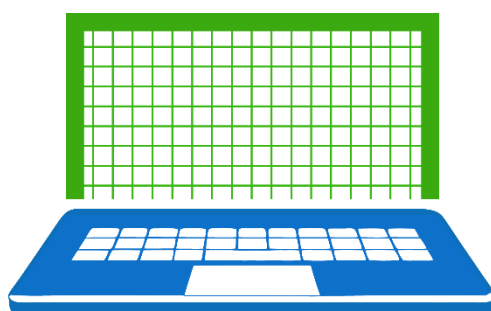




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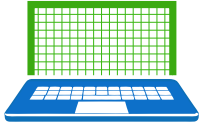
DUAL CAREERS **IN FOOTBALL** **EDU DC**

Deliverable 1.3
Concluding report on interviews and testimonials



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Introduction deliverable 1.3

This report provides an overview of all the interviews with various staff members from the clubs Crystal Palace, Arsenal, SC Freiburg, TSG Hoffenheim and Halmstads BK. These clubs are considered best practices in the field of dual career development.

In addition to the complete overview of all interviews, the report includes one or more detailed interview summaries per club, highlighting the key findings. These summaries provide insight into the role of the staff member as well as the club's methods and vision.

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Testimonials EDU – DC

Nations visited	Clubs visited	Interviewed staff members
3	5	16

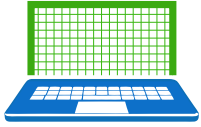


Name	Club	Role
Matthew Henly	Arsenal	Head of education
Sophie Reynolds	Arsenal	Head of player care
Alexei Rojas	Arsenal	Player U21
Rowan Griffiths	Crystal palace	Head of education
Alex Wynter	Crystal palace	Head of player care
Paul Barry	Crystal palace	Head of coaching
Gary Issott	Crystal palace	Academy manager
Orla Haran	Crystal palace	Head of Women's Academy
Natalie Bowles	Crystal palace	Women's Academy Player Care Lead
Alessandro Speroni	Crystal palace	Player U18
Zach March	Crystal palace	Player U21
Toby French	Premier League	Career coach
Daniel Schwaab	Freiburg	Connection coach
Markus Kiefer	Freiburg	Pedagogical coordinator
Philipp Himstedt	Freiburg	Sports psychologist
Martin Schweizer	Freiburg	TD academy
Tobias Schätzle	Freiburg	Teammanager first team
Luka Nujic	Freiburg	Player U23
Theresa Bernhard	TSG Hoffenheim	Sports psychologist
Morgan Ljungkvist	Halmstads BK	DC coordinator



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Crystal Palace



Crystal Palace F.C. is a professional football club based in South London, England. Founded in 1905, the club is nicknamed “The Eagles” and plays its home matches at Selhurst Park. Crystal Palace competes in the Premier League, the highest level of English football.

The club has a strong local identity and is known for its passionate supporters and vibrant matchday atmosphere. Over the years, Crystal Palace has established itself as a competitive side in English football, regularly competing against some of the country’s biggest clubs.



Interview Crystal Palace – Head of Education (Rowan Griffiths)

The primary philosophy of the education department at Crystal Palace Academy is to ensure that professional football training has no bad impact on a player's educational or social development. The academy operates on a system of two-year registration cycles, with critical decision points occurring at ages 9, 11, 14, and 16. A key focus is placed on the transition from primary to secondary school at the Under-11 level.

Crystal Palace has three distinct models to balance football and schooling:

1. Part-time (U9–U12): Players attend their regular schools full-time and train during evenings or weekends.
2. Hybrid (U13–U16): Players are released from school one or two days a week to train and study at the academy. Unlike some clubs that only provide study support, Crystal Palace employs qualified teachers to deliver active lessons in core subjects.
3. Full-time (U17–U18): At 16, players become full-time "scholars" and employees of the club.

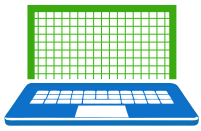
The player can choose the regular school by himself. The club currently coordinates with 75 different schools, where the Head of Education has contact with each school.

The academy places great importance on academic achievement. In recent years, players have achieved strong results in both A-levels and BTEC programs. The Head of Education



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highlights that “dual careers” are strongly encouraged. Some professional players are currently studying for undergraduate degrees at the University of Portsmouth, while others are preparing for entrance exams to Oxford. This approach is important, as the club understands that most academy players will not go on to have long-term careers as professional footballers.

Crystal Palace has also been a leader in providing “aftercare” for an academy dropout. The support system includes a dedicated Head of Player Care, often a former player who understands the challenges of moving on from football, as well as specialists in areas such as psychology, nutrition and safeguarding. By investing in both education and personal development, the club aims to develop not only potential first-team players, but also well-rounded individuals who are prepared for careers outside of football.

Interview Crystal Palace – Head of Player care (Alex Wynter)

The Player Care department at Crystal Palace Academy is based on the idea that staff support young people, not only young football players. The department works closely with the safeguarding, psychology and education teams to make sure players develop in all areas of life. The team includes people with different backgrounds, such as former players and experts in mental health and youth work. This helps them understand the players’ experiences while also giving professional support.

The academy offers support that fits each age group. For players from Under-9 to Under-16, the focus is on daily wellbeing, balancing school and football and strong involvement with parents. For older players in the professional development phase (U18–U21), the focus moves towards preparing them for adult life and a professional career. An important goal is helping players build an identity outside of football. Players are encouraged to have other interests, such as music, chess or education, so they are not defined only by their success in sport.

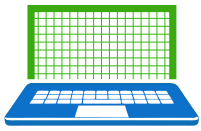
Crystal Palace is a leader in managing player transitions and avoids using the term “drop out” for players who leave the academy. Instead, they see it as a move into a new stage of life. Players aged 18 and over receive up to three years of aftercare from the club.

The department works in a very collaborative way through weekly multi-disciplinary team meetings. In these meetings, staff from player care, coaching, education and medical teams discuss the wellbeing of each player. The club also values strong communication with parents through “parent voice” feedback sessions and workshops. These workshops cover important life skills such as mental wellbeing, social media use, finances and healthy relationships, with a focus on respect and consent. In the end, the role of Player Care is to be a trusted and supportive link between the family, the player and the club’s coaching staff.



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Arsenal FC



Arsenal F.C. is a professional football club based in North London, England. Founded in 1886, Arsenal is one of the most successful and historic clubs in English football. The team plays its home matches at the Emirates Stadium and competes in the Premier League.

Nicknamed “The Gunners,” Arsenal has won numerous domestic trophies, including multiple league titles and FA Cups. Arsenal has a large global fan base and a strong tradition of developing talented players and playing attractive football.



Interview Arsenal – Head of Education (Matthew Henly)

The education department at Arsenal Academy works with a clear idea: joining the academy should never harm a young player’s education. The aim is that every player achieves more at school than they would outside the club, because of the extra support they receive. Under Premier League rules, the Head of Education must be a qualified teacher. This shows that clubs now want real teaching professionals with classroom experience to work in football.

A key part of Arsenal’s approach is keeping life as normal as possible. Unlike many top academies that move players to one “club school,” Arsenal believes most players (U9–U16) should live at home and go to their local schools. This is a clear choice. The club wants young people to have a full life outside football and not see themselves only as “an Arsenal player.”

To combine training with school, Arsenal follows a strict plan to limit time away from school:

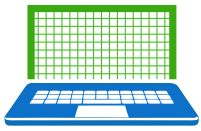
1. U9–U15: players go to school full-time and leave school only one afternoon per week for training.
2. U16: in their last year before becoming full-time scholars, players spend one full day a week at the academy. Because they miss about five hours of school, the club gives them six hours of private lessons.

For older players (U18–U21), Arsenal strongly supports a dual-career pathway. The club offers to pay all the costs for further education. This can include online degrees from the



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Open University, sports science courses through Setanta College or degree programs with the PFA Business School.

Another special part of Arsenal's approach is their aftercare policy. If a player leaves the academy, the club continues to pay for their education and still gives them access to tutors. This shows the club's "family" culture. Arsenal wants to make sure that players are supported in their move to life after football or in combining football with another career, no matter how successful they were on the pitch.

Interview Arsenal – Head of Player care (Sophie Reynolds)

The Player Care department at Arsenal Academy works with the main idea of "person first, player second." This means that to become a top football player, you first need to become the best version of yourself. The team has managers for different age groups (U9–U16, U18 and U21). They are part of the club's Operations department. They work closely with the psychology, safeguarding and medical teams. Every week, they have Multi-Disciplinary Team meetings. They also use a monthly "RAG rating" system (Red, Amber, Green) to check each player's mental health and well-being.

In the U18 phase, an important goal is to help players become more independent and develop life skills. The Head of Player care is a "safe person" for the players and acts as a link between the player and the coaching staff. This helps young players deal with the pressure of football. The club offers group workshops on topics such as social media and nutrition. At the same time, there is a strong focus on personal support. Players can have one-on-one meetings based on their own needs.

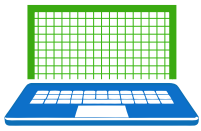
Arsenal uses a clear "transition strategy" to guide players through their journey. This has three stages: In (starting at the academy), Through (moving between age groups and school years) and Out (leaving the academy). When players leave, the club offers a lot of support. This can include arranging trials at other clubs, looking at scholarship options in the US or helping with university applications. The club understands that leaving can be emotionally difficult. That is why Arsenal has built a strong alumni program. This program offers long-term support, networking, mentoring and even job opportunities within different parts of the club.

To support parents, Arsenal recently introduced an online platform: "The Campus". It includes podcasts and other content made by club staff. The goal is to explain the academy's vision, values and key ideas. When players move into the U18 professional development phase, the club uses this platform to help parents understand that their sons need to become more independent. Parents are encouraged to let their sons take responsibility for their own careers. For example, players should contact coaches themselves if they are ill or have appointments. This is an important step in their growth as professionals.



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SC Freiburg



SC Freiburg is a professional football club based in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany. Founded in 1904, the club competes in the Bundesliga, the highest level of German football. SC Freiburg plays its home matches at the Europa-Park Stadion.

The club is known for its strong youth academy and sustainable approach to management. Despite having more limited financial resources compared to some larger German clubs, SC Freiburg has established itself as a competitive and well-organized team. In recent years, the club has regularly competed for European qualification, earning respect for its disciplined playing style and long-term vision.



SC Freiburg - Pedagogical coordinator (Markus Kiefer)

The SC Freiburg Academy is well known for bringing many young players into the first team. At the moment, around 11 former academy players are part of the professional squad. The club focuses on long-term personal growth instead of competing with other German clubs through high salaries. While some clubs offer more money to young players, Freiburg attracts talent with its strong “family culture” and a clear pathway to professional football.

A key rule at Freiburg is that education always comes first. Football must never replace school. Most players complete their Abitur (the highest German school degree) by the age of 19. To make this possible, the club works closely with four partner schools. From the beginning, the club speaks openly with parents and players. They talk not only about the dream of becoming a professional footballer, but also about what will happen if that dream does not come true.

For players in the Under-23 or second team, the focus often moves to higher education. After one year of full-time football, some players feel they need more mental challenge. Freiburg is now strengthening its dual-career program by working together with universities to offer flexible and online study programs. In the past, the club has also offered job training and coaching license courses during gap years. They now want to organize and improve this system even more.



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Freiburg's approach to education and development goes far beyond school and football. The academy supports players in building their identity through workshops and social activities, such as:

- Social work: players help in the community, for example by preparing meals for people in need.
- Cultural activities: the club organizes visits to the cinema, theater and local farms to widen the players' view of the world.
- Family involvement: connection coaches and education staff visit players' homes, sometimes even in other countries, to build strong relationships with parents.

The success of this system is supported by the long service of many staff members. Many of them have worked at the club for more than 15 years. This stability means that the dual-career vision does not depend on just one person, but is part of the club's culture.

SC Freiburg – TD academy (Martin Schweizer)

The sporting philosophy at SC Freiburg Academy is based on a broad approach called "School, Character, Football." The Technical Director (TD) is responsible for the football side of the academy. The TD works closely with the Head of Academy, who takes care of contracts and daily organization. An important part of the "Freiburg way" is long-term stability. Many staff members and coaches stay at the club for many years, sometimes even decades. This creates a strong "big family" feeling and helps young players move step by step from the academy to the first team.

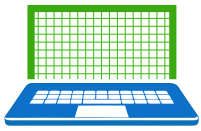
The academy strongly believes that focusing only on football is risky. An injury can suddenly end a career, so players must always have another path in life. For this reason, school is never less important than football. The club works closely with local schools and keeps track of players' grades. If a player's school results get worse, the club reduces their training time and gives them extra tutoring. The club's experience shows that almost every player who reached the first team also finished school successfully.

To follow each player's development in detail, Freiburg uses its own database built around the "STF Package." This system looks at six main areas:

- S (School): school results and diplomas.
- C (Character): energy, behavior and emotional growth.
- F (Football Intelligence): technical skills and tactical understanding.
- P (Perspective): physical development compared to age and future potential.
- A (Athletic): physical strength and fitness.
- K (Context): the environment, including parents, agents and friends.

A special part of Freiburg's structure is the role of the "connection coach". These are often former professional players. They act as a link between the U19, U23 and the first team. They guide players not only in football skills, but also in lifestyle, work attitude and personal identity. In addition, the club invests strongly in its own coaches. Every Friday, all academy





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coaches meet for 75 minutes. They discuss the club's 33 principles of play and even more importantly, their coaching culture. The focus is on how to teach well and how to connect with players as people, not only as athletes.

SC Freiburg – sports psychologist (Philipp Himstedt)

Philipp Himstedt, a sports psychologist at SC Freiburg, works with the U17 to U23 teams. He supports a broad and balanced approach to player development. The club understands that a football academy is a kind of “dream factory.” However, only about 1% to 3% of players will become professional footballers. Because of this, the club feels a strong responsibility to prepare all other players for a good life outside football.

The main goal of the sports psychology department is to develop the athlete and the person at the same time. This helps create psychological safety, because players see that they have more than one path in life. Himstedt helps players build an identity that is not only based on their performance on the pitch. By supporting interests in school or job training, the club makes sure that players feel valued as people, not only as athletes.

The focus on dual careers is clearly part of the club's daily work and culture:

- School comes first: Freiburg follows a strict rule: “If you are not in school, you do not train.” The club has worked closely with local schools for 25 years to create a good balance between football and education.
- Coaches who care: The club carefully selects coaches who truly care about the player as a person, not only as a football talent.
- Formal and informal support: In addition to workshops and meetings with former professionals, staff also have simple, everyday talks with players about topics outside football, such as the news, family or hobbies. This helps players think about more than just the game.

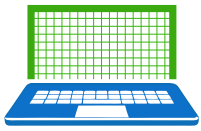
During regular multi-disciplinary team meetings and player reviews, staff members talk not only about physical results like speed or strength, but also about school progress, family situation and personal interests. Himstedt also notes that having activities outside football can improve performance. Learning a language, taking photos or playing a musical instrument allows players to step away from football pressure. When they return to the pitch, they often feel fresh and focused.

In the end, the Freiburg approach is simple: players are young people first and professionals second. The club wants to make sure they are ready for adult life, no matter how their football career develops.



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TSG Hoffenheim



TSG 1899 Hoffenheim is a professional football club from Hoffenheim, a small village in the state of Baden-Württemberg, Germany. The club was founded in 1899. Hoffenheim is best known for its fast rise through the German football leagues, reaching the Bundesliga in 2008.

The club plays its home matches at the PreZero Arena in Sinsheim. TSG Hoffenheim is known for its modern structure, strong youth academy and focus on innovation in areas such as sports science and player development. Despite coming from a small town, the club has become a stable team in German professional football.

TSG Hoffenheim – sports psychologist (Theresa Bernhard)

Theresa Bernhard, a sport scientist and psychologist, supports around 150 players in the women's department of TSG Hoffenheim, from the U12 teams up to the Bundesliga squad. Her work is part of a long-term partnership with Anpfiff ins Leben, an organization that helps young athletes build a strong educational base alongside their sport.

At Hoffenheim, having a dual career is not a choice for female players. It is a normal and required part of the system. The club believes that psychological and financial security come from having a 'plan B'. When players know they have another path for the future, they feel less fear about life after football. Bernhard explains that this feeling of safety often improves performance. Players who are mentally balanced and have interests outside the 'football bubble' are usually stronger and better able to reflect on their own development.

The success of Hoffenheim's model depends on having enough staff members to give personal attention to each player. She creates a safe and personal space where players can talk about their values, family and future plans. The goal is to see them as people first and players second. This personal approach includes:

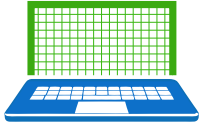
- Flexible study options: coaches are flexible and players can miss training if they need time to study for exams or attend university classes.
- Support at the training center: the academy has ten teachers who give extra lessons at the club.
- Work experience opportunities: the club works with sponsors and partner companies to offer internships. This helps players explore areas such as marketing or social work and prepare for life after football.

For the psychology department, success is not about every player getting the highest school degree. Instead, the goal is to find the best type of education for each individual player,



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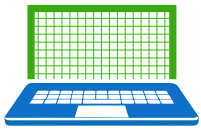
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based on her interests, talents and schedule. Whether a player chooses job training or a university degree, the main aim is that she leaves the academy with a clear plan for her future and strong self-confidence that does not depend only on football success.



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Halmstads BK



Halmstads BK is a professional football club from Halmstad, Sweden. The club was founded in 1914 and has a long history in Swedish football. Halmstads BK has won several Swedish league titles and is known for developing young players through its strong academy system.

The club plays its home matches at Örjans Vall and has a reputation for combining good football with a focus on education and personal development. Over the years, Halmstads BK has built a culture that values teamwork, long-term growth and close connections with the local community.

Halmstads BK – DC coordinator (Morgan Ljungkvist)

At Halmstads BK, the dual career approach is based on the belief that a person is more than just their football talent. Morgan Ljungkvist, who works both at the club and at Halmstad University, explains that skills learned in education (such as planning, building routines and thinking clearly) also improve performance on the pitch. The club believes that “you don’t play football with your feet, you play with your brain.” For this reason, being active in school helps players become more open to learning and better at reflecting on their own performance.

For more than 30 years, Halmstads BK has believed that school comes before sport. This idea is built into the club’s daily work. For example, the training ground is located close to schools to reduce travel time. The club also adjusts the match schedule of the U19 team around national university entrance exams. This way, players do not have to choose between an important test and a match.

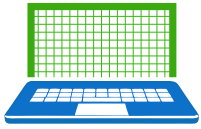
The club knows that every football career ends at some point, because of choice, injury or club decisions. That is why the academy puts strong focus on managing career transitions. Together with the sports psychology program at Halmstad University, players from the age of 15 receive support to deal with changes in their careers. This broad support prepares them for life after football and helps them build the mental strength they need to succeed in society, no matter how their football career develops.

Even though the club has success stories, including players who competed in the Bundesliga while continuing their university studies, there are still challenges. In men’s football, studying is not always seen as ‘cool’. A player’s social and economic background can also shape how they think about education. To change this culture, Halmstads BK points



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to role models from other sports, such as golf and athletics. These examples show that it is possible and valuable to succeed in both sport and education.

Ljungkvist advises other clubs to see dual careers as a solution, not as a problem. There may be short-term challenges, such as a player missing training or a match because of an exam. However, in the long term, the result is a healthier and more complete person, who is better prepared for professional football and for life after the game.



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