



BOWLS ENGLAND AFFILIATION FEE INCREASE - RATIONALE

At the Bowls England AGM on 25 February 2023 members voted, with a significant majority, for a £2 increase to affiliation fees from 2024. This document explains the rationale behind this increase. Alongside County Associations, Bowls England will work with affiliated clubs to maximize the benefits of affiliation and grow the numbers of people playing our sport.

National Governing Bodies, or NGBs for short, are an essential part of the fabric of our nation's sporting landscape. We play a leadership role, act as our sport's ultimate custodian and govern activity within our sport. Clubs, organisations and individuals affiliate to their sport's NGB and benefit from services and support.

At Bowls England we have a clear mission - to promote and develop the sport of lawn bowls so it enriches the lives of its participants, connects communities and is in good health for future generations. We trust these intentions strike a chord.

Our role as an NGB is wide-ranging -

- We provide practical support to almost 2000 affiliated lawn bowls clubs and grassroots players. More of this later ... and working alongside Coach Bowls, EBUA and others, we provide the structures to educate and develop coaches, umpires and volunteers.
- Working with County Associations, we administer international and national lawn bowls competitions and events. Our National Competitions are experienced and enjoyed by thousands, bringing people together and creating lifelong memories.
- We manage talent development pathways to help-players fulfil their potential. And, for those who rise to the top, we manage our international teams including lawn bowls' representation within England's Commonwealth Games Team. As well as making us feel proud, success on the global stage is crucial for our sport's visibility and inspiring new people to have a go.
- As an NGB, this requires us to work with World Bowls, partner organisations like Commonwealth Games England, funders Sport England, venues and other nations' NGBs.
- We promote lawn bowls and lobby on its behalf to ensure its voice is heard. Our All To Play For campaign, investment in live streaming and media work are examples of our commitment to ensure more people recognize lawn bowls' fabulous qualities. This work is key in inspiring people to participate.
- We develop new ways to play our game to grow participation within our ever-changing society. Bowls' Big Weekend, Bowls Bash and the PlayBowls platform are key to make our sport more accessible to new audiences and potential participants irrespective of their background or circumstance.
- One of the primary responsibilities of an NGB is to ensure its sport provides a safe, open and inclusive environment for all. At Bowls England, we work hard to



regulate the environment in which the sport is played including discipline and safeguarding.

- We actively seek and bid for major funds to support bowls and channel investment whether it be from commercial revenues or government funding. Over the last two years, we have secured over £400k from Sport England to help support our work, and we are working with new commercial partners to support our initiatives.
- And we act as a backstop when our sport is in need. This was never more evident during the Covid Pandemic when we helped clubs and counties navigate through the crisis, disseminating information, creating guidance and helping affiliated lawn bowls clubs access over £3m of government support.

NGBs function through investment from the public purse, commercial revenue and from those people enjoying the benefits of participating within that sport.

To help us perform our important role as an NGB and to harness the collective strength of our sport, local bowls clubs affiliate to their County Association and Bowls England by paying a fee. As part of all the above activity, this affiliation enables affiliated clubs to unlock a range of national services.

These services are more comprehensively detailed in the Club Support section of the Bowls England website and include –

- **Access to Player Recruitment initiatives**
 - We launched Bowls' Big Weekend in 2021. Hundreds of clubs have participated attracting an average of over 20 new players per session. Bowls Bash and play-bowls.com will open our clubs to a new audience.
- **Club Development and Education support**
 - The Bowls Development Alliance offers bespoke support to our affiliated clubs, including access to the Club Hub Programme, Club Health Checker and Education programme.
- **Business and Finance support**
 - We assist clubs to access information on potential grant funding Grant Finder. This investment has directly helped clubs using the system to secure almost £150,000 – this means for every pound we invested it has returned £8 to affiliated clubs. Our Civil Liability Insurance scheme protects clubs and can deliver significant savings.
- **Greens Maintenance support**
 - We continue to invest in our Greens Maintenance Advisory Service, which provides free advice and assistance to clubs regarding the bowling surface. The service has now responded to calls for assistance from more than 200 clubs, covering a wide range of topics from cutting height and thatch to coping through a drought.
- **Governance support**
 - We provide advice and support in areas including legal, safeguarding and disciplinary to help clubs to better manage their affairs when required.



- **Facilities support**
 - All affiliated clubs are eligible to apply for an interest-free Club Loan to enable them to make an important capital investment. Currently, almost £400,000 is out on loan to support affiliated clubs.
- **Competitions and Events**
 - Our national competitions and events continue to prove popular amongst our affiliated clubs – offering the chance to challenge players at a national level, make new friends and rekindle old rivalries.

Visit www.bowlsengland.com and click on Club Support to see all the benefits in full.

The Bowls England affiliation fee is calculated per playing member, with each County Association also charging a fee for county services. Individuals benefit directly from affiliation and their club benefits from the services we provide, which in turn also adds value to the individual. The more playing members a club has, the more membership revenue they are generating, and the more they contribute, so there is an in-built fairness to the system.

A common misunderstanding is to see affiliation as just about competitions. It is not. All playing members of a club, whether they play in competitions or play the Bowls England formats, must be declared and affiliated if the club wishes to affiliate. This is because the benefits are for the whole club, and all members will be advantaged if their club makes the most of its relationship with us. If affiliated clubs or individual players wish to play in national competitions or championships, they pay on top to enter.

The affiliation fee to Bowls England has been £5 per playing member since 2010. It is a fraction of what most sports receive, for example golf £9.50 and squash £15, and has been declining in real terms over the last 13 years. This fee is equivalent to £3.20 now and therefore in real terms the affiliation income received by Bowls England has been reducing year on year.

A decline in participation has exacerbated the problem. Through this period of steady decline, Bowls England built up its reserves. Whilst this strategy allowed us to absorb the impact of Covid-19, the absence of investment to address reducing participation – marketing our sport, developing our game to meet the lifestyles of today's society, supporting you, our clubs and counties, to grow and thrive - proved self-defeating.

Our new strategy, Fit for the Future, charts a different course and we are working hard to arrest this downward cycle. Including bearing the brunt of the Covid shock, we will be drawing down on over £1m, over half our cash reserves.

Whilst we are making positive strides to reducing our reliance on affiliation by growing our commercial income, and earning more government support, to continue the level of investment into our Fit for the Future strategy, it is important we address the real terms decline in affiliation income. This has all been put into sharper focus with our current economic climate and the increase in our operating costs, together with the growing demands of national governing bodies.



With all this in mind, the decision has been made to the affiliation fee from the 2024 season by £2, to £7 per playing member, which in real terms is less than what was being paid in 2010.

Whilst we understand that some of our community will be facing financial pressures, given the real terms decline over the last 13 years and £2 being equivalent to less than 20p per month, we do not feel this will prohibit anyone from continuing to enjoy our great sport. Introducing this in 2024 also allows plenty of time for clubs to adjust their membership subscriptions for the 2024 season, which remain incredibly good value in comparison to most leisure activities.

Of course, at all levels of the sport, growing the numbers of people playing is key for the costs of delivering our sport to be spread across broader shoulders. We are seeing positive evidence of this with a 4% increase across the country, some counties growing by over 11% and some clubs more than tripling in size over the last 12 months. This affiliation increase will enable us to do more to help all affiliated clubs grow.

- ✓ More visibility and coverage of bowls across national media.
- ✓ More investment into recruitment and local marketing initiatives such as Bowls Bash.
- ✓ More support for volunteers in affiliated bowls clubs.

All those who play lawn bowls care about its future and want their children and grandchildren to derive the same enjoyment from our great sport that they do. This affiliation fee rise will support activity that will make this more likely and help ensure that we deliver our Fit for the Future strategy, grow our sport, keep the cost of playing bowls low and help ensure bowls clubs thrive for current players and future generations.

Bowls England

April 2023