

PE1319/G
Scottish Parliamentary Petition PE1319 Response

Question 1 - Answer

A player participating in the Scottish Football Youth Initiative does not enter into a formal contract with the club for which he plays. Point 2.2.1 of the Association's Registration Procedures state clearly that in order for a player to sign a contract he must have attained school leaving age.

A player participating in the Scottish Football Youth Initiative signs a registration form which binds the player to the club for a specific period of time unless cancelled earlier by the club or by the authority of the Association or, in the case of a 10 or 11 year old, by the player's parents requesting cancellation(Point 2.5.1 of the Registration Procedures).

Registration forms for age groups 10 to 14 are for a maximum of one season and lapse automatically at the end of each season. The registration form at age group 15 can be carried forward by the club into age group 16 and age group 16 can also be taken forward in age 17 by the club(2.5.1 of the Registration Procedures).

The registration form itself requires to be signed by the player, an accredited official of the club, an independent witness and in the case of a player under 16 years of age the signature of the parent/guardian is also required. The club retains a copy of the form, the Association and relevant league of which the club is a member receives the original for registration purposes and the player is provided with a copy.

It clearly states on the reverse of the registration form the length of registration period possible within each age group and the fact that age group 15 can be taken into 16; and 16 into 17 at the club's written request.

It is the Association's position that when a player under 16 years of age signs the registration form, the counter signature of the player's parent/guardian, as an adult with full legal capacity, deems acceptance of the legality of the form and the rights and obligations of all parties to the registration.

Question 2 - Answer

The Scottish Football Youth Initiative Programme is a formal partnership between the Scottish Football Association, Scottish Premier League and Scottish Football League. Clubs participating in the Programme are streamed into a two-tier structure on the basis of pre-determined "Performance" and "Initiative" level criteria. Such criteria includes staffing, coaching and sports science, training provision, child protection, player education and welfare, facilities, medical provision, scouting and recruitment, administration and financial management.

Every club participating within the Scottish Football Youth Initiative is subject to the rigorous audit of all specified "Performance" or "Initiative" criteria by appropriately trained auditors, in accordance with the terms agreed by the Association's Board of Directors.

The payment of youth grant support to clubs participating in the Scottish Football Youth Initiative, which is itself an item audited under the terms of financial management criteria, is determined by the Association's Board upon verification of standards and participation levels.

Following the introduction of the “criteria-driven” approach in season 2005/6, a total of 208 formal “Performance” and “Initiative” criteria audits have been conducted by the Association’s administration at clubs participating in the Programme. Additionally, in this season alone, a total of 237 monitoring visits have been carried out with participating clubs to assess and evaluate the quality of youth development work being delivered within the programme.

Question 3 – Answer

In order to have the players who have been identified for “elite” talent development playing against players of a comparable standard only those who play in the Performance level of the Scottish Football Youth Initiative (at Under 13, Under 14, Under 15 and Under 16/17 Age Group) have a restriction that prevents them from playing for other teams. This amounts to 39% of the players involved in the Scottish Football Youth Initiative and is a restriction on 0.36% of the school population from involvement in recreational or school teams.

Minimally these players train 3 times per week and play one match. This allows assessment of their physical development in a structured environment. It helps avoid some of the over-playing injuries that were hitherto more commonplace in youngsters who were turning out for two, three or even four teams a week in competitive matches prior to the introduction of the Scottish Football Youth Initiative. Being at professional clubs benefits the young players socially, educationally and psychologically in a way that schools and recreational clubs cannot deliver. The professional clubs have Educational Welfare Officers that can help deal with any school issues.

Question 4 – Answer

There is not a transfer system in operation for the movement of players under 16 between clubs in the Scottish Football Youth Initiative.

However, there is a mechanism employed by the Scottish Premier League and the Scottish Football League whereby a club within the Scottish Football Youth Initiative, providing it has followed certain end of season procedures, may be entitled to a contribution to the costs of training and development of the player at the expiry of his registration for the time he had been registered with the club on a youth form.

A club is only entitled to this reimbursement if it has shown a commitment to the player in question by offering him a further term of re-engagement (registration) prior to the expiry of his existing registration. If no offer is made the player may sign for whoever he wishes with no reimbursement of training costs payable to his previous club.

This system is not in place to prevent a player moving clubs at the end of his registration, as he is clearly free to do so. It is there to encourage clubs to remain committed to operating youth academies to train, educate and develop young talent in the hope that these players will eventually graduate to first team football and, thereafter, aspire to international football.

In an ideal world there would be no “on cost” for the training and development of players if they wish to move on. However, the clubs invest significant sums of money in the training and development of youth players, more than is disbursed to them by the incentive schemes. In order to encourage them to continue to be active in youth development it is considered appropriate by the Leagues that their clubs receive a development contribution to partly offset the considerable outlay/ investment made towards the development of a youth player.

The current system allows this to happen to the benefit, not the detriment, of the youth players under the banner of the Scottish Football Youth Initiative.

Question 5 - Answer

The Association agrees with the point that the educational target should be increased from two hours to four hours of curricular physical activity per week. We are actively working with Local Authorities on programmes that will help them reach and exceed the two hours target. However, curricular activity resides within the authority of the education system managed by schools, Local Authorities and Government.

Question 6 – Answer

The Association agrees with the need for a long-term plan to build high quality artificial “3rd Generation” synthetic surfaces. The Association has conducted many research visits to our European football neighbours (e.g. Norway, Denmark and Sweden) and fully understands the returns to be gained in terms of increased participation as well as player and community club development.

To further support this opinion, the Association engaged “Genesis” management consultants to develop a long-term football facilities strategy for Scotland. After consulting many of the key stakeholders across football, as well as Sportscotland and many local authority partners, the strategy was completed in late 2006. To take the recommendations forward and a request for a new “£100m National Development Fund” to help deliver the build projects over the next ten years, the Association’s senior management met with the then First Minister, Jack McConnell (pre May 2007 election) and First Minister Alex Salmond in 2007 (post May 2007 election). This strategy, which contained, inter alia, a desire to build 200 new synthetic pitches and 60 new community hubs over the next 10 years, was subsequently rejected due to a lack of public funds.

Since we were advised that there were no national funds to deliver the football facilities strategy, the Association has, where possible, proactively sought to work with local authority partners in the development of their own individual pitch and sports strategies. This work is carried out by our 6 Scottish FA Regions. We can point to many instances where we are supporting local authority partners and clubs in the development and delivery of high quality artificial surfaces and long term pitch strategies.

The Association also welcomed the recent recommendations from the Henry McLeish Report which highlighted the requirement for an urgent improvement in the facility estate via new building projects and better access agreements to existing facilities in schools. We also welcome his recognition that the responsibility of delivering the improvements rest primarily with central and local government. As with our 2006 report and the many other strategies which exist at local authority level or with other sports, the key issue is not the development or updating of these strategies and plans but the financial mechanism and political will to implement them.

General

The Public Petitions Committee will be aware of the recent publication of the Report by Henry McLeish which focuses on the Grassroots development of the game of football in Scotland. The Association’s Board is actively reviewing and discussing the content. The Report contains 53 Recommendations and the Board has already decided to adopt a number of these. We are presently reviewing elements of the Elite Player Pathway of which the Scottish Football Youth Initiative is a key aspect and will be examining further the points raised within Petition 1319.