



ATHLETICS
NORTHERN IRELAND

STRATEGY

2023-2028



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Athletics, as defined in the rules and regulations of World Athletics, includes track and field, race walking, road, cross-country, fell, hill, mountain, trail and ultra-running.

Young and old, beginner to elite, for pleasure and career goals, our sport has so much to offer, indeed we are privileged to be custodians of athletics entering into a new strategic plan from 2023-2028. The breadth of athletics is its beauty and is perhaps what attracted us all to the Sport; however, in its beauty lies the greatest challenge. How do we cater for all ensuring high quality experience across every discipline and at all levels whilst:

- showing a duty of care to all
- ensuring everyone achieves their desired outcomes and personal goals
- ensuring everyone feels safe, respected, recognised and valued
- delivering effectively against the expectations of our members, partners, and funders.

It is also important to remember that sport and the wider economy is still recovering from the Covid 19 pandemic. We also face a cost-of-living crisis, which is squeezing budgets everywhere. Energy and insurance prices alongside all other rising costs are putting all organisations and households under financial strain. This ultimately effects the income generation of our sport which in turn puts pressure on our strategy to clearly prioritise where investment should be made across the whole sport. These are difficult times where only a clear strategic approach working together with partners will allow us to continue to deliver athletics successfully.

THE VISION FOR

2028

The overarching aim of this strategy is to unite the athletics community, fully accept the challenges and working together, navigate the next five years with a clear sense of purpose to achieve stability and success for the good of the sport we all love. We must prioritise the future by making difficult decisions now, but for the betterment in the long run, through agreement and clear direction on the way forward.

In the coming years we will see an invigorated and supported club community who operate as a family and will enjoy the wider social and physical benefits of the sport, whilst developing the next generation of emerging talented and committed athletes & volunteers.

We will have a suite of new and existing committees that will be driven through excellent volunteers that understand the current difficult landscape and are inspired to work alongside our staff to ensure the sport is fit for the future. These committees will keep us in touch with the needs of the members and in line with our strategy and values through supportive check and challenge and an enhanced capacity to achieve more.

A visible step change in our competition offer, with more exciting and relevant competitions with new and existing members of the sport inspired to get involved or continue in many cases lifelong dedication as athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators.

Alongside all of this we will focus on the development of "Our People" (Staff, Coaches, Officials, Volunteers, Performance Teams and Athletes) as the lifeblood and future of the sport.

The consultation with our stakeholders carried out in 2023 has shaped this strategic document which will help ensure we meet the challenges ahead. A summary of this consultation can be found in Appendix One.

OUR PURPOSE AND VISION

To **inspire** more athletes of all abilities and backgrounds to fulfil their potential, have a lifelong love for the sport, and ensure an inclusive sport where everyone belongs and can flourish.

Alongside this we aim to unite the athletics community to overcome the current challenges and work collaboratively to safeguard the sport for the future.

OUR MISSION

We seek to increase participation and performance success in athletics at all levels and across all disciplines, ensuring a positive and enjoyable experience for all. We will provide opportunities and enter into partnerships that will inspire and empower organisations and individuals of all ages, genders, races and abilities to achieve their full potential. In everything we do we will focus on safety, wellbeing, equality and positive social impact.

OUR VALUES

We integrate our core values throughout Athletics Northern Ireland in order to build trust, guide behaviours, and maintain a culture that supports achievement of our agreed objectives.



INTEGRITY

Everyone involved in our sport will be respected and treated fairly with a focus on positive relationships, facilitating inclusion, collaboration, mutual support and empowerment.



ACCOUNTABILITY

Everyone involved will be clear about their responsibility to deliver in their role, and to report performance accurately and promptly. All decision making will be clearly communicated and aligned to the strategy.



TRANSPARENCY

We will share relevant information, to support trust and alignment. Equally where confidentiality is necessary, we will operate discretion to protect our staff, members and the sport as a whole.



EXCELLENCE

We will plan, act, reflect, and really listen, to drive innovation and continual improvement. We will ensure our policies and procedures are fit for purpose and consistently applied.



FUN

We want people to feel excited and inspired by our sport, in a safe environment with fun and enjoyment at the heart of athletics.

Based on the results of our consultation and assessment of the current context in which the sport is operating the following areas of focus have been identified and will be the framework for the new strategy. These will be cross cutting themes organisationally and everyone will have a part to play in delivering against these key areas although some staff teams and committees will lead in particular areas under the direction of the CEO.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

RUN - JUMP - THROW - PUSH

1: FOUNDATIONS & VALUES



GOVERNANCE

Finance, Systems, Data, Governance Code, Compliance, Mem & Arts



INTEGRITY

Safeguarding, Welfare, Wellbeing, EDI, Anti-doping, Environmental Sustainability



VALUES

Integrity, Accountability, Transparency, Excellence, Fun

2: DELIVERING OUR MISSION

Athletics Northern Ireland will focus on six key areas on our Journey To 2028 underpinned by key Governance actions.

3: PURPOSE & VISION

Inspire more athletes of all abilities and backgrounds to fulfil their potential, have a lifelong love for the sport, and ensure an inclusive sport where everyone belongs and can flourish.

Unite the athletics community to overcome the current challenges and work collaboratively to safeguard the sport for the future.

INSPIRATION



COMMUNICATION
(INTERNAL,
EXTERNAL)



PARTNERSHIPS
(CLUBS
& STAKEHOLDERS)



PEOPLE
DEVELOPMENT



COMMERCIAL



PATHWAYS
(PLAYGROUND
TO PODIUM)



JOURNEY TO
2028

THE JOURNEY TO 2028

OUR PURPOSE AND VISION

UNITE

Unite the athletics community

INSPIRE

Inspirational winning performances will help us fulfil our purpose

OUR FOUNDATIONS AND VALUES

GOVERNANCE

Focus on ensuring the right systems, policies and procedures are in place to ensure smooth running of the sport, financial sustainability and compliance with the Governance code in Northern Ireland.

INTEGRITY

Focus on a safe, fair, sustainable sport that is inclusive and respectful to all and the environment.



DELIVERING OUR MISSION

INSPIRATION

Focused on how we create and harness the impact of Olympic and Commonwealth Games success and success in non-Olympic disciplines at World level to inspire the next generation and grow the athletics community. Celebrating success at national senior, masters and age-group championships level to grow the sport at all levels.

PATHWAY (PLAYGROUND TO PODIUM)

Focused on maximising the impact of the athletics curriculum within schools and clubs to ensure positive first experience and lifelong participation. Aligned curriculum between clubs and our academies to ensure smooth transition into Academies & Squads and collaborative development of future and current talent.

PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT

Ensuring focus on our "People" and providing access to bespoke and needs led development opportunities, enabling excellent delivery across the whole sport and rewarding and recognising good practice.

PARTNERSHIPS

A focus on delivering in collaboration with our key partners to enhance the quality of our delivery and achieve greater impact with a particular emphasis on our clubs.

COMMERCIAL

Focused on the growth of athletics to safeguard the future and ensure the wider social and physical benefits of lifelong engagement in the sport are sustainable.

COMMUNICATION

Focus on keeping all relevant internal and external parties informed of success, progress, challenges and good news stories on an ongoing and regular basis to grow good relations.

INSPIRATION		
We will focus on/Actions		Performance Indicators
Olympic and Commonwealth Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individualised support for our best performing coach-athlete pairs to progress onto GB & NI or Irish world class programmes and to produce performances on the highest stage that inspire the country. Support those capable of NI representation at Commonwealth Games. Teams will be aimed at showcasing the best of athletics in Northern Ireland. 	<p>Medals, top 8 and top 16 performances</p> <p>Number of NI competitors at major championships</p> <p>ANI CWG Team representative of NI population</p>
Non-Olympic Disciplines – Cross Country, Ultra & Mountain Running	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise that we have top-class athletes in non-Olympic disciplines that also have the power to inspire. Support athlete-coach pairs who demonstrate world class potential in these disciplines to help broaden the performance landscape of athletics. 	<p>Number of medals and top 10 performances</p> <p>Number of European and World Event competitors</p>
National level and Masters Track & Field Athletes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate inspiring success at national senior and masters level with an emphasis on inspiring more to get involved in track and field athletics. Ensure domestic competition calendar represents all athlete groups and levels in the athletics community. 	<p>Increase participation in national and masters championships by 10% per annum</p>
Age Group International Athletes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise performances in age group major championships also raise the status of athletics in Northern Ireland and can inspire the country. Ensure that talent systems have an integrated approach that puts the coach-athlete pair at the centre and support with services (SNISI) and performance management (Athletics NI). Create and seek out performance development competition opportunities appropriate to this level of athlete with a particular emphasis on track and field to ensure growth in numbers competing in track and field. 	<p>Representation in all four event groups (sprints, jumps, throws and endurance), at age group major championships 2027-28</p>

PATHWAYS (PLAYGROUND TO PODIUM)		
We will focus on/Actions		Performance Indicator
Clubs and Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create, develop and implement a simple, effective and inclusive foundation and fundamental curriculum for both schools and clubs. Support clubs and schools to develop their capacity to effectively deliver foundation and fundamental curriculums. Support clubs and schools to diversify their offer across event groups. Create, develop and deliver relevant club and school-based competition opportunities that align to relevant curriculum. Support the development of recreational runners from junior to senior through relevant programmes and partnerships. 	<p>Curriculum implementation in 40% of schools by 2028</p> <p>Number of schools & club competitive opportunities annually</p>
Academies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the development of future podium potential and senior national level domestic athletes through a simple effective and inclusive curriculum preparing robust and ready athletes across all event groups. Ensure that the Academy is promoted as a model of best practice and establish club links to create development opportunities for aspiring club coaches to avail of the Academy Curriculum, particularly for female coaches and coaches in rural areas. Create and seek out performance development competition opportunities in line with athlete development best practice. 	<p>Number of athletes on pathway programmes</p> <p>Numbers of athletes reaching Power of 10 targets</p> <p>% Satisfied athletes/coaches</p>
CWG potential (Squads)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting coach-athlete pairs at the event specialist stage with the aim of progressing athletes towards achieving medals and top eight places at the Commonwealth Games. Provide competition opportunities in line with performance targets and athlete development. 	<p>Number of athletes transitioning from academies into squads</p> <p>Number of athletes gaining selection onto the UKA Futures Programme or the Irish Carding System</p>
Podium/ Olympic Potential (Squads)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting athlete-coach pairs to operate within a performance team to achieve medals and top sixteen places at the Olympic Games, Paralympic Games and World Championships. Supporting athlete-coach pairs to gain selection onto the UKA World Class Performance Programme or the Irish Carding System at Performance level. Provide Competition opportunities in line with Performance Targets. 	<p>Number of athletes qualifying for major championship finals</p>
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear, recognised and embedded curriculum delivered across all athlete environments and event groups. Club support to integrate curriculum into context within their club setting. 	<p>Number of Clubs supported in curriculum delivery</p> <p>40% of clubs implementing ANI curriculum by 2028</p>

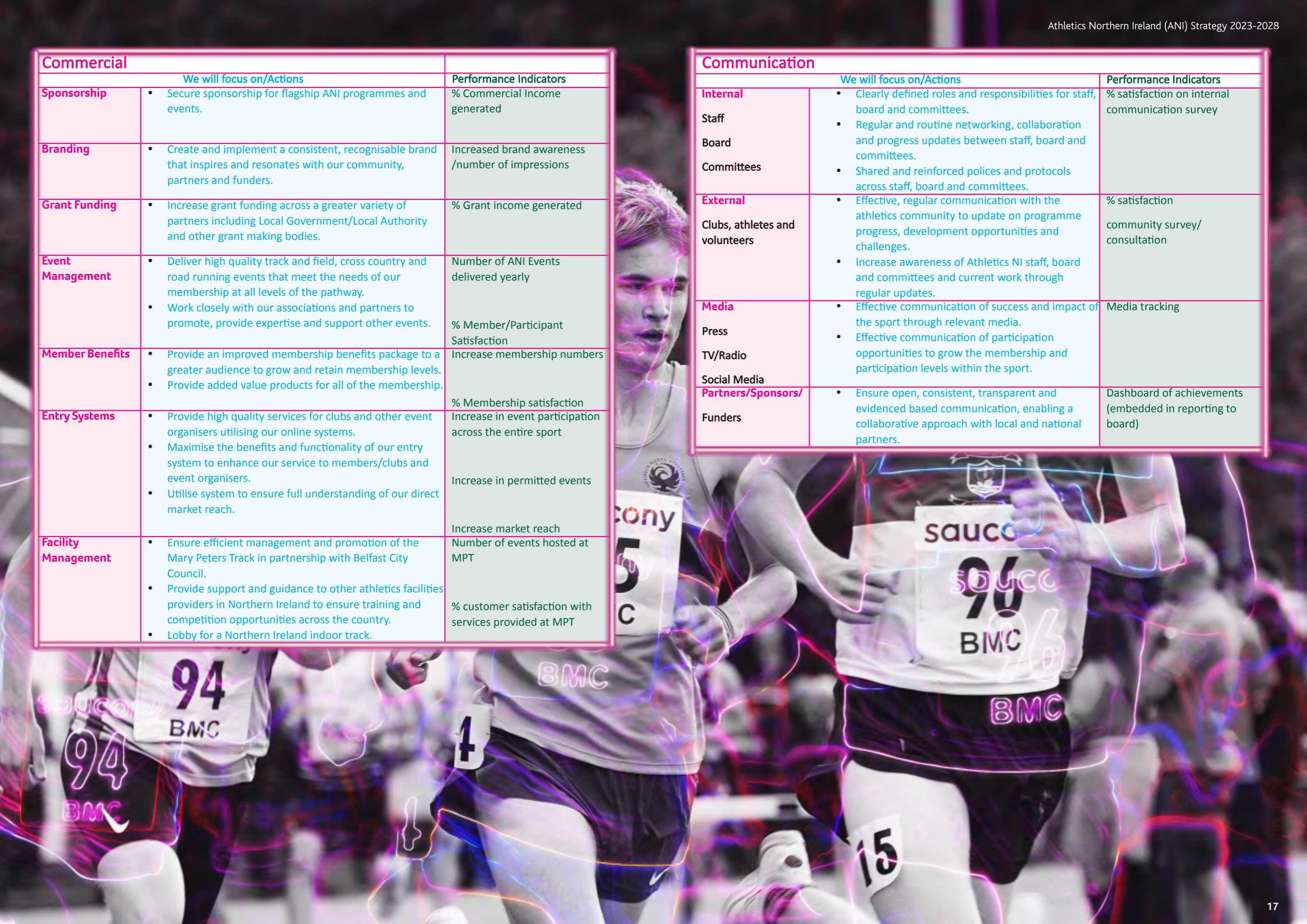
Partnerships		
We will focus on/Actions		Performance Indicators
Clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring clubs are central to what we do. Strive for positive relationships with all clubs across NI. Ensure up-to-date and detailed knowledge and understanding of club situations, personnel and club needs & aims. Support and engage clubs through regular consultation and development. 	% of satisfied clubs Number of clubs actively supported in their development Number of Clubs using club self-assessment tool
Local Authorities (LAs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alignment between LAs and ANI. A shared vision of planning and delivery. Joint investment in facilities to improve quality and quantity of projects. 	Number of 'live' partnership projects
Ulster Athletics Council/ Athletics Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing a true partnership flourishing with shared vision of success and alignment of aims and objectives. Successful delivery of joint championship events. Agreed protocol for sharing/pooling resources/reduction of duplication. Collaboration in planning and delivering. 	Number of joint championships Implementation of fresh memorandum of understanding
UK Athletics/Home Country Athletics Federations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Collaborative relationship embedded. Partnership arrangement around coach and official development. Partnership arrangement around commercial opportunities. 	Implementation of Athletics Unified partnership agreement
Sport NI/Sport NI Sports Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared vision of success. Aligned strategic plans and delivery model. Shared outcomes (to match funding to plans). Co-design of strategic plans and operational plans. Refreshed working relationship with SNI/SNISI. 	Service level agreement and project plan reporting
Universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared vision of success. Collaboration in planning and delivery. Joint investment to improve quality and quantity of facilities. Establish working agreement. 	Working agreement in place
Commonwealth Games Northern Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared vision of success. Collaboration in planning and delivery. 	Agreement on pre- games performance aims and policies
The Daily Mile (TDM)/Parkrun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustain and actively grow partnerships with The Daily Mile, Parkrun and BCM to develop running participation and endurance running at all levels. 	Proactive involvement in TDM network NI
Belfast City Marathon (BCM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting a no cost entry point to participation for schools/pupils with a focus on areas of deprivation. 	Fresh agreement for investment with BCM
Parkrun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear link and pathway to Junior Parkrun and club participation. 	Number of collaborative projects launched and/or supported
Ulster Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work collaboratively with event organisers and other partners such as Ulster Schools to support competition opportunities and enhance participation. 	% partner satisfaction (collaborative events)
Event Organisers NIMRA/NIURA /NIMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support development and participation within mountain running, ultra and masters. 	Enhance participation within these disciplines by 20% by 2028

Partnerships		
We will focus on/Actions		Performance Indicators
Paralympics Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-developed and delivered Athlete projects/plans. Sharing of resources and expertise to develop pathway to performance athletes. Open communication to reduced duplication of service. 	Increase the number of Para athletes populating the pathway by 10%

People Development		
We will focus on/Actions		Performance Indicators
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build staff capacity and seek to retain internal talent to effectively meet capacity needs of our sport. 	Number of formal and informal development opportunities
Coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create specific learning and development opportunities that meet the needs of coaches throughout the pathway. Increasing the number of coaches across all event groups. Rewarding and recognising our coaches to ensure talent/workforce is retained within the sport. 	Number of new coaches Retention of existing coaches Number of individual learning opportunities
Officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create specific learning and development opportunities that meet the needs of officials. Increased number of officials across all levels with particular emphasis on Under 40's to ensure succession planning. Rewarding and recognising our officials to ensure talent/workforce is retained within the Sport. 	Number of development opportunities delivered annually Number of officials L1- L3 20% increase in number of officials under 40 by 2028
Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More volunteers within the athletics family. Understand our volunteers' motivations and behaviours and utilise this to develop a recruitment strategy for new volunteers. Introduce tracking system for volunteers. 	Number of registered volunteers
Performance Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure ANI team personnel have access to the relevant knowledge and skills to perform effectively through learning and development opportunities. Enhancing understanding of the athletics performance environment to increase success. 	Number of Top 16 Performances
Athletes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Athlete wellbeing prioritised and holistic view to development of athletes beyond performance including support after retirement. 	New post-retirement support programme in place

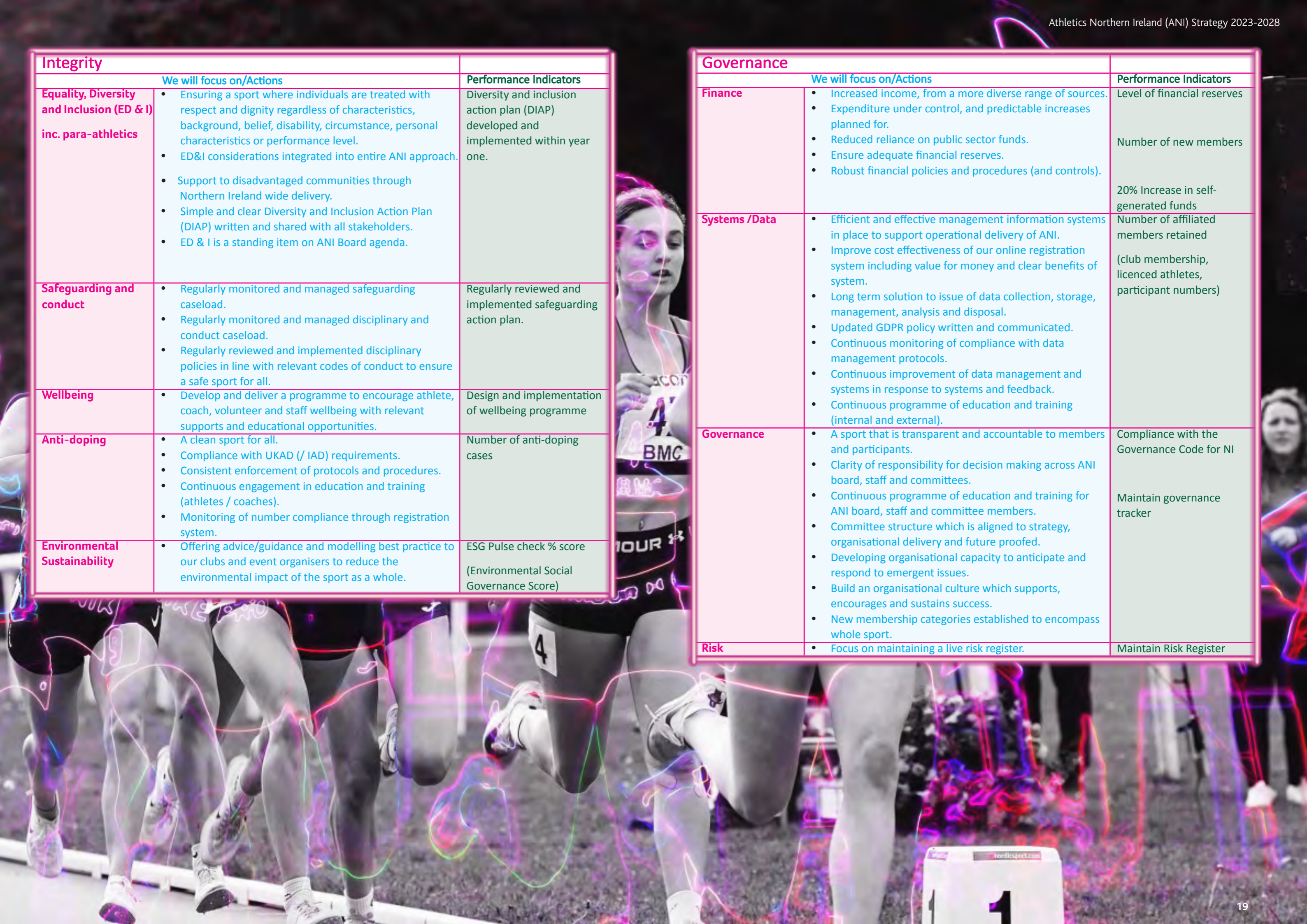
Commercial		
We will focus on/Actions		Performance Indicators
Sponsorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure sponsorship for flagship ANI programmes and events. 	% Commercial Income generated
Branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and implement a consistent, recognisable brand that inspires and resonates with our community, partners and funders. 	Increased brand awareness /number of impressions
Grant Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase grant funding across a greater variety of partners including Local Government/Local Authority and other grant making bodies. 	% Grant income generated
Event Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver high quality track and field, cross country and road running events that meet the needs of our membership at all levels of the pathway. Work closely with our associations and partners to promote, provide expertise and support other events. 	Number of ANI Events delivered yearly % Member/Participant Satisfaction
Member Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide an improved membership benefits package to a greater audience to grow and retain membership levels. Provide added value products for all of the membership. 	Increase membership numbers % Membership satisfaction
Entry Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide high quality services for clubs and other event organisers utilising our online systems. Maximise the benefits and functionality of our entry system to enhance our service to members/clubs and event organisers. Utilise system to ensure full understanding of our direct market reach. 	Increase in event participation across the entire sport Increase in permitted events Increase market reach
Facility Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure efficient management and promotion of the Mary Peters Track in partnership with Belfast City Council. Provide support and guidance to other athletics facilities providers in Northern Ireland to ensure training and competition opportunities across the country. Lobby for a Northern Ireland indoor track. 	Number of events hosted at MPT % customer satisfaction with services provided at MPT

Communication		
	We will focus on/Actions	Performance Indicators
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for staff, board and committees. Regular and routine networking, collaboration and progress updates between staff, board and committees. Shared and reinforced policies and protocols across staff, board and committees. 	% satisfaction on internal communication survey
Staff		
Board		
Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective, regular communication with the athletics community to update on programme progress, development opportunities and challenges. Increase awareness of Athletics NI staff, board and committees and current work through regular updates. 	% satisfaction community survey/consultation
External		
Clubs, athletes and volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective communication of success and impact of the sport through relevant media. Effective communication of participation opportunities to grow the membership and participation levels within the sport. 	Media tracking
Media		
Press		
TV/Radio		
Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure open, consistent, transparent and evidenced based communication, enabling a collaborative approach with local and national partners. 	Dashboard of achievements (embedded in reporting to board)
Partners/Sponsors/Funders		



Integrity		Performance Indicators
	We will focus on/Actions	
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED & I) inc. para-athletics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring a sport where individuals are treated with respect and dignity regardless of characteristics, background, belief, disability, circumstance, personal characteristics or performance level. ED&I considerations integrated into entire ANI approach. Support to disadvantaged communities through Northern Ireland wide delivery. Simple and clear Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) written and shared with all stakeholders. ED & I is a standing item on ANI Board agenda. 	Diversity and inclusion action plan (DIAP) developed and implemented within year one.
Safeguarding and conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly monitored and managed safeguarding caseload. Regularly monitored and managed disciplinary and conduct caseload. Regularly reviewed and implemented disciplinary policies in line with relevant codes of conduct to ensure a safe sport for all. 	Regularly reviewed and implemented safeguarding action plan.
Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and deliver a programme to encourage athlete, coach, volunteer and staff wellbeing with relevant supports and educational opportunities. 	Design and implementation of wellbeing programme
Anti-doping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A clean sport for all. Compliance with UKAD (/ IAD) requirements. Consistent enforcement of protocols and procedures. Continuous engagement in education and training (athletes / coaches). Monitoring of number compliance through registration system. 	Number of anti-doping cases
Environmental Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offering advice/guidance and modelling best practice to our clubs and event organisers to reduce the environmental impact of the sport as a whole. 	ESG Pulse check % score (Environmental Social Governance Score)

Governance		Performance Indicators
	We will focus on/Actions	
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased income, from a more diverse range of sources. Expenditure under control, and predictable increases planned for. Reduced reliance on public sector funds. Ensure adequate financial reserves. Robust financial policies and procedures (and controls). 	Level of financial reserves Number of new members 20% Increase in self-generated funds
Systems /Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficient and effective management information systems in place to support operational delivery of ANI. Improve cost effectiveness of our online registration system including value for money and clear benefits of system. Long term solution to issue of data collection, storage, management, analysis and disposal. Updated GDPR policy written and communicated. Continuous monitoring of compliance with data management protocols. Continuous improvement of data management and systems in response to systems and feedback. Continuous programme of education and training (internal and external). 	Number of affiliated members retained (club membership, licenced athletes, participant numbers)
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A sport that is transparent and accountable to members and participants. Clarity of responsibility for decision making across ANI board, staff and committees. Continuous programme of education and training for ANI board, staff and committee members. Committee structure which is aligned to strategy, organisational delivery and future proofed. Developing organisational capacity to anticipate and respond to emergent issues. Build an organisational culture which supports, encourages and sustains success. New membership categories established to encompass whole sport. 	Compliance with the Governance Code for NI Maintain governance tracker
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on maintaining a live risk register. 	Maintain Risk Register



APPENDIX ONE

ATHLETICS NORTHERN IRELAND STRATEGY CONSULTATION SUMMARY

ANI's recent consultation "Our Sport, Our Strategy, Our Approach" supported by Sheffield Hallam University showed the long-term focus of our sport was clearly evident and the Athletics Community wishes to show a duty of care to the whole Sport of Athletics in the next 4-5 years. The initial survey although a snap shot of views from the following respondents (See table 1) gave a useful insight into the areas of focus for this new strategy over the next 5 years.

Members	Responses	
Coach	32.37%	56
Official	12.72%	22
Athlete	58.38%	101
Parent/ Guardian	19.65%	34
Club Officer	10.40%	18
Committee	16.18%	28
Other (please specify)	9.25%	16
	Answered	173
	Skipped	4

TABLE 1 SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Strategy Review Stage 2 Approach

Sports Industry Research Centre (SIRC) at Sheffield Hallam University was asked to support the process of strategic plan development by facilitating a series of focus groups with the key stakeholders of ANI.

Three focus groups took place, each centring on a different group of stakeholders:

- Senior Managers
- Staff
- Board & Committee Members

In the first part of each focus group, participants were asked to identify the most significant issues facing the organisation, under eight themes identified as the most pertinent from the survey responses:

FIGURE 1 EIGHT KEY THEMES



Strategic Review Stage 2 Continued

After reviewing the content of the stakeholder submissions from this first phase, in each focus group, the issues which generated the most comments were identified and grouped into themes for action. Participants were then asked collectively to place each of these themes on a matrix, estimating the effort required for ANI to respond to the issue at hand, measured against the potential benefits of achieving a successful outcome.

THE MATRIX IS COMPRISED OF FOUR SECTORS:

- **Incremental** (low effort, low impact) usually continuous actions, involving small, subtle changes
- **Quick Wins** (low effort, high impact) light touch actions with immediate benefits, often prioritised first
- **Big Bets/Long Term Projects** (high effort, high impact) often long-term plans and processes which may involve significant change to practice
- **Money Pit** (high effort, low impact) processes which require significant support for little tangible benefit

The four quadrants on the graph provide a useful framework for the discussion of the findings of the consultation exercise, to which we now turn.

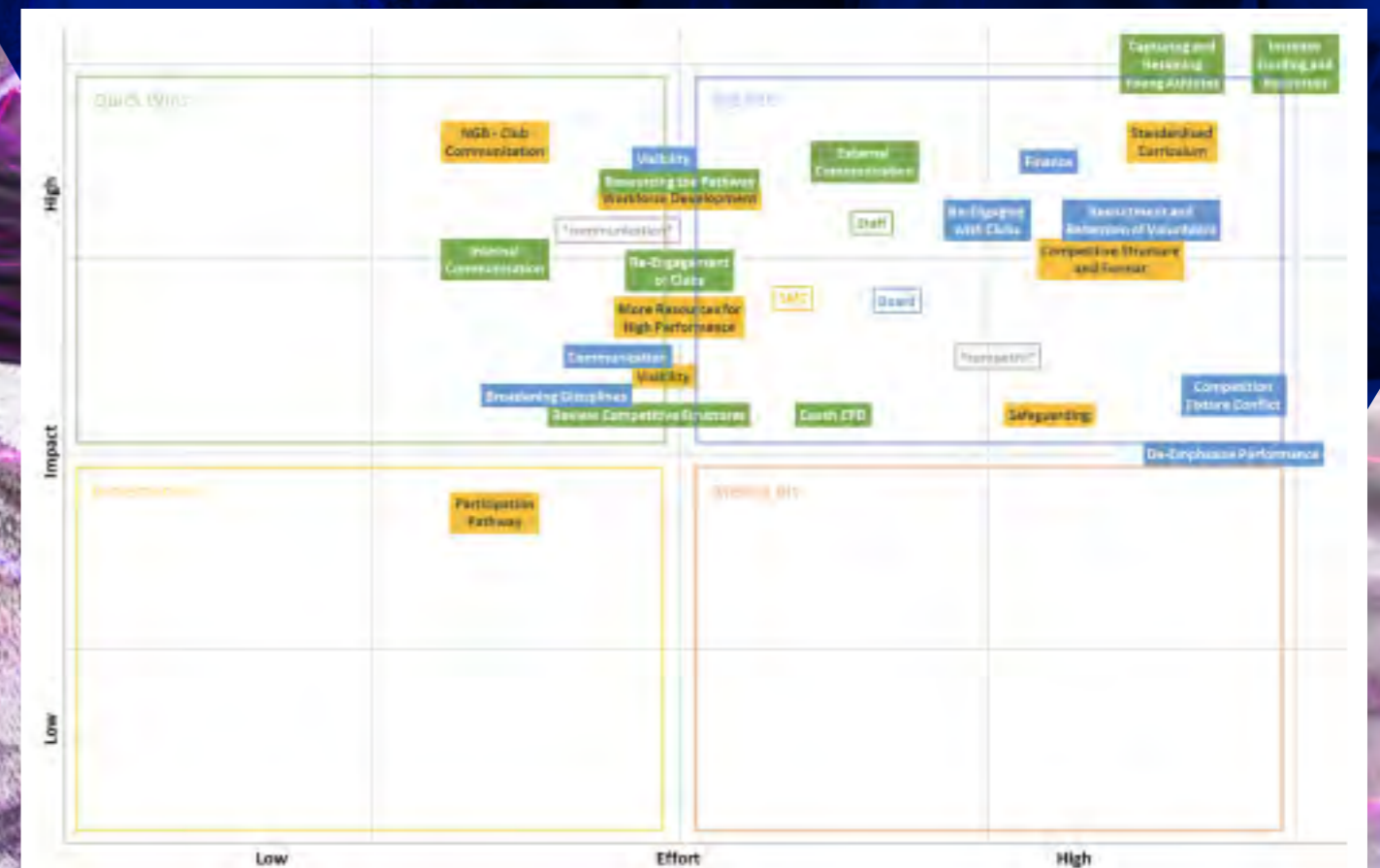


Figure 2 Athletics NI Strategic Planning Themes Identified by Focus Group Participants

IMPLICATION FROM CONSULTATION

There are several implications which can be drawn from the focus group conversations, and which should help the organisation to develop a strategy which reflects the concerns and wishes of ANI's stakeholders.

First, ANI should take comfort from the fact that participants in all three focus groups recognised the scale of the task at hand, understanding both the level of effort required to produce successful outcomes and the potential for significant impact. It is notable that the majority of challenges identified were in the category of Big Bets, though this is perhaps something of a misnomer as it suggests a tendency to gamble which is quite contrary to the nature of governing bodies of sport. Nevertheless, there is a sense of unity between staff, management and board that ANI should find encouraging.

Second, improved communication, both internally and externally, is critical. The general sense in each of the focus groups was of an organisation which, over time and for a variety of reasons, has lost touch with its participants, volunteers and clubs. There is an urgent desire to reconnect with clubs in particular, to understand the specific stresses and strains under which they operate. The most significant gains however, could materialise from improved communication within ANI, reversing the isolating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and building a more cohesive, efficient and confident organisation.

Third, resolving the thorny issue of the structure and format of competition could unlock significant benefits far beyond a simplified calendar of events, though it is impossible to ignore the scale and scope of the challenge. It is evident that senior managers, staff and board members share a common desire to provide meaningful competitions that provide participation opportunities which are attractive to athletes, coaches and spectators, and which present a positive image of the sport to potential sponsors. Athletics exists in a competitive environment in terms of the sport's ability to recruit and retain young people, particularly in relation to other activities which offer high profile professional opportunities at elite level (e.g., football and rugby). In effect, Athletics must shout to make itself heard in the marketplace. Operating under dual jurisdictions further complicates matters, and places ANI in a uniquely challenging position.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, the issue of finance underpins every aspect of ANI strategy. It is clear that the current budget places constraints on what the governing body is able to deliver as an organisation, and that an increase in the level of funding would release capacity to deliver on almost all of the challenges identified in this exercise. The key to addressing this challenge will be to identify and access a broader range of funding sources, beyond the traditional twin pillars of affiliation income and government grants. The generation of additional income through sponsorship is dependent upon being able to present a sport which is coherent in its planning and delivery, confident in its communication and united in its corporate direction, demonstrating how interlinked are the challenges facing the organisation at the current time.

Sport Industry Research Centre, Sheffield Hallam University





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