

What are they / What's the Purpose

The Youth Development Guidelines are a set of frameworks, age bands, training, competition, and development principles/standards used by England Athletics to guide how young people are introduced to athletics, how they train, compete, and progress safely and effectively. The goals are:

- To promote long-term athlete development (LTAD) rather than rushing performance.
 - To ensure age-appropriate training loads, types of competition, and coaching.
 - To encourage retention: keep young people in the sport by making the experience positive.
 - To balance performance development with wellbeing, education, and life outside sport.
 - To simplify and clarify age groups and competition structure.
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Key Components & Recent Changes

Here are some of the major components and recent developments:

1. **Age Group Changes** (coming into effect 1 April 2026)
 - Existing age groups (U13, U15, U17, U20) will shift to new ones: **U10, U12, U14, U16, U18, U20**. [England Athletics+2](#)[On Track Athletics+2](#)
 - Primary school-aged athletes (under 10-12) will compete in more participation-focused formats, especially multi-event (run-jump-throw) rather than strict competition. [England Athletics+1](#)
 - There will be a consistent “competition year” (October–September) so athletes stay in the same age group across track, road, cross-country etc. [On Track Athletics+1](#)
2. **Youth Endurance Resource**
 - A resource developed (led by Dr. Matt Long) that provides guidance on how to support young endurance athletes. Includes sections on physiology, strength & conditioning, skill acquisition, wellbeing, sample schedules, etc. [England Athletics](#)
 - Emphasis on “late specialisation” — meaning young athletes should try multiple events, build general fitness and skills, not specialise too early. [England Athletics](#)
3. **Talent Pathway / Youth Talent Programme**
 - For identified talented athletes aged ~16-18, there is a structured programme providing workshops, camps, support in both athletic and life/education/career fields. [England Athletics+1](#)
 - Coaches for these programmes also get development, mentoring, etc. [England Athletics](#)

4. Principles & Wellbeing

- Wellbeing, injury prevention, mental and physical health are explicitly included in the guidance. [England Athletics](#)
 - Training loads, competition distances, volume, intensity are all considered in relation to an athlete's developmental age (biological age, maturity) not only chronological age. [England Athletics+1](#)
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Example Specifics & Guidelines

Some more detailed specifics that are part of the guidelines or transition plan:

- **Maximum Permitted Distances:** For young runners, there will be caps on how far they can run in different formats (road, cross country etc) depending on their age group. For example, under the transition plan, there are tables for U12 etc. [England Athletics](#)
 - **Competition Focus:** Up to certain younger ages, the focus is often on participation, skill development, multi-event exposure rather than winning or specialisation. For example primary age U10/U12. [On Track Athletics+2England Athletics+2](#)
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Why These Changes / Guiding Values

- To reduce drop-out, particularly in teenage years. Young people often leave because of pressure, mismatched competition, lack of gradual progression. [England Athletics+1](#)
 - To align competition and development more naturally with school years so that age groups make sense in educational context. [On Track Athletics](#)
 - To ensure safety: avoiding overuse, overtraining, too much intensity too early.
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