Hockey Matters

Ulster Hockey Strategy 2017-2021
Section One – Introduction

Hockey in Ulster

Hockey is an exciting, dynamic game, open to all ages and abilities. Hockey has many qualities; it is played by men, women and children who have developed a love of the game, of scoring a goal, of saving a shot, of the friendship that comes with being part of a team and the sense of belonging from being a member of a club. Participation in hockey provides many benefits to individuals, supporting physical and mental health, providing educational benefits and the opportunity to learn and develop new skills as well as important attributes such as teamwork and fair play. Our members of all ages give a lot back to their local communities and the sport, undertaking voluntary roles in coaching, umpiring, mentoring, tutoring, administering and governing the game.

Ulster Hockey is a regional organisation that is responsible for the governance, administration, development and delivery of hockey within Ulster. This new Strategy aims to further develop the structures we have put in place since our formation in 2009, so that we can continue to develop hockey from grassroots to performance level. On and off the pitch, Ulster Hockey continues to demonstrate ambition and a desire to improve all aspects of our sport including playing, coaching, umpiring, administration and governance. However, in order to achieve the aims and objectives contained within this new plan we need the support of central and local government agencies, the private sector, other provincial organisations, Hockey Ireland and everyone involved in hockey within Ulster, to assist us in pushing the boundaries and growing our sport over the next four year period and beyond.

The Plan

This Strategic Plan outlines our aspirations for hockey in Ulster and explains how we will work towards our vision over the next four years. It sets out how we intend to build a more sustainable and exciting future for our sport, motivating and providing more opportunities for more people to get and stay involved. We want hockey to grow in participation numbers, improve its infrastructure, succeed at performance level, and be recognised for demonstrating excellence in governance.

We recognise the targets outlined in this plan are ambitious. However, after significant consultation while developing the plan, we are setting our targets safe in the knowledge that they are what our membership and stakeholders require. We recognise that in order to achieve our targets, we will have to improve every aspect of our performance. We also accept that attaining all the targets outlined in this plan may not be achievable. However, by striving to achieve them we will stretch ourselves and lay a much stronger foundation for our long-term success.

The delivery of this plan will also require increased investment in both financial resources and people. In the event that we are not able to obtain increased investment during the term of the plan we will have to review and potentially revise our targets, re-assess the priority of our key programmes and explore new ways to deliver.
The Process

Ulster Hockey carried out an internal review on achievements against the organisation’s Strategic Plan (2013-2017), which was also supported by the review of Sport NI’s Performance Focus programme. This process enabled Ulster Hockey to critically assess current operations against the targets and objectives outlined in that plan and identify areas requiring further progress.

Ulster Hockey also embarked on a number of consultation events with stakeholders during March and April 2016. These events ensured that stakeholders had the opportunity provide feedback to us on a wide range of topics and to shape the future direction of their sport. The events held in Coleraine, Omagh, Banbridge and Belfast (x2) involved consultation in the following areas of work:

- Participation Development
- Club Development
- Talent Identification and Development
- Coaching
- Umpire Development

An online consultation process was also carried out to provide additional opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback and engage in the consultation process, as well as a series of meetings with key delivery partners during the past year. Key findings and recommendations from the consultation events have been used to build on the progress of the last four year plan and shape the new Plan for 2017-2021.

We are confident that the new Plan can drive the work of Ulster Hockey over the next four year period and galvanise the support and involvement of all stakeholders as we work together to achieve the ambitious targets and objectives contained within the new Plan.

In conclusion, this Strategic Plan has been thoroughly researched and our key stakeholders have had a significant input to the whole process through transparent and inclusive consultation. We now need to focus on implementation and achieving the ambitious targets within the Plan. We will continue to work closely with our key stakeholders and partners to ensure that we have the right people, volunteers and executives, in place to drive and deliver the priorities outlined in this document.
Section Two – The Future

Our Vision

Our vision is to “Inspire an active hockey family”

Hockey has many qualities. It is an exciting, dynamic game that is open to all ages and abilities. Through this plan we want to inspire more people to get involved in hockey and more people to stay involved in all aspects of the game.

Strategic Priorities

We consider that the following 6 strategic priorities are critical to realising our Vision and ambitions:

1. GROWING OUR GAME – “More people, more hockey, more fun”

2. STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES – “Supporting our local communities to provide quality hockey experiences for all”

3. INSPIRING OUR FUTURE WINNERS – “Providing the best talent development experiences to recruit and develop exceptional young hockey players”

4. SUPPORTING OUR CURRENT WINNERS - “Supporting the best to become better and achieve at elite level”

5. RAISING OUR PROFILE – “Reaching and connecting further to grow the hockey family”

6. LEADING OUR SPORT – “Displaying strong leadership that will make best practice common practice”.

In implementing these strategic priorities we will develop an annual operational plan which outlines the targets, roles and responsibilities for delivery.
Section Three – Strategy Framework

**STRATEGIES**

Growing our Game

Strengthening our Communities

Inspiring our future Winners

Supporting our current Winners

Raising our Profile

Leading our Sport

**OBJECTIVES**

GROW

More people, more hockey, more fun

EXPERIENCE

Supporting our local communities to provide quality hockey experiences for all

INSPIRE

Providing the best talent development experiences to recruit and develop exceptional young hockey players

WIN

Supporting the best to become better and achieve at elite level

REACH

Reaching and connecting further to grow the hockey family

LEAD

Displaying strong leadership that will make best practice common practice

**KPI’s**

- Number of Participants (players)
- Number of volunteers (Administrator, coach, umpire)
- Number of affiliated schools
- Number of affiliated Clubs
- Strong Competition Structure/programme
- Facilities and infrastructure
- Number of Accredited Clubs
- Number of volunteers (Administrator, coach, umpire)
- Strong talent id and development pathway
- Number and quality of Talent programme coaches
- Achievements of Ulster Teams
- Number of Ulster players on JAG international teams
- Number of NI athletes on National Squads
- Clearly aligned HP Strategy for hockey
- Regional Academy for future elite performers
- Provision of elite support services
- Strengthen Ulster Hockey Brand
- Improved marketing and promotion of our game
- Higher quality hockey events (spectator numbers)
- Improved internal and external communications
- Strong and stable organisation
- Compliant with Code of good governance standards
- Improved engagement with hockey family
- Improved internal and external communications

“Inspire an active hockey family”
Section Four – Strategic Themes

1. GROWING OUR GAME

“More people, more hockey, more fun”

To achieve this we will require the input of everyone involved in our sport to enable hockey to be more accessible to more people. We will provide increased formal and informal playing opportunities for young people and adults in order to grow our game, improve its popularity and ensure a vibrant future for hockey in Ulster.

We will GROW OUR GAME through:

a. Schools

We will increase the number of young people regularly playing hockey in schools by:

- Developing partnerships with more schools to increase the number of schools participating in Ulster Hockey programmes
- Working with our affiliated schools to increase the number of people participating in schools hockey
- Developing partnerships with non-affiliated schools to introduce the game to new communities and increase the number of people participating in hockey
- Reviewing and enhancing the participation and competition structure for schools across Ulster to deliver quality competitions that meet the needs of players, schools and clubs
- Implementing a hockey coach development programme for Teachers to improve the quality of delivery in schools and support sustainability of our game
- Implementing an umpire development programme for Teachers to increase their understanding of hockey and improve quality of delivery
- Implementing a young umpires development programme for school pupils to encourage more young people to get involved and stay involved in umpiring
- Developing improved relationships between schools and clubs to ensure more young people get involved and stay involved in our game
- Providing appropriate tools and guidance to schools to support them to recruit, develop and retain volunteers to support the ongoing delivery of hockey
b. Clubs

Youth Hockey
We will increase the number of young people regularly playing hockey in clubs by:

- Employing a Youth Development Officer to oversee the structural implementation of our youth hockey programmes (junior clubs)
- Through ongoing consultation with clubs, reviewing the participation and competition structure for youth hockey across Ulster to deliver quality competitions that meet the needs of players, schools and clubs
- Implementing a coach development programme for youth hockey coaches and volunteers to improve the quality of hockey delivery in clubs
- Implementing a young umpires development programme to encourage more young people to get involved and stay involved in umpiring
- Developing new outreach hockey initiatives in new communities to expand the game of hockey to new areas
- Providing appropriate tools and guidance to junior clubs to support them to recruit and retain volunteers to support the ongoing delivery of hockey

Adult Hockey
We will increase the number of adults regularly playing hockey in clubs by:

- Working with key partners to deliver quality playing experiences and clear pathways to club hockey
- Delivering the highest quality playing experience and appropriate playing and competition structures for adult clubs
- Developing and delivering more opportunities for veterans and masters hockey, in conjunction with clubs
- Introducing new adult hockey programmes (e.g. social hockey, pick up hockey and mixed-hockey), in conjunction with clubs during the summer period, to encourage more adults to get involved and support the retention of adults in the game
- Implementing a coach development programme specifically for adult hockey coaches to improve the quality of hockey delivery in clubs
- Providing appropriate tools and guidance to adult clubs to support them to recruit and retain volunteers to support the ongoing delivery of hockey in their organisation
- Carrying out a review of the domestic competition structures to ensure we deliver quality competitions that meet the needs of all players, schools and clubs
2. STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES

“Supporting our local communities to provide quality hockey experiences for all”

If we are going to improve the player and volunteer experience so that they stay involved in our sport for longer, we must strengthen key aspects of infrastructure across the whole sport.

Schools and Clubs are an integral part of hockey and play an extremely important role in attracting, developing and retaining players within our sport. Therefore, supporting our schools and clubs to attract and retain participants forms an important part of Ulster Hockey’s strategic priorities for the next four years. By building their capacity we will enhance the player and volunteer experience and provide quality hockey experiences for all involved in our sport.

The volunteer workforce of coaches, officials and administrators also requires investment and support. By engaging more volunteers, improving standards across the system and recognising the contribution people make to our sport we will establish stronger, sustainable systems that will provide long term benefits to the sport and those involved.

Facilities are also a crucial element of our infrastructure and are integral to growing the game. A co-ordinated approach to retaining and enhancing current facilities, as well as developing new facilities, is required. Engaging with key partners is essential for this. We will develop and implement specific strategies for strengthening our communities, improving our facilities and growing our volunteers across the whole sport.

We will STRENGTHEN OUR COMMUNITIES by:

- Supporting schools by establishing a schools “accreditation” programme (with relevant tiers) designed to improve school club links for player participation, development and retention
- Supporting clubs by reviewing and enhancing our club accreditation scheme (with relevant tiers) to build capacity and improve standards across all clubs
- Supporting the development of Umpires and Officials by establishing an umpire and officials development pathway to improve the quality and quantity of these roles at all levels of the domestic game (schools and clubs)
- Developing and delivering a coaching development strategy that increases the quality and quantity of coaches at all levels of the game, but more importantly engages coaches to progress along a coaching development pathway through the provision of continuous learning opportunities.
- Providing appropriate tools and guidance to schools and clubs to support them to recruit and retain volunteers who will support improved quality of hockey delivery in their organisation
- Developing a facilities strategy for Ulster Hockey which aims to support clubs and schools to protect existing facilities, as well as secure new opportunities for new facilities where a demand / need exists. This will involve working closely with key partners to secure potential future investment.
3. INSPIRING OUR FUTURE WINNERS

“Providing the best talent development experiences to recruit and develop exceptional young hockey players”

Ulster Hockey has a successful history in the area of talent identification and development. Achievement is reflected in the high percentage of Ulster players involved in the senior international programmes of Ireland and Great Britain, as well as the competitiveness, and success, of Ulster performance teams when playing against both interprovincial and international teams.

The last four year cycle focused on broadening our approach to the identification and development of talent beyond our structure at U15 level. Talent search programmes at U11 and U13 levels and a wide range of talent camps in specific geographical areas, were successfully introduced. We have been well served through partnership working in various areas across Northern Ireland. These programmes have improved our visibility and have resulted in a province wide coordinated approach to identifying, capturing and nurturing talent at levels below U15.

The introduction of a full-time Talent System Coach into the staffing of Ulster Hockey has enabled an increased focus on the development of players whose talent is in the process of being confirmed. Much of the focus of this role has been to work specifically with leading under age players either individually, in small groups, or in performance squads.

Over the next 4 years we aim to retain, refine and enhance the core elements of the player pathway system. We will also ensure greater alignment of our talent system to national programmes, thereby providing clearer pathways for our talented athletes to progress and achieve their full potential.

We will INSPIRE OUR FUTURE WINNERS by:

- Reviewing and refining our talent identification and development system (programmes) to continue to engage players and coaches within the system.
- Producing and implementing an effective talent coach development plan that serves the needs of the talent and participation development strategies.
- Continuing to provide opportunities for Ulster teams to gain competitive opportunities against appropriate opposition, in addition to Hockey Ireland interprovincial competitions.
- Carrying out a review of the current interprovincial competitions (with all Provinces) and implementing changes that will enhance the competitive interprovincial structures at all age groups (U16 – Seniors).
4. SUPPORTING OUR CURRENT WINNERS

“Supporting the best to become better and achieve at elite level”

Ulster has a strong track record of supporting the development of elite hockey players who have excelled on the international stage for both Ireland and Great Britain. In the 2016 Rio Olympic Games 13 Ulster athletes were involved in Ireland and GB squads. This is testament to the excellent talent identification and development programmes in operation as well as the support services and high performance systems that have evolved. During the past number of years hockey in Ireland has progressed and grown from a nation that was almost there, to a nation that is consistently performing against the top countries and in major tournaments around the globe.

2015 saw Hockey Ireland flourish on the world stage both on the men’s and women’s side. The women won a World League 2 title and fell just short in World League 3 to secure a place in Rio 2016, after a shootout in the quarter final. Nine Ulster athletes were involved in the Ireland women’s team during the year. The men’s programme had its most successful year ever, winning a World League 2 title and finishing 5th in World League 3 achieving an Olympic berth for the first time since 1908. This was topped off by winning a first medal in the European Championships beating World number 4 England in the bronze medal match. Eighteen Ulster athletes were involved in the men’s programme during that year.

Ulster Hockey will continue to support all of our athletes to achieve at elite level regardless of the international pathway they choose.

We will SUPPORT OUR CURRENT WINNERS through:

High Performance Leadership

- Working with the Hockey Ireland High Performance Director to ensure alignment between national and provincial programmes for player and coach development.
- Clarifying and agreeing national and provincial roles and responsibilities.

High Performance Pathway

- Work with the Hockey Ireland Performance Director to ensure an aligned player pathway for the national and provincial programmes, including junior age group (JAG) programmes.
- Explore the development of a regional “futures” academy structure delivering the qualitative and quantitative player needs of the international game.
- To establish an aligned talent identification process to maximise recruitment of all potential talent
- To support, where required and when within Ulster Hockey’s remit, high performance players from Ulster.
5. RAISING OUR PROFILE

“Reach and connect further to grow the hockey family”

Raising the profile of hockey will require hard work and a co-ordinated approach if we are to achieve greater awareness of our game at all levels. Key partnerships are crucial to the long-term success of this area of the business. Elevating the profile of hockey through good branding, rewarding sponsorship, engaging social media content and media coverage is only the beginning. It is ever more important to ensure we convert the benefits of this work into a legacy of consistent support and growth beyond a single event or activity.

Gaining recognition and increased awareness at club level is even more difficult to achieve. Clubs rely on the good nature of volunteers and supporters who have grown with a club – more often passed down through generations. However, the stakeholders within our sport – from elite athletes, teams and coaches, through to the board members, investors and sponsors – have the ability, and responsibility to work together to build the best relationships that will benefit hockey at all levels.

We will RAISE OUR PROFILE by:

- Marketing the game by developing initiatives and campaigns to greatly increase general awareness of all levels of the game throughout Ulster, utilising a range of media platforms and partnerships
- Delivering higher quality domestic hockey events that seek to raise the profile of the sport, increase spectator numbers and improve brand awareness
- Developing and delivering higher quality marketing and communications to engage media and new audiences
- Improve our internal communications to ensure more efficient and effective delivery of programmes and activities at all levels of the game.
6. LEADING OUR SPORT

“Display strong leadership that will make best practice common practice”

How Hockey is governed will have a major impact on our future success. Since the formation of Ulster Hockey in 2009, our governance model has changed due to the ever changing environment, changing needs of the organisation and of the game. We must continue to assess our strengths and weaknesses, identify improvements and ensure Ulster Hockey has a best practice leadership model.

Sustainable ‘best practice’ governance will, amongst other things, facilitate adequate succession planning, identifying expertise within our structures and ensuring this expertise is put to best use in the continued development of our game.

Ulster Hockey is a business and we must ensure we develop modern and progressive governance and management structures to reflect best business practice. In leading our sport we will continue to develop our governance to ensure we achieve our ambition and a more successful future.

We will LEAD OUR SPORT by:

- Maintaining the highest standards of governance, running all operations with transparency and accountability
- Identifying and developing successors for key roles within Ulster Hockey to ensure long term and sustainable progress
- Establishing policy in key areas and working in partnership with key stakeholders to ensure capacity building for effective implementation
- Identifying, adopting and sharing best practice from within and outside of hockey
- Becoming recognised as a leading governing body internally within the sport of hockey (by other Provinces & Hockey Ireland) as well as externally by other Governing Bodies of Sport (local and national)
- Listening to our members by -
  - Expanding our school and club engagement programme to increase value for membership/affiliation (more forums and engagement opportunities delivering more value for money)
  - Building stronger relationships with players by providing enhanced opportunities to participate in hockey (affiliation programme for players to become direct members of Ulster Hockey)
  - Improving our communication mechanisms whereby our engagement with our stakeholders is regionalised and occurs more frequently.
Section Four – Financing our Ambition

As a not-for-profit organisation, financial return for Ulster Hockey is not the ultimate goal. However, a healthy financial position is extremely important and our need to operate more effectively as a business in the future is clear. Our financial performance is the means by which we secure the resources to pursue our ambitions and our financial aim during this strategic plan cycle 2017 – 2021, is to become significantly more self-sustaining financially and less reliant on public funding. This will result in us becoming more independent and in control of our own destiny. Furthermore, we will aim to create revenue streams that bring funding into the organisation from outside sources rather than seek significant further funding from our membership.

However, in order to inspire an active hockey family, we will need to increase our self-generated revenue streams significantly. Our long term aim is that 40% of our total revenue will be derived from self-generated sources, from a current position of 25%. Achieving this goal will prove to be extremely challenging but it is vital that we strive towards this and find other ways of financing our operations for future sustainability.

Resource Planning

To enable us to achieve the ambitious targets outlined in this plan and inspire an active hockey family we will require resources to employ staff, deliver our services and development programmes and run the organisation. Unfortunately, at April 2017, the financial resources we currently have to implement the plan are less than we had anticipated during the planning process, due to a reduction in Sport NI funding to Ulster Hockey. This will impact on how, and the extent to which we can, achieve our objectives. In particular, as Sport NI investment has been provided to Hockey Ireland for high performance, we will work with and through Hockey Ireland to implement our strategic priority of “supporting our current winners”.

Based on our known and anticipated financial resources in 2017 we have restructured the staff as outlined below, with effect from April 2017. Throughout this Strategic plan period, we will develop annual operational plans based on our financial projections and work towards achieving our objectives and targets as effectively and efficiently as possible, and within our financial limits. We will also endeavour to source additional income from a diverse range of income streams with a view to maintaining and growing the services we can deliver. The current staff structure is:

- 2 full-time Active Clubs Co-ordinators and a Part-time Everybody Active Coach focused on growing club membership numbers and strengthening our communities
- Full-time Administrative Officer to provide administrative support across the organisation
- Full-time Executive Manager to work with the Board in relation to the governance, management and financial management of the organisation.
- Full-time Talent Coach to co-ordinate and deliver work in identifying and developing our talented athletes, supporting them to achieve their full potential
- Full time Workforce Development Officer focused on growing and supporting our coaching, umpiring & volunteer workforce.
- Full-time Youth Development Officer to co-ordinate programmes to grow our game and strengthen our communities, working with both schools and clubs.
Conclusion

Since its formation in 2009 Ulster Hockey has made significant progress in the development of the organisation and of hockey at all levels. However, as this plan highlights, there is still work to be done to progress the sport further.

Hockey is a sport enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities and participation levels are continuing to rise, particularly at the grassroots level of the game. However, the infrastructure requires focus and investment to ensure greater support, visibility and media exposure in the coming years.

In the current economic climate we will face many challenges as we implement this plan. The willingness of our communities - schools, clubs, our valuable teams of volunteers and staff will be vital if we are to inspire an active hockey family and move into a new and exciting phase of development.

This strategy clearly sets out the strategic priorities that will help to grow our game, strengthen our communities, further develop the quality of our coaches, officials and volunteers and establish better structures to inspire our future winners to reach their full potential.

By 2021, the sport of hockey in Ulster, through strong leadership and an raised profile across Ulster, will have reached a new level in its development, providing a robust platform for continued progress of the sport at local, regional, national and international levels. By working together to deliver the objectives of this ambitious strategic plan, we can all play our part in achieving our vision to “Inspire an active hockey family”.

“Inspire an active hockey family”