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Between Growth and Overload: Navigating the Dual Career Paradox in Football Development

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Between Growth and Overload: Navigating the Dual Career Paradox in Football Development

1. Executive Summary

This report summarises the findings from the research phase (WP1) of the Erasmus+ Sport project **EDU-DC – Education and Dual Career**, coordinated by the Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB) with partner organisations across Europe. The research phase was coordinated by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB).

The research explored how *dual career* (DC) development is perceived and experienced in European football academies—both by **football players** and by **Dual Career Support Providers (DCSPs)**.

Two large-scale multilingual surveys were conducted:

<i>Target group</i>	<i>Responses</i>	<i>Completion rate</i>	<i>Average items per respondent</i>
Football players	530 complete	58 %	≈ 80 items
Dual career staff (DCSP)	134 complete	60 %	70 – 110 items

Together, these datasets provide a comprehensive snapshot of how European clubs, coaches, coordinators and players interpret and apply the concept of dual career.

Headline insights

- Both players and staff share a *strong philosophical belief* that education, personal growth and football performance can coexist.
- DC systems are **accepted culturally**, yet **unevenly implemented structurally**.
- Players experience tangible benefits—discipline, planning skills, resilience—but also recurring stressors such as fatigue and lack of recovery.
- DCSPs value holistic development but indicate gaps in *infrastructure, time allocation and professional training*.

- The data reveal what this report calls the **Dual Career Paradox**: the very systems that empower players to grow can also exhaust them if coordination and recovery are missing.

2. Introduction

The EDU-DC project supports the European Union's goal of enabling athletes to combine sport and education, ensuring sustainable personal and professional development beyond the field of play.

Within this broader framework, **Work Package 1 (Research Phase)** had two objectives:

1. **To understand players' lived experiences** of combining football with study or work, including wellbeing, satisfaction and perceived support.
2. **To explore how dual career support providers (DCSPs)** within clubs conceptualise and deliver DC support structures.

The present report covers the **players' survey findings**; Part 2 will focus on DCSPs and the integration of both perspectives.

2.1 Context

European football academies increasingly recognise that a player's long-term success depends not only on athletic excellence but also on education, mental health and life-skills. However, implementation remains fragmented across countries and clubs. The EDU-DC consortium therefore sought to map the *current landscape* before designing training and policy tools in later work packages.

2.2 Research Questions

1. How do players describe their satisfaction, stress and perceived support in dual career pathways?
2. What competencies do they develop through the combination of football and education/work?
3. Which organisational or relational factors most influence their wellbeing and performance?

3. Methodology

3.1 Design and Approach



A **mixed-methods** design combined quantitative scales with open-ended qualitative items. Numerical results outline general trends while textual responses provide meaning and nuance.

3.2 Participants

- **Players’ survey:** 920 started → 530 completed (58 % completion).
 - 66 % under 18 years old
 - 35 % female
 - 89 % engaged in a dual career (68 % education; 6 % work; 15 % education + work).
- **Countries & languages:** Surveys were translated into national languages across partner countries (e.g. Dutch, Danish, Bulgarian, English).
- **Ethics:** Participation was voluntary and anonymous; informed consent was obtained in accordance with university ethics guidelines.

3.3 Data Handling

Responses were cleaned and coded using standard statistical procedures. Open responses were translated to English and analysed thematically. The combination of methods enabled triangulation between numerical indicators (e.g. satisfaction scores) and narrative explanations (“why satisfied / dissatisfied”).

3.4 Scope of the Analysis

Part 1 of this report focuses on **players**. Comparative and integrated analyses with **DCSPs** will follow in Part 2.

PART 1: Players’ perspectives

4. Results – Players’ Perspectives

4.1 Demographics and Dual Career Status

The player sample (n = 530) was diverse across age, gender, and team level.

Variable	% of sample	Notes
Under 18 years	66 %	Majority in academy or secondary education
Female	35 %	Represents growing inclusion of women’s football



In dual career	89 %	68 % with education, 6 % with work, 15 % combining both
With football contract	44 %	8 % professional · 8 % semi-pro · 27 % youth contract
Receiving pay	34 %	55 % of those say income is sufficient to live on
Currently injured	13 %	Comparable to previous European samples

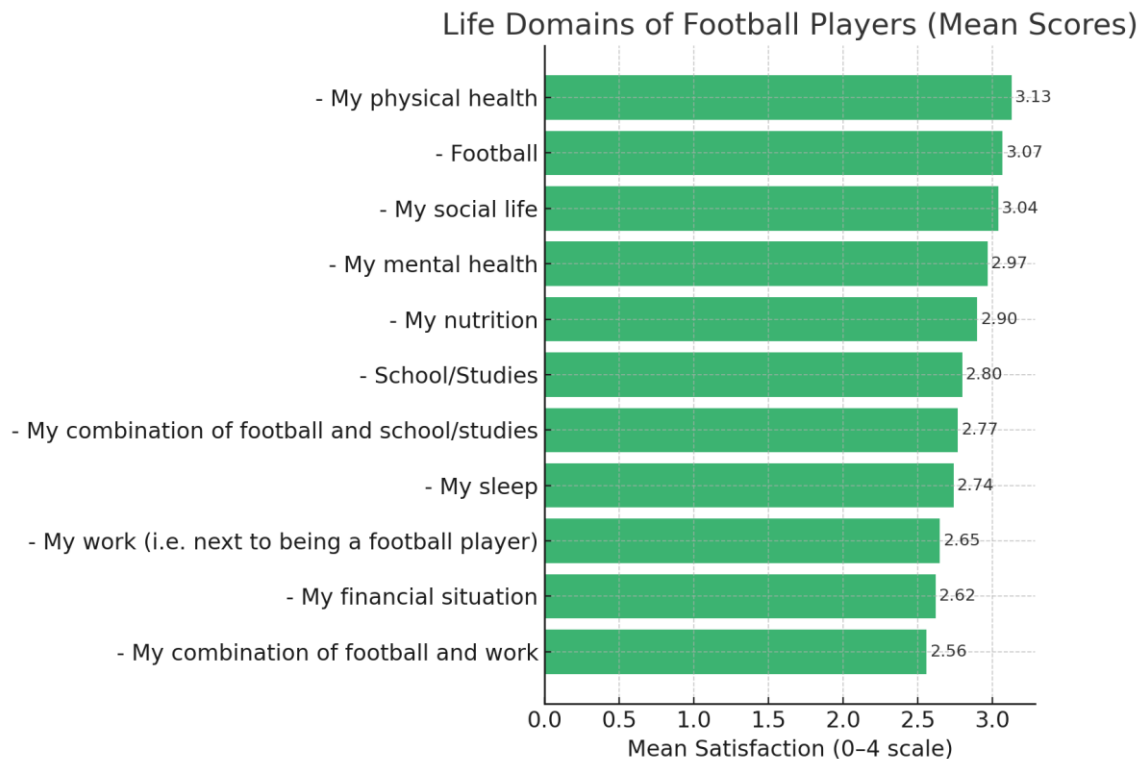
“My coach and teacher talk; I never have to choose between training and class.”
— Player, 17 yrs, male academy

4.2 Life Satisfaction Across Domains

Players rated satisfaction in major life domains on a 5-point scale (0-4). Mean scores hovered between 2 (*neutral*) and 3 (*satisfied*).

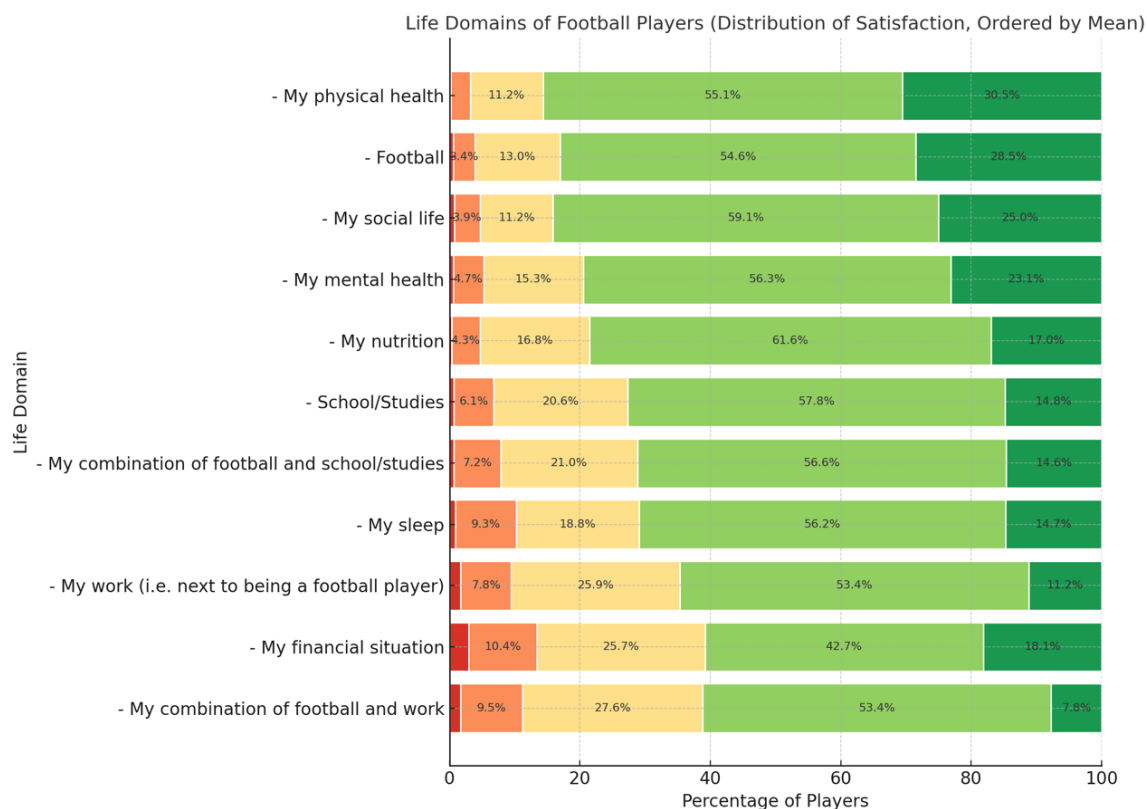
The highest satisfaction was linked to **relationships and sport participation**; the lowest to **rest and future security**.

Figure 1. Life-satisfaction means (n ≈ 500)



Players are moderately satisfied overall, yet recovery and long-term perspective remain weak points—areas where institutional support matters most.

Figure 2. Life-satisfaction frequencies (n ≈ 500)



The results show that football players report generally positive satisfaction across most life domains, with particularly high scores for **nutrition (61.6%)**, **social life (59.1%)**, and **physical health (55.1%)**. These areas suggest that players feel well supported in their daily routines and physical preparation.

Moderate satisfaction levels appear in domains closely tied to **education** — *school/studies (57.8%)* and *the combination of football and school (56.6%)* — indicating that most players manage their dual commitments, but not without friction. This aligns with earlier findings that coordination between schools and clubs often depends on individual arrangements rather than structural systems.

The **lowest satisfaction levels** relate to **financial situation (42.7%)** and **the combination of football and work (53.4%)**, revealing the vulnerability of players without professional contracts. Female and semi-professional athletes, in particular, often face economic insecurity that directly affects wellbeing and recovery.

Overall, the chart illustrates that **dual career satisfaction is less about physical or sport-related aspects and more about the structural and social environment surrounding the athlete.**

4.3 Why Players Are (Dis)Satisfied

A thematic analysis of 840 open responses (438 positive / 402 negative) produced five recurrent themes each for satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Why satisfied	Why dissatisfied
Balance – smooth coordination between club & school	Time pressure – overlapping schedules, travel fatigue
Support – feeling guided by tutors/coaches	Lack of coordination – weak club-school communication
Personal growth – learning discipline & resilience	Fatigue & overload – no rest, constant rushing
Future perspective – education gives security	Uncertainty – fear of injury & career end
Team environment – supportive peers	Feeling misunderstood – family/teachers underestimate pressure

4.3.1 Why Players Are Satisfied

Players reported to be **satisfied** when the dual career works. Representative quotes per theme are provided.

- **Balance** – Smooth coordination between club and studies.
“My coach and teacher talk; I never have to choose between training and class.”
- **Support** – Feeling understood and guided by staff.
“My tutor checks in every week; it helps to know someone cares.”
- **Personal Growth** – Learning competencies, such as discipline, time management, and resilience.
“Being both student and athlete makes me stronger in life.”
- **Future Perspective** – Education gives perspective beyond football.
“It’s good to know I’ll have something when my career ends.”

- **Team Environment** – Positive social climate boosts motivation.
“My teammates help each other — we all live the same pressure.”

4.3.2 Why Players Are Dissatisfied

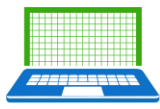
Players reported to be **dissatisfied** when the dual career system fails to support them. Representative quotes per theme are provided.

- **Time Pressure** – Overlapping schedules and travel exhaustion.
“I’m always rushing — no time to eat or breathe.”
- **Lack of Coordination** – Poor communication between club and school.
“Nobody talks; I get punished by both sides.”
- **Fatigue & Overload** – Constant tiredness and no rest.
“Every day feels like I’m surviving, not living.”
- **Uncertainty About Future** – Anxiety about what happens after football.
“If I get injured, I don’t know what’s next.”
- **Feeling Misunderstood** – Family or teachers underestimate their pressure.
“People think I have an easy life — they have no idea.”

The same structural forces that produce satisfaction when functioning (coordination, support) create frustration when absent—illustrating the **dual nature of satisfaction** and the underlying Dual Career Paradox.

- Aspect: When Present | When Missing
- Balance: Feels in control and proud | Feels trapped and exhausted
- Support: Feels valued and understood | Feels invisible and alone
- Growth: Builds confidence | Becomes burnout
- Future: Creates security | Triggers anxiety

Reflection: Beyond Performance – Seeing the Whole Player.



The findings make it clear that dual career satisfaction has little to do with reducing training hours or softening athletic demands. What truly matters are the human elements that frame those demands: clear communication, genuine flexibility, and visible recognition. Players don't ask for an easier path—they ask for one where their efforts in both school and sport are seen, aligned, and valued.

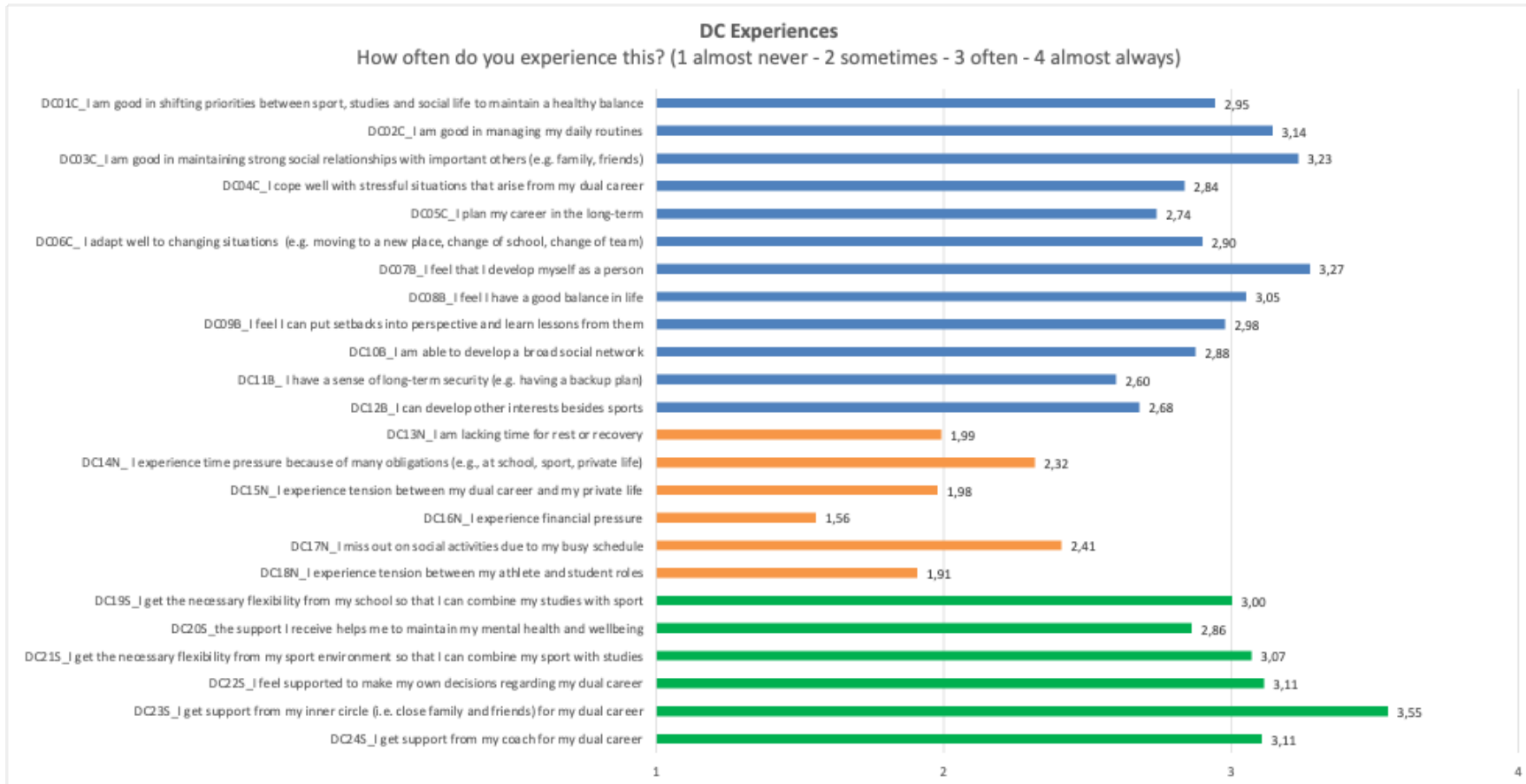
When these conditions exist, the dual career experience becomes a source of confidence rather than exhaustion. Players begin to feel that their personal growth and athletic progress are part of the same story, not competing chapters. They perform better because they are treated as whole people—students, friends, sons and daughters, teammates—not just athletes chasing results.

“In the end, dual career success is not about doing less. It is about being understood more.”

When communication and flexibility exist between education and sport, satisfaction rises; when financial or scheduling stress dominates, wellbeing declines. These findings reinforce the central theme of the **Dual Career Paradox**—that players can thrive holistically only when the system enables balance rather than forcing trade-offs.



Figure 2. Football players' Dual Career Experiences (DC Competencies 3.9 | DC Stressors 2.6 | DC Support 3.5)



Players report strong adaptive skills and moderate support, but persistent stress; dual careers clearly build capacity while taxing energy.



4.4. Dual Career Competencies, Stressors & Support

Three validated sub-scales of the Dual Career Experiences Scale (De Brandt et al., 2022) assessed how players perceive their own competencies, stressors, and help from others.

4.4.1. Dual Career Competencies and Benefits

Players consistently report the highest scores on the dual career competency items, showing that they feel capable, adaptable, and resourceful in managing the challenges of combining football with other pursuits. They describe themselves as organised, able to plan, and skilled in perspective-taking—evidence that living a dual career actively builds life skills that reach far beyond sport.

However, the lowest ratings appear in competencies linked to the future: developing a long-term vision, nurturing interests outside football, and concrete career planning. While players excel in managing their current balance, they are less confident about what comes after their playing years.

“I’ve learned to plan, to deal with setbacks, to balance multiple goals.”

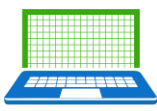
This sentiment captures the broader message: dual career environments are powerful learning arenas. They train athletes not just to perform, but to *adapt, plan, and persevere*—qualities that hold value in education, work, and life after football. These findings offer a strong argument for federations, clubs, and schools to continue investing in structured dual career programs as part of holistic athlete development.

Highest-scoring items included *“I can organise my time effectively”* (4.1) and *“I learn from setbacks”* (3.9), confirming that DC life strengthens transferable life-skills. Lower scores appeared for long-term planning (2.9) and developing non-sport interests (2.88).

“Being both student and athlete makes me stronger in life.”
— Player, 19 yrs, male academy

4.4.2. Dual Career Stressors





Although the average scores for dual career stressors sit near the midpoint, they reveal a meaningful pattern. These items are reverse-scored—so higher values represent higher stress—and many players reported frequent **time pressure, fatigue, and social sacrifices**, particularly during exam or competition periods.

“I’m always rushing — I rarely get real rest.”

This simple quote captures the tension at the heart of the dual career experience. Players demonstrate strong coping abilities, as shown in their high competency scores, yet this often comes at a cost. The constant juggling of sport, school, and life commitments leaves limited space for **recovery, reflection, and social connection**.

The dual career pathway therefore appears **sustainable only up to a point**: it builds valuable skills and resilience, but it also drains energy reserves if not supported by proper structures for rest and flexibility. This delicate balance embodies the essence of the **Dual Career Paradox** — the same system that strengthens young athletes can simultaneously stretch them to their limits.

“I’m always rushing — no time to eat or breathe.”
— Player, 17 yrs, female U-team

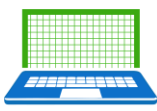
Time pressure (3.2) and missing social activities (2.45) were the heaviest stressors.

4.4.3. Dual Career Support

Perceived support from schools, clubs, and families plays a crucial role in how players experience their dual careers — and overall, this support is **moderately strong yet highly variable**. Most athletes feel that the people around them want them to succeed in both domains, but the level of practical help they receive depends greatly on the environment. Some organisations are flexible and cooperative, while others remain rigid or indifferent to the specific demands of a dual career.

“It all depends on the coach or teacher you get.”





This variability highlights a key structural challenge: support too often depends on individual goodwill rather than consistent systems. Establishing **shared communication protocols, coordinated planning between schools and clubs, and a culture of aligned flexibility** could reduce this unevenness. When support becomes reliable and predictable rather than personal and incidental, players' wellbeing and long-term motivation can truly flourish.

Perceived backing from coaches (3.32) and family (3.8) was generally positive but uneven. Some clubs and schools cooperate fluently; others remain rigid.

4.5 What Players Value and Miss in Club Support

4.5.1. Liked aspects

“What do you appreciate about your club's dual career support?”

When asked what they value most about their club's approach to dual career, players consistently highlighted **flexibility, understanding, and personal attention**. They appreciate when coaches acknowledge exam periods, when schools and clubs collaborate smoothly, and when practical support—such as tutoring, transport, or study space—is available.

“I like that they give time to study when we're at the club.”

“They allow time off training for exams and even helped me find a new school to stay on top of my education.”

These responses show that small gestures of trust and flexibility make a big difference. When clubs recognise education as part of the player's growth, athletes feel respected and supported as whole individuals—not just performers.

Key identified themes:

- **Flexibility:** time off for exams, skipping/moving training
- **Understanding and supportive coaches/staff:** mental support, personal attention
- **Collaboration with school:** adapted schedules, communication
- **Practical help:** transport, tutoring, study space
- **Freedom and autonomy:** school comes first, no pressure



“Which specific aspects do you miss or can improve in terms of support for your dual career from the club?”

While many players feel appreciated and supported, their feedback also reveals clear opportunities for improvement. The most frequent requests concern **better communication and planning**, with players asking for earlier scheduling, clearer information, and more direct contact between clubs and schools. Many also called for **dedicated academic support**—study coaches, homework sessions, or structured study time—to make the combination of football and education more sustainable.

Flexibility remains a recurring theme: athletes want **understanding rather than penalties** when exams or heavy schoolwork temporarily take priority. They also hope for more **adaptive training schedules**, with shorter or individualised sessions that acknowledge their total workload. Finally, some players emphasised the need for **recognition and resources**—financial assistance, career guidance, and a sense that the club values their broader development.

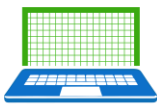
“They say they understand, but they don’t know how heavy it is and how much time it takes. We can’t fully focus on football and recovery, as we have six other responsibilities.”

“Someone who maintains contact with my school — that should happen but hasn’t yet.”

Together, these reflections underline that dual career success depends less on goodwill and more on **systematic coordination**. When communication, structure, and flexibility are built into the system—not left to chance—players can meet both their academic and athletic potential without burning out.

Key identified themes:

- **Communication and planning:** earlier schedules, better information, more contact with schools
- **Direct school support:** study coach, homework classes, dedicated study time, school-club collaboration
- **Flexibility and understanding:** less punishment for missing training due to exams, more freedom, awareness of stress/workload



- **Training adjustments:** shorter sessions, better timing, more individual training options
- **Recognition and resources:** financial support, career guidance, appreciation

4.5.3. Most-mentioned improvement needs (% of 530 respondents)

The majority of players point to **communication** as the main area needing improvement, with 41% mentioning issues such as unclear schedules, late information, or lack of contact between clubs and schools. Another 27% highlight the need for better **school–club alignment**, where educational and sporting calendars could be coordinated more intentionally.

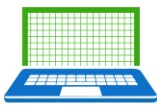
Requests for **greater flexibility** (19%) and **additional resources** (8%)—such as tutoring or study spaces—show that many players still rely on personal initiative rather than structured support. Only 5% referred to **recognition**, suggesting that while appreciation matters, the more urgent needs concern organisation and coordination.

Together, these findings confirm that **communication remains the central bottleneck** in the dual career system. As staff themselves acknowledge in their surveys, coordination between stakeholders is often informal or dependent on individual relationships. Strengthening these communication pathways would likely yield immediate benefits for player wellbeing and academic success.

Reflection: the Dual Career Paradox in Football

Across all findings, a clear paradox emerges. Players in dual career environments develop strong coping skills, resilience, and a grounded sense of identity—qualities that will serve them long after their sporting careers. Yet this growth occurs under constant tension between **autonomy and overload**. They are





expected to manage immense responsibility on their own, often without the structural support that makes such independence sustainable.

Their satisfaction does not depend on eliminating stress altogether; rather, it hinges on the presence of **systems that make stress meaningful and manageable**—coaches who plan ahead, schools that communicate, and families who understand the rhythm of both worlds.

“Dual careers build strong people — but only if the system protects their energy while testing their balance.”

Strategic takeaway: Dual career programs *work*. They build capable, adaptable young people who grow as both athletes and individuals. But that growth comes at a cost: without coordinated support and adequate recovery space, the risk of burnout increases. The **quality of communication**—between clubs, schools, and families—ultimately determines whether the dual career journey becomes a source of empowerment or exhaustion.

4.6 Would Players Recommend a Dual Career?

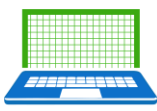
46 % Yes · 18 % No · 36 % Not sure

The prompt “*Based on your experiences, what would be your main reasons for (not) recommending a dual career to your fellow teammates?*” turns out to be one of the most revealing in the entire survey. Unlike a traditional satisfaction item, it moves beyond self-assessment into a **relational and behavioural space**. Players are not merely rating their own experience — they are imagining giving advice to someone like them.

This subtle shift changes everything. The question feels **personal but not invasive**, inviting empathy rather than judgment. It pushes respondents to weigh both the benefits and the costs of their journey: *Would I genuinely want someone I care about to go through what I did?*

In doing so, it unlocks **authentic, spontaneous reasoning** — the kind of insight that numerical scores can never fully capture. The answers blend emotion with perspective, producing a form of data that coaches, coordinators, and researchers can immediately **relate to and act upon**.





In short, this single question acts as a mirror. It captures how players *feel, reflect,* and *advise* all at once — turning raw experience into meaningful guidance for improving dual career systems.

4.6.1. Main reasons for recommending a DC to fellow teammates

When asked why they would encourage teammates to pursue a dual career, players consistently emphasised its value **beyond football itself**. The most frequently mentioned motive was having a **backup plan** — a sense of career security in case sport doesn't unfold as hoped. For many, this is not about pessimism, but about empowerment: having a future they can actively build, rather than one they passively await.

Equally strong were reasons linked to **personal development**. Players described how combining football with study or work had made them more independent, disciplined, and self-aware. Many also referred to the **psychological balance** it brings — a welcome break from the constant focus on performance, allowing them to manage stress and feel more grounded in daily life.

Education was viewed as a pathway to **new opportunities** and **broader skills**, while some also appreciated the **social and emotional variety** it brings — meeting people outside football, discovering new interests, or earning extra income through part-time work.

“It's good for your future: you build something and it provides a backup plan. In football, nothing is certain.”

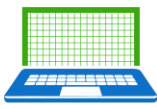
“It broadens your horizons. It gives me mental peace so I'm not just focused on football all day, but I've also developed enormously as a person. At the end of the day, you're not just a footballer, but above all a human being. Your identity is not football.”

Together, these reflections show that players don't see dual careers as distractions, but as **foundations for balance, identity, and growth**. They frame education not as an obligation, but as a form of freedom — a way to stay curious, secure, and human in a high-pressure sporting world.

Most players see DC as worth recommending—but only if support makes the challenge sustainable.

Key identified themes:





1. **Backup/plan B:** career security if football doesn't work out (27%)
2. **Personal development:** growth as a person, independence, discipline (23%)
3. **Balance and mental health:** break from football, manage stress, structured life (19%)
4. **Education and career opportunities:** build skills, diploma, future options (18%)
5. **Enjoyment and variety:** fun, social life, multiple experiences (13%)
6. **Financial benefits:** income from part-time work (13%)

4.6.2. Main reasons for not recommending a DC to fellow teammates

While many players see the dual career path as valuable, a significant number express hesitation — not because they reject the idea, but because they've **felt its weight first-hand**. The most common reason for not recommending a dual career is the **stress and mental load** it creates. Players describe the experience as demanding and exhausting, with constant pressure to perform academically and athletically at the same time.

Closely linked to this is the issue of **time constraints**. Long days, limited rest, and little space for social life or recovery leave many feeling stretched thin. Conflicts between training schedules and school commitments are frequent, and managing both worlds can become a source of chronic tension rather than balance.

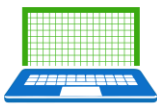
Several players also mentioned the need for **exceptional self-organisation and discipline**. While some thrive under this pressure, others find it overwhelming — especially without structured support. A few worry that the dual focus might come at the expense of **football performance**, reducing time for training, recovery, or mental preparation.

“I would not recommend a dual career because you can't focus on one career. You have to split the focus on two different careers.”

“It's very stressful. You don't have time for anything else and you're under a lot of pressure.”

These reflections reveal the other side of the dual career paradox: **the same system that builds resilience can also erode wellbeing** if the balance isn't carefully protected. Without coordinated planning, recovery space, and empathetic





guidance, what begins as an opportunity for growth can easily become a source of burnout.

Key identified themes:

1. **Stress and mental load:** stressful, mentally demanding, pressure, difficult to balance football and study
2. **Time constraints:** long days, little free time, limited social life, lack of rest, conflict between training and school
3. **Self-organisation and discipline:** requires independence, planning skills, motivation, initiative
4. **Potentially negative impact on performance:** *may* affect football performance, less focus on football, risk of fatigue

4.7 Athletic Identity and Wellbeing

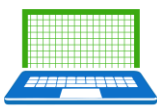
Findings from the adapted Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) reveal that football players generally possess a **strong and central athletic identity**. Most clearly define themselves through their sport, agreeing strongly with statements such as “*I see myself as a football player*” and “*Football is the most important part of my life.*” This high identification with the athletic role reflects deep commitment and passion — qualities often linked to motivation and perseverance.

However, items related to **emotional dependence** on performance and injury also scored relatively high, indicating that many players’ **self-worth is closely tied to success or physical readiness**. When their ability to train or perform is disrupted, their sense of identity and stability may be at risk.

On the **mental wellbeing scale (WHO-5)**, players reported **moderate to high levels of wellbeing**, especially in feelings of cheerfulness, energy, and interest in daily life. Yet, lower ratings appeared in items linked to **calmness and rest**, suggesting that mental recovery and relaxation remain fragile areas within the rhythm of their dual careers.

Taken together, these results paint a picture of **engaged, ambitious, and emotionally invested athletes** who thrive on structure and purpose — but whose psychological balance depends on sustained opportunities for **recovery, perspective, and support outside of football**. Helping players diversify their





identity beyond sport is therefore essential to protect long-term wellbeing and prevent burnout when challenges or transitions arise.

4.8 Open Comments – “Anything else that we didn’t cover in the survey?”

At the end of the questionnaire, players were invited to share any additional thoughts or reflections. Although most respondents had no further remarks, the open comments that were received add valuable depth and nuance to the quantitative findings.

4.8.1. No Additional Remarks / General Satisfaction

A majority simply replied with “no,” “nothing,” or “nee,” indicating overall acceptance of the survey content and low frustration levels. Only a few mentioned the length of the questionnaire as challenging.

These reactions suggest that the topic resonated with players and was considered relevant and legitimate.

4.8.2. Acknowledgement and Reflection on the Topic

Several participants used this space to express appreciation that the research was being conducted at all:

“Interesting, it made me really think about certain things.”

“It’s very good that this research is being done — it’s the reality for many players.”

The questionnaire itself appears to have triggered awareness and reflection. Players felt seen and valued when their challenges were recognised as worthy of research.

4.8.3. Barriers for Women in Football

Multiple female respondents highlighted structural inequality and financial insecurity. They stressed that combining football with education or work is often a **necessity rather than a choice**.



“Often women have no choice whether or not to do something next to football — it’s a necessity, otherwise you can’t make a living.”

“To make it possible for women to live from football, they should receive salaries that allow recovery and rest.”

Persistent gender inequity remains a major barrier. Many women are forced into dual careers out of economic pressure, not personal preference, limiting recovery time and long-term development.

4.8.4. Educational Flexibility and Institutional Support

A recurring theme concerned the **attitude of schools** toward sport. Some described supportive environments; others reported rigid policies that made their dual careers unsustainable.

“My regular school refused to adapt to my sports schedule, so I missed 30–40% of classes. At a sports school later, everything became easier.”

“More support is needed from secondary schools.”

Educational institutions can make or break the dual career experience. Where flexibility and communication exist, success follows; where they don’t, players struggle to keep up.

4.8.5. Need for Structural Opportunities and Resources

A few respondents proposed concrete improvements, including scholarships and partnerships with companies to create more flexible job options.

“There should be more scholarships for student-athletes.”

“Maybe clubs could cooperate with companies so players can find flexible part-time jobs.”

Players are calling for **formalised systems**—financial, educational, and vocational—that recognise the demands of elite sport and offer sustainable support.

4.8.6. “I can’t think right now”





A single spontaneous response like this captures another reality: the mental fatigue many players feel after balancing sport, school, and now a long survey. It's an authentic reminder of the cognitive and emotional load that defines their daily lives.

4.8.7 Overall Insight

While the majority of players had no additional feedback, those who did offered crucial insights into **structural weaknesses and unmet needs**: gender inequality, financial insecurity, and limited institutional flexibility remain key obstacles.

At the same time, the tone of many comments carried gratitude and recognition. Players appreciated that this topic is being researched — suggesting that beyond data collection, the study itself acted as a moment of reflection and validation.

4.9 Synthesis Part 1: The Dual Career Paradox

Across results, one consistent pattern emerges: **dual careers develop strong, adaptable individuals—but at the cost of chronic tension between autonomy and overload.**

Players learn planning and resilience, yet struggle for rest and perspective. Their satisfaction depends less on reducing workload than on *having structures that make stress meaningful and manageable.*

“Dual careers build strong people — but only if the system protects their energy while testing their balance.”

5. Transition to Part 2 – Staff Perspectives

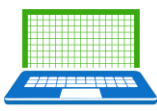
The following section (Part 2) will examine data from **Dual Career Support Providers (DCSPs)**—coaches, coordinators, and staff working inside European clubs.

By comparing their intentions and structures with the players' lived experiences presented here, Part 2 will clarify where belief meets practice and where the *Dual Career Paradox* can be transformed into sustainable development.

PART 2 – DUAL CAREER SUPPORT PROVIDERS' PERSPECTIVES

6. Introduction to the DCSP Study





The second strand of the EDU-DC research phase focused on those who design, deliver, and coordinate dual career (DC) support within European football academies: coaches, heads of academies, study coordinators, sport psychologists, and wellbeing officers.

While Part 1 described the *lived experiences* of players, this part examines the *institutional side* — how DCSPs perceive their role, what philosophies guide them, and where structural strengths or weaknesses appear.

A total of **134 complete responses** were analysed from a survey distributed across the EDU-DC consortium countries.

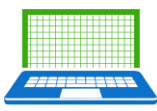
6.1. Sample overview

The survey included a diverse range of staff profiles representing the different dimensions of dual career support within football academies. As shown in the table, respondents span five main domains, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of modern athlete development.

Domain / Role Group	Approx. share of sample	Core responsibilities
Coaching & Technical Development	40 %	Daily football training, match prep, player performance
Academy & Talent Management	25 %	Overseeing pathways, methodology, long-term development
Education & Dual career Coordination	15 %	Bridging school and club, aligning timetables, monitoring progress
Support & Wellbeing Roles	10 %	Mental health, life-skills, safeguarding
Club Management & Operations	10 %	Logistics, HR, overall academy policy

Dual career support is not concentrated within a single function but **embedded across multiple layers of club staff**. Coaches, coordinators, psychologists, and managers each play a part in creating an environment where education and sport can coexist. This cross-functional involvement illustrates that supporting the “whole player” is increasingly viewed as a shared responsibility rather than a specialised niche.





The data also reveal a **distinct northern-European model influence**, characterised by the strong presence of pedagogical and study-coordinator roles. These professionals act as crucial bridges between football and education, ensuring that communication flows between schools, families, and clubs. Their prominence suggests that successful dual career systems depend less on isolated experts and more on **integrated, club-wide commitment** to holistic player development.

Profile of Dual career Support Providers (DCSPs)

The dual career staff who participated in the survey represent a broad and diverse professional community within European football. Their profiles highlight both the **emerging nature of the DC profession** and the variety of roles that contribute to supporting athletes' education and wellbeing.

Demographics

- Average age = 38 years (range 21–75)
- 23 % female
- 63 % full-time employment; 28 % part-time; 8 % freelance/voluntary
- 85 % work in professional academies
- 70 % have ≤ 5 years' DC experience → a *young profession in growth*

Respondents ranged in age from **21 to 75 years**, with an **average age of 38** and a most common age of **32**. Approximately **23% were female**, reflecting a still male-dominated field but with signs of gradual diversification.

Role in Club

Staff tenure was evenly spread across experience levels, though the largest share had been in their current club for **0–5 years**, indicating ongoing renewal and professional mobility.

Most respondents were **employed full-time (63%)**, with **28% part-time** and **8% working freelance or in volunteer roles**, often in educational or wellbeing support.

The **majority of clubs (85%)** operate at a professional level, with **9% semi-professional** and **6% amateur**. In terms of player categories, **53% of respondents work primarily with U18 players**, **8% with senior players**, and **40% with both**. Regarding gender, **71% work mainly with male players**, **20%**





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with female players, and 9% across both groups—showing a growing but still limited representation of women’s football within structured DC programs.

Interestingly, **sporting background** varies widely: **20%** of staff were former professional footballers, **54%** played at amateur level, **4%** competed as elite athletes in another sport (including volleyball), and **23%** have **no direct background in elite sport**. This mix enriches the dual career landscape, blending lived athletic experience with pedagogical and administrative expertise.

Dual Career Focus

Dual career work remains **a small portion of most staff members’ official roles**: more than half dedicate **10% or less** of their working time to DC activities. Furthermore, **two-thirds have under five years of experience** in this area, underscoring that **dual career support is still a developing and professionalising field**. Only a minority hold dedicated DC positions. This suggests that while the philosophy is widely accepted, DC implementation is still *distributed and partial*.

Together, these findings reveal an evolving support ecosystem—motivated, multidisciplinary, but still in the process of becoming a recognised and structurally embedded profession within European football.

“Dual career work used to be something we did on goodwill; now it’s becoming part of our culture.”

Core Responsibilities and Focus Areas in Dual Career Support

The activities of dual career support providers (DCSPs) extend well beyond traditional coaching or educational guidance. As illustrated in the table, their work touches nearly every dimension of the player’s daily life—ranging from practical scheduling to psychological care and institutional coordination.

Theme	Typical (examples)	actions	Emphasis
School/Employer Liaison	Contact exemptions; company links	teachers; internships;	Alignment across systems

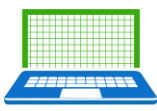


Scheduling & Load	Plan around exams; adjust training; transport/overnight	Reduce clashes & overload
Individual Guidance	ILPs (individual learning plans); time management; career counseling with parents	Tailored pathways
Education & Tutoring	In-house school; tutoring; coach-ed; college links	Secure qualifications
Policy & Program	Write/guard policy; monthly themes; partnerships	Make DC structural
Psych & Life Skills	Mental training; wellbeing checks; safeguarding; identity	Holistic perspective, not just players
Communication Hub	Club–school–family triage; conflict solving	Fast, clear coordination
Admin/Financial/Logistics	Study spaces; schedule tools; financial support	Remove practical barriers
Medical/Physical	Fit-to-train; S&C aligned with school; recovery	Avoid burnout/injury
No/limited role	Refer to DC lead; endorse culture	Clarifies ownership

School and Employer Liaison. Many DCSPs act as **connectors between systems**, maintaining contact with teachers, securing exam exemptions, or coordinating internships and company partnerships. Their goal is to ensure **alignment between education, work, and sport**, so that each setting reinforces rather than conflicts with the others.

Scheduling and Load Management. A recurring focus is on **preventing overload**. Staff help plan training around exams, arrange transport or overnight stays, and negotiate temporary adjustments in training intensity. This logistical flexibility is key to reducing the daily friction between performance and study.

Individual Guidance. DCSPs often create **Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)**, offer time-management coaching, and involve parents in career conversations. This



personalised approach allows each player to follow a **tailored development pathway** that reflects both ambition and wellbeing.

Education and Tutoring. Some clubs run **in-house schools or tutoring programs**, while others partner with local colleges. These initiatives aim to **secure educational continuity** and make sure players progress toward meaningful qualifications, even amid demanding training schedules.

Policy and Program Development. At the structural level, DC leads contribute to **policy writing, partnership building, and thematic programming**. By embedding dual career principles into club strategies, they move support from ad-hoc solutions toward a **consistent, institutional framework**.

Psychological and Life-Skills Support. Wellbeing, resilience, and identity development form a growing part of the DCSP role. Activities include **mental training sessions, safeguarding checks, and life-skills workshops**, reflecting a shift from viewing players purely as performers to recognising them as whole individuals.

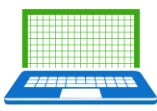
Communication Hub. DCSPs frequently serve as the **central communication bridge** between club, school, and family—mediating conflicts, streamlining information flow, and ensuring that decisions affecting players are made transparently and collaboratively.

Administrative, Financial, and Logistical Support. This practical layer includes **study spaces, scheduling tools, and financial aid** for education-related costs. By removing these logistical barriers, staff enable athletes to focus on development rather than daily survival.

Medical and Physical Coordination. Collaboration with medical and performance staff ensures that training loads, school stress, and recovery are balanced. This integrated approach helps **prevent burnout and injury**, especially during peak academic or competitive periods.

No or Limited Role. In some cases, DCSPs primarily **refer to dedicated specialists or endorse a general dual career culture** without hands-on involvement. Even this limited role helps clarify ownership and maintain alignment across the club.





Overall, these functions demonstrate that dual career support is a **web of interconnected practices** rather than a single job description. Its effectiveness depends on coordination, communication, and shared values across the entire club ecosystem.

*“The strongest dual career systems don’t rely on one hero role; they coordinate **policy, planning, people and care**—so school, training and life move in the same direction.”*

6.2. DC Club Scan – Thematic Findings

The **Dual career (DC) Club Scan** was developed to capture how clubs perceive and implement dual career support within their organisation. The instrument included **16 themes**, each represented by **three items**, resulting in a total of **48 statements** rated on a **five-point agreement scale** (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*). Themes covered a broad range of domains, from policy and communication to wellbeing, transition, and infrastructure.

Methodological note. Although the DC Club Scan generated valuable qualitative insights, it cannot yet be considered a **validated research instrument**. Analysis revealed that items grouped under the same theme often measured **different underlying constructs**, leading to inconsistent internal reliability. In other words, while each individual item was informative, aggregating them into composite theme scores (e.g., “average of Communication”) did not yield meaningful results.

Future validation could address this by applying **exploratory structural equation modelling (ESEM)** to examine how items naturally cluster together and whether more coherent categories or latent dimensions emerge. Such follow-up analyses may help refine the tool into a reliable framework for assessing the dual career status within football clubs.

Interpretation of Findings

Despite these psychometric limitations, the DC Club Scan remains **highly valuable at item level**. Responses offer a detailed snapshot of what clubs perceive as their strongest assets, their moderate or developing areas, and their main working points.

The following interpretation therefore summarises results **based on individual item scores**, identifying patterns across the dataset:





- **Main Strengths** — cultural acceptance of dual careers, integration of holistic development into club philosophy, and recognition of education as beneficial for performance.
- **Moderate Areas** — communication and collaboration with schools, transitions after sport, and partial inclusion of dual career policy in strategic planning.
- **Working Points** — insufficient infrastructure, limited staff training, and inconsistent monitoring of athlete wellbeing and education.

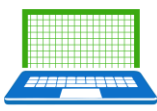
In short, while the DC Club Scan in its current form is better suited for **descriptive and diagnostic purposes** than for quantitative comparison, it provides a nuanced view of where European football clubs currently stand in translating/transforming dual career philosophy into consistent, evidence-based practice.





DC Club Scan





Main Strengths (average ≈ 4.0 – 4.3)

Theme	Example Item (mean)	Interpretation
Cultural acceptance	“Football, education and personal life can be combined” → 4.35	DC idea deeply embedded in values
Policy inclusion	“Dual career is part of our vision” → 4.31	Present in mission statements
Wellbeing focus	“Athletic development never at expense of holistic growth” → 3.99	Human development = performance
Coaching support	“Coaches motivate players to combine roles” → 3.86	Football staff increasingly partners, not barriers
Perceived benefits	“Dual career improves on-field performance” → 4.00	Seen as performance-enhancing

The item-level results from the DC Club Scan reveal several clear strengths across European football academies. These areas represent not only good practice but also an emerging cultural maturity in how clubs understand and integrate the dual career philosophy.

1. Strong Cultural Acceptance of the Dual Career Idea

Clubs overwhelmingly agree that “*football, education/work, and personal life can be combined*” (mean = 4.35) and that “*dual career is part of our vision and policy*” (mean = 4.31).

The dual career concept is widely recognised and **embedded in mission statements and institutional culture**. It has moved from being an optional ideal to a shared organisational value.

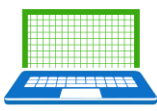
2. Wellbeing and Holistic Development Are Safeguarded

Items reflecting wellbeing scored among the highest, with “*attention to wellbeing*” (4.08) and “*athletic development never at the expense of holistic growth*” (3.99).

Clubs demonstrate a **mature understanding of the link between performance and personal development**, recognising that sustainable success depends on nurturing both the athlete and the individual.

“We don’t just build footballers — we build people.”





3. Football Staff Support and Motivation

Contrary to older assumptions that coaches resist educational balance, the data show otherwise. *“Coaches motivate players to combine roles”* scored 3.86, and *“interest in players’ school/work progress”* 3.77.

Coaches are increasingly partners, not barriers, in the dual career process. Their engagement reflects growing alignment between sport performance goals and educational support.

4. Perceived Benefits for Sport Performance

Clubs strongly agree that *“dual career improves on-field performance”* (mean = 4.00).

The idea that education detracts from performance is being replaced by the belief that balance, structure, and mental recovery actually **enhance performance capacity**.

5. Development of Life and Self-Regulation Skills

High scores were also found for *“encouraging responsibility and self-monitoring”* (4.01) and *“time-management training present”* (3.42).

Clubs are beginning to adopt a **competency-based educational model**, where players learn planning, accountability, and self-regulation—skills that contribute to both sport and personal life.

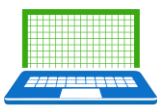
Overall, these strengths reflect a growing consensus: **dual career support is not a distraction from elite sport, but an enabler of long-term excellence and wellbeing**.

Moderate Areas Identified in the DC Club Scan (≈ 3.4 – 3.9)

While the overall outlook on dual careers is positive, several aspects of implementation remain **inconsistent or underdeveloped**. These moderate areas highlight where clubs are already moving in the right direction but have not yet achieved structural stability or systematic practice.

1. Communication and Collaboration





Club–school communication is rated relatively high ($mean = 3.99$), indicating good informal relationships and dialogue. However, the **alignment across sectors** — particularly between educational institutions, clubs, and federations — remains weaker ($3.40–3.58$).

Effective collaboration often depends on individual effort rather than formalised agreements. Strengthening cross-sector coordination and shared protocols could turn goodwill into consistent practice.

2. Transition Guidance

Support for **life and career transitions**, such as injury, deselection, or the end of a football career, shows moderate but promising scores ($3.25–3.68$).

While many clubs acknowledge the need for transition planning, efforts remain **case-by-case rather than systematic**. More structured frameworks could help players prepare emotionally and practically for post-sport life.

3. Monitoring and Policy Development

Dual career is increasingly part of **club discussions** (3.41) and formal **policy development** (3.74). Yet, **training for staff** is limited (2.69), suggesting a gap between ambition and expertise.

The policy foundation exists, but professionalisation of DC roles and upskilling of staff are essential next steps to make the policy operational.

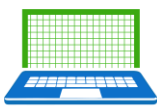
4. Motivation and Awareness

Scores for **player motivation** (3.39) and **staff awareness programs** (2.99) fall in the moderate range.

Clubs vary in how actively they promote dual career values among players and staff. Continued awareness efforts could help shift DC from being perceived as an additional task to being recognised as an integral part of athlete development.

In summary, these moderate areas reveal an ecosystem that is **philosophically aligned but still structurally uneven**. Clubs are clearly committed to the dual





career ideal, but the next step lies in turning informal coordination and ad-hoc initiatives into **formal, sustainable systems of practice**.

Main Weaknesses and Development Points Identified in the DC Club Scan (≤ 3.3)

Despite the strong cultural endorsement of the dual career concept, the survey reveals several **structural and resource-related weaknesses** that limit its full implementation. These development points underline where clubs’ intentions outpace their current capacities.

Area	Example Item	Mean	Comment
Infrastructure	“Facilities for study/work support”	2.89	Few dedicated spaces
Staff training	“Staff receive DC education”	2.69	Expertise gap
Career guidance	“Players have access to expert career planning”	3.36	Guidance underdeveloped
Monitoring	“Multidisciplinary monitoring in place”	3.29	Coordination inconsistent

1. Infrastructure and Flexibility Gaps

The lowest average score in the entire DC Club Scan concerns **facilities for study and work support** (*mean = 2.89*). Collaboration with educational and business partners also remains modest (*3.52*).

Clubs recognise the value of dual careers but often lack the **physical spaces, digital tools, or formal partnerships** needed to make them function effectively. In short, the infrastructure still lags behind the ideals — good intentions are present, but institutional backing is incomplete.

2. Limited Staff Expertise and Career Guidance

Training and expertise remain clear weak points. Items on **staff education in dual career management** scored only 2.69, **awareness programs for coaches** 2.99, and **expert career-planning support** 3.36.

The dual career system largely relies on **goodwill and informal experience rather than specialised training**. Many players navigate critical career decisions



without access to professional guidance, leaving support inconsistent and personality-dependent.

3. Insufficient Structural Integration and Monitoring

Indicators related to **multidisciplinary coordination** (3.29) and **clarity of dual career support roles** (3.55) show that while roles exist, collaboration across departments remains fragmented.

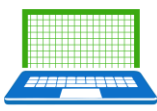
True dual career integration requires more than isolated initiatives; it demands a **systemic network of communication** linking coaches, coordinators, psychologists, and educators. At present, such integration is partial and person-dependent rather than embedded in club procedures.

Overall, these weaknesses highlight a familiar challenge across European football: **belief in the dual career philosophy is high, but practical implementation and expertise are lagging behind**. To close this gap, clubs will need investment in dedicated infrastructure, professional development for staff, and mechanisms for shared monitoring and accountability.

DC Club Scan: Main Strengths and Grow Areas.

Dimension	Strengths (≥ 4.0)	Growth Areas (≤ 3.4)
Culture & Policy	Vision & policy integration	–
Wellbeing	Strong holistic care	–
Coach Support	Motivating coaches	–
Competencies	Self-regulation skills	Time management training
Infrastructure	–	Study/work facilities
Expertise	–	Staff training & awareness
Monitoring	–	Coordination across disciplines

Overall, club staff indicate a **strong philosophical commitment** to dual career and wellbeing — it's embedded in values and supported by coaches. However,









structural and professional frameworks lag behind: few have dedicated facilities, formal training, or full-time dual career staff. The system is driven by *passion and belief*, but needs *infrastructure and expertise* to make that belief consistently operational.

“Belief > structure. Clubs *want* DC systems; resources and expertise lag behind.”

6.4 Philosophies of Dual Career in Clubs

Qualitative coding identified **six philosophical clusters**.

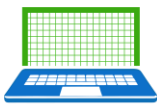
Philosophy Type	Approx. % of clubs	Core Belief / Example
 Holistic Development	40 %	“We develop both the player and the person.”
 Education as Equal Partner	25 %	“School comes first.”
 Balance & Flexibility	15 %	“You don’t have to choose — you can do both.”
 Wellbeing & Identity	10 %	“More than one identity protects mental health.”
 Responsibility of the Club	5 %	“We prepare them for life beyond football.”
 In Progress / Not Yet Defined	5 %	“We’re still developing our philosophy.”

The responses reveal six recurring philosophical orientations that together form the moral and cultural foundation of dual career practice across European football. While the specific emphasis varies by club and country, a clear consensus emerges: **developing the person is inseparable from developing the player**.

1. Holistic Development (≈40%)

The most prevalent philosophy views dual career support as part of *identity formation* and human development. Clubs adopting this stance describe football as a **vehicle for personal growth**, not the end goal. They emphasise values, life skills, and social contribution, aiming to produce “good people” as much as good players.





□ *Core belief: Success = both personal and athletic growth.*

2. Education as Priority or Equal Partner (≈25%)

A significant share of clubs—particularly in northern Europe—frame education as **non-negotiable** and equal in importance to football. They stress the need for every player to complete a diploma or vocational qualification, viewing DC as essential preparation for “life after football.”

□ *Core belief: Football careers are temporary — education ensures sustainable futures.*

3. Balance and Flexibility (≈15%)

These clubs focus on **coordination and adaptability**, striving to align school and training schedules to avoid conflict. They see their primary role as facilitators of balance rather than enforcers of choice, ensuring both domains can coexist harmoniously through clear communication.

□ *Core belief: Sport and study can coexist — if structure and dialogue are strong.*

4. Identity and Wellbeing Awareness (≈10%) □

A smaller but increasingly influential group position dual careers as a **protective factor for mental health and long-term resilience**. They highlight the risk of a one-dimensional “football-only” identity and promote emotional stability, balance, and life satisfaction as part of performance.

□ *Core belief: Dual identity = mental stability and sustainable performance.*

5. Responsibility and Role of the Club (≈5%) □

Some clubs explicitly frame DC as a **social responsibility**, seeing themselves as educators and mentors preparing young people for life beyond sport. These organisations reference policy frameworks or the EU’s DC definition, signalling a transition from moral conviction to structured implementation.

□ *Core belief: The club is a learning environment for life, not just football.*



6. In Progress or Not Yet Defined (≈5%)

A minority admit their DC philosophy is still evolving. They recognise the importance of the concept but have yet to formalise it in strategy or policy. This group underscores the uneven maturity across Europe—where belief in DC spreads faster than concrete implementation.

 *Core issue: Awareness is rising faster than operational clarity.*

Across all six philosophies, a unifying message resonates:

“We don’t just build footballers — we build people.”

The prevailing moral conviction is strong—football and education should coexist, and holistic development defines success. Yet, the challenge ahead lies in translating this conviction into **consistent, structural action**. The European football landscape now stands at a turning point: moving from belief and goodwill toward measurable systems of accountability and support. The question becomes not *whether* clubs value dual careers, but *how* they will embed that value in everyday practice.

“Awareness is rising faster than implementation.”

6.5 Summary of DCSP Findings

Strengths	Moderate Areas	Weaknesses
Philosophical commitment / holistic view	Communication, transition, policy follow-through	Infrastructure, training, monitoring
Coaching support for education	Motivation programmes	Expertise & career guidance
Perceived performance benefits	Limited time for DC work	Lack of formal coordination

“The system is driven by passion and belief — but needs structure and expertise to make that belief operational.”

PART 3 – Integrated Discussion - Players and Staff: How does this come together?

7. Two Worlds, One System



The dual career conversation reveals a fascinating symmetry: **players and staff speak the same language**, but from different vantage points. Their experiences and priorities reflect two sides of the same system — one living the reality, the other shaping the vision.

Both value holistic growth, education, and mental balance. Yet the **structural scaffolding** — time, training, coordination — lags behind.

Both sides believe in the same philosophy — that dual careers foster growth, balance, and maturity — yet they encounter it from opposite ends of the system. Players describe the lived tension between opportunity and overload, while staff articulate the structural aspirations that could make that balance sustainable.

The insight is clear: **alignment in values is not the issue; alignment in systems is**. The philosophy has taken root, but the scaffolding — time, training, and coordination — must now catch up to turn shared belief into daily reality.

	Players (Reality)	Staff (Vision)
Core belief	“Dual career makes me stronger — but it can be exhausting.”	“We build people, not only footballers.”
Main benefit	Growth, discipline, identity balance.	Holistic development and wellbeing.
Main barrier	Time pressure, lack of coordination, inconsistent support.	Lack of structure, facilities, and trained staff.
Desired experience	Individual flexibility, real understanding, consistent support.	Shared responsibility across roles, systematic approach.

7.1. Bridging the Dual-Career Gap: From Shared Belief to Shared Practice

The findings show a remarkable degree of **alignment between players’ lived experiences and staff intentions**. Both groups clearly believe in the same core philosophy — that football and education should coexist and that personal development fuels athletic performance.

- Both value **holistic growth**, recognising that identity extends beyond the pitch.
- Both link **education with mental balance** and long-term wellbeing.
- Both see **dual career as performance-enhancing**, not as a distraction.

- Both stress the importance of **supportive relationships** within the coach–player–school triangle.

The *culture* is ready — now the *structures* must follow.

7.2. The Gaps: Where Philosophy Meets Reality

Players’ *stress points* mirror staff’s *structural weaknesses*. Both sides describe the same system from opposite ends — players experience the gaps, while staff acknowledge the reasons behind them.

Theme	Players feel...	Staff admit...
Coordination	“Nobody talks; I get punished by both sides.”	Communication with schools still inconsistent (3.4–3.6 avg).
Facilities & Time	“No study space, no time to rest.”	Lowest score = 2.89 on facilities.
Professional Guidance	“We need someone who checks on school.”	Few trained DC experts (2.69 training score).
Load Management	“Always tired, no real rest.”	Most staff spend ≤ 20% of their time on DC.

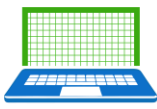
7.3. Moving Forward Together — From Belief to Practice

To transform shared conviction into sustainable reality, clubs and federations can act on four strategic levers:

1. **Institutionalise Communication:** Create clear dual-career contact roles, shared digital calendars, and formal school–club coordination channels.
2. **Train the Believers:** Equip coaches, coordinators, and staff with *dual-career literacy* — not just goodwill. Professional training will ensure consistent understanding and action.
3. **Create Recovery Space:** Invest in both **physical environments** (quiet study/rest areas) and **psychological monitoring** (load management, wellbeing check-ins).
4. **Celebrate Success Stories:** Share and highlight players who successfully combine football and education. Their stories reinforce the belief that dual career is not an exception — it’s the model.

Bottom Line:





Clubs already *believe* in dual career; players already *live* it.

The next phase is to **make it work by design, not by coincidence.**

8. The Dual Career Paradox

The dual career pathway simultaneously *empowers and strains*.

It cultivates resilience, autonomy, and adaptability—but without coherent structures, it risks chronic overload.

Empowering forces	Draining forces
Holistic philosophy	Lack of infrastructure
Coach support	Time pressure
Skill development	Recovery deficit
Educational value	Unclear coordination

The EDU-DC research phase reveals a football ecosystem *ready in mindset but under-equipped in structure*. The **Dual Career Paradox** summarises this reality: “*belief and goodwill are abundant, yet sustainable frameworks remain emergent.*”

The next stage for EDU-DC is to transform this paradox into a sustainable *balance of challenge and care*. The training modules (WP2 – WP3) will focus on turning this belief into practice—so that future generations of players and staff can grow, learn, and perform without having to sacrifice one part of themselves to succeed in another.

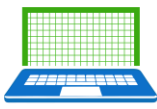
9. Recommendations and Next Steps

The research phase reveals that European football is culturally ready for dual career integration — the philosophy is widely embraced, but structures and coordination must now catch up. The following recommendations outline concrete actions at three levels of influence: clubs, practitioners, and policy stakeholders.

For Clubs

- **Formalise Dual-Career Roles:** Assign clear responsibilities, job descriptions, and defined working hours for DC coordination rather than relying on goodwill or informal tasks.
- **Create Learning Environments:** Invest in both **physical spaces** (study rooms, quiet zones, recovery areas) and **digital tools** that facilitate scheduling, communication, and tracking of educational progress.





- **Reward and Recognise Achievement:** Celebrate and publicly acknowledge players who successfully combine football and education. Recognition reinforces culture and motivates younger athletes to follow suit.

For Coaches & DC Support Providers (DCSPs)

- **Integrate Dual-Career Literacy into Coach Education:** Include modules on education–sport balance, psychological load, and holistic player development in coaching certifications.
- **Exchange Best Practices:** Encourage collaboration and study visits between academies to share effective models of scheduling, mentoring, and school partnerships.
- **Develop Peer Networks for Wellbeing Professionals:** Build communities of practice linking psychologists, educators, and DC coordinators to promote knowledge sharing and joint problem-solving.

For Policy & Erasmus+ Stakeholders

- **Support Cross-Border Training and Certification:** Facilitate European-level qualifications and training pathways for dual career coordinators, ensuring consistency in professional standards.
- **Fund Pilot Programmes:** Prioritise initiatives that **translate philosophy into daily practice**, testing scalable models for communication, flexible scheduling, and player monitoring.
- **Continue Mixed-Method Monitoring:** Combine quantitative and qualitative tools to evaluate the long-term impact of dual-career systems on athlete wellbeing, academic outcomes, and performance.

In essence:

European football has the *belief* and the *momentum*; what it needs next is the **infrastructure and expertise** to make the dual career ideal a consistent, measurable reality.



DUAL CAREERS.

ONE GOAL.



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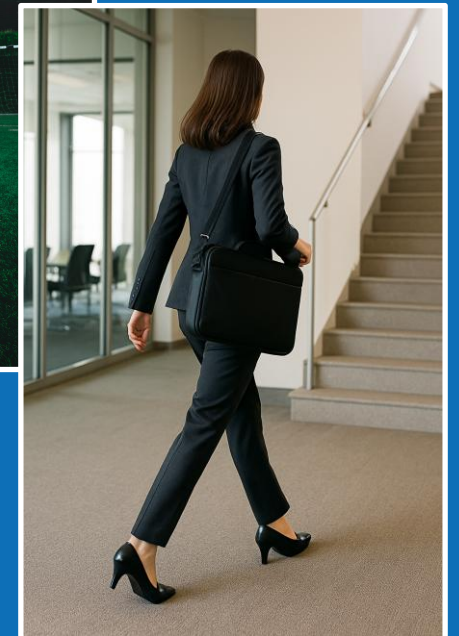
GENERAL IMPRESSION DUAL CAREER IN FOOTBALL



**DUAL CAREERS
IN FOOTBALL
EDU DC**

The term Dual Career (DC) is often associated mainly with top sport and education. This is misleading, because DC is more than that – it is about developing as a person. In practice, this means starting by looking at a player’s interests and talents outside of football. This can range from a four-year degree to something small like a DJ course. At the moment, the focus is often on what is practically feasible. Responsibility for the success of a DC is currently placed largely on the education system by clubs, as many of them still hold the attitude that full focus should be on top sport. Because this responsibility ends up with relatively young people in a challenging environment, they need to be very strong to make a DC succeed. From an early age, it should be taught and normalized so that pursuing a DC becomes both achievable and realistic, giving parents and players better insight into what is possible. Here, the KNVB and clubs also has a responsibility to inform clubs and parents about what DC really means and what it requires. The conviction that we are educating people and not just footballers is important to communicate. This also means striving for a DC after obtaining a basic qualification, regardless of the financial situation of the player or the club. While it begins with the intrinsic motivation of the player, the environment must provide the right tools to prevent that motivation from stagnating.

There are different phases in a DC, with age not being a fixed factor. An important phase is the transition after completing secondary school and deciding on the next step. This often coincides with the moment when players get a contract in football. To make this stage easier, it is important to create awareness of DC from an earlier age and to prepare for the next phase. The belief that choosing to do something alongside football can actually improve sporting performance is not (yet) a leading principle in football. Providing tailor-made solutions is crucial, so that players are not limited to choices that are merely easy to combine with football but instead can pursue something that truly matches their own interests.



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GENERAL IMPRESSION DUAL CAREER IN FOOTBALL

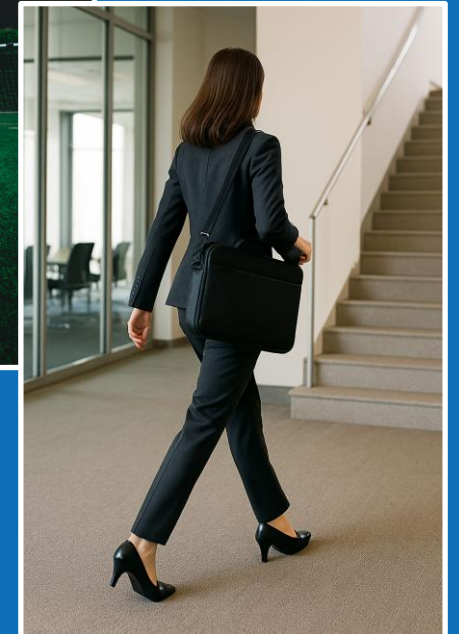
The results show that there are various actors involved in the process of dual development, including parents, coaches, study advisors, and teammates. The research indicates that there is still a strong belief within professional football organizations (BVOs) and among players that complete focus on football is essential for sports performance, which can come at the expense of support for dual careers. This results in players often having to choose between their education and their sports career at a young age, which can lead to stress and dropout both in education and in sports.

- Research shows that there is a need for an integrated approach in which the KNVB, BVOs, and other stakeholders collectively take responsibility for supporting dual development. Recommendations include:
- The KNVB should play a larger role in creating awareness and setting licensing requirements for clubs regarding dual development.
- Clubs should actively implement policies to support players in their dual development.
- A cultural change must occur within BVOs to recognize and embrace the benefits of dual development.

These insights can contribute to improving the well-being of players and their success both in sports and personally.



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DUAL CAREERS AT THE PILOTCLUBS

All pilot clubs are busy forming a vision for dual development that is integrated into the overall high-performance program, emphasizing what dual development means for the club. In this vision, education and development must take a primary place. From this vision, an attempt is made to achieve structural and optimal guidance, but a challenge here is the limited capacity and who is ultimately responsible for dual development. There is a visible trend among the clubs where an independent person is made responsible for the coordination of dual development. It is important that within this theme, work is carried out from an organizational chart with a multidisciplinary character. Within the clubs, we see a clear separation between the men's and women's departments, but clubs also see an opportunity for this theme to promote more integration and collaboration.

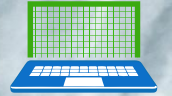
Balancing football with education or work proves to be very challenging for players. It is crucial to offer tailored support to players to achieve a sustainable dual career. There is a big difference between support structures among clubs and they often depend on individual motivation and resources. For women, combining football with study or work is essential due to lower salaries, while men sometimes abandon education once they receive a contract, which creates long-term risks. There is still much to gain in raising awareness about the importance and value of dual development for all age groups. Additionally, staff members need to be trained in teaching important life skills and competencies such as self-regulation and managing a dual career.

For all clubs, cooperation with secondary education generally runs well, but cooperation with higher education (MBO, HBO, university) is either lacking or more difficult. Furthermore, we see that collaboration with education is reactive. When problems arise with a player regarding education, only then is action taken. The pilot clubs indicate that substantive collaboration with education regarding talent development must be the next step. The management of the clubs recognize the added value to focus more on collaboration with sponsors, the business community, and other clubs or top sports organizations.

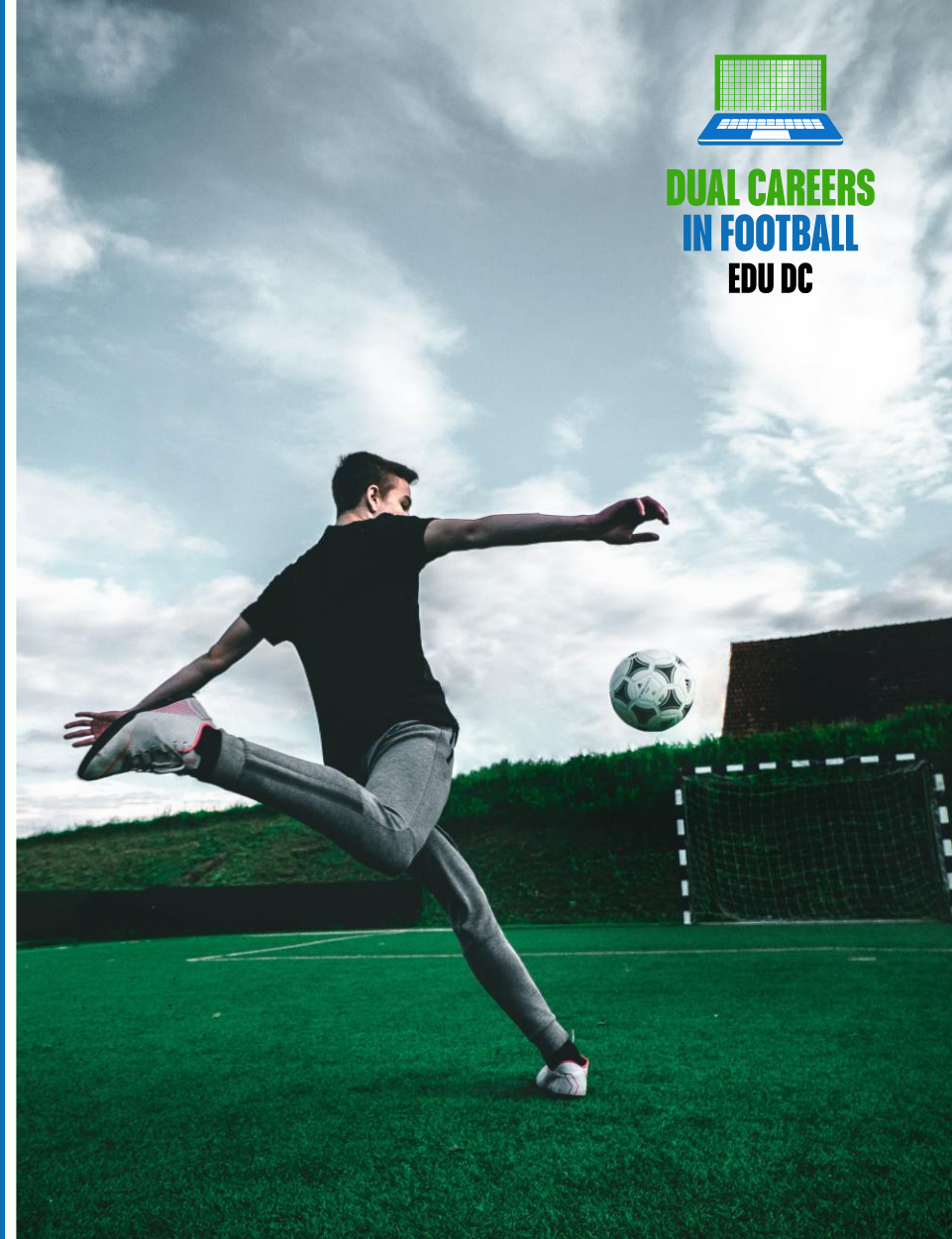
It is a challenge for clubs to provide continuous and proactive career guidance, especially when players complete secondary education or have signed a contract. The clubs endorse the importance of regularly checking in and preparing for significant transitions. At several clubs, players often choose a gap year, with clubs emphasizing the importance of keeping players in development even then. Despite these challenges, dual careers are seen as valuable for personal development, reducing stress, and providing future security. Clubs also recognize that supporting dual development can positively influence on-field performance. This indicates that clubs view dual development as plan A, rather than motivating players for plan B. At the various pilot clubs, there are already some good practices, such as partnerships with schools, mentorship programs, flexible scheduling, involving parents in development, and offering life-skills workshops to help players grow beyond football.



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DUAL CAREERS AT THE PILOTCLUBS

Vision & strategy

- Dual careers support personal growth, reduce stress, and provide security beyond football.
- Clubs also recognize that supporting dual development can positively influence on-field performance.
- Staff members must conform to the vision and approach of dual development.
- An awareness program for players, staff members, and parents should be implemented.
- Dual development is still too often dependent on individuals' intrinsic motivation and has not yet been implemented in policy.

Environment

- There is a need among clubs to organize education at the club itself.
- Clubs must involve the wider environment in their approach to dual development.
- Parental involvement is a challenge for most pilot clubs.
- Pilot clubs lack ambassadors or role models.

Service & support

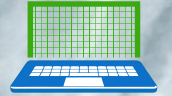
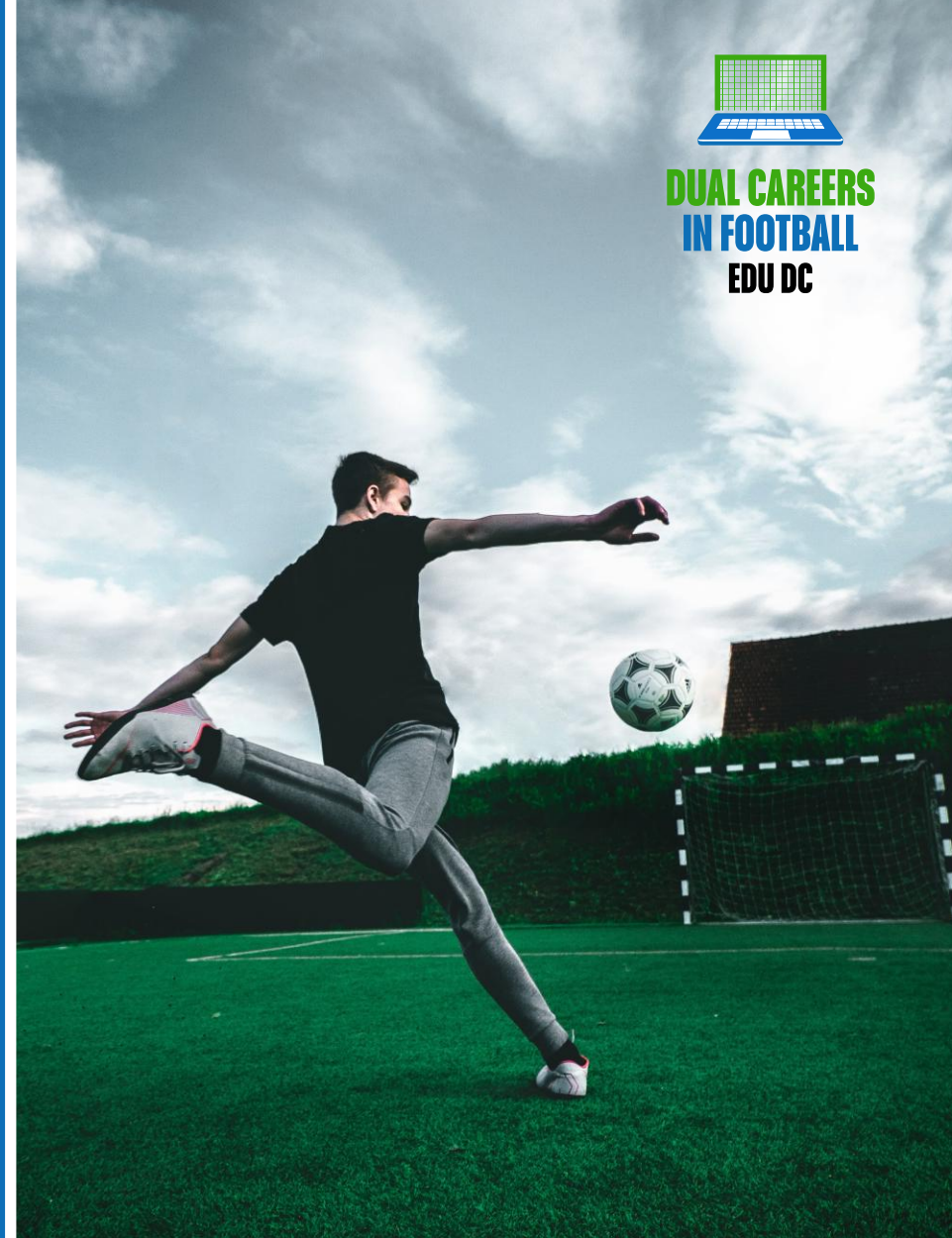
- There is a big difference between support structures between clubs.
- There is an opportunity to involve the wider environment in supporting different domains.
- Structural communication with key stakeholders inside and outside the club remains a challenge.
- Players need to learn to take responsibility for their own dual development.
- Many stakeholders express a desire to make dual development a fixed part of development conversations.

Results

- Balancing football with education or work is very challenging.
- Women must combine football with study or work due to lower salaries.
- Men often stop studying after signing a contract, creating future risks.
- Some good practices already exist: partnerships with schools, mentorship programs, flexible scheduling, parent involvement, and life-skills workshops.



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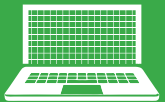
WORKING WITH THE 8 DOMAINS

GENERAL

Across all clubs, there is broad recognition of the importance of the eight development domains, but the way they are addressed varies in structure and depth. Social development, sports performance and wellbeing are relatively well covered, often through workshops, mentors, or coaching conversations. Education and employability are supported to some extent, yet collaboration with schools is inconsistent and aftercare for players leaving the academy remains limited. Career planning and transitions are widely acknowledged as critical, but programs for job applications, employability and alternative career pathways are missing. Life skills and identity development are seen as essential, with attention given to resilience, self-image, and dealing with setbacks, although the approach is rarely systematic and often depends on individual staff members. The danger of a one-sided identity development is highlighted by the various stakeholders. Players sometimes find it difficult to be vulnerable about challenges in these domains or to indicate that things are not going as well. Financial development clearly emerges as the weakest domain across all clubs, with little structured guidance on managing money or understanding contracts. Structural monitoring in these areas is lacking and is necessary for proper guidance of support and evaluation of the players.



AZ has a solid top sports program that covers all domains in courses except financial development. Players receive workshops and assignments on topics such as visualization, identity, and social media use. The staff members believe that more attention should be given to phone usage and how players present themselves. Players enter their physical and mental well-being in Soccerlab. On the women's side only the coach can view the completed well-being data per player. Career guidance within AZ should focus on good exploration and information regarding further education or finding a suitable job alongside or after football. On the women's side there is no structural career guidance due to a lack of specialists.



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WORKING WITH THE 8 DOMAINS

FC Utrecht has recently developed elite sports learning pathways that focus on commitment to holistic development and identity building. Last season, a start was made with the implementation, where dual development was included as a pillar. This is completely absent on the women's side and is highly dependent on the coach. According to the club, further elaboration of the elite sports pathway and the methods regarding dual development should lead to a stronger development culture.



SC Cambuur is busy giving individual attendance to players, but the guidance is often dependent on individual staff members. They have limited expertise in financial development within the club. Assistance with job applications and career guidance is still not available. Within the elite sports programs, the club focuses heavily on life skills and the development of competencies such as setting goals, reflecting, analyzing, and presenting oneself. A lot of players within the academy of Cambuur don't perform well at these competences. Additionally, there is a good opportunity to pay more attention to the social development and identity development of football talents. According to the staff members, more dedication and coordination are needed in this area.



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WORKING WITH THE 8 DOMAINS

Go Ahead Eagles addresses social skills and daily life competencies but lacks a systematic approach across the domains. Strength and performance training are underdeveloped, and there is no dedicated top sports mentor to oversee broader dual development. The club has mental coaches who pay attention to the well-being of the players.



“DUAL DEVELOPMENT IS MORE THAN JUST EDUCATION;
IT’S ALSO ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN DO TO CONTINUE
DEVELOPING YOURSELF AFTER YOUR MANDATORY
SCHOOLING.”

~ STAFF MEMBER



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ATHLETIC TRIANGLE (COLLABORATION AROUND THE ATHLETE)

GENERAL

Across the pilot clubs, the athletic triangle between club, school, and parents shows varying levels of development. In none of the pilot clubs do structural meetings take place within the triangle surrounding the player. Often, the conversations are between parents and the club or between the club and the school. We also see at every club that the communication in the triangle is not working well between the staff members of the club, parents and school representatives. Parental involvement is also a challenge. They are not engaged and/or not well informed about the working method on dual career. Also, parents sometimes feel that they are unable to access data or not being invited to evaluations and information meetings. At this moment, there is no structural communication within the triangle in an online tracking system at most pilot clubs.



AZ has the most structured approach, with mandatory start-of-season meetings involving all parties, regular follow-ups, and direct monitoring of school results through systems like Magister. Parents are actively involved in broader development themes such as nutrition, sleep, and resilience. The structural follow-up of the meetings within the triangle must also be proactively continued after secondary education.



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ATHLETIC TRIANGLE (COLLABORATION AROUND THE ATHLETE)

FC Utrecht recognizes the importance of cooperation but in practice communication is less consistent. Parents are only informed at the start of the season, and coaches struggle to balance football demands with school requirements. The players had progress meetings only with the coach. FC Utrecht struggles to engage parents; when information evenings are organized, attendance is often very low.



SC Cambuur emphasizes the importance of dual development and advises players to always do something alongside football. Monthly meetings with schools take place, but coordination with parents and schools still depends mostly on individual effort. At the beginning of the year the players on secondary school present themselves on dual career at school. Their coach also joins this meeting. During the season the head coaches also visit the school to evaluate and talk about the progress of the players.



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ATHLETIC TRIANGLE (COLLABORATION AROUND THE ATHLETE)

Go Ahead Eagles has the least structured system: there are no formal partnerships with schools and communication with parents is mostly through coaches or volunteers.



“THE CONTACT BETWEEN SCHOOL AND CLUB IS LACKING, IT DEPENDS ON THE INDIVIDUAL”
~ FOOTBALL PLAYER



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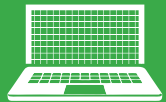
SUPPORT IN TRANSITIONS

GENERAL

All clubs lack support in the transition from secondary to further education. The clubs consider it important that their players complete their secondary education, but after that there is a lack of guidance for further personal development. It is important to have extra attention for players in the exam year, because this year can be very stressful and in this phase they need to think about the next step. The lack of guidance is evident in the transition from U19 to U21 and to the first team. We also see this with the transition of players moving out to live independently. In this phase we see that the first contract will play a role in the choices and the Club and players focusing only on football. In this case, there is a big risk for unilateral identity development. There are few role models from the U21 or first team. The players demotivate each other to continue with school or work. Especially in the women's program, there is less structured support and players often feel left to take the initiative themselves. Many tasks are the responsibility of the coach in women's football. Structural and pro-active guidance for drop-out is also lacking at all clubs.



AZ offers the most comprehensive structure, with top sports mentors, study supervisors and regular monitoring of school performance. Players until the U19 are encouraged to combine football with education through flexible arrangements, internships and personal development programs. The club says that players from the U21 and the first team are fulltime players and that is not possible to have dual career. At AZ there is optimal support in life skills and mental coaching. There is room for improvement to extend the career guidance and identity development for all the players in the youth academy and the first team. It is also important to integrate this on both the men's and women's side.



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SUPPORT IN TRANSITIONS

FC Utrecht acknowledges the value of dual development and provides support on a few domains regarding dual career. The club has several specialists on study, lifeskills and player guidance, but in practice the guidance is inconsistent. These specialist only work for the men's side, and there is a big need to integrate it also at the women's side. The transition from secondary school to further education is challenging at the club, but the club is offering extra support in this transition since the last season. Just like AZ, for FC Utrecht the players of the U21 team become professional players and have less flexibility in their program to focus on dual development. Despite the lack of flexibility, since this season there are more players who study or work on their dual development. At the women's part, there are several challenges during the starting phase in the academy. There is less support, and the girls are often feeling more stress when they face transitions in their lives.



SC Cambuur strongly promotes the idea that players should always do something alongside football. Coaches and study coordinators encourage schoolwork and internships and monthly meetings with schools are held, but the program still relies heavily on individual staff members and lacks a fully structured system. At Cambuur, the players often train in different teams with training schedules. This requests flexibility and pro-active support from the club. The club has a basic support to prepare a possible drop-out, but the next step can be structural aftercare. The club has bad experience with players that choose for a gap year. SC Cambuur is making good steps to offer continues career guidance.



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SUPPORT IN TRANSITIONS

Go Ahead Eagles provides the least formal support: there are no structural partnerships with schools and most guidance comes from coaches, volunteers, or external parties. While individual mentors and mental coaches are available, the overall dual development framework is still under construction.



“IF YOU’RE VULNERABLE OR NEED HELP,
YOU’D RATHER NOT SHOW THAT TO THE COACH.”

~ FOOTBALL PLAYER



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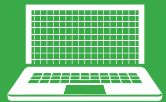
MULTIDISCIPLINARY SETTING

GENERAL

Most clubs have a multidisciplinary setting or are in the process of assembling a multidisciplinary team that shares a collective responsibility for dual development. This team meets regularly at all clubs to discuss the development of the club and the progress of the teams and players. Within this multidisciplinary approach, there is space for specialists to share their findings and experiences. The size and composition of the team, as well as the frequency of formal meetings, varies greatly from club to club. In most clubs, there is a need to schedule these meetings more structurally. Within the multidisciplinary teams, there is not always a shared responsibility regarding dual development, but the different specialists are responsible for different domains within dual development. The role of the (potential) coordinator of dual development is important to provide sufficient objectivity and independence within the multidisciplinary setting. Additionally, this role is essential for the coordination of this setting.



Has weekly meetings in a multidisciplinary setting. Many specialists and the head coaches within the boys' department are employed full-time. Within the multidisciplinary team, there is also a study coordinator and high-performance coaches involved in the support regarding dual development. On the women's side, coaches and specialists are employed part-time, with only the head of academy working full-time.



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MULTIDISCIPLINARY SETTING

FC Utrecht started assembling a multidisciplinary team with various specialists last season. Part of this team includes the coordinator for dual development from both the men's and women's sides, facilitating the integration of men and women. Other members of the multidisciplinary team are a high-performance coach, the head of the academy, and the head coach of the U17 team. The team has structural meetings every month, where they discuss the progress and status of dual development within the club and in the different teams. At the men's side the focus is mostly on the U17. There is a chance for the club to expand this to the other teams. At the women's side there is lack of specialists, and a need to bring in some expertise of the specialists of the men's side. Various stakeholders indicate that it is the responsibility of the multidisciplinary team to create an environment in which players can openly discuss the ups and downs regarding their dual development.



SC Cambuur has a small multidisciplinary team. This was a conscious choice to keep the lines short and clear. The club has recently appointed a high-performance coach who guides the players in the older teams of the academy regarding several areas. This team has a lot of informal contact and coordination about the progress and developments within dual development. In addition, the club has volunteer study supervisors with whom the multidisciplinary team regularly communicates. The general manager of the academy and the head of the academy are, alongside the high-performance coach, part of the multidisciplinary team.



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MULTIDISCIPLINARY SETTING

Go Ahead Eagles is currently working on a multidisciplinary team and creating a profile for a coordinator on dual development. Each phase has a mental coach that is offering mental support.



“A HEAD OF ACADEMY AND A FOOTBALL COACH ALREADY HAVE QUITE A LOT TO DO. SO IF YOU HAVE A SEPARATE PERSON DEDICATED SOLELY TO DUAL DEVELOPMENT, I THINK THAT’S BETTER THAN ASSIGNING THOSE TASKS TO THE HEAD OF ACADEMY OR TO THE FOOTBALL COACH.”

~ FOOTBALL PLAYER



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EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

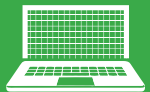
GENERAL

Within the pilot clubs, many new individuals have been appointed who are engaged in dual development and are part of the multidisciplinary team. These individuals have not followed any specific training regarding dual development. All staff members indicate a desire to gain more knowledge about the various domains and the goals, advantages, impact and requirements for an optimal and sustainable dual career. Conversations with the clubs reveal that there is the least knowledge about financial development. Furthermore, clubs are actively working on coordination in this area. The relevant coordinator for dual development must also acquire knowledge for policy development, organizing optimal support, driving a multidisciplinary approach and forming a network and how to collaborate optimally within it. It is noticeable that many staff members have a specialization within one or several domains. There is a need among these staff members to be trained more broadly and gain insight into other domains. This is particularly important for the coordinator, especially since the pilot clubs have not formally appointed a coordinator yet. Additionally, the training program must focus on competency development for staff members and how to develop this for players. Creating more awareness about Dual Development is an important first step for both staff members and players, so all staff members must be trained in this. It is important to take into account the differences between girls and boys in the various components.



“HAVING TOO MANY HOURS OF FREE TIME IS NOT GOOD FOR YOUR DEVELOPMENT. GAINING KNOWLEDGE ALONGSIDE FOOTBALL ALSO HELPS YOU IMPROVE YOUR PERFORMANCE ON THE PITCH.”

~ FOOTBALL PLAYER



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EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

DC COORDINATORS

- Developing vision, policy, and a sustainable network.
- Must clarify the importance of continuous, dual developmental pathways for all age groups.
- Organizing ongoing career / drop out guidance, study guidance, mental coaching, identity training, lifestyle coaching and competency training.
- Enhance structural and open communication in the athletic triangle around the player.
- Must be the linking pin between school, club, players and parents.
- Encouraging parental involvement and engaging parents within dual development.
- Must improve the cooperation with external partners.
- Monitoring well-being and the activities/progress within dual development.
- Stimulating and safeguarding an optimal development culture.



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EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

FOOTBALL COACHES

- Awareness on the role of coaches on dual career.
- Optimal collaboration with other specialists regarding dual development.
- How to build a sustainable and confidential relationship with players.
- How to offer optimal dual career support as a coach.
- How to develop crucial dual career competences with players in coaching and training.
- Identifying difficulties within the various domains of dual development at a player's level.



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EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

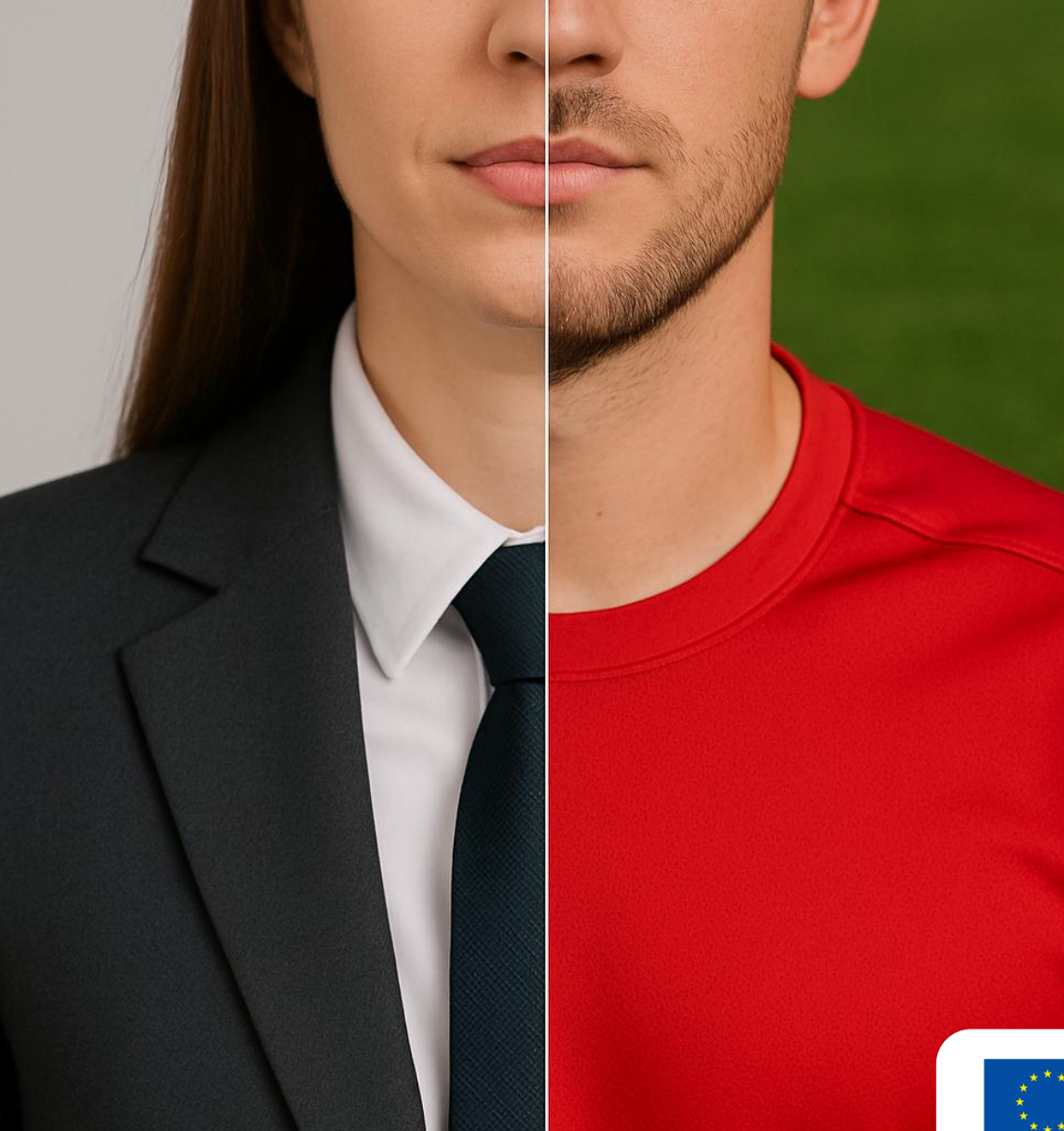
DC SUPPORT STAFF

- Carry out both individual guidance and group sessions within the various domains.
- Emphasize that dual development should not be optional but facilitated for every player.
- Coaching the coaches within specific domains.
- Identifying difficulties within the various domains of dual development at a player's level.
- How to build a sustainable and confidential relationship with players.



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DUAL CAREERS IN FOOTBALL EDU DC

RECOMMENDATIONS

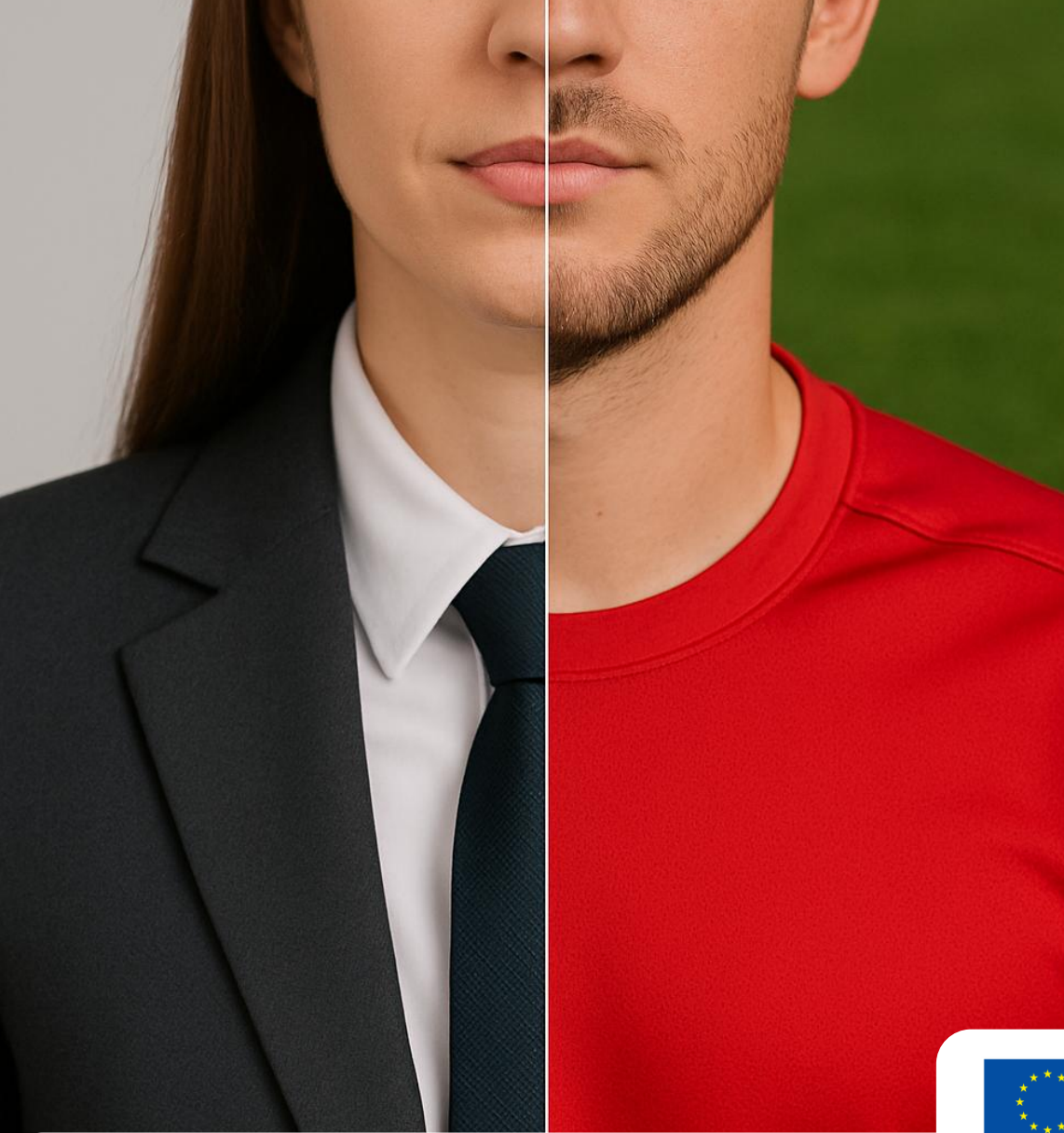
GENERAL

- Focus on programs for dual development that emphasize the individual responsibility of players and allow for personalized adjustments.
- The KNVB must set a good example on the theme of dual careers, inspire, advise on optimal programs, establish guidelines, and monitor (prove that dual careers work and contribute to better performance on the field). Organize regular intervision moments for stakeholders, such as study counselors, career coaches, and higher education institutions.
- Broaden the theme of dual careers. It also involves labor market orientation, the combination of work and football, and attention to well-being. Well-being can be an important theme, as clubs find it significant.
- Consider the different phases of dual careers in football carefully. The starting point is that tailored support must be provided for each phase, and there must be a continuous line within the dual career programs.
- Ensure significant attention to raising awareness among the various stakeholders in football. Focus on football talents, coaches, and parents.
- Ensure support at the management level. Ensure more coordination with football clubs on this theme and visit clubs to specifically discuss this topic.
- Establish thorough monitoring of experiences, needs, and results within dual development. These insights can be used in structural evaluations and further development of policies.
- Focus on role models and mentorship for inspiration and guidance in dual careers.



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DUAL CAREERS IN FOOTBALL EDU DC

RECOMMENDATIONS

PILOTCLUBS

- Create a vision and make sure that this vision and policy is established so that it can gain a more structural place within the club.
- In collaboration with education/work, there must be two-way traffic. This also requires flexibility and commitment from the football clubs.
- Bring the programs from the club and education closer together through coordination and scheduling, both practically and content-wise.
- Try to convince players of the importance of dual development, as currently, players are convinced that only more focus and time on football leads to better performance.
- Establish an organizational chart and profiles for the specialists within the multidisciplinary team.
- Ensure more proactive guidance instead of reactive guidance.
- Ensure sufficient pedagogical expertise within the club's guidance teams and strive for social diversity.
- Align support for men and women more closely.
- Make dual development a regular item on the agenda of important meetings within the club.
- Try to align as much as possible with existing programs and learning pathways of the football clubs.
- Ensure sufficient quality assurance and regularly involve the important stakeholders in and around the club.



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ONE PLAYER



MANY PATHS



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DC concept, stakeholders' perceptions and what it means

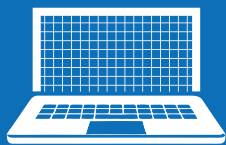
Dual Career (DC) is a new concept within Bulgarian football; or at least so many stakeholders seem to believe. In fact, many Bulgarian players even to this day practice a form of DC – whether it involves pursuing academic degrees or combining football with work. Unfortunately, the DC concept is not structured per se within Bulgarian football clubs, with people associating it purely with the educational domain. Larger clubs “touch” upon the domains of wellbeing and social development, but their efforts are linked to sporting performance, rather than player’s own development of skills and competences. In summary it can be said DC is seen as a plan B, rather than complementing a players plan A.

The Bulgarian football environment – pathway from grassroots to elite sport and choices thereon

Based on internal data, the drop out rate in Bulgarian football is ????. At the ages ?????, with only ???% obtaining professional contracts. And even at professional level, the remuneration received through football is often not sufficient. Hence many players are required to work as well as train. This places on them burdens of balancing the two aspects. With football being results orientated, Bulgarian football stakeholders yet focus more on the sporting performance, leaving the remaining 7 domains untouched. This creates challenges for both athletes and those acting as DC suppliers. Pursuing sporting results, coaches are often not as flexible in accommodating DC challenges. All parents, clubs and sometimes athletes deem responsible the educational institutions for the enhancement of off-pitch skills and competences, often also requesting the later to be flexible to accommodate the player’s sporting activities.

What the future (should) hold:

Clubs, although struggling often with limited resources (capital, human, infrastructural) should be strongly encouraged to offer tailored DC programs and to invest inn DC promotion, even internally from early ages. One possible way is the imposition of such requirements by the BFU. The later should actively promote awareness of the DC concept through education and role models, searching also strategic allies through which to provide stakeholders with options and tools to altering the culture to view DC not as restriction to one's football career but rather as an effective way to complement one’s sporting performance.



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DUAL CAREER IN BULGARIAN FOOTBALL IMPRESSIONS FROM INTERVIEWS



Awareness gap

Many players, especially males in certain clubs, only learned about the “dual career” concept after joining the National Sport Academy. Early exposure at club level is often missing.

Importance of strong parental & coach support

Across all groups, family and coaches play a crucial role in encouraging both education and sporting development.

Effective academy model

The National Sport Academy offers flexible study programs and tailored training schedules, enabling athletes to balance education with professional football.



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Clear pathways for players

Where structured support is provided (such as for female athletes at the National Sport Academy) high sporting achievements and clear post-playing career options are evident (coaching, PE teaching). Transition is eased.

Mixed male player experiences

Some male players had to choose between football and education early on, though those in dual pathways now value preparation for future coaching careers.

Proactive clubs

Certain clubs promote dual careers, align training with school commitments, and plan dedicated programs to prepare athletes for sport-related professions.

Overall conclusion:

Where dual career systems are well-integrated, they foster clear transitions, career security, and personal development, but expansion of awareness, resources, and structured policies at all club levels is still needed for consistent nationwide impact.



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DUAL CAREER IN BULGARIAN FOOTBALL IMPRESSIONS FROM PILOT CLUBS



Clubs and setting

- ❖ DC structures are not part of the organizational structure of clubs, even of the the National Sport Academy's football team, highlighting the need to raise awareness
- ❖ Larger clubs, like Ludogorec, have identified the need to develop players not only in terms of their sporting performance, but also education, wellbeing and even social and personal development
- ❖ Clubs like CSKA actively promote dual career ideals, aligning training schedules with school commitments and preparing athletes for roles as coaches or sport specialists, and they plan to formalize their own dual career program.
- ❖ Awareness and structured support vary significantly between clubs, but where frameworks exist, they are valued and effective

Gender-based impressions:

- ❖ In many cases, especially among male players, the concept of “dual career” was not explicitly introduced during their youth development; understanding often came only after joining the National Sport Academy, which provides flexible study programs allowing athletes to combine education with sport.
- ❖ Professional players rarely pursue academic qualifications rarely goes beyond secondary education within their active ages
- ❖ Some male players faced earlier career compromises, choosing between football and education, though those now in dual pathways appreciate the preparation for future coaching roles.
- ❖ Female players from the National Sport Academy's football team reported strong satisfaction with both their sporting and academic progress, buoyed by a supportive environment that adjusts training schedules to academic needs and offers clear post-playing career pathways, such as coaching or teaching.
- ❖ Across both genders, parental and coach support is crucial, and athletes in structured programs are generally satisfied, balancing training, competition, and studies effectively. Remaining challenges include lack of early formal guidance on dual career options at some clubs and the need for greater funding to provide holistic support, particularly for physical conditioning and recovery services.



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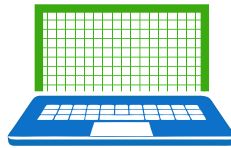
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DUAL CAREERS AT THE PILOT CLUBS



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All pilot clubs are busy forming a vision for dual development that is integrated into the overall high-performance program, emphasizing what dual development means for the club. In this vision, education and development must take a primary place. From this vision, an attempt is made to achieve structural and optimal guidance, but a challenge here is the limited capacity and who is ultimately responsible for dual development. There is a visible trend among the clubs where an independent person is made responsible for the coordination of dual development. It is important that within this theme, work is carried out from an organizational chart with a multidisciplinary character. Within the clubs, we see a clear separation between the men's and women's departments, but clubs also see an opportunity for this theme to promote more integration and collaboration.

Balancing football with education or work proves to be very challenging for players. It is crucial to offer tailored support to players to achieve a sustainable dual career. There is a big difference between support structures among clubs and they often depend on individual motivation and resources. For women, combining football with study or work is essential due to lower salaries, while men sometimes abandon education once they receive a contract, which creates long-term risks. There is still much to gain in raising awareness about the importance and value of dual development for all age groups. Additionally, staff members need to be trained in teaching important life skills and competencies such as self-regulation and managing a dual career.

For all clubs, cooperation with secondary education generally runs well, but cooperation with higher education (MBO, HBO, university) is either lacking or more difficult. Furthermore, we see that collaboration with education is reactive. When problems arise with a player regarding education, only then is action taken. The pilot clubs indicate that substantive collaboration with education regarding talent development must be the next step. The management of the clubs recognize the added value to focus more on collaboration with sponsors, the business community, and other clubs or top sports organizations.

It is a challenge for clubs to provide continuous and proactive career guidance, especially when players complete secondary education or have signed a contract. The clubs endorse the importance of regularly checking in and preparing for significant transitions. At several clubs, players often choose a gap year, with clubs emphasizing the importance of keeping players in development even then. Despite these challenges, dual careers are seen as valuable for personal development, reducing stress, and providing future security. Clubs also recognize that supporting dual development can positively influence on-field performance. This indicates that clubs view dual development as plan A, rather than motivating players for plan B. At the various pilot clubs, there are already some good practices, such as partnerships with schools, mentorship programs, flexible scheduling, involving parents in development, and offering life-skills workshops to help players grow beyond football.



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DUAL CAREERS AT THE PILOT CLUBS

Background

Before 1990s, there were several sports schools (secondary and higher) across the country, providing not only a pool of players, but also creating a structured DC approach, as understood at the time. Pilot clubs have claimed to have benefited from this at the time.

Today

Most of those schools have closed operations, creating a stronger need for clubs to form strategic partnerships and incorporate the DC concept in their organizational structures, strategies and action plans. It is fair to be claimed that pilot clubs is still on the beginning of their DC structure approach journey.

The clubs' perspective and actions

Proactive clubs have made it their mission to develop talent at all levels and across all aspects. Structuring their commitment, together with the pure sporting advancement of the clubs, will encourage others to replicate their efforts.

While there are no DC dedicated personnel, pilot clubs have identified individuals, who have been entrusted with the responsibility to work on different domains. A more structure approach is required with the strengthening of strategic partnerships (such as the Ludogorec and Levski schools; partnerships with higher institutions) and the incorporation of DC within the clubs' organizational charts. Management culture in larger clubs is more progressive allowing more flexibility in coaches.

Within pilot clubs there is a separation of women's and men's departments, claiming more tailored approach. Due to lower remuneration and / or sporting expectations, women's departments are more focused on DC in terms of education thus easing transition, while men's department's focus on sporting performance, touching put domains like well-being and social aspects.

Stakeholders and the pilot club's football community

Pilot club players pursue a DC, lead mainly by intrinsic motivations and / or motivation from their own family. Often their DC journey is financed by their own funds and lack professional / experienced guidance. While clubs do not exclude parents, their involvement is not structurally encouraged. Stakeholders perceive the DC concept as a "Plan B" to one's football career.

The BFU

While the BFU offers a variety of course to support players' transition, until now it has not itself provided a structured DC approach or requirements related to DC within clubs. A number of strategic partnerships have been concluded, yet no campaigns have been launched to raise awareness. A more synchronized and engaging approach is crucial to facilitate, enhance and monitor the evolution of DC in Bulgaria



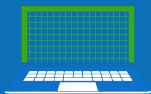
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DC SETTING IN PILOT CLUBS

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Environment

- In general DC is associated solely with the education domain
- DC is still seen as a supplement of football (and not enhancement of on-pitch performance)
- DC is practiced (often without realizing), yet not promoted therein)

Clubs

- Official DC structures and tailored approach are missing
- Limited club resources lead to often DC role combined with other tasks and duties in the club
- Lack of dedicated and trained DC personnel
- Men's and Women's departments concentrate on different domains and none in all 8
- Great difference in the support and tools offered by larger and by smaller clubs

Players

- Lack of awareness to options
- Players are intrinsically motivated to pursue DC
- Lower remuneration is often a key driver for DC (educational domain + work)
- DC pathway is often funded by players themselves
- DC challenges are even greater for players in smaller clubs / less flexible club staff
- Players deem parental support as crucial to DC journey (both to undertake the journey and to deal with challenges)

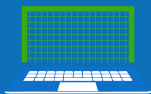
Community

- Cultural barriers (on what DC mean, how beneficial and each party's responsibility therein)
- Insufficient exposure of role models and lack of ambassadors
- Awareness gap on the options available
- Initial strategic partnerships are formed, yet not fully exploited



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EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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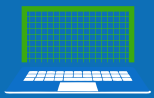
Culture change is needed to alter how DC is perceived

- Awareness campaigns and tools to allow:
 - DC structures and approaches to include all 8 domains
 - Clubs to be informed of the positive correlation of DC and on pitch performance
 - Increase awareness on available options
- Appointment of ambassadors (role models):
 - Promote DC to show that should be incorporated within the Plan A
- Dedicated DC policy to:
 - Facilitate structures in clubs
 - Creation of a job (including job description, responsibilities, etc)
 - Enhance implementation by clubs and ensure staff adherence
- Tailored training and workshops, incorporating all domains, the challenges, support, opportunities, benefits and consequences, accessible by all member clubs (in person and a shorter version possibly online):
 - DC coordinators
 - DC staff
 - Players, with special focus on their own responsibility to pursue rather than rely
 - Parents, with special focus on importance of their support and encouragement as seen by players
 - Other relevant stakeholders



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EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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Consistent monitoring Of performance and results

- Strategic partnerships and allies:
 - Diversity in terms of subject and location
 - Flexible programs
 - Funding options
- Active encouragement for DC by BFU through:
 - Incorporation of modules in the “Coaching Academy” program
 - Inclusion of respective criteria in licensing
 - Creation of dedicated work places to encourage engagement in DC



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WORKING WITH THE 8 DOMAINS



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Good practices

Educational domain: relatively good covered, with variety of sports programs and monitoring of academic achievements (grades) by pilot clubs; yet focus is on mandatory schooling, formal and football-related options (such as coaching)

Career domain: Larger clubs put efforts to support transition, yet there is no depth such as exploration of industries, expert assessment of one's skills and preferences, or job readiness. Women departments focus more on this domain rather than men (due to managerial understanding that this will be vital for women)

Well-being & Identity domain: Mainly dealt by psychologists, doctors and team administrators but again it is questionable whether sporting performance does not outshine individual development

Life skills and competences domain: mainly covered by coaching staff hence often is debatable whether sporting duties are not predominant. Parents play bigger role in this domain as they are the key drivers.

Social development: Covered by half of the pilot clubs. No mentorship. Again, parents are the key actors / drivers.

Financial development: Barely touched upon by any pilot club; Efforts circulate mainly around financial monitoring rather than financial skill development

Areas to improve

While clubs put efforts no club works on all 8 domains; pilot clubs seem to be recognizing importance of DC but they are missing depth and structure in their activities, often taking form of conversations and meetings, rather than a structured, integrated approach.

Need for a coordinated approach and tailored education. Clear lack of dedicated personnel, mentorship and tailored DC expertise is evident throughout. DC development and guidance often is highly dependent on the coaching and medical staff, making it debatable which interests are predominant.

There is great distinction between practices in men's and women's departments resulting from differences in resources and post-career needs.



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ATHLETIC TRIANGLE

(COLLABORATION AROUND ATHLETES)

The athletic triangle in the Bulgarian football dual career context reflects a strong network of support between athletes, their parents, and coaches, which plays a central role in balancing sporting and educational goals.

Pilot clubs such as Levski and Ludogorec and CSKA have strategic partnerships with secondary schools, offering a type of “boarding football school” options. Players often stay at dormitories and coaches (and in some cases medical staff and / or team administrators) have close communication with school personnel, monitoring the athletes’ academic performance. Levski and Ludogorec have formal partnerships with higher educational institutions as well.

In well-structured environments like the National Sport Academy and proactive clubs such as Ludogorec, Levski and CSKA, this relationship is actively nurtured. Pilot clubs have claimed supportive environments, where training schedules are organized and adapted to fit around academic commitments, avoiding clashes therein. Pilot clubs have claimed good communication with parents, with meetings organized twice per annum and coaches being on disposal upon request. A different vibe was noted in private conversations with coaches (naturally as they are not DC coordinators) sharing that sometimes parents are too intrusive, while parents on the other hand have expressed their desire for more frequent and better structured (and augmented) meetings.

Pilot clubs have claimed to provide career guidance to prepare players for future roles in sport. Where the triangle functions well, coaches and parents also encourage planning for post-playing careers, often in coaching or sport-related roles. However, in most clubs, especially in earlier stages of player development, the concept of dual career is not formally introduced, leaving athletes reliant on informal advice from coaches or family. Even when players are made familiar with options and benefits of DC, the concept of dual careers is introduced rather than actively promoted.



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ATHLETIC TRIANGLE (COLLABORATION AROUND ATHLETES)

Strong “parent – coach – athlete” bonds across focus groups, with athletes benefiting from close relationships with both their parents and their coaches, who put efforts to support both sporting and academic ambitions.

Area of improvement: In specific cases the “parent-coach” angle communication requires improvement

On an individual note – where the triangle is strong and aligned with institutional support, athletes are more likely to achieve both academic success and sporting progression, while feeling secure about their post-playing career paths.

Communication of the **athletic triangle** with **academic institutions** is at sufficient level.

Area of improvement: the introduction of DC training for clubs and their appreciation of their responsibility therein – for instance conduct of regular progress meetings; presence of club DC to player’s PTA

Positive outcomes in structured systems: When strong relationships are matched with institutional support, athletes achieve better balance between sport and education and feel more secure about life after football.

Areas of improvement: promote, encourage even require the practice of DC as a plan A, highlighting positive correlation with on-pitch performance

Awareness gaps in clubs: Except of of NSA, the concept of a dual career is not formally presented, leaving athletes reliant on informal conversations especially early in their development. While Ludogorec has claimed partnership with strategic allies, in the cases of Levski and CSKA, such are not structured.

Areas of improvement: educational and / or career fairs organised ideally by the clubs, or the BFU



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SUPPORT IN TRANSITIONS

Support for transitions in the Bulgarian football dual career setting focuses on helping athletes move smoothly from active playing to life after sport.

Strategic approach and strategic support

While there are strategic partnerships with schools in all pilot clubs, just two (NSA and Ludogorec) have expanded such partnerships to higher educational institutions. All pilot clubs regard the completion of secondary education as mandatory with efforts being placed even for clubs to monitor academic performance. Yet none of the pilot clubs provides support in terms of choice and application from secondary to higher educational institutions. Pilot clubs have put efforts to engage organizations in offering internships for their athletes, but such usually circulate around sporting roles rather than general industry options.

DC development framework

Mentorship is not practiced among pilot clubs. All pilot clubs have representatives that can act as DC role models, yet the general society focuses more on their on-pitch achievements, rather than overcoming the challenges and bearing the fruit from DC.

All pilot clubs appoint psychologists, who work with both men's and women's teams, yet their activities circulate more around building strength and improving sporting performance, rather than acting as life skill or mental coaches. Levski and Ludogorec have appointed nutritionists, who while appointed for the Senior men's team provide guidance to younger players.

The role of study supervisors is mainly practiced by parents and partially by coaches (which sometimes leads to conflicts between their on-pitch ambitions and the supervision of academic results).



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SUPPORT IN TRANSITIONS

Career guidance, identity development:

While pilot clubs encourage players to engage in DC, the lack of active awareness campaigns / initiatives, of expertise, dedicated staff and mentorship often demotivate players to put the extra efforts required in combining their athletic career with higher academic achievements.

Representatives of both NSA, Ludogorec and Levski have expressed that the clubs spread awareness on available personal development programs.

In environments like the National Sport Academy, female players are offered employment opportunities within the academy or coaching roles in other clubs, ensuring continuity in their professional involvement in sport.

While, all pilot clubs aim to prepare players for a possible early termination of their sporting careers, none of the clubs have structured support for post-sporting care.

Life-skills and competences:

Clubs such as CSKA and Ludogorec also emphasize personal development alongside football training, using specialist staff (e.g., psychologists) to build life skills and prepare players for future careers. Although this can be seen as a good practice, the devoted time on the domain and their different essentially expertise indicate that a more concentrated approach should be followed.

Women's setting

Pilot men's clubs claim that DC is nearly impossible for players in the senior team (due to time constraints given their full-time contracts). Players of NSA and the women's teams of the remaining pilot clubs act as an example that DC can be actively pursued if there is a strong desire (or need) to do so.

One staff member or coach in the women's teams, often combines several roles, including and as a DC expert in a variety of domains. Yet in fact, women are more actively pursuing a DC and being prepared for their post-sporting career life. One explanation is that clubs (and staff) acknowledge the need of women to do so (given the remuneration and women's football setting in the country).



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SUPPORT IN TRANSITIONS

Where structured support exists, athletes experience a more secure and confident transition.
Nonetheless, this level of assistance is not yet consistent across all clubs,
highlighting the need for broader adoption of dedicated transition programs.

- **Structured opportunities for female players:** The National Sport Academy offers clear post-playing roles, such as coaching or academy employment, to support smooth transitions.
- **Holistic development approach:** Clubs like CSKA integrate personal development programs, with specialists (e.g., psychologists) helping athletes build life skills beyond football.
- **Continuity within sport:** Many transition pathways focus on keeping athletes in the sporting environment, leveraging their expertise as coaches or sport specialists.
- **Impact of structured support:** Where formal programs exist, athletes report more secure and confident transitions into post-playing careers.
- **Need for wider implementation:** Such structured transition support is not yet standard across all clubs, indicating a need for broader adoption of dedicated programs.

The lack of adequately structured DC framework and the medium in terms of effectiveness support in transition, results in intrinsic motivators and parents usually being the driver to the pursue of DC



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MULTIDISCIPLINARY SETTING

In the Bulgarian football dual career context, multidisciplinary settings bring together various professionals and resources to support athletes' holistic development. These multidisciplinary setups enable not only athletic performance but also academic achievement, career preparation, and personal growth, although their scope and consistency vary between clubs.

At the National Sport Academy, training and education are closely coordinated, with schedules adapted to accommodate athletes' academic commitments. The female football program integrates educational planning directly into the sporting environment, ensuring players can progress in both areas.

CSKA complements this approach by engaging specialists, such as psychologists, who work with athletes outside the football field to develop life values and personal skills.

Levski and Ludogorec adds on the the aforementioned by engaging further experts, such as nutritionist and analysts.

Nonetheless, it must be noted that no formal, dedicated teams are being appointed, resulting to spread of responsibility (which in some cases leads to no responsibility, especially when players are not strongly committed or parents are not heavily involved).

The informal multidisciplinary team in all pilot clubs involves the head of the academy, the coaching and medical staff, and team administrators. In meetings, while there is a sharing of impressions on player's development, sporting progress reviews prevail – there is a clear need to follow a more DC centered approach.



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SUPPORT IN TRANSITIONS

- **Integrated training & education:** At the National Sport Academy, training schedules are adapted to fit athletes' academic commitments.
- **Direct educational planning:** The female football program embeds education into the sporting environment, ensuring progress in both areas.
- **Specialist involvement at CSKA:** Psychologists and other professionals support athletes' personal development and life skills beyond the pitch.
- **Holistic athlete support:** Multidisciplinary settings combine sport, education, and personal growth to prepare athletes for life during and after football.
- **Variation across clubs:** The scope and quality of multidisciplinary support differ, with some clubs offering comprehensive systems and others lacking similar structures.

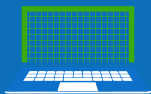


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EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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Bulgaria has a long history in practicing DC
Yet we are at the start of a structure DC journey

Pilot clubs lack a clearly dedicated DC structure and the persons appointed on informally to those roles lack tailored DC training. This is acknowledged both by the pilot clubs and their staff, who are expressed interest in expanding their skills in terms of dual development to better perform their functions. Currently, DC actors often rely on their own experience and opinions on the goals, benefits and challenges of DC.

The fact that DC settings are not organized in Bulgarian clubs, makes it difficult for those appointed with DC coordinator roles to form networks and share best practiced.

DC coordinators often perform a variety of functions yet are usually specialized in one of the 8 domains. With the absence of formal multidisciplinary teams and regular meetings, it is believed that DC coordinators themselves should receive optimal training on all eight domains. Financial development or the development of tailored social skills, such as media presence, public speaking are a crucial factor in one's life nowadays, but none of the pilot clubs touch upon those.

The training should consider both that the currently acting as DC staff a) have other primary roles and b) this is not their field of expertise (hence it is deemed necessary as they receive training on how to deliver the training to others, engaging them).

DC activities (training and implementation) should also consider that the varying needs and environment of boys and girls.

Increased awareness on DC itself and the benefits of it is crucial for the entire Bulgarian football community.



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EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF DC COORDINATORS

- ❖ Creating DC structures within organizational chart
- ❖ Drafting a DC policy and dedicated toolkit
- ❖ Establishing a DC network
- ❖ Provide tailored DC training on all 8 domains, including training on delivery within club and to players, DC role and their responsibilities as intermediary in the athlete triangle
- ❖ Enhance communication internally and with external stakeholders to improve understanding of DC, its importance from early age and the benefits therein
- ❖ Enhance internal and external awareness of DC options and promote active pursue of DC
- ❖ Stress importance of unceasing dual development and continuously monitor the developmental results
- ❖ Contribute to the effective organization of career and educational fairs



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EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF FOOTBALL COACHES

- ❖ Ensuring understanding of DC structures
- ❖ Ensure compliance with DC policy
- ❖ Provide tailored DC training on all 8 domains, including their responsibilities on promoting and supporting the DC of players
- ❖ Enhance internal communication and cooperation with DC coordinators and other DC staff to improve delivery of DC support and monitoring performance results
- ❖ Enhance internal and external awareness of DC options and promote active pursue of DC
- ❖ Stress importance of unceasing dual development



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EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF DC STAFF

- ❖ Ensuring understanding of DC structures
- ❖ Ensure compliance with DC policy
- ❖ Establishing a DC network
- ❖ Provide tailored DC training on all 8 domains, including training on delivery within club and to players, role and their responsibilities on promoting and supporting the DC of players
- ❖ Enhance internal communication and cooperation with players, coaches and DC coordinators to improve delivery of DC support and monitoring performance results
- ❖ Enhance internal and external awareness of DC options and promote active pursue of DC
- ❖ Stress importance of unceasing dual development



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RECOMMENDATIONS



**DUAL CAREERS
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Awareness campaigns and tools to allow:

- DC structures and approaches to include all 8 domains
- Clubs to be informed of the positive correlation of DC and on pitch performance
- Increase awareness on available options

➤ Appointment of ambassadors (role models):

- Promote DC to show that should be incorporated within the Plan A

➤ Dedicated DC policy to:

- Facilitate structures in clubs
- Creation of a job (including job description, responsibilities, etc)
- Enhance implementation by clubs and ensure staff adherence

➤ Tailored training and workshops, incorporating all domains, the challenges, support, opportunities, benefits and consequences, accessible by all member clubs (in person and a shorter version possibly online):

- DC coordinators
- DC staff
- Players, with special focus on their own responsibility to pursue rather than rely
- Parents, with special focus on importance of their support and encouragement as seen by players
- Other relevant stakeholders



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Culture change is needed to alter how DC is perceived





RECOMMENDATIONS



**DUAL CAREERS
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- Strategic partnerships and allies:
 - Diversity in terms of subject and location
 - Flexible programs
 - Funding options

- Active encouragement for DC by BFU through:
 - Incorporation of modules in the “Coaching Academy” program
 - Inclusion of respective criteria in licensing
 - Creation of dedicated work places to encourage engagement in DC

**Consistent monitoring
Of performance and results**



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Strengths

- Many players in fact pursue DC (often without even realising it)
- Bulgarian culture – warmer, more family orientated, caring, building bonds
- Secondary education regarded as mandatory for clubs and parents
- Proactive clubs have started understanding the importance of DC and its positive correlation to on-pitch performance
- DC roles unofficially appointed / practised by staff club
- Some DC activities practised in pilot clubs
- Role models are available to be engaged

Opportunities

- Lower salaries and high dropout enforce the need on players to pursue DC
- Exploit the strong athletic triangle bonds to promote DC
- Exploit the established strategic higher educational partnerships
- The effective introduction of DC by pilot clubs will make them “innovators” in the area in the context of Bulgarian football
- The lack of created structures and policies allow us to properly introduce and implement the DC concept
- Engage other stakeholders – such as corporate organisations
- Use ambassadors to raise awareness and promote the pursue of DC



Weaknesses

- No DC expertise or trained professionals
- No DC structures and formal policies
- DC perceived as a “Plan B”
- Infrastructural, monetary and human capital (multiple roles within one organisation) prevent effective and efficient DC environment / support
- Lack of awareness on DC and DC options

Threats

- Introduce a training that does not reflect the needs and abilities of local stakeholders
- Due to multiple roles, DC coordinators become demotivated both in the train
- Non-adherence to DC vision
- No change in the way DC is perceived – by players, parents, clubs and the society



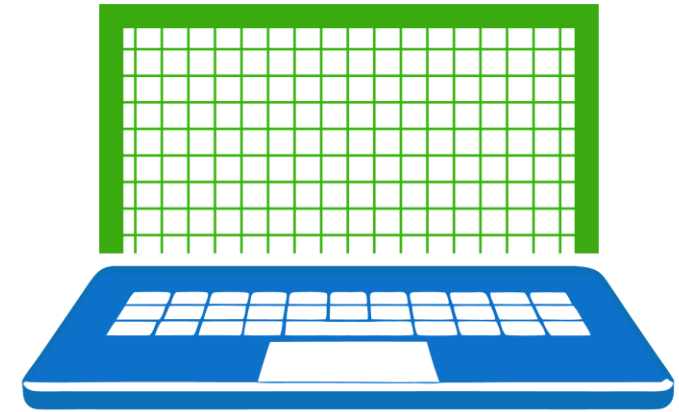
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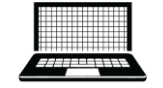
Educational Dual Career (EDU DC)

KEY FINDINGS DENMARK PILOT CLUBS

1. Framework and summary
2. Needs for Supporting Dual Careers
3. Challenges in Dual Career Implementation
4. Best Practices and Success Stories
5. Key Takeaways for Staff Education
6. Implementation Recommendations
7. Conclusion



DUAL CAREERS IN FOOTBALL EDU DC



OVERVIEW OF DUAL CAREER AND FOCUSGROUP CONTEXT

Dual Career Definition

Dual career means supporting young athletes in both their sports and academic growth simultaneously.

Focus Group Participants

Research gathered insights from players, coaches, parents, education coordinators, and club management in Danish football clubs (4 pilot clubs).

Key Research Aims

The study aimed to identify essential support needs and outline effective dual career education for club staff.

Findings Overview

Effective support requires collaboration, communication, flexibility, and holistic development for young athletes.

KEY SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED

Structured Coordination

Coordinated efforts between clubs and educational institutions align schedules and expectations effectively for dual career support.

Transparent Communication

Clear communication among educational institutions, clubs, and families is a critical issue for consistent support and understanding.

Flexible Scheduling

Training and academic schedules must be mutual flexible to accommodate individual needs and academic demands.

Holistic Development

Supporting personal identity and emotional well-being is essential for balanced holistic development.

BARRIERS AND STRUCTURAL ISSUES

Time and Scheduling Conflicts

Morning training and early professionalization often clash with school hours (time slots), creating significant time pressure for players.

Fragmented Support Systems

Different school attendances cause inconsistent support due to fragmented schedule and insufficient coordination.

Mental Load and Wellbeing

Balancing sports, academics, and social life imposes a heavy mental load and potential lack of wellbeing, especially without structured support.

Gender and Structural Inequalities

Female players face additional barriers from lower earnings and fewer dedicated support structures in some clubs.

WHAT WORKS WELL IN CLUBS

Balanced Sport and Academics

The 10th-grade pathway (Danish educational system) integrates sports training with academic education and life skills development.

Life Skills and Financial Literacy

Classes on general economic understanding, budgeting, taxes, and life skills help players prepare for real-world challenges beyond sports.

Parental Engagement

Regular meetings and home visits enhance mutual communication and understanding between clubs and families.

Mental Coaching and Support

Providing emotional support and mental coaching builds resilience and helps players manage pressure.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATING STAFF (CLUBS)

Structured Collaboration

Appointing education coordinators and holding regular meetings using shared communication platforms for effective teamwork.

Promote Flexibility

Adapt training schedules to academic calendars (early awareness) and support sabbaticals or reduced workloads during key periods.

Holistic Development

Integrate life skills, identity work, and well-being activities into regular club routines for holistic development.

Mental Health Support

Provide access to mental coaches and create peer reflection spaces to strengthen mental health support.

STEPS FOR CLUB-LEVEL EXECUTION

Policy Development

Clubs must create tailored policies and educational frameworks supporting dual careers in their own unique contexts.

Staff Training

Training staff on dual career principles and communication strategies ensures support of players holistic development.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Regularly assessment and evaluation of dual career initiatives guarantees effectiveness and allows necessary adjustments.

Sharing Best Practices

Exchanging successful models among clubs fosters continuous improvement and stronger dual career support and strategies.

Conclusion

FINAL REFLECTIONS AND CALL TO ACTION

Holistic Athlete Development

Supporting athletes beyond sports nurtures their overall well-being and long-term success on and off the pitch.

Structured Collaboration

Clubs must prioritize flexible, structured collaboration to effectively support dual career pathways.

Staff Education Importance

Educating club staff is a key element to sustaining and improving dual career support for young athletes.

Empowering Young Athletes

Implementing recommendations creates supportive environments empowering athletes in sports and academics.



**DUAL CAREERS
IN FOOTBALL
EDU DC**



FAI Presentation Summary



Implementation Plan for EDU-DC in
League of Ireland Academies



Introduction to EDU-DC Project

"EDU-DC: Building Dual Career Pathways for Irish Football Talents"

- 1) Overview of EDU-DC goals: Dual career support for players.
- 2) Why this matters for League of Ireland academies.
- 3) Vision: Empowering young footballers to excel on and off the pitch.





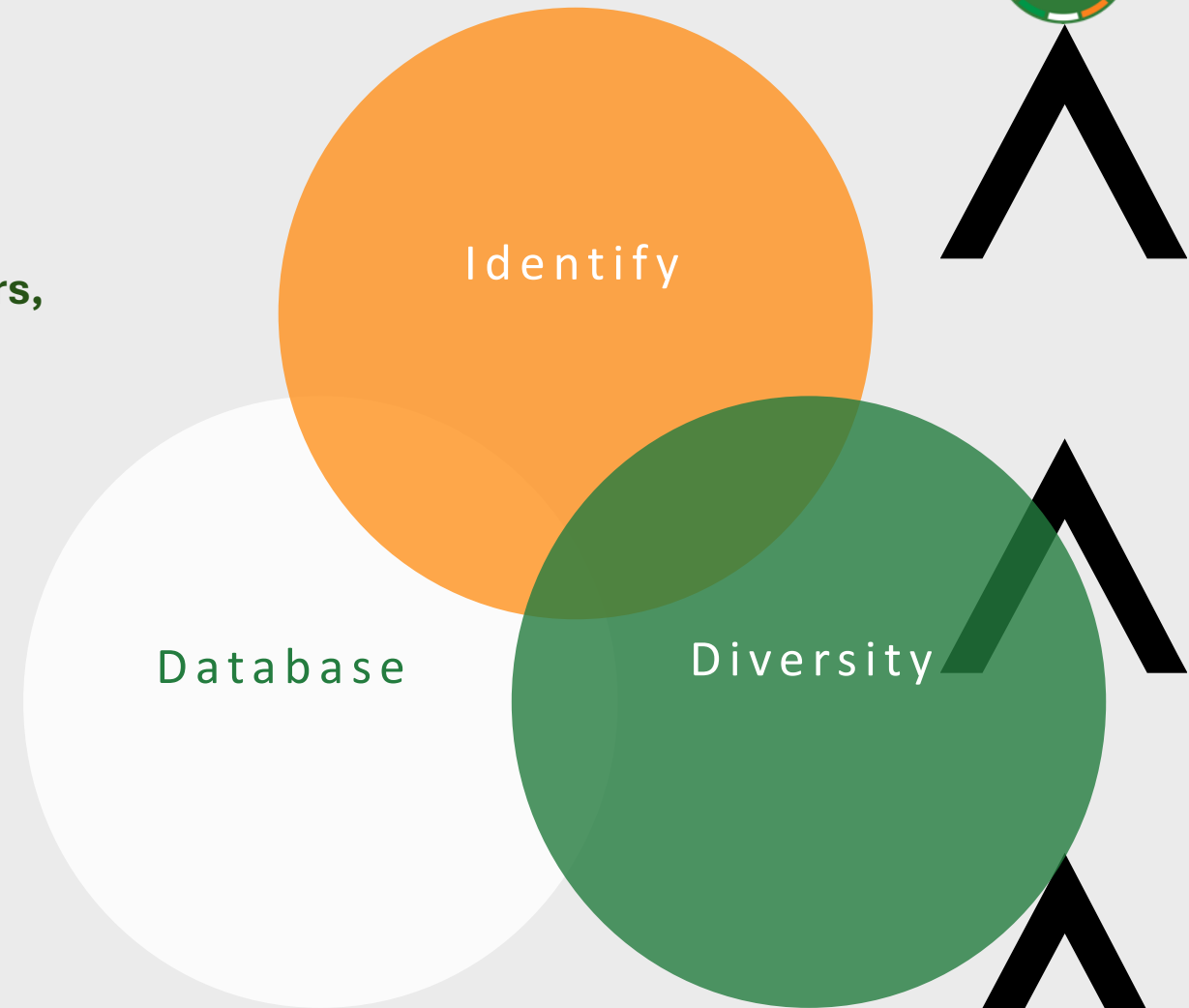
**Conduct outreach to clubs
for nominations.**



Mapping Profiles in Irish Football

- "Mapping Profiles for Dual Career Success"

1. Identify DC Coordinators and target groups (players, coaches, support staff).
2. Create a database of key personnel in League of Ireland Academies.
3. Ensure diversity and gender parity in selections.





Distribute surveys to Academies and collect responses.



Conducting Surveys

"Surveying Needs and Challenges"

Develop surveys targeting:

- 1.Players aged 16-21.
- 2.Coaches and DC staff.

Focus areas:

- Education
- Life Skills
- Wellbeing
- Employability.





**Use testimonials to
shape dual career
policies.**



Gathering Testimonials

"Collecting Stories and Insights"

Ensure gender balance.

Conduct interviews with:

1. 2 players per academy.
2. 2 DC staff or coaches per academy.





Collaborate with
experts to finalise the
pilot roadmap.



Needs Analysis and Pilot Design



FOCUS	ACTIVITY	ACTION
"Diagnosing Needs, Designing Solutions"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Analyse feedback from surveys and interviews.	Collaborate with experts to finalise pilot roadmap.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identify barriers to education and career support.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Design pilot actions tailored to League of Ireland contexts.	

Training DC Coordinators

"Empowering DC Coordinators"

Provide online training on:

Holistic DC model dimensions (e.g., education, life skills).

Practical assignments like CV workshops

Use an online platform for accessibility.



**Pilot the program with
4 clubs.**



Monitor and support implementation.



Training Coaches and PDMs



"Face-to-Face Training for Coaches"



Deliver in-person sessions covering:

1. Theoretical foundations.
2. Practical applications.

Target:

At least 50% female participation.



Track progress and
collect feedback.



Implementing Pilot Actions

"Bringing Plans to Life"

1. Activities for players:

2. Workshops on identity development.

2. Sessions on managing sports and education.

3. Involve families and staff in initiatives.



Monitoring and Evaluation

- "Ensuring Effective Implementation"

- Regularly assess:

1. Player progress
2. Program effectiveness.

Use feedback to refine actions.





Promote learnings via
social media and
newsletters.



Communication and Dissemination



"Sharing Success Stories"



- Host local engagement events:
- Showcase pilot results.
- Engage stakeholders.
- Participate in the EDU-DC International Conference.

Conclusion

"Pathway to Dual Career Success"

1. Summary of actions taken.
2. Vision for long-term integration of dual career support.

Call to action:

Collaboration across League of Ireland academies.

