



Strategy for Club Development and Modernisation

February 2021



Introduction



We are pleased to introduce our consultation document for input on the club development and modernisation strategy 2021 –2025. This draft plan has been evolving since the beginning of the 2017 – 2021 strategy as we have continually reviewed our successes and failures in the area of club development and modernisation, taking information from clubs through the Sport NI Club Survey, the Club Mark process, information supplied at registration and speaking to committee members, coaches, volunteers and athletes. It is also informed through unique insights and research into good practice with British Athletics and the Home Country Athletics Federations (HCAF). Our plan will align with the Athletics Unified Strategy that has been developed by British Athletics and the HCAFs.

The sports sector has moved on considerably in recent years with many sports modernising through a business-like and professional approach that has supported substantial growth. Athletics are competing with these sports for members, volunteers, audiences and media attention. We believe that by working together with affiliated clubs and partners, athletics will accelerate growth and gain greater recognition through media coverage which, in turn, will stimulate further progress in moving our sport up the rankings in terms of participation and popularity.

Athletics is one of the most diverse and accessible sports available when we consider all of the events within track and field (25 in the Olympic Games plus Paralympic events, including Club Throw and Wheelchair), add cross country, road running, race walking and mountain running into the mix and we recognise the spaces available to 'play' our sport. We attract participants from all walks of life and people with various abilities and disabilities.

By building capacity within our clubs and creating attractive offers, we will be able to welcome more into the athletics community, grow membership and increase the numbers progressing along the pathways. This will lead to more of our athletes becoming role models and encourage more participants in a positive spiral leading us to success.

We receive funding and guidance from Sport NI and the Sporting Clubs programme to develop our sport and it is our responsibility to make the best use of the financial and advisory support. We will work hard to develop and sustain real and meaningful working relationships between ANI and affiliated clubs and to place high quality and relevant resources into areas that will achieve maximum impact so that together we will attract and retain our members, raise the profile of the sport and put athletics at the top of the sports rankings for popularity, participation and audience numbers.

WE RECOGNISE THAT ATHLETICS IS ONE OF NORTHERN IRELAND'S MOST ACCESSIBLE SPORTS. BY 2025 WE INTEND ATHLETICS TO HAVE A HIGHER PROFILE AND TO BE RECOGNISED AS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR SPORTS FOR PARTICIPANTS AND AUDIENCES.

From the conversations, research and reviews we have had, we believe that:

- A warm, welcoming, inclusive environment and quality coaching is key to retaining our current members and attracting new participants
- Too few people are undertaking too many roles in the clubs - there is concern over burnout and volunteers not returning after the pandemic. The heavy burden needs to be alleviated
- People development is required for volunteers and paid staff in all areas -business, officials, coaching and athletes
- No two clubs are the same. Support required in one club is likely to be different in another. An accreditation scheme (ClubMark) is all well and good but what most clubs need is support, inspiration and empowerment at their own stage on a Club Development Pathway
- Excellent coaching of the foundation skills - Run, Jump, Throw - should be the focus for young and new participants to develop competence and confidence needed before moving into more specialised event group training
- There are coaching gaps in junior clubs that need appropriate coaches in place at each level. Athletes need to see the pathway that will take them from multi event through to event specialisation
- The programmes that ANI currently run such as Rising Stars, Couch to 5k and 5k-10k, need to become embedded in clubs
- The new runners entering our sport need to transition effectively into the club system
- Equality and inclusion should underpin all that we do

We believe that clubs will benefit from support in the areas of people development, culture and inclusion, business planning and modernisation. Athletics NI also has a key responsibility to support clubs in specialist areas where they excel or have a special interest and expertise such as Multi events; Running Participation; Talent Development etc .

We welcome this opportunity to engage with you and welcome the feedback you give.



Environmental Context



The cost of athletics

Athletics is a low-cost sport. Membership of Athletics NI is £12 for seniors and £6 for juniors over the age of 10. In addition, athletes need to pay approximately £30 club fees per year plus extra to use facilities. As an example, to use the Mary Peters Track, athletes must pay either £110 per year for Registered athletes (£130 for unregistered athletes) or £4 per time. Once these costs have been covered there is rarely any costs for coaching unlike other sports and particularly other individual sports such as tennis, swimming and triathlon. There is a feeling that, in athletics, we sell ourselves short and devalue our own coaching qualifications and the time our coaches dedicate to the sport.

Coaches and clubs pay for coaching qualifications and coaches must spend time away from families, pay for transportation and spend time planning. Our coaches are finding it more difficult to justify spending their free time, knowledge and skill as a volunteer. A strategy for professional club development is needed with investment into coaching, member benefits, club structure and systems. This will build capacity and enable clubs to raise the value of coaching, provide funds to upskill coaches, cover travel fees or remunerate them directly for their time and expertise.

There are some private enterprises that are already operating in the athletics coaching space and offering a good service that people are willing to pay for.

We need to look at models of good practice and offer support and direction to clubs that would like to consider this as a way forward. There are several examples in England, Scotland, Denmark and Sweden.

Volunteering

Sport and recreation make up a large component of the volunteering sector. Over 37,000 (13%) of the 282,067 formal volunteers in Northern Ireland are involved in voluntary activities with a sports club. We estimate that we need 1510 regular and active volunteers by 2025. There is some doubt as to where they will come from. We need to actively recruit and retain further volunteers.

See appendix one for figures on our workforce population

We have pushed at recruiting young officials but the over 50 age group may be a better feeding ground as this population are more likely to have time and longevity. Young people may go away to university to start their careers, to travel or be busier with young families.

The preponderance of older people administering clubs and organising events is essential to athletics at the moment but we need to meet our challenges and change in line with society and consideration of workload and to consider paying volunteers for their time and costs. Many events in Northern Europe recruit hard working individuals from new populations and, by doing so, recruit new interest into athletics.

Membership

Club membership at the end of January 2021 is 6610 – we have been hit hard by the pandemic. We currently have 94 affiliated clubs and have recently launched Run NI to encourage running groups to engage with our sport with a view to them becoming affiliated or signposting their runners to affiliated clubs once they feel ready. The pandemic has also encouraged a new population of runner who we need to connect with and bring into our clubs and groups.

Collaboration and Partnerships

Across the sport sector, there is an increased emphasis on enhancing relationships and partnerships with collaboration and creative approaches to achieving desired outcomes. Strong relationships and partnerships with stakeholder groups are key to successfully achieving ANI goals and objectives with a focus on connectivity and advocacy. We aim to strengthen our existing partnerships with councils, schools, the commercial sector and other sports to maximise opportunities for collaboration and sharing of resources.

Competition from other sports

Sport has arguably become more professional and accessible as a result of the Sporting Clubs programme, which aims to increase club membership by 7,000 and the Sporting Winners Programme that invests in 20 sports. Athletics has found itself competing for young participants before they are recruited by other sports such as rugby and GAA.

Where we have been proud to recognise that we provide young people with fundamental skills of running, jumping and throwing so that they can transition into almost any sport and have promoted athletics as a late specialisation sport, we now recognise that we need a smarter strategy to retain the athletes that start in our sport and encourage them to 'specialise' early not in any one event but in athletics so that we don't lose them to other sports. We do not mean that athletes should specialise in any one event or event group before they have laid down the foundations, but that they will choose athletics over other sports in their long-term commitment. Our programmes must recognise the landscape and competition for participants and look for delivery differences and accommodating programmes.

Gender

Women and girls, who account for more than 50 percent of the population of Northern Ireland, continue to be underrepresented in the sport and physical activity system. However, Athletics does not suffer a gender imbalance in participation. At the end of March 2019, ANI had 4620 female members as opposed to only 3780 male members but, as seen in the Female Coach Network survey, the number of women trained as coaches, particularly at Athletics Coach/CiRF and above, and actively coaching, still remains low. Large gaps persist in knowledge and practice relating to the psycho-social factors that influence women and girls as coaches, officials, leaders or administrators.

Our data suggest that men account for more of the total uptake of development opportunities as volunteers than women. Men also account for more hours spent on our boards and committees. Increasing the number of women on the board and committees can bring new voices, varying opinions, and different approaches and solutions to the decision-making process.



Para Athletics

On a broad scale, persons with disability are not participating in athletics at rates comparable to their able-bodied counterparts and are not enjoying the physical and social benefits that result from participation. Unique challenges and barriers face people with disability – physical and intellectual. ANI run Parallel Success sessions in a barrier-free environment that fosters participation and development of persons with a disability. We would like to grow this side of the sport by encouraging more coaches to work in this space and to raise awareness of the opportunities that we provide for Para athletes. We feel certain that there will be members of affiliated clubs who have a disability but have not yet considered Para athletics. We intend to discover the talent that is already within our sport, in athletes and coaches, and also encourage new participants into the Para programme.

Motivation for Athletics Participation

The largest sector of our sport is running where motivation ranges along a spectrum from running for social reasons; to losing weight, feeling and looking better; to improving times over set distances; to running for performance.

In general, some of the same motivators help explain why children participate in athletics, have fun, improve skills, belong to a group, be successful, gain recognition, get fit, and find excitement. Conversely, they drop out of sport because of other interests, boredom, lack of success, too much pressure, loss of interest, friends leaving, or because it ceases to be fun. An England Athletics study found that 'fun' was one of the pivotal reasons for being in athletics — lack of fun is a leading reason for dropping out. The optimum level of challenge in competition is another key factor with many put off through fear of failure against high standards. The road running community is more successful in attracting depth at all levels of ability, which then provides a more comfortable environment for runners to strive for improvements and personal bests. Our aim is to create more opportunities for members to compete in a safe and fun environment whilst also offering relevant competition for those striving for inter-regional and international selection.



Our Vision

IS TO OUT-PERFORM OTHER NORTHERN IRELAND SPORTS IN TERMS OF "EXCELLENCE" IN ORGANISATIONAL, ATHLETE, COACH, OFFICIAL AND VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT.

SPECIFICALLY, WE WILL PROVIDE CLUBS IN ALL AREAS OF THE COUNTRY WITH SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING, GOOD GOVERNANCE, INCOME GENERATION, LONG-TERM ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATIONAL AND LEADERSHIP TRAINING, ATHLETICS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY AND UNDER-REPRESENTATIVE POPULATIONS AND WE WILL PROMOTE RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY.

Our Goal

OUR GOAL IS TO ENHANCE THE CAPACITY WITHIN THE CLUB SYSTEM AND IMPROVE ATHLETICS EXPERIENCE THROUGH HIGH QUALITY DELIVERY



Desired Outcomes



By March 2022 there will be:

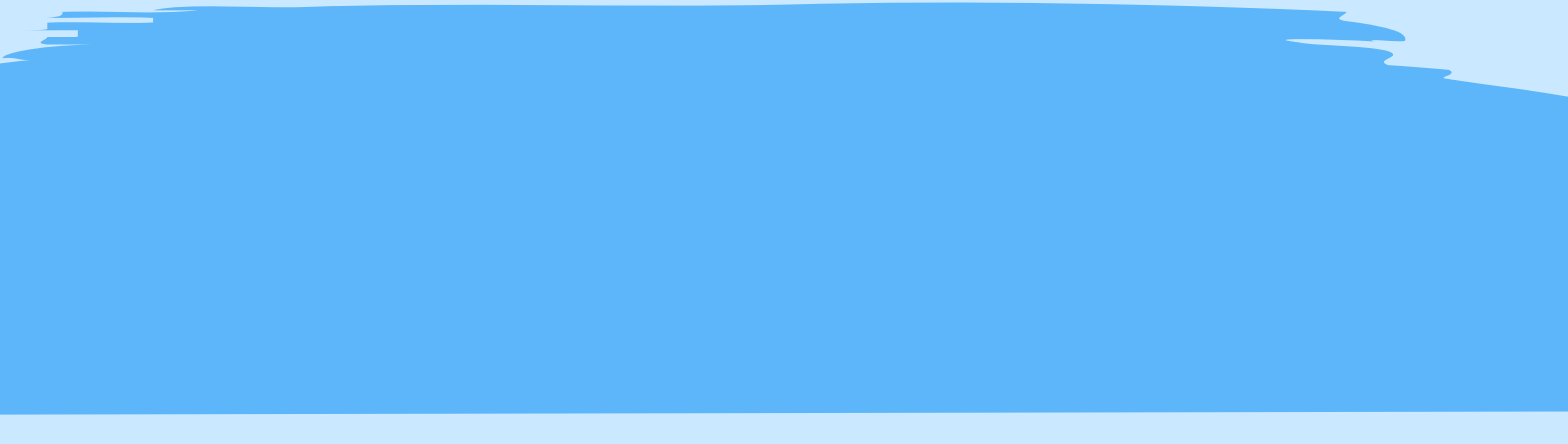
- A Club Development Pathway in place with descriptors that will place a club as: Affiliated, Evolving, Developing or Sector Leading
- Bespoke Club Development plans in place with targets and priorities to take clubs to the next stage on the pathway
- A Club Self-Assessment Tool and complimentary Club Education programme in place
- Overall membership grows to more than 10,000
- Increased customer (athlete) satisfaction on a net promoter score
- Increased number of athletes at each stage of the pathway
- Increased number of qualified and active coaches
- Increased number of qualified and active officials
- Increased number of active volunteers
- Increased number of learning opportunities for all of the above
- Increased number of underrepresented groups that our programmes reach through targeted programming
- Increased number of talented athletes transitioning to GB&NI and Ireland senior teams

OUR APPROACH

The delivery of this strategy requires leadership from Athletics NI with strategic investment in clubs through the Sporting Clubs programme and other ANI funds:

- We will provide a structured approach to allow clubs to engage on the club pathway at the appropriate level for the size, ambition and offering of the club
- We will facilitate clubs through self-assessment tool in the areas of
 - Governance
 - Planning and sustainability
 - Financial management
 - Club operations
 - Marketing and Communications
 - Facilities and equipment
 - Coaches and officials
 - Athlete Development Pathway
- We will assist clubs in setting targets and priorities and invest in a support package that will enable them to step up to the next level on the pathway

WE NEED YOUR FEEDBACK

- 1. Are these the right outcomes for our Club Development and Modernisation Strategy and to ensure Club Athletics in Northern Ireland is thriving in 10 years' time?**
 - 2. Do the broad actions support your club's needs?**
 - 3. Is our approach the right one?**
 - 4. Is there anything missing?**
 - 5. Is there anything else that you feel Athletics NI should be leading or delivering on to support you?**
 - 6. Why are these things important and to whom?**
 - 7. What would be the next stepping stones or key milestones to achieving long term success (4 years and 8 years)?**
 - 8. What do we need to action to increase our chances of hitting those milestones?**
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Appendix 1

Workforce Population

Population	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	Current Figures
Total Active Coaches	883	943	1057	1077	989
Female	411	484	548	545	497
Male	472	459	509	532	492
Prefer Not to Say	0	0	0	0	0
With a Disability	1	7	10	13	13
Total Active Technical Officials					
Total Active Technical Officials	61	73	113	113	102
Female	29	36	54	57	50
Male	32	37	59	56	52
Prefer Not to Say	0	0	0	0	0
With a Disability	5	3	7	8	7
Total Active Club Volunteers					
Total Active Club Volunteers	750	862	1214	1325	920
Female	350	405	589	629	450
Male	400	457	625	696	470
Prefer Not to Say	0	0	0	0	0
With a Disability	10	7	No Data	10	10