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This document gathers previous outputs (Surveys and Focus Groups) conclusions in order to identify the obstacles encountered in which the project will have to work in order to find feasible solutions.

Joint State of the Art

Intellectual Output 1

**ST/CK
PROJECT**

SPORT AND ACADEMIC
TALENT INTEGRATION
THROUGH EXCHANGE
PROGRAMMES IN HOCKEY



NOTTINGHAM
TRENT UNIVERSITY



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STICK PROJECT

Intellectual Output 1. Activity 3: Joint State of the Art Study

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INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT 1- Activity 3

JOINT STATE OF THE ART

Lead partner: *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*

I. Introduction

According to the **EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes**, young, high-level athletes who train and compete throughout Europe face multiple risks, with many missing out on high quality education and training that could help them prepare for a new career after they retire, in the event that they are professionals, or during their non-sport professional life if they are amateurs. “*The aim to succeed at the highest level of a sport demands intensive training and competitions at home and abroad, which can be difficult to reconcile with the challenges and restrictions in the educational system and the labour market*”¹

Nowadays, students at European universities have to develop, not only academic skills, but also those skills and competences that will allow them to succeed in a global job market. According to the **Europe 2020 Strategy**, Higher education and its links with research and innovation plays a crucial role in individual and societal development and in providing the highly skilled human capital and the articulate citizens that Europe needs to create jobs, economic growth, and prosperity. Therefore, one of the main goals of the Erasmus+ Programme is to support learners in the acquisition of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) with a view to improving their personal development, their involvement as considerate and active citizens in society and their employability in the European labour market and beyond. Intercultural and language abilities are a must, and this is the reason why the European Union is supporting mobility programmes in order to facilitate stays of study and training abroad. Elite and high-performance **amateur** sportsmen and women are not outside of this reality. We have to take into account that they have to develop a **dual career** at the highest level: both, academic and sportive. If they want to be at the highest sport level, trainings and competitions are very demanding. At the same time they have to do their best at the university, as their labour future does not depend on the sport, but on their studies and competences. Too often, these students have to renounce living a mobility experience because of the high sport demand. It also happens that some of them decide to put above their studies and then they leave their sport in order to live the international academic experience. Moreover, the partners experience demonstrates that Erasmus+ mobility programme requirements and schedule does not fit with the sport ones. When entering into the detail of the Erasmus+ KA103 call (mobility of individuals, Higher Education), it is immediately obvious that it is not designed to enhance dual career, as the schedule and steps to be followed at university

¹ EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes. Recommended Policy Actions in Support of Dual Careers in High-Performance Sport. Approved by the EU Expert Group “Education & Training in Sport”. Brussels, 16 November 2012

https://www.google.es/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEw jwxcqB8qjSAhUB5xoKHfT-BqsQFgghMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fec.europa.eu%2Fassets%2Fec%2Fsport%2Flibrary%2Fdocuments%2Fdual-career-guidelines-final_en.pdf&usq=AFQjCNHXbyKGVfa_sCxDoh5qNi90hHVijQ&sig2=CFhyRbPNv4PzBFU6-gwOKQ

level does not make it easy in combination with their sports career: students willing to take part in an Erasmus+ exchange programme have to apply at their home universities approximately one year in advance, and they will participate in a competitive selection procedure, mainly based on their academic results.

On the other hand, very often, when an athlete has the opportunity to apply for an Erasmus+ scholarship, the university where he/she has obtained a place has no sport club where he/she can continue his sport performance at the highest level. On the contrary, if they find a club where to play at the same high level, acceptable for their home club and national team for a period of time, then their home university does not have an exchange agreement with the university closed to that club, or the deadline to apply for the scholarship is over, or the place to go to that university has been taken by another student with higher marks. It has to be taken into account that the obtention of an Erasmus+ scholarship is through a competitive procedure, where high marks and level of language are the main selection criteria.

As the above mentioned Guidelines state, “*special arrangements are needed to avoid the situation where talented and elite sportspeople are forced to choose between education and sport or work and sport*”.

As the Executive Summary of the *Study on the minimum quality requirements for Dual Career Services* states, “*this is not only hard for the individual, but also a loss for society as a whole*”² Clubs and national federations lose then a talent, while they lose the opportunity to compete at the highest level. Others, they choose to live a sport mobility leaving aside the academic side, as the international Club where they are offered to play does not have a university with an agreement with their university.

Another detected problem is the fact that universities in the United States playing in the NCAA league, are every year more and more recruiting hockey female players from Europe offering them scholarships to study into their universities. This is an important loss of talent that Hockey clubs and national federations are experimenting in the last years. According to the data extracted from the USA NCCA league (<http://www.ncaa.com/rankings/fieldhockey/d1/ncaa-field-hockey-rpi>) at the present moment there are **159 hockey players** coming from European clubs studying/playing in the American university league, mainly coming from The Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Ireland, England, Scotland and Austria.

Europe needs to face this reality by offering an interesting option in Europe that allow them to combine both, academic and sport careers at the highest level.

The STICK project aims at the **design of a sport-academic exchange scheme into the Erasmus+ Programme**. Erasmus+ requirements and elite and high-performance sports' requirements do not fit very well, and the STICK consortium is jointly working on a feasible solution with from both sides of this reality: **higher education institutions and sport clubs** so that elite sportsmen and sportswomen do not have to choose between their academic and professional life and their sport life, enhancing their dual careers. At the same time, Clubs will not lose talented players when their players will be abroad, as they will be receiving high performance players from other EU countries in reciprocity. With this cooperation between universities and hockey clubs the STICK Project is accomplishing with at least two of the specific objectives of this Sport Action under Erasmus+:

² Study on the Minimum Quality Requirements for Dual Career Services (EAC/18/2014). Executive Summary. European Union, 2016

- **Strengthened cooperation between institutions and organisations active in the field of sport and physical activity.**
- **Better participation of sport organisations and other relevant organisations from various Programme Countries in enhanced networks.**

The STICK Consortium, conformed by five outstanding European universities (**Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona** in Spain, **University of Antwerp** in Belgium, **Nottingham Trent University** in the UK, **Dublin City University** in Ireland and **Erasmus Rotterdam University** in the Netherlands) and five European hockey clubs, performing at the highest completion level (**Atlètic Terrassa Hockey Club** in Spain, **Dragons Hockey Club** in Belgium, **Beeston H.C.** in the UK, **Pembroke H.C.** in Ireland and **Rotterdam H.C.** in the Netherlands), has worked on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the state of the art in the five participating countries. Thus, knowing in detail the opinion and realities of as many hockey clubs as possible, and of as many universities as possible on one hand, and listening at high performance hockey players' experiences, wishes and obstacles when considering the possibility of participating in an academic exchange programme, combined with their sport activities.

It has also been of great importance to get to know each other's perspective: the university/academic side and requirements and those from the hockey clubs.

Before designing an academic/sport exchange programme it is needed to know in detail all the aspects that enter into the scene: schedules, competitions, applications, deadlines, academic performance, exchange agreements, Erasmus+ call requirements, university procedures, etc.

According to these goals, the STICK Project has created and distributed a survey among all Hockey Clubs and Universities in the consortium partners' countries, and has organised parallel Focus Groups at each country with high performance hockey players, in order to have a wider knowledge of aspects such as the number of hockey players moving every year to play abroad, if they are combining this international sport experience with an academic experience (Erasmus+/others), in case it is not possible, the reasons why and which were the encountered difficulties, etc.

The results of these activities will allow the STICK project to design a Hockey/Academic Exchange Pilot Programme in order to test its implementation into the regular Erasmus+ mobility scheme.

The aim of this Activity is to put together all the conclusions of the previous activities within this Output, in order to identify the obstacles encountered in which the project will have to find feasible solutions. Thus, we will work on:

- A) The outcomes of the Survey to Universities and Clubs³.**
- B) The main issues of the Focus Groups meetings⁴.**
- C) The shared points and conclusions of internal discussions at consortium level, between universities' International Relations Officers, universities' Dual Career Coordinators and Hockey Clubs.**

³ See the full document in the next link: https://www.stickproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/IO1-FinalReportPaper_SurveyResults.pdf

⁴ See the full document in the next link: https://www.stickproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/IO1-FinalReportPaper_Focus-Group-Results-PORTATIL04.pdf

Following the conclusions of the mentioned above activities you can find highlighted the most relevant aspects to be considered before elaborating the Hockey/Academic Exchange Pilot Programme (Intellectual Output 2).

II. Outcomes of the Survey to Universities

23 of the 143 contacted universities (16%) completed the survey and the main outcomes obtained from them are that:

- There is no university which gives preferential access for incoming exchange athlete students.
- The quarter part of the universities received an outgoing application from a “high level” hockey player on Erasmus.
- Only one university accepted these applicants into their university.
- The major part of these universities are able to treat exchange athlete students identically to regular ones.

III. Outcomes of the Survey to Clubs

19 of the 74 contacted clubs (26%) completed the survey and the main conclusions are that:

- The number of foreign players (women and men) playing in top senior teams is relevant, especially those coming from another EU country. Nevertheless, the players without Erasmus are more than those granted with it.
- The major part of the clubs think their local universities support and show flexibility for those players and that the universities should show preference to them during the admission process.
- There is a variety of opinions concerning the definition of who they consider as top hockey players but playing in the domestic premier league was the most voted option.

IV. Main issues of the Focus Groups meetings

Four of the five universities and four of the five hockey clubs involved in the project participated in this activity.

8 of the 29 athletes who participated had studied abroad (Europe/U.S.A.).

There are seven main issues to point on here, derived from the Focus Group meetings:

- 1) Sport makes the Erasmus programme more attractive.
- 2) Quality of hockey, academic and support programmes.
- 3) Importance of the dual career programme.
- 4) Holistic support programme.
- 5) Concerns regarding international hockey.
- 6) Individual factors will always play a role.
- 7) Partners need to work together for the good of the athlete.

Considering these, there were recommend five key factors:

- 1) To find ways to demonstrate to university decision makers the value of sport in student recruitment.
- 2) To propose a standardized programme of support in place, which must be provided between a combination of the university and the club.
- 3) Universities should commit a dual-career accreditation programme.
- 4) To train university staff on the demands of dual-career athletes.
- 5) To decide what level of athlete we need to be focusing on. Are those playing international sport unrealistic?

V. Discussions between International Relations Officers, Dual Career services and Hockey Clubs

1) Detected obstacles

- Universities' calls to participate in an Erasmus exchange programme only take into account academic excellence criteria.
- There are some countries and/or universities which have not a framework to facilitate the players' dual career, despite the European directives to promote it.
- It is necessary to work on the communication between universities and clubs, both home and host, in order to properly support the athlete students.
- Athlete students frequently decide too late they want to participate in an Erasmus programme, when the host university's call is already closed.
- High level athletes will rarely participate in an exchange programme due their hard sportive requirements, however they are the target of this project.

2) Proposed solutions

A) Official documents:

- A 5-party agreement implicating the student, the home university, the host university, the home club and the host club would be so important to keep informed all the parts involved about the exchange and its complexities.
- An adapted grant agreement.
- An agreed certificate which defines who can be considered as a High Dedication athlete. The home Dual Career coordinator will issue this document.

B) Adapting both schedules:

- The regular Erasmus call, since one year in advance is too early for the clubs. The mobility numbers of athlete/students do not justify a separate call.
- The team making procedure should be done in April, included, at the latest.

C) Institutional guidelines:

- The 5 parts involved in the exchange procedure have to communicate, cooperate and know well the functions of the others.
- Clubs should inform the universities about the importance and the general situation of the athlete students to implicate all the institutions. Clubs have also to inform their players they have to decide if they want to go abroad within the regular schedule.

D) Actions to carry out before the exchange

- Athlete students should let their host university know about their special conditions during the application procedure. Therefore, is necessary to adapt, or prepare, a mechanism that can incorporate this special programme into the ordinary exchange procedure, in order to distinguish the high dedication athlete students from the regular ones.

E) Actions to carry out during the exchange

- Accommodation should be provided by both host university and host club.
- Importance of an academic/sports tutor role to plan the athlete student goals (it should be systematized).
- A former Erasmus -or not Erasmus- athlete student, as an additional role, to mentor the current athlete student could be interesting.

F) Actions to carry out after the exchange

- A brief report at the end of the exchange, aiming to improve future exchanges, would be helpful.