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FUTURE OF JUNIORS PLAYING IN OPEN ADULT HOCKEY BOARD DECISIONS - MAY 2007

The England Hockey Board considered a detailed report on the recent Club Survey on the Single System Recommendation Regarding Juniors Playing in Open Adult Leagues at its meeting on 8 May 2007.

The survey was distributed in hard copy to all club general / administration contacts as provided by clubs in their 2006 / 07 affiliation information. A further letter advising of the survey's distribution, together with a copy of the survey covering letter itself, was also sent to clubs' development (junior) contacts to raise awareness. The survey was distributed on 13 March 2007 with a return deadline of 11 April 2007.

244 surveys were returned, representing a 23.3% response rate. The Board was pleased that a sufficient number of clubs had been able to respond to make the data meaningful. Using the criteria of club type (men only, women only, joint, mixed); club size (defined by EH AGM voting rights) and geographical spread (hockey region) the Board agreed that the data returned was a representative sample of the whole club population. Attempts to assess urban / rural location as a factor proved impractical as the only objective definition that could be identified, from the Office of National Statistics (ONS), proved unsuitable for this purpose.

The Board would like to record their thanks to all clubs who took the time to return the survey. The returns provided excellent qualitative and quantitative data which was used to influence the Board's decisions regarding the issue of young people playing in open adult competition.

Summary of Board Decisions.../



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Following consideration of the findings of the clubs survey, the Board decisions in relation to juniors playing in open adult leagues are summarised as follows:

1. The Board maintains that the principle of restricting juniors from playing in open adult hockey is an appropriate policy for our sport. Its primary concern in reaffirming this position is for the development, quality of experience, welfare and safety of young people in hockey.
2. The decision taken in July 2006 to restrict U13s from adult hockey from season 2007/8 will remain. U13s defined as being under 13 years of age on 1 January 2008* (see notes on page 6 of this document).
3. There will at this point be no further restriction to young people playing in open adult hockey. A decision on whether to further restrict young people (U15s and/or U14s) from playing in open adult competition will be considered after the conclusion of the 2009-10 season. This will not affect current restrictions to Slazenger England Hockey League participation, which will remain in place** (see notes on page 6 of this document).

Between now and the conclusion of the 2009-10 season, England Hockey will work with regional and county associations, clubs, league organisers and other agencies as appropriate to develop enhanced networks of junior competition. This is intended to provide further alternative competitive opportunities for young people in hockey.

The timeline applied to this Board decision is subject to any revisions made necessary by changes to relevant legislation, conditions of insurance or other similar external factors beyond England Hockey's control.

Key points from Club Survey.../

KEY POINTS FROM CLUB SURVEY

The Board would like readers to note the following key points drawn from the clubs survey and related research which influenced the decisions taken.

1. Based on the 23.3% survey return data, there are an estimated 9550 U15 players currently playing hockey in open adult competition, representing approximately 11% of all players involved in this type of competition. Only 1.4% i.e. 1163 of these players are U13, or approximately 1 per club, though such an average is not meaningful due to the varying practice employed by clubs in playing U13s.

Survey returns – number of players in open adult competition (clubs responding to survey = 244)

	Adults	U16-U18	U15	U14	U13	Totals
Men	7757	1910	625	290	107	10689
Women	5642	1596	640	370	162	8410
Mixed	802	115	26	4	2	949
TOTAL	14201	3621	1291	664	271	20048
% of all players	70.8	18.0	6.5	3.3	1.4	
Estimated forecast to whole club population	60922	15534	5538	2849	1163	86006
Estimated U15s			5538	2849	1163	9550

The survey data suggests that there are proportionally more girls aged U13 to U15 included in women's teams (13.9%) than boys of the same age groups in men's teams (9.6%). This may reflect the tendency for girls to mature physically earlier than boys and/or greater provision of formalised beaver/badger activity for boys.

2. Based on the 163 returns received to section D of the survey (other information):
 - Only 20% of respondents used formal (written) guidance for the organisation or welfare of teams defined by the respondent as a development team. That is a team including juniors playing in open adult competition. Some 44% of respondents use no guidance at all
 - 58% of respondents indicated that they would consider playing development teams currently playing in open adult competition in specifically organised development competition, though 31% would not
 - 40% of respondents would stipulate a maximum travelling distance or journey time as a condition of participation in development competitions
 - 25% of responses indicated a likely consequence of restrictions on junior players to be a loss of teams

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3. For the survey data returned, junior only training or junior only competition across boys, girls and mixed and all age groups to U18 in season 2006-7:
 - 25% were offered no competitive matches and 35% offered no tournament/festival opportunities in the course of season 2006/7
 - 48% were offered 5 matches or less and 88% offered 5 or less tournament/festival opportunities
 - the survey data also showed that 40% of players receiving junior training in the combined U13, U14 and U15 age categories are not included in adult matches through either open adult leagues or development (beavers/badgers) competition. As such, the competitive opportunities available to these players are in junior teams only

This demonstrates that there are many youngsters who never, or very rarely, have an opportunity to play in competitive games. In recognising this the Board also noted that this may be caused by lack of organised opportunities and in some cases resources such as pitch availability, transport, volunteer, parent, and coach availability.

4. Data provided by those returning the survey enabled an impact assessment to be made, calculating potential loss of teams if further restrictions were applied, and alternative competition opportunities had not been put in place. A 'worst case scenario' methodology was applied for each team in isolation, meaning an assessment of its ability to continue was based upon the numbers of U14 and U15 players playing and the size of the squad. In practice, many clubs would be able to combine squads of players between teams to enable teams to continue, though it is acknowledged that differing playing standards, size of club and travelling distances are factors affecting this. For absolute transparency, however, a more conservative 'worst case scenario' methodology was used, ignoring the probability that clubs could potentially combine squads of players from different teams. Using this approach, based on the survey data, applying a required squad size of 13 or more and using a theoretical restriction on U14 players, a forecast to the whole club population would currently see an 18% reduction in teams assuming no alternative forms of competition. This is clearly something all in the sport wish to avoid.
5. For those clubs running two teams or less (**40% of affiliated clubs**), the number of young players and/or the age profile of the young players would make it challenging for the clubs to provide appropriate competition without either the involvement of adults or combining resources with neighbouring clubs in a similar position.

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6. Comments were noted that for some youngsters, who are physically, mentally and emotionally mature also possessing the hockey ability to play an equal part in a game with adults, the experience could be rewarding and beneficial. However, for many youngsters this is not the case. They are not sufficiently mature to play a full part in games; they have less pitch time than the adults; they need to be played in positions where their contribution does not undermine the quality of the game. They may be included because of a lack of alternative junior competitive opportunities or insufficient numbers for the club to run a junior team. For many of these youngsters playing in adult hockey is neither always appropriate nor rewarding and the experience may well hamper their development or cause them to drift away from the game.
7. In the wider sporting context, insurers and other agencies are increasing demands on all sports to demonstrate that they are fulfilling their duty of care to young people. A number of other sports already impose restrictions on young people participating in adult competition: Scottish hockey (U14); football (U15 moving to U16); lacrosse (U16); rugby (U18)
8. The survey data demonstrated a number of underlying challenges to hockey in providing young people with appropriate opportunities to participate and compete. This is a complex issue and solutions must be found to a number of challenges:
 - The apparent dearth of competitive opportunities for young players resulting in some junior participants playing very few matches
 - Ensuring that competitive experiences and development opportunities are appropriate for young people
 - The potential impact on clubs of increasing age restrictions
 - The challenges to those clubs running a small number of teams
 - The rising standards expected of voluntary organisations in their provision of opportunities for young people
9. While recognising that in addressing the challenges described in point 8 there may be an initial small reduction in the number of teams playing in adult leagues the aim of the Board is to enable more young people to participate fully in our sport resulting in a longer term increase in the number of young people and teams playing hockey in England.

Thanks again to all clubs who replied – you have played an important role in influencing key decisions! England Hockey looks forward to continuing to work with the Hockey Family for the further development of our sport.

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Notes

* Note for restriction on U13s - For absolute clarity, this restriction is not intended to apply to the practice of mixing junior and adult players in formalised matches where these are specifically organised to ensure that the primary purpose is the development of the junior players. Such matches are often referred to as beavers / badgers / vixens / fathoms, and no affiliation fee is currently payable to England Hockey for these teams. However, due consideration should be given, on an individual basis, to the inclusion of junior players in such matches to ensure that it is appropriate to do so. Factors considered might include physical and psychological maturity, age, playing ability and social skills.

** In the Slazenger England Hockey League (EHL) the rule introduced in 2006-7 will continue i.e. a player must have reached the age of 15 to be eligible to be registered to play in the EHL

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