



2021 | MIND THE GAP

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**Co-funded by the Erasmus+
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An abstract graphic consisting of a thick, dark blue curved line that starts from the bottom left and curves upwards towards the right. Several circles of varying sizes and colors (dark blue, light blue, and white) are scattered along and around this line. A dashed line with an arrowhead points upwards and to the right, intersecting the main curved line.

**ENHANCEMENT
OF COMPETENCIES
OF PROFESSIONAL
PLAYERS**

DISCLAIMER

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A SPECIAL THANK YOU

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Tony Higgins (*chair*), *President of PFA Scotland*; **Dr. Deirdre Lyons**, *Head of Player Development at Rugby Players Ireland*; **Rasmus Haagensen**, *Managing Director of 4player Denmark*; **Alison Brown**, *National Lead – Athlete Support & Governance at TASS*; **Dr. Emma Vickers**, *National Lead – Research at TASS*; **Grace Harrison**, *Project Coordinator at TASS*; **Guy Taylor**, *National Director of TASS*; and **Nienke van Gerven**, *Player Development Manager at FIFPRO*.



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
Aim, method and outputs	6
BACKGROUND INFORMATION	7
Sample Characteristics & Demographics	8
Education & Development	9
Career	11
Preparing for a Post-Playing Career	12
Dual Career	13
Plans After Playing Career	15
Retirement	18
Transition Process	20
Current Situation	26
Career Support	29
Wellbeing	35
CHALLENGES & BARRIERS	42
COMPETENCES	47
The Athletes' Competency Questionnaire for Employability	49
REFERENCES	58



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CHARTS/TABLES/FIGURES

LIST OF CHARTS

Chart 1: Educational Diploma	10
Chart 2: Diploma aimed for by active players combining football & education	13
Chart 3: Employment status of active players in a dual career football & employment	14
Chart 4: Plans after playing career	15
Chart 5: Reasons not to prepare for a post-playing career	17
Chart 6: Reasons for retirement from professional football	18
Chart 7: Transition process	20
Chart 8: Preparation for a post-playing career	21
Chart 9: Plans for a post-playing career	22
Chart 10: Satisfaction football career	24
Chart 11: Satisfaction post-football life	25
Chart 12: Current situation former professional players	26
Chart 13: Employment status former players	28
Chart 14: Reasons players did not receive support	30
Chart 15: Types of received support	32
Chart 16: Support providers	33
Chart 17: Players' general wellbeing (1/3)	37
Chart 18: Players' general wellbeing (2/3)	38
Chart 19: Players' general wellbeing (3/3)	39
Chart 20: Players' social network (1/2)	40
Chart 21: Players' social network (2/2)	41
Chart 22: Active vs. former players' perceived barriers	44
Chart 23: Active vs. former players' perceived challenges	46
Chart 24: Significant differences between active and former players in their perceived possession of items	55
Chart 25: Active vs. former players' perceived possession of competencies	57

LIST OF TABLES

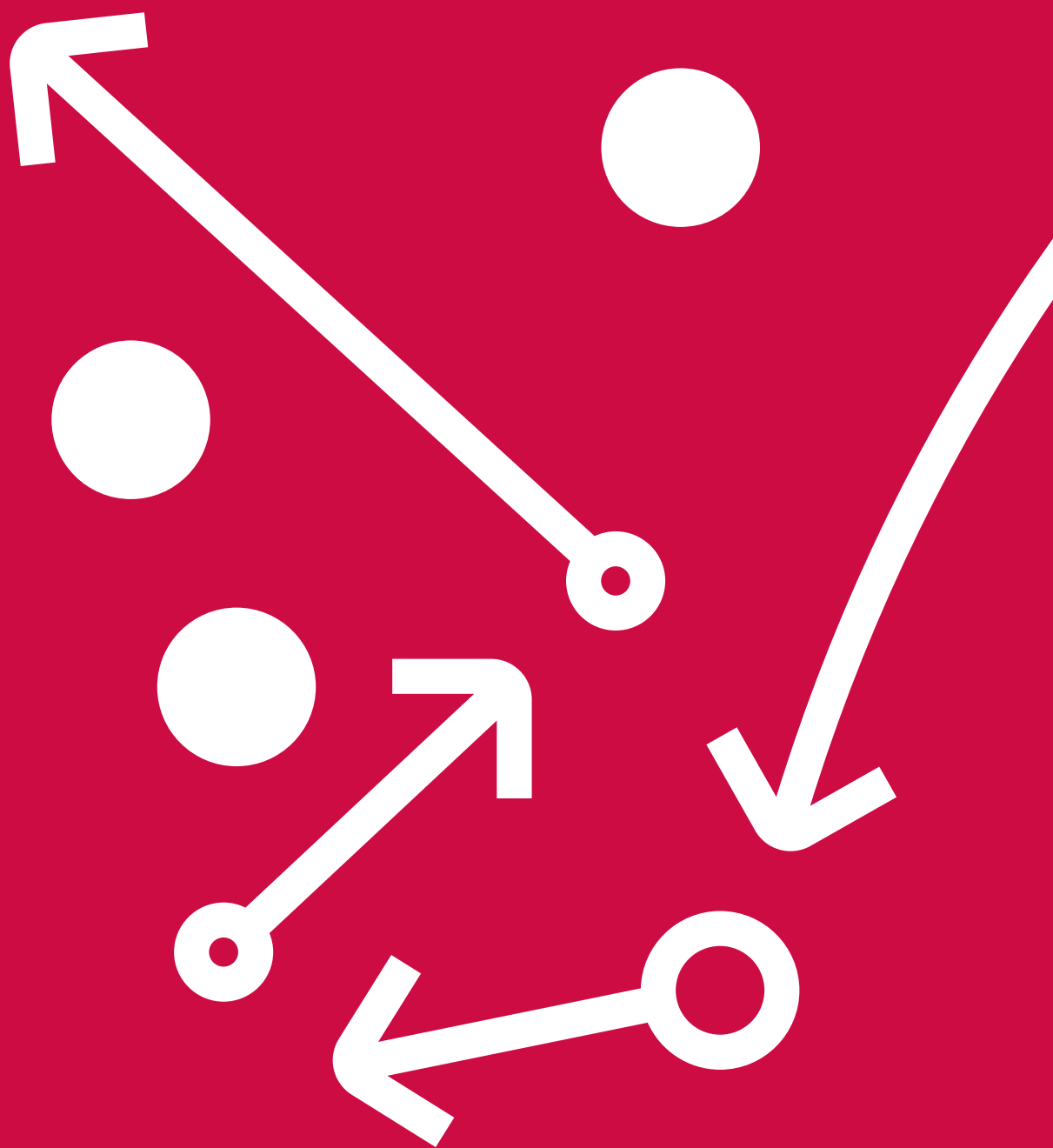
Table 1: Barriers in preparing for a post-playing career	43
Table 2: Challenges in preparing for a post-playing career	45

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Athletes' Competency Questionnaire for Employability (ACQE)	50
Figure 2: Average perceived possession and importance of the ACQE-competencies	56

INTRODUCTION

AIM, METHOD, OUTPUTS



AIM

ENHANCEMENT OF COMPETENCIES OF PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS

The aim of WP3 is to get a detailed insight into the **crucial competencies**, elements and processes professional players* have and need in order to **optimise employability and employment**.

METHOD

A **quantitative methodology** with **active and former** professional football players was used.

- Online questionnaire: Athletes' Competency Questionnaire for Employability (ACQE)**

OUTPUTS

Insight into the **crucial competencies**, elements and processes professional players have and need in order to optimise **employability and employment**.

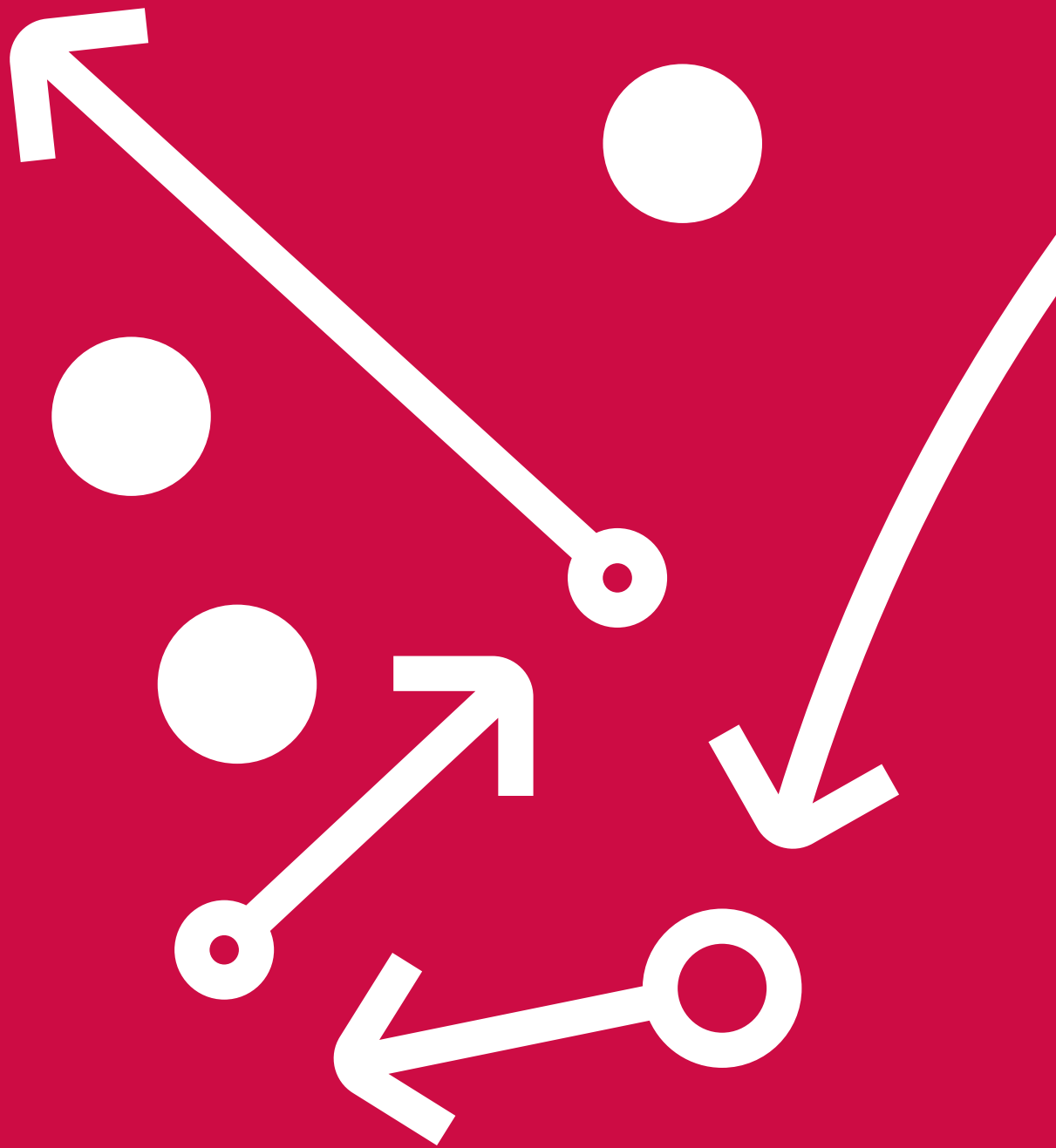
- Background information
 - Sample characteristics
 - Education & Development
 - Career
 - Wellbeing
- Challenges and barriers
- Competencies
 - Importance (How **important** is this competency for your successful transition to a new post-playing career?)
 - Possession (What is your current level of **possession** of this competency?)

* A professional is a player who has a written contract with a club and is paid more for her/his footballing activity than the expenses she/he effectively incurs. All other players are considered to be amateurs.

** Smismans, S., Wylleman, P., De Brandt, K., Defruyt, S., Vitali, F., Ramis, Y., Torregrossa, M., Lobinger, B., Stambulova, N. B., & CeciĆ Erpić, S. (2020). From elite sport to the job market: Development and initial validation of the Athlete Competency Questionnaire for Employability (ACQE). *Cultura, Ciencia y Deporte* (in press).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS, EDUCATION
& DEVELOPMENT, CAREER, WELLBEING**



SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS



805 players started the questionnaire of which 282 completed it (**completion rate** = 55,4%)



78% of players in this study were **male**



Players in this study came from **33 different countries worldwide**

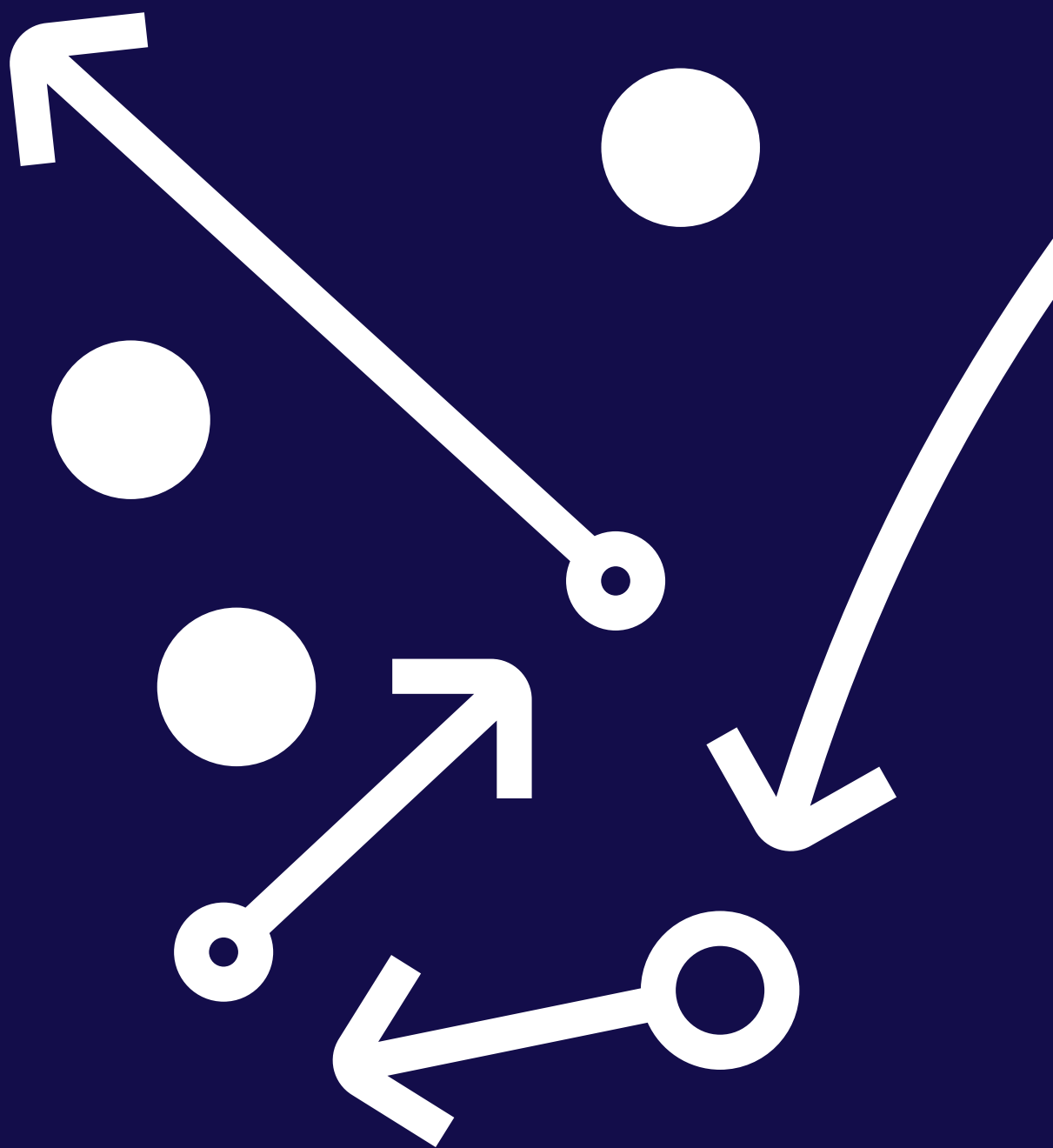


48% of the players were aged between 22-29.
3% of the palyers were younger than 22 and
39% were older than 29



- 68% of players were still **active** in professional football
- Half of the players were engaged in the **highest football division**
- Almost half of the players (45,39%) played for the **national team**

EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT

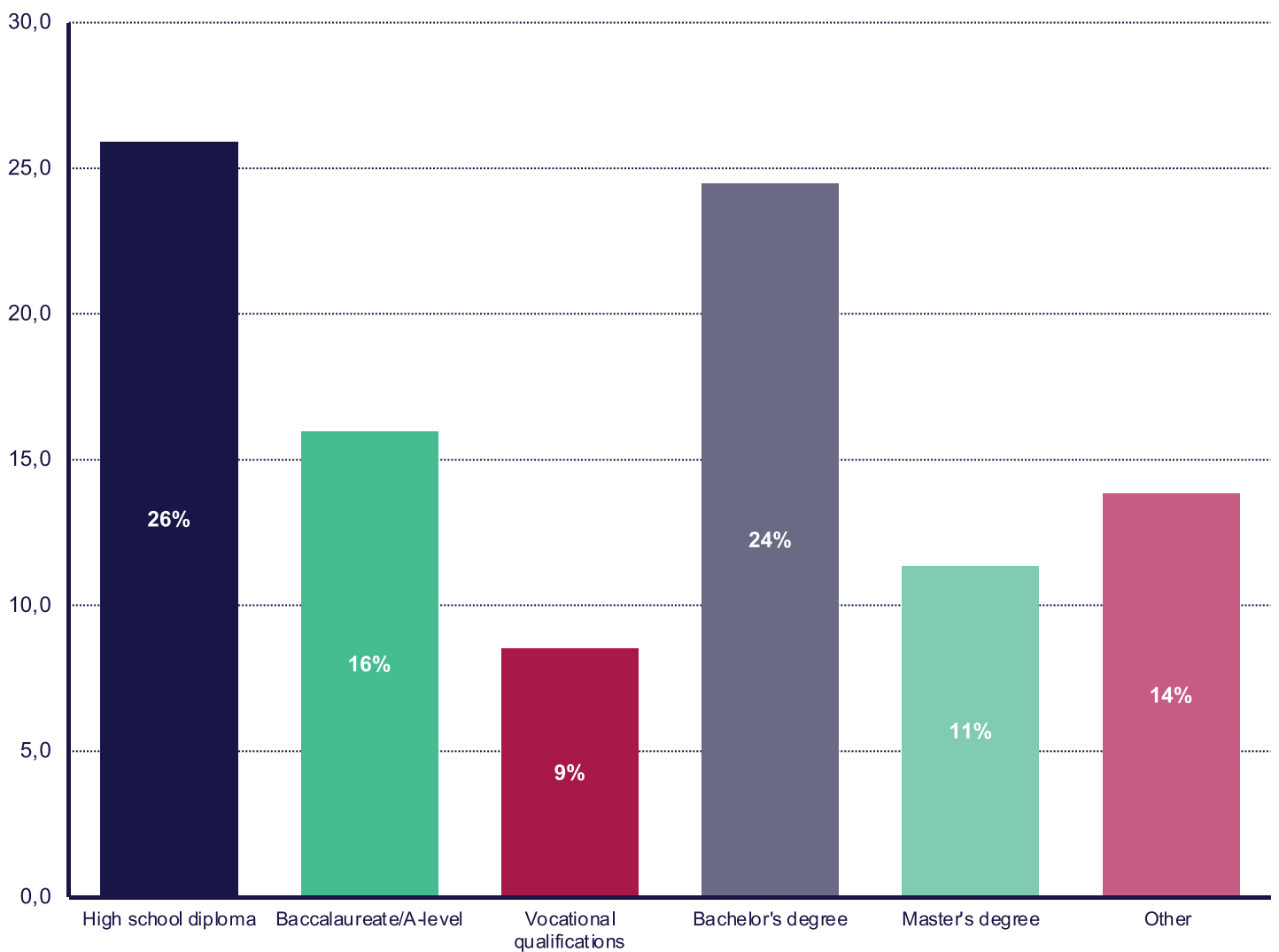




EDUCATIONAL DIPLOMA

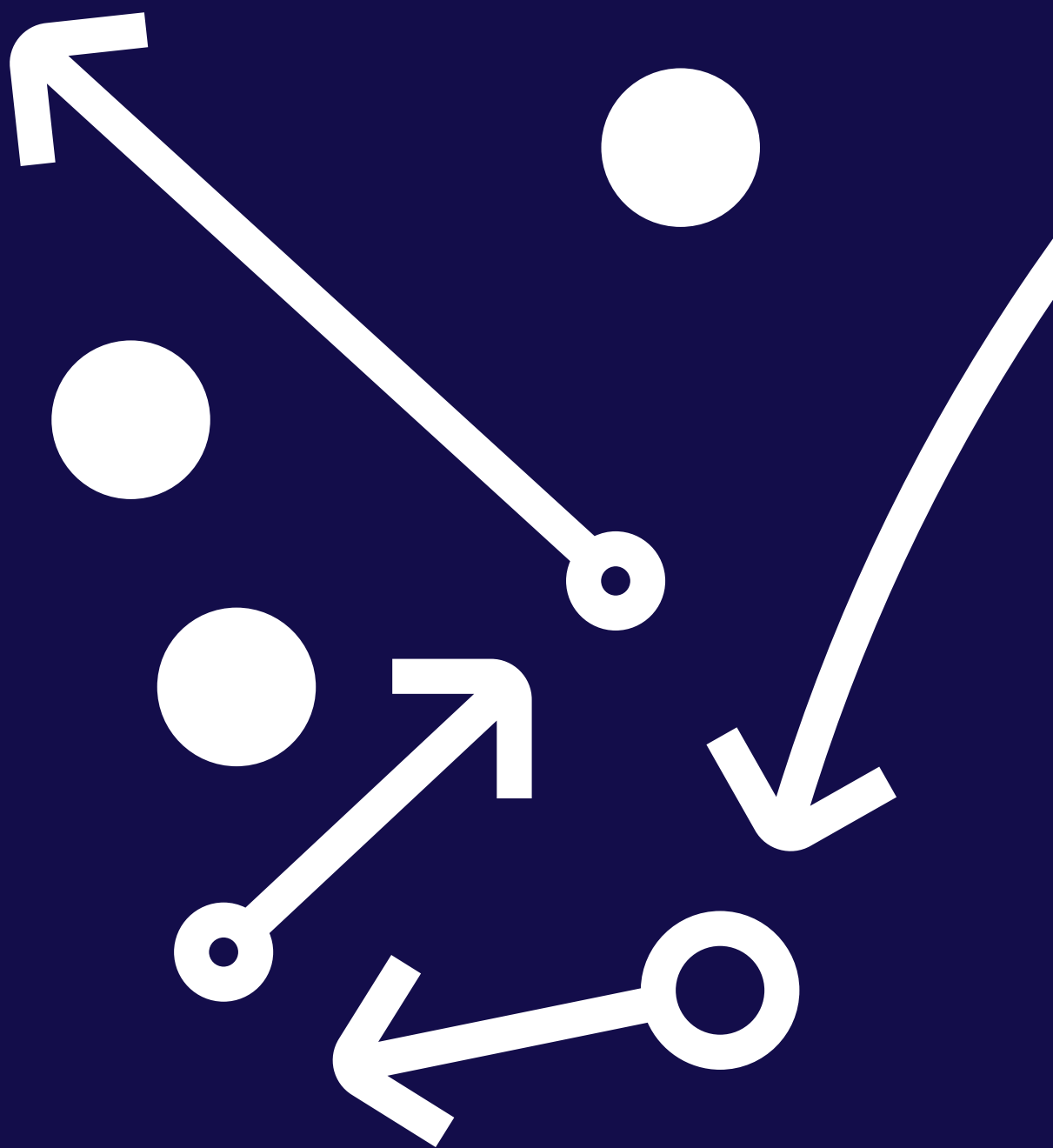
- 26% of the players have a secondary school diploma as highest completed degree.
- 74% of players (have) engage/engaged in further education, be it college, university or vocational training.

Diploma



(n = 282)

CAREER



ACTIVE PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS

PREPARING FOR A POST-PLAYING CAREER WHILE PLAYING PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

27%

Of active players
were engaged in
a dual career,
football & education,
during the research

19%

Of active players
were engaged in
a dual career,
football & employment,
during the research





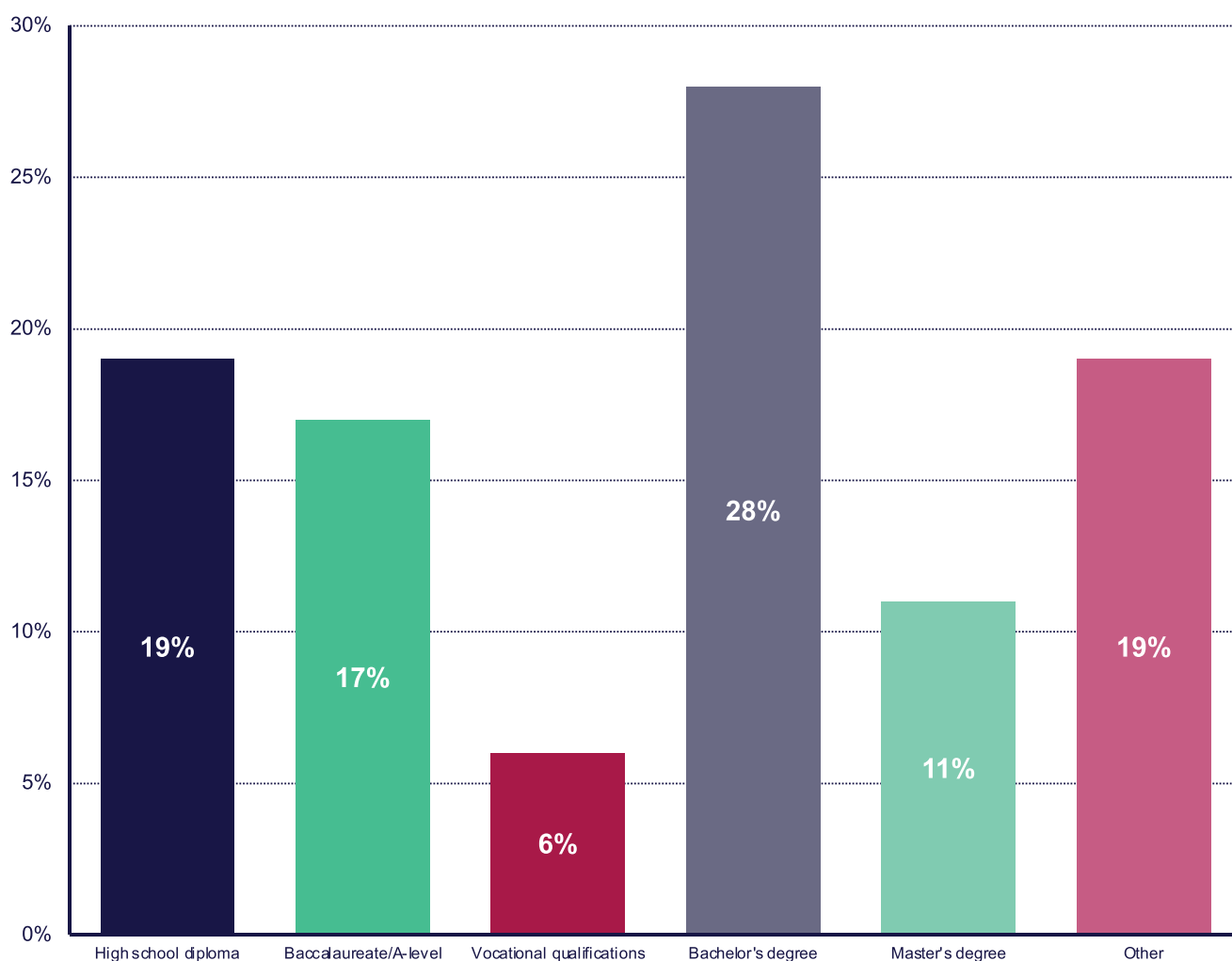
DUAL CAREER FOOTBALL & EDUCATION

"THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAYERS' ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT IS NOT ONLY IN THE ADDED VALUE OF AN ACADEMIC DEGREE, BUT ALSO IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCIES THAT RETIREES CAN USE TO ENHANCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATION AFTER RETIREMENT FROM FOOTBALL."

- PAUL WYLLEMAN, 2019

Diploma aimed for by active players combining football & education

28% of active players combining football and education, aim for a bachelor's degree.



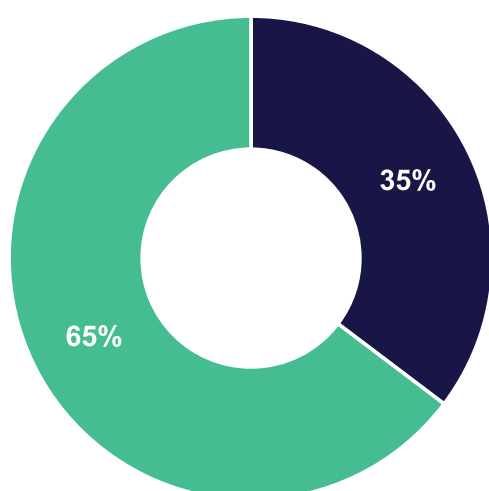
(n = 53)



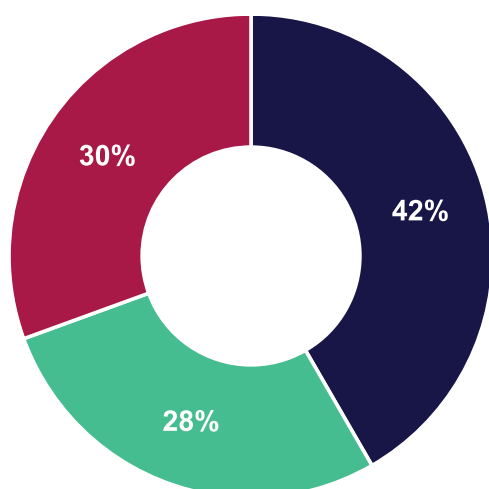
DUAL CAREER FOOTBALL & EMPLOYMENT

35% of active players reported to be employed full-time next to their professional football career. 42% of active players combining professional football with another employment are self-employed.

Employment status of active players in a dual career football & employment



- Full-time employed in another career next to my football career
- Part-time employed in another career next to my football career



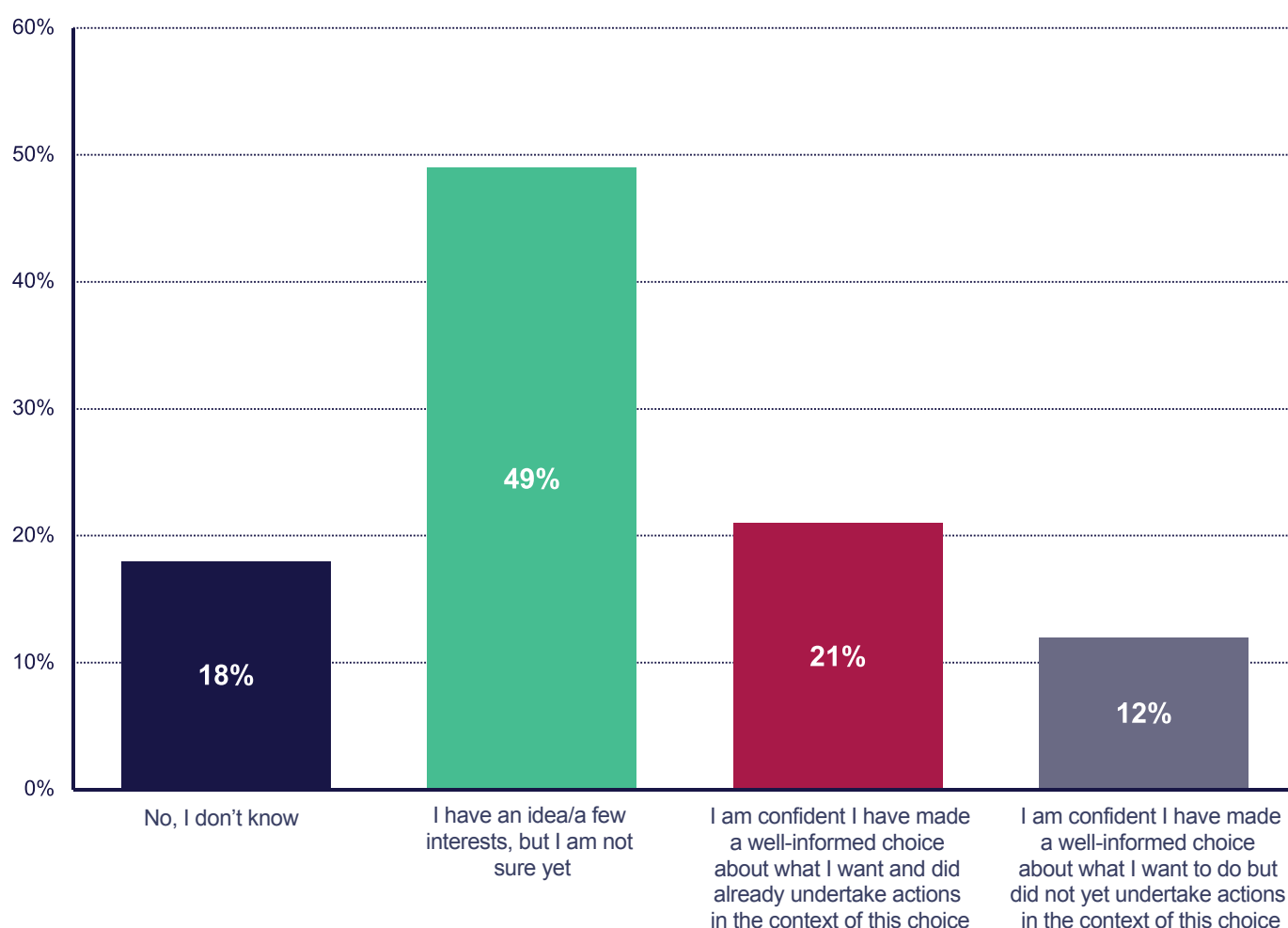
- Self-employed
- Employed in a private organisation
- Employed in a public/state organisation

(n = 36)



PLANS AFTER PLAYING CAREER

- 18% of active players do not have any idea about their plans after their playing career.
- 49% of active players indicated to have an idea/a few interests of what they want to do after their professional football career.
- Only 33% of active players are confident about their plans for the future.
- Of those active players being confident about their future plans, more than half did already undertake specific actions in the context of their choice.



(n = 193)

REASONS NOT TO PREPARE FOR A POST-PLAYING CAREER

50%

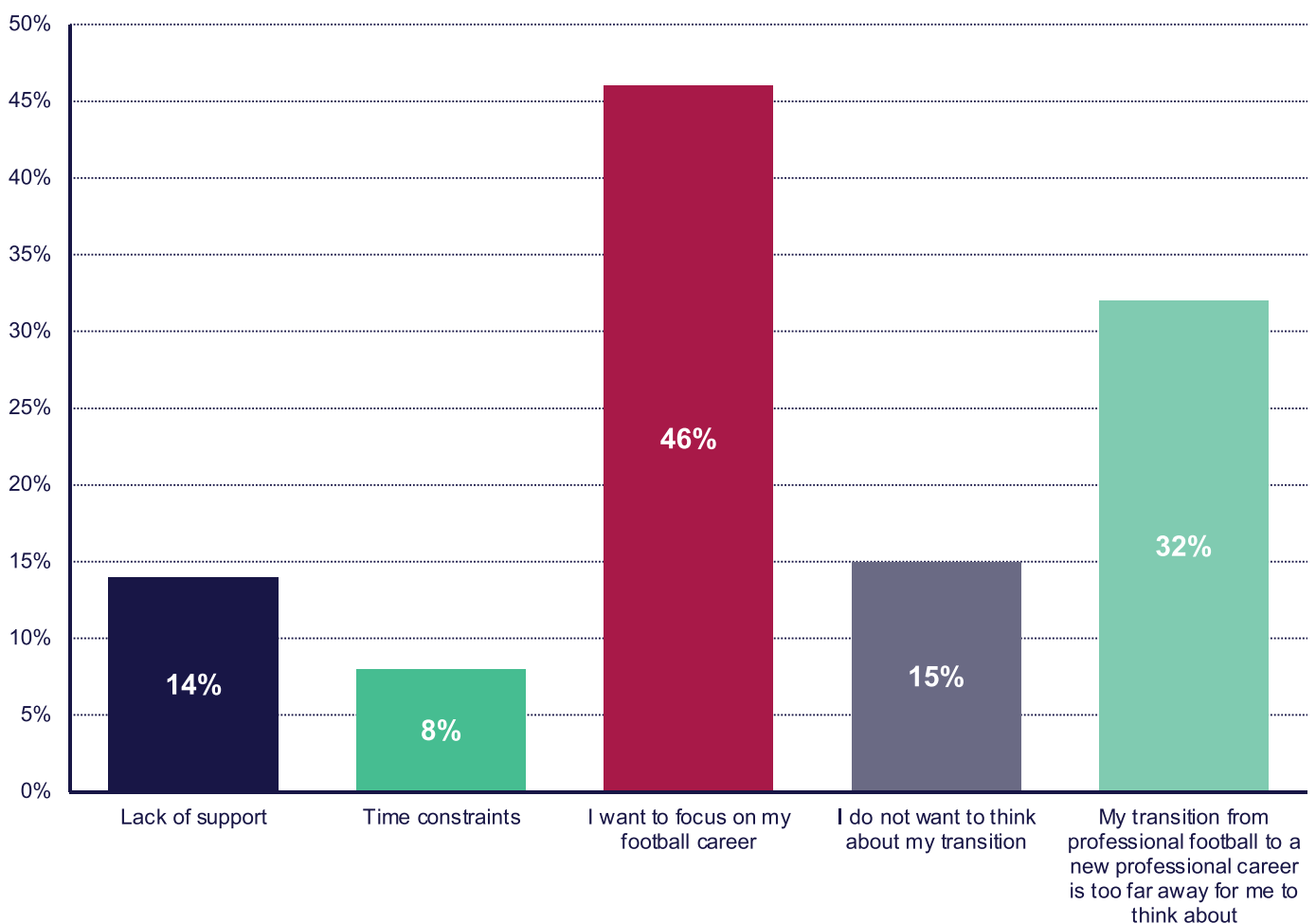
of active players reported that they have
not yet started to prepare for the transition
out of professional football

n = 193



REASONS NOT TO PREPARE FOR A POST-PLAYING CAREER

The main reason for active players not to prepare for a post-playing career was the wish to focus on their playing career, followed by the perception that their transition to a new career is too far away to think about.



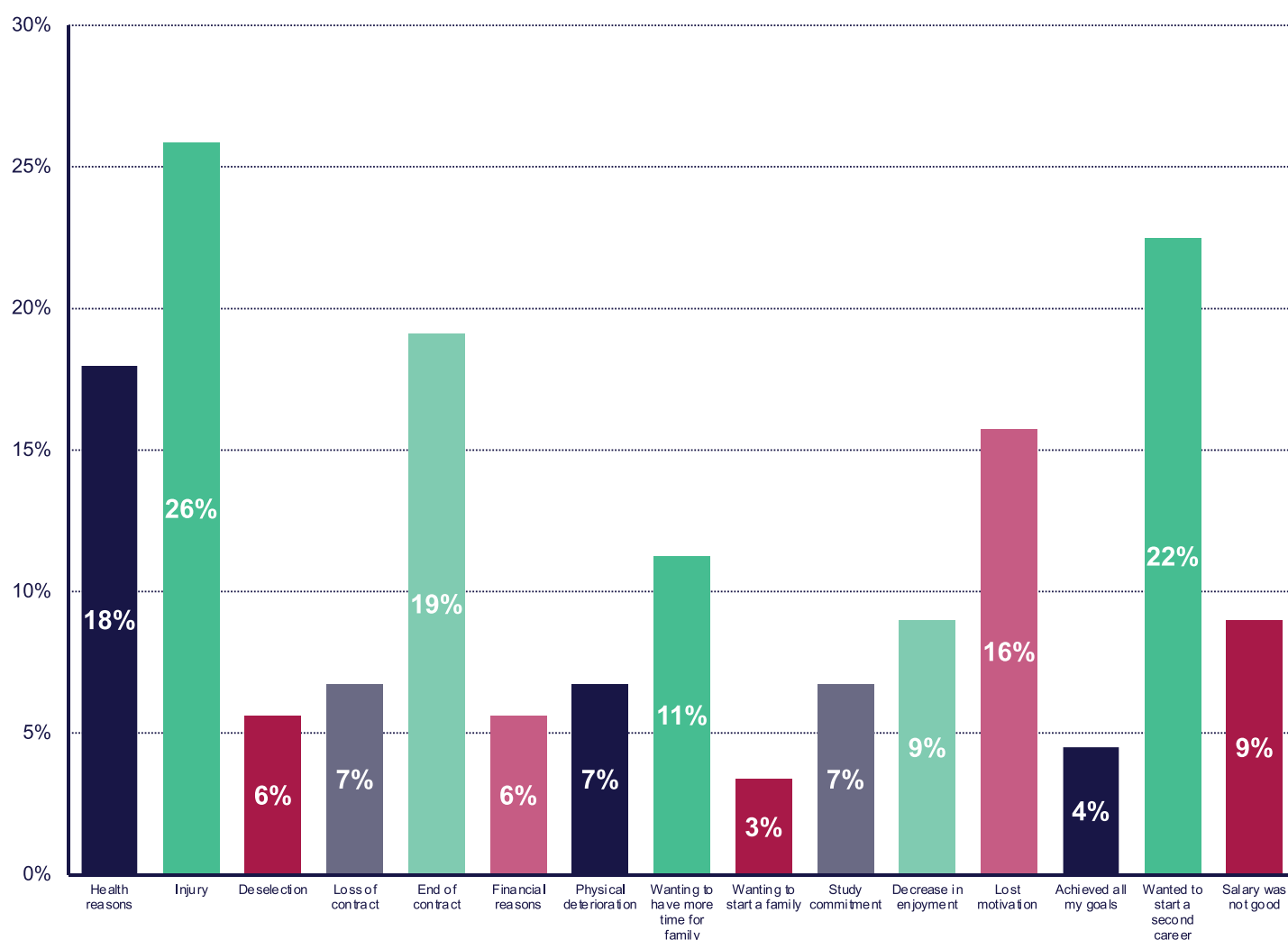
(n = 95)



REASONS FOR RETIREMENT FROM PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

53% of former players were forced to retire from professional football following an injury, end of contract or health reasons. Among the reasons to retire voluntarily, the main reason was the wish to start a post-playing career (22%).

Please note that participants were able to select multiple answers.



(n = 89)

FORMER PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS IN A POST-PLAYING CAREER

46%

of former players in this study did retire
unexpectedly from professional football

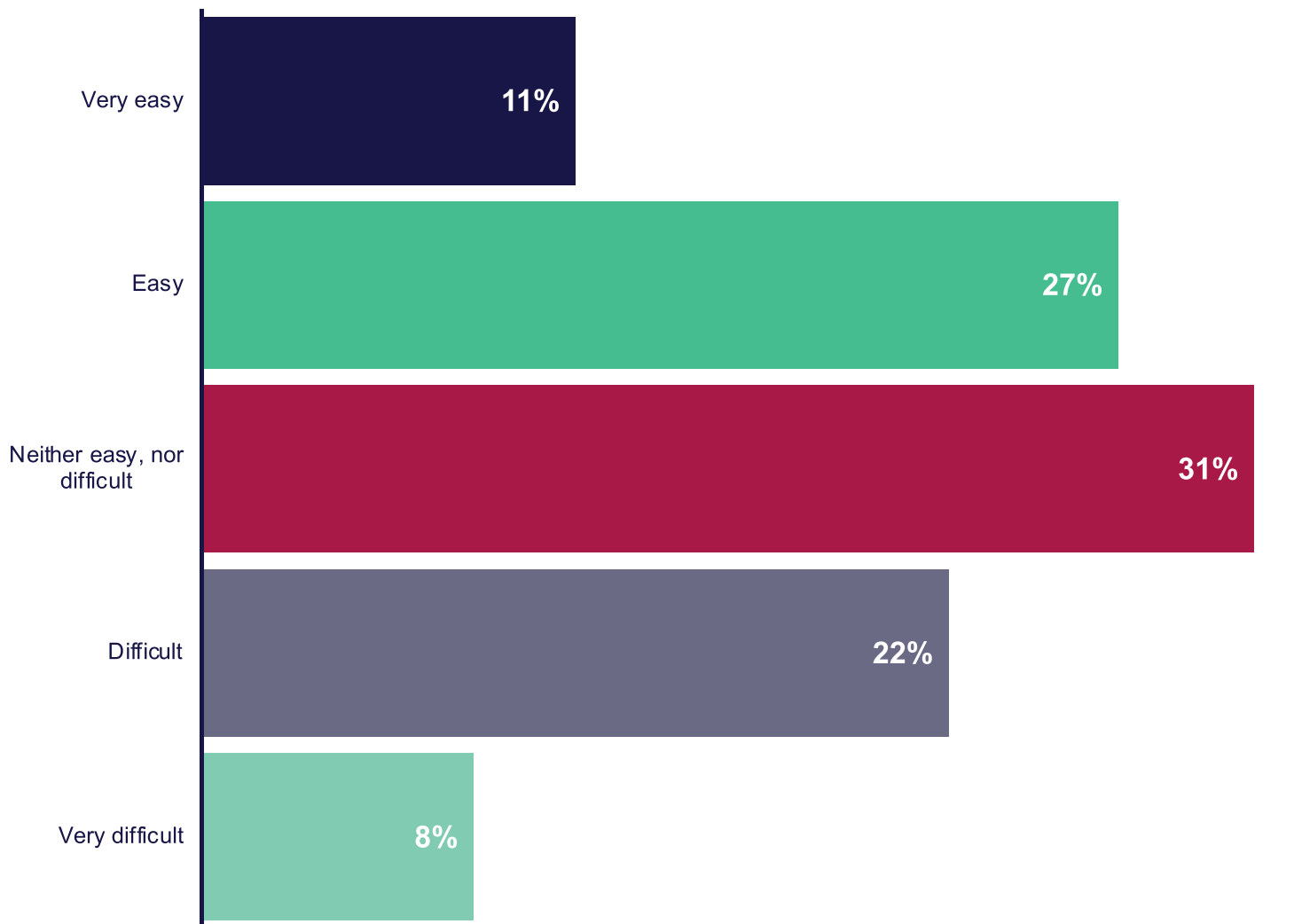
n = 89





TRANSITION PROCESS

70% of players indicated that they did not find the transition process difficult.

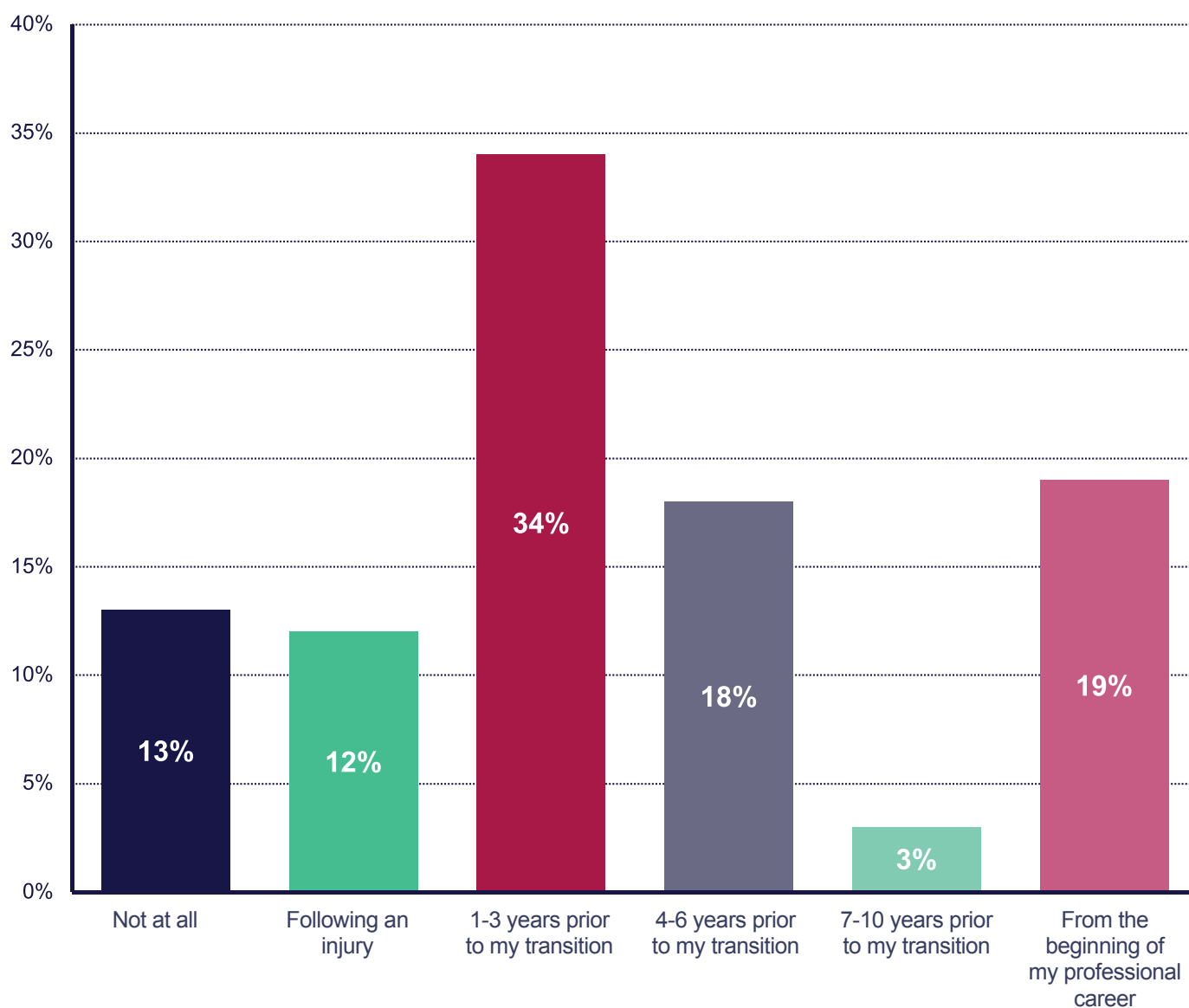


(n = 89)



PREPARATION FOR A POST-PLAYING CAREER

87% of former players did prepare for their post-playing career while still playing professional football.

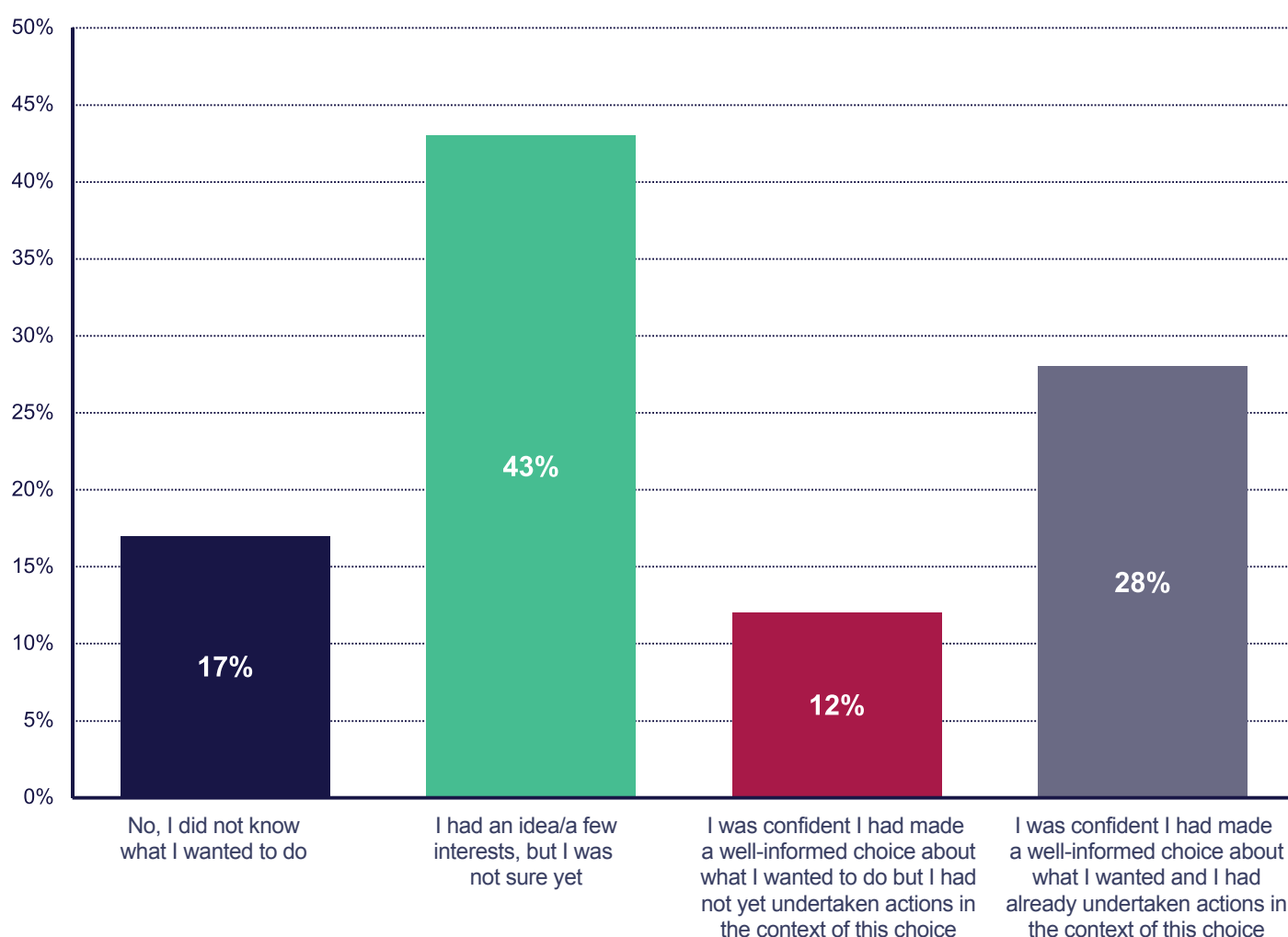


(n = 89)



PLANS FOR A POST-PLAYING CAREER

Similarly to active players, 43% of former players indicated they had an idea/a few interests for their post-playing career while still playing. 43% of former players were confident about what they wanted to do after their playing career. 28% of former players even indicated they already had undertaken actions in the context of their plans for a post-playing career.



(n = 89)

45%

of former players in this study needed more than 6 months to adjust to post-playing life

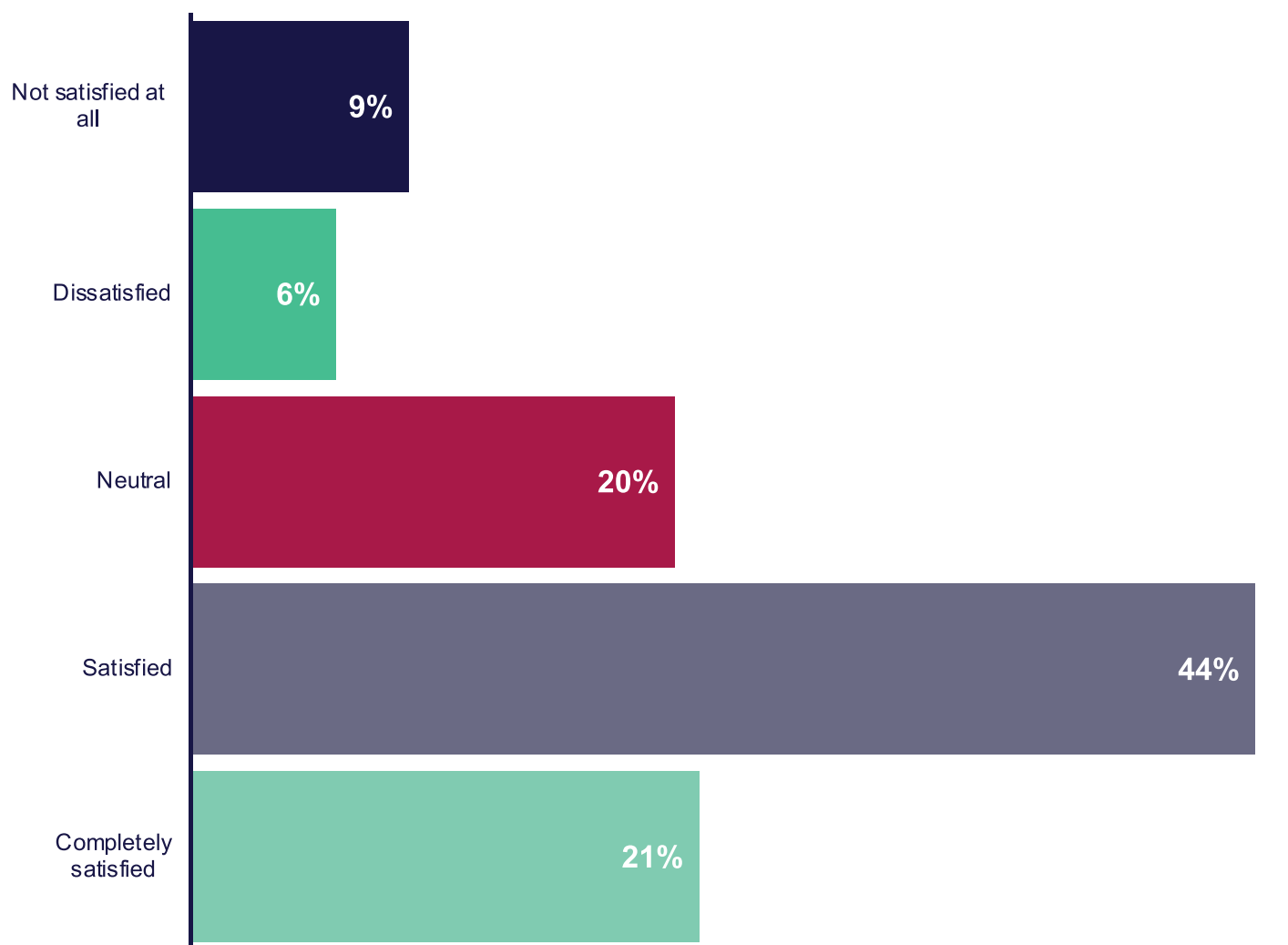
n = 89





SATISFACTION FOOTBALL CAREER

65% of the former players indicated to be completely satisfied or satisfied with their football career.

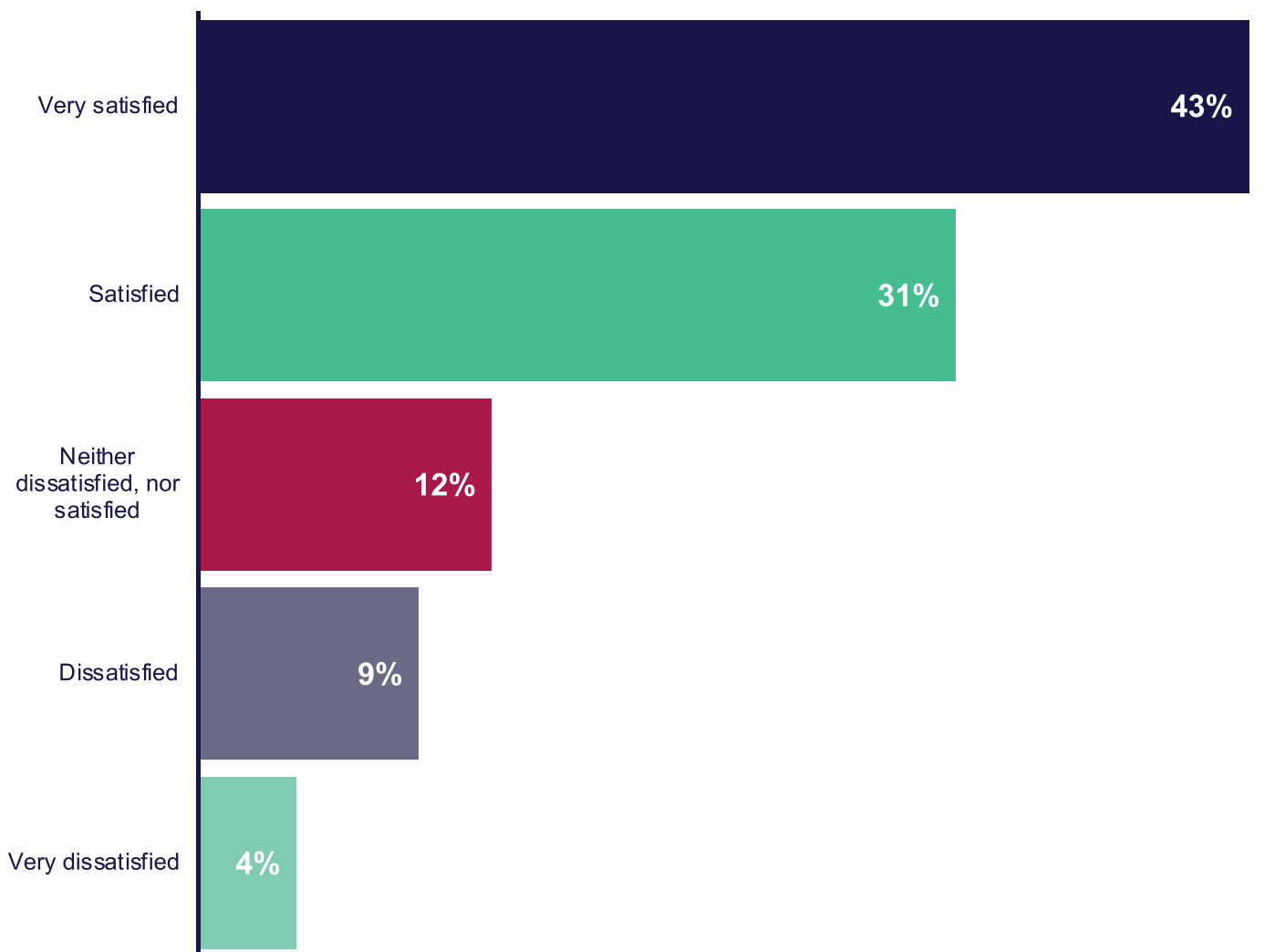


(n = 89)



SATISFACTION POST-FOOTBALL LIFE

While 74% former players indicated to be satisfied or very satisfied with their post-playing life, 1 out of 7 former players indicated to be dissatisfied with their post-playing life.

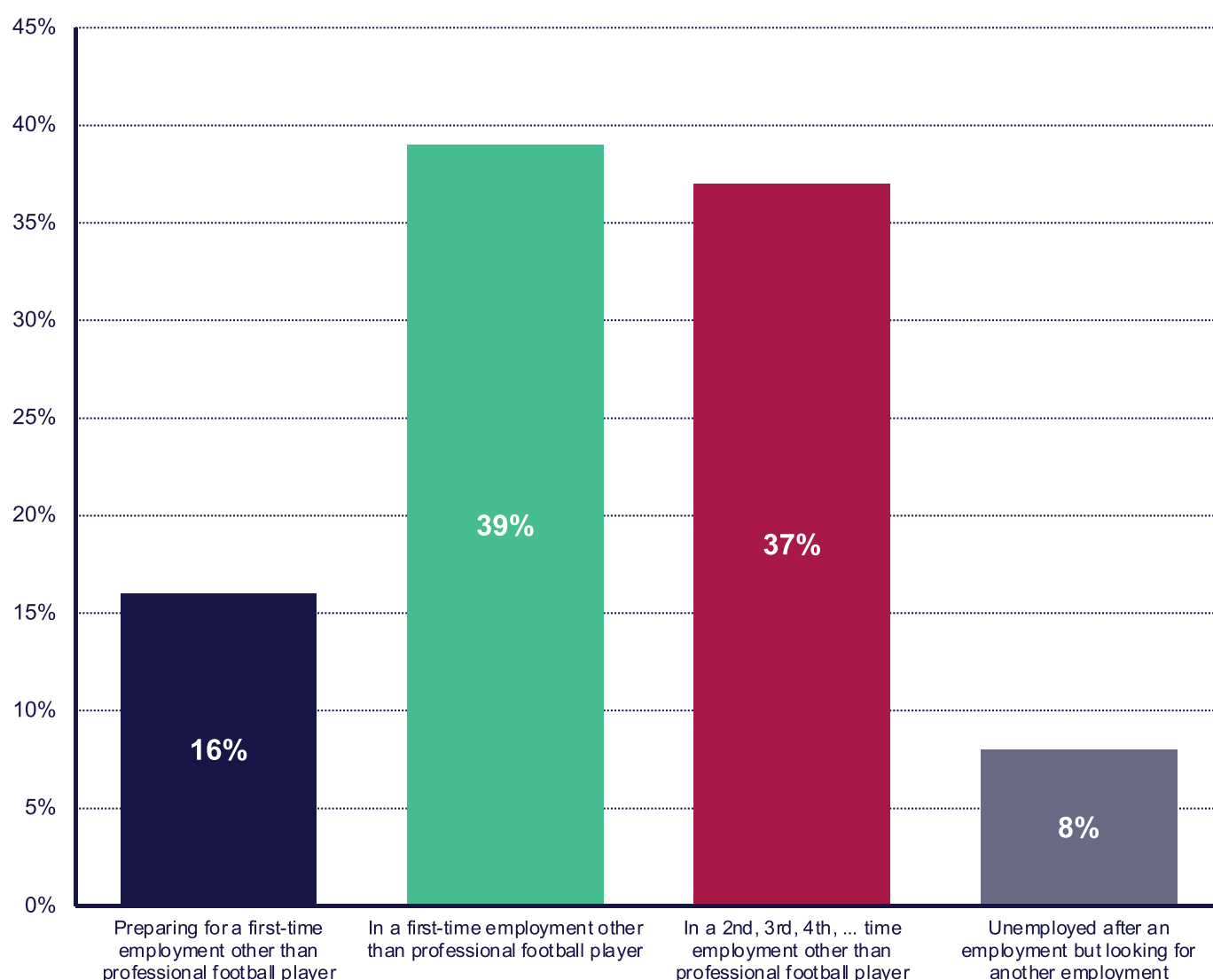


(n = 89)



CURRENT SITUATION FORMER PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS

76% of the former players are engaged in a post-playing career.



(n = 89)

93%

Of the former players in this study who found a post-playing job, were **full-time** employed

7%

Of the former players in this study who found a post-playing job, were **part-time** employed

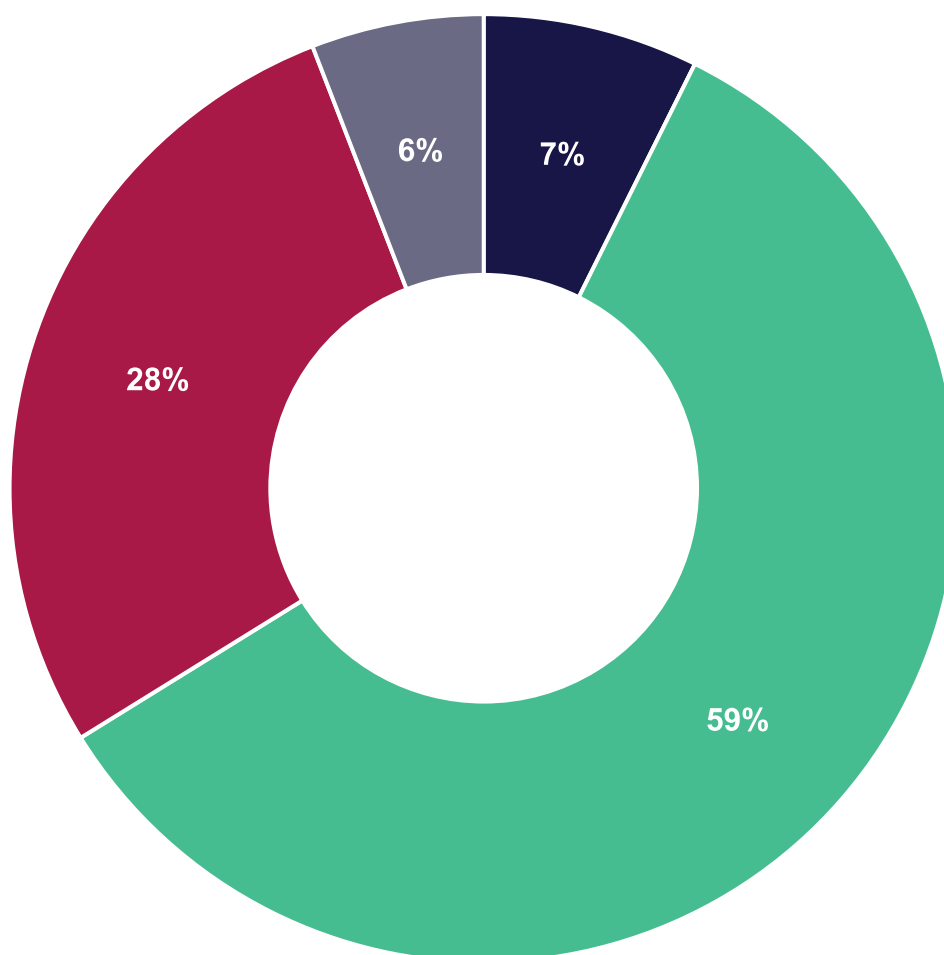




EMPLOYMENT STATUS

From all former players in a post-playing career (n=68), 59% were employed in a private organisation.

Employment status former players

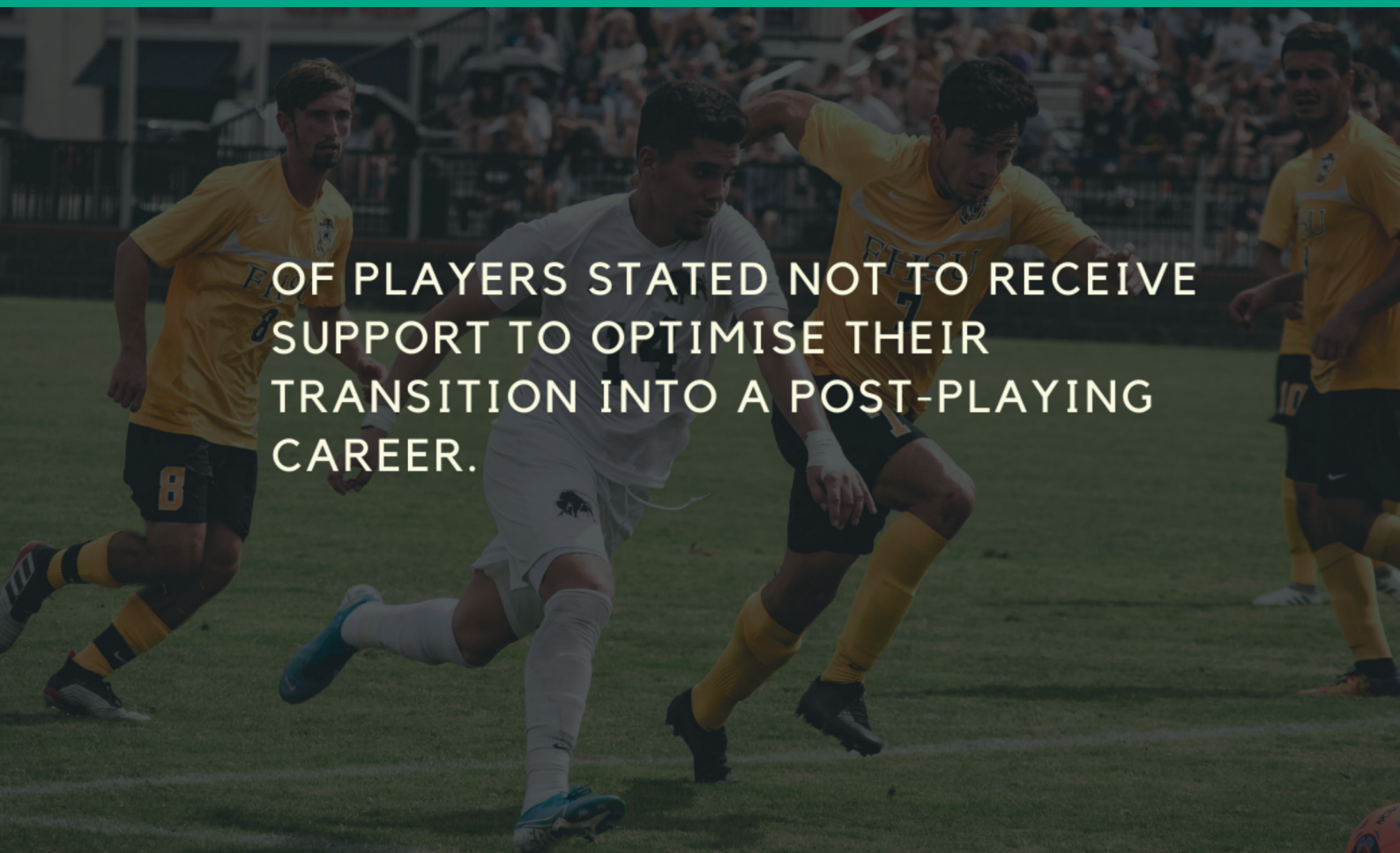


- Self-employed
- Employed in a public/state organisation
- Employed in a private organisation
- Other (please specify)

(n = 68)

CAREER SUPPORT IN OPTIMISING PLAYERS' TRANSITION INTO A POST-PLAYING CAREER

54%

A photograph of a soccer match. In the center, a player in a white jersey is running towards the left. To his left, a player in a yellow jersey is also running. To his right, another player in a yellow jersey is running. In the background, a fourth player in a yellow jersey is visible. The field is green grass, and there are spectators in the stands in the background.

OF PLAYERS STATED NOT TO RECEIVE
SUPPORT TO OPTIMISE THEIR
TRANSITION INTO A POST-PLAYING
CAREER.

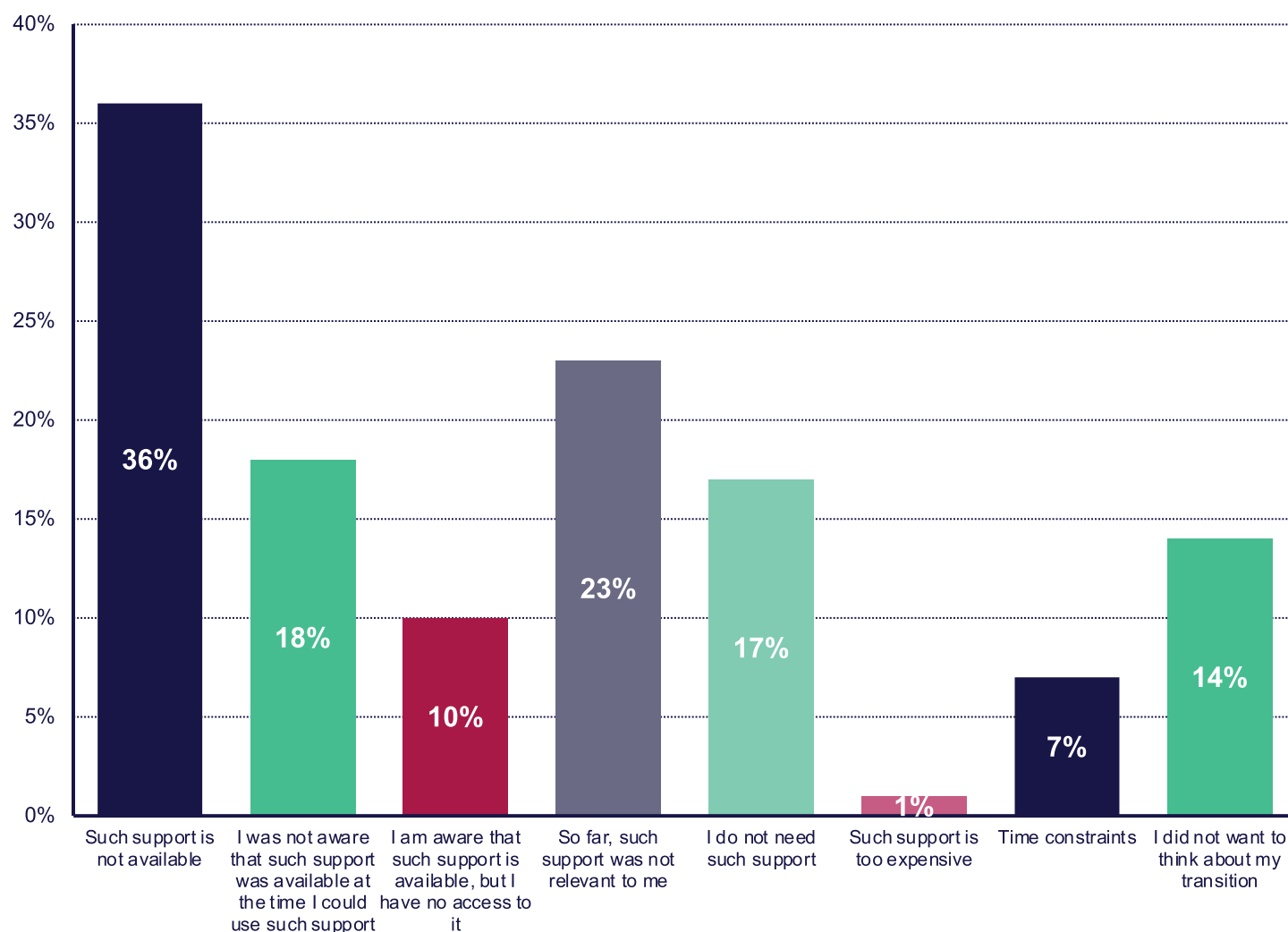


REASONS PLAYERS DID NOT RECEIVE SUPPORT

The 3 main reasons for not receiving support according to the players were:

- Support was not available
- Support was not relevant
- There was no need for such support

Please note that participants were able to select multiple answers.



(n = 152)

46%

OF PLAYERS RECEIVED SUPPORT TO
OPTIMISE THEIR TRANSITION INTO A
POST-PLAYING CAREER.



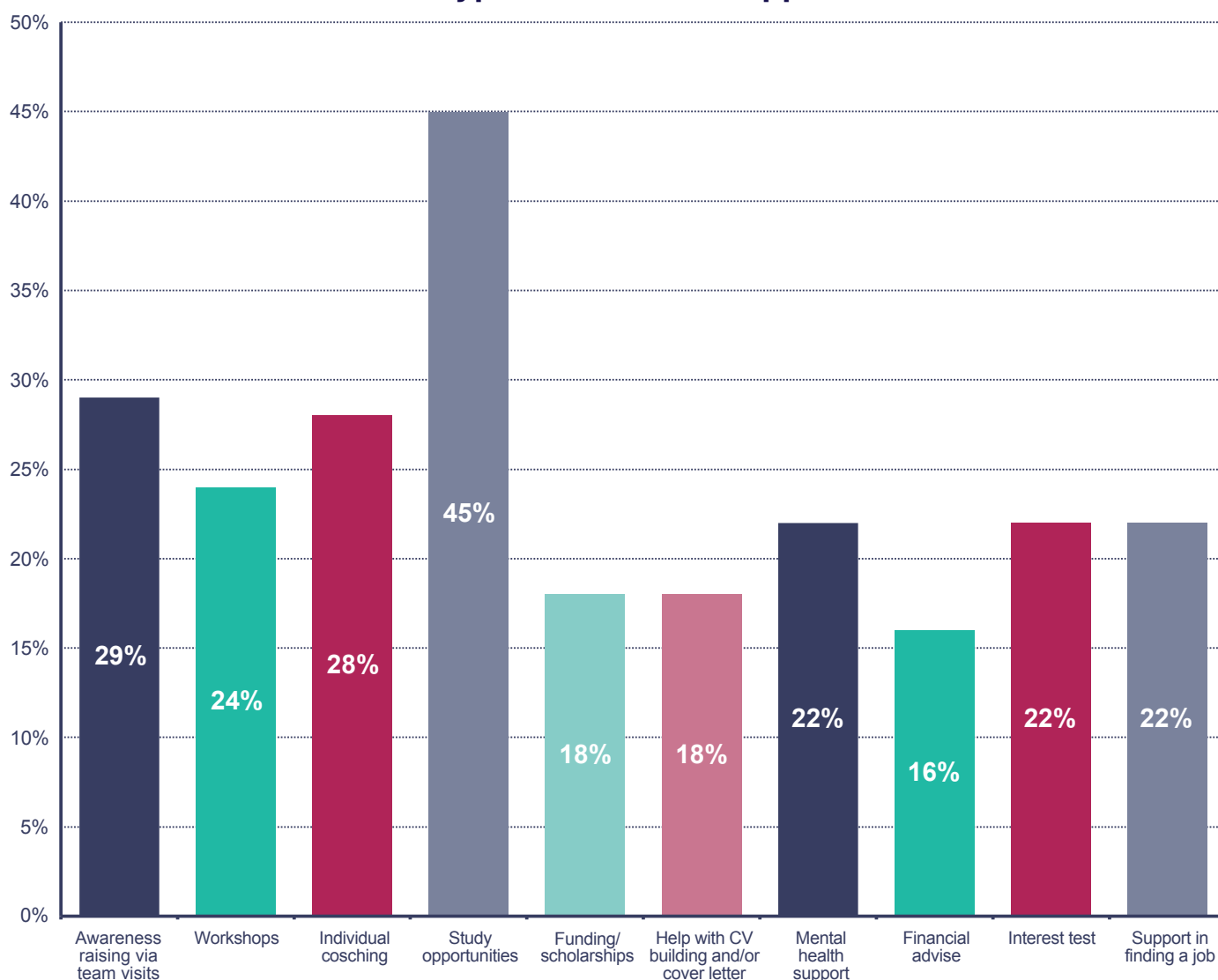
TYPES OF SUPPORT

129 players stated they received different types of support (ranked from most received to less received):

- Study opportunities
- Awareness raising via team visits
- Individual coaching
- Workshops
- Mental health support, interest test and support in finding a job
- Funding/scholarships and help with CV building and/or cover letter
- Financial advice

Please note that participants were able to select multiple answers.

Types of received support



(n = 129)

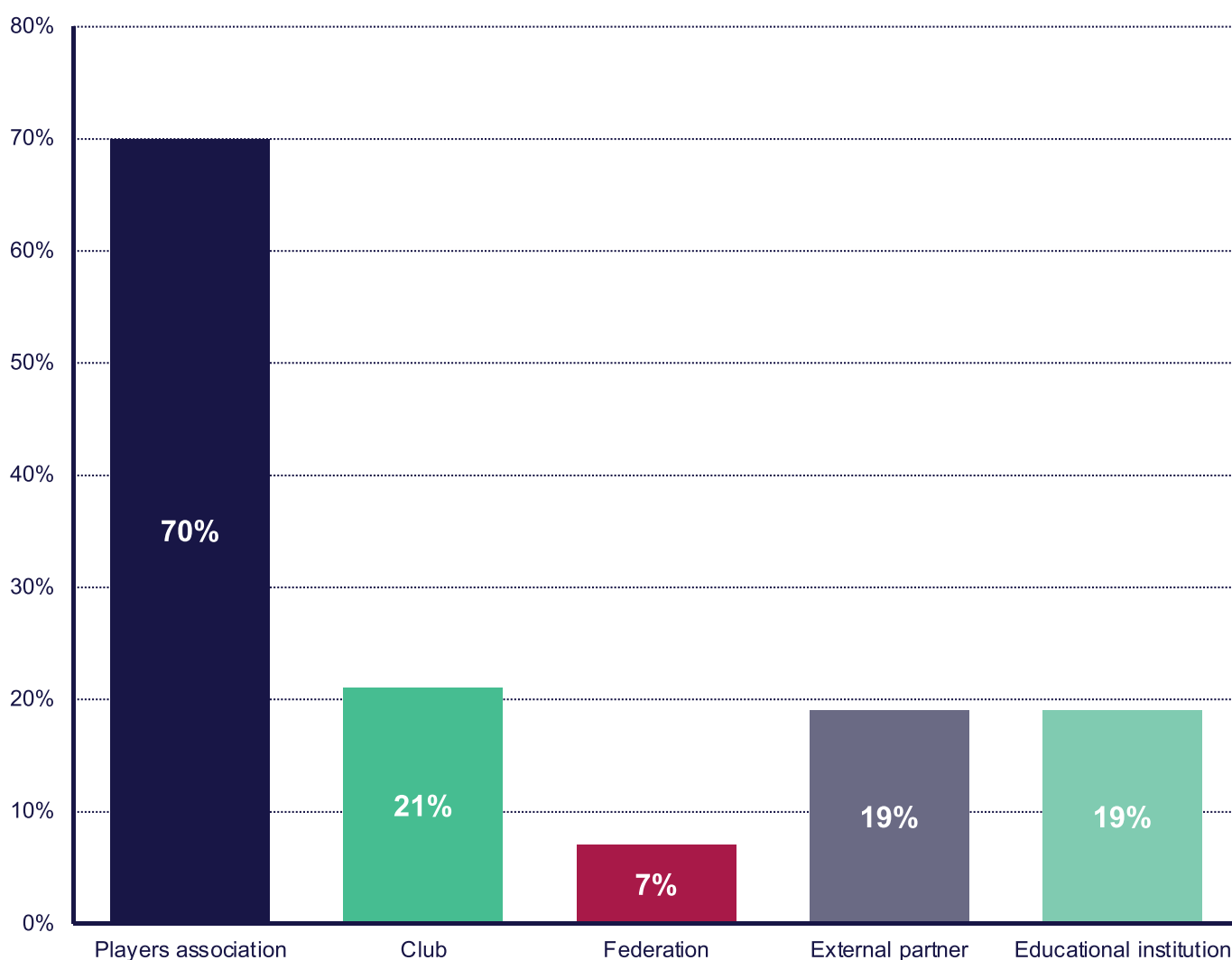


SUPPORT PROVIDERS

Of the players that received support, 70% indicated that the support was provided by the players' associations.

Please note that participants were able to select multiple answers.

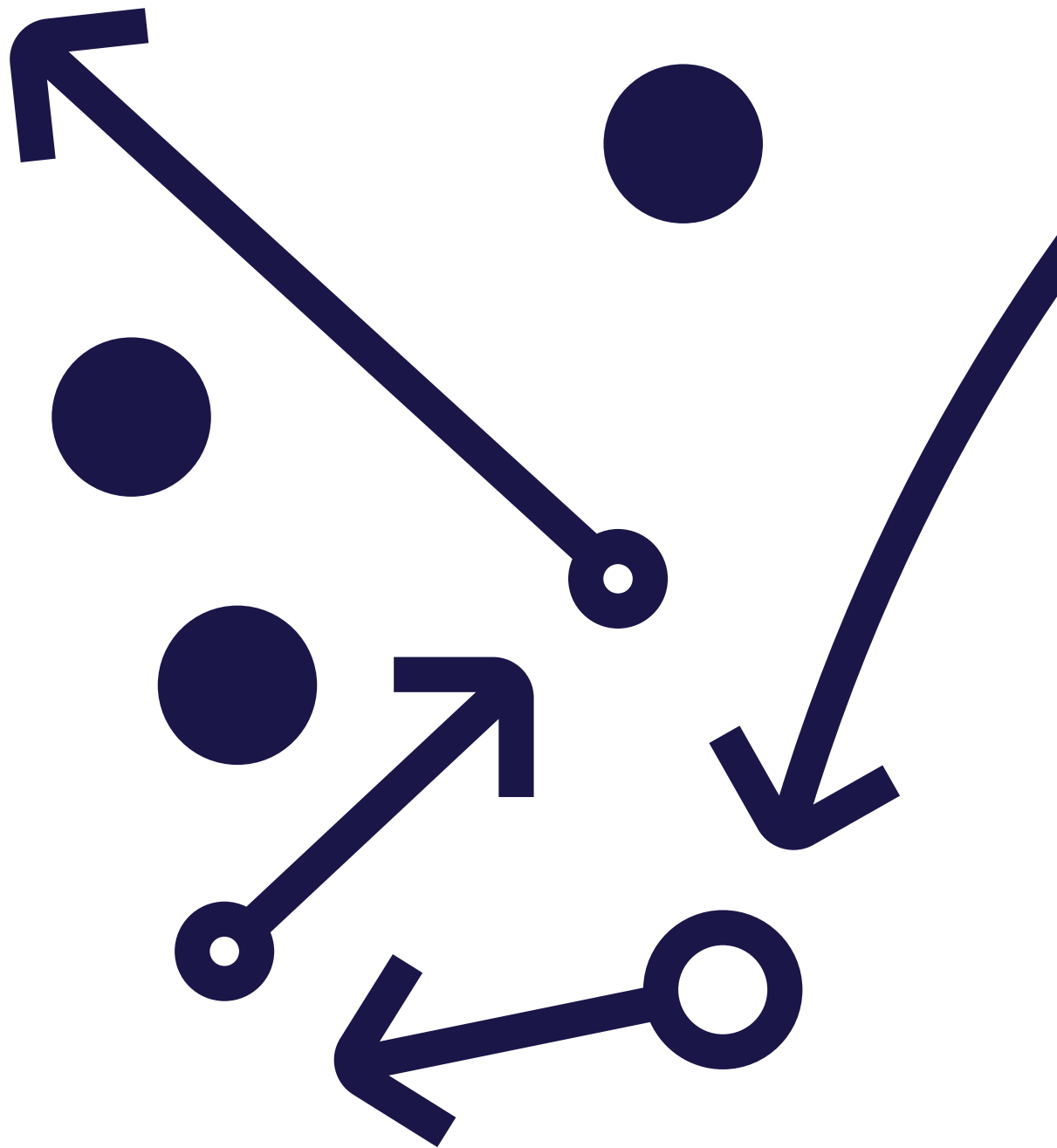
Support providers: Who provided the support?



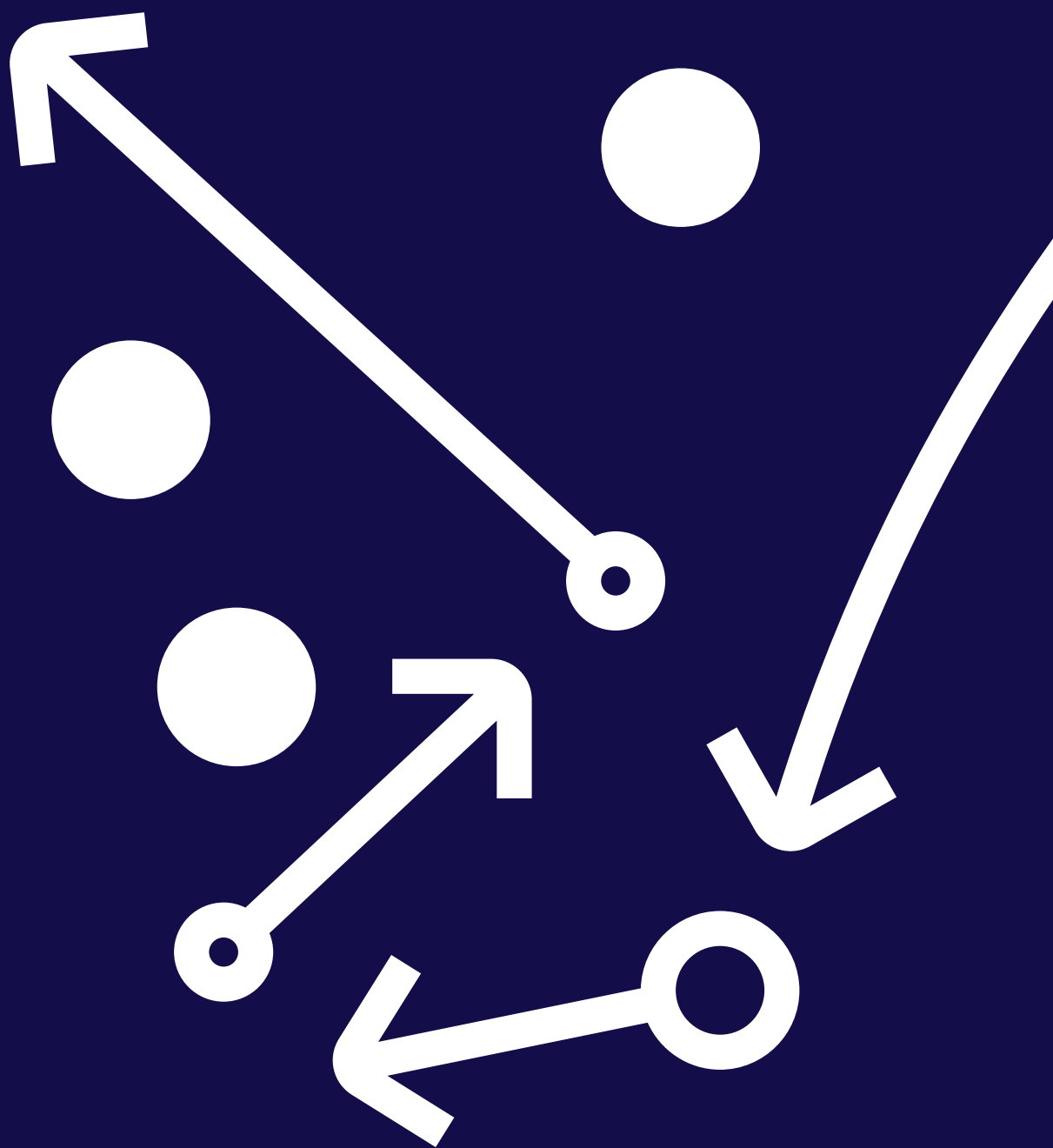
(n = 129)

"MY UNION WAS A GREAT HELP IN MAKING ME EXPLORE. GRADUALLY I FIGURED OUT I WANTED TO BE A TEACHER."

- THOMAS KORTEGAARD



WELLBEING



SATISFACTION WITH LIFE SCALE (SWLS)*

Players completed the SWLS, evaluating their perceived satisfaction with their life as a whole, by answering five statements using a 7-scale scoring system (1 – ‘strongly disagree’ to 7 – ‘strongly agree’):

- I am satisfied with my life
- The conditions of my life are excellent
- In most ways, my life is close to my ideal
- So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life
- If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing

Once the players assigned a score from 1-7 to each of the statements, a final score was tallied up with an indication of how satisfied they are overall with life:

- Extremely dissatisfied (5 - 9)
- Dissatisfied (10 - 14)
- Slightly dissatisfied (15 - 19)
- Neutral (20)
- Slightly satisfied (21 - 25)
- Satisfied (26 - 30)
- Extremely satisfied (31-35)

* Dineer, E., Emmons, R.A., Larsen, R.J., Griffin, S. (1985).
The Satisfaction With Life Scale,
Journal of Personality Assessment, 49:1, 71-75.

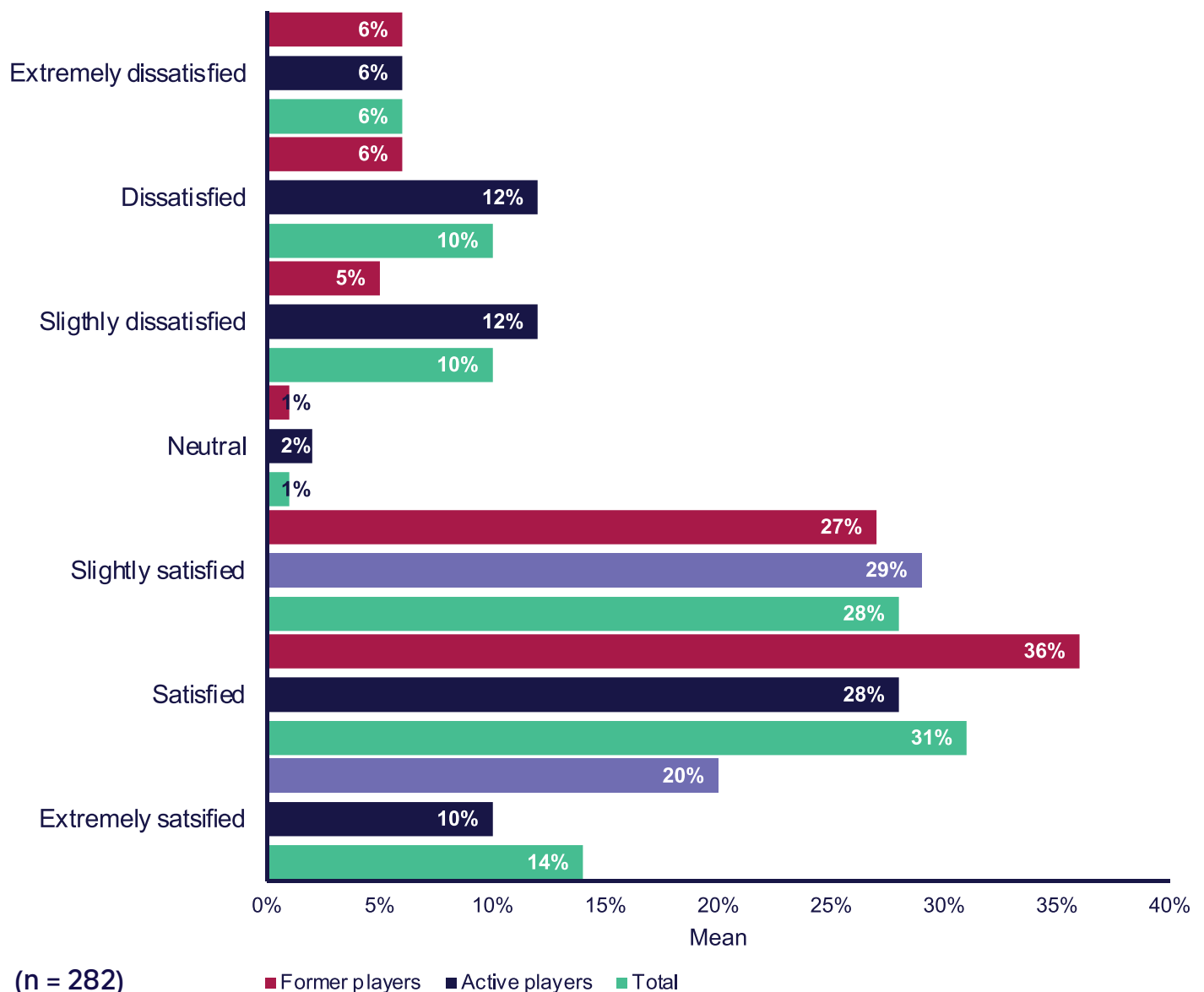




PLAYERS' GENERAL WELLBEING

Most participants indicated they are satisfied or extremely satisfied with their life. Significant differences between active and former players were found: the number of active players that has stated to be 'slightly satisfied' with their lives is significantly higher than that of former players; at the same time, the number of former players that has stated to be "extremely satisfied" with their lives is significantly higher than that of active players.

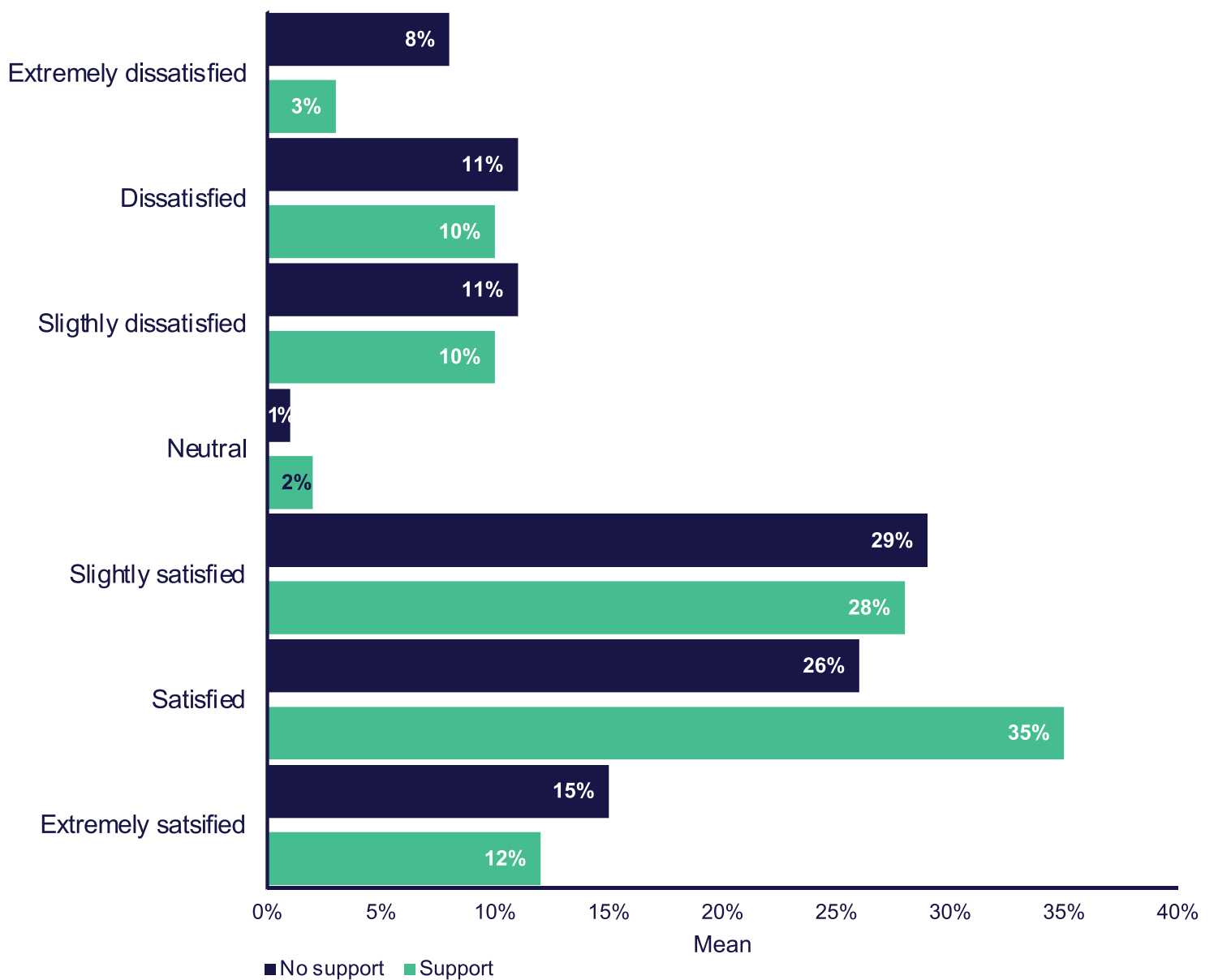
*Purple indicates a significant difference between active and former players.





PLAYERS' GENERAL WELLBEING

No significant differences were found between players who received support in their transition process and those who did not receive support.



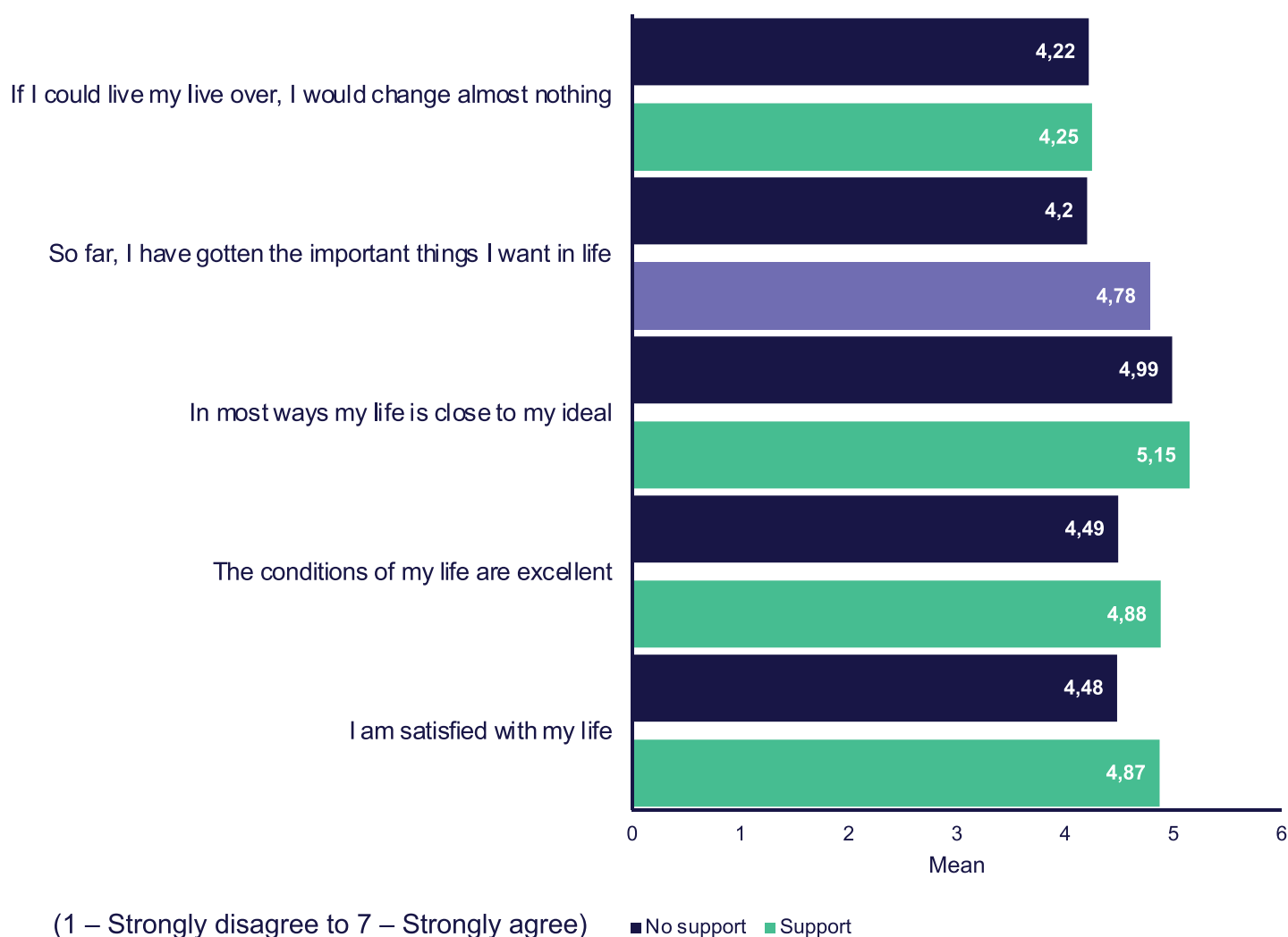
(n = 282)



PLAYERS' GENERAL WELLBEING

Descriptive statistics indicate that players who received support in their transition process agreed to a greater extent with all statements than players who did not receive support. A significant difference was found between support and not-supported players for the statement 'So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life'.

*Purple indicates a significant difference between players who received support in their transition process and those who did not receive support.



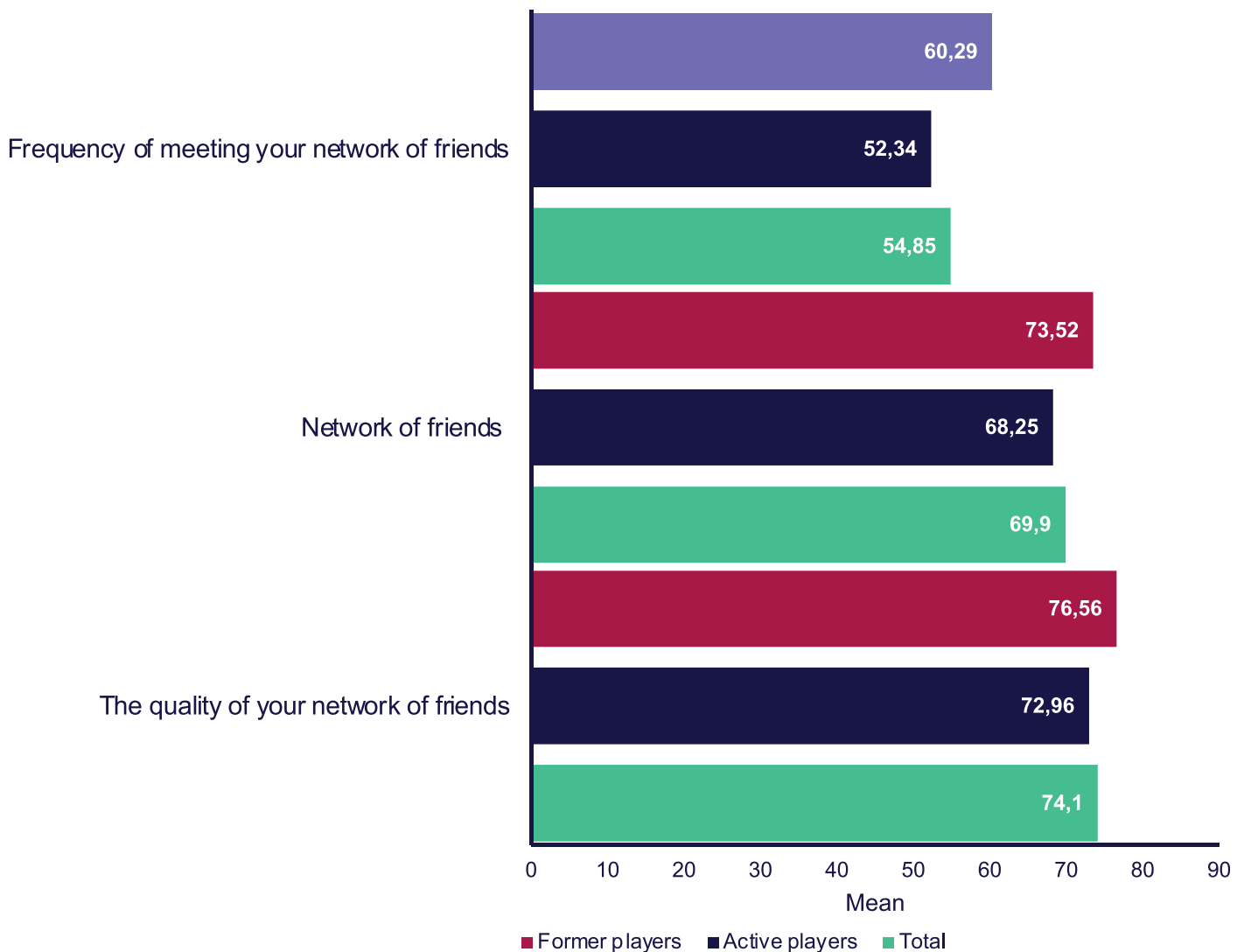
(n = 282)



PLAYERS' SOCIAL NETWORK

Descriptive statistics show that both active and former players are quite satisfied with their network of friends and the quality of it. Former players are significantly more satisfied with the frequency of meeting their network of friends than active players.

*Purple indicates a significant difference between active and former players.



(n = 282)

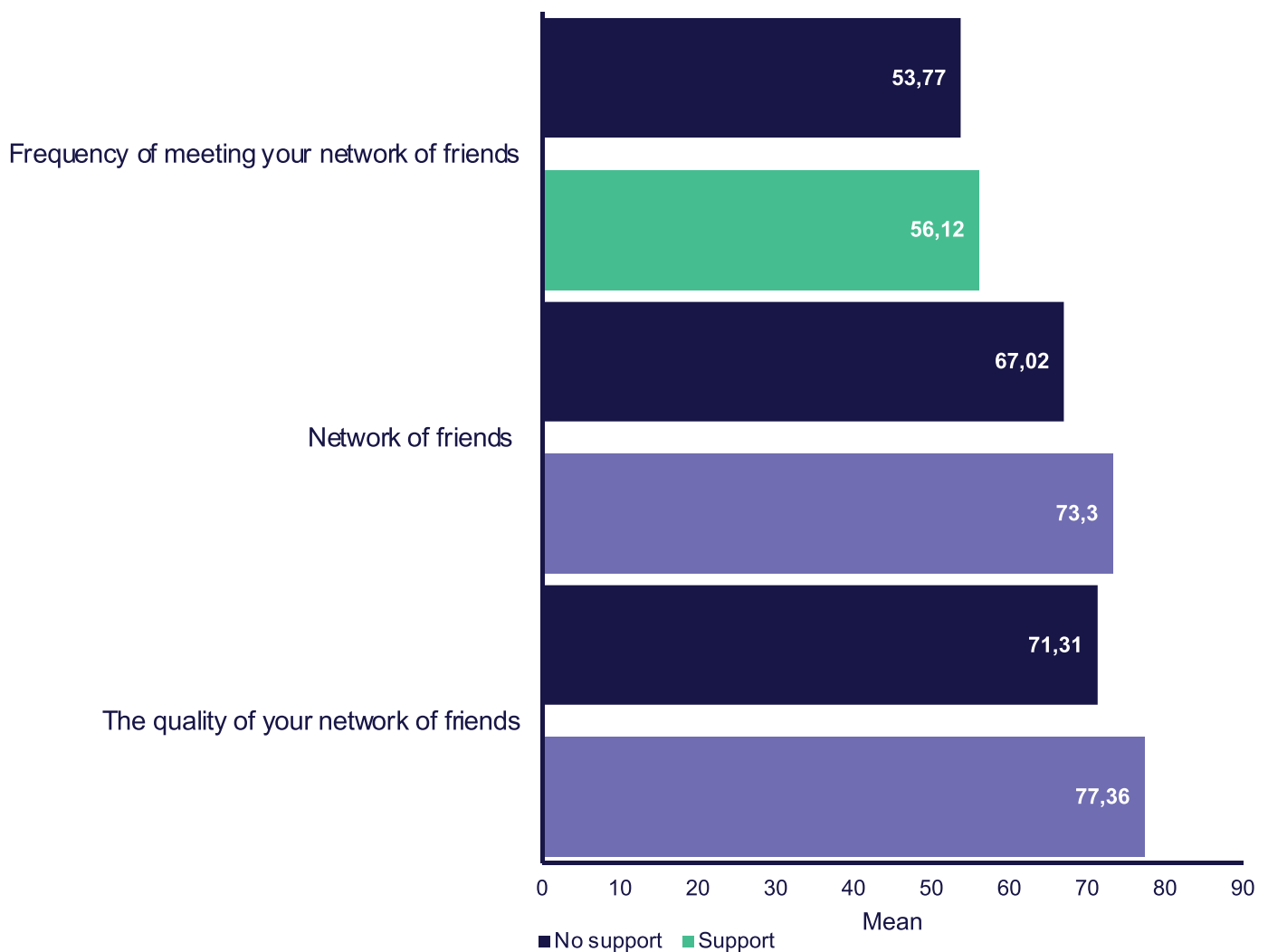
(0 – Not satisfied at all to 100 – Completely satisfied)



PLAYERS' SOCIAL NETWORK

Descriptive statistics show that both supported and non-supported players are quite satisfied with their network of friends and the quality of it. Both groups indicated a limited satisfaction with regards to the frequency of meeting their network of friends. Supported players are significantly more satisfied with their network of friends and its quality.

*Purple indicates a significant difference between players who received support in their transition process and those who did not receive support.

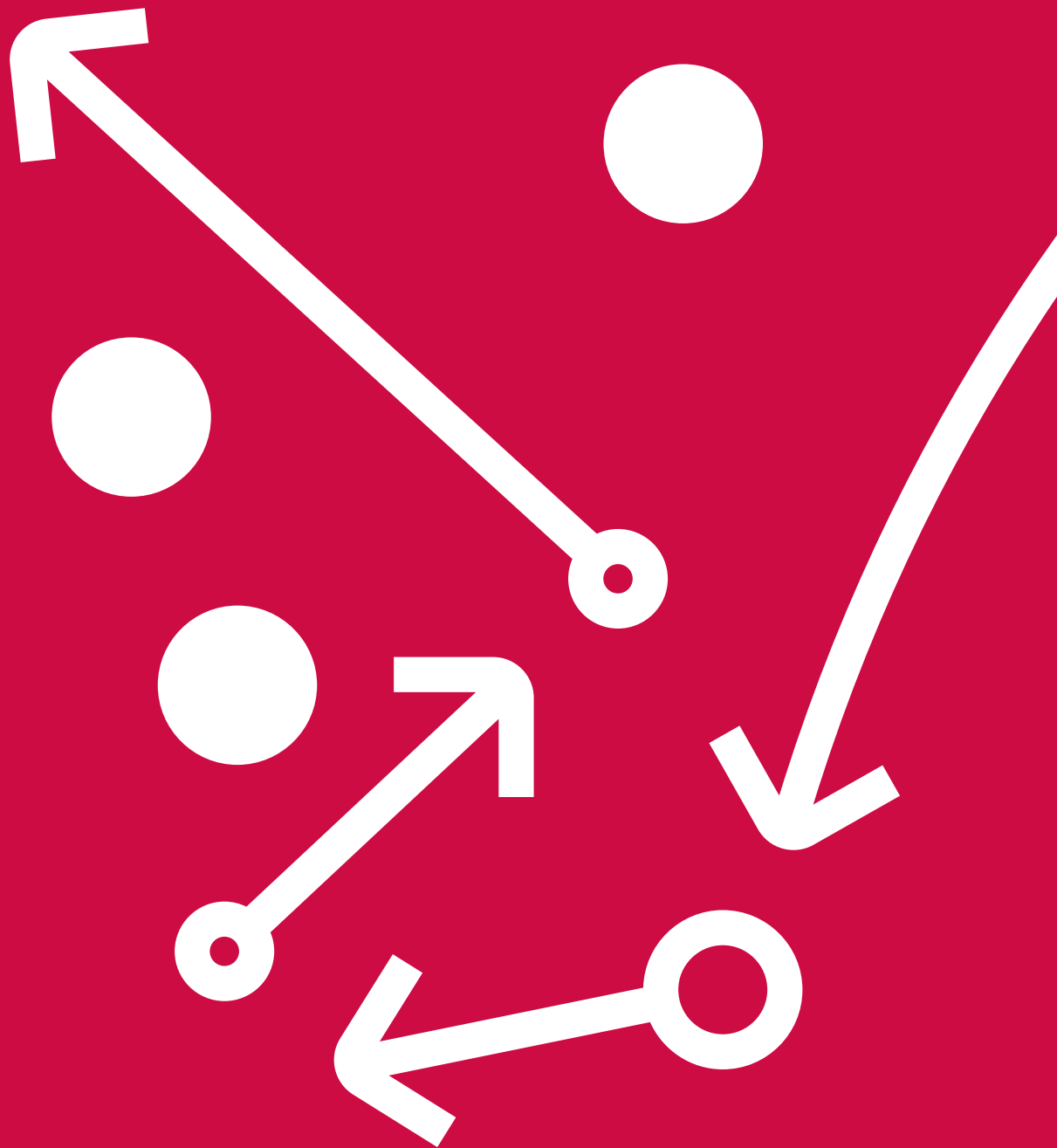


(n = 282)

(0 – Not satisfied at all to 100 – Completely satisfied)

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

**PLAYERS' PERCEIVED CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS
IN THEIR TRANSITION TO A POST-PLAYING CAREER**



BARRIERS IN PREPARING FOR A POST-PLAYING CAREER



Players reported that most of those challenges were perceived as only slightly a barrier in preparing for the transition into a post-playing career.

Players reported lack of financial resources, lack of a long-term perspective and lack of support as the most important barriers in preparing for a post-playing career.

Barrier	Total (mean)
Lack of financial resources	2.92
Lack of long-term perspective	2.81
Lack of support from organisation or professionals	2.74
Motivational problems	2.66
Time constraints	2.66
Difficulties with your (new) identity	2.58
Self-confidence issues	2.53
Injury	2.36
Social pressure	2.20
Lack of support of friends/family	1.98

(1 – Not a barrier at all to 5 – Certainly a barrier)

(n = 282)

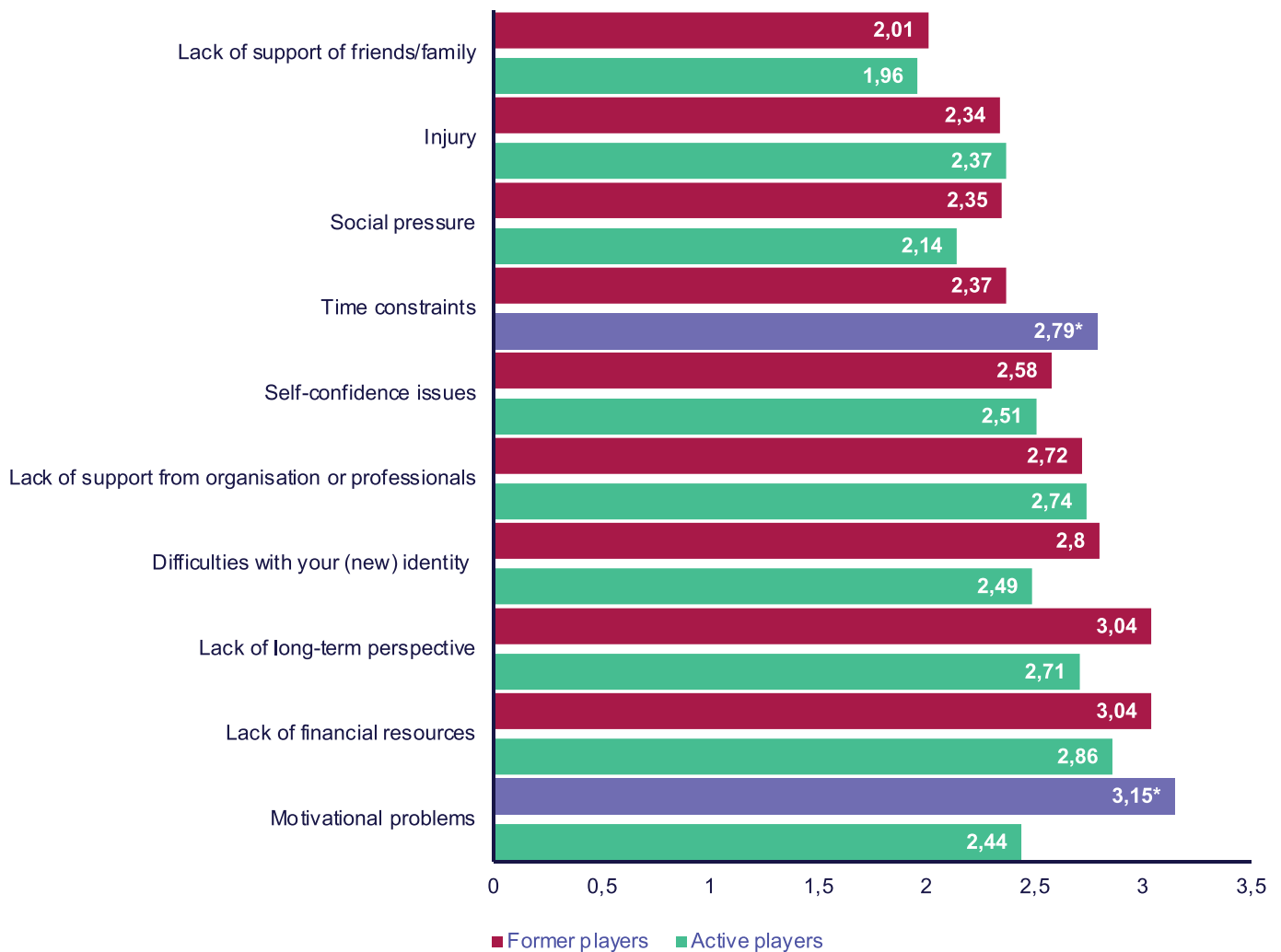


BARRIERS

While active players reported lack of financial resources, time constraints and lack of support from organisation or professionals as the most important barriers, former players indicated motivational problems, lack of financial resources and lack of long-term perspective as the most important barriers.

*Purple indicates a significant difference between active and former players.

Active vs. former players' perceived barriers



(n = 282)

(1 – Not a barrier at all to 5 – Certainly a barrier)

CHALLENGES IN PREPARING FOR A POST-PLAYING CAREER



Players reported that most of those tasks were only slightly a challenge in preparing for a post-playing career. Players indicated figuring out what kind of job to look for, creating a useful network and exploring personal interest as the most important challenges.

Challenge	Total
Figure out what kind of job to search for	2.96
Create a network that is useful for employment	2.72
Explore own personal interest regarding a post-sport career	2.69
Develop competencies needed for the job you are interested in (e.g., by reading, training, education)	2.55
Prepare for a job interview	2.39
Develop a CV	2.28

(1 – Not challenging at all to 5 – Very challenging)

(n = 282)

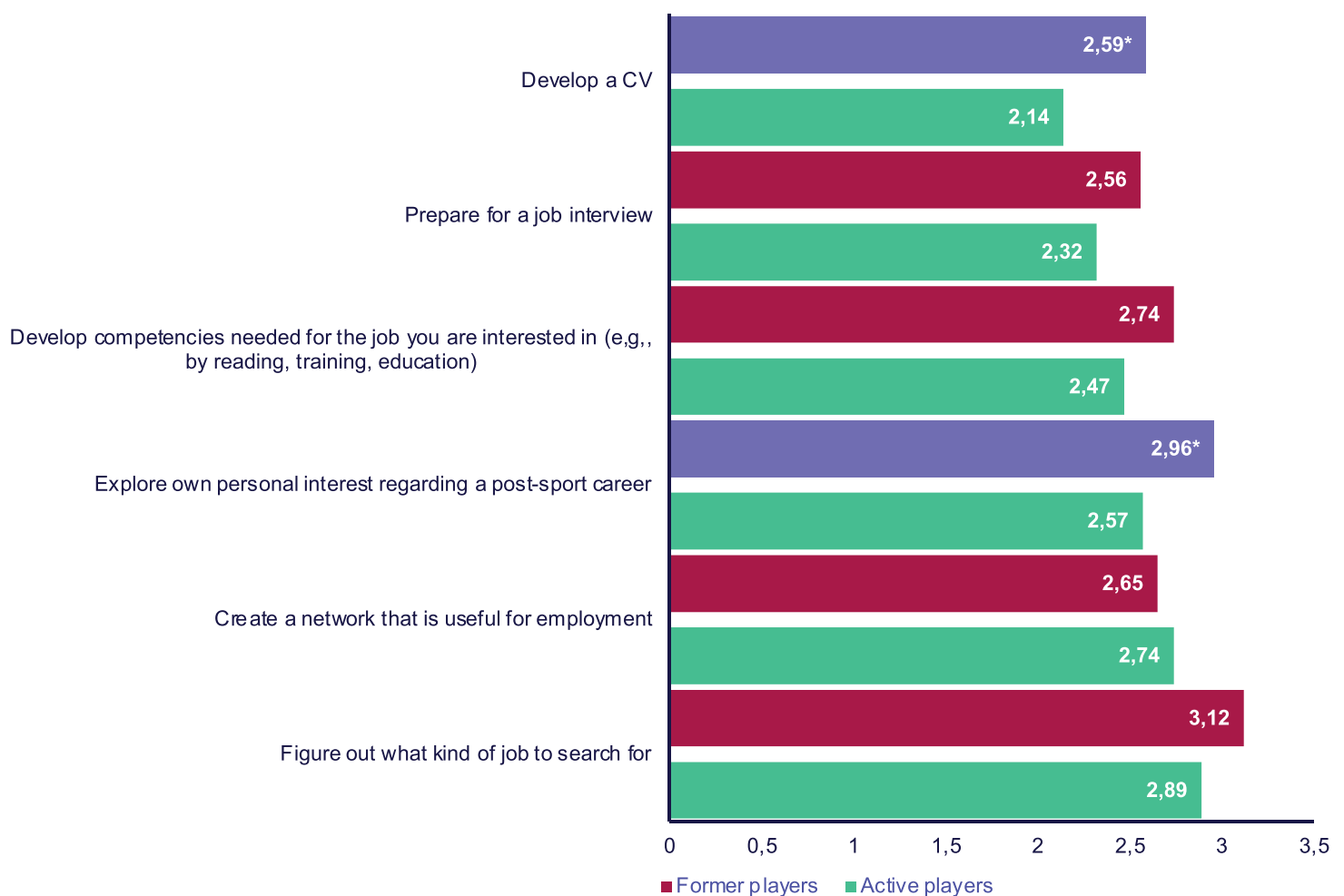


CHALLENGES

Figuring out what kind of job to search for and exploring personal interests was mentioned by both active and retired players as one of the main challenges. However, where active players listed creating a useful network as one of the main challenges, former players indicated the development of competences needed for a job.

*Purple indicates a significant difference between active and former players.

Active vs. former players' perceived challenges

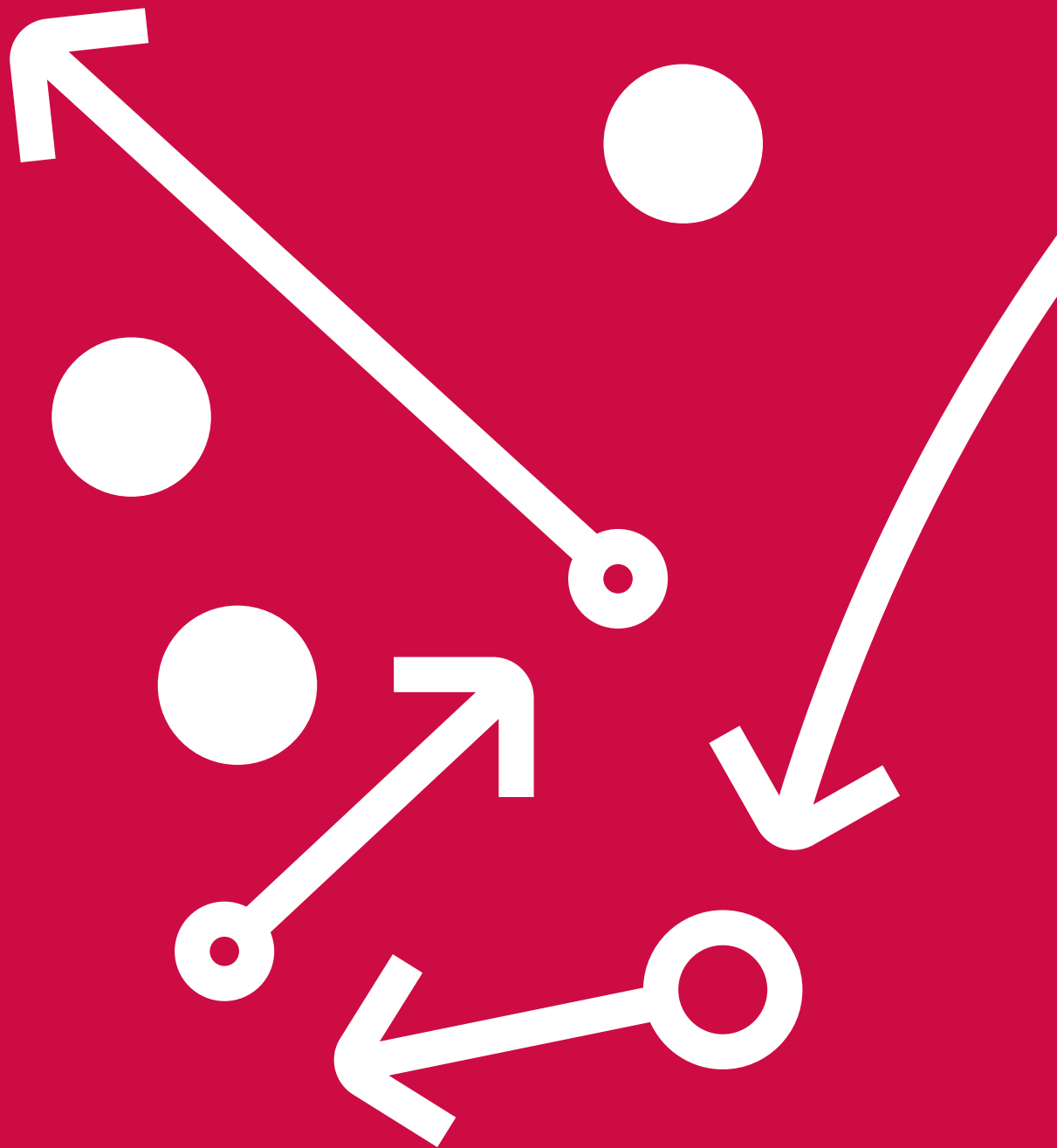


(n = 282)

(1 – Not challenging at all to 5 – Very challenging)

COMPETENCES

PLAYERS' COMPETENCIES REQUIRED TO OPTIMISE THEIR EMPLOYABILITY IN ORDER TO MAKE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO A POST-PLAYING CAREER.

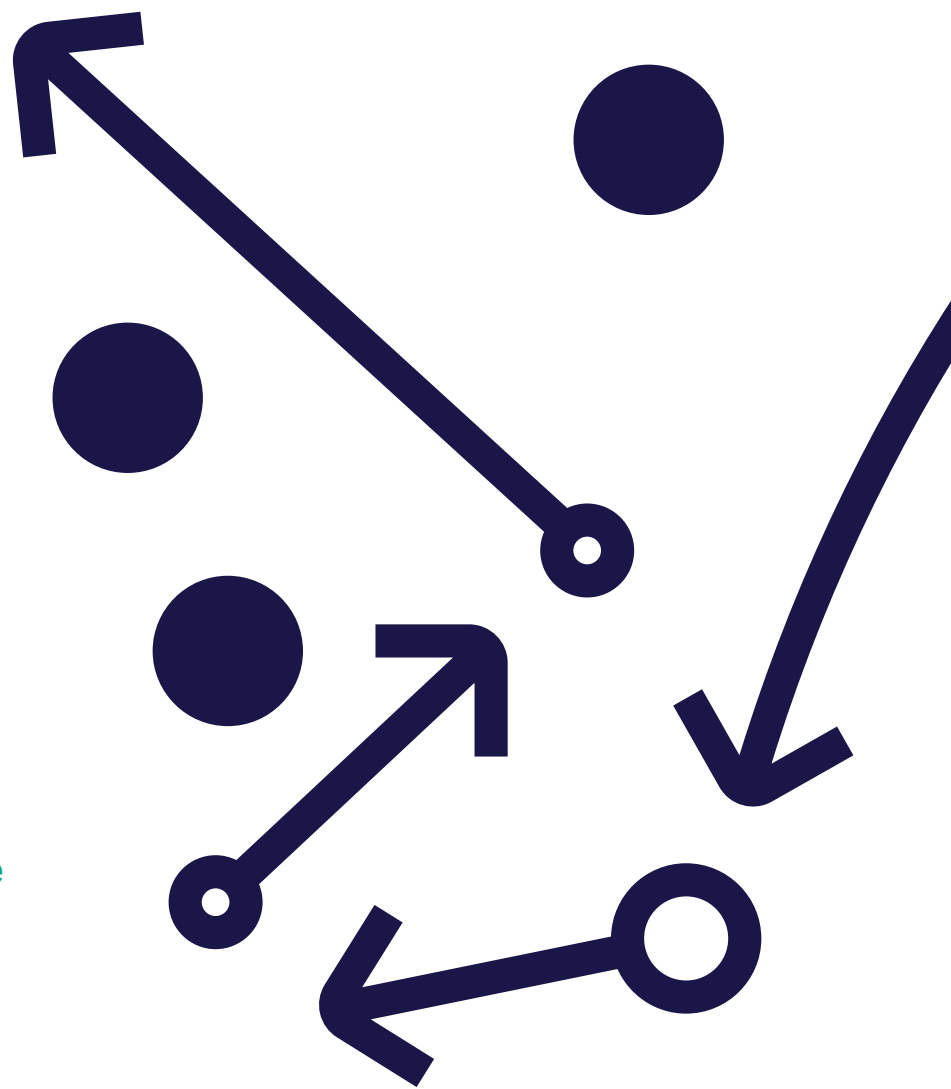


"AS A PROACTIVE APPROACH, PLAYERS SHOULD, WHILE STILL ACTIVE IN FOOTBALL, DEVELOP THOSE COMPETENCIES THAT CAN OPTIMISE THEIR TRANSITION INTO A POST-PLAYING CAREER."

- PAUL WYLLEMAN, 2019

Although employment and financial security are essential to most retiring or retired athletes, the athletes also need to have the needed competencies and skills if they are to ensure finding and maintaining employment postsport career.

The importance of former elite athletes' academic development is not only in the added value of an academic degree but also in the development of competences that retirees can use to enhance the development of a professional occupation after retirement.



THE ATHLETES' COMPETENCY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EMPLOYABILITY*

The **Athletes' Competency Questionnaire for Employability (ACQE)**,** an instrument for measuring the competencies required for athletes to optimise their employment and employability (Smismans et al., 2020), was used in order to get an insight into the players' internal resources. Such an instrument can assist athletes in monitoring their competencies and career needs (e.g., Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), and help career support providers to structure their work with active and former professional players (Baron-Thiene & Alfermann, 2015; De Brandt et al., 2018).

The ACQE consists of 28 items (i.e., skills, attitudes, knowledge) summarised in four overarching competencies required for active and former players to optimise their employment and employability:

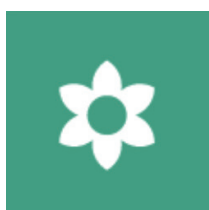
- Career & Lifestyle Management
- Career Communication
- Career Resilience
- Career Engagement & Flexibility

* Smismans, S., Wylleman, P., De Brandt, K., Defruyt, S., Vitali, F., Ramis, Y., Torregrossa, M., Lobinger, B., Stambulova, N. B., & CeciĆ Erpič, S. (2020). From elite sport to the job market: Development and initial validation of the Athlete Competency Questionnaire for Employability (ACQE). *Cultura, Ciencia y Deporte*, 16(47), 39-48.

** As outlined above, several studies investigated the competencies athletes require to cope with the different career phases leading to employment in a new career. To date, however, no valid and reliable instrument exists that measures the competencies athletes require to optimize their employability. Such an instrument can assist athletes in monitoring their competencies and career needs (e.g., Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), and help career support providers to structure their 8). The aim of this paper was therefore to develop and initially validate an instrument that measures athletes' competencies required to optimize their employability across different phases of athletic retirement. Two studies were conducted to develop and provide initial validity for this instrument. Validation of the Athlete Competency Questionnaire for Employability (ACQE). *Cultura, Ciencia y Deporte* (in press).

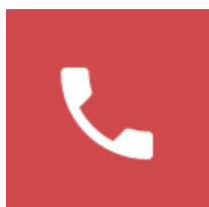
ATHLETE COMPETENCY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EMPLOYABILITY (ACQE)

Measuring active and retired athletes' competencies required to optimise their employability.



CAREER & LIFESTYLE MANAGEMENT

Organise, balance and stay committed to the combination of professional and private life



CAREER COMMUNICATION

Career awareness and interpersonal competencies to communicate effectively and build a supportive network



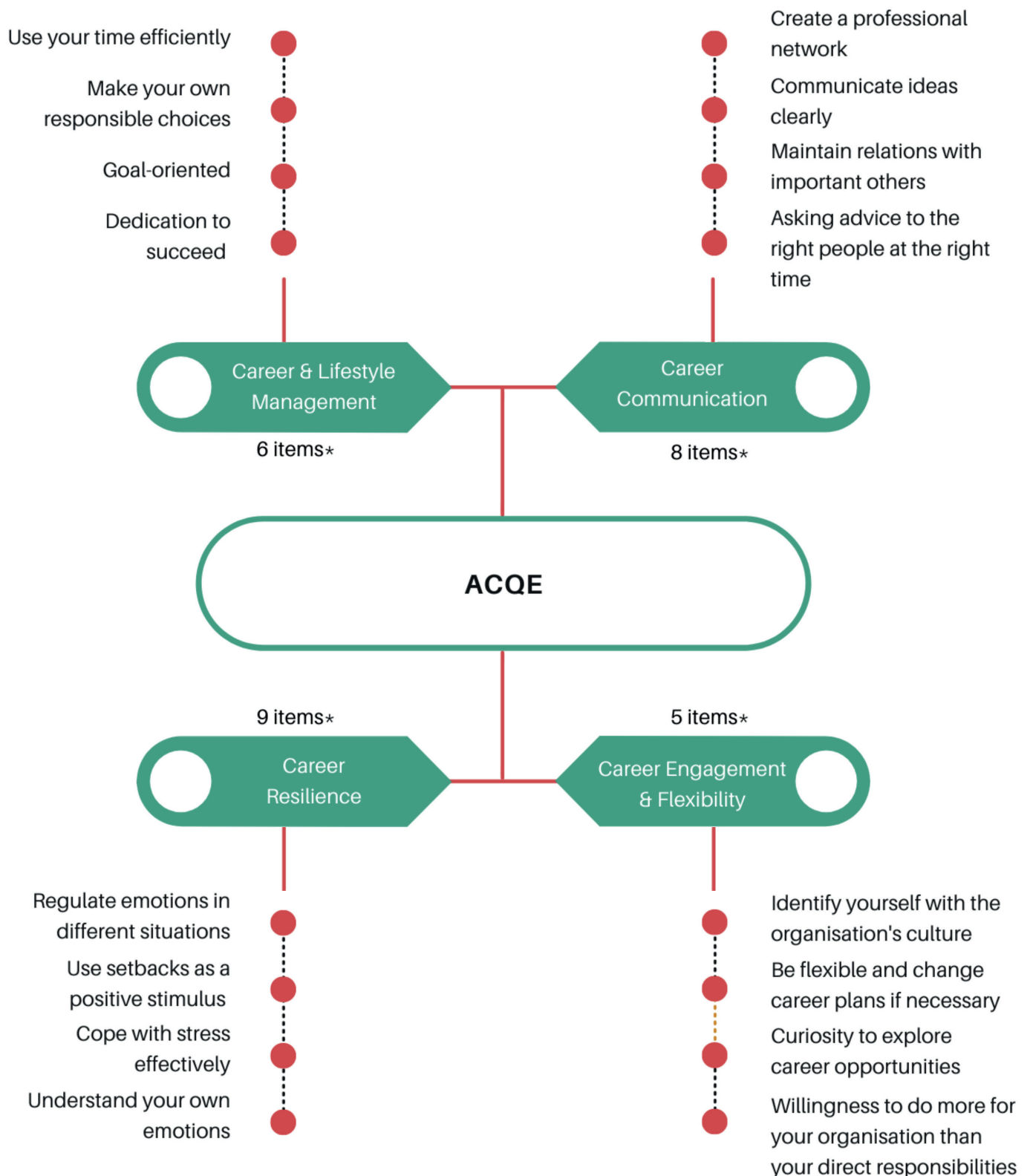
CAREER RESILIENCE

Recognise, understand and manage emotions and control and cope effectively with adversity and pressures of daily life



CAREER ENGAGEMENT & FLEXIBILITY

Be fully engaged at work and adapt to changing environments and situations



(Smismans et al., 2020)

*items represent skills, attitudes and knowledge

THE ATHLETES' COMPETENCY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EMPLOYABILITY*

Players received an email with an access link to the 28-item ACQE. Players completed the ACQE evaluating their perceived importance and possession of competencies on a 5-point Likert-type scale by answering the following questions:

- How **important** is this item for you to successfully transition into a post-playing career?
- What is your current level of **possession** of this item? ('1-very poor possession' to '5-very strong possession')

* Smismans, S., Wylleman, P., De Brandt, K., Defruyt, S., Vitali, F., Ramis, Y., Torregrossa, M., Lobinger, B., Stambulova, N. B., & CeciĆ Erpič, S. (2020). From elite sport to the job market: Development and initial validation of the Athlete Competency Questionnaire for Employability (ACQE). *Cultura, Ciencia y Deporte*, 16(47), 39-48.



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MIND THE GAP

ACTIVE PLAYERS

Top 5 ranking possession

- 1 I am able to collaborate with colleagues
- 2 I am aware of my own strengths and limitations
- 3 I am goal-oriented
- 4 I believe in my own ability to overcome challenges
- 5 I am willing to do more for my organisation than my direct responsibilities

Lowest 5 ranking possession

- 1 I cope with stress effectively
- 2 I engage in in-depth discussions in my work
- 3 I am curious to explore career opportunities
- 4 I am able to be flexible and change career plans if necessary
- 5 I am able to create a professional network

FORMER PLAYERS

Top 5 ranking possession

- 1 I am able to collaborate with colleagues
- 2 I am aware of my own strengths and limitations
- 3 I identify myself with the culture of my organisation
- 4 I am goal-oriented
- 5 I am able to lead a group of people

Lowest 5 ranking possession

- 1 I am able to create a professional network
- 2 I remain self-confident after mistakes
- 3 I use my time efficiently
- 4 I am able to be flexible and change career plans if necessary
- 5 I am curious to explore career opportunities



FOOTBALL PLAYERS' PERCEIVED POSSESSION OF THE 28 ACQE-ITEMS*

A significant difference was found between active and former players. For all the 13 items showed in the graph, former players perceived their possession of the competencies listed significantly higher than active players.

* items = skills, attitudes, knowledge

Significant differences between active and former players in their perceived possession of items



(n = 282)

('1-very poor possession' to '5-very strong possession')







AVERAGE PERCEIVED POSSESSION AND IMPORTANCE OF THE ACQE-COMPETENCIES

Players reported an average to strong possession of the four competencies required to optimise their employability. The players' average perceived possession in relation to the perceived importance awarded to the four competencies highlights the need for players to (further) invest in their competency development to maximise their chances for a successful transition into a post-playing career.

Average perceived importance & possession of the 4 ACQE-competencies

TOTAL

ACQE - Competencies		Importance	Possession
	Career & Lifestyle Management	4,16	3,67
	Career Communication	4,06	3,61
	Career Resilience	4,14	3,67
	Career Engagement & Flexibility	3,90	3,58

(n = 282)



FOOTBALL PLAYERS' PERCEIVED POSSESSION OF COMPETENCIES

Players reported an average to strong possession of the four competencies required to optimise their employability. Descriptive statistics indicate that former professional players perceive their possession of the four competencies stronger than active professional players. No significant differences were found between active and former players with regard to the four competencies.

Active vs. former players' perceived possession of competencies



(n = 282)

('1-very poor possession' to '5-very strong possession')

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