



YOUTH ACADEMY 2025-26

APPLICATION PACK



NURTURING JUNIOR TALENT
ASPIRING TO SENIOR SUCCESS

VISION

Our vision is to inspire more athletes of all abilities and backgrounds to fulfil their potential, have a lifelong love for the sport, and ensure an inclusive sport where everyone belongs and can flourish. In support of this, we aim to identify and develop talented junior athletes and raise their potential for senior success. We are focused on improving physical qualities, sporting knowledge, psychological skills and performance behaviours in young athletes whilst educating parents and coaches on what it takes to perform consistently on the international stage as seniors. In doing so we believe Northern Ireland will develop a pipeline of junior athletes prepared to represent Northern Ireland, Ireland, or Great Britain at major championships.

Mission

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

OUR VALUES

1. Integrity
2. Accountability
3. Transparency
4. Excellence
5. Fun



SUCSESSES

Since establishing the Academy in 2014 supported Athletes have achieved Commonwealth Youth Games Medals, European Junior Medals & World Para Medals & made breakthroughs to compete at European Team Championships, Senior Commonwealth Games, European & World Indoors.

In recent years nine Academy graduates have gone on to make senior major championships with the latest being Jenna Breen who was selected for the 4x400m Relay for the Tokyo World Championships. Kate O'Connor who was in the Youth Academy from 2014-2019 has gone on to win Commonwealth Games, European and World Indoor medals and compete at the Olympic Games.

European Cross-Country Championships were held in in December 2024 in Turkey with several Academy graduates in the Irish team with Nick Griggs winning a silver medal in the Men's U23 race. Lughaidh Mallon and Annabelle Morrison both competed in their respective U20 races.

Academy sprinter Ben Sykes who was 7th in the 100m at the European U18 Championships in 2024 stepped up again in a major final by taking the bronze medal in North Macedonia at the European Youth Olympic Festival in a PB of 10.57 seconds. Ben (4x100m) and fellow Academy athlete Frank Buchanan (1500m) also competed in the European U20 Championships in Finland. At the European U23 Championships in Norway there were no fewer than seven Academy graduates in the Irish team with Nick Griggs winning a silver medal in the 5000m.



ACADEMY STRUCTURE & SUPPORT FOR 2025-26

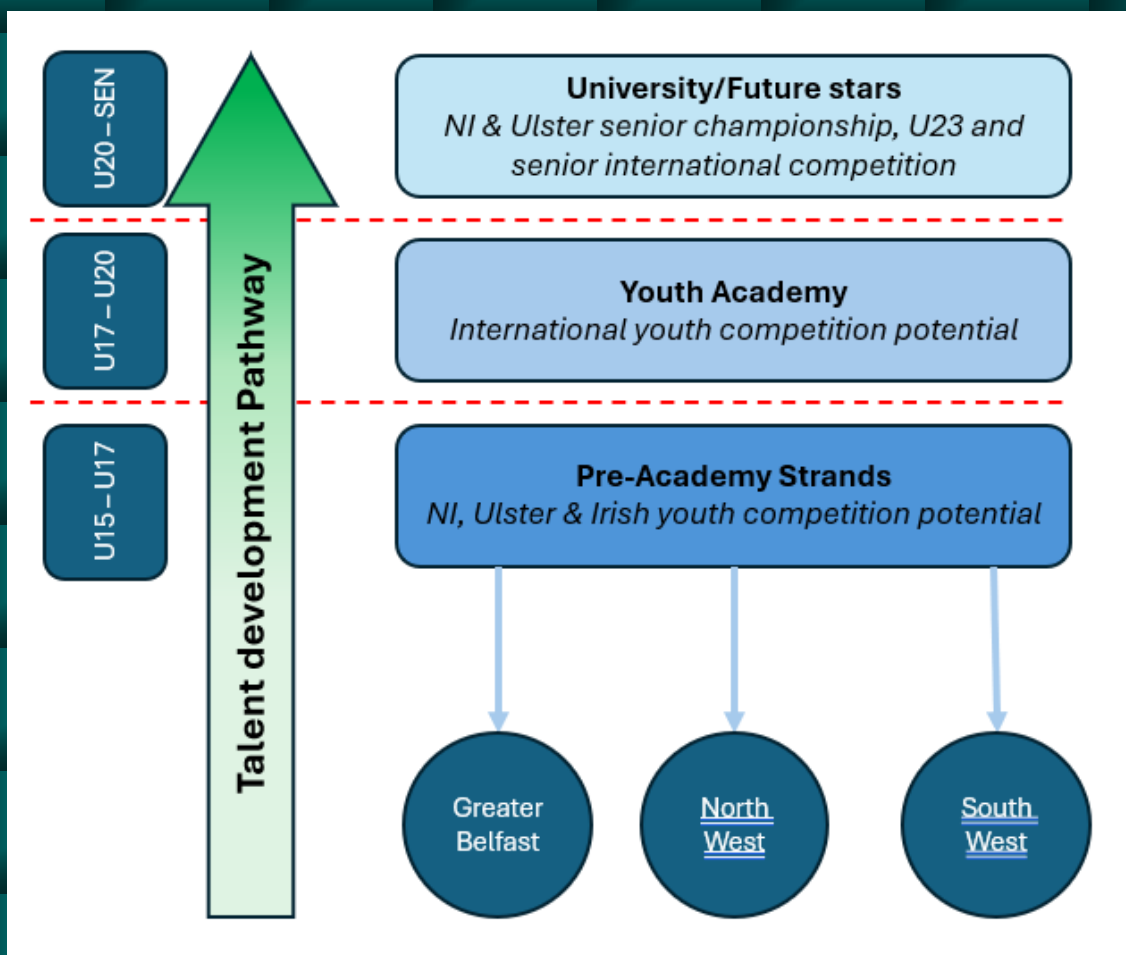
In September 2025 athletes aged under 23 years old will be eligible to apply to either:

Youth Academy (for NI eligible athletes aged between 15-21 years old)



- Weekly Speed Development
- Weekly Strength and Conditioning
- Quarterly Strength Diagnostics and profiling
- Integrated Physiotherapy Clinics
- Athlete, Parent and Coach Education
- Performance planning support for athletes and coaches

ACADEMY STRUCTURE 25_26



YOUTH ACADEMY SERVICES

The Athletics Northern Ireland Youth Academy has proven popular and successful and now has bases at Jordanstown and Magherafelt delivering weekly physical preparation and athlete education sessions. Delivery will recommence at both bases in October 2025.

Youth Academy will offer the following support dependant on relevance to the athlete-coach pair applying:

- **A launch weekend on Sunday 26th October 2025** at Ulster University Jordanstown where athlete and coaches will attend for baseline assessments to assist with goal setting and planning for the upcoming year.
- **Two additional camps in January and April at Ulster University Jordanstown**
- **2 x Weekly sessions** commencing on the week beginning 27th October 2025 focused on speed development, strength & conditioning and plyometrics
- **Bespoke Athlete and coach education** sessions focusing on nutrition, recovery, planning, mindset etc
- **Physiotherapy Support:** Physio support will be available on a case by case basis with academy partner physiotherapists.
- A handful of Youth Academy Athletes who are tracking toward major championships may be able to access increased planning support.



ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for:

- **Youth Academy...** an athlete must be eligible for NI Commonwealth Games selection by fulfilling one of the below criteria
 - Being born in NI
 - Having at least 1 parent or grandparent born in NI
 - Having 3 years residence in NI.
- **Pre-Academy Strands...** an athlete must be either NI eligible (as above) or Ulster eligible (from one of the additional 3 counties of Ulster.)

RETENTION

The Youth Academy is designed to deliver a 3-year curriculum. It is expected that for 2025-2026 there will be competitive applications from a number of new athletes and spaces are not guaranteed for athletes reapplying who have not shown upward progress. Occasional extensions are made for an athlete who has entered very young and would benefit from an additional year of support to assist with their first-year transition to university or work post 18 years. Where an athlete is clearly on a trajectory towards future Commonwealth Games and Youth Academy inclusion would help them to bridge the gap to the Athletics NI Commonwealth Potential Squad their time in the Academy may be extended beyond 3-4 years.



WEEKLY DELIVERY

YOUTH ACADEMY

MONDAY- 5pm – 7pm

A group of academy athletes will be able to attend on a Monday evening between 5-7pm for Strength and Conditioning.

WEDNESDAY- 5pm-7pm

Magherafelt Academy session with speed and strength and conditioning sessions delivered with physiotherapy clinics when required.

FRIDAY- 5.00pm-7.00pm

Athletes wishing to complete two Academy sessions per week will attend this session for speed development and strength and conditioning.

FEES

For successful applicants the athlete fees for inclusion in the Academies October 2025- June 2026 will be as follows. This will be based on two four month terms October – February & March – June. It will be 30 weeks across the year.

Youth Academy Jordanstown - £300

Youth Academy Magherfelt- £300

Academy fee payments will be requested at the time of offer of a place in an Academy program and payment will be required prior to weekly delivery commencing



STAFF

- **James Douglas is the Academies Manager for Athletics NI** and is responsible for Academy delivery and effective communication with athletes, coaches and parents.
- **Tom Reynolds is the Performance Lead for Athletics NI** and will oversee athlete transitions to Commonwealth programme
- **Scott Paulin, Athletics NI Pathways Coach** delivers on weekly speed development and strength and conditioning.
- **Thomas Rogan, Academy Coach** delivers on weekly speed development and strength and conditioning.

SHARED VALUES

Ambition – We aim to make a lasting impact on the sport for Northern Ireland and will seek out new and innovative opportunities to do so.

Challenge – We believe a high challenge-high support environment will achieve the best outcomes for junior athletes.

Consistency – We will consistently deliver world class physical preparation, injury prevention and education utilising all of the professional expertise available to us.

Performance Mindset – We know athletes will require high level psycho-social skills as well as physical skills to succeed as seniors and we will facilitate the development of these through our interactions with them.



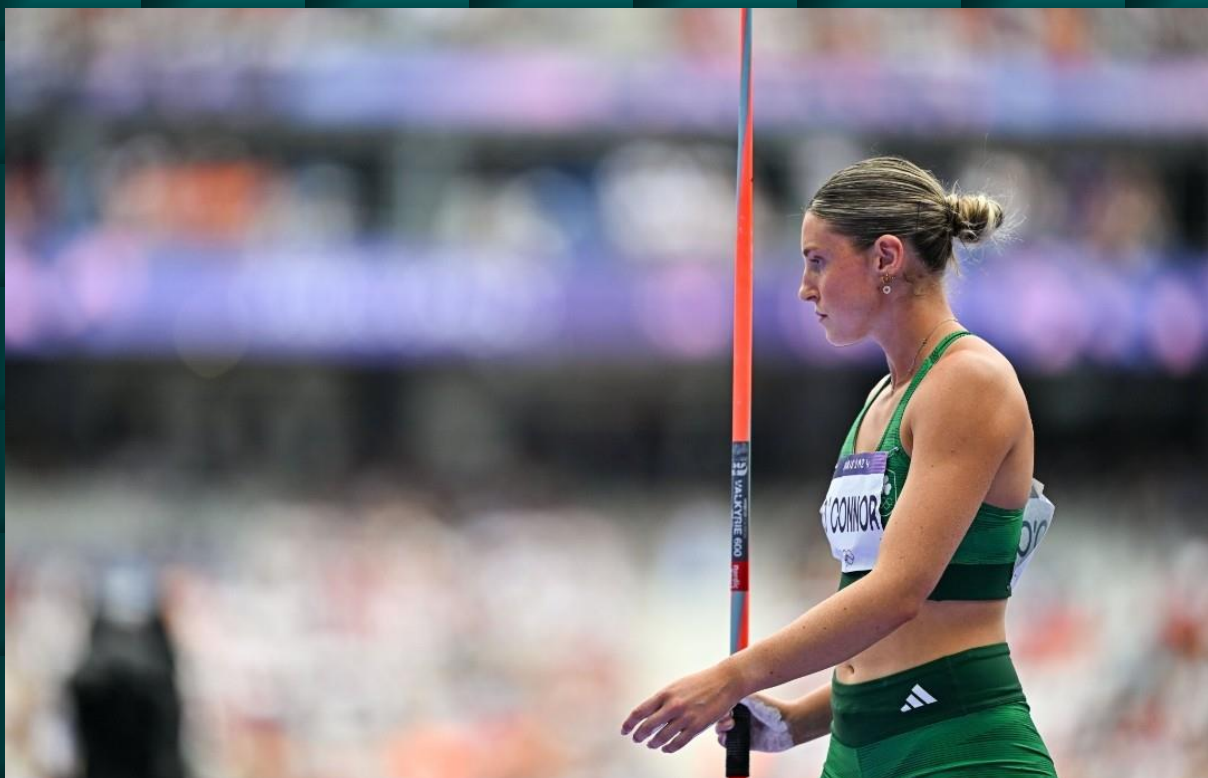
LOOKING BEYOND YOUR ACADEMY EXPERIENCE

The aim of our academies is to enhance the sporting knowledge, physical and psychological skills and performance behaviours of athletes to better equip them to undertake senior training with their personal coach in future.

“The academies are not designed to provide ongoing facilities access, strength and conditioning or physiotherapy support through an athlete’s senior career but instead to equip athletes and coaches with the skills they need to maximize their use of these services elsewhere as a pair.”

Youth Academy staff will support athlete transitions for those leaving Northern Ireland for university. Staff will also support other Academy exits by meeting with athlete-coach pairs to discuss next steps and areas for progress. We will help you identify what level of performance will be required for inclusion on the Commonwealth Potential Programme and discuss how athletes can best tap into the support personal coaches, clubs and universities offer.

Inevitably not all Youth Academy Athletes will make the Commonwealth Potential Programme but the Academy systems are designed to create upward pressure on the pathway and increase the number who do. By raising the potential of athlete-coach pairs we will increase the probability that talented juniors will progress to a major championship whilst also increasing the quality of national level athletes for Northern Ireland teams.



APPLICATION & SELECTION

The academies aim to support athletes and coaches who have identified their own strengths, weaknesses and areas for progress and who will benefit most from engaging with the physical preparation, physiotherapy and performance lifestyle support available. Selection will prioritise athletes who demonstrate the potential and ability to eventually represent Northern Ireland at a Senior Commonwealth Games.

Selection Criteria

There are no specific entry standards for Academy Selection as limited Academy capacity means athletes across all events must be compared.

Athletes will be assessed for inclusion based upon their performance standards and performance potential.

Performance

- Track and Field performances will be assessed by comparison to European Athletics Minimum Championship Standards for European U18, U20 and U23 Championships. Consideration for road, cross country and mountain running performances will be made.
- Performance levels will also be compared to Power of 10 Rankings and Power of 10 Top 10 Targets. These Power of 10 targets will be especially useful in considering U16 athletes who cannot be compared to European Athletics U18 standards.

Potential

- Potential for senior success will also be considered. Coaching partnership, commitment to the sport, maturation, peaking age for event, demonstration of ability and mindset to access support available will all be considered. The selection panel will discuss:
 - Coaching relationship and training environment
 - Use of Academy services to date
 - Training history
 - Training gaps
 - Motivation
 - Commitment to athletics and balance with other sports
 - Coach engagement
 - Injury history
 - Availability and mindset to engage with the programme for maximum impact

SELECTION PROCESS

1. Athletes who apply will be compared to each other based on performance, potential and ability to engage with the programme.
2. Athletes will then be ranked in priority order for selection to the academies.
3. Athletes will be offered places in Academies based on total capacity.

APPLICATION

Athlete -Coach pairs should meet to complete the online application form by midnight on Wednesday 8th October 2025.

We recommend that athlete and coach discuss the completion of this form and parents of U18 athletes are closely involved in the application process.

Please fill out the application form here:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScF8NwWeOKNrDQKFA8XyPD7Tx-R5n8kgrAAYHPWdryKehOZvA/viewform?usp=dialog>

A panel will deliver the selection process on 10th October 2025. All applicants will receive communication by Wednesday 15th October 2025.

Youth Academy will commence week beginning 27th October.