

Volleyball England Junior Competitions Review/Consultation – 2021-22 season

Introduction

For the 2021-22 season a major overhaul of the junior competition structure took place, with the competitions at U15,16 and 18 level changing from a knockout format to a Grand Prix format. Additionally, the competitions were split into two levels Tier 1 (performance), Tier 2 (development). The hoped outcomes were.

- Increased participation (both the number of teams and number of events each team participated in)
- Teams more closely matched (due to tier format and the Gold, Silver...pool system in Tier 1 and development team nature of tier 2)
- Create a format which had both performance and developmental elements

Focussing on the 2022-23 season these outcomes have not changed and are the underlying principles of the junior competition structure.

It should also be noted, that due to the uncertainty of the impact that COVID restrictions might have, all competitions took place in the period Jan-April and within the regulations a lot of flexibility was built in to try and minimise possible impacts of the pandemic, on the overall competition and to individual teams.

This review has looked in detail at the feedback received following each Grand Prix (coaches, parents, players, supporters, and referees), from the HUB team, via direct e-mails to the competitions team, and the results of mid-season (2021-22) observations around the format of the T1 GP3's. Based on this feedback key areas of success and concern have been highlighted and options put forward for the 2022-23 edition.

In term of entries, it is not possible to directly compare previous competitions due to the significant differences in formats, however if you look at the number of players you can get a measure of the participation levels. The last full season of the old format attracted 112 teams, if you assume an average squad size of nine players numbers would total around 1008, the 2021-22 competition attracted 2245 players, so whilst no totally accurate figures are available at present this measure would suggest an increase has taken place. The best recorded entry number is 210 teams (so 1,890 players), so again an increase.

Entries overview

2021-22	Total	Age Group			Gender		Tier		Grand Prix		
		U15	U16	U18	Boys	Girls	Tier 1	Tier 2	GP1	GP2	GP3
Clubs	82	54	44	57	75	63	37	75	76	76	70
Teams	355	181	89	98	182	173	90	280	294	316	284
Players*	2245	1277	938	941	1543	1484	973	2208	2675	2839	2617

****Total No. of Players is as registered on Volleyzone – all other figures are based on attendance at events and hence why the totals don't match***

Summary of Junior Competitions Feedback 2021-22 Season

82 Clubs

355 Teams

Sample Size:

410

Average Rating:

8.27

Average Rating for pre competition organisation:

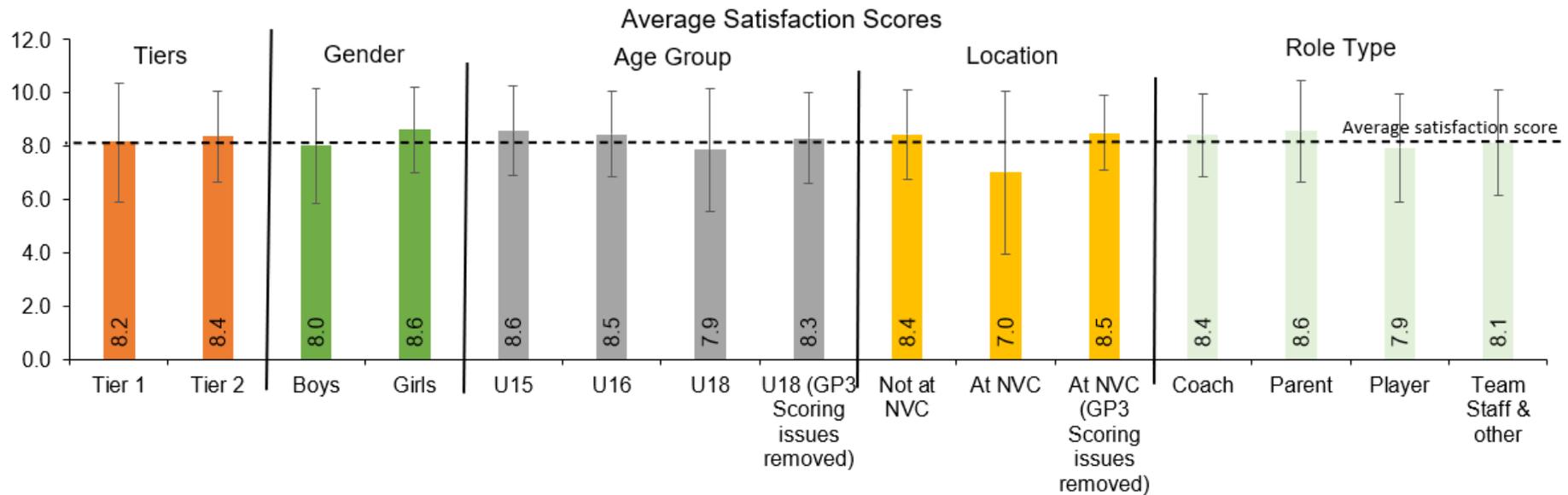
8.33

2245 Registered Players

For the average satisfaction rating, **no differences** were reported **between tier or gender**.

Differences were reported between ages (U15 to U18) and venue (at NVC or not), however, when responses relating to GP3 scoring were removed no differences were found.

Largely **no differences were reported between roles**, however, **parents** gave a significantly **higher average satisfaction score** (8.6 ± 1.9) compared to **players** (7.9 ± 2.0).



What Went Well:	9 or 10		all		Quote
	satisfaction score		respondent		
Key Themes	Count	%	Count	%	
Well organised	54	24%	79	19%	"Well organised. Fun. Friendly." Parent Tier 2 Girls U15
Level of competition	40	18%	69	17%	"good quality of competition for the boys. great to have them playing in games again" Team Staff Tier 1 Boys U15
Opportunity to play	25	11%	46	11%	"It was fun, I got to play lots of volleyball in my first external tournament" Player Tier 2 Boys U16
Atmosphere	26	12%	44	11%	"Atmosphere, seeing young people playing again in such a fun event" Coach Tier 1 Top 8 Teams Girls U18 - Kettering
Fun	25	11%	40	10%	"It was fun, every one was friendly and everyone with more experience tried to help those with less experience" Player Tier 2 Boys U15

What Could be Improved:	0 to 6		all		Quote
	satisfaction score		respondent		
Key Themes	Count	%	Count	%	
Nothing/don't know			64	16%	"Nothing noticeable or outstanding needs to be improved" Player Tier 1 Boys U18
Competition format	9	17%	24	6%	"Having professional referees referee our matches, as well as having more time to play matches (5 Sets)." Player Tier 1 Boys U18
GP3 Scoring Issue	8	15%	9	2%	"Your rules on who gets into the final. How can a team that wins all there games not get to the final. Boswell's beat Polonia convincingly but still didn't go through to the final. " Supporter Tier 1 Top 8 Teams Boys U18 - Kettering
Improve venue/facilities	6	11%	26	6%	"The venue was a bit small. Would be better with proper nets etc." Parent Tier 2 Girls U15
Improve quality of referees, line judges, scorers	5	9%	35	9%	"Just that the line judges and scorers provided made lots of mistakes" Coach Tier 1 Girls U16
Assigning referees to fixtures	4	8%	18	4%	"Qualified referees who will be fair" Player Tier 2 Girls U18
more local competition			21	5%	"The traveling demands are huge for certain teams. We're Midlands based so probably have the best of it. Perhaps more regional if possible?" Parent Tier 2 Girls U15

Top topics relating to competition format are:

- Time to play more matches (n=5)
- Points System unclear (n=4)
- Number of sets (n=4)
- Number of teams in pool (n=4)

Event Hosts

Feedback on the event hosts was positive with 53% giving a general positive comment.

Key themes attributing to this included well organised (13%), friendly (9%) and good venue (4%). Topics outside these three seemed isolated issues to the specific venues.

Feedback

As can be seen, the new format received high satisfaction levels, when looked at as a whole, but also when broken down by tier, age group, respondent's role etc. and a high number of positive comments were received regarding the organisation and of the level of competition. Several issues/areas for possible improvement have also been raised/identified and these need to be looked at to improve and develop the format. The evidence points towards an evolution, of a broadly successful structure, rather than another major overhaul.

In addition to the 'user' feedback it is also important to have observations from HUB team, who were central to organising the competitions. The main points they highlighted were.

- Short turn arounds between each GP – both within an age group and across age groups. This was a result of the competitions been squeezed into 3 months. *This should be eased if the competitions are spread throughout a full season.*
- Difficulties in securing hosts or hosts been able to secure venues – again 'exacerbated by the squeezed programme. *Again, should be eased if competitions are spread over full season* and hosts identified earlier.
- The time spent dealing with Volleyzone issues or completing all the Volleyzone entries for T2 clubs. Volleyzone issues are likely to continue as no upgrades or changes are being made to the system and we are still going to require registrations via Volleyzone. *Assuming a high number of players return next season then a high volume of registrations should be edits/updates, so this may ease the load. To decrease the HUB workload in this area we could require all T2 teams to complete their own registrations, however if a high level of errors are made the 'tidying-up' process could take longer!*
- Producing all the host and entrants' information packs, including results spreadsheets. *The work required in this area should be reduced to updates/edits, assuming only minor changes in the format/structure.*
- Checking and compiling results. *This will require the same level of work*
- Checking player list against Volleyzone – to ensure players were registered and checking for regulation breaches. *This will require the same level of work.*

The HUB team do however feel, assuming a similar competition format, that the experience and lessons learnt last season along with the body of work already in place should mean that the workload is eased/reduced. In fact, they feel that upscaling the number of events days, per age group/Tier, from 3 to 4 would be possible.

Prior to the 2021-22 GP3 several teams requested/suggested that GP 3 should change from the scheduled GP points event to a Last 8's, as had taken place in previous seasons. Teams were consulted on this, and whilst the results were debated it was decided that the regulations/format should not be changed mid-season, however a majority did feel that a last 8's format should be considered for the 2022-23 season.

Options and possibilities for the 2022-23 season

Given the high level of satisfaction recorded and the many positive comments received, any changes for 2022-23 need to be carefully considered so as not to adversely affect those satisfaction levels. The high level of satisfaction is also supported in the '*areas that could be improved*' feedback where the 'nothing/don't know' option was by far the most popular response.

When looking at the Key Themes in the '*areas that could be improved*' some of the issues could be addressed via changes to the competition structure/format, and others by encouraging change via clubs/hosts. There are also some differences in the issues around the T1 and the T2 competitions.

Having analysed and considered the feedback in detail the following issues have been identified as the prime ones which should be looked at to see if changes can be made to address them. It should be noted that whatever options are selected the competitions will be spread over the period Oct – May

Possible dates TBC	GP1	GP2	GP3	GP4/L8's**
U15 Boy	19/11/22 (T2 only) *	21/1/23	04/3/23	25/03/23
U15 Girls	20/11/22 (T2 only)*	22/1/23	05/03/23	25/03/23
U16 Boys	5/11/22	10/12/22	4/2/23	11/3/23
U16 Girls	6/11/22	11/12/22	5/2/23	11/3/23
U18 Men	15/10/22	26/11/22	14/1/23	19/02/23
U18 Women	16/10/22	27/11/22	15/1/23	19/02/23

Note if a three 'event' competition is decided upon then adjustments could be made to the final GP/L8 event date i.e., either date could be used. *For U15 GP1 only T2 event – Higher number of T2 entries means events could be more regionalised and could be used for teams to decide if T1 or T2 was most appropriate going forwards.

**These are Last 8 dates at Kettering. Both days of each weekend would be used for club hosted events. The Kettering dates are fixed due to other events and availability at the NVC. 19/02/23 TBC

Prime issues for consideration – based on feedback	Suggested solution/options
Competition format	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time to play more matches 	Number of matches played at each individual GP will vary depending upon the time available to the host and the number of teams in a pool. For T2 pools flexibility in the schedule is built in to try and maximise the number of hosts. For T1 pools four teams per court would seem to be the ideal, however entry numbers and withdrawals can have an impact on this. More matches can be accomplished by adding a 'round' to the competitions See option 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Points system unclear 	Review information and look at producing a spectators/player's competition guide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of sets 	This must be flexible in T2, due to booking time, number of teams per pool etc. In T1 matches are three sets, additional sets would make it impossible to run four team pools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of teams in pool 	In T1 ideally pool sizes should be four, however this may not always possible due to entry numbers and last-minute withdrawals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play-off system 	The assumption is that this is a comment about the GP 3 format – see option 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The entire format 	Most of the feedback was positive, so this is not required
GP points system (T1 only)	See option 3
GP 3 format (T1 only)	See options 2a and 4
Improve venues/facilities	Provide hosts with a 'great venue' check list. Not mandatory requirements, more of an aspirational list.
Officiating standards (Refs, scores, line judges)	Encourage teams to qualify club members as referees, to spend some time training their players in officiating duties, to be aware of the young officials pack available from VE and consider using qualified referees (this may be at additional cost to the host/participating teams).
Assigned referees	At present there are not enough active qualified referees for this to be feasible. This would also add additional cost to each GP. The final T1 GP/event will have as a minimum 1 st refs provided by VE, which, in part, is why this GP was/is more expensive.

More local competitions	This will continue to be the goal for T2 GP's, however, is dependent on entries. Some T2 teams also commented that they would like to play different teams, which might increase travel! T1 is promoted as a National Competition so as the competition progresses and if teams of similar levels are pooled together longer distance travel will have to be accepted as a factor of entering the T1 competitions. See note in Option 2a .
Better spectator facilities (viewing/seating, availability of beverages/snacks)	Encourage hosts to consider spectator facilities as part of their hosting plan. Junior events often attract a sizeable number of spectators and hosts may want to consider refreshment sales as a way of raising funds. This issue may have been exasperated by COVID, restrictions which were still in place during the Jan-March period.
More local competition – less travel (T2)	This is/was part of the T2 concept but is reliant on entries. See option 2c
More local competition – less travel (T1)	T1 is promoted as a national competition, which as the competition progresses matches teams of similar level/ranking. Longer distance travel must be accepted as part of entry, or the structure could change as per note in Option 2a and 2c
Playing facilities (space around courts, nets, referee stands)	Encourage teams to provide the best facilities they can. Some comments on this may be due to the court/hall size, flexibility was given within the rules in order that more clubs could host GP rounds, particularly at T2. This needs to continue in order to increase the number of possible hosts. Provide host with 'great venue' checklist.
Scheduling/Scheduled breaks	Review guidance to hosts regarding scheduling
Guidance on the rules (T2)	Review the guidance to hosts re local rule changes (i.e., foot in court due to serving space)

Options

Option 1 – Run competitions as 2021-22, with no changes except for spreading dates over full season

Pros

- Most paperwork etc in place and will only require editing
- Majority of Clubs/Teams will know the system/structure
- The overall feedback was extremely positive

Cons

- None of the issues raised will be addressed

Option 2a – Time to play more matches. Add a 4th GP to the competition structure

Pros

- Increases competitive playing opportunities. For T2 teams this would vary due to the flexible nature of the T2 structure. For T1 teams (assuming four team pools) this would give a 12-match season. For the 2021-22 season 204 juniors were registered to play in NVL, we have no figures on other leagues juniors might play in.
- Using the previous GP scoring formula would mean that T1 teams would play more matches against teams ranked at a similar level/ranking.
- Final rankings should be more reflective of each teams playing level, however when options were considered for the 2021-22 competition five rounds were required to 'guarantee' this.
- Increases the profile of junior volleyball in England.

Cons

- Additional costs – 1 x GP entry fee, travel, possible accommodation costs
- Increased commitment – coaches, parents, players etc
- Increased HUB admin
- Does not address concerns around final GP

Note - To ease travel issues an option could be to - GP 1 Regional, GP2 Regional/ranking blend, GP 3 National (on rankings), GP 4 Kettering

Option 2b – Change GP 4 (T1 only) to a 'Last 8's' format, with the top eight ranked teams playing pools and cross over semi- finals to decide the cup finalists.

Pros

- All teams go in to Last 8's still with a chance of making the final
- Most matches will be meaningful
- Easy to understand
- Drama of the knockout semi finals

Cons

- Additional costs – 1 x GP entry fee, travel, possible accommodation costs
- Changes the nature of the competition from one of consistency, over several matches, to a knockout format (this is however how Olympic, World Championship tournaments etc work)
- On the day injuries or unavailability could mean the top ranked team/s do not make the final.
- Would require changes to the regulations to ensure fairness (e.g., no players changing team after GP2)

Note -In addition, teams place 9-14 could play for a Shield trophy, with the final played on the day. This would need to be hosted by the clubs.

Option 2c, as option 2b, but for U15 age group change GP1 to T2 4 v 4 only (in November) which any team can enter. T1 then 2 x GP's and a Last 8's (teams ranked 1-8) and Shield (teams ranked 9-14, hosted by clubs). Any T1 teams outside top 14 can enter T2 events. T2 GP4's to be regionalised Plate tournaments i.e., South East Plate winners. Regions based on entries

Pros

- Gets U15's playing earlier in the season
- Teams/players can find their levels at first GP
- Progressive
- Spreads U15 events over a longer season
- T2 events could be a model for U16 and U18 T2 in the future
- More teams and players playing in competitive situations
- All teams have a chance to play for a trophy at their level

Cons

- Reduces U15 T1 events to 3

Option 3 (T1 only) – Change GP3 points system (of a 3 GP format) to become x3 points in the Gold group and x2 in Silver group)

Pros

- More teams would have a mathematical chance of reaching the final, at the start of GP3
- Games against team of similar levels attract greater reward
- Retains the concept of the performance over a season

Cons

- Does not address all the concerns raised about the GP3 format
- The race to the final could be over after the first round of matches
- It adds more complexity to the format

Option 4 (T1 only) – Run the competition as last season but change GP3 to a 'Last 8's format'

Pros

- All teams go in to Last 8's still with a chance of making the final
- Most matches will be meaningful
- Easier to understand
- Drama of the knockout semi finals

Cons

- Changes the nature of the competition from one of consistency, over the season, to a knockout format
- On the day injuries or unavailability could mean the top ranked team/s do not make the final.
- With only 2 GPs prior to the last 8's will the top 8 teams have been identified? Probably a greater issue for teams in the 5-12 positions.
- Would require changes to the regulations to ensure fairness (e.g. no players changing team after GP1)

Regulations

[VE Junior Regulations 2021-22](#) were put together when the effects that COVID might have on the competition were unclear, they were therefore written in such a way to give maximum flexibility both within the structure/format and for individual teams/players.

COVID exceptions have now been removed in all competitions so the 2022-23 competition the 2021-22 regulations should be reviewed (and compared to previous regulations) and amended/changed as required.

Areas that might need consideration include.

- Player eligibility
- Cross checked against the NVL regulations
- Adjusted depending upon which format is decided upon

Possible future ideas/developments

As stated earlier in this report any changes need to be carefully considered so as not to adversely affect the high satisfaction levels recorded during the 2021-22 season, which it must be remembered was in fact only half a season! So whatever outcomes are decided upon the competitions will evolve, if only to provide a bit more breathing space for all involved!

Going forward I would suggest that planning for the 2023-24 season should start as soon as possible (once the 2022-23 is up and running) and could include (but not limited to) the following

- Are our age groups correct?
- Should T2 be more competitive i.e. leading to a Plate or Bowl competition?
- Can and how should younger age groups be incorporated into the format? Festivals? Tournaments and Competitions?
- Can young officiating be linked to the format?
- Should the indoor season be extended for juniors?
- Can we increase junior playing opportunities even further?

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