



Handball Youth League Report 2018-19

This document is to:

- Give an understanding of the potential direction of the youth leagues,
- Provide feedback on questions raised during the start of the season,
- Propose potential future systems, which can be discussed for implementation at the club meetings in November and league Webex meetings in March.

Long-term Vision (5 - 10 years)

England Handball wants clubs to be empowered to run their own competitions at an appropriate level for their needs. This vision would see the overall structure provided by England Handball, and club teams/regions operating the leagues independently.

The thinking behind this vision is the more England Handball is involved in administering and controlling leagues, the more resource and administration is required. The overall aim is to reduce this need for England Handball to be involved in organising competition and empower clubs. England Handball would still be heavily involved to provide support when new leagues are launched. An example of this is the under-14 and under-16 leagues, which started in 2017-18.

Age Groups and Structure:

Age Groups

The long-term strategy is for leagues to move from:

- under-14 (school year)
- under-16 (school year)
- under-19 (year of birth)

To:

- under-11, under-13, under-15, under-17, under-19 (year of birth)

This mirrors IHF competition age groups, and allows a wider range of youth competition providing greater opportunity for appropriate age groups.

Structure

- under-11: County to Regional Competition
- under-13: County to Regional Competition
- under-15: Regional Competition leading to National Final
- under-17: Tiered Regional Competition split North and South

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- under-19: Tiered Regional to National Structure

Questions and Answers

England Handball has received a number of views/queries regarding the operation of the youth leagues.

Please find below answers to themes raised.

Junior Leagues

1. *"Most clubs that have junior teams did mention to the EHA before or in June or not just this season, but last season too, that getting junior teams ready for early September games is more than difficult as Handball is not as popular a sport than Football, Basketball and Netball in the UK. The fact that you actually compare the Handball ecosystem to these sports is not only surprising and disconcerting. The fact that only 6 girls showed up for the Regional South East academy selection early September demonstrate that comparing handball to these popular British Sports is surreal."*

We have not compared the ecosystem (funding, numbers, level of participation etc.) We have compared the start dates of comparative age groups in other sports who have the same responsibilities i.e. The majority of sports start in September and others even in August with the same age group of children who have school responsibilities with similar registration deadlines. It is also important to note that other Handball clubs in the UK have had no issue-registering players ahead of the start of the season.

The Regional Academy programme has nothing to do with competitions. However, as it is mentioned, all other Regional Academies had full attendance at the start of September.

2. *"You are surely right when stating that the low overall number of players per teams is the main factor of forfeiting."*

"Not only most clubs – emerging and mature ones - have issues to secure players in time for junior games scheduled so early in the season – despite the fact that the issue has been raised from more than one season to the EHA."

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"How are we supposed to find players in September when everyone is away for the summer holidays and they come back only once schools are back on?"

"How are we going to let them do so IF we cannot let them play "because they are not registered yet"

From a club-development point of view, it is advised that teams build up the numbers of players within their club over the course of a season. This can be achieved by playing friendlies and unstructured competition. The club can then enter structured competition for a new season when it deems it has enough players/members. These players/members should also have been uploaded on the Azolve system during the year, rather than trying to mass upload players before a fixture. This approach is more sustainable than trying to create a team for a competition in the space of three months.

3. *"We think that youth leagues should start in October, in that way, we would have more time to register players. Sometimes, parents do not bring children until the school has started (that can be after the 2nd week of September)."*

"Overall junior starts too early."

We were as disappointed as clubs were with the issues that occurred in the first round of junior competitions. However, it is worth noting the following:

The under-19 league started at a similar time to the last four seasons.

The under-16 league started one week earlier than last year. This competition is in its second year of existence. From the specific league feedback survey, no teams mentioned start dates of the competition being a problem. Attached for reference.

The under-14 league started earlier than previous years. However, this is communicated on the England Handball Calendar available to all teams in advance of registration opening and the start of the season.

4. *"The decision from the EHA for the Under-16 South East league to organise the league by "level of handball" while the EHA junior managers has a) never saw any team played b) not contacted the junior teams manager coaches to assess their team level of expertise/years or practice - result in unlevelled teams playing against each other with score like 40 - 1, or 30- 4 etc, We are very concerned that the beginners*

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teams/club will be more than demotivated by these experience of playing against mature teams."

This is incorrect. The league is a sorting league and will move to a tiered system in the next stage of the competition this is to avoid one-sided results. Please read the information sent out at the start of the season regarding the under-16 league via email from Liz.Roberts@englandhandball.com

5. *"Seeding needs to be applied to the leagues. The Under-19 southeast pools are completely unbalanced, given results in recent years. We have been advised that this was in response to requests for less travel by teams, but the groupings don't bear this out."*
The leagues are too costly for junior clubs, something we mentioned at the clubs meeting last summer, but fees still went up this season. Last season we paid over £1,600 in EHA memberships and U16/U19 league fees.

The under-19 league received £1000 from England Handball to reduce costs.

The under-16 league received £500 from England Handball to reduce costs.

The structure of the leagues is constantly reviewed in order to provide the cheapest and most effective solution for clubs.

Two years of a competition format provides clear data to review what is working and what is not working.

England Handball Overview:

The youth leagues start at a comparative time to other sports for the same age groups across the UK and Europe. Ultimately there is no issue with pushing the start of the season back to October if clubs feel this would benefit them.

The structure of the leagues operates on a centralised-venue system to reduce administration for clubs i.e. clubs only need to turn up and play at a given venue on a set date, there is no organisation of fixtures required for clubs. This has clearly been affected by the large number of drop outs at the start of the season by club teams not being prepared - which in turn has led to insufficient game time reflective of travel.

The ultimate test will be to see if fixtures are forfeited in November. If no teams

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withdraw from November fixtures then it is possible to conclude that the leagues start too early. If a number of teams withdraw from the November fixtures then it is possible to conclude that club administration is the primary concern.

ITCs and Registration Process:

1. *"The ITC policies that the EHA imposes on under 19s players are counterproductive. If clubs manage to find players so early in the season then some of them might not be English and we do not have time to register them on time or for their ITC to be validated on time. Most of us fail to understand why the EHA imposes the ITC rules for under 19s, more flexibility could help to secure junior players to avoid games cancellations."*

"How are we supposed to have a full team when the registration process takes up to 3 weeks to let boys and girls that might have played abroad only in youth teams and that would love to keep playing in the UK?"

Clubs wishing to enter the league are supposed to have players before entering the competition. It is ill advised to enter a league for which you do not have enough players to then try and create a team.

ITC requirements are an IHF/EHF rule. Applicable to every single country that plays Handball.

If the EHA does not want to have ITCs they would have to move away from the IHF/EHF, meaning no teams could enter European competition and National Teams could not play internationally or enter EHF/IHF competition. Funding received from the EHF/IHF would be stopped (which has been used in previous years to reduce costs of youth leagues)

If clubs wish to play in England Handball organised competition then they must have ITCs in place. These are not required for unregulated competition. However, in these cases where children are not registered they are not covered by England Handball insurance.

2. *What does "awaiting approval" actually mean?*

Once information has been submitted on a player, the England Handball office check the details of that player and the information has been inputted correctly, and check the player has an appropriate ID photo. Once these checks have been completed the player is then approved.

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3. *What is purpose of registration? Why is it so vital that grass roots youth players need to be registered two weeks prior to matches?*

Firstly, the data used from registration across all age groups is used for our analytics to measure the growth of the game, number of players registered, age-group player data, and the number of players coming into and leaving the game. This is information that Sport England requires from England Handball as part of our funding application. Failure to have this data would directly affect future funding applications.

Secondly ensuring all players are registered ensures the competitions are played on fair and equal basis. All players are of the same age group and have gone through the same registration and checks.

Finally, this links directly to players insurance. Non-registered/approved players are not covered by England Handball insurance that is part of England Handball membership. From a safeguarding point of view England Handball must also know which players are linked to which club in the case of disciplinary conduct charge or safeguarding disclosure. This is an important duty of care.

England Handball Overview

ITCs are mandatory and this will not change. The responsibilities for clubs are outlined on the website and in the rules and regulations.

All players must be registered according to the appropriate criteria through the Azolve system due to the reason mentioned above.

In future we will look to remove any data that might not be necessary. This could include addresses, emergency contact addresses.

League and Games organisation

1. *"The schedules and locations of games organised by the EHA junior team managers are 1) operationally not realistic 2) financially extortionate and operationally not realistic:*

"Under-16 team games on Sunday Sept 30th in Twickenham – miles away for some of the teams

"Under-16 team games on Saturday Oct 6th in Aylesbury – miles away for most London based teams and even further for Brighton to come all the way whilst there is a train strike that day!"

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The tournament locations take into consideration where all teams travel from as well as being restricted by hall availability. Venues are booked 3 – 6 months in advance where possible. In other cases, it has not been possible to be able to confirm venue availability until a month prior to the competition, simply due to the number of halls available.

Stoke Mandeville/Essex are the only courts in the South East with two courts available allowing teams/clubs to travel together rather than to separate locations.

Streamlining competitions to allow teams to travel together has been prioritised due to concerns over coaching numbers and feedback from previous years.

2. *"The closest youth teams are around 60 miles away (e.g. Guildford or London) and makes more difficult to promote, organise friendlies, etc."*

"How are we supposed to let teams compete if the teams cannot make it to the venue?"

This issue would be the same regardless of what type of league structure is implemented. Home and away or centralised venues would all require at some point further travel.

3. *"The U16 south pool has a huge geographical spread (Brighton, Cambridge, Colchester and London teams in one pool) and this has doubtless contributed to the high forfeit rate. Would it not have been better to have smaller more local groups, but play full matches? In the regional phase teams could use their training halls (subject to a minimum criteria for dimensions), which would reduce cost and travel. In our case, with all the enforced changes, we next have a 160 mile round trip for one 40mn U16 game."*

The change in format from last year was to bring this competition in line with the under-19 structure playing a South 1 and South 2 league after initial qualification rounds.

There is a greater number of teams in the South East which could have followed exactly the under-19 structure of 2 South East Leagues.

Across the South leagues there are teams spread from Devon to Essex and Dorset to Cambridge. The current league structure attempts to take this into consideration and facilitate teams to play an equal number of games.

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4. *In terms of Health and Safety, if an injury happens, who would be responsible or should look after it? Should any First Aider be at the sports event?*

All clubs are responsible for their own first aid. This is a minimum requirement of clubs travelling with youth teams. Clubs taking youth teams to competition should be self-sustainable and have appropriate equipment with them.

England Handball Overview:

Games in the under-16 league are organised to provide a wide variety of competition so teams are not facing the same competition on a repetitive basis as was the case in the 2017-18 season.

The under-19 and under-16 structure is designed on a central venue structure. With the tiered system approach the only way of reducing team travel is via a central system as per the charts provided.

There is the potential to move away from a centralised competition structure and this will be investigated further.

Cost, Venue Selection and Travel

1. *"We could consider approving our training venues for U14s & U16s, we could play some games at home (and make it more sustainable)"*

"I understand that is why we travel these distances, as there are very few "full size" or at least full width venues, but I feel that for U16 and especially U14 matches, we should rather play in local training halls (such as our 4 badminton courts we train in) and have at least half of the matches as home matches, instead of always travelling. This would reduce costs and allow more kids to participate."

The standards required for junior games are lower than those required for senior games.

The England Handball approved venue list is available online with guidelines on which halls are suitable for levels of competition. If teams are aware of halls that they deem suitable please inform England Handball via National Competitions Manager – john.pearce@englandhandball.com

2. *We appreciate that "booking halls" for a whole day is a challenge for the EHA but honestly our teams could organise the league games more cost efficiently in the sense that.*

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"We all fail to understand why we are pay £110 /hour (if we have only one game to play!!) to rent a hall where we court rent them for £50/hour in Central London"

"We don't see value for money when participating costs for the EHA U16/U19 Leagues have increased and the EHA has almost completely outsourced its running to the clubs (i.e. clubs create fixtures/update results, provide referees (U19s) & table officials (U16/U19) and self-manage/officiate on the day) with EHA only keeping responsibility for booking venues, scheduling and hosting the league tables/fixtures/results on its website."

All tournaments are organised/scheduled to incorporate two fixtures on the day providing more match time than a single 60-minute adult game. This in effect creates more game time for less cost than the traditional home and away format replicated in the senior leagues.

Some halls cost £50p/h others more e.g. £70p/h to £90p/h depending on location across the country.

- The average hall cost = £50p/h
- Number of games per team = 2
- Time = 1 hour per game
- Cost per team = £55
- Cost per game = £25 (for each team)

Therefore, all costs per team for two games = £100.

This leaves £10 spare for extra hall time or higher venue costs. This is of course dependent upon all teams completing their fixtures, as when teams withdraw the week of the competition the hall fee is non refundable. Hence we cannot change the price

Cost per minute of game time:

2 x 40min match (2 hour hall booking) = $100/80 = £1.25$ per min

1 x 60min match (2 hour hall booking) = $100/60 = £1.66$ per min

3. *I would like to give the example below as to how much cost we would have to pay for the U19 teams to play **one league game on Sunday** (Note: we tried to organise friendlies but no teams were available)*

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- *Tournament fees to play one 60 minute game: £65 i.e more than £1/min (!)*
- *Transportation costs for 8 players + coach + referee: £250*

i.e. £315 to play one game

1 - Teams have the option in the u19 league to submit a fixture change form and move fixtures to more a convenient time, date or location. As per information sent at the start of the season. This would allow you to move fixtures where required to reduce travel and costs.

2 - Tournament fees at u19 level include referee fees. There is no need to bring an extra referee. We are aware there have been a few issues with EHA referees nominations at the last u19 competition and will be in discussion with the Referees association.

3 - The cost of travel to a fixture is the responsibility of the club, in a home and away format the cost of travelling to a fixture would be exactly the same in the instance of playing a team away as travelling to a centralised venue.

4. *"For example the U14 tournaments held in Nottingham had no EHA presence whatsoever. Nothing was ready nor set up at David Ross as we are pretty familiar with the venue, overall the entire event really lacked energy and did not look professional at all which is disappointing considering this was for most of the players/parents their first game experience.*

Over the course of numerous seasons there have been constant requests for an England Handball presence at fixtures from certain clubs.

Aside from referees, this has not been possible so far.

Having an EHA staff member would increase costs of the tournaments further with the added time of paid staff. Having a volunteer tournament manager, teams hosting rounds of the competition or moving to a home and away format could be a viable option.

EHA asks clubs to pay £55 for each tournament for hall rentals, where No EHA representative comes to help support the team/ clubs volunteer's do it all

The halls have no idea what they have to prepare/organise i.e. the EHA person who books the hall do not brief them what are needs are

- *Halls are not available on time*

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- *No score table*
- *No health and safety check*
- *No local support*
- *No supervision*
- *No referees /no whistles (except on 30/9 as it was a referee course)“*

All halls are booked for Handball, with venues informed of what is required. Some venues appear to be better than others in setting up the courts and providing the expected equipment whereas others do not. Where this has been the case it has been raised with the venue.

Teams are responsible for refereeing u14 and u16 competitions as per the information sent at the start of the year and last year.

5. *“Please could you explain the rationale for these punitive punishments for youth teams at this grass roots level? To me this seems counter productive to the development of this sport.”*
“Fines are counterproductive and demotivating. September should be warnings or later start. It’s not by lack of trying.”

Forfeits in the under- 19 league have been prevalent over the course of the previous two to three seasons. This has made organising competitions exceptionally difficult and disruptive.

Fines were introduced to act as deterrent to prevent teams dropping out at the last minute. When teams withdraw from a league weekend with less than one week’s notice the cost and time required to rearrange fixtures is extensive.

Fines have only been introduced for clubs pulling out the week of the youth competition as this directly affects the opposition because travelling times and plans, which have been confirmed, then need to be altered.

6. *“I truly believe all the changes on admin tasks introduced for this year must have impacted clubs having teams ready for the first round - we had multiple players that couldn't take part in their first tournaments this season for whom we wouldn't have had any issue last season at the same time.*

“The added work did cost me a very dedicated member of our club's committee as well.”

The only administrative change this year is the requirement for photos to be uploaded onto the system so player identity can be confirmed.

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England Handball Overview:

Fees are based to cover the cost of hall hire with a small amount extra to extend bookings where required or cover higher hall costs.

Venues are available on the England Handball Approved venue list, and teams can add venues to this by contacting the National Competitions Manager directly. The request to have a competition manager at tournaments is difficult to meet and we are looking at options to address this whether this be changing the structure of the competition, teams hosting tournaments or moving to a home and away structure. Ultimately having a member of staff there increases the running costs of the competition and we have discussed whether referees could act as delegates in the centralised tournament structure. We have found that the centralised structure has been more and less successful depending on area and teams competing.

This will form part of the conversations in the Club meetings in November and March ahead of the 2019.2020 season.

Future Proposals

Centralised Program

What is the purpose?

Playing at centralised venues is designed to make teams life easier by reducing any external organisational factors. In essence teams have a set date and location where they can turn up and play their fixtures.

The purpose is to reduce administration as well as mitigate teams travelling excessive distances when taking in to consideration the spread of all the teams in registered to England Handball.

The aim is to reduce the travel to game time and cost ratio, by having teams in one place and able to play multiple fixtures in one day. This currently is meant to allow teams to play 2 x 40-minute matches rather than one 60 minute match.

How would it work?

Venues are selected based on team entries and where suitable court availability allows boys and girls to play at the same time.

Potential Amendments

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Allowing teams to host tournaments instead of England Handball organising and coordinating.

Positives

- Simplification of structure with teams just having to turn up on the day to play
- Set dates in the calendar, which can be booked in advance for all teams and planned for.
- There are no clashes of age groups allowing players to play across multiple age groups – u14 to u16, u16 to u19 and u19 to seniors.

Negatives

- Not all teams treat the tournament equally, some teams do not support refereeing and others do all of it
- There can be very long tournament days
- Teams withdrawing creates havoc to the schedules and causes mass changes, which affect multiple teams
- England Handball is not able to have a presence at the tournaments.

Requirements

Teams to be proactive in managing themselves on the day or for a manager to be leading the day.

Clearer checks by England Handball removing teams earlier from schedule if they do not have registered players

Home and Away league/Variation

What is the purpose?

Reasonably structured league format that is traditionally used in other sports leagues and mirrored from the senior competition.

How would it work?

Teams are provided a fixture list and expected to complete fixtures by a certain date and time or on a certain weekend.

Teams complete a set amount of fixtures in a home and away format hosting a team once and then away. This system mirrors the current

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England Handball Adult league system.

Potential Amendments

U19

National Tiers

National Tier 1 with Regional Tiers underneath, teams selected from the top performing teams over the last few seasons (Would this require a centralised program to prevent excess travel?)

Regional Tiers Leagues

North 1 - South 1 - South 2

Regional

North 1, Southwest 1, South East 1, South East 2.

U16

Regional Tiers Leagues

North 1 - South 1 - South 2

Regional

North 1, South West 1, South East 1, South East 2.

Positives

- Traditional format – Tiered system would allow for teams to compete at appropriate level.
- Certain amount of flexibility for teams to arrange their own fixtures depending if fixtures dates are fixed to weekends or time scales

Negatives

- The more you tier the system though the greater the travel across the country.
- Teams can be stuck playing against inappropriate opposition
- Senior and youth leagues would not match up

Requirements

The same requirements as the senior leagues

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Ranking/Play-off system

What is the purpose?

The main purpose would be to encourage the maximum amount of youth games to take place unrestricted by league schedules and calendar dates. Divulging power to the clubs in order to structure their own season.

Allow the alignment of senior teams fixtures and youth fixtures where possible.

This would allow clubs to choose which level they would like to compete at. Those more ambitious would be able to seek out the highest-level teams for tougher competition. Those who wished to just play local fixtures would be able to.

How would it work?

This sort of system is adapted/inspired from the American College Football System

Teams have complete freedom to play whoever they choose whenever they choose across the season. Allowing teams to organise fixtures against opposition at the most suitable time without being restricted by league dates or senior team competition.

At the end of the season by a set date, top-ranking teams would be invited to the Play offs to decide a national winner/finalists.

Rankings would take into consideration:

- Number of games played
- Win Loss Ratios
- Strength of opposition played
- Independent panel review (coaches vote)

Teams would be required to play a set number of games in order to meet the criteria to reach the play offs.

Fixtures would be organised with teams hosting their own fixtures as per the regional leagues.

Potential Amendments

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- Teams are provided a list of teams they must play i.e. 3/4 opposition clubs
- Teams are set a maximum they can play another team
- Teams set a maximum number of games they can play
- Teams organised into conferences/areas – bonus available for travelling to play against teams outside of conference/area.
- In order to facilitate travel and teams playing tougher opposition if required, teams travelling over 3 hours would play fixtures at a neutral venue.
- Consideration given to clubs who operate more than youth team

Positives

- Maximum freedom for clubs to play their own fixtures at times and locations that suit them
- Teams competing in Senior PHL/NHL/RHL would be able to organise fixtures back to back with teams from the same clubs taking youth teams to play ahead or after senior fixtures.
- Gives the youth leagues maximum flexibility.
- Places the emphasis on teams to organise themselves and reduces England Handball involvement.
- Reduces fees teams must pay to England Handball, only venue and travel costs would need to be covered by teams.
- Referees and Table officials would be organised by teams.

Negatives

- Unusual structure in comparison to traditional leagues
- Could lead to teams claiming bias against rankings or teams picked for play offs.
- The strongest team might not actually make it through to play offs depending on the opposition and number of fixtures they choose to play.

Requirements

Teams/Clubs would need to have appropriate referees taking charge of fixtures who would need to be registered with England Handball and have appropriate qualifications.

England Handball Comments

The amount of flexibility this provides is interesting and England Handball would be interested in exploring this option allowing teams to structure their own season based on their desires in a new format.

There is a large variance in the quality/level of the teams competing across the

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leagues and also a great deal of distance between teams. Therefore playing a standard home and away format in a structured league can see teams travelling long distances to play a team who is far superior or weaker than themselves, where they are forced to complete fixtures which might not suit their level or desires.

Applying a tiered system to the competition would immediately see teams travelling great distances as per the u19 and u16 league with the South 1 and South 2 competition.

This would be a very unique system but hopefully one that fits suitably to the current state/capability of the England Handball youth teams.

National Cup - Regional to National

What is the purpose?

Provide a structured knock out cup competition to produce national champion and a different format of competition for variance.

A national cup has not been introduced due to the current structure of the youth leagues. In the 2016.17 seasons a National u18 cup was introduced, this saw very few teams enter and the travel was extensive.

How would it work?

Depending on the Structure of the standard competition

National Cup

Reintroduce standalone National Cup with an open draw. This could see teams playing anyone across the country as per the senior cup.

County to Regional to National Cup

Teams play knockout fixtures within their region then progressing to play the winner of the next closest region.

The winner of the county plays the winner from another county through to Regional Finals and then National Finals.

Potential Amendments?

In order to facilitate travel and teams playing tougher opposition if required, teams travelling over 3 hours

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**Positives**

Traditional cup format

Negatives

Large amount of travel for youth teams at some stage of the competition.

Regional to National – Could see the final being played in the first round of the competition.

Requirements

Hosting by teams in the early rounds with referees. Referees look to be supplied in the final round of competition.

England Handball Comments

England Handball would not recommend a traditional cup format; there may be some scope for a County – Regional – National competition. However, England Handball currently sees little benefit in this format of competition.