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## Athlete Panel Annual Report 2025

### **Background**

The Athlete Panel was established in early 2024 following a competitive recruitment process. Beck Bennett was elected Chair in May 2024. Members of the group can be found [here](#).

The panel has met 6 times throughout 2025 to discuss emerging issues in the sport, feeding back on key topics and sharing thoughts on where best to focus their attention to influence key areas.

The following summary covers key areas where the group have focused discussions and played a key role in influencing England Athletics operational delivery throughout 2025.

### **Annual Summary**

#### **Key Discussion Themes**

- 1. Athlete Experience at Events** - The Athlete Panel has regularly discussed domestic competitions, with a strong focus on athlete experience. Concerns are often raised about lack of inclusivity and a general sense of athletes not feeling welcomed at events. Members have highlighted a lack of appeal in traditional championship and league formats, which are increasingly losing participants to open meetings that offer more engaging competition that often feature prize incentives, personal best opportunities, festival-style atmospheres with music, entertainment, and food, and enhanced spectator experiences including screens, streaming, and live results. The Panel regularly advocate for a change in competition formats to better meet athlete expectations and attract wider participation.
- 2. Club Landscape and Youth Engagement** - Discussions have also focused on the role of athletics clubs in supporting young athletes. Panel members have explored how clubs are competing with other sports that may offer more inclusive and exciting environments. Concerns have been raised about athlete retention and the need for clearer development pathways. The Panel have emphasised the importance of clubs providing welcoming cultures and visible pathways to ensure longer term engagement in athletics.

#### **Informing Operational Delivery**

The Athlete Panel has contributed to operational decision-making with England Athletics staff. Key areas of input included:

- Championship format reviews and delivery models
- Age-group rule change transitions
- Communications with the English Schools' Athletic Association (ESAA)

These contributions have helped ensure that athlete perspectives are embedded in policy and planning processes.

## Representing the Athlete Voice

Panel members have actively represented athlete views by attending various England Athletics events and competitions throughout the year, including County and National Championships, Regional Awards, and the Hall of Fame event. These events have enabled members to speak directly with athletes, coaches, officials, and volunteers, gathering insights from across the sport. This feedback has been instrumental in shaping the Panel's discussions and recommendations.

Each Panel member has identified a specific area of the sport they are passionate about championing. To deepen their understanding and ensure alignment with strategic priorities, members have engaged directly with relevant England Athletics staff to explore current programmes and initiatives. These individual focus areas are outlined below:

Beck Bennett – Grassroots and clubs  
 Dan Putnam – Schools athletics and competition pathway  
 Ella Fryer – University athletics and U20/U23 competition  
 Ellen Barber – Combined Events  
 Harrison Mayne – Competition athlete experience  
 James McCrae – Road and cross country endurance competition  
 John Beattie – Masters running  
 Laura Weightman – Junior to senior performance transition  
 Nisha Desai – Women's coaching and technical events  
 Tor Bennett Williams – Community engagement and accessibility  
 Zac Shaw – Disability and para-athletics

## Independent Observation

During the past year, Athlete Panel members have been invited to attend key selection meetings in an independent observer capacity. This has included participation in the recent competition funding meeting, where members provided feedback on the transparency and fairness of the decision-making processes. Their involvement has helped ensure that athlete perspectives are considered and that our practices remain open and accountable.

## Challenges and Areas for Improvement

Despite positive contributions and engagement throughout the year, the Athlete Panel has continued experiencing challenges that have impacted its effectiveness and consistency.

### Key Challenges

- **Scheduling Difficulties** - Finding suitable meeting times for all members has been consistently challenging due to varied personal and professional commitments
- **Inconsistent Member Engagement** - Some members have rarely attended meetings or contributed to discussions, which has possibly limited the diversity of perspectives
- **Limited Support for the Chair** - The Chair has had a reduced capacity to lead and coordinate the group effectively which has resulted in a recognised need for a Vice-Chair
- **Reliance on a Small Core Group** - A handful of committed individuals have carried the bulk of the responsibility, including driving discussions, following up on actions, and maintaining group connections