

## **PE1319/FFFF**

Petitioners submission of 19 January 2021

Thank you for email dated 13 January 2021. We, the Petitioners, are pleased to learn that the Committee will be reviewing our long-standing petition once again. The meeting, scheduled for 27 January 2021, is a significant date in that it will represent one full year since the Scottish FA Chief Executive Ian Maxwell and his colleague Alyson Evans gave evidence at a meeting of the Public Petitions Committee in January 2020. It also marks nearly eleven years since the petition was first launched in February 2010.

By way of reminder, at the meeting of the Committee in January 2020, Mr Maxwell stated that *'I would like to state that in relation to registration of players from age 15 playing as part of the club academy Scotland programme, I have established a working party, which includes representation from all CAS levels, to look specifically at the registration rules in relation to 15, 16 and 17-year-olds. The first meeting will take place on 26 February and representatives will question whether, in 2020, the current regulation is viable or whether, with the best of intentions, it is a rarely used rule that carries negative consequences for young people and should be revisited.'*

The petitioners seek to gain details of the outcome of the aforementioned meeting on 26 February and the findings of the working group which should have taken place eleven months ago (and prior to any Coronavirus disruption). It is our assertion that eleven months is sufficient time for any outcomes to have been implemented by the Scottish FA and for changes to be made. Although Mr Maxwell stated in January 2020 that *'that children's wellbeing is central to our work at the Scottish Football Association'* it would appear that no recent changes have been made and protecting children's rights continues to fall to the bottom of the list of priorities for the Scottish Football Association.

Furthermore, the Committee published their final report on the petition in June 2020. The recommendations within the report were irrevocably clear – the Scottish FA must change the rules surrounding professional youth football registration so that compensation is only due after a player registers as a professional. The Report also states that the three-year rolling registration must be abolished and replaced with the one-year registration used in age groups 10 to 14. If the Scottish FA fails to implement these recommendations, then legislation must be introduced to ensure that these recommendations are not ignored for any longer. We ask – what progress have the Scottish FA made since June 2020 to implement the Committee's recommendations? It is worth noting that these recommendations are not new concepts and have been suggested in 2015 by former Children's Commissioner Tam Bailie, by the Health and Sport Committee in 2017 and countless times in letters and evidence from the Petitioners during the Petition.

The Committee's support in this Petition has been invaluable and the recommendations are condemning. The recommendations and the Petition received cross-party support during a debate in the main chamber on 19 November 2020. It was made abundantly clear by all MSPs who spoke during the debate that the current rules and regulations which adversely affect young players must be changed and without delay. It appears that almost all of the organisations who have been

involved in this petition are in agreement that implementing the Committee's recommendations is the only way to ensure that children's human rights are upheld and protected.

After months of inaction and silence on the part of the Scottish FA, the Petitioners took it upon ourselves to write to Mr. Maxwell at the Scottish FA on 8 October 2020 to ask what progress has been made since Mr Maxwell's promises in front of the Committee in January 2020 and the publication of the Report in June 2020. As of 18 January 2021, we have received no acknowledge or response. Furthermore, on 6 December 2020, the Petitioners wrote to the Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing, Joe Fitzpatrick, and highlighted the depth of feeling across the political spectrum. We echoed the calls made by a broad range of MSP's that the Minister should use whatever leverage he has at his disposal to ensure the football authorities act swiftly. We have not received a response although we recognise that Mr Fitzpatrick shortly left his position. We are disappointed that the Scottish Government are yet to take decisive action on this issue.

Despite the backing of the Public Petitions Committee, support from multiple MSPs from all main Scottish political parties, eleven years' worth of evidence, support from the Children's Commissioner's Office (current and previous), evidence from legal experts during the petition and many other sources, we are no further forward in ensuring that these unlawful rules are changed. The Scottish FA have refused, through their inaction and omissions, to take meaningful action or implement the recommendations of the Committee's Report. We recognise that 2020 was a challenging year for people in all sectors of the country. However, we hope that the Scottish FA do not use the pandemic as a means to justify their unwillingness to protect children's rights. This petition has been pursued for eleven years and to quote the Committee "time is up." Scottish Football has received taxpayers' financial support during the pandemic and have regularly held meetings of the clubs through virtual means to vote on issues such as postponing the league. We hope that the Scottish FA agree that children's rights should be an absolute priority and use of innovative means, such as those used by the Scottish FA on other issues, should have been used to implement the findings of the Committee during the pandemic. It is appalling that children's rights continue to be low priority at the Scottish FA despite the attention which they often give to other areas of the organisation and are vocal about in the press. The Scottish Government must now step in to ensure that imminent action is taken, and that children's rights stop falling through the net at the hands of the Scottish FA.