

Recognition of talented children

Recommendations for Sports Clubs



Background

The TALENT project emerges from a strategic collaboration between seven European countries, including Croatia, Italy, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Spearheaded by the Centre of Excellence of Split-Dalmatia County (CI SDZ), this project brings together a diverse consortium of universities, non-governmental organisations, and network organisations. This partnership leverages the unique strengths and experiences of each member to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young athletes pursuing dual careers in sports and academics.

Initiated on December 1st, 2022, and set to span over 30 months, the TALENT project is designed to foster a comprehensive approach to talent identification and development. By incorporating advanced educational techniques and innovative sports science technologies, the project aims to create a supportive ecosystem that facilitates the harmonious growth of young talents in both their educational pursuits and athletic endeavours.

This multinational collaboration is not just a pooling of resources but a fusion of cultural perspectives and expertise, which enriches the project's approach and enhances its applicability across different socio-economic contexts. The synergy of this diverse consortium is anticipated to set new standards in the detection and nurturing of sports talents, offering a model that can be adapted by other regions around the world.

Purpose of the project

The primary goal of the TALENT project is to seamlessly integrate sports and education to support young athletes in managing dual careers effectively. This integration is crucial as the demands of maintaining high performance in both academics and athletics can place significant stress on young individuals, often leading to burnout or early dropout from one or both fields.

Objectives of the project

- **Development** of methodologies for early talent identification
- **Adaptation** of educational programmes to meet the needs of athletes
- **Establishment** of a supportive environment that involves coaches, educators, and families.

Purpose of the TALENT Recommendations

Through the developed online platform, these recommendations are targeting teachers, parents, coaches, sports clubs and decision makers to better understand what the needs of talented children are, in order to support their development and prevent drop-out from school or from sports.



Introduction

Sports clubs are essential in creating an environment where young athletes can excel without having to choose between education and their sporting careers. By implementing policies that support dual careers, clubs can ensure that athletes receive the necessary academic flexibility and personal development opportunities. This booklet offers strategies for fostering collaboration with schools, providing academic support services, and promoting well-being to help athletes sustain both their education and their sporting aspirations.

Sports clubs serve as the foundation of athletic development, providing the necessary infrastructure, coaching expertise, and a competitive environment for young athletes to grow. While talent develops successfully through structured training, clubs must take a more holistic approach that balances sports with education, health, and career development. The modern sports club is no longer just a place to train, therefore, it must be a support system that nurtures young athletes through every phase of their development.

The role of clubs extends beyond the pitch. More precisely, young athletes require guidance in managing academic commitments, handling mental pressures, and preparing for careers, whether in sports or beyond. Clubs must work closely with schools, policymakers, and families to establish structured dual-career programmes, financial support mechanisms, and inclusive environments that allow every athlete to succeed.

The role of sports clubs in talent development

Sports clubs play a pivotal role in shaping young athletes' futures. Their responsibility goes beyond technical training solely. They must create an environment where talent is recognised early, nurtured systematically, and provided with the resources to succeed in both sports and life. Club management may not have a direct influence on athletes, but they play a crucial indirect role by carefully selecting highly skilled professionals for their expert team and creating an environment that fosters excellence through adequate working conditions. This is especially important when working with children, the experts hired by the club should also have a high level of pedagogical skills in addition to the skills of coaching the chosen sport. The expert team in each club are essentially the people on whose quality of work the development of an athlete's career depends the most. Therefore, clubs should encourage coaches to continue their education with the aim of further development, especially in the area of positive youth development.

To effectively support young athletes, clubs should focus on:

- A. Talent identification and early development:** Clubs must develop scouting programmes and partnerships with schools to recognise promising young athletes early and provide structured training from a young age.
- B. Holistic athlete support:** Training programmes should integrate sports science, mental health support, and injury prevention strategies to ensure long-term development.

C. Education and career planning: Clubs must collaborate with schools and institutions to create dual-career pathways that enable athletes to balance education with their sporting ambitions.

D. Sustainability and financial stability: Clubs must diversify funding sources through sponsorships, government support, and community engagement to ensure long-term growth.

Sports clubs do not just provide training and competition opportunities. In addition to that, they shape the entire athletic journey of a young athlete. Their environment plays a fundamental role in developing discipline, work ethic, and perseverance in players. Beyond training sessions, clubs are responsible for instilling core values such as teamwork, resilience, and leadership, which contribute to both sporting excellence and personal growth.

To effectively support talent development, sports clubs must create individualised training programmes that cater to athletes at different stages of development. Young athletes require different forms of coaching, support, and motivation than elite-level players. Clubs should provide progressive training models gradually increasing intensity while ensuring that players develop technical, tactical, and psychological skills in a structured way.

Additionally, a critical aspect of sports club development is mental well-being and athlete psychology. Many young athletes face high expectations from coaches, parents, and themselves, which can lead to stress and burnout. Clubs must employ sports psychologists, mentorship programmes, and educational workshops to help athletes manage pressure, stay motivated, and avoid overtraining.

Injury prevention and recovery are also crucial in talent development. Clubs must work with medical professionals, physiotherapists, and strength and conditioning experts to implement injury prevention programmes, ensure safe training environments, and facilitate rehabilitation processes when necessary. Promising athletes may suffer long-term setbacks that hinder their progression without proper medical support.

Furthermore, career guidance is an essential part of sports club responsibility. While many young athletes dream of becoming professionals, the reality is that only a small percentage achieve elite-level careers. Clubs must prepare athletes for alternative career paths in sports management, coaching, sports science, or even completely different fields. Career counseling programmes, internships, and education on financial management should be included in club structures.

Community involvement and social responsibility are also becoming increasingly important for sports clubs. Clubs that actively engage in community programmes, charity events, and youth outreach initiatives build stronger relationships with the public and develop athletes who are not only skilled but also socially responsible and connected to their surroundings.

Clubs can create an environment where young athletes thrive both on and off the field by expanding their role beyond physical training. A well-structured club nurtures long-term athletic, academic, and career success, ensuring that young talent reaches its full potential.

Strengthening club-school partnerships

Collaboration between sports clubs and educational institutions is essential for supporting young athletes. Many players leave sports prematurely due to academic pressures or a lack of structured dual-career support. Sports clubs can mitigate this issue by establishing strong partnerships with schools.

Sports clubs can take several proactive steps to build successful partnerships with schools:

- A. First, clubs should introduce flexible training schedules that align with school hours and academic calendars. By adapting training programmes around peak academic periods, clubs can reduce conflicts between education and sport, allowing athletes to perform well in both areas.
- B. Another crucial approach is offering academic support within the club environment. By hiring tutors or creating study centers within club facilities, student-athletes can complete assignments and prepare for exams before or after training sessions. This ensures they do not fall behind in their studies while maintaining high training loads.

- C. Shared resources and facilities are another avenue for strengthening cooperation. Schools and clubs should co-develop and share training fields, gym spaces, and rehabilitation centers, reducing costs and ensuring young athletes have access to top-quality facilities.
- D. Additionally, sports mentorship programmes can be established where professional athletes or former student athletes provide guidance and motivation to young players. These mentorship initiatives offer invaluable career advice and help young athletes navigate the challenges of balancing education and sport.
- E. Lastly, sports clubs must actively engage with parents and teachers, educating them about the benefits of dual careers. Hosting seminars and workshops for parents on how to support student-athletes can lead to stronger family involvement in the athlete's development journey.



Table 1. Examples of strategies for strengthening partnerships

Strategy	Description
Academic support programmes	Clubs provide access to tutoring services, learning centres, and online education platforms within club facilities to help athletes keep up with their studies.
Dual-career scholarships	Joint initiatives between schools, local governments, and clubs to offer financial assistance for young athletes who need support to continue both their education and sports training.
Internships and career development	Clubs collaborate with companies, universities, and sports federations to offer work experience programmes, preparing athletes for potential careers beyond professional sports.
Parental engagement seminars	Clubs organise information sessions for parents, educating them on how to support their child's dual-career pathway without adding excessive pressure.

Sport clubs, in cooperation with schools and policy makers, should enable not only talented children to develop their potential to the maximum, but also enable every child who wants to play sports to be able to train within school sports clubs and/or in club sports for all within recreational groups that are also monitored because a child who shows competitive potential and interest can be redirected to a competitive group at any time.

One of the biggest challenges sports clubs face is long-term financial stability. To maintain high-quality programmes, clubs need sustainable funding strategies beyond just membership fees. Several approaches can help secure financial stability:

- A. Sponsorship and corporate partnerships:** Clubs should actively seek sponsorship deals with local businesses, sports brands, and large corporations that align with their values.
- B. Government and federation grants:** Many national sports federations and governments offer funding programmes for grassroots and youth development initiatives.
- C. Community engagement and fundraising:** Clubs should engage their communities by hosting fundraising events, tournaments, and initiatives that generate additional revenue.
- D. Scholarship and financial aid programmes:** Establishing financial aid systems ensures that talented athletes from all economic backgrounds can participate without financial strain.

Conclusion

Sports clubs are at the forefront of athlete development, education, and career preparation. Clubs can create an environment where young athletes can excel on and off the field by fostering strong school partnerships, ensuring financial sustainability, and offering comprehensive athlete support. With the right policies and initiatives, clubs can truly become hubs of excellence in both sports and education.

Further information can be found on the project's website

www.talent-edu.eu



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