

Original Article

Professional profile of graduates with a degree in physical activity and sports science in Spain

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**Abstract:**

The new job opportunities that resulted from the growth of the sports industry, due to the impact of sports on society and the increase of sports practice, along with the concern about the influence of such practice on health, have led experts in this field to demand the professionalization of the sector. Thereby, a regulatory development is being carried out, which, although at the regional level, recognises the professions of sports, determining the official academic titles or professional qualifications required for the professional practice and assigning to each profession its corresponding functional scope. Despite the fact that the affiliation rate of the Professional Association of Graduates in Physical Activity and Sports Science does not exceed 15% of the university graduates in Spain, such rate has increased in the last years. As an example, in Andalusia, the number of members has doubled in the last four years. This increase in affiliation may be a reflection of the professionalization process that the sports sector has been experiencing. The aim of this study was to determine the professional profile of graduates with a university degree in Physical Activity and Sports Science. As the main results, there continues to be a higher percentage of men who opt to take these courses, most of them have complementary training/education and there is a high percentage of multiple employment, that is, they combine more than one job, although teaching is still the most popular profession of choice. However, the percentage of graduates who choose teaching as a career is decreasing, which could be due to the diversification of the sector and of the sports professions.

**Key words:** profile; professional; sports; university graduate.

**Introduction**

The Spanish sports system has experienced important changes, which are reflected in the fact that the population who practise sports has doubled in the last 15 years, which means that, already in 2015, over half of the population were practising sports (García-Ferrando and Llopis-Goig, 2017). In the European scope, current data provided by the Eurobarometer on Sport and Physical Activity of 2018 indicate that 40% of Europeans practise sports at least once per week (European Commission, 2018). However, it must be pointed out that this study states that the percentage of the population who do not practise any sport has increased, from 42% in 2009 to 46% in 2018.

This scenario has promoted the expansion of the sports industry and the employment opportunities related to it (Campos-Izquierdo, González-Rivera, and Taks, 2016). The impact that sports have on society and health has generated the concern of public authorities, who consider it necessary to maintain the health and safety rights of consumers or users of sports services, through the assurance of their quality and of their professionals. The WHO has developed a new plan of worldwide implementation to help countries to expand their policies for promoting physical activity, called “Global action plan on physical activity 2018-2030”, which responds to the demands for updated guiding and a framework of effective and viable policy measures to increase physical activity in all levels.

This situation shows that the sports sector is in the process of professionalization. With reference to the theory of the sports job market of Heinemann (1998), Spain is in the equator of the process, since, according to this author, the development of the sports job market can be divided into three phases (Campos-Izquierdo, Pablos-Abella and Mestre-Sancho, 2006a):

- Pioneers phase: the market is young, there are no access restrictions, new professional fields and possibilities emerge and there is no corporate organization.

- Organisers phase: the first attempts to organize and regulate the market appear, and the training guidelines are codified. It is the first phase in which the public accept a profession, without the collective having authoritative power or social representation.

- Administrators and conservatives phase: the job market is regulated and closed through academic access requirements and professional associations that regulate such market.

However, sports professions are not regulated at the Spanish state level, although there are laws that tackle such regulation in five autonomous communities: Andalusia, Catalonia, Extremadura, La Rioja and the Community of Madrid. The need for this state regulation is driven by the urge to guarantee a safe, quality sports service provided by qualified professionals with suitable training and education that meet the requirements of the different functions carried out in sports organizations (Gambau, 2011).

There are several autonomous communities that, attending to this need and in view of the lack of state legislation, regulate the practice of sports professions, determining the official academic titles or professional qualifications needed for the positions in this market and assigning to each profession its corresponding functional scope, all of this in accordance with the general laws on academic and professional awards. The way in which the regulation was carried out in these autonomous communities was different. In some cases it was done through a specific law on the practice of sports professions and, in other cases, such as in Andalusia and La Rioja, this was conducted through their own Sports Law.

Law 3/2008, of April 23<sup>rd</sup>, on the practice of sports professions, Catalonia, gathers the professions of sports manager, trainer and sports instructor. Law 15/2015, of April 16<sup>th</sup>, which regulates the practice of sports professions in Extremadura, and Law 6/2016, of November 24<sup>th</sup>, which regulates the practice of sports professions in the Community of Madrid, also include the profession of physical trainer.

Law 1/2015, of March 23<sup>rd</sup>, which regulates physical exercise and sports in La Rioja, is the one with the widest diversity of professions: sports manager, manager of sports facilities, trainer, physical educator, sports instructor, sports competition assistant, natural environment guide and technicians without professional commitment.

Law 5/2016, of July 19<sup>th</sup>, which regulates sports in Andalusia, does not recognise the profession of physical trainer, although it considers it as a professional activity integrated in the profession of sports trainer in its article 92.6: “when functions of physical training are specifically carried out regarding athletes and teams, those who work as sports trainers must have the degree in Physical Activity and Sports Science, or an equivalent qualification”.

The last one to be approved is Law 3/2018, of March 26<sup>th</sup>, which regulates the practice of sports professions in Murcia. In addition to the professions recognised by Extremadura and Madrid (sports manager, physical trainer, sports trainer and sports instructor), it incorporates the professions of physical educator/sports therapist and sports lifeguard.

Likewise, and as a consequence of the period of professionalization that the sector is undergoing, the Professional Association of Graduates in Physical Activity and Sports Science (PAGPASS) is growing. Professional associations are institutions recognised by the Spanish Constitution (art. 36), and they differ from each other in nature and functions. They are not associations, unions, business associations, foundations, or professional organizations. Professional associations are public limited corporations that defend the interests of their affiliates. Their main function is to ensure the compliance with the professional duties. In Spain, according to the data of October 2017, there were 11,726 affiliates, which shows that, e.g. in Andalusia, the number of affiliates has doubled in the last four years, as stated in the yearly reports of the Andalusian Association. However, the number of university graduates in PAGPASS each year is much higher than the number of affiliations.

With respect to official sports teaching in Spain, they are currently classified into vocational training, advanced training and university teachings, corresponding to ISCED level 4, 5 and 6, respectively.

Regarding the professional opportunities for the university degree in PAGPASS, in 2004, the Spanish Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) approved and published the White Paper on the Degree in Physical Activity and Sports Science (Del Villar, 2005). Later, the Spanish Conference of Institutes and Faculties of Physical Activity and Sports Science approved unanimously the adaptation of the White Paper on the Degree to the Royal Decree 1393/2007, of October 29<sup>th</sup>, which regulates the official university teachings. This white book, based on the analysis of the job market, establishes the existence of five professional profiles, with specific competences for each profile:

- Teaching in physical education
- Sports training
- Physical activity and health
- Sports management
- Sports leisure

Although there are previous studies that analyse the profile of these professionals, either they are not recent (Campos-Izquierdo et al., 2006a; Campos-Izquierdo, Pablos-Abella and Mestre-Sancho, 2006b) or they focused on the analysis of a single autonomous community (Rodeiro, Gambau and Silva, 2018).

Therefore, the aim of the present study was to determine the profile of affiliate sports professionals with a degree in PASS in Spain.

### Material and methods

This is a transversal study. The information was provided by the Council of the Official Spanish Association of Graduates in Physical Activity and Sports Science (OSAGPASS Council), and a survey was created with different socio-demographic variables, through which the participants were asked about their gender, age, whether they had people depending on them, training/education obtained and profession/s they practiced, to determine whether there was multiple employment.

This survey was sent online to the different autonomous associations, which then gave it to their affiliates. The period established for the gathering of data was from June to October 2017.

Thus, the sample corresponds to affiliates of different autonomous PAGPASS of Spain. It consisted of 1,130 people (335 women and 795 men) who represented 9.6% of the total number of affiliates at the time of gathering the data.

To study the data, a descriptive analysis was carried out in absolute values, frequencies and percentages, using the statistical software SPSS v.24.

### Results

After the sample collection, the analysis of the data determined that 70.4% of graduates in PASS are men and 29.6% are women, of whom 47.2% are between 26 and 35 years of age (Table 1). Of the total sample, 31.9% have people depending on them, whose percentage is higher for those who said yes from the age group of 36-40 years onward with respect to those who said no.

Table 1. Age range and gender. Age range and people depending on them.

	Men	Women	Total	No people depending on them	Yes, people depending on them	Total
□ 65 years	0.4%	0.3%		0.4%		0.3%
18-25 years	14.0%	13.5%	12.2%	19.6%	0.3%	13.5%
26-30 years	24.8%	24.5%	23.9%	33.2%	6.1%	24.5%
31-35 years	21.5%	22.7%	25.7%	24.6%	18.8%	22.7%
36-40 years	16.9%	15.3%	11.6%	11.1%	24.4%	15.3%
41-45 years	9.7%	11.2%	14.9%	5.6%	23.3%	11.2%
46-50 years	6.0%	5.8%	5.4%	2.6%	12.7%	5.8%
51-55 years	4.0%	4.1%	4.2%	1.0%	10.5%	4.1%
56-60 years	1.8%	1.7%	1.5%	1.0%	3.0%	1.7%
61-65 years	1.0%	0.9%	0.6%	0.9%	0.8%	0.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Of the total sample, 92.2% had complementary training/education, of whom 51.7% had studied a master's degree or a postgraduate course related to the profession (Table 2).

Table 2. Complementary training/education.

Type	ISCED	%
Master's or postgraduate related to the sports sector	7	51.7%
Federative title	-	41.8%
Other degree	6	22.4%
Master's or postgraduate unrelated to the sports sector	7	14.6%
PhD related to the sports sector	8	12.9%
Other	-	12.6%
Advanced technician in physical-sports entertainment (TAFAD)	5	11.4%
I do not have any other studies	-	7.7%
Vocational training	4	7.6%
PhD unrelated to the sports sector	8	0.9%

With respect to professional practice, 86.3% were working in the field of physical activity and sports. Specifically, as shown in Table 3, most professionals work as teachers, followed by those who work in the scope of health/fitness, and, to a lesser extent, those who work in management and competition. Moreover, 44.8%

combine their main job with another job, which could be in the same field or not, with 13.4% of the total sample being the ones who work in some other scope for a salary in addition to their main sports activity.

Table 3. Scope of the professional practice

Profession	%
Teaching	37.7%
Health/fitness	20.4%
Management	12.8%
Competition	9.4%

### Discussion

The number of studies focused on graduates in PASS is very scarce, which hinders the comparison of their findings; however, with respect to the results obtained, it could be asserted that the profile coincides with those provided by Rodeiro et al. (2018), and Campos-Izquierdo et al. (2006a). The latter, in their book about graduates in PASS, states that these are 65.9% men, under 35 years of age (59.3%), with more than one job (52.7%) and work in educational centres (49.6%). This shows the poor evolution.

With respect to multiple employment, as confirmed by Campos-Izquierdo et al. (2006a), those who carry out several of these functions, engage mostly in Physical Education and sports teaching with the training of teams or individuals for competitions or passing physical tests, and also in tasks of organization and coordination of physical activity and sports with the care and maintenance of physical shape.

Multiple academic/professional title holding is a common characteristic of these graduates, although Campos-Izquierdo et al. (2006a) asserted in their book that most of them did not. The data of the present study not only show that they do take other official courses, but also that the percentage of those who do is considerable. Both studies coincide in that ongoing training is extensive and diversified.

However, although the data are generally in agreement, there are aspects that may show a different scenario. Regarding the dedication in the teaching scope, in the last years the number of affiliates who work as teachers had decreased; previous studies show that the percentage of graduates who worked as teachers was over 55% (Martínez del Castillo and Jiménez-Beatty, 2001), and more recent studies show that this percentage decreased to 46% and 50% in the works of Carratalá, Mayorga, Mestre, Montesinos and Rubio (2004) and Campos-Izquierdo et al. (2006b), down to 37.7%, as shown in the present study. These data may be a reflection of the diversification of the sector and, therefore, of the profession.

### Conclusions

This study concludes with the contribution of a possible profile of the university graduate in PASS, i.e., a man between 26 and 35 years of age, with no people depending on him, who complemented his studies with a master's degree or a postgraduate course related to the profession and works as a teacher in secondary education. It is worth highlighting that this profile has not undergone important changes in the last years, with a significant difference between genders, which is similar to the imbalance observed in university students (Coteron, Franco and Gil, 2012).

Another noteworthy fact is that over 90% of the graduates undertake complementary training/education. This could reflect the need for specialization required for the professional practice in the sports scope and the fact that the same degree grants access to very different professions shows that students pursue such specialization with this complementary training/education.

Lastly, as a reflection of the diversification of the sector, it was observed that, regarding the professional occupation, previous studies show that over 55% of the graduates worked as teachers; increasingly recent studies report that this percentage has decreased to 46% and 50%, until it reached 37%, as shown in the present study.

The interest of this study is to know a collective that, not only it is important for the professional associations of PASS, which could establish action strategies with these data, but also for sports professionals with the maximum official education. The associations, knowing the profile of the professionals they represent, will be able to adapt the complementary services they offer, such as the civil liability insurance and other agreements with companies of the sports sector, to ensure that their affiliates meet the demands of their professional occupation. On the other hand, it will be possible to detect those professions with less representation within the affiliate collective and run campaigns to attract these professionals into the associations.

However, as in every study, there were some limitations. Firstly, with respect to data collection, since this was carried out through an online survey, it was difficult to access some of the affiliates due to their lack of skills in the use of new technologies or simply because the email address lists provided by the associations were not fully updated. This could influence the data. On the other hand, and since there are no studies related to this, it would be appropriate to carry out a longitudinal study that could show the true evolution of this field. Regarding the analysis of the data, crossing some of the variables would have generated more information, as well as linear regressions.

Lastly, considering the limitations of the study, future lines of research should establish groups by segmentation and analyse in detail the multiple employment of the sample and the characteristics that result from this. Likewise, it is intended to determine the working situation of these professionals with respect to the quality of the employment and their satisfaction. As a final suggestion, the authors propose to carry out a study about the salary gap and the differences in access to managerial jobs between men and women.

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