



UMPIRING

TALENT PATHWAY

REVIEW



NOVEMBER 2021

INTRODUCTION

The West Australian Football Commission (WAFC) Umpiring Talent Pathway is a complex system. It is so connected and integral to all aspects of umpiring that it is arguably the most impactful and influential piece of infrastructure for WAFC Umpiring. The report aims to untangle the complexity of this system to facilitate a better understanding of the pathway and how it can be enhanced to benefit umpiring into the future.





FINDINGS

Stakeholder Perceptions

- Measurement of stakeholder perceptions indicated that there is room for improvement in how the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway is perceived across a range of areas. The most significant of these is a lack of awareness about the pathway and its processes, particularly in some umpiring sectors. WAFC Umpiring needs to communicate more effectively about the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway to promote better awareness and understanding.

Strategy and Planning

- The WAFC Umpiring Charter is the guiding document for the strategy of umpiring in Western Australia. It provides context to the priorities and objectives of WAFC Umpiring and how these impact the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway. The Charter, however, is not well embedded in some umpiring sectors and this impedes Umpiring WA achieving its vision of having more engaged Umpires than football requires.
- The WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway requires detailed strategy and supporting documents that outline the operations of the pathway. The development of a Talent Pathway Plan and Talent Pathway Manual would help clarify the direction of the pathway and improve understanding of its strategy and processes for Umpires at all levels.

Umpire Development

- The WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway should be: people first, Umpire-centric, flexible, innovative and connected. These principles provide context to the recommendations made in this report and can guide changes to the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway in the future.
- Umpire coaching is the most critical factor in the development and progression of Umpires and requires further review by WAFC Umpiring.
- The development of an Umpire competency matrix would provide a framework where the relevant competencies of each level of the pathway are clearly outlined. It would also demonstrate how these competencies are connected through the levels of the pathway. The need to demystify the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway is a strong theme from this review; an Umpire competency matrix would help to achieve that.

Umpire Management Systems

- The WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway requires fit for purpose systems to help manage the information that flows through it. A centralised system that can assist in the management of Umpires and the umpiring program would improve the effectiveness of the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway and supports the implementation of key recommendations in this report.



West Australian Football League

- The WAFL Development Squads are the linchpin of the WAFL system as they are the conduits for Umpires to transition from Community Football to the elite pathway. It is crucial that the Development Squads have a clear purpose.
- The Umpire development framework for the WAFL Development Squads, including what competitions Umpires are appointed to, must appropriately facilitate their long-term development.
- Effective talent identification for the WAFL Development Squads is essential and relies on empowered Junior Community Umpiring Clubs as key partners.
- The long-term health of the WAFL umpiring list is a key focus area with several factors complicating list management, which contributes to a perception that Umpires are not managed with appropriate levels of openness, honesty and accountability. The development of a WAFL list management plan, underpinned by a data-driven approach, will ensure the ongoing viability of the WAFL list and help address the servicing needs of the competition.

Junior Community Umpiring Clubs

- Junior Community Umpiring Clubs have an important role in the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway, as they are responsible for engaging Umpires in the game and retaining their interest in the long-term. Umpires with a strong connection to their role will more likely possess the level of commitment required to progress in the pathway.
- Junior Community Umpiring Clubs operate in a challenging environment where they are striving to increase Umpire numbers to cater for the growth in football. This tests their ability to dedicate energy to the development of talented umpires. Junior Community Umpiring Clubs are essential in promoting opportunities for their Umpires and facilitating talent identification in partnership with WAFC Umpiring. They can also support the training of psychosocial skills, which is a critical area in talent development and should commence as early in the pathway as possible.

Perth Football League

- The Perth Football League is Western Australia's largest Community Football competition and engages a broad range of Umpires. There is a perception that the Perth Football League is undervalued as a development competition and that the contributions of those involved is not recognised as readily as other sectors.
- The Perth Football League is a valuable development competition and has a role to play in the development and identification of talented Umpires. It should be realistic for those Umpires to progress to the highest level of competition possible.
- The Perth Football League is a valuable competition for WAFL Development Squad Umpires where they can gain different experiences and challenges relevant to their stage of development.
- It is essential that there are improved relationships between Umpire management and Umpires in the WAFL and Perth Football League. A focus on greater social interaction, facilitated by the respective Umpire associations, would contribute to stronger relationships. This also benefits the transition of Umpires between the leagues.





Regional Community Umpiring Clubs

- Regional Community Umpiring Clubs are, at best, on the very periphery of the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway. The Clubs vary greatly in size, structure and capacity and have different challenges that must be addressed.
- The key mechanism for the development of talented regional Umpires is through West Australian Country Football League (WACFL) carnivals. WAFC Umpiring should ensure that these carnivals are utilised effectively.
- The Peel Football and Netball League supports the development of WAFL Development Squad Umpires from that region through the provision of different experiences and challenges relevant to their stage of development.

Boundary and Goal Umpiring

- Boundary and Goal umpiring should be prioritised equally to Field umpiring and resourced according to their needs. The introduction of formalised Boundary and Goal umpiring programs for Junior Community Umpiring Clubs is one way in which the pathway can be strengthened.

Diversity in Umpiring

- Umpires from a diverse background, including female Umpires, have different needs and challenges and their development should be supported in a way that is Umpire-centric and flexible.
- An AFL and University of Sydney report recommends a parallel umpiring talent pathway for girls and women. WAFC Umpiring should assess the feasibility of this in order to support the development of female Umpires in the game.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Stakeholder Perceptions

1. WAFC Umpiring should conduct a stakeholder perception survey every two years to measure and analyse changes in perceptions of the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway.

Strategy and Planning

2. WAFC Umpiring should evaluate the understanding and implementation of the WAFC Umpiring Charter in all umpiring sectors to ensure it is embedded in those environments.
3. WAFC Umpiring should develop, in consultation with stakeholders, a Talent Pathway Plan that is strategic in focus with a three-year timeframe. The plan should align with the National Umpiring Talent Plan developed by the AFL.
4. WAFC Umpiring should develop a Talent Pathway Manual that is operational in focus and renewed annually.
5. WAFC Umpiring should ensure that the Talent Pathway Plan and Talent Pathway Manual are published, promoted and widely available for all umpiring sectors.

Umpire Development

6. WAFC Umpiring should undertake a review of the strategy and processes related to the Umpire Coach Pathway.
7. WAFC Umpiring should develop an Umpire competency matrix that outlines the relevant competencies for an Umpire at each level in the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway.

Umpire Management Systems

8. WAFC Umpiring should develop a business case for the procurement and implementation of an Athlete Management System (AMS) to support the management of Umpires in the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway.

West Australian Football League

9. WAFC Umpiring should state in its Talent Pathway Plan the purpose of the Development Squads in the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway.
10. WAFC Umpiring should assess the development benefits of each competition that Development Squad Umpires are appointed to.
11. WAFC Umpiring should state in its Talent Pathway Manual the development benefits of each competition that Development Squad Umpires are appointed to.
12. WAFC Umpiring should develop talent identification processes for Junior Field, Boundary and Goal Umpires that effectively empower the Junior Community Umpiring Clubs as key partners.
13. WAFC Umpiring should develop a WAFL list management plan that is strategic and long-term in focus. The plan should align with the Talent Pathway Plan developed by WAFC Umpiring.



Junior Community Umpiring Clubs

14. WAFC Umpiring should develop guiding principles for Junior Community Umpiring Clubs that state how a Club achieves its core purpose of fostering a love for umpiring.
15. WAFC Umpiring should state in its Talent Pathway Plan the purpose of Junior Community Umpiring Clubs in the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway, with a focus on the introduction and development of psychosocial skills.

Perth Football League

16. WAFC Umpiring should state in its Talent Pathway Plan the purpose of the Perth Football League in the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway.
17. WAFC Umpiring should develop structures and processes that facilitate the identification and development of talented umpires in the Perth Football League with a pathway to the WAFL.
18. WAFC Umpiring should ensure that the Perth Football League is utilised as an effective development competition for WAFL Development Squad Umpires and that it is resourced appropriately to achieve this.
19. WAFC Umpiring should develop processes that facilitate the transition of retiring Umpires from the WAFL to the Perth Football League.
20. WAFC Umpiring should engage the relevant Umpire associations to collaborate on social opportunities that will enhance the relationships between Umpires in the WAFL and Perth Football League.

Regional Community Umpiring Clubs

21. WAFC Umpiring should undertake a review of the strategy and processes related to Regional Community Umpiring Clubs in the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway.
22. WAFC Umpiring should ensure that WACFL carnivals are utilised as effective development and talent identification opportunities for regional Umpires.
23. WAFC Umpiring should ensure that the Peel Football and Netball League is utilised as an effective development competition for WAFL Development Squad Umpires and that it is resourced appropriately to achieve this.

Boundary and Goal Umpiring

24. WAFC Umpiring should develop formalised and appropriately resourced Boundary and Goal umpiring programs in Junior Community Umpiring Clubs.

Diversity in Umpiring

25. WAFC Umpiring should develop talent identification and development processes for diverse Umpires in the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway.
26. WAFC Umpiring should assess the feasibility of a parallel umpiring talent pathway for female Umpires as recommended in the AFL and University of Sydney report.



CONCLUSION

This evaluation found that the implementation of the WAFC Umpiring Talent Pathway is characterised by its complexity and that there are a range of factors influencing its outcomes. The report identified opportunities for improving the structure, design and implementation of the pathway. These recommendations across 10 key domains will enhance the umpiring experience at all levels. That said, the greatest challenge is ensuring the sustainability of the system so that the quality people involved are supported to continue their extraordinary contributions to umpiring and the game in Western Australia.

