FAQS

Do EIH and SIH still exist?

Everything is now under the brand of Ice Hockey UK (which we abbreviate to IHUK). It will take us a year or so to completely integrate the legacy EIH and SIH organisations with IHUK (for example things like branding and email addresses) but IHUK is now the governing body and organisation we all work or volunteer for.

Is IHUK's priority the GB Programme rather than junior or league hockey?

Absolutely not! Our priority is to get as many people playing hockey as possible, retaining them in the sport, and seeing the number of participants in the sport grow year-on-year. That doesn't mean our GB Programme is not important, but without junior hockey, which leads to adult league hockey and Rec hockey, there is no GB Programme, so the foundations of our sport will always be a top priority.

Is it true that the Board is looking at the future of the English and Scottish national player pathways?

Yes, we are. The Board has set-up a working group to review the operation of the national pathways in both England and Scotland. We want to ensure they integrate with the GB Programme and see if it continues to make sense to continue only having two regions in our national system (England and Scotland). We also want to make sure that we're clear with parents, guardians and players what exactly we are offering to them and asking of them while also being mindful that hockey can be an expensive sport.

Who will be part of the review process?

It will be a full review, led by people with a performance, coaching or playing background. It will include representatives from the current EIH and SIH pathways.

Is it true that the junior league structure is also under review?

Yes, the Board is also in the course of setting-up a working group to review the junior league structure. This has been prompted by ideas from clubs, as well as discussions over the summer about certain leagues. Now is a good time to see if the junior leagues are structured in a way that optimises the playing experience for juniors who are in the system.

Why are these reviews taking place? Is there a problem with how things operate now?

As a newly merged governing body, we want to make sure we're doing everything as well as we can. This isn't about things not working well historically. It's about challenging the way we do things to make the system even better for our players and coaches.

Especially now all organisations are aligned, it gives us far more visibility and accountability to ensure we make the sport even better. This is all part of the continuous improvement that all sports should aspire to

How many people work at IHUK?

Right now, we have six full-time employees and two contractors who make up our core staff. As the merger beds in, we're hopeful about adding one or two new roles down the line. For now, we're a lean, focused team, and we're incredibly grateful for the help and support of our volunteers. They're a huge part of what makes this sport work.

Do you think volunteers in the sport are taken for granted?

Volunteers are definitely not taken for granted by me and my team, but I do accept that many volunteers will feel like they are taken for granted.

Our sport could not operate without volunteers and on that basis alone we should therefore be clear every single day how grateful we are for the help of our volunteers.

But I'm conscious that 'thank yous' only go so far, and I have ambitions for us to invest more in our volunteers, for example by providing training, CPD, a more formalised 'volunteer contract' and perhaps even an annual get together. At the moment these are just ideas, but I hope we can progress some of them.

Why did IHUK require English Junior and Women's clubs to approve the registrations of their own players this season?

It's not quite this simple, but I acknowledge that I did not communicate the change in approach as early enough as I should have done. Put simply, the task of approving every player in every section is a huge one and if we spend the limited resource we have on that within IHUK and also the GMs of the leagues, then many other important projects get either delayed or even dropped. I do acknowledge this has placed a greater burden on club volunteers, and we should have communicated the change in approach earlier than we did.

We are confident that there is sufficient expertise in our clubs for our volunteers to carry out most of the approvals and escalate to IHUK when necessary. Moving approvals to clubs also removes a bottleneck that has historically held up players getting on the ice. We will be carrying out some sample auditing once the season is underway to identify where there have been any systemic errors.

Where clubs need our help, we will of course be there to provide it.

What is your view on the referee and officiating section?

As in any sport, the game doesn't happen without referees and officials. Also as in any sport, they are also often an unfair target for criticism and abuse. They should have our

support at all times, it's not an easy job. As a sport our ambition should be that our referees and officials feel supported and respected, and our players and participants should have confidence in the management of games on the ice.

Do you think it was fair that England and Scotland had different fees this year for the same registrations? What is the point of having a single governing body?

The honest answer is that we did not have time between concluding the merger and opening registrations for the new season to carry out a comprehensive review of the different fees charged by EIH and SIH. We did not want to rush a pricing review through because it's a complicated issue and we need to be fair to all participants, wherever they play their hockey.

This issue is very high on our agenda and something we are looking carefully at so that we can move towards a harmonised approach for Season 27-28.

This decision has not benefited IHUK, it leaves us in a cash neutral position.

What do you think about the role IHUK plays as a governing body in our sport?

This is a tricky one to answer as I have only been in role for a few months, but I'll do my best to share how I see it at the moment.

I acknowledge that at times our membership has frustrations with us. Some things would ideally be done quicker or more smoothly (and sometimes they could). I think there is a sense we sometimes take volunteers for granted (we do not, but we need to get better at making volunteers feel valued). Some people think we are only focused on elite players (this is definitely not the case). And I hear that communication could be better and more transparent (something we are trying to get better at).

While I'll be candid and acknowledge where we could do things better, I would also say that we are a small team (see above!) and I know that every single one of my colleagues chooses to work at IHUK because we have a shared ambition to make this already great sport, even better, at all levels of the game. There is a lot we do which clubs don't see and unfortunately the nature of being a governing body sometimes means that a club or player will only interact with us in relation to something they are not happy about it.

So – do we as a governing body do everything perfectly from a membership perspective? No, of course we do not. But we do get most things right and are we focused on improving the sport? I can definitively answer yes to both of those questions.

Do you think the sport needs to change?

That depends on what we mean by change. If change means improve, then yes, I do. I strongly believe in the importance of continuous improvement. Who wouldn't want a youngster's first 'learn to play' experience next year be better than the one we could provide this year? Who wouldn't want an up-and-coming teenager to have more

competitive games next season than they had last season? Who wouldn't want our Rec section to thrive even more next year than this year? And who wouldn't want our GB teams to perform better in this year's World Championships than last year?

And change is sometimes difficult. Take the pathway and league structure reviews I mentioned above. We're doing these because we want to make things better. I don't know what the outcomes of those reviews will be yet. What I can commit to is we will explain the reasoning behind whatever we decide and we are including a wide range of hockey experts in the review.

Sometimes maintaining the status quo is the easiest thing to do, avoiding change and therefore avoiding conflict. However, avoiding change means missing out on opportunities for improvement and I won't shy away from change in areas where the sport can improve and benefit everyone.

What is your key message to clubs, players, coaches, officials and other stakeholders?

I believe we are all in this together. We all benefit if the sport grows and is successful both on and off the ice. I hope that is a shared ambition we can all have and that we can work together to achieve it.

What will happen at the Town Hall? What if I cannot make it?
I will give a brief presentation at the Town Hall letting members know what we are doing in different areas. We'll then have a Q&A, which will be an opportunity for members to ask questions which we will do our best to answer! The session will be recorded and made available online.

Can you talk about IHUK's relationship with the UK Ice Hockey Foundation?
Absolutely, and we can certainly get into more detail about this at the Town Hall.

IHUK and the Foundation are two separate bodies with similar objectives – essentially we both want to get more people participating and remaining in UK ice hockey – whether as players, coaches, managers or otherwise - helping us to grow the game. As a sport, we should not underestimate how lucky we are to have the Foundation working with us all.

Kevin McLaughlin, the Foundation's Head of Development, has built a team of world class coaching talent who spend their days and evenings up and down the UK in our clubs both coaching juniors and developing club coaches. At IHUK, we are excited to be working with the Foundation as a partner who is delivering a world class junior club hockey programme on our behalf. And although the Foundation's daily work is very much within our club system, we also partner with Kevin and his team on the delivery of

the GB Programme.