

SCOTTISH FA



CLUB ACADEMY SCOTLAND

CLUB PROGRAMME

***DEVELOPING THE
COMPLETE PLAYER***



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INTRODUCTION

1

The Club Academy Scotland (CAS) Club Programme is designed to allow flexibility for all Clubs to enable a holistic learning environment for coaches and players. The (CAS) schedule is deliberately aligned to ensure there is Club availability across the different levels of (CAS), including creating space for alternative experiences for Clubs. [CAS Calendar](#)

In academies, developing players and coaches isn't just about putting the best against the best. While the best v best games programme is an essential part of stretching talent in highly competitive settings, it only tells part of the story. To help players and coaches reach their full potential, we also need to create alternative experiences that challenge them in different ways and broaden their learning.

A multi-dimensional approach means offering more than one pathway for growth. This could be through different game formats, new environments, varied opposition, or opportunities that take players and coaches out of their comfort zones. These experiences encourage adaptability, problem-solving, and creativity—qualities that aren't always fully tested in traditional fixtures. For coaches, they also provide valuable space to try new ideas, reflect on practice, and learn from fresh situations.

By blending these experiences with the existing best v best programme, we create a more balanced development journey. Players are exposed to a wider set of challenges, and coaches are supported to grow their craft. Together, this ensures that academies don't just produce technically strong players, but resilient, versatile, and adaptable individuals ready for the demands of the professional game.

We will explore some ideas throughout the guide of how alternative Club Programmes may be scheduled to enable a player centred approach to development.



CLUB TOURNAMENTS 13+

2

Hosting a tournament is a great way to engage with Community, build Club profile & develop local partnerships. Player benefits include development challenges and memorable experiences in a competitive environment.

From a coach perspective it is an opportunity to use club methodology in a competitive setting whilst learning from opposition coaches by sharing best practices.

Tournament Structure may include multiple teams playing in shorter matches, also ensuring player minutes are balanced. Benefits are to make it an annual event, attract sponsorship, stream live and build tradition. Clubs are welcome to invite Academies, Grassroots Clubs or Clubs from abroad.

Example 1

- 4 Team Tournament
- 11v 11
- 40 min Matches
- Group Format – Team that tops table wins the Tournament

Example 2

- 6 Team Tournament (3 Clubs)
- 7v7 (each Club brings 2 x 7s teams)
- 40 min matches.
- 2 Groups of 3
- Group winners, 2nd placed teams and 3rd placed teams from each group play each other in Final Match.



INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENTS

3

A great way to offer competitive, developmental and cultural benefits to players and coaches.

Brand & Reputation

- Enhances the club's profile by associating with global competition.
- Raises prestige locally ("our club competes abroad") and attracts new players.
- Recruitment & Retention
- Unique opportunities help retain existing players and entice new families.

Networking & Partnerships

- Build relationships with foreign clubs, academies, and organisations.
- Opens doors to future collaborations, exchanges, or tours
- Attracts sponsors interested in international exposure.

Player Development Benefits

- Exposure to Different Playing Styles
- Learn to adapt to diverse tactical systems, physicality, and cultural approaches to football.
- Raised Standards & Benchmarking
- Players measure themselves against international opposition, often higher tempo and intensity.
- Resilience & Independence
- Coping with travel, different environments, and being away from home builds maturity.
- Cultural & Personal Growth
- Travel broadens horizons, promotes teamwork off the pitch, and builds life skills.
- Pathway opportunities

Coach & Staff Benefits

- Learning from Different Football Cultures
- Exposure to international coaching methods, player behaviours, and tactical approaches.
- Benchmarking & Reflection
- Evaluate own coaching philosophy against global standards.
- Networking. Connect with international coaches, share ideas, and build CPD opportunities.
- Leadership Experience
- Managing a team abroad enhances logistical, pastoral, and organisational skills.

Wider Benefits

- Club Community Spirit
- Shared international experience creates lasting memories and strengthens bonds across teams, parents, and staff.
- Cultural Exchange
- Players and families gain exposure to new cultures, languages, and traditions.
- Motivation & Inspiration
- Experiencing football abroad reinforces love for the game and can inspire long-term commitment.

SUMMARY

Taking part in international tournaments offers competitive, developmental, cultural, and reputational benefits. It raises standards, inspires players and coaches, and strengthens the club's brand and community identity.

4

Futsal is more than a small-sided game, it is a powerful development tool which sharpens technique and decision making through its face paced tight environment.

Player Development Benefits

- Technical Excellence
- Small, heavier ball and tight spaces force precise passing, first touch, and ball mastery
- Decision-Making Speed
- Players constantly under pressure, leading to faster scanning, reactions, and problem-solving
- Creativity & Flair
- Encourages 1v1 skills, combination play, and improvisation
- Transference to Football
- Improves composure in tight areas, movement off the ball, and confidence in possession
- Equal Opportunities: All players are more involved due to smaller squads and rolling substitutions

Coach Development Benefits

- Tactical Learning: Coaches develop new ideas around pressing, rotations, and transitional play
- Adaptability: Forces coaches to manage quick game changes and shorter match formats.
- Player Assessment.
- Great environment for talent ID — technical qualities and decision-making are very visible in futsal.

Club & Community Benefits

- Accessibility.
- Indoor venues reduce weather cancellations, ensuring reliable scheduling.
- Engagement.
- Keeps players active during off-season or winter months.

Wider Impact

- Alternative Pathway
- Opportunities for players who may thrive more in futsal than in 11-a-side football.
- Cultural Value.
- Futsal is a global game (Brazil, Spain, Portugal, etc.), introducing players to different footballing traditions.
- Fun Factor.
- Fast, dynamic, high-scoring format keeps players and spectators engaged.

SUMMARY

A futsal tournament delivers technical, tactical, developmental, financial, and community benefits, while providing a fun, high-intensity format that complements traditional football.

BIO-BANDING

5

Bio-Banding creates a balanced Football environment by grouping players according to biological maturity rather than age. This allows late developers to flourish and early developers to be challenged in new ways. This is type of environment is focusses on long term player development and gives key insights to coaches and talent identification.

Fairer Competition

Players compete against others of similar physical maturity, reducing the advantage of early-maturing players who are often faster, stronger, and bigger.

Late developers get the chance to showcase their skills without being overshadowed physically.

Better Skill Development

Early maturers can no longer rely purely on size and strength; they must develop technical skills, tactical awareness, and decision-making.

Late maturers gain confidence and more ball time, helping them improve technically.

Improved Talent Identification

Scouts and coaches can better evaluate players' football intelligence, technique, and creativity without physical differences distorting performance.

Helps prevent the "relative age effect" (where players born earlier in the selection year are over-represented).

Enhanced Player Confidence & Motivation

Late maturers experience success in a level playing field, which can increase motivation and reduce dropout rates.

Early maturers face new challenges that stretch their game, preventing complacency.

Reduced Risk of Injury & Burnout

Players face opponents of similar physical size and strength, lowering mismatches that can lead to injuries.

Reduces psychological stress for players who feel disadvantaged due to late maturation.

Holistic Development

Encourages well-rounded development by balancing physical, technical, tactical, and psychological aspects.

Prepares players for the future when physical differences naturally even out in adulthood.

Specific details on what, why and how to run Bio-Banding Festivals can be seen the CAS Hub Library with our bespoke Bio-Banding Booklet [Club Academy Scotland | Performance | Scottish FA](#)

DOMESTIC CHALLENGE MATCHES

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Provide a vital platform for players and coaches to accelerate development by competing against other academies or grassroots clubs.

1 / GRASSROOTS - CLUB PARTNERSHIPS

Strengthening Relationships

- Creates meaningful collaboration between the elite academy and grassroots clubs — not just “one-way talent ID,” but shared value.
- Grassroots clubs see their older players being challenged by younger, technically advanced academy players, which can elevate pride and reinforce trust.

Talent Pathway Visibility

- Grassroots players see a tangible benchmark: “This is what academy football looks like.”
- Encourages aspiration — some older grassroots players may not progress professionally, but it shows the younger ones a pathway.

Mutual Growth

- Academy benefits by exposing players to bigger, more physical opposition.
- Grassroots clubs benefit from competitive, high-quality fixtures that may not otherwise be available to them.

Retention & Engagement

- Keeps grassroots players engaged (they’re playing “against the academy”), reducing dropout.
- Strengthens the academy’s local footprint and reputation as a supportive partner rather than a competitor.

2 / PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

Academy Players

- **Physical & Psychological Challenge:** Younger academy players face stronger, older players, forcing quicker adaptation to contact, decision-making, and resilience.
- **Game Realism:** Simulates future demands of professional football, where players often compete against older opposition.
- **Skill Transfer:** Must rely on technique, intelligence, and speed of thought rather than just physicality. Grassroots Players.
- **Exposure to High-Level Play:** Opportunity to test themselves against technically elite, high-tempo opposition.
- **Motivation:** Can reignite passion or ambition when they see what’s required at academy level.
- **Benchmarking:** Provides clear comparisons in work rate, discipline, and technical proficiency.

3 / Coach Development Perspective

Academy Coaches

- Helps coaches design sessions and match plans that prepare players for physical mismatches and problem-solving.
- Encourages reflection on player readiness, adaptability, and individual development needs. Grassroots Coaches.
- Valuable learning from observing academy players' technical habits, movement, and in-game behaviours.
- Promotes knowledge exchange with academy staff (pre/post-game discussions, shared feedback loops).
- Helps grassroots coaches raise standards in their own training environments.

SUMMARY

- Club partnership: Builds trust, raises standards, and creates mutual value.
- Player development: Academy players learn to cope with physicality and problem-solve; grassroots players gain benchmarks and inspiration.
- Coach development: Both sets of coaches expand their understanding through exposure, observation, and dialogue.



MEASURING IMPACT



1 / PLAYER DEVELOPMENT INSIGHTS

- **Adaptability:** How well do players adjust to different formats (e.g., futsal, small-sided, mixed-age) or unfamiliar styles of play?
- **Decision-making under pressure:** Are players able to solve new problems quickly when faced with unusual scenarios?
- **Resilience and mindset:** How do players respond to setbacks, new environments, or being out of their comfort zone?
- **Technical/tactical application:** Do players transfer core skills effectively into different contexts (e.g., ball control in tight spaces, positional play in larger formats)?
- **Creativity:** Are players attempting and experimenting with new solutions that they may not try in a traditional match setting?

2 / COACH DEVELOPMENT INSIGHTS

- **Flexibility in coaching approach:** How well do coaches adapt their methods to alternative formats and environments?
- **Innovation:** Are coaches trying new ideas, tactics, or training methods that wouldn't normally fit in the best v best structure?
- **Observation and reflection:** What new insights are coaches gaining about their players' behaviours, leadership, and adaptability, and from a Talent ID perspective.
- **Leadership development:** Are younger or less experienced coaches stepping into new responsibilities during these programmes?

3 / TEAM AND CULTURAL INSIGHTS

- **Collaboration and communication:** How effectively do players and staff work together when routines and conditions change?
- **Role flexibility:** Do players show willingness and ability to take on different roles or positions?
- **Environment handling:** How do teams cope with new locations, different rules, or diverse opposition styles?

4 / LONGER-TERM IMPACT

- **Transfer back into best v best games:** Are players bringing lessons learned (resilience, creativity, adaptability) into their performance in elite competition?
- **Player engagement:** Are alternative experiences increasing enjoyment, motivation, and love of the game?
- **Coach growth:** Are coaches reporting greater confidence and broader perspectives after taking part?

The key is that measurement should be development-focused rather than outcome-focused. Clubs should be asking "What did we learn from this experience?" rather than "Did we win?"

KEY QUESTIONS

- Adaptability** - How did players adjust to different formats/rules/opponents?
- Decision-making** - Did players show effective problem-solving in new scenarios?
- Resilience** - How did they respond to setbacks, mistakes, or being out of comfort zone?
- Technical/tactical transfer** - Were core skills applied effectively in the new context?
- Creativity** - Did players attempt new solutions or take risks?
- Flexibility** - How did coaches adapt their approach to suit the alternative format?
- Innovation** - Were new strategies, practices, or ideas tested?
- Observation & reflection** - What new insights were gained about the players?
- Leadership** - Did staff roles/responsibilities shift in productive ways?
- Collaboration** - How well did players and staff communicate and work together?
- Role flexibility** - Did players show willingness to play different positions or roles?
- Coping with environment** - How did the group handle new locations, travel, rules, or opposition styles?
- Lessons learned** - What key takeaways will influence training or matches moving forward?
- Application** - Did players/coaches transfer experiences back into best v best games?
- Engagement** - Did the experience increase enjoyment, motivation, and buy-in?

This can be filled in as a post-match reflection sheet by using QR coded surveys by coaches or even used in a debrief session with players to co-create insights. Over time, the club can build a library of reflections that show how the programme is impacting growth.

An academy should see itself as a development hub, not just a competition programme. Games are a test, but training, psychology, education, lifestyle, and coach development are what create sustainable elite performance.



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