

# THE HISTORICAL ASPECT OF DUAL CAREER IN EU AND GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES IN LATVIA

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**Abstract.** *From the information of organisations EUSA (2020), EAS (2022) and FISU (2022) documents, it is indicated that dual careers have been one of the priorities at the EU level in the last decade. Today's complex conditions in the world and in Latvia require paying more attention to Dual career support for student-athletes. Mentor support centres are being created for this in the world. There is no such centre in Latvia yet. The time of an athlete's career is short, so support is needed for students-athletes both for successful studies and high sports achievements.*

*The purpose of the article is to explore the historical formation and growth opportunities of Dual Career in Latvia.*

*Materials and methods. Theoretical method – Analysis of theoretical sources and documents.*

*The study analyses Dual career terminology, historical formation in the world and Dual career opportunities in Latvia. The support of University Sports Centres and mentor centre is needed to provide up-to-date information to student-athletes. Important information for the creation of a dual career centre is identified Within the framework of FISU-NUSF Projects 2022 – Establishment of a Dual Career Mentor Centre in Latvia.*

**Keywords:** *Dual Career, LSFP support, Mentor centre, student-athletes.*

## Introduction

From the information of organisations EUSA, EAS and FISU documents it is indicated that dual careers have been one of the priorities at the EU level in the last decade. Today's complex conditions in the world and in Latvia require paying more attention to Dual career support for student-athletes. Mentor support centres are being created for this in the world including Lithuania (2020.10.05.) (LSU, 2020). “In Estonia, services for dual career are organised at government level through national policy, under the auspices of several ministries” (Support, 2020, p. 3). There is no such centre in Latvia yet.

Experience shows that at junior age sports careers are usually stopped because a choice needs to be made – to do sports or to focus on education/learn a trade. The fast pace of events in sports requires to solve the question of how to combine both in the available time. For young people to have a purposeful sports career while leading a focused academic life, there needs to be support from the university. According to a study conducted by the European Commission [EC], each year  $\frac{1}{3}$  of young athletes aged 10 to 17 cease training, because other priorities appear (European Commission, 2007).

The term “Dual Career” [DC] can be described as a harmonized process, in which the athlete develops her/his athletic and academic competences, while improving psycho-social and psychological well-being. The essence of a dual career is to create an environment for the athlete in which they can do sports, gain an education or professional qualification in parallel, and make themselves ready for the job market after their sports career. So, the athlete gains knowledge useful for the life after their sports career as well as during.

Data available from the Latvian Olympic committee showed that 45% of the Latvian Olympic team (53% of Summer Olympics, and 36% of Winter Olympics contestants) are students or University graduates (Latvijas Olimpiskā Komiteja, 2012). The time of an athlete's career is short, so support is needed for students-athletes both for successful studies and high sporting achievements.

The purpose of the article is to explore the historical formation and growth opportunities of Dual Career in Latvia.

Materials and methods. Theoretical method – analysis of theoretical sources and documents. The study analyses historical formation of DC in the world and DC opportunities in Latvia.

### **Materials and methods: Theoretical background on Dual Career**

*History of DC creation: European Commission documents.*

Discussions about DC have been going on in Europe since the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, and some research shows significant results. In 2003 research titled “Combining sport and education: support for athletes in the EU Member States” looked at support opportunities for students-athletes in EU countries: 1. School education opportunities; 2. Financial support for active athletes, financial support to top-level athletes to cover training and competition expenses. 3. Grants for retired professionals to study at university or financial support to current professional athletes who wish to combine a full-time sports career with a university course. 4. Quotas for the entry of athletes to university. 5. Flexibility within the university system (timetable etc.), 6. Special athlete support programs (Flanagan, & Winther, European Parliament, 2003, pp.10-11).

Since 2005 the International Olympic Committee [IOC] has deployed a High-performance sports athletes' career program, with the help of which athletes are brought into the job market after the eventual end of their sports career. European Commission's 2007 "White book on sports" states that it is important to provide athletes with a "dual career" education from a young age to ensure the reintegration of professional athletes into the job market after their sports careers end (European Commission, 2007).

A 2008 EU Council declaration invites to strengthen dialogue with the IOC and representatives from the sports world, especially on the combined sports training and education process for young people, to achieve a state where young high-achievement athletes are ensured good quality education in parallel with their sports training. In education, life skills, and employment were emphasized again to promote both formal and informal education among athletes (Council of the European Union, 2008).

EU guidelines on supporting athlete's dual career in high-achievement sports, which meets the goals of "Europe 2020" criteria, were confirmed by the EU expert group in the Poznan meeting "Education and tuition in sports" on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2012. They bind the administration to advance high-achievement dual career development in each member country within the available means (European Union, 2012).

In 2016 significant research was undertaken in the EU on dual career promotion.

The aim of this study is to provide background information on the current situation of the combination of elite sports and education/work (i.e., dual career) commitments of European athletes. Based on the analysis of the scientific literature on several dimensions of European student-athletes, the EU-funded projects, policy systems and best practices of dual career across eight European Member States, this study highlights challenges and recommendations for implementing policy actions to integrate university and sports in dual career paths (Capranica & Guidotti, 2016).

Key findings were as follows:

Athletes could prepare for a post-athletic career within or outside the sport sector. Qualifications in the sport sector should be based on the formal, nonformal, and informal education. Alignment of sport qualifications to the European Qualification Framework [EQF] and the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training [ECVET] principles could facilitate the integration of non-formal education into formal educational paths. Sport is considered a tremendous environment for informal learning of life skills that represent important attributes of European citizens and productive workers. The recognition of the non-formal and informal learning of elite athletes is deemed central to implement academic curricula and define suitable dual career study models. Former elite athletes with a dual career degree could achieve greater educational

and labour market success with respect to their non-athlete counterparts. Academic programs should include dual career courses to prepare dual career experts/support providers to be employed in the sports and work sectors (Capranica & Guidotti, 2016).

The co-authors paper (Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022) provides an overview of DC research's current state. The results indicate that research on DC is in an intermediate state with the growing interest during the last years.

### **International organisations that support DC students**

There are three dual career supporting umbrella institutions: International University Sports Federation [FISU], European University Sports Association [EUSA] and European Athlete Student [EAS], in whose work participate Latvian University Sport federation [LUSF] board members A.Abele and I.Abelkalns.

FISU included DC in its 21<sup>st</sup> century strategy and started this academic year with a Dual Career Webinar (2022). It consisted of presentations about dual career as a part of FISU global strategy, and discussed activities deemed to be topical in the future. It was emphasized that to enact a DC, it is necessary to gain university support. It is also important to organize a volunteer movement. DC will be one of the main topics in the upcoming FISU World conference, and FISU World forum. In 2022/2023 a “Development of a Dual Career Toolkit dedicated to the stakeholders of the University Sports Movement” is also planned. In 2023/2024 it is planned to hold an “Update and promotion of good practices”. With the support of the European funding mechanisms, several project funding opportunities enable activities and implementation of the EU guidelines on dual careers. FISU are currently working on two dual career projects - Brand Value Alignment through Dual Career [BRAVA] and Micro Learning Entrepreneurship for Athletes [MLEA], both co-funded by the Erasmus+ program of the European Union.

One of the best review studies in the FISU DC webinar was presented by Siobhan James - General Manager International Programs & National Leagues UniSport Australia (FISU DC webinar, 2022). She gave a presentation on Elite Athletes' Education Network [EAEN] in Australia: 1) the program; 2) its guiding principles; 3) takeaways from experience: flexible study opportunities; actions of elites student-athlete coordinators; dual career opportunities not just for elite athletes, but also other students with a passion for a sport; promotion of students' critical thinking; maximal support not only for achievements of student-athletes, but also for facilitation of professional career. Every AIS (Australian Institute of Sport) confirmed TAFE (Technical and Further Education) has an Elite Athletes' coordinator, who supports athletes by enacting the Elite Athlete Education Network's fundamental principles. This countrywide network supports Australian athletes in a high-performance sports system. TAFE NSW is Australia's largest

vocational education and training provider based in New South Wales (FISU DC webinar, 2022).

There was also interesting case study in the FISU DC webinar, presented by Palestinian student-athlete Yazan AL Bawwab OLY, Canadian FISU Ambassador (FISU DC webinar, 2022). In his experience DC requires good time management: a good plan, self-discipline, enough moments of rest, but not too much, the priority is rest-sleep (8-9h), not entertainment events. It is important to make good use of and save time for professional activities and sports. Support can be found in the family/team, proper nutrition, power naps (20 minutes max) - a short nap during the working day to restore mental alertness. Smartly organized studies. It is important to evaluate priorities in a DC: when studying, the priority is the student, followed by the athlete. DC is not for everyone! The main goal is to balance a healthy lifestyle. Maximum University support is required) (FISU DC webinar, 2022). At the FISU World Forum in Cartago, Costa Rica (December 5-9, 2022), LUSF President Agita Abele, together with Executive Director Kitija Senkane, presented on the development of DC in Latvia, which was followed by active discussions about the best opportunities and examples of overcoming difficulties in DC (FISU, 2022).

The other organization - EUSA was founded in November 1999 in Vienna/Austria by 25 national federations. It is a non-governmental [NGO], non-profit organization, working in the field of university sport in Europe. It links national university sport federations, universities, teams, individual competitors, volunteers and other partners in 45 countries throughout Europe. EUSA activities promote values of especially university students aged 17-30, to actively involve both academic level as well as being active in sports career; without any discrimination (EUSA, 2021). EUSA also encourages educational activities in the field of student sports - mainly through Conferences, Seminars and Conventions. EUSA board implements and encourages participation in different educational programs and sports projects (EUSA, 2020).

The third organization - EAS Network is registered in Malta, founded in 2004 with the support of the European Commission. It is for universities, sports schools and other educational establishments interested in high performance sport, sports clubs and federations which are willing to help their athletes in their studies. The main aim is to support European athletes in combining high performance sport and education. Supporting the "dual career" means that the EAS-Network strives to optimize the training conditions for athlete/students but also that their future gets secured by making it possible for them to get an education or vocational training, so that they have a safe platform to start from when their sports career is over (EAS, 2022).

## **Formation of dual career support in Latvia**

In an informative report (Ministru kabinets, 2021) by the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science written for the EC (Brussels) it says: "On the issues within the competence of the Ministry of Education and Science to be considered at the Council of Ministers of Education, Youth, Culture and Sports of the European Union on 29-30 November 2021 is Latvia's position on what has been done to support DC in Latvia" (Ministru kabinets, 2021). This document described the situation regarding DC in the EU member states. The need to involve ministries and other institutions (sports organizations, administrative structures, educational institutions and companies) for dual career support was emphasized. It has been found that there is insufficient support for high-achieving student athletes. Information exchange and cooperation are needed at the EU level. Support centres are needed for dual professional training of young athletes (Ministru kabinets, 2021).

In Latvia, the work was coordinated with the document "Sports policy guidelines for 2014-2020" (Ministru kabinets, 2013). The opportunities of all high-achieving athletes (including those with disabilities) to combine training work with studies in budget groups until obtaining a bachelor's degree in the chosen specialty, who have successfully represented Latvia at the Olympic Games, European or World Championships, were promoted. Support programs for high-achieving athletes operate in universities: individual study plan, remote studies in the environment, reduced tuition fees and scholarships, since 2007 state budget scholarships are available (Ministru kabinets, 2013).

In 2021, the University of Latvia, as the leading partner of the "More than gold" project co-financed by the Erasmus+ project, published "Guidelines for promoting the DC of athletes-students: Methodology for universities and Handbook for institutions" in cooperation with universities of several EU member states (Ābelkalns et al., 2021b).

According to the 2021-2024 EU Work Plan for Sport (European Union, 2020), DC should be promoted in correlation with European values: security, integrity, solidarity, athletes' health, and respect for human rights. Exchange of experience, support for high-performance athletes to combine studies with growth in sports, and preparation of substitutes for national teams should be promoted. Exchange of information on DC at institutional, local, regional, and national level is needed. High-achieving athletes, coaches, sports managers are a model of a healthy lifestyle for young people. Scientific publications on DC should be supported to ensure evidence-based sustainable policy in the EU (Ministru kabinets, 2021).

Since 2007 (LSFP, 2022) differentiated scholarships are awarded to athletes - students who have high sports results in the given year and who are successful in studies. Scholarships are financed from state budget funds intended for the

purpose of sports. Out of 114 received applications from student athletes, the scholarship committee awarded scholarships to 56 applicants in 2022. The biggest number of scholarships were won by students from the University of Latvia (15), Latvian Sports Pedagogy Academy (13), Riga Technical University (13), Riga Stradins University (5), and Daugavpils University (4). Representatives of 26 sports will receive scholarships: floorball, orienteering, track and field, freestyle skiing, shooting, kayaking, cross-country skiing, biathlon, motorsport (speedway), curling, checkers, 3x3 basketball, basketball, figure skating, rowing, fitness, gymnastics, boxing, swimming, BMX cycling, triathlon, chess, table tennis, road cycling, sailing and karate (LSFP, 2022).

Chairwoman of the scholarship commission, LASE professor A. Abele stated that the concept of a dual career is becoming more and more important among athletes, as evidenced by the record number of scholarship applications received. For athletes it is important to feel supported and to know that their results so far in their career are valued (LSFP, 2022).

### **The most important DC key concepts**

A sports career is a set of sports activities voluntarily chosen by an athlete over several years with the aim of achieving the highest individual sports results in one or more sports (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Cote, 2009). International and professional sports, or high-performance sports are sports at the level of international competitions, including the training process to prepare for them. In high-performance sports are athletes from the age of 15-16 who are purposefully engaged in sports in sports schools and clubs, have entered Latvian youth or junior national teams and participate in Latvian and international competitions with the aim of achieving high results (Ministru kabinets, 2013). High-performance athletes are those who are included in the Latvian national team in one of the sports and in team sports, athletes who participate at least in the national championships of the highest division (Ābelkalns, 2014). A high-performance athlete is defined as an athlete recognized by the relevant sports federations as a member/candidate of the national team in the adult age group. DC athletes are high-performance athletes and/or university athletes who studies in a higher education study program and participates in high-level competitions (Ābelkalns et al., 2021a; Ābelkalns et al., 2021b).

### **Scientific background for Dual career in Latvia (models, theory, projects)**

In Latvia, the subject of DC is written on by prof. Juris Grants, ass. professor Ivars Kravalis, prof. Inga Belousa, and prof. Janis Zidens. J. Grants and I. Kravalis presented the topic “Dual career in Latvia” on 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> November 2013 in Helsinki on Latvian experience about simultaneously succeeding in high

achievement sports and performing well academically in Latvian Universities (Spīķe, 2013).

In 2014, LU ass. professor I. Abelkalns defended his PhD thesis on *Management of high-performance athletes' dual career in Latvian Universities*. Within it he developed a *high-performance athletes' education and sports improvement model in Latvia* (Ābeļkalns, 2014). Work on this topic was continued by I. Abelkalns (2019-2021), who lead the LU international ERASMUS+ project MORE THAN GOLD (Ābeļkalns et al., 2021b). During this project guideline were created for EU dual career student-athletes on how to combine high performance sports with education in universities. A. Paikena accentuates that high achievement sports is also characterized with skill development, dedication, competitiveness, excelling, and result seeking. The term “high performance sports” according to Latvian guidelines begins to be applicable from the age of 15, with some exceptions being permitted in a few sports (Paikena, 2019). This topic is continued in 2020 by A. Abele and I. Amantova (2020), who have created a *Dual career model for Latvia's environment* (see Figure 1).

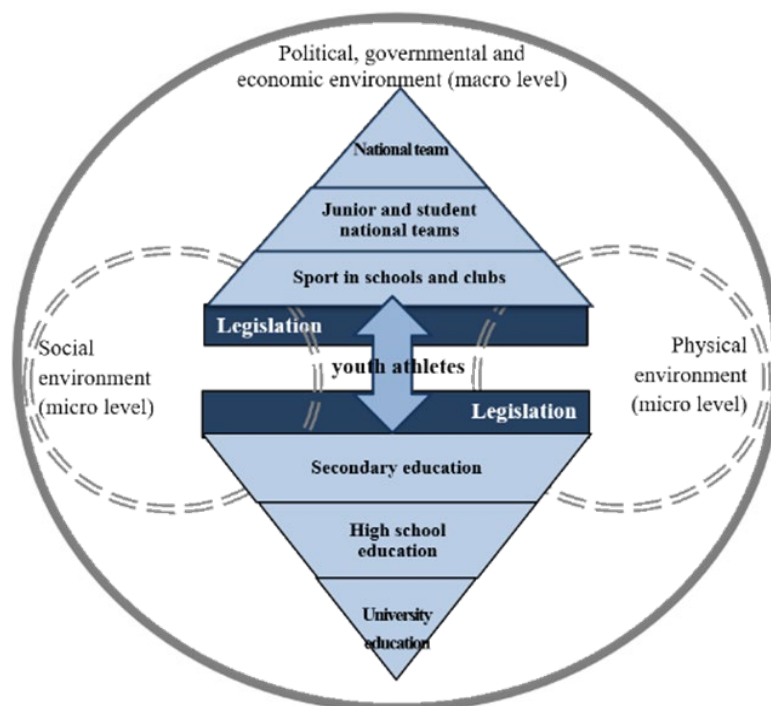


Figure 1 *Dual career model in Latvia's environment* (Amantova, Abele, 2020)

Unlike the leading EU countries, Latvia has not yet created a Dual career mentor centre. Along with this I. Abelkalns also points out the following shortcomings: a) the offered support is not organized at a state level; b) Latvian Universities generally either own insufficient sports facilities, or do not own them at all (Ābeļkalns, 2014). The afore mentioned points motivated LUSF to raise the necessity of creating a Dual career sports centre. This led to a joint FISU and NUSF project aiming to establish a Dual career mentor centre in Latvia.



## Conclusion

The study analyses historical formation of Dual career in the world and DC opportunities in Latvia. Research shows there is interested among student-athletes in information about DC opportunities in Latvia. Support by Latvian University Sports Federation, Universities Sports centres and the DC mentor centre is essential in providing student-athletes with relevant and up-to-date information. Important information for the creation of a DC centre is identified within the framework of FISU-NUSF Projects 2022 – Establishment of a Dual Career Mentor Centre in Latvia.

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