

Youth Cycling

The British Cycling Youth Workgroup was set up to perform complete review of all aspects of youth cycling to identify any issues and propose back to the Board a vision and long term strategy to resolve them. An initial phase of consultation with the membership (principally the Board, Regions, Commissions, National Youth Forum, organisers, officials, coaches, team managers and of course riders and their parents) took place over the summer of 2014 and analysis of the responses show there is a clear consensus of opinion. This paper provides a summary and proposes a range of potential solutions for consideration and implementation.

The Workgroup identified 3 key principles in the responses.

- Youth cycling should be fun. For young riders, building a lifelong passion for cycling through the development of core skills should be the focus and primary outcome.
- Youth cycling should be accessible. From club coaching activities to competitive opportunities to equipment, young people should have the opportunity to access the sport and cost should not be a barrier.
- Youth cycling should be simple and easy to understand. The rules, regulations and other information about youth cycling should be clear and easy to follow for all involved.

Further, there was wide agreement that the youth racing environment still needs to provide a mechanism for talent identification and development for the Great Britain Cycling Team, but that results in competitive events were only meaningful in this context after the age of 13-14.

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British Cycling are therefore proposing the following high level principles for further consideration.

As an initial step, all members of British Cycling are invited to give their views on how these broad concepts and rationales could be best implemented in their experience of the sport. All responses should be emailed to youthworkgroup@britishcycling.org.uk by Sunday 30th November 2014.

The intention is for British Cycling to then draw up and publish detailed changes to any rules and regulations by the end of March 2015 giving the staff and membership 9 months to get ready before the first changes come into effect in January 2016.

Broadly, it is felt that a phased approach for implementation would allow for ongoing review of the effect any initial changes had and help shape what further changes were required in the future. The first two proposed phases for consideration are as follows.

Phase 1 - National changes for the 2016 season

- The focus of National competition (including National Rankings, National Series and National Championships) should be for riders aged 13-14 and older.
- Young people aged 12 and under are still in the early stages of development. Racing should still be encouraged and enjoyed across these age groups, but it should be at a local / regional level. Results may still be produced, but ranking points should be removed to promote a more enjoyable experience for all.

- Event duration and difficulty should be designed to match the aims of the event and ability of the riders. For example, in Local races, multiple short races are more beneficial to the development of skills and cater for a wide variety of competitor abilities, whereas National races should have the sole aim of stretching the very best talent the country has. This should limit, if not completely remove, the need for any dispensation system.
- Equipment regulations, and education to riders and parents about them, should be updated to help reduce the cost and barriers to entry (real or perceived) to the sport. Any changes should focus on issues that can be easily understood and checked (for example, wheel depth, numbers of spokes on wheels, size of chainrings / sprockets etc) rather than more complex concepts to explain and administer (for example, construction materials, rollouts etc).
- British Cycling should produce a single, simple, quick guide that covers the whole of youth cycling from getting started at a local level via Go-Ride etc through to competition and the Performance Pathway. This should explain everything that a new rider or parent needs to know in one place (for example, the guide should contain a brief summary of the Performance Pathway followed by the option to download the full Performance Pathway Handbook) and be prominently available on the website.

It is envisaged that the above suggested changes will have a positive and immediate impact on all 3 of the key principles identified through the consultation.

Phase 2 - Develop the pathway from Local to National competition for the 2017 season

The structure of the calendar should be considered with a view to reducing the number of National events with increased time spent on Local / Regional competition, skill development and rest. The exact composition of the calendar should be considered following review and feedback from the changes made in the first phase, but the following broad principles should apply.

- "Local" competition should be for fun with no significant prizes or any mechanism to link the results of multiple races together. Many events should be held across the entire country for riders of all ages and abilities throughout the season with a focus on coach-led racing, and other such initiatives that encourage riders to try new tactics and develop their skills.
- "Regional" competition should facilitate a smooth progression from Local to National competition as riders develop. A small number of events should be held for riders aged 13-14 and upwards at the start of the season acting as qualifiers for the National events. Racing opportunities should also be provided for 11-12 year old riders as an introduction to more competitive racing against a broader pool of athletes.
- "National" competition should aim to identify and stretch the UK's best talent. A very small number of events should be held for riders aged 13-14 and upwards at the end of the season.
- "Other" events should provide variety to the racing calendar and a different perspective on competition; for example Stage Races or Team focussed events. A small number of events should be held at key points in the season and stand on their own merits as individual events outside of National Series / National Rankings etc.

In summary, all National level competition (including National Rankings, National Series and National Championships) should be for riders aged 13-14 and older, and only for the best riders as identified through Regional events with an emphasis on quality over quantity of races. For younger ages, and less talented riders, racing is still encouraged, but only at a Local / Regional level where the enjoyment and development of skills is paramount. This should also minimize the time and cost of travel for all and the perceived need for young riders to purchase expensive equipment, all within a focussed, simple and easy to understand event structure.

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