

COMPETITION CHANGES OFF-TRACK COMPETITION FOR YOUNG ATHLETES AND PARA ATHLETES

October 2025





INTRODUCTION

Off-track running (cross country, road, trail, and hill) is a cornerstone of athletics in Scotland, offering a pathway from participation to performance across all ages. However, recent analysis of participation trends and championship structures has highlighted challenges:

- Drop-off between U15 and U20 age groups
- Inconsistent formats and recognition across disciplines
- Limited entry pathways for U12 athletes
- Low visibility and access for para-athletes

This document outlines the proposed revised structure for off-track competition to promote inclusivity, progression, and recognition for young athletes, ensuring a consistent and developmentally appropriate pathway across these disciplines.

PROPOSAL SUMMARY

1. U12: EARLY EXPOSURE, LOW PRESSURE

While U12 athletes will not have formal championship races, the focus for this age group will be on encouraging local participation and skill development:

- Promotion of school, club and local cross country events, fun runs (1-2 km) without formal ranking such as Daily Mile and local come-and-try events
- Hill and trail running will continue to offer come-and-try days to U12s and will include fun runs at the Hill Running Junior League

Rationale: Foster enjoyment and movement literacy while avoiding early specialisation.

2. U14-U18: STRUCTURED PROGRESSION AND BROADER RECOGNITION

Cross Country

- Standardised maximum distances and age-appropriate formats
- Expansion of opportunities as athletes grow up:
 - District, Inter-District, and National Championships (Short Course U16+)
 - National and District XC Relays (team scoring retained)
- Recognition extended beyond top 3 finishers:
 - National XC, District XC and Inter District: medals for 1st-3rd + pin badges for 4th-12th (U14), 4th-9th (U16), and 4th-6th (U18)
- Inter-Districts will become more team-focused awarding team medals in all age groups on the podium.

Hill & Trail Running

- Gradual introduction through junior league, local or club-supported events with appropriate distances and elevation
- National Championship events (Hill from U14, Trail from U16+) with focus on skill development and safety
- U18: Progression to greater distances and more demanding terrain
- Hill/trail events will explore similar recognition expansion from 2028



Road Races

- Young Athletes Road Races (YARR):
 - U14: 3K
 - U16: 4K
 - U18: 5K
- Badges awarded to top 12 (U14), 9 (U16), and 6 (U18)



Rationale: Smooth transitions between disciplines; athlete development aligned with physical maturity; and consistent reward structures to improve motivation and retention.

3. PARA-ATHLETE INCLUSION IN OFF-TRACK

To ensure equity, all off-track disciplines will include para-athlete integration across all age groups:

- Cross Country and Road: classification-specific awards where numbers allow; integrated categories where feasible
- Hill and Trail: pilot participation on appropriate courses with support from Scottish Disability Sport and other partner organisations
- Officials and volunteers continue to receive training in inclusive delivery and awareness

RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION

- Aims to increase participation and retention in teenage years
- Greater inclusivity, especially for para-athletes and lower-ranked runners
- Smoother developmental transitions from club to district to national level
- Stronger alignment with athlete development model and inclusion goals



VOLUNTEER/CLUB/EVENT ORGANISER SUPPORT

These changes require active collaboration across the sport. Key supporting actions include:

- Encourage multi-disciplinary participation across off-track disciplines
- Help to identify and support para-athletes wishing to take part in off-track events
- Recruit and train local volunteers to deliver safe, inclusive and age-appropriate local competitions
- Promote participation-based rewards and team entries

CONCLUSION

The proposed changes represent a vital evolution in how Scotland supports young athletes in off-track disciplines. By aligning competition formats with athlete development, expanding recognition and ensuring inclusion, we will help build a stronger, more sustainable future for the sport. Your support - through clubs, volunteers and event organisation - is essential to the success of this vision.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Phase	Timeline	Key Actions
1	2025-2026	Communicate changes to clubs and event organisers
2	Winter 2026-27	Introduce badge recognition, beginning with 2026 Short Course XC; Team-based Inter-District XC
4	Spring 2027	Updated YARR with extended recognition awards
5	2027-28	Explore hill/trail recognition awards; expand para provision

