

# PROSPECTS

Job profile

## Sport and exercise psychologist

**Being physically fit isn't the only skill you need when taking part in sport and exercise; you also need to be mentally prepared to take part**

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Sport and exercise psychologists are concerned with the behaviours, mental processes and well-being of individuals, teams and organisations involved in sport and exercise. They typically specialise in either sport or exercise, although some work across both fields.

Sport psychologists work with athletes and teams involved in sport from amateur to elite professional level, with the aim of helping them deal psychologically with the demands of the sport, and to improve their personal development and performance.

Exercise psychologists work with the general public to increase motivation and participation in exercise, encouraging a healthy lifestyle and advising on the psychosocial benefits that exercise can offer.

## Responsibilities

Activities vary between the branches of sport and exercise psychology. Activities typical to both are likely to include:

- assessing your clients' needs and abilities, and monitoring sporting performance and behaviour
- implementing strategies to help your client overcome difficulties, improve performance or realise potential
- working with a multidisciplinary team including other psychologists, nutritionists, GPs, coaches and physiologists
- delivering counselling and/or workshops covering issues such as goal setting, visualisation and relaxation
- conducting and applying research in sport or exercise psychology.

Activities more closely associated with sport psychology include:

- working with a broad range of clients including individual athletes, teams, coaches and referees, from amateur to elite professional level across a range of sporting disciplines
- developing tailored interventions to assist athletes in preparation for competition and to deal with the psychological demands of the sport
- equipping athletes with mental strategies to cope with, and overcome, setbacks or injuries
- advising coaches how to improve squad cohesion or communication
- delivering group workshops on areas such as self-analysis of performance or techniques to develop mental skills within the sport.

Activities more closely associated with exercise psychology include:

- counselling clients who are ill, in poor physical or mental health and who may benefit from participation in more regular exercise
- advising individuals about the benefits, both physical and psychological, that can be derived from exercise
- working with individuals and groups in a variety of settings including GP surgeries, employers' premises, the client's home, clinical settings and local fitness centres
- devising, implementing and evaluating exercise programmes based on the needs of the client
- providing counselling and consultations to a cross-section of the public including people who are depressed, GP referrals, people in prison or groups of employees as part of a workplace-exercise programme.

# Salary

- Starting salaries range from around £20,000 to £22,000.
- Salaries for experienced sport and exercise psychologists typically range from £27,000 to £37,000.
- Senior psychologists and heads of department can earn around £48,000 or more.

For up-to-date salary scales for further education (FE) and higher education (HE) positions, see the University and College Union (UCU) (<http://www.ucu.org.uk/>). Experienced consultants working with top professional athletes can expect to charge up to £1,000 a day in consultancy fees. Salaries vary according to the type of employer. The salaries of those employed by professional clubs or national governing bodies tend to be higher than those of amateur ones.

Income figures are intended as a guide only.

## Working hours

Working hours for practitioners vary depending on the client and the nature of the sport. Although you would generally work office hours, evening or weekend work may also be required to fit in with training and sports competitions.

Hours within education or healthcare settings are mainly 9am to 5pm.

## What to expect

- Work environments vary depending on the client and could include an office base within a university campus, GP surgery or hospital, or field settings such as the athletes' village at major sports events, the team training base or employers' premises.
- Jobs are available with sports teams and organisations, as well as universities and colleges, throughout the UK and abroad. Sport psychology is well established in the USA.
- Travel within a working day is common, particularly if working with sports professionals. A sport psychologist may form part of a support team travelling with a team or athlete to competitions and tournaments locally, nationally and internationally.

## Qualifications

To qualify as a practising sport and exercise psychologist you will need to complete:

- a degree in psychology accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS) (<http://www.bps.org.uk/>) leading to the Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC)
- a BPS-accredited MSc in Sport and Exercise Psychology
- Stage 2 of the BPS Qualification in Sport and Exercise Psychology (QSEP) (two years of supervised practice).

Once you have completed Stage 2 of the BPS QSEP you will be eligible for registration with the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC) (<http://www.hpc-uk.org/>) and can use the title 'sport and exercise psychologist'.

Graduates with a degree in a subject other than psychology may be able to gain eligibility for GBC by taking a BPS-accredited conversion course, which usually takes one year full time or two years part time. For details of approved courses see BPS Accredited Psychology Courses (<https://www.bps.org.uk/public/become-psychologist/accredited-courses>).

Entry with an HND or foundation degree only is not possible.

Entry on to a Masters course is competitive and you will normally be expected to have at least a 2:1. Graduates with a 2:2 who also have a research-based higher qualification may be accepted. Before applying, check that your course is approved by the HCPC (see the HCPC Register of Approved Programmes (<http://www.hpc-uk.org/education/programmes/register/>)).

Once you've completed the Masters course, you will also need two years' supervised practice before you can register with the HCPC.

For those wanting to lecture in sport and exercise psychology or to follow a career in research, a PhD in sport and exercise is usually required.

Search for postgraduate courses in sport and exercise psychology (<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/postgraduate-courses-results?keyword=sport%20and%20exercise%20psychology>).

# Skills

You will need to show evidence of the following:

- an interest in sport
- excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- active listening and reflection skills
- patience and the ability to motivate others
- flexibility in order to work in a range of settings with different clients
- problem-solving skills
- decision-making ability
- commitment to research and continuing professional development (CPD)
- ability to work under pressure and cope with stressful situations
- a methodical approach to work
- IT skills.

## Work experience

For entry on to a Masters course you will also need relevant work experience. Practical experience in sports performance or in areas such as coaching, fitness and exercise instruction, health promotion and PE teaching will be useful. Contact course providers to find out how much experience they are looking for.

## Employers

Some sport psychologists work as private consultants or work full time for professional sports teams or national governing bodies of sport.

Most sport psychologists, however, combine consultancy work with teaching and research within universities or colleges throughout the UK and abroad, or work in other areas of psychology, for example clinical or occupational.

Similarly, exercise psychologists tend to combine consultancy with teaching and research. Your work might see you involved in GP exercise referral, cardiac rehabilitation schemes or work within the NHS or private healthcare providers.

You may get involved with setting up exercise and health programmes in prisons or for staff in the workplace as well as in psychiatric settings.

Look for job vacancies at:

- Jobs.ac.uk (<http://www.jobs.ac.uk/>) - for teaching and research posts.
- NHS Jobs (<http://www.jobs.nhs.uk/>)
- NHS Scotland Recruitment (<https://jobs.scot.nhs.uk/>)
- Psychologist Appointments (<http://www.psychapp.co.uk/>)
- UK Sport (<http://www.uk sport.gov.uk/>)
- National press.

Psychologists looking to work in consultancy need to establish contacts and build networks, even during Masters courses, as referrals are often by word of mouth or facilitated through contacts with GP surgeries or other health professionals.

## Sport and exercise psychologist jobs

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## Professional development

All practising sport and exercise psychologists are required to register with the HCPC. Registration renewal takes place on a two-year cycle and applicants for renewal must sign a professional declaration. Contact the HCPC for further information.

In order to stay registered with the HCPC, sport and exercise psychologists must undertake and keep a record of continuing professional development (CPD). Activities may include attending courses, workshops and conferences run, for example, by the BPS.

The BPS also provides learning and CPD opportunities through its Professional Development Centre (<https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologists/professional-development>) and runs an annual learning and professional development programme.

A number of sport and exercise-related workshops and conferences are also run by The British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) (<http://www.bases.org.uk/>).

Some sport and exercise psychologists choose to undertake further study, for example to broaden their expertise in other branches such as clinical or health psychology.

You may decide to undertake further research by completing a PhD, especially if you are employed in a lecturing role. See the BPS website for a guide to postgraduate research degrees.

## Career prospects

Opportunities for advancement exist both within professional practice and through research within an academic environment.

Within the field of sport psychology, you may find the opportunity to advance to a private practice as a consultant or to move to senior positions within a professional club, with individual athletes or a governing body.

Elite athletes work for many years to reach such a level and expect the same level of expertise from their support staff. It can take several years for a sport psychologist to work with clients at a professional level.

Within the field of exercise psychology, there may be opportunities for advancement to a consultancy role or involvement in GP referral schemes. There is an increasing role for professional staff within the area of health promotion. The role of health psychologist within the NHS may also present opportunities for qualified exercise psychologists.



Written by AGCAS editors

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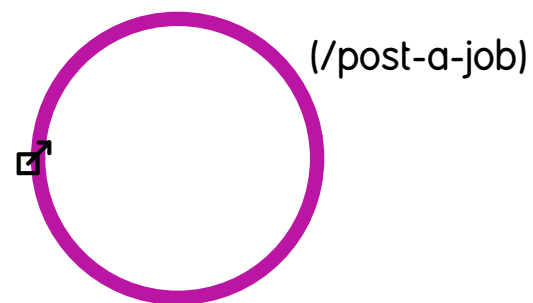
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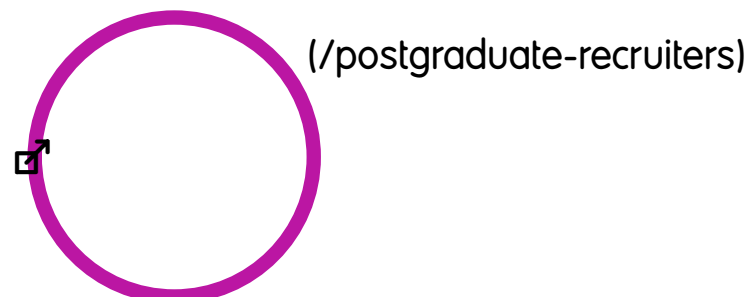
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