

Head Coach - annual report

Prepared by Chris Lees on 8th February 2026 for the Annual General Meeting on 2nd March 2026.

A huge thank you to our volunteer coaching team, all of whom give up their time not only to lead sessions for our members, but also to get and maintain their qualifications and certifications, keep up to date by reading England Athletics coaching news, and attending our coaching development mornings 3 – 4 times per year.

This team led 322 sessions (or will have done by the 2nd March) – that’s over 15% more than the previous year, and an average of 25 sessions supported by each coach, and over six sessions per week being offered to our members.

Athlete development and general club sessions

Regular club sessions have been going well, with numbers attending sessions overall continuing to increase. Our peak last year of 258¹ appearances in a calendar month (which itself smashed previous year’s record of 160) was exceeded in four months this year (April, May, June, and August). Our new record month was May 2025 when we had 271 appearances, which included 107 at intervals alone (although the peak for intervals was September 2025 with 126 appearances). Whilst Q2 and Q3 2025 both exceeded previous best quarters, Q4 2025 is a little down on Q4 2024 due to a quiet November 2025 – both December and January had higher totals than the corresponding months one year ago. Track nights have provided access to over 12 hours of technical coaching with 138 appearances through the year with peak attendance of 22 in June 2025.

Our own expanded licensed coach team (CiRFs and Athletics Coaches) taking on more 1-1 coaching will provide further opportunities, and in 2025-26 the coaching team will be running a series of classrooms sessions for members (for a small fee to cover costs) and non-members (for a still-small-but-slightly-larger-fee!).

NYSD Cross Country league has 18 in this year’s team (up from 16) and representatives at every meet so far, including two of our juniors. The team was impacted by illness and injury, but despite his own challenges, Louis Fernandes finished third place in his age category – a brilliant achievement given the high-level of competition in this league.

Coach development

We have welcomed Garry, Richard and Ste to our coaching team this year. Mike has completed his Coach in Running Fitness qualification, and Michelle has completed her Coaching Assistant and is on-track to complete her Athletics Coach (Jumps) qualification soon. Our current coaching team is:

Coach	LIRF	Coaching Assistant	CiRF	Athletics Coach	Event Group / Performance Coach
Chris Lees	✓	✓	✓	✓ (Throws)	✓ (Endurance)
Michelle Slade	✓	✓	✓	(in progress)	
Nige Haresign	✓		✓		
Mike Hollinshead	✓		✓		
Gemma Wardle	✓				
Joanne Sinnott	✓				
Nick Wilson ²	✓				
Ruth Hancock	✓				
Marc Blair	✓				
Sam Scarlett	✓				
Garry Smithies	✓				
Richard Slade ²	✓				
Ste Moon	✓				
Long-term sabbatical:					
Alice Inglis	✓	✓			

¹ Excluding programmes like couch to 5k.

² Not coaching due to injury at time of writing.

We have held three coaching development sessions (May, August, and January), and in autumn the three new LiRFs (Garry, Richard and Ste) obtained their additional first aid certification (Level 3 Outdoor First Aid).

Our team development priorities going into 2026 are:

- Increase the number of leaders (LiRFs) and coaching assistants inline with the growing club numbers.
- Promote the 1-1 coaching available from the team of four licensed coaches and classrooms for sharing knowledge.
- Grow our athletics coaching team.

Programmes

Couch to 5k

During this year, the coaching team delivered two couch to 5k programmes for a total of 26 participants starting, with the currently planned programme scheduled to start on the 24th February and finish on 2nd May.