



History and Background

The Football League, also known as the **Coca-Cola Football League** for sponsorship reasons, is a league competition featuring professional football clubs from England and Wales. The Football League was founded in 1888 by William McGregor, originally with 12 member clubs. Steady growth and the addition of more divisions meant that by 1950 the League had 92 clubs.

It is the oldest such competition in world football and was the top level football league in England from its foundation in the 19th century until 1992, when the top 22 clubs split away to form the FA Premier League.

Financial considerations led to a major shake-up in 1992 when, in a step to maximise their revenue, the leading members of the Football League broke away to form their own competition, the FA Premier League, which was renamed in 2007 as the Premier League.

Since 1995 The Football League has had 72 clubs evenly divided into three divisions, which are currently known as The Championship, League One, and League Two. Promotion and relegation between these divisions is a central feature of the League and is further extended to allow the top Championship clubs to exchange places with the lowest placed clubs in the Premier League, and the bottom clubs of League Two to switch with the top clubs of the National Football Conference, thus integrating the League into the English football league “pyramid” system. Although primarily a competition for English clubs, two clubs from Wales also take part (three prior to the relegation of Wrexham in 2008).

The Football League is also the name of the governing body of the league competition and this body also organises two knockout cup competitions, the Football League Cup and the Football League Trophy.

The Football League organises the Football League Play-off Finals, (2nd Division, 1st Division and The Championship) that are held at the end of the season at the new Wembley Stadium. The Championship final carries one of the biggest prizes in sport, promotion to the Premier League that is worth over £50 million to the winning team.

Since 1998 The Football League responsibilities have included the organisation and support to its 72 member Clubs with regards to Youth Development, via the Academy and Centre of Excellence system.

Change in Youth Development

Prior to 1998, most Football League clubs did run some form of development football for schoolboys. The players could be recruited and then registered from the age of 14 and the boys usually played their games through their schools and some local football programmes.

One of the first steps to “specialise” the coaching programmes was introduced by The FA who operated the National School of Excellence at Lilleshall for selected “talented” players. The school operated from 1984 to 1999.

FA Announcement in 1997

The FA's National School of Excellence is to be closed in two years' time following recommendations from the new technical director Howard Wilkinson, who wants the centre to be replaced with academies at leading clubs.

"It's because the school has been such a great success that we have decided the time is right to change the system. The new proposals will reach and benefit more youngsters,"

"Lilleshall has taught us a lot, we could not have initiated the academy schemes without it acting as the pilot. The National School has done a great job but its sample of boys is too small." Although the proposals need to be ratified by the FA, school officials have already accepted it will be closed in 1999. Since it was established in 1984, the school has produced a steady stream of internationals at all levels including Sol Campbell, Andy Cole, Nicky Barmby and Ian Walker. Recent graduate John Curtis excelled in last month's World Youth Cup in Malaysia, while classmate Michael Owen has already played in the Liverpool first team. The school, which is being copied by associations from Germany and France, offers 16 scholarships a year and its £500,000 annual budget is met by the FA.

The game's future, from a domestic point of view as well as from the perspective of a successful England senior side, depends upon ensuring that the best young players are given every opportunity to fulfill their talent and potential.

In 1998 the Charter for Quality was produced by The FA (Howard Wilkinson) and all professional football clubs in the Premier League and The Football League were given the opportunity to operate a Youth Development programme. (A UEFA requirement to enter UEFA competitions)

In 1998 Youth Development was handed to the respective League Clubs and with the guidance of the FA's Charter for Quality, separate criteria was set by the governing bodies; The Football Association (FA), The Premier League (PL) and The Football League (FL).

Separate criteria were set to operate an Academy or a Centre of Excellence and Football League clubs were given this opportunity to have a Youth Development programme.

It was not envisaged that so many professional clubs would take up the opportunity but the Football League now have 22 Academy Clubs and 46 Centre of Excellence Clubs. The remaining 4 FL clubs enter Under 18 age group teams in the FL Youth Alliance League.

Change in registered players age groups

"Lilleshall has taught us a lot, we could not have initiated the academy schemes without it acting as the pilot. The National School has done a great job but its sample of boys is too small."

Criteria were implemented to be included in the new Youth Development Rules to operate an Academy or Centre of Excellence.

A significant change was to be the age groups that the players would be allowed to register with a professional club – that age was lowered to 8 years of age. In most parts of Europe this is still 14 years of age as previously seen in England. Registered meant that the player had to be trained by that club and play in organised Academy and Centre of Excellence games programmes.

The numbers were to rise significantly with clubs registering between 110 to 130 schoolboy players. The numbers varies according to each clubs recruitment philosophy.

The Registration Department at the respective Leagues hold all registrations and are logged onto the "Extranet" (database) by both departments.

To be registered meant that there were compensation rites if a player wanted to leave or another club wanted to register that player.

It is important to say that all coaching is free, no fees are asked from the boys.

How does the Football League Youth Development Programme Operate?

Finance and Club's Funding

All Football League Clubs are given the opportunity to operate a Youth Development programme and receive additional financial support. For the first 10 years it was £138,000 but now each club can receive up to £180,000. To receive this entire amount the club will have to meet additional criteria.

With the level of Grant Aid distributed to clubs each season being raised from just under £10 million to £13 million - comes increased financial accountability. This important responsibility falls to the Business Manager who has the authority to withdraw funding in instances where clubs fail to meet their award conditions.

The Funding Partners have varied during the first 10 years but now consist of The Football Association and The Premier League.

Football League Clubs also invest their own money into Youth Development; the estimated overall figure for Football League's Youth Development programme is approximately £40 million per annum.

Criteria

Specific criteria was set as to the requirements of operating an Academy or a Centre of Excellence: There are 134 Rules plus 4 Appendices

The Rules relate to the following areas:

- Definition and Interpretation
- Operation of Academies, Centres of Excellence and Satellites
- Licensing of Football Academies and Centres of Excellence
- Monitoring of Football Academies, Centres of Excellence and Satellites
- Facilities and Accommodation
- Staff Requirements
- Trials
- Registration of Players
- End of Season Procedure
- Registration of Players
- End of Season Procedure
- Termination of Youth Player Registration
- Scholarships / Apprenticeships
- Approaches by and to Clubs
- Inducements
- Compensation
- Learning Programme
- Educational Requirements
- Relationship with schools
- Coaching Requirements
- Games Programme
- Youth Players Welfare
- Communications with Parents
- Code of Conduct
- Development Centres
- Discipline
- Transitional Provisions

Appendices

- Medical Staff
- Medical Requirements
- Football League Child Protection Policy
- Code Of Conduct

Rules re. Monitoring of Football Academies, Centres of Excellence and Satellites

27. The League will monitor Football Academies, Centres of Excellence and Satellites operated by Clubs to ensure compliance with these Rules and will, in particular, procure that each is

visited at least 3 times each season by a person appointed for that purpose by The League. Such person shall have access to all records kept in accordance with the requirements of these Rules.

28 At least twice each season such person will present to The League, to the Club concerned, and at its request, to The Football Association, a written report on visits made.

29. As soon as practical after the end of the season, such person will present to the Football Association, The Football League and the Club, a written annual report on each football Academy, Centre of Excellence and Satellite operated by Clubs.

The Football League Trust engages the following Youth Development staff to carry out the monitoring of the 134 Rules and the subsequent production of the reports.

- Youth Development Business Manager
- Head of Player Development / Regional Officer Midlands
- Youth Co-ordinator
- Regional Officer North and West
- Regional Officer North and East
- Regional Officer South and West
- Regional Officer North and East

The Youth Department are also responsible for organising games festivals, regional seminars (to share good practice) and exit trials for released players.

Additionally to this the Football League has separate departments who work with and advise the Youth Development staff.

- Player Registrations
- Fixtures and match officials
- Data and player information
- Human Resources (HR)

Reporting

4 Regional Officers have 15 clubs each and the Midlands Officer has 8 to monitor.

Each club will have a minimum of 6 visits each season that consist of;

- Action Plan visit at the start of the season
- Technical Visit for the Apprentice players (16-19)
- Technical Visit for the schoolboys (8-16)
- Match Observation for the Apprentice players (16-19)
- Match Observation or the schoolboys (8-16)
- Business Audit for the whole programme

Each visit generates a report culminating in an Annual Report that is provided to the Club and the Funding Partners, The FA and The Premier League.

The reports produced are extensive and cover all the key areas and Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) / Compliance issues are highlighted.

The overall aim of the monitoring system is to ensure compliance is being met by all clubs and to raise standards.

As seen previously in The Rules, some of the key areas of monitoring and issues of compliance are;

- Staffing and the engagement of the appropriately qualified staff,
- Facilities,
- Technical Programmes
- Games Programmes within the Youth Development systems.

As previously stated The Football League has:

- 22 Academies and 46 Centres of Excellence

Within those Football League Academies and Centres of Excellence the approximate numbers of staff employed in the system are:

- 1200 Technical staff
- 400 Medical staff
- 80 Sports Scientists (conditioning staff, psychologists, analysts)
- 50 Welfare Officers
- 30 Education Officers (for Schoolboys and Apprentice players)
- 60 Administrators

All the above are employed either on a full or part-time basis.

The Rules specify the qualifications of any staff member engaged in the Youth Development programme. Additionally any staff working with children has to be FA CRB checked.

An example would be the minimum qualifications required to coach part time in an Academy or Centre of Excellence are to hold:

- UEFA B (Level 3) Licence;

- Up-to dated Continual Professional Development (CPD);
- Emergency Aid qualification;
- Self Certification Form
- Safeguarding Children certification
- Completed a FA CRB check

Full-time coaching staff, Academy Manager or Heads of Youth, have to be a minimum UEFA A (Level 4) qualified before they are allowed to take the appointment.

All this is checked when the Regional Officers go into their Club's and on an on-going basis throughout the season through the Club and The Football League administration staff.

Facilities

There are separate and different requirements to be hold an Academy Licence or a Centre of Excellence Licence.

To hold an Academy Licence the club must have separate facilities that include;

- Appropriately sized grass pitches (3-6)
- 1 Indoor artificial pitch (60 x 40 yards)
- 1 Outdoor artificial pitch
- Private medical treatment and examination rooms
- Changing provisions to accommodate the number of players in the coaching and games programmes
- Separate washing and toilet facilities for home and visiting teams
- Separate washing and toilet facilities for match officials
- Separate washing and toilet facilities for staff
- Study Area
- Parents Lounge
- Computerised registration of players
- E-mail and internet links to The Football Association and The Football League

The Rules with regards to facilities to hold a Centre of Excellence Licence are less stringent and are as follows;

- A coaching area of a size considered by the Board to be appropriate for the number of players registered
- Adequate changing, washing and toilet facilities for such a number of players
- A separate treatment room
- Speedy access to medical assistance

The overall aim of the monitoring system is to ensure compliance is being met by all clubs and to raise standards.

Through the Leagues monitoring systems all clubs are being pushed to raise their standards each season and not just to sit back. Convincing the staff is not a problem, vision by senior personnel / management is usually the people we have to convince.

Technical Programmes

This is an area that has seen CHANGE since the inauguration of the Academy and the Centre of Excellence Programme in 1998.

Through the monitoring process, in-service training, the sharing of good practice and the FA CPD programmes, clubs have been kept up to date with new initiatives that are being introduced around the world.

The FA have promoted the 4 Corners of player development and if you go back to the staffing lists (page 6) and see the make-up of the teams delivering the technical, physical, psychological and social aspects of the players development you will see the clubs are implementing CHANGE

- Clubs are required to have; a plan – syllabus- technical guidelines – philosophy
- Coaches need to plan and record their sessions
- Qualified staff to deliver sessions
- Qualified specialist staff to deliver sessions
- Appropriate number of sessions delivered weekly
- Coach to player ratio needs to be not more than 1:10

New Initiatives

- Opportunity to introduce new staff (eg Technical Development Coach)
- Video analysis of players and coaches
- Skills DVD's
- Players record / assessment books
- Players diaries
- Homework programmes (skills & physical)

The Games Programme

Academy Games Programme is overseen by the Premier League

Centre of Excellence Games Programme is overseen by The Football League

The respective games programmes include clubs from both leagues but each league monitors their member clubs and share any poor practice / compliance issues raised by these monitoring visits.

The Football League arrange fixtures for the following age groups;

Schoolboy: Under 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

Most clubs, Academy and Centre of Excellence, will run one schoolboy team in all age groups registering about 16 players in each age group. Some clubs run joint age groups in the under 15 / 16 age bands.

Apprentice / Scholars; Under 17 – 19

At school leaving age (under 16 age group) the elite players in that age group will be offered the opportunity to complete a 2-year Apprenticeship with their respective clubs.

There are two distinctive sides to the Apprentice programme, Technical and Education. The technical side is monitored by the Football League's Youth Development system. The Apprentice's education programme is administered and overseen by Football League Education (LFE). Information with regards to LFE can be accessed on the internet.
www.lfe.org.uk

At the end of the two year apprenticeship the successful boys are offered a professional contract, although this may be offered at any time after their seventeenth birthday. In either case they are encouraged to complete their education programme.

Professional Contract

The boys have arrived?????

Or has life only just started?????

The boys are now handed to the Professional game, a game that is seeing CHANGE.

The young players now need to be given the TIME and the OPPORTUNITY to develop in order for the Clubs and National Team to cash-in on the massive investment that has already been made by the professional game.