

COUNCIL REPORT MARCH 2021

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Phil Harding, Chair for 2020/21, opened the meeting by welcoming all Members. In his opening remarks, the Chair commended the ESFA's outgoing FDM, Andy Weston, for his dedication and resilience, with Council Members adding their own recognition of Andy's work. The Chair reminded Members of the future national archiving project and of the "Forget-me-not" sponsored walk fundraiser being organised by the ESFA's Associate Charity, Grief Encounter, whose work to support bereaved children was even more important now than ever. Several Council Members and staff were walking in remembrance of ESFA colleagues lost in recent times.

Members went on to reflect further on the Player Passport and on the final implementation arrangements for season 21/22. Members were reminded that the fee did not have to be borne personally by parents, and that schools – confirmed by Heads serving on Council – may wish to support their talented players by covering the fee. Council's unanimous views about the future of the Player Passport scheme are presented overleaf.

Council heard that Rep Committee had agreed in principle (subject to FA guidance on the resumption of football) to a fixture for last season's U15 international girls' team against Wales, when caps could also be presented. Similar discussions for the U18 boys were underway. Council fully supported the recommendation of the Committee to vote against a proposal to SAFIB to lower the age at which boys would be eligible for selection. Members also heard of a proposal to change the format of the Bob Docherty competition, which was to be assessed for affordability by the Trustees before an ESFA position was confirmed. Finally, Members had received the routine report on Associations which remained unaffiliated, and of the work of the NCWOs to pursue compliance so that suspensions could be lifted.

Feedback from the Competitions Committee included the publication of the draws for the 20/21 rep football competitions, again subject to FA guidance, and the possibility of an outdoor summer Deaf Schools' Trophy. Committee Members had also reviewed the principles for the draws of the new Champions Cups. The PR campaigns for PlayStation and Danone were reported: the ESFA had committed to supporting these to the fullest extent, to compensate for the lack of football. Members were also informed that Schools' Football Week would now take place at the end of May, rather than the usual time in February, with a focus on well-being, participation and fun, rather than competitive football.

Council heard from that the Association Development Committee that the position of the Crown Dependencies would be given further consideration in order to conclude the Association Restructure process, and that discussion about the JPL and its impact on schools' football were ongoing. The final version of the referee appointment policy was shared with Council.

Trustees fed back on the work of the Commercial Director and on the negotiations to renew sponsorship contracts due to conclude this summer. A report on the work carried out to support sponsors was also provided. Members heard of the payments to CSFAs arising from the Association restructure programme, and that information about the activities being undertaken by Administrators was being sought, as furlough had affected some services. Trustees confirmed that the ESFA staff redundancy programme had now reached a conclusion, and the new staff structure approved. This included the creation of a new Governance Manager post, for which specific additional funding had been granted from The FA. The opportunity to re-name some posts had also been taken, but these were titular only with no changes to terms and conditions. Council Members were encouraged to seek expressions of interest from Members in the vacant Honorary Auditor post.

Members gave consideration to the format of future Council meetings, noting both the benefits and disadvantages of online meetings, and concluded that a combination of online and in-person meetings would be the most effective overall.

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking Members for their contribution to the discussions.

STATEMENT FROM COUNCIL

At its meeting on Saturday 13th March, Council discussed at length and gave careful consideration to ongoing feedback from Membership to the introduction of the Player Passport Scheme and Champions League competitions in Season 2021-22.

Council often has to balance diverse perspectives and inevitably there have been views expressed on the Player Passport / Champions League scheme ranging from total support expressed by many to forcefully expressed opposition from others. In recognising the right for those views to be held, the fundamental responsibility of Trustees and Council is to ensure that the ESFA continues to provide the best possible opportunities for young people at school, district, county and international levels – and to do so within the financial resources available. We have held 29 roadshows, feedback meetings for districts and counties, and met with the secretaries of the four regions. This has been by far the most open and democratic exercise undertaken by the ESFA, and many more colleagues have been involved than ever attend our AGM. Constructive suggestions to improve the scheme have been built into it wherever possible, and we will continue to work with the regions to co-ordinate fixture programmes.

We have also set up a Working Group of volunteers from Membership to work with us as we move forward, initially in advising us on the distribution of grants to districts and counties. They will also be invited to be part of the review process at the end of next season to inform our decision-making for subsequent seasons.

We have been delighted by the positive responses from Membership: enthusiastic volunteers, many from the younger generation of teachers who we need to encourage and who are actively planning to run more teams. They have welcomed the opportunity to have an enhanced programme of fixtures and, crucially, to offer a better-quality product that will counter the attractions of club-based leagues.

The solutions of the past are no longer suitable to address the issues of the present. Moreover, we have gone beyond the philosophical discussion about whether people think a payment scheme is acceptable, and now we all need to work together to ensure the continuation of inter-district and inter-county national competitions.

The decisions we have taken to secure the future of schools' representative football, and to make it diverse and inclusive are the correct ones and in line with the ESFA's Mission Statement and Constitution. **Without Player Passport / Champions Cup there will be no such competitions.**

The ESFA is a broad church where different views are accommodated without internecine outcomes. Council is unanimous in asking Membership to pull together to actively support and promote the Player Passport / Champions Cup scheme, to provide current and future generations of young people with the unique and special experience of schools' representative football.