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An analysis of job description and person specifications to define the requirements for obtaining employment within strength & conditioning

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AN ANALYSIS OF JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND PERSON SPECIFICATIONS TO DEFINE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR OBTAINING EMPLOYMENT WITHIN STRENGTH & CONDITIONING

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An analysis of the minimal qualifications, experience and skill sets required for S&C employment

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ABSTRACT

The strength and conditioning (S&C) industry can appear as a saturated market: there is a lack of balance between supply and demand of S&C coaches, with the former outweighing the latter. Job descriptions may be an effective tool for aspiring coaches to identify what current skill sets employers are looking for, in particular those deemed essential, but also those deemed desirable and potentially providing a competitive edge. However, it should be acknowledged that job descriptions can vary greatly with the information they provide with regards to qualifications, experience, and skill sets they expect from the applicant. This may make it unclear for new coaches aiming to work within the industry and provide little direction as to how they can best enhance their resumé with at least the minimal standards required to acquire a paid position. In addition, this ambiguity may also affect existing practitioners looking to move occupations, and those looking to climb the leadership ladder.

This paper provides S&C coaches with an insight into the minimal requirements currently needed to gain employment and progress to more senior positions. Over 50 job descriptions for paid work were reviewed, with 37% asking for one to two years' experience and the same amount not stating a minimum requirement, thus generating some uncertainty around the practical experience employers seek. Conversely, from an academic point of view, it was highlighted that a bachelor's degree (BSc/BA) (73%) and an NSCA CSCS (45%) or UKSCA ASCC (24%) certification was deemed as essential for most roles. This paper gives new and existing S&C coaches an overview of the basic minimal standards that employers generally require, and we hope this will help coaches to align their resumé and development in line with these requirements.

‘This paper provides S&C coaches with an insight into the minimal requirements currently needed to gain employment and progress to more senior positions’

Introduction

Strength and conditioning (S&C) coaches represent a specific discipline within sports and exercise science,³⁵ with the role comprising various responsibilities, ranging from technical instruction using suitable advanced training methods through to logistics and organization.^{19,20,21} To obtain this knowledge, practitioners are commonly expected to hold academic qualifications such as a Bachelors (BSc/BA) and/or Masters (MSc/MA) degree, as evidenced in a survey from the National Strength & Conditioning Association (NSCA),²⁴ which reported that 38% of S&C coaches held a bachelor’s degree and 57% a master’s degree in a relevant discipline, such as kinesiology or sports-science. Gaining a job in S&C is now highly competitive, driven by increased numbers of accredited practitioners who have exceeded the number of positions available.³⁰ For example, the 2019 NSCA census data revealed that the NSCA had over 10,000 certified members in over 50 countries;²⁸ however, we expect that number to be much greater today, with their website reporting they have “more than 60,000 members and certified professionals” in total. The 2018 United Kingdom Strength & Conditioning Association (UKSCA) census data revealed that the UKSCA has about 900 accredited members.³⁸

Since its inception in 1978, the NSCA has grown its initial 76 associate members to over 60,000 as above;²⁸ it currently endorses 263 academic courses in the US, and 79 courses internationally.²⁶ Furthermore, the NSCA recently announced that, beginning in 2030, to be eligible to take the Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS) examination, candidates must hold a Bachelor’s degree from a programme accredited by an NSCA-approved accrediting agency, which has specific requirements focusing on S&C.²⁵ Similarly, a report by the UKSCA and Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMPSA)³ highlighted professional standards representing the knowledge and skills required for what the UKSCA and employers (who helped create the standards) would expect an S&C coach to be doing in their day-to-day practice. Like the NSCA, this will provide opportunity for universities and courses to become endorsed by the UKSCA, by demonstrating that their programmes successfully map to the professional standards, ensuring that their content is in line with the required minimum competencies.

This industry growth serves to accommodate the high interest in S&C, which is now considered an essential element of athletic development and performance.³¹ In turn, this has led to job roles demanding both academically and professionally qualified S&C coaches, with a range of vocational experiences and skill sets.¹⁶ The development of such experiences and skills are often gained through coaching experience, often attained via education-based internships, which provide the opportunity to apply theoretical and practical concepts in real-world situations.^{39,32}

Various reviews and surveys have been conducted to illustrate the roles and responsibilities of S&C coaches within both paid and unpaid positions.^{30,12} The findings from these reviews and surveys highlighted that most S&C coaches have a minimum of a BSc degree and accreditation from a professional governing body, including the Australian Strength & Conditioning Association Level 1, 2 or 3 (ASCA), Accredited Strength & Conditioning Coach (ASCC) and/or CSCS. However, these papers have focused predominantly on S&C coaches who are currently employed, leading to uncertainty as to whether current job descriptions also highlight these factors as a requirement for new applicants.

An extensive and detailed analysis of these criteria, coupled with a greater understanding of the daily requirements of an S&C coach, could better inform goal setting around the attainment of skill sets and experience that would improve the chances of employment for new S&C coaches. Studies have also shown that if a coach operates at a higher level (ie, lead, head of department), the annual salary is generally higher.^{17,18,29,36} Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that higher salary roles may require applicants to have broader skill sets and experiences, reflected by higher roles and/or responsibilities within the job descriptions.

A sample job description was published by the NSCA for a high school S&C coach, which outlined the educational requirements and roles/responsibilities that employers should seek for this type of position, providing a structured guideline for both employers and applicants in terms of the skill sets required for the role.²⁷ However, in strength and conditioning, there are many variations of roles and responsibilities (ie, S&C coach, performance coach, athletic trainer, fitness coach, S&C specialist, etc) that would benefit from further clarification

in order to develop an appropriate job description and person specification. Equally, strength and conditioning appears to have become extremely popular in the private and commercial sectors and has resulted in a host of other professionals (personal trainers, athletic trainers, etc) also being labelled as S&C coaches. However, it is reasonable to assume that not all individuals who label themselves S&C coaches are educated or experienced in designing and delivering periodised training programmes for athletes, conducting appropriate testing protocols, analysing results, liaising with various support staff/stakeholders, and the requirements for creating positive training environments for athletes.¹⁶

The primary aim of this paper is to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the job descriptions we collected in order to determine what the minimum standard requirements are to obtain a paid role within strength and conditioning. Additionally, skill-based criteria and experience will be grouped based on the nature of the role (eg, leadership, working with youth, working in football), thus enabling future candidates to focus on their suitability and how to bridge any existing gaps.

Methodology

EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM

A collation of 51 job descriptions from five different countries (USA, UK, China, Singapore and New Zealand) were downloaded to investigate and identify key trends in S&C roles. Job descriptions were broken down in terms of qualifications (eg, professional and academic) and person specifications (eg, desired and essential skills and experiences) requested for applicants to apply for each position. All information was categorised using Microsoft Excel (Microsoft® Excel® for Office 365), enabling visual trends to be seen between job descriptions.

DATA COLLECTION

Job descriptions were obtained from website sources of the UKSCA, NSCA, LinkedIn, Indeed.com, and Glassdoor.com, between the months of August and November 2019. The ASCA was not used as a source, due to no vacancies being advertised during this period. Key phrases used to search for S&C roles were: 'strength and conditioning jobs', 'strength and conditioning vacancies', 'performance coach' and 'assistant strength and conditioning coach' jobs. The data was categorised via different sections,

Table 1: Key skills breakdown

KNOWLEDGE	APPLICATION	INTERPERSONAL	OTHER
Programme design	Session delivery	Communication	Sport/research knowledge
Management/ leadership	Testing	Teamwork	Injury/rehab
IT Skills	Data analysis and reporting	Educator/mentor	Nutrition

such as the country of origin, job title, job type (classified as full-time, part-time, and contractual paid positions, ie, a set number of months and/or hours per week), and website source; this was then all input into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Following this, the information was organized into 'essential' and 'desirable' criteria as outlined by the posted job descriptions.

The essential criteria were further sub-categorised into 'higher education qualifications', 'professional qualifications', 'years of experience', and 'key skills'. In addition, salary information was analysed if it was included within the job descriptions. Higher education qualifications were categorised into: 'Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)', 'master's degree (MSc/MA)', 'bachelor's degree (BSc/BA)' and 'not stated'. Professional qualifications were categorised into: 'NSCA CSCS', 'UKSCA ASCC', 'Accredited ASCA (L1, L2 and/or L3)', 'British Association of Sport & Exercises Sciences (BASES) Accredited', 'Level 3 personal trainer (PT)', and 'not stated' - meaning that no mention of any specific professional qualification was specified within the job description. Years of experience were categorised into: 'not stated', '1-2 years', '3-4 years', or '5+'. Key skills were subcategorised via essential and desirable, and further broken down based on key themes observed, which were defined as: 'knowledge', 'application', 'interpersonal', and 'other'.

Different skills were then listed under these four defined categories, based on the key skills required within the job descriptions, which can be seen in Table 1. The desirable criteria were subcategorised in the same way, but without the years of experience section. Key words from the job titles were chosen to underline the comparisons between the job descriptions. This helped to identify any similarities or differences between job descriptions in line with the other factors, such as years of experience, education, and qualifications. The key words were categorised into 'Performance', 'Strength &

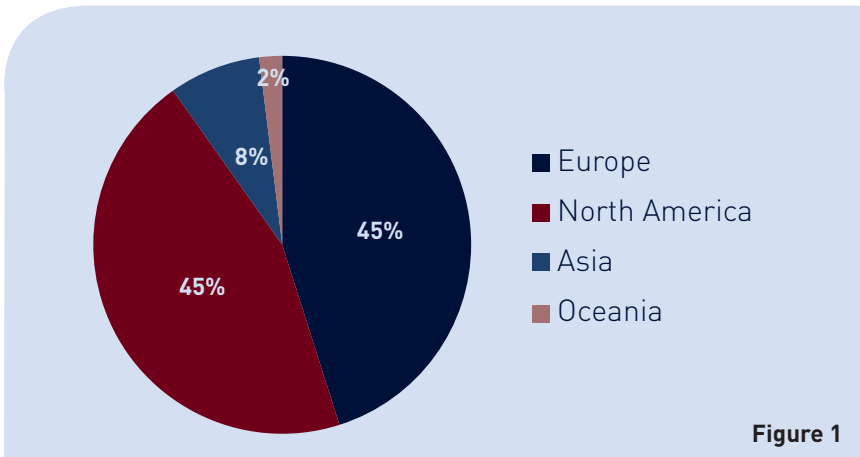


Figure 1

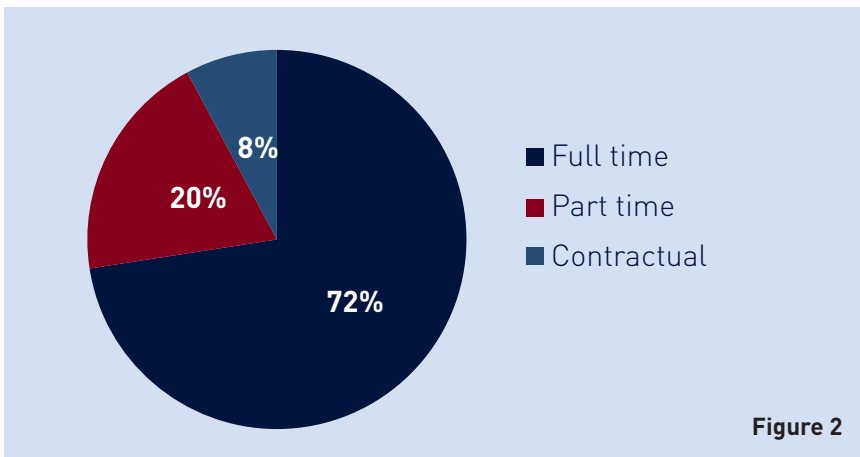


Figure 2

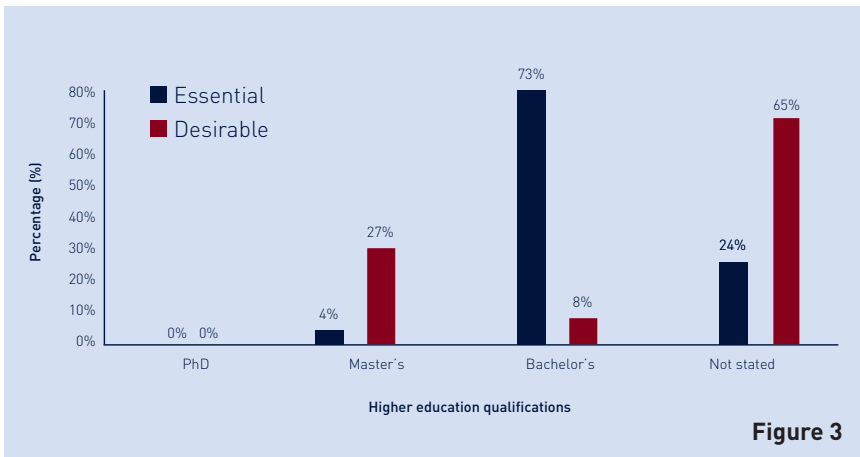


Figure 3

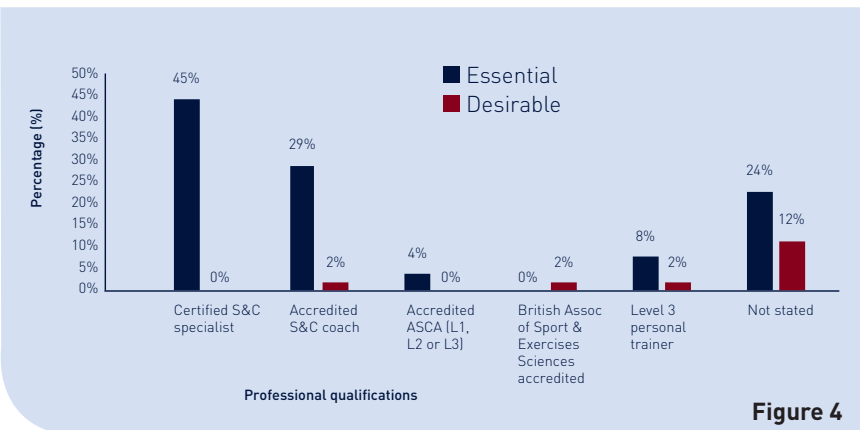


Figure 4

conditioning', 'Trainer/coach' and 'Other' - this latter consisted of words such as scientist, specialist etc. The last category of the raw data was the application and recruitment process: cover letter required, curriculum vitae (CV), and interview and/or assessment. Once all information was input into the spreadsheet, it was numerically categorised and converted to a percentage, for comparison during analysis.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

All data were analysed in Microsoft Excel. Each subcategory from the raw data was numerically recorded based on the number of job descriptions collated. The key skills were then numerically recorded showing how often each subcategory occurred within each job description. Visualisation of the data to depict potential trends, distributions, and occurrences were presented in bar and pie charts (see figures).

Results

Out of the 51 job descriptions studied from various advertising sources, no duplicates were found. The majority were split between the UK (45%) and North America (45%) (Figure 1). Although some differences may have been expected in job descriptions based on geographical location, none were noted - apart from the fact that the North American ones generally asked for references upon application. All 51 job descriptions were paid positions, with 72% of jobs full-time, 20% part-time, and 8% paid contractual positions, eg, 10 hours per week for 4-6 months). Within these job descriptions, key words in the job titles included 'trainer/coach', the most used (76%), with 'Strength & Conditioning' also being used in 45% of the titles. The words 'Performance' and other words like scientist, specialist etc. were only seen in 12% and 14%, respectively. The paid contractual positions were either fixed-term or renewable (extending the contract by additional months), and contractors were made aware of the expected

Figure 1. Breakdown of job descriptions analysed via continent

Figure 2. Percentage of job types analysed

Figure 3. Bar chart depicting the percentage of higher education qualifications within the essential and desirable criteria of job descriptions

Figure 4. Percentage of professional qualifications within the essential and desirable criteria of job descriptions

duration of their contract and when it was due to end. (Figure 2).

HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS – ESSENTIAL VS DESIRABLE

Results showing the higher education qualifications required from both essential and desirable criteria are illustrated in Figure 3. A total of 73% stated that a bachelor’s degree was essential, although it was not always clearly stipulated in which subject area; however, some of the UK-based job descriptions did state BSc within a sports-science related field. In contrast, 24% of job descriptions did not insert a higher education preference in their essential criteria; also, 65% of job descriptions did not insert a preferred higher education qualification in their desirable criteria. Only 4% of job descriptions said that a master’s was an essential criteria, while 27% said it was desirable; however, none specified whether this was to be taught or research-based degrees. Out of all the job descriptions, not one asked for a Doctor of Philosophy.

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS – ESSENTIAL VS DESIRABLE

Professional qualifications (Figure 4) have been classified as NSCA CSCS, UKSCA ASCC, ASCA Accredited (L1, L2 and/or L3), BASES Accredited, Level 3 PT, and ‘not stated’. A total of 45% of job descriptions were seeking a CSCS certification, although the majority of these roles were located within North America: 13 out of 16 roles within this location asked for this qualification. Only 29% of job descriptions asked for an UKSCA ASCC, or the option of obtaining it within six months. Out of the 51 job descriptions, 12 (24%) did not state any professional qualification as being essential.

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

‘Years of experience’ was not separated into specific roles (eg, management and assistant), due to the ambiguity of information within the job descriptions and the job titles. Results

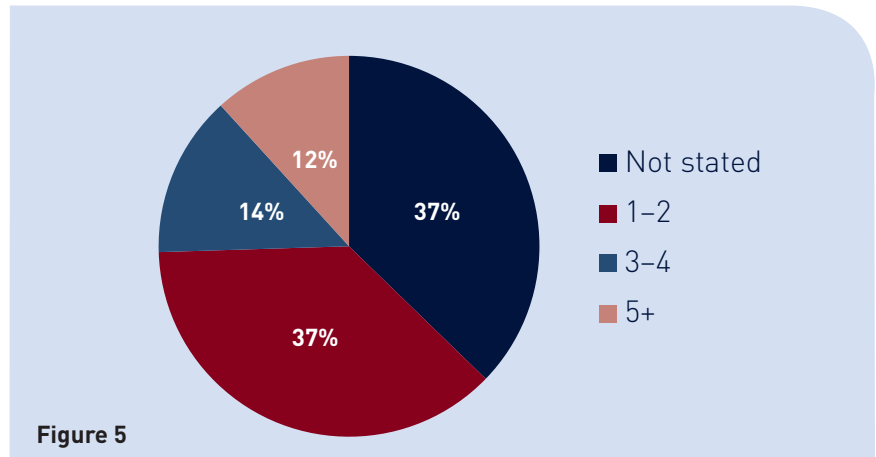


Figure 5

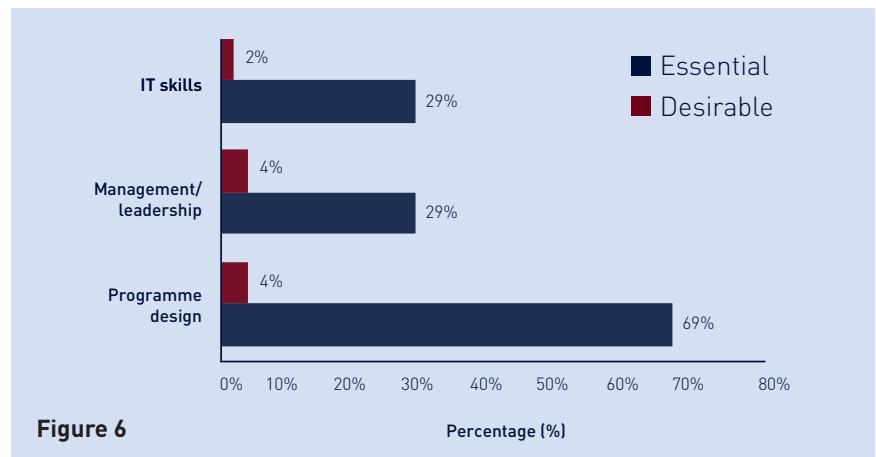


Figure 6

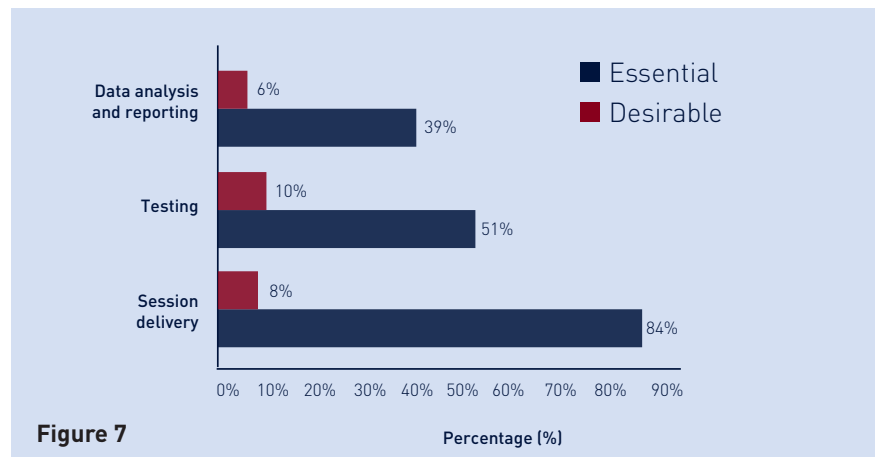


Figure 7

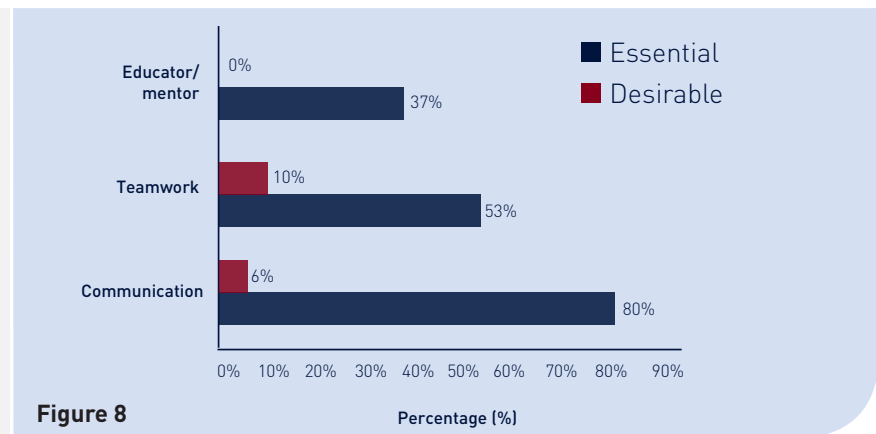


Figure 8

Figure 5. Years of experience required over all 51 job descriptions

Figure 6. Key skills required from a knowledge viewpoint within strength and conditioning, based on job descriptions analysed

Figure 7. Key skills required from an application viewpoint within strength and conditioning, based on job descriptions analysed

Figure 8. Key skills required from an interpersonal perspective within strength and conditioning, based on job descriptions analysed

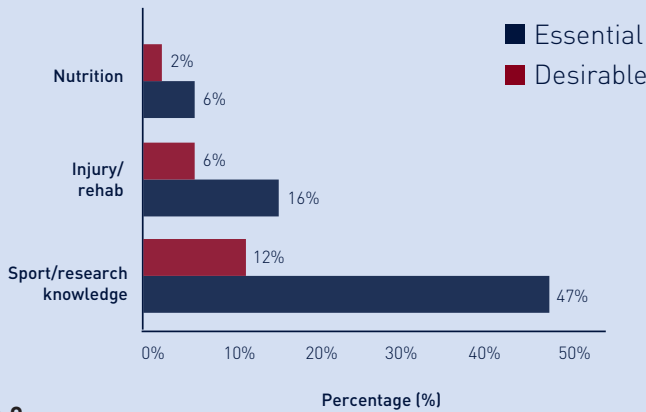


Figure 9

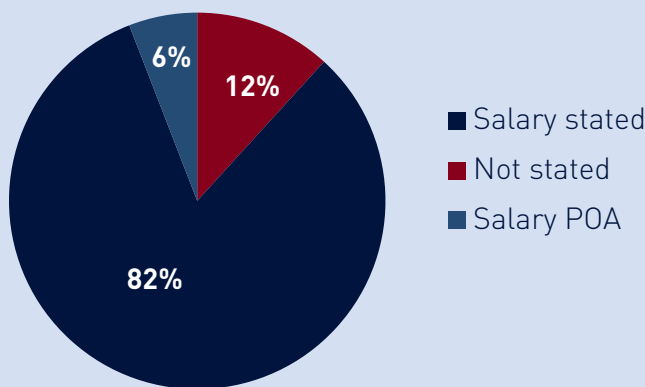


Figure 10

Figure 9. Other key skills required within strength and conditioning based on job descriptions analysed

Figure 10. Salary information within job descriptions

showed that 37% of job descriptions did not state how many years of experience were required across the varied levels of employment. Similarly, 37% stipulated requiring 1-2 years' experience, which related to varied levels of employment (eg, performance coaches, assistant strength and conditioning coaches and strength and conditioning coaches). The 1-2 years' experience was mostly required for professional clubs or private S&C facilities. A full breakdown of the required years of experience can be seen in Figure 5. Of note, 63% of the job descriptions that did state years of experience required did not always clearly define the areas of experience needed. For example, some job descriptions just stated 1-2 years, whereas others stated the same, but specified within what area (eg, youth athletes or elite).

KEY SKILLS – KNOWLEDGE

Results from the key skills section of what each job description stated were segmented into four different sections, as shown in Table 1. The first subcategory – knowledge – can be seen in Figure 6. Programme design (69%) is the highest ranked skill required within this category amongst the essential

criteria of job description, whereas just under a third (29%) highlighted as being essential 'knowledge within management/leadership' and IT skills.

KEY SKILLS – APPLICATION

The second key skills subcategory focused on the application requirements within S&C from the employers. This highlighted the hard skills required when coaching and often related to session delivery, testing, and reporting (Figure 7). All these skills were deemed essential in at least 39% of all the 51 job descriptions. Session delivery was highlighted as the most essential (84%), followed by testing (51%), and finally data analysis/reporting (39%).

KEY SKILLS – INTERPERSONAL

The third key skills subcategory looked at the interpersonal skills, which include – but are not limited to – communication, teamwork, and educator/mentor. The results highlighted that 80% of the job descriptions required good communication as essential, with teamwork also being seen as fairly essential (53%) (Figure 8); the educator/mentor skillset was also required, but to a lesser extent (37%).

KEY SKILLS – OTHER

The final subcategory of key skills looked at other significant elements required within S&C, such as knowledge of nutrition and injury, and sporting knowledge. Results from this section showed that 47% of job descriptions expected a 'good amount' of knowledge of the sport and research within S&C (Figure 9); other key skills, however, such as injury/rehab (16%) and nutrition knowledge (6%), were not so much in demand.

SALARIES

The salary data was split into three subcategories: 'salary stated', 'salary not stated', and 'salary price on application (POA)'. Results highlighted that 82% of job descriptions did not state a salary – in particular in UK job descriptions (0%), whereas, the US (12%) were most likely to state salaries, and 6% stated 'salary POA' (Figure 10). Due to a very low percentage of job descriptions stating a salary, it was not possible to appropriately analyse this data.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to review the context of 51 different job descriptions within S&C. This was intended to assist applicants in gaining employment by providing

guidance on how they could align their resumé and professional development with that stipulated by industry employers, based on the minimum requirements highlighted. This aim could not be fully met given the high level of ambiguity observed across the analysed job descriptions. For example, although 1-2 years' experience was the most commonly requested (37%), a further 37% did not state a requirement. However, the rise in popularity within paid positions in S&C has led to a loss of balance between the supply and demand of coaches,³ and therefore 1-2 years is probably best seen as a minimum requirement.

From a qualification perspective, the majority of job descriptions required a minimum of a bachelor's degree (73%) and a NSCA CSCS certification (45%), although these were all for roles within North America. UK-based roles mostly required a UKSCA ASCC (24%), or the ability to obtain this accreditation within six months. With 28 universities in the UK offering a bachelor's degree in S&C³¹ and 263 NSCA-endorsed academic courses in the US,²⁶ it is theoretically possible to attain much of the essential and desired criteria without having accrued much experience.

The present study also found that 'soft' skills, such as communication (80%) and teamwork (53%), are the most desired skills, which help to create buy-in and aid the delivery of 'hard', teachable skills, in this case programme design, data analysis, and reporting. Furthermore, we could not confirm the finding that more responsibility equated to higher salaries,^{17,18,29,36} given that salary was not often stated on the job description.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Most job descriptions highlight the need for a minimum of BSc and an accreditation from one of the national S&C governing bodies – in particular NSCA CSCS and/or UKSCA ASCC, with CSCS seemingly sought after more so. This coincides with Favre,¹¹ underlining that a degree is imperative because it forms the foundation of knowledge that underpins the profession. Indeed, there has been a recent proliferation of educational opportunities for potential and existing S&C coaches¹³ through higher education courses at universities. Alongside the higher education qualifications available, S&C coaches also have other professional qualifications available (eg, via the ASCA, NSCA and UKSCA), as well as a range of courses, conferences, and educational events to help develop the

highly structured skill set that S&C coaches require.¹⁴ However, the industry is vastly expanding with an increasing number of S&C coaches now meeting these minimal requirements. For example, there are now several thousand CSCS certified coaches within over 50 countries²⁸ and about 900 accredited coaches through the UKSCA.³⁸ Therefore, it may be anticipated that employers would look towards a master's level of education in order to differentiate between potential applicants. However, our data does not support that, revealing that only 4% of the job descriptions state this as essential and a further 27% state it as desirable. Nonetheless, in an analysis of the job of S&C coaches in Division 2 football, 52% of coaches had at least a master's level of education.²¹ Therefore, although job descriptions may not be stating a master's degree as a prerequisite for role, a large percentage of applicants may indeed have one. However, the lack of identification of subject areas, from both a bachelor's and master's level, highlights a challenge for potential applicants, due to such a wide variety of different degrees in sports science and those that are kinesiology-related. Previous research has briefly highlighted that competent S&C coaches should have earned both an undergraduate degree in a kinesiology-related discipline and at least one S&C certification.¹⁶

Although a majority of the S&C coach roles analysed required a bachelor's degree (73%), it was assumed that a higher qualification would be seen as mandatory for a head/lead S&C position. This was highlighted in a study by LaPlaca & Schempp,¹⁶ who analysed the characteristics that differentiated expert and competent S&C coaches, finding that the majority of 'expert' coaches had a master's degree and multiple S&C qualifications, as compared to the 'competent' coaches who held a BSc and one other S&C qualification.

However, evidence of employers attempting to make this differentiation based on qualifications was not seen in the analysed job descriptions, with 11 out of the 51 job descriptions highlighted as lead and/or management positions stating that the level of education deemed essential was either a bachelor's degree or not stated at all. To possibly explain this, we would direct readers to Nash et al²³ for a review on the parameters that may describe expertise in coaching. They conclude that this is demonstrated via applied practice, through examples such as problem-solving, innovation, ability to work independently, managing complex planning processes, and

'a degree is imperative because it forms the foundation of knowledge that underpins the profession'

focused learning based on self-awareness; it is not necessarily captured via credentials. However, although one may hypothesise that employers value experience of education beyond a BSc, which is supported by the aforementioned research, this was not noted with the job descriptions analysed here, as discussed in the following section.

PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE

Dorgo⁸ states that focus must be placed on a coach's knowledge that is used in practice, rather than their theoretical or propositional knowledge, further stressing the importance of practical experience and professional qualifications. Naturally, then, it was anticipated that the years of experience deemed appropriate would be different for different levels of job roles/titles (management vs assistant). Again, however, due to the ambiguity of the job descriptions, this could not be evidenced, with for example, 37% of job descriptions analysed not even stating any specific amount of work experience was required.

However, practical hands-on experience is considered a minimal requirement for the S&C profession and is vital to success and longevity in the field.⁴ Favre¹¹ also highlights that observation and practice will enhance not only ability and confidence to teach technique, but also the ability to recognize and correct mistakes. Therefore, while 74% of the job descriptions did not state any experience or only stated a 1-2 years as a prerequisite, it may be prudent to hypothesise that employers will appraise this on a case-by-case basis via each candidate's CV. In line with Hartshorn et al,¹² it may be that, for example, at least five years would be required to gain a role as a 'lead S&C coach', with where and how that experience was gained being another fundamental factor. Furthermore, previous research has found that both expert coaches and experts in other fields often have at least 10 years of experience.^{7,10}

A key element in most jobs, not just S&C, is the ability to apply theory to practice, a lot of which is often achieved through internships/mentorships.⁴ A recent study,³² looking at the State of the Nation survey, highlighted that most jobs go to those who were previously connected with the organization (eg, through internships and/or mentorships). Therefore, it may be wise for applicants to get this experience through internships, to help build their professional network. In addition to this, developing technical proficiency within the physical coaching of movements is also very important for a coach, especially

with new athletes, to help them optimise adaptation from the training process over time.³³ This reiterates the importance of having the theoretical knowledge, alongside the practical coaching experience, to help provide a well-rounded skillset. However, like technical proficiency of movements, there are a number of key skills that can also be taken from a vast range of experience, to help a coach excel in the field.

KEY SKILLS

Skill sets for S&C coaches can often be categorised into two main elements: 'hard skills', such as skills that can be taught/learned - eg, practical delivery of sessions and the understanding of the movement patterns; and 'soft' skills - eg, communication and interpersonal skills.²² Soft skills have previously been defined as gaining trust, and ensuring athlete buy-in, as well as the ability to justify the various approaches to practice.^{2,37} The results of this study concurred with these points, highlighting communication (80%) and teamwork (53%) as the two coaching skills that were the most commonly required from the coaching section. As supported by Springham et al,³¹ S&C coaches must be pro-active and develop successful working relationships with a number of key stakeholders including players, coaches, parents, medical staff, members of the performance team, and occasionally, executives.³¹ It would seem sage advice to make the high-level attainment of these qualities explicitly clear with the application process.

It has been suggested that S&C coaches utilise a broad scientific knowledge base,¹ and that their knowledge cuts across several domains, such as biomechanics, anatomy, physiology, and psychology,⁶ which is why as much as the soft skills are key, the hard skills are just as important. Thus, results showed that additional factors, such as session delivery (84%), programme design (69%), testing (51%), and data analysis (39%), were all some of the minimum requirements expected from S&C coaches in regard to skills and experience. Along with a growing body of peer-reviewed research, effective coaches need to not only understand the research, but also be able to apply it in the field and draw on a broader range of knowledge and skills than those typically discussed in the technical literature. These would include such abilities as those required to be creative (given various logistical and resource constraints) when applying the scientific evidence to each athletes' specific needs.^{34,5,15} In addition, 'good' sporting knowledge is also important, with 47% of job descriptions

Table 2: Breakdown of key minimum criteria required to obtain a paid role in strength and conditioning

KEY CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION
Higher education	Bachelor's Degree (BSc/BA) in sports science or a related field would be of advantage. Although not required, it is likely that many will also have a Masters (MSc)
Professional accreditation	ASCC and/or NSCA CSCS. Also consider obtaining some sports coaching awards (eg, FA coaching award for soccer)
Experience	At least 1-2 years of experience in the field – this could be obtained via internships or positions that test/develop your coaching skills. Employers will want to determine your ability to apply your knowledge in the field, especially given its inherent constraints (eg, resources, time, and athlete 'buy-in') which are often in stark contrasts to the lab settings of universities
Hard skills	Session delivery, programme design, testing and data analysis, research knowledge and implicitly therefore, how to solve problems
Soft skills	Excellent communication skills and teamwork (collaboration with other stakeholders) are key. Also at interview, employers may want to determine your adaptability, eg, how will you cope with an environment that challenges your understating and coaching philosophy. How can you create buy-in and what do you do when an athlete or sports coach disagrees and refuses to engage in your S&C programme?
Digital footprint and network (Anecdotal evidence)	Although not stated on any job description, it is likely that employers will undertake a 'background check' assessing social media and asking colleagues from the same professional network. Given this, ensure your profile matches the stated values of the organisation

* ASCC – Accredited Strength & Conditioning Coach, NSCA CSCS –National Strength & Conditioning Association, Certified Strength & Conditioning Specialist

requiring this. However, this is subjective as the amount of knowledge a candidate possesses maybe difficult to measure beyond the attainment of relevant coaching badges (eg, UEFA B football licence). This accentuates why a lot of S&C courses at universities are now trying to bridge the gap between theory and practice, with the use of professional placements as modules, in accordance with the industry demands.³⁹ Placements and/or internships often range from a few months to a year in duration and offer the opportunities of mentorships from more experienced coaches, providing CPD and real-world opportunities, such as session delivery, and programme design. This provides S&C coaches a way to gain experience and skills to be successful in the field, in addition to allowing the critical evaluation of theory into practice. These opportunities also build working relationships with employers, with research highlighting a 44% conversion rate from internships/placements to a full-time paid role.³² This helps to create networks to set up future full-time paid opportunities. These placements/work experience opportunities help to produce work ready graduates.

SALARIES

Salary is often a high driver when deciding on applying for a role.⁹ Within the current study, salary was hard to analyse, as 82% of the job descriptions did not state a salary. Within previous research, the average

salary for S&C coaches in the UK was approximately £20,000 to £29,999 (\$25,000 to \$36,000) per annum.³ However, the coaches' level in terms of experience and qualifications was not differentiated within this statistic. None of the UK-based roles in the current study stated a salary within the job description (0%). Within the US, high school S&C coaches' salaries were approximately \$55,000 per annum,⁹ with Division 1 collegiate salaries slightly lower at \$41,024 to \$47,416.^{20,36} Within the present study, the 12% of job descriptions that stated a salary were US-based, varying from private sector roles to collegiate roles. It should be reiterated that although salaries are not always a motivating factor within jobs,²⁰ they are an important consideration and do provide clarity to applicants when applying.

Practical applications

The S&C job market, although growing rapidly, would appear to be highly saturated.³ Although there is a high degree of ambiguity and lack of consistency across job descriptions, Table 2 displays a breakdown of the key criteria applicants may want to consider in order to help align their skill sets with the requirements of different jobs within S&C. Job roles seem to require both academically and professionally qualified S&C coaches, with them having some practical experience, often obtained

via education-based internships; employers are probably interested in a coach's ability to apply knowledge gained, especially given varying constraints in time and resources. We would speculate that what matters is where this experience and mentorship was undertaken and with whom (eg, which athletes, which age, which mentors), in order to make the candidate's quality of learning clear during the application process. Equally, the ability to demonstrate a high level of soft and hard skills within a performance setting must be made clear. Teamwork and communication are central, as is the ability to work in environments that may challenge your coaching philosophy. Similarly, technical and tactical knowledge of a sport, as demonstrated by a relevant sports coaching qualification, could serve to provide a competitive advantage and

give athletes a sense of confidence around a coach's understating of the game and thus the physical requirements that underpin this – this is one of many factors that enables employers to consider if athletes will 'buy in' to someone's coaching. Finally, and anecdotally, we would advise applicants to consider their digital footprint. Although your CV and covering letter, with hand-picked references, present an employer with your real highlights, your social media accounts will often provide the uncut version that they are also interested to learn about. Many clubs will naturally want to create a positive impression within their community and will want all their employees to be role models who demonstrate and share their values. If your profile does not match these, we would hazard a guess that this will not result in an interview.

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