

# England Athletics

# Youth Endurance

## Frequently Asked Questions

**This FAQ Document has been produced following the Youth Endurance Workshop held in Loughborough on 8th December 2015. This workshop was jointly planned by England Athletics & the Leicestershire Running & Athletics Network, and was delivered by the then National Coach Mentor for Youth Endurance, Jenny Harris.**



### England Athletics overall comments:

For many of the questions we have given general rather than specific answers as it is important to remember that each athlete is different and as athlete centred coaches and as such there will always be variables. However, we hope we have given you some useful answers to get you thinking as a coach. The exciting thing about coaching is the challenge or art of marrying what we know and what science or research tells alongside the many different individual athletes we coach.

### Leicestershire Running & Athletics Network overall comments:

As the instigator of the workshop as part of our coach development programme the input from England Athletics is of course very welcome, however some of the advice is as indicated above very generic and sometimes reflects the ideal world rather than the real world of a busy coach with possibly a large group of athletes to oversee. We also continue to be concerned that those with just a LiRF qualification are allowed to effectively coach 12+ without any guidance and understanding of the developmental needs of this age group.



**1 Are there any tried and tested methods of collating how much weekly activity young athletes are doing as a method of helping coaches gauge the appropriate intensity/distances an athlete should do in a session?**

Getting athletes to keep diaries is a good way of both monitoring the amount and type of activity an athlete is doing. Diaries or training logs can help you to understand your athlete better and aid the athlete to understand the effects that different types of activity and training has on them.

For the more advanced athletes and performance focussed coaches then tools such as [www.trainingpeaks.com](http://www.trainingpeaks.com) which come with fee to the coach are increasingly popular.

**Network comment:** *The advice here is good and proper however transferring it to reality may prove difficult. It is rare or nigh impossible to have a group of athletes of a younger age who are able to commit to providing this information in such detail. The extra work involved for a volunteer coach to go through perhaps a dozen or more submitted diaries on a week by week basis is also unrealistic. The key to coaching is to "know your athlete(s)" and this can only be done over time by engaging and understanding their current needs. Every athlete of any age is quite different and copes with different stresses in a different way. What is too much for one will not be enough for another. The key skill of the coach is to understand this and adapt accordingly. Issuing weekly schedules and advance notice of club sessions can empower the young athlete and its parents to balance off training demands against daily life.*

**2. Where can I find the (scientifically approved) recommended distances a young athlete should run regularly in a training session?**

There is little or no known scientifically approved guidance on recommended distances for young athletes. Whilst there are recorded performances of young athletes having run very long distances there is little to say what the long term effects of these are.

British Athletics guidelines for competition distances can be found at [www.britishathletics.org.uk/competitions/rules/](http://www.britishathletics.org.uk/competitions/rules/)

Therefore it is recommended that training distances are proportionate to competition distances in terms of length or duration above or below.

Start from the race distances a child is looking at as the end point of 'they will have to run this distance, which will take around this time, as an all out effort'. Training should therefore work towards that goal working under and over distance and under and over pace, remembering the rules of adaptation being based on progressive overload. At the same time the leader/coach has to have an awareness of where the young athlete is coming from so an analysis of the individual as they start should give a picture of what they are currently capable of. Knowing the start point and the end point the leader/coach can plan the progression.

As a ready rule of thumb work to a scheme of school activity plus two athletic sessions at 12, three at 13, four at 14 etc. these sessions could involve running, jumping and throwing activities lasting from 60 minutes to 90 minutes depending on the intensity and type of content. That is not 60 to 90 minutes of continuous exercise that is the length of the whole session including social and recovery time. The density of the activity would increase as the athlete gets more mature. This can be accelerated at the point the athlete starts specialising and/or dependent on the athlete's maturational development.

When working with any athlete it is worth remembering that where volume or intensity is concerned you can always add gradually when you feel they are ready.



**Network comment:** Whilst England Athletics are keen to follow the Run Jump throw programme for all young athletes, this is not always appropriate and/or wanted by those young people who “just want to run”. What does need to be included in these athletes are a certain amount of movement skills which can be integrated into a training programme. We need as a sport to cater for the needs of our young “customers” and provide what is wanted and not what the NGB dictates. Again though there are concerns that some who are looking after young runners are not suitably educated (different from being qualified) to safely progress youngsters coming into the sport.



### 3. How should I manage training in the days before a race? What period of recovery should I allow between a 'normal' or 'hard' training session and a race?

This very much depends on the athlete, their age, amount and intensity of training they are doing to begin with. And other sports/activities, plus they type of competition they are taking part in.

For example, an U13 who trains at the club once a week on a Thursday and does a variety of other sports at school may gain very little by taking it easy on a typical moderate Thursday session before a 3k local Saturday cross-country race if they have had a normal week of activity at school. Whilst and U17 who trains 5-6 days a week and is competing at national level may well benefit from a lighter session or week in the run up to the competition. Lighter could mean volume or it could mean intensity or both.

On the other hand the same athlete competing in a Saturday league might not rest up much at all, using the Saturday competition as training/competition practise instead.

Post competition would be equally variable. The U13 who ran a hard fought race, finishing up a hill on rough ground with the wind in their face may find the race has taken a lot out of them and might well need/want a rest day or two from running or other activities. The same athletes winning easily by on a flat course in mild conditions may be fresh to do other things in the next day or two.

### 4. What recovery period should I allow after a race before doing another 'normal' or 'hard' session?

As above it really does depend on the athlete.

But most clubs up and down the country operate a weekday Tuesday/Thursday or Monday/Wednesday offer for a reason. To allow at least 1 full day and 48 hours between harder sessions. Good coaches and clubs may well vary the intensity of these two sessions with Tuesday being harder and Thursday a good work out, but less intense.

Some athletes need longer to recover and might need 2-4 full days before redoing another 'hard' session and getting to know your athlete is key.

Recovery period might also vary at different times of year. For example, athletes doing low intensity session with higher volume will more likely recover quicker from this work than they will after lower volume, but higher intensity work.

And each individual's recovery can be accelerated or delayed by the things they do after the race or the session which is when factors like nutrition, hydration, rest and recovery activities come into play.

**Network comment:** Our thoughts here are again that those working with 12+ with only a LiRF qualification have had insufficient training to understand these points.



**5. Does the answer differ for hard sessions which are speed-based or hard sessions which are aimed at improving endurance?**

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And each individual's recovery can be accelerated or delayed by the things they do after the race or the session which is when factors like nutrition, hydration, rest and recovery activities come into play.

But again much of this will depend on the individual, what they are used to, their strengths/weaknesses. Mental recovery and an athlete's mental readiness to resume harder training should also be considered.

One athlete will mentally consider one type of work more demanding than another regardless of the physiological effects on their body.



**6. How do the answers for the above differ to those for adults? Should I generally allow more or less recovery time?**

Much the same, be athlete focussed.

Adult runners may have less going on in way of other physical demands of other sports, but may have physically demanding jobs or mentally stressful jobs or lives.

The key difference is that young athletes are still growing and so this impacts greatly on their recovery time.

***Network comment:** Again this statement reflects that only those who have sufficient knowledge should look after the development of young runners. And again we stress that the Network is able to give hands on support and guidance for those who require or need it.*

**7. How much training is just too much for our young athletes? Are we pushing them too hard too young? What can their bodies realistically cope with until injury and burnout set in due to their young age? (As coaches are we expecting too much whilst they are too young? When can we turn up the heat ... is it when they are 10? 11? 12? or do we wait until puberty? I know each child is different in what they can take on physically as well as mentally but are there any guidelines? )**

Little scientific evidence to say how much is too much. But there has been plenty of some research and plenty of anecdotal evidence that vast numbers of promising youngsters are lost from the sport due to injury or loss of interest. Ref. 'Bridging the Gap' document – research into the development and retention of young athletes.

This is also why England Athletics recommend that leaders/coaches have a broad base of knowledge across movement competencies as variety of activity and even events at a young age promotes physical literacy and the simple joy of learning, aiding retention.

The 'Training Terminology' document put together by Barry Fudge, Jenny Harris and the late Dave Sunderland is an excellent guidance document and gives some guidance on volume for different types of work.

Endurance Athlete Development Model:

<http://ucoach.com/document/endurance-adm/>

However, as athletes go through puberty there are key windows for development as well as key considerations on type and amount of training which is why coaching is challenging and why we must remain athlete centred. Got to:

<http://ucoach.com/document/uka-athlete-development-model-document/>

It is worth remembering that the statistics for the average age of athletes at the Olympics in endurance events starts at the mid-20s for middle distance events through to late 20s to mid-30s for long distance events. Working on the 10,000 hours, 10 year rule minimum then we should 'hurry slowly' and retain a focus on skill acquisition, physical preparation, personal development, competition development and fun if we are to develop well-conditioned, adaptable and resilient young athletes who can full potential and remain in the sport.



## 8. What is 'steady running' for young athletes?

Steady state (or easy) running for young athletes is pace games or parlauf type activities so that the athlete learns how to run at a steady sustained and consistent pace and begin to understand how to control their breathing. From here they can be introduced to shorter steady state runs.

**Network comment:** *We believe that children in the hands of a coach can easily understand the concept of "steady/easy/slower" running and experience working with these age groups is paramount here.*

## 9. Does rate of growth and PHV (Peak Height Velocity) always follow a simple 's' curve? Or can growth be 'stepped' stages?

When monitoring PHV it is important to monitor the rate of growth, not just the amount of growth. Growth spurts can be 'stepped' but there is usually one period of PHV.

See the Endurance Athlete Development Model referenced in Q7.

**Network comment:** *We are of the belief that this information is not widely distributed. As before, the Network is in a position to offer support and information to help develop those working with young runners. This applies to those who are qualified to any level.*

## 10. Are iron supplements or other supplements recommended for young growing athletes?

As a coach the first priority should be to ensure that the athlete is eating a healthy and well balanced diet.

If an athlete has a heavy training load and/or is feeling tired it might be worth getting a blood test to check for anaemia.

In all cases iron supplementation and other vitamin supplementation should be under the guidance of a medical or nutritional professional.

It is also important to remember that supplements can contain additives that are not labelled and coaches/parents and athletes should make themselves aware of the various anti-doping websites that give clear guidelines in this area.

[www.ukad.org.uk](http://www.ukad.org.uk) is a good place to start.

**Network comment:** *We fully agree here and if there are any doubts regarding extended poor nutrition issues the club welfare officer should be contacted. This course of action may not be available to running groups and more clarity and advice should be offered by the NGB. Nutrition information is available through the Network website.*

## 11. What guidance is in place for taking young children out road running? Any recommended distances OR ages?

See Q2 for 'rule of thumb' for recommended distances.

Think about safety considerations including - High visibility clothing, qualified leaders, risk assessment of routes and supervision ratios.

**12. Is there a difference between what a 'coach' is expected to know and what a 'leader' is expected to know?**

Yes! Coaches and leaders are expected to have different levels of knowledge as the content of qualifications is different. Leaders are expected to know the difference between leading and coaching, and limits of what their qualification insures them to deliver. For more information see the Roles of Leaders and Coaches document

<http://ucoach.com/qualifications/insurance/>

*Network comment: The LiRf qualification does indeed insure leaders to take those 12+ however this does highlight yet again that leaders are not taught the skills to safely progress young runners. Coaches and Leaders are "expected" to have different levels of experience but leaders are not taught the parameters that they should be working to.*

**13. With the advent of Junior ParkRun, kids triathlons and school 'mile a day' runs is there is a need for an EA qualification in Leadership of Young Runners which advocates and educates good coaching practice for leading run clubs for the young athlete?**

England Athletics have looked carefully at this area and recognise that there is a growing number of young people taking part in running. England Athletics alongside other activity and event providers are keen to encourage young children to run and to gain enjoyment and a challenge out of running and to create life long, positive, habits. England Athletics also see the development of all round movement ability, which includes running, as being important to the development of healthy practice and an important part of long term retention of young runners in the sport so our view is that any qualifications for leaders/coaches of young children should enable them to gain knowledge and practice of delivering movement including running as part of the qualification. This view is consistent with guidance from PE and child development practitioners as well as informed from our own independently commissioned research which emphasises the importance of movement skill development and late specialisation as the routes to healthy and enjoyable as well as successful sports participation. England Athletics already have qualifications that give the knowledge and practice that is needed to work with young people and we are exploring the introduction of a young athletes running workshop which will add to this in the form of a non assessed programme.

*Network comment: We very much welcome this initiative and hope that it will be high on the list of the development work undertaken by the governing body.*

**14. With 12 years of age being a particularly difficult time especially for girls, what do you feel about newly qualified LiRF s being insured to lead groups of children from this age with nothing about this covered in the course?**

England Athletics believe that this is fine as long as they are leading and the focus is on beginner/improver type activities to get/keep young people, including girls, active then the course content for delivering to this group is adequate. England Athletics would recommend that all leaders working with teenagers look at the recommended distances in the link above and remember that these runners are not mini-adults and as such volumes should be appropriate.

The LiRF award gives information and practice to enable leaders to take out groups of runners in running activities. If the focus of the individual shifts to that of working towards performance goals then England Athletics have created both the Coaching



Assistant to Athletics Coach route and LiRF to Coach in Running Fitness route, which provide a level of knowledge to coach young runners (in this example) towards performance improvement. If however, the leader is wanting to COACH or improve performance standards then England Athletics would recommend they should take the same route as all other potential coaches ideally taking Athletics Coach over CiRF.

**Network comment:** See our comments above in point 4 and 6

