



Inspiring the Next Generation of Sport Officials in Europe



Compendium of Good Practice Examples in the Perception, Recruitment and Retention of Children and Young People in Sport Officiating

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Introduction

ABOUT THE REFS PROJECT

○ Rationale and aims

The REFS project, “Inspiring the Next Generation of Sport Officials in Europe”, focuses on improving the engagement of children and young people in sport officiating. The project seeks to enhance the image and perception of officiating among children aged 8-13, and to support the recruitment and retention of young people aged 14-20 in officiating roles. Funded under the Erasmus+ Sport programme of the European Union, REFS runs for three years, from January 2025 to December 2027.

Sport in Europe depends on referees, umpires, judges and other sport officials. Without them, organised competition cannot take place. Young officials are therefore vital to the future of the sport sector, yet many sports face persistent challenges in attracting young people into officiating, supporting them through the early stages of their development, and retaining them as they encounter academic pressures, competing commitments, abuse, negative perceptions and uncertainty about progression pathways.

The rationale for REFS is based on two connected ideas. First, officiating should be promoted as an attractive and valuable way for young people to participate in sport, equivalent to the roles of athlete, player or coach. Second, because many sports experience high levels of dropout among officials, there needs to be a sustainable pipeline of younger sport officials who can replace those who leave or retire and become the next generation of the officiating workforce.



The REFS Partnership

Coordinated by the European Observatoire of Sport and Employment (EOSE), the REFS partnership brings together national and international organisations for sport officials, sport federations, a sports council, a national Olympic committee and a university. This mix of partners ensures that project deliverables are informed by research, practical sector expertise and strong dissemination networks across the sport officiating ecosystem.

Partners



COORDINATOR OF THE REFS PROJECT

France / Europe

European Observatoire of Sport and Employment (EOSE)



France

Association Française du Corps Arbitral Multisports (AFCAM)



Denmark / Europe

Badminton Europe



United Kingdom

Coventry University



Belgium / Europe

EuroHockey



Netherlands / International

International Federation for Sports Officials (IFSO)



Netherlands

Dutch Olympic Committee
Dutch Sports Federation
(NOC*NSF)



Malta

SportMalta

Project deliverables

The following deliverables will be available from the REFS website at www.refs-sport.eu

- Deliverable 1: European Research Report on Children and Young People in Sport Officiating

- Deliverable 2: Compendium of Good Practice Examples in the Perception, Recruitment and Retention of Children and Young People in Sport Officiating

- Deliverable 3: Guidelines for the Engagement of Children and Young People in Sport Officiating

- Deliverable 4: Series of Video Clips to Inspire the Next Generation of Sport Officials

- Deliverable 5: European Conference on Engagement of Children and Young People in Sport Officiating

- Deliverable 6: Strategic Sustainability Action Plan towards better Perception, Recruitment and Retention of Children and Young People in Sport Officiating

OBJECTIVES OF THE EUROPEAN COMPENDIUM OF GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

The main objective of this Compendium of Good Practice is to showcase and promote initiatives, programmes, policies and practices that support the recruitment and retention of young sport officials. The compendium brings together examples from different sports and organisations to illustrate how federations, associations, schools, clubs and other stakeholders are working to introduce young people to officiating, provide structured training and support, improve the image of officiating, and create more sustainable pathways into and through officiating roles.

The compendium is designed as a practical resource. Each case study explains what the initiative is, why it was needed, how it was implemented, who was involved, what challenges emerged, what impact has been observed, and how the learning could be applied in other sports, countries or settings.

GATHERING THE GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

To produce the case studies for this compendium, REFS partner organisations and contacts were asked to submit information using a common template. This template covered the issue or problem being addressed, an overview of the initiative, ownership and coordination, success and impact, implementation challenges, and advice on whether the initiative could be replicated in other sports or settings.

The submissions were then edited into a consistent case study format, while preserving the main information and learning provided by each organisation. Some submissions contained extensive detail and have therefore been developed as extended case studies. Others provided more succinct information and are presented as concise case studies. This mixed format allows the compendium to include a range of initiatives that provide useful learning for the sector.

KEY THEMES AND LEARNING POINTS

Several key themes and learning points can be drawn from the good practice examples:

- 📌 Early exposure to sport officiating matters. School-based and youth-focused programmes can help young people understand officiating as an active and valued form of sport participation.
- 📌 Clear pathways support motivation. Young officials are more likely to stay engaged when they can see how training, practical experience, certification and progression connect.
- 📌 Mentoring is central to retention. Across the examples, young officials benefit from one-to-one guidance, peer learning, experienced mentors and opportunities to discuss challenges in a supportive environment.
- 📌 The image of officiating needs attention. Several examples seek to challenge stereotypes of officials as older or isolated individuals, and instead promote officiating as young, skilled, inclusive and developmental.
- 📌 Safe and respectful environments are essential. Abuse, pressure and poor behaviour in a number of sports remain significant barriers, especially for young officials, and require organisational action.
- 📌 Local delivery needs national support. Good practice often relies on a national framework, but implementation depends on local clubs, schools, volunteers, mentors and educators.
- 📌 Time, funding and volunteer capacity are recurring challenges, particularly where programmes depend on evening delivery or voluntary mentors.
- 📌 Recognition helps sustain engagement. Diplomas, certificates, progression opportunities, role models and links to wider educational or civic outcomes can increase the perceived value of officiating.

INTRODUCING THE CASE STUDIES

The following extended and concise case studies will be of interest to sport federations, associations, clubs, schools, referee departments, officiating bodies and other organisations seeking to improve the perception, recruitment and retention of young sport officials across Europe.

Extended Case Studies

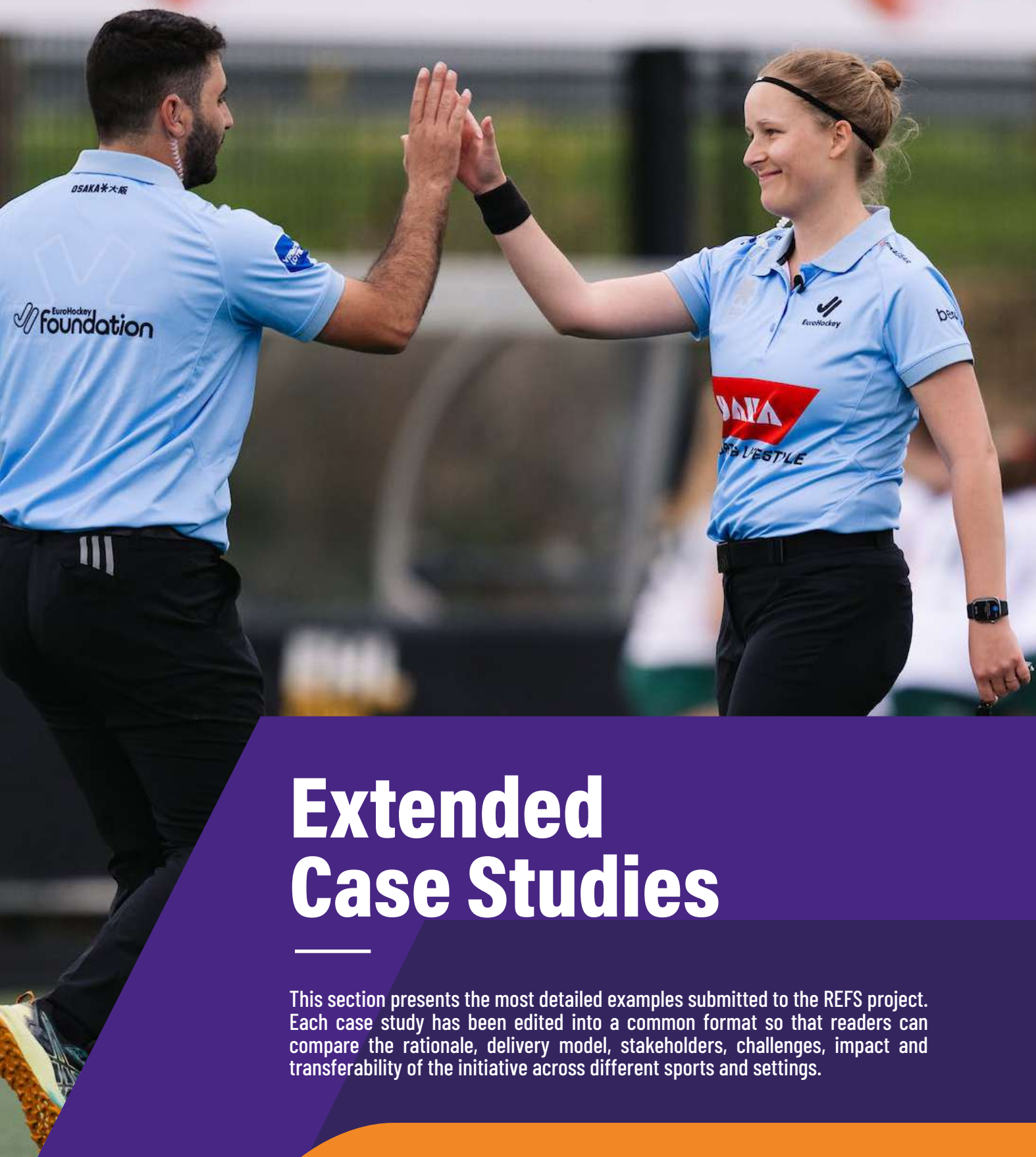
Organisation	Case study title	Sport / setting
The English Football Association / Dorset County Football Association	Young Referee Retention Programme	Football / England
EuroHockey Institute	Umpires for Nations and Umpires for Europe	Hockey / Europe
UNSS (France)	Young Referees / Young Judges Programme	School sport / multi-sport / France
Dutch Athletics Federation	Athletics Officiating Programme for Young People	Athletics / Netherlands
Rugby Football Union (RFU) England	Young Match Officials (YMO) programme	Rugby / England

Concise Case Studies

Organisation	Case study title	Sport / setting
Malta Handball Association	Referee Recruitment and Training	Handball / Malta
Basketball Netherlands	Monthly Referee Development Sessions	Basketball / Netherlands
Dutch Handball Association	Young Referee Development Pathway	Handball / Netherlands

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The REFS partnership would like to thank all organisations and contributors who shared examples, insights and experiences for this compendium. Their willingness to share practice is essential to supporting the wider sport sector to inspire, recruit and retain the next generation of sport officials across Europe.



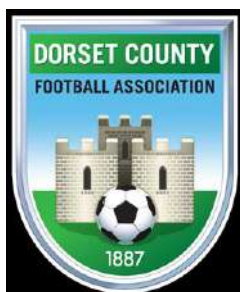
Extended Case Studies

This section presents the most detailed examples submitted to the REFS project. Each case study has been edited into a common format so that readers can compare the rationale, delivery model, stakeholders, challenges, impact and transferability of the initiative across different sports and settings.



YOUNG REFEREE RETENTION PROGRAMME

The English Football Association (FA) / Dorset County Football Association



Sport / setting	Main focus	Target group
Football / England	Retention, recruitment, progression and safe environments	Young referees aged 14-18



What is the initiative?

The FA Young Referee Retention Programme is part of the FA's national refereeing strategy. It focuses on supporting young match officials through mentoring, structured development and clearer progression routes. The programme aims to create a safe, inclusive and enjoyable environment that encourages young people to continue refereeing into adulthood and progress to higher levels of the game.



Why is it needed?

Football faces a growing challenge in recruiting and retaining young officials. The officiating workforce is ageing, while young people may be deterred by limited awareness, negative perceptions of refereeing, and concerns about pressure or abuse. Even when young people enter officiating, many leave around the age of 16, when academic examinations, education and competing commitments become more demanding. This creates risks for long-term sustainability, quality and accessibility of football at all levels.



How does it work?

Young people aged 14 and over can begin by taking The FA Referee Course, which combines online learning with face-to-face training. After the course, trainees must officiate a minimum of five games, supported by their County FA and mentors, before becoming qualified FA referees. The wider retention programme includes one-to-one guidance from mentors or Referee Support Leads, local Continuing Professional Development (CPD), access to County FA Referee Academies or Schools of Excellence, and talent pathways such as the FA Centre of Refereeing Excellence. The programme is also supported by wider measures to improve the matchday environment, including stronger sanctions for misconduct and trials of body-worn cameras in grassroots football.



What are the challenges?

The programme must respond to the competing pressures young people face, especially between the ages of 15 and 18. Education, examinations and other activities can make it difficult to maintain regular commitment. Consistency across County FAs can also be challenging because local capacity, staffing and resources vary. Abuse towards officials remains an ongoing cultural issue, even where sanctions and support mechanisms exist. The recruitment and retention of volunteer mentors and Referee Support Leads is another challenge, as these roles rely on experienced officials giving their time. Increasing diversity also requires sustained outreach and long-term investment.



Who is involved?

The FA owns and coordinates the programme as part of its national refereeing strategy. County Football Associations play a central role in local delivery, including mentoring, training and development support. Schools, clubs and grassroots leagues also contribute to creating environments in which young referees can practice, gain experience and feel supported.



Impact and learning

The programme has shown encouraging signs of improving retention among young officials who receive structured support. Mentoring and County FA-led initiatives provide reassurance, guidance and flexibility at key drop-off points. A clearer progression pathway has also made refereeing a more credible and attractive option by showing young people that there are achievable short-term goals and longer-term development opportunities. Training, CPD and academy structures can increase motivation and engagement, while measures to reduce abuse can improve confidence and make the matchday environment safer.



Can it be replicated?

The programme offers a transferable model for sports facing ageing officiating populations, volunteer burnout or youth dropout. The most important principles are structured mentoring from the outset, visible progression pathways, flexibility around education and life commitments, and firm organisational action to protect young officials. A national framework combined with strong local delivery can support consistency while allowing adaptation to different sport contexts.



UMPIRES FOR NATIONS AND UMPIRES FOR EUROPE

EuroHockey¹



Sport / setting	Main focus	Target group
Hockey / Europe	Development, preparation, belonging and progression	Young and developing umpires across Europe, typically aged 18-30



What is the initiative?

The EuroHockey Umpires for Nations and Umpires for Europe courses are one-year education and development programmes for young umpires across European hockey. Each programme brings together approximately 18 umpires from different countries. Participants take part in an in-person theoretical seminar, receive appointments at a high-level international invitational tournament, and engage in online mentoring moments with group mentors.



Why is it needed?

High-performance officiating can be daunting, whether at top domestic level or on the international stage. Umpires often aspire to reach major events such as the Olympic Games, World Cup and European Championships, but this requires substantial experience and preparation. As a result, the journey to the top increasingly begins at a younger age. Young ambitious umpires must learn to operate in pressured environments on and off the pitch, and some smaller national associations may not have extensive education structures in place.



How does it work?

The programme creates a supportive education environment in which umpires can learn collaboratively. Through the combination of theory, tournament experience and mentoring participants understand the standards expected in international hockey while building practical confidence. EuroHockey works with national associations to identify and nominate candidates, and the course content is monitored by the EuroHockey Officials Committee to ensure that it remains relevant to officiating at the highest level.

¹ - EuroHockey is the governing body for hockey in Europe.



What are the challenges?

One of the challenges has been managing the significant differences in umpire experience and education across Europe. The programme originally operated as one two-year course, but participants from national associations with stronger local education systems sometimes arrived with much more experience than other participants. This meant the first year was often spent bringing less experienced umpires up to a common level. Splitting the provision into Umpires for Nations and Umpires for Europe has helped to manage this difference, but variation in national education systems remains an issue.



Who is involved?

The programme is run by the EuroHockey Institute, the educational arm of EuroHockey. The EuroHockey Officials Committee monitors the course content. European national hockey associations nominate candidates and volunteer educators help deliver the programme.



Impact and learning

The programme is one of the EuroHockey Institute's longest-running education programmes, with the first edition taking place in 2008. More than 400 umpires have participated, and many leading European umpires have benefited from the Umpires for Nations and Umpires for Europe pathway. Since 2021, EuroHockey Institute programmes have been gender balanced in line with the Equally Amazing charter. Participant feedback highlights the value of the low-pressure environment, international collaboration and opportunities to learn from umpires with different national and sporting backgrounds. Although direct recruitment and retention effects are difficult to isolate, the programme is believed to improve preparation, confidence and belonging at international tournaments.



Can it be replicated?

The full model requires investment, board support and subsidy, particularly where travel, seminars and international tournament appointments are involved. However, the core message is highly transferable. Other sports can replicate the emphasis on low-pressure learning, peer networks, mentoring and staged exposure to higher-level competition, even where resources are more limited. The environment created around the programme is as important as the formal curriculum.



YOUNG REFEREES / YOUNG JUDGES PROGRAMME

UNSS - French National School Sport Union



Sport / setting	Main focus	Target group
School sport / multi-sport / France	Perception, training, certification and civic engagement	Secondary school pupils and young sport officials



What is the initiative?

The UNSS Young Referees / Young Judges programme provides a structured training pathway for young officials in school sport. The programme combines rule learning, practical officiating experience, progressive certification and formal recognition of achievement. The programme is designed not only to support the smooth delivery of school sport competitions, but also to develop responsibility, autonomy, decision-making, impartiality and civic engagement among young people.



Why is it needed?

The programme addresses several connected issues, such as the lack of trained referees, difficulties in recruiting young officials, and the limited recognition given to officiating roles. It also responds to a wider educational challenge by using officiating to help young people understand rules, responsibility, fairness and civic participation. The guiding principle is that without referees, no competition can take place. By creating a structured and rewarding pathway, the initiative makes officiating more attractive, sustainable and meaningful for young participants.



How does it work?

The UNSS pathway is accessible from secondary school and combines theoretical and practical components. Young people learn rules through quizzes, videos and educational resources, and they then apply this knowledge in real competitions. They can progress through certification levels from local to regional and national level. The programme includes a charter and oath to embed values of fairness, responsibility and respect. Key competencies include decision-making, impartiality, communication, authority, emotional control and game management.



What are the challenges?

Although the framework is strong, implementation can vary across regions because the guide is adaptable to different local contexts. Officiating is not always as immediately attractive to young people as playing sport, so engagement requires active promotion and recognition from organisations involved. The model also depends heavily on schools and physical education teachers, meaning local educator capacity is important. Young officials must learn to manage pressure, conflict, emotions and criticism. In some sports, pathways from school sport into federation structures may also need to be made more visible.



Who is involved?

The programme is coordinated by the French National School Sport Union in collaboration with schools and physical education teachers. It is supported by partnerships with sports federations and institutional bodies, including the Ministry of Sports, the French Olympic Committee and the Association Française du Corps Arbitral Multisports (AFCAM).



Impact and learning

The programme is widely implemented across France and provides a strong system for training and renewing young sport officials. Its success rests on clear progression levels, practical competition experience, diplomas and educational recognition. It supports recruitment by offering young people an active role in sport beyond playing. It supports retention by giving young officials increasing responsibility and visible progression. Participants develop transferable skills such as leadership, communication, decision-making and stress management. The experience can also contribute to CVs, career development, and connect with wider civic programmes, reinforcing the value of officiating as a form of youth development.



Can it be replicated?

This model is highly transferable because it follows a simple structure: train, practice, certify and recognise. Other settings should design clear progression levels, prioritise real competition experience, recognise achievements formally, and develop the soft skills required for officiating. Strong links between schools and sport federations are important so that young people can continue beyond school-based competitions and move into wider officiating pathways.



ATHLETICS OFFICIATING PROGRAMME FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Dutch Athletics Federation



Sport / setting	Main focus	Target group
Athletics / Netherlands	Two-day course for young and ambitious officials who wish to further develop their skills as judges/officials	Young people in the role of athletics officials



What is the initiative?

The U35 Officials Programme (TOP) is a two-day programme for young and ambitious officials who wish to further develop their skills as judges/officials in an adapted and modern format.

The programme has been developed as an advanced judging course covering the roles of Starter, Microphone Operator, Race Director, Road Athletics Leader/Registered Referee, or Umpire in a completely new style, under the guidance of top officials.

Young officials are trained together with their peers. The programme involves formal and informal interaction with other training groups in a safe, unique learning environment, namely the Papendal Top Sports Centre. Individual guidance is provided after completing the training by an experienced professional.



Why is it needed?

Significant aging within the officiating workforce and a lack of younger officials. Also affecting the overall image of athletics events, where there is a desire to present a young and fresh perspective. It was decided to transform training programmes into a format that better suits a new generation of young people.



How does it work?

The athletics federation holds one course specifically for younger people every year at the Papendal training centre over one weekend. The federation pays for accommodation during the weekend and the participants only have to pay for their travel. Most of the time the clubs pay for this travel. Because of this initiative they feel strongly bonded to each other and feel like they have peers they can keep in contact with during the rest of their careers.



What are the challenges?

A certain level of saturation has been reached. Careful consideration should be given to whether such a programme can be held annually or should take place every two years. The entry requirement for General Judge must be maintained. Clubs must therefore first be given the opportunity to train new judges before they can participate in the programme. Furthermore, reaching all clubs remains a challenge. This requires communication through a wider range of channels.



Who is involved?

The athletics federation coordinates and takes on an initiating role. It involves member clubs in the collaboration that assume a regional function. This is done to establish various communication flows; the power of repetition then generates enthusiasm for something new.



Impact and learning

Within two editions, approximately 70 new officials were trained who were immediately visible at National Championships and other major competitions in the years that followed. Participants continue to seek one another out and maintain the community created through the programme. This number of trained officials within the target group was not achieved through regular training courses in recent years.



Can it be replicated?

This programme is considered to be scalable. It involves active promotion, presenting the programme on a larger scale and with more flair. Additional elements such as informal programmes and relevant guest speakers give the programme more substance. In the Netherlands, there is now the possibility to apply for a «social service» subsidy, which creates more opportunities.



YOUNG MATCH OFFICIALS PROGRAMME

Rugby Football Union (RFU) England



Sport / setting	Main focus	Target group
Rugby / England	Supporting the progression of young rugby match officials on their officiating journey and contributing to their personal growth	Young match officials aged 14-18 or still in fulltime education



What is the initiative?

The Young Match Officials (YMO) programme encourages, trains, and supports young people to become rugby officials. It provides a safe and supportive environment so that young officials in clubs, schools or universities can develop skills such as leadership, communication, decision making and physical fitness and progress to higher officiating levels if they wish to.



Why is it needed?

Match officials play a significant role in sport. The YMO programme aims to encourage young people to recognise the value that becoming a match official can add to their personal growth. It also ensures there are enough referees for tomorrow's games by recruiting and retaining young referees today.



How does it work?

YMOs must have completed the England Rugby Ready2Ref (R2R) and either be aged 14-18 or still be in fulltime education (up to 24). When they complete the R2R and join the programme, they receive a branded RFU shirt to acknowledge their status.

When the YMO starts the programme, they can only be appointed for games where players are a minimum of 2 age grades below their own age. This is to help build knowledge, confidence and competence. Only when their mentor judges them ready, can a YMO progress to the next appropriate level.

Each YMO is allocated an approved mentor whose role is to observe the YMO during the game, provide advice and guidance and assist the YMO to reflect on their performance and record their reflections. The mentor is also responsible for safeguarding, especially in regard to pitch-side abuse, child protection and upholding the core values of rugby. They are the main point of contact with the programme leader.



What are the challenges?

Physical and mental fatigue is an issue. It is vital for the programme to monitor the YMO's welfare and develop a schedule they can sustain. Coordinators are encouraged to provide available support to improve cardiovascular fitness, strength and healthy lifestyle.

Further challenges include:

- 🔊 Abuse from adults, parents and coaches on the touchline
- 🔊 Retaining YMOs beyond 18: there is a drop out tendency when they leave school
- 🔊 Safeguarding and logistics, particularly having separate changing facilities, and enough mentors who meet legal requirements for child protection
- 🔊 Transitioning the YMO from youth rugby to adult games can cause a confidence dip



Who is involved?

Any member organisation of the RFU, such as clubs, referee societies, schools and universities can set up a YMO programme with RFU approval. RFU does not fund programmes but signposts leaders to potential funding streams.

There must be a nominated leader/coordinator and a sufficient number of mentors who are experienced officials or coaches, ideally holding the RFU's mentoring award or equivalent, and they must meet legal requirements for child protection.



Impact and learning

The YMO programme has been widely adopted by clubs, schools, universities and referee societies in England and has shown its effectiveness in supporting young people who have an interest in rugby or sport in general to achieve their potential as officials. Many who complete the programme progress to senior club games and some to national and international levels. All have gained in terms of personal development which is one of the core aims. Perhaps the main learning point is that each young person must be treated as an individual, and programmes must be adapted to their needs and potential.



Can it be replicated?

The programme offers a transferable model for any sport which understands how officiating can contribute to the personal growth of young people, help them embrace the core values of sport and provide a pipeline of officials for the future.



Concise Case Studies

This section presents shorter examples where the available information was more concise, but where the initiative still offers useful learning for other organisations. These examples are briefer and focus on the core practice, the main learning points and the potential for adaptation.



REFEREE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

Malta Handball Association

Sport / setting	Main focus
Handball / Malta	Recruitment, training, mentoring and retention



Overview

The Malta Handball Association has developed a multi-layered approach to referee recruitment, training and retention. The association uses social media awareness-raising, free introductory courses, collaboration with the University of Malta, and initiatives to promote participation among different demographic groups, such as women and girls, including a video featuring a female referee who officiates abroad. The model emphasises that without referees there can be no games, and encourages former players, coaches and active or social players to consider officiating.



Implementation and progress

Approximately 95% of referees come through local clubs. Younger referees often start at under 8 festivals, where simplified rules allow them to gain early experience before progressing into structured league matches that require Level 1 certification. Training is supported through collaboration with the French Handball Association, periodic seminars, match evaluations, refresher sessions and technical updates. The Malta Association is also working to strengthen regulatory support, reporting systems for abuse or violence, and a dedicated referees' association.



Learning for other organisations

The example shows the value of combining grassroots entry points with structured certification and international collaboration. French referees officiate major finals in Malta, creating opportunities for local officials to shadow and learn. The association is also exploring Erasmus+ exchange training camps and collaboration with other sports. Challenges include the voluntary nature of refereeing, limited financial incentives, possible perceptions of bias when officials are linked to clubs, and the loss of knowledge when experienced referees retire.



MONTHLY REFEREE DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

Basketball Netherlands

Sport / setting	Main focus
Basketball / Netherlands	Continuing development, motivation and knowledge sharing



Overview

Basketball Netherlands is using monthly short online development sessions to keep referees motivated, informed and up to date. Each session lasts approximately one hour and focuses on one officiating topic. The sessions are open to members of all clubs and aim to support both club-level and federation referees. The initiative also sits alongside a young group of officials who are identified as having the potential to progress through the development pathway, where more experienced referees help the inexperienced young officials by sharing their own observations.



Implementation and progress

The initiative responds to three connected issues; 1) encouraging clubs to educate their members as referees, 2) motivating those members to progress towards federation-level officiating, and 3) keeping existing officials engaged. The sessions are coordinated by the federation. Referees in the highest division were invited to host sessions, although securing regular experienced hosts has proved difficult. Feedback from participants has been positive, including from both club-level and federation referees.



Learning for other organisations

This is a useful smaller-scale example because it is easy to adapt. Short, focused online sessions can provide regular contact, practical learning and a sense of connection. The main challenges are time, budget and staffing. Sessions must usually take place in the evening because most referees work during the day and organising them adds to existing workloads. The initiative would benefit from clearer communication with clubs and greater support for experienced referees to host sessions.



YOUNG REFEREE DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY

Dutch Handball Association

Sport / setting	Main focus
Handball / Netherlands	Image, mentoring, progression and long-term retention



Overview

The Dutch Handball Association aims to train young referees to become high-quality officials who can remain in the sport over a longer period of time. The initiative also seeks to change the image of refereeing within Dutch handball, moving away from the stereotype of the “old man” referee towards a more positive image of young, fit referees, who are both men and women.



Implementation and progress

The approach is based on additional guidance, mentoring and a structured education and development plan. Young referees receive extra support and commitment from volunteers and staff members responsible for referee education and training, with the aim of helping talented officials progress towards the top level. The programme is coordinated by the Dutch Handball Association, working with those involved in training and development.



Learning for other organisations

The initiative has contributed to the identification and development of talented young referees. Recent referees promoted to the top level have come through this development route, showing its value as a progression pathway. The main challenge is keeping people motivated over a longer period of time. Around the age of 25, some referees prioritise private life, education or career, making continued commitment more difficult. The key lesson is that young referees are the future of sport and need sustained investment, guidance and visible pathways.



Cross-cutting lessons for the sector

Lessons

The case studies show that sustainable recruitment and retention require inter-connected actions across entry, motivation, education, support and progression.

-  **Make officiating visible early:** Children and young people need to see officiating as a meaningful way to participate in sport, not only as an administrative necessity. School sport, introductory festivals and campaigns can make the role more visible and attractive.
-  **Build confidence through supported practice:** Training by itself is not enough. Young officials need real-life experience in environments where they are supported, observed and encouraged.
-  **Create pathways that young people can understand:** Certification levels, academies, talent groups and development plans provide structure and motivation. Young officials should be able to see the next step. This will help aspirational officials.
-  **Invest in mentors and educators:** Mentors, Referee Support Leads, experienced officials, teachers and volunteer educators are central to delivery. Their roles should be recognised, trained and resourced.
-  **Protect young officials from negative environments:** Abuse, pressure and conflict can undermine recruitment and retention. Visible reporting systems, sanctions, safeguarding measures and matchday support are essential.
-  **Recognise officiating as wider youth development:** Officiating develops communication, leadership, responsibility, emotional control and decision-making. These outcomes can be recognised through certificates, diplomas, CV value and links to civic or educational programmes.
-  **Use flexible delivery models:** Online sessions, local mentoring, festivals, seminars and international exchange can all contribute. Programmes should be flexible enough to accommodate education, work and family commitments.
-  **Share practice across sports and countries:** The examples show that many challenges are common across sports. Cross-sport learning, joint CPD, Erasmus+ exchanges and international partnerships can strengthen local systems.



Conclusion

CONCLUSION

The case studies included in this compendium show that good practice is most effective when perceptions of officiating, recruitment and retention are treated as connected stages of the same pathway. Children and young people need to see officiating as a visible, valued and enjoyable form of sport participation, they also require accessible entry points, practical experience, mentoring, and clear, visible opportunities to continue and progress.

Across the case studies, the strongest initiatives combine structure with support. The FA, EuroHockey Institute, Dutch Athletics Federation, RFU, and French UNSS examples show the value of formal pathways, certification, mentoring, education and recognition. The shorter examples from the Malta Handball Association, Basketball Netherlands and the Dutch Handball Association demonstrate that important contributions can be made through local recruitment, online development, international collaboration and targeted support for young referees.

In summary, young officials are more likely to enter, remain and develop in officiating when organisations make the role meaningful, safe, supported and visible. This means investing in mentors and educators, recognising officiating as a form of youth development, addressing abuse and negative behaviour, and creating pathways that fit alongside education, work, family and other commitments. The information in this compendium can be used to support sport organisations across Europe to strengthen the next generation of officials.



Inspiring the Next Generation of Sport Officials in Europe



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