

The future development pathway of strength and conditioning: a proposed model from the UKSCA

Strength and conditioning has grown significantly in the United Kingdom over the last 15 years, which is evidenced by an increased number of accredited S&C coaches (ASCC), as well as universities offering S&C degrees. More specifically, ASCC numbers have risen from ~400 in 2011 to ~850 at the end of 2018.¹ Additionally, the UKSCA has recently launched a database on its website providing an overview of all undergraduate and postgraduate courses in S&C in the UK,⁶ detailing a total of 44 courses (22 for each category) at present. Thus, with a soaring rise in popularity for S&C in the UK, the UKSCA has continued to consider how best to represent our profession moving forward.

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Background

The rise in popularity has led to a loss of balance between the supply and demand of coaches, with the former far outweighing the latter. As a consequence, the last five years or so have seen a dramatic increase in the number of internships being offered in the profession,^{2,10} with many of these opportunities being unpaid. However, the UKSCA has recently released an 'intern pack', which emphasises a necessary balance regarding legality, coach development opportunities and payment for all. Further to this, our early career coach development panel offers education grants to employers running well-structured internship programmes, thus promoting good practice across the profession. In essence, we recognise the importance for practitioners to develop their coaching skillsets, but equally, we do not support free labour. For more detailed information, coaches and employees are advised to view this intern pack on our website.⁵

Having offered our future coaches some support in this area, the UKSCA also felt it necessary to recognise that, at present, it has many more accredited coaches than 5-6 years ago and the industry is highly

competitive as a result. In addition, strength and conditioning (S&C) appears to have become extremely popular in the private and commercial sectors and has resulted in professionals labelling themselves as 'S&C coaches' when they may not have the required competencies or expertise in S&C in recent years. Therefore, a decision was taken in 2018 to work with the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA), which has been tasked with creating 'professional standards' for each profession in the sport and physical activity sector in the UK. With respect to S&C, it was agreed that these standards would only be created if done as a joint process with the UKSCA. The UKSCA has therefore entered into an agreement with the CIMSPA to write these standards for the profession.⁴

Until recently, these standards would have only applied for the role of an ASCC, noting that since its inception in 2004, the UKSCA has only offered a single accreditation. Recently, however, the UKSCA worked in partnership with CIMSPA to create a set of professional standards for a new entry-point role in the sport and physical activity sector entitled 'S&C Trainer': this partnership took place from July-December, 2018.

Further to this, the UKSCA has partnered with YMCA Awards to create a new, regulated entry-point qualification entitled 'Level 2 Certificate in the Foundations of Strength and Conditioning (CFSC)', which was recently endorsed by CIMSPA and mapped to the S&C Trainer professional standards. It is important to acknowledge that this process encouraged wider consultation with employers, industry representatives, and the UKSCA membership. Ultimately, this consultation resulted in positive input which was a key driver for this initiative, helping to ensure the appropriate standards were met. In addition, a concurrent strategy was formulated to ensure that the core principles of the organisation (the role of ASCC) were not being compromised, as represented by our joint position statement with CIMSPA.⁴

This year, we are following this same process for the role of 'S&C Coach'. At this point, the membership should note that in this proposed model moving forward, there is a distinct difference between the term 'S&C Coach' and what ASCC means (discussed later). The membership will again be invited to take part in the wider consultation process for the S&C Coach standards soon. In conjunction, the membership will have hopefully noticed, from the Chairman's Column in issue 51 (December 2018) of *Professional Strength and Conditioning*, that we are also aiming to make use of the

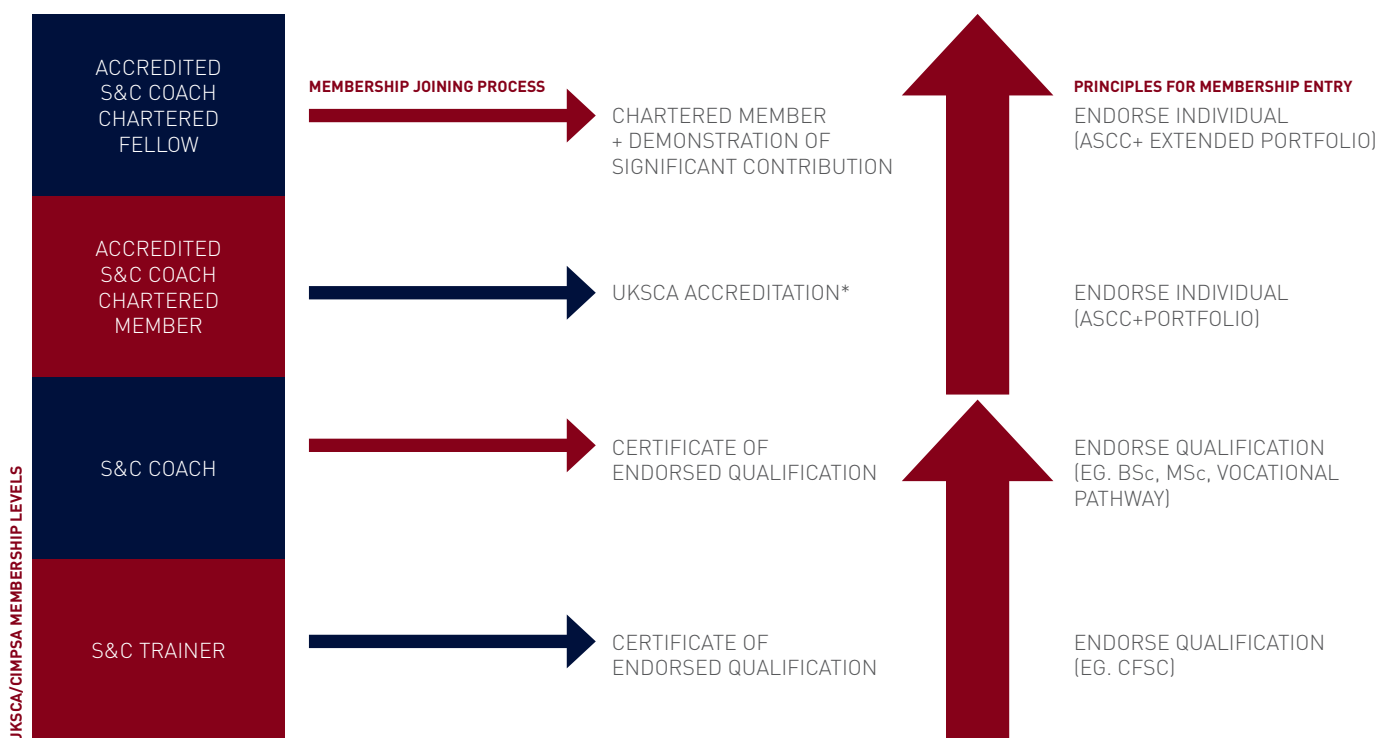
Royal Charter held by CIMSPA to further support the professionalisation of the S&C industry. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to inform members as to how the UKSCA envisages career progression for the future of the profession in the UK. Before discussing the proposed model in greater detail, the context of this article is set by Figure 1, with all subsequent information in this article presented chronologically from the bottom up.

Pathway Development for Strength and Conditioning (The UKSCA Model)

STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING TRAINER

In 2008, the UKSCA created a 'Foundation in Strength and Conditioning' workshop, building upon its workshops in 'Weightlifting for Sports Performance', 'Plyometrics, Agility and Speed' (PAS) and 'Planning Effective Programmes'. The aim of this workshop was to educate any interested parties (such as sports coaches, PE teachers, physiotherapists, etc. - see Figure 2) on the fundamental basics of S&C practice when working with both athlete and non-athlete populations, with a key focus on coaching the foundations of human movement (eg, strength-based lifts rather than Olympic lifting). Since then, over 4,500 individuals have attended this workshop. Thus, with coaches and other allied professions developing their understanding

Figure 1. UKSCA/CIMSPA proposed model for the progression of S&C qualifications in the UK. * means that chartered membership can be applied for once UKSCA accreditation is completed with accompanying documented evidence (in the form of a portfolio)



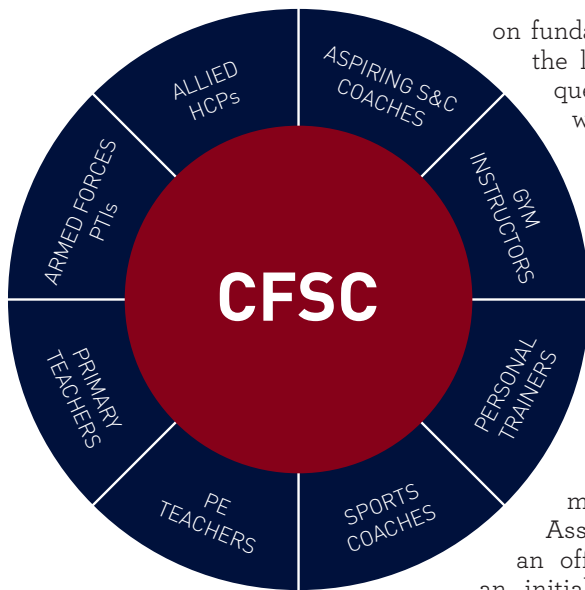


Figure 2. Proposed target market for the Level 2 Certificate in the Foundations of Strength and Conditioning (CFSC) qualification [supported by research from attendees on the UKSCA Foundation workshop since 2008]

on fundamental S&C principles in the last 10 years, it poses the question: why should this workshop be turned into a full qualification? There are a few reasons to propose here:

- **Pathway for Development.** Given the volume of interest since 2008, the UKSCA has formalised the content of this workshop as a qualification for both existing and future members. In doing so, the Association has provided an official qualification that is an initial stepping stone on the pathway for career development in S&C, which may be considered by many other professions (Figure 2).

- **Professional Standards.** Regulated qualifications in S&C at a comparable level currently exist already. However, the new entry-point qualification has been developed in conjunction with CIMSPA's employer-led model, noting that the qualification has been developed to meet the requirements of employers and it is underpinned by professional standards written by the UKSCA, employers and related professions. It has been clearly communicated to us by CIMSPA that while other regulated qualifications do currently exist at this level, applicants will need to adhere to the recently accepted professional standards if they wish to receive an endorsement for their course.

- **An Evolving Profession.** Previously, S&C has been considered to be a profession only for elite athlete populations. However, the scope of our profession now spreads far beyond that of enhancing athlete performance, emphasised by the fact recent literature has highlighted the importance of S&C training for the reduction of injury risk,⁷ health care,⁹ and even disease.⁸

The assessment process for this entry-point qualification requires candidates to provide evidence of an initial consultation and assessment with both an adult and youth client/athlete which then leads to the design and delivery of a training programme; a multiple-choice theory assessment; and individual and group-based coaching assessments. Further details of course content and methods of assessment will be available on the UKSCA website soon.

STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH

A key project in the partnership with CIMSPA in 2019 is to write the professional standards for the S&C Coach, and these are now under way. For the reader, it is worth reiterating that this is not the term now being proposed for ASCCs (discussed in the next section). When considering this new pathway for the profession, these standards will represent the minimum competency requirements for what the UKSCA would expect an S&C coach to be doing in their day-to-day practice. However, this document will not prescribe the mode of assessments that must be conducted at this level, allowing some degree of flexibility for those looking to map courses to these standards.

In this new model (Figure 1), this layer aims to engage university degree programmes (in S&C) and vocational course/qualification providers through a joint endorsement process from the UKSCA and CIMSPA. The key here is that to obtain this endorsement, universities and courses will need to demonstrate that their programmes successfully map to the professional standards, thus ensuring that their content is in line with the required minimum competencies. Previously, the UKSCA has tried to look at ways of engaging with the higher education sector and always found this challenging. However, remembering the robust method by which these standards are created, this ensures that universities and courses can apply for a joint UKSCA/CIMSPA endorsement, if they can prove that their content maps to the standards. We are also confident that this process is free from subsequent bias, because CIMSPA has its own quality assurance process, where all providers aiming to map to these standards will have their content reviewed.

Just like the process for S&C Trainer, these professional standards will have a wider consultation process, where the membership will be asked for their input. Stage 1 of this process occurred in January in Coventry, where members attended an open forum discussion regarding the professional standards process and wider vision for the future of the profession. Stage 2 of this process occurred in March in Loughborough, where an initial meeting was held by CIMSPA with the UKSCA, employers, stakeholders and partners to discuss the first draft of documentation. As a result of these meetings, amendments are currently being made to the draft and in due course will be sent out for public consultation, offering members the chance to contribute again. Once this process has

been completed and the standards amended (if required), it will go to the Sport and Physical Activities employer stakeholder group, the Professional Development Board (which is independent of CIMSPA) and the UKSCA Board of Directors for consideration.

Given that the term 'S&C Coach' has often been the term associated with the accreditation, it is now crucial to discuss the changes in the role of ASCC.

ACCREDITED STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH (CHARTERED MEMBER)

The accreditation process forms the foundations upon which the UKSCA was built in 2004 and consists of four assessed components: i) weight-lifting assessment, ii) PAS coaching assessment, iii) case study presentation and, iv) a multiple-choice theory exam. As per Figure 1, the joint UKSCA/CIMSPA model is to endorse individuals at a chartered level once they have completed the UKSCA accreditation, with an accompanying portfolio. It is important to note that this does not mean that coaches are only eligible for the accreditation/chartered membership if they have completed a university degree; there is no restriction here.

Given the associated credibility and stature of the Royal Charter, it is proposed that UKSCA members will be able to submit an application in conjunction with the ASCC accreditation process, highlighting the importance of coaching experience to receive chartered membership. The intricate details of this application process are being finalised by the UKSCA and CIMSPA together and the membership will be updated later in the year, but it is likely that it will require members to provide documented evidence of their practice, how this has progressed over time, and this will then be submitted alongside the existing UKSCA CPD log as well. It is also important to note that this will be an expertise-based, as well as a competency-based, application process, with interested readers referred to the work of Collins et al.³ Coaches will be able to demonstrate that they work at a standard underpinned by a particular level of expertise, which is supported by the UKSCA, a chartered institute (CIMSPA), National Governing Bodies of Sport, home country Sports Councils and UK Sport. Finally, existing ASCCs who are able to show documented evidence via a portfolio will be able to apply for chartered membership once the process is in place.

ACCREDITED STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH (CHARTERED FELLOW)

Concurrent to the development of chartered member, the UKSCA will work with CIMSPA to clearly define the process required for members to also become chartered fellows. Again, the details are yet to be finalised, and the membership will be updated in due course; however, it is likely that multiple avenues will exist when applying at this level. For example, accredited coaches who have obtained chartered status and can provide significant evidence of expertise in a defined area (eg, high performance sport, long-term athletic development, research and education, to name a few), may all be entitled to apply to become a chartered fellow. This project is in its infancy; however, it was considered important to explain these changes as part of a bigger vision for the UKSCA; moreover, discussions with CIMSPA highlight that it is just as committed to achieving this.

How will Chartered Status impact you, the members?

Given the exponential rise in popularity for S&C, developing professional standards and chartered status represents a much-needed process for coaches in the UK. Although predicting the outcomes of this process are never easy, there are several anticipated benefits to the membership body over time by following this process:

- When looking at how chartered status impacts other professions, it is clear that this process requires you to demonstrate an elevated level of expertise. Thus, the key aim here is for the UKSCA and CIMSPA to further professionalise the S&C industry in the UK, which can only be seen as a positive step forward.
- Linked to the above point, because chartered status is viewed so highly across multiple professions (eg, sport science, physiotherapy, construction, engineering), this may improve coaches' chances of being successful when applying for contracts that require a particular level of professional experience and expertise (eg, private healthcare work). In turn, we hope that this will create more job opportunities for accredited coaches outside of the high performance sport setting.
- Although purely speculative at this stage, we also hope that proof of a higher standard of practitioner may also lead to improved remuneration over time. Although there

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is no guarantee here, a higher standard in any profession is likely to lead to increased financial benefits and the UKSCA will be looking at ways in which it can support its membership during this transition.

Conclusion

In summary, the UKSCA recognises that the increasing interest and desire to work in S&C has caused an expansion of the profession beyond the realms of high performance sport. Given this increase in popularity, there is a requirement for professional standards

in the UK, thus ensuring that all roles are both clear and relevant to the current state of the profession. An additional point to note here is that the professional standards process is reviewed annually to ensure the content remains a true representation of the profession.

Finally, a clear pathway for progression in S&C now exists in the UK (from a UKSCA perspective), resulting in coaches being able to demonstrate their level of expertise via chartered criteria, which are underpinned and supported by the profession and employers.

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES



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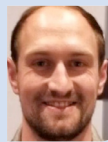
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