Interland report – James Bryant

I was really excited to have been selected to run for England a this year's Interland competition in Kattenbos, Belgium. A large team of athletes travelled down to Egham, Surrey to assemble at the coach collection point ahead of our long journey to the competition area. Getting to miss a day of school especially for it made the coach ride seem quite exciting.

On the Friday evening we stayed in a youth hostel in Oostduinkerke, just across the Belgian border from France. We had a team meeting before heading down to the beach for a walk in the dark, all of us looking forward to some fun orienteering experiences. The next day we had another reasonable coach journey across Belgium to the town of Turnhout, where we were allowed a couple of hours of free time, and took the opportunity to buy some Belgian chocolate.

Then finally we arrived at the accommodation, Dommelhof sport centre, where we got ready to do the first bit of actual orienteering of the weekend. I really enjoyed the training course, and was very pleased to have completed my first ever orienteering course abroad, although it took me a while to get into the map, since the hills were much smaller and more subtle than expected. However, the fast runnable forests and technical navigation meant that it was very enjoyable.

Later, we had some food, had a team briefing about the competition the next day, and spent a considerable amount of time in the huge playground adjacent to the accommodation. The slide was really great fun!

The next day it was finally time for the competition. I was fairly nervous to be running at an international event, and hoped the team would be able to do well against the local Belgians. Once I got out on the course, I enjoyed every second of my run. Despite a small error to the first control, it was a virtually mistake free course, and I found that the technical areas of sand dunes and contours were some of the nicest patches of forest I've ever been able to orienteer in. I was hugely pleased to come in 4th position on M17, and the top three were all local Belgians.

After the whole team had finished, it was time for prize giving. England were fortunately able to retain the junior trophy for classes M/W20-, but came second overall to local team Orienteering Vlaanderen, who performed very well in nearly every age class. Despite this, the whole team worked hard and it was an amazing experience to have orienteered in such interesting terrain.

The journey home was long, tiring, hot and slightly sad to have to return to England, but even still, it was a great opportunity to debrief with other age classes who ran my course, and the atmosphere on the bus was tired, but still fun. We arrived back in

Sheffield at 1am, where I went straight to bed ahead of school the next day, which I inconveniently could not miss because I had two exams to do.

Overall, Interland was an amazing experience, and thank you to anybody who helped to coordinate the England team or provided transport for the long journey, it was a weekend I'll never forget.