

From John Douglas, Chairman Adult Competition Review

Adult Competition Review – Update

Following approval of the Adult Competition Review recommendations by the RFU Council in June, an Implementation Group has been set up and work is underway to develop detailed plans covering all 21 recommendations. This work is a major step in shaping the future of the game and will be monitored closely by the Community Game Board which is responsible for overseeing the changes. Any necessary regulation changes will be approved by the Governance Committee and communicated to the game in good time before coming into effect.

At this stage it is worth restating the principles underpinning this vital work. They are: a varied diet of rugby; less travel for players to improve their quality of experience and welfare and to aid retention; time set aside in the season for rest and recovery, reduced financial burden on clubs; and a structure that works from the bottom up as well as from the top down.

There are however, a number of misconceptions and misinformation already evident ahead of the detailed plans being finalised, including that there was no consultation with clubs over changes to the leagues, that there will be no financial support for Cup competitions and that the RFU reneged on a commitment to guarantee 2 home matches in the Cups. None of these points is correct and it is therefore important to address those concerns now.

The review brought together extensive research and consultation, at all levels of the game, taking into account the views not only of club administrators but also those of coaches and referees amongst others and, importantly, of those who play club rugby. This was all set out in the published report and was endorsed by Council.

There are undoubtedly concerns in some parts of the country that the reduction in numbers in each league will disadvantage clubs financially. However, in moving to a flatter structure with fewer teams and reinvigorated Cup competitions, there will be more opportunities and advantages for clubs, both in terms of travel and rest periods, and also in providing greater variety of matches and opposition.

Financial implications will be concerning to many clubs and so part of the work of the Implementation Group will be to look at packages of incentives to ensure that clubs are not disadvantaged by playing in Cup competitions. These are likely to include travel costs and a reward structure to encourage clubs to take part and to realise the opportunities that they present. Further details will follow as this work progresses. In addition the flatter structure and reduction in the number of league matches will help to reduce costs. It is worth pointing out that in the current structure clubs have 13 guaranteed home matches. In the new structure there is a guaranteed minimum of 12 home matches with the possibility of more depending on progress in the cups.

Many of the agreed changes concern the structures and management of 2nd and Lower XV competitions to secure more playing opportunities. The implementation work addresses this area and the requirement for additional RFU resource and support.

The Implementation Group is working to a strict timescale and will report back to the Community Game Board at each of its meetings, and to RFU Council. The changes to the league structure will be implemented at the start of season 2016-17, with all clubs being advised of the mechanism for making those changes prior to the start of season 2015-16. This means that everyone has a full season's notice and knows the implications of promotion/relegation.

We know that there will be understandable concerns when any changes are introduced and regular updates will be provided to the game over the coming weeks.