

2011 British Athletics Facts

ABAC Fact File 10

Grass Roots Performance and Participation Trends

1. Statistical evidence. Rob Whittingham has been collecting data on UK athletes for more than 20 years. With co-author Peter Matthews he has published Annual statistical reviews of British Athletics since 1990. In 2006 he was awarded a 3 year contract by UKA Ltd to set up and run the web site “Power of 10” (P10). The statistics recorded by P10 comprised about a quarter of his database. He also established a more comprehensive data based website “*topsinathletics*” which in 2011 has recorded almost 250,000 performances covering all age groups from grass roots to elite levels.

2. Performance and Participation Trends from 2008 to 2011. In earlier Fact Files we looked at the state of athletics in 2011. Recently Sport England has acknowledged that participation levels in most sports are declining particularly in the younger age groups. They claim that running figures buck this trend and imply that athletics is in a healthy state. ABAC has asked Rob Whittingham to quantify the numbers of young athletes participating in track and field over the last three years. The data has been presented in two forms: First the actual numbers posting base level performances and above. Second the actual number of all performances which recognizes that many athletes compete in several events. The results for 2011 are compared with 2008 performances.

3. Analysis by age group.

Under 15's

U15 athletes making tops rankings	2008	8323	
	2011	7829	a reduction of 6%
Total number of performances	2008	16225	
	2011	15304	a reduction of 5.5%

There are 30 individual events in this age category.

Performance standards comparison by event **6 Up, 23 Down and 1 Level**

Under 17's

U17 athletes making tops rankings	2008	6241	
	2011	5911	a reduction of 5%
Total number of performances	2008	16470	
	2011	15374	a reduction of 6.5%

There are 35 individual events in this age category

Performance standards comparison by event **6 Up, 29 Down**

Under 20's

U20 athletes making tops rankings	2008	3391	
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2011 3341 a reduction of 1.5%

Total number of performances 2008 16420

2011 15760 a reduction of 4%

There are 38 individual events in this age category

Performance standards comparison by event **8 Up, 30 Down**

4. Retention of Track and Field Athletes.

In order to quantify the drop out rate for athletes this study has been expanded using the *topsinathletics* data which recorded the track and field performance for 41,337 athletes in 2007. The extended 2011 database has allowed a check to be made on how many of these athletes ranked in 2007 actually performed in the past year. Results show that in 2011 only 9,700 of these athletes had a recorded performance

That is, there has been a **drop out rate for track and field athletes of 76.5% over the last 4 years.**

5. P10 and P100 performances

The present study has mainly dealt with grass roots numbers and performance levels for young athletes. The trend in performance levels for elite and top end athletes has also been assessed. Examination of the P10 data for 2010 and 2011 also shows reduced numbers for the junior age groups, not only at the grass root level but also at the 10 and 100 levels.

The number of young athletes making the P10 and P100 targets has declined substantially.

5. Conclusions and comments

a. From 2008 to 2011 the participation and performances for young athletes **has declined in 80% of individual events**

b. It is apparent that across the board reductions like this confirm not only a substantial decline in grass root standards over the last 3 years but also a decline in numbers competing. A separate study has shown that the total **number of athletes competing in the English Schools Cup has declined by almost 4% comparing 2011 to 2008.**

c. The drop out rate for all athletes over the last 4 years is 76.5%. **That is an athlete drop out average rate of 19% per annum.**

d. The number of young athletes making the P10 and P100 targets has also declined substantially over the last year.

It is noted that in recent years several initiatives have been undertaken to increase participation particularly in the younger age groups. The setting up of Athletics Networks, the setting up of schools sports partnerships and the direct funding to schools for increased participation in sport have not halted a seemingly inevitable decline in grass roots track and field.

The much trumpeted London Olympics Legacy can only be judged a failure from the information contained in this report.