

PE1319/QQQ

Realgrassroots Letter of 18 December 2016

In January the Realgrassroots campaign will reach a land mark seven years since launching the Public Petition. This brings us to one of the oldest running petitions ever to sit at the Scottish Parliament.

We look forward to the evidence sessions the Committee hare about to engage in and we hope that the Scottish Schools FA, Scottish Youth FA, the PFA and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People will provide a useful insight into the state of the nation's game.

The Scottish FA, SPFL and indeed the Scottish Government have recently made much of the progress that has been achieved in recent months. It has been declared that the clubs are making improvements and the changes voted through are encouraging.

However, let's take a long hard look at the progress. It has taken 7 years of drive by the petitioners, 7 years of meetings, questions, letters and interrogation by the various members of the Public Petitions Committee and countless radio, TV and press articles to drag the clubs that effectively run Scottish football to where we are now. They did not come along with any great enthusiasm or haste. Indeed one might suggest they have been pressured and dragged screaming like some petulant teenager. 7 years to over-turn a rule that prohibited children from playing schools football should not be something to proud of.

It has not been lost that even after 7 years we still have youngsters who are only 15 years old (minors) are at the mercy of clubs when they 'register' for one season. They can be forced into a further two years with the signing club. And they tell us that's not a contract!

We have a compensation system that allows children as young as 11 years to be turned into a commodity. Now although that player may return to the recreational game, why should he if he is a talented player. Failure to pay compensation could mean that player not returning to professional football until the age of 23!

We have clubs that still operate out with the law of the land. Breaches of the Minimum Wage legislation have surfaced recently and there are more.

Our clubs have changed the rules to throw out the concept of 'strict liability'. The shameful scenes at Hampden after the Scottish Cup final have gone not only unpunished, but not investigated as the clubs take no responsibility for their fans behaviour.

The SPFL lawyers have produced documents for their member clubs to advise on how to 'get-a-round' Minimum Wage and even suggest that the club lobby Government to change the law.

The veil of respectability that clubs try to throw over their conduct is shameful.

Finally, we remind the Committee that in the 20 years of Pro-Youth, Initiative football or Club Academy Scotland our national team has failed to qualify for a major tournament. We really do have to ask was it worth it, well I suppose some clubs made some money from the compensation system so it must have been!