

2012 British Athletics Facts

ABAC Fact File 18.

Can athlete subscriptions fund England Athletics after Registration Fees are raised?

Background. Fewer than 18% of clubs responded to the UKA sponsored "Independent Poll" held in October 2005. Of these a majority voted against an Athlete Registration scheme. They were ignored.

England Athletics was incorporated in March 2006. In January 2007 it circulated clubs with information on a new Affiliation and Member Registration scheme. The scheme started on 1st April 2007 with a club affiliation fee of £50 plus £3 per competing club member. After one year the competing member fee was raised to £5 per annum. These fees have remained unaltered so far but will be changed from April 2013. The club affiliation fee remains at £50 but the competing member annual fees will be raised to £20 for adults and £15 for juniors and below for track and field athletes. The annual fee for road and country runners will become £10. They will be raised annually thereafter.

In 2005 (at the time of the Independent Poll) UKA claimed there were 254,400 active athletes in the UK belonging to 1483 clubs. In 2008 England Athletics projected an annual income of £1,145,000 from the scheme. In its original circular outlining the scheme England Athletics asserted that all income generated from affiliation membership would be returned to the appropriate region for investment in sport. ABAC commented that the then 9 regions would require more funding than the membership scheme could produce. Three years later the 9 regions were disbanded as uneconomic.

Revenues from the new scheme. In 2007 England Athletics employed 43 staff at a salary bill of £1,681,754. In 2011-2012 staff numbers had increased to 72 and the salary bill to £2,798,000. There is a high probability that there will be a substantial reduction in Govt grant aid for athletics over the next 4 year funding cycle 2013-2017. The question arises as to what extent will the new fees be able to support the central bureaucratic structure of England Athletics?

ABAC has asked Rob Whittingham to provide information to enable ABAC to analyse the potential revenue England Athletics might expect based on current and potential future numbers of athletes.

A useful source of information is the Sept 2012 Affiliated Clubs document available on the England Athletics website. It totals the number of **registered club athletes in 2011-2012 as 107,628**. It acknowledges that 65% of these (c70,000) are road runners. The 30% of track and field athletes includes all age groups (c37,500) and includes those road runners who might participate in a few low key track and field leagues to bolster club points. Some of these athletes may reject future track events and opt for the lower road fee. The Affiliated Clubs document also **details all of the 1146 clubs currently registered** with England Athletics as well as 69 clubs which are not.

Rob Whittingham has analysed the competition pattern for 1250 senior women athletes in the 2011 season. He found that 20% competed in only 1 track competition in the year. 50% competed in 4 or less track and field meetings. Again many of these may drop track races in the future due to the higher proposed registration fees. Based on this possibility and knowing the number of athletes in each age group (See earlier Fact Files) it is possible to predict the revenue which England Athletics might achieve from this scheme in 2013-2014. Here is where we are and what we predict.

2012-2013. 1146 clubs @ £50 = £57,300, + 107,500 athletes @ £5 = £537,500. **Total income £594,800**

2013-2014. Based on 2012 participation figures. 1146 clubs @ £50 = £57,300, + Road 70,000 @ £10 = £700,000, + Over 17 5,500 @ £20 = £110,000, + Under 17 32,000 @ £15 = £480,000 **Total income £1,347,000**

2013-2014 with reduced numbers.

Best Scenario. In 2005 it was claimed that there were 254,400 active athletes in the UK. Allowing that 90% of these (229,000) were English then the **reduction in athlete numbers in England in the last 7 years has been 121,460 or 53%**. This trend is continuing and will not be reversed by higher athlete registration fees. In the best case scenario the number of affiliated clubs will remain the same but we estimate that around 1000 athletes will withdraw from track and field and take the reduced road running rates. The sums then look like this.

1146 clubs@£50 = £57,300 + Road 71,000 @ £10 = £710,000, + Over 17 4,500 @£20 = £90,000 + Under 17 32,000 @ £15 = £480,000.

Total income £1,337,300

Worst Scenario. There is a big unknown in all of this. And that is **ARC** – The Association of Running Clubs – which is an independent body looking after the interests of grass roots runners. It has attracted many members since it was incorporated in 2007 due to high quality insurance, well priced race permitting and low fees. At present it has 204 affiliated clubs and 47 Associate Members such as race organisers and related sports clubs. ARC has 17,397 individual affiliated members. Most clubs and their members are also affiliated to England Athletics at present and compete in both ARC and EA events.

However with the increased EA fees there is a high probability that more clubs will leave England Athletics jurisdiction and affiliate to ARC. And many existing ARC clubs may well drop their EA affiliation.

Add to this the proposed changes to Young Athlete track and field Leagues in 2013 (See Fact Files 17 and 17 supplement) which will disenfranchise many junior athletes and it may be predicted that the number of under 17 athletes registering with England Athletics in 2013 will also drop. So here is a worst case scenario.

EA registered clubs fall to 1050, number of road runners fall to 40,000, the numbers for over 17 athletes reduce to 4500 and the numbers of under 17 athletes drop to 28,000 which makes the revenue income as follows.

1050 clubs@£50 =£52,500, + Road 40,000 @ £10 = £400,000, + Over 17 4,500 @ £20 = £90,000 +Under 17 28,000 @ £15 =£420,000.

Total Income £962,500

Concluding Comments

- *In a best case scenario the registration fees will not cover half the current wages bill, in a worst case scenario this drops to less than one third. From next year England Athletics will either have to reduce staff or increase fees again to balance its books unless other forms of income are developed.*
- *At a time when Sport England is aiming to increase the retention of 14 year olds and above the new charges for young athletes may well prove to be counter productive.*
- *There is also a proposed registration fee for under 11 year olds of £15 per annum. No allowance has been made for revenues from such charges because this group will receive "sweeteners" costing amounts which it is believed will make this group revenue neutral.*
- *England Athletics is expecting clubs to collect and submit these new charges. It has not put in place adequate measures to collect fees from athletes direct. Clubs are unlikely to support this.*
- *It is noted that hitherto Track and Field League secretaries have not checked on athlete registration. It is also noted that the current BAL Premiership Champions have no athletes registered on the latest England Athletics clubs listings.*

The big questions are.

What will England Athletics do if athletes refuse to register but continue to compete in leagues and open meetings?

What will England Athletics do if clubs refuse to collect the increased fees?

10 Oct 2012