

# COUNTY SCHOOLS COMPETITION ORGANISERS – TRACK & FIELD GUIDANCE 2026

## Introduction

England Athletics recognises the impact that the 2026 ESAA National Championships, ESAA Combined Events Championships, and the 2026 ESAA Track & Field Cup hybrid formats will have on local, county, and inter-county competition. Many county schools competition organisers select athletes for ESAA national and inter-county events through their county championships.

This guidance aims to support schools competition organisers during the 2026 season to ensure:

1. a smooth transition for athletes moving into the new UKA age-groups
2. a clear and fair qualification pathway for those targeting ESAA national events, and
3. safe, well-managed competition, particularly where events do not fully align with UKA Rules of Competition.

## Summary of ESAA National Formats for 2026

### ESAA National T&F Championships

- Hurdles: All hurdles events except steeplechase will follow the new UKA Rules of Competition, ensuring technical alignment and minimising disruption with the club competition
- Throws: Events remain within existing ESAA age groups (Junior U15, Inter U17, Senior U19), but will use UKA implement weights for U16, U18, and U20 athletes.
- Track & Jumps: All track events, including steeplechase, and all jumps will follow the current ESAA age-group structure (Junior U15, Inter U17, Senior U19) under the former competition rules.

### ESAA Combined Events Championships

- Will continue with existing ESAA age groups: Junior U15, Inter U17, Senior U19 under the former competition rules.

### ESAA Track & Field Cup

- Will continue with its traditional even-year age brackets, broadly aligned with UKA Rules but with some differences in hurdles and field specifications. Age groups: Junior Years 7 & 8, Inter Years 9 & 10, Senior Years 11, 12 & 13

## Licensing Guidance for County Schools Competitions

To help ensure safe, compliant competition delivery:

- Apply for competition licences early, clearly stating the proposed event formats.

- Licences fully adopting UKA Rules and age-groups will be approved as standard.
- Where organisers wish to run any events under older or alternative ESAA age-groups, a detailed risk assessment must be submitted. This should include:
  - which events fall outside UKA Rules of Competition
  - potential risks arising from differing specifications
  - mitigations to ensure athlete, official, teacher, and volunteer safety
- Applications will be reviewed in line with the national approach and ESAA event structures.

## Communication With Schools and Athletes

Clear communication is essential to ensure athletes have plenty of time to prepare safely for different technical specifications throughout the 2026 T&F season. Please ensure:

- Early notice of event formats, age-groups and technical specifications for schools, teachers, athletes and parents
- Athletes understand where school competition specifications differ from club competitions (e.g., hurdles height, implement weight)

## Guidance for County Team Selection

Where county competitions and ESAA Nationals differ in age-groups or technical specifications, we recommend:

- Capture athlete school year and DOB clearly in entry systems to support correct selection
- Consult with technical event group coaches to understand where flexibility is appropriate in selection while ensuring athlete safety (e.g. where throws implement weights differ, consider accepting performances using lighter implements if supported by evidence of safe technique and readiness)
- Where athletes have had limited qualifying opportunities due to transition year changes, accept 2025 performance standards, provided there is evidence of current fitness and form.
- Ensure any selections prioritise athlete safety, technical readiness, and fair opportunity across all event groups

## Additional Recommendations

- Collaborate with local clubs to provide opportunities for athletes to access practice sessions using different implements or hurdle specifications
- Ensure all officials and volunteers are fully briefed on any variations from UKA Rules
- Consider publishing a simple one-page summary of your county's 2026 format for distribution to all schools

For all age-group information, including 2026 technical specifications please visit the England Athletics website: <https://www.EnglandAthletics.org/about-us/age-group-changes/>