



“Playing Up” Key considerations

A key question that is being posed ...

Will it be mandatory for U7 to play 3v3 or will they be allowed to play up at U8s?

This is a question being regularly posed as we progress with our FutureFit implementation plans and we therefore want to provide clarity as to the FA's position on this matter and the general playing up of age-group.



So what are the current rules ...

The FA's current regulations provide some flexibility allowing for players to play out of their prescribed age group. In a general sense this allows for players to 'play up' a single age group. The focus and intent of these regulations' centres around two benefits:



Availability of Opportunity

Ensuring that all players have a reasonable opportunity to play. In some cases, dual age band leagues or playing out of age group provide the only options available to players to play the game.



Individual Player Development

In certain cases, a player's development can be supported by the opportunity to play outside of their prescribed age group. This should be a decision made in the best interests of the individual.



So can U7s play up to U8s next season ...

The FA do not intend to change the relevant regulations for 2026/27 providing players with the continued flexibility to play out of age group as per FA Rule C.142 and SCORY 18.C.

Removing this flexibility would remove the benefits that it currently provides to the game.

This position will be kept under review and is subject to change should The FA feel as though the regulation is being abused.



What needs to be considered

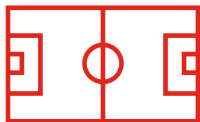
There are a variety of aspects that need to be considered if contemplating the option of playing U7s up to U8s.



**Player
Development**



**Rules &
Regulations**



**Impact on
Facilities**



**Experience of
3v3**



Rules & Regulations



SCORY 18.C "...Notwithstanding the above, a child is permitted to play up in the age group above their or her chronological age group, irrespective of any changes of format or competition structure, save that a child who attains the age of 6 after 31 August is permitted to play only in the Under 7 age group, and may not play in the Under 8 age group, for that Playing Season.

- *Leagues cannot run under 7s playing any other format than 3v3.*
- *If leagues offer Under 8s, regardless of what they call the division/group – it is still Under 8s so the age group criteria apply, meaning if they group all the Under 7 teams playing up together – those teams could sign Under 8 players as its classed as Under 8. That then becomes an issue for the league to deal with, as they cannot refuse the players registration and they need to consider the playing experience for the players concerned.*
- *When a player turns 6 years old (would be U6 for that season), they can play for the under 7s only in that season. If a league does not offer Under 7s these players cannot play until the following season. A player turning 6 during the season cannot play in the Under 8s.*
- *If an existing league is not going to offer the format, then new leagues could be created to offer that format.*
- *Leagues can offer formats below the max permitted for that age-group but cannot exceed the maximum allowed. i.e. Under 13s next season the maximum format is 9v9 so leagues cannot run Under 13s doing 11v11.*



Player Development



- *3v3 is not simply a smaller version of the game; it is a deliberately designed learning environment. Removing or bypassing it strips away key developmental stimuli at the most influential stage of a player's journey.*
- *At this age play is still very important, formalising their match environment can remove some of the "play" element which later down the line means they have developed technically, physically, emotionally and socially. Resulting in an earlier drop out*
- *Players who skip 3v3 are not "catching up" later – they are missing irreplaceable experiences around:*
 - *Repetition of core actions (dribbling, shooting, turning, 1v1s)*
 - *Independent decision making and problem-solving*
 - *Comfort on the ball under realistic pressure*
- *If those players then return to their chronological age group, they potentially spend three consecutive seasons in formats that assume prior learning has already taken place.*
- **A big presumption exists that all players in that team are the same level and develop at the same time – we know this is not the case, so is this move benefiting all the players in the team.**



Impact on Facilities

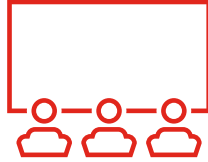


- *By playing Under 7s up to Under 8s there is the potential that this puts considerable pressure on 5v5 pitch stock given that you could have three age groups all playing the same format. 3v3 offers greater flexibility in where it can be played in comparison.*
- *Another facility point to consider is by delaying / not offering 3v3 provision for under 7's, it increases the challenge of access to appropriate slots to enable future 3v3 provision to take place, e.g. those slots that could have been utilised are instead taken by other formats / organisations.*

There are currently no guarantees of Goalpost support funding for future seasons to the same level.



Experience of 3v3



Evidence consistently shows that when coaches, parents, and league officials see 3v3 in action, opposition rapidly softens and acceptance increases. Seeing the format:

- *Removes abstract fears around "chaos" or "lack of structure"*
- *Demonstrates visible player engagement and enjoyment*
- *Helps adults recalibrate expectations away from traditional match outcomes*

Showcase events are been organised by the CFAs.





Club Tournaments/Festivals

Festivals/Tournaments

Sanctioned



To play or to organise a tournament / festival they must be sanctioned by the appropriate County FA

Correct Formats



Rule of thumb is:
If using 25/26 age-groups, use this season formats with U6 play 3v3

If using 26/27 formats use next season formats

The FA is allowing for the first time U6s to play in sanctioned festivals between January – September 2026 only.

Support



Contact your County FA – see their website for guidance and the process to sanction a tournament / festival.



FutureFit

