

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](#).

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 HCAFs and UK Athletics have not approved a change to a 1st January – 31st December competition year. This issue will be subject of further discussion and consultation but will not be part of the UK-wide implementation of age group changes ahead of 2026.

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

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.

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 will consider whether there is a need to create a consistent age group across track and field, road, cross country for junior athletes.

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

The upcoming webinars will provide guidance for competition providers and these will be published following the conclusion of the webinar series.

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 age groups they wish to cater for. 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.

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 not yet indicated whether they 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.

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 upcoming webinars will provide a clear proposal for technical events for athletes, parents, coaches, club officers, technical officials and competition providers and these will be published following the conclusion of the webinar series.

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.

What are the next steps?

Following the webinars and forums to be held in March and April 2024, the HCAFs will publish a draft implementation plan and will then continue to elicit feedback from the athletics community ahead of a finalised plan to be published in Autumn 2024.