

A Membership Plan for TTE?

Introduction

Table Tennis England (TTE) has worked hard to increase participation in the sport. Mission 2025 set a target of 200,000 regular adult players which has been achieved. But this has not been reflected in the size of our membership. Mission 2025 also set a target for 40% of regular players to join TTE which equates to 80,000 members. But when Covid struck, our membership was only 29,072 – far less than Badminton for example. This paper proposes that **TTE should produce a comprehensive plan to increase our membership. (R1)**

Becoming a regular player

Almost everyone has played table tennis casually. But regular play usually involves joining a local group. This may be an affiliated local league or club or some other type of group (an 'independent organisation') that we do not actively encourage to affiliate.

Those who play casually may not know what local groups are available. TTE tries to help them find one. But not all potential members know that TTE provides this service. **We should publicise TTEs advice service on local groups wherever table tennis is played and wherever potential members might see it. (R2)**

Our website provides information on local groups. The staff and volunteers who provide it already know all about TTE, so they have a different perspective from potential members. **We should test out the recruitment information on the website with potential members who don't know how table tennis is organised to see how effective they find it. (R3)**

Our mass participation projects measure success in terms of the numbers taking part. This is important but its value is limited if the participants don't become regular players. **We should build pathways into our mass participation projects to help those who take part to become regular players and then members and we should monitor our success in achieving this. (R4)**

Leagues and clubs

Having identified a league or club, players have a variety of experience when they try to join. We don't have much evidence about how easy they find it. Anecdotally, the barriers include the league or club:-

- being difficult to contact
- being full and not accepting new members
- not really catering for players of that age, gender or ability
- not meeting at a time or place which suits
- not providing the type of play desired
- not being welcoming.

We should research how easy it is for potential members to find a league or club that suits their needs, what barriers they face and how many players want to join a league or club

but fail to do so because of each barrier. (R5) We can then decide how best to overcome them.

The quality of league and club organisation varies widely. It depends mainly on the number and effectiveness of the local volunteers who run it. **We should work more closely with leagues and clubs and help them motivate, train and support their volunteers to improve their organisation and increase their membership. (R6)**

Diversity and Inclusivity

TTE has produced a detailed strategy *Level the Table* to make table tennis more diverse and inclusive. Our current membership is not as diverse as we would like. This may be partly because leagues and clubs are less attractive to some types of player – in particular to women and girls. *Level the Table* recognises that there is greater diversity in social and recreational table tennis and promises to adapt the sport to the individuals to be part of the table tennis community. But at present TTE only encourages leagues and clubs to affiliate even though our Articles and regulations permit other groups ('independent organisations') to do so too.

In 2020 TTE introduced new membership categories for club play (which includes insurance) and supporters. But as we do not recruit or engage with independent organisations, we don't know very much about what groups exist and their members know little or nothing about TTE.

We should set up a database of all types of local groups which play table tennis and engage with them regularly through *Over the Net* or other newsletter. (R7)

We should encourage all types of local groups to affiliate in the independent organisation category to give us the opportunity to recruit their members so that we increase both membership and diversity. (R8)

Conclusion

A bigger membership is not just about collecting more affiliation fees. It raises the profile of table tennis, improves our credibility in applying for government funding and provides a larger talent pool at the base of the pyramid from which future England players will come.

After years of no growth, now is the time for a sustained push to increase our membership!

Estyn Williams
National Councillor for Warwickshire

May 2022

Summary of Recommendations

Appendix 11

- R1.** TTE should produce a comprehensive plan to increase our membership.
- R2.** We should publicise TTEs advice service on local groups wherever table tennis is played and wherever potential members might see it.
- R3.** We should test the recruitment information on the website out with potential members who have no knowledge of our organisation to see how effective they find it.
- R4.** We should build pathways into our mass participation projects to help those who take part to become regular players and then members and we should monitor our success in achieving this.
- R5.** We should research how easy it is for potential members to find a league or club that suits their needs, what barriers they face and how many players want to join a league or club but fail to do so because of each barrier.
- R6.** We should work more closely with leagues and clubs and help them motivate, train and support their volunteers to improve their organisation and increase their membership.
- R7.** We should set up a database of all types of local groups which play table tennis and engage with them regularly through *Over the Net* or other newsletter.
- R8.** We should encourage all types of local groups to affiliate in the independent organisation category to give us the opportunity to recruit their members so that we increase both membership and diversity.