

This article was first published in Coaching at Work in 2021.

## **FEES: TIME TO STEP UP**

*In the fourth and final article in this series we look at how we determine appropriate fees in coaching supervision, and individual and team coaching. This issue: next steps – sharing the learning to move forward. **Clare Norman** and **Michelle Lucas** report*

Here, we'll refer to the earlier articles by way of summary. However, the main part of this article will be to share our learning as we've attempted to move forward an initiative that will bring greater transparency to this important commercial topic in our community.

### **Article one: Supervision**

Our main exploration was around the discrepancy between what coaches are willing to charge for coaching and how much they're prepared to pay for supervision, despite the additional experience and training of supervisors.

### **Article two: One-to-one coaching**

Here, we noted the challenge of determining fees which seem to reflect a complex web of variables including coach experience, client situation, subject matter, direct or indirect selling, programme/session length, location, market and context, portfolio mix of paid vs pro bono, compensation for holiday/sick pay, insurance, pension and business costs.

### **Article three: Team coaching**

This was the first time, as far as we can tell, that any comparative information has been gathered about team coaching rates. Given the wide and varied interpretation of what constitutes team coaching, our analysis focused on a specific definition of team coaching.

### **Looking ahead**

One aspect that we believe will become more prominent in the not-too-distant future will be the impact of digital platforms on the fee structures for coaching and supervision. For example, those platforms/organisations which are 'democratising' coaching, offering it to the masses rather than top leaders at much lower rates than we've seen historically.

We also wonder what additional impact the pandemic will have on rates, as more coaches have offered pro-bono coaching to organisations on the frontline. Will those organisations want to go back to paying previous rates or will they expect lower or no fees?

We've known from the start of this enquiry that if a benchmarking survey were to be done, we weren't the people to do it; we'd need to bring in some market research expertise. This would undoubtedly cost money – and therefore we'd need to find some sponsors. We approached the professional bodies (EMCC, AC, ICF, APECS) as well as organisations who'd sponsored or

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executed similar reports in the past (Ridler and Henley Business School). We also approached the Future of Coaching Collaboration Group.

We hadn't expected this to be easy – and we hadn't expected it to be as hard as it was! Initiating this enquiry as two independent practitioners meant that the household name consulting companies that deliver salary surveys in other professions were slow to respond to speculative enquiries. We did, however, connect with an independent market researcher who was keen to be involved and who quoted a ballpark figure of £5,000 for a UK-only survey. We felt this was likely to be a conservative fee, but it was something that would help our discovery conversations with the professional bodies.

Through our own networks and those of our trusted colleagues, over time, we managed to speak to the four main professional bodies in the UK. Clearly none of them could have anticipated our approach and so none of them had money in the budget for a project like this. All of them had pre-existing and important priorities. From responses to Covid to more practice related areas of research through to topical ethical matters and understanding the impact of the changing shape of the coaching service (the rise of digital platforms for example), our enquiry was met with already saturated agendas. Some were quick to recognise the potential value of transparency of fees in the marketplace, however, others posed a valid challenge: who actually wants this data?

As we identified in an earlier article, knowing ballpark rates can be of particular value to those who are newly entering the market. It might also be useful when responding to tenders – if price is less of a differentiator, procuring organisations can focus more on qualitative factors. However, would the community in general want this commercial data to be known?

Perhaps those who are more established in their services would see the benchmarks as a threat – especially if they're charging more boldly – publicising 'averages' could have the effect of lowering what they could command.

Another questioned how open the survey participants would be about their fees – especially if the survey targeted the practitioners. Would they actually know what their 'typical rate' or their 'range of rates' are? Few practitioners will have done a deep analysis of their fees at an absolute level of accuracy – most would be quoting their most recent or their 'felt sense' of their rates. So, this data would be subject to bias – perhaps the practitioner would share what they aspire to charge, rather than what they actually charge? Perhaps the practitioner would be motivated to over- or under-estimate their charges depending on their intention for participating in the survey.

This took us to an interesting place – perhaps we should be asking the recipients of coaching and supervision to share what they pay rather than asking the practitioners what they charge? We liked this idea and it might be possible to tap into this data where the service is being delivered to organisations. It would be possible to ask coaches what they pay for their supervision. The difficult area though, would be for private coaching clients – it would be almost impossible to reach those who pay for coaching out of their own pocket for coaching. Where would we find them?

These discussions served to highlight just how big an endeavour this initiative could become. In engaging the professional bodies, we anticipated that we might need to engineer an alliance so that the cost was more affordable for organisations individually. Each would want some degree of involvement to help shape the design of the survey, so that they could use the data that

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emerged to serve existing priorities. This took us to the notion of having a steering committee who would collaborate during the various stages of the project.

Through our discussions, we received a general level of help, with potential sponsors offering to support the survey by engaging with their members and networks to participate, even if they couldn't offer funding. This highlighted another stream of activity – somehow communication across the organisations needed to be co-ordinated and coherent. We began to see that our original intention to prompt an enquiry could easily mushroom into becoming full time researchers!

To stem that possibility, our proposal would be that a project manager(s) be identified to hold this all together and if there were sufficient finance from the sponsors, this could be a paid-for role. More likely however, it would need to be a volunteer – perhaps a coach just entering the market who has a project or programme management background.

We, along with the financial sponsor(s) and their representatives, could offer input to help ensure the complexities of the market are taken into account in both the design and the communication phases. An outline of the person specification that this project might appeal to is outlined in the box. Might this be something you would be interested in?

### **The outcome**

So, what was the outcome of our discussions...? We're sad, but not surprised to say that at this point in time, none of the organisations we approached are in a position to offer financial support for this initiative.

So, is this a sign that we should abandon the notion that this is a useful enquiry for our community and place it back on the 'too difficult pile'? Or perhaps we should all put our money where our mouths are and form an alliance of practitioners and generate some crowd funding?

We estimate that there are more than 5,000 coaches in the UK. So, if we each donated £1 – the maths is simple – collectively we could sponsor the initiative.

Conceptually, every donor would receive a copy of the full report (data held by an independent party – the researcher) so that every one of those who donate, could re-evaluate their own fee rates.

Would this kind of data be useful to you? And if so, what will you do ... wait until one of our professional bodies steps up to the plate on all of our behalf ... or will you step up to it yourself?

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## **Benchmark specifications**

### ***Person specification for project manager to guide the benchmarking study of one-to-one and team coaching and supervision fees***

- A coach who understands the landscape of private and organisational coaching
- Track record of managing successful project delivery in line with desired outcomes and agreed quality, time and cost limits
- Experience of identifying and managing project interdependencies
- Experience of building and maintaining constructive partnership and collaborative relationships
- Experience of managing project teams to achieve required objectives in situations where there is no direct hierarchical authority
- Thorough understanding and use of Microsoft Office suite
- A willingness to experiment with crowd funding, if not direct experience
- Curiosity about the fee structures that coaches and supervisors charge

### **The benchmarking researcher will:**

- Create the questionnaire in conjunction with the project manager and other stakeholders
- Run a pilot project
- Run the full fieldwork process including follow-up interviews
- Analyse the data
- Write an interpretative report as a PowerPoint presentation with commentary and summary