



South Central Hockey

Area Officiating Committee

We are now just completing our fifth season as the South Central Area and thanks to you all for sticking with us as we work out how to operate.

We have managed to complete another season of league hockey in the South Central Area, a lot of junior hockey has been played, we've had winners and losers, promotions and relegations and end of season celebrations just as usual. For which thanks must go to each and every one of you – players, coaches, officials, and committee members across the Area, for helping us to get through our fifth South Central season. Without you we really couldn't have done it.

As before huge thanks must also go to the committee that has helped to run South Central Officiating this year – their names are on our South Central website:

<https://southcentral.englishockey.co.uk/officiating>

Without them my job would have been impossible – and, without them, we would not have got through this season in as good a way as we have. Their individual reports will show the extent of work that has been carried out – we, in South Central, are very lucky to have such an exceptional band of volunteers.

Upcoming developments from England Hockey

The Level 1 course, which is now free following last year's membership changes from England Hockey, has been very busy this season with many courses being run (often 5 or 6 a week), with the new Level 1 course materials being used. These materials are, I believe, a big improvement on the old Level 1 course slide set and will, hopefully, lead to umpires being better prepared for their subsequent Level 1 assessments.

There is a high chance that new Level 1 candidates will recognise some of the Level 1 tutors as several are from the South Central Area. Clubs, and potential candidates, should go to:

<https://hockeyhub.englishockey.co.uk/officiating-offer>

on the Hockey Hub to book their places. Completion of the Level 1 course is one part of becoming a Level 1 (unassessed) umpire – the other parts are completion of the On-line rules test and the Safeguarding module. There is also much work ongoing to develop the Umpire Pathway leading to clearer progression as umpires develop. It is currently planned that the new Pathway will be introduced for the 2027/28 season, but much work remains to be done before that can happen.

What we in South Central are doing

Our development team, lead by Ginette, are busy developing an on-line training course for those people who are thinking about picking up a whistle for the first time, as well as those people who have been umpiring for a while and just want to improve their umpiring so that they can support their clubs better.

We are also developing a video library, with video clips taken, mostly, from South Central matches which will help to see how to, and possibly how not to, develop your umpiring skills. Head over to

Chair Area Officiating Committee – Simon Milford – chair.officiating@southcentral.hockey

<https://umpiredev.co.uk/>

to see what is going on here.

So looking like good news for next season – enjoy the break, if you are having one, and come back refreshed in September.

Club Liaison

South Central Officiating has in its remit officiating at all levels throughout the Area, not just the relatively small number of matches which receive appointed umpires. In order to reach everyone we need the help of clubs – Umpire Liaison Officers and Club Umpire Developers. Our Club Liaison Lead (Rowena Shepherd) continues to contact all for whom we have contact details but there are still very many clubs from whom we get little or no response. We are here to help – but we need you to get in touch with us, or just respond to us, to let us know how best we can help.

We have continued to develop the South Central Hit Squad, run by Steve “Godders” Godwin, to try to help clubs to develop more umpires. Many clubs have held successful sessions and we have been asked back to several to run either similar courses or extension courses.

Without clubs carrying on umpire development it is clear that the number of umpires will dwindle away, very much to the detriment of our sport. We really need ALL clubs to stand up and operate an umpire development process. Get in touch if you need any help setting up or running such a system – your game needs you.

Development

Again we’ve helped many officials progress this year, many to Level 1, a lot to Level 1 assessed, quite a few to Level 2, and even some to Level 3. Well done to all those who progressed, and many thanks to those who helped them along the way, at both club and Area levels. Especial thanks to the development team, run by Ginette Tessier (your Monday Mixer concept has been adopted by several other Areas now), and the Level 1 assessment team being managed by Hatty Wood and the Level 1 coaching sessions run by Rob West.

If you want to see more about umpire development in South Central then head over to:

<https://umpiredev.co.uk/>

Appointing

Appointing has been even more of a challenge this season, given the reducing number of umpires making themselves available to cover neutral appointments – trying to get the right umpires, to the right games, whilst taking into account travelling distances and ever changing availability. But appoint we have, all thanks to Allan Notman and his team of David Boyle, James Bartrip and Huw Richards. Thanks to Huw for all of his efforts, covering Berkshire HUA and then South Central, as he steps down from his appointing role and thanks to James Bartrip for picking up Huw’s share.

Young Umpires

We have been very fortunate this season to have the services of Sophie Parker as our Lead for Young Umpires. Sophie has been leading on appointing young umpires, where possible and with suitable support, across both indoor and outdoor sessions.

Congratulations too, to Sophie, on being appointed by FIH to the International Panel for Indoor Umpires, showing that she can also be a real role model for our younger umpires.

Technical Officiating

David Rigby is also available to support anyone who wants to think about the match official role, one which allows an involvement in higher levels of hockey, sitting right at the pitch side for national league matches.

Summary

Thanks to everyone who has helped us get through our fifth season in the new organisation. Having supported so many hockey matches has been no mean achievement and one of which we should all be proud. Plenty more to do next season, of course, so we can't sit on our laurels too much – but enjoy the summer (whether it involves hockey or not) and come back ready to face the new season in late summer 2026.

While we still have ongoing frustrations with GMS, we have also had a mixed year in general with both appointing and development, hindered and helped at times with other things outside of South Central in the calendar!

A number of umpires joined us in taking neutral appointments and while still not yet comfortably 'enough' with the Leagues we commit to appointing for, a welcome movement in the right direction.

We continue to encourage umpires to explore their abilities through awareness and development activity such as:

- Umpire Developer branded kit: purchased at the end of last season with enthusiastic encouragement from the Area Board Chair! This helps us to raise the profile of resources available to all umpires within South Central, where developers can be easily identified and approached by club umpires or those interested in umpiring. It proved a successful strategy from the very beginning of the season, with regular reports of developers being approached and asked questions.

- Monday Mixer: this is still the most regular and easiest access to the Development team. We have run them on every available Monday in season since the formation of the Area; an hour over Zoom for any umpire who wants to join, with questions posed and challenges talked through. The recordings are available for those registered to our umpire development website (more below). We also hold a developer meeting for the half hour before the regular Mixer and invite anyone with a question or need to meet a particular developer to stay after the main meeting.
- Development days: We ran three separate events this season, catering for specific development opportunities around both a men's and women's NPUA level friendly, and a mixed friendly. Our thanks to Fareham HC, Reading HC and Sonning HC for their indulgence of our needs!

- Developer development: while we still have a number of umpire/developers who are doing slightly too much umpiring and slightly too little developing than they would like, we are working hard at helping developers to improve their understanding of the art of both coaching and assessing. We are also working with a few umpires who have expressed a desire to move into more of a development-based involvement with hockey. We also encourage umpires who don't plan to move into development any time soon, to still request a 'shadowing' appointment. This places them with a developer for a day, where they can observe and contribute to their own and other colleagues' development by seeing things from a coaching perspective. Umpires that have done this have said how helpful it has been.

- Umpiredev.co.uk website: this is specifically for umpire development in South Central and by the time of the AGM will have had a major facelift with lots more to see!

Big thanks are always due to the development team and in particular to 1. Rob West, who continues to valiantly battle to get adequate development resource to umpires at Level 1 and in particular to the

north of the Area. Any umpire based in the north of the Area thinking about joining the development team would be more than welcome! Although if they currently take appointments, this would also exacerbate the issue of too few umpires being available in the north... 2. Steve Godwin, Simon Watkins, Karen Daffey and Keely Dunn for their help in creating a number of resources we are trialling or will trial next season.

We also continue to gratefully benefit from regular support from Keely Dunn of FH Umpires. Her collaboration with us has undoubtedly raised our development game!

In addition to the development team, we are hugely grateful to the appointing team for their efforts in appointing to as many matches as possible that we are asked to. This includes:

- Men's / Ladies Premier Division 1 & 2.
- Men's / Ladies Division 1 North.
- Men's / Ladies Division 1 & 2 South.
- National League Conference.
- British Universities, Colleges & Schools.
- Varsity Matches.
- England Hockey Cup Competitions.
- Indoor
- And a number of 'last minute' requests!

The following numbers have been achieved through their sterling efforts:

Appointments Outdoor = 3,338 (24/25 = 3,015)

Appointments Indoor = c.43 (24/25 = c.43)

Assessments Outdoor = 76 (24/25 = 99)

Coaching Outdoor = 119 (24/25 = 173)

While the number of coaching and assessment appointments has reduced from last season, this reflects our move towards specific focus on umpires that have potential to move upward through the panels, relaxing our approach to get to as many different umpires as possible in a single season.

This saw a bumper year of promotions, including congratulations to the following:

Promoted to NPUA/Level 3 (M):

Lovelace

Nominated to NPUA (W): Busse

Promoted to Men's Prem 1: McEvoy, Parsons

Promoted to Women's Prem 1: Summerfield, Gibson-Sexton

Promoted to Men's Prem 2: Bibby, Smith W, Bartrip

Promoted to Women's Prem 2/Level 2: Tovey, Beck, Sealey J

Promoted to Men's Div 1: Islip, Cornborough, Sealey R, Sealey J

Promoted to Women's Div 1: King, Sealey R, Godlonton I

Promoted to Men's Div 2: Hart, Small, Watson, Draysey

We also have a number of umpires at 'star' (*) level, where we will be actively working with them to achieve promotions early next season.

Unfortunately, unlike in previous years, I was unable to send an individual email to every club in South Central using GMS for season 2025- 2026. Using GMS in this way, to communicate with individuals /club officials, is apparently not permitted because of GDPR. It remains very difficult, if not impossible, for the SC AOC to identify and communicate directly with individual Club Umpire Developers at every club. At present, communication with individual clubs and umpire developers can only be achieved through the general SC Newsletters and the SC website.

Similarly, collating and maintaining a list of names and contact details of Club Umpire Developers - where they are known - is no longer acceptable. Collecting and storing this type of information about individual volunteers also has to comply with GDPR.

Effective contact between any club / club umpire developer depends on developers getting in touch with me. During 2025 - 2026, several individual clubs have been in contact at various times throughout the season to discuss issues specific to their club. Unsurprisingly, a common question is 'How do we get more umpires?' SC AOC can offer advice, assistance and help.

Once again this season we have offered coaching and development opportunities for club umpires at their club. Any club in SC can request an intensive coaching session for their club umpires - which can also include coaching for individuals new to officiating [beginners!]. The format usually involves several SC Developers coming to a normal training session at the club and offering coaching, advice and support tailored to the club's requirements. Once again Steve Godwin has been at the forefront of these efforts - very ably assisted by Keely Dunn and Rob West.

The level one practical assessment programme continues to work well thanks to Hatty Wood's efficient administration. Hatty is responsible for coordinating the candidates, a suitable match and an assessor. Candidates who have completed the theory etc should contact Hatty.

There was no further meeting of all the National Officiating Club Liaison leads this season.

I hope that next season all club umpire developers will bear the constraints of GDPR in mind and look out for published information from SC AOC. More importantly, I hope that if any Club Umpire Developer needs advice or assistance, that they get in touch with the Club Liaison Lead. The email address is on the website.

Hopefully, as a result of my previous annual reports more of you will already have an understanding of what Technical Officials are and do.

Whilst most of what we do is focused on the higher echelons, we are involved at all levels of hockey from schools and junior club events; through adult club events; to EH National Leagues; and Masters Hockey.

With national competition events at places like Lee Valley and the Nottingham Hockey Centre, we get to enjoy the best hockey in the country from the best viewpoints.

There are four main roles in Technical Officiating, these are:

Tournament Director – the individual who ensures that the overall competition is operating within the rules and regulations for all participants.

Technical Officer – is pitch side for each game of a tournament to ensure the games run smoothly, working with both team managers, benches and umpires.

Judges – are pitch side for each game of a tournament, administering and recording events from the game accurately and timely. They also manage the game time to ensure that the competition runs in accordance with the rules and within the allotted time on the day.

Match Official – this role is usually reserved for the English Hockey Leagues, where Match Officials conduct a mix of the Technical Officer and Judge roles on a match day.

For some Officials, there is the opportunity to quickly progress up the career path within the English Hockey Leagues and Tournaments to ultimately reach European or even full International level, as well as taking charge of some of England Hockey's top events.

Technical Officiating is a great way to be involved in hockey, being close to the action and experiencing a different side of the game. The best thing is...anyone can get involved! Whether it's being involved in the National Programme of competitions, or locally at a junior competition at club level, the role of Technical Officials is key to the game day experience being so high for all involved.

During the 2025/26 season South Central based Technical Officials have been involved in both national and local events, both outdoors and indoors. We have had a few faces join us and we hope (and need) to see more joining our ranks in 2026/27.

The Technical Appointment Panel are always looking for more volunteers to become Technical Officials. Details can be found on via this link.

<https://www.englishhockey.co.uk/deliver/officiate/technical-officiating/how-to-get-involved>

Or just e-mail us at LeadTAP.officiating@southcentral.hockey for more information about the role and the commitment involved.