



**Scottish Women's**

**Football**

## **Player Dispensation Guidelines**

### **Introduction**

Scottish Women's Football (SWF) want to ensure as many people as possible can play the sport that they love and to find the most appropriate team for them to participate within. There may be exceptional circumstances, occasions, and situations where the most appropriate team may be out with their usual age group. This is where SWF's Player Dispensation Process becomes appropriate for SWF Member Clubs.

The following circumstances are where a young person may be considered for dispensation:

- Geographical (travel) Reasons
- Medical, Health & Wellbeing
- Player Development Principles

These 3 areas will be balanced against the main pillars that the dispensation process is set upon.

These pillars are:

- Fairness
- Inclusivity
- Safety

Balancing those things can be challenging, and that is why Member Clubs are encouraged to carefully read the purpose, the rules, and the application process below before submitting any dispensation applications to SWF. The rationale that is set out for the dispensation application is so crucial and therefore the application must demonstrate how it meets the purpose and rules. Member Clubs must support their young people as best they can through the process and prepared for all potential outcomes. Dispensation must not be assumed as a guarantee.

Member Clubs who wish to submit any applications are also encouraged to approach their League Administrator for support or advice on their application in advance of submission.

It is strongly discouraged that Member Clubs submit annual applications and encourages Member Clubs to use any approved dispensation application as an opportunity to create a suitable Player Development Plan detailing the young person(s) footballing journey within the player pathway.

## **Purpose of Player Dispensation**

The Player Dispensation Process has a purpose to ensure our game is open to as many girls as possible with them playing at an appropriate level. However, that needs to be balanced against making sure decisions made fairly with sporting integrity at heart along with being safe for everyone to play. To ensure this the decision-making process is transparent, the 3 pillars are defined as the following:

### Fairness

Fairness within SWF's dispensation process is to make decisions without favouritism or discrimination. This includes ensuring that decisions do not create a competitive advantage taking into consideration the impact on other clubs at the level to be played at, the possible (if any) displacement of young people that are already involved within that age group and ensure that there is fair playing time across the team.

Included within fairness, all applications received, included previous ones for young people will be considered and any applications that are clearly for young people to move teams halfway through a season would not meet the purpose of dispensation and will be rejected under fairness.

### Inclusivity

This aspect of dispensation will consider Scottish football value of "inclusive" regarding child wellbeing & protection which is:

*Football is for everyone, irrespective of background. We celebrate what makes us unique and embrace our differences. We create a culture where rights are respected and everyone is treated fairly, with dignity and respect.*

We see the child or young person before the footballer and we encourage children and young people to have the right to express views on matters that affect them, should they wish to do so, and to have those views considered. Inclusivity within dispensation is to ensure that there is equal access to opportunities to young people across the game that considers fairness as described above.

### Safety

Safety within dispensation is to ensure that young people are protected from risk, harm, or danger which also factors in perceived or potential risk, harm, or danger. We want to be able to ensure that young people can participate in an enjoyable and safe environment, which promotes inclusion and protects them from harm, poor practice, exploitation, bullying or abuse so our decision-making process will reflect this.

## Rules of Player Dispensation

The dispensation process is only required for those who have exceptional circumstances, occasions, and situations to play up or down age groups within competitive SWF football. It is applicable in the following age groups:

1. 12's\*
2. 14's
3. 16's
4. 18 s

(\*This age group only accepts playing down requests, and those must only be from those playing at 14s [even then strong evidence must be supplied]) When considering an application (Appendix 1), please be aware that:

- Any applications made must be made per individual young person via the online portal
- Applications must be submitted to SWF by the Club Secretary (please see the Application Process for Player Dispensation section):
- Applications are individual and considered on that basis.
- Young people with granted dispensation must only represent the team for which they have received dispensation for the duration of the season and cannot move between age groups. For the avoidance of doubt, this also means that players who are age eligible CANNOT play in the adult first teams
- If there is a reason for that young person to move back to their original age group, the Club Secretary must submit a notification to SWF to cancel the dispensation
- No playing down dispensation applications may be submitted for young people wishing to play down into 18's.
- Where dispensation is granted for young people playing down an age group, clubs must ensure that their team(s) have a maximum of 1 overage player on the pitch at any given time at 12's level, a maximum of 2 at 14's level and a maximum of 2 at 16's level.
- Granted dispensation applies to the 2023 season only and is granted for **all** Youth Competitions.
- Teams must adhere to player movement restrictions as per competition rules.

### Playing Up Applications

Applications to play up an age group must be submitted per individual young person to SWF. The application will then be assessed and reviewed by SWF before referring the application to the SQGC to decide on the request.

For the 2023 season, young people wishing to play up must meet the below age criteria:

To submit an application to play 14s, the young person must be born in **2012**

To submit an application to play 16s, the young person must be born in **2010**

To submit an application to play 18s, the young person must be born in **2008**

### Playing Down Applications

Applications to play down an age group must be submitted per individual young person to SWF as above. If the application is for medical, health & wellbeing or player development reasons, the application will go directly to the SQGC for consideration.

For the **2023** season, young people wishing to play down must meet the below age criteria:

To submit an application to play 12's, the young person must be born in **2010**

To submit an application to play 14's, the young person must be born in **2008**

To submit an application to play 16's, the young person must be born in **2006**

### **Application Criteria**

The appropriate criteria must be given due consideration before submission of an application. If a club is unsure if they would meet the criteria defined below, they should contact their League Administrator prior to making an application. The rationale and criteria for when dispensation may be applicable is outlined below:

#### Medical, Health & Wellbeing

There may be medical, health & wellbeing conditions that affect a young person's ability to compete and play at their age-appropriate group. In these instances it may be in the best interests of the young person's development as a footballer to play in an age category below them. If a Member Club believes that the young person's medical, health & wellbeing condition is significant enough to impact their abilities to play at their current age group, they must work with the young person and their parents/carers to collect independent medical, health & wellbeing or expert evidence to outline within their application. This would be letters or statements provided by:

- General Practitioner/Doctor
- Nurse
- Physiotherapist
- Sports Scientist
- Medical/Health/Wellbeing Practitioner
- Teacher

- Social Worker
- Other Specialists (e.g. support workers, CAMHS specialists etc)

**Evidence must be submitted at the same time as the application form. Please do not apply and then follow up with evidence. Try to ensure that all information is collated with the application form within the submission.**

The evidence provided must identify why the young person is unable or could not play at their current age group, explaining why they must play down. If this isn't clear, there is a high level of probability that the application will be rejected.

### Geographical Reasons

There may be circumstances where due to the location of where the young person lives or the rural location of a club, there isn't an appropriate age group level within a 20-mile radius of their home. Under these circumstances a dispensation request would be considered. As identified within the application form, the request due to geographical reasons must include:

- A letter confirming the young person's home address
- The distance to the 3 closest age-appropriate teams (in miles)
- The mode of transport that will be used by the young person
- The necessary travel arrangements that would be put in place
- Other relevant information that helps explain the reasons for the mode of transport and the travel arrangements

**Please note:** When calculating the 20-mile radius, the distance from the young person's home address to the registered venue of the nearest Club will be used.

SWF will consider using local knowledge and the local League Management Committee's to advise on any clubs or teams that may be suitable when considering the application. This is so that SWF can advise if there are any clubs or teams that may be within the 20-mile radius that the young person, their parents/carers or the club secretary were not aware of when submitting the application.

### Player Development Principles *(This is only applicable for playing up to 16's & 18's)*

In certain exceptional circumstances, there may be a desire for a young person to play up to 16's & 18's age groups to assist with their development as a footballer. This would mean a young person playing up 4 years and therefore this requirement must have overwhelming evidence and reasons to back up the application. Where a club believes this is the case, the application must be submitted on explaining how the following principles are met:

- Ensure that an underage young person's safety and wellbeing is not negatively impacted by playing up
- The young person will be competitive at that age group and play at a level to match their individual ability

- Inclusion of the young person will not displace another young person who is playing in the team currently
- Ensure that there will be appropriate playing time for that individual young person and the others within the team
- The wellbeing of the current team will not be negatively impacted by the young person playing up

If dispensation is granted on these grounds, clubs must prepare an individual Player Development Plan after 6 months, clearly detailing a suitable pathway for the young person. For more information on Player Development Plans, please contact SWF.

### **Application Process for Player Dispensation**

Applications will be considered on the following process. All the applications must be submitted to SWF by the Club Secretary. Initially they will be filtered and reviewed by SWF. Applications that are for above 12's activity and made solely on geographical reasons or playing up, these will be put to the Strong Quality Growth Committee (SQGC) for the final decision but they may liaise with the League Management Committee (LMC) should they feel that be relevant. Applications made solely on medical, health & wellbeing reasons will be put to SQGC directly and will only be considered by them.

All decisions will be communicated by the relevant League Administrator to the Club Secretary who made the application.



### Appeals Process for Player Dispensation

There is a two-stage process for appeals regarding dispensation applications. The first stage is the SWF's Appeals Committee. The second stage is to the Scottish FA. Appeals must be actioned by the Club Secretary and follow the procedure below:

#### Stage 1 Appeal – Scottish Women's Football

The Club Secretary must follow the steps identified below:

1. Consider the grounds for appeal:
  - a. The Committee acted outwith its powers
  - b. The Committee issued a Determination which it could not properly have issued on the facts of the case
  - c. New evidence and/or supporting documentation has become available that wasn't considering in the original application

- d. The sanction imposed was excessive or inappropriate.
2. Complete a Scottish Women's Football Appeals Form
3. Submit the appeals form to [swf@scotwomensfootball.com](mailto:swf@scotwomensfootball.com)
4. Ensure the appeals form is submitted and deposit paid within **5 working days** from the date of receiving the dispensation decision.

In submitting the appeal to SWF, the young person can continue to play within friendlies and train with the age group applied for. They are not able to play in any competitive fixtures until the appeals process is completed. Please see SWF Appeals Procedure and Guidelines document on SWF's website and access the Appeals Form here: <https://scotwomensfootball.com/documents-anddownloads/>

### Stage 2 Appeal – Scottish Football Association

Following the outcome of stage 1, if the Club Secretary has the grounds for a further appeal, an appeal can be made directly to the Scottish FA whereby an Appellate Tribunal would be set up. The Club Secretary **must** consider the Judicial Panel Protocol, specifically sections 14 & 15: [www.scottishfa.co.uk/scottish-fa/football-governance/judicial-panel-protocol/](http://www.scottishfa.co.uk/scottish-fa/football-governance/judicial-panel-protocol/).

The grounds for appeal to the Scottish FA are as follows:

- The Tribunal failed to give the Appellant a fair hearing
- The Tribunal acted outwith its powers
- The Tribunal issued a Determination which it could not properly have issued on the facts of the case
- The sanction imposed was excessive or inappropriate.

To lodge a stage 2 appeal, the Club Secretary must contact the Judicial Panel Secretary at [judicialpanelsecretary@scottishfa.co.uk](mailto:judicialpanelsecretary@scottishfa.co.uk) with appeals submitted within **5 working days** of receiving the appeal outcome. If you have questions or are unsure about the appeal please contact the Judicial Panel Secretary