

4<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Dear Club Secretary,

### **Consultation on the Formal Membership of UK Athletics**

As member clubs will be aware, in November 2020, Athletics NI announced, together with the other three Home Country Athletics Federations (HCAFs) and UK Athletics a new 12-year strategy for the sport across the whole of the UK.

#### [Athletics Unified - Powering Potential; Enhancing Experiences; Delivering Success 2020-2032](#)

Alongside this new strategy, reflecting our shared commitment to a collaborative approach, the five organisations have established a new governance and engagement framework that includes new approaches to working across the organisations to develop athletics across the UK, to create alignment, and ensure there is accountability for the delivery of the strategy.

As part of the changes to governance, the UK Athletics Annual General Meeting on 11 December 2020 passed several resolutions to amend the Articles of Association to enable each HCAF to nominate a director to the UK Athletics Board. This change has now been implemented giving the Management Board of Athletics NI the ability to appoint a director to the Board of UK Athletics. The Board of Athletics NI have appointed the Chair, David Abrahams, to this role.

It was also agreed in December that detailed proposals would be formulated to enable formal consultation with the sport on the future formal membership structure of UK Athletics, as well as whether to have a "council", and if so its role and constitution.

This paper sets out some options for formal membership of UK Athletics going forward.

Having considered the options, the Management Board of Athletics NI also sets out the recommended position in relation to the membership of UKA [and also the council] and the reasons for reaching the conclusions we have.

As part of the UK wide consultation which is being conducted with its member clubs by each HCAF, we would like to invite your feedback on the options outlined, and particularly on the Athletics NI proposed position. Please send any comments, opinions, or questions on behalf of your club to [kerry.woods@athleticsni.org](mailto:kerry.woods@athleticsni.org) by Friday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

The feedback from each of the HCAFs will be submitted to the current UKA Members who will then vote to determine the final outcome of the consultation.



David Abrahams  
Chair

## Background – Roles and Responsibilities

A starting point for considering this issue, is the roles and responsibilities of UK Athletics. This is clearly set out in the UK Sport review of UK Athletics, and the approach that has been taken between the five organisations: ‘UKA should only do what only UKA can (most effectively) do’.

In order to approach this topic, it is the single most important starting point that the governing body of athletics in Northern Ireland is Athletics NI. The same is the case in each of the other three home countries, in which each HCAF exists to be the governing body for the whole sport, for and on behalf of their member clubs, and the individuals connected with them. Conceptually, therefore, UK Athletics exists in order to carry out roles and responsibilities that the HCAFs (for and on behalf of their respective members, whose interests they represent) either cannot do at HCAF level, or because the HCAFs decide for them to be done at UK level for reasons of efficiency (which includes consistency where this is seen as beneficial, as was highlighted as being the case in the recent independent review of Safeguarding). On this basis, UK Athletics can be seen as a “joint venture”, created by the HCAFs to carry out defined roles and responsibilities as decided by the HCAFs, with accountability from the “joint venture” created by the HCAFs to the HCAFs, and therefore the whole of athletics across the UK. Through this approach the sport can be sure that UK Athletics is only doing what only UKA can (most effectively) do. Examples are roles and responsibilities that the HCAFs require a UK level organisation to do: being a coordinating forum between them, being the World Athletics member, being responsible for GB and NI level performance, generating commercial activity including major events, etc.

Through this approach, the “collegiate” and collaborative approach required by UK Sport can be achieved, and with the HCAFs driving accountability for all activities in the sport, whether by the HCAF itself (for which it is accountable to its members), or through UK Athletics (accountable to the HCAFs, and therefore through to their members).

Under the Articles the current “formal membership of UKA” carries out two distinct roles:

- a) The formal legal membership of the Company in the same as exists in any Company Limited by Guarantee – including Athletics NI - or if in a Company Limited by Shares would be called “shareholders”. This has the standard powers under the law and Articles, as follows:
  - to receive the annual financial statements and reports of the activities of the Company from the Board
  - to amend the Articles of Association (effectively, the constitution of the company)
  - to remove directors by ordinary resolution
  - to appoint the Auditors and fix their remuneration
  
- b) As an advisory “council”: to receive information, debate issues, act as a sounding board, and act as ambassadors

This paper is concerned primarily with a), the formal membership of UK Athletics. There must be a formal membership, whereas a “council” is a matter of choice. The formal membership and the constitution of a “council” do not have to be the same. They have been so historically in the case of UK Athletics.

## Existing Formal membership

Currently, the “formal membership” comprises:

- President and Vice President
- one representative of each of the four HCAFs
- three persons elected by “Affiliated Clubs” (which are in effect, each of the member clubs of the HCAFs)
- one person elected by road runners
- one person elected by senior coaches
- one person elected by senior officials
- chair of the Athletes Commission
- any person from the United Kingdom serving as a World Athletics Council Member who elects to be a UKA Member
- any person from the United Kingdom serving as a committee member on the IPC Athletics Technical Committee who elects to be a UKA Member

## Formal membership options

### **Option A**

*The four HCAF’s become the formal members of UK Athletics, with one vote per each HCAF.*

This option reflects the position that the HCAFs are the governing bodies of athletics in their respective countries, reflecting the interests and democratic will of their members, and the concept that the HCAFs come together to create a body at UK level to carry out roles and responsibilities that need to be done at UK level. It also best reflects the “Framework Agreement” under which the respective roles and responsibilities of the HCAFs and UK Athletics are set out, and reviewed on an ongoing basis, so that the allocation of roles and responsibilities can best achieve the objective that UKA Athletics ‘should only do what only UKA can (most effectively) do’.

The HCAFs are accountable, through their membership structures, to the whole sport for the roles and responsibilities being carried out for their memberships through UK Athletics. All involved in the sport are represented through the representative structures of the HCAFs, who in turn appoint their leaderships, and ultimately boards.

It therefore has the advantage that decision making and accountability is clear, and that what is agreed between the HCAFs is what will be, rather than UK Athletics having a different set of members who may determine that they wish the organisation to do different things, or things differently, to what has been set by the HCAFs. Such a situation will only tend to cause confusion.

## Option B

*The four HCAF's become the formal members of UK Athletics, with votes distributed proportionately based on the number of member clubs within each HCAF.*

Many of the comments on Option A apply. As above, between them, the four HCAFs encompass 100 per cent of athletics across the UK through their membership structures. There is an argument that voting rights between the memberships should reflect relative sizes. On this basis, a measure would be created so that if one HCAF were 3 times the size of another, then it would have three voting memberships to one.

There are contrary positions, such as:

- the nature of the powers of the members is limited as above, and that therefore there is no need to move away from the principle in the "Framework Agreement" of the HCAFs being equal partners.
- UK Athletics does not levy membership fees (and a provision can be inserted to prevent it ever happening), so there is not an issue for UK Athletics that often drives the logic of weighted voting, of "taxation and representation". It would always be likely that expenditure will be on a basis that will follow size and scale of the athletic community, and that will be a responsibility of the Board and Executive, as opposed to members.
- The current constitution has never reflected weighting – at present, the biggest HCAF is only 1 out of 13 of a minimum number of votes if all positions are filled (and more if WA/IPC related positions are taken). Indeed, it is a fact that 100 per cent of athletics in the UK, in terms of membership represented through the HCAFs, only constitutes 4/13ths of the UK Athletics formal membership.
- The voting positions as formal members are mostly a simple majority (over 50 per cent – or 3 out of 4) or 75 per cent (again, 3 out of 4).

## Option C

*Formal membership is the four HCAFs, together with representative interests that are considered to fall outside the current membership models.*

This is a variation of either Option A or B. This option has merit if the central proposition that the HCAFs are the governing bodies of athletics in their respective countries is, somehow, not true. If it is true, then the interests of the whole of the sport will be reflected through each HCAF and, ultimately, their boards.

There may be a view, despite this, that four shareholders (albeit four votes representing each of the four HCAFs, and therefore 100 per cent of the sport) is somehow not what the sport wants. If this were the case, it tends to suggest HCAFs appointing more than one individual to carry their mandate through to a member general meeting. Additional

individuals could be appointed to reflect their involvement in the sport (for instance, athlete, coach, technical official, volunteer, club), although they would need to still operate corporately, according to the mandate of their appointing body. Again, that would appear unnecessary bearing in mind the nature of member meeting business.

Take the position of elite athletes, who have an ownership stake in UK Athletics through the chair of the Athletes Commission being a member with an equal vote with, say, an HCAF. The athlete perspective is of course vitally important, and needs to be thought about throughout the sport's governance, but that is not the same as a formal membership position. One possibility is for such an interest to be a non-voting attendee at general meetings of the company, but as above the nature of the role of a member may not make this worthwhile.

### **Option D**

*All HCAF member clubs to constitute the formal membership of UK Athletics on a one vote per club basis.*

This option has logic to it in as much as a member club of an HCAF governing body should also be a member club of a UK level body. This has the advantage of creating a clear membership connection between all member clubs in the UK with their UK governing body. At present, all member clubs of HCAFs are non-voting "affiliated member clubs" of UK Athletics, so a change to creating a voting membership would seem a logical step in order to create a greater sense of ownership and engagement between all clubs and UK Athletics.

There are contrary views:

- Common membership confuses the logic stated above, which places membership of the HCAF as the member club/governing body relationship, and the HCAFs then creating a UK level body, with the logic that UK Athletics should do the least possible, as opposed to the most.
- Membership, and the financials of the membership relationship, is of vital significance to the HCAFs, and that should not be confused by creating common membership.
- The issues that members consider are very limited, and are very different to engagement and consultation on sporting issues, which (in addition to finance as above) is the focus of the member/governing body relationship. Engagement and consultation are vitally important, but different, and need to be addressed through different routes (one being annual all club physical and remote forums, for instance an annual physical gathering each Summer).
- At an organisational level, managing relationships at UK level with clubs will be problematic. There is also the view that for a great number of clubs, the primary or most significant concern by far is the HCAF relationship and matters addressed through that.

## Option E

*All individuals within the UK athletics community, for instance registered athletes, coaches, volunteers become members of UK Athletics*

This would go beyond the HCAF representative membership approach, which creates a question as to why it would apply at UK level but not HCAF level.

Similar analysis for Option D, but with greater levels of organisational and logistical complexity.

### Athletics NI Management Board position

**Having reviewed the options set out above, the Board of Athletics NI firmly believe that option A will best represent the interests of athletics in Northern Ireland. This option would give each HCAF formal membership of UKA on the basis of one vote per HCAF. Northern Ireland would therefore have an equal membership of UK Athletics with the other HCAFs.**

In forming this judgement, the Board of Athletics NI took into account the specific role of UKA versus the well understood roles and responsibilities of the HCAFs. The HCAFs have always been recognised as the voice of the sport within their own territories, representing all of their stakeholders, including clubs, coaches, athletes, officials and volunteers. The role of UKA, by contrast, is much more limited to being the internationally recognised governing body with responsibility for the governance and rules of the sport across the UK, as well as elite performance and elite events. Under the new structure which we are recommending, UKA would be accountable to the HCAFs and indeed, its authority to meet its objectives would be delegated and derived from the HCAFs. That will ensure that the best interests of the entirety of our sport will be embedded in the way UKA operates going forward.

As the governing body for athletics in Northern Ireland, Athletics NI has the core relationship with the member clubs and will always consult with members in relation to any decisions taken in relation to UKA. In addition, Athletics NI will represent member views in the capacity as a member of UK Athletics and also through the working groups established across UKA and the four HCAFs. The new framework which has been put in place to ensure close collaboration across the four HCAFs and UKA will ensure that the views of the grassroots and all levels of the sport will be taken into account in everything that UKA is to do.

We also believe this obviates the need for a “council”. The Board of Athletics NI considers that the changes to the formal membership and winding up of the council, along with the implementation of the new approach in the Framework Agreement will allow the sport to modernise and work more effectively for all of its stakeholders going forward.

Option A will ensure that athletics in Northern Ireland has a strong voice and an equal say in key decisions affecting the sport at UK level. It will ensure there is clarity in the roles and responsibilities of UKA and the HCAFs.

The Board of Athletics NI values the input we receive from our member clubs and we would welcome your views on the proposals we have set out here on the way forward for the membership of UK Athletics.