



| A NEW VISION FOR | TRACK AND FIELD



Why do we need a new vision for track and field?

We are seeing a negative trend in participation in track and field among teenagers. We know that there are issues around volunteer capacity in some parts of the United Kingdom, and we also know that there are some fantastic clubs, coaches and competitions that buck the overall trend.

In many places across the UK there is some excellent practice being delivered by those working to provide our sport, but it is not systemic and in general track and field participation amongst our youngest athletes is concerning on a downwards trajectory.

However, the participation statistics and the young people who participated in the research have told us that:

- » **Participation Decline:** Fewer 13–19 year-olds are engaging with track and field, with many lapsing or never starting.
- Barriers to participation include:
 - » **Awareness:** Many don't know how to get involved or feel athletics is only for the 'talented'.
 - » **Perceptions:** Seen as overly competitive and less fun or social than other sports.
 - » **Accessibility:** Costs, travel, and unclear competition pathways limit participation.
 - » **Inclusion:** Clubs and coaching experiences can feel inconsistent or unwelcoming.
 - » **Changing demographics:** New audience needs and expectations aren't fully addressed.

Research and Insight

To find out more about the **qualitative** research, [click here](#)

To find out more about the **quantitative** research, [click here](#)

Name	Background
Steve Cram (Co Chair)	Broadcaster, Event Promoter, Coach and World Champion.
Steve Smith (Co Chair)	Founder of Raise the Bar; World and Olympic High Jump medallist
Christine Ohuruogu	Olympic and World Champion; Youth advocate
Tammy Oshinowo	Member of the Scottish Athletics Young People's Forum; current athlete
Louise Gear	Loughborough University Director of Sport; Former International Netball player and Head of Development at the Football Association
Nick Pearson	CEO Forte Talent Group; Chair, WSEH AC; Former CEO parkrun; former junior international athlete
Abi Ekoku	Former Chair of the Rugby League Players Association; Former CEO Bradford Bulls; Former International discus thrower and professional rugby league player
Gary Laybourne	CEO Coach Core Foundation; Youth Coach, South London Harriers
TJ Ossei	Founder Be Fit Today Track Academy

The group's purpose was:

- To start to develop a vision for the future of track and field competition in the UK that excites, engages, develops and retains young people in the sport.
- To utilise previous and recent research alongside group members' experience and knowledge, to set out the **key principles** behind an informed and ambitious vision for the future of track and field competition in the UK.
- To consider the impact of the findings on competition, focusing on athlete experience, formats of competition and its underlying structure.
- Provide a series of recommendations that require implementation to deliver on that vision for competition.

Our Guiding Principles

These six principles underpin the vision and should be adopted to guide delivery, design, partner collaboration and communication:

1 | Inclusive and Accessible for All

2 | Wellbeing and Personal Growth First

3 | Flexible and Responsive Formats

4 | Social Connection and Belonging

5 | Youth Voice and Ownership

6 | One Team: Joined-Up Delivery

Our Vision

The Vision Group identified 5 key elements that, combined, lay out a vision for track and field, which together make up the whole.

The group considered that to make track and field more accessible, inclusive and flexible and to meet the needs of young people, the vision needed to address the way that the sport is structured and delivered to create environments most conducive for an improved athlete experience across participation and competition (Vision Element 1), and to start to shift the culture of the sport to focus more on the development of young people first and foremost (across all levels of ability, interest and engagement, Vision Element 2).

However, the group recognises that the UK is a diverse country, with geographical, demographic and other differences between its different parts. So, the way in which the vision might be realised in Scotland, Wales and England may vary.

Likewise, there will undoubtedly be differences in the way in which the elements combine in the North East or South West of England compared to some of the urban centres in the West Midlands, North West or London.



Vision Element 1

Local and Regional Collaboration: New Athletics Hubs

Transforming the participation landscape into inclusive, high-quality clusters of activity with local reach and national impact.

The Case for Change

Young people value flexibility, social interaction, and lifestyle fit. Clusters of local clubs, who alone may operate with limited capacity, narrow access points, and over-reliance on individual volunteers, would allow for shared technical expertise, learning opportunities and competition.

Vision

We reshape the club landscape by creating and supporting the development of new local and regional hubs, each of which provides a new focus for coaching, competition, education and wider participation activity. These hubs should be well-resourced with professional staff, inclusive programmes, strong school and community links, and commercial capability, supporting both recreational and performance-focused athletes, driving competition innovation and a positive culture. Clubs would be at the heart of these hubs, retaining their individual identities at their own locations while pooling resources and playing an active role in the development of the sport at a regional level.

Hubs would therefore be a new mechanism through which competition, education, partnerships and, where relevant, coaching across event groups can be delivered, with a flexible approach to collaboration across different parts of the UK and a focal point for schools engagement.

How it might work

A hub can be both a physical space, centred around a specific facility, as well as a virtual space for stronger collaboration. This is NOT about funneling resource into the chosen few. It's about sharing resources and working together to grow and develop the sport.

Consortia of clubs will work together with institutions outside of the sport, such as universities, local authorities or commercial partners (or any combination) to create a hub focused on excellence in participation, ensuring:

- Shared technical expertise
- Collaborative competition delivery
- Communal coaches and officials education

Athletics as a sport becomes the key driver for hub facilities, but collaboration with other sports will be key, as will developing a financial model for these public/private partnerships to work to.

The hub will ensure that all events are developed for the benefit of all hub partner clubs.

Competition Culture

Prioritisation of flexible, inclusive, and progressive competition formats that reflect young people's lives and motivations.

The Case for Change

Young people want competition formats that are flexible, that can fit in with other sports and activities and that don't take up large amounts of time with delivery or travel. They want competitions that are appropriate for their age and stage of development and that take place in facilities fit for purpose.

Vision

A flexible competition ecosystem that offers local, fun, inclusive experiences alongside clear development pathways for all, including talented athletes. Tiered short-form, and youth-designed formats that foster both progression and enjoyment, delivered via regional hubs at well-supported, technologically-enabled and properly maintained facilities.

How it might work

With the vision of regional hubs realised, there will be new homes for local and regional competitions, taking place at technologically-enabled venues. Delivery will be co-ordinated at hub level supported by all hub clubs, underpinned by a national competition framework linked to licencing and funding.

At participation level, the hub will create a local calendar of athlete-centred meetings, bringing in external event delivery expertise to provide formats and high quality experiences that young athletes want.

Virtual club leaderboards will be created to maintain team elements.

“Clubs would be at the heart of these hubs, retaining their individual identities while pooling resources and playing an active role in the development of the sport at a regional level.”



Blended and Digital Pathways

Harnessing technology to complement in-person participation, track progress, and increase accessibility.

The Case for Change

Teen sport is increasingly self-directed and digitally influenced. Many now prefer flexible, hybrid models they can engage with independently, especially when balancing studies, social lives, or anxiety about in-person events. Perception of sport is highly influenced by visibility on digital platforms.

Vision

Introduce a **blended model** where in-person experiences are supported by digital tools. Technology supports marketing, engagement, progress tracking, and competition participation – all on young people's terms. A well-developed and supported digital community that supports positive real-life experiences.





Wellbeing and belonging at the core

Repositioning the wider perception of athletics as being grounded in belonging, identity, supporting good mental health and long-term engagement — not just performance.

The Case for Change

The research clearly shows that **pressure to perform, unsupportive cultures, and poor mental health support** are major reasons young people leave athletics and many lapsed athletes report that they still enjoy the sport but can't cope with its emotional or time demands.

Vision

A culture shift from one focused on talent and competition to one that prioritises **belonging, personal growth, and wellbeing**. Even the most talented athletes tell us that it is the social connections and sense of community that keep them engaged with the sport. Reinforcement of the reality that clubs should be safe, welcoming environments that meet young people where they are — emotionally and developmentally.



Athletics as the Foundation of All Sports

Embedding run, jump, and throw skills into the wider sporting ecosystem as the entry point for every young athlete and recognising that athletes can and should be participating in other sports.

The Case for Change

Athletics is often seen as “only for the talented” — yet its core skills underpin every sport. Young people involved in football, netball, and rugby report little exposure to athletics beyond primary school sports days. Many athletes report being discouraged from participating in other sports or being accused of “using” athletics to improve their performances in other sports.

Vision

For everyone to recognise athletics as a **universal movement** skillset, with every teen, regardless of their main sport or starting point, benefitting from exposure to athletics and being welcomed into the sport without pressure to specialise. For more partnerships across sports, so that those participating in other activities can benefit from what athletics has to offer.

Next Steps

Interested in supporting the further development of this vision? Want to understand the rationale for change and how these elements might be brought to life? We will be holding a series of webinars where Vision Group members will explain more.

Express interest here:

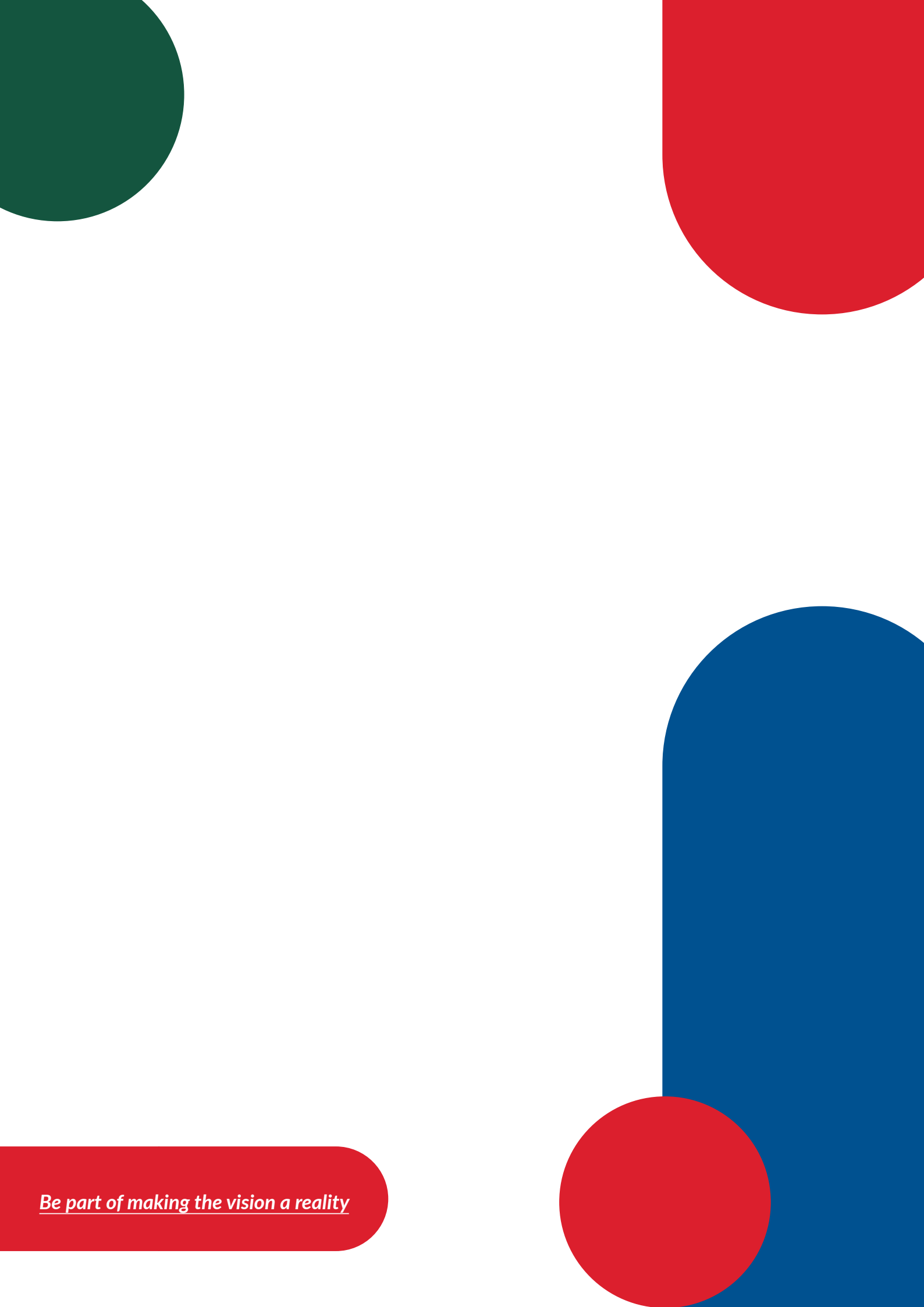
From there we will be asking clubs, coaches, competition providers and anyone else with an interest in making these vision elements a reality to make a commitment to developing this vision further and adopting these principles. You can do that by [clicking here](#)

In practice that will mean:

- Committing to following the principles and demonstrating how this will be achieved.
- Committing to working with other organisations to consider where change might be needed.
- Committing to developing and piloting new approaches to track and field provision.

This will involve collaborating via regional and national implementation groups and pilots and working together with young people, who are vitally important in continuing to shape the next steps.





Be part of making the vision a reality