



England Athletics Consultation Report 2014

Context

The 2014 England Athletics consultation was borne out of the exercise undertaken in 2013. Many club representatives at the consultation events that year expressed the view that England Athletics should improve communication links with member clubs and, as a result, EA committed to making consultation with clubs and the wider sport an annual exercise.

Format and Approach

Following input from the England National Council and the board Membership Process and Consultation Advisory Group (“Process Group”), it was decided that, like in 2013, the consultation should take place in the form of regional events and an online consultation survey.

Unlike in 2013, when the consultation events and online survey overlapped, the decision was taken to have the online survey follow the meetings and use it to further gauge opinion on the main themes to have emerged.

Likewise, whereas in 2013 England Athletics produced a fixed agenda for the consultation meetings, in 2014 there were fewer specific questions asked of attendees and, instead, England Athletics, via the National Council and Process Group, adopted a less fixed agenda. Broader areas for discussion were proposed and some updates given, but attendees were given a freer opportunity to discuss the matters that they deemed to be of importance.

11 “Club Conferences” therefore took place between March 24th and May 9th at venues in each of England’s nine regions (two each in Yorkshire and Humberside and the South East) adopting a format loosely based on the National Council’s 2013 Whole Council Conference. In the first part of each club conference, England Athletics (National Council and executive officers) provided information and updates (including a demonstration of the EA Portal) and suggested core questions to be considered across two broad areas, following which, in part two, regional councils were free to discuss issues of regional interest. In the North of England, the second part was led by representatives of Northern Athletics, who discussed the results of their survey on the future of area competition.

The slides used and the questions asked can be viewed and downloaded at www.englandathletics.org/consultation. The notes taken at each meeting are also available.

The two main areas were:

- Affiliation and Membership
- Spending Priorities and EA Strategy

EA’s finances were addressed at the end of the first part and attendees were shown the current budget deficit. The decision to outline the finances only after the discussion of spending priorities had taken place was deliberate, in order to identify what clubs valued without them having finance and cost at the forefront of their minds.

The format largely worked well and, anecdotally, attendees appreciated the fact that the questions

were more open compared to 2013 and allowed a range of opinions to be expressed. The section on the secretaries' portal was largely successful, although opinions varied depending on the club role that attendees occupied.

More than 300 people attended the events in total and there was a noticeably more positive atmosphere at the majority of events compared to 2013 (and 2012).

Results/Broad themes

Given the nature of the notes to have been taken at the club conferences and the deliberately more open ended questions asked, the "results" of the first part of the consultation process were difficult to quantify. Nonetheless, some broad themes emerged.

- On registration and affiliation, clubs were largely supportive of the existence of the scheme, but were clear that it must be fair for all clubs and individuals and that EA should ensure that this is the case.
- At the same time, the income generated via clubs should be spent on activities directly benefitting the "core sport".
- EA should ensure that more communication should take place on how income raised via affiliation and registration is spent.
- There should be more and better benefits associated with athlete registration.
- The old system of "unattached levies" on road runners was perceived to have been more beneficial to the sport than the current system of "registered athlete discounts" (although the detail of the previous and current systems was not discussed).

The size of the registration fee was not discussed at every event and was not a specific item listed for discussion. However, it was discussed briefly at some events and the only comments made were that the fee should be raised. Reasons given included the fact that costs rise, that the sport is perceived as "too cheap" and that a larger fee could help pay for greater service provision. There were no dissenting voices, although it would be wrong to suggest that silence necessarily meant agreement.

The Survey

The broad themes to emerge from the club conferences formed the basis of the consultation survey, which was produced in conjunction with members of the Process Group and National Council, as well as executive officers, and was live via the England Athletics website between June 20th and July 18th.

While the subject of the size of the registration fee was not explicitly discussed at the club conferences, given England Athletics' financial situation and the requirement (as set out in the articles of association) to consult with clubs on any decisions about fees, questions were included in the survey.

Survey Results

Below are the survey results, with additional comment in *italics*.

The survey was split into four sections:

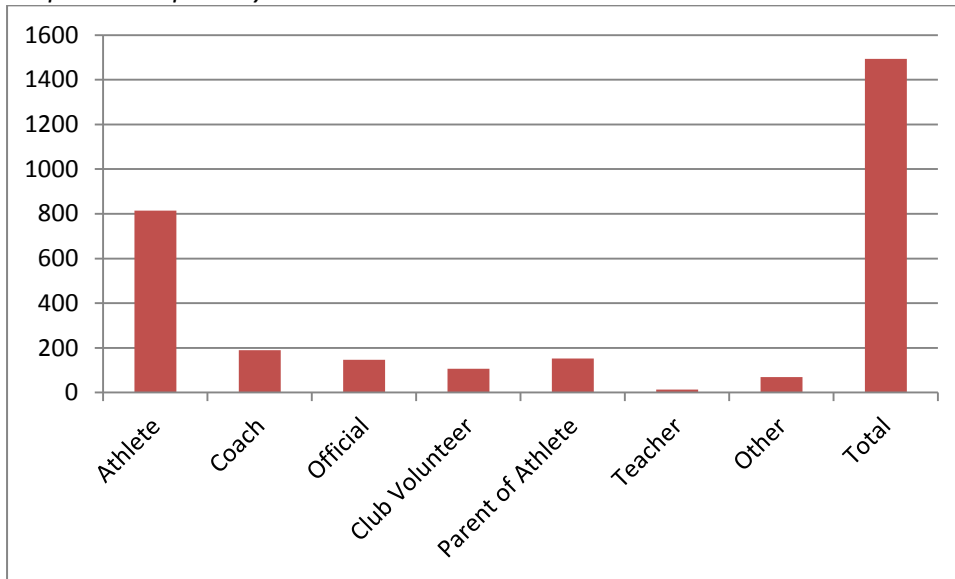
- Registered athlete benefits
- Registration and affiliation

- The functional areas that EA supports
- Finances (including registration fee and registered athlete discount)

A total of **1576** surveys were attempted, with not all questions completed by all respondents, including personal information.

Respondents were asked to identify their primary involvement in athletics:

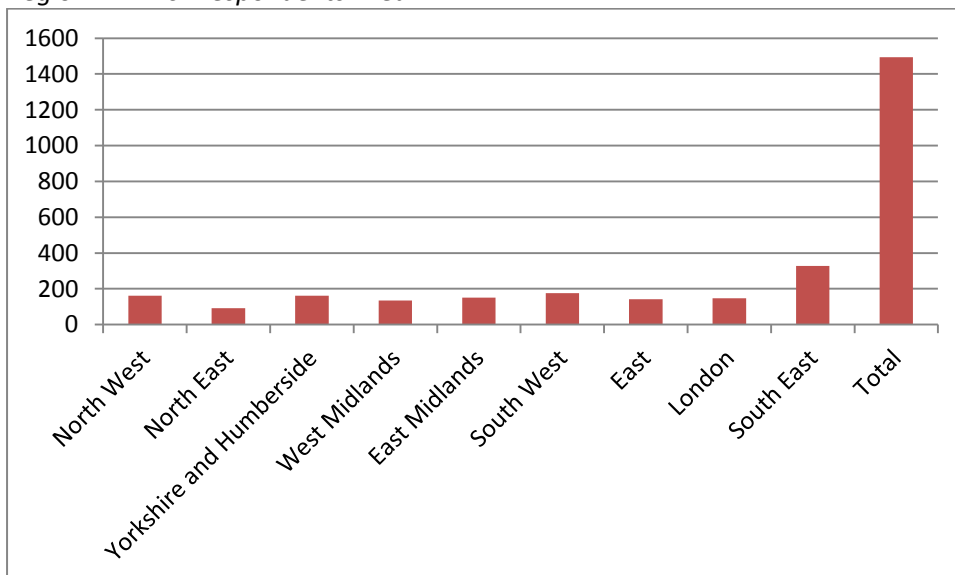
Respondents' primary involvement in athletics



It should be pointed out that it is "primary" involvement that is being self-identified. This is highly subjective and, of course, many of the athletes can have alternative involvement. The same could be said of coaches.

A large number of the respondents were able to provide athlete registration numbers or coach/official license details.

Region in which respondents lived



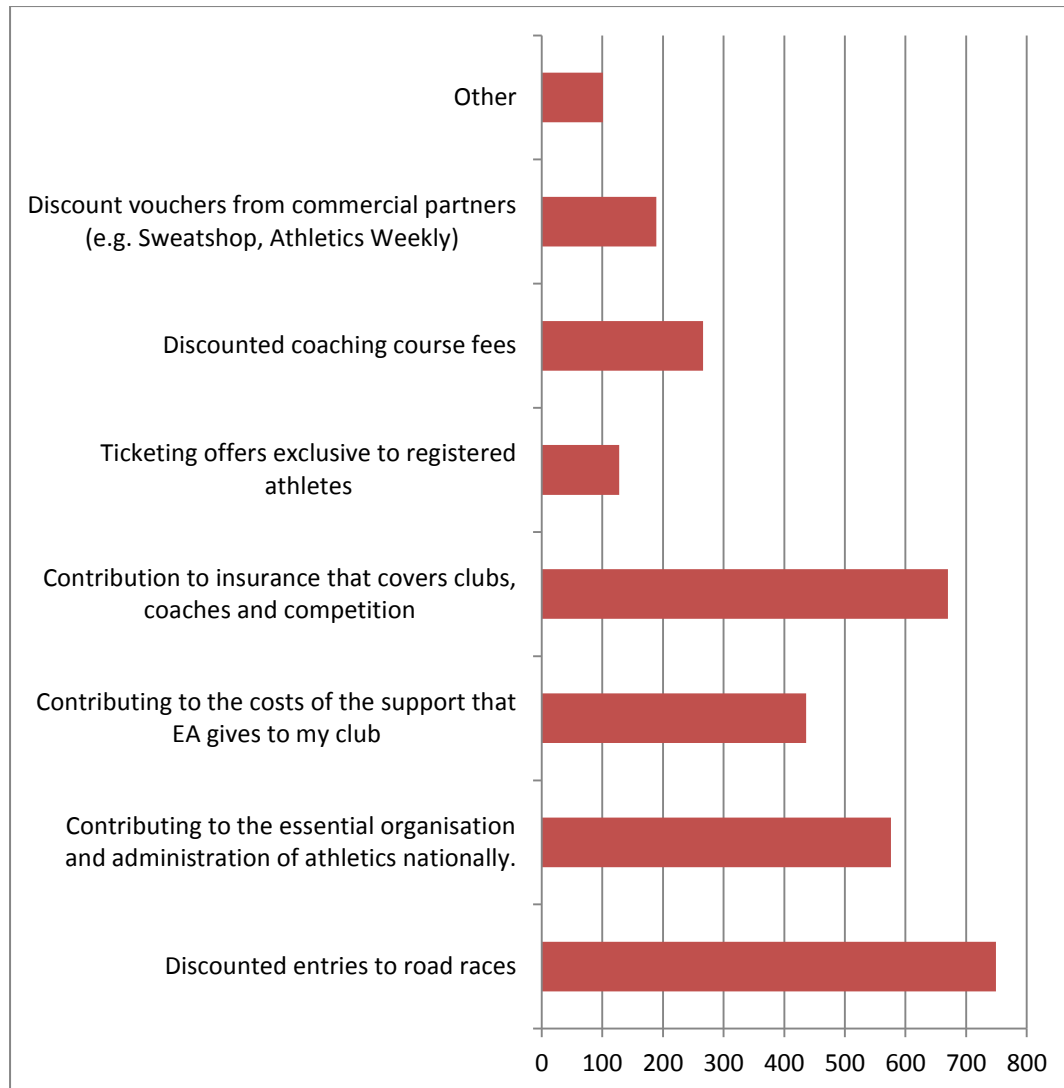
Section 1 – Registered Athlete Benefits

Are you aware of the England Athletics athlete portal at www.englandathletics.org/myprofile and that this is where benefits can be accessed?

Yes: 49% No: 51%

This figure is disappointingly low and it suggests that EA needs to raise awareness of the individual athletes' portal. It is also worth considering whether the portal is the best way to gain exposure for England Athletics' partners via member offers and for members to access these benefits.

What do you consider to be the main benefits of being registered with England Athletics (tick all that apply)?

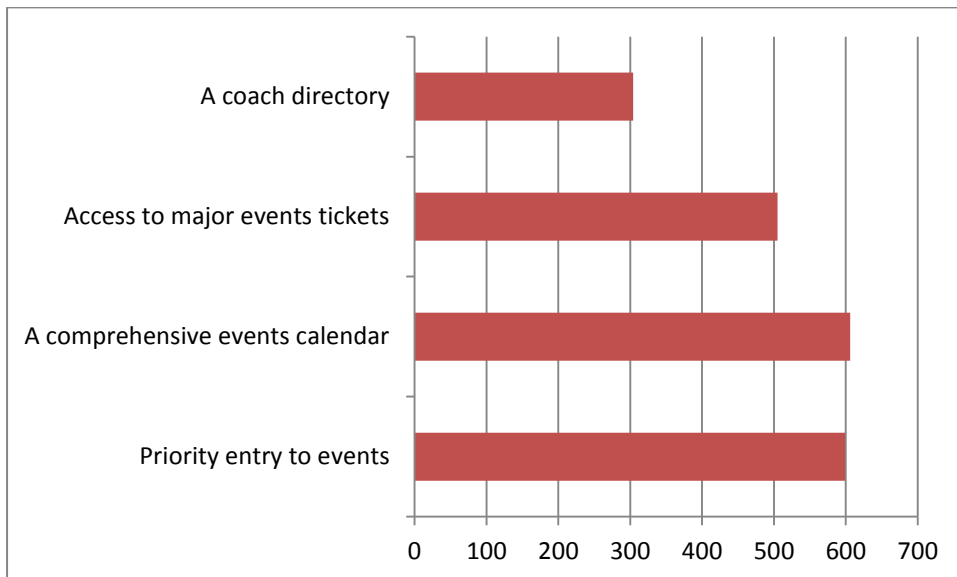


As people were able to tick all that applied to them, this just gives a flavour of some of the more popular reasons. The most popular were (in order):

- *Discounted entry to road races*
- *Contribution to insurance that covers clubs, coaches and competition*
- *Contributing to the essential organisation and administration of athletics nationally*

For athletes, discounted entry to road races was valued even more highly.

If England Athletics offered further benefits which of the following would you like to see?

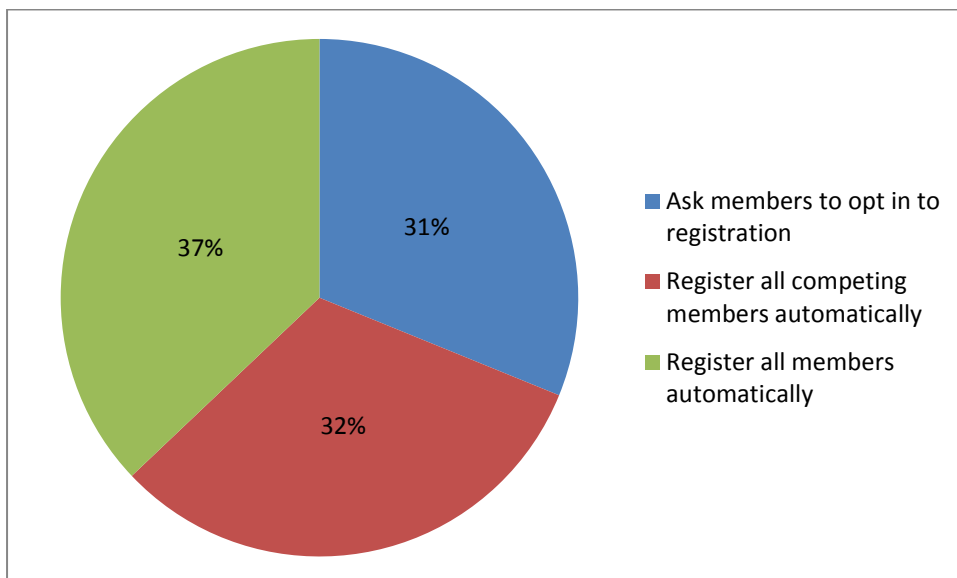


This suggests that individuals would be generally appreciative of more overt benefits associated with registration.

Section 2 – Registration and Affiliation

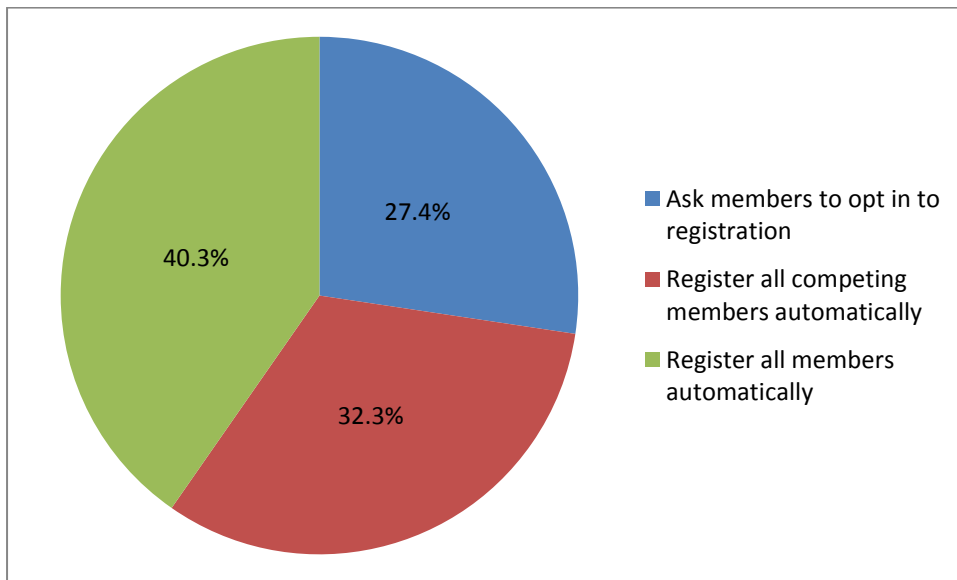
Club affiliation and athlete registration form part of the UKA Rules for competition. Eligibility to enter competitions as a club or individual depends on affiliation (club) and registration (individual) status. Please see www.britishathletics.org.uk/competitions/rules for full information.

Does your club (please tick):



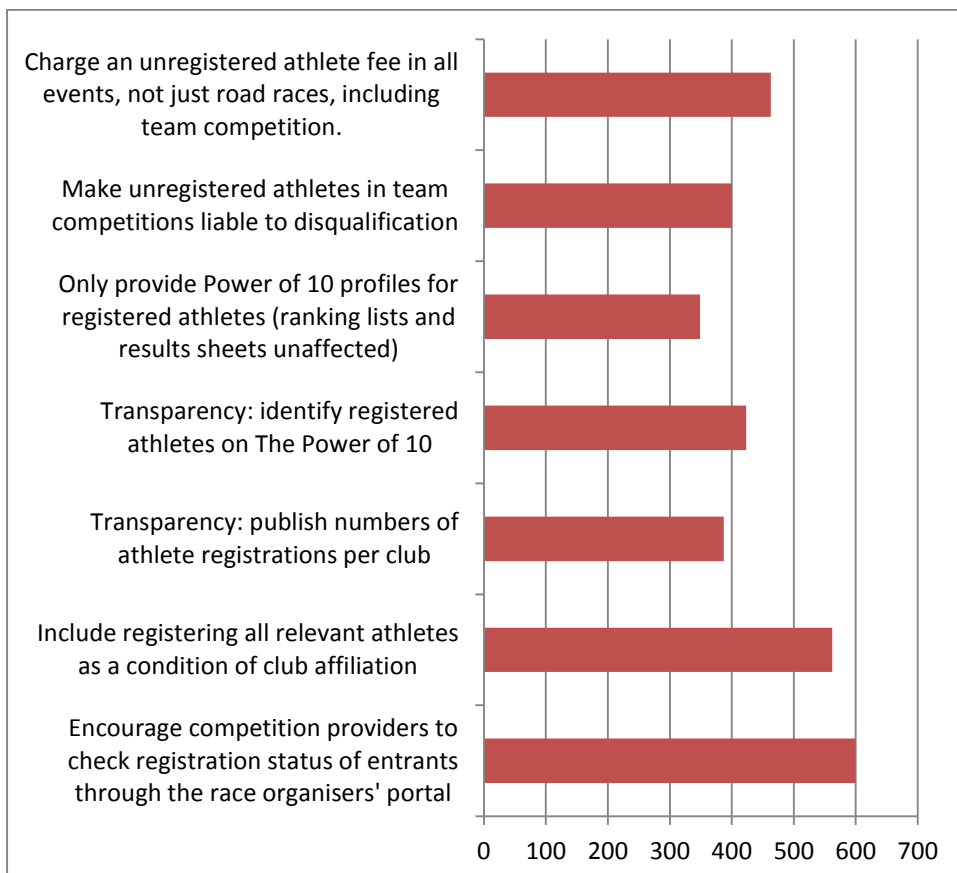
These figures are surprising, in that there is a perception that more clubs are not registering all of their members and there have, in the past and more recently, been calls for all clubs to register all of their members (hence the inclusion of this question in the survey). Clearly these responses are not verifiable and are based on individuals' understanding, but there may be more clubs simply registering everyone than previously thought. Still, it does suggest that, with 31% of respondents claiming that their club asks members to opt in, there could be significant numbers of athletes competing without having registered.

Which system do you prefer (please tick)?



The responses are broadly in line with what respondents see as current practice at their clubs. The result does show that the oft suggested “make everyone register” would not necessarily be easy to implement at this stage.

Many clubs have expressed a view that they want the system to be fair and equal and for action to be taken to ensure all clubs to follow the rules. Additionally, England Athletics uses this income from affiliation and the registration scheme to provide an infrastructure for the sport. How can we best ensure fairness? Which of these measures would you support?



Clearly there is a desire for EA to ensure fairness around the registration scheme, which confirms the views expressed at the club conferences.

All of these suggestions received some level of support and the phrasing of the question meant that we cannot assume that just because a respondent does not tick a particular measure that they are necessarily actively against it.

The headline here is that EA should be doing more to enable checks to be made by competition organisers (athletes are even more in favour of this than the general responses) and that any use of TPOT as a method of ensuring that people register needs to be considered and explained very carefully.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect is the fact that there was support for the charging of an unregistered athlete fee in all events and not just road races. The National Council and the Process Group have begun to consider this, but on the basis of consultation there needs to be swift action around ensuring fairness. The easiest to implement in the short term would be the publication of the numbers of registered athletes per club.

England Athletics are considering ways in which we can provide further support to clubs and athletes in the administration of the registration scheme.

Would you be interested in England Athletics providing an optional online payment service, for individual athletes, where individual club subscriptions and the England Athletics registration fee can be paid by individuals via a single transaction?

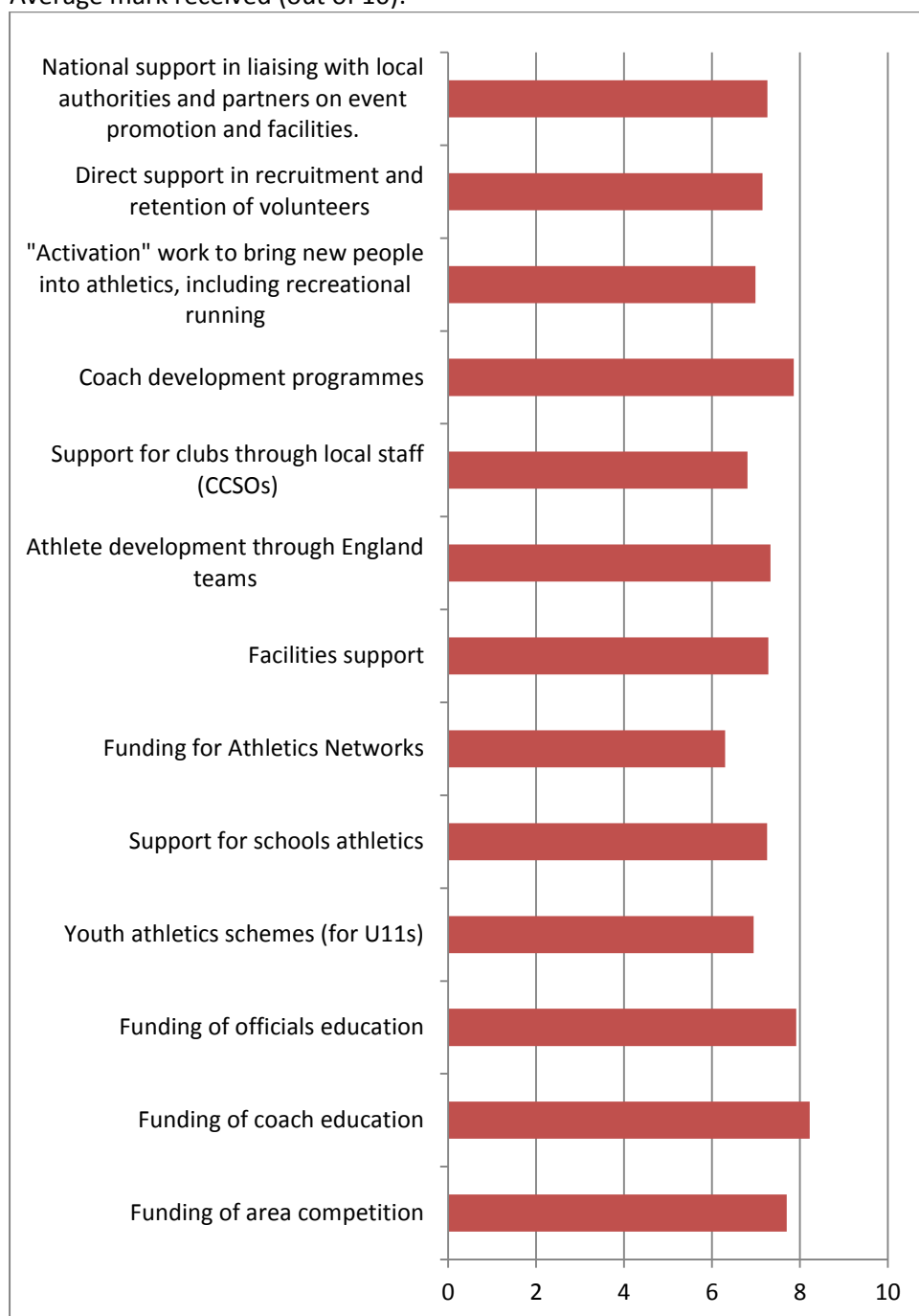
Yes: 51% No 49%

There is no reason not to trial this optional system.

Section 3 – The Functional Areas that England Athletics support

England Athletics carries out work and provides financial support in a number of different functional areas. Tell us how important you find each of these on a scale of 1-10, where 10 is very important and 1 is not important at all.

Average mark received (out of 10):



None of these areas are necessarily seen as lacking in value, but CCSOs and Networks were the least valued. It is quite possible that as athletes were well represented in those completing the survey, they are less likely to appreciate the work that networks do (or have direct contact with CCSOs). It is no coincidence that the areas most valued are athlete-centric areas or aspects that are athlete-facing. None should be considered as lacking in value.

Section 4 – Finances

As the financial explanation outlines, England Athletics faces a shortfall in income compared to the budget in the Whole Sport Plan. Cutting services and expenditure is an inevitable consequence. However, at Club Conferences, some representatives expressed the view that the affiliation fee should rise, partly to address this issue, but largely to reflect inflation and other increases in costs. What are your views (select one answer):

The registration fee should be increased to £12 for 2015-16	32.7%
The registration fee should be increased to £14 for 2015-16	5.8%
The registration fee should be increased to £15 for 2015-16 (and held stable for 2 years)	32.8%
My preference is that the affiliation fee remains £10, in the understanding that this will significantly affect the services that myself and my club receive from England Athletics.	28.8%

Simplified, 71% are in favour of some sort of fee rise.

The survey as a whole suggests only a small percentage want £14, with a roughly even split between those wanting it to go to £12 and those prepared to go to £15 for a fixed term. This presents a range of options, but in the absence of a clear mandate to increase to £15, it makes sense to adopt the more conservative £12 in the first instance. There is some appetite for the £15, fixed for a period and this can be explored further in the coming year.

NB - The board have made a decision to raise the fee to £12, which is justified on the basis of the responses to this question.

Some club representatives, particularly in light of the findings of the Northern Athletics survey on the funding of area competition, have expressed the view that in order to provide more direct support in functional areas of most importance to the sport, such as competition, schools athletics and under 11 athletics, they would be prepared for the registration fee to be further increased, with the proviso that England Athletics ring-fences the income for sport-specific expenditure and commits to regular, systematic reporting of how the registration income is spent.

Do you support this concept?

Yes – **37%**

No – **24%**

No strong view – **38%**

The phrase “further increased” is regrettable, because it suggests a large increase above one that has hypothetically already taken place above the 2014-15 level. The principle of demonstrating how the fees are spent for the good of the sport (which they are) was raised at the club conferences and is still worth pursuing.

Registered Athlete Discount

Another way of potentially increasing income that was widely discussed at the club conferences was by reintroducing “unattached levies” instead of the current £2 minimum registered athlete discount for entries on road and multi terrain races.

Currently, race organisers pay a race licence fee and retain 100% of the entry fees paid by athletes

entering their events. Registered athletes pay a discounted entry fee (a minimum of a £2 discount). The road and multi-terrain race licence fee for affiliated clubs was cut to £25 from 1 April 2013 (Current fees are at [link to runbritain](#)). In the past, “attached” or registered athletes’ fees were paid to race organisers, while an additional fee was charged to “unattached” or unregistered athletes, which was paid on to the governing body.

Some club representatives have suggested a return to this system, with England Athletics potentially receiving the additional income from unregistered participants as another way of funding the sport.

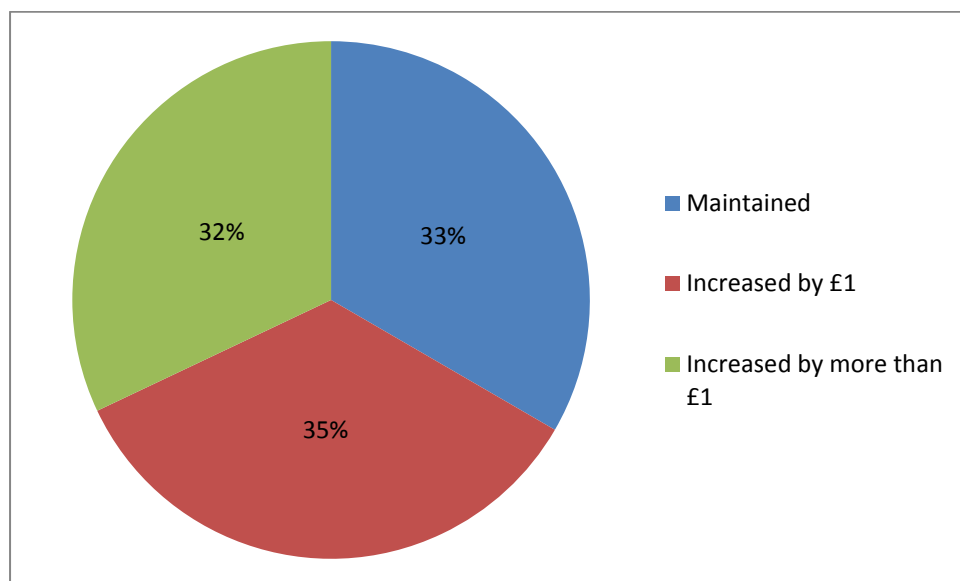
Would you prefer (please tick)?

No change to current system – **38%**

A return to “unattached levies”, where England Athletics levy a fee on all unregistered athletes and receive the income generated from the payment of those fees – **62%**

In hindsight, while this question was valid given the views expressed at the club conferences, it would have been better had more detail on the current system been provided to respondents. EA are not necessarily in possession of the facts at the level of detail required to make a sound decision on how the system should work. Such information would include the precise sums raised by the old unattached levies system and how the money was spent and allocated, as well as the likely effects of a return to that system. In the absence of this information, it would be an attempt to change how the current licensing system works is inadvisable.

The minimum registered athlete discount is currently £2. It has been suggested that increasing this discount would encourage more unattached runners to join clubs and more unregistered athletes to register. Would you prefer this fee to be (please tick):



There is clearly an acceptance that even if the system doesn’t change, the minimum discount probably should.

Conclusions

The 2014 consultation process as a whole was broadly successful. With 300 (approx.) club representatives attending events in person and a further 1500+ individuals completing the survey, it has been possible to identify the issues that most interest those volunteering and competing in the sport.

No consultation process is perfect and there will always be those who disagree with the actions

taken by the governing body, but the live events in particular offered club representatives the opportunity to express views on any aspect of the sport.

Compared to 2013, the atmosphere and general tone of the club conferences suggested that the work carried out by England Athletics staff and the National Council over the past 18 months or so has resulted in a level of increased trust that EA and clubs are “on the same side”. By no means did all attendees and all respondents agree with all that England Athletics does, but the commitment to consultation and the decision to appoint directly elected directors has, it would seem, gone some way to ensuring that engagement with clubs is more constructive than in the past. This work should certainly continue and great care be taken to communicate as much as possible in as transparent a manner as possible with members.

In terms of practical actions to result from consultation, the key are as follows:

- Increase the athlete registration fee
- Potentially increase the registered athlete discount
- Consider the introduction of a minimum charge for unregistered athletes in all disciplines, not just road running.
- Ensure fairness around the registration scheme to ensure that clubs have confidence in the system.
- Provide more and better benefits for registered athletes.
- Consider whether the current system of providing benefits via the athlete portal offers best value to both members and partners.