

# REPORT

## Football Coaches' Employment Conditions and Status

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October 2019



THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

## **BACKGROUND AND PROJECT**

The FCA contracted researchers from the University of Queensland to undertake some exploratory research to identify the conditions of employment of football in Australia, with the view of developing a deeper understanding of the industry to inform future policy and practice. To achieve this an online survey was developed with the link released targeting FFA and FCA registered coaches. The survey utilised a series of closed questions and provided an open-ended question inviting further comments from respondents around the conditions of employment of football in the country.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The surveyed group was a diverse collection of educated and passionate coaches. Their responses highlighted concerns and frustrations related to an overall lack of recognition, reward, and support that is reflective of the perceived low status of coaching in football. While these issues are not unique to football coaching in the Australian sporting landscape, they are concerning.

These concerns were evidenced in the significant imbalance between the work done by coaches and remuneration offered (including a lack of in-kind support and resources), the high cost of coaching accreditation with limited opportunities of financial return on investment, the lack of formal contracts addressing basics of employment conditions, the lack of a dispute resolution process, and poor governance.

In addressing these concerns and advancing football coaching, the following are **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**:

### **1. Increase support for the ongoing professional development of coaches**

Enhancing the accessibility and affordability of a variety of professional development activities (including sport-specific qualifications) would help further develop the capacity of these important workers, but also provide an avenue for ongoing recognition of coaches. This may also be an avenue for increases in the female coaching cohort (currently very under represented).

### **2. Develop contractual and remuneration guidelines**

There is a significant variation in the contractual formats and conditions as well as the remuneration offered to coaches. This is somewhat understandable, given the differences in experiences coaches may have, the breadth of the role, and the club's resources. However, given the concerns raised in this survey, there may be value in developing resources and guidelines related to minimum standards and conditions for coaches working in 'like' contexts.

### **3. Standardise Grievance/Dispute Resolution Procedures**

Currently, coaches do not have a standard grievance procedure to follow if they are not paid according to the agreed terms. Given the unpredictable nature of coaching appointments, it would be valuable for coaches to have a grievance procedure they can follow.

#### **4. Improve support for Governance**

Those responsible for appointing, supporting, and evaluating coaches have a significant impact on the working conditions of coaches at all levels of football. In addressing the issues raised and the recommendations above, it is likely that additional support and guidance will need to be offered to administrators and office bearers so they might be better equipped to invest in quality coaching.

## INTRODUCTION

The link for the Football Coaches' Australia (FCA) survey relating to coaches' employment conditions and status was distributed to over 4,000 coaches with 426 responding (including, 78 partially completed). Of the 348 completed surveys, 28% of respondents provided additional comments and feedback on their experiences relating to employment conditions.

It was a diverse sample reflective of the football world with representation from the community level through to professional coaches working nationally or internationally. Of this cohort, 25% had some experience as a professional coach (i.e. full-time payment), some for more than 10 years (25 coaches). The vast majority were very experienced in semi-professional (some form of payment) and volunteer contexts with nearly 90% of the cohort working in these settings for more than 4 years.

Nearly 85% had not represented the country in football although around 7% of the responding coaches had done so as players at the senior level (9% as junior or youth representatives). Far more had played in national contexts with 69% competing as athletes in National or State Leagues.

While the vast majority (311 coaches) identified themselves as being Australian, the cohort also reported a diverse mix of ethnic backgrounds (predominantly across Europe and South America).

As in common in sporting contexts, the majority of respondents were male coaches (402 in total), with 24 female coaches completing the survey (a further 3 coaches chose not to report their gender).

More than 80% of the coaches were married or in de facto relationships, with approximately 5% having been divorced and almost 15% never married. They also had other responsibilities, with the majority (67%) reporting that they had dependents.

## FINDINGS

### **Educated coaches**

The coaches are a formally educated group, with nearly 70% (239 coaches) having tertiary or post-graduate qualifications (regularly in coaching-related fields such as education, science, and/or psychology). The coaches additionally hold sport-specific qualifications including C License (39%), B License (40%), A License (16%) and Pro Diploma (5%) through FFA (81%), AFC (15%) or UEFA (4%).

A key issue that was noted related to the affordability of sport-specific accreditation. For example, *“Achieving the B Licence and higher requires some serious investment in time and money.”* (Assistant Coach, NPL). The coaches noted that licenses (especially the A License and Pro Diploma) cost thousands of dollars, with additional transport and accommodation costs as well as personal costs incurred through loss of income during this period. The coaches noted that there were seemingly limited prospects of financial return on this investment. A subsequent suggestion was to improve affordability for coaches. For example, *“From a holistic point of view, more/affordable coaching education ultimately would lead to better educated players”* (Head Coach, Local League)... *“FFA .... \$15k for a pro diploma ....making everyone licensed when there are no jobs to be licensed for... when the jobs go to former elite professional players”* (Assistant Coach, Overseas; Assistant Coach, Local League) is an additional frustration related to perceptions of a lack of job prospects and a ceiling for coaches who did not achieve an international player status

While not necessarily reflected in the circumstances of their employment, nor their experiences with contracts and terminations, most coaches reported the importance of (i) undertaking some professional development training related to their rights as an employee (78%); (ii) options to resolve grievances and disputes (83%); and (iii) taxation/superannuation issues (94%).

### **Work Circumstances and Remuneration**

The respondents to the survey were predominantly employed as coaches (76% head, assistant, specialist, strength and conditioning), technical directors (22%), or analysts (1%). They were typically employed in NPL (52%), National/State Football Federation (16%), Local League (17%) or other contexts (e.g. Academies 6%, Youth League 3%, A-League 3%, W-League 1.5%).

As seen in Figure 1, there was significant variation in the remuneration offered to coaches in these assorted work contexts. The most common circumstance, however, was that coaches received less than \$10,000 (70%; inclusive of those receiving no payment).

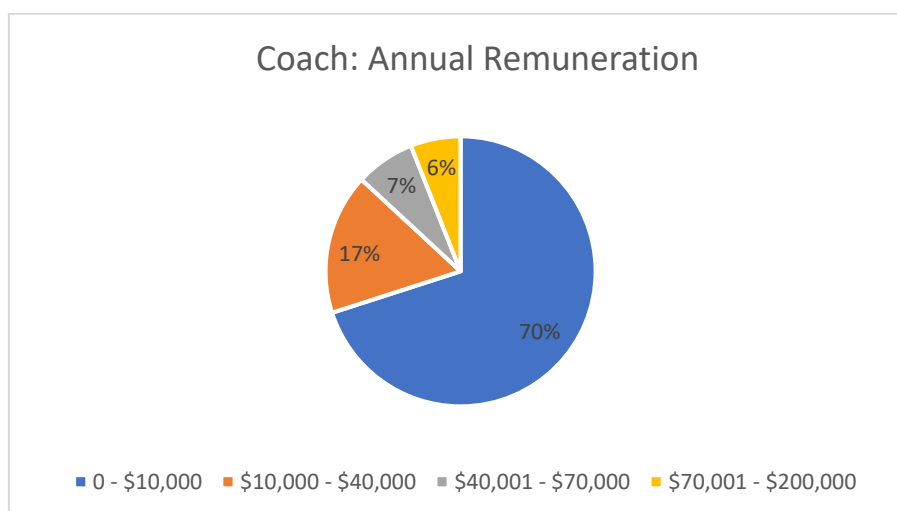


Figure 1. Annual remuneration for current coaching work

While it was clear that most coaches were driven by their passion to contribute to the game rather than by monetary gain, coaches raised concerns regarding the mismatch between recognition / remuneration and the actual hours that are spent in coaching (e.g., training, analysis, preparation, player contact) and related activities (e.g., club functions, professional development). Examples that highlight the concern about this mismatch included:

*“Too much work: 3 nights training per week plus game day then pre-season adds up to 26 rounds of football plus 6 trial matches and preseason training. Huge effort for minimal financial reward.”* (Head Coach, NPL)

*“I’m expected to give everything for a nominal fee as a coach.”* (Technical Director, NPL)

In keeping with the broader sports coaching domain, it was reported that while coaching standards and practices have continued to become more professionalised, coaching continues to be seen as a largely volunteer or amateur role. This was reflected in conditions and perceived status:

*“Remuneration was never sufficient even at an NPL level to cover expenses. The elite pathway was still essentially a volunteer ran program.”* (Head Coach, based overseas)

*“Whilst there may be some minimal remuneration, the roles are effectively volunteer status”* (Technical Director, NPL)

*“the remuneration is so low versus the hours spent preparing, travelling and actually coaching, plus associated costs such as fuel and phone bills, that I am actually paying to be part of our State program.”* (Assistant Coach, NPL).

Concerns were also raised about the impact of these expectations on areas outside of football. For example:

*“The salary is so ridiculous in comparison with the hours you have to work. On top of that, they asked for full weekends away from your family.”* (Head Coach, Local League)

These concerns were not limited to Community Clubs or NPL level but extended to the National League level with A-League / W-League / NPL coaches commenting:

*“Most clubs feel that you should be honoured to be involved with the club, so therefore treated as worthless.”* (Goalkeeper Coach, NPL).

*“Working conditions in A-League youth sides as Head or Assistant Coach is not better and sometimes is worse than NPL or State League. A-League Clubs expect you to coach for free or for minimal payment for the prestige but ask you to be exclusive.”* (Technical Director, NPL)

Previously committed coaches reported becoming disillusioned and moving away from coaching. For example:

*“There is no incentive for me to further my coaching qualifications / knowledge. Why would I invest thousands of dollars when it is unlikely to lead to meaningful employment or better pay in my current position? As an Asia B Licence holder I am earning less than \$8/hr.”* (Head Coach, Local League)

### **Contracts**

Further reinforcing the emphasis on ‘here-and-now’ as opposed to supporting a long-term vision for coaches in the sport, 85% of the coaches reported being contracted on a part-time basis and more than 75% of those employed were on contracts of 1 year or less (see Figure 2).



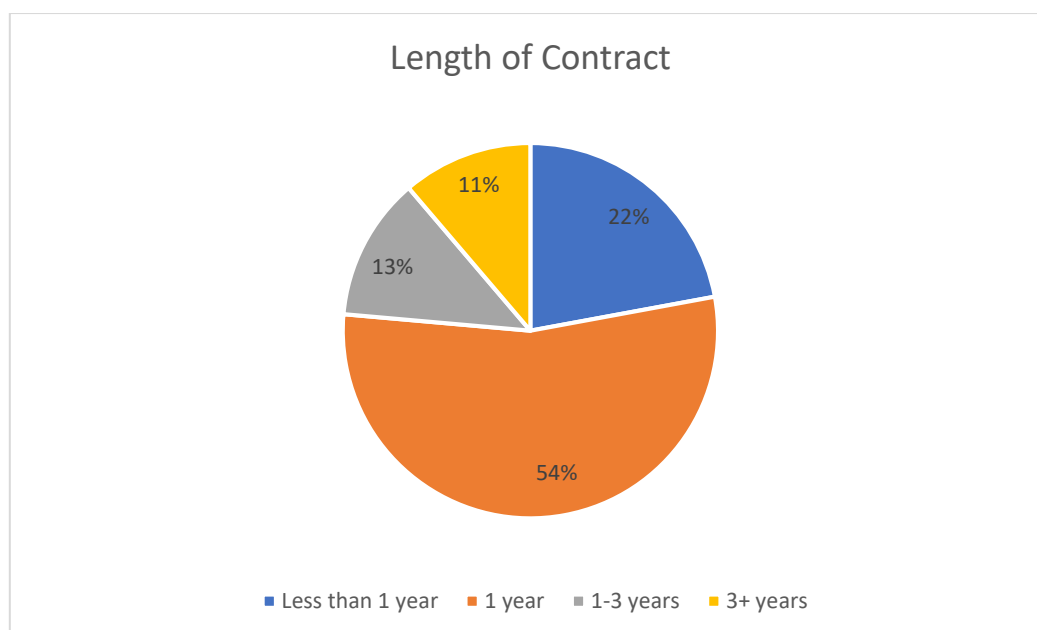


Figure 2. Length of contract

Even when they were contracted, only 57% of the coaches had some form of co-signed conventional written agreement, with the remainder working from emailed (6%) or handshake agreements (37%) (see Figure 3).

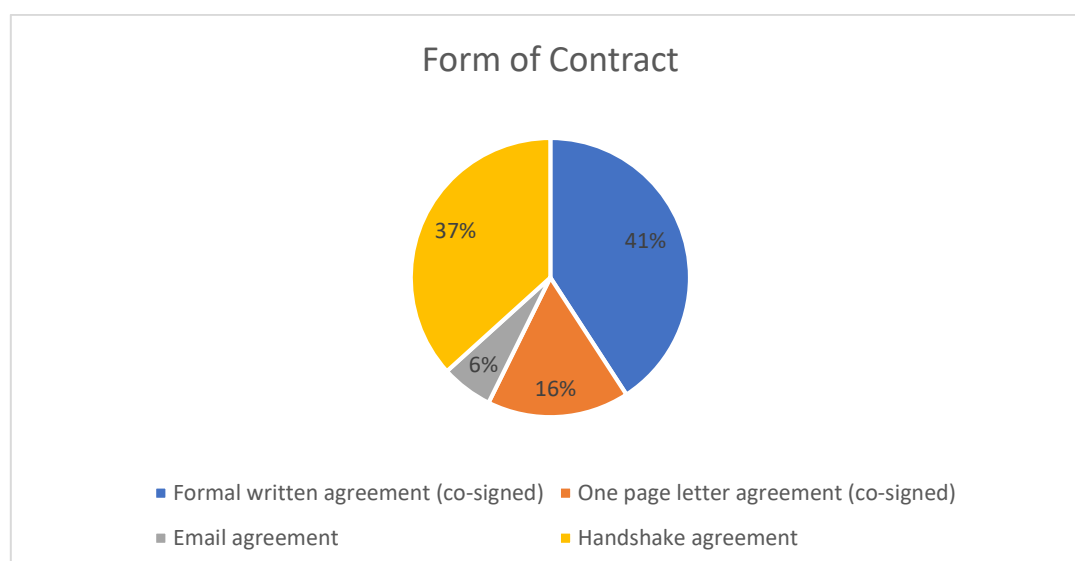


Figure 3. Form of contract

Moreover, 73% had started work as a paid football coach without a written agreement. This was reflected in the comments provided by many coaches. For example:

*"Every job with a club I have ever had has been a handshake agreement. There is no professionalism in NPL."* (Assistant Coach, NPL)

*“All my employment has been on an honorarium basis. No formal agreements at any stage.”* (Assistant Coach, NPL)

*“For every employed position at NPL/WPL Club level that I have had, I have never worked under the guidance a clear written position description or written contract.”* (Head Coach, Local League)

*“Always starts as a handshake/gentleman's agreement and everyone is your best mate and ends poorly with the loss of time, money and friendship!!!”* (Head Coach, NPL)

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that issues regarding payout in cases of termination were also identified. 84% of coaches stated they did not receive termination payments regardless of terms and conditions in contract. (see Figure 4).

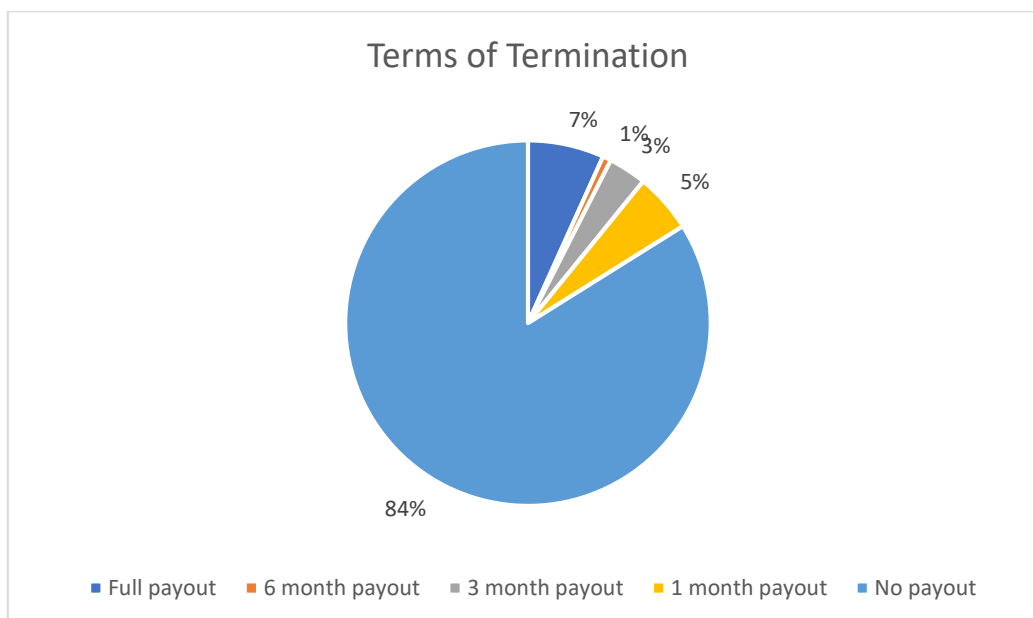


Figure 4. Terms of termination within contract

Regarding previous experiences with contracts, there were some notable issues with around 20% of coaches reporting that they had previously not received payment according to agreed terms and conditions and the same proportion indicated that they had cause to lodge a grievance, claim, or dispute. For example:

*“I have had occasion to deal with a club where we had a formal written agreement - but the payment was not forthcoming and there was an agreement reached on final (lesser) payment - the reason for the compromise on my part was that there was no real claim process I could follow - employment contracts with state federations have been very formal and well documented.”* (Head Coach, NPL)

Notably, of those who had cause, only 37% pursued a claim with only 54% of those receiving a successful outcome. There were also other anomalies that were surprisingly common such as 15% of coaches being asked to take a contract pay cut and 10% being demoted despite being contracted to higher positions. Examples of additional comments by coaches regarding the lack of binding and enforceable contracts included:

*“Payments are always late and generally you need to ask for it multiple times.”* (Assistant Coach, Local League)

*“I’ve never had anything in writing from my current club...bit worried that my current club hadn’t paid me up for last season and might not fix it up this season as they are very dodgy.”* (Head Coach, NPL)

*“The system is broken, and there is too much power with the clubs and member federations. Member federations don’t and will not enforce contracts. Apologies for being frank, but they are weak and a waste of time.”* (Technical Director, NPL)

Several coaches called for standardised contracts, a professional coach’s body and/or greater member federation support:

*“the FFA & the state bodies should enforce clubs to provide binding contracts to all position holders at the semi pro level & above.”* (Assistant Coach, NPL)

*“Coaches with accreditation from the C license to Professional Diploma should have access to an organisation similar to the Professional Players Association to assist with a wide variety of issue of to give suggestions / directives before Coaches sign contractors and also to assist Coaches if disputes arise.”* (Head Coach, National/State Federation)

*“Would be good if State League Coaches, even NPL could have a template contract that is legally binding that could hold these clubs to their word.”* (Head Coach, NPL)

*“There should be more advocacy for fair pay terms as a collective.”* (Head Coach, NPL)

*“There is no clear hourly rates for the soccer coaches according to their qualifications. At the moment every club or organization has their own pay rates. There should be a clear pay rate across the country so there is no confusion.”* (Head Coach, Academy)

## **Governance**

It was reported that football club committee members are often made up of volunteers with little training and understanding of governance, the value of coaching, or in many cases an informed view

about what quality coaching looks like. In some instances, it was reported that committee members held personal agendas (generally related to and resulting in forms of nepotism).

Several respondents expressed strong views on this lack of professionalism.

*"Lack of professionalism is staggering. Coaching is not seen as a real profession and something that you:*

*A- Do because you were once a good footballer, therefore you "know how to coach"*

*B- Shouldn't expect a "real binding contract" because so much of the dealings in monetary terms are under the table = Keep mouth shut if you want [to get] paid.*

*C- Almost impossible to build anything long term due to constant rebuilding year after year. No long term security in length of contract. As it is not part of the football culture." (Assistant Coach, based overseas)*

*"Australian football is the most disorganised system I have worked in globally. Mums and Dads on committees pretending to run football with no experience." (Assistant Coach, based overseas)*

*"Club Managements especially at NPL need to act more professionally in relation to running clubs. Just like coaches having to have minimum coaching licences for coaching at higher NPL levels there should also be something similar (I.e. NPL management accreditation and standards) for committees running these types of clubs." (Head Coach, Analyst, NPL).*

*"There are many administrators in high level positions, such as presidents of NPL clubs, who don't have any football playing/coaching background, but who want to get involved in the football decisions." (Head Coach, NPL; Head Coach Academy)*

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to acknowledge the support of Glenn Warry CEO, Football Coaches Australia in supporting the independence of this review survey by University of Queensland. We also extend our sincere thanks to the great number of coaches who participated in this project.