

BOWLS ENGLAND AGM – 24 FEBRUARY 2024

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

This document has been developed to give County Associations supporting information on the business in the agenda and the position of the Bowls England Board on the propositions that are being brought forward to the 2024 Annual General Meeting.

Item 8.2 – Bowls England Affiliation Fee

At the 2023 AGM, it was agreed “that the annual affiliation fee to Bowls England (as detailed in Article 15) is increased from £5 to £7 for the 2024 season with an annual increase broadly aligned with inflation to be applied in subsequent years. Any annual increase to be ratified at the AGM.”

To best ensure that annual inflationary increase is most reflective of the economic conditions at the time, whilst also complementing County Associations current processes, the Bowls England Board resolved to take the rate of inflation at the start of the relevant financial year. So, the affiliation fee for the 2025 season will be adjusted based on the rate of inflation on 1 October 2024.

Practically, that inflation level will be taken from the Consumer Price Index released by the Office for National Statistics. See below link. Owing to the delay in the release of this figure, it will be based on the inflation for September and County Associations will be advised in mid-October.

[CPIH ANNUAL RATE 00: ALL ITEMS 2015=100 - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/cpih/annual-rate-00-all-items-2015=100)

Item 11.1 – National Competitions Review

Introduction

As County Associations will be fully aware, over the last 14 months we have been reviewing our National Competitions programme so that it best supports our 'Fit for the Future' strategy. The objectives of the Competitions Working Party, made up of a cross section of our sport, was to recommend an evolved programme of events -

- To ensure the competition structure is valued by existing players and retains them in our sport.
- To stimulate opportunities for participation among those who do not currently play in national competitions.
- To support our international performance programme by providing an optimal environment to prepare players.
- To support our junior performance pathway by stretching and inspiring our most talented young players.
- To elevate the Aviva National Finals in the minds of all bowlers and increase the desire to attend.

We have drawn upon 5 surveys with thousands of responses from players, researched other nations and sports, absorbed feedback from County Associations and had huge numbers of discussions as a Working Party and across the Bowls England team. The Board has tabled this matter twice and approved the recommendations at its last meeting in January.

This paper sets out the recommendations, what they mean and the rationale. Throughout the deliberations, we have been motivated by four principles -

- Player-centricity - putting the enjoyment and satisfaction of players first.
- Fairness – striving to create a level playing field within each competition.
- Inclusivity – ensuring the programme is for everyone.
- Accessibility – breaking down any barriers to taking part.

There are many people who, quite rightly and understandably, enjoy our competitions programme as it is. It works for them. Our task is to manage a change process that continues to deliver for these players, whilst evolves in a way that improves the experience for those who are less satisfied and attracts new entrants. If we don't take on that challenge, we will go backwards. The challenges we are experiencing with the Commonwealth Games indicate powerfully the importance of adapting.

We believe this proposed new programme will deliver against the objectives set out, but also align Bowls England and the 35 County Associations behind a common agenda for the good of our sport.

For those who want the level of detail, we have included Appendices as a separate document.

- A. The make-up of the Competition Working Party
- B. An overview of the research that has informed these proposals
- C. An overview of Aviva National Finals qualification by event

Strategic Positioning

Over the years, new competitions have been added to the programme. Whilst some of these have been a success, particularly mixed competition, in totality our competition programme has lost some of its clarity of purpose. To be more strategically clear on why we are running competitions, we have segmented them into four areas.

Blue Riband

Every sport needs its ultimate prize - the pinnacle at the top of the pyramid of players at all levels. Golf's crown jewel is The Open, tennis has the Wimbledon Championships and Badminton players strive to win the All England Open. It is only right that bowls has its equivalent north star for English bowlers and events that are recognized beyond the bowls community.

Performance

One of the purposes of domestic competitions is to provide a springboard to the next level of competition, international. These events are the highest quality of inter-county team competition, delivering great sport in their own right but also best preparing players to represent their country.

Participation

It is critical if we are to continue reversing the decline in bowls participation that our national competitions programme works as hard as possible to inspire new players and also acts as a stepping stone for existing players to deepen their relationship with our sport. To achieve this, events must be accessible, relevant to that person's age and provide a fair test of their ability. In short, competitions that truly deliver competitiveness.

Team Spirit

Competitive sport is about shared experiences, friendships and memories that last a lifetime. These events are intended to enrich the enjoyment of players at County and Club level. They should feel relevant to as many clubs throughout the country so that our competitions programme acts as a gel to bind our sport together.

In the revised programme, here is where each event sits and the above will inform the way we position the events, market them, and deliver a relevant player experience.

Blue Riband	Performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Singles • Pairs • Triples • Fours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balcomb Trophy • Walker Cup • White Rose Trophy • Amy Rose Bowl • Junior Singles (u17 and u24) • Junior Pairs (u24)
Team Spirit	Participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middleton Cup • Johns Trophy • Mixed Inter-County (O60) • Club Two Fours (Open) • Top Club (New-format) • Tony Allcock Trophy • Champion of Champions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed Pairs • Mixed Fours • Senior Singles (O60) • Senior Pairs (O60) • Senior Fours (O55) • Family Pairs • Novice Pairs

Propositions

The below details all 19 propositions, what it means in terms of change and the rationale behind them.

Proposition	What this means	Rationale
<p>BLUE RIBAND</p> <p>1. To elevate Blue Riband and Performance events at the Aviva National Finals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain current formats in all rounds of Blue Riband events. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Singles – Four bowls per player; 21 shots ◦ Pairs – Four bowls per player; 18 ends ◦ Triples – Three bowls per player; 18 ends ◦ Fours – Two bowls per player; 18 ends • Retain current Aviva National Finals qualifier numbers – 62 in Championship events. • Adopt current approach to qualifier allocations by county per event. • Play in qualifying rounds to be evenings and weekends – daytime by mutual agreement. • Qualifying for all four events to be managed by Counties. • Greater investment in these events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blue Riband events to be the ultimate aspiration for outdoor bowlers in England. • These events to be lifted within the Aviva National Finals through increased prize fund, streaming/TV focus and event presentation. • Creates greater commercial and sponsorship opportunities. • Avoids clashes in schedule for all participants in Blue Riband and Performance events. • Provides fairness in qualification based on entry levels at county level. • Maximises use of green space at Aviva National Finals • Ensures players of working age may participate in all rounds. • Helps provides 2700 qualification places across all events (based upon all propositions being supported)
<p>PERFORMANCE</p>		
<p>2. To elevate top-level county competition consistent with international level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balcomb Trophy & Walker Cup played by 10 players per county. • Matches played in four disciplines – singles; pairs; triples and fours. • Formats to mirror international events – currently: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Singles – Four bowls per player; 21 shots ◦ Pairs – Three bowls per player; 18 ends ◦ Triples – Two bowls per player; 18 ends ◦ Fours; Two bowls per player; 15 ends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates high quality inter-county competition and international feel for players. • Provides opportunity for top 350 county players per gender to showcase ability playing world formats. • Assists the England Performance Team with Player ID and selection, removing need for trials and reducing burden on players. • Builds a partnership culture between England and County management. • BE expenditure on Talent ID aligned to inter-county competition

<p>3. To amend playing numbers and formats in White Rose Trophy & Amy Rose Bowl</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White Rose and Amy Rose played by teams of 5 players. • Shorter matches played in four disciplines and world formats. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Session 1: Singles and Fours ◦ Session 2: Pairs and Triples • Maximum of two entries per county; 48 nationally. • Counties may merge with other counties for participation, not performance, reasons subject to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Prior agreement of Bowls England ◦ Agreed plan to develop more junior players over course of three years. • No Senior Internationals permitted in White Rose Trophy and Amy Rose Bowl. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates a more consistent junior player pathway (note the British Isles Under 25s series is rinks but we expect this to change). • Provides greater opportunity to learn skills and tactics in world formats. • Restricting Senior Internationals avoids significant mismatches thus improving the player experience. • Assists the Performance Team with Player ID and selection, removing the need for trials and reducing the burden on players. • Builds a partnership culture between England and County management. • Increases the opportunity for young players to participate and promotes youth development within counties. • BE expenditure on Talent ID aligned to inter-county competition.
<p>4. To standardise the age in all junior events to under 24 on 1 April annually for both genders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ White Rose Trophy ◦ Amy Rose Bowl ◦ Junior Singles ◦ Junior Pairs • Some players who have been eligible will not be. • Qualifying for Junior Singles and Junior Pairs to be managed by counties as current. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates a clearer junior player pathway. • Provides opportunity for players identified during event to potentially experience junior international bowls in following season as part of performance progression. • Delivers gender equality. • Players competing within a smaller age range. • Winners to represent England in British Isles Championships in following seasons as relevant. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Note: There is not currently a British Isles Men's Junior Pairs, but we expect this to change.
<p>5. To introduce under 17 singles events for both genders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under 17 on 1 April annually • Managed as a National Competition by Bowls England 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates a clearer junior player pathway and demonstrates commitment to boosting junior participation. • Creates greater opportunity for young players to participate within their own age group.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winners of Junior Singles and Junior Pairs to represent England in British Isles Championships in following seasons as relevant. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Note: There is not currently a British Isles Women's U18 Singles, but we expect this to change.
<p>6. To create multi-county regional events</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Balcomb Trophy ◦ Walker Cup ◦ White Rose Trophy ◦ Amy Rose Bowl • Events take place at eight single green venues, which are geographically accessible. • Four or five counties at each venue over a weekend <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Exception is Amy Rose which will work on six teams at each venue. • Current regional groups reviewed to reduce travel. • All eight venue winners in each event to Aviva National Finals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a more intense experience for players and coaches replicating international competition. • Promote the sport of bowls and the essence of inter-county competition across the country. • Create a festival environment, generating revenue and publicity for host clubs and Counties. • Support Performance Team Talent ID with all players at single venue, removing need for trials and reducing burden on players. • Events integral to future international selection process ensuring prospective England players take part. • BE expenditure on Talent ID invested in support of inter-county competition. • Opportunity to commercialise these events and explore options for streaming.
TEAM SPIRIT		
<p>7. To retain Middleton Cup and Johns Trophy in agreed format</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counties to have open vote between KO with Plate OR Round Robin • Following vote Implementation Group to review regulations in conjunction with counties to consider logistics based on feedback including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Draw ◦ Venues for fixtures • Semi-Final and Final of Middleton Cup and Johns trophy to be played during Aviva National Finals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognises the importance of the Middleton Cup and Johns Trophy within the county calendar. • Provides opportunity for leading county players to experience representative bowl. • Assists counties with selection for Balcomb Trophy and Walker Cup. • Reduced burden on England players.

<p>8. To introduce a Mixed Over 60 Inter-County event</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Played as straight knock-out. • All players 60 and over on 1 April annually • 24 players per county (12 men and 12 women playing as six mixed rinks) • All fixtures midweek/daytime on set dates • Semi-Final and Final played during Aviva National Finals. • Following vote Implementation Group to review regulations in conjunction with counties to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Draw ○ Venues for fixtures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides inter-county representative play for those who may no longer participate in other county events or have never had that opportunity. • Retains more people in senior competitions delivering a positive experience of playing with people of a similar age. • Meets growing demand for mixed bowls. • Generates income for host clubs.
<p>9. To revamp the Top Club event to attract more clubs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 players per team • Updated format <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Session 1: 2 x two-bowl triples (two sets of six ends) ○ Session 2: 3 x three-bowl pairs (two sets of six ends) ○ Each match to a conclusion to determine winner ○ One end tie-break if required in each match should the score be one set each, therefore any match will be won 3-2; 4-1 or 5-0 • Multiple entries permitted per club. • An individual player may only represent one team in any season. • Separate events for each gender • Final stages played during Aviva National Finals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivers a more modern, exciting format, which means every game retains an interest throughout for players and spectators. • The sets format would mean that every match would be in the balance until the second set of session 2 • The proposed format is more accessible to more clubs, providing greater opportunity for smaller clubs (in number) to participate. • Provides option for larger clubs to have multiple entries to satisfy the needs of their members. • Was the key recommendation to come from the CWP Sub-Group for Inter-Club activity
<p>10. To amend the Club Two Fours to an open event</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event open to every member of club regardless of gender • 8 players per team • Multiple entries permitted per club • Individual player may only represent one team in any season • Two rinks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivers gender equality for this competition and means the club team represents the whole club. • Removes requirement for an additional women's event in an already packed calendar. • Provides opportunity for women to compete and test their game in this environment.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final stages played during Aviva National Finals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inspire more women to have the confidence to play in national competitions. Gives us an opportunity to trial more open events and build cross-gender club camaraderie.
<p>11. To restrict entry in the Champion of Champions to 'Club Champions ONLY'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entry in the 'Champion of Champions' to be the previous year's Club Championship Winner only. Removes current allowance for following to enter: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> County singles champion County u25 singles champion Senior singles area winner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Champion of Champions was identified in our Club Survey 2020 as a key part of club engagement with Bowls England Boost the value of the event by not permitting several entries from same club Further develops the relationship between all clubs and Bowls England
PARTICIPATION		
<p>12. To remove the Two-Bowl Singles Championship from the Aviva National Finals programme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counties may continue to organise competitions locally, but their conclusion will take place within the County. More effective use of green space at Aviva National Finals and fewer clashes. Removes concerns of 'no shows' at county level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two-bowl is the least valued event in the current programme for participants (39% rated as least valued of all events) County feedback showed high number of no shows in county qualifying rounds. Travel for a 45-minute game at county and national level cited as a turn off. Majority of participants also participate in other events so not detrimental to participation levels. Will create space in county calendar and Aviva National Finals to deliver Proposition 1. A vote against will significantly increase schedule clashes.
<p>13. To set the age limit for all senior events (excluding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior Singles Senior Pairs Tony Allcock Trophy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates fairer, more enjoyable competition for players in this age group. Increase entries from 60+ players who do not currently enter as they 'do not think they are good enough'.

<p>Senior Fours) to players aged over 60 on 1 April annually and permit daytime play in those events</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those aged under 60 on 1 April, who may have competed previously, will not be eligible. These players are likely to be playing in other events. • Play to be weekday, daytime. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Player survey showed the introduction of daytime events were particularly supported by those aged 60 and over. Matches played in the daytime will free up rink space in the evenings for other competitions. • Increases the chances of new qualifiers to the Aviva National Finals and alleviates potential clashes with Blue Riband events.
<p>14. To retain the Senior Fours age limit in line with British Isles qualification requirements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently over 55 on 1 April annually • Consistent with British Isles entry criteria. • Play to be evenings and weekends – daytime by mutual agreement. • Qualifying rounds to be managed by Counties as current 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures that the national winners are eligible to participate in British Isles event. • Any change to age banding at British Isles would automatically necessitate change at national level. • Given lower age limit ensures that those in employment, who wish to participate, may do so.
<p>15. To introduce 'Novice Pairs' for new and less experienced players</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One player in the pair 'not badged' i.e. not qualified for the National Finals. • One player no more than three years' playing experience (both could have less than three years' experience) • All players under 17 eligible regardless of playing experience. • Entry policed at 'point of entry'. • Further work by Implementation Group to clearly define entry criteria. • Managed by Bowls England as a National Competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a clear gateway to the national competitions programme. • Meets the demand for a competition for those who do not currently enter or enter without aspiration of reaching National Finals. • More attractive to those who don't enter because they are 'not good enough'. • Will encourage participation in other competitive events over time.
<p>16. To change eligibility to the Family Pairs to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent international and leading County players are no longer eligible. • Further work by Implementation Group to clearly define entry criteria, including for players outside England 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly identifies that this event is not aimed at 'elite' bowlers. • Ensures players are not competing against players of significantly different ability.

<p>anyone who has not played international or county level (Balcomb and Walker) representative bowls in the last 5 years</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria ensures that those who have played at high levels in the past but are now more recreational may still participate with other family members. • Allows more time for elite players to focus on competitions valued by national and County management and opens up more time for purposeful practice.
<p>COMPETITIONS MANAGEMENT</p>		
<p>17. To further investigate how to consolidate the administration for the benefit of players and administrators as part of implementation plan, taking into account the array of systems already in place at county level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single point of entry through an online competition management system. • One place to manage and view competitions activity. • Consistent dates nationwide for entry to enable national marketing campaign to drive entries. • Important piece of work for the Implementation Group with no set timescale at this stage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved player satisfaction making it much easier to manage their competitions activity. • Enables one national marketing campaign, increasing in entry numbers and income for counties and BE, which can be reinvested. • Demonstrates a joined-up approach between Counties and BE in terms of data management and communications. • Reduces fraudulent entry from players not affiliated. • Reduced workload for volunteers
<p>18. County Associations to continue to manage Championship events</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This applies to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Singles ○ Pairs ○ Triples ○ Fours ○ U24 Singles ○ U24 Pairs ○ Senior Fours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures consistent approach to competitions management in line with current practice. • Values the work that counties do in managing the qualifying stages.

19.
To introduce set dates in the later rounds of the Top Club as a trial for 2025 as part of national calendar

- Set date for later stages will be included in the 2025 annual calendar.
- Implementation Group to consider logistics.

- Player survey showed 61% in favour of set dates in some national competitions.
- Whilst deemed not practical in all rounds, introduction of set dates for later stages will enable players/clubs/counties to plan.
- Alleviate concerns from clubs and players on match arrangements, particularly 'inter-county' rounds.

Financial Position

Clearly, given the intricacies of the propositions, finances will need to be considered once the programme has been agreed. Like affiliation, the Championship fees have remained unchanged as delivery costs have increased with inflation.

However, based on past experience, an understanding on the size of the market, co-ordinated national marketing and likely reaction to price changes and logic, we estimate that revenue to County Associations and Bowls England through competitions will increase by 2027.

Bowls England will invest back into our competitions and Aviva National finals to achieve its objectives and for the value of our competition programme to increase for example increased prize money, more sustainable model for streaming and support for British Isles Championship players.

In support of increasing participation and putting players first, we will also:

- Remove all entry fees in u17 and u24 events to increase junior participation levels.
- Remove all entry fees in all inter-county events to alleviate some of the concerns regarding regional inter-county events, which are fundamental to our performance strategy and will provide the optimal environment for Talent ID.
- Seek external Sport England funding for our performance programme, which can be used to support inter-county performance events.
- Review all entry fees and travel expenses.

Next steps

The timeline below has been prepared in order that we can work together towards the launch of the new Competitions Programme for 2025. The Implementation Group, which will include county representatives, will be key to developing the agreed programme.

February–March	Outcome of the AGM communicated and assembly of the Implementation Group.
April-August	2025 schedules finalised, regulations revised and brand development.
August	Use Aviva National Finals as a platform for communications and stakeholder engagement. Launch entries across all counties with national marketing support.
Spring 2025	Entries close.
Ongoing	Explore rationalisation of competition management including single point of entry.

Please note, there is no provision in the Bowls England Articles of Association or Rules and Regulations for members to propose amendments to propositions.

Item 11.2 – County Association Propositions

Proposition 20

That, the Junior men's competition "The White Rose" allow Counties to put forward two teams each year, with effect from 2024.

Rationale: This would align with the Junior ladies competition "The Amy Rose" which allows two entries.

Proposed by: Bowls Hampshire
Seconded By: Bowls Surrey

Bowls England position

With the draws already taken place for 2024, this would cause a lot of anguish with Counties who have already arranged fixtures for 2024. The draw for the 'South' would have to be redrawn. With the competition review being implemented in 2025, it would not make sense to make this change for just one year.

Bowls England would not support this change.

Proposition 21

That there is an addition to the current qualifying rules.

3. QUALIFIERS FOR NATIONAL FINALS

We would like to ADD the following paragraph:

3.3 - The counties with TWO entrants (A & B) shall be shown in the championship draw to be in separate halves. Therefore, removing the "OPEN" draw that is now in place.

Rationale: This is to stop players travelling hundreds of miles to possibly play their other county qualifier in the second match when their two clubs are only 10 miles apart at home. Therefore, this would make huge savings on expenditure and time for individuals concerned. There were 10 instances in the 2023 championship programme.

Proposed by: Bowls Devon
Seconded By: Bowls Cornwall

Bowls England position

The open draw was adopted following the 2021 County Conference when there was support for this change. We recognise that two participants from the same County can play each other in the early stages of the National Finals in Leamington.

Bowls England would be happy to support this change.

Proposition 22

That the area final stage of the Tony Allcock, Men's and Ladies Top Club and the Men's Club 2 Fours to be played on a neutral green.



Rationale: this proposition seeks to ensure that the final round (the area final), before the "later stages" is reached of any national competition that it is played on a neutral green i.e., one round earlier than currently and as it was before this change was introduced. Our view is that when you are playing for a place in the final stage to progress out of your area then a neutral green should be used. We have noticed that in some competitions that some clubs seem to get a significant number of home draws, this being as a matter of luck and how the results produce the next round of competitors so by reverting to a neutral green for the area finals this will negate this home advantage.

Proposed by: Bowls Cornwall
Seconded By: Bowls Devon

Bowls England position

When the National Competitions were revamped in 2021 with county areas and all England rounds for the last 32/16, we marked all area finals to be played on neutral greens. Following player feedback post 2022, players felt inconvenienced arranging neutral greens when in cases clubs were only a few miles away from each other. Therefore in 2023 we removed this from the rules so all area finals of areas were on the challenger's choice of green, the All England rounds of L32/L16 remained neutral green.

Bowls England would be happy to support this change if Counties wish for all inter-club area finals to be neutral green.