



Scotland's Commissioner
for Children & Young People

Mr David Stewart
Convener
Public Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

28th March, 2013

Dear Mr Stewart

Public Petition 1319 – Youth Football

I have retained an interest in the above petition since I was asked to give evidence to the Committee in January, 2011.

At the time, I said that I felt children and young people were being treated as “commodities” by Premier League clubs, who were asking them to sign Registration Forms which tied them into agreements that they didn't fully understand and that unduly restricted their choices to move between clubs and play with their school teams. I felt that these arrangements benefited the clubs, but did little to ensure that the young players' own interests were protected.

I was recently copied into some correspondence between Mr Neil Doncaster of the Scottish Premier League and Mr Scott Robertson, one of the petitioners. The correspondence appears to acknowledge that a transfer market may exist for young players and that this is not regulated by the SPL in any way. This contrasts with the oral evidence provided by Mr Doncaster in January, 2011. I have enclosed a copy of the correspondence for the Committee's information.

I remained concerned about the current operation of compensation schemes, which appear to work against the best interests of young players, the vast majority of whom will not go on to become professional footballers. I am contacting you in the expectation that the Committee will wish to examine this issue in more detail.

If I can be of any further assistance to the Committee on these issues, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Tam Baillie
Scotland's Commissioner for Children & Young People

cc Mr Scott Robertson
cc Mr Willie Smith
cc Mr Neil Doncaster

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ND/MS

31 January 2013

Mr S Robertson
Realgrassroots

Dear Mr Robertson

Public Petition PE1319 – Improving Youth Football

Thank you for your letter of 17 January 2013, enclosing a copy of an earlier letter, dated 24 February 2012 from yourself and Mr Smith. I am afraid I have no recollection of receiving this earlier letter.

Let me therefore try to address the points you raise in both letters.

The SPL Rules in relation to the movement of young players from club to club do, as you correctly point out, provide for the payment of a contribution when a young player moves between one club and another. This figure, payable by the acquiring club, is calculated by reference to the player's age and the number of seasons that he has been with his previous club.

The system is designed to compensate the player's previous club for the investment in time and money made by that club in the player's training up to that point. Clearly if no such system existed, and the bigger clubs were free to engage the best young players without payment of any contribution, there would be no point in smaller clubs going to the time, trouble and expense of developing young players at all.

I cannot see why any acquiring club would pay more than the sums provided for in the SPL Rules. However, in the event that a greater sum were to be paid, I do not see how that prejudices the interests of either the player's previous club or the player himself. The payment of a greater sum than is provided for in the SPL Rules would not be a breach of those Rules. Therefore, and in the absence of any complaint from the player or either of the clubs involved, I cannot see why the SPL would wish to pursue the issue.

You seem to be advocating a system whereby clubs would be free to register young players without the payment of any training contribution. With all due respect, such a proposal would inevitably lead to the majority of professional clubs simply disbanding their youth development systems.

Cont'd.../

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Page 2

31 January 2013

Mr S Robertson
Realgrässroots

I fail to see how that would be of any benefit to Scottish football. It would dramatically reduce the number of opportunities for young players to be trained with a view to them becoming full time professional football players and surely runs contrary to the efforts of the Scottish FA to develop the Scottish national team.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Yours sincerely

Neil Doncaster
Chief Executive

cc Shona Robison, MSP
Tam Baillie, SCCYP
Jim Sinclair, Rangers FC
Chris McCart, Celtic FC