

Title: More Than Gold: Guidelines for Higher Education Institutes support of Dual Career Athletes

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The engagement of elite athletes in higher education institutions (HEI) is a priority to meet the aims of the Europe 2020 Strategy. However, in most European countries, Dual Career (DC) still is at a very early stage. In considering that European recommendations tend to be contained in non-binding documents following a top-down approach, a better understanding of issues relating to DC implementation from an operational perspective may result from a bottom-up approach. Therefore, the collaborative partnership “More Than Gold (MTG)” aimed to develop: i) Guidelines for HEIs on how to support DC; ii) Methodology material for HEIs with little or no dual career policy, services, and programmes based on best practices and advices from HEIs with well-structured DC policies.

The opinions of 77 student-athletes participating in focus groups organized at national level (e.g., Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, and Spain), and those of 71 HEI experts from 12 European countries responding to an online MTG surveys were collected to establish the most relevant and modifiable DC aspects at HEI level.

In considering that distance learning resulted very important and modifiable for starting and/or implementing DC policies and services at HEI, a MTG online survey was administered during the COVID-19 pandemic to 467 student-athletes. Findings indicated that HEI widely increased distance learning and flexibility opportunities for their students. In light of this massive implementation, it is hopeful that teachers could be prone to keep offering flexibility and distant learning for dual career athletes.

Finally, during the project’s life course the Italian and Romanian partner universities introduced for the first time a DC policy, proving the sustainability and the potential applicability for real changes at European HEIs with little or no DC policy and services in place.

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