



WELSH ATHLETICS
ATHLETAU CYMRU

PROJECT 2030

our strategic plan to welcome 10,000 mini and junior participants to our sport by 2030

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PART 1. WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

JUNIOR ATHLETICS IN WALES IS AT A TURNING POINT.

Project 2030 aims to welcome **10,000** mini and junior participants to athletics by 2030.

With **31%**¹ of children lacking confidence to try new sports, our current, competition-heavy model isn't working, especially for children U9. Club **volunteers** are overstretched, many children are missing out, and outdated systems are leaving too many behind.

If we get this new approach right, we'll welcome thousands more into a sport where fun, belonging and progression work cohesively, not insularly.

WHAT DO CHILDREN WANT FROM SPORT?

"I want to learn new skills and learn how to play the sport, as well as having a good time"

"Supporting everyone, not just the ones that are good. Everyone to be treated equally"

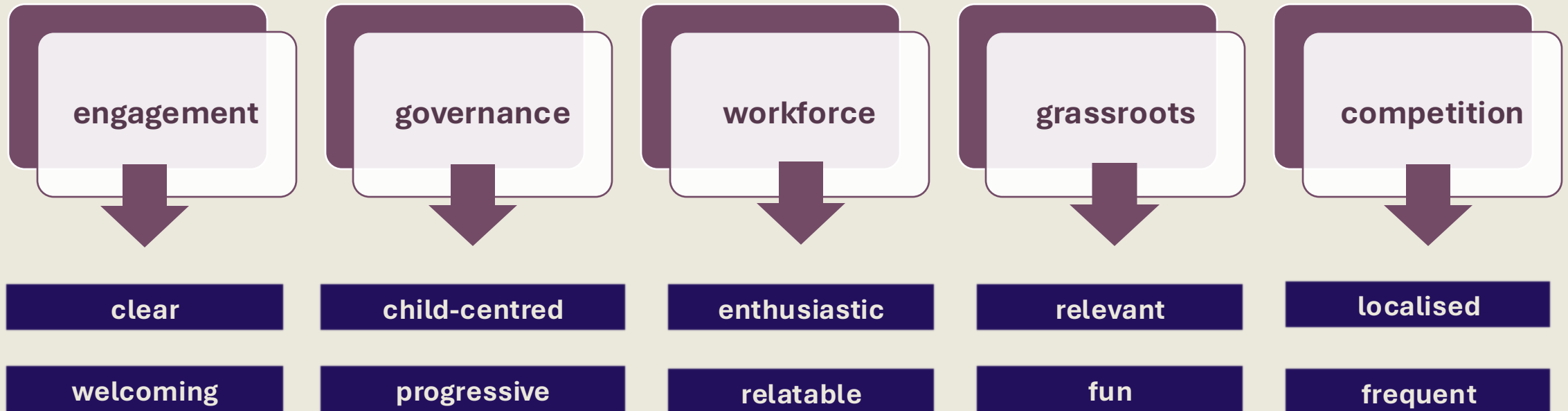
"I want a coach who is welcoming, smiles at me and makes me feel involved"



WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- ✓ We will see a huge influx of participants between 4-12 years, with **thousands** more children participating in athletics across Wales
- ✓ It will be **normalised** for parents, carers and older siblings to help out with sessions
- ✓ The experience at events will feel **inclusive**, fun, family friendly and supportive
- ✓ Clubs will be hosting **regular** festivals on a round robin circuit throughout the year
- ✓ Clubs will feel like **one team** again, coming together to host and attend events
- ✓ All 12 and under provision will be **officials-free zones** – instead, helper/leader led stations
- ✓ Our Welsh Athletics awards ceremonies will **celebrate** people and clubs that foster our values
- ✓ We will be a **solution-focused**, can-do sport!

WHAT WILL BE OUR CORE FOCUS?



1. THE ENGAGEMENT

- ✓ Easy to sign up, communicate and ask questions
- ✓ Flexible attendance and commitment
- ✓ Casual language, family friendly, online presence
- ✓ Clear participant journey from entry to performance
- ✓ Clear parent expectations, culture & roles

2. CLUB GOVERNANCE

- ✓ A structure that prioritises mini & junior athletics
- ✓ Community needs reflective in club decisions
- ✓ Flexible processes, prioritising safety and fun

3. OUR WORKFORCE

- ✓ Representative of community
- ✓ Recruit, support and encourage new workforce - parents, young leaders and students
- ✓ Upskill and support existing workforce
- ✓ Workshops tailored to grassroots delivery

5. THEIR COMPETITION EXPERIENCE

- ✓ 4-7 years access fun 'have a go' festivals with activity stations and challenges
- ✓ 7-12 years access inter-club competitions, experiencing run, jump, throw activities
 - ✓ Officials-free zones in all 4-12 years provision
- ✓ Regular access to local, varied competitions and events

4. GRASSROOTS PROVISION

- ✓ 4-7 years participate in Starting Blocs sessions
 - ✓ 7-12 years participate in next-gen athletics
- ✓ Varied goals and targets, via games and challenges
 - ✓ Progressive, stage and age appropriate
- ✓ All year-round access, in variety of community venues

WHAT COULD A GRASSROOTS SESSION LOOK LIKE?

Tiana turns up to her local athletics club, excited after seeing some super fast sprinters on TV. Her favourite song is playing on arrival and there's a friendly teenager who welcomes Tiana to the session, showing her where to put her drink and where the toilets are.

Her Dad heads over to the coaches in charge, he doesn't know much about athletics but is keen to help the club coaches with setting up. They explain that the sessions are family-friendly and they would love some help in herding the kids around the activities!

WHAT WILL THE EXPERIENCE AT EVENTS BE?

Tiana's Dad receives regular updates on their local athletics festivals for kids between 4-7 to turn up, move around the stations and try to complete different challenges! He thinks it's great because the festivals are pretty much every month for an hour or so close to where they live.

When Tiana gets to the next level up, she can go along to her inter-club competitions – this sounds scary, but it's all organised by the coaches and parents who deliver the club sessions! There's no scary officials, they get to try to beat their personal goals in run, jump and throw events, with the odd fun event thrown in!

THE PRINCIPLES

- ✓ 4–12-year-olds welcomed into sessions with **no pressure** on performance (U8, U10, U12)
- ✓ U12s will have the opportunity to **participate** in non-competitive and/or junior league as a transition year
- ✓ All clubs who apply to host sessions will receive **support** from Welsh Athletics, including training workshops, session plans, promotion, festival templates and equipment
- ✓ Clubs can opt to host all or **some** age groups including 4-7, 8-10, 10-12 as part of the new grassroots programme
- ✓ There will be a requirement that all provision for these age groups fits into the **principles** of inclusion, friendly and relevant
- ✓ A workshop will be available for people aged 14+ who want to **facilitate grassroots athletics**, they do not need to be L1 qualified
- ✓ Clubs will be expected to participate in hosting inter-club competitions and festivals to provide localised, **regular** opportunities
- ✓ Clubs will be expected to progress their **governance structures** in line with mini and junior provision being prioritised e.g. develop a junior committee
- ✓ Welsh Athletics will provide a **sign-up** portal for parents to register their children, with registrations being directed to the clubs

PART 2. WHY ARE WE EVOLVING ATHLETICS?

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

What is our traditional membership looking like?

Just **23%** of WA membership is held by juniors (2,486 out of 10,772)
104 clubs nationwide, with 60% providing *some* junior provision
We are welcoming **less children** to our traditional sport year on year

What are kids telling us?

84% of children surveyed¹ would rather experience something in **real life** than on a device. However, the convenience, sense of belong and accessibility of gaming makes it a popular choice – in part because it is an inclusive community where there is a place for everyone.

Who did we speak with to understand the current picture?

25% of clubs in Wales

Young Athletics Ambassadors, Junior Athletes, School children
Welsh Athletics staff, Board & Sub-Committee, WSAA
National Organisations, Charities & Sporting Bodies
England Athletics, Sport Wales, Welsh Government

What are teenagers saying about their athletics experience?

“I’ve got a lot going on, sport’s just one part of it, and it’s got to **fit my vibe**”
“It’s how I express myself. It’s the one place I feel **strong** and capable”
“I don’t go to things just because they’re there, it’s got to **mean something**”
- Sherbert Research

What can we learn from social activities?

1 in 10 adults run regularly in Wales

The popularity of social running and sports like Padel have boomed because of their accessible and autonomous ethos. It combines the benefits of exercise with flexibility, offering a low-pressure way to get active, connect with others, and boost mental wellbeing - making it more about **personal goals** and enjoyment than formal competition.

What can we learn from other sports?

NGB programmes² aim to give young children a fun, **positive first experience** in sport. They focus on **play**, imagination, and inclusion rather than competition, helping build **confidence**, friendships, and a lifelong **love** of being **active**. Most programmes target 4-12 year olds, using fun games to introduce the sport at a free, or low-cost fee.

¹ Rhyl Primary School consultation, 2025

² ECB's All Stars Cricket, UEFA Disney Playmakers, RFU's Kids First Rugby, England Hockey's Hockey Heroes and FAWHuddle

WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING IN OUR SPORT?



“Athletics is the foundation to every other sport, you need to run, jump and throw if you’re going to be good at anything else, so everyone should do athletics at a young age”

Welsh Athletics staff member



“competitions are quite long and boring, there’s not much of a vibe. You kinda go compete, hang around if you’ve got another event then that’s kinda it. With exams and stuff I dunno if I’ll carry on much longer”

Athlete, affiliated club



“if someone comes to my club at 9 and doesn’t want to compete, then there’s no space for them. I don’t want to waste my time on someone that isn’t going to represent my club”

Coach, affiliated club

“We are so proud of our club ethos, we welcome everyone. The challenge is we can’t cater for any more people with the amount of coaches we have. There’s more than 300 kids, mainly U7-U9 on our waiting list that we just can’t bring in.”

Coach, affiliated club



“there’s no pressure on having to be good here, my son is quite anxious, and the coaches are so patient with him. He loves the variety; he gets to try it all – the club down the road didn’t want to know because he was a bit shy. He also loves football, so it’s great he can do both”

Parent, non-affiliated club



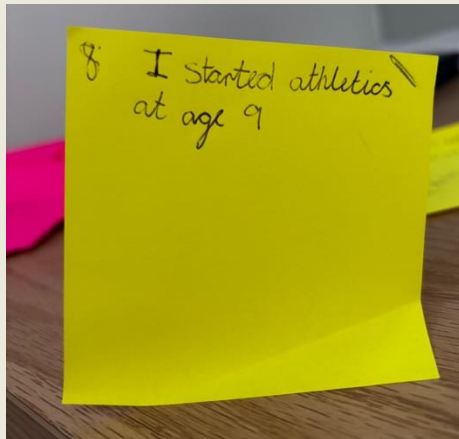
“My Mum is my no.1 supporter and drives me all over the UK. There’s hardly anyone that competes in my category so there’s not much competition around. I enjoy it, but it’d be nice to have some more people taking part.”

Para-athlete, affiliated club



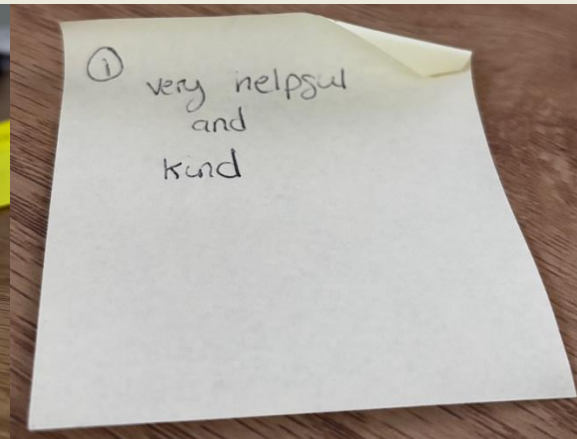
WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING AT JUNIOR CHAMPS?

when did you start athletics?



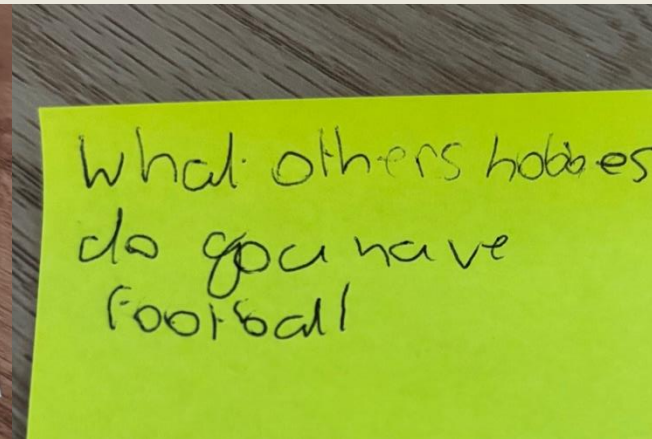
Research shows that if a child hasn't experienced a sport before the age of 7, they are very unlikely to choose it later on in life

my coach is...



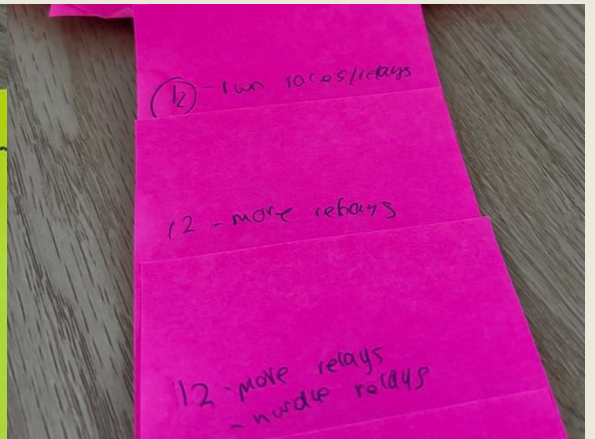
The most important thing to a child is that they feel included, that they belong and they are learning

what other hobbies do you have?



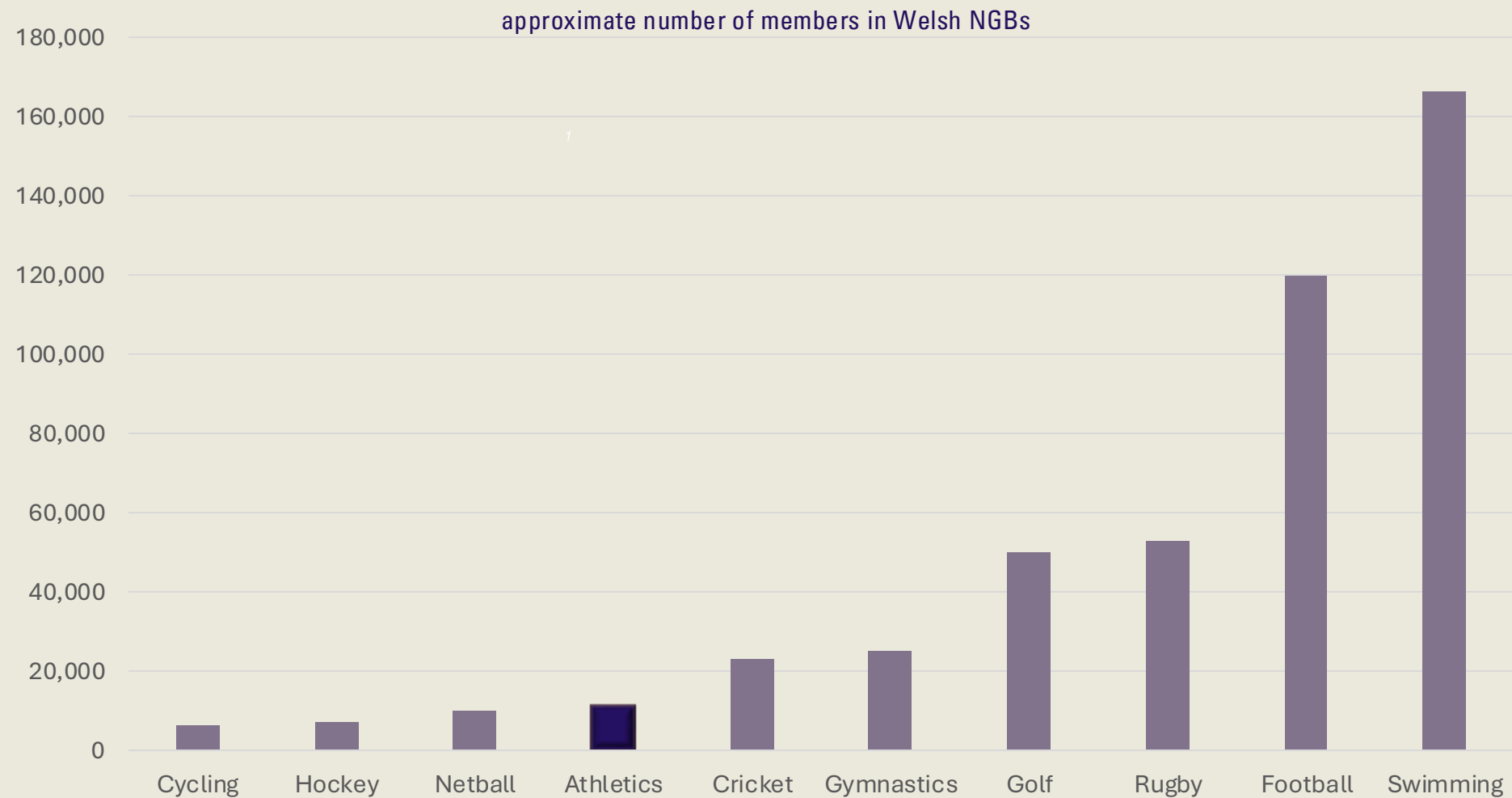
Other sports are not a threat to athletics, we need to embrace that athletics can help develop children for future ambitions

how would you improve comp day...



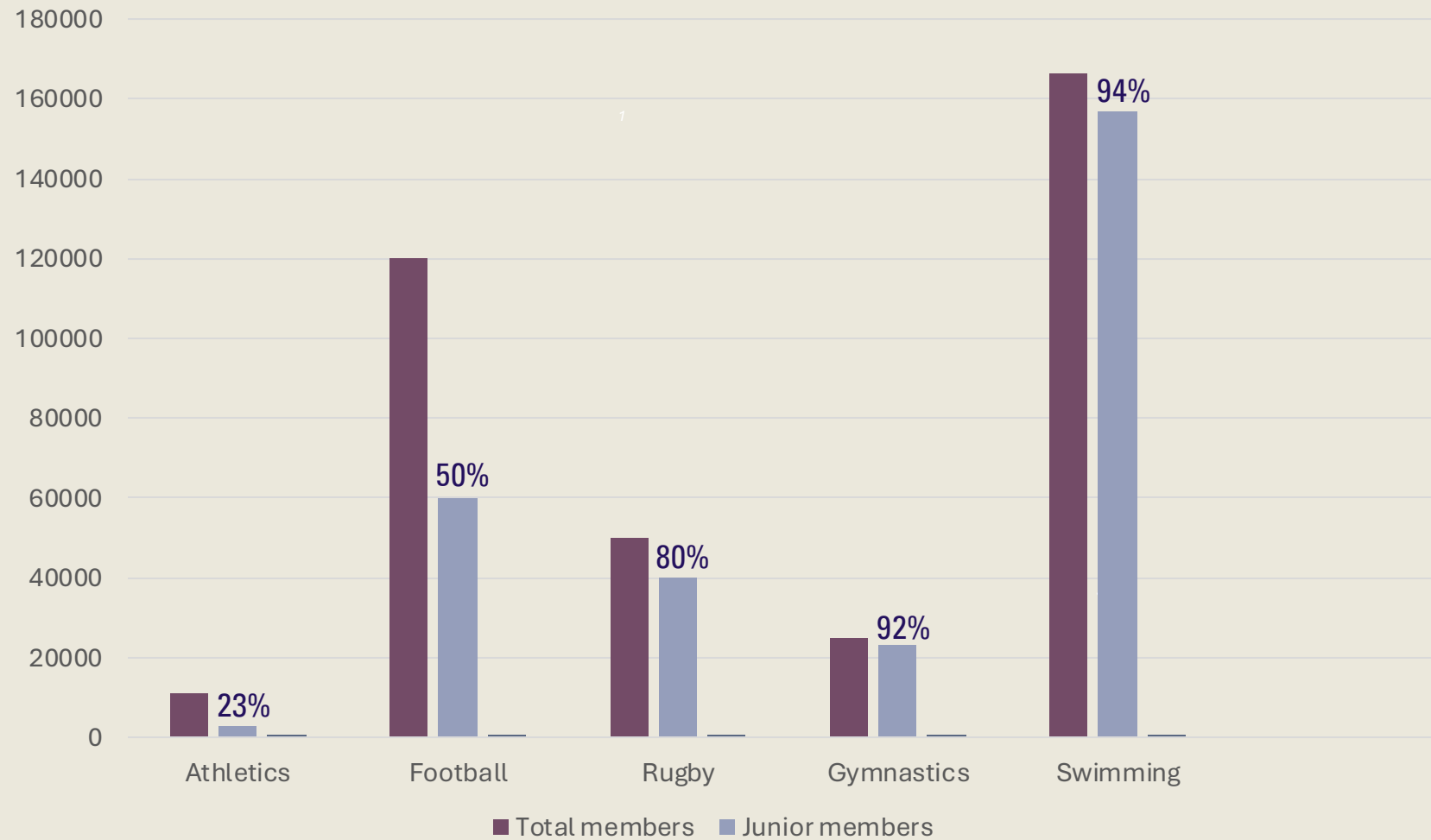
Competitions are not all about the power of 10, we have driven that narrative, not the children

HOW DO WE COMPARE TO OTHER SPORTS?



Figures are provided as a guide and are not reflective of actual 25-26 membership data

approximate number of juniors v total membership in Welsh NGBs



Figures are provided as a guide and are not reflective of actual 25-26 membership data

WHAT ARE WE CURRENTLY MISSING?

Evolverment of athletics with societal needs
Adaptability of our offer and workforce
Relevance of athletics to the modern family



We need to demonstrate our ability to listen, learn and respond. As the National Governing Body for Athletics in Wales, it is our duty to lead from the front and use the insight and knowledge we have available to us to act in the best interest of our young people.

WHAT'S THE RISK IF OUR CLUB OFFER DOESN'T **EVOLVE**?



the local pub

Limited competition used to see this pub as the bustling centrepiece of the community. Whilst some pubs progressed with societal changes, this pub remained a **boys' club**, offering the **same** menu of beer and ales, sticky floors and a clique of men propping up the bar. A place that soon went into **administration**.



new coffee shop

On the same street, clwb coffi opened. A **modern** and **welcoming** space providing free WiFi. The staff are friendly, **diverse** in appearance and culture. There is a range of milk choices to suit **everyone** – even our four-legged friends. They open in the evening to host the **local** environmental change group; there was also a 21st birthday in there last week!

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR ATHLETICS

- Keeping an offer that was developed in the past, for the past, will not grow our numbers
- Regardless of whether it used to work well, or people thought it was better in the old days, that doesn't change current motivations and desires
- Language, attitude and environment needs to reflect the world our current and next generation are living in
- Person-centred provision needs to refer to the participant first, coach and parent second
- It is more than the sport itself that 'speaks' to young people, do they feel like they belong there?

"it would be so good if there were more fun races at events, like hurdle relays, parents' race, toddler race. You could also do a mini-interview stage to make the athletes feel special. Getting the crowd going with cheering and stuff would bring a bit of energy too"

Parent & athlete at Junior Champs

WHAT'S THE RISK IF WE DON'T **ADAPT** TO OUR AUDIENCE?



learn to swim

Rosie went for her first swimming lesson this week. Her Mum really wants her to be **confident** in water and learn the **foundation** skills of movement. She booked on via the **online** platform and started the following week. The lessons are fun and **progressive** according to Rosie's ability. The coaches are **patient** knowing that she is here to **learn** and can't actually swim yet!



athletics club recruitment

Joseph had a natural **talent**. He was fast, **competitive** and determined in everything he did. His local club had a huge waiting list to join the club, but because the coaches could tell he was going to be **good**, they fast tracked him and let him join the **top** group. Joseph's best friend Elias had been on the waiting list for two years and still hasn't been invited to join, he plays football instead.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR ATHLETICS

- We are in the minority of sports that expect children to already be competent at our sport to join a club
- Children will find their motivation with time. Some will want to compete in the traditional form, others will prefer different measures of success, though this can change over time
- We are narrowing the amount of children that can experience athletics, creating a smaller pool of participation and performance
- It reinforces that there is only one metric of success = winning an event

"I was invited along to my local club at maybe 13 or 14 and was really excited, but also nervous. Nobody welcomed me on arrival, so I walked down the track hoping someone would tell me where to go. Eventually, I was told the groups are full and I can run some sprints by myself if I want. I never went back"

Non-athlete

WHAT'S THE RISK IF OUR OFFER ISN'T **RELEVANT**?



pick n mix

Sophie went to the shop where there was so much **choice**. She started off by putting her **favourite** sweets in the bag that she'd tried before, then gambled on a few **new** ones to try. Sophie was **excited** to try some new sweets, even if she doesn't like them, she's got some favourites as a back up!



liquorice

Ellie was handed a bag of liquorice from her Grandma. Delighted, she dug in, only to be **disappointed** at the horrible taste – liquorice isn't for her! That was the **only option** they had with them, so Ellie went without. The next day Ellie **told her friends** that sweets don't taste very nice and to **avoid** them at all costs, now none of her friends will try them.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR ATHLETICS

- Having one approach to athletics creates a rigid, structured environment, not suitable for everyone
- Children and their parents talk – if someone has a bad experience or doesn't like the provision, they are likely to tell others
- Running laps around a 400m track as a new participant is unlikely to entice them back if they've never run that far before
- Having choice doesn't mean having to offer everything to everyone, it's allowing the participants' motivations to guide offerings
- Dictating the offer is at the preference of the adults, not the child

“in an ideal world we'd have lots of different events all-year round so the children can give it all a go, whatever time they join the club. This year May was packed, we've got junior champs then that's about it, so if a child joins now, they'll have to wait a year to experience any sort of comp!”

Club committee member at Junior Champs

SUMMARY OF INSIGHT & LEARNINGS

Athletics must adapt to better reflect the changing wants and needs of today's society. Teenagers are increasingly telling us that the competition experience is too long and can be **boring** - signalling a **disconnect** between traditional formats and what young people enjoy today. Our insight highlighted that many club coaches and committees are caught up in day-to-day operations that they struggle to see new possibilities for the **future**. The thought of welcoming new people to the club is daunting and not an option they are considering due to **workforce demands** and pressures on current club structures.

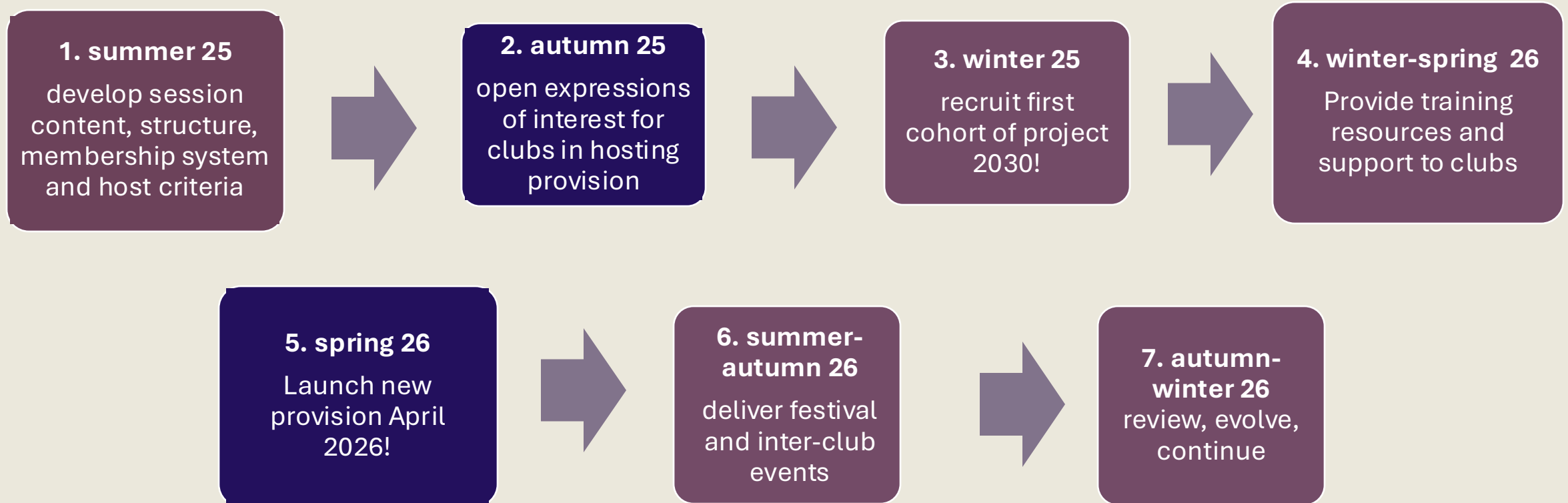
There is a misconception that fun and competitive cannot work together. The feeling amongst many coaches is that if an athlete wants to progress and be **competitive**, then there is no room for fun, as this implies they are not serious about performing. The Youth Sport Trust says that while traditional sport provides valuable benefits, a performance-orientated, competitive culture can exclude, pressure, and **demotivate** many children. They recommend shifting toward inclusive, playful, development-centred sport, prioritising fun, fairness, and **personal growth**.

To stay relevant, we need to be led by the young people's **motivations**, be **brave** in trying new approaches and **lead** from the front as an organisation to show and support our community in **adapting** their offer in an affordable, inclusive way.



PART 3. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

TIMELINE OF NEXT STEPS



MYTH BUSTER!

1. I DO SO MUCH ALREADY, I DON'T HAVE TIME

It does not need to be YOU that delivers these sessions. You may oversee the launch of it, but the purpose of this is for it to become self-sustaining with new parents and fresh workforce, not to overload the existing workforce!

2. WE'RE NOT INSURED FOR U9s

It is not true that clubs are not insured for children to participate under the age of 8/9. Clubs are covered under the existing policy for participants of any age; therefore, we are supporting clubs to welcome people from aged 4+.

3. WE'RE NOT A BABYSITTING SERVICE

If a child has come to our sport, regardless of the motivations of the parent, we have a duty to welcome them in and give them a positive experience. If they enjoy it, feel like they belong and make friends, they are likely to return, progress and perform.



4. KIDS DON'T WANT TO COMPETE ANYMORE

Our provision has not evolved since it first launched. Societal motivations are rapidly changing, we can't expect every generation to compete in the way we used to, it's our responsible to move with them and for them.

5. THEY CHOOSE FOOTBALL OVER US

Consider why children are choosing football (or rugby, or gymnastics, or cricket), aside from the status, they feel like they have a place in the team regardless of their ability. Less than 0.5% of the global footballing population make it professional, but that doesn't stop children wanting to play it.

6. WE ONLY TAKE COMPETITIVE ATHLETES

A child does not always know if they want to be competitive, putting that pressure on them at first arrival will likely put them off if they're not sure. This shows in our membership figures as majority of juniors do not progress to seniors.

WITH THANKS TO THOSE WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS RESEARCH

clubs

- Aberdare Valley Athletics Club
 - Aberystwyth Running Club
 - Archers Athletics Club
 - Bridgend Athletics Club
 - Colwyn bay Athletics Club
 - Little Lions
 - Lliswerry Runners
 - Menai Academy
 - Menai track and field Athletics Club
 - Neath Harriers Athletics Clubs
 - Newport Harriers Athletics Club
 - Ogmore Phoenix Running Club
 - Pembrokeshire Harriers Athletics Club
 - Pontyclun Athletics Club
 - Rhymney Valley Athletics Club
 - Starting Blocs, Merthyr
 - Swansea Harriers Athletics Club
 - Wrexham Athletics Club
-



individuals

Young Athletics Ambassadors
120 primary school children, Rhyl
80 athletes, Welsh championships
4 current / ex-Welsh senior athletes
Athletics tutors & educators
20 primary and secondary school teachers

organisations

Carmarthenshire Sport Development
England Athletics, Research & Grassroots
Game On Wales
Junior ParkRun
Pembrokeshire Sport Development
Run 4 Wales
Sport Wales, Foundations Framework
Welsh Athletics Development Board Sub-Group
Welsh Athletics staff
Welsh Government, Sport Policy
Welsh Schools Athletics Association
Wrexham Sport Development
Yns y Mon Sport Development

REFERENCES & SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- [ECB: All Stars Cricket](#) (2025)
- [England Hockey: Hockey Heroes](#) (2025)
- [FAW Huddle](#) (2025)
- [Foundations Framework Wales](#) (2024)
- [How to Create Meaningful Change when Coaching Children](#): Youth Sport Trust (2023)
- [RFU Kids First Rugby](#) (2024)
- Sherbert Research into the Decline of 13–19-year-olds in Athletics (2024)
- [UEFA Disney Playmakers](#) (2025)
- [Wales Strategic Volunteering Project](#) (2025)
- Welsh Athletics club consultation (2025)



**PROJECT 2030:
OUR NEXT GENERATION.**