

## Track Training Guidance for Coaches

This guidance has been developed to provide a real-world view of the training environment, the potential hazards a training session presents and examples of how to mitigate the risks of accidents and injuries occurring. 'It is the responsibility of all coaches and athletes to ensure that all training sessions are conducted in a safe manner' (UKA Code of Practice, 2021).

Event specific knowledge and experience are important for effective coaching. Coaches also have a duty of care and welfare to all athletes and support coaches participating in training sessions and to other track users. To ensure sessions are safe, enjoyable, and effective for everyone, everywhere, all the time, risk assessments are part of a coach's responsibility before, during and after a session.

### What is a Risk Assessment?

A risk assessment is an inspection which is carried out to identify any hazards which may occur during an activity. The purpose is to identify, assess and determine the level of risk or likelihood that the hazard could cause accidents and injuries.

It is best practice to conduct a risk assessment as part of club activity, both generally to cover all areas of the clubs training and competition activities at all venues, as well as a specific event by event risk assessment. Once in place the risk assessment can act as a reminder and check list when conducting all aspects of training.

Some of the common Hazards include slips, trips and falls, collisions with others, equipment, and the environment.

### What are the Hazards and who might be harmed?

When designing session plans and training programmes there are many variables to consider. Part of the planning process is to identify immediate priorities, long-term goals and ensuring every athlete is engaged and enjoying training and competition. An aspect of training often conducted in real time is continually re-evaluating the risks associated with training.

Whether a coach is familiar with a venue or using a different track for the first time, regular assessments are required to monitor the changing nature of the track training environment. 'A hazard is something with potential to cause harm to an individual. This can be an object, an activity, a medical condition (diagnosed or unknown), environmental conditions and even substance abuse' (UKA Code of Practice, 2021).

### Pre-Session

Prior to any training taking place coaches\* should be aware of information pertinent to the health, well-being, and readiness to participate of all athletes under their supervision including any pre-existing medical conditions and existing injuries, impairments or illness. Similarly, this information would be useful for clubs to know about all coaches and volunteers. It would also be best practice to have access to essential emergency first aid equipment and appropriately trained personnel available at the venue during training sessions.

\*[Data Protection Act 2018](#)

To conduct training sessions all coaches must possess a valid UKA licence to coach and be operating within the code of conduct of the coaching licence scheme. In addition, to help with

both the quality of coaching provision and to ensure the safety and welfare of participants, the athlete to coach ratio should always be manageable and within the recommended guidance.

## The Track Training Environment

The track can be a very busy place to train often with a range of participants of different ages, abilities, and experience. Understanding the track environment and the potential hazards that exist is important to maintain a safe environment for all athletes and coaches.

### Space

The **space** available to accommodate all track events should be well understood by all users. To minimise the risk of **collisions**, designated lanes may be allocated for different event groups - endurance athletes, wheelchair athletes, sprinters, and hurdlers. Likewise different areas of the track may form the base or gathering place for different groups of athletes and coaches within the same event group. **Communication between coaches regarding session content and the space required should take place prior to the session starting.** Inevitably with limited space available a compromise between coaches may require the implementation of plan B session options.

#### Potential Risks

- Collisions with others

### Equipment

All **equipment** used should be checked for damage and faulty equipment should be reported and not used.

#### Common damage/faults

- Hurdles – split or damaged cross bar, broken or unstable legs, legs not adjustable (rusted notches)
- Steeplechase barriers – splintered cross bar, unstable legs, legs not adjustable
- Starting blocks – missing pins, worn block plate surface, sharp or damaged edges, rusty.

The space available may also dictate the type of equipment which can be safely used to minimise potential collisions, trips or falls. While effective training aids, **weighted sleds and prowlers** can present a collision and trip hazard, likewise stray weight plates and pulley systems (bungees, overspeed pulleys and resistance equipment), timing gates can be problematic to other users.

The placement of training cones, markers and mini hurdles for stride length and stride frequency activities have the potential to dominate lanes, presenting trip hazards to other track users who may be unaware of their presence, especially when placed in the middle of a lane. Consider placing these on the lane line to minimise their impact on space. Be aware that some track users may have impaired vision.

The placement of **starting blocks** can be a hazard particularly when used at the 400m and 200m start points. Although not always possible, a safe place to conduct straight line block starts would be the 110m start line as this is generally away from the apex of the bend and will minimise trip hazards. Placement of starting blocks in unusual positions on the track ie part way down the straight so athletes finish at finish line while doing 60m runs or starting at finish line and running in the opposite directions can cause trip hazards and increase the risk of collisions.

When **transporting equipment** like starting blocks, the use of block trolleys can be helpful for both safe storage and to minimise the risk of cuts and scrapes from block pins, or injury from carrying heavy blocks as these can be difficult to handle. When carrying, pulling, or pushing equipment and trolleys for use on the track injury could occur if not handled correctly. Ensure any storage and carrying aids (e.g., block trolley) are well maintained and loaded appropriately.

**Hurdles and barriers** are essential equipment for short and long hurdlers and steeplechase athletes. The transport, placement and storage of hurdles should all be considered. Hurdles can pose a trip hazard and cause a greater risk of collision for other users if placed overlapping lanes. For hurdlers themselves the type, weight, height, and distance at which hurdles are set will have a direct influence on the level of risk to tripping, falling, and colliding with hurdles. When athletes contact hurdles at high speeds, hurdles can shift into adjacent lanes posing a risk to other track users.

The type of hurdle used for the participant should be relevant to their age and stage of development. Lighter training hurdles for youth athletes can be safer and a great way to build technical skill and confidence.

Athletes and coaches using adaptive equipment for training should check all equipment is in a safe working order. **Wheelchairs and running frames** are to be well maintained with regular checks made to the brakes, wheels, strappings, steering and any parts that may lead to equipment failure. The athlete must also wear appropriate safety equipment such as helmets and hand protection and maintain prosthetics and blades.

**Water jumps** should be well maintained to avoid stagnant water and debris building up. When not in use for prolonged periods of time, it may be appropriate to drain the water or erect a temporary barrier system to safeguard young children.

When equipment is not being used it should be safely stored and secured.

#### Potential Risks

- Slips, trips, and falls
- Collisions with others
- Equipment failure
- Environment
- Athlete overload

#### Facility / Surface

The maintenance of the **track surface** and kerbing is an important consideration when mitigating the risk of slips, trips and falls for all participants. Regular checks for wear and tear should be made, especially in high usage areas such as lane 1 and the 100m/110m start lines as damage can be caused as starting blocks can wear away the top surface.

Loose or protruding track kerbing can pose a trip hazard for all users. Groups of athletes running in packs present collision and trip hazards. Cuts and abrasions can result from accidental contact between athletes (spiking and falling). Evasive movements may also be required to avoid collisions; however, caution should be observed when moving into adjacent lanes and potentially colliding with other athletes or stepping onto the inside kerb.

Weather conditions will impact on the integrity of the track surface. Heavy rain fall, the presence of mud or leaves, ice and snow can reduce the grip, even when wearing spikes. Keeping the track surface clean and clear of debris will help.

Sufficient lighting whether it be natural or electrical should be available during training sessions. Clear visibility is important for safety. During inclement weather including fog and mist visibility can be reduced and therefore pose a risk to all users.

In the summer months extreme heat or prolonged periods of training in the sun also poses a risk to athletes and coaches. Ensuring sufficient shaded areas are available, hydration and taking sun protective measures (clothing/cream) should be implemented.

#### Potential Risks

- Slips, trips, and falls
- Collisions with others
- Equipment failure
- Environment

#### Session Planning and Athlete Development

All the information presented above can help design safe and effective training sessions for all participants. When factoring in the space available, equipment, track surface and weather, session plans can be effectively written including alternative plans to allow for alternative working in response to any changes in circumstances.

Organisation and Safety are key components to delivering engaging sessions. Providing clear communication at the beginning of a session regarding session content and reminding athletes about their responsibilities to adhere to track etiquette provides regular educational opportunities for young athletes about the safe conduct of athletic training.

In addition to the considerations around the training environment, the planning and delivery of training appropriate to the age and stage of development for each athlete is vitally important. To help minimise the risk of injury, it is imperative to factor in any pre-existing medical concerns to ensure athletes are not overtrained. Individual session content, training cycles and annual plans need to be carefully considered and regular reflection may require well-timed interventions to progress or regress an activity in a bid to maintain a safe and effective training environment for every athlete.

#### Potential Risks

- Pre-existing medical conditions
- Athlete overload

#### During the session

Training sessions can be very busy during peak times. Often different groups of athletes will share the same facilities and equipment. **Communication between coaches is important to aid the efficient running of a session and to minimise the risks of accidents occurring.** Athletes have a responsibility to adhere to track and field usage guidance and to look after all their belongings. When equipment is not being used, it should be stored in a safe place or returned to a designated

storage area. Loose personal belongings (bags, shoes) starting blocks and other non-competition training aids (mini hurdles, weighted vests) all pose a trip hazard.

#### *Athletes*

- Keep activity areas clear, well managed with consistent communication and clear instruction to athletes about when it is safe to start running can help minimise the risk of collisions with others
- Always ensure the activity is appropriate to the athletes age and stage of development, including technical and physical levels
- Technical progressions should be equally appropriate and regressed as necessary to minimise the risk of injury from poor technique (e.g. hurdle height and spacings)
- Ensure that all equipment used is appropriate for the athlete's level of ability (starting blocks and hurdles).

#### *Weather*

- Monitor the weather and visibility. During floodlit sessions ample lighting is essential to maintain good visibility of the areas of the track being used. When there is insufficient light stop the session.

#### *Track*

- Keep the track clear of equipment and other debris to minimise trips and falls
- Any items used for check marks should be placed adjacent to the lane to minimise tripping hazards
- Remind athletes of track etiquette and to step off the track looking in all directions on conclusion of a rep.

Summary of notable hazards.

- Slips, trips, falls
- Collisions with others
- Equipment failure
- Environment
- Athlete overload

#### **Post Session**

When the session has concluded, check all equipment for damage and make minor repairs as necessary. Return all equipment to storage and put away safely ready for next use. Report any notable damage and put equipment no longer fit for purpose to one side with a note.

During the post session debrief with athletes check everyone is healthy and report any accidents or injuries to the club or facility operator as appropriate. For safeguarding and welfare reasons, ensure all young athletes have been collected before departing the venue yourself or make sure a club representative or welfare officer is present until all club training has concluded, and everyone has departed from the facility.

#### **Other**

- Ensure training is supervised by a qualified professional (qualified and licensed coach)

- Training prescription should be age-related and not age- determined. Prescription should be based according to biological status, training age, motor skill competency, technical proficiency, existing strength levels, and psychosocial maturity
- Regardless of training mode, training volume and intensity shall not be increased at the expense of technical competency.
- Remind athletes to ensure they are hydrated before the session starts and have access to a drink and refueling either before, during or post session
- Anticipate potential risks of injury, taking measures to eliminate or reduce them, and alert participants to these risks, including recommended coach : athlete ratios
- Ensure athlete can hear instructions (be mindful of the use of headphones whilst training)
- Coaches shall achieve and maintain professional certification(s) with continuing education requirements and a code of conduct
- Coaches must operate within their scope of practice; responsibilities and knowledge and understanding of running training
- Athletes must be made aware of gym discipline and etiquette when using the facilities
- Ensure equipment is wiped clean after use
- Athletes and coaches should always be informed of the correct mode of dress required for coaching sessions.
- Clothing should not be so loose that it obstructs movement, nor should it be so tight that it restricts movement
- Clothing should insulate / aerate the athlete comfortably.
- All jewellery and watches should be removed prior to the session commencing
- In the event that an athlete wishes to wear different clothing in accordance with their religion or cultural traditions, this should be discussed and a suitable outcome agreed on, resulting in maintaining respect for the individual's beliefs at the same time as enabling safe participation
- Glasses should be with plastic or unbreakable lenses
- Coaches should ensure that athletes wear appropriate footwear
- Footwear should provide good traction
- Footwear should provide good support and appropriate cushioning for the activity being carried out
- Laces should be well tied and there should be no obstruction such as loose tongues of shoes.