

English Schools Track & Field Championships 2021

Update: (February 28th, 2021)

It is our sincere wish to stage a championship over the normal weekend in July, but we need to be aware of the uncertainty of the situation in England, despite all the plans being put in place following the government's announcement a few days ago. We are desperate that athletes have competition, and especially a championship, having missed out last summer and through most of the winter. We must, however, take account of the health and well-being of all our participants, as well as the ongoing financial survival of the Association. Despite the government statement on the route out of the pandemic, all the dates given are subject to the success of the vaccines and the hoped-for reduction in infections continuing through the spring and summer, and, although the dates given suggest life may well be getting back to normality during the summer, we cannot risk committing to spending the sort of money we normally spend on hotels and other costs, only to find restrictions aren't lifted sufficiently to allow a normal championship. For that reason, decisions need to be taken now on the format of the championship, rather than waiting until later. Even this week, the infection rate is still rising in some areas of the country and thousands of people are still in hospital and being added to every day, as well as the sad deaths of hundreds of people every single day.

The turnover for the championship is in the hundreds of thousands of pounds, with hotels costing a substantial amount, of which less than half is returned from entry fees. In the absence last year of a grant from England Athletics and a much-reduced contribution from our sponsor, New Balance, because of their own financial constraints brought about by the pandemic, we cannot commit to those costs and then find we must cancel hotels, losing deposits already paid to the hotels. Some of the hotels require deposits immediately we book, so we decided that this is too big a risk for the Association to take on.

Taking all of this into account, we are planning a reduced championship over the normal weekend, with one age group each day (Friday to Sunday) and the ability for most athletes to travel on the day of the competition and return home afterwards. To achieve this, we need to place restrictions on entries beyond the normal selection process of counties so that numbers are within the limits we can handle in a session from around 12:30 to 18:00 on each day. This will allow for reduced numbers of officials, reduced numbers of team staff and using only adult volunteers in small numbers.

The plan is to invite Senior (U19) athletes on Friday, Intermediate (U17) athletes on Saturday and Junior (U15) athletes on Sunday.

The venue is booked for all three days and sufficient officials are available all three days.

We don't know whether county associations will be allowed to take county teams on coaches or in minibuses to the event, so suggest that athletes will travel independently if that is not possible. A small number of team staff would be accommodated throughout the weekend if counties wish it and meet their athletes on arrival.

Much detailed planning has already taken place and will be published when these plans are finalised, hopefully before Easter. All the planning to stage the championships is done by volunteers with no professional staff to support it, which means we must take account of what individuals are able to do in preparing for the championship.

We may receive some negative feedback around this decision, but one of our high priorities must be the continued existence of the Association and a "hit" in the region of £200,000 would come close to ending our existence, which we are sure is a much worse outcome than a reduced championship where at least some of our athletes can compete.

Points being considered:

- Will counties be able to hold their county championships on June 12th? If they don't feel able to do so, they may wish to offer the date to local clubs to stage a Covid-safe open meeting to allow athletes the opportunity to perform.

- Will there be Covid-safe meetings in May/June for athletes to achieve entry standards? We would suggest advising athletes to find suitable competitions to attend and for counties to talk to local clubs to find what possible opportunities exist for competition for their athletes.
- Will there be a tier system or anything similar in May/June/July? This may restrict travel across the country. England Athletics will be publishing permitted competition regulations throughout the spring and we advise county secretaries keep up to date with what is shown on there. We need to comply with these regulations at national and county level. The current regulations and help pages are at: <https://www.englandathletics.org/athletics-and-running/news/guidance-update-2021/>
- Schools may be unlikely to allow group travel. That is why we are thinking that many athletes will need to arrive with their parents / guardians or an appropriate adult.
- The level of restriction in the Manchester area and the Government's position on large scale Covid-safe meetings may restrict the number of support (parents/guardians, etc.) adults allowed within the stadium. We need to consider that if only athletes/officials are allowed in the stadium, is the Championships viable; with parents bringing athletes to Manchester, where would they go? Our current expectation is that capacity of the stadium may be limited to 50%. If we staged a normal Championship and brought 2000 athletes and 500 team and technical staff to the championships, there would only be a small number of spaces left for parents and other spectators. Our plan brings less than a quarter of that number of athletes each day allowing us, we think, the freedom to allow all parents to be present in the stadium, as we expect many to be bringing their child to the venue.

Virtual meetings have been held with the stadium management, the city council staff, and a Covid safety expert (who advises British Athletics for their own major events) who is supporting us. We are also liaising with both UKA and England Athletics to help us ensure the safest outcome for our Championships. There will, of course, be further meetings with everyone involved.

We believe that the option below is the preferred structure. If restrictions are increased beyond what the Prime Minister envisages, and it is not possible to hold a Championship the 'fall-back' option would be a virtual competition as held in 2020.

Plan for a three-day Covid-safe event – 9th, 10th and 11th July

- The three age groups would be held over three days with the Senior age group on Friday, Intermediate age group on Saturday and Junior age group on Sunday.
- The number of competitors to be limited – maximum of 16 per event in both track and field events. For track events this means heats to finals. Field will be straight finals. It is possible that government regulations may even insist that 12 is the largest size of a competition bubble, so may have to be used for field events and endurance finals, rather than 16. Although the timetable would allow us to hold three heats of sprint events, and so allow 24 athletes in those events only, we feel that is fair to all to allow the same number in all events. We would welcome comments from County Secretaries on this point. We have chosen 16 as the number, as this is the maximum number that would allow us to stage three field events or two high jumps or pole vaults during the session.
- Counties to select, using the normal entry standards, from athletes within the county obtaining performances from Covid-safe open meetings or County Schools championships. Athletes should be encouraged to report performances to their County Secretary. Counties to forward nominations to ESAA. The closing date will be the same as normal, but the entry system may be different. County Secretaries will be given information on the entry system to be used.
- Immediately after entries close, ESAA will select Championship athletes from County nominations, with the aid of Power of Ten rankings on the date decided and report them to counties as soon as possible to inform athletes. We would remind counties to obtain a licence for their county championship and forward results to Power of Ten.
- If counties can bring their athletes as a group, they will need to organise this themselves. They will then need to arrange for each group to return home after their competition day. If not, athletes will

need to arrange travel to the Championships with parents or others (and their own accommodation if required). ESAA will be discussing some support for athletes from counties who would not be able to travel within one day to the championships. We may be able to suggest some hotel names.

- Athletes and those accompanying them should bring their own refreshments although there will be some for sale at the stadium. As in previous years, no bottled water will be distributed. Athletes should bring their own (non-glass) bottle and water fill points will be available around the stadium.
- Event will start at 12:30, with times to arrive at the event site published in advance. Depending on the progress of the disease, we may also insist on arrival times at the stadium, before which athletes should not arrive, and may also insist that athletes leave after their event, although we hope that this will not be necessary.
- There are large free car parks within five minutes' walk of the stadium and all participants will be expected to use these.
- Two/three team managers will be accommodated by ESAA if counties decide to keep a small team of team staff at the venue for the whole period of the Championships.
- We will appoint officials mainly from the North to cut down the need for accommodation and reduce close contact as far as possible.
- Seedings will be done in advance and published online. Results and onward seedings will be published online to reduce or remove requirement for paper to be handled. Athletes and teams will be encouraged to look at their phones to view start lists, results, progressions to finals and so on, again to cut down on the need for large groups to crowd round results boards. Stadium announcements will support this process. No paper results will be available at the Championships but will be available online immediately and distributed to counties following the Championships.
- There may well be no formal medal ceremonies, again depending on the progress of the disease, but athletes will be directed to the medal area to collect their medal and certificate immediately following their event.
- In view of the size and scope of the event, we believe the cost of live streaming is prohibitive and do not intend to proceed with it.
- Similarly, we do not intend to have a large screen. All results will be displayed online.
- External throws area. The venue has contacted the local academy and we plan to use their cage for three of the long throws. We recognise that this is less than ideal, as they only have a cage and no javelin facility, but this is a challenge we must face.
- If the Covid restriction requires it, we will use one of the concourses opposite the track with a rubber surface rather than the indoor space. Athletes will go straight to their event site at the time given to counties, rather than use a Call Room, again to ensure the Covid safety of the athletes and others.
- A provisional timetable for each day has been produced and will be circulated closer to the Championships. We will also distribute details of the requirements for each group of participants, so that they are aware of their own responsibilities before and during the Championships. This may well include details of face mask requirements, one-way systems that may be in use, times when people should arrive, whether temperature checks are required and where they will take place, as well as contactless check-in procedures.
- It is not considered appropriate to use school volunteers so we will not be inviting counties to nominate Young Officials this year.
- We will be working with the venue, the city council, the stadium owners, UK Athletics and England Athletics to produce a Covid-safety plan which will need to be presented to a Safety Advisory Group meeting of the Local Authority for their approval before the event can take place.

Distribution to County Secretaries & ESAA General Committee, copied to England Athletics.

Prepared by members of ESAA Summer Events Committee following their meeting on 27th February 2021.