Maximising your coaching sessions

DIRECTING THE PERFORMERS

FOCUS OF ATTENTION
British Canoeing in North America

British Canoeing is pleased to announce the confirmation of long standing and hitherto informal arrangements with paddlesports enthusiasts in North America.

While previously operating as BCU North America the new Paddlesports North America (PNA) is incorporated in New York State as a not-for-profit organization and an affiliate organisation member of British Canoeing. In this role PNA will now continue to administer and oversee BCU Personal Performance courses and awarding in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Further to this PNA’s role in the delivery of British Canoeing Coaching Awards in North America is also formalised with PNA now recognised as the formal delivery centre for British Canoeing coaching qualifications in North America. In this role PNA will provide and quality assure course delivery in order to ensure and maintain the standards required by British Canoeing.

PNA’s mission is to make British Canoeing’s training and education programs accessible to all, and specific to the needs of paddlers within North America, in order to promote paddler development, safety and stewardship of the environment. PNA also aim to expand knowledge and awareness of all paddlesport-related activities, and encourage lifetime participation in the sport through delivery of a long-term paddler development program.

If I’m based in North America what’s in this for me?

With the launch of the PNA, you will have the following initial benefits:

- Discounts on fees for British Canoeing’s paddler and coaching awards.
- A website www.paddlesportsnorthamerica.org containing all information needed by paddlers and coaches to progress through British Canoeing’s paddlesport system, which is recognized as the gold standard in paddlesport training and education.
- A database that keeps track of PNA members’ awards and certifications, as well as membership status.

- A seamless transition in the processing of memberships, awards and certifications.

PNA are also working on additional member benefits, which will be announced in due course.

If reading this as a paddler or coach based in North America visit www.paddlesportsnorthamerica.org for more information and guidance.

What does this mean in terms of course provision?

In reality, whatever, your current position in terms of award or coaching qualification delivery might be there will be little difference to what should already be happening. This is, however, an opportunity to remind and clarify the position.

All British Canoeing recognised course providers (including those based outside of North America*) wishing to run courses in North America should ensure that you are registered (and if appropriate licensed as Coach educators) with Paddlesports North America (PNA) to do so and that all courses requiring authorisation (3 / 4 / 5 Star Leader training and assessment, FSRT, Moderate and Advanced Water, all foundation and intermediate modules and Level 1 / 2 Coaching Paddlesports qualifications) are authorised through PNA.

What does this mean if I’m a British Coach resident in UK and wanting to run courses in North America.

*British Coaches (including all non resident North American BC Coaches) invited to run courses in North America should initially apply to British Canoeing to complete an annual agreement as an Overseas Deliverer. There is no additional training requirement or fee associated with this, however, you must meet current Coach update requirements and, in the case of Coach Education courses must hold a Coach Educator License Agreement with your Home Nation.

Once in place you will be able to seek authorisation, where required, through PNA who will be responsible for delivery and the internal verification of courses.

British Coaches (including all non resident North American BC Coaches) should note that without this agreement in place insurance cover is not extended to activity in North America.

British Coaches wishing to apply for this additional agreement to their endorsed delivery status should contact joanne.simpson@bcu.org.uk

NB - British Coaches should also note that their activities in North America may be considered by North American Border Control agencies as sitting outside standard travel permit agreements and require green card status.

All British Canoeing recognised coaches wishing to seek course authorisation or clarification of course delivery requirements in North America should contact –

Scott Fairty who will be PNA’s Interim Administrator and he can be reached at info@paddlesportsnorthamerica.org or 515-999-5762. Please contact Scott for all courses requiring course authorisation.

All British Canoeing recognised course providers invited to run, or wishing to run courses at other international venues (other than in North America) should contact BCU AB for further information or course authorisation – joanne.simpson@bcu.org.uk

For more information on available courses visit www.canoe-england.org.uk/coachingcourses-dates
This is the third article in a series of four that aims to examine how the current motor (movement) learning literature would suggest we best maximise the effectiveness of our coaching sessions. The articles are all linked and although I have tried to make them work as stand alone articles you may find it helpful to read the previous ones.

Are you **maximising the effectiveness of your coaching sessions?**

**Part 3 – Directing the performers focus of attention**

**What will be covered in the series of articles?**

As coaches we aim to develop the skill and performance of those we are coaching by manipulating their learning environment. To help us do this we have a number of coaching tools at our disposal. From a motor learning perspective these include:

1. Structuring practice (choosing the right environment, task(s), level of performance, and order of practice);
2. Conveying information;
3. Directing the performer’s focus of attention; and

For more information on available courses visit [www.canoe-england.org.uk/coachingcourses-dates](http://www.canoe-england.org.uk/coachingcourses-dates)
Conveying Information

- Actions are best planned and controlled using the movement outcome rather than form (Prinz, 1997).
- Verbal instructions should therefore be related to intended outcome rather than form or kinesthetic information.
- Try to match the skill level for demonstrations, then gender if possible.
- Frame a demonstration so that the learner can focus their attention on the required information. Include verbal cues and outcome related feedback.
- Match the information you give to the needs of the performer. For example, what stage of learning are they in? Are they able to produce the basic movement pattern, sequence and timing of events? Are they focusing on and utilizing the relevant information from their environment?
- Remember that we are usually aiming to help our performer produce a kinesthetic skill, in a constantly changing environment, with as little conscious control as possible. Less information is more!

A detailed explanation of contextual interference, variability of practice, generalised motor programmes, and schema development was given in the first article and an understanding of them is assumed in this one.

DIRECTING THE PERFORMERS
FOCUS OF ATTENTION

Those of you who are paying attention will have noticed that I have changed the order of the last two articles. Whilst writing the previous article on ‘conveying information’ I realised that ‘focus of attention’ actually related mainly to giving verbal information, so it made sense to cover this next.

In the previous article we looked at how we convey information to those we are coaching through verbal instructions, demonstrations (or other observational learning tools), and practice. Here we will focus a little more on the research relating to the verbal information you give to your performer regarding their focus of attention - F.O.A.
So what do we focus on whilst learning?

The question of what learners should be instructed to focus on when executing motor skills has received a good deal of recent attention. In most sporting disciplines, learners have traditionally been given instructions to direct attention towards aspects of the required movement and the coordination of their body to achieve it. In other words, the correct form or technique. The basic assumption has been that making learners aware of what they are doing is a requisite for successful performance (Baumeister, 1984). Even in the field of sport psychology (e.g. Kingston and Hardy, 1997), performers are frequently encouraged to adopt a process or task focus, which encourages them to pay explicit attention to technical aspects of the skill.

There is a trend in current research suggesting that instructing performers to be consciously aware of their body movements during skill execution is not a very effective learning strategy, and can actually undermine performance, learning and reduce automaticity of movements (Baumeister, 1984; Hardy et al. 1996; Jackson et al. 2006; Masters, 1992; Mullen and Hardy, 2000). Even complete novices have varying levels of automaticity in their performance; this could just be postural, or good balance, co-ordination and agility. Verbal cues that are related to the effects that our movements have on the environment (an external focus of attention e.g. the movement of the blade, the movement of the body (e.g. the movement of the arms, the movement of the hips, the movement of the head) (Lawrence, Gottwald, Khan & Kramer, 2012; Wulf, Hob, & Prinz, 1998).

There is a trend in current research to pay explicit attention to technical aspects of the skill.

A possible explanation for these benefits is provided by Prinz’s (1997) action effect hypothesis (covered in the last article), which suggests that actions are most effectively planned and controlled by their intended effects. Adopting an external focus of attention enhances automaticity between movements and their effects and allows the learner to focus on and use relevant information from the environment.

By combining the action-effect principle with research supporting the promotion of an external focus of attention, Wulf at al. (2001) proposed the constrained action hypothesis (CAH). The CAH suggests that adopting an external focus of attention helps to promote automatic processing and efficient motor programming.

Most coaches would agree that skillful performance is characterised by ‘automatic’ or consciously effortless performance. However, as a coach, how do we help beginners to attempt to perform a skill as though it were automatic?

Research also suggests that the negative self-focused attention effect is not exclusive to beginners. As mentioned in the previous article, there is considerable evidence that under certain conditions (e.g. high stress) the automatic control processes utilised by expert performers are overridden by the desire to ensure success. Masters (1992) coined the phrase ‘conscious processing’ to describe this behavior. Here, the performer tries to consciously control their movement, thus adopting a mode of control primarily associated with the early stages of learning (Fitts & Posner, 1967), resulting in less effective performance.

As with everything in life, there have been findings that are not as clear, or that contradict the support of promoting an external FOA. Lawrence et al (2010) found an internal FOA was supported for sports where the environment did not change, there was no equipment, and the outcome was purely ‘form’ based (for example, gymnastics).

If too much explicit knowledge is detrimental for learning a skill, and also leaves more experienced performers susceptible to negative stress effects caused by conscious processing, how do we facilitate high levels of performance? One strategy to promote implicit learning is to coach by analogy. The objective of analogous coaching is to encourage athletes to perform the skill being learned using a general analogical rule that acts as a movement metaphor and that, by default, incorporates the technical rules necessary for successful execution of the skill (Masters 2000). This idea is not new; the series of Inner Game books focused on analogous coaching and are still worth a read. The key with analogies is for the coach to be creative and insure that the metaphor itself is clearly understood by the athlete. There are many popular analogies used by paddlesports coaches, from slicing pizza (blade dexterity) to showing off your medals (trunk rotation). Many are in the BCU Coaching Handbook if you need a little inspiration to get started.

Another strategy is to use the environment to guide movement outcomes. For example, the movement could be

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going sideways rather than focusing on a paddle-stroke (performing a technically correct draw stroke). The use of simple outcome goals with an external focus of attention not only allows for individual differences but also starts to develop the flexibility to consistently achieve a movement goal in a dynamic sporting environment. As paddlesports coaches we want our learners to develop the ability to produce novel motor solutions that will enable skilled performance in a dynamic environment. Even for complete novices, an external focus of attention will allow flexible and more automated responses. As coaches, if we adopt this approach from the very beginning, we are ensuring that our performers are learning to focus on the perceptual information that will facilitate skilled performance. Also, by looking where they are going, and focusing on relevant environmental cues for performance, our paddlers should automatically adopt an appropriate posture.

Simply distracting the performer is another useful strategy that can be used effectively to prevent an internal focus of attention. Giving performers nonsense rhymes to recite, or secondary, cognitively demanding tasks (like asking them to listen out for specific sounds), concurrent with the skill they are learning, have been used extensively in motor learning research (Beilock at al 2002). This research supports the CAH and the de-automation of skills when the performer tries to focus internally. Many paddlesports coaches use this tactic effectively. An example would be throwing a stone in the water upstream of someone on a surf wave. By distracting them and encouraging them to look up stream, the coach has skillfully promoted a more effective posture and allowed the movement to become more reflexive, automatic and self-organising. This strategy is particularly effective when the performer is already able to physically perform the required task.

While analogies give learners the general idea of the movement without the use of explicit rules they may not give the learner enough information to evaluate their performance effectively, or alter an unsuccessful performance (Bennett, 2000). Sometimes, for more complex skills it may be important that learners have some knowledge of the fundamentals of the skill to be performed in order that they can monitor and evaluate their performance. Such fundamentals can be taught by coaches through facilitating an intrinsic or kinaesthetic (i.e. bodily movement) appreciation in athletes of the desired technique with little recourse to explicit rules. Often coaches focus on teaching the correct ‘technical’ aspects of a skill or movement because they are not familiar with basic, or sports specific, movement fundamentals. Within paddlesports we can focus on the sports specific fundamentals (posture, connectivity, power transfer, and feel). If these are not readily understood or cannot be performed you may need to focus on the fundamentals of movement (balance, co-ordination and agility). CANI have just finished developing a great new support module ‘Fundamentals of Movement for Paddlesport’ which is about to be rolled out across all the Home Nations. This module is designed to facilitate the coaches appreciation and recognition of fundamental movement problems and provide some ideas of how to solve these.

A few questions to ponder?

1. What is the most effective ‘focus of attention’ for learning?
2. Why?
3. How could you structure an introductory session to use as little explicit form, technique or internal focus as possible? You should be thinking not only of goals, tasks and cues that will promote successful adaptive performance; but also appropriate kit, equipment, blade size and style, environment, other group members, coaching tools, movement and sport fundamentals, and everything else that either hinders or promotes learning!
4. What is the action-effect principle?
5. What is ‘conscious processing’? The ‘constrained action hypothesis’?
An external focus of attention facilitates increased performance, learning and automaticity of movement. Focusing on outcome, or the effect an action has (movement of a blade or boat in relation to the environment), helps the learner develop more flexible, adaptable and automated responses. Coach movements (forwards, sideways, turning), rather than isolated paddle strokes. This also helps the development of perceptual-motor coupling; the ability to automatically interpret environmental information in terms of what it means for movement/performance. Coaching by analogy is a useful way to facilitate learning and automatic movement production. Distracting the performer is also a good way of preventing an internal FOA and is most effective when the performer can already physically produce the motor skill. If your learner is really struggling; analyze and fix the movement fundamentals first. Have they got good balance, co-ordination and agility? Are they effective with and understand, posture, connectivity, power transfer, and feel? Ditto for basic physical fitness (remember TTTP?)

You may still need to use some explicit internal focus of attention cues. Sometimes they are necessary for developing self-evaluation skills in both novice and skilled performers. If your performer is struggling with skill breakdown under pressure due to attempting to consciously constrain normally automatic movement patterns, you may need to look at a sports psychology focused intervention. This may be through using techniques such as pre-performance routines, process goals, confidence, focus, or arousal interventions.

……..I’m thinking of my own ‘broken’ white water roll!

Summary

An external focus of attention facilitates increased performance, learning and automaticity of movement.

Focusing on outcome, or the effect an action has (movement of a blade or boat in relation to the environment), helps the learner develop more flexible, adaptable and automated responses.

Coach movements (forwards, sideways, turning), rather than isolated paddle strokes.

This also helps the development of perceptual-motor coupling; the ability to automatically interpret environmental information in terms of what it means for movement/performance.

Coaching by analogy is a useful way to facilitate learning and automatic movement production.

Distracting the performer is also a good way of preventing an internal FOA and is most effective when the performer can already physically produce the motor skill.

If your learner is really struggling; analyze and fix the movement fundamentals first. Have they got good balance, co-ordination and agility? Are they effective with and understand, posture, connectivity, power transfer, and feel?

Ditto for basic physical fitness (remember TTTP?)

One coping strategy that has received widespread support is that of pre-performance routines (Jackson et al. 2006). These are most relevant in sports that have closed-skill elements (i.e. where the environment is stable, as in golf). Clearly this does not relate to many paddlesport disciplines!

An alternative strategy is to focus on an isolated aspect of the skill that, if executed effectively, will permit successful performance. This is known as a process goal in the sport psychology literature (Kingston & Hardy, 1997). However, despite supportive evidence that focusing on isolated aspects of technique might facilitate performance, such a process focus has been questioned. Finally, more global strategies to reduce the tendency for performers to engage in self-focused attention during potentially stressful situations might be to focus on psychological elements that promote focus, trust (Moore and Stevenson, 1994) and self-confidence.

Sports psychology for coaches is a subject that is beyond this article but would be good to cover in the future.

For more information on available courses visit www.canoe-england.org.uk/coachingcourses-dates
It’s Your Call!

So, your day’s been going from bad to worse and now you’re in the middle of nowhere, some way offshore, and it’s all gone wrong. The weather has been steadily worsening, your friends are cold and tired and what’s more you’ve got a serious casualty to deal with. You’ve managed the situation pretty well up to this point but it’s time to accept that you need help and you need it right away. Even though it’s just a mates trip; you’ve done everything by the book and left a passage plan with the Coastguard. You got plenty of stick for filling in those forms but now it’s reassuring to know they hold all your details on file. Hang on though; no one will raise any alarm yet because the group isn’t due back for hours.

Sod’s law – there’s no mobile coverage here; at least you can rely on the VHF radio to call for help. Moments later you have talked with the Coastguard and feel a huge sense of relief. The Coastguard was so calm; but so are you now. They now know you have a problem, what sort of problem it is and where you are. They’ve even dispatched professional help out to join you, what’s more a fishing boat and a yacht have joined in to say they are close and could help – aren’t people great! That VHF set is worth every penny! They’ve called again now just to check where you are and how things have developed. It won’t be long now - you’re sure you can see the lifeboat; oh yes there they are calling us up on the radio. Imagine how things could have gone. No radio, no mobile coverage, no one to see a flare!!

It may surprise you to learn that getting a marine VHF radio and learning how to use it properly isn’t difficult or expensive. You’ll need to buy a radio of course, but a basic set is a lot less than you might think. Good quality brand new sets can cost less than £50 (considerably less than this for second hand brand named units on your favourite ‘internet auction site’). There are two main types of marine VHF radio. The first type, generally newer, are Digital Selective Call (DSC) radios and these have in-built features like push button distress calls, GPS, they are waterproof and float. The second type is the standard VHF radio; the vast majority of VHF sets in use today are like this. They are basically the same as the DSC sets without all the add-ons. At present there are plenty of bargains to be had because the market is very competitive and as the better-off users upgrade to DSC sets the standard units tend to cost a lot less.

Having a basic VHF radio set (maybe as well as a mobile phone) means you can stay in touch and it isn’t just useful for when things go wrong. You can listen to the

Did you know that even if you don’t have a licence you can still legally operate a VHF radio when accompanied by a licenced operator? So if your mate has a radio, from time to time, practice calling-up the coastguard. It will give you practice and will be indispensable should the licenced operator need help. The system uses a pre-arranged structure and phrases to make sure that the most important calls and the most important parts of those calls get through, particularly in adverse circumstances. So learning how to talk on the radio is important (and this includes how to give a position in latitude and longitude).

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regular inshore and shipping weather forecast broadcasts, receive information about any hazards in your area, including port operations and updates about marine traffic, and have a chat with other kayakers or in fact anyone else turned-on and tuned-in.

It’s a pretty impressive list which shows that the radios are versatile and useful on a whole number of levels. So if they’re cheap and so useful there must be some other major barrier to having one. Is it that you need a licence? You can get a licence by attending a one day course. The course will cover how to say things when on the radio and can cover the DSC aspects too. This means you can get a unique DSC identity known as a Mimsy number (MMSI - Maritime Mobile Service Identity). There will be a separate article on the advantages to paddlers of the DSC system.

As paddlers we tend to be in closer contact with the sea compared to most other water users. So the radio is likely to get wet. By putting the handset inside a protective waterproof case you can make an inexpensive set water proof and ensure it floats. It can then be kept handy in a buoyancy aid pocket (it won’t be much use buried in the bottom of a watertight compartment). When choosing what to buy, think about the ease of use (e.g. imagine you are swimming and have numb fingers). Waterproof sets can be small enough to clip to a shoulder strap on the front of your body. Think about extended trips too. Keeping the radio charged on expedition can be a challenge. Most manufacturers offer an optional battery pack as an accessory. These take AA batteries and a fresh set of batteries can be fitted in the campsite when required. This is a lot easier than trying to keep your mobile ‘phone charged throughout a two week trip!

Sea paddling offers all sorts of opportunities to see great natural spectacles and get close to wildlife. So learning how to set-up the receiver (using what’s called the squelch control) will avoid having an annoying noise maker blaring out sound like that of a sizable waterfall; particularly when you are trying to get close to wildlife. You are in control, and apart from the volume and squelch settings, can choose to turn the set on and off as you like. One way of keeping the radio off most of the time, whilst working with others, is to pre-arrange to turn on for an agreed 10 minutes say on the odd numbered hours. There are plenty of options.

Having the ability to use a VHF set is important to British canoeing, so much so that there are plans to include VHF training as a valid British Canoeing coach update. Soon you’ll be able to attend a sea kayak symposium, learn how to use a radio, get a licence and a coaching update and all for a modest fee. While you’re at it, why not learn how to use GPS sets properly too! There is plenty of help on offer to make sure you can continue to safely enjoy your paddling. Make the most of what’s out there - It’s your call.

For more information on available courses visit www.canoe-england.org.uk/coachingcourses-dates
News round-up

COACHING REPRESENTATIVE ELECTIONS and VACANCIES

Regional Coaching Representative

Elections & Vacancies
The following RCR positions are up for election and we invite nominations:

- **North East**
- **East Midlands**
- **Devon & Cornwall**
- **Channel Islands**

Our congratulations go to Adam-Peter Gair, the newly elected **Yorkshire RCR**, Ian Bell who has been reelected as the **North West RCR** and Gary Denton who will be continuing as the **Eastern RCR**

Area Coaching Representative Elections & Vacancies
The following ACR positions are currently up for election and we invite nominations:

- **Team North:**
  - Durham
  - North Yorkshire
  - Cheshire
  - South West Cumbria

- **Team Central:**
  - Team Central: Bedfordshire & Luton
  - Suffolk
  - Lincolnshire
  - North Derbyshire

- **Team South:**
  - East London
  - Oxfordshire
  - Dorset
  - Isle of Wight

The **Hertfordshire ACR**, **Essex ACR** and **South Derbyshire ACR** are up for election and we invite alternative nominations.

Our congratulations go to the following newly elected ACRs: Lee Wilson, **Northumberland ACR**, Helen James, **Tyne and Wear ACR** and Guy Smith, **East Sussex ACR**.

Please get in touch! If you (or someone you know) are interested in taking on one of these roles please contact Natasha Devonshire **natasha.devonshire@canoe-england.org.uk** who can help answer your questions.

All applicants must submit a profile (not more than 200 words) and must be proposed by two current RCRs/ACRs or by five other coaches. These coaches must meet the British Canoeing Coach Update Scheme requirements and live, work or be a member of a canoe club in the respective area. These all need to be received by Natasha Devonshire in the British Canoeing Office by 4:00pm on 6th October 2014 – so please don’t hesitate to get in touch if you are keen.

Note - before nominating anyone, please ensure you have discussed this with them and that they are willing to stand.

Dynamic Coaching – An expanding skill set

British Canoeing Coaching Conference
22nd - 23rd November 2014
Wyboston Lakes, Bedfordshire

We are delighted to announce that the theme for the 2014 British Canoeing Coaching Conference is Dynamic Coaching – An expanding skill set.

Taking place at the excellent facilities offered by Wyboston Lakes, this year’s coaching conference will turn the spotlight back on to developing coaching skills and behaviours. The event will offer a range of workshops which look at taking existing skill sets to the next level or applying existing skill sets into new contexts, as well as offering development in some new areas.

Booking for this event opens on the 15th September, until then you can register your interest on [www.canoe-england.org.uk/coaching/coaching-conferences/](http://www.canoe-england.org.uk/coaching/coaching-conferences/) to receive exclusive updates and offers, including confirmed speakers and workshops ahead of the full programme announcement.

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British Canoeing England Coach Updates

- **West Midlands - Burton Canoe Club, Staffordshire**
  - 14th September 2014
  - Details available from Mark Brian
c米粉 slip Staffordshire@canoe-england.org.uk

- **North West - Crosby Lakeside Adventure Centre**
  - 21st September 2014
  - Details available from George Haisman
  ghaisman@talktalk.net

- **South East - Wey Kayak Club Guildford**
  - 26th October 2014
  - Details available from Andy Hall
  coaching.southeast@canoe-england.org.uk

- **West Midlands - Wychavon, Worcestershire**
  - 15th November 2014
  - Details available from Ian Dallaway
  coaching.westmidlands@canoe-england.org.uk

- **South West - Launceston**
  - 23rd November 2014
  - Details available from Darren Joy
  coaching.devonandcornwall@canoe-england.org.uk

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**British Canoeing Coaching Conference**

*Dynamic Coaching – An expanding skill set*

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22nd & 24th Nov 2014
Wyboston Lakes
Bedfordshire

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Tollymore National Outdoor Centre, situated on the edge of the Mournes, is Northern Ireland’s National Centre for Mountaineering and Canoeing Activities and is funded and managed by Sport Northern Ireland.

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4,5 Star Leader Courses,  
FRST and WW Safety and Rescue Courses  
and more, go to...  
www.canoe-england.org.uk/coaching/courses-dates

Star Award Courses/Coach Education Courses  
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*If funding is a genuine barrier to gaining a qualification we offer a range of potential sources of financial support that could in some cases mean you receive your training free. Majority of funding only available to volunteer coaches or leaders living in Scotland.

www.glenmorelodge.org.uk/sources-funding.asp