



Giving talented players the best chance of success

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Welcome to **Around the Table**, our regular look at the work Table Tennis England is doing to promote and support table tennis around the country.

This time, we take a look at how promising young players are being prepared for international competition by Talent Development Centre (TDC) programme.



What are TDCs and where are they based?

They are places where young players with potential can receive increased quantity and quality of training on a weekly basis.

We currently have seven TDCs around the country, at Harlow, Nottingham, Ormesby (Middlesbrough), Plymouth, Bristol and two in London, which are run by Urban Table Tennis and Greenhouse Sports.

Each centre is focused around a central 'hub' club or organisation, with a series of linked satellite clubs or sessions.

How did they come about and what is their purpose?

The aim is to significantly increase the quality and quantity of players in the performance pathway, eventually contributing to sustained international success.

The implementation of this programme stems from a Table Tennis England review of the sport's talent pathway in a search for future stars to challenge the likes of Liam Pitchford and Paul Drinkhall, and succeed on the world stage.

This review highlighted the need for high-quality coaching and access to the right environment to develop talented players, so extra coaching and support is provided for the best young prospects, creating a pathway for them to join the England Youth Squad and hopefully continue on to the top of the world game.

How were the TDCs chosen?

Table Tennis England launched a competitive tender process, under which organisations were invited to apply for TDC status and to set out their credentials. The applications were then assessed and those which were successful were granted TDC status.

For those who were unsuccessful on this occasion, and for other organisations which would like to apply, it is planned to seek more applications in the next few months as we continue to grow the network of TDCs.

How are the best prospects recruited?

The TDC programme aims to develop a squad of up to 20 players at each location, initially focusing on players aged under 14 years.

To do that, the clubs and organisations running the TDCs have built links with local schools and table tennis clubs and also hold talent identification days which are open to all players in the relevant age group.

For example, Greenhouse Sports currently has 13 schools which feed into four hubs at The Bushey Academy, Capital City Academy in Willesden, Ernest Bevin College in Tooting and Raines Foundation School in Bethnal Green.

In Bristol, where the TDC opened at SGS College in March, it was launched with an open evening and talent identification event.

All the other TDCs have built similar relationships and are also investigating other partnerships with community groups.

In some cases, there are links with overseas clubs. For example, Urban holds regular training camps in France, Hungary and Romania, which gives the youngsters the chance to spar with and play against talented players in different situations.

So is it working?

It's too early to say conclusively, but in conjunction with the work of the England Youth Squad, it is impacting the amount of training players across the country are doing, which can only be a positive step.

Talent Development Centres are actively recruiting new players, making the pathway more competitive and creating a bigger challenge, which is helping better prepare players (whether from a TDC or not) for the demands of international competition.

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