STARS

*Shaping Talents and Achieving Vocational Excellence in Sports*

*Project 101143990_ERASMUS-EDU-2023-PEX-COVE*

4 years duration | 17 partners | 4 countries

## Work Package n°3

# D3.1 – Transition Package into an Open Sport School

Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

| | |
|---|---|
| Project | STARS – *Shaping Talents and Achieving Vocational Excellence in Sports*<br>Project 101143990<br>ERASMUS-EDU-2023-PEX-COVE |
| Deliverable | D3.1 Transition Package into an Open Sport School |
| Relevant Work package: | WP3. Conceptualization and Design and Building Blocks of a Holistic Sports CoVE Model |
| Dissemination level | Public |
| Date | 01/07/2026 |
| Authors | 135 BPM (Lead), Université Picardie Jules Verne, Metropolitan College, AKMI, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Leipzig University, Bezirksregierung Düsseldorf |
| Status | |
| Version | Final |

*Shaping Talents and Achieving Vocational Excellence in Sports*

Project 101143990
ERASMUS-EDU-2023-PEX-COVE

Co-funded by the European Union

## Disclaimer

*The STARS project (ID 101143990) is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.*

## Authors

Hayat ABDELLATIF, Emilie HAQUET, Bastien GIUDICELLI (135 BPM)

With the contribution of Université Picardie Jules Verne, Metropolitan College, AKMI, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Leipzig University and Bezirksregierung Düsseldorf.

**TRANSFORMATION PACKAGE INTO AN OPEN SPORT SCHOOL** ..... 5
LIST OF ACRONYMS ..... 6
GLOSSARY ..... 7
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 10
1. Open School model: rationale for adoption by the sports training ecosystem ..... 12
The Open Schooling approach ..... 12
Why sport education needs open schooling ..... 15
2. The Open Sport School ..... 18
Pillar 1. Learner-centred and project-based learning ..... 19
Pillar 2. Community building through sport events ..... 21
Pillar 3. Promotion of sport values, health and wellbeing ..... 22
Pillar 4. Cooperation between schools, employers and networks ..... 24
Pillar 5. Opening facilities, expertise and opportunities to the community ..... 27
Conclusion: from principles to implementation ..... 30
BIBLIOGRAPHY ..... 32

**OPEN SPORT SCHOOL: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LEAD THE CHANGE** ..... 33
Executive summary ..... 33
introduction ..... 33
The Open Sport School vision ..... 33
What makes an Open Sport School? ..... 33
Who is this Practical Guide for? ..... 33
Four reasons to become an Open Sport School ..... 33
Build your own Open Sport School game plan ..... 33
Build on your strengths, find your starting line ..... 33
One vision, many game plans ..... 33
Turning ambition into lasting change ..... 33
A cycle of continuous improvement ..... 33
The Open Sport School Community ..... 33

**TOOL n°1: KICK-OFF: SELF-REFLECTION TOOL TO ASSESS YOUR SCHOOL'S OPENNESS** ..... 33
Introduction ..... 33
Pillar 1: learner-centred approach ..... 33
Pillar 2: community engagement through sport events ..... 33



Table of contents

Pillar 3: promotion of sport values, health and ethics....33
Pillar 4: cooperation with employers and networks....33
Pillar 5: Open facilities to local communities....33
Summary and next steps....33
Overall Open Sport School profile....33

**TOOL N°2: DESIGN YOUR GAME PLAN: PLANNING TOOL....33**

1. How the Game Plan works....33
2. Starting point: your school....33
3. Your Open Sport School vision....33
4. Strategic priorities....33
5. Open schooling activity....33

**TOOL N°2: DESIGN YOUR GAME PLAN: ACTIVITIES PORTFOLIO....33**

Flagship open schooling activities....33
1. Job dating through sport....33
2. Re-engagement through sport....33
3. Talent discovery through sport events....34
4. Community sport events....34

**TOOL N°3: BUILD YOUR TEAM, FIND YOUR CHANGE AGENTS, MAP STAKEHOLDERS AND ROLES34**

Introduction....34
1. Map your open sport school ecosystem....34
2. Define the roles....34
3. Build your line up....34
4. Find your champions....34

**CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME....34**

Programme overview....34
Section 1 – webinar: Inclusive excellence in sport VET....34
Section 2 – webinar: from project-based learning to competence recognition....34
Section 3 – webinar: leading the open sport school transformation: from innovation culture to institutional change....34
Section 4 – workshop: The Open Sport School design lab....34

**CAPACITY BUILDING TEMPLATES....34**

**TOOL N°4: ANNUAL MONITORING DASHBOARD: REVIEW PROGRESS AND PREPARE THE NEXT OPEN SCHOOLING CYCLE....34**

**Annex 1: 17 inspiring practices that informed the Open Sport School model.**

**Annex 2: Memorandum of Cooperation (Template)**

**Annex 3: Open Sport School recommendation matrix**

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| AI | Artificial Intelligence |
| BB | Building Block |
| CoVE | Centres of Vocational Excellence |
| HR | Human Resources |
| ITK | Institute for Applied Training Science |
| JASH | Journée Amiénoise Sport et Handicap |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicator |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| OSOS | Open Schools for Open Societies |
| RACI | Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed |
| SHE | Schools for Health in Europe |
| STARS | Shaping Talents and Achieving Vocational Excellence in Sports |
| TNA | Training Needs Analysis |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization |
| VET | Vocational Education and Training |
| WHO | World Health Organization |

# GLOSSARY

**Applied research:**
Applied research addresses specific practical problems and seeks to improve existing conditions or develop solutions that can be implemented in real-world settings. It takes theoretical knowledge and uses it to create tangible benefits for individuals, organizations, or society.[1]

**Capacity-building:**
Capacity-building is defined as the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world.[2]

**Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs)**
Centres of Vocational Excellence are a European flagship initiative to strengthen and develop Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Europe. CoVE projects are funded under Erasmus+ and aim to enhance the quality and innovation of VET. CoVEs are not just training institutions, but collaborative networks of local and international partners that respond to the evolving requirements of learners, businesses and communities.[3]

**Competences:**
Competences can be defined as broader attributes that refer to an ability to use knowledge, skills social and/or methodological abilities in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. Competence is not limited to the cognitive area; it also encompasses functional/technical areas, interpersonal skills and values.[4]

**Health Promoting Schools approach:**
Health Promoting Schools, also known as Comprehensive School Health1, is an internationally recognized approach to supporting improvements in students' educational outcomes while addressing school health in a planned, integrated, and holistic way. This whole-school model builds capacity to incorporate well-being as an essential aspect of student achievement. Actions address four distinct but inter-related components that comprise a health promoting school approach: social and physical environment; teaching and learning; policy; partnerships and services.[5]

**Knowledge:**
May be understood as the way in which individuals and societies apply meaning to experience. It can therefore be seen broadly as the information, understanding, skills, values and attitudes acquired through learning. As such, knowledge is linked inextricably to the cultural, social, environmental and institutional contexts in which it is created and reproduced.[6]

[1] Illinois Institute of Technology Library. (n.d.). *Community engagement*. https://guides.library.iit.edu/c.php?g=1481358&p=11040986
[2] United Nations. (n.d.). *Capacity-building*. https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/capacity-building
[3] European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. (2025). *Unlocking Potential – A spotlight on Erasmus+ Centres of Vocational Excellence*. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/3070648
[4] European Commission, Joint Research Centre. (n.d.). *Defining skill and competence*. https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities-z/skills-and-competences/defining-skill-and-competence_en
[5] Joint Consortium for School Health. (n.d.). *Health Promoting Schools.* https://www.jcsh-cces.ca/en/concepts/health-promoting-schools/
[6] UNESCO 2015*: Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good?* https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232555

**Learner-centred approach:**
Learner-centred learning is an educational approach that places learners at the heart of the learning process. Rather than focusing primarily on the transmission of knowledge, it seeks to actively engage learners in constructing their own learning experiences. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their development, participate in decision-making, reflect on their progress and contribute to the learning environment. In this approach, learning is not limited to the acquisition of knowledge but includes the development of skills, attitudes, values and the capacity to learn throughout life.

A learner-centred approach also implies a shift in the role of educators. Teachers and trainers continue to provide structure, expertise and guidance, but increasingly act as facilitators who support learners in exploring questions, solving problems, collaborating with others and connecting learning to real-life situations. This approach encourages participation, autonomy, critical thinking and engagement while recognising the diversity of learners' needs, interests and aspirations.

**Open schooling culture:**
refers to a type of learning /schooling that is flexible in terms of time, location, teaching methods and all the other factors connected to a teaching/learning process. The learning environment is extended beyond the classroom walls, other people take the teaching role, students engage with the wider world, and learning happens inside or outside the school hours. It encourages collaboration of schools with different community stakeholders to make education more practical, appealing and innovative for both students and teachers. This approach seeks to bridge the gap between formal and non-formal educational institutions and integrates the best elements of both. The most important benefits of open schooling include catering for diverse types of learners, flexibility, encouraging a more student-centred approach, students taking charge of their learning, fostering critical thinking, self-discipline and a sense of responsibility.[7]

**Peer learning:**
Instructional model, based on cooperation, which strengthens the interaction between learners and results in learning outcomes that benefit all participants.[8]

**Project-based learning:**
Project-based learning represents one of the most effective ways of implementing learner-centred education. It is a pedagogical approach in which learners acquire knowledge, skills and competences by engaging over a defined period of time with an authentic question, challenge or problem. Through projects, learners investigate, experiment, collaborate, make decisions and produce tangible outcomes. The emphasis is not only on what learners know, but also on what they are able to do with that knowledge in meaningful contexts.

Research consistently highlights several benefits associated with project-based learning. It strengthens learner engagement by creating meaningful and relevant learning experiences, supports differentiation by allowing learners to contribute according to their strengths and interests, and progressively develops autonomy through responsibility and decision-making. Project-based learning also reinforces cooperation and inclusion by encouraging learners to work collectively towards shared objectives while recognising the contribution of each individual.

**Skills:**
Skills may be defined as the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve useful problems, typically in the workplace.[9]

[7] European Schoolnet. (n.d.). *Open schooling: Bridging formal and non-formal education institutions*. European Education https://teachwitheuropeana.eun.org/updates/open-schooling-bridging-formal-and-non-formal-education-institutions/
[8] Cedefop. (n.d.). *Peer learning*. *VET Glossary*. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-glossary/glossary/peer-learning
[9] Cambridge University Press. (n.d.). *Soft skills*. In *Cambridge Dictionary*. https://www.jcsh-cces.ca/en/concepts/health-promoting-schools/

**Sport events:**
Designates any professional or amateur sport, athletic game, contest or event. 'Sport Event' includes but is not limited to youth sports, high school athletic activities, the Special Olympics, and other nonprofessional athletic/sport activities.[10]

**Sport values:**
Values of Sport refers to the Sport Movement's core values, beliefs and principles centred on fair play, respect, honesty, friendship and excellence.[11]

[10] Law Insider. (n.d.). *Sporting event*. https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/sporting-event
[11] UNESCO. (n.d.). *Values of sport*. https://www.unesco.org/en/query-list/s/sport-values

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vocational education and training (VET) providers are increasingly expected to go beyond the delivery of qualifications. Alongside preparing skilled professionals, they are called upon to foster inclusion, lifelong learning, wellbeing and civic engagement while strengthening collaboration with employers, researchers, public authorities and local communities. Responding to these expectations requires educational institutions to become more open, collaborative and learner-centred, creating learning environments that connect education with society and generate lasting value for learners and the ecosystems they serve.

These transformations are particularly visible within the sport ecosystem. The sector is becoming increasingly professionalised and diversified, creating new occupations at the intersection of coaching, health, education, event management, tourism, digital technologies and community development. Career pathways are also becoming more fragmented, with professionals expected to combine multiple roles, continuously update their competences and move between employment, entrepreneurship and project-based work throughout their careers. Preparing learners for this evolving reality requires more than technical expertise. It calls for educational approaches that develop adaptability, transversal competences, entrepreneurial mindsets and the ability to collaborate across sectors and disciplines.

Developed within STARS, the first Erasmus+ Centre of Vocational Excellence dedicated to sport, the Open Sport School is built on the conviction that **sport has the power to position vocational schools at the centre of the ecosystems they serve:**

- At the centre of **communities**, by fostering inclusion, participation and stronger local partnerships.
- At the centre of **professional lives**, by supporting skills development, employability and lifelong learning.
- At the centre of **personal lives**, by promoting health, wellbeing and the lifelong practice of sport.
- At the centre of **society**, by strengthening resilience, civic competences and collective responsibility.

The Open Sport School translates this ambition into a practical framework for institutional transformation. Building on the principles of Open Schooling, it supports vocational education providers in evolving from places where qualifications are delivered into open learning ecosystems, where education, sport, research, employers, public authorities and communities collaborate to create authentic learning experiences and shared value.

The Open Sport School provides a common direction for innovation while recognising the diversity of VET systems across Europe. It encourages institutions to build on their existing strengths and progressively embed learner-centred pedagogies, stakeholder collaboration, competence-based learning, applied research and community engagement into their everyday practice. In doing so, it promotes a broader understanding of vocational excellence, where technical expertise is reinforced by transversal competences, wellbeing, inclusion and civic responsibility.

This vision is articulated through five complementary pillars that define the characteristics of an Open Sport School and provide a shared framework for institutional development. Together, they help schools strengthen their educational offer, deepen their relationships with local and regional stakeholders, and maximise the educational, social and economic value created through sport.

To support implementation, the conceptual model is complemented by the STARS Open Sport School Transformation Package, a coherent suite of practical tools guiding institutions through every stage of their transformation journey. From self-reflection and strategic planning to stakeholder engagement, capacity

building, impact monitoring and participation in the European Open Sport School Community, the package enables schools to translate vision into action through a structured process of continuous improvement.

More broadly, the Open Sport School contributes to the long-term ambition of STARS: building a European community of vocational education providers that use sport as a catalyst for educational innovation, vocational excellence and regional development. By connecting learners with their communities, employers, research and society, it demonstrates how sport can create lasting value far beyond the boundaries of the sport sector.

# 1. Open School model: rationale for adoption by the sports training ecosystem

The open schooling culture is founded on an observation: many of the most meaningful learning experiences already take place beyond the boundaries of educational institutions. Learners develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and aspirations not only through formal education, but also through their interactions with families, peers, employers, sports clubs, community organisations and the wider society. At the same time, many of the challenges faced by educational institutions—such as learner engagement, school dropout, inclusion, employability, health promotion or social participation—cannot be addressed by schools alone.

Sport provides a particularly fertile environment in which these connections can develop. Sport activities, clubs, competitions, events and community initiatives naturally bring together learners, educators, families, employers, volunteers, public authorities and civil society organisations around shared goals and experiences. As a result, sport frequently creates opportunities for learning, participation and collaboration that extend beyond traditional educational settings.

The Open Sport School, as the backbone of the model of Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in sports developed in the STARS project, seeks to build upon and strengthen these existing connections. Rather than viewing education as an activity taking place exclusively within schools, it recognises learning as a shared process that is enriched by the contribution of multiple actors and environments. Educational institutions, learners, communities, sports organisations, employers and research actors each bring valuable knowledge, expertise, resources and perspectives that can contribute to richer learning experiences and more relevant educational pathways.

This perspective is particularly relevant in a context characterised by technological innovation, labour market transformation, demographic change and increasing social, environmental and health-related challenges. These developments affect both education and the sport sector, creating a growing need for learners to develop not only technical competences but also adaptability, collaboration, critical thinking, civic engagement and lifelong learning capacities. They also create opportunities for educational institutions to work more closely with the ecosystems in which they operate.

The ambition of the Open Sport School is therefore twofold. On the one hand, it seeks to enhance the quality, relevance and inclusiveness of sport education by connecting learning with real-life contexts, community needs and professional environments. On the other hand, it seeks to generate positive and lasting value for the communities that contribute to and benefit from these learning experiences. In this sense, the Open Sport School is not defined by a specific type of institution or activity, but by the quality of the relationships it creates between educational providers, sport actors and society.

The model is based on the assumption that educational institutions can offer richer learning opportunities when they are connected to their communities, and that communities can strengthen their own capacity for learning, participation and innovation when they actively engage with education through sport.

## The Open Schooling approach

The concept of Open Schooling has emerged as a response to a growing recognition that education can no longer be understood as an activity confined within the walls of educational institutions. Contemporary societies are characterised by rapid technological change, increasing complexity, interconnected global

challenges and evolving labour market demands. Meanwhile learners acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and values through a wide range of formal, non-formal and informal experiences that extend far beyond the classroom (UNESCO, 2015).

In Europe, the Open Schooling movement promotes a shift in the role of educational institutions. Rather than functioning as relatively self-contained organisations, schools are encouraged to position themselves as active participants in wider learning ecosystems, connecting learners with families, communities, employers, researchers, public authorities and civil society organisations. Learning becomes a shared endeavour, enriched by the contributions, expertise and experiences of multiple actors.

This perspective is closely aligned with the principles of Whole School Approaches, which emphasise that meaningful and sustainable educational change requires the engagement of the entire school community and its wider environment (Schools for Health in Europe [SHE], 2022). Rather than focusing exclusively on classroom practices, Whole School Approaches recognise the importance of leadership, school culture, partnerships, learner participation and community engagement in creating supportive learning environments (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020; UNESCO, 2016). Open Schooling extends this logic by strengthening the connections between educational institutions and the broader ecosystems in which they operate.

The Open Schools for Open Societies (OSOS) initiative provided one of the most influential frameworks for translating these principles into practice. It described schools as innovation ecosystems where learners, educators, school leaders and community stakeholders share responsibility for learning and collectively contribute to addressing societal challenges (Athanasiades et al., 2018). In this perspective, schools are not only places where knowledge is transmitted, but environments where knowledge is co-created, applied and mobilised in response to real-world issues.

Open Schooling is therefore characterised by a stronger relationship between education and society. It seeks to create meaningful connections between learning and the realities of everyday life, enabling learners to engage with authentic challenges and participate in activities that generate value beyond educational outcomes alone. The relevance of learning is strengthened through interaction with external actors, while educational institutions become more responsive to the needs, aspirations and opportunities present within their communities.

Several interconnected dimensions can be identified across the Open Schooling literature.

- The first concerns **governance and participation**. Open Schools promote more collaborative approaches to decision-making and encourage the active involvement of learners, educators, families and external stakeholders in shaping educational priorities and initiatives. This reflects a broader understanding of education as a shared responsibility.
- A second defining characteristic is **innovation**. Open Schooling encourages experimentation, creativity and the exploration of new approaches to teaching, learning and collaboration. Innovation is not limited to technological solutions but includes new pedagogical methods, interdisciplinary projects, community-based learning, applied research and innovative forms of competence recognition. The emphasis is placed on creating learning experiences that are meaningful, engaging and relevant to contemporary challenges.
- A third dimension relates to openness itself. Learning is viewed as a continuum that takes place across multiple environments and throughout life. Schools therefore seek to create connections between formal, non-formal and informal learning settings, enabling learners to move more fluidly between different contexts and forms of participation. This approach recognises that valuable learning occurs in many spaces and through diverse experiences.

- Finally, Open Schooling is characterised by a strong commitment **to social relevance and community impact**. Educational institutions are encouraged to contribute to the well-being and development of the communities in which they operate, while communities become active partners in educational processes. Particular attention is often given to inclusion, equity and participation, ensuring that learning opportunities are accessible to diverse groups and responsive to local needs.

Taken together, these dimensions position Open Schooling as both an educational approach and a framework for institutional transformation. It invites schools to move beyond traditional boundaries and become dynamic learning ecosystems in which educational excellence, innovation, participation and community engagement reinforce one another.

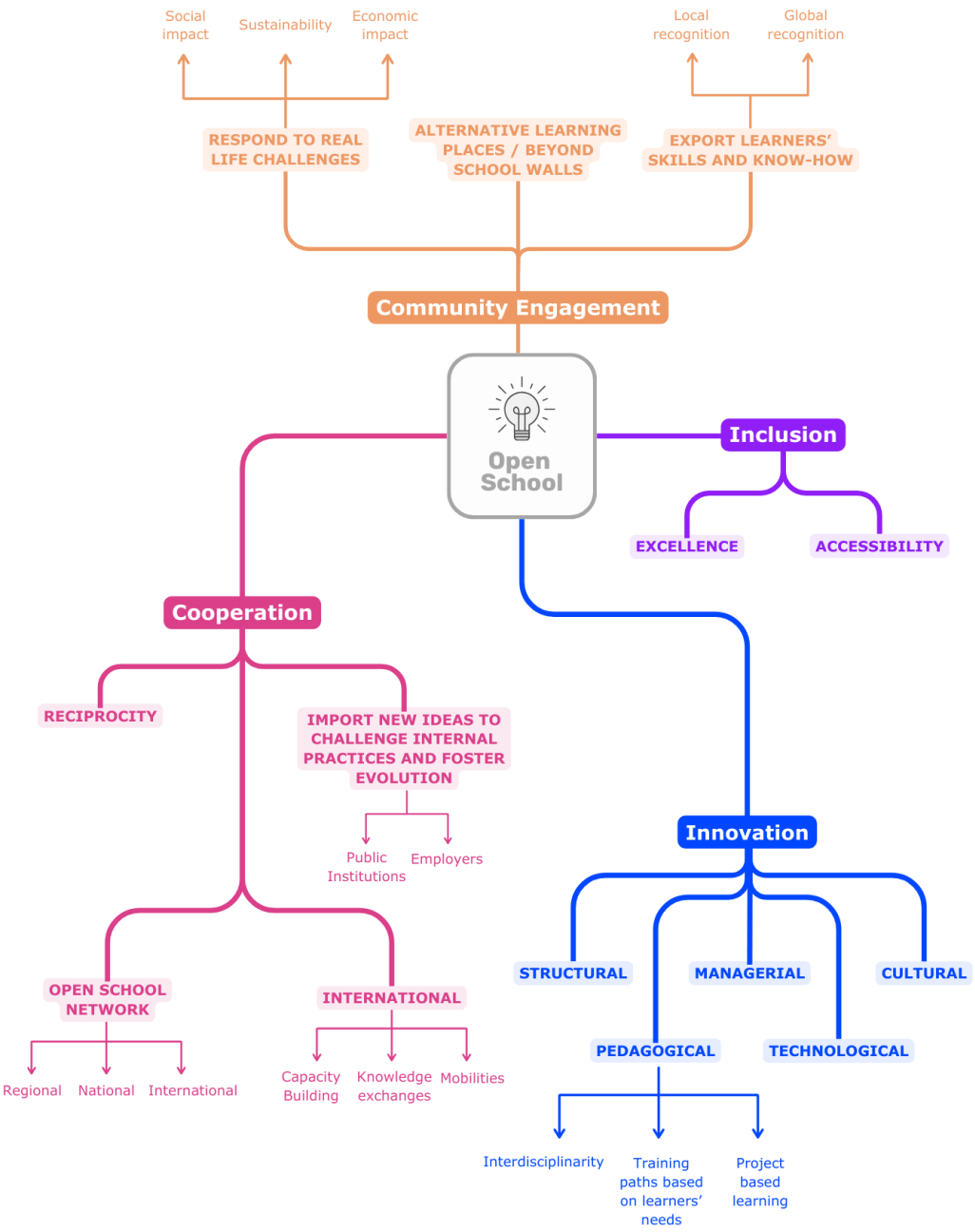


*Fig.1 Schema of the open schooling culture*

# Why sport education needs open schooling

The relevance of Open Schooling becomes particularly evident when applied to sport education and training. The sport sector is not only a field of physical performance or technical expertise. It is a complex ecosystem involving education and training providers, clubs, federations, employers, volunteers, public authorities, health actors, communities and learners at different stages of their personal and professional pathways. This ecosystem creates learning opportunities in many places: in classrooms, on the field, in clubs, during competitions, through volunteering, in workplaces, in community projects and through everyday sport activities.

This diversity is one of the strengths of sport, but it also creates a challenge for education and training systems. Learning in sport frequently takes place across formal, non-formal and informal environments, yet these environments are often poorly connected. Technical skills developed through training and competition may remain disconnected from transversal competences developed through volunteering, event organisation, coaching, leadership, teamwork or community engagement. Likewise, valuable experiences gained in clubs, federations or grassroots initiatives are not always recognised within formal education and training pathways.

For this reason, sport education requires approaches capable of connecting on-field and off-field learning. Preparing learners for sport-related careers cannot be reduced to technical or performance-based training alone. It also requires the development of communication, leadership, adaptability, responsibility, ethical behaviour, digital competences, environmental awareness, project management and civic engagement. This broader competence profile is not simply an educational aspiration; it reflects the reality that sport professionals increasingly operate in environments that demand collaboration across sectors, engagement with diverse communities, responsiveness to technological and environmental change, and the ability to create value beyond sporting performance itself.

Sport has become a significant economic, social and educational sector across Europe. Beyond its contribution to physical activity and wellbeing, it generates employment, supports local economies, contributes to tourism and social cohesion, and plays an increasing role in addressing societal challenges such as inclusion, health promotion and active citizenship. According to Eurobarometer, the sport sector employs nearly two million people and generates substantial social, health and economic value (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022). At the same time, it is experiencing profound transformations linked to digitalisation, environmental sustainability, demographic change and evolving labour market demands. These developments are influencing both the organisation of sport and the competencies expected from athletes, coaches, instructors, managers and sport professionals.

Across Europe, sport education and workforce development are organised through diverse institutional arrangements that reflect different educational traditions and governance models.

- **France** has developed a highly structured certification system for sport occupations, combining qualifications delivered by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Sports. The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games have further reinforced ambitions to create a lasting legacy for sport, education and skills development. Initiatives such as the Generation 2024 label have encouraged stronger links between schools and the sport movement, promoting participation, Olympic and Paralympic values, and the integration of sport into educational pathways. Recent reforms have also strengthened cooperation between education providers, employers and support the long-term development of the sport sector.

- **Germany** is characterised by its strong tradition of work-based learning and apprenticeship pathways. However, there is no dedicated Vocational Education and Training (VET) pathway for sport occupations *stricto sensu*; programmes that come closest to this are typically offered at bachelor level rather than within the VET system. Cooperation between training providers, employers and sector organisations therefore plays a central role in structuring learning opportunities and ensuring that competences acquired across these diverse contexts remain closely connected to professional practice and employment opportunities.
- **Spain** has progressively strengthened the integration of vocational education and training within the sport sector through close collaboration between regional authorities, universities, sport federations and employers. The system places particular emphasis on professionalisation, employability and the alignment of training provision with sector needs.
- **Greece** increasingly promotes cross-sector collaboration between education, sport, health, tourism and local development actors. This reflects a broader recognition of sport as a contributor not only to employment and skills development, but also to wellbeing, social participation and regional development.

Despite these institutional differences, a number of common trends emerge across all four countries. The STARS Regional Skills Partnerships identify similar priorities related to workforce development, including upskilling and reskilling, digital and green transitions, lifelong learning, stronger collaboration between education providers and employers, recognition of volunteer skills, dual careers for athletes and the attractiveness of sport professions.

These observations are reinforced by the STARS European Training Needs Analysis, which collected responses from 1,359 organisations across 47 countries, primarily France, Germany, Greece and Spain. The findings reveal strong demand for closer cooperation between education providers and sport organisations, more accessible training opportunities for both paid staff and volunteers, and stronger alignment between qualifications and labour market needs. Nearly 90% of respondents agreed that education and training providers should work more closely with sport organisations to ensure programmes remain relevant to sector realities, while more than 86% highlighted the need for accessible upskilling and reskilling opportunities across the workforce.

Evidence gathered through the STARS TNA highlights the evolving competence profile expected within the European sport sector. Alongside technical expertise, employers increasingly value communication, leadership, teamwork, adaptability, project management, digital competences, sustainability awareness and stakeholder engagement. The study also points to recruitment difficulties across several occupations, growing demand for upskilling and reskilling opportunities, and the importance of closer cooperation between education providers, employers and sector organisations in responding to emerging skills needs.

These developments are taking place within a broader context of technological, environmental and societal change. Digital tools are transforming training methods, communication practices and organisational management. Sustainability considerations are influencing the organisation of events and facilities. Demographic changes are affecting participation patterns and workforce structures. At the same time, growing attention is being given to issues such as inclusion, wellbeing, safeguarding, mental health and social impact. Together, these trends contribute to an increasingly complex environment in which technical expertise alone is often insufficient to describe the range of competencies mobilised by sport professionals.

Beyond its own workforce needs, sport occupies a distinctive position within education and society because of its inherently cross-sectoral nature. Few educational domains connect as naturally with such a wide range of public policy objectives and professional fields. Through sport, learners engage not only with issues related to coaching, performance and physical activity, but also with health promotion, education, social inclusion,

youth work, community development, tourism, event management, sustainability, digital innovation and active citizenship. As a result, the sport sector increasingly requires professionals who can operate across disciplinary boundaries, collaborate with diverse stakeholders and understand the broader societal impact of their activities.

This transdisciplinary dimension is reflected in several international educational frameworks. Open Schooling promotes stronger connections between educational institutions and their communities. Whole School Approaches emphasise the mobilisation of the entire educational environment around shared educational objectives. Similarly, the Health Promoting Schools framework developed by the World Health Organization and UNESCO recognises that educational success, health, wellbeing and participation are closely interconnected and require coordinated action involving learners, educators, families and community stakeholders. Sport naturally operates at the intersection of these approaches, creating opportunities to address educational, health and social objectives simultaneously.

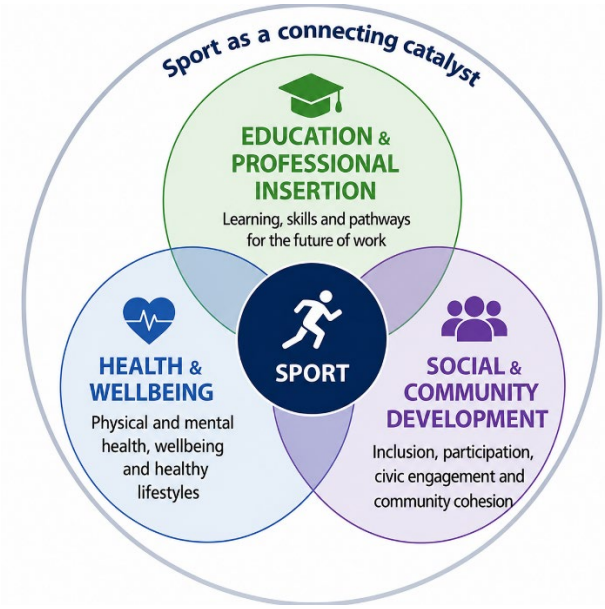


*Fig. 2: Sport as a connecting catalyst for school environment.*
*Note: this image was generated by AI*

VET has a particularly important role to play within this evolving landscape. In sport, vocational education cannot be understood solely as a pathway into employment at the end of initial training. Athletes, coaches, instructors, volunteers and sport professionals frequently follow non-linear pathways that combine education, competition, employment, volunteering, career transitions and continuous professional development. Consequently, VET systems must be capable of supporting lifelong learning, upskilling, reskilling, dual career pathways and the recognition of competences acquired through experience.

This is especially relevant for athletes and young people engaged in intensive sport pathways. Their learning does not occur exclusively within educational institutions, and their future prospects cannot depend solely on sporting performance. They require educational pathways that support the combination of sport and studies, facilitate transitions between different stages of life, recognise transferable competences and contribute to long-term employability and personal development. In this perspective, VET remains a constant reference point throughout an individual's sporting and professional journey rather than a temporary phase preceding labour market entry.

## 2. The Open Sport School

The Open Sport School is a systemic transformation model for sport education and training institutions. Built around five interconnected pillars, it provides a practical framework for translating the ambition of vocational excellence into institutional practices, partnerships and learning experiences.

Together, these pillars redefine how sport education institutions develop talent, engage with their ecosystems and respond to the evolving needs of learners, employers and communities. They support a broader vision of excellence that combines high-quality learning, labour market relevance, innovation, inclusion and societal impact.

As the cornerstone of the STARS Centre of Vocational Excellence in Sport, the Open Sport School model positions educational institutions not only as providers of training, but as catalysts for skills development, community engagement and sustainable transformation within the sport sector. The five pillars outlined below draw on best practices identified through the analysis of 17 open schooling initiatives across Europe. Together, they form an operational framework that supports the implementation and adaptation of this vision across diverse educational settings and national contexts.

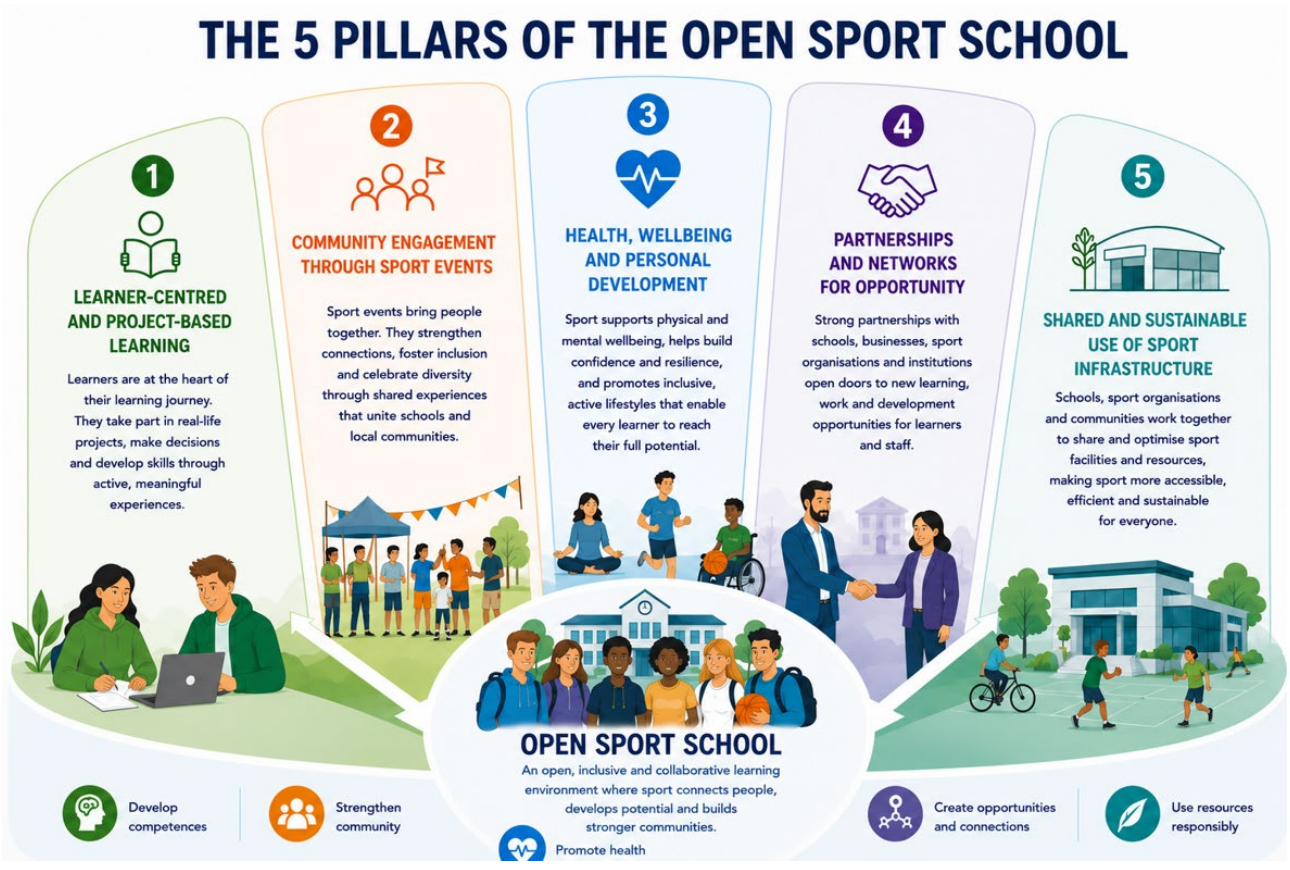


*Fig. 3 The 5 pillars of the Open Sport School model*
*Note: this image was generated by AI*

# Pillar 1. Learner-centred and project-based learning

Learner-centred and project-based learning place participation, responsibility and experience at the heart of education and training. Rather than focusing solely on the transmission of knowledge, they encourage learners to engage with authentic challenges, collaborate with others, make informed decisions and apply their competences in meaningful contexts.

In sport education and training, these approaches are particularly valuable as they connect technical development with teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and the acquisition of skills that are relevant both within and beyond the sport sector.

## What does it look like in an Open Sport School?

This approach translates into the way learning is organised, delivered and experienced within an Open Sport School. Rather than positioning learners as passive recipients of knowledge, Open Sport Schools create opportunities for them to actively shape their learning journey through participation, responsibility and engagement with authentic challenges.

Learners are encouraged to take part in projects that require them to investigate, plan, collaborate, make decisions and produce tangible outcomes. These projects may involve organising sport events, designing inclusion initiatives, developing health promotion campaigns, conducting applied research, creating communication tools or addressing practical challenges linked to sport and physical activity. Through these experiences, learners apply knowledge in meaningful contexts while developing technical, personal and social competences.

A central feature of this approach is that learning is driven by action and reflection. Learners are encouraged to take ownership of projects, contribute ideas, assume specific roles and learn from both successes and challenges. Project-based learning creates opportunities to connect theory with practice, while helping individuals develop autonomy, initiative, teamwork, communication and problem-solving skills.

To support this process, educators adopt the role of facilitators and guides. They provide structure, help learners formulate questions, support collaboration, encourage critical thinking and create opportunities for reflection. Rather than focusing exclusively on the final product, attention is also given to the learning process itself and the competences developed along the way.

Within the Open Sport School model, particular importance is placed on making these competences visible, in line with Building Block 6 (BB6) on the validation and recognition of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes developed through sport-related projects, volunteering activities, practical experiences and other forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning within the STARS CoVE model can be identified, documented and recognised through mechanisms such as micro-credentials, digital badges and validation processes. This helps learners better understand and communicate the full range of competences they acquire throughout their educational journey.

- In France, the *Journée Amiénoise Sport et Handicap (JASH)* organised by the Université de Picardie Jules Verne places students in charge of designing, planning and delivering an inclusive sport event involving athletes with disabilities and members of the local community. Students are responsible for project management, coordination and implementation, while working alongside external

stakeholders and beneficiaries. Through this experience, they develop communication, leadership, teamwork and organisational skills in a real-world context.

- At the *Institute for Applied Training Science* (ITK) of Leipzig University in Germany, practical learning experiences are embedded throughout the curriculum. Students collaborate with local sport clubs, schools and tournaments, applying theoretical knowledge in authentic environments while developing professional competences and intercultural understanding. Up to 40% of learning activities are practice-oriented, creating strong links between education and professional realities.
- The *From Outdoors to Labour Market* initiative implemented across Poland, Ireland, Spain and Scotland uses outdoor expeditions and challenge-based learning to support young people with fewer opportunities. Participants engage in immersive activities that foster self-awareness, resilience, teamwork and problem-solving while strengthening their readiness for employment and social participation.

Across these initiatives, a common pattern emerges: learners develop deeper and more transferable competences when they are entrusted with meaningful responsibilities, supported by educators and connected to authentic challenges. These experiences illustrate how learner-centred and project-based learning can contribute to vocational excellence by strengthening engagement, autonomy, competence development and the recognition of learning outcomes.

**A question from the field**

*"My school already organises many sport events: runs, tournaments, competitions and awareness campaigns. How can I make them more meaningful for learners and staff?"*

Sport events can become much more than isolated activities or moments of celebration. When approached through a learner-centred and project-based perspective, they become powerful learning environments that connect education, employability and community engagement.

A sport event mobilises a wide range of competencies that go far beyond sport itself. Depending on the educational pathways available in the institution, learners can contribute to communication campaigns, event management, logistics, budgeting, sponsorship, health and safety, media production, volunteer coordination, environmental sustainability actions, accessibility planning or stakeholder relations. In this way, a single event can create learning opportunities across multiple disciplines and departments, including sport, business, administration, marketing, digital technologies, hospitality, health and social care.

This approach also provides greater visibility to the educational value of activities that are already taking place. By identifying learning objectives, assigning meaningful roles to learners and documenting the competencies developed throughout the project, schools can transform events into structured learning experiences. Participation is no longer viewed simply as volunteering or extracurricular involvement; it becomes a recognised component of the learner's educational journey.

For school staff, this perspective creates opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and strengthens connections between theoretical learning and professional practice. For learners, it provides authentic situations in which they can apply knowledge, develop transferable skills and demonstrate responsibility. For employers and sport organisations, it offers opportunities to engage with future talent, contribute to skills development and strengthen links with education. For local communities, it creates initiatives that promote participation, inclusion and collective wellbeing while reinforcing the role of the institution as an active and visible community partner. Finally, for the institution itself, it offers a concrete way to connect learning with community engagement while making the impact of educational activities more visible and measurable.

Sport events can then be intentionally designed as learning opportunities that generate value for learners, staff, employers and the wider community.

## Pillar 2. Community building through sport events

Sport events provide valuable opportunities for schools to connect with their wider community. By organising or participating in sporting activities, schools can bring together learners, families, local organisations, employers, sport clubs and public authorities around shared experiences and common goals.

These events help strengthen relationships, encourage participation and create a sense of belonging among different groups. They also offer learners opportunities to engage with people outside the school environment, develop social and organisational skills, and contribute to community life.

Whether they are competitions, recreational activities, awareness campaigns or community celebrations, sport events can support inclusion, collaboration and active citizenship while reinforcing the role of the school as an open and engaged institution.

### What does it look like in an Open Sport School?

Within an Open Sport School, sport events are not viewed solely as recreational activities or isolated celebrations. They become strategic opportunities to strengthen relationships between educational institutions and their surrounding ecosystems.

Sport events create entry points for community participation. Families, employers, local authorities, sport organisations, associations and citizens are invited to contribute to educational activities and engage with learners. In doing so, schools become more visible, accessible and connected to their local environment.

The educational potential of sport events can be further strengthened through cooperation with a wide range of initiatives, from local tournaments, community festivals and charity runs to national, major and mega sport events, as promoted by the STARS CoVE model. Participation in these events provides authentic learning environments where learners can engage with professionals, volunteers, employers and sport organisations while gaining practical experience in areas such as event operations, communication, hospitality, logistics and stakeholder management. Whether organised by local clubs, municipalities, federations or major event organisers, these experiences create valuable opportunities to connect learning with practice and can serve as evidence within validation processes, supporting the recognition of competences acquired outside traditional classroom settings. A key characteristic of the Open Sport School model is that sport events are designed not only to attract participants but also to create lasting relationships. Events become catalysts for new partnerships, community projects, volunteering opportunities, internships and collaborative initiatives. They contribute to positioning the school as an active actor within the local ecosystem rather than a standalone educational institution.

The review of the 17 initiatives identified several examples demonstrating how sport events can strengthen community engagement and create educational value.

- In France, the initiative *Du Stade vers l'Emploi en Milieu Scolaire*, developed by 135 BPM and the Ligue d'Athlétisme des Hauts-de-France, uses sport-based job dating events to connect learners, employers, training providers and local organisations. Through shared sport activities, participants interact in a less formal environment that highlights soft skills, encourages dialogue and creates pathways towards internships, apprenticeships and employment opportunities.
- The *Journée Amiénoise Sport et Handicap (JASH)* organised by the Université de Picardie Jules Verne is 100% led by the students and brings together athletes with and without disabilities, associations and local citizens through inclusive sport activities. Beyond the event itself, the initiative raises awareness of disability, promotes inclusion and strengthens relationships between the university and the local community.

- In Italy, the *Cometa Cup* gathers schools from the Como region around a football tournament centred on fair play, respect and resilience. The initiative goes beyond competition through symbolic activities such as the "third half", where participants celebrate sport values and social interaction. The event reinforces a sense of belonging while promoting shared educational values.
- At Leipzig University in Germany, local tournaments and city sport events are used as opportunities to integrate international students into community life. Through participation and organisation, learners strengthen intercultural competences while building connections with local stakeholders and sport organisations.

Across these initiatives, a common pattern emerges: sport events become most impactful when they create opportunities for interaction, participation and shared experiences between learners and the wider community. Their value extends beyond the event itself by strengthening social cohesion, creating partnerships and generating learning opportunities that continue long after the event has ended.

**A question from the field**

*"My legislation does not allow me to welcome external communities inside my sport facilities. However, there are sport events organised nearby. How can participation in or in collaboration with these external events contribute to our educational mission and community impact?"*

An Open Sport School actively seeks opportunities to connect learners with the people, organisations and initiatives that shape the community around them. Building partnerships with sport event organisers is one powerful way to achieve this.

Sport events offer unique opportunities for collaboration. Whether local tournaments, charity runs, inclusion festivals or major sporting events, they bring together young people, families, volunteers, employers, public authorities, associations and citizens around shared goals and experiences. By working with organisers, schools can create meaningful opportunities for learners to engage with these wider networks, even when the events take place outside the school environment.

For learners, involvement in such events means experiencing first-hand how sport can promote inclusion, solidarity, health, intercultural understanding and civic engagement. They also meet volunteers, athletes, coaches, organisers and community leaders who can serve as positive role models, demonstrating different pathways for participation, contribution and personal development. For many young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities, these encounters can open doors to new networks, aspirations and future opportunities.

For schools, collaboration with sport events is a way to contribute to community life, support local priorities and strengthen relationships with stakeholders beyond the education sector. It also provides an opportunity to showcase and disseminate the talents, skills and achievements that exist within the school, making learners' contributions visible to a wider audience and strengthening the school's role as a valued community partner while supporting learners' employability through exposure to new networks, experiences and opportunities. Through active partnerships, schools can help shape inclusive and meaningful experiences that benefit both learners and the wider community.

## Pillar 3. Promotion of sport values, health and wellbeing

Sport is widely recognised as a powerful vehicle for personal development, health promotion and social inclusion (WHO & UNESCO, 2021). Beyond physical activity and performance, participation in sport can support physical, mental and social wellbeing by encouraging healthy lifestyles, positive relationships and active participation in community life.

For educational institutions, promoting sport values and health is not limited to organising physical activities or awareness campaigns. It involves creating environments that support the holistic development of learners and foster a culture of wellbeing, inclusion and responsible citizenship. This perspective is closely aligned with the Health Promoting Schools approach, which recognises the strong connections between education, health, participation and learning outcomes.

## What does it look like in an Open Sport School?

Within an Open Sport School, sport is used as a catalyst to promote positive behaviours, healthy lifestyles and shared values across the entire educational community.

Rather than focusing on the transmission of knowledge alone, this pillar emphasises the intentional use of sport and physical activity to support learners' physical, mental and social wellbeing. Through participation, learners can strengthen self-confidence, resilience and healthy habits, while schools create conditions that support positive lifestyles and overall wellbeing across the educational community.

This approach extends beyond physical education classes. Health promotion and sport values can be embedded across school life through inclusive sport programmes, awareness campaigns, peer mentoring initiatives, anti-discrimination actions, volunteering opportunities, student leadership activities and partnerships with health, youth and community organisations.

Open Sport Schools also recognise that wellbeing is a prerequisite for learning and participation. Particular attention is therefore given to creating safe, inclusive and supportive environments where all learners, including those with fewer opportunities, feel valued and able to participate fully. In this sense, sport becomes a tool not only for individual development but also for strengthening social cohesion and creating a positive school culture.

- In Italy, the *Cometa Cup* illustrates how sport can contribute to holistic development. While competition remains an important component, the initiative places equal emphasis on participants' wellbeing, self-confidence and personal growth. Through structured activities that encourage reflection, social interaction and mutual support, participants develop the attitudes and behaviours that underpin healthy, active and balanced lifestyles, embodied in the symbolic "third half" dedicated to dialogue and mutual recognition.
- The *Freizeitsportleiter* initiative in Germany supports young people in becoming recreational sport leaders through a structured programme that combines practical experience with leadership training. Participants learn how to organise sport activities, motivate groups, ensure safety and promote inclusive participation. By taking responsibility for planning and delivering activities, young people strengthen their communication, organisational and decision-making skills while adopting healthier and more active lifestyles. The programme also encourages peer learning, as participants often act as role models for younger learners and members of their communities.
- The *Journée Amiénoise Sport et Handicap (JASH)* organised by the Université de Picardie Jules Verne uses inclusive sport activities to raise awareness of disability and challenge stereotypes. Through direct interaction between students, athletes with disabilities and community organisations, participants develop empathy, understanding and a greater appreciation of diversity.
- The *Du Stade vers l'Emploi en Milieu Scolaire* initiative, developed by 135 BPM and the Hauts-de-France Athletics League, uses sport as a tool to promote healthy lifestyles, self-confidence and social participation among young people. By placing learners in a supportive and non-competitive environment, the programme helps reveal personal strengths, develop interpersonal skills and demonstrate that sport can contribute to wellbeing and personal development regardless of sporting level.

Several initiatives analysed within the STARS project also use sport as a vehicle for promoting active lifestyles, mental wellbeing and social participation among young people. By creating inclusive and supportive

environments, these programmes contribute to learners' confidence, sense of belonging and overall wellbeing while reinforcing positive attitudes towards health and physical activity.

Across these initiatives, a common pattern emerges: the most impactful programmes do not treat health, inclusion and values as separate topics. Instead, they integrate them into meaningful experiences that allow learners to live these values through participation, interaction and reflection.

**A question from the field**

*"Our learners already practise sport intensively. How can we ensure that sport contributes not only to performance, but also to their health, wellbeing and personal development?"*

Sport schools and academies often achieve excellent sporting results, but many are also asking a broader educational question: how can sport contribute more effectively to the development of the whole learner? Beyond technical and athletic progression, how can educational pathways help young people build confidence, responsibility, wellbeing and the skills they need for life?

Within an Open Sport School, sport becomes a powerful educational tool that supports personal, social and emotional development. Through reflection, collaborative activities, learner participation and meaningful experiences both inside and outside sport, learners develop the knowledge, attitudes and habits needed to manage their health and wellbeing, cope with challenges, make informed choices and build sustainable relationships with sport. They are encouraged to understand how sport can contribute to their growth as individuals, not only as athletes.

This approach is closely linked to vocational excellence. Learners are more likely to achieve their full potential when they train, learn and develop in an environment where they feel safe, supported, respected and able to thrive. By promoting wellbeing alongside performance, schools create the conditions for sustained engagement, motivation and success. A positive learning and sporting environment helps learners develop not only technical expertise, but also the resilience, self-awareness, teamwork and adaptability that are essential for lifelong learning, employability and future careers within or beyond sport.

This approach gives greater meaning to both learning and sporting experiences. It helps learners connect what they experience in sport with broader aspects of their lives, including health, relationships, education and future aspirations. At the same time, it reinforces the school's educational mission by demonstrating how sport can support the development of well-rounded, engaged and capable young people.

Sport therefore becomes more than a training activity. It becomes a vehicle for education and personal development, helping learners grow as individuals while preparing them to thrive in sport, education, employment and society.

## Pillar 4. Cooperation between schools, employers and networks

A strong culture of cooperation and networking is at the heart of open schooling and a defining feature of educational excellence. Schools do not operate in isolation: they are part of wider ecosystems that include employers, community stakeholders, public authorities, learners, families, alumni, civil society organisations, research institutions and other education and training providers. By building meaningful partnerships across these actors, schools can create richer learning experiences, strengthen their relevance and contribute to the development of more resilient, inclusive and innovative communities.

Open schooling promotes collaboration between education and the wider society, recognising that learning takes place across multiple environments. Learners develop knowledge, skills and attitudes not only in classrooms, but also through engagement with workplaces, community organisations, cultural institutions, research centres and civic initiatives. Effective cooperation between these actors helps connect learning to

real-world challenges, strengthen employability and active citizenship, and support smoother transitions between education and professional life.

A key characteristic of open schooling is the emphasis on collaboration between schools themselves. Rather than working independently, schools are encouraged to share practices, learn from one another and replicate successful initiatives. This creates a positive domino effect in which innovative approaches, educational solutions and successful partnerships can spread across institutions, regions and countries. By opening their doors and exchanging experiences, schools contribute to a collective movement of educational improvement that benefits learners, educators and communities alike.

Partnerships also enable institutions to anticipate emerging trends, respond to societal and labour market needs, and provide learners with access to expertise, facilities, mentoring opportunities and professional networks that would otherwise remain inaccessible. At the same time, participation in local, regional and thematic networks strengthens the capacity of schools to innovate and continuously improve their educational offer.

Finally, cooperation extends beyond national borders. Open schooling embraces international collaboration as a driver of quality, innovation and mutual learning. Through European projects, mobility opportunities, transnational partnerships and networks such as CoVEs, schools can exchange knowledge, benchmark practices and co-create solutions to shared challenges. For institutions, this international dimension can strengthen attractiveness, create new opportunities for staff and learner mobility, and increase visibility within European education and sport networks. For learners, it broadens horizons, develops intercultural competences and languages, and enhances employability by exposing them to different professional environments, practices and career opportunities across Europe. In this way, local educational initiatives become connected to wider European developments in education, skills and societal development.

## What does it look like in an Open Sport School?

Within an Open Sport School, partnerships are not occasional collaborations, but an integral part of how the institution operates. Schools actively engage with employers, sport organisations, public authorities, community groups and other education and training providers to create and enrich opportunities for learners.

These collaborations are embedded in the everyday functioning of the school. External stakeholders may contribute to learning activities, host learners for workplace experiences, participate in school events, provide feedback on skills needs or support specific projects. In turn, schools maintain regular communication with partners and create opportunities for dialogue and cooperation around shared objectives.

The CoVE network provides a cooperation and visibility platform that helps Open Sport Schools showcase their activities, exchange practices and strengthen their attractiveness. Through a shared website and communication activities, schools can highlight learner achievements, innovative projects, partnerships and opportunities available within the network. This visibility helps schools connect with new stakeholders and reinforces their role within local and regional sport ecosystems.

Partnerships also create concrete learning opportunities through internships, apprenticeships, mentoring programmes, guest lectures, volunteering experiences, sport events and community initiatives. By involving external stakeholders in educational activities, schools create stronger links between learning and professional practice while exposing learners to a diversity of career pathways and role models. This creates a virtuous circle: stronger partnerships generate more opportunities for learners, while successful learner experiences encourage employers and organisations to deepen their engagement with the school.

Cooperation contributes to the continuous improvement of educational provision while helping employers access a workforce that is better prepared for the realities of the sector. By sharing insights on emerging skills needs, technological developments and labour market trends, employers and sector organisations help

institutions adapt their programmes and strengthen the relevance of training. In turn, learners graduate with competences that are more closely aligned with workplace expectations, helping address skills gaps identified across the sport sector.

At a broader level, Open Sport Schools contribute to and benefit from local, regional, national and international networks. Within the CoVE framework, partner institutions cooperate around common priorities, exchange best practices and participate in joint activities that support the development of vocational excellence in sport. International cooperation is strengthened through regular online exchanges, collaborative platforms, thematic workshops, study visits and partner events, creating opportunities for mutual learning and innovation. These networks also play an important role in the training of trainers by supporting capacity-building activities, peer-learning initiatives and the sharing of effective pedagogical approaches. Through exposure to diverse educational models and practices, educators and school leaders can enhance their professional competences, adapt successful methodologies to their own contexts and contribute to the continuous improvement of sport education and training. By participating in these international communities, schools become part of a wider European ecosystem that promotes quality, innovation, collaboration and excellence in vocational education.

For learners, this international dimension broadens horizons and strengthens intercultural competencies, language skills and adaptability. For educators and school leaders, it creates opportunities for professional development and peer learning. For institutions, it reinforces attractiveness and visibility by connecting local activities to a wider European network of schools and stakeholders working towards vocational excellence in sport.

The review of the 17 initiatives identified several examples illustrating the value of structured partnerships and networks.

- In Greece, the *Global University Hub* developed by Metropolitan College demonstrates how international cooperation can expand learning opportunities and strengthen educational quality. Through partnerships between learners, academics, universities and external stakeholders, the initiative provides access to expertise, courses and collaborative projects addressing global challenges while generating local impact. It illustrates how international networks can support lifelong learning, innovation and intercultural exchange.
- In Italy, the Cometa educational model is built upon strong cooperation between schools, employers, social enterprises and community organisations. Learners are regularly exposed to authentic professional environments and real-life projects, creating meaningful connections between education, employability and local development. This ecosystem approach allows educational activities to respond directly to the needs of learners while remaining closely connected to the realities of the labour market.
- In France, the *Passerelle* initiative by 135BPM offers another valuable example of cross-sector cooperation. By bringing together actors from education, sport, social inclusion and community services, the initiative creates support pathways for young people, particularly those facing barriers to participation or employment. Through coordinated guidance, mentoring and practical activities, participants are helped to identify their strengths, develop new competences and access opportunities that might otherwise remain out of reach. The initiative highlights the importance of collaboration between different sectors in supporting successful transitions from education to further training, employment or active community engagement.

Across these initiatives, a common pattern emerges: the most sustainable and impactful actions are rarely delivered by a single organisation. They are built through partnerships that combine expertise, resources and perspectives from different sectors and different territories. By connecting education providers with employers, researchers, community actors and international networks, Open Sport Schools create richer learning opportunities, strengthen labour market relevance and contribute to the development of stronger local, regional and European ecosystems.

**A question from the field**

*"We already ask a lot from teachers. How can our school implement this project and benefit from the network without creating an additional burden for staff?"*

To ensure that learners remain connected to the realities of the sport sector throughout their educational journey, schools need to create regular and meaningful opportunities for interaction with employers, sport organisations, professionals and a wide range of stakeholders. This can include internships, apprenticeships, workplace visits, mentoring programmes, guest lectures, volunteering opportunities and participation in real-life projects linked to sport clubs, federations or events.

The key is to make these connections continuous rather than occasional. Learners should encounter professional practice at different stages of their education, allowing them to progressively understand workplace expectations, explore career opportunities and apply their knowledge in authentic contexts.

Building these connections is not the responsibility of a single teacher. School leaders, teachers, trainers, career guidance staff, work-based learning coordinators and administrative teams all play an important role in developing and maintaining partnerships. Their collaboration helps ensure that external engagement is embedded across the learner experience and aligned with educational objectives.

Schools can further strengthen these connections by involving employers, sport organisations, public authorities, community groups, alumni, higher education institutions and research organisations in curriculum design and delivery. Their input helps ensure that learning activities reflect current industry practices, societal developments and emerging skills needs. External stakeholders can also contribute as mentors, project partners, guest speakers, hosts for work-based learning experiences or assessors, providing learners with valuable feedback and insights into the sector.

Participation in local, regional and international networks further expands these opportunities. Through partnerships, mobility programmes and collaborative projects, learners gain exposure to different sport environments, cultures and approaches, helping them develop adaptability, intercultural competences and a broader understanding of the sector. For teachers, trainers and school leaders, these networks provide access to a wider professional community that extends beyond their own institution. By connecting with peers, sport professionals, researchers and education practitioners, staff can exchange practices, access new ideas and resources, learn from successful initiatives and collaborate on common challenges. This community-building dimension helps reduce professional isolation, strengthens innovation capacity and supports continuous professional development. It also creates opportunities for joint projects, peer learning, mentoring and international cooperation, enabling staff to remain connected to emerging developments in sport, education and vocational training.

## Pillar 5. Opening facilities, expertise and opportunities to the community

One of the defining characteristics of open schooling is the willingness of educational institutions to share their resources with the wider community. Schools possess valuable assets that extend beyond formal education, including facilities, equipment, expertise, services, networks and learning opportunities. Open schooling encourages institutions to recognise these assets as resources that can benefit not only learners, but also local communities and stakeholders.

In the sport sector, this principle is particularly relevant. Sport facilities often represent some of the most important infrastructures available within a community, while sport educators, coaches, researchers and learners possess valuable expertise that can contribute to broader societal objectives. At the same time, many local organisations, grassroots clubs, community groups and citizens face challenges in accessing

quality facilities, specialised knowledge or opportunities for participation. Opening educational resources can therefore generate mutual benefits for both educational institutions and the communities they serve.

This openness extends beyond physical access. It includes sharing knowledge, equipment, services, learning opportunities, innovation and expertise. Through this approach, schools become places where learners, educators, sport professionals, researchers, community organisations and citizens can interact, collaborate and contribute to common goals. In doing so, educational institutions strengthen their social impact while creating richer and more authentic learning environments.

## What does it look like in an Open Sport School?

Within an Open Sport School, facilities, expertise and educational resources are viewed as community assets that can support a wide range of educational, social and sporting activities beyond the traditional school timetable.

Depending on national regulations, governance arrangements and available resources, schools may provide access to sport halls, fitness spaces, outdoor facilities, specialised equipment or training environments for local clubs, associations, community groups and citizens. They may also host health promotion activities, community events, coach education programmes, inclusive sport initiatives or lifelong learning opportunities.

However, openness is not limited to facilities. Open Sport Schools actively share expertise and create opportunities for participation. Learners and staff may contribute to local initiatives through coaching activities, event organisation, sport science services, applied research projects, awareness campaigns or community development programmes. Schools can also act as gateways to innovation by connecting communities with research, new technologies and specialised knowledge that would otherwise remain inaccessible.

This approach creates opportunities for learners to interact with community stakeholders, observe professional practice and contribute to projects that address local needs. Shared use of facilities and resources can support volunteering experiences, work-based learning, civic engagement and community participation while reinforcing the connection between education and society.

The specific model adopted will vary according to local contexts, legislation, insurance requirements, governance structures and available capacities. Open Sport Schools therefore seek realistic and sustainable ways of opening resources while ensuring safety, quality and educational value for all stakeholders involved.

This approach is increasingly supported by public policies that encourage stronger links between educational institutions and their communities.

- In France, for example, the principle of ***mutualisation des équipements sportifs*** (shared use of sport facilities) promotes the joint management of sport facilities by schools, local authorities, clubs and community organisations in order to maximise public investment and increase participation in sport. Similarly, the *Génération 2024* label, and its evolution towards *Génération 2030*, encourages educational institutions to develop partnerships with sport organisations, open their activities to the community and promote sport as a driver of inclusion, citizenship, health and lifelong engagement. These initiatives illustrate how schools can progressively evolve from being users of sport infrastructure to becoming active contributors to local sport ecosystems.
- In Spain, the **"Yo Soy Zona Sur" Intercultural Community Process** demonstrates how educational, sport and community resources can be mobilised to support local development and social cohesion. Through open summer schools, sport schools, health promotion initiatives and community activities, local authorities, civil society organisations and citizens work together to create inclusive learning and participation opportunities. The initiative highlights how sport facilities and educational resources can become catalysts for community engagement and intercultural dialogue.

- In Germany, the **Lott Jon Initiative** connects vocational education students with daycare centres, schools and community stakeholders through the organisation of physical activity programmes and the "Mini Sports Badge". By opening educational expertise and creating opportunities for interaction between learners and local communities, the initiative contributes to the long-term promotion of physical activity among children and young people while strengthening cooperation between educational institutions and community partners.
- In Italy, **Polimi Parasports for All** demonstrates how educational institutions can share expertise, technologies and learning opportunities with the wider community. The initiative brings together universities, sport organisations, disability associations, students, families and citizens through activities focused on parasports, inclusion and innovation. Participants can engage in adapted sport activities, explore assistive technologies and interact with para-athletes and researchers, creating opportunities for learning, awareness raising and community participation.

Across these initiatives, a common pattern emerges: educational institutions create greater impact when they view their facilities, expertise, equipment and services as assets that can benefit both learners and communities. Whether through opening physical spaces, sharing specialised knowledge, supporting community activities or providing access to innovative resources, these initiatives strengthen social cohesion, increase participation and reinforce the role of educational institutions as active contributors to local development.

**A Question from the Field**

*"Our facilities are already heavily used and opening them to external groups seems difficult to manage. What value can this bring to our school?"*

Opening facilities and resources does not necessarily mean providing unrestricted access to all community members at all times. The objective is to identify opportunities where the school's assets can create additional value for learners and for the wider community.

Even limited forms of shared use can generate significant benefits. Hosting local clubs, community initiatives, coach education activities, health promotion programmes or inclusive sport sessions can strengthen relationships with external stakeholders and create new learning opportunities for learners. These activities can also increase the visibility of the institution and reinforce its role within the local sport ecosystem.

Opening resources can also involve sharing expertise rather than facilities. Learners, educators, coaches and researchers can contribute to community projects, awareness campaigns, sport events or innovation initiatives that address local needs. In return, community stakeholders bring experience, knowledge and opportunities that enrich the educational experience.

Shared resources often create new partnerships and opportunities that extend far beyond infrastructure use. Community organisations may contribute mentoring opportunities, volunteering experiences, internships, project collaborations or specialised expertise. Learners gain exposure to a wider range of stakeholders and experiences, while external actors become more closely connected to the educational mission of the institution.

By progressively opening facilities, expertise and opportunities to the wider community, Open Sport Schools strengthen their social impact while creating richer learning environments. They become recognised not only as places of education, but also as active contributors to participation, inclusion, lifelong learning and local development.

# Conclusion: from principles to implementation

The Open Sport School model provides a practical framework for strengthening the openness, relevance and societal impact of sport education and training institutions. Through the five pillars presented in this chapter, the model illustrates how educational excellence can be achieved by connecting learning with communities, promoting wellbeing and inclusion, building strong partnerships, creating authentic learning opportunities and opening educational resources to wider society.

At the same time, the model recognises that educational institutions operate in highly diverse contexts. Differences in legislation, governance structures, available resources, local ecosystems and educational priorities mean that there can be no single pathway towards becoming an Open Sport School. Rather than prescribing a fixed model, the framework provides a common vision and a set of guiding principles that institutions can adapt to their own realities and ambitions.

For this reason, the Open Sport School model is complemented by a series of practical implementation tools developed within the STARS project. Together, these resources are designed to support educational institutions in translating the principles of open schooling into concrete actions adapted to their local context.

1. **Self-Reflection Tool**: The Self-Reflection Tool supports school leaders and educational teams in assessing their current level of openness, community engagement and learner-centred practice. Through a structured framework covering key dimensions of the Open Sport School model, institutions are invited to identify their strengths, recognise areas for improvement and reflect collectively on their readiness for change. The tool provides a common baseline from which schools can initiate their transformation journey and establish priorities for continuous improvement.

2. **Open Sport School Game Plan and Activities Portfolio:** The Open Sport School Game Plan enables schools to translate the results of their self-reflection into a coherent and actionable implementation strategy. It guides school leaders in defining priorities, setting objectives, identifying milestones and integrating Open Sport School principles into their institutional development. Complementing this roadmap, the Open Sport School Activities Portfolio provides a collection of adaptable methodologies, learning scenarios and inspiring practices that help schools design learning experiences connected to real-world sport, community and societal challenges. Together, these resources support schools in moving from strategic planning to concrete educational action.

3. **Stakeholder Mapping and Partnership Toolkit:** this tool helps schools identify, engage and coordinate the diverse actors that contribute to an open learning ecosystem. It provides practical guidance for analysing local stakeholders, understanding their potential roles and establishing meaningful collaborations.

4. **Capacity-Building Programme:** it equips school leaders, teachers and external stakeholders with the knowledge and practical tools required to successfully implement the Open Sport School approach. Combining training modules, practical guidance, collaborative workshops and peer-learning opportunities, the programme supports both pedagogical innovation and organisational change. It enables educational communities to develop the skills needed to design learner-centred learning environments, foster cross-sector collaboration and embed openness as a sustainable institutional practice.

5. **Impact Monitoring Tool**: it enables schools to evaluate both the implementation process and the outcomes of their Open Sport School strategy. Beyond accountability, the tool encourages evidence-informed decision-making, helping schools demonstrate their achievements and communicate the value created for learners and their wider communities.

6. **Community Platform:** the Community Platform provides a collaborative digital environment where participating schools and stakeholders can exchange experiences, access shared resources and build long-term cooperation across the STARS network. Bringing together case studies, pedagogical resources,

implementation tools, examples of good practice and opportunities for collaboration, the platform facilitates peer learning, knowledge transfer and continuous professional exchange. By connecting institutions across regions and countries, it supports the emergence of a vibrant European community of practice committed to advancing innovation, inclusion and community engagement through the Open Sport School approach.

Together, these resources transform the Open Sport School model from a conceptual framework into an operational approach for educational innovation. They provide institutions with practical guidance, inspiration and tools to progressively strengthen their openness, enhance learner experiences and increase their contribution to local, regional and European sport ecosystems.

Choosing to become an Open Sport School therefore means more than adopting a framework for educational innovation. It means joining a growing European community committed to excellence, inclusion and openness through sport. It offers institutions the opportunity to learn from others, share their own experiences, contribute to the evolution of the model and benefit from a network of schools, educators, employers, sport organisations and public authorities working towards common goals. In this sense, the Open Sport School is not only a model for institutional development, but also a gateway to collaboration, visibility and continuous improvement within a dynamic European ecosystem.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Athanasiades, K., Mavrikaki, E., & Kampylis, P. (2018). *Open Schools for Open Societies: A roadmap for schools*. European Commission, Joint Research Centre. Publications Office of the European Union.

Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. (2022). *Sport and physical activity: full report. Publications Office of the European Union*. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/356346

European Commission. (2024). *Council recommendation on health-enhancing physical activity across sectors*. Publications Office of the European Union.

Schools for Health in Europe. (2022). *Whole school approach*. https://www.schoolsforhealth.org/concepts/whole-school-approach

World Health Organization & UNESCO. (2021). *Making every school a health-promoting school: Global standards and indicators*. World Health Organization.

**OPEN SPORT SCHOOL: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO LEAD THE CHANGE**

**Executive summary**

**introduction**

**The open sport school vision**

**What makes an Open Sport School?**
**Who is this Practical Guide for?**
**Four reasons to become an Open Sport School**

**Build your own open sport school gameplan**

**Build on your strengths, find your starting line**
**One vision, many game plans**
**Turning ambition into lasting change**

**A cycle of continuous improvement**

**The Open Sport School Community**

**TOOL n°1: KICK-OFF: SELF-REFLECTION TOOL TO ASSESS YOUR SCHOOL'S OPENNESS**

**Introduction**

**Pillar 1: learner-centred approach**
**Pillar 2: community engagement through sport events**
**Pillar 3: promotion of sport values, health and ethics**
**Pillar 4: cooperation with employers and networks**
**Pillar 5: Open facilities to local communities**
**Summary and next steps**

**Overall open sport school profile**

**TOOL N°2: DESIGN YOUR GAME PLAN: PLANNING TOOL**

I. How the Game Plan works
II. Starting point: your school
III. Your Open Sport School vision
IV. Strategic priorities
V. Open Schooling Activity

**TOOL N°2: DESIGN YOUR GAME PLAN: ACTIVITIES PORTFOLIO**

**Flagship open schooling activities**
**1: Job dating through sport**

**2: Re-engagement through sport**

**3: Talent discovery through sport events**

**4: Community sport events**

**TOOL N°3: BUILD YOUR TEAM FIND YOUR CHANGE AGENTS MAP STAKEHOLDERS AND ROLES**

**Introduction**

**1: Map your open sport school ecosystem**
**2: Define the roles**
**3: Build your line up**
**4: Find your champions**
**CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME**

**Programme overview**

**Section 1 – webinar: Inclusive excellence in sport VET**

**Section 2 – webinar: from project-based learning to competence recognition**

**Section 3 – webinar: leading the open sport school transformation: from innovation culture to institutional change**

**Section 4 – workshop: The Open Sport School design lab**

**CAPACITY BUILDING TEMPLATES**

**TOOL N°5: ANNUAL MONITORING DASHBOARD: REVIEW PROGRESS AND PREPARE THE NEXT OPEN SCHOOLING CYCLE**