



JUNIOR FOOTBALL REGULATIONS

UNDER 14 – UNDER 17

2026-27 SEASON



JUNIOR FOOTBALL REGULATIONS: U14–U17

The Football Association of Wales have developed a standardised set of rules specific to junior football (Under 14 - Under 17) which will help to:

- Make it simpler for players, coaches, clubs, leagues and parents to better understand the rules which are consistent across the Country
- Retain players, make the game more accessible for players of all abilities and make football a more appealing sport for players and parents.
- Ensure rules are age appropriate

The following regulations are to be implemented by all Junior Football Leagues in Wales.

1. PLAYING FORMAT

1.1 The playing formats for junior football (Under 14 - Under 17) are outlined below and are mandatory for all Junior Leagues in Wales to follow:

Age Group	Playing Format	Ball Size	Match Duration
Under 14	11 v 11	5	70 mins (35 min halves)
Under 15	11 v 11	5	80 mins (40 min halves)
Under 16	11 v 11	5	80 mins (40 min halves)
Under 17	11 v 11	5	80 mins (40 min halves)

1.2 COACHES & TEAM HELPERS

- 1.2.1 Clubs are to ensure that each age group squad has at least ONE qualified coach, minimum FAW Football Leaders Award. (CAP 2.3.3). All participating teams must submit a team sheet via COMET on match days. This is to identify what players have participated on any given match day.
- 1.2.2 As per Club Accreditation criteria 2.3.5, all clubs must ensure that there is an adult(s) in attendance who possesses an FAW DBS, FAW Football Leaders Award and FAW First Aid Award for all age group squad's matches and training sessions.
- 1.2.3 A club may appoint volunteers to the role of 'team helper' with any team. Subject to completion of a FAW DBS check, these individuals can supervise young people to ensure the correct player to adult ratio is maintained. (CAP 2.3.2). For clarity, where a club has multiple teams at the same age group, 1 qualified coach with an FAW Leaders Award must be present along with a first aider. Team helpers with a valid DBS check can assist with the organising of teams at a venue where a qualified coach is present.
- 1.2.4 For the avoidance of doubt, all coaches must have a valid FAW approved Enhanced DBS Check for Regulated Activity
- 1.2.5 As per club accreditation criteria 2.3.1, clubs must adhere to the following coach to player ratios as outlined below:



Age group	Qualified coach: Players ratio (Must have a minimum of an FAW Leaders Award)	DBS certified adult: Players ratio	Qualified first aiders: Players ratio (Must have a minimum of an FAW Football Emergency Aid Award)
U6 – U8	1:16	1:6	Minimum 1 per training or playing venue
U9 – U12	1:16	1:8	Minimum 1 per training or playing venue
U13 – U17	1:18	1:10	Minimum 1 per training or playing venue

Please remember that a minimum of 2 supervisors is always recommended, even if the number of children is low.

2. AGE GROUPS

- 2.1. To align with the Small-Sided Football regulations, age groupings must be a minimum of one academic year and a maximum of two years (FAW rule 88.2).
- 2.1.1 For the purposes of age groupings, an Academic year begins on the 1st September and ends on the 31st August of the following year. Academic year one (1) is the year in which a player reaches his / her 6th birthday.
- 2.1.2 Clubs are encouraged, if practically possible, to run single age group teams as this will help to grow the game and band players together who, in the main, are of similar age, size and football ability. It is recognised, however, that this may not be possible due to limited player numbers.
- 2.1.3 If leagues run single age band divisions, the FAW would encourage players to play within their relevant age group, however, we do want players participating within a suitable environment and therefore, there are circumstances when an individual playing up an age group should be considered by the club.
- 2.1.4 If a club feels that based on a player's ability or physicality, they should be playing down one-year group, permission to play down must be gained annually in accordance with FAW Rule 88. A written letter outlining rationale must be sent to the relevant league secretary and signed by the club secretary and be subject to approval by the relevant area association.
- 2.1.5 Where clubs operate single age bands, entire teams are not ordinarily permitted to move up an age group en masse. This approach could benefit some players but may also disadvantage others within a team.
- 2.1.5.1 If a club wishes to play a whole team up one academic year en masse, this must be communicated in writing to the relevant league secretary and area association secretary evidencing a clear rationale within the request.
- 2.1.5.2 If a club submits such a request during a league season, where fixtures have already commenced, the decision will be at the discretion of the League Management Committee.



2.1.6 Where junior leagues operate single age bands, i.e. U14, U15, U16 & U17, the age parameters on the COMET platform must reflect the age groups being delivered as per the League programme and not automatically set at a two year age band. Players wishing to play up or down can do so in accordance with regulation 2.1.3, 2.1.4 and 2.1.5.

2.1.7 A junior player can only be registered to one team roster at any given time within a junior league or cup competition. For example, where an U14 junior player is playing up a year at U15, the player can only represent the U15 team unless and internal transfer is made. This is to support the maintaining of competition integrity. Any club wishing to make internal transfers should refer to their Area Association rules.

2.1.8 A player may only participate in one team per match day. For example, a player representing an U14 team within a club cannot also play for the U15's on the same day. This is to protect player welfare by not overloading the participant and ensuring players do not exceed the maximum game duration in a 24 hour period. This applies to all Small-Sided and Junior Football age groups.

2.2 A junior player is permitted to play in the age group directly one year above. The age groups that a player is eligible to play in are set out in the following table:

Age as of August 31 st of the relevant playing season	School Academic year	Eligible age groups	Format	Match Day Squad Limit
13	9	Under 14	11v11	18
		Under 15	11v11	18
14	10	Under 15	11v11	18
		Under 16	11v11	18
15	11	Under 16	11v11	18
		Under 17	11v11	18
16	12	Under 17 & Open age	11v11	18

Where appropriate, Leagues can deliver multiple participation offers up to the maximum playing format permitted per age group. This is to encourage flexibility and a variety of playing opportunities. For example, a junior league could offer a 5v5 Futsal or 7v7 winter programme alongside the traditional 11v11 competition format.

	4v4	5v5	7v7	9v9	11v11
Under 6 & Under 7	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Under 8 & Under 9	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Under 10 & Under 11	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Under 12 & Under 13	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Under 14 – Under 17	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

2.3 Leagues will have discretion on whether to introduce an under 17 league programme. This age group is not a mandatory requirement, however this option can support the retention of players within the game who may not be ready for the transition into senior football.



- 2.4. On their 16th birthday, a player will be permitted to play open age football for the same registered club. Therefore, a player on their 16th birthday would have permission to play in both junior, youth and senior matches.
- 2.5 In order to provide relevant training and playing opportunities for girls across Wales, there is additional flexibility with regards to the age bandings that a junior female player or team can request to participate within:
- 2.5.1 Any junior girls' team aged under 12 – under 17, can request to play, up to a maximum of two years, down within a mixed / boys junior league. Any girls team with permission to do so, must conform to the playing format of the respective league age group. For example, an under 14 girls team playing in an under 12 mixed/boys league must play the 9V9 format.
- 2.5.2 Girls can request permission to play down up to a maximum of two years within a boys/mixed team or league, or for a Cymru Premier Academy at ages under 12 – under 17. For example, an under 12 girl can request permission to play within an under 10 boys team / mixed league.

Permission for girls or girl's teams to play down two years down are managed on a case-by-case basis as follows:

For a junior girls' team wanting to play down two years in a boys/mixed league, a written letter outlining rationale must be sent to the relevant league secretary and signed by the club secretary and be subject to approval by the relevant area association.

For a junior girl to play down two years in a boys/mixed team, a written letter outlining the rationale must be sent to the relevant league secretary and signed by the club secretary and player's parent.

For a junior girl to play down two years in a Cymru Premier Academy, a written letter outlining the rationale must be sent to Competitions Executive in FAW Domestic Department and signed by the Head of Coaching and players' parent.

3. BALL SIZE

The ball size for all junior football must be size 5.

4. MATCH DURATION

Match duration for each age group is set out in the table below:

Age Group	Match Duration
Under 14	70 minutes (35 minute halves)
Under 15	80 minutes (40 minute halves)
Under 16	80 minutes (40 minute halves)
Under 17	80 minutes (40 minute halves)
Under 18 and above	90 minutes (45 minute halves)



5. SQUAD SIZE & TEAM ROSTERS

- 5.1 To help provide adequate playing opportunities and to reflect the varying demographics across Wales, each Area Association will be responsible for setting squad cap limits which are to be documented in each Area Association's rules on an annual basis.
- 5.2 In matches played using the 11 v 11 format in junior football, clubs may be able to select a maximum match day squad of between 16 and 18 players. The maximum match day squad will be set by the Area association who will publish these limits within their rules.
- 5.3 Team Rosters in competition football (U12-U17)
The use of team rosters for all League and Cup competitions are compulsory at Under 12 age group and above for all junior leagues. This will help to maintain competition integrity
- 5.3.1 All teams (U12 to U17), competing in grassroots competitions provided by Area Associations, must complete a team roster on Comet, for each competition they have entered, which includes cup competitions.
- 5.3.2 Junior Leagues will have the authority to implement the locking of team rosters in order to maintain competition integrity. Where the locking of team rosters is implemented, Junior Leagues will set a date for all participating member clubs to complete a roster prior to the start of a season.
- 5.3.3 The maximum number of players that can appear on a team roster is set out within each Area Association rule book. Where team rosters are locked, clubs will need to request permission to add/remove players from a team roster to the relevant Junior League or Area Association Secretary.
- 5.3.4 Where a club has more than one team in a junior league or cup competition, the Junior League has the authority to enforce a rule where a player can only be assigned to one team roster for a designated competition. This is to ensure competition integrity. Failure to do so may result in Disciplinary Action being taken by the relevant League or Area Association.
- 5.3.5 Each Area Association is empowered to set internal transfer limits on team rosters for clubs wishing to move players. This is to maintain competition integrity.
- 5.3.6 Where the locking of team rosters is implemented by a Junior League, they will have the authority to enforce a regulation where a junior player can only be registered to one team roster at any given time. For example, where an U14 junior player is playing up a year at U15, the player can only represent the U15 team unless an internal transfer is made. This is to support the maintaining of competition integrity. Clubs wishing to make internal transfers should refer to their League and Area Association rules.
- 5.3.7 Any registered player that participates in a match and does not appear on a team roster would be deemed ineligible.



6. PLAYING TIME

All players in the match day squad should have a minimum of 50% playing time when participating in matches. For example, at an under 14 match where the total playing duration is 70 minutes, all players within the squad should play a minimum of 35 minutes each. This is to ensure that all participants have adequate playing opportunities to experience the match day environment, develop their skills and ultimately have an enjoyable experience.

7. SUBSTITUTIONS

There is no limitation on the number of substitutions allowed during a match. Rolling substitutions are allowed throughout meaning players may re-enter the game after being substituted.

8. POSITIVE MATCH DAY CULTURE

The FAW want to improve the match day culture and off-pitch behaviour of parents, coaches and guardians. As part of the campaign, the following practices must be introduced:

- 8.1 Smoking and vaping is banned from the side-line.
- 8.2 Supportive side-lines where spectators are encouraged to applaud and praise both teams' efforts but not shout, call out in a negative way or coach.
- 8.3 Coaches may support players through questions that prompt them to think for themselves but must not continually shout instructions during matches.
- 8.4 Behind the Line, Behind the Team'. Leagues/clubs must:
 - Create a 'Buffer zone' that runs parallel to the pitch, ideally 2 metres from both touchlines, a smaller buffer zone can be used where space doesn't allow 2 metres.
 - Buffer zone should be marked by portable crowd barriers, cones or an additional marked line.
 - Only players, designated coaches and 1st Aider are allowed within the zone.
 - All other spectators must watch from behind the buffer zone lines.
 - NO spectators are allowed to stand on the goal line or behind the goal.

9. MERCY RULE - MANAGING UNBALANCED MATCHES IN JUNIOR COMPETITION FOOTBALL

Matches that finish 18-0, 15-1 or even 35-0 are demoralising for the losing team and do nothing for the development of the players on the winning team. In addition, such scorelines can have a major impact on player enjoyment, well-being and participation in the sport.

In an attempt to prevent such high scorelines being recorded where matches are clearly unbalanced, the FAW have introduced the following mandatory rules for Junior competition football (Under 12 to Under 17):

- 9.1 Introduction of the 'Mercy' rule. When one team is ahead by eight (8) goals, the match is declared over, the home team must end the match timer on the Comet App and the score is recorded. Any remaining game time is to be played out as a friendly with no match events to be recorded other than discipline offences by the match official. As an example, a scoreline may finish 8-0, 9-1, 10-2. Comet will automatically prevent the winning team from entering further goals that would exceed the 8-goal margin.



Coaches are encouraged to use interventions to challenge players appropriately during unbalanced fixtures to aid player development. Guidance is available here. Any disciplinary action in the subsequent part of the game must be recorded in the usual way.

In addition to the 'Mercy rule' the FAW will be working with junior leagues across the country to support the development of ability banding leagues which will help reduce the number of unbalanced matches and provide a more enjoyable football experience for all.

9.2 The recording of goal difference is not permitted to be used by junior leagues as a determining factor for league standings.

10. FIXTURE FLEXIBILITY

In the spirit of promoting participation and enjoyment in competition junior football (U12 and above), teams are permitted to bring a scheduled fixture forward, provided the following conditions are met:

- **Mutual Agreement:** Both teams must agree to the new date and time. This agreement must be confirmed in writing by email, by both club secretaries or their nominated deputy.
- **League Notification:** The league secretary must be notified of the rescheduled fixture at least 72 hours in advance, with confirmation from both teams' club secretaries or their nominated deputy.
- **Referee Availability:** It is the responsibility of the teams to ensure a qualified referee is available for the new date in accordance with League rules. The league will assist where possible but cannot guarantee referee availability.
- **Fairness and Integrity:** No fixture may be moved to give an unfair advantage or to avoid playing with a weakened team.
- The rescheduled match must not clash with existing scheduled fixtures
- Any rescheduled match must not take place within 24 hours of a previous or forthcoming fixture.

11. WEARING GLASSES/SPECTACLES IN FOOTBALL:

Due to the physical nature of football, there is a moderate risk of eye injury. Spectacles or goggles may mitigate the risk of injury and can also be worn by individuals who need to wear prescription lenses. The FAW recommend that players who need prescription lenses wear Polycarbonate lenses with an elasticised band when playing football.



POLYCARBONATE LENSES

Polycarbonate lenses are made of a type of plastic that is more impact-resistant than standard plastic lenses. Polycarbonate lenses are also much thinner and lighter in weight. This is the most important property of all protective spectacles or goggles. Good polycarbonate is virtually unbreakable and will sustain an impact such as a ball or hand/finger. Frames should provide full coverage of the eye orbit and should not have adjustable metal nose pad arms.

Example of polycarbonate lenses with sports band



SPORTS BAND

An elasticised band should secure the frame instead of temple pieces. Players must have something that will be firmly secured to the head so that the spectacles or goggles won't fall off. A frame with temple pieces will not hold tightly enough and as such, any impact with the ball and or another player could lift the frame off and potentially cause injury to the eye.

Although sports eyewear is intended to offer the best protection available, there is always the possibility that the wearer may sustain an eye or facial injury due to severe impact or because of the nature of the activity.

Under 12 - Under 17

All players must follow the above guidelines and use Polycarbonate lenses with an elasticised band. It is important to note as stated in the Laws of the Game “*A player must not use equipment or wear anything that is dangerous*”. It is the Match Officials duty to ensure the safety of all participants. As such, if they feel the glasses/frame pose a risk to other players and/or the wearer, they may not allow the glasses to be worn. You should always check the suitability of spectacles with a registered optician, optometrist or medical practitioner. It might be useful to obtain a letter to confirm the spectacles adhere to the above guidelines which can be shown to a match official should they enquire about their suitability and safety. In exceptional circumstances, where it is not possible to follow these guidelines a request for exemption should be made in writing to the relevant League and or Area Association to be considered in conjunction with medical advice.

GUIDELINES FOR MATCH OFFICIALS

Match Officials should ensure that if a request has been made to wear glasses or goggles, as per the Laws of the Game they should be checked and must not be a danger to the wearer or any other player and should follow the above guidelines and Laws of the Game. As with all aspects of the application of the Laws of the Game, the ‘spirit’ and ‘intention’ of the Laws are crucial considerations, where this enables greater participation and enjoyment than might otherwise be the case.

12. WEARING HEARING AIDS IN FOOTBALL

Players are permitted to wear hearing technology during football matches provided they are comfortable and securely fitted. The decision on whether to wear a hearing aid during a match is up to the player, not the game leader or referee. However, the game leader or referee has a responsibility under Law 4 of the Laws of the Game that if a device of this nature becomes loose when playing they will have to request that the player leave the field of play in order for it to be made secure.

13. CONCUSSION

Concussion symptoms may vary and can include dizziness, headache, or unsteadiness. Please refer to the UK Concussion Guidelines for Non-Elite (Grassroots) Sport that will



help you identify, manage and prevent concussion affecting players in grassroots football:

UK Concussion Guidelines for Non-Elite (Grassroots) Sport [FAW Heading Guidelines](#)

A player can only return to football activities (not before day 21) as long as they are symptom free at rest for 14 days.

14. APPROPRIATE COMPETITION OFFERS

Reviewing and adapting junior league competition structures is essential to ensure young players enjoy their experience and remain engaged in the game long term. When competitions are balanced and appropriately structured, players are more likely to feel challenged, motivated, and included.

This can be achieved by:

- Assessing team ability before creating league formats or divisions
- Allowing flexibility to move teams where clear mismatches occur
- Introducing a phased league approach across the season. Using two or three competition blocks enables teams to move up or down divisions based on performance, while single-division leagues can benefit from a top-half and bottom-half format to create more competitive and enjoyable matches for all participants.

Where multiple divisions are in place, new teams should not automatically be placed into the bottom division, as this may create an inappropriate level of competition for both the new team and existing teams within that division. As junior football is not part of the formal football pyramid, competition structures should prioritise team ability and player development rather than traditional promotion and relegation principles. Creating balanced and flexible competition formats helps ensure players experience appropriate challenge, enjoyment, confidence, and long-term engagement in the game.

