

DCJA

Dual Career for Junior Athletes

Best Practice Report



Disclaimer:

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Summary of the Best Practice Report

Based on the findings that were presented in the baseline report, a bigger research project was designed to identify junior athletes' challenges and barriers and their needs to manage their dual career. Applying a mixed method, both qualitative and quantitative data was collected. For the qualitative data, all partners interviewed both junior athletes aged between 15 and 19 and social support providers including parents, teachers, coaches, and significant others. 106 participants contributed to the data collection (70 junior athletes and 36 social support providers). Four different themes were discussed in the results: Challenges and Barriers, Internal Available Resources (coping skills/strategies), External Available Resources (social/organisational support), and Support needed. For the quantitative data, a total of 1117 responded to the survey, of which 954 fully completed it (completion rate = 85.4%), which is a very large sample. The data was collected via two different questionnaires: Role Strain Questionnaire for Junior Athletes (RSQ-JA) and Dual Career Competency Questionnaire for athletes (DCCQ-A). Overall, the findings from both data clearly identified challenges and barriers that junior athletes face such as time constraint, injury, burden of travel, and limited funding/scholarship and both internal and external resources that they can currently access. The findings also show that what additional support they require to manage their dual career and ensure their balanced lives and wellbeing. Therefore, we have sufficient evidence to develop our online support curriculum in the next step.

Methodology

Qualitative Research

Applying qualitative approach allows researchers to have in depth understanding of participants' narratives (Tracy, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were applied to collect qualitative data. The seven partners in seven different countries – Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and the U.K. – interviewed both junior athletes aged between 15 and 19 and social support providers including parents, teachers, coaches, and significant others. 106 participants contributed to the data collection (70 junior athletes and 36 social support providers). All interview data was transcribed for the purpose of data analysis and the transcripts were 297 pages-long in total (junior athletes – 297 pages; social support providers – 205 pages). An interview guideline was developed by the Stirling research team based on literature review. There were two sets of interview questions:

For junior athletes

1. When did you start your sport and what were the reasons to choose your sport?
2. How have you found training and completing while studying at school?
3. What are your difficulties when you deal with both sport and study?
4. Have you asked for help? If so, who did you ask for and how did it go? If not, why you didn't ask for help? Were there any reasons behind?

5. When you face difficulties balancing between sport and study, how do you cope with this? Do you any skills and ways to deal with this?
6. Do you have any support from school, coach, family, teacher, or sport team to balance your dual career (sport – study)? If so, could you explain the details? If not, what type support do you think you need to further your sport career while attending your school?
7. What type of support will be helpful for you to deal with your career?

For social support providers

1. What is your role to support dual career junior athletes (e.g. parents, coaches, support staff, teachers, etc.)?
2. How long have you been in your position to support dual career junior athletes? How did you find it so far?
3. What are the challenges and barriers you have experienced to support dual career junior athletes? How do you cope with the challenges and barriers?
4. Do you get any support from sporting governing bodies or teams to better support your dual career junior athletes (e.g. guidelines, updated information, etc.)? If so, could explain it in detail? If not, what type of support do you think you need?
5. What type of support do you think it will be useful to support dual career junior athletes? From whom?

With the transcripts, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) was applied to identify themes. Three researchers from the Stirling team led the data analysis process. Each researcher read the transcripts, identified initial codes, and developed some possible themes. All researchers then shared the codes and themes and confirmed the final themes via a series of research meetings. All authors reached an agreement with the identified themes to inform the next stage of the project, development of an online support curriculum.

Quantitative Research

A survey was used to collect quantitative data from junior athletes (3.7% 14 and under, 91.6% between 15 and 19, 4.3% 20 and over) living in the seven partner countries. Participants included 1,170 junior athletes (51.2% female, 47.6% male) from seven European countries (U.K. = 108, Slovenia = 476, Portugal = 139, Italy = 104, Greece = 121, Spain = 66, Poland = 103). The structure of the survey was as follows:

Part 1: Role Strain Questionnaire for Junior Athletes (RSQ-JA)

The *Role Strain Questionnaire for Junior Athletes* (RSQ-JA; van Rens, Borkoles, Farrow, Curran & Polman, 2016) was used for this section. Twenty-five items were answered on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*. Items were grouped under the following factors – Overload in sport and between roles, Ambiguity, Overload in school, Underload, and Conflict.

Part 2: Dual Career Competency Questionnaire for Athletes (DCCQ-A)

The *Dual Career Competency Questionnaire for Athletes* (DCCQ-A; De Brandt, Wylleman, Torregrossa, Schipper-Van Veldhoven, Minelli, Defruty, De Knop, 2018) was used for this section. Twenty-nine items were answered on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *very poor* to 5 = *very strong*. Items were grouped under the following factors – Dual Career Management, Career Planning, Emotional Awareness, and Social Intelligence & Adaptability.

Part 3: Background information

Background information about the participants was collected including their country of residence, gender, age, education, and employment status.

The final English version of the survey was sent to all project partners and was then translated into their local languages and cultural contexts. All versions were then programmed into OnlineSurveys for the online data collection process. The link with the respective language was provided to all partners who were responsible for the data collection and distribution of the link to relevant junior athletes in their countries. Two researchers from the Stirling team led the data analysis process. Data was downloaded and combined into one master dataset. The researchers created variables for the different factors of the two questionnaires. Summary statistics were then produced for all variables (excluding missing values) over the entire sample, and across demographics.

Results Summary (Qualitative data)

There were four key areas to consider: Challenges and Barriers, Internal Available Resources, External Available Resources, and Supported need. Each theme has its sub themes as follows.

Challenges and barriers

- Balance between sport and study
- Time constraint
- Focusing on one over the other
- Issues in sport – injury, burden of travel, limited funding/scholarships

As expected, junior athletes identified ‘balancing between sport and study’ as their challenges and barriers and it has been mentioned the most. Time constraint was the issue as a result of their struggles to manage two different commitments. They also identified that it was challenging to focus on sport when they have some exams and assignment deadline at school/university. In the same way, it was hard for them to focus on their school/academic work when they have some important training and competitions. There were also some issues identified related to sport itself as mentioned above – injury, burden of travel, limited funding/scholarships. Especially, the junior athletes at secondary school require family support in terms of transportation and expenses, which can be a barrier for them if family support is not in place.

Internal Available Resources (coping skills/strategies)

- Time management skills
- Seek support
- Positive distractions
- Socialising

The junior athletes across the countries have their coping skills and strategies to manage their dual career. Time management skills were mentioned the most and many of them recognised them time management skills are key to success of their dual career. The junior athletes also seek support when they face challenges and barriers. Support providers varied. This will be discussed in the following section. Positive distractions were also one of the significant coping strategies including playing other sport, playing games, watching movies, doing yoga for mindfulness, etc. Socialising was also considered as significant by the junior athletes. Spending some quality of time with their family, friends, and teammates helped them to release their stress and keep motivated.

External Available Resources (social/organisational support)

- Support from schools and teachers
- Support from coaches
- Support from friends
- Support from family members
- Limited support from the University and governing bodies

As mentioned earlier, the junior athletes asked for support when they faced challenges and barriers. There are four different groups of social support providers identified: schools and teachers, coaches, friends, and family members. Since a number of the participants were attending secondary school, support from schools and teachers were most appreciated and frequently mentioned. Unfortunately, many of the participants who were attending universities identified limited support from their universities and sport governing bodies related to academic flexibility and financial support in particular.

Support needed

- Academic Flexibility
- Financial support
- Psychological support

There were three areas to be improved identified. Not only for the undergraduate students but also secondary school students require academic flexibility due to their extensive training and competitions in other cities or abroad. The communication between sport governing bodies (e.g. sport federations) and schools/universities was considered as crucial to provide academic flexibility. Some junior athletes mentioned that they did not let the schools/teachers know that they are student-athletes as they did not know how to appropriately communicate with them and have no clear information about their contact point. Financial support was recognised as crucial to continue their sport aspiration because not all athletes have sufficient family support in relation to finance. In particular, some sport such as tennis and cycling cost a lot more compared to other sport such as athletics, which require extensive financial support or scholarship. Lastly, psychological support was also considered as significant to continue manage their dual career well and ensure their general wellbeing in particular mental wellbeing.

However, such support has not been in place for many junior athletes in particular the ones at secondary school and a few athletes on a scholarship scheme associated with their universities have access to psychological support. This should be addressed in the future scheme to support junior athletes.

Results Summary (Quantitative data)

Dual Career Junior Athletes were asked to complete a survey which contained questions about their characteristics, the Role Strain Questionnaire for Junior Athletes (RSQ-JA), and the Dual Career Competency Questionnaire for Athletes (DCCQ-A). By dual career, we refer to when athletes combine their competitive sporting career with education or work. A total of 1117 responded to the survey, of which 954 fully completed it (completion rate = 85.4%). Table 1 contains participants' characteristics.

Table 1

		Dual Career Junior Athletes	
		Count	Column %
Total		1117	100%
Country	UK	108	9.7%
	Slovenia	476	42.6%
	Portugal	139	12.4%
	Italy	104	9.3%
	Greece	121	10.8%
	Spain	66	5.9%
	Poland	103	9.2%
Gender	Male	532	47.6%
	Female	572	51.2%

		Dual Career Junior Athletes	
		Count	Column %
Total		1117	100%
Age	14 or under	41	3.7%
	Between 15 and 19	1023	91.6%
	20 or over	48	4.3%
Education	Secondary school	857	76.7%
	Higher Education	167	15.0%
	Other	84	7.5%
Currently employed	Yes	105	9.4%
	No	997	89.3%

Main findings:

- Gender was almost equally divided across the entire sample.
- Most countries had a similar number of respondents except for Slovenia (42.6%) having a much higher response rate, and Spain (5.9%) having a slightly lower response rate.
- The majority of DCJAs were aged between 15 and 19 (91.6%).
- Most respondents were in secondary education (76.7%) with most of the remaining students in higher education (15.0%).
- The majority of DCJAs were currently unemployed at the time of the study (89.3%).

The 25 items of the RSQ-JA and their means and standard deviations are listed in Table 2, ranked from high (very often) to low (never). Overall, participants reported the highest scores with the following items:

- My brain is usually tired at the end of the day.
- School and homework take up too much of my time.
- My body is tired because I do a lot of sport.
- It is difficult for me to get everything done because I spend a lot of time travelling (between home, school, sport and other activities).

Participants reported the lowest scores with the following items:

- I am not challenged as an athlete.
- My coaches don't agree on what they want me to do.
- I don't know what to do to be a good family member.
- I don't know what happens if I don't do my schoolwork.

From looking at the items, the highest scores are linked to overload and the lowest scores are linked to ambiguity. Summary statistics for the RSQ-JA factors are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Factor (RSQ-JA items)	Mean	SD	N (valid)	Missing
Overload in sport and between roles	2.9	0.76	1091	26
Ambiguity	2.15	0.72	1087	30
Overload in school	3.03	0.91	1105	12
Underload	2.22	0.78	1102	15
Conflict	2.54	0.76	1100	17

Main findings:

- DCJAs score between negative and neutral on all factors.
- Overload in school was perceived as the strongest factor.
- Ambiguity around responsibilities was perceived as the weakest factor.

This confirms that the factors concerning overload score highly among the athletes and those considering underload and ambiguity score lowly.

Table 2

Question (Never vs Very often)	N (valid)	Item Score	Item Standard
			Deviation
My brain is usually tired at the end of the day.	1114	3.41	1.14
School and homework take up too much of my time.	1116	3.27	1.11
My body is tired because I do a lot of sport.	1112	3.23	1.06
It is difficult for me to get everything done because I spend a lot of time travelling (between home, school, sport and other activities).	1111	3.21	1.25
My teachers give me too much homework.	1112	3.17	1.13
I can't spend enough time with my friends because I am too busy.	1114	3.06	1.22
I can't complete my schoolwork because too much is due at the same time.	1113	2.94	1.16
I don't always like to focus on the role which others expect me to focus on.	1107	2.90	1.03
I don't feel like doing family chores.	1115	2.89	1.18
Sport takes up too much of my time.	1115	2.80	1.12
I can't spend enough time with my family because I am too busy.	1115	2.77	1.18
My schoolwork is too difficult.	1112	2.73	1.01
I am not challenged at school.	1113	2.46	1.05
My brain feels tired because I do a lot of sport.	1113	2.43	1.05
I don't know how my performance as an athlete is measured.	1112	2.40	1.06

Question (Never vs Very often)	N (valid)	Item Score	Item Standard
			Deviation
I don't like parts of my training program.	1113	2.31	1.11
My roles aren't challenging enough.	1110	2.28	0.95
I don't know what to do to become a successful student.	1111	2.27	1.10
I don't know what to do to become a successful athlete.	1109	2.27	1.03
I get so much advice on how to become a better athlete that it is hard to remember it all.	1112	2.27	1.04
I have to do things for my sport that I don't really want to do.	1110	2.10	1.12
I don't know what happens if I don't do my schoolwork.	1108	1.99	1.15
I don't know what to do to be a good family member.	1114	1.99	1.06
My coaches don't agree on what they want me to do.	1113	1.96	1.10
I am not challenged as an athlete.	1108	1.94	1.10

The 29 items of the DCCQ-A and their means and standard deviations are listed in Table 4, ranked from high (very strong) to low (very poor). Overall, participants reported the highest scores with the following items:

- Eagerness to listen and learn from others and past experiences.
- Willingness to make sacrifices and choices to succeed in sport and study.
- Clear understanding of what it takes to succeed in sport and study.
- Understanding the importance of rest and recuperation.

Participants reported the lowest scores with the following items:

- Ability to cope with stress in sport and study.
- Ability to use setbacks in sport and/or study as a positive stimulus.
- Ability to regulate emotions in different situations.
- Vision of where you want to go in life after your dual career.

It is important to note that all scores ranged between 3 and 4, so from neutral to positive. From looking at the items, it appears that the highest scores are linked to social intelligence & adaptability and the lowest scores are linked to emotional awareness. Summary statistics for the DCCQ-A factors are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Factor (DCCQ-A items)	Mean	SD	N (valid)	Missing
Dual Career Management	3.67	0.73	1081	36
Career Planning	3.45	0.71	1093	24
Emotional Awareness	3.31	0.77	1080	37
Social Intelligence & Adaptability	3.75	0.69	1089	28

Main findings:

- DCJAs score between neutral and positive on all factors.
- Social Intelligence & Adaptability was perceived as the strongest factor.
- Emotional Awareness was perceived as the weakest factor.

This confirms that the factors concerning overload score highly among the athletes and those considering underload and ambiguity score lowly.

Table 4

Question (Very poor vs Very strong)	N (valid)	Item Score	Item Standard Deviation
Eagerness to listen and learn from others and past experiences.	1110	3.98	0.95
Willingness to make sacrifices and choices to succeed in sport and study.	1113	3.89	0.99
Clear understanding of what it takes to succeed in sport and study.	1109	3.86	0.98
Understanding the importance of rest and recuperation.	1109	3.85	1.03

Table 4

Question (Very poor vs Very strong)	N (valid)	Item Score	Item Standard Deviation
Dedication to succeed in both sport and study.	1113	3.83	1.01
Ability to make your own responsible choices with regard to your study and sport career.	1111	3.79	0.95
Ability to maintain relations with important others.	1107	3.75	0.96
Ability to resolve conflicts.	1110	3.73	0.89
Ability to make social contacts with peers in study and sport.	1105	3.70	1.01
Belief that study and sport can positively complement each other.	1109	3.70	1.07
Ability to create individualised routines (for sport and study).	1110	3.70	0.97
Asking advice to the right people at the right time.	1108	3.68	0.98
Being curious to explore career plans outside elite sport.	1108	3.62	1.05
Ability to collaborate with support staff in study and sport.	1105	3.59	0.98
Ability to prioritise what needs to be done.	1108	3.58	0.98
Self-discipline to manage the demands of your study and sport combination.	1111	3.57	1.04
Ability to be flexible and change plans if necessary.	1113	3.53	0.91
Having knowledge about your career options in study and sport.	1111	3.51	0.95
Being patient about the progression of your sport and study career.	1106	3.45	0.97
Ability to plan conscientiously in advance.	1112	3.41	1.02
Belief in your own ability to overcome the challenges in sport and study.	1109	3.41	1.03
Ability to use your time efficiently.	1114	3.40	0.99
Assertiveness (being self-assured and acting with confidence).	1109	3.34	1.12
Ability to focus on here and now, without being distracted.	1106	3.33	0.96
Being prepared for the unexpected and having back up plans.	1110	3.31	0.95
Vision of where you want to go in life after your dual career.	1110	3.27	1.21
Ability to regulate emotions in different situations.	1104	3.25	1.04
Ability to use setbacks in sport and/or study as a positive stimulus.	1100	3.22	1.00
Ability to cope with stress in sport and study.	1110	3.18	1.10

Table 6

Factor (RSQ-JA items)	Country						
	Greece (N=120)	Italy (N=101)	Poland (N=103)	Portugal (N=137)	Slovenia (N=467)	Spain (N=65)	UK (N=107)
Overload in sport							
and between roles	2.35	2.6	2.93	2.76	3.02	3.54	3.02
Ambiguity	2.01	2.64	2.03	1.86	2.18	2.28	2.13
Overload in school	2.78	2.71	3.16	2.74	3.2	3.33	2.96
Underload	2.58	2.78	2.13	2.14	2.11	2.33	1.95
Conflict	2.8	2.82	2.5	2.31	2.46	2.78	2.61

Table 7

Factor (RSQ-JA items)	Gender		Education		
	Male (N=530)	Female (N=570)	Secondary (N=852)	Higher(N=165)	Others(N=83)
Overload in sport					
and between roles	2.77	3.02	2.89	2.85	3.07
Ambiguity	2.11	2.19	2.13	2.26	2.12
Overload in school	2.96	3.1	3.04	2.89	3.19
Underload	2.24	2.21	2.23	2.26	2.14
Conflict	2.52	2.58	2.52	2.65	2.61

Table 8

Factor (DCCQ-A items)	Country						
	Greece (N=120)	Italy (N=101)	Poland (N=103)	Portugal (N=137)	Slovenia (N=467)	Spain (N=65)	UK (N=107)
Dual Career Management	3.82	2.81	3.81	3.97	3.7	3.66	3.71
Career Planning	3.56	2.91	3.53	3.64	3.45	3.53	3.4
Emotional Awareness	3.51	2.77	3.49	3.44	3.32	3.23	3.32
Social Intelligence & Adaptability	3.88	3.01	3.77	4.05	3.78	3.85	3.78

Table 9

Factor (DCCQ-A items)	Gender		Education		
	Male (N=530)	Female (N=570)	Secondary (N=852)	Higher(N =165)	Others(N=8 3)
Dual Career Management	3.54	3.8	3.71	3.45	3.81
Career Planning	3.39	3.5	3.46	3.32	3.58
Emotional Awareness	3.45	3.19	3.33	3.17	3.4
Social Intelligence & Adaptability	3.7	3.81	3.78	3.54	3.91

Table 6 contains a breakdown of the RSQ-JA factors by country. Overload in Sport and Between Roles was the highest scoring factor for Portugal (2.76), Slovenia (3.02), Spain (3.54), and the United Kingdom (3.02). It was the lowest scoring factor for Italy (2.60). Overload in School was the highest scoring factor for Poland (3.16). This shows that DCJAs feel overloaded regardless of the country they are from. Ambiguity was the lowest scoring factor for Greece (2.01), Poland (2.03), Portugal (1.86), and Spain (2.28), suggesting that DCJAs do not find their responsibilities unclear in most countries. Underload was the lowest scoring factor for Slovenia (2.11) and the United Kingdom (1.95). Conflict was the highest scoring factor for Italy and Greece suggesting a potential difference from the other countries.

Table 7 contains a breakdown of the RSQ-JA factors by gender and education level. Overload in School was the highest scoring factor for both male (2.96) and female athletes (3.10). Ambiguity was the lowest scoring factor both male (2.11) and female athletes (2.19). Overload in School was also the highest scoring factor across all educational levels (2.89-3.19). Ambiguity was the lowest scoring factor for all educational levels (2.12-2.26) although Underload (2.26) scored equally as lowly for athletes in Higher education.

Table 8 contains a breakdown of the DCCQ-A factors by country. Social Intelligence & Adaptability was the highest scoring factor for every country (3.01-4.05) besides Poland for which it scored second highest (3.77). Dual Career Management was the highest scoring factor for Poland (3.81). The lowest scoring factor for all countries was Emotional Awareness (2.77-3.51).

Table 8 contains a breakdown of the DCCQ-A factors by gender and education level. Social Intelligence & Adaptability was the highest scoring factor for both male (3.70) and female athletes (3.81). The lowest scoring factor for male athletes was Career Planning (3.39) and the lowest scoring factor for female students was Emotional Awareness (3.19). Social Intelligence & Adaptability was the highest scoring factor across all educational levels (3.54-3.91). Emotional Awareness was the lowest scoring factor for all educational levels (3.17-3.40).

Conclusion

The studies in this report included an extensive data, which provided in-depth insights and strong evidence to the following step to develop an online support curriculum for junior athletes. The findings clearly demonstrated challenges and barriers that junior athletes can face, which needs to be addressed to assist them in balancing their life and continue their sport aspiration. Although some resources to cope with their difficulties are available, such resources are still limited for many athletes so further support is needed to fill the gap in practice and make the resources more accessible. The findings will guide us to move the project forward to develop an evidence-based online support curriculum that can address the gap.

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