



# **Triathlon Scotland Performance Programme Review**

## **2019-2020**

## **Background/Approach**

### **Introduction**

This report provides information and background regarding an independent review carried out on the Triathlon Scotland performance programme and staff between November 2019 and February 2020.

### **Purpose**

The purpose was to review all aspects of the Triathlon Scotland performance programme and collectively evaluate the status, effectiveness, and progress in order to identify the future direction, needs and priorities.

### **Background**

The aim of the Triathlon Scotland Performance Pathway programmes (TSPP) is to develop Scottish athletes to their full potential who are capable of representing Great Britain and can go on to win medals at Commonwealth, Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The TSPP is aligned to the BTF Athlete Development Framework and provides a gateway to the British Triathlon World Class Performance Programme (WCPP).

The TSPP currently operates three squads below the WCPP: Development, Confirmation and Academy, the purpose of squads is to support athletes onto the WCPP and selection to Team Scotland for the Commonwealth Games.

The programme seeks to empower athletes through the provision of opportunities and experiences that add value. These are designed to support athletes in learning more about themselves and so developing as an individual whilst also being part of an identified training group. Membership of the programme is earned through both performances in races and by evidencing a commitment to your own development process.

Triathlon Scotland work in partnership with the University of Stirling to offer a centralised programme in Stirling and also support athletes who are based elsewhere in Scotland and the UK.

## **The Process**

The review process involved gathering feedback from a cross section of 25 people currently engaged in the performance programme with various roles and responsibilities.

The review looked at the vision, mission, and values of Triathlon Scotland. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the programme. As well as the enablers, people, profile, and places.

The review was carried out over an 11-week period in a systematic way engaging three groups of individuals: Triathlon staff (British Triathlon, Triathlon Scotland, University of Stirling), support services and athletes. Engagement was either face to face or over the telephone.

## **Common Themes (Triathlon Staff)**

The following themes and perceptions emerged following consultation and dialogue with Triathlon Staff including coaches and colleagues from Triathlon Scotland, British Triathlon and University of Stirling operating across the pathway.

The views expressed below are perceptions, views and opinions shared in confidence by participating staff and should be treated with caution and consideration.

### **Vision: To inspire great experiences through swim, bike and run**

The general feeling was that the vision of Triathlon Scotland was not as relevant within a performance environment, however, major events and positive results on the world stage do inspire and motivate others.

Standards within the programme are high with ambitions shifting from being the best in Scotland to be the best in Britain. Collaborative working with athletes not on Triathlon Scotland programmes and 'exit routes' were highlighted as areas that staff felt could be strengthened in the future.

Strengths of the programme were perceived to be the quality and positive experiences of performance camps and a generally feeling that Triathlon Scotland were 'going in the right direction'.

### **Mission: To enable our participants to discover, enjoy and achieve through taking part in our sport**

Similarly, the feeling was that the mission didn't quite align with Performance aims and objectives. More people are taking part in Triathlon as a sport however there has been a decrease in performance athletes, there was a belief that this should be looked at closely to better understand.

It was also felt that standards have slipped with aspiring athletes operating below development squads and that there needs to be a focus on the full pathway to ensure ongoing success. Specific examples of this included a belief that 'behaviours had taken prevalence' at this level.

The culture within the programme was generally described as positive and a belief that good people have created a good culture for athletes and students alike.

**Values:**      **We love people**      **We are ambitious**  
                    **We are inclusive**      **We do what's right**

It was felt by most that the values of Triathlon Scotland were being adhered to within the performance programme however the perception was that they may be 'less relevant' within a competitive performance environment.

There is a belief that the programme is intended to be inclusive, however, the staff acknowledged that coaches can make assumptions and that athletes were not always at the centre of planning. It was also flagged that whilst the programme was deemed inclusive there was an opportunity to mirror the para and able-bodied programmes and increase the opportunities for para athletes to compete within the sport.

It was unanimously agreed by all staff that Triathlon Scotland were people focused and strived to understand individual needs and expectations and that the organisation made the 'right' decisions rather than the easy decisions.

It was also strongly agreed by all that Triathlon Scotland were ambitious and set stretched aims and objectives aligned to the resources at their disposal.

### **Perceived Strengths**

- Quality of athletes within the national performance programme.
- Athlete support from organisations including Triathlon Scotland, University of Stirling, **sportscotland** institute of sport (SIS) and Winning Students.
- Operational planning.
- Natural environment and access to world-class facilities.
- Quality of the University of Stirling Performance Centre.
- Improved partnership with **sportscotland** institute of sport (SIS).
- Athletes are given the opportunity to select their own coach and training base and are fully supported in this process.
- Engagement of academy coaches/depth of academy coaches.

### **Potential areas for improvement**

- Lack of direction or goal within the programme.
- Lack of trust from within Triathlon Scotland, coaches and former athletes.
- Requirement for better support for remote athletes.

- Number of female and para-athletes on the programme is low.
- Confirmation squad requires more overlap with academy squads.
- Athletes have not transitioned onto the international stage.
- Lack of a long-term strategy. No long-term athlete development plans.
- Poor collaboration between coaches.
- Issues with coach development and coach interactions.

## **Perceived Opportunities**

The quality of the athletes was consistently highlighted as an opportunity as well as the exposure to supported races and training camps. **sportscotland** SiS and coaching support was also commonly highlighted.

There are also opportunities to increase collaboration across UK programmes to pull or combine resources with centres such as Loughborough and Leeds.

Other opportunities included an appetite to empower clubs to identify talent and future potential athletes for the Triathlon Scotland programme.

It was also acknowledged for these opportunities to become reality there needed to be an athlete first approach implemented within the sport and organisation with all staff coming together working towards a common goal.

## **Perceived Threats**

Other providers providing similar services, threats to funding/resources, and the relationship between some existing coaches were all highlighted as potential threats to the programme.

The wellbeing of athletes (including injury/illness), world-class athletes opting out the programme, a lack of clarity around the benefits and impact of the programme were also highlighted as threats.

A shift in strategic direction at The University of Stirling is also a potential threat if the programme does not attract students in the longer term.

## **Places**

Facilities in Stirling are excellent. Triathlon Scotland does not support remote coaches but still claim responsibility for their successes.

There is a need to capitalise more on the success. There are good athletes within the centre, although there is a need to address and be clear on the support to athletes based outside the centralised programme in Stirling. Lochgelly facility has been superb, there is a need to better coordinate usage and forward plan.

There is a challenge around increasing facilities costs.

Semi centralised model, Stirling has exceptional facilities. However, out with Stirling, Glasgow is OK but doesn't have all the facilities required for performance athletes.

## **Profile**

The landscape of Triathlon in Scotland has changed however Triathlon Scotland has not changed or adapted in line. There is a frustration regarding a perceived lack of change following previous reviews.

Profiling of athletes could be better, particularly around elite performance's, but it is acknowledged that we (collectively) are getting better at telling the story. An improvement in athlete personal profiles could and should help attract sponsorship.

There is an 'inaccurate' perception that everything happens in Stirling, which is not the case. There is a need to further develop the relationship with Scottish Swimming to identify and work with what was described as 'triathlon friendly' clubs.

Senior racing is a real positive and has increased access to European Cup competition.

Some staff commented that there was 'No identity' and that athletes have no trust in Triathlon Scotland and there was no team ethos.

It was also highlighted that the perception in Scotland of the Triathlon Scotland Performance Programme (TSPP) is split, athletes' opinions are mixed, clubs have a historical negative view. However, overall, it is regarded as a robust programme that produces good talent. Nationally it is well regarded.

Athletes want to attend the University of Stirling because of the programme, which is seen as progress and the general opinion was that the programme was seen positively across the UK.

## **Common Themes (Support Services)**

The views expressed below are perceptions, views and opinions shared in confidence by participating support services and should be treated with caution and consideration.

### **Vision: To inspire great experiences through swim, bike and run**

It was acknowledged that linking the Triathlon Scotland organisational vision directly to performance objectives was difficult and, in some cases, irrelevant. A secondary performance specific objective was more appropriate, which is currently in place.

It was agreed that the athletes enjoy training in excellent facilities both in Stirling and around Scotland, ensuring that 'great experiences' were being created.

**Mission: To enable our participants to discover, enjoy and achieve through taking part in our sport**

It was perceived as being difficult to link the mission directly with the performance programme. It was believed that the intention is right, however, it was not always referred to in a performance context.

**Values:**      **We love people**      **We are ambitious**  
                    **We are inclusive**      **We do what's right**

Generally, it was felt that the performance programme does align to the organisation's values. It was felt that Triathlon Scotland is understanding of personal circumstances and have created a positive environment for support staff.

Triathlon Scotland is seen to be inclusive and that its values are implicit rather than mandatory. The current meeting structure and regular communication were identified as contributors to an inclusive approach with all disciplines, however, there is a challenge in that the national coach does not have the remit to cover all athletes.

### **Perceived Strengths**

- Both the quality and accessibility of the facilities utilised within the programme were deemed real strengths.
- The standard of the athletes and training partners on the programme was also identified.
- The collaborative partnership between SiS and Triathlon Scotland was also a strength which has been developing over a significant period (5+ years).
- The experience, passion and direction of the Performance Director was also believed to be a key factor in the current success of the programme.
- The structure of the programme was also perceived as a strength, however, there was a degree of uncertainty around the intention.
- Some deemed the existing model as 'semi-centralised' with others referring to a 'fully centralised' programme. The athlete-centred approach was key.

### **Potential areas for improvement**

- Planning and organisation were consistently identified as was the challenge of athletes knowing where they would get race starts (due to how international race starts work) in order to allow enough time to plan.
- Specific situations such as altitude training, planning visits etc should take place 12-24 months in advance, which does not currently happen.
- A lack of clarity of role and function of the coaching team was also identified as a weakness by the support staff, furthermore the coaching structure was described as 'fragmented'.
- The authority and level of delegation over individual coaches in the structure is also unclear and causes friction.
- It is not the programme of choice for the athletes, with some using the programme as a 'buffet', to pick and choose what they engage in.

### **Perceived opportunities**

A high level of training/competitions in excellent training environments currently exists. Athletes work directly with support staff on a regular basis. The key people within the structure are open to new ideas and being two years out from Birmingham 2020 allows time to implement any identified improvements to the current structure.

### **Perceived threats**

The current coaching set up is perceived to be the biggest threat to the performance programme. There is a lack of succession planning for national and centre coach posts. There is a view that Triathlon Scotland is not received well by coaching groups, academy coaches and the next generation of coaches. One respondent said: 'Without the right lead coach, they will not attract the athletes to the centre!'

The coaching structure has been fragmenting further, with coaches moving away and taking athletes with them.

Winning Students investment being redirected or University of Stirling changing strategy around coaching/facilities were also identified as a threat.

Missing Birmingham medal target was also mentioned by some staff.

### **Common Themes (Athletes)**

The views expressed below are perceptions, views and opinions shared in confidence by participating support services and should be treated with caution and consideration.

#### **Vision: To inspire great experiences through swim, bike and run**

There was a feeling of being involved in events, helping to inspire younger athletes.



There was agreement that the programme creates 'good experiences', athletes get on well together, with lots of support from Triathlon Scotland and SiS. Good coaching input however this also causes frustration with different programmes from national coach and centre coach.

**Mission: To enable our participants to discover, enjoy and achieve through taking part in our sport**

Athletes could relate to the mission and agreed that was what they experienced; however they were unsure if that was because of Triathlon Scotland.

There is a good to mix with experienced athletes, camps provide different and invaluable experiences.

**Values:**      **We love people**      **We are ambitious**  
                    **We are inclusive**      **We do what's right**

There was agreement that the values are adhered to. One athlete said: 'as a disability athlete I am treated the same as able bodied athletes.'

Triathlon Scotland could potentially do more at club level to ensure values are implemented. There was also a feeling that Triathlon Scotland could be more ambitious.

Generally, Triathlon Scotland do what's right but could be more transparent with decision making. More clarity is required to prevent spread of rumours and athletes should be better informed. Communication needs improving.

### **Perceived strengths**

- There is a close working relationship with SIS and good collaboration with British Triathlon at Loughborough.
- Having athletes in the same location is deemed hugely beneficial and access to SIS is very valuable.
- Facilities are excellent.
- Support lower down the pathway is excellent including at academy and confirmation squad level.
- Good preparation exists for squads.

### **Potential areas for improvement**

- The depth of female squad and the diversity of squads was highlighted. Collaborative working between Triathlon Scotland and University of Stirling regarding squads, clarity of roles, messaging etc.

- Communication, feedback from athletes is not listened too. Negative feedback is not actioned. Lack of cohesiveness between coaches.

### **Perceived opportunities**

Availability of swimming lane space at the University of Stirling as well as access to the SIS were highlighted as positives. Training camps, heat preparation etc as well as supported races, coach support and training with other athletes were also mentioned.

### **Perceived Threats**

Funding in general was perceived as a threat. Fragmentation of the coaching structure. 'The National coach is blunt but doesn't think he's listened to'. The partnership between Triathlon Scotland and the University of Stirling should be looked at, to ensure better use of support services etc.

### **Recommendations**

- Triathlon Scotland should review and clearly articulate the structure of the performance programme to the membership, athletes and support staff, in order to eradicate inconsistencies regarding the model. (Semi-centralised v centralised model).
- Triathlon Scotland should clearly define the structure, roles and responsibilities, level of delegation and authority/autonomy within the coaching structure and clearly articulate the connectivity between the performance programme coaching team and club/independent coaches.
- Triathlon Scotland should foster an open, transparent relationship with athletes regarding decision making and explore opportunities to include athlete representation in the process. Decision making processes should be clear and visible to athletes, understood and agreed by all where possible.
- Whilst the quality and accessibility of the facilities within the programme are described as 'excellent', the partnership with the University of Stirling should be reviewed in order to maximise support services and ensure that as many athletes as possible have access to the right support and avoid duplication.
- Triathlon Scotland should review and refresh their approach regarding athlete data and profiling to accelerate athlete development.
- Triathlon Scotland should play a leadership role in the development of coaches within the sport and should influence/collaborate with independent coaches that operate outwith the programme.
- Triathlon Scotland should review the talent pathway within the sport, focusing on the transitioning phases between programmes in order to maximise the number of athletes progressing from academy programmes to the international stage.
- Triathlon Scotland should create an ambitious, long term performance strategy that aligns to the overall strategic direction of the organisation. . Clearly

articulating the aims, objectives and expectations of the programme. Aligned to a sustainable staff structure to deliver the strategy.

- The Triathlon Scotland Coaches Code of Conduct should be reviewed and communicated in order to ensure the workforce know and agree to the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the SGB.
- Exit routes should be reviewed to ensure deselected athletes are valued, supported and retained within the sport.