LOI ACADEMY
GLOBAL FINDINGS REPORT

Presented by:

double pass

LEAGUE OF IRELAND

FOREWORD

The development of young talent is central to any successful and sustainable football ecosystem. In recognition of this, the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the League of Ireland (LOI) have demonstrated a strong commitment to raising the standards of Talent Development by commissioning a comprehensive assessment of all LOI Academies. This strategic initiative aims to build a robust, performance-driven environment where the next generation of Irish footballers can thrive.

Double Pass is proud to have partnered with the FAI and the LOI on this important initiative. Through our structured process, we evaluated Academy operations nationwide, benchmarked performance against international standards, and identified both strengths and areas for development. The result is this Global Findings Report, which consolidates key insights and presents strategic recommendations to guide future progress.

These findings are not merely observations—they are a call to action. If embraced and implemented, the recommendations will contribute to raising Ireland's FIFA ranking, improving the European Club coefficient, and enhancing youth national team performance. Additionally, they are expected to increase the market value of players within the League of Ireland and strengthen the League's overall competitiveness.

We extend our sincere appreciation to all Academy staff, Club representatives, and FAI/LOI stakeholders for their openness and dedication throughout this process. Together, we believe these insights can serve as a foundation for long-term impact, positioning Ireland's Talent Development pathway among the most progressive in Europe.

The Double Pass Team

FOREWORD

The publication of this Global Findings Report marks an important milestone for Irish football. For the first time, we have a clear, independent assessment of our Academy landscape, measured against international standards and best practice. This is not simply an evaluation of where we are today, but the starting point of a journey that can shape the future of our game.

The insights and recommendations within this report provide us with both a challenge and an opportunity. They shine a light on areas where we must improve, while also recognising the strengths and commitment that already exist within our Clubs and Academies. Most importantly, this report represents the beginning of something positive, a shared vision for how we can better support our young players, coaches, and Clubs. By embracing these findings and working collaboratively, we can build an Academy system that gives every young talented player the best chance to succeed, while strengthening the League of Ireland and, ultimately, the international standing of our senior Men's & Women's International Teams.

I would like to thank Minister Patrick O'Donovan, Minister Charlie McConalogue and the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport for their invaluable support and for providing the funding required to complete the audit. I would also like to extend our thanks to Paul McDermott and Nora Stapleton of Sport Ireland, for their assistance and expertise throughout this process. I also wish to acknowledge the team at Double Pass for their professionalism, our colleagues in the LOI Department and the FAI, and, most importantly, the Clubs, staff, and stakeholders who contributed so openly and constructively to this process. Your efforts underline the passion and dedication that drive Irish football forward and in years to come, we hope to look back on this process as the beginning of a bright new, successful era for Irish football.

Will Clarke
LOI Academy Development Manager

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INTRODUCTION
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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project is to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based evaluation of the LOI Academies and to define actionable priorities for the next four years of **Elite Player Development** in Ireland.

1. Assessment & Benchmarking
- Evaluate the current performance of LOI Academies by conducting an independent assessment to establish a baseline of strengths and areas for improvements across all 26 LOI Academies.
- Enable data-driven decision-making beyond empirical observations, providing measurable insights.
- Provide a competitive advantage through international benchmarking.

2. Strategic Alignment & Future Planning
- Define clear Elite Player Development objectives and priorities that align with the FAI's long-term vision.
- Establish long-term evaluation metrics for the next decade to track progress and guide strategy over the next decade.

3. Reporting & Delivery
- Deliver a Club-specific "Findings Report" for each Academy audited, outlining key strengths and targeted recommendations.
- Deliver a "Global Findings Report" to the FAI, offering a holistic view of the Irish Talent Development Landscape.

INTRODUCTION

SCOPE OF WORK

The scope of work encompasses the following activities:

1. **Standards and Criteria Development**
   - Collaborate with the FAI's League of Ireland Department to refine and finalise the standards and assessment criteria to be applied across all LOI Academies.

2. **Independent Assessment and Benchmarking**
   - Conduct independent assessments of all 26 LOI Academies.
   - Benchmark findings against comparable Academies and Academy systems across Europe.
   - Identify and document areas requiring improvement.

3. **Reporting and Presentation of Findings**
   - Deliver a detailed "Findings Report" to each audited Academy.
   - Present an overall consolidated LOI Academy "Global Findings Report" to the FAI.
   - Present findings and recommendations to all relevant stakeholders.

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DOUBLE PASS CLUB MODEL

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DOUBLE PASS CLUB MODEL

SCIENTIFICALLY BASED AND PRACTICALLY PROVEN

Our methodology is built on 20+ years of experience, the integration of global best practices, and has a solid scientific foundation: **THE DOUBLE PASS CLUB MODEL** functioned as the main conduit in the Project with the League of Ireland (LOI).

The Double Pass Club Model identifies the **Critical Success Factors** (CSFs) essential for an effective Talent Development System, alongside **Key Performance Indicators** (KPIs) used to measure the productivity and efficiency of a Youth Academy. It examines both management and football-related processes, on and off the pitch, through multiple perspectives.

What makes the Model unique is its **combination of scientific research and real-world application**. The methodology applies a **triangulation of diverse data sources**, including documentation and data analysis, standardised interviews, surveys, tagging of training sessions, and coach behaviour assessments. These inputs are processed through **proprietary algorithms**, enabling the delivery of robust international benchmarks across all levels.

The Model's scope is comprehensive, covering every element from financial and strategic planning to on-field practice. For each assessment, these dimensions are **operationalised through standards and criteria**, ensuring a deep and precise evaluation of Academy operations and outcomes.
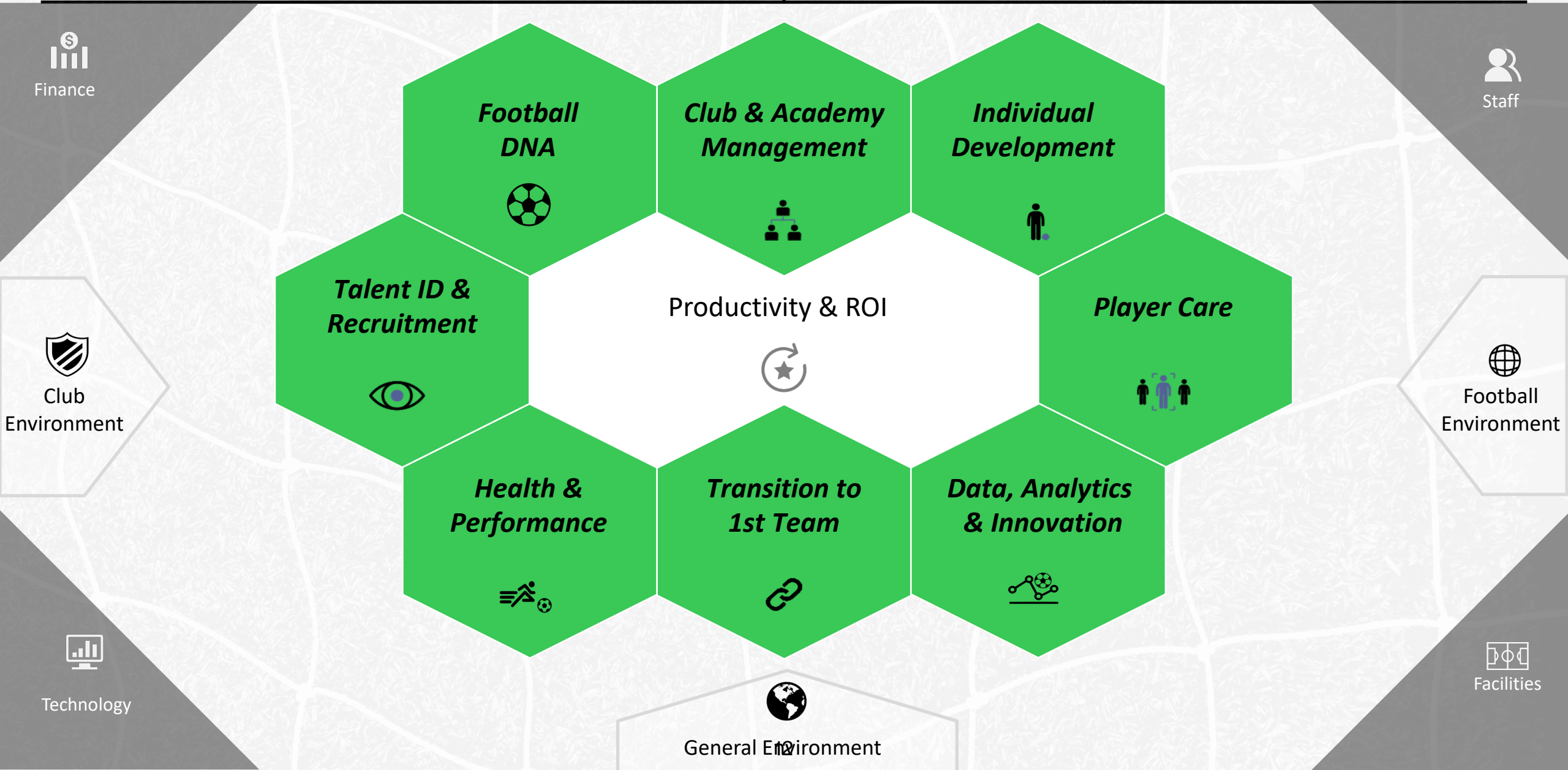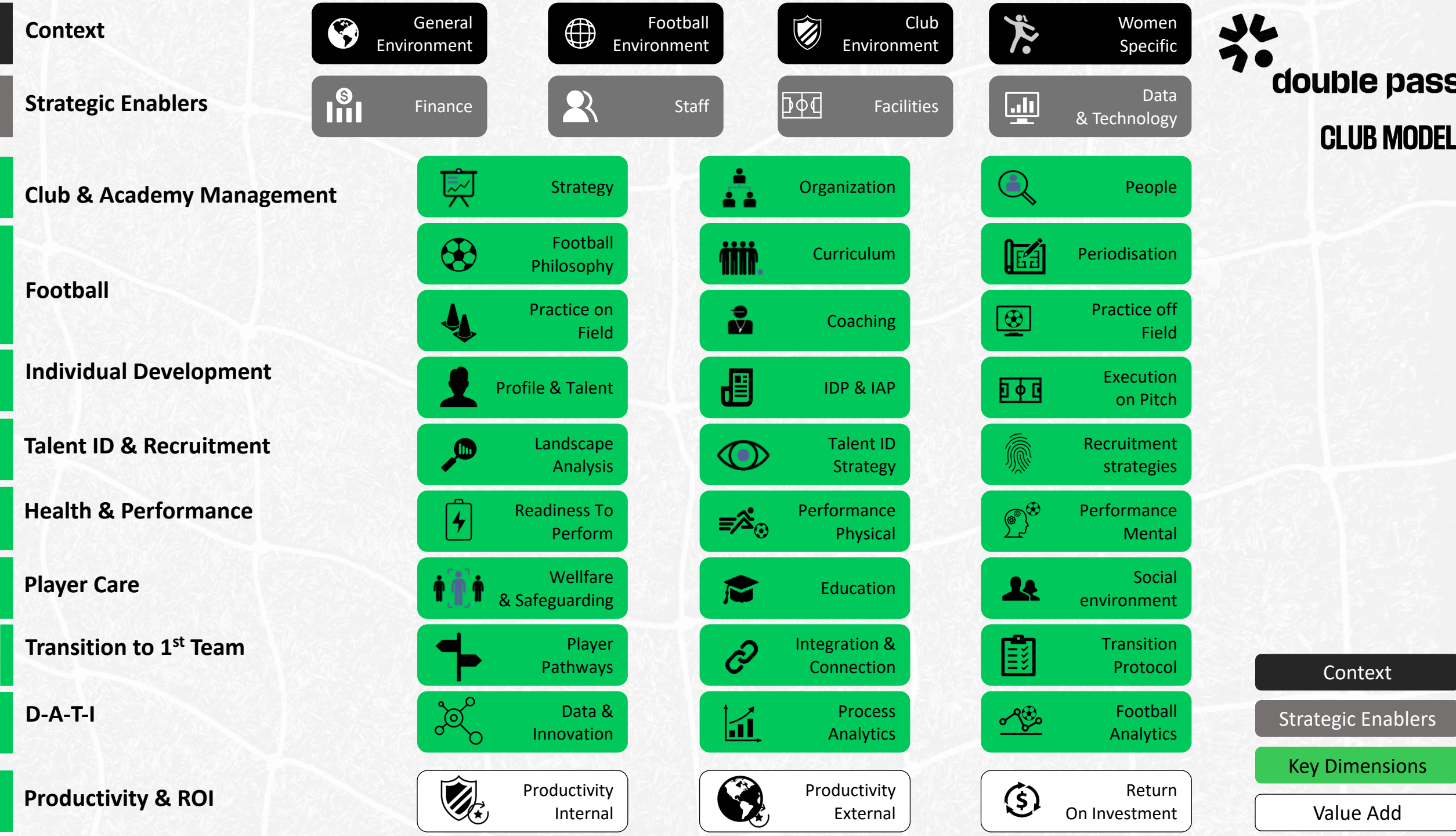
METHODOLOGY & APPROACH

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METHODOLOGY & APPROACH

COSTUMIZATION OF CLUB MODEL

The Double Pass Club Model has been **carefully redefined and adapted** to reflect the specific dynamics of Irish football, developed in close collaboration between the League of Ireland (LOI) and Double Pass. This joint effort has resulted in a **comprehensive and context-specific Assessment Model** designed to capture the realities, challenges, and opportunities unique to Irish Academies. The model is not only built on international best practices, but also incorporates the cultural, structural, and operational nuances of the Irish football landscape, ensuring that the assessment process delivers relevant, actionable insights for sustainable Elite Player Development.

The key Areas of Focus are:

| STRATEGIC ENABLERS | MANAGEMENT | FOOTBALL | SUPPORT | PRODUCTIVITY |

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METHODOLOGY & APPROACH

STRUCTURED AND MULTI-FACETED PROCESS

1 ANALYSIS	**2** INTERVIEWS	**3** ON-SITE VISITS	**4** THEORY INTO PRACTICE	**5** REPORTING
Documentation Analysis	Centralised Interviews	Facility Check	Self-Check Transition	Individual Club Reports
Data Analysis	Decentralised Interviews	Cross-Check Findings	Style of Play Analysis	Global Findings Report
			Coaching Intelligence	

PRODUCTIVITY CALCULATION: TALENT DEVELOPMENT INDEX

BENCHMARKING & INSIGHTS

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BENCHMARKING & INSIGHTS

INTRODUCTION

This section of the report presents a benchmarking analysis of League of Ireland (LOI) Academies against international standards. The data was sourced directly from Club-submitted files (Club ID). Insights reflect each Academy's self-reported structure and operations.

The comparison includes both **male and female** pathways and is structured across three tiers:
- **LOI Academy Average:** Aggregated data from all participating Academies.
- **Top 3 LOI Academies:** Academies with the highest number of YNT selections over the past 2,5 year (Bohemians, Shamrock Rovers, and St Patrick's Athletic)
- **International Double Pass Benchmarks:** Average results from the best-performing Academies according to Double Pass standards in nations ranked 1–20, 21–50, and 51–100 by FIFA.

To interpret the data:
- Each metric is presented as an average within its group.
- Comparisons are made across equivalent categories to highlight relative strengths and gaps.
- International benchmarking age groups: U6–U11, U12–U15, and U16–U21 are followed to ensure consistency and comparability.

This layered approach supports a clearer understanding of how LOI Academies perform globally and helps identify opportunities for strategic development.

NUMBER OF TEAMS

COMPARING LOI PLAYER PATHWAYS AND TEAM PROVISION WITH INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKS

Teams

Number of teams by age group and performance tier

Age	AVG LOI-FAI		TOP LOI-FAI		FIFA TOP 1-20		FIFA TOP 21-50		FIFA TOP 51-100	
	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀
U9	0.2	-	1.0	-	2.1	-	2.5	-	2.3	-
U10	0.2	-	1.0	-	2.0	-	2.1	-	2.0	-
U11	0.3	-	1.0	-	1.9	-	1.8	-	2.2	-
U12	0.2	0.1	0.7	-	1.8	2.9	1.9	2.4	2.1	1.5
U13	0.4	0.2	1.0	-	1.5	2.6	1.5	1.8	1.8	1.5
U14	1.0	0.1	1.0	-	1.4	2.4	1.9	2.2	1.7	1.3
U15	1.0	0.1	1.0	-	1.3	1.9	1.4	1.7	1.6	1.2
U16	-	-	-	-	1.2	-	1.4	-	1.5	-
U17	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.8	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.1
U19	-	1.0	-	1.0	1.1	2.1	1.4	1.3	1.1	1.2
U20	0.9	-	1.0	-	1.1	-	1.3	-	1.3	-

LOI Academies have a narrower player base than International benchmarks
Across all ages, LOI field fewer teams per Club, limiting opportunities for participation and progression.

Female Player Pathway is underdeveloped
Absence of female teams before U12 and low numbers thereafter show a significant structural gap compared to International standards.

Male pathway is consistently below global benchmarks
Even in the U12–U15, LOI male team numbers trail International top-tier averages.

Early engagement and inclusivity need priority
Addressing the low early-age participation, especially for girls, would help build a stronger, more sustainable talent pipeline.

PLAYER – COACH RATIO

ASSESSING COACHING COVERAGE IN LOI VS. GLOBAL NORMS

Player/Coach Ratio

Player/Coach ratios across age groups comparing LOI-FAI averages and FIFA world-ranking tiers

Age	LOI AVG		LOI TOP 3		FIFA TOP 1-20		FIFA TOP 21-50		FIFA TOP 51-100	
	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀
U9	5.8	-	5.8	-	9.4	-	11.2	-	12.6	-
U10	6.3	-	6.5	-	9.6	-	10.7	-	13.2	-
U11	6.7	-	6.3	-	10.3	-	10.5	-	13.0	-
U12	6.7	7.0	5.8	-	11.0	10.8	11.7	10.8	13.1	10.9
U13	7.0	7.0	5.0	-	11.4	9.8	12.4	11.4	14.4	11.2
U14	5.6	8.0	6.0	-	11.2	10.9	13.1	10.7	13.8	12.7
U15	5.9	9.0	7.0	-	11.9	10.5	13.8	11.0	14.4	12.0
U16	-	-	-	-	11.1	-	12.9	-	12.1	-
U17	6.3	9.6	7.6	-	12.2	7.2	12.2	5.9	10.9	10.9
U19	-	7.4	-	-	11.1	10.6	12.7	9.7	13.3	13.0
U20	5.9	-	6.0	-	11.1	-	12.7	-	13.3	-

LOI Academies report significantly lower player-to-coach ratios than International benchmarks across all ages and both genders - often nearly half the International levels.

Volunteer-heavy staffing likely explains much of this difference; while it increases the number of coaches on paper, these may not all be delivering structured sessions at the same standard or frequency as professional staff.

The numbers on paper may not reflect the daily operational reality on the pitch - actual session ratios could be higher if volunteers are not present at every training session or match.

Female pathway ratios follow a similar pattern where reported, but early-age data is missing, reflecting the limited female participation at younger ages.

International benchmarks indicate larger squads per coach, suggesting different coaching models, possibly with higher coach qualifications and a more centralised training structure.
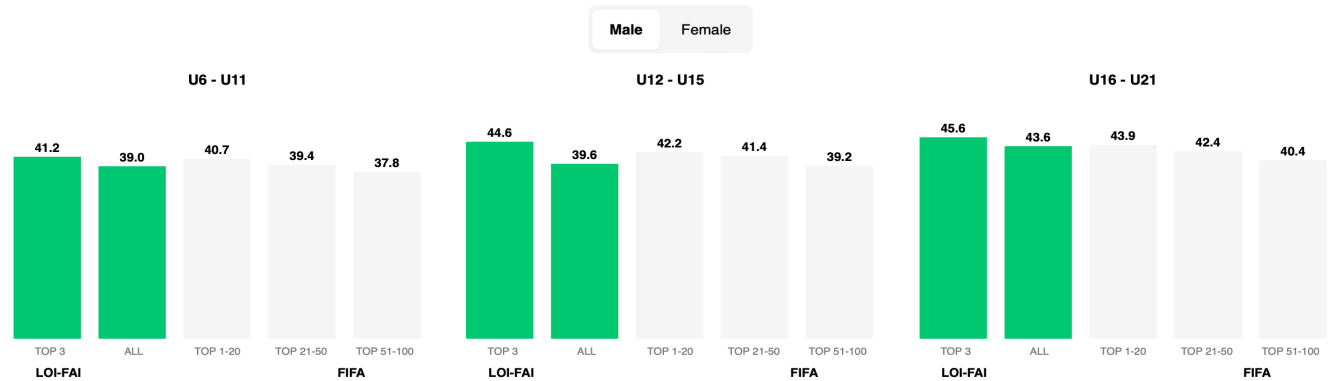
NUMBER OF TRAINING WEEKS

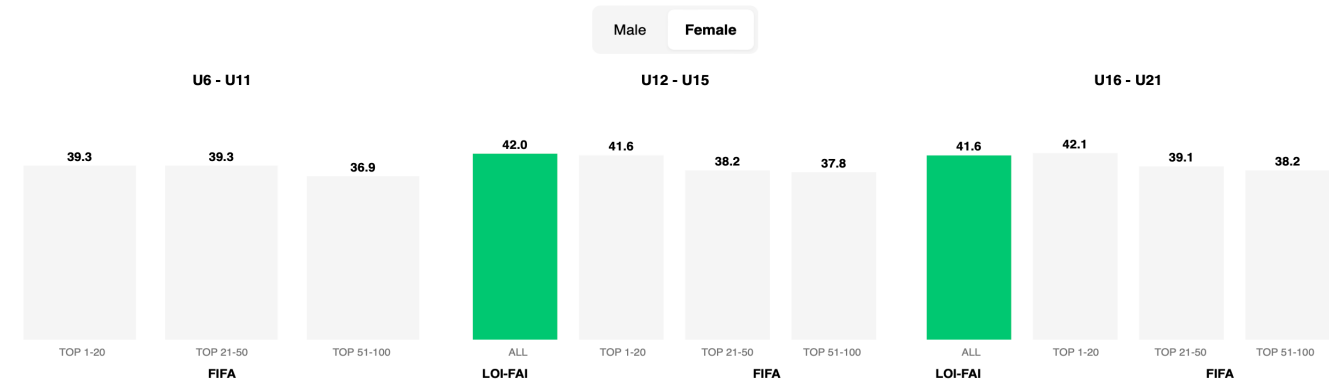## *COMPARING LOI ANNUAL TRAINING CALENDAR TO INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS*

Training Weeks Per Year

Annual count of training weeks shown for three age brackets (U6-U11, U12-U15, U16-U21) across LOI-FAI and FIFA benchmark groups.

[**Male** | Female]

Training Weeks Per Year

Annual count of training weeks shown for three age brackets (U6-U11, U12-U15, U16-U21) across LOI-FAI and FIFA benchmark groups.

[Male | **Female**]

LOI Academies maintain a high number of training weeks per year across all age groups, often matching or exceeding International benchmarks.

For males*, LOI averages range from **39.0–45.6 weeks**, which is on par with or slightly above International standards of **37.8–43.9 weeks**.
*(5 LOI Clubs have an U11 team; 3 of them also integrate U8-U10 of which 1 Club starts as young as U6.)

For females, LOI also equals or outperforms International benchmarks in all age categories, with a narrow range of **41.6–42.0 weeks** compared to International's **36.9–42.1 weeks**.

This consistency suggests strong year-round programme continuity in LOI Academies for both genders, providing comparable or greater training availability than in benchmark nations.
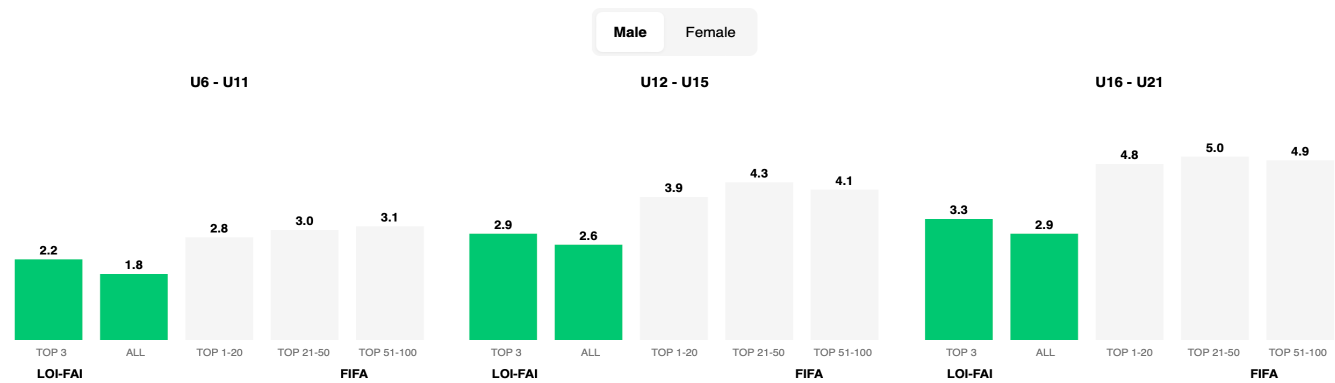
NUMBER OF TRAINING SESSIONS

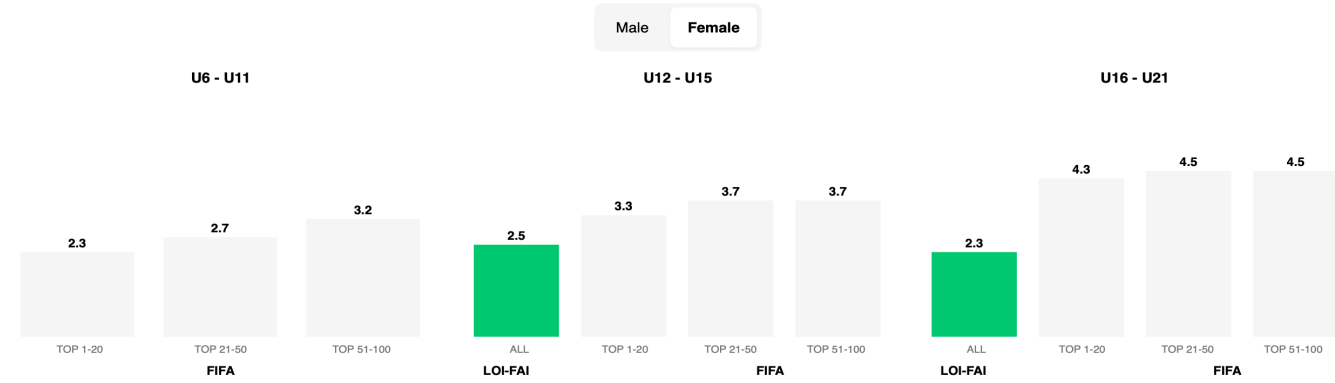## REVIEWS WEEKLY TRAINING PROVISION AGAINST INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKS

Training Sessions Per Week

Average number of weekly training sessions plotted for the same three age brackets and benchmark groups.

Training Sessions Per Week

Average number of weekly training sessions plotted for the same three age brackets and benchmark groups.

LOI Academies show consistent training frequency across age groups for both males and females, indicating a stable approach to weekly planning.

For males in U6–U11*, LOI training volumes are slightly below International benchmarks but remain in a comparable range (No data available for females in this age group).
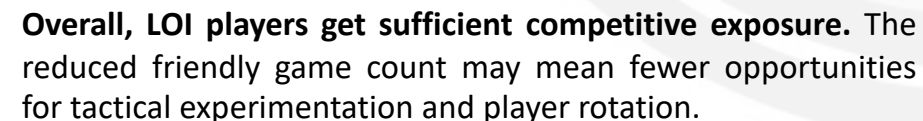*(5 LOI Clubs have an U11 team; 3 of them also integrate U8-U10 of which 1 Club starts as young as U6.)*

From U12 onward, the gap with International benchmarks grows, especially in the older age groups. By U16–U21, other nations average around 5 sessions per week compared to 3.3 for LOI males and 2.3 for LOI females.

While the **Foundation Phase (U6-U11),** operated by a small number of Clubs, is reasonably aligned with International norms, the **Youth Development and Professional Development Phase** in LOI train at a lower weekly frequency, which limits long-term player development.

NUMBER OF GAMES

COMPARING MATCH VOLUMES, COMPETITIVE AND FRIENDLY, WITH INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

Games Per Season
Solid fill for Competitive, diagonal-hatched pattern for Friendly games

Male | Female

U6 - U11

	TOP 3	ALL	TOP 1-20	TOP 21-50	TOP 51-100
	25.0	22.1	23.6	15.4	14.5
	9.0	9.7	15.3	19.5	10.9
	LOI-FAI			**FIFA**	

U12 - U15

	TOP 3	ALL	TOP 1-20	TOP 21-50	TOP 51-100
	26.0	22.7	28.5	24.3	20.5
	9.0	8.9	15.6	14.9	12.6
	LOI-FAI			**FIFA**	

U16 - U21

	TOP 3	ALL	TOP 1-20	TOP 21-50	TOP 51-100
	30.0	29.6	30.8	27.2	24.0
	7.0	6.3	12.9	14.6	12.6
	LOI-FAI			**FIFA**	

Games Per Season
Solid fill for Competitive, diagonal-hatched pattern for Friendly games

Male | **Female**

U6 - U11

	TOP 1-20	TOP 21-50	TOP 51-100
	18.7	16.5	15.8
	10.9	12.4	9.2
		FIFA	

U12 - U15

	ALL	TOP 1-20	TOP 21-50	TOP 51-100
	28.0	21.9	19.2	21.1
	8.0	11.5	8.7	11.0
	LOI-FAI		**FIFA**	

U16 - U21

	ALL	TOP 1-20	TOP 21-50	TOP 51-100
	28.2	24.1	20.9	26.6
	7.4	11.9	8.3	14.4
	LOI-FAI		**FIFA**	

LOI Academies generally play a similar number of competitive games per season compared to international benchmarks across all age groups for both genders.

For males, LOI competitive games range from 22.1–30.0 per season, compared to the 20.5–30.8 range on International level. In most age categories, LOI is slightly ahead or levels with International averages.

For females, LOI competitive games (all Clubs) range from 28.0 in U12–U15 to 28.2 in U16–U21, exceeding the International benchmark of 19.2–26.6. (No Top 3 data available for LOI females.)

Friendly games are less frequent in LOI than in International benchmarks, with LOI Clubs averaging 6–10 friendlies per season, potentially limiting varied match experiences.

Overall, LOI players get sufficient competitive exposure. The reduced friendly game count may mean fewer opportunities for tactical experimentation and player rotation.
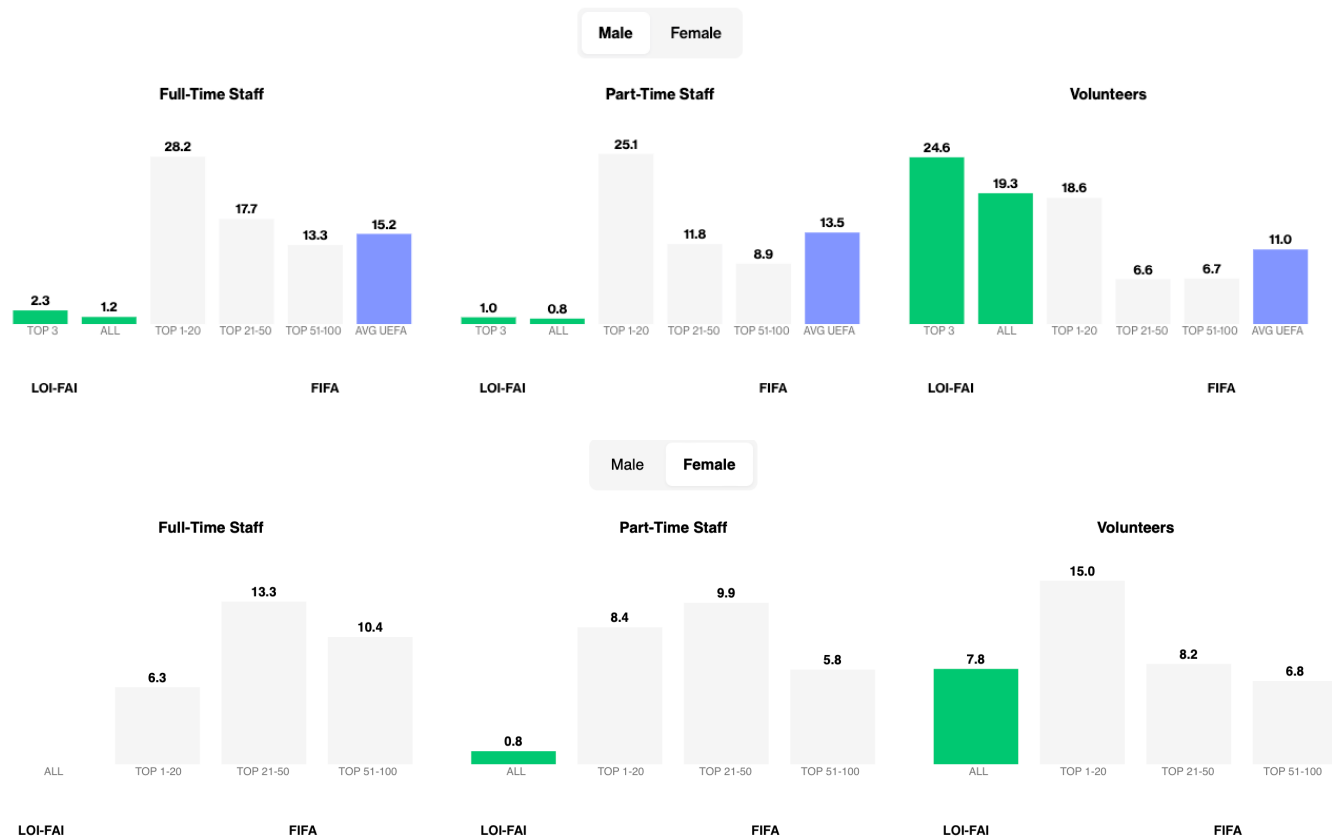
STAFF

ASSESSING LOI ACADEMY STAFFING VERSUS INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE / TOTAL

Staff: Total

LOI-FAI categories (TOP 3, ALL), FIFA categories (TOP 1-20, TOP 21-50, TOP 51-100, AVG UEFA)

LOI Academies report significantly **lower total staffing levels** than international benchmarks. On average, LOI Academies (boys) have 1.2 full-time and 0.8 part-time staff per Academy, with the top 3 slightly higher at 2.3 full-time and 1.0 part-time. In contrast, international benchmarks show much higher figures.

Particularly for staffing in girls' Academies: FIFA top 1–20 Academies report 6.3 full-time and 8.4 part-time staff, while LOI Academies report 0.8 part-time staff on average.

Volunteer reliance is also notable. LOI top 3 Academies report 24.6 volunteers, compared to 11.0 in UEFA averages and 18.6 in FIFA top 1–20 Academies.

These figures suggest that LOI Academies operate with **lean professional staffing and rely heavily on volunteer support**, which may limit capacity for consistent delivery and long-term development planning. Scaling up professional staffing would help align LOI Academies with international standards and support more sustainable operations.

STAFF

ASSESSING LOI ACADEMY STAFFING VERSUS INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE / CORRECTED

Staff: Corrected

Staff to team ratios across benchmark categories

LOI Academies report **low staffing levels** compared to international benchmarks, especially when adjusted for team structures. Most Clubs operate four boys teams and two girls teams, with just one Club starting girls at U12.

Staffing figures should be read per team group: per four teams for boys, and per two for girls. The top 3 LOI Academies show lower per-team staffing, as two of them run more than four boys teams, stretching their staff across a wider base.

This highlights the **need for scaled staffing** as team numbers grow, both in the male and the female pathway, to match international standards and ensure consistent support.

STAFF

ASSESSING LOI ACADEMY STAFFING VERSUS INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE / STAFF STRUCTURE

Staff Structure

Staff Structure Benchmarks: LOI-FAI vs FIFA World-Ranking Tiers
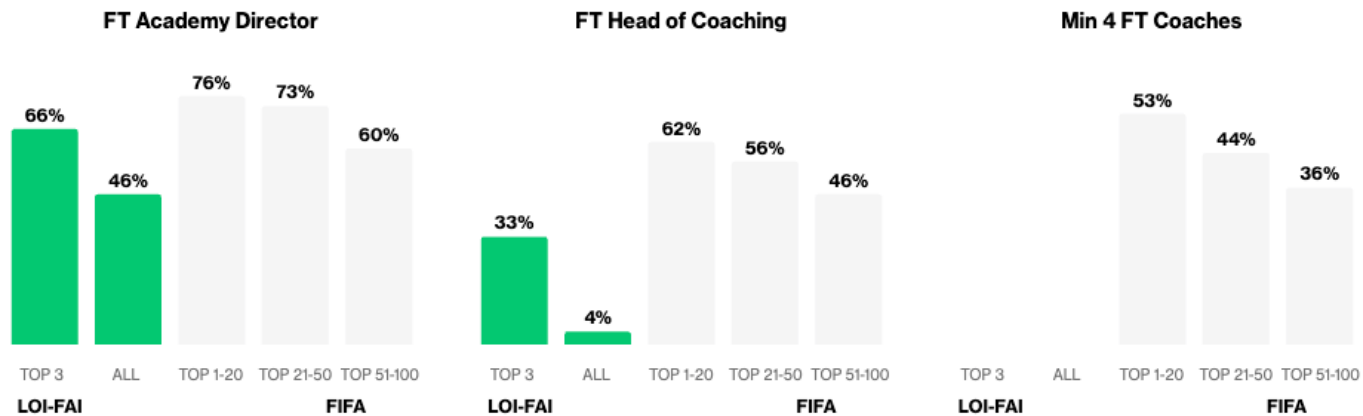
FT Academy Director — TOP 3: 66%, ALL: 46%, TOP 1-20: 76%, TOP 21-50: 73%, TOP 51-100: 60% (LOI-FAI / FIFA)

FT Head of Coaching — TOP 3: 33%, ALL: 4%, TOP 1-20: 62%, TOP 21-50: 56%, TOP 51-100: 46% (LOI-FAI / FIFA)

Min 4 FT Coaches — TOP 3: (none), ALL: (none), TOP 1-20: 53%, TOP 21-50: 44%, TOP 51-100: 36% (LOI-FAI / FIFA)

LOI Academies report significantly **lower total staffing levels** than international benchmarks.

While in two out of three LOI top 3 Academies there is a **full-time Academy Director** appointed, the average drops to 46% of LOI Academies with a full-time Academy Director.

The **full-time role Head of Coaching** is established in 62% of FIFA top 1-20 Academies and in 56% of FIFA top 21-50 Academies, while only one LOI top 3 Academy has the role in place.

None of the LOI Academies currently has four **full-time coaches** in place.

FACILITIES

EVALUATING LOI INFRASTRUCTURE AGAINST INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKS

Facilities

Facilities Benchmarks: LOI-FAI vs FIFA World-Ranking Tiers

Centralised Training Centre

	TOP 3	ALL	TOP 1-20	TOP 21-50	TOP 51-100
	100%	58%	86%	72%	78%
	LOI-FAI			FIFA	

Min. 2 Pitches for Academy

	TOP 3	ALL	TOP 1-20	TOP 21-50	TOP 51-100
	66%	77%	76%	79%	62%
	LOI-FAI			FIFA	

Indoor Facilities

	TOP 3	ALL	TOP 1-20	TOP 21-50	TOP 51-100
	33%	23%	81%	70%	61%
	LOI-FAI			FIFA	

Workspace for Academy Mgmt

	TOP 3	ALL	TOP 1-20	TOP 21-50	TOP 51-100
	66%	42%	72%	65%	66%
	LOI-FAI			FIFA	

LOI Academies lag behind International benchmarks in several key facility areas.

Centralised training centres are available at all LOI Top 3 Clubs (100%) but only 58% across all LOI Academies, well below International Top 1–20 nations (86%).

Minimum two-pitch provision is broadly in line with International averages (77% LOI vs 76–79% International). It needs to be mentioned that not at every Club the Academy has the priority use over all pitches.

Indoor facilities are a major gap—only 23% of LOI Academies have them compared to 61–81% in International benchmarks, limiting year-round training options.

Workspace for Academy management is present at just 42% of LOI Academies, compared to 65–72% in other nations, affecting operational capacity.

Overall, LOI infrastructure is trailing global standards and in need of strategic facility investment.

STRATEGY

SHARED VISION REGARDING TALENT DEVELOPMENT
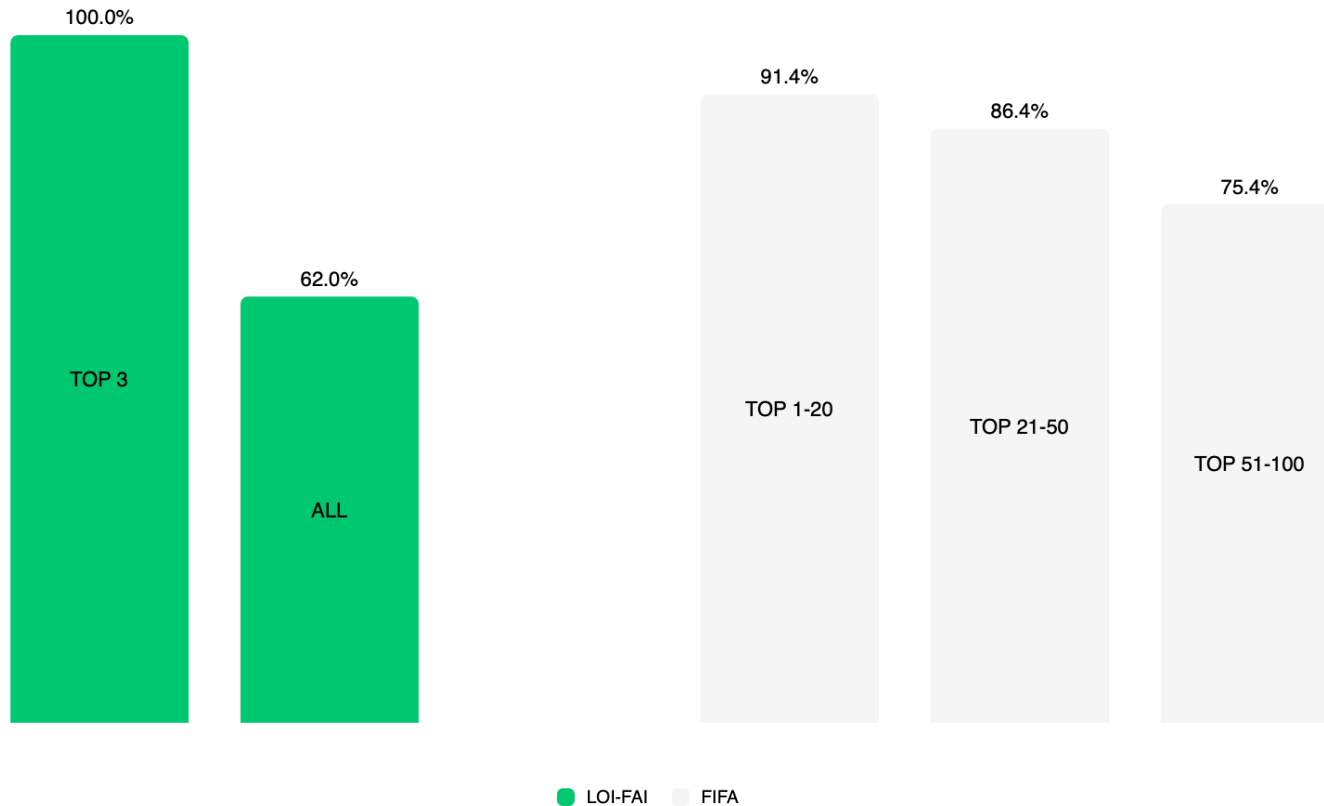
LOI Top 3 Clubs all report having a fully shared vision across their Academy structure (100%), which exceeds the International Top 1–20 benchmark (91.4%).

Across all LOI Academies, the figure **drops to 62%,** significantly below International averages (75.4–91.4%), showing inconsistency in strategic alignment across the League.

This suggests that while the leading LOI Academies operate with strategic clarity regarding the role of Talent Development, many others still **lack a fully embedded shared vision**, limiting cohesion in long-term player development.

LOI-FAI · FIFA

ORGANISATION

ACADEMY MANAGEMENT REPRESENTED IN THE TECHNICAL BOARD

41.4%
42.0%

33.8%

TOP 1-20
TOP 21-50

TOP 51-100

12.0%

ALL

0.0%
TOP 3

● LOI-FAI ○ FIFA
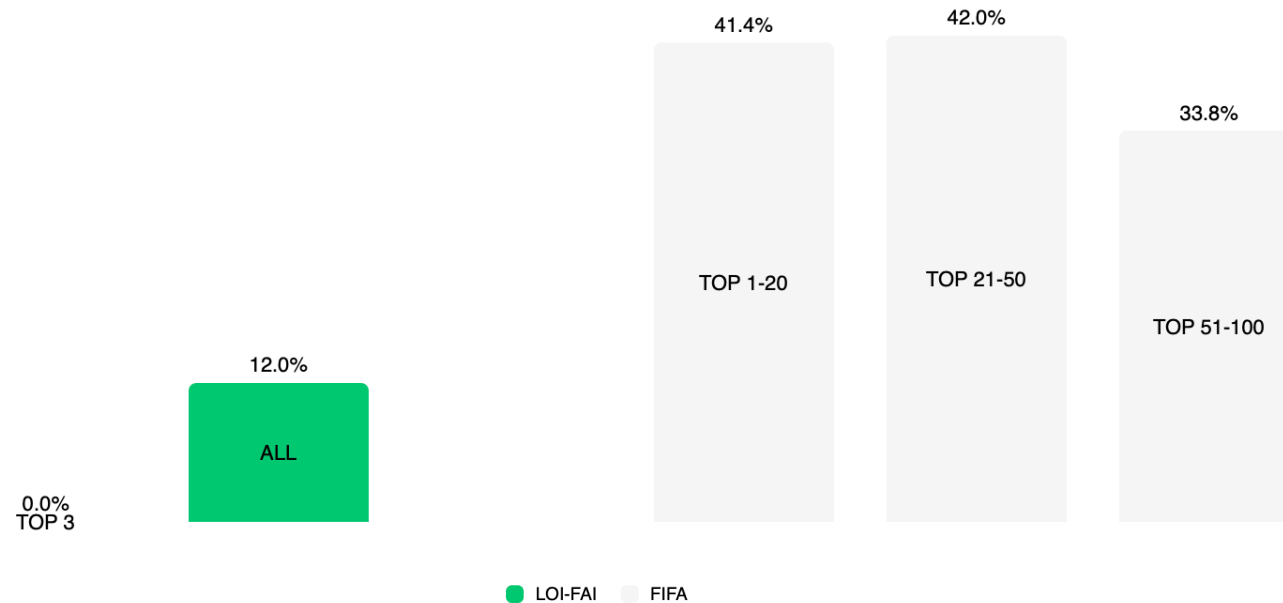
Academy representation in the Club Technical Board is very limited in LOI Clubs—0% for the Top 3 and only 12% across all Clubs.
This is well below international benchmarks, where representation ranges from 33.8% (Top 51–100) to 41–42% (Top 1–20 and Top 21–50).

A contributing factor is that **many LOI Clubs currently do not operate a formal technical board**, meaning Academy perspectives are often absent from high-level football decision-making structures.

The lack of formal representation risks weakening the link between long-term player development and senior football strategy.

FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHY

STYLE OF PLAY OF THE CLUB

33.0%

TOP 3

31.0%

ALL

63.8%

TOP 1-20

49.4%

TOP 21-50

40.0%

TOP 51-100

● LOI-FAI   ○ FIFA
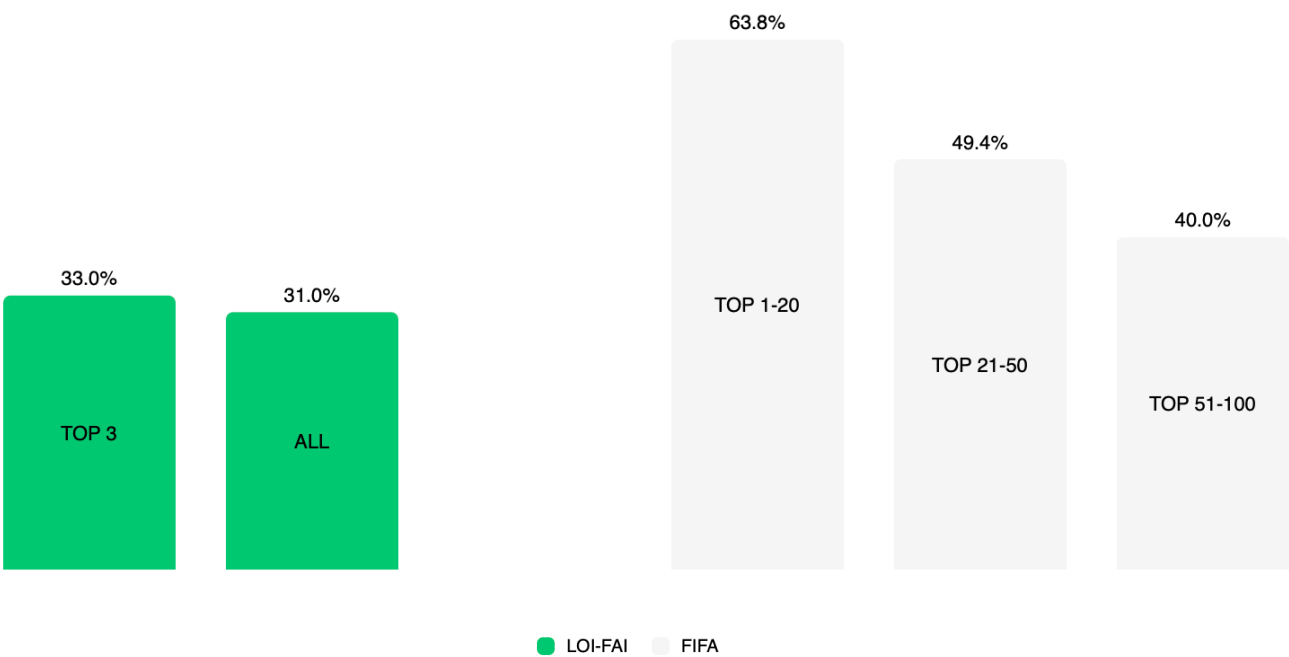
Only around one-third of LOI Academies have a clearly defined Club style of play—33% for the Top 3 and 31% across all Clubs.

This is well below International benchmarks, where 40–64% of Clubs have a documented and shared style of play, with the highest rate in the Top 1–20 nations (63.8%).

A clearly defined style of play is essential for aligning Academy development with first-team football, ensuring consistency in player profiles, tactical understanding, and long-term Club identity.

The current gap means that many LOI Clubs risk developing players without a clear tactical framework, potentially **weakening the transition to senior football.**

TEAM DEVELOPMENT

STRUCTURED CURRICULUM PER PHASE
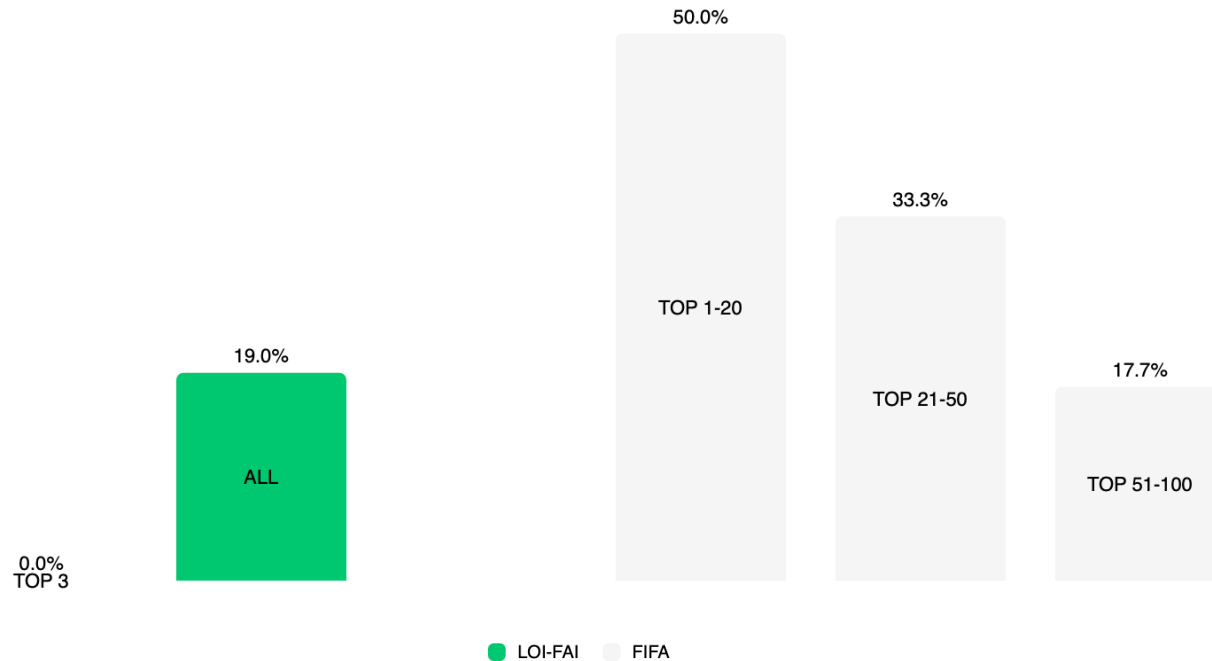
Only 19% of LOI Academies have a structured curriculum for each development phase, with 0% of the Top 3 reporting one in place.

Internationally, the prevalence is notably higher—50% in the Top 1–20 nations and 33% in the Top 21–50, even in the lower-ranked group (17.7%) it is comparable to LOI's overall figure.

The absence of a structured curriculum in most LOI Academies suggests a lack of formalised, phase-specific planning, which can lead to **inconsistent player development** experiences and gaps in skill progression.

Implementing a curriculum for each phase is critical to ensure continuity, age-appropriate coaching, and alignment between Academy stages, ultimately improving the transition to senior football.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

100.0%
TOP 3

69.0%
ALL

31.0%
TOP 1-20

12.3%
TOP 21-50

9.2%
TOP 51-100

● LOI-FAI ▢ FIFA
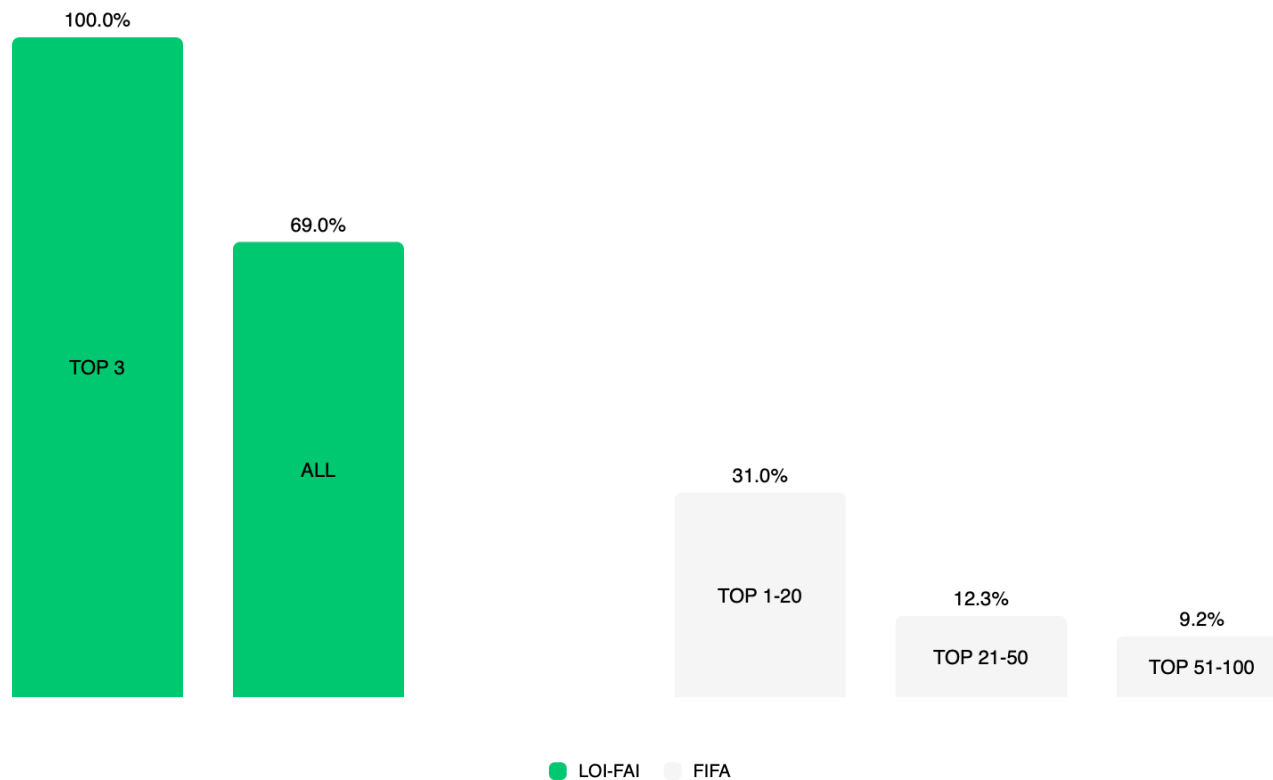
LOI Academies perform strongly in the use of Individual Development Plans, with 100% of Top 3 Clubs and 69% across all Clubs implementing them.

This is **substantially higher than international figures**, where usage ranges from 9.2% in the Top 51–100 nations to 31% in the Top 1–20.

The widespread use of IDPs in LOI indicates a strong commitment to personalised player development, enabling tailored objectives and monitoring to support each player's growth.

However, the gap between the LOI top performers and the overall average suggests that IDPs are **not yet a consistent feature across the LOI system.**

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

70.7%
TOP 1-20

75.3%
TOP 21-50

60.8%
TOP 51-100

27.0%
ALL

0.0%
TOP 3

● LOI-FAI   ○ FIFA
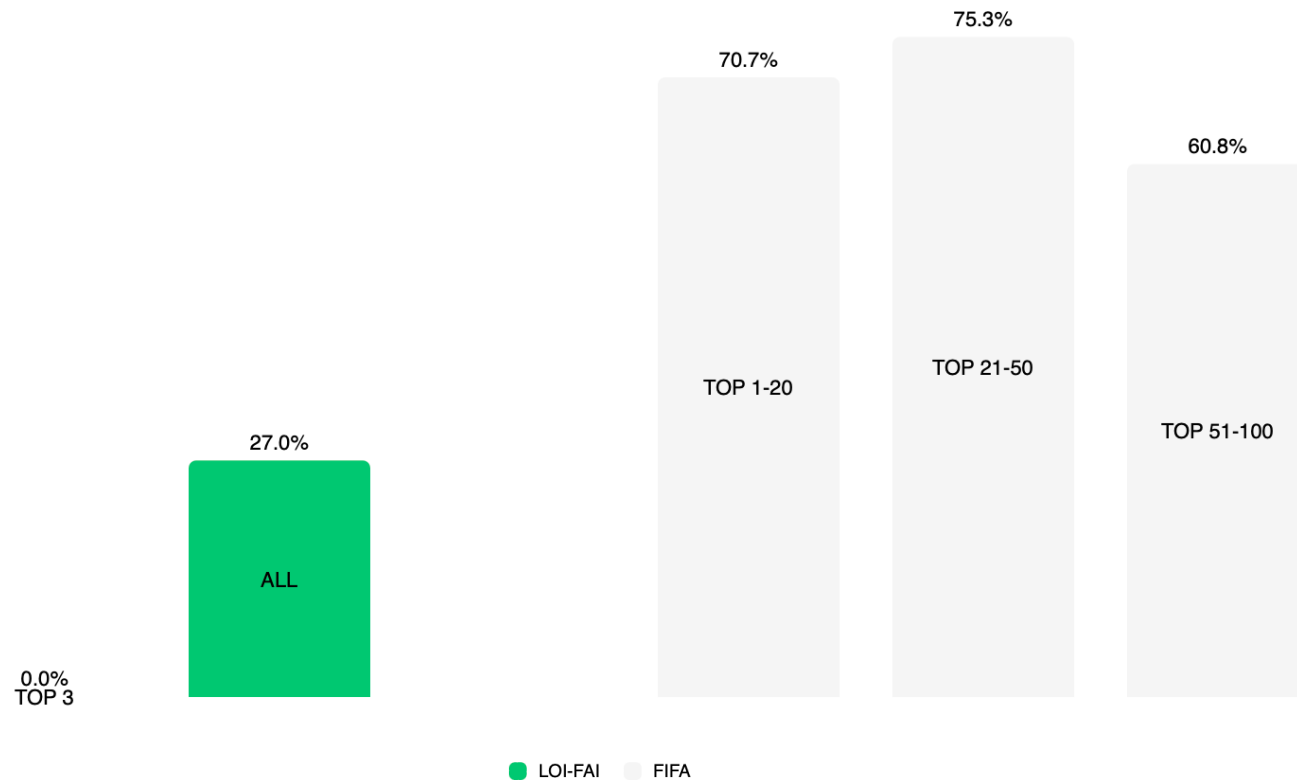
While 69% of LOI Academies report having Individual Development Plans in place (and 100% of the Top 3), **only 27% of Clubs effectively implement them** on the pitch.

This **gap between theory and practice** contrasts sharply with international standards, where IAP implementation rates are significantly higher—60.8%–75.3% across ranking tiers.

The **absence of Individual Action Plans (IAPs) in the LOI Top 3 (0%)** suggests that even at the highest-performing Academies, IDPs are often not fully translated into structured, actionable steps during training and match environments.

Without consistent IAP delivery, IDPs risk becoming administrative documents rather than active tools for player development, limiting their real-world impact on performance and progression.

TALENT IDENTIFICATION & RECRUITMENT

STRATEGY FOR TALENT IDENTIFICATION & RECRUITMENT
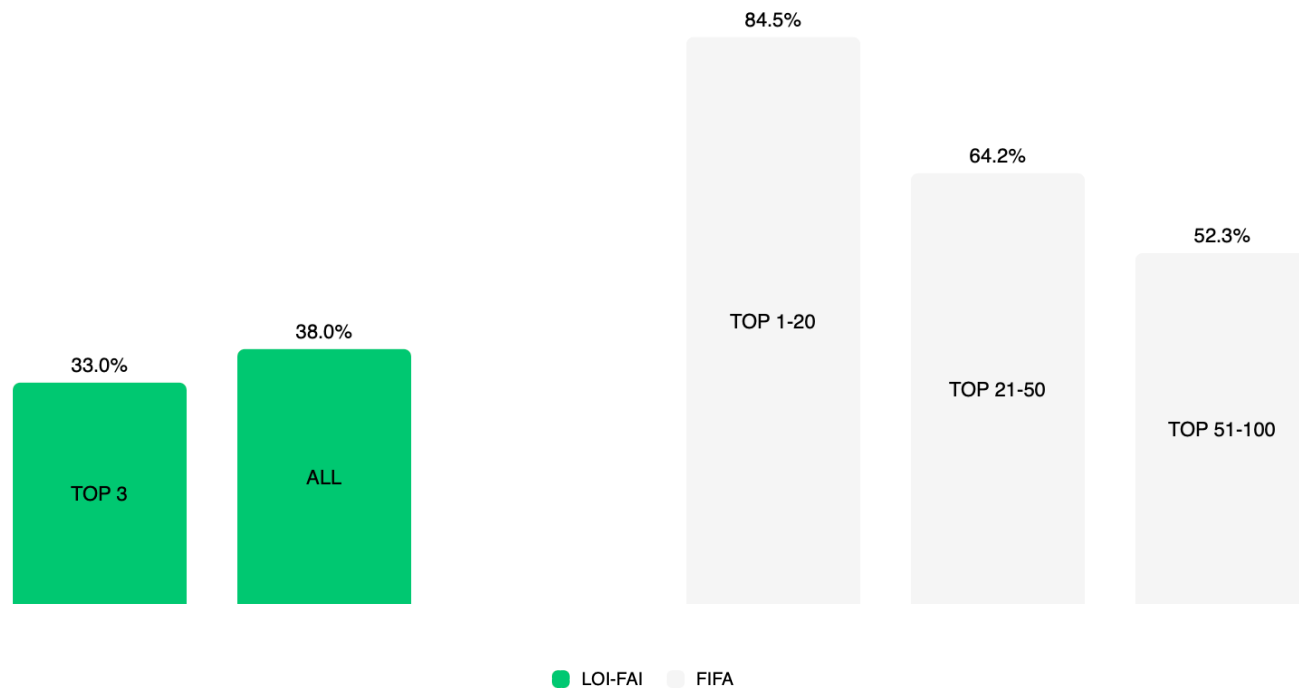
Only 38% of LOI Academies have a defined strategy for talent identification and recruitment, with the Top 3 Clubs slightly lower at 33%.

This is **significantly below international levels**, where adoption ranges from 52.3% in the Top 51–100 nations to 84.5% in the Top 1–20.

The gap suggests that many LOI Academies operate without a fully structured, long-term recruitment framework, which may limit their ability to consistently attract and retain top local and regional talent.

Strengthening strategic planning in this area could improve scouting efficiency, expand reach, and create a more sustainable player pipeline in line with leading international practices.

84.5%
TOP 1-20

64.2%
TOP 21-50

52.3%
TOP 51-100

33.0%
TOP 3

38.0%
ALL

● LOI-FAI   FIFA

PLAYER CARE

LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMES

100.0%

TOP 3

46.0%

ALL

75.9%

TOP 1-20

72.8%

TOP 21-50

53.8%

TOP 51-100

● LOI-FAI　　○ FIFA
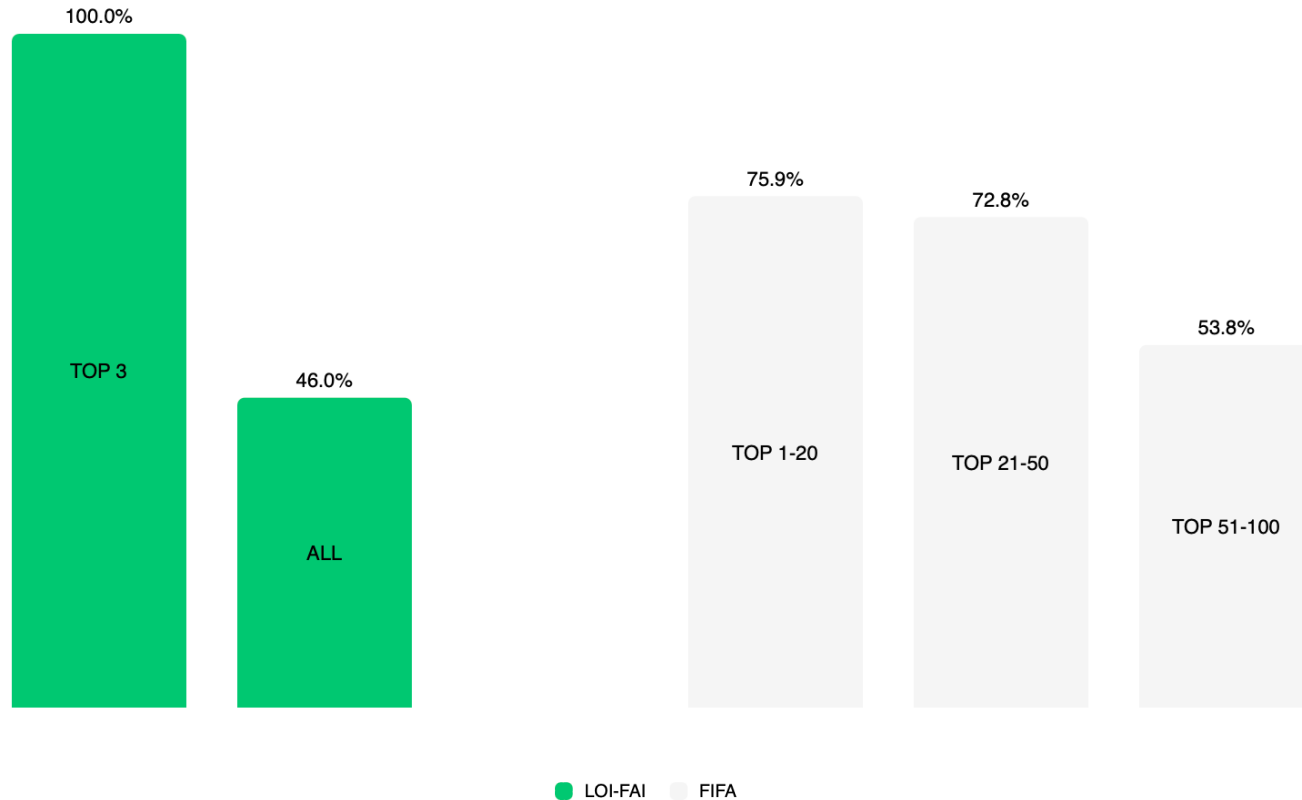
While **100% of the Top 3 LOI Academies** integrate life skills into their programmes, the figure **drops to 46% across all LOI Clubs.**

This is notably **below international levels**, where implementation ranges from 53.8% in the Top 51–100 to 75.9% among the Top 1–20.

The high commitment from the leading LOI Academies demonstrates that life skills provision is achievable, but the limited uptake elsewhere suggests a lack of standardised integration across the League.

Expanding life skills education—covering areas such as personal development, career planning, and mental well-being—would align more Clubs with international norms and help prepare players for life both inside and outside football.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

double pass

AREAS OF FOCUS
BASED ON INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARK AND AUDIT FINDINGS

6

Areas of focus

50

Recommendations

Governance & Regulations

Competitions & Pathways
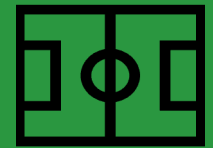
Infrastructure & Digitalisation

Workforce Development

Football Philosophy & Talent ID

Elite Player Development

GOVERNANCE & REGULATIONS

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Further Strengthen Football's Position in a Competitive Sporting Landscape**

   Design and execute targeted strategies to attract and retain talented young players within the League of Ireland.

2. **Clarify Governance Roles Across the Ecosystem**

   Define and communicate clear roles and responsibilities for player development amongst all football stakeholders to reduce fragmentation.

3. **Strengthen Club and Country Collaboration**

   Reinforce structured collaboration mechanisms between the League of Ireland and the FAI to drive alignment on national football development priorities.

4. **Enhance Club Licensing Criteria to Strengthen the Integration of Academy Players**

   Expanding the Club licensing requirements to include specific criteria for youth integration will strengthen the structural commitment to talent development, ensuring a more consistent and supported transition of Academy players into senior squads.

5. **Establish a Quality Assurance System to Classify Academies by Development Standards**

   Install a licensing or certification framework that defines clear performance standards for elite Academies. Use this system to stimulate investment in Talent Development and reward high-performing training environments, while continuing to support emerging Academies.

GOVERNANCE & REGULATIONS

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

6.   **Launch a Benchmarking & Monitoring Mechanism**

Regularly benchmark Academy performance against national and international standards to identify gaps, stimulate accountability, and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

7.   **Supplement Grants with Targeted Support**

Move beyond providing financial grants by offering hands-on technical and operational support to Clubs, tailored to their developmental stage and specific needs.

8.   **Establish Technical Boards Within Clubs**

Support Clubs in setting up Technical Boards that include both Academy and 1st Team representation to align development pathways.

9.   **Create a LOI – Strategic Development Department**

Establish a Strategic Development Department within LOI that will drive long-term growth, innovation, and alignment with organizational objectives.

10.   **Implement a Long-Term Strategic Planning Framework for Academies**

Require each Academy to develop a long-term plan with measurable KPIs linked to player production and Return On Investment.

GOVERNANCE & REGULATIONS
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

11.   Introduce Two-Year Player Registration Periods

Introduce two-year registration terms to reduce the emphasis on recruitment and encourage long-term Player Development.

12.   Review the principle of Domestic Training Compensation

Review the current Compensation Model to ensure that it that recognises and rewards Clubs based on their certified commitment to Talent Development and player progression.

13.   Enable and Regulate Academy Contracts

Empower Clubs to offer formal Academy contracts to youth players. This includes standardised contract templates, parental consent protocols, and alignment with national labour and child protection laws.

COMPETITIONS & PATHWAYS

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

14. **Pathway Design – Full Pathway Control**

Work gradually to holistic pathways within the Academies, ensuring player development from a younger age. Emphasis on the importance of a collaboration network between Academies and grassroots Clubs.

15. **Expand Age Group Inclusion**

Extend the Academy system to include training and development programmes for talented young players from the age of 12 (boys & girls).

16. **Limit Player Drop-out Before MU17**

Establish an MU16 squad in all Academies to create a more complete player pathway.

17. **Advance the Women and Girls' Football Development Pathway**

Ensure there are equal opportunities for talented young female players by implementing an WU15 squad in all Academies for girls.

COMPETITIONS & PATHWAYS
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

18. Diversity in Games Programme

Broaden the variety of opposition, competition formats, and playing environments within the Academy games programme. With an emphasis on the expansion of the cross border games programme and additional development events.

19. Optimise Competition Formats

Standardise national competition formats aligned with certification frameworks, balancing competitiveness and Player Development. Promote a "best vs. best" development model by exposing top talents to competitive and meaningful matches.

20. Investigate the implementation of MU14 in MU15 Games

Implementation of three periods supports minimum playing opportunities per player and accelerates learning and holistic player development.

21. Revise the MU17 and MU20 Competition Format to Prioritise Development

Redesign the structure of the MU17 and MU20 competitions into a developmentally aligned 'best v best' model, replacing geographic splits to provide consistent elite level challenge.

INFRASTRUCTURE & DIGITALISATION
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
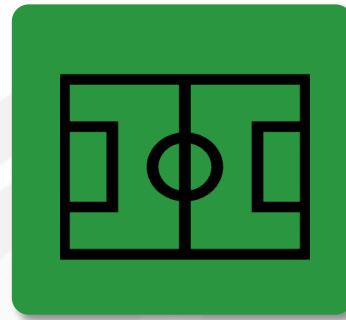
22. **Invest in Training Infrastructure to Close Facility Gaps**

> Prioritise long-term investment in high-quality training facilities across all regions, addressing one of the most significant constraints on both player and Club development.

23. **Facility Quality and Pitch Standards**

> Develop clear standards for match and training facilities, mandating minimum infrastructure requirements to ensure high-quality environments for Talent Development.

24. **Develop Multi-Disciplinary Support Infrastructure**

> Encourage Clubs to invest in full-time access to non-football facilities and expertise — including sports science, medical, performance analysis, and education — to support holistic player development.

INFRASTRUCTURE & DIGITALISATION

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
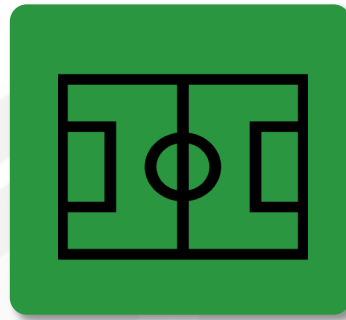
25.   **Create a Centralised Digital Platform for Academies**

Develop a unified national platform that enables all Academies to standardise Player Development curricula, share best practices, and ensure alignment in coaching methodology and documentation.

26.   **Establish a Centralised Player Data Hub**

Build a centralised player and Club data management system to streamline the collection, analysis, and sharing of information between Clubs, Academies, and the FAI, enabling data-driven decision-making and performance tracking.

27.   **Adopt Technology to Enhance Player Development**

Implement the widespread use of performance technology to improve training individualisation, monitoring, and feedback processes.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

28.   **Professionalise Sport-Technical Leadership roles in Academies**

Support the creation of key full-time leadership roles within Academies – Academy Director, Head of Coaching, Head of Talent ID & Recruitment - to professionalise Talent Development and enhance the quality of the Player Pathway.

29.   **Introduce the Concept of a Head of Coaching Role Within All Academies**

Clearly define the responsibilities of the Head of Coaching, ensuring they implement the Club's Football Philosophy and age-specific curriculum.

30.   **Introduce the Concept of a Transition Coach Within All Clubs**

Introduce the role of a Transition Coach as part of the first-team staff, serving as a dedicated bridge between Academy and first team to ensure continuity, personalised support, and structured player progression.

31.   **Introduce Specialised Technical Roles in Academy Structures**

Support the creation of key full-time roles within Academies - including Academy Coach, Individual Development Coach, S&C Coach, Video Analyst, … - to professionalise Talent Development and enhance the quality of the player pathway.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

32. **Create a Full-Time Academy Administrator Role**

Introduce a dedicated Academy Administrator position to oversee daily operations, coordinate logistics, and support strategic alignment.

33. **Introduce Minimum Standards Linked to Supporting Staff**

Set clear requirements for medical, performance, educational, and safeguarding staff to ensure holistic Player Development and Care.

34. **Establish a Structured Leadership Education Programme**

Formalise and institutionalise 'Academy Management Training' as part of a broader leadership education framework to support long-term capability building among Academy and Club leaders.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

35. **Embed Continuous Education across all Academy Roles**

Establish ongoing professional development and lifelong learning pathways for coaches, Academy Directors, and administrative staff, integrating international best practices and continuous skill enhancement. Provide regular networking and educational opportunities between Club representatives and professionals in the field to enhance knowledge exchange and innovation.

36. **Provide Mentoring Support**

Provide mentoring support to current and future leaders in the game, to promote leadership development, knowledge transfer and strategic thinking.

37. **Promote the Adoption of Coaching Competency Frameworks**

Link Coach Development to the Club's playing and training philosophy, with continuous feedback and performance analysis. Use competency frameworks to guide hiring, development, and performance management of coaching staff.

FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHY & TALENT ID
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

38.   Formulate and Implement a National Football Philosophy

Develop a coherent National Football Philosophy that aligns all stakeholders, from grassroots to the professional level, and mandate a fixed technical curriculum for implementation across all affiliated Clubs. The Football Philosophy will provide foundations in vision, structure and content, however, leaves freedom and ownership for each League of Ireland Academy to integrate it's own Club specific DNA.

39.   Design and Implement a National Football Curriculum

Develop a National Football Curriculum that translates the Football DNA into practical training guidelines for each age and stage. The curriculum should cover technical, tactical, physical, psychological and social development. It ensures a structured, consistent approach to coaching and player development across the country.

40.   Create a National Talent ID System for Boys and Girls

Build a coordinated national framework that connects League of Ireland Clubs and grassroots Clubs ensuring Talent Identification structures are inclusive and accessible for boys and girls across all regions, enabling the FAI to recognise and track outstanding talent nationwide.

ELITE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

41.   Strengthen National Youth Team Collaboration

Enhance alignment between Clubs and national youth teams in terms of training methodology, physical load management, and long-term player tracking systems.

42.   Implement Full-Time Football and Education Programmes

Recognise the need to implement a dedicated full-time football development and education programme post Junior Certificate to prioritise the holistic development of youth players.

43.   Launch/Intensify Dual-Career Sports Education Programmes

Create and intensify integrated education-football pathways post Leaving Certificate for youth players, allowing for academic continuity and football development, supporting long-term personal and career objectives.

44.   Embed an Individual Centred Development Culture

Make Individual Player Development the central focus of all training environments and competitions. This means designing programmes tailored to each player's needs, strengths, and potential. A player-centred approach will raise the overall quality of talent emerging in Irish football.

ELITE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

45.   Increase Player–Coach Contact Hours Across Age Groups

Create structured opportunities to boost player–coach interaction time at all levels, strengthening development, feedback cycles, and individualised coaching.

46.   Implement Mandatory Medical Screening Programmes

Standardise comprehensive medical screenings across youth Academies to monitor player health and detect early risks, supporting player welfare and long-term performance.

47.   Standardise PHV and Growth Monitoring Practices

Require all Academies to conduct Peak Height Velocity (PHV) and Mirwald testing, report data to the FAI, and designate a central resource to monitor growth trends and track late developers systematically.

48.   Launch Federation-Led Academy Education Workshops

Organise workshops focused on equipping Clubs with the tools to identify and support both late-maturing and high-potential players.

ELITE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

49.   **Ensure Targeted Support for Late-Maturing Players**

Continue to focus on the 'Future Developer' principle to support late-maturing players, ensuring long-term retention and equal developmental opportunity. Consider enforcing stricter rules around the Future Developers.

50.   **Utilise Travel Time for Developmental Engagement**

Encourage Clubs to optimise travel time - such as during bus journeys - for individual player conversations, video analysis, or mentoring sessions to maximise learning and maintain engagement.

THEMATIC DEEP-DIVES

double pass

THEMATIC DEEP-DIVES

INSIGHTS IN OUTCOMES AND PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

TALENT DEVELOPMENT INDEX

The Talent Development Index (TDI) is a strategic performance framework designed to measure the value creation from youth Academies, with a dual focus on **sportive impact** and **financial return.**

It is built upon a structured set of **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** that are tracked across multiple sporting seasons—specifically 2023, 2024, and the first half of 2025. These KPIs are calculated separately for **men and women**, ensuring gender-specific insights and benchmarking.

Each KPI is assigned a specific weight, and the aggregated results form a **composite score** that reflects the overall effectiveness and productivity of the Academy in developing talent for both competitive success and economic sustainability.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

To reinforce the **validity of the audit findings** and bridge strategic intent with operational reality, we implemented a targeted set of **tangible assessments**.

These evaluations—covering **self-assessment on transition to the first team, style of play analysis**, and **coach intelligence**—were conducted across individual Clubs and subsequently synthesised into a holistic League-level summary.

This approach enables a broader understanding of **systemic strengths** and **areas for improvement**, offering a consolidated view of Academy effectiveness across the landscape.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT INDEX

EVALUATES THE EFFECTIVINESS OF IDENTIFYING AND DEVELOPING TALENT FOR 1ST TEAM AND PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS.

%

AVG. TALENT DEVELOPMENT INDEX*

*Season 2023, 2024, and ½ Season 2025

- ❇ % of Home-Grown Players
- ❇ Transfer Revenue Academy
- ❇ Transfer Impact
- ❇ Home-Grown Players Transitions
- ❇ External Productivity

- ❇ Playing Minutes Home-Grown Players
- ❇ Senior National Teams
- ❇ Youth National Teams
- ❇ # of Debuts
- ❇ Starting 11

TALENT DEVELOPMENT INDEX

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Key Performance Indicator	Definition
% of Home-Grown Players	A Home-Grown Player is a player who, regardless of nationality or age, has been registered with the Club for a continuous or cumulative period of at least three years between the ages of 15 and 21.
Transfer Revenue Academy	Income generated from selling Home-Grown Players.
Transfer Impact	Measures the significance of Home-Grown Player sales to the Club's overall transfer revenue.
Home-Grown Players Transitions	Number of Home-Grown Players Who Completed a Transition (+450 Minutes Played*, Internally or Externally) in a season.
External Productivity	The number of U23 Home-Grown Players that are active in professional football.
Youth National Teams	The Number of Home-Grown Players that are selected for the games of the U17-U19-U21 National Team.
Senior National Team	The Number of U23 Home-Grown Players that are selected for their Senior National Team.
Playing Minutes Home-Grown Players	Percentage of total available minutes played by U23 Home-Grown Players.
# of Debuts	The Number of U23 Home-Grown Players that made their Debut in a season.
Starting 11	Number of starts by U23 Home-Grown Players in a season.

TALENT DEVELOPMENT INDEX

OVERALL PERFORMANCE RANKING (MEN)

TALENT DEVELOPMENT INDEX

PERFORMANCE RANKING FOR MEN'S PREMIER DIVISION
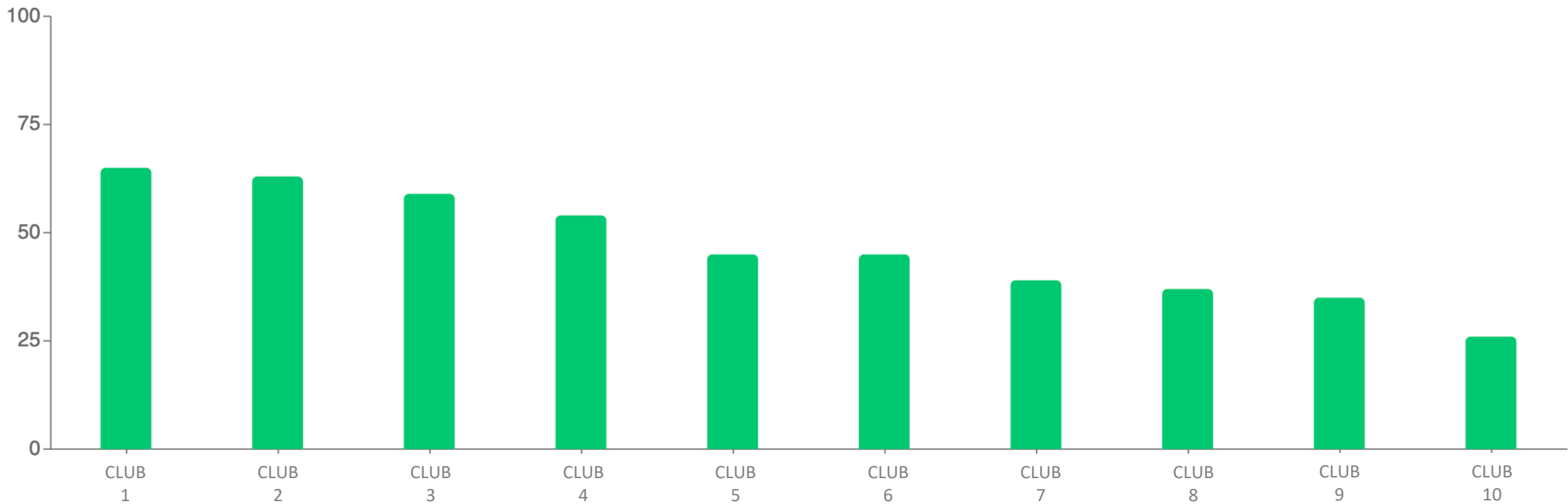
TALENT DEVELOPMENT INDEX

PERFORMANCE RANKING FOR MEN'S FIRST DIVISION
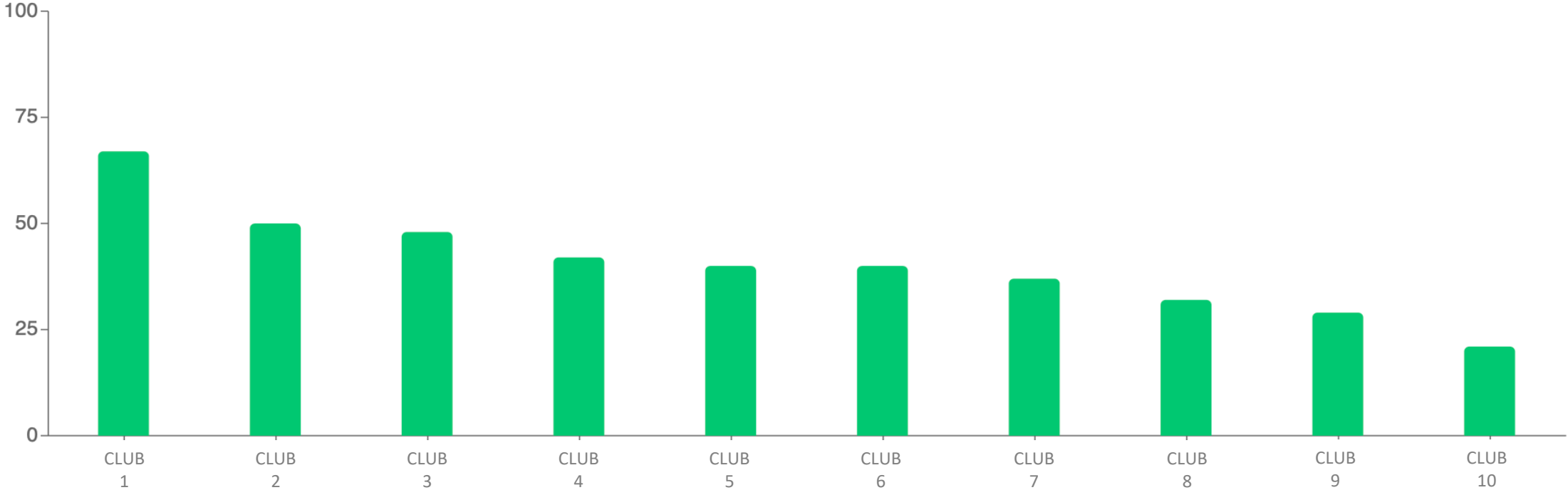
TALENT DEVELOPMENT INDEX
PERFORMANCE RANKING FOR WOMEN'S PREMIER DIVISION

* Calculations based on 5 KPIs

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

FROM FRAMEWORK TO FIELD

1

SELF-CHECK TRANSITION TO 1ST TEAM

This self-assessment invites Clubs to reflect on how players Transition to the 1st Team. It captures current practices while encouraging forward-thinking approaches that strengthen alignment between development pathways and 1st Team integration - supporting both immediate clarity and long-term ambition.

2

STYLE OF PLAY ANALYSIS

Through a systematic review of match footage, we conducted an objective, data-driven assessment of each Club's style of play. This approach enables Clubs to evaluate how closely their actual playing style aligns with their intended style of play.

3

COACH INTELLIGENCE

By capturing and analysing live coaching audio, we generated automated insights into coaching behaviour. This analysis sheds light on communication patterns, instructional styles, and engagement levels, offering coaches a powerful tool for self-reflection and continuous improvement.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

TRANSITION TO FIRST TEAM

1

SELF-CHECK TRANSITION TO 1st TEAM

This self-assessment invites Clubs to reflect on how players Transition to the 1st Team. It captures current practices while encouraging forward-thinking approaches that strengthen alignment between development pathways and 1st Team integration - supporting both immediate clarity and long-term ambition.

Using a structured self-checklist focused on Transition to First Team, this module enabled Clubs to reflect on the strength and alignment of their player progression pathways.

The framework explores four key areas—**Club Football Strategy**, **360 Player Development**, **First Team Environment**, and the **Transition Process**—allowing Clubs to assess how well their current practices support youth integration and align with their development philosophy.

Beyond evaluating robustness, the aim is to spark improvement—encouraging strategic dialogue, cross-functional collaboration, and continuous refinement.

Fifteen Clubs completed the self-check, with responses most often provided by Academy managers.

TRANSITION TO FIRST TEAM

KEY FINDINGS
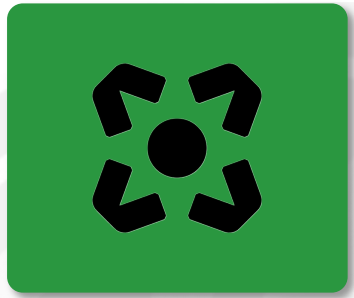
CLUB FOOTBALL STRATEGY

Most Clubs show **strong commitment** to integrate youth development into their broader vision. However, communication gaps between departments can hinder consistent execution.

Collaboration between Academy and first-team staff varies. Some Clubs have established cross-functional coordination, while others operate in silos.

Youth exposure to first-team environments is inconsistent. While some Clubs offer structured integration opportunities, others are constrained by competitive demands and short-term priorities.

Monitoring and evaluation systems are generally underdeveloped. Few Clubs track transition outcomes systematically.

360 PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

Most Academies are actively implementing **Individual Development Plans (IDPs)** to guide player growth. However, the use of Player Profiles as a formal tool for evaluating players is still either non-existent or in early stages of adoption.

Clubs generally possess a **conceptual framework for identifying players** who are ready to transition to the first team. There is a decent to good understanding across organizations of the distinction between performance and potential.

A majority of Clubs have established documented procedures for evaluating players. Nonetheless, a portion of Clubs still lack formalised evaluation processes, indicating **room for improvement in consistency and structure**.

TRANSITION TO FIRST TEAM

KEY FINDINGS
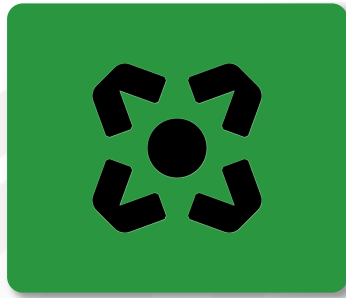
1ST TEAM ENVIROMENT

Most Clubs recognise the **importance of managing external influences**—such as parents, agents, and personal coaches—during the transition of young players to the first team.

While some structured support systems are in place, like mentorship by senior players and formal development talks, others such as individual development plans and transition coaches are less commonly implemented.

Overall, more teams report not having structured support systems for young talent than those that do, highlighting **a gap in consistent support** across Clubs.

TRANSITION PROCESS

There are several **structural and strategic gaps** in how Clubs manage the transition process. Most Clubs lack clear KPIs or a formalised plan to guide this transition, suggesting that the process is often ad hoc rather than intentional.

Operationally, there is a **disconnect in facilities and in the use of digital tools** such as player management systems and performance analysis platforms. This fragmentation can hinder collaboration and data-driven decision-making across departments.

Many Clubs **report limited alignment between youth and senior football** approaches. While some level of connection exists in certain cases, it is generally weak and in need of strengthening to ensure a consistent development pathway.

TRANSITION TO FIRST TEAM
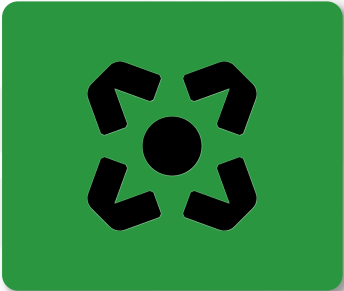
CLUB FOOTBALL STRATEGY

How important is each focus area in creating Team Value in your Club?

Potential Maximisation

Club	Value
CLUB 1	7.0
CLUB 2	7.0
CLUB 3	7.0
CLUB 4	6.0
CLUB 5	6.0
CLUB 6	6.0
CLUB 7	6.0
CLUB 8	6.0
CLUB 9	5.0
CLUB 10	5.0
CLUB 11	5.0
CLUB 12	3.0
CLUB 13	3.0
CLUB 14	3.0
CLUB 15	2.0

Youth Development

Value
7.0
7.0
6.0
6.0
6.0
6.0
6.0
6.0
7.0
6.0
5.0
7.0
7.0
6.0
2.0

Trading Excellence

Value
6.0
5.0
6.0
6.0
6.0
6.0
5.0
4.0
5.0
5.0
4.0
4.0
2.0
1.0
2.0

Scale: Not at all important — Moderately Important — Critical
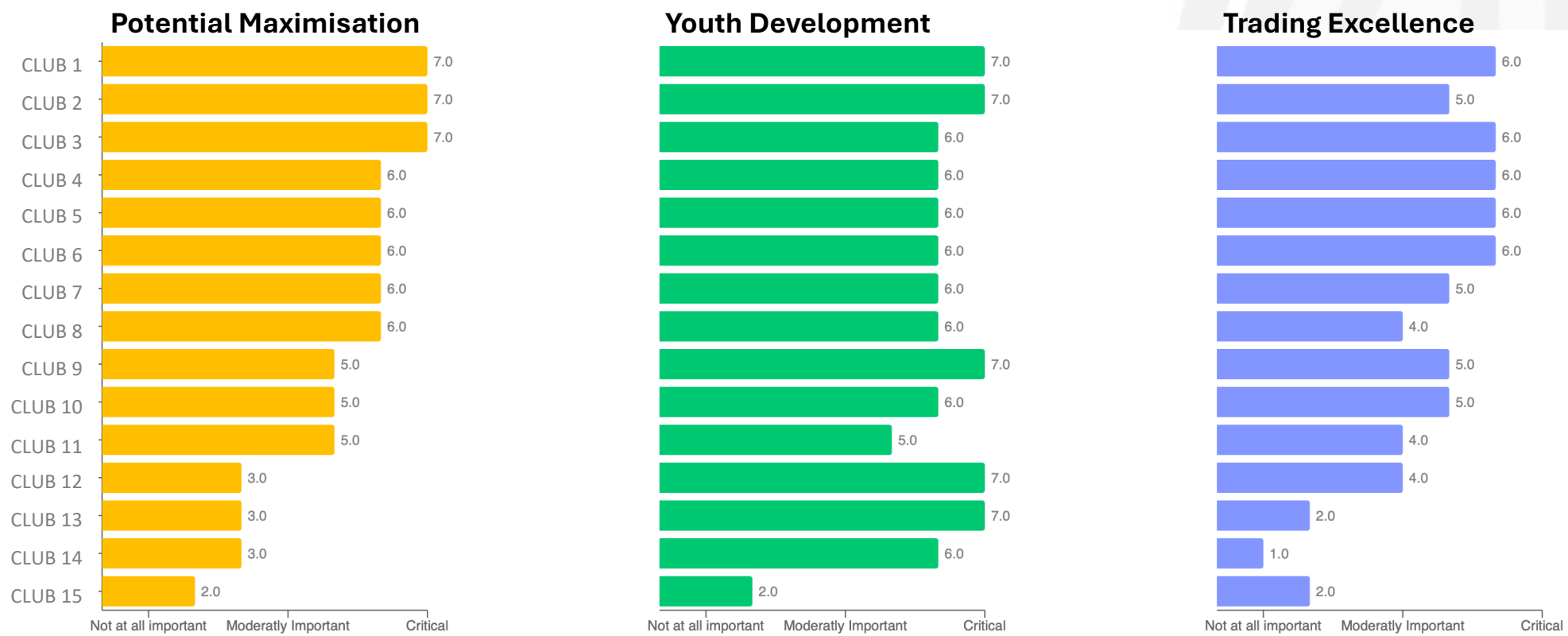
TRANSITION TO FIRST TEAM

CLUB FOOTBALL STRATEGY
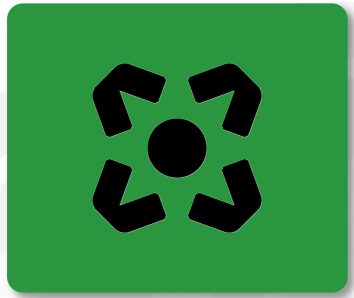
How important is each focus area in creating Team Value in your Club?

The chart from the Transition to First Team self-check illustrates how Clubs rate the strategic importance of three approaches to creating team value: **Potential Maximisation, Youth Development, and Trading Excellence**. Most respondents—primarily Academy managers—indicate that all three approaches are strategically relevant within their Club's overall strategy, though with varying degrees of emphasis.

These variations do not imply the absence of strategy in any area; rather, they reflect **relative prioritisation**. A lower score in one dimension often signals that a Club places greater emphasis on the other approaches, based on its resources, philosophy, or competitive context.

The fact that **Academy managers** completed most of the self-checks is significant. Their perspective naturally leans towards **development-focused priorities**, which may not fully reflect the Club's broader strategic positioning—especially in areas like trading or senior team integration.
This is reinforced by earlier findings showing that **Academy representation in technical boards is extremely limited**, with only 12% of Clubs including Academy leadership in strategic football decision-making. In many cases, Clubs lack a formal technical board altogether.

This disconnect highlights the **need for stronger integration of Academy voices in strategic structures** to ensure alignment between development pathways and overall Club strategy.

TRANSITION TO FIRST TEAM

360 PLAYER DEVELOPMENT
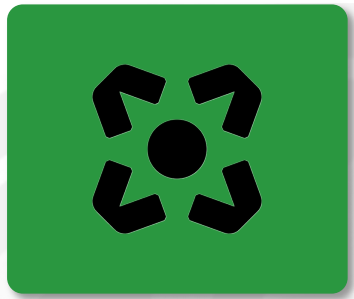
How does your Club deploy Position-Specific Benchmarking to evaluate players?
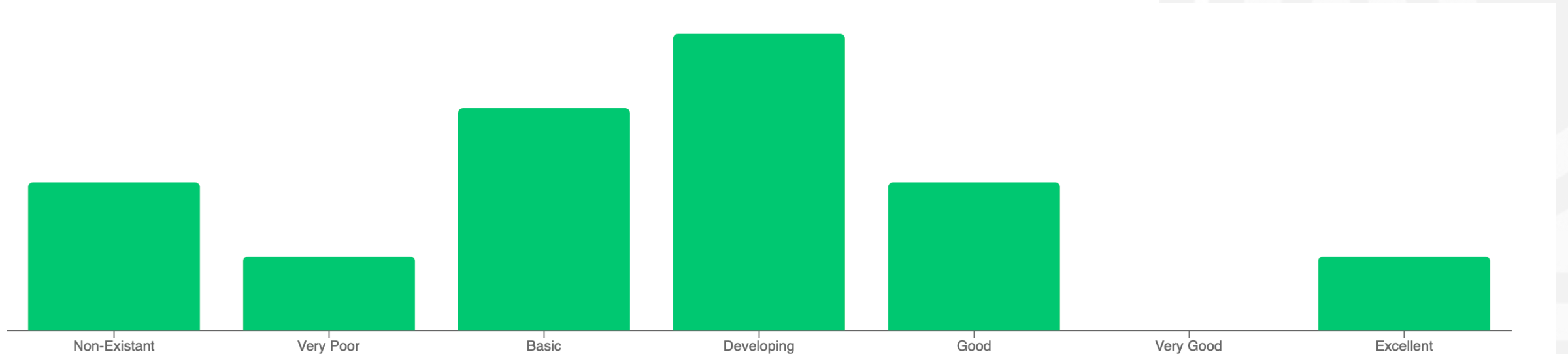
TRANSITION TO FIRST TEAM

360 PLAYER DEVELOPMENT
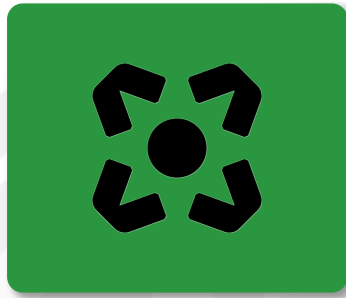
How does your Club deploy Position-Specific Benchmarking to evaluate players?

The chart from the **360 Player Development** section of the self-check shows how Clubs apply **Position-Specific Benchmarking** to evaluate players. Most Clubs rate their approach as either **"Developing"** or **"Basic",** with fewer indicating **"Good"** or **"Excellent"** practices. A notable number of responses also fall under **"Non-Existent",** suggesting that for many Clubs, this practice is either in its infancy or not yet in place.

This outcome points less to a strategic choice and more to a **technical gap**—specifically, the **absence of a clearly defined football philosophy**. As highlighted in the assessment, many Clubs **lack a shared football philosophy** that connects the first team and Academy. This disconnect leads to misalignment in playing style, training methodology, and player progression pathways.

The limited use of position-specific benchmarking also reflects findings from the audit, which noted a **disconnect between Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and the Club's overarching football philosophy**. Without a clear player profile framework, IDPs tend to be generic and lack coherence across the development system.

In short, the underdevelopment of position-specific benchmarking is symptomatic of a broader structural issue: the need for Clubs to define and embed a unified football philosophy that informs both individual player development and collective team strategy.

TRANSITION TO FIRST TEAM

1ST TEAM ENVIRONMENT
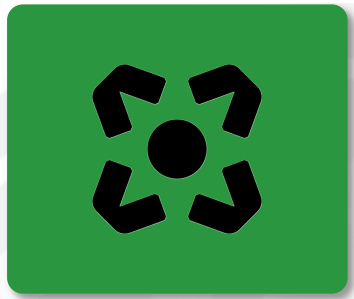
Which structured support systems are in place for young talents in the first team?
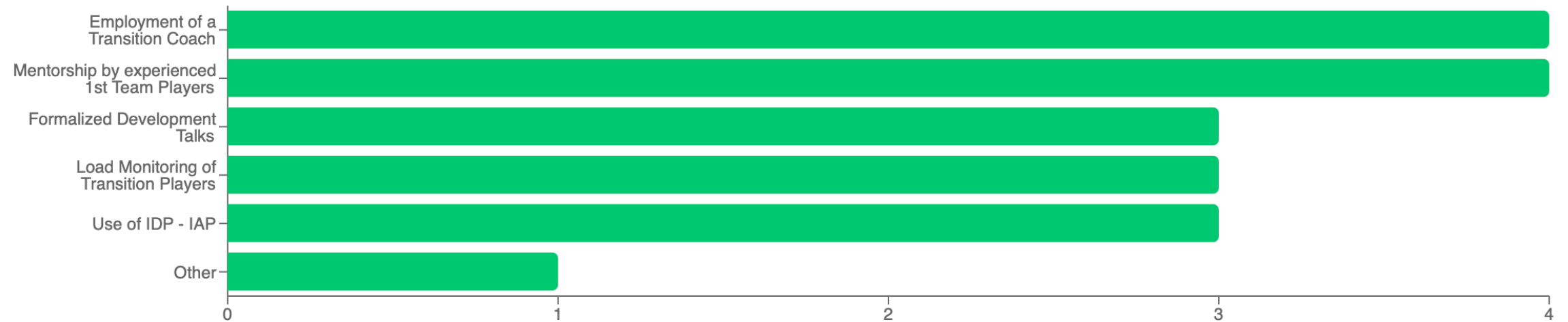
TRANSITION TO FIRST TEAM

1ST TEAM ENVIRONMENT
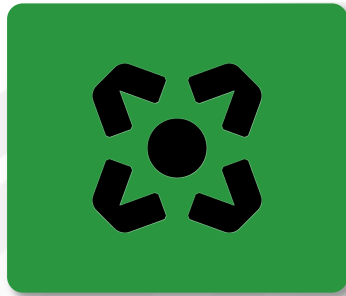
Which structured support systems are in place for young talents in the 1st Team?

Six Clubs reported having **structured support systems** in place for young talents integrating into the first team. However, the chart reveals that **implementation varies significantly** across Clubs. While some employ multiple support mechanisms—such as **transition coaches and mentorship by senior players**—others rely on fewer or more basic structures.

Notably, only two Clubs report using **Individual Development Plans (IDPs) or Individual Action Plans (IAPs)** at first team level. This stands in contrast to the widespread presence of IDPs at Academy level. However, as highlighted in the audit, these plans are often **generic and not anchored in the Club's overarching football philosophy or player profile framework**. This lack of depth and strategic integration at Academy level likely contributes to the **limited continuation** and implementation of IDPs within the first team environment.

The variation in support systems reflects broader structural and philosophical differences between Clubs. Where a **shared football philosophy** is absent, alignment between Academy and first team practices tends to weaken—impacting not only player development but also the consistency of support during critical transition phases.

TRANSITION TO FIRST TEAM

TRANSITION PROCESS
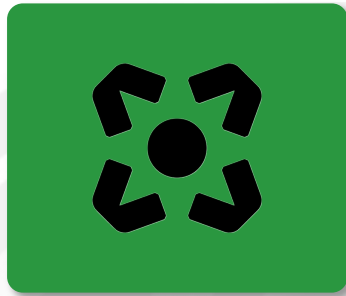
Is there a step-by-step plan (Transition Phases) implemented for integrating young talents into the professional environment?

15%

share of clubs answering Yes

Only **15% of Clubs** report having a step-by-step plan in place for integrating young talents into the professional environment. This result suggests that while some Clubs have begun to define **structured transition phases**, the majority still lack a formalised approach.

A step-by-step plan typically outlines **progressive phases -** such as exposure to first team training, matchday involvement, and gradual increases in responsibility - designed to guide young players through their transition. The absence of such frameworks in most Clubs may lead to inconsistent experiences for players and limit the effectiveness of the transition process.

The result highlights an opportunity for Clubs to strengthen their development pathways by clearly defining and implementing phased transition models that support both player readiness and long-term integration.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

STYLE OF PLAY ANALYSIS

2

STYLE OF PLAY ANALYSIS

Through a systematic review of match footage, we conducted an objective, data-driven assessment of each Club's style of play. This approach enables Clubs to evaluate how closely their actual playing style aligns with their intended style of play.

The analysis is based on **video-derived performance data**, grouped into **six key moments of the game**: Build Up, Chance Creation, Defending Build-Up, Defending the Box, Defensive Transition, and Offensive Transition.

The purpose of this study is to provide the FAI and LOI with a clear overview of collective strengths and weaknesses, identify performance gaps between teams, and support targeted development initiatives.

Data coverage varies per team due to differences in match footage availability and quality. The League averages presented here are therefore based on available matches and should be interpreted within that context.

STYLE OF PLAY ANALYSIS
KEY FINDINGS

Radar chart axes: Build up, Chance creation, Defending build-up, Defending the box, Defensive transition, Offensive transition
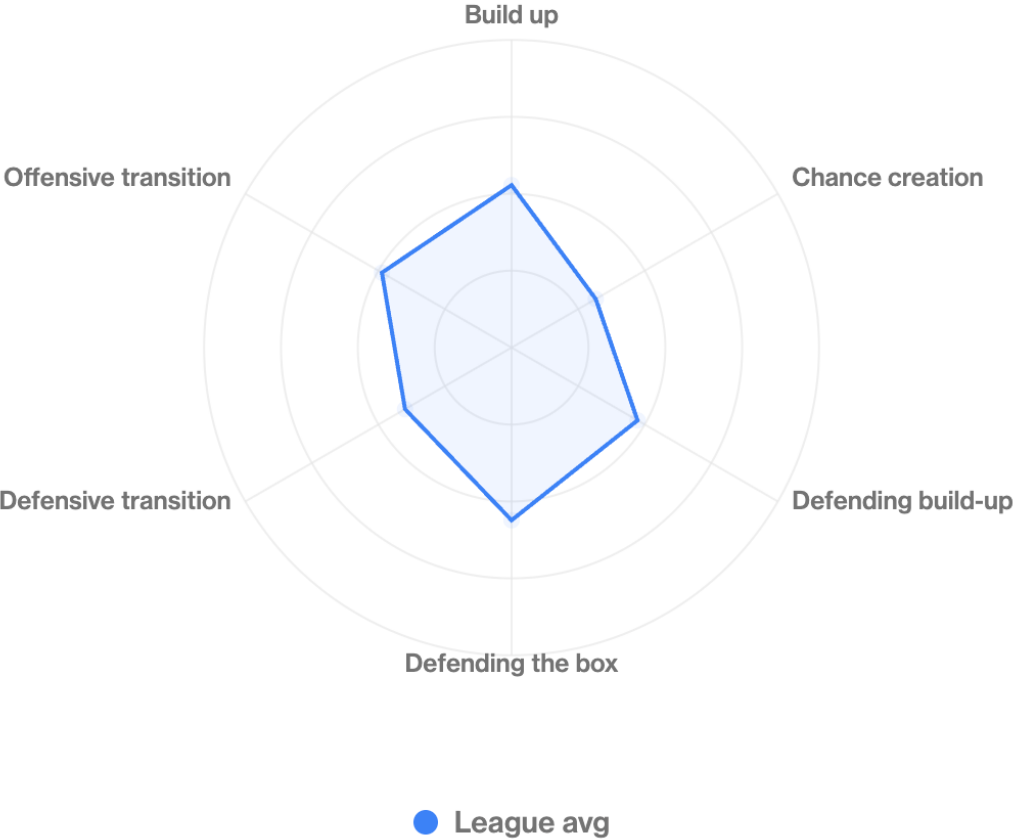
● League avg

Build Up
League average performance in the build-up phase is moderate, with significant variation between teams. While some teams show strong possession and pass accuracy, others adopt a more direct approach with limited ball circulation. The overall index suggests that structured progression from the back is an area with development potential.

Chance Creation
This is the League's lowest-performing moment on average. The frequency of chances created and conversion rates remain modest, indicating difficulties in advancing into dangerous areas and delivering effective final passes. Some teams stand out with higher chance volumes, but the majority produce limited offensive output.

STYLE OF PLAY ANALYSIS
KEY FINDINGS

Radar chart axes: Build up, Chance creation, Defending build-up, Defending the box, Defensive transition, Offensive transition

● League avg
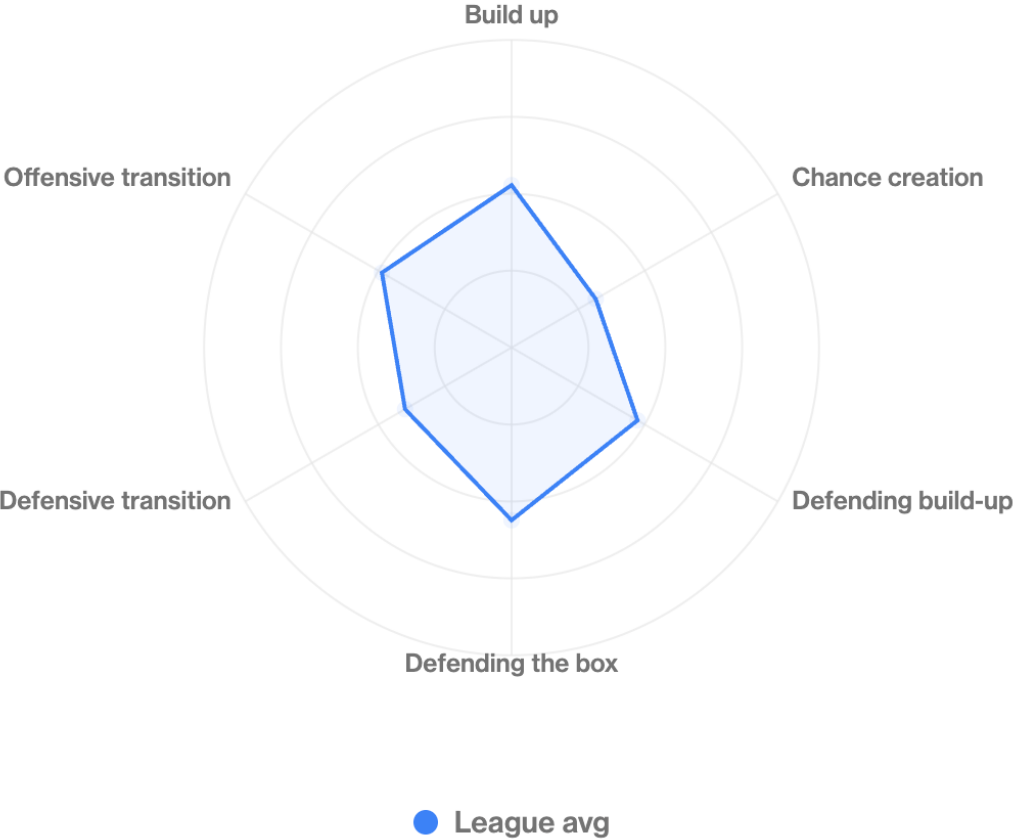
Defending Build-Up
Performance in disrupting the opponent's build-up is a relative strength. The average team records solid possession gains in deeper areas, supported by effective interceptions and recoveries. However, high pressing and regaining possession in advanced areas occur less frequently.

Defending the Box
The League shows a balanced but not outstanding profile in defending the penalty area. Teams generally limit the opponent's goal conversion, but concede a notable number of box entries and crosses. Defensive blocking and clearing actions are present but not consistently high.

STYLE OF PLAY ANALYSIS
KEY FINDINGS

League avg

(Radar chart with axes: Build up, Chance creation, Defending build-up, Defending the box, Defensive transition, Offensive transition)
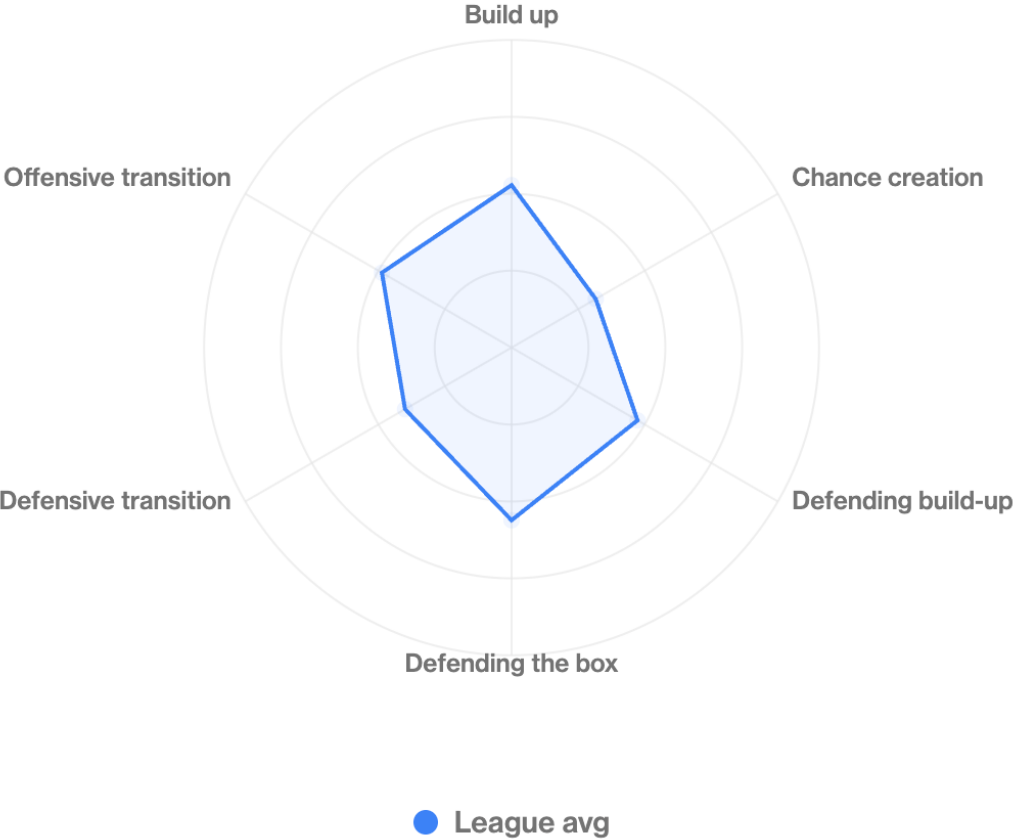
Defensive Transition
This is the strongest average moment for the League. Teams demonstrate good organisation and speed in preventing opponents from progressing during transitions, resulting in relatively few direct threats after ball loss. The data indicates an effective recovery structure once possession is lost.

Offensive Transition
League averages show moderate performance in exploiting offensive transitions. While some teams advance quickly into the final third, many fail to capitalise on counter-attacking opportunities, either through execution errors or lack of penetration.

STYLE OF PLAY ANALYSIS

RECOMMENDATIONS

Build Up

- Encourage structured possession play under pressure to reduce reliance on long passes.

- Increase repetition of build-up drills focusing on positional support and progression through thirds.

Chance Creation

- Prioritise patterns of play that lead to high-quality chances, particularly from wide and central combination play.

- Improve crossing accuracy and final pass execution to raise overall chance efficiency.

Defending Build-Up

- Develop situational pressing triggers to increase possession gains in advanced areas.

- Balance low-block discipline with selective high-press opportunities.

STYLE OF PLAY ANALYSIS
RECOMMENDATIONS

Defending the Box

- Implement targeted training on defending crosses and second balls.

- Strengthen compactness and communication in the penalty area.

Defensive Transition

- Maintain and refine transition recovery principles to protect this area of strength.

- Integrate counter-pressing moments when recovery high up is possible.

Offensive Transition

- Increase decision-making speed and forward support during counters.

- Use match scenarios in training to improve timing and runs into space immediately after regaining possession.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

COACH INTELLIGENCE

3 🧠

COACH INTELLIGENCE

By capturing and analysing live coaching audio, we generated automated insights into coaching behaviour. This analysis sheds light on communication patterns, instructional styles, and engagement levels, offering coaches a powerful tool for self-reflection and continuous improvement.

The framework evaluates coaching behaviours across five key dimensions:

- **Individuality** – Balancing team-based and individual-focused coaching.
- **Specificity** – Providing clear, actionable, and relevant feedback.
- **Interaction** – Using questions and instructions effectively to engage players.
- **Silence** – Allowing players space to think, decide, and take ownership.
- **Positivity** – Maintaining an encouraging and supportive learning environment.

For each dimension, Action scores represent what actually happened during the session, while Reflection scores represent how the coach believed they performed.
The comparison between these scores provides valuable insight into coach self-awareness, an essential factor in professional growth. League-wide median scores serve as a benchmark for comparing individual, Club, and national performance.

COACH INTELLIGENCE

KEY FINDINGS
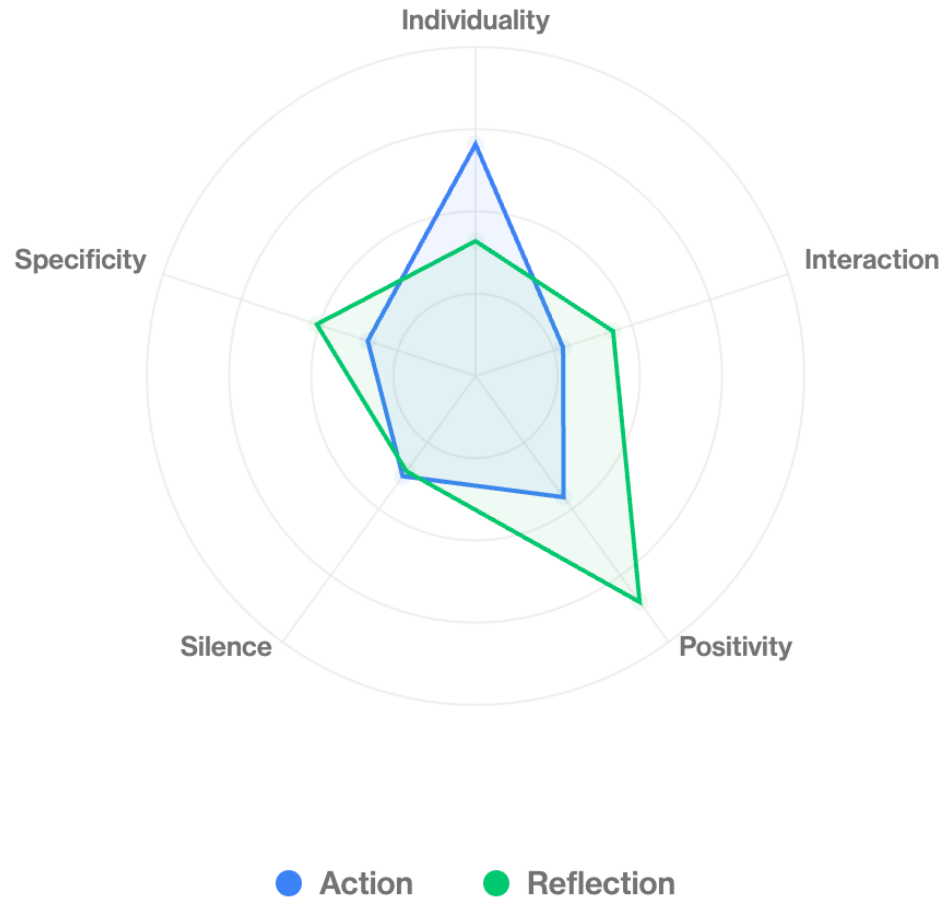
● Action   ● Reflection

Self-Perception vs. Reality

• In several dimensions Reflection scores differ notably from Action scores.

• This suggests that many coaches either overestimate or underestimate certain aspects of their behaviour, confirming research that up to 80% of coaches struggle to describe their own behaviour accurately.

Overestimation in Positivity

• In some cases, Reflection scores for Positivity are higher than Action scores, indicating coaches believe they are more positive than observed.

• This may reflect a natural coaching bias towards remembering positive interactions rather than the full range of behaviour.

COACH INTELLIGENCE
KEY FINDINGS

Radar chart axes: Individuality, Interaction, Positivity, Silence, Specificity
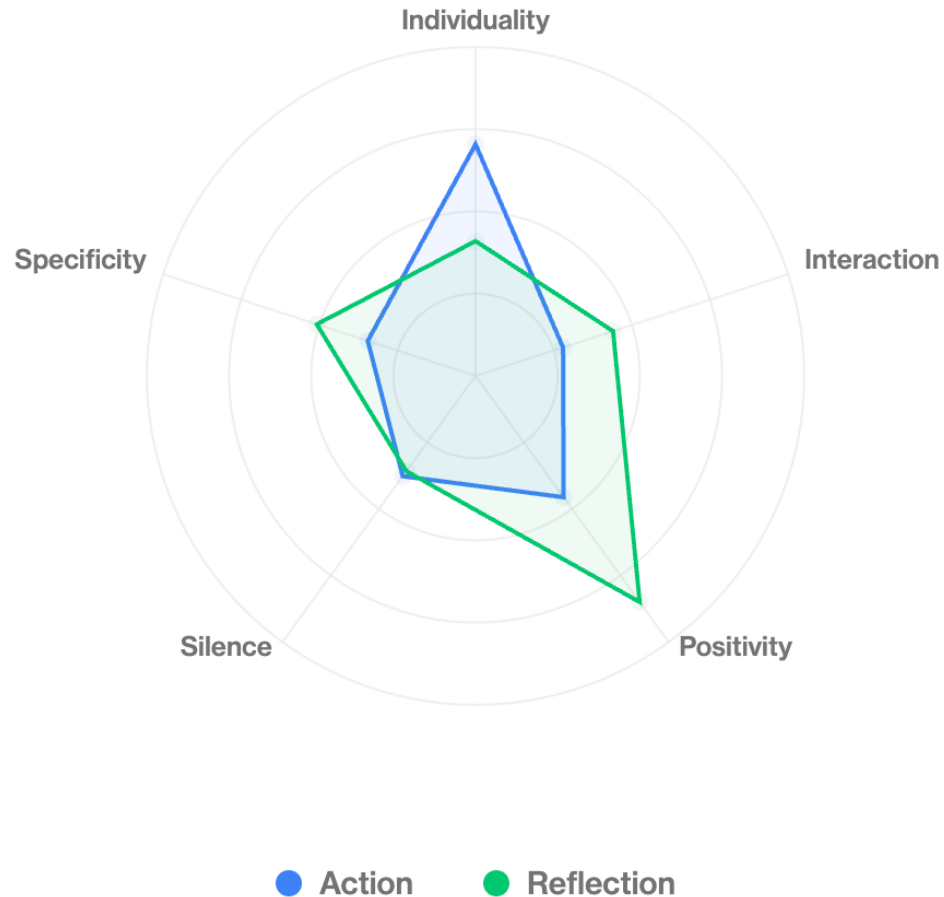
● Action   ● Reflection

Underestimation in Silence

Some coaches report less silence in Reflection than measured in Action, suggesting they are unaware of how much space they actually leave for player decision-making.

Specificity Awareness Gap

Where Specificity scores are low in Action but moderate in Reflection, coaches may think they are giving precise, actionable feedback when in reality much of it is still general.

Systemic Self-Awareness Challenge

The gaps appear in a consistent pattern across Clubs, making this not just an individual but a developmental priority for the whole League.

COACH INTELLIGENCE
RECOMMENDATIONS
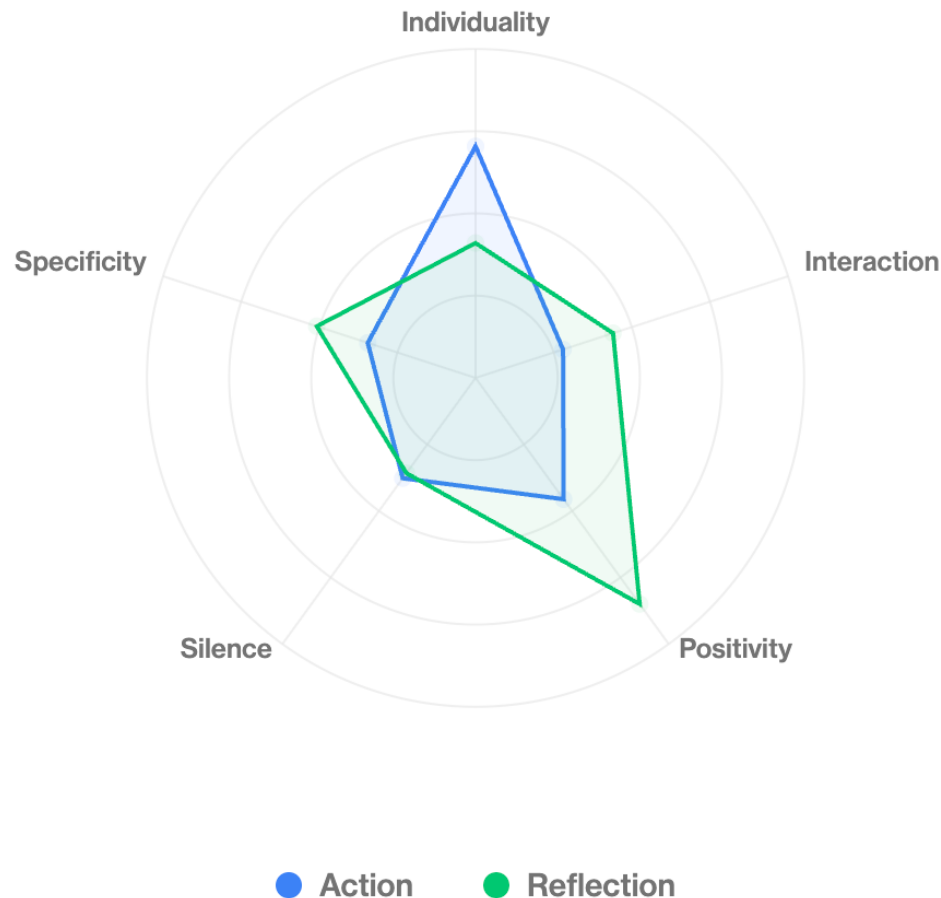
Integrate Video/Audio Playback in Coach CPD

- To develop accurate self-perception.
- Targeted Self-Awareness Training

Positivity Calibration

Encourage coaches to link "positive" feedback to specific behaviours rather than general encouragement, making positivity both observable and memorable.

Silence and Autonomy Awareness

Help coaches become conscious of when and why they remain silent, so they can use it strategically rather than unintentionally and leave space for player decision-making

Federation-Level Learning Programmes

- Organise workshops on the key findings of this report, ensuring coaches gain practical tools to address the identified gaps.
- These could be structured around the five dimensions of the framework, using best-practice examples and peer learning.

DIMENSION LEVEL ANALYSIS

double pass

STAFFING

The dimension deals with the availability of qualified and professional Academy staff. Are there specialists available supporting specific aspects of player development?

double pass

STAFFING
KEY FINDINGS
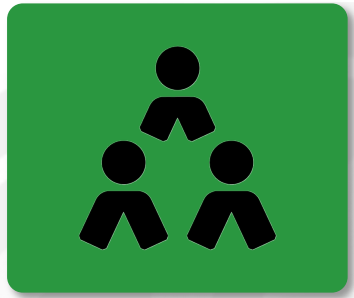
1. **Limited Full-Time Appointments**

   Most Clubs do not employ full-time Academy Directors and Heads of Coaching. These roles are often filled by volunteers or part-time staff, which restricts strategic oversight, consistency, and quality of Academy operations.

2. **Missing Head of Coaching Role**

   Most Academies lack a Head of Coaching - a key role responsible for coach development, session quality, and alignment with the Club's playing philosophy. This gap weakens the overall technical consistency within Academies.

3. **Role Overload**

   Academy Directors frequently manage multiple responsibilities - coaching, administration, logistics - beyond their core leadership function. This dilutes their capacity to focus on strategic development and performance management.

4. **Qualification Mismatch**

   Many Academy Directors lack formal training in leadership, planning, and Academy Management. While football-specific certifications are common, broader competencies required for strategic and operational leadership are often missing.

STAFFING
KEY FINDINGS

5. **Lack of Part-Time and Full-Time Coaching Staff**

The majority of the Clubs have no part-time or full-time coaches. This restricts the ability to deliver consistent, high-quality training across age groups and limits the capacity for (individual) Player Development.

6. **Volunteer-Driven Structures**

While the availability of dedicated staff is limited, Clubs rely heavily on volunteers to support Academy operations reflecting a strong community involvement and a commitment to Talent Development.

7. **Inconsistency of Coaching Staff**

Frequent turnover and inconsistent availability of coaching staff disrupt Player Development and hinder the implementation of long-term training plans. This instability affects continuity, trust, and the overall learning environment within Academies.

8. **Limited Availability of Support Staff**

Clubs often lack dedicated staff for Talent Identification, Health & Performance, and Player Care, limiting holistic development beyond technical training. Holistic Player Development is vital for building strong player pipelines.

STAFFING
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Establish Minimum Staffing Standards**

   To ensure strategic focus and operational consistency, Clubs should be guided towards appointing full-time Academy Directors and Heads of Coaching. This can be supported through licensing requirements, phased implementation plans, and targeted funding mechanisms.

2. **Establish the Head of Coaching as a Core Academy Role**

   To ensure technical consistency and elevate coaching standards, Clubs should prioritise the appointment of a Head of Coaching within their Academy structure. Where resources are limited, shared or regional appointments could offer a scalable solution.

3. **Promote Role Clarity and Focus**

   Introducing standardised job descriptions and role boundaries will help Academy Directors concentrate on leadership and development rather than juggling multiple tasks. Clubs can benefit from clearer internal structures and more efficient delegation.

4. **Coaching Workforce Expansion**

   Scaling up the number of qualified part-time and full-time coaches is essential for delivering consistent, high-quality training. This could be achieved through regional coaching hubs, shared staffing models, and coach-to-player ratio benchmarks.

STAFFING
RECOMMENDATIONS

5.   Develop Targeted CPD Programmes

Professional development tailored to Academy leadership - covering planning, management, and strategic oversight - should be made widely accessible. Embedding these programmes into qualification pathways will raise the overall competency and consistency of Academy Leadership.

6.   Coaching Continuity Measures

Improving retention through career progression, contractual stability, and ongoing development opportunities will help Clubs maintain coaching consistency. Documented training frameworks can also safeguard continuity when staff changes occur.

7.   Multidisciplinary Support Integration

Embedding roles in Talent Identification, Health & Performance, and Player Care into Academy structures will enhance holistic development. Prioritising Talent ID systems and scout training will strengthen Player Pathways and ensure early recognition of potential.

8.   University Collaboration

Clubs can strengthen their specialised workforce by partnering with universities for internships in areas like sports science, analysis, and coaching. These placements offer mutual benefits - Clubs gain fresh expertise, and students access real-world experience that can lead to long-term roles.

FACILITIES

This dimension focuses on the quality and availability of the facilities used by the Academy teams and Academy staff.

double pass

FACILITIES
KEY FINDINGS
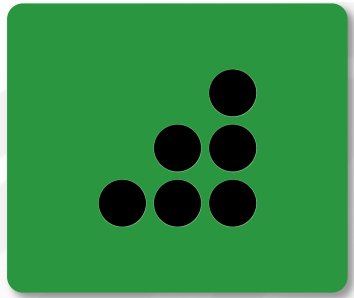
1. **Decentralised Operations**

    In several Clubs, football and administrative functions operate in isolation, with minimal physical or procedural integration. Training and core football activities are often separated from the Club's main infrastructure, using multiple training grounds, creating disconnects that hinder collaboration, alignment, and operational efficiency.

2. **Facility Disparities**

    Across the League, the overall standard of facilities falls short of what is expected for Academy-level development. While a few Clubs demonstrate strong infrastructure or pitch quality, these are exceptions in an environment where most lack the resources needed to support consistent training, recovery, and player care.

3. **Pitch Access**

    Many Clubs struggle to secure regular access to full-size pitches. Training sessions are often squeezed into limited time slots or held on undersized surfaces, which compromises preparation and development.

4. **Changing Room Provision**

    Changing rooms are often cramped, outdated, or shared across multiple teams, offering little privacy or comfort. This undermines the professional environment needed to support young players and staff.

FACILITIES
KEY FINDINGS

5. Meeting Room Availability

Planning and review sessions are frequently held in informal or borrowed spaces, as dedicated meeting rooms for Academy staff and players are rarely available. This limits the ability to conduct structured discussions and tactical briefings.

6. Workspace for Academy Staff

Coaches, managers, and support staff frequently work from hallways, shared desks, or off-site locations. Without dedicated workspaces, collaboration suffers, and administrative tasks become fragmented.

7. Lack of Canteen Facilities

The absence of canteen or cafeteria spaces is common, leaving players and staff without a central area for meals, informal interaction, or nutritional support. Parents also lack a welcoming space to engage with the Academy.

8. Medical Treatment Rooms
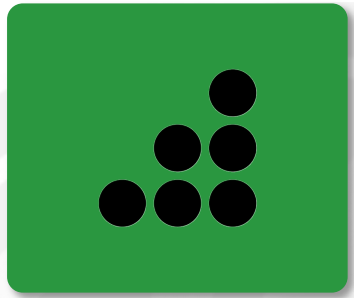
Injury care is often managed in makeshift settings - converted storage rooms, shared offices, or temporary setups. These arrangements lack the privacy, equipment, and consistency required for proper treatment and recovery.

FACILITIES
KEY FINDINGS

9. **Indoor Training Facilities**

Indoor or covered training areas are a rarity. During poor weather, sessions are cancelled or improvised, disrupting continuity and limiting the ability to deliver a consistent programme year-round.
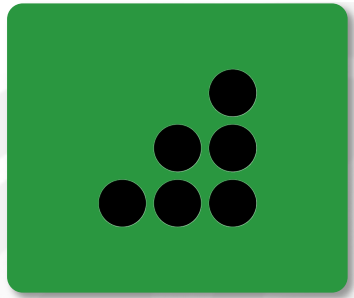
10. **Facilities for Girls' Football**

Girls' teams are often assigned separate training locations and lack access to dedicated changing rooms. This reflects logistical challenges but also shows a need for inclusive planning and equal-quality provision.

FACILITIES
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Improve Operational Integration**

    Clubs should explore ways to physically or digitally align football and administrative functions. Shared workspaces, integrated scheduling systems, or co-located offices can help bridge the gap and foster better coordination.

2. **Promote Facility Benchmarking**

    A recurrent League-wide facility audit could help identify critical gaps and highlight best-practice examples. By setting minimum standards, Clubs can be encouraged to invest and improve.

3. **Expand Pitch Availability**

    Clubs may need to renegotiate pitch access, invest in additional surfaces, or collaborate locally to ensure consistent training opportunities. Full-size pitch access should be treated as a core requirement, not a luxury.

4. **Support All-Weather Training Solutions**

    Indoor training options - whether permanent halls or temporary covers - can protect programme continuity during adverse weather. Regional indoor hubs could serve multiple Clubs and reduce individual costs.

FACILITIES
RECOMMENDATIONS

5. **Optimise Changing Rooms**

    Upgrading changing rooms should be a priority - not just for hygiene and privacy, but to reinforce a professional environment and create a positive perception of the Club. Modular units or phased renovations may offer practical solutions for Clubs with limited budgets.

6. **Create Dedicated Workspaces**

    Clubs should establish dedicated environments where Academy staff can plan, analyse, and collaborate without interruption. Whether through quiet rooms, shared offices, or mobile workstations, these spaces should support both administrative and strategic tasks, helping coaches stay organised and connected throughout the season.

7. **Foresee Canteen Areas**

    Introducing canteen areas, whether permanent or pop-up, can support nutrition and build community. These spaces also offer a touchpoint for parents and staff to connect informally with the Academy.

FACILITIES
RECOMMENDATIONS
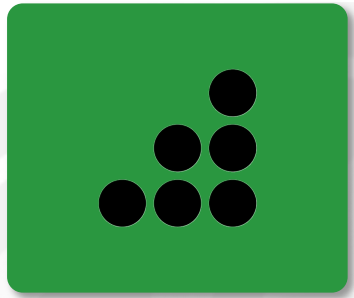
8.   **Strengthen Medical Infrastructure**

Permanent treatment rooms equipped with basic medical supplies should be part of every Academy setup. Where space is limited, shared medical partnerships or mobile units could offer viable alternatives.

9.   **Ensure Inclusive Facility Provision**

Facility planning must include equal access for girls' teams, with dedicated changing rooms and shared use of core infrastructure. This is not just about fairness - it's about creating a unified Academy culture that values every participant.

STRATEGY

This dimension analyses the Club's strategy to realise long-term success on and off the pitch. Is there a clear mission and vision for the Club in general and talent development in particular?

double pass

STRATEGY
KEY FINDINGS

1. **Strategic Planning Gaps**

   Most Clubs lack a comprehensive and structured strategic plan, resulting in fragmented decision-making and short-term focus across departments, including their Academies.

2. **Mission, Vision and Values Not Clearly Defined**

   Many Clubs lack a formalised articulation of their mission, vision and values. In some cases, these principles are communicated informally, but without consistent documentation or integration into daily operations, they fail to guide strategic decision-making or cultural alignment.

3. **Absence of Clear Goals**

   Clubs and their Academies generally operate without clearly articulated short, medium, and long-term goals. This hinders effective planning, performance monitoring, and continuous improvement.

4. **Academy Not Strategically Embedded in Football Business Model**

   Although Academies are referenced in Club vision statements, few translate this into measurable objectives. The absence of KPIs, limited use of development contracts, and weak integration into first-team squad composition reflect a missed opportunity to leverage the Academy's long-term value.

STRATEGY
KEY FINDINGS

5.   **Underinvestment in Talent Development**

Despite verbal commitments to youth development, actual investment remains limited, constraining their ability to build sustainable, high-quality programmes.

6.   **Football Business Model Not Academy-Driven**

The Academy's potential to contribute to long-term Club value - through player development, performance impact, and transfer revenue - is not fully recognised. Strategic planning rarely incorporates the Academy as a core business driver.

7.   **Squad Composition Lacks Academy Integration**

Academy output is not systematically considered in 1st Team Squad Planning. There is limited alignment between development pathways and positional needs, resulting in missed opportunities to promote home-grown talent.

8.   **Development Contracts Underutilised**

Few Clubs use development contracts strategically to secure and nurture Academy players. The absence of structured progression models and contract planning weakens retention and reduces the potential for future transfer value.

STRATEGY
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Support Strategic Planning**

   Encouraging Clubs to adopt structured, long-term strategic plans can help align football, Academy, and operational goals. This could be facilitated through planning templates, peer learning sessions, or strategic development modules tailored to different leadership profiles.

2. **Formalise Mission, Vision and Values**

   Develop a clear and documented statement of the Club's mission, vision and values, and ensure it is consistently communicated across departments. Integrating these principles into daily operations and strategic planning will strengthen cultural alignment and guide long-term decision-making.

3. **Embed Measurable Objectives**

   To move from intention to impact, Clubs may benefit from guidance on translating their Academy vision into measurable objectives. Introducing performance indicators and progress tracking tools can help reinforce accountability and ensure the Academy is part of the Club's core strategy.

4. **Establish Goal Frameworks**

   Clear articulation of short, medium, and long-term goals is essential for effective planning and continuous improvement. Integrating goal-setting into Club development reviews or licensing processes could help standardise this practice across the League.

STRATEGY
RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Embed Academy in Club Strategy

Establish measurable objectives and KPIs that align the Academy with the Club's strategic direction. Embedding these targets into planning processes strengthens accountability and ensures the Academy contributes meaningfully to long-term goals.

6. Position Academy as Value Generator

Integrating Player Development into financial forecasting allows Clubs to treat the Academy as a strategic asset. This approach supports sustainable growth by linking performance and transfer outcomes to business planning.

7. Align Academy Output with Squad Planning

Use succession mapping and positional analysis to connect Academy development with 1st Team needs. Doing so creates clearer pathways for home-grown talent and reduces reliance on external recruitment.

8. Structure Development Contracts Strategically

Introduce staged contracts tied to development milestones and performance indicators. Not only does this secure promising players early, but it also enhances retention and protects future transfer value.
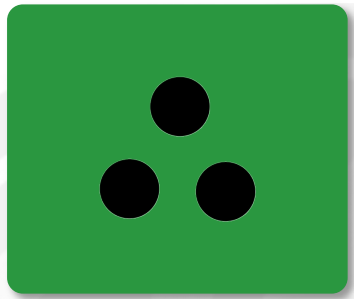
ORGANISATION

This dimension studies the organisational set-up and decision-making processes of the Club and the Academy. Special attention is paid to the connection between these organisational levels.

double pass

ORGANISATION
KEY FINDINGS

1. **Absence of Technical Boards**

    Technical Boards - essential for guiding long-term sporting decisions and fostering cross-departmental alignment - are largely missing across Clubs. This results in ad hoc decision-making and limited strategic oversight.

2. **Lack of a Dedicated Sporting Director Role**

    In most of the Clubs assessed, the Sporting Director role is non-existent. This leaves a critical leadership gap in overseeing the sporting strategy and aligning the Academy, recruitment, and 1st Team.

3. **Sporting Oversight Centralised in 1st Team Manager**

    In the absence of a Sporting Director, all technical and strategic responsibilities fall to the 1st Team manager. This creates a high-risk, short-term approach that neglects long-term development priorities.

4. **Lack of Role Clarity Across Football Functions**

    Across many Clubs, football-related roles - such as Academy Director, Head of Coaching, and Player Welfare Lead - are defined informally or not at all. The absence of clear job descriptions leads to overlapping responsibilities, inconsistent expectations, and operational inefficiencies.

ORGANISATION

RECOMMENDATIONS
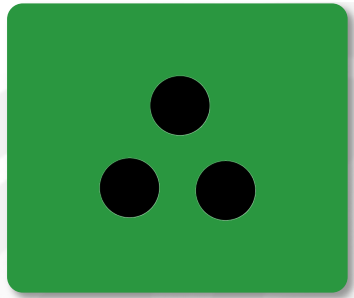
1. **Establish Technical Boards for Strategic Oversight**

   To guide long-term sporting decisions, Clubs would benefit from forming Technical Boards composed of representatives from the Academy, 1st Team, recruitment, and performance departments. These boards can serve as a forum for strategic alignment and cross-functional collaboration.

2. **Define and Promote the Sporting Director Role**

   Introducing a dedicated Sporting Director role can provide the strategic leadership needed to align the Academy, recruitment, and 1st Team. This role should be clearly defined, with authority to oversee sporting operations and drive long-term development.

3. **Standardise and Communicate Role Definitions**

   Introducing formal job descriptions for key football roles can help clarify responsibilities, improve accountability, and support staff development.

PEOPLE

This dimension explores the efforts of the Academy in providing a highly professional working and learning environment for staff members. How is staff performance monitored and evaluated? What development opportunities are provided to Academy staff?

double pass

PEOPLE
KEY FINDINGS

1. **Predominantly Volunteer-Based Workforce**

   The majority of Academy Staff operate on a voluntary basis or receive an expensed-based financial compensation. This model limits long-term commitment, professionalisation, and performance accountability.

2. **Unstructured Recruitment and Selection**

   Recruitment for football-related roles is largely informal, with no clear strategy or designated responsibility. Selection processes often rely on personal networks or availability rather than defined criteria or long-term planning.

3. **Limited Internal Coach Development**

   Internal educational pathways are either informal or non-existent. There is little investment in structured in-house training to support the growth and progression of Academy staff.

4. **Informal Performance Evaluation Practices**

   Performance reviews, where they occur, are typically ad hoc and undocumented. Without a formal framework, staff receive limited feedback, and development opportunities are inconsistently identified or followed up.

PEOPLE
RECOMMENDATIONS
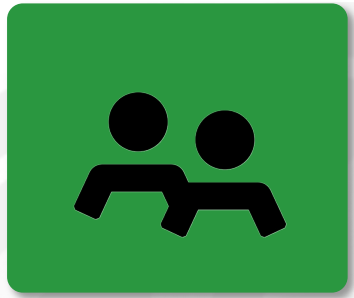
1. **Introduce Structured Recruitment Processes**

   Clubs would benefit from implementing basic recruitment protocols, including role profiles, selection criteria, and interview guidelines. Assigning responsibility for recruitment - whether to HR, the Sporting Director, or Academy Manager- can help ensure consistency and strategic alignment.

2. **Implement a Performance Evaluation Framework**

   Establishing a simple, repeatable evaluation process can support staff development and accountability. This might include annual reviews, goal-setting sessions, and feedback mechanisms tailored to coaching and support roles.

3. **Create Incentives to Strengthen Volunteer Retention**

   While volunteers remain vital to Club operations, offering modest but meaningful incentives - such as travel stipends, CPD access, or recognition schemes - can help improve retention and performance. Over time, Clubs should explore transitioning key roles into part-time or paid positions where feasible.

4. **Develop Internal Learning Pathways for Coaches**

   Clubs are encouraged to establish basic internal development structures, such as mentoring systems, peer learning sessions, or in-house workshops. These initiatives can help coaches grow within the Club and reinforce alignment with its playing and coaching philosophy.
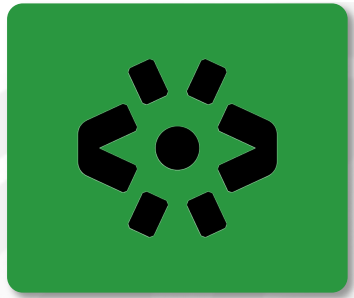
FOOTBALL OPERATIONS

Football Operations includes the specific planning, organisation, communication and process management conducted by the technical staff.

double pass

FOOTBALL OPERATIONS
KEY FINDINGS

1. **Missing Strategic Plan in Football Departments**

   Most Clubs operate their football departments without a formal strategic plan. This absence results in reactive decision-making, limited long-term direction, and weak alignment between the Academy, 1st Team, and recruitment functions.

2. **Disconnect Between Academy and 1st Team**

   Despite physical proximity in some cases, there remains a significant functional and relational gap between Academy operations and the 1st Team. This limits alignment in playing style, player progression, and shared objectives.
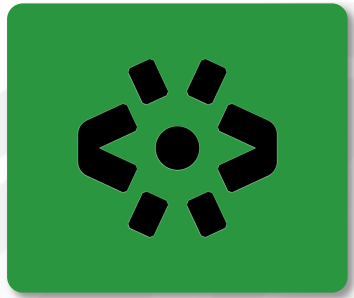
3. **Lack of Structured Coordination at Academy Level**

   Most Academies operate without a formal meeting structure, reducing opportunities for consistent communication, coordination, and collaborative planning among key staff.

FOOTBALL OPERATIONS
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Develop a Football-Specific Strategic Planning Framework**

    Clubs should create practical football plans that set clear goals for performance, Player Development, and recruitment, supported by measurable indicators. These plans should help align the Academy, 1st Team, and scouting efforts, using a flexible structure that fits the Club's size and resources.

2. **Strengthen Academy – 1st Team Integration**

    Bridging the gap between Academy operations and the 1st Team requires more than proximity - it calls for shared planning, aligned playing philosophies, and regular interaction. Clubs may consider joint training sessions, integrated performance reviews, or shared technical frameworks to foster cohesion.

3. **Introduce Formal Meeting Structures**

    Establishing regular Academy staff meetings can significantly improve communication and planning. Whether weekly or monthly, these sessions should include coaching, medical, and support staff to ensure alignment across all operational areas.

FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHY

In this section, we look at how the Club DNA and culture translates into a unique Football Philosophy for the Club and Academy. It focuses on the playing style and how this is developed, communicated and implemented.

double pass

FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHY
KEY FINDINGS

1. **Lack of Shared Football Philosophy**

   There is no unified or clearly articulated football philosophy connecting the 1st Team and the Academy. This disconnect results in misalignment across playing style, training methodology, and player progression pathways.

2. **Inconsistencies Within the Academy Structure**

   Teams within the same Academy often operate independently, with limited coordination or shared methodology. This fragmented approach undermines consistency in Player Development and team identity.

3. **Coaching Based on Individual Beliefs**

   In the absence of a Club-wide framework, coaches are left to implement their own interpretations of the game. As a result, training sessions and match-day decisions vary significantly from team to team, depending on each coach's personal preferences.

FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHY
KEY FINDINGS

4.   **No Integration Between Boys' and Girls' Programmes**

Technical and philosophical alignment between the boys' and girls' sides is virtually non-existent. This represents a missed opportunity to create cohesive development environments and share resources effectively.

5.   **Overemphasis on Opposition and Results**

Even at the younger age groups, coaching tends to focus heavily on preparing for weekend matches and countering opponents - often at the expense of long-term development objectives and individual learning.

FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Define a Shared Football Philosophy**

   Support Clubs in shaping a clear football philosophy that links the 1st Team and Academy. This shared vision must guide playing style, training methods, and Player Development across all levels.

2. **Create a Unified Academy Framework**

   Establishing a coordinated structure within the Academy enables teams to work with shared principles and planning. This improves consistency in coaching and strengthens the Club's identity.

3. **Standardise Coaching Across Teams**

   Introducing a common coaching framework (Coaching DNA) ensures that training and match preparation follow the same principles. This reduces differences caused by individual coaching preferences.

4. **Align Boys' and Girls' Programmes**

   Bringing boys' and girls' football under the same technical and philosophical umbrella creates a more connected development environment. It also allows for better use of shared resources.

FOOTBALL PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. **Build a Development-First Culture**

   Creating a culture that values player growth over short-term results leads to more sustainable success. This involves setting clear development goals and tracking progress regularly.

6. **Operationalise Documents**

   Football Philosophy documents must be actively used in coaching, planning, and decision-making. Keeping them updated and involving staff ensures they are useful and applied in practice.

7. **Strengthen Coach Engagement and Accountability**

   Helping coaches understand and apply the Club's Football Philosophy requires clear communication and training. Setting expectations and following up supports consistent use across teams.
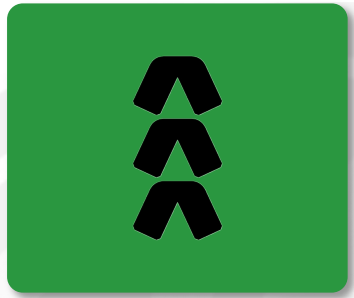
TEAM DEVELOPMENT

Team Development examines how the football philosophy is translated into a curriculum. Is there an age-appropriate curriculum to inform coaches on what to focus on in the different age groups and how to put this into practice?

double pass

TEAM DEVELOPMENT
KEY FINDINGS

1. **Absence of a Club-Wide Curriculum and Periodisation Plan**

   Most Clubs lack a structured curriculum or long-term periodisation model to guide training content across age groups. This leads to inconsistencies in development pathways and missed opportunities to systematically build key competencies.

2. **Undefined Learning Objectives per Age Group**

   Clubs generally do not articulate clear, age-specific learning objectives. This absence limits the ability to tailor content appropriately, track Individual Development, and ensure that training is aligned with long-term progression goals.

3. **Training Dominated by Match Preparation**

   Sessions are largely designed around the previous or upcoming game, with limited attention to broader Player Development objectives. This match-centric approach restricts the long-term growth of technical, tactical, and cognitive skills.
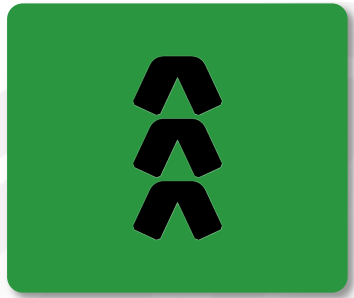
4. **No Vertical Integration Across Age Groups**

   There is little to no alignment between age categories when it comes to training content and developmental milestones. Each group tends to operate in isolation, without a progressive learning model guiding the journey from one stage to the next.

TEAM DEVELOPMENT
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Introduce a Club-Wide Training Curriculum**

    Support Clubs in developing a structured curriculum and long-term periodisation plan that spans all age groups. This provides a clear roadmap for Player Development and helps build core competencies in a consistent way.

2. **Define Clear Learning Objectives per Age Group**

    Setting specific goals for each age group allows coaches to tailor sessions more effectively and track individual progress. This clarity supports long-term development and helps align expectations across the Club.

3. **Balance Match Preparation with Development Goals**

    Encouraging Clubs to shift focus from game-specific preparation to broader developmental content will lead to more well-rounded players. Training should regularly include elements that build technical, tactical and cognitive skills over time.

4. **Connect Age Groups Through Vertical Integration**

    Linking age categories through shared training content and development milestones creates a smoother progression for players. It also ensures that learning builds logically from one stage to the next.
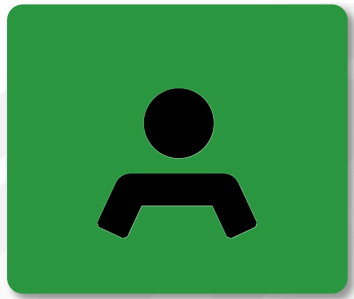
INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

This dimension focuses on the efforts made by the Academy in maximising the football potential of each individual player. How do players receive individual feedback and personal guidance on their performance and progression?

double pass

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT
KEY FINDINGS

1. **Individual Player Reviews**

    In many Clubs, players receive regular individual feedback, two or three times per season, allowing for continuous learning, reflection, and tailored development.

2. **Limited Focus on Maximizing Player Strengths**

    A small number of Clubs emphasise turning players' key strengths into "super strengths." The prevailing approach often centres on correcting weaknesses rather than amplifying unique assets that can define a player's future role.

3. **Poor Execution of Individual Development Plans (IDPs)**

    Most Clubs have IDPs in place on paper, but they are rarely implemented in practice. The plans lack structure, follow-up, and meaningful integration into weekly routines, diminishing their potential impact.

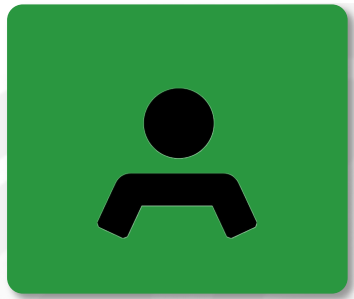4. **Disconnect Between IDPs and Club Philosophy**

    Individual development plans are often generic and not anchored in the Club's overarching Football Philosophy or Player Profile framework. This weakens coherence and alignment across the development system.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT
KEY FINDINGS

5.   **Limited Culture of Player Ownership and Self-Assessment**

Opportunities for players to reflect on their development and take ownership of their progress are not consistently embedded in the Academy environment. Encouraging self-evaluation and goal setting could help foster a more proactive and engaged learning mindset.
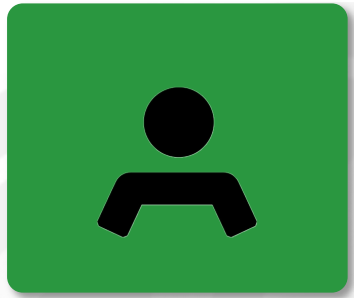
6.   **Perceived Time Constraints Not Effectively Managed**

Coaches frequently cite lack of time as a barrier to individual development, despite often spending 3–6 hours per week on bus travel. This reveals a missed opportunity to repurpose existing time for reflection, analysis, or one-on-one interactions.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Increase the Frequency of Individual Player Reviews**

   Encourage Clubs to schedule more frequent one-on-one feedback moments throughout the season, with a suggestion to hold them every 12 weeks for younger age groups, increasing to every 6 weeks for the older ones. More frequent reviews create space for reflection, goal-setting, and continuous development.

2. **Focus on Developing Player Strengths**

   Support a shift in coaching mindset towards enhancing what players already do well. By turning key strengths into standout qualities, Clubs can help players define their roles and increase their long-term potential.

3. **Improve the Use of Individual Development Plans (IDPs)**

   Help Clubs move beyond having IDPs on paper by embedding them into weekly routines, session planning and delivery, and coaching conversations. A structured approach with regular follow-up makes these plans more meaningful and impactful.
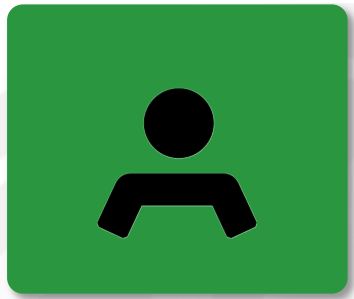
4. **Connect IDPs to Club Philosophy**

   Individual Development Plans should be built around the Club's Football Philosophy and Player Profile framework. This alignment strengthens coherence across the development system and ensures that IDPs support the Club's long-term vision.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT
RECOMMENDATIONS

5. **Make Better Use of Available Time**

Clubs could repurpose existing time - such as travel hours - for Individual Development activities. Reflection, video analysis, or short one-on-one conversations during these moments can add meaningful value without increasing workload.

6. **Promote Player Ownership and Self-Assessment**

Support the introduction of tools and routines that help players evaluate their own progress and set personal goals. Empowering players to take charge of their development fosters a more active and engaged learning culture

TALENT ID & RECRUITMENT

This dimension analyses the Academy's strategy and plans on identifying and recruiting the best available talent for their football programme. How is the process of Talent Identification standardised and put into practice?

double pass

TALENT ID & RECRUITMENT
KEY FINDINGS

1. **Lack of Dedicated Talent Identification Staff**

   Almost all Clubs operate without specialised personnel for Talent Identification and Scouting. This absence of expertise reduces the ability to systematically monitor and attract promising players.

2. **Subjective Recruitment by Academy Staff**

   Recruitment responsibilities often fall to Academy Directors and coaches, who make decisions based on personal judgment rather than structured evaluation frameworks, such as Player Profiles. This approach increases the risk of bias and inconsistency.

3. **Informal and Network-Driven Processes**

   Talent Identification tends to rely on personal networks, word-of-mouth, or chance observations rather than a structured and proactive scouting system. This ad hoc approach limits both reach and reliability.

4. **Guarantee of Comprehensive Talent Discovery**

   Given the lack of structure, Clubs cannot ensure that every promising player is identified and recruited. This undermines both the Academy pipeline and the long-term competitiveness of Clubs.

TALENT ID & RECRUITMENT

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Ensure Comprehensive Talent Discovery**

    Creating dedicated scouting roles within Clubs helps make Talent Identification a focused and consistent part of football operations. When scouting is treated as a specialised responsibility, Clubs can better track and evaluate players over time.

2. **Develop Formal Scouting Systems**

    Replacing informal, word-of-mouth scouting with organised systems allows Clubs to actively search for talent rather than waiting to hear about it, reducing chances of missing promising players.

3. **Invest in Scout and Recruitment Staff Education**

    Professionalising the scouting function requires targeted education for both scouts and heads of recruitment. Equipping staff with the knowledge, tools, and evaluation frameworks needed for modern Talent Identification strengthens the quality and consistency of recruitment across the football ecosystem.

4. **Link Recruitment to Player Profiles**

    Recruitment works best when it's guided by clear Player Profiles that reflect the Club's playing style and values. This makes it easier to identify players who fit the team and contribute to its future direction.

HEALTH & PERFORMANCE

The dimension examines the Academy's approach to improve players' fitness levels and to ensure that they are healthy and ready to perform. Are there medical and performance professionals available to supervise these processes?

double pass

HEALTH & PERFORMANCE
KEY FINDINGS

1. **Lack of Strategic Staffing and Direction**

   H&P departments often lack dedicated, qualified staff and operate without a clear strategic framework. This absence of structure undermines consistency and long-term progress in physical development.

2. **Narrow Focus on Physical Preparation**

   The current approach to H&P in most Clubs remains largely limited to strength and conditioning, with minimal integration of broader performance pillars such as injury prevention, recovery, nutrition, or mental resilience.

3. **Limited Screening and Testing**

   Basic physical screenings and fitness tests are conducted infrequently. This limits the ability to track development trends, identify risk factors, or personalise training loads.

4. **Health and Performance Services Often Outsourced**

   Many Clubs rely on external providers to support their health and performance programmes. This includes areas such as physical testing, injury follow-up, and matchday or training session support, reflecting a decentralised approach to Player Care and performance monitoring.

HEALTH & PERFORMANCE
KEY FINDINGS

5. **Minimal Gym Exposure**

   Most teams allocate only one gym session per week. This low frequency constrains players' ability to build the physical robustness required for long-term progression and transition to elite-level performance.

6. **Insufficient Weekly Training Volume**

   With typical training schedules consisting of only 2–3 field sessions and one gym session per week, the overall training volume falls short of the level needed for optimal physical and technical development.

7. **No Integration with Curriculum or Periodization**

   Performance objectives are not clearly mapped or aligned with the Club's Football Curriculum or Periodisation.   This disconnect leads to missed synergies between technical-tactical development and physical conditioning

HEALTH & PERFORMANCE

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Strengthen Staffing and Strategic Direction**

   H&P departments need qualified staff and a structure so that Clubs can build more consistent and effective development programmes. We also refer to the suggestion in 'Staffing' to collaborate with Universities.

2. **Broaden the Scope of Performance Support**

   H&P should go beyond strength and conditioning to include injury prevention, recovery, nutrition, and mental resilience. A more complete approach helps players stay fit, recover faster, and perform better over time.

3. **Increase the Frequency of Screening and Testing**

   Regular physical assessments - carried out multiple times per season - allow Clubs to track progress, spot risks early, and adjust training to individual needs, making development more targeted and safer.

4. **Develop In-House Health and Performance Capacity**

   Establish a dedicated Health & Performance department to centralise physical testing, injury management, and training support. Building internal expertise not only improves continuity of care and collaboration with coaching staff but also enhances data consistency and accessibility - enabling more effective tracking, analysis, and decision-making across the Player Pathway.

HEALTH & PERFORMANCE

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. **Raise Gym Exposure Across Teams**

Increase the frequency and consistency of gym sessions across all age groups to support comprehensive physical development. Beyond building strength, regular exposure enhances mobility, injury prevention, endurance, and overall athletic readiness for elite competition.

6. **Boost Weekly Training Volume**

To support physical and technical development, training schedules should include more field and gym sessions. A higher weekly volume gives players the repetition and intensity needed to improve.

7. **Connect Performance Goals to Football Planning**

Physical development should be linked to the Club's football curriculum and periodisation. Aligning these areas helps coaches and performance staff work together and get the most out of each training cycle.

PLAYER CARE

This dimension examines the Academy's engagement in the personal development and welfare of players. How are Academy players being prepared for a career on and off the pitch. How does the Academy support their players in combining elite football with their school studies?

double pass

PLAYER CARE
KEY FINDINGS

1. **Minimal Support Structures Beyond Welfare Officer**

   While all Clubs have appointed a designated Welfare Officer, broader support systems for player welfare and safeguarding are largely absent. There is a lack of multidisciplinary teams or integrated care networks to address players' wider needs.

2. **Strong Links to the Community**

   Many Clubs maintain close ties with their local communities, offering players a sense of belonging and connection. These relationships create a supportive environment that reinforces identity and values beyond the pitch.

3. **Foundational Safeguarding in Place**

   Basic elements such as codes of conduct and child protection policies are in place, forming a necessary compliance foundation. Still, these procedures are often treated as standalone requirements rather than part of a broader safeguarding culture.

4. **Limited Support for Personal Development**

   While many Clubs maintain strong community ties, structured programmes that support players' personal growth remain largely absent. Areas such as psychological wellbeing, academic support, life skills, and preparation for life beyond football are often overlooked, leaving players without the tools to develop off the pitch.

PLAYER CARE
KEY FINDINGS

5.   **Absence of Proactive Wellbeing Activities**

Few, if any, proactive initiatives are in place to regularly monitor or support the wellbeing of players. Activities such as regular check-ins, mental health workshops, or peer support groups are missing from the current Academy environment.

PLAYER CARE
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Expand Support Structures Around Player Welfare**

   Beyond appointing a Welfare Officer, Clubs need broader systems that include multidisciplinary teams and integrated care networks. These structures help address the wider needs of players, from safeguarding to emotional and social support.

2. **Embed Safeguarding into Club Culture**

   While basic policies like codes of conduct and child protection are in place, safeguarding must go beyond compliance. Embedding these principles into daily routines and decision-making helps create a safer and more supportive environment.

3. **Strengthen Personal Development Pathways**

   Structured programmes focused on personal growth - such as mental wellbeing, education, life skills, and career planning - should be part of every Club's Player Care Strategy. Supporting players off the pitch is essential for long-term development and wellbeing.

PRACTICE ON FIELD

This dimension explores the Academy's philosophy and approach for teaching and coaching young players. Is there a preferred methodology and coaching style to translate football theory into practice?

double pass

PRACTICE ON FIELD
KEY FINDINGS

1. **Session DNA Lacks Structure and Alignment**

   Session planning across teams is largely informal and guided by individual coaching preferences, with few shared tools or frameworks in place. In the absence of a documented session structure and a unified Football Philosophy, training formats vary widely, limiting consistency, innovation, and alignment with long-term development goals.

2. **Individual Plans Not Embedded**

   While individual development plans (IDPs) are in place and players often receive personal encouragement during training, there is limited evidence that session design and coaching consistently reflect each player's specific development goals. Although moments of individual attention are present, these are not yet systematically aligned with the objectives outlined in the IDPs.

3. **Coaching Without a Shared Framework (Coaching DNA)**

   Coaches provide positive reinforcement and support, yet there is no formal Coaching DNA to unify behaviour, feedback style, or delivery. This creates variability in coaching quality and messaging.

4. **Limited Training Contact Time**

   Players across all age groups experience insufficient training hours. The restricted contact time limits opportunities for skill development and tactical growth.

PRACTICE ON FIELD
KEY FINDINGS

5.   **Player-to-Coach Ratio Misrepresented**

On paper, the player-to-coach ratio appears healthy due to a large pool of volunteer coaches. In practice, sessions are often run by fewer staff, reducing individual attention and stretching coaching capacity.

PRACTICE ON FIELD
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Establish a Structured Session DNA Framework**

   To improve consistency and alignment across teams, we recommend developing a documented framework for session planning that reflects the Club's Football Philosophy and long-term development goals. Providing coaches with shared tools and guidelines will help move beyond traditional formats and ensure that training sessions contribute meaningfully to a unified Playing Identity.

2. **Integrate Individual Plans into Training**

   To better support player growth, we recommend more deliberate integration of individual development plans (IDPs) into weekly training routines. This includes designing sessions and coaching strategies that more directly reflect each player's specific development objectives. Providing coaches with the time, tools, and guidance to tailor exercises will help ensure that personal goals are consistently addressed throughout training.

3. **Implement a Club-Wide Coaching Framework**

   Introduce a Coaching DNA that defines expected behaviours, feedback styles, and session conduct. This will unify coaching approaches and strengthen player messaging.

4. **Increase Training Contact Time**

   Review scheduling and resource allocation to expand training hours across all age groups. Greater contact time will support deeper learning and more effective development.

PRACTICE ON FIELD
RECOMMENDATIONS

5. **Clarify and Optimise Coach Deployment**

Audit actual coach presence during sessions and adjust planning to reflect realistic ratios. Ensure that volunteer coaches are effectively integrated and supported to reduce strain on lead coaches.

DATA ANALYTICS

This dimension explores the Club's approach to Data Analytics. It examines the tools and methodologies employed to ensure that data-driven decisions enhance the Club's overall success.

double pass

DATA ANALYTICS
KEY FINDINGS

1. **Limited Use of Individual Video Feedback**

   While tools like Veo and Hudl are commonly used, video analysis is primarily conducted at the team level. Players rarely receive individual clips, which limits opportunities for personalised reflection and targeted improvement.

2. **Fragmented Use of Session Planning Tools**

   Although FAI Licensed coaches have access to Session Planner through their Coach Education pathway, there is no shared platform adopted across all teams for session and match preparation. This leads to fragmented workflows and inconsistent standards, as not all coaches use the same tools or follow a unified approach.

3. **Absence of a Centralised Video Library**

   There is no shared library of video clips or reviews to support team and Individual Development. Coaches lack access to curated examples or past footage that could enhance learning and reinforce key concepts.

4. **Limited Training and Game Evaluations**

   Training and match performances are rarely evaluated in a structured way. While occasional reviews may occur at team level, there is little to no consistent evaluation at the individual player level, limiting opportunities for targeted feedback and development.

5.   **Decentralised Management of Health and Performance Data**

Health & Performance data is primarily stored in Excel and managed externally, while structured evaluations of training and matches - especially at the individual level - are rarely conducted. The absence of a Club-driven platform limits consistency, accessibility, and the ability to track Player Development through integrated data and feedback.

DATA ANALYTICS
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Introduce Individualised Video Feedback**

   Expand the use of existing video tools to include individual player clips and personalised reviews. This will support reflective learning and allow players to better understand their performance in context.

2. **Implement a Shared Preparation Platform**

   Adopt a centralised software solution for session and game planning. A shared platform will streamline preparation, promote collaboration, and ensure alignment with Club-wide objectives.

3. **Develop a Club Video Library**

   Create a structured video archive with tagged clips for both Team - and Individual Development. This resource will serve as a reference point for coaches and players, supporting consistent messaging and long-term learning.

4. **Establish a Centralised Player Development Platform**

   Introduce a Club-managed system that integrates individual training and game evaluations with health and performance data. This will enable consistent feedback, improve data accessibility, and support long-term player development through structured analysis.

COLOPHON