

# «MORE THAN GOLD»

## Guidelines to Promote the Dual Career of Athletes-Students: Methodology for Universities

Ilvis Abelkalns, Pascal Izzicupo, Antonio Sánchez-Pato, Antonio J. Figueiredo,  
Liliana Elisabeta Radu & Laura Capranica

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**“MORE THAN GOLD”  
GUIDELINES TO PROMOTE THE DUAL CAREER OF ATHLETES-STUDENTS:  
METHODOLOGY FOR UNIVERSITIES**

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Liliana Elisabeta Radu & Laura Capranica

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## GLOSSARY

**High-Performance Athlete** (Elite athlete) - an athlete recognized by the Respectful sports organizations as a member/candidate of national team in the appropriate age group (or oldest/higher).

**University Athlete** - an athlete who studies at a university and engages in a specific sport at a university and represents a university in a specific level competition defined by university.

**Dual Career Athlete** - A High Achieving (Elite) athlete and/or university athlete studying in a higher educational study program.

**Scholarship** - a grant or payment made to support a **students-athletes'** education, awarded on the basis of academic or/and sport merit. This amount of award is supposed to cover tuition fees and/or sport related fees.

**Tuition fee** - financial cost set by university to be paid by students for educational services. Under dual career scholarships can be different kind of support, also, for example, tuition fee.



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DC	Dual Career
EAS	European Athlete as Students (Dual Career Network)
EC	European Championship
EPAS	the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport
EU	European Union
EUSA	European Association of University Sports
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
FADU	Academic Federation of University Sports
FISU	International Federation of University Sports
MTG	More than Gold
NC	National Championship
NOK	National Olympic Committee
OG	Olympic Games
SAs	Student-athletes
UCAM	Catolica San Antonio de Murcia University
UAIC	Alexandru Ioan Cuza University
UL	University of Latvia
WC	World Championship



## INTRODUCTION

Already in 2007, the European Commission in its “White Paper on Sport” declared the importance to provide “Dual Career” training for young athletes already at an early stage, in order to ensure the reintegration of professional sportspersons into the labour market upon the completion of their sporting careers (European Commission, 2007).

In addition, in 2008 the Council of the European Union in Declaration (European Commission, 2011) called for the strengthening of the dialogue with the International Olympic Committee and representatives of the world of sport, in particular, on the question of combined sports training and education for young people.

Following the European Council’s call in 2008 to address the issue of “Dual Careers” “Developing the European Dimension in Sport” (European Commission, 2011), the Commission emphasized the importance of ensuring that young high-performance athletes were offered quality education in parallel to their sports training.

The EU guidelines on Dual Career of Athletes (European Commission, 2012), which is recommended Policy Actions in Support on Dual Careers in High-Performance Sport (approved by the EU Expert Group “Education & Training in Sport” at its meeting in Poznań on 28 September, 2012) stated that the promotion of Dual Careers of athletes matched with the several aims of the Europe 2020 Strategy:

- prevention of early school leaving;
- more graduates in higher education;
- higher employability;
- increase of economic activity of citizens;
- making sport policies more efficient by keeping more talented and high-performance athletes in the sport system.

According to the Conclusions on Dual Careers for athletes published the European Commission in 2013 (European Commission, 2013), the term

“Dual Career” implies that an athlete is able to combine their sporting career, including high quality training, with education and/or work in a flexible way.

The EU Work Plan for Sport 2017-2020 adapted by the Council of Ministers proposed that the EU Work Plan for Sport should be governed also by the following guiding objective: it should take into account the relationship between education and sport, including Dual Careers (Council of the European Union, 2017).

It should be specified that Latvia as an initiator of the project marks the compliance of the project with the Latvian Guidelines. In the end of the year 2013, “Sports Policy Guidelines for year 2014 – 2020” were adapted where the point 10.4 states that “One of the goals of the country is to create a Dual Career model for athletes who have successfully represented Latvia in the past 4 years in such competitions as the Olympic Games, the European and World Championships (1 - 6th place), which substantiates their capacity to successfully combine their studies in a state-funded programme up to bachelor’s degree in the selected scientific or scholarly field” (Ministru kabinets, 2013).

The overall goal of the project was to develop Dual Career Guidelines for higher education institutions (HEI) and strengthen Dual Career policies in all EU countries, especially in the countries, where Dual Career policy is at an early development stage. Furthermore, in the project framework, the best practices comprising different activities for students, which can help students (for instance, career center services, psychologist services, mentoring program for students, etc.) within the study process were collected. It led to the development of methodology for HEIs aimed at sharing how already existing activities in HEIs can be used for supporting Dual Career.

Apparently enough, successful athletes should possess certain characteristics (e.g., being goal-oriented, hard-working, etc.).

The skillsets and characteristics common among successful athletes can also be found among the best employees:

- Athletes are resilient both physically and mentally.

The best employees the same way as athletes need to be able to function at a high level, consistently and for long periods of time. Likewise, successful athletes similarly to successful employees need to be able to learn from their mistakes and move on.

- The same way as athletes in team sports need to be team players, the best employees in partnerships need to be able to work with their partners and lead teams effectively.

- For the best employees, having talent and skills is meaningless unless they possess strong work ethics to put effort into their key objectives for 60+ hours per week. Similarly, the best athletes in the world will not be the best just because of their skills. A successful athlete can achieve very high results in their “second career” due to being aware that in order to succeed, they should really work hard.
- Clear focus on the game, and nothing but the game, is critical to winning among athletes. Focus is necessary for success also for the best employees.

An athlete having a higher education degree is a valuable human resource and is competitive on a labour market.

According to the international research (European Commission, 2012), *every year 30% of young people between 10 and 18 who do sports give it up as they find that their sport activities take up too much of their time*. This is especially the case for high-performance athletes; it is difficult to reconcile the demands of their sporting life with the challenges and constraints of the education system or the labour market.

Likewise, in many countries, where the development of Dual Career is at an early stage, sport is not promoted as a career choice that can be successful not only during the active period, but may contribute to the development of personal career in general. The conclusion can also be drawn that athletes frequently face psychological pressure – “now or never”. You get “all or nothing” and one may not have this opportunity again. The athlete’s career is not long.

Dual Career would allow to look at sport from a different perspective, remove the psychological tension, and at the same time, help achieve the best results in sports.

In addition, the society and sport would benefit from the positive image of educated athletes who make sports more attractive for others, function as positive role models for young people and stand for the excellence in the society.

Therefore, in order to support the university, it is essential to create appropriate high-performance athlete support guidelines and methodology for HEIs based on the research on the needs of athletes, identification of problems and resources (Condello et al., 2019).

Based on the assessment of the support aimed at high-performance athletes in HEIs, the conclusion can be drawn that HEIs do not have a common

understanding of the importance of Dual Careers, which was also confirmed by the analysis of student support services and activities for athletes. Frequent support measures at HEIs vary based on the initiatives of the heads of individual structural units or academic staff, rather than on the general united guidelines on support provision (Guidotti et al., 2014).

Within the Dual Career of high-performance athletes, it is crucial to rely not only on the Dual Career and management theories, but also on the practical experience and strategy of HEIs.

Therefore, one of the objectives put forward within the project framework was to collect the best practices in higher education which can be used for Dual Career practical support ( e.g. mentoring programs for students, career centre services, etc.).

The project also focused on one of the most topical problems in the area of Dual Career putting forward the issue of “graduation time” as one of the topical ones within the Dual Career context. Upon the graduation from the middle school or sports school, the achievement levels of athletes are different. The smartest of the young athletes withstand the competition and enrol in higher education study programmes, but they are forced to finish the sporting career, as most of the universities do not have funds to provide training and competition mode in accordance with the requirements for high achievements.

The most frequently reported obstacles are the lack of support and understanding from the academic staff. The faculty should understand that high-performance athletes stand for their state and represent their country in the world, therefore, their daily lives are different.

In addition, young athletes should be aware of the fact that higher education is necessary not only for their future, but it also helps them to achieve better results in the present. Therefore, one of the objectives set within the project framework was to raise awareness of young athletes of the opportunities for the development and application of life skills as well as their needs. High-performance athletes may think that ending a career in sports can guarantee a well-paid job due to having high achievement credits (Surujlal, 2016). However, it is not always the case. Therefore, the necessity for quality education should be promoted from an early stage.



## EXPLORING ATHLETES' NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS: DISCOVERING ATHLETE'S MOTIVATION FOR A DUAL CAREER

The aim of the empirical study was to explore the opinions and attitudes of high-performance athletes towards education, sport, what support they received and what would be necessary to develop Dual Career guidelines at the national level within the project *More than Gold* (MTG).

Therefore, the survey was conducted applying the questionnaire, interviews and focus-group discussion as data collection methods. The questionnaire (see Annex 1) as a data collection tool was used in all the five Consortium partner countries (Latvia, Romania, Italy, Spain and Portugal). The key issues addressed were related to the support provision within the dual career perspective, as well as identified needs of the athletes related to the dual career implementation.

### **Study Methodology and Procedure**

The empirical research framework conducted within the MTG project was developed based on the previous research and its outcomes (Aquilina, 2009; Abelkalns, 2014; Sanches Pato, Isiodori, Calderon et al., 2017).

The aim of the empirical research was to clarify and analyse the opinions of high-performance athletes of MTG project member states on the opportunities for Dual Career implementation as well as support provision for high-performance athletes within their dual career implementation.

### **Research Description**

To achieve the key objective of the project, the empirical research was carried out to obtain data on the dual career opportunities for high-performance athletes in the project member states, in order to develop dual-career management guidelines at both the institutional and the state level.

Other objectives set within the project framework were to explore whether there was any connection between achievements in sport and education, as

well as to identify the main challenges related to the necessity to combine high-performance sport and enrollment in the higher education study process. In addition, it was also crucial to find out what conditions would be necessary to promote dual-career management.

The quantitative and qualitative study framework chosen as the research approach allowed to obtain the data necessary for the research purpose and relevant for the exploration of the issue in question (Манейм & Рич, 1997; Kroplijs & Raščevska, 2004; Geske & Grīnfelds, 2006; Kristapsone, 2008).

Quantitative methods mainly aimed at the identification of differences while qualitative methods allowed understanding the nature of the differences (Brewer, 2003).

The use of qualitative methods also ensured close contact, interaction and openness of the researcher towards the participants involved in the study, which is an advantage given the scope of the study (Creswell, 1998).

The validation of measuring instruments as well as data triangulation were performed to ensure validity and reliability of the research results (Raščevska & Kristapsone 2000; Geske & Grīnfelds, 2006).

To ensure the reliability and validity of research results, as well as following the initial research procedure, a pilot study was carried out in February, 2019.

During the first stage of the empirical research (April-May, 2019), survey as the approach to research design was carried out applying a questionnaire as one of the data collection methods to identify the high-performance athletes' opinions related to dual career implementation.

Within the second research stage (April-June, 2019), focus-group interviews with high-performance athletes were organised. In the third stage (July-August, 2019), the survey data were collected, processed, analysed and interpreted.

## **Study Ethics**

During the development and implementation of the study, the authors considered the fundamental ethical principles of the study: principles of benefit, fairness and awareness (Geske & Grīnfelds, 2006; Kristapsone, 2008).

It was clearly stated that anonymity principle was maintained for the participants involved in the study, i.e. the research sample – the personal data of the respondents (first, last name) were encrypted.

## Research Sample

The general research sample of the study comprised the high-performance athletes from the countries participating in the project (Latvia, Romania, Italy, Spain, Portugal) - participants of the Olympic Games, the world and European championships, international competitions of different types (the World Universiade, regional championships, the European Cup, etc.) and awarded winners of national championships.

Taking into account that the project team had limited access to all high-performance athletes in all the member countries, the respondents were selected from the higher education institutions involved in the project - University of Latvia (Latvia), Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (Romania), University degli Studi G. d'Annunzio Chieti - Pescara (Italy), Catolica San Antonio de Murcia University (Spain) and Coimbra University (Portugal)).

The respondent selection was performed based on the *type of the sport* and *age*. There were two groups of sports identified in the layer – *type of the sport* – individual sport athletes and team sport athletes. The layer – *age* was divided into two groups - up to 22 years, and the group over 23 years of age. At least 50% of all student-athletes enrolled in the higher education programmes in the selected HEIs were supposed to take a part in the survey.

In the further research stages, the respondents were selected from all groups and 420 questionnaires were distributed to obtain the data on the above-stated issues. The respondents included in the pilot study did not participate in the empirical study.

Out of 420 questionnaires, 296 questionnaires were completed and returned. Twelve questionnaires were not used for the processing of the data due to being incomplete.

**Table No. 1. Number of Survey Participants.**

Higher education institution	Distributed questionnaires	Eligible
University of Latvia (Latvia)	80	67
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (Romania)	100	91
University degli Studi G. d'Annunzio Chieti - Pescara (Italy)	80	67
Catolica San Antonio de Murcia University (Spain)	100	43
Coimbra University (Portugal)	60	16
TOTAL	420	284

Within the survey framework, **focus group discussion** was also applied as a data collection method to obtain a holistic view of the issue under investigation. Three focus group discussion were conducted. The research sample for the focus group discussion comprised 77 respondents (high-performance athletes - students who participate in national level competitions and take ~ first 5 places) aged 18-25.

## **Data Collection Methods and Research Tools**

As previously stated, for the purposes of the empirical study, the survey applying questionnaires, interview and focus group discussion as the data collection methods was used (Annex 1, 2).

Questionnaires and interviews as data collection tools were developed based on similar published studies on dual career implementation and the related issues (Abelkalns, 2014; Sanches et al. 2017).

Given the choice of the diverse data collection tools, the probability of the researcher's personal impact (Kristapsone, 2008) was undermined by neutral and objective attitude in the process of both data collection, analysis and interpretation.

The questionnaires developed for the athletes of the specific age group comprised specific questions based on the overall project vision related to dual career processes and management of support opportunities. Therefore, the results obtained in the project framework provide the holistic view of the problem through its exploration from different perspectives.

The questionnaire consisted of four parts, each focusing on the identification of specific issues based on the overall vision of the project.

It should also be specified that the questionnaires also included closed questions to reduce the time necessary to complete the questionnaire, as well as to reduce the number of unanswered questions and to facilitate data processing. Closed answer options were structured in different ways: versatile, dichotomy, and scale-type choices. This allowed structuring the responses, but limited the respondent to the additional disclosure (Kristapsone, 2008).

In order to obtain opinions on the management of the dual career process of high-performance athletes and develop national guidelines for dual career, **an interview** as the data collection tool developed within the project framework was applied (Annex 2).

Interview is an appropriate data collection method for the research purpose for it allows obtaining information in close social interaction between the respondent and the researcher (Creswell, 1998).

Within the study framework, a semi-structured interview was used allowing the researcher to ask additional questions and, if necessary, to obtain more detailed information. In addition, free answers positively impacted the interviewed person's expectations to provide certain answers (Kropļiņš & Raševska, 2004; Geske & Grīnfelds, 2006; Kristapsone, 2008), which ensured higher objectivity of the data obtained. An interview consisted of three parts:

- *the first* part included general questions about the respondent;
- *the second* part covered questions related to support provision issues in the daily life of high-performance athletes;
- *the third part* addressed the issues related to tutoring or official support provision for athletes and students.

Focus group interviews were documented through audio recording, then scripted for their analysis and interpretation.

A pilot study was organised to assess the effectiveness and practical application of the data collection tools developed within the project framework. The aim of the pilot study was to:

1. clarify the opinion of high-performance athletes on combining sport and professional and/or academic education. In addition, the content of the questionnaires was assessed;
2. elaborate the identified shortcomings (Kristapsone, 2008).

## The Research Process

The pilot study took place in February, 2019 involving 15 student-athletes of different age groups.

The following conclusions were drawn based on the summary and evaluation of the data obtained in the framework of the pilot study:

1. The duration of the questionnaire completion process was up to 20 minutes, as initially defined as the optimal time to complete the questionnaires;
2. Certain questions were assessed as vague based on certain criteria;
3. A proposal to add a clarification note was put forward (*a number of responses may be selected*), as it was not clear whether only one or more answers could be selected;

4. Recommendation to separate the questions concerning the tutor with a note, *please answer further only if you have a sports tutor*, was added.

Based on the feedback provided by the respondents, the questionnaire was revised and elaborated.

Within all the research stages, the data collection was performed providing as similar conditions as possible, as well as providing all the additional information and explanations if necessary.

Once questionnaires were received, they were sorted, encrypted, and the answers arranged in order to categorize them into as quantitative value as possible.

Twelve questionnaires completed by high-performance athletes were not used for data processing due to being incomplete.

Prior to interviews, the project team contacted the respondents to obtain consent for the interview and to inform them about the purpose. The organizer provided a short (5-10 min) presentation on the MTG project vision, objectives, etc. A template of the PowerPoint presentation was provided in English (attached) comprising information on the project aims, the expected contribution of participants and the organization of the workshop.

A group of five people was organized around a table with the question stated on a big paper sheet. The leader encouraged the opinion exchange. The group was asked to put forward ideas relevant for answering the question. The final stage of the workshop aimed at the identification of the five most relevant ideas and their confirmation. The duration of the procedure, as expected, was 30-40 minutes.

The questionnaire data were collected and processed using the data statistical processing programs SPSS and Excel.

The following data statistical processing methods were used for processing the data - descriptive and inferential statistics, factor analysis, content analysis.

## **2.1. Opinions of High-Performance Athletes: Results and Discussion**

The data processing and analysis carried out in the study is based on (n-284) high-performance athletes' questionnaire data, of which n-138, 48% were completed by females and n-146, 51% male respondents. The average age of high-performance athletes involved in the study was 22.4 years (range of 18-29

years). Based on the analysis of the data obtained from the high-performance athletes, the athletic achievements and experience in the learning process of the respondents were significant.

As previously specified, all the respondents were divided into two age groups: up to 22 years (n-180, 63.4%), and over 23 years (n-104, 36.6%).

Young people aged 16 - 19 are generally secondary school students, and starting from 19 up to 25 years of age they frequently enrol in higher education study programmes. As concerns high-performance athletes, the transition from secondary school to higher education institution, is of highest topicality in the process of the dual career development. The transition from secondary school to higher education for young people involves major changes in personal and daily life (changing the environment, switching from junior to adult sport) which often causes additional stress for athletes. It is challenging for athletes to identify their place in the adult community, which may be the consequence of the feeling of being unable to immediately achieve high results in sport. This may frequently lead to untimely decisions – leaving high-performance sport in favour of education, for instance, aiming to get a profession or vice versa - stopping academic or professional education in favour of the sport career.

To proceed, it should be stated that 47 % of the respondents (n-132, 47%) represented individual sports and 53 % (n-152, 53%) were team sports representatives.

Given that one of the most important preconditions for high-performance student-athletes is professional experience (in sports and education), it was crucial to find out what level of competition respondents were competing in and what level of education they had acquired.

The Table No. 2 reveals that the largest number of athletes (n-225, 79%) are enrolled in bachelor's programmes, master's (n-54, 19%), doctoral (n-3, 1%). Given the numbers, it should also be highlighted that three respondents noted that their studies were not of primary importance for them at that moment.

Apparently enough, the financial aspect is an important component in the dual career process. Therefore, it was crucial to synthesize the data on the source of funding for high-performance athletes' tuition fees. Athletes enrolled in the state-funded programmes (n-145, 51%), (n-100, 35.2%) stated that they were enrolled in the self-funded studies, while 1.4 % (n-4, 1.4%) students were partly sharing their own funding with the HEIs' budget to cover their studies expenses. It should also be admitted that 35 respondents did not provide any answer to this question.

**Table No. 2. The Current Education Status of the Respondents – High-Performance Athletes.**

<b>Studies</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Bachelor	225	79
Master	54	19
Doctoral	3	1
Other	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table No. 3. Sports Level of the Respondents – High-Performance Athletes.**

<b>Level of competition</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Elite level	127	45
National championships	122	43
Regional level	30	10
Other	5	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>100</b>

The analysis of major achievements specified by the high-performance athletes (see Table No. 3) revealed that participation in the elite level competitions - the Olympic Games, the World Championships, the Cup competition stages and the European championships (n-127, 45%) - was marked as the most frequent criterion. The World Universiade Championships and European Student Games were marked as personally crucial by 2% of the respondents (n-5, 2%).

In order to better understand the student-athletes' needs in HEIs, the views of athletes having a personal tutor (n-107, 38%) and the opinions of athletes without a personal tutor (n-177, 62%) were interpreted within different categories.

To proceed, six questions were put forward providing a number of statements on the importance of sport and education towards achievements. The answering options were presented in a form of a scale (1-5). It should be highlighted that this stage was particularly important in the context of the project, since it highlighted the factors relevant for the further analysis of the data.

Within this stage, the first question aimed to identify the main reasons for choosing the faculty or specialization to enrol in. The data obtained revealed that the majority of the respondents (n-267, 94%) gave preference to a specific



university or programme to acquire knowledge and skills within the specific study field which was of personal interest for them for numerous and different reasons. The importance of obtaining a university degree was marked by 77.8% of the respondents (n-221, 77.8%). As concerns the comparison of the data obtained from the male and female respondents, the conclusion was drawn that it was more important for the female respondents to acquire new knowledge and skills (n-105, 76.1%) than for the male respondents (n-129, 93.5%). The opportunity to obtain a University degree was identified as more important for the female respondents (n-116, 84.1%) if compared with the male respondents (n-105, 71.9%).

The comparison of opinions among student-athletes according to their athletic level revealed that high-performance athletes (n-102, 80.3%) found it crucial to receive a University degree, while those who were mainly involved in regional competitions (n-26, 86.6%) gave preference to a particular higher education institution with the aim to receive financial support for studies and sport. On the other hand, the analysis of the data obtained from athletes having tutor support and those who did not have such an opportunity revealed that the athletes who received support (n – 96, 89.7%) found it necessary and of primary importance to acquire knowledge and skills, while athletes who did not have that opportunity (n-136, 76.9%) found obtaining the degree or diploma as of highest topicality for them. It should also be stated that the youngest student-athletes - up to 22 years (n-67, 37.2%) - believed that enrolment in higher education programmes would help them finding a better team and “sign a contract”.

Within the further survey stages, the academic plans of high-performance student-athletes for the following five years were explored. The data obtained confirmed that education as the priority was important for 88% of the respondents (n-250, 88%). However, the comparison of the data obtained from female and male respondents revealed that female respondents (n-119, 86.2%) were planning to continue their studies in the higher study cycles (e.g. Master's studies) in the future. In addition, the data showed that female respondents (n-106, 76.8%) were aiming to receive higher grades in the future. Male respondents (n-97, 66.5%) were also thinking of continuing their studies as well as 67.8% of the male respondents (n-99, 67.8%) wanted to start working on improving their learning outcomes. The data also showed that the learning outcomes were more important for athletes over 23 years old (n-81, 77.9%).

Another important conclusion was that support (e.g. tutor support) for high-performance athletes was of highest topicality in the dual-career process. This was also confirmed through the analysis of the data on the results and achievements of the respondents.

Given that the MTG project focused on the dual careers of athletes, it was crucial to clarify the respondents' views on their future plans in sport over the next five years. Apparently enough, the majority of the respondents (n=259, 91.2%) considered being fit and healthy as a priority.

To proceed, based on the analysis of the opinions of female and male respondents, the conclusion can be drawn that female respondents (n=98, 71.1%) were more loyal to their university team in comparison to male respondents (n=84, 57.5%). This trend was also observed when comparing the opinions of athletes according to their level of sport achievements. Regional-level athletes (n=22, 73.4%) were more committed to participation in their higher education institutional teams as compared to elite (n=81, 63.8%) and national (n=75, 61.5%) level athletes. As concerns the future plans in sport, apparently enough, elite athletes proved to be more determined, e.g., to obtain medals at national level (n=109, 85.9%), to qualify for the Olympic Games (n=86, 67.7%), to obtain medals at international level (EC, WC, OG, etc.) (n=108, 85%).

Within the survey stages, the differentiation was also made based on the types of sports (e.g., individual and team sports). The athletes affiliated to individual sports types (n=77, 58.4%) confirmed having a more realistic chance for qualifying for the Olympic Games than the representatives of team sports (n=50, 32.9%). Older athletes also demonstrated the willingness to qualify for the Olympic Games (n=59, 56.7%) to obtain the acknowledgement in top-level competitions (n=72, 69.3%). Unsurprisingly enough, the importance of "signing a better contract" was confirmed by 70.2% of the respondents (n=73, 70.2%). The comparison of the views of student-athletes having access to tutor support and those who missed support provision revealed a similar situation. The athletes receiving the tutor support expressed a greater willingness to qualify for the Olympic Games (n=57, 53.3%) and win international competitions (n=77, 65%). In contrast, athletes who did not receive tutor support stated that they aimed "to get a better contract" in the following 5 years (n = 115, 65%).

The previous questions were aimed to explore the future plans of student-athletes. The next set of questions was aimed to identify what would be the next steps to achieve the above-mentioned objectives set within the project framework. The high-performance athletes claimed that their main priority

was a possibility to create a flexible schedule for studies and trainings (n-249, 87,7%) which would go hand in hand with the opportunity to both have access to high quality education and the opportunities to combine it with their sports experience (n-246, 86.7%). This substantiates the conclusion that student-athletes were interested in the courses they studied as they had the opportunity to improve their athletic mastery, which was also confirmed in the previous studies (Åbelkalns, I & Geske, A. 2013).

**Table No. 4. Opinions of Athletes With and Without Tutor Support on the Importance of Knowledge in their Sports Career**

SportTutor		Have sport tutor	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>0 Have not</b>	Valid	1	1	,6	,6	,6
		2	1	,6	,6	1,1
		3	22	12,4	12,4	13,6
		4	65	36,7	36,7	50,3
		5	88	49,7	49,7	100,0
		<b>Total</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	
<b>1 Have</b>	Valid	1	8	7,5	7,5	7,5
		2	2	1,9	1,9	9,3
		3	4	3,7	3,7	13,1
		4	30	28,0	28,0	41,1
		5	63	58,9	58,9	100,0
		<b>Total</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	

Based on the cross-comparison of the data of different groups of athletes, the conclusion can be drawn that the trend was similar for 75-85% of the respondents. Unsurprisingly enough, the degree and higher education were more crucial for the Master's students than for those involved in the Bachelor's study cycle. This was also the case between student-athletes who received tutor support and those who did not have this opportunity (see Table No 4), which may substantiate the conclusion that tutor support leads to higher motivation.

To proceed, within this research stage, it was essential to find out the respondents' opinion on the possible agents within support provision. The figure No. 1 shows that the family (n-257, 90.5%) was considered to be the main support provider, followed by coaches (n-230, 81%) and professors (n-189, 66.6%) respectively. In turn, athletes did not expect to receive support from deans (n-96, 33.8%) and directors (n-96, 37.3%). The data also revealed that tutor support was significant only for 40.5% of athletes. Almost half of female

respondents (n-67,48.6%) marked tutor support as crucial in pursuing dual-career while only 32.9% of male respondents found it crucial for achieving the objectives set (n-48,32.9%). At this point it should be highlighted that tutor support was available only for 38% (n-107, 38%) of the respondents. The data analysis revealed 60.8% of the respondents (n-65, 60.8%) still acknowledged the significant role of tutor support, while 12 respondents (n-12, 11.2%) considered that tutor assistance was not or almost unnecessary. Based on the comparison of the views of individual and team sports athletes, the conclusion can be drawn that tutor support was more appreciated among team athletes (n-67,44.1%) than among individual sports representatives (n-48, 36.4%). Team sports athletes also stated that club owner’s support was of topicality for them (n-70, 46.1%), while only 40.2% of athletes of individual sports marked the given option (n-53, 40.2%).

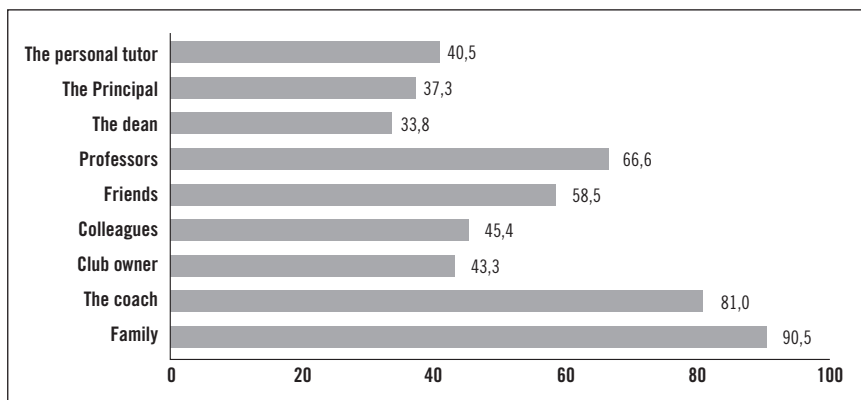


Figure No. 1. Support Agents (%)

As concerns the data obtained from the respondents involved in different education cycles, it should be noted that Master’s students were more likely to appreciate the support of professors (n-42,77.8%) and tutors (n-29,53.7%), while the data of Bachelor’s students for the same category confirmed the different situation n-142, 63.1% and n-84, 37.4% respectively.

Within the next research stage, the needs of athletes, their objectives and obstacles to their achievement were explored. The data obtained clearly showed that time and space for relaxing and recovery after the physical effort (n-168, 59.6%) was of primary importance for the respondents, followed by

a flexible schedule for training (n-166, 58,5%), as well as appropriate sports facilities located close to the faculty (n-151, 53.2%). To understand the needs of student-athletes, the comparison of responses between different groups was performed based on gender, type of sport, education, having/not having a tutor and age group (up to 22 years and older). Table No. 5 summarizes the main results. For athletes without a tutor, the need for support was related to appropriate sport facilities located close to the faculty (n-104, 58.8%) - (n-47, 43%) and flexible schedule for training (n-114, 64.4%) - (n-52, 48.6%). This situation can be explained by the fact that athletes who do not have a tutor must contact program directors, coaches, professors to plan a flexible training schedule. On the other hand, as regards the distance from school to sports facilities, athletes who do not have a tutor are often lower-level athletes, or representatives of types of teams sports performing outside the university. The same applies to time and space for relaxing and recovery after the physical effort, where those without a tutor (n-111, 62.7%) experienced difficulties. The same refers to younger athletes (n-119, 66.1%).

Similar trends may be observed among individual and team sports athletes' opinions. Here the differences in opinions were revealed in the statement on a flexible schedule for training, where athletes of individual sports (n-85, 64.4%) and younger athletes (n-114, 63.3%) had more needs than team athletes (n-81, 53.3%) and older student-athletes (n-52, 50%).

**Table No. 5. The Needs in Sport of High-Performance Athletes from Different Groups.**

Statement	Team sport (Percent)	Individual sport (Percent)	Have Tutor (Percent)	Have not Tutor (Percent)
Appropriate sports facilities close to the faculty	53,9	62,1	43	58,8
Time and space for relaxing and recovery after the physical effort	54	64	53,3	62,7
Financial support for travelling to international competitions	59,1	36,8	57,9	40,7
A flexible schedule for training	64,4	53,3	48,6	64,4

Within the further survey stages, the athletes's potential solutions to the above-mentioned problems were identified. The opinions revealed three main types of solutions: flexibility within the faculty/university schedule (n-165, 58.1%), good communication among the sports' club, the federation, the

faculty (n-158, 55.6%) and finding sponsors (n-155, 54.6%). It should also be highlighted that significant differences in opinions were revealed between teams and individual sports athletes and those who received and did not receive tutor support. For athletes without a tutor, training within the faculty's facilities (n-72, 40.7%) and the need for flexibility within the faculty/university schedule (n-113, 63.8%) were more relevant. On the other hand, individual sports representatives had more essential needs for the successful dual career (see Table No. 6). These differences in views can be explained by the fact that in the team sports, especially if it is a higher education institution team, recruited from university student-athletes, it is easier to manage both training and study planning, which is confirmed in the previous studies (Aquilina, D. A., 2009; Geraniosova, K. & Ronkainen, N. 2015). Team sports contracts are concluded with players, which is also a guarantee for the implementation of the dual career. On the other hand, in individual sports, the approach is individual, with the exception of higher education institutions providing athletes with a tutor.

**Table No. 6. Possible Solutions for Teams and Individual Sports Athletes to Improve Sporting Needs in Dual Career.**

Statement	Team sport (Percent)	Individual sport (Percent)
Finding sponsors	58,3	51,3
Training within the faculty's facilities	41,7	32,9
Benefiting from a free recovery processes offered by the faculty/University	51,5	30,3
Being supported by the family	23,5	21,7
A good communication between the sports' club, federation and faculty	62,1	50
Flexibility within the faculty/university schedule	64,4	30,6
Internal legislation which supports the sportsmen/women	42,4	27

Having clarified the athletes' needs, the questions were posed on the necessity for support from other professionals involved in dual career implementation. The data revealed that the respondents expected to receive the support from decision-makers of the University or Faculty (n-184, 64.8%); the coach (n-108, 38%) and the president of the sports club (n-93, 32.7%) considered as important for successful dual-career implementation. Fundamental differences between individual and team sports athletes were

identified. Individual sports representatives pointed out that the coach (n-63, 47.7%) was key in dealing with challenges, whereas team sports representatives (n-45, 29.6%) did not consider coaches as the essential support provider. In addition, female respondents (n-58, 42%) considered a coach as an important supporting person if compared to female respondents' opinion (n-50).

To proceed, *Part Four* of the present study aimed to identify the challenges and possible solutions to promote the development of dual career in higher education institutions. The module comprised 10 questions. Firstly, the reason for choosing specific study courses within the specific study programme was clarified. The majority of the respondents (n-175, 61.6%) noted that they chose studies because they wanted to be better at what they did. The second most popular category was the courses which would add to their sports career (n-138, 48.6). The comparison of team and individual sports athletes' views revealed that individual sports representatives (n-94, 71.2) wanted to be better at what they did if compared to team athletes (n-81, 46.7%). The athletes of individual sports (n-54, 40.9%) and athletes who did not receive tutor support (n-63, 35.6%) had chosen studies due to the reason that they liked interactive activities. Female respondents appreciated the possibility to engage in something new and challenging for them, while the same aspects were crucial only for 34.8% of the male respondents (n-48, 34.8%). Therefore, it can be concluded that females and athletes who did not have a tutor support chose studies more purposefully aiming for achievements.

The same as in the previous study stages, factors contributing to the choice of studies were clarified. Factors such as family (n-140, 49.3%), university location (n-102, 35.9%) and its prestige (n-93, 32.7%) were among the most popular choices. The conclusion was also drawn that parents were obviously viewed as the main supporters, both in sport and in education, and it was essential for the respondents that a higher education institution was located in a favourable place and athletes would not need to spend time travelling from studies to training and vice versa. It should also be highlighted that for elite and national level athletes the choice was in favour of the prestige of the university and sports club (n-87, 69,8%).

The next question provided the data on how studies could help in the sports career. The respondents pointed out that it was an opportunity to improve their theoretical and practical knowledge (n-197, 69.4%). In the second place, the development of their communication skills was mentioned (n-146, 51.4%). The opportunity to participate in international and national competitions

(n-103, 36.3%) was also marked as crucial. To proceed, the most important for elite athletes was extra examination sessions (n-53, 43.7%), an excuse for missing classes (n-51, 40.6%) and the opportunity to participate in national and international competitions (n-48, 38.8%). For regional athletes - study grants and study abroad opportunities (n-9, 30%) were marked as significant.

The next question was aimed at exploring the difficulties faced by high-performance athletes in the study process. The most significant problem was inability to participate in all theoretical and practical lessons (n-188, 66.2%), which was apparent provided that athletes often had to participate in competitions, training camps and workouts. The analysis of the data obtained from individual and team sports athletes revealed that besides the opportunity to participate in all lectures, athletes of individual sports admitted that there was no time to participate in all voluntary activities organised by the university (n-68, 51.5%) and there was not enough time to prepare all home assignments (n-59, 44.7%).

It is crucial to note that elite and national-level athletes faced more challenges than regional-level athletes (see Fig. 2).

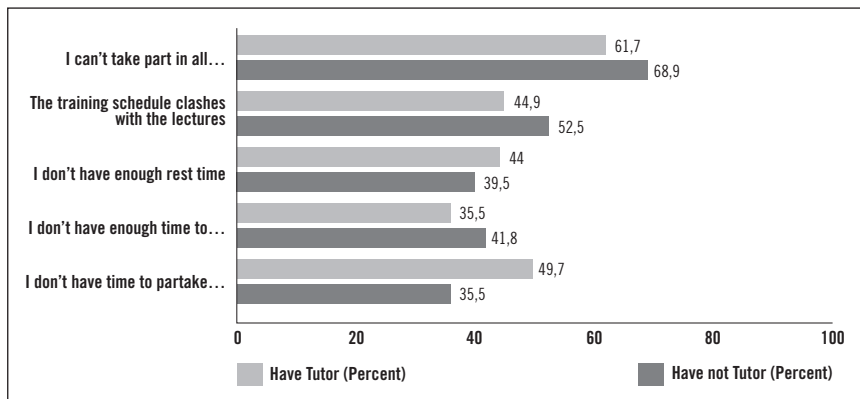


Figure No. 2. Difficulties Athletes Face.

To proceed, it was also crucial to explore the technologies used within the study process. The data obtained revealed that the majority of athletes had access to digital materials (n-203, 71.5%) and on-line educational resources (n-128, 45.1%). However, more interactive digital resources would be appreciated.



Another crucial objective set within the framework of the MTG project was to explore ways how to find the rightful balance between sports and studies within the dual career perspective. To address these issues, specific questions were posed. Based on the data obtained, the conclusion was drawn that the family was mainly responsible for support provision within the dual career perspective (n-208, 73.2%); the coach was mentioned by 44.7% of the respondents (n-127, 44.7%). These data are crucial to consider when developing institutional support provision programmes. Given that the majority of the institutions involved in the project confirmed having support provision frameworks, apparently enough, certain elaborations are necessary to be introduced. Therefore, Table No. 7 summarizes the initiatives proposed by the respondents.

**Table No.7. Student-Athletes' Recommendations for Elaborations in Institutional Support Provision Frameworks Within Dual Career Perspective.**

Statement	All Athletes (Percent)	Individual sport (Percent)	Team sport (Percent)	Bachelor (Percent)	Master (Percent)	Have Tutor (Percent)	Without Tutor (Percent)
Good communication process	35,5	40,2	27,6	32	40,7	34,6	32,8
A personal tutor for the dual career path	38	46,2	30,9	37,3	37	37,4	38,4
Recognizing the sports performances and promoting them between the faculty members and students	46,5	52,3	41,4	44,9	50	44,9	47,5
Presenting the sports and educational achievements on an academic level (ceremonies, festive meetings)	27,5	34,1	21,7	26,2	33,3	28	27,1
Founding a sports counselling centre for the dual career path	45,4	50,8	40,8	42,7	53,7	46,7	44,6
Recognizing the dual career path	53,2	60,7	40,8	53,3	50	42,1	59,9

The data displayed in Table No. 7 suggest that, firstly, the respondents would like the dual career to be recognised and managed in general. It was specifically

emphasized by individual sports representatives (60.7%), bachelor's students (53.3%) and athletes without a tutor (59.9%). The following is therefore a statement that dual career centres should be established in higher education institutions and that there is a need to improve mutual communication. More sports competitions and achievements to be promoted in higher education institutions were also seen crucial which might be rooted in the apparent necessity for raising awareness and recognition from the broader community.

To proceed, within the final survey stage, only the respondents having access or not having access to tutor support provided their input on the issues in question (n-107, 38%; (Latvia 6, Spain 43, Romania 46 and Portugal 12). Table No. 8 summarizes the opinions of high-performance athletes as concerns their expectations from tutors.

**Table No. 8. High-Performance Athletes' Expectations.**

Statement	Have Tutor (Percent)
Access to studies (administrative help)	41,1
Flexibility in examination dates	41,1
Justification for assistance on the basis of training and / or competitions	40,2
What subjects I should select	36,4
Aspects of Teaching and learning e.g. seminar	35,5
How to contact teachers	32,7
How to solve administrative issues	31,8
Exam calendar	30,8
The use of virtual campus	21,5

Table No. 8 shows that primarily athletes expect tutor to be supportive in administrative tasks, such as exam schedule coordination. This explains the fact that athletes frequently need to travel due to participation in different level competitions. In such situations, tutors can help arrange academic schedules allowing athletes to focus on important competitions. High-performance athletes noted that they would very much appreciate having the opportunity to meet with the tutor when it was necessary (n-60, 56.1%) or once a week (n-22,20, 6%). Using telephone calls (n-52, 48.6), e-mail (n-50, 46.7%) and face-to-face appointments (n-48, 44.9%) as a means of communication were mentioned as most appropriate communication modes.

## 2.2. Analysis of the Data Obtained Within the Focus Group Discussion

The focus group discussion was organized within the three stages:

**First part** describes the respondents.

Focus group interviews were carried out in five higher education institutions, with three similar groups of 5-8 high-performance student-athletes in each school, a total of 15 focus groups. The processing and analysis of the data are based on the (n-77) high-performance athletes' answers, of whom (n-35, 45.4%) were female respondents and (n-42, 54.5%) were male respondents (see Table No. 9). The purposeful sampling of the respondents was performed. The respondents represented a number of groups based on the level of education, individual and team sports, female and male athletes and different level student-athletes. The average age of high-performance athletes involved in the study was 22.4 years (between 20 and 25 years).

**Table No .9. Focus Group Respondents' Description.**

Country	Female Athletes	Male Athletes	Team sports	Individual sports	Average age	Number
University of Latvia (Latvia)	5	12	6	11	23,1	17
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (Romania)	8	7	4	11	21,8	15
University degli Studi G. d'Annunzio Chieti - Pescara (Italy)	8	9	4	13	22,2	17
Catolica San Antonio de Murcia University (Spain)	10	3	7	6	23,6	13
Coimbra University (Portugal)	4	11	6	9	21,31	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>22,4</b>	<b>77</b>

Among all the respondents, 64.9% of the respondents (n-50) represented individual sports, such as athletics (n-13), karate (n-6), judo (n-5), as well as sports such as skeleton, triathlon, and (n-27, 35%) team sports such as volleyball (n-7), soccer (4), rugby (4) and also hockey, field hockey and others. The range of respondents' study areas is broad - sports science (n-56

72.7%), medicine (n-7, 9.1%) and economics (n-6, 7.8%) were identified as the most popular ones. Focus group interviews included students of all study levels, mostly bachelor's (n-57, 74%) and master's students (n-17, 22.1%) and doctoral students (n-3, 3.9%). The respondents represented the high-performance sports level participating in the Olympic Games, the World and European championships, the Cup contests and the national championships.

**The second part** covers questions about the importance of education and sport support in the daily lives of high-performance athletes.

**Question 1** was formulated with the aim to explore the understanding of the term "high-performance athlete". Based on the analysis of the results, the conclusion can be drawn that the most common answer in the (n-11) groups was: *"those who participate in international competitions or top leagues"* (e.g. *"those who practice professionally at a high level six times a week"* (n-6) and *"those who are members of national teams"* (n-4); *"those who participate in the Olympics, world championships,"* *"for whom a competition is a way of life and a business,"* *"those sportsmen who focus on a target"*. The data showed that athletes defined high achievements in sport based on the consideration of numerous aspects to be taken into account when considering the understanding of the notion of "high-performance athlete". Within the focus group discussion, the following definition was agreed upon - high-performance athletes are among those who are in the youth, junior or adult national teams, in one of the sports types or being a member of the national sports team that competes at the highest level.

**Question 2** addressed the issues related to challenges associated with the necessity to maintain the rightful balance between sports life and academic life. The data obtained revealed that there were no significant differences in the responses of the athletes representing different sports groups. All the respondents stated that it was rather challenging to find balance between their sports life and studies. These data were not surprising, however, the primary aim was to consider the implications of the situations for the existing practices to find ways to elaborate those practices and work out tools to meet the needs of the target group. Mainly the representatives of summer individual sports stated that they had no problems to balance their trainings with studies, but there was still good time management required. Indeed, the time was indicated

as the central problem by all the respondents; they had to participate in training camps, which usually were held from March until April, sometimes even till May, and, meanwhile, May was the beginning of the summer season (e.g., *“When discussing all the details in advance, there is no problem to manage everything”*).

Flexibility in course scheduling was also highlighted as a fundamental problem ( e.g., *“It is difficult to combine studies with trainings, it can be done; however, it requires a good time management by making an effort to do it”* (n-13)). However, the opponents stated that it was *not so difficult when the frequency of the classes is NOT mandatory and good management is applied* (n-6). Athletes also noted that it depended on the teacher and kind of sport, and it was easier for individual sports to maintain the balance given that each individual could coordinate their trainings individually. Apparently enough, time management skills should be seen as one of the key priorities and support frameworks should include this aspect within both the study courses and other initiatives.

**The next questions** aimed to explore what types of support were available to achieve good balance between sports life and studies. At that point, there was a comparative consensus within the groups - the family, coaches, university, the sports federation and the team were named. The analysis of the responses allowed drawing the conclusion that in all fifteen groups, family members were the main supporters, naming parents, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives (n-15). The results were confirmed by scientific literature ( e.g., Kärkliņa and Trapenciere, 2009). To proceed, the second most common answer (n-7) revealed that the coach was the important support provider. However, it should also be noted that the coach was also identified as a person who was hindering the implementation of a dual career ( e.g. *“... my coach puts his sport in the first place, and my studies could be continued after a year or two ...”*). The third major supporter was group members or team mates (n-6), followed by friends (n-5), sports federation, the National Olympic Committee (n-4), university tutors (n-3). Within three focus group discussions, the athletes themselves found themselves the best “assistants” in all their life processes.

**Question 4** aimed at identifying future plans and expectations after the graduation. The immediate answers posed to this question were training, working, learning providing also certain insights and details about the respondents’ future plans. For instance, working in the field of study (n-11);

working in the field of sport as an organiser, coach, sports teacher and physiotherapist (n-9); devoting their lives to sport (n-4) (e.g., *...receive my bachelor's degree, then I could increase my training load and have a better contract ...*"); continuing to obtain education in further education cycles (n-3) (e.g., *The gained knowledge and intelligence will not vanish. That is the most important. Not every person who gets in the university is the smartest, but one can develop thinking and intelligence there*). Some groups, on the other hand, had a version saying that they had no idea what would happen after graduation.

During the focus group interviews, the majority of athletes agreed that they would wish to work in the field of sports and, particularly, in the study area they had explored with a great interest; besides, the respondents stated that they would like to share the knowledge and experience gained in their sports career.

**Question 5** was posed with the aim to find out what kind of technological or teaching tools were used to facilitate progress in class. The respondents were asked to name technologies that were used in the study process. The data obtained revealed that higher education institutions implemented studies in the University e-environment (n-6). In addition, the interviewed student-athletes indicated the following drawbacks: not all study courses were combined with e-learning options; not all training camps had an available free internet connection to accomplish and submit assignments on time; and not all professors supported studying according to an individual plan. Two groups noted that no technological advancements were incorporated in the study process (n-2).

**The next question** aimed to explore the respondents' opinions on the changes that should be introduced to promote successful dual career implementation. The solutions proposed by the student-athletes included individual study plans, video lectures, scholarships, flexible exam schedules, setting up study support centres, creating a training base. Based on the data obtained, the conclusion can be drawn that the primary change should focus on a balanced study plan (n-9) aiming to provide the planning tools for trainings especially before the competition. Secondly, a flexible exam schedule (n-6) should be ensured. Thirdly, video-recorded lecture courses (n-4) should be accessible and understanding from professors through raising awareness initiatives

should be promoted (n-6) (... *to allow athletes to hand in home tasks later , maybe a week - two, because sometimes there is really no time and everyone needs to explain why such a situation has occurred. Above all, there should be greater understanding*). This way, athletes could handle the challenges of the ongoing study process while being in training camps for competitions. An important improvement would also be improved infrastructure of sport in higher education institutions, when learning and sporting could be implemented at one place, thus saving time and money. In addition, the issue of setting up dual-career centres and the interest sports clubs was raised, since sports clubs/federations did not necessarily support the choice of athletes to study. The respondents also emphasized that special scholarships for athletes should be introduced, which would alleviate many social needs.

**The next question** was formulated with the aim to identify the most challenging aspect within the dual-career implementation. Implementing a dual-career at a high level is challenging and athletes frequently admit it. The analysis of summarized results revealed the key challenges associated with the dual-career implementation process. The most challenging point identified by athletes was the necessity to participate in training camps and combine these activities with the studies or several trainings per day (n-9). Apparently enough, this led to missed classes and distancing themselves from the study process. Competitions overlapping with exams (n-9) were also stated as a challenge. Similarly, the lack of time (n-5) and total fatigue were viewed as obstacles for effective dual-career implementation. The lack of understanding from lecturers and sports organisations in the study process (n-4) was mentioned confirming the data obtained with the help of the previous questions. Another problem highlighted was the lack of financial resources in sport, which led to challenges in the study process provided that the difficult choice to either continue the studies or "give up on it" had to be made in many cases.

**The final question** within this question set was posed aiming to get data on the assessment of the implementation ( e.g., services and features) of the dual-career programme at universities. Two universities involved in the MTG project (Spain and Portugal) were assessed positively (e.g., *Good, very important* (n-11)). The respondents highlighted interest in dual career development within their institutional initiatives (e.g., *The university values athletes and students very much, it is the university where sports stand out, they value it very much above*

*all for the CEU year after year*”). During the interviews with the representatives of Católica San Antonio de Murcia University and Coimbra University, the functionality of dual career centres was positively assessed. However, the lack of understanding from lecturers was also mentioned, thus making a second statement in the “could be better” (n-9) groups. In conclusion, unfortunately, the dual-career service of the University of Latvia (Latvia), University degli Studi G. d’ Annunzio Chieti - Pescara (Italy) has not been officially developed. In these universities, dual careers are carried out on a voluntary basis. In group interviews, the respondents described their sports centre as a place where one could receive both moral and financial support (e.g., ... *it could be our sports centre, as this centre facilitates the study fee reduction*). The respondent also pointed out that “*if certain problems connected with my studies arise, I call you, my sports coordinator, and you try to help me as soon as it possible. But I believe that it is not service related.*” All the respondents agreed that a dual-career centre should be established in the nearest future where student-athletes could share their experience and receive support related to study schedules. In turn, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (Romania) focus groups provided the statement “*very poor*” (n-6), as all the respondents reported a low level of dual career support. Therefore, they proposed to promote awareness of the importance of sports results for the faculty/university, for instance, through the creation of the “Hall of Fame” for the athletes.

**Third part** included questions about tutoring (support person for student-athletes).

**Question 1** aimed to identify what support aspects were expected from the sports tutor. The University of Latvia and University degli Studi G. d’Annunzio Chieti – Pescara do not have sports tutor as an official position, therefore, the respondents could not provide any answer to this question. However, the respondents highlighted that, first, their professors showed understanding; second, they had a chance to study according to their individual plans; third, they used the opportunities of e-studies in the study process; and, fourth, there were possibilities to receive funded opportunities to enrol in higher education study programmes receiving financial support from the state or the university. However, the financial support was limited. At the same time, some respondents pointed out that they had never received any support when that was necessary. As concerns the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (Romania),



there is no individual tutors, but only certain similar support is provided for groups of students based on different factors and categories. Still, also group tutors were described as those *warning them about changes in the schedule, in regulations and procedures, informing them about life in the campus, facilitating socialisation with the colleagues and a better insight into each teacher's approach.*

The respondents from Catolica San Antonio de Murcia University (Spain) and Coimbra University (Portugal) positively assessed the tutor support in the implementation of dual career, especially if the tutor was familiar with the peculiarities of sports: *It is good that the Sports Tutor knows the characteristics of the sport I practice, to be able to advise me, since all sports are not equal.* The respondents also highlighted the fact that *if we did not have the need for a sports tutor, we would not request it.* Analysing the results obtained from all the groups, some key ideas were topicalized. Firstly, the tutor should promote understanding between professors and sports organisations (n-13); secondly, the tutor should support the organization of a study plan, including an individual study plan, an examination schedule (n-6), etc. In addition, (n-3) focus groups pointed to the need for support to adjust to the new environment and the situation as such, especially during the first study year. Thus, to implement a dual career, student-athletes should feel deep understanding from academic personnel and have a chance to design well-balanced individual study plans. Besides, a support centre with student trusted professionals should be established to help with studies and sports related issues, as a result saving high-performance athletes' time and energy. The tutor's responsibilities are related to orientation in dual career, emotional and psychological support.

**Another question** addressed the issues related to communication tools to be used to promote effective information exchange. In addition, it also aimed to identify the frequency of communication sessions necessary for the respondents. The data obtained revealed that high-performance student-athletes preferred face-to-face meetings (n-11) (e.g., *For me, the best deal with people has always been face to face; anyway, by phone or by mail it seems enough. Regarding the number of times: As many as you need it. Maybe in a month I need to get in touch with him 5 times, instead, in the next three*). As the second most important means of communication e-mail (n-10) and the third - telephone conversations (n-8) were identified. The data also showed that 3-4 times per month or whenever it was necessary were the most common answers (n-11).

**The next question** was posed to explore the existing practices, mainly, what type of support (if any) was already received from the tutor. The respondents' responses confirmed the data obtained with the help of the previous questions revealing the development of mutual understanding with lecturers as a crucial tutor support area (n-7). Coordination, time-management and the related areas were also highlighted in the majority of the focus group discussions held within the research stage.

This went hand in hand with the next question – “*How do the student-tutor or peer-tutor help you?*”. As previously stated, not all the respondents had access to tutor support (n-4) which was the result of the lack of official dual-career support centres in two universities. On the other hand, those who had a “student-tutor” noted that such support was necessary to better align themselves within the student life (n-5), as well as helped within the time-management and study organization process (n-5). In general, the data described the student-athletes' day-to-day life in all groups of universities involved in the MTG project (e.g., *My student tutor and several athletes have a WhatsApp group, and we are friends, helps me with the work and notes, Our student tutor usually contacts us weekly*).

Upon the completion of this stage, further comments were received. To summarize the discussion, the respondents (n-7) suggested having a well-equipped training centre at the university to have accessible training opportunities close to their academic study centres. The respondents also highlighted the necessity to set up dual-career support centres in schools (n-5).

## Conclusions

Sport significantly contributes to the well-being of each country and the European Union at large and the change in attitudes towards sports in the last decade of the EU confirms this. One of the key aspects of maintaining the EU sports ecosystem is sport in higher education institutions focusing specifically on combining high-performance sport with studies. More broadly, it would also mean sports science studies to promote understanding of the economic aspects of sport promotion.

The aim of the MTG project was to develop recommendations at national level to combine high-performance sport with higher education studies. The project is based on the “EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes” approved in 2012 (European Union, 2012).

In order to understand the high-performance athletes' needs in dual careers, a survey was conducted in the EU member states involved in the MTG project (Latvia, Italy, Romania, Spain and Portugal). Based on the data obtained in the survey framework, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The respondents agreed upon the working definition for the term *high-performance athletes*, which points out that such athletes should be members of the youth, junior or adult national teams in one of the sports types or members of the national sports team that competes at the highest level.
- The analysis of the student-athletes personal needs revealed that high-performance athletes enrolled in higher education programmes aiming to acquire knowledge and skills that could improve athletic performance.
- The data obtained for the category *future plans* revealed that one of the main objectives for the respondents was to complete their studies. Older students and those who received tutor support wanted to improve their achievements in studies and get enrolled in the next cycle higher education programmes.
- High-performance athletes would prefer working in the field of sport after graduating from university and completing their sports careers. The added value would be the position providing the opportunity to take advantage of acquired knowledge and athletic experience.
- It is very crucial for athletes to qualify for the Olympics, to win in international competitions and the most important is to implement a flexible study and training plan in order to accomplish it.
- High-performance athletes viewed family and trainers as their main supporters in their dual careers, while they did not feel any support from deans and programme directors and would like to receive more support from sports teams' clubs. An important conclusion was that older athletes felt more support from professors.
- In general, it can be concluded that athletes who received tutor support were more motivated to implement a dual career, which means that tutor support is necessary at the beginning of studies to guide young people in the right direction towards their goals.
- Having analyzed the results within *the Sports needs and objectives section*, the conclusion can be drawn that athletes lack time to rest properly after exhausting workouts.
- One of the most important factors affecting the overall performance is the lack of qualitative sports infrastructure in school, therefore athletes are required to spend a long time on the way from school to training

places and vice versa. Athletes who did not have a tutor acknowledged the necessity for the support related to appropriate sports facilities located close to the faculty and a flexible schedule for training. This situation can be explained by the fact that athletes who did not have a tutor had to invest their time to discussing their needs with program directors, coaches and professors to plan a flexible training schedule.

- For athletes without a tutor, training within the institutional facilities and the need for flexibility within the faculty or university schedule were more relevant. On the other hand, individual sports representatives had more essential needs to successfully pursue the dual career. This difference in opinions can be explained by the fact that in team sports, especially if it is a university team and recruited from university student-athletes, it is easier to manage both training and study planning, as evidenced by previous research.
- Team sports contracts concluded with players are also the guarantee of dual career implementation. On the other hand, in individual sports, the approach is individual, with the exception of universities providing athletes with tutorship or other individual support.
- High-performance athletes expected to take the lead from university decision-makers and coaches. Coaches, as supporters, were more recognized by athletes of individual sports. The analysis carried out confirms the fact that the coach provided more support in building a dual career for athletes of individual sports. It should also be noted that a coach can be one of the individuals who is hindering the implementation of dual career in university, so attention should be paid to trainer education as part of a dual career implementation.
- Master's students noted that meetings with professors contributed to dual career implementation by improving the quality of studies.
- Bachelor's students more often noted that good balance could be achieved if a flexible training schedule was provided.
- Athletes received substantial balanced support for the dual career implementation from colleagues, team-mates.
- As concerns the academic needs, athletes generally chose an education institution based on its location, so that athletes would not need spend time travelling from studies to training and vice versa. Attention was drawn to the fact that for elite and national team athletes, the choice was in favour of university and sports club prestige.

- Athletes believe that studying helps to acquire the knowledge and skills that can be used in sport to improve results.
- High-performance athletes as students received support in planning flexible examination schedule and the possibility to participate in international competitions.
- The main difficulty in the learning process faced by athletes was the inability to participate in all theoretical and practical lessons provided that athletes frequently had to take part in competitions, training camps and workouts.
- The research data showed that younger athletes did not have enough time to rest, while older athletes did not have enough time to complete home assignments. The athletes who did not have a tutor experienced more difficulties in their studies. Therefore, it can be concluded that tutoring practice has a positive impact on the athletes' daily lives in the dual-career process.
- The data obtained revealed that it was difficult to combine studies and sport at an equally high level. However, internal and external motivation, support and good planning make it possible, and special attention should be paid to the first study years.
- The significant challenge in sports careers, which hinders the study process is the lack of time and planning the study schedule. The lack of professors' understanding was mainly marked by athletes under the age of 22. It should be noted that athletes of individual sports felt more misunderstanding by professors in comparison to team sports representatives. This could be explained by the fact that team sports are performed as a team and their studies are coordinated by a tutor at least to a certain extent.
- All universities involved in the MTG project implement dual-career practices, some being more successful and some less; however, necessary improvements need to be implemented.
- The data obtained revealed that dual-career centres should be established in higher education institutions and the need to improve mutual communication was acknowledged. In general, acknowledgement of achievements should be considered at institutional level.
- Improving the sports infrastructure in universities can also be seen as a significant development allowing to learn and practice at one place, thus saving time and money.

- The establishment of dual career centres and the sports clubs, since sports clubs/federations do not necessarily support the choice of athletes to study, is of fundamental importance. The athletes also emphasized that special scholarships for athletes should be introduced, which would alleviate many social needs.
- The analysis of the data on the necessity of the tutor revealed that the tutor should promote, first, understanding between professors and sports organisations, second, help develop a lecture plan, including an individual study plan, an examination schedule, in order to adjust to the new environment and situation, particularly in the first year of study.
- Therefore, to build a dual-career, student-athletes have to feel a deep understanding from academic personnel and would need to have a chance to design well-balanced individual study plans. Besides, a support centre with student trusted professionals could be established to help with studies and sports related issues, as a result saving high-performance athletes' time and energy. The tutor's responsibilities are related to orientation in dual career, emotional and psychological support.
- High-performance athletes pointed out that the main tutor support was received for building mutual understanding with lecturers. Tutor helps to coordinate the examination schedule.
- A number of universities, for instance, the University of Latvia and University degli Studi G. d' Annunzio Chieti - Pescara do not provide a sports tutor as an official position. At the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (Romania), there is no athlete tutor, but only a group tutor working with selected categories of students.
- High-performance student-athletes primarily give preference to meetings in-person with tutors. The second most important communication tools respondents mentioned were e-mails and telephone conversations respectively.
- Student-athletes prefer contacting their tutor 3-4 times per month or when necessary.
- A "student-tutor" support should be introduced in higher education institutions for athletes to get familiarized with the student life, as well as provide help with managing administrative tasks.
- Student-athletes suggested having a well-equipped training base or centre at the university to provide training opportunities as close as possible to their study place.

- All universities need to set up dual-career support centres with comprehensive activity schemes and frameworks, such as flexible learning and training schedules, the tailored learning curriculum, e-training, the use of indoor premises and sports services and social support services.
- University encouragement to cooperate with sport schools, clubs, general education institutions in order to promote systematic education at the highest level is of necessity.
- High-performance athletes should have access to mentoring and tutoring practices or initiatives.
- Flexible schedules for examinations, seminars, etc. should be developed.
- It would be an added value to set up an athletes' fame hall in universities and introduce scholarships.
- Referring to the study carried out in the framework of the MTG project, which allowed adjustments to the “EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes” to be introduced, it is possible to develop dual career guidelines at the national level.





## DESCRIPTION OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

### 3.1. Dual Career in Latvia

In Latvia, sports issues are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science. At the national level, specific Dual Career policies in higher education do not exist. General support for elite athletes – potential participants in the Olympic Games – from Latvian Olympic Committee is provided. However, if an athlete has a status of a student, no support is provided at all.

Currently there is no any specific support for DC athletes in terms of psychological assistance, medical support. The only official support comes from The Latvian Sports Federation's Council (LSFP, 2020) as a special funding programme to support top athletes in vocational and higher education, but the total amount of the funding is limited and it does not cover all DC athletes. In fact, this support comes as a single payment based on educational merits and it is supposed to cover tuition fees.

An active role in promoting DC ideas in Latvia has the Latvian Universities Sports Federation. DC issues are also resolved on the institutional level. Universities (or other HE institutions) are supporting DC athletes, but this support and attitude differs depending on institutions and their strategies.

According to publicly accessible information from the Latvian Olympic Committee, there are 45% of students or university graduates in the Latvian Olympic team (summer OG 53%, winter OG 36%) (Latvijas Olimpiskā Komiteja, 2016).

**Table No.10. Dual Career in Latvian Universities.**

Type of support	Financial
<b>Description</b>	<p data-bbox="288 248 441 272"><b>General description</b></p> <p data-bbox="288 277 956 432">The process of combining studies and sports is complicated and time-consuming, as the person has to put maximum energy to manage his/her time evenly both for sports and studies. It is not a rare case that the quality of one of the priority courses of the DC can be lower due to daily load. Universities, understanding the significance of the situation, pay more and more attention in terms of the tuition fee discounts and scholarships, thereby promoting the development of DC.</p> <p data-bbox="288 437 967 592">DC students need both – good level study results, as well as high achievement sports performance. Combining both above-mentioned processes, the student-athlete may receive the tuition fee discount and the scholarship. As a result, additional motivation for further development emerges, and the responsibility for obtained social guarantees, provided by the university, are promoted. Such initiatives promote personal development and successful further Dual Career process.</p> <p data-bbox="288 596 463 620"><b>Procedure description</b></p> <p data-bbox="288 625 967 675">Amount of tuition fee or scholarship is considered individually. Each university in Latvia has its own criteria for selecting athletes. The following is taken into account:</p> <ul data-bbox="288 679 594 778" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="288 679 561 703">– National level sports achievements</li> <li data-bbox="288 708 594 732">– International level sports achievements</li> <li data-bbox="288 737 400 761">– Study results</li> <li data-bbox="288 766 370 790">– Interview</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="288 794 978 860">The amount of provided support differs. Still, the majority of the universities in Latvia usually ensure study tuition discounts and/or scholarships as the main DC development support. The universities implementing this kind of practice are as follows:</p> <ul data-bbox="288 865 676 1177" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="288 865 445 888">– University of Latvia</li> <li data-bbox="288 893 490 917">– Riga Technical University</li> <li data-bbox="288 922 482 946">– Rīga Stradiņš University</li> <li data-bbox="288 951 568 975">– Latvian Academy of Sport Education</li> <li data-bbox="288 979 676 1003">– Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies</li> <li data-bbox="288 1008 449 1032">– Ventspils University</li> <li data-bbox="288 1037 434 1061">– Liepaja University</li> <li data-bbox="288 1066 445 1090">– “Turība” University</li> <li data-bbox="288 1094 561 1118">– BA School of Business and Finance</li> <li data-bbox="288 1123 591 1147">– Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences</li> <li data-bbox="288 1152 468 1176">– Daugavpils University</li> <li data-bbox="288 1181 549 1204">– Rezekne Academy of Technologies</li> </ul>
<b>General aim</b>	To support athletes financially
<b>Necessary resources</b>	The university requires additional financial resources to be able to provide best athletes with funded studies and guaranteed scholarship. It is possible if university administration recognizes the importance and sees future in DC development.
<b>Mutual collaboration</b>	Active communication between sports representatives and university administration is necessary. Through mutual collaboration, each athlete’s potential contribution to the further study process has to be evaluated.

<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Financial</b>
<b>Additional information</b>	<p>Communication with athlete's previous club or sports school representatives regarding future aims should be promoted. Otherwise, it may lead to a situation, when university has provided tuition fee discount or scholarship, but the student is officially affiliated to and continues to represent another organization.</p> <p>Individual athletes' support: if possible, there has to be communication with specific sports federation to understand the athlete's compliance with students' sports level. In individual sports, the level may differ, therefore it is important to understand each athlete's potential contribution to the further development of the university.</p> <p>Team sports support: sports team composition and the admission of athletes have to be thoroughly considered to ensure the appropriate representation of sports kinds.</p>
<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Psychological</b>
<b>Description</b>	<p><b>General description</b></p> <p>Numerous DC initiatives have led to Latvian Universities being able to provide support to students. One of the support types is psychological support. Psychological support helps students adjust to the new environment, find solutions to problematic situations, communicate with academic staff more successfully or focus on their personal development. Psychological support is one of the cornerstones in DC, as it is the only way to understand the actual abilities of a student—athlete, as well as to understand how to combine sports and study processes.</p> <p><b>Explanation</b></p> <p>Researchers addressed the issues related to psychological factors and how they affect human work capacity and general life quality. It is very important to have access to psychological support during different transition periods – for instance, when starting studies. Personal transformation takes place, and these changes can affect the quality of the main task completion. As concerns DC, insufficient psychological support may lead to lower study and sports results. Therefore, psychological support provision at state, institutional and individual levels should become the obligatory part within planning the study process.</p> <p><b>Procedure description</b></p> <p>In the Latvian DC system, psychological support is very important, as students-athletes frequently face additional difficulties – problems with sports infrastructure or issues related to the economic situation.</p> <p>At the moment, Latvian universities do not have any guidelines for psychological support in terms of DC, therefore each university has to resolve these questions at the institutional level. For example, at the University of Latvia, the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art, the experts affiliated to the Psychology Department resolve the related issues. In case of the necessity, athletes of the University of Latvia can attend individual consultations to learn how to combine sports and studies more successfully.</p>
<b>General aim</b>	To provide psychological support to student-athletes.
<b>Necessary resources</b>	If a university aims to develop the field of DC, it is necessary to introduce a specific position – sports psychologist. This expert could help all the university athletes (providing consultations by appointment).

<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Psychological</b>
<b>Mutual collaboration</b>	Active communication among athletes, coaches, sports department administration and psychologists should be promoted. Proactive coordinated action would help to identify psychological issues and take actions accordingly.
<b>Additional information</b>	To optimize institutional financial resources, psychologists from the students' community can be involved (if there is a psychology department in the university). Individual sports – individual approach to each athlete is necessary. Consultancy sessions together with a coach are possible. Team sports – both individual consultation and team joint meetings or team building events led by psychologists are possible.
<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Participation in competitions</b>
<b>Description</b>	<p><b>General description</b></p> <p>Student sports competition cycles in different sports take place throughout the whole study year. In addition, events frequently take place in remote sport centres, therefore transportation issues have to be resolved. Sportswear, participation fee or license purchase questions are also topical. In solving these questions, Latvian universities have different approaches.</p> <p><b>Explanation</b></p> <p>Similarly to study tuition fee discounts, also this kind of discounts for students-athletes are part of the social guarantees that universities can provide. This way the sense of belonging to a specific educational institution, as well as responsibility and personal development are promoted. Above-mentioned processes are part of the main tasks of DC provided that they promote understanding of the support mechanisms.</p> <p><b>Procedure description</b></p> <p>Institutional capacity regarding the development of DC in Latvia differs. Several universities are able to support their athletes' participation in some competitions, for example, SELL GAMES or forums organized by the Latvian University Sports Federation. This kind of practice is available at the University of Latvia, Rīga Stradiņš University and Riga Technical University. Above-mentioned universities provide sportswear and cover participation fees. Several universities cover only participation fees in competitions organized by the Latvian University Sports Federation, for example, in athletics or table tennis. As concerns World Universiade forums, each university has its own criteria based on which financial support for an athlete is assessed.</p>
<b>General aim</b>	To provide students-athletes with an opportunity to participate in different level student competitions.
<b>Necessary resources</b>	A university has to grant additional financial resources to be able to support the development of DC and competition cycle. If possible, it is necessary to provide athletes also with sports equipment and cover participation fees.
<b>Mutual collaboration</b>	University sports departments have to communicate with the representatives of the Latvian University Sports Federation, specific sports federations, as well as with other higher education institutions regarding the student sports procedure planning and upcoming events. If possible, universities have to try to raise extra funds from the total university funds to be able to provide athletes with additional social guarantees (for example, insurance).

<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Participation in competitions</b>
<b>Additional information</b>	<p>Individual sports: support for transport expenses is possible, for example, covering personal transport fuel expenses or public transportation tickets. This way, it is possible to optimize university resources, as there is no necessity to rent a bus for this specific purpose.</p> <p>Team sports: collaboration with other higher education institutions and stakeholders in the framework of international tournaments is possible to strengthen the capacity and use all the opportunities in the context of specific forums. For example, the leading team of the University of Latvia won bronze medals in the World Universiade in 2017. Players affiliated to other universities also represented the team.</p>
<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Individual study plans</b>
<b>Description</b>	<p><b>General description</b></p> <p>The main idea of DC is that a higher education institution is open and collaborative with students who do high level sports. One of the priorities is customizing the study plan with the aim to adjust it to the student-athlete's daily schedule to ensure the possibility for the student-athlete to perform both functions within the DC maintaining the quality.</p> <p><b>Explanation</b></p> <p>Developing individual study plans or customized schedules for students who do high level sports promotes a well-planned distribution of load within the daily routine. Otherwise, by trying to combine both key activities within the DC, emotional and physical overload can be faced leading to failure in completing main tasks.</p> <p><b>Procedure description</b></p> <p>Latvian higher education institutions have gradually developed a strategy to apply individual plans or customized schedules in the daily study practice. In the long term, the Latvian Academy of Sport Education has its own approach by offering its students, who are national team athletes, free class attendance.</p> <p>Some other higher education institutions – the University of Latvia, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies and Rīga Stradiņš University – implement other approaches offering individual study plans comprising individual consultancy sessions with the academic staff and this way promoting the DC development.</p>
<b>General aim</b>	To help students combine studies and sports.
<b>Necessary resources</b>	No additional financial resources are necessary. The most important aspect is building understanding about DC and its significance in combining studies and sports.
<b>Mutual collaboration</b>	An important factor is communication among students-athletes, academic staff, administration and coaches. Students should provide information on their plans regarding training schedules, competitions or camps timely. It is very crucial to be aware of the load and customize the plan to achieve positive results. A coach can also perform the function of a manager providing help and promoting the DC process.
<b>Additional information</b>	<p>Individual sports: the process is relatively easier provided that training schedules can be customized for individual sports athletes. Remote learning opportunities should be considered (e.g., provision of the necessary materials, online lectures, etc.).</p> <p>Team sports: collaboration and openness are the grounds for the positive outcomes. Remote learning opportunities should be promoted. In the case when the whole team is affiliated to one higher education institution, the whole study plan can be customized based on the team's needs.</p>

<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Catering</b>
<b>Description</b>	<p><b>General description</b></p> <p>One of the basic objectives within the DC is facilitating student-athletes' daily routine. To implement this objective, sufficient financial resources are necessary. Catering provision in the most convenient location would be of fundamental importance, which would ensure balanced and healthy diet, as well as cover some of the personal expenses to meet the needs of athletes having high daily load.</p> <p><b>Explanation</b></p> <p>Athletes' achievements are affected by numerous factors. Talent or genetics can be mentioned as the main ones alongside with general characteristic features. However, the performance level is also predetermined by other factors, such as coach professionalism, infrastructure, medicine availability as well as healthy food. Social guarantees provision within the DC – catering – promotes balanced diet habits, this way also ensuring better results in sports.</p> <p><b>Procedure description</b></p> <p>Some Latvian higher education institutions provide catering services. Currently, it is practised only for team sports athletes (with rare exceptions). Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences provides its basketball team with two meals per day, Ventspils University – one meal per day. The same catering practice for basketball teams is available at the University of Latvia and Rīga Stradiņš University.</p>
<b>General aim</b>	To facilitate and promote students-athletes' healthy diet habits.
<b>Necessary resources</b>	Providing daily catering for students-athletes is part of social guarantees, therefore, additional financial resources, as well as catering service provider (preferably with food range that fits the athletes' needs) are necessary.
<b>Mutual collaboration</b>	Not necessary.
<b>Additional information</b>	<p>Universities can provide catering applying a voucher system. Vouchers can be distributed, for example, in the beginning of each month.</p> <p>Individual sports: the process is more challenging provided that individual sports athletes have different training schedules, therefore, it is challenging to adjust catering services.</p> <p>Team sports: provided that team sports athletes have trainings and games according to the same schedule, it is possible to plan the catering schedule.</p>
<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Involving mentors</b>
<b>Description</b>	<p><b>General description</b></p> <p>Mentor functions are a significant factor in the DC implementation. The process of combining studies and sports is difficult and needs additional physical and mental effort. This is particularly true for the first year students who have not yet acquired university requirements and are frequently unable to successfully plan their time. Involving mentors would solve this issue given that mentors could help first year students to effectively plan their time.</p>

<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Involving mentors</b>
	<p><b>Explanation</b></p> <p>Through involvement of an additional person (mentor, tutor or personal development coach), a student may acquire self-discipline and time-management skills. It is easier for the student to complete his/her tasks timely leading to higher achievements in general.</p> <p><b>Procedure description</b></p> <p>In Latvian higher education institutions, the practice of involving mentors or other support personnel for students-athletes is not developed yet. However, additional human resources are provided, who, in addition to their direct responsibilities, help athletes find the most effective solutions. They help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– communicate with federations, sports centre representatives;</li> <li>– find solutions for participating in competitions (transport and other expenses);</li> <li>– promote collaboration with lecturers, this way promoting DC.</li> </ul> <p>Frequently enough, these activities are performed by university sports centre employees or administrative staff within the relevant study field.</p>
<b>General aim</b>	To help first year students-athletes to adjust to the university environment.
<b>Necessary resources</b>	Involvement of additional personnel to provide mentors for the most promising students-athletes. In case the university does not have necessary resources, different alternatives are possible (e.g., involving other students as mentors or participation in projects with the aim to involve mentors).
<b>Mutual collaboration</b>	Active communication and search for alternatives is necessary from the university sports department representatives. This way, it is possible to find solutions applying different mentoring approaches. It is very crucial to focus on the key goal – to help students combine studies and sports.
<b>Additional information</b>	<p>Individual sports: involving mentors for athletes is possible (e.g., one mentor for all the track and field athletes).</p> <p>Team sports: universities having their own sports teams have to provide at least one mentor for each team. Even if players are enrolled in different study programmes, their daily problems and time planning most likely will be similar, so the mentor's help would be useful.</p>
<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Sports medicine</b>
<b>Description</b>	<p><b>General description</b></p> <p>Factors affecting sports achievements are different. One of them is sports medicine accessibility, which, by definition, incorporates also rehabilitation and food supplements. To achieve the most positive results, more professional attitude is necessary. Higher education institutions should work out the appropriate strategies and tools to provide everything necessary for the athlete's development taking into account the necessity to invest additional financial resources.</p> <p><b>Scientific explanation</b></p> <p>One of the significant aspects of sports medicine services is the rehabilitation process (e.g., massages, ice baths). Apparently enough, this helps to recover after physical exercises faster (both during and after trainings and competitions). Risks of injuries decrease, as well as the quality of sports activities improves. Similar effect is ensured by supplementary sports vitamin use during the daily training process.</p>

<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Sports medicine</b>
	<p><b>Procedure description</b></p> <p>In Latvia, as concerns the DC implementation process, sports medicine is applied comparatively rarely. Most often physiotherapists are hired for university sports teams, and at the same time they perform also certain tasks assigned to or implemented by coaches. The basketball team of the University of Latvia has two experts – a physiotherapist and a basic physique coach. Additional sports medicine is supported also in Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences and Rīga Stradiņš University.</p>
<b>General aim</b>	To promote students-athletes' capacity development in sports through access to sports medicine.
<b>Necessary resources</b>	The key necessity is additional financial resources. Additional employees are necessary to ensure high quality sports medicine provision. As a potential alternative, purchasing food supplements can be mentioned provided that this kind of support may be more cost-effective than hiring additional employees.
<b>Mutual collaboration</b>	To successfully optimize resources, effective communication between university sports department administration and coaches is necessary. It is necessary to understand which athletes make up the priority group for this type of support.
<b>Additional information</b>	<p>Individual sports: a significant aspect is careful selection of athletes as a priority group within sports medicine framework. It is crucial to recognize an athlete's general level in a specific sports cycle, as well as to assess the contribution of the athletes to the development of the institution.</p> <p>Team sports; it is necessary to assess each athletes' potential benefit in terms of available sports medicine services.</p>
<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Infrastructure</b>
<b>Description</b>	<p><b>General description</b></p> <p>Infrastructure is one of the key problems in the Latvian sports system. It is one of the main challenges for individual sports athletes in Riga. For example, as concerns track and field athletics or swimming base, these fields are underdeveloped. Higher education institutions in Riga are facing these problems due to the infrastructure question being unresolved at the state level.</p> <p><b>Explanation</b></p> <p>DC incorporates many components and some of them are more significant than others (e.g., infrastructure or sports base availability). If students-athletes are not provided with the opportunity to effectively train in a specified sports training place, there is no point to invest additional resources in sports medicine or psychological support.</p> <p><b>Procedure description</b></p> <p>Infrastructure problems are most topical in Riga, the capital of Latvia. They are being solved by concluding rental contracts with available sports bases or through the development of the local sports infrastructure. For example, Riga Technical University and the University of Latvia are renting the only track and field hall available in Riga to ensure the accessibility of appropriate training conditions.</p>
<b>General aim</b>	To provide appropriate training infrastructure.



<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Infrastructure</b>
<b>Necessary resources</b>	If a higher education institution does not have its own sports infrastructure, additional financial resources are necessary. Most often sports complexes are being rented. In the long-term perspective, higher education institutions have to pay attention to the development of their own sports infrastructure.
<b>Mutual collaboration</b>	To successfully develop the university infrastructure, sports department administration has to create a long-term development strategy for further budgeting questions in terms of sports bases management. The issues of cost-effectiveness should be considered.
<b>Additional information</b>	Individual sports: infrastructure-related issues for individual sports are complicated. University has to evaluate whether the number of specific sports athletes is sufficient to invest additional resources into renting sports facilities. Team sports: the situation is relatively better as compared to the individual sports. Availability of basketball, volleyball or handball halls is satisfactory. The situation is more challenging with football.
<b>Type of support</b>	<b>Student government</b>
<b>Description</b>	<b>General description</b> The main function of the student government is to address the issues related to students' needs and look for solutions. The structures of the governing bodies may differ provided that within the Latvian DC system, no unified athlete governing system exists. <b>Explanation</b> Proper management is key to success – research should be done to explore the best practices and innovations. In addition, collaborative projects provide the opportunities for sharing the experience which can be processed and adjusted to different contexts and environments. <b>Procedure description</b> Currently, Latvian universities proceed with an individual approach through engaging athletes in student government activities.
<b>General aim</b>	To promote student-athlete communication on topical questions and listen and process the opinions of the beneficiaries (students, academic staff and others involved in the DC implementation process).
<b>Necessary resources</b>	A separate room to organize meetings, as well as the guidelines for government members to equip them with the tools to effectively work on the further development strategies.
<b>Mutual communication</b>	This is one of the rear support types that does not require additional financial resources. The solution is collaboration and effective communication among all the beneficiaries.
<b>Additional information</b>	Individual sports: the suggestion is to include one representative of individual sports into the Council and other governing bodies. Team sports: one representative from each team should be included into the Council.

## Feedback from Stakeholders – Latvia

The following feedback was received from the stakeholders:

- Lack of motivation for some stakeholders to implement the DC objectives due to insufficient financial support.
- Flexibility in lecture scheduling is of primary importance.
- Many questions should be resolved at the national level:
  - It is necessary to allow universities to apply a certain number of state-funded study places for DC students;
  - To provide scholarships for DC students;
  - No tax should be applied to DC students' scholarships;
  - Access to sports facilities should be ensured;
  - Legislative bodies should review and make amendments to certain regulations (e.g. "Education Law", "Sports Law", "Law on Municipalities", "University Law").
- Municipality support should be ensured.
- The following aspects were highlighted:
  - Availability of medical services;
  - Availability of psychologist services;
  - Availability of mentor who supports in planning studies and sports, as well as provides consultancy for DC students in the remote learning process.

In addition, the stakeholders also highlighted some engaging activities which would be beneficial within the DC implementation (e.g., sports related TV show Hattrick offered students-athletes to participate in a competition (through voting) for one-time financial support - the athletes were chosen by show organizers.).

### 3.2. Dual Career in Italy

This subchapter introduces a series of methodological indications concerning the curricular requirements that can make HEIs able to transform the guidelines into practice for the dual career implementation.

In the last decade, the interest in the topic of dual career increased significantly in the European Union (EU). The interest in dual career has

grown as there has been an increasing consciousness of what the profile of the student-athletes (SAs) and their role in the society are. As suggested by Sánchez Pato, Isidori, Calderón and Brunton, the SAs show a “centaur” profile (half a student and half an athlete), which means that they dedicate themselves with equal effort to excelling in both fields, the educational and the sports (Sanchez-Pato et al., 2017). They are not ordinary students because they must balance academic results and athletic commitment. This ability to accept at the same time two such important challenges reveals that they have strong aspirations and an uncommon moral temper, which can be poured into the field of study and work with great profit for themselves and for the society (Lupo et al., 2015; Guidotti et al., 2014; Guidotti, Cortis, & Capranica, 2015; Guidotti, & Capranica, 2013; Lupo et al., 2017). Furthermore, thanks to the experience they accumulate by competing in sports at the highest levels, SAs develop a series of competences and skills that can rarely be developed through the traditional educational system (Armstrong J.S., 2011).

### **Individual Study Plan**

Many SAs need an individual study plan because of both training and competition commitments. The study plan is the layout of the study courses included in the study program in a logical sequence and time, which corresponds to the duration of the study program licensed or accredited. As an example of an individual study plan, the University of Latvia provides the opportunity for the individual study plan which is a written agreement between the student and the University on the study courses to be acquired in a particular semester. This support service is provided with the aim of adjusting the study process to the needs of the student. The student is entitled to develop an individual study plan different from the one offered in the study program, in accordance with the institutional regulations on the individual plan, taking into account the pre-requisites for the acquisition of the study courses specified in the course description. Individual study pace for the study program acquisition should be chosen based on the student’s time and financial resources. In this case, the study process may be slower or faster compared to the duration of the normative licensed or accredited study programs, as long as it does not contradict the regulatory enactments regulating the study process. The individual plan is created for the entire study program acquisition period. When developing the individual study plan, the preliminary knowledge of

the study course for the acquisition of the study course should be considered. Such a process requires the SAs to take the responsibility for their education. While asking for flexibility, they should be aware of the ethical norms and university rules and provide the important information about the support they are asking for. They should plan the university study path in advance and let the counsellor know the schedule of competitions, training camps, and further sport-related commitments as soon as possible. Indeed, provided that sports calendars are often unpredictable, planning and dialoging are essential for flexibility. If, on the one hand, SAs are required to be responsible when requesting services, on the other, this should not discourage them and push to avoid asking for help. Athletes are often used to relying only on their own capacity and this could be a deterrent to embark on a complex path such as defining an individual study plan that requires programming in advance and clarity with teachers and counsellors. In other words, SAs may believe that the game is not worth the candle or may think that asking for help is a sign of weakness. In this context, the university plays a central role in overcoming this kind of prejudices and stereotypes.

## **E-Learning**

The UCAM Catholic University of Murcia (Spain) developed the Project ESTPORT “Developing an Innovative European Sport Tutorship Model for Dual Career of Athletes” (557204-EPP-1-2014-1-ES-SPO-SCP), co-funded by: The European Commission, Erasmus+: Sport, Youth and EU Aid Volunteers. Briefly, the project developed a collaboration synergy in the field of dual career for students-athletes, by developing and implementing a Sport Tutorship program, so that athletes could combine their higher education studies with sports competitions.

The ultimate goal is therefore to facilitate, through the Sport Tutorship, the integration of athletes into the university context, by maintaining their sport career performance. The implementation of this project also contributes to the improvement of the quality of good governance in sport, by reinforcing academic development of students-athletes and sport staff, including coaches, tutors and professors (Sanchez-Pato et al., 2017). Among the innovative aspects of this project, the Universities provided different types of support in three main areas of support: academic, sporting and also related to post-athletic career opportunities.

- Academic support: Extended term-time; Individual study schedules; Alternative access to delivery of courses; Individual tutoring;
- Sporting support: Scholarships; Professional supporting services; Infrastructure, Elite sport development; Programmes;
- Post-athletic career: Study grants; Introduction of new programmes; Lifestyle management services.

Student-athletes benefit from a range of services, such as alternative access to delivery of courses, for example, through e-learning or distance learning, co-ordinate their personal time schedule that allows them to work around their sporting commitment and have other concessions, such as flexibility in entry-requirements and permission to attend training camps and competitions during the term time.

In both Latvia and Coimbra University, digital pedagogical materials are available allowing SAs to maintain their learner activity. In addition, there is the possibility of having on-line classes with their teachers. Furthermore, other Universities such as “G. D’Annunzio” University of Chieti-Pescara offer a digital platform to professors who want to digitalize the content of the course program. However, this service is not compulsory and relies on the teachers’ own initiatives. To date, this kind of technology is used mainly as a “content container”, where the SAs can find the materials assigned by their teachers. However, the possibilities offered by e-learning have just been explored so far. In fact, by taking advantage of the fact that participants do not have to be physically present, as well as the possibility of using social networks also for educational purposes, it is possible to give the student the possibility of an interactive study that is otherwise difficult to ensure through traditional teaching. As an example, SAs can build a digital portfolio (a computer-based collection of the student performance over time) where they pour all their experience and competences while carrying out their individual learning plan. Teachers and university counsellor may help SAs in choosing the appropriate content and adhere their individual study plan. Therefore, digital technologies represent an important toolbox where SAs can show their competences and skills not only to the university community but also to employers and eventual work partners. An approach like this entails a number of requisites: first of all, university must be equipped with e-learning platforms; this is the minimum criteria for distance learning studies that all the university should guarantee to SAs. Second, teachers and university personnel should

be educated at working in digital environments; the required competences in some cases need to be developed *ad hoc*, through specific training courses. Furthermore, the same subjects need to be delivered through untraditional learning processes that may be more productive with SAs due to both their unique sport experience and the possibilities offered by digital technologies. As suggested by Sánchez Pato, Isidori, Calderón and Brunton, at least with SAs, there is a need for a cultural effort to go beyond the traditional learning model and allow students to actively participate in their education (Sanchez-Pato et al., 2017). Student-athletes accumulate inimitable experiences during their athletic career conferring them competences and skills that could be useful in both the academic studies and later in the occupation. Unfortunately, this baggage is often lost when the educational systems are not implemented beyond the traditional learning model, which is based on the content rather than on the competence. From this point of view, the term flexibility should be conceived not only with respect to the pace of study and the technological resources employed but should also take into consideration the philosophy of teaching at the basis of the educational offer. Many authors have indeed emphasized that the traditional model does not generate better academic results or more successful employment (Armstrong J.S., 2011). The traditional approach mainly revolves around the figure of the teacher, who is responsible for the learning objectives and tasks. Unfortunately, students often find this type of content of little interest and, especially when they must devote their efforts and their time to other demanding activities like SAs do, there is the risk of a progressive lack of motivation that can eventually lead to giving up the studies or sport. This approach is practically based on the extrinsic reward (Kohn 1986, 1993) in an academic setting, based mainly on knowledge in a competitive environment (the higher the grades, the better the student, regardless of what he is able to do in the real world), that can be particularly detrimental for SAs. Intrinsic rewards, on the other hand, are more important for motivation and should be eventually reinforced through external rewards, especially taking athletes in consideration. From this point of view, competence and skills acquired by SAs in their athletic career may be the starting point for defining the individual study plan. Indeed, sport is considered as providing a set of experiences and knowledge that SAs can successfully convert on their professional career (Isidori, 2015). Furthermore, the advent of the above-mentioned new digital technologies offers innovative opportunities in education. Obviously, a paradigm shift like this is unlikely

to be accomplished in a few years and there are other actions within the development of dual career programs that can be easily implemented, regardless of the educational model of reference. It should be stated that, in order to develop problem-solving skills and apply the competences acquired during sport career, a joint effort that involves all the levels of intervention starting from the decision makers, up to the same SAs that must be aware of their path formation, is needed. It is right to specify that not all the students would benefit from an untraditional individual learning plan at university. SAs are not the ordinary students; they are in the same way special and fit in within the natural learning process in which they decide upon, with the help of university staff, the objectives and the task of their education. Key figures for assisting SAs at the university in this process are represented by tutors and mentors (Sanchez-Pato et al., 2017). Thus, e-learning requires an integrated action in which different actors are involved (e.g., tutors, mentors, teachers and managers), both when its use is taken into consideration as a remote platform for the lessons in which the SAs cannot participate, and when it is considered as an educational means to go beyond the traditional didactic model. E-learning needs the investment of financial resources: in order to offer a service having these characteristics, it is necessary for the University to have the appropriate platform to carry it out. This implies having professional staff managing the digital resources, trainings for teaching staff that may need to learn how to use and manage digital contents, and technological resources to run the whole support service. In brief, the universities need hardware and software resources and the staff to manage it. This service would be suitable for both individual and team sports as well as for winter and summer sports without any distinction. There would be no difference in the type of sport or level to access this service - what is important is to offer this service to the SAs residing outside the University. An important aspect is that sport federations should be able to offer a web station to the SAs that needs to follow the lessons. Furthermore, there should be the possibility to have on-line meetings with teachers to integrate into the distance educational process.

### **Exam Schedule Flexibility**

To date, “G. D’Annunzio” University of Chieti – Pescara, within limited number of courses and not regulated as a formal procedure, allow SAs to

ask for an additional examination date. However, it is at the discretion of the teacher to decide whether to give the SA the possibility to have an additional examination date or not. Sometimes, a number of prejudices and stereotypes that should be overcome may prejudicate the decision of the teacher about the flexibility they may apply for SAs within the absence of a written regulation. Often teachers perceive SAs as those seeking benefits because of their status. On the contrary, scientific literature provides evidence to the fact that SAs have a set of volitional and moral characteristics that not only make them able to emerge in academic activities compared to other students (Diersen, 2005), but can also lead them to achieve brilliant results in the labour market upon completing sport and university careers making them an important resource for the society. At present, the possibility to stipulate an internal regulation to which professors must adhere is a subject of evaluation on the academic agenda of the “G. D’Annunzio” University. While waiting for a written regulation, the University management is trying to make the university staff aware of the dual career issues.

### **Valorization of Sport Commitments Through ECTS**

In conclusion, several universities in the EU activated dual career services focusing on curricula requirements designed to make the educational path more flexible. Student-athletes, as an example, have the option for part-time studies, individual study plan, distance learning (e-learning), valorization of sport commitments through ECTS. To date, each country is addressing the issue with their own methods, generating a very large amount of experiences ranging from countries where dual career is at an early stage (e.g. Latvia, Romania) to countries with national law on dual career (i.e. Portugal). In some other countries, such as Italy, there is a big difference within the universities due to the fact that the initiative is left to be resolved at the institutional level. This wide diversity of legislative settings has been described by Aquilina and Henry (2010) as: 1) State-centric regulation (i.e. Government legislation or statutory regulations place responsibilities on higher education institutions to provide flexible academic paths); 2) State as sponsor/facilitator (i.e. States promote formal agreements to meet athletes’ needs at the educational level); 3) National Sporting Federations/ Institutes as intermediary (i.e. national governing or sports bodies negotiate flexible academic paths with educational institutions); and 4) Laissez-faire/



No Formal Structures (i.e. individually negotiated agreements are arranged, when possible). Although this heterogeneity generated a lot of useful experiences that can be replicated within EU, at the present moment there is the need for shared guidelines for higher education institutions (HEI) and methodology materials for dual career in HEI. Although this chapter was focused on curricula requirements, it is important to underline that dual career support services are part of a whole dual career program in which all the services are integrated. Indeed, financial and social support are essential for implementing the services discussed in this chapter. In the same manner, infrastructure is necessary to offer some services, such as distance learning. Finally, without a well-designed tutorship service, the coordination of the dual career program will be impossible, especially taking into consideration that top-level athletes often need to stay abroad for prolonged periods. This implies that networking among the universities is essential both for sharing experiences and supporting SAs at distance.

### **Feedback from Stakeholders - Italy**

The implementation of policies and strategies in favour of the dual career of student-athletes was discussed during the meeting. On this occasion, the University “G. d’Annunzio” of Chieti-Pescara, the Regional School of Sport of the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI) Abruzzo, and the Italian Triathlon Federation (FITRI) were represented.

During the meeting, local journalists were present provided that, on this occasion, the official regulations for the dual career of student-athletes of the University of Studies “G. d’Annunzio” of Chieti-Pescara were introduced.

The FITRI has several athletes of national interest enrolled as students at the “G. d’Annunzio” University of Chieti-Pescara. The FITRI is on the front line to create synergies with the academia. This synergy pushed towards the formulation of the first dual career regulation at the University of Abruzzo. The president of the Regional Sports School CONI Abruzzo has invited the sports federations to follow this example and has declared himself available to act as a bridge between the sports federations and the University of Chieti-Pescara.

The stakeholders agreed that the regulations for the dual career of student-athletes should allow them to approve in advance the dates for the examinations based on their needs. Besides, student-athletes should be able

to retrieve compulsory attendance lessons and/or practical laboratory lessons. All these aspects are included in the regulations presented on that day. Furthermore, “special prizes’ are foreseen for the athletes - if they win a medal in international competitions, they will receive the bonus points on the final degree mark depending on the step of the podium reached. All those present declared themselves happy for this initiative.

### 3.3. Dual Career in Portugal

Member states present significant differences in dual career policies (Aquilina, 2013; Aquilina & Henry, 2010), including State-centric regulations (i.e., France, Hungary, Luxemburg, Poland, Portugal and Spain), State as a sponsor/facilitator (i.e., Belgium-Flanders, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden), National Sporting Federations/Institutes as intermediary (i.e., Greece and United Kingdom) and *laissez faire*/no formal structures (i.e., Malta, Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Malta, Slovakia and Slovenia).

In state-centric regulation, the legislation is developed and/or approved by the state and applied equally in all institutions of the country. In turn, sponsoring states are those that fund institutions but have no direct influence on dual career policies. Federations/National Institutes as mediators should accompany the student-athlete in the transitions between education and sport.

In Portugal, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have some scope for applying national policies. The dual career development in applying student-athlete status, which protects student-athlete throughout their academic career, is notorious. This application varies from HEI to HEI, depending on the rights and duties that each HEI requires.

Despite the different conditions, efforts have been made to increase the national and university sports offer. In recent years, the number of sports practitioners has increased significantly, thus generating a direct relationship with the increase in obtaining Olympic medals.

In Portugal there is the Academic Federation of University Sports (FADU) which is responsible for the exclusive organization of University Sports and allows all students to participate actively in Sport, representing its sport. Participation in events organized by this Federation are added towards student-athlete status in all HEIs. The increased supply of sports in recent

years shows that there is a substantial sporting interest in Portuguese higher education students.

The most acknowledged Portuguese HEIs have followed the guidelines of the European Union and in recent years have developed student-athlete attraction strategies. The number of federated and university practitioners is increasing, making it essential to develop student-athlete policies. At the national level, there are already several universities that include the student-athlete in their special agenda. In addition, the Portuguese government published a specific law that regulates the rights and duties of student-athletes.

The University of Coimbra has a close cooperation with the Academic Association of Coimbra, the club with the greatest sport diversity in the country and existing since 1887. Surrounded by the unique academic environment, it stands out from all other Portuguese universities for its complexity of offer concerning academic and sports. Studying at the University of Coimbra allows students to practice dozens of sport modalities.

At the federated level they are offered to participate in 27 different federated sports and all students are also invited to participate in the 48 sports offered by FADU, guaranteeing training conditions for all athletes. Revised in 2016, the Student Athlete Statute (first applied in 2008) ensures that all athletes at the University of Coimbra have access to equal study conditions. This statute protects all athletes wishing to reconcile a sports career with an academic career: Be present in at least 75% of training sessions; The training has to take place in sports facilities of the University of Coimbra; To be summoned to represent the UC / AAC in at least half of the official tests of his/ her specialty; The student athlete benefits from preemptive rights in choosing the classes of the curricular units he/she attends; Request the release of faults that coincide with the preparation hours immediately prior to the competitions, the competitions themselves and the corresponding trips; Postpone the deadline for the submission of papers and written reports and/or the date of the respective defenses, as well as the date of the performance of other tests included in the continuous or periodic evaluation regime.

In 2014, a group was formed to synthesize the state of dual careers in Portugal, as well as to propose measures to improve the academic and sports career of these student-athletes.

**Table No .11. Comparison Between the European Council Guidelines (Education/Training) on Athletes’ Dual Careers and Existing Measures in Portugal**

Principles and Policies	
Board Guidelines	Measures implemented in Portugal.
<p>1- Create tailored courses that allow athletes to combine their sporting activities with studies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The National Qualifications System, having as its fundamental objective, to promote the elevation of the basic formation of the active population, through the school and professional progression already foresees the possibility of creating alternative curricular courses and adequate to the different realities, within the sport, within the autonomy of primary, secondary and higher education establishments, vocational training, and rehabilitation centers and vocational schools.</li> </ul>
<p>2 - Create tailored academic cycles, individual learning pathways, distance learning and e-learning, supplementary pedagogical guidance and flexibility in exam schedules can be helpful in this regard.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Article 6 of Decree-Law No. 139/2012 of 5th July provides as training offers in secondary education the existence of courses with their own plans. It is up to the schools, within their autonomy, to propose the creation of these courses that confer double certification.</li> <li>– The system only predicts this situation for students who are at risk of dropping out by successive retentions, so it cannot be applied to high-income practitioners.</li> <li>– Distance learning is a possibility that should be explored by students whose attendance may be at stake for longer periods and may be suitable for student athletes who are absent from their place of residence for extended periods of time. Ordinance No. 85/2014, of April 15th;</li> <li>– With regard to the exams, athletes covered by the RA regime may request to change the dates of the exams, provided that they coincide with the period of participation in sporting competitions, as regulated in article 17 of DL No. 272/2009 of October 1 and Article 44 (6) of Normative Order No. 5-A / 2014.</li> </ul>
<p>3 - Create a quality certification system for dual career services provided by training centers, sports schools, sports academies, sports clubs, sports federations and / or universities.</p>	<p>—</p>

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**Principles and Policies**


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<p>4 - Support educational institutions at national level and between Member States to cooperate in adapting teaching programs and to work, as a matter of priority, to establish equivalences between qualification levels, as described in the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The national qualifications framework approved by the law No. 782/2009 of 23th July adopted the principles of the EQF as regards the description of national qualifications in terms of learning outcomes according to the descriptors associated with each level of qualification.</li> </ul>
<p>5 - Implement measures that facilitate and promote the athletes' geographical mobility to allow them to combine their sporting careers with studies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Promotion and implementation of the program Erasmus + Sport.</li> <li>– E-Learning.</li> </ul>
<p>6 - Develop sports training and/or qualification programs for athletes [...] by promoting the relationship between education providers [...] and sports organizations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The National Qualifications Catalogue includes training offers with access conditions that may be suitable for athletes whose training references were attended by sports organizations.</li> <li>– The National Coach Training Plan is regulated by central government in partnership with sports organizations.</li> </ul>

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In the report prepared by this group, the following recommendations emerge regarding the education and training system:

1. Promoting recognition of good dual career practice;
2. Implementation of the figure of the accompanying teacher/trainer of the high-performance athlete;
3. Consideration, at the teacher's time, of the work developed in the school attendance of sports agents;
4. Extension of distance learning to student-athletes;
5. Possibility of subject evaluation;
6. Creation of a network of specialized sports services in higher education institutions;
7. Extension of the scope of school insurance;
8. Creation of student-athlete status;
9. Introduction, in the diploma supplement, of the recognition of the relevant sporting activity developed during the passage to higher education;
10. Creation of preferential conditions for access and attendance to vocational training courses;
11. Introduction of new training references in the national qualifications catalogue.

## University Sports Observatory

The establishment of Observatories is decided upon by the Rector on his own initiative or on the proposal of the Rectoral Team, Organic Units, Services or Administration, and for each specific case, the object and scope of intervention, the objectives and the composition of the Observatory are defined.

The Observatories of the University of Coimbra are flexible and reflective structures, integrating professors from different Organic Units. Their mission is to contribute critically to the development of specific themes of interest to the University.

The Sports Observatory of the University of Coimbra is responsible for controlling and monitoring the application of the Statute of Students - Athlete of the University of Coimbra.

Understood as an instrument of training and education, sport is an important component in the academic life of the student population. By associating a physical improvement aspect with the intellectual development of young people, sports activities also foster a healthy spirit of cooperation and competition, contributing to an undeniably global well-being of the individual.

In the current framework of European Higher Education, the diversification of extracurricular activities by students is understood and valued as an expression of a conscious and mature citizenship. The creation of a student-athlete status of the University of Coimbra seeks to frame a sports attitude that is governed by criteria of quality and rigor.

The Sports Observatory of the University of Coimbra includes a representative of the Rectory, who chairs a representative of the Faculty of Sports Sciences and Physical Education, a representative of the Social Action Services of the University of Coimbra and also a representative of AAC.

By the beginning of each school year, The Sports Observatory of the University of Coimbra publishes the recognized competitions to obtain Student Athlete Status, a listing that may be modified if the official calendar of the National and/or International Federations is changed. The Sports Observatory is funded by the university budget. The amount is variable.

## Sports Merit Board

In order to stimulate its student athletes, the University of Coimbra implemented the sport-merit board that is composed of students-athletes who

have obtained high sports results, under the terms established by the Sports Observatory of the University of Coimbra.

Merit boards have been widely used in the education system as a way of rewarding students with the best academic performance. In this sense, the recognition of sporting merit is an interesting example of a good practice developed at this university. Its scientific justification can be understood based on the regulation of behaviour. It has been found that top athletes are intrinsically motivated but also have high values of introjected regulation, i.e. their behaviour is often regulated by pressure and social recognition issues. In this sense, the merit board can be understood as a way of society recognition of the effort made by athletes, to which is also added a monetary prize, which acts as a source of external motivation.

It is the responsibility of the Sports Office of the University to keep the sport merit board up-to-date, with the update being made until the end of the school year in which the competitions in question occurred.

In addition to the rights provided in the Special Rights of Students of the University of Coimbra Regulations, students-athletes who are members of the sport merit team are awarded a cash prize in the following terms:

1. 500€ is awarded to students receiving a medal in Championships organized by the European Association of University Sports (EUSA) or by the International Federation of University Sports (FISU);
2. 250€ is awarded to students receiving a medal in Championships organized by EUSA or FISU;
3. 100€ is awarded to students receiving a medal championships organized by EUSA or FISU.
4. The amounts referred to in the previous paragraph shall be 50% in the collective modalities.

The financial resources are variable according to the sports merits obtained by the students.

### **Special Access Contingent**

In the first phase of the national competition, the vacancies fixed for each course in each higher education institution are distributed by a general quota and by special quotas to which certain percentages of vacancies are reserved (students from the islands of Madeira and the Azores, people with disabilities,

etc.). The special access to higher education for high sport performance practitioners integrates the special access contingent.

The special Contingent covers students who, cumulatively correspond to the following requirements:

1. They are high-performance athletes, for the purpose of registration organized by the Portuguese Institute of Sports and Youth.
2. They were practising in those conditions, but they finished their sport careers and did not use this special regime, being able to benefit from it within three years from that term.

During the sporting life, high-performance athletes can benefit from the special regime, provided that they meet the necessary conditions, and there is no limit to its use.

On the other hand, if the athlete finishes his/her high-performance sports career and has never benefited from the special regime of access to higher education, the student can do so within three years of that term. The student can only use this post-career benefit once.

If during the high-performance sport life, students have benefited from the special regime, they can no longer do so after finishing this career.

The number of students covered by the special contingents to be admitted in each pair of institutions/courses for all special schemes may not exceed 10% of the vacancy in the national or local competition or in institutional competitions in the school year concerned.

### **National Legislation Governing the Status of the Student-Athlete**

In Portugal, there is a national law that regulates the benefits of student-athletes. The XXI Constitutional Government Program establishes as a priority the articulation of sports policy with the school, reinforcing physical education and sports activity in schools and higher education institutions and making them compatible with school and academic pathways, in line with the recommendations of the European Union for the adoption of mechanisms to support the development of dual careers for student-athletes.

The regular practice of physical and sports activity, in a school and academic context, is recognized as an important complement in the course of the student development, with a view to their integral formation as an individual, promoting the development of healthy habits throughout life.



For that reason, Decree-Law No. 129/93, of April 22, which establishes the principles of the policy of social action in higher education, in its current version, and Law No. 62/2007 of 10 of September, which approves the legal regime of higher education institutions, determine that social action in higher education includes support for sports activities to be provided to all students.

For some years, a system of support has been in place for students who are high-performance athletes or who regularly perform in national teams, provided for in Decree-Laws No. 272/2009, of October 1 and 45/2013, of April 5, which was recently complemented by the implementation of the pilot project called “High Income Support Units in School” created by Order No. 9386-A / 2016, dated July 21, of the Assistant Secretary of State and Education and the Secretaries of State for Education and Youth and Sport stating that it is time to extend support to other student-athletes, contributing to the improvement of the reconciliation of study, training and competition plans for young people who want to get involved in formal sporting practice within the framework of the organization of sport in higher education.

The status of the student-athlete within higher education, which is now approved, following Resolution of the Assembly of the Republic No. 128/2017, of June 22, aims to support the development of dual careers in higher education institutions and the academic community, promoting the sporting representation of higher education institutions and student associations, representing an incentive to practise sports in this context.

It also provides support to students who develop their sports in the federated system and those who intend to continue the practice developed in the field of school sports.

Thus, within the framework of autonomy in which higher education institutions and student associations define the very terms of the organization and development of the practice of sport, the set of minimum rights of access to sports practice by all students within higher education is standardized (e.g., the assessment of absences, alteration of evaluation dates, priority in the choice of schedules and the possibility of requiring special examinations.).

The aim is to establish a legal and regulatory framework that improves the conditions of participation in competitions that are integrated in the sporting context of higher education, also contributing to increase of the relevance of these competitions:

### **Article 1**

This decree-law establishes the status of the student athlete of higher education (statute), defining the eligibility requirements and the corresponding minimum rights.

### **Article 2**

Scope of application

For the purposes of the provisions of this decree-law, students of higher education are students enrolled and enrolled in higher education who cumulatively:

- a) Participate in the championships and competitions provided for in the following article;
- b) comply with the requirements of sporting merit applicable to them in accordance with Article 4;
- c) achieve the minimum school performance provided for in Article 5

### **Article 3**

Participation in championships and competitions

1. Students who, in the academic year in which they require the attribution of status, benefit from the student athlete status:

- a) Have participated, in representation of the higher education institution in which they are enrolled and registered or of the association of students in or integrating national university selection, in:
  - i) National university championships organized by the Academic Sports University Federation (FADU); or
  - ii) International university competitions organized by the European University Sports Association or the International University Sports Federation;
- b) Have participated in the most recent ones:
  - i) Competitions for the attribution of national titles by sports federations, pursuant to paragraph h) of paragraph 1 of article 13 of Decree-Law no. 248-B / 2008, of December 31, current writing; or
  - ii) international competitions for the award of European and world titles by international bodies in which national sports federations are integrated; or
- c) Are enrolled as athletes in the sports service of the higher education institution in which they are enrolled and enrolled or in the respective student association and have participated, in the academic year prior to the year in which they require the attribution of the statute, in:

- i) National school championships; or
- ii) International competitions of school scope.

2. Under the terms regulated by each institution under the provisions of article 8, students may also benefit from the statute, among others:

- a) They have participated, in the academic year in which they require the attribution of the status, in regional championships and in the other tests of qualification for the national university championships; or
- b) Be affiliated to a sports federation governed by Decree-Law no. 248-B / 2008, of December 31, in its current version (federated athletes).

#### **Article 4**

##### Sports Merit

1. In the academic year in which they require the attribution of the status, students referred to in paragraph a) of paragraph 1 of the previous article practitioners of collective sports must have:

- a) Represented his team or selection in at least 60% of the games of one of the competitions referred to in paragraph a) in paragraph 1 of the previous article; and
- b) Participated in at least 75% of their team's or team's training, or 25% in the case of federated athletes, provided that at least one training per week is carried out, except for vacations or examinations.

2. The minimum requirements for participation in training and representation of the team or selection applicable to the students referred to in paragraph b) of paragraph 1 of the previous article practitioners of collective sports modalities integrated in other sports federations are defined by protocol between the institution of higher education and the respective sports federation and provided for in the regulations referred to in Article 8.

3. The students referred to in sub-paragraphs a) and b) of paragraph 1 of the previous article practicing of individual sporting modalities must have been classified in the first third of the league table of the national championships and competitions foreseen in the mentioned subparagraphs.

4. The students referred to in sub-paragraph i) of paragraph c) of no. 1 of the previous article must have been classified in the first third of the league table of national school championships referred to in the said sub-line.

## **Article 5**

### School performance

1. In order to benefit from the status, the students of higher education must have obtained at least 36 credits, or all the credits in which they have been enrolled, in the academic year prior to the one in which their number is less than 36.

2. The provisions of the previous number do not apply to students who require the assignment of the status in the school year in which they are enrolled for the first time in a given study cycle.

## **Article 6**

### Duration

The statute shall have the duration provided for in the regulations referred to in Article 8, which may not be less than one year, and shall enter into force from the time of its attribution.

## **Article 7**

### Rights

The student athletes of higher education are holders of at least the following rights:

- a) Priority in the choice of schedules or classes whose frequency scheme best suits their sporting activity, provided that this is duly proven by the applicant;
- b) Relief of absences that are motivated by participation in official competitions of the modality they represent;
- c) Possibility of changing dates of formal moments of individual evaluation that coincide with the days of the championships and competitions referred to in a) and b) of paragraph 1 of article 3;
- d) Possibility of requesting the accomplishment of at least two annual examinations or equivalent in special time of examinations.

## **Article 8**

### Regulation

1. The legal and statutorily competent body of each higher education institution regulates the institutional application of this statute until the beginning of the 2019-2020 academic year, defining in particular:

- a) the criteria for the award of the status to students who are enrolled and enrolled for the first time in a course of study;

- b) The criteria for the award of the status to students who participate for the first time in the championships and competitions referred to in Article 3 (1) (a);
- c) The criteria of academic and sporting merit necessary for the extension of the status to other students, in accordance with paragraph 2 of article 3;
- d) The duties of student athletes in higher education;
- e) The procedures for requesting, assigning, renewing and terminating the statute;
- f) the duration of the statute, which shall comply with the provisions of Article 6;
- g) Mechanisms for monitoring compliance with statutory and regulatory provisions relating to status;
- h) The body or service that assures the management of procedures related to the statute in the higher education institution.

2. The norms issued under the terms of the preceding paragraph may go beyond the provisions of this Decree-Law with respect to the rights of student athletes of higher education and their eligibility criteria, provided that in a more favorable sense to students, with the exception of the minimum school use provided for in Article 5.

3. The regulations referred to in paragraph 1 shall be drawn up in close liaison between higher education institutions and sports federations and their clubs with a view to strengthening mutual collaboration and pursuit of the objectives of increasing the development of dual careers.

### **Feedback from Stakeholders - Portugal**

In order to finalize the HEI guidelines developed under the *More Than Gold* project, several stakeholders were consulted representing different fields in the sports and university context, namely, sports federations, sports associations, clubs, municipal councils and representatives of other higher education institutions.

More specifically, the feedback was obtained from the following institutions: Federação de Patinagem de Portugal, Federação Portuguesa de Desporto para Pessoas com Deficiência, Associação de Futebol de Viseu, Grupo Desportivo

de Condeixa, Clube Desportivo Carapinheirense, Grupo Desportivo Sourense, Associação Académica de Coimbra - OAF, Associação Académica de Coimbra – Secção de futebol, Câmara Municipal de Poiães, Clube Condeixa, União Recreativa Cadima, Associação Louzan de Natação, Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Instituto Politécnico de Viana do Castelo, Federação Portuguesa de Canoagem, Académico de Viseu Futebol Clube.

The methodology used varied depending on the proximity and availability of some of the contacted partners. In this sense, face-to-face and virtual meetings were held, and in some cases, a summary of the guidelines was sent by email, after which a response was obtained from these partners.

In general, the feedback obtained from the entities consulted about the guidelines was very positive. Stakeholders reinforced the need for greater flexibility on the part of higher education institutions in adapting class schedules and exam schedules for student-athletes. They also stressed that this flexibility should be a general rule and that it should not depend on the greater or lesser awareness of one or the other teacher for this to take place.

In addition, they were very pleased with the recommendation regarding the proposal to create residence infrastructures near the training facilities for these students, since they considered this to be one of the most challenging problems for this group of athletes. They also assigned special emphasis to the creation of the figure of teacher-tutor and student-tutor, something that is not yet a reality in the Portuguese context.

### **3.4. Dual Career in Romania**

In the context of belonging to the European Union as a member, Romania has the obligation of aligning its national legislation with the Common European Legislative Framework. The process is ongoing and it was launched on January 1, 2007.

The sport-oriented EU policies are regulated in the European Sports Charter, The Sports Ethics Code, the Anti-Doping Convention, the White Paper on sport, directives of the European Commission and of the European Council.

The recommendations of the European Commission (2012) highlight – besides the importance of sports activity – the importance of quality education delivered in parallel with the training of sports performance under the generic name of the dual career of athletes (European Commission, 2012).

Nowadays, Romania is at the beginning of developing the dual career of athletes due to the opportunity provided by the projects of the European Commission through the Erasmus+ Sport program based on the European Guidelines for the dual career of athletes and the Guidelines for promoting the dual career in the European Union (EOC EU Office, 2011).

Until Romania joined the EU in 2007, the legislation regarding the dual career of athletes was vague, inconsistent and general. The Law No. 69/2000 reprised an OMEC 5159/1998, and it referred only to the granting of lifelong annuities after retreating from the sports life for the athletes who had won medals in major international competitions. It also comprised provisions regarding the absence of motivation for athletes who were also higher education students. The Government Decision No. 1004/2002 brought along the possibility of enrolling in a faculty without a contest for the medallists of international school Olympiads, athletes with international medals included. Furthermore, the Minister's Order No. 4799/2010 allowed athletes to pass their GED in special sessions (Cabinet Ministru, 2010).

However, all these details outlined within legislation contain a series of unavoidable shortcomings: overlapping between the important sports competitions and the exams (NC, EC, WC, OG, etc), or the overlapping of centralised training programs within the national teams and the faculty schedules comprising teaching activities. The June 2017 Report stated that in Romania, former athletes are generally absorbed by the sports system and that there are no concrete initiatives or a legal framework regarding the dual career of athletes (European Union, 2017).

The Strategy for performance sport (2016 - 2032) introduced the instructions concerning the creation of a long-term education system for the high-performance athletes, as well as their social reinsertion. Nonetheless, there is no methodology for its application, no funds allocated to collaboration with the institutions involved or agreements/partnerships between various partners (COSR - federations – clubs – universities) introduced. Consequently, state intervention is minimal. The Ministry of National Education approved state-subsidised sports only for bachelor's studies and limited scholarships only for the schooling period of student-athletes. Moreover, occasionally, other institutions (economic agents, non-governmental organisations) may sponsor these athletes in this period individually.

The intervention of institutions such as sports federations, the Romanian Olympic Sports Committee, clubs and sports associations to support the

dual career of athletes is limited to the status of intermediary between the athletes and the university, thus supporting sports performance only, not the professional performance.

Pursuant to Art. 151, Para. (2), of the Law No. 1/2011, The Law of National Education, “In their own methodology, the higher education institutions can decide upon special facilities and conditions related to the admission of the candidates to the bachelor’s degree education, who have obtained awards during high-school at the national and international school Olympiads and/ or other national and international contests.”

On the Romanian territory, 23 state and private faculties provide accredited programs in professional training (bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral studies) in the field of the Science of physical education and sport and facilities for the admission exam for performance athletes.

Henceforth, universities provide the athletes with the possibility of being enrolled – by differentiated criteria – only for full-time and part-time bachelor’s studies – depending on the performance level and on the sports results based on a specific methodology, based on the Law of National Education 1/2011, Art. 151, Para. (2).

For instance, at “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University in Iași, the performance athletes who obtained high results at Olympic, world, European or national level during their high school education may benefit from enrolment for the specialties in Physical and Sporting Education and Sport and Motor Performance: (a) on state-subsidised study places : the Olympic athletes: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> at WC, EC in the four prior years; (b) on study places with tuition: 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> place at NC in the previous calendar year in Olympic sports ; 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> place at WC, EC (seniors, youth, juniors) in the two prior years at Olympic sports.

The West University in Timișoara has 10 state-subsidised study places at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport. These places may be claimed by athletes without a contest if they are high school graduates with GED and if they obtained notable sports results (Ministerul Educației Nationale, 2019).

In addition, Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj has facilities for enrolling in the first year of studies. They refer to specific criteria for high performance athletes (for the following Specialties: Physical and Sporting Education and Sport and Motor Performance). The candidates with notable results at international contests may be enrolled without admission contest filling the places allocated by the Ministry of National Education. This position also includes a scholarship for academic performance (Universitatii Babes-Bolyai, 2018).



A series of benefits – particularised for each institution pursuant to national legislation and to institutional autonomy – may be identified for bachelor's and master's studies.

Consequently, a series of measures aimed to support dual career during the studies are included in internal regulations based on the supporting documents presented at the beginning of each academic year. These measures include different percentages of absence justification for the disciplines included in the curriculum each semester, special exam sessions at the end of each semester, and at the end of the study cycle (bachelor thesis/master thesis), as well as an agreement between the teacher holder of the discipline and the athlete concerning an individualised schedule by the specific of the discipline in question.

The only specialised University in Romania, namely, the National University of Physical Education and Sport, supports the student-athletes by justifying their absence to lectures and seminars in various percentage based on their sports performance levels: 80% justification for national and Olympic athletes, 50% justification for national athletes and 30% justification for athletes in lower-ranked teams. In addition, athletes benefit from a separate exam session besides the traditional one at the end of the semester.

Whereas the legislation is vague and it may be annotated and improved, the first steps in supporting the student-athletes by observing the existing legal framework have already been made by the Romanian universities. Besides the admission criteria, a series of measures have been adopted and included in internal regulations for the schooling period of student-athletes.

Hence, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University in Iași adopted the Regulation regarding the organisation of the teaching activity for performance student-athletes affiliated to the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport from the academic year 2018-2019. Support provision measures have a wide spectrum, from the possibility of particularising the calendar dates for exams to absence justification, all depending on the sports performance levels.

Thus, whereas other national reports mentioned that the decision makers had no views for the dual career of athletes, today the universities in the country have not only understood the situation, but also developed a legal framework (Senate decisions, state-subsidised study places, study places without admission contest, bursary, absence justification, prolonged exam session, etc.) meant for the student-athletes to graduate favourably for themselves, for their group and for the society.

As a general conclusion, Romania has made the first important steps in acknowledging the notion of *Dual Career Of Athletes* and in developing the legislation in the field.

## **Feedback from Stakeholders - Romania**

Throughout the performing sports career, the athletes fulfill several roles, at the same time being students, family members or employees, while being challenged to manage the demands of a dual career: sports and educational/professional ones. The dual career period for an athlete is complex, requiring effort and sacrifice, but also support from the family, school/university or sports environment that must support a balanced development.

### **Financial support**

Financial support for the students-athletes differs from one university to another, which may be the support for a semester, an academic year or for the entire period of study. Unfortunately, these are the academic results which are the priority, while sports results are being considered less.

The financial support for a high-performance athlete is very important. This support could come from the specialized federation or the Olympic committee for elite athletes. In addition, governmental organizations could provide scholarships for student-athletes in order to prevent school dropout in favour of sports or to ensure competitiveness in the labour market upon the completion of their sports career.

### **Infrastructure**

The infrastructure is required; high quality infrastructure facilitates quick and easy access as well as comfort for a student-athlete.

The infrastructure provided by universities and by the community is insufficient, efforts are being made to modernize the existing bases and to design new facilities for all the students. Investments in infrastructure would help reduce the time spent travelling from one location to another (study, training, canteen, dormitory, library, etc).

### **Mentors/tutors**

The role of the mentor is acknowledged and appreciated. The mentor is the one who communicates with the management and shares the information

necessary for the smooth running of the schedule and of the activities during the semesters.

The involvement of mentors is significant to create a connection among athlete-coach-teacher, in order to achieve a balance between sports and studies.

### **Curriculum**

The importance of the individual study plan is emphasized. Depending on the performance goal of the athlete, they frequently cannot attend the full-time studies and are obliged to choose certain subjects to attend.

The open examination session is a mandatory requirement, that can be followed if the competitions and /or the training stages overlap with the examination sessions.

A very good option is that of distance learning or part-time studies.

These proposals should be applied not only in the institutions with the specific vocational-sports focus, but also in other faculties/universities.

### **Social support**

Diverse and complex support is of fundamental importance for student-athletes. It should also be highlighted that a team of professionals and the community at large should support the student-athlete towards the high performance in both directions.

### **Other activities**

Good practices of dual career implementation can be adapted to the specific contexts and environments.

Monitoring student-athletes at university level is a very good idea - the model (presented in the corresponding sub-chapter of this document) can be applied also in Romania alongside with other initiatives outlined.

## **3.5. Dual Career in Spain**

Currently, there is an increasing interest in the topic of the Dual Career in Spain. The European Union has put its focus on the support that could be provided to student-athletes during their professional career and upon its completion. With this objective, different initiatives and political strategies have been proposed. One of them, to which the European Union has given

much importance, is the Sports Dual Career, which consists of providing them with the opportunity to feel current university students, being able to attend classes and take their courses in a regular way (European Commission, 2007; 2012). This interest in the EU for the education of student-athletes is due to the fundamental right for education, and even more so when these athletes give up their lives for their communities, countries or societies, making them partakers of their sporting successes (Schweiger, 2014). According to Giulianotti (2004), although education is a universal right, it is known by all that young student-athletes tend to sacrifice their academic performance for sports, and finally focus more on their professional sports career. Therefore, one of the proposed objectives is to help student-athletes avoid this.

Unlike ordinary students, student-athletes need help to develop professionally in the future, to be able to get involved in a learning system dominant in the society. Meanwhile, the Dual Career is considered a key topic. Today, the importance of the development of student-athletes by European educational institutions has been recognized having become aware of the complex processes to which these athletes are subject. In fact, it is understandable that student-athletes have special characteristics, since they are affiliated to two simultaneous careers, sports and academic one, and want to succeed in both. This demands a specific teaching system that can assist them in achieving their goals. Higher education institutions interested in taking part in this process of adapting and improving the conditions for student-athletes should not only focus on the teaching content, but also on administrative, organizational and logistic processes of the university life of any student (Sánchez-Pato et al., 2017).

The processes that must evolve have the persons that are key in their development, which are the Tutors and Mentors. As previously indicated, these are the fundamental precursors of student-athlete support in their academic career. Although the terms mentor and tutor are currently used as synonyms, it should be stated that there are differences between the two notions. The main objective for both is common, providing support and assistance to student-athletes, but at the same time, promoting the “achievement of achievements”, ensuring positive attitudes and behaviours. *“Tutor and tutorship are academic terms, they define the figure and action of people whose objective is to support and help students in their academic life. A tutor must be competent in the main subjects taught to student-athletes”* (Sánchez-Pato et al., 2017). On the other hand, mentor and mentoring are terms referring to an adult who, with the

objective of influencing and improving students' skills and abilities, acts as a role model (Danish, Petipas, & Hale, 1993). All these different types of mentors, with different backgrounds, serve as an example to student-athletes. The figure of the mentor is more recognized as a guide than as a teacher, in addition, it positively influences the difficult transition of the sports career of athletes towards their academic career. According to Stankovich, Meeker & Henderson (2001), both the mentor and the tutor are key figures in the support of the student-athlete in his/her transition from professional life to university life. Both figures would represent the basic pillars of the Tutorship/Mentorship system in the context that is of concern within the Sports Dual Career.

If the focus is placed on the actions of mentoring and tutoring, it would lead to error, thinking that they are synonyms and that they refer to the same idea. These two actions, within the Sports Dual Career have a common objective and are part of the same system, but they are different, as indicated above. Mentoring is responsible for helping student-athletes live the experience of university life in a positive way. Mentors help these students cope with the stress to which these students are exposed. Meanwhile, tutoring focuses on the academic support that can arise from any problem in a particular subject or course. Both Tutoring and Mentoring demonstrate the importance of developing new learning models for the academic success of student-athletes (Schön, 1983; Mezirow, 2000; Tuijnman, & Boström, 2002; Jackson, 2012). There is really no definition of what is a good tutor or mentor for student-athletes, but what is agreed upon is that this figure should include actions of both figures (Sánchez-Pato et al., 2017).

Defining the figure of the student-athlete, it has to be understood as a complex person, composed of many interests and motivations. Sometimes motivation will be more oriented to one of the careers, academic or sports one. The one which is usually less attractive is the study, therefore support should be provided in this direction. It is also necessary to make these special students understand the relationship between the result and the dedication to a certain task, or how to overcome the difficulties they will encounter along the way (Zagelbaum, 2014).

The keys to propose an effective system for student-athletes are finding solutions to the problems that may arise, putting the necessary effort to carry out the planned tasks, and motivate students in every way, whether emotionally or intellectually. Mentors should have a positive impact on student-athletes

so that they increase their intrinsic motivation, always in the context of the Dual Career. The mentor has to motivate the student to study, trying to reduce pressure and helping as much as possible; the mentor is responsible for giving advice and sharing experiences.

According to Sánchez-Pato et al. (2017), a tutor should be composed of 50% of tutor and 50% of mentor focusing on solving student-athlete problems. As indicated, being part of the tutor, one should have knowledge of the subjects or career that the student is undertaking. A remarkable skill of the tutors is their ability to listen and be able to transmit concepts or definitions that the student-athletes do not understand during their study, in this way being able to help little by little to ensure that these students can solve their problems autonomously in the future. The knowledge of the career of the student-athlete, compression and motivation are the key skills of any tutor or mentor.

In addition, the entire system has to focus on teaching skills or abilities and solving problems that may appear in their daily life. In addition, it should motivate the student and show them the tools to create autonomous learning environment and foster an increase in intrinsic motivation. The use of new technologies should be frequent to establish communication between the student-athlete and the tutor, and that this relationship is a common and trustworthy habit. All these characteristics should be part of any system of tutoring in the Sports Dual Career provided to the student-athletes who attend the university or perform higher education studies. Given that the primary objective of any of these systems is to help the student-athlete to be an independent and autonomous person, the following principles are put forward: (a) Teach the student-athletes to manage the problems that may arise, (b) teach them to analyze the problem and propose a solution, (c) guide them to find tools and skills to solve problems, (d) teach student-athletes to obtain the necessary information to solve tasks autonomously, (e) help them carry out a response as a team or individually, (f) the student-athlete will have to be given continuous examples of how to solve certain problems, and also gradually increase the difficulty.

To sum up, it could be said that tutoring consists of creating a communication channel with the student-athlete, with the aim of developing their communication and educational skills. It is an opportunity for educational institutions to foster the development of student-athletes affiliated to their programs.

The main challenges students face are flexibility, tutoring and the need for a systematic approach. These three aspects should become the grounds for the methodology to approach the issues related to student-athletes' needs (Casucci, 2002). For the athlete, the sports career represents the opportunity to develop professional life and the way of growing as a person in the society. In summary, according to Isidori (2015), the definitions of the Sports Dual Career should comply with methodologies that include a specific pedagogy for the athlete's sports follow-up, seeing the athlete as a person with different types of intelligence based on the Howards Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2011). Reid (2002) indicates that "they have to be oriented and guided within the framework of a formation of values and virtues".

### The Sports Tutorship Model

After analyzing the benefits of having a Tutoring or Mentoring program or the model for student-athletes, years ago, UCAM took a step forward having developed the program Sports Tutoring and naming the responsible person - Sport Tutor. Three theoretical principles to consider in a Sports Tutoring model were identified: (i) Integration, (ii) individuality and (iii) proactivity.

- **Integration:** it focuses on unifying all the necessary departments for the student-athlete, academic, sports or professional services.
- **Individuality:** each athlete is unique, and must be treated individually. Each program must be structured according to the specific needs of each athlete.
- **Pro-Activity:** the program must act autonomously, even anticipating future needs.

The program would work as follows: the needs of student-athletes should be identified and then those needs analyzed. The next step would be providing guiding and assistance in choosing the future occupation field. Moreover, whenever possible, the link between the development of both careers, sports and academic ones, should be identified.

The sports tutoring must be carried out by the Sports Tutor assigned to the athlete and supervised by a department coordinator, therefore, their training schedule and their academic calendar will be analyzed together, and thus previously detecting possible problems and the needs of the student. This Sports Dual Career model would provide students-athletes with individualized

attention, including meetings in person with their Sports Tutor or in a virtual way. In these meetings, aspects such as academic time management, advice and everything that a high-performance athlete may need to facilitate their passage through the university and their work life after finishing their sports career would be discussed. The Sports Tutor is responsible for collecting information to provide access to the resources student-athletes may need as an aid when searching for a job.

Following the UCAM model, its Sports Tutors develop and manage an official census of all athletes affiliated to their faculty each academic year. This way the academic calendar of each athlete is managed and adjusted to their competitions schedule. In particular, the issues they consider are as follows: (a) supervision of the development of both careers of the students included in the official census; (b) personal tutorials; (c) creation of coordination lines between competitions and academic obligations of student-athletes (exam dates, class attendance, class assignments); (d) informing student-athletes on all the issues of interest to them; (e) intermediary between the student and any professor of the faculty the student is affiliated to; (f) designation of the Student Tutor of the faculty. This is the person UCAM has already assigned the position to in several of its faculties. Sometimes this person is responsible for resolving concerns and other problems without having to go through the Sports Tutor. Student-athletes especially appreciate about having the Student Tutor is that they help them to be part of work groups, or take class notes on the days they cannot attend classes due to participation in competitions; (g) Sometimes, the help this Student Tutor can offer is essential, since it provides access to classroom information directly through the peers; (h) preparation of an annual report by the faculty based on the collection of relevant information, such as: sports results, personal reports, academic results, etc. (Sánchez-Pato et al., 2017).

Therefore, a Sports Tutor controls both the sports and academic development of the student-athletes at the same time offering personal tutoring. In addition, it is an advisory tool to get the necessary information.

## **Feedback from Stakeholders - Spain**

### **Infrastructure**

The first point put forward within the research stage was a clear and straightforward idea implying that the Dual Career (DC) needs investment in



both sports and academic facilities for its success. Many of the attendees also explained that today, provided the online education is getting increasingly used, this claim would “take a back seat”. However, everyone agreed that the virtual learning space is still an ongoing process and needs years of development.

*Respondent 3 (Discussion): The topic of the virtual campus, online education, is becoming more and more prevalent. This triple aspect would come out by itself. Today you don't need the academic facilities near your training place, there would be a priority in terms of those 3 levels, for me that 15 minutes rule is not important.*

*Respondent 1 (Discussion): Online education, that comes here registered as increasing the academic facilities, that those platforms are available. Improvement of the facilities not only physical but also online so that it can support that online study of the Student-athletes (SAs).*

*Respondent 1 (Written): Examinations could be conducted in the places of residence of the SAs, such as in high performance centres.*

*Respondent 3 (Written): In order to facilitate travel, agreements should be reached with sports associations close to the University.*

The majority of the participants stressed the importance of the American model, within which the residence where the SA lives, the training place and the academic centre are located within the 15 minutes distance to get from one place to another. However, the stakeholders also acknowledged that this goal is difficult to achieve in the short term by any European university. It is therefore clear that the success of such programmes in the future depends on the investment in facilities within these three levels mentioned.

*Respondent 4 (Discussion): It is a question of sport optimizing time. It can also be virtual training in some cases. We, for example, had to set up a room for UCAM students to go there to connect to the virtual campus. The question is about being able to optimize the time. We know that UCAM's scholarship athletes are not here, because of their high performance, they carry out online degrees.*

*Respondent 1 (Discussion): First point, the issue of infrastructure. To obtain academic and sporting success (dual career) there cannot be more than 15 minutes between residence, sports field and academic classroom. The partners talk about the need to increase the number of residences, sports and academic facilities. This is what they see as important to improve the DC.*

There are also opposing views on this issue. The most common one is thinking that if universities focus on these facilities for DC success, and

obviously the economic level is a significant barrier, they would never start taking steps in that direction. According to the experts' opinion, there are many things and solutions that can lead to success in DC without the need to link this success to economic investment in facilities, as this is the limitation for many universities.

*Subject 6 (Discussion): Creating an all-encompassing sports facility is very complicated, in addition to maintaining those 15 minutes of distance between them. Those sports that require other types of facilities are complicated to make facilities like this.*

### **Mentors/Tutors**

As concerns Mentors and Tutors, UCAM has a broad experience since it implemented this model more than 20 years ago. Obviously, it has a lot of issues to improve, and meetings with experts are useful to improve the mentoring process. Most of the attendees considered the Sports Tutor as a facilitator for the SA fostering self-sufficiency in everything related to DC. The Sports Tutor does not solve the SA's problems but helps to solve their own problems themselves. There was one idea that kept being reiterated by the stakeholders - "flexibility". The importance of the training of the Sports Tutors should also be stressed, as they should have thorough knowledge of the studies to be enrolled in and of high-performance sport.

*Respondent 4 (Discussion): Athletes must be people who are aware of the processes both at the sports and academic levels. This dual career is based on the universal right to study on an equal footing with others.*

*Respondent 2 (Discussion): I hold out my hand to you, give you my telephone number or tell you to give me yours and what time you have so that I can call you and start a conversation. I tell a person I don't know that I want to study this, how I study it, where to start, in this case – this is the Sport Tutor.*

*Respondent 4 (Discussion): You have to choose Sports Tutors who have authority and not just anyone.*

*Respondent 1 (Discussion): Most of these proposals are given by universities that do not have dual careers. They have all good practices and opinions, but it is not real at all. The Sport Tutor must have knowledge about the career the athlete is developing. They are looking to be more autonomous; they have to help them develop their own solutions. What the dual career is ensuring that he can be autonomous in the future, giving him guidelines and help so that he can do it his way.*

One of the ways to elaborate this service is to ensure that the Sports Tutor is facilitates communication between SA and teachers. This is a common complaint of the SAs, as they are not able to attend classes on a regular basis due to competitions, etc. They do not have access to the relevant information during the course, and sometimes the teaching staff do not provide this information through the accessible channels, but rather they would do it face-to-face in the classroom.

*Respondent 2 (Discussion): At UCAM there is a boy who had to go to South Africa for 20 days. He has a classmate who has agreed to pass on class information to him. It is important that what the university has to offer is a link. When there's an international competition, the athlete gets into his own world and doesn't have an opening to studies.*

*Respondent 1 (Discussion): The guidelines for creating a successful mentoring system, one input from the partners is that of a psychologist service, involving the athletes in the academic activities. Many times, we assume that all students know everything, but it is not always the case. Knowing the strategies is a way to improve the dual career.*

### **Curricula Requirements**

Within the discussion framework, there was no consensus on the curriculum-related issues and opinions differed. Each expert here focused on his or her field, and obviously highlighted the needs they suffered from on a daily basis, and the advantages they enjoyed in their position. Again, there is a common view on “flexibility” on the part of the faculty, which is essential to the success of DC. SAs are obviously recognized for what they are – they are students placed in a special situation.

*Respondent 2 (Discussion): What is true is that there is a change of paradigm, we have always come from careers and face-to-face classes, but if the athlete has not been able to attend class it is not his fault, in short, we have to be flexible.*

*Respondent 4 (Discussion): I think that with the virtual campus you can follow the tasks quite well because there are announcements ...*

Another issue highlighted within the discussion framework was the lack of flexibility characteristic to some teachers and the system itself, which is a barrier to the development of DC. The lack of previous training for the SAs when they enter the university, which would focus on the administrative processes and needs of an ordinary student is viewed as a serious shortcoming. Being distant from the daily academic life, SAs cannot predict what they need to handle

within the DC implementation. Unity is requested from the entire university community, since without coordination among different departments, the development of the DC would be impossible. A popular request from the students is for flexibility in the delivery of assignments, change of exam dates, etc. The latter is a common request for the athletes facing the necessity to deal with the due dates of the assignments coinciding with international competitions, etc.

*Respondent 5 (Discussion): [Responding to the comment of the Respondent 8] It is not the case only with thw athletes who start the degree studies, but it happens to all of them. Something similar to a seminar could be launched with small tutorial videos to show them how to access the virtual campus.*

*Respondent 9 (Discussion): It is necessary for all the components of UCAM to be ready. Psychology on the part of the professors to understand the life of the sportsmen and women. If there is no regulation this will not work (to change exams dates...)*

*Respondent 1 (Discussion): Alternative access to homework submission, students who cannot attend class must receive the same information as other students in order to submit homework. For athletes, it is necessary to open personalized homework assignments, which requires planning and significant input. A post-sports career is in focus, as when they finish their sports career they need to work.*

*Respondent 11 (Written): Put a guide with information containing short videos about how to use the campus for those who start.*

It is worth mentioning that the SAs who attended the event focused their requests on this part of the meeting. Their main concern is the lack of information and flexibility from some teachers. However, they stated that such teachers are the minority.

*Respondent 11 (Discussion): Autonomy is necessary, but there are athletes who are very lost, There is no guide to indicate what they should do to study, access the virtual campus...*

*Respondent 8 (Discussion): I have many suggestions and complaints from athletes, one of which is that teachers do not take the time to explain to athletes how to approach their subject.*

*Respondent 10 (Discussion): The problem is that since they do not attend classes, they do not know the subject of the work.*

*Respondent 7 (Written): Provide notes in all subjects and do not assume that a few slides with words are sufficient and will be understood.*

To sum up, all stakeholders understand the need to continue improving this process and service, which is vital for DC. To conclude, the final reflection of one of the participants was as follows:

*Respondent 2 (Discussion): This is a long process and we are still in the middle.*

### **Social Support**

In the final part of the meeting, the importance of Social Support for the SAs was highlighted. The attendees understood social support as: family, sports community and university community (academic). They also wanted to emphasize that there were significant differences in relation to the type of sport. These were mainly based on the differences between team and individual sports. Furthermore, they highlighted the importance of the sports context, since a positive context, where the rest of the team is also SAs is beneficial for the group, while in the case when the athlete is the only student in the team, difficulties and the lack of motivation towards the academic part of the DC is the frequent case.

*Respondent 1 (Discussion): Social support: family, sports community and academic university community*

*Respondent 2 (Discussion): The integral vision of the person is important.*

*Respondent 7 (Discussion): It is very important if it is a team sport...It is the environment - if your teammates study, you will study more.*

*Respondent 4 (Discussion): A structure is needed to put it into practice; it is up to the person to bring these things forward.*

*Respondent 4 (Discussion): It is not the same to perform in an individual sport as in a team sport.*

There were also negative or critical comments on this subject, especially on the overprotection of some SAs or on the pressure to which these SAs are subjected during their DC, both at the academic and sport level.

*Respondent 10 (Discussion): You can't make things so easy for athletes, they have to do their part too.*

*Respondent 1 (Discussion): Poor athletic or academic performance can reduce the scholarship. The difference is that there is always that pressure to lose or pay back that scholarship.*

### 3.6. The Role of European Athlete as Student (EAS) in Higher Education Institutions

In recognizing the value of educated athletes as human resource, the European Commission encourages the development of financial and logistic support specifically designed for student-athletes, which would promote their dual career at sport (e.g., sports equipment, travelling to competitions, etc.), academic (payment of tuition, tutoring, etc.), and work (e.g., employment, leaving sports, etc.) levels (European Commission, 2012). The Member States have full competence in the field of sport and education. However, sport disciplines vary in requirements and organization. In fact, despite the fact that the majority of the Member States offer a wide variety of support measures (e.g., academic, sports, or military, etc.) and volumes (European Commission, 2004), European student-athletes are facing serious disparities in pursuing a successful dual career.

Established during the European Year of Education through Sport 2004 to facilitate the recognition of the educational needs of student-athletes, the European Athlete as Student (EAS) network provides a platform for a fruitful dialogue between universities, high schools, sports clubs and federations, and agencies of the labour market in support of the promotion of the European Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes (European Commission, 2012). In particular, EAS aims to encourage the exchange of dual career best practices, to strengthen the link between educational institutions and sport organizations, and to support European projects and research on dual career (Capranica et al., 2015).

In line with the recommendations of the European Commission (2012), EAS supports educational institutions (e.g., high schools and universities) and sport bodies (e.g., National Olympic Committees, sport federations, and clubs) within and beyond Europe to develop Dual Career guidelines for advancing curricula, sharing resources and structuring educational programmes for athletes. In particular, networking is considered crucial to progress towards the implementation of dual career actions and policies, and to raise awareness of best practices and methodological advances in European dual career. Due to its extensive networking role, at policy level EAS is a stakeholder of the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) of the Council of Europe, the European University Sports Association (EUSA), and the International University Sport Federation (FISU).

To promote cooperation between different dual career actors at micro, meso, macro and policy levels (Capranica & Guidotti, 2016), EAS participated in several European projects (EAS participated in the “Athletes2Business”, “Better Boards Stronger Sport Project”, and “ProSafe Sport”, “Better Boards Stronger Spots”, and “Facilitating Higher Education for Athletes – Winner education model), and studies (“Study on the Minimum Requirement for Dual Career Services”, “Study on Sport Qualifications Acquired through Sport Organisations and (Sport) Educational Institutes”, and “Qualifications/ Dual Careers in Sports”). Currently, EAS is an active partner of ongoing Collaborative Partnerships (“More Than Gold”- MTG”, “Media as a Channel of Athletes’ Dual Careers promotion and Education - Ed Media”, “Athletic Migration: Dual career and qualification in sports – AMID”, “Education Model for Parents of ATHletes in Academics – EMPATIA”, “Dual careers for wOmEN Athletes – DONA”, “Sport Opens Schools - SOS “, “STARTING 11 The European Dual Career Toolkit”), which aim to implement different aspects of European dual career of athletes.

To help the dissemination of project findings, the annual EAS conference represents an effective knowledge-hub in which academic institutions and sport bodies converge and discuss key aspect of dual career. In placing a relevant role to innovative aspects of dual career, the Conference also stimulates young researchers to present their recent research and awards a scholarship to the best scientific contribution. In fact, the need for more research in dual career is substantiated by three literature reviews (Guidotti, Cortis, & Capranica, 2014; Stambulova & Ryba, 2014; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2018). Finally, during the Conference several workshops are organized to discuss roles and responsibilities of individuals and well-structured cooperation among organisations to implement the dual career programmes.

Indeed, dual career is particularly challenged when athletes face the transition from high school to higher education, which also coincides with the transition from youth to senior sport categories, which implies increased demands and commitment (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2018). This peculiar stage results in longer absences from home due to increased training volume and less motivation to study. Therefore, the adoption of legal provisions is particularly envisaged at university level to determine the scope and type of individualized adjustments for top athletes pursuing the higher education (Kerstajn, 2018). In considering that different sports disciplines require specific training and competition schedules, facilities, and locations (especially for environmental

sports), it makes sense that universities also offer different adjustments, lectures, and tutoring for high-performance athletes. In particular, it is urgent that higher education institutions provide flexibility for class attendance and exams, adjust the curricula based on a dual career pedagogical study model (Lapland University of Applied Sciences et al., 2017), and arrange specific services (career counselling, psychological and health assistance, accommodation and sports facilities, distance learning) and tutoring (Pato, Isidori, Calderón, & Brunton, 2014). In considering the peculiarities of high school and higher education systems in addition to the relevant different approaches to education and sport between countries, EAS represents a valuable encounter for European high schools and universities to share actual dual career approaches and best practices, to envisage implementations of dual career provisions, and to engage in a shared European dual career vision. In particular, this dialogue could contribute to the establishment of European dual career guidelines for higher education institutions, which is necessary to guide the holistic development of student-athletes in their transition from high school to university and during their academic path towards the accomplishment of a university degree.

### **3.7. Exploring Dual Career Quality Implementation at European Higher Institutions: Insights from University Experts**

To make effective decisions in the development of guidelines for the implementation of policy and provisions of dual career at HEIs level, the MTG partners made use of ‘Delphi’ multi-stage consensus methods (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000). In particular, two conditions guided the research design: 1) to build on ‘idea-generating strategies’ based on a group consultation process involving university student-athletes living in European countries with different dual career policies and competing in different sports disciplines (Capranica et al., submitted); and 2) to establish the quality of the produced ideas based on the knowledge of a wide group of European HEI experts with diverse educational and professional backgrounds responding to an anonymous survey.

Therefore, the aim of this sub-chapter is to introduce the convergence of the opinions of European HEI experts on possible implementation of six dual career policies and provisions areas (e.g., Financial Support, Logistic



Support, Assistance/Tutorship, Curricula Requirements, Social Support, and Policies) in relation to the extant dual career policy adopted by their academic institutions. It was hypothesized that HEI experts' views could contribute to foresee implementations of dual career policies, services, and provisions at European university level.

## **Methodology**

The present research stage involved 21 experts in virtue of their training or expertise and academic position (i.e., administrative staff, manager of sport services, dean, vice dean, head of department, professor, associate professor, lecturer, and researcher). In particular, experts have information and knowledge in a substantive area beyond that of the average person and who regularly share this information and knowledge through consultation, teaching or public speaking, or publications and written reports. For the Committee of the Protection of Human Subject (CPHS) purposes, experts are not human subjects when asked to provide opinions within their areas of expertise and do not require CPHS approval. Furthermore, in the present work the experts' opinion were about the external topic (e.g., factors deemed relevant for dual career policies and services), not including demographic queries about age, education, income or other personal information. Participation in the task was voluntary and informed consent was assumed with subjects' reply that they were willing to participate. Participating experts were free of opting out at any time without providing any reason, and incomplete opinions were not considered. In the quest to ensure better knowledge on dual career of athletes at HEI level, the rights and welfare of research participants have been protected at all times, and confidentiality has been ensured and maintained throughout the research. For the above reasons, IRB review was not required.

To help enhancing effective decision-making in the implementation of dual career guidelines for HEIs, the opinion of European HEI experts was collected as the last phase of a Delphi method, which is based on qualitative research, quantitative, and mixed-methods (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000).

In the present research stage, to evaluate the relevance of the individual 26 dual career aspects identified in the previous phases and the feasibility of their implementation at HEI level, an online survey was selected to allow a time and geographic flexibility in addition to multimedia and self-administration (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000). To show the relationship between the

mean ratings of the relevance and feasibility of the 26 dual career aspects were organized in bivariate go-zones plots. Finally, Qualitative Data Analysis method guided the development and implementation of this research. Then, a final consensus of the dual career experts participating in the European ERASMUS+ Collaborative Partnership More Than Gold was acquired during a dedicated workshop.

## **Materials and methods**

### **The instrument**

The questionnaire encompassed two sections to gather information on: 1) the country, type of HEI (e.g., private or public), academic position (i.e., administrative staff, manager of sport services, dean, vice dean, head of department, professor, associate professor, lecturer, and researcher), European Research Council (ERC) area of expertise (i.e., Social Sciences and Humanities, Physical Sciences and Engineering and Life Sciences) of the respondents and 2) the actual availability of dual career services in the respondents' HEI, and the respondents' opinion regarding the relevance of the individual 26 dual career aspects and the feasibility of their implementation at HEI level by means of a 10-point Likert-type scale (lowest value=1; highest value=10). Furthermore, for each of the 26 dual career aspect respondents were allowed to suggest possible implementation, if any (Supplementary material).

### **Recruitment**

To ensure an appropriate representation of HEI experts, a purposeful sampling was deemed appropriate and a core strength to gain a comprehensive, meaningful, and practical knowledge on dual career at university level. By screening their National and European networks, the More Than Gold Team identified and invited potential participants in agreement to their country-specific regulations of General Data Protection Regulations and privacy rights of personal data. Participants were informed that their contribution was voluntary and anonymous and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason. Thus, a link to the online survey was provided and informed consent was assumed from the completion of the survey. The survey was launched on 1 March 2020 and was closed on 14 May 2020, with a follow-up contact with a seven-day in between. According to the literature (Deutskens et al., 2004), this procedure was deemed necessary to increase

the response rate for the online surveys encompassing more than 20 items (Callegaro et al., 2015).

Application of the Research Results in the Development of the Guidelines for the Implementation of Policy and Provisions of Dual Career at HEIs Level

The university departments and institutions have immediate responsibility in implementing dual career policies and provisions, essential for student-athletes to know what is expected of them and what support they can expect from their university towards the completion of a degree (European Commission, 2012). Based on the needs and expectations of European student-athletes, this research stage was conceived in the understanding that the existing dual career policies and support provisions at HEI level need to be grounded in a concern of their relevance and feasibility for implementation (Capranica et al., submitted). Thus, this research matches the collaboration of researchers and practitioners for the development of a consensus about problems and solutions. This approach is founded on a phenomenological lifeworld-led approach to ideas that can be used to inform practical directions in dual career HEI settings. In fact, the everyday experience of the participating experts was a coherent and useful starting point to develop deep understandings of the considered 26 aspects encompassed in the six delineated dual career categories, intended not to form a checklist but to emphasise insights into features of the best dual career at tertiary educational level. As such, the study is concerned towards 'actions' over the 'research' component and offers impactful suggestions for dual career implementation of the European HEIs strategic agenda. Thus, the present findings emphasize current quest for dual career progress and reinforce the need of a minimum standard for dual career policies and provisions (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences et al., 2016; Capranica & Guidotti, 2016; European Commission, 2012). In this respect, well-structured cooperation systems between HEIs and other dual career stakeholders could provide opportunities to strengthen the potential of the athletes of the future, the stakeholders are sharing of knowledge from policy to best practices (Capranica et al., 2015, 2021).



## GUIDELINES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

It is widely reported that athletes frequently face challenges combining their sporting career with education and work. Therefore, the project aimed to explore the opportunities for dual career implementation and provide possible solutions to the problems identified.

Based on the data obtained within the project framework, the recommendations for higher education institutions are put forward.

### 4.1. Financial support

#### Human Resources/Financial Resources

One of the most fundamental challenges acknowledged within the project Consortium countries is the lack of funding to address the problematic issues the HEIs face within the Dual Career implementation process. Sufficient financial resources should be invested to ensure human resources accessibility to provide sufficient support based on the assessment of needs of the target audience.

The expert team, including coaches, medical and other staff members, should be set up ensuring its functioning as a coordinated team to guide the sporting careers towards the high-performance level. The approach requires the full understanding and a mind-shift in sport governing bodies in the project Consortium countries.

The HEI experts envisaged a collaboration between HEIs, sport bodies and public sectors to overcome the limited funding and to reduce the financial pressures for the cost of a higher education (e.g., tuition fees, books, housing and food, tutor, etc.) and sport (e.g., equipment, training camp, physiotherapy, travel, etc.), which might determine dual career dropouts of student-athletes.

Despite many athletes compete in nonrevenue-generating sports and very few elite student-athletes are financially independent through their sports earnings, they could generate substantial value for their HEIs and sport

bodies, especially when engaging followers through social media platforms (Condello et al., 2019; Kunkel et al., 2021). Thus, independently from the private or public nature of HEIs, student-athletes could be popular choices to target for brand endorsement opportunities, and to align internal and external dimensions achieving collaborative practices to co-create sport-related values (Balmer, 2012; Kunkel et al., 2021; Mingione, 2015; Mingione & Leoni, 2020).

### **Individual Study Plan**

Individual and student-centred approach should be applied to meet the needs of each individual student involved in the Dual Career implementation process (e.g., the study process may be slower or faster in comparison to the duration of the normative licensed or accredited study programme, as long as it does not contradict the regulatory enactments regulating the study process). All these processes may be regulated through the application of additional agreements.

Appropriate process management strategies should be applied (e.g., the director of the study programme may be entrusted coordination and the related responsibilities).

It is apparent that athletes can only develop successful dual careers if they have access to and benefit from effective support services. The overlapping objectives of sport, education and work, different legal and financial frameworks, high work load and pressure rooted in the necessity to perform exceptionally in sport substantiate the necessity to view such support services as obligatory rather than complimentary services.

Support strategies for Dual Career implementation should focus on sport, educational, and lifestyle systems of the athletes. It is of fundamental importance to consider the athletes' needs holistically. Such support schemes, strategies, frameworks should be developed in collaboration with athletes, coaches, performance directors, counsellors, physiotherapists, doctors, education-based representatives and other stakeholders with one common aim to work out individualised action plans for each student-athlete.

### **Students' Council**

Students' Council work is based on the initiatives of most active students. However, this may also imply that extrinsic motivation may be driven by external rewards. The Council co-ordinates cooperation with the Dean of

the Faculty, Student Parliament, sponsors, etc.; organizes cultural events, excursions and competitions, other activities, such as an annual first-year camp, solves academic problems, represents their interests in both academic and material and cultural fields. Such initiatives also require additional financial resources.

### **Summer Camps**

The camps usually take place at youth hostels. Students spend an unforgettable weekend learning various personal development skills and life skills, such as communication, productivity, presentation skills, teamwork, emotional intelligence, agreement and persuasion. The camp is also visited by one of the sponsor companies, who prepares engaging tests aimed at the development of specific skills. Such initiatives also require additional financial resources.

### **Financial Support for Student-Athletes**

It is widely reported and the data obtained in the project framework confirm that high-performance athletes frequently face financial problems. In many cases, sports equipment and training as such require financial investments, which frequently are covered by the athletes themselves. In addition, the investment of time into sporting and studies frequently leads to the lack of time and opportunities for employment (even part-time). Therefore, in the majority of cases, these are scholarships, grants, fees and other types of financial support which may be of fundamental significance for student-athletes.

Although different models and schemes of how athletes can get financial support in EU Member States exist, the implementation of these measures may be different depending on specific contexts. In the majority of cases, in the educational stage of a dual career, scholarships and specific fees or discounts for high-performance athletes are of primary importance. Apparently enough, other financial support models are possible or rather accessible, such as contracts or sponsorships.

Therefore, the suggestion is to develop comprehensive and transparent Dual Career financial support models based on certain eligibility criteria. The aspects to be considered may be as follows: payment of tuition fees or reduced tuition fees for specific education programmes; financial support for certain sport-related expenses, for instance, sporting equipment or travel expenses, etc.).

## 4.2. Infrastructure

Problems encountered in managing dual career can obviously be different: career choice, financial support, lack of balance between sport performance and education, infrastructure, etc. (Oros & Hantiu, 2016).

Apparently enough, one of the most important challenges which may not always be resolved due to numerous reasons is having sports facilities close to educational provision and accommodation. This crucial aspect should be considered and included in university policies and programs comprising Dual Career as an element of their excellence.

In general, schools and universities perform the role of education provision while ensuring that sporting and lifestyle management services are available. It is their responsibility to maintain the athlete's well-being and to educate them appropriately (Aquilina & Henri, 2010).

European Commission (2016) state that accommodation and the campus should be located close to each other to improve the athlete's mobility. The basic principle here is that the athletes should not waste time travelling from one facility to another. Apparently enough, they should be able to use their training-study time schedule most efficiently. The guidelines highlight the 15 minutes rule stating that all facilities should be within a 15 minute biking distance from each other. Most athletes can only develop dual careers if they benefit, alongside a balanced performance team, from effective supporting services. In Guidelines for DC, Chartrand & Lent (1987), and Lavallee & Wyllema (2000) consider that the conflicting requirements of sport, education and work, different legal and financial frameworks, the general lack of time and high pressure due to expected exceptional performance in sport make the availability of such services a precondition for success. Academic evidence has highlighted the importance of a strong support structure to help elite athletes achieve their sporting ambitions as part of their life-long strategy. Aquilina (2013) believes that student-athletes successfully manage DC when support from the education system is provided (e.g., sport facilities, classrooms, flexible schedule, network support from academic staff, etc.).

### Accomodation Facilities/ Residence

At present, the university life is so diverse that its many different facets blend to create a unique academic and personal experience. There are many aims



as concerns the on-campus living experience. Typically, students live very close to the campus, being a short walk away from their classes and university buildings.

The general aim for accommodation service is to provide a home for university students and help new arrivals to become acclimatized and adjusted to the new environment. As concerns SAs, the overall aim is to give SA the chance to live as close as possible to the campus area.

### **Examples from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (UAIC)**

Located at a two or three-minute walking distance from the main University building, the TituMaiorescu Campus is the quintessential embodiment of the student hustle and bustle, offering its residents all the prerequisites for turning their study experience into a wonderful unforgettable story. Another four campus buildings are located at a 10-20 minutes walking distance from the UAIC Iasi buildings, or a few minutes by local transportation means (one or two stations by bus or tram).

The right to accommodation is granted to enrolled students and PhD students who do not have a permanent residence in Iași. It does not matter whether they pay the tuition fee for studies or whether they are enrolled in the free type of studies. The main criterion in granting the right to accommodation is the annual average obtained in the previous academic year. For the students enrolled in the first year study programmes, the average obtained at admission is taken into account.

To ensure qualitative accommodation infrastructure, University needs financial resources (e.g., new buildings, renovation of the existing buildings, endowment, interior design, maintenance costs, including staff resources for administration).

### **Examples from Catolica San Antonio de Murcia University (UCAM)**

As with sports facilities, the student residence would exponentially increase the quality of the DC. SAs, if they had the possibility of studying, living and training in the same place, would stand for the excellence within the DC. From all perspectives, the success lies in the fact that the SA feels comfortable and can reconcile each of the intended activities. Therefore, these infrastructures would give a quality leap to the DC.

*The difference* between universities accommodation facilities service implies the necessity of adjusting the residence opportunities for the dual career implementation.

UCAM has extensive experience in Dual Career of Students-Athletes. The DC would greatly benefit and would not need to adjust to the situation, since the SA could live within the campus area being able to attend classes. There are no differences detected between sports, gender and performance levels in the granted possibilities to use these facilities.

At UAIC, the key criterion for granting the accommodation services is the annual average of academic evaluation for all students. There are no any special criteria for the selection of SAs. In the majority of cases, top SAs do not require assistance for accommodation provided that they are given this opportunity through their own sport club. In addition, one of the proposals might be assessing previous results of SAs.

## **Sport Facilities**

Physical activity and sports activity have a positive impact on well-being reducing stress and increasing self-confidence and emotional well-being for university students. Thus, promoting physical activity is an important aspect within the promotion of public health. Many goals can be achieved through access to good facilities.

Guidelines for dual career suggest that sports facilities should be located close to educational facilities and the place of residence to ensure athlete's mobility.

The overall aim for all partners is to provide the possibility for SAs to practise all their tasks in the most time-effective way provided that this is one of the factors affecting their performance in general.

The UCAM experience suggests that the goal of every University is having their own sports facilities located in the most appropriate place. This way, SAs would be given the opportunity to train daily combining studies and sports. This approach would definitely promote the quality in the DC of all European universities (Sánchez-Pato et al., 2017).

In Latvia, HEIs have poor sports facilities. In the majority of cases, sports halls are being rented. Therefore, this is the issue of highest topicality.

UAIC currently has limited sport facilities available in the campus, but two new projects in sport infrastructure are ongoing. It is possible to integrate new

sport facilities in DC implementation framework given that the University provides appropriate conditions for training and competing on campus alongside with the provision of sport equipment. This would be a good opportunity to find balance between studies and training and shorten the travelling time from campus to training club facilities. It should be highlighted that the key issue here would be investment in such initiatives.

It should also be stated that this service should be offered to all SAs regardless of their level or the type of sport.

### **Educational Facilities**

UAIC offers the opportunity to choose both a major and a minor field of study in a combination at their choice to fit their career goals. The University introduces unique initiatives to stimulate research quality, to encourage dynamic and creative education and to engage its best students in academic life.

The overall aim of the service is to offer students and student-athletes many issues to resolve in the field of development and research, which would lead to the competitiveness in the labour market.

Educational facilities are located in the campus and comprise: free internet access; e-mail service; libraries; labs and research centers; cultural centers (German, British, Spanish, French); students' associations; access to the canteen, restaurant; career counselling.

These facilities help SAs to combine study and training at high level. Within the DC implementation, the main aim of HEIs is having high quality infrastructure, professional training support and academic support aimed at SAs. High quality of infrastructure leads SA towards obtaining good results in the educational process alongside with high sports performance.

### **4.3. Mentors/Tutors**

Provided the increased interest in Dual Career implementation, the European Union has put its focus on the support provision frameworks that would meet the needs of student-athletes during their professional career and upon its completion. With this objective in mind, different initiatives and political strategies have been proposed. One of them is the Sports Dual Career, which is supported by the European Union as one of the key priorities aiming

to ensure that student-athletes have the opportunity to be the students, attend the classes and take courses in the traditional way (European Commission, 2007; 2012).

The terms *tutor* and *mentor* have already been defined in the corresponding sub-chapter of the document. Still, it should be highlighted that both the mentor and the tutor are key within the dual career organization process - they are vital pillars of the *tutorship/mentorship* system in the context that is of concern within the Dual Career.

Both tutoring and mentoring practices demonstrate the importance of developing new learning models for the academic success of student-athletes (Schön, 1983; Mezirow, 2000; Tuijnman, & Boström, 2002; Jackson, 2012). Within the project framework, the Consortium had elaborated the previous models incorporating the new knowledge and experience gained through participation in the project activities.

### The Sports Tutorship Model

The three theoretical principles proposed by UCAM as one of the project Consortium members and building grounds for the Sports Tutorship Model are: (i) Integration, (ii) individuality and (iii) proactivity.

- **Integration** as one of the principles defines the aspect of unity and collaboration among all the stakeholders and the beneficiaries for the promotion of Dual Career implementation (i. e. academic, sports and professional services).
- **Individuality** stands for the individual approach to each athlete emphasizing the unique features of each student-athlete, which should not be neglected within the study program development process.
- **Pro-Activity** as a principle implies anticipation of the future needs. This approach would build the grounds for assisting the target audience in their future career choice taking into consideration the dual focus of student-athletes.

In considering that HEIs usually provide various services for students (e.g., academic orientation, consultation, career and personal counselling, and psychological support) it seems quite feasible to implement them by training their personnel on dual career issues, such as dual career challenges in transitions and development, time management for combining sports and

**Occupational guidance**

- Diagnosis and identification of need.
- Guidance and counselling for employment.
- Working together with athlete training pathways and career paths.

**Training**

- Information and advice about training activities.
- Information and advice about scholarships and financial aids.
- Support in the management and processing of entries to training activities.
- Sport monitoring and academic tutoring.
- Having an intermediary between businesses, organizations and institutions to facilitate access to employment services.

**Employment**

- Information and advice about the job market (type of contracts, social security, labor law, etc.).
- Information and advice about employment sites/opportunities, related to their professional profiles.
- Advice and support during the job search.
- Providing tools for active job search.
- Job vacancies management.
- Tracking job incorporations and work maintenance.

**Collaboration**

- Promoting partnerships with private businesses, organizations and institutions.
- Coordination of activities with partners.
- Searching for potential employers.

**Figure No 3.** Model for the Implementation of Dual Career.

academic commitments, coping and emotional distress in and outside of sport and academics, and establishment of positive relationships with sports and faculty staff (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences et al., 2016). In addition to psychologists and dual career staff, HEI experts identified also professors having a positive perception of student-athletes as potential tutors to assist the sport-study combination and to create an academic environment promoting the student-athletes' commitment to higher education (Guidotti et al., 2014; Harrison, Comeaux, & Pletcha, 2006; Jolly, 2008).

Even though empathic attitudes of well-informed service providers and faculty members are envisaged for enhancing positive academic experiences for student-athletes and building university readiness mindset, HEIs are called to develop/implement dual career programmes and dedicated services to

ensure inter-departmental collaboration and coordination, which are crucial for promoting tailor-made arrangements and committed guidance to sustain student-athletes (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences et al., 2016; Grafnetterova, Hawkinson & Rodriguez, 2020).

The HEI experts deemed also relevant pro-active dual career programmes potentially able to anticipate the student-athletes needs and/or challenges, however they diagnosed them a low feasibility. Indeed, pro-active programmes could be possible when based on high-quality practice, extensive experience on the student-athletes' needs (Grafnetterova, Hawkinson, & Rodriguez, 2020; Patton et al; 2016). However, in many Member States dual career is still in its infancy stage and these findings corroborate the needs to integrate efforts through further intra- and inter-country exchanges of best practices to build a solid European dual career discourse (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences et al., 2016; Capranica et al., 2015, 2020; Guidotti, Cortis, & Capranica, 2015).

#### **4.4. Curricular Requirements**

It is a well-known fact that both careers are time and energy demanding and high-level sport requires travelling or living abroad for a long time. Without the support, an athlete may find himself/herself in the situation of having to choose between study and sport, thus compromising their right to an education or the possibility of a potential elite sport career. For this reason, dual career programs are conceived to allow SAs combining education and high-performance sport. However, in spite of this recent attention to dual career, the idea that SAs are special individuals and for this reason deserve special consideration is not always accepted and they are still facing different barriers at cultural, social, institutional, and policy level. In this context, the universities play a central role in promoting the academic development of SAs by empowering them to combine high-performance sport and education. Regardless of the university subject and the sports, SAs have the right, established by the article 26 of the "Universal Declaration of Human Right" (United Nations, 1948), to have an education without any restrictions. On the contrary, quite frequently the choice of the subject is restricted due to the compulsory attendance of the lessons or more in general because of the lack of flexibility in learning programs. In the worst scenario, they are in the

situation of having to choose between study and sport. Universities should make available the opportunity for SAs to have flexible study path including individual study plans, distance learning (e-learning), flexible exam schedules, and valorization of sport commitments through ECTS.

When designing programmes to enhance academic success, arrangements should be attuned to specific student populations (Patton et al., 2016). In particular, HEI experts considered individualized study plans and distance learning aspects as highly priorities with a high potential for implementation. In considering that only 40% of HEIs actually encompass aspects related to the academic curricula of student athletes (range: 25-55%), several actions should be initiated/enriched.

Actually, athletes engage in various sports under different competition and training schedules taking place in unique facilities and venues. Not only HEI experts indicated individualization of study plans as a highly required aspect, but also underlined that it needs to be supported by a tutorship programme helping student-athletes developing connections to the institution and providing an orientation to campus resources and services, as well as encompassing elective courses aiming to enhance concentration, relaxation, psychological well-being, and self-efficacy for improving academic readiness (Minkler, Glass, & Hut, 2020; Sanchez-Pato et al., 2017). To ensure a sound quality implementation of the identified individualized study plans, written agreements between the student-athlete and the university have been suggested, which could also profit from a co-construction process involving sports bodies to verify the compatibility of potential conflicting commitments and to increase the likelihood of meaningful learning situations for athletes persisting towards their degree completion, particularly relevant for the first year student-athletes who might undergo various academic and social changes (Grafnetterova, Hawkinson & Rodriguez, 2020; Brown et al. 2015; Ryan, Thorpe, & Pope, 2017).

Traditionally, academic culture has been reluctant to adopt teaching-practice using technology due to possible lack of proper organizational support and/or digital literacy of teachers and students (Herodotou et al., 2020). Coherently, the HEI experts considered innovative teaching and ECTS recognition for informal and non-formal learning through sport participation less feasible with respect to their relevance. Actually, distance learning resulted crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, which imposed HEIs a rapid change towards online delivery mode of teaching by means of synchronous

and asynchronous classes, webinars, social networks and distance evaluation (Brady & Pradhan, 2020; Abenza-Cano et al., 2020). Thus, online scheduled curriculum-based study could be maintained to guarantee in the future adequate support to student-athletes, who could benefit from online-based study plans when unable to attend onsite classes and examinations (Izzicupo et al., 2021). Furthermore, to represent the student-athletes' accomplished work and to extend beyond initial degree conferment, HEI experts suggested the adoption of digital portfolios that could foster the students' critical thinking and equip them with a website for post-graduation employment searches (Cleveland, 2018). Finally, in considering that transfer of skills and knowledge are core concepts in the education and employment policy discourse to face the actual and future challenges in technologies, markets and organisations (Unesco, 2020), HEIs are urged to establish a ECTS conversion system encompassing the valuable soft skills developed in and through sports (e.g., commitment, teamwork, respect, goal orientation, self-efficacy, time management, responsibility, and autonomy, etc.), which proved to have positive effects on career success and labour market trajectories of athletes (Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003; Debois, Ledon, & Wylleman, 2015; Henderson, Olbrecht, & Polachek, 2006).

### **Individual Study Plan**

Within the project framework, the University of Latvia has proposed the strategy on the application of an individual study plan implying choosing an individual - a slower pace of study or individual study modules for the limited part (B) of the study program. The individual study plan is coordinated by the director of the study program. Students, who have chosen a slower pace of study, conclude an additional agreement - an attachment to the study contract and pay for the study courses acquired according to the volume of selected study courses and pricing of paid services in the respective academic year. In this case, the total fee for the studies exceeds the statutory fee. Obviously, this support requires extra resources: SAs should discuss their individual study plan with an academic counsellor for helping them in taking the right decision. According to the specific needs, this figure can be a mentor or/and a tutor, paid from the university resources. Furthermore, there will be the of additional salary for time for the specific student – consultation or lecture, as well as for possible extra administrative work. The difference might be – whether



these costs are covered by the higher education institution or are included as additional tuition fees. Probably, one of the most significant challenges in the context of defining curricular specifications is to strike a balance between flexibility and the resources available to different universities. In fact, it is necessary to provide a methodology that can be shared within the EU, regardless of the different financial resources available. This means that what is required is common European basic package that all universities may be able to apply should be indicated. From this package, each individual university can decide whether or not to provide additional services. The individual study plan would be created for all the university subjects. Indeed, the choice of subject should be completely free for the SAs and not limited by academic lack of support services or sport commitments. The implementation of the individual study plan needs to be supervised by the head of the structural unit of the university or college who is responsible for implementing the corresponding study program. Given the importance for SAs of managing education path in accordance with the sport schedule, this service should be considered mandatory, suitable for both individual and team sports as well as for winter and summer sports.

## **E-Learning**

Dual career is demanding not only in terms of effort but also in terms of time. Flexible forms of education delivery are essential for SAs that should travel daily and are forced to prolonged absences during competitions or training camps. E-learning is a possible solution to overcome these problems for it allows the students to follow the courses without being present at the lectures. Some university courses cannot be offered as an on-line course entirely. In such a case, they should be adapted to allow the student athletes to have distance learning for at least part of the course program, with the opportunity to cover the mandatory on-campus part when they are able to do it. This means that the above-mentioned individual study program must be planned also taking into account the possibility of keeping the entire course online or at least part of it. The overall aim of e-learning studies should be to give the chance to the SA to follow their lessons when they are out of the campus and maintain academic activity interruptedly. To date, e-learning is becoming quite common: some higher education institutions already developed the possibility for SAs to have e-learning classes during

international competitions/camps. To allow SAs to maintain their learning path, digital pedagogical materials are made available on-line. In addition, there is the possibility of having online discussions with the academic staff. The possibility of continuing their studies online is a great advantage for the SA. This way, if they are staying outside the campus for personal or professional reasons, they could still follow the lessons without any obstacles. At present, and with the technological advances that are available, it seems understandable that an online teaching model should be applied in special cases. Obviously, this support service should be the result of the collaboration of sports federations and teams that should provide the possibility to have on-line courses during training camps and competitions. To date, a complete framework of the federations that allow SAs to have their classes on-line does not exist. However, for example, some Portuguese sport federations developed the possibility for the athletes to participate in e-learning classes during international competitions.

### **Exam Schedule Flexibility**

Student-athletes may be pressed to miss their studies due to the necessity to participate in competitions, training camps, travelling, as well as they may not be able to attend daily training sessions that are prolonged or distant from the campus. When sporting commitments overlap with exams, SAs should be able to request to adjust the examination schedule. Generally speaking, this applies mainly to written examinations due to being less demanding to perform an examination session like this. However, this is not mandatory, and the same dual career support service can be applied to other types of examinations. The best scenario is that the SAs communicate well in advance the dates they need to change, when they are informed about the calendar of sports commitments. Furthermore, it should have allowed them to both anticipate or postpone the date of the exam based on the pace of the individual study plan defined with the tutor or others involved. In fact, SAs often change the pace of their studies, sometimes speeding up due to a window free from sports commitments. On such occasions, they should be able to perform as much as possible, obviously respecting their level of preparation. This type of planning, in addition to putting the SA in the conditions of not missing the exam dates, helps to develop the programming and organization skills of its course of study, a skill that will surely be useful again in other contexts. On the other hand, it is not

always possible to learn well in advance when a SA will be convoked for a selection, a training camp or a competition. Thus, flexibility is required to satisfy the needs of those students. Under a practical point of view, SAs must signal the activities which will overlap with the exams while sport federations must certify it. This support service is quite easy to implement: universities should have an internal regulation to which professors must adhere; a sport tutor or a dual career coordinator should put in contact SAs and professor or should organize the examination schedule according to the study plan and sport commitments, while no additional teaching staff should be in general required. Thus, adapting the examination schedule is a support service that can be easily implemented.

### **Valorization of Sport Commitments Through ECTS**

Student-athletes take part in sport events that often have a high educational value. Indeed, participation in international competitions and meeting other athletes of different cultures may provide a number of competences and skills that the traditional learning model struggles to accomplish. These experiences can be even more educational than formal university training, from some point of view. Therefore, degree courses related to sport science and physical education should valorize sport commitments, such as national or international training camps and competitions through ECTS. From a practical point of view, sport science courses universities should assign ECTS to the activities certified by sport federations in order to recognize them as laboratories or training. No additional teaching staff should be required. This support service applies for individual and team sports as well as winter and summer sports without any distinction. To date, “G. D’Annunzio” University of Chieti – Pescara, limited to sport science courses, is valorizing high-level sport commitments after the teaching board has positively assessed the activity examined. However, to date, no formal regulation has been adopted. It is worth noting that, in particular settings, the sport activity may be pertinent to further courses rather than sport science and physical education. Indeed, several educative experiences of different nature (e.g. linguistic, organizational and managerial) that can be gained outside of the sport event are an integral part of the sporting commitment. Thus, with well-defined study plan worked out in advance, sport participation at high-level can be valorized.

## 4.5. Social Support

Dual career is a complex domain requiring the involvement of different actors performing specific roles and responsibilities in inspiring, accompanying, and supporting the athletes who aim to combine their sport and education careers (European Commission, 2012). Recently, an academics conversation on different dimensions (e.g., individual, interpersonal, social and policy) of European dual career emerged (Guidotti, Cortis, & Capranica, 2015; Stambulova & Wylleman, 2018), with the majority of the investigations pertaining the athletes' perceived reasons for maintaining involvement in sport and education, career transitions, and motivations towards academic and sport careers. In particular, according to the European physical activity determinants framework (Condello et al., 2016), the athlete's capability to combine sport and education dual career pertains to the cluster *intra-personal context* and *well-being*, which includes also psychological aspects such as personal goals/outcome expectancies/ achievement orientation/motivation (Kerstajn et al., 2018). Indeed, specific physical environments (e.g., mountain, maritime and rural small city or town) and behavioural patterns within a community affect the interaction of parents, siblings, peers, teachers and coaches, which could impact the holistic development of athletes (Baker, Shuiski, & Schorer, 2014; Turnnidge, Côté, & Hancock, 2014). In fact, the communities and their organizational structures influence the meanings individuals assign to education, sport, sport experiences and sport outcomes during the life course. In general, sports and education tend to reflect and reaffirm the important traditions and values of a community, which are also strongly related to how community members consider socio-economic classes, genders, races and ethnicity, ages, capabilities, and other factors. Furthermore, the ways that education and youth sports are sponsored, organized, and connected directly shape the context of everyday life of student-athletes and their supportive entourage.

Taking to consideration that parents, siblings, peers, teachers, academic staff, classmates, coaches, teammates, sport managers, and sport staff have a direct, strong, and frequent relationship with the student-athlete, a well-structured cooperation system is necessary (Capranica & Guidotti, 2016; Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences et al., 2016). In fact, when exposed to contrasting advices towards academic or sport priorities, student-athletes could be misdirected and face the risk of sport or academic disengagement

or dropout (Donnelly & Petherick, 2004; Wylleman & Reints, 2010; Park et al., 2013).

Students are expected to establish positive relationships with faculty and peers to build a sense of confidence, a focus on academic performance, feelings of support and encouragement leading to the achievement of a university degree and solid bonds to the university community (Booker, 2016). In being involved in different activities at different times, university students benefit from their academic experience, with social integration, classroom interactions, interactions with faculty, and activities enhancing personal development, learning, and cognitive growth. Indeed, HEIs have the responsibility to allocate resources for learning opportunities, student engagement programmes, and services that foster student involvement (Lower-Hoppe, Petersen, & Hutton, 2020). Due to demanding sports responsibilities, often student-athletes have limited time for engagement in the social experience at university level, which might affect their feeling of belonging or connection to faculties and peers (Condello et al., 2019). In the present work, Social Support for student-athletes was considered relevant and highly implementable (e.g., Quadrant IV) for publicizing athletes representing the university through media, social media, halls of fame and merit boards, as well as for updating faculty, students, parents, and sports federation/club staff on dual career issues through seminars and workshops. These findings indicate that HEI experts tend to consider student-athletes as a resource for drawing national visibility to the universities, thus attracting interest from alumni, legislators, and prospective students. Conversely, peer to peer support, institutional dual career committees, and publicity of student-athletes for labour market were assigned to the Quadrant I, considered as still relevant although less feasible for implementation. Actually, the significant amount of time and efforts student-athletes invest into sport could disconnect them from their university peer groups, leading to feelings of isolation, separation, loneliness, and fatigue from a dual career commitment (Condello et al., 2019). At an institutional level, faculty and administration are urged to reconsider the importance of the peers' community and should reward classmates showing cooperative behaviours by offering authentic interactions in support to student-athletes, thus favouring a positive educational climate and a sense of belonging leading to unique and significant educational path towards a degree completion in a timely manner. Indeed, the cooperation between student-athletes and academic role-set members (e.g., professors and non-athlete students) could be enhanced by establishing a dual career

committee, which could be an integral part of the day-to-day functioning of the various stakeholders within and beyond the HEIs. In fact, HEI base their internal quality assurance on committees encompassing an active involvement of staff and students, deemed crucial to build a quality culture through sharing information for self-assessment (Stalmeijer et al., 2016). To enhance their quality assurance process, HEIs should also consider a committee effectively dedicated to student-athletes as atypical students and connected to the development of a tutorship programme. In particular, the dual career committee should track the dual career support systems and the student-athletes' academic experience so that support may be adjusted as required.

In addition to the relevant role sport participation has on the health, the social welfare and the economic benefits for the European society, athletes can be considered valuable human capital for the labour market for their informal education acquired in and through sports, which helps them developing skills directly and/or indirectly impacting positively on labour market outcomes, job quality and earnings. Thus, HEI experts are strongly advised to reconsider the relevance of creating the right environment and actions (e.g., collaborations with companies, letters of recommendation, internships) fostering the employability of (former) elite athletes, which not only would align to the recommendations of the European dual career guidelines but also could invest in the institutional prestige and the quality of education delivered (European Commission, 2012).

## **The Family**

Parents play significant social, educational, psychological, economic and cultural roles in providing a supportive entourage for dual career athletes (Domingues & Gonçalves, 2013; Knight & Harwood, 2015; Wendling, Kellison & Sagas, 2018). In particular, six main categories can depict the parental role in helping children combining sport and education: 1) control over school work; 2) transportation to trainings and matches; 3) monitoring of trainings and matches; 4) moral support; 5) financial support; and 6) lifestyle adjustments. Thus, the challenges of a parent as a supporter in the dual career of an athlete encompass logistic problems, financial burdens, day-to-day adjustment to sports and educational obligations, and wellbeing of a child athlete. However, parents often lack specific knowledge and skills to facilitate positive relationships with their talented progeny and other dual career sport and educational stakeholders (Dorsch et al., 2016; Dorsch et al.,

2019; Harwood & Knight, 2015; Capranica et al., 2018; Harwood, Drew, & Knight, 2010; Hardcastle, Tye, Glassey, & Hagger, 2015), thus undergoing several stressors (Harwood & Knight; 2009). In particular, negative parental attitudes might challenge athletes and increase the risk of sport or academic dropouts (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007; Stefansen, Smette, & Strandbu, 2018; Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004; Wylleman, DeKnop, Ewing, & Cumming, 2000). Surely, cooperation between higher education institutions and parents could help the definition of a shared dual career vision and envision of possible effective strategies (special adjustments of obligations and absences from the lessons due to sports) for the benefit of student-athletes (O'Neill, Calder, & Allen, 2015; Knight, Harwood, & Sellars, 2018). Despite the involvement in sports, parents might influence the choice of an educational institution of a child (Grobljan, 2018), provided that parents value a proper education of the athletes to prepare them for a professional career at the end of their competitive years.

In sports, a holistic picture of the family subsystem includes the athlete's siblings, who have attributes in common with many interpersonal relationships, yet possessing unique characteristics requesting attention and being at risk of resentment or conflicts if perceiving parental inequalities (Harwood & Knight, 2009; O'Neill, Calder & Allen, 2015). In fact, competition, modelling, comparisons, and compassion characterize the sibling relationship, influencing social, emotional, and cognitive development of the individuals and being often the longest relationship across the lifespan (Yeh & Lempers, 2004). Whilst researchers have recently begun to explore the influence of sibling relationships in sport (Blazo & Smith, 2018), broader work suggests that siblings can be developmentally salient, in tandem with other social agents, such as parents and peers.

### **The Sport Community (e.g., coaches, sport managers, teammates, and staff)**

Besides parents, athletes perceive coaches as the most relevant supporters of their dual career (Condello et al., 2019). In fact, coaches have a crucial role in influencing the physical, psychological, and socio-emotional development of athletes. In the last decades, several conceptual models have been developed to understand their impact (Chelladurai, 2007; Smoll & Smith 2002). Actually, a successful coaching effectiveness necessitates a sound conceptualization of the coaching process, integrating parent-coaches (Jowett, 2008; Weiss &

Fretwell, 2005) and coach-athlete (Davis, L., Jowett, S., & Tafvelin, S., 2019; Olympiou, Jowett, & Duda, 2008) relationships, and the parent-athlete-coach triad (Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011). Also teammates can promote or discourage college athletes' aspirations to the student-athlete status, especially when considering the relevant time spent together during training and competition (Marx, Huffmon, & Doyle, 2008).

## **The University Community**

Sport commitment often sets the requirement for athletes to attend training and competitions, which might conflict with university requirements (Condello et al., 2019). Especially in the absence of the formal cooperation between sport and academic bodies, athletes have to individually negotiate their academic path with teaching staff. Although some educators might have a general positive perception of athletes considering them excellent students (Jolly, 2008; Guidotti et al., 2014), others might suffer the additional academic burden that require to provide the recommended distance learning, flexibility for class attendance and exam schedule, and extra laboratory sessions for student-athletes (Harrison, Comeaux, & Pletcha, 2006), also assuming that limited formal and informal interactions with students and faculty could not provide an adequate development of academic competencies, and overall college experiences and social activities (Engstrom et al., 1995; Comeaux, 2012; Gosper et al., 2010). Meaningful relationships with their classmates provide opportunities for assistance and support regarding academic issues and personal goals, especially when peers have strong academic orientations (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Therefore, to enhance the student-athlete integration process, the academic community should develop supportive and inclusive environments through the identification of individualized academic paths and the involvement of students who might facilitate learning and social opportunities in and beyond the classroom life (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001).

## **4.6. Other Support**

In considering their mission for the holistic development of youth, higher education institutions have a responsibility to raise awareness of the multiplicity/specificity of challenges of a dual career, and to initiate a fruitful dialogue in



support of student-athletes within the educational community (e.g., teachers, administrators, career counselling service) and among the student-athlete's family, university student community, and sport community (e.g., coaches, team-mates, sport managers and staff). Finally, HEIs have a crucial role in monitoring the dual career path of their talented athletic students.

In initiating, implementing, and monitoring of a fruitful dialogue between the actors of the entourage in support of student-athletes, the following recommendations should be considered:

### **At institutional level**

- Planning seminars, workshops and meetings on dual career within the educational programme for all the academic staff (e.g., teachers and administration), during which dual career information collected at institutional, local, regional, national and international levels should be provided.
- Recording, analysing, and summarizing the views of the educational and dual career staff and planning improvements according to the Specific (targeting a specific dual career area to be improved), Measurable (identifying feasible indicators and criteria for a efficient monitoring of the dual career progress), Assignable (specifying dual career roles and responsibilities), Realistic (foreseeing realistic outcomes to be achieved) and Time (defining the expected timing of improvements) approach (S.M.A.R.T.), when possible.
- Ensuring wide publicity to student-athletes representing the Higher Education Institution to promote university image.
- Organizing seminars, workshops and meetings on dual career for the student community at large, during which dual career information collected at institutional, local, regional, national and international levels should be provided.
- Envisaging a peer-to-peer support to be recognized through awards, ECTS recognition, etc.
- Ensuring wide publicity campaigns promoting the student-athletes and their characteristics suitable for the labour market;
- Establishing University Sports Observatory to contribute to the development of specific themes of interest at the University;
- Developing Sports Merits Board to reward students for the high academic performance.

### **At the student-athlete's family level**

- Planning seminars, workshops and meetings on dual career with all the family members to share valuable information for the well-being of the athlete and opinions on the best ways to ensure the effective support.
- Including parent representatives in the institutional dual career committee (if possible).

### **At the student-athlete's sports level**

- Planning seminars, workshops and meetings on dual career with the athletes' coach and other relevant staff of their supportive sport entourage to share valuable information aimed at the well-being of the athlete and opinions on the best ways to ensure the effective support.
- Including sport representatives in the institutional dual career committee (if possible).

### **At an integrated academic-family-sport level**

- Envisaging an institutional dual career committee, including representatives of the relevant actors of the athletes' supportive entourage (e.g., athletes, family members, sport staff, career staff).

## **Policies**

The European Commission recommended Member States to develop national dual career guidelines in relation to their country-related specificity of sport and education systems and cultural diversity (European Commission, 2012). Indeed, policies clarify the roles of various dual career stakeholders as well as their rights and obligations, which help defining expectations and forward planning for possible structural implementation through a thorough evaluation of actual strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and resources. However, at present national recommendations have been published only in Sweden and few other countries regulate the principles of sport and education, whereas a systematic dual career-friendly approach is often lacking at the European higher education level (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences et al., 2016; Swedish Sports Confederation, 2018). Despite

HEIs are recommended to include dual career within their strategies, in the present study respondents reported a limited presence of dual career policies in place in their universities and assigned low relevance and feasibility for implementation values to the three policy-related aspects (European Commission, 2012; Capranica & Guidotti, 2016). These findings substantiate that HEI experts tend to underestimate the importance of a legal basis in dual career, thus overlooking its crucial role in ensuring transparency and equality in addition to raising cultural awareness of various social institutions (McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis, 2004; Ryan, Thorpe, & Pope, 2017). In fact, dual career policy development could kick-start the process of establishing agreements with responsive dual career actors (e.g., policy makers, representatives from various HEIs, and sports bodies) for the implementation of strategic initiatives, practices, and support systems facilitating the academic path of athletes, especially during temporary relocation due to an ever-growing globalized sport (Capranica & Guidotti, 2016; European Commission, 2012; Palumbo et al., 2021).

The converting of HEI policies into practice requires continual vigilance through the adoption of a monitoring system to evaluate the application of the dual career policy of the university, which fosters a reflective thinking capacity and allows to capitalize from constructive feedback on the outcomes for envisaging further refinements (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences et al., 2016; McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis, 2004). Although the open answers of the experts presented the institution of a dual career observatory as a suggested HEI strategy, the assignment of this policy aspect to Quadrant I highlights the perception of experts that services requiring financial investment and the involvement of decision-makers are difficult to implement, despite their relevance.

The present findings indicate that few HEIs adopt academic-specific admission procedures for student-athletes, even though this aspect is considered the least relevant and feasible for implementation. However, a lack of a clear definition of eligible athletes between HEIs has been highlighted, which not only determine unequal treatments of European elite student-athletes but also limit the possibility to gather harmonized data between Member States (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences et al., 2016; Capranica & Guidotti, 2016; Condello et al., 2019). In considering that in Australia (Australian Government, 2021), Canada (Canadian Sport Institute, 2021), and New Zealand (Ryan, Thorpe, & Pope, 2017) the student-athlete status

is clearly defined, European HEIs should try to overcome specific cultural/organizational regulations and to identify a structured cooperation for the dual career eligibility process, recognition, and service provision, which could implement the European strategies in education (Capano & Piattoni, 2011).

## CONCLUSION

The dual career of student-athletes is frequently viewed separately and not in the holistic way. Upon enrolling in higher education, the athlete comes in to the system with the sport career as a performance athlete and the results obtained in sports competitions. In addition, the new student status should be taken into account. Sports organizations, coaches and decision-makers in sports frequently view the situation only from the athlete's perspective (talented and oriented towards achieving sports goals), while educators and management are more oriented towards academic achievements which would make the basis for employment in the future. It should also be highlighted that student-athletes frequently are pressed towards achieving highest results in both academic studies and sport. Therefore, decision-making forums should undertake the responsibility for the implementation of the national dual-career legislation, as well as the implementation of institutional policies at the level of higher education institutions that support the dual career of students-athletes.

Investing in the education of young, gifted high-performance athletes and promoting decent conditions are crucial for sustainable development of sport at all levels. It should be particularly emphasized that education systems for young, gifted athletes should be open to all.

In conclusion, several universities in the EU activated dual career services focused on curricula requirements designed to make the educational path more flexible. Student-athletes, as an example, have the option for part-time studies, individual study plans, distance learning (e-learning), valorization of sport commitments through ECTS, etc. To date, each country is addressing these issues with their own methods generating a very large amount of experiences ranging from countries where dual career is at an early development stage (e.g., Latvia, Romania) to the countries with the national law on dual career (e.g., Portugal). In other countries (e.g., Italy), there is a significant difference within the higher education institutions. This diversity of legislative settings was described by Aquilina and Henry (2010): 1) State-centric regulation (i.e. Government legislation or statutory regulations place responsibilities

on higher education institutions to provide flexible academic paths); 2) State as sponsor/facilitator (i.e. States promote formal agreements to meet athletes' needs at the educational level); 3) National Sporting Federations/Institutes as intermediary (i.e. national governing or sports bodies negotiate flexible academic paths with educational institutions); and 4) Laisser-faire/No Formal Structures (i.e. individually negotiated agreements are arranged, when possible). Although this heterogeneity generated many useful experiences and practices that can be replicated within EU, at the present moment there is the need for shared guidelines for higher education institutions and methodology for dual career in HEI.

The data obtained within the project framework allowed drawing the following conclusions:

*Financial support:* Within this category, the key focus was put on investments and funding, which is a very significant challenge for the majority of higher education institutions.

*Fee exemption/Scholarship:* Student-athletes often have additional expenses due to travelling and training alongside with the necessity to cover other expenses. Therefore, financial support is crucial for them. Student-athletes successful in both academic and sports career should have the opportunity to apply for fee exemption or scholarship.

*Infrastructure:* The key goals within this category are related to the provision of sports facilities and organization of the infrastructure which would contribute to the well-being of student-athletes promoting their effective integration in the new environment. The opportunity to have the place of residence close to University campus would be very beneficial. Student-athletes should have access to: free internet; e-mail service; libraries; labs and research centers; cultural centers (German, British, Spanish, French); students' associations; canteens, restaurants; career counselling. These facilities help student-athletes to combine study and training at high level. High quality infrastructure leads to obtaining good results in both the educational process and sports.

*Mentors/Tutors:* The sports tutoring should be implemented by the sports tutor assigned to the athlete and supervised by a department coordinator. Support provision will lead to the coordinated action aimed at building the grounds for the student-athlete to succeed. Therefore, their training schedule

and their academic calendar should be analyzed together, and thus previously detecting possible problems and the needs of the student. The three theoretical principles to consider in a Sports Tutoring Model included integration, individuality and pro-activity.

*Curricula requirements:* a series of methodological indications concerning the curricular requirements were developed to guide higher education institutions in transforming the guidelines for the dual career into practice. Many student-athletes would benefit from individual study plans because of both training and competition commitments. E-learning is a possible solution to overcome these problems for it allows the students to follow the courses without being physically present in the classroom. Some university courses cannot be introduced as an entirely on-line course. In such cases, they should be adapted to allow the student-athletes to participate in distance learning covering at least part of the course through the opportunities provided by the rapid development of information and communication technologies. The opportunity to take the mandatory on-campus part when they are able to do it should also be provided. When sporting commitments overlap with examinations, student-athletes should be able to request to adjust the examination schedule. Through effective communication and collaboration, the best scenario would be possible focusing specifically on the effectiveness of the measures applied to achieve the goal of the dual-career process.

*Social support:* The family role in helping children combining sport and education can be summarized as follows: 1) control over school work; 2) transportation to trainings and matches; 3) monitoring of trainings and matches; 4) moral support; 5) financial support; and 6) lifestyle adjustments.

The sport community at large and coaches specifically perform a crucial role in shaping the physical, psychological, and socio-emotional development of athletes.

The academic community at large and the institution community specifically should develop supportive and inclusive environments through the identification of individualized academic paths and the involvement of students who might facilitate learning and social opportunities in and beyond the classroom. Seminars, workshops and meetings on the issues related to dual career for the student community at large should be organized with the aim to collect information at institutional, local, regional, national and international levels.

*Other support:* Merit boards have been widely used in the education system as a way of rewarding students with the best academic performance. In this sense, the recognition of sporting merit is an example of good practices developed in some higher education institutions. The effectiveness of these practices is confirmed by research on behaviour regulation pointing out that high-performance athletes are intrinsically motivated, however the external motivation plays a significant role in their overall results.



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# ANNEXES

## Annexe Nr1. Questionnaire

### DATE OF IDENTIFICATION

#### I. INTRODUCTION

##### A. Gender

M  F

##### B. Age

1  18 2  19 3  20 4  21 5  22 6  23 7  24 8  25

##### C. What sport do you practice?

1  individual sport  
2  team sport

##### D. How many years have you been training?

.....

##### E. Level of performance achieved:

1  elite 2  national 3  regional 4  other .....

##### F. The best performance

Position..... Competition..... Year.....

##### I. How many training sessions do you perform per day?

1  2

##### J. How many days per week do you train?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7

##### L. Your academic degree level:

1  high school 2  bachelor degree 3  master's degree

##### M. What are you studying at the moment?

Faculty.....

A Level: 1  bachelor degree 2  master's degree 3  Phd

B Year of study: 1  1 2  2 3  3 4  4

##### N. Financial resource for your studies:

1  State budget  
2  Tuition fee

**K. Does your university pay you a scholarship?**

- 1  Yes
- 2  No

**II. PERSONAL NEEDS**

Please mark:

1- strongly disagree; 2- disagree; 3- neutral; 4-agree; 5- strongly agree

<b>1. Which are the main reasons that made you choose the faculty or specialization that you are currently doing</b>	
1 <input type="checkbox"/> to get a degree	1-2-3-4-5
2 <input type="checkbox"/> to acquire knowledge and skills	1-2-3-4-5
3 <input type="checkbox"/> to receive financial support for study and sport	1-2-3-4-5
4 <input type="checkbox"/> for the university experience	1-2-3-4-5
5 <input type="checkbox"/> to find a good team to play/practice sport	1-2-3-4-5
6 <input type="checkbox"/> to enter in sports industry/sport professional	1-2-3-4-5
<b>2. Which academic objectives do you have for the next 5 years?</b>	
1 <input type="checkbox"/> to get good marks	1-2-3-4-5
2 <input type="checkbox"/> to get degree	1-2-3-4-5
3 <input type="checkbox"/> to continue studies at next level	1-2-3-4-5
4 <input type="checkbox"/> to get financial support for academic effort	1-2-3-4-5
<b>3. Which sports objectives do you have for the next 5 years?</b>	
1 <input type="checkbox"/> to be fit and healthy	1-2-3-4-5
2 <input type="checkbox"/> to participate in sport competition at regional and national level	1-2-3-4-5
3 <input type="checkbox"/> to be part of the university's team	1-2-3-4-5
4 <input type="checkbox"/> to win medals at national level	1-2-3-4-5
5 <input type="checkbox"/> to qualify to Olympic Games	1-2-3-4-5
6 <input type="checkbox"/> to win medals at international level (EC, WC, OG etc.)	1-2-3-4-5
7 <input type="checkbox"/> to get a better contract	1-2-3-4-5

<b>4. What are the next steps for you in order to achieve these objectives?</b>	
1 <input type="checkbox"/> to interfere athletes-student with student-athlete life and responsibilities	1-2-3-4-5
2 <input type="checkbox"/> to create a flexible schedule for study and train	1-2-3-4-5
3 <input type="checkbox"/> to follow just what it,s important and interesting for me	1-2-3-4-5
4 <input type="checkbox"/> to enrich my knowledge useful to improve sport experience	1-2-3-4-5
<b>5. What are your expectations for the end of your studies?</b>	
1 <input type="checkbox"/> To get degree	
2 <input type="checkbox"/> To find a job	
3 <input type="checkbox"/> To still perform in sport	1-2-3-4-5
4 <input type="checkbox"/> To be a good professional	1-2-3-4-5
<b>6. Identify the people who can help or aid you in achieving your personal and professional objectives?</b>	
1 <input type="checkbox"/> Family	1-2-3-4-5
2 <input type="checkbox"/> The coach	1-2-3-4-5
3 <input type="checkbox"/> Club owner	1-2-3-4-5
4 <input type="checkbox"/> Colleagues	1-2-3-4-5
5 <input type="checkbox"/> Friends	1-2-3-4-5
6 <input type="checkbox"/> Professors	1-2-3-4-5
7 <input type="checkbox"/> The dean	1-2-3-4-5
8 <input type="checkbox"/> The Principal	1-2-3-4-5
9 <input type="checkbox"/> The personal tutor	1-2-3-4-5

### III. SPORTS NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES

#### 7. Which are the main sports' needs you have? (you can mark multiple answers)

- 1  Appropriate sports facilities close to the faculty
- 2  Time and space for relaxing and recovery after the physical effort
- 3  Financial support for travelling to international competitions
- 4  A flexible schedule for training
- 5  Other .....

**8. What solutions do you have for the aforementioned issues? (you can mark multiple answers)**

- 1  Finding sponsors
- 2  Training within the faculty's facilities
- 3  Benefiting from a free recovery processes offered by the faculty/university
- 4  Being supported by the family
- 5  A good communication between the sports' club, federation and faculty
- 6  Flexibility within the faculty/university schedule
- 7  Internal legislation which supports the sportsman/women
- 8  Other .....

**9. Who could help in fixing the identified issues? (you can mark multiple answers)**

- 1  Decision makers within the faculty or university
- 2  Year guidance councillor
- 3  Personal tutor
- 4  Family
- 5  The coach
- 6  The club's president
- 7  Other .....

**IV. ACADEMIC NEEDS**

**10. Why did you choose to study this specific course? (you can mark multiple answers)**

- 1  Helping me in my sports career
- 2  I want to be better at what I do
- 3  It's something new for me, a challenge
- 4  I want to teach others with the help of my experience
- 5  I like interactive activities
- 6  Other

**11. What or who helped you to make this decision? (you can mark multiple answers)**

- 1  Location
- 2  Sport tradition
- 3  Family
- 4  University's prestige
- 5  University's sports clubs
- 6  Educational offers
- 7  Colleagues
- 8  Friends
- 9  Other .....



**12. How do you think your studies will help you in your sports/professional career?***(you can mark multiple answers)*

- 1  Improving my theoretical and practical knowledge
- 2  Learning how to make the correct decisions
- 3  Improving my communication skills
- 4  Improving my physical qualities
- 5  Other.....

**13. What kind of facilities do you have as sport student? (you can mark multiple answers)**

- 1  Motivation of absences
- 2  Extra exam session
- 3  Mass –media promotion
- 4  Access to sport facilities
- 5  Study grant
- 6  Study abroad
- 7  Domestic and international sport training camp
- 8  National and international sport contest participation
- 9  Other .....

**14. What difficulties do you encounter as a sports student? (you can mark multiple answers)**

- 1  I can't take part in all theoretical and practical courses
- 2  The training schedule clashes with the lectures
- 3  I don't have enough rest time
- 4  I don't have enough time to do my coursework
- 5  I don't have time to partake in all volunteering activities organized by the university
- 6  Other .....

**15. What kind of technological or teaching tools do your teachers use to ease your progress at class? (you can mark multiple answers)**

- 1  Data bases
- 2  Electronic course materials
- 3  Interactive classes
- 4  On-line educational resources
- 5  Videoconferences - tutorials
- 6  Other .....

**16. How to manage to obtain both academic and sports achievements at the same time?**

*(you can mark multiple answers)*

- 1  Good time management
- 2  Learning and studying everyday
- 3  It is difficult to obtain good results in both areas
- 4  Other .....

**17. What is the most difficult aspect of your athlete career for you to coordinate with your studies? (you can mark multiple answers)**

- 1  Lack of time
- 2  Timetable
- 3  Being excluded from the team
- 4  Lack of communication with the coach or colleagues
- 5  Lack of understanding from the professors
- 6  Other.....

**18. Who supports you towards achieving a good balance between your sporting life and your studies? (you can mark multiple answers)**

- 1  My family and friends
- 2  My university friends
- 3  Flexible meetings with professors
- 4  Flexible training schedule
- 5  The coach
- 6  Other.....

**19. What aspect/s of the University would you change to ease your dual career?**

*(you can mark multiple answers)*

- 1  A good communication process
- 2  A personal tutor for the dual career path
- 3  Recognizing the sports performances and promoting them between the faculty members and students
- 4  Presenting the sports and educational achievements on an academic level (ceremonies, festive meetings)
- 5  Founding a sports counselling center for the dual career path
- 6  Recognizing the dual career path
- 7  Other .....

Please answer further only if you have sport tutor

**20. I need a sports tutor for:**

Please mark:

1- strongly disagree; 2- disagree; 3- neutral; 4-agree; 5- strongly agree

<b>1. Which are the main reasons that made you choose the faculty or specialization that you are currently doing</b>	
1 <input type="checkbox"/> To have someone who listens to me and is available	1-2-3-4-5
2 <input type="checkbox"/> For academic support	1-2-3-4-5
3 <input type="checkbox"/> For personal support	1-2-3-4-5
4 <input type="checkbox"/> For time management	1-2-3-4-5

**21. Would you like your sports tutor to advise/help you with: (you can mark multiple answers)**

- 1  Access to studies (Administrative help)
- 2  What subjects I should select
- 3  Exam calendar
- 4  Change in exam dates
- 5  Justification for assistance on the basis of training and / or competitions
- 6  How to contact teachers
- 7  How to solve administrative issues
- 8  The use of virtual campus
- 9  Aspects of Teaching and learning e.g. seminar

**22. What is for you the best way to be in touch with your Sport Tutor?**

- 1  Mail
- 2  Text message
- 3  Phone call
- 4  Face to face meeting
- 5  Skype meeting
- 6  Others .....

**23. How many times per month should these meeting occur?**

- 1  1
- 2  2
- 3  4
- 4  Daily
- 5  When it is necessary
- 6  Others .....

**Thank you very much for your support!**

## Annexe Nr 2. Questions for focus groups

### Introduction

1. What do you study?
2. What sport do you do?

### Questions

1. In your opinion, what does it mean “High performance Athlete”?
2. How easy/difficult is it for you to balance your sporting life with your academic life?
3. Who supports you towards achieving a good balance between your sporting life and your studies?
4. What are your expectations for the end of your studies?
5. What kind of technological or teaching tools do your teachers use to ease your progress at class?
6. What aspect/s of the University would you change to ease your dual career?
7. What is the most difficult aspect of your athlete career for you to coordinate with your studies?
8. How highly do you value these services and features of the dual career at your university?
9. With which aspect would you like your sports tutor to advise/help you?
10. What is for you the best way to be in touch with your Sport Tutor and how many times per month?
11. How does the Sport Tutor help you?
12. How does the ‘student-tutor’ or ‘peer-tutor’ help you?
13. What else would you like to say?



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