

A large group of runners in various colored athletic gear are competing in a cross-country race on a vast, green grassy field. The sun is high in the sky, creating long shadows on the grass. In the background, there are rolling hills and a body of water under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2017 – 2020



# Content

President's Introduction

CEO's Message

## SECTION 1 - Context 2013 - 2016

- 9 Introduction
- 10 Supporting the Growth of our Sport
- 11 Supporting High Performance
- 12 Coaching and Official Development
- 13 Developing Juvenile and Schools
- 14 Promoting Health and Fitness
- 16 Enhancing Supporting Infrastructure
- 17 Ensuring Good Governance
- 18 Summary of the 2013-2016 Plan

## SECTION 2 - Strategic Plan 2017-2020

- 22 Mission, Vision and Values
- 23 Context
- 24 Stakeholders
- 27 **Strategic Priorities**
  - 28 Membership Growth
  - 30 Athlete and Customer Focus
  - 32 High Performance
  - 34 Recreational Running
  - 36 Child Safeguarding
  - 39 Governance, Finances and Training
  - 40 Marketing
- 42 2017-2020 Plan Summary

# PRESIDENT's Introduction

As President of Athletics Ireland I am delighted to introduce the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan. This plan outlines the strategic priorities which will guide the organisation over the next four years. It will assist us in focusing our efforts to ensure that we are working towards the common goal of growing our sport.

Before we embarked on our plan for the future we carried out a thorough analysis of our performance across the organisation over the past four years. In the main we can be very satisfied with how we have progressed, evidenced by the growth in membership numbers, number of coaches trained, medals won and finals made at international level, numbers of people running generally, child safeguarding, professionalism in how we run our competitions and, very importantly, how we govern the organisation.

Our challenge now is to build on the good work carried out in recent years and deliver on the ambitions for our sport over the next four years.

We are very grateful to all who contributed to the direction of this plan – volunteers and staff alike - and I would like to thank them for their support over the last number of months. We are fortunate to have extremely committed people who are totally dedicated to the success of the organisation and our sport.



The achievement of the goals contained in this new plan will result in a bigger and stronger sport, having advanced our own specific priorities. Our ambition is also to become an even more integral part of the national agenda of becoming a fitter and healthier nation. We achieve our goals through working together as one organisation and with our many stakeholders, including Sport Ireland, whose partnership is central to everything we do. There are of course many other stakeholders, including our sponsors, who are vital to us and we are grateful for their ongoing support.

I look forward to working with all of you over the next four years to implement the plan.

Georgina Drumm  
President, Athletics Ireland



# CEO's Message



The primary objective of Athletics Ireland is to grow all forms of athletic activity and in the life of the 2013-2016 plan we have seen significant growth in both membership and clubs. During the period of the plan we also took on a wider agenda of contributing in a more meaningful way to the national agenda of “increasing physical activity levels across the entire population”. In the 2017-2020 plan this wider agenda is embedded in our mission and we will strive to become a major contributor to the national objective of getting Ireland fitter through our club, school and mass-participation event structures. As part of this agenda we will work on deepening our engagement with non-members to develop closer partnerships with our association.

We have set ourselves ambitious objectives for the four years and will focus on seven strategic areas to ensure we achieve our goals. We will concentrate our efforts on our members, our competitions, our elite athletes, coaching, participation in our sport, child safeguarding, governance and marketing.

We are operating in an increasingly competitive environment and it is essential that we focus on communicating the organisation, our products, our strengths and our ability to deliver value to funders including Sport Ireland and commercial

sponsors. We will continue to seek new opportunities for sponsorship and expansion of our footprint in recreational events. New revenue streams will result in increased support for the high performance and coaching programmes, our competitions and important governance structures including child safeguarding.

We are grateful for the support of all our stakeholders, particularly our volunteers, and we look forward to the next four years with great optimism. With the continued commitment of our volunteers and staff working together we can achieve our organisation goals and make a significant contribution to the health of the nation.

John Foley  
Chief Executive Officer.





# Introduction

The period leading to 2013 was characterised as a time in which Athletics Ireland made “significant strides in developing a more stable organisational environment, while implementing programmes and activities which are moving the organisation forward.”

Building on this progress we set ourselves a number of Strategic Priorities for 2013 -2016 as follows:

1. To promote the growth of the sport of athletics and health and fitness generally among our members.
2. To support the achievements of our elite athletes, in particular by implementing the High Performance Plan.
3. To build on the existing base of Coaches and Officials.
4. To promote the sport of Athletics among Juveniles and Schools.
5. To promote health and fitness to the population as a whole.
6. To further develop the supporting infrastructure.
7. To ensure good governance and financial stability.

Before moving forward it is important to review the past four years and to measure progress in each of the Strategic Priority areas.



# 1. Supporting the growth of our sport

In the 2013-2016 period we targeted:

**- Growth in membership to 60,000 by the end of 2016**

We achieved a figure of 58,296, representing a growth of 16,000 members over the period of the Plan. While a growth of 38% in four years is impressive by any standards, there are areas of opportunity in clubs and counties with the appropriate support structures – particularly in coaching which, if resourced properly, will yield dividends.

**- Having a member-centred organisation through:**

- Focus on Governance
- Communication with our members through our website and magazine
- Putting in place “Club-Mark” to assist clubs.

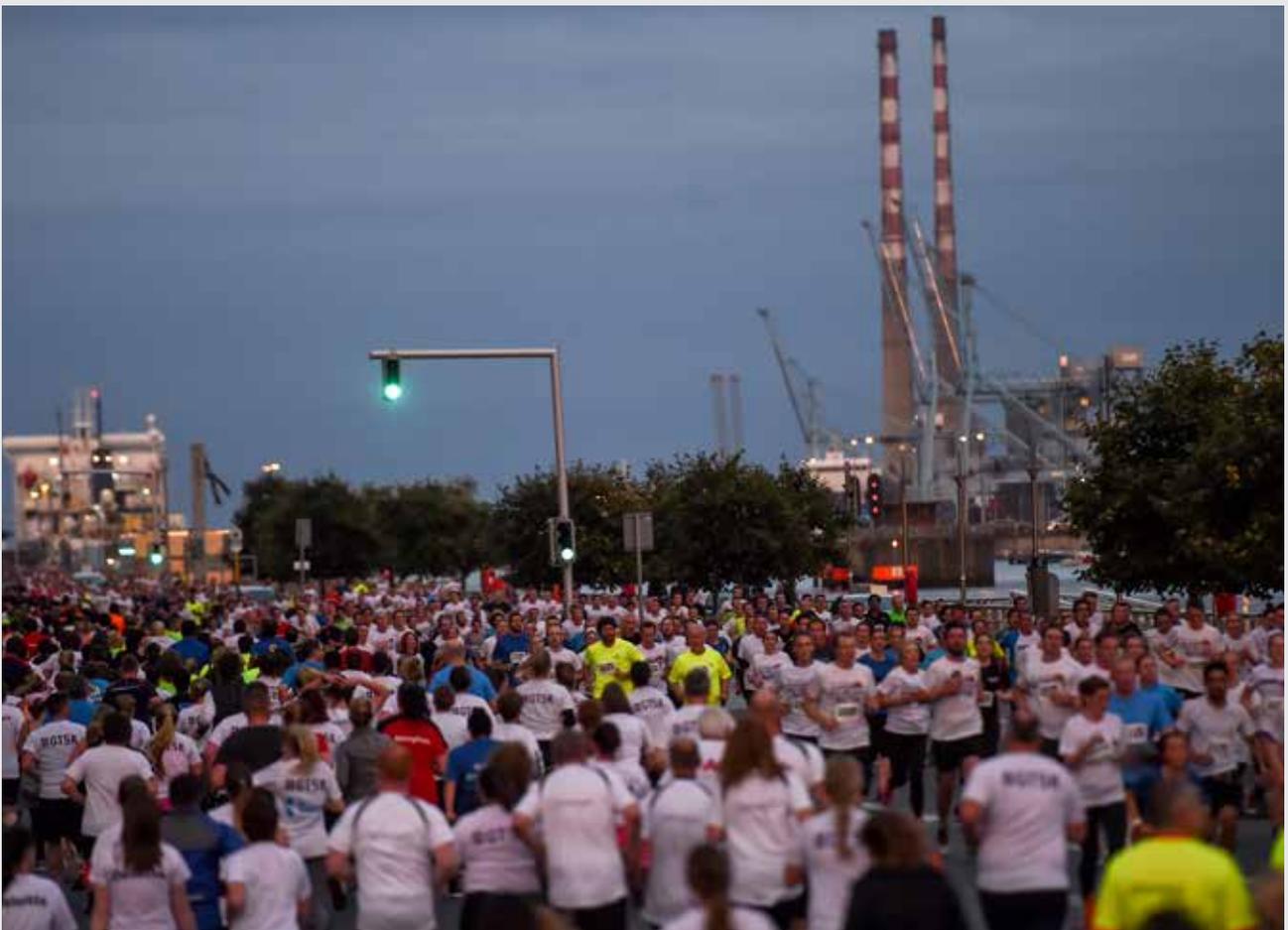
We have made significant progress in each of these areas in the period and the journey will continue with specific focus on Governance.

**- Management of recreational running in a structured way**

We have made enormous strides in recreational running in the past four years and our entry into this area has had the benefits of:

**Assisting** the national agenda of getting more people running, evidenced by the fact that in 2007 3.1% of the adult population were running, growing to 6.1% in 2011 and 8.2% by 2015 (source: Sport Ireland National Sports Monitor).

**Generating** funds to grow our organisation – specifically in the recruitment of young people into the sport – and supplementing funding from Sport Ireland to ensure that our High Performance programme continues to progress.



## 2. Supporting High Performance

In 2013 our objectives were to:

- Implement a coaching, financial and administrative strategy for European and World events
- Develop, support and fund a H.P. team

We appointed a Director of High Performance in 2011. With this appointment, the appropriate structures were put in place and a new, professional approach implemented in High Performance in the areas of structure, people, resources, facilities, policies, talent development, coaching / team support and competition pathways.

The primary mission of the programme was to have “more athletes winning on the world stage” and in the Rio cycle 24 medals were won overall at Youth, Junior and Senior levels. The partnership with Sport Ireland and the Institute of Sport was integral to the success of the programme. During the period, the number of athletes receiving support

from the Institute increased and in 2016 exceeded 100. It is a major factor in ensuring that more athletes are healthy and available to compete at European and World levels.

In summary, we have made significant strides in the High Performance area in the past four years. However, High Performance Coaching is an area which needs far more focus; this area will be targeted specifically during the life of the 2017-2020 plan. A very significant initiative in the Coaching area which has already commenced is a “Coach Mentoring” programme, whereby our top Irish coaches and ex-elite athletes, complimented by high-calibre coaches from abroad, mentor our coaches. To ensure that the coaching agenda is a top priority, the job specification for the Director of High Performance has been changed so that Coaching experience and success are pre-requisites for the position, while continuing to maintain and enhance the excellent structures and procedures already in place.



### 3. Coaching and Official Development

In the 2013-2016 period we planned to:

- Put in place a coaching structure.
- Increase the number of coaches at all levels.
- Qualify more officials at National and International levels.

We made progress in developing a coaching structure during the period of the Plan. There is still work to be done in this area and it will receive specific attention from 2017.

We have a mix of full-time and part-time coaches working with us in the elite area, with National Coaching Co-ordinators working on all disciplines. In addition, the "Coach Mentoring" initiative is bringing a new focus to this most important discipline. We have a full-time Junior Endurance Coach in place which will bring dividends over time.

We continue to train coaches at all levels from Athletic Leader to Level 1 and 2 and Level 3. Retention of these Leaders and Coaches is an issue, as it is in other sports, as they tend to take our courses when their children become involved in the sport and discontinue their involvement if and when their children quit the sport.

A number of clubs are at full capacity because there are insufficient coaches to cater for the demand and in some cases children are experiencing delays joining clubs because of this shortage. That said, we trained 1,382 leaders/coaches in 2014 and delivered close to 1,300 in 2016. We also supported 350 National School teachers in delivering the Fit4Class programme.

We have very high-calibre officials and the demand for training and up-skilling is very encouraging.

At the 2016 NTO course /assessment for national officials there was unprecedented demand for places and the pass rate was extremely high. The one area needing attention is the recruitment of younger people to act as officials and this will receive focus in the 2017-2020 plan.

These new recruits will be blended in with our existing highly qualified, high-calibre officials.

We continue to have Athletics Ireland officials officiating at World and European levels. We are limited to a small number and are close to the maximum with people of the qualifications required for prestigious international events.



## 4. Developing Juvenile and Schools Athletics

**Our objectives for 2013-2016 were:**

To encourage participation through clubs and schools by

- Focusing on talent identification.
- Upgrading coaching to cater for all grades.

Juvenile participation through our club structure and Schools programme continued to increase during the life of the 2013-2016 Plan. In 2012 we had 25,776 Juvenile members and at the end of 2016 35,000 – an increase of 36% over the period.

Schools participation also continues to increase and in 2016 there were 659 secondary schools affiliated to the Irish Schools Athletics Association, compared with 617 in 2013. Participation in secondary schools competition increased in the period from 27,000 to close to 30,000. While historically, secondary schools activity was

predominantly confined to the regional, provincial and national track and field, combined events and cross-country championships, there have been a number of initiatives put in place in the past three years, such as the Schools Mile Challenge, iRunForFun and Fit4Class, which have increased participation in schools. The total number of school children taking part in these initiatives in 2016 was 87,000.

There is a high degree of overlap among young athletes competing in Juvenile and Schools competitions. While there is close co-operation between a number of Clubs and Schools, there is an opportunity, recognised by both organisations, for us to benefit greatly from even closer co-operation and this will be an important area of attention going forward. It will assist us in identifying talent and increasing participation through greater coaching involvement in schools by our club coaches and ensuring that we receive greater focus on our sport.





## 5. Promoting Health & Fitness

We had objectives of:

- Developing Fit4Life and Fit4Youth programmes.
- Promoting health and fitness, particularly among youths.

**Registrations** in the past four years grew by 16,000.

**Masters (35+)** grew at a faster rate, from 11,525 to 18,353 (+59%), driven by the Fit4Life initiative which had the added dimension of attracting more women into clubs.

**31,277 Female members** account for 54% of our membership; this compares with 23,700 in 2012 (+32%). The 'Women in Sport' initiative funded by Sport Ireland has been the important element in the growth of this number, as it allowed us place the appropriate resources behind Fit4Life.

With the trend towards healthier lifestyles and with running being easily accessible, there is a momentum which will continue and will positively impact on running in particular. There is, however, a potential issue which we need to work hard on. While the Fit4Life initiative has worked extremely well, it is important that we assist our clubs in ensuring that they continue to be relevant and creative in recruiting and retaining members.

The National Physical Activity Plan published in 2015 outlines the "national framework for whole of Government and whole of society to improve the health and wellbeing of people living in Ireland". The National Sports Monitor advises that 310,000 people run each week; 12% of them are members of clubs.

It states that “there is strong evidence to support the multiple benefits of physical activity on health and wellbeing. It promotes healthy growth and development in children and young people. It contributes to cognitive function. It is important for healthy ageing and helps to maintain quality of life and independence when we grow older. It is also a preventative factor for many non-communicative diseases”. In the Athletics Ireland 2013-2016 Plan we made some progress in this area with our recreational running initiatives and in our primary and secondary schools. In recreational running we own and manage a number of events, including the Grant Thornton Corporate Team Challenge, the Remembrance Run, the Streets of Dublin 5K, the Virgin Media Night Run and the Rock ‘n’ Roll Half Marathon. Combined, these events attract in excess of 30,000 runners.

On our schools initiatives we now have over 18,000 taking part in the Schools Mile Challenge. In addition we have the iRunForFun and Fit4Class initiatives which have 36,000 taking part. We also work very closely with parkrun; many of our clubs organise these runs in their local parks. The parkruns are an ideal vehicle for us in recruiting club members and as these runs expand we will continue to help them develop.

These initiatives are about participation and while a number of participants may join clubs, our primary motivation for driving them is to lead the national agenda in getting people to take exercise. The recreational running events have the very important added dimension of driving revenue for the organisation to ensure that we can continue to grow our programmes and develop our sport.

As the National Governing Body for athletics it is essential that we intensify our focus to “Get Ireland Running”. There was a concentration on running in the 2013-2016 Plan and there is now a need to focus on the other disciplines; Jumping and Throwing. Ireland had success in both many years ago and there is potential to replicate this success by allocating the right resources, particularly coaching. This will also be part of the new Plan.



## 6. Enhancing Supporting Infrastructure

The areas of focus were:

- Child Safeguarding and Code of Ethics
- Mental Health Support
- Upgrading of Systems of administrative support for events
- Information Systems

We have made enormous progress in the area of Child Safeguarding, Code of Ethics and Mental Health in the last four years, continuing the Child Safeguarding programme in line with the National Vetting Act 2012- 2016 and the Children First Act, 2015.

1. 4,162 sports leaders vetted between 2013 and 2016 to date. 7,411 sports leaders have been vetted since 2010.
2. 203 child protection courses delivered to 2,417 sports leaders since 2012.
3. Code of Ethics and Good Practice in Children's Athletics central to ethical behaviour in and supported by policies and guidelines, as listed in our safeguarding statement on the Child Safeguarding webpage.
4. A quarterly Child Safeguarding newsletter is distributed to all club Children's Officers and designated liaison persons. In total, 690 recipients receive relevant updates and information on vetting and child protection and welfare practices.
5. Child Safeguarding social media (Facebook) maintained to widen the distribution of these messages to the wider club community and sports network.

Central to our Child Safeguarding ethos is the reporting process, whereby everybody has a duty to act if they have a concern regarding the welfare of a child, whether in a club or the wider community.

We have made significant progress in upgrading our Administrative Support for events. Online entry is fully integrated for every event and we manage all our championships, ensuring that technology is used to optimise all aspects of timing and results. This has been achieved through the dedication of a number of staff and volunteers and the difference compared to the previous system represents a significant improvement.

Competition and maintaining standards of excellence in the running of our competitions are at the very core of Athletics Ireland's purpose. Competition days are moments when we interact with our all our stakeholders and are judged both as an organisation and as individuals on our ability to manage.

The introduction of technology has resulted in huge progress and while we have a little way to go, we can be satisfied that we are firmly in the territory of excellence. It is important here that we acknowledge the Department of Sport's Capital Grant, for the purchase of the appropriate technology.

On information systems, we now have a fully integrated system for online entry and hold a database of our members and participants in our recreational events. We use this data with permission from participants through opt-ins and conforming to data protection requirements. While we use the data at a basic level, we will, with experience and the appropriate in-house expertise, use it in a more sophisticated way in the future, focusing on direct marketing and user-defined interaction.

## 7. Ensuring Good Governance and Financial Stability

**Training of Board and Committee Members on excellence in Governance and ensuring that we have the appropriate financial systems in place are key.**

### Governance

We have made good progress and are progressing to ensure compliance with the Governance Code. There is, however, still work to be done and it is essential that the Board and management continue to embrace governance.

### Financial Controls

We are compliant to the appropriate levels on the management of our finances but we have not been able to create reserves. We have incurred significant costs in litigation on anti-doping and appeals in the period which were un-budgeted and placed the organisation in a difficult situation.



# Growth 2013–2016

Overall, we have made excellent progress and are well set as we commence a new Plan. It is an exciting time and we look forward with confidence to growing our sport and making Athletics Ireland an even stronger organisation as we progress towards 2020.

## Examining the numbers we can see the progress in participation:

### Membership

2012: 42,300



Juvenile: 25,750  
Adult: 16,550

2016: 58,296



Juvenile: 34,517  
Adult: 23,779

### Schools Participation

2012: 27,000



Championships: 27,000

2016: 87,000



Championships: 30,000  
Mile Challenge: 18,000  
IRun4Fun: 30,000  
Fit4Class: 6,000  
Development Events: 3,000



**Code of Ethics/  
Child Safeguarding Courses**

2012: 800\*

2016: 400



\* Programme commenced 2012

**Vetting of Members**

1,100

1,351

**Coach/Leader/  
Teacher Coaching Courses**

2012: 1,286

2016: 1,318



Coach/Leader: 1,256  
Teachers: 30



Coach/Leader: 1,208  
Teachers: 110

**Athlete Squads/  
Coach Network  
Squad**

2012: 370

2016: 650



Athlete Squads: 300  
H.P. Squads: 70



Athlete Squads: 500  
H.P. Squads: 150

**Recreation  
Initiatives**

2012: 9,000

2016: 62,500



Managed Events: 4,000  
Own Events: 5,000



Own/Managed  
Events: 60,000  
Summer Camps: 1,300  
Paced Miles: 1,200







Strategic Plan  
**20**<sup>17</sup>/<sub>20</sub>  
*Sport for Everyone*



# Our Mission, Vision & Values

## Mission

Athletics Ireland has a mission to support and develop the athletes of Ireland of all ages and abilities and to contribute positively to increasing physical activity levels across the entire population.

## Vision

Athletics Ireland is an athlete-centered organisation, committed to the promotion of all forms of athletics in Ireland. Our brief spans track and field, through cross-country and road running, mountain running, trail running, ultra-running, race walking and mass-participation events, at all levels and ages, including under-age, senior and master, with athlete welfare as a primary concern. We have a commitment to enhancing our coaching structure to support athletes of all abilities, with a particular emphasis on the elite / High Performance level and to ensuring that our administrative structures are efficient, responsive to our members and managed in line with the best principles of good governance.



## Values

### Being Athlete Centered

From our youngest to our oldest, from those who show athletic promise to those already competing internationally and those who join recreationally.

### Being Transparent and Responsible

- in our governance, our coaching, our competitions and in our promotion of athlete Safety and Welfare.

### Being Visionary

- in the development of partnerships, in educational and physical activity programmes, showing leadership in our sport and in society.

### Being Systems-Focused

- in incorporating excellence, integrity and collaboration across the organisation.



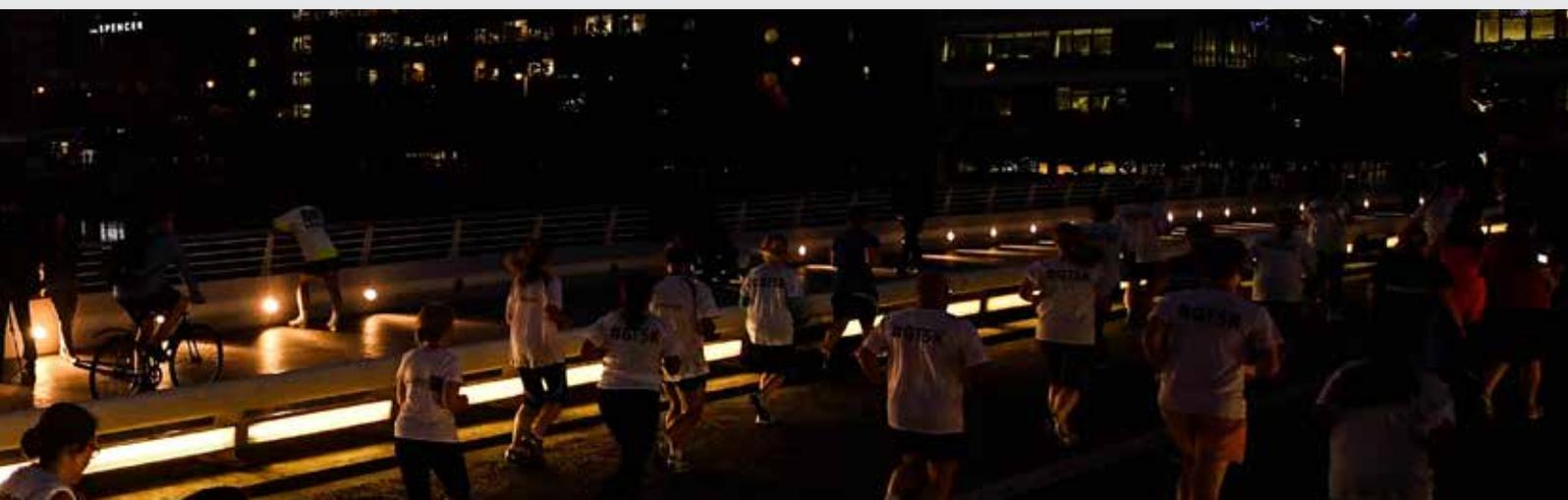
# Context

## As we embark on a new phase, we can be satisfied that we have a number of strengths:

- Our sport has low barriers to entry and is available to everyone. It is a “Sport for Life”.
- We cater for a variety of disciplines to meet varying individual needs.
- We offer a great base for all sports by offering participants agility, balance and co-ordination.
- Our coaching is of high quality.
- The Child Safeguarding system is functioning well.
- Our High Performance programme is system and process-driven.
- We have a strong club, school and recreational events base.
- We operate our championships and recreational events to high standards.
- We generate significant income through sponsorship and recreational runs.
- We have a number of high-profile athletes.
- We have strong media reach and good relationships with sports media.

## While we can enter 2017 with positivity, we must also be conscious of the challenges:

- We operate in a very competitive environment where sponsors require greater commercial benefits.
- The competition from the main ball sports, emerging sports and gym activities will continue to strengthen.
- Athletics worldwide has been damaged by the on-going doping scandals.
- Athletes transferring to European countries, where there is no affiliation to the new country, and the impact on our potential to win medals.
- The need for creativity and differentiation in the recreational running area is even more of a priority in a cluttered market.



# Stakeholders



Currently we work with many external stakeholders to ensure the delivery of our events and programmes. These include sponsors, partners, funders, supporters and collaborators.



We deliver our sport - which is a complex business - for all age groups and it, in turn, has a positive social and economic impact on the communities which we serve and which have high participation rates in their local sports clubs. The Irish population is growing older and with our high level of technology usage, more sedentary. The government has introduced several new policy documents to address these issues and this will affect how we must work over the coming years.



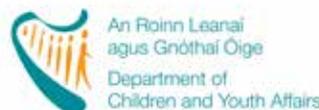
The various activities outlined in this new Strategic Plan reflect this changing landscape and will require us to continue to invest in the important partnerships that we have developed over the years. In some cases, the changing nature of the way we now operate will also mean a revision of the scope of our work as we grow the sport and implement the Goals and Objectives of the Plan.



We will also need to forge new relationships with other stakeholders as required by the new National Physical Activity Plan (NPAP) to deliver its action points, particularly those related to the Get Ireland Running programme.



Overall, we have a strong dependency on our collaborative partnerships and we look to engage actively over the lifetime of this Plan to ensure the continued successful delivery of our ambitions, to the benefit of all who take part in athletics.







# Strategic Priorities

In the 2013-2016 Plan we identified seven strategic priorities and for the period 2017-2020 we will also have seven priorities; whilst incorporating elements of the previous plan they are focused on continuing the journey, growing the organisation, supporting elite athletes and coaching and contributing in a meaningful way to the National Physical Activity Plan.

- 1 To continue to grow our membership through our existing club base, enhanced coaching and through new clubs and recruitment from schools, with specific focus on disadvantaged areas.
- 2 To Ensure that our Competitions are athlete-focused, with an enhanced customer experience.
- 3 To support our elite athletes by continuing to develop structures, so that we can field world-class athletes, with a sustainable performance coaching structure, facilities and support staff.
- 4 To expand participation in recreational events through a focus on existing programmes and the creation of initiatives in co-operation with Healthy Ireland.
- 5 To maintain and enhance our Child Safeguarding processes and Healthy Club Plan.
- 6 To manage Governance and Finances to best demonstrated practices and to train our staff to acquire expertise in every area to become “best in class”.
- 7 To make Marketing a key focus throughout the organisation.



# 1. To continue to grow our membership

During the period of the 2013-2016 Plan we grew to over 58,000 members (+38%) and have targeted growth to 70,000 over the next four years.

## Membership Growth



At the end of 2016 there were 340 clubs nationwide; to achieve our new target we will need 370 clubs.

Central to achieving these objectives is the appropriate resourcing of the Regional Development team.

In this context it is planned to add three new full-time Regional Development Officers; these will be supplemented by four part-time people funded jointly by Athletics Ireland, Local Authorities and Third Level Institutions.

The building of the National Indoor Arena as part of the Sport Ireland Campus is a huge boost to our sport, just as the Nenagh indoor facility and the Athlone International Indoor Arena were. We will now have top-class indoor facilities complementing our activities in the High Performance area and also giving us the opportunity to recruit young people into the club structure.

In addition, the building of the National Cross Country course creates opportunities for national, international and mass-participation events.

**To continue to grow our membership we will:**

- Focus on the existing club base to ensure that clubs are equipped to take on and retain new members. This will be achieved by the Regional Development Officers working with the clubs on governance, coaching, club officer training and capacity. A number of clubs are self-sufficient, while some need assistance in a number of areas; both will be prioritised.
- Target disadvantaged areas, particularly in the counties where we are already strong and in larger population areas where ball sports are dominant.
- Ensure that clubs and schools (primary and secondary) work closely together in a meaningful and structured manner to continue to attract young people into our sport.
- Build on the existing relationships with Local Sports Partnerships and Local Authorities using the combined strengths of each to grow our sport.
- Work with Sport Ireland and Healthy Ireland to examine ways of attracting people at all stages of life to our clubs, offering guidance on achieving levels of fitness in a friendly environment.
- Continue to co-operate with parkrun and European Week of Sport initiatives, with the objective of recruiting participants into clubs.
- Partner with Sport Ireland National Campus in creating participation events on the National Cross Country Course and in the new Indoor Arena.
- Grow our Active Running Database through the development of the Athletics Ireland runner database.



## 2. To Ensure that our Competitions are athlete-focused, **with an enhanced customer experience**

There has been significant progress over the period of the Plan in how we run and manage our national competitions. The introduction of Meet Manager and online entry has resulted in our competitions being run far more smoothly and focused on ensuring that our customer, the athlete, has a far better experience than previously. The training of officials has also developed and there is a growing competence in this group. However, there are still a number of areas related to competition needing attention, including the experience of our spectators at events and the focus on competition amongst our younger athletes.

The attraction and retention of young people in our sport are key factors as we strive to grow over the next four years. While drop-outs are a feature of every sport, it is less difficult to retain young people in a team environment and therefore it follows that if we are to maintain and grow numbers in our clubs, something needs to change. The IAAF and EAA promote participation and enjoyment and while there is a place for intense competition, this should not be the focus for younger athletes.

There is an obligation on all of us leading our sport to change the way we manage this issue and to focus on our young people's enjoyment of participation, with less emphasis on winning as individuals and less pressure on them to attain underage international team status at European and World levels. In this context it is appropriate to examine more inter club/county competition.

There are noteworthy examples of young athletes who were not under-age stars and who emerged as elite Senior athletes. This issue is one of our most strategic and one needing the utmost attention.

**These are our objectives as we continue to enhance the experience of our stakeholders in national competitions:**

- Continuing to manage our competitions in a professional manner, ensuring that we embrace the latest appropriate technology.
- Ensuring that our athletes are the centre of every competition and that their experience – from on-line entry to leaving the stadium or course – is a pleasant one.
- Adding team-focused 'Games' to intense national and international competition.
- Upgrading our officials regularly with focus on recruiting younger people and giving them meaningful roles and pathways.
- Improving the experience of our paying customers by creating more excitement at events and minimising the time between events.





### 3. To Support **Our Elite Athletes**

The Athletics Ireland High Performance programme was established in 2011 to create an athlete-focused, coach-driven, performance-centred system, providing athletes with world-class support services and environments, so that they could focus solely on performance.

The priority for the 2020 Tokyo cycle will be on continuing to develop the High Performance programme so that we can have more athletes competing on the world stage. Central to achieving this objective will be the introduction of a sustainable performance coaching structure, upgraded facilities and support staff.

#### **Our High Performance Goals are:**

**To target 25 medal 'opportunities' at major championships** and from these opportunities we are aiming to win 16 medals at Senior, U23 and Junior level. Specific championships which are targeted to achieve our medal objectives are: Olympic Games, World Championships, European Outdoor and Indoor Championships, European

Cross Country, World University Games, European U23 Championships, World Junior Championships, European U20 Championships and European U18 Championships.

#### **To be recognised as having a sustainable High Performance system with strong leadership and investment.**

To achieve these goals we will focus on a number of areas:

**Coaching:** We will identify, develop and support talented coaches to deliver on our medal objectives to support our elite and developing athletes. Education and mentoring of our coaches by world class professionals will be central to our strategy.



**Carded Athlete Support:** We will continue to identify, develop and support talented athletes capable of winning at the highest level in their disciplines. Support will be concentrated on athletes and event areas which are returning results and have the potential of to win medals at European, World and Olympic level.

**Leadership:** Clear, consistent and timely communication on the High Performance programme and individual athlete issues is key to ensuring that our athletes are confident of their environment and we will continue to strive to make steady progress in this area.

**Performance Services:** We will continue to provide and enhance our delivery of world-class performance service programmes. This area is critical to a successful outcome in 2020 and will be achieved in collaboration with the Sport Ireland Institute which will provide world class professional medical services to our athletes.

**Championship Pathway, Team Support and Training Environment:** We will continue to identify international events which will assist the development of our junior athletes and provide professional team support staff to

manage international/championship teams. As funding is dependent on performance, we will expose athletes to the appropriate level of competition aligned to the High Performance Plan. We have developed a structure of team support at championships with staff and volunteers working closely to ensure that there is the appropriate, athlete centred environment in place. We will continue to maintain and enhance this to Tokyo 2020. We continue to see improvement in facilities, indoor and outdoor, which will greatly benefit our athletes in their training while also providing top-class competition venues.

**Financial Investment:** During the life of the 2013-2016 plan we continued to receive excellent support from Sport Ireland and without this investment we could not run our High Performance programme. In addition to this support we generated incremental funds through our Recreation Running programme which resulted in extra support for the programme. We will continue to supplement the Sport Ireland funding through the running of existing programmes and new revenue stream opportunities to ensure that High Performance has the consistency of investment necessary to achieve our objectives on both medal achievement and sustainability.





## 4. To Expand participation in Recreational Running

There has been significant progress made in our involvement in recreational running. While the running market is quite saturated with commercial events, we found that by creating points of differentiation we have been able to build successful events over the past four years through our own resources and through partnership with other organisations.

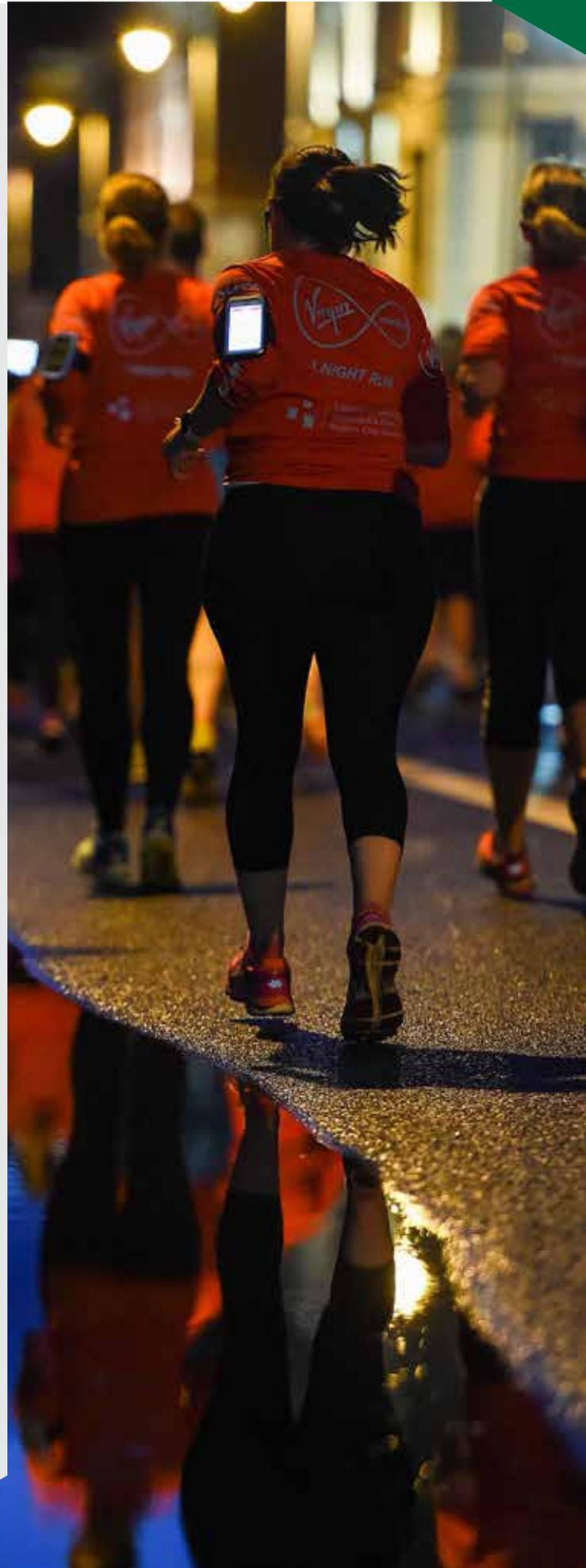
We are fortunate in having volunteers with expertise and also strong relationships with the Gardai and other statutory bodies, guiding the organisation of our programmes. Our events, which had total participation of 62,500 in 2016, include the Grant Thornton Corporate Team Challenge, The Remembrance Run, Dublin Remembers 1916-2016, The Virgin Media Night Run (in partnership with Titan Experience) and the Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon (in partnership with the Competitor Group). We work with Dublin City Council and Sport Ireland in managing the logistics of the Operation Transformation event in the Phoenix Park and also manage the logistics of the "Darkness into Light" and Independent Newspapers events.

When the numbers of children and adults taking part in events organised through Athletics Ireland Club, Schools and National structures are counted we arrive at a total in excess of 200,000 and our plan is to grow in each of the areas through 2020. By achieving our objectives we will have shown leadership and results in achieving a healthier Ireland whilst also continuing to assist in funding our core Athletics Ireland activities.

### These are the Objectives:

Grow participation in all our existing events through:

- Achieving the membership objective of 70,000
- Initiating programmes in disadvantaged areas.
- Continuing to add new mass-participation events, growing to a total of 100,000 participants
- Positioning Athletics Ireland as the authority in recreational running activity, working with authorities to ensure that standards of operation apply.
- Adding to our pool of volunteers to ensure that we do not overload any club.
- Ensuring that we are closely aligned with Sport Ireland, Healthy Ireland and the HSE on participation initiatives.
- Resourcing the recreation department adding two full-time resources in the period of the plan.
- Continuing to work with parkrun to continue the trend of increased participation in running nationwide.
- Growing participation in Summer Camps to 2,500
- Growing Fit4Class to 30,000 participants, iRunForFun to 100,000 participants and School Mile Challenge to 27,000.



## 5. To Maintain and Enhance our Safeguarding processes

### Child Protection and Welfare strategy for 2020

Child protection and welfare in sport is concerned with keeping all children and young people under the age of 18 safe from abuse, discrimination and harassment. It also involves preventing those who are unsuitable to work with children in sport from accessing our athletics clubs, through our safe recruitment and vetting practices.

Sports organisations have a legal, moral and ethical obligation to protect all children and young people under the age of 18 attending and/or participating in sport. Child protection legislation exists in Ireland and the Children First Act 2015 and the National Vetting Bureau Act 2012 – 2016 specifies the obligations of sporting organisations and their volunteers and staff. Over recent years Athletics Ireland has developed child protection policies and guidelines that ensure all of our members and participants have a safe, fun and fair experience in sport.

A child-centred organisation is one that committed to protecting children from physical, sexual, emotional and psychological harm and from neglect. This is more than simply minimising the risk or danger to children; it is about building an environment that meets the needs and the interests of participants; an environment where children can feel respected, valued and encouraged to reach their full potential. This commitment is a part of our culture, reinforced by our policies and procedures, and is communicated and supported through safeguarding training and education.

In recent years a wide range of policies, guidelines and training has been put in place to assist Athletics Ireland clubs in creating the best environment possible for children and young people to participate in sport, with the following objectives:

- Conduct an annual club audit on safeguarding requirements and monitor compliance.
- Create a youth leadership forum to allow young people's voice to be heard.
- Continued implementation of safe recruitment policy and vetting requirements.
- Review and updating of our code of ethics to incorporate recent legislation changes.
- Create a children's version of our Code of Ethics.
- Develop and deliver all three Sport Ireland safeguarding workshops.
- Make available our anti-bullying and consequences of social media workshops for children.
- Communicate policy and guidelines with Club Children's Officers and Designated Liaison Persons.



## Club Health & Wellbeing strategy for 2020

The goal is to create a club health and wellbeing plan and to pilot this plan in 12 athletic clubs in 2017. Support and guidance will be sought from Sport Ireland, HSE, Healthy Ireland and the National Office for Suicide Prevention.

The objective is to increase awareness of health promotion practices within our clubs and provide them with the tools to promote health and wellbeing within their local communities. This will strengthen clubs and widen their relevance to all ages within the club. The plan will be based on the Healthy Ireland framework and will address wellbeing for children, young people and adults as appropriate. Healthy Ireland is a Government-led initiative which aims to create an Irish society in which everyone can enjoy physical and mental health, and where wellbeing is valued and supported at every level of society. The Healthy Ireland plan includes the following:

1. **National physical activity plan.**
2. **Obesity policy**
3. **Tobacco free Ireland**
4. **Alcohol and drug awareness**
5. **National sexual health strategy**
6. **Healthy workplaces**

Athletics Ireland regards itself as integral to the implementation of the National Physical Activity Plan nationwide.

### Goals

Increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life

Reduce health inequalities

Protect the public from threats to health and wellbeing

Create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland

## Athletics Ireland Health and Wellbeing activity components

### Safeguarding

- ChildSafeguarding & Welfare policy
- Anti-bullying workshop for children
- Consequences of Social Media workshops for youths

### Activity for all (participation)

- Physical activity for recreational groups ( adults, youths, little athletes)
- Social inclusion initiatives (disadvantaged groups)
- Alternative options (Pilates, yoga, kettlebells)

### Wellbeing

- Mental health awareness & suicide prevention
- Gambling, alcohol & drug dependency awareness for juvenile and adult members
- Healthy eating & nutrition for all





*“We are fortunate in having staff who are totally committed to the success of the organisation. The attitude is one of vocation rather than work and the willingness to “go the extra mile” on an ongoing basis is quite unique.”*

## 6. Manage Governance and Finance & Risk to Best Demonstrated Practice and Train Our Staff

The cornerstone of how we operate is that we have the appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure that the organisation is run well, with specific focus on Governance, including management of our finances to best-demonstrated practice and management of risk.

### Governance

On Governance we continue to make progress on adopting the Governance Code which is in place for board members, managers, staff and volunteers. The code is based on five principles:

- Leading the organisation
- Exercising control of the organisation
- Being transparent and accountable
- Working effectively
- Behaving with integrity

There are a number of steps under each principle and having self-audited we see that we are strong in some areas and have work to do in others. Our plan is to be fully compliant with the "Code" by the end of 2018 and thereafter have a robust process in place to ensure that we remain compliant.

To achieve compliance there will be a Working Group formed, consisting of the President, Chair of Finance and Risk, Chair of Competition, Chair of Juvenile, Chair of High Performance, Chair of Coaching, CEO, Director of Finance, Operations Manager and Personnel/ Child Protection Manager.

The Committee will partner with Carmichael House, who are experts on the "Code" to ensure that we make the necessary progress throughout 2017/18.

### Finance & Risk

The financial area is well controlled and is overseen by the Finance and Risk Committee and we are audited by an

external Auditor to ensure that we are compliant with legal and regulatory standards.

#### Our objectives in the financial area are:

- Ensure that we continue to be compliant on all legal and regulatory issues.
- Budget conservatively, building reserves each year.
- Examine the cost base ensuring that we are getting value in each area.

#### Our objectives in the Risk area are:

- Examine the risks facing the organisation and put in place the appropriate measures to minimise these risks.
- Have Insurance in place covering all the major areas.
- Educate the organisation, clubs, counties, provinces on risk issues and planning to minimise these risks.

### Training

We are fortunate in having staff who are totally committed to the success of the organisation. The attitude is one of vocation rather than work and the willingness to "go the extra mile" on an ongoing basis is quite unique. The staff work closely with our volunteers, who are also incredibly dedicated to our sport and together we are taking the organisation forward in a positive way.

Because we are a relatively small organisation, there is significant pressure on staff to deliver on objectives. It is important that we recognise the contribution that they make and train them appropriately to ensure that each of them can grow in expertise in their specific area of responsibility and allow expansion of roles to take on new responsibilities.

The needs of each employee will be assessed in early 2017, with the objective of implementing the appropriate training during the life of the Plan.

## 7. Marketing

In the 2013-2016 plan, marketing received very little focus. As we have evolved as an organisation we recognise that marketing is central to everything we do – both internally and externally – as we seek to influence our members, potential members, recreational running participants, government, sponsors and media. The context within which we communicate our marketing message has changed dramatically with the emergence of social media, whereby the average user receives 285 items of content each day. While “traditional” media once dominated, now Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram are part of our daily lives and even the traditional space is more complex, due to the plethora of channels and outlets.

From a communication/media perspective every person, organisation and business can share, consume and publish anytime, anywhere across social channels. Broadcast is now available beyond traditional TV, with Facebook Live and live streaming. However, to be visible, investment in promoted posts is often needed.

Visual content is by far the most effective medium of digital communication. Whether in the form of stunning images, captivating storytelling videos or colourful infographics, visual content is the new king. There has also been a significant shift in how people get their news and views, towards social media channels. The market has become more fragmented, with numerous digital channels now available.

### Marketing/Communications Objectives

#### Continue to build awareness and a positive brand image for the sport

##### We will achieve this by:

- Leveraging the already established successful International meets nationwide to drive positive engagement with the media and sports fans by ensuring support provided is utilised for delivering quality fields in events in which Irish athletics stars are competing. Also, providing marketing and communications support to gain further visibility for these events.
- Establishing the National Championships as a ‘go-to’ sporting event for the Athletics community by making the



experience entertaining. Investing in a strong social media campaign to encourage attendance by adult members.

- Optimising the opening of Sport Ireland National Indoor Arena, Abbotstown.
- Preparing athletes to be positive advocates for themselves and the sport through communications and support training.
- Maximising opportunities for earned media for pre-key National and International athletics championships through investment in striking PR photography, hosting media conferences, pitching key athletes for features in sport and lifestyle publications.
- At championships, maximising coverage by sharing live streaming clips of best moments to digital media. Increasing frequency of post-race interviews and behind-the-scenes footage capturing those 'golden moments' that can go 'viral'.
- Increasing Athletics Ireland's social reach via content on highly engaged platforms of Instagram and YouTube and working to build Snapchat following. Continue to provide engaging and informative content on our national championships, international championships, and local Grand Prix meetings (Athlone International, Cork City Sports, Morton Games and Letterkeny International)
- Establishing a clear crisis management protocol which anticipates crises and deals with them to minimise impact on the sport's reputation.
- Communicating the positive organisational initiatives to the athletics community and key ones targeted to the media.
- On-going engagement with key stakeholders and Government.

### Maximise commercial opportunities for Athletics Ireland

#### We will achieve this by:

**Sponsorship:** Conducting research to profile the Athletics Ireland membership to identify brand sponsorship fits and to acquire credible data to share with potential partners. Build membership database, a critical asset for commercial partners for acquisition and retention. Building the smaller programmes so that they are marketable. Developing collateral and pitching to identified target list.

**Recreational Races:** Continuing to drive sales for our growing number of recreational races; Grant Thornton Series, Virgin Media Night Run, Streets of Dublin, Remembrance Run 5K.

### Improve communications with the Athletics Community

#### We will achieve this by:

- Re-launching the website for improved user experience
- Rolling out a regional digital marketing course to support clubs in maximising potential in this area
- Conducting a feasibility study into an App which would allow for push notification on latest news, results, entry on-line deadlines, coaching courses, membership registration reminders, changes to timetables.

### Create a refreshed brand identity for Athletics Ireland

#### We will achieve this by:

- Creating a new look and feel for the Athletics Ireland brand and ensuring that all sub-programmes have a similar design for consistency. Bundling youth programmes under one overarching sub-brand and creating a sub-brand for the running community e.g. Athletics Ireland|RUN. Research would be needed to be conducted to determine the most appropriate name.
- Ensuring strong visibility of brand at events supported by Athletics Ireland

### Make Athletics Ireland|RUN central to the Running Community

#### We will achieve this by:

Creating a digital hub for the running community through which we can promote Athletics Ireland-owned recreational events and recreational races which we give permits to.

The needs of the running community should be researched to ascertain what this hub would contain but it could include a comprehensive fixtures list, a ranking system like the approach taken by parkruns and IMRA when you can track your times, pbs against other runners. Charge additional fee to permitted races to be part of the ranking system.

All sign-ups would need to give personal information to be part of the hub and data is a powerful commercial tool.



## Summary

Athletics Ireland has seen significant growth in every area over the past four years. The organisation has evolved in a significant way and as we enter into a new phase with new strategic priorities we do so with confidence. We are fortunate that we have high-calibre volunteers and staff committed to the organisation and its ambition to:

- **Grow our membership**
- **Ensure that our competitions are athlete and customer-focused and run to the highest standards.**
- **Support our elite athletes in contending for medals on a world stage.**
- **Expand participation in youth and adult recreation events in co-operation with Sport Ireland and Healthy Ireland.**
- **Maintain and enhance our Safeguarding processes.**
- **Manage Governance and Finance professionally and train our staff.**
- **Make Marketing as a key focus of the organisation.**

There are specific initiatives and milestones in each of the priority areas and these will be part of the monthly, quarterly and annual plans which will be monitored and evaluated to ensure that there is continuous progress.

**At the end of 2020 Athletics Ireland will be a significantly stronger organisation and will have made a major contribution to the health of the nation.**

# 2017 - 2020 Plan

## Membership

2016 - 58,300



Juvenile - 34,980  
Adult - 23,320

2020 - 70,000



Juvenile - 42,000  
Adult - 28,000

## Schools Participation

2016 - 87,000



Championships - 30,000  
Mile Challenge - 18,000  
IRun4Fun - 30,000  
Fit4Class - 6,000  
Development Events - 3,000

2020 - 202,000



Championships - 35,000  
Mile Challenge - 27,000  
IRun4Fun - 100,000  
Fit4Class - 30,000  
Development Events - 10,000

## Code of Ethics/ Child Safeguarding Courses

2016 - 400



2020 - 400



## Vetting of Members

1,351

1,600

## Coach/Leader/ Teacher Coaching Courses

2016 - 1,318



Coach/Leader - 1,208  
Teachers - 110

2020 - 1,550



Coach/Leader - 1,400  
Teachers - 150

## Athlete Squads/ Coach Network Squads

2016 - 650



Athlete Squads - 500  
H.P. Squads - 150

2020 - 850



Athlete Squads - 700  
H.P. Squads - 150

## Recreation Initiatives

2016 - 62,500



Own/Managed Events - 60,000  
Summer Camps - 1,300  
Paced Miles - 1,200

2020 - 112,500



Own/Managed Events - 100,000  
Summer Camps - 2,500  
Paced Miles - 5,000  
Couch to 5K O50s - 5,000



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*Sport for Everyone*