

# Strategic Implementation Plan 2019-2022



**FENCING**  
IRELAND



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# Fencing in Ireland in 2019

## The Sport Context

The sport of fencing in Ireland benefits from good levels of support from Sport Ireland. For 2019 this has been demonstrated with an increase in core funding from €29,000 to €55,000, as well as project funding of €35,000 from Dormant Accounts for a project in Dublin 15.

Fencing is a small and niche sport, but with decent potential to ramp up its activities, with its core fundamentals being strong. It is a sport with an international dimension and outlet, and with the possibility of collaborating with other sports. It has the potential to grow both its participative and competitive dimensions, and use the increase in core funding to build its administrative capacity.

## Membership at Club Level

Clubs vary within the sport. Clubs exist using rented halls, and within universities. Within the fencing community club membership experiences vary. Some clubs are doing well at attracting and retaining a vibrant community of fencers from all age ranges and walks of life. However, many clubs are struggling to attract and retain players (other than a die-hard core group). Because fencers can have a long sporting career, the sport has an active cohort of master's participants.

## Engagement with NGB

Many members have little interaction with Fencing Ireland except on the basis of entry into competitions. Knowledge of the existence of the NGB and the benefits it offers the community can be limited. However clubs have significant interaction and dependency with the NGB in particular for support with equipment and training camps.

Coaches who “make a living” from the sport make up the core group engaged with the NGB and are key to the growth and retention of athletes in the sport.

## Fencing Ireland

The National Governing Body of the sport is now in a settled period after some upheaval in recent years. It currently has no paid staff but will soon have a shared Development Officer position with Trinity College Dublin. The increase in 2019 core funding opens up the opportunity for a part time General Manager / Administrator.

## Volunteers

In many sports in Ireland, activity is dependent on volunteers who tend to be the parents of the younger athletes or previous athletes themselves. These volunteers act as coaches, referees, organisers of national and regional competitions club committee members, etc. Other than at Board level, volunteering within the sport is low, and few structures are in place to recruit and support volunteers to the sport.

At university club level, some clubs report a dwindling committee that has been doing the job for many years and does not have a succession plan or a “next generation” to whom they can hand over.

# The Key Challenges facing the Sport

- The sport of fencing has been a niche sport and may continue to be. However, it is built on solid foundations and has the opportunity to grow significantly.
- Universities (Third Level) are important to the success of the sport but are not closely held and supported within the community.
- There is not a clear coaching pathway within fencing. Coaches manage clubs in an entrepreneurial manner that is not consistent with a community club approach.
- The sport exists in a smaller number of geographical pockets around Ireland.
- There are growing but still low numbers participating at underage level.
- There are low levels of retention within the sport post-Third Level.



# Vision, Mission and Strategic Goals

## Fencing Ireland's Vision

*Fencing is a vibrant community of players, clubs, coaches and volunteers who succeed in their goals in the sport and who play an active role in the Fencing community, which is committed to high standards and a welcoming, and sociable approach*

In summary, the strategic plan for Fencing Ireland for the next four years is summed up as follows:

Mission		
Promote, foster and develop the sport		
Strategic Goals		
Design and have clarity on a sporting pathway <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- For athletes</li><li>- For coaches</li><li>- For volunteers</li></ul>	Build ties with the university clubs nationally	Refocus clubs to a Volunteer Led Model and support as needed to grow the sport
Leadership and Governance - Underpin the strategic goals with effective governance, executive, budgetary and administrative supports that are all aligned to the strategy.		
Geographic Cluster – Focus on the areas of existing strength initially, specifically Dublin and Nenagh, expanding as the sport consolidates and grows		



# Implementation Plan

## Strategic Goal 1 - Pathway Development

***Design and have clarity on a sporting pathway***  
***For athletes***  
***For coaches***  
***For volunteers***

Notes in support of the Implementation Plan for this Strategic Goal

### Strategic Principles

- Put together a small working group (2-3 max, with experience from other sports)
- Undertake an annual review and communications exercise - a pathway or map through the sport is most useful when it is clearly and widely understood
- Build collaboration with other stakeholders who can help e.g. Coaching Ireland, SSI, Pentathlon Ireland, facilities, etc.
- Draft a simple pathway/map that shows opportunities (age 5 to 80) for coaches, athletes, volunteers
- Highlight where gaps currently exist and address and action those gaps

### Athletes

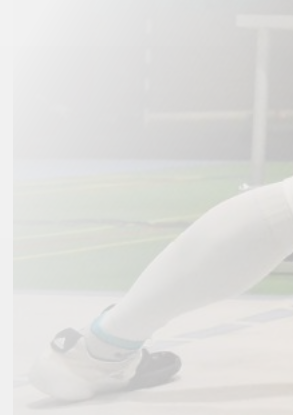
- As many as possible for as long as possible'
- Player / athlete centered with their welfare at its heart
- Build the base of the pyramid
- From grassroots to competitive with clearly described progression points along the way
- Competition and coaching structures matched to age grades
- Qualification criteria for progression from national to international competition

### Coaches

- Coaches matched to coaching opportunities at an appropriate level and grade
- Providing development opportunities for skilled coaches
- Allow coaches to coach, and allow volunteers to administrate
- Involve parents in a culture of volunteerism in the sport

### Volunteers

- Support athletes to transition to volunteer roles
- Support volunteers with training/toolkits and clarity around the task



# Strategic Goal 2 - Re-Align Club Structure

***Refocus clubs to a Volunteer-Led Model and support as needed to grow the sport***

Notes in support of the Implementation Plan for this Strategic Goal

## Strategic Principles

- Put together a Working Group specifically to support clubs - public and university.
- Design a “club model for success”, promoting a move to a sustainable model of volunteer led/administered club with a number of coaches and work individually with coaches on modifying the model.
- Develop an annual Club Symposium to garner support for change and build the club machine around the coach with supports from the governing body to encourage volunteerism and assist in the much-needed growth of clubs. (Recommendations for practical supports such as shared resources to help run clubs are outlined in Appendix 1).
- Co-create Marketing Plan and Club Toolkit (See Appendix 2 for some initial work on identifying segments for growth).
- Embed pathways into club structures.
- Create School Programme in conjunction with the TCD Sport Development Officer, to build a pipeline of players from schools into clubs.



# Strategic Goal 3 - Develop University Clubs

## *Build ties with the university clubs nationally*

Notes in support of the Implementation Plan for this Strategic Goal

### Strategic Principles

- Build relationships with the Sport Development Officers from the 4 big universities, and with Student Sport Ireland.
- Explore opportunities to work together on Inter collegiate competition and EUACA
- Support university clubs in their work of running clubs and recruiting and retaining members beyond university and make the sporting community a closer community.
- Encourage participants to become coaches and to stay in the sport after university through a form of associate member opportunity





# Implementation Timetable

[illegible]

[illegible]

# Underpinning the Strategic Goals

## Leadership & Governance

### *Develop robust leadership and governance structures*

Notes in support of the Implementation Plan

## Strategic Principles

- Create job descriptions and KPIs for executives. In 2019 the NGB will employ two key staff, a Sport Development Officer and a part-time General Manager/CEO.
  - » The DO will primarily be responsible for:
    - Aligning the Athlete, Coach and Volunteer Pathways across the sport
    - Prioritizing the building of participation of Fencing through supporting clubs
    - Grassroots Development Initiatives
  - » The part-time GM will be responsible for:
    - Implementation of tasks from the strategic plan
    - Building strategic partnerships in the wider sporting community
    - Administration and operations (allowing the Board to move into an oversight and strategic role)
- Recruit and train executive team (GM/DO), recognizing the potential reporting and workload challenges that arise in shared positions (with an external organization) and part-time positions.
- Draft Terms Of Reference (TOR) for Board and Committees that continue the move to a competence based board and adhere to best practice principles on board recruitment, responsibilities, oversight and succession, and undertake an annual review of those TOR.
- Continue to invest + attend Sport Ireland Leadership & Organisational Development & Change programmes
- Communicate strategy to clubs and members, with annual update on goals achieved
- Explore alternative sources of funding incl. grants (such as Women in Sport funding, Dormant Accounts, Local Sports Partnerships), or commercial (specifically philanthropy, Corporate Social Responsibility or Community funding). Note that given the current membership levels we do not recommend putting significant efforts into approaching the sponsorship market at this stage.

## Geographic Cluster

***Focus on the areas of existing strength initially, specifically Dublin and Nenagh, expanding as the sport consolidates and grows***

The sport exists primarily in Dublin and with one active club in Nenagh that delivers schools programmes across the regions. It is recommended that this plan focus primarily on those clubs as a starting point, as well as those university clubs across the country that seek to engage. Once a critical mass of work has been achieved with these core clubs supports may be radiated out to more distant clubs that do not currently engage with the NGB. That said if any other club shows enthusiasm and wants to engage they will of course be most welcome to join the process.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Club Symposium and Club Toolbox

Sample tools for joint creation and dissemination to clubs via a Club Symposium

GOAL	THE TOOL TO DO THE JOB - A HOW TO GUIDE TO...
Membership Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social events</li> <li>• Friendly Competitions</li> </ul>
Membership Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Segmentation approach to selling Fencing</li> <li>• Designing product, price and promotion for different segments</li> <li>• How To sell to selected segments</li> </ul>
Running Tournaments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Templates (How To Manual) for running events</li> <li>• Shared resources for organising competitions</li> </ul>
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to maintain equipment</li> <li>• Recommended suppliers</li> </ul>
Admin and Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sample accounts</li> <li>• Breakeven points</li> <li>• Business cases for coaches and clubs</li> <li>• Policies and procedures</li> <li>• Structures and roles to assist in volunteer management</li> <li>• Volunteer tasks and task descriptions</li> </ul>
Fun Stuff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video of drills</li> <li>• Games with kids</li> </ul>
Social ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case studies of success as inspiration      Success stories of clubs that have improved their finances, increased membership, run coaching programmes, etc.</li> </ul>
Housekeeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garda Vetting, Child Safeguarding, Anti-Doping</li> <li>• Insurance information</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2 – Draft Marketing Plan for Development

For each selected segment, the community around Fencing Ireland will co-design and support a suitable marketing mix that includes all that is needed to deliver a suitable Fencing product to a suitable “buyer”. By marketing mix, we mean creating tailored:

<b>Products</b>	Programmes for different groups adapted to the needs of each segment
<b>Promotion</b>	Marketing messages and supports, suited the needs of that segment (including templates and fliers)
<b>Price</b>	Pricing for the different programmes. Also, a note to be vocal about affordability at introductory level at least where equipment is provided.

To demonstrate how this will work there will be a different “package” for different segments such as:

Segment	Needs Product	Promotion Messages	School-Age
In school or After - Schooler Programme  Selected age ranges from schools local to existing clubs	Convenience for parents and teachers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fun</li> <li>• Sociable</li> <li>• Non-sporty group</li> </ul>	Term-length introductory programme	Fun indoor sport With classmates Exercise for kids Reasonable price Something different for the non-sporty
Pay to Play - School Drop Off Players – parents who are free during the morning dropping their children at school	Convenient time slot before the day begins  A different kind of workout – mental and physical	Term-length programme that starts at 9:10am with breaks at mid-term etc.	Fun way to burn calories and get a work out Glamorous and different Competitive spirit Social opportunity
Transition Year and Secondary  (Note – Guidance offered from P.Dight for this)	Convenient to school schedule <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fun</li> <li>• Sociable</li> <li>• Non-sporty group</li> </ul>	Term-length introductory programme	Sport for the non-sporty student Reasonable price Equipment provided
University Clubs - As presently offered	Social and competitive	As presently configured with adaptations to retain	Affordable and available after university career

# Notes



