

# **Position statements - 8. Quality of applied sport psychology services, 2006**

## **FEPSAC Position Statement # 8**

### **Quality of applied sport psychology services**

#### **Situation analysis and purpose**

Top level sport is characterised by a relentless quest for success which includes the investment of time, energy and money of those involved. On average 10 years of intensive training (deliberate practice) are required for an athlete to reach a high level of performance. Numerous support systems have been developed and are offered to support those in the field through their long journey (medical assistance, performance diagnosis, nutritional consulting, and physiotherapy).

Additional assistance is required in the area of psychological support. Failure in sport is frequently attributed to inadequate arousal, disturbing thoughts, lack of mental readiness or a general lack in psychological skills to cope with the situational demands during competitions. The aim of applied sport psychology in competitive sport is to provide efficient psychological support for athletes, teams, coaches, sport clubs, organisations and significant others through sport psychology consultants. These may be sport psychologists, mental trainers, psychological coaches or other sport psychology service providers. While a central focus is usually on optimising performance, other psychological themes such as well-being, work-life-balance or interpersonal issues may also come across.

Many athletes and sport teams rely heavily on the services offered, and a large number of intervention strategies and methods have been developed, scientifically tested and successfully applied in the past. This increases the sport people's trust in the power of sport psychology assistance, thus enhancing the responsibility of sport psychology organisations and the individual sport psychology consultants to be professional and to deliver services of only highest quality. In the domain of top level sport this means working in a highly professional environment, often under the public eye and under high time pressure and efficiency requirements. The consultant needs to be on the highest level of competence and to maintain this level over time. Sport psychology consultation always comprises interpersonal work based on a trusting relationship with the client who may have an urgent need for help and support. It is indispensable to take responsibility for all the actions and to avoid harming others.

FEPSAC acknowledges the work of sport psychology consultants as professionals in the applied field of top level sport. To support them in their profession, FEPSAC proposes a framework of Quality Management to define the criteria for high quality services. The purposes are to make quality criteria comparable and equivalent in the open European labour market, to allow for a clear distinction from problematic and superficial interventions and to protect athletes and others from unserious offers.

#### **Quality Management System**

The quality of sport psychology services applies to three levels: The sport psychology organisation, the different intervention centres, and the individual sport psychology consultant. This position statement refers mainly to the aspect on how an organisation attends to issues of quality in their services. This is considered to influence the quality of work of individual sport psychology consultants in the field even if the satisfaction of the client depends primarily on his or her individual experience with one consultant.

Three quality factors of services are proposed, namely the quality of the structure, of the processes and of the outcome. These factors are considered to be in a cyclic interrelation and indispensable for the quality improvement.

##### **Structure quality**

The quality of the structure refers to relatively stable aspects such as the personal and professional prerequisites and the available technical, infrastructural, organisational and financial resources. As a basis, the co-operation and work with the coach, the position within and the integration of sport psychology services in the sport system, including sports medicine, sport science, and athlete career education co-ordination, need to be well defined.

More specifically, the competencies of the professionals including their motivation, education and further education, specialisation and aptitude have to be determined, in relation to the potential intervention type. For example, professionals introducing mental skills training requires different qualities than those who provide sport psychology consultation or clinical intervention. Each professional needs to be aware of the limits of his or her knowledge and competences. Mentor programmes should be established to assist young

colleagues in their professional training. Rules and guidelines are required for the embodiment of the consultation process, including how the intervention is documented and how structural adaptations are made as a result of Quality Management. In addition, the availability for the client, access to sport psychologists, and the response time to the first contact are important criteria. The co-operation among sport psychologists, networking and teamwork add to structural quality. Legal and economical aspects, the reimbursement and the existence of a price structure are also decisive factors, same as a professional code of conduct and ethical standards including the control and sanctions system for violations of these rules.

### **Process quality**

Process quality refers to the quality that is actually achieved during the sport psychology service delivery. This includes a close professional relation and co-ordinated activities between the consultant, co-workers, colleagues, other professionals and the client. The services on offer must be based on an assessment of the needs using reliable diagnostical tools. High quality is achieved by a fit between method and indication, the variability of methods available to be used and the control of all these decisions. Resources (time, money) should be used economically, and the documentary practices and protection of data privacy must be assured. Finally, the process should be accompanied by supervision and case presentation in peer supervised groups.

### **Outcome quality**

The outcome quality can be defined as the difference between a set goal and the actual output and is assessed by formal and informal evaluation. Beside client's satisfaction with and perceived value of the service and of the consultant, other systems for evaluating the consultation need to be established. Not only performance outcome, but also the duration of the consultation, drop-out rates or long term compliance could be possible examples. On the organisational level, the efficiency of the whole system, acceptance by relevant partner organisations (e.g. National Olympic Committee) and the percentage of athletes placing demands on the services are also important criteria to be assessed.

## **Recommendations**

1. Quality management goes beyond the question of education, professional training and title recognition. It also involves an attitude towards the quality requirements in the structure, the process and the outcome of all services delivered.
2. Sport psychology associations are invited to consider the use of Quality Management tools to increase reliability. FEPSAC develops and offers templates and sample documents to all members.
3. Sport psychology consultants should attend to quality issues within the service delivery and actively contribute in supervision groups.
4. Developing quality management tools will be an advantage in the competition with less qualified suppliers.
5. Using Quality Management tools improves the quality of the services provided both on the level of an organisation, but also on the level of the intervention centre or the individual consultant.
6. Clients should pay attention when seeking psychological support and check if the provider is aware of quality issues of his or her professional activity and if their services are supported by an organisation defining criteria for quality delivery.