



GRASSROOTS COACHING IN CRISIS?

The state of sports
coaching in the UK 2019

Contents

01

Introduction

02

Support for
this report

05

Report findings
at a glance

06

About the
research

07

The best bits
of coaching

08

Everyday
problems

12

Modern day
fears

16

How can we
retain coaching
talent?

1. Introduction



Every week across the UK, 3,106,000¹ people give up their time to coach young people and adults in a sport they love. Thanks to them, 8 million of us are able to enjoy grassroots sports.

Yet, despite all the brilliant work they do, the role of coach is not an easy one. Coaches spend hours on admin before they even arrive at the pitch and once there have to deal with players not showing up and people not paying subs. At Spond, we've developed an app that supports grassroots coaches in the organisation, communication and management of their team and their club, but we want to go further.

We recognise the importance of listening to the challenges our local sporting heroes face and giving them the recognition and support they deserve, which is why we've commissioned this report.

It takes a frank look at the best and the worst of grassroots sport, from the perspective of coaches.

We want to raise awareness of the biggest obstacles coaches face, so we understand what needs to be done to retain coaching talent in the UK and boost outcomes for grassroots sport in Britain.

Per-Otto Wold
CEO, Spond

1. <https://www.sportpartnershiphw.co.uk/uploads/yougov-coach-survey-final-0.pdf>

Support for this report:



“Grassroots sports coaches are the driving force behind greater levels of activity in local communities and supporting these volunteers is central to Sport England’s ambition to increase the opportunities for people to participate in sport and physical activity.

“Sport England is committed to improving coaching through our dual strategies for the development of coaching and volunteering ‘Coaching in an Active Nation’ and ‘Volunteering in an Active Nation’, but as Spond outlines in this report, we also need to see greater recognition of the vital work coaches do from all stakeholders.”

“Spond’s research has uncovered some worrying challenges that coaches are currently facing,

such as lack of appreciation and the increasing time it is taking to do all of the administration to run sports activity sessions and teams. It is particularly worrying to see that such a high percentage of respondents considering quitting coaching altogether due to the increased expectations being placed on them. It’s important we all work to minimise these issues so that England’s 2.6 million plus coaches are valued, incentivised and equipped to continue improving the physical health and mental wellbeing of participants across the country.”

Stuart Armstrong
Head of Coaching, Sport England

Support for this report:



Technology plays a critical role in how we communicate on a day to day basis. The intelligent application of technology in local community sport can, and does, have a huge impact for all. With ever increasing demands from participants, their parents and carers, for up to date information on selection, venues and times, technological solutions can have an instant and positive impact not only for the players and parents but the coach too. Many coaches cite administration as a 'necessary distraction' from what they love to do, coach. Intuitive and easy to use technology has a huge role to play in ensuring both participants and coaches have a reduced administrative burden and are left to do what they love, spend time participating and coaching respectively."

Mark Gannon
CEO, UK Coaching

Support for this report:



“Without the dedication of community coaches across the UK, millions of children and teenagers would not have access to the sport and physical activity which is so critical to their development and wellbeing.

The role of coaches is absolutely invaluable to StreetGames - they help inspire and transform the lives of the young people we work with, and their influence has wider positive reverberations throughout the communities where those young people are growing up.

StreetGames is extremely grateful to Spond for pledging £30k to us as part of this campaign. This donation will provide additional funding for our coach training academy, enabling us to equip coaches working in some of our most disadvantaged communities with the skills they need to support disadvantaged children across the country through the power of sport.”

Jane Ashworth OBE
CEO, StreetGames

2. Report findings at a glance



72%

Almost three quarters of coaches are not paid for their role and **do not receive any remuneration**



Over 1/2

(54%) of coaches have **considered quitting** because of the challenges they face



6 in 10

(62%) say they feel **unappreciated**



33%

of coaches say **players not turning up** is the biggest challenge they face



32%

One third say **lack of funding** is a significant problem



1/4

(24%) spend over **seven hours a week on admin** to organise the game in advance of playing



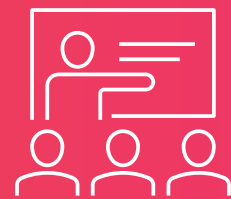
36%

Over one third of coaches say an **aggressive parent is their biggest fear**



300,000

UK coaches have **considered quitting** because they don't feel appreciated



28%

of volunteers say they have **not received enough information and training on GDPR**

3. About the research

The research was conducted by Censuswide, with 726 respondents who have ever coached or been involved in the administration of sport at grassroots/amateur level in the UK (501 respondents from online panels and 225 respondents from a private database) between 19.07.2019 - 05.08.2019. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles.

Coaches were drawn from a wide variety of sports, including football, cricket, rugby, netball, athletics and gymnastics.

Unless otherwise stated, all statistics in this report relate to this primary research.



4. The best bits of coaching

According to coaches, these are the top three factors that spur them on each week, and it's not winning matches!

#1 Working with young people

The opportunity to positively contribute to the lives of young people is a major motivation for the majority of coaches. Sport England research found partaking in sport not only improves the physical health of children and teenagers, but builds confidence, benefits mental wellbeing and helps young people thrive².

"The best thing about being a coach is watching and guiding the young people's development and confidence both in and out of the sport."

Hockey Coach, Liverpool

#2 Teaching a sport I love

The coaches surveyed reported they are driven by a passion for sport and, just like the players they teach, coaches can look forward to improved physical and mental health³. Becoming a coach also allows people to promote the benefits of physical activity, hone their sporting skills and continually boost their level of fitness.

#3 Giving back to my community

The majority (82%) of respondents are volunteer coaches who get involved as a means of giving back to their community. The Sport and Recreation Alliance believes volunteer sports coaches act as a catalyst for improving local communities, and their investment is a huge benefit to the wellbeing of the UK⁴.

"I love working with young players. We've created a safe and fun environment, which has become a community hub for young people."

Athletics Coach, Sussex



2. <https://www.sportengland.org/media/11719/sport-outcomes-evidence-review-report.pdf>

3. https://www.sportengland.org/media/11317/coaching-in-an-active-nation_the-coaching-plan-for-england.pdf

4. <https://www.sportandrecreation.org.uk/pages/volunteering-research>

5. Everyday problems

There are a number of significant issues that coaches come up against on a weekly basis.

Feeling unappreciated

More than six in ten (62%) coaches feel unappreciated either by parents or participants. One in five (19%) coaches say that not being appreciated is the single biggest challenge they face as a coach and 10% have considered quitting as a result of feeling unappreciated.

This equates to as many as 300,000 volunteers who could turn their back on a sport they love. Our findings also show that almost 100,000 UK coaches have already quit due to a lack of appreciation.

“I don’t think the players appreciate what goes into being a coach. I’m always the first and last one here and it’s rare I ever get a ‘thanks’.”

Rugby Coach, London



2. <https://www.sportengland.org/media/11719/sport-outcomes-evidence-review-report.pdf>

3. https://www.sportengland.org/media/11317/coaching-in-an-active-nation_the-coaching-plan-for-england.pdf

4. <https://www.sportandrecreation.org.uk/pages/volunteering-research>

Time investment

An often overlooked obstacle for coaches is the amount of time involved in coaching, which doesn't start and stop on the sports field.

Nearly three quarters (70%) of coaches spend two hours or more organising sessions each week. This could include corresponding with players or parents, managing attendance or chasing subs.

Given the majority of coaches aren't paid for their role, this is a huge time investment.

Almost a quarter (24%) of coaches spend more than seven hours on admin each week, the equivalent to a full working day or 5,218,080 hours of time these coaches dedicate to their clubs each week. Based on the average UK salary for a sports coach job, this equates to £46,962,720 of unpaid work these volunteer coaches do every week.

The amount of time involved has led (14%) of volunteers to consider quitting - the equivalent of an estimated 450,000 volunteers, while 124,000 have already quit.

“Getting everything ready for the next match takes me even longer than coaching the match itself.”

Netball Coach, Leeds

Almost a quarter (24%) of coaches spend more than seven hours on admin each week

Nearly three quarters (70%) of coaches spend two hours or more organising sessions each week.



Funding cuts

One third of coaches (32%) say lack of funding is the most significant problem they face. A funding deficit has led more than one in 10 (13%) of coaches to consider quitting and 8% to quit - so this is an issue that must be addressed urgently.

A lack of funding has a direct impact on the provision of facilities and kit. Some National Governing Bodies (NGBs) are trying to address this, and Sport England has awarded £260 million in funding to grassroots sports over the last year. The Football Association (FA) also donates money to fund the development of new and refurbished grassroots sports facilities to improve the quality and experience of playing sport at grassroots level, and it has been outspoken about the 'significant funding gap' in grassroots soccer, given its social and economic impacts are valued at £10.8 billion⁵.

“Lack of funding in grassroots football is shocking: the pitches are in the worst state I’ve seen in 35 years of being involved.”

Football Coach, West Midlands

“I constantly worry about having to fold the club due to lack of players or funds.”

Cricket Coach, Newcastle

It also impacts the ability of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds to access much needed sport. For example, The Social Mobility Commission's report, *An Unequal Playing Field*⁶, found that children from the poorest backgrounds are three times more likely not to take part in extracurricular sport, with cost being one of the biggest barriers to inclusion.

“It’s hard to recruit and keep some under-privileged kids involved in the club when they are unable to maintain subs. There doesn’t seem to be any help for these children or avenues for the club to fund kids in this situation.”

Swimming Coach, London



5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/sport/football/fa-report-reveals-significant-funding-gap-amid-calls-for-further-investment-at-grassroots-level-a4187236.html>

6. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818679/An_Unequal_Playing_Field_report.pdf

Absent players

“Every week I worry about not having enough players and disappointing others.”

Football Coach, Leeds

Anyone involved in grassroots sports will know that one of the biggest problems clubs face is attendance. Often coaches don't receive confirmation from parents or players about whether they are attending, so it's a case of seeing who turns up on the day. This lack of visibility can leave teams in the lurch. If they are players down on match day, it can be hugely demotivating, as opponents have an instant advantage.

A third (33%) of coaches say players not turning

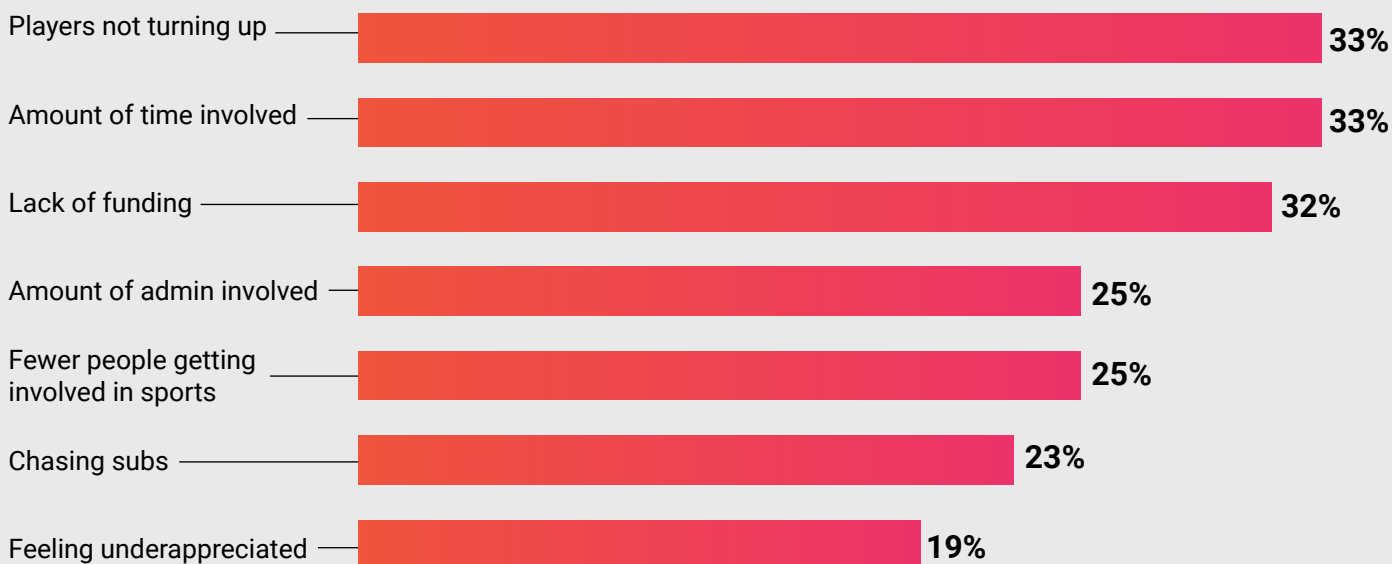
up is a major challenge to the ongoing success of grassroots sport.

This links to a wider societal problem of fewer young people becoming involved in sport. The latest data from Sport England's Active Lives Children and Young People survey showed that a third of children are currently doing fewer than half an hour of physical activity a day.

And research by Public Health England found that the number of children getting enough physical activity drops by 40% as they move through primary school. Yet nearly all the children who participated in the survey said they liked being active (93%)⁷.

It's therefore vital that grassroots sports clubs are visible and accessible, and the positive benefits of being involved in sport are widely promoted in schools and colleges.

Which would you say are the three biggest challenges that you face as a coach?



Base 726

7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/number-of-children-getting-enough-physical-activity-drops-by-40> Unequal Playing Field report.pdf



6. Modern day fears

We've heard about the everyday challenges that affect coaches, but the responsibility that comes with coaching carries more serious concerns, which can weigh heavily on coaches' minds.

So what's keeping coaches awake at night?

Experiencing a safeguarding issue

Safeguarding, and in particular, the safety of the players, is coaches' biggest fear by far. Almost half of respondents (48%) say that a major on field injury is what they fear the most.

Coaches are also increasingly expected to be vigilant to the mental welfare of those under their care. Many NGBs have provided excellent training to coaches, helping them spot the

danger signs that a young person may be being abused or exploited, and understand how to intervene with the help of trained safeguarding officers.

For many coaches, knowing how to effectively support a vulnerable child can be an intimidating experience. Coaches also need to ensure that their own interactions and communications with children and parents - both digital and in person - are always following safeguarding best practice.

Fears about how to adequately support and protect children without encroaching on safeguarding rules is a big concern for many coaches, and has led 8% (around 250,000) to consider quitting.

Aggressive parents

An aggressive parent is the second biggest fear for coaches, with 36% saying it causes them anxiety.

Whilst the vast majority of parents are supportive of coaches, in recent years, there has been a rise in threatening and pushy parents on the sports field⁸.

It's an issue the majority of coaches we spoke to have experienced. When asked about their worst coaching experience, the most common answer by far was 'aggressive or unhelpful parents'. Some coaches even said they have been physically assaulted by a parent.

"My worst coaching experience was being punched in the face by a parent."

Rugby Coach, Glasgow

"The worst thing I've ever experienced as a coach was seeing a team thrown out of a club due to the behaviour of adults."

Netball Coach, Kent

"The worst thing was being spat on by parents of the opposing team at a match."

Football Coach, Bristol

The The Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Football Forum (BFF) also spoke out recently about the racist abuse of children as young as seven on the football pitch, by adult spectators⁹.

The behaviour of a small minority of parents is a major obstacle to the continued success of grassroots coaching - 15% (around 465,000) of coaches say they considered quitting their role because of an aggressive parent.



8. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/12171203/Parents-on-football-touchline-so-violent-someone-could-be-killed-youth-league-chairman-warns.html>

9. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/football-racism-discrimination-young-children-seven-bame-a8901251.html>

Non-payment of subs

Confronting a player or parent about the non-payment of subs, is a fear for over a fifth (21%) of coaches, and has led 8% (250,000) to consider quitting.

Payment for grassroots sports is traditionally cash-in-hand, which can also make it harder for coaches or those involved in the administration of grassroots sport to keep track of who has paid.

“Having to collect subs is the worst thing about coaching. Constantly chasing parents and feeling like a pain, gets me down.”

Basketball Coach, Manchester



Data privacy breach

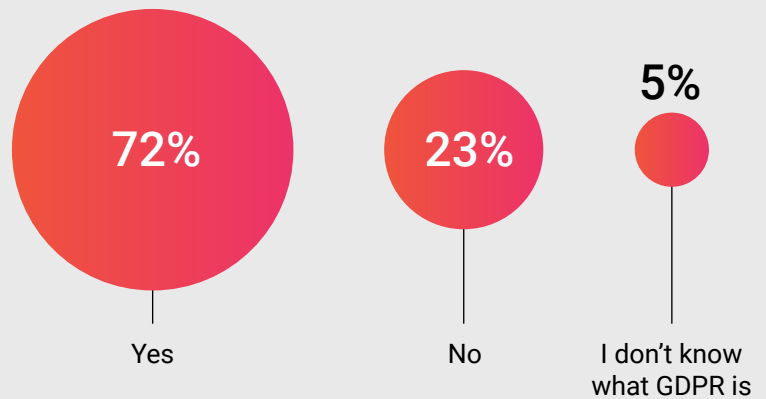
A very modern challenge which impacts coaches or those involved in the organisation of clubs, is compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The collection of personal information such as players' email addresses and phone numbers, is now subject to data protection regulations.

Yet, our research found over a quarter (28%) of volunteers say they have not received enough information and training on GDPR to ensure their team or club is compliant. In fact, 5% of coaches say they don't know what the GDPR is.

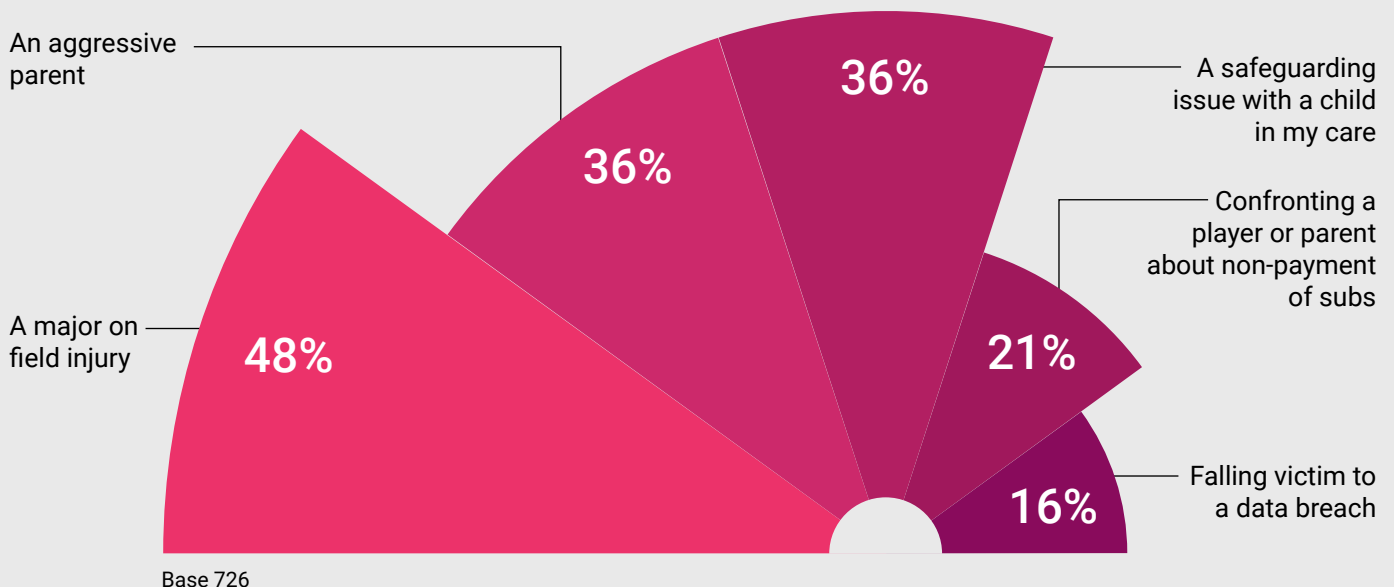
16% of respondents say falling victim to a data breach is their biggest fear as a coach. This is a significant issue as grassroots sports clubs could be fined for failing to comply, so it's important that coaches make sure they are clued-up on the regulations, and national sporting bodies either provide up-to-date, uncomplicated information on GDPR or work with digital platforms that handle this pain-point by securing compliance.

5% of coaches say they don't know what the GDPR is.

Have you received enough information and training on the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to ensure that your club is compliant with data privacy laws?



Which aspects of being involved with grassroots sports do you most fear happening?



7. How can we retain coaching talent?

In this report, we've outlined the everyday challenges and more serious concerns that coaches face.

Over half (54%) of coaches say the issues they experience have led them to consider quitting, which is equivalent to over 1.5 million coaches.

As many as 450,000 coaches have already quit due to these challenges, and the loss of further volunteers would be devastating for grassroots sports.

It's vital we retain coaching talent in the UK. The invaluable commitment of coaches not only enhances social and community development, promotes physical fitness and improves mental

wellbeing, but without coaches, we'd lose 7.6 million coach-led participation sessions every week¹⁰.

Spond's platform is purpose-built to specifically support coaches and group activity administrators. It's important to us that we do everything in our power to help organisers of grassroots sport succeed but we also need to see greater support across society to really make a difference.

So how can we collectively take the pressure off coaches and keep them teaching a sport they love?



Lack of funding

One third (32%) of coaches said this was the most significant problem they face and it's become a major issue for grassroots sport.

Our research found it has already resulted in almost **250,000 coaches quitting**, and a number of coaches surveyed reported that facilities are not up to scratch, with many playing on poorly maintained pitches

The solution

We need to see greater investment from Government and local councils. If funding isn't increased not only will community wellbeing suffer, but we will see a decline in the pool of homegrown talent in elite sports.

At Spond one of our aims is to help coaches and clubs collect subs and other payments, improving their financial situation and saving time. In the future, we intend to introduce several fundraising initiatives as part of the Spond platform to assist with the financing of teams and clubs. Our vision is to enable the lowest possible membership rates so that all young people are able to participate in grassroots sport.

10. https://www.sportengland.org/media/11317/coaching-in-an-active-nation_the-coaching-plan-for-england.pdf



Lack of appreciation

An estimated 300,000 coaches are considering quitting because of the lack of appreciation they receive and as many as 100,000 have already quit.

It's devastating to think a simple 'thank you' could have saved these coaches.

The solution

We need to build a culture of 'Thank Yous'. Parents and players must keep in mind that most coaches are giving up their time for free to help train people in a sport they feel passionate about. It's time we celebrate coaches and give them the respect they deserve.

Spond believes every coach should receive appreciation and credit for what they do. That's why we are launching **#ThanksAMillionCoach**. We want everyone who's ever been involved in grassroots sports to say 'thanks' to their coach, and help give our nation's true sporting heroes the respect they deserve.

UK Coaching also runs annual awards to celebrate exceptional coaches. Visit www.ukcoaching.org/events/our-awards for details.



Safeguarding

Safeguarding is something all coaches need to be mindful of, but it can be difficult for coaches to always know the best way to adequately support vulnerable children.

Confusion around safeguarding laws can compound the pressure on coaches, so it's no surprise that

safeguarding is cited as a reason as many as 250,000 coaches are considering quitting.

The solution

There is a wealth of information and support on safeguarding out there. UK Coaching for example, has both workshops and webinars on Safeguarding and Protecting Children. Coaches can find out more by visiting www.ukcoaching.org

Safeguarding children is at the core of the Spond app. We want to ensure all children are protected and coaches feel confident in managing communications with child participants - which should always be on behalf of a parent or guardian. That's why all communication goes through a central system so there is no direct contact between organisers and children.



Absent players

Almost 350,000 coaches have considered quitting as a result of poor attendance.

This isn't just a case of players not turning up on the day, but coaches having a lack of visibility over which players can and can't attend each week, and therefore being unable to ensure subs are available.

The solution

Our app enables coaches and players to keep track of who is attending every session so they have full visibility ahead of time and can rope in subs if necessary, so there's no surprises come match day.

It also sends reminders to players and parents so sessions aren't missed by mistake.

More generally, we need to see a greater dialogue around the benefits of sport for young people - both physical and mental - to encourage more children and teenagers to become involved in grassroots sport.



Time involvement

The time that goes into organising grassroots sports is often unseen but more time-intensive than coaching the sport itself. According to our study it's led to an estimated 450,000 coaches to consider quitting.

The solution

The decision to develop Spond was based on our Founder's belief that organising grassroots sports should be easier - from personal experience. By streamlining the admin and removing all the pain-points of organising, a recent survey showed that Spond frees up around 2.2 hours of coaches' time every single week, so they can focus on teaching the sport they love.



Collecting subs

A significant number of coaches we surveyed fear chasing parents and players over non-payment of subs. Almost 250,000 said they have considered quitting because of this.

The solution

There is a wider societal issue here around funding for families from lower social-economic backgrounds to ensure they can take part in sports. This is something the government and local councils need to make sure is available so these families don't miss out on exercise that is vital to their wellbeing.

Spond makes payment of subs and other fees possible with one click. We increased visibility of payment statuses for coaches, team administrators and guardians to save them and club managers time and hassle.



Data privacy protection

Certain clubs are failing coaches by not providing adequate information on data privacy laws.

The fact that over a quarter of coaches (28%) do not believe they have received adequate information on GDPR is something that needs to be addressed urgently.

The solution

All grassroots sports clubs must educate themselves about the GDPR and the implication of breaching data privacy, and this information must be clearly disseminated to coaches and any other volunteers involved.

Sport England has an online toolkit to help clubs unsure about the regulations - <https://www.sportandrecreation.org.uk/pages/gdpr>

Spond can also support clubs, teams and coaches in this area. Spond's platform has been built specifically to ensure GDPR compliance in all aspects of our product and operations.

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