



Welsh Athletics Track and Field Committee. Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday 26th November 2019.

Venue: Cardiff International Sports Campus

PRESENT

Rhiannon Linington-Payne (RLP), James Williams (JW), Crispin Backsall (CB), Joyce Tomala (JT), Bethan Akanbi-Mortimer (BAM), Lynette Harries (LH), Alan Currie (AC), Tom Marley (TM), Kath Elias (KE), Mark Gold (MG), Lynne Brier (LB)

1) APOLOGIES

Darran Williams, Sue Hooper (represented by Alan Currie)

2) WELCOMES

LB welcomed new and returning members of the committee.

3) APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRPERSON

JT was appointed to undertake the role of chairperson of the Track and Field committee.

4) CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No conflicts of interest were declared.

5) ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

LB confirmed that both CB and JM wish to continue as representatives from the North Wales and West Wales regions. CB said that he welcomed the Tuesday night meeting and thanked the committee for arranging this.

6) DISCUSSIONS

A presentation by JW took place at this point in the meeting as a late addition to the agenda.

6.a) COMPETITION REVIEW PROPOSALS

JW thanked the committee for allowing him to share his presentation, as well as accommodating a request to change the date of the meeting. He presented Welsh Athletics proposals to re-structure and modernise domestic competitions. The proposals had been discussed over two Board meetings and approved by the Board at their most recent meeting. The presentation was based on factors such as:

- junior athletes competing too often – Power of 10 profiles for talented Welsh junior athletes display an overloaded competition history;
- over-complicated pathways for junior athletics;

- retention rates – JW stated quoted a 28% annual dropout amongst athletes in Wales - significantly greater than in other sports;
- Pressures placed on volunteer officials.

JW stated that long-term athlete development under-pins all of the proposals.

The proposals included the following:

Under 11s, Under 13s, 15s

- More multi-disciplinary approach for Under 11s and Under 13s i.e. 2 + 1 approach – combination of runs, jumps and throws;
- Shorten length of competition day to about five hours to appeal more to athletes and parents and reduce demands on officials;
- WJL over six fixtures of shorter days to help prevent boredom from setting in;
- Leagues to be split after three fixtures so that top four in each division come together to create pool A and bottom four in each division come together to create Pool B. This will allow clubs of similar sizes the opportunity to compete against each other;
- In popular events, more races or pools to be introduced to ensure that more athletes have the opportunity to compete;
- Welsh teams to withdraw from YDL at all age group categories to free up space for more domestic competitions i.e. six WL fixtures (this is not proposed as an immediate action);

Under 17s, Under 20s, Seniors

JW stated that these particular age groups no longer want to travel long distances and spend long hours at the track. Athletes no longer engaging fully with club athletics within these age groups. Exam, peer and work pressures are impacting on their ability to commit to the demands of current competition format. The event specific competitions are becoming more over-subscribed with events such as “Run with the Wind” and BMC selling out. Athletes are migrating to such events. JW highlighted the need to move with the times. This would render Welsh League no longer relevant.

- Proposal to create more events specific series of competitions for Under 17, Under 20 and senior age groups e.g. Run with the Wind, throws events etc. It is proposed that this will replace the Welsh League. However, the events specific competitions will be a virtual league where attendance will amass points for the club and will also take place throughout Wales to provide opportunities for all athletes and maintain a club ethos;
- No reason why the “RWTW” format cannot be duplicated throughout Wales;
- In the series finale of events specific competitions, it is proposed that there will be a cash or prize incentive;
- Withdrawal of Welsh clubs from YDL – JW shared statistics on levels of turnout of Welsh athletes at YDL matches.

Schools

JW stated that whatever was put in place for schools competition should encapsulate the full spectrum of competition across Wales. Schools competitions currently take place

roughly at the same time as club competitions, but if Welsh Athletics could set their own fixture calendar, instead of it being set as a top down approach from UKA, dates could be allocated where schools competitions get top priority. JW felt that this would also further strengthen the link between the schools district programme and schools national programme, as well as further strengthen the good relationship between schools and Welsh Athletics that already exists.

The proposals for schools athletics are as follows:

- Develop teacher education in Wales - In last steering group meeting it was agreed to establish a working group that would include some officers from Welsh Schools, such as Steve Jones from Welsh Schools and Chris Moss and Andrew Jenkins from Welsh Athletics, with the aim to develop a national approach, focussing on teacher education. JW said that this would fully embed schools athletics in the competition calendar and competition pathway.
- Begin a formal Consultation with the membership as to whether or not the Under 13 age group should be at national championships. The consultation will request views from the members as to whether or not this is either to be fully withdrawn, be re-formatted to be a multi-event championship or remain as it is. This proposal is in line with the philosophy that Under 13 athletes shouldn't be specialising so early and supports the runs, jumps, throws model.

Internationals

JW stated that Wales have signature road international events, such as Cardiff Half Marathon, Snowdon Marathon, Cardiff Cross Challenge, but there is no signature track and field event.

The proposals for international competition are as follows:

- Establish a signature international standard track and field event in Wales;
- Achieve EAP status;
- Move the current Wednesday night Under 20 International to later on in the season and hold on a weekend to provide wider international opportunities for upper age group junior athletes;
- Removal of the indoor international. It is currently a struggle to raise interest amongst teams invited and amongst Welsh Under 20 athletes themselves. By first weekend in March, most athletes have ended their indoor season. This will be removed this coming season - JW confirmed that this is with great regret.

Event Delivery

- Need to invest in upskilling new competition providers as well as the resources to deliver competitions effectively.

Evaluation of Effectiveness of Changes

- Open-track competition management system currently being used. Now in the process of developing a platform that will enable Welsh athletics to analyse the data that has been amassed e.g. entries, male/ female entry splits, age groups splits; event splits, club/ regional entry splits etc, as well as percentages of PBs, SBs per age group, event, gender etc;

- JW also confirmed that the athlete voice would be widely used as an evaluation tool to find out what they want;
- Membership views to be collated on an annual basis as well as annual surveys;
- Monitor satisfaction of members following all competitions and championships

Implementation Proposals

2020

- Implement changes to Under 17, Under 20, Senior competition;
- Launch of Welsh Junior League in North Wales;
- No Welsh Indoor International;
- Launch consultation for proposal to remove Under 13 national championships;
- Launch consultation on plans to withdraw from YDL.

2021

- Implement changes to Welsh Junior League;
- Welsh clubs to begin removing themselves from YDL (to be fully implemented by 2022);
- EAP meetings to be held in Wales;
- Pre- commonwealth Games event to attract some of the top athletes to Wales.

Following JW's presentation, the committee were invited by JT to discuss the proposals that had been introduced to them.

JT asked why the presentation had gone to the Board and not General Council as it is operational rather than purely strategic. JW replied that the Board had requested this first and foremost as it is a strategic proposal.

JT asked whether or not the Board had agreed to the all of the proposals unanimously. JW replied that the Board they have agreed to the proposals that he had presented to the track and field committee, although they have also presented a significant amount of challenge since the beginning of the procedure in September and a lot of additional work has been carried out as a result of this, especially as many Board members have links to athletes who will be affected by the proposed changes e.g. in a coaching or parenting capacity.

JW also stated that discussions in joint Board and General Council meetings have always included evolving competition structures.

BAM asked whether or not the proposals had been passed by the athlete voice representatives. JW confirmed that the ideas themselves had not been discussed with the athletes, although the athletes themselves were requesting shorter, sharper competitions, with less travel time. Much of the content of the proposals were aligned to the concerns of the athletes.

BAM expressed concern that the withdrawal from YDL competitions in upper and lower age groups could mean that the same athletes would be competing against each other time and time again in Wales, whereas YDL offered variety. BAM also expressed concern about competitions being held around exam time. JW stated that statistics have shown that the level of competition in Upper Age Group YDL is quite poor and that athletes are not fully engaged in Upper Age Group YDL competitions. BAM asked how the attendance in this age

group compares with the attendance at Welsh Senior League. JW stated that the Welsh senior League also had its flaws.

JW reiterated that the events specific format was the way forward. BAM felt that event specific competitions were a good idea if you were a sprinter from Cardiff, a jumper from Swansea or a thrower from the Carmarthen area. JW said that the competitions would be cast wider to ensure that everyone had opportunities to compete. The format would be easy to drop into any track.

BAM felt that these proposals would be of little benefit to multi-event athletes as they would no longer be able to access the events that they required during one competition. The proposals could increase the amount of competitions that multi-eventers would have to travel to. JW said that he hoped that the evolution of the new competition structure and encouraging young athletes not to specialise too soon would lead to more multi-eventers due to increased interest in these competition structures.

MG Stated that Cardiff had worked hard on retention of young athletes and this is because of the existence of league matches, such as YDL. Taking them away would result in athletes leaving the sport.

AC expressed his opinion that drop-out from athletics is nothing new. He stated that discussions have always taken place about the retention of junior athletes and we are in danger of becoming a sport for junior athletes. There is very little competition for senior athletes, unless they are inspiring to represent at a high level e.g. Commonwealth Games. One-off events specific competitions are not enough for them. JW used BMC as an example of good practice in events specific competitions and the fact that they are well attended and the preferred choice for athletes. JW reiterated the league format is not engaging enough for athletes and the days are too long.

LH expressed her concerns about the gap between those who do well at Under 20 and senior level and the lack of international experiences for them, especially athletes who become Welsh champions. LH felt that being the Welsh senior champion should mean more and that they should have the chance to compete as the Welsh senior champion.

LH expressed concern that too much good practise has been abandoned, such as teams representing Wales overseas. JW replied that Welsh senior champions are selected for the Manchester International. JW said that they would love to provide more international competitions and agreed that more international competition is needed, but other home nations didn't necessarily share this philosophy and this made it difficult to provide more international representative opportunities. This is one of the reasons why the performance team look to go to events specific matches in Europe.

LH said that she would like to see more competition in Europe and suggested working groups to look at various elements. JW said that members of the Board are pushing to clarify what international opportunities will look like in the new proposals and what opportunities will be in place for senior athletes.

LH agreed with JW that the current length of competition days were too long, but was concerned that additional races or pools for popular events would have resource implications e.g. people not wanting to officiate. This point was linked with club development and the fact that some clubs always provide officials and others don't bother.

LH felt that all current competitions have a place, but agreed with JW that the calendar is congested and young athletes are expected to compete too often. LH expressed a need to look at the infrastructure as a whole, not singular issues. JW said that increasing races and pools won't add too much to the timetable or length of day because other events are undersubscribed.

JW agreed that lack of officials is a key risk for the sport. Welsh Athletics are trying to put on more courses but recognise the need to do more.

TM felt that events specific competitions were a good idea and stated that as an athlete, he had always preferred BMC to league matches. However, TM went on to say that the objective data being gathered will be used to inform future decisions and drive future actions, rather than the more subjective opinions of individuals.

KE felt that it was brave of Welsh Athletics to be looking at the issues being proposed and said that she was hopeful that good things would come from the proposed changes.

KE felt that competitions needed to be better rather than more.

KE said that doing same event every week and reaching the same goals had to be boring for young athletes. She stated that there will always be natural drop out because athletes know their standard and it is inevitable that some will move on to something that they are good at. However, she felt that there is a need to be smarter at keeping in touch with the older Under 15 athletes to let them know that their abilities are appreciated and encourage them to keep going, encourage them with competition and support in an effort to keep them in the sport.

KE praised the hard work that is carried out by Welsh Athletics around competitions and expressed concern about how they would encourage others to take on these responsibilities. She supported the fact that there is a need for a pool of people around the country willing to take on some of these events.

KE referred to recording results and the amount of work carried out by Darran Williams as being an area that needed support. JW stated that the current results system being used by DW is complicated and only he can operate it. This puts pressure on him around competition time. JW said that the new system is more user friendly for anyone who wants to put on a competition and results will be sharper.

MB expressed interest in the mandate on how competition events will be split in future. Will the younger athletes have to do what's on offer and will they have to do three events? Also, how will we convince clubs to remove themselves from YDL. Clubs will not commit to this. JT said that she would comment on proposals to leave YDL, after all members of the committee had given their views.

LB said that she agreed with the proposal about ending national championships for the Under 13 age group and felt that they shouldn't specialise at such a young age.

She also expressed concern the timescales for implementing some changes were ambitious. JW replied that the proposals in question had been talked about for a long time, yet nothing has changed. He said that these proposals were Welsh Athletics proposals that had been discussed significantly across the board for at least five years and he felt that we all have a duty, as a governing body to lead this proposal. He realised that people often dislike change,

but felt that some brave decisions needed to be made and changes had to be made in the near future for the benefit of the athletes. JW stated that some of the changes being proposed has been discussed for several years on all levels, including club level and across Wales in general. JW felt strongly that the proposed changes would benefit all athletes throughout Wales and needed to be carried out as timely as possible.

CB said that he welcomed WJL in North Wales although many may not agree. He said that the proposals needed to go out quickly to be implemented in 2020. JW appreciated and agreed with this point.

JT picked up on concerns about YDL proposal and stated the following facts:

- YDL is already changing and proposals for change have been in place for a while to make YDL a better experience for athletes and officials. JT asked why there has been no engagement with YDL on this matter. JT reminded the committee of how many teams in Wales have actually committed themselves to the YDL:
Upper Age Group: 18 South Wales clubs and 4 North Wales clubs (Independent and composite).
Lower Age Group: 13 South Wales clubs and 4 North Wales clubs (Independent and composite).
- fixtures have already been reduced from five to four and three for the bulk, plus promotion matches,
- double headers have been introduced to reduce the number of officials and venues required. This relieves strain of costs on host clubs and cuts back on the amount of travel required.

JT asked why the decision had been made to throw out YDL at the same time as the announcement that there is a need to provide more competition and new competition providers. JT said that those organising YDL fixtures were experts in providing competition.

JT also asked why the YDL upper age group clashed with Welsh Athletics league match on UKA fixtures. TM stated that this should have been changed a week before the UKA fixtures conference and this would be addressed and rectified.

JT asked if proposals could be shared at South / East Wales annual general meeting tomorrow and also reported back to clubs. JW would like the new proposals to come directly from WA in the fixtures meeting on December 5th, and would like it to be held until after 5th December after the meeting with the clubs. JW went on to inform the committee that they able to open up the invitation to attend the fixtures meeting on 5th December to whoever wished to attend from the clubs. JT requested a guarantee that the presentation would be sent out to track and field committee members on 6th December. JW replied that he would endeavour to send the presentation out to track and field committee members on the 6th December.

Action: LB to send this presentation out to the regions.

KE asked JW if Welsh Schools had been made aware of these proposals.

6.b) RATIFICATION OF RECORDS

AC went through a list of possible Welsh outdoor records improvements for summer 2020.

The following were approved:

Men

Under 13 100m – King Musa (Cardiff AAC) – 12.34

Under 15 300m – Will Lovejoy (Hereford & Co) – 36.36 (record omitted from 2018 proposal)

Under 17 1500m – Ben Reynolds (Cardiff AAC) – 3:50.19

Under 17 3000m – Osian Perrin (Menai T&F) – 8:23.64

Under 13 Shot put (3K) – Salem Kiambi (Cardiff AAC)– 12.92

Under 20 discus (1.75K) – James Tomlinson (Pembroke Harriers) - 61.64

Senior Hammer – Osian Jones (Liverpool Harriers) – 73.89

Under 20 Javelin – Tom Hewson (Andover) – 70.80

Women

Senior 5000m – Melissa Courtney (Poole AC) – 14:53.82

Under 17 2000m Steeplechase – Ellen-Mary Kearney (Wirral AC) – 7:06.64

Senior Marathon – Natasha Cockram (MMRT) – 2:30.49

Under 15 Pole Vault – Ellie-Mae Wainwright (Newport Harriers)

Under 13 Long Jump – Nia Powell (Pontyclun) – 4.91

The following records were not permitted:

Under 13 200m – Joseph Berry – 24.87 (no wind reading)

Under 23 10000 – Jake Smith – 29:01.08 (not registered to Welsh Athletics. Registered as an English athlete)

Triple Jump – Amelia Richards inaugural record – AC to check whether or not there was a wind reading for this event and to check the length of run up for this event.

JW left the meeting at this point.

6.c) Review of Inter Regional Championships

CB confirmed that North Wales have not yet held a regional meeting.

MG confirmed that review proposals had not been passed on to him for discussion in the South Wales regional meeting.

There was no representative from West Wales present, although it was acknowledged that the video link to the representative for West Wales may not have been working.

JT reiterated the importance of discussing this point on a regional level.

Action – LB to contact all regions once again because Track and field committee is to take this point to General Council.

LH proposed that the track and field committee could, in the absence of response from some regions, make decisions on how these competitions should move forward.

JT reminded the committee that this committee is elected to make decisions.

CB said that North Wales wanted the Inter Regional championships but wanted no under 13 but want an U20 and senior full competition, rather than an Under 13 category. CB said that North Wales would like to see the match alternating between North and South Wales.

JT reiterated to CB that we cannot go back to the long days that would inevitably come from a full timetable of events for Under 20 and senior athletes. CB fully appreciated this point.

TM said that when it was moved from Brecon to Aberdare, it was intended that the competition would move around different locations.

JT stated that in the next meeting, whether regions have discussed or not, this committee would make final decision to take back to General Council in April (date to be confirmed).

Action: LB to email regions minutes and give a fortnight deadline from them to respond. Response by 15th December.

6.d) Fixtures 2020

It was confirmed by RLP that the fixtures meeting is to be held on Thursday 5th December at Welsh Institute of Sport.

LB pointed out clashes with NAL and Welsh Junior Champs. Also NAL and Welsh Inter-Regionals if they revert back to having seniors in the latter.

It was confirmed by TM that Regional Championships are to be held on weekend of 9th and 10th May, East and South Wales likely to be held on Saturday 9th and West Wales likely to be held on Sunday 10th May.

JT asked that all track and field committee members receive the full dates when confirmed in fixtures meeting.

7) REPORTS

7.a) Domestic Competition Update

JT referred to the competition on Sunday 1st December. Regions are not responsible for this event as it is a Welsh Athletics open meeting. South and East representatives have met already to gather extra officials and will not be supporting the South West and West regions or the open meeting element of this competition. The correct information must be sent out to all four regions who have their championships as part of this competition, that they must arrange their own officials. It is not an East Wales responsibility. All regions must provide their own officials.

LH expressed concern about lack of officials. It needs to be clarified as to who does what. This also applies to the event on January 5th. LH suggested an earlier closure of entry so that the numbers can be confirmed sooner, providing more time to plan for a sufficient number of officials.

BAM said that parents would also appreciate an earlier entry closure because they will need to see the timetable before they offer to volunteer. BAM said that parents would probably volunteer more readily once they'd seen the timetable.

JT said that she and Sue Hooper had met with TM to discuss the matrix to spell out who is responsible for each competition because it is not all Welsh Athletics responsibility and not all the responsibility of the officials secretary.

7.b) General Council

No report – LB did not receive minutes. JT agreed to share her report with LB and stated that Chris Jones had delivered an excellent presentation during the meeting.

7.c) Officials

AC reported that the Officials AGM had been held on 30th October.

JT was elected as Chairperson.

There are no representatives from North or South regions on this committee.

AC said that selections had been made for forthcoming indoor competitions, but more officials are still needed.

Jeff Wickens has agreed to become timekeeper representative on officials committee.

James Thie will inform on Cardiff Met meetings and officials.

The officials conference is to be confirmed. TM is looking at dates in March that do not clash with six nations.

AC spoke about issues with officials not DBS covered. Sue Hooper is trying to find out more information about this.

AC expressed concerns about a para games being organised in Cardiff on 17th May by one individual. Some concerns have arisen around this. It has already been discussed with track and field and referred to officials committee. The organiser has already been advised by numerous people not to go ahead with this event. There are concerns surrounding licencing for this meeting, as well as the financial implications for the organiser. JT said that Cardiff doesn't have Track Mark and therefore this competition cannot be held in Cardiff. Swansea is the only track with Track Mark. RLP said that the organiser had informed her that he had already booked the track. There are concerns for the welfare of the individual organising this event and it was agreed that he required additional support and guidance on this matter.

Action: LB to follow up on this matter and contact Steve Jones with a view to safeguarding the organiser of this event.

AC shared dates of next officials meetings – 9th April, 29th October and currently three possible dates for September.

7.d) Regional Reports

No reports presented from West or South Wales.

East Wales have employed a communications officer in a non-paid capacity and are in the process of updating their website and making business cards and flyers with QR codes.

8) Minutes of Last meeting

No actions that have not already been covered.

Indoor International has been called off.

LB asked if all minutes from Track and Field can be put on the website. They have all been done so they need to be on the website for all to see.

LH asked when website will be fully updated to include information that was previously included.

RLP suggested that individuals let the media manager, Rob Sage, know if there are gaps on specific pages so that he can address this.

9) Correspondence

LB shared letter from Barrie Owen, President of Swansea Harriers, expressing concern about lack of competition opportunities for senior and Under 20 athletes in certain events, such as 2000m/3000m steeplechase, sprint hurdles and 400m hurdles and 400m and some jumping events. TM agreed that opportunities need to be in place; but stated that it was not necessarily the sole responsibility of Welsh Athletics to host such events. TM referred back to the development of event providers and also said that a lot of these events could be catered for in the events specific competitions. TM said that Welsh Athletics will be looking at the events specific competitions to ensure that events are provided with equal opportunities.

LH mentioned development type initiatives to boost opportunities in certain events. This may be one of the ways forward.

Action – LB to invite Adrian Palmer to the next meeting to discuss this further.

Also, individuals will be given opportunities to voice their concerns and opinions on competitions during the consultation period.

10) AOB

BAM said that entries for regional championships at weekend brought up issues navigating the website and difficulties with athlete URN numbers. TM confirmed that some issues have been fixed but others are ongoing. TM will pass concerns on and hopefully issues will be fixed.

JT asked who would be trouble shooting at this weekend's indoor match in Darran's absence. TM confirmed that he himself would be taking Darran's place and RLP would be present in the meeting as well.

LH requested that notebooks should not be used on the field events at this weekend's open meeting in the absence of Darran, in case the technology failed. She would prefer to list the second card in case of technology failing. RLP suggested that LH spoke to Darran on this matter.

JT asked who would have the float for this weekend's open meeting. RLP said that she would have the float

JT needed to know prior to South and East regional meeting whether or not 1200m or 1500m would be included for Under 11 and Under 13 athletes in Welsh Junior league matches. Are we still going with 1200m? It was proposed that this should be discussed in the fixtures meeting on

5th December. RLP and LB felt that 1500m was not beneficial to young athletes, especially in light of new initiatives to safeguard young athletes from competing too much.

Next meeting on 5th February.

The meeting ended at 9pm.