

May the Mentor be with You! An innovative approach to the Dual Career mentoring capacitation

¡Que el Mentor te acompañe! Un enfoque innovador para la formación de Mentores para la Carrera Dual

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Resumen

La Comisión Europea ha realizado notables esfuerzos en los últimos años para ayudar a aquellos estudiantes que, dentro del Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior, concilian sus estudios con el deporte de alto rendimiento (estudiantes-deportistas). Para ello, se han desarrollado diversos proyectos que buscan dar respuesta a las necesidades de este colectivo, siguiendo las recomendaciones establecidas por la propia Comisión Europea. El proyecto YODA Mentors, desarrollado en colaboración de seis países miembros de la Unión Europea, busca la formación de profesionales capaces de cubrir las necesidades especiales que estos estudiantes-deportistas puedan tener a lo largo de su carrera deportiva y académica, Mentores profesionales para la Carrera Dual, capaces de trabajar conjuntamente con instituciones de educación superior e instituciones deportivas a nivel europeo. En este artículo se describen las principales características del programa de formación desarrollado a partir de las recomendaciones establecidas por los comités de expertos de los países participantes, así como la experiencia de los participantes (mentores y aprendices) que están formando parte del mismo. Se resaltan y discuten las características diferenciales del proyecto YODA Mentors comparándolas con proyectos financiados con anterioridad y que comparten el objetivo de formar profesionales que participen en la Carrera Dual.

Palabras clave: Carrera Dual, Unión Europea, mentoría, estudiante-deportista, deporte y educación.

Abstract

The European Commission has made notable efforts in recent years to serve those students who, within the European Higher Education Area, combine their studies with performance sport (student-athletes). In this sense, various projects have been developed that seek to meet the needs of this group, following the recommendations established by the European Commission itself. YODA Mentors project, developed in collaboration of six member countries of the European Union, seeks the training of professionals capable of meeting the special needs that these student-athletes may have throughout their sports and academic careers, professional Mentors for the Dual Career, able to work together with higher education and sports institutions at European level. This work describes the main characteristics of the training program developed based on the recommendations established by the expert committees of the participating countries, as well as the experience of the participants (mentors and mentees) who are being part of it. The differential characteristics of the YODA Mentors project are highlighted and discussed, compared to previously financed projects with the same objective of training professionals involved in the Dual Career.

Key words: Dual career, European Union, mentoring, student-athletes, sport and education.

Introduction

The creation of the European Union meant the unification of economic and social policies among member countries to achieve a common framework for action. In the educational field, the Bologna Plan (Allegre, Berlinguer, Blackstone & Rüttgers, 1998) and the creation of the European Higher Education Area (European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, 1999) aimed to respond the need for unification of the training programs of the member countries as well as to promote mobility within the European Union, both for students, and for workers and teachers. In this new unified and international scenario of higher education, the role of the student has been updated, becoming the true protagonist of his/her educational process and their active role of learning is fostered throughout their life (European Union, 2018). Within the support received by the educational institution in which it is inserted, there will be room for new forms of tutoring and autonomous learning with special emphasis on the different mentoring processes.

After more than 20 years of evolution of the internationalization programs, in 2014 the European Commission (EC) took the idea to a new level by the creation of the Erasmus+ Programme (2014-2020), as a 14 billion budget for the promotion of education, training, youth and sport (European Commission, 2013). From that moment, the EC materialized its commitment not only in the field of education, but also on the facilitation of the implementation of European project to promote volunteering, arts and culture, fight against exclusion and sport, among others. The Erasmus+ Sport appears also in 2014 following the publication of the Lisbon Treaty in 2007. The treaty recognizes for the first-time sport as a European affair (article 165 of the treaty) and the “White Paper in sport” set the line for the policies to be developed under the European scope. Bearing this in mind the Erasmus+ Sport call, became a very important opportunity for associations, clubs, elite youth academies, as well as higher education institutions and foundations.

Within the different lines of promotion in the framework of the Erasmus+ Sport funding, the topic of the Dual Career (DC) has been promoted since the first call (European Commission, 2013). The concept of DC refers mostly to the challenge of reconciling a sports career with studies or work, which is a source of concern for most elite athletes. According to Reymond, Taylor, Earley, Friss, Soderlind, & Dini (2015, p.3),

“Dual career initiatives should at their core be about personal development of the athlete off the field of play.

At its best, dual career work will explore an athlete’s identity outside the game and their emotional wellbeing. It may involve practically supporting them to achieve basic literacy standards, school qualifications, how to write a CV and job application courses. Other key areas can include helping players to learn a trade, foreign languages, basic computer skills and even entrepreneurial support”.

This issue is being considered by the European Commission (EC), to promote the development of sport in a socially responsible environment, described in the *EU Guidelines on the Dual Careers of athletes* (European Commission, 2012). In this sense, the EC considers of great importance the improvement of the learning and education of athletes, through their educational training with the aim of developing their skills and competences outside the world of sport (European Commission, 2007, 2012).

Student-athletes who seek to combine studies and elite sports face difficulties in the reconciliation of his/her academic life with sports life (Brackenridge, 2004; Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003) which can lead to academic dropout (Álvarez & López, 2012; González & Torregrossa, 2009). Another important challenge in the student-athletes life occurs when the time comes for sports retirement and the search for alternatives to a livelihood that has consumed them during the central years of their academic on training (Puig & Vilanova, 2006; Torregrossa et al., 2015 ; Wylleman et al., 2004). This transition between sport life and life without professional-sport may implies mental health and financial issues (Carlson, Kim, Lusardi & Camerer, 2015; Goutterbagge, Aoki, & Kerkhoffs, 2015).

For several years, researchers have demonstrated the need for athletes to adjust to career transitions from sport, noting that an intervention that ensures a successful transition should cover the following fields or areas of action: information processing deliverance, existential psychology following, and mentoring (Lalvallee & Wylleman, 2000).

At the European level, the treatment of the special situation of student-athletes has not been carried out in a unitary way among the member countries (Committee - Qualifications / DCs in Sports), proliferating different DC policies focused on seeking the maximum development of the two facets of the recipients (Aquilina & Henry, 2010). The differences in DC policies and support structures found among EU countries calls for stronger cooperation between Member States in order to make progress towards a harmonized DC system across the EU from which high-mobility athletes could benefit from (Morris, Cartigny, Ryba et al., 2020). Cross-sectorial

cooperation among European States is needed, given the multifaceted character of DCs and specialized staff and a stable and systematic monitoring system is needed to ensure the effectiveness of DC programs or career assistance programs (Torregrossa et al., 2020). However, such support structures are fragmented and lacking coherence in most countries, not to mention the lack of consistency across all EU Members.

Another relevant aspect respect DC which is commonly forgotten is that of inclusion. Disability is a global issue on different levels: social, health, economic. It has been estimated that over one billion people in the world live with some form of disability. The percentage of disability in the world is constantly increasing due to the progressive aging of the population and the resulting increase in individuals suffering from chronic diseases (WHO, 2011), and the sport environment must face this situation and adapt its policies in order to be as inclusive as possible. But although in most of the elite sports environment, with differences between disciplines and individual or collective sports, there are trained professionals with full dedication to the sport, for disabled sports and athletes still the lack of resources and adapted programs supposes an added disadvantage to the already more difficult situation that these athletes face (European Commission, 2012).

There exists a big need to deal with this important problem thus various action programs and social policies are still being implemented in order to create strategic and organizational systems that want to promote social, territorial, economic and labor inclusion of these individuals. Moreover, if becoming more independent from third parties should be one of the goals of the DC programs (Torregrossa et al., 2015), then the Tutor, Support Provider or Mentor should be aware and qualified to give an efficient help to this population (European Commission, 2012).

The role of the DC Mentor is going to be fundamentally to “optimize elite athlete’s DC” (Defruyt et al. 2019), working on the various dimensions that affects the student-athlete, such as psychological, psychosocial, financial, educational and performance (Cosh & Tully, 2014). But these dimensions are not intrinsic to the subject but are influenced by a multitude of external factors and stakeholders who are satellites of the student-athlete’s figure. Therefore, the Mentor will need to interfere, negotiate and persuade the stakeholders, and align the different interests and expectations, looking after the interests of the mentee and to overcome the different barriers and difficulties, and if possible and for greater success, generating an environment of cooperation and growth hand in hand with the stakeholders (Ryan, Thorpe & Pope, 2017).

European DC projects focused on the support provider, tutor or mentor

Seeking to improve the living conditions of the student-athletes, the results of the Erasmus+ Sport Projects shows that 59 DC projects have been funded since the programme launch: 9 projects in 2015; 4 projects in 2016; 13 projects in 2017; 15 projects in 2018; and 17 projects in the last call, 2019.

Some of those that have been finished, opening the path that leads to the DC supporter professionalization, and that YODA Mentors project is now walking.

GEES (Gold in Education and Elite Sport). 2014 Call. Start:1-01-2015 – End:31-12-2016.

It aimed to describe the competences, instruments, and methods required for athletes to successfully prepare, manage, and finalize their DC pathway, as well as develop a profile of competences, instruments and methods required by DC experts/support providers working with student-athletes. GEES define the figure of “DC Support Providers” (DCSP).

The objective of the project was double, to research and define the Athletes’ competences needed for developing their own dual career pathway and, on the side of the provider, to qualify the support experts/services provided to athletes preparing, managing and/or finalizing a dual career ‘education and sport’ pathway.

GEES project has been a fundamental path opener for YODA. The defined DCSP figure, which partially overlaps with our mentor’s figure in terms of the support services provided. However, whereas the DCSP are sport professionals, already experts in DC given their background, whose expertise is put to the service of student-athletes, YODA mentors are being trained to become, from no-experience, DC support experts.

ESTPORT (An innovative European sports tutoring model of the DC of student- athletes). 2014 Call. Start:1-01-2015 – End:31-12-2017.

The core element of the European Sports Tutorship Program was the creation of the figure of “Sports Tutor”. Some of the key points and main features highlighted in the project were the need to help student-athletes to achieve academic and sports excellence, and therefore the need for ad hoc training for these sports tutors. Moreover, they highlighted the need to observe and monitor the academic performance of the students-athletes, and the opportunity to group these

students with the same needs and interests, so they improve together helping each-other.

The *ESTPORT*'s "Sports Tutor" also partially overlaps with our DC mentors in their role of supporting student-athletes on their academic path. But again, YODA project builds on previous results by taking a step further. "Sports Tutor", as defined in *ESTPORT* (Sánchez-Pato, Isidori, Calderón & Brunton, 2017), is clearly linked to the university where student-athletes are studying a degree.

YODA mentor's figure, however, is not linked to a particular institution, but it has been designed in wide approach, aimed at both academic and sports institutions regardless of academic or performance level. We aim at defining the skillset, knowledge and attitudes necessary for a new professional figure of mentors, who could provide guiding services at different educational or sport centers, public institutions, or as freelance professionals, and who will be linked primarily to the student-athlete.

DECA (Dual European Careers Athlete - Professional Basketball and Vocational Training). 2015 Call.
Start:1-01-2016 – End:31-12-2018.

The project, highly focused on the basketball environment, was designed to create a new approach to vocational education and training according to the DC by studying the relationship between sport and the economy. Finally, to provide results in the field of performance and limitations of the student-athletes.

DECA has addressed the European policy objectives for the DC of athletes in several ways. It gives promising athletes prospects to pursue their athletic careers, while simultaneously providing them with an education and vocational training to prepare them for employment after their athletic careers. In addition, the project was an innovative approach to solving the unemployment of youths in Southern European countries by serving as a best practice example for youth and sport mobility. YODA Mentors will provide a figure (the mentor) who contribute or even take the baton from *DECA*, to achieve its foundational objectives.

As can be seen in the projects indicated the individual who provides the council and support, that can be identified in the figure of the Tutor, DC Support Provider, depending on the reference or project (Knight, Harwood & Sellars, 2018; Sánchez, García & Rosique, 2018), or going one step further with the figure of the Mentor (Chambers, 2018). Indeed, there is still no clear and consistent definition of mentoring, on the contrary, there is some confusion between the

figure of the mentor, tutor or coach (Parsloe & Wray, 2000). But even if there are different approaches and competences attributed to this role, it is important enough to be one of the dimensions that must be measure while evaluating the student-athlete's perception of the DC (Sánchez-Pato, et al. 2016).

European DC projects with a special approach to disabilities or inclusion

Based on the funded projects, we have search for disabled approach or orientation of the project on the abstracts. The results show that only 2 projects, other than YODA Mentors, of the 59 previous projects have attended or focused on the Disabled athlete:

IMPACTS (Improving Para-Athlete Coaching and Training Careers in Sport). 2014 Call.
Start:1-01-2016 – End:31-12-2017.

Focused on the active and former disabled athletes, this project promotes the coach or trainer career after the end of the competitive life, aiming to improve career opportunities in sport for disabled athletes, and establishing links between education/training (vocational training centres) and sport (associations, clubs, athletes). As a methodology, they shared best practices in sports coach/trainer training methodology, practices and experiences in the relationship of sports and disabled athletes/trainers/coaches. But the final and most important goal was not only to promote the disabilities perspective on DC, but to promote the disabled athlete as a role model to increase participation of disabled people in sport.

IMPACTS aimed to provide new opportunities for athletes with disabilities to exercise the role of supporter, as well as to foster ties between educational and sports institutions. Although YODA has a similar inclusive perspective, it does not focus directly on the disabled athlete, but rather aims for the Mentor (with or without disabilities) to acquire the knowledge and have the necessary skills to guarantee the correct attention to athletes with special needs or disability.

Dual-Track Careers for Para-Athletes. 2019 Call.
Start: 01-01-2020 - End:31-12-2021.

Lead by one of the YODA Mentors Partners, AETOI Thessaloniki, Dual-track Careers has been launched in 2020 this DC and inclusive oriented project, defining the objective of conducting a grass-root research of the ecosystem around the athlete with a disability, to

find ways to get the system working more optimally, seeking ways to support families in the long term. As a result of this state of the art first research, they will produce a Handbook of Best Practices for professionals all over the EU, as well as to create a learning platform to orient the athlete transitioning to the workplace and to teach the athletes the basics of the business and entrepreneurial world.

YODA Mentors draws upon and builds on these previous EU projects financed by the Erasmus + Sport program, GEES (Gold in Education and Elite Sport), ESTPORT (European Sports Tutorship model for the DC of athletes), and DECA (Dual European Career Athlete - Professional Basketball and Vocational Training) because their innovative approach and success on the DC and support provider area, but also on IMPACTS because of its inclusive perspective.

Young Ordinary and Disabled sports' Athletes Mentors – YODA Mentors

2018 Call. Start:1-01-2019 – End:31-12-2020.

The differentiating and innovative value of the YODA Mentors project

Mentor-mentee oriented

As stated in the *EU Guidelines on DCs*, guidance could be helpful to develop and improve the conditions needed for sustainable DC programs allowing for tailor-made arrangements for elite athletes across Europe.

Mentoring is thus conceptualized as a dynamic and interactive relationship of professional exchange between individuals with different levels of experience, where the most experienced (mentor) guides and assists the new or training professional (mentee) with the purpose of promoting development during the career of the mentee. The figure of the mentor as the supporting person who guides and accompanies mentees in their professional development also performs a wider function from those of tutors or coaches (Jones et al., 2009).

This role represents paramount support for students to develop the necessary skills to achieve optimal performance along their career, and mentoring acquires great importance for those students who are part of DC programs and who have additional difficulties to develop their maximum potential in the academic and sports paths.

Tailor-made online and international program

By devising and implementing a cross-border mentors' training program at EU level, YODA Mentors contributes to the exchange and dissemination of good practices and learning experiences in the area, as recommended in the *EU Guidelines on DCs*. Furthermore, the project implements virtual environment monitoring tools, aiming at tackling school dropout early on, in compliance with the prevention of early school leaving, as included in the Europe 2020 strategy.

Other objectives included in the strategy fulfilled by this project are bringing more graduates to higher education and enhance graduate (an athlete) employability, while allowing for talented athletes to remain in the high-level sport system. YODA Mentors' approach contributes to this by highlighting two innovative aspects:

The project innovates by introducing a new mentors' training program to qualify them for DC management, with the necessary skillset to provide support to athletes with and without disabilities alike. Our mentor's figure is not linked to a particular educational institution or level of education. We aim at defining the skillset, knowledge and attitudes necessary for a new professional figure of mentor, so the conceptualization of this figure is more similar to Flecher's (2000). Therefore, the mentor could provide guiding services at different educational or sport centers, public institutions, or as freelance, and who will be linked primarily to the student-athlete.

The EU Guidelines on DCs (European Commission, 2012) clearly state that the demands for travelling and stays abroad make combining sport with studies hard. That is why we believe that online education and distance mentoring (with someone guiding athletes at their side regardless of their location) hold the key to successful management of DC. Moreover, to offer a mentor training program with the basic elements to qualify successful mentors, which could later be expanded upon and adapted to national education systems in the EU, could significantly reduce the cost of curriculum development. Therefore, the use of ICTs will open new communication channels ensuring continuity in guidance from mentors, as well as facilitating mobility of both athletes and mentors between partner countries, in compliance with aims stated in the Europe 2020 strategy, as well as, more specifically, in the EU Guidelines on DC.

Inclusion approached

Special mention is made in the mentoring programme on specific (and often neglected) challenges for athletes

with disabilities. Whilst the number of students with disabilities in higher education has increased over the past 10 years, their continued underrepresentation results in questions; in particular, regarding their overall education and learning experiences (Disability Rights Commission, 2006). There is still a lack of resources and support for the study of youth with disabilities. There exists a big lack of data regarding disabled athlete in higher education and especially in their possibilities in DC after para-sport will be finished.

Therefore, in order for young people with disabilities not only to play sports, but also to choose their studies at university with confidence, it is necessary to provide them with all kinds of assistance in both studies and sports. Unfortunately, if the adaptation of the physical environment is regulated and most universities are accessible to people with disabilities, then assistance in combining sports and studies is rarely received by athletes with disabilities.

YODA Mentors aims to ensure that people with disabilities are not discriminated against, and therefore creates the conditions for people with disabilities to participate fully and acquire knowledge in the field of DC. Thus, the participation of people with disabilities in the YODA Mentors project spreads raise the awareness of the disabled sports situation, enables athletes with disabilities to become mentors at the end of their professional careers, so as not to drop out of the labor market and continue their careers, as well as motivate young athletes with disabilities to study in higher education, as they will know that a mentor will help them to reconcile studies and sport.

The mentor, with the right knowledge and sensitivity towards the special circumstances of athletes with disabilities, can make a difference in terms of maximizing the role these athletes can play in sport and in society, even becoming role models for young athletes to follow (Fairhurst et al., 2017). Training and mentoring programs can be devised both for disabled and able-bodied athletes, thus fostering equality among athletes, thus being in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted in 2006 by the UN General Assembly, which was ratified by the EU in 2008 and came into force in 2011.

YODA Mentors Methodology

Inclusive participants selection

For the selection of mentors-to-be who will receive the online course, a series of participation requirements and assessment criteria have been established, opening

the proposal for participation in all the countries of the members participating in the project (Spain, Portugal, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Greece).

As an indispensable participation requirement, those interested in participating must have a higher education degree, being involved with DC of athletes with and without special needs, be involved or have been involved in high performance sports or in physical activity, not to be taking part in other mentoring programs and be able to express and manage English as the main language of the online course.

The previous requirements are considered mandatory to take full advantage of the content established in the online course, and the expert committee considers the previous experience as coach, teacher, sports psychologist and the previous experience with special needs athletes to be an added value of the candidate.

In order to guarantee neutrality in the selection process, questions have been established that must be asked by each expert committee in the interview of the possible candidate and that allow estimating the requirements established previously (see Table 2). At the same time, it has been established as a requirement throughout the process that the expert committee of a country cannot evaluate the mentors to be candidates from its own country, thus promoting an initial international evaluation that meets the objectives proposed in the projects.

As a final part of the mentors-to-be training, the possibility has been established for each of the participants to carry out practices with student-athletes (mentees) from the participating countries. As for the selection of mentors to be, basic general requirements have been established for those who want to participate as mentees (be over 16 years of age, pursue higher or university studies in any of the participating countries, be part of a performance program or compete nationally in their country, as well as compete internationally or be part of the Olympic program in their country). The selection of the mentees will be made, as with the mentors, by the expert committee and it will be ensured that both the mentor and the mentee are not part of the same country to promote the internationalization of the projects.

Designed and implemented on an eLearning platform

The Massive Open Online Courses (training programs) initiative attempts to offer online courses designed for large numbers of participants, open to everyone, with entry qualifications, making it ideal for athletes who wish to expand their knowledge, skills, and competencies without the necessity to engage

Table 1. Interview Guidelines for mentors to be selection.

1. Please make a summary of your DC experience
2. What do you consider that has been your greatest achievement in the sporting aspect? And in the academic aspect?
3. What would you say has been the biggest difficulty you have faced when it comes to making your studies compatible with sports? How have you overcome it?
4. What has been the figure that has helped you the most when it comes to making your studies compatible with sports life? What qualities would you say he/she had?
5. What do you consider should be the qualities that a student/athlete has to have to make both aspects of their life compatible?
6. Do you have experience in athletes with disabilities? and if so, what kind?
7. What has motivated you to participate in the program?
8. In which way you considerer this training-course will help your professional career?
9. What do you consider to be your best attitudes to be a mentor for the DC?

in formal educational practices. The DC guidelines highlight athlete's re-integration to education or work by attempting to provide a flexible solution to athletes who attend educational programs, especially for those who are travelling in professional athletic events and do not possess the time to invest in cultivating their training or education. YODA Mentors innovate by introducing educational modules for mentors in dual-careers which have not been considered or applied in any European training program in terms of offering a full-course online experience (including a mentoring period).

As stated previously, YODA Mentors project is about developing a training program for DC mentors, in order to qualify them to provide informed advice and support to student-athletes (mentees) throughout their sport career, right from the start (from secondary education trough to higher education). The program will offer comprehensive training, valid both for mentors-to-be (and student-athletes) with and without disabilities.

The different roles in this project will be as follows

Expert Committee: including experts in DC (covering the most demanded sport activities), selected by all partners (2 per partner/country).

Tutors: selected by the Expert Committee, to draft the course materials and to train mentors (1 per partner/country).

Mentors-to-be: candidates selected through a public call in each participant country (4 per partner/country). They will undertake the training program to become DC mentors. A mix of candidates (disabled and able bodied) will be ideally selected.

Mentees: young athletes combining studies (secondary or higher education) and sports (8 per partner/country). They will take part in the mentoring stage as mentees of previously-trained mentors. The aim will be to have athletes with and without disabilities taking part of the program.

Table 2. YODA mentors program training modules.

Module	Content
Module 1	The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as a scenario for mentoring
Module 2	What is mentoring, strategies and resources
Module 3	Competences and Strategies for Dual Mentoring
Module 4	High Level Athletes
Module 5	Sportsperson with Special Needs
Module 6	Vital Events of the Dual Athlete-Student
Module 7	Legal Aspects of the High-Level Athlete
Module 8	DC Programs in Europe

Each partner will bring sport centers/federations/clubs to the project, providing athletes with and without disabilities that will be selected for the mentoring period. The aim will be to train 24 mentors-to-be (4 from each partner/country) who will mentor 48 student-athletes (8 per partner/country).

The training proposal prepared has the support of having been designed by experts in the athlete's DC, as well as having the academic support of the three participating universities (Universidad Isabel I, University of Latvia, and Lithuanian Sports University), allowing a better design of the contents and greater control of the elaboration of the same.

The online course agreed with by the expert committee and prepared by the different tutors is specified in 8 training modules that cover the most relevant aspects in the life of student athletes (see table 1), thus, the purpose of this programme is to provide the necessary professional skills and knowledge that could realistically be applied to sports coaching.

Mentoring stage

The online experience is extended from the training program by a final mentoring stage. Knowing that each mentor-mentee is pairing is unique (Klasen &

Clutterbuck, 2002), each of the trained mentors will have a first experience with 2 mentees from their same country via online. According to Young et al. (2005), considering that there are three fundamental types of mentoring, responsive, interactive and directive, the interactive methodology has been determinate as the one to be promoted in the project. Based on the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC), the method can be also identified as informal and facilitated mentoring model (Marshall, 2001).

The matching process Mentor-mentee has been completed by asking the applicants to complete a questionnaire outlining the goals and needs as the mentee. The results have been analyzed to, knowing that the matching is not an exact science, reduce the possibilities of drop-outs and mismatches, thus taking into consideration the performance level, sport, cultural issues, age and personalities of Mentors and mentees (Layton, 2005; Eby & Lockwood, 2005), even if they are both individuals from the same country.

During the mentoring stage, the mentors will encourage an open, friendly and trust-based relation with the mentees (Johnson-Bailey & Carvero, 2004). Both, mentors and mentees, should recognize each other as peers, improving a friendly environment for frequently counseling, expecting the greater results that have been attributed to informal respect formal mentoring (Gibson, 2004).

Following the recommendations of CAC, the mentoring stage is based on the structured design model (Marshall, 2001): (1) the mentoring phase is strategically planned by YODA's consortium; (2) one project partner has facilitated the matching of mentors and mentees; (3) a training programme for mentors-to-be and a short mentorship phase for mentees has been developed; (4) the participation includes a 'No-fault' termination clause; (5) the stage promotes a formalized career development plan, as well as the Consortium facilitates the tracking system for this phase; (6) a project's partner leads the implementation of the program and monitor the progress, and give counsel and evaluation for the Mentors.

The process must be facilitating and enriching, avoiding the dominance of the mentors over the mentees, especially if the mentoring process results in a replica or copy of the experiences of the Mentor's career (Cushion et al., 2003).

Concluding comments

YODA Mentors project addresses the European policy objectives for the DC of athletes in several

ways. It promotes a new way of compliance with the DC Guidelines, by approaching to the supporting role from the mentor perspective and offering the possibility of developing real dyad mentor-athlete training. Furthermore, the project follows up on the findings of all projects and studies mentioned above by creating an online programme for this new professional figure for DC.

Clearly enough, the possibility to create the figure of DC mentor as new sport qualification, with a well-defined set of competences, along with the basis for a high-quality training program, would open up opportunities for sport professionals to gain a new qualification as well as to broaden the range of job opportunities. For student-athletes, the program brings the possibility to be guided and supported through their DC by a thoroughly qualified and knowledgeable expert; for sport clubs, association, centres, etc., it would offer an input to better get to know the needs of student-athletes to manage their DC, thus making it easier to retain them in sports, without undermining their future professional prospects.

Finally, a network of qualified DC mentors would allow for an exchange of experiences and best practices of great benefit for all the target groups.

Next steps

Starting in September 2020, the project enters the final stretch of its execution, launching the mentoring stage. Until December, the 24 mentors from the six participating countries who have completed their training through the online course, will have the opportunity to put into practice all the knowledge acquired with 2 mentees for each of them.

During the process, the project researchers will be able to assess the strengths and difficulties perceived by the mentors at this stage, as well as advise them in the process. At the end of the mentoring stage, the project will be completed by completing the deliverables and producing new content that will help to disseminate it.

Limitations

Fortunately, this project will suppose, upon completion, an innovative turn for the Dual Career of the student-athlete, contributing this new approach to the Mentor. However, the project has certain limitations at the design level given its peculiarity.

YODA Mentors intends to generate a great impact in terms of awareness of the Dual Career among

stakeholders of the member states of the union and the general public, but the focus and the main beneficiaries of the training program are in the countries that are part of the project consortium: Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Latvia and Lithuania.

The duration of the project and the financial support provided by the European Commission have allowed us to have the support of a group of 12 international experts in DC, 6 tutors who have designed and developed the training program, 24 mentors-to-be who would benefit from the course and 48 mentees that will participate in the mentors-to-be internship. Despite the fact that participation has been intercultural and numerous, the needs of DC in Europe require a greater impact of the project. A greater number of mentors is needed and, perhaps, this first “class of graduated mentors” will encourage them enough to become evangelists of the mentoring methodology and to multiply the impact of the training program.

The focus of the project has been limited to the figure of the DC Mentor, the capacitation and the design and implementation of the mentoring program. Beyond the individual role of the mentor and the peer relationships in DC that may arise from mentoring, it may be interesting to approach the problem from a structural perspective within academic and sports institutions. The assessment of the needs of the institutions and the design of Dual Career Plans could be an efficient model to complete the work carried out and give a further reinforcement to the incorporation of mentoring within the institutions and, even more importantly, to increase the level of compliance of the academic and sports institutions with the European Guidelines for Dual Careers.

Future projects

In the near future, YODA Mentors should evolve into a second project funded by the European Commission. For this second phase, we hope to be able to count on the participation of the current partners of the project, doing the work of experts in different

areas, but including new partners that allow us to give a new institutional orientation in countries where the project has not reached.

This new phase will allow a greater role for YODA Mentors (graduates), who will participate advising new interested institutions, multiplying the impact and taking it to a new level.

Finally, hopefully the next project can bring about a structural change within the institutions. We want to help more entities get involved or improve their work in the field of DC, based on evaluation and through specialized advice and consulting in this field of academic and sports management.

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For more information about the project please visit <https://www.yodamentors.eu>.

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