Dear friends and colleagues in the athletic community,

I am humbled by the honour bestowed upon me. We are unique as individuals, there has never been anyone like us, before or now. We seek to achieve to our full potential. I will work hard to match the outstanding effort of the out-going chair, Stewart Barnes, but I can only be myself, I hope I am worthy.

The Former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating expressed the opinion that the reward for public life is public progress. To paraphrase and invert this, I would say, the price we must pay to see progress achieved is that of public service.

We live in straitened times, in both economic and societal terms. Resources are stretched that little bit more each year, both in human and monetary terms. The association is no different, the grant from the Home Country Athletics Federation has reduced and those who help to conduct the sport are diminishing in number, albeit not at too rapid a rate.

Succession Planning

The MCAA is a competition provider, we do so both in Track and field as well as what is referred to in athletics as non-stadia competition. To develop further we need to have an 'athlete centred approach', because after all that is our rationale for our existence, providing competitive opportunities.

We need, on the competition front, to construct a robust program of events to cater for our clientele. It is contingent on us to have sufficient qualified officials to achieve this aim. Regrettably, our volunteer workforce has aged and diminished to a degree. We need clubs and associated groups to encourage members to embark on officials' courses and to take their involvement further at league and association level, irrespective of discipline. Advancement comes about through experience. At the most senior level, younger officials are being rewarded with opportunities to officiate at the highest level (see the recent European Championships).

We need volunteers to come forward, with an eye to involvement in the administration of the association. Again, we witness a group of willing workers who have carried the load despite their lengthy years of service. The Treasurer has said that he will remain in place for one more year. We need to fill vacancies as they occur. Some current positions remain unfilled. I encourage people to come forward, even if only to gain experience shadowing some of the current office bearers, with a view to stepping up when the situation arises. I am not being pessimistic, however with the best will in the world, we all have a finite 'shelf life'.

England Athletics

The grant from the Home Country Athletics Federation has reduced in recent years, this in part, is down to their having to work within financial constraints. Their income arising from membership, a settlement from Sport England and other sources. I would suggest that we cannot expect an increase in funding coming from England Athletics.

Their responsibilities include supporting clubs, through their current workforce, the provision of Coaching and Officials' course and competition via the various championships they offer. We must aim to support these in a fulsome manner, to perhaps leverage further goodwill.

The key point here must endeavour to maintain goodwill between they as a federation and us as an association. Whilst fighting our corner, albeit as a club, county or the wider association, setting up conflict will gain nothing.

Facilities/Competition Venues

We as clubs and an association are all too aware that athletics facilities are not normally a high priority for councils as they seek to best balance their books or more likely minimise deficits. The standard of tracks is seeing increasing wear and tear, councils reluctant/unable to address this. Some clubs have entered into operational agreements but find their hands tied when seeking to remedy issues that arise.

Equally, we see the potential of other venues we use looking at cost increase with more providers looking at parking fees and the like. This adds to the cost of operating the competition. Does the association increase fees to meet this or do they need to attract more competitors?

There is no magic solution available. We do need to attract more competitors to cover costs, thus reducing the need to look at increasing the cost to competitors. Somewhat of a circular argument.

Finance

As headlined by the treasurer at the Annual General Meeting, we are making surpluses on competitions, but this is only going part way to cover costs of operating the association. There has been a need to dip in to reserves built up by wise managements over the decades. This is not a permanent solution.

If we can build numbers of athletes competing in our various championships and look to minimise costs, we will endeavour to set ourselves on a sound footing. Economic issues in the wider world are cyclical. We just need to ride this out and look toward a more stable situation.

For My Part

I am fallible, I will need to rely on the wise counsel of others, I seek to be first amongst equals, not to be a dominant figure, rather to seek to guide, to be a set of safe hands who will at times challenge others. To ask difficult questions.

On April 18, 1521, at the Diet of Worms, Martin Luther spoke the famous words, "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me…". I too stand before you, however conscious, in my case, I must endeavour to do more. I urge you to share these thoughts widely in your clubs and as widely as possible.

Yours in Athletics,

Mark Wall

Chairman