

## **Supporters Survey 2026 – You Asked Us, We Asked Them and They Answered**

### **The Academy – Past, Present and Future**

#### **Introduction**

In our 2026 supporter survey, one of the biggest topics raised in the open question box at the end of the survey was the Academy.

If we go back to the Guildhall, many supporters will remember the vision that was presented for developing our own “Britneys and Justins” through the Academy and into the first team. It was presented as an important part of the club’s long-term strategy to become more sustainable.

Ten years on, we are still waiting for an Academy graduate to establish themselves as a regular first-team player. There are increased hopes that Toby Steward could become that player, but what about the wider group coming through behind him?

Are we genuinely optimistic about the current crop? Do we have the right recruitment strategy, facilities, coaching and player-development structure in place to attract and develop young talent, both locally and from further afield?

Has there been sufficient progress? What has changed over the last decade? And what are the club’s long-term plans for the Academy?

These were just some of the questions raised by members in our survey.

We are therefore delighted that Andrew Cullen (AC) and the recently appointed Head of Academy, James Barlow (JB), along with Sporting Director, Rich Hughes (RH) agreed to an exclusive written interview covering all aspects of the Academy.

We have used questions submitted by our members, alongside a number of additional questions of our own. Their responses (with initials of those that responded) in their entirety, are below.

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## Questions for James Barlow

### Your background and philosophy

#### **1. Could you tell us a little about yourself, your background in football and your career to date, and how you have come to your current position as Head of Academy at Portsmouth Football Club?**

JB - Having been at the club since March 2020, entering the 7<sup>th</sup> season with this football club. My previous experiences have provided me with a varied understanding of youth development, strategic enhancement and continued learning. Holding positions at Burton Albion, Nottingham Forest, the FA, England National sides (Futsal) and leading performance programmes at Nottingham & Loughborough Universities.

Portsmouth Football Club has been a large part of my footballing passion, from watching in the stands in the early 2000s to support our future blues. To be entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the continued growth of our academy is a true honour. I'm incredibly proud to be part of the academy and to thank all existing and previous staff for their hard work, commitment and contributions in building such a strong foundation for me to continue to shape who we are, what we represent and how we operate moving forward. A club that identifies as the heartbeat of the city, that enthuses a culture where we have a 'play like our city'. Previous holding the position of Head of Coaching here, we understand the responsibility in how we educate our young players and the consistent approach required across the age groups, aligning our language to ensure players can build a stronger connection to 'who we are', show their character and on pitch qualities.

#### **2. What is your philosophy when it comes to developing young players? What sort of culture do you want to create within the Academy, and what characteristics do you want to see in players who progress through the system? In your view, what does success look like for the Academy?**

JB - Our identity is that all teams have a high work rate, a strong team spirit and play exciting attacking football. From watching Portsmouth 1<sup>st</sup> team for over 20 years, this exuberates everything that Fratton Park expects and requires. This provides enough structure but flexibility to ensure individual coach personality and player qualities flourish within their age and stage. Our young players have to showcase their individual character to provide a point of difference. We wish to observe players that 'play like their city', that have a good technical quality, that embrace their standout strength and apply themselves towards their individual objectives and through their connection to the club (knowing who they represent). Success within an academy is often measured by productivity. A point of view that can be narrow but understandable. As an academy, we are to also consider the experiences, memories and

education provided to the young players. For example, for all scholars (100%) last season to achieve a distinction in their sporting excellence professional qualification. Which is a measurement of their apprenticeship of their knowledge, understanding and application of the game (Including, nutrition, anti-doping and contextual content). The academy is a broad education system which coordinates a multitude of disciplines that provide support and challenge to our young players. Whether that is within Player Care and their identity away from football, their physical performance through strength and conditioning, their nutritional understanding through sport science and their objective reflection from analysis of their own performance. Within all these disciplines, we expect the players to exhibit the values of the football club. Being Proud, passion, stronger together and honest. All areas in which we consider through their adolescent growth.

### **How the Academy works**

#### **3. Could you take us through the overall structure of the Academy, from the youngest age groups through to the U18s? In particular, could you explain:**

- How players are identified and recruited at each age group.
- The balance between local recruitment and players coming from further afield.
- How the scouting network operates and how extensive it is. How far can we look and actually how far do we look?
- Whether the Academy has dedicated staff and specialist departments responsible for areas such as player recruitment, performance analysis, medical provision and sports science.
- The coaching structure and qualifications of Academy staff.
- The facilities available to each age group.
- How the Academy works with the club's first-team football department.
- How players are monitored and assessed as they progress through the age groups.
- What support is provided for education and qualifications, particularly given that many young players will ultimately not progress into professional football.

JB - Through the EPPP EFL system, we govern the age groups of U9-U18 formally within an academy setting, whilst also identifying and providing the correct provision for a U7-U8 development (pre-academy) set up to enable their transition into academy football. Within the academy, we have a specific focus of identifying local talent, through much review and objective measure, we wish to have a strong representation within the PO postcode. Of course, the players have to be of the quality, but ensuring we have a connection with the local

JPL, Grassroots, private academy and geographic understanding of what is happening within the island and the surrounding area. As the age groups progress, the boundaries to identify and recruit talent expand which does allow for us to observe teams within North Hampshire and further afield which is essential to view district and representative sides, whilst also building strong connections and networks with other professional academies.

For a category 3 academy – a phrase which I use loosely due to the provision provided – we have a FT member of staff within all multi-disciplinary areas which is above the EPPP rule means, which allows for us to streamline processes through our head of departments. Providing KPIs within each area to continue to push for greater, more professional and streamlined outcomes contributing to the club objectives and our collective academy vision.

The coaching structure ensures that we provided the correct coaching provision, ensuring all age groups train to the specific time and above, required by the EPPP system, and to ensure that multi-disciplinary support. Player development is at the forefront of these considerations. A journey that is non-linear and never the same for each child. Whilst understanding the forever changing landscape of football and the heights they are aspiring to reach.

Players are consistently monitored and open discussions are frequently had between John, Rich and I. This is a really positive platform that allows for the academy and first team to work closely on a week-to-week basis.

**4. What does the pathway actually look like for an Academy player who has the potential to reach the first team? At what stages are players assessed, and what are the key milestones they need to reach?**

JB - As mentioned in the above question. Players within the U18 programme and U15/16 programme are within the EFL Youth Alliance League and EFL South West League, competing against our fellow southern counterparts. These games are filmed, reviewed and shared with the players weekly – allowing for an environment in which prepares them for what it feels like to be a professional. This is monitored brilliant by our staff in Piero Mingoa, Paul Dale, Chris Hamilton and Dan Sackman. The coaching cohort consider the whole journey, the whole player and utilise a variety of great experiences to put this to life to the players, whilst being complimented by the performance support staff.

**5. How much emphasis is placed on developing players who are already within the local area, and how far does the Academy's recruitment network extend beyond the local area?**

JB - The recruitment team and I place a strong emphasis on the local area. We continually review our scouting network, player observations and community links to identify talent across the PO postcode area. Under the EPPP framework, players aged 9–12 may travel up to

one hour to an Academy, while those aged 13–16 may travel up to 90 minutes. Our structured scouting network gives us strong visibility across Portsmouth, Southampton and the wider Hampshire area.

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## Questions for Andrew Cullen

### Appointing James Barlow

**6. Following Greg Miller's departure to Charlton, why did the club decide to promote James internally as Head of Academy? Was this a straightforward decision, or was a wider recruitment process considered?**

AC - We considered carefully what we needed from the next Head of Academy and whether we needed to look externally. However, we also had a very strong internal candidate in James.

James has been at the club since March 2020 and had already played an important role in developing the coaching programme and the wider Academy structure. That gave him a detailed understanding of our players, staff and development philosophy, while also providing continuity at an important time for the Academy.

James has also contributed to a number of cross club projects, some led by myself, and throughout demonstrated vision, creativity and strong communication skills – all necessary leadership qualities

Greg had achieved so much in introducing and stabilising processes throughout our Academy and had become highly regarded throughout the EFL Academy system. We therefore did not need revolution but continuity. The appointment though was not simply about continuity. We believed James had earned the opportunity and had the qualities and ideas to take the Academy forward.

**7. What qualities did James demonstrate that convinced you and the club that he was the right person to lead the Academy? What are the key areas where you expect him to make a difference, and how will you assess whether the appointment has been successful?**

AC - James understands both the club and the community

What particularly impressed us was his clarity around player development, coaching standards, performance, education and creating a consistent football identity across the Academy. His philosophy around players who "play like our city", with high work rate, strong team spirit and exciting attacking football, also fits naturally with Portsmouth.

Ultimately, however, we will judge the success of the Academy through outcomes. That isn't simply how many players make their first-team debut, but across a whole range of KPIs including medical, sports science, education, safeguarding, community involvement, staffing and the delivery of the goals and objectives outlined in the Academy Performance Plan

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## **Academy Category Status and Investment**

**8. Without giving commercially sensitive figures, can you give supporters an indication of the scale of investment currently required to operate the Academy and how that investment has changed over the last decade?**

AC - I do not think it would be appropriate to disclose detailed commercially sensitive figures, but the important point is that operating the Academy requires a significant and continuing investment by the owners.

The Academy today is also a considerably broader operation than simply employing coaches and running teams. It requires investment in coaching, recruitment, medical and sports science, analysis, education, safeguarding, player care and facilities.

In 2017/18, the club was spending £550,000 annually on the academy. In my first season with the club in 2021/22, the annual spend had increased by 70% and since then by a further 50%. The grants we receive as part of EPPP have not significantly increased in that period, so this significant extra expenditure is funded by the owners. We're spending nearly three times as much as a decade ago, and nearly half a million pounds more than in my first season meaning annual owner investment is now well over £1m. On top of that there has been further capital investment in academy facilities at the training ground, which have been completely transformed with significant improvements.

**9. One of the biggest issues raised by supporters concerns the Academy's Category status. Could you explain, in straightforward terms, how the Academy Category system works within English football? What are the different Categories, what do they mean in practical terms, and what are the principal differences in areas such as facilities, staffing, recruitment and investment?**

AC - The current Academy structure derives from the Elite Player Performance Plan, or EPPP. It was introduced in the 2012/13 season, with the objective of improving the quality and number of homegrown players progressing into the professional game. It was part of a condition linked at the time to the renewal of the Premier League / EFL solidarity agreement.

EPPP replaced the previous academy approach with a four-category system, Categories 1 to 4. The category relates to the standard and scale of the Academy operation rather than the

league position or status of the club's first team. Academies are assessed against areas including facilities, coaching, education, player welfare and development/productivity.

In straightforward terms:

- **Category 1** is the highest level. These are the most extensively resourced Academy programmes, with the greatest level of infrastructure, staffing and coaching provision and the widest recruitment reach.
- **Category 2** is also a substantial full Academy programme, with high levels of professional staffing and player-development provision, but below the requirements and resource levels of Category 1.
- **Category 3**, which is where Portsmouth currently operates, provides a structured Academy programme with a greater regional emphasis. In our case, we formally operate age groups from **U9 through to U18**, alongside development provision at U7 and U8. Importantly, our current staffing provision across the multidisciplinary areas is above the minimum required by EPPP for Category 3.
- **Category 4** is principally focused on the older, professional-development age groups rather than operating the complete Academy pathway from the younger foundation ages upwards.

The important distinction is that moving from one Category to another isn't simply a question of spending a little more money or changing the name above the door. Each step requires progressively greater provision across areas such as staffing, coaching contact, facilities, education, welfare, sports science and the overall player-development programme.

That is why, when we talk about whether Portsmouth should ultimately become a Category 2 Academy, the important question isn't simply "would we like to be Category 2"? Of course we want the best possible Academy. The question is whether the additional infrastructure is available on one site and whether the ongoing investment required would materially improve the quality of players we recruit and develop and, ultimately, increase the number capable of progressing into our first team.

**10. What Category is our Academy currently, and what limitations, if any, does this place on the Academy? How do we compare with clubs of a similar size, and does the club benchmark the Academy's performance against comparable clubs? What is the risk of losing promising young players to clubs with larger or higher-category academies, and what can we do to mitigate that risk?**

AC - Part of this question has already been answered in Q9.

We recognise the competitive challenge. We operate in an area where talented young players will inevitably attract interest from larger and higher-category academies. However, that is a challenge limited to not just Cat 3 clubs. It was a matter raised only last week within an FA/ PL/ EFL club working group I sit on where a PL Cat 1 club is increasingly seeing its young academy talent raided by big six clubs.

James and Greg put a great deal of emphasis over the last four years building trust with local grassroots clubs. Our Academy strategy has a particularly strong focus on identifying the best local talent and building strong relationships with grassroots football, JPL clubs, private academies and the wider football community across Portsmouth and the surrounding area. As players get older, our recruitment footprint then widens considerably.

Category status matters, but it isn't the only determinant of whether an Academy succeeds. Our focus must be on making the quality of our programme, coaching and individual pathway compelling enough that young talented players and their families believe Portsmouth is the right place for their development.

**11. Is there an ambition for Portsmouth to progress to a higher Academy Category? If so, what tangible benefits would that bring? If the club were to pursue a higher Category, what would it involve, what would the likely timescale be, and what additional investment would realistically be required?**

AC - It's something we keep under review, but I don't think it would be responsible to announce an arbitrary target or timescale.

Moving category requires considerably more than additional spending. We have to consider the facilities, staffing, programme and player-development benefits, site restraints and determine whether that additional investment would genuinely improve outcomes.

Our approach will therefore continue to be evidence-led.

The objective should not simply be to "become Category 2". The objective should be to produce better players and create a stronger pathway into Portsmouth's first team.

**12. In broad terms, is there a commitment from the owners to increase investment in the Academy if the football department believes that additional investment would materially improve the pathway for young players?**

AC - Yes. As illustrated in Q8 above, the owners have continued to significantly increase annual investment in the Academy and, importantly, discussions about future investment are driven by what we believe will genuinely improve player development.

That doesn't mean simply spending money for the sake of demonstrating investment. Any proposal must show how additional resource improves recruitment, coaching, facilities or the pathway into senior football.

If the football department can demonstrate that additional investment would materially improve those outcomes, then that's something we would absolutely consider.

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**Why do we need an Academy?**

**13. Looking at the last ten years, and acknowledging that currently no recent Academy graduate has established themselves in the first team, why does the club believe maintaining an Academy is important? What does the Academy need to deliver for the club beyond simply producing first-team players?**

RH - The question of why we need an academy is a multi-faceted question, and the answer isn't straight forward. In the first instance, the club wants to maintain a presence in the area, and feel that it is very important that the club has a pathway for young football players to represent the local football club.

The task of academy players establishing themselves in the first team is very difficult, as the rules of the academy system makes it difficult for players to come all the way through the pathway is difficult as they can be picked off at early age groups.

One of the big elements that the club needs is time, we have sat in several forums and meetings and spoke about the need for time and the ability for players to grow through the system. We have seen the green shoots of this, and have seen at the top end, there has been a growth in professional contracts and we have seen five players that have developed through the academy to have professional contracts.

Ultimately, we want Portsmouth players playing for Portsmouth's first team. We haven't achieved enough of that yet and we shouldn't pretend otherwise. But the number of players now reaching professional-contract level gives us genuine encouragement that the work undertaken over recent years is beginning to show tangible results

**14. If we use the Academy as it existed around ten years ago as our starting point, what are the most tangible improvements that have been made since then? Could you give supporters some specific examples in areas such as:**

- Facilities
- Staffing
- Coaching
- Recruitment and retention, particularly given the presence of larger academies at Southampton, Brighton and Bournemouth
- Sports science and medical provision
- Performance analysis, including the potential use of AI and data
- Player welfare and education
- Links with the first team
- The number, quality and geographical spread of players being recruited

AC - There has been considerable change over this period, although we think we have to start by acknowledging that the ultimate outcome supporters want to see is Academy players progressing into the Portsmouth first team. We haven't delivered enough of those outcomes yet, and we shouldn't shy away from that.

However, if you look beneath that headline measure, the Academy operation today is considerably more developed and professional than it was ten years ago.

- **Staffing and specialist support:**

We now have full-time staff across the multidisciplinary areas of the Academy. Indeed, our provision is above the minimum requirements for a Category 3 Academy. That provides much greater specialist support around the individual player rather than development being predominantly coaching-led.

- **Recruitment:**

We are much more structured in how we identify talent. There is a deliberate emphasis on finding the best players within Portsmouth and the PO postcode area, supported by relationships with grassroots clubs, JPL clubs and private academies. As players get older, we widen that search into north Hampshire and further afield, including representative football and relationships with other professional academies. We have also gone beyond England into Scotland and Northern Ireland with highly exciting prospects identified and playing with us.

- **Coaching and Player Development:**

There is greater emphasis on creating a consistent approach across the age groups so that players understand how we want Portsmouth teams to play and what is expected of them as they move through the pathway.

- **Education and Welfare:**

Developing a young footballer isn't solely about what happens on the training pitch. Education is an important part of the programme. A good recent example is that all of our scholars last season achieved a distinction in their Sporting Excellence Professional qualification.

- **Transition into senior football:**

This is an area where we have put considerably more focus. We currently have five players developed through the Academy who have been awarded professional contracts. Rather than simply keeping those players within Academy football, we are increasingly looking to expose them to meaningful senior football through carefully selected loans.

- **Individual development after the Academy:**

We have also strengthened that transition by having Joe Morrell as IDP Coach and Shaun North working in a transition role. That means our higher-potential players can receive individual coaching and, importantly, be monitored and supported when they go out on loan.

We therefore think it is reasonable to say that the infrastructure underneath the Academy is considerably stronger and more professional than it was ten years ago. But ultimately, we have to convert that improvement into outcomes. Supporters will quite rightly judge our Academy by whether young players progress, earn professional contracts and, ultimately, whether some of them become Portsmouth first-team players.

That is the next step for us. We can demonstrate that the environment and pathway have improved, and the increase in players reaching professional-contract level is encouraging, now can we turn that progress into players capable of playing regularly at Fratton Park and becoming assets for the club.

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## **The Pathway to Men's Football**

**15. One issue supporters regularly raise is the gap between U18 football and senior men's football. Why does the club currently not have a dedicated development squad or U21 side acting as a bridge between the Academy and first-team football?**

RH - Again, we have discussed this, as a football club, we want to make sure we are creating a bespoke pathway for the players, if the club was to move to a development squad, we would have to invest in players, coaches, facilities and all the things that go towards a development squad. Our work and research has been to create a pathway that is more bespoke to the players that we have that have demonstrated the requisite potential. We have seen this with the 5 academy players that have been rewarded with pro contracts all being out on loan subject to injury, this provides them with the experience to go and play competitive football, that has more meaning and purpose than U21 development football.

Whilst we are not philosophically opposed to an U21 team, the question is whether, at this point in our development, it provides a better environment than carefully selected senior loans combined with individual development support.

**16. How do you currently provide that bridge for players who are too old for U18 football but are not yet ready for regular first-team football? Do players train with the first team, go out on loan, play elsewhere, or follow individual development programmes? For example, what factors do you consider when deciding whether an Academy player is ready to go out on loan, and what do you hope they will gain from that experience?**

RH - As discussed above, we are looking at the loan of players to step 2/3 of the non-league system, this gives the players an opportunity to go and play at a competitive level, where winning means something, we feel that this is a huge part of the players development in playing competitive football.

With regards to the players readiness to going out on loan, this is more based on a perspective of the players going out and then assessing how they do and then reevaluating.

**17. Is the creation of a development squad or U21 structure something the club has considered for the future? If so, what factors would determine whether such a structure becomes viable?**

RH - There is a cost element that has to be considered, this isn't a perspective of trying to save money but more so making sure that as a football club, we are investing money in the right manner and we are able to maximise the return on the investment.

We have a structure in place with Joe Morrell as IDP Coach and Shaun North working as a transitions coach to make sure that the high potential players have individual coaching and also someone to monitor the players as they are out on loan.

**18. How optimistic are you about the current group of Academy players? Without placing unnecessary pressure on individual teenagers, are there particular age groups, player profiles or characteristics within the current group that give you encouragement about the future?**

RH - There are plenty of reasons to be positive about the players developing through the academy at the moment, one of the highlights of the season so far was the U18's performance vs Farnborough in pre-season where our boys gave a great account of themselves against a step 2 team. There are plenty of high potential players within the system and we are discussing these players regularly and discussing their individual plans.

**19. What would you say to supporters who look at the lack of first-team Academy graduates over the last decade and question whether the current system is working?**

RH - I would completely understand why the question has been raised, however, in the moments where it has felt like the system hasn't been working, the work has been going on behind the scenes and that has shown up now with the performances and players that are being demonstrated

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## Looking Ahead

**20. In your experience, what are the biggest challenges facing clubs like Portsmouth when it comes to developing young talent? Do you believe changes are needed to the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) to help clubs across the EFL develop talent and ensure that there are greater incentives and benefits for clubs that invest in player development?**

AC - There are several challenges, but one of the biggest is the competitive environment in which we are trying to identify, recruit, retain and develop young players.

We want to give talented young players from Portsmouth and the surrounding area the opportunity to represent their local professional club. However, we also operate in a region where there are a number of higher-category academies competing for that same talent.

The EPPP system has undoubtedly raised standards across Academy football, but I do think it is right to continually review whether the system provides sufficient incentive for clubs throughout the EFL to invest significantly in developing young players. This is a major cause of concern for several clubs across all categories

Clubs commit considerable resources over many years to coaching, education, welfare, medical provision and the overall development of a young player. The challenge is ensuring there is an appropriate reward for clubs that do that successfully, particularly if a talented

player moves to another Academy before ultimately reaching senior football. The current rules can undermine that investment, and changes are currently being discussed with the Premier league.

I would like to see a system which continues to give young players opportunities to progress, while at the same time ensuring that clubs such as Portsmouth have a genuine sporting and financial incentive to continue investing in youth development.

**21. If we were to come back and interview you again in ten years' time, what would you hope the Academy would look like?**

AC - At my grand old age, it most probably will not be me!

More seriously, I would hope that the Academy had become an established and important part of the football strategy at Portsmouth.

Success for me wouldn't necessarily be defined by what Category number is above the door. I would want to see:

- a reputation for identifying and developing talented local players;
- a highly regarded coaching and development environment;
- strong education and welfare provision;
- an effective pathway from Academy football into senior men's football;
- Academy graduates regularly earning professional contracts;
- players gaining meaningful senior experience;
- and, most importantly, players developed by Portsmouth progressing into our first team and playing at Fratton Park and becoming assets for the football club.

We currently have five players who have developed through the Academy and earned professional contracts, so the challenge is to turn that progress into successful senior careers.

I'd also want young players and their parents across our region to look at Portsmouth and believe that if you're good enough, work hard enough and continue to develop, there is a genuine pathway here.

If we achieve that consistently, then the Academy will also provide sporting and financial value to the club.

**22. What should supporters be looking for over the next two or three years that would demonstrate that the Academy is moving in the right direction? What tangible signs of progress should we expect to see, and are there any measurable targets or milestones against which supporters can judge that progress?**

AC - I think supporters are entitled to expect tangible evidence rather than simply being told that things are improving.

I would look at progress at several different stages of the pathway:

- More players progressing successfully through our Academy age groups.
- More scholars earning professional contracts.
- Young professionals moving into meaningful senior football through carefully selected loans. That is already an important part of our approach.
- Academy and young professional players training regularly around the first-team environment when appropriate.
- Players ultimately earning first-team opportunities and appearances for Portsmouth.
- Greater success in attracting and retaining high-potential players, particularly from Portsmouth and the surrounding region.
- Continued improvements to coaching, recruitment, facilities and multidisciplinary support around our young players.

We've introduced additional support at the crucial transition stage, including Joe Morrell as IDP Coach and Shaun North currently working in a transition's role, so that high-potential players receive individual coaching and players going out on loan are monitored and supported

I would not want to promise that a particular number of Academy players will make a particular number of first-team appearances by a certain date because player development simply isn't that predictable.

But supporters should absolutely expect to see more players reaching the top end of our pathway and getting closer to our first team.

### **23. And finally, is there anything else you would like to add for our members?**

AC - Firstly, James, Rich and I understand why supporters have asked these questions.

Many Pompey supporters care about the Academy and we have over 2,000 monthly subscribers contributing to the Academy Lottery, generating £120k each year for which we are hugely grateful. It is understandable to look at the first team today and ask why more home-grown players haven't subsequently established themselves in it. That's a perfectly reasonable challenge and we shouldn't be defensive about it.

What I would ask is that people also look at where the Academy is today and the progress that is being made underneath the first team.

We have five players who have developed through the Academy currently holding professional contracts, encouraging talent throughout the system and a much clearer emphasis on providing individual development and meaningful senior football for players reaching the top of the pathway.

There is also something particularly special about developing your own players. Seeing somebody who has grown up supporting Portsmouth, or who has spent several years within our Academy, eventually walking out at Fratton Park for the first team means something special to supporters.

That's what we want to see more of.

But we also have a responsibility towards every young person who comes through our Academy. Very few young Academy players anywhere in the country will ultimately establish themselves as professional footballers. Our responsibility therefore goes beyond producing footballers. We need to help develop young people, provide them with a good education and give them experiences and values that will benefit them whatever direction their lives eventually take.

The current Academy gives us reasons to be optimistic, but I do not think we should overstate where we are. The real test now is whether we can convert the work taking place throughout the Academy into players capable of progressing into our first team.

That is the challenge we've set ourselves, and ultimately that's what we will do our very best to deliver.