National Youth Development League Surveys 2026

The NYDL management group instigated two surveys towards the end of the track and field season to gauge responses to how the league had worked with the new age groups. The first survey was sent to clubs for their YDL team contacts to consult with relevant club members and respond, whilst the second was a survey of athlete views sought via the YDL's Instagram account.

Eighty clubs responded to the first survey with 16 clubs sending two responses, one from the view of the lower age group and one from the view of the upper age group. This represents just over 50% of the clubs involved in the league in 2026.

Three Hundred and twenty five athletes responded to the Instagram survey

Below is a summary of the results of the club survey put together by Chat GPT. The management group will be discussing the results in October with a view to putting together recommendations to the AGM in November.

Club Survey

Chat GPT reviewed all **96 survey responses** and analysed the ratings, divisions and written comments. The main message is quite clear: **the Lower Age Group is generally working well, while the Upper Age Group needs significant attention, particularly around participation, the U20 age group, fixtures and the length/efficiency of meetings.**

1. Key Takeaways

- **Lower Age Group is viewed positively.** The average rating was **3.77 out of 5**, with 59 of 96 respondents (61%) rating it **4 or 5**. Most comments support keeping the current approach, with relatively minor improvements.
- **Upper Age Group is the biggest concern.** Its average rating was only **2.28 out of 5**. Of the 68 people who answered, **41 (60%) rated it 1 or 2**.
- **U20 participation is a major issue.** Many respondents believe the current U20 structure is not attracting enough athletes, partly because of the age-group changes, exams and clashes with other competitions.
- **There is strong opposition to reducing opportunities for athletes.** Respondents generally rejected reducing field-event places and strongly rejected combining multiple age groups into one fixture, particularly the proposed U16/U18/U20 combination.
- **Practical issues matter almost as much as the competition format.** Repeated concerns included long meetings, shortage of officials, travel costs, fixture dates, clashes with NAL/English Schools competitions and the delay in publishing results.

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2. Question Breakdown

A. Current divisions represented

The responses came from a wide range of clubs and divisions, giving the survey a reasonably broad club perspective.

Upper Age Group

- Premier: **30**
- Division 1: **39**
- Do not compete in UAG: **16**
- 11 respondents did not answer.

Lower Age Group

- Premier: **25**
- Division 1: 45
- Division 2: **7**
- Division 3: **8**
- Scotland North & East: **4**
- Do not compete in LAG: **3**

What this tells us: The survey is particularly strong in representing clubs competing in the main Premier and Division 1 competitions.

B. Lower Age Group – how successful was it?

Average rating: 3.77 / 5

Rating	Responses
5 – Great	22
4	37
3	31
2	5
1 – Poor	1

61% gave a 4 or 5.

Main themes

The Lower Age Group is generally seen as **successful and enjoyable**.

Positive comments included:

- Athletes enjoying the team competition.
- Good opportunities for U14 and U16 athletes.

- Support for keeping the existing range of events.
- The new scoring/non-scoring arrangements were viewed positively by some clubs because they allowed athletes to "have a go".

Suggested improvements

The recurring suggestions were relatively practical:

- Improve **timetabling** and reduce clashes.
- Move relays away from the end of the day.
- Consider allowing **more athletes in field events**.
- Consider **double-header fixtures** to make better use of officials.
- Improve fixture dates and reduce expensive travel.
- Improve the speed of publishing results.
- Consider additional events such as **U14 200m hurdles**.

Outlier views

There was some disagreement about whether U12 athletes should be brought back into the league.

Some respondents strongly supported this because of **athlete retention**, while others felt U12 competition should remain more informal and local.

Overall: There is no strong appetite for a major overhaul of the LAG. Most feedback points towards **improving the existing format rather than replacing it.**

C. Upper Age Group – how successful was it?

Average rating: 2.28 / 5

Rating	Responses
5 – Great	1
4	15
3	11
2	16
1 – Poor	25

60% of respondents rated it 1 or 2.

This is by far the clearest negative result in the survey.

Main concerns

1. Very low U20 participation

This was one of the strongest themes in the written responses.

Respondents described:

- Very small U20 fields.
- Athletes having little or no competition.
- Athletes choosing not to travel when there are very few competitors.
- Exams affecting participation.
- The new age structure creating a particularly small U20 cohort.

Several respondents questioned whether the current U20 competition is sustainable.

2. U20 athletes still need appropriate competition

There was also an important counterargument.

Some respondents strongly believe the YDL should **continue to provide U20 competition**, particularly because it gives athletes opportunities to compete using the correct U20 hurdles and throwing implements.

So the issue is not simply **"remove U20"**.

The real issue appears to be:

How can the league provide meaningful U20 competition when participation numbers are low?

3. Fixture clashes

This came through very strongly.

Respondents highlighted clashes with:

- NAL fixtures
- English Schools Championships
- Schools Cup
- Exams
- Other athletics competitions
- Holidays

There is a clear view that fixture planning needs to take the wider athletics calendar into account.

4. Travel

Some clubs are facing substantial travel costs and logistical difficulties.

This was particularly serious for clubs travelling long distances or requiring flights, boats, coaches and overnight accommodation.

Overall conclusion

The UAG needs a more fundamental review than the LAG.

The strongest message is that simply making small timetable changes will probably not solve the underlying participation problem.

D. Proposed change 1 – reduce U18/U20 track places

75 responses

Average rating: **3.21 / 5**

Rating	Responses
5	19
4	17
3	17
2	5
1	17

This produced a **mixed result**.

There is no clear consensus.

Some respondents support reducing places to help:

- Shorten meetings.
- Reduce pressure on officials.
- Make fixtures more manageable.

However, others strongly oppose reducing athlete opportunities.

Key message: This proposal needs further discussion rather than being treated as an agreed solution.

E. Proposed change 2 – reduce Upper Age Group field-event places

79 responses

- **Disagree: 48**
- **Agree: 31**

Approximately **61% disagreed**.

This is a fairly clear rejection.

Why?

Several respondents felt field events are already under-provided for and that reducing places would:

- Reduce athlete opportunities.
- Discourage field-event athletes.
- Make it harder to retain athletes.
- Penalise clubs that have strong field-event squads.

One particularly strong theme was that **non-scoring places do not feel like genuine team participation to athletes**.

Conclusion: There is little support for reducing UAG field-event opportunities.

F. Proposed change 3 – combine U14, U16 and U18

93 responses

- **Disagree: 70**
- **Agree: 23**

Approximately **75% disagreed**.

This is one of the clearest results in the survey.

The main concerns were:

- Fewer opportunities for athletes.
- Loss of the existing team structure.
- Rotating events meaning athletes could miss their preferred events.

- Potential damage to team spirit.
- Parents and athletes preferring the existing LAG arrangement.

There were some supporters who believed combining age groups could:

- Reduce the pressure on officials.
- Make better use of facilities.
- Create a more efficient meeting.

But they were clearly in the minority.

G. Proposed change 4 – combine U16, U18 and U20

91 responses

- **Disagree: 83**
- **Agree: 8**

Approximately **91% disagreed**.

This is the **strongest result in the entire survey**.

There is overwhelming opposition to this particular proposal.

The comments suggest that respondents believe combining these age groups would:

- Reduce athlete opportunities.
- Create timetable problems.
- Damage the team competition.
- Make it harder for individual athletes to compete in their events.
- Potentially make the U20 problem worse rather than better.

Conclusion: This proposal has very little support and should probably not be pursued in its current form.

H. Proposed change 5 – increase second-claim opportunities in the Lower Age Group

93 responses

- **Disagree: 55**
- **Agree: 38**

Approximately **59% disagreed**.

There is therefore **no strong mandate** for a major increase in second-claim participation in the LAG.

The feedback suggests that the LAG is already functioning reasonably well and that changing eligibility could potentially alter the character of the competition.

I. Proposed change 6 – increase second-claim opportunities in the Upper Age Group

78 responses

- **Agree: 48**
- **Disagree: 30**

Approximately **62% agreed**.

This is significant.

It suggests that respondents see **second-claim athletes as a potentially useful way of strengthening the UAG**, particularly where clubs have insufficient U18/U20 athletes.

This could provide a way of improving competition without necessarily combining three age groups into one fixture.

J. Other comments – major themes

The final comments reinforce the numerical results.

Most frequently repeated themes

1. Keep athlete opportunities high

Respondents repeatedly said that the YDL should be a development league and should encourage young athletes to compete rather than restrict the number of places.

2. Fix the U20 problem

This is the biggest structural issue.

There are two broad views:

- Keep U20 but find a better way to make the competition viable.
- Remove U20 from the YDL and provide suitable U20 competition elsewhere.

Both views recognise that the **current situation is not working well**.

3. Improve fixtures

There is strong support for:

- Avoiding NAL clashes.
- Avoiding English Schools clashes.
- Avoiding problematic school-holiday dates.
- Reducing long-distance travel.
- Localising divisions where possible.

4. Make meetings shorter and more efficient

Officials are a major issue.

Suggestions included:

- Double headers.
- Better timetabling.
- More efficient use of officials.
- Reviewing event scheduling.
- Potentially increasing the number of officials each club provides if more age groups compete simultaneously.

5. Keep the team element

This is important.

Many respondents see the YDL as valuable precisely because it is a **team competition**.

Any move towards a purely performance-based competition could risk losing some of its appeal to developing athletes.

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3. Four Actionable Recommendations

1. Undertake a specific review of the Upper Age Group

Priority: Very High

The survey clearly shows that the UAG is the main problem.

The review should focus specifically on:

- U20 participation.
- The effect of the recent age-group changes.
- Exam periods.
- Fixture clashes.
- Travel.
- The number of athletes actually competing at each meeting.

Do not simply apply the LAG model to the UAG. The survey suggests the two sections have different problems.

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2. Protect athlete opportunities rather than reducing them

Priority: High

The survey strongly rejects reducing field-event places and combining three age groups.

Therefore, before reducing places, investigate ways of making the existing programme more efficient.

For example:

- Better timetabling.
- Double headers where practical.
- Sharing officials more effectively.
- Better allocation of non-scoring places.
- Reviewing the number and timing of events.

The principle should be:

Make the competition more efficient without unnecessarily reducing opportunities for athletes.

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3. Review U20 and second-claim eligibility together

Priority: High

The results suggest a potentially useful solution.

There is significant support for **more second-claim opportunities in the UAG**, while there is strong opposition to combining U16/U18/U20 into one fixture.

A working group could therefore examine whether increasing second-claim opportunities could:

- Increase U18/U20 fields.
- Improve the quality of competition.
- Make travel more worthwhile.
- Help smaller clubs remain competitive.

At the same time, the league should assess whether the U20 category can remain viable under the current structure.

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4. Introduce a much stronger fixture-planning process

Priority: High

This is one of the easiest areas to act on immediately.

Before publishing future fixtures, check them against:

- NAL fixtures.
- English Schools Championships.
- Schools Cup.
- Major championship dates.
- School examination periods.
- Bank holidays.
- Major travel difficulties.

Also investigate **more geographically sensible divisions and double-header opportunities**.

This could improve participation without changing the fundamental competition structure.

Overall Conclusion

The survey points towards evolution rather than wholesale change.

Lower Age Group:
✅ Generally successful
✅ Strong support for the team format
✅ Mostly minor improvements required

Upper Age Group:
⚠ Significant dissatisfaction
⚠ U20 participation is the biggest problem
⚠ Fixture clashes and travel are major issues
⚠ Requires a more fundamental review

Proposed structural changes:
❌ Strong rejection of combining U16/U18/U20
❌ Majority rejection of combining U14/U16/U18
❌ Majority rejection of reducing UAG field places
✅ Majority support for more UAG second-claim opportunities

The simplest message to take to the team is:

Keep what works in the Lower Age Group, protect athlete opportunities, and concentrate the major review effort on making the Upper Age Group more attractive and sustainable — particularly for U18/U20 athletes.

Monday 4:18 PM
Can you refine, splitting the views of those in the premier divisions from those in other divisions

Yes. I've refined the analysis so that the **Premier division view is separated from the non-Premier divisions**. I've treated "Premier" separately within each age group, rather than combining Premier clubs into one overall category.

Refined Survey Analysis: Premier vs Other Divisions

1. Key Takeaways

- **The Lower Age Group is rated positively by both groups, but Premier clubs are more positive.**
  - Premier: **4.08/5**
  - Other divisions: **3.72/5**

    - So there is broad agreement that the LAG is working, with Premier clubs particularly positive.
- **The Upper Age Group is viewed much more negatively by both groups, but the problem is more serious outside the Premier.**
    - Premier: **2.57/5**
    - Other divisions: **2.08/5**
    - This suggests the UAG problem is not simply a Premier-division issue.
- **There is very strong agreement across all divisions against combining U16, U18 and U20.**
    - Premier UAG: **90% disagree**
    - Other UAG divisions: **89% disagree**
    - This is one of the clearest areas of consensus in the survey.
- **Premier clubs are generally more cautious about reducing athlete places.**
    - They are particularly opposed to reducing UAG field-event places and combining age groups.
    - Clubs outside the Premier are also opposed, but there is slightly more willingness among them to consider changes to the format.
- **There is strong support for increasing second-claim opportunities in the UAG in both groups.**
    - Premier UAG: **69% agree**
    - Other UAG divisions: **55% agree**
    - This is potentially one of the most useful areas to explore as a way of increasing participation without fundamentally changing the age-group structure.

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2. Lower Age Group

Premier clubs

25 responses

Average rating: **4.08/5**

- 5: **11**
- 4: **8**
- 3: **4**
- 2: **1**
- 1: **1**

Premier view

The Premier clubs are **strongly positive about the current LAG structure**.

Their comments focus mainly on improvements rather than fundamental changes:

- Shorten the timetable.
- Reduce gaps between races.
- Improve field-event opportunities.
- Consider two athletes in some field events.
- Improve fixture dates.
- Avoid school holidays where possible.
- Improve results publication.

What this means

Premier clubs do not appear to be asking for a major restructuring of the LAG.

Their message is essentially:

The format works; make the competition more efficient and improve the athlete experience.

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3. Lower Age Group – Other Divisions

64 responses

Average rating: **3.72/5**

- 5: **11**
- 4: **28**
- 3: **21**
- 2: **4**
- 1: **0**

The non-Premier clubs are also broadly positive, but slightly less enthusiastic than Premier clubs.

Main differences

Their comments place more emphasis on:

- Travel distances.
- Regionalisation.
- Competition being more evenly balanced.
- Providing more opportunities for smaller clubs.
- Field-event participation.
- Problems with venues and officials.

There is also more discussion about the structure of lower divisions and whether divisions are competitive enough.

Important distinction

The **Premier clubs tend to focus on improving an already successful competition**, whereas **other divisions are more likely to raise issues about the competitiveness and practicality of the league structure**.

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4. Upper Age Group

This is where the differences become more interesting.

Premier UAG clubs

28 responses to the rating question

Average: **2.57/5**

- 5: **1**
- 4: **8**
- 3: **6**
- 2: **4**
- 1: **9**

So even among Premier clubs, the UAG is clearly **not viewed as successful**.

Premier concerns

The Premier responses particularly highlight:

- Lack of U20 athletes.
- Athletes choosing other competitions.
- Competition clashes.
- The need for a shorter timetable.
- Making fixtures Level 2.
- Improving the quality of competition.
- The National Final being expensive for southern clubs.
- U20 athletes being unavailable because of university dates.
- Better use of second-claim athletes.

There is also a more strategic discussion among Premier clubs about **the status and purpose of the UAG**.

Premier attitude to proposed changes

Proposal	Agree	Disagree
Reduce U18/U20 track places	**17**	6

Proposal	Agree	Disagree
Reduce UAG field-event places	10	**19**
Combine U14/U16/U18	3	**27**
Combine U16/U18/U20	3	**27**
Increase LAG second claim	13	17
Increase UAG second claim	**20**	9

Interpretation

Premier clubs are saying:

We recognise the UAG has a serious participation problem, but don't solve it by simply taking opportunities away from athletes.

They are relatively receptive to **reducing track places**, presumably because this could help shorten meetings.

However, they are strongly against:

- Reducing field-event places.
- Combining age groups.

And they show **strong support for increasing UAG second-claim opportunities**.

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5. Upper Age Group – Other Divisions

37 responses to the rating question

Average: **2.08/5**

- 5: **0**
- 4: **7**
- 3: **4**
- 2: **11**
- 1: **15**

This is the **most negative group in the survey**.

Main concerns

The same issues appear as in the Premier, but often more strongly:

- Very poor athlete turnout.
- Lack of competition.
- Large gaps in the timetable.

- Excessive travel.
- Problems caused by regional divisions.
- Lack of meaningful competition for some events.
- U20 numbers being particularly weak.
- Officials being present for long periods when there are relatively few athletes.

There is a strong feeling among some clubs that the current structure is **not sustainable**.

Proposed changes

Proposal	Agree	Disagree
Reduce U18/U20 track places	**17**	13
Reduce UAG field-event places	16	**20**
Combine U14/U16/U18	9	**28**
Combine U16/U18/U20	4	**31**
Increase LAG second claim	15	**22**
Increase UAG second claim	**18**	15

Interpretation

The non-Premier UAG clubs are **more negative about the current system**, but they don't necessarily support the proposed solutions.

This is important.

Their message is not:

"Reduce the competition."

It is more:

"The current competition isn't working in our divisions, so something needs to change."

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6. The Most Important Premier vs Other Division Differences

A. Perception of the UAG

	Premier	Other divisions
UAG rating	**2.57**	**2.08**

Both groups think the UAG needs improvement.

However, **non-Premier clubs are significantly more dissatisfied**.

This suggests that the solution should probably recognise that the UAG experience varies according to the strength and geography of the division.

B. Reducing UAG field-event places

	Agree	Disagree
Premier	34%	**66%**
Other	44%	**56%**

Neither group supports this proposal.

However, **non-Premier clubs are somewhat more open to it**.

This may reflect the different practical problems experienced in divisions with smaller numbers.

C. Combining U14/U16/U18

	Agree	Disagree
Premier	10%	**90%**
Other	24%	**76%**

There is overwhelming opposition from both groups.

The Premier clubs are even more strongly opposed.

D. Combining U16/U18/U20

This is the strongest consensus.

	Agree	Disagree
Premier	10%	**90%**
Other	11%	**89%**

This proposal should therefore be considered effectively rejected by the survey.

There is almost no difference between Premier and non-Premier opinion.

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7. Second-Claim Opportunities

This is one of the most interesting findings.

UAG second claim

	Agree	Disagree
Premier	**69%**	31%
Other	**55%**	45%

Both groups support this change, but **Premier clubs are particularly supportive**.

This provides a possible solution to the UAG participation problem that does **not require combining age groups**.

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8. What the Survey Is Really Telling Us

When the Premier/non-Premier split is taken into account, I think the survey tells us **four important things**:

1. Don't radically change the LAG

Both groups rate it reasonably well.

The emphasis should be on:

- Better timetabling.
- Better dates.
- Less travel where possible.
- More efficient use of officials.
- Improving field-event opportunities.

2. The UAG needs a fundamental review

This is true for **both Premier and non-Premier clubs**.

However, it is even more urgent outside the Premier.

3. Don't assume that reducing opportunities will solve the problem

The survey does **not** support reducing field-event opportunities or combining age groups.

The strongest opposition is to combining U16/U18/U20.

4. Look at participation rather than simply the timetable

The underlying problem appears to be **too few athletes competing in some UAG events**.

That creates:

- Long gaps.
- Poor competition.
- Frustrated officials.
- High travel costs for relatively little competition.
- Reduced enthusiasm among athletes.

So shortening the timetable alone may improve the day, but **it won't fix the underlying participation problem**.

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9. Refined Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Keep the LAG structure broadly intact

Premier and non-Premier opinion supports this approach.

Concentrate on practical improvements rather than restructuring the age groups.

Recommendation 2 – Establish a dedicated UAG review group

The UAG should be reviewed separately from the LAG, with representation from:

- Premier clubs
- Division 1 clubs
- Lower divisions
- Smaller clubs
- Clubs with strong U18/U20 squads

The objective should be to develop a structure that works **across different levels of participation**, rather than assuming one solution fits all.

Recommendation 3 – Investigate greater UAG second-claim flexibility

This has **majority support in both Premier and other divisions**.

It could increase the number of athletes without removing age groups or reducing opportunities.

This should be one of the first options tested.

Recommendation 4 – Do not proceed with the proposed three-age-group fixtures

The survey is exceptionally clear.

There is around **90% opposition to combining U16, U18 and U20**, regardless of division.

Similarly, there is strong opposition to combining U14/U16/U18.

These proposals should therefore be **removed from the shortlist or substantially redesigned**.

Final Team Message

I would present the refined findings to the management team like this:

The survey shows a clear difference between the Lower and Upper Age Groups, but surprisingly little difference between Premier and non-Premier opinion on the major structural proposals.

The LAG is broadly successful across all divisions and needs refinement rather than fundamental change.

The UAG is the main concern, with non-Premier clubs particularly dissatisfied. However, there is strong agreement that reducing opportunities or combining age groups is not the answer.

The strongest positive option is to explore greater second-claim participation in the UAG, alongside a wider review of fixtures, travel, participation levels and the U20 structure.

In short: protect what works in the LAG, don't reduce athlete opportunities unnecessarily, and focus the major review on making the UAG more competitive, accessible and sustainable.