

1, What is the Southampton athletic Academy?

It is an athletic training group specifically set up to coach young athletes across a range of athletics disciplines from school year 4 through to school year 10. The group is run by Southampton Athletic club and membership of the club is compulsory to join the Academy.

2, Can my child join before year 4?

I am afraid not. This is a reasonable age to begin athletics coaching. Unlike other sports such as gymnastics, tennis or swimming, there is no need to be at a certain standard at a young age. Athletics is a late development sport and we want to coach children for the longer term rather than to be a fantastic performer at 8 years old. Our competitions do not start until school year 4 and our new year 4's are all inducted from the first training session of the Autumn term which is the first Wednesday in October. You cannot join most athletics clubs until school year 4.

3, How does this work, school year 4 to 10 is a big age range?

Because of the age range, the Academy is split into two sections. The Junior Academy which is for school years 4 & 5 and the Senior Academy which is for school years 6 and upwards. Occasionally, year 5 young athletes are invited to join the senior academy early in order they can train with young athletes of a similar standard.

4, What are the differences between the two?

One of the principle values of the Academy is that of athlete progression. In the Junior Academy, young athletes learn the basic athletic disciplines of running, throwing & jumping in a safe & fun environment. They do this through sportshall and cross country events and competitions in the autumn & winter and quad kids events and competitions in the Spring & Summer. Training takes place once a week on a Wednesday with competitions at the weekends.

In the senior academy, young athletes make the step up to training twice a week. They continue to learn the basic athletic disciplines but across a wider range of events. Training is still fun but it is harder and more emphasis is placed on the more traditional athletic events.

5, Why multi-event, my child is only good at running?

Athletics is a late development sport and whilst children may be good at a specific event when they are younger, this may not be true when they have grown and are older. We want to avoid children specialising in a certain event too young and instead give them the opportunity to try a wider range of events. The basics they learn will stand them in good stead in later years.

6, What happens after the Academy?

At Southampton we have a fantastic set of specialist coaches. Children will graduate from the Academy and move to a specialist group around the age of school year 9 but this is dependent on the child. There will be a transition into the specialist coach perhaps on a shared basis with the Academy to begin with before a complete handover.

7, When & where are the training times?

The Junior Academy train outside in the Spring & Summer at the track at Southampton Sports Centre from 6-7.30pm on Wednesday evenings. In the Autumn & Winter they train at the same time and day inside the Sportshall at Wyvern school. The junior Academy represents the U11 age group. The spring season begins in April & the Autumn season begins in October.

The Senior Academy train in the & Spring & Summer at the track at Southampton Sports Centre from 6.30-8pm on Wednesday evenings and again at the J track at Wyvern school from 10-11.30am on Saturday mornings. In the Autumn & Winter they move the Wednesday evening slot to the J track at Wyvern school from 6-7.30pm. The senior academy have representatives from the U11, U13 & U15 age groups.

8, My child hasn't tried athletics before is there room for them?

Southampton Athletic club is completely inclusive and there is room for everyone in the Academy from novices to the best children in the country. As coaches we learn to differentiate coaching to suit children of all abilities. We encourage children to compete for us but this is not compulsory.

9, My child has a disability, is there room for them?

As an inclusive club we encourage young athletes with disabilities to join the group. Depending on the disability, we try to include them with able bodied youngsters and differentiate the activity accordingly. All our coaches are trained on disability awareness.

10, How does coaching work?

The children are split into groups to keep the coach to children ratios healthy. As athletics is a late development sport, we don't try to place children in groups by ability and believe every child has some potential. The same coaching format is then followed for both the senior & junior academy

There is a fun warm up and warm down at the start and the end of the session for everybody. Young athletes working in their groups in the middle of the session and are coached across a range of events in these groups. Play, work, play if you prefer.

11, Who are the coaches.

We have a group of around 14 coaches who work with both junior & senior academies. Each coach is CRB checked, volunteer checked and qualified and registered with UK athletics. Andy Fisher is overall Academy Head coach and Head coach of the Senior Academy. Andy is one of the few specialist children's coaches in the country who is qualified specifically to coach children in the 8-14 age group.

All coaches carry a photo id licence with accreditation from UK athletics you are welcome to ask to see this or confirmation of CRB check upon request.

We are always looking for more coaches and Parents provide by far the biggest source of these so why not come forward & help, it is great fun.

12, What do the children need to take part?

Athletics is a very simple sport, they just need sports clothing and a bottle of water. For the senior academy we recommend that children have athletics spikes although this is not compulsory. For the junior academy, these are not necessary but they should wear them if they have them. Athletics is an outdoor sport and doesn't stop for the weather. If it rains, the children will get wet and need to dress appropriately.

13, Can my child try out a coaching session to see if they like it.

Yes of course. We recommend that new or novice athletes come along for a couple of weeks to see if they like it. If after a couple of weeks, they want to carry on, they would need to join the club and become enrolled in the Academy. The cost of the trial sessions are £2.50.

14, What does it all cost?

At Southampton Athletic club we want to make athletics as inclusive as possible and this is reflected in our membership and Academy fees. For all children, membership is just £47 per year and the academy fees are just £2.50 per session.

After a few weeks, children are expected to join the club. Our membership fees are one of, if not the cheapest for any athletics club and also compare extremely favourably with any other sport. We encourage children to compete for the club and when they do in team competitions, this is completely free and is included in their membership fee.

15, How do the children get picked for competitions?

We have Team Managers at the U11, U13 & U15 age groups who select the athletes for team competitions. In addition, there are many individual competitions such as open meetings which you can enter directly. There will be a cost for entering individual competitions and championship events.

The club selection policy is very clear and transparent and available from Team Managers who are Andy Fisher for the U11's, Lisa Woodman for the U13 boys, Kate Higgins for the U15 boys, Anna Matthews for the U13 girls and Nicky Wright for the U15 girls. The academy coaches and Team Managers speak regularly to understand the current performance levels of the young athlete's.

We encourage children to compete regularly against each other and other clubs, learning to race or jump & throw against others is an important part of their development.

16, My child also does other sports?

We encourage young athletes to take part in other sports. Athletic ability is behind virtually every other sport and the coaching they receive in the Academy will help improve your child's ability in whatever sport they do as well as in athletics.

17, My child can't come to every session.

We understand that young athletes are often busy with other sports and there is no compulsion to attend every week or twice a week. However, the coaches attend every single session and a reasonable amount of commitment is required in order to maintain athletic progression and development.

18, Can I get more involved in the club?

Yes please! Like many sports clubs we rely completely on volunteers for coaching, administration & officiating. Please contact Andy Fisher if you would like to help in any of these areas. We are very grateful for any help and support we are a massive club with nearly 700 members who train and compete all year around. We are currently short of officials who can help time & measure.