

COMPETITION & TECHNICAL CHANGES

2025 – 2026

PART 1: GIRLS & WOMEN



FOOTBALL
NSW

BACKGROUND: PLAYER DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

Football NSW Strategic Plan 2023 - 2026

“...to develop the most effective youth system of any state”

GOALS

- National team success
- An average of 45% of Australian national representative players are selected from NSW
- Increase in players from NSW reaching A-Leagues and signing professional contracts
- Achieve 75% participant retention rate
- Improved transparency with members
- Clear roles & responsibilities throughout the game ensuring clarity and empowerment
- Streamlined service delivery across Australian football structures
- 25% increase in female coaches and referees



**GROWING
FEMALE
FOOTBALL**



**SUPPORTING
COMMUNITY
FOOTBALL**



**ENHANCING
COMPETITIONS**



**PRODUCING
FOOTBALL
TALENT**



**PROVIDING
LEADERSHIP**

BACKGROUND: PLAYER DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

The Competitions Department & Technical Department commenced a review into the Youth Player Development system in Football NSW throughout the 2024 season.

REVIEW

- Youth League Competitions
- High performance programs
- Talent support programs
- State representative programs
- Regional football pathways



INFORM

- Competition structures
- Club requirements
- Club servicing & support
- Talented player programs

STAGE ONE

STAGE TWO



BACKGROUND: PLAYER DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

STAGE ONE

Research	Examination of Technical & Competition recommendations from FIFA, AFC, UEFA, Football Australia & other national bodies
Competition structures	A review of the past 10 years of FNSW Competition structures and alterations
Data analysis	In-depth data analysis to obtain objective evidence on various factors of FNSW Competitions and Clubs that relate and influence football development.
Observations	Ongoing observation from FNSW staff and representatives of the Youth Development system in FNSW, including training and matchday visits to Clubs.



23 Membership & Stakeholder meetings

STAGE TWO

Talented player prog.	A review of FNSW delivered talented player support programs; TSP, TDS, FNSW Institute, NYC
Consultation meetings	Held with a wide array of relevant stakeholders & members
Membership surveys	Surveys to all GYL, BYL & AYL players, Clubs, coaches and parents



1,490 survey responses

GIRLS' & WOMEN'S COMPETITION CHANGES: 2025 - 2026

The following changes will come in effect for the 2025 – 2026 Girls' & Women's Competitions:

I.	Maintain the current numbers within Girls' /Women's Competitions (two tiers of 14 clubs)
II.	Expand the Girls' Youth League Two to include Under 18, aligning the leagues
III.	Women's Reserve Grade & U20s to become Under 23s (plus four overage players per team sheet)
IV.	Decoupling of Girls' & Women's Competitions
V.	Implementation of Club Standards across Girls' Youth League; two-year licence period
VI.	Dissolution of the FNSW Institute program & introduction of the 'Future Sapphires' programs

I. Maintain the current numbers within Girls' /Women's Competitions

Football NSW will not be expanding or reducing the Girls' & Women's Competition for the period 2025 – 2026.

REASONING

20% of Girls Youth League teams are currently deemed 'low' in squad size (<14 players).

Poor referee coverage & capacity
MO, AR1, AR2
GYL1 – 96%, 91%, 86%
GYL2– 89%, 80% & 66%

Limited mechanism in place to 'performance manage' Clubs

GYL Competitiveness is deemed low.

Goal difference

GYL1 – 2.00 – 2.99

GYL2 – 2.93 – 3.81

Goal difference of 4 goals +

GYL1 – 26% of fixtures

GYL2 – 32% of fixtures

Top 4 vs Bottom 4

GYL1 – 3.78 – 5.13

GYL2 – 5.25 – 8.28

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Expansion of the Girls' & Women's Competition as part of a development plan.

Increased referee coverage and capacity to support growth.

Meet the future demand of the increased grassroots female football numbers post recent growth.

FNSW implementation of a Club Standards & Benchmarking framework.

II. Expand the Girls' Youth League Two to include Under 18s, aligning the leagues

Football NSW will introduce the Girls' Under 18 age grade into Girls Youth League Two, aligning the Competition grades.

REASONING

Increase player retention during a known 'peak drop out' period of Youth sport.
Current GYL2 retention rate of 46%.

98% support from Clubs.

Reduce the gap or 'jump' between grades within the Girls player pathway
Currently from Under 16 to Under 20.

Addition of 224 player & 14 coach opportunities within female pathway.

Reduce player movement impact on promoted/relegated Clubs.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

This change will stretch referee resources, however, it is deemed necessary to support the growth of the female game.

Alignment of GYL1 & GYL2.

III. Women's Reserve Grade & U20s to become Under 23s (plus four average players per team sheet)

Football NSW will align the NPL Reserve Grade & League One Under 20s grades to an 'Under 23s grade'. Within this grade, teams will be able to field four (4) overage players per fixture.

REASONING

Alignment of Competitions; NPL Womens & League One Women's

Increase match minutes & opportunities for young players

Range is within average age of Reserve / U20 grades currently 17.8 – 20.3 years

Reduces the ability of Clubs to influence fixtures to secure points by using Senior players

IV. Decoupling of Girls' & Women's Competitions

Football NSW will 'decouple' the Girls' Youth Competitions & Senior Women's Competitions for purposes of Club movement between Leagues.

REASONING

Increase focus & investment of Club resources on Youth programs; technical staff, facilities, player services, player retention etc..

Each program has a different core purpose and focus:
Senior program = Performance
Youth program = Development

Alignment with international football federation recommendations and best practice leagues globally.

Reward & recognition of 'good' youth development environments.

Current coupled method promotes Clubs to focus efforts entirely on Senior program for Leagues success (i.e. promotion)

Senior Club Championship;
First Grade – x4 points
Under 23 – x1 points

Alike the Boys Youth League structure.

V. Implementation of Club Standards across Girls’ Youth League; two-year licence period

Football NSW will introduce the Club Standards & Benchmarking Framework across Youth Leagues and Junior Development Leagues from the 2025 – 2026 Licence period. In line with this, the Girls’ & Women’s Clubs Participation agreement will move to a two-year cycle.

REASONING

Acknowledgement that the current ‘Club Championship’ model within Boys’ Youth League is not fit for purpose.

Increase retention rate of players, currently;
2022-23 – 41%
2023-24 – 44%

Decrease the ‘win at all costs’ mentality within Youth football.

Adherence to FIFA, AFC, UEFA and leading football nations recommendations and practices.

Hold Clubs more accountable to the experience and environment provided to Youth players.

Improve player experience and wellbeing.

Recognise and reward ‘good’ player development environments.

Improve and increase the amount of high-quality youth football development environments in FNSW.

Football NSW to increase its support & capability building to Clubs; planning, training and matchday visits and support.

Meets critical criteria outlined within the FIFA ‘Give every talent a chance’ report.

V. Implementation of Club Standards across Girls' Youth League; two-year licence period

The Club Standards & Benchmarking Framework will be implemented across the Girls' Junior Development Leagues & Girls' Youth Leagues in 2025 - 2026. Please see the 'Club Standards Information Pack 2025-2026' for further information.

The Club Standards evaluates Clubs across five components. Each component is weighted, with the final assessment score determining the ranking of the Club within the Youth League structure and consequently whether a club is promoted or relegated from the Leagues.

STANDARD	DESCRIPTION
League Compliance	This includes minimum requirements for participation in each league. i.e. Minimum of three training sessions per week
Club Championship	This is the accumulation of points for the Club across two years of Competition in the Under 14, Under 15, Under 16 & Under 18 grades.
Football Criteria	The Clubs ability to submit detailed documentation as outlined in Appendix 1 of their football program, including Youth Development Plan, Player services, Coach Development Plan and Football operations.
Technical Qualifications	This component incorporates the Technical Qualifications and appointment of staff, including disciplinary across the two-year period.
Progression & Retention	This component includes the player retention of the Club over a two-year period, and, the progression of players from the Club to a higher tier and/or APL Academy.



V. Implementation of Club Standards across Girls' Youth League; two-year licence period



As per the Junior Development League implementation of the Club Standards & Benchmarking framework in 2024, each Club will be appointed a Technical Advisor to support, assess and build capabilities of their staff.

As outlined within the Information Pack, Clubs will be accountable to the following:

- Football criteria – Planning document submission
- Football criteria – Delivery – FNSW observation of Training & Matchdays
- League Compliance requirements
- Technical Qualifications of staff
- Player progression & retention

Due to the implementation of the Club Standards, the participation licence period will move to a 2-year cycle, enabling Football NSW to evaluate Clubs frequently to improve and grow the game.

Please see the 'Club Standards Information Pack 2025-2026' for further information.



VI. Dissolution of the FNSW Institute program & introduction of the 'Future Sapphires' programs

Football NSW will cease its delivery of the FNSW Institute Program at the conclusion of the 2024 season. From season 2025, FNSW will introduce and deliver the 'Future Sapphires' program in line with its State teams.

The Football NSW Institute program has been vital to the development of the female game and participants in NSW since its inception, supporting the growth of a large array of talented individuals that have progressed to represent FNSW State teams & National teams.

As part of the Player Development Review, an in-depth assessment was completed of the program and Football NSW's role within the ecosystem, including evaluation as part of the FIFA 'Double Pass' report.

The Institute has been a leading program across the state, however since its introduction the football ecosystem in NSW has changed considerably. Female participation numbers have soared within the grassroots game in recent years, FNSW Clubs have improved and increased their investment and focus on the female game, FNSW Competitions have three of five A-League Clubs represented within the Competitions and Football NSW has increased its investment into the talent player pathway through the Talent Support Program and State teams.

The decision to dissolve the Institute program shifts the core responsibility of player development to our Member Clubs. This change will provide clarity of the player development pathway in NSW and encourage Clubs to continue to invest in their programs.

As part of the dissolution, Football NSW will be granting a participation licence to Western Sydney Wanderers FC to join the Girls' & Women's Competitions from 2025, thus resulting in four of five A-Leagues Clubs participating.

Football NSW will shift its role within the football ecosystem to support Club development and capability building as per the Club Standards & Benchmarking framework, alongside continued investment within the talented player pathway, including programs such as Talent Support Program, Talent Development Scheme, State teams and the introduction of the Future Sapphires program.

VI. Dissolution of the FNSW Institute program & introduction of the 'Future Sapphires' programs

The Future Sapphires program will be introduced as a supplementary program alongside players Club commitments.

FUTURE SAPPHIRES PROGRAM

As of 2025, Football NSW will introduce and deliver the Future Sapphires program. The Program is a supplementary program to players Club commitments with the overall aim to ensure all talented players receive a minimum of four training contacts per week. Player will receive in-depth individual support across Technical, Tactical, Physical, Psychological and personal development areas. The Program will cater to the needs of the highest-considered talented players in the given age grade in line with the State team program.

- The Program length: 40 weeks
- Program contact: Two contacts per week
- Selection: Invitation in November 2024
- Age groups: Under 15, Under 16, Under 18
- Squad size: 20-24 individuals
- Cost: TBC

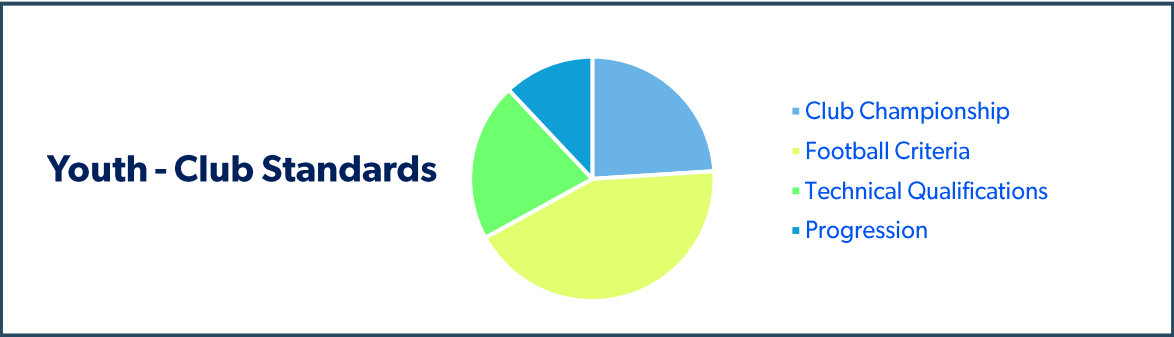
For more information please see the 'Future Sapphires Program Information Pack 2025'.

GIRLS' & WOMEN'S COMPETITIONS: 2025 - 2026

SUMMARY

- Addition of the Girls' Under 18s age group in Girls' Youth League Two
- Alignment of underpinning grade to First Grade to become Under 23s
- Decoupling of the Girls' Youth & Womens Senior Competitions
- Movement to a two-year Participation Licence agreement with Clubs
- Implementation of the Club Standards & Benchmarking Framework to determine promotion & relegation for Girls' Youth Leagues
- Dissolution of the FNSW Institution program and introduction of the Future Sapphires program
- Player points system (PPS) will remain in place for the senior leagues, the current NPL Women's PPS will be adopted into League One Women's.
- Placement into the respective leagues will continue to be based on the application of the 2024 Competition Regulations ([click here](#)) specifically Section 2 article 15 - Promotion and Relegation from 2024 to 2025 - Women's Competitions on page 13

	YOUTH LEAGUES				SENIOR LEAGUES	
GYL1 / NPL	Under 14	Under 15	Under 16	Under 18	Under 23	First Grade
GYL2 / League 1	Under 14	Under 15	Under 16	Under 18	Under 23	First Grade



Senior - Club Championship
First Grade – x4 points
Under 23 – x1 points

GIRLS' & WOMEN'S COMPETITIONS: 2025 - 2026

Further information

- Football NSW will release a Junior & Youth Player charter in November 2024 to support player & parents understanding of the Football NSW club environment.
- Football NSW will release a Club Technical Recommendations guide to support Clubs in creating a high performing environment in conjunction with the Club Standards & Benchmarking framework.
- Football NSW will release 'Part 2: Boys & Men' in late 2024.
- Football NSW will release a Competitions development plan in late 2024.