

NI Fencing Ltd.
The Northern Ireland Fencing Academy



Northern Ireland Fencing Academy

Sport NI “Sporting Clubs” Strategic Plan

NI Fencing Ltd.

2017-2021



Preamble

The purpose of this document is to outline where we currently are as a sport, and how we aim to develop over the course of the next four years. The content of this document describes a new structure for club development, coach development and athlete training based on the remit of the Sport NI 'Sporting Clubs' program for 2017-21. This structure is titled the "Northern Ireland Fencing Academy" (NIFA).

Strategic Document Structure

Section 1 of this document outlines the targets of the NIFA. Each target is described in terms of the rationale, the current state of operation, specific activities and how each target will be delivered and measured.

Section 2 outlines the implementation and impact that the NIFA project is expected to have on the sport of fencing in Northern Ireland.

Vision

The vision of the NIFA is consistent with the NI Fencing Ltd. plan 2015-19 as outlined in the company's strategic document:

“To provide everyone with the opportunity to participate and succeed in fencing”.

To achieve this vision over the coming years, NI Fencing will introduce the NIFA as a multi-target performance strategy with primary goals of developing a professional, skilled and active population of fencers, coaches, officials & volunteers. Five targets are specified in this program.

1. Athlete Training
2. Coach Development
3. Sports Science & Medicine
4. Officials Training
5. Volunteer Training

NIFA format

The NIFA will take the form of monthly training events. We are planning to host 9 NIFA events per year (dependent upon venue availability). Additional events may be organised as the need arises.

The specific content of each training event will be proposed by the Performance Director, in agreement with the NI Fencing board of directors, and will be cognisant of the developing needs of the sport and fencing population of Northern Ireland.

Author acknowledgements

This Development Plan was written by the Board of Directors of NI Fencing Ltd after consultation with Sport NI, fencing club representatives, fencers and coaches in Northern Ireland

NI FENCING LTD. BOARD OF DIRECTORS (2016-17)

- Joanne Simpson Managing Director
- Gerard Madden Finance Director
- Mike Westgate Performance Director
- Katie Gillespie Welfare and Compliance Director
- David Connery Membership Director
- David Connolly IT & Communication Director
- Maureen Kerr Company Secretary

With special thanks to:

- Peter Hazlett Managing Director (until 18th Aug 2016)
- Dr. Chris Gill Finance Director (until 18th August 2016)

Section 1: Targets of the NI Fencing Academy

1. Athlete Training

Rationale

Expertise and competitive success in any sport requires considerable effort on the part of the athlete, and depends on multiple factors. One of the most important factors is physical training. Expertise and success in fencing requires considerable physical training, including general fitness (agility, speed, flexibility, cardiovascular fitness) and 'fencing fitness' (fencing lessons, footwork practice, bladework & bouting).

Current operation

Fencers' physical training is co-ordinated by NI Fencing Performance Director Maître Mike Westgate. Specific monitoring occurs during six annual 'Academy' physical training sessions, (in addition to further annual sessions aimed at junior fencers) although clubs and fencers largely operate in isolation around these events.

The performance pathway in use by NI Fencing for athletes is shown in Fig. 1 overleaf

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Fig. 1 NI Fencing Athlete Performance Pathway

| SELECTION | TRAINING LEVEL | REGION + COMPETITIONS |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Senior World Championship 2. Senior World Cup 3. Commonwealths | Elite Training | European/International |
| 1. European U-23's 2. Ireland/GB European & World Junior Championships 3. Five-Nations | Senior Training | UK/NI, Ireland Senior Opens |
| 1. European Cadet & Junior World Cups 2. NI School Games 3. Ireland/GB European & World Junior Championships | National Academy | British, Irish, NI Senior Opens |
| | Junior Academy | BYC's, NI Junior Series |
| | Club Level | NI (Junior Series) |

Where we are going

We will transfer existing Academy sessions under the remit of the NIFA. This new program for athlete training will be delivered in the form of 9 annual training events led by the Performance Director.

Advancements will be made by providing the following resources and activities:

1. Increased number of NIFA training sessions directly monitored by the Performance Director
2. Objective measurement of performance
3. Sports science & medicine resources
4. Specialist contributions

(3 & 4 will be described separately as they reflect specific targets of the NIFA)

Where we hope to be

Over the next four years, we aim for the NIFA to become an extremely high-quality fencing training event that is productive and cooperative on a number of levels that are beneficial to athletes (in addition to other populations). Across 9 yearly events, the following structures will be in operation:

- Athletes can avail of coaching, training equipment and progress monitoring
- Coaches can gain practical experience as part of their development
- Officials & Volunteers can gain practical experience by assisting with athlete training events
- NI Fencing can maintain regular face-to-face communication with NIFA participants on relevant issues

Measurement of target success

- A record of attendance will be kept for each athlete. Inadequate attendance will impact the chance for squad selection.
- Objective assessment of physical performance (including strength & condition, plyometric, and footwork) will be conducted. The British Fencing Association has devised these tests. These tasks will provide athletes with objective indicators of their performance and allow both the athlete and coach to identify areas in which they need to improve.
- Additional evaluations of athlete satisfaction and performance will be conducted via questionnaire at appropriate times as deemed necessary by the Performance Director

2. Coach Development

Rationale

Skilled and active coaches are crucial to a thriving and developing sporting environment. Coaches help promote and raise awareness of the sport, they can provide new opportunities to fence by setting up new clubs, they can develop talent through giving lessons and advice, and they can help retain and grow numbers within a sport by providing structure and making the sport enjoyable.

Current Operations

NI Fencing operates a coach development programme that occurs four times per year. Maître Mike Westgate leads these courses using a syllabus from the Irish Academy of Arms*. The pathway for coach development is outlined in Fig. 2 overleaf

In addition to the formal coach development pathway, NI Fencing also operates an online discussion forum for fencing coaches qualified at Level 2 and above. The purpose of this forum is to advertise coaching courses and to discuss relevant issues, techniques, developments and research.

Fig.2 Coach Development Pathway

| Irish Academy of Arms Coaching Pathway | | |
|---|---|---|
| Level 5 | Maître d'Armes (3 weapons) | World/Olympic Level Coach |
| Level 4 | Maître d'Escrime (1 Weapon) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Epee • Foil • Sabre | International Standard (GB/Ireland Teams) |
| Level 3 | Prévôt (1 Weapon) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Epee • Foil • Sabre | UK/International Coach (NI Teams) |
| Level 2 | Moniteur (1 Weapon) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Epee • Foil • Sabre | Club Level Coach |
| Level 1 | Entraîneur (3 weapon basic skills) | Club Level Coach Assistant |

**The Irish Academy of Arms is an All-Ireland NGB for the registration, regulation and training of Fencing Masters and coaches at all levels. This academy is affiliated to the International Academy of Arms.*

Where we are going

The NIFA aims to enhance both the quality *and* quantity of active coaches in NI over the coming years. The existing coach development series will be reorganised under the remit of the NIFA.

Advancements will be made by:

- Pairing Coach Development courses with Athlete Training events to provide practical experience to coaches
- Guest international coaches will expose developing coaches to a wider range of coaching styles, activities and techniques

Where we hope to be

At present, Northern Ireland has the following population of coaches qualified with the Irish Academy of Arms.

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Level 1 | x 7 |
| Level 2 | x 9 |
| Level 5 Maître d'Armes | x 1 |

Over the next four years, NI Fencing aims to increase both quality *and* quantity to achieve the following population of active coaches.

| | |
|--------------------------|---------|
| Level 1 | x 10-15 |
| Level 2 | x 10-12 |
| Level 3 | x 5-7 |
| Level 4 Maître d'Esgrime | x 2 |
| Level 5 Maître d'Armes | x 1 |

Measurement of target success

- The number of qualified coaches will be determined via an online coach database indicating level obtained, location of clubs where they work
- Assessment* and certificates issued by the Irish Academy of Arms

**Assessment will be linked to an online coach profile system that will required coach students to log their on-going practice as evidence of development.*

3. Sports Science & Medicine

Rationale

Physical health and positive mental well-being are factors that allow an athlete to succeed in their sport. Issues that can hinder sport performance include physical injury, inappropriate nutrition, anxiety, inability to focus/concentrate and lack of goals.

The benefits of Sports Science & Medicine are a key element to how NIFA aims to enhance the performance of its athletes. NIFA aims to educate and facilitate the development of competency on concepts relating to athlete performance including sport psychology, nutrition, and the prevention & treatment of injury in order to help coaches and athletes enhance their training programmes and ultimately their performance.

Dr. Gerard Madden (psychologist & fencing coach) will coordinate the Sports Science and Medicine unit of NIFA and will deliver a core set of psychology workshops and supervision to athletes & coaches at NIFA events. Additional contributors (e.g., dieticians, physiotherapists and medical doctors) will be invited to speak to NIFA members & fencers on appropriate topics as needed.

Current Operations

NI Fencing has no structured resource for Sports Science & Medicine.

Where we are going

NI Fencing will identify individuals that can contribute to the Sports Science and Medicine unit. Professionals with personal experience of the sport of fencing are desirable, when possible. As this unit has not previously been in operation, it is important to maintain an on-going evaluation of this resource in order to assess its benefit to athletes.

Where we hope to be

We aim to be providing resources, education and competency in skills that are beneficial to athletes, coaches and parents.

The contributions made by mental health and sports medicine professionals will NIFA participants to the most recent, evidence-based practices and theory.

Measurement of target success

- The Performance Director will work in conjunction with Dr. Madden to ensure that these events take place as planned.
- Psychological and performance outcomes can be assessed as follows:
 1. Evaluation of workshop learning outcomes via questionnaire
 2. Injury Monitoring
 3. Monitoring athlete results following goal-setting
 4. Self-esteem, anxiety, motivation and other psychological outcomes can be assessed with standardised psychometric measures

4. Officials Training

The successful, efficient and well-staffed organisation of fencing events relies on an active and skilled network of officials. With this in mind, NIFA aims to provide officials training in a range of skills that are directly relevant to the sport of fencing.

1. DT training (DT = fencing competition organiser)
2. Referee Training
3. Event Organising
4. Team Manager training
5. Selector training
6. Armourer

Current Operation

NI Fencing relies on a small population of existing individuals that possess the above to organise and run its events. Although Officials training has been inconsistent over the past number of years, the anticipated growth of the sport necessitates a need to grow, sustain and retain a population of Officials.

Where we are going

NI Fencing is currently identifying individuals and Bodies that can provide training and qualification in the above skills. Running these courses will be incorporated into the NIFA and will be paired with Athlete Training and Coach Development sessions when appropriate (e.g., athletes assist in demonstrating referee scenarios)

Where we hope to be

Over the coming years, NI Fencing aims to have a large, skilled and active population to the extent that we are self-contained and self-reliant. Over-time we anticipate a reduced need to outsource for skilled individuals.

At present, there is an officials population of ~25. Over the course of the next several years, we aim for the following:

- Officials population of ~75
- Female Officials representation of minimum 35%

Measurement of target success

Measurement of Officials training is largely straightforward.

- NI Fencing will implement an Officials Database where individuals can list their skills and qualifications
- All awarding Bodies can provide certificates for courses passed and qualifications gained

Some qualifications & skills (DT, Referees and Armourer) are linked to a logbook that evidences practical experience and on-going development of skills

5. Volunteer Training

It is a reality for all sports that volunteers are crucial to the successful running of a sport, from club level to international competitions, from friends & family, to Officials that offer their skills without fee.

With this reality in mind, NI Fencing aims to provide volunteer skills training to NIFA participants in order to foster a co-operative and self-reliant population of skilled and qualified individuals.

There are five volunteer skills clusters that will be addressed in this strand of the NIFA

- **First Aid**
- **Child safeguarding in Sport**
- **Athlete Support training** (e.g., Anti-Doping, Accompanying Adult, Athlete Sponsorship)
- **Additional Regulations training** (Code of Conduct, Criminal Background check)
- **Growth and Development** (Outreach, Recruitment, Women's Officer, Fundraising, Liaison, Club & Competition volunteers)

Current Operations

NI Fencing has no current database of trained & qualified volunteers.

Recruitment of volunteers generally occurs on an informal basis and happens within individual clubs. Skills are typically learned in isolation without standardisation or monitoring.

Where we hope to be

Over the coming years, NI Fencing aims to have a large, skilled and active population of volunteers to the extent that we are self-contained and self-reliant. Over-time we anticipate a reduced need to outsource for skilled individuals.

At present, there is an officials population of ~25. Over the course of the next several years, we aim for the following:

- Officials population of ~75
- Female Officials representation of minimum 35%

Measurement of target success

Measurement of volunteer training is consistent with methods of Officials training measurement

- Clubs will maintain a database of volunteers where individuals can list their skills and qualifications
- All coaches, club representatives and individuals involved with persons U-18 will be required to obtain **a minimum** of First Aid, Safeguarding Children and Criminal Background checks
- All awarding Bodies can provide certificates for courses passed and qualifications gained
- Volunteers will be encouraged to keep a log of skills learned and practical experience as evidence of on-going development.

Section 2: Implementation & Impact of the NIFA Strategic Plan

The NI Fencing Ltd. Strategic Plan 2015-2019 (already published) outlines principles and actions relating to the Expansion and Development of our Sport. The following information will link these principles and action plans to the current NIFA development program in order to describe the impact this program will have on our duty to the sport and its participants.

Expanding and Developing our Sport

This existing strategic plan (2015-2019) identifies a number of goals that relate to 1) increasing and retaining membership, 2) increasing membership diversity, 3) setting up new clubs, and 4) developing a population of individuals committed to furthering the sport of fencing in Northern Ireland.

The NIFA program aims to assist in fulfilling these goals by addressing the action plans previously set out.

Membership: NI Fencing is still committed to increasing membership numbers. We anticipate consistent year-on-year growth up to ~350 members by 2021

- **Retention:** The existing actions to develop a membership retention policy will be integrated into the Volunteer Training strand of the NIFA
- **Diversity:** Similarly, NI Fencing is committed to increasing female participation numbers up to 35-40% amongst the population of fencers, officials and volunteers. Women's Officer training will be provided within Volunteer Training. Additionally, funding provisions are requested to acquire Wheelchair fencing equipment to allow for the involvement of differently-abled fencers
- **New Clubs:** Year 1 & 2 will prioritise the training of coaches and officials. However, year 3 & 4 will see the introduction of a Development Officer through whom the setting up of a club (with coaches and officials) will occur. Club start-up funding has been

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requested to facilitate this. Existing clubs will also be monitored on a club database and will be working towards Clubmark accreditation.

- **Population Development:** The core of the NIFA is to provide a comprehensive set of resources, skills training and equipment to develop a skilled, active and monitored population of coaches, officials and volunteers. Projections for each population have been proposed and the resources and personnel needed to provide training in these areas is currently underway to be in place by 2017/18

Impact on our Sport

The goal of the NIFA is to positively impact as many aspects of our sport as possible. The anticipated impact of each of the individual strands of the NIFA is outlined as follows:

MEMBERSHIP: Increased membership year-on-year with appropriate strategies in place for retaining, sustaining and monitoring members. Having more members creates greater opportunities for success and has the potential for sustaining volunteer and coach population in future years.

DIVERSITY: A specific strategy to improve and sustain participation of females positively impacts underrepresented groups and allows more individuals to benefit from being involved in sport.

CLUBS: Clubs will be monitored to ensure organisational and training standards are maintained (Clubmark as evidence). Databases of members, officials and volunteers in each club allows for the easy identification of individuals to assist in organising and running events. The addition of a new club beginning in 2019/20 will provide an additional base from which to continue to develop membership and will also provide more opportunities for people to get involved in a new sport.

OFFICIALS: Increased population with a wide range of skills and equipment relevant to fencing, with a realistic geographic distribution throughout the main fencing locations of Northern Ireland

COACHES: Improved quality and quantity of active coaches certified using a standardised and internationally recognised qualification system. The NIFA anticipates having a large stock of coaching and fitness equipment for use in clubs and other training events.

VOLUNTEERS: Large population of skilled and rewarded volunteers to ensure the quality and staffing of all NI Fencing events. Essential skills training in First Aid and Child Protection maximises our ability to ensure the health and safety of all individuals, especially children and vulnerable adults.

ATHLETES: Athletes are provided with a highly resourced calendar of training events that address physical, mental and practical skills and provides the chance of monitoring and objective measurement of performance.

DEVELOPMENT OFFICER: The introduction of a development officer under the NIFA development program can help to further sport development once the NIFA has been in operation for two years. Providing assistance in setting up a new club in addition to resources and support for members will help to further the sport for the foreseeable future.

EQUIPMENT: NI Fencing will be able to provide equipment at all levels of the sport through investment from Sport NI. Possessing our own set of equipment reduces the need to outsource or hire specialist equipment from other Bodies. Equipment includes scoring apparatuses for competitions, technical software and hardware for the training of officials, protective equipment for coaches, equipment to assist with repair of fencing weapons, a stock of mini-fence items specifically aimed at teaching fencing to U-10's, provisions for Wheelchair fencing, and health and safety equipment for use at NIFA events.

Geographic Breakdown

The following locations are the main centres of fencing in Northern Ireland

1. Belfast

- Belfast Fencing Club
- Grosvenor Fencing Club
- Queen's University Belfast Fencing Club
- Fence Like an Olympian
- Hunterhouse College Fencing Club
- R.B.A.I Fencing Club
- Stormont Fencing Club

2. Hillsborough

- Mid Down Fencing Club

3. Lisburn

- Lisburn Gladiators

4. Holywood

- Sullivan Upper Fencing Club

5. Derry/Londonderry

- Foyle College Fencing Club

6. Coleraine

- University of Ulster Fencing Club

The geographical spread of athletes, officials and populations is consistent with the locations of fencing clubs. Over the course of the next four years, NI Fencing is committed to further developing the existing fencing centres in Northern Ireland *in addition* to interest in developing further fencing potential in geographic locations where there is little fencing at present.*

The rationale for the geographic spread definitions is consistent with the geographic boundaries used by the NI Education and Library Board.

Geographic Location 1:

- Belfast (All clubs in Belfast)

Geographic Location 2:

- South Eastern (Clubs in Hillsborough, Lisburn & Holywood)

Geographic Location 3:

- Western (Clubs in Derry/Londonderry)

Geographic Location 4:

- North Eastern (Clubs in Coleraine)

**At present, there are no fencing clubs located in the Southern geographic region of NI (Armagh, Banbridge, Cookstown, Craigavon, Dungannon, South Tyrone, Newry, Mourne)*