

Industry insight - Sport and leisure

In a nutshell

The sport and leisure industry covers a wide range of areas, with jobs in sectors such as sport and recreation, health and fitness, playwork, outdoor pursuits, caravanning and gaming.

Some areas in the sport and leisure industry are thriving. The 'Golden Decade of Sport' will see events such as the 2012 Olympic Games and the 2015 Rugby World Cup create thousands of jobs in coaching, fitness, logistics, management and many more.

The main issues currently facing the industry include:

- ensuring that people working in the industry are appropriately qualified;
- the current economic climate means that people are spending less on sport and leisure activities, e.g. gym membership, and funding cuts have affected after-school play schemes, etc.

What kind of work can I do?

The main areas of work are:

Health and fitness

- club and duty management;
- sales and marketing;
- instructing and coaching;
- consultancy work based on GP referrals, usually with particular sections of the population, e.g. people with diabetes or arthritis;
- osteopathy, naturopathy and chiropractic;
- lifestyle consultancy and nutrition - opportunities are increasing as the industry embraces the concept of wellness.

Sport and recreation

- sport development, performance, administration and facility management;
- outdoor education;
- outdoor pursuits;
- general management in venues including theme parks, cinemas and tourist attractions;
- sport media, including writing, PR and marketing;
- area, club and duty management in a range of venues, including casinos and bingo halls;
- management of holiday and caravan parks;

- adventure tourism and gap year providers.

Playwork

- playworkers - work face-to-face with children and young people in play settings;
- playwork facilitators - facilitate the provision of play settings and opportunities but do not directly provide it, e.g. playwork coordinators, trainers, Early Years Development and Children Partnership (EYDCP) officers;
- play-related workers - volunteers and paid workers in settings or services where play is an element but is not the main focus of the activity or services provided, e.g. youth groups, leisure schemes that focus on sport, school assistants, etc (SkillsActive, 2010).

Gaming

- casino managers, dealers, cashiers, inspectors;
- online gaming and gaming software;
- betting shop managers and cashiers;
- bingo and lottery callers.

The following profiles are examples of key jobs that exist in the sport and leisure industry:

- [Event organiser](#)
- [Fitness centre manager](#)
- [Outdoor pursuits manager](#)
- [Secondary school teacher](#)
- [Sports administrator](#)
- [Sport and exercise psychologist](#)
- [Sports coach](#)
- [Sports development officer](#)
- [Sports therapist](#)
- [Theme park manager](#)

What's it like working in this industry?

- Working hours can be long and seasonal. Employees are often required to work shift patterns and weekends. The biggest seasonal changes are in the outdoor and caravan sectors, where most jobs are created in the summer (SkillsActive, 2010).
- About 47% of the industry is employed on a part-time basis, compared to 27% of the whole UK workforce (SkillsActive, 2010). The sport and leisure industry as a whole currently employs 663,300 people, which accounts for around 2% of the UK workforce (SkillsActive, 2010).
- Opportunities for graduates exist throughout the UK, with a greater concentration in southeast England. There are also significant opportunities in the North West and Scotland. Wales and Northern Ireland have the lowest numbers of employees.
- With the increase in large multinational health clubs, holiday camps, and betting and gaming employers, it may be also possible to find work overseas.

Sport and recreation

- The sport and recreation sector employs around 371,800 people. This is spread across the public, private and voluntary sectors (SkillsActive, 2011).
- There are a huge number of volunteers working in sport and recreation. According to Sport England's Active People Survey 4, almost 2 million people in England commit at least one hour a week to volunteering in sport.

Betting and gambling

- There are around 123,081 people employed in the betting and gambling sector in both full and part-time jobs.
- There are currently just over 140 casinos, employing around 13,000 people, in the UK. There are almost 18,000 employees in the bingo club industry and 55,000 in the betting industry (Gambling Commission, Industry Statistics 2009/10).

Health and fitness

- There are now 5,852 fitness facilities in the UK, including private health clubs and public-owned leisure centres, which together employ over 50,000 staff (FIA State of the UK Fitness Industry Report, 2011).
- The total market value of the health and fitness sector is estimated at £3.81billion (FIA State of the UK Fitness Industry Report, 2011).

Entry and progression

How do I find a job?

Vacancies may be advertised through [SkillsActive - The Sector Skills Council for Active Leisure, Learning and Well-being](#), or professional bodies such as [The British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences \(BASES\)](#).

The following organisations are also among the main recruiters:

- [Sport England](#), [Sport Wales](#), [Sport Scotland](#) and [Sport Northern Ireland](#)
- [English Institute of Sport](#) and [UK Sport](#)
- [Leisure Opportunities](#)
- [Holiday Park Jobs](#)
- [Local Government Jobs](#)
- [Local Government Careers](#)
- [Jobs.ac.uk](#)

[Careers in Sport and Leisure](#) is a large annual fair that hosts a wide variety of employers and jobs.

The majority of positions within the industry are non-graduate and many are part time. Graduate schemes are not very common but do exist with some of the larger national and multinational chains.

Jobs are advertised in terms of business need so tend to be all year round, although there are definite seasonal increases.

Social media is becoming a more popular way to advertise sport and leisure jobs. Sign up to [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#) and get creative with your job search.

What skills do I need?

Essential skills in the industry include:

- communication;
- teamwork;
- technical/job-specific knowledge;
- customer service skills;
- organisation;
- problem-solving;
- leadership.

In general, industry-specific qualifications, such as the UKCC coaching qualification, are more important than academic qualifications. However, a degree is essential for the small number of graduate schemes and for teaching, lecturing and sport science-related vacancies.

Where can I find work experience?

There are a large number of voluntary, part-time and seasonal opportunities that exist with local authority health and sport centres. Contact your university sports centre as a starting point.

Coaching qualifications may be very helpful in gaining work experience in sport and fitness. Consider joining a vacation/summer school centre in the UK or abroad to gain experience if you have sport coaching qualifications.

If you can demonstrate good customer service skills, the majority of gaming, betting and theme parks will offer entry-level positions, such as croupier, and will train you on the job.

Is postgraduate study useful?

Most positions do not require a postgraduate qualification. A Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma in Management from the [Chartered Management Institute \(CMI\)](#) can be useful for trainee manager roles, although many employers tend to fund employees to do this. Further study tends to be supported once you are employed in the industry. Details of sport-related courses can be found on the BASES website.

It is common within local authority sport and health clubs to study for the [Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity \(IMSPA\)](#) certificates and diplomas.

Accreditation from professional bodies is more common for staff in senior positions. An MBA may be useful for senior manager positions.

How can my career develop?

In most areas there is no set path for career development, although this depends on your background and on the sector in which you are working. For example, sport science graduates could progress to consultant level with additional experience and qualifications, whereas those working in local authorities and sporting governing bodies may progress to regional or national sport development managers. In general, being flexible about location will improve your chances, as it is common to move jobs to take a higher level position.

Typical employers

Big players

- **Local authorities** are the main providers of basic sport and recreation for the local community and in England they manage over 1,500 indoor sport centres.
- **Health and fitness centres** - **David Lloyd Leisure, Esporta, Fitness First, LA Fitness, Living Well, Nuffield Proactive Health, Steiner Leisure Ltd, Virgin Active.**
- The five **sport councils** of the UK are: [Sport England](#), [Sport Northern Ireland](#), [Sport Scotland](#), [Sport Wales](#) and [UK Sport](#). Each council receives grant-in-aid from the government, distributes lottery sports funds and is responsible for the sports development of their respective region. The councils are usually staffed in small numbers by research, administrative and technical personnel.
- **Betting and gambling companies** - opportunities exist for graduates from any discipline for trainee and general manager positions in the betting and gambling industry. Large employers include: **Gala Coral Group, Ladbrokes plc** and **Rank Group plc.**
- **Leisure** - Merlin Entertainments Group is the world's second largest leisure group and employs around 16,000 staff. It operates in the UK, Europe and USA and offers a graduate training scheme.

Self-employment

Freelance work, although not common, is possible, particularly in personal training and sport performance and psychology. With experience and management skills, playworkers may be able to set up their own after-school club.

Opportunities abroad

Sport and leisure is a global industry requiring skilled personnel. Overseas opportunities are available for lifeguards, coaches, recreation managers, fitness instructors, studio group instructors, personal trainers, group exercise coordinators, sales/leisure managers, and PR and marketing managers.

The betting, gaming and theme park industries have positions in a wide range of areas including trading; developing online games; marketing; finance; customer services management; duty and general management; HR; as well as opportunities for bilingual internet operators and croupiers.

It is usual for those on graduate schemes with multinational employers to complete the scheme in the UK before being seconded abroad. Permanent relocation is rare but may be possible on request.

Working for one of the larger multinational companies may offer more opportunities to work abroad. This may be advertised as part of their graduate scheme or once you are already employed by the company. There are also opportunities working on cruise ships and in resorts that may offer the opportunity to travel.

Summer camp placements in the USA and Canada, with organisations such as [Camp America](#) and [BUNAC](#), are a very popular way to work abroad and gain experience in sport and working with young people. Holiday centres and parks in Europe can also provide opportunities to gain experience in seasonal positions within the sport and leisure industry - see [Holiday Break Jobs](#) for more information.

Will my qualifications be recognised?

Qualifications and work experience are generally transferable across European Union (EU) countries. Countries outside the EU, in particular the USA, may require qualified individuals to pass an additional federal state examination for certain occupations. Physiotherapists, for example, may be able to obtain temporary employment via the US Certificate for Healthcare Workers.

In 2006, the registers of exercise professionals of the UK and Europe, New Zealand and Australia (Fitness Australia) signed the [International Confederation of Registers for Exercise Professionals \(ICREPS\)](#), agreeing to work together to provide an international passport for fitness professionals in other countries. The ICREPS also has mutual qualification recognition with North and South America.

A good knowledge of foreign languages is often necessary when searching for jobs abroad, particularly in Europe.

Future trends

'Golden Decade of Sport'

Over the next ten years the UK is hosting some major sporting events, such as the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the 2015 Rugby World Cup and many others. The Olympics alone will create over 100,000 paid and 70,000 volunteer opportunities (SkillsActive, 2010).

Development of health and fitness market

The health and fitness market is one of the fastest growing sectors in the UK. Up until 2014, there will be over 27,000 new job opportunities available in this sector (SkillsActive, 2011).

Globalisation

- With low cost airlines offering affordable access to Europe, it is now easier for UK holiday makers to travel abroad, which has had an impact on the UK caravan and outdoor industries.
- Coaching qualifications that are recognised throughout Europe mean that qualified coaches can look further afield for work.

Demographic changes

By 2020, 25% of the UK population will be aged over 60 (Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, 2011). As the proportion and number of 'time-rich and cash-rich' customers rises, the industry will need to capitalise on the opportunities this will provide.

Government initiatives

The UK government, through [Sport England](#) and other regional bodies, is investing money into schools, community sports, elite sports, coaching provision and training for PE teachers. It is anticipated that job opportunities will increase in sport development and coaching.

Impact of legislation

- The new government white paper 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People' aims to encourage local authorities take new responsibilities for public health and so more opportunities may arise within local authorities in fitness and leisure.
 - The introduction in playwork of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the new General Childcare and Early Years Registers means that staff must have appropriate qualifications before they are employed, which can be difficult for some employers who employ and train seasonal staff.
 - Since it was introduced across the UK in 2006-2007, the Smoking Ban law has led to a decline in bingo participation at traditional clubs and it is anticipated that this decline will continue. However, there has been a subsequent rise in online gambling.
 - The introduction of a maximum 48-hour working week, minimum wage legislation and limitations on night-shift working hours are expected to affect the industry's future. Changes to the long working hours culture will increase the industry's reliance on part-time shift workers, particularly in the online gaming and betting industries.
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Jargon buster

- **Big Lottery Fund** - the National Lottery distributor which awards grants to community organisations, education, health and environment projects throughout the UK.
 - **Croupier** - a dealer who works at gambling tables collecting bets and paying out winnings.
 - **County Sport Partnership (CSP)** - a partnership of agencies committed to providing a high quality single system for people to benefit from sport.
 - **Head lad/lass** - oversees stable staff and is responsible for the care of competing horses.
 - **Local authority/Local education authority (LA/LEA)** - responsible for services in your area, e.g. education, leisure, transport, etc.
 - **MMORPG** - massively multiplayer online role-playing games. A type of online role-playing videogame (RPG) in which a large number of players interact with one another in a virtual world.
 - **National Caravan Council (NCC)** - the UK trade body for the touring, motor home, caravan holiday and park home industries.
 - **National governing body (NGB)** - represent and promote their specific sport by providing governance for the sport and organising national, regional and local competitions through county federations or associations.
 - **NMSM** - new member sales manager (bingo). Creates new business through the introduction of new members.
 - **Pitt boss (or pit manager)** - an employee who supervises the gambling in a casino.
 - **Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs)** - set up to help safeguard the health and interests of people who use the services of exercise and fitness instructors, teachers and trainers.
 - **School Sports Partnerships (SSPs)** - groups of schools working together to develop PE and sports opportunities for all young people.
 - **Sport biomechanist** - an individual who uses scientific principles of mechanics to study the effects of various forces on sporting performance.
 - **Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS)** - a scheme aimed at giving young, talented sportspeople a scholarship to develop their skills.
 - **UK Coaching Certificate (UKCC)** - a development framework to support the development, endorsement and improvement of sport coaching qualifications.
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Case studies

Outreach officer for a sports charity: Paul Barrett

After a career change, Paul graduated from Manchester Metropolitan University in 2011 with an MA in Sports Development and Coaching. He now works for a sports charity as an outreach officer.

Following graduation in September 2011, I realised that competition within the sport development market was tough and I didn't have much experience in the field, so I undertook a three-week unpaid placement at Greatersport. Gaining this experience provided me with more gravitas when applying for jobs. After applying for a few jobs, I got an interview and was successful.

My degree was very important when applying for the job as it was included on the 'desirable' list on the job specification. Transferable skills such as time-management and organisational skills when planning coaching lessons and writing essays proved very useful for my current role.

As an outreach officer, my main role is to build relationships to enhance the charity's sports programme. It involves attending meetings and identifying partners who can add value to the programme. These partners may be volunteers, sponsors, personnel (coaches) and facilities staff. As the new boy, I also have to make the teas!

My career ambitions are to go and work for a national governing body, hopefully British Cycling, in a management role. However, I'm happy at the moment gaining as much experience as possible as I still have a lot to learn.

My favourite part of the job is providing sporting opportunities for people who would never have an opportunity without the charity's influence. I have always loved sport and so now being able to combine working in sport for a good cause gives me great satisfaction.

The biggest challenge I have faced so far is dealing with the frustration of working with sometimes seemingly inefficient organisations who expect everyone else to do the work for them. However, the more I deal with them the more I develop coping strategies and ways to combat this challenge.

I feel that this is a great sector in which to look for job opportunities, as there is a lot of interest and funding due to the 2012 Olympic Games, making the sector a potentially good place to be in with regards to future opportunities.

For anyone wanting to get into this sector, I would suggest not being too selective in what you want to do. Have a very open mind, and gain plenty of experience in terms of volunteering within the sector as an undergraduate. The latter is vital in gaining potential employment.

Fitness instructor: Chris Hepworth

Chris graduated from York St John University in 2008 with a BA (Hons) in Sport Studies. He now works as a fitness instructor for the University of Salford.

After I graduated I got a job as a casual gym instructor at Oldham Community Leisure. After approximately six months of working casual hours, I applied for a full-time job as a senior fitness and class instructor for Link4Life in Rochdale. After a year and a half, a job as a fitness instructor came up at the University of Salford and I successfully applied for the job.

My sports degree very much overlapped with my current job. Specific modules were aimed at physical fitness which I could then use in gaining the qualifications for my current job. The skills and knowledge that I gained from my degree have been easily transferable to what I do now. However, since leaving university I have had to gain additional qualifications, such as fitness class qualifications and first aid at work, among others.

My job includes carrying out health and safety checks on all the gym equipment in the morning and some cleaning of the machines. I will then have gym inductions to take and I usually have approximately one hour personal exercise programmes. I teach a variety of fitness classes throughout the week, including studio cycling, boxercise and abs blast. I am now also in charge of the Exercise Referral Scheme, where students are referred to me for exercise because of stress, anxiety or medical conditions.

My role as a fitness instructor has developed dramatically and I now have more management responsibility in the sports centre and am able to put my input into how the gym runs its incentives, advertising and fitness classes. The next step in my career is hopefully to become a health and fitness manager and gain more experience in the management side of the health and fitness industry.

I have a passion for health and fitness so the best thing about my job is seeing other people enjoying taking part in exercise. I enjoy seeing something that I have planned in the gym or a class that I have delivered putting smiles on people's faces.

The most challenging but also an enjoyable part of my job is trying to keep up with the latest research or information to be released about health and fitness. There is always something else to learn, another qualification to gain or another exercise to learn.

If you enjoy health and fitness and you are keen to always try and learn more, then this is the career for you! A degree is a base point but extra qualifications and experience will make you stand out from the crowd. The health and fitness industry has a clear pathway for progression but you have to be prepared to work hard and look to learn more all the time.

Written by Anna Tayler, University of Salford, November 2011

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