

DCJA

Dual Career for Junior Athletes

Baseline Report



Disclaimer:

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Summary of the Baseline Report

To understand the types of structured organisational support services, the seven partners investigated existing support services/systems for dual career junior athletes in seven different countries. Between March 2020 and June 2020, desk-based data collection was conducted to identify any relevant support services/systems for dual career junior athletes. Seven member countries collected data from websites of sport organisations, sport clubs, and schools to identify any structured support services/systems used to help junior athletes manage their dual careers. The seven countries identified between 10-36 organisational support services/systems which support dual career athletes in their respective countries. Many of the sport organisations across the countries provide financial support via a small grant to cover equipment costs; travel expenses; and sport science and medicine support such as physio and sport psychologist. However, results indicated holistic support for junior athletes is lacking at secondary school level. Therefore, our DCJA project that aim to develop an online support curriculum for junior athletes can fill such gap in practice.

Introduction

Dual careers, combining sport and education or sport and work, can be beneficial for athletes, helping them to balance sport and non-sport commitments in preparation for 'life after sport' (Aquilina, 2013; Carless & Douglas, 2013; Henry, 2013; Lally, 2007). The benefits of engagement in dual careers include development of employability skills, financial security, and well-rounded identities, less life stress, and establishment of a good social network and plans for retirement (Petitpas, et al., 2009; Price, et al., 2010; Tekavc, Wylleman, & Cecić Erpič, 2015; Torregrosa, et al., 2015). However, researchers identified that dual career athletes faced challenges and barriers, such as time constraints, when balancing sport and education (Cosh & Tully, 2015; Ryan, et al., 2017). Other researchers also investigated dual career athletes' coping strategies to overcome such difficulties caused by managing two different commitments simultaneously such as distancing, rationalization, active agency, self-disciplining, and responsibility transfer (e.g., Schubring & Thiel, 2014). Therefore, the need for support for athletes to help them balance their lifestyle has been highlighted and some career support programmes have been established to address such need (e.g., Gordon, et al., 2005).

Theoretical Framework

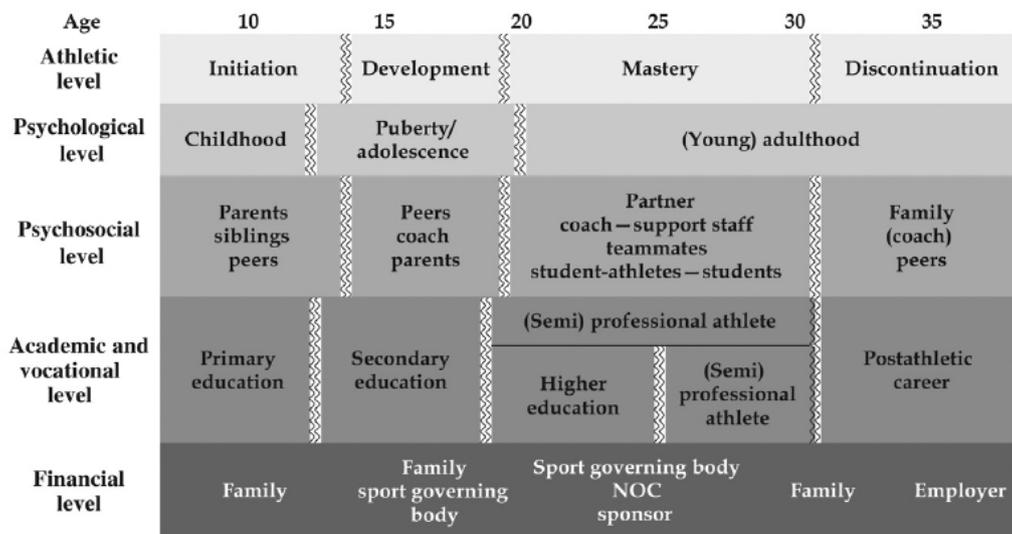


Figure 1. The Holistic Athlete Career (HAC) Model (Wylleman, et al., 2013)

To conceptualise the potential crossover of demands further, Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) introduced the developmental model based on the findings from research on the development of athletes' interpersonal relationships (Wylleman, 2000; Wylleman, et al., 2007), dual careers of elite student-athletes (Wylleman et al., 2004), and retired athletes (Wylleman et al., 1993). The lifespan model represents a holistic perspective of development, including four different levels of athletes' development: athletes' athletic, psychological, psychosocial, and academic and vocational development. After about a decade, the Holistic Athlete Career (HAC) Model was introduced, which includes five different levels of athletes' development: athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, and financial (Wylleman, et al., 2013). The HAC Model (Wylleman, et al., 2013; see Figure 1) served as the underlying framework for the study.

Methodology

First, ethical approval was sought and granted by the University of Stirling General University Ethics Panel (GUEP). Following this, between March 2020 and June 2020, desk-based data collection was used. To identify any structured support services and systems used to help junior athletes in managing their dual careers, data were collected from websites of sport organisations, youth sport clubs, and schools in each country in seven countries – Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and the United Kingdom. The data collection was conducted by the researchers in each country who are native to each language (English, Greek, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Slovenian, and Spanish).

The data from each country were collected based on the template provided (Morris et al., 2020), which focused on understanding 1) the sport system (Centralised or Decentralised), 2) presence of sport school, 3) level/type of organisations (e.g. scholarship schemes, charities, higher education institution, sport governing bodies, etc.), 4) name of organisations, 5) name of support services/programmes, 6) type of support services/programmes (e.g. educational, financial, psychological, vocational, etc.), and 7) eligibility (e.g., target age group).

Results

Structured organisational support services or systems provided to junior dual career athletes

The seven member countries (Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and the United Kingdom) identified between 10-36 organisational support services/systems for junior dual career athletes. The identified support services/systems are provided by different types of sport organisations, including charities, governmental institutions, local authorities, sport governing bodies, sport clubs, higher education institutions, sport schools, sport academies, and leisure operators. Although other levels of support mentioned in the HAC Model were identified, it is notable that financial support, such as small grants to cover travel expenses and equipment and scholarships for attending higher education institutions, were mentioned as the most common support across the sport organisations and countries. Educational support, such as tutoring and managing dual careers, was provided by mainly higher education institutions and national sport governing bodies through their support programmes (e.g. Winning Students programme and Performance Lifestyle in the UK). Some countries, such as Italy and Portugal, provided vocational support to athletes to help them integrate into the work environment. For instance, in Italy, athletes are appointed as army, air force, and carabinieri personnel during their sport career, which allows them to develop their career outside of sport and secure their jobs in one of the defence sectors once they retire.

Most of the support identified is not limited to junior athletes but includes them and older athletes. The support provided by a small number of the secondary schools, contrastingly, including sport schools, solely targets the junior athletes aged between 15 and 19-years-old. Such support is limited to tutoring or academic flexibility (e.g., rescheduling exams, assignments). In the case of junior athletes aged between 17 and 19 who attend higher education institutions in the UK, they can receive a holistic support service including tutoring and academic flexibility via support programmes such as Performance Lifestyle. This holistic support includes support from sport psychologist, nutritionist, strength and conditioning coaches, physios, and dual career management (e.g., timetabling, communication with lecturers and coaches, applying for an extension for assignments/exams in advance, etc.).

Country	Sport System	Sport school	Support programme/services for dual career junior athletes			
			Numbers of programmes/ services identified	Target age group	Level of support	Education vs Vocation focus
Greece	Centralised Ministry of Culture and Sports	No	12	The level of performance and outcomes of competitions focused, not age driven	Athletic Psychological Academic Financial	Education
Italy	Centralised Ministry of Sport	No	17	The targets of the majority programmes match with 15 – 19-year-old or older (e.g. between 18 and 23-year-old) The level of performance and outcomes of competitions	Academic and Vocational Financial	Education
Poland	Centralised Ministry of Sport	Yes Sport Mastery Schools (SMS) Sport Schools (SS) Schools with sport classes (Ssc)	10	The targets of the majority programmes match with 15 – 19-year-old or student-athletes in general	Academic Financial	Education

Country	Sport System	Sport school	Support programme/services for dual career junior athletes			
			Numbers of programmes/ services identified	Target age group	Level of support	Education vs Vocation focus
Portugal	Centralised Ministry of Education	No	16	The targets of the majority programmes match with 15 – 19-year-old or older (e.g. over 18-year-old)	Academic and Vocational Financial	Education
Slovenia	Centralised Ministry of Education, Science and Sports	No	36 (a range of secondary schools were presented)	The targets of the majority programmes match with 15 – 19-year-old or older (e.g. 19-year-old and over)	Academic Financial	Education
Spain	Centralised Ministry of Sports and Culture	No	23	Various Levels of athletes (e.g. local, national, international, Olympians) Student-athletes Type of sport (e.g. Futsal, soccer, etc.)	Athletic Psychological Academic Financial	Education
UK	Centralised UK Sport	Yes Sport Schools (e.g. Glasgow sport school)	14	The targets of the majority programmes match with 15 – 19-year-old or older (e.g. aged 11 and 25, 16 to 28) Student-athletes at higher education institutions	Athletic Psychological Psychosocial Academic and Vocational Financial	Education

Similarities or differences between the seven countries

All countries in this study have a centralised sport system (see Table 1). These bodies (e.g., Ministry of Culture and Sports [Greece], Ministry of Sport [Italy and Poland], Ministry of Education [Portugal], Ministry of Education, Science and Sports [Slovenia], Ministry of Sports and Culture [Spain], UK Sport [UK]) are the ones that are responsible for establishing and implementing a support scheme for dual careers of junior athletes.

However, there are no specific schemes/systems identified for junior athletes with dual careers developed by those bodies. Although UK Sport has developed the Performance Lifestyle programme to assist athletes in balancing different commitments during their sporting career, the services are not tailored for the target population in this study.

Five countries have no sport school system, while Poland (e.g. Sport Mastery Schools) and UK (e.g. Glasgow School of Sport) have. However, among those countries that do not have sport school systems, some of them do have an equivalent form of initiatives. For example, in the case of Spain, the policies have been centralised by the National Council of Sports and its programme for dual career support (PROAD) for elite athletes. In the last decade, some public bodies like Junta de Castilla y León, Junta de Extremadura and Gobierno de las Islas Baleares have contributed to increase the dual career support facilitation at regional level. In the compulsory school sector of Italy, the *Sport Lyceum* was recently established, within the humanities and scientific subjects. In the last 6 years, the number of participants has increased at the national level. In Greece, sports schools, both primary and secondary levels, operated for 20 years until its national financial crisis. There are verified programmes at the secondary level of education (secondary schools), called Sports high school programmes or Sports departments, specially adapted for young athletes in Slovenia. Moreover, there are some special schools called Unidade de Apoio ao Alto Rendimento na Escola (UAARE; Unity of Sport for High level Athletes in School) that function on a regular base for normal students and with a special system embedded for high level athletes in Portugal; athletes from all sports can attend this special system.

The findings associated with a sport school system show that all countries in this study have not established a structured system at the level of secondary school, which can help junior athletes in pursuing sport and education. There was only one country, Slovenia, that identified some support services provided to junior athletes at secondary schools (n=14), which is limited to educational support such as tutorial support and academic flexibility.

This indicates that a structured support system/service with a holistic approach within secondary schools that was designed to assist junior athletes in balance two different commitments is lacking.

As emphasised in the previous section, many of the sport organisations across the countries provide financial support in the form of a small grant to cover equipment, travel expenses, and sport science and medical support such as physio, sport psychologist, and strength and conditioning (e.g. TASS in England and Winning students in Scotland). The higher education institutions in the UK, such as University of Stirling and University of Bath, have holistic support for student athletes as mentioned earlier, but not at secondary school level. Although other countries such as Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Slovenia identified some support from their higher education institutions, such support is limited to educational or financial support such as tutorial support, academic flexibility, scholarships, fee waiver, and grants. As aforementioned, there were some sport organisations that provide vocational support (e.g. Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the UK). However, the majority of support appears to focus on education over vocation (see Table 1).

¹ The Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS) is a Sport England funded partnership between talented athletes, education institutions and national governing bodies of sport. <https://www.tass.gov.uk/>

² Winning Students was established in May 2009 as Scotland's national sports scholarship programme supporting student athletes. <https://www.winningstudents-scotland.ac.uk/>

Conclusion

The present study aimed to understand the support provided to junior dual career athletes within sport organisations, sport clubs, and national governing bodies in different European countries. The findings from this study extend the knowledge of organisational support for junior athletes with dual careers and identifies a clear gap in both literature and practice – a lack of a holistic support system for junior athletes aged between 15 and 19-years-old. The study also highlights the importance of taking a holistic approach to support provision. It is hoped that the evidence in this study raises an awareness of the need for a customised support system for junior athletes and contributes to development of evidence-based support schemes.

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