



England Athletics Chair of National Council Tony Shiret Chair Blog, June 2015

With the season under way, athletes, their support teams and families and the whole array of people needed to run meetings are fully engaged and the question as to whether the sport is making progress in terms of making itself attractive and sustainable in the future is more pertinent than ever.

In truth it is hard to argue that much progress has been made and the sport is clearly not regenerating itself to a significant degree. Having said that, there are still many brilliant performances that show we still have excellent coaches and athletes – just not enough of them.

The UK Women's 100m Record by Dina Asher-Smith (and third all-time performance by Asha Philip) is a case in point in this respect. Her coach, John Blackie, has worked for many years at Blackheath & Bromley, where his achievements include running a young athletes project, the Bees Academy, and he was honoured as England's Development Coach of the Year in 2011. Well done to Dina and John (and Asha) – but are we creating enough John Blackies? In the last financial year (to April 2015) it looks like only around 200 new Athletics Coaches and Coaches in Running Fitness were licensed in England. This is not enough.

The recent consultation meetings held across the country to hear the views of the clubs have now finished. The most consistently discussed areas were Age Group changes, Regional level competition and Coach Education. The meeting notes will be published shortly, followed by an online consultation survey.

On the proposed changes to age groups all Regional Councillors in England were asked to say whether they supported the changes or not. We received a 57% response – itself pretty amazing in athletics in my experience – and of the respondents 13% supported the proposed changes and 73% opposed them (the balance were indifferent between the existing and proposed rules or not prepared to express an opinion). Accordingly the National Council has formally opposed the proposed Rule Change and communicated this to UKA.

You may also be interested to hear that Chris Tomlinson approached the National Council (along with his club and the London Council) with a request to assist him with an attempt to appeal the UK Record set by Greg Rutherford in the USA last April. On considering the facts, we felt that there were significant grounds for an appeal to be heard to resolve the disputed areas and also to clarify the UKA ratification procedures.

These requests were made to UKA by the Board of EA following a request for them to do so by the National Council. The requests were rejected without further explanation by the Board of UKA at its meeting of 21st May.

EA made the request as it was felt appropriate to act in the interests of an affiliated member. It is naturally disappointing that the UKA Board did not feel that the collective opinion of the London and National Councils and the EA Board should be acted upon.

A note of the original National Council decision on this matter has been added to the record of our meetings [here](#).

At the most recent National Council meeting I was asked to continue as Chair for another year. I have agreed to do this and the coming year will be an interesting time. Hopefully we will end up with a workable set of rules following the latest revisions to the UKA Rules of Competition. More importantly (and I have said this for many years now) we need to have a plan we can work to that allows us to reverse the decline of the sport and build for the future. Running as a leisure activity is incredibly popular just now but track and field and off-track

competitive running are not well enough organised, funded or led to capitalise on this popularity in my view.

England is doing its bit to set out how it should move forward with a Strategy group moving towards an initial plan for the wider sport to discuss. But ultimately, whatever is decided, success or failure will come down to creating capacity in areas like Coaching, Officials, Volunteers and more meaningful stimulus to the sport in schools. Creating the conditions for more people to be involved in all of these areas should not be too hard.

The problem has been that most of the levers required to create these conditions have been within UKA which also has to deliver performance at international level. Fortunately there are now some signs of progress. EA now deals directly with Sport England rather than being directed by UKA for most of the areas funded by Sport England. As well as the developing EA Strategy, certain areas governed by UKA are now showing signs of activity – with new strategies being developed for Officials and Competition, and some attempt to establish why the current system for Coach Education introduced by UKA's Kevin Tyler in 2010 is not producing more examined and higher level coaches.

I would like to say that a good part of this work has resulted from volunteer intervention as the National Council has become more proactive. We regularly invite leading UKA figures to discuss progress in some of these areas. Our interest seems to have coincided with greater activity. Clearly this greater collaboration is how the system should work.

Tony Shiret, June 2015