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# **The Football Association**

**Season 2023-2024**

**THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION**

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## THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION RULES OF THE ASSOCIATION

### SECTION VIII: YOUTH

#### Children not registered as Academy players

The following provisions apply to any child not registered as an Academy Player. All matches must be played in accordance with the correct version of the Laws of the Game appropriate for the format specified.

#### *Children under 6 years old*

C140 A child below the age of six shall not play, and shall not be permitted or encouraged to play, in a match.

#### *Children aged 6 and over*

##### *Age groups and formats*

C141 Children shall not play, and shall not be permitted or encouraged to play, in a match between sides of more than the stated number of players, according to their age group as follows:

Age on 31 August of the relevant playing season	Eligible Age Groups	Maximum Permitted Format
6	Under 7	5v5
	Under 8	
7	Under 8	5v5
	Under 9	7v7
8	Under 9	7v7
	Under 10	
9	Under 10	7v7
	Under 11	9v9
10	Under 11	9v9
	Under 12	
11	Under 12	9v9
	Under 13	11v11
12	Under 13	11v11
	Under 14	
13	Under 14	11v11
	Under 15	
14	Under 15	11v11
	Under 16	
15	Under 16	11v11
	Under 17	
	Under 18	
16	Under 17	11v11
	Under 18	

C142 The relevant age for each player is determined by their age as at 31 August of the relevant playing season.

### Guidance

*Children who are aged 6 on 31 August in a playing season (together with those who turn 6 during the playing season) will be classed as Under 7 players for that playing season. Children who are aged 7 on 31 August in a playing season will be classed as Under 8 players for that playing season etc.*

- C143 A child is permitted to “play up” in the age group immediately above their age group, irrespective of any difference in format or competition structure, save that a child who attains the age of 6 after 31 August is permitted to play only in the Under 7 age group and may not play in the Under 8 age group for that playing season.
- C144 A child under the age of 15 as at 31 August in a playing season shall not be permitted to play in a match during that playing season where any other player is older or younger than that child by two years or more, save that The Association may in its sole discretion:
- C144.1 enable disabled children to play football in an age group other than the groups dictated by their birth date, including “playing down”;
  - C144.2 permit a child to play football in an age group other than the groups dictated by their birth date, including “playing down”.
- C145 To play in an Under 18 competition, a child must have attained the age of 15 as at 31 August of the relevant playing season.
- C146 Subject to Rule C147, to play in an open age competition a child must have attained the age of 16.
- C147 A girl aged 15 or over on 31 August of the relevant playing season may participate in a PGA competition administered by the FAWSL and FAWC.

### Guidance

*This is a new provision introduced for the 2022/23 season which provides a limited exception to the default position that a child not registered as an Academy Player must have attained the age of 16 to play in an open age competition.*

### Competition Structure

- C148 In respect of competitions relating to the Under 7 to Under 11 age groups (inclusive):
- C148.1 leagues may organise a maximum of three trophy events per season. Each trophy event must be played over a maximum period as set out in the table below. The results of the trophy events may be published.

AGE GROUP	MAXIMUM PERIOD OVER WHICH EACH TROPHY EVENT MUST BE PLAYED
Under 7 and Under 8 (mini-soccer)	2 weeks
Under 9 and Under 10 (mini-soccer)	4 weeks
Under 11	6 weeks

- C148.2 the remainder of the season may consist of organised development fixtures only. Competitions and Clubs may collect the results and compile league tables in respect of these fixtures but must not publish either.

- C149 There are no restrictions on the structure of competitions relating to the Under 12 to Under 18 age groups (inclusive).

### ***Authorisation Provisions***

- C150 The written consent of The Association or relevant Affiliated Association(s) shall be required pursuant to Rule B for any Competition for Under 18 age groups and below.

### ***Gender of Players in Under 7 to Under 18 Matches***

- C151 A child in the age groups Under 7 to Under 18 inclusive may play in a match involving boys and girls.

### ***Disability Football - Gender of Players in Under 17 Matches and above***

- C152 In respect of disability football only, and only in accordance with the current dispensation policy, The Association may grant dispensation to permit any team playing at Under 17 level or above to field both male and female players in a match.

### ***Priority for School Activities***

- C153 Priority must at all times be given to school or school organisation's activities in accordance with the recommendations of the "Memorandum: Children of School Age and School Games" whilst a pupil is in Fulltime Education.
- C154 All Clubs and Competitions, excluding those whose matches are played on Sundays, must include in their rules a requirement that the availability of a pupil must be consented to by the head teacher.

## **MEMORANDUM: CHILDREN OF SCHOOL AGE AND SCHOOL GAMES**

One of the important aspects of games in school is the opportunity they afford of developing a pupil's sense of loyalty and honour. It is therefore of concern when interest in games outside the school conflict with a pupil's loyalty to the school and/or school organisations' activities.

1. It is usually the pupil of outstanding football ability whose services are sought by any Club, and the Player is most likely to be a member of the school or association team. While schools' matches are often arranged on Saturday mornings and Club matches take place in the afternoon, it is considered that a player should not play in two matches on the same day, for the one match is likely to affect play in the other.
2. An outside Club or organisation should consult the headteacher before selecting any child of school age to play for a team, and should accept the head-teacher's decision on these matters. Headteachers of schools should not restrain pupils, who are not selected for school games of any kind, from playing for an outside organisation during their free time.

### THIRD GENERATION (3G) FOOTBALL TURF PITCHES

There continues to be significant interest in the use of Third Generation Football Turf Pitches (3G) for clubs in the National League System and below.

Much of this interest, both from leagues and clubs within the non-League pyramid, seeks to understand The FA's position regarding the sanction of these pitches, particularly in FA Competitions.

The FA Board and Council have now approved the use of such pitches in all FA competitions.

- FA Cup
- FA Trophy
- FA Vase
- FA Youth Cup
- FA Women's Super League, FA Women's Premier League, FA Women's Cup and FA WSL Continental Cup
- FA Sunday Cup
- FA County Youth Cup

The use of such pitches is however dependent on compliance with conditions of use – a copy of these is available for download and should be read in association with these notes.

It has been agreed that matches for steps 3 – 6 of the National League System, Womens Super League and FA competitions may be played on 3G Football Turf Pitches that conform to the FIFA 1 star/Quality performance standard, or the equivalent International Artificial Turf Standard (IATS)/ International match standard (IMS). (see specific notes in the league rules relating to steps 1 and 2 and the FA Cup competition rules relating to first round 'proper' fixtures involving professional clubs)

To qualify for use, the pitch must be certified annually as meeting the FIFA 1 Star/Quality or IATS/IMS Standard and listed on the FA's Register of 3G Football Turf pitches. The relevant certificate or report must be supplied to The FA and relevant competition for approval before play is allowed.

3G Football Turf pitches are also allowed to be used for matches for Step 7 and below (including youth competitions) subject to the pitch meeting the correct performance criteria (relaxed from the FIFA 1 star /Quality standard) and appearing on the FA 3G register. A pitch must be tested (by an accredited test institute) every three years and the certificate or report passed to the FA. The FA will give a decision on the suitability for use and add the pitch to the Register.

Clubs should make their own risk assessment of whether such an installation is plausible or not given their individual circumstances and depending on the volume of use. There is a risk that pitches may deteriorate over time and may not achieve the required standards at each period of retesting especially if the pitch has significant use and is not maintained appropriately.

It is suggested that clubs negotiate suitable longevity warranties from the pitch manufacturers to ensure that the pitch will last in line with the club's business plan and intended usage levels. A sinking fund should be established to ensure sufficient funds are available when the surface needs replacing.

Clubs are encouraged to understand the full maintenance required, which may be necessary to validate any warranty. The FA have found that most pitches that fail the performance test have insufficient maintenance. These pitches are not maintenance free and it is recommended that 1 hours maintenance is provided for every 10 hours use. This should increase for high activity use such as youth competitions or school use.

The FA together with representatives from the industry have prepared information regarding the design, installation, construction, maintenance and testing of Football Turf Pitches and The FA Facilities team can also offer advice to clubs considering installation. This information can be accessed within the facilities section of The FA's website [www.TheFA.com](http://www.TheFA.com).

**GOALPOST SAFETY GUIDELINES**

**Updated June 2018**

The Football Association, along with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Health and Safety Executive and the British Standards Institution, would like to draw your attention to the following guidelines for the safe use of goalposts.

Several serious injuries and fatalities have occurred in recent years as a result of unsafe or incorrect use of goalposts. Safety is always of paramount importance and everyone in football must play their part to prevent similar incidents occurring in the future:

To minimise the risk of poorly designed, badly installed or inadequately maintained goals being used the BSI have a standard for football goals, nets, maintenance and management which has been agreed across Europe. Only goals and nets that are certified as complying with the relevant British Standard should be purchased or used for all forms of football.

Traditionally larger sized/weighted goals have been designed to withstand the types of misuse that can occur on unsupervised sites (people swinging on the cross bar, etc.); making the goals strong enough to withstand abuse does result in them being quite heavy and concerns have been expressed that there is the possibility of a greater risk of injury occurring through a heavy goal tipping or when a free-standing type, as often used on 3G pitches, is being moved around a field. Lighter goals have been developed for these pitches and a new standard established. BS EN 16579

When selecting goals and other sports equipment, consideration must be given to the precise uses of the pitch, so that changes in activity can take place with the minimum of effort and inconvenience. Goals can be freestanding, and therefore easily moved, although it is important to make proper provision for their storage when not in use (the run-offs of the pitch must not be used for this purpose) or they can be socketed when semi-permanent installation is required.

1. For safety reasons goalposts of any size (including those which are portable and not installed permanently at a pitch or practice field) must always be anchored securely to the ground or have a weighted back bar.
  - Portable goalposts must be secured as per the manufacturer's instructions; this is also a requirement for the Laws of the Game.
  - Under no circumstances should children or adults be allowed to climb on, swing or play with the structure of the goalposts;
  - Particular attention is drawn to the fact that if not properly assembled and secured, portable goalposts may overturn; and
  - Regular inspections of goalposts must be carried out to check that they are properly maintained.
2. Portable goalposts should not be left in place after use. They should either be dismantled or removed to a place of secure storage, or placed together and suitable fixings applied to prevent unauthorised use at any time.
3. Goalposts which are "homemade" or which have been altered from their original size or construction should not be used under any circumstances as they potentially pose a serious safety risk
4. There is no BS/CEN standard for wooden goals and it is unlikely that wooden goals will pass a load or stability test. The FA recommends that wooden goals should be replaced with British Standard compliant metal, aluminium or plastic goalposts. All wooden goals previously tested by independent consultants have failed strength and stability tests.

The FA and BSI, recognise the previous industry, standards for goalposts – BSEN 748 (2013) BS 8461:2005 +A1: 2009 and BS 8462: 2005 +A2: 2012 along with the new BS EN standard 16579. It is strongly recommended that you ensure that all goals purchased comply with the relevant standard. A Code of Practice BS 8461 is also available and copies of all of these standards are available from the BSI. Funding for the replacement of unsafe goals is available via the Football Foundation and eligibility criteria and further details can be obtained from their website.

**REMEMBER TO USE GOALPOSTS SAFELY AT ALL TIMES**

## **THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION EQUALITY POLICY**

The Association is responsible for setting the standards and values to apply throughout football at every level. Football is for everyone; it belongs to, and should be enjoyed by, anyone who wants to participate in it.

The aim of this Policy is to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and with respect and that The Association is equally accessible to all.

All Participants should abide and adhere to this Policy and to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

The Association's commitment is to promote inclusion and to confront and eliminate discrimination whether by reason of age, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marital status or civil partnership, race, nationality, ethnic origin, colour, religion or belief, ability or disability, pregnancy and maternity and to encourage equal opportunities.

This Policy is fully supported by the Board of The Association and the Director of Football Regulation and Administration is responsible for the implementation of this Policy.

The Association will ensure that it treats people fairly and with respect and that it will provide access and opportunities for all members of the community to take part in, and enjoy, its activities.

The Association will not tolerate harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying, abuse or victimisation of a Participant, which for the purposes of this Policy and the actions and sanction applicable is regarded as discrimination, whether physical or verbal. The Association will work to ensure that such behaviour is met with appropriate action in whatever context it occurs.

The Association commits itself to the immediate investigation of any allegation, when it is brought to their attention, of discrimination and where such is found to be the case, The Association will require that the practice stop and impose sanctions as appropriate.

The Association is committed to inclusion and anti-discrimination and raising awareness and educating, investigating concerns and applying relevant and proportionate sanctions, campaigning, achieving independently verified equality standards, widening diversity and representation and promoting diverse role models are all key actions to promote inclusion and eradicate discrimination within football.

July 2016

**The ESFA fully supports this FA policy**

## **ESFA SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN POLICY**

Every child or young person, defined as any person under the age of 18, who plays or participates in football should be able to take part in an enjoyable and safe environment and be protected from abuse. This is the responsibility of everyone involved in football thus every Association is required to endorse and adhere to ESFA's Safeguarding Children Policy.

ESFA recognises its responsibility to safeguard the welfare of all children and young people by seeking to protect them from abuse and harm. This means creating a safe and inclusive atmosphere where everyone works together to tackle both bullying and discrimination, ensure safer recruitment, and tackle poor practice which leads to harm and reduces equal opportunities. Best practice in Inclusion, anti-bullying, equality and the respect agenda are all part of making safer cultures and prevention of harm and abuse. ESFA is committed to working to provide a safe environment for all children to participate in the sport to the best of their abilities for as long as they choose to do so.

The ESFA Safeguarding Children Policy key principles are:

- The child's welfare is, and must always be, the paramount consideration
- All children and young people have a right to be protected from abuse regardless of their age, gender, disability, culture, language, racial origin, religious beliefs or sexual orientation
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately
- Working in partnership with other organisations, children and young people and their parents and carers is essential.
- Sound recruitment and selection procedures will help to screen out those who are not suitable to work in football
- ESFA local Associations with representative teams must appoint a Welfare Officer in line with ESFA affiliation requirements.
- The safeguarding of children whilst under the supervision of a school is the responsibility of that school as outlined in their governance policies. Safeguarding in schools is underpinned by the relevant DfE Guidance "Keeping Children Safe in Education 2020", which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

ESFA is committed to working in partnership with the Police, Social Care Departments, and Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCB) and the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in accordance with their procedures. This is essential to enable these organisations to carry out their statutory duties to investigate concerns and protect all children and young people.

The ESFA Safeguarding Children Policy is in response to Government legislation and guidance, developed to safeguard the welfare and development of children and young people. It is noted and accepted that The Football Association's Safeguarding Children Regulations (see The FA Handbook) applies to everyone in football whether in a paid or voluntary capacity.

ESFA supports The FA's Whistle Blowing Policy. Any adult or young person with concerns about an adult in a position of trust with football can 'whistle blow' by contacting The FA Safeguarding Team on 0800 169 1863, by writing to The FA Case Manager at The Football Association, Wembley Stadium, PO Box 1966, London SW1P 9EQ, by emailing [Safeguarding@TheFA.com](mailto:Safeguarding@TheFA.com) or alternatively by going direct to the Police, Children's Social Care or the NSPCC

## **RESPECT**

Respect is The FA's response to a clear message from throughout the game that the health of football depends upon high standards of behaviour on and off the pitch.

- Respect is a behavioural code for Football
- Respect is about recognising that the integrity of the game is more important than the result of the match
- Respect is about creating an understanding of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in Football
- Respect is about those involved taking responsibility for the consequences of their own actions
- Respect is about supporting match officials to do their job. Without them we don't have a game
- Respect is not a slogan. It is a collective responsibility of those involved in football to create a fair, safe and enjoyable environment in which the game can take place.

The following Respect Codes of Conduct outline the types of behaviour that will support a fair, safe and enjoyable game in this country. They also identify a range of sanctions which may be taken if these codes are not abided by.

### **YOUNG PLAYERS**

When playing football, I will:

- Always play to the best of my ability and for the benefit of my team
- Play fairly – I won't cheat, dive, complain or waste time.
- Respect my team-mates, the other team, the referee or my coach/team manager.
- Play by the rules, as directed by the referee
- Be gracious in victory and defeat – I will shake hands with the other team and referee at the end of the game
- Listen and respond to what my coach/team manager tells me
- Understand that a coach/team manager has to do what is best for the team and not one individual player
- Talk to someone I trust or the club welfare officer if I'm unhappy about anything at my club.
- I understand that if I do not follow the Code, any/all of the following actions may be taken by my club, County FA or The FA:

I may:

- Be required to apologise to my team-mates, the other team, referee or team manager
- Receive a formal warning from the coach/team manager or the club committee
- Be dropped or substituted
- Be suspended from training
- Be required to leave the club

In addition:

- My club, County FA or The FA may make my parent or carer aware of any infringements of the Code of Conduct
- The FA/County FA could impose a fine and suspension against my club

**SPECTATORS**

We all bear a collective responsibility to set a good example and help provide a positive environment in which children can learn and enjoy the game.

Play your part and observe The FA's Respect Code of Conduct for spectators at all times

I will:

- Remember that children play for FUN.
- Applaud effort and good play as well as success.
- Respect the Referee's decisions even when you don't agree with them
- Appreciate good play from whatever team it comes from
- Remain behind the touchline and within the Designated Spectators' Area (where provided)
- Let the coach do their job and not confuse the players by telling them what to do
- Encourage the players to respect the opposition, referee and match officials
- Support positively. When players make a mistake offer them encouragement not criticism
- Never engage in, or tolerate, offensive, insulting, or abusive language or behaviour
- I understand that if I do not follow the Code, any/all of the following actions may be taken by my club, County FA or The FA:

I may be:

- Issued with a verbal warning from a club or league official
- Required to meet with the club, league or CFA Welfare Officer
- Required to meet with the club committee
- Obligated to undertake an FA education course
- Obligated to leave the match venue by the club
- Requested by the club not to attend future games
- Suspended or have my club membership removed
- Required to leave the club along with any dependents

In addition:

- The FA/County FA could impose a fine and/or suspension on the club

**COACHES, TEAM MANAGERS AND CLUB OFFICIALS**

We all bear a collective responsibility to set a good example and help provide a positive environment in which children can learn and enjoy the game. Play your part and observe The FA's Respect Code of Conduct at all times.

On and off the field, I will:

- Use my position to set a positive example for the young people I am responsible for
- Show respect to others involved in the game including match officials, opposition players, coaches, managers, officials and spectators
- Adhere to the laws and spirit of the game
- Promote Fair Play and high standards of behaviour
- Respect the match official's decision
- Never enter the field of play without the referee's permission
- Never engage in, or tolerate, offensive, insulting or abusive language or behaviour
- Be gracious in victory and defeat
- When working with players, I will:
- Place the well-being, safety and enjoyment of each player above everything, including winning
- Never engage in or tolerate any form of bullying
- Encourage each player to accept responsibility for their own behaviour and performance

- Ensure all activities I organise are appropriate for the players' ability level, age and maturity
- Co-operate fully with others in football (e.g. officials, doctors, physiotherapists, welfare officers) for each player's best interests
- I understand that if I do not follow the Code, any/all of the following actions may be taken by my club, County FA or The FA:

I may be:

- Required to meet with the club, league or County Welfare Officer
- Suspended by the club from attending matches
- Suspended or fined by the County FA
- Required to leave or be sacked by the club

In addition:

- My FA Coaching Licence may be withdrawn

### **MATCH OFFICIALS**

We all have a responsibility to promote high standards of behaviour in the game.

The behaviour of the match officials has an impact, directly and indirectly, on the conduct of everyone involved in the game – both on the pitch and on the sidelines.

Play your part and observe The FA's Respect Code of Conduct of match officials at all time.

I will:

- Be honest and completely impartial at all times
- Apply the Laws of the Game and competition rules fairly and consistently
- Manage the game in a positive, calm and confident manner
- Deal with all instances of violence, aggression, unsporting behaviour, foul play and other misconduct
- Never tolerate offensive, insulting or abusive language or behaviour from players and officials
- Support my match official colleagues at all times
- Set a positive personal example by promoting good behaviour and showing respect to everyone involved in the game
- Communicate with the players and encourage fair play
- Respond in a clear, calm and confident manner to any appropriate request for clarification by the team captains
- Prepare physically and mentally for every match
- Complete and submit, accurate and concise reports within the time limit required for games in which I officiate.
- I understand that if I do not follow the Code, any/all of the following actions may be taken by my County FA or The FA:

I may be:

- Required to meet with The FA/County FA Refereeing Official
- Required to meet with The FA/County FA Referees Committee