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Welcome to the “Understanding the Irish Sailing Pathway” handbook. This handbook aims to guide young competitive sailors and their families through the process of progressing within the Irish Sailing Performance Pathway.



**James O’Callaghan**  
Performance Director  
Irish Sailing



# THE PERFORMANCE PATHWAY

# AIMS

The ultimate aim of the Performance Pathway is to nurture and develop sailors throughout their junior and youth sailing. The Pathway is a journey of six phases which starts with an introduction to the sport of sailing, but can lead ultimately to international regattas and Olympic level competition.

The key is to develop young sailors of the appropriate age, size and ability and guide them to progress forward at the right time. The Pathway identifies the key elements to achieve along the journey.

## 6 PHASES OF THE PATHWAY

Linking research to the development of world-class sailors is important in understanding how the Pathway operates, how the classes are selected and ultimately how sailors are guided into the right direction. Transformation into a world class performance sailor does not happen overnight.

The model retained and adapted to our sport is the Long Term Player Development model, which divides progress into 6 phases.

- Phase 1:** Enjoying sailing and racing
- Phase 2:** Gaining an understanding for sailing
- Phase 3:** Developing into the sport
- Phase 4:** Excelling in the sport
- Phase 5:** Performing in competition
- Phase 6:** Performing on the world scene



# WHAT TO EXPECT

IN EACH STAGE

## ENJOYING SAILING AND RACING

The aim at this level is to introduce sailors to sailing, create a love for the sport through encouragement, providing fun, praising effort and valuing progress over winning. Whilst maintaining enjoyment, basic technical and tactical skills can be introduced.

### The boats

Optimist & Topper

### Training

Mainly club based and some open training, for example class training in Baltimore over the February mid term break.

## GAINING AN UNDERSTANDING FOR SAILING

The aim at this level is to secure fundamentals by exploring techniques, advance initial learning and develop a learning environment and good ethos. The technical and tactical work will focus on developing consistency and promote decision-making.

### The boats

Optimist & Topper

### Training

Club based, open training

### Competition levels

Club and national competition with the introduction of international racing for experience

### Training levels

In summer, as much as the sailor likes provided it is effective and the sailor is learning. In winter, no more than once a week with a good break in December and January.

## PHASE

# 1:

under 12

## PHASE

# 2:

12-15



# WHAT TO EXPECT

IN EACH STAGE

## DEVELOPING INTO THE SPORT

This stage is a key turning point for many sailors and their parents, as sailing is becoming their primary sport. It is a phase allowing sailors to enter the Pathway for the first time through club youth programme, but some may also have a successful exit towards non-Pathway sailing. It is the phase where sailors figure out how far they want to take their sport. Coaches will start to empower, increase focus and challenge their sailors.

The boats	Training	Competition levels	Training levels
Topper, Laser4.7, Radial, 420	Club based, open class training, Irish Sailing Laser regional training, Irish Sailing national Topper squad	Club and national competition with the introduction of international racing for experience.	Increasing training levels to 2 days a week with recovery periods and increased intensity periods.

## PHASE

# 3:

14-18

## EXCELLING IN THE SPORT

This is the **IRISH SAILING ACADEMY** phase. Having figured out they want to excel in the sport, sailors are now self motivated, they still benefit from parental support and but begin to build strong independence. Coaches become facilitators and service providers get involved in the sport education of the young athletes. Building on the foundations set by the previous phases, the Academy aims to develop a culture of excellence, personal responsibilities and an understanding of the commitments necessary to succeed. Sailors may continue on their Pathway journey after a few years on the Academy, or they may exit having been prepared for life challenges in general. Many of the past and current Pathway coaches are former Academy sailors.

**Squad:** ISA Academy.

The boats	Training	Competition levels	Training levels
Laser Radial, 420	Club based, open class training, self sailing time, Irish Sailing Academy training	Club and National competition, travel abroad to key events and training camps.	Training camps both domestically and in Europe. Fully supported gym programme.

## PHASE

# 4:

16 - 18





# WHAT TO EXPECT

IN EACH STAGE

## PERFORMING IN COMPETITION

Time to move into an Olympic class. The Irish Sailing Development Squad aims at young aspiring Olympians. Self-motivated, well-supported, independent and competitive former Academy sailors have now stepped into their Olympic class of choice and undertake high performance training. They will link effectively their college studies with a busy training and racing schedule.

**Squad:** Irish Sailing Development Squad

The boats	Training	Competition levels	Training levels
Laser std, Laser Radial, 49er, 49erFX	Self-sailing time, squad training camps	Club and national competition with frequent travelling abroad for possible long periods of time to international competitions Performance criteria set.	Training regime adjusted to the racing calendar taking into account college pressures and exams.

## PERFORMING ON THE WORLD SCENE

This is the final phase of the Performance Pathway. The few sailors reaching the Olympic Team are self-motivated, professional, competitive and already have solid experience within a high Performance culture.

Sailors are now effectively full time sailing and their personal and professional life are organised around their sailing campaign.

**Squad:** Olympic Team

The boats	Training	Competition levels	Training levels
Laser std, Laser Radial, 49er, 49erFX	Self-sailing time, sailing with sparring partners, coached sessions.	Club and national competition with frequent travelling abroad to international competitions or/and camps. Performance criteria set to determine funding levels.	Training regime adjusted to the racing calendar with training periods worked around major key events.

## PHASE

# 5:

18-21

## PHASE

# 6:

over 18

# Annalise Murphy

## A TIMELINE TO SUCCESS

5-10

Sailed with my parents on their catamaran.

10

Got my first Optimist. I did the junior section and completed my level 1 & 2.

11

First Optimist Irish National Championships.

13

First 4.7 Irish National Championships.

15

Selected for ISA Academy. Competed at my first international event, started training more once I started transition year, trained with the ISA squads during the winter months (I have trained every winter since I started in October 2004!).

16

Rory Fitzpatrick hired as ISA coach. We sailed on Wednesday afternoons and weekends. Competed at the ISAF Youth Worlds in Weymouth. Started a strength and conditioning programme.

17

Lost the ISAF Youth Worlds trials. I got to compete at the ISAF Senior World Championships in Cascais which was my first real insight into Olympic level racing.

18

I finished my youth sailing on a high with a 5th place at the Worlds Championships and 4th at the European Championships. Moved up to the Development Squad.

19

I finished 8th at the World Championships which is probably the result that changed my life. It qualified me for a Sport Ireland Carding grant and meant I had the opportunity to defer my degree and go full time. Moved up to the ISA Performance Squad.

21

I finished in the top 10 in every event this year bar Palma where I was 11th. I also qualified for the London Olympics!

22

I finished 4th at my first Olympics (London 2012).

23

European Champion.

26

Silver medal at the Rio Olympics (2016).



“ I try to have fun and look at setbacks as a challenge to try to overcome. ”

My advice would be to sail as much as possible and to try and learn something small every time you go on the water. I believe sailing shorter more productive sessions often are much more beneficial than long sessions on the water not very often. Long sessions are still sometimes necessary to improve hiking fitness and downwind practice. I try to have fun and look at setbacks as a challenge to try to overcome. Nobody is perfect and you can only do your best.

**Annalise Murphy**  
Silver Medallist, 2016 Olympics



# THE SELECTED CLASSES



## OPTIMIST: JUNIOR

With an average national attendance of 40 beginners, 80 boats in the Under 12 category and a further 50 in the 13-15 category, the Optimist is the class in which most young sailors have their first sailing experience. The IODAI (International Optimist Dinghy Association of Ireland) works closely with Irish Sailing Performance management and the national coach to propose a balanced training and racing programme involving the class in the initial two steps of the Pathway.



## TOPPER: JUNIOR

The Topper has been a very successful feeder to the youth programme. Aiming at junior sailors too big for the Optimist yet too young for the Laser, the class proposes a friendly yet competitive training and racing programme. The class is gaining in numbers and all main clubs have now a Topper programme.



## LASER 4.7: JUNIOR/YOUTH

The Laser 4.7 is an introduction to Laser sailing for light sailors graduating from Optimist and Topper and wishing to continue the single-handed route. Sailors can get valuable experience and develop their skills in a smaller rig therefore the 4.7 must be a short yet important step before moving into the Radial rig.

<b>Single/Double</b>	One person	One person	One person
<b>Recommended max age:</b>	14	15	16
<b>Class max age:</b>	15	-	18
<b>Weight range:</b>	30-52kgs	45-62kgs	50-62kgs

**The Irish Sailing Performance programme has identified the classes that best facilitate progression through the Performance Pathway.**

These classes effectively develop the necessary skills and knowledge sailors will require to successfully develop their skills through junior, youth, development and eventually Olympic classes racing.



**LASER RADIAL:  
JUNIOR/YOUTH**

The Laser Radial is the most popular of the youth classes. It introduces youth sailors to high performance sailing, provides life long racing (it is also a senior class) and it is the chosen equipment as the one person's dinghy. This gives an opportunity to youth sailors to race against the world's best. It is also the Single hander for the World Sailing Youth Worlds (male & female). Irish Sailing recognises the key role of the Radial in the Performance Pathway and training in the class starts at youth provincial level all the way towards the Olympic team.



**420: JUNIOR/  
YOUTH**

The 420 class is the selected youth double-hander of the Pathway. Aimed at sailors physically unlikely to reach the right size in the Laser class but also wishing to develop two person skills, the 420 has an active class in Ireland. The class with the help of Irish Sailing national coach provides open training whilst the best sailors get selected in the 420 Academy. The skills developed in the 420 are very transferable and the class delivers excellent rounded sailors. The 420 is the two person dinghy for the World Sailing Youth World Championships.



**LASER  
STANDARD:  
DEVELOPMENT /  
OLYMPIC**

The Laser Standard is the natural and final progression for boys into a one person Olympic class, just as is the case with the Radial for girls, competition goes to Olympic level. The best youth Radial sailors from the Academy make the transition into the Development Squad before attempting to take the final step into the Irish Sailing Olympic team. The class maintains a very active non-Olympic racing calendar.



**49ER &  
49ERFX:  
DEVELOPMENT  
/OLYMPIC**

The 49er is the Olympic skiff with the FX being a smaller rig version for women. Irish Sailing has recently implemented a push towards skiff sailing in the wake of good results from our full time campaigners and young talented sailors coming out of the youth programmes.

One person	Two person	One person	Two person
18	Youth U18 No max age	Dvpt U21 No max age	Dvpt U21 No max age
-	-	-	-
60-72kg	105-120kgs	75-85kgs	49er : 145-160kgs 49erFX: 115-130kgs



# THE ROLE OF PARENTS

Setting up an effective system to nurture and develop the sailor from grassroots to Olympics requires full understanding of creating **a successful team around the sailor.**

The biggest influence in the early phases of a sailor's progress are their parents. They are a big part of the team and they will be central to a sailor's performance and progress.

The Irish Sailing Performance Pathway philosophy aims to ensure sailors and parents are educated and supported so that they positively influence their sailor. The most effective parent-sailor teams are based on mutual respect and understanding of each other's role.

Parents are encouraged to allow sailors to experience failure which will help them to learn from their mistakes. This teaches the sailor resilience, which will stand to them as they progress with their sailing. As the journey to success is a long one, effort and persistence should be rewarded over performance goals. This way the sailor will feel more freedom to make decisions for themselves with out the pressure of making a mistake. In the later phases, the parent's involvement and responsibilities will decrease with sailors getting older and more independent.







I started out in the Optimist when I was 7 years old. With hard training I qualified for the trials and made the under 12 squad. From there I never looked back. I took the opportunities the ISA gave me and excelled. I won junior and senior nationals and all of the provincials in the Optimist. As I got taller and bigger I was advised to move into the Laser 4.7. I quite liked this boat and won all the Irish events in my first year and came 15th at the Europeans.

After this I was approached by the ISA Academy. I spent 4 years on this squad under the advisement/supervision of the ISA, my coach Milan and my trainer Mark McCabe. In my final year I won silver medal at the ISAFs and was 6th in the European Championships and 7th in the World Championships. A few months ago the Performance Director approached me with a massive opportunity. The chance to sail with two time Olympian Ryan Seaton in the 49er class. I took this opportunity and am currently campaigning to win gold medal in Tokyo 2020 and fulfill my dream of becoming a successful Olympian.

**Seafra Guilfoyle**





## IRISH SAILING LASER ACADEMY

### How to get selected

The Laser Academy groups together the best Laser sailors in the country with a view building a strong culture of performance and independence.

Teams who have shown promise and diligence to training are invited in the programme for a probationary period after the initial interview. If they perform to a level expected, then after 6 months, following a review, they are invited to join the programme.

### Squad Size

4-8 sailors

### Age restriction

16 - 18 (19 in exceptional circumstances)

### Coach

Irish Sailing Laser Academy coach: Russell McGovern

### Programme

Winter 3-4 training camps based in southern Spain, plus international European regattas. Significant strength and conditioning support from Sports Med Ireland, as well as other service providers. Support at Laser Radial Junior World and European championships.



## IRISH SAILING 420 ACADEMY

The 420 Academy regroup the best Youth two person dinghy sailors of the programme. The Academy is in constant review but key times to secure an interview would be after the Irish Sailing Youth Pathway National Championships and after the summer events.

### How to get selected

Teams who have shown promise and diligence to training are invited in the programme for a probationary period after the initial interview. If they perform to a level expected, then after 6 months, following a review, they are invited to join the programme.

### Squad Size

3-4 teams (6-8 sailors).

### Age restriction

16 - 18 years old. In exceptional circumstances 19 or 15 years old.

### Coach

Irish Sailing 420 Academy coach: Ross Killian.

### Programme

September- January: 3-4 overseas camps/events in France, Spain or Italy using the Irish Sailing owned 420s. The boats remain on the continent with the sailors flying in to sail. This way they miss minimal school. Foreign camps are organised in conjunction with competitions or with other international teams to form a multi-nation training group. When not at abroad camps sailors also train at home in their own boats in various Irish venues.

## FURTHER INFORMATION



**Contact the Performance department**  
[isaperformance.ie](http://isaperformance.ie)

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**The IODAI: Optimist class association**  
[iodai.com](http://iodai.com)

**The ITCA: Topper class association**  
[irltopper.com](http://irltopper.com)

**The 420 class association**  
[sail420.com](http://sail420.com)

**The Laser class association**  
[laser-ireland.com](http://laser-ireland.com)





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