

The Skills You Need to Become a Strength & Conditioning Professional

Introduction

The sports industry is seen by many as a glamorous and fun industry to work in. As such, the popularity of strength & conditioning courses in the UK is sky-rocketing! But what does it actually take, to become an S&C professional? What are employers looking for in the job roles they have available?

The UK Strength and Conditioning Association recently undertook a study to see what the requirements were of employers in the S&C sector. To do this, they looked at 51 job advertisements from the UK and USA. Below are (highly) edited highlights of the results!

This article is a useful reflection tool. If you spot areas that you are weak in, then make an action plan to strengthen up your CV!

The Stats!

Figure 3. Is a bar chart depicting the percentage of higher education qualifications within the essential and desirable criteria of job descriptions. It effectively shows that for three quarters of all advertised S&C jobs, you will need to have a BSc Hons degree in Sports Science or a related sports coaching degree. That does of course, mean that one quarter of all advertised jobs are available to those with potentially less academic achievement. In those cases, it is highly likely that additional practical coaching experience would be essential.

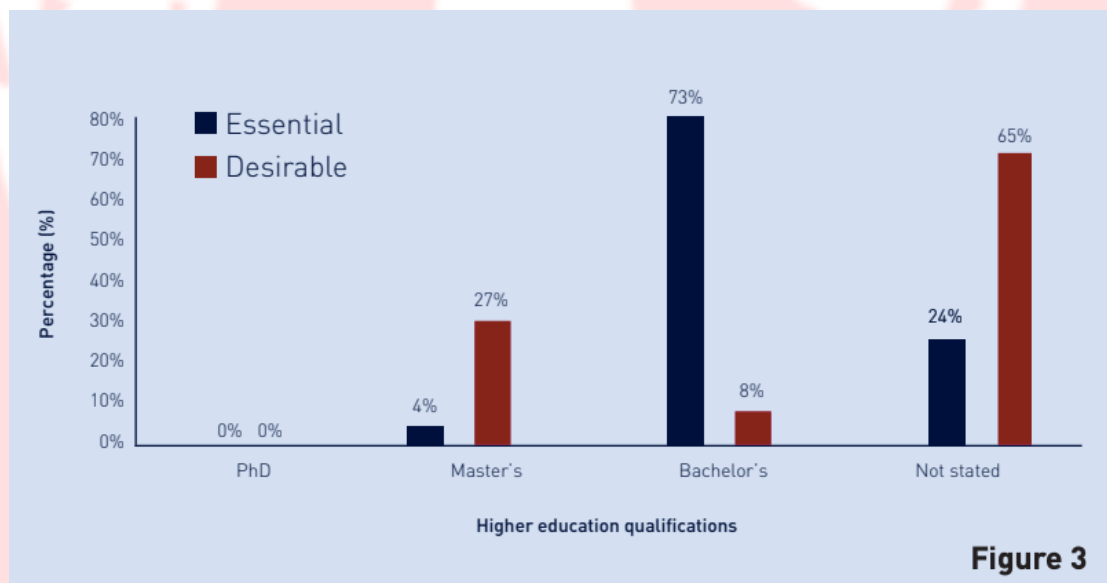


Figure 3

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Figure 4. Shows the percentage of professional qualifications within the essential and desirable criteria of job descriptions. You can see from the graph that gaining vocational certification of your knowledge and skills is almost essential with 84% of jobs requiring an S&C accreditation/certification or a Level 3 Personal Training certification.

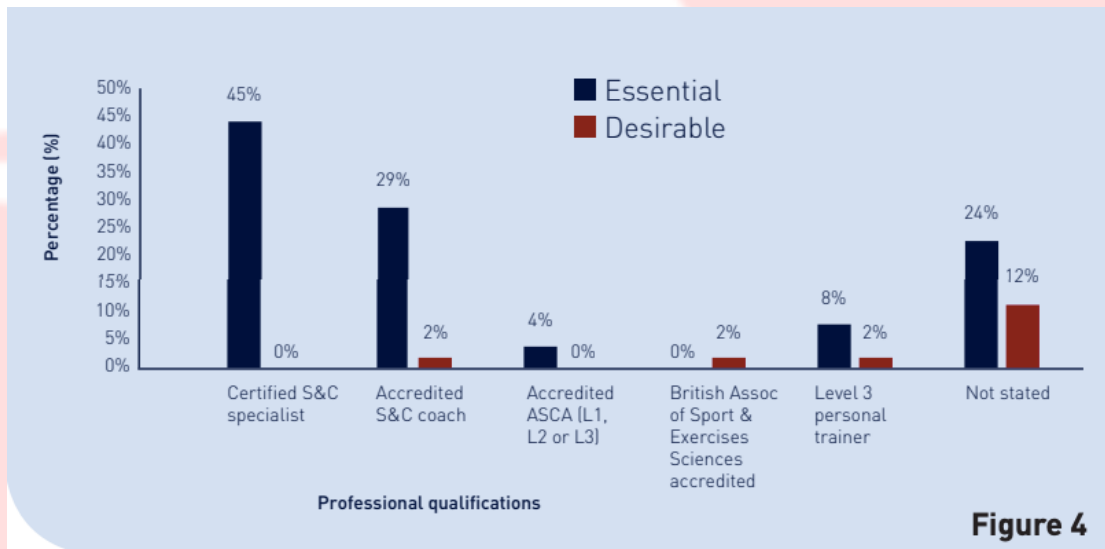


Figure 4

Figure 5. Shows the years of experience required over all 51 job descriptions. This shows that 26% of job descriptions (where specified), required 3 or more years of experience. Therefore gaining practical experience as soon as possible during or post-qualification is advisable.

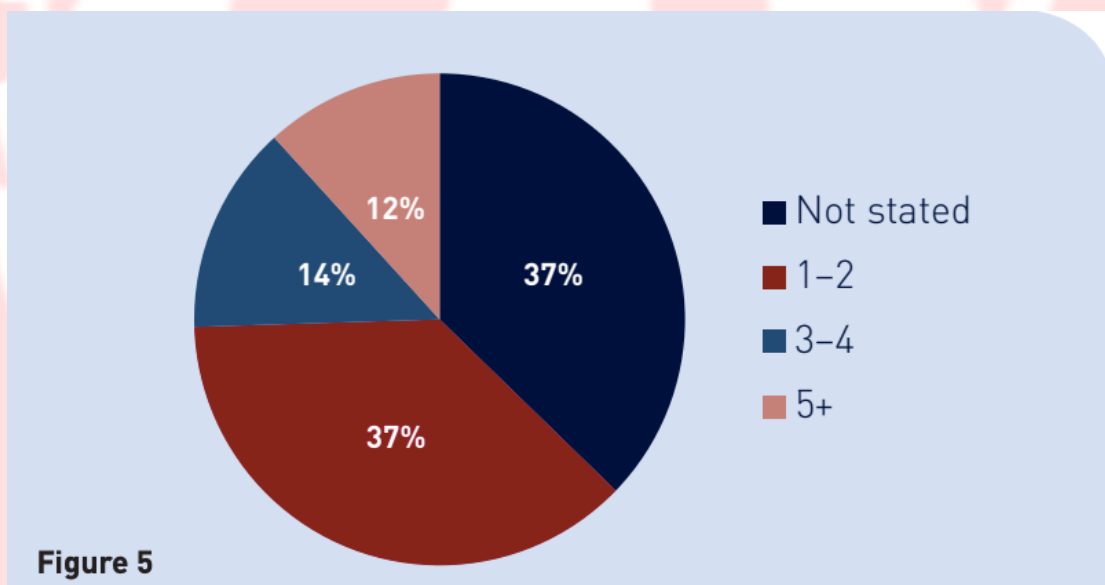


Figure 5

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Figure 6. This graph shows the key skills required from a knowledge viewpoint within strength and conditioning, based on job descriptions analysed. The ability to appropriately programme for athletes is by far the most important skill-set. However, nearly 1/3 of all jobs required IT and Leadership skills.

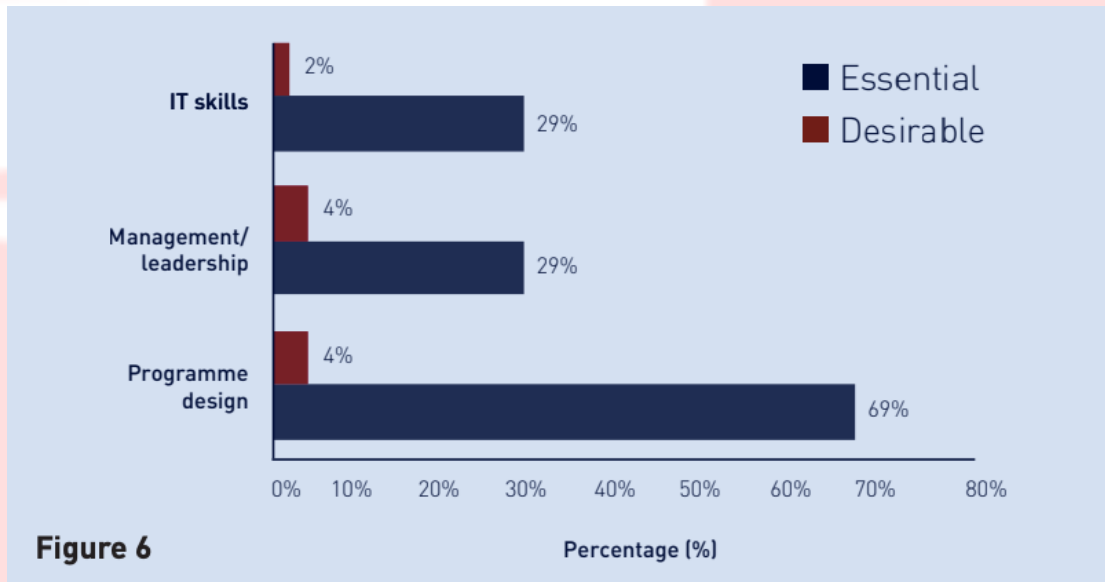
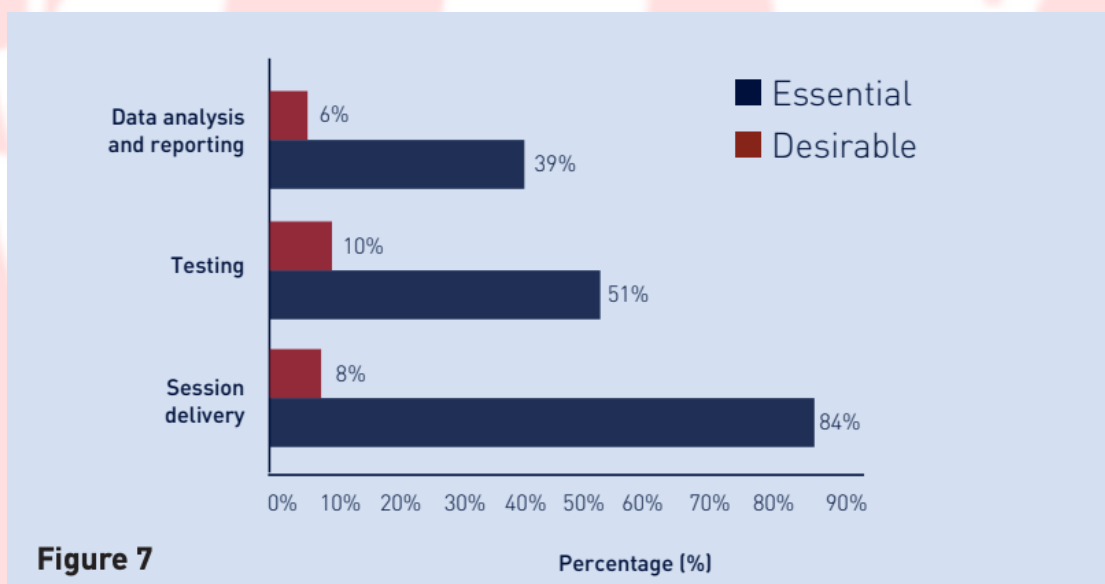


Figure 7. This graph shows the key skills required from an application viewpoint within strength and conditioning, based on job descriptions analysed. Again, highlighting that along with programming, the practical delivery of sessions is essential. Fitness screening and testing and the analysis and reporting of these results is also high on the list of requirements.



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Figure 8. Many sports students and graduates do not always appreciate the importance of communication skills. The following graph shows the key skills required from an interpersonal perspective within strength and conditioning, based on job descriptions analysed. The graph clearly demonstrates that communication skills should be developed in-line with practical skills.

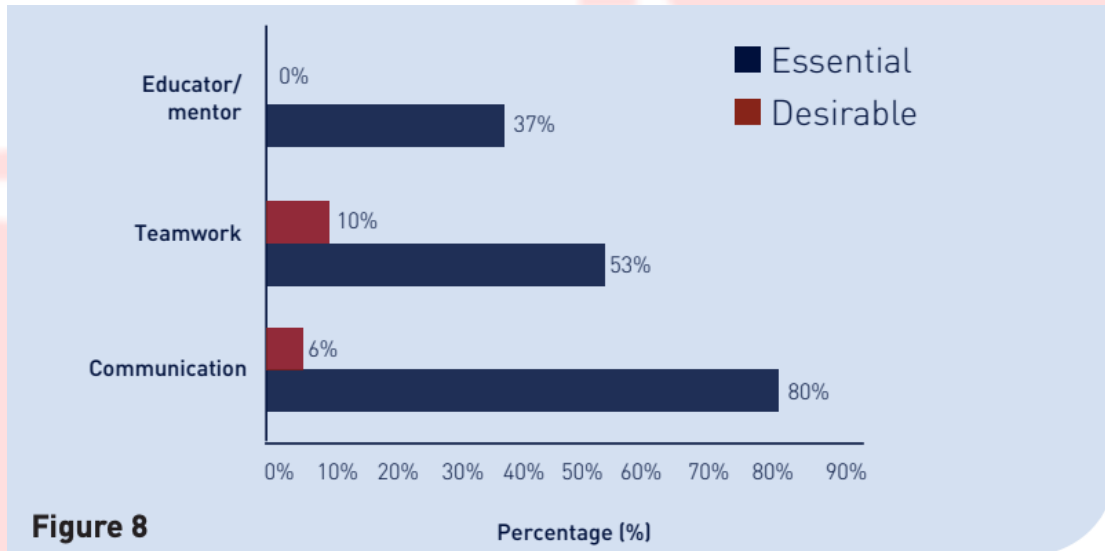
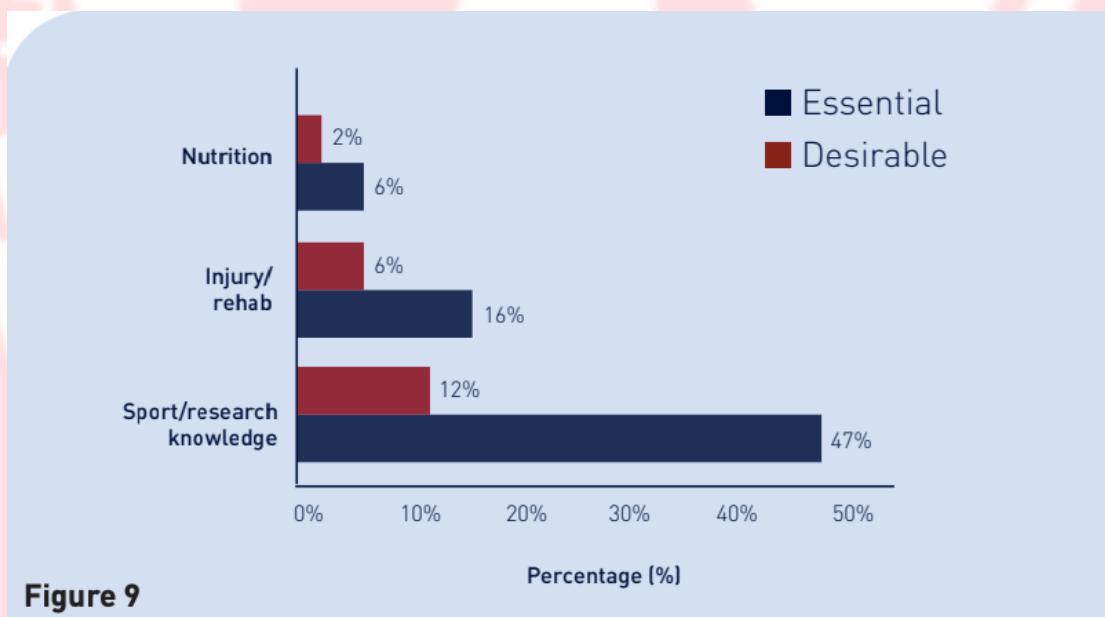


Figure 9. Below are the other key skills required within strength and conditioning, based on job descriptions analysed. You can see that staying up to date with the latest research is incredibly important.



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Table 1&2. The following table summarises the key skills required of an S&C professional.

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

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