

Title: Elite Athletes and University Education in Europe: A Review of Policy and Practice in Higher Education in The European Member States

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Sport(s): N/A (covers policy rather than specific sports)

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Main Theme: Policy

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Aims: This study provides a comparison of policy relating to elite athletes in higher education in 25 Member States of the European Union.

Method: The 25 research teams were asked to complete a 'template' which collected information about the systems in place in their country for the education of elite athletes. The template covered compulsory education, post-compulsory further education, professional and semi-professional academies, university and higher education provision, post-athletic career training and vocation support & lifestyle management. However, this study focuses on university and higher education. The second stage of data collection required the 25 teams to identify and summarise examples of provision. Finally, a third stage involved the teams from France, Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom identifying and evaluating case studies of interventions relating to education of elite athletes. The combined data provided a comparison of national systems.

Results and Practical Implications: The authors found that provision varied from 'negligible provision' to 'established structures backed by legislation'. Where provision was backed by legislation, there were four different types of intervention: State-centric regulation, State

sponsored/ Facilitated, National Sporting Federations/ Institutes as Intermediaries and Laissez Faire (no formal structure). *State-centric Regulation*; In countries classified as having State-centric Regulation, higher education institutions are required to provide adapted opportunities for student-athletes. This may be flexible entry requirements, exam dates, time-tabling or type of course delivery. The countries in this category were France, Hungary, Spain and Portugal. *State Sponsored/ Facilitated*; To be classified as State Sponsored/ Facilitated, a country needed to have a formal system for acknowledging student-athlete's needs but not a legal requirement for action. For example, this could involve permissive legislation rather than statutory requirement. Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden were classified as having State Sponsored/ Facilitated provision. *National Sporting Federations/ Institutes as Intermediaries*; The United Kingdom and Greece provided different examples of National Sporting Federations/ Institutes as Intermediaries but in broad terms the National Sporting Federations/ Institutes catered for the individual needs of a student-athlete. This may be in the form of financial support or lifestyle advice. *Laissez Faire*; In countries assigned to the Laissez Faire category, student-athletes must balance their education and sporting commitments by themselves. The category also included countries where education was open to all and some where only financial support was offered to student-athletes. Countries in this category included Malta, Cyprus, Italy, Ireland, Austria and the Netherlands. Overall the paper highlighted the differences between countries policy and suggested that the European Union should work to keep the issue of elite athletes in higher education on the policy agenda. This is important because one of the key roles of the European Union is to identify unequal treatment of individuals within the European Union.

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