



LITTLE ATHLETICS ACT POLICY ON PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF ATHLETE SKILLS

Introduction

One of the biggest issues for Athletics generally is our retention rates and how we can improve on them. One way we see as addressing that issue is to provide a progression or step up in available competition for the younger age groups and the opportunity to gain a new experience each year. This should provide some incentive for them to stay on in the sport.

The other incentive to stay on in the sport is a demonstrated pathway in skill progression, plus an overall pathway towards participation in senior sport.

It should be noted that Little Athletics is widely recognised as the “Foundation for All Sports”, and LAA has adopted this as our motto and part of the branding for Little Athletics.

With this in mind, the objective of Little Athletics is to not only progress within the sport of athletics - but in all sports.

4.2 Background

LA ACT encourages the use of the Victorian-developed “On Track” Program at all Centres. The purpose of the “On Track” is not always understood this is at times exacerbated by an expectation in some quarters that children in the Under 6 to Under 8 Age Groups should participate in competitive activities like older children. Even in those Centres where “On Track” is fully entrenched, pressure is placed upon the program to incorporate traditional events so that the children can participate and perform well in these competitions.

The Association has recognised this and has developed a strategy to change the way people think and put in place a pathway program that facilitates the skill development of our young members in a fun environment, but in a transparent structured way.

To facilitate this, the Association breaks our membership down into the following three distinct categories:

1. Entry/Foundation Cluster (Under 6 to Under 8 Age Groups);
2. Core/Sustainment Cluster (Under 9 to Under 13 Age Groups); and
3. Transition/Exit Cluster (Under 14 to Under 17 Age Groups).

Having done that, the Association caters for the development of children in these age groups in terms of programs delivered and skills developed in a progressive manner.

The following skills development concept is envisaged to meet that progression.

Entry/Foundation Cluster (Under 6 to Under 8 Age Groups)

For the *Under 6 Age Group*, the priority needs to be the development of a basic foundation in motor skills in a fun and games environment. The focus here should be on

- The development in the basics of running, jumping and throwing;
- The development of a good sense of balance, flexibility and agility;
- Participation in a non event specific environment;
- Participation in a non-competitive environment;
- A team or small group emphasis;
- Heavy parent involvement.

For the *Under 7 Age Group*, the priority needs to be the reinforcement of the Under 6 curriculum and transition into event familiarisation. Here the objective is to translate the motor skills into an event structure. There is no need to address the “rules” of events, as the task is to translate the positives of the skill development into a rough form of event structure (i.e. not the emphasis with the rules of events!)

Performances for this Age Group would not need to be recorded. However, we may need to tailor the program so as to be able to feed the activities into designated carnivals. For the *Under 8 Age Group*, the priority needs to be the reinforcement of the Under 6 and Under 7 curriculum and transition into traditional events. This also involves:

- Introducing and consolidating rules of events;
- Reinforcing underpinning skills, as the inevitable focus tends to drift towards rule compliance;
- The introduction of formal performance measurement.

For LAACT, we have the product to facilitate the delivery of this concept – “On-Track”. However, what is a critical ingredient to the success of the “On Track” Program is the development/retention of a core coaches who can effectively deliver the product to meet the objectives of the above concept.

LAACT has endorsed this concept and children within this age group will be limited to competing in the following carnivals:

- *Relay Carnival* – Under 7 and Under 8;
- *Multi-Event Carnival* – Under 8;
- *Regional Championships (no progression to ACT Championships)* - Under 8.

At the Association level, there will be no records held for the Under 6 to Under 8 Cluster.

Core/Sustainment Cluster (Under 9 to Under 13 Age Groups)

The Core or Sustainment Group is where our major membership is contained. It is therefore critical that members within this Cluster gain an enjoyable experience from their participation in Little Athletics and our retention rates remain high. We therefore must retain the development of skills for all participants for their self-esteem, and retain a social environment above any priority for performance measurement. However, we

recognise that performance measurement is sought after by a large section within this group, and we need to cater for this section as well in the way of performance recognition (i.e. in the way of medals and records etc).

In terms of skills development, the priority for this group is:

- The reinforcement of Under 6 to Under 8 skills development curriculum and rules compliance; and
- The continued development of event specific skills development.

The “On Track” Program caters for the development of event specific skills for the Under 9 and Under 10 Age Groups (Level 4 and Level 5 respectively).

For the Under 11 to Under 13 Age Groups, more formal coaching of the ‘technical model’ of each event should commence and undertaken on a regular basis, either as part of the normal program or separately at Centre coaching days and Association sponsored coaching clinics. To support this, Centres must actively encourage and support the development of coaches to facilitate this need.

In terms of the social environment, primarily this is the domain of Centres and the responsibility for ensuring this is promoted and encouraged is their responsibility. The Association endorses the concept and will encourage this environment at its carnivals.

Transition/Exit Cluster (Under 14 to Under 17 Age Groups)

The AT&FCA have a well-developed coach education regime and there are a number of well qualified coaches who practise within the region. So in theory, this Cluster is perhaps the best catered for in terms of skills development.

However, it is recognised that there are deficiencies in pathway development and this is something in which we encourage Athletics ACT (AACT) and its parent body, Athletics Australia, to actively participate with LAECT. It should be noted that in encouraging our members to progress down the pathway towards an athletic career, we cannot push them in that direction unless they want to, and there is an attraction to the program(s) on offer by AACT that makes the athlete want to go there. This attraction should not only include an attractive and rewarding competition environment, but also other facets that need to be in place that meet the social and intrinsic needs of these young people. For some, this may mean they need to perceive a pathway for themselves that maps out a progression into a fully fledged career in track and field.

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