

Title: A Holistic Ecological Approach to Sport and Study: The Case of an Athlete Friendly University in Denmark

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Main Theme: University

Secondary Theme: Dual career support

Aims: The aim of this study was to provide a description of a Danish university athlete support system and to identify the factors that lead to this environment's effectiveness.

Method: The research used a case-study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the environment. One researcher observed the environment over a period of three months and also conducted interviews with student-athletes, university management, sports coaches, and sport management.

Results and Practical Implications: In this environment, student-athletes described the support they received from the DC support team (e.g., for academic flexibility and communicating with relevant stakeholders) as vital in their sporting and academic development. The dual career support team was at the centre of this environment and worked to integrate the sport, study and private life aspects of the student-athletes' lives. This support team communicated with the athlete and with each other to find support solutions. The support team supported student-athletes in three ways, depending on the stage the student-athlete was at: (1) pre university, the team promoted the benefits of dual careers to relevant stakeholders and to the athletes themselves; (2) in their first year, the team worked closely with the student-athletes to develop study plans and adapt to

university life; and (3) in the later years of university, the team empowered athletes to manage their own dual career, with the aim to prepare them for life after university. Support varied for different athletes, who each had their own dual career management plan, which are continually reviewed and adapted. Strong relationships between the university support team and the sports support team meant that coaches and academic staff understood the importance of a dual career and granted athletes flexibility when required (e.g., during exams and at the start of university). National sport organisations also provided financial support for the university sport system and had an ongoing dialogue with the DC support team. This study provides one example of a dual career support environment at a Danish university. Practitioners can use this as an example of good practice but must also recognise that this is a specific situation and that each environment will have its own solutions. Instead practitioners could consider using this as an example to evaluate their own environments practices and identify areas for future development.

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