



Dear Northern Club,

The UKA rules group have had a proposal for a rule change put to them by England Athletics and the other three home countries.

The proposal has been put without full and proper consultation with the clubs. Only in September, a matter of weeks before representations could be made to the rules group, did England Athletics reveal in a series of webinars giving the reasoning behind their proposal. Webinars are not consultation. They are lectures followed by a few approved questions and answers.

The proposals will cause considerable chaos. There is scant evidence it will benefit our athletes nor our clubs and officials. The justification is to bring us in line with international age groupings for u20 and u18s even though the only events athletes compete in are the European under 18 championships every two years and the Commonwealth Youth Games every four years. The proposal would result in a complete overhaul of age groupings within our sport.

The age groups will move from u13, u15, u17 and u20 to u12, u14, u16, u18 and u20. The ages being on the 31st August at the end of the competition year.

The burden of dealing and coping with these proposals will fall on clubs, leagues, counties and areas. Those providing the great majority of competition in the UK are volunteers already hard pressed in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic. The volunteers have had a difficult time trying to rebuild their membership and restart competition and that task is still ongoing. The last few years have also resulted in a reduction in experienced administrators and officials. This proposal could not have come at a worst time for the sport.

Little consideration has been given to the endurance side of our sport. Cross Country Age Groups will align with current age groups so for example Year 9 and 10 will be together but within the U16 age group but the result will be that the U20 Age Group will be a two year group which will affect entry numbers. It will also increase the number of races on any given competition day leading to further burdens on time and over-stretched officials and secretaries.

The potential implications of approving such a proposal does not stop here. If passed, this may be followed in two years by a change to the ages being on the 31 December at the end of the calendar year. Again, the effect on athletes, clubs and officials will be extremely damaging.



In track and field, the proposed new age categories would be for u18 year 11 & 12, u16 year 9 & 10, u14 year 7 & 8, and u12 year 5 & 6. The current proposal does not force the ESAA to change their grouping. The question to be asked is why is the burden of change being placed on the clubs but not on the schools. The result of this approach may mean less voices in opposition. An enemy divided is the well-known saying. However a change for the school age groups could be the next step and if this happened there are numerous implications with possibly year 13 becoming a one year age group. Could the ESAA justify an added age group within their championships?

David Paver has produced an excellent piece of work opposing these changes and quote 'If English Schools does not change then one of the two years in each age group would have different specifications for hurdles, most of the throws, steeplechase, and for some a 300/400 discrepancy. It would be hard for this year group to get English Schools Entry Standards as they would not be doing their ESAA event in club competitions as well as the difficulty of training for different hurdles specifications and throws weights and swapping between them in different weeks. For the strongest few athletes these increased distances between hurdles might not be a problem but for most club athletes, they would present a considerable challenge in their first year of the age group and the effect on Combined Events hurdles which might result is a reluctance to try Combined Events.'

Of course, this piece also highlights the enforced complete overhaul of national, regional and club records with a possible further overall within a short period. This caused many problems years ago and will do so again. It would require a re-writing of the history of the sport.

Northern Athletics, based on the majority opinion expressed, opposes the change and a submission based on the above will be submitted to the UKA rules group to be taken into consideration when decisions are made.

If there are clubs who wish to add their name to those opposing, please complete the form available via the following link:

<https://forms.gle/chHCYpGRRMaqJGYw6>

(Copy and paste into browser if clicking on the link does not work) and also make contact with David Paver who is compiling his own list: davepaver@hotmail.com

Northern Athletics Board