A large, light green watermark of the Northern Ireland Volleyball logo is centered in the background. The logo consists of a circular border containing the text 'NORTHERN IRELAND' at the top and 'VOLLEYBALL' at the bottom. Inside the circle is a stylized volleyball with three curved segments.

Northern Ireland Volleyball: Your Journey Through the Talent Pathway

Talent Pathway 2025-30



Vision and Mission

Vision Statement

To build Northern Ireland into a respected and competitive force in international volleyball by nurturing top-tier athletes, creating a culture of excellence, and inspiring pride through strong performances.

Mission Statement

We aim to provide a structured environment where athletes and coaches can grow. Through quality coaching, competitive opportunities, and holistic support, we strive to help every athlete represent Northern Ireland with pride, integrity, and purpose.

Executive Summary

The Northern Ireland Volleyball Talent Pathway program welcomes all young athletes, providing a clear route from their first steps in the sport to competing on the international stage. It's designed to support players at every stage—whether learning the game at school or preparing for a CEV championship.

Each pathway from Regional Development Squads to our Senior National Teams is built to help athletes grow their skills, confidence, and competitive edge. Training plans are age-appropriate and focus on improving technical and tactical skills, fitness, mindset, and character.

Players also benefit from expert coaching, strength and conditioning support, and a positive team environment. They receive individual feedback and development plans tailored to their goals and stage of progress. We also ensure they gain the match experience needed to implement their learning.

Coaches are a vital part of the journey. That's why we invest in their development, too—with mentoring, CPD sessions, and a shared framework that helps keep everything connected across the country.

At its heart, the Talent Pathway is about people. Whether a teenager discovering the game or a senior athlete chasing a cap for Northern Ireland, we create spaces where players feel seen, challenged, and supported. The coach-athlete relationship is at the core of our approach, making each player feel valued and integral to the process. It's not just about the next match—it's about building a system that brings out the best in every player and coach.

Player Development

We focus on helping players become better volleyball players, athletes, and teammates. At every stage of the pathway, we build on what athletes already know and challenge them to take the next step.

We support each athlete's development in four key areas:

- **Skills:** Teaching strong fundamentals and developing technical consistency.
- **Game sense:** Helping players read the game, make decisions, and understand tactics.
- **Physical performance:** Building strength, mobility, endurance, and jump ability in age-appropriate ways.
- **Mindset:** Fostering confidence, resilience, and leadership.

Whether players are just starting in a Regional Development Squad or preparing to compete at a European event, we provide a supportive structure that grows with them. Each athlete follows a clear development plan, gets feedback they can act on, and has regular opportunities to show what they've learned.

This is a long-term journey. It's not about being the best at 15—it's about helping every athlete reach their full potential when they're ready to compete for Northern Ireland. The journey requires patience and commitment, but the rewards are worth it.

Coach Development and Support

Behind every great player is a coach who helped them get there. That's why we emphasise supporting our coaches—so they can give athletes the best possible experience.

We offer regular coaching workshops, mentoring from experienced coaches, and a clear national coaching framework that ensures consistency across the country. Whether someone is coaching their first junior session or leading a national squad, they're part of a learning network that supports their growth.

Our goal is to build a strong, connected coaching community. When coaches work together, share ideas, and stay aligned with pathway goals, everyone benefits—especially the players.

Competition and Performance Opportunities

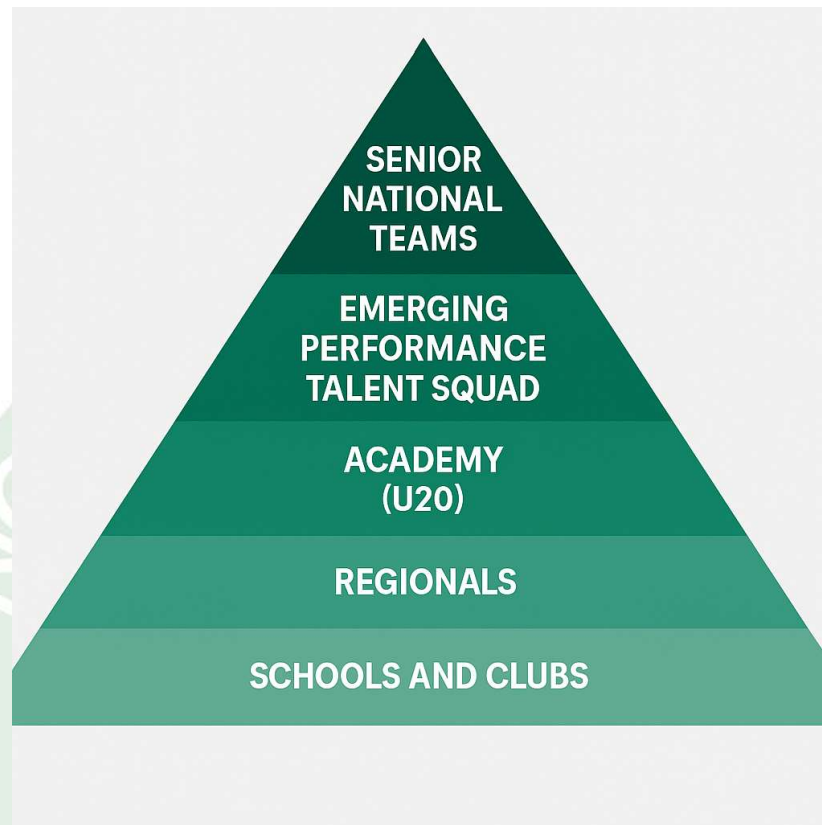
Playing games is where it all comes together. That's why we ensure athletes at every stage of the pathway have access to the right types of competition—local, regional, national, and international.

Younger players gain experience through school leagues, club matches, and regional tournaments. As they progress, they participate in Aspire competitions, inter-regional fixtures, and development events that test their tactical understanding.

As players move into the Academy and Emerging Talent levels, the competition becomes more challenging and focused on results. This includes training matches, national friendlies, and international exposure through the CEV and Small Countries Association events. We also explore opportunities with European clubs and exchange programmes.

Every match is a learning opportunity. We use video analysis, stats, and coach feedback to help athletes reflect, improve, and prepare for the next challenge.

Player Pathway Structure



Regional Development Squads

To make sure every player has a chance to shine, we've set up three Regional Development Squads across Northern Ireland:

- **Central Region** – Belfast
- **Northern Region** – Coleraine
- **Southern Region** – Craigavon

These squads are the entry point for young players into the national pathway. They're local, accessible, and designed to help athletes advance toward higher-level training and competition. Each region is led by dedicated coaches who follow our national standards and focus on teaching core skills, team play, and confidence-building.

It's all about creating a supportive environment where young players can enjoy learning, be challenged, and start to see what they're capable of.

Programme Overview

Our programmes are built around stages that match an athlete's age, experience, and readiness. Each is a stepping stone to the next, with a clear focus on player development, coach support, and appropriate competition.

Programme	Age Group	Focus	Coaching Priorities	Key Outcomes
Regional Dev.	U12–U15	Core skills & game intro	Fundamental technique, movement & teamwork	Ball control, game confidence
Aspire U16	U14–U16	Skill development & identity	Consistency, roles, gameplay basics	Serve, pass, movement, early game IQ
Aspire U18	U16–U18	Tactical & physical growth	Positional play, strategy, team discipline	Positional mastery, system understanding
Academy	U17–U19	Team systems & performance	Competition prep, video review, leadership	Match readiness, pressure management
Emerging Talent	U18–U22	High-level training & exposure	Peak development, feedback, international play	Game maturity, leadership, global exposure
High Performance	18+	Elite execution & Mindset	Specialist support, tailored prep, goals	International-level consistency & resilience

Selection Criteria

When making selections, we consider the whole athlete—not just who scores the most points. Our process is designed to identify potential and reward hard work.

Clubs or schools can nominate athletes and scout at competitions and regional sessions. From there, they're invited to attend trials or training camps where we assess each individual's overall performance and engagement across all parts of the programme, including:

- Technical skills and fundamentals
- Game understanding and adaptability
- Physical qualities like speed, jump height, and endurance
- Coachability, resilience, and attitude
- Attendance and commitment across all parts of the programme, including regional sessions, Aspire and Academy camps, competition fixtures, and development meetings

We track progress with video, stats, and coach evaluations and listen to the athlete, coaches, and broader team. Selection is never a one-off. Players can grow into the programme, re-enter at different stages, and continue to develop through hard work and performance.

Key Performance Markers:

- **Vertical Jump:** U16 target – 45+ cm, U18+ target – 55+ cm
- **Yo-Yo Intermittent Recovery Test Level 1:** U16 target – Level 14+, U20 target – Level 16+
- **5/10/20m Sprint Times:** Benchmarked against national age group standards
- **Pro Agility Test:** Measured to assess quick change of direction and lateral movement
- **Skill Evaluation Scores:** Minimum 7/10 in technical and tactical assessment by pathway coaches
- **Attendance Rate:** 85%+ attendance across all scheduled pathway activities
- **Coachability and Behaviour:** Consistently positive feedback from multiple coaches

Support Structure

We don't just coach—we support the whole athlete. From Regional Development right through to the Senior National Team, every athlete has access to a support network tailored to their stage of development. Here's how we break that down:

Pathway Stage	Coaching	Strength & Conditioning	Psychology	Education & Career	Medical & Wellbeing	Performance Reviews
Regional Dev.	Local coaches, skills-based focus	Introductory fitness guidance	Positive mindset workshops	Club/school-led	Basic injury prevention and referrals	Group feedback, learning goals
Aspire U16	National guidance begins	Baseline fitness testing, body control drills	Group sessions on resilience and confidence	Time management	Coordination with schools for injury support	Individual development plans begin
Aspire U18	Positional coaching, small	Strength development and mobility	Intro to performance psychology	Exam support	Access to physio through national	Feedback loop every block

	groups	targets	y		team contact	
Academy	Team systems, national staff	Fully integrated S&C plan, testing & recovery	1:1 support offered	Uni/scholarship advice	Personalised injury and load tracking	IDPs and player reviews
Emerging Talent	Specialist sessions, lead coaches	Tailored high-performance support	Regular profiling and psych tools	Life balance coaching	Advanced rehab and recovery access	Target setting and monitoring
High Performance	Senior national team coaches	Elite physical prep, testing, and recovery	Competition mindset and leadership coaching	Career mentoring	Direct access to sports medicine staff	Performance audits and leadership reviews

We believe in looking after the person behind the player. Our support framework ensures athletes have access to what they need—when needed—so they can grow in all areas of life, not just on the volleyball court.

Competitive Exposure

Game experience is one of the most powerful development tools. That’s why our pathway includes structured competitive opportunities at every level.

Domestic Matches form the foundation—league play, school tournaments, and inter-club matches help build comfort and confidence.

Regional Fixtures like Home Nations and NI vs ROI games challenge players to think quicker, adjust tactics, and play purposefully. Aspire and Academy players especially benefit from this environment.

Training Matches and Friendly matches are held throughout the year, allowing squads to build chemistry and practice systems in a low-stakes but high-quality environment.

International Exposure is where we test our top athletes. Whether through the CEV U17/U19/U22 events, Small Countries Association tournaments, or friendly fixtures with European teams, these games offer real-world experience and a window into the next level.

We help athletes learn from every match—using video, statistics, coach feedback, and self-reflection to grow from every win and loss.

Long-Term Outcomes

We're not just building teams—we're building a volleyball culture in Northern Ireland that lasts.

We want athletes to see a clear path to the top, coaches to feel part of something bigger, clubs and schools to know they play a vital role, and parents to trust that their child is part of a positive, safe, and rewarding environment.

This means:

- Making it easier to move through the pathway and stay involved
- Keeping more players active and motivated during their teen years
- Improving coaching and competition across every level
- Performing well on the international stage and gaining recognition

Player retention is a big part of this. We want athletes to stay because they feel they belong and believe they're getting better, on and off the court.

Success Measures

- % of players progressing to Senior level
- Retention and engagement at each stage of the pathway
- Long-term match results across domestic and international competitions
- Club and coach feedback
- Financial and operational sustainability

Appendix A – Selection Timeline

Our selection timeline is designed to ensure fairness, structure, and plenty of opportunities for athletes to show their potential. Here's how the yearly process works:

- 1. May – Club and School Nominations Open**
Coaches and PE staff submit athlete nominations using the NI Volleyball referral form. This is the key entry point into the national system.
- 2. June – Regional and National Trials**
Athletes attend skill-based assessments and gameplay evaluations in their region. Sessions focus on technical skills, movement, teamwork, and game IQ. Players are also evaluated on fitness benchmarks and attitude.
- 3. July to August – Summer Training Block**
Selected athletes participate in camps focusing on development, learning, and integration. Attendance, improvement, and engagement are all tracked during this phase.
- 4. September – Squad Review and Selection**
Performance staff meet to assess player data, video feedback, coach insights, and attendance records. Final squads are chosen, and athletes receive outcome feedback, whether selected or not, with development advice.
- 5. October – Athlete Onboarding**
Finalised squads begin the next stage of their journey. Individual development plans (IDPs) are created, training calendars are distributed, and players start full integration into the programme.

Throughout the year, attendance at pathway events—including trials, training, matches, and feedback sessions—is recorded and considered in all selection decisions. (clubs and schools)

- 1. June** – Regional and national trial events begin
- 2. July–August** – Summer training blocks with review points
- 3. September** – Final squads confirmed, feedback shared
- 4. October** – Development plans are created, and training begins

Appendix B – Nomination Form Example

Category	Response Field
Athlete Name	
Date of Birth	
Gender	
Current Club/School	
Primary Playing Position	
Years of Playing Experience	
Athlete Email	
Parent/Guardian Name	
Parent/Guardian Contact	
Nominator Name	
Nominator Role	
Nominator Contact	
Technical Strengths	
Tactical Understanding	
Physical Qualities	
Coachability & Attitude	
Recent Competitions/Highlights	
Additional Notes	

Submit completed forms to callum@nivolleyball.com

Appendix C – Staff Roles

A team of dedicated professionals powers the Talent Pathway, each uniquely helping athletes grow and thrive. From planning training sessions to offering mental health support, these individuals work together to ensure every athlete receives what they need to succeed—on and off the court.

- **Performance Manager:** Acts as the strategic lead for the entire Talent Pathway. Oversees all programme levels, from Regional Development through to High Performance. Coordinates athlete progression, manages staffing, designs delivery schedules, and serves as the primary contact for stakeholders, including clubs, schools, and international partners. Ensures alignment between coaching, S&C, and support services.
Leads the entire pathway, sets the vision, oversees delivery, manages operations and ensures all athletes and staff are supported throughout.
- **Pathway Lead Coach:** Leads technical and tactical content design and delivery across Aspire and Academy levels. Works closely with Regional and Performance coaches to implement consistent training principles. Oversees talent identification, supports coach mentoring, and plays a key role in squad reviews and player feedback.
Designs technical and tactical content, supports coach development, and leads training at Aspire and Academy levels.
- **Regional Coach:** Delivers sessions in the Central, Northern, or Southern regions. Supports early identification of promising athletes and helps transition players into Aspire squads. Acts as a local contact for clubs and schools, providing developmental feedback and assisting with regional squad logistics.
Delivers sessions in each geographic area, identifies talent, and mentors players as they enter the pathway.
- **Support Team:** This team includes specialists in strength and conditioning, psychology, and education. Each member contributes to athlete monitoring and well-being. S&C staff provide physical testing and individualised plans; psychologists offer workshops and 1-to-1 support; and education advisors help balance sports with academic or personal commitments.