



YOUTH CONSULTATION

Report Two - Staying in the Game

APRIL 2022



Oxfordshire FA



INTRODUCTION

Alongside our Oxfordshire FA Youth Leadership Team, we are excited to launch the second instalment of our youth consultation initiative. This is where we will regularly be getting feedback from children & young people across the county to help make continuous positive improvements.

The aim of 'Staying in the Game' is to get the views of 16-21-year-olds, specifically on making the transition from youth to adult football.

This insight will help shape our work for the 2022-23 season and hopefully support us keep more players aged 16-21 participating into their adult years.

I would personally like to thank all 105 young people that took part in the study and look forward to working with you going forward as we shape the game together.

Michael Thurlow

Football Development Manager

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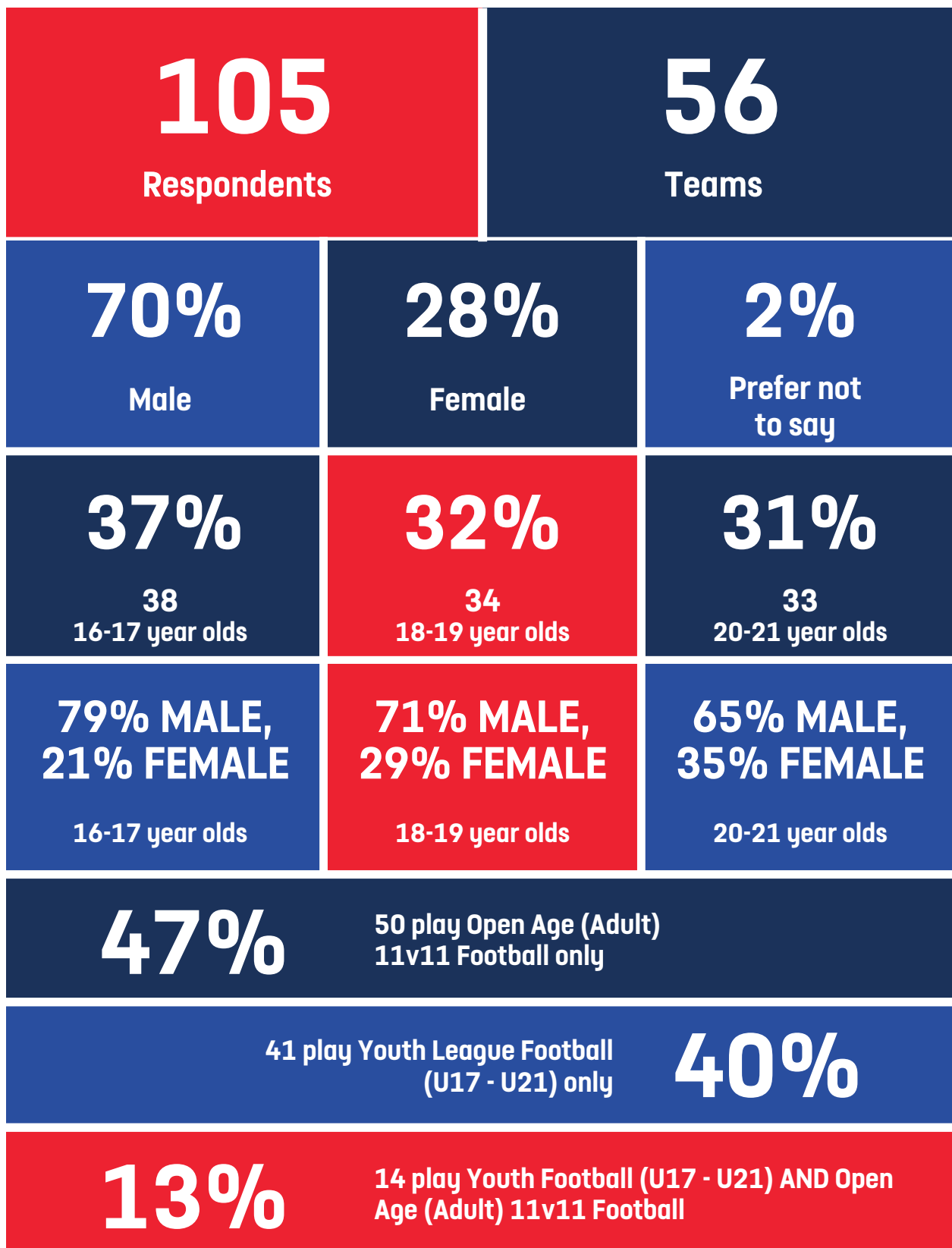
It is extremely important we get the views of young people and that these views are at the heart of future decisions made to further improve the game in Oxfordshire

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CONSULTATION SAMPLE

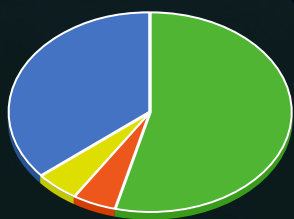
Consultation was carried out online using Microsoft Form with respondents completing different questions based on whether they played youth (U17-U21) only, Adult Open Age only or both youth (U17-U21) and adult open age football.

A range of open and closed questions were used.



RATE THE EXPERIENCE PLAYING FOOTBALL AT YOUR CLUB

(TRAINING AND MATCH DAYS)



- VERY POSITIVE
- POSITIVE
- NEITHER POSITIVE
NOR NEGATIVE
- NEGATIVE

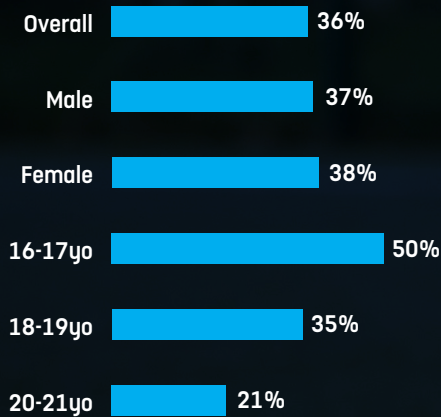
90%

of respondents rated their experience of playing football at their club as 'positive' or better with over a third feeling their experience was 'very positive'.

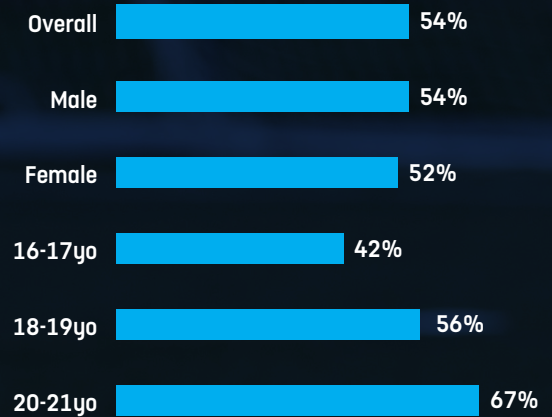
5% felt the experience was neither 'positive nor negative' with only 5% feeling it was 'negative'. None of the respondents felt they had a 'very negative' experience.

There was only a marginal difference in experience between male and female players.

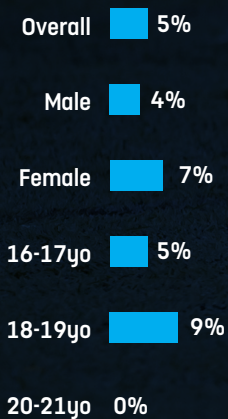
VERY POSITIVE



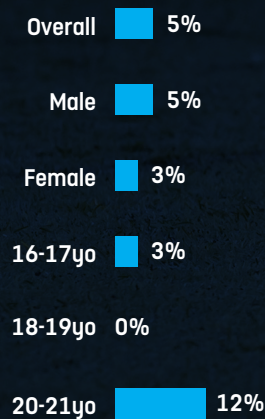
POSITIVE



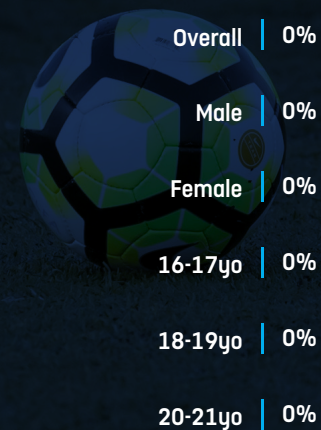
NEITHER POSITIVE NOR NEGATIVE



NEGATIVE



VERY NEGATIVE



Overall, 90% of respondents rated their experience of playing football at their club as 'positive' or better with over a third feeling their experience was 'very positive'. 5% felt the experience was neither 'positive nor negative' with only 5% feeling it was 'negative'. None of the respondents felt they had a 'very negative' experience.

There was only a marginal difference in experience between male and female players with the majority of both genders rating it positive or better (91% male, 90% female).

As with gender, experience is fairly consistent across the age boundaries with 92% of 16–17-year-olds, 91% of 18–19-year-olds and 88% of 20–21-year-olds giving a rating of positive or better.

The highest negative rating was recorded in the 20–21-year-old age group with 12% feeling this. This 12% was made up of three male respondents and 1 female. The only other negative response came from a male within the 16–17-year-old age category.

EXPLORING THE REASONS

Tell us a bit more about why you think this?

Looking at the reasons behind these responses there were several themes that emerged.

There was little difference between the age groups.

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE

On the negative side reasons tended to be specific to each individual and with the small number of responses in this category there was **only one theme that emerged around level**. Of those that gave this as a reason, two felt the level was too high which impacted morale due to defeats or lack of available minutes with the others feeling that the **standard of playing or coaching was too low, or team-mates were not taking it seriously**.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

Regarding positive responses, overall, the **most frequent theme was around the positive culture and team spirit at clubs**. Feeding into this was the sense that teams and players felt valued by great clubs and the importance of being able to play with a good group of friends.



Following on from this in terms of prevalence was enjoyment, whether that be playing matches, training or just the game itself. Factors underlying this were having good coaches that featured strongly as well as good training sessions.

Several responses referenced **having good facilities** and being able to play in well organised and competitive leagues. Winning and playing in winning teams was also cited but only by four respondents.

MALE VS FEMALE

In terms of gender differences in reasoning, having a positive culture and great team spirit was the most referenced theme for both male and female respondents. The second most prevalent theme for males was enjoyment whereas females referenced having good coaches ahead of enjoyment. you going forward as we shape the game together.

IF YOU COULD MAKE ONE CHANGE TO THE GAME OF FOOTBALL THAT YOU PLAY OR FOR 16-21 YEAR OLDS THAT MIGHT PLAY IN THE FUTURE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

MATCH OFFICIALS

By far the most prominent response to this question centred around the quality and consistency of match officials. This was frequently raised by both genders and by all age groups.

Referees were referenced the most with standard, protection of younger players, impartiality and provision all highlighted for improvement. Assistant referees were also a key feature within responses. The need to have more qualified neutral people appointed to run the line was raised as the lack of this provision is leading to players or club representatives taking the flag and 'cheating' or making wrong or biased decisions.

PROGRESSION

The second emerging theme identified surrounded progression. This was split into two categories referring to either moving from the youth to adult game or trying to progress into the higher levels of the game.

From the male perspective more support was requested to help players find adult opportunities once they had finished U18 football. On the female side the focus was more on having an easier transition into the ladies' game such as an U18s or U19's league.

With regards to progression into the higher levels of the game both genders called for an increase in support.

On the female side more opportunities to be scouted were highlighted as well as the need to provide more help for players trying to break into National League and WSL football as the financial and time pressures may lead to increasing drop-outs when managing work, education, playing and training becomes too difficult. Male responses were more focussed on supporting players released from academies to continue either through playing or a career in the game.

MORE OPPORTUNITIES

The third most prominent theme was the desire for more opportunities to play or participate.

More opportunity to play was identified almost exclusively by female respondents. This was referenced in terms of a need for more 16+ girl's teams and leagues, a wider range of in and after school opportunities as this is inferior to what is available to boys and a greater access to girls skills camps. The one male responder called for more opportunities to play men's football.

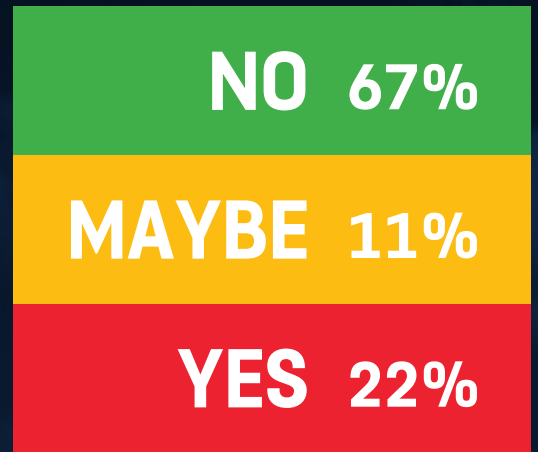
GAME TIME

A number of respondents across the age range would increase the amount of game time available. This came from only males and focussed on unlimited substitutions, smaller squad sizes and giving younger players in the men's game and benched players more opportunities to play.

QUALITY OF FACILITY

The final main theme was focussed on the quality of facility provision. Whilst several respondents had highlighted facilities as having a positive impact on their experience it is clear that this is not the same across the board with a number of responses identifying the need for better pitches and facilities in general.

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT WILL LIKELY STOP YOU FROM PLAYING?



EDUCATION

This was the most prominent response with respondents stating that moving away to university will stop them from playing.

OTHER COMMITMENTS & INTERESTS

The second emerging theme was respondents having other commitments such as work, other sports and activities.

INJURY

There were four respondents that stated that injury would be the only thing that would stop them from playing- whether an existing injury or if they got one in the future.

STANDARD OF TEAM AND LEAGUE

A couple of respondents said the standard of teams and league will make them give up. It is no fun heavily losing or winning every week.

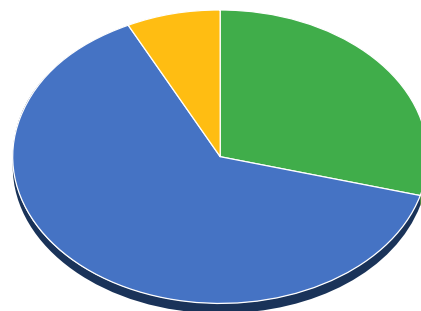


FEMALE

Despite only a couple of responses, feedback from female respondents stated that a lack of opportunities to transition from youth to adult was a challenge.

Two female respondents stated being unsure on the progression from youth to adult as being a reason for dropping out.

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPATING IN YOUTH (U17-21) FOOTBALL?



- Very Positive - 12 respondents
- Positive - 26 respondents
- Neither Positive nor Negative - 3 respondents

93%

of those only playing youth league football (U17-U21) said their experience was positive or better.

These were the main themes that were consistent across male and female.

FUN & ENJOYMENT

The main theme was that football brought respondents so much fun and enjoyment – this was training and matches. In these responses, the other themes were mentioned as these contributed to why football provided so much fun & enjoyment.

COMPETITION

The second prevalent theme was that the competition was providing a positive experience. The teams in the leagues are mostly competitive and friendly to play against.

It was stated that that this has become less so as they progress through the age groups with teams folding resulting in smaller divisions.

TEAM TOGETHERNESS & SOCIAL

The third emerging theme was respondents said their team togetherness & spirit provided them with a positive experience.

It was mentioned that playing with friends and making new friendships was what kept them coming back each week.

COACHING & DEVELOPING SKILLS

Despite only from three respondents, it was stated that having high quality coaches that can help player development was important.

Two of these responses were from female players.



WHAT IS YOUR PERCEPTION OF ADULT FOOTBALL IN OXFORDSHIRE?



56%

said their perception of adult football in Oxfordshire was positive or very positive. 44% said it was neither positive nor negative. No one said their perception was negative.

EXPLORING THE REASONS

56% SAID THEIR PERCEPTION OF ADULT FOOTBALL WAS POSITIVE OR VERY POSITIVE.

The main reason for this perception was due to a positive interaction with adult football in the past. Examples were their U18 team playing a local adult team, playing a game for their local adult team, or watching a local adult team from the sidelines.

The other prominent positive perception was adult football was competitive and an opportunity for progression.

It was also mentioned that it seemed positive that there were many opportunities in the county for both men and women to play adult football.

44% SAID THEIR PERCEPTION WAS NEITHER POSITIVE NOR NEGATIVE.

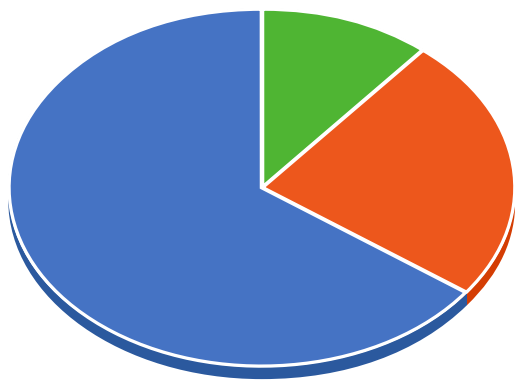
Of those, 11 responses were linked to not having any exposure to adult football and therefore they had not thought about it.

One respondent said 'I don't think it is spoken about largely to entice people in'.

Interestingly, 13 out of 16 that had neither a positive nor negative perception were aged 16-17-years-old.

Despite only being mentioned by one individual, it was said a reason for not having a positive perception was due to playing a couple of games in the past and them not liking the environment, lack of sportsmanship and professionalism.





- YES
- NO
- MAYBE

65%

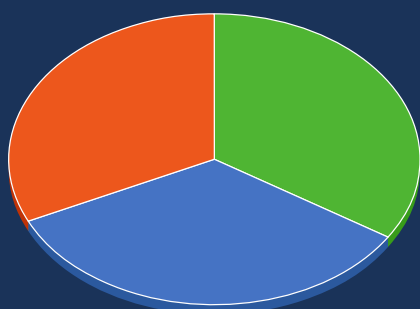
of respondents said they were aware of their local opportunity.

35% however said they were not aware of or were unsure of where their local opportunity was to play adult football.

80% of these were aged 16-17.



DOES YOUR YOUTH CLUB ACTIVELY PROMOTE ADULT FOOTBALL AND ENCOURAGE YOU TO GET INVOLVED?



- YES
- NO
- OCCASIONALLY

34% said that their youth club actively promotes and encourages to get involved in adult football. However, 66% said that adult football is either not promoted or only occasionally.

88% of those respondents are aged 16-17 years old. Responses were consistent across male and females.

WHAT COULD BE DONE TO PROMOTE ADULT FOOTBALL AND MAKE IT MORE ATTRACTIVE FOR YOU TO PLAY IN THE FUTURE?

MORE PROMOTION

The main response was more promotion is needed directly to youth players 16-21 and via social media. This was specifically around their local opportunity and what to expect in adult football.

TASTER SESSIONS

The second emerging theme was the suggestion of local adult

clubs providing 'taster sessions' for youth players to get involved and experience playing with adults.

This was particularly a popular response from female players.

TELL US MORE ABOUT IT!

Respondents said it would be useful to have more information on how youth players can get involved, any relevant information and what to expect.

MORE OPPORTUNITIES

Four respondents said it would be good to have more opportunities available in their local area. This also linked to wanting more of an opportunity to progress and play for higher ability adult teams.

MORE ENGAGEMENT WITH ADULT TEAMS

It was only brought up by two respondents, but it was suggested that more engagement from adult team managers with youth teams would be positive. Having young adult players speak to youth teams about their experience.

It was mentioned that adult clubs inviting youth players to come and watch a match would be a good way of introducing players.

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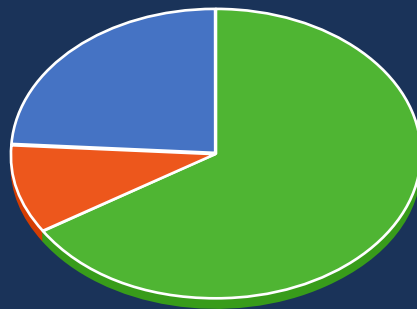
Events to include younger people and adult players to give them taster sessions so the intimidations of playing with older ages decreases

”



WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT EXPERIENCE OF PLAYING PLAYING IN OPEN AGE (ADULT) 11V11 FOOTBALL?

We asked a series of questions to individuals that stated they played open age adult 11v11 football in Oxfordshire



■ 24% VERY POSTIVE
■ 66% POSITIVE
■ 10% NEITHER POSTIVE NOR NEGATIVE

EXPLORING THE REASONS

10% STATED THEIR CURRENT EXPERIENCE OF OPEN AGE ADULT FOOTBALL WAS NEITHER POSITIVE NOR NEGATIVE.

Despite only a small number of respondents, the main reason for male respondents for it not being an overall positive experience was due to experiences of poor behaviour from other players, coaches and the sidelines.

It was also mentioned by two respondents (one male and one female) that poor referees or experiencing referees not turning up to games impacted on their experience.

90% OF RESPONDENTS SAID THEIR EXPERIENCE WAS POSITIVE OR BETTER.

The main theme that emerged, was having a good level of ability, competition, and challenge. It was stated that most games had equal levels of ability and brought a good level of challenge. It was highlighted that the leagues do a great job with splitting divisions based on ability. This consequently helps with keeping results level which has a positive impact on the experience.

The other theme that was mentioned frequently was centred around team spirit and the social element of football. It was highlighted that individuals get great enjoyment out of playing with their team-mates.



DID YOU EXPERIENCE ANY BARRIERS MOVING FROM YOUTH FOOTBALL INTO OPEN AGE (ADULT) 11V11 FOOTBALL?

“

None at all. Everyone was so welcoming and every team I played against showed me respect

”

70% OF RESPONDENTS SAID THEY EXPERIENCED NO BARRIERS WHEREAS 30% EXPLAINED THEY FACED AT LEAST ONE BARRIER WHEN STARTING THEIR ADULT FOOTBALL JOURNEY.



EXPLORING THE BARRIERS

PHYSICALITY

The main barrier stated was the physical difference between youth and adult football. This was seen as a challenge and a worry for players. However, it was stated that even though this got some getting used to the majority now enjoy the game and it has made them better players.

LACK OF OPPORTUNITY

The second most prominent theme was that respondents said there was lack of opportunity and not being given enough game time when they joined their local adult team. It was stated it was difficult to find their local team that was the right ability that you would get a good level of game time. This subsequently impacted on their experience of starting adult football.

DRESSING ROOM

It was also mentioned by two respondents that they felt pressure walking into a dressing room full of adults a barrier. It was also stated by one individual that they did not like the communal changing rooms. However, their club have made a separate room available to use for changing and showers.

THE UNKNOWN

One respondent mentioned that not knowing what to expect was a barrier. This was not knowing what the differences and changes would be from youth to adult.



DID YOUR YOUTH CLUB ACTIVELY **PROMOTE YOUR LOCAL** ADULT FOOTBALL OPPORTUNITY AND ENCOURAGE YOU TO GET INVOLVED?



57%

of people said that their youth club actively promoted and encouraged them to get involved in their local adult football team.

“

It did, but not within the club we were playing for despite them having a ladies team

”

THIS IS CONSISTENT ACROSS GENDER WITH 58% OF BOYS AND 57% OF GIRLS BEING PROMOTED THEIR LOCAL ADULT OPPORTUNITY.



**WHAT WAS YOUR
PERCEPTION OF ADULT
FOOTBALL **BEFORE** YOU
STARTED PLAYING?**

VERY NEGATIVE

Overall | 0%

Male | 0%

Female | 0%

NEGATIVE

Overall | 4%

Male | 5%

Female | 0%

NEITHER POSITIVE NOR NEGATIVE

Overall | 36%

Male | 35%

Female | 37%

POSITIVE

Overall | 47%

Male | 47%

Female | 48%

VERY POSITIVE

Overall | 13%

Male | 13%

Female | 15%

THE POSITIVES

There were a number of themes that emerged for why respondents had a positive perception of adult football in Oxfordshire. These were reasonably consistent across male and females.

The main theme was that individuals had **A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE** in the past, whether this was watching family, friends, or their club's adult team. This also links in with a few respondents that said they had received positive feedback from friends on their **POSITIVE EXPERIENCE** starting adult football.

The final theme was the positive perception that they saw adult football as the **NEXT STEP** up and **A NEW CHALLENGE**. They saw it as an opportunity to develop and grow as a player. Adult football is seen to be competitive but in a positive way.

THE NEGATIVES AND NEITHER NEGATIVE NOR POSITIVES

There were several themes to why individuals did not have a positive perception of adult football. Again, these were consistent across male and female respondents.

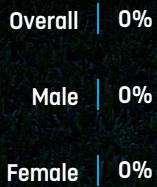
The main theme that emerged was the perception adult football was physical and this was a worry. However, most followed up their comments with saying it was not as physical as they thought.

Linking to this, it was mentioned by a couple that adult football was seen as **AGGRESSIVE** and had **POOR BEHAVIOUR**.

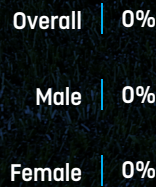
THE 'UNKNOWN' was the second most mentioned theme. This was that respondents did not have a positive perception due to the fact they did not know what to expect and received no information on what the differences were between adult & youth football.

WHAT IS YOUR PERCEPTION OF ADULT FOOTBALL NOW YOU HAVE STARTED TO PLAY?

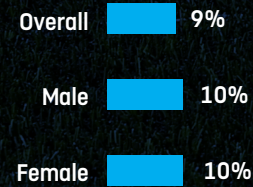
VERY NEGATIVE



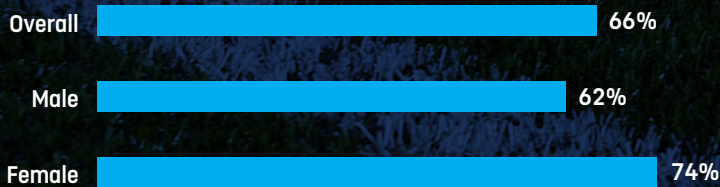
NEGATIVE



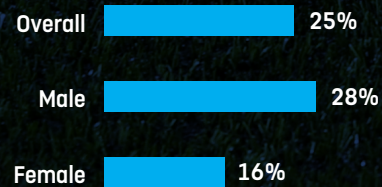
NEITHER POSITIVE NOR NEGATIVE



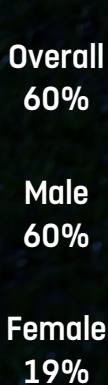
POSITIVE



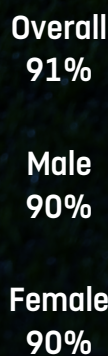
VERY POSITIVE



Positive or better perception BEFORE



Positive or better perception NOW



There is a huge increase in respondents' positive perception from BEFORE they started playing to NOW.

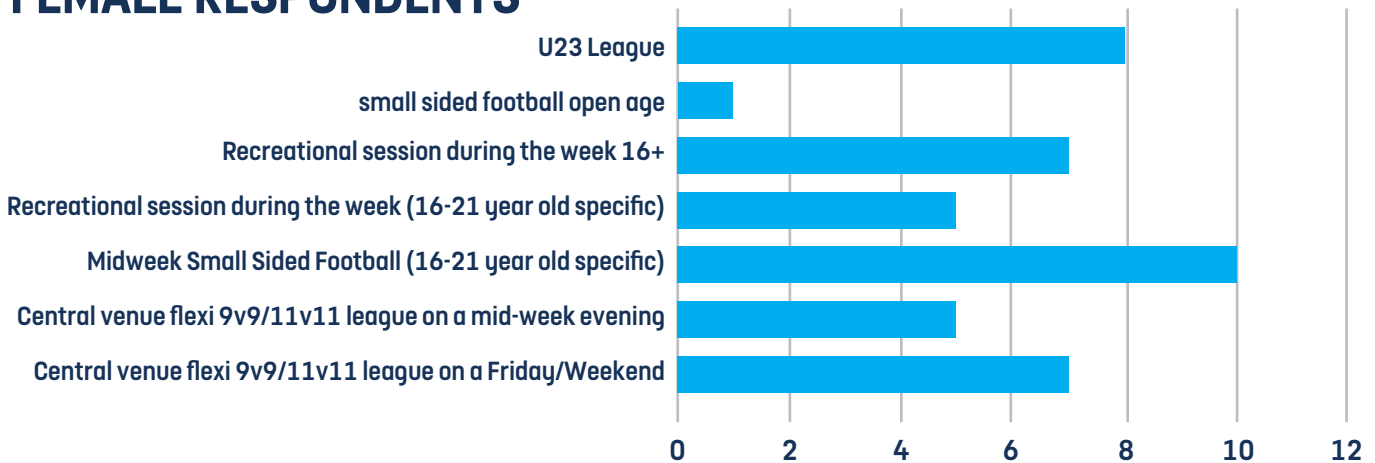
Overall, 33% more players now have more of a positive perception of adult football.

A staggering 71% more female respondents have a more positive perception of adult football.

MORE OPPORTUNITIES

ARE THERE ANY FORMATS OF FOOTBALL THAT WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO PLAY MORE?

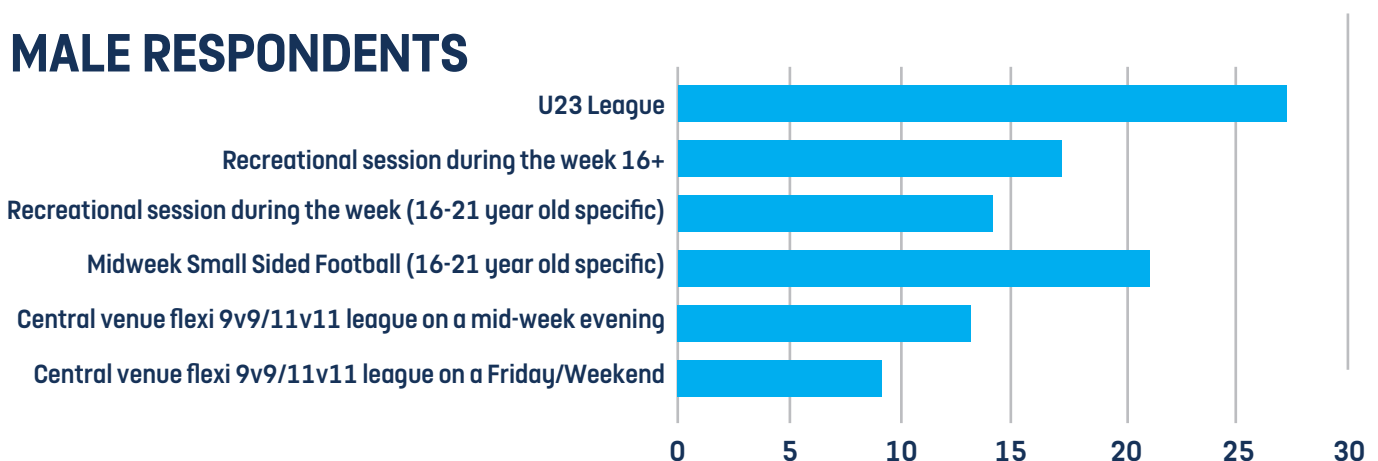
FEMALE RESPONDENTS



The most popular new activities from female respondents were MIDWEEK SMALL-SIDED FOOTBALL (16-21 YEAR OLD SPECIFIC) and U23S LEAGUE.

For the 20-21 AGE GROUP the most popular responses were RECREATIONAL SESSIONS DURING THE WEEK 16+ and FLEXI FOOTBALL.

MALE RESPONDENTS



The most popular response (27) from male players was a specific U23s League. This was tightly followed by 21 responses wanting a Midweek Small Sided League specifically for 16–21-year-olds.

Responses were consistent across the age groups, though an U23 League was most popular amongst the older age groups.

SAFEGUARDING - REPORTING CONCERNS

A SERIES OF QUESTIONS WERE ASKED REGARDING SAFEGUARDING AND REPORTING CONCERNS.

HOW WOULD YOU REPORT ANY CONCERNS OR PROBLEMS AT YOUR CLUB?

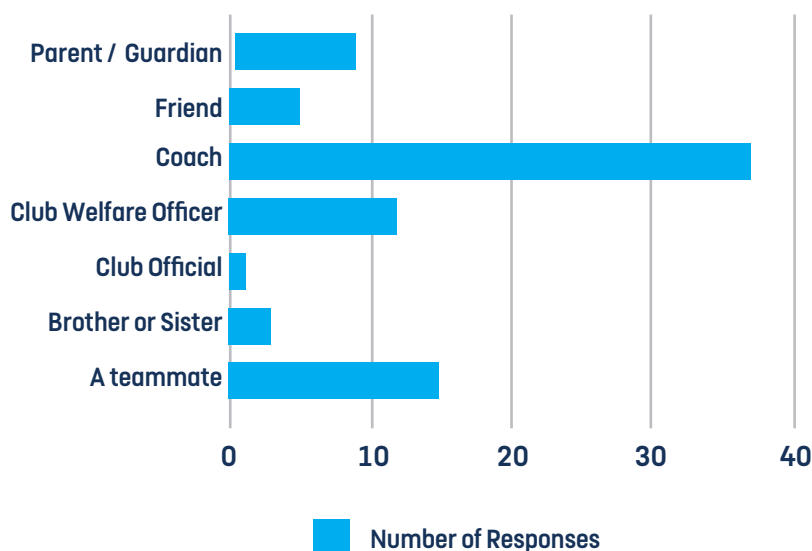
FOR THIS QUESTION, RESPONDENTS COULD SELECT MORE THAN ONE OPTION TO WHO THEY MIGHT REPORT A CONCERN OR PROBLEM TO AT THEIR CLUB.

37 INDIVIDUALS that play open age (adult) 11v11 Football selected their coach as someone that they would speak to.

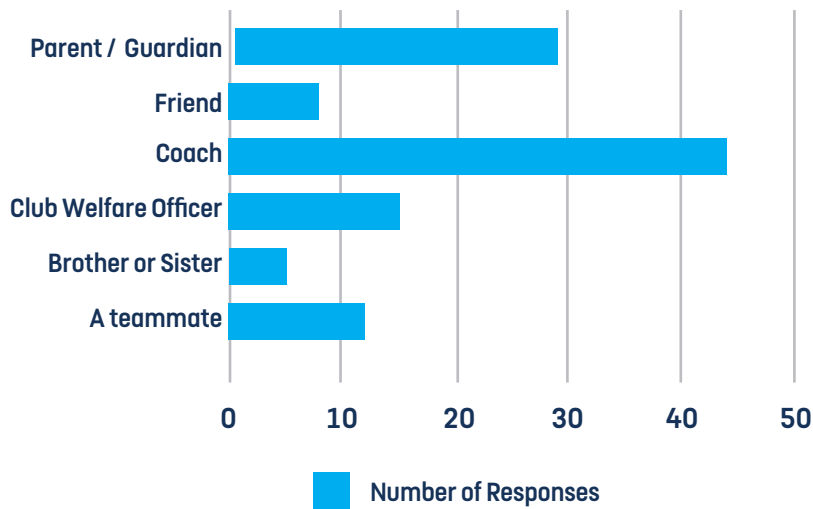
12 INDIVIDUALS selected Club Welfare Officer as someone they would talk to.

All these respondents play adult football as part of a club with youth teams. Of the other respondents that did not select Welfare Officer, 52% play football as part of a club with youth provision so will have a Club Welfare Officer in place.

OPEN AGE (ADULT) 11V11 FOOTBALL ONLY



YOUTH LEAGUE FOOTBALL (U17 - U21)

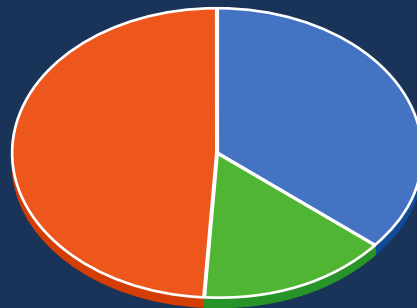


Similar to adult football, the most popular response for reporting concerns was the coach with it being selected 44 times.

Only 15 individuals (27%) of those that say they play youth football selected their Club Welfare Officer as someone they would report a concern or problem to.

DO YOU KNOW WHO YOUR CLUB WELFARE OFFICER IS AND HOW TO CONTACT THEM?

This only shows feedback from individuals that play youth football (U17-U21) only.



■ 15% YES
■ 36% MAYBE
■ 49% NO

20 respondents did not know who their Club Welfare Officer was and 15 were unsure.

Only 6 individuals stated they knew who their Club Welfare Officer were at their youth club.

The results were consistent across gender and ages.





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