

Members' Questions for AGM 2023

Q1. Please state the policies and procedures in place for athletes selected for the Youth Academy, specifically the criteria for Hardship grants and who receives them. In addition, explain why some athletes are selected by Coaching staff and kept a place paid or free, and others who are much higher ranked are not offered a place. This also applies to the Erasmus trips when athletes who are hand-picked by ANI Coaches can be justified when others are not offered a place.

The criteria for Academy selections have been consistent for a number of years and is published in the annual Academy Application Pack. The 2022/23 application pack can be found at the following link [2022-YouthAcademyApplicationPack.docx \(live.com\)](#)

Hardship fee waivers have been available for a number of years but 2022/23 was the first year that any applications for this came through. The following was included in the standard email going out to selected Academy Athletes until 2022/23. 'For anyone who is experiencing financial difficulties a fee waiver does also exist. We do not require you to provide any details and only ask for you to confirm by email to the Academies Manager that you would like fees to be waived. This will be treated in the strictest of confidence.' At the end of 2022 this policy was reviewed and now for 2023/24 there were no hardship fee waivers offered.

Much work has been done in the last year to ensure equality and fairness in our selection process. For 2023/24 the Academy selections took place in conjunction with the published criteria at the following link [Academy 2023-24 Applications Now Open | Athletics NI News | Athletics News Northern Ireland | Athletics Northern Ireland](#). Both criteria and process had been agreed between ANI staff and the head of the Selection Committee. All Academy athletes have been selected in line with the policy and all high ranked athletes who applied were selected.

For the Erasmus selections, these were carried out in line with the rules outlined in the application, primarily that athletes could not previously have travelled on an Erasmus camp to be eligible for a funded trip. The 24 athletes were made up by first selecting from the Youth Academy, then selecting from Commonwealth Youth Games long list (who had not travelled on an Erasmus trip before) and finally selecting from Speed Power Academy.

Q2. At the beginning of the year a priority list of equipment was drawn up for the Mary Peters Track and submitted to the CEO and Track and Field Committee. Despite there being an allocated budget for equipment which is needed on an annual basis why did the CEO refuse to purchase any of the items on the list. There now is a deficit of equipment needed to run competitions and furthermore on at least two occasions the photo finish equipment has failed during competitions, why has a backup laptop not been purchased.

All expenditure must be completed in line with the financial policies and procedures including comparable quotes. Items were procured on a case-by-case basis as and when needed throughout the season. Large expenditure on equipment for Mary Peters Track was minimised due to the uncertain future of the Belfast City Council contract and associated risks.

The nature of the current photo finish equipment requires use of laptops with associated software programmes of which there are two. A new laptop would not solve the problem as it would not be compatible with our existing equipment. Options are being looked at to find a cost-effective solution going forwards.

Q3. Who is responsible for the Mary Peters Track Tender, and what is the current update. Will more costly consultants be brought in to do the work of staff and how can this be justified given the current financial crisis.

There is no financial crisis at Mary Peters Track. Elaine is leading negotiations with Belfast City Council around the future relationship. This has included liaising with UK Facilities and Planning Manager to explore best practice examples of different management models across the UK. Subsequently we were put in touch with Sporting Assets a leading expert in this field who have recently supported UK Clubs with similar projects who have advised of suitable models. The current contract was extended to the end of March 2024 to allow Belfast City Council alongside ourselves to fully investigate the future management of the track as it was agreed that the current short terms contract is not fit for purpose.

We are currently doing desk research and consulting with some experts to ensure that we understand what is feasible and financially sustainable to ensure we arrive at a new management arrangement that would be better suited to the longer-term nature of the relationship required and allow future security of the contract for the organisation, staff as well as the council

Q4. Staff Turnover and responsibility for Strategy, HR and Management (Combination)

The reasons for staff leaving are wide and varied and we now conduct exit interviews with all staff so that any lesson learned can be factored into the future. With the current information held we do not recognise any trends at this time. It is normal practice for staff changes to occur, especially in a competitive employment market and with the nature of roles in sport being subject to funding, it can make other roles & vocations more attractive. Other industries are also offering better salaries which can be difficult to compete against and there is less room for progression in a small organisation. The CEO has responsibility for Strategy, HR & Management. Over the past 17 months the CEO has secured increased funding to cover more roles within the organisation and recontracted all staff. The CEO has pushed for an introduction of multiyear funding which is now being promised which would allow us to offer more security to staff. The new strategy has been set with a focus on ultimately reducing reliance on grant funding in the longer term. It is not appropriate to speak about individuals' reasons for leaving.

Free usage note: Limitation of the facility. No gates as public park. Issue has been raised with BCC

Q5. Can the financial cutbacks be better managed, staff to take ownership and responsibility. Does cutting budgets in certain areas reflect poorly in ANI while other areas have free rein with the monies.

There have been no cut backs what in fact the organisation has been focused on is increased financial controls to better understand our expenditure, provide value for money and in the long-term try to deliver more while growing our reserves. We are delighted to have received our largest ever Grant from Sport Northern Ireland and our capital and reserves are tracking back well to pre-pandemic levels. As of month 5, (Aug 23) we have £59,000+ reserves and £189,00+ cash position. We are also one of 12 National Governing Bodies who have been granted greater financial assurance via a Financial Control Statement (FCS) making our financial monitoring & reporting to Sport NI less onerous. This is only awarded when the organisations financial systems are deemed robust and the recent work in this area has enabled ANI to maintain this Robust rating and be granted and FCS

Much work has been done over the last 16 months to introduce New Financial policies and procedure that are in line with the necessary financial expectations of National Governing Body for sport. Business cases have been introduced to better manage budget from across different programmes and organisational areas. Procurement has been introduced to ensure better controls, approvals and value for money, alongside new authorisation levels.

Increased costs in a number of different areas require us to be prudent and control spending across all areas of the business. Due to the nature of restricted (restricted in the sense that it must be used in certain areas) funds from Sport NI, some areas of the business may have appeared to be less affected due to ringfenced nature of grant funding.

Budgets have been introduced across all areas of the business and our New Audit & Risk Committee is working hard to support the Board by providing financial oversight and acting as a check and balance on the organisation's financial affairs. All steps towards future financial sustainability and independence.

A next step in this process is the creation of a Competition and Events Committee who will support staff in ensuring that the correct budgets are in place to continue to deliver events to the required standard across all event groups.

Q6. Can you please explain the purpose of the club league competition and evaluate it's worth? (it's not a league, is poorly supported, events are sometimes hand timed and events get cancelled)

The club league is not an ANI competition. It is organised and managed by a separate competition provider. Therefore, all questions on competition structure should be directed to the organiser. Athletics NI remain committed to working with all competition providers to ensure the best possible competition experience for all athletes, including sharing best practice

Q7. Please explain clearly who gets medals for the combined championships.

At the age groups there are ANI, USC and AI (individual schools) registered athletes.

Only Club registered athletes can qualify through to the All-Ireland Age-group Championships from the NI & Ulster Age-group Championship however the NI & Ulster Championships is open to NI Schools Athletes who are yet to join a Club and we encourage those podium athletes at the Ulster Schools Championships to attend. Those Schools athletes have a two-week window to join a club post Championships and if they do, they can take up a qualification place at the All Irelands.

Top 3 podium is presented, then Schools athletes (with no club) who do not qualify to all Irelands are taken out and there is an NI & Ulster Podium. This was a compromise made so that no athlete will miss out on a medal regardless of club affiliation and to encourage non club athletes to register with a club. However, we have recently agreed a solution for next year that the Ulster schools will register with ANI as a club therefore allowing non club affiliated athletes to progress through to the All-Ireland and negating the need for double podiums. The aim will still be to get these athletes to join a local club as soon as possible. This local club would take precedence over the Ulster schools club once the athlete become registered to the new club.

Q8. Erasmus question has been removed as possible slanderous allegations that could ensue therefore will not be answered.

Q9. What commercial sponsorship was brought in over the past year and where were the funds allocated?

For the events, £10,000.00 sponsorship was brought in from Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council for the International Cross Country and £6,000.00 from Flahavan's for the Primary Schools Cross Country League. There are additional partnerships with Shokz Headphones, Kingsbridge Private Hospital and Runners Need who provide discounts for our members.

£10k was also brought in from Belfast City Marathon in 2223 to assist in the development of a comprehensive offering of endurance-based athletics activities from grass roots to high performance.

Q10. The joint age groups event in Athlone saw a lower level of volunteering officials provided from USC, with parents officiating inside the track while videoing races. Will this be raised and addressed for future events or will this become the norm?

The parents in question, who were videoing were approached at the time and this was dealt with. They were advised that if they are officiating, they cannot video inside the track. We have a limited number of officials, across ANI and UAC and so we want to encourage parents/ coaches etc to get involved, as we need our officials and volunteers in order to run the events. These volunteers will be steered towards officiating courses as soon as practically possible to try and grow our no of qualified officials.

Q11. Why are names, and in deed, re-voting for board members back decades. Do they not only have an 8-year maximum on the board.

Confirmation of appointment of directors of the Company for period from incorporation to 26th October 2023

The Articles of Association of the company provide that any director appointed by the board to fill a casual vacancy shall hold office only until the next annual general meeting and shall then be eligible for re-election.

Since incorporation, the board has appointed several directors to fill casual vacancies but does not appear to have ever submitted their appointments to the members for ratification at any general meeting. This does not mean that individuals were not authorised to function as directors as the activities of all directors have been deemed authorised under the articles during this period. It is, however, a technical defect that has, inter alia, the potential to invalidate Directors & Officers insurance in place at the relevant times. For the protection of all individuals who have voluntarily served our sport as directors, we propose a resolution to affirm and ratify all appointments hence the list of previous directors.

Q12. We received a series of questions and we are unable to answer regarding funding of individual athletes.

No individual athlete can be referenced.

All decisions regarding funding are made through internal policies & procedure and are compliant with Sport NI Term & Conditions of Award.

We regularly liaise with AAI on funding of elite athletes and adjust what elements of their performance plan we support accordingly.

Q13. Can you confirm who the Safeguarding Officer is.

Allister Woods is ANI's Welfare Officer

Q14. Can you confirm ANI's policies and procedures for informing clubs if anyone is banned by UKA from coaching or competing.

It is not an Athletics NI policy or procedure, but an overarching UKA process that has been written in collaboration with the HCAFs.

If a coach is banned, the coach in question will be made aware by UKA and will be informed of any further conditions set against them outside of being unable to coach (e.g. some bans can have knock on effects on club memberships). The coach's case may have been tried at panel therefore they might be aware of what the outcome will be. In a Safeguarding case, UKA will publish the outcome and will also include specific points in coaches code of conduct that have been breached. They will never list details that could identify the victim or victims (Everything we do is all to protect and support victim/s).

Once a decision has been made, UKA will notify ANI Welfare Officer who will in turn notify relevant staff who deal with licensing or memberships and other staff where relevant. This will also include liaising with the club around a banned coach or athlete and what the connotations of that are and what the club need to do.

It is up to the club as to how they communicate the message of a ban or suspension to their wider membership.

If anyone has further queries, please feel free to contact welfare@athleticsni.org.

It is also important to note that clubs should not assume we as an organisation know everything in terms of issues arising in clubs. We can only act on information that has been provided to us.

Q15. How many athletes have had their registration paid for by their club but have not managed to complete the Antidoping statement? What is the current status of these athletes? Are they registered and insured? If they are not registered or insured will those fees be returned to the clubs?

OpenTrack has been utilised as our solution to solve issues around anti-doping compliance and we are well aware that this has had a significant effect and has added many hours of work for club secretaries. Please accept my sincere apologies.

Current number unsigned 2500 and Current number signed 5800.

Marsh have confirmed that the anti-doping disclaimer has no impact on the insurance cover and therefore all covered as club members.

This may change in future if UKAD make compliance more stringent.

A number of steps have been taken to try and close the gap and get all athletes to sign the disclaimer including a club webinar, step by step guide, video guide for parents and direct emails to those who have not ticked the disclaimer. However, the gap remains significant.

A task and finish group is being established to make the necessary improvement to this process and create an OpenTrack Development Action plan to make necessary improvement to the system across the board.

Q16. Individual athlete/member direct payments to Open Track rather in line with other governing bodies such as Cycling & Triathlon Ireland.

This is something that OpenTrack indicated they can do, but it would need consultation with our clubs if we were to move to this, as many have their own membership systems which they have invested money into setting up. A solution is to have a hybrid approach with some clubs opting to use OpenTrack if they haven't created their own system. As the system grows and matures perhaps those clubs with their own systems might migrate across, however in the meantime there would have to be sharing of data with clubs or an API set up with other systems.

Q17. Pro-rata even half yearly) memberships for those who decide to join partway through an ANI calendar year.

Unmanageable and open to abuse and not offered in other HCAF's.

Q18. The issue of race entry swapping, partly for medical reasons but also for the skew in average times effecting GFA qualifications in particular the impact on older female athletes.

This issue was discussed by the XC & Road running committee in January 23 after the question was raised at last year's AGM. It was decided that any athlete found to have competed in the number of another athlete will be disqualified unless permission has been obtained from the race director or his/her nominee before the start of the race. Retrospective (i.e., after the race has started and /or finished) changes will not be accepted. Entry swapping is discouraged at all ANI events and good practice is shared with race organisers for implementation. It was deemed disproportionate to disqualify a Team if one athlete runs in the wrong number but the individual can be disqualified and then the next available athlete would be used as the scorer for the team if available.

The new endurance committee will be tasked with considering Good for Age issue and any potential changes that may be deemed necessary.

Q19. Race capping male entries to 50% on events (particularly those likely to sell out) to level up female participation

New Endurance Committee to consider.