

Track and Field Competition Review 2020

Competition – it's what you train for

Executive Summary

In order to better-understand the competition needs and wants of track and field athletes in Scotland, **scottishathletics** circulated a survey to all members aged 15+. These survey responses can be used to analyse current competition needs and to influence future track and field competition planning.

The first section of the survey focused on athletes' competition experiences so far. Responses revealed that the most popular types of competition in Scotland are **scottishathletics** National Championships across all age groups, and club/stadium open graded meetings for U17-Seniors. U17 athletes also ranked Scottish Schools Championships in their top two. Two factors tend to structure the athlete's season: Championships (the focus of the season) and local open meetings to aid preparation for those Championships, with lower cost and travel implications.

Athletes were then asked about their motivation for competing and any barriers they had experienced in accessing appropriate competition. PB potential was the main reason for competing in a particular event, and U17s also liked medals and selection opportunities. When asked about barriers to competing in certain events, a singular location, evening programming, the speed at which events sell out and facilities were all mentioned as barriers.

The survey also asked specific questions about league competition to glean whether athletes felt that the current league structure in Scotland was fit for purpose. By age group, U17s have the highest level of league participation and Master 50+ the lowest. In both National and Regional leagues, several respondents said that they regularly compete in events they have not prepared for. This is worrying, as athletes may be competing in technical events for which they have had no training, increasing their own risk of injury, as well as that of other athletes and officials involved.

Feedback on league competition was mixed. Regional leagues were praised for the social aspect of representing the club/team; the provision of an introductory-level competition for new athletes; and the way that these leagues keep recreational senior and masters athletes engaged in the sport. National leagues were also viewed as enjoyable by most participants, but they were seen as too competitive for those in the leagues below and yet were described as not competitive enough by others. Feedback on league competition implied that the competitive-level of leagues is unclear, and that leagues are viewed as a good introduction to the sport, but athletes' engagement drops over time. It is possible that other formats could offer the same benefits as league competition whilst overcoming their criticisms.

Overall, the main conclusions of the following report indicate that athletes in Scotland want:

- A mixture of informal, relaxed, "social" competition and high-quality competitive events throughout the season
- A clearer competition hierarchy from National Championships and down to assist athletes with identifying appropriate competition for their experience and performance level. If this already exists, it needs to be communicated more clearly to athletes and coaches
- High-quality local opportunities at all levels from open graded meetings to Championships regardless of where in Scotland the athlete lives
- Competitive opportunities that can retain a team/social element
- Well-organised events that create an atmosphere conducive to producing PB performances

Introduction

Competition is a key element of our sport, with a growing number of athletes striving to run faster, jump higher and throw further in the pursuit of medals, points and PBs every season. **scottishathletics** aims to ensure that the Scottish track and field competition calendar offers appropriate competitive opportunities for athletes of all ages and abilities from introductory to international level, and assists athletes to identify and compete in events at the right level for them as they develop within the sport.

Via a survey circulated to **scottishathletics** members in June and July 2020, competing Scottish athletes have been given the opportunity to contribute to discussions around the structure of the competition calendar in Scotland in the coming years, helping us to understand why athletes compete in the events they do; the value they place on competition at different levels; and what they expect to get out of each competition experience. Responses to the questions will be used to shape the future of the competition calendar in Scotland.

Aims

Reorganising the Track and Field Competition Calendar:

- Where are athletes currently competing and why?
- Which existing events hold the most value for athletes?
- Why do athletes compete? What do they want from an event?
- Are there limitations to competing in certain types of event (time, travel, cost, etc.)?
- Do opinions differ across age groups?
- Are leagues fit for purpose, or are other formats more effective and more appealing?

Methodology

On 18th June 2020, the **scottishathletics** Track and Field Commission circulated a survey to 6,478 **scottishathletics** athlete-members aged 15+ at the end of the current competition year. This ensured that the survey was sent to all athletes in the U17 age group and above. It is acknowledged that a number of athletes are registered under the same e-mail address (eg. parent and child, siblings or couples), and so the covering e-mail invited the recipients to complete the survey once per person, if required. This age bracket was chosen as it was felt that athletes in the younger age groups may still be 'finding their way' in the sport and would be reliant on clubs and coaches to recommend appropriate competition for their age group, ability and experience.

The survey gathered some basic information on the athlete (home district, age group and gender category in which they compete); their competition experience; their priorities when choosing a competition to take part in; and any further thoughts they had on competition in Scotland. They were also asked whether they regularly compete in Scottish league competition, and those who said they did were asked for more details about their experiences and opinions.

Results and Discussion

Respondents

The survey received 704 responses: 481 of which were complete and included in these results. Of these 481 complete responses:

- 197 results came from females, 283 from males and 1 from a non-binary athlete
- 109 results came from athletes currently within the U17 age group; 87 from U20 athletes; 29 from U23 athletes; 85 from Seniors (23-34); 81 from Masters athletes aged 35-49 and 90 from Masters athletes aged 50+
- 211 athletes said that they are a member of a West District club; 197 a club in the East District; 60 the North District; and 13 athletes said that they are not a member of a Scottish club

For the purposes of these results, age groups will be considered in three groups: U17 and U20 (40% of respondents); U23 and Senior (24%) and Masters (36%), unless a question requires the responses to be split further.

It is not known exactly how many of the 6,478 members who received the survey are track and field athletes, as it is recognised that a large number of **scottishathletics** members will compete only in other disciplines of athletics (cross country, road, trail or hill). This means an accurate response rate cannot be calculated, and it is possible that some responses received were submitted by athletes who do not compete in the discipline at all. On the one hand, it can be useful to collect opinions of those not competing to understand why they do not do so, but it could also produce overall survey responses that are not representative of those currently active within the sport and biased in one direction. Respondents were asked how often they compete in a track and field season, which helped to give an indication of which responses came from those competing regularly in the discipline. Those who answered 'never' to this question typically did not complete the questionnaire, and so it is likely that the vast majority of responses discussed in this report came from athletes participating in track and field athletics. Returning to response rate, the 2019 District/Open weekend saw entries received from around 652 athletes in these age groups and the four National Championships just over 1000 entries (including some from U15s competing as U17s and duplicates from U17s competing as U20s or U20s and Masters competing as Seniors). This means that the 481 respondents certainly cannot make up the entire track and field population, especially as there will be additional athletes competing locally but not in Championships. It is estimated that the 481 respondents may make up approximately 40-45% of Scottish track and field athletes aged 15+. Despite the survey response rate therefore likely to be around 45% at most, the data collected can still be used to indicate broad ideas.

It could also be said that as the survey method allowed the form to be submitted multiple times, there is opportunity for an individual or small group of individuals with a particularly strong opinion to submit multiple responses to sway the overall results. It is not immediately apparent that this is the case, as there are no clear similarities between any two responses, but this cannot be known for sure. The method chosen is considered appropriate for a preliminary exploration of opinions of track and field competition in Scotland, but further research could be conducted in future into specific ideas before any major changes are made.

Competition Experience

Athletes were first asked how many events, on average, they compete in in a typical Summer season. Overall, athletes said that they compete in an average of 3-10 events per Summer, with Masters athletes most likely to compete in fewer events. Within the U17, U20 and U23 age groups, the average number of competitions per year increased into the 11-20 events per year bracket. 12% of U17 athletes said that they typically compete in 20+ events per season – the highest of all age groups.

Athletes were asked which of a range of competition-types they had competed in within the past two years. **scottishathletics** National Championships and local open events were most popular (both

attended by 63% of the total respondents), with international and UK events seeing the lowest levels of participation.

When split by age groups, local OGMs and **scottishathletics** National Championships remained the most popular types of competition amongst athletes in the U17/U20 and U23/Senior groups, whilst Club Championships were the most popular amongst Masters athletes. This indicates that the majority of athletes across all age groups want to compete locally in club or stadium events, as well as including **scottishathletics** National Championships in their annual competition plans. The percentage of respondents who said that they had attended each type of competition within the past two years can be found in Table 1 below.

	U17 and U20	U23 and Senior	Masters
Club Championships	64%	42%	61%
Club or Stadium OGM	81%	68%	39%
Regional League	67%	40%	27%
Scottish National League	74%	50%	16%
British League	8%	30%	2%
Event Specific OGM	33%	44%	15%
Non-SA Championships	74%	32%	1%
SA District/Open Champs	66%	54%	22%
SA National Champs	75%	66%	48%
British Championships	6%	24%	12%
International (Scottish)	16%	21%	3%
International (British)	1%	11%	4%

Table 1

When asked which Scottish-based competition-type was the athlete's priority whilst planning their season, 326 respondents said that **scottishathletics** National Championships were first. 58% of U17 athletes also listed the Scottish Schools Championships as either first or second. Consistently ranked lowest-priority were club championships and local league matches. The average score (out of 7, with 1 being highest priority and 7 the lowest) for each event-type are shown in Table 2 below.

	U17	U20	U23	Senior	Mas 35-49	Mas 50+
SA National Championships	1.94	1.40	1.41	1.62	1.95	1.99
School/Uni Championships	2.94	2.89	3.45	5.22	5.78	5.79
Event Specific OGM	4.63	4.25	3.86	2.93	4.26	3.93
Club or Stadium OGM	4.39	4.84	4.41	3.79	3.77	3.63
Scot. National League	3.82	3.86	4.14	3.98	4.14	4.67
Regional/Local League	4.73	5.14	5.00	5.14	4.49	4.51
Club Championships	5.54	5.62	5.72	5.32	3.62	3.48

Table 2

Whilst a large proportion of athletes compete in local matches on a regular basis, these events are not usually an athlete's focus for the season: they appear to use these easily-accessible local and regional meetings to prepare for other events. This implies that the most sought-after competition opportunities are local open competitions, leading up to National Championships. The most-valued competitions are **scottishathletics** National Championships across all age groups, with Schools and Universities Championships second for athletes within the age groups likely still to be in education; event specific open graded meetings (such as Miler Meets or Throws GP) for Seniors, and Club Championships for Masters. Club Championships are consistently ranked lowest by the youngest four age groups surveyed, but see a rise in popularity amongst Masters athletes.

In order to understand why athletes compete in the events they do, survey respondents were asked which factors influence their decision to compete in a given competition. Options included rewards (eg. prizes, trophies, medals or further selections), PB potential, the opportunity to represent their club, the event date, travel requirements, entry fees, social opportunity and the attendance of competitors of a similar ability. Of all of the factors listed, the event date and how the competition fit amongst other competition plans, as well as the opportunity to compete against athletes of a similar ability whilst representing your club were the most commonly considered. When asked which of the factors was most important to the athlete’s decision to enter an event, 26% of overall respondents said that PB potential was the main factor they considered when entering an event: the most popular response overall.

“At senior level, the open format is better for development, however the club camaraderie is definitely one aspect that shouldn't be lost as that is the major down side of open events.”
Senior Male, North

By age group, different factors were of highest importance. Around 1/3 of athletes in the youngest age groups surveyed said that the potential for a PB was the main factor considered when entering an event. This was followed by rewards (such as medals, prizes or selections) for U17 and U20 athletes, and then the opportunity to run against athletes of a similar ability. Athletes in the Senior age group also considered the event date in relation to other competition plans a major factor, as did Masters athletes. Masters athletes’ main reason for competing, by a small margin, was to represent their club. A breakdown of the most popular responses by age group can be found in Table 3 below.

	U17 and U20	U23 and Senior	Masters
Rewards	17%	11%	15%
Competitors of similar ability	14%	18%	13%
Travel Distance	3%	4%	8%
Entry Fees	0%	1%	1%
Event Date	14%	18%	20%
Friends Attending	6%	4%	5%
PB Potential	33%	36%	12%
Representing your club	13%	8%	22%
Other	1%	2%	4%

Table 3

Athletes were asked about any barriers they experienced, restricting their ability to compete in certain events. The most commonly mentioned event was the BMC meets, often hosted by the Glasgow Athletic Association (GAA) within their popular Miler Meets. Respondents felt that these are high-quality meetings, but barriers to participation included places selling out quickly, and their weekday-evening timings that make travel from outside of the Glasgow area difficult. Travel time and costs were mentioned as barriers to other events too, indicating demand for high-level competition opportunities to be offered all across Scotland. In addition, the lack of suitable facilities for competition was highlighted as a barrier. Whilst North-based respondents in particular wanted to see more events held outside of the central belt, it was acknowledged that a lack of suitable, accessible facilities made this difficult. There were also comments from U17 athletes who said that they would like to compete in Scottish Schools events, but their schools were unaware of the competitions and how they operate. Even though club competition appears to be accessible, other types of competition require additional knowledge that may not be readily available to all.

44% of respondents also stated that they have competed outside of Scotland at least once within the past two years. The majority of these athletes attended UK League events, BMC meets or English Championships to access a higher standard of competition. A number of Masters athletes said that they attended British, European or World Masters events; and island athletes had attended the Island Games. The main motivating factors for competing outside of Scotland were clubs' and coaches' encouragement to attend specific events, and seeking a higher standard of competition (especially in more technical events like hammer, triple jump or combined events).

"I don't believe Scotland has the facilities to provide more Championship level competitions [...] I do not envy the task of Scottish Athletics in working with Government and Local Authorities to get more better equipped facilities, however, these are badly needed." 50+ Male, West

General suggestions for the track and field calendar in Scotland included introducing a clear hierarchy of competition from National Championships downwards; introduction of a track and field Inter-District Championship; more student opportunities and more events held away from the central belt. As some of the changes suggested also already exist (eg. discontinuing entry standards at National Championships to allow anyone to enter), the communication of both existing processes and any changes should also be made clearer.

Specifically from the U17 age group, comments were made on the types of competition young athletes aspire to compete in. Suggestions may come from events athletes have competed in; that they have seen Senior athletes compete in; that they have seen on television or on social media; or that they have heard about in other countries. Suggestions included:

- Qualification opportunities, eg. top X teams from a regional league qualify for a national final
- Inter-District opportunities, similar to cross country
- Open events with pacemakers, specifically aimed at younger athletes (U15-U17)
- U17 heats and finals on different days at National Championships
- Greater focus on field events, including greater emphasis on throws and jumps GP meets
- Greater incorporation of para-athletes in mainstream events
- An international league or regular opportunities to compete outside of Scotland

Leagues

Respondents were then asked about their participation in, and views on, leagues in Scotland. Of the 481 athletes who completed the survey, 13.5% have competed in local leagues (eg. Forth Valley League, CSSAL, Ram League) within the past 2 years, 15.5% have competed in both local and national leagues on a regular basis, 26% have competed in national leagues only (eg. SAL, SWAL, YDL) and 45% said that they did not regularly compete in leagues and had not attended a match within the past 2 years.

"As you have to fill in for certain events you loose [sic] the focus on your main event"
U20 Female, East

When we split the responses by age group, we see that the youngest age group has the highest level of participation in league competition. 75% of Masters athletes who responded said that they did not compete in any leagues, and this increases to 80% if we consider respondents aged 50+ only. On the other hand, 81% of U17 and U20 respondents compete in at least one league; and this

increases to 86% in the U17 age group. As athletes were asked to consider their participation within the past two years, some of these U17 athletes will have competed in leagues as U15s.

“Entrants and standard of competition at leagues can vary and sometimes not produce enough competition to perform to the highest level” U17 Male, West

When we split the responses by gender, we see that women are more likely to compete in local leagues than men, and that men are more likely not to compete in league competition. 25% of male respondents said that they compete in national league competition, and 27% of females did. This means that participation in a national league is more or less as likely for males as for females. However, 25% of males said they would compete in local or both leagues, compared to 35% of females; and 50% of

male respondents said that they did not compete in leagues, whilst only 38% of female respondents did not compete. This implies that whilst participation is fairly even in national leagues, female athletes are more likely to compete in local league competition than males, and males are more likely to seek other competition opportunities than to compete in a local/regional-level league.

Focusing on national leagues, only 47% of respondents said that they tend to focus only on events they had been training for during a league match, whilst 25% said that they regularly compete in events that they have not prepared for at all. Some viewed league matches as an opportunity to try new events, whilst others said that they took part in other events for team points or because their club had put them forward (sometimes even without their knowledge). 53% of respondents said that they felt that their performance would be better if they competed against athletes of a similar level of ability, whilst a further 32% said that they felt that this may be beneficial but that the league match would not feature enough athletes to enable this to happen. Only 15% of respondents did not feel that performance-based seeding would help to improve their performance in national league events.

In local leagues, just 36% athletes said that they focus only on events they have been training for, whilst 32% said that they regularly compete in events that they have not trained for at all. The reasoning for this was similar to that of national leagues, where athletes competed for team points or because their club expected them to. It was mentioned that regional leagues are a good introduction to competition for newer athletes, and this could also be why athletes try out new events during these matches. When asked why athletes compete in local leagues but

“It’s a relaxed environment, I enjoy league matches as a way to work on my events but often use them as a guide to see where I am in the work up to National Championships.” U17 Female, East

not national leagues, responses stated that there was a significant difference in standard between local and national league competition that the respondent was not prepared to move up to national level league competition, or travel commitments were too great. Some athletes also noted that their smaller club would not be able to field a team in a national league due to its membership size and athletes’ other commitments. Positive feedback on these leagues focused on the social aspect of attending an event as part of a team, with respondents viewing local leagues as a good introduction to the sport for new athletes, and a way of keeping recreational senior and masters athletes engaged with both their club and the wider sport without the focus being purely on competition.

Whilst feedback demonstrates that league matches can be enjoyable, they do not appear to be viewed as competitive by those performing at a high level. Respondents with British or international experience either did not compete in Scottish leagues or tended to state that they do not prioritise league matches as they do not have competitive opposition due to other athletes of their level not attending. This means that the standards of a national league match will be much lower than that of a national championship if competitive athletes are choosing not to attend: as fewer and fewer of these athletes attend, standards drop further. Even some athletes without international experience stated that they felt the standard was too low for them to perform well, demonstrating how this effect

has evolved in recent years. Paradoxically, however, athletes who compete only in local leagues felt that the standard of national leagues was too high for them to move up. Responses described a perceived large jump in performance standard between the two, meaning that some athletes who may now be capable of competing in national leagues believe that they are unable to do so due to how they perceive the national league, or have perceived it in the past. If the standard of some national leagues has become unclear, many of their target athletes could be being missed. Some clarification on the expected standards of national leagues is required going forward.

Conclusions

Responses to the survey can help us to understand what athletes want from track and field competition in Scotland; why they compete in the events that they do; and what else they would like to see in the competition calendar. Although the survey is not guaranteed to be 100% representative of the track and field population in Scotland, it serves as a useful indicator of the range of current opinions and offers some helpful suggestions of how athletes would like to see the sport evolve in the near future.

- Where are athletes currently competing and why?

The most popular forms of competition across all age groups are National Championships and club/local open graded competitions. Local events are popular as they offer the opportunity to prepare for larger competitions without the need to travel long distances, and comments noted that middle distance athletes could often find tactical races at these meetings to help them to prepare for running in heats and finals of larger events. National Championships were highest-ranked overall when survey respondents were asked which events were their priority in planning their season. Comments stated that these are the most competitive opportunities available in Scotland.

- Which existing events hold the most value for athletes?

Survey respondents listed National Championships (both **scottishathletics** Championships and others such as the Scottish Schools Championships) as their main priorities when planning their competitive season. In addition to this, local meetings provide good opportunities to gauge how their preparations are going in the lead up to these larger events. Club Championships were ranked as lowest-priority by the youngest age groups surveyed, but they ranked highly amongst Masters athletes. This indicates that athletes within this oldest age group have different priorities when choosing competitions to athletes in the younger age brackets.

- Why do athletes compete? What do they want from an event?

The main motivating factors for competing varied across the three age brackets surveyed. U17 and U20 athletes look for competitions where they are likely to be able to achieve a PB. A number of factors could influence this, from the organisation of the event, the facility, other athletes in attendance and several other variables. Athletes in these age groups also preferred events with rewards such as medals, prize money or selection opportunities for other events and national teams.

Senior athletes also prefer events with the potential to produce PB performances. For these athletes, a competition's date in relation to other competition plans was also an important factor when choosing events to attend, as well as the other athletes likely to be in attendance performing to a similar standard to themselves.

Masters athletes prioritise the opportunity to represent their club, as well as how the event date fits around other commitments when deciding when and where to compete. This implies that Masters

athletes, the majority of whom attended Club Championships above all other forms of competition, have a strong connection to their club and view competition as a major part of being a club member.

- Are there limitations to competing in certain types of event (time, travel, cost, etc.)?

Travel costs and time were noted as the two main barriers to competition in Scotland. Several respondents commented that the BMC meets held in Glasgow were high-quality meets that they would like to attend, but their evening programming made travel from outside Glasgow difficult for those working 9-5. It was also mentioned that places sold out very quickly, meaning that it is often difficult to secure a place. It was suggested that a weekend meet elsewhere in Scotland would make high-quality event-specific open meetings such as these more accessible.

Facilities were also raised as a barrier to the provision of quality competition in certain areas of the country. Several respondents stated that they would like to see the Senior Championships held away from Grangemouth and more large events taking place away from the central belt, but it was also acknowledged that the availability of suitable facilities in other parts of the country plays an important role in making this possible too.

- Do opinions differ across age groups?

There are some differences between the responses from different age groups, but general opinions appear to be largely the same. Unsurprisingly, U17 and U20 athletes are more likely to chase PBs than Masters athletes; and Masters athletes appear to have a greater focus on club competition than any other age group. U17 and U20 athletes are more likely to compete in league competition, although this could be influenced by U17s' recent experiences at U15 level where they could be competing in the Youth Development League (YDL) nationally. Whilst there were some differences in responses across the age groups, the same main priorities were mentioned and similar barriers to competing were highlighted.

- Are leagues fit for purpose, or are other formats more effective and more appealing?

Overall, feedback on league competition was mixed, with praise for leagues' focus on team competition and earning club points but criticism for the performance standard experienced. Leagues, particularly local or regional leagues, were viewed as a good way to introduce new athletes to competition and for experienced athletes to try out new techniques in a relaxed competition environment in the lead-up to a larger event. However, it was felt that national leagues did not consistently offer a high-enough standard of competition to maintain the engagement of more competitive athletes; and did not always allow athletes to concentrate on their main event(s). It is possible that other formats could offer the benefits of league competition whilst overcoming its criticisms. For example, club-organised trips to open meetings could produce the same social experience as attending a league match (with team travel and overnight stays) whilst offering a higher standard of competition in the athlete's main event. Initiatives such as the new event-specific series also offers the opportunity for athletes to score points for their club, but each athlete can do so in their main event. There are other options, drawing on inspiration from the league format, that could be explored.

Next steps

Further research and consultation should be carried out before any major changes are introduced to the Scottish track and field calendar, but this survey serves as a useful starting point to the discussion around what athletes, particularly those in the U17 and U20 age groups, would like to see within the sport over the coming years.

Responses to the survey show that athletes who completed it are relatively happy with the competition currently on offer, but that changes could be made to improve the clarity of the competition calendar and accessibility of certain competitions.

Athletes said that they want:

- A mixture of informal, relaxed, “social” competition and high-quality competitive events throughout the season
- A clearer competition hierarchy from National Championships and down to assist athletes with identifying appropriate competition for their experience and performance level. This also needs to be communicated more clearly to coaches, athletes and others involved
- High-quality local opportunities at all levels from open graded meetings to Championships (rotation of Senior Championships specifically mentioned, as well as BMC meets) regardless of where in Scotland the athlete lives
- Competitive opportunities that can retain a team/social element
- Well-organised events that create an atmosphere conducive to producing PB performances

It is also clear that any changes made need to be communicated clearly to the sport. Responses to the survey indicated that a number of athletes are not aware of current competition structures and opportunities on offer in Scottish Track and Field, and so the way that any changes are communicated to athletes, coaches and clubs will also play a key factor in their success.

Appendix

Additional quotes about leagues and competition in general:

“A Mens League in Grangemouth on a Saturday in summer (with the BP plant against the backdrop) is not an enticing affair! The format is pretty antiquated. Look at The Monument Mile, BMC Miler Meets or Highgate 10K. They are going out of their way to make their races attractive (prize money, music, atmosphere, pacers, seeded races...etc). Simply running a meeting is not good enough anymore. Some of the older coaches, officials...etc in the sport still look on the Men’s League (with rose tinted spectacles) as a great opportunity, but as a 33 year old athlete who has been competing in them for over a decade, I consider them to be fairly depressing and lacking atmosphere. That said, they are still a good opportunity for competition, and if they are to be removed, then they definitely need to be replaced with the same number of competitions in a different format.” Senior Male,

“I am not a fan of league competitions. I would like to see more championship races throughout the season and more individual prizes. I would also like to see more opportunities for selection throughout age groups and senior. My experience of leagues is that they don’t do much for the individual athlete: Miler races improve chance of Pbs, championships give medals, OG meeting allow to test however try I feel there isn’t a valid space for league competitions.” Senior Female, West

“I don’t taper at all for league matches. Often use them to race a shorter distance than I usually would (a positive). End up having to do more than one event for points which means I might hold back in an event and just do the bare minimum to get good points. I also find the standard at these meets to be lacking depth in the last couple of years. The match hosted in the north is poorly attended (no fault of the clubs up there, they should get a home match), also some athletes don’t bother and think they’re too good for it.” Senior Male, East

“I take league matches as a sort of training session - rather than going for the win or a PB, my coach and I analyse my throws to see what we can tweak and set little goals throughout the competition. This could be getting the javelin to be released earlier, to approach the throw with more force or to take two steps back on my run up. Championships are different - you need to have the perfect technique on the day. SSAA is an example - you need to have perfect technique on the day to finish first or second at U17 to qualify for SIAB.” U20 Female, East

“I think league matches are mostly focused on getting points for your club/team. Therefore, I may do as many events as I can even if they are very close together on the timetable. Whereas, a national championship or open graded I am entirely focused on my individual performance. I think that this can create a more serious environment because everyone competing wants to perform at their highest level. Compared to a league match where people may only be there for points. Saying that a league match can have a really great atmosphere with your club supporting you which may help people in their event.” U23 Female, West

“There are too many events per match meaning teams have to get athletes to do multiple events to gain league points. I often have to 3 or even 4 track distance events meaning I don't do any of them that well. I do the league for my club and to help out the team but from a performance perspective it is a waste of time. The Upper YDL was the same when I competed in that previously.” U23 Male, East

“I compete in the league because I feel that the team element of the competition is very important. It is the only opportunity our sprinters, field eventers and endurance athletes regularly spend time together. Also, it's a fantastic opportunity for athletes racing adulthood to compete with established senior competitors with less pressure but with competitive meaning.” 35-49 Male, East

“Unlikely to PB in but good opportunity to race for my club and run races outside my main event. Good for tactical races rather than fast.” Senior Male, East

“A league match will never be able to have the same atmosphere as a championship, and often the levels of competition at these league matches are not high enough to challenge some athletes” U20 Male, West

“It definitely needs changed. Because a full complement of track and field athletes are needed, clubs find themselves having to ask athletes to cover various different events which they are neither trained for, nor keen for. The format is antiquated and needs to be changed. As I say, the BMC Miler Meets, the Monument Mile, and the Highgate 10K are taking the sport to the next level, and the national leagues are being left behind. No music, no atmosphere, no prize money, no pacers....etc. The principal benefit of the national leagues is that they are a precious competition opportunity. However, if they were replaced with the same number of competitions, but in a different format, then I would certainly not lament the demise of the national leagues in their current format.” Senior Male,

“One of the best changes that could be made, would not be seeded races, but the ability for teams to have more flexibility with entering non scoring athletes. The UK U17/U20 YDL does this well. And removing B-string scoring in all poorly attended events. The scoring system also needs to be easy for people to understand, i.e. scored by place, not points relative to performance level. Many of the Scottish leagues also seem to be run by people resistant to change, who want to do things their way and have forgotten about the athletes, particularly around timetabling.” Senior Male, East

“As much as I love competing in my club colours and helping them to secure points, the distance events don't seem to entice many of the top club level athletes. Maybe by allowing pace makers and open entries to the 5 and 10k events the field may grow in strength/numbers and draw in more competitors. Limiting some of the larger clubs to 2 athletes when they have 4 or 5 capable of running sub 15/16 is detrimental to the race. Would also be nice to have a Mens League further north next season.” Senior Male, North

“I used to compete at all YDL leagues but as I got older the events available were only the runs and a field event (usually long jump). I understand why this is but it is a shame as I know many athletes that stopped for the same reason” U20 Female, East

“Fielding teams at senior level 4 times per year is too hard and it becomes more about filling events than creating a competitive atmosphere.” Senior Male, West

“I feel as if I will perform as well [in a league match] as other races but not any better. You race hard for the team but don't have the same adrenaline as National races.” U17 Male, West

“League matches such as the YDL usually have a smaller field of competitors as are often in exam season. The standard is also generally much lower as athletes will be likely to compete in more than one event and events that are not specific to them, this means that races are run with a less high quality and competitive field. Often these events are also overnight as are down south or the other side of the country and therefore pre race preparations are not the same as they would be before a national competition as there is usually lots of late nights with the team.” U20 Female, East

“I think league matches are mostly focused on getting points for your club/team. Therefore, I may do as many events as I can even if they are very close together on the timetable. Whereas, a national championship or open graded I am entirely focused on my individual performance. I think that this can create a more serious environment because everyone competing wants to perform at their highest level. Compared to a league match where people may only be there for points.” U23 Female, West

“There are too many events per match meaning teams have to get athletes to do multiple events to gain league points. I often have to [do] 3 or even 4 track distance events meaning I don't do any of them well. I do the league for my club and to help out the team but from a performance perspective it is a waste of time. The Upper YDL was the same when I competed in that.” U23 Male, East