What is the purpose of the following fact sheet?
The purpose of this factsheet is to define what “athletic identity” is, to underline the importance of this issue in the light of career transitions, and to show how it can influence not only sports performance, but also the quality of athlete’s retirement. Then, ways to maximise the positive effects of the identity change occurring at career termination will be illustrated.

What is “athletic identity”?  
Every person has different “identities”. In fact, someone perceives you mainly as a colleague or a friend (your social self), for others you are an old schoolmate (your academic self), another sees you as the younger brother (your family self) etc. Among these different identities (or roles), your athletic identity is the way you perceive and feel about your sporting role, which comprises your goals, values, thoughts and sensations related to your sport.

Why is it important to examine athletic identity in light of my career after retirement?  
For many top athletes, athletic identity is central, as they dedicate 100% of their resources and time to the pursuit of their sporting goals. In such cases, it means that they choose to put their schooling and professional training on hold. As a result, top athletes might experience identity foreclosure that becomes detrimental to their personal development beyond sport. There is indeed a risk that an exclusive identification with the athletic role and goals has negative consequences on the transition process.

Be aware that a transition out of sport implies identity change: when putting an end to their sporting career, athletes lose an important part of themselves. In the case of identity foreclosure, the loss of their sporting role dramatically increases the intensity of the identity crisis.

What can I do to maximise positive effects of identity change in the transition out of sport?  
Studies have shown that athletes with a strong and exclusive athletic identity: a) experience greater difficulties in adjusting to life after sport; b) need more time to adjust emotionally and socially to the identity change; c) are more at risk of using ineffective coping strategies for identity change.

To help you face identity change upon your athletic retirement, it is strongly recommended that you:

1) Reduce your exclusive identification with your sporting role and expand your self-identity to other pursuits (professional, associative, social, alternative roles in the sports federation, etc.). This will reduce the pressure during your sporting career and facilitate your transition out of sport.

2) Discover interests and competences for other activities beyond sport. This will foster your efficiency in alternative roles and your confidence in exploring other fields.
3) Acquire solid stress management and time management skills. Such skills will represent tools that help you better reconcile sport with your other roles, such as going to school, and keeping social activities.

4) Prepare adequately for your career outside sport, instead of waiting until after your sports career to pursue non-sport skills. By continuing to keep track of other aspects of your life besides your sport, you will minimise the shock experienced at the moment that you retire from sport.

5) Nurture relationships with coaches, managers and family members who care about your sporting success as well as your personal growth. Being supported by significant others to consider other avenues in life will help you keep an open mind and diversify your identity.