



OFFICIATING COMMITTEE REPORTS to West Area EHO AGM – held online 11th May 2022

Report from Chair:

Firstly, I would like to thank all of those who have worked so hard throughout this season to ensure hockey could be played. And to help officiating begin to grow, post the pandemic shutdown. This last season has posed many challenges.

I would like to thank specifically David and Graham with regard to appointments and development at Level 2. But also not overlooking the North and South Sector teams who have taken on the difficult role of filling the void that will be left by the dissolution of the County Hockey Umpires Associations. I would also like to thank those County Associations for assisting in the transition.

I must particularly thank Mike Bendry and Mike Daniel, who worked hard to keep the Bucs appointments going.

I should also, of course, mention the GMS. To me, that's the 'Great Mike Sheppard' who has worked tirelessly to enable us to actually use the game management system and educate us on how we can get things out of it. We have moved on from a very difficult place at the start of the season due to his help. The system is still posing difficulties and Mike is continuing to aid us in overcoming them.

In the second half of the season, we gained our Young Umpire Lead, James Makepeace and I'd like to thank him for joining us and starting the journey of integrating Young umpiring into the new structure.

Plus, there's Thomas Wilson, who is acting as our liaison with the adult competitions committee and advising on the finance side of things where we are working with the West Area Finance team.

The information on our structure and the key contacts are all on the new West website and will continue to be developed and updated over time.

We started this season trying to build 'club clusters' to aid communication and information exchange outside of GMS. Unfortunately, this has not made the progress that I had hoped, and so this will be a priority for me over the summer, as well as integrating the Bucs appointing into our current structure ready for next season.

The Officiating Working Group is liaising with England Hockey to hopefully be able to provide new kit ready for next season as well as more development materials via the Hockey Hub.

I understand that things are far from perfect and there is still much work to do. But we are now in a better place to take things forward. Thank you.

Pete Hammond
Officiating Chair

Report from Appointing and Development Leads:

Well what a season that was! We knew before the season started that there would be challenges, not least with the now infamous GMS, but we had no idea of the scale of the problems that would be encountered pretty much from day 1 of the season right through to the final League Saturday.

Probably the biggest single issue during the season was communication, from everywhere! Some Clubs were very good, others not, some umpires were excellent, others not so and it is tiresome having to chase for availability from the same people time and time again. Communications from the League were also poor, as it was from Competitions concerning the various Schools and junior Clubs tournaments we were appointing to. In addition, NPUA were repeatedly very late publishing appointments which obviously has a knock on effect at all levels.

Men's League Appointments

The first challenge was to find a number of additional umpires to cover 3 Divisions (36 appointments) rather than the 2 Divisions (24 appointments) that we had previously covered at West level. This was to some extent achieved by a number of umpires being put forward from the County HUA's before they ceased operating and we embarked on a comprehensive coaching programme to assist these umpires make the transition to Level 2. Pleasingly most were successful, although a couple were not, but there is always next season.

We were invariably struggling for numbers on a weekly basis even though we had a team withdraw from the Premiership after just a couple of weeks and another withdraw from Division 1 North at Christmas. Somehow we did manage to get 2 umpires to every Premiership and Division 1 (North and South) match but sometimes more by luck than anything else.

We also had to contend with late calls from NPUA to cover their gaps, and then for the last few weeks of the season numerous call offs due to Covid, the last one of these coming in at 5am on the last Saturday of the League season!

On a brighter note, apart from a number of umpires gaining their Level 2, we had a number of umpires either successfully gaining their Level 3, or returning to NPUA appointments after a break for whatever reason, and there were also several umpires upgraded from B Panel to A Panel.

Women's League Appointments

As most of you will know, appointments to the Women's Premier Division have been a major problem for several seasons, and it was no better this season even though there were only 10 teams in the Division rather than the usual 12.

It was only on the few weeks when the National League was not playing that we were able to cover all matches and on most other weeks we only managed to cover 2 or 3 of the 5 matches.

Calls from NPUA became somewhat silly at times with as many as 4 “reserves” being requested some weeks and although we did everything we could not all requests were able to be met.

We had just 1 new umpire join the Panel this season and gain her Level 2, but this was offset by a successful promotion to Level 3. We desperately need more umpires on the Women’s Panel as we are getting close to the point where any sort of sensible appointing will become impossible, but where they are going to come from is anyone’s guess.

Assessments/Coaching

A remarkable total of over 150 assessments/coaching took place this season, split about 90 assessments and 60 coachings. Compared to previous years the number of assessments were down but the number of coachings much higher

Schools Outdoor Tournaments

Thankfully the Girls Schools tournaments before Christmas went reasonably smoothly, although with no preliminary round some of the tournaments were getting quite large in number which does present issues with the umpiring, not least getting enough umpires to be available on a weekday.

Unfortunately, the Boys Schools tournaments after Christmas were rather more problematic with a number of issues, including unworkable programmes having to be amended several times and a tournament that had been previously notified to us being cancelled with us only finding out when requesting the programme after assembling a team of umpires.

Indoors

Very close to a complete disaster! We have relied on a small but dedicated team of Indoor umpires for a number of years and I am afraid that after the events of this season the team may well be somewhat smaller next year.

The first issue was that of overnight accommodation for those travelling considerable distances with a very early start. Eventually this was resolved for this season, and we have been informed that the West now has a policy for overnight accommodation. But we have also been informed that it is not being published!

The Schools tournaments were not a major problem but the Junior Clubs were not good. The venue for the Girls tournaments caused issues because of its geographical location whilst teams not arriving for the Boy's tournaments caused chaos.

But the best was saved for last with the Senior Club's tournaments turning into something of a shambles. The weekend before the tournaments programmes with 9 teams in both Men's and Women's tournaments were circulated. On the Friday evening, after appointments had been drafted for the Men's tournament on the Saturday, by chance we discovered that the Men's tournament was down to 7 teams and the Women's tournament on Sunday down to just 5 teams.

But still it went on. On the Saturday evening another team withdrew from the Women's tournament meaning that we had to ask umpires to stand down as there were not enough games for the number of umpires appointed. And unbelievably, another withdrawal on Sunday morning just 45 minutes before the tournament was due to start leaving 3 teams and 6 umpires. Umpires therefore ended up giving up pretty much a whole day for one game. Understandable some were less than pleased!

And as a post script, the Women's tournament winners did not take their place in the National Indoor League meaning that the day really was a waste of time for all concerned!

North and South Sectors

With the demise of County HUA's, there is now a North and South sector operating below "West" level.

The situation is very similar in both sectors with only a very small number of umpires taking appointments. Efforts have been made to recruit umpires into the neutral pools although with limited success.

If Clubs playing below the "Premier" leagues want to continue receiving neutral appointments they have to put umpires into the neutral pools. This is what the "Club Cluster" initiative is meant to achieve and it is extremely disappointing that there has been no progress whatsoever. If we are to have any chance of recruiting enough umpires to the neutral pools to keep them viable this has to work, but it is likely to be a while before this produces umpires of Level 2 standard and we have lost a whole season whilst the average age of the panels continues to increase!

And so to finish. A big thank you to everyone who has taken appointments this season, assessors, coaches and umpires. Many have been available most weeks, and

we hope that will be the same next season. We also hope that those who we only saw occasionally will be seen more regularly next season.

David Lillywhite – Development Lead
Graham Woolcock – Appointments Lead

Report from Liaison Lead:

Initial Email

PH sent out my introductory email to all club contacts in the Area advising of our existence and encouraging all club umpires to register on GMS. Also asking if any would be interested in the club cluster role

I had some responses, mainly about issues with the GMS. PH dealt with these accordingly. Whilst in contact I took the opportunity of asking if they would be interested in the Club Cluster role titled Group Club Liaison Officer. PH created a role description to aid this. So far only interest no “yes’s”

Group Club Liaison Officer

Have broken down the area into smaller cluster groups of up to 6 clubs, which hopefully make it more palatable. I am looking to contact an umpire in each of these new groupings so this is a work in progress. I obviously have knowledge of the Devon possibilities but am seeking help in the other counties.

Membership Fees

One question several asked was the payment of club umpires membership fees. In Devon we had a system whereby clubs could pay for their club umpires. Maybe we can look at this for the future.

L1 Assessments

Agreed between myself and PH that we would adopt the system previously used in Devon that all Assessments are sent to me for onward transmission to EH. I would then be copied to the EH reply/confirmation to the umpire and can congratulate and make contact with each newly assessed umpire.

Trying to get a list of all Assessors in the Area so I can advise. However EH will be advising me of any new assessments in the area so I can make contact with the Assessor.

Report from Junior Umpiring Lead:

Friends, Peers and Committee Members

I would like to start my report with a thank you; to the committee for offering me the opportunity to join the West Hockey Branch in the Young Umpire Lead position, to those within the Branch who have offered support and counsel and to those in the broader membership who I have had the chance to meet and talk to whether virtually or in person.

For those I have not had the opportunity to meet yet a quick introduction. I joined the West Hockey branch in November 2021 as Young Umpire Lead. I am not a hockey player but someone who passionately stood on the side-lines in support of my partner for several years before choosing to do something more, become an umpire. I have been fortunate to see through this role a club that not only fosters a 'family ethos' but also takes great pride in developing and supporting its young players in whatever path through hockey they choose. This passion is something I have seen displayed across several clubs I have come across during this role and something I feel is representative of the west Area.

I chose to put myself forwards for this role for two reasons, firstly because of my professional experience. Having worked across a range of areas from HR to communications I've found working with people is my passion, creating environments that enable people to be the best they can and providing coaching, guidance and experiences that enable them to do and to be more. Secondly, I want to give back, to an Area and a sport I have seen as my home (I'm a northerner from birth).

To say picking up the role has been a challenge is something of an understatement. Not being native to the area I have relied heavily on the committee and the kindness of the wider membership base. Providing into the activities going on in the area and names of a small number of young umpires in the Area who I'm sure are only just some of a much larger team across the Area. It would be wrong for me to blame IT (I do it a lot at work) however I do believe as someone new to the role and committee that the current challenges around the implementation and adoption of the Game Management System are severely restraining our ability to both identify and develop your umpires who are striving to do more to support our sport.

My initial 6 months in post has been very much information gathering. Whether through attending events to meet young umpires or talking to those in this group through my local umpiring appointments I have been inspired by a generation who want to make a difference. When asked why young people chose to become umpires there are a range of responses. "Developing key future life skills", "to supporting the

club I love”, “to better understand the game”; whatever the reason they deserve more.

As I look ahead to the next 12 months and the 22/23 hockey season, and with your support, I intend to shift towards action. I came across a term at work recently reflecting on the world ‘post covid’ and a theory around why people would choose to return to the office – and I feel the same is true for returning to hockey.

Community. It has been flagged through several of my conversations with Young Umpires or through those that have developed and supported them that the opportunity to be with friends and peers is a key reason why young people chose to engage. However, there is nothing in place today that brings together this group and recognises them as a team and as a community. Whether this be a platform for them to share experiences or advice with each other or just simply post some of the images they take every weekend while around a hockey pitch there is so much more we can do to build a sense of energy, fun and friendship around umpiring for this generation. Coming into the role as someone with no background or knowledge of the region I also feel we could be doing more to build a community to support our young umpires. As I continue to work through the GMS challenge, I’d like to ask each of our areas to please get in touch. Having worked in communications I’d like to think I’m not a person who is difficult to reach out to and if nothing else say hello. You can find my contact details at the end of this report.

In building a sense of community it unlocks the second opportunity in front of us, increased **collaboration**. I have been massively fortunate to see several events that offer opportunities for our young umpires. What has been difficult to see is how all these fit together into a coherent system to build a stronger pool of talent here in the West Country. Living local to the Bristol area I have had the opportunity to talk to the Avon Junior Hockey Committee. I understand the criticality of early training for young umpires of any age, the importance of creating safe spaces for them to develop alongside playing the game and how essential it is that as they grow and develop and consider their options at critical ages, they are provided with coaching and support. I believe there is a lot of richness in the Avon model however I also appreciate I have not had the opportunity to date to see and hear more of what is going on across the region. Looking ahead to next season I want to work with this community to identify best practice and build something that provides structure to the next generation, building on the principles I’ve seen adopted in Avon...and I’m sure beyond.

This in term brings me onto the final priority, **concentration**. It would be easy for us to use the uncertainties around us an opportunity to slow down however I feel that in building the young umpire and supporting community and in increasing

collaboration we can build something special for the West Area. We have the best resources to achieve this, all of you attending this AGM and those of you reading this report. If we can get this right, I feel we can provide a great benchmark for the broader EH Young Umpire community and most importantly create a generation of umpires that not only enables our Area to thrive but also the broader hockey community.

Enjoy your summer, whether you're playing hockey, or not. Thank you again and I look forwards to hopefully talking to more of you very soon.

James Makepeace West Area – Young Umpire Lead

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Report from Area Technical Officiating Lead: What we have done this season

- Have been able to support the west indoor finals with technical officials
- Had 1 person interested in technical officiating and have put their name to the technical appointments panel who are making contact with them
- Have made contact with the west hockey league to ask would they consider the idea of having a match official on the premierships matches for next season but have not had a reply from them.

Plans for next season

- To go out to all clubs to see if anyone from their club would be interested in becoming or finding out more of what technical officiating is about.
- To get some courses ran on technical officiating if we get the interest from the clubs.
- To continue to support events and tournaments with technical officials and get any new ones that are interested to support and work alongside experienced officials at these events and tournaments.

Richard Hill

Area Technical Officiating Lead - West