

The way forward for developing orienteering in Scotland in 2026

Supporting the development of orienteering across Scotland is one of the key strategic priorities [[read more here](#)] for the SOA. Mary Williams, SOA's Development Director, sets out below some of the latest thinking around attracting new participants and retaining them to grow orienteering as a sport, and how the SOA is supporting clubs.

It's interesting to reflect on wider research on how the world is evolving, particularly around what younger people are looking for now. Since the Covid lockdown, many people now work from home and remotely from colleagues, creating big gaps in the opportunities for social interaction. No surprise then that this is a big factor in choices around leisure time. In a recent BOF Development Conference on Improving Event Experience (available to watch [here](#)), some key findings from market research were shared on GEN Zs (20- to 30-year-olds):

- 49% go for a run or walk once a week
- 75% prefer to do so in pairs and sign up for activities with a friend, and hope to meet new people at the event
- 70% will only travel to local events and want a good finish with plenty of social interaction e.g. a pub or café. They want these events to be regular on the same day each week.
- They mostly communicate with Instagram and or Tik Tok (rather than Facebook). They are keen to post pictures about their exciting and fun activities and adventures (orienteering should fit that need).
- They like a suitable challenge, ability to achieve, to have fun, excitement and to feel welcomed. They want easy courses but not necessarily short - many want to run 5 or 6km.

The majority of newcomers and weekly orienteers are not competitive, but are there for an exciting form of exercise and vitally, to have fun with friends. This gives some really clear steer about how orienteering events can be designed to be as attractive as possible to new audiences, particularly younger adults as a considerably-sized and important category for the longer-term sustainability of orienteering. Think about, for example: entry options for pairs, making sure there's social interaction (e.g., at a café or pub), longer easier courses, selling the fun-factor (novel elements or locations and explaining that you only get to see your course when you start so who knows where you might go!)

The SOA's strategy has been using insights from a range of sources and the SOA staff team is continuing to develop initiatives to help attract and retain younger-adult newcomers - for example, through the new Adults Beginners' sessions and promoting Permanent Orienteering Courses (POCs). We are also

seeking to recruit a new coordinator for SEDS (the Scottish Elite & Development Squad) - do get in touch if you would like to be involved in this. Other development work is with higher education institutions and local authorities. Whilst this is upstream of clubs seeing new orienteers, it's important to help broaden awareness of what orienteering is. Giving simple tasters prompts ideas about bringing others to the sport, particularly through schools. The development officers are delivering 'Introduction to Orienteering' courses at universities and colleges across Scotland, and also have projects going with after school clubs and council leisure organisations in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Inverness and Dundee.

For example, through funding sourced from the Aberdeen Health Improvement Fund, Louise is working with Grampian Orienteers (GRAMP) and Aberdeen City Council to design and erect a new POC and accompanying noticeboard in Hazelhead Park. The map will be available to download for free through a QR code on the board, where it can be printed or used on the MapRun app. GRAMP has recently had the Hazelhead map updated, and used the area for events and activities to bring orienteering to groups including parkrunners, members of local running clubs and schools. An Adult Beginners' Day was held in October. The new POC project aims to capitalise on this work and continue efforts made pre- Deeside 2025 to increase participation in orienteering across Aberdeen.

Councils often have funding available for POC projects for use by schools, youth groups, mental health groups, running clubs and active health groups as well as individuals and families (in addition to clubs of course for their own training and events). Good quality orienteering information boards (e.g., shown below, by Pendle Forest OC) can broaden access to orienteering, particularly where parks are close to communities facing more disadvantage - a high priority for SportScotland, which grant funds SOA's development work.

Such projects can be supported by SOA club development funding to cover mapping, design and installation and promotion of permanent courses with local organisations as well as club coaching which link into the Scottish Orienteering Strategy and SportScotland funding targets.

The development challenge for orienteering is also being worked on elsewhere in the world. In the BOF webinar [\[hyperlink again\]](#), Partnerships Manager Kay Hawke provided some valuable insight from Belgium, where Keep on Orienteering (KONO) has been growing orienteering in a highly effective way. Key elements to this included building strong local partnerships with local authorities and businesses, to help with event planning (perhaps opening up novel options for routes), promoting wide community participation (local young people etc) and gaining sponsorship, to help with resourcing as well as wider public profile.

The other main strand of development is coaching. SOA's Coaching & Volunteer Officer, Suzanne Robins-Bird has done a wonderful job over the last years developing and delivering a diverse programme of courses for coaches, planners, organisers, controllers and young people as well as introductory courses to orienteering for institutions and outdoor centres. The SOA has organised three

successful beginners' coaching sessions across the country, with further sessions in March, in Inverness, Edinburgh and Aberdeen - please do encourage your non-orienteering friends and contacts in those areas to have a look. Area-level coaching sessions are also starting up, e.g., the successful East Area session in January [[more details here](#)]. Sadly, Suzanne is retiring in April and we await to see who will take her place. Meantime I wish Suzanne all the best in her retirement.

FIN YOUR WAY PROJECT **VIRTUAL ORIENTEERING COURSES** **SPORT ENGLAND**
GO ON AN ADVENTURE WITH YOUR PHONE!

Queens Park, Blackburn
Scale 1:2500
Contour Interval 5m
Magnetic North 2024



Key to Map Symbols

ORIENTEERING IS A FUN ADVENTURE SPORT USING A MAP TO FIND CHECKPOINTS. THE SKILL IS FINDING THE MOST EFFICIENT WAY BETWEEN THEM TO COMPLETE THE COURSE CHOOSING YOUR OWN ROUTE. YOU CAN WALK, RUN OR RACE THE COURSES.

1. DOWNLOAD THE **FREE** MAPRUN APP
2. FILL IN SIMPLE DETAILS
3. ENABLE LOCATION & FILE ACCESS
4. SELECT 'EVENTS NEAR ME'
5. CHOOSE A FYW QUEENS PARK COURSE
6. HEAD TO THE TRIANGLE (START) TO START YOUR COURSE

GET READY

QUICK TIPS

VISIT START (TRIANGLE) THEN VISIT THE FIRST CHECKPOINT (CIRCLE) TO START YOUR COURSE - WAIT FOR IT TO TURN GREEN   ① → ①

VISIT EVERY CHECKPOINT ON THE COURSE IN NUMBER ORDER- MAKE SURE THEY TURN GREEN. ② → ②

WHEN COMPLETED HEAD TO THE FINISH (DOUBLE CIRCLE), WHEN IT TURNS GREEN YOU CAN SEE YOUR SCORE! 

re:fresh
your health and wellbeing

ActiveBwD 
part of Together an Active Future

PENINE FOREST ORIENTEERING

YOUR LOCAL CLUB IS PFO- FIND OUT MORE AT WWW.PFO.ORG.UK