



# Athletics Trust Scotland Young People's Forum

## Information Booklet for Clubs and Coaches





The following information sheets in the booklet have been created by members of Cohort One of the **Athletics Trust Scotland Young People's Forum**.

In November 2022, a survey was sent out to all scottishathletics members under 23 years, with a focus on mental health and the retention of young athletes in athletics. These topics were also the main themes of the ATS YPF conference with the forum led on in March 2023. The members used the responses and feedback from the survey and conference to put together these documents. They cover the following:

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*With thanks to the members of the YPF Cohort One for their work on this.*



## 1.Competition Participation

One topic that often comes up within clubs, is young athletes who turn up to training on a regular basis but don't compete for the club. Although athletics is a competitive sport, people can participate for several reasons, including recreational purposes. Through encouragement and looking at how to support young athletes, those who don't initially compete, may do so as they get older. There are many positive benefits from participating including social, emotional, health, and fun.

Recent surveys carried out by the ATS Young People's Forum, showed that the motivation for young people taking part in athletics is:

- Health and fitness (72%)
- Fun (72%),
- Competition (71%),
- Friends (69%)

Male athletes see competition as the number one motivator - 10.5% more than females do. Female athletes choose fun, friends and health and fitness before competition. The surveys showed that 73% of young people don't feel pressured to compete, however, 21.5% did and in terms of the gender split, slightly more females felt pressured to compete than males.

### Where does the pressure to compete come from?

- Approx 70% of Males and females felt most pressurised by their coach.
- Males are more likely to put pressure on themselves than females.
- Peer pressure occurs 17% more in males than females in sporting environments.

From the survey, 21% of respondents said that sport had a negative effect on their mental health, with a pressure to compete being named as one of the causes.

Feedback was gathered from young people around what can you do to help encourage and support athletes to start or continue to compete. These may be some areas to consider:

- Have you asked why they don't want to compete?
- Are they lacking in confidence? (e.g., they don't think they are good enough)?
- Do they only get asked when the "better" athletes can't make it?
- Asked to compete in events they haven't tried before (for points in Leagues) – negative experience.
- Do they have a support network to take the athletes to competition? (e.g., parents/carers can't take them).
- Coaches focus on the athletes who appear to be talented and don't recognise the efforts of the perceived less talented athletes the same way.
- Pressuring athletes to compete or made to feel bad when they don't? Threatening to ask athletes to leave the club for not competing.



There are several considerations for clubs to try:

- Set up fun inhouse competitions or interclub fun-based competitions for younger age groups to show what is involved prior to each season.
- Explain the different types of competitions that are available and what's involved.
- If an athlete is competing in a championship event for the first time, is there any discussion on how this is different to say a league event e.g., what is the call room at track and field.
- Buddy up new athletes with older athletes who already compete.
- Promote All results and the benefits of competing for the individual.
- Celebrate all performances.

**Remember:** It is okay if not all athletes want to compete, they are already getting something from the club. If their experience is positive, this will encourage them to continue. They may start competing or get involved in the club as a volunteer or coach.

**Survey question:** *“Does sport have a negative impact on your mental health?”*

*“The club are putting huge pressure on me to compete. They have asked me to leave as I don’t want to compete. The other club I tried to switch to have already said if I don’t compete then I can’t join. They spoke to my old club. I am being forced out the sport.”*

*“I was in a club and everyone in the club kept pressurising me to compete and I couldn’t deal with it. My coach I moved to understands me and is helping me with my confidence without asking me to compete.”*

*“I don’t think that this is particularly overwhelming now, but as a teenager and a student, I felt that I needed to compete to be fully involved in the club and to prove my abilities as a runner, but then it caused huge anxiety. I’m much happier now that I compete on my own terms, much more selectively.”*



## 2. Top Tips for Coaches

As a coach these are what has been highlighted as being useful to young people in your club:

- If the athlete's relationship with their coach is good and athlete centered, then it makes the athlete feel more included and listened to
- Having conversations with athletes is important
- Athletes feel that coaches need to really get to know the athlete.
- Having an adaptable coaching program especially around exam time
- Getting the study/work/life/training balance is important for both the coach and the athlete.
- As a coach, do you ask how your athletes are doing at the start of a session?
- Being seen as a person and not just an athlete
- Hold an evaluation meeting - This could be easily carried out at the end of a session as athletes are stretching and cooling down
- Coaches priorities: focusing on the best achievement
- Honest conversation throughout the whole journey

**Survey question: "What role does your coach play in keeping you in athletics?"**

*"Encouraging to all  
no matter what  
your ability."*

*"Vital, supportive coaches  
help to make you  
comfortable, know your limits  
and support you with  
whatever you want to do.  
Maintaining athlete led  
coaching."*

*"He does not, essentially  
judges me for not coming  
to training or getting  
good results at  
competitions."*

*"My coach plays a  
big part in keeping  
me in athletics."*



### **3.Coaching During Exams**

At different stages of a young athlete's career, they will be faced with times when they have to take time out to sit exams or have pressure to finish course work, whether this is at School, College or University. This advice is aimed at raising awareness for Coaches around how to support athletes throughout exams and other stressful times.

#### **Statistics**

- From our questionnaire, we have found the majority of young people knew that they could reach out to their coach for support or for help, however 16% highlighted that they didn't know where to go for help.
- 11.4% of people voted that they trusted their coach to go to for help.
- Only 3% of athletes stated that they couldn't go to their coach during exam time for help.

#### **What can a coach do for an athlete during this time?**

- Be flexible with the athletes and understand that they might not be able to make all of the sessions or competitions
- Send the athletes the session plan so that they can do the sessions at home, in their own time and around their exam schedule.
- Allow athletes to come to sessions and do their own thing with their training or allow them to come so that they can talk to people and get away from studying.
- Give athletes the competition schedule so that they don't miss any of the competitions and they decide what ones they can do.
- Be prepared with solutions that they have found to help with stress and anxiety for the athletes.
- Tailor training for athletes who are returning to training and have lost fitness due to not being able to do much during exam time.
- Keep in touch with athlete's during this time, especially if they haven't made it to any sessions.

#### **What can athletes do to help their coach?**

- Give the coach the exam schedule and let them know when you can't make a session. This will help the coach to prepare sessions that fit around your schedule.
- A good way for athletes to help the coaches to help them, is to tell the coach what they would like and are able to do, what would be best to help the athlete.
- Keep in touch with your coach during this time and let them know how and what you are doing



### What have the coaches done that have worked for the athletes?

- From the questionnaire we found that 70% of athletes said that their coach made allowances during exam time for them.
- Some of these were: taking time away from athletics, not entering them for competitions and giving them sessions to do elsewhere.

### Survey question: Does your coach make allowances if you have exams in terms of training and competition?

*"Allowed to adapt training around exam times to make it easier and reduce the pressure of it."*

*"My coach does not pressure me to put athletics first. They always ask how my coursework is going and time off training/ competing is not frowned upon."*

*"Understands you won't be at training and able to compete."*

*"Reduces intensity of training near competition."*

*"Aware of athletes' priorities."*





## 4.Changes and transition phases in athletics

In March 2023, the first Athletics Trust Scotland Young People's Forum Conference took place. This was organised and delivered by the young people on the Forum for the young people within athletics.

The ATS Young People's Forum was set up to give young people a voice in the sport. Focus group sessions were set up as part of the conference, to allow further engagement with those who attended. One such focus group was based on the '*Changes and Transition Phases in Athletics*'.

### Changes and Transitions

There are considerations to be taken into account as junior athletes progress through the age groups and hit the age where there is more outside pressure which can impact on their attendance at the club, affects their training and results in competitions.

The focus group identified the following as areas which can have an impact:

- Changing training squads
- Motivation (going from faster/slower)
- Social/Friendships
- School exams
- College or University, including moving away to study
- Start working

### Support

The young people looked at what should be considered to help support athletes during the different transition phases.

- Time management (discipline, organised)
- Know the challenges,
- Injuries
- Lack of time to train
- Dropouts
- Mindset
- Keep positive
- Motivation
- Have Flexible training times, adaptable
- Easier access to facilities, including indoors
- Look at cost of transport to training and competitions, can financial support be provided
- Learn to balance social life with athletics
- Education pressures (homework, study, exams)

It is important to recognise that as athletes get older, they may need to take a more flexible approach to training. Having a good relationship with their coach is key in keeping athletes motivated and in the sport.





## Keeping athletes involved

As athletes get to the age of 16 or over, they may start looking for part time employment, which could mean working weekends and missing competitions. Some clubs will pay for coaching qualifications for athletes aged 16+ and use them to deliver Run, Jump and Throw sessions, which are delivered before the club's main training. These athletes are paid to deliver at these sessions, removing the need to find other employment. This is one way to help keep them training and competing.

If any athletes have lost their motivation to train but still want to be involved in the sport, there are a few options to consider:

- Ease back on training and remove competition element until enjoyment has returned
- Nurture the passion back and remind athletes why they first started
- Get involved with the club in some volunteer role such as Team Manager for events (good role model for younger athletes as well)
- Help out with coaching before gaining coaching qualifications. This could help lead to paid work through clubs, Local Authorities/Leisure Trusts or other organisations
- Become an official and be involved with local and national competitions
- Train to become a physiotherapist, nutritionist or Sports psychologist.
- Help athletes to work out a plan around study/work/social/training life balance

Clubs and coaches play a part in helping athletes transition through the different phases. For example, if an athlete is moving away to university, can help be given to locate a coach or club in the area they are moving to? They are more likely to stay in the sport and still have connections with their first club and know that they are welcome when home during holiday times.

Central AC have produced a discussion document looking at how to support athletes transitioning from being a junior to senior (appendix 1).

How a club supports its athlete's will be key to how long they stay within the sport either as an athlete or in some other capacity.



(APPENDIX 1)

Draft Discussion Document

## **Facilitating the Junior to Senior Transition (JST) process in Central AC**

### **Purpose**

Having established a relatively clear pathway model and process based on LTAD principles for entry and transition through the Club to event level training, there does not appear to be a formally defined process or mechanism for facilitating and supporting athletes who wish to make the transition from junior level athletics and continue into the senior level of the sport, and this is potentially a missing element in the Club's Athlete Development Pathway.

The Junior to Senior Transition (JST) is a long-term process in itself, spanning from around U17 through to leaving the U23 age group and during this time athletes will be exposed to a number of significant life changes. In addition to training and competing at a higher level, these changes include factors such as maturation, education, employment, individual responsibility, financial considerations and social environment. If a Central athlete was to move away from the Club (e.g., to attend university), we may not be able to influence all of these factors, but if we can help an athlete navigate any of them in order to pursue the sport, then the hope is it would still be beneficial to the athlete for the Club to do so.

Although there is limited research on the subject, studies such as those conducted by Drew (2020) and Franck (2018) would indicate that this transition presents significant challenges to athletes, with a high attrition rate and many athletes unable to successfully make the move from junior to senior. One of the key messages from these studies is that the availability and range of support and advice for athletes (and parents) plays a significant part in achieving a successful transition. The purpose of this document is therefore to explore and determine ways that Central AC, in partnership with external stakeholders where possible and appropriate, can take an active and practical role in supporting our junior athletes to becoming seniors. The aims of this would also be to facilitate any athletes achieving this goal where they desire it, not just those who may be able to reach elite status.

I have drafted my initial thoughts around the broad elements where I think Central personnel can have a direct influence on the overall process and I seek and welcome feedback, suggestions and opinions from stakeholders across the Club as there is a wealth of knowledge and experience to help define and refine the steps we can take to support athletes as they reach the latter stages of their time as a junior. It may be that some or all of these elements already take place on an informal basis, and we therefore seek to build greater awareness of how to support athletes across the Club in making the transition.

Gareth Marchant ADO



## Broad Elements

### Element 1 – Understand the athlete (from entry to Event level training or 15-16 yrs)

It seems sensible to conclude that the primary relationship for communication to understand the athletes' senior ambitions would be with their coach. Questions to establish the athlete's goals and aspirations could be (athletes' desires and circumstances change over time, so this would not be a fixed-point discussion and would need to be reviewed regularly):

- Where do you see yourself with athletics when you are (age)?
- What do like about athletics?
- What are you expecting to do when you leave school? How would you rate the importance of sport in those plans?
- Are you looking at universities from a sports perspective, an academic perspective, or both?

*\*Would it be helpful to create a template form that could be used in athlete interactions for coaches to record their responses and act as a reference over time? \**

### Element 2 – Education: provide information to all involved

Just raising awareness that there is a JST and what some of the pros and cons of it can help everyone involved (athletes, parents, coaches, etc) to better understand the process and to manage expectations around moving to the senior level of athletics.

This could be facilitated by workshops, talks from senior athletes who have been through it (whether successfully or unsuccessfully), presentations from Scottish Athletics, one to one meetings with athlete, coach and parent or by bringing in professionals from areas such as nutrition, psychology or physiotherapy.

Some of these options might prove difficult to implement for the Club from a logistical or cost perspective but are included to foster discussion.

### Element 3 - Mentoring

#### Athlete Mentoring

Research would indicate that an effective way to help a junior make the move to senior is through learning from the experience of athletes who have done it and know what the environment is like. If we could tap into the wealth of athletes in Central who compete in seniors, this could be a great way of helping the development of juniors making the transition. Bringing in athletes from outside Central, or even from different sports, that have made the transition and could relay their experience on could also be invaluable.



## Coach Mentoring

If coaches could talk about their experience of transitioning athletes to seniors, this could also provide another perspective on the pitfalls and successes they have experienced or overcome.

## Element 4 – Practical Assistance

One of the most common scenarios we face with in Central is when an athlete goes off to university. In conjunction with Scottish Athletics, I would seek to facilitate discussions around enabling the sporting aspects of changing coaches, getting access for athletes and parents to talk to relevant people about facilities and the practicalities of training.

At Central AC, we may not see all athletes all the way through the transition, but wherever we have the opportunity to help facilitate any part of it, we could proactively look at ways to do so.

## Element 5 – Competition Experience

The research would indicate that exposing U20 and U23 athletes to competing at a senior event can help to acclimatise them to the dramatic change in standard and competitive environment from junior to senior level. Any decisions to do this would be entirely between coach and athlete and be deemed to be appropriate to the stage of their development to do so, but if done from an experience and learning perspective could prove to be valuable component of helping manage expectations and building awareness of the individual athlete.

## Role of the ADO

The ADO role is envisaged as being facilitative and as appropriate, for example by participating in discussion, defining processes, liaising with external stakeholders, and investigating new research or developments in best practice related to JST.



## Retaining Young People in Sport – Officiating (16+)

Officiating is a great way to stay involved with athletics without the stress of competing. There are very few young people that are qualified officials as most young people see officials as 'old' as the average age of officials is 58!

### Benefits of Officiating

- Included in the sport
- Satisfaction from helping others
- Understanding of how events work from behind the scenes
- Volunteering hours
- Sense of belonging
- Still able to keep in contact with athletics friends
- Seeing all ages and abilities compete
- Feeling happy when the athletes in your pool PB.
- Respected by the athletics community for the hard work you put in.

### How can I become an Official?

- There are courses every year that allow you to gain your level one. If you sign up to a course for level one, there will be a training day and then you have to officiate at four events to get your licence, as well as doing your health & safety, PVG and safeguarding.

### How old do I have to be?

- You can be a Level one UK Athletics Official from the age of 16
- Many people are scared to become an official at a young age as they feel intimidated by the older officials because of the age gap, but when you get to know them, they are lovely! All of the officials I have met include me in everything and give me the chance to gain more experience by giving me new roles at every event.

### What do I gain?

- Volunteering hours
- Something to put on your CV
- Respect within the athletics community
- New friendships of all ages
- A deeper understanding and knowledge of the sport
- Good Communication skills
- The ability to adapt to different needs
- Learning the different issues that athletes face and helping them to cope during the competition so they have the best possible experience
- A sense of belonging / worth.





### What jobs will I do?

- The Chief Judge for your discipline will allocate your roles and events. Everyone will be given a start list so they know about time etc.
- If you are feeling uncomfortable on the role that you are given, don't be scared to communicate it to who is on your event and they will explain it again or swap roles.
- Some include: retrieve, front and rear circle, gun, change height/bar, call up, scribe, call room etc.

### Who do I speak to if I am interested?

- Clubs, coaches etc
- There is information on the Scottish Athletics [website](https://www.scottishathletics.org.uk)
- Email [shonamalcolm@scottishathletics.org.uk](mailto:shonamalcolm@scottishathletics.org.uk)
- Other officials would be happy to give information.







## Disability Inclusion

Disabilities can be physical, learning, visual or hearing. Some of these are harder to see and can be harder to understand. This can make the inclusion of a disabled athlete more difficult than other athletes because the support required is greater and varied.

Inclusion of athletes with disabilities is important to both the athletes themselves and athletics clubs because, as I have experienced with Fife AC, it can provide wide-ranging benefits.

### Benefits to Clubs/Coaches:

- Coaches gain more experience coaching
- Clubs can increase their membership
- Clubs benefit from participation in a wider variety of disciplines
- It can help create a very positive and diverse group of members.

### Benefits to Athletes:

- It improves physical and mental health
- Inclusion allows them to gain experience in very social environments and the confidence to do so in the future
- It builds a training group that all the athletes can push each other to excel
- It creates a very supportive and trustworthy training group and an overall positive experience for everyone.

As an athlete who trains in a mixed group with other athletes who have a variety of disabilities, I can share the benefits it has brought to me and my fellow training partners. My brother, an athlete with the T20 classification (intellectual impairment), trains in a high-level training group that has pushed him on in his running career. He also helps to push these athletes on too. But the social side of training has been just as important, especially to his development as a person and since joining the group he has become more sociable, independent and has made so many friends through the sport. Everyone around him has learnt how to help him perform to his best, understand some of his decision making and tendency to be sometimes unaware or unsure of instructions or remember the training programme. Sometimes, he just needs a bit more time. His participation in the group has helped mainstream athletes become more educated in how to help and support people with disabilities.

### How to be inclusive:

- Invite athletes with disabilities to participate in your group
- Hold group warm-ups that include all
- Make sure mainstream athletes are aware of disabilities and how they can support such athletes
- Meet up for social outings outside of the sport.





## An Athlete's Perspective on Disability Inclusion



Athletics is a sport that is very much open to everyone, no matter your background, age, ability or disability. This is an account of an athlete with a hidden disability and his experience of getting involved in athletics and an athletics club.

Callum started his athletics journey while he was at high school around the age of 14. Callum has a learning disability and dyspraxia. He has recently been classified in the T20 and F20 category.

He initially took part in an athletics event for Additional Support Needs (ASN) schools at Crownpoint. During this event, a coach from Red Star Athletics Club, approached Callum and

invited him to come along and give the club a try. Initially he was training with the endurance groups but another coach, picked up that he would be much better as a sprinter.

Callum then started to train for 100m and 200m's. He stayed with the club for around four years, but they had suggested that he join a mainstream club to help him improve. As he was about to do this COVID-19 kicked in and during this time, his parents took over his training.

After Lockdown, he enquired with Cumbernauld AAC about joining the club and they were open to him joining.

At the start, Callum sat down with his coach to discuss the best way to accommodate his needs. Callum is a visual learner and needs drills to be repeated regularly and explanations of sessions to be broken down into stages.

He now takes part in both mainstream and disability competitions, including National Championships. Although he takes part in 100m and 200m's he will soon start training for 400m's too. Due to his classification and progress, he aspires to represent Scotland and ultimately, gain a GB&NI vest.

Through the support from his clubs and coach Callum has passed his Coaching Assistant qualification and regularly coaches alongside his coach with Run, Jump and Throw sessions. He will shortly be going through his Athletics Coach qualification.

Callum also joined the Athletics Trust Scotland Young People's Forum which has opened up other opportunities to learn more about the sport. He is now an Official with the Start Team as an Assistant Starter. Callum has had the full support of his club and coach throughout.

### Top tips for athletes with a disability

- Be open and discuss your needs with your coach, keep the lines of communication open
- Let your coach know what your goals are
- If you are struggling with training or the training environment, speak to your coach and work together to find a solution
- Most of all, make sure you are enjoying what you do.



### Top Tips for a coach working with someone with a disability

- Be open and discuss with the athlete what their goals are and what support they require, keep the lines of communication open
- Attend Disability Inclusion training
- Liaise with **scottishathletics** National Disability Pathway Officer for further advice and support
- Learn about Classifications and support the athlete to get classified
- Source appropriate competition opportunities
- Be aware of any issues within a training group the athlete may face e.g. bullying, harassment and /or discrimination
- Be aware of all competition opportunities available and the pathway.

### Benefits of being a disability inclusive club

- Wider range of participation and abilities
- Brings a different dynamic to the club
- Potential to become a club volunteer or coach
- Potential of athletes reaching a higher level e.g., Scottish or GB&NI representation at National/International events
- Encourages further learning for coaches to develop their knowledge in how to adopt their coaching style to coach athletes with a disability.

