

**Title:** Moving Elite Athletes Forwards: Examining the Status of Secondary School Elite Athlete Programmes and Available Post-School Options

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**Keywords:** elite athletes; performativity; post-school options; secondary school

**Sport:** Mixed

**Journal:** Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy

**Primary theme:** Role of the institution

**Secondary theme:** Career plans

**Aims:** This study examined dual career athletes' experiences of two elite athlete programmes in New Zealand. Both programmes focused on school-age (between 14 and 18 years) athletes. The first school was a state school with a sports academy and the other was a private school specifically designed for elite athletes.

**Method:** Ten individuals from each school were asked to take part in one or two interviews and one focus group. Teachers and coaches involved in the programs were also interviewed for their experiences. The study involved both male and female athletes from a variety of sports.

**Results and Practical Implications:** The findings suggested that a small minority of individuals in these programmes benefitted from an environment that was shared with other motivated individuals. Participant's often described being encouraged by the status of the program to adjust their behaviour to represent the program at a high level in sport and academics. These individuals invested time and energy into developing skills, knowledge and relationships with other elite athletes. However, this study also suggests that programmes of this nature promoted social exclusion and an elitist mentality. Students in the programmes perceived themselves and others in the programme as superior in

motivation and discipline, often labelling those outside of the programme as ‘lazy’ or ‘average’. This perception was often reiterated by teachers and coaches. This study also showed that career planning for individuals who wished to pursue sport at university or a career in professional sport was highly supported and encouraged by the two programmes. However, there was little support or advice available for those who wished to pursue a non-university career or a career outside of sport. This meant that many individuals described feeling unsure of their post-school careers.

Although this study only investigated two programmes in New Zealand, there are many similar systems and programmes across the world. Further investigation of these programmes would give us a clearer idea of the positive and negative impacts. However, athletes and their support network should consider the possible positive and negative impacts highlighted in this study before enrolling in similar programmes. Furthermore, stakeholders should consider the impact systems are having in promoting an elitist culture and their role in supporting all education and vocational career plans.

TASS have produced this lay summary. The full article is available (permissions may apply): <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17408989.2014.882890?needAccess=true>