

Youth Football – FA Position Statements

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Youth Football – FA Position Statements

The FA and CFAs are regularly approached to voice an opinion on ethical or technical issues in youth football. Through the England DNA, the Laws of Mini Soccer, Youth Football and Futsal, The FA Respect Programme, Safeguarding Policy, Procedures, Standards and Guidelines and the Standard Code of Regulations Youth (SCORY) there are generally consistent answers to provide to these queries. However, there is a value in working up a series of position statements that summarise The FA’s policy stance on a range of issues. These position statements are short summaries of The FA’s stance – they are not meant to be academic assertions but state a view which is based upon The FA’s expertise built on research, insight and extensive knowledge and experience. These statements have been worked up by The FA’s Youth Football Advisory Group – a group that brings together representatives of The FA’s Grass Roots Division and the National Lead Coaches 5-11 and 12-18.

The draft position statements found in this document are a practical reference resource to assist FA and CFA respond authoritatively to the queries they regularly receive. The position statements set out below are The FA’s current policy on these issues but like anything will need to evolve over time as football and society changes. The statements are also not exhaustive – there are likely to be many other issues that require a similar treatment and your assistance in identifying these would be welcomed.

Dermot Collins 12/06/2020



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1. *What is the FA's view on children being introduced to football at the earliest opportunity and specialising in that activity?*

The advice of The FA's Technical Department supports a diverse sports and movement programme at an early age rather than an intense specialisation on football. This might mean the integration of fundamental movement activities and games focusing on agility, coordination and balance within a football environment. Coaches should be encouraging children in the foundation phase (5 -12) to also participate in other sports. Early recruitment in to football should not entail early specialisation as an intense focus on one sport can lead to overuse injuries in developing bodies and declining levels of enjoyment. The greatest predictor of whether a player will be retained in a sport is the enjoyment they derive from it. Whilst The FA does support specialised coaching programmes that have increased contact time with young players, this is not based on the outmoded model of 10,000 hours of practice as a requirement.

2. *What is the FA's stance on young children being engaged in coaching programmes described as being elite?*

The FA's stance is that it is impossible at an early age to determine whether very young children will progress into becoming elite adult players. Research has suggested that very few Elite Athletes were elite, or particularly exceptional in their Foundation years. Whilst Professional Clubs can organise specialised coaching programmes for young people, those involved cannot and should not be deemed as elite. Good practice in this area would involve children being involved in fundamental movement and games activities as well as football specific practices and matches.

3. *Can Children under the age of 7 be involved in organised football activity?*

FA Regulations prohibit competitive football until U7s. However, It is legitimate to work with children who are u/4, u/5 and u/6 but the programmes offered to these groups needs to be age specific and not just a version of older age group provision. The focus needs therefore to be on play and technical/skills-based training games rather than matches. This in turn requires a focus on the quality, suitability and specialism of coaches working with these younger age group. An example session for instance might involve some ABC movements and games, FA Level 1 Practices and a series of 1 v1, 2 v1, 2 v2, 3 v2, 3v3 games set up in a Carousel and differentiated to provide a variety of challenges for players at various stages of development.

4. *What formats of football are best suited to develop the technical skills of young children?*

The FA's Mini Soccer programme begins at 5 v 5 but there is evidence to suggest that other formats offer additional technical benefits at these younger age groups. Formats of 2v2 or 3 v 3 or playing with an imbalance, can accentuate and accelerate the development of individual offensive and defensive technical skills. FA Regulations allow for u/7s and U/8s to play formats other than 5 v5 but, this format has become the universal default. The 'blocking' of Mini Soccer and Youth Football seasons, lends itself to offering a variety of formats, as well as competitive and non-competitive fixtures and tournaments. The FA advocates the greater use of these smaller-sided formats. These formats if introduced in the right way can make the first engagement of children with football a positive and memorable age appropriate experience that is more playful than competitive. It should be emphasised that no additional changes in regulations are required to employ smaller sided formats.

5. *Should all children, regardless of ability, be offered equal playing time?*

Children will get better by taking part and playing. In the Foundation phase the focus should be on developing the individual players rather than results of the team. In relation to the management of a team this should mean that in a game or over a course of games that a squad of youth players should experience a range of situations – starting, starting as a substitute, coming on as a substitute, being substituted. There should be an aim to offer all squad players comparable game time. However, we believe this approach should be based on a developmental ethos rather than regulation imposed by a stop watch. There are coaching aides that can assist Coaches manage substitutions <http://www.somersetfa.com/coaches/even-stevens> Changes in selection or playing position should be individualised to the player. What is their physical condition? (are they experiencing a growth spurt for instance), can they cope with being moved from defence to attack? Is there a tactical logic in changes – e.g. progressing a player from Left Back to Left Winger?

We believe that Clubs should clearly set out their selection and game time policies, so that parents are aware of the approach taken and can take this into account in selecting a club that meets the needs of their child or children. A failure to offer playing time has a direct correlation on players enjoyment and leads to drop out from the game.

6. *Is it legitimate for community football clubs to engage in the periodic trialling of its youth squads as a way of removing perceived 'weaker' players and replacing them with others considered to be of a higher standard?*

The FA recognise that the management of squads in a club can be demanding. Large

Squads may require the selection of a match day squad or a differentiation between a 'training squad' and a 'League squad'. In some cases, a club may operate a 'League Team' and 'Friendly team', to offer all players some game time. It could be argued that Teams that operate squads with too many players result in reduced game time and a stockpiling of players that could productively play elsewhere. However, despite these considerations the ethos of an FA Charter Standard Club should be on a commitment to work with and improve its member players, rather than running open trials with a view to releasing existing players and replacing them with perceived 'better ones' from elsewhere. The key motivation for most young players is fun, enjoyment and a desire to play with friends. These drivers for young people's participation are undermined by an unstable environment, in which the player feels that they are easily dispensable.

7. In what circumstances is it permissible for Boys to play in predominantly Girl's Football Teams and competitions?

The development of girl's football has required that an option be provided for girls to play in boy's football teams, because of a lack of girl's-only opportunities, or to provide a more appropriate competitive environment for talented girls. Having established this principle Equality Legislation requires that the same opportunities be available for boys wishing to play in girl's teams and leagues. This is a legitimate approach, if without the participation of boys, the team may not be viable in terms of numbers, or because a male player cannot identify other suitable opportunities to play, or because a female player cannot be found to play in a specific position e.g. Goal Keeper. However there have been recent cases of boys being played in girls leagues to gain a significant competitive advantage. Whilst this is not against the letter of the law, it is certainly against its spirit and clubs or teams adopting this tactic should be strongly discouraged from doing so

8. *What is International Clearance and why does The FA require it for players that just want to play Grassroots football?*

Players can only be registered with one national association at a time so Clubs must therefore request international clearance for:

- Any player who has previously been registered abroad; or
- The first time an overseas national registers with a club in England.

This applies at all levels of football and includes players previously registered for a club in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. International clearance must be requested for any player **over the age of ten**. Players under the age of 18 are also subject to the provisions of FIFA Article 19, under which international transfers are only allowed when:

- The player is moving to this country with his parents for non-football reasons; or

- The player's residence and new club are within 50km of a national border (e.g. Wales)

Please refer to the detailed guidance on TheFA.com for further information and documentation required for the application. The application form must be sent directly to The FA at Registrations@TheFA.com along with a copy of the player's passport photo page/national identity card. The FA will contact the relevant National Association and request an International Transfer Certificate (ITC). **The FA will contact the club directly.** County FAs are not involved in this process so are unable to request assistance or fast track your application.

The player is not allowed to play until this clearance is received.

9. *In what circumstances is it permissible for a young player to play up or down a year?*

For this to take place the FA need to issue a formal dispensation. There are very limited circumstances in which dispensations to play up and down are permitted. The FA seek to maintain a balance between making sure that players are in the appropriate age group for their size and development but also that no-one is gaining an unfair advantage and the safety and well being of the child and other children is preserved.

The following table shows the age-groups a player can play in

Age on 31 August of the relevant Playing Season	Eligible Age Groups
6	Under 7
	Under 8
7	Under 8
	Under 9
8	Under 9
	Under 10
9	Under 10
	Under 11
10	Under 11
	Under 12
11	Under 12
	Under 13
12	Under 13
	Under 14
13	Under 14
	Under 15
14	Under 15
	Under 16
15	Under 16
	Under 17
	Under 18

16	Under 17
	Under 18
	Open Age

i) Playing up a year

A player can play one-age up. The only exceptions are:

- Those who are aged 6, can only play when they are 6 years old and play in under 7s
- Players aged 15 can play for under 17 and under 18
- Players aged 16 can play for under 17, under 18 and open age

ii) Playing down a year

A player can be considered to play a year down, if the characteristics of that child's disability or significant physical developmental delay ('SPDD') mean that participation in their chronological age group would put them at a significant disadvantage. An application should be made directly to the FA to consider this. Dispensations are issued for a stated period, which is usually one football season.

As a FA Pilot, FA Girls Regional Talent Clubs can play as an individual or as a team in a boys' league up to 2 years down if it considered appropriate for their development and to ensure the right level of competition. FA Girls Regional Talent Clubs can therefore play at their chronological age-group, a year down or two years down. There are also pilots taking place involving community girls' teams playing in a predominately boys league to play down one age-group. For leagues to do this, they require permission from the FA so that it can be monitored.

iii) What about Disability Football?

Disability Football allows for wider age range bandings to allow teams/leagues to recruit a critical mass of players necessary to form a team. This would be difficult with 2-year banding restriction.

Disability football has dispensation to adopt a maximum 4-year age banding up to and including U16s only. The FA recommends U8, U12 and U16 as initial age bandings. should numbers permit. The use of 2-year age banding is encouraged

A player can apply to the FA for dispensation to play down an age if there has been significant physical development delay.

10. Why isn't goal difference used in youth football to determine placings?

Youth Football in England is governed by the Standard Code of Rules – Youth (SCORY). *Rule 22 a* sets out that the winner of a championship should be determined by the team with the highest number of points. If these are equal, then a play-off match should be arranged, or the title shared. It is not permissible to use Goal Difference to resolve a Championship. Youth Football can involve mismatches and significant differences between teams and the publication of goal difference can be dispiriting and reduce the retention of players and teams. Given that goal difference cannot be used to determine placings the value of its inclusion in league tables should be discouraged.

11. Why can't leagues publish tables for u7 to u11 leagues?

The FA's Youth Review restructured youth football so that it reflects what children want from the game rather than the motivations of the adults that coach or watch them. If league tables are introduced too early, then points rather than the development of players becomes the focus of games played. Standard Code of Rules Youth (SCORY) does not permit the publication of tables for these age groups although it is possible to publicise the results of Trophy events.

12. What is a Trophy Event?

The FA's Youth Review in 2010 changed the way that Youth Football was structured in England moving teams into smaller formats of the game and reorganizing seasons to offer a range of different playing experiences rather than a uniform season-long league. Since these changes, youth football has boomed in popularity.

Children from U7 -U11 do not play in leagues. They can however play trophy events during the season. This allows them to learn about winning and losing in a competitive but time limited environment. Trophies can be awarded to the winners and the results of mini-event published.

Trophy events for u/7 to u/11 s should be structured so that they can be completed over a maximum of two weekends and take notice of the maximum playing durations for the age groups concerned. (u7s & u8s - 40 minutes, -60 minutes, – 80 minutes).

u7s & u8s – can take part in 2 weeks of trophy events

u9 & u10s - can take part in 4 weeks of trophy events

u/11s - can take part in 6 weeks of trophy events

Trophy Events can be configured in a variety of different ways to cater for the number of teams involved.