Elite Sports Schools:
An International review on policies and practices

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1. **Point of departure & Aims of the study**

- Number of sports schools and pupils
- Funding
- Selection process
- Coaching
- Integration of sports pupils in regular schools
- Flexible curriculum
- Indicators of success

2. Aspects to investigate & Methods

3. Selected results

4. Conclusions
Point of departure

How to Achieve a Sporting Culture of Excellence in Scotland
(Coalter, Radtke, Taylor & Jarvie, 2006)
Commissioned by the Scottish Institute of Sport Foundation (SISF)

Lack of an integrated strategy for elite sport in Scotland

- Key issue: school sport/development of young athletes
- Pupils are good at sport or the academic side
- Absence of links between schools and sports clubs
- British medal winners come from private schools
- Talented young people start sports training too late
- How to Achieve a Sporting Culture of Excellence in Scotland
  (Coalter, Radtke, Taylor & Jarvie, 2006)
  Commissioned by the Scottish Institute of Sport Foundation (SISF)

Sports Schools – An international review (Radtke & Coalter, 2007)
Commissioned by the Scottish Institute of Sport Foundation (SISF)
Aims of the study

Sports Schools – An international review (Radtke & Coalter, 2007)
Commissioned by the Scottish Institute of Sport Foundation (SISF)

1. Examples of best practice in other countries
2. Implications for practice
Countries included in the study
Previous research

Richartz & Brettschneider (1996); Brettschneider & Klimek (1998); Beckmann (2002); Lavallee et al. (2004); Beckmann et al. (2006)
Structure of presentation

1. Point of departure & Aims of the study
2. Aspects to investigate & Methods
3. Selected results
4. Conclusions
Aspects to investigate & Methods

Macro-level
(larger context of society: e.g., education system in the respective country)

Meso-level
- Academic and sporting curricula
- Selection process
- Funding
- Relationships with governmental and sporting organisations

Micro-level
- Pupil population and core sports
- Academic records
- Sporting records
- Drop-out rates

Methods:
1. Review of literature
2. Expert interviews (exploratory in-depth interviews) (n = 69)
Structure of presentation

1 Point of departure & Aims of the study
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### Case study countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Approach of a (decentralised) national strategy</th>
<th>Approach of a (centralised) national strategy</th>
<th>Approach of a private sports school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sweden</strong></td>
<td><a href="#">Flag</a></td>
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<td><a href="#">Flag</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Population:</td>
<td>9.1 million inhabitants</td>
<td>64.1 million inhabitants</td>
<td>4.4 million inhabitants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area:</td>
<td>450,000 km²</td>
<td>675,000 km²</td>
<td>704 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density:</td>
<td>20 inhabitants per km²</td>
<td>113 inhabitants per km²</td>
<td>6,500 inhabitants per km²</td>
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</table>
Number of sports schools and pupils (in 2007)

Most schools founded in the early 1990s
A relatively recent phenomenon in Singapore (2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of sports schools (n)</th>
<th>Number of sports pupils (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1,595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1,323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Formal criteria for status of a sports school (by DOSB)

- Valid for four years (one Olympic cycle)
- Link with local Olympic training centre & focus on same core sports
- Provision of qualified coaches & facilities by Olympic training centre
- School close to training facilities (max. 20 min)
- High number of national youth squad members in the region
- School designed as a boarding school
- Sport co-ordinator employed by the school
- Provision of adaptations to the timetable of pupil athletes

German approach of a national strategy
Government-funded state schools: no general school fees (exception: SIN & NED)

- Fees are charged for boarders, athletes’ extra support, participation in the sport programme (CAN, ITA, FRA, NED, SWE)
- Additional governmental funding and/or funding from local authorities (AUS, SWE, FIN, GER, NED)
- Private industry supplementing government funding (SWE, SIN, GER)
- Private industry funding for scholarships (CAN, FRA, SIN)
- Additional funding from sports federations (NED, BEL/Flanders, GER)
### Parent contribution per year (2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NED</td>
<td>€ 50 – 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRA</td>
<td>€ 700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWE</td>
<td>€ 500 – 1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITA</td>
<td>€ 2,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAN</td>
<td>€ 2,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIN</td>
<td>€ 2,900 (Singapore citizens) € 12,000 (foreigners)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selection process

Sports federations centrally involved in the process of selection

Pupils’ academic merit taken into account

**SIN**: Annual selection trials to assess the technical skills, fitness and potential for further development & written psychological tests

**BEL** (Flanders): Sports performance re-assessment each year

**SWE**: no yearly sports performance assessment by the school, club or sports federation
High quality coaches & high level of cooperation between elite and club coaches

**GER**: Olympic training centre provides training via regional elite coaches who develop athletes’ individual training programme in cooperation with club trainer.

**BEL** (Flanders): during school week, pupil athletes coached by coaches employed by sports federation – at the weekend club training and games at home.

**SIN**: Training programmes run by federations and coached by federation coaches.

**CAN**: Coaching staff approved by national or provincial sport organisations. No sport training done at the school.
Integration of sports pupils in regular schools

- Singapore
- Germany
- Canada
- Italy

- Specialist provision
- Wholly integrated into regular classes
- Partly integrated into regular schools

- Australia
- Germany
- Sweden
- Finland
- Netherlands
- France
- Netherlands
- Belgium
Flexible curriculum

Possibility to extend the duration of the studies to four years

Flexible curriculum: School year divided into five seven week terms - pupils construct their own timetables

Sports training is accepted as a school subject (27% of credits can be obtained)

Most adaptable curriculum: decentralised & highly flexible

FRA: 24 hours of school lessons vs. 20 hours of trainings per week

BEL (Flanders): 32 hours of school lessons vs. 12 hours of training per week

Schools draw up their own curriculum: special emphasis on certain subject areas

Non-graded school system: pupils’ responsibility for learning & decision-making
Flexible curriculum

Institut National des Sports et de l'Education Physique (INSEP) in Paris

INSEP houses up to 1,000 sports people (296 pupil athletes aged below 18)

On Fridays: pupil athletes attend classroom lessons in the respective lycée within sports classes (no mixed classes!)

Classes at INSEP from 8 to 11 am & from 2:15 to 4:15 pm (Monday to Thursday)

Cooperation with four local upper secondary schools (lycées) & 68 teachers

Lycée Marcelin Berthelot
(148 pupil athletes)

Lycée Louis Armand
(75 pupil athletes)

Lycée Hector Berlioz
(48 pupil athletes)

Lycée Professionnel Jean Moulin (24 pupil athletes)
Flexible curriculum

Approaches to compensate for the reduced classroom time

- Extra tutorials & distance learning materials, lap-tops / internet support provided to enable school work to continue during long absences for training or competition (CAN, FRA, GER, ITA, SIN)

- Year-round schooling provided by teachers on a separate summer contract (CAN)

- Focus on fewer subjects reducing the required curriculum time (NED)

- Modified school curriculum provided which contains additional sports-related subjects (AUS, CAN, FIN, ITA, SWE, SIN)

- Modified curriculum includes *sports training* as a school subject with relevant credits (SWE & FIN)

- Pupil athletes are allowed to extend the duration of their studies by one year (AUS, BEL, GER, FIN, NED, SIN, SWE)
Indicators of success

Academic achievement

- Above the national average (AUS, CAN, NED, SWE)
- No difference between pupil athletes and non-athletes (FIN)
- Below the national average (FRA)

Sporting achievement

GER: between 2001 & 2004
- 683 medals at junior world & European championships
- 327 medals at Olympic Games, world & European championships
- 82% of Olympic medals

Drop-out rates

GER: 18 per cent
BEL: 9 - 23 per cent
SWE: 5 - 10 per cent
FIN: 3 per cent

Swedish approach:
Attending a sports school in order to learn to set goals and to develop achievement orientation (regardless of the pupil athletes’ sporting achievement)
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Conclusion: Generic components

Two key aspects
• Nature and degree of flexibility available within school curriculum
• Close relationships between sports schools and sports federations

School as part of
• national system (GER, SWE, FIN, NED)
• less systematic approach (AUS)
• unique approach (CAN, SIN)

Substantial variations between/within case study countries

Differences in the financial resources available to sports schools
• Number of available scholarships
• Level and quality of sports facilities provided by the schools
Conclusion: Cautionary note

Sports Schools – Effective and efficient institutions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proponents</th>
<th>Critics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. Zinner, 2008; Meusel, 2008)</td>
<td>(e.g. Hohmann, 2009; Emrich et al., 2008; Prohl &amp; Emrich, 2009)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Many successful athletes are former pupil athletes at sports schools (early vs. late specialisation)</td>
<td>• 50% of successful international athletes did other sports than today at school age (late vs. early specialisation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• e.g. Turin 2006: 58% of German participants are former/current pupil athletes – 75% of German Olympic medals won by former/current pupil athletes</td>
<td>• No advantages of pupil athletes taught at sports schools compared to pupil athletes taught at mainstream schools (in terms of sporting/academic achievement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sports Schools are effective and efficient institutions for long term athlete development</td>
<td>• Sports schools as multidimensional educational institutions – What about the pedagogical quality of sports schools?</td>
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</tbody>
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