Athletics Ireland

2026 – 2028

UPDATED IN 2025 · UPDATED IN 2025 · UPDATED IN 2025

2026

ATHLETICS IRELAND

HIGH-PERFORMANCE PLAN

Introduction

Athletics Ireland published its High-Performance Strategy 2022-2028 at the beginning of the Paris Olympic cycle, with a commitment to review and update strategy in 2025, at the outset of the LA Olympic cycle. This document sets out our strategic aims for the LA Olympic Cycle.

A key metric for the High-Performance programme is the number of medals won on the international stage. In the Paris cycle we identified thirty medal opportunities over the course of the cycle. At the outset this target was considered an ambitious 'stretch,' yet Irish athletes achieved thirty-four medals in targeted championship events from 2021 to 2024. This compares favourably with the twelve (12) medals won across the Rio cycle from 2012 to 2016 and the 30 medals achieved in the Tokyo cycle.

Simultaneously, the depth of performance continued on an upward trajectory, and the number and the quality of athletes that have achieved a higher championships entry standard has become a feature of our programme, while the depth in performance delivery has greatly increased, as evidenced by results at global championships in Oregon, Budapest, Paris and Tokyo in the last four years.

The key recommendations identified in the Sport Ireland-led Paris Cycle Review include the need to maintain the focus on developing coaches and increasing contact time with athletes, to explore opportunities to regional hubs of performance support services, and to identify priority new hires to increase system capacity. These themes are broadly consistent with recommendations from the Tokyo cycle review, and we have made significant strides throughout the Paris cycle in achieving these recommendations. But much work remains to be done.

This strategy highlights performance coaching in our sport as a key area for investment and is critical to continue and enhance success. We acknowledge there is much to be done to enhance the support and integration of our performance coaches. We will be innovative and adaptable in enhancing coaching capacity and capability and will implement initiatives that

will be successful in an Irish context, while cognisant of the need for sustainability in our performance coaching model. Parallel to investment in indigenous coaching talent, we identify the need to integrate medal-winning expertise and global credibility into our coaching eco-system, while cognisant that any investment in Performance Coaching must be accompanied by a high level of quality assurance and oversight of that investment.

While Athletics Ireland currently support approximately seventy athletes via Athlete Carding at Emerging Talent through to World Class levels, approximately two- hundred athletes represent Ireland at targeted international pathway and senior championships in any given year, and further depth is added to the performance programme through the Pathway Programme, National Relay, Endurance, Race Walks, and Field Event squads. Our approach has been to support our athletes in the environment and coaching partnership that works best for them and our shared performance goals, currently Irish athletes are succeeding domestically, from professional groups in Britain, the USA, and elsewhere.

During the Tokyo and Paris cycles we expanded our capacity to support and engage with the recruitment of full-time National Event Leads in Field Events, Endurance and Sprints and these roles have added significant value to our ability to roll out strategy. Capacity-building will remain a key feature of our strategy as we operate in an expansive, predominantly decentralised, and truly global sport. Greater engagement with and support of athletes and their coaches in their day-to-day performance environments is imperative.

Identifying and supporting talented young athletes with the potential to perform at the very highest level remains a key priority. We have seen unprecedented success at key pathway championships during the last cycle and are now seeing some outstanding talent successfully transitioning into the senior ranks, who are well placed to make a significant impact in LA 2028 and beyond. Enhanced investment in our Pathway Programme is required as we seek to consistently identify talent and equip that talent with the skills and aptitudes required to fulfil their potential.

The Sport Ireland Institute (SII) is an invaluable resource to our performance athletes and coaches and will continue to serve as a central hub, while we will work towards extending the network of supports available so that they best serve the needs of athletes whose optimal performance environment is remote from the capital, consistent with SII's own strategic direction going forward.

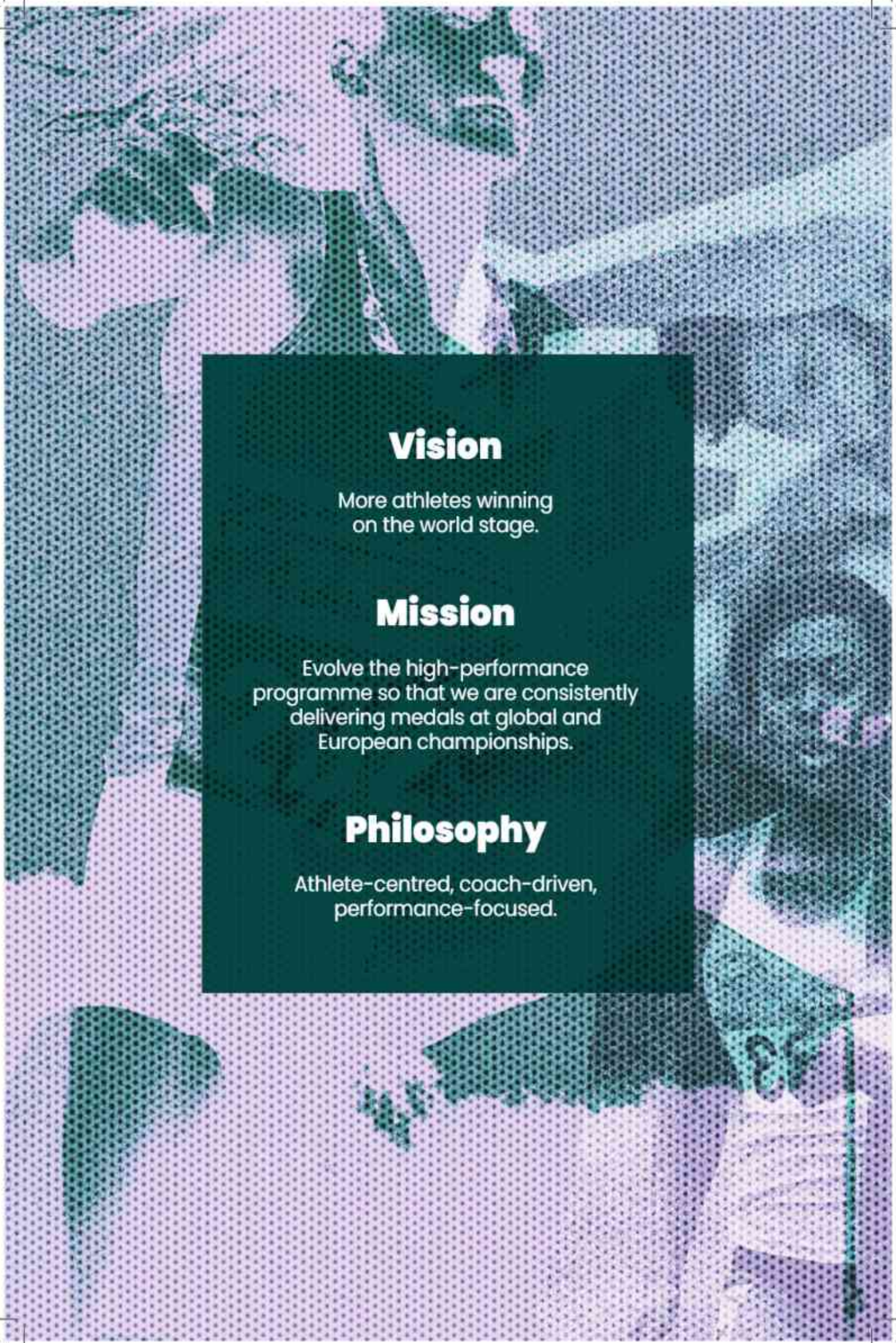
Governance matters and has a direct impact on performance. We are proud of our record in this area and will continue to emphasise good governance of the High-Performance Programme over the next cycle. We will continually review our selection policies and procedures for championships selections and athlete carding to ensure clarity, transparency, and robustness.

Partnerships are critical to the success of our high- performance programme as we seek to provide an optimal platform upon which our athletes and coaches can thrive and we will work collaboratively with all our stakeholders in building this platform, but most particularly we will embrace the existing positive relationships with Sport Ireland (SI), Sport Ireland Institute (SII) and the Olympic Federation of Ireland (OFI) as we work towards fulfilling our mission. Optimal alignment and integration are recognised as being critical, and as such we have aligned our key strategic pillars with those

of Sport Ireland's High-Performance Strategy 2021-2032.

We are very ambitious and continue to strive to embed and deliver excellence throughout our system. To meet the demands of this ambitious strategy we have had to be innovative and develop several diversified income streams. These streams include commercial investment, philanthropic funding and recreational running income, all adding significant contributions to our high-performance budget.

Culture and environment are critically important to us, and we have embraced Athletics Ireland's expressed values of integrity, respect, inclusion, and excellence which will underpin everything we do and will be both extended to and demanded of all stakeholders in the system as we achieve success, the right way, at levels not seen before.



Vision

More athletes winning
on the world stage.

Mission

Evolve the high-performance
programme so that we are consistently
delivering medals at global and
European championships.

Philosophy

Athlete-centred, coach-driven,
performance-focused.

What we value

Integrity

We operate honestly, with fairness, transparently and to best practise.

Respect

We promote respect for everyone within the high-performance community.

Inclusion

We welcome everyone and we embrace diversity.

Excellence

We have ambitious targets and support everyone to realise their full potential.

Guiding principles

We want to go from good to better to best. We will do this through leadership and our guiding principles.

People
Our athletes, coaches, volunteers and staff are our most valuable asset. We put people front and centre of everything we do. People make our organisation. We embrace diversity, equal opportunity, and gender balance.

Partnerships
We are a better organisation by collaborating with others at all levels.

Foundations
We value excellent leadership, with appropriate controls and risk management, being transparent and accountable, working effectively, and behaving with integrity.

Innovation and sustainability
We will be innovative and creative in all we do. We will promote good practices in sustainability.

Technology
We embrace technology across the spectrum of our sport and business.

Communication
We value the importance of communicating with all stakeholders, whether listening or engaging. We value clarity of messaging in all we do.

Our targets

Medals achieved by Irish athletes are a key return on investment in the high-performance programme. The table on p.11 illustrates our targeted medal opportunities for the 2025-2028 cycle. These performance goals are our "opportunities" for medals based on objective data from recent and historical championship performances and assume that athletes are healthy and competing in their specific events. "Medal Opportunities" are based on what we can achieve and what we should be supporting as a high-performance programme. Other new medal opportunities may arise over the next three years, and some opportunities may disappear due to injury or other factors.

	2025	2026	2027	2028	
Olympics Games				1	1
World Championships	1 (1)		1		2
European Championships		2		2	4
World Indoor Championships	1 (1)	1		1	3
European Indoor Championships	2(3)		2		4
European Cross Country	4	1	1	2	5
World University Games	1(2)		2		3
European U23 Championships	2(5)		2		4
World U20 Championships		1		1	2
European U20 Championships	2 (1)		2		4
European U18 Championships		2		2	4
					36

() Medals achieved in 2025 displayed in brackets alongside original target

Headline objectives

Through this strategy we will ...

1. Have achieved an Olympic medal.
2. Have increased the number of medals won at targeted championships by a further 20%.
3. Actively seek to advance the professionalisation of high-performance coaching.
4. Appoint and retain event-specific technical expertise with a proven track-record of success whose key remit will be to steer the development of personal coaches of priority performance and pathway athletes through thorough engagement and check-and-challenge while providing strategic leadership to the event-group.
5. Enhance the support of and investment in our Performance Pathway Programme to better prepare our talented young athletes for the challenges inherent in transitioning to full senior international athletes competing on the global stage.
6. Actively promote the development of a positive, challenging culture in the training, competition, and lifestyle environments of all involved in the performance system.
7. Provide direct support to coaches of targeted athletes tracking towards success in 2028 Olympic Games, who in turn will have an enhanced capacity to engage with centralised training and competition programme fostering greater integration and accountability towards shared performance goals.
8. Identify and support coaches of priority performance training- groups, with a track-record of transitioning athletes into senior international competitors, strategically integrated and aligned with Dublin-based or regional hubs.
9. Enhance integration with Athletics Ireland's Development Team to extend and align the reach of athlete pathway development into younger age-groups, and into the provinces.
10. Actively pursue opportunities for collaboration with institutes/ universities alongside local clubs to become Regional Centres of Excellence for athletics offering regionalised HP services.

Our strategic pillars

1. Focused performance investment
2. Athlete performance and holistic support
3. World class coaching and support services
4. Business structures and planning
5. Partnerships
6. World class facilities and equipment
7. Research and innovation

Strategic Pillar 1: Focused performance investment.

Sustained investment over many years has brought increased levels of success across our sport. Athletics Ireland will work closely with Sport Ireland (SI) and other key stakeholders to ensure continued and enhanced investment in the high-performance programme. Investment will be predicated on evidence-based decisions to effect maximum performance success. Continued investment will underpin the high-performance structures and strategy and will drive further success on the European and global stage.

Key Actions

1. Cognisant of the critical role played by Sport Ireland in funding and supporting High Performance sport, Athletics Ireland will continuously review criteria for SI investment and will implement all relevant measures which underpin successful HP programmes and against which Athletics Ireland will be assessed by SI.

These include:

a. Clearly define and communicate the performance ambition for our sport.
b. Develop a communications strategy and annual communication plan in collaboration with the marketing team.
c. Clearly identify athletes with high performance potential.
d. Demonstrate world class performance planning.
e. Develop both the experience and capacity of coaches within our sport.
f. Clearly quantify medal opportunities and associated medal targets along the championship pathway.
g. Build on and clearly communicate to stakeholders our existing and ongoing track-record of success.
h. Demonstrate exemplary governance and decision-making processes within the sport as per leadership and guiding principles.
i. Develop and communicate the business model underpinning the performance programme.
j. Invest in High Performance staff through continuous professional development.

2. Athletics Ireland will undertake regular horizon scanning to ensure that upcoming talented athletes are identified and supported, via annual and mid-season carding decisions.

Strategic Pillar 2: Athlete performance and holistic support.

One of the fundamental philosophies of the Athletics Ireland High Performance Strategy 2026-2028 is that athletes and the people who support them are at the heart of everything we do.

Athletics Ireland will continue to administer the Sport Ireland annual carding scheme and will annually review Athletics Ireland's own athlete carding scheme.

The welfare of athletes, coaches and of everyone involved in HP Sport will be central to the strategy and no short cuts will be taken to achieve ambitious goals. A key objective of the HP Programme is to enhance, protect and improve the performance environment and experience for all programme members.

Key Actions

1. Continue to develop and refine the annual athlete carding scheme, identifying priority athletes for investment and support on their journey to World Class senior athletes, including specifically:

a. Continued ownership and management of Sport Ireland carding by Athletics Ireland.

b. Continued investment by Athletics Ireland alongside Sport Ireland support allocation.
c. Annually review and evolve Athlete Agreement contracts.

2. Actively engage in and direct athletes to enhanced Sport Ireland Institute athlete life skills support, including advice on education, financial planning, balancing academic load, dual-career planning and accessing athlete-friendly employment schemes with both public and private sector organisations.

3. Athletics Ireland will lead on athlete welfare and develop effective ways to recognise and address athlete issues, including:

a. Continued support of the Athlete's Commission, established in the previous cycle.
b. Continued access for Sport Ireland carded athletes to support service via Athletics Ireland Employee Assistance Programme.
c. Review Athletics Ireland complaints and disciplinary procedure for all athletes, coaches and support staff operating within High Performance Athletics.
d. Conduct an annual athlete welfare audit and culture review.

4. Athletics Ireland will enhance its support of and investment in its Performance Pathway Programme to better prepare our talented young athletes for the challenges inherent in transitioning to full senior international athletes competing on the global stage. Athletics Ireland will:

a. Enhance the capacity of the Pathway Programme through recruitment of event-specific expertise who will facilitate enhanced interaction with coach-athlete units from an early stage.
b. Create enhanced bespoke support packages for identified priority transitioning athletes and their coaches. Continue to build on existing educational curricula targeting both priority pathway athletes and the wider pathway cohort.
c. Provide enhanced centralised event-specific contact-time via domestic and overseas camp opportunities.

5. Athletics Ireland has a well-developed International Competition Pathway. Athletics Ireland will review the competition pathway annually and further develop appropriate opportunities where required. Athletics Ireland will develop long-term competition planning to ensure that athletes get the optimum exposure to competition stress conditions and become more comfortable in top level competition environments as they progress to Senior status.

6. Athletics Ireland will enhance its review and debrief process after each championship and competition cycle to assist in delivering optimum environments for our athletes. Each international competition

debrief report submitted within two weeks of the event by the team manager through the HPD.

7. Enhance the capacity of the High-Performance team by building out the Operations Team with capacity for additional responsibility including Athlete Welfare, Managing Partnerships, Research and Innovation, and providing additional operational team support at peak operational periods. This will allow the Performance staff to focus on Performance.

8. Further develop anti-doping educational curricula and web-based presence.

Strategic Pillar 3: World class coaching and support services.

This strategy highlights performance coaching in our sport as a key area for investment, critical to continued and enhanced success. We acknowledge there is much to do to enhance the support and integration of our performance coaches. Athletics Ireland will collaborate with all stakeholders to develop high-quality coaching structures that will benefit the performance environment and culture, and the achievement of our targets on the international stage.

We will be innovative and adaptable in enhancing coaching capacity and capability and will implement initiatives that will be successful in an Irish context, while cognisant of the need for sustainability in our performance coaching model.

Parallel to investment in indigenous coaching talent, we identify the need to integrate medal-winning expertise and global credibility into our coaching eco-system, while cognisant that any investment in Performance Coaching must be accompanied by a high level of quality assurance and oversight of that investment.

We will continue to work closely with the Sport Ireland Institute to deliver a world-class model of performance support services, while simultaneously building out an AI retained team of service providers. Athletes will be supported through the expertise of an integrated multi-disciplinary professional team which will increase in capacity over the lifetime of the Strategy ensuring athletes and coaches are comprehensively supported in their journey towards delivering on a global stage.

Key Actions

1. Athletics Ireland, in partnership with Sport Ireland, and through our diversified income streams, will maintain initiatives implemented in the last cycle that actively seek to advance the professionalisation of high-performance coaching and will invest accordingly. Athletics Ireland will:

a. Appoint event-specific technical expertise in the event groups with a proven track-record of success on the global stage whose key remit will be to steer the technical development of personal coaches of priority performance and pathway athletes through

thorough engagement and check-and-challenge.

b. Provide direct support to coaches of targeted athletes tracking towards success in 2028 Olympic Games fostering greater integration and accountability towards shared performance goals.
c. Identify and support coaches of priority performance training groups, with a track-record of transitioning athletes into senior international competitors, strategically integrated and aligned with Dublin-based or regional hubs, which can provide a focal point for performance and pathway athletes and for the provision of performance services.
d. Engage with key stakeholders, e.g. third level Institutions, in the identification and recruitment of paid performance coaches.
e. Through cooperation with the Development Team, enhance support of athletes and coaches at Development and Performance Development level through expanded capacity and enhanced structure, allowing the Performance staff to focus on 'Performance.'

2. Athletics Ireland will further develop the capability of high-performance coaching across the system. This will include:

a. Retain a lead for Coach Education whose remit is to ensure comprehensive provision of appropriate upskilling for high performance coaches.
b. Engage in and support Sport Ireland led professional development programme for coaches working with Performance and Pathway athletes, e.g. PEP, other.
c. Create a Pathway Coach Development programme that includes accessing experiences on training camps and at major pathway championships.Devise and implement a sport-wide coach licensing programme.

3. Athletics Ireland will continue to support and utilise Sport Ireland Institute's delivery of a world class standard of performance support services to our priority athletes. AI will:

a. Continue to utilise SII at Sport Ireland Campus as the focal point for centralised service provision while leveraging the roll-out of SII supported regional hubs to enhance accessibility for athletes based regionally.
b. Contribute to SII led collaboration across the HP system – NGBs, Higher Education Institutions, private sector.
c. Engage in and contribute to SII led best practice knowledge - sharing networks around support service provision.
d. Develop a network of Athletics Ireland regional providers to create a regional network of support.
e. Provide bespoke performance service support for overseas priority athletes.
f. Provide on-going education to athletes and coaches across a suite of service areas.
g. Conduct an annual review of Performance Service Provision.

Strategic Pillar 4: Business structures and planning.

Governance matters and has a direct impact on performance. We will continue to emphasise good governance of the High-Performance Programme over the next cycle. We will ensure that we have a defined, suitable, and effective governance structure in place. Athletics Ireland will focus on maintaining this standard of good governance to ensure continued and enhanced investment by Sport Ireland and key stakeholders.

Key Actions

1. Athletics Ireland will meet all Sport Ireland established target standards of governance practice in relation to our high-performance programme. Athletics Ireland acknowledges that Sport Ireland funding will be contingent on the following minimum standards criteria:

- **a.** The maintenance of a full-time paid performance team in the sport, led by a full-time Performance Director (PD).
- **b.** The Performance Director role must be separate from any coaching role.
- **c.** Athletics Ireland will retain its High-Performance Committee (HPC), which supports and empowers the Performance Director and to ensure that people with the requisite expertise are making decisions affecting the high- performance programmes.
- **d.** Independent high-performance expertise will be in place on the HP Committee.
- **e.** There will be independent directors on the board of the sport.
- **f.** Maintain clearly delineated relationships between CEO, HPC, PD and board.
- **g.** Provide new board/HPC members entering the high-performance system with appropriate training.

2. Athletics Ireland will undertake the following actions:

- **a.** Maintain compliance with the governance code.
- **b.** Maintain a focus on enhancing and embedding best practice, cognisant that compliance with minimum standards must be achieved to receive funding.
- **c.** Continue to generate a minimum of 20% of the funding for the HP programme through Athletics Ireland sources.

3. Athletics Ireland, with the support of Sport Ireland, will:

- **a.** Actively engage in SI led best practice HPC forum to share expertise and knowledge amongst HPC members from across sports, meeting on a regular basis e.g., quarterly.
- **b.** Actively pursue appointments to relevant positions within European Athletics and World Athletics Federations, to influence high performance decisions at European and World Level.
- **c.** Further explore the development of alternative funding streams to reduce reliance on Sport Ireland funding and enhance AAI's capacity to better pursue its HP goals.

Strategic Pillar 5: Partnerships.

Athletics Ireland is committed to strengthening its partnerships and relationships across the system involving Government, Sport Ireland, Athletics Northern Ireland, other National Governing Bodies, Olympic Federation of Ireland, Paralympics Ireland, higher education institutions and primary and secondary education. Athletics Ireland will enhance the way it collaborates with stakeholders across the sporting environment. This collaboration will improve opportunities to further develop the performance pathway and allow greater cohesion while considering the athlete's welfare.

Key Actions

1. Actively pursue opportunities for collaboration with institutes/ universities alongside local clubs to become Regional Centres of Excellence for athletics offering regionalised HP services.

- **a.** Leverage SII expertise to support dual career (academic/ vocational) with athletes involving flexibility around workload.
- **b.** Leverage relationships with higher education institutions to better facilitate transition from successful underage to successful senior athlete.
- **c.** Foster strong links between sports science faculties within higher education institutions, e.g. via IRC research posts in relevant academic disciplines.
- **d.** Co-funding high performance coaching and technical expertise based at higher education institutions.
- **e.** Leverage and support existing 3rd Level sports scholarships programmes so that resources are directed to priority athletes.

2. Actively engage in and support SI/SII networking and information sharing sessions between HP interest groups, such as High-Performance Committee's, Performance Director's, Pathway Leads, Coaches, etc.

3. Actively seek to influence, via SI, key areas of strategic importance to high performance athletics, including, for example, high performance facility development, primary and secondary school sports education and policy development.

4. Actively engage with Paralympics Ireland in implementing the integration of our respective performance programmes.

Strategic Pillar 6: World class facilities and equipment.

The Sport Ireland Campus is a significant asset to Athletics Ireland. As such the Sport Ireland masterplan for the Campus will play a significant role to maximise this facility and the needs of high-performance athletes in our sport. Athletics Ireland will continue to work with Sport Ireland to implement plans which maximise opportunities for our sport.

In addition, Athletics Ireland recognises the potential for regional facilities

to play a larger part across the high-performance training environment. We will collaborate with the higher education sector, regional authorities, clubs, etc., to access these facilities and develop regional hubs. Athletics Ireland will continue to work with Sport Ireland and Government to implement plans which maximise these capital infrastructure opportunities.

Key Actions

1. Continue to engage with Sport Ireland as it builds out the masterplan for the Sport Ireland Campus, as per the Government's commitment to its completion, to include the following:

- **a.** Completion of outdoor 400m track and ancillary facilities.
- **b.** Accommodation for athletes.
- **c.** On-site village to include best practice needs for athletes, including a canteen, transport on-site, access points, etc.
- **d.** Collaborate with the Development Director of Sport Ireland Campus to share knowledge on best development for the Campus.

2. Athletics Ireland will actively collaborate with institutes/universities to access regional performance facilities and to develop regional hubs.

Strategic Pillar 7: Research and innovation.

Opportunities exist for research and innovation projects to add value to all pillars of this strategy including Athlete Performance, Coaching and Support Services, Business Structures and Planning, Partnerships, and Facilities. Through the strategy, Athletics Ireland will continue to work with Sport Ireland and other stakeholders to develop innovation plans, programmes and strategies that will add benefit and create further opportunities for athletes to progress and achieve success.

Key Actions

1. Athletics Ireland will seek to create partnerships with universities, via Irish Research Council funding for PhD study for example, where relevant and available, and/or the private sector to conduct applied research and development projects in areas relevant to High Performance.

2. Collaborate with other NGB HP units / SI / SII on research projects that are focused on adding value to the day-to-day practice of performance directors, coaches, support staff and athletes.

3. Actively engage with and support the proposed SI innovation and research hub, to generate ideas, identify research priorities, and share learnings within the high-performance community.


29
ADELEKE

Key Milestones

2026

- Have delivered seventeen medals at targeted championships in cycle to date
- Have delivered a global championship medal
- Invest in a minimum of eight coaches of priority athletes
- Invest in a minimum of three performance training groups
- A minimum of three performance partnerships with targeted 3rd Level
- Develop a process and system to review and appraise individual athlete daily training environments and extend process to 70% of supported athletes.
- Have assimilated Para athletics into the Performance Programme
- Maintain 20% self-generated funding minimum
- Conduct a welfare audit and culture review annually with all supported athletes

2027

- Have delivered twenty-seven medals at targeted championships in cycle
- Have delivered two global championship medals
- Invest in a minimum of nine coaches of carded athletes
- Invest in a minimum of four performance training groups
- A minimum of three performance partnerships with targeted 3rd Levels
- Ensure 80% of supported athletes daily training environments have been reviewed and appraised.
- Maintain 20% self-generated funding minimum
- Generate one (1) additional income stream

2028

- Have delivered an Olympic medal.
- Have delivered thirty-six medals at targeted championships
- Invest in a minimum of ten coaches of priority athletes
- Invest in a minimum of five performance training groups
- A minimum of four performance partnerships with 3rd Levels
- Ensure a minimum of 90% of supported athletes daily training environments have been reviewed and appraised.
- Support and maintain the Athlete's Commission throughout the cycle
- Maintain 20% self-generated funding minimum
- Generate two additional income streams

We thank you for your ongoing support of Athletics Ireland

Acknowledgements

The staff and Board of Athletics Ireland.

All those who responded to the survey or gave their time in the consultation for this strategy.

The clubs, volunteers and athletes who make up athletics in Ireland.

Athletics Ireland

Unit 19, Northwood, Court Northwood Business Campus, Santry, Dublin 9, Ireland

admin@athleticsireland.ie

www.athleticsireland.ie

@irishathletics