

## **Frequently Asked Questions:**

Q. Why are The FA making changes?

A. The FA are constantly looking to evolve and develop the game of football as the game changes. Many years ago the game was played in a W-Formation and since that time it has evolved into different set ups and today we even see Barcelona playing a 1-4-6-0 formation with no recognised centre forward. Other changes include much more of a possession-based approach to being successful and we need to make sure our game evolves at the same rate.

There hasn't been a real in-depth look at youth football since the introduction of Mini-Soccer in 1999 and it was timely that the system was given a modernisation.

Q. Is this all because the England Senior team didn't do very well at the last World Cup?

A. The below expectation performance of the senior team at the World Cup hasn't been the catalyst for change; discussions were already taking place for about 8 months before the world Cup in 2010. It is also noted that if we win Euro 2012 that the youth system still requires a modernisation, regardless of the performance of the national team. The Spanish, despite winning the Euro 2008 and World Cup 2010 are still changing and moving their grassroots system forwards, having just increased the year group they play 9v9.

Q. Consultation has been done but you haven't spoken to me or my clubs?

A. The consultation on what youth football should look like has taken place over the last two years, including 35 individual County FA meetings where they invited youth leagues in to the discussion along with 16 regional roadshows involving lots of debate with clubs, leagues and coaches. The FA is sorry if you haven't made any of the events personally but is confident that a broad enough cross-section of people within the game has been spoken to for their views, which The FA has listened to.

Q. How did you capture the views of children?

A. 50 focus groups of children in the 8-12 years age range, from Devon to Durham have been undertaken, which consist of groups of 10-14 players coming together for 45 minute in-depth interviews about what they like and don't like about football, why they play the game and what changes they would make. It was felt that it was vitally important we heard the views of the children in this matter. The focus groups were parent and coach-free so as to avoid any contamination of the data and conducted by a National Development Manager with a Masters Degree unit in Research Methods in Education, supported by County FA Development Staff, most of which have Degrees in Sport, including research methods.

Q. But you haven't spoken to every player?

A. Realistically that task would be impossible, however, simply ask your children "why do you play football?" and we are confident the results won't be too far away! The focus groups were then followed up with academic research which was found to support all the feedback from the children – that they are driven to play for intrinsic reasons, such as loving the game and that trying their hardest was important than winning, and not extrinsic things, such as trophies and medals. For further reading, please see Daniel Pink – Drive as an example.

Q. Changing the goalposts to be more appropriate makes sense, how are we going to pay for it?

A. Of course, if new sets of goalposts are needed to be purchased for 9v9 there may be a cost incurred. Please go to Sport England's Small Grants Programme for 100% funding on the cost of goalposts. There is a further £1m ring-fenced funding via the Football Foundation which will pay 50% towards the cost of goalposts as well. Up and down the country, many youth leagues and clubs have set up schemes to support purchasing these as well, and in these economic times its vital we pull all

of the sources of funding together so that cost isn't an added challenge. Please work with your local County Development Manager, based at the County FA, to get advice with funding.

The goal sizes for 9v9 are 16x7' or 21x7' and we have deliberately opted for two sizes. Based upon the current financial climate, it would be remiss to state that children must use one size and with many school pitches and sites having 'youth' size goals, many reflect this already and there is no need to purchase additional goals.

Q. And what about pitches?

A. Not being blessed with a huge stock of pitches we can give up, we have to be smarter with how we use existing space. Leagues that have already implemented 9v9 have used a variety of different solutions. This includes playing box-to-box on an existing pitch and coning-in either side of the pitch, playing with different coloured lines marked on a pitch or across an existing big 11v11 pitch. Some leagues have worked out they only needed 3 pitches to service 12 clubs and not every club needed a home pitch to play on. Some have been playing central venue and all teams comes to one place.

Q. Can we reallocate pitches across a town?

A. Of course, it might need a whole town approach to this and if there are several sites with several different formats being played on, it might be worth designating different sites for different formats of the game, your FA Regional Facilities Manager and County Development Manager can help you with this.

Q. Can we use 3G artificial turf pitches?

A. Absolutely, these could be the best surface children ever learn to play the game on as the ball always runs flat, doesn't get stuck in mud and other than snow, there is unlikely to be games called off. As with the above three questions, work with your County Development Manager to help get access to these pitches. If these pitches can be used for World Cup Qualifiers and Champions League matches, they are certainly good enough for local youth football! However, this refers to 3G pitches only, not sand-based artificial pitches.

Q. So what does a pitch look like? How can we work with our Local Authorities to get them?

A. The FA will provide diagrams of the pitch markings, size of penalty area and all the things you need to know. The FA, through the network of Regional Facilities Managers will work with the Local Authorities, Boroughs and other pitch providers to ensure they get all the support they require.

Q. What do we need for 5v5 for the younger children?

A. Nothing extra at all. The game will use the same size goals as Mini-Soccer (12x6') and you can play on half an existing Mini-Soccer pitch or simply cone down an area 30x20 yards. Adults get hung up on the use of cones, the children are totally fine with them!

Q. How will the professional clubs games programme look?

A. The recommendation that has been approved in the new Elite Player Performance Plan is to mirror the formats in grassroots football.

Q. How will the approach be competitive enough to teach children about winning and losing?

A. The child-friendly approach to competition balances off what the children want from their football experience with learning to win and lose. It is about making sure the environment they play in isn't adult-dominated with children being scared of making mistakes. Equally, we need to allow children to learn to play the game, practise things without worrying about losing a position in the league and develop in a positive environment. It has been found through pilot study's that this format makes the game and environment better for children.

Q. Won't changing the selection dates just shift the problem?

A. We know from academic research that moving to Jan-Dec selection year will cause a bias of children born in the first four months of the year, however, with the Sep-Dec born children still getting the advantage in the school teams, this will allow a different cohort of children to come through into club teams. It also means the summer-born children that were previously marginalised for school and club football won't be permanently sidelined in all football.

Q. How will this affect recruitment of the youngest players?

A. This will simply mean players will play in calendar year groups rather than class year groups. Children make friends within minutes of meeting other children and this will also increase their friendship circles further, something they say they like from football. There is very little evidence of one entire class becoming an entire club team, typically they are made up of children from four to five different schools.

Q. Will you change existing teams?

A. No. There will be no changes to any existing teams. It will be phased in like the other changes and therefore the children in those teams will just have that set of friends for football, effectively not knowing a different system. Where they have made the change in other countries, they have found they have increased participation and the children have been absolutely fine. Other countries have split school/club football and have had no negative impacts.