of their time coaching (Please see Table 2). In addition to coaching, the vast majority of Irish coaches also provide one or more of the following people-related services: general training and leadership development, mentoring, teambuilding, HR consulting, recruitment, facilitation and mediation. Irish coaches also spend quite a bit of their time writing and researching as well as performing day to day business management activities.

**Table 2: Percentage of working time spent delivering coaching**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Island of Ireland</b>	<b>RoE</b>
0%	0.0%	0.9%
5%	9.5%	11.0%
10%	9.5%	18.5%
20%	20.3%	20.3%
30%	14.9%	16.3%
40%	16.2%	8.3%
50%	12.2%	9.0%
60%	9.5%	5.9%
70%	5.4%	4.3%
80%	1.4%	3.1%
90%	0.0%	1.4%
100%	1.4%	1.0%

It would be of interest to research further the reasons why only 30% of coaches in Ireland spend 50% or more of the time coaching. Further data might reveal whether this is determined by the coaches' personal choice and preference, the level of demand for coaching services in Ireland, difficulty accessing credible and reliable coaches, the number of coaches in the market, the amount of time the coaches have spent building their coaching portfolio and delivering coaching services, or some other factor.

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### Corporate client coaching in Ireland attracts higher fee rates

Table 3 below shows that 52% of Irish coaches charge a fee of €200 or higher per hour; 16% €100 or less per hour and 12% €400 or above per hour. The price range of €200-€400 seems to be the most typically used. In contrast, only 37% of coaches in RoE charge €200 or higher per hour. 22% of RoE coaches charge €100 or less per hour and similarly to Ireland 10% charge €400 or higher per hour.

The survey also found that corporate clients pay higher rates for coaching than non-corporate clients (33% of corporate clients are charged within the €200-€400 per hour bracket in comparison to only 8% of non-corporate clients)

**Table 3: Fee rates for corporate clients per hour (p/h)**

Rate per hour	Island of Ireland	RoE
Internal coach / no charge	12.0%	13.7%
<€50 p/h	8.0%	4.7%
€51-100 p/h	8.0%	16.9%
€101-199 p/h	20.0%	28.2%
€200-399 p/h	40.0%	26.3%
€400-599 p/h	6.7%	7.2%
€600-799 p/h	1.3%	1.6%
€800-1000 p/h	2.7%	1.0%
>€1000 p/h	1.3%	0.5%

The research data also shows that organisations in the Island of Ireland and RoE are investing substantial amounts of money building internal coaching capability. There are many examples of large organisations in Ireland trying to cultivate a coaching culture by developing the coaching capabilities of their leaders, creating internal coaching networks, coaching panels and academies, making coaching a core element of their leadership development programmes and complementing all of this by bringing external coaches as required.

Further research could be conducted in the area of Irish organisations' internal versus external investment in coaching and market trends in this area. Research could also explore why corporate coaching in Ireland attracts higher fee rates on average than in RoE.

### Coaches across Europe and Ireland value their reflective practice

Reflective practice is widely accepted as an effective method for learning and continuous professional development (Passmore et al; 2011). The data suggests that the main tools for reflective practice are very similar across Europe: Self-reflection, reading coaching books and research, peer networking and formal supervision (Please see Table 4 below). According to the data, 29% European respondents spend less than 1hr per week on reflective practice. Most European coaches (43%) spend between 60-90 minutes per week on reflective practice.

Ireland was found to have the highest percentage of coaches using formal supervision with a qualified coach (51%). This could be a result of the coaching accreditation bodies regularly advocating and promoting the need for supervision, an increased number of supervision events taking place and a larger number of accredited Irish coaching supervisors available. The survey data also highlighted, however, that 20% of coaches in Ireland do not receive any supervision. The numbers of UK and RoE (excluding UK) coaches not receiving supervision are even higher than those in Ireland (27% and 39% respectively). Supervision is a requirement for any accredited coach. ICF, AC and EMCC recommend anything between 4 -12 hours coaching supervision per year at Level 2 Practitioner Level. Professional coaching bodies across Europe need to continue promoting coaching supervision in order to improve the capabilities and effectiveness of coaches. Further research could explore the reasons why formal coaching supervision is not as popular in Ireland and across Europe as it should be and identify ways to encourage everyone providing coaching to become formally supervised.

**Table 4: Methods used to reflect on your practice (respondents could select from more than one option)**

Methods to reflect on practice	Island of Ireland	RoE
Self-reflection	75.5%	76.2%
Reading coaching books	68.1%	65.9%
Peer Network	56.4%	59.0%
Formal supervision with qualified supervisor	51.1%	38.0%
Reading coaching research	48.9%	47.8%
Self-support	34.0%	28.2%
Mentor	12.8%	19.7%

Co-Mentoring	7.4%	11.9%
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The survey also found that while 71% of Irish respondents (79% in RoE) invest 16 or more hours per year to continuous professional development (CPD), roughly 29% of respondents invest less than 15 hours per year in CPD. According to the ICF, AC and EMCC a Level 2 Practitioner coach should be investing between 13-30 hours per year on CPD. It is reassuring to find out that when Irish coaches were asked about the amount of CPD hours required, 44% of them indicated that coaches should spend between 16-30 hours per year. Irish coaches like to keep their coaching practice up to date by attending coaching courses, webinars, conferences and networking events as well as reading coaching research and books.

Further research should be conducted to find out the reasons why some coaches are potentially not investing as much time as they should on their personal development. Future research could also explore the potential impact that coaches who do not have an appropriate reflective practice, are not being supervised and do not invest enough time developing themselves could have on coaching outcomes and the credibility of the coaching profession.

#### **Irish coaches have a preference for behavioural / goal and solution focused coaching models**

While behavioural / goal focused and solution focused models are the most popular and commonly used by Irish coaches; they also use cognitive behavioural, NLP, and transactional analysis models. Behavioural / Goal focused and solution focused models are the most popular models also in the RoE and UK. The results also show that quite a large number of Irish coaches make use of a number of coaching psychology models to guide their coaching practice and bring about insight, learning and behavioural change. Table 5 below provides an overview of the main coaching models used by Irish coaches.

**Table 5: Models used in respondents' coaching practice (respondents could select more than one option)**

Coaching models	Island of Ireland	RoE
Behavioural / Goal focused coaching (e.g. GROW Model)	70.2%	66.3%
Solution focused	52.1%	46.5%
Cognitive Behavioural Coaching	41.5%	31.4%
NLP	36.2%	31.9%
Transactional Analysis	30.9%	26.9%
Gestalt	21.3%	15.5%
Psychodynamic	18.1%	9.4%
Motivational Interviewing	16.0%	21.3%
Existential	7.4%	8.3%

Transpersonal	2.1%	7.6%
Other	12.8%	21.8%

Further research could explore why coaches have a clear preference for goal and solution focused models as opposed to more fluid, non-goal focused models. The research might test whether the mounting pressure on coaching to demonstrate a clear return on investment and value for money might be driving this trend. Research should also explore any potential negative effects this trend might have on the coachees and the coaching experience.

### **Irish coaches should be more thorough when contracting with individuals and particularly with organisations**

The survey asked participants the extent to which they explicitly cover certain things when contracting with individuals and, on a separate question, organisations. In relation to individual client agreements, coaches in Ireland responded as being more likely to make explicit 4 out of the 7 elements than their counterparts in Europe. Over 50% of Irish coaches explicitly include in their contracts the following four elements (1) What is confidential information and not to be shared outside the session, (2) What is not confidential and can be shared appropriately (3) The responsibilities of the different parties involved and (4) What is coaching (See Table 6). Less than 50% of Irish coaches cover the other 3 elements explicitly when contracting with individuals i.e. cancellation arrangements, evaluation of the sessions and how to complain about the coach if needed.

In relation to organisational client agreements, in Ireland, the percentages across all categories are much lower indicating that organisational contracting is not as thorough as individual client contracting. Worth highlighting the fact that the evaluation of coaching interventions is only explicitly included in individual contracts by 34% of respondents and in organisational contracts by 36%.

**Table 6: Topics explicitly included in respondents' in individual and organisational client agreements (respondents could select more than one option)**

	<b>Individual Client agreements</b>	<b>Individual Client Agreements</b>	<b>Org. Client Agreements</b>	<b>Org. Client Agreements</b>
<b>Topics</b>	Island of Ireland	Europe	Island of Ireland	Europe
What is coaching	74.4%	65.0%	54.3%	51.0%
The responsibilities of the different parties involved	73.4%	70.0%	62.8%	64.0%
What is confidential	72.1%	67.0%	63.8%	59.0%
What is not confidential	70.2%	41.0%	43.6%	40.0%

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The cancellation arrangements for a session	48.9%	58.0%	42.6%	54.0%
How the coachee will evaluate the value of the session	34.0%	40.0%	36.2%	38.0%
How the individual coachee can complain about the coach	24.4%	27.0%	28.7%	26.0%

The survey data also shows that 61% of all contracting tends to happen verbally with the individual client (coachee) and 39% in writing and that multiparty contracting is not common practice either verbally or in writing. Further research should explore ways to promote and disseminate better contracting and coaching evaluation practices.

### **The experience and professional qualifications of the coach are perceived to be the key factors when commissioning coaching**

Respondents were asked to state the important factors when commissioning coaching, with five options being available (see table 7 below). The ‘Experience of the coach’ came up as the most important factor when commissioning coaching services across all geographies. More specifically, for RoE respondents, all five options were selected to varying degrees. In significant contrast, respondents from Ireland only selected two of the five options, with ‘Price’, ‘Member of a professional body’ and ‘Experience of the provider’ all rated as 0 percent. For the two options that were selected, 50% of the participants stated that both ‘Experience of the coach’ and ‘Professional qualifications of the coach’ were important when commissioning coaching services.

**Table 7: The most important factor when commissioning coaching**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Island of Ireland</b>	<b>RoE</b>
Experience of the coach	50%	50%
Professional qualifications	50%	23%
Experience of the provider organisation	0%	14%
Price	0%	7%
Member of a professional body	0%	6%

Further research should explore the reasons why coaches in Ireland do not appear to consider price, experience of the provider or membership to a professional body as key factors when buyers commission coaching services and yet, the majority of them belong to one or more professional coaching bodies. Research should also explore whether Irish coaches’ perception that membership of a professional body does not influence buying decisions and therefore there is no clear financial incentive to join these bodies, might be negatively impacting the professional bodies’ membership figures.

## Discussing ethics and sharing ethical codes need to become common practice

Ethics are widely recognised by professional bodies and coaching practitioners as an important element of professional standards that all professions should adopt (Lowman, 2013). Hence that all professional coaching bodies require all their members to sign up to their code of ethics and behave accordingly. While only 60% of Irish respondents always share their ethical code with individual clients, 72% of European coaches always do. 11% of Irish coaches as oppose to 6% of European coaches never share their ethical code with their clients. Only 37% of Irish coaches tell coachees about the ethical code at the start of the coaching conversation (See Table 8).

**Table 8: Sharing ethical codes**

	<b>Island of Ireland</b>	<b>RoE</b>
Yes – always	59.5%	72%
Yes – Sometimes	29.7%	22%
No - never	10.8%	6%

Coaches were also provided with 4 Ethical dilemmas and asked their opinions as to what should be done. They were given 5 options to select from and one of them was “to do nothing”. The ethical dilemmas were the following: (1) The coach pays a fee to secure the contract; (2) The coach enters a sexual relationship with a current client; (3) The coach fails to report low level of drug taking by the client; and (4) The coach fails to report theft of commercial information by client. To these ethical dilemmas 10%, 8%, 67%, 46% of the participants respectively selected to “Do nothing”.

The study also reveals that in cases where the coach fails to report low level drug taking by the client or to report theft of commercial information, a large percentage of European and Irish coaches felt that nothing should be done (65% and 45% respectively on average). While the former may be considered less concerning, as in Ireland, personal consumption of small quantities of drugs would not be deemed to be a serious offense, the theft of commercial information is likely to attract a custodial sentence and thus may be considered a serious offense and one which should be reported by a coach if it was revealed by a client.

Passmore, Brown, Csigas et al., (2017) recognise that the diversity of coaches’ personal and professional backgrounds, and the subtle variations in cultural differences may lead to differences in interpretation and behaviour when faced with ethical dilemmas. This is evident by the research data as when coaches were asked what should be done when a ‘coach either pays a fee to secure a contract’ or ‘enters in a sexual relationship with a current client’, while European coaches were more in favour of a professional body issuing them with a formal warning, Irish coaches were more in favour of removing them from their professional register permanently. This suggests a high ethical standard being expected by Irish coaches, and in turn, may relate to the level of maturity of the coaching market or experience of the individual coaches participating in this study.

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Further research is needed on the reasons why a large number of coaches do not always share their ethical code with the coachees as well as to identify strategies to further embed ethical codes and good practices into the coaching profession. This research also suggests that further work is needed by coaching professional bodies, coaching training organisations and other key stakeholders in making the coaching profession a role model in the field of ethics and conduct, through providing more training, guidance and clarifying how coaches should deal with ethical dilemmas.

## **Implications of the research and its findings**

Although Ireland has the highest percentage of coaches using formal supervision with a qualified coach (51%), to further improve coaching practice in Ireland, the authors recommend that professional coaching bodies keep encouraging coaches to become formally supervised and for more coaches to become professionally trained and accredited in coaching supervision.

While the survey results found that 71% of Irish respondents invest 16 or more hours per year in continuous professional development, there is a large percentage of coaches who could benefit from increasing the time they spend (a) reflecting on themselves and their practice as well as taking deliberate action to improve both and (b) keeping up to date with the latest research and thinking.

The survey data showed that only 31% of all contracting happens in writing and that multiparty contracting is not common practice either verbally or in writing. It is recommended that professional bodies keep promoting and educating coaches on the importance of proper contracting.

Coaches should make sponsoring organisations and coachees aware, at the contracting stage, of the Code of Ethics they adhere to and share a copy of the code with them. This is one way to ensure coaches can be held to account for their standards of practice. Only 56% of the respondents share their code of ethics with their coachees. We would also encourage professional bodies to continue promoting and educating coaches in the areas of ethics and dealing effectively with ethical dilemmas.

Irish coaches use quite a number of coaching psychology tools and models to bring about insight, development and learning as well as facilitate the achievement of outcomes. It is recommended that coaches regularly reflect on their use of models and techniques to ensure that they select the ones best suited for the situation as opposed to the ones that they are more familiar with, enabling them to meet their clients where they are, as opposed to forcing clients to fit with the coach's approach.

Evaluation of the impact that coaching has on the coachee and the system is critical. The authors recommend that coaches place a greater emphasis on the formal evaluation of their coaching efforts as 54.7% of respondents only evaluate the impact of their coaching either informally or when asked by the organisational client.

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The research also highlights the importance of understanding nation-wide as well as local coaching practice related issues, particularly, if a unified coaching protocol, ethical practice is needed. Future research should explore whether a unified coaching protocol and ethical practice for all nations in the UK and the Republic of Ireland could help improve the credibility of coaches and the coaching industry, and how these can be introduced while respecting and compromising with variations in local coaching practices.

## Conclusions

This article has aimed to capture the uniqueness of current norms and practices in Ireland's coaching industry versus other European countries. The research points to a market where coaches start practicing coaching at an advanced stage in their career, are typically highly educated and members of a professional coaching body, spend between 25-50% of their working time engaged in coaching, expect to attract significant fees for their work, and invest time and money in their reflective practice with 51% of respondents being formally supervised. Furthermore, Irish coaches have a clear preference for behavioural / goal and solution focused coaching methods and strongly believe that the two most important factors to commission coaching work are the coach's experience and professional qualifications. The survey results also indicate that coaching practice in Ireland could benefit from more robust contracting and a stronger emphasis on making ethics a core element of the coaching process.

This paper has also highlighted a number of areas to be considered for further research, and a number of recommendations to further improve coaching practice and the credibility of the coaching profession in Ireland. Furthermore, this study should be a catalyst for more sophisticated, explanatory or predictive future coaching psychology research (Corrie & Webster, 2016) due to its mainly descriptive nature. Future coaching psychology research might inquire into the causes, motivations, enabling and restraining factors, be they at individual, organisational or societal levels, which might be shaping these responses and creating the differences in preference and emphasis in how coaching is carried out in Ireland (Tee, Passmore & Brown, 2018)

Coaching psychology research should also play a key role in advancing coaching standards across Europe by identifying, disseminating and promoting best coaching practices in order to encourage their widespread adoption and improve the credibility of the coaching profession.

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