

Executive Summary

Following our consultation on potential changes to the national ranking system at the start of 2020, this consultation document explores a number of aspects of the system in greater detail. Specifically, we identify options and seek views on:

- Catering for returning players
- Catering for new players
- Consequences of a withdrawal or no-show
- Integration with ITTF results

Separately, we are in the process of undertaking detailed analysis on a number of questions associated with the win/loss points system. These issues are therefore out of scope of this consultation.

In addition to the publication of this consultation, we plan to host online meetings for interested parties to discuss the points raised. Please visit our website for details.

We are keen to hear the views of all interested parties on the topics raised in this document. Please respond by email to rankingconsultation@tabletennisengland.co.uk by **31st January 2021**.

We plan to make decisions in Spring 2021 on the issues raised in this document and those relating to the points system, We will provide feedback on this consultation together with any decisions that are made.

Given the lack of recent data with which to test our new ranking system (a consequence of Covid-19) we are now aiming for implementation at the start of the 2022/23 season. This will allow for a period of testing via parallel running in 2021/22.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and purpose

Between January and March 2020, we consulted in depth on the nature and type of national ranking system that would be most appropriate for us in England¹. We received very helpful feedback in response to that consultation, which helped us to determine how we should develop our new system. We summarised this feedback and our conclusions in a feedback report².

In brief, the Table Tennis England Board decided to retain a relative system (along the lines we have at present) but to make changes to the points system in order to better meet the principles that you told us were most important. We also committed to exploring whether it would be feasible to integrate the rankings lists across age-groups and/or genders without creating undue distortions. To inform these changes, we are in the process of exploring alternative points systems using computer-based simulation analysis.

However, we also need to decide what approach to adopt to certain considerations that were outlined in the earlier consultation but not explored in any detail.

This consultation discusses those points, identifies options and seeks views on which of the options to implement.

1.2 Scope

The considerations covered in this paper are:

- Catering for returning players – see section 2
- Catering for new players – see section 3
- Consequences of a withdrawal or no-show – see section 4
- Integration with ITTF results – see section 5

As they are the subject of ongoing analysis, we are not consulting here on questions associated with the following:

- The wins/losses points table
- Event weightings
- Bonus points
- The extent of integration of the ranking lists

To keep this document concise, we are not reproducing the detailed background information and analysis that was provided in the earlier consultation paper. However, for ease of reference, Appendix 1 contains a brief overview of the present national ranking system.

¹ [Ranking-System-Consultation-Document-22.01.19.pdf \(tabletennisengland.co.uk\)](#)

² [Rankings-consultation-response.pdf \(tabletennisengland.co.uk\)](#)

1.3 Consultation process

We invite responses to the questions raised in this consultation document. Please respond by email to rankingconsultation@tabletennisengland.co.uk by **31st January 2021**.

We are planning to discuss these issues with the Members Advisory Group and National Council, and to host open online discussions for other members. Details will be published on the Table Tennis England website.

We plan to publish a feedback report in Spring 2021 setting out the findings of this consultation and the approach that we propose to take as a result.

2. Returning to play

The points system for players returning after time away from the game is inextricably linked to the question of how points are deducted for periods of inactivity. There is also a link with the question of how to cater for new players, which is discussed in section 3.

We can think of the approach to inactivity as having 3 phases:

- Phase 1 – initial inactivity: player still appears on ranking list
- Phase 2 – extended inactivity: player retains points but does not appear on ranking list
- Phase 3 – lengthy break / retirement: player loses any remaining points

Under our current system, phase 1 is 6 months. Phase 2 is a further 6 months, during which they do not appear on the ranking list. At the end of phase 2 (having been inactive for 12 months altogether) they lose all their ranking points and are treated as new players next time they play in a ranking event.

There was a widespread view expressed via the earlier consultation that the present system of losing all points after 12 months of inactivity is too harsh. Extending phase 2 would recognise that players who have been away from the game for a while don't completely lose their ability to play, and that after a period of training and competition many are able to regain a level at or close to where they were previously. It therefore seems reasonable that their starting points when they return should be related to the points that they had before their time away from the game.

We anticipate a structure in the new system whereby inactive players will lose a percentage of their points after a defined period of time (to the end of phase 2 as described above), and that this period will extend to more than one year. By way of illustration, this might be a 3% reduction in points for every 3 months of inactivity, other than in the summer months; however the details are under consideration as part of our broader analysis of the points system.

At the end of phase 1, the player would cease to appear on the ranking list but their points would be retained in the background, potentially with further deductions for ongoing

inactivity during phase 2. As is the case now, if the player returned to competition before the end of phase 2, their ranking points at that point in time would be used. If they start playing again in phase 3, they would be considered as a new player – see section 3.

Question 1: We would welcome views on the proposed approach. In particular:

- i. what is the appropriate period of inactivity (i.e. to the end of phase 1) after which a player ceases to be shown on the ranking list?***
- ii. what is the appropriate period of inactivity (i.e. to the end of phase 2) after which a returning player should be treated as a new player (see section 3)?***
- iii. should the reduction in a player's points during phases 1 and 2 be capped (e.g. with no further reductions applied after a certain period of time) or should their points continue to be reduced until they lose them all at the end of phase 2?***

3. New players

Under the current system, the rules seek to allocate unrated players an initial ranking that depends on how they do in their initial matches against rated players. Broadly, new players need to play 4 matches and obtain at least 1 win in a single ranking month in order to obtain an initial rating.

A key purpose of this system is to be fair to their opponents; hence the points resulting from those initial matches are calculated on the basis of the new player's first rating rather than assuming they have zero points.

We received a lot of comments on this issue in the course of our earlier consultation, although there was no clear consensus on the best approach. Concerns included:

- The potential for a player's initial rating to be skewed by the nature of their first tournament, e.g. if they are placed in the lowest group at a ratings tournament. This puts a ceiling on the maximum initial rating they can achieve
- The potential for foreign players to be inaccurately represented, and not reach an appropriate level of points because they play infrequently
- The system of giving 100 starter points to beginners who win 3 games against other unrated players in a single playing day at a designated starter event. The principal concern is that these points can be lost, meaning that more established players can be leapfrogged by beginners who have played one event

We have identified a broad range of options for how we might cater for new players in a new system, taking on-board ideas suggested by respondents to the earlier consultation. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive options:

- a) Retention of the present system recognising that it isn't perfect but that all options have advantages and disadvantages

- b) A variation of the current system but based on more information. This might be more matches played and/or more wins gained and/or more information from the matches played (e.g. games won). Using more information could be expected to provide a more accurate initial rating but could also have disadvantages. First, if more matches or more wins were required, it could take longer for players to get their initial ratings. Second, under the present system, only opponents who play the new player in the ranking period in which they receive their initial rating are credited/debited points for their match (other than a nominal +/-1 adjustment). This generally works ok while only 4 matches and 1 win are required since these often occur at one event. Increasing the number of required matches will make it more likely that early opponents won't see an appropriate adjustment to their ratings for their matches against the new player. Finally, using more information from the matches played, such as the number of games won, would increase the complexity, and could therefore reduce the transparency, of the calculation
- c) Provide a collar on starter points such that once they have at least 100 points, their points total cannot drop below that level
- d) Broaden the process of automatically awarding foreign players rankings. At present, this only happens if the player is ranked in the top 30% of the ITTF World Rankings. In practice, drawing a correlation with the ITTF Rankings becomes unreliable as you go further down the list and wouldn't provide an accurate basis on which to award national ranking points. Prior to further analysis, we cannot be certain how much scope there is, if any, to extend the present approach
- e) Create an expert panel to determine initial points for new players who have a track record elsewhere (whether internationally or domestically). The main downside of this approach would be the associated administrative burden. In normal times, events are run throughout the season, with the potential for new players to enter at any time. The panel would have to be available at short notice at all times. It also questionable whether any panel could have the breadth of knowledge to undertake this task. In practice, they would have to liaise with other administrators and officials across the country and abroad in order to successfully fulfil the role. It also quite likely that these contacts would have conflicts of interest. Given these difficulties, we do not see great potential for this approach
- f) Allow new players to self-certify their level, potentially by reference to a ranking in another national association or a local league and/or accompanied by a letter of endorsement from a registered official or Company Member (i.e. local league or county representative). The benefit of such a system would be to reduce the likelihood of a player being under-ranked, which can unduly penalise their opponents. We recognise that such a system could lead to players being over-ranked, so we would have to consider what safeguards could be built in to avoid this. For example, their ranking could be adjusted based on initial results if these are significantly different from what would have been expected given the player's self-certified level. We would also have to consider this option alongside the proposed approach for dealing with returning players (see section 2). It may be considered inequitable for a returning player to have points

awarded equal to their previous total deflated for inactivity if a new player is able to self-certify a level of ability

- g) An alternative to the previous option – possibly only applicable for tournaments with banded events - would be to encourage tournament organisers to establish the standard of new players (potentially via player self-certification and/or reference to local league rankings) to improve the match between their standard and the group within which they are placed. This is more likely to lead to an appropriate initial rating. Organisers already have the ability to seed players or place them in a band appropriate to their standard. This option would seek to enable the use of such discretion by giving the organisers better information on the standard of the new player

Question 2: We would welcome views on the options identified above for catering for new players together with any practical suggestions for how these could work fairly and effectively

4. Consequences of a withdrawal or no-show

Under our current system, if a player withdraws or does not turn up for an event, their opponent will proceed within the event (or win the match in a team event) but will not get any ranking points. The person who has withdrawn, or has not shown up, does not receive a ranking points deduction.

We only received a couple of comments on this via the consultation but they supported the awarding of points for the opponent of someone who withdraws and/or point deductions for the person who withdraws (potentially subject to medical evidence being provided).

We agree there should be consequences in these circumstances, and propose the following system for if a player withdraws from a tournament after the draw is published:

- Subject to medical exemption (see below), the player is deemed to lose their first/next match
- They lose and their opponent gains ranking points accordingly
- This applies to all events entered by the player at the same tournament, e.g. their first matches in two different bands at the same Grand Prix
- A medical certificate could be provided by the player to obtain an exemption from this rule, however this would be limited to events organised by Table Tennis England only, given the administrative implications for tournament organisers. Precedent for such exemptions exists in ITTF events

We recognise that such a system is not perfect. In particular, there will be circumstances in which the withdrawal is unavoidable for reasons that cannot be covered by a medical certificate. However, the withdrawal of players is a common problem, which can materially affect the enjoyment of the event for other players.

A particular question arising from the approach outlined above is how to treat group matches. For example, if the no-show was in a group of 4, should points be deducted from the player and awarded to their opponents for all 3 matches that were missed, or just for the first scheduled match? Having an impact on all 3 could be seen to be unreasonably harsh on the player who withdrew. Alternatively, rewarding the first opponent only may be seen as unfair since the other opponents are also missing out on a scheduled match. A further variation could be to reward all of the opponents with win points, but to only penalise the withdrawing player in relation to one of the matches (maybe the one against the lowest rated player, where the impact would be greatest).

Question 3: We would welcome comments on the proposed approach to dealing with withdrawals and no-shows at tournaments:

- i. what are your views on the general principle of penalising a player in this way and on rewarding their opponent?***
- ii. how do you think group matches should be treated?***
- iii. what are your views on the proposal to allow medical exemptions for Table Tennis England-organised events but not for other events?***

5. Integration with ITTF results

The present system for awarding our players ranking points for their international results is complicated and highly labour-intensive to administer. This involves the creation of a dummy domestic rating for each of their opponents by reference to the world and national rankings, and then manually calculating the points impact of the individual matches.

This approach lacks transparency and is difficult to understand for the players involved and the wider membership. It also entails a significant amount of staff time, which could be better deployed on activities that are more valuable for members. It would therefore be sensible to simplify the way in which our international players gain domestic ranking points.

We have identified the following options (in approximate decreasing order of labour-intensity):

- a) Maintain the present system but with a simplified points system, i.e. a system that awards/deducts points for individual matches but where the calculation of those points is simplified; for example, based on the type of event and the stage of the event rather than the particular opponent
- b) Similar to a) but where national ranking points are awarded based on the stage of the event reached rather than results in all of the individual matches
- c) Do not attempt to award national ranking points based on the results of individual international matches or events. Instead, overlay points on top of the national system, with an appropriate multiplier, to reflect players' standings in the ITTF ranking as they vary over time

- d) Override the national list for our highest ITTF-ranked players, who would automatically be placed at the top of the national rankings in world ranking order. We would have to create a simplistic dummy rating for each of these players for when they play in national events, which could relate to their ITTF ranking. An implication of this approach is that the players to whom it applies would see no impact on their national ranking from their domestic results. Furthermore, on its own, this approach doesn't give credit for international results to those players not ranked sufficiently highly in the ITTF rankings. It could, however, operate in conjunction with one of the other options for the lower ranked players.

We are also conscious of potential changes to the ITTF ranking system in 2021. Any decision on how we amend our system to take account of international results will have to be mindful of ITTF changes once these are clarified.

Question 4: We would welcome comments on the alternative approaches identified for dealing with our players international results. Which of the approaches (or combination of the approaches) is preferable and why?

6. Other issues

In addition to the considerations covered in the preceding sections, there are a few other issues that we will consider later in the process.

6.1 Scope of the national ranking system

In our consultation feedback report, we said that we agreed with those respondents who preferred not to include local league results within the scope of the national ranking system. We also said that we would give further consideration to the question of whether any other changes to the scope of the ranking system would be appropriate, such as the inclusion of BUCS³ or other closed events, or events not regulated by Table Tennis England.

This question is related to our ongoing review of membership categories (which will encompass engagement with recognised/ affiliated bodies, also known as 'organisations in good standing') and our forthcoming competition review. We will therefore pick it up again in the context of those reviews.

6.2 Transition between age-groups

Our earlier consultation confirmed our view that the present approach for dealing with the transition between age-groups is not fit for purpose. The question of how we change this is linked to the question of whether we can implement an integrated ranking list. If we had a fully integrated list, there would be no transition required.

We therefore intend to park this question until we know whether integration of the lists is feasible. Potential alternatives to the present system may be informed by any new approach

³ British Universities & Colleges Sport

to new players (see section 3).

6.3 Ranking points for mixed events

Although not such a significant issue, this would also be catered for if we were able to integrate the lists across the genders.

We therefore also intend to park this question for now.

6.4 Doubles

In our previous consultation document, we noted that while there are relatively few doubles matches played within our competition structure, we do not believe that it would be realistic to implement a national doubles ranking system.

We received no responses to the consultation that were counter to this view. We can therefore confirm that we do not intend to take forward the concept of a national doubles ranking system at this point in time.

7. Next steps

We had originally hoped to implement our new ranking system for the 2021/22 season. However, the absence of any qualifying events since March has led us to reconsider the timetable because we will need to test any major changes on actual data. We are therefore aiming for implementation at the start of the 2022/23 season, having tested the new system via a process of parallel running in 2021/22.

Given this change in the timetable, we plan to make decisions in Spring 2021 on the issues raised in this document and those relating to the points system, which are being analysed separately. We will provide feedback on this consultation together with any decisions that are made.

Appendix – Overview of our current National Ranking System

Our current national ranking system was developed in 2014 in conjunction with TT365 and is now supported by Sport:80. It is a 'relative' system, which means that ranking points are awarded or deducted based on the relative levels of the players, as measured by the difference between their total ranking points going into the event.

The number of points awarded (or deducted) depends on how expected or unexpected the win (or loss) is. The theory is that a player whose ranking is too low should gain points until their ranking reflects their true standard. Similarly, a player whose ranking is too high will lose points until their ranking more accurately reflects their playing strength.

Some of the main features of our current system are:

- Results count towards the national rankings if they are from national events organised or sanctioned by Table Tennis England, some international events in which players represent England, and some VETTS events⁴
- There are separate lists according to gender and age-group
- The winner of a match receives more points than the loser loses (leading to 'inflation'), which creates a positive incentive for players to compete. Those who don't should gradually slip down the rankings
- More points are available the higher the rating of the event (known as 'weighting')
- Bonus points are awarded for high finishes in the higher rated events
- Every player has a 10% points reduction at the start of each season
- Players who are inactive for 12 months lose all of their points
- New players, or players returning after a lay-off, receive an initial number of points depending on how many players they beat in their first event, and the ratings of those players, subject to playing 4 rated players and winning at least one match

A guide on our website explains our current ranking system in detail⁵.

⁴ VETTS stands for Veterans English Table Tennis Society

⁵ [A Guide to the Ranking System Type: pdf Size: 305 KB \(tabletennisengland.co.uk\)](#)