

RYA Northern Ireland – Female Focused Camp FAQ'S

There has been great success in Northern Ireland running Women on Water programmes over many years through clubs and RYA NI. However, the research shows that there needs to be more support for women and girls involved in all pathway routes within sailing, from club level racing, right through to the Performance Pathway.

What is the theme for the weekend?

Connections in sailing, being the best me and performance pathway. The weekend will offer more transparency around menstrual cycles in sport, circuit training for all ages, inspiring girls with role models in the sport from coaches to athletes, race training, opportunity for transitioning classes and discussion on the Olympic journey as a girl in the sport.

What are the aims of the weekend?

Showcase performance-based training, racing and coaching specifically for junior and youth females (U21 - 12yrs).

Inspiring sailors with female role models across the pathway.

Encouraging our female sailors to train, actively participate in Club racing, compete outside of their Club in competition, try a variety of pathway classes and have the knowledge of “what it takes” to pursue the Performance Pathway.

The weekend will consist of the following classes (Topper, Feva, ILCA, 29er)

Have the opportunity to ask questions and collaborate with people outside the NI Sailing network.

1. Why is the weekend only for Women and Girls?

The Women and Girls research shows that many women and girls in the pathway squads feel their opportunities to pursue sailing as a career are limited, as well as having a lack of understanding about pathways in the sport, often feeling pushed out of the competitive side of the sport too young. This came down to factors such as;

- Women and Girls being affected more than men around physicality, and the limits this puts on sailors being able to progress in a specific class, making transitioning into youth classes more challenging.
- Female youth sailors are put off staying in the sport competitively when they are told they are required to put on a significant amount of weight to progress.
- Parents outlined they were concerned about their daughters next steps in the pathway, since their options appeared to be limited because of their age and weight.

Additionally, of the seven Northern Irish Olympians, all have been male and we hope this camp will go some way to inspire female sailors to become the first ever NI Sailing female Olympian.

Experiences of discrimination for women and girls within the sailing environment and the impact this has made.

Within the women and girls research, 51% have identified they have experienced some form of gender discrimination within the sailing environment. Two quotes from the research include;

- "I have experienced sexism and been targeted for verbal abuse on the water and other incidents on the shore because of my gender."
- "One of the others that I sat alongside [at an event] was so unbelievably sexist, saying you just need to speak up, women are just too quiet." (National level sailor)

Some additional summaries included;

- Being spoken down to and receiving verbal abuse
- Attitudes towards females in the sailing environment
- Being pushed out the way and not given the opportunity to learn and complete tasks without being interrupted
- Feeling intimidated
- Being blocked from progressing into other pathway roles

Following on from the quotes and the results of this section, we want to be able to provide equal opportunities for women and girls within the performance pathway. Creating a performance environment where they feel comfortable to be able to ask questions, not feel under pressure or intimidated and have the chance to understand more about the pathways they can take in a female led environment.

2. Why is there a targeted age range?

Many of the youth sailors U19's goals and aspirations were more focused on performance outcomes, sailing internationally, being selected for squads, winning medals and representing their country, compared to the older age groups. The age gap has been made a bit higher to support those involved within the Irish/GBR sailing programme.

It's important that we are supporting junior and youth girls who wish to progress into programmes within the sport and actively race in their home club, as well as internationally.

34% of women and girls stated that club level racing was the highest level they had reached and 58% of women and girls stated that they had never sailed outside of Northern Ireland.

Over the course of the weekend, we would like the sailors to see a variety of role models being visible to them, whether this comes across;

- A junior sailor looking up to one of the youth sailors involved in an Irish Sailing Programme.
- A youth female coach involved in our CPD programme working with a female RYA Mentor.
- Junior and youth pathway girls having the opportunity to see and engage with a female athlete who has been a part of the Olympic Circuit and competed internationally.

- Will there be any performance camps like this in the future for boys?

Yes, we are planning on running either a male only camp or a mixed camp next year which will run in a similar format to the female focused camp, reflecting performance pathway aims and inspiring people in the sport. After the first camp this year we will review the feedback from the camp and implement any changes that we believe will make the weekend more impactful for the sailors.

3. What are the benefits and opportunities of participating in the weekend?

Female sailors will have the opportunity to collaborate with female coaches such as Alison Young, three-time British Sailing Team Olympian for the ILCA class as well as work with RYA Scotland's Training Development Officer Robyn Philips. Not only will the girls get a weekend full of sailing training and racing on the water, but also the opportunity to challenge and reflect on their learnings with workshops and skills-based sessions. We will also be delivering fitness sessions, an opportunity to try active pathway classes to support transitioning and a menstrual cycle in performance workshop led by industry expert Nikki Boniface.

4. What are the next steps to progress in the sport after the weekend?

Opportunities within RYA Northern Ireland include;

Double Handed Pathways - supporting more pathways within double handed sailing. Under the age of 19 a massive 57% of girls stated they had never tried double handed sailing before. We hope that after the weekend of participating in the RYA recommended active classes such as Feva and 29er that this will inspire girls to try more double handed pathways and see routes available for them to transition. With this in mind we have released our first year of the Team Racing Programme for U19s under Project Theia, completing a NI Team Racing Team to be selected and represent Northern Ireland at the Elmo Trophy in August. By introducing a new racing format and open training with double handed sailing we believe that this will support sailors when it comes to their transition into youth as well as their skill set when it comes to instructor/coach pre assessment.

Transition Days – Additional support for those ageing out or looking for a more suitable transition into youth classes. Opportunities here will follow within the RYA recommended pathway classes (ILCA and 29er), as well as including recommended active club classes with the support of Class Associations. This could include the likes of RS400, GP14, RS Aero, Waszp etc.

Development Academy – Starting point for sailors learning to race but also an opportunity for those to continue to gain specific class training across different venues in NI, bridging the gap between entry to the sport to performance pathway. The Class training is limited on numbers to support a stronger training group across the winter season and will be announced before August.

RYA NI Sailing Team – Performance Squad – Opportunity for sailors to progress into squads via an application process from Pathways clubs coaches. In squad will have the chance to train with an RYA Head coach to develop their skills and enhance their love for racing. Those who are part of the squad will represent RYANI at a series of events and have the opportunity to receive additional support from RYA NI.

The Olympic classes are now 50/50 male and female with the majority being double-handed boats and even half of them are now foiling. If we are to maintain opportunities to reach their aspirations, we must continue to evolve and future-proof our sport domestically.

Women on Water Development Programme – For those who are 18 and over wishing to develop their skills in a chosen pathway in sailing. The opportunities here have a wide range of workshops, examples of subjects the workshops will cover development in could be, Race Officiating, Dinghy Sailing, Powerboating etc. With this programme in place, we hope to support more female participation and increase confidence in their chosen pathway, to be able to continue progressing in the sport and become more involved in their home club.

Coach CPD Programme – The CPD programme is specifically for coaches who wish to further their skills and learn more in depth about sailor behaviours, technical skills, racing rules, session planning etc. Coaches involved in the programme have the chance to receive free mentoring on the water, as well as access to free workshops and more opportunity for paid work within the Pathways department, supporting programmes such as Women on Water Development Programme, Development Academy and Team Racing. Some coaches will progress onto the Performance Coaching Pathway.