

National Council Competition Review Sub Committee Recommendations

As the National Council Sub Committee considering the Competition Review, we have provided a report which is seriously concerned about the current proposals if they were implemented. In fairness to all concerned, it is not the right approach to criticise a report without suggesting a better alternative and, therefore, the Committee have had an extensive meeting to look at all of this and are presenting the following proposals.

It has been said that the competition programme at the moment is not fit for purpose and this seems to be an overriding theme. This is correct as far as the junior and cadet programme is concerned and its failure is one of the reasons that our players are in such a poor position in European and World rankings. It is also correct in terms of the senior programme with Grand Prix etc, but it is not necessarily correct across the board as there are some other areas of the competition programme that are much closer to being fit for purpose. Therefore, a sweeping statement that all is not fit in our view is not correct.

We would like to recommend a different way of looking at a Competition Review. There are different standards of play required within the competition programme and there are also a different series of age groups. Our suggestion, therefore, is to look at the competition review and its suitability at the

1. National level
2. Regional level
3. Local level

It seems peculiar that a competition review has taken place and seemed to have ignored 75% plus of the competitive play in this country. This is at local league level, and we believe that there are improvements that can be generated here.

Local League was out of scope of the *National* Competition Review – this has been clear and clearly stated throughout - but the Steering Group agree that improvements can be made at local level that will complement the competition review.

The competition programme also needs to be different for different age groups and we would set up six categories, there could be more, but the six that we have identified is for

1. Junior and cadets
2. Under 13
3. Senior men
4. Senior women
5. Over 40 veterans
6. Over 60 veterans

Whilst it has not been possible to look in detail at all of these levels in the time available the Committee has spent some time reviewing the cadet and junior levels which seems to be the one which is the main focus for the Talent and Performance Committee and the one which is clearly not fit for purpose. Our proposals are as follows.

Clearly there are currently only three events which are adequate for the English programme.

- a. The Junior and Cadet National Championships
- b. The Junior and Cadet National Cup
- c. The Junior British League

In total this represents only 7 or 8 days in total of the right level of competition in England for players who are likely to be selected for the England teams for the European Youth Championships and other important international competition.

To be fit for purpose the programme requires a minimum of at least 20 days of the right level of competition. This is substituted to some degree for trips to foreign tournaments which clearly have some use but are very expensive in terms of cost, particularly to the parents who are still largely subsidising this and in time, as the amount of travel time for these events is significant in each case and on the days the players are not playing the sport. Major changes need to be made to the junior and cadet programme to facilitate this as follows.

Agreed; all these areas, including the frequency/ quantity of competition opportunities, are covered by proposals in the competition review.

1. The Junior and Cadet National Championships to continue as now.

Agreed; as per the competition review

2. There could be two National Cup events for juniors and cadets. The first one in the early part of the season could be for 24 players in each of the four age categories. This competition would consist initially of 4 groups and 6 with each player having 5 matches in the first stage. The top two players would move to the 1-8 section, the third and fourth to 9 – 16 and the fifth and sixth to 17 – 24. This would mean in the second section each player would have a further 6 matches and as 1 match played between the player in their opening group would be carried forward. This would take 2 days to play with each player having 11 matches in all and finishing with a position of 1 to 24.

The second National Cup should be as now in January or February with top 10 on a full round robin basis, 9 matches in total.

Agreed - this is the 'National Series', as per the competition review

3. The realignment of the 4 Star tournaments should take place with the 4 best 4 Stars being selected. These tournaments would be encouraged to run with Junior, U17, Cadet and U13. They should also be run with team events on the first day for junior and cadet teams, dependent on the size of the hall and the number of tables. The entries could be limited to a manageable number with preference upon ranking, plus perhaps some wild cards for the entries received before the closing date. There would be requirements for England players who wish to be selected for England to participate in a minimum of 3 of these 4 Star

tournaments. The tournaments should be split geographically between north and south on an equal basis and should be spread throughout the calendar.

Another initiative connected with the 4 Star tournaments should be an invitation to a European Association to send a Junior and Cadet team of say 8 boys and 8 girls to participate in the 4 Star playing team and individual competitions plus the organisers would host an international match at the 4 levels, junior and cadet boys and girls, on the Friday evening prior to the competition. This would mean that the 4 Star tournaments would be very strong and represent a tournament well worthwhile participating in for the better English junior and cadet players.

With regard to the remainder of the 4 Star tournaments some of which are only played in club venues given 3 Star status but would be given some priority.

Agreed in terms of principles; this is covered by the proposal for open tiered tournaments, as per the competition review

4. England to host an English Junior Open Competition as part of WTT or as a separate Junior Open bringing international teams to England to participate. There have been a significant number of applications from Europe to host the WTT Junior event for next season but none from the UK. This should run with team events in the first half and individual in the second, and should be open to as many of the higher ranked English players as allowed by the WTT system.

This is not a national competition, but point noted (and covered within *Table Tennis United*)

5. The Junior British League running at present with two weekends.

6. A new competition Cadet British League on the same basis as the Junior British League.

The Steering Group do not agree on this point, and this direction is not evidenced via the body of knowledge established via mapping + external insight + internal insight + forums + 1:1 interviews + consultation + analysis + modelling + feedback.

It is considered that:

- a) the best Cadets play-up to Junior events
- b) NCL provides appropriate opportunity for lower-level
- c) this would risk player pressure to double-up, also creating calendar clashes. The latter is something the structure of the competition review aims to specifically avoid.

Instead, an expansion of the national junior league programme is proposed, to three or four weekends, which is considered to better meet the same principles.

It is also recognised that cost and resource is a significant factor for clubs and participants, and expansion of a Junior programme is considered to be a more cost-effective approach than directly replicating the Junior event at Cadet level.

This would provide the minimum of 22 days of top competition in England for the best juniors and up to 30 days for the best cadets.

Participation in foreign tournaments would still be encouraged but may not be used as currently with the costs significantly less for both the Association and parents.

The above programme would not be difficult to implement and if confirmed from the January National Council meeting with the approval of the Board and the TAP Committee, this could be implemented for next season 2023-24.

Similar analysis is required for all other sections.

Regional Participation

There is clearly an opportunity for the new 7 Regional Committees as proposed by the CEO to have a major role here. Each region could have its own calendar and the Regional Committee could encourage the establishment of more competitions where there would be an interest and this could cover all of the 6 age categories listed above. It would not necessarily be that the region would organise the event but would evaluate what is required and encourage Counties, Leagues and Clubs to host events in table tennis club centers to encourage regional competition.

Agreed in terms of principles, and this will be reflected in the competition review now that Table Tennis United has been launched and Area structure being implemented early in 2023.

Local Participation

There is nothing detailed in the current Competition Review with regard to local leagues but there is room for development here too.

This is out of scope of the national Competition Review - but the Steering Group agree that improvements can be made at local level that will complement the competition review.

The Committee is not suggesting that the policy should interfere with the current running of the local leagues which are in the main successful, but that there should be some clear link and plan between the development programme of PING!, Ping Parlour and other similar programmes and schools programmes in the areas of the local league where a clear route from participation in these sectors into clubs in the leagues in the summer period with the opportunity to create teams in the local league for the start in September.

Much more analysis needs to go into all of the other categories other than junior and cadet, but clearly this is possible in a relatively short period of time and could be undertaken by the National Council Sub Committee or another group, but in any case, they should be presented to the new Advisory Committee for Competitions for further consideration and implementation.

This could be completed by the National Council Sub Committee for the January meeting if requested. These would include a major role for County Championships, National Cadet and

Junior Leagues, Wilmott Cup, JM Rose Bowl, Carter Cup and the Bromfield Trophy plus all the British Leagues and Local Leagues.

The CEO and Chair have advised National Council that the Steering Group and Board will continue to progress the Competition Review.

Alan Ransome
Chairman
National Council Competition Review Sub Committee

7th November, 2022