



A GUIDE TO CAREERS IN

Sport and Exercise Sciences

Pathways, qualifications and career options for students
in Sport and Exercise Sciences in Irish universities

Irish Sport and Exercise Sciences Association

September 2026



Welcome from our incoming ISESA Chair



This guide is designed to help you understand the career landscape that your qualification opens up, on the island of Ireland.

Sport and Exercise Science is a broad, exciting and growing field. Graduates work in sport at all levels, public health, clinical exercise services, research, education, technology and industry. There is no single “correct” route through it, but well-informed decisions made early (about course choices, work experience, postgraduate study and professional development) will save you time and help you stand out in a competitive employment market.

This guide gives you a map of the territory: the core disciplines, the study pathways available in Ireland, the qualifications and professional recognition that employers look for, profiles of common roles, and the types of organisations that employ Sport and Exercise Science graduates.

SarahJane Cullen

Chair of ISESA

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About ISESA

The Irish Sport and Exercise Sciences Association (ISESA) is an all-island, non-profit organisation and the representative body for the Sport and Exercise Sciences community in Ireland. ISESA exists to support students, academics, researchers and practitioners across the Sport and Exercise Sciences, connecting the community, promoting professional standards, and advocating for the value of Sport and Exercise Science in Irish sport, health and society.

Strategy Framework 2026 - 2029

Our Vision:

To enhance the health, wellbeing and performance of individuals through sport and exercise sciences

Our Mission:

To lead, represent, and advance the sport and exercise sciences community through advocacy, knowledge exchange, collaboration, and accreditation

Our Values:

Collaboration
Inclusion
Excellence

01



A Visible Leader

Providing advocacy and a voice for sport and exercise sciences across the sport, exercise, industry, government, technology, healthcare and education sectors

02



Excellence in Professional Practice: Accreditation

Providing accreditation pathways, upholding professional standards and advancing professional quality

03



Excellence in Professional Practice: Professional Learning

Providing lifelong learning and advancing professional quality

04



Connected and Empowered Community

Supporting our members and stakeholders through collaboration

05



A Sustainable and Effective Organisation

Providing best practice governance and growth to support our objectives



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1. What is Sport and Exercise Science?

Sport and Exercise Science is the application of scientific principles to understand and improve human movement, performance, health and wellbeing. It asks two connected questions: how can we help people perform better in sport, and how can we use physical activity and exercise to help people live longer, healthier lives?

The field is built on these main disciplines:

- Biomechanics
- Clinical Exercise
- Nutrition
- Performance Analysis
- Physiology
- Psychology
- Skill Acquisition
- Strength and Conditioning
- Sport Technology and Data Science

Sport science and exercise science are not the same thing

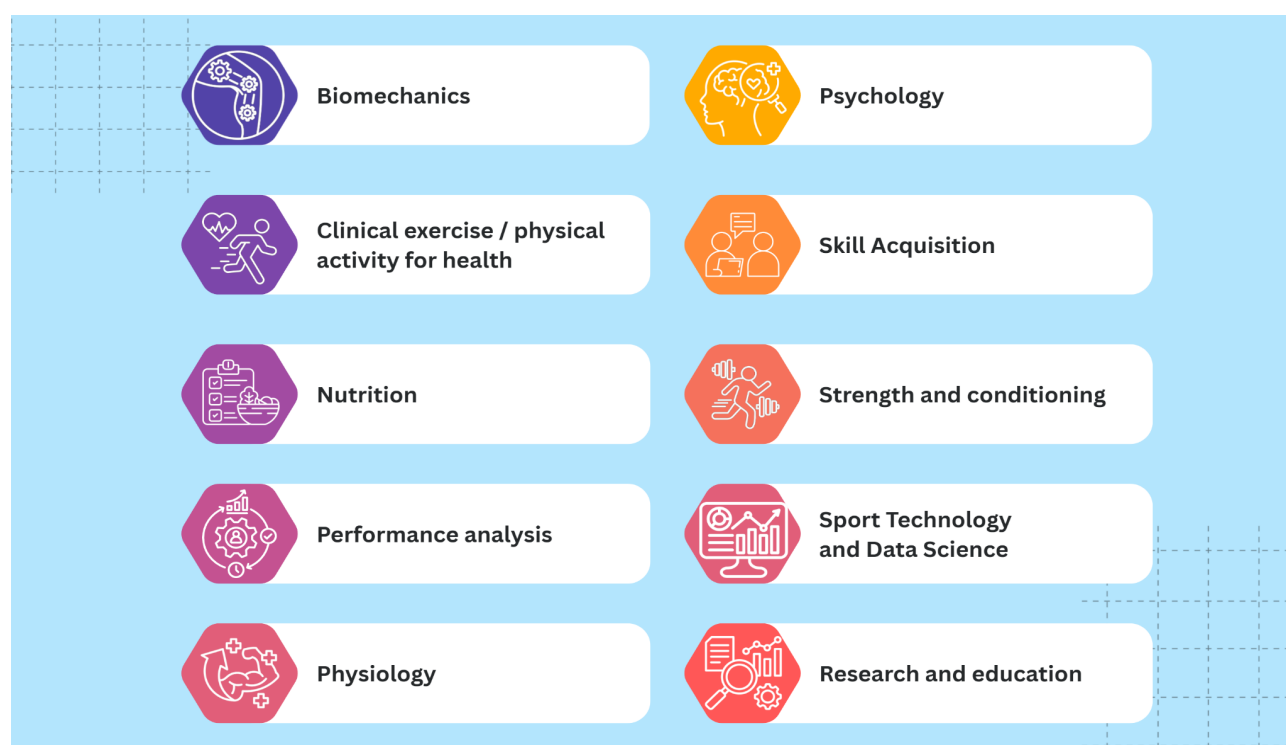
“Sport science” typically focuses on athletes and performance: preparing individuals and teams to train effectively and compete successfully. “Exercise science” applies the same knowledge to the general population: using physical activity to prevent and manage disease, support rehabilitation and improve quality of life. Most Irish degree programmes prepare you for both, and many careers move between the two.

ISESA Podcast highlight:

This ISESA podcast episode is aimed at anyone who might want to know more about studying sport and exercise science. We will give you the broad strokes of what studying sport and exercise science at 3rd level is all about, what the university experience might entail and importantly, what career opportunities are out there for graduates.

<https://isesa.ie/resource-library/science-week-2025-why-choose-sport-and-exercise-science/>

2. The disciplines of work



The table below summarises the main disciplines of work and where each can lead.

Discipline	Examples of what practitioners do	Example destinations
Biomechanics	Movement and technique analysis; force and load measurement; injury-risk screening; equipment and footwear evaluation.	Performance sport; injury and rehabilitation settings; sports technology companies; research and education.
Clinical exercise / physical activity for health	Exercise prescription for people with chronic conditions; cardiac and pulmonary rehabilitation support; community physical activity programmes.	Health service and community settings; local sports partnerships; charities; private health; research and education.
Nutrition	Fuelling, hydration and supplementation advice; body composition; education of athletes and support staff.	High performance sport; teams; private consultancy (see note on regulated titles, Section 5); research and education.



Discipline	Examples of what practitioners do	Example destinations
Performance analysis	Capturing and analysing match, training and GPS data; video analysis; presenting insights to coaches and athletes.	Team sports at all levels; governing bodies; data and technology companies; research and education.
Physiology	Physiological testing and monitoring; designing and evaluating training and conditioning programmes; environmental preparation (heat, altitude); recovery strategies.	High performance institutes; professional teams; clinical exercise services; research and education.
Psychology	Supporting motivation, confidence and focus; behaviour change for physical activity; athlete wellbeing and transitions.	Performance sport; health promotion; private practice; (see note on regulated titles, Section 5); research and teaching.
Skill Acquisition	Use instruction and feedback to select and sequence practice activities within a session and periodise skill development for the development of expertise and the retention of children and adolescents in sport.	Coaching across the lifespan from childhood to adult, and amateur to professional; coach education; coach development; coach consultancy.
Strength and conditioning	Designing and coaching physical preparation programmes; athletic development; return-to-play support.	Professional and semi-professional teams; academies; universities; private facilities, research and education.
Sport Technology and Data Science	Utilising sports technology to assess and monitor performance; collecting relevant data and interpreting to support decisions; using technology and data to support critical decision-making.	Professional and semi-professional teams; sport technology industries; sport science consultancy; academies; universities; research and education.
Research and education	Generating new knowledge; teaching and supervising the next generation; consultancy.	Universities; research centres; institutes of sport.



3. Study pathways in Ireland

There are several routes into and through Sport and Exercise Science on the island of Ireland. The most common pathway is a Level 8 honours bachelor degree followed, for many roles, by postgraduate study. Further education awards, transfers and mature-entry routes are all well established across most Higher Education Institutions. ISESA offers a comprehensive list of undergraduate and postgraduate sport and exercise-related courses available through our University partners: isesa.ie/where-to-study

The typical pathway

- **Second level → CAO application.** In the Republic of Ireland, school leavers apply through the Central Applications Office (CAO). In Northern Ireland, applications are made through UCAS. Check the specific subject and grade requirements of each programme.
- **Further education (QQI Level 5/6).** Post-Leaving Certificate courses in sport, exercise or science can provide an alternative entry route to degree programmes through QQI-linked progression.
- **Honours bachelor degree (NFQ Level 8, typically 3-4 years).** Degrees in sport and exercise science or related areas where a range of discipline areas are covered. Many include placement or applied-practice modules. A Level 8 qualification is an essential requirement for Accredited Sport and Exercise Scientist status with ISESA.
- **Postgraduate study (NFQ Level 9).** Taught MSc programmes allow specialisation - for example in performance science, strength and conditioning, performance analysis, nutrition or psychology. A Level 9 qualification is increasingly the expected standard for applied practitioner roles, and the minimum educational requirement to obtain Accredited Advanced Sport Scientist status with ISESA.
- **Professional Doctorates / Doctoral research (NFQ Level 10).** A PhD is the standard route into academic and research careers, and is increasingly common. Structured PhDs, professional doctorates and industry-partnered projects are widely available.

Where you can study

Sport and Exercise Science programmes are offered across the island, including at universities and technological universities in the Republic of Ireland and universities in Northern Ireland. Programmes differ in emphasis - some are performance-focused, others health-focused. ISESA offers a comprehensive list of undergraduate and postgraduate sport and exercise science related courses available through our University partners: isesa.ie/where-to-study/



4. Qualifications and entry requirements

Entry requirements vary by institution and are updated every year - always check the current CAO, UCAS or institutional listings. In general, applicants should expect the following:

Entering an undergraduate programme

- Each course has specific Leaving Certificate (or equivalent) minimum grade requirements. Check the relevant programme requirements on their respective website.

Entering a postgraduate programme

- Taught MSc programmes normally require a minimum of a 2.2 or 2.1 honours degree in a relevant discipline; applied programmes may also ask for evidence of practical experience.
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) routes in Irish universities allow you to use past work, life experience, and previous study to gain entry, exemptions, or advanced standing in academic courses.
- Research degrees (MSc by research, PhD) usually require a strong honours degree and a research proposal or alignment with a funded project.

Qualifications employers commonly ask for

Beyond your degree, employers in Sport and Exercise Science frequently look for a portfolio of supporting qualifications and evidence:

- A relevant Level 9 (MSc) qualification for applied practitioner posts.
- Professional accreditation or certification relevant to the discipline (see Section 5).
- Coaching qualifications from national governing bodies, and safeguarding/Garda vetting or Access NI clearance for work with children and vulnerable adults.
- First aid / basic life support certification.
- A demonstrable record of applied experience: Relevant up-to-date references from past or current employers, placements, internships, voluntary support roles and personal projects. Please visit our blogs to read about other people's experiences: isesa.ie/blogs



5. Professional recognition and accreditation

Sport and Exercise Science is an emerging profession. Accreditation and professional recognition demonstrate that an individual has met defined standards of knowledge, supervised experience and ethical practice, and is committed to continuing professional development (CPD).

ISESA and professional standards

As the representative body for the Sport and Exercise Sciences community in Ireland, ISESA supports the development of professional standards across the field and connects Irish practitioners to international frameworks through its association with the International Confederation of Sport and Exercise Sciences Practice (ICSESP).

Find more information on what types of accreditation ISESA offers here: <https://isesa.ie/accreditation/>

ISESA Accreditation

There are currently two streams of accreditation:

1

Accredited Sport and Exercise Scientist

This accreditation stream is open to individuals who have completed a **Level 8** qualification in sport and exercise science (or equivalent) and who have acquired a minimum of **140 hours** of work experience within a sport and exercise science setting (university internships/placement can count towards these hours).

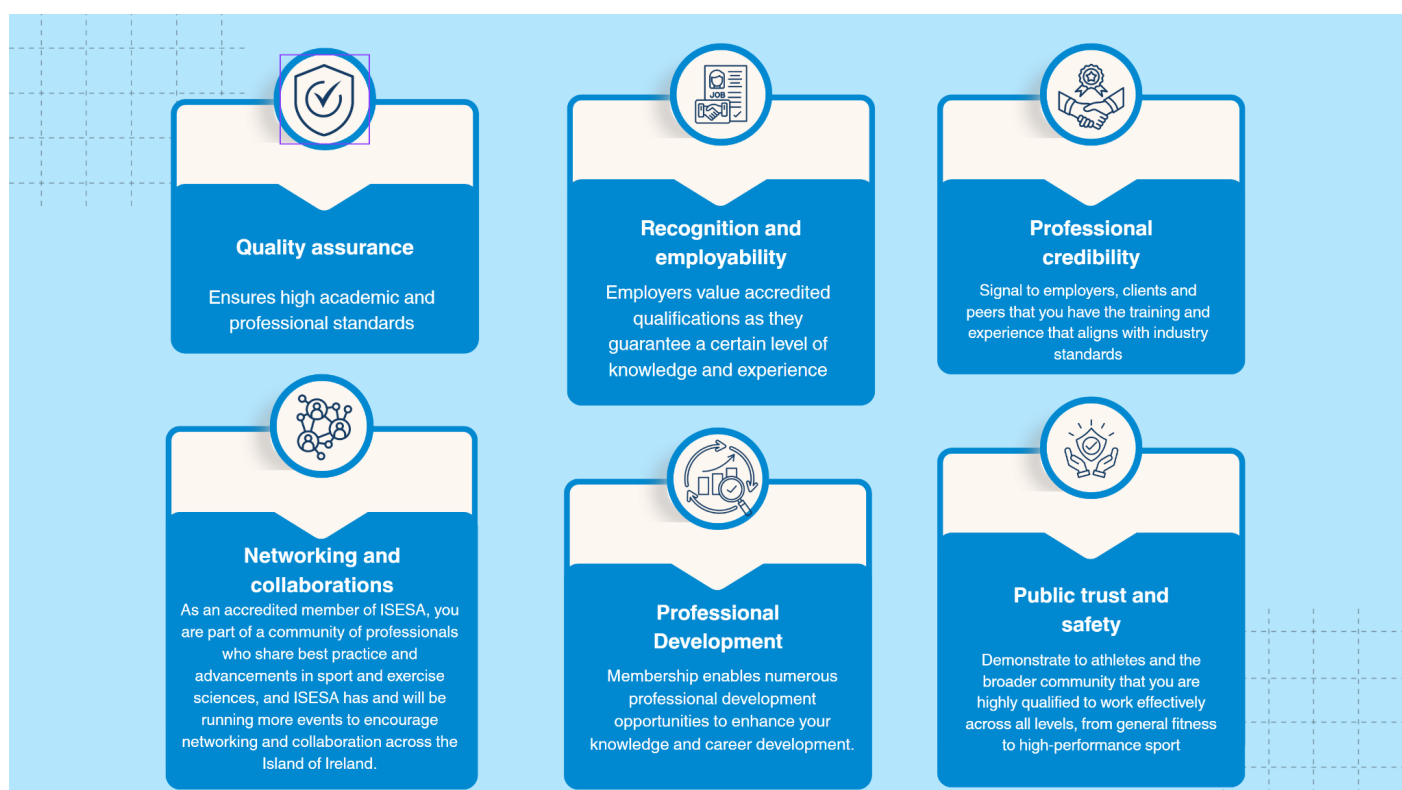
2

Accredited Advanced Sport Scientist

This accreditation stream is open to individuals who have completed a **Level 9** qualification in Sport Science (or related specialty stream i.e., Strength and Conditioning, Sports Nutrition etc), and who have acquired at least 200 days (or **1,600 hours**) of work experience within high performance sport.

6. Benefits of Accreditation

Professional Accreditation is essential for advancing the professionalism, quality and credibility of our industry. Being Accredited as an ISESA Professional provides:



7. Careers in sport

High performance and professional sport is the destination many students first imagine, and Ireland offers genuine opportunities across institutes, governing bodies, professional teams and player pathways. It is a competitive, network-driven sector where reputations are built through applied experience, reliability and results.

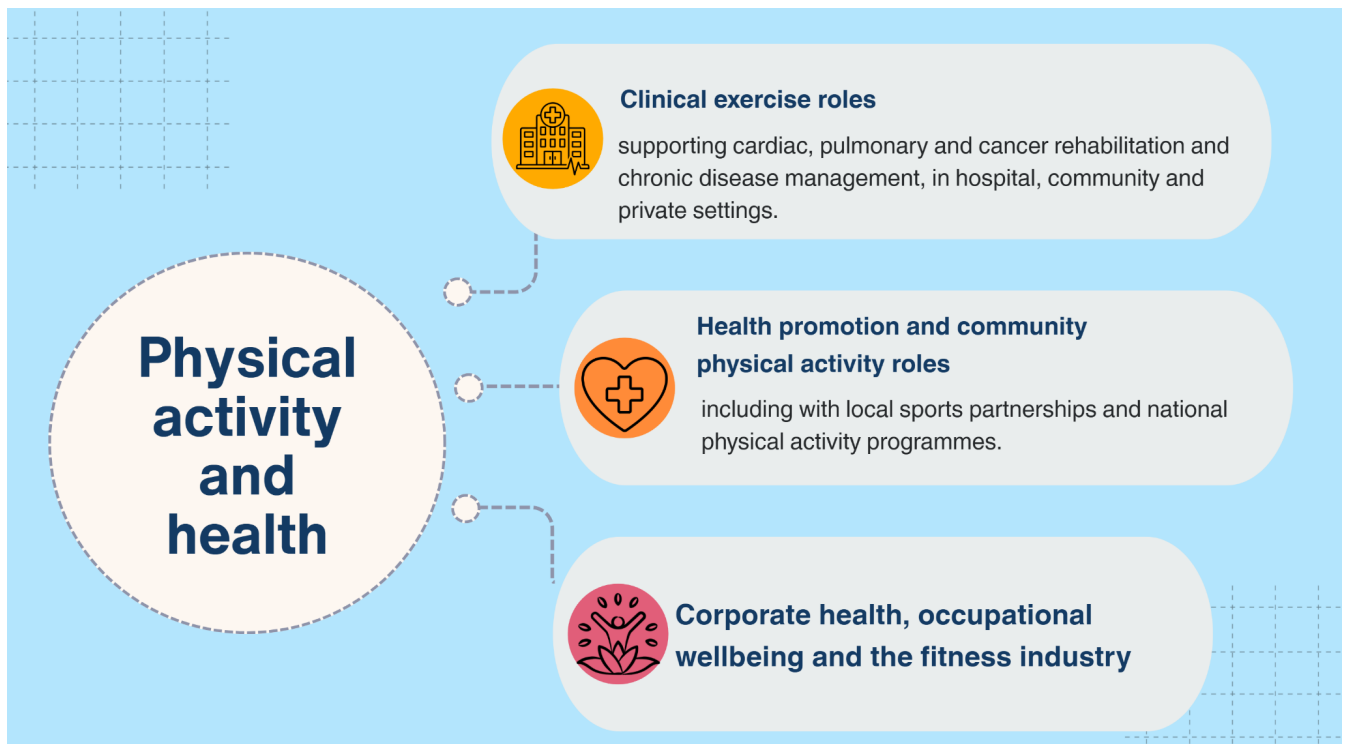


Building your career

- Early-career roles are frequently part-time, seasonal or internship-based; multi-role portfolios (e.g. combining a team role with teaching or private work) are common.
- Evening and weekend work is the norm in team environments.
- Many successful candidates for full-time roles hold a Level 9 qualification, ISESA Accreditation and have developed a strong applied CV through relevant practical experience.

8. Careers in health

Most Sport and Exercise Science graduates build careers beyond elite sport - and the biggest growth in demand is in health. Physical inactivity and chronic disease are major public health challenges, and exercise professionals are increasingly embedded in prevention, treatment and rehabilitation.





9. Careers in education and research

Education

- Lecturing in further and higher education, usually requiring postgraduate qualifications and, for university posts, a PhD.
- Coach education and development roles with governing bodies.

Research and academia

- PhD research in performance, health or methodology; postdoctoral research; academic careers combining research, teaching and applied consultancy.
- Research roles in industry: sports technology, nutrition, pharmaceuticals and med-tech.

10. Related professions

A Sport and Exercise Science degree is also a strong foundation for graduate-entry routes into physiotherapy, medicine, dietetics, athletic therapy, clinical exercise physiology and other regulated health professions, as well as careers in sport management, event delivery, media and policy.



11. Job profiles

The profiles below describe six of the most common destinations for Sport and Exercise Science graduates in Ireland.

Sport Scientist / Exercise Physiologist

Works with athletes and coaches to test, monitor and improve physical performance, translating laboratory and field data into training decisions.

Typical work: Fitness testing and profiling; training-load monitoring; recovery, heat and altitude strategies; reporting to coaches.

Typical entry route: Level 8 degree plus MSc in sport/exercise physiology or performance science; applied placement experience; professional accreditation, such as ISESA Accreditation (ASES and/or AASS).

Example employers: Institutes of sport, governing bodies, professional teams, universities, private performance centres.

Strength and Conditioning Coach

Designs and delivers physical preparation programmes that make athletes stronger, faster, fitter and more robust to injury.

Typical work: Gym-based and field-based coaching; programme design and periodisation; testing; return-to-play support alongside medical staff.

Typical entry route: Level 8 degree, recognised S&C certification, ISESA Accreditation (ASES and/or AASS) and typically an MSc; a long apprenticeship or internships and part-time team roles is normal.

Example employers: Professional and inter-county teams, academies, universities, schools, private facilities.

Performance Analyst

Turns video, event and GPS data into insight that shapes how teams train, select and compete.

Typical work: Filming and coding matches and training; GPS and athlete-monitoring workflows; building reports and dashboards; pre- and post-match presentations.



Typical entry route: Level 8 degree with analysis modules or MSc in performance analysis; strong software and data skills; voluntary club analysis experience is the classic first step. ISESA is currently developing accreditation for Accredited Sports Performance Analysts. Applicants will have to hold a minimum of Level 8 University degree, can evidence training in the required Sports Performance Analysis domain knowledge and skill areas, and have undertaken minimum required work experience in an applied sport setting. More details will follow soon. Accreditation for Accredited Advanced Sport Scientists is also available to Performance Analysts.

Example employers: Team sports at all levels, governing bodies, broadcasters, sports-data and technology companies.



Clinical Exercise Physiologist / Exercise for Health Specialist

Uses structured exercise to prevent and manage chronic disease and to support patients through rehabilitation.

Typical work: Pre-exercise screening and risk stratification; prescribing and supervising exercise for cardiac, pulmonary, metabolic and oncology populations; behaviour-change support.

Typical entry route: Level 8 degree plus MSc in clinical exercise (or equivalent); relevant certifications; experience in clinical or community exercise settings.

Example employers: Hospitals and health service programmes, community rehabilitation services, local sports partnerships, charities, private clinics.

Performance Nutritionist

Helps athletes fuel, recover and adapt - translating nutrition science into practical food-first strategies.

Typical work: Individual athlete consultations; body-composition assessment; menu and travel planning; supplement risk management and anti-doping awareness; education workshops.

Typical entry route: Level 8 degree plus accredited postgraduate nutrition qualification and recognised registration; ISESA Accreditation (ASES and/or AASS); clarity on scope of practice relative to the regulated dietitian title.

Example employers: High performance programmes, professional teams, private consultancy, food and supplement industry.

Lecturer / Researcher

Advances the science and educates the next generation, combining teaching, research and often applied consultancy.

Typical work: Designing and delivering modules; supervising student research; publishing; winning research funding; applied projects with sport and health partners.

Typical entry route: Level 8 degree, MSc and PhD; teaching experience and a publication record; postdoctoral experience, and professional accreditation for many university posts (such as ISESA ASES and/or AASS).

Example employers: Universities and technological universities, further education colleges, research centres and institutes.



12. Potential employers

The table below maps the main categories of employers for Sport and Exercise Science graduates in Ireland, with some examples.

ISESA is proud to support the career development of our members. We feature job openings, internships, and research opportunities across the sport and exercise sciences in Ireland and beyond. Find relevant roles for students, practitioners, researchers, and academics on <https://isesa.ie/vacancies/>

Sector	Examples of organisations	Typical roles
High performance system	Sport Ireland and the Sport Ireland Institute; Sport Northern Ireland Sports Institute; national governing bodies with high performance programmes.	Sport scientist, physiologist, S&C coach, analyst, nutritionist, psychologist.
Professional & team sport	IRFU and the provincial rugby teams; GAA inter-county setups; League of Ireland clubs; FAI; basketball, hockey and other league clubs.	S&C coach, performance analyst, athletic therapist, sport scientist.
Health sector	Community health organisations; private hospitals and clinics.	Clinical exercise physiologist, exercise specialist, health promotion officer.
Community & participation	Local sports partnerships; local authorities; charities and social-inclusion programmes; campus sport departments.	Physical activity coordinator, development officer, coach.
Education & research	Universities and technological universities; post-primary schools; research centres.	Lecturer, researcher, PhD candidate, PE teacher, technician.
Private sector & industry	Performance and fitness centres; sports technology, wearables and analytics companies; nutrition and health brands; self-employment and consultancy.	Performance coach, product specialist, data analyst, consultant.



13. Building your employability

Two graduates can leave the same programme with the same grade and very different prospects. The difference is almost always the deliberate accumulation of experience, skills and relationships throughout the degree, not after it.

While you study

- Volunteer early: club teams, university performance programmes, community exercise classes and events all count. Depth beats breadth - sustained roles show reliability.
- Treat your placement as a nine-month interview: turn up early, take on the unglamorous jobs, and ask for feedback.
- Build transferable skills employers name most often: communication with coaches and clients, data handling and spreadsheets, report writing and presenting.
- Collect coaching, safeguarding and first-aid certifications as you go.

Build your network

- Join ISESA as a member and attend conferences, events and webinars.
- Ask practitioners for twenty minutes of their time - most remember being students and will help.
- Maintain a simple professional presence: an up-to-date LinkedIn profile and a portfolio of testing reports, analysis samples or programmes you have written (with permission).