

Parent's Guide To **Youth Athletics** **In Northern Ireland**



Athletics Northern Ireland is the governing body for the sport of athletics in Northern Ireland. We are involved in all disciplines of the sport of athletics - track and field, cross-country, road running and mountain running and cater for all ages. Athletics Northern Ireland supports athletes at all stages of the pathway from grassroots to high performance.

Athletics NI recognises the fantastic work of the Ulster Secondary Schools Athletics Association in providing a first introduction to the sport for thousands of children as they prepare for district and Ulster Schools Championships. The Ulster Schools Championships is one of the highlights of the local competition calendar. Thank you to the U.S.A.A. and all of the officials and parents who have supported today's competition!

For children who wish to continue their participation in athletics there are currently 76 clubs based throughout Northern Ireland, which are affiliated to the governing body. By joining a club athletes can benefit from the knowledge and experience of qualified coaches, and increase their competitive opportunities.

Athletics is a late development sport and Athletics NI encourages participation in a range of sports and multiple athletics disciplines throughout childhood. This will produce physically prepared, robust and well rounded athletes with the best chance of senior success. As athletes progress their performances and involvement in the sport they may be selected for an Athletics NI Athlete Development Programme such as Rising Stars, Youth Academy or an event specific development squad. This will support but not replace club coaching.



**Jackie Newton-Director of
Coach & Athlete Development**



**Laura Kerr-Coach
Development Lead**



**Tom Reynolds-Athlete
Development Lead**

Athlete Development Pathway

We encourage athletes emerging from schools and community athletics to join an affiliated athletics club. Athletics NI supports 76 affiliated clubs. 12 athletics clubs with junior sections have received Sport NI's Clubmark Award...

- **City of Lisburn AC**
- **North Belfast Harriers**
- **Newtownabbey Racers**
- **St. Anne's AC**
- **Springwell RC**
- **East Down AC**
- **Orangetown AC**
- **North Down AC**
- **Mid Ulster AC**
- **Valley Running Club**
- **Belfast Running Club**
- **East Coast AC**

Athletes and parents can search the websites and facebook pages of these clubs to find their training venues and times. All other affiliated clubs are listed on pages 12-15.



Athlete Development Pathway

Multi Event Approach

In line with the British Athletics Athlete Development Model, Athletics NI recommends that athletes between the ages of 12 & 15 years old should be exposed to a range of Athletics events across as many event groups (running, jumping and throwing) as possible.

At this stage in their development it is very difficult to predict what event or even event group the athletes may be best suited to when they are fully mature (track and field athletes typically peak in their mid to late 20's.) Furthermore, as a fully mature athlete, regardless of event, their training will to some degree involve a variety of running, jumping and throwing activities and so a background in a range of events will provide a solid foundation for the future.

http://ucoach.com/assets/uploads/files/ADM/UKA_Athlete_Development_Model.pdf

Rising Stars

Athletics NI's Rising Stars programme has been set up to demonstrate the delivery of a Multi Event Approach for athletes aged 12-15 years old. Research conducted by England Athletics, published in '[Bridging the Gap](#)', shows that young athletes engaged in a multi event programme are less likely to become injured or drop out in their later teens. The coach and athlete development initiative is delivered in eight regions across Northern Ireland led by Athletics NI's development team. Each term a new training syllabus, supporting resources and videos are published online. A number of clubs use these resources to deliver a multi event approach.

<http://nifutures.com/rising-stars/>



Athlete Development Pathway

Event-Group Training

Around the age of 15-16 athletes will probably begin to focus on a specific event group (sprints, endurance, jumps, throws or multi events) as they begin to realise where their potential and interests lie. At this point the athlete should focus on a range of events within the event group so as to develop a good all round conditioning and co-ordination base. It is also important to remember that while an athlete is engaged in other activities, those activities have a conditioning component to them. For example, if an athlete is playing football several times a week this may take care of their aerobic training requirements. As a general rule of thumb the frequency of training will increase as the athlete develops, however, an increase in the frequency of Athletics specific training should only occur if performance is stagnating and there is good reason for thinking more training sessions will yield better results.



Youth Academy

From roughly 15 years of age, Athletics NI provides opportunities for selected athletes and their coaches to enhance their performance through squad training. Youth Academy provides a structured syllabus of physical preparation opportunities and support workshops on relevant themes such as university preparation and performance lifestyle behaviours. Selection is based on athlete performance standards. The syllabus is also published through the [Nifutures.com](http://nifutures.com) website and an open version of Youth Academy runs quarterly <http://nifutures.com/open-academy/>

Supporting Your Child in Athletics

As the parent of an aspiring athlete, we hope you can support your child as they pursue their athletic goals and balance school work, other sports and all of the demands placed on them academically and socially. Athletics during childhood should be a fun and positive experience that allows for personal growth and long term physical development.

Coaching

Parents can support their child in finding the most appropriate coach and club for their age, stage and event group. Athletics NI recommends that children aged 12-15 should be exposed to multi event training in their club environment. Not all clubs coach running, jumping and throwing and it's important to find out what a club offers prior to joining.

The best club for your child will be one that offers consistent and structured training delivered by qualified and insured Athletics Coaches. There should be a strong focus on learning technical skills during youth and reinforcing key movement patterns (including squatting, lunging, hinging, bracing, jumping, landing and skipping) through a coached warm up. A high quality coach will spend time cueing an athlete's running mechanics including knee lift, foot strike, arm carriage and trunk position using running drills and submaximal efforts to reinforce technique.



Injury

A key concern amongst Athletics Coaches, Strength and Conditioning Specialists and Physiotherapists working with elite performance athletes is the general lack of skill, strength, speed, mobility, balance and coordination exhibited by teenage athletes who potentially could become major championship medal winners. A lack of these qualities increases the risk of injury and limits an athlete's senior potential. The best athletics coaches will take responsibility for development of these physical components.

Volume and intensity of running, jumping and throwing should be built up slowly over time as athletes become more technically proficient. Sudden increases in mileage, volume of jumps contacts or change in footwear or training surface is known to cause injury. Overtraining and excessive repetition of specific movement patterns (associated with early specialisation) may also lead to injury and burnout.

Growth Spurts

Just before or when an athlete is going through puberty he/she may experience a rapid growth spurt. The timing of this tends to be variable between boys and girls. During this phase, the bones grow prior to the soft and connective tissue and increased hormones allow muscle development. It is particularly important that athletes train appropriately at this stage. Coaches should plan accordingly for the overall training load and the type of training to keep the athlete injury-free, maximise the benefit they have from extra strength and maintain good flexibility.

The coach will appreciate any information parents can provide on their child's rate of growth as it will help them to plan the programme and sessions accordingly. Measuring your child's seated and standing height on a monthly basis will alert the coach to any sudden increases and the need for any changes to be made to the training and competition plan.

Lifestyle

In an individual sport like athletics a hundredth of a second may separate medalists. With such fine margins separating athletes, optimising daily behaviours and lifestyle may be crucial in driving up performance. Parents can support their child to perform at their best in athletics by encouraging them to sleep for a minimum of eight hours per night, eat a balanced diet that is low in fast foods and sweets, arrive at training and competition hydrated, refuel appropriately after each training session and rest appropriately to avoid overtraining. Studies have shown that...

“Children who sleep on average <8 hours per night are 1.7x more likely to become injured than those who slept >8 hours.”

“Reduced performance, high levels of fatigue, disturbed mood and increased prevalence of infection are all symptoms of overtraining.”



“For post exercise refueling milk offers a more nutrient dense beverage choice that is more effective for rehydration than traditional sports drinks.”

Mindset

Undue pressure to perform should not be placed on children and as young people mature at different rates it is often more helpful to encourage self improvement than constant comparison with peers. In line with the skills based coaching approach discussed previously we recommend that athletes set process goals with their coach related to improving their technique and physical competence.



PARENTS IN ATHLETICS TOP TIPS



1. Encourage, encourage,
encourage

2. Respect the coach, most
coaches are volunteers



3. Avoid pressuring your child about
winning or losing, focus on the process

4. Set an example, respond
rationally to disappointments



5. Consider your feedback, be supportive
whilst allowing your child to consider areas
for progress

6. Understand that quality rest, recovery
& refuelling are required for training
adaptation



7. Help your child eat like an athlete by buying
nutritious, whole foods rather than convenience foods



#ParentsInAthletics

Further Competition Opportunities in 2017

In addition to schools competition athletes may continue to compete individually or for a club throughout the year. The Athletics NI Age Group Championships on the 10th (U18-U20) or 17th (U14-U17) June at Mary Peters Track will provide a standard of competition similar to the Ulster Schools Championships. Additionally the Northern Ireland Multi Event Championships take place on the 2nd & 3rd of September.

Athletes may enter online at: <http://athleticsni.org/Fixtures>

Athletes wishing to compete in the Ulster Schools Multi Event Championships on the 15th September 2017 may wish to remind their P.E. teachers about registration for this.

There are a series of non championship open competitions that take place across Northern Ireland during the Track and Field season. These open competitions are great introductory events for athletes to gain competitive experience. Details of open competitions including the Firmus Super 6 Series and North Down AC Open Meetings can also be found in the fixtures section of our website.

<http://athleticsni.org/Fixtures>

For athletes registered with a club the Youth Development League also provides a great team experience.



Age Group International Competitions in 2017

Schools International

The Irish Schools International Team is selected from the Inter Provincial Championships in June and has two athletes per event in the Intermediate age group. The team competes against school teams from England, Scotland and Wales. This year the International will take place in Dublin on 17th July.

School Games

The Games take place in Loughborough between 31st August and 3rd September and are for those in the Intermediate Schools age group. The top Northern Irish athlete in each event is selected based on results in the Irish Schools Championships and Inter Provincial Championships.

Bedford England Age Group Championships

The NI & Ulster Team that travels to Bedford on the last weekend of August is for those in the Junior and Intermediate age groups. The selection is based on standards and takes into consideration all competition performances before the selection date. The selection policy will be published in June on the Athletics NI website <http://athleticsni.org/Athletes/Competition-Opportunities/Selection-Policies>.

Schools Multi-Event International

The Multi-Event International (Indoors) is selected from the top 4 performances from the Junior and Intermediate age group results at the Irish Schools Multi-Events in November. Any athlete who does well at more than one event group (Sprints/Hurdles, Jumps, Throws, Endurance) could have a chance at this international.

Cross Country 2018

Please see the following link for typical cross country international competition opportunities.

<http://athleticsni.org/Athletes/Competition-Opportunities>

Affiliated Clubs

The following clubs are affiliated to Athletics NI. The clubs section of our website <http://athleticsni.org/Clubs> provides further information on finding a club in your local area and the clubs map shows the geographical region of each.

3 Ways AC: Shane02ocallaghan@me.com	Mid Ulster AC: barrieholmes2000@yahoo.com
Acorns AC: secretary.acornsac@gmail.com	Moneyglass & District Runners: moneyglassdistrictrunners@gmail.com
Albertville Harriers: jennyhamilton83@gmail.com	Mourne Runners: http://www.mournerunners.co.uk/
Annadale Striders: connormcmullan@btinternet.com	Murlough AC: carol@ni-media.com
Armagh AC: mmktyross@yahoo.co.uk	Newcastle & District AC: info@newcastleac.org
Ballycastle Runners: ballycastlerunners@yahoo.co.uk	Newry Athletics Club: newryac@gmail.com
Ballydrain Harriers: ballydrainharriers@rocketmail.com	Newry City Runners AC: katensumer@hotmail.co.uk
Ballygalget AC: secretary.ballygalgetac@outlook.com	Newtownabbey Racers: iamfionamcgivern@hotmail.co.uk
Ballymena Runners AC: ballymenarunners@hotmail.com	North Belfast Harriers: secretary@northbelfastharriers.com
Banbridge AC: banbridgeac@hotmail.com	North Down AC: northdownac@gmail.com
Beechmount Harriers: pfmagee@sky.com	Olympian Youth Club: 028 7135 3751

Belfast Running Club: ClubSecretary.BRC@gmail.com	Omagh Harriers: pdcampbell@btconnect.com
BOLT Running Club: dunn348@gmail.com	OMG AC: nigel.mcgrath@hotmail.com
Burren AC: m.d.dunford@talk21.com	Orangegrove AC: hello@orangegroveac.co.uk
City of Derry AC Spartans: gerry.lynch@hotmail.com	Orchard County AC: wmillsoff01@qub.ac.uk
City of Derry AC Juniors: gerry.lynch@hotmail.com	Ormeau Runners: ormeaurunners@outlook.com
City of Lisburn AC: eric.frizzell1@btinternet.com	PACE Running Club: drew.taggart@antrim.gov.uk
Club Pulse Runners: sonimac@googlemail.com	Pegasus Coleraine AC: alistairkennedy@btinternet.com
Co Antrim Harriers: downeyirene8@gmail.com	Queens AC: Athletics@qub.ac.uk
Derry City Track Club: runmalrun@googlemail.com	Rasharkin Runners: ann.darragh@hotmail.co.uk
Dromore AC: mikeevy@yahoo.co.uk	Regent House: akeys340@rhs.newtownards.ni.sch.uk
Dub Running Club: bgri3@allstate.com	Scrabo Striders: linzigg@hotmail.com
East Antrim Harriers: shieldschristine@hotmail.co.uk	Seapark AC: secretary@seaparkac.com
East Coast AC: eastcoastac@gmail.com	Slieve Gullion Runners: slievegullionrunners14@gmail.com
East Down AC: simon.mcgrattan@gmail.com	Sperrin Harriers: info.sperrinharriers@gmail.com

Enniskillen RC: secretary@enniskillenrc.co.uk	Springwell Running Club: springwellrunningclub@gmail.com
Foyle Valley AC: dendoh@hotmail.co.uk	St Annes AC: annemaguire28@gmail.com
Glens Runners: henrymcialister77@gmail.com	St Malachy's AC: athletics@stmalachyscollege.org
Jog Lisburn Running Club: adrian.daye@sky.com	St Peter's AC: beejco2@hotmail.com
Kernan Running Club: kernanrunclub@outlook.com	Strabane Track Club: sinead@crawfords333.fsnet.co.uk
Knockmany Running Club: elsie_o_sullivan@hotmail.com	Tafelta AC: c.mcgrath142@btinternet.com
Lagan Valley AC: laganvalleyac@gmail.com	Torque Racing Club: heather@athleticsni.org
Larne AC: bdspence@googlemail.com	Ulster University AC: dean@athleticsni.org
Magherafelt Harriers: rodney@ryoung.wanadoo.co.uk	Valley Running Club: valleyrunningclub@yahoo.co.uk
Maguiresbridge Running Club: secretarym5m@gmail.com	Victoria Park & Connswater AC: Gary.Keenan@eani.org.uk
Mallusk Harriers: maeveogorman2@live.co.uk	Willowfield Harriers: willowfieldtharriers@gmail.com

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Relevant Websites

Athletics NI - <http://athleticsni.org/>

British Athletics - <http://www.britishathletics.org.uk/>

Athletics Ireland - <http://www.athleticsireland.ie/>

Ulster Schools - <http://www.ussaa.co.uk/>

NI Futures - <http://nifutures.com/>





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