

Athletics NI Strategic Plan 2017-2021

VERSION 1.0

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PART I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 Introduction

The following report provides a brief summary of a proposed and evolving strategy for Athletics in Northern Ireland.

Part II begins with our long term vision to build,

“A vibrant Athletics community that inspires everyone to reach their full potential.”

In the run up to 2021 it is our mission to make Northern Ireland, pound for pound, the most effective place in the world at supporting volunteers to deliver the best possible experience to athletes and participants. This mission will be accomplished by striving to achieve four key ambitions:

1. Get more athletes to major championships to inspire the public
2. Offer a better participation experience to engage every community
3. Host the best 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games to make Northern Ireland proud
4. Aspire to excellence in everything we do

In delivering these ambitions we will employ a strategy that that leverages our strengths and resources while striving for efficiency in everything we do. As detailed in Part III, in practice this necessitates a focus on developing our sport through our volunteers. This is because an investment in a single volunteer can last many years and radiate throughout the community, impacting on numerous athletes and participants.

To successfully implement such as strategy we will need to understand and meet the needs of our volunteers, while simultaneously nudging them to adopt good practice. This will necessitate prioritising five key areas for development:

- Support Pathways
- Curriculum
- Communication
- Partnerships
- Financial Sustainability

It will also mean focusing on two distinct athlete populations, developing performance athletes and fitness focused participation runners, which all the evidence suggests we can be most effective at supporting.

To summarise our strategic focus, Athletics NI will develop a vibrant Athletics community that meets the needs of community participants and Northern Ireland’s performance athletes by providing targeted support to clubs and volunteers.

We will provide programmes and initiatives that are both learning opportunities and examples of good practice. Resources and content created to support these initiatives will be shared and become examples upon which clubs can develop their own bespoke offerings.

We will focus predominantly on two distinct athlete populations; developing performance athletes, who aim to qualify for major championships, and fitness focused participation runners. We will also work in partnership with British Athletics, Athletics Ireland and the Sports Institute Northern Ireland to support athletes aspiring to win major international medals.

While the scope of Athletics NI's overall remit is extensive this strategic focus will be used to prioritise the goals that contribute to our four key ambitions.

The resulting plan, outlined in Part IV, details the goals we have set to achieve each of our ambitions. The plan explains the intermediate actions we will take aligned to each goal, as well as detailing who is accountable, the times involved and the measures we will use to track our progress.

The appendices that conclude this report include material that is referenced throughout.



OUR FOUR AMBITIONS 2017-2021



OUR MISSION

Northern Ireland, pound for pound, the most effective place in the world at supporting volunteers to inspire athletes and participants



STRATEGIC FOCUS

Athletics NI will develop a vibrant Athletics community that meets the needs of community participants and Northern Ireland’s performance athletes by providing targeted support to clubs and volunteers.

- We will provide programmes and initiatives that are both learning opportunities and examples of good practice.
- Resources and content created to support these initiatives will be shared and become examples upon which clubs can develop their own bespoke offerings.
- We will focus predominantly on two distinct athlete populations; developing performance athletes, who aim to qualify for major championships, and fitness focused participation runners.
- We will also work in partnership with British Athletics, Athletics Ireland and the Sports Institute Northern Ireland to support athletes aspiring to win major international medals.

Guiding Principles & Beliefs



Competitive Advantage

- Skilled and enthusiastic team who embrace athlete centred coaching and are prepared to work anti-social hours
- In house coach development and tutoring expertise
- In house physical and technical coaching expertise across all event groups and most event specialisms
- In house media production capabilities
- Small geographic size with high population densities confined to only a handful of key areas
- A world class competition venue at Mary Peters Track
- Majority of athlete population confined to distinct age brackets (12-18, 25+) and areas of interest (adult participation endurance).



Strategic Priorities & Objectives



PART II: AMBITION

2 Our Vision

“A vibrant Athletics community that inspires everyone to reach their full potential”

In many ways our vision of a vibrant Athletics community is already taking root through the collective action of the dedicated volunteers that turn out at tracks, on roads and in parks every week across Northern Ireland. This can be demonstrated by the rapid growth in the number of registered members of Athletics NI, which has increased by around 70% since 2013/2014 to around 6,400 in 2016/2017, but can also be seen every day when we catch sight of someone out running in our local communities.

3 Mission

Over the next four years it is our mission to make Northern Ireland, pound for pound, the most effective place in the world at supporting volunteers to deliver the best possible experience to athletes and participants.

Our Mission: Northern Ireland, pound for pound, the most effective place in the world at supporting volunteers to inspire athletes and participants.

Ownership: Director of Coaching & Athlete Development

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the sport and take on a variety of roles from club administrators, to coaches, leaders and officials. While we want to continue to capitalise on recent success and grow the sport yet further, our main focus must now be to provide volunteers with the support they need to improve the quality of everything they do.

With more individuals taking up the sport, clubs and volunteers are struggling to meet demand. More participants necessitate more volunteers and newly recruited volunteers need guidance and support. This places an increasing burden on the existing volunteer workforce and it is our role to provide them with effective and efficient mechanisms for dealing with this demand. This means qualifying more leaders, coaches and officials to build capacity within clubs. It also means upskilling these volunteers so they can meet the needs of their participants and contribute to the talent and performance goals of British Athletics and Athletics Ireland.

All of this takes money and, therefore, Athletics NI will be looking to secure more investment from our funding partners and sponsors. Simultaneously, we will also focus on building productive relationships with partner organisations, while exploring opportunities to improve our own revenue generation.

4 Ambitions

Aligned to this mission, our four key ambitions leading up to 2021 are as follows:



4.1.1 Get more athletes to major championships to inspire the public

It is our ambition to field more Northern Irish athletes at major championships than ever before. To achieve this, we need to support our top athletes to train effectively, while simultaneously growing the next generation of Athletics champions.

4.1.2 Offer a better participation experience to engage every community

It is our ambition to inspire Northern Ireland to get moving and take up Athletics as an accessible and inclusive route to lifelong health and wellbeing. From conquering our first steps, to running in the park, jumping in puddles and throwing a ball, Athletics is built on the foundations of our simplest childhood pleasures. Our task is to nurture a better participation experience to engage members of all communities, genders and abilities as they grow up and progress through their lives. This will mean Track & Field for some, running for more and fitness for all.

4.1.3 Host the best 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games to make Northern Ireland proud

It is our ambition to work with Sport NI, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Commonwealth Games Council to ensure they stage the best ever Commonwealth Youth Games in Belfast 2021. It is our responsibility to ensure we make the Athletics at

these games an unforgettable experience for the young athletes who attend, their supporters and support staff. 2021 is also an opportunity to make the people of Northern Ireland proud by showcasing to the world the best of what we have to offer.

4.1.4 *Aspire to excellence in everything we do*

It is our ambition to aspire to excellence in everything we do. In our role as leaders of our sport, it is essential that we achieve the highest possible standards. Within Northern Ireland we are responsible for taking a strategic lead across many diverse areas including coaching, officiating, competition scheduling and permitting, health and safety, facilities managements and ethical standards. By aspiring to excellence in all areas we can become an example of how an effective governing body operates and delivers transparent governance to its membership.

PART III: STRATEGY

5 Strategic Focus

Comparing Northern Ireland with other countries in the UK and Europe, clearly we cannot compete on two fronts – investment, and athlete numbers. At an organisational level, a similar challenge exists because the scope of Athletics NI’s responsibilities is as broad as it is elsewhere but the number of staff available to deliver this remit is necessarily constrained.

In order for Northern Ireland to ‘punch above our weight’ with respect to our close neighbours and the rest of the world we must employ a strategy that leverages our strengths and resources while striving for efficiency in everything we do. In practice this necessitates a focus on developing our sport through our volunteers.

To successfully implement such a strategy we will need to understand and meet the needs of our volunteers, while simultaneously nudging them to adopt good practice.

5.1 Guiding Principles and Beliefs

The following principles and beliefs guide this strategy. Plans and tactics arising from this strategy are aligned and guided by these beliefs.

1. Encourage a participant and athlete centred approach to performance and fitness
2. When working with young people, promote practice that maximises the chances of athletes achieving success as seniors
3. Provide opportunities for individuals to enjoy lifelong participation in Athletics
4. Create initiatives that leverage resources and can be scaled effectively by:
 - a. Focusing on coach development
 - b. Supporting club delivery of programmes and initiatives
 - c. “Open sourcing” curriculum and support materials so clubs and volunteers can replicate initiatives in their local community
5. Fund elite performance rather than attempting to forecast elite potential
6. Where selection criteria are necessary, provide opportunities for coaches and athletes who are not selected to access programme content either remotely or via ‘open’ sessions. Such provision is intended to cast the net as wide as possible to ensure athletes that mature late are still able to learn key skills relevant to achieving senior success
7. Wherever practical and economically viable, spread the delivery of programmes and initiatives across Northern Ireland, rather than confining delivery to the Belfast area
8. Communicate transparently at all times using a range of media channels
9. Foster productive relationships with funding bodies and key strategic partners to ensure skills and resources are used to maximum effect
10. Ensure all sources of external funding are aligned with and contribute to the strategic needs of the sport.

5.2 Why focus on coaching and volunteers?

We will focus on supporting coaches for three key reasons.

Firstly, it is possible to coach more than one athlete per year, and many over a career. By channelling resources towards the high quality support of coaches we will multiply our force significantly and have a positive effect on far more athletes.

Secondly, providing direct support to athletes is not effective if this does not take proper account of the extent of the support given by their 'home' coach. For instance, bringing together athletes four times during a winter can be fun and motivating but if their coaches are not involved or in agreement then it is unlikely that any lessons learnt will be consistently applied through the long months of training. Developing, empowering and inspiring coaches gives a wider reaching and more permanent legacy that will be felt by more athletes every week of the year.

Thirdly, athletes develop at different rates. Thus, selecting individual athletes to focus resources upon at a young age is not an effective way to spend money. Late or early athlete development makes identifying the best athletes to support difficult and attaching funding to a specific athlete greatly limits the numbers who can benefit. By focusing on coaching far more athletes can benefit and successfully fulfil their potential. This will benefit those at the highest levels of the sport but also help to provide vibrant competition and participation at all levels of the sport.

In short working with coaches is the most effective way to help develop the best athletes and bring the same benefits to the maximum number of athletes of all abilities.

Many elements of this argument apply equally to other volunteers within the sport. If we can improve the practice of all volunteers, from club secretaries to team managers and officials the impact can be multiplied across all those participants they encounter during their time operating in the sport. Therefore, empowering volunteers is the most effective mechanism for leveraging our scarce resources.

5.2.1 Bringing Athletes and Coaches Together to Learn On-The-Job

Outside of formalised qualifications or development events, coaches naturally learn from other coaches. Each individual's expectations and vision of what effective coaching looks like typically arises from the practice they observe around them, either as an athlete or from other coaches in their vicinity. Traditionally, many coaches start out by assisting another 'senior' coach. Therefore, where effective coaches already operate the next generation tend also to be effective. Conversely, where ineffective coaches operate bad habits are perpetuated. This apprenticeship style, on-the-job training, is common in vocational professions where craftsmanship is passed down from generation to generation, and coaching is no different.

With the apprentice model in mind, it is important that coaches are regularly exposed to examples of best practice and also get a chance to learn by doing. Therefore, we will aim to construct coach development opportunities that facilitate learning in this manner.

To encourage the development of effective coaching we will provide:

1. Examples of good coaching practice
2. Opportunities for coaches to gain confidence by actually attempting to deliver key elements of sessions to real athletes
3. Feedback and guidance in a friendly and non-judgemental manner.

To facilitate such a learning environment, we will actively encourage coaches to bring their groups together on a regular basis and assist them in doing so. We will also seek to bring the latest information and thinking on coaching to all individuals who wish to engage with us.

Some of the activity we run will only involve coaches but many activities will involve significant numbers of athletes too. The focal point throughout, however, is the needs of the coach because this will bring the greatest long term and sustained benefit to the athletes.

6 SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis can be a useful tool to help identify areas for investment and opportunities for improvement.

6.1 Strengths

STAFF

- Close knit team enables smooth internal communication
- Excellent staff work ethic and willingness to work antisocial hours
- Athletics NI staff believe and apply principles of athlete centred coaching

PROGRAMMES & DELIVERY

- Youth Academy is a unique and pioneering athlete development programme
- In house technical and physical preparation expertise across all event groups and the majority of event specialisms
- In house coach development, mentoring and tutoring expertise
- In house media creation capabilities and ability to train existing staff in this area

FACILITIES & PARTNERSHIPS

- Mary Peters Track is potentially the best venue for Athletics in Ireland and one of the top non stadium venues in Europe
- Athletics NI have solid ties with the Belfast Marathon
- A core group of engaged voluntary coaches are already delivering Rising Star
- Athletics NI manage several Every Body Active coaches across various regions

EVENT MANAGEMENT

- Athletics NI's online race entry system is the key provider in the domestic market

- In house ability to stage quality events on behalf of our membership and external customers
- Athletes can compete for both Ireland and Great Britain in major championships providing a wide scope for international representation.

6.2 Weaknesses

STAFF

- Wide scope of responsibilities and duties
- No Every Body Active presence across several regions
- All positions have a high monitoring and governance workloads
- Lack of expertise in some event specialisms including Race Walking, Pole Vault, Wheelchair Racing and Hammer
- No dedicated communications manager
- Little administration support for coaching department

PROGRAMMES & DELIVERY

- No development programmes focused on running for fitness
- No initiatives or curriculum focused on the running for fitness

FACILITIES & PARTNERSHIPS

- Income streams and sponsorship are difficult to secure long term
- Lack of indoor facilities makes high performance training difficult

EVENT MANAGEMENT

- Poor weather and competition from overseas providers makes attracting athletes to major meets difficult
- National Championships have relatively weak attendance
- There are not enough volunteers to meet demand for competition events
- Lack of investment in competition equipment and infrastructure.

6.3 Opportunities

STAFF & ATHLETES

- Active Communities & Every Body Active have generated skilled staff who can contribute to future expansion and delivery of the sport
- Conditions could be attached to direct athlete funding from Athletics NI enabling us to use our top athletes for appearances at specific events
- Multiple Paralympic champion Jason Smyth is now back and training in Belfast
- With a few exceptions, all teams are now joint Ulster & Northern Ireland. This increases the pool of athletes for selection and will provide greater integration with athletes and coaches based in the south

PROGRAMMES & DELIVERY

- Every Body Active and associated awards programmes are well suited to Athletics
- Local clubs want to engage and pilot initiatives
- Skilled and knowledgeable presenters are available from the UK mainland and Ireland to support the delivery of initiatives if necessary

GOVERNANCE

- Sport NI are supportive of regime change

DEMOGRAPHICS & MEMBERSHIP

- Northern Ireland has a relatively small geographical size with high population densities confined to only a handful of key areas
- Athletes that remain in Northern Ireland for University have limited options outside Queens and Ulster University
- Running for fitness and participation continues to grow year on year
- The running fitness boom has brought adults into clubs who now want to set up youth sections

FACILITIES & PARTNERSHIPS

- Athletics Ireland are keen to work more closely on Coach Development initiatives
- The indoor facilities at Ulster University's Jordanstown campus are underutilised for Athletics
- Ulster University are interested in partnering with Athletics NI on a coach development project
- The Sport NI £8.75m Performance Facilities Fund could result in elite indoor facility
- NIrunning.co.uk provides excellent up to date event coverage of smaller events
- There is potential to work more closely with the Irish Milers Club to create better endurance events in Northern Ireland
- Dale Farms is a local business that has just released a sport focused protein milk drink. Since this is classed as a food rather than a sports supplement British Athletics agree they are a potential sponsorship partner

EVENT MANAGEMENT

- Opportunity to bid for European Cross Country in Belfast between now and 2021
- The 2021 Youth Commonwealth Youth Games will be held in Belfast.

6.4 Threats

STAFF, ATHLETES & MEMBERSHIP

- Uncertainty over funding makes long term planning difficult
- Potential for loss of skilled coaching staff to other sporting organisations or countries
- The road running community are disengaged and may attempt to break away from established governance structures
- Many ambitious developing athletes leave Northern Ireland to attend University

FACILITIES & PARTNERSHIPS

- Ulster University are relocating large areas of the Jordanstown Campus to Belfast City Centre. This may affect utilisation of the sports facilities at Jordanstown
- University Athletics clubs have weak governance and contribute little support to developing athletes within Northern Ireland in contrast to their counterparts elsewhere
- Relationship with Athletics Ulster could break down
- Post Rio 2016 a change of leadership at Athletics Ireland could alter our relationship
- New Chief Executive at UKA could be less supportive of Athletics NI
- When the management contract for Mary Peters Track expires in 2018 another company may bid to run the facility

EVENT MANAGEMENT

- The increased proliferation of unlicensed races could reduce the quality of competitions, as well as negatively affecting the sports appeal and safety record

- Police attitudes towards road races may lead to changes in delivery as well as increased costs.

7 Competitive Advantage

Northern Ireland has several areas of strength that if capitalised on and aligned with existing opportunities can place Athletics on an upward trajectory.

7.1 Skilled and enthusiastic staff

The most effective way to improve athletes' performances is to support the volunteers that work with them. This is best achieved via frequent face to face contact preferably at their regular training venues.

The major stumbling block for organisations who attempt to take this approach is the recruitment, training and retention of appropriately skilled staff. Because Athletics is a sport that incorporates numerous disciplines and improved performance is heavily influenced by physiological factors, the scope of knowledge and experience required for a team to effectively support volunteers is extensive. Some of the most important factors involved in the delivery of effective learning and development include:

- Knowledge of physical preparation
- Broad knowledge of event specific preparation across each event group
- Detailed knowledge of event specific preparation for each event specialism
- Knowledge of athlete development principles
- Knowledge of sports science and medicine
- Tutoring and mentoring skills

Athletics NI are in the fortunate position to already have staff who are skilled, enthusiastic and prepared to work anti-social hours. The team is especially well positioned to support developing athletes undertaking a multi-event approach. This is a significant strategic advantage.

7.2 Learning & Development Curriculum and Delivery

As "knowledge workers", appropriate learning and development opportunities are key to volunteers in Athletics becoming as effective as possible (Davenport, 2005). Athletics NI currently have a Coaching & Development team that can provide learning and development support across many areas, without the need to bring in outside support. This will enable the delivery of effective initiatives without the need for extensive programme budgets.

7.3 Support Resources

While face to face delivery is important. Volunteers also need access to resources to refresh their memory. Athletics NI have staff who are capable of creating resources for this

audience both in written and multi-media format. Few if any competitors have this capability in house.

7.4 Geography

With its relatively small geographic size and areas of high population density confined to a few key district councils, Northern Ireland has few geographical constraints when it comes to supporting athletes, participants, coaches and volunteers. This makes it relatively easy to provide on the ground support directly to clubs across the province.

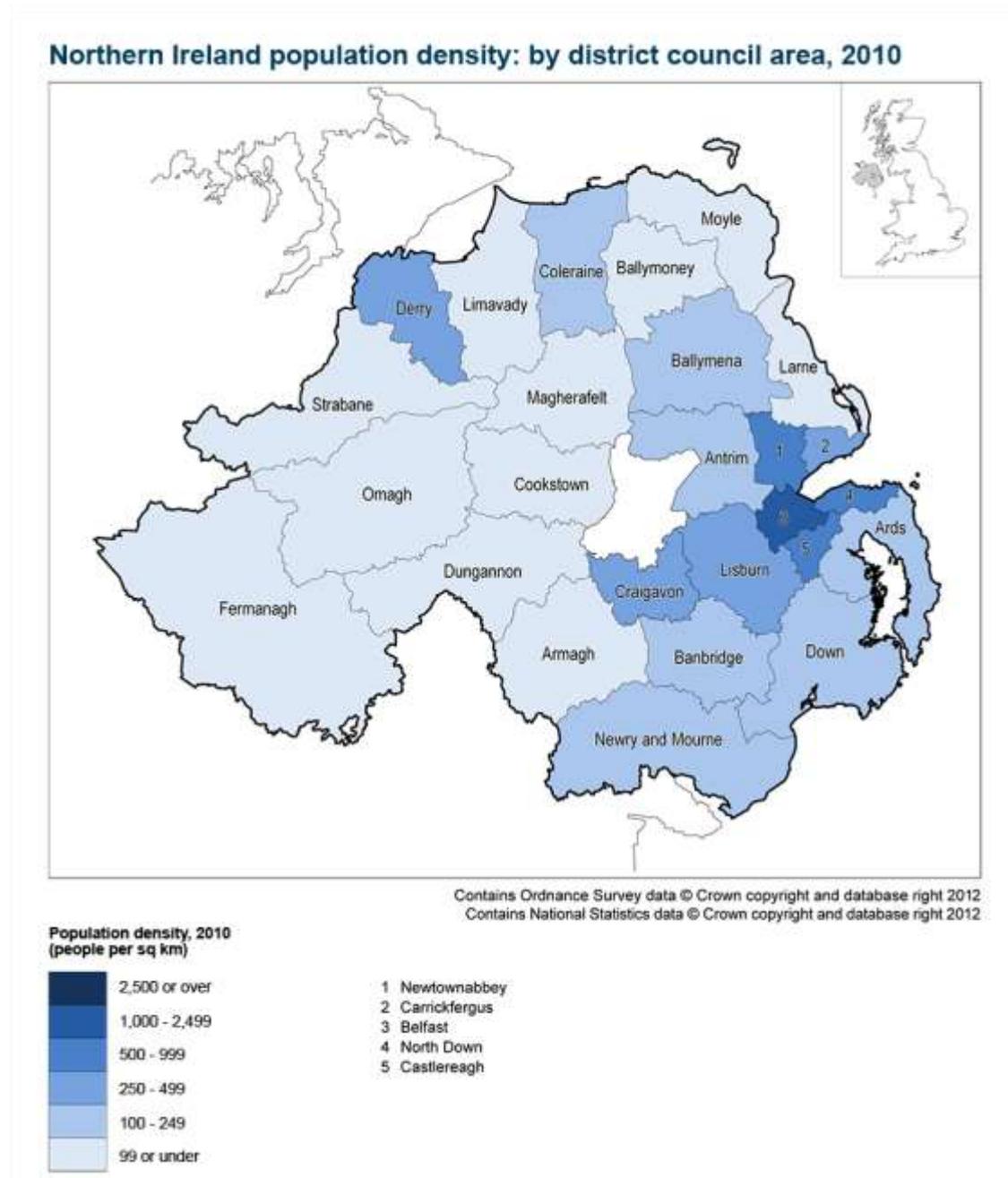


Figure 1: Northern Ireland Population Density. (Office of National Statistics, 2012)

7.5 Mary Peters Track

Mary Peters Track in Belfast was refurbished with the support of Belfast City Council in 2012. The state of the art eight lane Mondo surface is extremely quick making it an attractive venue for competitors wishing to achieve good performances. The track is currently managed by Athletics NI, which enables the organisation to make use of it free of charge. The free use of the venue and the Les Jones room housed in the Athletics NI Offices enables Athletics NI to host competitions and events at minimal cost providing a significant strategic advantage.

7.6 Athlete Populations

7.6.1 Performance

Since many ambitious athletes leave Northern Ireland to attend University, and many high performance athletes are also based abroad, the allocation of performance focused resources should be directed towards athlete populations that remain in Northern Ireland.

Providing focused support for athletes from 12-18 years of age will both service the majority of performance focused athletes and also help reduce the dropout rate that occurs during the teenage years (Shibli & Barrett, 2011).

The proposed system would support ambitious athletes and their coaches to develop the skills and performance behaviours necessary to be successful in a services supported environment, such as those provided by the British and Irish High Performance systems as well as some Universities.

If this can be achieved athletes should then be well prepared to succeed whether they decide to move away from Northern Ireland for University, feed into the Irish or British performance systems or stay and be supported through the Sports Institute Northern Ireland (SINI) and Athletics NI.

Focusing on this population necessitates the allocation of resources towards athletes and coaches who show potential to qualify for Commonwealth, World Championships and Olympic Games.

This stance is supported logically by our SWOT analysis but also gained roughly 70% of the votes in the 2015 Athletics NI Coach and Volunteer Consultation when listed alongside two other alternative courses of action (Crick, 2015).

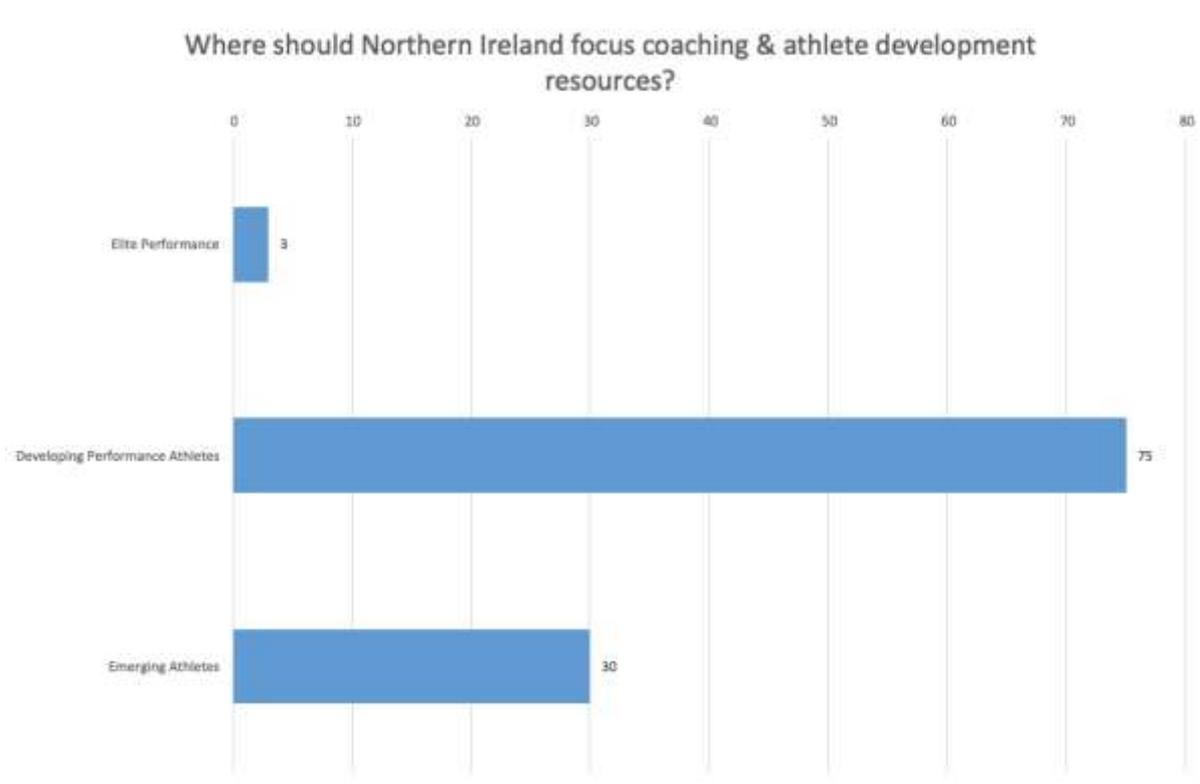


Figure 2: What role should Athletics NI play in the development of high performance athletes? Results from the 2015 Athletics NI Coach and Volunteer Consultation (Crick, 2015).

7.6.2 Mass Participation

Running for fitness is growing rapidly in Northern Ireland, thanks to the success of programmes such as the NHS's "Couch to 5k" scheme. The running fitness community also benefit from a growing number of competition formats that include Park Run, road, cross-country and obstacle challenges.

As these adult participation clubs grow their members are looking to move down the age groups and set up training options for younger athletes. The size and success of these clubs means that they may eventually create youth sections that eclipse those of traditional Track & Field clubs. Therefore, they are strategically important for the long term health of performance Athletics.

To date Athletics NI have not provided significant support to participation clubs with the exception of organizing races. In the future resources should be allocated to help them improve and develop their practice.

7.7 Proposed areas of Strategic Advantage

Compared with its near neighbours in the UK mainland and Ireland, Northern Ireland is well positioned to create initiatives that focus on two key areas:

1. The development of emerging performance athletes and associated volunteers

2. The participation running community who exercise primarily for fitness

The skill sets required to support these groups are well developed both within Athletics NI and local strategic partners such as existing clubs. Furthermore, there are strong synergies between the curriculums needed to support both populations as each are in the early stages of developing the skills and behaviours necessary to achieve their goals. Therefore, resources created for one group can be reused with only minor alternations for the other.

A focus on supporting athletes and volunteers working with developing athletes, predominantly between the ages of 12-18, plays to Northern Ireland's strengths because:

- The majority of performance focused athletes fall within this age range
- The majority of volunteers work with athletes that fall within this age range
- University age athletes often leave Northern Ireland dramatically reducing the number of local athletes that can be supported
- Athletics NI staff are exceptionally well positioned to support athletes and coaches working in this age range
- Supporting the development of athletes within this age range should increase the quality of performances and the number of athletes that remain in the sport
- The skill sets required to support athletes in this age range provide volunteers with an excellent grounding in the theory and practice of coaching. Learning how to support developing athletes is likely to make them more effective with older athletes.

7.8 Strategic Focus

From 2017 to 2021, our strategic focus can be summarised as follows:

Athletics NI will develop a vibrant Athletics community that meets the needs of community participants and Northern Ireland's performance athletes by providing targeted support to clubs and volunteers.

We will provide programmes and initiatives that are both learning opportunities and examples of good practice. Resources and content created to support these initiatives will be shared and become examples upon which clubs can develop their own bespoke offerings.

We will focus predominantly on two distinct athlete populations; developing performance athletes, who aim to qualify for major championships, and fitness focused participation runners. We will also work in partnership with British Athletics, Athletics Ireland and the Sports Institute Northern Ireland to support athletes aspiring to win major international medals.

While the scope of Athletics NI's overall remit is extensive this strategic focus will be used to prioritise the goals that contribute to our four key ambitions.

8 Strategic Priorities

The following five strategic priorities provide the framework for the strategic direction of Athletics NI until 2021. They clarify how Athletics NI intends to achieve its vision by focusing on the following areas:

- Support Pathways
- Curriculum
- Communication
- Partnerships
- Financial Sustainability

8.1 Support Pathways

Athletics NI will create transparent Support Pathways focused on three key areas:

- High performance athletes
- Clubs focused on performance and participation
- Volunteers with a special focus on coaches

8.1.1 High Performance

The High Performance Athletes Support Pathway will outline the steps athletes can take towards achieving their high performance aspirations and the associated support mechanisms available to them.

The pathway should be accessible via the web and publicised to clubs, athletes and volunteers.

8.1.2 Club

The Club Support Pathway will outline the programmes and resources available to athletes involved in performance or participation club Athletics.

The pathway should be accessible via the web and publicised to clubs, athletes and volunteers.

8.1.3 Volunteers

Opportunities for volunteers to develop their skills and expertise will be aligned to initiatives associated with the High Performance and Club Support Pathways. They will be individually branded to reflect their target audience.

The pathway should be accessible via the web and publicised to clubs, athletes and volunteers.

8.2 Curriculum

To increase the effectiveness of the Support Pathways, Athletics NI will create curriculum and resources that sits alongside. These resources will enable any club or volunteer to immediately understand the content of the programmes on offer and allow them to implement a similar initiative within their own personal context.

8.2.1 Content

Curriculums should be created that support the development of emerging, ambitious and fitness focused athletes and participants. They should be illustrated using a variety of media and made accessible via the web.

8.2.2 Delivery

Staff and volunteers will need to be trained to deliver curriculum. This process will begin with staff who will then support volunteers via on-the-job training.

8.3 Communication

Athletics NI will communicate in a clear and transparent manner across multiple communication channels.

8.3.1 Web Presence

A dedicated curriculum and resources website should be created and populated with content.

Key pages on the athleticsni.org website related to Support Pathways, such as competition opportunities, selection criteria and coaching qualifications should be up to date and easy to maintain.

8.3.2 Recognition & Profile

Wherever possible the achievements of athletes and volunteers should be highlighted in communications. Simple initiatives such as including the name of the coach alongside an athlete's result can significantly raise the profile of volunteering.

8.4 Partnerships

Athletics NI will seek to build strong partnerships with other stakeholders within the Athletics community.

8.4.1 Local Universities

Universities currently play little role in supporting athletes across Northern Ireland. Given the high number of young people who attend such institutions they should be a key strategic partner in the delivery of Athletics across the province.

8.4.2 Local Councils

Athletics NI will aim to partner with local councils through the Every Body Active 2020 scheme. Here there is scope to align the delivery of Every Body Active with Athletics NI

created Support Pathways and Curriculum both with young developing athletes and adult focused participation running initiatives.

8.4.3 Clubs

Athletics NI will seek out clubs to become trailblazers in the role out of Pathways across Northern Ireland.

8.5 Financial Sustainability

Athletics NI will work to make all initiatives financially self-sustaining and scalable.

8.5.1 Fiscal Stability

Where significant value is generated and it is appropriate to do so, programmes will be positioned to generate income. Alternatively, outside funding or sponsorship will be sort to improve the delivery quality.

8.5.2 Standardised Delivery

To ensure a consistent athlete / volunteer experience, programme delivery will be standardised.

8.5.3 Staff Support

Athletics NI will work to increase the pool of individuals who can deliver core initiatives through targeted training and support.

PART IV: THE PLAN

9 Introduction

This section outlines the specific tactics, actions and associated measures planned to achieve our four key ambitions. Many of the specific actions are repeated throughout the document as their impact will be felt across more than one objective – in these instances, the individual responsible for each action is always the same.

The timelines outlined against each action refer to the “deadline” for action to be completed. These deadlines represent the current plan with regards allocation of priority and resource. However, we recognise that the level of funding from Sport NI, and subsequent availability of resource, may adjust both the priorities and timelines for completion of the tactics and actions outlined in this section. Therefore, this section of the Strategic Plan will be reviewed and amended where necessary following the allocation of funding from Sport NI.

9.1 Get more athletes to major championships to inspire the public

Get more athletes to major championships to inspire the public	
Ownership:	Director of Coaching & Athlete Development
Interlinked objectives	9.3
SMART Measure	The annual number of NI athletes on Irish and British international teams

It is our ambition to field more Northern Irish athletes at major championships than ever before. To achieve this, we need to support our top athletes to train effectively, while growing the next generation of Athletics champions.

9.1.1 Our goals:

- Provide a transparent and inclusive Athlete Development Pathway within Northern Ireland that aligns and feeds into the British and Irish high performance systems
- Support the coaches of athletes on the pathway through a parallel Coach Development Pathway
- Support coaches to identified current and emerging high performance athletes to ensure they gain exposure to the most up to date performance coaching practice
- Lobby to secure an indoor training facility that meets the needs of performance athletes who wish to stay and train in Northern Ireland
- Support the Athlete Development Pathway with a strong domestic competition structure and appropriate international teams
- Develop partnerships with universities and the Sports Institute Northern Ireland (SINI) to provide opportunities for emerging performance athletes who wish to stay in Northern Ireland to train effectively

- Promote the selection and success of Northern Irish athletes on international teams to the Athletics community and general public.

9.1.2 Integrated Tactics and Actions

Get more athletes to major championships to inspire the public					
Priority	Tactic	KPI	Action	Timeline	Ownership
1	Provide a transparent and inclusive Athlete Development Pathway (ADP) within Northern Ireland that aligns and feeds into the British and Irish high performance systems.	All elements of the Athlete Development Pathway are functional and easily accessible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalise Athlete Development Pathway document and associated diagrams ADP and associated opportunities are effectively communicated via AthleticsNI.org An annual calendar exists that displays all ADP associated programmes run or supported by Athletics NI The curriculum and resources for all ADP initiatives is readily available via AthleticsNI.org and Nifutures.com The ADP and associated initiatives are promoted across multiple channels and through all relevant touchpoints. 	<p>October 2016</p> <p>November 2016</p> <p>September 2017</p> <p>September 2017</p> <p>October 2016</p>	<p>Director of Coaching & Athlete Development</p> <p>Workforce Administrator</p> <p>Athlete Development Lead</p> <p>Communications Manager</p>
2	Support the coaches of athletes on the pathway through a parallel Coach Development Pathway (CDP).	All elements of the Coach Development Pathway are functional and easily accessible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDP is fully explained on AthleticsNI.org An annual calendar exists that displays all CDP associated programmes run or supported by Athletics NI The curriculum and resources for all CDP initiatives is readily available via AthleticsNI.org and Nifutures.com The ADP and associated initiatives are promoted across multiple channels and through all relevant touchpoints. 	<p>October 2016</p> <p>September 2017</p> <p>September 2018</p> <p>January 2017</p>	<p>Coach Development Lead</p> <p>Workforce Administrator</p> <p>Athlete Development Lead</p> <p>Communications Manager</p>
3	Support coaches to identified current and emerging high performance athletes to ensure they gain exposure to the most up to date performance coaching practice	Elite performance coach development programme aligns with British Athletics strategic lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a stream of coach development activity aimed at the coaches of NI's elite and emerging performance athletes that aligns to the elite curriculum being developed by British Athletics Build strong links to British Athletics' High Performance Coach Development Manager and Futures Coach Development Manager to ensure Northern Ireland aligns and follows their strategic lead Work in conjunction with British Athletics to ensure Athletics NI staff and identified coaches are exposed to the elite performance curriculum being developed by British Athletics through their Tokyo 2020 strategic plan Provide support and one-to-one mentoring to the group of targeted coaches to encourage them to adopt the practice and performance behaviours identified in the British Athletics performance curriculum. 	<p>September 2017</p> <p>September 2017</p> <p>September 2017</p> <p>September 2018</p>	<p>Director of Coaching & Athlete Development</p> <p>Coach Development Lead</p> <p>Coach Development Lead / Athlete Development Lead</p>

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4	Lobby to secure an indoor training facility that meets the needs of performance athletes who wish to stay and train in Northern Ireland.	Indoor facility exists and is utilised by performance athletes within NI.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take all necessary measures to ensure the Athletics High Performance Centre funded through the Sport NI Elite Facilities Programme is built to specification. 	Ongoing	Director of Coaching & Athlete Development
5	Support the Athlete Development Pathway with a strong domestic competition structure and appropriate international teams.	Year on year comparisons of annual consultation survey results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key domestic competitions and international team opportunities are communicated to the membership All ADP initiatives are linked to key domestic competitions The delivery of domestic competitions is optimised to allow athletes to achieve the best possible results The selection criteria for international teams are unambiguous, transparent and readily available on AthleticsNI.org Selection criteria are consistently applied when selecting international teams. 	<p>January 2017</p> <p>January 2017 August 2017</p> <p>January 2017</p> <p>September 2017</p>	<p>Communications Manager</p> <p>Athlete Development Lead Events Manager</p> <p>Athlete Development Lead</p>
6	Develop partnerships with universities and the Sports Institute Northern Ireland (SINI) to provide opportunities for emerging performance athletes who wish to stay in Northern Ireland to train effectively.	Quantity and quality of training opportunities for athletes aged 18-23.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit a University Athletics Development Officer to work in conjunction with Ulster University and Queens University to provide quality training opportunities for emerging performance athletes Ensure athletes and coaches can access UUI indoor facility at convenient times Develop new and promote existing performance training opportunities for athletes aged 18-23 years old Improve communication between SINI and Athletics NI to ensure performance athletes are supported effectively. 	<p>October 2018</p> <p>September 2017</p> <p>September 2017</p> <p>September 2018</p>	Director of Coaching & Athlete Development/ Athlete Development Lead/ University Development Officer
7	Promote the selection and success of Northern Irish athletes on international teams to the Athletics community and general public.	All success by NI athletes on international teams is recognised on AthleticsNI.org.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team selections are promoted via news stories on AthleticsNI.org and through other associated sources such as NIrunning.co.uk News stories are promptly published regarding standout performance by NI athletes or those representing international teams The annual awards event is used to recognise the achievements of athletes and coaches selected to international teams and those who break Northern Irish records. 	<p>September 2017</p> <p>September 2018</p> <p>February 2017</p>	Communications Manager

9.2 Offer a better participation experience to engage every community

Offer a better participation experience to engage every community

Ownership:	Coach Development Lead
Interlinked objectives	9.3, 9.4
SMART Measure	Year on year tracking of Athletics NI affiliation data

It is our ambition to inspire Northern Ireland to get moving and take up Athletics as an accessible and inclusive route to lifelong health and wellbeing. From conquering our first steps, to running in the park, jumping in puddles and throwing a ball, Athletics is built on the foundations of our simplest childhood pleasures. Our task is to nurture a better participation experience to engage members of all communities, genders and abilities as they grow up and progress through their lives. This will mean Track & Field for some, running for more and fitness for all.

9.2.1 Our Goals

- Create a pathway for runners moving from couch to club
- Work with clubs and volunteers to develop resources and initiatives that meet the needs of participants running for fitness
- Deliver a schedule of coaching qualifications that meets demand from clubs
- Ensure races are safe, secure, accessible and properly licensed
- Provide schools with support to deliver pupils' first experience of Athletics
- Improve the club affiliation and monitoring process
- Signpost participants to clubs and encourage them to engage in lifelong activity
- Reward and recognise clubs that follow best practice in club development.

9.2.2 Integrated Tactics and Actions

Offer a better participation experience to engage every community					
Priority	Tactic	KPI	Action	Timeline	Ownership
1	Create a pathway for runners moving from couch to club.	Coach to club pathway and resources published on AthleticsNI.org.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit a Running Participation Officer Liaise with clubs to identify an appropriate pathway that serves participants to transition from couch to club runner Launch the pathway by hosting a participation running conference focused on the needs of running clubs Support the pathway with a series of Running Fitness Network events throughout the year. 	September 2016 January 2017 September 2017 September 2018	Coach Development Lead Running Participation Officer Running Participation Officer / Communications Manager
2	Work with clubs and volunteers to develop resources and initiatives that meet the needs of participants running for fitness.	Quantity and quality of initiatives aimed at participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a best practice guide for clubs focused on Running Fitness Develop a curriculum of resources for participants wishing to achieve specific running related goals Develop an effective warm up and cool down workshop Develop Run Strong physical preparation curriculum, resources and workshop. 	September 2018 September 2019 March 2017 September 2017	Running Participation Officer / Coach Development Lead
3	Deliver a schedule of coaching qualifications that meets demand from clubs.	Number of individuals on qualification waiting list is below a predefined level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move the booking process for coaching qualifications to uLearnAthletics.com Maintain a waiting list for qualifications Schedule enough qualification courses to meet demand by both award type and geographical location Offer professional development opportunities to the tutor and assessor workforce based on individual needs analysis Direct newly qualified leaders and coaches to the next steps on the coach development pathway and towards development opportunities that meet their future aspirations. 	September 2017 September 2016 Ongoing September 2018 September 2018	Workforce Administrator Coach Development Lead Communications Manager
4	Ensure races are safe, secure, accessible and properly licensed.	Plan exists for the development of race related volunteers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule and publicise calendar of training courses aimed at road running volunteers including marshalling and first aid Update annual communications plan to include a marketing campaign focused on raising awareness of permitting process Create a training workshop for club based race directors that includes details of insurance requirements and publicise on club visits and via NIrunning.co.uk Organise an Event Organisers Conference to promote best practice. 	September 2017 September 2017 September 2018 September 2019	Events Manager Communications Manager Events Manager Communications Manager

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5	Provide schools with support to deliver pupils' first experience of Athletics.	Attendance at teacher development events increases year on year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signpost teachers to new British Athletics Schools resource app • Deliver teacher training opportunities and support with content on Nifutures.com • Ensure EBA coaches work with schools to both showcase programmes and upskill assisting teachers. 	September 2018 September 2019 September 2020	Coach Development Lead Coach Development Lead EBA Coaches
6	Improve the club affiliation and monitoring process.	100% of clubs are using the British Athletics Affiliation Portal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move club affiliation to the British Athletics online system already implemented elsewhere in the UK • Create a training curriculum that supports clubs with the new system • Increase awareness of the changes and available support resources through an ongoing affiliation marketing programme 	March 2018 March 2018 March 2018	Operations Manager / Workforce Administrator Communications Manager
7	Signpost participants to clubs and encourage them to engage in lifelong activity.	Year on year increase in new athlete affiliations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with EBA coaches to ensure sustained participants transfer into clubs • Create marketing material aimed at Parkrun and Couch to 5K participants. 	September 2017 September 2018	Running Participation Officer Every Body Active Coaches Communications Manager
8	Reward and recognise clubs that follow best practice in club development.	Number of news stories and events promoting best practice by clubs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicise clubs that deliver Rising Stars and Startrack syllabus on AthleticsNI.org and through termly marketing campaigns • Provide an award for "Best youth development club" based on an inspection of delivery. 	January 2019 January 2020	Communications Manager Coach Development Lead

9.3 Host the best 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games to make Northern Ireland proud

Host the best 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games to make Northern Ireland proud	
Ownership:	Events Manager
Interlinked objectives	9.1
SMART Measure	Post event review of Athletics delivery at the 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games

It is our ambition to work closely with Sport NI, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Commonwealth Games Council to ensure they stage the best ever Commonwealth Youth Games in Belfast 2021.

It is our responsibility to ensure we make the Athletics programme at these games an unforgettable experience for the young athletes who attend, their supporters and support staff. 2021 is also an opportunity to make the people of Northern Ireland proud by showcasing to the world the best of what we have to offer.

9.3.1 Our Goals

- Develop the Track & Field competition experience so it meets the needs of athletes and spectators
- Develop officials and volunteers with the goal of delivering the best possible 2021 Games' Athletics programme
- Develop effective policies and procedures for team management and train volunteers in their implementation
- Provide an effective and enjoyable preparation experience for athletes targeting the 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games
- Bid for more international competitions to provide training opportunities for officials and event staff
- Recognise and reward the work of volunteers associated with competition delivery.

9.3.2 Integrated Tactics and Actions

Host the best 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games to make Northern Ireland proud					
Priority	Tactic	KPI	Action	Timeline	Ownership
1	Develop the Track & Field competition experience so it meets the needs of athletes and spectators.	Year on year increase in the number of entrants to major NI competitions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow British Athletics' strategic lead with respect to the competitions and consult NI athletes to identify areas for improvement Roll out the use of "duel straight timing" for sprint events Consult with officials to raise awareness of and create practical solutions to common issues. 	September 2017 September 2017 September 2018	Events Manager Workforce Administrator
2	Develop officials and volunteers with the goal of delivering the best possible 2021 Games' Athletics programme.	CWYG Volunteer Development Pathway (VDP) published.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and communicate a clear pathway for officials wishing to be involved in the 2021 CWYG. This should occur in partnership with the Officials Committee including a transparent selections policy Deliver a series of initiatives to address the skill shortages identified in the VDP. 	September 2018 September 2020	Officials Committee / Events Manager
3	Develop effective policies and procedures for team management and train volunteers in their implementation.	Percentage of team staff who have undergone team management training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop team management handbook and training day curriculum Team leader to review management process following major competition Collect survey data from all athletes who attend competitions to check quality of team management 	September 2018 Ongoing September 2020	Athlete Development Lead Workforce Administrator
4	Provide an effective and enjoyable preparation experience for athletes targeting the 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games.	Post event participation survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver a warm-weather training camp incorporating coach development opportunities prior to the 2017 and 2021 CWYG Deliver a series of CWYG preparation workshops for athletes and coaches in the two years prior to each event. 	As appropriate As appropriate	Athlete Development Lead / Coach Development Lead
5	Bid for more international competitions to provide training opportunities for officials and event staff.	Delivery of more international fixtures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make a bid for the European Cross Country Championships Host the 2017 Summer Home Countries International Host the Celtic Cross Country in 2018 Host the Home Countries International in 2020. 	Aligned to deadlines set by bidding criteria	General Secretary / Operations Manager / Events Manager
6	Recognise and reward the work of volunteers associated with competition delivery.	Number of times volunteers are recognised in communications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publicise the involvement of those volunteers who engage with the CWYG development pathway Create and implement strategic marketing plan to publicise and reward volunteers. 	September 2020	Communications Manager

9.4 Aspire to excellence in everything we do

Aspire to excellence in everything we do	
Ownership:	Operations Manager
Interlinked objectives	9.1, 9.2, 9.1
SMART Measure	Year on year staff consultation results

It is our ambition to aspire to excellence in everything we do. In our role as leaders of our sport, it is essential that we achieve the highest possible standards. Within Northern Ireland we are responsible for taking a strategic lead across many diverse areas including coaching, officiating, competition scheduling and permitting, health and safety, facilities managements and ethical standards. By aspiring to excellence in all areas we can become an example of how an effective governing body operates and delivers transparent governance to its membership.

9.4.1 Our Goals

- Maintain the highest standards on anti-doping
- Establish Northern Ireland as an example of best practice with respect to supporting youth development and running for fitness
- Align the club affiliation process with the gold standard implemented in England, Scotland and Wales
- Align online booking of coaching qualifications with systems used in England, Scotland and Wales
- Ensure Athletics continues to be at the forefront of diversity and equality
- Work closely with Irish and British Athletics to ensure development programmes for coaches and volunteers are aligned and complementary
- Ensure Athletics NI continues to improve its governance in line with best practice
- Communicate transparently across a range of channels and formats
- Ensure Athletics NI continues to be at the forefront of delivery with respect to major events.

9.4.2 Integrated Tactics and Actions

Aspire to excellence in everything we do					
Priority	Tactic	KPI	Action	Timeline	Ownership
1	Maintain the highest standards on anti-doping.	Anti-doping strategy is 100% aligned with UKAD and British Athletics lead.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise anti-doping strategic plan to ensure it keeps pace with the strategic lead of UKAD and British Athletics Recruit and train volunteers to assist with the plans delivery. 	Ongoing	Athlete Development Lead
2	Establish Northern Ireland as an example of best practice with respect to supporting youth development and running for fitness.	Completeness of curriculum and information published on Nifutures.com.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all curriculum and resources are published online via Nifutures.com and accessible to all Promote Nifutures.com content widely via social media and all appropriate events. 	March 2021	Director of Coaching & Athlete Development Communications Manager
3	Align the club affiliation process with the gold standard implemented in England, Scotland and Wales.	British Athletics club affiliation portal implemented in Northern Ireland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move club affiliation to the British Athletics online system already implemented elsewhere in the UK Create a training curriculum that supports clubs with the new system Increase awareness of the changes and available support resources through an ongoing affiliation marketing programme. 	March 2018 March 2018 March 2018	Operations Manager Workforce Administrator Communications Manager
4	Align online booking of coaching/officials qualifications with systems used in England, Scotland and Wales.	All qualifications can be booked online via uLearnAthletics.com.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move the booking process for coaching qualifications to uLearnAthletics.com Ensure data on the system is current and up to date. 	September 2017 September 2020	Workforce Administrator
5	Ensure Athletics continues to be at the forefront of diversity and equality.	Progress against DSNI pledge criteria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sign up to the DSNI pledge and associated action plan Ensure all programmes are fully inclusive Raise our level of Equality Standard for Sport compliance from “foundation” to at least “preliminary”. 	September 2016 January 2021	Director of Coaching & Athlete Development Operations Manager
6	Work closely with Irish and British Athletics to ensure development programmes for coaches and volunteers are aligned and complementary.	Athlete Support Pathway & Coach Development Pathway align with British Athletics and Athletics Ireland initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the Athletics Ireland Coach Development Networks within NI and align and reinforce delivery themes Align Elite Athlete Support Pathway content with British Athletics’ high performance coach development curriculum. 	Ongoing September 2018	Communications Manager Director of Coaching & Athlete Development

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7	Ensure Athletics NI continues to improve its governance in line with best practice.	Progress relative to Sport NI governance targets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue working to ensure the “Code of Good Governance” for the board is refined and updated. 	September 2020	Operations Manager
8	Communicate transparently across a range of channels and formats.	100% of website content is up to date, engaging and well formatted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure website content is up to date, engaging and correctly formatted on a monthly basis Create communications plan that aligns with this strategy and covers all touchpoints. 	Ongoing	Communications Manager
9	Ensure Athletics NI continues to be at the forefront of delivery with respect to major events.	Number of award nominations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek nomination for an Event Management Award. 	September 2020	Operations Manager / Events Manager

APPENDICES

10 Bibliography

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11 Proposed Athletics NI Organisational Chart

