



National Coach Accreditation Scheme Update

Peter Gahan, Wednesday, 1 June 2011



Peter Gahan, the ABF's Player and Coach Development Manager, explains the upcoming changes to the National Coach Accreditation Scheme.

It is a requirement of the Australian Sports Commission that Accreditation Schemes be regularly reviewed, and as such, the ABF's National Coach Accreditation Scheme has had a major overhaul.

The new NCAS places a large emphasis on equipping coaches with the ability to conduct training programs filled with stimulating and productive activity relevant to the particular age group.

Before we get into too much detail about the new scheme, the question of how it relates to the previous one, and what happens to any currently held Coach Accreditations, should be answered.

New Cards:

In the near future, all currently accredited coaches will receive an accreditation card, which will mark the introduction of the new scheme, and indicate the coach's new accreditation level, as well as the expiry date. These points are explained below.

"Mapping": moving individuals from the old scheme into the new one:

The new scheme contains a substantial amount of material which was not covered previously, so the various levels have no direct correlation with those of the older scheme, and transferring from one scheme to the other cannot be perfect. After a good deal of consultation with the ASC, we have adopted the following as the fairest method possible without compromising the integrity and intent of the new scheme.

Currently accredited coaches will be moved into the new framework using the following process:

- On May 31 or thereabouts, the ASC will automatically change existing accreditation levels on its database, Sports Accreditation Online (SAO), up by one numeric value: a coach currently at Level 2 will become Level 3.
- The new status will expire on the date that the pre-existing accreditation would have done. That is, if a current accreditation under the old scheme was due to expire on September 14 this year, the new one will expire on the same date.
- If a coach wishes to remain accredited, he or she will need to complete all the assessment requirements of the new scheme sometime prior to that expiration date. The coach can choose to attempt the assessment at any level they like, but will need to pass at that level to remain accredited. For example, a coach who chooses to attempt the Level 4 assessments, but failing to meet requirements, will no longer be accredited. Many will consider it a better idea to attempt assessment at a lower level initially, and then shoot for the higher levels later.
- There will be a cost associated with the assessment process. The exact amount is still being finalized.
- The upshot of this is that sometime in the next four years, as current expiry dates are reached, all coaches wishing to remain accredited will need to go through the new assessments at some level.
- A coach may decide to attempt assessment immediately when he or she is mapped across to the new scheme, perhaps feeling that the new rating does not truly reflect his or her capability as a

coach.

- A coach may extend his or her accreditation for a further four years by providing evidence of meeting the updating requirements only once at each level. Prior to the expiration of the second four year period, a coach will need to complete the full battery of assessment requirements. In this way, any advances in the material will disseminated to all levels of coaching.

Understandably, the response from some coaches has been less than enthusiastic. They feel that they have already gained their accreditation, and that that should last them for a lifetime. New learning is always being added to the pool of baseball knowledge. From every perspective, it is critically important that the accreditation process is continually updated, and that coaches carrying a given level of accreditation are required to demonstrate that their knowledge and ability meets the new standards which evolve. There is no doubt that those with a real interest in the game will want to be part of a scheme which can ensure that the quality of coaching across the board is being improved. Many of our top coaches have committed to the new scheme, and are working their way through the assessment tasks. The national coaching staff of Jon Deeble, Tony Harris and Phil Dale, along with former big leaguers David Nilsson, Graeme Lloyd and Glenn Williams, are among these. There are also many former professional and national team players. All can see the value of an approach which demands that coaches achieve specific competencies based on material developed and used by the best coaches in the world.

Structure of the new scheme:

A key feature of the new scheme is its close alignment with the player development pathway. While not a rigid correlation, the required competencies of each accreditation level are specifically matched to the improving playing standards of players and teams as they move through the ranks. The first levels are quite easily achieved, designed for those new to baseball, but the expectations on coaches become steadily greater.

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| Level 1 | Aussie T-Ball |
| Level 2 | Junior Club Ball |
| Level 3 & 4 | Club and State teams & programs |
| Level 5 | Specialist Coach |
| Level 6 | Advanced Specialist Coach |

The first four levels require a coach to demonstrate competencies covering all aspects of the game, while levels 5 and 6 identify those who can show the capacity to coach levels in specialist areas at the higher; for example, managing or pitching.

At each level, required competencies are grouped into three categories:

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| Knowledge | This includes rules, long term athlete development, conditioning, injury management, baseball specifics which cannot be assessed in a practical setting, etc. | Written or On-line Assessment |
| Activities | Reinforcing the critical understanding that both enjoyment and skills are most effectively developed by doing things, this component trains and obliges the coaches to be able to conduct specific activities and drills. | Practical Assessment |
| Instruction | As they move through the levels, coaches are increasingly required to be able to teach teams and individuals various aspects of the game: skills, tactics, strategies, philosophies etc. | Practical Assessment |

The emphasis on assessment:

Objective assessment is one of the really crucial elements of the scheme. All written assessments are done by requiring the candidate to select the correct answer. This is done to remove any shades of grey, and so that formatting them for online use, with automatic marking, is relatively easy.

Clear, unambiguous assessment tools have also been developed for each practical competency as well, so that the assessor has the smallest amount of discretion possible: the candidate either demonstrates all required parts of the competency, or not. Candidates are strongly encouraged to be familiar with these tools: these describe, after all, the standard they will need to come up to.

One of the benefits of a competency-based scheme is that it is relatively straightforward to recognize prior learning. An individual with a long involvement in the game will need to a relatively small amount of homework to be able to pass the mid-level assessments, particularly if they have maintained contact with current practices, while those without much context will require quite a bit of study and practice. The relevant issue is whether the competencies are demonstrated, not how they were learned.

The integrity of the scheme, and therefore the strength of our programs and ultimately our sport, rests on strict adherence to standards. The role of the assessor is therefore a vital one, and training of personnel for this role is substantially completed. They need to have a solid understanding of the specified requirements, be competent observers and, very importantly, possess enough fortitude to make the “pass” or “not yet competent” call regardless of any personal feelings toward the candidate.

ASC General Principles of Coaching:

The Sports Commission requires that all accredited coaches must have completed education and full assessment in the General Principles of coaching. For this purpose, they have developed an online facility which is free of charge and covers all necessary issues along with a thorough assessment of the coach's understanding. This is an excellent resource, though working through it is somewhat time-consuming, but there are very substantial benefits to enforcing its use by our accreditation candidates. Some of the critical elements of the general principles are the issues of duty of care, negligence, child safety and so on. An organization is well-advised to ensure that no shortcuts are taken in the delivery or assessment of this material; to do so is to leave the individual and the organization itself open to the possibility of litigation. We are therefore making it a requirement that all coaches must complete this online assessment prior to attempting the written and practical assessments at each level. Once done, there is no need for a coach to repeat the exercise to progress further in his or her accreditation.

We have also introduced the requirement that coaches must submit a signed acknowledgment of an commitment to the ABF Coach's Code of Conduct.

Resource Development:

The Levels 1-4 of the scheme, aimed at club and state team coaches, will each need:

1. Competency documents, detailing the competencies required at that level.

The content for each level has been finalised, and is usable in its current form, but a substantial amount remains to be done to make the material more user-friendly. A lot of work has been done, and remains to be done, collecting, editing, formatting and presenting good video and photos of the many activities, so that a coach can more easily grasp the way in which a given activity is to be done.

2. Written Assessment, to assess required knowledge

Once again, written tests have been finalised and can be used as they are in supervised exam conditions. It is intended that each of these will become available online in an interactive format.

3. Practical Assessment tools: checklists specifying what the assessor must see or hear in order to assess coach as competent
These have been assembled. Minimal upgrading is required.
4. Workshop Manual: presenting the require learning in a manner suitable for a course
These are available, but will be improved along with the fleshing out of the competency documents.
5. Online resource: video of each activity, drill and instructional requirement
These are available, but will be improved along with the fleshing out of the competency documents.
A small portion of the activities have been captured and prepared for use as online resources, but this remains a major task and as yet no facility for access by the baseball population has been developed.

Implementation:

States commencing assessment now

Assessor training has proceeded to the stage where most states are ready to commence putting candidates through the new procedures. The possible exception is WA; this will be addressed shortly. The lacklustre appearance of the current resource material may make the learning task more difficult, but it is still possible for a coach to develop the competencies using self-paced study.

States running courses of their own design

One practical approach is for a qualified individual to run seminars, workshops and training sessions which cover the knowledge, activities and instruction required by a coach at a given level. These courses are being tailored to suit local circumstances, and several states have expressed satisfaction with that approach. All have indicated that more and better user-friendly resources would be preferable, if not essential, hence the priority need to produce these.

ABF Player and Coach Development Manager to conduct workshops in all states

Concerns have been raised that most states do not have any single individual who is both available and capable of properly educating local coaches in the many activities which are now integrated into the scheme. For this reason, and in the interests of national consistency, the ABF will have an individual who is familiar with all competencies visit each capital and conduct weekend or mid-weekly seminars on the material - states are currently deciding on the best format to suit their own needs.