

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Stirling</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> C26 Sport</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Development of athlete career transition support</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>As a consequence of research carried out at the University of Stirling, as set out in this case study, the following developments to athlete career transition support have been achieved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A proactive athlete career transition support programme has been developed in the Republic of Ireland. At this point, 219 athletes across 24 sports have been supported by the programme.</li> <li>• A multi-dimensional intervention has been created in the Republic of Ireland containing the proactive and reactive support processes, identified by the research, aligned with critical support stages before, during and after the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.</li> <li>• The research findings have informed the training of psychologists and advisors in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland who work with athletes who retire from their sport.</li> <li>• The sportscotland Institute of Sport has developed an explicit high performance sport transition model in order to guide practitioner transition-based decision making, and where required, professional intervention and athlete/coach support processes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The intensity of training and commitment that athletes often make to achieve success can have negative consequences. This research was led by Professor David Lavalley after he took up his post at the University of Stirling. The systematic review set out in this case study, was carried out from August 2011- October 2011 and examined the transitions high performance athletes make to other careers after they retire from their sport. The purpose of this study was to provide a systematic review of studies on athletes' career transition out of sport in order to identify the existing evidence base and inform intervention strategies. The research produced a journal article and a series of conference presentations that have disseminated the findings to academic and practitioner communities.</p> <p>The research identified the key variables related to the quality of athletes' career transitions. These variables have been used to train practitioners who are providing proactive (e.g., career planning, providing education of transferable skills) and reactive support (e.g., coping with emotions, supporting identity reformation process) programmes to athletes to help them prepare for their career transition out of sport and adjust to post-sport lives. This research has found that high-level sporting competition plays an important role in developing transferable skills such as communication and time management, but that athletes who focus exclusively on their sport can become role restricted and be more at-risk of finding it difficult to change career. Athletes who are better prepared for life after sport are able to balance their education and career development alongside training and competition. In recent years, career and education support programmes for athletes have been developed in countries around the world, however, this systematic review research has changed the way athletes are supported through these programmes.</p> <p><b>The research team</b></p> <p>The research was carried out August-October 2011 by</p> <p>David Lavalley: Professor and Head of School of Sport; joined University of Stirling in July 2011</p> <p>Sunghee Park: Doctoral Student, University of Stirling in 2011</p> <p>David Tod: Lecturer, Aberystwyth University in 2011</p>

### 3. References to the research

Park, S., Lavallee, D., & Tod, D. (2012). Athletes' career transition out of sport: A systematic review. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. DOI: 10.1080/1750984X.2012.687053

### 4. Details of the impact

The systematic review set out in this case study has underpinned the development of interventions by the Irish Institute of Sport and sportscotland for athletes experiencing a career transition. Following the publication of the research findings in the *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology* in May 2012 the research has been used by the Irish Institute of Sport and sportscotland Institute of Sport to formulate their career transition programmes for athletes. Both organisations indicated that central to their capacity to design a best practice intervention was their ability to draw upon the systematic review findings. The research helped them understand, and immediately provide, better services to athletes who were demonstrating a diverse set of career transition support needs.

*“The research as published by you and your colleagues has allowed us to get a macro view of the factors that affect the athlete career transition adjustment process. The findings have allowed us to design a multi-dimensional support programme that contains a series of proactive and reactive support processes....All of these supports have been designed to effectively transition athletes out of the London 2012 games experience and correlate to the suggested support measures as indicated by your review.”*

(Head of Performance Skills, Irish Institute of Sport)

The research team provided training in the research findings to staff at the Irish Institute of Sport. As stated above, this has specifically allowed that organisation to create an athlete transition profiling process that aims to predict the onset of transition related difficulties. The Irish Institute of Sport can now proactively identify those athletes who are at risk of adjustment related difficulties in order to initiate proactive support measures well in advance. As a result the Irish Institute of Sport are intervening with athletes and providing proactive support measures before the onset of a difficult career transition. The findings of the systematic review has also shaped the professional development of the career transition support teams, consisting of psychologists and advisors through a series of workshops run by the research team that were based on the research findings.

In the Republic of Ireland, the research has had impact on the development of the Irish Institute of Sport athlete support strategy leading into and after the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The research has informed the development of a proactive athlete career transition support programme for 219 athletes across 24 sports, which was developed in 2012. As stated above by the Head of Performance Skills the research has also led to the design of a “multi-dimensional support intervention” The research has also informed the establishment, in 2012, of the “*first ever defined post-game athlete support programme involving a series of diverse supports*” (Head of Performance Skills, Irish Institute of Sport), including post-event debriefing led by a dedicated team of psychologists, in order to effectively support athletes retiring from sport.

The impacts at the Irish Institute of Sport are significant, and have been on-going since 2012. The Institute has listed the following five points as impacts emerging from the research:

1. A more systematic approach to managing athlete career transitions
2. Alignment of NGBs with the Institute's Performance Transition Programme

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3. Proactive monitoring and evaluation of athletes career adjustment difficulties
4. More informed government funding of athlete development
5. Better informed Institute staff.

The impact at the sportscotland Institute of Sport is on-going and has primarily affected the training and development of sportscotland staff.

*“We ran two very successful continual development workshops, The focus of these workshops stemmed in content from [the] review paper...”*

(Head of Science and Innovation, sportscotland Institute of Sport)

The beneficiaries, in Scotland, are the athletes being supported by the programmes, as well as the psychologists and advisors who have benefitted through professional development training.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

Letters to corroborate the impact have been provided by the Irish Institute of Sport and the sportscotland Institute of Sport. They are quoted from in the case study above. Contact details for the organisations have been provided with the REF submission.