

**PE1319/B**

**SCOTTISH YOUTH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION**

**CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1319**

Dear Sir,

Please accept the following as the submission for Petition PE1319 on behalf of the Scottish Youth Football Association (SYFA).

**What are your views on the petition and the issues discussed at the meeting on 20 April?**

**General:**

I thank the Public Petitions Committee for allowing this Petition to be considered and I appreciate on behalf of young football players in Scotland the time the committee has allocated. Young people are this country and every other countries greatest asset we disenchant this asset at our nations peril.

The SYFA was formed in May 1999 and is the governing body for grassroots players from age 6 to 21 years of age. SYFA has in membership 6 Regions, 47 leagues, currently 3403 clubs and approximately 40,000 players and 12,000 volunteer officials.

**Point 1:**

I am not qualified to answer the various points of Law contained within the Petition. However I feel that at the age of 10 it is far more important for children to become children gathering social skills and contacts as opposed to embarking on a pseudo career in professional sport. Where the criteria for success is determined years later and where the ability to recommit to growing up and education are possibly long since gone.

A further negative is the number of players trawled from grassroots clubs. When a grassroots club loses a significant number of players and even their coach it puts in jeopardy the future of playing football for the remaining players.

There also needs to be a greater equity in terminating the contract. If a child feels his club or their coaching is not good enough should he also not have a right to terminate the contract? Should any termination and/or exit strategy not be a two way process measured against the player's welfare. This should be an obligation to place the young player back into grassroots football

**Point 2:**

This point is both interesting and crucial as all public funds issued on behalf of taxpayers by Government to any organisation must be fully audited and therefore transparent. Public money against a backdrop of the current credit crunch should not be used as a substitute for monies normally received from other sources but should be there to augment development. An audit should also show that criteria laid down are in fact being achieved. Should the audit not be measuring the development of talent e.g. players to make the first team or young players retained as against the number of players involved at a club.

**Point 3:**

I suggest that no organisation set up and/or controlled by adults should draw up regulations that severely inhibit the development of any child. On the legal front, for which I am not qualified, would a child on reaching adulthood have the ability to investigate a compensation claim against such a regulating body. Could this question again be asked of Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People

**Point 4:**

If compensation payments are supposed to represent training given to young players I ask two simple questions, why should there be any charge levied for training given as clubs receive grants to carry out said training and if payments are deemed to be acceptable why are payments restricted to SFA Full and

Associate member clubs and not all football clubs in Scotland. A compensation payment of £3000 per annum is enough to ensure that a young player may be denied the ability to participate due to a clubs inability to pay. Again the young person suffers.

**Point 5:**

Successive leaders within Scottish education and local authorities have let down generations of young people with their inability to implement 2 hours of quality physical education. How can all concerned now be trusted to increase to a total of 4 hours per week

The knock on effects of obesity, heart disease and alcohol could be arrested by getting kids active at a younger age and would save the enormous drain on the NHS at a later stage. So if health is so important to the nation why do we sell off playing fields?

**Point 6:**

For sport to flourish in Scotland and to achieve Government aims of a healthier nation there needs to be an investment within all sports facilities. The climate has change so it is reasonable to accept that facilities also need to change. I note the initial target regarding facilities within sport 21, did we achieve the target no, the target was then simply amended or deleted when reviewing the document. Two SportsScotland audits highlight an almost £6 billion combined deficit in sports provision to bring facilities up to an acceptable standard not a world leader standard but an acceptable standard. Perhaps the lessons have been learned and we now aim low

Unfortunately the public sector is generally awash with short-termism linked to the possible life span of a councillor therefore denying a long term solution. Selling off of playing fields is a prime example.

**What concerns do you have about the demands and impact (the legal, moral and general as the petition states) this is having on under 16 year olds signing on with professional football clubs?**

I strongly believe that education through the ability to read, the ability to write and the ability to be physically literate are the most important skills we can pass onto our children. Under accepted growth science we only get one chance at attaining these skills. We need to do the right thing at the right time. Under the current demands of initiative football, players are expected to commit to four nights training and attendance on match days. This commitment is sometimes extended to the full family who may all need to help with transport to training and matches. Again if players commit to four nights what affect will this have on their education

I also believe that due to grant money clubs feel they need to have teams irrespective of the availability of talent and ability to have a long term career thus within Scotland we witness the rise of the “jersey filler” We promise kids the world on the way into the system unfortunately kids are being rejected as quickly as they are being recruited. A club has 2 or 3 potential diamonds and therefore need another 16 or so “jersey fillers” to aid their development. Refer to points made about exit strategy.

**What actions need to be taken, when, and by whom?**

I strongly believe that recreational football in Scotland needs to have an input into decisions that affect the movement of players from grassroots football to become players for full and associate member SFA clubs. Volunteers mostly have the interest of children at heart and not merely make decisions that in the first instance affect their personal employment or that of the business interests of their club.

I feel that the Board of the SFA now makes decisions regarding children when only a partial debate has taken place thus reducing full knowledge and understanding. All changes to SFA Registration procedures used to be circulated to all affiliated groups within the Scottish game. This allowed debate

and gave the ability to challenge the more outlandish proposals. This facility has now been removed and all changes are approved on behalf of the clubs by the board.

Players in conjunction with their parents / guardians need to have a greater input into their futures. When registering to play within initiative football a number of years ago players signed a one year contract. The player had to commit to the club for one year although a club could cancel a registration at any time, the players rights were to say the least minimal. Through the current approval system we now have a club with the ability to extend a 15 years olds contract to three years by simply sending a recorded letter.

Look at the elite development path at Bellahouston for hockey, gymnastics etc taking the best away but maintaining their pathway through mainstream education. Sport works around education and not the other way round. Perhaps peer pressure would increase the importance of education and keep the kids on track both physically and in education thus increasing the children's options at the time when clubs decide on their football future.

For clubs the education of the child is secondary. I cannot see anything where the education of the child is paramount. Need football not be an option for academically able kids? There are very few in this country earning enough in the game to last a career never mind a lifetime. Can clubs expect a child to attend training 3/4 nights a week and all day Sunday when the chances of progressing are so slim and the rewards in general are not high enough?

**What evidence do you have as to the ages at which children are entering into registrations/contracts with professional clubs?**

SFA Registration Procedure 2.5.1 states that a player can register for a full or associate member club after having attained their tenth birthday. This procedure also covers restrictions on school activities.

**Registration Procedure 2.5.1**

Registration at age group 14 allows a club should it wish and provided it has conformed with Procedure Rule 2.5.2 to bring the players registration forward to age group 16 for the ensuing season

Registration at age group 14 allows a club should it wish and provided it has conformed with Procedure Rule 2.5.2 to bring the players registration forward to age group 16 for the ensuing and final season upon this form at age group 17.

**Registration Procedure 2.5.2**

Not later than 30<sup>th</sup> June in the playing season of signing at age group 15 the club shall by recorded delivery, advise the Association, the player, his parent(s)/guardian(s) and any other recognised football body where applicable confirming whether a player's registration is to be continued for the following season. This procedure must also be carried out if a club intends to continue a player's registration from age group 16 to 17. Failure to advise the Association in writing will result in a player's registration lapsing

**What is your view on the legality of such registrations/contracts and the stipulations they make on the children concerned?**

I concede that I am no expert in employment Law however I believe that young people should have the ability to self determination complete with the ability to freely move as and when required. I am again not sure of European Law.

I hope the information provided is of assistance to you but should you require additional information please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

David Little, National Secretary, For and on behalf of the Scottish Youth FA