

Final Report: UKA rule book / 2024 proposal (age groups)

1. Purpose of Paper

This report, to be submitted to the UKA Rules Group on 31st October 2023, provides a summary of the suggested changes to the existing age groups set out within the UKA rule book, following a period of consultation.

In particular, the recommended changes from the current age groups of U13, U15 and U17 to new proposed age groups of U12, U14, U16 and U18. (See Appendix 1)

2. Key Points

History of the suggested rule change for Age Groups

- The suggested changes to the age groups in the UKA rule book are not new and have previously been unsuccessfully proposed.
- This was in part due to the lack of supporting information and the focus on changing to align with World Athletics and other countries' age groups, not how it would benefit the athletes in the UK. In addition, there was a lack of support from school athletics and cross country bodies.

Why change now?

- An increasing number of athletes are dropping out of athletics and in particular those aged 14-16 years (GCSE age group) and 18-20 years (A-Level age group).
 - Following the completion of the summer track and field season, so far during the 2023/24 affiliation year around 5,450 (37%) of U17 and U20 registered athletes from 2022/23 have not renewed their registration.
 - A similar trend was seen during the 2022/23 affiliation year with around 35% of U17, U20 registered athletes from 2021/22 not renewing their registration.
 - The average dropout across all age groups and categories is around 26%.
 - This analysis suggests that we are losing at least 5,000 young athletes between the ages of 15-20 from our membership each year and athletes of this age group are more prone to drop out from the sport than other age groups.
 - Using data from power of 10, research found that of 24,854 athletes aged 13 to 19 who competed in track and field in 2016 (71% of them members of affiliated clubs), 43% of them did not compete again the following year. The same churn rate existed between 2017 to 2018 and the drift away was highest amongst 16 and 17-year-olds, who failed to return at alarming rate of 30% each year.
 - This suggests that high drop out rates are not a new trend and are getting worse.
- Sport England research stated that academic pressure is also contributing to poorer mental health with children in the UK having the lowest levels of life satisfaction in Europe.
- Women in Sport during their research with 4,000 teenagers found that of the 43% that once considered themselves sporty that subsequently dropped out of sport, 47% cited schoolwork as the main factor.
- In our research, conducted in 2018*, highlighted that when athletes are top of their age group at U17 and U20, this clashes with either their GCSE or A-Level exams, causing a large amount of stress on the young person. The research called this a 'Perfect Storm' of pressure and indicated that this plays a major factor in dropout rates.

** The focus of the research was participation and targeted current and lapsed athletes aged 16-25- the age group where the largest drop-out and decline is seen. An independent research agency spoke to n=60 coaches, officials, clubs, facility providers, statisticians, technology providers from across the sport. This was followed by in-depth qualitative video auditions and interviews with n=30 current and lapsed athletes. The project finished with a quantitative survey with n=523 current/ lapsed athletes to ascertain the scale of the issues, hypotheses, and potential solutions.*

- Changing to U12-U18 age groups would have several benefits, including:
 - Competing at the top of your age group in a non-major exam year.
 - Providing new age groups of U12s (allowing younger athletes to compete earlier) and U18s (allowing for an easier transition to U20s and seniors).
 - U12s would be exclusive in Primary schools and U14 the first two years of secondary, allowing for better emotional and social development.
 - This could also allow for easier transition through the age groups for technical events.
- At this stage the recommendation is to leave the school's competition age groups in their current format of U13, U15, U17 and U19. By leaving the schools age as they currently are and only changing the club-based competition age groups, this would provide young people with a national title opportunity every year (schools U15, U17, U19 and clubs U16, U18, U20).



An athlete shouldn't have to choose between academic or athletics success.

We are pressurising our young athletes to perform at the highest level both physically and academically at the same time, this is not sustainable and why we see athletes leaving our sport.

Let's ease the pressure on our young athletes, protect and nurture their mental health and ensure they can perform at their optimum both physically and academically on alternate years.

Changing the age groups to evens will help do this, it will reduce pressure, protect their mental health and give them the opportunity to shine academically and in athletics, enabling our athletes to have a lifelong love of the sport at whatever level they compete.

Developing the proposal

- The matter of age groups was discussed across all HCAFs during the summer of 2022, England Athletics Whole Council Conference on 15th October 2022, at the Competition Conference on 3rd December 2022 and at the YDL consultation as part of the National Age Group Indoor Championships on the 11th and 12th of February this year.
- On the 5th April a presentation was made to all HCAFs Boards and Councils. The proposal received strong support to be worked up for submission in line with the established UKA led and published rules revision process.
- In principle, all four home countries NGBs support the proposed changes, and a working group was developed to pull together the final proposal.
- At the England Athletics Board meeting on 18th May a recommendation to work collectively with the other three home countries and UKA to put forward the age group changes for the 2024 UKA rule changes was approved.
- A proposal from all HCAFs was submitted to the UKA Rules Group ahead of the 30th June deadline.
- A consultation process including webinars and surveys was conducted during September and October across the UK in line with the UK Rules Group published timeframe.
- The results were analysed alongside the feedback already provided through the process so far and a summary report was presented to the England Athletics Board, England Council and representatives from the other HCAFs on 30th October.
- Following robust and open debate a final recommendation was agreed and this report was produced.

- The UKA Rules Group will then make their own recommendation to the UKA Board to consider at their meeting in December with a final publication of decisions during February 2024.

Consultation findings

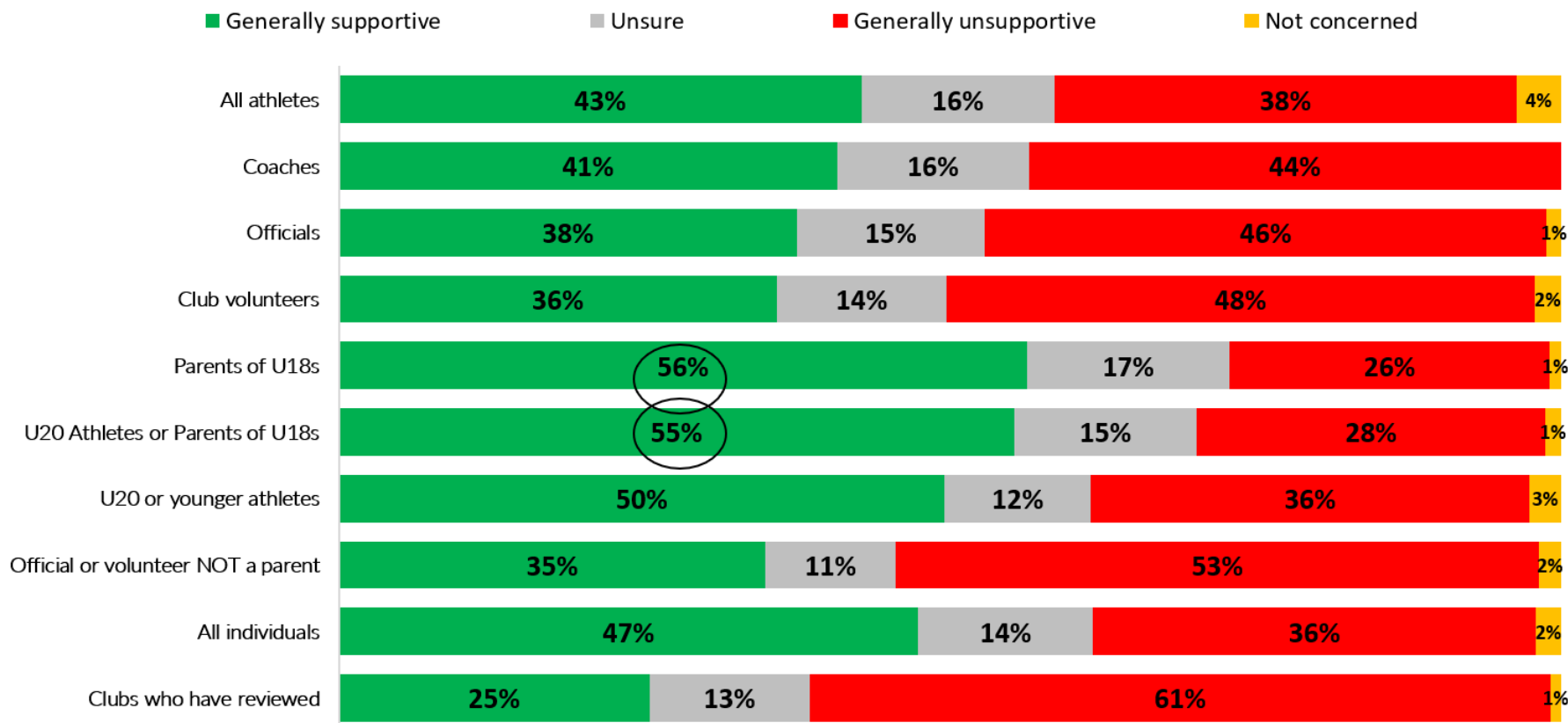
- Following the UK wide proposal from all HCAFs to consider changing the age groups of competition, we conducted the next phase of the consultation process.

Webinars

- All Home Countries have held a series of webinars consulting with the sport. All who attended the webinar had the opportunity to ask questions or give feedback on the proposal. At the end of each webinar an informal poll was held to gauge the opinions of those in the room.
- Of the 330 people who attended the webinars 240 people provided feedback through the poll or follow-up feedback form.
- Analysis of the feedback can be found in Appendix 2.
- In summary, 112 (47%) respondents were in favour of the changes, 63 (26%) against the change and 65 (27%) remained undecided.

Survey

- Surveys were set up by England Athletics to give all their key stakeholders in the sport the chance to have a say.
- One survey was for Affiliated Club and Member Bodies to provide a collective committee view following discussions within the club.
- A second survey was conducted for any individuals across the sport including athletes, parents, coaches and officials to provide their views on the proposals.
- The surveys were open from 26th September until 23rd October and were promoted across email newsletters, social media and on the homepage/ pop ups across England Athletics websites and portals.
- 122 clubs responded to the club survey and 831 people responded to the individual survey.
- The survey results in isolation **do not** provide an overwhelming case of support for the proposals in the current form.
- There is a clear difference between the views of clubs and member bodies, club volunteers, coaches, officials and the views of parents and athletes under the age of 20.
 - Only 25% of clubs and member bodies are in support of the current proposal and 61% unsupportive.
 - 55% of athletes under the age of 20 and parents of U18s are in support of the current proposal and 28% are unsupportive.
 - 50% of athletes under the age of 20 are supportive of the current proposal and 36% unsupportive.
- A summary of the results from all individuals (47% in favour) and other group breakdowns can be found in the chart overleaf:



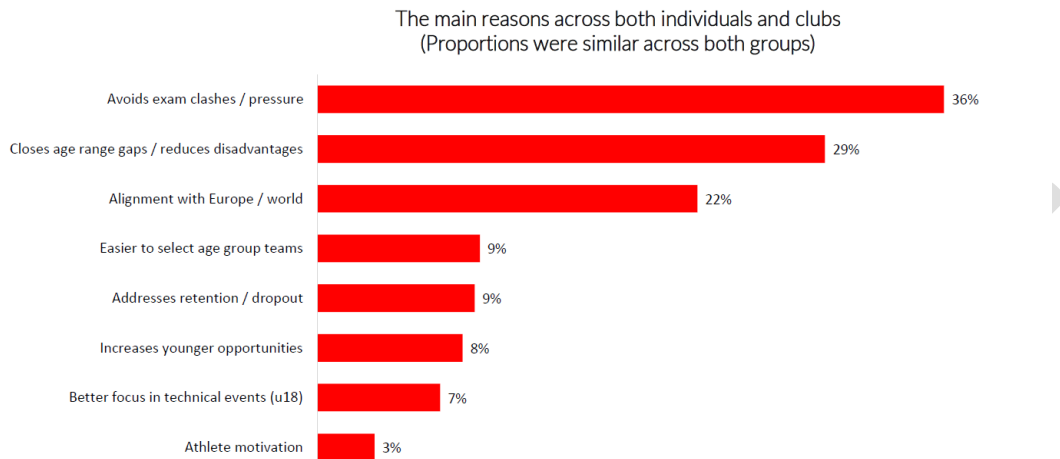
Bases: All athletes (304), Coaches (255), Officials (176), Club volunteers (210), Parents (332), U20 Athletes/Parent (467), U20 or younger athletes (117), Official or volunteer but not a parent (169); Total individuals (831), Clubs reviewed (122)

Note: some groups overlap

○ Denotes Statistically different to other groups

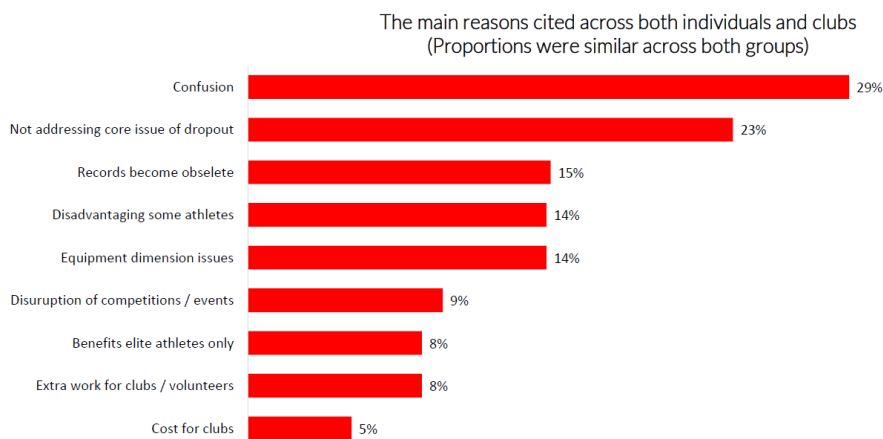
- The survey also asked respondents to qualify their choices and provide a rationale as to why they are supportive or unsupportive of the proposed changes. Whilst the main reason for supporting change is the benefit they will have on reducing pressure on athletes, it is apparent that there is significant confusion surrounding the proposals, specifically in relation to how the proposed changes would be implemented and the misalignment with age groups in school athletics. There are also concerns about the burden and disruption the changes will create for clubs and club volunteers. The tables below provide a summary of the qualitative feedback, more detail is provided in Appendix 3:

Reasons for support among clubs & individuals



Source: EA Age group consultation survey analysis; Based on those answering both club and individual surveys (295 who provided a reason for their supportive view)

Reasons for lack of support among clubs & individuals



Source: EA Age group consultation survey analysis; Based on those answering both club and individual surveys (298 who provided a reason for their non-supportive view)

Other HCAFs

- Following their own consultation, Welsh Athletics, Scottish Athletics and Athletics Northern Ireland are in full support of the proposals after receiving a largely supportive response from stakeholders.

UK Event Specific Advisory Groups

- Evidence of support for the proposal from the UK Advisory Groups for throws, jumps and combined events can be found in Appendix 4.

Other Feedback

- England Athletics have been approached by several individuals from member clubs and associations who do not agree with the proposed changes for a few reasons:
 - Perceived lack of consultation with clubs earlier in the process
 - The impact of implementing change on clubs and competition providers and their volunteer workforce.
 - Dispute the validity of the correlation between exam pressure/ education and athlete drop out.
 - The potential for confusion around implements and hurdles.
 - The potential for confusion around schools age groups not changing.
 - Some athletes being disadvantaged as they will be in the lower end of age group for consecutive years.
 - Impact on age group records.

- An alternative survey has been released by those against the change which has also been publicly supported by Northern Athletics and English Cross-Country Association. At this stage we are not aware of the results of the survey that canvassed the views of young athletes.

UK Rules Group

- All HCAFs were approached by the UKA Rules Group to provide clarification regarding the proposals. The table overleaf provides a summary of the responses to the specific questions that were posed:

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Questions from UKA Rules Group	Response
<p>The substantive supporting evidence underpinning the opinions in favour of change expressed by each of the four HCAFs.</p>	<p>The research with athletes that has been summarised as part of this paper and has been available via the EA website since 2019 found that the main reason for drop-out in track and field athletics is time constraints from studying. In particular, the intensity of athletics competition clashing with important exams was cited by 45% of respondents. In the words of a lapsed female thrower, <i>“There is so much pressure to do well in your exams, that it just becomes your only focus. There was too much expected in me both at school and in athletics that it became too much”</i>. The findings from webinars and the survey results, especially the thoughts of athletes support the case for changing the age groups to help alleviate pressure and provide better balance for young athletes.</p>
<p>Demonstration of an awareness of the problems faced by clubs, as well as athletes, from the proposal; and an explanation of how the perceived benefits will outweigh these problems.</p>	<p>We are aware that the issues being raised by a small number of clubs in relation to the proposals are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived lack of consultation with clubs earlier in the process –There has been ongoing informal consultation with key representative groups and stakeholders (HCAFs, EA regions, UKA Advisory Panels, coaching and competition groups) since returning to the sport post lockdown. Consultation has been conducted in line with the UKA Rules Group timeline. There was consultation for feedback on the proposal before submission on the 30th June with the following organisations and bodies: HCAF Boards, UKA Board, UKA Rules Group, UK Members Council. • The impact of implementing change on clubs and competition providers and their volunteer workforce - Discussions have taken place on a 1:1 basis with competition providers and clubs to ascertain any potential challenges. A desire to work with competition providers and clubs to ensure that any transition process is proportional and at a pace that works for everyone. The proposal required a provisional timeline, but this can be discussed in further detail once there is certainty on the status of the proposal. There would be a commitment from each HCAF to work with competition providers to overcome any transition challenges. We recognise that changes of any kind will impact on the sport, and this is the reason there has been widespread consultation, and the other rule proposals which have been suggested for the 2024 rule book. The Home Countries will support competition providers and the volunteer workforce to implement the age group rule change, should it be accepted, for the benefit of the athletes competing in the sport. Further information around implementation of the changes, including further consultation can be found in Appendix 4. • The potential for confusion around implements and hurdles - There are already different hurdle heights and implement weights used in competition for athletes competing in U18 competition, the ESAA and ESAA cup competition. For most athletes, it would simplify the club pathway. Education for the small number of athletes competing in ESAA competition is important for coaches, athletes and parents targeting English School competition. Further information around technical progression can be found in Appendix 5. • The potential for confusion around schools’ age groups not changing - Schools’ competition already takes place with different age groups and there appears to be no confusion for athletes, coaches and parents. The information provided by each competition provider clearly states how athletes are grouped by age. ESAA cup competition uses the evens age groups, and the T&F/XC Championships have an U19 age-group. Furthermore, athletes seeking U18 specific competition for international teams have not reported a lack of understanding in age group rules. Education on qualification opportunity and selection policies has worked well in this area. There is risk of athletes not finding appropriate qualifying competition for ESAA, but there is

Questions from UKA Rules Group	Response
	<p>an opportunity here for county schools associations to create a clear school pathway at local and regional level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some athletes being disadvantaged as they will be in lower end of age group for consecutive years - A transitioned approach across two seasons could support these athletes, ensuring there is still competition opportunity in odds and evens age groups, so athletes are not in the younger end of an age group two years running. Equally, schools retaining the odd age groups could address this through county schools' competition, with athletes having the opportunity for national championship every season. • Impact on age group records- The view is that new records would need to be established, and existing records up to the point of change will remain for the age group it was achieved in. It would be an enormous task to go back through age groups, identifying what age the record holders were and if the record were to remain. Equally, it would be unfair to remove records and identify new winners that were rightfully achieved under the rules at the time. Keeping these records ensures they are part of athletics history and the story of athletics evolving and adapting to suit the next generation of athletes. They shouldn't be forgotten, amended, or tampered with; they should be honored showing the upmost respect for the history of the sport.
<p>An explanation of how introducing an Under 12 age group will have any impact on drop out from the sport. Many clubs have long waiting lists for membership from potential young athletes at this age and will be unlikely to be able to accommodate a further year group.</p>	<p>The proposed introduction of an U12 age group is not focused on growing the sport, and therefore putting considerable strain on clubs and coaches in the younger age groups. U12 athletes are already taking part in athletics in the U13 and U11 age groups. The proposal aims to group children appropriate to their age and stage of development, ensuring there are clear and consistent rules for competition across the county. The U12 age group is primary school children where the focus for competition should be fun, multi-event and localised. The introduction of U12 allows a natural split of primary and secondary athletics. Whilst most clubs do operate within appropriate age and stages groupings of children, often younger U13 athletes are exposed to much older athletes within a club environment or at competition which adds safeguarding considerations. The U10 age group is then an option for clubs and local competition organisers to introduce if they have the volunteer workforce to deliver such activity. Programmes such as funetics have created a model for clubs to use young volunteers to deliver athletics activity to primary school children.</p>
<p>An indication of a recognition of the consequences of change for the wider sport, particularly the endurance disciplines and how these are to be addressed.</p>	<p>Many U20 and Seniors are mixed at league level, so the jump for 16/17 year old into senior distances and competition is enormous during a key transition period. Despite this, the previous proposal in 2016 identified the impact on cross country as a reason for the change not being accepted. The new proposal ensured that there was minimum impact on cross country, with the focus on improving athlete retention. The proposal now creates an opportunity for consistency across the various disciplines with age group, with the current rule book having several differing start dates for an age group depending on which discipline an athlete competes in. Any further proposal to fully align with World Athletics would need further consultation with the membership to ensure aspect like impact to Cross Country is fully considered.</p>
<p>An explanation of the thought process and ultimate intentions on alignment with World Athletics age groups (given these don't extend below Under 18 and that different countries will have different education systems - what evidence of the position in other countries has been obtained?).</p>	<p>All four Home Nations already have different education systems and cut-offs. The proposal being put forward does not relate to Jan 1st-Dec 31st. Any future proposal would be discussed in its own merit. The overarching aim of this proposal is to maximise retention by attempting to remove any barriers to continuing in the sport.</p> <p>There are a number of studies including one conducted in Norway that also correlate educational pressure to drop out. https://sportstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/019-043_vol_2_2011_enoksen.pdf</p>

3. Recommendation

Owing to the continued drop-out from the sport amongst 15-20 year olds and the findings of the research with athletes that correlates the drop-out with exam and studying pressure, the HCAFs still believe that a change in the age groups will help to reduce drop-out (in addition to other competition reforms and innovations).

Whilst the feedback from athletes and parents of athletes (the target beneficiaries), through the survey, demonstrates support for the proposed age group changes, on balance the proposals in their current form do not have the support from our member clubs and bodies. This is illustrated by the response to the England Athletics club and member body survey. We have listened to this feedback and it has fundamentally shaped our recommended way forward.

It is apparent that there is confusion and several concerns relating to implementation and the perceived burden the changes to age groups will place on clubs and volunteers. Based on the feedback this is likely to require further time, dialogue, planning and consultation.

Based on the information available, and following discussion with the HCAFs, England Athletics Board and England Council it was decided that a revised proposal should be submitted to the UKA Rules Group for consideration

The HCAFs would like to recommend that the **UKA Rules Group approve a revision to the rules to change the current age groups of U13, U15 and U17 to new proposed age groups of U12, U14, U16 and U18 with an implementation date of 1st April 2026.**

While there is support for the proposals across the UK amongst athletes under the age of 20 and their parents, we acknowledge there is still uncertainty and resistance against changing the age categories amongst the HCAF member clubs and bodies. If the proposal is approved, the revised target date of implementation will align with the 2026-2028 rulebook and allow us additional time to work with the athletes, the competition providers and the wider sport to test, learn and thoroughly jointly operationalise the new age groups categories, addressing the concerns of confusion and potential disruption.

In addition to this recommendation, the HCAFs acknowledge that exam pressure is not the sole cause for decline in participation of the 15-20 year olds and we are committed to initiate further research into this area.

Finally, we fully valued the collaboration with this consultation process and appreciated the robust quality of debate which informed our recommendation. Age group change proposals form one component of a wider strategy required to address the continuing decline in track and field participation, alongside other aspects such as competition reform. We urge everyone in our sport to engage constructively and to work proactively at all levels to make positive change.

The continued commitment from all HCAFs is to support change that puts the needs of our athletes first.

APPENDICES

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RULE T3 S1 UKA SUPPLEMENT ADDITIONAL UKA AGE GROUPS AND CATEGORIES

- (1) The Competition Year for Cross Country and Road Running competitions shall be from 1st September each year to the following 31st August. The Competition Year for Fell, Hill and Mountain competitions shall be from 1 January to 31 December each year. The Competition Year for all other disciplines shall be from 1st October each year to the following 30th September.
- (2) The operative date for determining membership of age groups for all athletes under the age of 17 shall be for Track and Field and Race Walking, the 31st August at the end of the Competition Year, and for all other disciplines, the 31st August prior to the TR3 92 WORLD ATHLETICS AND UKA COMPETITION AND TECHNICAL RULES – 2022 EDITION commencement of the Competition Year.
- (3) Competition Providers may offer a third non-binary competition category within Endurance Running events. This category, in addition to male and female, should adhere to all other rules and local conditions.

Athletes will only be eligible for prizes and awards in one of these categories and must declare which category at the point of entry (subject always to Rules T3 S2, S3, S4, S5 and S6).

All competition categories should be published in the official results, however for current ranking purposes only male and female sex categories will be recognised. A review will be conducted on the requirements necessary for non-binary Track and Field events in time for inclusion in the 2024 – 2026 rule book.

NOTE 1: In Northern Ireland the qualifying date for all disciplines is taken at 31st December at the end of the year of competition.

NOTE 2: UKA Rules do not cater for athletes under the age of 11 years. This does not necessarily preclude provision by Competition Providers for competitions for athletes younger than 11 years, with correspondingly reduced distances to run.

Home Country Webinar Consultation Overview

Consultation webinars to give clubs, athletes, parents, and coaches the opportunity to feedback on the Age Group rule change proposal were held across three dates in September., the 12th, 18th, and 20th September. The webinars were held on different nights to ensure a variety of options for people across the sport to attend. The webinars have also been recorded.

Webinar 1 – 12th September

Registrants: 224
Attendees: 109 (at the maximum)
48% attendance

Webinar 2 – 18th September

Registrants: 258
Attendees: 136 (at the Maximum)
53% attendance

Webinar 3 – 20th September

Registrants: 155
Attendees: 86 (at the maximum)
55% attendance

It is worth noting that some people registered for all webinars and attended just one, however, the number of people that did this was low.

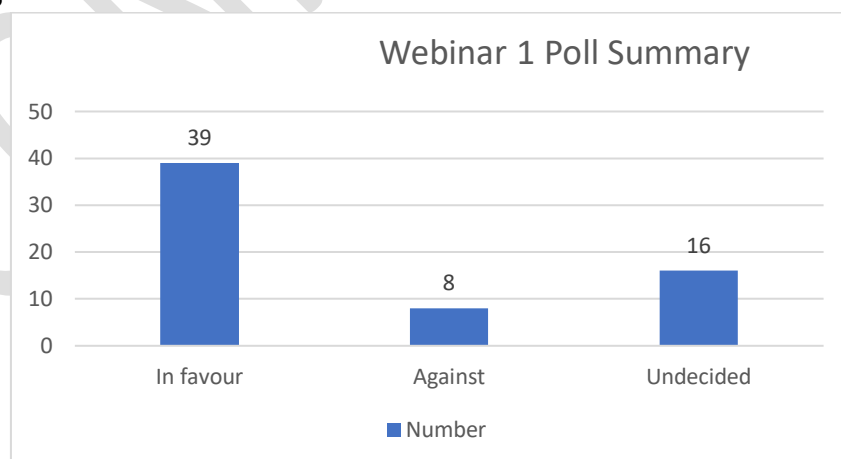
Poll Results

At the end of each webinar, we held an informal poll to gauge the reaction to the Age Group Proposal.

The results of the webinar can be seen below, per webinar and then as an overview.

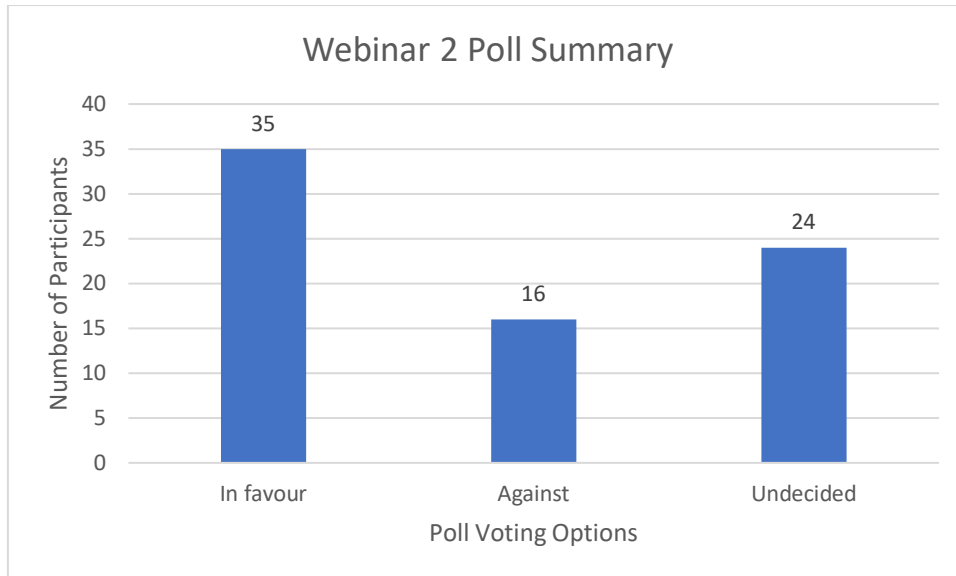
Webinar 1

Number of people who voted: 63
In favour: 39
Against: 8
Undecided: 16



Webinar 2

Number of people who voted: 75
In favour: 35
Against: 16
Undecided: 24



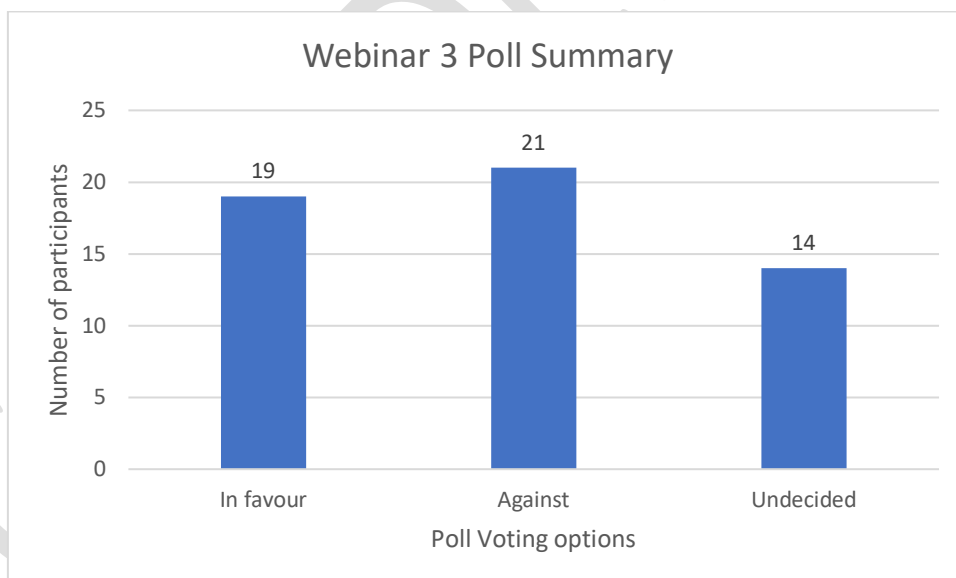
Webinar 3

Number of people who voted: 54

In favour: 19

Against: 21

Undecided: 14



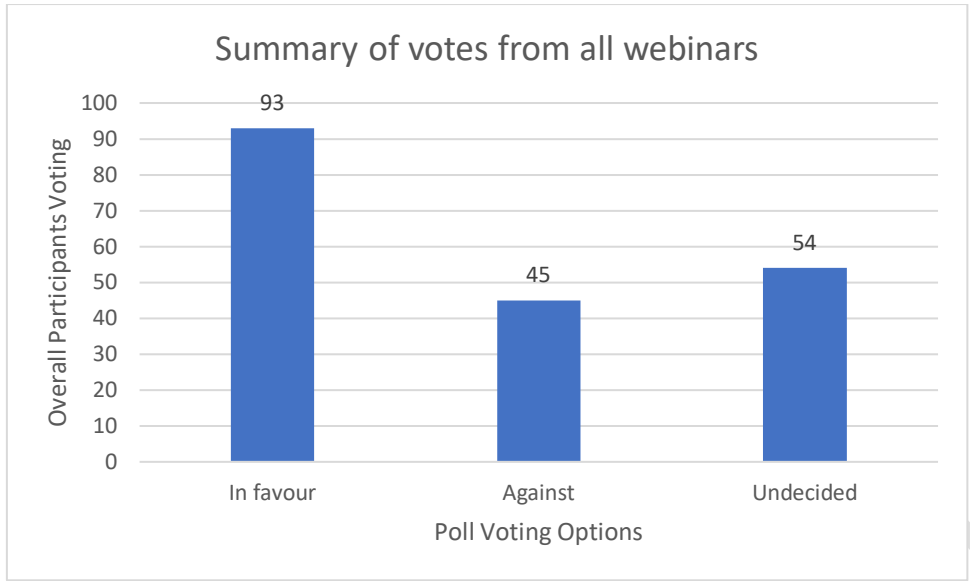
Overall Poll Summary

Number of voters across all 3 webinars: 192

In favour: 93

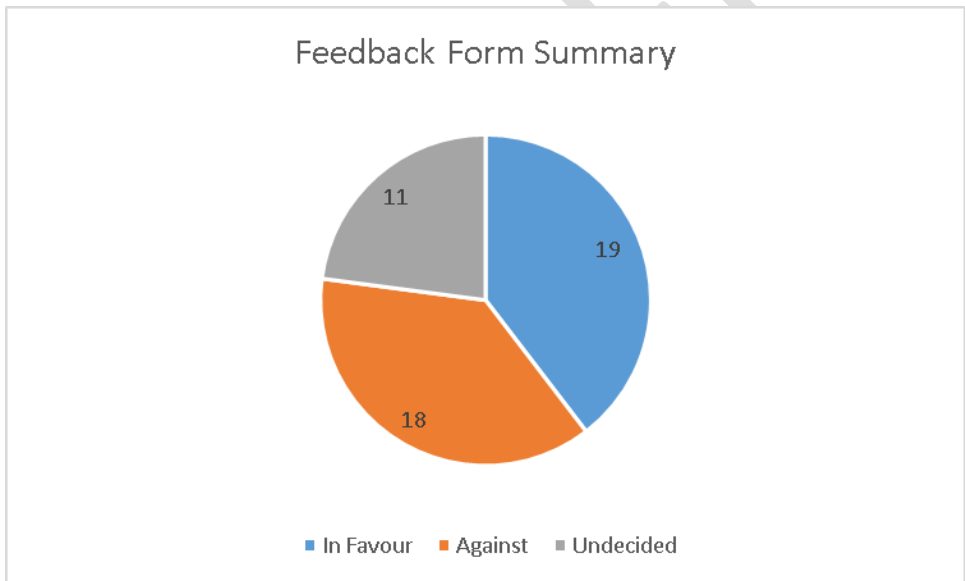
Against: 45

Undecided: 54



Feedback Form Analysis

48 people responded to the feedback form. Of those who responded 19 were in favour of the proposal, 18 against and 11 remained undecided.



October 2023

Appendix 3

Qualitative feedback review

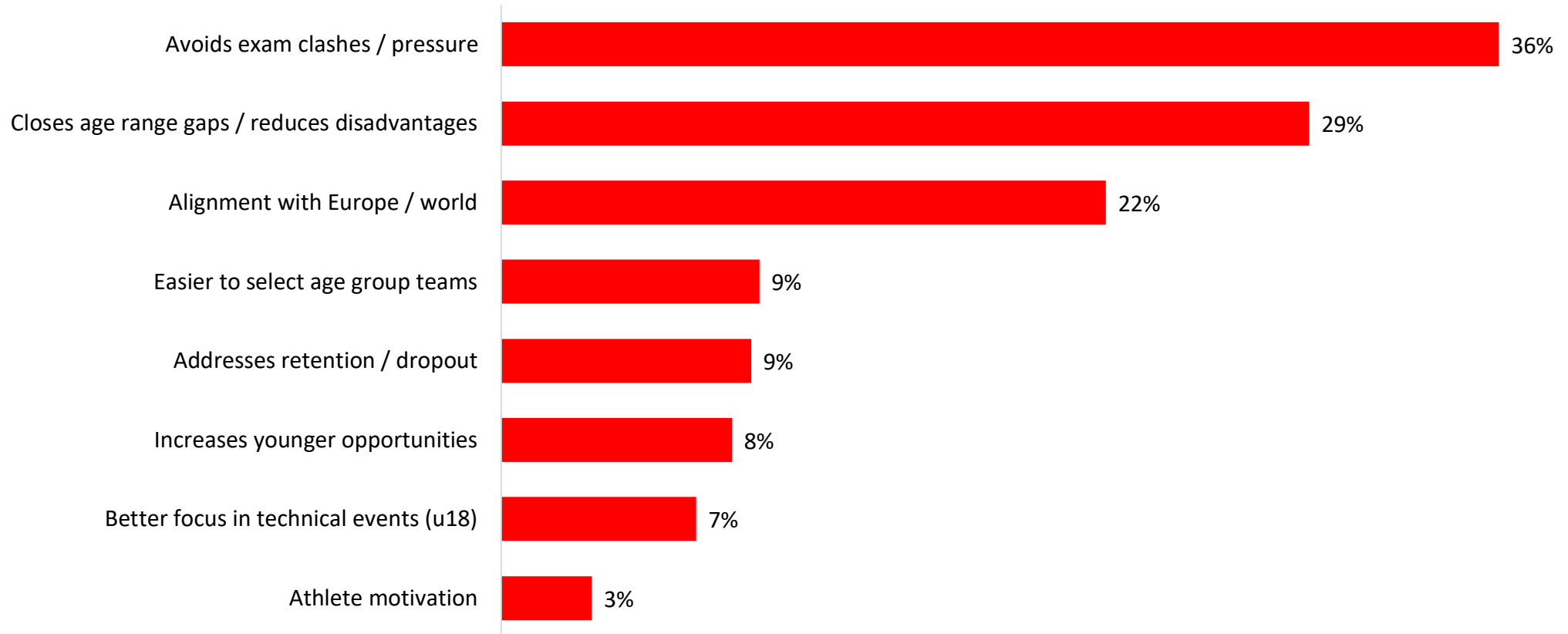


Reasons for support among individuals & clubs

- **The proposals do avoid exam pressures and clashes for some**
- **They provide more opportunity for young athletes to develop and close the age distances**
- **Aligning with Europe/rest of the world can be a positive – as is aligning with other sports**
- **For some the changes will address the issue of dropout**
- **Better for technical events – allowing more focus at u18 age**
- **It could provide more opportunities for younger athletes (Under 12)**
- **The changes could make it easier to select age group teams and help athletes to stay motivated**

Reasons for support among clubs & individuals

The main reasons across both individuals and clubs
(Proportions were similar across both groups)



Reasons for support – in their own words

- **The avoidance of exam clashes or pressure**

have an U17 who is in GCSE year now, and this would relieve a lot of pressure

Better for exams clash. Big workload in exam years and my parents want me to concentrate on exams instead of Athletics

it reduces the stresses of balancing study and optimal competing year at the same time. This alone makes it worth the change. It makes the conversations easier to have with our son when exams come around

Year after year I 'lose' athletes because, quite rightly, education comes first. And it's not just during in exam season - it's the months running up to it

missed most of this season as I had to stop athletics a few months before and during GCSEs to focus on my GCSEs. This caused major setbacks in my times and performance

As a GCSE student myself being at the top of the age group will have high pressure so changing the age groups would really help and allow me to have more time

Wasn't able to get a full season last year due to GCSEs and felt like I missed a key year for competition

Exams will take preference so to allow my daughter to fully focus on these without the pressure she puts on herself to make English schools qualification

have seen a number of athletes that I coach leave athletics due to time capacity pressures on the lead up to their exam years, both GCSEs and A Level

asking students to compete during GCSE and A level years is very stressful and could add to more athletes dropping out

Reasons for support – in their own words

- Reducing age disadvantage, particularly at Under 20 level

Competing against peers closer in age as there is such a huge range especially when going from U17-U20. The development of athletes and their progress is vast during the period

I find it better because I wouldn't go into next year being nervous as a 1st year Under 20 when I'll be competing with u18s instead

Having 3 years all together in U20s as I imagine that is very off-putting for the youngest ones in first year U20s

Greater spread so an individual is the youngest in a lower age group. U17s no longer competing with people that much older

My daughter has just completed her 2nd season at U17 level and now faces U20 / seniors - she is still only 16, so an U18 section would be a good stepping stone

it closes the distance between age ranges making it easier for the athlete to feel they have less of a disadvantage if they are competing with others

my daughter will find moving from a 2nd year of U17 that hasn't been as good as can be, to compete with U20 the following year very daunting

It feels unfair for 16 year olds to be competing in u20 competitions when athletes in that age category could be 19

It would also remove the leap from U17 to U20. My daughter will be 16 years old when she starts competing as a U20 ... I am concerned the huge age difference in the field of U20s will discourage her and lead to her potentially abandoning the sport.

Reasons for support – in their own words

- **A recognition of athlete development and making it easier to some age group teams**

easier on selecting age group teams

the gap/ difference in physicality and maturity between the older U13 and younger U15 is lesser than between younger and older U13 girls, so [positive] to me, at this point in my daughter's athletics career

athletes may be more likely to continue some level of training and competition if some of the pressure is removed by the fact that they are bottom year

It keeps two year steps for athletes through there junior and youth stages

having leagues cater for the U18 age group would mean greater competition opportunities with more being held locally

would help young athletes, especially in the first two years of secondary school. Developmentally there can be a huge difference between year 8 and year 9

- **Better focus for some technical events**

hurdlers and throwers are at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the world because athletes will have to adapt to a new hurdle spacing/weight implement and this makes progression in their event more difficult

Better transition for throwers especially males going up the weight of throwing implements

The slow down in progression for throws is welcome

Working with athletes in the current U17/U20 age group can see the difficulties in transition with sprint hurdles that many don't continue with the event

I feel the adapted age groups apply better to higher level athletes and it allows them to have a full season focusing on the correct heights and weights instead of having a split season focusing on the two different specification

Reasons for support – in their own words

- **Increasing opportunity to compete when young and addressing dropout**

Increased opportunities for U12 at primary level transitioning to secondary is a great idea

the chasm between primary/secondary always makes that early age group difficult for younger athletes and can instantly see some lose interest

It will be great for enthusiastic and younger athletes to get a taste of competition

if done the right way this can introduce competing to u12s in a way that will be of benefit to them

Younger children are really keen to compete as primary so moving the age bracket to a year younger would support this

Many of the athletes that I coach are aged 10. They cannot compete as U11's. It would be a huge step forward if they could compete as U12 in a 2 year category

it will allow younger athletes in the U12 category the chance to compete

- **Alignment with Europe or the world (and other sports)**

Falls in line with most other sports ... Less of a big age gap in each age category

moving toward standardising with the rest of the world makes sense in the long view

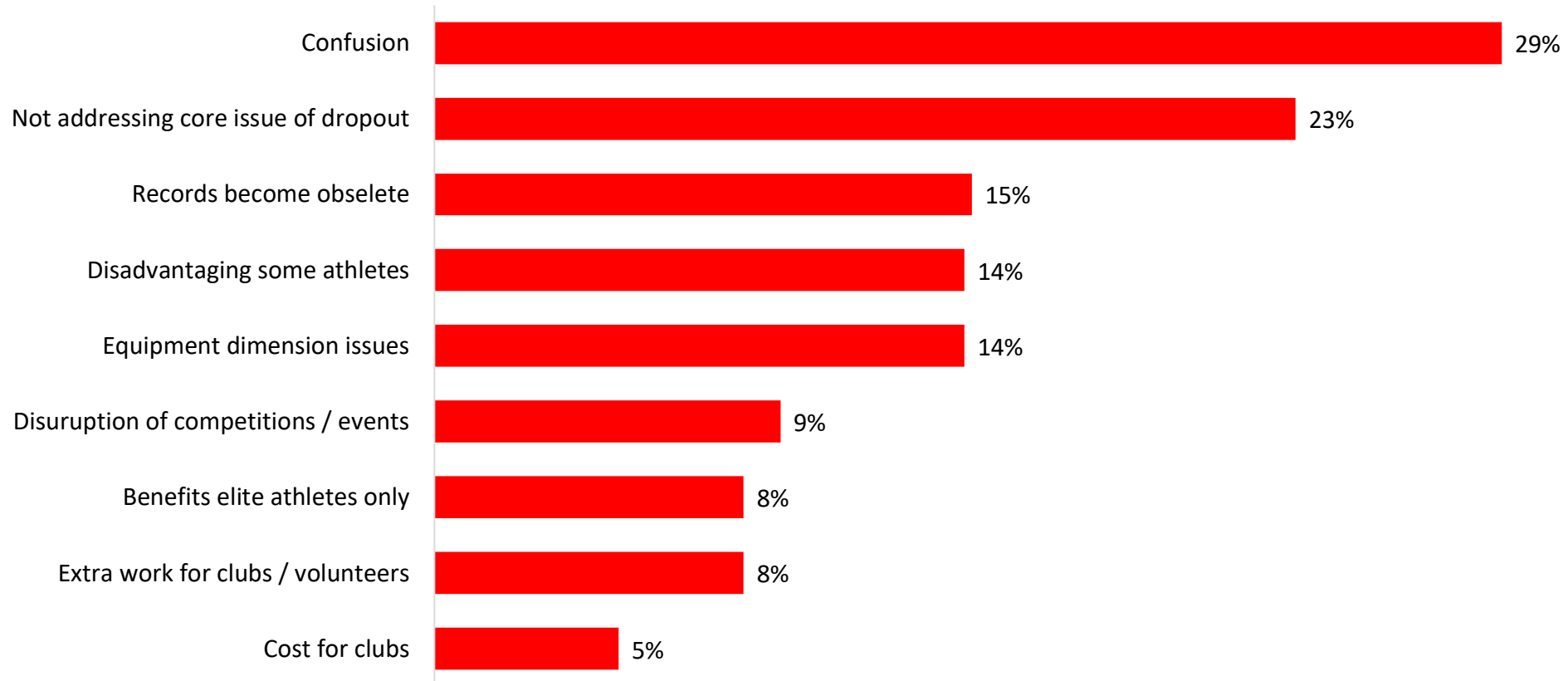
I feel it is more in line with other sports as much as anything. I don't like that my top of rankings 15yr old has to compete against year 12's because yr 12's in his school have massively more time to train than a Yr 11

Reasons for lack of support among clubs & individuals

- **Changes will cause confusion for parents and athletes – partly due to mismatches with schools age groups and lack of comparability**
- **The changes are not felt to be addressing the issue of drop out at certain ages, or may make it worse**
- **Existing records (club, competition, championships) will become obsolete and comparing performance will be problematic**
- **The changes disadvantage athletes born at certain times of the year – and those in certain years which will impact retention**
- **Perception of issues relating to equipment dimensions**
- **General disruption in the sport in terms of competitions and events**
- **Benefits of changes are limited to elite athletes / a small minority**
- **Cost and resource implications for clubs who are already heavily burdened**
- **Concern over volunteer dropout and overburdening**
- **Concerns over the process of consultation itself**
- **Bigger issues to address in the sport (e.g. underfunding, lack of volunteers)**

Reasons for lack of support among clubs & individuals

The main reasons cited across both individuals and clubs
(Proportions were similar across both groups)



Lack of support – in their own words

- **Parent and athlete confusion was a common concern**

Changing the age groups will cause lots of confusion for both young athletes and their parents

Mismatch between school and club athletics will cause confusion

this will be so disruptive to school athletics ... we would have school age pupils in the same year not being able to compete against each other!

I fear that the disruption and confusion of having different age groups for schools and club competitions will cause long lasting damage to our sport

Happy to change the EA age groups BUT only if schools change too

this change will damage the sport, particularly if ESAA don't come with EA in making the change ... we are creating confusion in terms of age groups ... if we deviate from schools athletics

Not collaborative approach with schools, increased confusion for parents and athletes

- **For some the proposals do not really address dropout**

Dropouts because of "studying for exams" will only be one factor in deciding to quit

Bring athletes in line with Europe competition rules I think ... instead of having u 17s to raise it to u18s, making a three year age group then have the u 20s age group.

There is no real cause for change ... u17 drop off is not a GCSE related thing but age thing you need do more to keep teens interested. I am a teen and completed my GCSEs 1 year ago

There is no evidence or research of value to support the claimed benefits. It will be costly in money and labour intensive. I would rather see energy, money and time spent on developing facilities and supporting coaches to coach

Lack of support – in their own words

- **Records obsolescence for athletes and volunteers**

I've worked hard to break a club record which under the new proposals would no longer exist

How records will be dealt with has not been addressed at all

club histories and records thrown in the bin (this is not trivial – I've recently seen examples of very old club records being surpassed to the delight and encouragement of the young record breakers, but let's throw that away). Stupid

historic records will be meaningless. That's not fair to kids growing up and feeling proud of their achievements

- **Perceptions of unfairness on a cohort of athletes – impacting retention**

you would not be competing with friends as year groups would be split up ... no competition and would be demoralising for bottom year athletes competing 2 consecutive years against older athletes

half of all young athletes will spend two seasons at the bottom of their age groups ... means we will lose even more athletes, not improve athlete retention

My child will stay in the lower end of the new age group ... It was hard enough to keep him motivated this year but knowing he was going to be an older one this coming season got him through. I think now football will win out

For those that will now spend two consecutive years at the bottom end of their age groups it will be difficult to motivate them when they are unable to be competitive

it will have a negative effect on the mental health of those in the first year of competition for their age group to have to spend another season competing with those older than them rather than the younger year

this change will lead to a short and medium term loss in competing athletes amongst those athletes who are currently first year in their respective age group ... face two years competing against older athletes

Lack of support – in their own words

- **Benefits related just to elite athletes**

To align with international competition is great for the 30ish athletes a year it affects, but to change for so few is ridiculous!

feels like a complete overhaul of the system, to benefit the <1% of athletes

What is to be gained from all this disruption? A few elite athletes?

this change benefits a limited number of "elite" athletes under 18 who have 2 or 3 competitions to enter just to bring the age groups into line "with the rest of the world". You have totally lost touch with the grass roots of athletics at club and school level

All this ... is to suit the needs of the few athletes when it comes to European competitions, but will ultimately affect the many around England

It will not reduce drop out around exam time as those who will drop out due to exams will do so regardless of age group. It is designed with U18 qualification competition in mind which is only for a select few so you would be "catering" for the minority rather than the majority

- **Issues related to dimensions / weights exist when some consider the detail**

Athletes in the same school year will be on different heights on hurdles and weights for throwing events

As a hurdles coach I'm concerned that there will not be sufficient competitions opportunities for athletes seeking ESAA selection and preparations, as club competitions will be at a different specification

Lack of support – in their own words

- **Cost and resource implications for clubs / organisers**

Clubs and athletes will need plenty of time, once the change has been agreed, to prepare ... My club has coaches for each age group and gender so we will need to agree who covers which age bands and find two additional coaches. We need to assess whether it is feasible to cater for two additional groups sharing the same facilities

As a volunteer this will have huge effects on events to adapt to the changes, putting pressure on many people already giving up their time for free to gain absolutely no benefit at all

I feel that this an unnecessary change that will create work, reorganization and cost when there are many other elements clubs and athletes require support

realigning the younger age groups will create a lot of work and potential cost at a time when UKA and EA can least afford it ... I coach juniors and we would need to realign sessions

It could cause a lot of administration work for volunteers who are already pushed for spare time

under the new proposal, athletes will be in one age group for club and another age group for schools competition. Who needs that kind of confusion / bureaucracy?? Coaches and team managers certainly don't

- **There were also some concerns over the consultation process**

The information given out has been one sided with scant reference about the problems that will be encountered ... and seems to be geared to a small minority of athletes

I just feel it shouldn't be in place for next year, I agree with the changes to bring us in line with the rest of the world but feel as though it's being rushed through

Concern that England Athletics consultation on the matter has been minimal

This proposal seems to be more of "seen to be doing something", rather than for the good of encouraging young athletes

Reasons for being undecided – in their own words

- Some reasons for indecision tend to mirror those who are unsupportive but not as strongly – however there is a clear need for some areas of clarification ...

It is not clear how the age groups would work in XC season when the non-exam year is already top of the age-group

Can clubs cope with the additional age groups and how will affect T&F leagues - already a battle putting these events on with 3 age groups

how will it effect the younger age groups and will it make competitions longer days

Clarification is needed on how you will mitigate the transition years where athletes will find themselves changing age groups a year earlier than expected

Current competitions for 3 age groups normally over run and there are often insufficient officials requiring parents to step in, how will an extra age group be managed?

there is no list of events for the new age groups U12 and U14, this is vitally important

It feels slightly unclear about whether age group classifications change to even numbers and still retain a link with school years or whether there is also an alignment to calendar years...

From the proposal I'm unclear as to how this impacts the winter season and in particular Cross Country

Age group championships ... county, area and National, will this be re-structured to allow separate age groups to compete. YDL age group whether guidelines would see a change on YDL structure

what are we proposing to do in order to avoid increasing the drop out rate during this transition?

I would like to see the empirical evidence supporting the proposal. Is it data driven or based on speculation?

UK Throws Advisory Group- Position Statement

Nick Ridgeon
Email: nridgeon@englandathletics.org
Tel: 07471027364
16.10.23

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you as chair of the UK Athletics Advisory Panel for Throws regarding the proposed changes to age group competition. The change would see U12, U14, U16 and U18 age groups being introduced to replace the existing U13, U15, and U17 age groups. It is the opinion of the panel that the proposed changes are overwhelmingly positive for throws as an event group within the UK.

As a group we believe that the changes will:

- 1) Grow participation within throws. It is thought that these changes will improve retention within the event group by becoming more inclusive, increasing the attainment and therefore enjoyment and may potentially reduce injury risk.
- 2) Improve talent and performance levels within throws. The change will result in alignment with international championship competitions and the reduction in implement weights will enable more athletes to achieve talent and performance standards.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Ridgeon

UK Athletics Advisory Panel for Throws – Chair
nridgeon@englandathletics.org
07471027364

Panel Members 2022 – 2024

Alison Grey (Scottish Athletics)
Ryan Spencer-Jones (Welsh Athletics)
Laura Kerr
David Turner
Mark Chapman
Mike Winch
Malcolm Fenton
Goldie Sayers

UK Advisory Panels
View on Age-Group Rule Change Proposal

To whom it may concern,

As Chair for both the Jumps and Combined Events UKA Advisory Panels, I obtained the below position and comments on the current proposal for changing the age group bands.

If you require any further clarity or information, please let me know.

Kind regards,

Darren Ritchie

UK Advisory Panel Chair for Jumps and Combined Events
England Athletics Event Group Lead for Jumps and Combined Events

UK Jumps Advisory Panel

Five members of the panel were 'supportive' of the proposal
One member was 'not concerned'

Key points from the panel:

- Adds an additional age-group in the pathway to better support transitions through the pathway
- The jump from U17 to U20 would not be so big for late maturing athletes
- Closer alignment with WA age-groups

Panel Members:

Scott Simpson
Allan Hamilton
Aston Moore
Jamie French
Denis Doyle
Linda Nicholson
Kate Rooney
Guy Spencer
Frank Attoh
John Herbert

UK Combined Events Advisory Panel

Five members of the panel were 'supportive' of the proposal

One member was 'generally unsupportive of the proposal'

Key points from the panel:

- Closer alignment with WA age-groups
- Combined Events transition through the age groups is better with even age groups. (e.g. an extra age-group for technical progression in the hurdles)
- The physical affect and academic challenges are reduced with the even age groups
- Different schools pathway could create confusion in hurdles and throws. A better option is for ESAA to adopt same technical progressions.

Panel Members:

Tom Reynolds

Rafer Joseph

David Feeney

Mike Holmes

Kelly Sotherton

Laura Turner-Alleyne

Implementation & Support Plan- Further Consultation & Considerations

How we intend to support and lead on this should the extended timeframe for rule change be approved.

Throughout the consultation period there has been some feedback about how the bulk of the administration work to implement this would lie with the clubs and administrators in the sport. We want to reassure the community that should this change be approved the HCAF's and UKA will lead and support the sport in this area.

We commit to:

Clubs

- Engaging in further consultation on what support the sport requires.
- The 2024 and 2025 seasons to continue under the odd age group structure to allow time for change to be implemented.
- We will provide, where requested, support webinars to various groups in the sport during 2024, 2025 and 2026.
- Address concerns of burden and disruption.
- Address concern regarding club records.

Athletes

- Mental health support line for those athletes negatively impacted by having multiple years as the bottom of the age group.
- Guidance for coaches, parents, and club officials on how to discuss this situation with athletes to support them through navigating this change.
- Committed to engage the views of athletes within the decision-making process.

Officials

- We will consult with the Officials community on what support they need, in addition to the rule book, to be able to carry out their role effectively and look to implement support where it is required.
- We will consider easy reference downloadable 'E - cards' for Officials for the new age groups to help with implementation of rules on competition day.

Coaches

- We will consult with the Coaching community on what support they need, in addition to the rule book, to be able to carry out their role effectively and look to implement support where it is required.
- We will provide coaches with guidance on how to navigate the differences between the schools and club age groups for technical events where the changes in competition may mean adaptive coaching.

Competition

- Establish formal consultation process with competition providers. Engage Schools association to explore further alignment by 2026.
- We will provide a framework for competition for every age group, including under 10's, outlining what types of competitions and competition formats they should be engaging with and why.
- We will ensure clear guidance is given across every event group ensuring guidance on maximum distances, hurdle heights, spacing, weights or types of implements to be used for every age group from U10 upwards.
- We will ensure partner results systems provided by the HCAF's and UKA will be adopted to be used from April 1st, 2026.

- We will work with digital systems such as Power of 10 to ensure that these are ready to adopt the new rules from April 1st 2026.
- We will work with competition providers and support if required with feedback forms and surveys to their members to help shape the future of their competition formats.
- Test and learn through pilots over 2024 and 2025 seasons.

Rule Book

- We will ensure that the rule book is a fully inclusive document to allow all from the sport to read or hear the rules.
- That the changes to the rule book are communicated in a transparent and easy to understand way.
- We will ensure the Club and Schools guidance is separate and easy to reference and understand.

Technical Implementation

Hurdles Progressions through the ages

Male Sprint Hurdle Progressions						
U20				110m		<i>99cm</i>
U18				110m		<i>91cm</i>
U17			100m			<i>91cm</i>
U16			100m		<i>84cm</i>	
U15			80m		<i>84cm</i>	
U14			80m		<i>76cm</i>	
U13	75m			<i>76cm</i>		
U12	75m	<i>68cm</i>				

Bold Blue = distance increases *italic = Height progressions*

Female Sprint Hurdle Progressions						
U20				100m		<i>84cm</i>
U18				100m		<i>76cm</i>
U17			80m		<i>76cm</i>	
U16			80m		<i>76cm</i>	
U15			75m		<i>76cm</i>	
U14			75m		<i>68cm</i>	
U13	70m			<i>68cm</i>		
U12	70m	<i>60cm</i>				

Bold Blue = distance increases *italic = Height progressions*

Throws Progressions through the ages

FEMALE ATHLETES IMPEMENT WEIGHTS								
Age	SHOT - Club	SHOT - Sch	DISCUS - Club	DISCUS - Sch	HAMMER - Club	HAMMER - Sch	JAVLEIN - Club	JAVLEIN - Sch
Senior	4.00 kg		1.00 kg		4.00 kg		600gram	
U20	4.00 kg		1.00 kg		4.00 kg		600gram	
U19	4.00 kg	4.00 kg	1.00 kg	1.00 kg	4.00 kg	4.00 kg	600gram	600gram
U18	3.00 kg	4.00 kg	1.00 kg	1.00 kg	3.00 kg	4.00 kg	500gram	600gram
U17	3.00 kg	3.00 kg	1.00 kg	1.00 kg	3.00 kg	3.00 kg	500gram	500gram
U16	3.00 kg	3.00 kg	1.00 kg	1.00 kg	3.00 kg	3.00 kg	500gram	500gram
U15	3.00 kg	3.00 kg	1.00 kg	1.00 kg	3.00 kg	3.00 kg	500gram	500gram
U14	2.72 kg	3.00 kg	0.75 kg	1.00 kg	2.72 kg	3.00 kg	400gram	500gram
U13	2.72 kg	2.72 kg	0.75 kg	0.75 kg	2.72 kg		400gram	400gram
U12	2.72 kg	2.72 kg	0.75 kg	0.75 kg			400gram	400gram
U11	2.72 kg		0.75 kg				400gram	

Throws Progressions through the ages

MALE ATHLETES IMPEMENT WEIGHTS								
Age	SHOT - Club	SHOT - Sch	DISCUS - Club	DISCUS - Sch	HAMMER - Club	HAMMER - Sch	JAVLEIN - Club	JAVLEIN - Sch
Senior	7.26 kg		2.00 kg		7.26 kg		800gram	
U20	6.00 kg		1.75 kg		6.00 kg		800gram	
U19	6.00 kg	6.00 kg	1.75 kg	1.75 kg	6.00 kg	6.00 kg	800gram	800gram
U18	5.00 kg	6.00 kg	1.5 kg	1.75 kg	5.00 kg	6.00 kg	700gram	800gram
U17	5.00 kg	5.00 kg	1.5 kg	1.5 kg	5.00 kg	5.00 kg	700gram	700gram
U16	4.00 kg	5.00 kg	1.25 kg	1.5 kg	4.00 kg	5.00 kg	600gram	700gram
U15	4.00 kg	4.00 kg	1.25 kg	1.25	4.00 kg	4.00 kg	600gram	600gram
U14	3.00 kg	4.00 kg	1.00 kg	1.25	3.00 kg	4.00 kg	500gram	600gram
U13	3.00 kg	3.00 kg	1.00 kg	1.00 kg	3.00 kg		500gram	400gram
U12	2.72 kg	3.00 kg	0.75 kg	1.00 kg			400gram	400gram
U11	2.72 kg	2.72 kg	0.75 kg				400gram	