

*Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2016*

Convenor Michael McMahon,  
Public Petitions Committee  
Scottish Parliament  
Holyrood  
Edinburgh

Dear Michael,

**PE1319 – Improving Youth Football**

The petitioners broadly welcome the content of Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People response to the letter he received from the Scottish FA & Scottish Premier Football League on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2015.

We believe that the Commissioner has recognised as we have that professional football clubs in this country are simply not prepared to embrace fully the changes that are necessary to ensure that children's rights supersede the commercial interests of private limited companies.

These organisations and their member clubs have over many years now introduced changes to rules and regulations that have deliberately diluted not only the fundamental protection of children's rights under the law but have demonstrated a complete disregard for any employment laws that effect companies in all other industries.

Given this stark refusal it appears to us that the serious efforts the commissioner has made to encourage proper and worthwhile engagement in the hope clubs would address the issues has sadly failed hence we fully support his view that the Government must take measures immediately to regulate these organisations and prohibit in law controls over young people that would not be permissible in any other walk of life.

The commissioner also in his response does make reference to the fact that the SFA/SPFL engaged with some young players in membership of their clubs to seek their views however you will have noted from our previous submission on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2016 that we pointed out that those individuals that took part represented just under 7% of the children currently in the system. No views were sought from the many hundreds of children who were left devastated by rejection by these clubs.

This is borne out by an article in the Daily Record of Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> November 2015 where a very experienced former Scottish internationalist Jim McNally now manager of Peterhead FC who highlights the cases of youngsters slipping into depression. The headline was 'Ex-Scotland and Dundee United ace Jim McNally hits out: Pro-youth system is driving our kids to suicide, the article can be viewed by following this link: <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/sport/football/ex-scotland-dundee-united-ace-6820756>

A quote in the same article illustrates the help that Mr McNally gave to a young player called David Cox as he battled depression after having been released as a youngster by Kilmarnock FC.

Realgrassroots remain firmly convinced that our young players remain exposed to unnecessary abuses by football clubs and support the Commissioner's call for independent regulation.

We believe that young players (and their parents) have the absolute right to freely choose whether to participate in schools football. There should be no caveat available to clubs to exploit. This is a young person's education and formative years and there should be no interference from football clubs.

No young player should be denied opportunities and options, therefore the retention of a rule which allows clubs to shackle a youngster for a term of three years is abhorrent.

We would seek an alternative to the current compensation system which has been referred to as a Children's Transfer Market. It is incomprehensible that a player can sign and be registered for one year at 11 years of age and should he choose to leave that club AND compensation is not paid he can be frozen out of the Club Academy Scotland system for the next 8 years!

Could consideration be given to instituting a system whereby compensation is awarded at the point a young player first becomes professional? Thus we reward clubs for nurturing success.

Realgrassroots appreciate the cross party support from MSPs who spoke at the recent parliamentary debate sponsored by MSP Chic Brodie. Not only did we witness condemnation of practices highlighted throughout the petition but members were appalled some of our professional clubs were failing to pay even the Minimum Wage. We hold evidence of a professional contract that afforded a 16 year old the paltry sum of £1 per week. A copy can be made available to Committee members on request.

Yours faithfully,

**William Smith**  
(On behalf of the Realgrassroots team)

**Scott Robertson**