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## **Domestic Structure 2010 and onwards – “Cricket’s big debate”**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- Determining a coherent, sensible and acceptable structure for domestic cricket for 2010 is proving extremely challenging.
- The ECB need to fit four competitions into a six month period hemmed in by international matches and tournaments, the Champions League and the probability of poor weather at the start and end of the period available.
- The ECB need to take into account the cricketing and commercial imperatives, including the desires of our broadcasters and sponsors and the pressure to reduce the overall volume of cricket being played by increasingly overburdened players.
- The attempts to formulate a good structure for 2010 have forced ECB to re-evaluate its priorities and one current proposal being debated is a reduction in the number of games played in the four day County Championship (currently 16 matches over the season).
- 92% of players believe the County Championship is the most important competition in our domestic season.
- There is too much cricket - There is a real danger that, unless the game addresses the general volume of cricket being played, we not only dilute standards and devalue our offering to fans but, domestically, hamper the development of our cricketers, which ultimately weakens the goal of a creating long lasting success for England sides across all formats.
- 65% of players believe that we don't need 2 T20 competitions, with 57% believing that this will create T20 overkill.
- We seem to be tinkering with a system that is recognised as working to incorporate a tournament in P20 that many see no point in (let alone understand the financial forecasts or rules and conditions) and a Champions League that we have no ownership of and that only 2 county teams (out of 9) can achieve the chance of invitation.
- Consistently players recognise that 2 divisions, promotion / relegation, combined with 96 overs a day is the correct format for the CC bearing in mind that we incorporate 18 sides.
- Any other structure for the County Championship will not be symmetrical, would lose integrity and destroy standards that are recognised as high as can be remembered.
- Statistics point to T20 being the future of the one day format. It has overtaken 50 over cricket in popularity at domestic level. The game could consider that any reduction of cricket should therefore made to this format.
- The PCA strongly recommend that unless full and proper research has been undertaken as to the feasibility of P20 and that transparency can be gauged as to the potential financial upside (if any) and to what extent that could impact amongst the 18 counties, that the P20 be reviewed again.
- PCA recommend that the ECB Cricket Committee is given an increased mandate to have sufficient authority to make a difference in the game on all cricketing issues. One of the key challenges in our game moving forward will be ensuring that people who understand the cricket needs have a greater say and involvement. Any changes to the structure need to be carefully considered and total transparency with regard to future commercial gains need to be provided to all stakeholders.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **STRUCTURE OF DOMESTIC CRICKET**

For several years, players have commented on the structure of our domestic and international game.

More than ever this is an area for real concern.

It is proving incredibly challenging for ECB to come up with a sensible, coherent and acceptable structure for domestic cricket in 2010. There are a number of pressures, some external and some internal, that make it nigh on impossible to squeeze the volume of cricket dictated by various commitments into the time available for the season.

This paper has been put together after regular consultation with players on the domestic structure over the previous 3 years \*(**appendix ii & iii**) and is aimed at ensuring that the correct considerations are prioritised.

Player views expressed through our surveys in previous years has already contributed to the scrapping of 40 over competition for 2010 onwards and other adjustments, but there is a long way to go in achieving a satisfactory domestic structure and one wonders whether commercial and cricketing factors can ever sit in harmony to create a perfect structure for all stakeholders?

This year, players have had only 4 days to review the latest proposal paper put forward by the ECB for 2010, but we have garnered comment from all dressing rooms to supplement the more general statistics we received through our 2009 pre-season survey.

It seems difficult to fathom, but it now appears that the new P20, details of which are largely unknown, and the Champions League tournament are now dictating a re-shuffle of the structure of County Championship cricket.

English cricket has no direct stake in the Champions League and, at best, it may invite 2 of our domestic teams to have a one in sixteen chance of \$1m in prize money. This is a tournament that only 9 out of the 18 county teams will have the chance of qualifying for anyway, so to allow it to constrain our domestic season seems misconceived.,

The current generation of cricket administrators hold the destiny of cricket in their hands. The decisions made over the next 12 -18 months can dictate the future health and success of the game.

We can only hope those making these final decisions have the full knowledge and understanding of the core product and the thorough feedback of all stakeholders, including players, broadcasters and spectators. The rejection of PCA involvement in the P20 working party this past year was not an auspicious beginning.

## IS THERE TOO MUCH CRICKET?

The Schofield Report and recent player surveys all document that we play too much cricket and make valid cricketing reasons for these conclusions:

***“Domestic Competition Structure To reduce the amount of cricket played at First Class level to enable players to maintain and develop their cricket skills and fitness levels during the season, and provide competition formats and regulations which as far as possible mirror the international game.”***

***Schofield report 2007***

The domestic structure in 2009 is as congested, cluttered and confused as anyone can remember.

Under the new broadcasting deal running from now until 2013, we are led to understand that the domestic game is supposed to have 4 competitions. We would like to hear definitively if this is the case.

In 2007 and 2008, players called for 3 strong, differentiated domestic competitions \***appendix ii & iii**

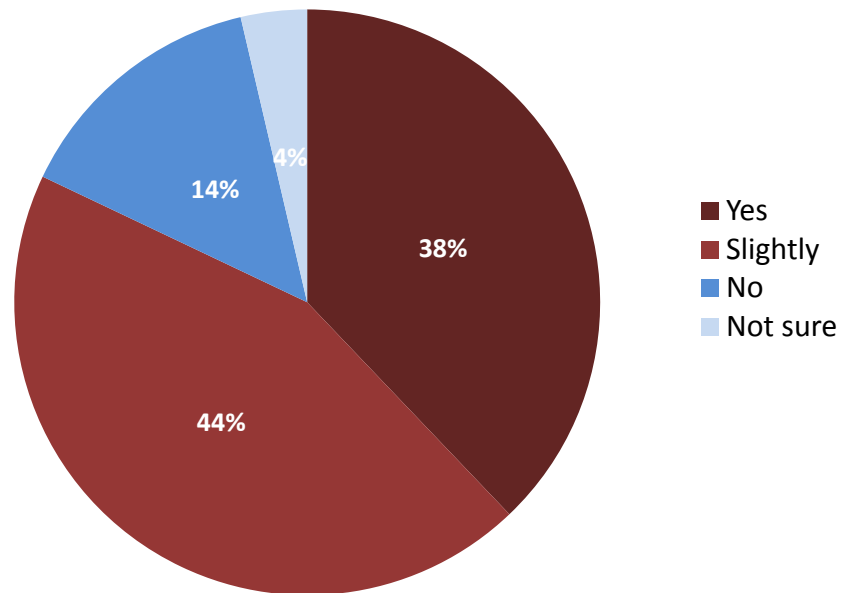
***There is a real danger that, unless the game addresses the general volume of cricket being played, we not only dilute standards and devalue our brand but domestically, hamper the development of our cricketers, which ultimately weakens the goal of a creating long lasting success for England sides across all formats.***

74% of cricketers in 2007 and 77% in 2008 thought we play too much cricket. (Responses of 'yes' or 'slightly too much' combined.)

This year's survey has shown a 10% increase on 2008, up to 86%. A more cluttered structure of cricket has been caused by

- England hosting the ICC T20 championships in June (leading to domestic T20 being brought forward and split into 2 stages)
- A shift into de-regionalising the Friends Provident Trophy and an altered structure allowing for an element of 'blocking'.

### Too much cricket played? - Whole Sample



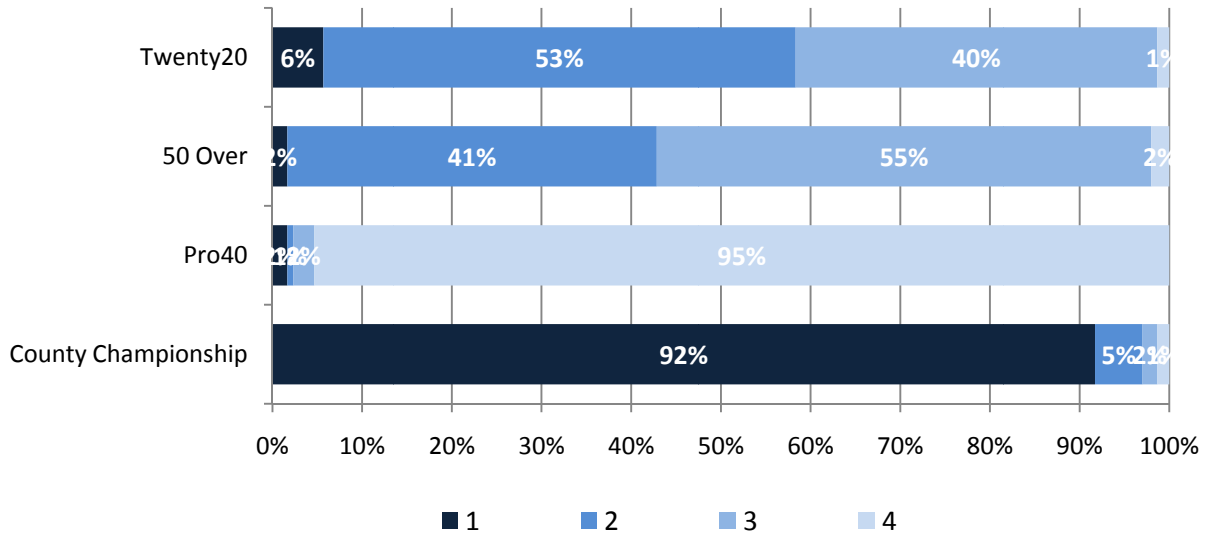
### Championship still the players favorite, but Twenty20 continues its rise in popularity

- 92% of players still put the 4 day county championship at the most important domestic competition and the obvious pathway to the pinnacle format of Test cricket. (In 2008 it was ranked most important with 88%) An increase in prize monies could be a reason for this increase \*appendix i
- This year's survey shows an ever increasing shift towards the T20 format. In 2008 players prioritized 50 and 20 over cricket equally as the 2nd most important competition. However we can now see the T20 format beginning to edge ahead.

### Rate the four domestic competitions in order of importance? (Use numbering 1 - 4, with 1 being the most important)

	1	2	3	4	Total Responses	Not Answered
County Championship	92% (274)	5% (16)	2% (5)	1% (4)	299	2
Pro40	2% (5)	1% (2)	2% (7)	95% (283)	297	4
50 Over	2% (5)	40% (121)	56% (166)	2% (6)	298	3
Twenty20	6% (17)	53% (158)	40% (118)	1% (4)	297	4

## Importance of 4 domestic competitions - Whole Sample



### Player statistics

- An overwhelming number of players primarily acknowledge the raison d'être for county cricket is to produce England cricketers.

What is the primary objective for county cricket in your opinion?				
		Responses	Percent	Graphs
Win trophies		202	68%	
Produce cricketers to play for England		244	82%	
Earn a living		138	46%	
Other		8	2%	
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES:</b>		<b>295</b>		
Not Answered:		6		

## **Twenty20 cricket**

### **P20 - 2010**

Future plans for a new twenty20 domestic competition, P20 (formerly named EPL), are largely unknown at the time of writing. The PCA were excluded from the working party that formulated P20, but that has not prevented us considering the details that have been put into the public domain so far. Consequently, it is difficult to make a definitive contribution or recommendation, but we believe it is worth opening up for further debate our present analysis based on what we already know:

### **Potential strengths**

- Potential to bring iconic overseas stars for the competition to clearly differentiate it from domestic T20
- England player participation
- A prime slot in the English summer
- Potential to gain commercially

### **Opportunities**

- Establish a strong global event
- Overseas broadcast revenue
- Grow the cricketing audience and in particular the family audience
- Domestic cricketers to play in a global event
- Attract new investment
- Grow links and relationships with other International Boards
- Mobility options for a county loan structure for the length of the tournament

### **Weaknesses**

- 1 competition too many
- Will there be differentiation of T20 as we know it?
- Only top 9 teams in the 2 divisional structure will have chance of going to the Champions League
- 2 divisional structure could hamper commerciality for 2<sup>nd</sup> divisional teams
- Young English players will miss out if significant numbers of overseas players are attracted
- Revenue predictions are believed to be low
- Our summer slot is a key 'rest' period for top international players

### **Threats**

- T20 overkill
- If no differentiation then audience 'fatigue' could be a factor
- England / International schedule
- Southern Premier League (SPL) and Indian Premier League (IPL)
- Economic environment
- BCCI relationship – Player power

In light of the above analysis, it is clear that P20 could be a success, but there are great risks attached to proceeding without more information and consultation. Given that we all acknowledge that Twenty20 cricket is the best commercial offering at domestic level, is the P20 really the best commercial proposition for English cricket? Is it possible that we painting ourselves into a corner because we lack the imagination to think outside our current structural constraints?

### Summary

- 65% of players believe that we don't need 2 T20 competitions, with 57% believing that this will create T20 overkill.
- Of the 26% of cricketers who thought that we do need 2 T20 competitions almost all of them believe the extra tournament needs to raise incremental income without cannibalising existing revenues.

Many factors have affected the T20 success / attendances in the last 2 years

### 2008

- Poor weather

### 2009

- T20 World Cup
- General cricket 'overkill'?
- Economy
- Tournament played earlier and spilt into sections

T20 Competitions						
	Yes 1	No 2	Not sure 3	Total Responses	Not Answered	
Two Twenty20 competitions are planned for 2010. T20 & a new P20/EPL. Do you think this will be T20 overkill?	57%	22%	21%	301	0	
	(172)	(67)	(62)			

Does English Domestic cricket need two T20 competitions?			
		Responses	Percent
Yes		75	26%
No		190	65%
Yes providing.....(see next question)		26	9%
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES:</b>		<b>291</b>	
Not Answered:		10	

Yes, (England does need two T20 competitions) providing that (tick all that apply)			
		Responses	Percent
The two competitions are distinguishable		55	63%
They raise significant income		80	91%
They attract significant international stars		49	56%
	<b>TOTAL CLICKS:</b>	<b>184</b>	
	<b>TOTAL RESPONSES:</b>	<b>87</b>	
	Not Answered:	214	

## Conclusion

We seem to be tinkering with a system that is recognised as working to incorporate a tournament in P20 that many see no point in and let alone understand the financial forecasts or rules and conditions and a Champions League that we have no ownership of and that only 2 county teams (out of 9) can achieve the chance of invitation.

Recent player poles on the current format of county cricket and in particular the County championship over the past 15 months –

- April 2008 player voted the CC as the most important competition with **88%**
- April 2009 has seen the CC increase in its importance to **92%**

## Player representative views

Over the past week the County representatives were asked to canvas dressing room opinion on the possibility that the County Championship structure would be altered after receiving the ECB paper -

*“We have always had the championship as our club’s priority and compromising this comp is the wrong thing to do. The qualities are there for all to see within the competition and the standards are without doubt better than ever”*

*“View from the dressing room is very similar to those from around the counties. Very happy with structure and standard of 4-day cricket as it is and would hope the ECB kept things as they are. Would like to see only 3 comps, but was a view that more 50 over cricket should be played when conditions are better later in season”*

*“We voted the championship as the most important so it should be the last to suffer from too much cricket, we have a competitive and prestigious cch which promotes tough cricket and is a true reflection of the counties”*

*“There should be 3 competitions. Championship being the priority, major twenty20 and 50 over comp. To sum it up, this is a big opportunity to get this right. We feel 2 T20 comp's is major over kill for player and spec. Down the road this could kill the product!”*

*“Championship should stay the same, since two divisions it is clear the standard and competitiveness has improved. Justin Langer not long ago who was saying he felt it was a strong setup at the moment. 16 games in our dressing room was the view due to fairness and symmetry. With the best teams winning their tables with no arguments. 7th of April is too early and some teams could end up with 2 or 3 wash outs at the end of the season. We have major concerns about the overkill of twenty20, crowds have been down already this year and that can't be a good sign”*

*“The championship in its current format feels like it works as near to perfectly as we'll get. The 16 match competition allows for the interference of weather etc and allowing the best team to come out on top. Since the arrival of the 2 division format, the boys have only positive words for it. If you start to play a non symmetrical comp, then it would cause frustration to players and fans alike. I thought the ECB were trying to make sure that the championship remains the no.1 comp by upping prize money etc, and then this look like they've reneged on that immediately.”*

*“With regards to scheduling it's felt that 7th April is too early to start, largely due to poor weather and pitch conditions. We'd rather play until the end of September, and feel that it's a waste for 16 of the counties to miss out on 2/3 weeks of decent conditions at the end of the year. Big concerns that there is no, or little, 1day 50 over cricket after the end of May. How are you supposed to force your way into the England 1 day side? Why are we playing all of our 1 day cricket on the poorer 1 day wickets early season, when at international level, home and abroad, 1 day cricket is generally played on flat pitches?”*

*“Last year in the first Div, going in to the last game I think 4 teams could win the title and 4 teams could go down illustrating the competitiveness. It would be a farce not to play a symmetrical championship. Therefore a 16 match championship seemed the only option”*

*“The interesting thing is that last year the ECB wanted to preserve the status of the 4 day game and increased prize money to reflect this. Now they are potentially devaluing the product by messing with the format and also implementing the MOU. There are benefits to a reduction in cricket but it must be done in a more structured way than was proposed in the document.”*

*“The fact that the second half of September is seen as a possible opportunity to fit in even more cricket is quite remarkable. The view from our dressing room is that none of the options given are acceptable, however there should be a push to keep Championship cricket as strong as possible. Obviously another concern is the set up of the P20.”*

Consistently players recognise that 2 divisions, promotion / relegation, combined with 96 overs a day is the correct format for the CC bearing in mind that we incorporate 18 sides.

Any other structure will not be symmetrical, would lose integrity and destroy standards that are recognised as high as can be remembered. \*Appendix v- conference cricket

- All changes laid out with regard to a reduction will affect the integrity of the county championship.
- If three conferences were an option, why have 3 divisions of 6 not been considered in order to maintain the standards that have been created?
- Why are we suggesting changes that will affect the outcomes and the participants of this year's competition. I.e. - potentially one up from Div 2?

Statistics point to T20 being the future of the one day format. It has overtaken 50 over cricket in popularity at domestic level. The game could consider that any reduction of cricket should therefore made to this format.

## **Recommendations**

The PCA strongly recommend that unless full and proper research has been undertaken as to the feasibility of P20 and that transparency can be gauged as to the potential financial upside (if any) and to what extent that could impact amongst the 18 counties, that the P20 be reviewed again.

Dependent upon that information, we also recommend a full open review of the opportunities previously discussed for a franchise based tournament.

In the mean time, we suggest exploratory discussions with Sky as to the feasibility /implications of 3 domestic competitions in the current broadcasting agreement.

### **We again, as in previous years, strongly suggest a 3 competition format that -**

- Allows for the current format - 16 x 4 day County Championship, 50 overs and T20 comps
- Allows time for rest and practice – removing 'back to back' fixtures
- De- clutters the cricketing landscape
- Allows 50 over cricket to be played at a more conducive time of the year
- Allows for the successful T20 programme to be consolidated and capitalized
- We again recommend that the ECB cricket committee are given an increased mandate to have teeth and authority to make a difference in the game on all cricketing issues. One of the key challenges in our game moving forward will be ensuring that people who understand the cricket needs have a greater say and involvement. Any changes for the structure need to be carefully considered and total transparency with regard to future commercial gains need to be provided to all stakeholders.
- Consideration should be given to a reduction in FPT from 8 matches to 4 whilst keeping quarter finals (old B&H style)

## Appendices

### (i) Prize Monies 2008 v 2009



The header of the table features the PCA logo on the left and a close-up image of a cricket ball on the right.

	2008	Players	2009	county rewards
County Championship Division 1	£100,000	to	£350,000	<b>£150k</b>
County Championship Division 2	£30,000	to	£90,000	<b>£75k</b>
Pro40 Division 1	£44,000	to	£75,000	<b>£75k</b>
Pro40 Division 2	£15,000	to	£40,000	<b>£40k</b>
Friends Provident	£43,000	to	£75,000	<b>£75k</b>
T20	£42,000	to	£40,000	<b>£40k</b>




## (ii) Summary of 2008 player views

### PCA aims

- Competition structures to ensure maximum intensity, integrity and quality in each match.
- Focus on quality not quantity.
- De-clutter the season so that it is easier for spectators to understand.
- Help create commercially viable structures.

Many have talked about reducing the levels of cricket. Last season our survey showed 49% of players thought we played slightly too much.

The question is how much cricket could be reduced in order to create meaningful time for rest, recuperation and practise? Would any reduction be eaten away with more one-day cricket? Changes to the structure have been made since then and need to be recognised.

New changes to the Friends Provident (FPT) 50 over competition and a reduction of overs in 4 day cricket seem to have made a significant difference to standards, but they need to be judged properly after a full season. Players do recognize the difficulty in trying to find the perfect structure both commercially and in cricketing terms and that is reflected in this year's views

### Balance any new robust commercial structure with key cricketing development needs

- Concentrate on a 3 competition structure closely mirroring International cricket
- Maintain 2 divisional county championship structures
- Increase prize money for winning County Championship to £1m
- Abandon 40 over cricket
- Encourage ICC to restructure Future Tours Programme (FTP) & create a meaningful Test Championship
- Create a window for IPL
- Remove restrictions on players who play in ICL
- Restrict numbers of non-England qualified cricketers to balanced and acceptable levels
- ECB to consult properly with the games key stakeholders on all issues affecting the game
- ECB to create an ongoing strategy for consumer feedback at every level of the professional game each year
- Develop better 2nd XI cricket structures as matter of importance
- Put more time and resource into recreational club cricket structures

### **(iii) Summary of 2007 player views**

#### **PCA aims**

Competition structures to ensure maximum intensity, integrity and quality in each match.  
Focus on quality not quantity.  
De-clutter the season so that it is easier for everyone to understand.

#### **Headline results of survey**

95% of cricketers said the domestic structure should mirror international formats as closely as possible.  
93% of cricketers believed that the divisional structure with promotion and relegation worked well in the County Championship.  
Only 23% of cricketers felt that the structure for 50 and 40-over cricket worked well in 2006.  
67% of cricketers said that there should be just three domestic competitions.

#### **PCA recommendations**

County competitions must closely mirror the international competition set up.  
Keep current two division, four day County Championship structure, but reduce the number of overs to 96 in a day – moving closer to Test matches.  
50-over competition to be prioritised and redesigned.  
To abandon the 40-over format and focus on 50-overs mirroring the international set up.  
Invest in success – continue to grow the Twenty20 Cup.

#### **One of the issues consistently raised by players during discussions with the PCA was the desire to reduce back-to-back matches.**

Less back-to-back matches would enable more recovery time and mean that players played at a higher intensity.  
More effort must be made with the schedule to ensure that this can happen.  
The players support the decision to allow the new ball to be taken after 80 overs. This will bring many benefits by removing some of the poorest passages of cricket. Despite this, the players were disappointed that there was no reduction in the number of overs per day for the 2007 season.

**A sixteen match two division County Championship is not a key commercial driver for the counties. Nevertheless, our research shows that the players believed it was the best competition format for producing future test players.**

#### **(iv) Conferences for Championship cricket (2008 report)**

Whilst a 3 conference championship offers some merits and would allow a 12-15 match tournament, it is felt that after increasing standards in recent years, it would be a large backward step to begin a random or regional based 3 conference county championship. It doesn't reduce cricket enough to have any significant impact.

Standards are high in both divisions, but it is becoming widely recognised that division one has a greater depth.

Cricket is now being likened to the tough Australian Shield cricket. Randomly picking/pooling teams will destroy several years of work in getting the standards to the high levels that we see today. Strong arguable reasons for adopting a conference system are yet to be put forward. In fact since 'Raising the standards' in 1997, the format has carried little favour.

It creates an asymmetrical format which would be complicated to follow for players and spectators and will lack competitive sporting integrity.

An asymmetrical structure could work in a one-day format but should not be considered for the premier 4 day competition which is highly regarded by the players.

#### **(vi) Team Salary Payments**

##### **Introduction**

"Team Salary Payments" ("TSP") is the concept that the players in a league are entitled to a percentage of the total revenues of the league and a system under which that total is divided amongst the players by an agreed formula.

A "Wage Cap" is an amount chosen by the teams in a league limiting the total amount they may spend on player salaries. A "hard" cap is an arbitrary limit determined by the league. A "soft" cap is an amount set by reference to objective criteria usually related to team or league revenues.

The ECB are currently running a trial for a system they are calling "Team Salary Payments" but is more akin to a halfway house between a genuine TSP and a wage cap. The purpose is threefold:

- One is to improve the competitiveness of competitions by keeping to a finite level how much one club can spend on its playing staff.
- The second is to keep under control the main item of expenditure of FCC's, players costs. This in turn is to help to try and ensure, as far as is possible, the long-term

financial survival of FCC's and the long-term employment prospects of players - to the benefit of all Counties, players, other staff and supporters.

- The third is to provide the players with an objectively defined direct interest in the financial state and wellbeing of the professional game and to incentivise them to contribute more holistically to its success.

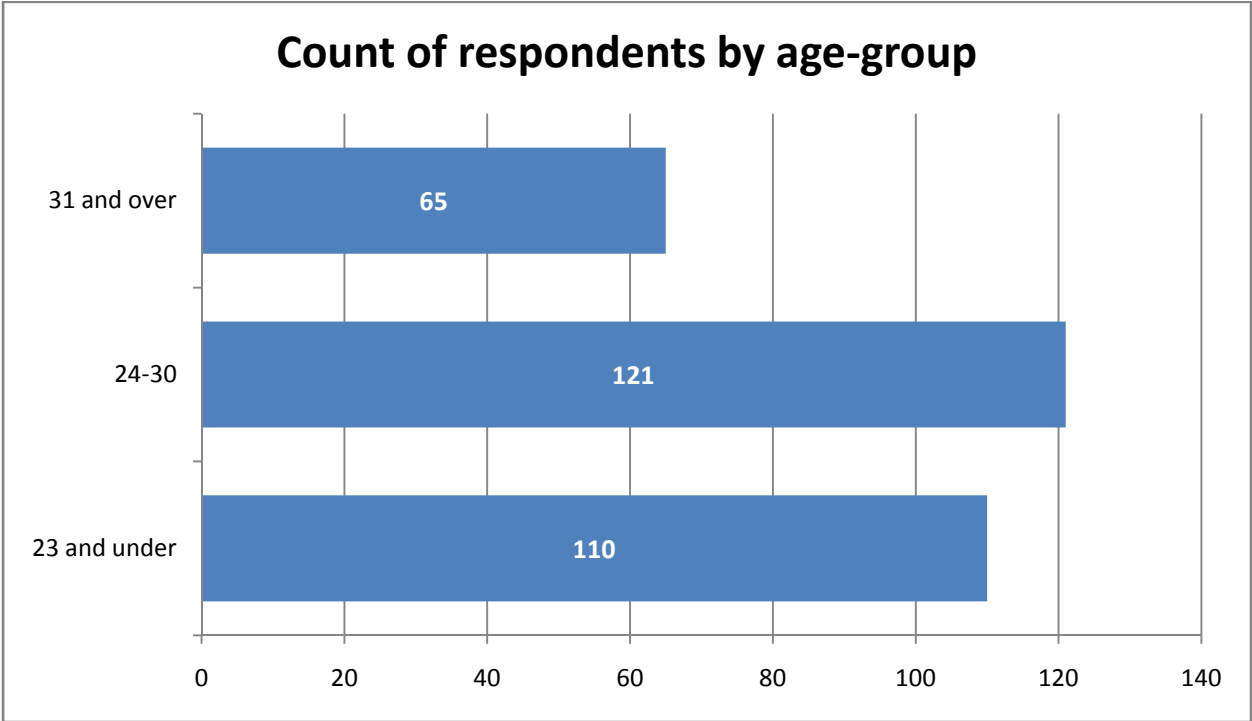
2009 is a trial run with the TSP set at £1.85m per County. The rules of the system are complex, but clear and aimed at ensuring transparency and compliance. The key difference between a genuine TSP system and the ECB proposal is that the Counties do not have to spend £1.85m – it is simply a wage cap – and the vast majority of Counties do not pay anywhere near the maximum.

The PCA has been involved in the consultation around this proposed system, but not in the fixing of the level of TSP. We reserve judgment dependent on the outcome of the trial and evidence of any adverse impact on players, but the stance we have taken throughout is that it is absolutely essential that the TSP figure must be set purely by reference to a fixed percentage of total ECB revenues.

The PCA has strongly recommended a level of 40%, which is sensible given the purpose of the scheme and by reference to actual expenditure on player salaries in other major team sports in the UK.

Without this commitment to objective TSP level setting, the PCA will oppose the proposed system as an arbitrary (and anti-competitive) wage cap.

(vii) Survey sample



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