

## **PE1319/MMM**

Scottish Youth Football Association Letter of 4 August 2016

### **PETITION PE1319**

I acknowledge your correspondence dated 1 July 2016 and thank you for giving the Scottish Youth Football Association (SYFA) the opportunity to make a submission on the future of Scottish Football.

#### **General Points**

SYFA governs Scottish grassroots football at youth level and has 7 regions, 39 leagues, approximately 3,300 member clubs, approximately 14,000 volunteers and 60,000 registered players.

All Scottish players will play within SYFA, with some moving to Club Academy Scotland (CAS) member clubs. I note current thinking within the game that there are too many clubs in CAS and as such wish to reduce playing levels down to 1,000 players. This cull of players will need to be managed to keep the 2,000 players in sport. We await further discussion with the Scottish FA regarding reporting of said players,

#### **Scottish FA and SPFL document "*Improving Youth Football in Scotland*"**

I would comment on the recommendations as follows:

- Recommendations 1 - 3

The second paragraph highlights "*examples of good work done by clubs*". If this is an accurate statement it should become the standard and enshrined within CAS Policies and Procedures.

The appointment of chaplain Mark Fleming is a positive move, albeit he accepts that there are issues for players raising concerns by referring issues to clubs e.g. mental health,

The survey is fundamentally flawed re the target audience by speaking to players only within CAS and not players who have left CAS. So this creates a conflict of interest and is skewed in favour of a specific set of outcomes.

- Recommendations 4 - 7

One club states they will introduce parental and child participation in developing effective policies via parent and player forums. Similar to above this should be enshrined within CAS Policies and Procedures,

- Recommendations 5 - 7

*"Currently 56% of players commented that their club explained to them and their parents/carers what signing the registration form meant". This by inference means 44% of clubs neglected to inform players, denying pertinent information to allow parents/carers to make the best decision on behalf of their child.*

- Recommendation 8

SYFA at our Annual General Meeting have reduced the 28 days to 7 days from receipt of notice. A good move for children and young people who only want to play football for fun.

In paragraph 3 reference is made of "*mutual consent or for exceptional reasons such as breach of discipline/code of conduct etc.*" This needs careful monitoring to ensure situations involving young players are not engineered.

- Recommendation 9

The standard pack must have a sign off form and be written in child friendly terminology as potential recruits only see the club signing form and not the regulations within any pack. Players will not read a long pack but simply ask "where do we sign?"

If Scottish academies are fewer in number but with higher standards, young players might stay where they are and not be poached by others, north or south of the border.

I acknowledge the positive measure of equal playing time, a theory stated by former national manager Craig Brown in 1999.

- Recommendation 10

I strongly agree but the decision should be taken by players and parents/carers without a fear of sanction. I refer to my comment at recommendation 8.

- Recommendation 11

Bullet point 1 turns young people into tradeable commodities and needs careful scrutiny by the Petitions Committee.

Bullet point 3: we await the necessary report from the Scottish FA to allow this to take place.

If there must be training costs they must be policed and enforced. During an early hearing of the petition Chris McCourt, Celtic FC and Jim Sinclair, Rangers FC gave evidence of a breach of protocol resulting in a bidding war that reached allegedly £30,000, What was done about this evidence by the SPFL?

- Recommendations 12 - 13

The "*complaints/mediation mechanism*" is again fundamentally flawed due to the makeup of this new body e.g. clubs ruling on other clubs and CAS administration staff employed to operate the mechanism. The body is to have any gravitas it must be completely independent, therefore, removing any potential for a conflict of interest.

## **Points 1 and 4 of the Petition**

### **Point 1**

Children and young people are Scotland's greatest asset and must be treated accordingly. Currently the contracts are one sided in favour of clubs to overcome a lack of trust between said clubs.

Contracts are not needed but if they are required by SF A they need to be restricted to actual elite players. Less than 1 % of young people become professional players so what is in place for the "jersey fillers"? I believe all young people need to be treated with respect and complete honesty.

If the main reason for Scottish contracts is to stop our young players being given the freedom of movement to other clubs or clubs in England this must be a breach of children's human rights. I am not qualified legally but can only raise the concern with wiser informed people. I believe we no longer put young children in Scotland up chimneys.

### **Point 4**

Compensation turns young people into tradeable commodities. If regulation is agreed who will police the system? The clubs; I think not.

The removal of regulation of agents increases the likelihood of rogue traders with no regard for the welfare of young people. Their ethos is making profit irrespective of the aspirations of young potential elite players. I recommend reading **The Secret Agent: Inside the World of the Football Agent by Anonymous (published by Arena Sport)**. This in itself is a dangerous indictment of young people's welfare within our national game.

In closing I hope the views expressed are helpful and further offer a truly thought out process to increase the welfare and safeguarding of young players in elite level football. We must all act in a child centric fashion on behalf of the most important people within youth football, namely the players.

Yours sincerely

David Little

Chief Executive