AN EXAMINATION OF THE DUAL CAREER PATHWAY AND TRANSITIONS UK STUDENT-ATHLETES EXPERIENCE THROUGHOUT UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

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Abstract

A dual career in sport is the challenge of combining a sporting career with education or work. An increasing population of athletes are choosing to further their academic careers by combining elite level sport with university education. University student-athletes may, however, be susceptible to experiencing a number of stressors (e.g., managing sport and academic timetables and personal sacrifices). This thesis extended knowledge on dual careers through the examination of athletes' and stakeholders' perceptions of the whole university experience, including the transition into, experiences during, and the transition out of university. A qualitative research design was employed throughout the thesis and data were collected through focus groups, longitudinal semi-structured interviews, and one-off semi structured interviews with participants from a range of UK universities. Data were analysed thematically and narratively. Additionally, autoethnographic data from the author (a former elite student-athlete) supplemented participant data. Part A explored athletes' and stakeholders' perceptions of the transition into university for student-athletes. Results found that student-athletes form expectations before they move into university (e.g., perceived living challenges), but often experienced different demands following the transition (e.g., increased sporting commitments following entry to university sport). These results suggest that pre-transition support may not be targeting the correct areas. Part B examined the experiences during university for student-athletes. Results found that student-athletes have diverse and challenging experiences at university, leading to the creation of five different narratives (e.g., injury narrative). Overall results highlight the importance of integrating university and external stakeholder support, and the development of more effective practitioner-athlete relationships. Finally, part C explored athletes' and stakeholders' perspectives of the transition out of university for student-athletes. Results found that student-athletes took five different pathways when they left university (postgraduate education, full-time sport, vocation sport dual career, triple career, and discontinuation from sport). Student-athletes experienced challenges with the renegotiation of their identity when they left university, and a loss of core support services led them to perceive that they had difficulty reaching their elite senior potential after university. Overall results of the current thesis have implications for how stakeholders educate and prepare student-athletes for transitions, and how stakeholders within the student-athletes' circle interact whilst they are at university. Alongside an adapted theoretical framework that represents UK experiences, recommendations for improved university dual career provision in the UK are made, including the need to address why athletes are entering university, reasons why universities are supporting athletes, and the need to address the post-university gap in support systems. These recommendations challenge and extend current policy guidelines.

Contents

Abstract……………………………………………………………………………...i
Contents……………………………………………………………………………..ii
List of Tables……………………………………………………………………….vi
List of Figures………………………………………………………………………vii
Chapter One……………..…………………………………………………...…….1
1.1 Introduction…………………………………………………….………...2
1.2 Significance and Structure of Thesis…………………………….....……...7
1.3 Definition of Terms……..………………………………………………….8
Chapter Two……………….....………………………………….…………….……9
2.1. Theoretical Perspectives…………...…………………………………..……10
2.1.1 Talent Development in the Athletic Career…..……………………………..10
2.1.2 Holistic Focus in the Athletic Career..……………………………………....11
2.1.3 Individual Transition Models……………………………………………..17
2.2 Empirical Review on the Pathways Through University…………………..…...22
2.2.1 The Transition into University..…………………………………………..22
2.2.2 During University…………………..…………………………………..…31
2.2.3 The Transition out of University……......………………………………..35
2.2.4 Review of UK University Sport Scholarship Programmes…………………39
2.3 Summary, Unsolved Issues, Knowledge Gaps and Focus of the Current Work.....40
Chapter Three……………..……………………………………….………………46
3.1 Research Design………..………………………………………………………47
3.1.2 Epistemological View……………………………………………………….48
3.1.3 Research Origins……………………….……………………………………49
3.2 Participants……………………………………………………..………………51
3.2.1 Participant Recruitment, Inclusion Criteria, and Sample Size…..…………..51
3.3 Procedure and Data Collection Methods…..…………………………………...53
3.3.1 One-Off Semi-Structured Interviews…………………………….………..55
3.3.2 Longitudinal Semi-Structured Interviews……………………………..……..57
3.3.3 Focus Groups………………………………………………………………..59
3.3.4 Autoethnography……………………………………………………………61
3.4 Data Analysis Procedures…….…………………………………………………..66
3.4.1 Thematic Analysis…………………………………………………………..66
3.4.2 Narrative Analysis………..…………………...…………………………68

3.5 Research Credibility……….……………………………………………………..70
  3.5.1 Naturalistic Generalisability………………………………………………….71
  3.5.2 Width……………………………………………………………………………71
  3.5.3 Credibility……………………………………………………………………..…71
  3.5.4 Transparency………………………………………………………………....73
  3.5.5 Evaluation and Trustworthiness of Autoethnography………..……………..…..73
Chapter Four…………………………………………………………………………..76
4.1 Introduction to Part A……….………………………………………………………77
4.2 Method………..……………………………………………………………………...79
4.3 Results………..……………………………………………………………………….80
  4.3.1 Pre-Transition Decision: To Go or Not to Go?..80
  4.3.2 Pre-Transition Decision: Where to Go?...84
  4.3.3 Pre-Transition Expectations and Demands: A Challenging Process……..….86
  4.3.4 Pre-Transition Support: Logistics and Uncertainty……………………..…91
  4.3.5 Acute Changes Following Transition: Unexpected Demands and Changes....93
  4.3.6 Management of Acute Change Following Transition………………………107
4.4 Discussion……..…………………………………………………………………109
  4.4.1 Part A Advancements to Knowledge……………………….………………113
  4.4.2 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research……………………………..…121
4.5 Conclusion……………………………………………….………………...123
Chapter Five…………………………………………………………………………124
5.1 Introduction to Part B…………………………………………………………....125
5.2 Method……………………………………………………………..……….126
5.3 Results………………………………………………………………………..…..126
  5.3.1 Ben's Story: Living at a National Training Centre where Sport is the Priority………………………………………………………………...…..127
  5.3.2 Georgina's Story: Injury Complications Leading to Selection Blues……....134
  5.3.3 Sara's Story: Poor Relationships and Social Experiences Leading to Isolation……………………………………………………………………..140
  5.3.4 Paul's Story: External Stakeholder Pressures and Sport-Specific Demands.....146
  5.3.5 My Story (Autoethnographic Data): Reflections on Why I didn't Excel Further in My Sport at University…………………………………………………………154
5.4 Discussion……………………………………………………………………..156
  5.4.1 Part B Advancements to Knowledge…………………………………...…...156

    5.4.2 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research……………………………..163
  5.5 Conclusion………………………………………………..………………...164
Chapter Six…………………………………………………………………………..166
  6.1 Introduction to Part C……………………………………………..………..167
  6.2 Method……………...……………………………………………………….168
  6.3 Results…………………………………………………………..………..169
    6.3.1 Pre-Transition Thoughts: Anxiety and Uncertainty………..……………....170
    6.3.2 Pre-Transition Planning: Sporadic………………………………………173
    6.3.3 Post-University Path: What Decisions do Student-Athletes Make and Why?...174
    6.3.4 Challenges Upon Leaving University: Loss of Support Structures………...186
    6.3.5 Transition Support……………………………………………………..192
  6.4 Discussion………..………………………………………………………....195
    6.4.1 Part C Advancements to Knowledge……………………………….………196
    6.4.2 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research……………………………..202
  6.5 Conclusion……..…………………………………………………………...204
Chapter Seven…………………………………………………………………………..206
  7.1 General Overview of Thesis and Results……………………………………...207
  7.2 Main Findings Contributing to the Adapted Model…………………………..…209
    7.2.1 Athletic Level………………………...…………………………………209
    7.2.2 Psychological Level……………………………...……………………212
    7.2.3 Psychosocial Level……………………………………………………213
    7.2.4 Academic/Vocational Level……..………………..…………………..…..215
    7.2.5 Financial Level……………….…………………………………………..216
  7.3 Adaptations to the Higher Education Section of the Holistic Athletic Career Model…………………………………………………………………………...217
  7.4 Thesis Strengths………...…………………………………………………..219
  7.5 Thesis Delimitations and Limitations……...……………………………………220
  7.6 Reflections on Autoethnography: A Therapeutic Process………………………221
  7.7 Thesis Practical Implications.……………………..…………………………..222
    7.7.1 Implications for Supporting Student-Athletes Making Decisions around and Transitioning into University………………………………………………..222
    7.7.2 Implications for Supporting Student-Athletes During their University Dual Career……………………………………………………………………..224

    7.7.3 Implications for Supporting Student-Athletes Making Decisions around and Transitioning out of University...……………………………………………225
    7.7.4 Overall Thesis Practical Implications………………………………….226
  7.8 Future Research Directions………………………………………..…………..228
  7.9 Summary of Recommendations to University Dual Career Provision in the UK………………………………………………………………………………229
  7.10 Concluding Comments…..…………………………………………….....…234
References…………………………………………………………………………235
Appendix A: UK University Sport Scholarship Review……………………………..A1
Appendix B: Information Sheets, Consent Forms Used in and Further Details of Part A…...A5
Appendix C: Interview Schedules (Part A)…………………………………………....A16
Appendix D: Information Sheets, Consent Forms Used in and Further Details of Part B….A19
Appendix E: Interview Schedules (Part B)……………………………………………A26
Appendix F: Information Sheets, Consent Forms Used in and Further Details of Part C.….A29
Appendix G: Interview Schedules (Part C)……………………………………………A34
Appendix H: Data Use Across Thesis…………………………………………………A37

List of Tables

3.1. Outline of stakeholder roles……………………………………………………………54

3.2. Focus group participant information……………………………………………...……60

B.1. Part A participant labels……………………………………….……………….A15

D.1. Part B participant information…………………………………………………….A24

D.2. Part B longitudinal interviews time for information……………………………...…A25

F.1. Part C participant labels…………………………………………………..…….A33

H.1. Data use across thesis…………………………………………………………..A37

List of Figures

2.1. A developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes at athletic, individual, psychosocial, academic/vocational, and financial levels…………………………………...13

2.2. Athletic career transition model……………………………………………………..…20

2.3. Holistic athletic career model with box added to represent period of exploration of the current thesis……………………………………………………………………………..…41

3.1. Authors dual career timeline………………………………………………….…..61

7.1. Adaptation of the holistic athletic career model representative of the dual career pathway through university…………………………………………………………………………216

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

To achieve elite-level sporting performance, research has identified that athletes must spend a significant amount of time investing in their sport, that may lead to sacrifices in other spheres of life, such as gaining qualifications (e.g., Torregrosa, Ramis, Pallarés, Azocar, & Selva, 2015; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Despite these sacrifices having the potential to lead to elite performance, the risks (e.g., career-ending injury, limited exploration of career options outside of sport) and potential pitfalls (e.g., financial insecurity) of competing in top-level sport have led to an increasing population of athletes choosing to continue their academic development (e.g., MacNamara & Collins, 2010; Reints & Wylleman, 2009; Ryba, Stambulova, Ronkainen, Bundgaard, & Selänne, 2015) to give them alternative options in their life should their sporting career be unsuccessful. Ryba et al. (2015) refer to a dual career in sport as the challenge of combining a sporting career with education or work. As a consequence of the increased numbers of athletes partaking in dual careers, in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of research papers that have focused on understanding athletes' experiences of a dual career, especially from a North American, Australian, and European perspective (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014).

Scholars have widely reported the benefits that being involved in a dual career can have for athletes (e.g., Aquilina, 2009; EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes, 2012; Reints, 2011; Stambulova, Stephan, & Jäphag, 2007), including at a social level (e.g., expanded social networks and support systems), health-related level (e.g., reduced stress levels through being able to direct focus onto different areas), developmental level (e.g., opportunity to develop identities in a number of areas helping to avoid the issue of identity foreclosure), and financial level (e.g., higher employability prospects). There is also evidence to suggest that the different areas of a dual career can positively influence one another, for example, being an athlete whilst also being a student can have a positive effect on educational performance (e.g., Chen, Snyder, & Magner, 2010; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Henry, 2013). Although student-athletes may need to undertake flexible learning pathways (e.g., complete an academic degree in 5 years) to have the time to effectively train and compete in their sport, they have been found to complete their education at a higher academic level than the general population in their age group (e.g., De Knop, Wylleman, Van Hoecke, & Bollaert, 1999).

Despite the reported benefits of a dual career, research (e.g., Stambulova & Ryba, 2013; Bruner, Munroe-Chandler, & Spink, 2008) has also indicated that the combination of high level sport and education or work can be stressful. Student-athletes, for example, have to devote both time and energy into managing academic, sporting, and social roles (Broughton & Neyer, 2001).

Additional stressors within student-athlete populations may include dealing with fatigue, possible financial concerns, making personal sacrifices (e.g., spending minimal time with family), and challenges sustaining relationships with non-athletic peers (e.g., MacNamara & Collins, 2010; Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 2009). Research also suggests that to successfully maintain a dual career in sport, not only are high levels of motivation, commitment, resilience, and responsibility required from athletes, but often special arrangements are needed, such as flexible classes to accommodate training schedules (EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes, 2012).

According to the holistic athletic career model (Wylleman, Reints, & De Knop, 2013) that depicts different transitions and career stages within the athletic career, student-athletes at the university level will move through a number of stages, with each stage presenting new challenges. Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model highlights that during the transition to university, during their degree programme, and after university, student-athletes can experience a number of simultaneous events within differing life domains that can make the experience challenging.

First, the academic transition of moving to university may present new challenges for athletes. The transition into university for the general student population represents a major period of change within individuals' lives, and presents students with learning experiences, and opportunities for psychosocial development (Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000). Athletes may also experience transitions in their sporting development during this period, including moving from the junior to senior level. This athletic transition has been highlighted as being a significant step up in both physical and psychological terms, and characterised by a greater pressure to perform consistently (Pummell, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2008). During the period of moving to university, athletes may also experience changes in their psychological development, when the transition into young adulthood is taking place. The transition from adolescence into adulthood is described as being a confusing, stressful, and profound time of change (Arnett, 2004; Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). In addition, athletes may also have to adjust to changes within their identity (Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003), and may experience conflict between their student and athlete roles (Killeya-Jones, 2005). In combination with the changes outlined above, athletes may also experience an alteration in the type of psychosocial support received at university, and they may be required to form new relationships with support staff and other students (MacNamara & Collins, 2010; Wylleman et al., 2013). Finally, following the transition into university, athletes may also experience changes in their sources of financial support, from a reliance on their family, to sports federations and governing bodies (Wylleman et al., 2013). If new university student-athletes are able to cope effectively with these multiple transitions, this may lead to them being able to successfully manage their dual career. Poor coping, however, may lead to student-athletes experiencing a crisis or unsuccessful transition, at the athletic (e.g., burnout) or academic level (e.g., limited engagement with new style of education). A crisis transition into university may also have the potential to lead to mental health issues (e.g., psychological disorders; Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007), and drop out of the dual career (Bengtsson & Johnson, 2012).

Student-athletes may also experience periods of difficulty as they move through their university careers. Debois, Ledon, and Wylleman (2015) recognised that the dual career experience may be stressful during periods when athletes were competing in major events (e.g., World Championships), and when student-athletes were required to prioritise one career above the other (e.g., during exam periods). Research has also suggested that student-athletes' motivation to engage in education may fluctuate throughout their time at university, through issues such as fatigue, time constraints associated with training, and a singular focus on future sporting career opportunities (Burden, Tremayne, & Marsh, 2004). Additionally, aside from the predictable transitions that take place when athletes' move into their university careers, such as the move into a new level of education, during university, student-athletes may also be faced with other challenges that are not expected, and cause further difficulties (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004). These challenges may include the need to adapt to setbacks (e.g., injury and slumps in performance), pressure to retain sporting titles, lack of selection for major events, and personal life issues such as conflicts in relationships (e.g., MacNamara, Button, & Collins, 2010; Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). During student-athletes' time at university, the time demands of participating in sport are also suggested as leading to potential academic difficulties and the inability to have an active social life (Comeaux, Speer, Taustine, & Harrison, 2011), that could have implications on psychological wellbeing.

Finally, student-athletes will also come to the stage when they have to make the transition out of university and begin a new phase of life. Following the transition, student-athletes may move into semi-professional or professional sport or vocational careers (Wylleman et al., 2013). Research suggests that the transition out of university can be stressful for student-athletes, and they may be at risk of experiencing various psychological responses, such as confusion, grief, feelings of failure, depression, and isolation (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Falls & Wilson, 2013; Fuller, 2014; McKnight et al., 2009; Petitipas et al., 2009). Additionally, further challenges that student-athletes may encounter when they transition out of university include the loss of support networks (Murphy, 1995; Werthner & Orlick, 1986), uncertainty about their career paths (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990), and a loss of structure in their lives due to regimented schedules whilst at university (Moreland-Bishop, 2009). Due to these challenges, and the limited opportunities to continue competing in top-level sport, research from the United States (US) suggests that many former student-athletes will be forced to retire from competitive sport following their exit from university (e.g., Baillie & Danish, 1992; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Levy, 2005; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990).

Taking into account that student-athletes experience this combination of normative transitions (e.g., making the academic transitions into and out of university), and potential non-normative challenges (e.g., a season-ending injury) during their time at university, it is clear why some student-athletes may have difficulty keeping up a high level of performance or continuing to pursue a dual career. De Brandt (2017) reported that 1 in 3 student-athletes following a higher education and elite sport path dropped out of their dual career within the first three years. These figures highlight the challenges related to athlete attrition at university, that may lead to further difficulties when these athletes come to retire from their competitive sports careers. Considering the range of challenges that a dual career may present, in recent years, the focus of academic research has been on understanding the process to help facilitate and develop more effective dual career provision for high level athletes who are combining their sport with education at the university level (e.g., Aquilina, 2013; Brown et al., 2015; MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Despite recent efforts, there are a number of areas within the university dual career literature that would benefit from further exploration or are yet to be explored.

At present, there is limited research that has explored the experiences of university student-athletes within a United Kingdom (UK) context. The importance of researching dual careers in sport from a UK perspective was highlighted in a recently published independent report to government in the UK, titled ‘Duty of Care in Sport’ (2017). The report highlights that the areas of education and transition should be important focus areas for national governing bodies (NGBs) and educational institutions in the UK. Literature on university level student-athletes has, however, had a large focus on the experiences of collegiate athletes in the US and Canada (e.g., Miller & Kerr, 2002; Falls & Wilson, 2013; McFarlane, 2014; Tracey & Corlett, 1995; Moreland-Bishop, 2009), with less attention given to the experiences of student-athletes within Europe. This is supported by Stambulova and Ryba (2014) who analysed various cultural discourses in career research and found the dual career topic to be heavily observable in North America and Australia, and recently gaining prominence within Europe. Increased interest in the dual career topic in Europe may be due to the publication of the document titled “The EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes” (2012). These guidelines highlight that an athlete’s welfare is the responsibility of educational institutions, alongside NGBs, and sports federations. Gaining an increased understanding of university student-athlete experiences within specific contexts, such as the UK, may help national organisations to implement the correct types of support to help facilitate student-athletes' careers whilst at university (e.g., universities may be able to prepare athletes more effectively in making transitions). Gaining a greater understanding of student-athlete experiences may be particularly important in the UK because research has suggested that UK athletes will specialise and invest much later in their athletic careers than US athletes, with investment often mirroring educational changes, such as the transition into university (Collins et al., 2012). The educational transition into university for student-athletes within the UK may hold differing challenges to those within the collegiate system in the US, because it may be the first-time that athletes combine sport and education in such a way. In addition, understanding the experiences of student-athletes from a UK perspective may be of benefit because more than 50% of Team Great Britain's athletes who competed at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games were current students or alumni of the higher education sector (British Universities & Colleges Sport, 2016). This figure suggests that university is a common pathway for elite UK athletes to take, and understanding how to optimally support these individuals to maximise performance potential in both sport and education, whilst maintaining a healthy wellbeing, is of importance.

In the current literature, a large number of research articles examining the experiences of student-athletes is from the perspective of athletes themselves (e.g., Aquilina, 2013). Although understanding student-athletes' perceptions of their university experience is important to gain knowledge of how they can be optimally supported, there may be a number of other key individuals who play an important role in supporting student-athletes during their university careers. These individuals may include coaches, performance lifestyle advisors, physiotherapists, academic staff, and managerial figures, who may be responsible for the support programmes implemented. Gaining knowledge of university student-athlete experiences from various sources of support may be advantageous, because these individuals will have interacted with student-athletes in varying contexts, dealt with many issues, and all with differing levels of contact and openness (e.g., student-athletes may be more comfortable talking to certain support members about the challenges that they are facing than others). In particular, there is a limited representation of academic staff in student-athlete literature. Research has, however, suggested that improving relationships between academic staff and student-athletes is important because they play a role in shaping the development of student-athletes during their time at university (Brown et al., 2015; McKenna & Dunstan-Lewis, 2004). Gaining the perspectives of academic staff, in addition to other stakeholders in dual careers, may also be of benefit because they may have a key role in facilitating the dual career by providing flexible academic schedules for student-athletes.

In addition, there are a number of methodological limitations in the student-athlete literature. Currently, the majority of the athlete development and transition literature (e.g., junior to senior transition) has employed retrospective interviewing (e.g., Pummell et al., 2008). This form of data collection may have resulted in retrospective recall bias having an effect on the validity of the data presented (Levine & Safer, 2002). Accordingly, conducting research that can limit the effect of these problems, such as interviewing student-athletes longitudinally, and student-athletes who are just about to, or have recently made a transition, may provide a more comprehensive understanding of dual career literature. Using longitudinal methodology may advance understanding of student-athlete experiences, because it may become clearer over time, that there are different factors that influence the dual career experience for student-athletes, leading to differing perceptions (e.g., positive vs. negative university experiences).

Considering the limitations of previous literature highlighted above, to advance knowledge of dual careers in sport, the primary purpose of this thesis is to examine the pathway through university for UK student-athletes. Specifically, this thesis will examine the transition into university for student-athletes, experiences student-athletes face during university, and the transition out of university for student-athletes, by examining the following key aims:

(1) examine athletes' and stakeholders' experiences of the transition into university for student-athletes (Part A);
(2) examine student-athletes' perspectives of their experiences during university (Part A, B, and C);
(3) examine athletes' and stakeholders' experiences of the transition out of university for student-athletes (Part C);
(4) expand knowledge available on student-athlete experiences within a UK context (Part A, B, and C).

1.2 Significance and Structure of Thesis

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction to the area of study and the reasons why further exploration of the area is important. Following this, Chapter 2 provides an overview of relevant theoretical frameworks, existing student-athlete research, and a section highlighting unsolved questions in the literature. Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the methodology used throughout the thesis, including the research design and research origins, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 contains Part A, an examination of UK student-athletes' and stakeholders' perspectives of the transition into university, that contributes to aims 1, 2, and 4 of the thesis. Chapter 5 contains Part B, a narrative enquiry of UK student-athlete experiences during university, contributing to aims 1, 2, 3, and 4. Chapter

6 outlines Part C, an examination of UK student-athletes' and stakeholders' perspectives of the transition out of university, that contributes to aims 2, 3, and 4 of the thesis. Finally, chapter 7 provides a general discussion of the overall results and context-specific additions to Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model. Evidence outlined from Part A, B, and C was used to adapt the higher education section of the model to make it representative of the UK dual career pathway through university. Chapter 7 also discusses strengths, limitations, and practical implications of the thesis, and future research directions within the area of dual careers will be put forth.

1.3 Definition of Terms

Dual career: The challenge of combining a sporting career with education or work (Ryba et al., 2015).

Student-athlete: Engagement in the sports domain and the domain of education (EU Guidelines on the Dual Careers of Athletes, 2012).

Transition: An event or non-event, that results in changes in oneself and one's life, behaviour, and relationships (Schlossberg, 1981).

Within sport career transitions: Transitions athletes face during their athletic careers (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Youth to senior transition: Transition faced by athletes into the highest level of competitive sport (Wylleman, Lavallee & Alferman, 1999).

Social support: Refers to the social interaction between supporters and recipients, aimed at inducing positive outcomes in humans and their world (Bianco & Eklund, 2001).

Stakeholder: One who is involved in or affected by a course of action (Merriam Webster's Dictionary, 2018).

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives

The following chapter will first review existing athletic career models, and seek to identify the commonalities and differences among the models. An empirical review of the pathway through university for student-athletes, including the transition into university, experiences during university, and the transition out of university will then be discussed. Finally, the chapter will end with a section outlining the current gaps in the literature, unsolved issues, and the focus of the current research.

2.1.1 Talent Development in the Athletic Career

During the late 1990s, attention shifted from a focus on athletic career termination towards a more ‘holistic’ life-span perspective of athletic involvement. This shift in perspective ran parallel with research and theories from the fields of talent development and career development, and a number of descriptive models that highlight different career phases were developed. Bloom’s (1985) model of talent development identified the different stages that talented individuals developed their craft in a number of diverse fields, such as art, athletics, and music. The results of Bloom’s research indicated that successful individuals had similar learning and development phases, that included; the early years, middle years, and late years. Bloom’s (1985) staged model of progression highlighted that for individuals to move on successfully in their career, they need to have reached certain levels of skill, learning, attitude, or relationships, but do not necessarily need to obtain overt levels of performance success at different age groups. Applied to sport, this particular route of talent development included: (a) the initiation stage (young athletes are introduced to organised sport and during which they are identified as talented athletes), (b) the development stage (athletes become more dedicated to their sport and the amount of training and level of specialisation is increased), and (c) the mastery or perfection stage (athletes reach their highest level of athletic proficiency).

Similar to Bloom (1985), the four-stage sports career model developed by Salmela (1994) highlights that a career in sports is built on a descriptive model of career development that consists of a number of phases that individuals must pass through to progress in their career. Salmela’s (1994) model consists of three active phases, these include, initiation, development, and mastery. Athletes first become involved in sport as a child (the initiation phase), and during these years, the parents are responsible for initially getting their children interested in sport. Following this, athletes will soon begin to increase their commitment to sport and begin to focus more on the improvement of skills and techniques (the development phase). Athletes will then begin to invest the majority of their time in their sport and will become committed to achieving an elite level of performance (the mastery phase). In the final phase (discontinuation), athletes' commitment gradually decreases as their career comes to an end. In each of these career development phases, parents, coaches, and athletes must adapt to meet the different demands that are placed on them (e.g., coaches may provide emotional support during the discontinuation phase).

A further model that uses stages to describe progression through the sports career comes from Côté (1999), who identified the stages of sampling, specialising, investment, and mastery. These stages can be linked to athletic career transitions, however, Stambulova (1994, 2000) contributed to this perspective further by developing a stage model based upon her research on career transitions among Russian athletes. Stambulova (1994) considered the athletic career as consisting of predictable stages and transitions, including: (a) the beginning of sports specialisation, (b) the transition to intensive training in the chosen sport, (c) the transition to high-achievement sports and adult sports, (d) the transition from amateur sports to professional sports, (e) the transition from culmination to the end of the sports career, and (f) the end of the sports career. Following on from models that use stages to describe progress during the athletic career, research began to become more directed towards the 'whole-career' of an athlete (e.g., Wylleman et al., 1999).

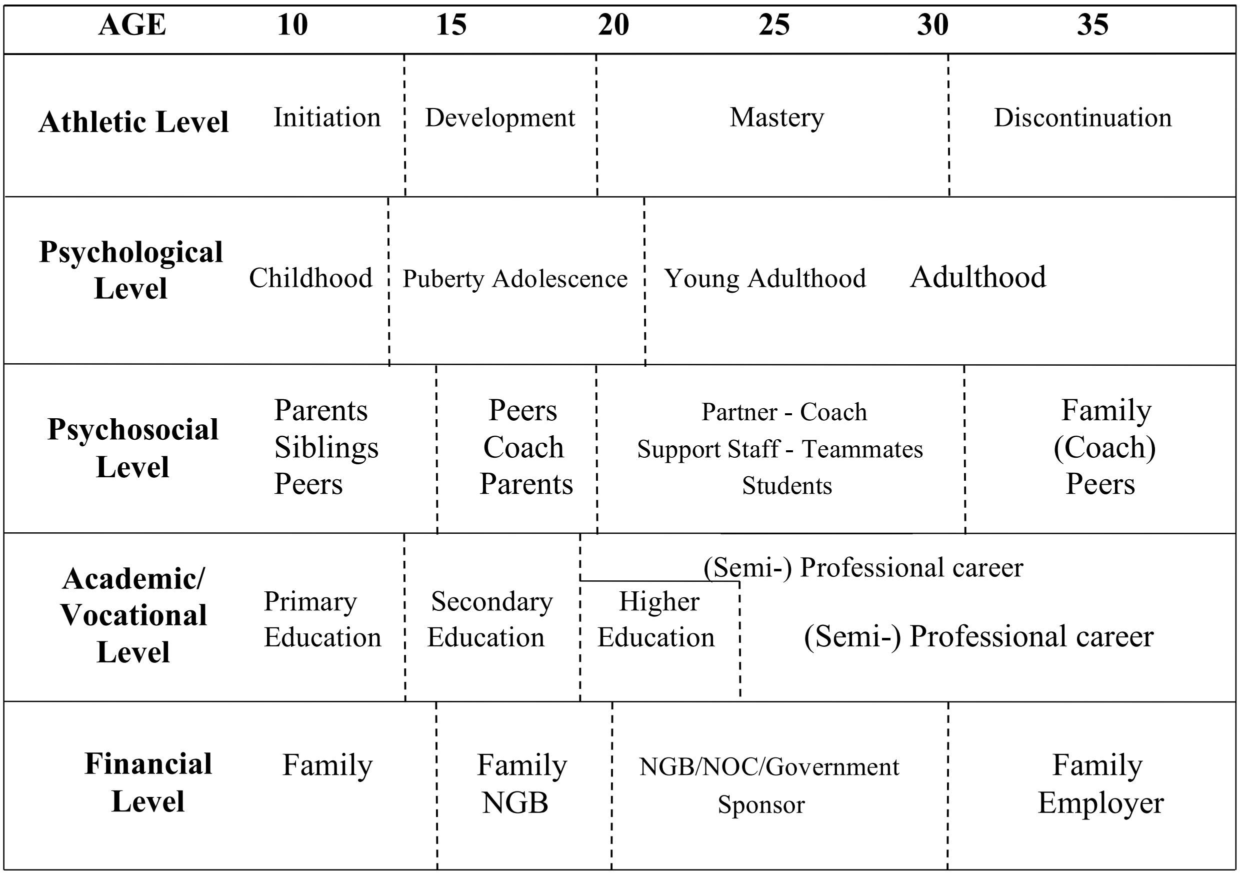
2.1.2 Holistic Focus in the Athletic Career

A more holistic approach to the study of the athletic career was advocated by Wylleman et al. (1999), and advances previous models described above, because this approach takes a life-span perspective view of athletic transitions, spanning both the athletic and post-athletic career. These researchers also deemed it important to include those transitions faced by athletes in other domains of their lives, as opposed to only focusing on development within sport (Wylleman et al., 1999). The reasons for exploring the whole-career are based on research findings that demonstrate the strong concurrent, interactive, and reciprocal nature of transitions occurring in the athletic career and those transitions occurring in the other domains of athletes' lives (e.g. academic, psychological, professional; Petitpas, Champagne, Chartrand, Danish, & Murphy, 1997; Wylleman, De Knop, Ewing, & Cumming, 2000).

2.1.2.1 Holistic athletic career model. Using data on the career development of pupil-athletes, student-athletes, professional and elite athletes, and of former Olympians, Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) established the holistic athletic career model that includes career development phases and transitions faced by athletes at an athletic, psychological, psychosocial, and academic/vocational level (Figure 2.1). Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) suggested grouping all forms of transitions (athletic and non-athletic) susceptible to punctuate the course of athletes' lives, and to classify them into two categories; (i) non-normative transitions, and (ii) normative transitions. Non-normative transitions result from important, unplanned events in the life and career of an individual, that take place in an unanticipated and involuntary manner (Schlossberg, 1984). In the sporting environment, non-normative transitions can be brought about by the loss of a coach, an unanticipated rupture within the team or a season-ending injury. Also included are those non-events (i.e. awaited or desired events that do not take place), such as not being selected for the Olympic Games after years of dedicated training. Non-events tend to be problematic for athletes, given the lack of control that they have over these events (Aquilina, 2013). In contrast, normative transitions are those that correspond to the "normal" passage from one stage to another. They form part of a definitive change in events, or biological, social, and emotional changes related to age (Baltes, 1987), the process of socialisation (Wapner & Craig-Bay, 1992), and to the organisational context that individuals are involved in (e.g., school, family). In most circumstances, normative transitions are predictable, and can be anticipated in the planning and organisation of athletes' careers (Schossberg, 1984; Sharf, 1997; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Normative transitions are included within the holistic athletic career model, whereas there is no representation of non-normative transitions or non-events due to their unpredictability, despite these factors playing a potentially important role in the quality of participation in competitive sport.

Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) suggested that other transitions external to sport need to be considered when dealing with sporting career changes (e.g. transitioning into higher education may coincide with the transition from junior to senior sport), meaning that athletes may experience additional stressors due to competing transitions. These changes are demonstrated in the holistic athletic career model by the inclusion of normative transitions that athletes may experience within athletic, psychological, psychosocial, and academic/vocational domains. An updated version of the model was developed by Wylleman et al. in 2013, and included the addition of normative transitions within the financial domain. Each layer of Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model will now be discussed in detail, including supporting literature for the career stages and transitions.

2.1.2.1.1 Athletic level. The top layer of the model represents four development stages and the transitions into these phases that athletes will face in their athletic development. These athletic stages include the three outlined by Bloom's (1985) talent development model (initiation, development, mastery), discussed above, and a discontinuation stage that has been added to reflect the transition out of competitive sport. According to the model, athletic transitions include: (a) transition into organised competitive sports (around 6 to 7 years of age), (b) transition to an intensive level of training and competition (around 12 or 13 years of age), (c) transition into the highest or elite level (around 18 or 19 years of age), and (d) transition out of competitive sports (roughly between 28 and 30 years of age). Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) point out that it is important to take into account that these age ranges are averaged over many athletes and across a number of different sports, and hence may not be sport specific. For example, talented young gymnasts and swimmers are likely to specialise much earlier, compete at senior international level, and retire from their sport at a much earlier age than performers in track and field athletics, who do not reach their performance peaks until adulthood (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Balyi, 2000). Research has also suggested that female gymnasts are likely to discontinue their sport between 15 and 19 years of age (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). Additionally, these transitions may not occur in a limited, specific time period. This difference in career trajectories is supported by researchers who have emphasised that career paths that lead to excellence are not linear (e.g. Abbot, Button, Pepping & Collins,



AGE	**10**	**15**	**20**	**25**	**30**	**35**
Athletic Level	Initiation	Development		Mastery		Discontinuation
Psychological Level	Childhood	Puberty Adolescence		Young Adulthood	Adulthood	
Psychosocial Level	Parents Siblings Peers	Peers Coach Parents		Partner - Coach Support Staff - Teammates Students		Family (Coach) Peers
Academic/ Vocational Level	Primary Education	Secondary Education	Higher Education	(Semi-) Professional career	(Semi-) Professional career	
Financial Level	Family	Family NGB		NGB/NOC/Government Sponsor		Family Employer

Note: A dotted line indicates the age at which the transition occurs is an approximation.
Figure 2.1. A holistic perspective on career development and transitions faced by athletes at athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, and financial levels (Wylleman, De Knop, & Reints, 2013).

2005; MacNamara et al., 2010; Ollis, Macpherson & Colins, 2006; Debois, Ledon, Argiolas, & Rosnet, 2012). Although athletes within their careers will pass through each of the main stages (i.e., initiation, development, specialisation, mastery), each trajectory is singular, consisting of micro-stages peculiar to each one (e.g. injury, change of performance context), and which create wave like progress towards excellence.

2.1.2.1.2 Psychological level. The second layer of the model reflects the developmental stages and transitions occurring at a psychological level. The first of these is childhood (up until 12 years of age) and demonstrates the level to which a young athlete is ready for structured competition (e.g., degree of interest), and cognitive development (e.g., understanding of their role). The next three stages are puberty (around 12 to 15 years of age) and adolescence (around 15 to 18 years of age), and adulthood (from 19 years of age onwards; Rice, 1998). During these stages, athletes will be confronted with a number of developmental tasks, including dealing with more mature relations with peers of both sexes, accepting one's physique, and attaining emotional independence from parents and other adults (Rice, 1998). Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) also suggest that although not represented in the model itself, the developmental task of being psychologically ready for competition is related to childhood, whereas developing a self-identity is a developmental task during adolescence. This development of identity may be particularly relevant for athletes, because participation and continued involvement in competitive sport can have an influence on the way self-identity develops (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000). For athletes, this continued involvement in sport may lead their self-identity to become heavily related to sport.

2.1.2.1.3 Psychosocial level. The third layer of the model represents the changes that can occur within athletes' psychosocial environment. This level is based on research within the athletic family (Hellstedt, 1987, 1995), marital relationships (e.g., Coppel, 1995), and interpersonal relationships (e.g., Alfermann & Würth, 2001; Bloom, 1985; Price & Weiss, 2000) Wylleman et al. (2013) demonstrates that up until approximately age 13, parents are the most influential people in athletic development. The high level of emotional support and motivation provided by parents in times of stress and anxiety has emerged as an important characteristic of the investment years (Cote, 1999; Wylleman, De Knop, & Van Kerckhoven, 2000). During the investment period, siblings are also considered to be an important influence, ranking second behind parents. Between the ages of approximately 13 and 18, Wylleman et al. (2013) demonstrate that relationships with peers are now the most influential in athletic development, closely followed by the relationship with coaches. This change may be due to the increasing amount of time that individuals spend with their peers at school and in training or competition environments at this age. Between the ages of 18 to 30, the partner, coach, teammates, support staff (e.g., performance lifestyle advisor, physiotherapist, strength and conditioning coaches), and students become important figures in the lives of athletes. Athletes may experience a large number of changes within this time period if they choose to move into higher education, and potentially move away from existing support networks. Finally, from the age of approximately 30 onwards when athletes may be entering the discontinuation stage, Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) suggest that the relationship with one's family is of primary influence, whereas the relationship with the coach and peers becomes less important. This change is most likely because athletes are preparing for their life after termination from sport. There may, however, be a number of external sources of social support who are not present in the model who may also have an influence in helping athletes with their adjustment to retirement (e.g., sport psychologists, performance lifestyle advisors).

2.1.2.1.4 Academic/vocational level. The fourth layer of the model contains the stages and transitions that occur at academic and vocational levels. The model reflects the transition into: (a) primary education or elementary school (at 6 or 7 years of age), (b) secondary education or high school (at ages 12-13), (c) higher education (at ages 18 or 19), and (d) vocational training or professional occupation (around age 22). Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) highlight that the transition into vocational training or professional occupation may occur at an earlier stage, but was included after higher education to reflect the typical "predictable" sports career in North America when university sport bridges high school varsity and professional sport (Petitpas et al., 1997). At the development stage, talented athletes aged 16 to 18 may face the transition from the junior to senior level in their sport (Pummell et al., 2008), and the decision as to whether they continue into higher education or undertake a (semi) professional sports career. This level of the model has been adapted to include either the decision to continue into higher education and then begin a (semi-) professional career, or to begin a (semi-) professional career straight after the transition into the senior level (Wylleman et al., 2013). During the mastery stage, elite athletes will encounter transitions at academic and vocational levels (Wylleman et al., 2013). Upon entry into higher education, student-athletes will have to become more personally involved with their academic career, engage in more systematic planning to study, and cope with the changing social environment (De Knop et al., 1999).

For elite athletes transitioning out of higher education, their next steps will be strongly influenced by the choices made when entering higher education (Wylleman, De Knop & Reints, 2011). For example, student-athletes may choose to continue their education into postgraduate study to bridge one or two more years in preparation of a major competition such as the Olympic Games. As elite athletes may not have had the opportunity to actively employ the knowledge and skills gained in higher education (e.g., summer jobs, vocational training), they may not hold the relevant professional skills necessary for vocational success (Wylleman, et al., 2011). They may find themselves being confronted with low wages in comparison to their non-athletic peers on the basis of their age and athletic achievements. Accordingly, they may have to turn to their family for financial support during this period until they have enough vocational success to fully support themselves via their employment (Wylleman et al., 2011).

2.1.2.1.5 Financial level. Finally, the last layer of the model is the financial level. Wylleman et al. (2013) highlight that family are the main source of financial support from sport initiation until approximately 13 years of age. Between the ages of 13 and 18, when athletes are in the development stage, family continue to be the main financial supporter, however, this may now be supplemented by financial support from the NGB. Wylleman et al. (2013) demonstrate that when athletes make the transition into higher education, financial support provided by the family may cease, and instead be replaced by NGBs, National Olympic Committee's and government sponsors (e.g., Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme in the UK). Finally, from approximately the age of 30, when athletes may decide to discontinue their athletic career, Wylleman et al. (2013) highlight that family may initially be a source of financial aid to recently retired athletes, before they go on to find employment. Adaptations that have been made to the model within different contexts will now be discussed.

2.1.2.2 Adapted versions of the holistic athletic career model. Currently, many career transition theoretical frameworks, including Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model, are not context-specific, with researchers often adopting models from dominant discourses without a critical analysis of how well they fit in the intended socio-cultural context (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Cote, 2009; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013). Because sport has become more complex, there has been an increased awareness of cultural diversity, calling for a culturally informed sport psychology research and practice (e.g. Ryba, 2009; Ryba, Schinke, & Tenenbaum, 2010; Ryba et al., 2013; Ryba & Wright, 2005; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009). Researchers have begun adapting Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model to specific contexts. For example, Ryba et al. (2016) adapted the model to incorporate specificities of the Finnish context. The adapted model includes additions at the psychosocial and academic/vocational levels, including the addition of teachers as social support figures at the lower and upper secondary school age (Ryba et al., 2016). In addition, the adapted model demonstrates the varied trajectories of how to combine elite sport and academic/vocational development, and differences in how athletes are financially supported across their careers (e.g., sports clubs, scholarships).

Additionally, Richardson, Relvas, and Littlewood (2012) contextualised the holistic athletic career model within professional football, outlining within-career transitions from the youth to professional level. Richardson et al. (2012) identified a need for what they termed the 'critical post academy phase', when players will typically receive a one or two-year professional contract, but are not yet within the first team squad. The authors argued that players are often not prepared for this element of their career and may experience diminishing levels of social support. Richardson et al. (2012) also included an environmental and cultural level within their adapted version of the model. The cultural level suggests that when making the transition into the post academy development phase, athletes may feel lonely, isolated, and uncertain. These post-transition feelings may also be relevant within other transitions, such as the transition into university for student-athletes, because student-athletes may lose existing support networks and feel isolated and uncertain within their new environment. The development of context-specific models is important, because not only do they highlight key differences within athletic contexts, but they may also be important indicators for practitioners (e.g., coaches, sport psychologists) working within these contexts. Within the general discussion of the current thesis, a context-specific version of the higher education section of the holistic athletic career model that is representative of the UK dual career pathway through university will be presented. This adapted model may be a key resource for stakeholders who have a role in supporting student-athletes.

2.1.3 Individual Transition Models

2.1.3.1 Athletic retirement and general transition models. Prior to the development of dual career specific models, or models that can be applied to within-career transitions, researchers developed a number of models to explain transitions within an athletic career (e.g., Baillie & Danish, 1992; Parker, 1994; Sinclair & Orlick, 1994; Swain, 1991; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Individual transition models are relevant to the current thesis, because during a university dual career, athletes will make a number of transitions, including the transition into and out of university. Athletes may also make additional simultaneous transitions, including the transition into the mastery phase in their sport, and the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Wylleman et al., 2013). Individual transition models are effective as they explain how each aspect of a transition interlink (e.g., the transition demands and resources) to create a transition outcome (e.g., healthy career transition). For example, Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model examines the entire transition out of sport for athletes, and included the following components: (a) casual factors that initiate the career transition process (e.g., age, injury), (b) developmental factors related to transition adaptation (e.g., self-identity, perceptions of control), (c) coping resources that affect the responses to career transitions (e.g., social support), (d) quality of adjustment to career transition (e.g., career transition distress may lead to psychopathology and financial problems), and, (e) treatment issues for distressful reactions to career transition (e.g., cognitive, emotional, behavioural). Although some parallels could be drawn from these models and applied to within-career transitions, such as pre-transition preparation and available resources for transition, they may not be effective in describing within-career transitions (e.g., the transition into higher education) because they were developed to explain the career transition out of sport.

One model that has been used by a number of researchers (e.g., Baillie & Danish, 1992; Parker, 1994; Sinclair & Orlick, 1994; Swain, 1991) to describe the change process in athlete transitions is Schlossberg's (1981) human adaptation to transition model. Schlossberg proposed a conceptual framework that strives to describe the diversity in the experience of transitions and identified three factors contributing to the adaptation of an individual to a transition. These factors include: (a) the characteristics of an individual (e.g. age, past experience with a similar transition), (b) characteristics of pre-transition and transition environments (e.g. social support of friends and family, institutional support) and, (c) perception of the particular transition (e.g. gradual or sudden transition, degree of stress, positive or negative effect). With recognition that transitions within athletes' careers may not be aptly explained via non-sport specific psychological theories and models, sport-specific transition models were established, as described above. These models were, however, specifically designed to explain the career transition out of sport (e.g., Greendorfer, 1992; Hopson & Adams, 1977; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Sinclair & Orlick, 1994; Sussman, 1972; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), as opposed to within-career transitions (e.g., student-athletes' transition out of university), that may have differing factors associated with the process.

2.1.3.2 Athletic career transition model. Unlike the transition models previously discussed, Stambulova's (2003) athletic career transition model was the first to explain the process of a single transition that could be applied across sport careers (e.g., the youth to senior transition and the transition into higher education). Stambulova's (2003) model (Figure 2.2) was based upon her research with Russian athletes (Stambulova, 1994) and incorporated ideas from previous transition models (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Schlossberg, 1981; Stambulova, 1997; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Stambulova's (2003) athletic career transition model emphasises pre-conditions and demands, coping processes, factors that may influence coping, transition outcomes, and later consequences of transition.

2.1.3.2.1 Transition demands, resources, barriers and coping. Stambulova (2003) suggested that transitions come with a set of specific demands or challenges (e.g., forming relationships with a new team) that need to be overcome to transition in an athletic career successfully. These demands can potentially create conflict between "what the athlete is" and "what he or she wants or ought to be". How effective athletes are at coping with the demands of transition depends upon the dynamic balance between transition resources and barriers they encounter (Stambulova, 2003).

Resources are defined as internal and external factors that facilitate the transition coping process (Stambulova, 2003). Internal resources include, personality traits (e.g. openness), knowledge, skill level, and an athletes' level of motivation to successfully make the transition.). There are also a number of external resources that can have a positive effect on the transition, these include financial, organisational, and social support (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Stambulova, 2003). Athletes perceive social support from significant others (e.g., coaches and parents) as facilitative in the transition process (Bussmann & Alfermann, 1994; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993), and the most important resource at the beginning and at the end of the athletic career. Organisational support from the governing body is also suggested to be important, and is usually the highest when athletes are at the peak of their career, whilst dramatically decreasing upon termination from sport (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007).

Transition barriers include internal and external factors interfering with effective coping. Internal barriers that can adversely affect the transition process include a lack of specific competencies, interpersonal conflicts, and limited preparation. Preparing for a specific transition may increase athletes' knowledge and skills, along with helping to improve the quality of adaptation (e.g., Petitpas et al., 1997; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). External barriers that can negatively affect the transition process may include difficulties for student-athletes in combining sport and academic work, and professional athletes holding no educational or professional qualifications that may lead to difficulties finding an occupation following retirement (e.g., Kavanagh, 2010; Wylleman, De Knop, Menkehorst, Theeboom, & Annerel, 1993). To cope successfully with transition requires the creation of a dynamic balance between athletes' resources and barriers, to counteract the demands of change they experience (Stambulova, 2003). When athletes have an overabundance of resources including transition knowledge, skills, personality traits, and motivation, they are more likely to overcome barriers

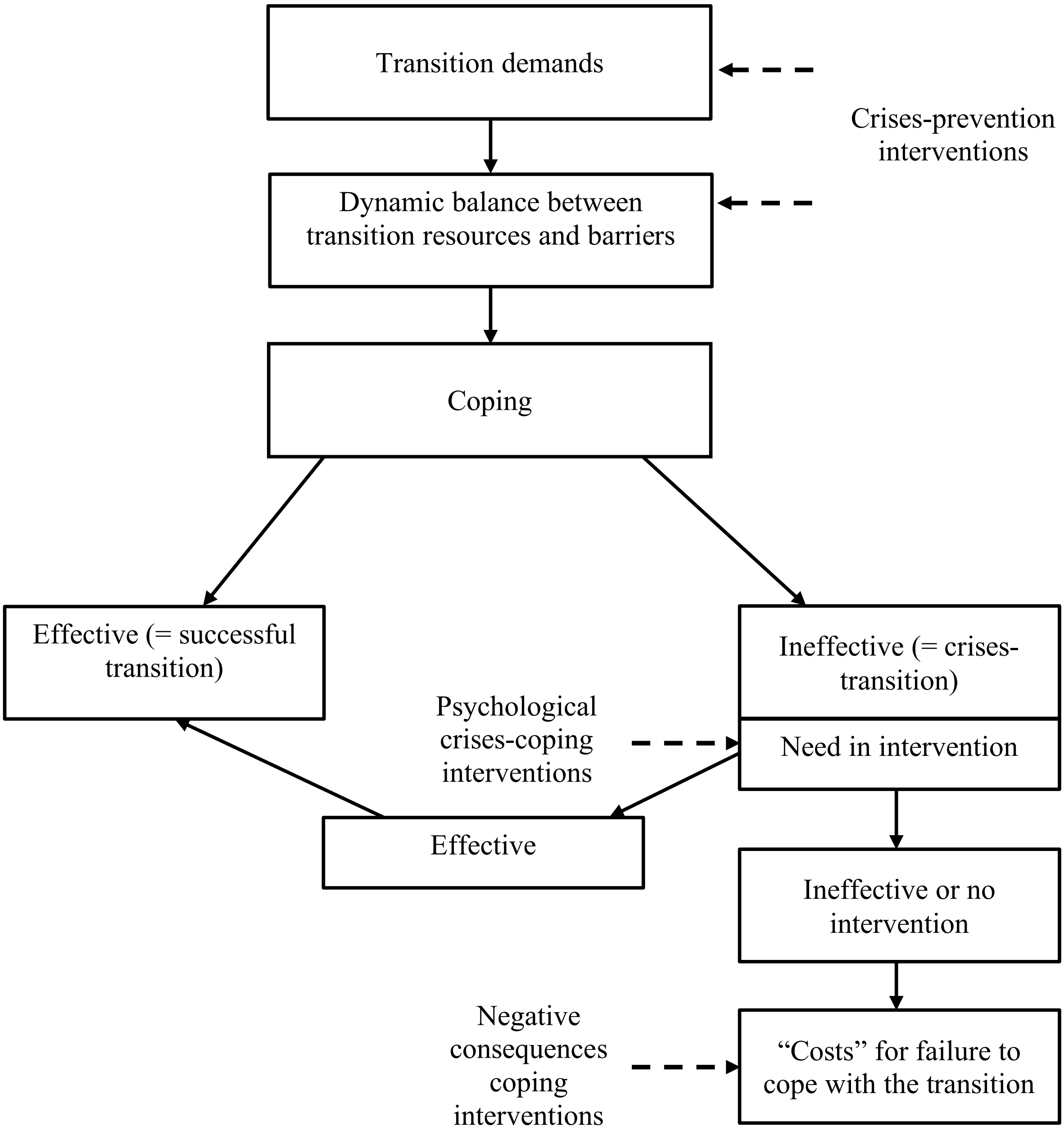

Transition demands
Crises-prevention interventions
Dynamic balance between transition resources and barriers
Coping
Effective (= successful transition)
Ineffective (= crises-transition)
Psychological crises-coping interventions
Need in intervention
Effective
Ineffective or no intervention
Negative consequences coping interventions
"Costs" for failure to cope with the transition

Figure 2.2. Athletic career transition model (Stambulova, 1997, 2003)

and make the transition (e.g., out of elite sport) with more success. This balance of resources will typically lead to a more general feeling of adjustment and an increase in satisfaction with sport and life. The importance of having adequate resources to match the demands of the transition was a key feature of Jones, Mahoney and Gucciardi's (2014) study on sub-elite rugby players making the transition to the elite level.

2.1.3.2.2 Effective (successful) vs. ineffective (crisis) transitions. Stambulova (2003) proposed that that there are two possible outcomes of the coping process, successful transitions and crisis transitions. A successful transition will occur when athletes are able to mobilise their resources or develop the resources necessary to cope with the demands and barriers in an effective way. Conversely, athletes who cannot adequately cope with the situation will face a crisis transition. Crisis transitions take place when athletes are not able to cope with the transition demands on their own, and require psychological assistance or intervention aimed at changing coping strategies. A change in coping strategy could positively influence the long-term consequences of transitions (Stambulova, 2009). Following unsuccessful interventions, or if athletes choose not to receive any psychological help, this may result in negative outcomes (e.g., a decline in level of sport performance, injury, overtraining, and psychosomatic illnesses). For example, if a crisis intervention is unsuccessful in relation to the move into higher education, this may subsequently lead to drop out of the dual career.

2.1.3.2.3 Interventions. Since the 1990s, researchers have asserted the need for intervention programmes to help facilitate the process of change during athlete career transitions (e.g., Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Alfermann & Stambulova (2007) outlined three perspectives in assisting athletes to cope with career transitions: (a) crisis-prevention interventions, (b) crisis-coping interventions, and (c) negative-consequences coping. Crisis-prevention interventions aim to prepare athletes to deal with transition demands and barriers, and help them to develop the necessary resources either before or early on in the process, and aim to deal with both normative and non-normative transitions (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Intervening at this early stage may involve assessment, career planning, goal setting, education, counselling, mental and life skills training, and helping to enhance the social support system available to athletes (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Stambulova, 2010). The second intervention is suitable when athletes have reached an obvious level of crisis, at which point, psychological crisis-coping interventions are most relevant. These interventions strive to help athletes find the best available way to cope with transition demands by analysing the situation and responding accordingly. This intervention may come in the form of cognitive restructuring, stress management, and emotional expression (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). The final perspective outlined is that of negative-consequences coping. Interventions that deal with the negative consequences of athletes unable to cope with the crisis (e.g., premature drop out, drug abuse, eating disorders) are problem-specific and often require clinical or psychotherapeutic intervention.

2.1.3.3 Adapted versions of the athletic career transition model. Stambulova's (2003) athletic career transition model has previously been used to explore the process of retirement in athletes in the Czech Republic (Kadlcik & Flerm, 2008). Kadlcik and Flerm (2008) found that a number of factors influenced the transitional process out of sport for athletes, including demands, resources, and barriers of transition. The authors suggested that each factor had the potential to facilitate or debilitate the quality of the transition, acting as a barrier or resource in the coping process (Kadlcik & Flerm, 2008). More recently, however, the athletic career transition model was adapted to more aptly suit the process of transitioning from the junior to senior level in football (Morris, 2013). The adapted model incorporated both individual (e.g., history and perceived demands) and environmental aspects (e.g., club interventions and actual demands) that are believed to create a dynamic balance, leading to either effective or ineffective transitions. Morris (2013) suggested that to cope with the move to senior sport, a dynamic balance among the demands, resources, and barriers associated with transition needs to be achieved. Adapted individual transition models such as those described above are useful resources for practitioners, such as coaches, who are working with specific populations (e.g., footballers) making the transition from the junior to senior level. Practitioners may then be able to assess whether their athletes have the correct resources to make a successful transition.

2.1.3.4 Current thesis: a holistic focus exploring individual transitions. The current thesis will use a combination of Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model and Stambulova's (2003) athletic career transition model to examine the whole pathway through university for UK student-athletes. The holistic athletic career model provides an overview of the normative transitions within multiple life areas and factors that student-athletes will experience during their time at university. The athletic career transition model can then be used to explore the specific transitions into and out of university for student-athletes, and the processes associated with these in a greater level of detail. A review of the literature on the dual career pathway though university for student-athletes will now be presented.

2.2 Empirical Review on the Pathways Through University

2.2.1 The Transition into University

2.2.1.1 Potential athletic challenges: junior to senior athlete. During the ages of 18 and 21, when athletes may be making the transition into university, some athletes will also experience a normative transition from the youth to the senior level (Stambulova, 1994), and attempt to become mastery level performers (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The transition from the junior to the senior level occurs when athletes move from age-grade competition to playing in open events where participation is unrestricted by age, during which athletes will move into the highest level of competitive sport (Wylleman et al., 1999). The junior to senior transition has been frequently described by athletes as one of the most difficult changes that they will experience in their sporting careers (Stambulova et al., 2009). The difficult and fragile nature of this transition has been highlighted in research that found only 17% of athletes who were junior national champions in their chosen sport went on to become successful senior athletes (Vanden Auweele, De Martelaer, Rzewnicki, De Knop, & Wylleman, 2004). Athletes have reported stagnation in their development during the transition to the senior level, by either becoming recreational athletes as opposed to mastery performers, performing with no consistency, or discontinuing involvement with their sport (Bennie & O'Connor, 2006; Vanden Auweele et al., 2004).

A number of demands have been identified that can influence how successfully athletes adjust to their new senior careers. These include experiencing an increased pressure to perform from others around them (e.g., coaches), the need to develop higher technical and physical levels, and increased rivalry at competitions (Lorenzo, Borrás, Sánchez, Jiménez & Sampedro, 2009; Morris, Tod & Eubank, 2016; Pummell et al., 2008; Rosier & Wylleman, 2015). Additionally, athletes may hold a number of expectations about the transition into senior sport. These expectations include the belief that senior sport is a much higher standard than the junior level (Jorlén, 2008; Morris et al., 2016), and the expectation that they need to perform “perfectly”, that can lead to athletes working harder to improve (Morris et al., 2016). If athletes are unable to successfully cope with these factors and adjust to the demands of senior sport, this could lead to a number of problems. These problems may include athletes being low in self-esteem, increased sensitivity to failures, an increased number of psychological barriers, and uncertainty when making decisions (Stambulova, 2000).

The transition from the junior to the senior level has been described as being a lengthy process that may start many years before athletes are at the age of making the transition (Morris, 2013). During this process, and depending at what stage of the transition athletes are at (i.e., beginning, middle, end), there are varying demands (e.g., creating time for recovery is particularly important at the beginning of the transition), coping strategies, resources, and perceived levels of stress (Franck & Tuovila, 2008). Coping strategies may involve athletes having to develop a number skills to help them transition successfully into the senior level. These skills may include, the setting of clearly defined and realistic goals, communication skills, problem-solving, acceptance of responsibility, time management, motivation and determination to succeed, the ability to handle pressure, and high levels of resilience to help cope with set-backs (Bruner et al., 2008; Finn & McKenna, 2010; Hollings, Mallett, & Hume, 2014; Morris, 2013; Stambulova, Franck, & Weibull, 2012).

Researchers have suggested that social support received during the transition from the junior to the senior level can be a key resource for athletes (e.g., Bruner et al., 2008; Pummell et al., 2008; Salmela, Young, & Kallio, 2000). Social support may be provided by peers, family, and coaches (e.g., Bennie & O'Connor, 2004; Pummell et al., 2008). Parents may provide emotional, technical, and tangible support (e.g., transportation to and from training) during the transition to the senior level (Pummel et al., 2008), yet it is imperative that parents are able to find the right balance between pressure and support (Pummell et al., 2008; Salmela et al., 2000). Parents who have a negative influence on the transition have been suggested as putting too much pressure on athletes, and interfering with decision-making (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2008; Salmela et al., 2000). Over time, however, parental support may change from a leading to a supporting role (Côté, 1999), and may be due to athletes seeking more sports-related advice from coaches (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Financial support is also suggested as being an important resource during the transition from the junior to the senior level (Salmela et al., 2000), and having limited finances could hinder the transition (Pummell et al., 2008).

The organisation (e.g., university) that the junior to senior transition takes place has also been found to have an effect on athletes' ability to cope with the demands of change (Morris, Tod & Oliver, 2015; Pummell et al., 2008). Research has suggested that there may be limits regarding the support that coaches can provide during the transition, and additional sport science supporters provided by organisations, such as sport psychologists, may be needed to provide greater assistance (Morris, Tod & Oliver, 2015). Additionally, the sports organisation could be a source of stress for young athletes as they make the transition to senior sport if there are limited training opportunities and the communication between athletes and their organisations is poor (Pummell et al., 2008).

The challenges of moving into senior sport have been well documented (e.g., increasing physical fitness, the need to develop mental skills), however, these challenges may be exacerbated when athletes are also experiencing transitions within other life domains, such as in their education (Finn & McKenna, 2010; Hollings et al., 2014; Pummel et al., 2008; Rosier & Wylleman, 2015; Wylleman et al., 2013). These coinciding transitions mean that athletes have to cope with changes in their athletic careers alongside changes in their academic environment, such as adapting to a new style of education (Brown et al., 2015). This combination of transitions may lead to athletes having less time to complete academic work, and an increased need to organise and plan their schedules more effectively (Pummell et al., 2008; Rosier & Wylleman, 2015). It has also been suggested that athletes may struggle to make a successful move to the senior level if they are distracted by features of the university culture, such as drinking alcohol and having a poor diet (Finn & McKenna, 2010).

In sum, there are a number of themes presented in the junior to senior transition literature that could have an influence on how successfully athletes are in making the transition. These themes include the need to adapt to increased pressure to perform, and an increased need to develop technical ability and physical fitness. The development of mental skills such as resilience, motivation, and time management are also suggested as being key features that can affect how successfully athletes navigate and adapt to the transition. Social support (e.g., emotional support) from parents and coaches is also discussed as being an important factor in the transition, however, when the wrong type of support is provided (e.g., being overly critical), this can be a hindrance on transition. Additionally, organisational support may be important during the transition to senior sport, for example, sport science support provided by a university or club. Finally, when athletes experience the transition to senior sport at the same time as becoming a university student-athlete, this can cause conflict and increased time pressures. There may, however, be additional changes within student-athletes' athletic careers when they move into university that have not been well explored in the literature. For example, student-athletes may also move into a new sports team when they move to university, and have to adapt to new styles of play, and new training environments.

2.2.1.2 Psychological changes: emerging adulthood. When student-athletes transition into university, traditionally, this move may coincide with the transition from adolescence to young adulthood (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Researchers have described the transition from adolescence to adulthood as a confusing, stressful, and profound time of change (Arnett, 2004; Erikson, 1968; Rindfuss, 1991; Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). The transition into adulthood can cause a significant degree of upheaval, because newly emerging adults may experience challenges in areas of their personal (e.g., sexual relationships), social (e.g., changing relationship with parents) and academic lives (e.g., moving to university; Kantanis, 2000).

As youth reach late adolescence, they will enter a stage often referred to in the literature as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004). This period has been described as being particularly important for setting the stage for continued development through the lifespan, as individuals will have to make a number of important decisions that could influence the rest of their lives (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). These decisions may, for example, include those about undertaking university-level education, and moving out of the family home for the first time. Additionally, a key feature of emerging adulthood includes the opportunity for identity exploration and development (Arnett, 2004; Erikson, 1968; Rindfuss, 1991). A coherent and well-integrated identity structure provides a sense of purpose and direction, and can serve as the basis for successfully coping with and adapting to the demands of daily life (Erikson, 1968). The process of identity development when entering university may be particularly challenging for athletes, because they will need to develop an identity as a university student (Briggs, Clark. & Hall, 2012), and as an athlete within the university environment, alongside taking on new roles associated with an emerging adulthood identity (e.g., living independently).

During the transition into emerging adulthood, individuals may also experience changes in social relationships. Friendships during the transition from adolescence to adulthood are often marked by noteworthy increases in closeness, reciprocity, and intimacy (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). In addition, during the progression from adolescence to young adulthood, there is often a change in the relationship with parents. During this time, parents tend to exert less power and influence on decision-making and actions, and youth will begin to spend significantly less time with them, with many moving away from the family home for the first time (Arnett, 2004; 2005). Nonetheless, research suggests that late adolescents are still concerned with meeting their parents' expectations and are often in need of parental assistance in coping with age-related demands (Youniss & Smollar, 1985), including the move to university. Research suggests that through attaining psychological and physical distance from parents (e.g., moving to university), the establishment of an autonomous identity is facilitated, and emerging adults are free to pursue personal goals and establish meaningful non-familial relationships (Moore, 1987). Finally, during adolescence, the first romantic relationships are established and sexual experimentation takes place (Feiring, 1996). Romantic relationships are believed to play a role in identity formation during adolescence by providing a sense of belonging and status in their peer groups (Levesque, 1993).

In sum, there are a number of factors that can make the transition from adolescent to emerging adulthood challenging, including identity exploration, and the need to make important life decisions. In addition, individuals may experience changes in relationships, including becoming more independent from parents, and the formation of romantic relationships may occur. Few studies have explored the influence of the transition into emerging adulthood for student-athletes as they move into university, however, this combination of transitions is suggested to be stressful as athletes have to take on personal responsibility for their own development (Brown et al., 2015).

2.2.1.3 Changes in relationships and support during the move to university. Research suggests that moving into the first year of university can be particularly challenging, because the change of environment may force individuals to distance themselves from existing social support networks produced by families and close friends (Fisher, Murray, & Frazer, 1985). When students have access to social support when they have made the transition to university (e.g., from new peers), they are reported to adjust well to the new academic and social domains of university (Urquhart & Pooley, 2007). When students do not have social support networks, however, they tend to be lonely, anxious, and this can have a negative influence on their well-being (Halamandaris & Power, 1997). In addition to the general student population, social support has been discussed as a key factor for student-athletes when they transition into university (Giacobbi et al., 2004), with the suggestion that they should develop rich social support systems. Student-athletes may experience additional changes within their psychosocial environment to the regular student population, including new relationships with teammates, and support staff (Wylleman et al., 2013).

Prior to the transition into university, student-athletes may have relied on their family for support (Wylleman et al., 2013). For example, parents may have provided tangible support, including providing transportation for athletes to training and events. Following the transition into university, new students may experience deindividuation from their parents, leading to increased freedom and responsibility to direct their own lives, and independently cope with challenges (Flanagan, Schulenberg, & Fuligni, 1993; Lopez & Gormley, 2002). Research has suggested that for student-athletes, the situation is similar, because although parents continue to provide emotional and financial support following the move to university, their direct input progressively diminishes as they progress through the transition (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). It is also suggested that the correct balance in support needs to be found, because too much or not enough parental involvement during the transition to university for student-athletes can potentially have a negative influence (Dorsch, Lowe, Dotterer, Lyons, & Barker, 2016). Parents can provide too much support, that can be perceived by student-athletes as being intrusive and can lead to increased pressure to perform in their sport and education (Dorsch et al., 2016). Nonetheless, when parents provide no support (e.g., emotional) for student-athletes during their transition into university, student-athletes may begin to internalise the limited social support and feel uncared for (Dorsch et al., 2016).

A change in friendship groups may also occur when students transition into university. During the first few days of university, emotional support from family and friends at home may be a key support source and can provide a buffering effect against being in a stressful new situation (Tinto, 1989; Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). As students develop social networks at university, however, new peers may gradually become the main source of social support during this transition period (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). For student-athletes, it has been reported that following the transition into university, they found it difficult to sustain relationships with peers who were not involved in sport, and found it was easier to be accepted by 'like-minded' athletes (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). This difficulty forming peers outside of sport may highlight that sources of support in a sporting context become more important to student-athletes when they move into university. In addition, advice and support in the form of mentoring from older and more experienced student-athletes is also suggested as being a beneficial support source for student-athletes during their transition, that may help to increase their sense of belonging (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Deal & Camiré, 2016; Whitfield & Edwards, 2011).

Additionally, when student-athletes move into university, they may experience a change in coach. The coach may be a key figure in helping student-athletes to adjust to the challenging demands of the performance environment at university (McNamara & Collins, 2010). Research has suggested that some student-athletes may struggle to form a strong coach-athlete relationship following the transition into university (Brown et al., 2015). Despite these issues, having the motivation to fulfil their potential and a willingness to learn from people around them lead some student-athletes to seek out learning opportunities with new coaches, and to view their new relationship as a positive feature of the transition (McNamara & Collins, 2010). Coaches could work closely with university transition programmes, so that they are able to incorporate their own assessments and adjustments to help with a smooth transition for student-athletes (Skinner, 2004).

Wylleman et al. (2013) also suggested that when student-athletes move into university, in addition to the coach, their partner, teammates, and other students become sources of support. Additionally, when student-athletes move into university, they may also be tasked with having to form a number of new relationships with support staff (Wylleman et al., 2013), and may add increased stress to the transition. New members of support staff that student-athletes are introduced to may include strength and conditioning coaches, physiotherapists, and performance lifestyle advisors. The development of these relationships is a factor that the general student population does need to consider during the transition to university.

To summarise, the transition into university can lead to a number of relationship changes for student-athletes (e.g., new student peers, support staff and coaches). Student-athletes may benefit from forming these relationships before they make the transition into university as they may become overwhelmed with new demands when they arrive, and having trusted support in place may be a key factor. Additionally, the type of support that student-athletes need prior to and just after transitioning into university may be different during other phases of the transition (e.g., several months following transition), and these periods are yet to be explored in depth in the literature. The formation of relationships with further stakeholders, such as academic staff, and the specific role that these individuals play during the transition to university for student-athletes has not been explored in the literature.

2.2.1.4 The move into university education. The transition to university for students can be a considerable period of change within their lives, and presents students with new learning experiences and opportunities for psychosocial development (Tao et al., 2000). The move into university education has been acknowledged as a potential source of strain for students' due to the multiple demands placed on individuals, including educational, personal, and social demands (Briggs et al., 2012; Gall, Evans, & Bellerose, 2000; Hussey & Smith 2010). For some students, the stress associated with the transition into university can lead to feelings of disconnectedness and isolation (Peel, 2000; Tinto, 1975), however, for others, there is excitement at experiencing new-found independence in the university environment (Kantanis, 2000).

Due to the significance of the first year of university, a large amount of the literature has focused on the first year transition, when students are undergoing the immediacy of change (e.g. Yorke & Longden, 2008), and are also vulnerable to dropping out of university (McInnis, 2001; Snyder & Dillow, 2013). Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn and Terenzini (1996) suggest that drop out in the first-year is the result of a number of factors, including dislike of academic course and limited social support. Research suggests that student-athletes have been found to be more prone to quit university than the general student population, due to challenges they experience managing busy schedules in both sport and education (Bengtsson & Johnson, 2012).

One of the factors associated with difficulties for students adjusting to the transition to university is the discrepancy between the expectations that they have about university life and their actual experiences once they make the transition (Jackson, Pancer, Pratt, & Hunsberger, 2000; MacFarlane, 2014). There may be mismatch between students' pre-transition expectations and aspirations and the reality they experience at university, that may in turn bring about adjustment difficulties (e.g., thoughts about dropping out; Kantanis, 2000; Tranter, 2003; Smith & Hopkins, 2005). Research suggests that student-athletes may benefit from forecasting some of the potential problems that they might experience at university to help them to consider how they might cope with these, and help them to form expectations (Brown et al., 2015). The expectations that student-athletes have about their transition into university include; meeting new and different people, having fun, enjoying the freedom of a learning environment that is not regimented, being mentally stimulated by new learning experiences, and having the opportunity to explore more interesting subject choices (Kantanis, 2000). In addition to these, student-athletes may form further expectations around their sport, such as how being at university may enhance their sporting development. Previous research has suggested that students who form diverse expectations (i.e., positive and negative expectations), and are well prepared for the experience, will adapt to university life more successfully than those who do not (Jackson et al., 2000). Students who are anxious about being at university, due to limited preparation, report increased levels of stress, depression, and may adjust poorly to university life (Jackson et al., 2000). Expectations that students hold will often be accumulated out of prior educational experiences, or information provided by peers and family (Leese, 2010). This research highlights that students may bring social and cultural resources to university that they use as a guide to form impressions of their new experiences. Factors that made the transition difficult, however, and meant that many expectations were not met, include, the inability to make friends, staff members not being as accessible as expected, and a heavier workload than expected (Kantanis, 2000).

When student-athletes move into university, they will experience changes in the style of education, that can lead to both positive and challenging outcomes. Research suggests that student-athletes perceive that the flexibility of teaching and attendance requirements at university facilitated their commitment to their sport, following years of restricted timetables at school (McNamara & Collins, 2010). The new academic environment may, however, also create challenges, because the new style of education may require student-athletes to become more independent and take charge of their own academic career, become more self-regulated, prioritise their time more effectively, and plan ahead (De Knop et al., 1999; MacNamara & Collins, 2010). The need to become increasingly independent may include attending classes without being told to, rescheduling exams, and investing more time to study outside of classes (De Knop et al., 1999).

In sum, the transition into university can be a significant source of stress for students, because the transition can lead to changes within multiple life areas. Within the academic domain, these changes can include moving into a new style of education that requires individuals to function more independently. This demand may be increased for student-athletes who also have to contend with changes and expectations within their sporting environment. Other features of the university environment, such as the social culture, and the effect that this has on the transition to university for student-athletes has not been well explored.

2.2.1.5 New sources of funding and financial independence. When moving into adulthood and into higher education, it is reported as being a time when individuals have an increased focus on taking responsibility for their own decisions and financial well-being (Arnett, 1998). The transition into financial independence can, however, be overwhelming and has been identified as being a concern when students have made the transition into university (Briggs et al., 2012; Mudhovozi, 2012; Smith & Renk, 2007). Additionally, research suggests that students may find themselves in difficulty if they have not considered the financial implications of being at university (e.g., budgeting for accommodation, food, books; Yorke, 2000). Advice, therefore, on coping with finances following the transition (e.g., learning to budget) into university is suggested as being an important element (Yorke, 2000). Financial problems have also been attributed as a reason for drop out of university in the first year of study (Yorke, 1999), highlighting how significant this factor may be within the transition.

Before student-athletes move into university, their families are often the main financial source of support in their athletic career (Wylleman et al., 2013). Wylleman et al. (2013) demonstrates that following the transition into university, however, student-athletes become less financially reliant on their families, and instead this support is replaced by NGBs, National Olympic Committee's (if athletes are at the top level in their sport), and government sponsors (e.g., Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme in the UK). As student-athletes may also have to budget for areas in their sport (e.g., competitions, travel to training, equipment), alongside areas such as accommodation and food when they arrive at university, financial management could be an issue for this population.

2.2.2 During University

2.2.2.1. Time management: striking a "balance". Having the capability to manage time effectively and maintain balance is regularly highlighted in the dual career literature as being an important factor for student-athletes during their time at university. Finding an optimal balance, however, has been suggested as being one of the most difficult demands for university student-athletes (Britse & Varga Karlsson, 2017), because they must continually negotiate the dual roles of student and athlete (Comeaux et al., 2011). Compared to non-athletic student counterparts, student-athletes will face an additional set of complex demands, stressors, and challenges that arise from their involvement in competitive sport (Broughton & Neyer, 2001), and may lead to an increased need to hold effective time management skills. On a day to day basis at university, student-athletes may have to cope with moving among training, classes, gym, study groups, meetings, and other obligations (Read, 2017). Further to this, when student-athletes experience competition schedules spread over several months (i.e., team sports) or packed periods (i.e., individual sports), this could affect their capability to successfully time manage their sport and educational commitments (Aquilina, 2013; Debois et al., 2015). The time demands reported by student-athletes to fulfil training commitments has varied among studies. Research has reported that student-athletes spend around 10 hours a week training in their sport (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007), however, further studies have observed an even greater time demand of up to 40 hours of training a week (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007).

Research suggests that the term 'balance' will not typically imply that student-athletes are investing equal amounts of time into their sport and academic roles (Aquilina, 2013). How student-athletes manage their time or find what is perceived to be the right balance will depend on personal characteristics, the type of sport, and exact choice of living (e.g., if an athlete does not live in close proximity to their university, this may lead to additional travelling and they may perceive that they have a difficult balance to maintain; Aquilina, 2013). With regards to sporting differences, a swimmers training, for example, may take place much earlier in the day than a tennis player's training, and may have implications on how their day is structured. In sum, managing busy timetables within sport, academics, and social life is a challenging feat for student-athletes during their time at university, and may have the potential to become overwhelming and lead to stress (Etzel, 1989). The concept of balance may, however, be individual to each student-athlete.

2.2.2.2 Social support in managing the dual career at university. The availability of social support and understanding of an athletes' support network is thought to be key to achieving a well-balanced dual career (Henriksen & Mortensen, 2014), and may help to avoid burnout, build self-confidence, and enhance performance (Freeman, Coffee, & Rees, 2011). Whilst at university, student-athletes may need support from their coaches, club, and NGB to be able to manage their dual career, however, such support may not be readily available to them (e.g., Aquilina, 2013; Conzelmann & Nagel, 2003). When there is limited support during a dual career, research suggests that this may lead to athletes' premature retirement from elite sport (Aquilina, 2013; Wylleman & Reints, 2010). Limited support for the maintenance of a dual career has been suggested as being due to the negative perceptions of coaches and sports organisations that being a student will threaten the sporting development of their athletes (McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006).

Coaches are suggested to play an important support role in the dual career experience for student-athletes, and may often become athletes' most frequent university contact (Bruening & Dixon, 2007). The support of coaches is suggested to go beyond supporting athletic development, because they may also provide guidance within other areas of life, such as helping students to organise their academic schedules (Skinner, 2004). Coaches may also support their athletes through making the training environment enjoyable, that may help to alleviate academic stress, and offer flexibility in training schedules to allow for educational commitments (Cosh & Tully, 2014). Additionally, coaches may also support their student-athletes through cultivating sources of emotional support within their athletic teams by improving team cohesion, that may be valuable in helping student-athletes to reduce the burden of combining sport and education (Cosh & Tully, 2014). Coaches, however, have been suggested as being mindful to providing proactive support to student-athletes (e.g., solving the problems of athletes) without them having the opportunity to seek help first, that may benefit long-term development (Brown et al., 2015; Collins & MacNamara, 2012).

Research suggests that when student-athletes are at university, they may have access to increased social support than at the school level, including that from performance lifestyle advisors (Brown et al., 2015; Aquilina & Henry, 2010). Although the exact type of support that these individuals provide to student-athletes during their time at university has not been well explored in the literature. In addition, student-athletes may develop partner relationships during their time at university, who they may receive important emotional support from when trying to balance busy academic and sporting schedules (Tekavc, Wylleman & Cecić Erpič, 2015).

2.2.2.3 Wellbeing and mental health in university student-athletes. Being a university student whilst also being a high performing athlete at university has the potential to have negative implications on wellbeing and mental health. The wellbeing of student-athletes is a topic discussed amongst the North American literature (e.g., Gabbard & Halischak, 1993; Watson & Kissinger, 2007), but is limited with contributions from Europe. Research suggests that for student-athletes, sport can help to buffer academic stress, and can have positive implications on wellbeing (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). For others, however, the intense training schedules, travelling, and the pressure to succeed can intensify stress, and when this is combined with academic demands, can lead to negative effects on mental health (e.g., depression; Humphrey, Yow, & Bowden, 2000; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003).

Studies have suggested that for student-athletes participating in intercollegiate programmes, between 10 and 15% (2% higher than non-athletes) will experience psychological issues severe enough to warrant counselling (Watson & Kissinger, 2007). More recent research has, however, reported even higher figures, with research suggesting that 23.7% of NCAA student-athletes present clinically relevant symptoms of depression (Wolanin, Hong, Marks, Panchoo, & Gross, 2016). Mental health problems that student-athletes are reported to be more susceptible to facing during their university careers in comparison to their non-athletic peers include; substance abuse (particularly alcohol), social anxiety, depression, and particularly within female populations, eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia (Gill, 2008; Maniar, Chamberlain, & Moore, 2005). Such clinical psychological issues have the potential to have harmful consequences to athletes' educational and sporting endeavours (Hosick, 2005). Despite the potential for these issues to occur, research has asserted that the population of student-athletes are less likely to seek out professional help than non-athletes (Moulton, Molstad, & Turner, 1997). The reasons for limited help-seeking behaviours may include a fear of appearing weak, losing training time, losing the respect of peers and coaches, and the fear of being viewed as needing psychological assistance (Brooks & Bull, 1999). Based on these results, regular monitoring of student-athlete wellbeing via one-to-one meetings and psychometric measures may be important during university. In addition, Hoisick (2005) suggests that licensed psychologists can enhance the medical care for student-athletes by providing mental health screenings, prevention education, and providing counselling on challenges and stresses related to being a student-athlete.

2.2.2.4 Identity fluctuations during the university dual career. An area that has received considerable attention within the dual career literature is the development of identity for student-athletes, and how they alternate between their athlete and student roles during their time at university. The term student-athlete proposes that individuals must develop multiple identities, encompassing different roles within each. Possessing a strong athletic identity has been found to have a positive influence on sports achievements (Danish et al., 1993; Werthner & Orlick, 1986), exercise adherence, and athletic performance (Brewer et al., 1993). The literature, however, appears to be divided on whether holding a strong athletic identity when also a student at university has a positive or negative effect on athletes' education. US studies have indicated that university student-athletes with a strong athletic identity are still successful in their academic pursuits (e.g., Paule & Gilson, 2010; Potuto & Hanlon, 2007; Richards & Aries, 1999). Conversely, other studies have indicated that when student-athletes' identify more highly with their athletic role, they may experience more challenges within their university education (e.g., Adler & Adler, 1991; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrell, & Sabo, 2005; Singer, 2008).

As student-athletes progress through their time at university, they may experience gradual changes within their identity (Knott, 2016; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Miller & Kerr, 2002; 2003). When student-athletes move towards the end of their university degree, their student identity may gain increasing importance, and it is thought that aiding and nurturing this development in student identity can help in endorsing more positive outcomes for student-athletes (e.g., greater ability to make career decisions; Finch, 2009; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003). This change in identity has also been suggested as being due to the perception that student-athletes' athletic careers were coming to an end, and there was no reward to be gained by continuing to put the athlete role first (Knott, 2016; Lally & Kerr, 2005).

The influence that the environment and certain individuals within it can have on student-athletes' identities has also been a topic of discussion in the literature (Adler & Adler, 1991). Coaches were identified as having a strong influence on student-athletes' preference to their athlete role over their student role (Marx, Huifmon, & Doyle, 2008; Mirabile & Witte, 2013; Singer, 2008). Further individuals who may also contribute to the importance of student and athlete identities include parents (Marx et al., 2008), teammates (Miller & Kerr, 2003), fans, professors, and other students (Adler & Adler, 1991). Professors and other students in the university may have adverse impressions of student-athletes, and hold the perception that they do not put enough effort into their education, and that they receive special attention (Adler & Adler, 1991). This negativity may lead some student-athletes seeking support from their teammates during their time at university, and may lead to strengthening athletes' identities (Adler & Adler, 1991; Singer, 2008).

2.2.3 The Transition out of University

2.2.3.1 Leaving education: the move into a new phase of life. The transition out of university for the general student population is described as a challenging and overwhelming experience, and a transition phase that is thought to be critical in terms of future career success (Hodkinson, Sparkes, & Hodkinson, 1996; Kenny & Sirin, 2006; Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2012; Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2010). Currently, a large amount of the literature that has explored the transition out of university has investigated the perspectives of the general student population and their move from university into a full-time vocation (e.g., Polach, 2004; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). There is, however, limited research that has explored the transition experiences of student-athletes, whose experiences may be more complicated than regular students because they also have to contend with potential changes in their sport. The few studies that have explored the transition out of university for student-athletes suggest that they are vulnerable to experiencing various psychological responses, such as confusion, grief, feelings of failure, depression, and isolation (e.g., Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Falls & Wilson, 2013; Fuller, 2014; McKnight et al., 2009; Petitipas et al., 2009). After having balanced the demands of athletics and academics for a large part of their lives, research suggests that student-athletes were used to everything in their lives being structured, (e.g., being told when to train and when to eat), and had difficulty adjusting to a life without structure and instruction (Moreland-Bishop, 2009).

Research on the general student population suggests that expectations may play an important role in how graduates adjust to leaving university education. In addition to facing the challenges associated with learning the norms and skills within their new vocation, graduates must also manage the disappointment resulting from unmet expectations, that can result in greater stress during the transition (e.g., Perrone & Vickers, 2003. Expectations that are not realised include having responsibility for several tasks requiring a range of skills from their employers and receiving limited guidance, however, following exit from university, new employees described their work as routine and restricted (Gardner & Lambert, 1993). Research suggests that reducing this potential degree of discrepancy by helping students to develop accurate expectations allows students to become prepared for the workplace, and these individuals report more positive experiences in their transition from student to employee (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). For student-athletes, the development of accurate expectations may be particularly important in the transition out of university, because they may also have to form expectations about changes in their sport (e.g., for some athletes, it may be important to form realistic expectations about the feasibility of continuing their sport to a high level post-university).

In addition, research has identified some of the transition concerns that the general student population hold about moving out of university. These include identity changes, such as the shift in professional status from an undergraduate student to a university-educated person, that comes with new social responsibilities and expectations (Chickering & Schlossberg, 2002). Students also have concerns about change or loss, assuming adult responsibilities, and losing support systems (Pistilli, Taub, & Bennett, 2003; Taub, Servaty-Seib, & Cousins, 2006). The concerns that student-athletes hold about leaving university may, however, differ from those of the general student population as they may have to consider how they will continue competing in their sport when they leave university.

2.2.3.2 Potential changes in the status of the athletic career. The majority of research exploring the transition out of university for student-athletes describes the transition as being 'career-ending' (e.g., Baillie & Danish, 1992), from 'athlete to non-athlete' (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990), and the 'conclusion of sport eligibility' (Levy, 2005). Research from North America suggests that for the majority of university student-athletes (99%), their elite-level competitive sport careers will terminate following their exit from university (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Ogilvie & Howe, 1986), and most student-athletes will make a transition to a life outside of sport (Brown, 2003). It is estimated that only 3.42% of collegiate student-athletes will continue to play at a professional level in American Leagues when they transition out of university (NCAA, 2015). When collegiate athletes move out of university, there appears to be minimal opportunities to remain competing in professional sports. Research on non-collegiate populations from Europe also suggests that this period of life is a time that coincides with a change in the perspective of student-athletes, when other life domains became more important than before (e.g., professional occupation, family), and the athletic career was not the most important aspect in their life anymore (Tekavc et al., 2015). Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model does, however, suggest that student-athletes may transition into a professional or semi-professional sports career, combined with a vocation upon exit from higher education.

2.2.3.3 Preparation for the transition: limited planning. One of the concerns facing the general student population during their final year of university is the pressure to generate an action plan for their post-university lives (Saginak, 1998), and this is also true for student-athletes. Studies suggest that student-athletes enter university with limited awareness of their vocational interests outside of sport and have vague or non-existent career objectives (e.g., Parham, 1993). This limited vocational awareness is despite choosing a degree topic, suggesting that the topic chosen by student-athletes may not be well thought out, or aligned to their interests.

Whilst research suggests that student-athletes may engage in some vocational career planning in the later university years, it is delayed compared to non-athletic populations (Lally & Kerr, 2005). In comparison to their non-sporting peers, research suggests that student-athletes participated in fewer career development programmes, had limited work experience, felt ill-prepared for the working world, and typically spend less time considering their post-university options (e.g., Moreland-Bishop, 2009; Riley; 2015; Smallman & Sowa, 1996). These challenges may be due to an intense focus on sport during student-athletes' time at university, leading to limited time to explore potential career options (e.g., Brown, Glastetter-

Fender & Shelton, 2000; Kim Wai Sum et al., 2017; Moreland-Bishop, 2009; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). The university years are thought to be an important time in personal development, and the exploration that contributes to the career development process (e.g., Lucas, 1997). Student-athletes may, however, not be using this time to effectively prepare for a potential future career outside of sport (Brown et al., 2000). As many student-athletes may not be able to continue into professional sport following exit from university (e.g., Harrison & Lawrence, 2003), career development programmes implemented by universities may be important in the planning process (Moreland-Bishop, 2009).

Without adequate career preparation for the transition out of university, it may be challenging for student-athletes who have to give up their athletic identities for that of a former collegiate athlete (e.g., Brown et al., 2000; Murdock, Strear, Jenkins-Guarnieri, & Henderson, 2016). Recent research conducted on US student-athletes also suggests that as many elite athletes will be unable to continue their athletic careers beyond university, support providers can encourage the athletes that they work with to learn to see themselves beyond their sport-specific identities (Reifsteck, 2018). Considering that student-athletes report lower health-related quality of life after college than non-athletes (Simon & Docherty, 2014), this preparation for transition may include emphasising the value of being active, physically competent people who model health behaviours for their community (Reifsteck, 2018). Preparing for a physical activity identity outside of competitive sport may not be an important feature of the transition out of university for UK student-athletes if they have continued opportunities to compete to a high level post-university.

2.2.3.4 Changes in support networks and support provided during transition.

When students transition out of university, because they experience feelings of loss and anxiety, confront new responsibilities, and a new social identity (e.g., Perrone & Vickers, 2003), social support during this period may be a key factor. Research on the general student population suggests that parents, peers, and romantic partners are important sources of support throughout the transition from university to work life (Buhl, Noack, & Kracke, 2017).

Perceived helpfulness of significant others has been deemed to be an important adjustment factor to post-university life, along with joint exploration (e.g., exploring potential options about what path to take following university with a significant other; Buhl et al., 2017). Whereas informational support (e.g., telling someone what to do) was perceived by students to be less helpful during the transition out of university and into the workplace (Buhl et al., 2017). Despite parents continuing to be an important source of support throughout the transition out of university, there are a number of changes within the parent-child relationship that may occur. These changes may include having reduced financial dependence on parents and increased spatial distance (Buhl, 2007). There have, however, been few academic studies to explore the changes in parental relationships that student-athletes may experience during this time, and whether they correspond to those of general students.

Research suggests that when student-athletes transition out of university, one of the most challenging factors they experience may be the loss of support networks, particularly separation from teammates and coaches, who are perceived to like “family” (Murphy, 1995; Werthner & Orlick, 1986). The renegotiation of relationships with teammates is suggested to be particularly problematic for student-athletes following years of training and competing together, and led to the loss of what was perceived to be their entire peer social network (Coakley, 2009; Moreland-Bishop, 2009). Additionally, student-athletes who are encouraged and supported by their coach during the transition out of university experience easier transitions than athletes who do not experience this encouragement (Fuller, 2014). Coach encouragement may help athletes to accept the loss of their athlete roles when they leave university.

Finally, student-athletes are suggested to be hesitant about seeking help with the range of emotions they experience when transitioning out of university and potentially away from sport (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). One of the reasons cited for this limited disclosure is that student-athletes may be under the impression that nobody would be able to relate to their predicament about leaving education and their competitive sports careers simultaneously (Fuller, 2014). Whether student-athletes who transition out of university and continue with their sporting careers experience similar challenges with seeking support has not been explored in the literature.

2.2.4 Review of UK University Sport Scholarship Programmes

In total, there are 95 sport scholarship programmes within UK universities. By reviewing the programmes, I gained an understanding about the types of support that student-athletes receive whilst they are at university in the UK. The review highlights the differences among programmes of support offered, including the eligibility criteria required to be on and remain on a sport scholarship programme (e.g., requirement to compete for the university in BUCS leagues and events, attain specific academic grades, annual reviews of sporting and academic progress) and the different types of support provided by each (e.g., financial bursaries and tuition fee support, physical support, performance lifestyle/psychology, and academic support). For more details on the types of support provided by sport scholarship programmes within UK universities, see Appendix A. The following section of this literature review will analyse unsolved issues and the current gaps that are present in the literature, before finally outlining the current thesis.

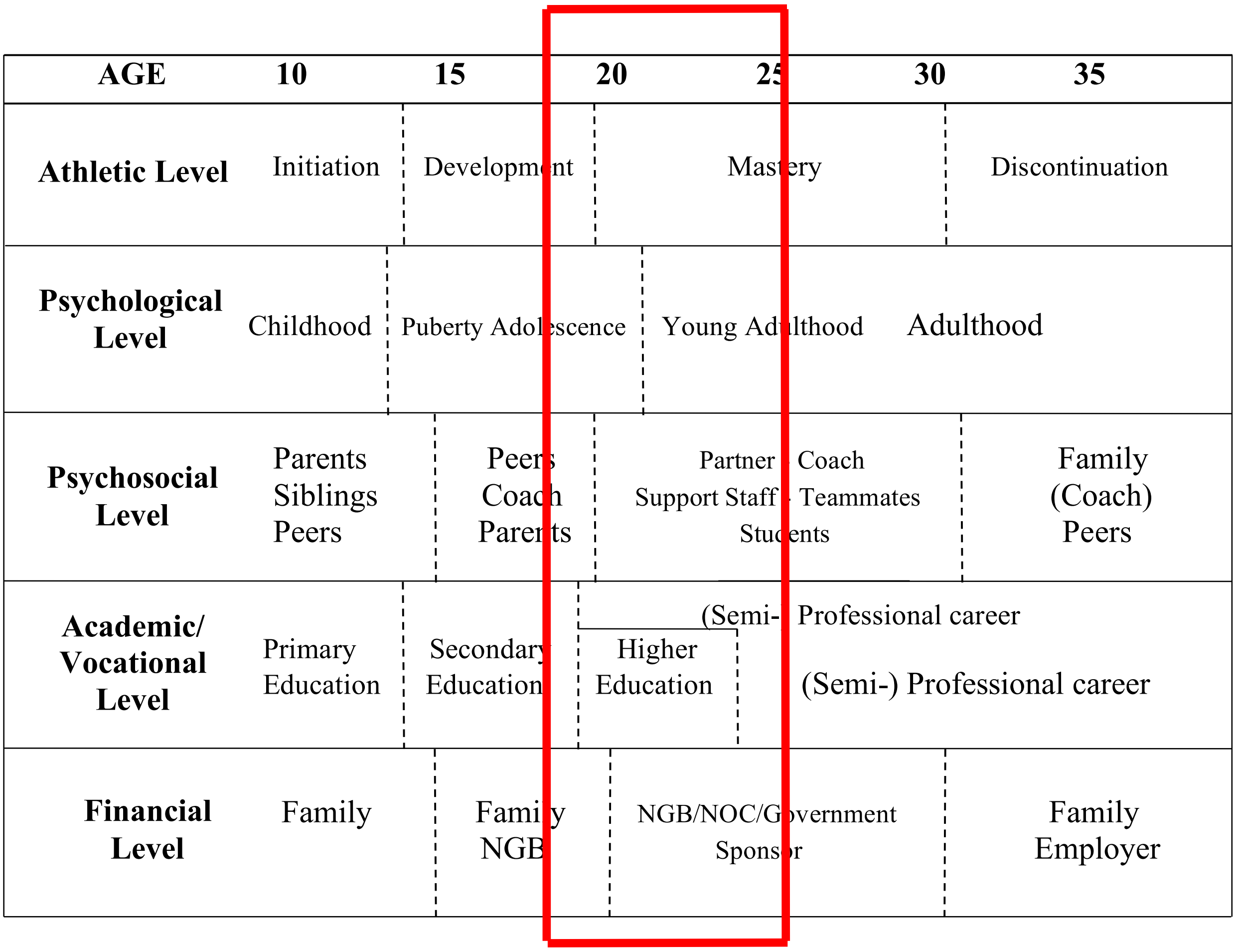
2.3 Summary, Unsolved Issues, Knowledge Gaps and Focus of the Current Work

The literature review started by discussing current existing athletic career transition models, and highlighted those that will be used in the current thesis. Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model best demonstrates the period of the athletic career that the current thesis is focusing on, and is represented by the boxed area in figure 2.3. Stambulova's (2003) model can then be used to explore the pathways within Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model (into and out of university) in a greater level of depth. Following the review of models, empirical research on dual careers was discussed, focusing on the whole pathway though university, including the transition into university, experiences during, and the transition out of university.

Due to the many gaps present within the dual career literature, summarised below, and the increasing population of elite-level student-athletes (e.g., MacNamara & Collins, 2010; Reints & Wylleman, 2009; Ryba et al., 2015), more research is required to gain a greater understanding of the university experience for this population. Accordingly, the overall purpose of this thesis was to examine the whole pathway through university for student-athletes from athletes' and stakeholders' perspectives. This thesis will address this purpose by examining:

(1) examine athletes' and stakeholders' experiences of the transition into university for student-athletes (Part A);
(2) examine student-athletes' perspectives of their experiences during university (Part A, B, and C);
(3) examine athletes' and stakeholders' experiences of the transition out of university for student-athletes (Part C);
(4) expand knowledge available on student-athlete experiences within a UK context (Part A, B, and C).

To add to the existing knowledge on dual careers, answer the research questions, and help achieve the overall purpose of this thesis, 3 parts of one overall study have been devised. Parts A, B, and C of the current thesis focus on the transition into university, experience during university, and the transition out of university for student-athletes, respectively. Knowledge on dual careers will be advanced by the three parts of this thesis as they assess the perspectives, using novel modes of investigation (e.g., longitudinal method) and analysis (e.g., autoethnographic, narrative) of various sources who have an understanding of university student-athlete experiences. By doing do, this will provide knowledge of factors associated



AGE 10 15 20 25 30 35

Athletic Level: Initiation | Development | Mastery | Discontinuation

Psychological Level: Childhood | Puberty Adolescence | Young Adulthood | Adulthood

Psychosocial Level: Parents Siblings Peers | Peers Coach Parents | Partner Coach Support Staff Teammates Students | Family (Coach) Peers

Academic/ Vocational Level: Primary Education | Secondary Education | Higher Education | (Semi-) Professional career | (Semi-) Professional career

Financial Level: Family | Family NGB | NGB/NOC/Government Sponsor | Family Employer

Figure 2.3. A holistic athletic career development perspective, including stages and transitions at the athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational and financial level (Wylleman, De Knop & Reints, 2013). **The box (added by the author) highlights the period of exploration of this PhD thesis.**

with the university experience for student-athletes that we do not currently have an understanding of from previous research.

Various sources have contributed to the current thesis who have knowledge of the factors associated with the university dual career from both a personal perspective (i.e., student-athletes, including autoethnographic accounts) and a supportive role (e.g., head coaches, managerial figures, performance lifestyle advisors, academic staff). At present, a large amount of the literature on dual careers focuses on the perceptions of athletes (e.g., Aquilina, 2013). Although athlete perspectives are key to understanding experience, stakeholders who interact with and co-ordinate the support of student-athletes, such as head coaches, performance lifestyle advisors and managerial figures may be able to provide additional knowledge we do not already know. Previous research has suggested that future research would benefit from gaining the perspectives of academic staff, because although we do not yet know their specific roles, they are suggested to play a role in shaping the development of student-athletes (Brown et al., 2015).

Methodologically, limited athletic career research has employed a narrative and autoethnographic approach (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). One such study comes from Carless and Douglas (2009), that narratively explores the career and retirement experiences of professional golfers. To further advance knowledge and methods of presenting data in the area of dual careers, part B of the current thesis has been devised with a narrative methodology to present the dual career stories of university student-athletes. This style of writing may allow the reader to connect on a more personal level with the data presented (Phoenix & Smith, 2011). Additionally, there are limited studies within dual career research that have used an autoethnographic method. This method may provide a deeper insight into the influences, and the meaning of personal experiences (Pace, 2012), that the reader may be able to resonate more closely with. Autoethnographic writing is included within all three parts of the current thesis and aligns to the research aims. In addition, there are a limited number of longitudinal studies in dual career research (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014), with researchers favouring a retrospective approach to view dual career development across the whole athletic career (e.g., Debois et al., 2015; Tekavc et al., 2015). The majority of athlete career research using this method has explored the athletic retirement process (e.g., Torregrossa et al., 2015), opposed to phases within the athletic career. Using a longitudinal approach in part B of the thesis may have methodological advantages, because it avoids the limitations of retrospective interviewing, that may result in memory distortion and retrospective recall bias having an effect on the validity of the data presented (Levine & Safer, 2002). Longitudinal methodology also allows changes to be examined over time (Holland, Thomson, & Henderson, 2006).

Aim one of the thesis was to examine athletes' and stakeholders' experiences of the transition into university for student-athletes. As highlighted in the literature review and the above model, the coinciding transitions during the move to university (Wylleman et al. 2013), makes this period particularly important to examine, because there may be stress in a number of life areas. At present, there is limited research that has explored the pre-transition perceptions of student-athletes, and whether these perceptions marry to actual experiences when they have arrived. In addition, there has been limited research that has examined the decisions that student-athletes make about moving into university, and the factors that influence these decisions. Previous research has suggested student-athletes may have to make difficult decisions within their dual careers (e.g., Aquilina, 2009). Part A has been devised to expand on this gap and explores the phase before student-athletes transition into university.

Understanding this pre-transition process in greater depth may allow stakeholders, such as university athlete support staff and academic staff, to provide student-athletes with the support and advice required during this period to allow for a successful adjustment to university.

In addition, studies exploring the transition into university have been vague in describing which time point of the transition they are exploring when student-athletes have entered university (e.g., Brown et al., 2015). Part A focuses on the specific challenges and demands that student-athletes will be confronted with in approximately the first six weeks of being at university. The type of support (e.g., tangible, emotional) that student-athletes need just after transitioning into university may be different during other phases of the transition (e.g., several months following transition), and this is yet to be explored in depth in the literature. Providing student-athletes with the correct support during this period may be important to avoid drop out, of which they are at an increased risk of (Bengtsson & Johnson, 2012)

Aim two of the thesis was to examine student-athletes' perspectives of their experiences during university. The literature review highlighted that student-athletes experience a number of stressful situations whilst at university, such as managing busy timetables (e.g., Tekavc et al., 2015) and fluctuations in their identity (e.g., Lally & Kerr, 2005), that can lead to potential mental health issues (e.g., Humphrey et al., 2000). Research has explored the factors that facilitated or constrained dual career development throughout the whole athletic career (e.g., Debois et al., 2015), however, no studies have had an exclusive focus on the experiences of student-athletes as they move through their university careers. By doing so, it may be possible to assess the changes that occur over time (e.g., across each year of study), the processes associated with these changes (Holland et al., 2004), and the differences among student-athlete experiences. Part B was devised to explore the experiences of student-athletes in real-time as they move from the start to the end of their university degree. Exploring this process in more detail may enable stakeholders to have an understanding of how to support student-athletes who have divergent experiences at university, and the types of support they may require within certain periods.

Aim three of the thesis was to examine athletes' and stakeholders' experiences of the transition out of university for student-athletes. The literature review demonstrates the limited research on the transition out of university for student-athletes, and particularly outside of the US. For US student-athletes, the options to continue high level sport following university are limited (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003), however, this may not be comparable to other nations, such as the UK, where a professional club structure exists. This may lead to increased opportunities to continue competing in high level sport post-university. The factors associated with the transition and necessary support that student-athletes require may differ. Part C of the thesis was devised to expand on this gap in the literature and explore the perceptions of student-athletes in both the pre-and post-transition phase, support provided, the pathways that student-athletes take when they transition out of university, and reasoning behind their decisions. This knowledge may enable stakeholders to have an effective understanding of how they could support student-athletes in preparing (e.g., career support) and adapting to the transition (e.g., emotional support). This knowledge may also help to optimise the potential of student-athletes following the direction that they take when they leave university (e.g., into full-time sport or into a vocational career).

Finally, aim four of the thesis is to expand knowledge available on student-athlete experiences within a UK context. "The EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes" (2012) provides recommended policy actions in support of dual careers in high-performance sport, and encourages national stakeholders to explore the factors associated with dual careers within their respective cultures. Member states across Europe have set up of a range of initiatives to support the dual career (Aquilina & Henry, 2010), with research highlighting that athletes will profit from different dual career pathways, opportunities, and stakeholder attitudes based on the national context (Küttel, Christensen, Zysko, & Hansen, 2017). Dual career systems across Europe range from 'State-Centric' systems that are backed by legislation (e.g., Spain, France), to 'Laissez-faire' systems where no formal structures exist (e.g., Italy, Austria; Aquilina & Henry, 2010). In the UK, a system operates whereby the athletic talent development needs of athletes are placed in the hands of institutions such as universities. UK universities place high importance on supporting student-athletes, that is highlighted in the review of UK university sport scholarship programmes (currently 95 programmes in the UK; see Appendix A). Despite the uniqueness of the UK context, at present, there is limited research in dual careers within UK populations. Additionally, comparative to the American context where currently a large proportion of the student-athlete literature is situated, athletes in the UK will typically develop via a club-based system external to their education (Brennan & Bleakley, 1997). UK athletes may not experience a link between their sport and educational environment that is widely viewed in the US until they enter university (McCormack & Walseth, 2013). UK student-athletes may experience additional factors during their university dual careers that we are not yet aware of in the literature. In addition, figures highlighted on the British Universities & Colleges Sport (BUCS) website states that during both the 2012 London Olympic Games and the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, the majority of Team Great Britain were either current student-athletes or had been through the higher education system (British Universities & Colleges Sport, 2012, 2016). During the London Olympic Games in 2012, several sports had a strong student-athlete representation, including; modern pentathlon (100%), women's water polo (100%), rowing (90%), field hockey (87.5%), athletics (79.5%), and swimming (54%). Many of these Olympic-level student-athletes also regularly represented their universities within the British University and Colleges leagues and events (British Universities & Colleges Sport, 2012). These figures further demonstrate the large roles that student-athletes play in the elite sport system, and the importance of examining their experiences to gain a greater understanding of how to support the process to maximise their elite potential.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In deciding which research approach to take, I was primarily guided by my thesis aims, outlined in chapter 1. Given that the focus of the study was on exploring athlete and stakeholder perceptions of the university student-athlete pathway, a qualitative research design that allowed their perceptions to be captured was deemed most suitable. This method allowed the opportunity to explore participants' perceptions of the UK university student-athlete experience from their own perspective (Patton, 2002). Qualitative methods allow the researcher to step around the platform of scientifically derived knowledge as the only truth and to explore knowledge as complex social questions answered through problem solving (Glesne, 2006; Patton, 1990). Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013) argued that with qualitative research, researchers are able to understand and capture other people's points of view without predetermining their thoughts and feelings. Qualitative methods also avoid research being constrained by the hypothesis-driven focus of many quantitative research methods (Guest et al., 2013). Instead, experiences are based on participants' own beliefs and experiences, not on pre-defined, testable hypotheses (Öhman, 2005).

In addition to allowing capturing of others' perspectives, qualitative data collection methods highlight human behaviour and social interaction, exploring the quality of a phenomenon, not the quantity (Öhman, 2005). In other words, qualitative enquiry allows for greater flexibility, and gives the opportunity for researchers to probe more deeply into responses (Guest, et al., 2013; Öhman, 2005; Patton, 2002). For example, during interviews when respondents reply with short answers with almost no description (e.g., yes or no), qualitative enquiry allows the researcher to follow up on this with further probes or questions. Probing questions give the opportunity for the researcher to delve deeper into the response, because in some situations, participants may need clarity around certain questions (Guest et al., 2013). As the aim of the current thesis is to gain an understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences of the pathway through university, a qualitative data collection and analysis was deemed the most suitable for use throughout. As discussed above, currently, there have been few studies conducted on UK student-athlete higher education experiences. Qualitative methods allowed for the exploration of previously unexplored factors, and the potential to gain an overall greater understanding of the area of interest.

Despite the use of qualitative enquiry throughout the current thesis, there are limitations to this form of research that ought to be acknowledged. First, a limitation to qualitative methodology is that data interpretation and analysis may be more complex. Berg and Lune

(2012, p. 4) highlight that “qualitative research is a long hard road, with elusive data on one side and stringent requirements for analysis on the other.” Due to the complex nature of qualitative methods, data collection and analysis can be a time-consuming process that can result in the researcher becoming lax and missing relevant information from the end transcriptions (Carr, 1994). Additionally, the data collection and analysis in qualitative enquiry are more likely to be influenced by the researcher than such areas will be in quantitative enquiry (Smith & Caddick, 2012). To overcome this limitation and give the reader a greater understanding of why I have interpreted results in the way I have, later on in the current chapter, I have outlined my own situation and experience of being a student-athlete, and consequently the influence that it may have on my own research.

3.1.2 Epistemological View

Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary field that encompasses a wide range of epistemological viewpoints, research methods, and techniques of interpreting and understanding human experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002). There are a number of epistemological schools of thought within qualitative enquiry, and each have different data collection and analysis techniques that can be used (Patton, 2002). Mantzoukas (2004) highlights that school of thought can influence how researchers communicate with their audiences, and can affect individual beliefs and values (Merriam, 1998).

One school of thought is that of traditional scientific research (e.g., Ragin, 1987). Scientific knowledge is belief based on reason and empirical evidence (Wenning, 2009), and the rules of scientific research state that it must be conducted systematically, sceptically, and ethically (Robson, 2002). Artistic and evocative epistemology (e.g., Bochner, 2001) is further school of thought. Denzin (1997) states that evocative epistemology offers a way of knowing that goes beyond vision, representation, and mimicry. Those in the arts-informing inquiry tend to focus on evoking meaning through the creation of complex products or performances (Denzin, 1997), but without any sort of text or interpretation, the evocative epistemology is easily lost. Social construction and constructivist (e.g., Glesne, 1999) is a school of thought that refers to the process by which reality is created by the observer through their active experience of it (Jonassen, 1991). To social constructivists, knowledge is a human product that is socially and culturally constructed (Ernest, 1999), and meaning is located in an understanding of how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within a social, community context (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996). As social construction, however, cannot be independent of us as its observers, the objectivity is created by people and can therefore be changed by them (Yeganeh, 2004). In turn, the objective reality and its meanings may also influence the people who contributed to creating them (Yeganeh, 2004). Critical realism (e.g., Cook & Campbell, 1979) is another school of thought and suggests that human knowledge captures a small part of a deeper and vaster reality (Fletcher, 2017). Critical realists do not deny that there is a real social world we can attempt to understand or access through philosophy or social science (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002), but some knowledge can be closer to reality that other knowledge. The ability to engage in explanation and causal analysis makes critical realism useful for analysing various social problems and suggesting solutions for social change (Fletcher, 2017).

My philosophical viewpoint sits in the critical realism paradigm. Although I believe that a real world exists that is independent of my own perceptions and constructions, my understanding of this world is socially constructed from my own standpoint and perspectives. I believe that my own background and experiences are an integrative part of understanding myself and others around me. For critical realists, an object's structure is made up by internal social relations that possess specific capabilities and tendencies to act in certain ways under particular conditions (Sayer, 2000). From a critical realist perspective, there is no possibility of gaining a single, "correct" understanding of the world, and many who hold this perspective argue that the only way to gain a good understanding of the world and constructs within it is to gain a majority understanding from the perspectives of individuals who have a knowledge of the area under investigation through their own personal experiences (Maxwell, 2012). Holding this viewpoint, the current thesis explores the university student-athlete experience and the transitions that take place within this time frame, with an aim of gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the factors associated with these transitions. The current chapter details the research origins, data collection, data analysis, and credibility procedures used within the research of the current thesis that align to the critical realist paradigm.

3.1.3 Research Origins

To provide the reader with an understanding of why I chose to undertake a thesis in the area of student-athletes and to offer context to my autoethnographic stories, I believe it is important to provide information on my background experiences. I am a 27-year old British female and have spent a substantial part of my life combining sport and education, including through secondary school, college, and university. My sport is table tennis and I have been competing for 19 years. I was introduced to the sport by both of my parents who played to a high national level, and who also have experience of being educated to undergraduate and postgraduate degree level at university. During my athletic career, I reached a career high of number 3 on the senior women's ranking list, won 11 national singles and doubles titles, and 3

British singles titles. I have been fortunate to have travelled the world playing for England and Great Britain in many different events, including the Senior World Team Championships, European Youth Championships, and the Youth Olympics. I played for a team in the elite Swedish national women's league for a number of years, and had the challenge of combining this demand during several time points in my university career. I received a sport scholarship for 7 years at university and have considerable experience of being a student-athlete and receiving university support services. These athletic experiences are the foundation of what motivated me to conduct research within the area of student-athletes, because I believe that there are areas of my university experience that could have been improved, and in turn, enhanced my sporting performance. Whilst being a high achieving athlete, I have also been passionate about pursuing my education and have been a dedicated student from school to university. I have a first-class undergraduate degree in BSc Psychology and Sport Science and a distinction level Master's degree in MSc Psychological Wellbeing and Mental Health, where the main focus of my research was in the area of athlete mental health (e.g., perfectionism, exercise addiction, anxiety, compulsive behaviours). On a vocational level, I have worked as a performance lifestyle advisor for student-athletes at two UK universities, that has given me first-hand experience of the many challenges that athletes from a wide variety of sports experience whilst at university. Additionally, I have lectured at university level in sport psychology and research methods, through which I was able to gain a greater understanding of athlete career development and transition theory, and comparing it to my own experiences, motivated me to pursue research within this area. I was also appointed as a national table tennis coach, and have coached at junior and senior international level around the world, including taking on the role as player-coach at the 2015 Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships in India for Team England. These coaching experiences again mean that I have first-hand knowledge of guiding athletes through various transitions in their career, such as the junior to senior transition.

My experiences as a student-athlete may have influenced how I interpreted the results of the current thesis. For example, when I interviewed athletes, I may have attempted to draw parallels between their individual experiences and my own, and misinterpreted what they were trying to say. Additionally, I may have connected with some participants more than others (e.g., those who had a challenging transition experience into university), that could have influenced the results. Also, having already experienced an entire university career, I may have had a greater understanding of the transition into and out of university for example, than my participants. This increased understanding may have allowed me to draw out some themes within the data that researchers who do not have such similar personal experiences may have missed. Finally, when interviewing stakeholders, my own perceptions of the support that they provide, having been through the process myself, may have affected how I interpreted their data.

3.2 Participants

3.2.1 Participant Recruitment, Inclusion Criteria, and Sample Size

The recruitment of student-athletes, athlete support staff, and academic staff across the current thesis was achieved through snowball and purposive sampling techniques. Purposive sampling is typically used in qualitative research and involves identification and selection of individuals or groups of individuals that are proficient and well-informed with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2002). For example, specific members of athlete support staff, including heads of performance sport and head coaches, were recruited for the current thesis because these individuals had experience of working with university student-athletes during their everyday jobs (see Table 3.1 for an outline of stakeholder roles). These individuals were perceived as being able to provide rich data about student-athlete transitions and experiences.

In addition to purposive sampling, snowball sampling was also used to identify additional participants who were rich informants about the research area. Snowball sampling is defined as; a technique for finding research subjects when one subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on (Vogt, 1999). For example, student-athletes were recruited for the current thesis via the help of university sport scholarship managers and athletes known to myself. Following this, snowball sampling was used, whereby these individuals were asked if they were aware of other student-athletes who fit the criteria and would agree to participate. Snowball sampling seeks to take advantage of the social networks of identified respondents (i.e., student-athletes) to provide a researcher with an ever-expanding set of potential contacts (Thomson, 1997). The method is based on the assumption that a link exists between the initial sample and others in the same target population, allowing a series of referrals to be made (Berg, 1988).

The eligibility of participants to participate in data collection was decided by inclusion criteria relevant to the research questions. Student-athletes had to: (a) have received a sport scholarship (either an offer of a scholarship, ownership of one, or had one when they were at university) from their respective universities, (b) competed at high national or international level in their chosen sport, (c) be about to attend university, attending university or just completed their undergraduate degree at university, and (d) be 18 years or over at the time of data collection. This criterion was put in place so that athletes were able to draw on personal experience of competing in high level sport whilst also transitioning into, through and out of university. To be eligible for inclusion, stakeholders had to, have knowledge of the university student-athlete programmes by either supporting student-athletes or having a role that involves providing provision to student-athletes (e.g., academic staff).

Researchers have addressed the challenges of determining sample size (e.g., Patton, 2015; Merriam, 2009), with many qualitative methods authors generally agreeing that it is impossible to specify in advance of a study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the beginning, when an initial design is formulated, a desired or targeted sample size may be specified, but may not be the final number (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) also states that sample size can be emergent and flexible, because the size and composition of the sample can be adjusted based on what is learned as the enquiry deepens. For example, from the focus groups in part A, it became clear that it was also important to gather the perspectives of student-athletes in the pre-university transition phase, rather than just those currently at university. Gathering pre-transition perspectives was perceived to be important because stakeholders highlighted the type of support that they provide to student-athletes before they transition into university. Gathering the views of student-athletes in the pre-transition phase may help to increase understanding around whether they felt prepared after receiving this support. The sample size therefore increased to accommodate for this emergent group. In addition to adaptation of sample size based upon emergent findings, Patton (2002) also suggests that if saturation is not reached, and if doing so will help researchers answer their research questions, more participants can be added (Patton, 2002). In determining my final sample size, I drew upon the work of Patton (2002), who suggests that when data saturation has been reached and there are no new themes emerging within interviews, further participants may not be required because they are unlikely to add any further data that can answer the research questions. Within the current thesis, following Patton (2002), it was decided that saturation was reached after three interviews did not add any additional knowledge to the topic being studied.

Participants were not recruited for specific parts of the thesis, and some participant data was used across a number of different parts. For example, data from student-athletes in their final few weeks of third year of university who were used in the write up of athlete stories in part B were also used in part C, when there was discussion around the challenges student-athletes perceived they would face when they left university. In addition, some of the longitudinal data collected from student-athletes for part B who were in the first few weeks of university were used in part A. The focus of part B was not to highlight immediate changes upon arrival at university, and the data therefore fit more appropriately in part A where the focus was on immediate transition demands. For more information on who took part within each part of the thesis, see Table H.1 in Appendix H.

3.2.1.1 Participants. In total, 45 participants took part in the thesis, including a total of 26 student-athletes and 19 university stakeholders. Student-athletes were aged between 18 and 24 years ($\bar{x}$ = 20.3 years; *SD* ± 1.9), were from 11 universities across the UK, studying a range of degree courses (e.g., Pharmacy, History, Sport and Exercise Science), and had experience of competing at national (*n*=3) and international level (*n*=23). University stakeholders had between 1 and 18 years' experience of either supporting student-athletes or having a role that involves providing provision to student-athletes ($\bar{x}$ = 5.9 years; *SD* ± 3.9) and were from 2 UK universities. Stakeholders had various different roles (See Table 3.1 for details), and included; university sport managerial figures (*n*=2), sport scholarship managers/performance lifestyle advisors (*n*=2), head coaches (*n*=6), strength and conditioning coach (*n*=1), physiotherapist (*n*=1), sport development staff (*n*=4), academic staff (*n*=3). Participants were given pseudonyms to protect anonymity (see Table B.1 in Appendix B for participant labels in part A, and Table F.1. in Appendix F for participant labels in part C).

3.3 Procedure and Data Collection Methods

After ethical approval was gained from the Department of Sport and Exercise Science, Liverpool John Moores University, initial contact about the research took place via email to relevant stakeholders (e.g., university athlete support, academic staff, and Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme) to gain access to student-athletes. Stakeholders emailed potential student-athlete participants on behalf of myself, with the relevant information about the part of research that they were being invited to take part in (including an information sheet outlining the purpose, risks, safeguards, and benefits of taking part; see Appendices B, D, and F). Student-athletes known to myself were also recruited in the process. A similar process occurred when recruiting stakeholders to the research project. The gatekeeper at each institution (e.g., director of sport) was informed about the support staff roles that I was interested in taking part in the research. The gatekeeper then proceeded to email fellow support staff about the research on behalf of myself. For participants that expressed their interest in taking part, I made contact with each by email, attached a copy of the consent form,

Table 3.1.

Outline of Stakeholder Roles.

Stakeholder Role	**Description of Role**
University sport managerial figures	Role names: director of sport, performance sport manager. These roles have a small amount of direct contact with student-athletes. The roles involve putting the structures in place to allow members of staff to deliver support to services students-athletes.
Performance lifestyle advisors/sport scholarship managers	Role names: sport scholarship manager, high performance sport officer. This role involves supporting student-athletes holistically, by helping to manage all of the commitments in their lives. Involves regularly meeting with athletes to discuss and work through current challenges. Additionally, they have responsibilities in managing the recruitment of top-level athletes into the university.
Head coaches	Coaches were from netball, football, hockey, rugby and lacrosse. See the athletes several times a week for training sessions and help the athletes with their athletic development.
Strength and conditioning coach	Develops and monitors student-athletes' gym programmes, and sees them several times a week to coach them through the programme.
Physiotherapist	Helps student-athletes with injury and rehabilitation.
Sport development staff	Role names: coaching and competitions manager, student development and activities manager, student group co-ordinator, vice president of activities in the student union. These roles help to support the BUCS programme within the university, manage university competition schedules, and help with strategic sporting decisions higher up in the university.
Academic Staff	Teach student-athletes in lectures and tutorials, and are the point of contact about academic-related issues.

and asked if they had any further questions about the research project. They were then asked to sign and return the consent form (see Appendices B, D, F for copies of the consent form) before dates for their participation in the study were agreed upon. Data collection with participants took place using the methods outlined below.

3.3.1 One-Off Semi-Structured Interviews

A total of 14 one-off semi-structured interviews were used within the final-write up with student-athletes (n=9) and stakeholders (n=5), and were used in data collection points 1, 5, 9, and 10 (see Appendix H). Interviews lasted between 26 and 54 minutes ($\bar{x} = 33.9$, *SD* ± 7.5). Interviewing forms a cornerstone of qualitative data collection in sport psychology (Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis, & Sparkes, 2001), and has the potential to yield data that provides depth and detail to create understanding of phenomena and lived experiences (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Patton (2002) describes semi-structured interviews as a research technique where the researcher has a number of pre-determined questions to be covered with participants, but is flexible and allows new topics to be brought up during the conversation (Patton, 2002). In addition, the use of semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to explore participants' perspectives, thoughts and opinions, and provides the opportunity to highlight specific factors associated with the topic without being constrained by specific questions (Patton, 2002). Semi structured-interviews are suitable where depth of meaning is important and the research is primarily focused on gaining both insight and understanding (Gillham, 2000; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The semi-structured interview schedule also allowed for new questions to be asked and adapted based on the responses of participants.

3.3.1.1 One-off semi-structured interview schedule detail. ***3.3.1.1.1 Student-athlete interview schedules.*** A total of 4 interview schedules were used for one-off interviews with student-athletes. Questions were related to Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model, Stambulova's (2003) athletic career transition model, and previous literature on the student-athlete transition to university (see Appendix G; e.g., Aquilina, 2013; MacNamara & Collins, 2010; Fuller, 2014). At the beginning of the one-off student-athlete interviews, participants were asked to provide relevant contextual information (e.g., their age, sport, course, year of study, length of time competing in sport), and perceptions of their current academic and sporting performance. Additionally, student-athletes already at university were asked about their transition experiences into university. Student-athlete interview schedules included those for: (a) student-athletes who were about to make the transition into university ("what are your feelings about the forthcoming transition period?"), (b) Student-athletes already at university ("which areas of support are you finding most important following your transition into university?", (c) Student-athletes about to make the transition out of university (e.g., have you received any support to help you in your transition out of university?), and, (d) student-athletes who had recently made the transition out of university (e.g., "what path have you taken since you left university and why did you decide to take that path?").

3.3.1.1.2 Stakeholder interview schedules. A total of 3 interview schedules were used for one-off stakeholder interviews (see Appendix C for an example schedule). Prior to interviews with stakeholders, they were asked to describe their role and the number of years they had spent working with student-athletes. These interview schedules included that for a sport scholarship manager that focused on pre-transition support (e.g., "do you help to manage the athlete's expectations of their transition into university?). Finally, two one-off semi-structured interview schedules were developed as follow-up interviews with two members of different athlete support staff focus groups (conducted 1 month after focus group). Questions were related to specific themes and points of interest that emerged from the focus group they participated in, where the interviewee was asked to expand on those points to obtain more in-depth data (e.g., there was discussion about individual background and how this affects the transition, can you expand on this?").

Despite using one-off semi-structured interviews throughout the current thesis, there are limitations to the technique that need to be considered. Brown (2001) stated that a disadvantage of conducting semi-structured interviewing is the potential for the researcher to be subconsciously bias. As I was the interviewer throughout the whole PhD, I may have inadvertently projected my own bias into the interview process. Although there were certain topics to be covered on the semi-structured interview schedule, my body language or the way I asked certain questions may have resulted in different responses from participants. To reduce this limitation, I used pilot interviews throughout my PhD. Pilot interviews are a technique that could potentially counteract this bias and also enhance the skills of the researcher, in which the interviewer asks questions that they will ask in the final study to an experienced qualitative researcher (Gillham, 2000). The experienced qualitative researcher is then able to support the development of the interviewers' skills to draw out responses to the questions that they ask (e.g., the experienced researcher could suggest alternative ways that questions could be asked to participants). In addition, to further improve the quality of my interviews, I drew upon Patton (2015) who suggested taking notes during interviews to help formulate new questions as the interview moves along, picking up on things said earlier in the interview. Patton (2015) also suggests that it is important to explain the purpose of the particular questions throughout the interview. As outlined by Patton (2015), I also used probes throughout the interviews. Probes are used to deepen the response to a question, and increase the richness and depth of responses. The main type of probe that I regularly used was an elaboration probe. For example, "can you explain that further?" Elaboration probes tell the interviewee that you need further information or context regarding a certain topic (Patton, 2015).

3.3.2 Longitudinal Semi-Structured Interviews

A total of 22 interviews were used within the final write-up, with data from 7 student-athletes in their first (*n*=3), second (*n*=2), and third year (*n*=2) of their undergraduate university degree (see Table D.1 in Appendix D for participant details), and were used in data collection points 6, 7, and 8 (see Appendix H). Interviews lasted between 25 and 50 minutes ($\bar{x}$ = 33.5, *SD* ± 7.7). Two student-athletes missed interview phases as they did not respond to correspondence about setting up interviews (see Table D.2 in Appendix D for information on who took part in each interview phase). Interviews were conducted at three different time points with each participant to explore their experiences in real time. Collection of data for time point 1 was in October-November 2016 (just following the transition into university or into a new academic year). It was important to gather information here as student-athletes were adapting into their new environment and new responsibilities. Collection of data for time point 2 was in February-March 2017 (middle point of the academic year). This is a time when student-athletes have just returned from the Christmas break, and may have new assignments and heavy training schedules. Finally, data collection for time point 3 was in May-June 2017 (the end of the academic year). During this time point, student-athletes may have a heavy competition and exam period, and are beginning to think about the move into the next academic year, or their transition out of university.

Stambulova and Ryba (2014) analysed current athlete career research from 19 countries, with results demonstrating that longitudinal studies are in the minority (e.g., Mayer, 1995; Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, & Delignières, 2003; Torregrosa, Sanchez, & Cruz, 2003; Torregrossa et al., 2015). Lavallee and Robinson (2007) suggest that longitudinal research methods allow researchers to explore athletes' career experiences in real time, reducing limitations associated with retrospective designs. Exploring the experiences of student-athletes as they move through university over a longitudinal period will also allow for examination of the changes in the demands and challenges they experience. For example, research suggests that transitions within and from sport can last between six months and one year (Brandao et al., 2001; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Stambulova, 1997, 2001). Transitioning athletes may face several stages that force them to make psychosocial adjustments in various areas of their lives. Such processes can be captured in more detail, with changes in psychosocial adjustments more clearly highlighted, using longitudinal methods (Holland et al., 2006).

3.3.2.1 Longitudinal semi-structured interview schedule detail. A total of 16 interview schedules were used for longitudinal interviews with student-athletes. Semi-structured interviews took place with student-athletes across three time points across the university academic year (September to June), including the beginning (1 month into year), middle (5 months into year) and end of the year (8 months into year). The first interview with each participant began by discussing athletes' individual background information in a greater level of detail than the one-off interviews, because the outcome of the interviews was to use a form of storytelling to present athlete experiences at university. At the start of the first interview, student-athletes were asked a number of contextual questions (e.g., age, sport, degree course, university), followed by questions about their sporting achievements, length of time competing in sport, their greatest achievements and failures in sport, length of time participating in their sport and their past academic experiences. The main body of questions were related to Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model, and previous student-athlete literature (e.g., Aquilina, 2013; Brown et al., 2015) Interview schedules (*n*=3) were created for time point 1 (see Appendix E for an example schedule) for student-athletes in their first, second, and third year at university. Questions were adapted depending on which year the student-athlete was in. For example, student-athletes in their second and third year were asked at the beginning of the interview to describe their experiences during university so far. Questions were then adapted to student-athletes' year of study, for example, "have you experienced any new challenges so far in second year?" Following time point 1, a new schedule was created for each student-athlete (*n*=13). New interview schedules included follow-up questions relating to previous interview answers (see Appendix E for an example adapted schedule). This created the possibility of asking more specific questions related to the student-athlete's current situation. For example, when a student-athlete discussed that they were experiencing an issue with minimal NGB support for their dual career, this was followed up in the next interview to see if there were any changes in the issue; "has anything changed with the limited NGB support for your dual career?" Young, Powers, and Bell (2006) suggest that one of the difficulties associated with collecting data in longitudinal studies is participant attrition (the loss of study participants). In attempts to maintain attrition, I emailed participants after each interview phase, thanking them for their time, discussed how their input was valuable, and highlighted the time point of the next interview.

3.3.3 Focus Groups

A total of 6 focus groups, with 29 participants, were conducted across the thesis (see Table 3.2 for details on who took part in each focus group), and were used in data collection points 2, 3, 4, and 11 (see Appendix H). Focus groups lasted between 43 and 70 minutes ($\bar{x}$ = 54.3 *SD* ± 8.9). A research focus group is defined as an 'interview with a small group of relatively similar people on a specific topic of interest' (Carey, Asbury & Tolich, 2012). Using a focus group methodology has a number of advantages. First, the type and range of data generated through the social interaction of the group are often more profound and richer than those obtained from one-to-one interviews (Thomas, MacMillan, McColl, Hale, & Bond, 1995). Patton (2015) highlights that focus groups are cost-effective data collection, and have the possibility to highlight diverse perspectives and differences of opinion. A further advantage is that collecting research via a focus group methodology allows for multiple perspectives rooted within the context to explore and illustrate the problem of interest (Creswell, 2013; Lewis & McNaughton Nicholls, 2014).

As the current research focused on understanding the perceptions and experiences of UK university student-athletes, and the views of stakeholders, focus groups allowed an exploration of participants' thoughts and opinions. Collecting data from stakeholders and athletes via this method allowed for different perspectives from different roles and points of view to be examined. For example, the head football coach had a more direct form of interaction with transitioning student-athletes than the director of sport does, who oversees the roles of staff supporting this process. This difference in level of contact means that they may have had different perspectives on the same process, and may give a greater overall understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Additionally, the interactions and learnings in the group can constitute learning among the participants, and there is possibility to engage in problem solving (Wiebeck & Dahlgren, 2007). This problem solving occurred in the current study, because during the focus groups, stakeholders began discussing how they could improve transition experiences for student-athletes.

3.3.3.1 Focus group interview schedule detail. A total of 4 focus group schedules were created for the focus groups with student-athletes (*n*=1) and stakeholders (*n*=3). Questions across all focus groups were related to Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model, Stambulova's (2003) athletic career transition model, and previous literature on student-athlete transitions (e.g., MacNamara & Collins, 2010; Fuller, 2014). At the beginning of the focus groups with student-athletes, each participant was asked to provide relevant contextual information (e.g., their age, sport, academic course, year of study, length

Table 3.2.

Focus Group Participant Information.

Focus group	**Number of participants**	**Participant information**
Athlete support staff	6	Director of sport, performance sport manager, sport scholarship manager, strength and conditioning coach, 2x head coaches.
Athlete support staff	6	Sport scholarship manager, 2 x head coaches, student development and activities manager, student sport group co-ordinator, vice president of activities in the student union.
Athlete support staff	7	Director of sport, performance sport manager, sport scholarship manager, strength and conditioning coach, 3x head coaches, coaching and competitions manager.
Academic Staff	3	2x lecturers in exercise physiology, 1x lecturer in sport psychology.
Student-athletes	3	2x first year student-athletes, 1x postgraduate student-athlete.
Student-athletes	4	2x second year student-athletes, 2x postgraduate student-athletes.

of time competing in sport, sporting level). The student-athlete interview schedule focused on the transition into university, and included questions such as; "what do you feel are some of the challenges you faced immediately following the transition to university?" Stakeholder focus group interview schedules began by asking participants to describe their roles and how long they had either been supporting student-athletes or had a role that involves providing provision to student-athletes. Stakeholder focus groups included: (a) athlete support staff - focus on the transition into university (e.g., "what do you currently do to help facilitate a smooth transition for student-athletes into university?"), (b) Academic staff - focus on the transition into university (e.g., "do you have contact with student-athletes before they make the transition to university?"), and (c) Athlete support staff - focus on the transition out of university ("what skills do you perceive that student-athletes need to successfully adapt to the transition out of university?").

Although focus groups were used within the current thesis, there are some limitations to this method that ought to be acknowledged. First, Patton (2015) discussed that facilitating and conducting a focus group requires group process skill that is beyond simply asking questions. The moderator must manage the interview so that it is not dominated by one or two people and all participates have the opportunity to share their views (Patton, 2015). To improve my skills at conducting focus groups, I conducted a pilot focus group at my table tennis club with four county-level athletes. During this pilot focus group, I recognised that some of the members taking part were not contributing as much as others. To combat this, I actively asked questions to these members when they had not contributed for a while. By doing so, I gained experience of facilitating a focus group and was able to bring these skills into play when conducting the groups for the current thesis. A further limitation is that the focus group is beneficial for the identification of major themes but not so much for the micro-analysis of subtle differences (Krueger, 1994). To combat this limitation, I used two one-off semi-structured interviews (outlined above) to discuss in detail some of the major themes that emerged from the focus groups. Finally, focus groups typically have the disadvantage of taking place outside the natural settings where social interactions normally occur (Madriz, 2000). Although difficult to entirely eliminate this limitation, efforts were made to conduct the focus groups in settings that were familiar to the participants. For example, the athlete support staff focus groups were conducted in a room within the sports centre that they work, and the academic staff focus group was conducted within a teaching room.

3.3.4 Autoethnography

As part of my thesis, in addition to the data collected via focus groups and interviews outlined above, I have included my own stories and experiences as an elite student-athlete in an autoethnographic format. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that combines autobiography with ethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Autoethnographies provide insight into real-life events, influences, and the meaning of personal experiences for individuals (Pace, 2012). It is a highly-personalised form of writing "where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture" (Holt, 2003). As contended by a number of researchers, placing a magnifying glass on a lived experience could offer valuable insight for the researcher, participants, and readers (e.g., Raab, 2013). Ellis and Bochner (2000, p.739) state that autoethnographies are "stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, that themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language." Further to this, Ellis and Bochner (2000, p.737) state that, "by exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life." I hoped that by exploring and writing about my own life as a student-athlete at a UK university that this would enhance the current thesis in a way that made it unique, personal, and provide a way of highlighting a reality that readers may not have considered previously. In addition, writing autoethnographically offers new ways of communicating findings (Spry, 2011). Writing and interpreting my experiences may offer a style of writing that student-athletes may find appealing and inviting. Ellis (1995) notes that this form of writing may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, that can make social change possible for more people (Ellis, 1995). Student-athletes may be able to use the writing as a means of reflecting on their current situation and stimulate them to take action.

As a research tool, autoethnography has been used to study several diverse topics, these include; academic depression (Jago, 2002), classroom performance (Alexander, 1999), and masculine identity formation (Brooks, 2006). Within the field of sport psychology, examples of autoethnographic studies include, Krane (2009), who crafted sport stories from her childhood and analysed them for their psychological and social influence, and Douglas (2014), who contrasted media narratives of her sport career with self-stories to convey self-reflexive understanding of her self-identity and life in professional sport. There have, however, been few autoethnographic studies that have been conducted by student-athletes, documenting the challenges that they have encountered throughout their dual careers. One study from Ross (2006), explores the researcher's experience of being a black, lesbian student-athlete at an NCAA Division 1 University. Although the author briefly explored their identity as a student-athlete, there is no focus on the transition into university, the process of moving through university, and the transition out of university. In addition, Hartman (2014) wrote an autoethnographic account that analyses the culture of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) through a personal narrative of their experience as a Division I basketball player, with recommendations regarding scholarship regulations. To the best of my knowledge, no autoethnographic studies have, however, focused specifically on transitions and experiences that student-athletes face during their career, and within a UK context.

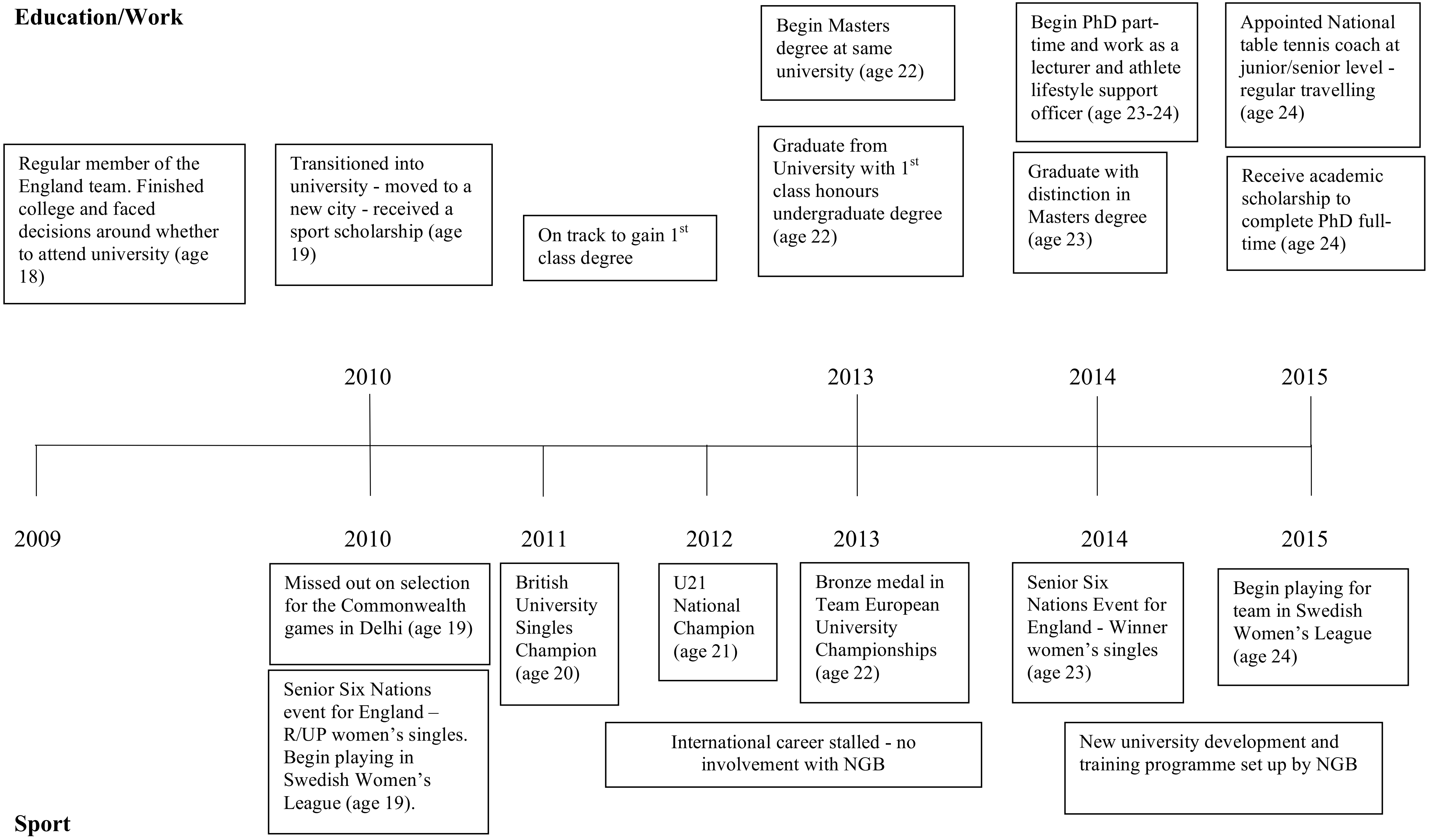
Initially, it was my intention to write an autoethnography as a separate section in the thesis. It became clear, however, that the content of my autoethnography and certain periods that I had written about corresponded with the three parts that have been presented in the current thesis; the transition to university, the process of being a university student-athlete, and the transition from being a student-athlete. I decided to present my autoethnographic writing within these sections of the thesis in a chronological order. This presentation of autoethnographic elements meant that the thesis write-up became an overall story of the whole university experience for student-athletes, from entry into the process, right through to the exit from university, and completion of a degree. For example, in Part A, before participant data on the acute changes that student-athletes experience when they move into university, I have included a segment of my own experiences of the changes that I experienced when I made the transition into university. Within these pieces of writing, I endeavoured to highlight the difficult decisions, struggles, and challenges that I faced moving into, through and out of university. By sharing my own experiences alongside participant data, I hoped to add a level of detail that has not been witnessed before in dual career research.

Although I decided to use autoethnographic writing throughout my thesis to supplement participant data, academics have reported concerns about the method. Patton (2015) highlights that some critics object to the method because of the way it blurs the line between social science and literary writing. Autoethnography has been dismissed for social scientific standards as being insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, and analytical, and too aesthetic, emotional, and therapeutic (Ellis, 2009). Additionally, the most common criticism of autoethnography is of its strong emphasis on self, being narcissistic, introspective, and individualised (Coffey, 1999). Despite this critique, Richardson (2000) sees the integration of art, literature, and social science as precisely the point, bringing together the creative and critical aspects of inquiry. Later in the chapter, I have addressed the trustworthiness and evaluation of my autoethnographic accounts.

3.3.4.1 Construction of Autoethnographic Narratives. Data in ethnographic research will typically arise from interviews, participant observation field notes, documents and diaries (Morse & Richards, 2002). When researchers write autoethnography, they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal experience (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). To do so, similar data sources can be accessed to those undertaking ethnography. For example, Sparkes (1996) drew from medical records, diary extracts, and newspaper articles about himself to discuss his sporting career and the chronic condition that ended it. These researchers do, however, also highlight that remembering their experiences is a key part of the data collection process for their narratives (e.g, Ettorre, 2005). Autoethnographers will then use the data collected to describe patterns using elements of storytelling (e.g., character, plot development, use of scene, dialogue), showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice (Ellis et al., 2011). Using these techniques ensures that the writer shows rather than only telling (Raab, 2013).

For the construction of my autoethnographic narratives, I focused on the memories of my lived experience, news articles that reported my successes of being a student-athlete at university, alongside supporting comments from individuals who were an integral part of my life during this period. First, I identified the important events that made up my own university student-athlete experience. Recalling events was done retrospectively by the creation of a dual career timeline that includes both key academic and sporting events that occurred just before, during, and after my undergraduate university degree (see Figure 3.1). The timeline begins in 2009 when I was making the decision about whether to attend university, and runs up until age 24, when I was conducting my PhD full-time and competing for a club in Sweden. Through careful inspection of the timeline, links were made among key events in both academics and sport to form key periods that occurred within my dual career as a university student-athlete, that reflect the three parts of the current thesis (decisions about moving into and transitioning into university, experiences during university, and the transition out of university). After framing these particular periods, I reflected on the events that occurred, and in particular, events that evoked the most emotion within me, and began to bullet point these events, highlighting exactly what happened, the emotions that were experienced, and the behaviours and decisions that I faced. Following this, I asked my mother, father, and former coach of 10 years if they could recall any other key behaviours, emotions or discussions that we had around this time. In addition, I looked at old online and magazine news articles about myself. These articles were written by my university and local sports organisation during my time at university, and focussed on the achievements I made in my sport alongside balancing my university studies.

During the writing process, I used a combination of showing (e.g., use of creative language and setting the scene) and telling. I did not use any characters or plot to recreate my experiences, and instead wrote about my experiences from my own perspective that may have enabled the reader to connect more personally with me as an author. Dialogue was used throughout to highlight some of my own thoughts and the comments of others (e.g., my coach), along with theoretical interceptions to sum up main points. Quotes from articles were used only in my narrative within part B, and were used as way of understanding how my experience at university was perceived by others in comparison to my own thoughts and perceptions.



Regular member of the England team. Finished college and faced decisions around whether to attend university (age 18)

Transitioned into university - moved to a new city - received a sport scholarship (age 19)

On track to gain 1st class degree

Begin Masters degree at same university (age 22)

Graduate from University with 1st class honours undergraduate degree (age 22)

Begin PhD part-time and work as a lecturer and athlete lifestyle support officer (age 23-24)

Graduate with distinction in Masters degree (age 23)

Appointed National table tennis coach at junior/senior level - regular travelling (age 24)

Receive academic scholarship to complete PhD full-time (age 24)

Missed out on selection for the Commonwealth games in Delhi (age 19)

Senior Six Nations event for England – R/UP women's singles. Begin playing in Swedish Women's League (age 19).

British University Singles Champion (age 20)

U21 National Champion (age 21)

International career stalled - no involvement with NGB

Bronze medal in Team European University Championships (age 22)

Senior Six Nations Event for England - Winner women's singles (age 23)

New university development and training programme set up by NGB

Begin playing for team in Swedish Women's League (age 24)

Figure 3.1. Author's dual career timeline from age 18 to 24

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

3.4.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data from one-off interviews and data from the focus groups. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are a number of strengths to thematic analysis. First, it can usefully summarise key features of a large body of data, highlight similarities and differences across the data set, and also generate unanticipated insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An abductive approach when analysing the data thematically was taken. A deductive approach is aimed at testing theory and usually begins with a hypothesis, with an emphasis on causality. An inductive approach, however, is concerned with the generation of new theory emerging from data and exploring previously researched phenomena from different perspectives. An abductive approach, however, involves deciding what the most likely inference is that can be made from a set of observations. Abductive reasoning is not restricted to or associated with any particular methodology (Lipscomb, 2012), aims to reach the best possible explanation, and is beneficial if the researcher's objective is to discover new things (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

To prepare the data for the analysis process, focus groups and interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim, to create a permanent record of the conversations. By transcribing the data by myself, without the use of software, I was able to immerse myself in the data and become familiar with it in preparation for data analysis. Following the transcription of the focus groups and interviews, all of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis were used to summarise key factors and parallels in Part A and C between student-athletes and stakeholders, and any unanticipated insights to emerge from the data. This form of analysis helped to ensure that data were not pre-selectively grouped into previously existing categories. Thematic analysis also allowed for new themes to emerge that have not previously been highlighted in career development literature. The six phases of analysis included: (a) familiarisation and immersion with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes and meaningful patterns in the data relevant to the research question, (d) reviewing themes and defining each individual theme and the relationship between the themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report. Details of what was conducted within each phase, and examples, will be outlined below.

3.4.1.1 Familiarisation and immersion with the data. The first phase of data analysis involved reading and re-reading the focus group and interview transcripts in an "active way". This means beginning to note down any initial ideas, themes or patterns that were emerging in the data, that can be returned to in subsequent phases. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that it is important that you immerse yourself in the data to the extent that you are familiar with the depth and breadth of the content. This phase provides a foundation on which data analysis and interpretation can occur, because familiarity enhances the identification of themes that can be further examined in subsequent phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, through the phase of familiarisation of the data, it began to become clear that there were a number of challenges associated with the transition into university sport.

3.4.1.2 Generating initial codes. The second phase involved the production of initial codes. I systematically worked through the data set, giving full and equal attention to each data item, and identified interesting features that may form the basis of repeated patterns (themes). This identification was done by writing notes on the data transcriptions, identifying segments of data. For example, one theme that emerged from the data was the idea that there were often acute changes in response to transitions by university student-athletes. Any quotes that appeared in the data that associated with this were subsequently marked with the code AC.

3.4.1.3 Searching for themes. After the generation of initial codes, phase 3 involved refocusing the analysis at the broader level of themes. Codes were sorted into relevant themes and clustered into overarching themes relevant to the research question. Some initial codes went on to form main themes, but for those that did not come under any of the overarching themes, they were placed within a miscellaneous document until the following phase. This identification of miscellaneous data was particularly relevant when viewing data associated with the transition out of university, when I found a number of transition challenges that did not fit under any current themes. These included not having anywhere to live, and relationship issues with a new coach. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight that it is important not to abandon anything at this stage until it is uncertain whether the themes hold as they are, or whether some need to be combined, refined and separated, or discarded.

3.4.1.4 Reviewing themes. Phase 4 involved the refinement of themes that were identified in the previous phase. Within this phase, the entire data set was re-read for two purposes. The first was to ascertain whether the themes work in relation to the data set, and the second was to code any additional data within themes that had been missed in earlier coding stages. During this phase, it became clear that some themes were not really themes because there was either not enough data to support them or the data were too diverse. For example, when exploring the transition into university, the theme of moving into a new environment was removed because there was not enough data to support the theme. It also became apparent that separate themes might collapse to form one theme and some themes might need to be broken down into separate themes. For example, when exploring the transition into university, original ideas for themes included a ‘change in priorities’ and ‘social pressures’, that were collapsed into ‘moving into the UK university social culture’.

3.4.1.5 Defining and naming themes. During the fifth phase of analysis, themes are defined, refined, and labelled. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that it is important not to try and get a theme to do too much, or to be too diverse and complex. As part of the refinement process, I identified whether or not a theme should contain sub-themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe sub-themes as ‘themes-within-a-theme’ and can be useful for giving structure to a particularly large and complex theme. For example, in Part A, under the broader theme of ‘pre-transition expectations and demands’ were a number of sub-themes, including perceived living challenges and major events leading up to transition.

3.4.1.6 Producing the report. The final phase of data analysis involved producing the report and explaining the results found. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that enough data extracts to demonstrate the prevalence of the theme ought to be included, and that particularly vivid examples could be used, or extracts that capture the essence of the point you are demonstrating. Accompanying the data extracts are analytic narrative, which as Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight, should go beyond description of the data. Arguments in relation to the research question are made and the results are interpreted in relation to previous research.

3.4.2 Narrative Analysis

Narrative inquiry, as one form of qualitative research, has attracted increased interest within sport and exercise psychology (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). Narrative analysis is described as a technique that seeks to interpret the ways that people perceive reality, make sense of their worlds, and perform social actions (Jowett & Frost, 2007). Smith and Sparkes (2009a) describe narrative analysis as a method that takes the story itself as its object of enquiry, as opposed to an account, report, chronicle, or a few brief words. These researchers also suggest that for sport and exercise psychologists, an important and often distinctive goal of narrative analysis becomes understanding both what stories describe and how (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). Organised under the umbrella term ‘narrative analysis’, there are two standpoints or preferences towards analysing narratives that can found in the literature. These are termed ‘story analyst’ and ‘story teller’. A story analyst undergoes a process that considers stories as fundamental data for systematic, rigorous, principled narrative analysis (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). A storyteller standpoint has some similarities with the story analytic method, including that they are both concerned with stories and their meaning. For storytellers, however, analysis is the story (Ellis, 2004). Additionally, a feature that often distinguishes story analysts from storytellers is that the former tells a story and theory whereas the latter 'shows' or 'tells' a story and theory (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a).

Creative non-fiction is a form of narrative analysis and has been widely used within sport literature as a way of representing qualitative findings. For example, Smith's (2013) paper presents the experiences of spinal cord injury in rugby union players, and their formation of identity. Creative non-fiction stories can be used to disseminate knowledge to reach multiple audiences, using everyday language, with the goal to encourage and stir imagination in those reading (Smith, Tomasone, Latimer-Cheung, & Martin Ginis, 2015). Creative non-fiction offers a story using facts developed from systematic research, but uses many of the techniques of fiction (e.g., composite characters and dialogue) to communicate results in compelling and emotionally vibrant ways (Smith, 2013). For the longitudinal data I collected, which I mainly presented in part B of the write-up, I drew from creative non-fiction principles to communicate athlete experiences at university. The elements of creative non-fiction that I drew upon included piecing participant data together to form a story of athletes' whole university career. This included forging together the data of a number of different participants to produce four 'characters'. Smith and Sparkes (2009b) suggest that narratives take many diverse forms and includes an event that unfolds sequentially over time to provide an overarching explanation. The stories presented in part B represent a sequence of events that occurred over time during university to help provide a greater understanding of student-athletes experiences during university. To achieve this, the first stage involved analysing data on a nomothetic basis to identity the common themes amongst the interviews. This stage was achieved by using the first three phases of Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis: (a) becoming familiar with the data (reading transcripts a number of times), (b) generating initial codes, and, (c) searching for themes. Following this process, I read through the transcripts again with the view to identifying themes for the student-athletes 3 year stories and highlighted commonalities and differences among participant experiences (Riessman, 2008). Following this, I made connections among participants in their first, second, and third years, who had similar experiences at university. Following the identification of connections among participants, 5 'golden threads' were selected that were representative of experiences student-athletes had during their time at university (e.g., injury, poor relationship development). Following this, a wavelength longitudinal approach was used to create four three-year dual career stories with participant data. These stories included data from the experiences of a student-athlete from year 1, that was then linked with the data of a student-athlete from year 2 and year 3, who had the same themes within their interviews. Data was then amalgamated from first, second, and third year student-athletes to form a 3-year story that had a 'golden thread' running throughout (e.g., how living at a national training centre influenced motivation for education).

Narrative analysis allowed me to portray the divergent experiences that student-athletes had during their time at university, in a way that prospective or current student-athletes and stakeholders may engage with on a personal level. Additionally, Elliot (2005) describes narratives as a story with a beginning, middle, and end, that are written in a chronological order, are meaningful, and are written for a specific audience. The audience who may be interested in reading these narratives may include student-athletes themselves who are about to or are currently undertaking a dual career at university, support staff (e.g., performance lifestyle advisors, coaches), parents, and NGBs who have large student-athlete populations in their sport. The stories may also have the power to resonate with prospective student-athletes who are interested in finding out about the university experience, and stakeholders who are communicating potential challenges to prospective or current student-athletes. Some forms of academic research that use specialised terminology are largely comprehensible to academic audiences. In contrast, narrative analysis allows people to become part of a collective story in which a sense of solidarity can challenge feelings of isolation (Phoenix & Smith, 2011). The use of narrative analysis may allow potential student-athletes to understand the possible benefits and challenges associated with being at university, and allow stakeholders to put in place effective support systems for student-athletes at differing stages of their university dual careers.

3.5 Research Credibility

Qualitative researchers, who have opinions that are based on differing assumptions about reality and world views, should consider quality of the research from perspectives congruent with their philosophical assumptions to help ensure trustworthiness of data (Merriam, 1998). Patton (2002) states that despite differing philosophical beliefs, the criteria that researchers select to judge the quality and credibility of their work must be clearly outlined so that others are able to critique it based upon these principles. In line with this, I would like the work of my thesis to be judged by the following four criteria outlined by Smith and Caddick (2012), that includes; naturalistic generalisability, width, credibility, and transparency. Each of these criteria will now be discussed in detail below, followed by a section outlining the trustworthiness of my autoethnographic writing.

3.5.1 Naturalistic Generalisability

Naturalistic generalisability is the degree to which the findings of this research can apply or transfer to other areas or situations that are similar in nature (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Smith and Caddick (2012) argue that this involves producing qualitative work that resonates with, provokes action in or stimulates curiosity among readers. Readers should also be able to empathise with experiences presented to make connections to their own circumstances (Smith & Caddick, 2012). To achieve this, it is the responsibility of the investigator to ensure that sufficient contextual information is provided so that the reader is able to make a transfer to their current situation (Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) highlights some of the information that should be provided by the researcher to help the reader make this transfer. This information included: (a) the number of organisations taking part in the study and where they are based, (b) any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data, c) the number of participants involved in the fieldwork, (d) the data collection methods that were employed, (e) the number and length of the data collection sessions, and (f) the time period over which the data were collected. Providing the reader with these six factors may allow parallels to be drawn between the findings of the research presented and their current situation, and may allow readers to form a greater understanding of their own situation. Within the current thesis, I have provided the number universities that participants were from, how many stakeholders and student-athletes took part in the thesis, inclusion criteria for participants, the methods of data collection, the number of interviews and focus groups conducted, how long these lasted, and how long each data collection period lasted.

3.5.2 Width

Smith and Caddick (2012) describe width as the comprehensiveness of the evidence given to support research findings. In the current thesis, quotations supporting the research findings have been used throughout, followed by explanations of how I have interpreted the data. Through explaining the results, this enables the reader to form an understanding of my interpretation of the data, and may lead to appreciation of why I reached the conclusions that I did. I have also included a number of autoethnographic accounts to supplement participant data, that both contrast and confirm research findings.

3.5.3 Credibility

Credibility is the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomenon that it is referring to (Merriam, 1998), and how well data and processes of analysis address the intended focus (Polit & Hungler, 1999). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. To enhance credibility, I followed a number of the provisions outlined by Shenton (2004). Researchers can use these provisions to promote confidence that they have accurately recorded the phenomena under scrutiny. First, Shenton (2004) highlights that the adoption of research methods that are well established in qualitative investigation is important, and when possible, the chosen methods should have been used previously in akin projects. Within the current thesis, I adopted research methods, such autoethnography, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups, that have previously been well established in qualitative enquiry, and within comparative studies (e.g., Brown et al., 2015).

I also enhanced the credibility of the data through methodological, participant, and peer scrutiny triangulation. Shenton (2004) highlights that triangulation includes the use of different methods, such as focus groups and individual interviews. It is argued that whilst these methods of data collection suffer from some common methodological shortcomings (e.g., time consuming), their distinct characteristics also result in individual strengths (Shenton, 2004). Brewer and Hunter (1989) also suggest that the use of different methods in concert compensates for their individual limitations. Shenton (2004) also states that when possible, supporting data may be obtained to provide a background to help explain the attitudes and behaviours of those in the group under scrutiny. This supporting data may include the background information provided by myself to give context to my autoethnographic data presented throughout the thesis. Additionally, a further form of triangulation involves the use of a wide range of informants, and is a way of triangulating via data sources (Shenton, 2004). Within the current thesis, I have included a wide range of people who have differing roles and responsibilities (e.g., academic staff, coaches, athletes in differing stages of their university career) with dual careers in sport. This inclusion of diverse roles may have enabled individual viewpoints and experiences to be verified against others, and in doing so, create a rich picture of the attitudes, needs or behaviours of those under scrutiny (Shenton, 2004).

To help enhance credibility of the results, Shenton (2004) also suggests that an examination of previous research findings to assess the degree to which the projects' results are congruent with those of past studies is important, including those addressing comparable issues. In chapter two of the current thesis is a literature review that has thoroughly assessed the current research within the areas of athlete career development, and university student-athletes. Within the discussions throughout the thesis, I compare the findings of the current thesis to these previous findings, to triangulate and verify the credibility of current findings.

Finally, Shenton (2004) suggests that peer scrutiny of the research project can enhance credibility. I achieved this whilst conducting the current thesis, because I presented my data at a number of conferences, and received feedback from attendees, that helped me to adapt areas of the thesis. Additionally, throughout the process of undertaking my thesis, I regularly received feedback from my fellow academics, academics from further universities, and stakeholders in supporting organisations (e.g., Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme) about the interpretation of results and the write up of data. The fresh perspective that these individuals provided allowed me to regularly challenge assumptions that I have made and strengthen arguments within my thesis (Shenton, 2004).

3.5.4 Transparency

Transparency is the over-arching concern in establishing the quality of qualitative research, and is the benchmark for the presentation and dissemination of findings (Hiles & Čermák, 2007). Transparency refers to the degree that research has been explicit, clear, and open about the assumptions made and the methods and procedures used within their research (Hiles & Čermák, 2007). To help ensure transparency, a researcher should detail all procedures carried out (i.e., data collection, analysis and interpretation), and must be clear enough in their writing for others to be able to replicate the work as close as possible in future (Hiles & Čermák, 2007; Smith & Caddick, 2012). Shenton (2004) states that to enable readers of the project to develop a thorough understanding of the methods and their effectiveness, the researcher should do various tasks. The investigator ought to discuss in detail the research design, describe what was planned and executed on a strategic level, and outline the operational detail of data gathering (Shenton, 2004). Within the methodology chapter of the current thesis, I have outlined in detail the research design, methods, and procedures carried out within the PhD. This detail will enable the reader to assess the extent that suitable research practices have been followed (Shenton, 2004).

3.5.5 Evaluation and Trustworthiness of Autoethnography

As autoethnographic writing runs throughout each part of the current thesis, it is important to discuss how I evaluated and addressed the issue of trustworthiness within these pieces of work. Ellis (2000) states that a good autoethnographic narrative should be able to engage the readers feeling and thinking capacities, alongside generating questions regarding the experience, and how the reader may have experienced the events described. Richardson (2000) put forward a number of criteria against which to evaluate autoethnography. These criteria included aesthetic merit (e.g., how pleasing is the narrative to read), the impact the narrative causes the reader (e.g., by reflecting on my narratives, student-athletes may be encouraged to take action in their current situation), and how much the narrative expresses the reality (e.g., could my narratives align to other athlete's experiences). Richardson's criteria, however, refers to all types of ethnography (including autoethnography), and therefore some of the criteria proposed may not be applicable to all types of autoethnography, which takes diverse forms and genres. To combat this issue, I would like my autoethnographic writing to be judged by Le Roux's (2017) five criteria, specifically designed for judging autoethnographic writing. These criteria include: (a) subjectivity (the self is primarily visible in the research), (b) self-reflexivity (there is evidence of the researcher's intense awareness of their role in and relationship to the research that is situated within a cultural context), (c) resonance (this requires that the audience is able to enter into, engage with, experience or connect with the writer's story on an intellectual and emotional level), (d) credibility (there should be evidence of plausibility, honesty and trustworthiness in the research), and (e) contribution (the research should extend knowledge and generate ongoing research).

I have used a number of techniques to ensure I fulfil these criteria. First, my writing involves subjectivity, because I have written primarily of my own dual career experiences, and have been critical throughout, questioning my own decisions, and trying to find self-understanding. For example, when writing about my decision to enter university as a student-athlete, I questioned whether the reasons I believed I chose to go to university (e.g., parental beliefs and limited funding) were the real reasons. This questioning also links to self-reflexivity, because I was consistently critical of myself, my beliefs, motivations, and decisions that I made, whilst being self-aware of the environment that I was situated within. I would also argue that my autoethnographic writing has resonance, because I tried to make the writing interesting, engaging, and expressed my emotions and feelings throughout. For example, during my experiences of being at university, I expressed uncertainty around whether my perceived lack of sporting performance was my own fault or the fault of others, and the distress that this caused me. I also believe that there is credibility, trustworthiness, plausibility, and honesty in my writing. Méndez (2013) argues that autoethnography entails being ethical and honest about the events described. In attempts to address honesty and integrity, I wrote the autoethnographic pieces of writing before I had engaged in the data collection process and write up of participant data. Participant data and my own data are two separate entities, that were then later linked within the same part using the discussion sections of each part. The autoethnographic elements of the thesis were originally written together as the first study, however, it became clear as time went on that what I had written about aligned with the research questions outlined, and they were integrated. Finally, I believe there is a substantive contribution in my autoethnography. My autoethnographic writing extends knowledge, because elements emerged within these pieces of writing that have not previously been discussed in the dual career literature. Additionally, I did not find any other pieces of autoethnographic writing about UK student-athlete experiences and few that have explored student-athlete experiences in general. Further to this, these pieces of writing generate ongoing research, because they highlight the limited autoethnographic research within the context of student-athletes.

Chapter Four: Part A

"A Perfect Storm" - UK Student-Athletes’ and Stakeholders’ Perspectives of the Transition into University

4.1 Introduction to Part A

As highlighted in the literature review, the transition into university represents a major period of change, and can lead to stress (e.g., Gall et al., 2000; Tao et al., 2000). First year students may be leaving their family homes for the first time and into a new environment, and in the process, distancing themselves from existing social support networks (Fisher et al., 1985). In addition to experiencing these challenges that are apparent for many students, taking into account the dangers (e.g., injury) and drawbacks (e.g., financial insecurity) of elite sport, a number of elite athletes choose to combine their sport with higher education (e.g., Reints & Wylleman, 2009). During the transition into university, on top of other student transition demands, student-athletes may experience increased demands as they endeavour to balance their academic, athletic, and social roles (Bruner et al., 2008).

Wylleman and colleagues (2013) athletic career developmental model highlights this, suggesting that when athletes make the academic transition into university, simultaneous transitions may be occurring in other domains of their lives. These include transitions within their sport (e.g., junior to senior level) and psychological development (e.g., adolescence into young adulthood). Additionally, during the academic transition into university, student-athletes may have to adjust to other demands, including sudden changes in identity. Studying American student-athletes, Miller and Kerr (2002, 2003) found that when student-athletes moved into university, they began to develop a student identity in addition to their prominent athletic identity. This change in identity was due to the recognition that a successful vocational career after university was a higher priority for student-athletes than their sports careers. The potential shift in identity when transitioning into university may be challenging for student-athletes, because they may experience conflict between their athlete and new university student role. Consequently, Killeya-Jones (2005) suggests that role conflict may emerge for student-athletes as the two competing roles are within a shared domain, with each contesting for temporal and psychological resources (e.g., motivation). Further, student-athletes may experience changes in existing relationships or be tasked with forming new ones when they move into university. These changes have been found to occur in relationships with parents (e.g., decline in support for the sporting career), peers (e.g., difficultly in maintaining relationships with peers outside of sport) and support staff (e.g., athletes may have to step away from partnerships with their current coach and develop new relationships with university support staff; MacNamara & Collins, 2010; Wylleman et al., 2013). These changes in relationships can occur simultaneously to changes in the educational environment that student-athletes transition into (Brown et al., 2015; MacNamara & Collins, 2010).

Student-athletes may need to become increasingly proactive in managing their studies in a more flexible learning environment, and plan ahead with studying and training schedules (Brown et al., 2015).

Due to the simultaneous transitions taking place, and the specific challenges associated with moving into university, the initial transition period (i.e., approximately the first six weeks of university) may be particularly key for student-athletes as they try to navigate having a dual career, because this is when students are undergoing the immediacy of change (Yorke & Longden, 2008). Research has supported this, by indicating that the period of greatest stress during the transition to university for students may be within the first few weeks, because some of the initial challenges that this transition creates can lead to feelings of doubt and homesickness (Baker et al., 1985; Yorke & Longden, 2008). Yorke and Longden (2008) also found that this increased demand on students can lead to them considering potentially withdrawing from university, due to them finding the first year a daunting experience (Yorke & Longden, 2004). These feelings of doubt may be increased further for student-athletes, who also have to undergo changes within their sporting environment. During the transition to university, if student-athletes are unable to successfully adapt to acute changes, they may be vulnerable to dropping out. Snyder and Dillow (2013) report that approximately 30% of first-year students drop out of university within the first 12 months, and Jackson (2003) estimates that dropping out of university might be as high as one in four in UK universities. Researchers have, however, suggested that student-athletes may be at an increased risk of dropping out of university, due to the stress of managing packed sporting and academic schedules, and not having enough time to fulfil their commitments (De Brandt, 2017; Bengtsson & Johnson, 2012; Tekavc et al., 2015).

Despite having a knowledge of some of the major factors that influence students as they move into university, and how the demands of this transition can lead to feelings of isolation, wanting to drop out, and homesickness, there are additional areas that have not been well explored. There is a gap in knowledge surrounding the pre-transition decisions that student-athletes face about entering university, the perceptions that student-athletes hold before they make the transitions, and a limited understanding of how student-athletes could be best supported in preparing for the transition. Additionally, a greater understanding of the sudden or acute changes that take place following the transition into university may also help to avoid the factors outlined above, such as drop out, homesickness, and isolation. Understanding acute changes may allow those providing support to student-athletes during this time, including sport scholarship providers, academic staff, and athletes' families and friends, to put effective support systems in place. This support may be targeted at the challenges of engaging in a dual career that student-athletes highlight as important in their development. Also, there is currently limited research amongst the area of dual career transitions in UK populations. It may be particularly important to understand the factors associated with transitioning into university for UK student-athletes, because research suggests that UK athletes often do not reach the investment phase in combining their education and their sport until they reach the age of moving into university (Toms & Bridge, 2008). The transition into university for UK student-athletes may produce different challenges to countries where sport and education are combined from an earlier age (e.g., North America and Canada). These challenges may include learning to balance demanding academic and training or competition schedules, increased pressure to succeed following sport scholarship awards, and adapting to new support programmes.

In sum, the current study examined the pre-transition perceptions, opportunities, challenges, and acute changes that student-athletes may experience as they transition into university. In the current study, the ‘transition period’ for participants was outlined as being from April pre-transition until November following the move to university. This time frame ensured that the focus of data was on the pre-transition stage and the acute changes of the transition into university. The current study also aimed to provide context specific knowledge of the factors that influence and shape the experiences of student-athletes when they transition into university in the UK.

4.2 Method

Data from 15 student-athletes from 6 universities from data collection points 1, 2, and 6 (see Table H.1 in Appendix H) were used in the write up of part A. Data were from interviews with athletes prior to their transition into university (highlighting perceptions about the transition), a focus group of student-athletes at university, some of whom had only been at university for a few weeks (highlighting experiences within the first few weeks of being at university), and data from the first phase of data collection of longitudinal interviews with student-athletes (whose data was mainly presented in part B) who had been at university for 6 weeks (discussion of immediate changes experienced after transition that was not the focus of part B). These student-athletes were aged between 18 and 23 years. Data from 16 stakeholders who work with student-athletes, including university athlete support staff (e.g., managerial figures, head coaches) and academic staff from 2 universities from data collection points 3, 4, and 5 (see Table H.1 in Appendix H) were also used in the write up of part A. Athlete support staff (who highlighted their experiences of athletes transitioning into university and the current support that they provide) had a range of experiences working with student-athletes (between 1 and 18 years). Academic staff (who highlighted their knowledge of student-athlete transition demands and ways that they currently provide transition support) had been teaching between 3 and 10 years. Autoethnographic data from the author supplemented participant data (written separately) and focused specifically on the pre-transition decision-making process and acute transition phase following entry into university. Data were collected, analysed, and reported as outlined in chapter 3.

4.3 Results

Results of the current study suggest that student-athletes who make the transition into university go through a number of different stages during this process. First, they may have to decide whether or not to make the sacrifice of moving to university and engaging in a dual career to the detriment of their sporting performance, a difficult decision that is highlighted below using my own autoethnographic experiences. This decision can often be influenced by parental beliefs, with the subsequent decision of what university to go to becoming increasingly a joint decision. Having made the decision to go to university and what university to go to, there are a number of perceptions of the transition to university that student-athletes hold. These include worries about formulating new relationships with coaches and peers, that can lead to heightened stress for student-athletes. These anxieties are often negated by support from significant others, such as parents and support staff (e.g., sport scholarship managers). Finally, when student-athletes move to university, they experience increased pressures to have an active social life as part of the new university social culture, that can have a negative influence on athletic performance. These results are highlighted in detail below.

4.3.1 Pre-Transition Decision: To Go or Not to Go?

Autoethnographic data from my experiences. As I eased my legs into the ice bath, I felt a sudden stabbing pain burst into my muscles, from my feet to my waist. This final ice bath marked the end of an intense, month-long trip, that included a gruelling 3-week training camp in China, culminating in an individual 5th place finish at the Australian Youth Olympics. After 5 weeks of living as a professional athlete, I faced returning to my studies, and taking my exams that would determine whether I would gain confirmation of my place at university. In the weeks of returning back to school, however, the performance director from my NGB expressed his delight at my recent performances, and posed a question that had the potential to significantly influence both my sporting future and academic future, “would you consider the opportunity to train full time at the national academy?” Despite my confident run of recent performances and love for the sport, a tornado of thoughts flooded over me, as the transition into full-time training would be a major step in my athletic career (Poczwardowski, Diehl, O'Neil, Cote, & Haberl, 2014). I thought to myself, "me, a professional athlete?" This move would mean calling the electric blue walls of the English Institute of Sport (EIS) home, where I would hear the endless clattering of balls from intense multi-ball sessions for 6 hours each day. I thought to myself, "I've taken part in long and intensive training camps for the entirety of my junior career, but could I live this reality every day…perhaps I am good enough to be a professional player?" I had lived and breathed table tennis from the day I started as a 7-year old who could barely see above the dusty wooden table in my garage, cardboard boxes and old toys stacked around me, to the multiple national champion and Great Britain representative I was today, training in modern facilities all over the globe.

Over the last few years within the England table tennis set up, I had witnessed an immense hype and build up to the 2012 London Olympic Games. It was the only topic on every player's, coach's and performance director's lips. Nothing else bared importance compared to the Olympics! The buzz of potentially gaining a place on the Great Britain Team was an opportunity that may only present once in a life time, and embedding myself in a professional athlete environment might make this vision a reality. Despite this opportunity, education was a key feature of my life. Proudly wearing my neatly ironed school uniform and glimpsing up at the wooden frames of my parents' university degree certificates, I wanted to follow their path, and the passion and drive to succeed in education had been instilled in me from a young age. I was a proactive student, and although my time off from school was far greater than any of my peers, the lengthy list of A's and positive teacher comments on my annual report card evidenced my ability to manage the demands of sport and education at the school level. "Was being just an athlete enough for me?"

In between training sessions, I spent hours scouring the websites of potential universities I was interested in going to, and my eyes glistened as I saw the many sport scholarship opportunities that were available, "the chance to gain a university degree alongside strength and conditioning, physiotherapy, lifestyle support, a financial bursary, and academic flexibility when requested seems too good to be true!" At university, I would benefit from understanding academic staff that could provide me with flexibility with assignment deadlines should I be away on England duty. My teachers at school had no idea about the sacrifices I was putting into being a good student and an England table tennis player. After returning home at 4am from a week of 7-hour days training days in

Luxembourg, I was at school for 8am. “That’s detention Emma, you’ve had all week to finish your project!” There was no point arguing. This lack of acknowledgement angered me, and I burst with excitement thinking about how my sporting commitments would be valued within the university educational environment. Consideration around the loss of identity as a student suggests that identity development outside of sport had a positive effect on my overall sense of self (Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000).

To help me in my decision-making process, I began viewing the backgrounds of other table tennis athletes. I asked my coach, “Why are there no members of the England men and women’s table tennis team at university?” He commented, “it seems to be the choice of one or the other unfortunately, the nature of the sports makes doing both very challenging, taking into account the 6-hour training days of professional players, weekly league matches, and pro-tour events all over the world.” I became acutely aware that the majority of athletes who were training full-time at the national academy had prematurely dropped out of education when they were at school, no qualifications to their name. This drop out suggested that these athletes had sacrificed their education for the sport. “If others haven’t done it before, why would university be the right decision for me?” For table tennis, going to university is not typically viewed as being part of the developmental pathway, but as a separate pursuit (Devaney et al., 2017). The culture of my sport was pushing me away from education which I valued so highly.

Looking in the opposite direction, I began to look to the situations of my school peers. They would be following the “traditional” educational path, from school, to college, to university, and starting the latter stage at age 18. If I was to delay this transition, adapting back into education after a break could be a challenge, because some of my knowledge and academic skills may have been forgotten, and I would be alongside students who were younger than myself. “I can’t wait for next year, moving away from home, meeting new people, and going on nights out!” My friends echoed. Lost in my own thoughts, I considered, “I would be left behind, taking on a completely different lifestyle, as a poorly funded athlete, living alone, and missing out on the personal development opportunities that university might present.” Despite thriving off my sporting achievements, I had a strong desire to fit in and be normal, I wanted to do everything that my peers were too. This desire to belong is highlighted as being a powerful fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). I was exactly this person, I desired to belong. Despite this, thoughts about making the Olympic Games Team created turmoil in the decision-making process, and for weeks I experienced a tug-a-war of emotions around what the ‘right’ decision to make was. “Do I take a leap of faith, or take the ‘safe’ option?” I was confused over what the right educational decision to make was (Devaney, Nesti, Ronkainen, Littlewood, & Richardson, 2017).

I looked to my parents for answers. From being my personal taxi to training and competitions, investing copious amounts of their earnings into coaching and events, and being emotional support during competition, they were key figures in my athletic career (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002), and I valued their opinion. Both of my parents had played table tennis to a high national level, and they had a good understanding of the challenges of reaching the top. The best part of my childhood had been spent in the table tennis room above my Dad’s hardware store. By day he sold nails and gardening equipment, and by evening, he would help me to perfect my shots for hours on end, until the dimly lighted room no longer made it possible to see anymore! Nevertheless, I felt anxious about asking my parents if they could fund my living expenses if I chose to train full-time at the national academy, considering I would be receiving no income to live off! My Dad commented, “If you I don’t aspire and or believe that you can play at the highest level in the world, then perhaps playing full-time isn’t the best option.” This is coming from someone who is a table tennis fanatic and would have done anything to see me play at the highest level! At this crossroad in my life, I had potential medals and sporting success tugging me in one direction, and the sweet victory of gaining an academic degree tugging me the other way! After a long period of deliberation, and many in-depth discussions around the pros and cons of taking each pathway, I considered, “why can’t I just have both!”. My mind was made up. I decided to challenge the culture of sport. To me, the benefits of being able to complete a university degree, gain a sport scholarship award to help fund my living expenses, and at least ‘attempt to’ maintain an elite sport career, far outweighed the potential losses I may suffer from going full-time and training at a national training centre. As a full-time athlete, in a few years I may retire from my sport and look back in regret, with no real education beyond the school level, and poor prospects of attaining full-time employment.

4.3.2 Pre-Transition Decision: Where to Go?

Data from athlete, coach, and support staff experiences. Having made the decision to go to university, student-athletes then have to make the decision about what university they would like to go to. The majority of pre-transition decisions about which university to attend were based around enhancing student-athletes’ sporting development. Kate said:

> To be honest, I was thinking about basketball [when making my decision about which university to attend], because I had done my research and I saw that the

> WBBL (Women's Basketball League) had recently begun, and I'm not going to lie, that's my ultimate goal, to play professional.

Similarly, Nathan said, "mostly it's to do with sport and just trying to be able to train and stuff." With sport at the forefront of student-athletes' decisions, this may have the potential to lead to adjustment difficulties within the academic domain following their move to university (e.g., limited engagement with academic work). Student-athletes also suggested that their decision about which university to attend was dependant on the location and sport scholarship availability. Nina discussed, "Manchester was where the high-performance centre was, so here was one of the nearest universities that offered like a good sport scholarship programme at the same time". Isabelle stated that the location was her priority within the decision of which university to attend, despite her university not being supportive of her particular sport:

> It's renowned for sport…it's in the midlands where a lot of table tennis people, and a lot of players who are of a good level, who are of England standard, are in that area so you get much better-quality training…they [university] really mainly focus on their nine key sports and because sport is so big there…the other sports, the smaller ones like table tennis and handball…they don't really get a look in, so I've just had to travel [to training].

Sophie supported this by highlighting that she made the decision of which university to go based on where her current coach was situated, "my coach is in Sheffield, so I had to pick from either two really". Placing a high importance on the location of a university may restrict the type of educational course that student-athletes can undertake (i.e., the university may not provide a course that they are interested in), and may lead to poor engagement with their studies.

Academic staff also recognised that student-athletes make the decision to attend a university based on nearby sporting opportunities. Andrew (academic staff) stated, "from my understanding of speaking to the [sport] scholars here is that they are at [university] because of the location, in terms of the facilities…so then is it the sport bringing them here rather than the academic side". Student-athletes may perceive that they have minimal choice in the decision of where to attend university, and may have to make personal sacrifices through their decision (e.g., travelling further to training). The decision-making process may be a challenging one because student-athletes may feel the need to oblige to the requirements of their sport (e.g., can only attend a certain university because it is close to good training opportunities). The decision may become more challenging when parents also have expectations about where their child should go to university. The parents of student-athletes are now having an increasingly active role in the decision-making process around where their child would benefit from going to university to best support their dual career. In 2012, the tuition fees for students in England saw a significant rise. Support staff suggest that this rise appears to have led parents to become more proactive and have an increased involvement in the pre-transition phase. Matthew (performance sport manager) said:

> I think a lot of parents do put their hands in their pockets from day one, and I think therefore the parents as a result…feel that they have a bit more of a hold on their education, and a bit more of a decision to where their children are going."

Adam (sport scholarship manager) added to this:

> They are saying that £44,000 is the average cost when they [students] graduate…they've obviously seen that it's a big investment for them and they really need to know that they're getting the most out of their university life, from an academic point of view but also from a sport point of view as well…so the parents are becoming a lot more active in that role…and contribute to the decision-making process of their sons and daughters.

Rebecca (high performance sport officer) supported this involvement by stating that her main source of contact within the pre-transition phase are parents who want to gain an understanding about the support that their child will receive at university, "parents still govern quite a lot of their life anyway, I think there'll always be the backdrop to their life". Parents may push for their child to enter a university that reflects which area of the dual career is perceived as being the most important to them. For example, if parents perceive that their child would benefit from having more of a focus on education, student-athletes may transition into a university that does not have the most suitable environment for their athletic development. Student-athletes may perceive that they have less control over the transition, and this may lead to them moving into a university that they are unhappy with, and potentially restricting their academic or sporting development.

4.3.3 Pre-Transition Expectations and Demands: A Challenging Process

Data from athlete experiences. After making the decision to move to university, student-athletes perceived that there are a number demands that they will have to overcome when they first arrive at university to successfully transition into a dual career. Social support prior to and during transition can help to overcome these demands.

4.3.3.1 Perceived living challenges. Student-athletes expressed their excitement at the possibility of having increased independence following the transition, however, they perceived that being in full control of their living circumstances may be a challenge. For example, Abbie said, “I think it’s going to be the living side of it, like make sure I’m eating correctly so that I have the energy to perform to my full potential”. Similarly, Nathan stated, “sorting out when I’m going to have my food, when I’m going to go to uni, when I’m going to do work, when I’m going to train and all that stuff, they’re probably the main challenges”. It may be useful for student-athletes to begin increasing their independence within their home environments prior to transition (e.g., begin cooking for themselves), that may lead to an increase in confidence in managing their living immediately following the move into university. Student-athletes are aware of the need to balance their commitments effectively and eat at the correct times, however, the perception that this will be a challenge suggests that student-athletes may be unsure of how to overcome this challenge and take full responsibility. By giving student-athletes increased responsibility prior to transition, they may also have the opportunity to develop their skills with support from others (e.g., parents and coaches).

In addition to having to manage becoming more independent following the transition to university, Nathan was anxious about taking on the responsibility of budgeting his expenses, “I’m currently a big believer in just spending money when I get it, so that’s going to be quite a change”. Cara also shared similar worries, and believed that all of her funding would go back into sport:

> I’m worried about living, the thing is it’s the budgeting as well…because I get the lowest [student loan] grant you can get so that’s not good, but with my [sport] scholarship I’m not sure what tier I’m on yet, but obviously, there’ll be a financial part there, but that’s going to be put back into sport anyway because I’ll be travelling to the club to go and train.

Budgeting and managing finances may be a topic for athlete support staff to educate student-athletes on prior to their transition into university. Being educated on ways to budget and handle expenses with general living (e.g., food) and sporting expenses (e.g., travel to training) could be advantageous for those student-athletes who anticipate that it may be an issue.

Finally, Abbie perceived that living independently of parents may lead to stress with general living challenges:

> I think it’s just like if I get stressed, it’s like making sure, I won’t have my mum there to say oh it’s alright, just be able to deal with stuff like if I’m getting stressed, to be able to control it, and like not get too anxious, because I know that I’m quite a stressful person…you’ve got no food and then you’re running

> behind on your work, that's what I don't want to allow it to get to, to keep organised, so that I don't get stressed, because I'm not going to have my mum there, she'll be on the end of a phone but it's not quite the same.

This quote highlights that stakeholders may benefit from understanding the personalities of student-athletes before they transition into university. For example, this particular student-athlete may benefit from learning stress management techniques prior to their transition if they are vulnerable to feeling this way after making the move. Providing tips on how student-athletes can successfully organise their time among activities such as training, lectures, and food shopping may also be advantageous in the pre-transition phase to help student-athletes transition with greater confidence in their ability to live as independent young adults.

4.3.3.2 Expectations about formulating new relationships with coaches and peers.

Student-athletes about to make the move into university highlighted that having to form a relationship with a new coach was a transitional concern. Cara said:

> My coach now, I get on with him so well, he brought me through the whole way, he knows exactly what I'm good at, he knows exactly what my weaknesses are, it's starting again…like in football teams and in team sports it's alright because there you've got other people but individual sports if you don't like your coach, you can't really do it all by yourself, especially in boxing because you've got them in your corner…my coach now he will not put me in for a fight unless he pretty much knows I'm going to win it…I'm just scared they'll [new coach] throw me in with anyone, that is my main worry.

Cara's worries suggest that building a relationship with a new coach may be pivotal for student-athletes before they move into university to appease the worries that they may have. Developing a relationship with the coach before transition may be particularly relevant for student-athletes in individual sports who rely on their coach to personally guide their development, and do not have teammates to confide in. Building this relationship before making the move, via one-to-one meetings, email or phone conversations may help student-athletes to develop an element of trust. This is supported by Jack who stated, "I'm not really good at working with new people…having new coaches and stuff, because I've had the same coach for a long time". Similarly, Tim stated, "it's about trusting your new coach as well because obviously, they're learning themselves as well aren't they". This affirms Cara's previous statement, whereby developing trust via contact prior to the transition into university may be advantageous.

Student-athletes also anticipated that there could be challenges with forming new peers upon their transition into university. Abbie said:

> Obviously like socialising is important, making friends…but I am like here for the scholarship, I am going to play table tennis and do sport and exercise science, and if drinking was going to make me…fall behind or not perform as well, then I wouldn't like that.

In support of this, Sophie stated, "I'm fearful of not making friends and stuff, I'll kind of like just be training most of the time". New student-athletes may have limited time to socialise after transitioning into university compared to other students, as they adjust to their new sporting environment. Creating networks of student-athletes (e.g., via social media) at the same institution prior to transition may be beneficial to overcome this. These networks may help student-athletes to move into university with the knowledge that there are others in a similar situation to themselves.

4.3.3.3 Expectations around how time will be spent after arriving at university: sport first. Prior to moving to university, there was variability in the perception of whether the athlete or the student role would take priority for student-athletes when they first arrive at university. Nathan stated:

> It will be more sport and more training than academics, I'm going to try and balance it out as well as I can…but I can see myself not trying as hard in the academic part in order to succeed in the sport.

Just prior to beginning university, Nathan decided to change to a part-time degree programme because he had recently been accepted onto the NGBs performance programme. When questioned on what other roles he held other than being an athlete, Nathan responded, "I haven't really got that much", and that academics would be "on the side". Student-athletes beginning university on a centralised performance path programme or highly identifying as an athlete may benefit from acknowledging the importance of developing a student identity when they make the transition into university. This acknowledgement may increase the likelihood of staying committed to education, and avoiding drop out. Similar to Nathan, Sophie stated:

> I don't really want to be doing much of the student stuff, it sounds so boring…because I don't want to focus kind of too much on education, I know it sounds really bad, but you can get worse as an athlete.

Sophie recognises the vulnerabilities associated with being an athlete (e.g., injury, de-selection), but the expectation that she will not engage much with her student identity when she arrives at university may have negative outcomes on her academic motivation and performance longer term. Cara discussed that having already missed a lot of school due to sporting commitments, she believed that this may continue, “I think my sport will be over my degree if I’m honest…I think that [sport] has got to take priority, because even now it does, I’ve missed so much time off my education”. One of the challenges of holding this perception is that at the school level of education, student-athletes who had to take a significant amount of time off due to sporting commitments may have received extra support to help them catch up on academic work they had missed. The university environment, however, may be more self-directed and independent, and individuals may need to increasingly rely on their own motivation to achieve academically. Fiona highlighted a different perspective, “for me, it’s definitely student, unfortunately…if you don’t get your grades, you’re not going to go anywhere…I know that I’m not really going to make a massive career out of basketball”. Due to parental pressures to achieve academically and the belief that she cannot have a successful long-term career in her sport, Fiona perceives that she has to put her student role first when she makes the transition into university. It may be useful for stakeholders to understand the external pressures that student-athletes are experiencing prior to their transition into university, because they may become a source of strain upon transition.

4.3.3.4 Major events leading up to transition. In addition to perceiving challenges around achieving balanced living and a balance between sport and education, in the lead up to the transition to university, student-athletes described that they experienced major events that had the potential to affect their transition experience. For example, Abbie said:

> My home circumstances changed a little bit so that’s made me like push myself more to think about I want to do in the future…my mum and dad split up, so now I’m maybe less at home…like I want to look forward to it, I want something positive to think about.

These types of experiences may lead to student-athletes feeling upset or stressed over the transition period and feel uncertainty around communication and support from their parents. This demand may also lead to poor coping with further stressors following the transition (e.g., adapting to a new coach). Abbie stated, however, that she dealt with this event by focusing her energy on being a successful student-athlete.

Another example of a pre-transition event comes from Isabelle, who was called up to compete for England immediately before she was due to move to university:

> I got pulled up for England [European Championships] three days before, because someone was injured, so for me I don't know…I was really upset not being able to say goodbye and you know it was kind of a rush...I was quite apprehensive in what people would, what other people think…I didn't want to come off bad or be like judged badly.

This event may highlight that the first few weeks of university are perceived to be a platform to engage socially and make new peers. By missing out on social opportunities due to sporting commitments, student-athletes may feel concerned about being isolated in their environment. Athlete support staff may benefit from linking student-athletes with other transitioning student-athletes at their university, that may enable them to avoid feelings of isolation after making the transition.

Finally, just prior to moving to university, Nathan highlighted his concern over whether he would receive funding for the next Olympic cycle to allow him to continue competing in his sport to a high level:

> In terms of funding and stuff, at the end of the Olympic cycle, things are very up in the air because there's been a big restructure with of all the coaching…if I stay on funding, I should get a bit more money and I should get coaching support and everything, but again with it being the Olympic year, nobody knows what's happening…it's not particularly the best time because of the whole restructure and being insecure in terms of funding, but it's the year I've been landed with [going to university]… I have been put forward for funding and support but…nobody knows yet if you're actually going to get it until December [post-transition].

Following the commitment that he had made to his sport by relocating to the national training centre, if Nathan was placed in a scenario just after transitioning into university where he did not attain the necessary funding to train and compete in his sport, this could create a stressful situation and the possibility of having to discontinue his dual career. It may be beneficial for student-athletes experiencing similar financial concerns to discuss the consequences of events such as discontinuation of funding with the NGB or university support staff, and have alternate plans in place if this eventuality was to occur.

4.3.4 Pre-Transition Support: Logistics and Uncertainty

Data from athlete, coach, and support staff experiences. Although perceiving that there were a number of challenges that student-athletes may have to overcome to successfully transition to university, university athlete support staff do provide forms of support to student-athletes prior to their transition into university to support the process. In contrast, however, academic staff may not be aware of the role they can play in supporting student-athletes as they embark on a dual career.

4.3.4.1 Athlete support staff. Within the pre-transition phase, the support provided by university athlete support staff (e.g., coaches, sport scholarship managers) appears to be for the majority, logistics based, with discussions around what athletes can expect to receive as part of their support package immediately after they transition into university. Rebecca (high performance sport officer) highlighted that they help student-athletes to create an individual programme prior to their arrival:

> Academically you'll have a completely bespoke academic programme which is flexible around your programme and then sport, in terms of the support you'll get, so S and C [strength and conditioning], physio, nutrition, psychology, and the lifestyle support, and then other logistics after that are around accommodation, so where's the best place to be located.

Knowledge of Logistical information (e.g., how often athletes will complete their strength and conditioning programme, how to access physiotherapy support) before student-athletes transition into university may enable them to plan more efficiently, and may reduce uncertainty associated with the transition. Christian supported this by stating:

> I'd spoken to the scholarship scheme prior to obviously coming to university and it was sort of trying to get the link set up at uni, what to expect….so you knew what support you were going to get once you came to university so you can plan around that.

Rebecca also stated:

> I've asked them all to send me their potential international competitions, if they might be involved in international competitions, just so we can be aware of what's coming up over the next couple of months and what they could potentially be excluded from, so it's become a lot more hands on now and very specific about that athlete because we know that they are coming, and this time now that relationship is starting to build a lot more in terms of finding out about them, so that we can give them all the information around the real final logistics. It's changed from being quite indirect (through emails) to now very specific, very direct (phone calls, face-to-face).

Having detailed information about student-athletes may provide support staff with increased opportunities to provide the correct kind of psychosocial support following transition (e.g., athletes who will be training for large periods at the national training centre may need increased academic support following missed classes). Adam (sport scholarship manager) discussed the induction phase they have for incoming student-athletes, “they come in and them we have a presentation from myself which talks about the [sport] scholarship scheme past, present, and future, and we get alumni in from the sports scholarship scheme to talk about their experience”. Simon (sport development staff) suggested that the induction programme is a great way for the student-athletes to find out “what’s expected of them within the programme”. This knowledge may enable student-athletes to plan more effectively for the transition, but also suggests that student-athletes may move into university with pressures and expectations placed on them to actively engage in university support programmes, potentially increasing stress during transition.

4.3.4.2 Academic staff. Academic staff perceived that they did not have a specific role in supporting student-athletes before they move into university. Andrew (academic staff) highlighted, “I don’t know who we actually need to talk to about say transition or support for certain types of athletes, I wouldn’t be aware of that unfortunately.” Andrew also stated that the only support they provide as academic staff is during student-athletes’ time at university, “I think that’s the only time [during university] that I’ve been involved in terms of the support that we provide, it’s probably offering options in terms of extensions and trying to aid them in their academic studies”. Elliot (academic staff) stated that he finds out who the student-athletes in his classes are after they have arrived at university, “normally the way that I actually find out, is in the sports hall in the entrance, there’s the pictures, and I’m like oh I know that student, I know that student.” Andrew (academic staff) highlighted, however, that he has in the past come into contact with student-athletes’ before they have moved into university, but was unaware of how to best support them:

> I’ve come into contact with a couple of athletes, I don’t know what sports they were playing, but I remember their parents raising concern about how they would juggle training and obviously academic work…I say speak to the people in the sports hall because they’re more in the loop.

As student-athletes express their concerns about balancing their sport and education before they move to university, it may be beneficial for academic staff to have knowledge about how they can provide flexible academic programmes or support to student-athletes (e.g., academic staff could provide timetabling information to give student-athletes’ an indication of when and how often they may be able to train). Academic staff may also benefit from knowledge of who they should report to about student-athletes experiencing transitional problems (e.g., struggling to adapt to educational programme). Despite not providing support before student-athletes move into university, academic staff are aware of how their input could be valuable. Gavin said:

> I suppose they will need to be aware before they arrive that there is additional support and flexibility there because I think sometimes it can get to the point where they don't know that the support and flexibility might exist, so they get to the point where they're a bit overwhelmed and they eventually speak to somebody, and they're like oh we [academic staff] can do this, and they didn't know that that was possible.

Andrew further supported this by suggesting that having information before they arrive on the student-athletes in their classes would be beneficial, "I think maybe if you know who has other requirements and reasons for them not attending, or a late submission before rather than after, it's better to work that way round…and know who they are before it's too late". Academic and athletic departments would benefit from working cooperatively to prepare student-athletes for their transition into university.

4.3.5 Acute Changes Following Transition: Unexpected Demands and Changes

Although student-athletes perceived that they may have to overcome challenges during their transition to university, many of these challenges were not as difficult as student-athletes thought they might be. Instead, there are a number of additional demands that student-athletes and stakeholders may need to be aware of so that student-athletes can receive more effective support and transition with greater ease.

Autoethnographic data from my experiences. ***4.3.5.1 Role conflict and uncertainty.*** "University…it is the best years of your life!" A statement I had heard on countless occasions, and it fuelled my excitement! The first few weeks of university were a haze, day to night I didn't stop, and my diary was overflowing. "Is it always going to be like this?" I had not prepared for the complexity of challenges associated with fulfilling a number of different roles as a student-athlete, or the anguish I would feel about my sporting role when I arrived at university.

Two months before I was due to move into university, I experienced a failure in my sporting career. My shelves were full of gleaming trophies from the competitions that I had won up and down the country that season, and I had reached a career high ranking of 3 in England. Such experiences, however, did not make me immune from lack of selection for the 2010 Commonwealth Games, after being a favourite to do so. "Why bother training and competing anymore, I don't even know what I'm trying to achieve?" Dejected and downhearted, thunderstorms were cast over my future in table tennis. Crawling out of this hole would take a great deal of motivation and hard work, and at this point in time I wasn't sure if it was something I was prepared to face. I was about to enter university on the top-level sport scholarship, the cream of the crop in their eyes, and something I had so desperately been looking forward to. Yet I had limited self-belief, motivation, and felt like throwing in the towel. In my eyes, nothing was going to raise my mood or change how I felt. I began to distance myself from my athlete role as a way of coping with this perceived failure (Brewer, Selby, Linder, & Petitpas, 1999). I had no idea about how the next few years would pan out, or how my athlete role would play a part in the university experience.

On a crisp Autumn morning, I packed my off-white Citroen C1 to the brim. Clothes, cooking equipment, boxes, books, and pillows spilled out from its tiny inside, and I cautiously made the drive to my new residence to start my university journey as a student-athlete. Upon arrival, there was a buzz of excitement in the air, and waving their parents goodbye, new university students could taste their impending freedom. Being an athlete, the experience of being away home was not new but I had never lived with people outside of my sport that I didn't know before. Hearing the bump of my suitcase as I dragged it up eight flights of stairs to my new flat, I was instantly confronted by the nervous smiles of six new people. They were completing different courses, from English Language to Biochemistry, from privileged and non-privileged backgrounds, and ticked off a corner from each part of the country. I felt comfortable instantly, and after hearing horror stories about living with difficult people at university, I sighed with relief, recognising how lucky I was to be with such a friendly group. After making new friends with such ease, I was even more excited about getting involved in the numerous student and social activities that were timetabled over the next weeks!

The first few weeks were a blur. There were activities pulling me both ways, and I swiftly recognised the challenges that my dual career may present. Sitting in a packed lecture theatre with hundreds of students eagerly scribbling on their notepads and squinting at the distant screen was swiftly followed by sport scholarship welcome events. "Welcome…you are the best athletes at the university, and we look forward to supporting your journey" echoed across the sports hall. Introductions to every member of the university athlete support network followed, along with the 30 other sport scholarship athletes on the programme, all kitted in the pristine white scholarship athlete uniform. This uniform identified us as 'the special ones'. Like a recharged battery, I began to feel my motivation for sport slowly surging back. "Maybe this will be a successful transition for me after all!" Arriving back to my flat in the evening, there were further activities within my student role to fulfil. Student union activities, late nights out, and endless enjoyment. My new flatmates had a care-free existence in their few weeks of university and were enthusiastic about enjoying their new social lives and freedom, testing their limits with alcohol, and staying up until sunrise. Although I happily engaged in these new activities associated with the culture of being at university in the UK, I felt different. “Why don’t you just come out and enjoy yourself” my new peers suggested. One thought playing on my mind like a broken record, and this was the need to get back into a training routine. During these first few weeks of university, I couldn’t evade thoughts about feeling guilty for enjoying a new social life when marked on my calendar, I could see the start of the competitive season slowly creeping closer and closer.

In the months before my transition to university, signing on the dotted line, I had committed to representing a club in the Swedish Women’s Elite league, Malmö BTK. This league was one of the best in Europe and at the time of signing the contract, I was ecstatic about taking on this new opportunity! As the first match approached, I had concerns about how I was going to get back into preparations, after taking some time out from my sport following entry into university and frustration over my lack of selection. I had to begin formulating plans about how and when I was going to train and prepare aside from my new university commitments. I had moved into university with a certainty that the changes in my education were going to be a positive move for my future vocational career, and I had a set timetable of lectures and classes to attend. There was uncertainty, however, surrounding my sporting schedule, because I had to organise my own training with individuals who also had other commitments with work and education at other universities. Therefore, with no set schedule, I didn’t know whether I would get the training that I needed to continue to develop as an athlete. I felt uncomfortable for not having training in my daily routine as I did pre-university, and without it, I began to lose my identity of someone who was a high achiever and committed to working towards their goals. To combat these feelings, each evening after lectures and seminars, I observed the blurred red trail of lights ahead of me, as I sat though my daily commute to my table tennis club, a 2-hour round trip during rush hour! I had anticipated this demand before moving into university, however, I had not perceived it would be the burden that it became. Only a few weeks into university and I was fatigued. At first, it was odd to be leaving the ‘university bubble’ and returning to facets of my previous pre-university life. “If only I had high quality training and coaching on my doorstep!” I envied those athletes who had a 2-minute commute to training, as they made a leisurely 100 metre stroll from their accommodation block to their training venue on campus. I began to question whether I had made the right decision to attend this specific university or even be at university at all if I was still so intent on achieving in my sport, as making this drive each day was the only way I could continue to train. "Maybe they were right, maybe a dual career wasn't going to be a successful option for me in my sport?" On a regular basis, I found myself facing decisions around whether to attend training, or take the time to relax with my new peers at university. In saying this, following years of my weekends consisting of driving up and down the motorway, spending up to ten hours a day in sports centres, and having to cope with the pressure of being the top seeded player, leaving my junior years behind and entering university was a welcomed relief. Transitioning from a restricted junior career, when events and training was dictated by the NGB, to the freedom of being a senior athlete meant that I had reshape how I approached my athletic career. As a senior athlete, I now had to take charge, and be the driving force behind my athletic career decisions (Pummell et al., 2008). This new athletic responsibility, however, was challenging when I also had student roles that I was eager to fulfil.

A whirlwind of different events and different roles to fulfil meant that during these first few weeks of university, there was some confusion around my identity, and whether my student or my athlete role took priority. "What should I put first?" Did I want to be a student and relax with my new social role at university, or did I want to get back to my best level of sporting performance, be disciplined in my elite athlete role, and begin my rocky ascent up the mountain to success. The thought of sacrificing one over the other wasn't an option for me, but the overwhelming experiences that I faced following entry into university made me realise that I needed to search for a healthier balance if I was going to succeed in both.

Data from athlete, coach, and support staff experiences. ***4.3.5.2 New educational environment: limited guidance.*** When making the transition into university, student-athletes found that there was a need to adapt to a new educational environment that was different to the one they had previously experienced at school. Isabelle said:

> It was kind of a surprise because no one was actually telling us what to do [when we arrived at university], so the additional reading or whatever, you can get away with [not doing it], or you thought you could get away with not doing it and then when you get to the coursework…so that's the initial thing, the first sort of term is like oh actually I do need to do this on my own and no one else is going to tell me…we just had to sort of use our initiative a bit more.

The increased motivation and initiative required to successfully carry out academic work in the university environment may have implications for student-athletes, because they may need to become increasingly proactive in organising and scheduling their time. Isabelle continued, “if you want better feedback, you'd have to email them, whereas at school you get given it all the time…so ye you definitely have to go out and take the opportunity”. The increased need to take personal responsibility for academic development may also be linked to student-athletes’ transition into emerging adulthood. Tim perceived that a focus on sport over education throughout his school years led to increased challenges adapting to the independent learning style:

> The academic side I wasn’t very good to be honest because when I was in college, I was trying just to be a boxer so I sort of just dismissed the academic side and then and obviously, it was a lot easier, and then when I went to university, it was sort of a big change in that you are left to do stuff yourself, whereas in college you obviously get everything.

This quote suggests that student-athletes may have a lack of clarity around the new expectations placed on them academically when they arrive at university. John supported this:

> I’ve found it quite different if I’m honest. My first week here, I walked into a tutorial on the Wednesday, I got here on the Saturday, and they gave me an essay to write, a proper essay that counted towards my final grade, and I was like, I haven’t even been in a lecture yet and I’m having to write an essay, and I thought I hadn’t really had any guidance at all on how to do it, or what to write about, what level to write at, so that was a bit of a shock I suppose…I didn’t expect it to sort of be assessed that quickly.

It may be beneficial for students to understand the expectations that will be placed on them academically when they arrive at university (e.g., through online materials, workshops delivered in schools). Student-athletes may, however, have additional changes in their lives that regular students do not (e.g., introduced to a new sports team), and preparing for these changes in their academic environment may have as positive effect on changes amongst other areas.

4.3.5.3 Identity changes: student-athlete, athlete or student? When athletes make the transition into university, they will be faced with developing a new identity as a university student. The process, however, of acquiring a student-athlete identity is messy. When student-athletes arrived at university, they either experienced a change in how they perceived themselves or no change. Rebecca (high performance sport officer) perceived that immediately following transition, new university student-athletes may experience confusion over their identity:

> Everything is about their sport…it seems to be that they come [to university] as an identified sporting athlete, and I think that's where that transition probably becomes a bit more difficult because now they need to now flip it…and realise that they're becoming a student-athlete and there's a focus on getting a degree now, not just about passing your A levels.

An enhanced focus on the student role could have value in the early stages following the transition into university, considering the need to be more independent and proactive with academic work. Rebecca continues by highlighting that student-athletes' intense focus on their athlete role becomes less apparent when they begin to settle in to university life:

> We're seeing a bit of a chop and change, they'll come in with a real high athletic identity, and I think what they experience in the first 4 to 6 weeks…they start to resonate with the student identity where you know they've got their halls of residence friends…they've seen an aspect of the nightlife…and I think at that point…we see a bit where they are not so forefront with their athletic identity…I tell a lot of the [sport] scholars, you find your identity now, and if you know your identity quite soon on in early life at university, I think that would put you on a good foot for the rest of the year.

Taking part in activities associated with the student role in the first few weeks of university may serve to strengthen student identity. These quotes also suggest that there may be an expectation from university stakeholders for student-athletes to develop their student identity as soon as they arrive at university. Pressure to renegotiate identity could, however, lead to increased stress for student-athletes following the transition. Student-athletes, however, had differing experiences when they arrived at university. Isabelle highlighted that instead of seeing an increase in student identity, her athletic identity began to get stronger following the transition into university:

> I think when I first moved into university, my athletic identity was even less so, whereas at least now I'm kind of like, I need to become this to become an athlete, rather than before I was like oh I'm not even near, whereas now I'm taking my head out the sand and I'm like I need to do this because I need to be an athlete, I need to be physically fit otherwise you're not going to be good enough at your sport.

Comparative to the perception of stakeholders that the student role should become increasingly important, increased support for the athletic role at university (e.g., strength and conditioning training) may serve to strengthen athletic identity following transition. Increased athletic identity could, however, have a negative influence on student-athletes' engagement with their education. Abbie also supported this, and although she had engaged with her education by attending her classes, her athletic role remained the most important in the initial transition period:

> I base everything around training and competition, if I'm training, I'll look at my timetable and think I can put training here, here and here and then like I'll have to do this around training, I fit studies around table tennis and my social life around table tennis.

Finally, following the transition into university, Nathan experienced a separation between the athletic and student role:

> I'm not sure really…when I go to university, I'm a student, but when I'm not at university, I'm an athlete…which is quite hard obviously with having to do stuff at home and essays…I'm not at university, yet I've still got to be a student…I like to just keep the two things separate, when I'm in university I won't talk about my training unless someone asks.

A disconnect between the athlete and student role could lead to ongoing challenges for Nathan at university, because he highlights that there are occasions when he needs to act the role of a student away from university. These results highlight the variation of the perception of identity among student-athletes when they arrive at university. The expectation from stakeholders for student-athletes to renegotiate their identity when they make the transition may create tension, and may be unrealistic in the weeks following transition.

4.3.5.4 Moving into the UK university social culture: increased social pressures.

When athletes transition into university, they are quickly exposed to the new university social culture. Although it is difficult to capture all elements of the culture, there is one aspect in particular that results suggest can complicate the initial stages of the transition. The drinking culture found in many UK universities can potentially have a negative effect on student-athletes' performances, but in contrast to the above pre-transition perceptions, may have a positive effect on student-athletes' making friends in their new environment. After making the transition into university, student-athletes may be exposed to a wide range of new people who come from an array of different backgrounds, and have increased opportunities to engage in new social experiences. Sebastian (strength and conditioning coach) said:

> If they come through where they've been involved in where it's all around the sport, and they've been in such a pressure environment…and then when they come to university, everything else is exposed to them like the drinking…they're seeing the people that they train with in a social aspect as well as a competitive aspect, I think it's tough for them to adjust to that sometimes…then they start to take their foot off and start to see a different aspect of life.

Beth supported this by stating that being in a strict high-performance sporting environment before university was a reason for wanting to enjoy her new social life:

> My experience from the academy…like I never ever went out before I came to university…It was very frowned upon at the academy, not only because we were underage, just in general, but here because I knew that I had more freedom and I just wanted to get that social side which I'd been missing for the last however many years.

Transitioning from a pressured environment to one where they make their own rules, may be a confusing scenario for many student-athletes, with Harry (head coach) suggesting that this period is "part of a learning curve." When student-athletes enter the new university culture, the balance among their social, academic, and sporting lives may become skewed, with the social aspect often taking centre stage. This cultural challenge is supported by Steven (head coach), "they're [student-athletes] aspiring to play at a higher level, but they're a minority, and you've got the rest of them saying let's go out…it's tough for them because they've got so much to balance…it's peer pressure again." Athlete support staff perceive the university social culture to have become such a problem for recently transitioned student-athletes, that they have considered ways to reduce it. Rebecca (high performance sport officer) said:

> We've actually discussed it as a team, if money wasn't an object, what would we actually do to decrease the kind of social culture that deteriorates academic and sport, and actually I think there's a lot more to be done within ourselves as a department and say look, set the environment, if the environment is set where you've got the right standards, we empower the athlete to make the right choices.

Despite student-athletes expressing their desire to have an active social life when they arrive at university, that may be key to maintaining a healthy wellbeing, because support staff are eager to reduce these social activities, this may suggest that athlete support staff are performance-focused in their objectives. Their appears to be some confusion over where the line is drawn between student-athletes enjoying themselves socially at university and the importance of their sporting and academic performances. George, however, agrees with support staff and explains that when he was introduced to the new social culture immediately after transitioning into university, this initial engagement ultimately had a negative effect on his athletic performance:

> At the start of my first year, I sort of struggled a little bit, just because a lot of my course mates would be going out most evenings and at the weekend…whereas obviously being an athlete, I had to be quite sensible with that, I still went out quite a bit, more than I probably should have…but that's just the pressures that you have when you are trying to balance your social life alongside your training, and I think that's why when I got to racing season, it impacted me slightly in that I didn't run as fast as I was hoping to.

Student-athletes may hold the perception that having an active social life is part of normal university student behaviour, that may lead to them engaging in behaviours such as drinking alcohol, even when they do not want to. Andrew (academic staff) and Diane (sport development staff) supported this, suggesting that athletes are "bought into the mind-set" that they need to be regularly socialising, and "that it's part of the student experience." Athlete support staff may benefit from discussing potential social pressures that student-athletes may experience prior to transition, and the negative effect that these pressures could have on sporting and academic performance. Student-athletes will then be informed and be prepared to make the right judgement for themselves.

4.3.5.5 Transition into university sport: challenges and disappointments. In addition to challenges that are present from the new university social culture, following the transition into university, student-athletes may also be expected to compete for their university in their sport. This expectation to compete often comes from the criteria outlined within athletes' sport scholarships. This commitment to the university may also run alongside competing for an external club and their country, that can lead to increased sporting commitments and pressures from external clubs and NGBs.

4.3.5.5.1 University sporting commitments. Joan (sport development staff) stated, "it's expected that they [student-athletes] will take part in the BUCS (British Universities and Colleges Sport) domestic programme, and they will contribute, and likewise they get their memberships paid for to join these clubs by the scholarship programme". The pressure to fulfil sport scholarship agreements could lead student-athletes to take on more sporting commitments than is healthy for them to do so. Beth highlighted the challenge that she experienced when she transitioned into university due to the training and league commitments of both her new external club and university club, “I could potentially be playing every single day of the week…I can’t do that…I would love to, but it just won’t work”. Rebecca (high performance sport officer) explained this by highlighting that the increased commitments early on in the university career of student-athletes can affect their emotional state:

> They’re physically drained because a lot of these [sport] scholars are also training and competing elsewhere nationally, and we are seeing a lot of exhaustion and a lot of emotional states where they feel like they can’t cope, they feel like everything’s gotten on top of them, they feel quite snowballed.

Balancing the demands of a number of different sports clubs (i.e., external club, university, national) could have negative implications for student-athletes, because they are also coping with settling into a new environment, with new academic and social demands. Feeling exhausted due to these new sporting commitments could result in burnout for student-athletes and potential drop out from the dual career. These emotional states may highlight the need for athlete support staff to manage the sporting commitments of student-athletes, and look at the feasibility of their sport scholarship arrangements, to help maintain a healthy wellbeing.

Exploring the challenge of university club demands in more detail, Matthew (performance sport manager) stated that it can be dependent on the sport that student-athletes are participating in:

> I’ll give you some examples of conflicts that we have, let’s look at rugby first, because of the physical nature of the sport, it’s unrealistic to expect players to play twice a week…A sport like football, playing twice a week is perfectly viable…but with the external clubs, they’re playing on a Tuesday night, and we expect them to play for us on a Wednesday, and again the same scenario with money, they can earn quite a bit in those fixtures, so the timetabling of it is an issue.

In sports where there is a high physical demand on the body and adequate recovery time between competitive matches is needed, competing for a university and an external club could have negative consequences for student-athletes (e.g., burnout). The different coaches within a student-athletes’ circle (i.e., external club, university, national) would benefit from being in regular communication to avoid student-athletes experiencing this challenge, and have realistic conversations about whether it is viable for certain athletes to compete for both clubs. Lucas (head coach) supported this, “it’s not just my relationship with the players and everyone within the university, but it’s also trying to bring together the aspirations of the [external] club coach.” An integrative approach from coaches may enable student-athletes to adapt more successfully to the transition into university.

4.3.5.5.2 Pressures and limited understanding from external clubs and NGBs. Due to commitments to compete for a university club alongside an external club, student-athletes may experience pressures from their external club to focus their priorities on competing for them and not their university. Lucas (head coach) said, “we have players who are told by the university physio that they’re injured, but then the following night they’re feeling the pressure to go and train with their [external] club, so that itself is a big challenge”. The pressure to train and compete externally could result in both physical (e.g., injuries) and mental (e.g., low wellbeing) challenges for student-athletes. John explained that immediately following his transition into university, he lost financial support from his external club:

> When I told my manager of my team that I was coming to university, I could tell that there was a bit of a change in the way he was speaking to me…a couple of weeks after I came to university, he told me that he wouldn’t renew my contract and wouldn’t support me [financially] anymore.

An unexpected loss in support could be distressing for student-athletes, putting them in a difficult situation as to whether they can continue competing with their sport. When questioned as to why John thought his manager was not happy about him moving into university, he continued:

> Well it surprised me a bit to be fair, because the sort of coach of the team has previously coached a rider who studied at university and became pro while he was at university, so I thought maybe he would have a good understanding of whether it could be done or not. But I don’t really know why it is, I suppose there’s quite a big training demand on cycling, especially it’s difficult at this sort of time of year with the light particularly, like for example I went out on Wednesday, I set off at like half past 8, so it hadn’t been light for very long, got back at 4 o’clock and it was almost dark, so it’s sort of taken up all my day just to do that one ride, so balancing it with the academics is quite difficult.

Stakeholders within external clubs may have limited understanding around the reasons why athletes choose to continue their dual careers (e.g., exploring alternative identities may lead to a more successful adaptation to retirement). This limited understanding also suggests that student-athletes may be developing in club environments that are performance-focused, instead of the underlying focus being on personal development (e.g., encouraging athletes to pursue alternate identities). Additionally, following the transition into university, NGBs may perceive that student-athletes are no longer committed to achieving in their sport. Sebastian (strength and conditioning coach) said:

> For the NGB to understand the commitments of the athlete when they arrive at university, sometimes that's a bit more in terms of what the NGB is expecting, and what the athlete is having to do…they [student-athletes] should talk to head coaches and PDM's (performance development managers) so that they understand what the athlete is going through at certain times in the year, if it looks like there's a lack of commitment, they [student-athletes] might be trying to balance all these different areas.

Isabelle supported this, "I think that by going to university, they [the NGB] think that it is a lack of commitment in your sport, and I think they do view you differently." Stakeholders within NGBs may benefit from having an understanding of the new commitments that student-athletes face when they transition into university, so that their involvement in education is not viewed as poor commitment to sport, but as a means of personal development.

4.3.5.6 Becoming a senior athlete. In addition to the challenges that are present from moving into university sport, at the same time as making the transition into university, some student-athletes (i.e., those that follow a developmental pathway when the U18 level leads into the elite senior level) may also experience the start of their first sporting season as senior athletes. This transition in their athletic development leads to new demands (e.g., increase in training intensity). Rebecca (high performance sport officer) described some of the challenges associated with moving into the senior level during this period:

> A lot of it with the senior demands is the change of the volume of the training programme, so we're starting to see now especially with key sports where the senior programme is still centralised, whereby they are dictated by the NGB in terms of training, they'll be on a salary as well, so that's when it becomes very challenging in terms of the athlete, because they'll have to go to their national training park, they'll also have to abide by whatever the terms and agreements are with their salary and contract, they'll also have an increased competition load as well.

At the same time as moving into university and taking on new student and social roles, student-athletes are also being pulled away from this environment to fulfil the commitments of their new senior role, suggesting that there could be conflict between the two roles during this time. The implications that new senior demands may have on student-athletes, including pressures to be away from the university environment, may lead to limited academic engagement. Lectures and classes may be significant to attend in the initial stages of moving to university, because this is when students gain an understanding of the course and what is expected of them. Student-athletes also discussed the new stressors associated with their new senior roles when moving into university. Tim, who is a Boxer, said:

> You're fighting juniors where they won't hurt you as much, and the next minute you're fighting men, and they're trying to knock you out so you've got to take it a bit more serious then because a lot of people get hurt when they're not fit.

Beth highlighted that when moving to university, and into a new senior club, the intensity was similar to, "playing for England [at junior level] every week". Spending longer hours training to match the physical demands of senior sport may be stressful for student-athletes when they also need to adapt to new academic (e.g., increased workload) and social demands. Following this increase in training frequency, Rebecca said:

> They start to require a lot more support on the S and C and physio side, mainly because the training load has increased and the competition load has increased, and with that they might be very cautious that they might get injured, they're very cautious that they might get tired very quickly.

These quotes highlight that the risk of injury and time spent recovering from sport may also increase following the move to the senior level. With an increase in training and competition commitments, however, as outlined in the above section, having enough time for recovery may be a challenging feat for student-athletes.

Student-athletes also suggested there were new psychological demands when becoming a senior athlete whilst moving into university. Nathan suggested, "it's hard to go from one of the top athletes to one of the bottom and working up that ladder again". George expanded on this by highlighting his struggles at no longer being one of the best athletes in his new training group now that he was in the senior age category:

> When I went to university, I was training with a group of athletes, and one guy was slightly better than me, in my training when I was training at home before I had gone to university, I was always, like in training, I'd be at the front of each session, running like the fastest times, and then when I got to university, it was a big difference, suddenly I was running with people who were ahead of me, and so I don't know whether mentally that sort of knocked my confidence slightly

> going into the season, and I think that was may be another reason why I wasn't able to run as fast that year.

Coaches could help student-athletes to prepare for this change before making the transition into university, and express how this situation could be used as a positive development experience, as opposed to a negative. Ed (director of sport) summed up the change of becoming a senior athlete and how it links to moving into university:

> I think it's a bit of a perfect storm isn't it, you're moving from junior to senior, you're moving from a school or college situation where you're told to be where and when and everything's done for you, you've probably got your parental background and structure to back you up and suddenly you're in a senior situation in an unfamiliar environment, having to make all your own decisions, organise all of your life and it's little wonder that people are going to struggle with that.

The simultaneous transitions are likened to a "perfect storm", implying that the transition to becoming a student-athlete is a challenging event that arises from a number of unique circumstances that may be unique to the circumstances of dual career athletes. These circumstances could lead to additional stress for athletes and feelings of being overwhelmed. Describing these events as occurring suddenly also suggests that changes are taking place quickly. It may be a time in the athletic career where the most amount of changes are taking place in a short period of time.

4.3.6 Management of Acute Change Following Transition

Data from athlete, coach, and support staff experiences. To help manage the challenges highlighted above, student-athletes may use a combination of internal factors (e.g., personal qualities) and external resources (e.g., social support) provided by university athlete support staff, that can help them cope with personal circumstances they experience following their transition into university.

4.3.6.1 Internal factors. *4.3.6.1.1 Personal qualities.* A number of personal qualities have been outlined that are suggested to be key factors for student-athletes to have or develop following the transition into university. One of these qualities includes asking for help when a situation is out of control. Rebecca (high performance sport officer) said:

> It's interesting you always see a split, some that try and gain control over a situation and ask all these questions, the other ones almost want to bury their head in the sand and say it's too much…they normally come to me and say, how can I deal with this stress, because I can't cope with it at the moment

> because there's so much going on…some have to gain control and some are just happy to coast on by.

Student-athletes may hold the perception that feeling out of control and asking for help is a sign of weakness on their part. Support staff suggested, however, that those who do not actively recognise that their situation is out of control (e.g., cannot cope with the demands of different sports clubs) experience increased stress. Another personal quality discussed as being salient is having the confidence to make decisions. Adam (sport scholarship manager) discussed, "part of my role is also to give them the self-confidence and the belief to make decisions". It may be necessary to equip student-athletes with this belief early on during their transition into university to help them become more independent and begin to take responsibility for their own development (e.g., decisions around external clubs). In addition to this, Matthew (performance sport manager) highlighted that having awareness of the influence of decisions may also be key for student-athletes when they transition into university:

> You've got to understand what the consequences of your actions are, so you as an athlete need to understand that if you make the decision that you're going to go out on a big Wednesday night having played, so you've made that decision, an athlete needs to understand that if you've picked up small knocks, it's going to affect your recovery.

The decisions made within the first few weeks of university may influence student-athletes either positively or negatively during the rest of their university career (e.g., engaging with their academic course straight away could have a positive effect). Rebecca suggested that a further personal quality that student-athletes would benefit from holding is high levels of self-sufficiency:

> If you were to categorise the (sport) scholars, you can categorise quite quickly through the type of communication that you have with them, the ones that are very sufficient, very much I'm going to go and do this one my own, very independent, I'm coming to [place], I've booked all my accommodation, and the ones that, their parents are still the ones emailing me and the parents are still the main point of contact, and we've got 77 [sport] scholars and probably about 50% of them, the parents are still the main ones with the email address…whereas the rest of them are very self-sufficient, kind of taken their own empowerment of their career now.

Previously, student-athletes expressed their concerns in the pre-transition phase about having to organise their lives by themselves and this reiterates the need for this to happen, with support staff noting that self-sufficiency is a key resource. Student-athletes who are proactive and self-sufficient with their development may adjust to the independent university learning and living environments with greater ease than those who rely on others. Student-athletes who have relied on parents and coaches to guide their transition into university and did not demonstrate self-sufficiency may struggle to adapt to new demands, such as having to structure and plan their own time. The personal qualities outlined here may also align with student-athletes' transition into young adulthood, because they involve taking responsibility for oneself. This alignment with the transition to young adulthood is supported by Isabelle who suggested that taking responsibility is one of the key personal qualities that she used when she moved into university, "taking responsibility for your actions, rather than passing the book, oh my friend made me go out, or something like that you know, or I didn't want to [socialise] but they said I had to".

4.3.6.1.2 Using life experiences as a resource tool. To successfully negotiate the transition into university, student-athletes may be able to draw on their own backgrounds and life experiences (e.g., living away from home, taking charge of training programme). Beth highlighted that the overall transition into university for her was, "really positive because I came from an academy so I was used to having to balance my studies with basketball." Being part of an academy often means moving away from home to train at a performance centre. Having the experience of transitioning into a new living and sporting environment may have made the transition into university less of a shock for Beth. Similarly, John said:

> For me it wasn't incredibly difficult, I spent a year outside of education before coming here, I spent half of it living in Portugal and Italy training full-time, and so living away from home, I'm not very far away [from home] here compared to when I was over there, so that's not very difficult to me.

Student-athletes who already have experiences of living away from home and being independent may have already developed knowledge and skills associated with being independent student-athletes that could help them to adapt positively to the transition to university. New university student-athletes may be able to draw on these experiences, recognise how they coped, and use these in the knowledge that they have already been through similar processes and events. Student-athletes moving into university that have limited life experiences, such as travelling abroad for competitions and living away from home, may need increased guidance from support staff during the transition phase. Alina (physiotherapist) expanded on this:

> I think what can have an impact as well is how well the athlete is prepared to come to university, so if the athlete has never been allowed to take charge of his own timetable or training regime because it has always been dictated by the parents and has received massive help and been wrapped in cotton wool, the transition can be affected by things like that.

Student-athletes who have experience of independence and taking charge of their own development could use this as a tool in their adjustment to university life. Coaches and parents could endeavour to give their athlete or child more freedom to plan and organise their life in advance of the transition, so that they already have experience of guiding their own development.

4.3.6.2 External resources. *4.3.6.2.1 Emotional support immediately following transition*. The transition into university for student-athletes can lead to feelings of being lost and overwhelmed. To help with this challenge, athlete support staff provide emotional support to student-athletes immediately following their transition into university. Rebecca (high performance sport officer) stated:

> A lot of students will contact me and off the back of that comes collateral emotional damage as well so I deal with a lot of stuff around stress and anxiety, feeling out of control, feeling almost worthlessness, feeling as if they're not going to perform well sporting or academically, feeling as if they're going to let people down…and there's all these elements of emotional damage and it's all come from a spiral of stress.

If student-athletes are vulnerable to experiencing these feelings during the early stages of their transition to university, this may suggest that they could be vulnerable to developing mental health problems. Emotional support may therefore be a key support source during this time, however, support staff recognise that they may need help in determining when this support needs to be provided. Matthew (performance sport manager) said, "it's a really challenging thing to do, but it's trying to pick up the cues to students who emotionally are struggling and it sounds very cliché, ensuring they know that there are people available to come and talk to". It may be important for members of support staff, including athlete and academic staff, to have an awareness of the warning signs of when student-athletes may need emotional support (e.g., expressing concerns over performance and letting people down).

Olivia (head coach) stated that she makes it clear when student-athletes arrive at university that she is on hand to provide emotional support, but many do not seek this support:

> I say to the girls if they have got a problem, just come and talk to me, I think some of them think oh god I'm not going to go and talk to her because I don't want her to think this or that. I think more they haven't had the confidence to do that and I don't know if that's something from me or them, but they haven't spoken to me as much as they could have.

As student-athletes may be in the process of developing new relationships with coaches and support staff following the transition into university, they may not yet have built up a level of trust. Without this trust, student-athletes may perceive that they cannot confide in support staff, and instead they may choose not to seek support in this period, and continue to struggle.

4.3.6.2.2 Appraisal and informational support. Athlete support staff provide appraisal and informational support to student-athletes following their transition into university. Rebecca highlighted a technique that she uses to appraise student-athletes when they arrive at university:

> Just getting them to lay out on the table what they've got going on in their life and things they feel out of control with and things that they feel in control of, and it's about highlighting personal traits that they've got to try and find that control back and that seems to be again quite a strong technique, it's about empowering them.

Empowering student-athletes to think for themselves in the early stage of the transition may give them the confidence that they can overcome future situations when they are stressed or anxious throughout their university dual career. The personal traits that Rebecca highlights are those discussed previously in the personal qualities section (e.g., self-control, ability to make decisions, being self-sufficient). Rebecca also suggested that appraisal support is used to help student-athletes self-evaluate their situation when they are feeling overwhelmed with the transition:

> They come away [from the meeting] thinking it doesn't seem as bad anymore because they've managed to just talk to somebody about it who is completely external from both aspects and actually for a lot of them, they tend to be very visual and so seeing it out on the table, they can see ok so I've actually only got three problems, but two of those problems I've already got interventions in place, so this is the only one I need to find a solution for and they know that

> they have the solution and they know that they have the ability, whether its motivation or organisational aspects, they always know they have those skills.

By increasing awareness that student-athletes have the skill-set to overcome stressful and anxious situations during their transition, this may help student-athletes to use these skills and to successfully move forward and overcome these. In addition, understanding the techniques that student-athletes prefer (e.g., visual) may also be of benefit.

Athlete support staff also perceived that on occasion they have to play a 'parental' role with student-athletes following their transition into university. Matthew (performance sport manager) said that as a number of student-athletes are moving away from home for the first time, "the role maybe changes slightly because you're having to do a little bit more parental type support in the early stages…in a different way to parents telling their kids what to do…but to ensure that that support network is there." Matthew expanded on this by highlighting that this includes informational support:

> It's more of a social and a moral responsibility now than anything else to help manage their transition into the university environment and just making sure they're ok with the very basic things and that can sometimes even come down to for some of them, ensuring they know where the nearest supermarkets are, what the phone numbers of taxi companies.

This parental role may be the kind of support that student-athletes require in the initial stages of the transition if they are struggling with their new-found independence. Athlete support staff, however, previously discussed that student-athletes would benefit from being actively independent upon their transition, a feature of their emerging adulthood. Despite this, support staff also suggested that they believe it is their responsibility to help manage the student-athletes' transition by providing them with relevant information, potentially taking away athlete responsibility. Informational support could be minimised in this stage, and instead, the focus could be on empowering student-athletes through the use of appraisal support.

4.4 Discussion

The current part of the thesis examined the experiences of student-athletes' transition into university within the UK, with a specific focus on the pre-transition period and acute changes following transition. Stambulova (2003) suggested that transitions are a process rather than a singular event. The results of the current study support this and suggest that when student-athletes make the transition into university, there are several stages within this process. First, the current study examined the challenging decisions and opportunities that student-athletes have to consider before they enter university (e.g., enter university as a dual career athlete or attend a national training centre as a full-time athlete). When the decision is made to attend university, athletes and their parents make informed decisions around where to go, particularly taking into consideration the location for enhancing sporting development. After deciding whether to go and where to go, student-athletes then start to consider and become nervous about the move to university, and hold a number of expectations about their move (e.g., expectation that the athlete role will continue to have greater importance over the student role). Despite student-athlete concerns, university athlete support staff provide forms of support in the pre-transition stage to help prepare athletes for their transition into university (e.g., logistical support). Academic staff, however, perceive that they have no role in the process, despite results from the current study suggesting that they may be key individuals in helping student-athletes settle in to their dual career (e.g., by providing extensions when required). Student-athletes and stakeholders perceived that there were a number of acute changes that took place immediately following the transition into university that were difficult to manage (e.g., sudden pressures from NGBs, exposure to a new social culture). Due to these acute changes, in line with Stambulova's (2003) athletic career transition model, student-athletes use a combination of internal (e.g., previous life experiences) and external resources (e.g., appraisal support) to help them cope.

4.4.1 Part A Advancements to Knowledge

- The pre-transition and acute transition stages add detail to theoretical models (e.g., Wylleman et al., 2013).
- The decision about attending university can be complex for student-athletes and can include logistical, psychological, and cultural factors (e.g., perception that going to university and being a world-level athlete in a certain sport is not a regular occurrence).
- Holding certain pre-transition expectations can lead to challenges for student-athletes adjusting to acute changes following the transition into university (e.g., expectation that the athlete role would come first may lead to challenges adapting to the new educational environment).
- Pre-transition support may be too logistics based and could aim to target pre-transition areas of concern or potential changes that student-athletes may experience following transition (e.g., balancing multiple clubs)

- Pre-transition events could influence how successfully student-athletes adapt to or approach the transition into university (e.g., parental divorce, lack of selection for major event, end of Olympic cycle leading to funding concerns).
- Identity plays a role within each step of the transition process into university for student-athletes, including the decision of whether to go to university and where to go in the pre-transition stages. Following transition, student-athletes experienced role conflict and pressure to renegotiate their high athletic identities.
- Stakeholders are keen to find ways to reduce the negative behaviours (e.g., excessive drinking influences sporting performance) that result from student-athletes moving into the new social culture, however, student-athletes wanted to socialise at university following restrictive junior careers, and may be beneficial for their wellbeing.
- Academic staff perceive that they have no role in the transition process to university for student-athletes despite being able to assist in providing flexible learning pathways, and previous studies highlighting their importance within the dual career. Academic staff were also unaware of who to approach about student-athletes who they acknowledge are having difficulty adapting to the transition.
- The transition into the senior level when also moving into university may lead to tension between activities that are important within the new university student role (e.g., attending lectures) and requirements to spend time outside of the university negated by athletes' new senior roles (e.g., attend training at a national training centre with the senior team).
- Coping mechanisms during transition can include acknowledgment of previous experiences for student-athletes in recognition of how they coped with similar scenarios.

The current study supported previous research that has identified simultaneous transitions in development occurring when student-athletes move into university (e.g., Brown et al., 2015; MacNamara & Collins, 2010). The focus of this research, however, adds to dual career literature as it highlighted the link between pre-transition decisions and expectations, and the immediate changes that student-athletes have to adapt to within the first weeks of arriving at university. Within the transition process to university, the current study found a number of themes running throughout, including; expectations, social support, culture, location of university, and identity.

Expectations played an important role within the transition process. Reflecting previous literature (e.g., MacNamara & Collins, 2010), before making the transition to university, student-athletes in the current study held expectations about the perceived challenges they may face immediately following the transition. Research suggests that when students hold a number of different expectations about their transition into university, this can help them to adjust successfully to university life (Pancer et al., 2000). In the current study, student-athletes perceived that they may have difficulty establishing personal responsibility, and experience a number of challenges through living as independent adults (e.g., eating correctly, budgeting finances, dealing with stressful situations in the absence of parents) immediately following the transition to university. Although student-athletes were aware of the need to balance their lives effectively when they transition into university, holding these pre-transition perceptions highlights that in some areas, they may be unsure of how to overcome this challenge and take full responsibility in their new emerging adult role. In line with previous research on general student populations (Pancer et al., 2000), it may be beneficial for student-athletes to receive increased education on areas that they anticipate will be a challenge for them following transition (e.g., budgeting and stress management techniques), so that they are confident in overcoming such challenges should they face them. If student-athletes have an overabundance of resources, including transition knowledge, they may be more likely to overcome barriers and make the transition into university with greater success (Stambulova, 2003).

Additionally, advancing previous dual career literature, the current study found that pre-transition expectations may negatively influence adjustment to changes experienced after moving to university. For example, student-athletes in the current study may have developed poor expectations around their educational transition, because they perceived that sport would continue to be their priority over education when they arrived at university. These expectations may have in turn contributed to the challenges associated with adapting to the increased motivation required within the new university educational environment (e.g., Brown et al., 2015; MacNamara and Collins, 2010). Educational changes in the current study included a sudden increase in expectations to complete assignments with limited guidance from academic staff on how to do so (Scanlon, Rowling, & Weber, 2007).

Keeping with previous literature (e.g., Brown et al., 2015; Giacobbi et al., 2004), the current study highlighted that social support is a key factor for student-athletes when they move into university. Developing this literature, however, the current study demonstrated that social support can be important across the whole transition process, from decisions around whether to go to university, to adapting to changes after making the transition. Within the pre-transition decision stage of whether to attend university, and when making decisions about where to go, parental values and advice guided decisions, along with coach encouragement. Parents are suggested to be important individuals within athletes' academic and educational careers, and supportive during challenging transitions (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Mills, Butt, Maynard, & Harwood, 2012). During the pre-transition period, despite the concerns of student-athletes, university athlete support staff do provide forms of support. The current study, however, suggests that this support is primarily logistics based (e.g., awareness of programme of support student-athlete will receive following transition). Despite the provision of logistical support, student-athletes remain anxious and uncertain about their transition into university, highlighted by the pre-transition expectations and perceived challenges described by student-athletes (e.g., concerns over living challenges). As suggested above, increased education on potential changes may help to combat this challenge.

Amongst the topic of social support, an advancement from the current study to dual career literature is that academic staff perceived that they have no role in the transition process. Previous studies (e.g., Brown et al., 2015) argue that the inclusion of academic staff in future research is imperative, because they play a role in shaping the development of student-athletes' identities. Representing a novel finding in the dual career literature, findings of the current study suggest that academic staff were unaware of the correct contacts to approach when they became aware of student-athletes experiencing transitional challenges or how to answer questions related to the management of the dual career. If academic staff are unaware of the student-athletes that they will be teaching upon arrival at university, they will not be able to assist athlete support staff in developing individualised plans to help manage the dual career (e.g., some athletes may need flexible learning pathways).

In the current study, athlete support staff (e.g., sport scholarship managers, head coaches) were the primary source of social support to student-athletes within the first few weeks of university, and provided emotional, informational, and appraisal support. Previous literature suggests that the emotions of an individual involved in a career change (e.g., moving to university) are recognised as being a key component when making transitions, and being able to manage these emotions during a transition phase are important to remain focused (Caplan, Vinokur, Price, & Van Ryn, 1989). Emotional support was perceived to be key in the early stages of the move to university in the current study, because student-athletes became overwhelmed with the changes they experienced (MacNamara & Collins, 2010). Due to the types of emotional states described (e.g., feeling worthless), student-athletes may also be vulnerable to experiencing mental health issues if they do not receive the correct types of support immediately following transition. Adding to previous literature, as strong relationships between support staff and student-athletes had yet to form, picking up the cues of when emotional support is required (this may also include picking up mental health concerns), is a key challenge that university athlete support staff face, and they may benefit from further training in this area.

Informational and appraisal support were also provided to student-athletes by athlete support staff following the transition into university. Informational support is described as access to new information and guidance (Mitchell & Trickett, 1980). Not previously described in the literature in this way before, the current study found that athlete support staff perceived to play a “parental” role with recently transitioned student-athletes, that included helping them to settle in by providing information to support them in their new environment (e.g., providing taxi numbers, information on supermarkets). Even though informational support may be perceived as useful, it does in part go against the idea of making student-athletes independent learners and displaying high levels of self-sufficiency, described as an important personal quality that student-athletes would benefit from holding. In keeping with previous athlete talent development literature that opposes the use of overtly supportive programmes (e.g., Brown et al., 2015; Sarkar, Fletcher, & Brown, 2015), providing student-athletes with all of the relevant information may decrease the opportunity for them to become independent learners within the university environment, and potentially impede psychological development. Athlete support staff also described providing appraisal support (Mitchell & Trickett, 1980), that includes helping student-athletes to evaluate the current resources that they hold to overcome transitional challenges. Appraisal support may be key in empowering student-athletes to problem-solve themselves, and may be particularly effective in the early stages of their transition, so that these skills become embedded for the rest of their dual career and beyond. In support of previous research (e.g., Sarkar et al., 2015), an implication for stakeholders from the current study (e.g., academic staff, coaches, performance lifestyle advisors) may be to encourage student-athletes to actively engage with challenging situations by providing appraisal support (e.g., helping the athlete to understand the skillset they have to overcome challenges), that may increase their chances of positively adapting to university life, and offer opportunities for enhanced long-term development.

In line with Stambulova (2003), whose athletic career transition model highlights that internal resources can be used to help overcome transition barriers (i.e., acute changes experienced), student-athletes in the current study used internal coping strategies, including recognising their own personal qualities. Personal qualities are described as the psychological factors that protect individuals from negative consequences (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). Many of the personal qualities (e.g., having the ability to ask for help when a situation is out of control, taking responsibility for actions, being self-sufficient, the belief to make decisions and understanding the influence of decisions) that were highlighted as being effective in helping student-athletes to cope with the transition to university relate to student-athletes' transition into young adulthood, and the need to develop personal responsibility (Brown et al., 2015).

Additionally, student-athletes and stakeholders recognised a further coping strategy was drawing on previous life experiences (e.g., previous transitions away from home into sports academies, training abroad full-time). Student-athletes moving into university who are limited in these life experiences may need increased guidance (e.g., support with living challenges such as cooking) during this period. The finding that previous transition experiences may be of benefit mirrors those discussed within youth to senior transition studies (e.g., Morris et al., 2015), but is an advancement to the student-athlete literature. Morris et al. (2015) discuss that drawing on previous transition experiences and becoming aware of the coping mechanisms used could allow athletes to develop a number of the other key factors that may help influence their success in the transition to senior sport. Student-athletes may have already developed a number of key factors in the years leading up to their transition that increase their likelihood of coping (e.g., learning how to live independently). These may be important discussion points with student-athletes before or immediately following the transition to university, so that they are aware themselves of how they can manage the transition, and in turn, help to build levels of self-sufficiency.

The location of the university was an important factor for student-athletes in the decision-making process, and also influenced experiences following transition (highlighted by my autoethnographic narrative). First, the location of a university in relation to sporting opportunities was a key factor for student-athletes when making the decision of where to go. McFarlane (2014) highlight that future research would benefit from focusing on student-athletes' pre-university expectations to understand in detail their motivations that may influence their decision to attend a particular institution. In the current study, in line with Aquilina (2009), the majority of student-athletes chose to attend a university with the goal of enhancing their sporting development. In a US study, Vermillion and Spears (2012) reported that there are many factors in the decision to attend a particular university for student-athletes, including, personal or social relationships (e.g., coaching staff), career goals (e.g. support services) and finances (e.g. amount of financial aid or sport scholarship bursary offered; Vermillion & Spears, 2012). The reasons for choosing a particular university for UK student-athletes were similar regarding sport scholarship availability, however, student-athletes in the current study were fixated on the location of the university (e.g., close to national training centre), rarely taking into account university training and educational opportunities. This decision suggests that for student-athletes in the UK, the environment (e.g., training facilities, sports clubs, and quality of training partners) external to the university may have a greater influence in the decision than what the university can offer, even though this may lead to further travelling. Following the transition into university, however, student-athletes experienced challenges with the location of their university when having to make regular commutes to training not on university campuses. This demand led to fatigue after also fulfilling new student and social roles on the same day. Student-athletes had not anticipated the time challenges associated with this travel, but it was deemed necessary to continue their athletic development.

Advancing previous literature, the current study found that identity played an important role across each step in the transition process, including the pre-transition decision-making process, perceptions held before making the transition, and experiences following transition. The opportunity to become a full-time athlete or make the transition into a university dual career was negotiated through athletes' identity. Although the decision around whether to attend university was challenging, and athletes experienced confusion over making the right educational decisions (Devaney et al., 2017), the perception that they did want to be 'just an athlete' was a motivator to attend university. Prior to making the transition, however, student-athletes held the perception that their athlete role would continue to take priority over their student role when they arrived at university. This perception of identity may have influenced the decision of which university to attend, as student-athletes chose universities with the goal of enhancing their sporting development, over educational opportunities.

In keeping with previous literature (e.g., Rosier & Wylleman, 2015; Wylleman et al., 2013), within the current study, when student-athletes (i.e., those that followed a developmental pathway that leads from U18 level to the senior level) moved into university, they simultaneously experienced their first season as senior athletes. Advancing literature, this demand combined with moving to university may lead to tension between activities necessary within the new university student role (e.g., attending lectures) and requirements to spend time outside of the university (e.g., the need to attend a national training centre for senior camps). The current study also suggests that a demand of moving into the senior level may be the need to rebuild identity as an athlete of lower status and ability in the new senior university training group (Pummell et al., 2008), alongside the move to university. In addition to the potential stress in developing a new senior identity, the current study suggests that student-athletes may be under pressure to renegotiate their high athletic identities when they arrive at university. University athlete support staff perceived that student-athletes should develop an increased focus on the student role to create a dual-identity to cope with the demands of transition (Killeya-Jones, 2005). Athletic identity, however, remained high for new student-athletes, and for some, even increased following transition. As the process of identity acquisition is complex (Ryan & Deci, 2003), the expectation for student-athletes to attain a dual-identity immediately following transition may be unrealistic, and may be a process that takes time.

Within the current study, advancing previous literature, the role of culture (e.g., in certain sports and within universities) was a factor within different stages of the transition process. First, when making the decision about whether to continue the dual career at university, student-athletes reflected on cultural norms within their sports (e.g., athletes dropping out of education at a young age to pursue sport full-time challenged their beliefs about attending university). Richardson and colleagues (2012) post-academy development phase model highlights that athletes may need to adapt to changes at the cultural level when they make transitions. In line with Richardson et al. (2012), in the current study, an acute change that has received limited research attention was the exposure to the UK university social culture. This new demand led to increased social pressures from new peers to engage in activities such as excessive alcohol consumption (Banister & Piacentini, 2006; D'Alessio, Baiocco, & Laghi, 2006). Although student-athletes wanted to have an active social life, the culture was perceived by both student-athletes and stakeholders as complicating the transition and having largely negative consequences, particularly within student-athletes' sporting development (e.g., drinking alcohol to excess and regularly socialising meant that athletes' priorities changed). Finn and McKenna (2010) also highlighted that coaches in their study recognised the difficulties for student-athletes who were distracted by the university culture, that promoted behaviours (e.g., high levels of alcohol consumption) that were perceived to be unhelpful for athletes. The finding from the current study that stakeholders are keen to reduce the perceived negative behaviours associated with the university social culture suggests that there is a divergence between what stakeholders perceive to be important for student-athletes (i.e., performance-focused) and what student-athletes want from the new culture (i.e., to enjoy their new social life) following restrictive junior careers. Mental health literature tells us that an active social life may have indirect effects on health through enhanced mental health, by reducing the influence of stress (e.g., Cohen, 2004; Thoits, 1995). Engaging in the new cultural activities immediately following the transition may be a key factor for student-athletes to reduce the stress associated with the transition. During this time, student-athletes may be negotiating how their student, athlete, and social roles can successfully fit together when at university.

In addition, the current study advanced previous literature by highlighting the role conflict that moving into the UK university social culture can create for student-athletes within the first few weeks of being at university. The current study suggests that when student-athletes enter university, they may buy into the mind-set that having an active social life, and drinking alcohol (e.g., Heather et al., 2011) is an important part of being a university student. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorisation theories (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) emphasise that norms are linked to specific, contextually-relevant reference groups (Terry & Hogg, 1996), for example being a student in a UK university. The desire to engage in new social experiences may be linked to student-athletes wanting to engage in the behaviours that are deemed to be norms in the UK student population. The current study advances dual career literature by highlighting the role confusion that student-athletes may experience over wanting to take part in activities associated with the student role (e.g., socialising, drinking alcohol), alongside wanting to portray their professional athlete role (e.g., prepare for upcoming sporting events) when they first arrive at university. The roles of a student and an athlete have expected behaviours placed on them by the social environment that surrounds them, and in the current study, attempts to fulfil all of these roles led to confusion over priorities, guilt over not focusing on sport, uncertainty over routine, and fatigue.

In addition to the university drinking culture, when entering university in the UK, student-athletes may experience an expectation to compete for their university in the BUCS leagues, as part of sport scholarship criteria. This demand may also be in conjunction with sporting commitments for external sports clubs and country (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015). Taking on new university sports club commitments was suggested in the current study, however, to be perceived negatively by stakeholders' external to the university (i.e., student-athletes experienced a loss of financial support), suggesting that student-athletes may experience conflict with external funders (e.g., NGB) over choosing to enter university. In addition to stressors such as the potential loss of financial support, if this sudden increase in sporting commitments is not well managed, it could lead to both physical (e.g., student-athletes experienced pressures to compete when injured that could lead to long-term injuries) and emotional difficulties (e.g., feeling like they cannot cope with the influx of new sporting demands combined with changes in other areas of life) for student-athletes. This change may not be apparent in other cultures, such as the US, where sport and educational pathways are combined (McCormack & Walseth, 2013), and student-athletes may not face the new challenge of regularly competing for more than one club. If sport scholarships and external club contracts are drawn up before the transition into university, this may give student-athletes and their support personnel the opportunity to allocate their time before over-dedicating themselves. In turn, this may lead to reduced stress following the transition to university. In addition, as student-athletes may feel obliged to take on all new sporting commitments when at university, a review of sport scholarship requirements (e.g., criteria that athletes must compete for their university) may also help to address this issue.

4.4.2 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

The present section of the current thesis advances knowledge in the area of dual careers by examining the pre-transition decisions and perceptions student-athletes hold about transitioning into university, and the acute changes they experience when they make the transition. The knowledge compliments existing findings (e.g., athletes experience simultaneous transitions when entering higher education), but also highlights a number of distinctive findings that advance previous literature. These findings include the views of academic staff who hold the perception that they have no role in the transition process, and that student-athletes' pre-transition perceptions often do not marry with their actual transition experiences. The results revealed insights into the kinds of support that may be key for student-athletes during this time and suggests that, currently, support may be targeted at the wrong areas (e.g., logistical support as opposed to targeting potential areas of change). The results of the current study may be a guide for educational institutions who currently do or do not deliver transitional support to student-athletes. An additional strength is the use of autoethnographic writing to supplement participant data. This writing provided new insights on the transition into university that were not discussed within the data provided by participants. This included discussion around the difficult decision-making process of whether to attend university, how student-athletes may feel uncomfortable with their limited routine following transition, and may experience confusion over wanting to engage in both student and professional athlete behaviours (e.g., regular training) immediately following transition.

There are, however, some limitations of this section of work that ought to be recognised. This part of the current thesis focused on the perspectives of student-athletes and university stakeholders. Results of the study, however, suggest that there a number of other individuals outside of the university environment who may be influential within the transition process. These individuals include the parents of student-athletes, who are a suggested to be key source of support, particularly within the pre-transition phase. Obtaining their perspectives in future work may give a more detailed and personal perspective of the transition. Findings also suggested that performance staff from NGBs and external sports clubs may also have input into the transition to university. For example, coaches within external clubs discontinued the support of their athletes following their move into university. It would be interesting to understand their views and perspectives on their athletes undertaking a dual career in sport and education, and gain insight into the reasons underpinning their support (or lack thereof) to university student-athletes.

Despite there being a number of student-athlete participants who were in the pre-transition phase and those who had just transitioned into university, 7 participants were later on in their dual careers (e.g., in their 2nd year of university). The retrospective nature of some of these interviews and focus groups may, therefore, be a limitation (e.g., recall bias; Levine & Safer, 2002). Gathering the perspectives of student-athletes later in their university careers, however, may have been beneficial, because they may have realised that some demands they initially thought to be associated with the transition were more influential than others. Longitudinal examination of the factors associated with transition into university for student-athletes could, however, reduce retrospective recall bias and experiences happening in 'real-time' across varying stages of the transition could be collected.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this part of the current thesis adds to previous dual career literature by suggesting that the transition into university for student-athletes is a process that includes several pre-transition decisions, development of expectations, and an adaptation to acute changes following the transition. Key results include the complexity of the decision-making process about entering university or moving into a full-time training centre (Debois & Leseur, 2013), that is influenced by cultural, psychological, and parental factors, and confusion over which role should take priority (student or athlete) upon arrival at university. In addition, the finding that there are divergences between what student-athletes perceived would be the challenges when they moved into university and the acute changes they actually experienced following the transition. This finding suggests that pre-transition support may be focused on the wrong areas and is too logistics based (e.g., informing athletes of their training timetables), as opposed to focusing on potential changes in the first few weeks that can lead to adjustment difficulties. Further key findings not previously discussed in depth in the literature include the acute changes of moving into the university social culture and how it may have a negative influence on sporting development, and challenges balancing the demands of multiple clubs (club, university, and country). Finally, immediately following the transition into university, stakeholders may benefit from providing both emotional and appraisal support, and should empower student-athletes to engage with challenging situations to help develop their skillset for the rest of their dual careers. The practical implications highlighted throughout the current study will be advanced in the general discussion.

The current part of the thesis (part A) focused on the transition into university for student-athletes. The next part of the thesis (part B) will now look beyond the initial stages of the transition, and explore the experiences that student-athletes have during their time at university. By doing so, this may give greater insight into the different experiences that student-athletes have at university, and new challenges that arise throughout. By understanding how demands change across student-athletes' time at university, this may allow support providers to implement more effective support systems that match these demands.

Chapter Five: Part B

Understanding UK Student-Athlete Experiences: A Narrative Enquiry During University

5.1 Introduction to Part B

Part A of the current thesis demonstrated that the transition into university is a process that includes pre-transition decisions, perceived challenges, and acute changes that student-athletes may need to adapt to. Stakeholders described the types of support that they provide to student-athletes before transition (e.g., logistical support) and immediately following transition (e.g., informational support). As student-athletes did not anticipate the changes they experienced (e.g., challenges related to moving into university sport), pre-transition support may benefit from focusing on education about these potential changes, because student-athletes may be able to begin developing strategies that might help them cope before making the move to university (Pancer et al., 2000).

Building on from part A and previous literature that has focused exclusively on the transition into university (e.g., MacNamara & Collins, 2010), part B will explore the experiences that student-athletes have during their time at university, and the factors that influence university dual career experiences. This career development stage lies between the transition into and out of higher education within Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model. Previous literature (e.g., Debois et al., 2015) has suggested that the dual career experience can be stressful during periods when the sport had major events and when athletes were required to prioritise one career above the other. In addition, whilst at university, research suggests that student-athletes may experience issues related to fatigue and social isolation due to academic and sporting demands (e.g., Burden et al., 2004; Comeaux et al., 2011). Currently, no studies have explored the whole experience of being at university in depth, from the experiences of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year student-athletes. By exploring student-athlete experiences throughout the first to the final year of university, it may become clear at which point student-athletes are experiencing the most pressures and how the prioritisation between sport and education changes correspondingly. Knowledge of student-athlete experiences during university may allow support providers to have a greater understanding of how to individualise support to student-athletes, and how different types of support may be valuable at varying time points in the university dual career (e.g., when the student-athlete moves into their final year of university they may require more vocational career support).

Additionally, there are few longitudinal studies within dual career research (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). This is surprising considering that the dual career may cover a large portion of the athletic career (Wylleman et al., 2013). Part B will expand on this methodological gap and the gap in the current literature highlighted above by using a longitudinal approach. By exploring the longitudinal experiences of student-athletes as they move through university, this will also allow for examination of change in the demands and challenges they experience, and the processes associated with these changes (Holland et al., 2004). In sum, the current study examined, longitudinally, the university dual career experiences of student-athletes, who are in their 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year of undergraduate study within UK universities.

5.2 Method

Longitudinal data from 7 student-athletes (4 female and 3 male) who were competing in a number of sports (table tennis, canoe slalom, basketball, triathlon, boxing), and one-off interviews with 2 student-athletes (whose data was mainly presented in part C) who were about to leave university (these athletes provided data about their final year of university that was not the focus of part C) from 6 UK universities were included in the write up of part B. These student-athletes were from data collection points 6, 7, 8, and 9 (see Table H.1 in Appendix H). The student-athletes who took part in the longitudinal data collection were aged between 18 and 21 years and had competed in their sport between 9 and 11 years (see Table D.1 in Appendix D for further participant details). The student-athletes were in their first (*n*=3), second (*n*=2), and third (*n*=4) years of study in their undergraduate degree. Longitudinal data were collected through semi-structured interviews at three time points during an academic year (see Table D.2 in Appendix D for details on these time points). Data were supplemented with autoethnographic data from the author (written separately), that focused on my experiences of being a student-athlete at university, and the perceptions I hold about how I could have excelled further in my sporting career. Data were collected, analysed, and reported as outlined in chapter 3.

5.3 Results

To provide a greater understanding of the experiences of student-athletes during university, outlined below are the stories of four UK student-athletes who completed three years of university; Ben, Georgina, Sara, and Paul, who each had differing university dual career experiences. Also included are the autoethnographic experiences and perceptions of my own time as a university student-athlete. Student-athletes' stories highlight the individual characteristics of a dual career, with each focusing on a specific 'golden thread' that highlights a certain area that influenced student-athletes' dual career experiences.

5.3.1 Ben's Story: Living at a National Training Centre where Sport is the Priority

Ben was an elite-level international athlete who competed in the sport of canoe slalom, and was studying a course at university in sport and exercise science. At the start of his university career aged 18, he had been competing in his sport for around 11 years. Prior to his move into university, he had been a member of the Great Britain junior team for 4 years, making the final at both the World and European championships, and had aspirations to compete in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. Two months before his move into university, however, Ben was unhappy with the particular university that he had chosen, because it did not offer the best possible training environment for him to excel in his sport. Instead, he made the last-minute decision to attend a university that was closer to his sport's national training centre in London, where he could train with the best athletes in the country on a daily basis. London was hundreds of miles away from Ben's small Northern hometown, was an unfamiliar environment to him and distanced him from his existing support networks, including his family and coach. Due to Ben's parents' academic backgrounds, they were keen for him to enter university with the knowledge that it was important to have an alternative plan if his career in sport did not work out. Ben, however, perceived that being a university student would be advantageous because he would receive extra funding for his sport from the university sport scholarship programme, "I need to be a student…for the scholarship and the funding". Ben also believed that whilst at university he would be able to continue putting his sport first, as he did during his school years.

> I always do just classify myself as an athlete and I'm just doing the studies as a backup plan sort of thing, but ye it does make it a little more difficult sometimes because to succeed in something you have to go be passionate about it and it makes it a lot more difficult if it is only your second plan… my education is just about getting through…pass it all and always keeping on top of things, that's the main goal at the minute, and then obviously with the sport there's a lot more to do and I've got bigger plans and some short-term goals and long term goals.

Shortly after making the move to London, one of the first challenges to emerge for Ben in his new dual career, that was necessary due to his decision to live near his national training centre, was the long commute into university, that he made several times throughout the week.

> I had a meeting with my group at half 5 in the afternoon, so I went into uni in the morning, so that was an hour and a half each way, went training and then had to go back again, six hours travelling on one day, which wasn't fun.

After a few weeks of being at university, Ben was already finding the long commute to be exhausting and struggled to muster up the energy to get out of bed to attend lectures and seminars. Because of the significant amount of travelling he had to make to get into university, and because the decision to attend university had been made for him by his parents, Ben had low academic motivation, describing that "student life is very much on the side, a side note rather than actually in mind…I've got a lot of stuff set up for training and sport, but generally at university, it's just rock up and don't fail". From the start of Ben's university career, the decision he had made to be close to his national training centre had put him in a challenging situation, and he began to have doubts about whether he would be able to continue to make the commute for the next three years. In the early stages of his 1st year of university, however, Ben's sport also produced challenges that were necessary to overcome.

> The new training, the lower intensity is actually so much higher than it was before because it's the hardest course in the world…it's a lot more physically demanding, which is causing me to get tired and stuff, but it will take a couple of months to get used to the load.

The physical fatigue that Ben experienced from training at the new course had a negative influence on his education, leading to a difficulty focusing in lectures, and on occasion, even falling asleep during classes. This issue highlights that the physical demands of training can have a significant influence on educational focus, and how adequate rest and recovery for student-athletes to be fully attentive may important. In addition to increased physical demands, Ben's move into his 1st year of university coincided with the transition of becoming a UK sport funded athlete.

> I've got to like get top 15, top 20 in the world, which is like ye I can do it, but you know, when you're on the world stage, anyone could have a really bad run, I am good enough to make the top 10 if I have a good run…but you never know what other people could do…I might mess up or something, so it adds the pressure to actually do well…and with selections looming in the air, it's starting to get more stressful.

Ben perceived that this increased pressure was placed on him by his coaches at the national training centre, who he believed did not understand or care about his university commitments. This highlights the pressures that Ben experienced from others to continue to put sport above his education. This increased sporting pressure, in combination with the distance from his university, may have also been a contributing factor to why Ben continued to have limited engagement with his education throughout his first year of university.

> I think I'm supposed to be going into uni, but I haven't, I haven't been in for quite a while because I've had some races that I've had to focus on… I am going to continue with that trend for the rest [of the year], as I said before, I haven't done much…I haven't been into uni for like 5 weeks…I sort of just sacked it off… I am quite remote from the university, that is problematic.

Due to his remoteness from the university, Ben also discussed that the sport scholarship programme he was a member of had not been of use to him, because he was too far away to access support (e.g., lifestyle advice from his sport scholarship manager) on a regular basis, and had not developed any close relationships with support staff. Being remote from his university also had additional challenges for Ben, as he was isolated from student peers.

> It is quite awkward to get into uni, it's just a bit of a burden, I can't really enjoy a social life and that, so it's been a bit hard with that…if it was closer it would be much easier and I could have nights out with uni people.

Living with older athletes at the national training centre who rarely interacted with him and having formed no peer relationships at university, Ben was socially isolated and regularly felt down about his situation.

Following the completion of his 1st year end of year exams, Ben was not optimistic about the outcome, because his sole focus for the last few months had been on gaining selection for the upcoming U23 Canoe Slalom World Championships. Fortunately, the sporting transition into the national training centre proved to have been successful for Ben, because he had made selection for the national U23 team, despite being only 19 years old, a feat that few athletes achieved. The consequences of his intense focus on canoe slalom, however, meant Ben failed the majority of his first-year exams, which required him to complete retakes over the summer period, following his return from the World Championships. The success in Ben's sport had so far been at the expense of his education. Ben, however, was not surprised at his low academic achievement, "I didn't really have high expectations [in my education], if you set high expectations the they are harder to achieve, if you set lower expectations and you go above them, then you are happier". Despite Ben's limited educational performance, his only concern was how he would perform in the World Championships, and the consequences of his performance: "there is quite a lot hanging on this...I could lose my funding, but that's all up in the air…you've got to get the results". The pressure to succeed in his sport to maintain his UK sport funding may have been a further reason as to why Ben continued to focus on sport to the detriment of his studies.

Ben made the transition into his 2nd year of university with the knowledge that he had gained funding for another year after finishing in 5th position at the World U23 Championships. In addition, after a disastrous 1st year of university education, following the retake of his exams, Ben managed to get by with a low pass and was able to proceed into his 2nd year of university.

> I was naïve with my studies and I thought ah I'll just pass this but it didn't go to plan…I thought I'll get my revision done early and it won't cause me as much stress, but again I still didn't do as much as I should have done because when I'm training, it's all I think about.

Despite the challenges that Ben experienced keeping up with his education, he was optimistic that he would be able to continue to put canoe slalom first. Following the transition into 2nd year, however, Ben experienced difficulties in both areas of his dual career.

> I've definitely had to work harder than last year, so the workload has definitely increased and because my modules, all of them are coursework based, I've had quite a lot of coursework due in so that's been a bit of a struggle, I've had to do more work, deadlines coming up and stuff, exams as well…this year you've had to do more outside [university]…I've had to do a lot more reading and a lot more in taking of facts…these last two weeks have been pretty stressful, I think I've had about five assessments all at once.

This increase in academic work in the early period of 2nd year lead Ben to perceive that his timetable had become more difficult to manage with his canoe slalom commitments at the national training centre. For the first time whilst being at university, he began to experience challenges in his canoe slalom that he was struggling to overcome. Following a few months of intense training at the national centre for international events in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, Ben experienced limited progression in his times, that lead to motivational difficulties, "I don't feel like I've sort of improved, I actually think I've probably got a bit worse, I feel like on a plateau sort of thing". The increase in academic demands that Ben had to complete comparative to his 1st year of university may have been one of the reasons for his plateau in sporting performance, and he was frustrated that his older teammates who were full-time athletes did not have the stress of going to university. Despite this increase in academic demands (e.g., assignment deadlines, upcoming exams, presentations), Ben focused his efforts into working through the plateau he had experienced in his sport, motivated to stay on the same level as his teammates, "I've got exams coming up and a big competition…I should be doing more revision and going over my notes…I haven't been doing as much extra work as I should be…I would definitely say that I am prioritising my sport”. In an end of year review, the sport scholarship manager at Ben’s university expressed his concern over his limited focus on education and minimal time spent in the university environment.

> I sat down with [sport scholarship manager], one of the things he said to me was who are you, and I was like I’m a canoe athlete, and he was like no, you’re Ben, and just part of what you do is canoe slalom, so I think I was lacking a bit of my sense of identity and everything was just canoe, canoe, canoe, train, train, train, and I got a bit lost in the bubble…I have been down about sport and just generally not done anything, you know not done anything amazing academically, and not done anything amazing sport wise…ye sort of not excelling in either so I’m not sure what I’m doing.

Ben experienced a lack of clarity over his current identity, having been unable to achieve any top results in either sport or education, and expressed general disappointment over his dual career. Following the culmination of Ben’s competitive calendar, he reflected on the importance of taking time away from his sport to keep his motivation high, but continued to experience challenges switching his focus to education.

> I feel like I’m a different person to when I’m doing this [academic work], because you’ve got to just sit yourself down, and obviously, I’m used to being up [training] and just doing stuff all the time, you’ve got to just sit and focus on one thing yourself and ye it is quite hard…I trained so hard all season, so maybe have a bit of a breather and a little bit of missing canoe rather than it being canoe, canoe, canoe, because usually at some points in the year I would miss canoe…before uni, but now I don’t miss it because it’s always there…like today I’m only going to an hour of training…whereas at the start of the season I was like no I can’t do that, so I think it’s just taking a step back from it, like I’ve not got any competitions.

Conscious of what occurred in his 2nd year, Ben made the effort to enter his third and final year of university with the mind-set that he was going to attempt to stay on top of his academic work, in the hope that it would also benefit his sporting performance.

> I’ve just been focusing on, that I’m keeping on top of little things…I’ve been getting my work done earlier, which I’ve learnt from the past two years, as soon as you get some work, just do that straight away, and that way I won’t have to miss any training, if there’s a deadline coming up, I think oh I’ve not done that

> work, I should have done that last month and it's in for tomorrow, but I'm going to have to miss the gym in order to get that completed, it takes the stress away and I won't have to miss any gym sessions.

Putting doubts in his mind about whether this would be possible, early on his is 3rd and final year of university, Ben achieved selection to represent Great Britain in a number of international opens across Europe, due to take place in what would be his final month of university. Performances in these opens would influence who would be selected for the Great Britain Senior team at the World Championships. Ben's coaches at the national training centre believed that he was in good shape to be selected, and increased the number of training sessions he was completing on a weekly basis to 9 sessions on the water, and 5 gym sessions, all combined with full-time study. Ben began making the journey into university on only one day of the week, despite having lectures and seminars on three of the days. Following his focus on training, Ben found that there was not much free time within his days, with a large proportion of time spent on activities that helped to facilitate his sport. This ultimately led to limited time to complete academic work.

> What I've realised is, it's not how long the session is, say the session is an hour, it isn't just an hour out of your day that it's taking up, it's getting your kit ready and then you've got to travel to the gym and then you've got to get a shower after the gym and then you've got to eat after the gym, so it all adds up, so then you end up spending two and a hour hours at the gym, even if it's just an hour session…that's where a lot of my time goes, getting your stuff ready, cooking your food, getting a shower, those little things add up and then the next minute you sort of want to chill out after a session, you don't really want to do too much work, and the nights gone then and you've missed another day, but it's just about managing it really.

Time spent on activities that help to facilitate the dual career should not be underestimated, and student-athletes may benefit from also planning these activities into their daily routine (e.g., cooking), so that they have a clearer idea around the available time that they have. Towards the end of his 3rd year, Ben experienced what he described as the most stressful time in his university career, when he was training for an international event in France at the same time as revising for his upcoming 3rd year final exams. The results of these exams would play an important role in whether he would graduate from university this year or not. Ben, however, put his training commitments before his revision, despite the importance of passing his final exams

> I just kind of ignored anything to do with the exam, I can't focus on two things and I can't switch off and go and revise, I find it too hard and too boring, so I sort of just put it to one side.

Ben reached the semi-finals of the international open in France, finishing in a higher position than his older teammates, putting him in a strong position to achieve selection. Following his 3rd final year exams, Ben was informed that he been selected for the upcoming Senior World Championships, a huge step within his athletic career, and a step closer to his Olympic Games dream. Despite ending his 3rd year of university successful in his sport, it had been to the detriment of his university education, and failing two modules of his degree meant that Ben would have to retake his final year of university. Shrouded in disappointed, Ben was angry that he would have to spend an extra year travelling into university and completing academic work, after desperately wanting to take the step into full-time sport during a critical first year in the national senior squad. Ben believed that the only positive of staying at university was the financial aspect, "I've had the scholarship money so that pays for all of my canoeing, competitions and stuff…so I haven't struggled there". Due to his low academic motivation, however, the possibility of successfully completing university was now an uncertainty.

In sum, Ben's story demonstrates the challenges of a dual career for an elite student-athlete living at a national training centre, where university was not a priority for him or his coaches. The story highlights that for student-athletes who live and train at national training centres, and do not live in close proximity of their educational institution, this could lead to poor integration with the support services and student life at their university. These student-athletes may be at risk of feeling unattached and isolated from student experiences, and consequently have a low wellbeing. Finally, Ben's experience questions why some athletes choose to enter university. Although athletes may experience pressures from others (e.g., parents) to continue with their education, and perceive that it may be important for them in their post-sport career, if they are not motivated or interested in continuing their education, they may benefit from exploring further dual career options. Reflecting on his dual career, Ben perceived that university had been the only option for him.

> That was just the standard route [to go to university] and no one ever really told me any different, so for me that was just the natural progression, it was never even an option of not going to university, so looking back, I wish someone was there for me to say, you know, university is not the be all and end all.

Athletes may benefit from exploring their options in depth before making their decision about undertaking higher education. Further options for athletes may include vocational training, apprenticeships, and online courses.

5.3.2 Georgina's Story: Injury Complications Leading to Selection Blues

Georgina was 18 years old when she entered university and was a badminton player. She had been a regular member of the England junior national team, and was deemed to be a rising star in the sport when she stepped in for an injured player to gain selection at age 18 to represent the England senior national team at the European Team Championships. Ranked as one of the top female players in the country, she had aspirations to play in further major senior events for England whilst at university, and was hoping to gain selection for the Commonwealth Games. The squad for these games was due to be announced within Georgina's 3rd and final year of university. Georgina carried out a degree in Human Biology and decided to attend her specific university because she liked the campus environment and the academic course that she had chosen was competitive to get onto. Education was important to Georgina, and she had been a high-achieving student at school, receiving top A-Level grades. She also chose the university in the hope that it would aid her sporting development, because it is a university that is "renowned for sport", and in a central area of the country where there were opportunities to train with England's top players who were at universities nearby.

Georgina's start to university life was not like most students, as she had a small amount of time to prepare after getting a last-minute call up to play in the European Team Championships.

> I came late, so I got pulled up for the England thing three days before, because someone was injured, so for me, I don't know, I was really upset not being able to say goodbye and you know it was kind of a rush.

Although she was delighted to be selected, moving into university late meant that Georgina had concerns, "for me it felt like I was massively behind, socially, maybe not as much academically, it turns out we didn't do much in those three weeks". Fortunately for Georgina, her confident personality meant that she had no trouble making new peers when she finally arrived at university. After a positive performance at the European Championships, where Georgina proved she was capable of competing at the international senior level by having unexpected wins over tops players, her confident sporting performances continued. Georgina had a successful few months, with wins over players ranked above her in the top 5 of the UK rankings.

Two months into her 1st year of university, however, Georgina experienced a major blow in her badminton career, and something that she perceived could be detrimental to her chances of being selected for the Commonwealth Games. During a footwork routine in training, she rolled over on her ankle and was in excruciating pain. Following an MRI scan, Georgina received the news that she had obtained anterior ligament damage in her ankle, a serious injury that required prolonged rehabilitation and physiotherapy. Georgina was unable to train or compete for an extended period, "I couldn't really walk or do anything for months…I don't feel like it's particularly improving". The injury was a huge wake-up call for Georgina, and in the absence of training and competition, she had a sudden realisation about how important badminton was in her life.

> I didn't realise how much of a big part of your life it is…your sport, it's massive, and I suppose I was sort of like that's my thing, everyone has a thing, so I suppose you're like, if I'm not doing badminton, what am I doing like, or I don't know what sort of defines me, you don't really think about it and I suppose you could have had a break and not missed it and then that would have told you something but I did miss it and for me it definitely showed that I wanted to come back and I wanted to keep going and see where it goes basically over the next three years, in university.

When an athlete experiences an adverse event, such as an injury, their drive and motivation to succeed may increase, with the knowledge that they may have limited time before an injury becomes career-ending. Georgina was determined to fight back to full fitness following her injury, but was unable to walk without crutches for five months. During the recovery phase, despite missing her sport, Georgina was able to focus more intently on university, something that she was also passionate about succeeding in. Georgina perceived that she was adapting well to the new style of university education and enjoyed the independence that came with it. Nonetheless, as soon as she began to receive results back from her first assignments, it became apparent that she was struggling with the new style of writing that was expected of her at the university level.

> I got my work back and looked at it, there was a massive red cross through two pages, so I got a lower grade because I formatted it wrong…it was kind of a surprise because no one was actually telling us what to do.

These poor results were unexpected for Georgina, having been one of the best students at her school. She became motivated to work even harder than before within her education, but her consistent overthinking and limited exercise from not training began to affect her sleep quality.

> I've actually struggled to get to sleep because I haven't been doing as much physical activity and I've found that I'm actually quite restless…I'm tired mentally…I'm just thinking about getting my assignments in, and in all the lectures we've gone through practice questions and your sitting there and you don't know it and you're like oh my god…I get stressed if I don't do enough work.

In addition to limited sleep thinking about her injury and academic work, Georgina received negative news regarding her sport, that had the potential to reduce her chances of a successful recovery from injury. After reaching out for support from her NGB to help her through her injury, including funding for physiotherapy, her hopes were met with immediate disappointment.

> I thought maybe they do think I've got something, but then when you get an injury and they're nowhere to be seen, it kind of makes you think maybe that was false, it basically doesn't make you believe that your national governing body are backing you basically, and I definitely feel that they could have maybe I don't know, given psychological support, you know just so you're talking about it…they could have helped out that way, and maybe just keeping me in the loop and feeling more included.

When student-athletes experience serious injuries, feeling supported and valued during this time may be critical to a successful recovery. Georgina, however, was left feeling isolated and undervalued, and believed that the discontinuation of support was partly due to her also being at university, and not one of many badminton athletes who were training full-time abroad. She relied on her university's physiotherapy programme to help her through the injury, however, when she ran out of allocated sessions, this resulted in Georgina having to use the small amount of money she received from her sport scholarship to pay for private sessions.

Nearing the end of her 1st year, Georgina gradually began incorporating badminton training back into her routine, alongside her rehabilitation twice a week, "I'm not up to doing half the amount of training yet that I was doing, I was doing 16-20 hours a week and at the moment I'm doing 6-8…it's taken a massive step back from where I wanted it to". The lengthy time out from training had left Georgina with minimal confidence in her game. This challenge was complicated for Georgina because her NGB no longer had a women's national coach due to financial issues, meaning that she no longer had any guidance with her training from an expert coach when at university.

> I'm not particularly, not as confident as I was and probably not playing as well as I'd like to, and I suppose that may be partly down to injury and I'm a bit on my own in terms of there's not many coaches around, so I think I'm just a bit like, I feel isolated so I kind of just need someone else's input…I think we forget about how important it is to be able to just talk through issues with people who understand your sport…I suppose I kind of lost the belief that I was going to improve…I'm kind of overthinking and doubting, and unfortunately doubt is not a luxury thing that anyone can afford in sport.

Georgina believed that the isolation of having no coaching or NGB support following her return from injury was particularly distressing due to being in an individual sport, "if you did have a problem then your teammates could sympathise". This concern may highlight that there are differences between student-athletes undertaking a dual career in individual and team sports. Student-athletes in individual sports who have a limited support around them may feel more isolated when they are faced with challenges, comparative to those in team sports, who may have opportunities to buffer support off one another.

Entering her 2nd year of university, Georgina perceived the importance of the coming year, because it was the year that she needed to perform well in competitions in the hope of being selected for the England squad in the upcoming Commonwealth Games. Despite the importance of the upcoming year, Georgina was aware that the discontinuation of support from her NGB following injury, was going to be a major barrier. She began to become increasingly concerned about whether gaining selection was going to be a reality.

> I've just got to try and find another support mechanism…at the moment I'm kind of in a bit of a rut because the commonwealth selection is coming up and people have put their application forms in, in order to be considered for selection, and I haven't had any communication with the national governing body all term…it does knock your confidence a bit, especially because you don't know what you need to do in order to get back into the team, because part of your selection is that you need to have the international ranking and in order to do that you need to do a tournament abroad, which costs money, and money that I don't have, so I asked the question and didn't really get a response…it's kind of a bit up in the air what's going to happen.

In addition, because Georgina had not been able to compete for the university in the British University and Colleges League, Georgina also lost her sport scholarship financial bursary, "I was hoping to get financial support from the uni, but I didn't receive anything, so that was a bit like oh no how am I going to make the money".

In her first major event following her troubles with injury which was funded by her parents, Georgina felt under a lot of pressure to perform well. The English National Championships was an important tournament in the selection process for the Commonwealth Games. Unfortunately, Georgina's worst fears were met, as it became evident that her injury had not fully recovered, "I was in that much pain, but I couldn't drop out, so I just had to play through it". Consequently, Georgina lost in the last 16-stage of the women's singles competition to a younger player, ranked much lower than herself, resulting in a drop in her national ranking. With just a few months until the Commonwealth selection, Georgina had major doubts about whether the sacrifices that she had made for her sport had been worth it, when instead, she could have focused more intently on her educational commitments.

> You make a lot of sacrifices as a sportsperson and as an athlete you know, from your personal life and from other areas…I'm kind of thinking is that sacrifice worth it, thinking you know have I made the right decision, because I'm kind of doubting whether it is all worth it…what are my goals…previously my goal was to get to the Commonwealths, but I don't believe that, I don't believe that I've got a chance at the moment, so if your goal is that and you don't believe that you've got a chance, what are you playing for…I'm struggling to motivate myself because I don't believe that I'll get selected…I'm just not at that performance level for various different reasons, and I'm putting all this time in.

Questioning her involvement and motivation to continue competing in badminton following her career-changing injury, Georgina decided for the meantime to turn her attention to her student role, with the knowledge that her education was valuable to her career.

> I probably feel that I need to get good grades, because I'm not going to make a career out of this [badminton] and ye so probably education at the end of the day is very important for your job career…I can't make the living that I want to make out of badminton, but I can through getting a good degree and then a good job.

Due to the challenges with injury that Georgina had experienced in her sporting career, she had started to doubt her sporting prowess, and had begun exploring vocational options by completing work experience with a local sporting organisation. Despite becoming increasingly career minded and gaining valuable vocational experience, there was a positive for Georgina's badminton career in the early stages of her 3rd year at university. After a restful summer period, Georgina's ankle injury had dramatically improved, and she had been successful in receiving a small amount of funding from local sponsors. Georgina used the money to attend an international senior open event in Luxembourg, along with other athletes from England in contention for selection for the Commonwealth Games.

> I did a tournament in Luxembourg and that was 5 days, it was like a progressive knockout, so you are guaranteed 5 matches, and I got 8, so that was good…I got my money's worth, and my ankles didn't hurt, which is the first time in like a year or so…I definitely feel sort of the last term I have definitely lacked confidence in home tournaments, but I've played better over sort of the last couple of weeks, so Luxembourg gave me a bit of confidence and just playing generally better and relaxing a bit more.

For the first time since the initial few months of her university career, Georgina's confidence in her sporting ability was on the up, and after gaining an international ranking above many of her England counterparts, she was back in contention for selection. Following a tumultuous sports career at university, that included a devastating ankle injury that plagued her throughout, the discontinuation of support from different sources, leading to doubts about the sacrifices she was making for her sport, a refocus on education, and exploration of vocational career interests, Georgina had regained full fitness. As the selection date grew closer, Georgina became increasingly anxious, "the pressure's building up, so I'm just trying to stay relaxed and to destress". During this period of 3rd year, Georgina also had to cope with increasing academic stressors, such as her final year project, that included spending extra hours in the laboratory.

A few months into her 3rd year of university, Georgina received the news from her sport's performance director outlining that she had been unsuccessful in gaining selection for the upcoming Commonwealth Games. The main reasons cited were not being able to produce consistent top performances, absence from competition, and educational commitments. Despite having had doubts over the possibility of selection and beginning to think about post-university career options, the news was devastating for Georgina, having fought with all her might to regain fitness following her ankle injury and returning to competition. The news left Georgina feeling upset and confused, and she perceived a lack of control over her sporting future.

> My goals in badminton are uncertain, the only thing I can control are my grades at university, so actually now I'll probably be more specific on them, because I feel that I'm in control, whereas at the moment I kind of feel like I'm not in control of what my [sporting] goals are because I don't know where I stand at all.

In the weeks following, Georgina released herself from all training commitments, and instead decided to try and take her mind off badminton by throwing herself into revision for her upcoming final 3rd year exams, "it was just a matter of coming back [from disappointment] and putting in the hours, you know, every day in the library". The goal-setting that Georgina had once used within her sport had now shifted to education, "I think the goal setting for sport, for badminton, has like diminished…I've focused more of my time on academics, I'd say that there are a lot more goals towards academics". Having university commitments to fulfil acted as a coping mechanism for Georgina when facing the distress of non-selection. Georgina finished her final exams and ended her university experience feeling pleased with her academic results, gaining a 2:1 in her degree overall, but dissatisfied and underwhelmed at her sporting experience, "the prolonging of my injury was an unexpected factor which wasn't good…it's gone so fast…I think I just had more expectation to do better". Georgina perceived that it would be difficult to have continued involvement in badminton upon leaving university and the future in her sport at this point was uncertain.

> I think it is going to be much harder…first just to practice and stay in touch with badminton, and second, to obviously train and keep the level that I'm at, they'll be the biggest challenges…I won't have as much free time as [what I had when I was] a student.

Overall, Georgina's story highlights that injury can have a significant influence on the dual career, and can be a pre-cursor to a number of negative events (e.g., discontinuation of support, inability to sleep affecting education, lack of selection for major event), and lead to a re-evaluation of priorities during university (e.g., prioritising academic commitments and thinking about post-university vocational career).

5.3.3 Sara's Story: Poor Relationships and Social Experiences Leading to Isolation

Sara was 18 years old at the time of her transition into university, and had been competing in hockey for around 9 years at a high national level. Sara perceived that she did not reach her potential as a junior athlete because she just missed out on representing Great Britain, only making the reserve team, but now had aspirations to play for a top premier league UK club, and gain selection for the Great Britain U21 squad during her time at university. Sara chose to study sport and exercise science, and decided to attend her specific university because it was well-known for her course, had some of the best sports facilities in the country, and she had been offered a sport scholarship award. Sara moved into university with the mindset that her sport could be the most important area of her dual career, and was eager to train hard and improve.

Following her transition into university, Sara perceived that she settled into independent living with greater ease than expected. This included cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, and budgeting money for herself, after having not lived away from home previously, and relying on her Mum to carry out these activities. The start of 1st year, however, created social challenges for Sara, because she struggled to form close friendships with her new peers in her university halls of residence, and ended up isolating herself from them. This left Sara feeling underwhelmed at her initial university experience, having expected to make friends instantly.

> I was struggling to find similarities and common ground with my flatmates, they weren't really interested in sport and well I was struggling and they were quite outgoing and they were doing sort of drugs or whatever and I'm just not interested in that at all. I didn't want to go out with them because I didn't want to be associated with them because they would be likely with people who are doing the same thing and I wasn't that sort of person…I actually pretended I wasn't in my room half the time.

This may be a common issue that student-athletes experience following their move into university accommodation. Instead, they may be suited to being housed with other athletes where they can bond over commonalities in their sport and avoid peer pressures from those who do not understand their sporting commitments. Aside from feeling lonely and isolated in her new environment, soon after making the transition to university, an issue within her personal life meant that Sara had difficulty focusing on being a student-athlete. This issue was dealing with her parents' recent divorce.

> I've got a lot of stuff going on at home, which I never engage well when I've got other stuff going on, it's just always how I've been…I haven't spoken to my dad in like 4 weeks, so I guess when I feel upset about that, I haven't got anyone to go to here.

Issues within student-athletes' personal lives may have a negative influence on their engagement at university, and for Sara, this issue escalated with the perceived lack of peer support around her. The challenges in Sara's home life also influenced her ability to cope with problems with her new academic course in 1st year.

> I guess with my course and feeling stressed about that, it was just another thing…I just feel like I don't engage as well as I have done at school and at college…I sit there and I'll just be thinking about other things, and he's [lecturer] just gone through a whole lecture and I've not really done anything…I think I'm moving course…one of the modules, I can't do it…I feel like I just won't be able to do it at all…I rang my Mum, but she's not here, and my course mates don't understand because they're all happy with what they're doing.

Alongside the inability to engage with her university course and feeling lonely within her new living environment, as an athlete who had not previously been exposed to training more than once a day, Sara was struggling to keep up with the intense training schedule with her new university club. This created a hectic schedule for Sara, with a regular day alternating between lectures, gym sessions, and hockey training, followed by matches both during the week and at the weekend. Sara frequently rang her Mum explaining how physically and mentally tired she felt and the struggle that she was having keeping up with her university athletic peers, some of who were at an elite-level and competing internationally. All of these factors combined may have contributed to Sara's consideration to drop out of university in the 1st year.

> A couple of weeks ago I was going to drop out…I went home for a little bit and tried to figure it all out…I was so confused about what to do…I've always had like strong support from my Dad, took me to every tournament, took me to training sessions…he was always there…I would have told my Dad [about wanting to drop out of university] and he would have been like ok, this is fine, but now I don't have anyone to turn to here.

Sara had to weigh up the decision of whether to continue at university as a student-athlete or drop out to pursue an alternative career, but was unsure of who to talk through this decision with. Having not developed close relationships with athlete support staff at her university, Sara perceived that they would not be able to provide her with guidance around this important decision.

> I think I needed to do it on my own [make the decision about whether to drop out] because I think the university staff would be biased towards keeping me here…they'd [athlete support staff] be like oh we're going to lose a player and that just wouldn't be beneficial, and I think the university would be like oh you

> don't want to waste your time and stuff like that, so I had to do it on my own…because either way I wouldn't have listened to what they would have said…when I was considering leaving I don't think I got out of bed for a week, I think I just, I was so confused about what to do, I think I actually jut cried in bed for a week.

This suggests that student-athletes may view athlete support staff as being sports performance-focused, as opposed to being concerned about athlete wellbeing. Dropping out of university would, however, mean that Sara would lose her sport scholarship, and she would no longer have the support in place to continue playing hockey to a high level. This could amount to losing the possibility of fulfilling her dream to play for Great Britain. Being at university may present student-athletes with opportunities to prepare for a post-sport career, but may also present opportunities for them to excel in their sport through access to core support services (e.g., strength and conditioning) and financial support, that they may not be able to receive through other channels. Sara's identity had become tied to her role as a sport scholarship athlete at the university, and she feared that losing this would be a challenging feat to accept.

> I've just been trying to prove myself, like I am good enough to have it [sport scholarship], and I don't know whether that's to other people or to myself more. It's kind of provided that motivation to keep going…if I lose it [sport scholarship], I don't know what I would do with myself because I don't know how that would affect my hockey, so then I don't know where I would be at, I think I'd be really lost.

Sara made the decision to continue at university, recognising the opportunity that she had been handed with her sport scholarship award. After eventually approaching academic staff about the struggles she was having engaging with some of the content of her course, Sara was delighted to be given the opportunity to move to a new academic course (Health and Nutrition) that had similar modules, and felt renewed motivation to succeed academically.

Following her move into the 2nd year, Sara had successfully regained her sport scholarship, that included physiotherapy, and strength and conditioning support. Consequently, she was still motivated to excel in hockey, and after a short break over the summer, trained well during the first few weeks of her 2nd year. Sara perceived that she was gradually seeing improvement in her hockey, and the heavy training schedule from her 1st year at university had now paid off. After being invited to attend training sessions at a local external club, Sara was delighted to be asked to sign a contract to join the club, who competed in the English Women's Premier Hockey League. This ticked a box for one of the goals that she wanted to achieve during her university career. This new commitment now meant that Sara would have to balance training and matches for her university and external hockey club, alongside increasing academic demands in the 2nd year.

After a few months of training and competing with her new premier-league hockey club, Sara was feeling deflated and underwhelmed at the experience, "I'm not getting as many minutes as I should, which has taken its toll a little bit…I have confidence in my ability, it's just not getting shown enough". Sara perceived that her external club coach was a difficult person to communicate with, and they hadn't got off on the best foot, as Sara had questioned some of his training drills and methods. Sara didn't want to approach him about how she was feeling about not getting enough minutes during matches due to concerns about being dropped from the team altogether. Although Sara wanted to discuss this issue with someone, she did not feel comfortable disclosing the troubles she had experienced in her sports club with her allocated performance lifestyle advisor at university, because again, they had not established a close relationship.

> We supposedly have a lifestyle advisor…but really, we only see them once a term so it's literally just like a ten-minute brief overview and you don't get that bond really, so you don't divulge anything of relevance really…. they can't really say much, because they don't know you, so there's little they can advise you on, because they don't really know you very well…I mean if they were more frequent, and you actually built up a relationship with them, because at the moment they're there to support but really, support means, for me, support is there like all the time, it's a constant thing, you actually want them to care about you, whereas at the moment, they're doing it to tick a box, they're doing it out of duty.

Poor relationship development in both the university environment and in her club with peers and staff meant that Sara felt isolated and alone with her thoughts and decision-making at university. Having someone close to confide in about these challenges may have been key at this point. During this period of uncertainty around what to do about the lack of enjoyment and opportunities she had within her external hockey club, Sara had a heavy academic load at university, "I've got five exams, so quite a heavy demand…I'm motivated because I don't want to fail…quite a lot of it boils down to these three sets of results, so I need to do well". During a weekend at home away from her academic stress and sporting challenges at university, Sara contacted her peers from school, but realised that they were no longer close.

> I've fell out with a few people…all they want to do is go out and drink…instead of ringing up and saying oh we'll just go out for something to eat, they just don't bother with you…I'm not too bothered because I'd rather do hockey.

Without supportive peers both inside and outside of the university, and limited social opportunities, the dual career experience was isolating and lonely for Sara.

At the start of her 3rd year of university, Sara experienced difficulties keeping up with her demanding training schedule with commitments at both her university and external hockey club. Instead of seeking support on how she could manage the demands or find a collaborative solution, combined with a packed academic schedule, Sara made the decision to leave her semi-professional club. She felt that the transition had not paid off, and felt undervalued by her coach and teammates, many of who were full-time athletes.

> There's been a massive change, I left my professional team. Reasons being I wasn't going to go anywhere with it, the situation wasn't improving and I just hated going to training and it was the pain of my life, so I just decided to leave…I didn't feel like I was progressing because the coach didn't care about me as much. I didn't really feel valued in the team.

With the limited progress in her sport, and inability to form any close and trusting relationships with athlete support staff, Sara decided that for her final year, she would increase her efforts towards performing well academically, and put her sporting goals on hold. Towards the end of her 3rd year of university, Sara expressed concerns about having to move back to her hometown and rebuild a relationship with her Dad, "I feel more distant from my family than before…I'm going to have to be back at home…and I think that's going to be weird and a little bit of a struggle, because I haven't lived there for three years". Ending her time at university, Sara felt underwhelmed that she been unable to make the step up to the next level in her sport, and be in consideration for the Great Britain squad, but pleased that she had managed to finish her course with a 2:1 after wanting to drop out early on in her university career. Reflecting on her time at time at university, Sara believed that the experience had not been what she had expected, due to the limited close relationships that she had formed, and poor social experiences.

> It's been a lot different to what I thought it would be, student life that's been a lot different, I think when you think you're going to be a student, when you think you're going to uni, you think you're going to go to like parties all the time and stuff, big social groups…I've just gone to my lectures and gone [back

> to my flat], not really interacted with them much, not made too many good friends, which I thought I would do.

Sara’s dual career story highlights that the inability to form strong relationships with peers, teammates, coaches, and support staff can make the dual career experience isolating and may be a factor as to why she did not achieve her goals. As there was also the perception that support staff do not truly care about their athletes and their wellbeing, this may suggest that the communication from support staff is currently too focused on performance and not athlete-centred. Sara’s story may also shed light on those student-athletes who are not at the top of the game in their sport, and are spending their university years trying to develop their sport to step up to the next level. These developing student-athletes, however, may not have the same support or resources that elite-level student-athletes entering university already have access to, and their experiences may be equally as challenging as those regularly competing internationally.

5.3.4 Paul’s Story: External Stakeholder Pressures and Sport-Specific Demands

Paul was 19 years old when he entered university and was an international level boxer, competing in the 64kg light welterweight category. At the time of his move to university, he had been competing in his sport for 11 years and had represented England internationally as a junior in a number of different competitions, including the Commonwealth Youth Championships. Paul had won a number of National and British competitions across his successful sporting career, and was now aiming to gain a spot in the Great Britain senior squad. Due to a lack of NGB funding to compete in his sport, Paul decided to attend university to study Pharmacy, following his lifelong interest in science. Paul was keen to excel in his academics alongside boxing, however, his coaching team around him, along with his parents, were keen for him to continue to put boxing first, as he was on the verge of gaining funding to be a full-time athlete at the national training centre. Prior to becoming a university student, Paul had a year out of education to train and compete in his sport on a full-time basis in his hometown, and had a successful year, winning various titles across the country. Comparative to many university students who jump at the opportunity to move away from their family homes, Paul’s university experience was different, as he made the decision to attend a local university and continue to live with his family.

> I wanted to stay at home, obviously with boxing, my Dad’s my coach you see, and I didn’t really want to move away when I went to university...and I looked at the [sport] scholarship scheme and out of the universities that I was going to

> choose, because I could get the scholarship…I chose that one, because it was the best…you've got to be careful who you bring into your team because some people try and change it a bit too much and can disrupt the training that you've got, but it's a good relationship with my Dad [coach]…it's just easier to live at home.

Both Paul and his coaching team were cautious about making changes in his sport, and decided to continue to work with the same team of coaches that were external to the university. Paul also perceived that by not moving into the university environment he would be able to stay dedicated to his sport.

> When you're an athlete, you've got to stay dedicated…I've got my family around me and they know what I want [to achieve in sport]…they only want what's best for me, whereas when you move into university, your friends, they're not too bothered about your sport…they don't know you that well…and trying to go to sleep early, because the different lifestyles, they can influence you [negatively]....when sport does get hard, I speak to my Dad [coach] straight away, so I think if I was living away from home then I suppose it would be a bit more difficult because sometimes, you doubt whether it's for you, because it is so tough, but with the right people around you, you can get through it, because people do drink a lot, it's the culture isn't it, to go out and drink a lot, so it's not a place you want to be in.

This suggests that athletes may hold preconceived negative perceptions of the university environment that it could be detrimental to their sporting performance, and may be a barrier why some athletes choose not to enter university. Following his year out as a full-time athlete, Paul found the transition back into education challenging, "the course is really hard after having a break from studying for a year, I'd forgotten a lot…it was sort of a big change in that you are left to do stuff yourself". For student-athletes that are moving back into education after time away, the educational transition may be particularly challenging, and the period of adaption may be prolonged. Alongside having to adapt back into education, Paul was experiencing his first full season as a senior athlete, and found the new intense training routine combined with study to be challenging in his 1st year.

> What I have realised is that when you go into senior, it's a lot more serious, the punches hurt more and there's more risk of getting seriously hurt, there's just no way you can cut any corners really….you've got to take it a lot more serious, and you know yourself at the end of the day whether you've trained hard

> enough, so that's why it does make it a bit more difficult from when I was in college and I was studying because you could sort of get away with not training that hard, but nowadays the standards gone a lot higher and you know you need to be fully prepared, so it does affect your studies obviously when your training all the time, because you're tired and you've not got enough time to study.

The increase in intensity and frequency in training that student-athletes may experience when moving into the senior level may require more effective time management skills when also combined with university education. Paul found his transition into the senior level in boxing to be particularly stressful, because his sport meant that if he lacked preparation, he could be seriously hurt. Due to the need to increase the intensity and frequency of training during this time, Paul's coaches in his home club, including his Dad, began to put increasing pressure on him to train, and he felt obliged to continue focusing on boxing over university.

> Everyone [external coaches] was just pushing me to box and train and be in the gym and I had to just keep doing that…they want me to do well in boxing and they're not too bothered about the university side...they're only really bothered about me doing well in my sport.

This highlights the importance of external stakeholders and universities working in cooperation to create an optimal balance for the athlete. Because of these external pressures, Paul began struggling to keep up with his academic work in 1st year, but felt apprehensive about approaching academic staff for support. Paul perceived that the academic staff on his particular course were not well informed about his sporting commitments and believed that they would not be willing to help.

> I think the support of lecturers and staff at the university could be better…from my perception of things, because I do a pharmacy degree, it's not really sports related, my lecturers and people involved with my course, they don't really seem too bothered about the sport side of things because it's just about passing, well they're not interested if I'm doing well in sports to be fair, so I'm not too sure when I can receive any [academic support]…I don't think they're really bothered what I do…they don't really know anything about me…the scholarship manager, there's been a couple of times when I've been busy and he's emailed them for me and I've had to miss a few lectures, but ye I do think it would be a lot easier if I did have a sports degree, so that they sort of understood it a bit more…I feel with the pharmacy degree, they're not interested at all.

Academic staff in departments other than sport may rarely come into contact with the sports department at their university, and therefore, may have limited understanding about the student-athletes within their classes and their sporting commitments. Despite being in his 1st year of university, Paul already had the belief that it may have been easier to have started a degree in sport.

> I feel like I'm not on the same wavelength as a lot of people at uni, I've not got many mates in my class, and I think that's just because, it's the personalities really, I just don't get on with them too much, if I had done a sport [course] or something.

Not connecting with his student peers led Paul to feel disconnected from his university, and towards the end of his 1st year, he perceived that his university experience may have been more positive for him if he had taken the same step as many other students and moved onto campus.

> I'll go in [to university] and go to my class or my lectures and then I'll come home or go to the gym, I haven't really got that involved…I would have liked to have lived in [university] and seen that side of it, it would have been a better experience…it would be nice to have some time to do other stuff.

This may suggest that Paul was keen to get involved in other activities and socialise whilst at university, but due to living at home, and the external pressures he experienced to focus on boxing, this meant that he did not have the opportunity to do so. Having the opportunity to socialise and pursue interests outside of sport and education may be key to student-athletes maintaining a healthy wellbeing.

Paul ended his 1st year of university successful in his sporting endeavours, winning a fight by knock out against an up and coming local boxer, that he had been training towards for months. After feeling pressured, however, to have an intense focus on his sport from his Dad and coaches in his club, Paul struggled to keep up with his demanding pharmacy course, and this affected his performance in coursework and exams, failing two modules, "I thought ah I'll just pass this but it didn't go to plan". During the summer, unlike most students who have time to relax and avoid thinking about university, Paul had to try and focus on revision and re-sit two exams that he had failed at the end of the year. Paul placed a lot of pressure on himself at this point in the year, because he desperately wanted to remain on his university course. This pressure was in addition to increased pressure from his sport scholarship manager, who highlighted that Paul would need to attain a certain grade to remain on the programme for the following year. After a few weeks of revision, and in the absence of training, Paul passed his exams, and achieved the 2:2 grade that he needed.

After his move into the 2nd year of university, Paul recognised that he had been naïve with his studies in his first year, and needed to increase his efforts towards his education throughout the year, to avoid the same situation occurring. Upon his transition into 2nd year, Paul noticed a sudden increase in academic expectations, and from the offset found himself loaded with academic work.

> They expect you to know everything about the first year, so you have to make sure that you have your base knowledge for the second year, so you do have to go back and look at what actually went on last year…I think it's a bit more challenging because it comes in waves of work, so there could be a portion of a term that's less busy and then all of them all come at once, and the coursework is definitely a longer word limit so I've found the coursework a lot harder because it's an extra 1,500 plus whatever words than previously, so structuring the whole essay thing for me has been a bit difficult.

Coinciding with these new academic demands, Paul experienced a setback in his sporting career. He gained an injury that meant that he had to take unexpected time out, cancelling upcoming planned fights. During this time, Paul perceived that the physiotherapy available through his sport scholarship programme was a critical resource in helping him to recover, "I've had a couple of injuries recently…a tendon injury in my elbow…I've had half my training load for a couple of weeks". Paul was, however, starting to feel increasing pressure from his Dad to get back into training, and perceived that were a number of challenges associated with being a boxer and a student.

> I think individual sports are definitely different…team sports you've got substitutes, you can ask for a bit of time off, I don't think the levels of fitness have to be that high as they are with boxing, the thing with boxing is, I always think, someone's trying to punch you and hurt you, the only time you get hurt is when you're not fit, so the last thing I want is to go into the ring and end up getting hurt or getting beat because I wasn't fit so, and it's always been my personality to never ever go into a ring unfit so I always do as much as I can fitness wise, whereas if I was in a team game…you can sort of ask to be substituted by your manager, if you say I've got a lot of exams coming up, I need a little break.

Student-athletes in certain sports may perceive increased pressure to train and overcome injuries because their particular sport requires them to be in peak condition to compete, leading to less time to dedicate to their studies. Combined with the pressure to get back to full fitness, Paul received some distressing news regarding the health of his Grandfather, “he has just got diagnosed with dementia and that has had a really big effect…it’s just a bit worrying”. The news put added stress onto Paul’s dual career and he became increasingly concerned about his ability to cope with all of the demands that he was due to face in his 3rd and final year.

Consistent with his 2nd year, Paul found that the academic demands at the start of 3rd year rapidly increased, “I’ve noticed already that the workload has increased, exams and reports that are due on the same weeks, so obviously juggling them two and training alongside it is very difficult.” During his preparation for the national championships, Paul experienced issues specifically related to his sport of boxing, which he believed had a negative influence on his ability to study.

> The whole thing it’s been really hard, I was training all the time and then dieting, that played a big part in it, and if I’ve got low energy and I’ve got to go and try and concentrate on revision…my energy levels were down, it was hard to do stuff, like I didn’t feel like I wanted to go out and speak to people, I felt a bit moody, I just wanted to go to the gym, and go home and go to bed or something, rather than going to uni and getting some support…or go and find some support, or go and study with people in my class, I didn’t really want to go and see them…I’ve realised how much that adds to the effects, because this week I’ve been eating what I want and I feel one hundred times better.

This situation for Paul highlights that a dual career can have different challenges depending on the particular sport, “it can get stressful and stuff, when I was making weight, the first time I made the weight in a while, I didn’t know if I was going to make it a few days before”. Student-athletes going through similar situations may need increased emotional support and guidance during these difficult periods, and preparing in advance would be beneficial. The stress of dieting and the pressures that Paul’s coaches were putting on him to make weight and be a successful athlete, alongside pressures from academic staff and his scholarship manager to achieve certain grades for his final 3rd year exams became overwhelming. The stress that Paul experienced from these pressures ultimately lead to a minor car accident shortly before his first fight in the national championships.

> There's a lot of things on my mind as well that's not been good, it's distracted me really, I've just not had much luck, I've not been the luckiest really, like I crashed my car and stuff…I just went into the back of someone, it was because my mind was elsewhere and I just dropped my phone for two seconds…my mind can sometimes just go into overload and I'll be somewhere else, focusing on completely different things, rather than just one thing, but I think I just need to learn from that as well and break things down and just focus on one thing, what I'm doing at that time, instead of thinking about what I'm going to be doing in the next hour and what's coming up.

This demonstrates how stress and overthinking caused by a dual career, and constantly being under pressure to achieve from others, can reflect itself onto other areas of life, having the potential to result in dangerous situations. This experience for Paul highlights the importance of why it is imperative to help athletes manage their dual careers, because pressures from a number of stakeholders who are not in communication with one another can lead student-athletes to become overwhelmed with multiple demands.

Following this incident, Paul had to immediately refocus his energy onto final preparations for the national championships. Unfortunately for Paul, his national championships ended when he lost on a points decision in the quarter-finals, meaning that he would not have a shot at selection for the Great Britain senior squad. Following his final fight of the event on the Saturday, Paul had an important exam on the Monday following, and had not had time to prepare effectively, because he had been prioritising boxing in the weeks leading up to the fight. Because of this, Paul was not optimistic about how he performed in this exam.

> I found it hard as well after the final fight had finished, knowing that I had an exam on Monday…I'll just try and pass as many as I can sort of thing, because I do think it's really hard doing a 3-hour exam when you've got a fight on the weekend.

One of the challenges of being a student-athlete may be learning to channel emotions after a sporting event and switching focus straight back onto education. Surprisingly for Paul, despite his perception that he would not do well, he passed this exam, and was pleased, despite the low grade. Paul believed that during his time at university, he felt obliged to continue training hard to be a successful boxer, because his parents had financially supported him throughout.

> My Dad's a massive support, I was thinking as well, like financially he's helped me, because I live at home, and he'll just help me if I need any food or if I need anything, whereas if I moved out, I'd probably get a part-time job you see, and I don't think I'd be able to go to uni, go to work and then do as much training as I was doing, so I think that helped me…that financial support, that's the thing, if I did need to get a job, there's no way I'd be able to balance it all, because I've found it difficult anyway.

Sources of financial support may be key factors to the continuation of a dual career, and without such support, student-athletes may be forced to consider alternative options (e.g., drop out of sport). This financial support may have also been an additional pressure for Paul to contend with, in the knowledge that his parents had desperately wanted him to succeed as a boxer. On reflection, Paul believed that being at university had not lived up to his expectations, and that living at home had isolated him, "I have missed out on the student lifestyle definitely…I could have lived on campus and lived in halls or something". The experience of intense training for the national championships during his 3rd year, however, had inspired Paul to want to become a professional boxer, and he realised that his passion for boxing far outweighed his passion for pharmacy. Pressures to transition into full-time sport, however, also came from external influences, because Paul's Dad and members of his coaching team were also keen for him to make this step.

> This competition that I've been in, I was training all the time and I really enjoyed it, and I've been speaking to a few people who want me to turn professional, so what I'm thinking about doing…is just going full-time, being a full-time athlete and just seeing how that goes, so ye I'm thinking about doing that.

In sum, Paul's dual career demonstrates that external pressures (e.g., to put training before university) can cause significant stress in the dual career. Paul's story also highlights that a number of individuals within the dual career environment, such as academic staff, can negatively influence student-athlete experiences, when there is no perception of support or understanding of student-athlete commitments. In addition, sport specific factors (e.g., dieting in boxing) can have a significant effect on the ability to focus on education. University support staff may benefit from being aware of these potential differences and individualise support to athletes accordingly.

5.3.5 My Story (Autoethnographic Data): Reflections on Why I didn't Excel Further in My Sport at University

Entering university, I was one of the best female table tennis players in Great Britain, had visited more countries than most people could only dream of, and regularly exhibited the capital letters of 'England' across the back of my shirt. Upon graduation from university, proudly wearing my gown and mortar, and to the cheers of the crowd, I marched across the stage to collect my first-class honours degree certificate, that was a token of my efforts over the last 3 years. Living away from home, paying my own bills, and organising my overflowing schedule, I had gained independence, made friends for life, and was the bearer of a number of titles and awards that I had gained across the years. Although my time being at university as a student-athlete was enjoyable, I left confused over my future in the sport, had a broken identity from an England player to someone not good enough, and the perception that I could have achieved more. Looking in from the outside, my time at university seemed successful, as one internet article from my university's website quoted, "Emma has been chosen to carry the Olympic torch for her extraordinary ability to balance her studies and elite sport." Winning a number of British events, a high England ranking, and gaining 1st class marks, had earned me the prestigious honour of being a 2012 Olympic torch bearer for the university, an extraordinary experience that I am forever grateful for and will never forget! However, instead of making waves in my sporting career during my time at university, the opposite had occurred. Cracks appeared in my international table tennis career, and I had slowly watched my ranking crumble, whilst younger athletes and those not at university, took the top spots. Upon reflection, I can't help but dwell on whether this was my fault and whether I should have acted differently, or the whether I should have expected more support external to what my university sport scholarship programme could offer.

With the words 'elite athlete programme' etched across my back, I recognised that being one of the top sport scholarship athletes at my university was a big achievement in itself. Being on the sport scholarship programme gave me access to a comprehensive support package, including a full strength and conditioning programme, physiotherapy, a financial bursary, nutrition, and performance lifestyle support. Support services integral to be an elite level performer. A cut from UK sport in recent years also meant that my governing body received limited government funding for its elite players, meaning that individuals like myself faced an endless battle to support our athletic careers through other means. These cuts meant during my first year at university, it was the first time that I had access to a full programme of support services. Striding through the sliding doors of the glistening new million-pound sports centre in my 1st year and catching a glimpse of my picture displayed amongst the rest of the university's sport scholar cohort, I felt a sense of pride, and that I had perceived value within the university's sport system. I had everything in place to allow me to become a better athlete, and develop myself personally through doing my degree. There was, however, one piece of the jigsaw was missing.

Despite this internal support at university, I craved more attention and coaching support from my governing body. Being at university had created a major challenge within my sport, and that was my distanced relationship with my governing body. A brick wall between me and them. Instead of well-established communication between my university and my NGB, they operated as two separate entities. Having once been a staple member of the national squad and competing on the world stage, including at the World Senior Team Championships in China, one of the most prestigious events in the world, I was now regularly competing against recreational players in the university leagues in our sports hall on campus. Such experiences had no benefit to my development, yet were integral to remain part of the sport scholarship programme. I was winning, but at what cost? A university magazine news article stated, "Emma is ranked fourth in table tennis in England, she recently won two gold medals at the British University National Championships, however she will miss out representing Great Britain at 2012 as there is such a lot of competition to get into the team." Success for my university was winning these events, but success to me was much bigger.

Having chosen to undertake a dual career at university, I felt that I was not a priority, and being at university was perceived to be a lack of commitment to my sporting development (McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006). My efforts trying to combine my sport with university studies felt worthless if I had no opportunities to excel further in table tennis. "Is the daily hassle worth it?" Not having a paid coach within the university, as most of the other teams did, was a major disadvantage, and my bank account was swiftly emptied each month through coaching and petrol expenses. "Am I in the wrong?" I felt uncertain around whether I should have been more courageous in reaching out for support, asking for help, and admitting that my sporting career was at a standstill. "Am I satisfied with never playing for England again?" A question that regularly crossed my mind. What gain was there by trying to prove that I could make it alone?

5.4 Discussion

The aim of the current part of the thesis was to examine, longitudinally, the experiences of UK student-athletes during their time at university. These experiences were communicated through a form of story-telling, and demonstrate the individuality of dual careers. Although student-athletes recognised that going to university could have positive outcomes for them, including preparation for a post-sport career (e.g., Borggrefe & Cachay, 2012), and access to support services from sport scholarship programmes (e.g., financial bursary to help them pay for sporting and living expenses), few positive experiences came to light during the narratives. This may suggest that although there is value in athletes going to university, there is a need to improve the process. The current study highlights that a university dual career can be a stressful few years, and recognises the importance of developing strong relationships with support providers to help with important decisions, and reduce stress. In addition, social support (e.g., peer support systems) is a key factor across the dual career, and when this is not provided, student-athletes may be vulnerable to social isolation. Injury also led to stress within the dual career, and had the potential to negatively influence student-athletes outside of their sporting environment (e.g., poor sleep quality, academic stress). The results of the current study also suggest that building collaborative stakeholder environments (e.g., internal and external to the university) may be beneficial in maintaining positive wellbeing for student-athletes. Student-athletes may also experience sport-specific features within their dual careers that can negatively influence their education (e.g., transitions into dieting phases in boxing). Furthermore, resilience may be a key psychological factor in a dual career, and mental fortitude training may be of benefit to student-athletes to emphasise that feeling vulnerable to stress is not a weakness. Finally, student-athletes may experience similar stressors within their education at akin time points (e.g., increased academic workload at the start of the second and third year), however, sporting stressors across the dual career were varied due to the different characteristics of student-athletes' sports, and their level of competition.

5.4.1 Part B Advancements to Knowledge

- Poor peer relationships during university can be due to a number of factors, including difference in values, limited understanding of sporting commitments, and not living within close proximity of a university.
- Experiencing injury during a university dual career can lead to additional challenges for student-athletes, including, difficulty sleeping due to limited physical activity, and increased academic stress.
- The inconsistent messages (e.g., to focus on different areas) between stakeholders that are internal and external to the university can be overwhelming, lead to identity confusion, general disappointment, and poor performance in sport and academics.

- There is a potential link between student-athletes entering sport-specific transition phases (e.g., dieting in boxing for a fight) and poor educational performances (e.g., low mood leads to an inability to focus on revision for exams).
- Living at a national training centre alongside attending university can lead to low academic motivation, fatigue, and social isolation.
- Student-athletes experienced barriers in accessing and seeking social support during their time at university (e.g., limited knowledge about how a support service could help them).
- Minimal effort applied to education within the 1st year of university may lead to issues managing time in the 2nd and 3rd year, and may be due to poor development of key skills (e.g., managing and prioritising time).

Within the current study, student-athletes recognised the positives of undertaking a university dual career. Literature has outlined the benefits that higher education can have for athletes, including providing more effective coping strategies when approaching the end of the sports career (e.g., Cecić Eprič et al., 2004; Torregrosa et al., 2015), and enabling athletes to become less susceptible to burnout (e.g., Chen, Snyder, & Magner, 2010; Price, Morrison, & Arnold, 2010). In the current study, the perceived benefits highlighted during the dual career included access to core support services, financial assistance, and flexibility of time to pursue sport, suggesting that the majority of perceived benefits for student-athletes were based around being able to support the athletic career. These benefits correspond with how many of the student-athletes in the current study approached their dual career as for most, commitments and effort put forth for the athlete role often outweighed that of the student role, even during times when the student role required increased attention (e.g., Paul continued to put his sporting role first during his final year university exams).This finding is in line with previous studies that identified an underlying assumption that sport comes first in the dual career (Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Pink, Lonie, & Saunders, 2018). These findings may also suggest that many athletes enter university for reasons aside from having the opportunity to enhance personal development and create opportunities for a successful post-sport career, that may lead to poor experiences.

Despite student-athletes recognising the potential benefits to their experience (e.g., Chen et al., 2010; Petitpas et al., 2009; Reints, 2011), the narratives in the current study highlight that a university dual career can be a pressured and stressful few years. Taking this into account, one of the key areas of support that could be of benefit to student-athletes throughout their time at university is performance lifestyle or mentoring support. The narratives in the current study, however, highlight that student-athletes may have poorly developed relationships with performance lifestyle advisors, due to limited contact, apprehension about approaching advisors for support, and minimal understanding of the benefits of this type of support (e.g., highlighted by Sara's poor relationship development with support providers and my limited understanding of performance lifestyle support in my autoethnographic narrative). These factors meant that student-athletes in the current study did not see the profit of performance lifestyle support. As the narratives, however, demonstrate that student-athletes regularly felt isolated, stressed over key decisions (e.g., dropping out of university), experienced personal challenges (e.g., parental divorce), and felt undervalued in their environments, in line with recent studies (e.g., Devaney et al., 2017), embracing the use of counselling approaches (e.g., a person-centred approach) with student-athletes may be of worth over practical approaches (e.g., time management techniques). Further to this, the importance of developing meaningful and trusting practitioner-athlete relationships to support student-athletes through personal and emotional issues has been highlighted in previous literature (e.g., Devaney et al., 2017; Hoffman & Loughead, 2016). The current research aligns with these findings about relationship development, suggesting that increased contact between student-athlete and advisor may be of value during university. In addition, the narratives suggest that performance lifestyle support or intervention may be particularly key at certain time points, including; following the transition into university (i.e., helping with adjustment to new demands), during perceived times of stress (e.g., important sporting and academic events occurring simultaneously), adverse sporting events (e.g., loss of funding, non-selection for major event, injury), following personal dilemmas (e.g., family health concerns), the start of the second and third year (e.g., increased academic demands), and before the transition out of university (i.e., making decisions about future).

Social support is suggested to be influential in attaining a well-balanced dual career (Henriksen & Mortensen, 2014). In the current study, in addition to poor relationships with support providers influencing the dual career experience, when student-athletes did not form strong peer relationships during their time at university, the narratives suggest that this may lead to social isolation and low wellbeing (e.g., Sara failed to develop strong peer relationships and felt lonely at university). Previous literature has suggested that the time demands of a dual career may lead to social isolation for student-athletes (Comeaux et al., 2011; Ford, 2007). In the current study, however, factors that influenced poor peer relationships in a dual career, included, limited similarities with new peers that have different values (e.g., engaged in drug-taking behaviours), peers who did not understand student-athletes' sporting commitments, and not living within close proximity of the university that led to the inability to engage socially. Issues such as relationship troubles are suggested to be a higher source of stress for athletes than non-athletes (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005), and may be due to the factors outlined above that student-athletes in the current study experienced. In the current study, academic staff were perceived to be unsupportive of the dual career, and had limited understanding about sporting commitments. Parsons (2013) found that professors' often have negative perceptions towards student-athletes, that can be a stressor for this population. Supporting findings of the current study, improving relationships with academic staff was also a key recommendation within McKenna and Dunstan-Lewis's (2004) study on UK student-athletes.

Previous literature has reported that during the university dual career, student-athletes may have access to increased social support than at the school level, including that from performance lifestyle advisors (e.g., Brown et al. 2015; Aquilina & Henry, 2010). Advancing these previous studies, the current study found that there were barriers to accessing and seeking social support for student-athletes during their time at university. These barriers included holding limited knowledge about how a support service could help them (e.g., limited understanding about what performance lifestyle support can offer), limited help-seeking behaviours when they were struggling with dual career demands, and not living on campus. Further barriers included the perception that support staff would not understand their commitments (e.g., Paul perceived that academic staff did not understand dual career stressors) or would only be concerned with their sports performance (e.g., Sara perceived that athlete support staff were focused on sports performance and not wellbeing). Research has suggested that student-athletes may be hesitant about seeking support with transitions, such as the move out of university (Blinde & Stratta, 1992), however, in the current study, limited help-seeking behaviours extended to the student-athletes' whole time at university.

Injury was a pre-cursor to a multitude of new problems within the dual career within the current research, and was particularly prevalent within Georgina's narrative. Price et al. (2010), however, found that having a balanced life throughout the sporting career (i.e., taking on different roles such as being a student) helped athletes to cope more effectively with non-normative events, such as injury. When student-athletes experienced injury in the current study, this led to increased levels of motivation to succeed in sport, and the perception that they needed to recover quickly (e.g., Paul perceived that no other athletes could take his place and Georgina perceived that she needed to perform well to gain selection). This response to injury is in keeping with Tracey (2003), who highlights that thoughts and affect changed over time to view the injury as a challenge that athletes approached with a positive attitude. Despite this, advancing previous literature, injury led to new challenges in the dual career for student-athletes, including, difficulty sleeping due to limited physical activity, and an enhanced emphasis on education during the injury (e.g., Aquilina, 2009) led to increased academic stress. Poor sleep quality has previously been reported as being a stressor for student-athletes (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005; Hickey & Kelly, 2005), but has not been highlighted in relation to injury. In addition, an athlete who is stressed has been reported to be injury-prone and to take longer than normal to recover after injury (e.g., Gould, Feltz, Horn & Weiss, 1982). Academic stressors may play a role in reoccurring injuries for student-athletes, and demonstrates a key challenge that injured student-athletes may experience. In the current study, challenges with injury were enhanced when student-athletes lost financial support from NGBs and university sport scholarship programmes during this critical period, and led to feelings of being undervalued. Research highlights that cooperation between stakeholders in a dual career support environment, such as universities and NGBs, is necessary for an optimal recovery from injury (Defruyt, Wylleman, De Brandt, Stambulova, & Linnér, 2017).

UK student-athletes in the current study also experienced stress when there was a disconnect between their university commitments (e.g., academic commitments, university sports club commitments) and sporting commitments external to their university (e.g., within clubs, NGB expectations, national training centre commitments). As research suggests there are mutual benefits to supporting sports performance and personal development (e.g., university education) simultaneously (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006), a collaborative approach amongst universities and stakeholders' that are external to universities (e.g., NGBs), may help student-athletes to have satisfactory dual careers and improve opportunities for flexible arrangements. This disconnect within athletes' support circle was a key factor within Ben's, Paul's, and my own autoethnographic story, whereby NGB support at university (e.g., training camps, financial support) may have enhanced my sports career. Recent talent development research conducted with Swedish university student-athletes supports the application of a collaborative stakeholder dual career environment (Linnér, Stambulova & Henriksen, 2017). The current study advances previous literature by suggesting that when such arrangements are not in place, and student-athletes struggle to meet the expectations and pressures (e.g., Paul experienced pressure to focus more intently on the sport aspect of his dual career) of internal (e.g., academic staff, university sport scholarship managers) and external stakeholders (e.g., sports clubs, parents, NGBs), this inconsistency can be overwhelming, lead to identity confusion (e.g., Ben was uncertain where his priority should lie), general disappointment in the experience, and poor academic and sporting performance. Literature has suggested that the praxis of dual career development can be challenging due to factors such as sports clubs and structures that encourage a singular focus on sport (e.g., Christensen & Sørensen, 2009). This singular focus on sport was evident in the current study, when having to relocate to a national training centre, combined with the mind-set that sport came first, led to education being neglected.

Environmental factors such as social support and the collaboration of stakeholders may not be the only important factors within a dual career, because the narratives in the current study also suggest that personal qualities such as resilience may be influential. Resilience has been defined as ‘‘the capacity of individuals to cope successfully with significant change, adversity or risk’’ (Lee & Cranford, 2008, p. 213). Throughout university, student-athletes in the current study experienced a number of challenging situations, that required overcoming to successfully move through their dual careers. These included adapting to new training environments, poor sporting performances, poor academic results, overcoming personal difficulties (e.g., limited close relationships, parental divorce, family health troubles), feelings of wanting to drop out of university, serious injuries, not being selected for major events, financial challenges, and sport-specific challenges (e.g., dieting). During some of the challenges discussed above, student-athletes coped positively with the adversity and developed an enhanced focus (e.g., Georgina’s injury made her realise what she wanted to achieve in sport during her time at university). Sarkar et al. (2015) suggests that rather than eliciting prolonged maladaptive behavioural responses (e.g., anger over negative experiences such as injury), these intense negative emotions appear to fuel athletes’ subsequent effort and application. For other student-athletes in the current study, however, challenges proved hard to overcome (e.g., Sara dropped out of her sports team because of a poor relationship with her coach and perception that she could not keep up with academic work). Arora (2015)’s doctoral thesis exploring resiliency in US student-athletes suggested that being resilient in the face of everyday stressors was perceived to be a key factor in the lives of student-athletes, yet results also signified a lower level of resilience among student-athletes compared to non-athletes. Considering that student-athletes in the current study and those from previous literature (e.g., Arora, 2015) have demonstrated low levels of resilience in the face of challenges, student-athletes may benefit from undertaking a resiliency training programme during their time at university, also described as mental fortitude training

(Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016). Fletcher and Sarkar (2016) state that within the programme, emphasising that feeling vulnerable to stress (e.g., when student-athletes experience high demands in sport and education simultaneously) and struggling to cope with adversity (e.g., failing exams or performing poorly in a major sporting event), should not be viewed as a sign of weakness, and instead there could be open discussions about this topic being a sign of strength, and the potential beginning of positive change.

Student-athletes may experience sport-specific demands that can influence the dual career, and supported by previous research, the type of sport has been suggested to influence dual career development of athletes (e.g., Tekavc et al., 2015). Sport-specific features (e.g., the dangerous nature of boxing means that there is increased pressure on athletes to be fit for each fight) combined with academic demands and pressures from stakeholders can be highly-demanding on a student-athletes' coping abilities. The potential link between entering sport-specific transition phases (e.g., dieting in boxing for a fight) at university, and the influence that they may have on education (e.g., Paul experienced low mood from dieting that led to poor educational focus) advances dual career literature. Aquilina (2009) recognised that some student-athletes prioritise their dual careers differently depending on their sport (e.g., golfers prioritised education in the knowledge that they did not have the added pressure to peak at a certain age, and could maintain their athletic career for many years after university). In the current study, a student-athlete boxer experienced pressure to train excessively, and may be due to the knowledge that within boxing, athletes have limited time to achieve their sporting peak. The current study is supported by Aquilina (2009) who suggested that student-athletes in combat sports (e.g., Paul's career as a boxer) may be disadvantaged, because the culture that they are embedded in does not necessarily promote education, making their dual career difficult to manage (Aquilina, 2009). In addition, the need to relocate to a national training centre to enter a funded programme as part of a sports developmental pathway is an additional sport-specific feature that can influence dual career experiences. In the current study, the move to a national training centre, previously highlighted as a significant event in an athletes' career (Poczwardowski et al., 2014), and for Ben, led to isolation from student peers and a low wellbeing. Additionally, long travelling distances between the university and national training centre, highlighted in Ben's story, may lead to low academic motivation and poor attendance of classes.

Finally, due to the longitudinal nature of the current study, it was possible to assess changes and events that occurred across similar points within the university dual career (Holland et al., 2004). For example, minimal effort applied to education within the 1st year of university may lead to issues managing time in the 2nd and 3rd year, when student-athletes may experience a gradual increase in academic demands, (e.g., longer essays, more classes, more assignments at the same time), that was particularly prevalent at the start of the 2nd and 3rd year. Limited focus on education within the 1st year may lead to student-athletes not developing the key skills associated with discipline in organising study times, that has been reported to lead to student-athletes losing track of their two careers and suffering negative repercussions (Aquilina, 2009). Nonetheless, the different experiences that student-athletes had within their sport during their dual careers due to the different types of sport, different developmental pathways, and sporting level, meant that they experienced stressors within their sport at differing time points. Dual career support providers may benefit from mapping the competition and training schedules of different sports and assess how these may interact with academic demands.

5.4.2 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

A notable strength of the current study is that it is the first to examine the whole university experience for student-athletes, longitudinally. By capturing the whole experience, it was possible to assess the different experiences that student-athletes have throughout their university dual career. The use of create narratives enabled the communication of data that may capture the interest of readers and have the power to resonate with them (Fasting & Sand, 2015). Student-athletes and stakeholders (e.g., coaches, performance lifestyle advisors) may be able to read the stories and draw parallels with either their own situations or the situations of the student-athletes that they are supporting. In doing so, they may be able to use the stories to assess how they could act on their current situation. For example, if a student-athlete experiences sport-specific demands, a performance lifestyle advisor may be able to guide student-athletes in planning for these specific phases, and liaise with academic staff to provide flexibility in their academic commitments during this time. A final strength of the current study is that it demonstrated the diversity of student-athlete experiences through the presentation of dual career stories that had a golden thread running throughout. The diversity and individuality of the dual career experience is evident and highlights the need for support to be individualised (e.g., one student-athlete may need increased support in prioritising time, whereas another may need increased emotional support).

There are limitations in this section of the thesis that should be noted. First, due to time constrictions to conduct the current thesis, a wavelength longitudinal approach was taken, whereby student-athletes in their 1st, 2nd and 3rd years of study were interviewed for an academic year, and then their stories were pieced together to create a whole dual career story.

The stories may have looked different if the same student-athletes had been interviewed across three years, because they could have experienced different demands to the story of the student-athlete that they were pieced with. A further limitation may be that only student-athletes were interviewed longitudinally during data collection, and there was no input from stakeholders at these times. Results of the current part of the thesis suggest, however, that stakeholders are influential in the dual career experience (e.g., limited stakeholder support left student-athletes feeling undervalued), and capturing the opinions, perceptions, and experiences of stakeholders (e.g., performance lifestyle advisors, NGB coaches) around how they perceive student-athletes are coping may have added further depth to the data.

The findings from the current part of the thesis found there to be sport-specific demands within a university dual career. For example, student-athletes who compete in boxing may enter dieting phases that influence academic motivation, and student-athletes in individual sports may feel isolated at university due to having no teammate support networks. Future research may benefit from exploring the specific demands and cultures of sports (Aquilina, 2009), and their effect on the dual career. The need to explore sport-specific dual career development pathways was also highlighted by Tekavc et al. (2015), who found differences between the dual careers of basketballers and swimmers (e.g., type of study programme selected). An exploration of sport-specific factors and the influence of culture, may enable support providers to tailor their support services accordingly (e.g., footballers may be in embedded in a culture where education is viewed negatively and could influence academic engagement).

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the current part of the thesis adds to previous dual career literature by assessing the whole university experience for student-athletes using a narrative approach. By doing so, the study highlighted how stressful being at university can be for student-athletes, and the need to improve the process for them, alongside recognition of the divergence of university student-athlete experiences. Although the experience is not easy, student-athletes recognised the opportunities that being at university provided for them (e.g., sport scholarship support services). The narratives presented a number of key themes, many of which advance dual career research, that may be of benefit to support providers, and these implications will be advanced in the general discussion. Key findings include the need to embrace collaborative arrangements amongst university stakeholders and stakeholders outside of the university (e.g., NGBs), the development of close practitioner-athlete relationships, the need to address the barriers that student-athletes experience in seeking social support at university, and how sport-specific factors can underpin the experiences that student-athletes have at university. Finally, part B highlighted that when the academic part of the university dual career is viewed to be secondary to sport by student-athletes and stakeholders, or the benefits of university are perceived to be related to the continuation of the athletic career (e.g., gaining a sport scholarship), this perception may result in poor academic motivation, performance and negative experiences. These findings correspond with those of Ronkainen, Ryba, Littlewood, and Selänne (2018) who found that when coaches viewed education as a back-up plan, athletes' interest and engagement in education decreased.

The current part of the thesis (part B) focused on the experiences that student-athletes have when they are at university. The next chapter (part C) will investigate the experiences of student-athletes as they transition out of university, including the pre-transition perceptions they hold about life after university, and how they prepare for the transition. Part C will also examine the paths that student-athletes take when they leave university, and the challenges that they experience adapting to their new lives. Gaining insight on the transition out of university for student-athletes may help to inform dual career support programmes.

Chapter Six: Part C

"Into the Big Wide World" - UK Student-Athletes and Stakeholders Perspectives of the Transition Out of University

6.1 Introduction to Part C

Part B demonstrated that being at university can provide student-athletes with a number of opportunities (e.g., increased access to support services), however, the experience can be challenging, and there is a need to improve the process. Additionally, part B highlighted that student-athletes can experience a number of different factors in their dual career that can influence their overall experience, including injury and external stakeholder pressures. Overarching themes amongst student-athlete experiences in part B provide a number of implications for dual career support providers, including the need to develop a collaborative stakeholder approach (Linnér et al., 2017), and the development of close practitioner-athlete relationships (Devaney et al., 2017).

Building on from parts A and B that focused on the transition into, and experiences during university for student-athletes, part C will focus on the end of the dual career experience, and investigate the transition out of university. Currently, literature on the transition out of university for student-athletes has been limited. The transition out of university from a general student perspective, however, considers this period to be critical in terms of future career success (e.g., Koen et al., 2012). Abandoning life as a student is suggested to be a challenging and overwhelming experience (e.g., Kenny & Sirin, 2006; Murphy et al., 2010), because individuals have to become acquainted with new norms and skills within a vocation, and manage possible disappointment over unmet expectations (e.g., perception they would have more personal responsibility in their new vocation; e.g., Holton & Russell, 1997; Perrone & Vickers, 2003). These challenges associated with moving out of university can create psychological responses, such as anxiety, shock, and depression (e.g., Perrone & Vickers, 2003). Research conducted on the general student population has described transition experiences in relation to moving from university into the workplace (e.g., Perrone & Vickers, 2003). There are currently, however, few studies that have explored the experiences of student-athletes as they make the transition out of university, and whether they follow a similar path into full-time employment or make alternative decisions. Considering that student-athletes also have their sport to factor into the decision-making process, the transition out of university may be more complex than the general student population.

Studies that have investigated the experiences of student-athletes as they transition out of university are mainly represented by North American populations (e.g., Moreland-Bishop, 2009). These studies have suggested that for the majority of university student-athletes (up to 99%), their elite-level competitive sports careers will terminate at the same time as leaving university (e.g., Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Ogilvie & Howe, 1986). The challenges that student-athletes may face when they make the transition out of university include a loss of structure due to their lives being dictated by others (Moreland-Bishop, 2009), and isolation following the loss of support networks, including coaches and teammates (Moreland-Bishop, 2009). In addition, due to an intense focus on sport whilst at university, athletes engaged in limited career planning that lead to increased challenges gaining employment (e.g., Lally & Kerr, 2005). Despite the challenges that student-athletes my face, literature suggests that they are often hesitant about seeking help with the emotions that they experience when transitioning out of university and potentially away from competitive sport (e.g., Blinde & Stratta, 1992).

As student-athletes in the US experience sporting participation that is closely linked to their education throughout their athletic career (e.g., Despres, Brady, & McGowan, 2008; Hoch, 2006; Scholand, 2007), when leaving university, they may lose the opportunity to continue competing to a high level. In the UK, however, because athletes often develop via a club-based system (Rubingh & Broeke, 1998), and compete for sports clubs that are external to their university, they may have increased opportunities to continue competing to a high level following their transition out of university. Taking this difference in developmental pathways into consideration, student-athletes in the UK may have divergent experiences to US athletes when they leave university. For example, if student-athletes in the UK continue to compete in their sports clubs when they leave university, they may not experience the challenge of losing coaches, and having to forge a life that is independent of competitive sport. Instead, student-athletes in the UK may experience challenges associated with balancing their sport alongside new pursuits (e.g., a vocation) following university, that may require differing types of preparation and social support (e.g., seeking flexible employment).

In sum, the aim of part C was to examine the experiences of student-athletes as they transition out of university. This included the exploration of pre-transition perceptions that student-athletes hold about leaving university, the paths student-athletes take upon their exit from university, the challenges they experience following transition, and how the transition is managed.

6.2 Method

Data from 13 student-athletes in a number of different sports (e.g., rowing, judo, basketball, aerial skiing) across 8 UK universities from data collection points 2, 9, and 10 were used in the write up of part C (see Table H.1 in Appendix H). These included data from the final data collection phase of longitudinal interviews with 2 third year student-athletes (whose data was presented mainly in part B) who were just about to make the transition out of university (highlighting perceptions about making the transition that was not the focus of part B), and one-off interviews with student-athletes about to make transition out of university. Data were also used from student-athletes in a focus group who were at university (mainly presented in part A) who highlighted plans they had for when they left university (that was not the focus of part A), and data from one-off interviews with athletes who had made the transition out of university in the last 2 years (highlighting the pathways they had taken and challenges faced). Student-athletes were aged between 21 and 24. Data from 7 stakeholders (e.g., head coaches, director of sport) from data collection point 11 who have a role in the transition process were also used in the write up of part C (see Table H.1 in Appendix H). Data were collected through focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and supplemented with autoethnographic data (written separately) from the author, that discussed my experiences of the pathway that I took when I left university. Details of the data collection process and the procedures used are outlined in chapter 3.

6.3 Results

Results suggest that when student-athletes approach the transition out of university, they feel excitement and relief at being able to leave education after a challenging few years in their dual career. Student-athletes, however, felt uncertain and anxious about their lives post-university, and anticipated that they may experience a number of challenges (e.g., reduced motivation to compete in their sport). Despite a high level of uncertainty, student-athletes engaged in limited preparation for the transition out of university. Student-athletes in the current study took five different paths when they left university (e.g., full-time sport), that led to a number of new challenges, including the loss of core support services from university sport scholarship programmes (e.g., financial support), challenges associated with leaving university at the same time as leaving restricted age groups, and difficulty adapting to a new identity. The support process in place for student-athletes during their transition out of university is not well developed. Student-athletes are aware that there are support providers in place to talk through the transition process, however, support providers did not actively approach the topic of transition, highlighting an incongruence between support required and student-athletes being proactive in seeking support. Finally, parental support (e.g., financial and tangible support) may once again become a key support source for student-athletes when they have left university to continue funding their athletic careers.

6.3.1 Pre-Transition Thoughts: Anxiety and Uncertainty

Data from athlete experiences. Shortly before making the transition out of university, student-athletes were excited about leaving education, but held concerns about their next steps.

6.3.1.1 Excitement and relief at leaving university. Student-athletes expressed their excitement and relief that their time at university had drawn to a close. Marie said, “I’m excited for it to be over…I think I’m just ready to finish uni…I am a bit nervous as well you know”. Ellie also highlighted her excitement at being able to leave education and focus on new ventures, “I’m quite excited, I’ve kind of got a little bit of a plan together to hopefully go to the Olympics in Tokyo, so I will be full-time sailing over the next four years”. Joanna reflected on how she felt just prior to leaving university:

> I was definitely excited about it, I think I’d come to uni and the final year was hard, to do my dissertation, also to compete at U23’s, I didn’t spend much time on campus at all, so I think a part of me was really looking forward to leaving.

Student-athletes may perceive that being a university student has restricted their opportunities to develop further in their sport, and may be excited to remove this aspect from their lives. David stated, “I was quite looking forward to it really [leaving university], I was at the point where I was kind of done with education”.

6.3.1.2 Stepping into the unknown. Despite being excited and relieved about leaving university education, the transition out of university was deemed by current student-athletes to be nerve-wracking, and one that would require them to make significant decisions about the direction of their lives. Marie stated, “it’s just the big transition of going from university and trying to support yourself, keeping up your sport, and making big life choices about what you want to do”. Bradley also expressed his concern about having to make important life decisions, “going into the big wide world, it’s quite daunting…everyone’s kind of going to be going away, getting jobs, and having, I don’t know how to put it, real lives”. The perception that they will be moving into “real life” may imply that student-athletes perceive that undertaking a university dual career is unique situation to be in. Student-athletes also held concerns around what life would entail without having education as a consistent factor in their lives. Jacob said, “it’s just fear of the unknown really…I haven’t given much thought to it, I’ve literally been in education since however old, so it will be the first year out of study…that will be a pretty big change”. Oliver also had limited clarity over what his life would be like following the transition, and suggested that although he has plans set in place, this doesn’t relieve any of the nerves and apprehension that he has about taking the next steps, “It’s uncertainty for the future that’s the scariest…I’ve got certainty of a job…I think it’s just uncertainty of how happy I’m going to be…it’s just adapting”. Similar to Oliver, Joanna had made plans for post-university, but had not formed clear expectations:

> The only thing I was 100 percent sure of was that I would be training from 7:30 until 4 every day, that was pretty much the only certainty, whereas if I’d have enough money, I wasn’t really sure if I needed to find a job.

When student-athletes move into university, although it is a new environment, they may already have past experiences of moving into new educational and sporting environments (e.g., moving into secondary school and moving to new sports clubs). Whereas when student-athletes transition out of university, they may be moving into situations that they have not encountered before (e.g., having a vocation whilst competing in sport). Oliver perceived that the transition out of university will present greater challenges than the transition into university, “I would still say that this is definitely way harder…it’s like really hard leaving your life [at university], because everyone builds their life around university”. This perception demonstrates the level of concern that student-athletes have about leaving university. Although these concerns could also apply to the general student population, student-athletes may hold additional anxieties around how they will adapt to a new sporting environment.

6.3.1.3 Perceived challenges. Prior to their exit from university, student-athletes perceived a number of challenges that they may encounter. Bradley said:

> I am in this high-performance atmosphere [at university], with loads of different athletes…and actually leaving university, even though I’ll be going into being a full-time athlete, it’s slightly different just identifying yourself as an athlete just training at home...Going into major competitions there’s going to be a lot of pressure, the Olympics is one of the biggest events globally…I’ve got to take it up to the next level.

He continued:

> I don’t know yet [how it will impact me], but I am assuming it will take some motivation to get on the training…at university, you are surrounded by other athletes, always training and stuff like that, and it helps you get into that mentality of taking sport seriously, being at home, it’s going to be a different atmosphere…it will be down to me to motivate myself to go to training, rather than having teammates who are going training today and want to train with you,

> or do a rehab session together, you've got to go and do rehab on your own…it's going to be a little different.

Recognition that the relocation process that student-athletes may experience when they leave university could lead to challenges with motivation and identity represents a high level of pre-transition thought. Concerns about keeping high levels of personal motivation after leaving university training groups was also expressed by others. Oliver said:

> Motivation wise, it's going to be tough, because you have to organise your own sessions…I am used to that because I have done it at U18, but I haven't done that for three, four years, and then you've just got to think of the sacrifices, what else you could be doing all the time, so ye, it definitely is going to be hard…you are literally just playing for yourself again…it's tough, it's going to be really hard.

In addition to perceived psychological challenges, student-athletes held concerns about finding flexible employment that would enable continued participation in sport. Marie said:

> I think it's the fact that I'm going to be juggling sport and a career as well, so that's what I'm most nervous about. We have long competitions where you're away for ten days, and I've had teammates in full-time careers where they struggle to get that length of time off, you know because a Friday here and there is a lot easier than a whole week kind of thing so…and having an employer that actually understands that…a job that's good, but lenient enough for me to do basketball, and good enough to support me and pay for rent and food and travel and things like that."

Athlete support staff may benefit from highlighting the potential challenges of combining work alongside sport (e.g., limited flexibility of time), and methods of coping with the changes that they may experience (e.g., being stricter with training times and how to approach the topic with employers). Additionally, student-athletes perceived that they would face new challenges at the athletic level when they left university. Jacob said:

> Whether I'm good enough to make that transition up into the men's squad, because it's my final year, we've got the junior world championships in Canada in June, so I've just been selected for that and that is my last junior tournament, so after that it's all men's squad stuff so after that I've been invited to a couple of men's squad stuff, I've had injuries unfortunately so it's kind of stalled me a little bit, so I don't know whether that jump is going to be possible for me.

Differences within sporting developmental pathways may add a new dynamic to the transition out of university for student-athletes, and may require an additional level of preparation. This challenge will be discussed later in the results section.

6.3.2 Pre-Transition Planning: Sporadic

Data from athlete, coach, and support staff experiences. ***6.3.2.1 Planning for a career outside of sport.*** Athlete support staff perceived that student-athletes are reluctant to engage in career planning prior to their exit from university due to the high expectations and ambitions that they have within their sport. Natalie (sport scholarship manager) said:

> They're still quite fresh in the ambitions towards their sport…they're quite reluctant to think post third year…some of them are very reluctant to think about it…because they want to put all their eggs into becoming a professional athlete…and obviously for some sports…it's going to be very hard to become a full-time athlete…it's looking at the feasibility of them continuing their sport at a higher level.

Due to the developmental and funded pathways of certain sports, making the transition into full-time sport may be more challenging, and engagement in planning for alternate options may be beneficial. Student-athletes may, however, perceive that exploring potential career avenues for when they leave university demonstrates limited dedication to their sport. David said:

> I sort of thought that I would come out of university and having that athletics background, that would be the route that I went down, mentally I didn't want to give myself any other option, like in a way I did just put all of my eggs in one basket and thought this was the only option…and it would almost be like admitting failure to athletics… if I did go to [career] fairs, maybe they would have opened my eyes to other options…I guess I didn't really think about that too much when I was at university, I was thinking about getting my degree done and not really what follows uni, whatever challenges happen, just tackle them as and when it comes…mentally I didn't want to give myself any other option.

This quote questions David's motives to undertake a university degree if he was not able to be flexible in thinking about other career options aside from sport. During university, student-athletes may not perceive that it is necessary to plan for a vocational career if their mind-set is focussd on entering full-time sport. Unlike David who was reluctant to engage in planning for a career outside of sport, student-athletes did begin to make alternative plans if their career as a full-time athlete after university did not work out. Jacob said, "I'm trying to just kind of make little contacts, [put] plans in place…but I am thinking that if basketball doesn't work out for me immediately after this year [after university]". Ellie mapped out a vocational plan to be put in place if her efforts as a full-time athlete did not reach the desired outcome, "I planned for a plan B, with my university degree, I could become a commission broker in London, I'm kind of building up my contacts through sailing…I always do that if worst case scenario were to happen". Planning for eventualities such as injury may be key for student-athletes choosing a path in full-time sport. Joanna's injury before she left university motivated her to begin planning for a potential vocational career outside of sport:

> When I did my shoulder [injury], that gave me quite a good opportunity to work on that sort of stuff, I mean it's not a career-ending injury but it is just kind of a reminder that it's not going to be plain sailing, so I've definitely thought about what I want to do and tried to put things in place, especially with the tutoring, it's kind of made me think well do I want to go into teaching, and then like what do I want to do after.

Having a pre-determined career path before transitioning out of university may lead to a smooth and confident transition into full-time time sport for student-athletes. Natalie (sport scholarship manager) supported these athlete quotes by suggesting that planning for the transition out of university could be an ongoing process whilst student-athletes are at university, and facilitated by support providers:

> I definitely think that we could start earlier [preparing student-athletes for the transition out of university], what I'm starting to do now in the [sport] scholar inductions in the first year is to mention to them that they need to start their planning for 3 or 4 years-time, and I normally give them a task to go away, come back, and tell me what their idea is.

Student-athletes may begin to resonate with the importance of planning for their transition out of university and exploring alternate careers if this message is instilled within them at an earlier stage in their dual career, as opposed to only focusing on the transition during their final year of university.

6.3.3 Post-University Path: What Decisions do Student-Athletes Make and Why?

Data from athlete, coach, and support staff experiences. When the time comes for student-athletes to transition out of university, they have to make a decision regarding what their next steps will be. Within the current study, five different pathways were identified that student-athletes took. These pathways were: (1) continuing education and sport path (2) becoming a full-time athlete, (3) moving into a new dual career of sport combined with a vocation, (4) beginning a triple career (sport, education, and vocation) and, (5) dropping out of sport (a career ending transition), and moving into a vocation or an alternative path. Student-athletes discussed a number of reasons why they took each path, and are included in the discussion of each pathway below.

6.3.3.1 Continuing into postgraduate education: a means of sustaining a sports career. One pathway that student-athletes took when they finished their undergraduate degree at university was to continue studying by starting a postgraduate course (e.g., Master's degree, PhD). Athlete support staff were in two minds about why student-athletes chose this particular path. Dan (performance sport manager) stated that student-athletes are aware of the value that employers have on postgraduate qualifications:

> It's becoming a little bit of a thing isn't it, if you want to get anywhere [in your vocational career], you've got to have an MA or an MSc or something as opposed to just your undergrad [degree], so I think you can be a little bit more relaxed in the advice and guidance [you give to student-athletes about doing a postgraduate degree], because they've already gone through the three years, you know they're not coming in fresh for the first time, and you can feel a little bit more confident maybe that you're setting them up in a better position.

Greg supported this through his decision to continue into postgraduate education with the intention of furthering his vocational career prospects, "I've got my accountancy [undergraduate degree] …that's what I'm qualified in so that's pretty good, but also this new degree that I'm kind of adding on to that…this is more business orientated…I'm looking at maybe getting a job abroad afterwards". Despite knowledge that postgraduate education can further career prospects, athlete support staff also perceived that student-athletes choose to continue their education after they finish university for alternative reasons. Natalie (sport scholarship manager) said, "there tend to be a lot [of student-athletes] that also then look into postgraduate study as a form of being able to sustain their career in their sport". Cameron (head hockey coach) supported this statement, "they admit to us that they want to do a postgrad, because it's just again the use of the scholarship, to keep them here, rather than them go and do it at a rival or another university". This quote implies that universities are keen for student-athletes to continue onto postgraduate education, and may be due to their eligibility to continue competing for them in the British Universities and Colleges Leagues. Dan (performance sport manager) supported this, "increasing the number of sport scholarships has allowed that to happen, because there are more universities, including ourselves, that will fund Master's level education…if they're [the athletes were] to pay for it, they probably wouldn't".

Natalie (sport scholarship manager) suggested that student-athletes within particular athletic situations may be more motivated to stay at university after they finish their undergraduate degree:

> With sports that they know that are on the fringes of podium potential [World Class Performance Programme] or professional sport…they know that it gives them a bit of time to increase that age gap, from becoming an U23 to then a senior.

Student-athletes that follow a developmental pathway where leaving university will coincide with the move into the elite senior level may decide to continue their education to enable continued access to sport services. An extra few years of receiving support services may give athletes the time needed to develop their skills, physical fitness, and gain experience, to successfully make the step into the next level of their sport (e.g., professional contract, UK sport funding pathway). Despite the challenges, student-athletes recognised the benefits of maintaining their education for the purpose of their sport. Joshua said:

> I want to do a Master's [degree] next year…it allows me another year of training, fair enough I understand the workload that comes with a Master's isn't going to be a walk in the park...it just gives me that leniency of time where you can get in the gym, you might not be in [classes] every day, or you have training sessions in the middle of the day.

The leniency of time that may come with being a student may be a motivating factor for student-athletes to continue into postgraduate education. Greg perceived that continuing to be a student-athlete also had benefits over full-time sport:

> I always find that it's good to have something else to do as well, especially when you're in a contact sport with potential injuries and stuff like that, so if you're doing something else as well as your sport, it's good for the mind as well, it keeps your mind active, it's something else, it's another outlet, so I guess I do prefer being a student-athlete.

Holding an alternate identity (i.e., student) and purpose alongside sporting commitments may also be a key motivator for student-athletes to take this path, and could prolong the sporting career.

6.3.3.2 Becoming a full-time athlete: a make or break year. In the current study, the most popular pathway taken by student-athletes when they transitioned out of university was to become a full-time athlete. The step into full-time sport was often perceived as being a "make or break" year, when athletes decided to dedicate one year after graduation from university to see if they have what it takes to be successful, and make the transition into the next level (e.g., World Class Performance Programme). Decisions about their next steps would then result from the outcome of their year as a full-time athlete. During a make or break year after university as a full-time athlete, Joanna joined the Great Britain squad and attained UK sport funding, highlighting the success of this year:

> I think it kind of was a make or break year [after university]…I guess at the time I never really looked at it like that, and I think now I look back, and I think if I hadn't been invited into the team this year, would I have carried on for another year…I think it possibly would have been a turning point…I wouldn't switch this for anything else, as hard as it gets sometimes…I am extremely lucky to be doing what I am doing.

Bradley also discussed his upcoming transition into full-time sport following university:

> I'm only going to ski full-time, planned for a year, until the Olympic Games…I suppose with most people it's a year where if they make it, they make it, and then after that it's kind of like, how am I going to fund my career…because you're going into life, because as much as your parents can help you throughout your career, they can't fund you forever…I'm not a funded athlete, and my sport has not got any funding from UK sport or my NGB at all, so getting to the Olympics is very dependent on funding and me carrying on my skiing career…it will be possible to do the next season, but after that it will be very up in the air, I will have to see how the Olympics goes.

The desire to compete in a major event, such as the Olympic Games, may be a common driving factor among student-athletes to pursue a career as a full-time athlete for one year after university. Limited NGB funding was a common downfall for student-athletes that chose full-time sport, and was the reason many could take only one year to try and fulfil their potential. Ellie stated, "the thing with becoming a full-time athlete, it always comes down to financing…finance is always going to be an issue, finding a sponsor, and making the steps to becoming a full-time athlete". Dan (performance sport manager) supported this:

> I think one of the frustrating things is, often a lot of it does come down to the individual's financial circumstances, and which of them can graduate and be funded by parents for a few years to have a go at their sport.

Student-athletes may have the option to pursue longer sporting careers with the financial backing of parents. For athletes, however, that do not have this option, they may be under pressure to find vocational employment if their year as a full-time athlete does not have the desired outcome (e.g., failure to progress onto fully-funded programme).

Although student-athletes were excited about moving into full-time sport after challenging dual careers at university, they recognised that the transition was a risk. David said:

> I've transitioned out of university and it's like a make or break type of thing, and then you need to look at what you are actually going to do…it is just the one year…I've sort of taken a risk and now that I'm home and training properly with my normal coach, I'm hoping that it's going to pay off this year and then hopefully I can get on a bigger contract where all the money that was coming will be back again, so it's kind of a risk at the moment…there will be more money in athletics if I stick to it in the long run and it pays off…it's the driving factor for you really to work harder and to make it, so that you can make a living for yourself and move out… It is that ultimatum kind of thing, do I risk it and go for the athletics with a lower income at the moment but hoping that it will pay off in the future and they'll be a bigger income later, or do I just go into the working world and go for it that way, and have athletics as a side thing.

A major driving factor for student-athletes to pursue a make or break year may be the knowledge that it could lead to financial gains in the future. As the transition, however, was perceived to be a risk, student-athletes that choose this path may benefit from support providers encouraging these individuals to still remain thoughtful about planning for a vocational career before they leave university. Marie supported this by highlighting that she may need to reconsider her path after a year of full-time sport following university, "I feel like if it doesn't go well in this first year, it's really going to make me think what my priorities are". Bradley also perceived that his decision to become a full-time athlete was received negatively by others who thought that a vocational career was the correct path to take following university, "sometimes when I tell people that I'm going into full-time skiing, they are like well what's after that, you know they expect you to have a career".

For student-athletes that choose the path into full-time sport, and have not explored vocational career options, the decision may be based on how student-athletes identify themselves when they leave university. Greg, who decided to pursue full-time sport after university, said:

> I always identify myself as an athlete I guess because I always try to focus on that, and that's a really stable part of my identity and has been for quite a lot of years, I suppose because I've been on the national squad for so long, it does become part of your identity I guess.

The perception of self may factor into the decision-making process about which path student-athletes take when they leave university, and suggests that even though student-athletes have developed a student identity from being at university, athletic identity remains stronger.

Student-athletes also had additional reasons for why they decided to take a make or break year as a full-time athlete. Joanna perceived that she had a final opportunity to take the next step in her sport after university:

> You kind of only live once, as cliché as that sounds, so it's like, you might as well, I'd hate to live with the what ifs…with sport, it's kind of one of those things where you only get one shot at it…I also didn't want to miss out on doing that.

Jacob also chose the opportunity to transition into full-time sport due to the perception he may not be able to be an athlete for much longer:

> What I'm planning to do is train with GB (Great Britain) for a year…I'm just going to have a year training and then hopefully reach a decision of whether I am going to try and go full-time or try and find a job…then it will be give me an opportunity to find out whether full-time training is what I want to do, it appeals to me a lot at the moment, but then I don't know whether after a year, whether my shoulder injury really plays up…that's kind of playing on my mind a bit as well…because I'm not sure what I want to do, I'm just going to have a year training and then hopefully reach a decision…I've decided that because of these injuries, I want to give it a full year of my attention and just see where I can get to.

When student-athletes experience and overcome injury during their dual career, this may become a key turning point in their decision about what to do when they leave university.

6.3.3.3 A change of dynamic in the dual career: sport and vocation. A further path that student-athletes took following their transition out of university was to start a new dual career combining their sport with a vocation. Dan (performance sport manager) said, "it's an alteration or a change in the type of career, they're still active [as an athlete], just in a different way". Student-athletes that began a vocation sport dual career described that they chose to do so to fund their sporting ambitions. Emily discussed that she was unable to support herself just through the government funding that she received for her sport:

> I was put on the lowest band of lottery funding, which meant I was getting £500 a month, which isn't enough to live on, so then I had to get a part-time job, which is a lot easier said than done, because training is three times a day and we start at 7 and finish at like 4, and that's kind of like, what, 5 days a week, and so getting a part-time job was going to be quite difficult to fit in with the hours, but I started tutoring, so I tutor A level PE…which means that it's after school, which fits in with after training.

Despite the allocation of additional funding for her sport, Emily decided to continue combining sport with a vocation, "I got moved up a funding band…which means that I don't have to do as much tutoring, but I still do it because I actually enjoy doing it, and it is something different other than sport…it worked really well". Similar to a dual career as a student-athlete, having an alternate focus may be beneficial when sport becomes stressful. Joanna highlighted the similarities between having a vocation sport dual career and being a student-athlete:

> I would say that there are definitely similarities…so being able to organise, planning stuff in advance is one of the biggest things, so like having dates and stuff, knowing what's coming and just planning ahead, having all of that sorted is definitely really similar.

In contrast to Joanna, David found his new vocation sport balance following his transition out of university difficult to maintain:

> I think I've found that it is quite difficult to balance a working life alongside training as well, for me I am working part-time at a gym where the hours are quite unsociable, so I have to start at 5:45 in the morning, through until 2:30 in the afternoon, or you do the late shift which is from 2 in the afternoon until 11 at night, so the hours are not quite a standard 9 to 5, so I'm waking up early in the morning, doing a 9-hour day and then going to training afterwards, and it's quite tiring, and that's the reason I'm only working part-time, there's not many sources of income.

Increased time pressures and a limited social life may be one of the key downfalls of a vocation sport dual career, but may be necessary to provide funds for athletes to continue competing in their sport. Bryn (head lacrosse coach) suggested that student-athletes leave university and choose to combine their sport with certain careers because these careers enable the flexibility of time that allows them to continue training and competing:

> A lot of them that play at the top, top level, go into teaching or coaching [after university], so it gives them the flexibility to push for a World Championships or a European Championships…they have time to go to tournaments and don't need to get that time off work.

Student-athletes may perceive that they are restricted in the types of vocations they can enter when they leave university, and may take on roles that they are not passionate about, yet enable them to continue their competitive sports careers. Dan (performance sport manager) also highlighted that when student-athletes leave university, if they want to earn money through a vocational career, this may require them to compete at a lower level in their sport:

> A number of athletes do have the ability to go higher [in sport] than they do when they graduate, and I think that end of career term used in America, although it's very strong, I think does have some relevance, because I know of a lot of students who graduate who would keep playing at a really high level, but because there isn't the money available in the sport to do it, they don't. I think rugby is a really clear example of that, if you go to London, you will earn more money as a semi-professional player at national 1 and national 2 [level], and having a job, than you would being a professional player in the championships.

This may cause conflict for student-athletes leaving university. Athletes may torn feel torn between making decisions over what will benefit their financial and athletic situation, and suggests that a sacrifice may be necessary within one of these areas.

Autoethnographic data from my own experiences. ***6.3.3.4 Taking on a Triple Career: Success, Identity Confusion, and Fatigue.*** Dancing my fingers across the keyboard of my laptop in a dusty corner of the library, I was enthralled in writing my final year university project. I realised during the process of writing it that I had gained a passion for conducting research, and felt inspired to continue my education beyond my undergraduate degree, and begin a Master's degree in psychological wellbeing and mental health. Upon results day, pieces of envelope scattered the room as I hurried to open my results letter. Joy swept across my face, "I got a first class!" Relief flooded from my body after the countless hours I spent cramped at my bedroom desk preparing for my exams. This result only served to motivate me further to continue into postgraduate education. The year of undertaking my Master's degree, however, my stature as an elite sports person had fallen, and I was no longer competing for England. "Who am I if I can't call myself a current national champion, or I'm not toting the three lions across my back?" Like a rusty old bicycle, I was deflated, and not feeling particularly wanted or needed within my table tennis environment anymore. Having spent years at university enduring an endless battle to find high quality training, and travelling every day to my home club, there was no fight left in me, "should I end my 17-year table tennis career here?" The pressures of striving in two intertwined domains left me feeling burnt out (Sorkkila, Ryba, Aunola, Seliänne, & Salmela-Aro, 2017), and I began to consider retirement from the sport that had dominated my thoughts, actions, and ultimately, my life.

"I am a student-athlete, I don't know how to be anyone else" I contemplated. In an effort to move on, I began mindlessly scrolling through jobs adverts in the psychology sector. After the completion of my undergraduate and postgraduate degree, I still felt uncertain about where my vocational passion lied. Across the many websites I scoured, I saw numerous adverts for taking on a PhD, and just by curiosity, I began to do some research about what the PhD process entailed. "Maybe my future is in academia?" Conducting original scientific research was an area I had excelled in. After contacting a member of staff at my university who conducted research in athlete career development, he expressed interest in supervising me. Within days, I enrolled onto a PhD as an enthusiastic 23-year old, yet I swiftly came to terms with the idea that I would be nearing my thirties by the time I finally left education! My university was eager to support me through the PhD process, yet there was one catch. "We require you to continue training and competing for the university" the sport scholarship manager expressed. My postgraduate dual career challenges were set to continue.

I began my PhD on a part-time basis after being offered teaching work by the university to help cover my tuition fees, living expenses, and gain valuable vocational experience. Teaching now took on a large role within my schedule, and a lot of responsibility was put on my shoulders considering that I had no prior experience! There was, however, another area to fit into my life, and that was table tennis. Within the first few weeks of my teaching and PhD career, a meeting with my sport scholarship manager took an interesting turn. "The national governing body recognises that the number of student table tennis players at university has significantly risen, and they would like to form a collaborative arrangement with us to deliver a training and development programme." This would be the first time since before I had transitioned into university over four years ago that I had the opportunity to engage in structured, high level, and intense training throughout the week, and receive regular coaching from one of the best coaches in the country. Rolling my eyes, "four years too late" I considered. A PhD, the highest level of academic degree, alongside a teaching job and a full training and competition schedule. Challenge accepted. This was the beginning of my triple career.

At 7:30am, my traffic fuelled journey to university began. Bumper to bumper across the 12-mile journey, I sat alongside frustrated morning commuters, with screeching car horns providing my morning soundtrack. Sitting down at my desk, I faced a mountain of academic articles stacked to the ceiling, as I began brainstorming PhD ideas. This was swiftly followed by supervisory meetings about how my PhD was progressing, and preparation for upcoming teaching commitments. After a couple hours preaching about research methods and sport psychology theories in front of my students, I slumped in my chair at the end of the day. For most, this would mark the end of the work day, and time to relax at home. Pacing to my car whilst hastily taking bites of my early morning prepared sandwich, a drive to our training venue ensued, where 3 hours of table tennis drills, competitive match play, and physical training awaited. As 9:30pm approached, with dark circles clouding my eyes, sweat seeping through my hair, and lactic acid filled muscles, I made the drive home, ready to take on the next day in my triple career. Distractions were a luxury, as I was consistently occupied with either work, studies or training throughout my days. After experiencing intellectual stimulation throughout the day with teaching and PhD work, I was hungry to release some stress in my evening training sessions (Aquilina, 2013), and I believe that this this helped to maintain interest and commitment to my sport. Although challenging, this routine was motivating me to excel further.

A couple months on from the start of my triple career, clicking hastily on my work computer with the knowledge that the new national rankings were online, I saw my England senior women's ranking rise from 7 to 4, not far behind my career high of 3. Learning is an ongoing process, and it may have taken until my 5th year of university to finally find the correct structure, routine, and governing body input for my sporting and academic roles to become mutually beneficial (Aquilina, 2013). Despite being a university lecturer and a PhD student, my first England representation in a number of years was on the horizon, after being selected for the upcoming Senior Six Nations event in Scotland. My passion for table tennis through this intense regime had been reignited, and as we left the steel grey skies of Scotland behind, I beamed with pride as I looked down at my gold medal, after becoming British champion.

Despite the early successes of my triple career, there was inevitably another side that others did not witness. After 14 hour days, and no free weekends, my social life was a distant memory. The money from my sport scholarship and what I earnt from teaching barely made ends meet as table tennis competition entry fees spiked, and consistent travel meant that my car was guzzling petrol. "I've got to move back home" I considered. After years of developing and building independence and finally supporting myself through employment, this was a shot in the foot. Although I had experienced the stressors of undertaking a dual career for a number of years (e.g., Petitpas et al., 2009), financial, logistical, and social challenges were exacerbated when I also had to contend with a third element in the dual career dynamic. The pounding of my alarm signified the start of a new day of my triple career. Stifling my yawns, I struggled to pull myself out of bed following a full weekend of competition and lengthy travel. Five months into my triple career, my daily mood was low, and my identity was muddled. Who am I? Am I an athlete, a student or a teacher? I was all three at once, and on the same day. The confident, authoritative, and knowledgeable me when I was teaching. The studious, reflective and quiet me when I was doing PhD work. Finally, the skilful, active, and aggressive me when training in my sport. Each role in my triple career had differing expectations, demands, and challenges attached to it. Ultimately, the time demands of my triple career, sacrifices made within my social life, new pressures to succeed once again in sport, new vocational responsibilities, a higher level of academic study, identity confusion, and fatigue, meant that it was not sustainable for a number of years as role conflict was permeating my life (e.g., Finch, 2009).

6.3.3.5 Dropping out of sport: an athletic career-ending transition. Following exit from university, some student-athletes discontinued involvement from their sport, and took an alternative path (e.g., full-time employment). Christopher (coaching and competition manager) highlighted, "I think sometimes it's [dropping out of sport] not under their control". Dan (performance sport manager) supported this:

> I think coming out of that centralised programme is an interesting one, because there are more and more sports who are looking at university very positively and want universities to be part of their programmes...the fact that they're in university may keep them in, because they know that they can have the access to them [athletes]…you get that drop out [of sport] at the same time because they've come out of the sector, and they are no longer available for the centralised programme…when they graduate and they're no longer a student, suddenly they may not be required.

Dan also highlighted, "there might not be a decision to make, because for some, financial circumstances mean they have to go the way that may not be in their sporting interests, but it allows them to put food on the table". Faye supported this by discussing that finances were a limiting factor to her continuing her sport when she transitioned out of university, “where I was in the sport, I don’t think I could financially do that either [continue competing], unless my parents were willing to fund me completely, and I never really crossed that bridge with them”. Aside from financial concerns, Faye’s decision to discontinue involvement in her sport after leaving university was also involuntary due to a serious injury:

> I was still hesitating a bit, I was thinking maybe I could [continue sport], it was a difficult decision, but it was kind of made for me, the nature of my injury was just horrendous, so I just couldn’t, even now I wouldn’t be capable of training anymore…I dislocated my shoulder…I went to see like the best shoulder surgeon that all the canoeists go to see because they all have problems, and he said yes, and fixed it and everything, but I still had loads of problems, he did a second operation and he said it didn’t actually work what he had done and said that at some point between the first and second operation, I had got an infection in the operation and that caused all sorts of complications and it didn’t actually heal properly.

These quotes reflect the simultaneous nature of transitions that occur when student-athletes leave university. Having to endure a forced retirement from sport at the same time as leaving university may be particularly challenging for student-athletes because they face losing both their student and elite athletic identities simultaneously. Forming a new identity outside of both sport and education may be difficult considering that they have lived as student-athletes for a number of years. These individuals may require extra guidance from support providers before they transition out of university to explore their options and expectations moving forward. Faye, however, also stated that even if she was not injured as she approached the transition out of university, it is likely that she would have made the decision to discontinue involvement with her sport. This was because she perceived that it was not possible to compete to a high level in her sport if you also have aspirations to get a job or continue into postgraduate education:

> You have to be a full-time athlete…especially how it is now, everything’s in London…all the top guys are in London, you have to live there, all the sessions are like half nine until half eleven and then in the evening it’s like four until six, so to have a proper job would be impossible…it’s difficult to go to university as well, I think that kind of made my decision as well actually, the fact that the support moved to London, that kind of really cut me off, because if I did want to continue studying it was impossible down there and if I did want to find a job, it

> was impossible down there…I remember thinking that before the injury, I didn't ever want to live down there, because of how expensive it is and you can't do anything alongside [sport].

Sport-specific factors such as the need to relocate if athletes want to continue with their sport, leading to difficulties maintaining a dual career, may also be important factors related to the decision to drop out of sport after transitioning out of university. Oliver believes that sport-specific factors also affected his decision to drop out of high level sport after university, stating that it is rare for athletes in his sport to go full-time following university, "people don't do that after university in table tennis, which is purely because of the framework, because the senior organisation…funding doesn't allow it, there's no motivation to do that, you're just wasting time".

6.3.4 Challenges Upon Leaving University: Loss of Support Structures

Data from athlete, coach, and support staff experiences. Following the transition out of university, student-athletes experienced difficulties adapting to their new lives. Some of these challenges were perceived by student-athletes in the pre-transition stage, some however, had not been anticipated.

6.3.4.1 Loss of core support services. *6.3.4.1.1 Physical support.* The loss of core support services was a significant challenge that student-athletes faced when they made the transition out of university, and particularly for those who were still trying to pursue sport to a high level. David said:

> The physio support and the strength and conditioning support, which I found really helped me [at university], so yes there was quite a lot of support available when you are at university, and that is something that I have actually found tough then when you come out of university, it's that there's not a lot of support available, and that the support is very much focused on people in full-time education and people below the age of 21, and once you get out it's almost like…you need to make enough money to support yourself kind of thing, so it's a lot harder in that sense.

Loss of physical support could stagnate athletic development upon exit from university. Such issues may, however, be exacerbated when student-athletes also experience the loss of support from other sources during this time. David continued:

> I was funded throughout my junior years [by NGB] up to U23 [level], and the support I was getting from them was really good in terms of the physio support, doctors support, I think you get the private medical support…when I broke my

> foot, they [NGB] were so helpful for me, everything was here ready, to go through the NHS (National Health Service) to get an MRI scan, it literally takes 2 or 3 months, I got it in 2 days I think, so that was at a private hospital as well, I saw the top foot doctors across London, so literally everything was there and in place, the support network was there, but since coming out of the U23 age group, ye nothing really, I've not had much support from them at all…its breaking into that, breaking through to that senior elite level where I can access that sort of funding.

There may be a pool of athletes who leave university and enter a 'post-university development phase', who are being overlooked in the support process. These may be athletes who have just made the transition out of university, whilst also leaving age restricted groups (e.g., U23 level), yet have the potential to push onto UK sport funding to attain full-time athlete status. The responsibility of who picks up this support for athletes after university is, however, not clear, and those who fall within this realm may not progress any further in their sport. The difficulties that student-athletes face when they leave university through the loss of core support services may suggest, that to some extent, student-athletes are over-supported during their time at university. It could be argued that university sport scholarships that provide athletes with high levels of support could only be received by student-athletes who have the potential to push onto UK sport funding or compete for professional or semi-professional clubs when they leave university. This regulation of scholarships may help to avoid situations where student-athletes are instilled with the belief that they can become professional athletes when they are at university, but do not have the support in place to do so when they leave.

6.3.4.1.2 Financial support. In addition to the loss of physical support such as strength and conditioning, former student-athletes faced challenges through the loss of financial support when they left university. Emily said, "you realise how expensive physios and massage is, everything like that costs, which is quite a hit." She continued:

> To put it in perspective, I think I brought in around £7,000 from sources of funding last year, whereas this year [following the transition out of university], I think I'm literally down to only £500. It is a massive, massive drop when you've got to try and make those sources up in other ways, but ye I mean that £7,000 isn't even including student loan or anything like that, it is the Nike money, the TASS [government organisation for athletes in education] money, the scholarship money from the university, the gym funding, and I was getting

> funding from this local school near where I live…It's just trying to make it back up in other ways…I've not quite ran quick enough to get on a new contract, so yes, I have lost that source of income, I'm still getting kit from them but just not money, so it's a bit of a tough situation…it's a bit of a less consistent income [in my current situation as a vocation sport dual career athlete], but I'm basically doing what I need to, to fund my athletics and that's it, but I've not really been able to save any money kind of thing going forward.

Receiving funding from the sources described above may allow some student-athletes to be in a comfortable financial situation when they are at university, and they may not need to think about gaining employment to support themselves. Alexander (head rugby coach) stated that, due to financial circumstances, student-athletes may be faced with challenging decisions around their sporting pathway when they leave university:

> I think the biggest one that I experience [as a coach of student-athletes] is earning money from the sport now, and taking another year of development to earn more money in the long run…there would have been other rugby clubs on the table that have offered significantly more money to play a lower level and that's the challenge for them, they're on this pathway, developmental pathway, they're not quite there yet…they can stop that pathway right now, and go and earn some good money alongside a job, or they can earn money, but with the potential to kick on to another level, and that's the decision, the biggest dilemma that people have.

Athletes may experience conflict within their athletic careers due to limited funding after leaving university, and highlights the complexity of the decision-making process that athletes have to go through. Education for student-athletes on potential funding sources and financial planning for post-university may be of benefit.

6.3.4.2 Transition out of age restricted groups coinciding with the move out of university. As opposed to athletes who experience the transition into the elite senior level at the same time as moving into university, the different developmental pathways of some sports mean that exit from university can occur simultaneously alongside the transition out of restricted age groups (e.g., Under 23), and into the senior level. David said, "it's my last year at U23, so next year I will be fully in the senior age group, so ye it's quite a big year I think…it is such a massive jump from U23 to senior elite level, and that is the time when most people will be coming out of university". Similar to this, Joanna said:

> I finished uni, and the year that I finished, I went to my final [year in] U23's…so it was the transition of graduating from uni, but then also kind of moving up an age group as well…that was like my first year in seniors, I kind of like wasn't really sure what to expect.

Losing core support services and funding that may come as part of being a university student-athlete could make the transition to the senior elite level particularly challenging for athletes who follow this developmental pathway. Bridging the gap between being an U23 to an elite senior athlete may be a motivating factor to have a make or break year as a full-time athlete. Greg supported this:

> It was good to have that year off [education and work], because that year off was when I was transitioning into the seniors [after university], it was good in a way, it fit pretty well…because it's a contact sport, in martial arts, the strength difference…especially because I'm a heavy weight as well, they mature later on, almost 28 to 30, to 34 maybe…I guess that year really, that was quite good, I finished my degree…and then having that year out to get a bit stronger and more experienced and that, so by the time I started the second one [year as a full-time athlete], I was kind of on top of the judo really.

Making preparations for the move into the elite senior level for specific sports that follow this developmental pathway could be part of the pre-transition planning for student-athletes when they leave university. This planning could involve forecasting some of the challenges that they may experience at the new senior level alongside the resources they will need (e.g., finances, strength and conditioning, coaching programme) to successfully make the jump.

6.3.4.3 Social changes. For Joanna, leaving university required her to move into a new team environment, with a new coach:

> The coach and I just never really got on…so that was difficult, just the relationship that I had with the coach at [university], I knew it wouldn't be the same anywhere else, but I just found him [new coach] quite difficult, and I think that was quite hard to begin with, when you kind of switch, you've got a new training group, and you don't really get along with the coach that well, that can be quite challenging.

A poor coach-athlete relationship could result in poor adaptation to full-time sport, but may have been heightened by an increased distance from her family when she left university, "I suppose the biggest sacrifice is I never really see my family, that was the biggest one".

David also experienced changes in his relationship with his parents and peers when he left university:

> At university, you are living on your own and gaining that independence, you come out of university and then it was then like ok, I've moved straight back into my parent's house...it's almost like you lose all of that independence straight away.

He continued:

> You're not surrounded by your mates constantly, you've not got the buzz of being at university when you get home…a lot of my mates are still at university, a lot of my other mates have sort of gone straight into full-time work, so they're not really around as much, and when they are, it will be on the weekend, so they'll be going out Friday nights and Saturday nights, whereas now I'm into that full-time athlete mentality, they do the things that I can't do, so you lose out on that side of things completely.

Losing peer support networks through distance and no longer being able to take part in the same activities, combined with increased dependence on parents, could lead to feelings of isolation, and loss for former student-athletes.

6.3.4.4 Formation of a new identity: student-athlete to who? Leaving education may result in student-athletes having to form a new self-concept. Jacob said, "losing that student identity is quite a big deal I guess". Christopher (coaching and competition manager) supported this by highlighting a challenge that student-athletes may face when they leave university:

> Going through university as a scholar, a big fish in a small pond, and then you're finishing university, and you're not being wanted in a centralised programme, not having that support, those support programmes…it can be psychologically devastating…you take two steps back almost, to rebuild yourself and start from the bottom, it can be very difficult times for athletes to transition into the real world.

Moving from being a person of value within a university (e.g., sport scholar) to an individual who does not feel they hold a role of value outside of university could have a negative influence on athletes' psychological state. This psychological challenge is supported by Jason (director of sport) who suggests that as a university, they have limited knowledge around how to support this challenge:

> That [loss of a student-athlete identity] can have potentially a big impact on the self-esteem and the psychology of that individual, and I'm sure that must lead to a lot of people just dropping out of their sport actually, and I'm not sure how much we can do to prepare people for that.

David was unprepared for how he would feel following his move into full-time sport after university:

> Going to university, it's the norm to be that elite athlete…maybe it's more the case now that I'm back home and out of university…where it's a rare case to have an elite international athlete…that could have played a role in how my progression has been since being at university, it's not been quite as good as I would have liked it to have been…When you come from university and you think to yourself, I'm an international track and field athlete, but then I'm working in a gym part-time and half the job is where I'm cleaning it, it's a bit like is this who I am, is this who I want to be, you wouldn't see Christiano Ronaldo cleaning a gym would you…it takes away that elite athlete identity to think ok I am just a normal person, there's nothing special about me…how do I say it, it takes away that sport confidence in your like, and you think ye that's not just my identity, I am a normal person, I'm no one special kind of thing so that affects motivation and confidence I guess a bit more than anything.

Being part of a collective group identity at university where there was a common goal to achieve in sport, to no longer being in environment around other top-level athletes, could lead to a re-evaluation of identity. David experienced conflict in his identity when he left university, as although his mentality was that of an elite-level athlete, limited funds meant taking on a role not traditionally associated with this group (e.g., having to take on a low-wage job).

6.3.5 Transition Support

Data from athlete, coach, and support staff experiences. Support provided to student-athletes during the transition out of university was limited, and there appears to be an incongruence between support being provided in a proactive manner to student-athletes and student-athletes proactively seeking support. Strategic support during the transition out of university is an area under development by universities, however, currently, student-athletes rely on social support from parents following the transition out of university.

6.3.5.1 Individualised transition support. Student-athletes recognised that there were forms of individualised transition support to access at their university, yet many were unsure what this support could provide and did not actively seek advice. Jacob said, “the help is there for me but it’s up to me to be pragmatic about it…there are people there, but it’s up to me to contact them”. As student-athletes expressed their uncertainty around leaving university, before they leave, it may be a key time for them to begin forming expectations and exploring what life might be like when they transition out of university with a support provider (e.g., performance lifestyle advisor). David suggested that the support that he received, however, was not targeted at perceived areas of importance as he approached the transition out of university:

> I didn’t see that lifestyle support person that often to be honest…when I used to meet up with them, we used to just discuss how my degree was going at the time, any exams that I had coming up…we’d talk about that, and how organised I was, and I don’t know whether it helped me too much to be honest…we didn’t really ever talk about that transition out of university and I think that probably would have been helpful to sort of let the athlete know that when you go into the working world, it’s not the same.

In addition to David’s perception, Bradley said, “it’s hard to know what to ask about transitioning out [of university]”. These quotes suggest that although student-athletes have someone to talk to about the current challenges that they are facing, and perceive transition support may be useful for them, there is an incongruence between the support provider actively bringing up topics related to transition (e.g., formation of expectations), and student-athletes proactively seeking support and asking questions.

6.3.5.2 Strategic support. Forms of strategic support are provided to student-athletes within certain sports. University athlete support staff, however, recognised that comparative to when student-athletes move into university, and during university, from a strategic standpoint, they do not prioritise the exit period. Jason (director of sport) said:

> Our focus is very much on recruiting talented athletes, well not just talented athletes, athletes in general, and supporting them as best we can while they’re here, I think from a strategic point of view, we have had very little focus on what happens at the end of their university life, it is something that we have talked about a little bit, but it feels though, strategically, it’s not something that we’ve ever really grabbed hold of…it would be quite resource intensive to try and manage that, and we haven’t really taken that step…on a kind of wider

> scale, it's not something that we focus on…it's something we could make sure that we plan in to what we do, as opposed to it happening on a slightly more adhoc basis…clearly there's a resource implication and a time implication there.

As student-athletes are recruited into universities through sport scholarships, and may receive support services throughout their time at university, and compete for the university, part of the duty of care for athletes may be to put in place strategic operations for when they leave university (e.g., opportunities for recruitment with partner companies and sports clubs). Alexander (head rugby coach) discussed the athletic support they have begun to put in place at the strategic level for student-athletes.

> One of the things we are looking at doing…is developing a club link [with the university], what we have found is that a lot of students gravitate to London post-degree, and trying to find a club then that will be a link to the university, so almost like a partner club.

Creating links between universities and clubs may give student-athletes the opportunity to continue to play at a high level post-university, and reduce concerns they may have about their athletic futures.

6.3.5.3 Social support: parents as key a support source following transition.

Student-athletes in the current study reported that following their transition out of university, they relied on their parents for social support (including financial and tangible support) after gaining independence from them during their university years, meaning that support had come full circle. David illustrated this:

> I've sort of taken a risk this year [after university] and relied on my parents [financially] sort of a bit more than some other athletes could, but obviously it's not something that I want to have to do for the rest of my life, it's just something that I'm doing for the year and I am hoping that eventually it is going to pay off, so it's one of those things…I think that's probably been a major factor for me, I'm quite lucky in that sense that I've got that support at home, that I can rely on them a little bit, reluctantly, obviously I don't want to rely on them.

David also suggested that moving back home with his parents after university created a healthier environment for him to pursue his sport, "university housing is not the best kind of accommodation, so being back at home with my parents, it's like a cleaner house, I'm eating better food here as well, and you know, my parents are paying for that". Parents may provide opportunities for their child to continue competing in high level support post-university through the provision of financial and living support. Student-athletes also described their parents providing encouragement for them to make independent decisions about what they wanted to do after they left university. Joanna said, “my parents have…always kind of told me to just go and do what I think is best and what I believe in, so that side of it, I knew I had their backing [to go full-time as an athlete]”. Similarly, Bradley perceived that parental support was imperative in making the decision to go full-time as an athlete:

> My parents are a huge part of my support [after university], both financially and support as in just moral support, you know they drive me to the airport, they help me to get ski’s, they help me to get sponsors and stuff like that, so I don’t think it would be possible to do what I do without the support of my parents, they got me into it and they kind of let me decide whether I wanted to take it on full-time, and they said that they would support me if I did, and they have done.

Parental support may be a key factor for those athletes who enter the previously discussed ‘post-university development phase’ and are not yet at the level in their sport to be accepted onto fully-funded programmes, but have the potential to do so.

6.3.5.4 Drawing on experiences and skills learnt from being a university student-athlete. Following the transition out of university, former student-athletes recognised that they could manage the transition by applying skills or experiences acquired through being a student-athlete at university. David said:

> Probably how proactive I am as a person, so at university you have a deadline, so you have to work towards those deadlines, they are set in place, but when you leave university, that’s it, that’s your life that you’ve got to take control of and set targets and deadlines for yourself, but I would say that that is outside of the athletics context, so obviously within athletics…I’ve got deadlines where I’ve got to meet the qualification times and standard to gain qualification for certain events, but if I apply that to my working life.

Recognition of skills developed at university and how these can be applied within a different dual career may be an effective coping strategy if athletes are receiving minimal support from other avenues. Joanna perceived that her hectic schedule as a student-athlete prepared her to manage her timetable in her new dual career.

> At times, it got really manic and busy, but I think you kind of learn from university, to deal with that, so like time management and stuff, you kind of

> have to be good at it to survive uni, and it's a case of just switching lectures for something else.

In agreement, Ellie stated, "because I've had quite a hard few years at university, it's kind of prepared me in a way, where I could deal with that situation of time management or looking for jobs". Difficult situations experienced at university, such as swapping between the student and athlete role on a daily basis, may give athletes confidence that post-university challenges can also be dealt with in a similar manner. Transferable kills acquired through being a university student-athlete may be an important discussion point between student-athletes and support providers before exit from university.

6.4 Discussion

The current study explored the experiences of student-athletes as they transition out of university, and is the first to investigate the transition within the UK. The results of this study highlight that the transition out of university is a period of significant change within athletes lives. Before making the transition, student-athletes were excited to leave university education after challenging dual careers, yet remained uncertain and anxious, that may be due to limited transition preparation made by student-athletes (e.g., despite being at university, athletes may still not be flexible in thinking about vocational careers). When student-athletes leave university, the current study found that they took five different pathways: (1) continuing education and sport path, (2) becoming a full-time athlete, (3) moving into a new dual career of sport combined with a vocation, (4) beginning a triple career (work, sport, and education), and (5) dropping out of sport (a career ending transition), and moving into a vocation or an alternative path. These pathways advance theoretical knowledge by adding context-specific detail to the post higher education section of Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model. After making the transition, former student-athletes experienced a number of new challenges covering a holistic perspective, including the loss of financial support and difficulties adapting to a new identity. During the transition period, however, transition support provided by the university is minimal, and results of this study suggest that there may be an incongruence between support that is required and student-athletes' proactively seeking support. Student-athletes relied on parental support when they had left university to financially support their athletic careers following the loss of university scholarship programmes. Finally, athletes were knowledgeable that skills and experiences that they had acquired at university could be applied within their post-university lives.

6.4.1 Part C Advancements to Knowledge

- Student-athletes in the UK take five different pathways when they leave university, many of which have not been discussed previously in the literature, including a make or break year and a triple career (e.g., highlighting the challenges of completing a PhD, working, and being a high performing athlete), and advances theoretical knowledge by adding context-specific detail to the post higher education section of Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model.
- The transition out of university may be a critical moment within the lives of student-athletes, whereby the loss of identity and membership in an elite group can lead to the loss of self-esteem and athletic motivation.
- The loss of core support services (e.g., financial support) when student-athletes leave university coinciding with leaving age restricted groups (e.g., U23 level) can lead to difficulties transitioning into the elite senior level of competition. The difficulty experienced by athletes highlights that there may be a gap in support systems when athletes leave university (university may be a make or break period for some athletes).
- The developmental pathway of a sport can underpin the decisions student-athletes' make about the path they take when they leave university (e.g., discontinuing involvement from sport due to the need to attend a national training centre to continue development at the elite senior level).
- There is an incongruence between support provided to student-athletes (resources) and student-athletes actively seeking support (internal barriers).
- Student-athletes may experience conflict between the athletic and financial level when they leave university (e.g., take a lower financial income and taking a step up the developmental pathway), highlighting the complexity of the decision-making process.

The current study reflects previous literature that highlights the simultaneous, interactive, and reciprocal nature of transitions occurring in the athletic career and those transitions occurring in other life domains (e.g., Petitpas et al., 1997; Wylleman et al., 2000; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Advancing knowledge, the findings of the current study suggest that when student-athletes move out of university, reflecting Wylleman al.'s (2013) holistic athletic career model, they experience changes at the athletic (e.g., transition to senior elite level), psychological (e.g., transition from identifying as a student-athlete to someone else), psychosocial (e.g., loss of support services from university, and changing relationship with peers), academic/vocational (e.g., leaving education and moving into an alternative career), and financial levels (e.g., loss of financial support from university sport scholarship programmes). The transitions were also interactive with one another, and may lead to conflict for student-athletes. For example, at the athletic and financial levels, student-athletes may experience conflict between taking a lower financial income and taking a step up the developmental pathway in their sport, or earning a good financial income through having a vocational career and competing in lower level sport. These findings highlight that the transition out of university can be a decisive point for student-athletes' athletic careers, and the difficulty of the decision-making process around which path to take.

The majority of literature on the student-athlete transition out of university comes from the study of US athletes, and suggests that when athletes leave university, they will experience a simultaneous transition out of competitive sport (e.g., Moreland-Bishop, 2009; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). The findings of the current study, however, recognised that the transition out of university for high level student-athletes is a within-career transition, because four out of the five pathways that student-athletes took, involved the continuation of the athletic career. Tekavc et al. (2015) reported that when athletes approached the end of university, this coincided with a change in their perspective, and the sporting domain became less important. This contrasts the perceptions of athletes in the current study, who were keen to push to a higher level in their sport after university. For athletes that discontinued involvement in their sport during this period, it was involuntary, due to limited finances (e.g., Koukouris, 1991), and career-ending injuries occurring not long before transition (Stoltenburg, Kamphoff, & Lindstrom Bremer, 2011). Previous literature has addressed the transition from full-time sport into the workplace (e.g., Ungerleider, 1997), but has not focused on the challenges and reasoning behind making the transition from being a university student-athlete to a full-time athlete. A novel finding from the current research was that the step into full-time sport after university was often perceived as being a 'make or break' year. Reasons for taking this path included the desire to qualify for an Olympic Games, believing it be their last chance to succeed in sport, limited finances, an attempt to step up **to** the next sporting level, and limited exploration of vocational career paths (e.g., Kim Wai Sum et al., 2017; Lally & Kerr, 2005).

Despite the excitement they felt, the current study suggests that when student-athletes approached the end of their undergraduate university careers, they were anxious about making decisions about their next steps, and faced a potential change in their identity.

Perrone and Vickers (2003) highlight that graduates are often uncertain and unprepared for the significant, life-influencing decisions that they face when they leave university. Advancing previous literature, these decisions about which path to take after university fit with what Nesti and Littlewood (2011) define as ‘critical moments’. Nesti, Littlewood, O’Halloran, Eubank and Richardson (2012) highlight that these ‘critical moments’ provide athletes with an opportunity to examine the choices they face, and to choose a way ahead despite the anxiety that will accompany this decision. During the transition out of university, student-athletes had to confront their anxieties associated with a change in their identity (Nesti, et al., 2012), from being a student-athlete to someone else. As with other life transitions (Schlossberg, 1981), this change in identity was a key challenge associated with moving out of university. The current study found that the move out of university led student-athletes to perceive that they had lost a position of value, and the loss of an elite training group led to motivational and confidence challenges, and questions surrounding who they now were. Tajfel and Turner (1979) argued that groups (e.g., university sport scholarship athletes) provide people with a source of pride and self-esteem, as well as a social identity that provides a sense of belonging in the world. In line with research on other populations (e.g., religious groups; Harris, 2015), the loss of self-esteem that student-athletes experienced through having to renegotiate their identity when they left university, and left group memberships behind, meant that they struggled to continue developing in their sport. Devaney et al. (2017) recognised that currently there is limited discussion of supporting athletes with a holistic approach focusing on their identity negotiation, and in the current study, student-athletes were not prepared to cope with the aftermath of this critical moment.

Athletes who maintain a dual career are believed to have achieved a greater balance in their lives, that limits the development of an exclusive athletic identity (e.g., Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000). Advancing dual career literature, the findings related to identity within the current study suggest that despite having completed a university dual career, athletes continued to struggle with their perception of self. A high athletic identity was a motivating factor to continue pursing elite-level sport, even in the absence of support programmes when athletes left university. The current study also suggests that athletes may not be flexible in thinking about alternate career paths other than being an athlete, despite attaining university qualifications. This may suggest that during university, there is limited emphasis on vocational career development for student-athletes. This finding is comparative to research from the US that suggests that athletes’ student-identity gains prominence as they progress through university, due to the recognition that a successful vocational career after university was a higher priority than their sport careers (e.g., Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003). Student-athletes that experienced injury during university in the current study, however, were more inclined to consider alternate career options due to the perception that injury may reoccur following transition. Harris (2003) also suggested that injured student-athletes were encouraged to see beyond collegiate athletics and anticipate a future based on an identity separate from their sport.

Advancing previous literature, in the current study, one of the challenges of moving out of university for student-athletes was the loss of physical core support services (e.g., physiotherapy, strength and conditioning coaching). The loss of support services that student-athletes experienced complicated other challenges, including the transition into the elite senior level, further highlighting the complexity of the transition. The developmental pathway of some sports (e.g., athletics, rowing) mean that student-athletes experience the transition out of university alongside the transition out of age restricted groups (e.g., U23 level). Age restricted groups that student-athletes may be competing in at university are suggested to help maintain motivation for athletes in the gap between junior competition and the peak performance age range (European Athletics, 2013). Athletes describe these age groups as a major milestone in their progress to world-class competition (Dick, 2013). The loss of university support services alongside a loss in support from alternate sources (e.g., NGB financial support) may mean that former student-athletes have difficulties progressing beyond this development phase after university. This challenge faced by athletes may require universities and sports federations to address this post-university development gap in support (e.g., provide graduate scholarships for athletes who have the potential to progress into the elite senior level). The loss of financial support following exit from university has previously been highlighted as a factor in athletes' decision to drop out of sport (e.g., Tekavc et al., 2015). These results reflect those of previous studies that suggest that student-athletes' abilities to manage and overcome the demands (e.g., loss of core support services) they experience during concurrent transitions (e.g., transition out of university and out of restricted age categories) is likely to determine whether they become successful senior athletes (Bennie & O'Connor, 2006; Hollings et al., 2014; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990).

A novel finding from the current study was that the developmental pathways of certain sports also underpinned student-athletes' decision-making process around which path to take when they leave university. For student-athletes that were about to move into the senior level, the drop in necessary support led them to pursue a vocation sport dual career when they left university, or as outlined by Wylleman et al. (2013), a semi-professional sports career, combined with a vocation. Despite being incorporated into dual career definitions (e.g., Ryba et al., 2015), the exact challenges of a vocation sport dual career have not been well explored in the literature (Tekavc et al., 2015). Motivations to pursue this path were to assist the athletic career through financial income, and athletes took on small jobs to support their career as opposed to full-time roles that may be to the detriment of their performance. A challenge of this path, however, included restricted work hours (EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes, 2012; Pink et al., 2018; Wylleman & Reints, 2010), leading to challenges keeping up with highly demanding training schedules, and is comparable to the more flexible timetabling student-athletes experienced at university. In addition, student-athletes may continue their dual career into postgraduate education to continue receiving support services, and help to bridge the gap between restricted age categories and the elite senior level. Alternatively, taking a ‘make or break year’ as a full-time athlete following the transition out of university was also a motivator for student-athletes following the developmental pathway outlined above. Finally, when relocating to a national training centre after university is a requirement to continue on the developmental pathway to the elite senior level, student-athletes may discontinue their sporting involvement (e.g., due to the location of a national training centre restricting their development outside of sport).

At the psychosocial level, student-athletes in the current study experienced changes in their relationships when they left university. These changes included having to form new coach relationships, being distanced from close peers, leaving training groups (Moreland-Bishop, 2009; Murphy, 1995; Werthner & Orlick, 1986), and having a reduced a social life due to the time demands of a new career. Previous literature (e.g., Buhl, 2007) has suggested that when students leave university, they experience a reduced financial dependence on their parents and increased spatial distance. In contrast to previous literature (e.g., Buhl, 2007), the current study found that when student-athletes leave university, they relied on parental support (e.g., for financial, living, tangible support) to aid them in their athletic careers to cope with the loss of support from other sources (e.g., university). This finding suggests that family support may occur at an earlier time point for UK student-athletes than outlined in Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model. Research has suggested that the lure of professional sport and the rewards associated with it (e.g., financial rewards) has led to many parents becoming increasingly involved in their child’s athletic careers (Frenette, 1999). The loss in support, and belief that their children can continue to reach a higher level in sport, may place a lot of emphasis on parents to provide valuable support to student-athletes moving out of university sport scholarships. In addition, psychosocial support following exit from university may be dependent on the pathway that student-athletes take when they leave university. For example, if student-athletes transition into professional sport, they may continue to receive support from NGB support staff. Athletes, however, who become semi-professional alongside vocational careers may rely on parental support when they leave university. Pink et al. (2018) recently suggested that although Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model has been valuable in conceptualising dual career development, it does not highlight how athletic development and academic/vocational development may shift as a function of athlete status (e.g., professional, semi-professional, amateur). Similar to the views of Pink et al. (2018), the current study suggests that psychosocial support may differ depending on the status of the athletic career (e.g., professional sport, semi-professional).

Student-athletes also received limited social and strategic support from their educational institutions during the transition process out of university. Strategic support was identified as being less of a priority during the transition out of university comparative to recruiting athletes into the university. To some extent, supporting athletes throughout their time at university (and placing expectations on them to compete for the university) and then not having strategic systems in place when they leave (e.g., creating pathways where they can enter contracts at sports clubs or gain employment) may question the duty of care that universities have for athletes. Additionally, although student-athletes were aware that there was a support provider (e.g., sport scholarship manager, performance lifestyle advisor) within their university who could offer transitional support (e.g., assist athletes in the planning process), student-athletes did not actively seek this support. Previous studies have suggested that student-athletes can be hesitant about seeking help with the diverse emotions they experience when transitioning out of university (e.g., Blinde & Stratta, 1992). A novel finding in the current study, however, was that support providers did not actively approach the topic of transition on a regular basis with student-athletes, suggesting that there is an incongruence between support provided, support required, and student-athletes actively seeking support with the transition process (e.g., actively planning next steps). Stambulova's (2003) athletic career transition model highlights that to cope successfully with a transition, this requires a dynamic balance between athletes' resources and barriers. For student-athletes leaving university in the current study, this balance may not have occurred, because they had minimal resources (e.g., transition knowledge), and had internal barriers (e.g., limited preparation and help-seeking behaviours). This finding may suggest why student-athletes experienced challenges adapting to their post-university lives. Encouraging student-athletes to actively engage in the planning process for post-university early on in their university careers may help to facilitate the support process. Student-athletes did, however, demonstrate awareness of how they could apply their skills learnt from being university student-athletes (e.g., setting deadlines, experience of set-backs) into their new post-university careers (Good, 2015). This suggests that student-athletes may have learnt a number of life skills throughout their time at university that can be applied to new settings.

6.4.2 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

The findings of the current part of this thesis contribute to existing dual career research by highlighting the different pathways that student-athletes take when they leave university, the corresponding challenges that they face, and the limited support provided during the transition. Confronting anxieties about leaving university, having to make important life decisions, and confronting a change in identity suggest that the transition out of university is a critical moment (Nesti & Littlewood, 2011; Nesti et al., 2012) within athletes' lives. In combination with the loss of core support services, and leaving age restricted groups, the current findings may be of interest to universities, sports clubs, federations, and NGBs, to assist student-athletes in either preparing for the loss of support or implement additional support for athletes during this period. Additionally, gathering the perceptions of student-athletes who were at differing time points in the transition (e.g., student-athletes who were about to make the transition and those who had already made the transition) is a further strength of the current thesis. By gathering data from participants who were at different time points, this enabled the researcher to assess the concerns that student-athletes had about leaving university, and the challenges they actually experience when they leave. This knowledge may help support providers to more effectively prepare student-athletes during the planning process for the transition out of university. As this research was also the first study to investigate the transition out of university for student-athletes in the UK, this is also a significant strength of the study. Currently, research on the transition out of university has largely been conducted in the US, when the transition often coincides with the move out of a competitive sports career (e.g., Brown, 2003; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). As the current research suggests that this often not the case for UK athletes, this could help to inform support systems.

Within the current study, however, there are limitations that need to be recognised. First, although a group of university athlete support staff (e.g., sport scholarship manager, head coaches, sports development staff) who have differing roles in supporting student-athletes were interviewed, they were all from the same educational institution. Their views may not be parallel to those from other support providers from UK universities who may provide enhanced support services to student-athletes (e.g., individualised transition support). This limitation may, however, have been counteracted by the athlete participants in the current study, who were from 8 different universities across the UK, and therefore brought knowledge of different support systems and experiences of making the transition out of university.

The findings of the current study suggested that support sources external to the university may be influential in the support process for student-athletes when they leave university. These include parents, who were found to provide financial, living, and tangible support to student-athletes when they left university, and continued to be supportive of their athletic careers. Gaining the perspectives of parents during the transition out of university may be of value for future research, because parents may have witnessed first-hand the challenges that student-athletes face when they leave university. Additionally, exploring the views of further external stakeholders, such as NGBs, may be of interest, because student-athletes described losing financial support from their NGBs adjacent to their transition out of university. Exploring the reasons for this loss in support, and how NGBs could more effectively support student-athletes during this period would be of research interest. Additionally, future research may benefit from interviewing the same athletes over a longitudinal period to assess their transition out of university and whether they have or have not been successful in their chosen paths. In doing so, universities may have a greater understanding of how to effectively prepare student-athletes who take different pathways when they leave university.

The current study found that student-athletes that follow a developmental pathway that will lead to the transition out of university coinciding with the transition out of age restricted groups may experience challenges attaining their elite senior potential. Based on this finding, future research may benefit from exploring the post-university development phase that athletes may enter in greater detail. Exploring this challenge in detail may help to gain an understanding of how former student-athletes can be supported during this phase to maximise their elite senior potential. Understanding ways that universities and NGBs can either prepare student-athletes for the loss in core support that they may experience when they enter this phase, or how these stakeholders can effectively support athletes following their exit from university may be of benefit. This knowledge may also help to avoid drop out of sport for athletes who have the potential to reach the elite senior level after they leave university, but need an extra few years of development to do so.

Finally, university stakeholders highlighted that they are keen for their student-athletes to progress into postgraduate education to maintain their eligibility to compete for the university within the BUCS leagues. This need for athletes to stay at university may suggest that, to some extent, universities are supporting athletes for the wrong reasons. Instead of focusing on personal development through the process of undertaking a dual career, universities may be using athletes for their own benefit. These perceptions were congruent with those of student-athletes who perceived that staying in education allowed them the opportunity to continue receiving support services and the flexibility of time to further their athletic careers. Currently in the UK, the system may be ineffective in supporting athletes' dual career development and holistic needs. Instead, a performance-focused approach is taken that endeavours to recruit athletes to gain athletic success for the university. The current system may be the reason why some student-athletes failed to prepare for the transition out of university. These athletes perceived that focussing on career development and preparation for a life outside of sport was aligned to admitting failure.

6.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this part of the current thesis adds to previous dual career literature as it is the first to explore the transition out of university within a UK context. The current study recognises that the transition out of university can be a critical moment in the lives of athletes, as they must face decisions about their future, and confront a change in identity. A key finding of this study was that there are five different pathways that UK student-athletes take when they leave university, each encompassing a complex range of driving factors (e.g., continue receiving core support services, finances, desire to compete in the next Olympic Games), and challenges covering a holistic perspective (e.g., identity confusion, social changes, athletic challenges). Limited preparation, however, and an incongruence between support provided and student-athletes' proactively seeking support may be a factor to why student-athletes struggle to cope with the challenges that they face. A further key finding of this part of the current thesis was that there is a pool of athletes who are significantly overlooked when they leave university. These are those who are not progressing straight onto a fully-funded sports programme or have a contract at a professional club, are leaving age restricted groups, and have lost core support services provided to them at university (e.g., physiotherapy). Suggestions of support have been made, and will be advanced in the general discussion. Studies have revealed that athletes on dual career tracks report more successful transitions and adaptation to work life compared to those who focus exclusively on their sport throughout their career (e.g., Aquilina, 2013; Torregrosa et al., 2015; Tshube & Feltz, 2015). There are also a number of athletes, however, who undertake a university dual career, and following completion, lose support services, have unfulfilled sporting ambitions, and may ultimately not fulfil their elite potential, highlighting the ‘make or break’ nature of the university experience for some athletes. This raises questions about why student-athletes are supported during their time at university on sport scholarship programmes if upon exit from university, they do not have opportunities to continue to progress. The experiences highlighted may be due to the current system that is present within the UK, whereby universities may be supporting athletes as a means to gain success within university events and leagues. Finally, the difficulties that student-athletes may experience when transitioning out of university also raises the question whether, to some extent, student-athletes are over-supported during their time at university. Student-athletes may be integrated into an environment at university where there is too much support and too little challenge provided by their sport scholarship programmes (defined as a comfortable environment; see Fletcher and Sarkar, 2016), leading to minimal performance enhancement and limited possibility of exiting into full-time programmes. Instead, a focus on empowering student-athletes to search for their own support, and support providers guiding them in this process may be advantageous. This ideology will be discussed further in the general discussion, the next section in this thesis.

Chapter Seven

General Discussion

7.1 General Overview of Thesis and Results

The purpose of this PhD was to explore the pathways (i.e., into and out of higher education), and career development phase (i.e., during higher education) within Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model within a UK context. At present, although there is increasing input from Europe, the student-athlete literature has predominantly come from US populations (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014), and the experiences of student-athletes in the UK had largely been unrepresented. The purpose of the following chapter is to present a summary of the key findings of the current thesis that contributed to a modified version of the higher education pathways and career development phase of Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model, relevant to a UK context. Following this, my reflections on conducting autoethnography, the strengths and limitations of the overall thesis, practical implications, future research directions, and a summary of recommendations to university dual career provision in the UK will be presented.

To achieve the primary purpose of the thesis, there were four aims. The first aim of the thesis was to examine athletes' and stakeholders' experiences of the transition into university for student-athletes. The holistic athletic career model (Wylleman et al., 2013) highlights that during this period, athletes' may experience a number of simultaneous transitions. These include the transition into higher education, the transition to the senior or mastery level of competition, and the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. These coinciding transitions can lead to increased stress for athletes (Brown et al., 2015). Part A of the thesis contributed to this aim by investigating a number of elements within the transition to university for student-athletes. Within part A, there was exploration of pre-transition perceptions, pre-transition decision-making processes, acute changes that student-athletes experience, and how student-athletes are supported through the transition into university. This was achieved using focus groups and semi-structured interviews with student-athletes and stakeholders (e.g., sport scholarship managers, head coaches, academic staff), and supplemented with autoethnographic data from the author.

The second aim of the thesis was to examine student-athletes' perspectives of their experiences during university. During a university dual career, student-athletes experience stress when they are required to prioritise one career above the other, and may experience fluctuations in motivation to engage in education and consequential fatigue (e.g., Burden et al., 2004; Debois et al., 2015). Part B contributed to this aim by conducting longitudinal interviews with student-athletes across a university academic year. Longitudinal dual career studies are a minority (e.g., Ryba et al., 2016), and there are currently no studies that have explored the experiences during university from a UK perspective. By conducting longitudinal research, it became possible to assess changes over time and the processes associated with these changes (e.g., Holland et al., 2004). By exploring the experiences that student-athletes have during university, it also became possible to assess how different events (e.g., injury, external stakeholder pressure) can influence experience, and the types of support that student-athletes may require during this time.

The third aim of the thesis was to examine athletes' and stakeholders' experiences of the transition out of university for student-athletes. Currently, exploration of the transition out of university for student-athletes is limited in the literature, and has been dominated by research conducted on US student-athletes (e.g., Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Moreland-Bishop, 2009). These studies highlight that when student-athletes leave university, for most, this transition marks the end of a competitive athletic career (e.g., Brown, 2003). The athletic development of UK athletes, however, often takes place in sports clubs and national training centres that are external to their education (Rubingh & Broeke, 1998). This difference in developmental pathways may highlight that there are increased opportunities for UK student-athletes to continue competing to a high level in their sport post-university. Part C of the thesis primarily contributed to this aim by examining the experiences of student-athletes both before and after making the transition out of university. Within part C, there was an exploration of pre-transition perceptions, the pathways student-athletes took when they left university and decisions behind these, challenges experienced, and support provided during transition. This was achieved through a focus group with stakeholders (e.g., sport scholarship managers, strength and conditioning coaches, sport development staff) and semi-structured interviews with student-athletes. Additionally, participant data was supplemented with autoethnographic data from my own experiences of leaving university as a student-athlete.

The final aim of the thesis was to expand knowledge available on student-athlete experiences within a UK context. "The EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes" (2012) encouraged national stakeholders to explore the factors associated with dual careers within their respective cultures. By exploring the experiences of UK student-athletes, this may help national organisations (e.g., NGBs within the UK) to implement the correct types of support to help facilitate student-athletes' careers whilst at university, and help them to make effective transitions. During both the 2012 London Olympic Games and the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, the majority of Team Great Britain were either current student-athletes or had been through the higher education system (British Universities & Colleges Sport, 2012, 2016). At the 2012 London Olympic Games, sports such as women's water polo and modern pentathlon had a 100% representation from current university student-athletes and alumni (British Universities & Colleges Sport, 2012). These figures highlight the important role that student-athletes play in the elite sport system in the UK. Examination of UK student-athletes' and stakeholders' perspectives of the university dual career provides context specific data. Having this data allow stakeholders (e.g., universities, NGBs, sports clubs) to put in place effective support to maximise the elite potential of UK student-athletes both during and beyond their university careers.

7.2 Main Findings Contributing to the Adapted Model

Theoretically, the main findings of the current thesis support Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model as a basis for understanding the pathway through higher education. Many of the factors within the model (e.g., simultaneous transitions occurring in different life domains) were highlighted by participants in the current thesis as occurring during the higher education section of their athletic careers. Additions can, however, be made to the model to make it representative of the UK university dual career pathway. The current thesis adds depth to the holistic athletic career model (Wylleman et al., 2013), and provides an increased level of detail that may help student-athletes at university and those supporting them to better understand the dual career process. The main findings that contributed to the adapted version of the model will be discussed in the paragraphs below under each level of Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model (e.g., athletic level, psychological level). The findings under each level of the model are separated into; prior to and transitioning into university, during university, and the transition out of university. The adapted higher education section of the holistic athletic career model (Wylleman et al., 2013) representative of the UK dual career pathway through university is then presented.

7.2.1 Athletic Level

7.2.1.1 Prior to and transitioning into university. School-age student-athletes in the UK may face challenging decisions around what their next steps will be, that could influence their development at the athletic level. This decision may include whether to continue their athletic development at university (Devaney et al., 2017), or as a full-time athlete in a national training centre (Poczwardowski et al., 2014). Following the transition into university, UK student-athletes may experience the athletic transition of moving into a national training centre simultaneously alongside moving into university, that can lead to the need to adjust to a higher intensity of training (Debois & Leseur, 2013), and challenges with academic motivation.

In addition to the above challenges, corresponding with Wylleman et al. (2013) and previous literature (e.g., Brown et al., 2015), student-athletes in UK populations experienced the athletic transition into the senior level of competition coinciding with their move into university. The transition into senior competition at the same time can lead to additional challenges, including increased training load (Pummell et al., 2008), increased risk of injury, an increased need to access support services, a need to be outside of the university environment, and can be more intense within certain sports (e.g., in boxing there may be a higher level of danger and risk of injury). For student-athletes following different developmental pathways, however, the transition may run alongside the move into the U23 level of competition. The current thesis also recognised that when moving into university, this can coincide with the athletic transition of moving into university sport (i.e., BUCS leagues and events). This athletic transition may be a UK specific factor, because it can be a requirement to hold a sport scholarship award. The transition into university sport can run alongside external club and country commitments, and result in a sudden increase in the volume of sporting commitments (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015).

7.2.1.2 During university. During student-athletes' time at university, they may experience a number of athletic events, and both normative and non-normative transitions or non-events (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The current thesis found that student-athletes experienced a number of unpredictable athletic events during their time at university. Although not included in Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model due to their unpredictability, they are included within the UK context model to highlight some of the key athletic challenges that student-athletes experience during this phase. The current thesis found that student-athletes experienced fluctuations within their athletic performance, related to their current situation (e.g., athletes struggled to perform well in their sport when they had high academic demands). These findings relate to Debois et al. (2015) who suggests that a dual career can be stressful during periods when athletes are required to prioritise one career above the other.

Additionally, student-athletes experienced transitions into periods of being injured and had time away from their sport, leading to an enhanced focus on education (Aquilina, 2009), and can lead to increased stress. Correspondingly, this led student-athletes to experience further transitions back into training following injury, and led to increased motivation to succeed in sport (Tracey, 2003). Student-athletes also experienced transitions into new external sports clubs during their time at university that increased their current commitments. Student-athletes also left these sports clubs during university due to difficulties keeping up with academic commitments for example.

In addition, during university, student-athletes experienced athletic transitions into beginning preparations for a major event (e.g., World Championships), leading to an enhanced focus on sport. Further to this, student-athletes also experienced transition phases within their specific sports. For example, a boxer began a dieting phase for an upcoming fight, that had a negative influence on other life domains (e.g., limited energy led to poor motivation to study for exams). Additionally, an example of an athletic non-event was being notified that they had not made selection for a major sporting event (e.g., Commonwealth Games), leading to limited clarity over athletes' sporting future. Aquilina (2013) suggested that these non-events may be particularly problematic, given the athlete's lack of control over decisions being made. Finally, student-athletes' athletic development and competition took place within their universities (BUCS leagues), external sports clubs, high performance centres with Team Great Britain, and representing their country internationally.

7.2.1.3 Transitioning out of university. Upon transition out of university, when UK student-athletes experienced an athletic career-ending transition, similar to the experiences of US athletes (e.g., Baille & Danish, 1992), this was involuntary. Dropping out of sport during this time was due to being dropped from a centralised programme, location of national training centre not being close to vocational or further educational opportunities, and career-ending injuries (Stoltenburg et al., 2011). A novel finding in the current thesis was that the transition out of university for student-athletes can occur alongside the athletic transition of leaving restricted age groups (e.g., U23 level). Competing within these restricted age categories is perceived by athletes to be a major milestone in their progress to world-class competition (Dick, 2013). Following exit from university, athletes may move into a post-university development phase. During this phase, athletes aimed to take the next step in their sport and become elite senior level performers, however, they experienced challenges attaining this level due to the loss of core support (e.g., strength and conditioning) from their university and other sources (e.g., NGB) during this period. Aligning with Wylleman et al. (2013), student-athletes chose to further their athletic development and transition into full-time sport following university. A novel finding in the current thesis, however, was that student-athletes took a make or break year after university (i.e., one year as a full-time athlete to try and progress into the elite senior level).

7.2.2 Psychological Level

7.2.2.1 Prior to and transitioning into university. Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model highlights that the transition from adolescence to young adulthood occurs simultaneously alongside the transition into higher education for athletes. Aligning with Wylleman et al. (2013), in the current thesis, when moving into university, student-athletes had to become more independent within their living and academic environments, and recognised that they had to begin taking personal responsibility for their development (Brown et al., 2015).

In addition to psychological development related to the move to young adulthood, the current thesis suggests that changes at the psychological level could also encompass other identities that student-athletes may have to develop when they move into university. Student-athletes' that experienced the transition into the senior level of competition at the same time as moving into university had to adapt to a new identity as a senior athlete (Pummell et al., 2008). This change may be challenging for student-athletes as they may have to become accustomed to no longer being the best athlete in their university training groups, and may have to become responsible for guiding their own athletic development. Additionally, the current thesis suggests that student-athletes may enter university with high athletic identities, and a change within their psychological development following the transition may also encompass the development of a university student identity (Killeya-Jones, 2005).

7.2.2.2 During university. Emerging adulthood has been identified as taking place (roughly) between the ages of 18 and 25, and is a time when individuals experience identity exploration and development (Erikson, 1968). As the emerging adulthood stage may be taking place during student-athletes' entire university dual career, this may explain why student-athletes experienced challenges and conflict within their identities at university. These identity challenges included becoming encompassed in the athlete role, and having poor identity development within other areas (e.g., student role). Literature suggests that individuals may experience conflict between athlete and student roles (Finch, 2009; Sturm, et al., 2011), and one identity may be stronger than the other (Miller & Kerr, 2002).

7.2.2.3 Transitioning out of university. Following completion of a university degree, former student-athletes in the current thesis highlighted that they had to relocate back to their family homes, and become dependent on their parents for financial and living support. In the process, student-athletes felt they had lost the independence and personal responsibility they had developed following their transition into university, and may have impeded on their psychological development.

In addition to psychological development related to young adulthood, the transition out of university led student-athletes to experience changes in their perception of identity. A change in identity has been discussed as a key facet of transition (Schlossberg, 1981), and in the current thesis, after leaving university, former student-athletes' experienced a transition from student athlete to full-time athlete. Despite this change, due to the loss of elite training groups, loss of support from universities and NGBs, and no longer having an alternative focus, athletes struggled to accept their new full-time athlete role. In addition, following the move out of university, athletes had to develop a vocational identity for the first time. This was challenging for athletes as having a vocational identity was not perceived to be part of an elite athlete's role.

7.2.3 Psychosocial Level

7.2.3.1 Prior to and transitioning into university. First, within the pre-transition decision making phase, and in line with Wylleman et al. (2013), parents and coaches assisted student-athletes in making decisions about whether to enter university, and which university to attend. Parents have been cited as key support source in their child's athletic and academic careers (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002), and the values they hold about education may play a factor in the decisions that athletes make (Devaney et al., 2017). After making decisions about which university to attend, prior to transition, adding to the UK context of Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model, university athlete support staff provide logistical support (e.g., information around support programme athletes would receive following transition), that may not be effective in preparing student-athletes for the changes they may experience following transition.

As represented by Wylleman et al. (2013), following the transition into university, student-athletes in the current thesis had to build new relationships with coaches and members of university athlete support staff (e.g., physiotherapists, sport scholarship managers). In contrast to previous literature (e.g., MacNamara & Collins, 2010), when student-athletes perceived that a change in coach was a positive feature of moving to university, student-athletes in the current thesis were anxious about forming new coach relationships, and perceived that they would have difficulty building trust. Following the transition into university, university athlete support staff (e.g., scholarship managers) provide social support, including emotional (e.g., Cosh & Tully, 2014; MacNamara & Collins, 2010), informational, and appraisal (experiential) support (Brown et al., 2015). Within the current thesis, student-athletes perceived that the development of peer relationships was important following transition, and they enjoyed an active social life during this period. Research suggests that peers can buffer stress associated within transitioning into university (Tinto, 1989).

7.2.3.2 During university. During student-athletes' time at university, they experienced changes within their psychosocial environment. First, UK student-athletes often receive support from both university athlete support staff (e.g., performance lifestyle advisors), and from other support providers external to the university (e.g., coaches from sports clubs). This combination of psychosocial support sources may create challenges for student-athletes who experience pressures from different stakeholders to focus on different areas. Peers within training groups were also perceived to be sources of support during university. Finally, adding context to Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model, the current thesis found that student-athletes can receive support from academic staff during their time at university (e.g., providing extensions). Student-athletes, however, perceived that academic staff's understanding of their sporting commitments was limited, and in line with previous literature (e.g., McKenna & Dunstan-Lewis, 2004), this is an area of support that could be improved.

7.2.3.3 Transitioning out of university. The current thesis found that when UK student-athletes transition out of university, they experience changes within their psychosocial environment at different time points than represented within Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model. Wylleman et al. (2013) demonstrates that family support is a key support source close to athletic retirement. In the current thesis, a novel finding was that student-athletes relied on parental support immediately following their transition out of university. This support came in the form of emotional, tangible, and living support, and enabled athletes to continue with their athletic careers. This finding is in contrast to previous research from the general student population that suggests that the transition out of university can lead to reduced financial dependence on parents, and increased spatial distance (Buhl, 2007). Also adding context to the holistic athletic career model (Wylleman, et al., 2013), when student-athletes transitioned out of university, they experienced having to develop new relationships with coaches when they moved into new training centres, or back into their pre-university sports clubs. In addition, the current thesis highlights that when student-athletes leave university, they become distanced from their peer support networks, and experienced challenges though moving out of training groups (e.g., loss in motivation; Moreland-Bishop, 2009). Following the transition out of university, student-athletes also lost core support services (e.g., physiotherapy, strength and conditioning, financial support) that they received through holding sport scholarships at university. Finally, student-athletes also described losing NGB support whilst moving out of age restricted groups, that led to difficulties progressing into the elite senior level.

7.2.4 Academic/Vocational Level

7.2.4.1 Prior to and transitioning into university. Student-athletes had to make the challenging decision about whether they wanted to continue their dual careers and make the academic transition into university, and also make decisions around which institution they wanted to attend. Research suggests that US student-athletes choose educational institutions based on factors such as the coaching staff and their career goals (Vermillion & Spears, 2012). In the current thesis, UK student-athletes perceived that the location of the university regarding its proximity to external sports clubs and training centres was more important. In line with previous studies (e.g., Brown et al., 2015; MacNamara and Collins, 2010), the move into higher education meant that student-athletes had to become increasingly motivated, proactive, and organised within their new educational setting.

7.2.4.2 During university. During their time at university, student-athletes experienced academic factors such as fluctuations in academic motivation (Burden et al., 2004), depending on current situations they were in (e.g., personal life stressors influenced motivation to study). Student-athletes also experienced a gradual increase in their academic workload (e.g., more assignments, more complex academic work, and increased expectations from academic staff) as they progressed from their first to their final year, that was particularly apparent at the beginning of the second and third year of university. The increases in workloads created stress for student-athletes in combination with their sporting commitments. Student-athletes also experienced failures within their education (e.g., failed exams, inability to complete academic course) when they neglected their student role due to training for important events within the sporting calendar. This finding supports Debois et al. (2015), who suggested that the dual career was less manageable during major sporting events (e.g., Olympic Games), with many athletes putting their academic careers to one side during these periods.

7.2.4.3 Transitioning out of university. When UK student-athletes completed their undergraduate degrees at university, they made a number of different academic and vocational transitions, that add context to Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model. First, student-athletes that dropped out of sport following the transition out of university, moved into a full-time vocational career or alternative path. In addition, student-athletes made the decision to continue their university careers, and begin a postgraduate degree, to either further their career prospects or to help sustain their athletic career by continuing to receive support services provided by the university. A further pathway taken by student-athletes when they left university was to go into a vocation sport dual career. Student-athletes were motivated to take a vocation sport pathway to gain financial income to support their sports careers, but the limited flexibility within this career (e.g., Wylleman & Reints, 2010; Pink et al., 2018) led to training challenges. In addition, not previously highlighted in the literature, after leaving university, student-athletes may combine the two careers outlined above and begin a triple career combining sport, postgraduate education, and a vocation. This combined academic and vocational transition led to time demands that were difficult to manage, fatigue, and personal sacrifices. The time demands of participating in sport have been linked to social isolation, and a reduced social life for student-athletes (Comeaux et al., 2011), and may be heightened within the triple career due to additional commitments.

7.2.5 Financial Level

7.2.5.1 Prior to and transitioning into university. Prior to entering university, student-athletes held concerns about managing their finances independently of their parents. Additionally, following the transition into university, student-athletes may experience a loss in financial support from their external sports clubs. Tekavc et al. (2015) also found that student-athletes may face financial difficulties in their athletic clubs, including manipulations from their club representatives or managers. The transition into university can also coincide with the transition into becoming a UK sport funded athlete, that can put added pressure on the athlete role for student-athletes.

7.2.5.2 During university. Aligning with financial sources outlined in the holistic athletic career model (Wylleman et al., 2013), during university, student-athletes received financial aid from government funded organisations (e.g., TASS, UK Sport), NGBs, and sponsors. Adding context within the adapted model, UK student-athletes also received financial support from their student loans and university sport scholarship programmes, that helped with living and competition expenses. In addition, student-athletes may also receive financial aid from parents whilst at university, particularly for those who continue to live in the family home whilst at university. Although student-athletes in the current thesis struggled to fund their athletic careers at university, they also perceived that being at university was a positive for their financial situation. This finding contrasts previous literature that highlights that financial issues are a common concern for student-athletes (e.g., Petitpas et al., 2009).

7.2.5.3 Transitioning out of university. Adding context to Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model, the current thesis found that when student-athletes move out of university, this may coincide with a loss in financial support from a number of different sources. These include university sport scholarship programmes, NGBs, government sponsors, and sponsorship deals. These changes within financial support may occur at an earlier time point for UK student-athletes than highlighted within the holistic athletic career model (Wylleman et al., 2013). Following the loss of financial support from sources such as sport scholarship programmes, athletes relied on their parents immediately following the transition out of university, to financially support their athletic careers.

7.3 Adaptations to the Higher Education Section of The Holistic Athletic Career Model

Based on the findings of the current thesis, an adaptation of Wylleman and colleagues (2013) holistic athletic career model representative of the UK dual career pathway through university is presented below. The adapted model includes all of the layers presented in Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model, including the athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, and financial levels. The adapted model includes a pre-transition section occurring at approximately age 17-18, followed by the move into university at approximately age 18-19, and the adaptation period. This is followed by the during university section between approximately ages 18-22, followed by the transition out of university and adaptation period at approximately ages 21-23.

<table>
<tr><th>Age</th><th>17</th><th>18</th><th>19</th><th>20</th><th>21</th><th>22</th><th>23</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Period</th><th>Pre-transition</th><th>Transition in/adaptation</th><th colspan="2">During</th><th colspan="2">Transition out/adaptation</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="3">Athletic Level</td><td rowspan="3">School/college student-athlete (decision around athletic development)</td><td rowspan="3">Adaptation to national training centre/elite senior level/ U21/23 level/transition into university sport</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="3">In and out of injury/transitions into and out of sports clubs/into preparation for major event/into sport-specific phases/BUCS, club leagues and international competition</td><td colspan="2">Discontinuation</td></tr>
<tr><td>Post-university development (make or break year/leaving age restricted groups)</td><td>Elite senior level</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Elite senior level</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Psychological Level</td><td>Adolescence/ strong athletic identity</td><td>Adaptation to young adulthood/senior athlete identity/university student identity</td><td colspan="2">Conflict between athlete and student role (questioning identity)</td><td colspan="2">Full-time athlete identity/ vocational identity/loss of independence</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Psychosocial Level</td><td>Parents/coach/ university athlete support staff</td><td>Parents/university support staff/new peers</td><td colspan="2">University athlete support staff/ academic staff/peers/training groups/sport club coaches</td><td colspan="2">Parents/new coach (support dependent on status of athletic career)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="4">Academic/ Vocational Level</td><td rowspan="4">School/college (decision around entering university and where to go)</td><td colspan="3">Higher education</td><td colspan="2">Higher education continued (postgraduate)/combined with vocation</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Adaptation to more independent educational environment</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="3">Fluctuations in academic motivation/increases in frequency and difficulty of workload/failed exams/vocational work experience</td><td colspan="2">Semi-professional career (part-time vocation)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Professional athletic career</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Full time vocation/alternative path</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Financial Level</td><td>Parents/sports clubs</td><td colspan="3">UK Sport/university sport scholarships/sponsors/NGBs/ government sponsors (e.g., TASS)/student loan/parents</td><td colspan="2">Parents/employer/UK Sport/NGB/sport scholarship programmes/government sponsors</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 7.1. Adaptation of the holistic athletic career model representative of the UK dual career pathway through university.

7.4 Thesis Strengths

The structure of the current thesis represents a major strength, as there is representation of each element within the university dual career for student-athletes. This includes pre-transition decision-making, thoughts about entering university, immediate changes following transition, experiences during university, perceptions of leaving, and challenges experienced upon exit. Through reading the current thesis, athletes and stakeholders may gain an increased understanding around each step of the higher education process, including the types of challenges to expect within differing stages and how athletes could be supported within different periods.

A further strength of the current thesis is the novel research areas that were explored. These novel areas included an exploration of the experiences during university for UK student-athletes, including exploring first, second, and third year student-athlete experiences. Additionally, the transition out of university for UK student-athletes was a previously unexplored area, and included investigating the different pathways that student-takes took when they left university and their reasoning behind these. In addition to exploring these novel research areas, the current thesis used methodologies that have previously been limited within dual career research (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). These included the use of longitudinal data collection and narrative analysis, that combined, captured the experiences of student-athletes during their time at university in a unique and creative way.

Additionally, a strength of the current research was the use of qualitative research methods throughout. There has been debate around the strengths and weaknesses of employing both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Patton, 2002). As some of the research areas explored were relatively new areas of enquiry within the dual career literature (highlighted above), there was a need to explore these areas, in depth. This is because participants may be able to highlight new factors and insights not previously discussed in the literature (e.g., Guest, et al., 2013; Öhman, 2005; Patton, 2002). A qualitative methodology, where student-athletes were able to highlight their transition experiences out of university in detail, for example, was therefore, the chosen method of enquiry (Patton, 2002)

A final strength of the current thesis was the use of a homogenous sample. Using a specific sample of people (i.e., UK university student-athletes and their support providers) enabled rich data to be collected within the phenomena of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Student-athletes who were not involved in the current research may be able to draw parallels between their own experiences and that of those in the current thesis, and enable them to more effectively understand their current situations. These individuals may be able to identify how they can overcome demands and challenges associated with their own dual career experience by reading about how other athletes coped with similar situations. Drawing parallels between experiences may also be applicable for dual career support providers, because reading the results of the current thesis may provide a greater understanding of the needs of the student-athletes they support. This understanding could in turn lead to improved support systems for student-athletes both within universities (e.g., university sport scholarship programmes), and external to universities (e.g., NGBs, sports clubs).

7.5 Thesis Delimitations and Limitations

Within the current thesis, the holistic athletic career model (Wylleman et al., 2013) was chosen throughout to formulate interview schedules, and to represent the UK dual career process. The model was chosen due to its significant strengths in portraying athletic career development phases and transitions within a dual career. Alternative frameworks have, however, been presented in the literature to explain transitions within sport (e.g., Baillie & Danish, 1992; Sinclair & Orlick, 1994; Schlossberg, 1981; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Drawing from multiple models may enable a broader understanding of the factors associated with the UK university dual career process. For example, drawing on Schlossberg's (1981) human adaptation to transition model may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the personal characteristics (e.g., past experiences) of student-athletes can influence their transition into university.

A limitation of the results of the current thesis is that some of the data may have been influenced by recall bias (Levine & Safer, 2002), whereby individuals may have been unable to accurately explain their experiences. This potential limitation was reduced, however, with the collection of longitudinal data, when data were collected in real time (i.e., during athletes' time at university), and just prior to and following transitions. Student-athletes and stakeholders may have also been influenced by social desirability, and may have answered questions in a way that they perceived others would want them to answer. For example, student-athletes may have been concerned about speaking negatively of those who support them in fear of losing this support. In addition, stakeholders such as coaches, may have been uncertain about criticising university support programmes when there were managerial figures who oversee these programmes in the same focus groups. In chapter 3, I have explained how I attempted to alleviate such challenges, by using various data collection methods and the use of participants from a number of different roles. Despite the use of these techniques that were employed throughout the thesis, Patton (2002) argues that no qualitative research methods can ever fully diminish research biases and aspects such as social desirability. Patton (2002) suggests that this should be taken into account when evaluating results of research purporting to use these methods.

7.6 Reflections on Autoethnography: A Therapeutic Process

Autoethnography has a number of important functions. Not only is this method effective in inviting the reader into the author's world and to use what they learn to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives (Ellis, 2004), but this form of writing has also been suggested to have therapeutic effects for the author (Ellis et al., 2011). Through the writing process, the author may begin to make better sense of their experiences and develop a deeper understanding of the events that have occurred in their lives (Ellis et al., 2011). Further researchers describe autoethnographic writing as a self-discovery process that happens as a result of self-reflection and self-analysis (Chang, 2008). During this process, the author may express vulnerability by revealing their deepest thoughts, and although this may be painful for some writers, the author can experience positive effects (Raab, 2013). These positive effects may include healing and a sense of empowerment through opening up about experiences (Raab, 2013).

During the writing of my own experiences of being a student-athlete at university, I experienced some of the therapeutic benefits outlined by the above researchers. Examining my university experiences in such a personal and detailed way allowed me to acknowledge aspects of the experience that I had not previously recognised as having a significant influence on the outcome of my dual career. These include the identity crisis I faced during each part of the experience, including the loss of identity when not being an England representative and the uncertainty that this created for my future in the sport. I also demonstrated vulnerability by outlining the distressing thoughts I had about what more I could have done to excel in my sport, and whether this lack of performance was my fault or the fault of others. The reflections also allowed me to understand in greater depth some of the factors that influenced decisions I made when entering and leaving university. For example, these reflections allowed me to recognise the importance I placed on wanting to fit in and follow the same pathways that others around me had taken (e.g., athletes in my sport rarely entered university) when I was deciding to enter university. This highlighted to me that as an individual, I may be susceptible to being easily led by the actions of others, instead of making decisions that are suited to me personally. Finally, despite the challenging experiences I faced transitioning into, during, and out of university, I recognise that the overall experience was a positive in my life, as the twists and turns in my dual career are what led me to develop into the person I am today. Because of this, my autoethnography writing was successful in eliciting self-discovery.

7.7 Thesis Practical Implications

Due to the findings of the current thesis, there are a number of potential implications that could have a positive effect on the university experience for student-athletes. First, the practical implications from each part of the thesis will be addressed. This will be followed by a summary of the overall implications that were evident across all studies.

7.7.1 Implications for Supporting Student-Athletes Making Decisions around and Transitioning into University

First, the results of part A suggest that the transition into university is a process and not just a singular event, and therefore, athletes may benefit from receiving support during each stage of the process. The conflict athletes may experience in the decision around moving into university or into a professional sports career suggests that social support to aid in evaluating athletes' potential options from parents and coaches may be advantageous, highlighted by my autoethnographic narrative in part A. In addition, when choosing which university to attend, athletes could be supported in weighing up the pros and cons of each, and consider how education and sport will fit together at their chosen university to help attain an optimal dual career experience. Although the location of the university was found to be a key motivator in the decision of which university to go to for athletes in part A, they may benefit from being encouraged to assess how their decision could influence their transition experience (e.g., having to regularly travel to training can lead to fatigue).

Results of part A also suggest that expectations and perceptions that student-athletes hold about being at university often do not marry with the actual experiences that they have (e.g., athletes perceived they would experience general living challenges, yet when they arrived, issued related to managing multiple club commitments emerged). Prior to transition, alongside logistic-based support (e.g., information around training times), student-athletes could be supported by their universities in developing a number of expectations about their transition. For example, in the months before transition, student-athletes could begin to develop ideas about the potential challenges (e.g., moving into a new university could lead to an increase in the frequency of training) they may encounter at university (both positive and negative), and in doing so, they may begin to develop strategies about how they might cope with these challenges (e.g., timetabling in rest and recovery periods), and may lead to student-athletes making the transition with greater confidence. If universities do not have contact with student-athletes prior to transition, this support could also be delivered by NGBs and sports clubs, or disseminated though online materials to incoming student-athletes. Additionally, the acute changes that student-athletes experienced when they made the transition highlighted key areas of support that university support staff may provide to student-athletes following their transitions to university. For example, because many of the challenges (e.g., taking on more sporting commitments, pressures from NGBs and role conflict) student-athletes experience when they enter university have the potential to have a negative influence on student-athlete wellbeing, monitoring wellbeing in the early stages of transition (e.g., through questionnaires, one-to-one discussions) to ensure that student-athletes are not overwhelmed and taking on too many commitments may be of benefit.

Additionally, university athlete support staff and additional stakeholders could endeavour to provide appraisal support over the use of informational support following the transition into university. This support could involve encouraging student-athletes to actively engage with challenging situations (e.g., facilitating athletes thought processes through activities such as brainstorming to come up with their own solutions to the problems they experience). This encouragement to engage with challenges could aid student-athletes in becoming more self-sufficient during the early stages of their university careers, and provide them with the skills to prepare them for the rest of their time at university and beyond.

Academic staff are a regular feature in the lives of student-athletes. The results of part A, however, highlight that academic staff have limited knowledge about the transitional stressors that student-athletes may face, and how they can support them through the process of moving into university. If academic staff are unaware of the student-athletes that they will be teaching in the pre-transition phase, they will not be able to assist athlete support staff in developing individualised plans to help manage the dual career (e.g., some athletes may need flexible learning pathways). The need for student-athletes to build stronger relationships with academic staff so that their understanding of athlete commitments is enhanced is also a key implication during student-athletes' dual careers, as highlighted by the challenges Paul experienced in part B. Developing relationships with academic staff, however, could be a process that begins either prior to or immediately following the transition to university. This improved communication could be achieved through one-to-one meetings between student-athletes and academic staff to discuss athletes' commitments (e.g., identifying potential clashes between sporting and academic commitments ahead). Alternatively, this could be achieved through enhanced communication between athlete support staff and academic staff through regular student-athlete updates provided from both stakeholders.

7.7.2 Implications for Supporting Student-Athletes During their University Dual Career

During the university dual career, one of the key implications for both student-athletes and university athlete support staff is the development of meaningful and trusting practitioner-athlete relationships. Part B highlighted that due to the stressors and pressures that student-athletes face during university, performance lifestyle support may be a key support source during the dual career, yet is often perceived by student-athletes to have no value (highlighted by Sara's story in part B, whereby a poor relationship with her lifestyle advisor meant that she continued to struggle instead of reaching for help). Creating opportunities for regular contact to enhance the quality of relationships may be advantageous, and may include performance lifestyle advisors spending more time within student-athletes' sporting environments (e.g., during training sessions). In addition, because performance lifestyle meetings were perceived by student-athletes to have minimal focus on the areas that they perceived to be important, it may be beneficial for student-athletes to set the agenda of the meetings (e.g., focusing on a specific challenge that they are experiencing). In addition, due to the types of challenges described within the dual career (e.g., low wellbeing), although this may require further training, upskilling advisors to embrace counselling approaches (e.g., person-centred approach) with student-athletes over practical approaches (e.g., time management techniques) may help to avoid the isolation that student-athletes may feel when facing these challenges (e.g., in Sara's story in part B, she may have benefitted from this type of counselling support when she was experiencing uncertainty around whether to continue with her dual career). This implication may also highlight that individuals with a counselling background might be suited to supporting student-athletes through the university dual career. These individuals may be able to provide student-athletes not only with advice around time management, but will also be well equipped to use talk-based therapies, and help student-athletes to address their dual career stressors in a positive way by developing strategies and increasing self-awareness. The discussion section of part B also highlighted key time points that performance lifestyle support may be particularly important (e.g., following adverse sporting events such as non-selection for a major sporting event and failed exams), and meetings could be devised around these time points.

In addition, part B highlighted that when student-athletes experience injury during their time at university, additional challenges may present themselves alongside this (e.g., poor sleep quality, increased academic stress, loss of financial aid), and were particularly evident within Georgina's story in part B, that ultimately led to a poor university experience. Due these challenges that may occur following injury, support providers (e.g., coaches, performance lifestyle advisors) may benefit from monitoring student-athlete wellbeing during this time. Injured student-athletes could also be given opportunities to remain part of the sporting environment so that they continue to feel valued in their sport throughout the injury.

Part B of the thesis highlighted that the university dual career can be individual to each student-athlete, depending on their sport (e.g., student-athletes may experience sport-specific phases in their dual career), their current level (e.g., developing vs. elite), and the developmental pathway that they are on (e.g., student-athletes have to be located at a national training centre to continue developing in their sport). Taking this into account, support providers may benefit from recognising these differences. For example, developing student-athletes may need support with balancing their time with increased sporting commitments and academics (i.e., dual career management). Elite level student-athletes may, however, benefit additional support on how to gain sponsorship deals, and prioritise commitments. Furthermore, for student-athletes who are not located on the university campus (e.g., living at home or located at a national training centre), efforts could be made for these individuals to regularly incorporate themselves within the student activities on campus. This may help these student-athletes to avoid feeling isolated from student peers, and keep their academic motivation high. This challenge was particularly evident for Ben in part B, when a large distance separated him and his university, meaning that he became isolated from a social life and ultimately affected his wellbeing.

7.7.3 Implications for Supporting Student-Athletes Making Decisions around and Transitioning out of University

The results of Part C suggest that the transition out of university is an uncertain time for student-athletes, yet they engage in minimal planning for the transition with support providers (e.g., athletes described exploring potential careers as the equivalent of admitting failure to their sport). Athlete support staff in part C suggest that planning for the transition out of university could be an ongoing process throughout the university career. Similar to the transition preparation described in part A, this preparation could include the development of a wide range of expectations (both positive and negative), because many of the challenges athletes faced post-university (e.g., changes in social support network, how the loss of sport scholarships would influence their athletic development post-university), had not been anticipated. Additionally, because student-athletes struggled with the renegotiation of their identities when they left university (e.g., loss of identity as part of an elite training group), support providers could work with student-athletes to prepare them for changes within their identity. This preparation may include forming expectations about the roles that their new identity might portray (e.g., roles of a vocation sport dual career athlete).

Part C also highlighted that following the transition out of university for student-athletes, there may be a pool of athletes who are neglected within support systems. These include those who are not progressing straight onto a fully-funded sports programme or moving into contracts at professional clubs, are leaving age restricted groups (e.g., U23 level) and have lost core support services provided to them at university (e.g., physiotherapy). These athletes may, however, have the potential to become elite senior performers. Due to the difficulties that athletes may have in progressing beyond this development phase after university, this may require universities, NGBs, and sports clubs to either address this post-university development gap in support, or address the reasons behind why it is taking place. It could be argued that university sport scholarships could have more stringent criteria placed on them (e.g., potential to progress onto fully funded programmes or have opportunities to continue competing at a high level post-university). These criteria could help to avoid the situation of student-athletes being fully supported whilst at university, and then suddenly dropped from all support systems when they transition out.

In addition, improving the provision of strategic support from universities to exiting student-athletes may be advantageous, and was highlighted as an area under development from universities. By forming links with external sports clubs and companies, exiting student-athletes may have opportunities to continue competing in their sport to a high level and continue to receive support, or have the opportunity to exit into a vocation.

7.7.4 Overall Thesis Practical Implications

In addition to practical implications within each part of the current thesis, there are also implications that emerged across a number of the studies. First, the current thesis demonstrated that a collaborative effort should be made to connect the different support sources within student-athletes' circles when at university, and was evident during transitions, and during athletes' time at university. As student-athletes often choose their educational institution based on the location of their sports national training centre, or professional clubs, stronger relationships among universities, national training centres, and external clubs would be beneficial for the needs of student-athletes (e.g., may help to reduce travel time). Student-athletes struggled to balance the commitments of internal (e.g., university sports team) and external stakeholders (e.g., NGB commitments), and received different messages and pressures from each. By joining forces, these bodies may be able to provide greater flexibility to student-athletes and, consequently, greater support. For example, universities and NGBs could develop partnerships to provide flexible learning pathways and training commitments for student-athletes. In addition, because student-athletes described being treated unfairly by their NGBs through making the decision to undertake higher education, creating these links may help to educate stakeholders within these organisations on the importance of continuing education.

Already highlighted within parts A and C, increased education around transitions is a key implication of the current thesis. Readiness for the transitions into and out of university may be a factor that influences the outcome of athletes' transitional experiences, with inability to prepare for the demands perhaps one of the major reasons that some do not cope. In addition, the current thesis found that the development of a number of psychological characteristics (e.g., resilience, the ability to make decisions, and self-sufficiency) may be advantageous at different stages within the dual career process. Knowledge of how to develop these skills may be integral to the support provided by athlete support staff (e.g., through workshops).

Finally, the difficulty that student-athletes face when they leave university may in part be due to their limited knowledge on how to independently seek support and advice following an over-reliance on stakeholders and the support programmes they have during their time at university. It could be argued, that to some extent, student-athletes are over-supported during their university dual careers, potentially as a result of the current system in the UK, that seeks to recruit athletes to compete for their university within BUCS events and leagues (highlighted as one of the key eligibility criteria for gaining a scholarship; see Appendix A). As previously highlighted, sport scholarship criteria could be more stringent, and only allow athletes on these schemes who have the potential to step into the next level of their sport (e.g., World Class Performance Programme funding). In addition, student-athletes could have opportunities to take on more responsibilities when at university. For example, university student-athletes could be responsible for seeking their own support, such as setting up their meetings with support providers (e.g., performance lifestyle meetings), setting the agenda of their meetings (e.g., discussions around potential vocational careers), seeking their own academic flexibility arrangements and providing reports on their dual career progress. In addition, searching for proactive solutions to their problems, such as academic flexibility when they are overwhelmed with demands in their sport, may not be beneficial to their long-term development when they leave university and face balancing their sport with less flexible options (e.g., a vocation). Making student-athletes more self-sufficient at the beginning of their university journey, as previously highlighted, may to some extent help with this. By doing so, student-athletes may transition out of university with greater confidence, awareness, and preparation, so that they can deal more effectively with the challenges ahead (e.g., loss of core support services).

7.8 Future Research Directions

In recent years, the dual career topic area has received increasing attention (e.g., Aquilina, 2013; Brown et al., 2015), however, the current thesis recognised a number of areas that require further enquiry. First, throughout the thesis, there have been references to the demands of different sports (e.g., sport-specific transition phases and the developmental pathways of different sports) and how they influence dual career experiences (e.g., dieting in boxing lead to an inability to focus on education). Bruner et al. (2008) suggested that during the transition from the junior to the senior level, each sport may have their own personal transition demands that should be considered. If athletes are also transitioning into university at the same time as moving to the senior level, there may be specific demands that affect their ability to manage the transition and their dual career. For example, a swimmer who trains early in the morning may have fatigue during lectures, whereas for sports that train late in the evening, there may be an issue with limited social life. Further research into sport-specific dual career demands, and the developmental pathways that underpin certain sports may allow for a greater understanding of the needs of different sports and allow support providers to tailor support accordingly (e.g., flexible timetables).

Additionally, following on from the need to enhance understanding of sport-specific populations, there may be other specific populations of student-athletes who may have distinctive dual career needs. A recent study conducted by Campbell (2017) explored the identity perceptions of para-student-athletes as they made the move into higher education. No studies have, however, explored the specific demands and challenges that this population may experience during a university dual career. Bundon, Ashfield, Smith, and Goosey-Tolfrey (2018) highlight that para-athletes experience challenges determining when they should retire from their sport due to uncertainty about future employment. In addition, para-athletes experience retirement factors that are unique to para sport, such as declassification (Bundon et al., 2018). Such challenges may suggest that there is a need for more well-developed para-athlete dual career pathways in the UK to aid with the retirement process. Para-student-athletes may experience different trajectories in their athletic careers that influence their dual career development (e.g., they may take up their sport during university). Exploring the experiences of para-student-athletes may highlight if there is a need for individualised support specific to this population.

A further population that may also benefit from exploration is mature student-athletes (e.g., a 25-year old athlete entering university) who may not fit within Wylleman and colleagues (2013) model due to entering higher education at a later stage of their lives (e.g., already transitioned into adulthood and are elite senior performers when entering university). For example, athletes who compete in tennis may not reach their peak in their sport until their mid to late twenties, but during this time, they may also be aware of the importance of a dual career as they approach retirement age. Exploring the factors and challenges of the university experience for mature student-athletes may enable these individuals to be supported in the correct ways (e.g., this population may have been out of education for a number of years and require increased academic support when they enter university).

Additionally, during the thesis there was discussion around student-athletes who were struggling to cope with the transition into university and had thoughts about dropping out and discontinuing their dual career. It may be of interest to explore and compare the differences between student-athletes that have a positive transition experience, and those who have a crisis transition (Stambulova, 2003), and drop out of university. This exploration of different transition outcomes may allow a greater understanding of the factors associated with positive and negative transitions into university, and allow interventions to be implemented to help ensure fewer student-athletes drop out.

Part C of the thesis highlighted the different paths that student-athletes take when they leave university, including alterations in the dual career by moving into a vocation sport dual career, and carrying out a triple career of sport, education, and work. Research on dual careers in education and sport has expanded in recent years (e.g., Aquilina, 2009; Brown et al., 2015), yet there is currently limited exploration of dual careers when sport is combined with alternate activities such as a vocation (Tekavc et al, 2015). The current thesis found that athletes who move into different dual careers experience new challenges, including limited flexibility to train around work hours, and a loss of core support services that may be due to a gap in current support systems. A more detailed exploration of the challenges of vocation sport dual careers and how to support these individuals may help to prolong and enhance the athletic career.

7.9 Summary of Recommendations to University Dual Career Provision in the UK

The following section will sum up key recommendations discussed across the thesis that need to be addressed by dual career support providers (e.g., universities, sports clubs, NGBs) and policy makers (e.g., government) around dual career provision within the UK. These recommendations challenge, support, and/or extend current policy guidelines, including the Duty of Care in Sport Review (2017) and the EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes (2012).

1. *Universities should address their reasoning for supporting athletes.* The system present within UK universities focuses on recruiting athletes to compete in university leagues and competitions. This system, to some extent, may be detrimental to athlete experience as the focus may not be on the dual career process, but on athletic performance. Dual career support that is enforced by legislation (instead of being in the hands of universities) may aid in challenging the negative effects (e.g., limited preparation for a vocational career) of this system. Legislative support may mean that the focus shifts from what universities can gain from athletes (e.g., BUCS points) to a focus on athlete wellbeing and personal development (as this becomes a requirement by law). This point supports guideline 2 of the EU Guidelines that states that public authorities responsible for policy domains should implement dual career policies for talented and elite athletes.
2. *Athletes should address their reasoning behind entering university.* Athletes in the UK may decide to enter university or continue into postgraduate education as a means to support their athletic career (e.g., gain support services through sport scholarship programmes) instead of being motivated to pursue education. Athletes and stakeholders should address the reasons behind why they are entering university, as when education is viewed as secondary to sport or lacks importance, this can lead to poor university experiences. This point supports comments made in the Duty of Care in Sport Review that reports that athletes should not attend or undertake a course just so that they receive funding for their sporting development or can stay on a sporting pathway. The review suggests that it may suit some participants to only think about life after sport once their career in sport is finished.
3. *Universities should reconsider sport scholarship criteria.* Universities should reconsider the criteria they put forth for athletes to gain a sport scholarship. For example, the criteria that athletes must represent the university puts the focus immediately on sports performance and may have negative implications on athletes having to balance this demand with additional sporting commitments (e.g., external sports club training). In addition, as there are a number of athletes who complete a dual career, and following exit from university, have limited opportunities to progress further, this raises questions about why some student-athletes are supported during their time at university on sport scholarship programmes. This may also suggest that

sport scholarship criteria should be more challenging to help athletes thrive during university (e.g., athletes should have attained a certain performance level). This point challenges guideline 3 of the EU Guidelines that suggests that there should be incentives for educational institutions to support athletes (e.g., representation by athletes in university competition). These incentives may result in athletes being supported for the benefit of the university and not their own personal development.

4. *There may be a pool of athletes neglected in support systems following exit from university.* There is a need to address the gap in support systems for athletes' post-university. A pool of athletes may be neglected from support when they transition out of university (e.g., athletes who have not yet reached their elite senior potential or are not moving into fully funded programmes/contracts), and this may lead to drop out in this period. This gap in support needs to be addressed via NGBs, sports clubs or TASS (e.g., continuation of support during this phase) or universities who could provide graduate scholarships for athletes who have the potential to excel into the elite senior level with a few more years of support (e.g., strength and conditioning, physiotherapy, physiological support). This point extends both the EU guidelines and Duty of Care in Sport Review, as neither highlight the importance of supporting the post-university phase. This point also extends guideline 24 of the EU Guidelines that states that public authorities and sport stakeholders should set up, or further develop, a coherent system of financial support for student-athletes in which the different stages of the dual career are recognised (e.g., post-university when athletes need a few more years of development to transition into the elite senior level). In addition, this point supports guideline 26 of the EU Guidelines that suggests public authorities should create a specific status for non-professional high-level athletes, granting them a minimum of health protection. This status may support this pool of athletes who have lost a number of support services following their transition out of university.
5. *Universities may be over-supporting athletes.* Universities may be sculpting an environment where athletes are receiving too much support. Athletes may not experience enough challenge, accountability, and responsibility to facilitate their development into elite senior performers during their time at university and following exit. A balance between support and challenge should be sought (e.g., athletes have access to regular lifestyle support but they should have responsibility in contacting their advisor to arrange meetings). This point extends comments made in the EU Guidelines that suggests that being on a sport scholarship should not give athletes

special treatment over fellow students other than what is required to help him/her balance the challenges he/she faces in pursuing a dual career. Providing an environment that is over-supportive may reduce opportunities for long-term development.

6. *Universities should provide collaborative environments.* There is a need for universities, NGBs, sports clubs and national training centres to provide a “joined-up” approach and build more effective, co-ordinated, flexible support for student-athletes. Currently, many student-athletes are developing in environments that consist of multiple expectations and pressures. For example, stakeholders internal to the university such as academic staff may expect student-athletes to put their student role first during exams, but external club coaches may put pressure on athletes to prioritise their sport. A joined-up approach may relieve athlete’s stress around having to communicate with numerous stakeholders. This point extends guideline 1 (part a) of the EU Guidelines that suggests that there should be cooperation between stakeholders in elite sport including the athletes' representing organisations, education, employers, and business.
7. *Stakeholders may have negative perceptions about athletes undertaking a dual career.* Stakeholders (e.g., coaches in NGBs) may have negative perceptions towards athletes undertaking university education due to perceptions that they are not dedicated to their sport, and as a result, may terminate support (e.g., financial and coaching support). Increased education on the importance of undertaking a dual career and facilitating opportunities for collaborations between NGBs/sports clubs and universities as highlighted above may help with this issue. This point extends guideline 32 in the EU Guidelines that states that sports authorities should raise awareness among coaches, athletes, and their entourage about the importance of dual careers. This increased knowledge and awareness may mean that more athletes feel confident about undertaking higher education.
8. *Athletes should be supported with their identity renegotiation during their dual career.* Identity and identity change were key features there were highlighted across the thesis and this demonstrates the importance of support providers addressing and preparing athletes for identity renegotiation (e.g., transition from being a student-athlete to a full-time athlete). This point extends comments made in the EU Guidelines that suggests identity change is a challenge during the transition into the post-sport career, but does not highlight the importance of supporting identity renegotiation during the dual

career. Supporting identity renegotiation may enable athletes to adapt more successfully to their new roles.

9. *Pre-transition support should be provided prior to entry into university.* Increasing athlete readiness for the transition into university is pivotal. Pre-transition support should include not only logistical support (e.g., what services athletes can expect to receive when they arrive), but universities should also provide pre-transition workshops, lifestyle meetings or the dissemination of materials (e.g., online) around potential changes that may be experienced when athletes arrive at university. During pre-transition workshops or meetings, athletes should begin to develop strategies to overcome changes that may help them to adapt more positively. This point adds detail to guideline 8 (point 2) of the EU Guidelines that states that career transition support should be available for all talented and elite level athletes.
10. *University academic staff need to be upskilled in dual career support.* There is a need to enhance the provision provided by academic staff during the university dual career as in the current thesis both academic staff and athletes perceived that they had limited understanding. Enhancing academic staff's role during the transition into university may allow academic staff to work with athlete support staff to provide individualised academic pathways for athletes. Currently, many academic and athletic departments within universities may operate independently and this may mean athletes do not benefit from fully co-ordinated, flexible pathways. Regular meetings and athlete information provided to academic staff in the pre-transition phase may help to combat this issue. This point extends guideline 30 of the EU Guidelines that suggests educational institutions should promote further education of staff. This point also extends a recommendation provided in the equality, diversion, and inclusion theme in the Duty of Care in Sport Review that suggests school teachers should undergo mandatory training to enable them to best support athletes. University academic staff may also benefit from mandatory training around dual career demands.
11. *Monitoring and upskilling of athlete support staff around wellbeing should be implemented.* Based on the pressurised and stressful few years that student-athletes may have at university, the implementation and evaluation of wellbeing monitoring throughout university may be important, alongside upskilling support staff on detecting mental health issues and using counselling approaches with student-athletes. This may help support staff to detect student-athletes who need specialised counselling or mental health support. This point extends a recommendation made in the education theme of

the Duty of Care in Sport Review that states that universities should have a Duty of Care Policy in place to support the needs of athletes. This point also extends guideline 4 of the EU Guidelines that states that the welfare of athletes should be a priority in dual career systems.

7.10 Concluding Comments

To conclude, the current PhD achieved the principle purpose and the aims set out. First, the thesis expanded knowledge on dual careers by providing a detailed examination of the whole pathway through university. This included an exploration of the transition into university, experiences during, and the transition out of university for student-athletes, from the perspectives of athletes and stakeholders (e.g., head coaches, managerial staff, academic staff) involved in the process. The PhD also provided a thorough understanding of the UK context and resulted in the presentation of an adapted model of the higher education section of the holistic athletic career model (Wylleman et al., 2013). The model includes adaptations at the athletic, psychological, psychosocial, academic/vocational, and financial levels. The model may be used by stakeholders (e.g., NGB's, sports clubs) within the UK to understand the pathway through higher education for athletes and assist athletes going through a dual career process. The current PhD not only advances knowledge and the literature in the area of dual careers, but continues to demonstrate the value in producing context-specific research and theoretical framework adaptations within athlete career research (Stambulova & Ryba, 2014). Dual career researchers may benefit from continuing to pursue context specific research, so that effective dual career support systems can be put in place. Recommendations for improved dual career provision in the UK that may challenge or extend current policy guidelines have been provided at the end of the thesis, and include discussion around the importance of addressing why universities are supporting athletes in the UK.

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Appendix A: UK University Sport Scholarship Review

A.1 Review of UK University Sport Scholarship Programmes

As the current thesis is exploring UK university student-athlete experiences, forming a clear picture about what support is currently available to student-athletes across the UK is advantageous. I conducted an analysis of current university sport scholarship programmes within the UK, and in doing so, I was able the establish the varying types of support that universities provide to their athletes. The first step I took in the analysis process was to type 'UK university sport scholarship programmes' into an internet search engine. Following this, I went onto all university websites that outlined details of their university sport scholarship programme. All details outlined regarding the programme were transferred into a word document. When university sport scholarship programmes were no longer coming up in the search engine, I looked on the BUCS website at the most recent points table (British University and Colleges Sport, 2017). I was able to eliminate those universities where I had already found details of the scholarship programme, and searched all remaining universities that I had no details for to review whether they also offered sport scholarships. When all individual scholarship programme details had been outlined in a word document, I then preceded to input these details into a spreadsheet under a number of categories. Following review of the spreadsheet, these categories were separated further.

Results of the analysis demonstrate that through online searching, there are currently 95 UK universities that offer forms of support to university student-athletes. Of those universities that outlined how many sport scholars they currently have at their university, this varied between 10 and 90, and between 4 and 50 scholarships available in a single year. 20/95 universities outline that they provide 'sport-specific' scholarships (e.g., women's football scholarship, men's rugby scholarship). 22/95 universities outline that they have focus sports, some of which are all team sports, and indicate that only exceptional candidates from other sports will be accepted. 35/95 universities highlight the various different levels of scholarship awards that are available for student-athletes to receive (e.g., bronze, silver and gold, tier one and tier two, development scholarship and performance scholarship).

A.1.1 Eligibility criteria. There are differences in the eligibility criteria that athletes need to fulfil to get on and remain on university sport scholarship programmes. 75/95 universities outline detailed eligibility criteria. This eligibility criteria includes the need for prospective student-athletes to fulfil the necessary academic requirements and hold a place on one of their courses, or have accepted an offer to study (25/95). 7/95 universities outline that athletes need to be on a full-time course over another form of study, and similarly, 6/95 universities outline that they only accept undergraduate students. 12/95 universities state that athletes cannot apply for a scholarship until they already a student at university, that may leave athletes with little time to prepare with regards to their support services. 77/95 universities outline the eligibility criteria in terms of the level of sporting representation that is required of athletes to attain a sport scholarship award. There is a wide variety of criteria provided by universities, accepting athletes from county to senior international level. Universities ware often vague in their criteria, stating that they support athletes who are at a 'high representative level', 'county level and above', and 'close to national standard'. Many universities were more stringent in their criteria, stating that athletes should be on an NGB pathway, European, Commonwealth, World or Olympic level, premier league club level, nationally ranked in the top 10 at senior level and have represented their country at junior or senior international level. Additionally, 11/95 universities outline that athletes should have the potential to attain a certain performance level whilst at university (e.g., senior international level).

One of the main eligibility criteria outlined is that sport scholars must represent their university within the BUCS events, and have the ability to achieve BUCS points. 35/95 universities state that commitment to representing their university is expected of student-athletes if they are to hold a sport scholarship award. Two universities outline that athletes must be on a 'sports-related' course to successfully gain a sports scholarship, that may significantly limit the academic opportunities of athletes. Additional eligibility criteria outlined includes having annually agreed performance targets (adhere to specific sporting and academic targets), attend regular progress meetings, produce progress reports, satisfactory academic progress, attend PR functions, attend workshops, run coaching sessions in your sport, be an ambassador for the university and receive no other external funding (other than TASS).

A.1.2 Financial support. There is a large variation in the monetary bursary that universities provide to athletes as part of their sport scholarship award. 12/95 universities outline that there is a 'financial contribution' or 'cash bursary' available and this offer is bespoke and 'assessed individually'. 49/95 universities outline specific amounts that they provide to athletes that depend on the level of award that student-athletes have attained. Financial bursaries range from £100 annually up to £10,000, with 28/95 universities offering between £500-£2,000 annually. Two universities detail that for exceptional candidates they offer a bursary of up to £10,000. 7/95 universities outline that they only provide financial bursaries as a form of support. 9/95 universities state that as part of the scholarship programme, they provide tuition fee support. This tuition fee support ranged from 20% off overall fees, 100% of tuition fees paid in the first year and 50% in the second and third year, and up to £1000 off tuition fees.

A.1.3 Physical support. The most popular area of support outlined in the scholarship programmes for student-athletes is strength and conditioning support, with 58/95 universities stating that they provide personalised support for individual athletes. 30/95 universities also outline that they provide tailored sport science support, including physiological assessments, performance analysis, and fitness testing. 55/95 universities state that as part of a scholarship, student-athletes have either free access to sports facilities, including a gym or a free sports membership. 44/90 universities outline that they provide either unlimited physiotherapy or medical services to athletes, or an allocated number of free physio/sports massage sessions. Another form of support regularly highlighted is nutrition support, either in the form of tailored nutrition advice or group sessions, with 31/95 scholarship programmes stating that they provide this.

A.1.4 Performance lifestyle/psychology support. In comparison to physical support, lifestyle was outlined less frequently as being part of a scholarship award. 30/95 universities mentioned that they provide forms of lifestyle advice to their student-athletes (either workshops or individual meetings). Universities outlined this support as being performance lifestyle, lifestyle management, athlete lifestyle support with an accredited mentor, enhanced lifestyle and time management support, and personal mentoring. What is involved as part of this support is rarely outlined, but some universities outline that the aim of lifestyle support is to minimise the stress of lifestyle factors on the ability to perform and achieve the student-athlete balance critical to success. Further to this, 22/95 universities state that they provide sport psychology support either on a group or individual basis, but no universities state what is involved within this support. Universities state that lifestyle advice and performance psychology can come in the form of workshops, suggesting that it is not always individually tailored advice.

A.1.5 Academic support. 22/95 university sport scholarship programmes state that they provide some form of academic provision. Universities state that they would negotiate academic flexibility, academic mentoring, academic guidance or that academic disadvantages would be considered based on sporting excellence. One university stated that they are working with academic departments to raise their awareness of elite athletes' needs and are developing specific schemes where flexibility can be granted via each department, including extended deadlines and deferred assessments.

A.1.6 Additional areas of support. 28/95 sport scholarship programmes also highlight that they provide workshops to student-athletes. Many do not state what is included within these workshops, but topics highlighted include anti-doping, performance lifestyle, psychology, sports science, injury prevention, managing the media, and training planning. 11/95 universities highlight that as part of a sport scholarship they also provide accommodation support, that includes trying to locate athletes within close proximity of their training facilities, guaranteeing first choice of halls accommodation and placing student-athletes in ‘athlete friendly’ accommodation. Further areas of support provided by individual universities include; medical insurance, media promotion, links to external clubs, car parking privileges and permits, coaching and coaching expenses, and access to partnership networks such as Sport England. Additional areas of support include; a bus pass, a food card, summer accommodation, pastoral support, access to officiating/coaching awards, passport points, assistance in seeking funding, and priority scheduling of training times.

Appendix B: Information Sheets, Consent Forms Used in and Further Details of Part A

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

UK Student-Athletes' and Stakeholders' Perspectives of the Transition into University

Location:

School of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University

Investigators:

Emma Vickers, Dr. Robert Morris, Dr. David Tod, Dr. Martin Eubank

You are being invited to participate in a research project. However, before you give consent to participate in this study, it is important that you completely understand why this research is being completed and what will be required of you. Please ensure that you take time to read through this information sheet. If there are any areas that are not clear, or that you would like more information on, feel free to contact the researchers who will be happy to provide this information for you.

What is the purpose of the study?

The student-athlete transition to university is a within-career transition that has received minimal attention in the literature, particularly within a UK context. During this transition, the student-athlete is faced with additional and unique challenges to that of the regular student, including regular competition, lifestyle pressures, and identity issues. It is increasingly being highlighted that there is a need for educational administrators to understand the experiences of student-athletes in higher education settings because of the integration of academic, athletic, and social experiences that first-year student-athletes will face during their transition to university. Research has indicated that institutional and external support prior to, during, and after a number of athletic career transitions has been related to effective transition, however, similar research on the student-athlete transition to university has been neglected. Such research could be used to support the development and implementation of an intervention that supports and guides student-athletes through the transition process, that currently does not exist. The aim of this study is therefore to explore the roles and perceptions of athletes, athlete support staff, academic staff, and managerial figures in the student-athlete transition to university within the UK.

Who can take part?

You have been asked to take part in this study because you have been identified as a current transitioning student-athlete or an individual who plays a supportive role in the transition experience. To take part in this study you must be at least 18 years of age.

Do I have to take part?

No. Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. If you would like to participate you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Benefits of taking part:

There will be benefits to all members of staff taking part in the study as they will gain a more comprehensive understanding of each other's individual roles in the student-athlete transition to university. The outcome of the research may also help the departments to see how they could improve or modify the current systems that they have in place. Benefits for student-athletes will come from sharing experiences of their transition with fellow individuals in a similar position to themselves.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to take part in this study you will be asked to attend a 1 hour focus group and may subsequently be asked to take part in a 1 hour follow up interview.

Procedure

You are being asked to participate in one of four focus groups within the study, that have been clustered according to participants' roles (i.e., athletes, athlete support staff, academic staff and parents), lasting approximately 1 hour. You will be asked a number of questions regarding the student-athlete transition to university in order to stimulate discussion on the topic. A copy of some of the questions that are going to be asked during the focus groups will be provided in advance and you will have the chance to read through them. Subsequently, you may be asked to take part in a 1 hour interview discussing your role in the transition in more detail. As part of the informed consent form, you will be asked for your permission to video record the interview to ensure that data provided is accurately documented. The study has been designed with reference to the British Psychological Society's code of ethics

Where will I complete the study?

Liverpool John Moores University or other university premises. Some interviews may be conducted via skype.

Are there any risks?

There are no anticipated risks associated with taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:

The data you provide will be kept entirely confidential. The recording of the focus group will be stored on a secure password protected computer at Liverpool John Moores University that only the researcher will have access too. The data will then be transcribed and analysed, with all electronic transcripts to be kept on a password protected computer in a secure office to ensure your data's security. To uphold anonymity within the write-up of the study, no personal names will be used and instead an alias (e.g., participant X) will be used when disclosing data collected. Confidentiality cannot be maintained in focus groups, although it will be asked for.

Rights:

It is your choice whether or not you wish to take part in this study. If you wish to take part in this study, you will be given this information sheet to read and be asked to sign a consent form. You are reminded that if you decide to take part in the study, you are still free to withdraw at any time without provision of reason. Requests for a copy of the results attained will be honoured following study completion and publication in a scientific journal.

Complaints procedure:

If you have any complaints regarding the way you have been treated or anything else relating to the study you can write to Dr Martin Littlewood who is independent from the research team and will investigate the matter fully.

Dr Martin Littlewood
Principle Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Sciences
School of Sport and Exercise Sciences
Tom Reilly Building
Liverpool John Moores University
Byrom Street
Liverpool
L33AF
Tel: 01519046235
E-mail: M.A.Littlewood@ljmu.ac.uk

What happens now?

When a date for the focus group is finalised, you will be asked to complete an informed consent form to confirm that you are happy to participate in this study.

Thanks for your time. If you have any further questions or are willing to participate in the study please contact Emma Vickers.

Emma Vickers
PhD Researcher
School of Sport and Exercise Sciences
Tom Reilly Building
Liverpool John Moores University
Byrom Street
Liverpool, L33AF
E-mail: e.vickers@2015.ljmu.ac.uk

Student Supervisor:
Dr. Robert Morris
Lecturer in Sport and Social Sciences
Tom Reilly Building,
Byrom Street,
Liverpool, L3 3AF
Tel: 01519046230
E-mail: r.morris@ljmu.ac.uk

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

UK Student-Athletes' and Stakeholders' Perspectives of the Transition into University

Emma Vickers - School of Sport and Exercise Science

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights. ☐
3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential ☐
4. I agree to take part in the above study (focus group/interview) ☐
5. I understand that the interview/focus group will be audio / video recorded and I am happy to proceed ☐
6. I understand that parts of our conversation may be used verbatim in future publications or presentations but that such quotes will be anonymised. ☐

Name of Participant Date Signature

Name of Researcher Date Signature

GATEKEEPER INFORMATION SHEET

UK Student-Athletes' and Stakeholders' Perspectives of the Transition into University

Location:

School of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Liverpool John Moore University

Investigators:

Emma Vickers, Dr. Robert Morris, Dr. David Tod, Dr. Martin Eubank

Your staff are being invited to participate in a research project. However, before you give consent to participate in this study, it is important that you completely understand why this research is being completed and what will be required of you. Please ensure that you take time to read through this information sheet. If there are any areas that are not clear, or that you would like more information on, feel free to contact the researchers who will be happy to provide this information for you.

What is the purpose of the study?

The student-athlete transition to university is a within-career transition that has received minimal attention in the literature, particularly within a UK context. During this transition, the student-athlete is faced with additional and unique challenges to that of the regular student, including regular competition, lifestyle pressures, and identity issues. It is increasingly being highlighted that there is a need for educational administrators to understand the experiences of student-athletes in higher education settings because of the integration of academic, athletic and social experiences that first-year student-athletes will face during their transition to university. Research has indicated that institutional and external support prior to, during, and after a number of athletic career transitions has been related to effective transition, however, similar research on the student-athlete transition to university has been neglected. Such research could be used to support the development and implementation of an intervention that supports and guides student-athletes through the transition process, that currently does not exist. The aim of this study is therefore to explore the roles and perceptions of athletes, athlete support staff, academic staff, and managerial figures in the student-athlete transition to university within the UK.

Who can take part?
Members of your support staff are being asked to take part in this study because they have been identified as being individuals who plays a supportive role in the student-athlete transition experience.

Do they have to take part?
No, taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. If you would like your staff to participate they will be given a participant information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You are still free to withdraw your staff at any time and without giving a reason.

Benefits of taking part:
There will be benefits to all members of support staff part in the study. Support staff may gain a more comprehensive understanding of each other's individual roles in the student-athlete transition to university. The outcome of the research may also help your department to improve or modify the current systems that are have in place.

What will happen to my staff if they take part?
If you agree to take part in this study, your support staff will be asked to attend a 1 hour focus group and participants may subsequently be asked to take part in a 1 hour follow up interview. It will be your responsibility to help recruit appropriate members of staff who have been identified by the researcher as important individuals to take part in the study.

Procedure
Your support staff are being asked to participate in one of four focus groups within the study, that have been clustered according to participants' roles (i.e., athletes, athlete support staff, academic staff and parents), lasting approximately 1 hour. They will be asked a number of questions regarding the student-athlete transition to university in order to stimulate discussion on the topic. A copy of some of the questions that are going to be asked during the focus groups will be provided in advance for you to disperse to you staff and you will have the chance to read through them. Subsequently, a member of your staff may be asked to take part in a 1 hour interview discussing your role in the transition in more detail. As part of the informed consent form, you will be asked for your permission to video record the interview to ensure that data provided is accurately documented. The study has been designed with reference to the British Psychological Society's code of ethics

Where will I complete the study?
Liverpool John Moores or Nottingham Trent University premises. Some interviews may be conducted via skype.

Are there any risks?
There are no anticipated risks associated with taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:
The data you provide will be kept entirely confidential. The recording of the focus group will be stored on a secure password protected computer at Liverpool John Moores University that only the researcher will have access too. The data will then be transcribed and analysed, with all electronic transcripts to be kept on a password protected computer in a secure office to ensure your data's security. To uphold anonymity within the write-up of the study, no personal names will be used and instead an alias (e.g., participant X) will be used when disclosing data collected. Confidentiality cannot be maintained in focus groups, although it will be asked for.

Rights:
It is your choice whether or not you wish for your support staff to take part in this study. If you wish to take part in this study, you will be given this information sheet to read and be asked to sign a consent form. You are reminded that if you decide to take part in the study, you are still free to withdraw at any time without provision of reason. Requests for a copy of the results attained will be honoured following study completion and publication in a scientific journal.

Complaints procedure:
If you have any complaints regarding the way you have been treated or anything else relating to the study you can write to Dr Martin Littlewood who is independent from the research team and will investigate the matter fully.

Dr Martin Littlewood
Principle Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Sciences
School of Sport and Exercise Sciences
Tom Reilly Building
Liverpool John Moores University
Byrom Street
Liverpool
L33AF
Tel: 01519046235
E-mail: M.A.Littlewood@ljmu.ac.uk

What happens now?
You will be asked to help finalise a date with your staff members for the focus group to take place. When this is done, you will be asked to complete a gatekeeper consent form to confirm that you are happy for your staff to participate in this study.

Thanks for your time. If you have any further questions or are willing for your staff to participate in the study please contact Emma Vickers.

Emma Vickers
PhD Researcher
School of Sport and Exercise Sciences

Tom Reilly Building
Liverpool John Moores University
Byrom Street
Liverpool, L33AF
E-mail: e.vickers@2015.ljmu.ac.uk

Student Supervisor:
Dr. Robert Morris
Lecturer in Sport and Social Sciences
Tom Reilly Building,
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E-mail: r.morris@ljmu.ac.uk

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY GATEKEEPER CONSENT FORM

UK Student-Athletes' and Stakeholders' Perspectives of the Transition into University

Emma Vickers - School of Sport and Exercise Science

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily ☐

1. I understand that my support staff's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw them at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights. ☐

2. I understand that personal information will be collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential ☐

3. I agree for my staff to take part in the above study (focus group/interview) ☐

4. I understand that the focus group will be audio and video recorded and I am happy to proceed ☐

5. I understand that parts of the conversation may be used verbatim in future publications or presentations but that such quotes will be anonymised. ☐

Name of Gatekeeper Date Signature

Name of Researcher Date Signature

Table B.1.

Part A Participant Labels

Data Collection	**Participant Labels**
Focus group A	Athlete support staff (Matthew, Rebecca, Ed, Sebastian, Lucas, Steven)
Focus group B	Athlete support staff (Adam, Diane, Joan, Olivia, Harry, Simon)
Focus group C	Student-athletes (John, Beth, Kate)
Focus group D	Student-athletes (Tim, Jack, Christian, Nina)
Focus group E	Academic staff (Andrew, Gavin, Elliot)
Interview A	Performance sport manager (Matthew)
Interview B	Sport scholarship manager (Adam)
Interview C	Physiotherapist (Alina)
Interview D	High performance sport officer (Rebecca)
Interview E	Cara (student-athlete - pre-transition)
Interview F	Nathan (student-athlete - pre-transition)
Interviw G	Isabelle (student-athlete)
Interview H	Abbie (student-athlete - pre-transition)
Interview I	Fiona (student-athlete)
Interview J	Sophie (student-athlete - pre-transition)
Interview K	George (student-athlete)

Appendix C: Interview Schedules (Part A)

Student-Athlete Focus Group Schedule

Thoughts and feelings now

1. What are your thoughts about the transition to university now that you have made the transition?

Facilitating the Transition

2. Can you tell me what support you received prior to your transition to university? Probe: what did it involve?
3. Can you tell me what support you received during and after your transition to university?
4. Are there any other areas of support that you feel would be beneficial during this transition?
5. Did you use any internal resources during the transition? Probe: transition knowledge, skills.

Challenges

6. What do you feel are some of the challenges you faced immediately following the transition to university? Probe: What made the transition hard? Athletic, psychological, social, academic, financial.
7. Did you feel supported in overcoming these challenges? Probe: How?
8. Can you highlight any challenges associated with moving into the new culture?

Moving Forward

9. What do you think is important now if you are to continue to successfully have a dual career in sport and education?

Summary

10. Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn’t, and you think is important to this interview?

Athlete Support Staff Focus Group Schedule

Introduction

1. Can you describe your experiences of the student-athlete transition to university? Probe: How long have you worked with student-athletes?
2. What are your roles in supporting student-athletes during this transition?

Facilitating the Transition

3. What do you currently do to help facilitate a smooth transition for student-athletes to university? Probe: Psychological, social support?
4. Do you have contact with student-athletes before they make the transition into university? Probe: if not, do you think this would be beneficial?

Challenges

1. What do you feel are some of the challenges that student-athletes’ may face immediately following their transition into university? Probes: What makes the transition hard? Athletic, psychological, social, academic, financial.

2. What strategies have you employed in the past to help student-athletes overcome these challenges?
3. Can you highlight any challenges associated with student-athletes moving into the new culture?

Summary

4. Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn’t, and you think is important to this interview?

Academic Staff Focus Group Interview Schedule

Introduction

1. Can you describe your experiences of the student-athlete transition to university? Probe: How long have you worked with athletes with student-athletes?
2. What do you believe your role is in supporting student-athletes during this transition?
3. What is your knowledge of the athlete support available at your university? Probe: do you communicate with one another?

Facilitating the Transition

4. What do you currently do to help facilitate a smooth transition for student-athletes to university?
5. Do you have contact with athletes before they make the transition to university? Probe: if not, do you think this would be beneficial?

Challenges

6. What do you feel are some of the challenges that student-athletes’ may face immediately following their transition into university? Probes: What makes the transition hard? Athletic, psychological, social, academic, financial.
7. What strategies have you employed in the past to help student-athletes overcome these challenges?
8. Can you highlight any challenges associated with student-athletes moving into the new culture?

Summary

9. Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn’t, and you think is important to this interview?

Example One-off Stakeholder Follow-up Interview

1. Could you describe in detail what your perceived role is in the student-athlete transition as someone that is in a managerial position?
2. You spoke about parental type role in the early days of the transition for some student-athletes, can you expand on this?
3. There was discussion about individual background and how this can affect the transition, can you expand on this?
4. Do you perceive that there are differences in how student-athletes from different sports make the transition into university?

5. The club vs. university issue was an interesting theme to come out of the first focus group, how does this affect the university and the transition?
6. Do you think that university coaches should also have knowledge about the youth to senior transition seeing as this is also new challenge for transitioning student-athletes?

Appendix D: Information Sheets, Consent Forms Used in and Further Details of Part B

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

A Longitudinal Study Examining the Transitional Experiences of Elite Student-Athletes in a UK University

Location:

School of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Liverpool John Moore University

Investigators:

Emma Vickers, Dr. Robert Morris, Dr. David Tod, Dr. Martin Eubank

You are being invited to participate in a research project. However, before you give consent to participate in this study, it is important that you completely understand why this research is being completed and what will be required of you. Please ensure that you take time to read through this information sheet. If there are any areas that are not clear, or that you would like more information on, feel free to contact the researchers who will be happy to provide this information for you.

What is the purpose of the study?

Student-athletes represent a population of growing interest and importance to sport researchers and policy makers, in part, due to the significant number of talented and elite sport performers attending further and higher education institutions. The student-athlete transition to university is a within-career transition that has received minimal attention in the literature, particularly within a UK context. During this transition, the student-athlete is faced with additional and unique challenges to that of the regular student, including regular competition, lifestyle management, and identity issues. Longitudinal research that tracks the transition from school to university has been in the minority within a UK context. Exploring the student-athlete transition process over time will also allow for examination of changes of the demands, resources, and barriers athletes may experience throughout the change. Such research could be used to support the development and implementation of an intervention that supports and guides student-athletes through the transition process, that currently does not exist. The aim of this study is therefore to longitudinally examine the transition of elite student-athletes from school to university within UK universities.

Who can take part?
You have been asked to take part in this study because you have been identified as a current transitioning student-athlete.

Do I have to take part?
No. Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. If you would like to participate you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Benefits of taking part:
Benefits for student-athletes will come from sharing and discussing experiences of their transition with the researcher who has personal experience of this transition. The outcome of the research may also help the departments to see how they could improve or modify the current systems that they have in place and help student-athletes to transition smoothly.

What will happen to me if I take part?
If you agree to take part in this study you will be asked to complete some questionnaires and attend (skype) an interview.

Procedure
You are being asked to participate in a longitudinal study that will track your transition from school to university. This will involve taking part in a number of interviews pre-and post-transition to university that you will be asked a number of questions regarding your transition. Interviews will take place at five time points during and after their transition to university, including a few months prior to the transition (March-June), immediately before (August-September), immediately after (October-November), at the start of the second term (January-February) and at the end of their first year at university (May-June). You will also be asked to contribute to a diary every two weeks regarding your transition experiences (or more), however this is voluntary. As part of the informed consent form, you will be asked for your permission to audio record the interview to ensure that data provided is accurately documented. The study has been designed with reference to the British Psychological Society's code of ethics and has been approved by LJMU Research Ethics Committee.

Where will I complete the study?
Liverpool John Moores or Nottingham Trent University premises. Some interviews may be conducted via skype.

Are there any risks?
There are no anticipated risks associated with taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:

The data you provide will be kept entirely confidential. The recording of the interviews will be stored on a secure password protected computer at Liverpool John Moores University that only the researcher will have access too. The data will then be transcribed and analysed, with all electronic transcripts to be kept on a password protected computer in a secure office to ensure your data's security. To uphold anonymity within the write-up of the study, no personal names will be used and instead an alias (e.g., participant X) will be used when disclosing data collected.

Rights:

It is your choice whether or not you wish to take part in this study. If you wish to take part in this study, you will be given this information sheet to read and be asked to sign a consent form. You are reminded that if you decide to take part in the study, you are still free to withdraw at any time without provision of reason. Requests for a copy of the results attained will be honoured following study completion and publication in a scientific journal.

Complaints procedure:

If you have any complaints regarding the way you have been treated or anything else relating to the study you can write to Dr Martin Littlewood who is independent from the research team and will investigate the matter fully.

Dr Martin Littlewood
Principal Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Sciences
School of Sport and Exercise Sciences
Tom Reilly Building
Liverpool John Moores University
Byrom Street
Liverpool, L33AF
Tel: 01519046235
E-mail: M.A.Littlewood@ljmu.ac.uk

What happens now?

If you would like to take part, contact the researcher and you will be asked to complete an informed consent form to confirm that you are happy to participate in this study.

Thanks for your time. If you have any further questions or are willing to participate in the study please contact Emma Vickers.

Emma Vickers
PhD Researcher
School of Sport and Exercise Sciences
Tom Reilly Building
Liverpool John Moores University
Byrom Street
Liverpool, L33AF

E-mail: e.vickers@2015.ljmu.ac.uk

Student Supervisor:
Dr. Robert Morris
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Tom Reilly Building,
Byrom Street,
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E-mail: r.morris@ljmu.ac.uk

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY
STAKEHOLDER CONSENT FORM

Transitional Experiences of Elite Student-Athletes in a UK University

Emma Vickers - School of Sport and Exercise Science

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights. ☐
3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential ☐
4. I agree to take part in the above study (interviews) ☐
5. I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded and I am happy to proceed ☐
6. I understand that parts of our conversation may be used verbatim in future publications or presentations but that such quotes will be anonymised. ☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Table D.1.

Part B Participant Information

Participant	**Age**	**Sex**	**Sport**	**Level**	**Years competing**	**Course**	**Year of study**
1	18	Male	Canoe Slalom	International	10	Sport and Exercise Science	1
2	18	Female	Table Tennis	National	9	Exercise, health and nutrition	1
3	18	Female	Triathlon	International	11	Chemistry	1
4	19	Female	Table Tennis	International	9	Sports Science	2
5	19	Female	Basketball	National	8	Real estate	2
6	20	Male	Table Tennis	National	10	Economics	3
7	21	Male	Boxing	International	11	Pharmacy	3

Table D.2.

Part B Longitudinal Interviews Time Point Information

Time Point	**Significance of time point**	**Participating student-athletes**
1 (October - November)	*Post-transition 1* - first year student-athletes are settling into their new lives at university and may be experiencing a number of new demands, second and third year student-athletes are settling into their new academic years and may be experiencing changes.	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7
2 (February-March)	*Post-transition 2* - first, second and third year student-athletes are mid-way through their first year and have just arrived back at university after the Christmas break, with many having to complete exams and beginning to up their training for the competition season	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
3 (May-June)	*Post-transition 3* - nearing the end of the first-year student-athlete's first year at university, third years prepare to leave university and for all it is often a time of academic pressures and a heavy competition season.	1, 2, 4, 6, 7

Appendix E: Interview Schedules (Part B)

Student-Athlete Pre-Transition Semi Structured Interview Schedule

Introduction

1. Age, sport, length of time competing, degree course
2. Can you tell me about your sport and describe your achievements? Probe: career, successes, failures, career goals
3. Why have you chosen to go to university and your particular university?
4. How do you feel about your current sporting performance?
5. How do you feel about your current academic performance?

Thoughts about and Facilitating Transition

6. How are you feeling about your upcoming transition into university? (Probe: excited/nervous/expectations)
7. What kind of contact have you had with the university regarding your transition into university? Probe: athlete support staff, coaches, academic staff
8. What do you foresee as the main challenges you will face in your transition to university and throughout your time at university?
9. Are you currently doing any preparation for the transition to university?
10. Have you considered what your social experiences might be like?
11. What are your reasons for choosing to attend university and your particular university?
12. Who are you currently receiving support/funding from for your athletic career?

Example 1st Year Student-Athlete Semi-Structured Interview Schedule - Phase 2 (Adapted to Athlete)

Thoughts and feelings now, 2 months post transition

1. What are your general feelings about moving into university, how have you found the initial period? Probe: smooth, stressful, nerve-wracking, exciting? How was the move to London, did you find somewhere to live?
2. Have your expectations been met so far as student-athlete at university?
3. How do you feel about your current academic environment/performance? Probe: is it a step up?
4. How do you feel about your current sporting environment/performance? Probe: How much time are you spending training
5. Originally you were going to be full-time, but are now part-time, what changed?

Facilitating the Transition

6. Which areas of support are you finding most important post-transition? Probe: parents, coach, NGB, external funding? Has contact with academic staff continued?
7. Has the support from your mentor helped you?

Challenges

8. What challenges have you experienced being a student-athlete at university in this initial stage? Probe: has the end of the Olympic cycle affected your funding/training/transition programme in any way?
9. How are you finding the transition into your new age group?
10. How have you found the UK university culture?
11. Have you had to employ any internal characteristics to cope with the transition?

Identity and goals

12. What do you perceive your identity to be at this time point? Probe: is one area stronger than the other? How did you come to that conclusion?
13. What goals do you have at the moment?

Summary

14. Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't, and you think is important to the situation you are currently in? Probe: has the interview prompted any new thoughts and feelings?

Example 2nd year Student-Athlete Semi-Structured Interview Schedule - Phase 2 (Adapted to Athlete)

Thoughts and feelings now, 2 months into 2nd year

1. How is your second year at university progressing?
2. How do you feel about your current academic environment/performance?
3. How do you feel about your current sporting environment/performance? Probe: recent events?
4. Are you still experiencing issues with overthinking in your sport?

Facilitating the second year

5. What support are you receiving currently in the second year? Probe: has there been any change in the lack of NGB support? How are you coping with having no personal coach?
6. Has parental support remained the same? Probe: is it still a barrier that they don't understand your sport?
7. You were disappointed with your university not being beneficial for your sport, has this remained the same?

Second year challenges

8. Have you experienced any new challenges? Probe: sport, education, personal life
9. How is your current injury?
10. How are you balancing university club and commitments with your other teams?

Identity and goals

11. What do you perceive your identity to be at this time point? Probe: is one area stronger than the other? How did you come to that conclusion?
12. What goals do you have at the moment?

Summary

1. Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't, and you think is important to the situation you are currently in? Probe: has the interview prompted any new thoughts and feelings?

Example 3rd year Student-Athlete Semi-Structured Interview Schedule - Phase 1

Introduction

1. Age, sport, length of time competing, degree course
2. Can you tell me about your sport and describe your achievements? Probes: career, successes, failures, career goals
3. Why have you chosen to go to university and the particular university? Being in 3rd year, have you began to think about your transition out of university?
4. How do you feel about your current sporting and academic performance? How much time are you spending training/doing academic work at the moment?

Thoughts and challenges - Year 1 of university

5. Thinking back to the first year, how did you find the transition into university, what are your feelings about your first year?
6. What were your sporting and academic performances like throughout the first year? Probe: were you satisfied?
7. Did university life meet your expectations? Probe: has the specific university met your expectations?
8. What challenges did you initially experience in the first year being a student-athlete? Probe: in sport, education, personal development, finance, social support
9. How did you find the new UK university culture?
10. What has it been like competing in the BUCS leagues and also competing for an external club?
11. What support have you received throughout your first year at university? Probe: parents, coach, NGB, external funding?

Thoughts about Year 2 at university and challenges

12. Did you experience any new challenges transitioning into year two of university? Probe: did you learning anything from first year? Taking on any new roles/responsibilities?
13. Did you receive the same level of support as the first year? Probe: parental support? University support?
14. What were your sporting and academic performances like throughout the second year? Probe: were you satisfied?

Thoughts about starting Year 3 at university and challenges ahead

15. What challenges do you anticipate you will experience or already have as a student-athlete in your third year?
16. Will you still be receiving the same level of support as previously? Probe: has anything changed?

Identity and goals

17. What do you perceive your identity to be at this time point? Probe: is one area stronger than the other? How did you come to that conclusion?

Summary

18. Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't, and you think is important to the situation you are currently in? Probe: has the interview prompted any new thoughts and feelings?

Appendix F: Information Sheets, Consent Forms Used in and Further Details of Part C

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

The Transition out of University for UK Student-Athletes: Perspectives of Athletes and Stakeholders

Location:

School of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University

Investigators:

Emma Vickers, Dr. Robert Morris, Dr. David Tod, Dr. Martin Eubank

You are being invited to participate in a research project. However, before you give consent to participate in this study, it is important that you completely understand why this research is being completed and what will be required of you. Please ensure that you take time to read through this information sheet. If there are any areas that are not clear, or that you would like more information on, feel free to contact the researchers who will be happy to provide this information for you.

What is the purpose of the study?

The student-athlete transition out of university is a within-career transition that has received minimal attention in the literature, particularly within a UK context. During this transition, the student-athlete is faced with new challenges, including the development of a new identity or the loss of a sports career. Such research could be used to support the development and implementation of an intervention that supports and guides student-athletes through the transition process, that currently does not exist. The aim of this study is therefore to explore the roles and perceptions of athletes and stakeholders in the student-athlete transition out of university within the UK.

Who can take part?

You have been asked to take part in this study because you have been identified as a current transitioning student-athlete or an individual who plays a supportive role in the transition experience. To take part in this study you must be at least 18 years of age.

Do I have to take part?

No. Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. If you would like to participate you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

Benefits of taking part:

There will be benefits to all members of staff taking part in the study as they will gain a more comprehensive understanding of each other's individual roles in the student-athlete transition out of university. The outcome of the research may also help the departments to see how they could improve or modify the current systems that they have in place. Benefits for student-athletes will come from sharing experiences with the researcher who has also undertaken the process, and they may begin to form a clearer picture surrounding their transition.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you agree to take part in this study you will be asked to attend an approximately 1 hour focus group or a 45-minute interview.

Procedure

You are being asked to participate in either the focus group or an interview. You will be asked a number of questions regarding the student-athlete transition out of university in order to stimulate discussion on the topic. A copy of some of the questions that are going to be asked during the focus groups will be provided in advance and you will have the chance to read through them. As part of the informed consent form, you will be asked for your permission to audio record the interview to ensure that data provided is accurately documented. The study has been designed with reference to the British Psychological Society's code of ethics

Where will I complete the study?

Liverpool John Moores or Nottingham Trent University premises. Some interviews may be conducted via skype.

Are there any risks?

There are no anticipated risks associated with taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:

The data you provide will be kept entirely confidential. The recording of the focus group will be stored on a secure password protected computer at Liverpool John Moores University that only the researcher will have access too. The data will then be transcribed and analysed, with all electronic transcripts to be kept on a password protected computer in a secure office to ensure your data's security. To uphold anonymity within the write-up of the study, no personal names will be used and instead an alias (e.g., participant X) will be used when disclosing data collected. Confidentiality cannot be maintained in focus groups, although it will be asked for.

Rights:

It is your choice whether or not you wish to take part in this study. If you wish to take part in this study, you will be given this information sheet to read and be asked to sign a consent form. You are reminded that if you decide to take part in the study, you are still free to withdraw at any time without provision of reason. Requests for a copy of the results attained will be honoured following study completion and publication in a scientific journal.

Complaints procedure:

If you have any complaints regarding the way you have been treated or anything else relating to the study you can write to Dr Martin Littlewood who is independent from the research team and will investigate the matter fully.

Dr Martin Littlewood
Principle Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Sciences
School of Sport and Exercise Sciences
Tom Reilly Building
Liverpool John Moores University
Byrom Street
Liverpool
L33AF
Tel: 01519046235
E-mail: M.A.Littlewood@ljmu.ac.uk

What happens now?

When a date for the focus group is finalised, you will be asked to complete an informed consent form to confirm that you are happy to participate in this study.

Thanks for your time. If you have any further questions or are willing to participate in the study please contact Emma Vickers.

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LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY STAKEHOLDER CONSENT FORM

The Transition out of University for UK Student-Athletes: Perspectives of Athletes and Stakeholders

Emma Vickers - School of Sport and Exercise Science

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights. ☐
3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential ☐
4. I agree to take part in the above study (focus group/interview) ☐
5. I understand that the focus group will be audio recorded and I am happy to proceed ☐
6. I understand that parts of our conversation may be used verbatim in future publications or presentations but that such quotes will be anonymised. ☐

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Table F.1.

Part C Participant Labels

Focus group A	**Athlete support staff (Natalie, Dan, Jason, Christopher, Alexander, Cameron, Bryn)**
Interview A	Marie (student-athlete - pre-transition)
Interview B	Ellie (student-athlete - pre-transition)
Interview C	Jacob (student-athlete - pre-transition)
Interview D	Bradley (student-athlete - pre-transition)
Interview E	Rory (student-athlete - pre-transition)
Interview F	Oliver (student-athlete - pre-transition)
Interview G	Joshua (student-athlete - pre-transition)
Interview H	David (transitioned student-athlete)
Interview I	Faye (transitioned student-athlete)
Interview J	Greg (transitioned student-athlete)
Interview K	Joanna (transitioned student-athlete)

Appendix G: Interview Schedules (Part C)

Athlete Support Staff Focus Group Schedule

Facilitating the Transition

1. As a university, what do you currently do to help facilitate a smooth transition for student-athletes out of university? Probe: psychological preparation, career advice, logistics etc.
2. What do you believe your individual roles are in supporting student-athletes during this transition? Probes: are there any areas of support you wish you could provide but currently do not? Formation of career plans? Information about postgraduate study?
3. What help do you think student-athletes need during this transition compared to regular students? Probe: do they need more career advice?
4. Do you think certain individuals or certain sports require different levels of support?
5. When should you start to prepare athletes for their transition out of university?
6. Do you continue to support athletes when they leave university? Probes: scholar alumni programme?

Challenges

7. What do you feel are some of the challenges that student-athletes' may face during their transition out of university? Probe: What makes the transition difficult for them?
8. What strategies have you employed in the past to help student-athletes overcome these challenges?
9. What skills do you perceive that student-athletes need to successfully adapt to the transition out of university?
10. Do you perceive that athletes transition out of university with stronger athletic or student identities? Probes: do you aid in this process?
11. Do you perceive that athletes may delay the process by continuing their education?

Summary

1. Overall, do you feel that the support provided helps athletes' transition smoothly into post-university life? Probes: If yes, why? If no, why not?
2. Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't, and you think is important to this interview?

Student-Athlete (Pre-Transition) Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Background Information

1. What is/was your sport/highest level of competition/how long competing for?
2. What did you do at university/when did you graduate? Age now?
3. How have you found your university experience as a student-athlete? Probes: what challenges have you encountered? Has it been a positive experience? Has it enabled you to keep up a high level of sport?
4. Currently what demands are you experiencing in your sport and education at the end of 3rd year?

Thoughts and Feelings now

5. What are your general thoughts and feelings about making the transition out of university? Probes: are you apprehensive, anxious, excited, relieved etc.
6. What are your plans for after you make the transition? Probes: professional athlete, vocational career, gap year etc.
7. Why did you make that decision? Probes: funding, motivation, flexibility of time etc.
8. Have you begun to make preparations for your transition out of university? Probes: Have you engaged in any work or work experience in your time at university?
9. Have you made a plan B?

Facilitating the Transition

10. Have you received any support to help you in your transition out of university? Probe: governing body/parents/club/university, TASS
11. Are there any other areas of support that you feel would be beneficial to aid you during this transition? Probes: psychological, career support etc.
12. Will you lose any sources of support?
13. Do you perceive that you would need more support with your sport or with your vocational career?

Challenges

14. What do you feel are some of the challenges you may face when making the transition out of university? Probes: what makes the transition difficult?
15. How do you feel about moving into a new environment?
16. Are you supported in overcoming these challenges? Probe: how?
17. Do you currently identify more highly as an athlete or student as you make the transition? Probes: why do you feel that way? Has that changed recently?

Moving Forward

18. What skills do you personally think you need to possess to successfully adapt to the transition? Probes: motivation, transferable skills from sport to the workplace etc.
19. Do you feel that you have been supported with these factors you consider important? Probe: athlete support staff, academic staff, TASS, NGB etc.

Summary

20. Overall, do you feel that the support you have received will help you make the transition smoothly? Probes: If yes, why? If no, why not?
21. Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn’t, and you think is important to this interview?

Student-Athlete (Post-Transition) Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Background Information

1. What is/was your sport/highest level of competition/how long competing for?
2. What did you do at university/when did you graduate? Age now?
3. Looking back at your time at university as a student-athlete, how was the experience? Probes: was it a positive experience? Did it enable you to keep up a high level of sport? What support did you receive from your university?

Thoughts and Feelings now

4. What were your general thoughts and feelings about making the transition out of university? Probes: was it a successful transition? Were you apprehensive, excited?
5. What have you done since you made the transition out of university? Probes: professional athlete, vocational career, gap year, still motivated with sport, competing for new teams etc.
6. Why did you make that decision? Probes: funding, motivation etc.

Facilitating the Transition

7. Did you receive any support to help you in your transition out of university? Probe: NGB/parents/club/university
8. Are there any other areas of support that you feel would have been beneficial to aid you during this transition? Probe: psychological, career support etc.
9. How did you feel about losing certain areas of support?
10. Do you perceive that you needed more support with your sport or with your vocational career?
11. Did you make any preparations for your transition out of university? Probes: did you have firm career plans?

Challenges

12. What do you feel were some of the challenges you faced when making the transition out of university? Probes: what made the transition difficult?
13. Were you supported in overcoming these challenges? Probe: how?

14. Did you identify more highly as an athlete or student when you made the transition? Probes: why did you feel that way? Has that changed?

Moving Forward

15. What skills do you personally think you needed to possess to successfully adapt to the transition? Probes: motivation, transferable skills from sport to the workplace etc.
16. Do you feel that you were supported with these factors you consider important? Probe: athlete support staff, academic staff, TASS, NGB etc.

Summary

17. Overall, do you feel that the support you received helped you make the transition smoothly? Probes: If yes, why? If no, why not?
18. Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn’t, and you think is important to this interview?

Appendix H: Data Use Across Thesis

Table H.1.

Data use across thesis

Data Collection	**Parts of Thesis Data was Used**
1 - Athletes pre-transition interviews (entering university)	Part A
2 - Athlete focus group 6-week post-transition (into university)	Part A & C
3 - Athlete support staff focus groups (transition into university)	Part A
4 - Academic staff focus group (into university)	Part A
5 - Stakeholder interviews (into university)	Part A
6 - Phase 1 longitudinal athlete data collection (during university)	Part A & B
7 - Phase 2 longitudinal athlete data collection (during university)	Part B
8 - Phase 3 longitudinal athlete data collection (during university)	Part B & C
9 - Athlete pre-transition interviews (leaving university)	Part B & C
10 - Athlete post-transition interviews (left university)	Part C
11 - Athlete support staff focus group (transition out of university)	Part C