

FAQs: Age group changes Overview

What is being changed?

The current age groups – categories in which young athletes compete – are to be revised. From April 1, 2026, young athletes will compete in the following age groups:

U12

U14

U16

U18

These new age groups will replace the existing U13, U15 and U17 groupings.

What will happen to U11s?

The U11 age-group is currently an optional age-group that many competitions and clubs use to introduce children to adapted age-appropriate athletics. The UKA rules for competition do not cater for U11 athletes and there is no requirement to affiliate U11 athletes with the Home Country Athletics Federation. An U10 optional affiliation and competition age-group will replace U11s.

Why is it being changed?

The change was initially proposed as one of several ways in which the significant drop-off in track and field participation amongst teenagers could be addressed. Research and insight show that one of the contributing factors to this drop-off is the clash with exam commitments, which leads to pressure to perform both academically and physically. The age group changes will mean that athletes are competing at the top of their age group in non-exam years, therefore relieving some of that pressure.

You can read further detail about the reasoning behind the change [here](#).

Are the changes designed to make the process of selection for Commonwealth Youth Games easier?

The Home Country Athletics Federations have successfully selected competitive teams for Commonwealth Youth Games since their inception in 2000, while UKA have also selected teams for a number of world and European youth championships. These games do not take place every year and impact only a minority of athletes. Selection for the Commonwealth Youth Games therefore was not a factor in these changes being proposed and approved.

Who decided to change it?

The proposal for change was put forward to UK Athletics by the Home Country Athletics Federations – Athletics Northern Ireland, England Athletics, Scottish Athletics and Welsh Athletics – (HCAFs) following a period of consultation with athletes, parents, clubs, coaches, member bodies and officials.

This consultation process included a webinar series and a survey process, which allowed those within the sport to provide feedback and opinion on the proposals as either an individual or a collective group representing a club or member body.

The webinars were attended by 330 people, while the club survey received 122 responses, and 821 people responded to the individual survey.

Was there unanimous support for the changes?

The consultation process invited differing opinions on the proposed changes, and saw robust discussion and debate.

While the changes garnered significant support from young athletes and their parents, there was uncertainty among other stakeholders, including clubs (committees and officials) and member bodies.

What happens now?

Informed by stakeholder opinion and the debate within the consultation, the decision was taken to add a requirement allowing time to seek expert guidance on the implementation of the changes which will aim to provide detailed clarity and minimal disruption to athletes taking part in age-group competition, meaning that they will come into effect on April 1, 2026.

Over the period of time between now and that date, the HCAFs will work alongside stakeholders to ensure that opinions and concerns are taken on board and addressed, and that the benefits of the age group changes are felt by all those within the sport.

FAQs: Age Group Changes Implementation

When will the new age groups come into effect?

The new rules will be applied from 1st April 2026.

The new U12, U14, U16, U18 and U20 age groups will come into effect for the 2026 track and field season for all competitions commencing after April 1st and the UKA rulebook will reflect these changes.

Will the dates of the track and field competition year be changed?

The competition year will run from 1st October – 30th September.

Will all disciplines (road, cross country, track and field) use the same competition year?

Currently athletes move into their new age group at the conclusion of the summer track and field season for the following winter road/cross country season.

As part of the current consultation, we propose the creation of a consistent age group across track and field, road, cross country for junior athletes. The off-track sub-group will consider how best to ensure that athletes transition from one discipline and age group to the next and any issues arising that affect the road and cross country seasons.

Will the new age groups in the UK align with World Athletics' method of determining age groups (calendar year of birth)?

The dates of the competition year are outlined above. In the UK, an athlete's age group is determined by their age on August 31st of that year (currently U11s-U17s, from April 2026 U10s-U18s). I.e. athletics age groups are determined in the same way as a child's school year.

This will not change as part of this process.

So, to summarise:

- U10-U18 Cut off dates will be 31st August within the competition year.
- U20 upper cut off date will be 31st December in the calendar year of competition.
- Senior athletes are aged 20 or over on the 31st December in the calendar year of competition.

While the World Athletics' method for determining an athlete's age group differs from what will continue to be in place in the UK from 2026, World Athletics does use even years to categorise athletes for competition (i.e U12, U14, U16, U18), so the new age groups in the UK will align to that.

What will be the club competition opportunities across the U12, U14, U16, U18 and U20 age groups?

The March 2024 webinars have provided information for competition providers on the age groups that will be implemented and the proposed race distances, implement weights and hurdle heights for each. These are published here.

As is currently the case, the HCAFs will offer national championship competition for older children and U20s and will provide guidance and recommendations to competition providers on the competition formats and approaches suitable at each age group.

Organisations such as leagues, counties, areas and open competition providers will make their own decisions on which of the newly implemented age groups they wish to cater for. For example, currently an open meeting may focus on U13s and U15s, post April 1st 2026 they may choose to focus on U14s and U16s, or alternatively they may prefer U12 and U14.

The HCAFs will offer support and recommendations and will seek to ensure that sufficient competitions for all age groups are planned. Discussions will continue at competition provider forums in 2024 and as part of the competition sub group.

All permitted/licensed events will need to comply with the rules of competition, which will be amended to reflect the changed age groups.

Are there competition opportunities for current U11s (year 1 U12s from 2026)?

As is currently the case, athletes aged in school year 6 and below will continue to access local competition opportunities with an emphasis on personal improvement, building a love of the sport and being part of a team. Sportshall Athletics and QuadKids are just two examples of the types of competition for this age group that will continue.

Will the schools athletics associations' age groups change?

The HCAF schools associations have indicated that they do not currently expect to change from the age groups that they currently use for their championships, which are U15 (junior boys/girls), U17 (intermediate boys/girls) and U19 (senior boys/girls). In England, the English Schools Cup already uses U10s, U12s, U14s, 16s, U18s, which from 2026 will align with the wider sport.

The HCAFs will continue to work with the schools associations in order to ensure that the pathway for athletes is clear and to maximise development and qualification opportunities.

What support is available to competition providers and club officials in updating timetables and other documentation?

Athletics NI, England Athletics, Scottish Athletics and Welsh Athletics will provide comprehensive guidance, tools and templates to members of the athletics community to assist with the changes that will need to be made.

When will the rulebook be updated?

The rules review process will be undertaken from autumn 2024, ahead of publication of a new rulebook, which will include these age group changes, by winter 2025/26.

What implements will be used in each age group, what will the hurdle heights be and what will be the approved track distances?

The webinars delivered in March 2024 provide a clear proposal for technical events for athletes, parents, coaches, club officers, technical officials and competition providers and the slides and recordings can be found [here](#)

Will the changes require significant investment in new equipment?

In producing the recommended hurdle heights and implement weights, care has been taken to propose implements for each of the new age groups that are already in wide use across the sport. Where discussions with implement manufacturers are needed (e.g. around 60cm hurdles), these will take place.

What will happen to club/area/national records?

A working group will be established in spring 2024 to determine the process for maintaining records for the new age groups and to consider how to maintain records and note performances in the current age groups.

“UK Age bests” will continue to be recorded as is currently the case.

How will rankings work and which age groups will the Power of 10 show?

From April 2026, the Power of 10 will show the new, even year age groups. The records sub-group will consider the issue how historical performances will be ranked and displayed.

What are the next steps?

A group comprising HCAF staff, board members, athlete representative(s) and independent members has been established to oversee the implementation phase.

Smaller working groups are also being convened to check and challenge current proposals, identify challenges and work through solutions across a number of specific areas of work. These are:

- Records (County, Area, Club & National)
- Para Athletics – competition structure and implements
- Technical events – throwing implements, race distances, hurdle height/spacing
- Competition formats and structure, including schools athletics
- Off-Track considerations (Endurance)
- Alignment with World Athletics / World Para Athletics requirements
- Technology

A timeline of next steps includes:

- Regional Open Online Forums (England) April 3rd-22nd

- Sub-Groups - established by Mid-May 2024
- Recruitment of members via expression of interest
- Interim implementation plan published – July 2024
- Further feedback and consultation – July-October 2024
- Final Implementation plan - published October 2024.