



## England Athletics Consultation Report 2017

### Context, Format and Approach

The England Athletics annual consultation process is now a regular feature of the calendar following consultations with stakeholders in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016. In those years the format was broadly the same: live “roadshows” or meetings in March/April/May, followed by an online survey, which was open to all. In 2017 we changed that approach due to our own internal restructuring during the Spring. Two specific processes were followed, namely an online consultation survey, which was “open” from May through to July, followed by seven roadshows across the English Regions which were spread across September, October and November.

In addition, the CEO and other members of England Athletics staff and board visit clubs on a regular basis to informally consult and listen to our member clubs, the volunteers and participants within those clubs. Such regular dialogue is, of course, extremely useful in informing our ongoing work as an organisation, but is not reflected in the summary of this report.

Again, as was the situation in other years, while there were fixed topics on the agenda (EA updates, which were provided beforehand and were available for download from the EA website as pre-reading, Club Support, Volunteer Recruitment, Road Running, Finance and the Future), an attempt was made to allow open discussion and for those in attendance, where possible, to air their views on all EA matters and issues of concern to the sport.

In two of the Northern events, namely in the North West and North East, time was allocated to representatives from Northern Athletics to promote their plans, and to answer questions relating to their long-term financial sustainability.

Seven events took place between August 30th and 20<sup>th</sup> November at venues in 7 English regions (East and West Midlands were combined into one event). There were between 15-30 people present at each roadshow with a total of circa 160 people present in total.

The slides promoted as pre-reading, and the notes taken at each meeting can be viewed and downloaded at [www.englandathletics.org/consultation-2017](http://www.englandathletics.org/consultation-2017).

The issues on the agenda were:

- Updates from EA on recent changes and priorities
- Communication
- Club Support
- Road Running
- The Future

The extent to which attendees discussed matters varied from region to region. In the East region, held in Stevenage, where there was a small attendance, all attendees sat around a single table, while in London, Coventry, Exeter, Durham, Liverpool and Wakefield, the event was attended by a larger contingent of people and involved presenters at the front and cabaret seating. The events in some regions were led and facilitated by the regional chair(s), while in many this function was performed by members of EA Staff. The consistent attendees at the majority of roadshows were Chris Jones, Dean Hardman and Dan Isherwood.

## **General Attendance & Feedback**

As with 2016, the atmosphere at the meetings and the approach of attendees was generally positive and collaborative. Specific events were amongst the most positive consultation events held since 2012 in our opinion, both in terms of the constructive ideas, forward thinking nature and the way in which criticism/ feedback was provided by attendees. There was some positive feedback on our investment into recreational running, club support and coaching. There was some criticism of EA, in some other regions, particularly relating to ongoing financial support to competition, and with regards to our general communications, and digital platforms as an organisation.

Whilst it was pleasing to see, and meet attendees, we need to continue to work towards attracting a wide cohort of club representatives and volunteers to such a programme in what is a diverse sport, and there was a lot of repetition in terms of both the people attending and the questions/topics raised. Engaging younger people, off-track clubs and a broader demographic in the consultation events continue to be challenges we face. A rethink is required ahead of any plans for consultation in 2018 and beyond.

## **The Future**

This report has informed a number of recommendations which will be considered by the Board of England Athletics to inform future programmes of this nature, but one immediate suggestion put forward, has been, that we should skip a year in terms of future physical consultation, and instead run our next programme in 2019 ahead of the 2020 UKA rule book revisions. This would be important in ensuring that the sport has the best possibly opportunity to engage with future rule changes that ultimately have a direct, and tangible impact on the sport at a domestic level.

In 2018 we could instead continue to consult through CEO club visits and the like whilst also conducting targeted online consultation surveys during the calendar year to inform EA ongoing work. Consideration needs to be given to the cost, time and general resource required to put on such physical roadshows (a burden on both volunteers and staff alike during a time when resources and general capacity within the organisation are a challenge)

The EA Board has also recently established a Task and Finish group focused on the future role of its council structure. As part of this work, consideration to how best EA can future consult with its membership, will be integrated into the thinking of this group.

## **Director Attendance**

Attendance by EA Board Directors was helpful. Neil Costello, Tim Soutar, Mike Neighbour, Mick Shortland and Peter Crawshaw for example attended an event each (Neil Costello attended the NW leg of the programme as well) and this (Director representation) is something that is important. There were also comments tabled relating to what the Board does and how people can best provide feedback to Directors. The notion of Board meetings being held at club locations across the country before a training night was suggested.

## **Results/ Broad themes**

The nature of the meetings and the different notes (taken by different individuals) meant that it was impossible to quantify any results from the events in the same way that an online survey would enable us to aggregate set responses to set questions.

However, as might be expected, some broad themes/topics did emerge, albeit many of them pertained to matters for which EA does not have full responsibility:

- Future funding of the sport

- EA recent reorganisation and how we enhance capacity to support clubs
- Off-track clubs and road running
- Coach development and support
- Communication and the need to enhance digital systems
- The role of EA Councils
- Volunteering and how we build capacity in this area
- Competition Strategy (particularly in the North of England specific to the future of Area Competition organisation and funding)

Other issues were also raised, albeit with less regularity:

- Roles and responsibilities between EA and UKA
- Affiliation and registration fees
- UKA rules of competition
- UKA support to the domestic sport

## **Thematic Feedback**

### **Future funding of the sport**

There was little discussion and few queries raised on the EA registration fees this year. The decision to raise the athlete and runner registration fee by £1 effective from April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, had already been decided/relayed to clubs before the roadshow programme began this year, and this had been shaped through previous consultation on the matter and through our online survey. With inflation and interest rates increasing in recent months, there seems to be a general acceptance that “little increases and often” are the most palatable way forward in this respect during a time when the level of public investment into sport is reducing and under threat long-term, whilst annual reviews are required to ensure that the sport is engaged on this matter and that EA remains in tune with the wishes and thoughts of its members.

The important issue of ensuring that the off-track community is listened to in this respect continues when considering future affiliation and registration pricing, and those off-track clubs present at roadshows made it clear that they regularly review the value of the EA fee themselves, and asked EA to evidence the value to them of continuing to pay.

There seemed to be general acceptance that the sport needed to “wash its own face” and not be dependent on one major source of funding to sustain it for future years. Some opinions were expressed that we were a cheap option compared with other leisure and sporting activities, and membership bodies.

### **EA recent reorganisation and how we enhance capacity to support clubs**

There was quite a lot of feedback on the growing concern around clubs specifically regarding sustaining facilities, and maintaining our stock of track and field tracks around England owing to the growing local authority financial challenges faced. This subject created lots of discussion around asset transfer and clubs taking greater control and influence around the running of athletics facilities – the risks, opportunities and challenges that this situation creates.

EA was able to relay to people that support in this area is available but that with a reduction of staff, it was not possible to be all things to all people so online support and guidance would be important to enable clubs to be able to deal with some of these issues themselves. There were some comments expressed around the communication of recent changes to EA staffing and how this might have been clearer.

## **Off-track clubs and road running**

There were some comments again, as in other years, around road race licence income and the minimum £2 discount to registered athletes and runners. People felt that this should be increased in some regions and EA committed to raise this again with UKA as it is part of the UKA rules of the sport. There were some questions posed at some roadshows around the amount of funding that is paid back into the sport by commercial race organisers and whether this was enough in some cases. As road racing continues to grow, the burden on clubs and their volunteers becomes greater and so financial support is required to help bolster the number of people who are skilled and prepared to commit to volunteer at such events.

The subject of what EA does, or can do for off track clubs, created a lot of discussion. This was particularly relevant given the growth in off-track club participation in the last decade, and knowing that upwards of 50% of EA member clubs are purely off track with pure track and field clubs comprising only 8% of the sport. Ideas around competitions, coaching initiatives, recreational running programme work and support to volunteers were the key areas where discussion was focused.

EA plans to host some off-track roadshows in early 2018 which were relayed to audiences, and feedback to this concept was generally positive.

## **Coaching & Athlete Development**

There seemed to be a general acceptance that recent changes to the coach education system were helpful and there was a recognition that feedback through such consultation processes, had been helpful in shaping change at a UK level but that the pace of change was a challenge (too slow). There were some comments about the negative impacts from removing the national and local coach mentoring programmes but also an acceptance that funding was a challenge. There was some positive response to the pending launch of an England Coaches Club during Spring 2018. Further digital enhancements are due in 2018 and these were relayed at a few events to positive noises. There were positive comments expressed about the work EA had done in the area of international competition opportunities for athletes such as the Manchester International, and in hosting major European coaching conferences in recent times.

## **Communication and the need to enhance digital systems**

The quality of the digital platforms within the sport was a continual discussion point. Dan Isherwood was able to update delegates at each roadshow as to what EA is planning in this space, through its ongoing digital developments, to better support participants and volunteers during their journey through the sport. This was particularly relevant given the recent reduction in EA staffing and the need for digital systems to enable volunteers to “self-help”. There is a requirement here to work with UKA on aspects of future digital work because of the shared nature of the data system (Trinity) where EA/majority of participant data resides.

Increasing appropriate access to certain data, visibility of accurate statistics and data protection (with specific focus on the emerging concerns around GDPR) were also discussed at more than one of the consultation sessions. England Athletics are committed to a number of projects aimed at improving this area of work. Each Regional Council will now get a regular dashboard including headline club, athlete, coach and official trends and a list of all clubs in the region. Advice and guidance will be provided to clubs on what they will need to do to comply to the General Data Protection Regulation that comes into force in May 2018. Ongoing research, data analysis and the sharing of insight is a priority for the organisation.

## **The role of EA & Its Council Structure**

EA relayed to delegates that the Board had set up a yearlong Task and Finish group looking at the future role and structure of the EA Council system. There was some discussion around councils at roadshows, with a range of mixed opinions as to the benefit and merit of the current system. There were a wide range of thoughts on how best this system should develop beyond 2018 including keeping the system as it is, removing it completely and simply liaising with each county association directly, reducing the number of regions to reduce cost, enhance the quality of debate and to mirror other geographical boundaries in the sport. The consistent feedback in this respect focused around what is the role of the council system first and foremost? Define the answer to that question first, and then focus on structure/geographical boundaries and so on.

There was, as seems in accordance with other years, a confusion around roles and responsibilities between the home country athletic federations and that of UK Athletics. Despite work to clarify and communicate these respective roles and responsibilities, there remains more work to be done on removing grey areas and in some cases, ensuring that both role, and function, sits in the right area of the sport. There were some comments about what UKA should actually do in this current time to support the domestic sport now that its focus is largely fixed on elite performance, major events and rules of the sport. Clarity was provided with regards to other shared functions within the sport such as welfare, road race licensing, IT, qualifications and licensing but that more work is required on this front. There were some opinions expressed that domestic competitions and leagues should sit with the home countries in terms of liaison and lead contact rather than UKA given the opportunity to align our ongoing delivery work and support to coaches, officials and participants beneath world class performance.

## **Volunteering and how we build capacity in this area**

General feedback relating to volunteering surrounded the matters of waiting lists for participants in some clubs, knowledge and education to upskill people to take on specific volunteering roles in clubs, and how we could enhance the diversity of volunteering in our sport. There were some views expressed that the NGB can help by reducing bureaucracy and red tape around qualifications, and be more flexible around how related activities and courses are staged, and where. The role of EA in this respect should, according to feedback, be one of facilitation, support to clubs with defining recruitment and volunteer training/skill development strategies, sharing best practices, networking club leaders to, and with, each other and initiating/leading pilot approaches i.e. supporting clubs to recruit volunteer coordinators in clubs.

## **Competition Strategy (particularly in the North of England specific to the future of Area Competition organisation and funding)**

On Competition, specifically the future of area competition, the issue was raised at events across the North with some discussion at the London consultation around the quality of organisation, results and future funding. In the North West there was strong support for competitions held by the area competition provider. The concept of an optional new athlete/runner payment system to Northern Athletics, to support their efforts to become more financially sustainable, was raised by the chair of the association. Further lobbying was carried out at the Yorkshire and North-East region and clubs will need to determine if they want to support such a motion or not ahead of it being introduced in October 2018. In other regions such as the Midlands, South West, East and South East, such support was not discussed widely or even raised in some cases. This was consistent with feedback gleaned in previous years.

# The Survey

## *The Response*

- The survey was promoted to all athletes, club secretaries, coaches, officials and other volunteers on our database and was open from April 1<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> July
- Over 2,500 responses were received, the same level of response as 2016
- Over 80% of respondents are current athletes of which over 90% participate at least once a week
- ... many have multiple roles in the sport
- 49% of respondents participate in T&F, a higher proportion than our overall membership
- 66% of respondents do Road Running
- ... many do multiple disciplines
- Response mirrors regional spread of registered athletes
- Respondents most likely to be older and been involved in the sport for longer than 5 years
- Survey was too long and we need a larger response to improve our representation across the sport e.g. younger athletes
- New 12-month engagement plan = more opportunities for more people to provide feedback on a regular basis

## *Key Findings*

- **Our service:** An overall satisfaction rating of 6.6 / 10 which we need to improve
- **Our systems:** 75% of clubs use online systems but improvements required. Increase awareness of system functionality, improve usability and some enhancements e.g. reporting, data fields, communications
- **Our website:** Feedback suggests that people would visit our website to (1) Event listings (2) Results (3) News (4) Advice
- **Track and Off-track clubs:** Felt the following areas of support are most important: (1) Recruitment and development of volunteers (2) Facility and equipment support (3) Competition structure (4) Additional support for coaches (5) Online support
- **Off track clubs:** Felt the following areas of support are most important: (1) Demonstrate more value for runners (2) Additional support for coaches (3) Increase capacity of coaches (4) Increase visibility through visits (5) Increase access to specialist support (6) Online support
- **Competition:** For both national and area competition is highly valued by athletes, overall satisfaction is over 50% but improvement can be made to promotion, event entry and at event experience.
- **Volunteers:** 73% satisfied, 90% will do same/ more next year but want to feel supported: access to information and good communication
- **Coaches:** Place highest value coach education and insurances. Expert practical and technical advice, access to resources and CPD opportunities would be valued as part of an improved online platform
- **Officials:** Place highest value on official education, competition and insurances. Satisfaction in volunteer co-ordination is low
- **Athletes:** High value is placed on athlete registration, insurances, event permitting and competition.

## Conclusions

Attendances at events were largely in line with previous years and the quality of discussion and constructive approach taken by attendees was very pleasing.

In terms of practical actions to result from consultation:

- Continue to consider any increase in the registration fee carefully and on an annual basis
- Registration income should be focused on strategic priorities and delivery of valued services
- Progress EA strategy in light of response to the survey
- Focus on applying more resource to support clubs around facility retention/development
- Continue to revise volunteer recruitment resources and remove barriers
- Work with UKA to continue to improve coaching and officials' education
- Continue to work with UKA to ensure clarity around roles and responsibilities.
- Improve digital systems and communications
- Work with area competition providers to ensure this level of competition is retained