



Workshop Report  
"Athletes and Career Programmes"

Project: Athletes2Business (A2B)

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### **1. Introduction**

In the framework of the AthletesToBusiness initiative, the first workshop on "Athletes and Career Programmes" was held on 6 May 2010 at the premises of INSEP in Paris, France. Enriched by a large group of specialists, the seminar envisaged to capitalize on the amount of experience and expertise at hand to produce recommendations on dual career in the European Union. The conference was chaired by A2B project manager Michael Trinker.

Participants of the workshop were, among other, representatives of the IOC and European Commission, national sport associations, business specialists and experts of education as well as top-level athletes from the FIS and EOC Athletes Commission.

Prior to the workshop, speeches on dual career from the perspective of the European Commission, examples of good practice as well as the preliminary results of the athletes' questionnaire aimed at introducing the given circumstances and generating discussion input.

Special to the workshop was the hosting at the premises of INSEP, a renowned example for reconciling top-level sporting achievement with an educational career. In the interest of complementing the workshop findings, INSEP shared a comprehensive overview on its established practices prior to the workshop session.

This report summarizes the round-table discussions of the seminar. As a guidance, key recommendations emphasized in the Taj Ineum study on "The Training of Young Sportsmen and Sportswomen in Europe" published by the European Commission in 2008 have been integrated.



## **2. Results of the Study on the Training of Young Sportsmen and Sportswomen in Europe**

The study conducted research among sports and law experts in the 27 EU Member States, covering 15 sports. Although recommendations produced do not constitute the European Commission's official position, it considers them useful for further activity on the promotion of the quality of sports training in the EU and the protection of the moral and physical integrity of young sportspeople. Findings and recommendations developed on dual career shall be listed hereafter.

### **Findings**

While in compulsory school, dual career is well arranged, the research found particular difficulties in managing combined sports and education in higher education. Oftentimes, the support provided at academic level (e.g. in University or sports faculties) is solely related to a sports focused study programme. While some nations like France or Finland have made efforts to diversify the ways of helping athletes, there is still a large need for improvement on a general EU level.

### **Recommendations**

#### **a) Protection of the health and the environment of high level young athletes**

The research suggested to promote the limitation by sports organisations (whether national or international) of the duration of training and of the number of competitions for high level young athletes, in order to safeguard their health and to preserve their chance of reconciling sport and educational training (dual career).

Detailed Recommendation:

Each Member State should encourage sport organisations to set out limitations regarding the duration of training and the number of competitions according to the considered sports and to the age of high level athletes. This should be very specific and determined for each sport.

Cases of Good Practice:

- Belgium: Minimum age for starting training and competitions
- Latvia: Training volume is regulated
- Slovenia: Training volume is regulated (role of sports associations, Ministry of Education and Sports and Slovenian Olympic Committee)

#### **b) Promotion of the dialogue and cooperation between sports and education**

The study suggested to promote the dialogue between sports and education at both national and local levels in order to develop flexible systems for combining high level sports and academic education.



Detailed Recommendation:

- Encourage Member States to set up a tailored programme of Lifelong Learning dedicated to the promotion of apprenticeship all life long
- Encourage Member States to make appropriate investments in e-learning programmes

Cases of Good Practice:

- France, United Kingdom: Combined sports and education in training centres allow athletes to benefit from individual arrangements and flexible schedules
- Germany: Possibility for extended studies in more than 100 Universities
- Finland: Academic network associates sport associations and institutions to combine knowledge and provide tailored athlete services.

The study further revealed the following recommendations regarding dual career support:

**c) Provision of Counselling Services**

Recommendation:

EU Member States and sport organisations should consider the development of counselling services for young athletes by integrating former athletes, (independent from sports associations and trainers), who are able to efficiently advise young athletes.

Cases of Good Practice:

Finland disposes of an elaborate network of sports associations, institutions and former athletes. Collectively, they are aware of the obstacles encountered by young athletes and provide efficient advice for their career post-sports.

**d) Provision of Specific Scholarships**

Recommendation:

A privileged status for athletes obtaining scholarships should be provided laying down special conditions (e.g. lighter regulations concerning academic results).



### **3. Workshop “Athletes and Career Programmes”**

#### **3.1. Status Quo on Athletes**

Central to the first discussion round was the analysis of the present situation with regards to the obstacles encountered by athletes in a dual career project.

##### **Academic Environment**

The workshop members agreed on the fact that the period of higher education entails the most difficulties in the pursuit of a dual career.

In several EU Member States efforts are being made to allow high level athletes to combine higher education and high level sports (Taj Ineum). However, the models available are not flexible enough to allow a dual path. Participants regret a lack of new teaching methods such as e-learning or project-based learning. On the other hand, higher education institutions are no specialists in the sports field; sensitivity towards the needs of athletes must first be developed.

##### **Governmental Priorities**

As sport is not an issue of priority among national governments, workshop participants regret the lack of government-led initiatives or ministerial support regarding the combination of education and sport.

##### **Social Environment**

The social environment, in particular family can restrain an athlete from an orientation towards a dual career if pushing him for sporting success and excellence only. In this regard, also the sports environment including coaches, clubs and sport federations is lacking willingness to support combined sports and higher education.

##### **Financial Situation**

Especially at a young age, high performance athletes are in an unfavourable financial situation: Training and sports equipment require large investments, often covered by parental support. An educational path demands further expenditures, thus raising doubt to envisage a dual path.

##### **Time**

Athletes need to balance intensive training and educational work. The carrying out of both projects is highly time-consuming. As illustrated by the figures in the questionnaire, the majority of athletes still considers sports to be suffering from an educational project.

##### **Dual Career Services**

As underscored by the athlete questionnaire, a majority of athletes is not aware of the services (i.e. career counselling) available to them. Members of the workshop see deficits in the communication and knowledge of such specialized help.

##### **Self-Responsibility**

Participants underscored the individual responsibility of athletes to establish a life project. As it entails time and effort, athletes are lacking motivation to train and



study at the same time. Oftentimes, the athlete is unable to re-visit education at a later point in life.

It was observed that difficulties arise in particular in the educational offer for athletes in the period after compulsory school. Sensitivity of the academic society, the sports environment and government are lacking. Next to the self-responsibility of athletes, workshop members pointed out deficits in the communication and knowledge on the possibilities of specialized help. Time constraints and financial issues create additional burdens.

### **3.2. Ideal Situation for Athletes to be Successful in Dual Career**

The exercise involved sharing experiences and knowledge on how an ideal framework for dual career could look like for athletes.

#### **Individual Guidance**

Ideally, the availability of career guidance is ensured to every athlete, flexibly adapting to different sport levels and varying needs. Concrete information on dual career is provided from the age of 16 plus while the athlete himself plays an active role in this process. Like seen as a good practice at INSEP, athletes are drawn away from two separate projects towards a uniform combined project. In this regard, the career plan is evaluated along with changing circumstances with particular attention to transition periods. Counselling staff complements the personality of athletes and demonstrates empathy.

From a geographical point of view, proximity of services and people is guaranteed.

#### **Higher Education**

In the interest to combine intensive training and educational work, flexibility and tailored services are ensured by education institutions. These include tutored long distance learning as well as flexible solutions in schedules and examinations.

#### **Networks**

Ideally, there is a network of experts involving parties of the four target groups, athletes, businesses, sport organisations and educational institutions sharing and building upon knowledge, experiences and good practices.

#### **Social Environment**

In an ideal situation, the athlete's environment is fully supportive of his dual career ambitions. Parents, coaches, teachers and federations associate and collaborate to support the athlete. To arrive at this stage, the theme of dual career is trained and communicated intensively among the involved actors.

#### **Economic Situation**

The economic situation of the athlete is complemented by financial aids.

#### **Promotion of Success Stories**



Examples of athletes successfully pursuing a dual career are communicated effectively to encourage younger sportsmen and sportswomen to follow this path.

Ideally, the educational, sports and social environment are largely supportive to athletes. Individual guidance encourages their life project ambitions. The economic situation is secured and services are located in short distance. Networks serve as a facilitator to build upon good practices.

### **3.3. Recommendations**

Considering the analysis of the present situation and the outlook of an ideal situation, the following recommendations have been addressed to:

#### **The European Union**

- The European Union shall support the formation of networks in the interest to share knowledge and exchange good practices on dual career. In doing so, respective measures of Member States can be supported and complemented.
- EU standards for EU experts should be developed to support countries in the development of dual career structures
- To establish improved standards, quality control standards should be implemented at educational institutions and training centres

#### **The Member States**

- The Ministry of Education should develop and implement dual career guidelines for education institutions
- In the interest to guide a substantial number of athletes, career counselling offers should be expanded
- The information and communication of counselling services available to athletes should be improved
- The social environment of athletes (family, coaches, clubs) should be accustomed with the topic of dual career

#### **The European Union and Member States**

- The European Union and its Member States should enforce the exchange of good practices of existing national programmes to provide a platform for networking. This should include specific networks (e.g. career counselling network).



- To improve the legal framework, dual career should be implemented on legal documents (i.e. strategy laws)
- In order to improve the financial framework, extra funding for dual career programs should be provided
- High level athletes should be allocated a proper status by granting related rights. These could entitle owners with flexibility in studies, personalized guidance and financial aids:
  - Scholarships providing a specific athlete status
  - A solidarity fund demanding high-level well paid athletes to provide a certain percentage to less paid lower sportsmen to support their dual career activities
  - A pension fund for athletes (Retirement Retraining Model) to supply financial warranties
  - Financial incentives for internships (e.g. tax incentives) provided to companies to help join businesses and athletes and ease their access to the labour market.

### **Sport organisations**

- Sport organisations should work towards increasing dual career opportunities for athletes and develop a culture of an obligation to provide services also related to dual career.
- In line with CSR, sport organisations should develop a policy on dual career in order to provide an all-round service for athletes.
- Sport organisations should set up a position within their structure providing orientation/ support for questions related to dual career for athletes. This position could also help reducing the information gap of athletes regarding their dual career opportunities.
- Sport organisations should act as a multiplier on information about dual career and sensitise the athlete's environment like coaches, therapists etc. on dual career opportunities for athletes.
- Sport organisations should advocate for internal, public and private support for athletes' career programmes.
- Sport organisations should conclude agreements with association consisting of businesses with the aim at promoting dual career like the cooperation agreement between the CNOSF and MEDEF.



- Besides demanding plans from athletes towards their sport career, sport organisations should also demand plans for educational goals.

## **Athletes**

- Athletes themselves are to a large extent responsible for reconciling the demands of top-level sporting achievement and those of education and professional training. Thus, they also have the obligation to seek actively advice themselves for their planning of a successful dual career. In order to be able to strike a responsible and reasonable balance in view of a successful dual career, athletes have to be supported by sport organisations, educational institutions and other stakeholders accordingly.
- Athletes' Commissions should raise awareness on the importance of dual career by distributing relevant information to athletes.

### **3.4. Priorities, Follow-up**

Various points of actions have been identified. As the workshop on athletes in Paris revealed, too little information is available for athletes on dual career opportunities. Therefore, projects aiming at raising awareness, improving the knowledge base (on dual career) and sensitising the athletes themselves as well as their environment should be implemented first.

The actions points will be presented to relevant stakeholders. The implementation of the action points can be easily monitored and reported on by relevant networks.

## **4. Conclusion**

Although, initiatives in Member States are carried out to combine sports and education, the models available in particular in the case of academic education are not readily adapted to the needs of high-level athletes. The establishment of a network regrouping actors involved in dual career could provide valuable support in sharing good practices to plan and launch initiatives in this field.

