

BRITISH EQUESTRIAN LEVEL 4 COACHING CERTIFICATE

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE IN SPORT COACHING

COURSE PROSPECTUS

INTRODUCTION

In today's busy and competitive coaching landscape, coaches are expected to provide cutting edge practice that's informed by current research. The Level 4 Coaching Certificate learning programme enables coaches to explore and evaluate contemporary thinking with colleagues from across equestrian disciplines, rowing and other sports.

A key strength of the Level 4 Coaching Certificate programme is the informal networks that are developed through the process, which help coaches to bring diverse and creative approaches to problem-solving and everyday decision-making. This makes for a rich learning mix and provides a unique environment to inspire coaches in their quest to excel.

BACKGROUND

British Equestrian and British Rowing have partnered with the University of Stirling to deliver the Level 4 Coaching Certificate qualification, including a Postgraduate

Diploma (PGDip) in Sport Performance Coaching. This partnership allows us to offer both components at a lower price than a standalone Postgraduate Diploma.

The course consists of a bespoke programme that's been developed specifically for both sports. The syllabus of professional education is intended for high-performing coaches who have already completed the Level 3 Coaching Certificate, British Horse Society (BHS) Stage 4 or 5 in Complete Horsemanship, Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) Advanced Coach, or equivalent qualification. Enrolment takes place annually (dependent on numbers of applicants).





KEY PEOPLE



DR JANE BOOTH
Course Director

"I play a supporting role across the programme, from the introductory information sessions through to the final panel interviews. With over 25 years' experience in sport, coaching and leadership, I bring a passion for learning, sense of curiosity and a belief that great people make amazing things happen, as I endeavour to integrate applied elements into the course to stimulate and encourage reflection and personal development planning."

KEY PEOPLE



STEPHEN MACDONALD
Academic Course Leader

"I'm your principal contact at The University of Stirling and oversee the running of the course. I'm an experienced and active coach, coach educator and mentor with over 30 years of practical experience in Adventure Sports Coaching and Performance Coaching domains. Before joining the University of Stirling in 2017, I spent 10 years coaching the dynamic sport of canoe slalom at both club and national level."

KEY PEOPLE



DAVID PADGEN
Relationship Officer

“Managing the Level 4 Coaching Certificate programme has sat within my portfolio of responsibilities since I joined British Equestrian in 2018. I work closely with Amy, Jane and Stephen to ensure the smooth running of the programme and I also ‘book-end’ its delivery because I’m part of the interview panel at the start and the coaching impact professional discussion at the end.”

KEY PEOPLE



AMY DOBBINS
Level 4 Coordinator

“As part of my role at British Equestrian, I support candidates during their time on the programme, from enquiries and information days, right through to your coaching impact professional discussion and Level 4 awarding ceremony. David and I manage the British Equestrian aspect of the programme and work collaboratively with the University of Stirling to ensure a seamless administrative process.”



WHAT IS A LEVEL 4 COACH?

Level 4 coaches are visionary and knowledgeable decision-makers who display exceptional skills, behaviours and the highest professional and ethical standards. They advance the development of themselves and others, lead cutting-edge programmes or a specialist part of an existing programme, and make a positive impact on sport performance and behaviour.

THE CAPABILITIES OF A LEVEL 4 COACH

There are eight capabilities and behaviours we look for in a Level 4 coach and these are the measures we will assess at your final panel presentation and professional discussion. The final panel is explained later in this guide.

A Level 4 coach should be able to:

- build and maintain effective, long-term working relationships
- create and sustain a supportive

learning environment that's aligned to the needs of participants and the coaching context

- empower and challenge participants and themselves to exceed in what they believe they can achieve
- use an integrated approach to synthesise information, solve problems and manage change
- generate strategies and make effective decisions in a dynamic and uncertain environment
- demonstrate exceptional communication skills and adapt these to the needs of the participants and the context
- be self-aware, self-reflective and drive for continued self-improvement
- demonstrate a positive impact on the behaviour and performance of participants



SOPHIE WELLS
British Dressage

"I applied for the Level 4 Coaching Certificate to continue my personal development. It opened my eyes to so much more and put me completely out of my comfort zone. Being surrounded by people constantly wanting to improve and better themselves, as well as the passionate tutors we worked with, has been inspiring and I'm very grateful for the opportunity."



LIZ MADELEY

**British Horse Society and
British Showjumping**

“Completing the Level 4 Coaching Certificate was an incredible journey, marked by challenges and personal growth. The comprehensive approach fostered my passion for learning and self-improvement, providing me with advanced skills and knowledge that I’ve been able to apply in practice.

The camaraderie, collaboration, and support from my fellow course members greatly enriched my learning experience – the exchange of ideas, discussions and shared experiences significantly influences my practice.”

WHAT MAKES A LEVEL 4 COACH?

To be successful at this level, you will need to:

- develop as highly motivated active learners
- be able to work autonomously and manage their own learning process
- take responsibility for identifying their own learning needs and aspirations

You don’t have to be working in a high-performance environment to be considered a high-performing coach or to be eligible for the Level 4 programme. For example, you might be primarily working with adults in a participation environment, or with children or young athletes.

When we refer to ‘riders’ in this guide, we are also including carriage-driving and vaulting activity.



ABOUT THE COURSE

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Because this is a postgraduate level programme, you will need to be prepared to dedicate the time needed to study in order to gain the most benefit from the learning.

In order to apply to study for the Level 4 Coaching Certificate, you must meet the following requirements:

- Hold a Level 3 Coaching Certificate or recognised equivalent qualification, such as a British Horse Society (BHS) Stage 4 or Stage 5 Coach in Complete Horsemanship, or an Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) Advanced Coach Certificate
- Demonstrate that you've been a high-performing coach in a specific environment for a minimum of five years and display high-performing characteristics aligned to the Level 4 Coaching Certificate criteria.

- Provide two references who are able and prepared to verify your expertise and experience.

As part of the application process, it will also be necessary to demonstrate that:

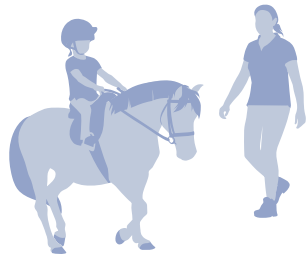
- you can provide a range of evidence of on-going professional development and of your current high performing coaching practice.
- you employ an athlete-centred approach to your coaching.
- you are capable of holding an ambassadorial role in equestrianism.

You will also need to identify a mentor to support you with specialist, sport-based, technical development. Your chosen mentor must be approved by your chosen discipline's governing body.



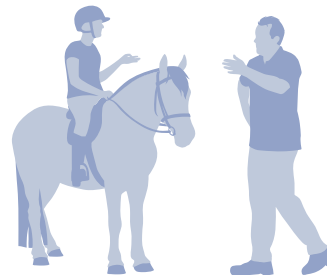
COACHING ENVIRONMENTS

Your high-performing coaching activities should take place in one or more specific contexts or environments. These are as follows:



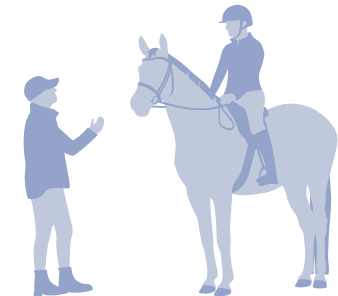
12 YEARS AND UNDER

Riders up to the age of 12 of all abilities, from learning to ride to training and competing.



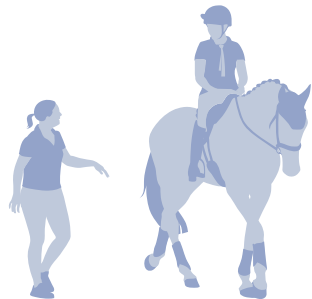
13 TO 18 YEARS

Teenagers of all abilities, including those learning to ride, riding for pleasure, and training and competing outside of talent programmes.



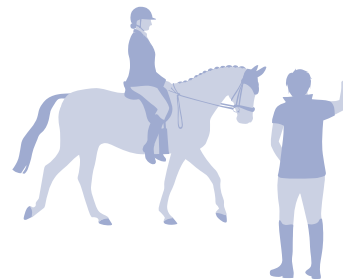
ADULT PARTICIPATION

Riders over the age of 18 whose activities include learning to ride, riding for pleasure, training, and competing for personal wellbeing and goals.



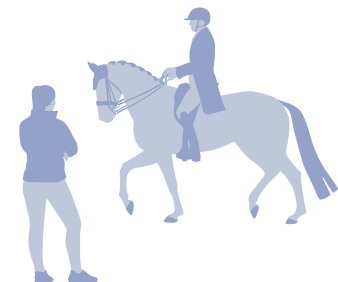
ADULT COMPETITIVE

Riders over the age of 18 who focus on being competitive against others. They ride and train with the aim of competing successfully and moving up the levels.



PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT

Riders on squads and the talent pathway programme who are working towards senior elite performance.



ELITE PERFORMANCE

Riders representing their country.

ABOUT THE COMBINED COURSE

The British Equestrian Level 4 Coaching Certificate qualification incorporates the opportunity for coaches to gain a Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) in Sport Performance Coaching and is designed to support and credit learning within the workplace.

Forming an integral part of the Level 4 Coaching Certificate, the PGDip element has been created around work-based learning modules that are focused on the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to develop professional practice, as well as the ability to manage academic learning.

Using a range of work-based learning situations, the PGDip course will enhance the knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking skills that are of importance to professional practitioners in sports coaching. You'll have regular interaction with subject experts who facilitate learning opportunities via lectures, seminars, tutorials, subject-specific forums and student conferences.

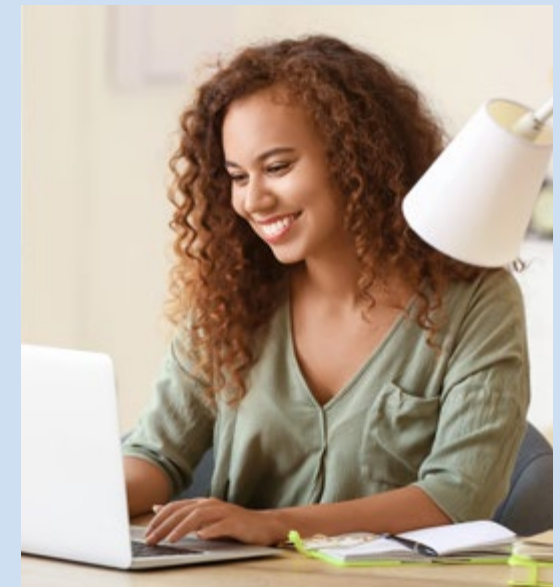
In addition, you'll operate in a learning and assessment environment that emphasises how theory and empirical research is applied to stimulate a solution-focused approach to the real issues relevant to sports coaching.

This approach enables you to explore coaching practice through the rigour of academic learning, blended with the experience of coaching. The structure of the programme provides the opportunity to develop critical thinking about coaching and to impact on personal coaching behaviours.

British Equestrian will be the awarding body for the Level 4 Coaching Certificate qualification, while the PGDip element of the course will be awarded by the University of Stirling.

TAKING IT FURTHER

You may also choose to progress to the Applied Coaching Project module in order to gain the MSc in Sport Performance Coaching qualification with the University of Stirling. This would be at an additional cost by separate arrangement between the coach and the University.





MIA PALLES-CLARK

British Showjumping

“The Level 4 programme enabled me to develop as a coach and as a human, expand my coaching relationships, and improve my communication and listening skills. It’s been a huge undertaking – going back to university at the age of 48 was never going to be easy – but I can honestly say it’s been life-changing to me as a coach. Coming through the process and being able to deliver your research to fellow coaches and your governing body is such an honor and incredibly fulfilling, makes the process so worthwhile.”

COURSE OUTLINE AND COMMITMENT

The programme runs over two years, with the course commencing in autumn 2026 and concluding with a coaching impact professional discussion in autumn 2028.

The University of Stirling Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) comprises eight modules, each exploring different areas of coaching, and is designed to meet the needs of busy coaches working in the industry. The programme is:

- offered part-time over two years, with option to extend to three years if needed
- delivered online with recorded lectures and content, allowing students to dovetail learning with their own schedules – no need to travel to the university campus
- complemented by online face-to-face check-ins by webinar and individual tutor support.

The learning will also be supported by two in-person seminar events per year, hosted by British Equestrian and our

partners British Rowing and supported by the University of Stirling. The first of these will be in the autumn term (September/October) and the second in the summer term (May).

The University continues to support the development of adaptive expertise, professional judgement and growth in the coaches we work with, through the programme aims:

- To develop coaches who are evidence-guided, critical problem-solvers in the dynamic context of sport coaching.
- To develop appreciation of relevant theoretical concepts in sport coaching and the ability to critically apply these to real-world coaching applications.

LEARNING SUPPORT FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

The University of Stirling has a history of guiding students, from a variety of backgrounds, through postgraduate study. As such, there is genuine recognition that many learners

undertaking the Sports Performance Coaching PgDip don't come from traditional academic backgrounds. The course has been designed to support students in transitioning to an unfamiliar learning context. Furthermore, with applied backgrounds in coaching and coach development, the core teaching staff understand the need for course content to feel relevant and accessible.

In addition to this cooperative environment, students have access to the wider study support services at the University and will also benefit from a number of additional opportunities to help adjust to the academic environment. As an example, there are study skills sessions that include how to think critically, how to reference academic work and how to draw upon research to support a presentation.

Finally, there is a strong personal tutor system at the University of Stirling, to which every student has access. This provides foundations for the wrap-around care and guidance that sets the University of Stirling apart.





ELLIE HALSEY

British Horse Society

"At the start of the course, my coach developer asked me what I wanted to look like as a coach at the end of the experience, but I couldn't have imagined the difference in me over that time! I wanted to develop more self-confidence and a greater underpinning knowledge, but what I have learned, both about coaching and myself, has far outweighed what I expected. I'm more accepting of myself and have a far greater understanding of how I learn and how others develop"



STEPH BRADLEY

British Dressage

"Like it or not, coaching is intellectual work, although not usually considered as such. Developing coaching knowledge by broadening critical understanding of the complexities of the role is the worthwhile journey that the Level 4 Coaching Certificate takes you on. It is not for the faint-hearted – it's two years hard of work – but, at the end, you've learned more about yourself, acquired a thirst for learning, conducted your own research and made lifelong friends along the way."

POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA MODULES

1. THE COACHING PROCESS

The coaching process is far from simple and yet coaches engage successfully in it every day in their work with and for athletes and participants. Integrating research, theory and personal practice, this module examines the coaching process, what coaches do, and the impact of their work on athletes and participants.

The module aims to provide you with the opportunity to examine what coaches do and the reasoning behind their actions and to critically analyse models of the coaching process. You'll engage with up-to-date research, theory and concepts to explore and critically reflect on what you do when coaching and why.

TOPICS COVERED

- Day-to-day activities of coaching (including coaching behaviours)
- Interpersonal coaching relationships
- Why coaches work as they do
- How coaching is conceptualised

2. COACHING CONCEPTS

This module considers the formation of coaching knowledge and various aspects of what it means to function as an effective coach, leading to coaching expertise.

You'll engage with up-to-date research, theory and concepts to explore and critically reflect on what you do when coaching and why. To encourage the application of coaching theory into a coaching practice, your assignments will be directly related to your own context.

TOPICS COVERED

- The development of coaching knowledge
- Aspects of effective coaching
- The coach and their ethics
- The formation of coaching expertise
- The role of decision-making in progress towards coaching mastery
- The cognitive expertise required to impact the coaching process

3. UNDERSTANDING PERFORMANCE

This module is about enhancing your decision-making and problem-solving abilities as a sport coach by using objective methods.

We will explore the practical use of sports science methods relating to the objective measurement and analysis of performance demands in your sport. Case studies will be presented to illustrate how theory is applied to coaching practice.

TOPICS COVERED

- Exploring the demands of your sport
- Critical understanding of measurement and analyses of performance data
- Enhancing decision-making processes as a coach through more objective methods
- Considering the ethical basis of using data in sport

4. COACHING AS LEARNING

Sport coaching and the development of coaching expertise have traditionally focused on the 'what' rather than the 'how' of the coach's skills and knowledge.

This module aims to develop your critical understanding of the pedagogical process and provide an underpinning for your coaching practice. You'll engage with up-to-date research, theory and concepts as means to explore and critically reflect on what you do when coaching and why.

TOPICS COVERED

- Theories of learning
- Informed and integrated approaches to pedagogy in devising, managing and implementing coaching practice.
- Views and concepts related to the application of innovative pedagogy
- Pedagogy and the conditions within which athletes learn
- The creation of positive learning environments

5. PLANNING FOR SPORT COACHING

This module will enhance your knowledge, skills and understanding of 'nested' planning at the macro, meso and micro-level in your coaching context.

We will critically explore sports management models, long-term athlete development, periodisation and individual session planning. Case studies will also be presented to illustrate how theory is applied to coaching practice.

TOPICS COVERED

- Developing a deeper understanding of your coaching context through exploring complex systems approaches to planning.
- Creating plans to enhance your coaching practice within your context.
- Critically applying evidence-guided theory to your coaching practice.

6. IDENTIFYING AND SOLVING PROBLEMS IN SPORT COACHING

The sport coaching environment can be complex and dynamic, with coaches under pressure to bring innovation into their practice. This can lead to a reliance on what may have previously worked rather than considering what the most important problem to be solved is.

This module is about enhancing your skills in identifying and solving problems in your coaching context. We will explore project management, research and evaluation methods.

TOPICS COVERED

- Theories of learning
- Informed and integrated approaches to pedagogy in devising, managing and implementing coaching practice.
- Views and concepts related to the application of innovative pedagogy
- Pedagogy and the conditions within which athletes learn
- The creation of positive learning environments

7. UNDERSTANDING PERFORMERS: PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Understanding the people that coaches work with is invaluable to enable them to make the performance better. This module will provide you with an in-depth examination of key psychological concepts useful for coaches to assist them in understanding and enhancing performance. You'll engage with up-to-date research, theory and concepts as a means to explore and critically reflect on how you understand the people you work with.

Content delivery will include recorded lectures, textbook extracts, journal articles, sport-specific materials, web sources and module co-coordinator-designed materials. They'll be combined with videoing and self-reflection of your coaching practice and discussion of scenarios, problems and issues.

TOPICS COVERED

- Foundational concepts for understanding performers (and people)
- Skills and tools to enhance performance

8. CREATING ENGAGING PRACTICE

Creating effective practice is, perhaps, the ultimate goal of the sport coach. This module gives you a practical understanding of key principles of skill acquisition and practice design. This will facilitate skill and performance development through the creation of engaging sessions. You'll engage with up-to-date research, frameworks and concepts, and draw together several strands from the MSc programme, including pedagogy and creating empowering coaching climates.

A key feature of the module is in-depth class discussions, allowing you to develop your understanding alongside your colleagues. Together, these will let you explore and critically reflect on your own practice design.

TOPICS COVERED

- Skill acquisition
- Design and structure of practice
- The goals of practice sessions
- Delivery, planning and review of practice



CLAIRE EDWARDS

British Showjumping

"This course has been life-changing. While challenging throughout, the academia has significantly altered my thought pattern and I'm now a more capable, critical individual with a greater depth of thought and informed decision-making. It's enabled me to develop my skills and enhance my coaching practice, which has had a positive effect on not only my coaching life, but also my daily life. This is a fantastic opportunity where, while developing further, you learn a lot about yourself as well and emerge an even better version of yourself."



JANE RANDALL

British Dressage

"The Level 4 has given me the theory to wrap my practice around and reignited my passion for learning. It has helped me be more creative with my coaching, keeping the athlete (horse and rider) at the centre and creating an environment for learning. It has opened doors I did not know were there. It is not easy – it is not meant to be – but those learning pits were worth it! I'm surrounded by a supportive culture of knowledge and practice and I have fabulous connections with coaches from many different sports."



LEVEL 4 COACHING CERTIFICATE

The British Equestrian Level 4 Coaching Certificate includes the following elements.

REFLECTIVE LOG

You'll be expected to keep a reflective log over the period of the programme. Its purpose is to record the impact of personal development on your coaching practice. The log will combine your reflections on how the PG Dip learning has helped personal development, feedback from two 360 reviews, two field-based visits, and input from your technical mentor.

360 REVIEWS

You'll be provided with an online questionnaire, which you'll need to ask eight to ten people to complete. Those people should be a mixture of clients and their supporters – such as parents, carers, friends – and any peers who see you work on a regular basis. These reviews are conducted twice during the programme,

once early in year one, then again at the end of year two, and the feedback will be discussed collaboratively with your course director.

FIELD-BASED VISITS

You'll receive two field-based visits from an expert coach developer appointed by British Equestrian. They'll observe you during a coaching session, which will then be followed by a one-to-one discussion to review and reflect on the coaching. This is not a technical knowledge or skills review – instead, it is to review and enhance your coaching practice. Field-based visits are carried out early in year one and towards the end of year two.

COACHING IMPACT PROFESSIONAL DISCUSSION

This is the opportunity to share your personal learning over the course of the programme with a panel of experts. You'll be asked to present your reflective log in whatever form you choose to.

Previous alumni have used PowerPoint presentations, recorded videos, flip charts or props – you can be as creative as you wish, provided it fits within the allocated 30 minutes and the space available. Your presentation will be followed by a professional discussion with the panel based on what you've spoken about and information from the 360 reviews and field-based visit reports. The panel will consist of the Level 4 Course Director, the British Equestrian Level 4 programme manager, a representative from your primary Member Body and an independent coaching expert.

MENTORS

Mentors have proven to be extremely valuable to Level 4 alumni in previous years, so you will be encouraged and supported to identify at least one mentor to work with through your Level 4 Coaching Certificate journey.

Your mentor could be someone from within your own member body to provide technical sport guidance or someone who you could discuss coaching and share ideas, thoughts and challenges with. Alternatively, it could be someone to support your academic learning. You could even work with a mentor for each of those areas if that's what you feel you need.

If you have mentors in mind when you apply, you can identify them in your application form, but this will also be discussed and explored in more detail during the British Equestrian Level 4 Coaching Certificate induction day in September.



COURSE FEES

Course fees for the Level 4 Coaching Certificate qualification, including the Postgraduate Diploma, total £7,900, which will be split into two annual fees.

The first-year payment of £3,950 is due in September 2026, with the second payment of £3,950 due in September 2027.

You may be eligible for support from your Active Partnership or other grant-aiding organisations – for further information about this, please contact David Padgen at British Equestrian. Previous Level 4 coaches have been successful in achieving grant contributions towards their Level 4 fees.

STUDENT LOANS

If you commit to completing the MSc in Sport Performance Coaching before starting the programme, you can apply for a student loan for the full two years

of study. For this, you would first need to contact the Programme Director at the University of Stirling, Stephen Macdonald, to discuss your intention to complete the MSc, then the relevant home nation student loan awarding agency as soon as you decide to take this option.

Click the links below to access your home nation student loan awarding agency.

[England](#)

[Wales](#)

[Scotland](#)

[Northern Ireland](#)



HOW TO APPLY

Applications should be completed and submitted [via the online form](#).

The closing date for applications is 4 May 2026. As part of the application assessment, your chosen discipline's governing body will be consulted to seek an endorsement. Suitable applicants will be invited to interview in June or July.

For more information regarding this programme please contact the British Equestrian Participation and Development Team:

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AMY DOBBINS

Level 4 Coordinator

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