

## A Single System for Hockey

### Summary of consultation feedback

#### 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Some readers may be familiar with the term Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD). This is a concept based on evidenced research about how young people develop sporting ability. This research has for many years been used to underpin physical education teaching. An England Hockey Working Group has undertaken a two year project to consider whether and/or how adopting the principles of LTAD may be of benefit to hockey in England.
- 1.2 The result of this project was the Single System for Hockey proposals, setting out a long term vision for a consistent, open and transparent system for hockey in England. The Single System proposals were published for consultation at the England Hockey National Roadshows in late February 2006, with a closing date of 31 May 2006. This paper is a summary of the feedback received from the Hockey Family during this consultation.
- 1.3 The Board of England Hockey considered a report on the recent Single System for Hockey consultation at its meeting on 18 July. A statement detailing the Board's decisions at this meeting, considering feedback received during the consultation process and the resulting recommendations made by the Single System Working Group has also been issued and is available to download from the England Hockey website at [www.englandhockey.co.uk](http://www.englandhockey.co.uk)

#### 2. CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 2.1 An initial period of consultation on this project was held in Spring/Summer 2005. This Phase I of the Single System project saw face to face contact with approximately 450 people in group sizes small enough to enable meaningful discussion. The formal Phase I consultation paper was downloaded in excess of 1400 times from the website, and 67 responses were received.
- 2.2 Formal Phase 2 consultation began during the England Hockey Roadshows in February 2006 and the consultation period closed on 31 May 2006. Relevant headline figures are as follows:
  - a. Approximately 450 people attended the 7 National Roadshow meetings
  - b. Approximately 40 additional meetings were held in the Regions with National or Regional England Hockey staff in attendance to discuss Single System proposals. These have been attended by approximately 950 people
  - c. A Single System section of the England Hockey website was established with a high profile home page presence retained throughout the consultation period. Downloads of documents were made as follows:

Full text version of Single System document	1714
Text only version of Single System document	1463
FAQs document	1685
<b>Total</b>	<b>4862</b>
  - d. A print run of 4000 of the Single System for Hockey proposals was also prepared. The document was distributed at the National Roadshows, in the 2006 AGM mailing in late March and at subsequent meetings in the Regions or on request from England Hockey. Approximately 3200 copies were distributed through these routes.

#### 3. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

- 3.1 Feedback was received via meetings and also requested in written form, allowing complete freedom for responses. A total of 280 written responses were received, representing the Hockey Family as follows:

Regions	8
County	16
Clubs	70
Schools	12
Personal view	170
Other	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>280</b>

- 3.2 All written responses were read and considered together with verbal feedback from meetings in order to collate a summary of feedback received. The feedback being qualitative in nature, it was difficult to convert to quantitative figures. However, the issues raised most frequently were:
- a. Restricting juniors from playing in adult competition
  - b. Resourcing in relation to volunteer time, coaches, finance and facilities
  - c. Adopting a 1<sup>st</sup> January age qualification date, particularly for school competition
  - d. Adopting a two cycle season
  - e. Changes to Regional competitions
- 3.3 Given the nature of the feedback from meetings, and with the majority of written feedback representing personal views, it was difficult to establish any clear trends between issues raised and category of respondent, with the following exceptions:
- Restricting juniors from playing in adult competition was an issue raised most frequently by clubs
  - Adopting 1<sup>st</sup> January age qualification was an issue raised principally by schools or school teachers
- 3.4 Feedback from Phase 1 consultation had demonstrated an understanding and acceptance of the underpinning principles of a proposed Single System for Hockey in England and the weaknesses it is intended to address. Based on this feedback, the decision was taken to issue the Single System for Hockey document as a summary of the proposals for consultation. This ensured that the document could be kept to a very accessible/readable length (8 pages), with additional detail and context having been provided throughout the Phase 1 process. Further information and context was provided through an FAQs paper made available as a website download, and through attendance of England Hockey staff at consultation meetings in Phase 2.
- 3.5 It has been evident from the reaction in both meetings and written responses that, notwithstanding the foundation of the Phase 1 process, some respondents felt that further detail may have been desirable within the consultation document to enhance understanding.
- 3.6 In brief summary, the consultation feedback demonstrated an understanding and acceptance of the principles for establishing a Single System for Hockey. Positive acceptance, it appears, of the need for change, but expressing concern regarding the nature of some of the proposed changes and a desire to be convinced that such changes are practical. Further analysis of feedback received is given by subject in the following sections.

#### Principles

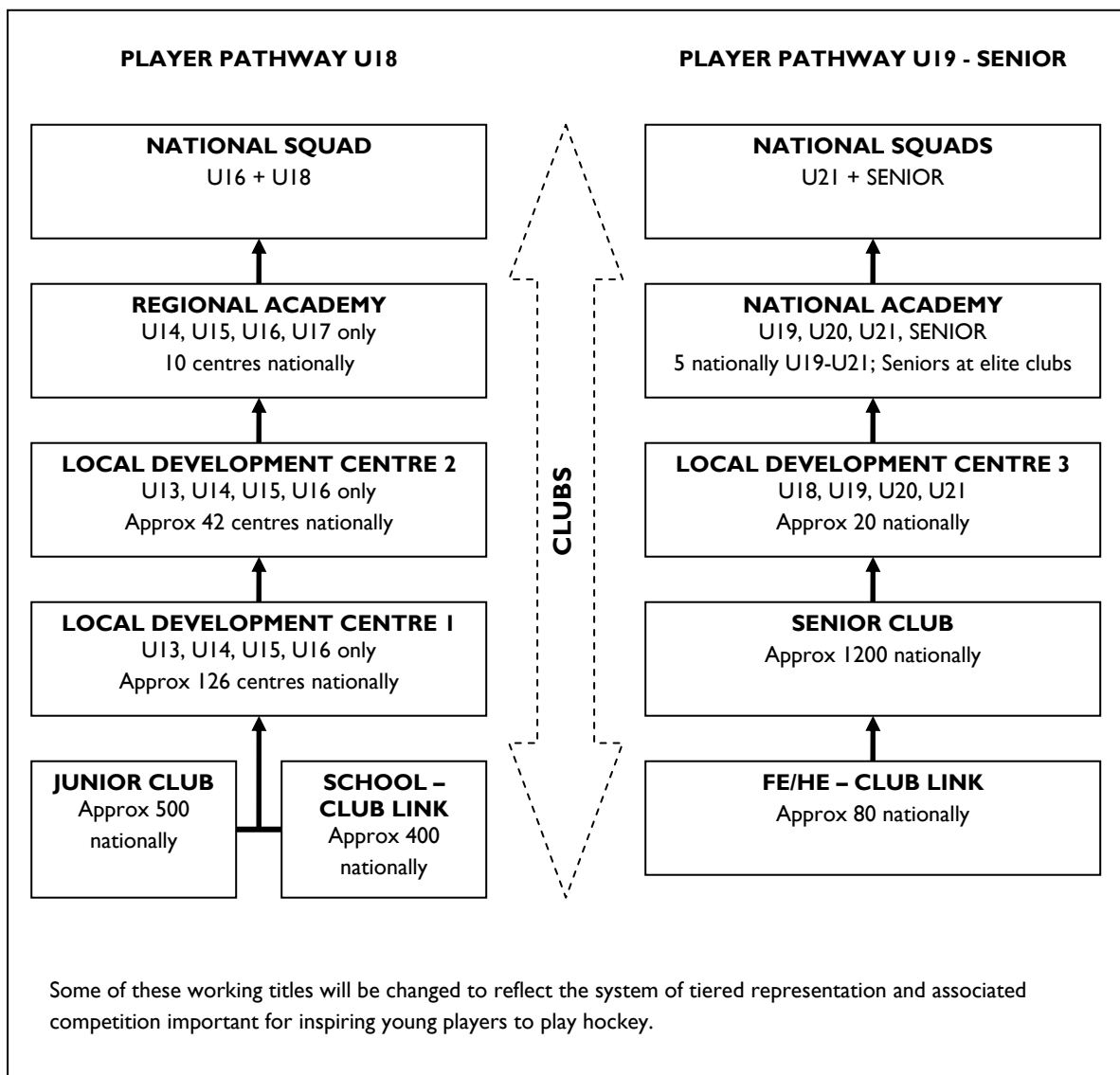
- 3.7 There seems to be general acceptance of the need for change based on the principles of improving consistency, openness and transparency of existing systems. There has been much anecdotal evidence demonstrating a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of the player pathway in certain areas. In the worst instances, this has resulted in a withdrawal of players from county/regional activities. Due to fixture congestion and resulting conflicts, flexibility within talent identification systems has been provided, but in some cases this has negated attempts to create an open and transparent system, with some coaches known to abuse this flexibility.
- 3.8 Despite the potential benefits for increasing participation numbers, some feedback, notably from clubs, suggested that there remains the perception that the development of a Single System is solely performance driven. Concerns expressed by pathway deliverers (counties, regions), in the majority, were based around issues of practicality rather than the acceptance of the need to create a more consistent system. This is considered to be a positive reaction to the proposals.
- 3.9 As a means of promoting consistency and common philosophy, there was negligible concern expressed regarding the proposal to produce a player development syllabus with accompanying talent identification and supporting coaching resources. This too is regarded positively.

#### Player Pathway (Diagram 1)

- 3.10 School club links. This is a concept that has been in operation for some time and is generally supported. Many examples of successful school-club links have been provided in feedback. Concerns expressed included the availability of coaches and the restriction in numbers of clubs to 400, though in practice the target is 400 school club links, with potential for more than 400 clubs to be involved. These comments demonstrate the ongoing challenge of encouraging the Hockey Family to believe that such partnerships are an effective means of developing our sport.

3.11 Local Development Centres. Feedback suggested that these are conceptually accepted as equivalent to existing Active Sports stage 3&4 and pre-county activity. Where adopted and effectively implemented within the player pathway, such activity has proved very effective as an exit route for school based coaching and in supplementing representative county provision. Some concerns expressed suggested a misconception that representative hockey was to be abolished. This was perhaps due to the use of generic terminology in the proposals intended to challenge the traditional view of roles of providers in the existing player pathway. Other concerns expressed related to resourcing, specifically finance, coaches and volunteer time.

**Diagram 1 – Player pathway**



3.12 Regional Academies. Increasing the number of centres, though broadly supported, raised concerns regarding coach availability and resourcing in terms of cost and additional administration required. Providing a high performance assessment environment to reduce reliance on tournaments at younger ages received a mixed response. This is summarised as a broad acceptance of the principles and potential advantages, but a reluctance to part with the tradition of tournaments. Some feedback suggested a misconception that the proposals would deny young players the opportunity to receive representative honours.

- 3.13 National Academies. This proposal was broadly accepted as an appropriate mechanism for the development of elite players. Its potential to facilitate a high performance competition structure for 18-21 age group was also welcomed.
- 3.14 FE/HE club links. Together with reviewing BUSA competition structures, this concept was well received, with respondents acknowledging that 16/18yrs dropout experienced as junior players continue in full time education must be addressed.

#### Structuring and extending the season

- 3.15 The principle of structuring the season to reduce conflicts for young players' time has been well received. The benefits of reviewing structure in terms of talent identification and supporting deselection of players have also been clear. However, significant concern has been expressed regarding the calls on volunteer time by extending the length of the season to ten months. Availability of facilities was also questioned by some respondents.
- 3.16 The potential for competition with other sports, most notably cricket, has also been raised. In some instances this reflected a need to be convinced that a Summer time preparation phase would enable management of individuals to accommodate varying commitments. The prevailing view was that an 'all or nothing' commitment would be required of young people.
- 3.17 Apprehension was also expressed regarding the potential for loss of synchronisation with schools provision as they would be unlikely or unable to adhere to a preparation:competition:rest cycle. Additionally, for young people involved in multiple sports, a lack of synchronisation with competition cycles of other sports may negate the desired effect.

#### Roles and responsibilities

- 3.18 Feedback from schools centred on a perceived lack of clarity on their role in the proposed Single System. Schools, particularly from the independent sector, indicated that they have a vital role to play, especially for boys hockey. The proposal to find mechanisms through which hockey can be better accessed in the state education sector has been well received. It is interesting to note that the independent/state sector representation within junior national age groups squads is changing, with an increasing proportion of state sector educated players, perhaps reflecting the growing commitment to junior development in club hockey.
- 3.19 Feedback from Counties largely considered the process of change, and a desire to understand further the mechanisms by which roles may evolve. Concern was also expressed regarding an increase in workload to establish LDCs. Some respondents indicated that retention of Hockey Development Officers could assist greatly with bringing changes to fruition.

#### Competitions

- 3.20 Feedback regarding proposals for competition centred on four themes: standardisation of the age qualification date to 1<sup>st</sup> January; changes to Regional competitions; withdrawal of junior national competitions; and restricting juniors playing in adult competition.
- 3.21 Feedback received on 1<sup>st</sup> January age qualification was largely from the schools sector. Addressing the practicalities of combining school year groups was the overwhelming concern. Concern was also expressed by counties where a middle school system is in operation, indicating that players in first or final year of middle schools born Sept – Dec could be significantly disadvantaged, or even prevented from playing. Some feedback also suggested a perception that the system would be changed to accommodate a minority of players with the potential to play international age group hockey.
- 3.22 Apprehension regarding changes to Regional Age Group competitions focused on the withdrawal of U14 (boys) and U15 tournaments, with some concern also expressed regarding the implications to the unofficial U13 boys tournament. The incorporation of an U16 tournament in a major school exam year also raised concerns. Though the proposal to provide high performance assessment camps and associated coach development was well received, there is a reluctance to part with the tradition of tournaments.
- 3.23 Proposed changes to competition structures were linked by a number of independent school respondents to a potential loss of support in private schools. Concerns from clubs regarding the withdrawal of national junior competitions at younger age groups has largely focused on the desire to ensure that there are significant events/competitions to which young people can aspire to play.

### Juniors in adult leagues

- 3.24 Understandably, the majority of feedback, particularly from clubs, concerned the proposed restriction of juniors from adult only competition. The majority of concerns were raised on the basis of the following:
- a. Both small clubs and rurally based clubs suggested that they do not have sufficient numbers to run junior only, nor adult only, teams
  - b. That in rural areas the low volume of clubs would make junior competition uncompetitive
  - c. That clubs can and should be trusted to effectively, and sensitively develop juniors alongside adults
  - d. That playing alongside adults allows the most talented players to be stretched in a way that is not considered possible in peer group only competition
  - e. That preventing juniors playing in adult leagues would require withdrawal of senior teams from leagues and subsequent loss of income for clubs and hockey in general
  - f. That for small clubs such a ruling could threaten their very existence, reducing playing opportunities for young people
  - g. That young players enjoy the challenge of playing with and against adults as an opportunity to develop socially and this could be argued as a unique selling point for hockey in comparison with other sports
  - h. That the family values of hockey, enabling parents to play in the same team as their sons/daughters would be lost
- 3.25 Some concerns were also expressed on this issue that do not appear to put the development of the young person first. For example:
- a. Restricting juniors from playing in adult leagues until they reach 15 means only 2-3 years return on a club's investment before losing them to further/higher education
  - b. That losing juniors from adult leagues will result in a drop in playing standards in local adult leagues, in clear contradiction of some respondents' views in 3.24 d above
  - c. That juniors are needed to make up the numbers i.e. ensure that adult teams can run
- 3.26 At a practical level, the ability to implement the proposal has been questioned by clubs: 'How would/could it be policed?' and by some league organisers: 'leagues have sole jurisdiction over their rules'.
- 3.27 In many instances, feedback suggested an understanding of the issues to be addressed i.e. the inappropriate playing of junior players in adult only competition. However, there was clear concern about the potential impact of the proposal. Many also agreed that this practice, though common, naturally favours the more talented and/or physically mature players. As such, it perhaps acts as a disincentive for organising alternative junior activities for juniors not considered capable of playing in adult teams at a young age, contributing to mid-teens dropout.
- 3.28 A number of alternatives suggestions were made:
- Reduce the long term age restriction from U16 to either U15 or U14 as players in U16 age group are considered physically, emotionally and psychologically able to play adult hockey
  - Provide guidelines for assessing whether young players are 'ready' to play in adult only hockey, perhaps to include consultation with parents, coaches and teachers
  - Encourage the growth of 'development team' competition such as existing 'badgers' leagues. These involve teams of mixed adults and juniors playing other like-minded teams, often with specific rules designed to aid the development of young players

## **4. PURPOSE OF CONSULTATION FEEDBACK**

- 4.1 The Board of England Hockey considered a report on the recent Single System for Hockey consultation at its meeting on 18 July 2006. A statement detailing the Board's decisions at this meeting, considering feedback received during the consultation process and the resulting recommendations made by the Single System Working Group has also been issued and is available to download from the England Hockey website at [www.englishockey.co.uk](http://www.englishockey.co.uk)

## **THANK YOU**

England Hockey wishes to express its thanks to all those who have contributed to the Single System for Hockey project and those who engaged in the related consultation processes either through attendance at meetings or by providing written feedback. Much constructive debate regarding the future of hockey in England has been prompted by this consultation process and this is regarded as very healthy for the sport.

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