



The FA Youth Development Review

“Their Game”

A Guide to Youth Football
Development in Gloucestershire

Kids football is changing - smaller pitches - smaller teams - smaller goals - child friendly competition

This booklet aims to provide players, clubs and leagues with a guide to the developments taking place in youth football.

These positive changes have been put in place to improve enjoyment, fun and development of young players allowing more touches, on a better proportioned pitch with an increase of involvement in the game as a whole.

This is about a modern, child-friendly approach to youth football, challenging the win-at-all-costs mentality that is stifling development and enjoyment for young people. Working together with a proactive attitude, adults can help develop a better environment for young people that puts their needs at the centre of the process.

The key changes taking place over the coming seasons are outlined below:

- Introducing a 5v5 format for the U7 & U8 age groups
- Introducing a 9v9 format for the U11 & U12 age groups
- Developing a new competition pathway for the U7 to U11 age groups
- Developing the laws of Mini-Soccer



**OUR CHALLENGE AS ADULTS IS SIMPLE –
TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE FALL IN LOVE WITH THE GAME**

Why Children Play?

The Football Association has conducted research with groups of children across the whole country.

The top six reasons why children play football are highlighted below:

- Trying my hardest is more important to me than winning
- I love playing football because it's fun
- It helps keep me fit and healthy
- I like meeting new friends through football
- It's a really good game and I love it
- I like playing with my friends.



Adult values and children's values are quite different about what they want from their football experience.

Research from children also indicates that through the primary school age group and up to 11/12 they are not focused on winning the league and they state that trophies and medals are not that important to them.

These six factors are much more important to them in the scheme of the reasons why young people play football.

If trophies and medals aren't that important for children it might be worth thinking about your end of season plans.

Children are getting trophies now for doing something they would have done anyway – turn up and play football! How equitable is the 'Top Goalscorer' award anyway? The most important trophy for children is 'Player's Player', voted for by their team mates.

The challenge for spectators and coaches is to ensure the learning environment created for children when they come to football is one that matches their expectations, not the adults' version.

If we get this right it can be a fun, exciting and social experience for all involved!

New Player Pathway

The new player pathway will see a journey for young people that builds and progresses their learning and development as they head towards the adult version of the game.

The new formats are based upon all the academic research, evidence about child development and player development that has been gathered throughout the extensive consultation process.

Put simply, smaller versions of the game will enable players to:

- Have more touches of the ball to develop technique
- Have more dribbling opportunities and 1v1s
- Have more shots and score more goals
- Have more involvement in the game
- More involvement means more enjoyment through playing football



The feedback from children was that they play football to be involved by touching the ball. Putting them on full-size pitches at the age of 10 was not what they wanted or enjoyed.

They found it impossible to defend a goal the same size as those used in the Premier League. They also wanted a pitch size that didn't mean the game became all about stamina and fitness rather than technique and skill.

The new pathway puts the development and retention of players at the heart of the process. Ultimately, The FA and all of those involved in the game want to see more young children playing football.

Summary of the New Player Pathway

The new player pathway formats are detailed in the table below, where you will see the changes at each group over the coming seasons.

We have highlighted where mandatory changes are set to be implemented.

Season 2013/14 (maximum format, but can play smaller numbers)	Season 2014/15 (maximum format, but can play smaller numbers)	Season 2015/16 (maximum format, but can play smaller numbers)
Under 7's: 5 v 5	Under 7's: 5 v 5	Under 7's: 5 v 5
Under 8's: 7 v 7	Under 8's: 5 v 5	Under 8's: 5 v 5
Under 9's: 7 v 7	Under 9's: 7 v 7	Under 9's: 7 v 7
Under 10's: 7 v 7	Under 10's: 7 v 7	Under 10's: 7 v 7
Under 11's: 9 v 9	Under 11's: 9 v 9	Under 11's: 9 v 9
Under 12's: 9 v 9 / 11 v 11	Under 12's: 9 v 9	Under 12's: 9 v 9
Under 13's: 11 v 11	Under 13's: 9 v 9 / 11 v 11	Under 13's: 9 v 9 / 11 v 11

New Competition Pathway

Following research around the country, including focus groups with young people and child development experts, it was found that the adult pathway of an 8 month long season wasn't necessarily the best mechanism to support player development and enjoyment. It was found that the views children have on their game compared to what adults assume that children want are quite different.

Based on our research a new, modern and child friendly approach has been developed that builds competition as players get older. This dismisses the notion that there is such a thing as "non-competitive" football. In every children's match, even with U7s, the two teams want to try their best to win!

However, the most important aspect is the nature of the environment we put children in.



The Competition Pathway for 2013/14 will look like the table below:

Under 7	No League tables published. No single eight-month long season. Three trophy events allowed per mini-season, lasting 2 weeks each
Under 8	No League tables published. No single eight-month long season. Three trophy events allowed per mini-season, lasting 2 weeks each
Under 9	No League tables published. No single eight-month long season. Three trophy events allowed per mini-season, lasting 4 weeks each
Under 10	League tables allowed
Under 11	League tables allowed
Under 12+	League tables allowed

The Competition Pathway for 2014/15 will look like the table below:

Under 7	No League tables published. No single eight-month long season. Three trophy events allowed per mini-season, lasting 2 weeks each
Under 8	No League tables published. No single eight-month long season. Three trophy events allowed per mini-season, lasting 2 weeks each
Under 9	No League tables published. No single eight-month long season. Three trophy events allowed per mini-season, lasting 4 weeks each
Under 10	No League tables published. No single eight-month long season. Three trophy events allowed per mini-season, lasting 4 weeks each
Under 11	League tables allowed
Under 12+	League tables allowed

The Competition Pathway for 2015/16 will look like the table below:

Under 7	No League tables published. No single eight-month long season. Three trophy events allowed per mini-season, lasting 2 weeks each
Under 8	No League tables published. No single eight-month long season. Three trophy events allowed per mini-season, lasting 2 weeks each
Under 9	No League tables published. No single eight-month long season. Three trophy events allowed per mini-season, lasting 4 weeks each
Under 10	No League tables published. No single eight-month long season. Three trophy events allowed per mini-season, lasting 4 weeks each
Under 11	No League tables published. No single eight-month long season. Three trophy events allowed per mini-season, lasting 6 weeks each
Under 12+	League tables allowed

What is a Trophy Event?

The new approach to youth football will phase out the one 'season-long competition' for young players and bring in a mixture of learning opportunities. This will provide youth leagues with the ownership to run different approaches to competition that capture the attention of young players in modern way.

Leagues will have flexibility during the blocks of competition to organise different events that still promote the importance of winning and losing but build this progression as players get older.

Leagues cannot publish league tables throughout the season up to U11 as part of the new approach to a child-friendly competition. However, they will be able to promote and publicise the winners of the different competitions.

This will allow recognition of winners where appropriate but without the pressure of three points and goal difference on the children every week for 26 weeks.

The FA has found from research that one of the main reasons children drop out of football is due to increased pressure from adults on the expectations to win every week.

Being creative with competition and building development as the children get older is a great way to keep children playing football longer.

Furthermore, this variety will give children the excitement of looking forward to what happens next – the new format of the game and new competitions to play in! This becomes like an addictive computer game for children, "We have completed this level. What might I find on the next level?".

Currently, we provide children with the same experience year-on-year and wonder why many drop out the game at 14-18 after six to ten years of doing the same thing over and over again!



Thinking Ahead...

For those that like to plan ahead or who may be linked to a league development plan this is what the complete pathway will look like by the 2015/16 season for youth football.

This will be the complete pathway once the changes have been phased in. This will provide a robust and child-friendly system that allows progression and enjoyment for all young people.

Whilst this shows what the proposed pathway in 2015/16 season it is important that development systems continue to evolve and develop.

Age Group	Maximum Format	Recommended Pitch Size (yds)	Ball Size	Ideal Goal Size	Approach to Competition
U7	5v5	40x30	3	12x6	3x Trophy Events over two weeks each
U8	5v5	40x30	3	12x6	3x Trophy Events over two weeks each
U9	7v7	60x40	3	12x6	3x Trophy Events over four weeks each
U10	7v7	60x40	4	12x6	3x Trophy Events over four weeks each
U11	9v9	80x50	4	16x7	3x Trophy Events over six weeks each
U12	9v9	80x50	4	16x7	Any varieties inc. one season long league table
U13	11v11	90x55	4	21x7	Any varieties inc. one season long league table
U14	11v11	90x55	4	21x7	Any varieties inc. one season long league table
U15	11v11	100x60	5	24x8	Any varieties inc. one season long league table
U16	11v11	100x60	5	24x8	Any varieties inc. one season long league table
U17	11v11	110x70	5	24x8	Any varieties inc. one season long league table
U18	11v11	110x70	5	24x8	Any varieties inc. one season long league table

Developing Mini-Soccer

Mini-Soccer offers an introduction to the game of football at a size and scale that meets the needs of the young people playing – with smaller goals and pitches and less players per team.

Mini-Soccer provides children a fun, enjoyable introduction to football in an environment that allows them lots of touches, shots, dribbles and ultimately more involvement and enjoyment in the game.

Mini-Soccer modifies football without losing the essence of the game, which is important for children and therefore is the appropriate introduction to the game.

The developments in Mini-Soccer include:

- U7 & U8 age groups will play 5v5 (pitch size 40x30 yards)
- U9 & U10 age groups will remain 7v7 (pitch size 60x40 yards)
- The correct ball size for U9s and below is a size 3 & for U10s is a size 4
- All team members should receive equal playing time where possible with a best practice recommendation of 50% per player for each game
- Development matches may be split into quarters instead of just halves
- U7 & U8 children can roll the ball in underarm with one or both hands or take a normal throw-in the children have the option to choose
- The halfway line acts as a retreat line on goal kicks. The opponents must drop off to the halfway line to help the goalkeeper learn to play out from the back. However, if they want to play quickly they can do. The ball is in play as soon as it leaves the goal area – this Law is mandatory



Players

The new player pathway will provide young players with a progressive route through 5v5, 7v7 and 9v9 football through to the 11v11 game.

Alongside the player pathway, a revised competition structure will provide a modern and child friendly approach that builds competition as players get older.

The Youth Development Review will provide players aged U7 - U11 with a variety competitions, before they enter the league structure at U12s.

It will be important to bear in mind the following rules with regards to the Qualification of Players.

Children shall not play, and shall not be permitted or encouraged to play, in a match between sides of more than the following:



2013/14		2014/15	
Under 7s	5v5	Under 7s	5v5
Under 8s	7v7	Under 8s	5v5
Under 9s	7v7	Under 9s	7v7
Under 10s	7v7	Under 10s	7v7
Under 11s	9v9	Under 11s	9v9
Under 12s	11v11	Under 12s	9v9
Under 13s+	11v11	Under 13s+	11v11

Qualification of Players

Children who have attained the age of six but are under the age of (a) seven as at midnight on the 31st August in season 2013/14 (b) eight as at midnight on the 31st August in season 2014/15 may be permitted to play in a match between sides with a maximum of five players and shall play according to the correct Laws of The Game for that format.

Children who have attained the age of (a) seven as at midnight on the 31st August in season 2013/14 (b) eight as at midnight on the 31st August in season 2014/15 may be permitted to play in a match between sides with a maximum of seven players and shall play according to the correct Laws of the Game for that format.

Children who have attained the age of ten but are under the age of (a) eleven as at midnight on the 31st August in season 2013/14 (b) twelve as at midnight on the 31st August in season 2014/15 may be permitted to play in a match between sides with a maximum of nine players and shall play according to the correct Laws of the Game for that format.

Children who have attained the age of (a) eleven as at midnight on the 31st August in season 2013/14 (b) twelve as at midnight on the 31st August in season 2014/15 may play in a match between sides with a maximum of eleven players and shall play according to the correct Laws of the Game for that format.

Children who have attained the age of six as at midnight on the 31st August in a playing season may play Futsal according to the Laws of the Game Futsal. The particular age ranges for such activity are subject to amendment by The Football Association from time to time.

A child who has not attained nor will have attained the age of six as at midnight on 31st August in a playing season shall not play, and shall not be permitted or encouraged to play, in a match of any kind in that playing season.



Rules on Mixed Football

The FA has increased the mixed football age group to U15

A change to the age limit at which boys and girls can play football in the same teams has been unanimously voted in by The FA.

The resolution to increase the mixed football age limit from U14s to U15s was approved on Thursday by The FA shareholders at their AGM after The FA Board, FA Executive and FA Council agreed the proposal.

The change will come into effect for the forthcoming 2013-14 season and will enable The FA to conduct further research into mixed football at this older age group.

Kelly Simmons, Director of the National Game and Women's Football at The FA, said:

“This is really great news and we are delighted that The FA Shareholders fully supported the rule change to enable boys and girls to play in the same teams if they wish to do so up to the U15 age limit.

“The most important thing is to give girls who want to play football the choice.”



Coaches

Most importantly, ensure that you don't overload your players with lots of information. Before the game you may just want to set a couple of basic targets for the players to achieve.

Just before the kick off remind the players what they were again and possibly ask the substitutes to watch the game and see if they are achieving them.

The focus at half time can now be on whether the players have completed the tasks. Get the substitutes to help feed this back. It will almost certainly be a more powerful message coming from them rather than you.

After the game, think of the different ways that you can use to debrief the players. Once again refer back to the targets you set the players and link these into what actually happened during the game.

You may want to arrange the players into small groups and ask them to debrief amongst themselves then feedback to other small groups.

Things to consider when talking to players:

- Use age appropriate language
- Get the attention of your players before speaking
- Keep it simple
- Be positive at all times
- Focus on the most important aspects
- Give clear instructions to your players
- Always finish with a positive
- Don't forget they are just children, not Professional footballers!



Developing Talented Players

As coaches & parents, we would all love our child to become the next top England player, to have a career as a professional footballer and no doubt when they start playing, most children have that same dream! Sometimes adults build the pressure on young players much too soon without understanding the environment that is needed to foster talent.

Being 'Player Centred': A coach that is totally focused on talent development puts the player first; their needs are paramount. Too many competition structures, training programmes, coaching methods and practice schedules have been set to suit those who administer and run them rather than those who participate.

For talent to be truly nurtured these systems require review, players needs assessed and changes made to ensure that every player has the best network of people supporting them as they attempt to achieve their potential.

Using 'The 'C' System' to Develop the Whole Child: Developing talent should be about developing the whole player not just their skills and techniques. Using the 'C' system can help coaches, parents and organisers to keep their eyes on the progress of all aspects of their development.

Core aspects of the 'C' system include:

- **Competence** - Developing the players' abilities in all aspects of their sport.
- **Confidence** - Sport develops confidence if delivered well. A confident player performs better so this is an area that should always be referred to when developing young players.
- **Creativity** - The players should be in charge of their own development and should be allowed to come up with their own solutions. Children have been shown to be more creative than adults but often their creativity is stifled through well meaning adults wanting to show them the 'proper' way.
- **Connection & Caring** - Players should be encouraged to be competitive but they should also be taught to look after each other. Getting players to be in touch with one another needs helps to develop teamwork and leadership skills.
- **Character** - Sport can develop a player's character and teach them valuable life lessons that will be important to their future development.

Parents

The most influential people in terms of a child's development are his or her parents. A child's beliefs, values, perceptions, attitudes and goals are shaped by their home influences and have a profound effect in later life.

Evidence suggests that interest and support from the home are vital in a child's overall development. With this evidence, engaging parents in the learning experience of their children, if guided and educated correctly can lead to positive effects in reinforcing messages of support you offer to the players during the sliver of time you have with them. Working with parents should be seen as a three-way process, between you, the player and the parent.

Just as you will involve them in creating a clear and robust philosophy, by creating a learning environment for the child and parent it will provide them both a much greater understanding of what the common goal is.

Longer term the parents will begin to hopefully become powerful reinforcers and ultimately see the time the child is with you as more than just football, but as a vital learning experience. A good way to reinforce this is by referring them to the 'FA Four Corner' model.

Why Not:

- Organise a pre-season meeting for players and parents
- Talk to the parents before/after coaching and explain what you are doing and why you are doing it; explain the benefits
- Use a questionnaire to get the views from the parents, what else can be improved
- Hold a Parents' Evening – hold evenings when parents can come along with their child and discuss how they are getting on
- Set them basic tasks – this could be asking for support around setting out equipment or keeping a record of playing time for you
- Direct them towards FA online courses to help develop their knowledge too!

Youth Football in Gloucestershire

The Gloucestershire FA currently has a range of youth leagues affiliated offering Mini-Soccer to U18s Football.

Youth League	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18
Avon Youth League						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Bristol (U18) Combination League												✓
Bristol Girls League				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Bristol Saturday Youth League					✓	✓		✓				
Cheltenham Youth League			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Cotswold Youth League		✓	✓	✓	✓							
Gloucester County Girls' League				✓		✓		✓				
Gloucester Youth League		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Gloucestershire County Youth League												✓
Hanham Minor League			✓	✓	✓							
Mid Gloucester Mini-Soccer League		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
Stroud & District Youth League						✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

*Please note all data supplied above is based on provision during the 2012/13 season and is subject to change based on individual league constitutions.

Youth Football in Gloucestershire

In addition to our affiliated leagues, the Gloucestershire FA will also provide County Cup Competitions at the following age groups:

- U12 Boys (9v9)
- U12 Girls (9v9)
- U13 Boys (11v11)
- U14 Boys (11v11)
- U14 Girls (11v11)
- U15 Boys (11v11)
- U16 Boys (11v11)
- U16 Girls (11v11)
- U18 Boys (11v11)



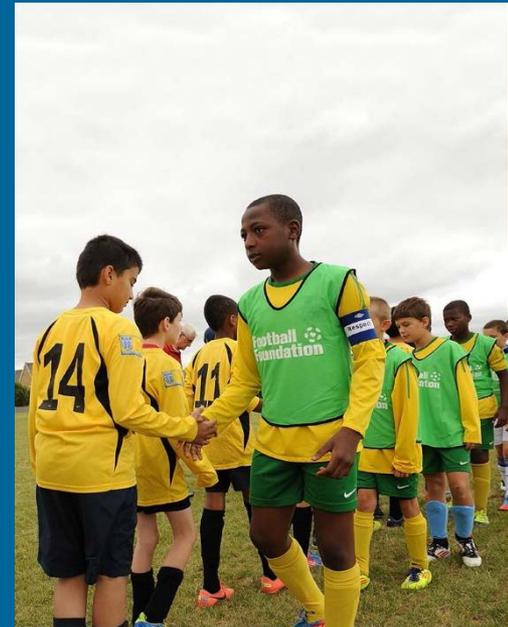
Mixed gender teams are permitted in the U12 to U15 competitions.

Further Information

If you would like further information on the Youth Development Review and/or Youth Football in Gloucestershire then please get in touch with Scott Milne, Football Development Officer at Scott.Milne@GloucetsershireFA.com or call 01454 615888.

Further reading & information:

- The FA Youth Development Review: U7/U8 (Booklet)
- The FA Youth Development Review: U9/U10 (Booklet)
- The FA Youth Development Review: U11/U12 (Booklet)
- The FA Youth Development Review: Youth Leagues (Booklet)
- The FA Guide to Pitch and Goalpost Dimensions (Booklet)
- The FA: Kids Football is Changing (Digital Resource)
- The FA: Series of Youth Development Review video clips
- The FA Standard Code of Rules for Youth Football (2013/14)



Much of this information and more is available online at [TheFA.com/kidsfootball](https://www.thefa.com/kidsfootball) or contact Scott Milne via the details above for guidance on where to find information.

“Their Game”

Kid's Football is Changing



www.TheFA.com/kidsfootball