



Irish Fencing Federation
Cónascadh Pionsóireachta na hÉireann

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"Accelerating Growth"

Development Strategy – 2016-2018

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Background

The Irish Fencing Federation (IFF) is the National Governing Body of the Olympic sport of fencing in the Republic of Ireland. Legally, the organisation is a company limited by guarantee not having a share capital.

This is the latest statement of strategy for the Irish Fencing Federation which reflects recent consultation with key 'stakeholders' on April 26th 2015. It is entitled "Accelerating Growth" as the last strategy period has seen significant progress which it is felt should be built on to accelerate participation and standards.

Achievement under existing strategy (see the mid year review)

There has been a heartening increase in the number of children fencing over recent years and they have enjoyed competitive success in Northern Ireland as well as in national competitions. While schools have proved difficult to secure as venues, we believe we can build on a club approach that has proved successful in Limerick and Tipperary as well as the greater Dublin area.

The new Executive Committee for 2015/2016 is intent on using the Federation's financial reserves in order to 'prime the pump' and grow the base of fencers rapidly as it is believed this is the best route to retain people in the sport and thereby secure its sustainability.

Structure and Stakeholders

The Irish Fencing Federation is run by an *Executive Committee*, elected at each Annual General Meeting by fencers licensed to compete in competitions held under its auspices for more than one season (the season runs from September to the following August). This group are also the Directors of the Company Limited by Guarantee and co-opt other members to address any skills deficit that might be identified. Specific functions are also delegated to sub-committees (such as Juniors and Selectors) and individuals as deemed necessary.

The roles that have been identified are:

Chairman
Secretary
Treasurer
Youth/Junior
Marketing
Competition/Armoury/Refereeing
Performance
Veterans

In addition, the following roles are performed by ex-officio members (not participants in the Executive Committee)

Legal Counsel	Tim Bouchier-Hayes
Children's Officer	Fiona Timlin
Anti-Doping Officer	Lorraine McGill
Selectors	Yves Carnec; Eamonn McGrattan; O'V McNamee; Annalise Mion
Veterans' Chair	Eric Kemp

It is also planned to nominate 'deputies' to office holders in order to smooth succession transitions. Additionally, the establishment of prizes for 'veterans' in existing competitions is to be explored as another means of keeping them involved in the sport as potential future Executive Committee members. It is also planned to

explore holding the AGM on the weekend of a training session and hold awards presentations concurrently in order to increase participation and encourage fencers to become involved in their governing body.

These *licensed fencers* are the key “members” of the Federation. There are categories of licensed fencers that do not have voting rights – Youth, Associate (principally for NI fencers to fence in National competitions) and First Free (the fee is waived for first time participants to encourage participation). However there are other fencers who are content to participate in club nights, but are not interested in competitive fencing hence they may not take out a license. These are referred to as *participants* throughout the document and should be viewed as a valid part of Irish fencing.

Another key stakeholder group is that of *coaches*. These are composed of both full-time and part-timers (individuals who have other sources of income, but receive some income for their coaching) as well as unpaid coaches who are committed to supporting fencing at some level. We continue to develop and roll-out a structure with Coaching Ireland that provides a structure defining the competence of coaches notwithstanding the difficulty of involving suitably qualified individuals in the process (some of these left Ireland and we are working on “importing” the necessary input).

There are a limited number of *referees* who are needed to oversee bouts in competitions and make critical decisions as to how hits are awarded. There has been an attempt to start a Referee Association but with limited success to date. Following the stakeholder consultation, clubs will identify and train selected members as referees. Success on this form of volunteering is critical to the smooth running of competitions.

There are a variety of different types of *clubs* – universities and colleges (which account for a large number of licensed fencers) and a smattering of private clubs (making it difficult for graduates to continue the sport unless they live and work in a limited number of catchment areas). The Federation has had some success in getting clubs to affiliate by offering umbrella insurance arrangements (more attractive to the private clubs as third level institutions often provide this to their ‘societies’) and waiving the affiliation fee. The organisation of competitions is shared between the universities and the Federation itself, drawing heavily on the time available to the latter from its limited corps of volunteers. It is hoped to make more use of Working Groups to organise competitions and take the detail away from the Executive Committee/Board. The Junior committee is an example of how this can work to do so.

Finally, it is recognised that the *Irish Sports Council* is a key stakeholder providing essential funding to allow the Federation continue to operate. In return, we believe we need to ensure that fencing is a viable sporting option for as many people in Ireland as possible.

Vision

The primary objective of the Federation is to continue to build participation in accordance with its Memorandum of Association as a company limited by guarantee.

“The object for which the Federation is established is to promote, foster and develop the sport and art of fencing.”

- Memorandum of Association of the IFF

Mission

To deliver on the vision, the IFF’s mission can be described as developing and promoting the sport of fencing, ensuring its proper conduct. The odds of producing world class athletes locally can only be improved by increasing the number of licensed fencers competing in local competitions.

Core Values and Principles

As the recognised National Governing Body (NGB) of fencing in Ireland, the IFF is established to make rules and regulations for the proper conduct of competitive fencing in Ireland and by Irish athletes representing their country abroad in the sport.

The IFF condemns any cheating or other unsporting behaviour in Irish fencing. In particular, the IFF has welcomed the Irish Sports Council's (ISC) initiative to combat doping in sport and is co-operating with the ISC's Anti-Doping Unit to test for and prevent doping at any level of competitive fencing in Ireland. Further information about this anti-doping policy is available from Dr. Lorraine McGill, the IFF's Anti-Doping Officer. The full document is on the [IFF website](#).

In relation to children and young people, the IFF recognises the importance of having safeguards in place to ensure the best conditions for children's participation in sport. In order to guarantee the safety and proper care of children in Irish fencing, the IFF is a signatory of the ISC's *Code of Ethics & Good Practice for Children's Sport*. Further information about the IFF's policy on children's participation is available from the IFF Secretary, Nuala McGarrity. More information is being developed by the Children's Officer and will be posted on the website as the situation develops.

The Reality of Fencing in Ireland

There follows a **S.W.O.T.** (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis which is a good way of examining the overall picture of Irish fencing from a strategic perspective.

Strengths

- Fencing *fits modern life-styles* as it does not require prior arrangement or booking for a fencer to enjoy an evening's training and one can expect to have several bouts in an evening at the club or "salle".
- Fencing has a potentially strong niche as a physically active, *all-weather sport* with modest land-use requirements.
- Irish fencing has a long history, with a significant number of *Olympians*, which serves as an incentive for current fencers.

Weaknesses

- There is an *over-reliance on university fencing* both to keep up the numbers in the national competitions and to run competitions (such clubs can experience significant 'succession' issues from one academic year to another). There has been some improvement in the number of private clubs in recent years, which does provide a home for fencers to join after university and it is critical this continues in order to strengthen the sport.
- Administrative and organisational tasks too often fall on the same *few individuals*. Actions to increase the number of referees and establish Working Groups should help to spread the load.

- The IFF is very *dependent on Sports Council support*. This will remain critical in the period of this strategy to ensure the National Governing Body is capable of further developing the sport.

Opportunities

- Fencing has a real chance to expand with the support of the Sports Council, providing an *alternative sporting option* for Irish adults and importantly, children.
- There has been a significant improvement in *cross-border co-operation* with Northern Irish fencing at children's level both for competition and training.
- Collaboration with the *Modern Pentathlon Association of Ireland* has included access to their premises at the National Sports Campus.
- Active *Veterans' category* at international level ought be a reason to keep older fencers in the sport where they could make contributions as referees and possibly Executive Committee/Board members in the future.

Threats

- The single, obvious threat is the absence of *dedicated fencing premises*. The sport (other than in universities) has had to fall back on shared usage of facilities, typically rented, which limits the hours available to fencers.

Strategic Themes for Irish fencing 2016-2018

The IFF has identified the following strategic themes within which it can set goals and allocate resources for each of the three years. Each has specific indicators by which progress can be judged by stakeholders.

1. Developing Junior (under-18 years of age in an Irish context) fencing
2. Promote the sport in Ireland
3. Retention of third level fencers on graduation
4. Develop referees for competitions
5. Increase participation in local competitions
6. Complete development of coaching structure

1.1. Developing Youth (under-18) fencing

This continues to be critical to building the sport in the longer-term. The areas in which it is envisaged goals will be set over the three year life span of the strategy are:

Training: . It is planned to run more special training days, using many of the accredited coaches.

Hosting training days outside Dublin will not only help fencers in other locations, but also make participation more exciting for Dublin-based junior fencers.

Creating opportunities for Junior fencers to train several times a week (physical fitness as well as fencing technique) and to receive individual lessons is seen as critical to their development and their enjoyment

Some under-18s have travelled to overseas camps in more recent years and it is planned to consider week long camps in Ireland.

Squad building: The more ambitious Youths are to be supported and mentored, training together and travelling to overseas competitions as well as those in Northern Ireland. The aspiration is to create a cohort of athletes who would be candidates for High Performance in the longer-term.

League: Consideration is to be given to a Youth version of the adult leagues that have been run for Sabre and Epee recently.

Prizes: The use of equipment vouchers should be used to encourage young fencers extend their stock of personal equipment.

GOAL	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	INDICATOR
1:1 Training opportunities		# of camps # participating
Training outside Dublin		# of camps outside Dublin
Youth squad development		# of youths mentored
Establish Youth League		#of participants
Vouchers for personal equipment as prizes in IFF events		# of competitions awarding equipment vouchers as prizes

1.2. Promote the sport in Ireland

Fencing is often unknown or misunderstood in Ireland. The Federation believes that it is timely to put a particular effort into educating the public about the realities of modern competitive fencing and thereby generate interest in participating in the sport. This is separate from the need to continue communications to those already fencing at some level.

Public Demonstrations: Roll out the successful model from Dundalk to other centres and pursue schools in particular.

Social Media: The co-option of someone to specifically help with promoting the sport will involve trying to maximise the contribution of social media given the budgetary restrictions that we face. Enabling existing fencers explain to their networks why they enjoy the sport so much should help to recruit new fencers.

GOAL	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	INDICATOR
Secure demonstrations		# of demonstrations
Elaborate section on web site for beginners		# of unique visitors in year

1.3. Improve retention rate of third-level graduates

The largest body of fencers are those in third-level, but there is a high level of ‘churn’ when they graduate. The intention is to examine ways in which these graduates can be retained in the sport.

GOAL	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	INDICATOR
Identify factors inhibiting joining clubs		Report to Board
Pursue graduates to continue the sport		# of new graduates joining clubs each September

1.4. Develop referees for competitions

There is an acute shortage of referees competent in awarding hits, particularly for foil and sabre (two of the three weapons in competitive fencing) where good refereeing is particularly important to fair competition.

Import instructors: The Federation plans to bring in referee trainers from Britain and to develop a scheme to certify referees' competence.

Training in clubs: The Federation plans to encourage clubs to encourage training of members as referees.

Awards: Consideration is to be given to adding a refereeing module to the awards scheme with a view to building up a cadre of referees in the longer-term.

GOAL	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	INDICATOR
Organise training sessions for referees		# of nationally certified referees
Ensure clubs send participants to courses		# of clubs represented at referee training workshops
Pursue veteran and lapsed fencers as referees		# attending training
Add refereeing module to Awards Scheme		# of awards at that level

1.5. Increase participation in local competitions

While there has been a sustained increase in the numbers entering local competitions at under-18 level in recent years, adult competitions have been static. This is to be addressed over the next three years with goals being set each year around a number of areas including the following:

Continue with Satellite competition: The Coupe du Nord (sanctioned as a satellite event to World Cups by the FIE - the international governing body) has been held in Ireland as part of the Irish Open competition (the Men's Epee event). It has succeeded in attracting fencers from many countries that present a fresh and significant challenge for local fencers, thereby raising their skill levels.

Introduce 'plate' competition for less successful: The Federation will explore the introduction of 'plate' competitions giving a second chance to competitors knocked out in the early rounds. This is hoped to allow such competitors gain more experience and glean more satisfaction from their entry.

GOAL	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	INDICATOR
Continue satellite to make Open more interesting		# of overseas competitors
Introduce and promote 'plate' competition at Nationals		# of adult entrants

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1.6. Complete development of coaching structure

The Federation is committed to completing the development of a coaching structure in conjunction with Coaching Ireland.

Level II Coaches: Curriculum to be completed and course run.

GOAL	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	INDICATOR
Establish and run Level 2 course		# of Level 2s certified
Run fresh Level 1 courses		# of participants