



Scottish Women's Football

Player Dispensation Rules and Regulations

Guidance notes

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 outwith 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 - an alternative age-appropriate team is outwith a 20-mile radius for travel.
- Medical - a long term injury or illness has affected their ability to participate in their appropriate age group.
- Player Development Principles - A player has exceeded the technical, tactical skill level of their appropriate age group or a player falls well below the technical and tactical skill level for their appropriate age group.

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

These pillars are:

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.

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 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 help prepare them for all potential outcomes. Dispensation must not be assumed as a guarantee. A maximum of **FOUR** dispensation requests are permitted per age group.

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. Any advice at this stage should not lead a club to believe that their application will be successful – League Administrators will only act in an advisory capacity to support with factual requests.

It is strongly discouraged that Member Clubs submit annual applications and SWF 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.

Rules and Regulations of Player Dispensation

Clubs may only submit a maximum of FOUR applications per age group. 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. 14s - play up and play down
2. 16s – play up and play down
3. 18s - play up only

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 avoidance of doubt, this means that players who are age eligible cannot play as part of any adult teams governed by SWF and cannot move between youth 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. If the club wish to move the player to senior football, notification must also be given. Further application to the dispensation process following cancellation will not be accepted.
- Where dispensation is granted for young people playing down an age group, clubs must ensure that their team(s) have a maximum of TWO players with dispensation on the field of play at any one time.
- Granted dispensation applies to the 2024 season only and is granted for **all** Youth Regional League, League Cup and Youth National Cup Competitions. Players with active dispensation are not eligible to play in the 23-24 Senior season or the 24-25 Senior season.
- 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 2024 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 2013.

To submit an application to play 16s, the young person must be born in 2011.

To submit an application to play 18s, the young person must be born in 2009.

Playing Down Applications

Applications to play down 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 Strong Quality Growth Committee- SQGC to decide on the request.

For the **2024** season, young people wishing to play down must meet the below age criteria:

To submit an application to play 14's, the young person must be born in 2009.

To submit an application to play 16's, the young person must be born in 2007.

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

There may be medical 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 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 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 following the online form being completed. Please use reference Request ID number and Player Name as subject in your email to swf@scotwomensfootball.com

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 or documents are not submitted 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:

- 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. Regional variance may be applied to this distance by the SQGC.

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 16s & 18s*)

In certain exceptional circumstances, there may be a desire for a young person to play up to 16s & 18s 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 via the SWF Dispensation online [portal](#).

Appeals Process for Player Dispensation

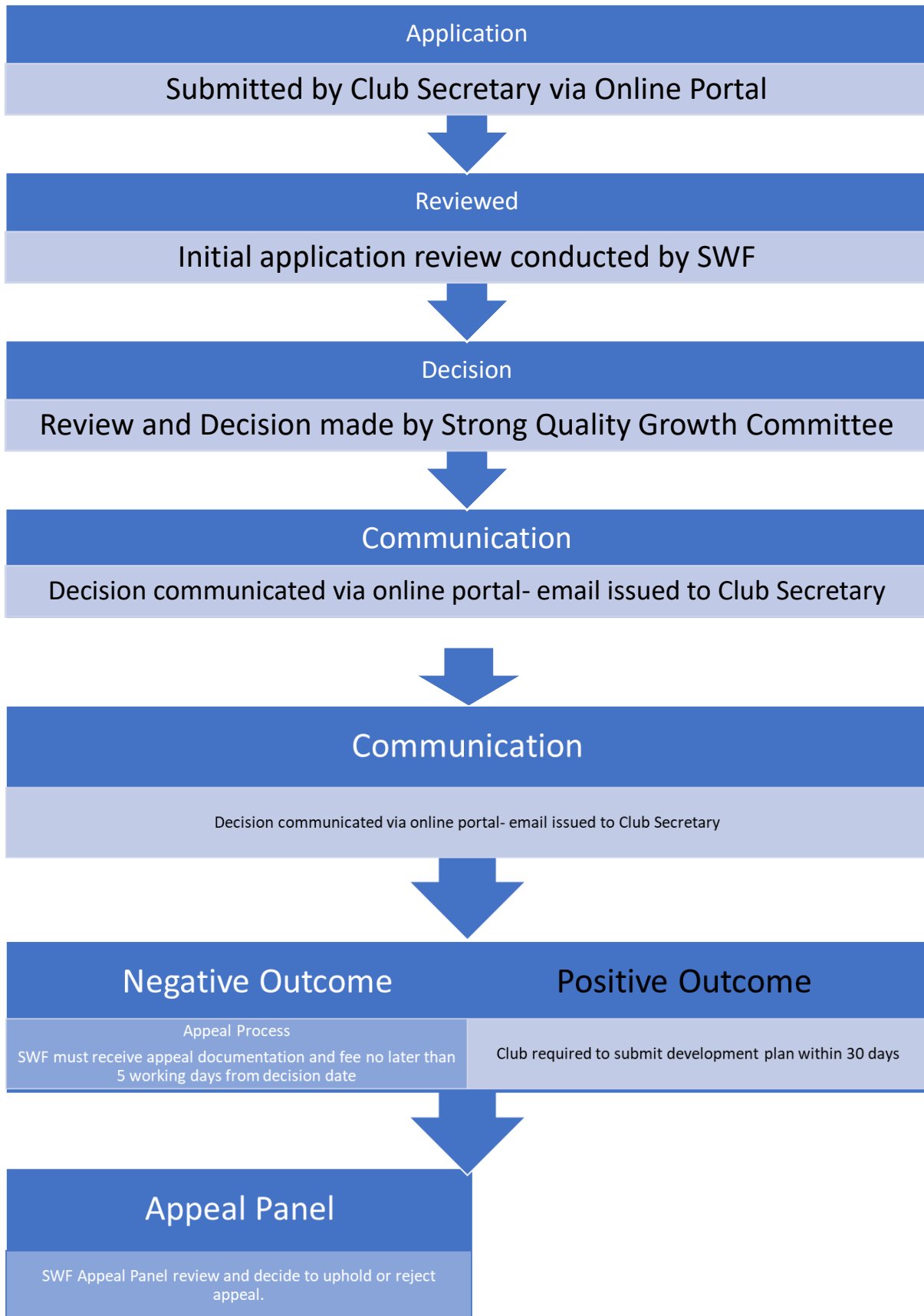
There is a process for appeals regarding dispensation applications. In the first instance is the SWF's Appeals Committee. Appeals must be actioned by the Club Secretary and follow the procedure below:

Stage 1 Appeal – Scottish Women's Football

The Club Secretary must

1. Consider the grounds for appeal:
 - a. The Committee acted out with its powers.
 - b. New evidence and/or supporting documentation has become available that wasn't considering in the original application.
2. Complete a Scottish Women's Football Appeals Form

3. Submit the appeals form to swf@scotwomensfootball.com
4. Ensure the appeals form is submitted and deposit paid (£50) 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. However, clubs must consider the wellbeing risks of allowing a young person to play outwith their age group. Clubs should refer to the Friendly Application Guidance document for further criteria with regards to Friendlies. 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/>

If the Appeal panel rejects the appeal the SFA Judicial Panel may be approached to consider a further appeal. The Club Secretary **must** consider the Judicial Panel Protocol, specifically sections 14 & 15: www.scottishfa.co.uk/scottish-fa/football-governance/judicial-panel-protocol/.

To lodge a secondary appeal the Club Secretary must contact the Judicial Panel Secretary at judicialpanelsecretary@scottishfa.co.uk with appeals submitted within **5 working days** of receiving the appeal outcome.