



# COMPETITION GRANTS 2026

## County Schools Competition Organisers

Application Information & Criteria

## Overview

### Background

From April 2026, the UKA Rules for Competition will introduce a significant realignment of junior age groups from 'odd' to 'even' years. This change announced by [UKA Athletics in early 2024](#) marks an important step forward for the sport, creating opportunities to develop the athlete pathway, and aiming to address athlete drop-out during adolescence. By evolving competition, we aim to make athletics more inclusive, engaging, and enjoyable for young people. While the sport has a proud and traditional history, its diverse and dynamic nature offers exciting potential to balance heritage with innovative formats, ensuring that athletes not only stay involved but build a lifelong connection with athletics.

As part of our ongoing commitment to delivering an inclusive, sustainable, and strategically aligned competition pathway, and aligning with the principles within [A New Vision for Track and Field](#), we launched our new competition funding model in autumn 2025. Through this process, we identified and confirmed the key competitions for investment in 2026, ensuring that funding is directed towards events that play a central role in athlete development, performance progression, and strengthening the national competition structure.

With the introduction of the hybrid age-group model at 2026 English Schools Athletics Association (ESAA) National events, school competition providers may also recognise the need to deliver local competition in line with the ESAA formats rather than full adoption of the new age-groups.

To support this transition, we are introducing a one-off grant scheme for the 2026 summer season. This funding is specifically for schools competition providers to help them move to the new UKA age-group-structure and the wider ESAA alignment taking effect from 1 September 2026. This targeted approach aims to provide stability during the change period while supporting our long-term competition strategy.

### England Athletics & ESAA Partnership

England Athletics has a longstanding and valued partnership with the ESAA, historically providing over £100,000 each year to support the delivery of their national events. ESAA has confirmed its intention to fully align its national track & field competitions with the new UKA age group structure from 1 September 2026, adopting a phased hybrid approach (detailed below) during the 2026 track and field season structure from 1 September 2026.

As a result, ESAA events in summer 2026 will operate under a hybrid competition model, outlined below.

### ESAA National Championships

- Hurdles Events – All hurdles events, with the exception of steeplechase, will follow the new UKA Rules of Competition. This ensures athletes have appropriate qualification opportunities within the wider competition pathway and avoids unnecessary disruption to training and competition arising from differing technical requirements.
- Throws Events – All throws events will continue to be grouped under the existing ESAA age categories (Junior U15, Inter U17, Senior U19), but will use UKA implement weights for U16, U18, and U20 athletes.
- Track Events & Jumps – Track events, including steeplechase, along with all jump events, will follow the current ESAA age-group structure using the former rules of competition (Junior U15, Inter U17, Senior U19).

### ESAA Combined Events Championships

- The Combined Events Championships will continue to operate under the current ESAA age-groupings using the former rules of competition (Junior U15, Inter U17, Senior U19).



## ESAA Track & Field Cup

- The Track & Field Cup has traditionally used its own age-group structure which it will continue to follow for 2026. This structure broadly aligns with the new UKA Rules for Competition in 'even age-groups'. However, there will be some technical differences across certain events, including hurdles and selected field disciplines. For 2026, the Cup will retain its established groupings: Junior (Years 7 & 8), Inter (Years 9 & 10), and Senior (Years 11, 12 & 13).

## Who Can Apply?

### County Schools Championships

This grant is designed to support County Schools Championships in ensuring smooth alignment between ESAA national competition formats and the club competition pathway. Competition providers may wish to apply for the grant in a variety of areas to help support the transition to the new age-group structure which could include areas such as:

- Adding extra days of competition to accommodate new age-group formats
- Securing additional qualified officials to ensure safe and compliant event delivery
- Enhancing event operations through technology, such as electronic timing systems, EDM or photo-finish equipment
- Improving digital infrastructure, including updated or more efficient online entry and results platforms
- Updating trophies, medals, and awards to reflect the revised age-group structure
- Providing additional administrative time or operational support to help manage the transition effectively

### Inter County Competition-County Competition

Enhanced grant levels will be available for schools competition providers developing new or revised inter county competitions that fully adopt the new UKA age-group rules. A particular focus of this support is to create county representative opportunities for Year 7 and Year 8 athletes (U14s), who have traditionally not had the chance to compete in ESAA national events for their counties. This targeted funding aims to ensure these younger athletes still have valuable county level representative experiences, while supporting counties to innovate and embed the new age-group structure.

### Local and Regional Schools Competition

Other schools competition providers (e.g. individual schools, athletics clubs, SGOs) may also wish to apply for a grant to support licensed or [Funetics Multi Challenge](#) local schools competitions operating under the new age-groups, helping support or grow the local athletics offer and easing the transition to the updated rules. This includes a particular focus on competitions for Year 5 to Year 8 athletes, supporting early entry points into the sport and giving young participants a positive first experience of athletics through school. Collaboration with local athletics clubs also provides a way to enhance opportunities for these younger athletes and strengthen their progression into the wider club system.

## What We Cannot Fund

The grant cannot be used for race kit or team tracksuits, travel or accommodation for national ESAA competitions, or any other non-event delivery costs such as personal athlete equipment, athlete grants, catering, or operational expenses unrelated to implementing the new age-group structure.



We are unable to fund school competition providers who plan to deliver their events solely under existing schools age-groups that sit entirely outside the UKA Rules for Competition and who show no plans to begin the transition towards the new formats. This grant is specifically designed to support competitions that are either fully adopting new age-groups, partly adopting new age-groups in alignment with ESAA events, or taking steps toward adopting the new age-group structure that effectively support the development and progression of young athletes within their county.

## Before You Apply

Please consider the information below before submitting a grant application.

### Project planning

Schools competition providers should have a clear plan outlining the format of their events. They should clearly detail within the application where they intend to fully adopt the new UKA Rules for Competition. Where events will continue to use existing age-groups, or a mixture of new and existing age-groups, providers must include an associated risk plan that identifies any elements operating outside the rules and outlines how the organisers will mitigate these risks.

As part of their event planning, competition organisers should also consider the following:

#### Communication & Information

- Develop a clear communication plan for schools and clubs
- Ensure all competition format details are easily accessible to participants
- Publish technical specifications (e.g., implement weights, hurdle heights, age-group details) in advance

#### Entries & Results

- Provide clear information for the entry process, including deadlines and eligibility criteria
- Detail how and when results will be captured and published
- Ensure systems used for entries and results are reliable and user-friendly

#### County Team Selection

- Publish county representative opportunities
- Provide accessible information for County team selection policies and standards
- Make selection timelines and criteria easy to find for athletes, parents, teachers, and coaches

### Budgets

We encourage all schools competition providers to submit budgets that reflect the full cost of event delivery as part of their applications, and to clearly articulate how any additional funding would enhance the athlete experience, particularly in relation to inclusiveness, accessibility, and the long-term sustainability of the event.



## Competition Licence

This grant funding application process is separate from the competition licensing process. All competition licence applications should continue to be submitted through the usual [licensing portal](#). Competitions intending to operate fully under the new UKA Rules for Competition will have their licences issued as normal.

However, where any part of a competition proposes to use existing age-groups in line with current ESAA national formats, the licence application will be placed on hold until the ESAA formats are reviewed and confirmed, and guidance is published to address and mitigate any identified risks to athletes and officials operating outside the rules.

## ENGLAND ATHLETICS FUNDING MATRIX

The table below sets out the criteria that will be assessed as part of each application.

	County Schools Competition	Inter County Schools Competition	Local School Competition
Maximum Funding Range	£1,000	£3,000	£500
Age Range	Year 5 to Year 13 athletes (U12 to U20 athletes)	Year 7 to Year 13 athletes (U14 to U20 athletes)	Year 3 to Year 13 athletes (U10 to U20 athletes)
UKA Rules for Competition	Fully or partly adopted	Fully adopted	Fully adopted
Format	Track & Field Championships / Match / Open or Guest events	Track & Field Championships / Match	Track & Field Championships / Match / Open or Guest events FMC Events
Technology (optional)	EDM / Electronic Timing / Photo finish Online entry / Live results	EDM / Electronic Timing / Photo finish Live results	Optional
Licence	EA/UKA Level 1 or Level 2  <i>(U12 competition will not require a licence)</i>	EA/UKA Level 1 or Level 2	EA/UKA Level 1 or Level 2  <i>(U12 competition will not require a licence)</i>
Other Considerations	Collaborative working (e.g. with other counties/competitions/clubs) Para-athletics events Accompanying volunteer/officials development programme Wider event experience (e.g. catering, parking, transport, spectators etc)		



## Submitting an Application

Once applicants have reviewed all the information, please complete a grant funding application using the form link below:

[Application form](#)

The deadline for applications is **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2026**.

If additional guidance or support is needed during the process, applicants are encouraged to contact the team at [eventsupport@englandathletics.org](mailto:eventsupport@englandathletics.org).

## Next Steps

Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their funding application by **Thursday 2nd April**. Please note that priority will be given to applications where there is clear evidence of disadvantage or limited opportunities for athletes seeking qualification for ESAA events.

Successful applicants will receive funding by early May 2026.

