



## Policy – Player development

DRAFT

### 1 Document purpose

This document explains the Association's position with regard to the development of junior footballers.

### 2 What this policy applies to

This policy applies to all competitions, clubs, teams, players and officials.

### 3 Policy

#### 3.1 Player development

Junior football is about developing players and their enjoyment of Australian Football. And at the heart of player development is giving each player a fair opportunity to compete for, win and dispose of the ball during competitive matches of football.

#### 3.2 Influences on player development

**Competition** – Matches should facilitate player development and enjoyment of Australian Football. A separate Association policy relates to the competition rules that set the match environment. Other ways that competition may influence player development are: (a) age groups, and (b) number of players on the field. These topics are covered later in this policy.

**Coaching** – Quality coaching that focuses primarily on player development, rather than winning the game, is the main influence on a player's development and enjoyment of Australian football. A separate Association policy relates to coaching.

**Umpiring** – Quality umpiring of the competition rules should help to ensure that fair and competitive matches of football are played, giving each player a fair opportunity to win and dispose of the football. A separate Association policy relates to umpiring.

**Game day environment** – Promotion of the spirit of junior football, a commitment to player welfare and management of the on and off field behaviours should create a game day environment that is enjoyed by all involved. A separate Association policy relates to the game day environment.

**Club** – Strong clubs provide the care, community and resources required to support the development of players as part of a team. All clubs and club members should support the view that player development is the fundamental aim of junior football. A separate policy relates to clubs and association.

**Grounds and facilities** – Quality grounds and facilities that are available for the demands of junior football is important for the development of footballers. A separate Association policy relates to grounds and facilities.

### 3.3 Single year age groups preferred

As the player numbers allow, the grades of competition should move to single year age groups.

The reason for this position is that it is in the best interest of player development. Single year age groups give players a more even opportunity to compete for and win the ball. As players age, they become bigger, faster and smarter. Generally then, in a contest for the ball between an older player and a younger player, the older player will have a better than average likelihood of winning the ball. Conversely, the younger player will have a less than average likelihood of winning the ball. This is not ideal for the development of either player.

Also, younger players can feel intimidated by older players as they are generally bigger, faster and smarter. Because of this, players may leave the sport, or potential players may avoid the sport.

### 3.4 Numbers on the field for each grade

#### 3.4.1 Competition Rules

The Competition Rules for the Association should state the maximum number of players on the field for each competition grade, noting that the Laws of Australian Football do not permit more than 18 players on the field for each team.

For junior grades of football, the maximum number on the field for each team should be less than 18.

#### 3.4.2 Junior grades (Year 7 and younger)

For the junior grades to Year 6, the *maximum* number of players permitted on the field for each team should be 15. WAFC rules for Year 4 to Year 7 grades allows a team of 9, 12 or 15 players a side.

The reason for this position is that the focus for development of players in the junior grades (Year 7 and younger) should be more on gaining possession of the ball and ball handling skills, and less on competition for the ball. With less players on the field, each player on the field will have a greater opportunity to gain possession of the ball, and then find space to dispose the ball correctly. These are the fundamental skills of football that players of the junior grades should be learning.

### 3.5 Open rules might apply to Year 7

For Year 7s, the Association might consider AFL Junior Policy for 12 year olds (Year 7s) as it recommends either: (a) applying modified rules like Year 6, or (b) running as an open rules competition like Year 8, provided the Year 7 grade is a single year competition only (i.e. not a combined Year 6/7 competition).

Competition football for the Year 7s is an option worth considering. Due to the alignment of competition year groups to school year, players are up to a half year older than the previous '12s and under' grade, and .

### 3.6 Play ups and even ups

Players should be encouraged to play with their age group. Within their age group, players can generally expect to compete with players of similar size and ability, which is best for a player's development.

Competition rules permit players to play one age group higher than their regular age group. A player might be encouraged to play up a grade where the *player's coach* considers this is best for the

player's development after giving consideration for the player's welfare. Clubs should resist allowing play ups just to improve player numbers for the team in the higher grade.

Where a player does play up, the two coaches should collaborate and limit the time on the field for the player during a match day. For example, the player might play three quarters in their regular grade and just one quarter in the higher grade.

Where a higher grade team is short of numbers, the even up rule should apply. With the even up rule in place, any spare players may play a quarter for the team with the lesser numbers, rather than sit on the bench. Players should be encouraged by their coaches to play with full commitment to the contest, irrespective of the team that they're playing for, remembering player development has priority over winning the game.

Where a team is persistently short, players should be encouraged to ask their non-football playing mates to play football, to bolster team numbers.

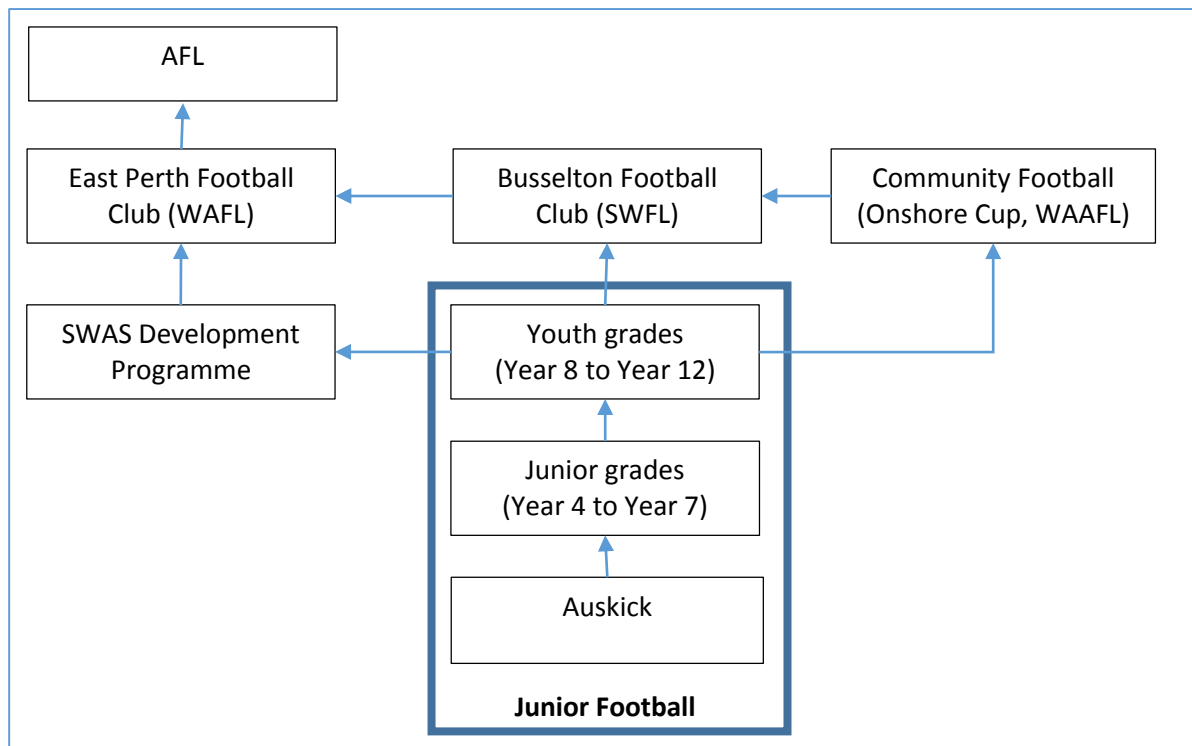
### 3.7 Talented player pathways

A high performance development programme for talented players that demonstrate aptitude for the game should be promoted by the Association.

The Association should establish key relationships with the SWAS Development Programme and the East Perth Football Club to ensure talented players are given opportunity to participate at the highest levels of the sport.

### 3.8 Beyond junior football

Every player should be encouraged to aspire to a football career beyond junior football, be it at local, state or national levels; and in the various capacities of the sport including as a player, official, match official, administrator or other capacity; as an amateur or a professional.



Irrespective of a player's life pursuits, every player should leave junior football with an appreciation for the sport; a lasting impression of junior football as a positive experience; an ongoing interest in their personal health and fitness; and a good sense of community.

#### 4 Why this policy is required

Player development is fundamental to junior football. By focussing on player development, players can expect more enjoyment and satisfaction from the sport. As players gain more enjoyment, they are likely to participate more, get more involved and ultimately become far better footballers. With teams of better footballers, more competitive games of football are played leading to improved player development.

While aiming to win games of football is important, a focus on winning will generally benefit only a few to the detriment of the rest. Given the 'rest' are less involved, they tend to become disenfranchised from the sport and may drop out. And a team of mostly disenfranchised players does not create a competitive or enjoyable game of football.

#### 5 Document record

Date	Version	Description	By
27-Aug-2013	1.0 DRAFT	Draft for comments	AS
15-Jan-2014	1.1 DRAFT	Included reference to the policy for the game day environment	AS