

The state of European coaching

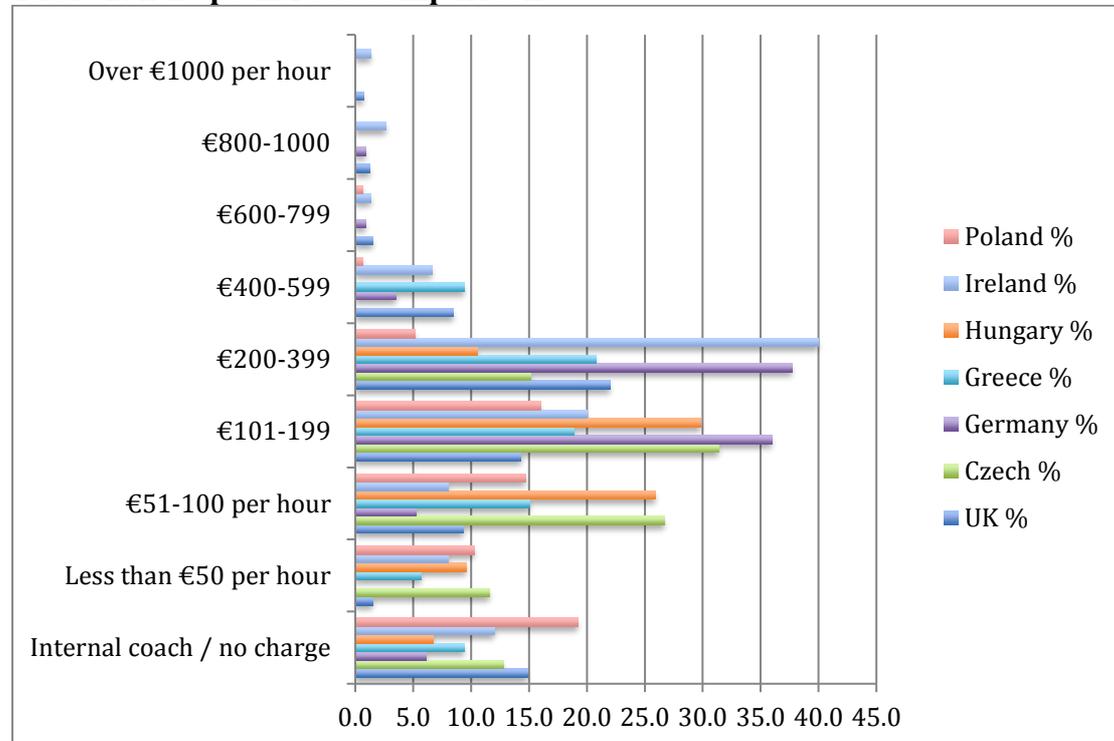
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Europe is a diverse continent with over 50 countries, more than 40 national languages, with traditions and cultures informed by thousands of years of history. It stretches beyond the 27 members of the European Union to countries like Russia, Macedonia and Iceland. These different histories, traditions, cultures and languages influence the development and shape of coaching practice. This paper focuses on exploring the results of a large-scale study which sought to explore this diversity of practice. This article explores two themes: fee rates and ethics.

What's the going rate for coaching?

European fee rates vary widely both within countries, between client groups and between countries. These variations reflect the experience and qualifications of the coach, with more experienced and better qualified coaches commanding higher fees. Secondly fees charged for corporate clients were significantly higher than fees charged to individual clients, reflecting the ability to pay and possibly the perceived financial return on investment by companies. For corporate work the average fee rate across Europe was 175Euros per coaching hour. This compared with 123Euros per hour for individual coaching, meaning that personal coaching is around 30% lower priced. In both cases the range was from below 50Euros to over 1000Euros, showing the diversity which exists in the market. However, of greatest interest was the fee range between countries, which is illustrated in Table 1. One possible explanation is that economic differences explain these differential rates, a further explanation is that less developed coaching economies cannot command higher fees as buyers have yet to be convinced of the benefits of coaching. A closer examination of the results suggests that both factors play a part.

Some professional bodies have responded negatively to the publication of the fee rates across Europe. However professional bodies have a duty to wider society, and helping to promote openness and transparency, helping clients to make more informed decisions based on evidence and facts about both the benefits of coaching and its likely costs.

Table 1: European Fees Comparison

Just how ethical are coaches?

Ethics sits at the heart of coaching practice. Every coach claims to be ethical and claims to follow their own professional code of practice. However, what people say they do, and what they think is acceptable is not always the same.

The research revealed that most coaches share a copy of their ethical code with their clients; 72% doing so with all their clients. Most provide their ethical code at the start of the coaching relationship, and a good number, around a quarter, provide a copy as part of their written agreement.

Given that we are not always honest about our own practices, we invited coaches to comment on the practices of another coach and judge what should happen to this 'coaching colleague' in five different scenarios:

1. Entering a sexual relationship with a client
2. Entering a sexual relationship with an ex-client where coaching ended more than a year ago
3. Failing to report 'low level' drug taking by a client

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4. Failing to report a client who has stolen commercial sensitive information from their employer.
5. Paying a fee to secure a coaching contract

We specifically chose behaviors across arrange, some covered by professional codes (sexual relationships with clients and ex-clients), some covered by the law (bribery and theft) and others which might be considered to be personal ethical decisions (drugs).

In the first two cases we asked coaches about what they might expect to happen to a colleague, who had a sexual relationship with an ex-client and with a current client. In the case of a former client 65% said that no action should be taken. This compared with current clients where 36% of clients felt the individual should be permanently removed from the register and 25% said they should be removed for a year.

The third scenario involved 'Low level drug' taking by a client. In a number of European countries, the personal use of cannabis is legal and in many others it would be considered to be of low priority by the police. Forty-four percent felt that no action should be taken if the coach failed to report this drug taking, although 30% felt the coach should be removed from their professional register for failing to disclose such activities.

More serious were the two cases of serious illegal conduct; bribery and commercial data theft. In most of Europe these practices are likely to result in a prison sentence for the individual, and the risk of imprisonment for any individual who 'covers-up' or 'fails to disclose' such activity. Yet only 12% and 9% respectively considered these acts would be matters they would consider reporting to the police, with 38% saying they would expect no action to be taken against a coach who failed to disclose theft of commercially sensitive information. Such information might include designs, patents and insider dealing, all of which are serious criminal offenses.

This raises some questions about ethical training in coaching. How can ethics become a more central feature in coach training? Coaches owe both a duty to their clients, but also to the organizational clients and wider society and coaches may need to break with the tradition of confidentiality to protect themselves and the organizations they work with.

Note: A copy of the *The State of Play in European Coaching and Mentoring Executive Report* is available in the members section of the ICF website.

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