

Learning about what works in Phase Two of the Mayor of London's Sport Unites Programme

Spotlight: London Coaches Programme (NBA)



"I want to give back and be that coach I looked up to when I was growing up." (Coach)

"How can we do something different that meets the needs of the Mayor's Office and develops basketball in the capital?"
(BE staff member)

"Basketball needs more love in London." (Coach)



Background

The London Coaches Programme (LCP) is a partnership initiative funded by the Mayor of London as part of the wider Sport Unites Programme, together with the National Basketball Association (NBA). It is delivered by Basketball England (BE). From the outset, BE was keen to try something new and different, that would achieve positive social outcomes, meeting the Mayor's aspirations for young Londoners, as well as boosting basketball's profile and levels of participation in the capital.

LCP is a three-year programme, launched in 2023 and due to end in 2026, that aims to create a network of development, training and delivery opportunities for 500 new young community coaches aged between 16 and 30. This is an intentionally ambitious target, with BE *'thinking big'*, as only around 200 – 300 coaches typically qualify in the whole of England each year. BE wanted to attract coaches from across London's diverse communities, who would not necessarily be attached to a club. The Programme is free for those selected to take part, so it is accessible to the widest possible range of young Londoners.

As well as training coaches, LCP also aims to build pathways into employment for the new coaches, to develop young people (8-14 years) and signpost them to clubs, to target diverse communities and to mentor a total of 20,000 young people across London.

An important part of the developing context for LCP is the increasing focus on growing basketball in London, highlighted by the launch of the Mayor's Basketball Task Force in September 2024. The Task Force hopes to raise the sport's profile, secure major events, and create positive opportunities for young people across London, so the synergies with LCP are clear.

What happened?

LCP is made up of several elements, with some input delivered in face-to-face workshop sessions, combined with online training. Also included are other forms of personalised support such as mentoring, which was a key priority for the Mayor's Office. This combination represented a new way of delivering training for BE, so required a great deal of thought and discussion to refine the design and details of how the LCP would work. For example, coach recruitment, the ratio of mentors to coaches, the role of mentors, expectations of the time commitment and the underpinning coaching principles and philosophy were all issues that needed to be explored and agreed. The elements of the Programme include:

- Community Coach Award
- Mentoring sessions
- Training in safeguarding and first aid
- Mental Health course
- Coaching licence
- Signposting to clubs/organisations

LCP was launched with a high profile event at the central London Outernet venue in January 2023. This featured the London Mayor, stars of the basketball world, and local schoolchildren. The event received lots of media interest, raising awareness among boroughs and communities, as well as potential coaches.

So far, four cohorts have been launched, with a short gap between each one, allowing BE to review and improve the programme for each new cohort.

Advertising has taken place through a range of different routes, including social media. Coaches with diverse aspirations and backgrounds have been attracted to the Programme, hoping to gain:

- **Connections** with other people
- Opportunities for **personal and career development**
- Learning about a **new sport**
- A way of **giving back** what they themselves had learned from a great coach.

The numbers of people who have been reached by the Programme are as follows.

By January 2025:

- **235** coaches have completed the first part of the coaching qualification (they are eligible to be assistant coaches)
- **102** coaches have finished the second part of the coaching qualification (they are eligible to coach independently / lead sessions on their own)
- **20** coach mentors are in place across London (15 active mentors and 5 who have finished their mentoring period)
- **8,300** young people have been coached by LCP coaches between December 2023 and March 2025, and it is forecasted that 13,500 young people will be coached by LCP coaches by June 2026.



What has been the impact?

LCP is making a difference at several distinct levels, not only to the coaches themselves, but also to the partner organisations and to basketball in London.

For the coaches

“It’s shaped me as a coach and as a person in myself. It’s given me confidence.” (Coach)

(My highlight is) “taking three junior teams through to an international tournament in Belgium. I’ve learned loads and picked up responsibilities.” (Coach)

- LCP has **built a strong network** of young coaches across London, connecting them with peers and with the wider basketball world.
- It has given coaches **access** to:
 - the **experience and knowledge** of their mentors, players and staff from funding and governing bodies such as the NBA, BE and GLA
 - **resources** – for example one coach highlighted that because of the contacts he had made through the LCP, he had been able to get hold of some high quality basketballs to use with a group of disabled young people.
- Many coaches mentioned the increased **self-confidence** they had gained through the programme, both as coaches and as individuals.
- LCP was designed to connect new coaches with **employment and other opportunities** and it is clear that these have been a highly valued element of the programme, with some coaches moving on to paid roles in successful clubs, while others highlighted international events as a particular high point.
- Most of the coaches were already active in sport, not exclusively basketball, either as players or as unqualified coaches, and they saw the LCP as **complementing and building on** their other activities.

For basketball in London

“(LCP is) the best way to network in English basketball and the best way to get jobs.” (Coach)

“... the Programme has forced us to adapt and change how we think and do learning, not just traditional approaches; it’s the online resources and the mentor programme, it’s great!” (BE staff member)

LCP is having a significant impact on basketball in London and on the key organisations who support the sport. It is creating a vibrant new focal point for basketball and is boosting the profile of the sport, including.

- establishing a **new network** of coaches, tutors, mentors, and events, creating a real sense of energy around basketball
- helping to create and tapping into important **London synergies**, for example by its connection with the Mayor's Basketball Task Force
- pioneering **new ways of delivering coach training** that work for diverse young coaches through its unique combined and supportive approach.

What have been the challenges?

“Reward those who do engage, rather than punish those who don’t.” (BE staff member)

The LCP team has identified two key areas of concern that they have needed to tackle.

- As a programme that is free to participants, the LCP has had some difficulties with **drop out and non-attendance**. BE is addressing this issue by emphasising, at every possible opportunity, that coaches will get out what they put into the Programme, and by showcasing the many experiences and opportunities that coaches can benefit from, if they fully engage with and commit to LCP.
- **Communication** with the growing network of coaches, mentors and other partners (for example to publicise employment opportunities) has been complex and variable at times. After experimenting with and rejecting various methods and platforms, BE has settled on using WhatsApp, as this has the greatest reach among coaches.

What are the key lessons for others?

“Coaches are often left after being taught. The benefit of this programme is not leaving them, (but) affording them broader opportunities. these opportunities open your mind to possibilities that you might never even think of.”
(Mentor)

- Feedback from coaches and others involved in LCP stresses the importance of the additional **opportunities and networks** that make the programme unique. Access to mentoring, to international coaching and development opportunities and to pathways into employment, for example, are all extremely valuable in widening horizons and opening up possibilities.
- The positive emphasis on networks, relationships and connection sets a distinctive tone for LCP – leaving coaches feeling that they are supported and are **part of something larger**.
- **Partnerships** are key to the success of LCP, with different partners bringing different things to the table, for example ‘*We had the NBA as a partner. They are a highly recognised brand and bring kudos.*’ (BE staff member)
- The design of LCP, with gaps between cohorts, has built in time for reflection and review, enabling **adaptation and learning**.

What next?

“(The programme is) an opportunity to challenge yourself. A place to feel encouraged and cared for. A place where you find joy and a sense of belonging.” (NBA staff member)

Partners are exploring the next steps for LCP, including how to make the most of London-wide synergies, such as connecting with the Mayor’s Basketball Taskforce. BE is also in the early stages of designing pilot projects to test some ideas for the future that have emerged from LCP. For example, this could include building new partnerships to introduce basketball to younger children.

To leave the final word to a member of the BE team who has been involved in LCP from the outset:

“We thought it was a great idea and now we’re doing it. Don’t dismiss your dreams, you can make them happen.”
(BE staff member)