

STRENGTH & CONDITIONING PROFESSION

IQF Role Classification & Salary Alignment Guide

How S&C roles are classified against the IUSCA IQF Practitioner framework, and how salary, requirements, and role scope are assessed for fair alignment.



GUIDE

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FRAMEWORK

Purpose & Scope

Purpose

This guide explains how roles listed on the IUSCA Job Board may be classified according to the IUSCA IQF Strength and Conditioning Practitioner framework, and how IUSCA may evaluate the alignment between role scope, salary, qualification requirements, experience expectations, responsibility, and practitioner autonomy.

The guide is intended to support employers, practitioners, universities, internal reviewers, and the wider strength and conditioning community by improving role clarity and encouraging fair, proportionate, and transparent recruitment practice.

This document should be read alongside the IUSCA IQF Level Descriptors, which define progression in strength and conditioning practice through increasing sophistication in reasoning, professional judgement, autonomy, complexity management, and error correction. The IQF Level Descriptors establish that progression in S&C is not simply a matter of accumulating more methods, qualifications, or years of experience, but reflects the practitioner's ability to define problems, interpret evidence, make decisions in context, and act effectively under uncertainty.

Scope

This guide may be applied to strength and conditioning, athletic development, physical preparation, performance sport, sport science, university, school, academy, club, institute, private-sector, and related practitioner roles.

It may be used for:

- Employer-submitted vacancies
- Publicly available roles identified by IUSCA
- Internal review of job adverts
- Employer guidance
- Practitioner career guidance
- University role review
- Future salary and employment standards work

The guide does not replace local employment law, institutional grading systems, national qualification frameworks, or employer-specific role evaluation processes. It provides an IUSCA professional interpretation of the advertised role based on the information available.

Relationship to the IQF Level Descriptors

The IQF Level Descriptors provide the foundation for role classification.

In the Level Descriptors, practitioner progression is described across several dimensions of professional practice, including:

Dimension	Relevance to role classification
Reasoning orientation	How the role requires the practitioner to think, interpret, justify, and adapt decisions
Outcome definition and intent	Whether outcomes are externally defined, clearly specified, or strategically shaped
Adaptation and stimulus reasoning	The level of responsibility for matching training stimulus to intended adaptation

Dimension	Relevance to role classification
Relationship to evidence and scientific reasoning	How far the role requires interpretation, evaluation, and application of evidence
Complexity and variable management	The extent to which the role involves interacting variables, trade-offs, and uncertainty
Autonomy and responsibility	The level of independent decision-making and accountability
Error detection and correction	The extent to which the practitioner must identify, monitor, revise, and improve practice

These dimensions provide the basis for classifying roles listed on the IUSCA Job Board.

A job title alone is not sufficient to determine IQF level. Two roles with the same title may sit at different levels if they differ substantially in autonomy, responsibility, complexity, athlete population, supervision, leadership, or decision-making expectations.

IQF Role Classification

IUSCA may classify a role according to the IQF level that best reflects the likely practitioner capability required to perform the role appropriately.

The classification is based on the advertised role scope and requirements. It is not automatically determined by the employer's preferred job title, the salary offered, or the qualifications listed.

For example, a role advertised as an “Assistant Strength and Conditioning Coach” may still align with IQF Level 6 if it involves autonomous programme design, complex interdisciplinary working, responsibility for athlete outcomes, and minimal supervision.

Equally, a role requiring a master's degree or advanced certification may not necessarily be a high-level role if the actual responsibilities are limited, supervised, or delivery-focused.

Typical Role Alignment by IQF Level

IQF Level	Typical role alignment	Broad interpretation
IQF Level 2	Instructor, supervised assistant, placement, delivery-focused role	Structured delivery under supervision, with limited responsibility for independent decision-making
IQF Level 4	Defined-scope practitioner, assistant coach, early-career autonomous delivery	Independent practice within a clearly defined scope, with accountability for decisions and outcomes within that scope
IQF Level 6	Scientific practitioner, autonomous S&C coach, evidence-informed programme design	Full professional accountability, evidence-informed programme design, complex decision-making, and responsibility for athlete or cohort outcomes
IQF Level 7	Advanced or senior practitioner, lead role, complex interdisciplinary responsibility	Strategic responsibility across teams or systems, leadership of others' decision quality, and management of organisational complexity
IQF Level 8	Strategic leader, head of performance, expert practitioner, profession-level contributor	Field-shaping leadership, governance, policy, standards, strategic influence, and contribution to the wider development of the profession

Levels 1, 3, and 5 remain important within the full IQF framework, but job-board classification will most commonly use Levels 2, 4, 6, 7, and 8 because these correspond more clearly to common employment categories.

Where a role appears to sit between two levels, IUSCA may classify it as a transitional or developmental role. For example:

- IQF Level 2 to 4 developmental
- IQF Level 4 to 6
- IQF Level 6 to 7

This may be appropriate where a role includes both supervised and autonomous elements, or where the position is designed to support progression into a higher level of practice.

CLASSIFICATION

Role Classification by Level

The following sections outline how a role may be classified at each IQF level, the typical features IUSCA looks for, examples of roles that commonly align, and the associated certification wording.

ROLE CLASSIFICATION

IQF Level 2 · Supervised Practitioner

A role may be classified at IQF Level 2 where the practitioner is primarily expected to deliver structured tasks under supervision.

Typical features may include:

Classification factor	Typical indication
Autonomy	Limited independent decision-making
Supervision	Direct or regular supervision required
Programme design	Programmes are provided by others
Decision-making	Routine decisions within a structured environment
Athlete population	Lower-risk or closely supervised populations
Responsibility	Limited responsibility for outcomes
Evidence use	Basic application of established principles
Error correction	Feedback and correction mainly provided by others

Typical roles may include:

- S&C placement student
- Supervised intern
- Assistant instructor
- Delivery assistant
- Early developmental coach
- Volunteer or placement role with structured supervision

Level 2 roles should not normally require advanced certification, degree qualifications, extensive experience, or independent responsibility for athlete outcomes.

ROLE CLASSIFICATION

IQF Level 4 · Practitioner

A role may be classified at IQF Level 4 where the practitioner is expected to make independent decisions within a defined scope of practice.

Typical features may include:

Classification factor	Typical indication
Autonomy	Independent decisions within clear role boundaries
Supervision	Oversight available, but not constant direct supervision
Programme design	May adapt or design programmes within defined parameters
Decision-making	Can justify decisions using principles and intended outcomes
Athlete population	Defined group or lower to moderate complexity caseload
Responsibility	Accountable for outcomes within role scope
Evidence use	Applies evidence contextually and recognises limitations
Error correction	Uses feedback to adjust practice without reliance on constant correction

Typical roles may include:

- Assistant S&C Coach
- S&C Practitioner
- Academy S&C Coach
- School Athletic Development Coach
- University S&C Coach with defined responsibility
- Early-career practitioner role with appropriate supervision and support

Level 4 roles may appropriately list IUSCA IQF Level 4 Practitioner certification, or equivalent recognised professional certification, as desirable or essential depending on the level of autonomy and responsibility. Level 4 roles should not list a degree as an essential requirement.

ROLE CLASSIFICATION

IQF Level 6 · Scientific Practitioner

A role may be classified at IQF Level 6 where the practitioner is expected to operate as an autonomous scientific practitioner with full professional accountability for a defined area of practice.

Typical features may include:

Classification factor	Typical indication
Autonomy	Full professional accountability within a defined role
Supervision	Works independently, with senior oversight where appropriate
Programme design	Designs, evaluates, and adapts programmes based on evidence, context, and outcomes
Decision-making	Makes consistent decisions under complexity and uncertainty
Athlete population	Responsible for meaningful athlete, cohort, or team outcomes

Classification factor	Typical indication
Responsibility	Accountable for planning, implementation, monitoring, and adaptation
Evidence use	Integrates multiple sources of evidence and acts with incomplete information
Error correction	Builds learning and feedback into practice

Typical roles may include:

- Strength and Conditioning Coach
- Lead practitioner for a defined sport or cohort
- University S&C Coach with autonomous caseload
- Performance support practitioner
- Applied sport science and S&C practitioner
- S&C Coach responsible for programme design and athlete outcomes

Level 6 roles may appropriately list IUSCA IQF Level 6 Scientific Practitioner / aISCP, or equivalent recognised professional certification, as desirable or essential depending on the scope of the role.

ROLE CLASSIFICATION

IQF Level 7 · Advanced Scientific Practitioner

A role may be classified at IQF Level 7 where the practitioner is expected to operate at an advanced or senior level, often with responsibility for other practitioners, interdisciplinary systems, departmental practice, or complex organisational decision-making.

Typical features may include:

Classification factor	Typical indication
Autonomy	Strategic or senior responsibility across teams, systems, or departments
Supervision	May supervise, mentor, or evaluate other practitioners
Programme design	Shapes systems and environments, not only individual programmes
Decision-making	Manages complex trade-offs and second-order consequences
Athlete population	High-complexity or high-performance population
Responsibility	Responsible for others' decision quality and professional practice
Evidence use	Critiques models, assumptions, and methods
Error correction	Establishes cultures and systems that support learning and review

Typical roles may include:

- Senior S&C Coach
- Lead S&C Coach
- Head of Athletic Development
- Performance Lead

- Lead Practitioner across multiple sports or teams
- Senior university S&C or performance role
- Interdisciplinary performance support lead

Level 7 roles may appropriately list IUSCA IQF Level 7 Advanced Scientific Practitioner / aISCP*^m, or equivalent recognised professional certification, as desirable or essential depending on role seniority.

ROLE CLASSIFICATION

IQF Level 8 · Master Practitioner / Thought Leader

A role may be classified at IQF Level 8 where the practitioner is expected to provide strategic leadership, influence systems beyond a single programme or team, shape standards, lead governance, or contribute to the wider development of the profession.

Typical features may include:

Classification factor	Typical indication
Autonomy	Highest-level strategic responsibility
Supervision	Leads senior staff, systems, policy, or organisational direction
Programme design	Influences the structures through which programmes and departments operate
Decision-making	Works at policy, governance, paradigm, or organisational strategy level
Athlete population	Responsibility may extend across organisations, systems, or national/international structures
Responsibility	Accountable for long-term standards, systems, and professional consequences
Evidence use	Develops, refines, or challenges explanatory frameworks
Error correction	Establishes mechanisms for ongoing revision, governance, and professional integrity

Typical roles may include:

- Head of Strength and Conditioning
- Director of Performance
- Director of Athletic Development
- Head of Performance Services
- Strategic consultant
- National or international performance lead
- Senior university or organisational leadership role
- Professional standards, education, or governance role

Level 8 roles may appropriately list IUSCA IQF Level 8 Master Practitioner / mISCP, or equivalent recognised professional certification, as desirable or essential depending on the nature of the role.

REFERENCE

Classification Factors

When classifying a role, IUSCA may consider the following factors.

Autonomy

Autonomy refers to the extent to which the practitioner is expected to make independent decisions.

A role with limited autonomy may involve delivery of pre-planned sessions under supervision. A role with high autonomy may involve independent programme design, athlete management, interdisciplinary decision-making, and accountability for outcomes.

Supervision

Supervision refers to the level of support, oversight, and review provided.

Developmental roles should include clear supervision, mentoring, and escalation routes. Roles with limited supervision should not normally be classified at a low level if the practitioner is expected to carry significant responsibility for outcomes.

Athlete or Client Population

The complexity, risk, and performance level of the athlete or client population may influence role classification.

A role working with developing athletes in a highly supervised environment may require a different level of capability from a role working independently with elite, professional, high-risk, injured, or complex populations.

Programme Design Responsibility

Programme design responsibility is a key classification factor.

Roles focused mainly on delivery may sit at a lower level. Roles requiring independent design, monitoring, adjustment, evaluation, and integration with wider performance planning will usually sit at a higher level.

Decision-Making Complexity

Roles differ in the complexity of decisions required.

Lower-level roles usually involve routine decisions within clear parameters. Higher-level roles require the practitioner to manage uncertainty, competing priorities, incomplete information, indirect consequences, and trade-offs between short- and long-term outcomes.

Interdisciplinary Working

The extent and nature of interdisciplinary working may influence classification.

A role that requires the practitioner to contribute to multidisciplinary meetings may not automatically be high level. However, a role requiring the practitioner to lead interdisciplinary decision-making, coordinate performance strategy, or manage conflicts between professional perspectives may indicate a higher IQF level.

Leadership Responsibility

Leadership responsibility includes formal line management, mentoring, supervision of junior staff, leadership of systems, and responsibility for the decision quality of others.

Roles involving leadership of people, processes, departments, or organisational systems will usually require classification at a higher level than roles focused only on individual delivery.

Required Qualifications

IUSCA considers qualification requirements as part of classification, but qualifications alone do not determine the IQF level of a role.

A role requiring a master's degree or advanced certification may still be classified at a lower level if the responsibilities are limited, supervised, or delivery-focused.

Where a role requires high-level qualifications, IUSCA will consider whether the salary and role scope are proportionate to those requirements.

Required Experience

Experience requirements should be proportionate to the role.

High experience requirements may indicate a higher-level role, but this depends on whether the responsibilities actually require advanced judgement, autonomy, and complexity management.

IUSCA may identify a mismatch where a role requires several years of experience for a role that is low paid, narrowly scoped, heavily supervised, or mainly delivery-based.

Strategic Influence

Strategic influence refers to the extent to which the practitioner shapes systems, standards, policy, organisational direction, or the work of others.

Roles with significant strategic influence are more likely to align with IQF Level 7 or Level 8.

Contribution to Practice

Contribution to practice refers to the practitioner's role in improving methods, systems, standards, professional learning, education, governance, research translation, or the wider development of the field.

This is particularly relevant to higher-level roles, especially Level 7 and Level 8.

ALIGNMENT

Salary & Role Alignment

In addition to IQF role classification, IUSCA may provide a salary and role alignment rating.

This rating considers whether the salary, employment conditions, qualification requirements, experience expectations, responsibility, and autonomy appear reasonably aligned.

The rating is not intended as a personal judgement on an employer. It is an assessment of the advertised role based on the information available.

Salary and Role Alignment Ratings

IUSCA applies a four-point rating to indicate how well the advertised salary and package align with the role scope and requirements.

Rating	Meaning
Green	Salary, requirements, and role scope appear appropriately aligned
Amber	Some mismatch exists, but the role is not clearly below expected standards
Red	Salary appears materially below the level expected for the responsibilities or requirements
Grey	Salary not disclosed or insufficient information is available

GREEN	Appropriately aligned
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A Green rating indicates that the role appears to show reasonable alignment between salary, role scope, qualification requirements, experience expectations, responsibility, and autonomy.

A Green rating may be applied where:

- Salary or salary range is clearly disclosed
- Role expectations are clear
- Essential criteria are proportionate
- Experience requirements are reasonable
- The advertised responsibilities match the likely IQF level
- The salary appears suitable for the role scope and context
- Developmental roles include appropriate supervision
- Senior roles are appropriately recognised in salary and status

A Green rating does not guarantee that the role is suitable for every applicant, nor does it represent a full endorsement of the employer. It indicates that the advertised role appears broadly aligned based on the information available.

AMBER	Some mismatch may exist
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An Amber rating indicates that some mismatch may exist, but the role is not clearly or materially below expected standards.

An Amber rating may be applied where:

- Salary is slightly low for the apparent role scope
- The role requires more experience than appears necessary
- Essential criteria may be somewhat excessive
- A postgraduate qualification is listed where desirable status may be more appropriate
- The responsibilities are broad but not clearly senior
- The role includes some ambiguity around autonomy or supervision
- Salary alignment is difficult to judge due to regional or sector variation

An Amber rating may be accompanied by an editorial note explaining the main area of concern.

RED**Materially below expected level**

A Red rating indicates that the advertised salary or employment package appears materially below the level expected for the responsibilities, qualifications, experience, autonomy, or professional judgement required.

A Red rating may be applied where:

- The role requires advanced qualifications or certification but offers a low salary
- A degree/master's degree is essential for a role that appears assistant-level or low paid
- Several years of experience are required for a role that is not appropriately remunerated
- The practitioner is expected to work autonomously without salary recognition
- The role includes significant responsibility for athlete outcomes but low pay
- The role involves management, leadership, or strategic responsibility without appropriate grading or salary
- An unpaid or very low-paid role includes substantial professional responsibility
- The advert appears to overstate requirements while understating reward or support

A Red rating does not necessarily mean the role cannot be listed. However, it indicates that IUSCA considers there to be a significant misalignment in the advertised role.

GREY**Insufficient information**

A Grey rating indicates that salary has not been disclosed or that insufficient information is available to assess alignment.

A Grey rating may be applied where:

- No salary or salary range is provided
- FTE or hours are unclear
- Contract terms are unclear
- Responsibilities are too vague
- Qualification or experience requirements are incomplete
- The role cannot be reasonably classified from the information provided

IUSCA encourages employers to disclose salary information and provide sufficient detail to allow applicants to make informed decisions.

Factors Considered in Salary and Role Alignment

IUSCA may consider the following factors when applying a salary and role alignment rating.

Factor	Relevance
Salary	Whether pay appears appropriate for the role level and context
FTE / working hours	Whether the salary reflects the actual working commitment
Country or region	Salary expectations differ across jurisdictions and labour markets
Sector	University, professional sport, school, academy, private sector, charity, or public sector roles may differ
Contract type	Permanent, fixed-term, casual, seasonal, internship, placement, or self-employed arrangements may affect interpretation
Required qualifications	Degree, postgraduate degree, professional certification, or specialist qualifications
Required experience	Number of years and relevance of experience expected
Responsibility level	Responsibility for athlete outcomes, programmes, staff, systems, budgets, or strategy
Practitioner autonomy	Level of independent decision-making and accountability
Postgraduate qualification requirements	Whether master's or doctoral-level requirements are proportionate
Advanced certification requirements	Whether high-level certification requirements match salary and scope
Management responsibility	Whether line management or supervision is appropriately recognised
Strategic responsibility	Whether departmental, organisational, or system-level responsibility is appropriately recognised

Relationship Between IQF Level and Salary Alignment

IQF classification and salary alignment are related, but they are not the same.

The IQF classification identifies the level of practice the role appears to require.

The salary alignment rating evaluates whether the salary and employment package appear proportionate to that level of practice and to the advertised requirements.

For example:

Example	Possible classification	Possible salary alignment
Supervised placement role with clear mentoring and limited responsibility	IQF Level 2	Green
Assistant role requiring MSc, advanced certification, and 3 years' experience at a low salary	IQF Level 4	Red
Autonomous S&C coach role with fair salary and appropriate certification requirements	IQF Level 6	Green
Lead role with staff management but unclear salary and contract terms	IQF Level 7	Grey or Amber

Example	Possible classification	Possible salary alignment
Head of Performance role with strategic responsibility but salary below senior practitioner expectations	IQF Level 8	Red or Amber

A lower-level role is not automatically problematic if the salary, support, and requirements are proportionate.

A higher-level role is not automatically well aligned if the salary, contract, or expectations are inappropriate.

Editorial Notes

Where helpful, IUSCA may include a short editorial note alongside a listing.

Editorial notes should be factual, proportionate, and focused on role alignment.

Examples may include:

Scenario	Example editorial note
Excessive qualification requirement	The role appears to sit at IQF Level 4, but the requirement for a degree may be above the likely role scope and salary level.
Low salary for responsibility	The role includes autonomous programme design and responsibility for athlete outcomes, which appears closer to IQF Level 6. The salary appears below the level IUSCA would normally expect for this scope.
Good alignment	The salary, responsibilities, qualification requirements, and supervision arrangements appear appropriately aligned for an early-career practitioner role.
Insufficient information	Salary and FTE information were not disclosed, so IUSCA is unable to assess salary alignment fully.

Editorial notes should not be used to make personal or reputational judgements about an employer.

Use of “Or Equivalent” Certification Language

IUSCA encourages employers to include relevant IQF certification wording in job adverts.

The recommended format is:

Relevant IUSCA IQF Level X Strength and Conditioning Practitioner certification, or equivalent recognised professional certification.

This wording supports recognition of the IUSCA IQF pathway while allowing employers to recognise other appropriate qualifications and certifications.

The appropriate level should be determined by the role scope, not simply by employer preference.

Limitations

Role classification and salary alignment are based on the information available at the time of review.

IUSCA may not have access to full job descriptions, internal grading documents, benefits packages, pension arrangements, workload expectations, institutional context, or local salary data.

The classification and rating should therefore be understood as a professional interpretation of the advertised role, not a legal determination, employment ruling, or formal job evaluation.

Review and Development

IUSCA may update this guide as the IQF framework develops, as additional salary data becomes available, and as the Job Board generates further insight into employment practice across the strength and conditioning profession.

The aim of future updates will be to support clearer career pathways, fairer recruitment, appropriate professional recognition, and better alignment between role expectations, practitioner capability, and employment conditions.

Classification follows practice. A job title alone does not determine IQF level — autonomy, responsibility, complexity, and accountability do.