

The SportsComp Erasmus+ project. An initial WP2 Protocol Overview: The International and Multidisciplinary Delphi and Qualitative Study.

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Within the overarching framework of the SportsComp Erasmus+ project, Work Package 2 (WP2) aims to enhance the quality of sports physiotherapy education through competencies update and development.¹ WP2 is coordinated by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in collaboration with the University of Thessaly (UTH), the International Federation of Sports Physical Therapy (IFSPT), the University of Tartu (UT) and Jamk University of Applied Sciences (Jamk). This phase is dedicated to updating competencies and delineating the role of sports physiotherapists within sports and health systems. WP2 is envisioned as a foundational step toward creating e-learning courses and a tutor guide intended to facilitate competence development, learning, and pedagogy across academic, professional, and diverse learning environments.

UNVEILING GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERT INSIGHTS

In the first phase of WP2, the consortium pursues ethical approval and refines the methodology for the Delphi survey-based study, stakeholder interviews and focus groups.

Central to the progression of WP2 is the Delphi survey, a methodical approach to soliciting expert perspectives and building consensus. The process commences with Round 1, where surveys are crafted with the intention to distribute to all 40 IFSPT member organisations and through four members of World Physiotherapy for reaching the submitted aim to reach a consensus as wide and global as possible. As stated in the SportsComp Erasmus+ application, the study aims to secure participation from at least 30 member organisations, ensuring representation across high-, middle-

and low-income countries. Each member organisation is called upon to nominate expert sports physiotherapists. These surveys, rooted in the foundational 11 competencies identified in prior stages, serve as the initial catalyst for dialogue and reflection within the global sports physiotherapy community.

Following the dissemination of surveys, monitoring mechanisms through REDCap® track survey rounds and participant engagement,^{2,3} as the project is committed to achieving consensus on over 80% of the competency profile within two rounds. Next, data analysis ensues to distil key insights and propose updates to the existing competency framework. The findings are compiled into data reports, ensuring transparency and accountability in communicating the results. This phase also entails active engagement with survey participants, IFSPT member organisations, and project stakeholders to foster a collaborative environment conducive to knowledge exchange and refinement of ideas.

As the Delphi process evolves, subsequent surveys (minimally two rounds) are deployed across six continents to capture diverse perspectives and ensure a holistic representation of global insights. Iterative rounds continue until a consensus is achieved, with periodic reviews and adjustments to accommodate emerging trends and evolving practices within the field of sports physiotherapy.

FROM SURVEY TO SYNTHESIS: CHARTING THE COURSE FOR COMPETENCY ADVANCEMENT

Focus groups and interviews complement the Delphi study. Under the leadership of the UTH, these qualitative research methodologies are employed to capture the voices of end-

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users and stakeholders. Athletes, alongside athlete support personnel and sporting or national healthcare organisations, form the crux of the end-users. Stakeholders range from Regional Olympic committees to international sport federations and International Olympic and Paralympics committee. Through the focus groups and structured interviews, insights are garnered and transcribed for in-depth thematic analysis.

The qualitative data obtained from these engagements serve as the foundation for delineating the expected competencies of sports physiotherapists across different contexts, ranging from elite sports settings to community healthcare environments. The data analysis culminates in extensive reports at each project stage. This qualitative exploration adds depth and nuance to the competency framework, ensuring alignment with the evolving needs and expectations of end-users and stakeholders within the sports and healthcare systems.

CULTIVATING CONSENSUS: A COLLABORATIVE ENDEAVOUR IN SPORTS PHYSIOTHERAPY EDUCATION

As WP2 progresses, an essential milestone is the Partner Consensus Meeting, scheduled for 24-26 April 2024 in

Brussels (Belgium). This meeting brings together all project partners to deliberate and solidify consensus on identified competencies and roles collectively. It is an opportunity for further knowledge exchange and cross-pollination of ideas, fostering synergy and alignment across diverse perspectives and expertise.

Ultimately, the conclusion of WP2 lies in synthesising the findings into a comprehensive Final Report. Led by Jamk and participated by all project partners, this report contains an international consensus on sports physiotherapy competency profiles within a global context. Grounded in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Level 7 standards, this report will elevate the standards of sports physiotherapy practice and will propel the field forward on a global scale. The dissemination of the updated competency profile to all stakeholders underscores the commitment to transparency and collaboration. Integrating this approach, WP2 aims to inspire the improvement of sports physiotherapy education, catalysing advancements in healthcare and sports systems worldwide.

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