

**Raising Our Game:**  
**Young Player Development and the success of**  
**future England teams**

**Recommendations to The FA Board**

**December 2010**

## **Foreword by Alex Horne**

The disappointment of the England Senior team's performance in South Africa was felt keenly, not just within The FA but across the whole game and the English public at large. Whilst there will often be uncontrollable factors that can determine performance at international tournaments, what is not in question is that English football has an absolute responsibility to ensure that everything possible is done to produce the best possible players and that in turn these players are given the best possible chance to succeed.

The recommendations in this paper are made in response to the request of The FA Board in July 2010 – to ensure that the whole game of English football is working together to produce more and better English players, and that everything possible is being done to help ensure their transition into successful international teams. This paper contains 25 recommendations (summarised on page 5) a number of which I would like to highlight for what I believe to be their strategic importance and for the challenge of their implementation.

The proposed changes to the games programme in youth football are significant. I understand that they will not be straightforward to deliver, and I am determined that The FA both centrally and through the County FAs will provide the support necessary to grassroots clubs to phase in the changes over time. These are hugely important changes – central to our philosophy that better technical development comes from more contact time with the ball in a playing environment designed for development. These changes are about formats and facilities – but they must also be about attitudes and approach by everyone involved with our young players at every age and consistent with the beliefs endorsed in our *Future Game* documents.

Our recommendations across coaching are in my mind nothing short of the 'professionalisation' of a sector of our game that is of fundamental importance given the critical role that coaches play in the development of young players. The FA must ensure that the highest quality coaches are available to the game, and that these coaches are trained with the right skills to specifically work with young players at every age across clubs from grassroots to elite. We must invest in coach education and we must ensure the highest standards of continuous development through a licensing approach. St. George's Park will be the physical catalyst for the revolution of an industry, central in delivering a new generation of technically skilled FA qualified coaches.

The relationship between England international teams and the professional clubs is one that will always be scrutinised. I believe, like with any other aspect of the game, our responsibility is to provide open and transparent communication. Collectively we must ensure that the clubs and the international teams are working together in the interest of the individual player's development, and towards the ultimate success of our England teams. Our recommendation for mandatory player release for all England teams should be viewed alongside our intention to work to rationalise the international fixture calendar and a pledge to be pragmatic in the use of players alongside the closer working with clubs. This combination is an attempt to establish a clear and consistent approach to the often difficult issue of player release whilst recognising the importance of experience within our development team squads in preparing our international teams for tournament success.

It should be noted that whilst the recommendations in young player development and coaching apply to both men's and women's football, the recommendations on international team development pertain only to men's football at this stage. The nature of the development of the women's game is that it naturally prizes international success above all else. This must be kept in mind as the Women's Super League becomes established.

Some of the final recommendations below require the support of Board and Council for changes to the rules and regulations of the game, many are cultural and will require momentum and leadership from the whole game, starting I hope with The FA Board. Others require a re-prioritisation of focus and budgets centrally within The FA's core operations. In addition there are a number of recommendations which constitute new projects or the extension of existing projects with significant resource implications for the game, either at club level or within the National Game and Professional Game budgets. With agreement in principle and with commitment from the Board, I will work with the Executive to demonstrate that these plans can be resourced, funded and achieved.

I believe that the development of future generations of the highest quality young English players is the central challenge facing English football today. It requires action and a determination to improve at every level of the game, from grassroots mini-soccer teams to the Club England set up, and all points in between. The good news is that I believe the game is willing. There is some very exciting work underway within the professional game to modernise youth development in the clubs (EPPP); its objectives, and its potential outputs are fundamental to what I believe can be achieved and we have sought at each stage to keep these recommendations integrated with our own recommendations. Likewise the grassroots of the game and in particular the National Game board members have shown great support and understanding, recognising their vital role in player development. As I have experienced during the consultation and compilation of these recommendations, the English game is at its best working together, and in doing so we are capable of delivering significant results for the benefit of the whole game.

**Alex Horne**  
**15 December 2010**

## **Technical Overview by Sir Trevor Brooking**

It is crucial for the future of the England team that we develop young English players who possess the technical and physical capabilities and, crucially, the game understanding and decision making, to excel at the highest level of the domestic and international game. The scale of this challenge is significant in a global market where the recruitment of talented players exists across international boundaries. As a first step we must be clear on what we are trying to achieve – what are the technical attributes of the young English international player of the future – and what philosophy must English football collectively follow to produce them?

There are many examples of players playing at the highest level in international football who possess the attributes we wish to develop in our own players; with an expert command of first-touch, awareness and decision-making, observing talented players at the highest level is akin to watching the game being played two steps in advance. It is this level of composure, vision and creativity that our young players must aspire to, and the skills which coaches must encourage and develop at appropriate stages in a young players' development.

Discussion of elite young player development invariably leads to a consideration of the differences in playing style and philosophy adopted by different countries. It is widely agreed that as a country we must do more to ensure we develop players who can play the game in the style that the modern game demands. As such, all outfield players must be comfortable in possession of the ball and capable of playing the game 'through the thirds' of the pitch. Expertise in the areas of receiving and passing, as well as individual and combined movements to create and exploit space will be a minimum requirement for players to play in this style.

This too must be supplemented with excellent game-understanding and decision-making, with players demonstrating an awareness of when to maintain possession and when to play quickly. With teams more organised in their defensive structure and often defending deeper and with greater numbers, players with the capability of producing an unexpected piece of skill or a decisive pass to 'unlock' the opposition will continue to grow in value. Furthermore, individuals and teams must possess the capability to recognise opportunities to counter-attack quickly and decisively when the opposition is 'out of balance'.

Developing young players of this calibre is not something which will change in the short-term and it is crucial that a long-term development mindset is adopted by all who are involved in young player development. To apply the philosophy outlined in *The Future Game* guides, we need coaches to create environments in which players are encouraged to be creative and expressive without the fear of failure. For this to happen we need forward-thinking and imaginative coaches working throughout the age-groups.

Training more coaches through The FA Youth Award is central to this aim. Developing a strong foundation of the technical skills and game-understanding encouraged on The FA Youth Award, will enable young players to progress from mini-soccer into the eleven-a-side game with the confidence and ability to play out from the back and pass the ball through midfield. If coaches encourage this development pathway for young players, then we may begin to nurture young players who will be expert decision makers who can provide the unexpected skills which can change games at the highest level. We hope that all those involved in the game, at all levels will support the philosophy and vision we have advocated for the future of player and coach development in the recently released Future Game documents. The recommendations in this paper, allied to the proposed developments in the professional game, I believe represent a significant step change in the ability of English football to produce more and better technically able young English footballers, and the successful England international teams we all want to see.

**Summary of Recommendations**

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Board Decision Required</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>
<b>A</b>	Agreed mandatory pathway for grassroots youth football playing formats	<b>2 year phased transition</b>	Approve and agree to take recommendations forward to Council	Extensive consultation with the County FAs and the Leagues
<b>B</b>	Promotion of <i>The Future Game</i> as a best practice guide to player development	<b>Immediate</b>	To approve	Communications plan to be developed and agreed by FA SMT including resource plan for FA Board by April 2011
<b>C</b>	Public communications campaign to target teachers, parents and volunteers about the importance of player development	<b>Immediate</b>	To approve	Communications plan to be developed and agreed by FA SMT including resource plan for FA Board by April 2011
<b>D</b>	FA to continue to work with the other football authorities on whole game YD issues, and to consider how YD could be given greater prominence in the game's governance	<b>Ongoing</b>	To approve	Proposals on potential YD governance changes to be presented to FA Board by Spring 2011
<b>E</b>	Expansion of the FA Tesco Skills Programme nationwide	<b>By season 2012-13</b>	To approve in principle	Fully funded proposal to FA Board by April 2011
<b>F</b>	Work with policymakers to ensure the protection of football provision in primary education sector	<b>Immediate</b>	To approve	Ongoing public affairs activity and development work
<b>G</b>	Work with the professional game to understand the impact of the 'relative age effect' and what solutions might be developed	<b>Ongoing</b>	To approve	Co-ordination between FA and the PL YD modernisation plans
<b>H</b>	Identify opportunities for grassroots clubs to provide talent identification and development support to the professional clubs	<b>Ongoing</b>	To approve	Co-ordination between FA and the PL YD modernisation plans
<b>I</b>	Update and promote The FA's Coaching philosophy across the whole-game including the development of an online resource	<b>By Spring 2011</b>	To approve	Plans to be agreed by Football Development and FA Learning with IT including resource plan if outside of IT budget capacity

<b>J</b>	Public campaign to promote the importance of coaching qualification and age appropriate coaching in particular	<b>Immediate</b>	To approve	Communications plan to be agreed by FA Dev., Football Services and Marcomms including resource plan for FA Board by April 2011
<b>K</b>	Ensure that age appropriate qualifications are included in rules and regulations for the appointment of coaches	<b>Ongoing</b>	To approve	Co-ordination between FA and the PL YD modernisation plans
<b>L</b>	Establish a Coaches Academy network to bring together outstanding coaches of different levels and experiences on a regular basis for coach education opportunities	<b>For season 2011-12</b>	To approve	FA Learning to provide fully costed and resourced proposal by March 2011
<b>M</b>	The FA to launch the Licensed Club for Coaches to kite-mark qualified and up-to-date coaches in the grassroots and professional coaching workforce.	<b>By August 2011</b>	To approve	FA Learning to continue roll-out of existing plans including funding implications
<b>N</b>	Work with the Professional Game and grassroots to ensure the FA supply of coach educators is in tune with the demand across all levels of the game.	<b>Ongoing</b>	To approve	Co-ordination between FA and the PL YD modernisation plans; Football Development to bring forward specific proposals on new coach educators required by April 2011
<b>O</b>	The FA should undertake to report on an annual basis the latest available research on coaching techniques as well as an assessment of performance in terms of coach education, retention and development.	<b>By January 2012</b>	To approve	FA Learning to progress
<b>P</b>	Develop further opportunities to ensure that England international development team coaches work closely with clubs on the identification, development and transition of young England players into the U16 England development set-up.	<b>Ongoing</b>	To approve	Co-ordination between FA and the PL YD modernisation plans
<b>Q</b>	Expand and coordinate club visit programmes for the international coaches to ensure that the international programme for individual players is appropriate and consistent with their club based development programmes.	<b>As of season 2011-12</b>	To approve	Co-ordination between the FA and PL and FL representatives

<b>R</b>	Encourage England teams at all developmental age-groups to play with a consistent playing philosophy to ensure transition amongst teams is consistent.	<b>Immediate</b>	To approve	Coordination and agreement by Club England and the international development coaches
<b>S</b>	Overlay the transition of coaching staff individuals across age-groups to provide continuity to young players progressing through the international teams.	<b>As of season 2011-12</b>	To approve	New proposals to be developed and agreed by Club England by May 2011
<b>T</b>	Require future England Senior Coaches to have significant input into and exposure to the national development team structure.	<b>As of season 2012-13</b>	To approve	Will be considered alongside the recruitment criteria for the successor to Fabio Capello
<b>U</b>	Work with the professional game to consider ways to support the U17-U21 age groups of developing young English players to ensure they maximise their opportunities for playing elite level football and their chances to experience the Club England environment.	<b>Ongoing</b>	To approve	Co-ordination between FA and the PL YD modernisation plans
<b>V</b>	Agreement between The FA and the Professional Game on the mandatory release of players for international duty	<b>Immediate</b>	To approve	Club England to ensure continuing positive communication with clubs; FA to approach FIFA re: international calendar
<b>W</b>	Agreement to work with the professional game to collect and collate match performance, fitness and medical testing data to consider the impact of the English football calendar on pre-tournament fitness levels.	<b>To report end of season 2011-12</b>	To approve	Co-ordination between FA and PL representatives
<b>X</b>	Undertake research to better understand the “player experience” of international tournaments to inform future decisions on preparation and environment.	<b>To report end 2011</b>	To approve	Club England to agree research programme
<b>Y</b>	Formally engage with the leading professional clubs to share their experience on establishing the optimal preparation and environments to encourage player performance.	<b>To report end 2011 (alongside X)</b>	To approve	Club England to agree research programme and liaise with PL and club representatives

## Introduction

1. In July 2010 The FA Board asked General Secretary Alex Horne to undertake a review of how English football could bring about greater success in international football.
2. This paper concludes with a series of recommendations that form part of a presentation to The FA Board on 22 December 2010.
3. The future success of England's international teams at all levels is the responsibility of The FA, but in the shared interest of the 'whole game' of English football. In seeking to ensure this success, this review has taken a holistic view of the player development pathway; from a five year old starting out in the grassroots of the game, to an elite player joining up with the senior England squad for his first international tournament. This pathway runs through many aspects of both the grassroots and the Professional Game, which are key partners in delivering successful England teams now and in the future.
4. Many of the challenges raised in this review are already being met through the activity and programmes of either The FA or Premier League. Where this is the case their work is acknowledged and endorsed and in these cases this review has identified additional and complementary recommendations only where appropriate.
5. The starting point of this review was to take the responsibility for delivering successful international teams and split it in two complementary challenges. The first is to review the 'pipeline' of English players at every age and stage. Effectively;

**To ensure that the whole game of English football is working together to produce the widest and deepest possible talent pool of young English footballers into the elite end of the game.**

6. Meeting this challenge starts with the very first interaction boys and girls have with football, either informally or formally, and follows their development through schools and grassroots clubs, until they reach a potential entry point into the professional clubs and their academies. It is concerned with identifying the best possible structures and formats for developing young players; and the right educational and social environments in which to implement them.
7. The second challenge is in essence to review the 'route to market' of England international teams at every age and stage. Effectively;

**To ensure that the systems, structures and practices of English football at all levels support the transition of this talent pool into successful England international teams.**

8. Meeting this challenge required a detailed review of how England teams perform at every age; the trends of individual career development through the international team structure; the environment and preparation of England teams before and during international tournaments; and the ways in which the elite club environment can continue to support the transition of their playing talent into successful England teams.
9. Running through both of these challenges is the requirement to deliver the optimum coaching strategy and resources for players at every age and at every level. Central to this requirement is the education of coaches themselves, and ensuring that the English game can continuously



produce the highest quality and required quantity of coaches, with a consistent approach, at every age group.

10. Understanding the development of English players and international teams in comparison to our international competitors is hugely important. Where appropriate international benchmarking has been incorporated into this review's analysis; and where not possible, it is being identified as a future evaluation requirement. The key to understanding international comparisons is to identify where adopting best practice will add value but also where the uniqueness of English football may make this inappropriate. This review hopes to have achieved this balance.

### **The Process**

11. At every stage, from the setting of the terms of reference to the analysis of the evidence, and the development of recommendations; there has been significant consultation across the whole game. The centre-piece of this consultation was a two day work shop in September 2010 where a range of key individuals and organisations were represented. This session was followed up with further specific working group sessions to ensure that all inputs were captured and best reflected in the final report.
12. Emerging findings have been discussed with the National Game Board. (NGB) and with the Professional Game Board (PGB). The enclosed recommendations are the result of analysis and feedback across the whole game and are refined to the right level for FA Board review.
13. The recommendations provided below. This whole game analysis is important – player development and international team support are not isolated, 'unique responsibility' functions. Agreeing future actions will of course require a full understanding of implications across the whole game, and consequently the support of the whole game.
14. Where appropriate recommendations have been accompanied by an indicative timeline, funding implication and required action for The FA Board to take.

### **The Current International Player Development Landscape**

15. Many of the questions being raised in this review are not new. The football authorities have both individually and collectively been attempting to address them for a number of years. The work of the *Charter for Quality* review (1997) and the *Review of Young Player Development in Professional Football ('Lewis Review' 2007)*<sup>1</sup> both had a significant and positive impact on the English game.
16. There have been many positive recent developments in English young player development and in the transition of young English players into successful international teams. The past two years have been our most successful for over two decades at development level, reaching finals and semi-finals consistently before winning the UEFA U17 tournament in summer 2010. Following the disappointment of the World Cup, our development teams have qualified for the FIFA U20 World Cup in Colombia, through reaching the semi-finals of UEFA U19s this summer, while our new U19 and U17 teams have qualified for the next stages of their respective campaigns. Additionally, the U21s qualified for the UEFA finals in Denmark next summer

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix: *Review of Young Player Development in Professional Football ('Lewis Review' 2007)*

against a very strong, technically gifted Romania team. The encouraging performance of these teams only heightens the importance of ensuring their successful transition into the men's senior international set up.

17. **Figure one** below is a representation of the whole-game approach we have adopted to developing successful international teams.



18. **Section 1** represents the challenge of young player development. How children from the earliest ages are brought into the game through grassroots clubs and their primary physical education. This is ultimately the responsibility of The FA who sets the standards and format for youth football. A significant step forward was taken in this area when in September 1999 The FA introduced the concept of mini-soccer. This was a controversial decision at the time, but has now been accepted as integral to player development. Some 11 years after its introduction it is timely to revisit the system to ensure that it continues to allow children the best chance to reach their potential within football.
19. The *Lewis Review* in 2007 further called for a greater emphasis on skills development in this field (for children aged 5-11). This has been addressed in some measure by the successful introduction of The FA's Tesco Skills programme, which continues to expand, and of age-appropriate coaching qualifications. There remain significant challenges in this area, not least in how to work with educators to allow for a greater emphasis on footballing development within a primary education system short of funds to invest in sports provision.
20. From as early as the age of 8, children who demonstrate the highest technical and physical promise are now beginning to transition into the structure of professional club academies and centres of excellence. First established after the Charter for Quality review, there are now 40 academies and 44 centres of excellence based amongst the professional clubs. The current generation of England teams are all products of this system.
21. Established and operated by the professional clubs, these academies and centres of excellence are currently under review by the Premier League's Elite Player Performance Plan (**Section 2**). The EPPP, which is being developed in consultation with The FA and the Football League, is

seeking to implement a format for enhancing technical player development within the clubs, and crucially, a means of measuring and classifying club performance in this area. The FA fully supports the EPPP and hopes that the recommendations within this paper will complement its impact.

22. In support of both grassroots young player development and the work of the professional clubs to enhance their own player development structures is the need to develop and provide the highest quality coaches (**Section 3**). The FA is responsible for coach education in the English game and is tasked with providing a high quality and technically appropriate supply of coaches to every level of the game.
23. Central to this is ensuring a consistency of approach; a coaching strategy that is understood and accepted by the whole game and can be the basis of all coach education from age appropriate youth awards right through to an elite UEFA Pro-License coach. The recent publication of *The Future Game*, a universal guide and support manual for coaches, is the first step in this process.
24. The supply of the highest quality coaching requires the highest quality coach education. This in turns requires not only a consistent strategy but the resources and facilities to support it. The development by The FA of the National Football Centre, at St. George's Park, is central to meeting this challenge. Progress is currently being made to deliver the centre for the summer of 2012.
25. Whilst there has been some success in the development of young English players coming through the grassroots and elite clubs structure, this has still yet to translate into successful performances by the senior England teams at international tournaments, with green shoots such as the European success of our U17 team needing careful monitoring. Furthermore the success of the professional game in England is often cited in direct comparison to the 'under-performance' of England's national teams. This transition of English players, performing well in club football, into successful international teams is the responsibility of The FA (**Section 4**).
26. There are numerous variables that influence the performance of international teams in tournament football. The important challenge is to identify those variables that firstly can be measured, and secondly affected to have a materially positive impact on performance. Central to this is to understand how England teams compare with their international competitors.
27. This understanding starts with the very first interaction between players and the Club England set up at U16 level and runs through every age-group into the senior teams. It covers the amount of contact time, the preparation and environment of England match and tournament set-ups and the shared efforts to get England teams into the best mental and physical condition for international tournament football.

#### **Following the Player Development Pathway**

28. **Figure Two** below is a representation of the player development pathway<sup>2</sup>, mapping player age against playing ability.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix – complementary FA coaching pathway



29. Boxes 2,3,5 and 6 represent the responsibility of The FA in ensuring the pipeline from the grassroots of the game and the primary education sector into the professional clubs is delivering as many as possible technically able young footballers.
30. Those players with the highest technical ability are identified by the professional clubs and enter into the Academies and Centres of Excellence where they continue to develop through boxes 4, 7 and 11. Responsibility for young player development at this point lies with the clubs where the incentive to produce and develop valuable playing talent is driven by the demands of club football. The current EPPP is seeking to provide greater and more transparent quality assurance to this process.
31. From the age of 15 onwards the best players in the club academies begin to be exposed to the England international development team structure (boxes 8 and 12). These teams are operated and administered by The FA and represent the first steps of 'international career' development for elite players.
32. Once a player has graduated into the senior set up of their professional club (box 15) their interaction with international football is most likely to be through the England U21 team and the men's senior international team (box 16) both of which are operated and administered by The FA.
33. A central challenge for this review is to ensure that the transition points between these various stages work in an effective and co-ordinated manner, both to ensure individual player development and international team development is enhanced.

## SECTION ONE: Whole Game Young Player Development

### Key challenges identified in consultation

34. There is a need for a clear **vision and plan for young player development** that is universally understood across the whole game and consistently implemented. This required approach means that the grassroots and the professional game must be aligned in their individual player development objectives and ensure that the **correct level of support for young players is provided at the points of transition both into and out of the elite player structure** to encourage their continuing development in the game.
35. There is a requirement for **significant changes to the playing formats and competition structures of youth football** to ensure that this vision can be delivered.
36. There is a requirement **to increase the provision of quality technical age appropriate coaching** to enhance the development of young players at the earliest ages.
37. The Football authorities must ensure that

### Developing the optimum player pathway for technical development

38. To develop more technically proficient young players in England; players that show a comfort whilst in possession of the ball, that can demonstrate the technical proficiencies to control, turn and pass effectively and at speed, it is vital that the playing **formats and competitive structures are designed to create the optimal environment for young players to develop their technical skills**. Wide ranging and ongoing consultation conducted by The FA across the national game and international benchmarking<sup>3</sup>, indicates that **this modernisation should include devising and agreeing a player pathway – across team formats, pitch sizes and goal sizes and league structures – that maximises player development opportunities**.
39. **Children are by their nature competitive, but the football structures for children between the ages of 7 and 11 in particular need to be reflective of the reasons children play – enjoyment, taking part, friendship – and not the adult based ‘outcome led’ structures of competition**. This is not to deride the importance of competition, but in better reflecting the reasons why children enjoy the game, greater opportunities for participation and skill development can be created. This is a belief supported both by a range of academic studies and crucially the feedback of children themselves.<sup>4</sup>
40. In order to create the best learning environment for children the ethos of ‘Development football’ needs to be introduced **with no league tables being produced until under 12s**, the season that children join secondary school. Development football could offer a variety of formats throughout a season, including festivals and training centres, all with an emphasis on ‘learning the game’, all supported centrally by The FA and CFAs. **From the age of 12 ‘Development Leagues’ will then become the playing structure where formal trophies and leagues will be played**.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix for international comparison of youth football player pathways

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix for a summary of academic papers in *The Future of Football: Developing the Structure of The Game*, Nick Levett, 2010

- 41. The existing structure of team formats offers very limited phasing of development and learning for children**, with a structure that runs from 7v7 to 11v11. Whilst there is a playing option for leagues to run smaller-sided competitions at the young age groups, U7 and U8, the vast majority enter straight in at 7v7. **At the age of 11 however children are transferring directly from this mini-soccer format to a full size pitch with full size goals. The effect and challenges of this sudden change are significant on the technical development of young players.**
- 42.** Research<sup>5</sup> commissioned and undertaken by both academics and professional clubs and associations has demonstrated the value of small-sided games and the benefits they bring to player development. For example, Manchester Metropolitan University (2002/03 season), found that when compared to 8v8 (the standard Academy Games Programme format) a 4v4 format realised a 135% increase in passes, a 260% increase in scoring attempts and an over 200% increase in one on one encounters and dribbling skills. These findings are supported extensively by amongst others the **University of Cologne, who concluded their study into mini-soccer formats by saying, “7v7 in half field and 11v11 are totally inappropriate for players less than 12 years of age as they encourage kick and chase soccer”.**<sup>6</sup>
- 43.** A full size pitch favours children that are more physically developed than others. The size of the pitch makes the game more difficult for the late developer, and potentially the more technical player that does not have the physical development within their year group of players to be as effective in big spaces. There is **less emphasis on technique as bigger pitches provide a greater margin for error and a reduction in the pressure to keep possession of the ball in confined space.** Players find that physical advantage is the key factor, and that the ‘kick and run’ technique is successful without players being forced to develop the effective control and skills that they will need in later years.
- 44.** The **current system offers very little in terms of phasing the learning and development of young players appropriately.** At the age of six, they can be playing on the same size pitches as children aged ten when in growth and development terms, as well as cognitive understanding and spatial awareness, there are huge differences. **Our system needs to better reflect these ages and stages of development for children in a more appropriate way.**
- 45.** There are **a number of clear advantages to be gained from the introduction of a 9v9 age range into mini-soccer to allow for a more gradual stepped transition into 11v11 on a full size pitch with full size goals.** This transition format begins to introduce some of the important concepts of 11v11 such as keeping a team shape and improving positional awareness, whilst utilising a  $\frac{3}{4}$  size pitch with  $\frac{3}{4}$  size goals, and maintaining the emphasis on ball skill development. **In addition where the format has been piloted it has also proved to have a positive impact on participation rates, diminishing a common drop-off when the 11v11 transition is reached.**
- 46.** However, it is important to recognise that changes to the formats and structures of youth football can place a significant burden on the County FAs in terms of time, logistics and resources. Many of the recommendations below would require changes to physical assets as

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix - *The Future of Football: Developing the Structure of The Game*, Nick Levett, 2010

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix - *The Future of Football: Developing the Structure of The Game*, Nick Levett, 2010

well as rules and regulations. **The FA would seek to work with the County FAs to ensure that any changes were phased in at the right speed with the right level of central support.**

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A.** FA to agree a mandatory pathway for grassroots youth football playing formats to create optimum technical development opportunities for young players, ensuring that a development centric approach to youth football is not undermined by the drive for results at too early an age.

This pathway should pay particular attention to establishing the most appropriate transition between ages in the areas of team numbers, pitch size and goal size. Once agreed this pathway should be phased in with the appropriate level of support for County FAs to ensure smooth transition. The table below represents a potential proposed pathway based on the latest consultation feedback.

Age Group	Format	Game Management	Pitch size (yards)	Goal size
Under 7	5 v 5	Development Learn the Game- Organised games programme	30x20 to 40x30	Mini Soccer 12x6
Under 8	5 v 5	Development Learn the Game- Organised games programme	30x20 to 40x30	Mini Soccer 12x6
Under 9	7 v 7	Development Learn the Game- Organised games programme	50x30 to 60x40	Mini Soccer 12x6
Under 10	7 v 7	Development Learn the Game- Organised games programme	50x30 to 60x40	Mini Soccer 12x6
Under 11	7 v 7/9 v 9	Development Learn the Game- Organised games programme	70x40 to 80x50	16x7
Under 12	9 v 9	Development Play the game- League programme	70x40 to 80x50	16x7
Under 13	9 v 9 /11 v 11	Development Play the game League programme	90x50 to 110x70	16x7/Full size
Under 14	9 v 9 / 11 v 11	Development Play the game League programme	90x50 to 110x70	16x7/Full size
Under 15	11 v 11	Development Play the game League programme	90x50 to 110x70	Full size
Under 16	11 v 11	Development Play the game League programme	90x50 to 110x70	Full size

**To Note**

- i. *Young player technical development is enhanced through the opportunity to experience a variety of football formats. Variety can be met by changing the number of players, for example 4v4, or by changing the size of the area, making it larger or smaller. Variety can also be provided by introducing children to Small Sided games, including the official FIFA indoor/Small Sided format, Futsal. The above proposals have been developed to recognise the balance between providing variety and the challenge that volunteers, clubs and leagues may have in providing a varied programme.*
- ii. *Coaches should be encouraged to provide a variety in their programmes and The FA will support leagues, particularly through the FA Charter Standard League programme, to also look to provide variety of games programme where possible.*
- iii. *For those age groups playing in a non-competitive 'games' rather than 'league' environment the FA may consider "licensing" a number of events during a season, where results could be collected and winners awarded.*
- iv. *These recommendations would be fully reflected and supported by FA coaching qualifications.*

**Ensuring consistency and effectiveness in young player development**

47. Changes to the structures of youth football to enhance young player development must be **supported by a complementary communications and promotional campaign to ensure that a clear philosophy of player development can be easily understood and put in practice by coaches, teaches, parents and volunteers.** The game as a whole needs to pro-actively communicate the requirements of young player development, the importance of allowing children to learn their football in the right structures and environments.
48. It is vital that we create the right learning environment where their ability to take risks with new skills and their decision making with the ball at feet is not suppressed by a pressure for results. **To achieve this ambition it we must support adults involved in grassroots football with more knowledge and information on how best to prioritise player development.**
49. Furthermore to ensure this consistency of approach **appropriate consideration needs to be given to make sure that the governance structures of football are well placed to both prioritise and promote the importance of young player development across the whole game.** This review process has demonstrated that the constituent parts of the game have an aligned and mutual approach to player development and this approach must be supported by representation within The FA that can both facilitate and when appropriate promote the importance of these issues.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- B. FA to promote FA *Future Game book* (to follow up the elite version) to provide consistent and best quality advice on player development for all grassroots clubs and coaches.
  - i. Promotional campaign to include the elite version
  - ii. Future Game support materials for coaches and teaches to be made available online



and promoted for use

- C. FA to develop and roll out a communication strategy to educate teachers, coaches, league officials and parents as to the shared 'best practice' approach to young player development across the whole game, that includes:
  - i. The philosophy and ethos of Mini Soccer and youth football and the benefits of proposed changes to formats and structures
  - ii. Importance of technical development over competition for the youngest age groups.
  - iii. Learning the Game campaign
  - iv. Player and Coach pathways
  - v. Ambassador programme with respected figures from across the game promoting key messages.
- D. FA to continue to work alongside the other football authorities to ensure a consistent and complementary implementation of the shared vision for whole game player development. This work should continue to be co-ordinated by the Professional Game Board and The National Game Board. The FA should also consider how young player development can be given greater prominence within the governance of the football authorities including potentially FA Board representation and reporting requirements.

### Increasing the provision of quality coaching to children in the primary education structure

- 50. The **availability and quality of opportunities for children** to play and learn football skills in the primary education system is a **fundamental determinant of the game's ability to reach and develop as many potential future players** as possible.
- 51. Recent changes to the infrastructure and funding profile of schools' sport provision have unfortunately added a significant challenge for sports Governing Bodies to their ability to co-ordinate quality coaching programmes into the primary education sector. Moreover, **there is a concern that without a mandated and assessed target for basic Physical Education provision the quality of physical literacy attainment across the country will diminish**, lessening the available talent entering into both the grassroots and club structure even at the earliest ages.
- 52. As a consequence football needs to work pro-actively to help address this challenge. This might include **working alongside other sports and the existing Sport England structures to create a national scheme to take quality football coaching into the primary education structure**.
- 53. Central to the game's ability to reach as many young children as possible with quality skills coaching is the **expansion of the current FA Tesco Skills Programme** which currently covers 26 counties with 106 full-time coaches. This programme has been a huge success in its first three years having provided over 2 million opportunities for children between the ages of 5 and 11 to experience quality skills coaching from FA qualified (and continually developed) coaches. **In addition access to schools allows teachers to experience and learn from their exposure to FA qualified coaches and their session plans**.
- 54. Furthermore the FA can utilise its existing programmes and coach education structures to **provide support and training to existing primary teaching staff to up skill them in PE and basic football coaching provision**. In particular by developing skills programme bases

syllabuses or teaching resources football can help pass on its expertise in an easy and user-friendly way to teachers who are looking for cost-effective and engaging ways to provide quality PE to their pupils.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- E. The FA should expand the FA Tesco Skills coaching programme for 5-11 year olds to become a national programme, with a team in every CFA, increasing its ability to reach, and provide quality technical skills coaching to young players within schools and their grassroots clubs. The programme should be supported by an online presence with supporting materials for children and parents to access. By April 2011 a fully funded proposal should be put to The FA Board for a phased expansion to take place by season 2012-2013.
- F. The FA to continue to work with key policymakers to raise the profile of physical education and the direct links between physical literacy attainment at primary schools and football development programmes. A key objective of this work should be for football to enhance its contact time with pupils in the primary education sector, and may include:
  - i. Develop an FA Primary Education 'offer' that co-ordinates FA resources and support
  - ii. Develop a Skills Programme primary education syllabus that is accredited by the Education sector.
  - iii. Link to competition via school teams/ESFA competitions and the new Schools Sports Olympics
  - iv. Support teachers to deliver high quality PE through ongoing Skills Coach and RCDM 5-11 support, dedicated resources (e.g. lesson and homework cards, team coaching guides) and in-service
  - v. Utilise Skills Coach expertise and resource to develop other coaches delivering FA programmes within schools, e.g. Club Links

#### Relative Age Effect

55. In addition to the structures and formats of youth football, the 'Relative age Effect' or 'Age bias' continues to have an impact on the numbers and quality of young players developing into the game. **The relative age effect describes the observation that greater numbers of performers born early in the selection year are over-represented in junior elite squads compared with what might expected based on national birth rates.**
56. Physical and psychological differences between children who belong to the same age category but differ in age up to almost one year can lead to increased dropout of the youngest players and their exclusion in high-level training or for membership of professional clubs. Among elite adults, this process is reflected in an imbalance in players' birth date distribution, with an overrepresentation of players born in the months after the cut-off date, and an underrepresentation of players born in the months before. **For example in 2009, 57% of students between the age of 9 to 19 in Premier League academies were born between the months of September and December, the first period in the English academic year.**
57. There is an extensive range of academic research<sup>7</sup> into the relative age effect across a range of different education, grassroots and elite sporting sectors, and ultimately its impact on the

<sup>7</sup> See appendix for brief synopsis of key academic research and evidence from other sports in *The Future of Football: Developing the Structure of The Game*, Nick Levett, 2010

ability to produce a greater cohort of quality young English players may be difficult to ascertain. Understanding this issue and addressing its ability to force a significant percentage of children out of the game at an early age is must be of primary importance however, and all parts of the game including the EPPP are looking at plans to address this.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- G.** The FA to work with the professional clubs and the Premier League to understand the impact of their current pilot programmes to address the issue of 'age-bias'. If programmes that might include split-calendar teams or alterations to the age selection criteria prove successful consideration will be given to their whole game implementation.

**Providing support for young players entering and exiting the elite structure**

- 58.** Whilst this review has sought to work along the player development pathway in its most commonly recognised form, **it is important that the whole game recognises that there is no absolute defined path or trajectory along which future international level players might develop.** As such the entry and exit points for young players into and from the elite structure should not necessarily be either arbitrarily defined or restrictive.
- 59.** In addition whilst this review is focussed on how to bring about the development of the highest number and quality of English players, The FA also has a responsibility to consider the impact on young players as they move in and out of the elite game whether successful or otherwise, to ensure that individuals stay engaged with the game in some capacity. This **responsibility includes promoting the established player development pathway, to allow coaches, parents, teachers and players to have a clearer understanding of how and where careers may develop and the consequences for them as individuals at each stage.**
- 60.** Understanding these transition points requires a strong link between grassroots and professional clubs, including better sharing of coach and development programmes at a local level. As the professional game's plans for the modernisation of young player development move forward it is important that co-ordination ensures that the grassroots of the game can play its part at the local level in supporting clubs identify and develop talent.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- H.** Work with the Premier League and Football League to understand the impact of their young player development modernisation programme on the transition points into and from the grassroots; and identify subsequent opportunities for grassroots clubs to provide talent identification and development support to the professional game.

## SECTION TWO: Coaching

### Key challenges identified in consultation:

61. How can we **ensure there is a clear whole game strategy** for coaching that is universally understood and consistently implemented?
62. What needs to be done to **ensure that this strategy remains world leading and relevant to the development of young English players and successful international teams?**
63. How can we ensure that the **highest quality technical coaches work with the right young players at the right time?**
64. How can we ensure **the continuing production of top quality coaches at all levels of the English game?**

### Background

65. The FA's Vision 2008-2012 identified the immediate need to prioritise and support the nation's players and coaches as a cornerstone to the long-term success and health of our game.
66. Insufficient numbers of high-quality English players, coaches and coach educators (in comparison to our European counterparts) means that it **is time to reverse recent trends and formulate a clear, integrated plan across the Professional Game and grassroots to effect change and raise standards across the coaching workforce.**
67. We need to address the major issues in coaching and player development which include fundamental questions around what, how, when and where we teach the game and the quality and depth of the FA coach educators cascading the messages of the FA Coaching philosophy. **In addition, collectively, with our partners in the professional game, we must strive to further support excellent coaches and provide and promote more opportunities for talented English based coaches.**

### Developing and communicating a clear FA Coaching philosophy

68. The FA must develop and communicate **a clear coaching philosophy which is based upon the needs of the player at every stage of the player pathway.** *'The Future Game'* book for the elite game has been an excellent start in articulating some key messages for coaches and has been incredibly well received. The follow up resource for coaches in the grassroots game was recently launched on December 9th 2010 and is now available for grassroots coaches. **Embedded in the books is the overarching coaching philosophy alongside the entire key technical, environmental and physical development guidelines for coaches working with young players of all ability, male and female.** The challenge now is to develop a range of initiatives and a clear communication strategy to highlight the critical points in terms of coaching in support of player development. **Specifically that the right coach, with the appropriate training must be working with the right player at the right time of their development.**

69. In addition, now we have a plethora of technical, age and ability specific content, we must move to digitise this content and deliver more interactive ways of communicating with our coaches. **A website should be developed which would be an online learning centre for all FA coaches (a “virtual St George’s Park”).** It will provide a single point for The FA’s coaching philosophy and connect back to FA and County FA data and provision of courses. It should capture best practice across all levels of coaches, bring together Licensed Coaches and host online learning opportunities, CPD events and courses. It must be innovative, with animated practices and session planning tools and engaging to the current and next generation of the coaching and tutor workforce.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- I. Update and promote The FA’s Coaching philosophy across the whole-game including the development of an online website (a virtual St George’s Park) for accessing supporting materials and updates.
- J. Promote the take up of age appropriate qualifications across the game to ensure that quality coaches with the right skills are available to players at each stage of their development, from the earliest stage. Develop and implement a public campaign to support coaching as a profession, with emphasis on specialist youth coaches. Establish and clearly communicate age appropriate coaching pathways.
- K. Ensure that the qualifications, appropriate to the age with whom the coach is working, are included in rules and regulations for the appointment of coaches. As part of the National Game Strategy, The FA must ensure the appropriate qualifications are required to work with young players in grassroots football (e.g. Charter Standard Clubs) and we intend to specifically work with The Premier League and The Football League to try to ensure that the new, age specific qualifications are embedded in the rules and regulations<sup>8</sup> as part of the EPPP.

#### Targeted Support for Coaches

70. We must ensure the **formal and informal mechanisms are in place to assist coaches in their development and progression through and between the FA coaching levels.** This will encourage more people to ascend the coaching ladder, create extended learning opportunities – and generally broaden the skill-set of our coaching workforce.
71. Whilst the formal qualifications are crucial for the development of outstanding coaches, there is a recognised need (echoed in other sports and indeed by UK Sport) that additional support is required to maximise coaching potential. **The FA would like to develop an initiative to formalise and provide additional learning opportunities and contact with promising coaches across the age groups and crucially including a group of ex-players as part of the Club England set up.** The best potential and existing coaches working through the ages need to be identified early and supported through specialist mentoring programmes, drawing from experience within the game.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix for current rules and regulations pertaining to coaching

- 72.** This **Coaching Academy** concept will also serve to elevate the status of coaching with a much needed recognition scheme beyond Licensed coaches which is exclusive in the sense that it is aimed at talented, outstanding coaches with great potential meriting extra support. Targeting and dedicating some FA resource to the Coaching Academy programmes allows more contact time and tutelage of a small number of well placed individuals working mainly in high performance environments which will accelerate their development and impact.
- 73.** The Coaching Academy concept should be branded, promoted and have an exclusive feel with carefully elected alumni and is exactly the type of initiative we have committed to in building St George's Park.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- L.** Establish a Coaches Academy network to bring together outstanding coaches of different levels and experiences on a regular basis for coach education opportunities and continuous learning. The programme is about identifying excellent coaches and coach educators and providing high quality additional support to the coaches working with the best players and to the coach educators working with the best coaches. This programme is specifically for coaches working in England and coach educators as identified during their course of training who are considered to be outstanding and worthy of nurturing, mentoring and being part of this network based at St George's Park. The programme will include National and Regional gatherings, residential training, online learning, mentoring and where relevant game and tournament experience/shadowing. The FA Coaching Academy, which will ultimately be based at St George's Park, will be one overall concept with a number of bespoke programmes:
- i. FA Coaching Academy – Potential England coaches working with our international teams (especially but not exclusively ex-international players). This would comprise of coach mentoring to the international set-up so that young English coaches are fully prepared and supported throughout this process of international coach development, and have an empathy with our international team ambitions.
  - ii. FA Coaching Academy – UEFA A Licence (senior players) for outstanding UEFA A Licence candidates working in the professional game.
  - iii. FA Coaching Academy – Youth Award module 3 for outstanding specialist youth coaches.
  - iv. FA Coaching Academy – Underrepresented groups for excellent coaches considered to have significant potential to work with elite players of all ages/gender/disability from underrepresented groups (e.g. BME/female/disability).
  - v. These concepts could be supported by Regional Academy programmes to bring together coaches for CPD and informal sessions with their peers.

#### **Coaching as a profession**

- 74.** We need to create a culture of **life-long learning where coaches strive to improve**, are qualified, licensed and have far greater recognition and status at both youth and senior level. According to the Sports Coach UK Independent Survey, *“The introduction of a coach ‘licence to practise’ has been identified as a positive development within sports coaching with the potential to assist both governing bodies of sport and non-governing-body coach employers/deployers to recruit, develop and retain quality sports coaches. The potential for the*

*introduction of a licence to practise that leads to higher levels of quality-assured coaching practice and an enhanced experience for participants and performers is clear.”<sup>9</sup>*

75. The FA must work energetically to ensure coaching is now regarded as a highly specialised, valued profession and is recognised as such. To do so, we must lead progress towards a **professionally- licensed coaching workforce**, endorsed and supported by the whole game. A licensing scheme will allow The FA to assess, maintain and track the quality and whereabouts of coaches, which subsequently impacts upon the recruitment, retention and development of players.
76. Football has a large number of coaches working in the game; many are doing an excellent job. There are however, far too many who are not qualified or who qualified a long time ago and have not acquainted themselves with current technical, or teaching methods, to reflect the modern needs of society and of the game. Traditionally, The FA has concentrated on delivering quality coaching awards, and has qualified over 120,000 coaches in the last 5 years. **Coaching qualifications alone however do not fulfil the requirements of a coach development system - they are merely its foundations.**
77. The FA must raise the awareness nationally of the importance of employing coaches who are **not only qualified but also up to date in the retention of their awards and committed to their ongoing learning and development.**
78. We need to introduce a Licensing scheme now because the interface between coaches and The FA is currently not working effectively (evidenced by a mere 5% of coaches qualified in the last 3 years joining The FA Coaching Association). Despite the implementation of new qualifications, **the FA Coaching Association membership scheme, conferences and coaching seminars, the vast majority of coaches do not seek to update their knowledge or skills.**
79. **The Licensed Coach scheme will underpin The FA’s drive to raise standards in coaching and enable The FA to recognise coaches as a professionally regulated profession.** The Licence system will require coaches and The FA to continually work together to support the coach’s development, and importantly recognise it, through Licence status. It will underpin the FA Charter Standard programme, and particularly support the Charter Standard Health check process that has just been launched as part of the National Game Strategy.
80. Proposals for Coach Licensing Scheme<sup>10</sup> have already been presented to and adopted by the Professional and National Game and there is unanimous acceptance that this will raise the standards of its workforce and allow recruitment to be far more based on fit for purpose, active coaches, with a clear history of appropriate qualifications and Continuing Professional Development relevant to the position for which they may be employed.

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix for Sports Coach UK SNAP Survey 2010 ‘Views on the registration and licensing of sports coaches’

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix for Coach Licensing Scheme proposals and independent research

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- M.** The FA to launch the Licensed Club for Coaches to kite-mark qualified and up-to-date coaches in August 2011 for the grassroots and professional coaching workforce.
- i. The FA should work with the clubs and leagues across the whole game to ensure effective and regular CPD opportunities for coaches are in place.
  - ii. Becoming a Licensed Coach should be integrated into initial qualifications from 2012/13
  - iii. The scheme will recognise active, qualified coaches starting from a Level 1 and there will be a range of membership levels and benefits.
  - iv. A Licensed Coach website must be completed by May 2011 which will be able to identify where coaches are working and what qualifications they hold and will evolve into a section of the virtual St George's Park website described in **I**. The FA should integrate CFA team coach data and FA coach education course data to improve management information and enable targeted marketing and investment into coaching.
  - v. The FA will work with the professional game to ensure Licensed Coaches with the appropriate level of qualifications are incorporated into their new academy regulations.

**Coaching the Coaches**

- 81.** The FA must boast a team of **the highest-quality coach educators** with the knowledge and experience to make a difference and inspire the next generation of coaches.
- 82.** Currently, whilst there are 16 coach educators funded by The NGB who are dedicated to coach development in the grassroots game. There are 4 coach educators working with coaches in Academies and Centres of Excellence who recently started a pilot project to work with coaches of 5-16 yrs in 25 clubs.
- 83.** The FA Coach Education team working across the whole coaching pathway comprises 4 dedicated staff currently with assistance from the international team coaches as part of their work programmes. There is a desperate shortage of in-house coach educators working on the UEFA B and UEFA A Licence. Clearly course delivery and tutelage is vastly enhanced with a consistent, specialist FA workforce. Based upon The FA's current coach education programme and the proposals outlined and subject to the demands of the modernised youth development structures of the professional game, the recruitment of additional, high quality coach education staff will be required.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- N.** Work with the Professional Game and grassroots to ensure the FA supply of coach educators is in tune with the demand across all levels of the game.
- i. The recommendation is for the current Regional Coach Development Managers ("RCDMs") working in the National Game to work on the delivery of Levels 1 and 2 and the Youth Award modules 1 and 2. This will allow more dedicated time to work in the CFAs and to deliver informal CPD and regional 'Academy' events for grassroots coaches.
  - ii. With both the UEFA B and A Licences now run nationally, a new team of 4 coach educators are required to deliver these awards and mirror the work of the current RCDMs. These coach educators would be dedicated to delivering the UEFA B and A Licences,



related regional and national CPD, mentoring, the coaching regional academy programme for coaches working with players of 17years+ and international courses at St George's Park.

- iii. A team of 4 new coach educators is also required to support the whole game approach to youth development, particularly with the key transition points across the formats of the game.
- iv. Work with the professional game to understand the coach education requirement to support Academies. This could potential involve a number of new coach educators supporting clusters of professional clubs on a regional basis.

### **Research and benchmarking**

84. Clearly, any successful programme to deliver change for the better **must be accurately monitored and modified accordingly, so it keeps delivering effectively.**
85. Our coaching programme must be underpinned by cutting-edge resources and research to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes we have put in place. All this work should be co-ordinated and housed at St George's Park which will be focal point for the FA's coaching programme.
86. A world-class coaching system and its success will be reliant not just on research, but on the feedback which ensures the system keeps producing better results – i.e. improved players and coaches. **We need to ensure our monitoring and evaluation programme is comprehensive and transparent. To do this, we must establish a research advisory panel, which has representation from across the game.** The panel will be charged with prioritising the areas for research, ensuring research projects are undertaken speedily – and that there is well-defined path for feedback and subsequent action, as appropriate. The FA must investigate all components of the coaching system and initiate innovative, football-specific research programmes to support the coaching strategy.
87. Research is required to be undertaken around several key areas including; player pathways, coach pathways, coaching philosophy and practical delivery. Furthermore, investigations into coach behaviour and the creation of effective learning environments will be crucial across all age groups.
88. The key findings of all the research must be immediately fed back into the coaching programme to initiate positive change. Crucially, success must be measured, recorded, monitored and communicated.
89. A benchmarking programme is also essential in order for us to reflect and keep abreast of world leading best practice. **This should extend beyond football and into other sporting and commercial sectors, from which we can learn and share ideas with coaches.** Outputs from benchmarking and research trips must be formally captured and accessible for others through a range of media formats including books, DVDs and web-based materials which will be available to coaches of all levels and housed at St. George's Park.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- O.** The FA should undertake to report on an annual basis the latest available research on coaching techniques as well as an assessment of performance in terms of coach education, retention and development. A comprehensive research programme should be developed to incorporate a suitable balance of all these elements and an annual publication should be written, communicated and used to assess the coaching strategy for performance and relevance.
  - i. A long term programme to independently measure the effectiveness of coaching should be established
  - ii. A research programme should be developed to assess coaching techniques, the FA coach education scheme, coach retention and delivery.
  - iii. The FA should also internationally benchmark our coach education performance. Where relevant it should also seek to highlight and learn from other major sports best practice.

## SECTION THREE: International Team Development

### Key challenges identified in consultation:

90. How can we ensure that all **English International Players have the greatest possible exposure and experience of international tournament football** and matches throughout their career development?
91. How do we ensure that **England international players at all ages approach international tournaments in the optimal condition?**
92. How can **The FA work with the professional game to support the transition of England players** through the age structure of international team football?

### Background

93. This review (re)endorses the *Lewis Review* of 2007, in stating that the *“The system of coaching and player development should be so enhanced that there is an increasing stream of better young players qualified to play for England – players who have been better coached from a very young age, and who have the technical, physical and mental skills to succeed at the very highest international level.”*
94. **The development of better young players qualified for England, whilst of fundamental importance, is not however enough in isolation to generate successful England international teams.** The players who have represented the senior England international teams in recent seasons are regarded as being of the highest order in terms of their physical, technical and mental skills. Skills which they repeatedly and successfully demonstrate through their club performances.
95. Therefore there is a **demonstrable ‘disconnect’ in transitioning these best quality and high performing English players into a cohesive and successful international team for major tournaments.**
96. There are numerous variables that go into the assessment of international tournament performance. **This review is not aimed at unpicking recent England senior tournament experiences.** Instead it is concerned with how the England international team structure impacts with young player development - and where the whole game can support player development to ensure the transition into international teams can work to increase the chances of on field success for England teams.

### International team talent identification

97. The table below outlines the international comparison of leading European football nations for their early year’s talent identification and development team programmes. **There is no uniform approach,** but most involve a **combination of work within the professional clubs, regional and national scouting programmes.** Likewise there is no conclusive one best approach as different nations (including England) have attained different levels of success at different times at this level.

Country	U16 and below talent Identification and international team development
<b>England</b>	Professional club Academies and Centres of Excellence support the player's club development programme up to the age of international recruitment which is the England U16 squad. Prior to selection, a one year club scouting and monitoring programme takes place at U14/U15 and includes a hundred plus players. The U16's commence with a four day development course for 46 players (August) at the National Football Centre. They then play the three match Sky Sports Victory Shield - for 30 to 35 players – which runs through the Autumn and winter. The following February an International friendly is played away for 18 players, followed by two four game international tournaments in April and July for squads of 18 players.
<b>Spain</b>	Non professional local clubs play in either a Federation or Government funded championships at U14, U16 and U18 years, played during school holidays. This programme is supported by 47 regional coaches providing support and talent ID on behalf of the RFEF. Having monitored boys through these regions regularly from 14 years of age a group of 55 boys (5 for each position) are selected and invited to the RFEF National Football Centre for three days per month for coaching. These 'concentraciones' continue and the squad is refined to 33 until the U16 National Championships take place in January. A squad of 18 players are selected after those championships to prepare for the U16s first three international fixtures at the Santarem Tournament in Portugal during February.
<b>France</b>	The French Football Federation has 12 regional centres accommodating approx 30 boys between the ages of U14's and U15's. Boys will board and go to school in the regional centres but go home at weekends to play for their Football Clubs; their education and football development continues in this way until their U15 year. At the national football centre at Clairefontaine there are three year groups including the U16's National squad. All these boys are selected from the "selection-elite" process of about 60 boys channelled through the regional structure. In April of their U15 year at two centres, Clairefontaine and Vichy over 400 boys take part in a National Cup competition. The second part of this competition continues in June with a final four squads involved and is observed by 15 National Coaches. 60 + boys are selected to attend the Clairefontaine for three days in August and at this National event, U14, U15's, U16's and U17's play internally.
<b>Italy</b>	Boys receive invitations to the Italian Football Federations National Football Centre for an in-house tournament at U15's. The players come from three or four regions of the country amounting to approximately two teams from each region (approx 66 players) but also included are the squad from the year above. This internal tournament gives the opportunity for assessment of the players by Italian National Coaches, assistant coaches and goalkeeping coaches. The players are then monitored at their clubs through to the end of the season, when about 60 boys are invited back to Coverciano for another tournament over four days which includes coaching. Squad of 18 is then selected during the pre-season for an annual invitation to a French U16 Tournament in Paris followed by one or two international fixtures, before a squad of about 22/24 are again invited back to Coverciano this time as the older age group for in house games with the new younger team.
<b>Holland</b>	The KNVB organise 50 regional teams (from six districts) throughout the country at U12, U13, U14, and also have a 'professional' (clubs) team and 'amateur' (grass roots) team out of the six districts at age 14. There are 8 National Coaches supported by 24

	District Coaches and 50 Regional Coaches across these age groups providing talent identification. At U15 six district teams provide one national squad and a 'shadow' squad. Early in the U15 year (Sep - Dec) a 3 day training camp and an internal match (v professional clubs older age group) takes place and is followed by two international fixtures. Following the winter break (Jan – April) another 3 day training camp and internal match are followed by a friendly match with a nearby foreign club e.g. Dortmund or Schalke and two more internationals prior to U17 tournament qualification commencement.
Portugal	Portugal begin their International Programme at U15's when boys who have been recommended by their regional network of contacts with clubs and school sports teachers in 22 regions are invited to Lisbon. Approx. squads of 18 or so (350-400 in total) take part in a tournament and are assessed by all the National Coaches (five in total). Four squads are selected to come together for three day weekends in September and October and a five day event during December/Christmas Holidays for coaching and internal games. After the New Year in February they select a squad for a 6 day x three games v European nations who also have an U15's programme. The year finishes in April with a two day coaching weekend to establish a squad to start in U16's in September after the school's summer holidays.

98. There are clearly many similarities between the English system and these international competitors. **Scouting and selection from amongst a club development system into an international team environment in readiness for transition into the U16 age group.**
99. Where there is some distinction is in the number of nations that hold regional and or national player get-togethers at the pre-U16 ages. The Spanish 'concentraciones' or French U15 get-togethers at Clairefontaine or Vichy, are used to allow their national development coaches greater time to review talent and provide development input at this earlier age. These get-togethers also provide young developing players their **first feel for the international set up** and a very initial introduction to the **demands, in terms of preparation, environment and performance, that they may be expected to meet in the future.**
100. In comparison, the English game has a much stronger club academy system, where boys are already receiving the highest quality coaching and playing at the highest standards for their age group. This **highly competitive environment provides a rigorous talent identification filter, and the professionals in the structure work closely with The FA's international development team coaches.**

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- P.** As part of the modernisation of the ongoing professional game young player development system, consideration should be given to what further opportunities might be developed to ensure that England international development team coaches work closely with clubs on the identification, development and transition of young England players into the U16 England development set-up.

### **Ensuring successful transition through the international development teams**

- 101.** As young players simultaneously transition through the international development teams and their club academy structure into elite football, the challenge is to ensure that their personal development, playing development and international team experiences remain positive. **The international development team structure must ensure that it is closely aligned to the professional club academy coaches when handling and developing their individual players.**
- 102.** There are several examples of **best practice, where leading professional clubs mutually involve England development coaches in the personal review and development of individual players.** This level of co-operation can only be beneficial to the player, club and international development team.
- 103.** Furthermore there is a responsibility on England international development teams to ensure that the **experience of the environment of international football at these early age groups is a successful and positive one that adds to the development of individual players.** Research undertaken on behalf of The FA in 2008<sup>11</sup>, for example, demonstrated the importance of team leadership and team cohesion in having a positive impact on success; and warned of the negative impact on performance of players losing composure during games, player boredom, and a lack of available activities in downtime.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- Q.** Expand and coordinate club visit programmes for the international coaches to ensure that the international programme for individual players is appropriate and consistent with their club based development programmes.

- 104.** As with club football, **familiarity and consistency both on and off the pitch help to provide comfort to players and to encourage positive performance.** As players move through the England development teams there is a need for a **consistency in philosophy of playing style and exposure to familiar and trusted coaching staff.** This continuity should run from the U16 age group right through to inclusion of input from the England Senior Coach into development teams.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- R.** Encourage England teams at all developmental age-groups to play with a consistent playing philosophy to ensure transition amongst teams is consistent.
- S.** Overlay the transition of coaching staff individuals across age-groups to provide continuity to young players progressing through the international teams.
- T.** Require future England Senior Coaches to have significant input into and exposure to the national development team structure.

<sup>11</sup> 2008 England Youth Performance Environment, Pain & Harwood

**105.** Of the 34 players who have represented England in senior internationals since the 2010 FIFA World Cup, 12 represented England at U16 level, 8 at U17 level and 12 at U19 level. This is consistent with international comparisons, and is in part due to the variety in development paths and vagaries of injuries. In addition all of the current England squad, bar two, represented England at U21 level. **On average 2 players per age group (i.e. year of birth) are expected to graduate into the full senior international squad.** At the 2010 World Cup England had 5 from the 1981 year group (the most of any leading European nation from one year group was the Holland squad who had 6 players from the 1984 age group), but had squad players from every age between 23 and 32. **These figures<sup>12</sup> suggest that the drop off rate for England international players through the development team structure is similar to European counterparts.**

**106.** Understanding these drop-off trends, however, requires close co-ordination with the professional game. Between the ages of 17 and 21 young players graduate out of the club academy structure into elite football. In development teams they move through the age groups of U19 and U21 and, if successful, begin to challenge for senior international call up. **Ensuring that these players continue to play regular competitive football of the highest quality is central to their development.**

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- U.** Work with the professional game to consider ways to support the U17-U21 age groups of developing young English players to ensure they maximise their opportunities for playing elite level football and their chances to experience the Club England environment.

#### **Maximising experience of International Football**

**107.** The extent and nature of an individual player's international football experience **has a significant impact on their ability to successfully transition into a major international tournament environment.** The greater the players exposure to 'successful' international football (especially tournaments) throughout their development the higher the likelihood of a successful transition into senior international tournament football.

**108.** The respective **Spanish, German and Holland FIFA World Cup 2010 squads each had more development age group caps** and both the Spanish and German squads had a group of players who had won international tournaments together in development teams. It is no coincidence that the three recent European winners of the FIFA World Cup – Spain, Germany and France - have won multiple development titles in the last 16 years. **Spain alone, prior to their senior squad winning both the FIFA World Cup and UEFA European Championships, had won 12 international development titles in this period.**

**109.** Ensuring that talented young English players are able to experience the equivalent quality and quantity of international development football experience is extremely important to their ultimate development into a successful senior international team. **England's young development teams need to be given access to the best players and time to afford them a successful experience that will have a positive developmental impact** for senior teams of the future.

<sup>12</sup> See appendix – England Senior squad pathways; FIFA 2010 European squad age distributions

- 110.** England's development teams, like this year's U17 European Champions, must be targeting successful tournaments not just in their own right, but as important developmental stepping stones in imbuing confidence of the international set up into young England players as they move through international football.
- 111.** Success requires the ability for England development squads to select and play the best possible players available to them. Situations such as the FIFA U20 World Cup where England fielded an under strength squad have a negative impact on the development of young players and the establishment of a successful mentality around England international football. **In total 35 players were withdrawn by their clubs for this event and since September 2009 there have been a further 46 withdrawals of players for seven U19 England get-togethers.**<sup>13</sup>
- 112.** To ensure this approach **requires open and clear communication between the Club England structure including the England development coaches and the professional clubs.** Early warning must be given to clubs around the timings of international fixtures and tournaments and the release of players to join up with the England set up must be pragmatic and flexible – based on a principle of prioritising success in competitive international fixtures.
- 113.** Simultaneously efforts **need to be made to work with FIFA and UEFA to provide a better and more clearly co-ordinated international calendar**<sup>14</sup> which reflects the concerns of clubs over player release timings, but also recognises the key development tournaments (such as the FIFA U20 World Cup and the Olympics) that are currently excluded from its remit.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- V.** Agreement between The FA and the Professional Game on the mandatory release of players for international duty at all age groups based on the following principles
- i. Club England to agree and distribute an upcoming fixture calendar and potential squad long-lists for which mandatory release will apply. (This might be on a two season cycle). This calendar may include fixtures currently outside the FIFA international calendar but which are considered important for England team development.
  - ii. The FA will work with FIFA to coordinate and agree the international calendar and list of events, with particular respect to ensuring that all age-group international tournaments and agreed preparation fixtures are sensibly scheduled and formally recognised.
  - iii. Ensure that at all times there is clear and early communication between Club England and professional clubs over the potential individuals who may be required throughout the international programme (as per i)
  - iv. Individual players will not be considered for two international development tournaments in one closed season period.

**Optimal physical condition for international tournaments**

- 114.** There is strong anecdotal evidence that English teams have suffered from physical and or mental fatigue in comparison to their opposition at end of season international tournaments.

<sup>13</sup> See appendix – International development team withdrawals since September 2009

<sup>14</sup> See appendix – FIFA International Calendar and rules on international player release



However, independently collated data from season 2009-10 demonstrates that the **England squad both collectively and as individuals had played less football than the Germany and Spain squads**. In terms of average match-time within each squad, of the regular 2009-10 season, the Spanish had a significant 325 minutes of more playing time (3 and a half matches) over the average, and an average of 576 more minutes playing time per player than the England squad.<sup>15</sup> **The Spain squad also recorded the highest number of collective squad playing minutes for the whole season in both domestic and European competition football.**

**115.** So if there is no correlation between minutes played per season and international team performance the profile of when international players are playing their football must also be considered. The profile of **the 2009-10 season shows that the Spanish and German World Cup squad players played more football than their English counterparts in every month of the season bar two** – August and December in the case of Spain and December and January in the case of Germany. In fact bar December (which accounts for the busy Christmas football calendar) English players are playing matches at a comparative frequency as their European counterparts and when it comes to the end of the season (April and May), much less than their Spanish, German and French rivals.<sup>16</sup>

**116.** As such the **evidence for a winter break remains inconclusive**. Whilst England players are starting their season earlier, and peaking their match time in December and January, they are also playing fewer games both over the season, and in the run up to international tournaments than their leading European competitors. **Further specific data is required to assess whether the 'intensity' of the football being played in the English professional game has a disproportionate effect on English players at the end season**, and whether the profile of the calendar (intensity in December, downtime in May) is actually detrimental to end of season international tournament preparation. Research may look at the number of injuries and when in the season they are sustained, and the impact of season breaks in other countries and when they optimally fit into the fixture calendar.

**117.** Furthermore the evidence<sup>17</sup> of the 2009-2010 FIFA World Cup squads shows that the **Spanish, German and French squads had all played many more minutes of Champions League and Europa League football than their English counterparts**. Arguably it could be claimed that the English players are not suffering from tiredness at the end of the season, but rather a lack of matches at the highest competitive level in the run in to major tournaments when the English season is at its least intense.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**W.** Agreement to work with the professional game to collect and collate match performance, fitness and medical testing data to consider the impact of the English football calendar on pre-tournament fitness levels. This data could ultimately provide a national database to benchmark fitness and performance levels to help with international team preparation and inform future decisions on the professional games fixture calendar.

<sup>15</sup> Scout7 FIFA World Cup Squad Report, November 2010

<sup>16</sup> Scout7 FIFA World Cup Squad Report, November 2010

<sup>17</sup> Scout7 FIFA World Cup Squad Report, November 2010

### **Optimal preparation and environment for international tournament football**

118. Over a number of tournaments The FA has approached preparation and environment issues in a rigorous and comprehensive manner. **Paramount consideration is always given to the football requirements of the squad and the coaching team to ensure facilities for training and preparation of the highest quality.** In addition the requirements of the players in terms of safety, security, entertainment and relaxation are also central to the development of both the pre-tournament and during the tournament plans.
119. Each tournament throws up unique challenges and it is important that The FA continues to improve these processes, and where appropriate seek to learn wider best practice both from within our own game and other elite performance sports. **For example it is clear that in the elite end of the professional game preparation and working environments at club level bring out their optimum performance.**
120. In addition, whilst The FA always seeks to understand the reasons for disappointing results, and has collected feedback previously from coaching and playing squads, it should seek to go further **in formally collating qualitative and quantitative feedback from all international squads** to better understand the successes and failures of team environment and preparation from their perspective.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- X.** Undertake research to better understand the “player experience” of international tournaments to inform future decisions on preparation and environment. Research could include qualitative fieldwork with current and recent past players and support staff across all teams, as well as international benchmarking.
- Y.** Formally engage with the leading professional clubs to share their experience on establishing the optimal preparation and environments to encourage player performance.

## APPENDIX OF SUPPORTING RESEARCH MATERIAL

The following material will be tabled at the Wednesday 22 December FA Board meeting, and will be available (individually or collectively) beforehand on request.

- Review of Young Player Development in Professional Football ('Lewis Review' 2007)
- FA Coaching Pathways
- International comparison of youth football player pathways
- *The Future of Football: Developing the Structure of The Game*, Nick Levett, 2010
- Current rules and regulations pertaining to coaching
- Sports Coach UK SNAP Survey 2010 'Views on the registration and licensing of sports coaches'
- Coach License Scheme Proposals
- Independent research on coach licensing
- *England Youth Performance Environment*, Pain & Harwood, 2008
- 2010 England Senior squad pathways
- FIFA 2010 European squad age distributions
- International development team withdrawals since September 2009
- FIFA International Calendar and rules on international player release
- Scout7 FIFA World Cup Squad Report, November 2010