

Governance of Athletics in the UK in 2021.

In December 2020, following the findings of the Street Review, the UK Members Council (UKMC), effectively the 'shareholders' of UK Athletics (UKA), voted to change its Articles to admit to the UKA Board Directors nominated by each Home Country Federation (HCAF) and to change the term 'UKMC' to 'UK members'.

Perhaps more significantly, the UKA AGM confirmed that decisions about the future role and composition of UKMC were to be the subject of consultation based on an options appraisal (in line with the Street Review).

Why does this matter for clubs?

1. The Street review made a number of recommendations. They were to be implemented by UKA and the HCAFs in accordance with detailed recommendations, particularly relating to widespread consultation. The behaviour of UKA is governed by the Code of Sports Governance (the Code), compliance with which is an absolute requirement to secure public funding.
2. The key findings, progress in implementing them and how the processes and outcomes conform to the Code are set out below. Taken together they paint a disturbing picture.
 - 2.1 **Review the role and composition of UKMC following an options appraisal.** UKA presented a set of Article changes that removed UKMC, without having undertaken any options appraisal, proposing to replace it in a form that would diminish any check and challenge to the UKA Board and its Executive. These were accordingly rejected by UKMC.
 - 2.2 **Appoint an Independent Chair after a publicly advertised process in line with the Code.** Nic Coward was appointed Chair within 6 weeks of his appointment as interim CEO. The UKA Annual report showed no record of the method of his appointment as Chair and there is no other evidence of a public process. When questioned, UKA placed reliance solely on the 'casual vacancy provision' in its Articles, thus acknowledging the breach of the Code and of the Street Review.
 - 2.3 **Develop a strategy for Athletics.** UKA has published two strategy documents, the latest being An Athletic Nation. There is a section on clubs. The Code requires a governing body to consult on strategy with all interested stakeholders (a stakeholder is defined as anyone affected by the proposals). The UKA CEO stated some 300 clubs had been engaged in the development of the strategy but when subsequently questioned she could not name one of them and it was revealed she was relying on an EA survey on a topic related, but not specifically relevant, to the strategy.
 - 2.4 **Agree a 'who does what' between UKA and HCAFs.** A framework agreement has been signed between UKA and HCAFs but it has not been widely communicated to the clubs and wider sport even in Executive summary form. The Code requires UKA to have a strategy to communicate with stakeholders and to inform them on significant matters of governance.
 - 2.5 **Appoint a Head of Coaching.** Nothing has happened for almost a year despite the Review stating it was a cause for optimism that '*an agreement was reached [between UKA and the HCAFs] on the appointment of a Head of Coaching who would lead on a strategy for Coaching for Athletics in the UK (a current gaping hole within the sport)*'. Although UKA has appointed a Performance Director and a Head (GB Team) Coach, the appointment of the Head of Coaching role is apparently still awaiting Mark Munro to start his position as Development Director and will be junior to him.

Alongside this, UKA commissioned a review of competition which paid lip service to involvement with clubs and leagues and had a SWOT analysis that appeared geared to deliver the required outcome with little or no evidence. The latest 'consultation' on equalising cross-country distances seems to have followed the same path, without even the benefit of a questionable SWOT analysis.

It should be noted that UKA sought to change its Articles to *regulate* competition rather than *co-ordinate* it as now. Put that with the strategy of developing hubs for talent gives a direction of travel to marginalise clubs or treat them as simply a breeding ground.

As you can see, while the review was supposed to make UKA more open, transparent and communicative, the reverse is happening and UKA, at Chair and CEO level, seem keen to shut down any form of check and challenge, with the HCAFs apparently willing accessories.

On the evidence so far, is it likely that UKA will change this manifest behaviour of taking clubs for granted?

A further matter of major concern is **the impending financial crisis**. UKA has dwindling cash reserves: down from £16m to £6m in 4 years. Its profit and loss account is being propped up by deferred income. The self-

initiated withdrawal from one of the Diamond Leagues limits the commercial upside. There is to be a 10% reduction in UK Sport funding. For the sport even to carry on as now, it either has to find new commercial opportunities (in a very difficult market) or it seeks more money from potentially fewer members. At club level, people will justifiably ask what they are getting for their money. There is a cost to providing the administrative infrastructure for the sport but the piper needs more input into decisions on music and the size of the band.

All these examples confirm the need for a proper structure for oversight of the UKA Board. The key issue is then: **should the clubs take the initiative for themselves or wait and see what emerges?** The options are:

1. **UKA and HCAFs take the lead.** Given the track record set out in 2.1-2.5 above, and succeeding paragraphs, it would seem unlikely that any emerging options would do other than centralise control and stifle any process challenging their accountability. They may well have started such discussions.
2. **UKMC takes the lead.** The best option, with UKMC setting up a sub-committee to (a) consider options to be put to the clubs and (b) discuss with UKA and the HCAFs the logistics of consultation. However, this would only be credible if the HCAFs recused themselves on the grounds of their multiple conflicts of interest: UKA Directorships, members of CEO forum, Framework Agreement obligations, etc
3. **The Clubs take the lead.** Clubs were the founders of UKA. 95% of the sport is delivered by volunteer members of clubs. They are not just a 'Workforce' but the repository of skill and knowledge and need to be listened to and shown more respect. Only with proper oversight provision will they be able to turn the tide of UKA marginalisation. Time may not be on the clubs' side - see 1 above - and need to be able to respond quickly to any further proposal or, ideally publish their own proposals first.

How might they do this? Anything other than a small group will make the task unwieldy. But from where would that group gain its legitimacy? AAL may seem the obvious vehicle through its leaders and its contacts with people who run teams and clubs which are the lifeblood of the sport, but to be credible to the sport at large (and UKA) it needs to be inclusive of the majority of the sport who are recreational runners. Perhaps the endorsement of the UKMC Club and Road Running representatives might suffice? A reasoned and robust analysis of options should also carry its own legitimacy.

Assuming it is agreed that it needs doing, the next steps might be:

1. Agreeing to a simple strap line ("Clubs Unified" – reflecting the UKA 'Athletics Unified' strategy banner) with any club being automatically affiliated to the body, or something similar, would do the trick. That way coaches and officials and volunteers at large can be bound in.
2. Setting up a group of say 5 including a chair to consider options. (The group can receive external input and seek advice and should be encouraged to do so). The proposal needs to set out:
 - 2.1. what level and nature of oversight is necessary and appropriate and why;
 - 2.2 what, say 3, options (indicating pros and cons for each) might best deliver this effectively and how;
3. Decide how these options should be communicated to clubs for consultation;
4. Develop a plan to produce a preferred outcome post consultation by a specified date.
5. Make it public to the sport at large – develop a media strategy.

In conclusion, the UKA CEO announced at a recent webinar that the Street review had been delivered except the issue about UKMC. That self-serving statement sums up the UKA senior team's approach to the review. Don't worry that the review's emphasis on ethical behaviour, proactiveness, openness and transparency have been ignored, as has substantive compliance with the Code of Sports Governance, we have ticked boxes.

Unless this attitude is effectively checked and challenged then the freshness and excitement that brings people into athletics will be drowned in a sea of thoughtless ill-informed centralised control. Clubs will have lost their independence and their attraction to the volunteers who actually run the sport. The message is, if you are not prepared to act now, then don't complain afterwards.

Endorsed at AAL meeting 13.1.21

Grace Hall	Alan Johnson	Len Steers.
AAL Chair	AAL Secretary	AAL Member