

Notes on the Open Discussion which followed the AGM of the Fell Runners Association Limited on 17th June 2017

Although not part of the Open Discussion, Tim Murray of Helm Hill Runners raised two points relating to junior runners when the Executive Committee's report was being considered.

Firstly, Tim Murray made a request for consultation with running clubs and earlier advance warning when changes such as the revision of the age group categories for juniors are introduced. The parents of some runners had found the revision of the age group categories confusing. The organisation of the junior races in the Kendal Winter League had been more difficult because of the revision.

Anne Buckley pointed out that the revision had not made a practical change to the age categories for junior runners. The revision involved only a change to the labels attached to the various categories. Tim Murray made clear that he understood that and that his issue was with the way that the changes had been implemented.

Secondly, Tim Murray referred to the confusion that had arisen about the eligibility of junior runners for the English Junior Championships. An online system through which junior runners were to register for the Championships operated in such a way that it appeared that junior runners had to be individual members of England Athletics in order to be eligible for the Championships.

Nick Harris explained that no change had been made to the criteria to be satisfied by junior runners to compete in the Championships. Junior runners would be eligible if they were either members of the FRA or individual members of England Athletics. He promised to review the wording used to set out the criteria for eligibility for the Championships.

Tim Murray said that his concern was that the online registration procedure was introduced without consultation with running clubs and that difficulties for the clubs could have been averted.

Barbara Haigh of Penistone Footpath Runners asked why there was no category in the English Championships for women aged over 70 years. Wendy Dodds suggested that to include such a category in the Championships might entice F70 runners to contest it.

Judith Jepson explained that the policy currently applied to all the age categories in the Championships is based on "meaningful competition". That is that there should be a sufficient number of runners contesting an age group category to render it a real competition. That F70 is not a category in the Championships does not prevent race organisers awarding prizes for F70 runners in Championship races and otherwise.

Nick Harris said that he had canvassed several F70 runners about competing in the Championship and been told that they did not intend to compete. He suggested that the number of F70 runners competing should be monitored and that this was a matter for the Championships Sub-Committee to consider further.

The Championship Sub-Committee chair has responded as follows - The very purpose of a National Championship contest is to seek out a worthy Champion through competition. As such the focus is primarily aimed at the senior competition as an elite competition. It is in the interest of the Championships to facilitate emerging young talent in the U23s who are potential challenges for future Champion status. British Athletics do not recognise veteran categories in national competition. As such the FRA is generous to facilitate this to accommodate its older membership.

It is not in the FRA's interest to undermine the gravitas of this competition by introducing categories where there is insufficient competition despite the fact that there are isolated pockets of maturing talent or speculation about potential. This is also not reflected in English Championships for any other running discipline. Anyone over 18 can participate in an FRA Championship race and individual race organisers may award individual or team prizes as they see fit. This is already a major benefit to our members.

Introducing a W70 Champion - The championship subcommittee will analyse existing/ recent past participation in Championship races and general races of W70s. They will make a full and fair recommendation.

Ron Rees from Pennine Fell Runners then asked why there was no category for M60 teams in the English Championship. A category for M50 teams was introduced some ten years ago. Many of the runners who competed in the M50 category were now in their sixties.

Nick Harris said that M60 teams in the Championship was another matter which would be referred to the Championships Sub-Committee to consider further.

The Championship Sub-Committee chair has responded as follows - The sub will analyse existing / recent past participation for Club members over 60 in counter Championship races to assess the viability. We will make a full and fair recommendation.

Stephen Pyke drew attention to the consultation which Judith Jepson carried out with younger runners. It appeared that an impression had developed among some younger runners that fell running is a sport which caters mainly for older runners.

Nick Harris pointed out that to try to attract to and retain younger runners, the Executive Committee recently reduced the FRA membership subscription for runners aged under 23 years. That would affect some sixty current FRA members.

Charmian Heaton referred to the decision of the Executive Committee to offer honorary life membership of the FRA to current members aged 85 years and over. That offer had been received with great pleasure by the members concerned. One such member, Reg Baker, was present at the meeting.