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*EXECUTIVE MASTERS IN SPORTS ORGANISATION MANAGEMENT*



**MEMOS XXVII  
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**“Elite level athletes’ awareness and use of dual-career programs in Latvia”**

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Affiliation of Tutor



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This work would not have been possible without the support and resources provided by all involved.

## **Declaration**

I fully understand the principles of academic integrity and acknowledge the University's policy on plagiarism. I hereby confirm that this project is my original work and accurately represents my efforts undertaken for the MEMOS XXVII programme.

Sign: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 9 June 2025

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NOC: Latvian Olympic Committee

## **Table of Contents**

<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	2
<i>Declaration</i> .....	2
<i>Table of Contents</i> .....	3
<i>List of Abbreviations and Acronyms</i> .....	5
<b>Chapter 1 Opening paragraph</b> .....	<b>6</b>
1.1. Background .....	6
1.2. Rationale .....	6
1.3. Problem Statement .....	6
1.4. Approach .....	7
1.5. Outline of the Report .....	7
<b>Chapter 2 Review of Existing Knowledge</b> .....	<b>8</b>
2.1. Introduction .....	8
2.2 Overview of dual-career Research .....	8
2.3 Dual-career in Europe .....	9
2.4 Overview of the situation in Latvia .....	10
2.5. Promoting dual-career .....	10
2.6. Summary and implications for this project .....	11
<b>Chapter 3 Methodology</b> .....	<b>12</b>
3.1. Introduction .....	12
3.2. Survey of athletes and coaches .....	13
3.3. In-depth interviews with athletes and coaches .....	13
3.4. Detailed overview of existing programs in Latvia .....	14
3.5. Timeline .....	14
<b>Chapter 4 Findings</b> .....	<b>15</b>
4.1. Introduction .....	15
4.2. Survey results .....	15
4.3. In-depth interviews with athletes and coaches .....	22
4.5. Overview of existing programs .....	27
<b>Chapter 5 Recommendations</b> .....	<b>28</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	28
5.2 To improve information about dual career programs .....	28
5.3 To create cross-sectoral collaboration .....	29
5.4 To establish a clear regulatory framework .....	29
5.5 To enhance access to dual career programs .....	29

5.6 Action Plan .....	30
<b>Resources .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Résumé .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Annex 1: Athlete Questionnaire .....	38
Annex 2.: Interview Questionnaire .....	40
Annex 3: Transcript of the conducted interview with an elite-level male athlete residing in Austria online via Google Meet on the 18th of March. ....	42
Annex 4: Questionnaire for stakeholders – representatives from universities and program implementers.....	44
Annex 5: Available Information About Dual Career Programs at Educational Institutions in Latvia .....	47

## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

LOC - Latvian Olympic Committee  
LSFC - Council of Sports Federations of Latvia  
LASS - Sports Union of Latvian Universities  
FISU - International University Sports Federation  
EUSA - European University Sports Association  
EAS - European Athlete as Student  
LOU – Latvian Olympic Union  
NOC – National Olympic Committee  
QS - Quacquarelli Symonds  
NCAA - National Collegiate Athletic Association  
LU - University of Latvia  
RTU - Riga Technical University

## **Chapter 1 Opening paragraph**

### **1.1. Background**

The Latvian Olympic Committee (LOC) was established in 1922 and remained active until 1940, when its operations were abruptly halted due to the Soviet occupation. After 50 years, the LOC regained its rights and rejoined the Olympic family, embarking on the challenging task of rebuilding the organization and the nation from the ground up. In the 30 years since Latvia regained independence, the LOC has played a crucial role in shaping its processes, policies, values, and priorities, significantly impacting the development of athletes and the broader sports community. (Latvijas Olimpiskā komiteja, 2024).

### **1.2. Rationale**

Today, sports and education play crucial roles in self-development and personal fulfilment. The discussion about sports organizations adopting a more athlete-centered approach and supporting dual careers is increasingly relevant worldwide, especially in youth education. Consequently, Europe has already developed support systems and environments tailored to dual careers, including sports-friendly schools, elite sports colleges, professional and/or private clubs, sports-friendly universities, combined dual-career systems, national sports programs, defence force programs, and players' union programs. Some of these initiatives are present in nearly every country and have been functioning for over 10-15 years, while others still need to improve their availability throughout the region (Morris et al., 2021). High school graduates are beginning to plan their futures, aiming to balance their athletic ambitions with university studies and the pursuit of professional expertise in their chosen fields (Latvijas Augstskolu Sporta savienība, 2023).

### **1.3. Problem Statement**

So far, the LOC has not actively addressed dual-career issues, engaged athletes in education, or responded to their specific needs. However, other non-governmental organizations, such as the Sports Union of Latvian Universities (LASS) and the Council of Sports Federations of Latvia (LSFC), have diligently worked to promote this topic to the best of their ability. LASS updates and collects information on dual-career opportunities through its website, and its most recent informational booklet was published in 2023. Additionally, LASS established the Mentor Centre in 2023. Meanwhile, LSFC provided a sports scholarship program for young athlete students from 2007 to 2023.

At present, universities and athletes mainly bear the responsibility for supporting dual careers, receiving only limited informational assistance from LASS. Individuals who are already aware of the opportunities are actively seeking additional information.

As the situation evolves each year and there is currently no formal dual-career support program, it is essential to understand what elite athletes need. This includes whether they are utilizing or have utilized any educational programs offered by universities, whether they are aware of these programs, how they have accessed information about them, and if these programs meet their needs. If athletes know about these opportunities but are not participating, it is important to identify the barriers preventing them from doing so and to

explore what would motivate them to engage in dual-career programs while pursuing their sports careers.

At the same time, it would be valuable to identify which dual-career programs are currently in demand, whether they are at full capacity, and what recent trends reveal about athlete participation. Additionally, understanding the channels through which information about these programs is shared would enhance outreach efforts.

#### **1.4. Approach**

A survey will be conducted with approximately 200 elite-level Latvian athletes to achieve the project's goals and objectives, as hearing the athletes' voices is critical to effective program design. Understanding the needs of individuals in dual-career pathways could provide valuable information regarding the most effective division of support services for sports organizations (Cartigny et al., 2021). Additionally, elite-class coaches will be included as a secondary target group, given their proven influence on and support for athletes. Family and coaches are athletes' most valuable and influential support groups (Knight et al., 2018). Coaches aim to protect and enhance athletes' sports and personal skills (Guidotti et al., 2015). Following this quantitative approach, 5-8 athletes will be strategically selected for in-depth personal interviews to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the situation, thus adopting a mixed-method approach that provides a more complete picture through combined quantitative and qualitative research elements.

At the same time, it is crucial to evaluate the current programs and opportunities. Research on the present situation will be conducted, including meetings with the providers of each program.

#### **1.5. Outline of the Report**

This report comprises five main parts that logically and systematically summarize the research progress, evaluation, and recommendations for further action. The 'Review of Existing Knowledge' section summarizes and analyses the existing theoretical and practical information on the selected topic. The general theory on the concept of dual-career is identified, and significant current research and information are specifically explored in Europe, with a final emphasis on the availability of research in Latvia. The promotion of the dual-career concept, along with effective practices or theories proven in research, is also briefly reviewed. The 'Methodology' section describes the research methods used, employing both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Before the recommendations, the final part of the study is the 'Findings' section, which presents the main results and findings based on all three data collection methods and their outcomes. The results are interpreted in the context of existing information, highlighting key trends, problems, and opportunities. As a result, 'Recommendations' and 'Action plan' have been developed with specific tasks to address the identified issues, along with deadlines, responsible persons, and evaluation criteria.

## **Chapter 2 Review of Existing Knowledge**

### **2.1. Introduction**

International and European dual-careers are relatively recent areas of interest for sports organizations. The evidence base and dual-career research have expanded over the last decade, with many athletes and contexts studied extensively (Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022). This growth has led to various support programs, the establishment of dedicated support organizations, and the accumulation of valuable experiences and best practices.

This chapter examines dual-career studies in Europe, including the possibilities, scope, and outcomes offered by the Erasmus+ funded research program. It also reviews Latvia's situation regarding dual-career research and development.

Successful initiatives have been made in the Latvian context, a supportive non-governmental organization has been established, and scientific studies have been conducted. This research project will evaluate whether the efforts made thus far are practical and whether athletes are well-informed about the available opportunities and are utilizing them. Suppose it is found that athletes lack informational support and understanding of dual-career issues. In that case, options will be provided on how to engage athletes better, involve them more effectively, and through which channels to convey information in Latvia. It will also be crucial to clarify the current dual-career opportunities available, which universities offer them, the channels through which information is disseminated, whether the programs are adequately filled, and how the Latvian Olympic Committee can support these initiatives with its information platforms and additional activities.

The project's overall goal is to develop a research-backed communication strategy to motivate and promote the use of dual-career programs among high-performance athletes. Simultaneously, it aligns the communication strategy with the marketing and communication activities of existing program providers, maximizing the effectiveness of invested resources and time while achieving the best possible results over the next five years.

### **2.2 Overview of dual-career Research**

The term dual-career, defined as "a career foci on both sport and studies or work" (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2015b, p.1), emerged over the past decade, sparking a growing body of global research. Studies on dual-career in sports and academic institutions primarily examine the challenges athletes face, such as balancing the demands of sports and studies while managing their social and personal lives. Research also highlights the short- and long-term benefits of combining sport with education or work for a more diversified identity, expanded social networks, and improved employability skills, as well as potential drawbacks, including an increased risk of burnout (Stambulova, 2020).

Student-athletes face various challenges due to limited leisure time, academic overload, frequent class absences, and financial insecurity. Proposed improvements to current programs aim to address these challenges and enhance communication about existing initiatives and legal aspects (Gjaka et al., 2024).



Athletes' career development and transitions vary widely, underscoring the need for improved context-specific information. Numerous factors, including athletes' motivation, identity, health, lifestyle, well-being, and career construction styles, require tailored sports and cultural considerations and evidence-based options for different populations of athletes and contexts (Stambulova, 2020). Therefore, research into dual careers and proposed support programs would benefit from a comprehensive study of individual countries and regions.

The significance of exploring new lines of investigation through anthropological, sports, and educational perspectives to analyse athletes' life projects and families across diverse cultures and socioeconomic realities during various stages of their dual-career transitions (Rodrigues da Costa et al., 2021) has been highlighted.

### **2.3 Dual-career in Europe**

European athletes can pursue diverse dual-career pathways because of the variations in how each country organizes its dual-career support systems, leading researchers to approach the topic with sensitivity to specific national contexts (Aquilina & Henry, 2010). Over the past decade, dual careers have been a priority for the EU (Informative report, Ministry of Sports and Education, 2021). Enhancing dual-career experiences aligns with the 2019-2024 European policies aimed at inclusive and connected higher education, which advocate for the right conditions for students from different backgrounds to earn a degree (European Commission, 2019). By investing in practical actions for the next generations of educated student-athletes, the Sports Office of the European Commission could strengthen its international leadership in dual-career support and further promote the European sports culture in and beyond Europe (Capranica et al., 2021).

The Erasmus+ program has been in effect since 2014 with an initial budget of 14 billion for promoting education, training, youth, and sport (European Commission, 2013). In the dual-career topic results, the total amount of projects funded from 2014 to January 2020 exceeds 20 million euros. The geographical distribution of the results highlights some best practices in Northern European countries (Kristiansen & Houlihan, 2017; Stambulova et al., 2015) as well as in other programs outside the European Union, such as Australia and New Zealand (O'Neill et al., 2017; Ryan et al., 2017).

Several European international organizations directly support sports development and participation in dual-career projects. The most prominent and significant of these organizations include the International University Sports Federation (FISU), the European University Sports Association (EUSA), and the European Athlete as Student (EAS), among others.

To ensure the reintegration of high-performance athletes into the labour market at the end of their sports careers, the EAS dual-career Network emphasizes that, from the very beginning, special attention must be given to the dual professional training of young athletes (EAS, 2013).

## **2.4 Overview of the situation in Latvia**

The perspective on dual careers in Latvia was outlined during the Education, Youth, Culture, and Sport Council on November 29-30, 2021. The conclusions indicated that there had been insufficient support for high-achieving student-athletes, highlighting the need for cooperation among several ministries and other institutions. Support for dual careers from sports organizations, administrative structures, educational institutions, and companies is also necessary (Informative Report, Ministry of Sports and Education, 2021).

In 2020, a study in Latvia explored the motivations of young athletes pursuing dual-careers, highlighting that coaches significantly influence the career paths of high-performing youth athletes (Abelkalns & Kravalis, 2020). This aligns with insights from kinesiology professor Daniel Gould, director of the Michigan Youth Sports Institute, who states in his article *“Quality Coaching Counts”* that coaches play a crucial role in shaping the career development of young athletes. Beyond teaching sports fundamentals, coaches significantly impact athletes' motivation and professional growth aspirations (Gould, 2016).

In other research, young elite athletes aged 17–19 reported feeling increased support from sports organizations and society. However, respondents in this age group noted a lack of specific assistance from sports organizations in facilitating a dual career. This suggests that sports organizations should encourage young athletes to pursue dual-career paths (Abelkalns & Kravalis, 2020).

In Latvia, progress has been made in supporting dual careers. A dedicated organization has been established to address dual-career challenges and has created a mentor centre (LASS, 2024). Additionally, since 2007, a state-funded program has provided scholarships for dual-career athletes through the NGO Latvian Sports Federation Council. However, this program was suspended in 2023 due to reduced state funding (LSFC, 2023). Nevertheless, the key question remains: have these initiatives been effective?

Meanwhile, opportunities provided by various international projects—Erasmus + and FISU—are also utilized, and at least five universities or professional schools offer dual-career programs: Latvian University, Rīga Stradiņš University, Riga Technical University, Latvian Sport and Pedagogy University, and business high school Turība (Ābelkalns et al., 2023). Are elite athletes receiving adequate education, and can student-athletes balance their sports commitments with their studies? It is also essential to evaluate whether current efforts are sufficient or if the Latvian Olympic Committee, as the primary sports organization, should be more proactive in advocating for this issue.

## **2.5. Promoting dual-career**

Educating young elite athletes about the importance and possibilities of pursuing a dual career is crucial. Studies have already been conducted in several countries to identify the best approaches. However, it is essential to recognize that everything must be regulated nowadays, and that the situation needs to be studied regularly.

In Estonia and Finland, support for the whole-person approach emphasizes the importance of communication and coordination while reinforcing the development of planning,

communication, and responsibility as environmental success factors (Kiens & Larsen, 2021). Another research indicates that dual-careers can be effectively promoted on YouTube (Onose et al., 2023).

## **2.6. Summary and implications for this project**

In summary, dual-career issues have been extensively researched worldwide over the past decade. Nearly every developed country has at least one or numerous local studies. The ever-changing sports ecosystem requires continuous improvement, development, and progress.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

### 3.1. Introduction

A combination of data collection and analysis methods was employed to achieve the project goals, ensuring a comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of the current situation. The choice of methods is crucial, as it directly influences the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the findings. A quantitative approach was implemented to measure the level of awareness among elite athletes regarding dual careers and the use of available services. This yields numerical indicators, such as how many athletes are informed and how often they engage with various services.

A qualitative research approach was the most appropriate method for gaining a deeper understanding of athletes' needs, the information channels they rely on, and the factors that influence their motivation or demotivation. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore these aspects in greater detail.

Therefore, the study used a mixed-methods approach for data collection. This included a survey targeting elite athletes and coaches (n = 204 respondents), supplemented by in-depth interviews with 5 to 8 carefully selected participants. A thorough review of existing career programs offered by universities and colleges provides contextual insights. A detailed timeline for the project is included in Table 1.

**Table 1: Timeline of the project**

Research Questions/Objectives	Data Required	Method of Data/Information collection	Participants/ Who	Timeline
Explore what the dual-career concept entails	Research about dual-career	Literature review	Science A detailed time plan can be seen in table no.articles, Books about theory	27.11.2024
Create overview of benchmarks		Review case studies	TASS provided option, Belgium, Norway and Canada programs	10.01.2025
How many elite athletes know about dual-careers and have used dual-career options in Latvia?	Quantitative data	Questionnaire	Elite athletes, classified by NOC criteria and approved by ministry	31.01.2025
What would encourage athletes to sign up for dual-career studies, what would motivate them?	Quantitative data	Questionnaire	Elite athletes, classified by NOC criteria and approved by ministry	31.01.2025
What are programs provided in Latvia regarding dual-career, how many applications they have and what are data for last 5-10 years	Qualitative data with interviews of program leaders and quantitative data from the statistic each program has	Interviews	All Universities, academies and schools which provides dual-career programs	01.03.2025

### **3.2. Survey of athletes and coaches**

This was the ideal time to survey athletes. One Olympic cycle had just ended, and a new one had begun, so just a few weeks earlier, the new elite summer sports roster had been confirmed – 13 gold athletes, 23 silver, and 42 bronze, as well as 36 with an additional decision, bringing the total to 113 athletes (LOU Summer athletes list). Winter athletes had already been confirmed in the summer; they were currently in the active season – 22 athletes in gold, 16 in silver, and 33 in bronze (LOU Winter athletes list). The coaches of the athletes mentioned above were also included in the squads and, given their significant influence on the athletes' everyday lives, participated in the survey. All these athletes and coaches had been approved and selected by a special commission formed by the Ministry of Sports, LOC, and LOU as the best qualified for additional support from the state for high sports achievements or the potential to achieve high accomplishments. The study focused on athletes and coaches from individual sports and small team sports (with up to four members), selected based on nationally recognized criteria outlined earlier. Notably, this group represented a more adaptable segment regarding dual career planning and opportunity utilization. Compared to athletes in larger team sports, whose schedules were often rigid and dictated by collective commitments, these individuals found it relatively easier to coordinate with coaches and training partners, allowing for greater flexibility in managing academic and athletic responsibilities.

An online survey tool will be used to gather data more quickly and analyse it more accurately. The questionnaire topics and demographic information are summarized in Annex 1.

### **3.3. In-depth interviews with athletes and coaches**

After the questionnaire phase, in-depth interviews with 4 to 6 athletes and/or coaches will be organized to gather detailed insights into the needs of various respondent groups from those who participated in the survey. The primary goal will be to collect more information about the support they need for dual-career issues. The questionnaire for interviewers is available in Annex 1.

Only survey respondents who agree to participate in an in-depth interview will be considered. The aim is to select the most diverse respondents for these interviews to gain the broadest insight into potential barriers and limitations to utilizing dual career support programs. The intended interview group will include both female and male athletes, as well as coaches. Additionally, the selection process will emphasize the inclusion of individuals living both in Latvia and internationally, in major cities and smaller towns, and, significantly, representatives from various sports. It is equally important to include individuals in the interview group who have used any of the dual-career support programs, as well as those who have not yet participated, those who are unaware of the programs, and those who do not understand how to access them, alongside other factors that have prevented their participation.

In-depth interviews will be conducted in person or through online video calls to ensure maximum participant engagement. While survey respondents—especially athletes and coaches—often tend to answer quickly without fully considering the questions, these

interviews aim to explore their perspectives in greater depth. They will help to better understand the challenges and benefits that athletes and coaches associate with dual careers.

The second and third sections of the survey will be emphasized, particularly regarding the concept of dual careers—its understanding, practical application, and barriers to its adoption. The goal is to gain clearer insights into the participants' level of interest in dual career programs and the limitations or obstacles that hinder their involvement.

Additionally, the interviews will explore how information about dual career programs is communicated. This includes identifying the preferred communication channels, frequency, and messaging tone. Participants will also be asked whether they have received, noticed, and understood the past informational materials provided by the LOC regarding various support programs for athletes.

Before each interview, their submitted survey responses will be carefully reviewed to ensure the conversation is meaningful and specific, and that the resulting data complements the existing findings.

#### **3.4. Detailed overview of existing programs in Latvia**

To gain a broader understanding of the possibilities of dual-career programs in Latvia, it is insufficient to survey athletes and coaches and conduct in-depth interviews merely. A more comprehensive view can be achieved through interviews and direct communication with higher education institutions and universities, compiling a list of which universities offer the mentioned program, whether all spots in the programs are filled, if existing information channels are functioning, whether higher education institutions and universities require any support, if they recognize what LOC could do in the current situation, and how to achieve the best possible results together.

Within the project, universities or higher education institutions mentioned in the QS World University Rankings 2025 will be reviewed, examined, and interviewed, assuming they have provided all the necessary information about dual-career support and identified existing programs. If any additional information about support programs is obtained from athletes and coaches during the survey, it will be included in the analysis.

#### **3.5. Timeline**

Three weeks are allocated to complete the questionnaires. At the same time, in-depth interviews with the managers of dual-career programs can be conducted to conduct a situational analysis of the programs offered by universities and colleges.

After completing the elite athlete survey, 4 to 6 participants will be chosen for in-depth interviews, which are expected to last an additional one to two weeks. The data collection process will be finished within one and a half months.

## **Chapter 4 Findings**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter provides a detailed examination of the results obtained. The initial section presents an analysis of the survey questionnaire responses from athletes and coaches, followed by a subsection that analyses the findings from the in-depth interviews conducted with athletes and coaches. The third section outlines the results and information gathered from interviews with representatives of higher education institutions and universities and other stakeholders associated with dual career support programs. In conclusion, a compilation of the available programs is presented.

As a result, a clear understanding of elite athletes' and their coaches' perspectives on the dual career concept, information availability, barriers, and constraints that hinder their involvement in programs will be developed. Insights will be collected from those implementing dual career programs regarding their scope, opportunities, challenges, and potential, alongside a compilation of currently available programs and services.

### **4.2. Survey results**

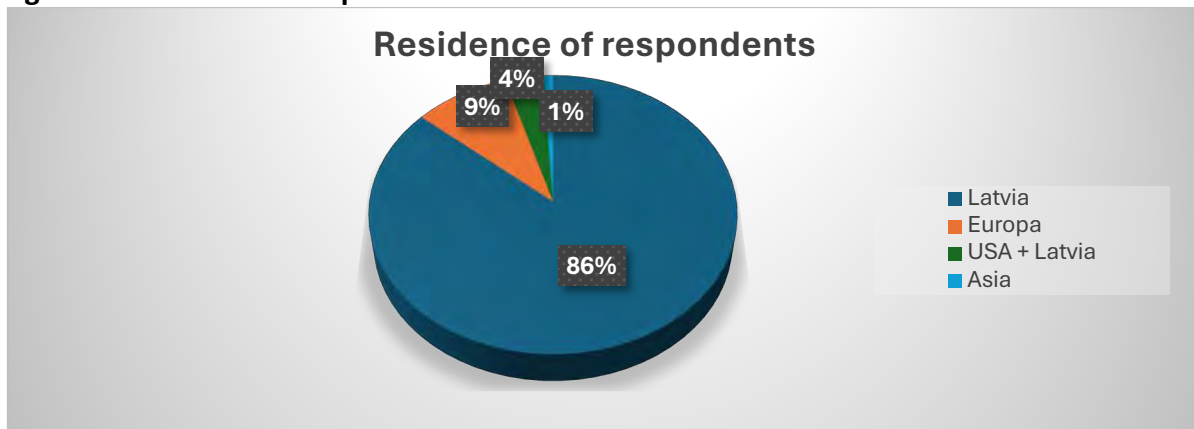
The survey was conducted electronically over three weeks, yielding 109 responses and a response rate of 53%. The respondents, who were athletes and coaches aged 15 to 68, all qualified as elite sports representatives for the country. Because they already held status and had a relationship with the NOC, there was no legal requirement for additional documentation during data collection.

As stated earlier, the questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section gathered personal information to provide insights into the respondents and their environments, which could influence their choices and actions. The second section featured questions about dual-career arrangements to assess the respondents' awareness and whether they have taken advantage of any programs. Lastly, the third section concentrated on communication, exploring how respondents prefer to receive information and where they seek news about dual-career options.

#### *Respondent Profile*

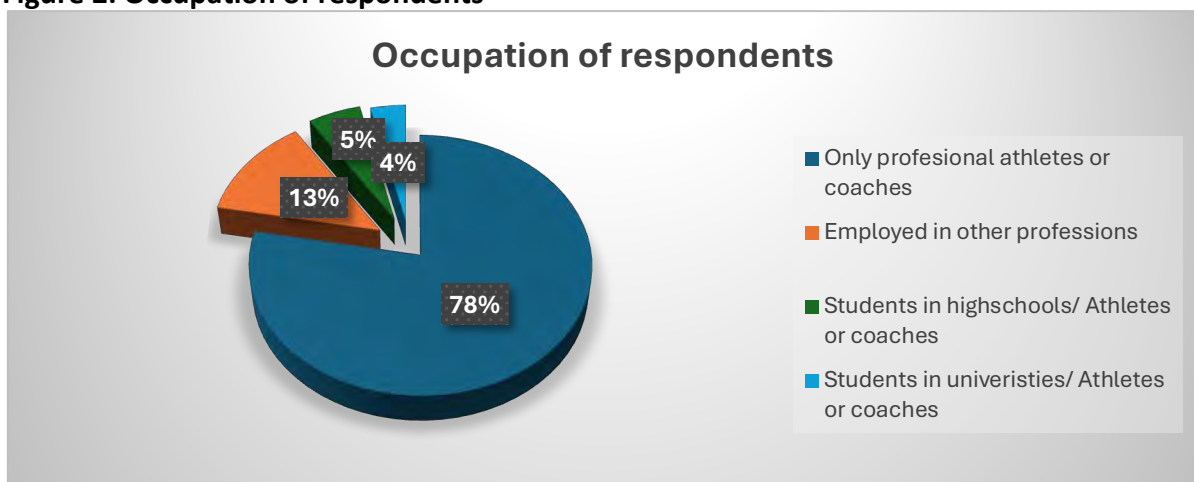
In the analysis of the first part concerning personal information, 94 participants reported residing in Latvia (86%), while the remainder were categorized into three main groups. All data can be found in Figure 1: Residence of respondents. Among those living in Latvia, 37 are located in the capital, Riga (39.4%), while the other 57 reside in various regional cities or counties (60.6%).

**Figure 1: Residence of respondents**



The respondent pool included 82 athletes (75.2%) and 24 coaches (22%), with three individuals (2.8%) identifying as both an athlete and a coach. Respondents also provided a more detailed breakdown of their occupations. The majority were professional athletes or coaches without other employment. However, a notable portion reported being employed in different professions while continuing their athletic or coaching careers, and some indicated that they are currently high school or university students. More detailed information is presented in Figure 2: Occupation of respondents.

**Figure 2: Occupation of respondents**



Respondents represented 17 different sports disciplines. The top three most common disciplines were athletics, with 26 respondents (23.9%), and combat sports, with 14 respondents (12.8%). This variety highlights the diversity of the athlete and coach group involved in the study. More detailed information is available in Figure 3: Sports Represented by Respondents.



**Figure 3: Sports Represented by Respondents**

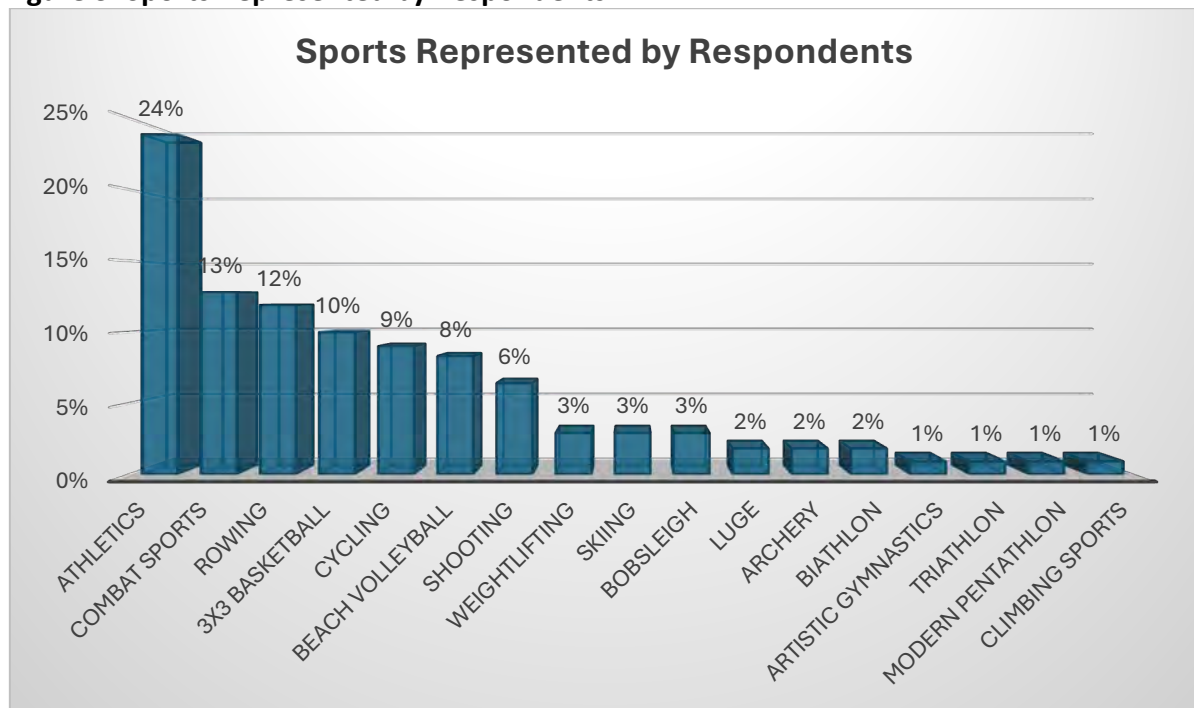
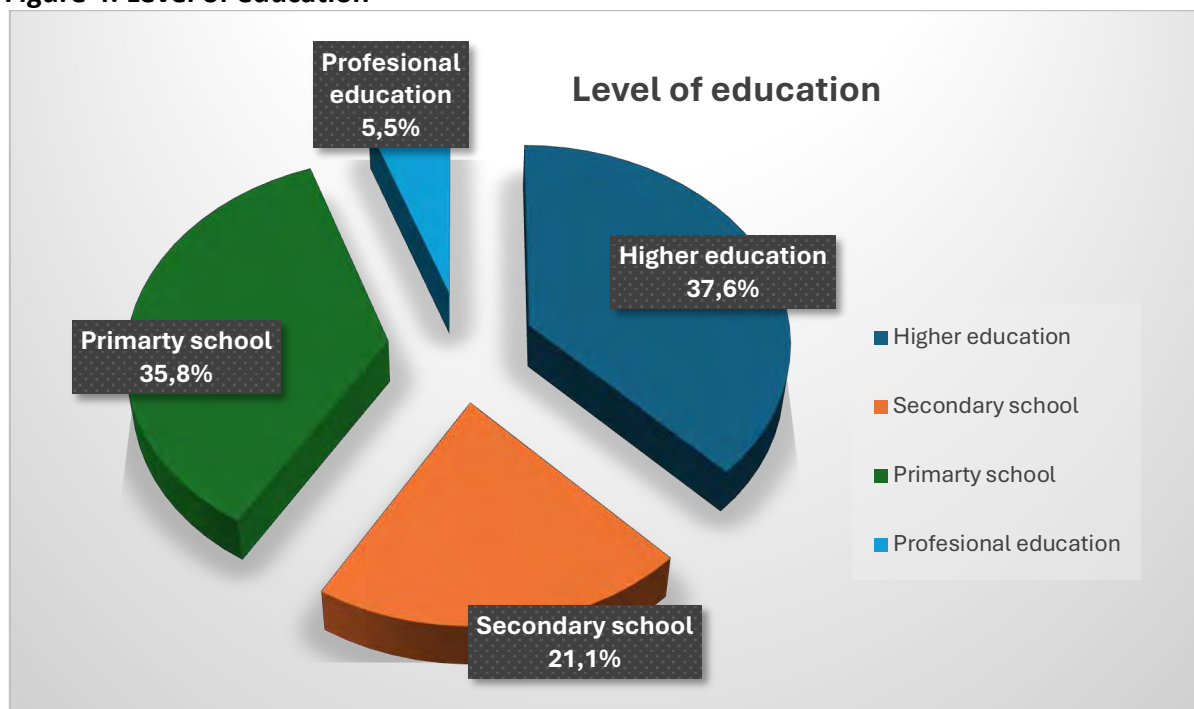


Figure 4 displays the levels of education. Therefore, it can be concluded that at least 56.9% of the respondents demonstrate potential eligibility or interest in utilizing dual career programs.

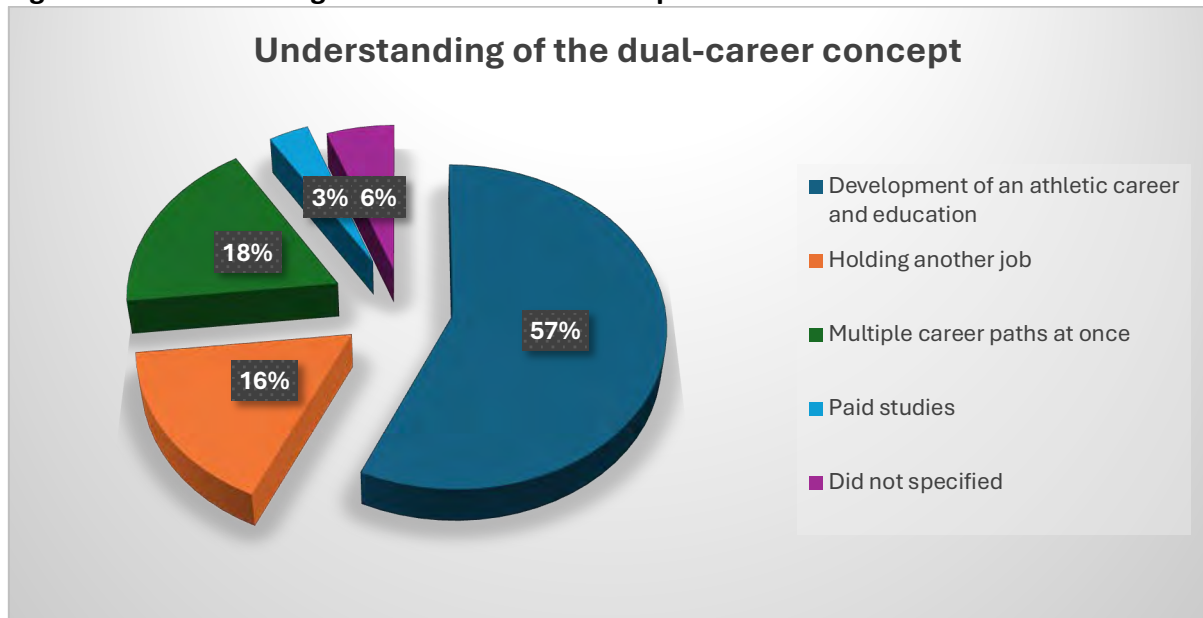
**Figure 4: Level of education**



The sample mainly includes elite athletes who have at least a secondary education, reside in Latvia, and compete in one of the individual Olympic sports.

Upon further analysis of respondents' knowledge regarding the dual-career concept, 71,6% reported being familiar with the term, while 28,4% did not recognize it. Those who answered affirmatively provided additional responses explaining the dual-career concept; further information can be found in Figure 5: Understanding the dual-career concept. Ultimately, only 56 respondents fully grasp this term's meaning, accounting for almost 50% of all respondents.

**Figure 5: Understanding of the dual-career concept**



Only 28 respondents (25.7%) have utilized any dual-career support programs. Table 2: Used Dual-Career Programs illustrates the breakdown of the various dual-career program providers. The majority of respondents—16 individuals (14.6%)—have engaged with the University of Latvia's dual-career program, and 14 of them (12.8%) have received support from the LSFC scholarship while either concurrently or alternatively participating in another university program. None of the respondents reported utilizing the Erasmus+ program or the FISU program.

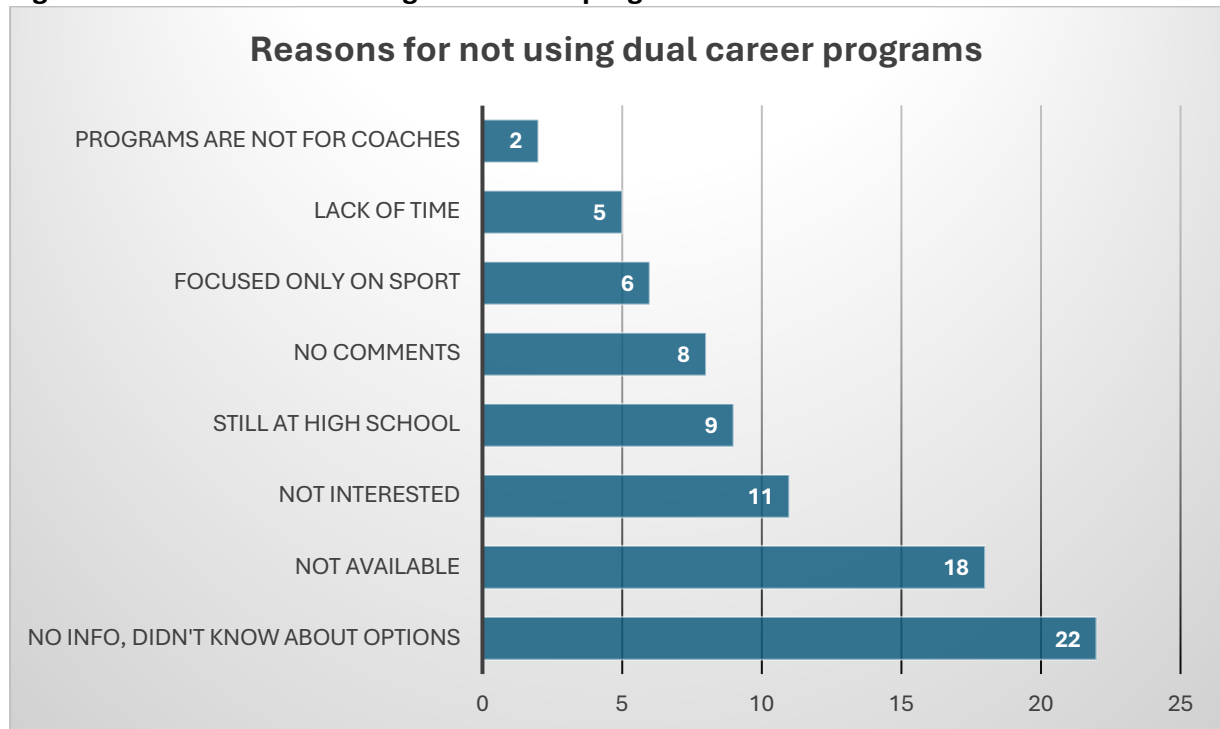
**Table 2: Used dual-career programs**

No.	Programs	Respondents
1	University of Latvia	16
2	LSFC scholarship	14
3	Athletes 365	4
4	Business school Turība	2
5	USA NCAA	1
6	University of Daugavpils	1
7	Erasmus +	0
8	FISU programs	0

Of the 81 respondents who indicated they had not used any dual-career support program, eight did not provide comments suggesting any obstacles, while the majority (22) stated that there was no available information, they were not interested, or they were simply unaware

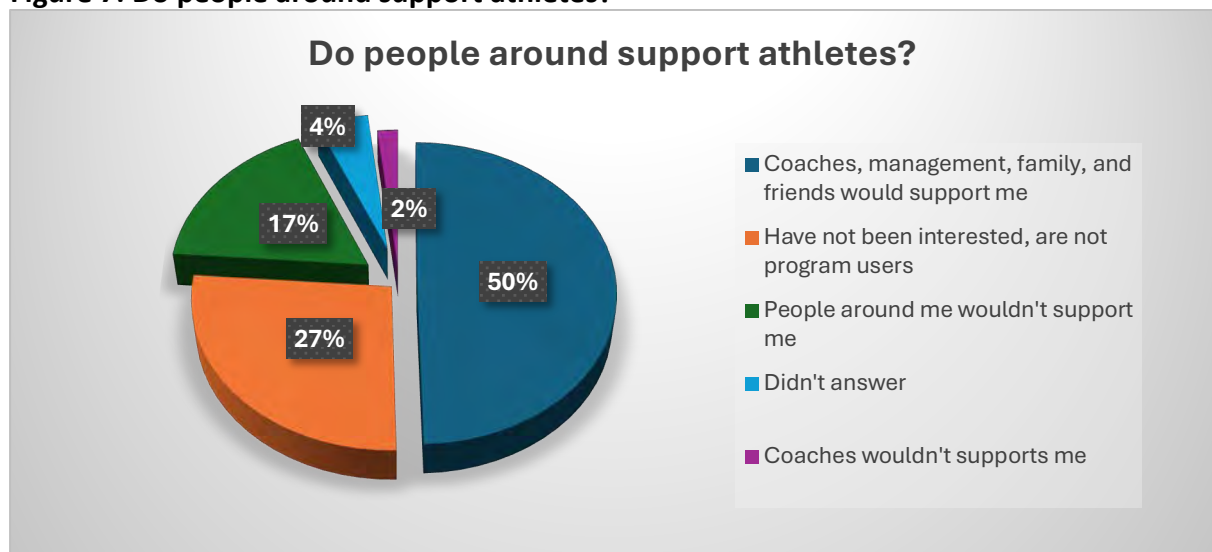
of such programs. Figure 6: Reasons for not using dual-career programs shows a detailed breakdown of the possible barriers.

**Figure 6: Reasons for not using dual career programs**



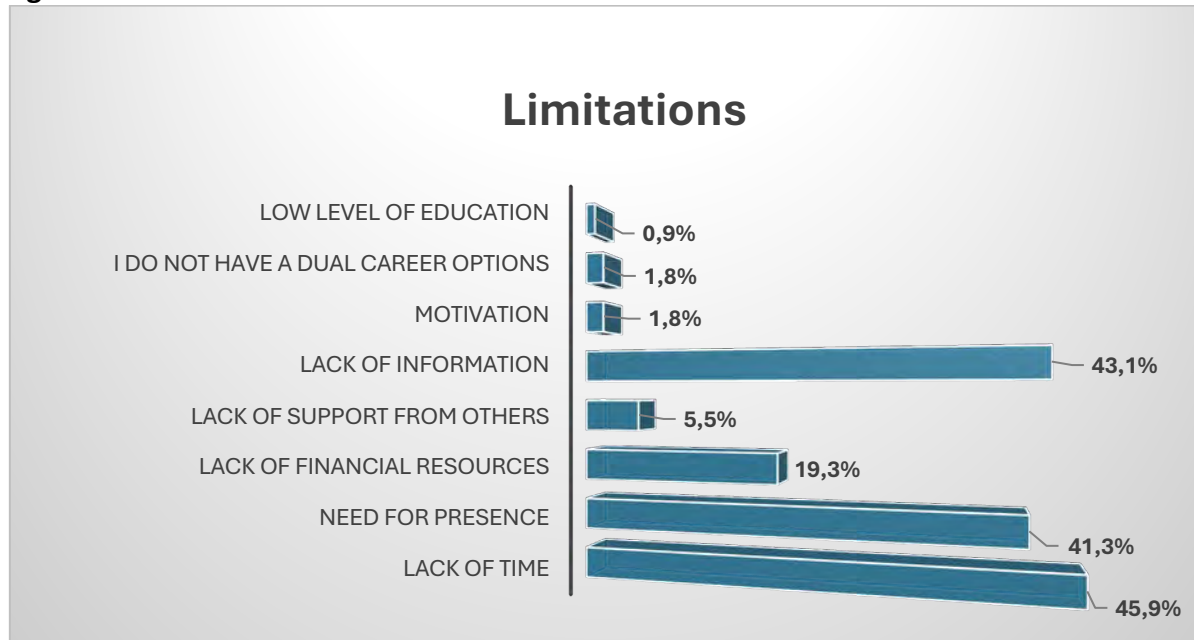
When asked whether those around you- coaches, management, family, and friends- support your involvement in dual-career programs, the majority, 56 respondents (49,6%), answered affirmatively, emphasizing the moral support and the fact that it often comes directly from family and coaches. A broader distribution of responses can be seen in Figure 7: Do people around support athletes?

**Figure 7: Do people around support athletes?**



In the final question of the second block on dual-career with multiple answers, what limitations do you perceive for engaging in dual-career programs? Fifty respondents (45.9%) noted a lack of time, 47 respondents (43.1%) mentioned a lack of information, and 45 respondents (41.3%) highlighted the need for presence. Here are the three most prominent comments; a more detailed examination can be found in Figure 8: Limitations.

**Figure 8: Limitations**



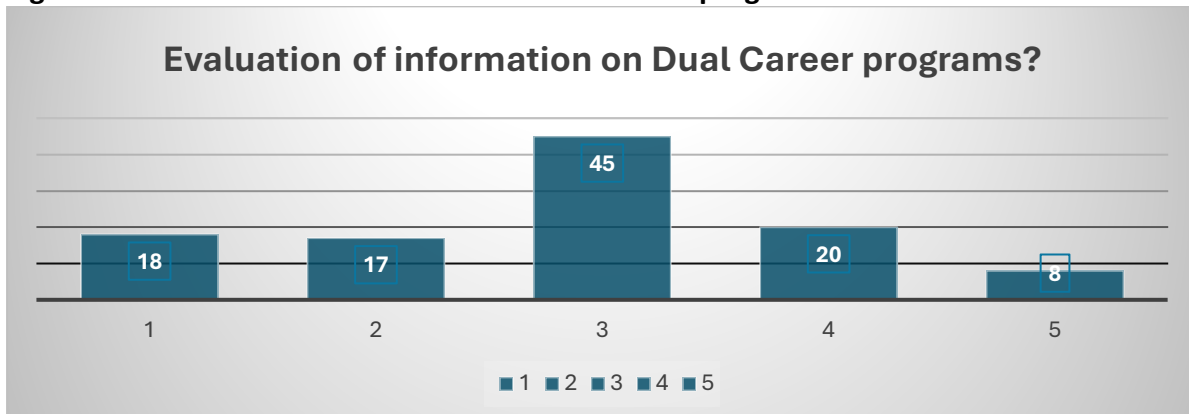
Consequently, data suggest that the understanding of the dual-career concept is inadequate. Even those who assert they know its meaning, as defined in *Chapter 2*, mainly provide incorrect or vague responses to the follow-up question. The potential of the majority is evident in their participation in dual-career programs, as only a quarter of participants have utilized or are currently using one of these programs. Among those who have not engaged with the available dual-career programs, 10% express no interest, indicating significant potential within the surveyed group to increase the proportion of athletes taking advantage of these programs. The majority confirmed that their support networks, which include family, friends, and coaches, would offer assistance or are already doing so if the athlete begins training. However, a large percentage - 43,1% (45 respondents)- cite a lack of information as one of the primary barriers to their involvement in dual-career programs.

The final section of the questionnaire focused on communication, information accessibility, and channels of information. A question was posed to assess the availability of information regarding dual-career programs. Respondents provided an average rating of 2,84 on a 5-point scale (where 1 = very poor and 5 = excellent). A total of 108 respondents participated in this evaluation: 18 athletes/ coaches (16,5%) rated the availability of information as very poor, 17 respondents (15,6%) marked it as poor, 45 respondents (41,3%) chose the middle option as normal, 20 respondents (18,3%) rated it as good, and only eight responses (7,3%) deemed the availability of information to be excellent.

**Figure 9: Average Rating**



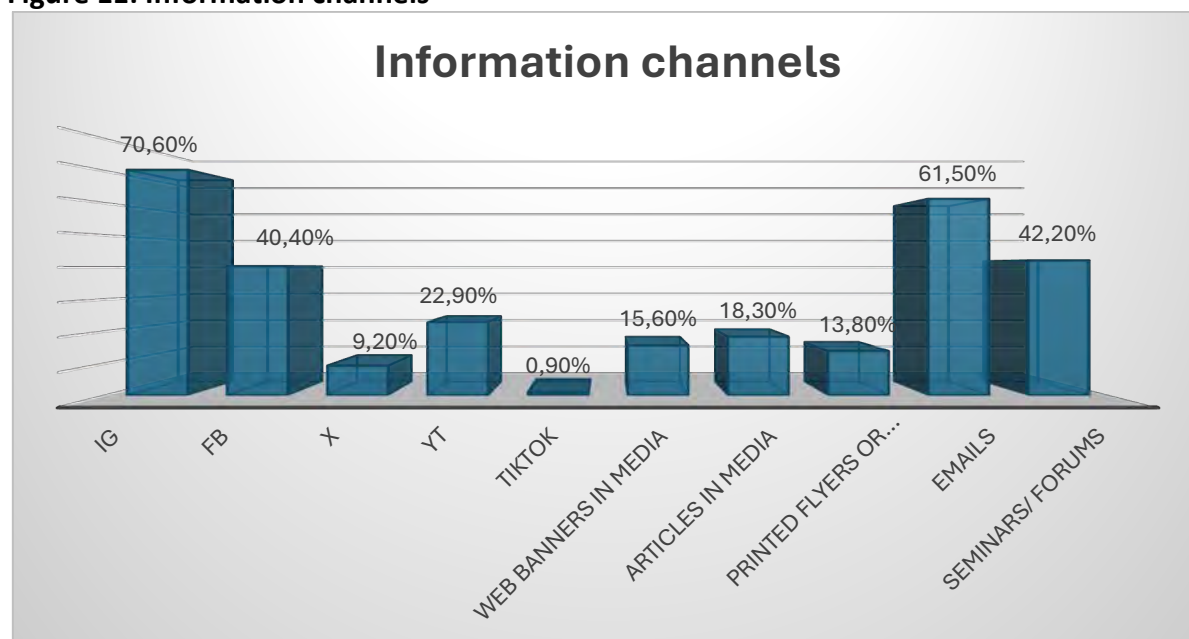
**Figure 10: Evaluation of information on Dual Career programs?**



Eighty-five respondents (78%) expressed interest in information about dual-career programs.

Several online and digital channels and face-to-face information delivery were noted when identifying channels through which elite athletes can more conveniently receive details about dual-career programs. The identified information channels and their evaluations can be explored in Figure 11: Information channels.

**Figure 11: Information channels**



Lastly, 60 athletes and coaches (55%) seek information about the dual-career in LOC information channels, including the website, social media accounts, and the office, to explore the available dual-career programs and the support mechanisms they provide.

In summarizing responses regarding dual careers, the data indicate there is room for improvement in providing clearer and more accessible information about dual career programs. The availability of information is insufficient; many individuals would gladly receive it through social networks, email, and direct communication during seminars. However, as a provider of information, LOC is not seen as relevant.

In conclusion, athletes' understanding of and relevance to dual-career programs in Latvia is low, confirming initial suspicions. Increasing the availability of information would help address some of the barriers indicated by respondents. This could alleviate time constraints by offering information that can be reviewed on a personalized schedule, resolving the problem of insufficient information, and meeting the need for presence in certain instances through distance learning. Athletes and coaches would appreciate receiving information and utilizing the benefits of available programs to complete their studies and obtain additional professional opportunities. It is important to note that it is not surprising that many did not identify the LOC as an information channel, as mentioned earlier in this paper; the LOC has not addressed this issue so far, which is reflected in athletes' responses, as they do not expect to receive information from the LOC regarding this matter.

#### **4.3. In-depth interviews with athletes and coaches**

##### *Sample*

Five respondents were selected for in-depth interviews from those willing to participate in the questionnaires. Two female and three male athletes, one of whom is also a coach, were interviewed. This distribution was chosen because 58% of the total sample group is male and 42% is female. The most diverse candidates were selected by reviewing the profiles of the athletes and coaches for the in-depth interviews.

##### *Interviewee profile*

One female interviewee is a beach volleyball player living in Riga, the capital of Latvia. She has completed both bachelor's and master's degrees. Another female interviewee is a taekwondo athlete residing in Latvia and Germany. She is 26 years old and has finished her secondary education. A mountain skier was chosen among the male participants—he resides permanently in Austria, has also completed his secondary education, and is currently enrolled in a bachelor's program. A Greco-Roman wrestler living in Daugavpils, the second largest city in Latvia and the farthest from Riga, has completed higher education but had not heard of dual-career before. The final interviewee is an athlete-coach who resides in the small town of Iecava, Latvia. He has completed higher education and is reportedly aware of dual-career; however, based on further answers to the questionnaire, it can be concluded that his understanding is not complete or accurate.

The analysis of the interviews identified five themes: online learning, lack of information, information channels, support from those around, and lack of a system. These themes are explained in the following sections.

### *Prefer online learning*

Four out of five interviewees indicated that participation in high-performance sport necessitates training outside of Latvia, citing limitations related to climate conditions and the superior quality of training facilities abroad. Furthermore, respondents emphasized that conventional educational models often fail to accommodate the rigorous demands of elite athletic careers, frequently requiring prolonged periods for degree completion or proving altogether incompatible. Illustrative examples were provided: one interviewer reported extending undergraduate studies to six years instead of the standard four, while another could not complete a master's program due to insufficient time for final exams.

Interviewee 4: *"It's important to have remote learning options; for instance, I am currently abroad at a training camp. I also had a situation during my master's studies when I was away from Latvia for one and a half months. During that time, the spring exam session had already started. I returned at the end of the session and didn't have enough time to complete everything due to a lack of time, which is why I didn't finish my master's studies."* Notably, neither of the two mentioned interviewees expressed support for the current dual-career framework, suggesting a perceived inadequacy in meeting the needs of elite athletes.

Two out of five interviewees emphasized that universities' approaches to remote learning have evolved significantly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. One interviewee noted that the transition to online instruction during the spring session of the pandemic facilitated the timely completion of academic assignments and enabled consistent lecture attendance, despite physical absence. This flexible approach to learning has, in some cases, continued post-pandemic, offering greater accessibility even at institutions that do not formally identify as dual career program providers. Interviewee 3, in particular, highlighted the ongoing benefits of this shift in instructional delivery and recommended also including intermediate tests and exams remotely, like what was done during COVID-19.

### *Lack of information*

In examining the availability of information regarding dual-career opportunities, four out of five interviewees reported being unaware of such programs. Furthermore, two interviewees stated that their attempts to seek support from specific universities were unsuccessful. Interviewee 3 noted: *"When I inquired about support for athletes, no additional information on dual-career options or academic support for athletes was provided. The emphasis was on leisure activities and opportunities to earn extra credit through elective courses."* It is essential to highlight that the University of Latvia (LU) is among the most established institutions offering dual-career programs and disseminating related information (Chapter 4.4). Therefore, this indicates a significant communication gap within university departments that impedes access to vital resources. Interviewee 4 at Daugavpils University shared a comparable experience, suggesting that he had a similar experience, even though at the same time and university, Interviewee 2 received support and could study according to an individual plan. Thus, we can conclude that these systemic shortcomings contribute to the failures experienced by student-athletes.

Only one in five interviewees showed awareness of dual career opportunities and reported utilizing the available programs in Latvia and internationally. Furthermore, it was emphasized that athletes are often unaware of alternative support initiatives that are not directly linked

to Latvian educational institutions. This includes international resources such as those offered by Athletes 365—a platform likely familiar only to a limited subset of athletes, primarily those who have participated in the Olympic Games. These insights suggest a significant information gap that may hinder broader engagement with valuable support mechanisms to facilitate dual-career development.

#### *Information channels*

All interviewed athletes confirmed they receive information through the LOC's communication channels, including social media platforms, WhatsApp groups, and email correspondence. While time constraints often prevent them from fully engaging with this content, the respondents emphasized the need to deliver information more personally and directly. None of the athletes has actively used LOC channels to seek information about dual-career opportunities. Nevertheless, they recognized the importance of consolidating such information into a centralized and accessible format. Additionally, they suggested targeted outreach strategies aimed at younger athletes, particularly those approaching secondary school graduation, such as incorporating brief presentations at youth sports events or distributing tailored informational materials. Interviewee 5: *"I'm interested in what I can say and recommend to athletes who, after finishing primary or secondary school, start making choices and begin studying at universities, to help them do so while keeping sport as one of their career paths."*

#### *Support from others*

Four out of five athletes interviewed reported that their coaches were generally supportive and accommodating regarding balancing athletic and academic commitments. One respondent acknowledged that, while their coach did not always favour adjusting, they ultimately reached compromises to pursue quality education alongside training. Interviewee 1: *"I was lucky my coaches understood that education is important, not just sports and an athletic career. It was always possible to decide to attend exams or important lectures. There was a coach who admitted that he might not always like it when training sessions were missed, but he allowed it."* Similar sentiments were expressed about the broader support system, including family and community members, who provided a mainly positive and encouraging environment. In contrast, one athlete shared a different perspective, stating that their coaches were exclusively results-oriented and showed little concern for athletes' well-being beyond performance. According to this respondent, such an approach is common across many sports, where athletes can engage in non-sporting activities only after expending all their physical and emotional energy in training and competition.

#### *Lack of system*

One interviewee noted that Latvia lacks a sustainable and supportive system for athlete development, which may be attributed to the country's relatively recent restoration of independence. Many institutional frameworks, including those in education and sports, have only been re-established over the past three decades. As a result, critical intersections, such as dual-career pathways, remain underdeveloped, poorly defined, and insufficiently regulated (see Chapter 4.4). In contrast, other countries, like Germany, have more mature systems where sports are closely integrated with national defence structures. The second interviewee stated: *"I have observed that there are countries with no support at all, and others with well-developed systems where, through universities or the military, an athlete is already*



*integrated into a future profession. At first, you combine it with training, but most importantly, it gives you the sense that you are needed even after your sports career ends. I think this is something that is not well-organized in Latvia.”* This model could represent a potential direction for Latvia’s dual career development, particularly considering the current geopolitical context and national defence priorities.

#### **4.4. In-depth interviews with representatives from program administrators**

##### *Interviewee profile*

Interviews were conducted with representatives from higher education institutions and universities that, based on information available online and from various sources, have active dual career programs. In total, the interviewees represented four educational institutions, with some institutions having multiple participants in the interviews. Additionally, a member of parliament responsible for advancing sports-related issues in the country and the head of the organization managing the national scholarship program were also interviewed. All were asked to share their opinions on the dual-career system in Latvia, the program providers (including statistical data and quantitative indicators), and their perspectives, suggestions, recommendations, and constructive criticism. A more detailed interview questionnaire can be found in Annex 4.

##### *Unified criteria system*

Several interview respondents noted that no unified dual-career system or shared vision is implemented at the national level. As a result, higher education institutions interpret the concept and its implications individually, often adapting definitions and principles from international practice.

LU representative noted that, as part of the Erasmus+ program, LU has established dual-career criteria that could be adopted nationally and implemented across all educational institutions in Latvia. These guidelines encompass mentoring, social support, medical care, and other essential support mechanisms that are vital components of dual-career support.

Meanwhile, a representative of Parliament noted that there is currently no progress on dual-career matters. The representative said, “There is a lack of clear direction and initiative from the sector to address dual-career issues at the national level.” Previous stakeholders, such as the Latvian University Sport Federation (LASS), have attended several parliamentary commission meetings to discuss the issue, but their perspective differs from that of the universities. Consequently, no action has been taken over the past two years.

To advance the issue, the sector or a driving force (LASS and leading universities) must establish a framework and proposals concerning dual-career matters at the national level. This could ultimately lead to regulations by the Cabinet of Ministers.

##### *Universities encourage the sports pathway*

As mentioned, universities provide dual-career support based on their understanding and practices. One commonly highlighted benefit, noted by three out of four institutions, is the inclusion of student-athletes in professional sports teams. This strategy helps fulfil the university's goals in athletics while allowing athletes who join these teams to qualify for the

dual-career program and receive additional support. However, such opportunities are not universally available for individual sports or disciplines that the university does not prioritize.

Currently, individual athletes can seek support by approaching educational institutions or universities that have established dual career criteria and regulations; unfortunately, there are only three such institutions.

*Programs that offer co-funding attract high participation.*

All interviewees recognized the necessity of raising awareness about dual careers and emphasized the importance of explanatory work regarding the concept and its regulation, particularly in Latvia. Simultaneously, two of the interviewed universities—those with the most extensive experience in dual career programs—reported that they encounter no difficulty filling available program slots, as the number of athlete applicants is nearly double the number of available places. This trend is also reflected in the statistics of the dual career programs offered by LSFC (see Table 4.4). However, it is essential to note that all these programs provide financial support through reduced tuition fees or even scholarships.

**Table 3: Eight-Year statistics of the LSFC dual-career program**

Year	Athletes applied	Athletes receiving scholarship	Total support (EUR)
2025	October,2025	October,2025	48 000
2024	Program suspended		
2023	94	52	50 200
2022	114	56	50 400
2021	75	45	40 200
2020	72	51	50 400
2019	66	41	36 400
2018	63	37	35 600

*Athletes need to reapply for programs annually*

Three of four educational institutions and the national program administrator, LSFC, confirmed that athletes must reapply for dual career programs each year. Only at Riga Technical University (RTU) can athletes receive support for the entire duration of their academic program without needing to reapply annually. A student may lose eligibility only if there is a prolonged period of inactivity.

This approach saves students time and energy, allowing them to focus more on achieving results instead of constantly securing their place in the program. This can be viewed as a clear added value in RTU's case.

*Collect all available information*

All interviewees acknowledged the importance of raising awareness and improving the framework for dual careers. They also emphasized the value of providing timely, high-quality information to athletes, especially young individuals who have just completed or are about to complete secondary school.

Two of the four educational institutions noted that their efforts to promote current academic programs begin with the annual “Skola” education fair, typically held in February. They emphasized that decision-making when choosing a profession or pursuing further education is rarely impulsive—it requires time and careful consideration.

All institutions expressed a strong interest in effective communication channels to reach athletes and attract them to their programs. One institution highlighted the concern of athletes leaving to study abroad, a particularly noticeable trend among track and field athletes.

The discussion also covered the need to motivate athletes to pursue education alongside their sports careers. Here, role models—well-known and successful athletes—were seen as crucial. A key recommendation was to actively share stories of athletes’ educational achievements in public communications, ensure that such information is included in their profiles or biographies, and consider using endorsements or motivational messages from prominent athletes in informational materials to inspire others.

#### **4.5. Overview of existing programs**

This section reviews all publicly available information regarding the accessibility of dual career program details at major national universities, higher education institutions, and those mentioned by any interviewees. The main goal is to determine what each institution offers and how easily incoming students can find, understand, and access this information. Can athletes without knowledge of dual career support programs find this information through general information channels?

As shown in Annex 5: Available Information About Dual Career Programs at Educational Institutions in Latvia, state-funded study spots for high-achieving athletes are available at two of the seven institutions examined. Information on tuition fee discounts of up to 100% is available for five of the seven educational institutions. Based on the reviewed media articles, there is no reason to believe that any other higher education institution offering scholarships or full tuition fee waivers is missing from this table.

Based on the available information, it can be concluded that descriptions of dual career programs are generally hard to find, and even when they are available, they are not always clearly identified as part of these programs. At the same time, it is essential to note that nearly all the reviewed educational institutions have clearly described and presented their sports centres. This indicates the availability of sports infrastructure, opportunities to join professional university teams, and the chance to participate in national and international competitions, both among universities and colleges, as well as in national championships and leagues.

## **Chapter 5 Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the author provides recommendations and specific proposals for addressing and improving the issues and conclusions described in the work. Overall, the suggestions include clearly defining the concept at the national level, enhancing the accessibility and delivery of information through various channels, and developing the content of programs.

### **5.2 To improve information about dual career programs**

For younger athletes and their coaches, since identifying elite-level athletes starts at the primary and secondary school levels, it is crucial to introduce the concept of dual-career early. This is also supported by data from the surveyed athlete database, where most respondents have only completed primary or secondary education. Thus, this age group can be identified as a key target audience for promoting dual-career awareness and explaining available opportunities. Establish effective information exchange channels with primary and secondary schools, sports schools, and federations to ensure up-to-date information is distributed through all available communication channels.

More targeted and comprehensive information is required. Given the awareness level demonstrated in the study among elite athletes regarding dual-careers and the various support programs available, more focused information is demanded. This information should not only summarize programs and services implemented nationally but also provide an overview of international opportunities and resources, such as Erasmus+ for Athletes 365 and other initiatives.

The lack of accessible or transparent information like a consolidated infographic - The survey among elite athletes revealed that it is the primary barrier to utilizing dual-career, or that a specific educational institution or study program is not recognized as supporting dual-careers. However, this does not exclude other programs offering tuition support or alternative assistance mechanisms. Therefore, clear, visually engaging, and easily understandable communication channels or informational materials would benefit elite athletes by encouraging their participation in dual-career initiatives. The consolidated infographic presents information about all available programs—in Latvia and internationally—to ensure that athletes know the opportunities to pursue education alongside their sports careers. It is essential to provide information to athletes in a format that is both accessible and easy to understand.

Focus more on clarifying what dual-career entails, given athletes' understanding of the dual-career concept and the limitations highlighted by respondents. A comprehensive knowledge of these programs can effectively resolve some of the perceived barriers, such as the need for physical attendance or time constraints, through personalized study plans. Therefore, it is recommended that informational materials clearly explain what dual-career programs offer and outline the overall benefits for athletes and the opportunities for overcoming potential barriers.

Utilizing social media—specifically Instagram and Facebook—along with email, seminars, and forums - to effectively convey information to athletes and coaches. Additionally, elite athletes

actively use WhatsApp groups to share various updates and information are identified as a valuable communication tool.

### **5.3 To create cross-sectoral collaboration**

Explore the potential of integrating sports and military structures to develop dual-career pathways, as seen in countries like Germany and other parts of Europe. This approach could provide solutions for advancing both fields in a mutually beneficial way.

### **5.4 To establish a clear regulatory framework**

To create a unified system, the sector or a driving force (LASS and leading universities) must develop a framework and proposals regarding dual-career issues at the national level. This could ultimately lead to regulations from the Cabinet of Ministers.

Develop and implement regulatory frameworks for dual-careers and the criteria for their identification and presentation in educational institutions. Ensure that all educational institutions' websites offering dual-career programs in various forms provide accessible and easily understandable information.

### **5.5 To enhance access to dual career programs**

Engage and involve schools and educational institutions that currently do not offer dual-career programs but have a well-developed sports focus and awareness. The goal is to encourage them to incorporate dual-career support for athletes as the next step in their development and to appear on the lists of higher education institutions that interest athletes.

To educate the public and athletes about the concept and significance of dual careers, in order to promote broader understanding of these issues in society. This would also enable academic staff and coaches to become increasingly knowledgeable on the topic, so they can more effectively support young athletes in making important life decisions.

## 5.6 Action Plan

Recommendation	Actions	Lead	Resources	Progress benchmarks	Completion date	Evidence of success
Improve information about dual career programs	Establish an effective information exchange channel with sports schools and federations	LOC Sport dep.	Sport manager	All sport schools and federations receive information	March, 2026	Sport schools and federations have published it and sent to all their databases
	Collect information about all Dual career programs	LOC Project dep.	Project department	Response from all universities	October, 2025	List of all dual career programs offered for Latvian athletes.
	Prepare the section on web page of LOC	LOC project dep.	Project department	Include the section in the website structure	October, 2025	Published section, updates information 2 times per year
	Create infographic of dual-career	LOC project dep.	Project department	Collected all information	October, 2025	A4 format infographic
Establish strong cooperation and communication between LOC and dual-career program providers	Create a contact list with current programs and persons responsible, and organize a successful information flow	LOC and partner universities	Project department	Program and contact list	August-September 2025	All contact persons on a list, information flow at least 2 times per year
Included the topic of dual-career in the Athletes' forum	Create the event plan of Athletes forum dedicated to dual career	Board, Athletes commission	Project department	Approval of proposal	October-November 2025	Attendance of at least 100 in person - 300 online.
Create cross-sectoral collaboration	Invite Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Education and Sports to discussion	Board of LOC	Board and Ministries	Signing of a memorandum of understanding	July, 2026	Created dual-career programs in military structures
Establish a clear regulatory framework	Introduce all partners with framework	LASS and education institutions	LASS	Discussion of interim results at a Saeima subcommittee meeting	November, 2025	A common understanding and agreement among universities on the definition.

	To develop Cabinet of Ministers regulations for the harmonized framework and organize this at the national level, ensuring a unified understanding.	LASS and Parliament	LASS	Submitted proposal for regulations in Cabinet of Ministers	June, 2026	MC regulations
Enhance access to dual career programs	Emphasize to educational institution representatives the importance of information dissemination within educational institutions	LOC and education institutions	Education institutions	Informative campaigns within education institutions	Augusts, 2026	Employees of education institutions are aware of dual-career opportunities
	Emphasize remote learning and personalized scheduling as key criteria for dual-career pathways.	LOC project dep. and LASS	LASS	Greater understanding among educational institutions of the need to provide support.	June, 2026	An increased number of educational institutions capable of meeting the main requirements

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**Use of AI tools**

Chat GPT - for grammar and style checking - Task - *"Improve language"*

Google translate – for translating

Grammarly - for grammar and style checking

Google Forms – for questionnaire respondents

Office Dictation – for transcribing audio interviews

## **Abstract**

The global focus on athlete-centered approaches and dual-career support is increasing, especially in youth education. In Latvia, however, dual-career responsibilities mainly fall on universities and athletes, with limited active involvement from the Latvian Olympic Committee.

This thesis aims to thoroughly examine elite athletes' awareness and engagement with dual-career programs in Latvia. It identifies barriers and motivators to participation and uses these insights to develop specific recommendations and a strategic plan to improve the current dual-career support system.

A robust mixed-methods approach was used. The quantitative phase involved a survey of about 200 top Latvian athletes and coaches. This was complemented by in-depth qualitative interviews with five athletes and five program officials, which provided detailed insights. A comprehensive review of literature on dual-career concepts also established a solid context. The study revealed a significant lack of awareness among elite athletes regarding dual-career programs. The primary obstacle was the lack of clear, organized, easy-to-access information. Athletes strongly preferred receiving information through lively communication channels such as social media (Instagram, Facebook), email, structured seminars, interactive forums, and informal WhatsApp groups.

Based on these findings, a detailed action plan was developed. Key areas include improving information, clarifying dual-career benefits, and promoting programs. Involve cross-sectoral collaboration, establish a regulatory framework, and improve access and engagement.

This thesis offers significant practical contributions by providing concrete, actionable recommendations and a detailed LOC and stakeholder plan. Implementing these proposals aims to strengthen Latvia's dual-career support system and enhance elite athletes' educational integration and holistic development.

## Résumé

L'approche centrée sur l'athlète et le soutien à la double carrière sont de plus en plus mis en avant au niveau mondial, notamment dans le cadre de l'éducation des jeunes. En Lettonie, cependant, les responsabilités liées à la double carrière incombent principalement aux universités et aux athlètes, avec une implication active limitée du Comité Olympique Letton. Cette thèse vise à examiner en profondeur la connaissance et l'engagement des athlètes d'élite en Lettonie en ce qui concerne les programmes de double carrière. Elle identifie les obstacles et les facteurs de motivation à la participation et utilise ces informations pour élaborer des recommandations spécifiques et un plan stratégique visant à améliorer le système actuel de soutien à la double carrière.

Une approche robuste à méthodes mixtes a été utilisée. La phase quantitative a consisté en une enquête auprès d'environ 200 des meilleurs athlètes et entraîneurs lettons. Cela a été complété par des entretiens qualitatifs approfondis avec 5 athlètes et 5 responsables de programme, fournissant des informations détaillées. Une revue complète de la littérature sur les concepts de double carrière a également établi un contexte solide.

L'étude a clairement révélé un manque significatif de sensibilisation parmi les athlètes d'élite concernant les programmes de double carrière. L'obstacle principal était l'absence généralisée d'informations claires, organisées et faciles d'accès. Les athlètes ont fortement préféré recevoir des informations par des canaux de communication dynamiques tels que les médias sociaux (Instagram, Facebook), le courrier électronique, des séminaires structurés, des forums interactifs et des groupes WhatsApp informels.

Sur la base de ces résultats, un plan d'action détaillé a été élaboré. Les domaines clés comprennent l'amélioration de l'information, la clarification des avantages de la double carrière et la promotion des programmes. Il s'agit également d'impliquer une collaboration intersectorielle, d'établir un cadre réglementaire et d'améliorer l'accès et l'engagement.

Cette thèse apporte des contributions pratiques significatives en fournissant des recommandations concrètes et réalisables ainsi qu'un plan détaillé pour le LOC et les autres parties prenantes. La mise en œuvre de ces propositions vise à renforcer considérablement le système de soutien à la double carrière en Lettonie, améliorant l'intégration éducative et le développement holistique des athlètes d'élite.

## Appendices

### Annex 1: Athlete Questionnaire

<b>Introduction</b>	
<p>Society increasingly considers the integration of athletes into everyday life and their transition after the end of their sports careers. Consequently, the issue of "Dual Career" has been on the list of topical issues in the sports sector for 10 years. Considering how informed Latvian athletes are about this concept, whether they have already used various programs, or are open to learning about it, Ruta Millere Celmiņa, Head of the Marketing Department of the Latvian Olympic Committee (LOK), is conducting a survey of high-performance athletes within the framework of the International Sport Management MEMOS program.</p> <p>The collected responses will be used to develop and improve the services and programs provided by the LOK, as well as to be included in the research part of the MEMOS project.</p> <p>Thank you in advance for your time!</p>	
<b>No</b>	<b>Question</b>
<b>Personal information</b>	
1	Age
2	Can you list the country where you spend most of the year
3	Sport
4	Athlete or coach
5	Level of Education
6	Current employment status? (Including studying)
<b>Questions about dual-career:</b>	
7	What does the term dual-career mean for/to you?
8	Have you used any dual-career guidance programs?
9	If, yes, describe which once.
9.1	Erasmus + or FISU programs
9.2	LSFP support
9.3	University or professional school programs
10	What has stopped you from doing this until now?
11	Do those around you, coaches, management, family, and friends support your involvement in dual-career programs?
12	What limitations do you see for engaging in dual-career programs?
<b>Questions about communication:</b>	
13	Would you be interested in more information about dual-careers?
14	Where would you most like to receive information about this?
14.1	Social media – IG, FB, TT, YT, X
14.2	Advertising in media
14.3	Flyers or bulletins
14.4	Direct email
14.5	Informative seminars
15	Would you look for information about support programs for athletes at the NOC Latvia channels – web page, social media channels?

<b>Other:</b>	
16	Would you be willing to participate in an interview about this topic?
17.1	Yes - please provide your contact details here
17.2	No
18	Do you have any comments that you would like to add about your experiences and/or suggestions on dual-career?
	Thank you!

## Annex 2.: Interview Questionnaire

Introduction	
<p>Society increasingly considers the integration of athletes into everyday life and their transition after the end of their sports careers. Consequently, the issue of "Dual Career" has been on the list of topical issues in the sports sector for 10 years. Considering how informed Latvian athletes are about this concept, whether they have already used various programs, or are open to learning about it, Ruta Millere Celmiņa, Head of the Marketing Department of the Latvian Olympic Committee (LOK), is conducting a survey of high-performance athletes within the framework of the International Sport Management MEMOS program.</p> <p>The collected responses will be used to develop and improve the services and programs provided by the LOK, as well as to be included in the research part of the MEMOS project.</p>	
No	Question
Questions about education:	
1	Are you currently enrolled in any educational institution?
2	If yes, please specify the institution and program.
3	How has your sport career influenced the pace or timeline of your academic studies?
4	Does your current or past educational institution offer flexibility for athletes?
5	What is your preferred study format: on-site, remote, or hybrid? Why?
6	Have you experienced any barriers in trying to balance education with sport?
7	What are the main challenges you've faced in trying to pursue both sport and education?
Questions about dual-career:	
8	Are you familiar with the term <i>dual-career</i> as it relates to athletes? If yes, how would you define it?
9	Were you aware of any dual-career support programs when you were making decisions about your education?
10	Have you ever attempted to access dual-career support or asked for athlete-specific academic help?
11	Was your study schedule adapted (e.g., individual plan, remote lectures)?
12	Have you received academic or logistical support from your university related to your sports career?
13	What do you think could be improved in Latvia's dual-career system?
14	What would help you or others most in successfully managing a dual career?
Questions about communication and information channels	
15	Where do you usually receive information about athlete-related opportunities (e.g., LOC, WhatsApp groups, coaches)?
16	Do you feel these channels are effective? What could be improved?
17	How would you prefer to receive important information (e.g., email, one-on-one sessions, short presentations at events)?
18	Have you ever received any information about dual-career options through LOC or educational institutions?
19	Do you think role models (successful athletes with education) influence younger athletes to pursue dual careers?
Questions about support	



20	Have your coaches been supportive of your academic pursuits? Please provide examples.
21	How about your family or community—have they encouraged balancing education with sport?
22	Do you believe that current sports systems in Latvia are supportive of dual careers?
Thank you!	

**Annex 3: Transcript of the conducted interview with an elite-level male athlete residing in Austria online via Google Meet on the 18th of March.**

**Interviewer:** Hello, as mentioned in the questionnaire, the interview is intended for a study-related research project. I specifically chose you for the interview because you indicated that you do not live in Latvia and do not use dual-career programs. Could you comment on your current situation with higher education?

**Interviewee:** Basically, in this spring semester, I have a study paper and one course to finish and the bachelor's thesis to write.

**Interviewer:** Are you studying in Latvia or at a school in Austria?

**Interviewee:** No, at the University of Latvia.

**Interviewer:** Does the University of Latvia offer a dual-career program for your program?

**Interviewee:** The situation was that I had inquired at some point, but there was no information at the university, and no one seemed particularly interested in helping or supporting either. Ultimately, I realized that their sports opportunities are more like extracurricular, afternoon activities where you can play sports like football, basketball, and go to the gym. But I wanted to be able to, as an athlete, more easily arrange deadlines, coordinate tests, exams, and seminars with my training and competition schedule. Currently, the situation is that deadlines are strictly set for makeup exams, and as a result, my bachelor's degree has now dragged into the sixth year instead of three. As an alpine skier, it's simply not possible to coordinate the deadlines. From the end of September until mid-April, I'm in the active season when I need to be in Austria due to training and competitions, both financially and otherwise, and it isn't easy to align all the deadlines for coursework and exams.

Perhaps it's a case of the Faculty of Law at the University of Latvia, which is not interested in offering concessions to athletes with dual-careers. Three years ago, I spoke with the dean, and no solutions for dual-career support were offered.

**Interviewer:** Yes, regarding accessing information, you mentioned social media – Facebook, media, email, and seminars. Did you hear about the Athletes' Forum held in autumn?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I did, but I couldn't attend because the timing didn't match. I was already in Austria. We were having training sessions, and unfortunately, I couldn't register.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any other comments about how to better deliver information to athletes, especially those who are not in Latvia and whose academic year coincides with the peak of their sports season?

**Interviewee:** Honestly, I don't have suggestions. I receive everything – information comes through WhatsApp groups, social media, and emails. I'd even say there's no problem receiving information from the Olympic Committee (LOC) and the Latvian Olympic Union (LOU).

As for dual careers, it's the university that needs to better understand and manage what it offers. Whether it depends on the level of sport—is it only for Olympic team athletes, or also for others who compete at European and world levels?

**Interviewer:** How would you comment on the influence that coaches have on an athlete's decision to continue their studies after high school, and what is their general perspective on the dual career model?

**Interviewee:** I only have experience with my foreign coach and my physical preparation coach in Latvia. Overall, I can say the attitude is very positive. It's important to pursue something alongside sports, as a sports career lasts for only so long, and you'll need to prepare for life afterward. However, I've also heard the opposing viewpoint – that studies can distract from sports; sometimes you're focused on exams or deadlines during training. But personally, my experience with coaches has been very positive.

**Interviewer:** Do coaches provide support to athletes during challenging moments in their dual-careers, offer flexibility, or demonstrate understanding?

**Interviewee:** In my case, it's not that the coach dictates we ski or do squats from morning to night. We mostly agree on all training and competition plans together, so it's not really a pressing issue for me. If I know I have a test in two weeks, I just arrange with my coach that the week before, I'll have one less training session, or, for example, while the team trains on the mountain, I stay home or train for a shorter time and focus on my studies. I'd say the coach is supportive, and it's relatively easy to find a compromise – sometimes that means skipping a training session or sacrificing a bit on the sports side, but it's not like I get blamed for it in the next session.

**Interviewer:** In your current bachelor's program, were the lectures mandatory to attend in-person, or were you allowed to attend remotely?

**Interviewee:** I've now transitioned to distance learning, so most of both the autumn and spring semesters take place online. This arrangement is perfect for me because I can attend lectures as planned and avoid the travel expenses associated with getting to Latvia and the university.

**Interviewer:** Has that changed since COVID-19?

**Interviewee:** It has changed since COVID-19.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any other questions or comments?

**Interviewee:** Regarding remote lectures, perhaps midterm tests could also be conducted remotely. I understand the situation with exams, but maybe we could consider midterms as well. In my case, within the Faculty of Law, some lecturers organize tests online even during distance learning, while others manage everything in-person. This is especially relevant given the existing experience from COVID-19.

#### Annex 4: Questionnaire for stakeholders – representatives from universities and program implementers

Introduction	
<p>Society increasingly considers the integration of athletes into everyday life and their transition after the end of their sports careers. Consequently, the issue of "Dual Career" has been on the list of topical issues in the sports sector for 10 years. Considering how informed Latvian athletes are about this concept, whether they have already used various programs, or are open to learning about it, Ruta Millere Celmiņa, Head of the Marketing Department of the Latvian Olympic Committee (LOK), is conducting a survey of high-performance athletes within the framework of the International Sport Management MEMOS program.</p> <p>The collected responses will be used to develop and improve the services and programs provided by the LOK, as well as to be included in the research part of the MEMOS project. Thank you in advance for your time!</p>	
No	Question
Personal information	
1	Name, Surname
2	Position
3	Representative organization
<b>Questions about dual-career:</b>	
4	<p>Do you believe Latvia currently has a clearly defined national framework for supporting dual careers in sports?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not sure</p>
5	<p>Has your institution developed its own internal dual-career support criteria or regulations?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>If yes, please describe key components (e.g., mentoring, tuition support, flexible study schedules): _____</p>
6	<p>What types of support are available to dual-career athletes at your institution? <i>(Select all that apply)</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Academic mentoring</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Flexible scheduling</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Online/remote study options</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Financial support</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Social/psychological support</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Medical or rehabilitation services</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Career counselling</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</p>
7	<p>Would you support the adoption of a unified national dual-career policy across all educational institutions?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p>

	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> With modifications (please specify): _____
8	How many student-athletes applied to your dual-career program in the last academic year? <input type="checkbox"/> Number of applicants: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Number accepted: _____
9	Do student-athletes at your institution need to reapply for the dual-career program every year? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Depends on program
10	Does your institution offer financial support to dual-career athletes (e.g., tuition reductions, scholarships)? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Partial support (please explain): _____
11	Does your dual-career program cater equally to athletes in both team and individual sports? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Primarily team sports <input type="checkbox"/> Primarily individual sports
<b>Questions about communication:</b>	
12	What channels does your institution use to inform athletes about dual-career opportunities? <i>(Select all that apply)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> social media (Instagram, Facebook) <input type="checkbox"/> Email/newsletters <input type="checkbox"/> WhatsApp or messaging groups <input type="checkbox"/> Website/online portals <input type="checkbox"/> In-person seminars or forums <input type="checkbox"/> Through federations or sports schools <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
13	How would you rate the current awareness level of dual-career options among athletes? <input type="checkbox"/> Very high <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate <input type="checkbox"/> Low <input type="checkbox"/> Very low
14	What are the top 3 barriers that limit athlete participation in dual-career programs? <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of information <input type="checkbox"/> Rigid academic schedules <input type="checkbox"/> Financial constraints

	<input type="checkbox"/> Low motivation to study <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of institutional support <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
15.	<p>What would help improve dual-career participation rates in your opinion? <i>(Select all that apply)</i></p> <input type="checkbox"/> A national unified framework <input type="checkbox"/> Financial incentives <input type="checkbox"/> Awareness campaigns <input type="checkbox"/> Role model stories/public endorsements <input type="checkbox"/> Improved collaboration with federations/sports schools <input type="checkbox"/> Easier reapplication process <input type="checkbox"/> Better flexibility in academic programs
16.	<p>Do you think including athlete role models in promotional and informational materials would increase engagement?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Maybe
	Thank you!

**Annex 5: Available Information About Dual Career Programs at Educational Institutions in Latvia**

No.	University or professional school	Program Overview
1	University of Latvia (LU)	Tuition fee discount - from 25-100% depending on athletic achievements and academic success (for ~50 students each year)
		Individual study schedule - a flexible approach to the learning process by creating an individual study schedule that is adjusted to the regime of training, training camps, and competitions
		International experience - the opportunity to represent the University in international competitions, which is a great springboard for achieving personal records and gaining international experience
		Sports scholarships - awards sports scholarships that cover tuition fees to athletes who demonstrate high achievements in their sport and are also successful in their studies
		Necessarily to apply for dual-career support each year
		Information is available on the website in an easy-to-find and understandable format
2	Technical University of Riga (RTU)	Sports scholarships for the entire period of study - Athletes are granted budget places for the entire period of study (since 2015), ensuring financial stability and the opportunity to focus on both studies and sports ~25 students each year
		Flexible study schedule - an individually tailored study plan that allows students to coordinate their learning process with their training and competition schedule
		Long-term support - The program provides long-term support, helping athletes plan their futures in both sports and academics, options to join sport teams of university, use sport infrastructure, mental support
		Dual career program support does not apply to all study programs and those that can be applied for are subject to quota regulations
		The application process is clearly regulated and organized, but information is difficult to find without an updated seasonal press release
3	Riga Stradiņš University (RSU)	Individual study system (more than 10 years) - High-class athletes are provided with the opportunity to study according to an individual schedule, adapting the learning process to the training and competition schedule
		Sports Excellence Tuition Fee Discount - a sports excellence tuition fee discount of up to 100%. This discount is available to 30 athletes who demonstrate high achievements in their sport
		Sports club activities - RSU Sports Club offers the opportunity to practice more than 10 sports, including basketball, volleyball, hockey, swimming and others, allowing students to maintain a high level of athletic fitness while studying

		Information about dual career program offers is not easy to find and review, information is only available in the media and on the university website, if you know where to look
4	Latvian Academy of Sport Education (LSPA)	The academy has been merged with Rīga Stradiņš University, therefore separate public information is no longer available
5	University of Daugavpils (DU)	Support from the Sports Department - various types and levels of sports events are organized and managed, as well as student participation in the Latvian Universiade and international competitions is encouraged
		100% discount on tuition fees for 3 students - evaluation is carried out by a coaching committee, and athletic and academic performance is evaluated once a semester
		Career and Initiative Support Centre (KIAC) - career counselling, support from a psychologist and youth affairs specialists, helping students plan and develop their careers, both in sports and in other fields
		Information about dual-career support programs for athletes is not publicly available
6	Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LBTU)	The publicly available information does not mention support provided within dual career programs for high-performance athletes
		Opportunities to use the infrastructure and join teams, as well as represent the university in various competitions, including the SELL Games, the Latvian Universiade, international events, and others
7	Business university of Turība (BA Turība)	Tuition fee discounts - of up to 100% for athletes who actively participate in university sports team - basketball
		Career Centre and Support - Individual consultations, seminars and workshops, psychological support and career test
		Sports activities and teams - the opportunity to participate in various sports teams and competitions
		Flexible environment for student athletes - allowing them to achieve high results in both academic and athletic fields
		Information about dual career opportunities is not easy to perceive and understand