



*Talent Development*  
*A New Way Forward*

# Hello

I'm Ed Barney and I'm the Performance Director of England and Great Britain Hockey



Looking ahead we see so much opportunity for hockey.

We have been asking ourselves what is right for the sport in the long run, and we are grateful to everyone who shared their views on this topic in the Talent Survey. We've had recent international success, but we want to get better. We've heard, and we know there is a need to do some things differently, radically different in some areas...

With this in mind, I would like to take this opportunity to update you on some of the exciting changes we are planning for the talent pathway in England. **These are potentially some of the most significant changes to our pathway in a decade, if not a lifetime.**

*They represent a vision, a direction of travel*

# Our Vision

First, let me ask you a question, what do you think 'success' looks like in say 6-8 years? For us, it's a vibrant elite game in England, English clubs excelling in European Club hockey and role models inspiring through consistent international success.



**But this isn't about 'England Hockey', it's about hockey in England.** We would like to take these next steps with those who share a determination to take performance hockey to a new level in this country. We want to do this in genuine partnership, we want to create shared ambitions which will see a sport that is exciting and **accessible for all**. And, we want to see a sport that is inclusive and diverse, with a talent pipeline that everyone is proud of. To do this, we need to create more 'exceptional talent environments' with great coaching, where training sessions and competitions are frequent and of the highest quality. A learning environment fit for the future which takes care of each young player which is backed up with one clear, consistent plan for their hockey.

**They say 'home is where the heart is' and it's the heart, the club game, that we believe is critical to future success.** Evidence from around the world in both hockey and other team sports is clear that a high-quality club game is critical to the health and vibrancy of the sport, and to international success.

*So, it's to home that we want to return*





# But why do we need to change?

**Being frank, maintaining the status quo is not ok. What may have been right for yesterday will not be right for tomorrow.**

To re-create magical moments like the ones we saw in Rio we need to be better. We certainly have some gaps to our international competitors. We aspire for greater strength in depth throughout our pathway, more highly skilled players, more professional coaching opportunities and more hockey 'talent hotspots'.

We see this as a big opportunity, not a criticism – how good would it be if we can find a way to step up in all these areas? Some of the challenges you've talked about relate to the current pathway. The Player Pathway Performance Centres are constrained by limited contact time and struggle to stretch the abilities of our best players often enough.

For some, Performance Centres add another environment to an already congested hockey programme. Nearly all the talented players in England play across multiple hockey set-ups, often with competing demands. We will strive to create a more bespoke, less conflicting hockey schedule for them.

And to our culture, which celebrates diversity in some areas (e.g. equality of gender provision) but in others, we have a long way to go. The recent talent survey suggests significant room for improvement, namely the player experience, methods for selection, bias, accessibility, inclusion and finally the profile and attractiveness of hockey as the sporting choice of generations to come.

*We don't believe the current approach or structure will deliver our ambitions*

# So, what are we going to do about it?



**Clubs and schools are the heart of our game**, with the most talented young players often spending 80% or more of their hockey playing and training time in club and/or school teams. We have an incredible opportunity to put the club and the school at the heart of talent development.

But, to do this, will mean moving away from our regionally delivered Performance Centre model and finding a way of delivering the exceptional talent development environments mentioned earlier, in clubs and schools across the country.



*I think a radical change in approach is required and I think we need to start thinking more about schools and clubs providing players to the pathway, rather than relying on the pathway to produce and develop talent.*



*(Source: Talent Survey)*

*We recognise that this will be a seismic change*



but it's a critical one we need to make if we are going to achieve these ambitions. We need the highest potential players to be able to access the best training, with the best coaches on a regular basis (two, three or four times a week as is the case for many of our international competitors).

# Our ambition

**Our aspiration is for these ‘centres of excellence’ to become the priority environments for our best 15-18 year olds** (approximately, the top 500 in each gender).

But we recognise that anything in the future needs to be flexible with much greater collaboration between England Hockey, clubs and schools, ensuring we find the best solution for everyone.

**Progression in hockey isn’t straightforward, it’s a bumpy route and we must be better at supporting this.** Flexibility, openness and avoiding a ‘one size fits all’ is the future. We’ve heard your feedback about the current selection methods, and we will create a more open and transparent selection process to each stage which takes greater account of future potential.

“**A different and continuous approach to talent development, current routes can be a ‘closed shop’ even though they are not meant to be.**”

(Source: Talent Survey)

We’ve made a start on this. We’ve listened to your feedback, received some great ideas and considered how successful team sports excel in this area. We will deliver a more open, and ‘potential-based’ selection system. It’s a complex area and we will need the help of coaches who have real depth of experience and knowledge to help develop and deliver this.

“**Quality of Club hockey experience - we rely on the performance pathway too much to develop talent, but high quality club environments would serve a greater role and provide a greater oversupply of talented players at a young age.**”

(Source: Talent Survey)



# Early talent development

Over 9000 young players are currently engaged in local Academy Centre programmes nationwide, providing an age-grade representative opportunity for many young people.

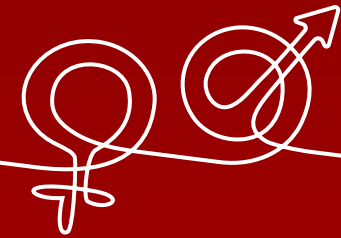
In the future we see Academy Centre hockey continuing to offer this opportunity in early talent development - it has a role to play in attracting players to the sport and providing competitive opportunities. We also know that Academy Centre hockey provides the highest 'representative' experience for most players and can inspire a life-long involvement with the sport.

But, a 'single route' into the talent system isn't player centred.

**We want to open the access routes** and want clubs and schools to sit alongside local Academy Centres as recognised entry routes.

We're also keen to explore the possibility of some form of 'accreditation' which identifies and recognises those clubs and schools who excel in hockey talent development.

# Inclusion and diversity



We must excel in providing safe, enjoyable and positive experiences for every young person and we know the lived experiences in hockey for some young players needs to be better. We know there are talented hockey players who haven't had the opportunity to shine.

We need to work together to improve, but what does that actually mean?

**The kind of areas we will be addressing include:**

- **accessible locations** for 'centres of excellence'
- equality of **geographical spread**
- positive action in the representation and selection of **state educated players**
- targeted initiatives which see a step change in the **representation of ethnic groups** in performance activity

We recognise that hockey must do better in these areas.



*We are passionate about working with clubs to grow the breadth and diversity of the talent pool.*



# What next?

Thank you for your time. We've made some bold statements about **our direction of travel** that will require a significant change from England Hockey, something we are committed to doing. We need to work in partnership and collaboration with the hockey community and help shape the sport for generations to come. It will not be achieved overnight, but, if we don't start now, then when?

**We now need your help to evolve the ideas, address unanswered questions and shape the detail.**

In summary, the ideas that we've heard and are keen to drive forward over the coming years are as follows:

- **A shift in approach from England Hockey with a prioritisation of club hockey**
- **An emphasis on shared ambition and collaboration between clubs, schools and England Hockey**
- **Exceptional talent development environments with primarily club based 'centres of excellence' for our most talented player to replace Performance Centres (likely late 2022)**
- **A flexible system which ensures the right environments for the right players**
- **Local Academy Centres sitting alongside clubs and schools in early talent development (11-14yrs)**
- **Recognition for clubs and schools who excel in talent development**
- **Open, more evidence-based selection processes**
- **Action to deliver more inclusive and diverse talent and performance programmes**

We want to know what you think and what questions you have. We've provided a few in a supporting document but please let us know by emailing [talent@englandhockey.co.uk](mailto:talent@englandhockey.co.uk).

Over the next few months, we will be setting up a number of forums and workshops to explore topics and develop the detail. Following on from this, we hope to share a more detailed plan for the future of junior talent development.

*A hugely exciting road lies ahead...*

I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the hard work, commitment and passion of the people who support junior hockey. We look forward to working alongside you to deliver the next exciting chapter of English hockey.

**We have the opportunity to re-shape junior hockey - it is in our gift to make the experience stimulating, inspiring, challenging and one that young players are proud and excited to be part of.**

Best regards,

*Ed James*



**ENGLAND  
HOCKEY**