

# Elite Student-Athlete Programs in Australia

A report on the support and services provided to elite student-athletes  
by Australian universities.

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## Introduction

Research has revealed that elite athletes have the capacity to achieve simultaneous sporting and academic success (Henry, 2013; Wylleman, 2017). The 2008, 2012 and 2016 Australia Olympic team confirmed this with over 50% of medallists being current or former elite student-athletes (AIS, 2016). However, to achieve such success elite student-athletes generally require specific support and flexibility in their academic pursuits (Aquilina, 2013). For this reason, the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) implemented the [Elite Athlete Friendly University \(EAFU\)](#) program in 2004. This program, which now involves 41 Australian universities, gives elite student-athletes access to the academic support and flexibility they require.

Whilst the academic support offered to elite student-athletes through the EAFU program is essential, it is apparent that Australian universities are now extending their support to other focuses. This includes performance support, personal support and financial support. In addition, many Australian universities are also forming partnerships with high performance sporting organisations that offer additional opportunities for elite student-athletes. However, despite this positive investment and growth, there still appears to be limited understanding of the support available to elite student-athletes across the Australian high performance sporting system.

The purpose of this report is to provide greater insight into the elite student-athlete support and services currently provided by Australian universities. The data presented has been gained through a survey process as part of the UniSport Australia Elite Student-Athlete Showcase project. In total 35 Australian university members fully completed this survey with an additional 5 universities completing parts of the survey only. For more information on the Showcase project, or to view specific university elite student-athlete support, visit the [UniSport site](#).

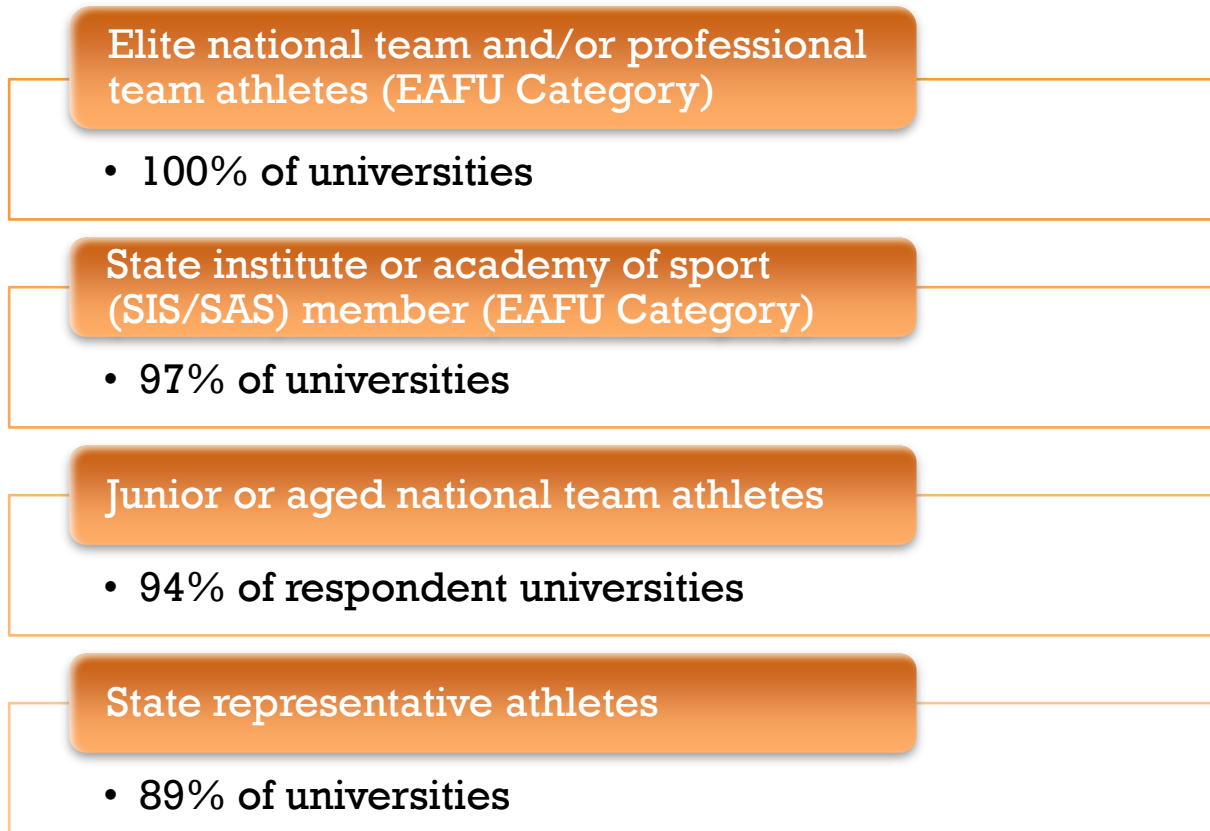
## Findings and Discussion

### Summary of Key Findings

- Australian universities support over **4,750** elite student-athletes across more than **48** sports.
- There are **66** university staff working directly with elite student-athletes.
- Elite student-athletes study at **152** Australian university campus locations.
- **All** universities are providing some forms of academic flexibility as prescribed under the EAFU Guiding Principles.
- There is over **\$3.9 million** per year in financial support and scholarships provided to eligible elite student-athletes from Australian universities.
- **26** universities have partnerships with a total of **93** high performance sporting organisations or teams.

### Pathway Categories of Athletes Supported

The graphic below shows the percentage of respondent universities (n = 35) that support elite student-athletes at various pathway categories. The data indicates that most universities are supporting additional categories of elite student-athletes outside of those defined by the [EAFU program](#). These include athletes who have achieved junior or aged (e.g. U23) national teams as well as athletes who have achieved state selection. It is important that sporting organisations, schools and prospective elite student-athletes are made aware of this support capacity, particularly those who do not currently meet EAFU definitions.



## Sports Supported

The below table highlights the number of respondent universities (n = 35) that support elite student-athletes in each sport. Athletics (34), AFL (32), cycling / BMX / mountain bike (31), football (30), hockey (30), swimming (31) and triathlon (30) are the sports that have elite student-athletes supported in 30 or more universities.

Sport	Number of Universities
AFL	32
Archery	16
Athletics	34
Badminton	14
Baseball	13
Basketball	24
Bowls	9
Canoeing	23
Combat Sports	20
Cricket	29
Cycling / BMX / Mountain Bike	31
Diving	11
Dragon Boating	2
Equestrian	24
Fencing	15
Football (soccer)	30
Golf	11
Gridiron	1
Gymnastics	21
Handball	3
Hockey	30
Lacrosse	1
Motor Sport	11
Netball	28
Orienteering	2
Paralympic Sports	22
Roller Sports	2
Rowing	26
Rugby League	23
Rugby Union	25
Sailing / Yachting	20
Shooting	12
Softball	13
Squash	15
Surfing	9
Surf Lifesaving	22
Swimming	31
Synchronised Swimming	1
Table Tennis	11
Tennis	17
Touch Football	20
Triathlon	30
Ultimate Frisbee	3
Volleyball	22
Water Polo	24
Water Skiing	2
Weightlifting	18
Winter Sports	23

### Elite Student-Athlete Staff

There are currently 66 staff engaged by Australian universities (n = 40) to work with elite student-athletes. Thirty of these staff (45%) are employed directly by their university, typically within student services (or equivalent), with another 31 (47%) engaged via the university's sport unit (or equivalent). The remaining 5 (8%) are in combined positions. Whilst this is a significant amount of human resources across the network an important consideration is that 47 of these staff (71%) are either part-time and/or have other non-elite student-athlete related job responsibilities.

### Academic Support

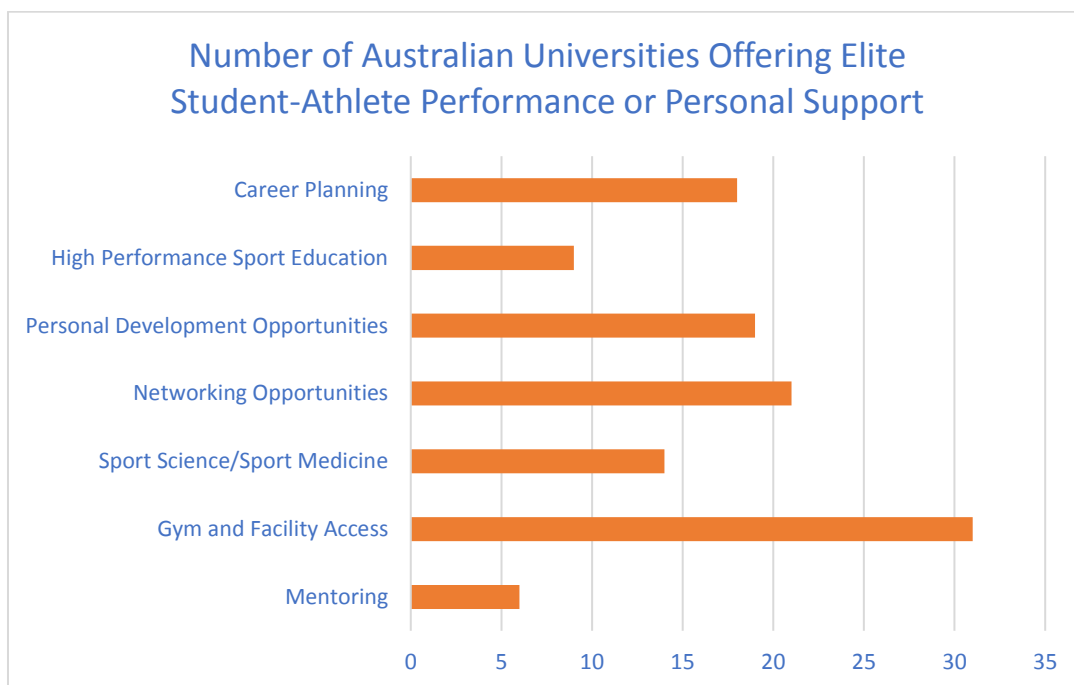
The EAFU program outlines a series of guiding principles prescribing academic support that affiliated universities endeavour to provide to their elite student-athletes. These principles cover course entry, coursework, assessment and enrolment related needs. Refer to the [EAFU website](#) for more information on these guiding principles. The table below highlights the number of respondent EAFU affiliated universities (n = 34) that currently meet each guiding principle.

Guiding Principles		Number of Universities
<u>Course Entry Related</u>	Ability for elite student-athletes to submit accompanying documentation for consideration for entry into a course.	24
<u>Coursework Related</u>	Access to distance education materials, and/or class notes for missed lectures, tutorials or practicals.	25
<u>Assessment Related</u>	Ability to negotiate assessment deadlines based on sporting related travel commitments	34
	Ability to sit exams externally under exam conditions, within the athlete's environment (e.g. whilst travelling, in their hotel etc).	29
	The minimum attendance at lectures, tutorials or practicals waived where student-athlete unavailable due to sporting commitments.	31
	ALL Assessment Related Guiding Principles.	20
<u>Enrolment Related</u>	Tailor academic study load to integrate with sporting commitments, available for first year students as well.	33
	Negotiate lecture, tutorial and practical timetables to accommodate sporting commitments.	22
	Extend minimum time to complete course due to periods of decreased study load.	24
	Take several leaves of absence where required due to increased sporting commitments (e.g. Olympic Games year).	34
	Complete cross institutional study options with interstate universities, and flexibility within this policy provided for student athletes (e.g. first year student's eligible, increase number of subjects able to be completed by cross institutional study.	24
	Provision of summer study alternatives and/or ability to swap between distance education mode and on campus mode, depending on sporting commitments	25
	ALL Enrolment Related Guiding Principles.	9
<b><u>ALL Guiding Principles</u></b>		<b>6</b>

Pleasingly, all universities are currently ‘negotiating assessment deadlines based on sporting related travel commitments’, which is essential for the busy and often interrupted schedules of elite student-athletes. However, only 6 of the 34 (18%) respondent EAFU affiliated universities meet all EAFU guiding principles with ‘the ability to negotiate lecture, tutorial and practical timetables around sporting commitments’ being the principle that the least universities are currently providing (65%). The data also reveals that many universities have extended their academic support to other areas such as practicum flexibility (21 universities) and free tutoring support (10 universities). Collectively, these results highlight the variance in academic support offered by universities to elite student-athletes. This suggests that prospective elite student-athletes should consider their own needs and requirements before choosing a university.

### Performance and Personal Support

Many Australian universities are now providing significant performance and personal support to their elite student-athletes in addition to the academic support. This is logical given the significant expertise, facilities and equipment many Australian universities have access to. The graph below indicates the number of respondent universities (n = 38) offering various forms of performance and personal support.



The most common forms of performance and personal support are gym and training facility access (31 universities), networking opportunities (21) and personal development opportunities (19). Other support areas offered by less than 4 universities include free apparel, guest speaking opportunities, discounted meals and free parking. This data confirms that Australian universities are moving beyond their traditional academic provision and support to provide a more holistic range of services to elite student-athletes. This is certainly a positive outcome given the varying needs and challenges of such athletes.

## Financial Support

There is over \$3.9 million per year in funding awarded by Australian universities to elite student-athletes. Thirty-two universities offer elite student-athlete scholarships or grants with 33 offering funding support specifically for travel and competition. Nine universities also offer sport-specific scholarships covering the sports of AFL, athletics, cricket, football, hockey, rugby union and swimming. Individual scholarship amounts do range from \$250 to over \$50,000 per year, demonstrating a substantial range of funding available. Nonetheless, Australian universities are clearly dedicating a significant amount of financial resourcing towards elite student-athletes and it is important the Australia high performance sporting system continues to be made aware of the support and options available. There are also additional opportunities for interested sporting organisations to partner with universities to offer enhanced sport-specific scholarships through joint funding arrangements.

## High Performance Sport Partnerships

Twenty-six universities reported partnerships with a total of 93 high performance sporting organisations or teams. Common benefits offered to elite student-athletes through such partnerships include training facility and equipment access, sport science and sport medicine support, education provision, internships/work placements, scholarships and research opportunities. Whilst it is likely there are additional partnerships between universities and sporting organisations in Australia, these were not reported as they do not provide high performance sport outcomes and/or direct support to elite student-athletes. Rather such partnerships typically exist for commercial reasons only.

This data shows there is already a notable number of university and high performance sport partnerships in Australia. However, there is still significant scope for additional partnerships as 38% of Australian universities do not currently have such a partnership. Additionally, the human, facility, technological and financial resources available to universities mean they can have the capacity to make an impact in the industry. Many universities also have the enthusiasm to get involved in such partnerships if suitable and mutually benefit opportunities arise. To continue to grow such partnerships, UniSport Australia are working with its university partners to study current high performance sport partnerships further as well as identify future partnership opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

This report has further outlined the support currently made available to elite student-athletes from Australian universities. This includes the long-established academic support and flexibility as well as more holistic focused performance, personal and financial support options. In addition, there is a significant number of universities now partnered with high performance sporting organisations and teams to provide additional opportunities for elite student-athletes and the overall high performance sporting system. It is now essential that prospective elite student-athletes, sporting organisations, schools and other relevant organisations are better informed of such support and opportunities available.

## Reference

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