Routes to practising as a sport and exercise psychologist

The aim of this article is to provide an overview of the routes to practising as a sport and exercise psychologist in the UK. Practising, in this context, refers to working with members of the public and advertising services as a practitioner psychologist. The article will clarify the roles of BASES, the British Psychological Society (BPS, 'the Society') and the Health Professions Council (HPC).

The legal regulation of practitioner psychologists in the UK has developed over the past four years. The Government White Paper 'Trust, Assurance and Safety – The Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century' recommended the protection and regulation of the use of the title psychologist, and by 2009 the HPC opened a register for appropriately qualified practitioners. The HPC oversees the regulation of 15 types of health professionals such as physiotherapists, dieticians, speech therapists and radiographers. It sets out standards of proficiency for safe and effective practice to protect members of the public. The HPC has legal powers to protect named titles and to govern standards, skills and behaviour. There are seven domain specific psychologist titles that are protected (clinical, counselling, educational, forensic, health, occupational, and sport and exercise), as well as the titles 'practitioner psychologist' and 'registered psychologist'. To use any of these protected titles, or any derivative thereof you need to be on the HPC register of practitioner psychologists. At this point it is important to state that 'psychologist' is not a protected title, the HPC only explicitly protects the nine adjectival titles previously mentioned.

Up until 1 July 2012 there are two routes to gaining entry onto the register as a sport and exercise psychologist. The first is through having completed the HPC approved training route for sport and exercise psychology. This training route is currently the route developed by the Society. The second route is via a grandparenting application. When the register was officially opened a three year-period was outlined where current practitioners who did not meet the requirements of the HPC approved training route could apply via the grandparenting application based on their knowledge and experience. To complete this route, practitioners need to complete the grandparenting application pack (available: www.hpc-uk.org/apply/grandparenting). There is a non-refundable £420 fee for the scrutiny and processing of this application. However, it is important to clarify that this route closes on the 1 July 2012. After this date any practitioner wishing to use the title of 'sport and exercise psychologist' will only be able to gain entry onto the register through completing the HPC approved training route for sport and exercise psychology.

"If you intend to practise explicitly as a sport and exercise psychologist, i.e., use this title, work with the public and advertise yourself, you will need to be HPC registered by 1 July 2012."

Once the grandparenting period has passed using the title of 'sport and exercise psychologist' without being on the register could result in a misuse of title fine that is currently up to £5,000. Also, if you advertise that you provide sport and/or exercise psychology services but are not on the HPC register you could also be fined. If you practise under another title (for example performance psychologist) then no action will be taken as long as you do not mislead the public regarding the service that you provide. Similarly, if you are working as a multidisciplinary sport and exercise scientist who includes aspects of psychology as part of your practice but you are not trying to present yourself as a specialist practitioner psychologist, then you do not need to be registered. For example, someone who is working on a fitness promotion scheme might use knowledge of motivational interviewing as part of their work.

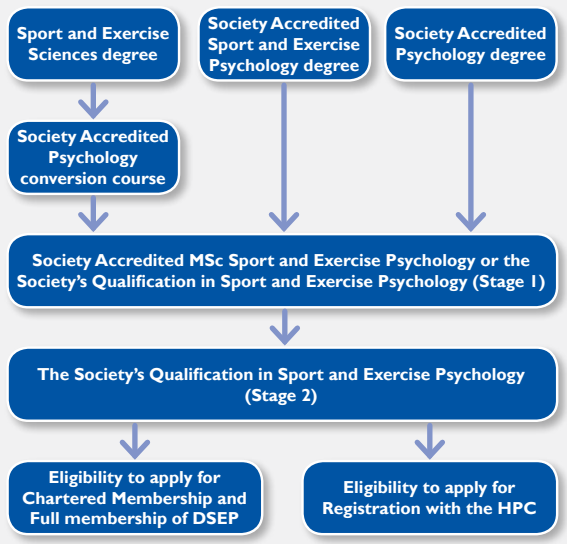
The HPC has also outlined that individuals researching or lecturing in further or higher education would not normally be expected to be on the register. So, having the title of Lecturer/Senior Lecturer in Sport & Exercise Psychology without being on the HPC register is fine. However, the situation is slightly different for members of staff teaching at postgraduate level. The HPC outline in their standards of education and training document (available: www.hpc-uk.org/publications/standards/index.asp?id=183) that practitioners teaching on programmes that form part of the approved education pathway (BPS accredited Masters in Sport & Exercise Psychology or equivalent) should be on the register of practitioner psychologists.

HPC registration lasts for a period of two years. After which time practitioners need to renew their registration. To renew registration, practitioners need to demonstrate continued professional development through the previous two years.

The Society's training route for sport and exercise psychology is now split into three specific stages (see Figure 1). First, students need to have achieved Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC), which is normally achieved through the completion of a Society accredited psychology degree, Society accredited sport & exercise psychology degree, or a relevant conversion course. Conversion courses are normally one year full-time in duration and are often, but not always, composed of a number of existing year 2 (level 5) and year 3 (level 6) undergraduate psychology modules. Many Universities offer these courses on a full-time or

part-time study basis. A list of all accredited conversion courses is available via the Society website.

Once this stage is completed students are required to complete either a Society accredited MSc programme in Sport & Exercise Psychology or The Society's Qualification in Sport and Exercise Psychology (QSEP Stage 1). Once this is completed students progress to the Society's Qualification in Sport and Exercise Psychology (QSEP Stage 2). All candidates for the QSEP (Stage 2) must hold either the Society's own Stage 1 Qualification or a Society accredited MSc in Sport and Exercise Psychology. QSEP (Stage 2) consists of supervised practice and the demonstration of research competence in sport and exercise psychology through a portfolio of competence under the supervision of an Approved Supervisor. It is envisaged that candidates will take a minimum of three years (full-time, or the part-time equivalent) to complete this process (this includes a one year full-time accredited Masters programme).



Note: You do not need to be a Chartered Member of the Society to be HPC registered, you only need to complete the Society's Qualification in Sport and Exercise Psychology to be eligible for HPC registration.

Figure 1. Post July 2012 route to becoming a registered sport and exercise psychologist (developed by the Division of Sport & Exercise Psychology within the BPS)

On successful completion of their training candidates are then eligible to apply to the Society for chartered status and full membership of the Division of Sport & Exercise Psychology (DSEP). They are also eligible to apply for registration with the HPC as a Sport and Exercise Psychologist.

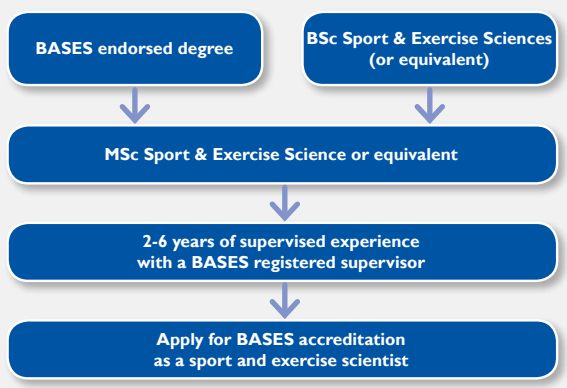


Figure 2. Route to becoming a BASES accredited sport and exercise scientist

For practitioners who do not wish to explicitly practise as registered sport and exercise psychologists, BASES accreditation offers a route to becoming a BASES accredited sport and exercise scientist (see Figure 2). This route offers a number of benefits, including a good understanding of the domains of sport and exercise and also the ability to appreciate and understand the other disciplines within sport and exercise science. This is of particular use for practitioners working in higher education. With most sport and exercise psychology provision located in Sport & Exercise Science University Departments, integration with other disciplines is important. As such, BASES accreditation is both useful and desirable in these settings.

BASES accreditation is an important indicator of knowledge and expertise when it comes to discipline-specific research. The structure of this route requires candidates to have completed a first degree in sport and exercise sciences (or equivalent). This would ideally be a BASES endorsed programme of study (for more details on the BASES Undergraduate Endorsement Scheme visit the BASES website), followed by a relevant MSc in a Sport & Exercise Sciences-related discipline. This is then followed by between 2 and 6 years of supervised experience. On completing this route candidates are able to apply for accreditation as a sport and exercise scientist. This accreditation lasts for a period of 5 years, after which accredited individuals need to apply for renewal. For candidates wishing to pursue BASES supervised experience you will need to identify a registered supervisor in your discipline area who can support you through to BASES accreditation. On the BASES website is a Directory of BASES accredited sport and exercise scientists that can be searched in the first instance to identify registered supervisors with a relevant area of expertise and potentially in the same geographical area.

The Society also offers an alternative form of Chartership (CSci) for research focused, rather than applied focused psychologists. This Chartered Scientist route has been developed in recognition of those psychologists who focus more on research. As such, it has been designed to be conferred by the Society on behalf of the Science Council. For further details on the Chartered Scientist route please visit the Society website.

In summary, if you intend to practise explicitly as a sport and exercise psychologist, i.e., use this title, work with the public and advertise yourself, you will need to be HPC registered by 1 July 2012. If you are not already on the register by 1 July 2012, you will need to complete the sport and exercise psychology training route within the BPS. If you intend to be a multidisciplinary sport and exercise scientist, be research active, or lecture within sport and exercise psychology at undergraduate level, you do not need to be HPC registered. However, psychologists teaching on Society accredited postgraduate programmes would normally be expected to be registered. ■

Websites

BASES accreditation and supervised experience guidelines: www.bases.org.uk/accreditation

BASES Registered Supervisors: www.bases.org.uk/SE-Registered-Supervisors

British Psychological Society Division of Sport & Exercise Psychology: www.bps.org.uk/spex/spex_home.cfm

Health Professions Council: www.hpc-uk.org.uk

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