



Developing a Modern, Effective and Sustainable Future for Orienteering in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Orienteering's Strategic Plan
April 2009 – March 2021

Orienteering – a challenging outdoor adventure sport enjoyed by people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds



NI ORIENTEERING STRATEGIC PLAN 2009 – 2021

INTRODUCTION

1.1 This plan sets out NI Orienteering's strategic direction and objectives (the ends) for the period 2009 – 2021, together with the routes to achieve them (the ways) and the resources needed to deliver them (the means). Although looking 12 years out to ensure that strategic decisions are appropriate and lasting in nature, it will concentrate initially on the first four years of the timeframe in recognition that the immediate need to develop and change will be followed by a period of sustained improvement. Four years matches opportunities offered by Sport NI and its initial funding cycle and meets the Jan Kjellstrom International Orienteering Festival 2011 milestone¹, successful passing of which will represent meeting the biggest challenge yet faced by NI Orienteering.

1.2 That this plan closely resembles that of the national governing body, British Orienteering², is no co-incidence. We, and other regional associations, are faced with the same challenges: how to increase participation, how to improve performance and how to maximize the volunteer support on which orienteering depends. The core challenge addressed by this plan is how to remain true to the essential volunteer ethos that underpins the sport whilst embracing the opportunities offered by using professional staff to support and develop participation and performance. NI Orienteering, if successful, will be the first orienteering association to go beyond part-time Regional Development Officers to establish a core development, coaching and performance staff at regional level³.

1.3 Orienteering is an individual adventure sport that provides an exciting and fun challenge for all ages and all abilities from all communities and all backgrounds. It is an established and successful sport with an appetite to develop and expand still further. The International Orienteering Federation has 70 countries as members and holds annual World Championships in which both GB and Irish teams compete and at which GB has achieved gold.

MISSION

2.1 NI Orienteering exists as an Association to provide leadership, support and technical supervision to individuals and orienteering clubs in Northern Ireland in order to maximize the quantity and quality of orienteering performance and participation in NI.

VISION

3.1 NI Orienteering intends to be the leading adventure sport association, against which others are benchmarked. Dynamic, modern and fit for purpose, it will enable effective and efficient delivery of the sport by clubs, schools and other providers, increasing participation and

¹ NI Orienteering is to host the UK's largest International Orienteering Festival over 4 days in April 2011, the 'JK'

² 'Developing a Sustainable Future for Orienteering' The British Orienteering Federation's Strategic Plan April 2004 – to March 2009

³ Scotland has a full-time Professional Officer and a full-time Outdoor Centre offering orienteering as a core activity.

improving performance by bringing together a strong volunteer ethos, a rapidly improving infrastructure and a new professional coaching and development staff.

STRATEGIC SITUATION

4.1 Drivers For Change. The first third of the period, to 2013, contains a number of drivers for change within orienteering in Northern Ireland. The change of focus in Sport NI's funding initiatives towards performance, coal-face staff and linking District Councils to Active Communities participation offers an opportunity for NI Orienteering to modernise, expand its role in supporting members and clubs, and re-focus volunteer effort into core event activity. At the same time, British Orienteering is revamping its event structure in a way that, for the first time, offers Northern Ireland a real chance to be part of the ranking system that underpins performance monitoring and international selection. However, without modernising our structures and putting our people and infrastructure resourcing onto a more predictable and secure footing, we will not be able to sustain the necessary increase in standards to take advantage of the new opportunities. Perhaps the biggest challenge, one which will make heavy demands on an already stretched volunteer force, is the commitment to host the JK Festival in 2011. Our reputation was enhanced by our successful hosting of the British Orienteering Championships in 2002; the opportunity offered by the JK is considerably greater. Apart from offering outstanding courses on new terrain to our own orienteers, the Festival will attract a significant influx of Irish, GB and International competitors and their families over the Easter weekend⁴.

4.2 Current Success. NI Orienteering has a number of successes on which to build. Our part-time RDO has made considerable inroads into schools, the education system, District Councils and outdoor activity providers to encourage participation and to ensure the maintenance of a basic quality of instruction. Transitioning from 'in-school' orienteering to 'after-school' orienteering and thence to mainstream sport will come next. The Junior Squad, although still small has provided individual and group success over the past 3 years, with one retained major British Championship title, a healthy number of Irish Champions and podium places on both sides of the water. The Squad, with an incomplete team, also managed to defeat a number of stronger regional teams at the Junior Inter-Regional Championships. But developing juniors is not cheap and is currently over-dependent on volunteer and parental support, including financial. At senior level Lagan Valley Orienteers, our largest club, has been dominant north and south of the border, especially at the Irish Championships. It has also led the way in generating new interest with a summer long series of Wednesday Evening Events, 13 in total, which introduced orienteering across a number of sites and communities in the Belfast area for the first time. Similar events in the south west and north west, on a smaller scale, have had similar success.

4.3 Potential Threats. There are a number of potential threats which could slow or hinder progress towards a broader participation base and achieving the standards required to participate in British Orienteering's new event structure: support for moving from exclusively Saturday events to incorporate some non-Saturday events is not universal among members or the

⁴ JK 2008 in Southern England attracted nearly 3000 competitors for each of the main days and nearly 1500 for the others.

volunteer pool; we do not have enough mapped Level 1 terrain⁵ to be able to put on one event per year, our longer term aspiration; our volunteer base is strained, being heavily diverted into the management of club and association at the expense of event organisation and a programme of structured progression for our members; the membership of the smaller clubs has declined, as juniors spread their wings away from Northern Ireland; and our relationship with the Forest Service, whilst rapidly improving, does not yet offer the long-term security of access that we desire.

4.4 Development Over Time. We are likely to see a period of consolidation and preparation (2009) followed by rapid expansion (2010 and 2011). The smaller clubs (FERMO and NWOC) will concentrate on rebuilding their base before seeking to enlarge. JK2011 preparation has started and will engage a small but growing number of volunteers before expanding sharply in 2010. Engagement in Active Communities development will provide a major source of expansion which, coupled with a focus on transition for school orienteering from ‘in school hours’ to ‘after school hours’ will bring juniors and adults into mainstream sport. All this comes in the first third, the ‘Modernisation’ part of the 12 years covered by NI Orienteering’s Vision, but will set the platform for a greater concentration on performance from 2012 onwards, aiming for more podium success at international level. The middle third will be the time to ‘Deliver Structures’, followed by the 4 years in which the ‘Structures Deliver’. Our target is a World Championship medal at Junior, Senior or Masters level.

4.5 Management Capacity. NI Orienteering will modernize its management structure and processes to ensure that it is in a position to deliver the growth envisaged in this plan. It has already a full set of governance policies that meet the national Governing Body and Sports NI’s guidelines. It will concentrate on adjusting its structure to maximise the effectiveness of a professional staff and reduce the demands on volunteers. It will use best practice from modern management techniques to generate the projects necessary to achieve the strategic goals in a resource efficient way. Its management goal is to be acknowledged as the leading fully fit for purpose adventure sport regional governing body in Northern Ireland.

4.6 Affiliations. NI Orienteering, its clubs and members are affiliated to the UK National Governing Body, British Orienteering, and have adopted the UKCC Coaching Scheme. The Irish Orienteering Association is the Republic of Ireland’s equivalent national body. Individuals orienteers may choose to run for either the GB or the Irish team; juniors may elect on an annual basis, seniors face a 2 year fallow period if they change national allegiance. Although the fixture lists north and south of the border are deconflicted as far as possible each year, more detailed coordination and cooperation between NI Orienteering and the IOA has been weaker than it should be. Closer cooperation in matters of mutual advantage such as the hosting of the Irish Orienteering Championships, selection for Home International representative teams, protection policies and alignment of coaching standards is an immediate objective with immediate benefit. In particular such cooperation should serve to ameliorate the disadvantages brought about by geographically enforced isolation from GB mainland orienteering at local and regional levels.

⁵ Terrain capable of supporting courses for the UK Elite. Such terrain is embargoed for orienteering use for 24 months before a Level 1 event to ensure fairness of competition.

4.7 Opportunities for Collaboration. NI Orienteering will continue to work alongside others with whom it shares common values and agendas. These currently include adventure sport governing bodies such as CANI and MCI, outdoor organisations such as CAAN and outdoor education centres, and landowners such as the National Trust. The list also includes youth groups, community groups, ethnic groups, the Scout movement and youth clubs. In the future we hope to have more collaboration with disability groups and youth intervention projects.

ORIENTEERING – UNIQUELY DIFFERENT

5.1 Orienteering is an adventure sport, with markedly different characteristics from conventional, fixed pitch or courts based sports. Like many adventure sports it is an individual sport conducted in a group environment. Apart from ski orienteering, the three other orienteering disciplines - foot, mountain bike and trail orienteering – all feature in the annual fixtures list. While terrain, weather and course constantly vary, the demands on physical fitness, navigational ability and mental robustness remain fixed.

5.2 Orienteering has no fixed sized ‘pitch’. Its ‘surfaces’ constantly change and its physical infrastructure (map) degrades (loses accuracy) as a result of natural and seasonal and man-made changes to both ‘pitch’ and ‘surface’. It has a constant need for variety. The essence of the sport lies in the participant’s ability to meet ‘new’ mental and physical challenge within an established, progressive and modern set of rules and guidelines. Fixed ‘pitches’ (permanent orienteering courses) have considerable value as an introduction to the sport and as a training medium but cannot sustain the levels of performance required by the majority of participants.

5.3 Familiarity with terrain reduces the essential ‘unseen’ nature of the challenge. It is therefore a vital part of our development that we should expand the amount of mapped high quality terrain to generate better opportunities for top class performance. At the same time we will put in place a planned programme of mapping or re-mapping local parks and schools to provide the ‘pitches’ for Active Community participants to use as they start to orienteer and on which local coaches can start the transition to mainstream sport.

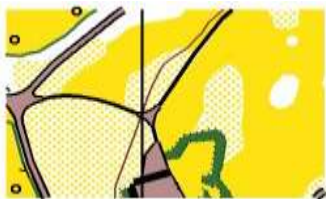


Fig 1: A park map



Fig 2: A simple map



Fig 3: A complex map

5.4 Orienteering already has a well established and fit-for-purpose development path that is independent of age or gender. Progression along what is known as the colour coded pathway from the lowest White to the highest Black reflects the gradual acquisition of new skills and physical prowess rather than increasing age!

5.5 Orienteering makes extensive use of technology which has significantly enhanced the sport over the last 10 years. Advanced computer aided drawing programmes have simplified the production of orienteering maps, the correction of existing maps to reflect changes to the terrain and production of pre-printed competition maps. Electronic timing equipment simplifies complex course planning, improves the competitor experience and allows for the real time production of results. These results can be posted to club websites as soon as the event is finished where they are placed with other club information.

STRATEGIC GOALS

6.1 The strategic objectives that follow can be summarised into 4 goals that reflect the progressive nature of this plan over its 12 years:

- 6.1.1 To build the capacity to create a structure able to support and sustain a wide variety of orienteering activity from small to large, local to national, beginner to highly skilled, young to old, occasional to committed participation and from novice to World Championship contender.
- 6.1.2 To deliver the modern structures on which future high level performance and widespread participation will be built.
- 6.1.3 To maintain the momentum to ensure that the new structures deliver performance and participation goals at the inspirational level and quantity that Northern Irish athletes are undoubtedly capable of achieving.
- 6.1.4 To present a positive image of Orienteering and build recognition of its versatility, appeal and benefits

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

6.2 Participation

- 6.2.1 To increase membership by 5% year on year
- 6.2.2 To exceed 150 participants regularly at NI Orienteering premier events
- 6.2.3 To establish orienteering as a firm partner in the Active Communities programme
- 6.2.4 To develop by 2010, as a subsidiary of NI Orienteering, a NI Schools Orienteering Association with a minimum of 10 member schools and its own championship
- 6.2.5 To create more opportunities for regular participation
- 6.2.6 To attract sufficient new members to form a new club in the south east area

6.3 Performance

- 6.3.1 To achieve at least 4 representatives on GB or Irish teams at World and European Championships annually

- 6.3.2 To achieve at least 4 individual medals at National Championships (British and Irish) annually
- 6.3.3 To achieve a World Orienteering Championships podium place by 2021
- 6.3.4 To deliver a Junior Squad funded and able to provide a full size team at the JIRC in 2014 and beyond
- 6.3.5 To develop a fully resourced talent identification pathway by 2010
- 6.3.6 To recruit and train coaches and officials, sufficient to support a programme of expansion and performance improvement at every level of the sport

6.4 Governance and Management

- 6.4.1 To deliver a fully modernised and fit for purpose governing body, restructured and manned to provide leadership and support to members and clubs alike
- 6.4.2 To establish partnership agreements with all District Council consortia by 2009
- 6.4.3 To establish a closer working cooperation with the Irish Orienteering Association
- 6.4.4 To achieve 'reasonable' assurance in Sport NI audit of Governing Bodies
- 6.4.5 To help clubs achieve the Sport NI quality club accreditation as early as possible

6.5 Championships and Major Events

- 6.5.1 To deliver a full programme of NI Championships annually
- 6.5.2 To deliver a successful and profitable JK Festival in 2011
- 6.5.3 To host a successful Irish Orienteering Championships in 2010
- 6.5.4 To host successful Home International Championships in 2009 (Senior), 2011 (Junior) and 2012 (Veteran)
- 6.5.5 To deliver one National Level 1 Event in each of 2010 and 2012 in addition to the JK in 2011

6.6 Infrastructure

- 6.6.1 To establish a roster of 6 terrain areas capable of sustaining National Level 1 events
- 6.6.2 To establish a resourced mapping programme to support school, local community, club and regional events
- 6.6.3 To establish and maintain a formal, profitable relationship with the Forest Service, other principal landowners and the NI Environment Agency

6.7 Marketing

- 6.7.1 To develop a marketing plan by 2009
- 6.7.2 To implement marketing plan in 2010 and 2011 to support growth in participation and major events

THE WAYS

7.1 There are few realistic options available when examining the ways in which NI Orienteering may set about achieving these strategic objectives. Traditionally, orienteering in Northern Ireland has been entirely managed and organised by volunteers. More recently this volunteer effort has been supported by a part time Regional Development Officer, mostly funded by Sport NI and British Orienteering. The volunteer effort is being diluted in a number of ways: an increase in the governance requirements placed on any sport involving young or vulnerable people; an increase in the number of events being offered (12 under the NI Orienteering banner plus a wide variety of club events of all sizes); an increase in the equipment and associated IT management burden as electronic punching has developed; more demands on volunteers' time by their employers; an increase in the interaction between NI Orienteering, British Orienteering and Sport NI and a rapidly increasing interest by schools and educational bodies in the use of orienteering to support of their curricula. Each of these increases may be small in themselves; together they add up to a strain on resources that is in danger of putting off the very volunteers on which the sport depends. Thus NI Orienteering's future success depends on refocusing and revitalising the available volunteer support and finding innovative ways to reduce the burden on volunteers whilst still reaching out to new potential participants in schools, communities and other sports.

7.2 NI Orienteering intends to use the opportunities offered by recent changes in the funding offered by Sport NI to make the leap from an (almost) fully volunteer organisation to being the first orienteering regional governing body to employ a full time staff of significant size. This step is not small and its risk is well understood, but maintaining the status quo, or even the status quo ante (pre RDO), will not enable orienteering to grow. At best it will maintain a low, steady state; more likely, it will decline to an unsustainable level and today's orienteers will have to migrate to other sports. The areas, and thus the 'ways', in which we intend to invest are:

- Development support to clubs, in the form of more Regional Development Officer hours spread more widely across Northern Ireland. This is likely to involve a number of part-time development officers more closely tied to local clubs and districts.
- A move towards professional coaching at all levels, to supplement and support today's volunteer coaching.
- An Business Development Officer, to provide the full time focus and drive to underpin the delivery of this plan.
- A modernised governance and management structure, able to engage and use full time staff whilst reducing the time required of individual volunteers.
- A more structured, planned and resourced infrastructure programme, designed to bring essential infrastructure up to date (maps, terrain and access) and then to maintain it at the level needed to sustain participation and performance growth over the 12 years covered by this plan.
- A more self-sufficient Association structure able to support clubs and to allow them to concentrate on the management of events rather than administering the sport.
- A planned programme to increase participation at every level, from junior to senior, from all communities and of all standards.

- A programme of talent identification and performance coaching to deliver top quality performance from our talented athletes.
- Close cooperation with the Irish Orienteering Association on matters of mutual advantage.
- More training of event officials, including in the use of orienteering IT.
- Maximising the resources available from British Orienteering.

RESOURCES – THE MEANS

Funding

8.1 NI Orienteering's income as an Association comes from 3 streams: membership fees, Sport NI and British Orienteering funding and one-off grant income (e.g. lottery awards and Awards for All). In the past orienteering received a small but regular grant from the then Sports Council. Profits from NI Championships and events are kept by the organizing clubs as an incentive for staging them. These form an important part of their income, particularly for the smaller clubs with correspondingly low amounts of subscription and local event revenue.

8.2 NI Orienteering's cost model is one which seeks to promote affordable competitor costs and so encourage maximum participation. This cost model has ensured that NI Orienteering covers its annual operating costs - the sport is financially viable and has always lived within its means. However it has been found difficult to raise sufficient additional monies for capital investment. Accordingly, NI Orienteering has made a number of successful bids to various grants schemes over the last 10 years to obtain funds for investment in essential infrastructure: the production and maintenance of maps and the modernization of vital equipment for competition activity. NI Orienteering is currently unable to fund the level of investment needed to expand to its full potential without external assistance.

8.3 Unlike 'pitch' or 'court' based sports, orienteering has no fixed facilities. It needs to secure use of appropriate land (terrain), survey the terrain, update the map and then construct the event facilities for each event for which suitable equipment is also needed. These are unique, tangible costs not found in the majority of other sports and are significant to orienteering, given its current small size. Planning courses, organising events and controller oversight are all done by volunteers giving between them well over 100 hours of their time to a typical medium size event. Serious competitors also undertake significant travel to major events which are invariably in the South of Ireland, mainland UK or further afield in Europe.

8.4 It is an important part of this strategy that, even at our current state, event entry fees are kept low so as not to form a barrier to participation, particularly to the disadvantaged. Orienteering seeks to broaden participation from under-represented groups and therefore offers discounts on annual subscriptions and entry fees. Charges for introductory events and mid-week activities are held down to a level that covers only equipment and map printing costs so as to encourage newcomers and regular participants alike. There is little opportunity to generate income outside the staging of events with which to fund development. Orienteering is a participation not a spectator sport, so 'gate money' is not a funding option. The annual cost to a regular orienteer, including membership fees, entry fees, modest equipment purchase and travel

is measured in hundreds not tens of pounds, already too high for some. For the talented and dedicated costs are even higher, involving frequent travel to GB, throughout Ireland and further afield to major competitions. To increase participation income we must encourage more people to take part rather than charge more. In the longer term there may be other partnership funding opportunities but we are not currently in a position to develop that line.

8.5 Our aspiration to stage National level events, with their higher entry fees and increased numbers seeks to generate more income for clubs. Some of that will be diverted to the Association if it proves necessary, but the sums involved are small, in the low hundreds not thousands of pounds. Mapping costs cannot be recovered from a single event. Typically the map for this standard of event will cost in the region of £10 – 15k, with subsequent updating every 5 years a further £1 – 1.5k each time.

8.6 Taking advantage of Sport NI initiatives is therefore the primary source of developmental funding that underpins this strategy. At its current stage of development, NI Orienteering is not in a position to take the financial risk of employing staff to generate income. In time that may be an option to supplement Sport NI funding. To strengthen the case for such investment, it is essential that NI Orienteering proves to Sport NI that it is a high performing and fit for purpose Governing Body and therefore receives ‘reasonable’ assurance in any performance audit.

Membership

9.1 Overall membership levels have not changed markedly over the last few years, although the biggest club is getting bigger and the smaller clubs are shrinking slightly. While new members are not exclusively juniors from school, that is the biggest pool in which to fish and will be the starting point for RDO and coach activity. It is important, though, not to ignore potential adult recruits. The Active Community Programme should help us reach new adults, as will our continuing links to other adventure and running sports. Encouraging existing athletes to transfer their energies to orienteering will form an important part of our performance improvement plan. We have much to offer, particularly to talented athletes who, for whatever reason, feel that they are unlikely to achieve world class honours in their current sport.

District Councils

10.1 District Councils will become the main focus for central government delivery of sporting development. Under the Review of Public Administration, the number of District Councils is to reduce and the boundaries to change. As an interim, existing councils are forming consortia with those with whom they are to amalgamate in order to bid for Active Community and Capital Infrastructure funding. NI Orienteering will continue to form partnerships with consortia and councils to foster orienteering. In 2009, as boundaries become clear, a realignment of club areas with new District Councils will take place, to encourage closer relations and mutual support.

Schools

11.1 Although there is a rapidly increasing interest by schools and education authorities in orienteering as part of their curricula, activity is largely confined to school hours. Multi-school events in Armagh, Antrim, Omagh and Fermanagh each have attendances in the several hundreds, but there is little evidence of clubs being able to take advantage of the interest generated. Teaching staff no longer have the time to provide the critical adult link that forms the catalyst for transition to mainstream sport. Some volunteer engagement is there, but not enough to make a significant difference. The advent of community coaches, more RDO support and full time Business and Coaching Development Officers will provide the springboard to move from in-school to after-school orienteering.

11.2 Northern Ireland is effectively excluded from the activities of the British Schools Orienteering Association by dint of distance and the cost of travel. It is therefore the intention of this plan to form a NI Schools Association to encourage inter school orienteering. Sponsorship will be sought to fund, as an incentive to participate and win, leading NI school teams' participation in mainland GB competitions and championships. At the same time, potential links to schools orienteering in the Republic of Ireland will be explored, to the same end: lifting orienteering to a full sport status in participating schools.

SUPPORTING PAPERS

12.1 This plan will be supported by a Development Plan and, once it becomes clear that bids for Sport NI funding are successful, an Operating Plan.

RISKS

13.1 This Strategic Plan is deliberately ambitious, reflecting the opportunities currently available and the strong desire for major change to kick start expansion and improvement. This degree of ambition inevitably accepts some risk although mainly to the rate and nature of expansion rather than to core orienteering activity at club level. There are 3 main areas of risk:

- Failure to attract Sport NI funding at a level sufficient to enable the momentum for change to build and be sustained. This will be mitigated to some degree by the degree of consultation carried out in preparing the funding submission but is still a high risk with high impact. Reverting to the status quo pre bid remains a viable if less than optimum fall back.
- Inertia within the orienteering community and the Association membership could put at some risk the pace at which change can be achieved. Careful leadership together with a programme of club and membership briefing will mitigate the risk, as will the appointment of an Business Development Officer and increasing the support offered to clubs through more RDO time. This is a medium level risk with a medium level impact.
- There is risk to orienteering overall if we fail to achieve the level of volunteering necessary to deliver our sport at the same time as we try to modernise the way it is marketed, administered and funded. This is a low risk but medium level impact possibility. It will be mitigated by flexibility in the modernization timetable to allow it to

mature at a sustainable rate and by the injection of paid, full-time staff to relieve volunteers of Association level burdens.

SUMMARY

14.1 This plan forms the first stage of a coordinated set of plans and bids designed to take orienteering forward. Currently under-funded, orienteering has enormous potential to bring sport and physical activity to a wide audience with a relatively small injection of cash. The volunteer base is currently too small to deliver expansion at the rate that is possible today. Increased participation, enabled by professional development, coaching and administration will improve performance and enlarge the volunteer pool. The opportunity is here to kick start modernization and growth; NI Orienteering intends to seize it.

Philip Baxter
Chairman
31st October 2008