



SSaMs

Sports Students as Mentors for Boys and Young Men



DISSEMINATION REPORT



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



SSaMs is a project financed by the Erasmus Plus Programme – Key Action 2 – Strategic Partnership in the field of Higher Education.

Sport Students as Mentors for Boys and Young Men

Overview and Evaluation

About SSaMs

Across the European Union, the prevalence of boys' leaving school early is higher than for girls. Boys' affinity with sport places sports workers in an influential position to communicate with boys about their education and health concerns, however sports workers do not necessarily possess the skills and qualifications to do this, hence SSaMs objective to rectify this. A consortium consisting of Higher Education Institutions and a Non-Governmental Organisation, including individuals with various expertise across sport, education, health care and promotion, but also economics and social welfare, was brought together for the development and the realisation of this idea. The aim of the project was to create a university course that would enhance the knowledge and skills of undergraduate sport students, to enable them to provide mentoring support for young males through sport.

Consortium

University of Gloucestershire, UK (UOG) – Coordinator
Institute of Technology Carlow, Ireland (ITC) – Partner
University of Thessaly, Greece (UTH) – Partner
Palacky University, Czech Republic (UP) – Partner
Universidad de Murcia, Spain, (UMU) – Partner
CESIE, Italy (CESIE) – Partner

About this Report

This report aims at summarizing the project in a way that will facilitate its dissemination for interested parts: stakeholders, including higher education institutions, educational and sport authorities; and target groups, including sport students and youth sport coaches and officials.

In particular, this report presents (a) the rationale and the objectives of the project, (b) the activities that were carried out, (c) the outputs that were produced, and (d) the implementation and the evaluation of the course that was piloted in university students.

Rationale and Objectives of Proposed Work

Early school leaving (ESL) has long been identified as a problem with important consequences on several life aspects (social and health), in particular for young males. The development of policies targeting this problem could eventually help to diminish it. Mentoring young males through sport is a viable way to act towards this direction. Sport coaches are appropriate agents for mentoring young males, but not adequately educated for such roles and lacking skills. For such a strategy to be effective, educating prospective sport coaches will help to prepare them to act as mentors for young males; at the same, establishing the role of mentors for young males will open new work opportunities and increase engagement of higher education institutions (HEI) with local communities.

The aim of ‘Sport Students as Mentors’ (SSaMs) is to assist in reducing ESL amongst boys and young men. Across the EU the rate of early school leaving is considerably higher amongst boys than girls in all member states [except Bulgaria] (EU, 2010; EU, 2016). On educational support there is “a shortage of initiatives specifically targeted at boys” (EU, 2010). The project is in-line with the Europe 2020 strategy that sets out a target of "reducing the share of early leavers of education and training to less than 10 % by 2020" (EU, 2010).

Mentoring is a well-established non-formal method of engaging young people to improve academic attainment. On addressing youth unemployment, EC recommendations include enhancing support for non-formal education workers including those in mentor roles (EC, 2014). Sports personnel work with boys and young men on health and social concerns in schools and non-formal education settings via professional sports clubs 'sport in the community' schemes (CTFC, 2011; CCFC, 2011). There is also evidence of sport coaches working in a small number of schools as mentors assisting boys with their educational achievement (Eaude, 2008; Gulati & King, 2009; Beattie et al, 2014). However, whilst sport coaches are well placed to work with young males, in terms of male affiliation with sport and particularly work with hard-to-reach young males, a criticism of existing community sports coach work is that sport coaches lack the knowledge and skills required to work effectively in supportive education, health, and social contexts (Parnell et al, 2013).

The objective of SSaMS was to develop a HEI course to enhance the knowledge and skills of undergraduate sport students, to enable them to provide mentoring support for young males who are underachieving at school and, so, motivate them to stay at school and improve their educational attainment. The course could also instruct coaches on support for young men's mental and emotional health. The course aimed to develop an in-depth understanding of the

rationale for a gender-sensitive approach to helping young males, and of how mentoring can improve academic achievement and continued participation of young males in education

Activities

To achieve these objectives, a course of instruction was developed to provide a rationale for work with males on early school leaving and issues that disproportionately affect young males or affect life choices. The development of the course was based on two key activities: (1) the development of the course material, including (1a) a needs analysis and (1b) the development of the learning material, and (2) the development of the Train the Trainers material. These are outlined below.

1a. Needs Analysis

The aim of the Needs Analysis was to inform the development of the SSaMs Learning and Train the Trainers Material through surveys among two target groups: Higher Education Institutes and Students.

1b. Learning Material

The SSaMs learning materials for sports students was developed based on existing materials that was further informed by the preceding needs analysis. The materials were subsequently piloted, amended as required, and translated into partner languages.

2. Train the Trainers Material

The SSaMs train the trainer materials was developed as a resource (user-guide) to provide instruction for tutors facilitating the implementation of the SSaMs course with sports students, upon completion of the project from interested parts.

Description of Outputs

1a. Needs Analysis

Higher Education Institutes

The HEI survey was conducted through a questionnaire that included 2 parts; the first involved information on structural aspects of the HEI and the existence of relevant mentoring teaching, research and practical activities on ESL; the second part involved information regarding the existence but also the potential of national government policies for reducing ESL. The survey was communicated to 101 HEI. Replies were received from 49 HEI, among them three HEI from 3 from non-participating EU countries.

The most significant findings were

(a) 30% of respondents indicated that they were aware of work in the Faculty, either teaching, research or practical applications, towards reducing ESL.

(b) Among those reporting practical applications, 50% reported that this include mentoring of young people in the local community; this was not gender specific.

(c) Among participating countries, Ireland has male-specific gender-based governmental policy; however within respondents of all countries responses regarding governmental policies were inconsistent – some aware, some unaware.

(d) 35% of respondents identified mentoring work with schools and youth groups to reduce ESL as a viable area of work for sports science graduates and 40% indicated that they would like further information about the work, whereas 17% indicated no interest, and 8% did not know.

(e) 44% of respondents agreed that a module providing knowledge and skills of mentoring work specifically with young males to reduce ESL would fit within the sports science study programme, and 40% indicated that they would like further information about it, whereas 8% indicated no interest and 8% did not know.

The key conclusions were that gender specific ESL is rather overlooked in European and that the project concept will be unfamiliar to many sports science departments; however there is enough interest to run the module.

Students

The Students' survey was conducted through a questionnaire that included 3 parts; the first involved, required personal skills and attributes; the second, organisational structures; and the third, perceptions on preventing boys' ESL. In total, 168 students completed the survey (67% males, 87% aged 19-25 years). Their key findings were:

- Positive attributes and qualities required for mentoring included: Being a good listener – communication skills, organisational skills, empathy, patience and understanding, knowledge, inspiring, trust, intrapersonal knowledge – an understanding of oneself, being able to allow a mentee to act on their own and offer guidance, humour, having a moral compass – promoting values.
- Among participants, 84% felt that the gender of the mentor did not matter, 11% felt that young males would respond more positively to another male, and 5% felt that females are best placed to work with young males. Regarding the age of the mentor, a preference for similar age mentors was prevalent.
- Students recognized sport psychology as the domain providing the most relevant knowledge and skills on mental and emotional health concerns.
- Students indicated information concerning psychology, sociology, education, and knowledge of ethical considerations as suitable course components.
- A 'mentor for the mentor' emerged as a prominent theme; students also indicated a need for knowledge and skills concerning (non-sport-based) psychology, counselling and communication skills, and child development and welfare.
- Students strongly agreed that sport organisations and sport coaches could be viable agents to provide support as mentors for boys and young men on educational concerns (89%) and health concerns (88%).

Overall, the partners agreed that (a) it is important that students' views are reflected in the completed module, and (b) the module needs to be more practice-focused than theory-focused; for that a coaching approach to mentoring was recommended so that mentoring is familiar to sports students.

1b. Learning Material

The learning material that was developed based on existing materials, the expertise of the partners, and considering the outcomes of the Needs Analysis comprised six sections that can be implemented over six 1-hour-sessions. The sections are:

1. A context for work with young men
2. The role of the mentor
3. Setting boundaries; building mentor-mentee relationships; safeguarding
4. A model for mentoring: Positive Youth Development and the 5Cs
5. Life skills and goal setting
6. Supporting the emotional and mental health of boys and young men

Each section consists of a PowerPoint presentation¹ and supporting materials to be used as per the session plans. These include a Mentor Reflection Workbook for students to record mentee progress, Case Studies, 5C Indicator Cards, and examples of ground rules for mentor-mentee relationships.

Section 1 focuses on the rationale for work with young males and the potential negative consequences of poor educational attainment and early school leaving. The aim of this section is to explore the world of boys and young men and links to early school leaving. From this section, students are expected to (a) understand the importance of helping boys and young men to stay in education, and (b) understand how sport can be used to mentor and support boys and young men.

Section 2 focuses on mentoring as an approach that can be used to help young males achieve their academic or vocational potential and address early school leaving. The aim of this section is to promote an increased understanding of mentoring. From this section, students are expected to (a) understand the roles and tasks of a mentor, and (b) understand the main skills that can be used when mentoring.

Section 3 focuses on building a fruitful mentor-mentee relationships based on a set of shared rules and mutual trust, and setting boundaries and safeguarding against potential risks the role of mentor may bring. From this section, students are expected to (a) understand the need for ground rules and boundaries when mentoring others, and (b) understand why we need safeguarding and what a mentor should do if a disclosure is made.

Section 4 focuses on exploring Positive Youth Development, as a strengths-based approach that acknowledges the potential and strengths in all young people and views them as resources to be developed through appropriate. The aim of this section is to use Positive Youth Development and the 5Cs as a framework (Competence - Confidence - Connection - Character - Caring) for mentoring. From this section, students are expected to (a) understand the concept of Positive Youth Development, and (b) understand the concept of the 5Cs.

¹ The PowerPoint presentations also act as an aide-memoire and guide for the lecturer who should read through them prior to session work.

Section 5 focuses on deciding outcomes based on the needs of the mentor, the mentor's organisation, and the mentee; and setting goals on how to achieve these outcomes based on the principles of goal-setting. The aim of this section is to explore practical strategies to promote life skills in sport/physical activity. From this section, students are expected to (a) learn how life skills can be developed through sport/physical activity, and (b) learn how to develop effective goal setting plan.

Section 6 focuses on supporting the emotional and mental health of boys and young men, considering the links between poor mental health and consequences of poor academic outcomes in relation to mental health. The aim of this section is to explore how mentors can help to support and maintain the emotional and mental health needs of boys and young men. From this section, students are expected to (a) understand the association between poor mental health and the potential consequences of poor academic outcomes in relation to mental health, and (b) explore how mentors can assist in improving boys and young men's emotional and mental health with a focus on developing resilience, and signposting to appropriate services.

2. Train the Trainers Material

The Train the Trainers material is a comprehensive guide for the implementation of the Learning Material from interested parties. It comprises six documents, one for each Learning Material section, that present:

- (a) The aim and the expected learning outcomes of each section
- (b) A step-by-step description of the activities included in each section
- (c) Additional information including resources needed, timescale, and variations for the activities for each section.

All the SSaMs training resources are available in English, Spanish, Greek, Czech and Italian and can be downloaded from www.sportsmentors.eu.

Implementation and Evaluation of piloting the Learning Material with students

The material developed through the project was piloted in six partner countries. The aim of the pilot was to explore the impact of SSaMs in university students, but also to identify how the material could be improved. In total, the Pilot was implemented on 145 students. Participants were recruited from those expressing interest in work concerning mentoring, education, youth work, gendered work, sport in the community work, outdoor and leisure activity work. A brief questionnaire was used for the quantitative evaluation of the pilot; in addition, participant reported their perceptions and experiences through open-ended questions.

Pilot - Quantitative assessment

A questionnaire with 12 items was developed to assess students' perceptions regarding (a) their understanding of the course (4 items), (b) their confidence (5 items), and (c) competence serving as mentors in young males (3 items). Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale

from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The mean scores for each section per partner are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Results from students' survey.

	UM	PU	UTH	SR	CESIE
Section A. Understanding	4.25	4.65	4.63	4.20	4.27
Section B. Confidence	4.00	3.67	3.91	3.56	3.97
Section C. Competence	3.00	3.63	3.89	3.76	3.63
Average	3.75	3.98	4.14	3.84	3.96

Overall, students participating in the pilots scored relatively high on the understanding of the course, and moderately-to-high for their confidence and their competences to implement the course.

Pilot - Qualitative assessment

The qualitative part of the evaluation was about aspects of the course that were appreciated and aspects that could be improved.

Regarding aspects that were *appreciated*, students reported some general evaluation, aspects of structure and organisation of the course, and importantly, knowledge and skills they acquired.

General comments included the *attractiveness* and the *novelty* of the course altogether, the *gender focus*, and the content.

Comments regarding the structure and the organisation of the course showed that students enjoyed

- *The organisation and the clarity of learning material*
- *The analytical and clear content of the slides*
- *The form and continuity of the topics, the presentation and the activities*
- *The involving and engaging character of the course*
- *The exchanging of experiences*
- *The dialogue and the intriguing questions*
- *The highly interactive nature of the course, that triggered thinking and discussing*
- *The small size of the groups that made the course enjoyable and constructive*
- *The interactive practical activities*
- *The work on case studies and the examples*

Comments regarding knowledge they acquired suggest that the course

- *raised their awareness about mental health in young people*
- *provided useful information on how to work with young males*

- *helped them understand the importance of mentors*
- *learned about mentoring*

Finally, regarding skills, students reported that the course helped them to

- *Develop skills to work with young people*
- *Develop mentoring skills*
- *Develop skills to improve others' lives*
- *Develop skills to explore others and provide guidance*
- *Develop positive youth development skills*
- *Develop skills that can be transferred to other domains (outside sport)*
- *Develop skills to self-reflect and help others*
- *Develop skills to contact, establish rapport, and motivate others*
- *Getting training as mentors*
- *Overcome personal fears and limitations as mentor*
- *Apply mentoring skills in real life*

Regarding aspects of the course that could be improved, these involved the course content. The most dominant one was “*more practice*”. Other than that, students indicated that

- *The course material was at times repetitive*
- *Some points were not very clear and needed further elaboration*
- *There were sections with too much theory in a compact way*
- *Sometimes too much information in limited time*

and recommended that to enhance the learning experience of the students, it would help adding

- *Hands-on experience*
- *Observation of demonstration of a mentoring session from an expert mentor*
- *Videos with real mentoring situations*
- *Instructional time for discussing some more “difficult” issues*
- *Guidance for specific cases (e.g., what to do if a boy is reluctant to cooperate)*
- *Examples for increased understanding of some concepts*
- *Techniques for approaching young boys*
- *Background information*

Overall, the students enjoyed the course, in particular due to its novelty, its interactive nature and its practical focus, and provided valuable ideas for further improving the material and the implementation of the course.

All comments and recommendations made by students in the pilot evaluation were carefully considered and changes were made where this was deemed feasible and appropriate for the improvement of the course, in particular with regard to increasing the practical aspects of the course.

The experiences of the trainers and suggestions for future implementation

Overall, the trainers implementing the pilot course were satisfied with the material and the interactive nature of the course, which succeeded in getting students involved. In particular, they highlighted the effectiveness of the case studies that were discussed, the supporting material that facilitated the delivery of the course, and the value of the activities. In addition, the trainers stressed the motivation of the students to get involved and their creativity. For the improvement they suggested that maybe more time could be devoted to each session, especially for elaborating in deeper discussions with the students and practising the activities for longer; this would also improve the balance between lecturing and practising.

Finally, the trainers provided their suggestions for issues regarding the recruitment of participants and the promotion of the course value, ideas for the implementation and the sustainability of the course. For recruiting participants to the course it was deemed important to justify the gender-based approach of this initiative, emphasize that the course would enhance their skills and competencies working with young people in various settings, and in particular sport, and in parallel, that it can assist them with their future careers. Further, to highlight that the course is highly interactive and includes practical activities. These aspects would be attractive in particular for those willing to pursue coaching positions, as such carriers start from youth sport. Such promotion could be effective through universities but also through sport clubs. Moreover, to enhance the applicability of the course outside sport, it would be helpful to develop adapted case studies and activities that would suit the different target groups.

Trainers indicated that the course can run as a stand-alone module or the component of other relevant modules. They also suggested alternative forms of implementation that could increase the accessibility of the course. Such alternatives to facilitate those interested with limited opportunities to attend in person, included offering an a prolonged (one-session) workshop followed by on-line training and activities, developing the course fully on-line, or organizing webinars. Such modes of implementation would also help the sustainability of the course.

Further, it was suggested that maintaining the SSaMs website as a visible source for information, and creating an online knowledge base for gender-based mentoring work and allied work, would help the sustainability of the project outputs. Finally, the sustainability could be supported through the development of links with universities that could provide opportunities for research, in the form of student thesis, but also for applied practice on the topic. Towards the latter, links sport and educational authorities could be established to create internship positions.

Conclusion

The main objective of the SSaMs was to develop a course aiming at training sport students as mentors for young males, to prevent early school leaving. To achieve this objective, a need analysis addressed to university staff and students was conducted. Based on existing materials and the outcomes of the needs analysis, course material and supporting documentation was developed. Finally, the course was

piloted and evaluated in five partner countries. The evaluation of the piloted course highlighted its value and helped improving the material.

Overall, the SSaMs project was successfully completed. The SSaMs course can prove a valuable tool for developing the skills and competencies of sport students to act as mentors for young boys, aiming primarily at preventing early school leaving, but also at developing important life skills. To achieve these goals the sustainability of the course is warranted though its implementation in university courses, but also in the form of seminars to young sport coaches. Finally, to fully exploit the potential of the SSaMs project, opportunities should be created for sport students and graduates for practising the role of the mentor, to further develop their expertise in the field, but also to promote the idea of mentors as a valuable prospect in youth sport.

PARTNERS



UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE (United Kingdom)

Paul Hopkins
phopkins1@glos.ac.uk
www.glos.ac.uk



UNIVERSITY OF THESSALY (Greece)

Professor Marios Goudas
mgoudas@pe.uth.gr
www.uth.gr



Palacký University
Olomouc

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI (Czech Republic)

Ladislav Baloun
ladislav.baloun@upol.cz
www.upol.cz



UNIVERSITY OF MURCIA (Spain)

Pilar Sainz de Baranda
psainzdebaranda@um.es
Maria Jesus Bazaco / *mjbazaco@um.es*
www.um.es



I.T. Carlow (Ireland)

Dr Noel Richardson
noel.richardson@itcarlow.ie
www.itcarlow.ie



CESIE (Italy)

Caterina Impastato
caterina.impastato@cesie.org
www.cesie.org



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.