

# Scottish Women's Football

## Player Dispensation Rules and Regulations

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## Guidance notes

Scottish Women's Football (SWF) wants 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 in. There may be exceptional circumstances, occasions, and situations where the most appropriate team may be out of 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 – the player lives in a rural location.
- Medical - a long-term medical condition or disability that has affected their ability to participate in their appropriate age group.
- Player Development Principles - A player has exceeded the technical and 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.

SWF's dispensation process makes 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, the possible (if any) displacement of young people who are already involved within that age group and ensuring that there is fair playing time across the team.

SWF's dispensation process is open to all clubs in Scotland; applications are processed based on the criteria set out within this document.

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.

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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 and is never guaranteed. Clubs should not submit team affiliations based on dispensation applications being approved.

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 coaching strategy to return the player to an age-appropriate football journey within the player pathway, where possible.

## Rules and Regulations of Player Dispensation

Dispensation applies to players within SWF competitive youth leagues. Applications for trophy-free league participants are not applicable and cannot be reviewed as part of dispensation. For the avoidance of doubt, Competitive leagues refer to 14s, 16s and 18s leagues across regional and youth performance leagues. Trophy-free leagues refer to 12s and below. Trophy Free age bands must be adhered to. Exceptional Geographical and medical cases may work with SFA Club Services Officer to discuss the request to play process.

By submitting a dispensation application, the club official confirms that parent and/or guardian permission has been sought to share personal information of players with SWF and its Strong Quality Growth Committee. Club official and parents/guardians agree to the information being held following the SWF Privacy Policy.

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: all other age groups must adhere to the age bands circulated by SWF:

1. 14s - play up and play down
2. 16s – play up and play down
3. 18s - play up only

When considering an application, please be aware that:

- Any applications made must be made by an individual young person via the online portal
- Applications must be submitted to SWF by the Club Secretary or Club Wellbeing Officer
- 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 age-eligible players 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 applications to the dispensation process following cancellation will not be accepted.
- Where dispensation is granted for young people playing down an age group, a maximum of TWO players with dispensation can be on the field of play at any one time. For the avoidance of doubt, 3 or 4 players can be listed on a team line who have dispensation to play down, however, only 2 can be on the pitch at once. To add a player from the bench who has dispensation to the field of play, another player with dispensation would need to be removed so that there are only ever 2 overage players within the playing team at one time.

- Granted dispensation applies to the 2026 season only and is granted for **all** Youth Regional League, League Cup/Plate and Challenge Cup Competitions. Players with active dispensation are not eligible to play in the 25-26 Senior season or the 2026 Senior season.
- Teams must adhere to player movement restrictions as per competition rules.

### Playing Up Applications

Play Up applications are only applicable to players with year of birth 2011, 2013 and 2015.

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

#### Play Up Rural/Geographical

The player lives in a rural location. Please ensure the following supporting evidence has been provided;

- ☐ Current home address
- ☐ Name of the team they are looking to join
- ☐ Name of the nearest age-appropriate team
- ☐ Confirmation of the club training venue, address and postcode.
- ☐ Explains why playing an age group above would not endanger other children
- ☐ The club secretary or child wellbeing officer has submitted the application form.

#### Play up Player Development

The player has exceeded the technical and tactical skill level of their appropriate age group. Please ensure the following supporting evidence has been provided;

- ☐ An overview of the skill level of the player in comparison to the skill level of players within their age group.
- ☐ Detail in relation to the well-being strategy for the player to have no negative effect from exposure to the older environment.
- ☐ The club secretary or child wellbeing officer has submitted the application form.

### Playing Down Applications

Play down applications are only applicable to players with a year of birth of 2011 and 2009. Applications to play down an age group must be submitted by an 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.

### Play Down Medical

The player has a long-term medical condition and or disability affecting their ability to participate within their appropriate age group. Please ensure that supporting information has been provided by a medical professional, which

- ☐ Identifies the player's long-term medical condition or disability,
- ☐ Identifies the particular characteristics of the above which are relevant to seeking dispensation to play outwith the player's own age group.
- ☐ Explains why this would place the player at a significant disadvantage over peers
- ☐ Explains why playing the year below would reduce the disadvantage caused by the medical condition or disability.
- ☐ Explains why playing an age group below would not endanger other children
- ☐ The club secretary or child wellbeing officer has submitted the application form.

### Play Down Rural/Geographical

The player lives in a rural location. Please ensure the following supporting evidence has been provided;

- ☐ Current home address
- ☐ Name of the team they are looking to join
- ☐ Name of the nearest age-appropriate team
- ☐ Confirmation of the club training venue, address and postcode.
- ☐ Explains why playing an age group below would not endanger other children
- ☐ The club secretary or child wellbeing officer has submitted the application form.

### Play Down Player Development

The player falls below the technical, tactical skill level of their appropriate age group. Please ensure the following supporting evidence has been provided;

- ☐ An overview of the skill level of the player in comparison to the skill level of players within their age group.
- ☐ Detail in relation to coaching strategy for the player to meet the skill level of their age group in future.
- ☐ Detail in relation to the well-being strategy for the player to have no negative effect on younger children.
- ☐ The club secretary or child wellbeing officer has submitted the application form.

## Application Criteria

The appropriate criteria must be given due consideration before submission of an application. If a club is unsure if it would meet the criteria defined below, it should contact its League Administrator prior to making an application. The rationale and criteria for when dispensation may be applicable are 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 the reference Request ID number and Player Name as the subject in your email to [swf@scotwomensfootball.com](mailto:swf@scotwomensfootball.com)**

The evidence provided must identify why the young person is unable to play at their current age group, explaining why they must play down. If this isn't clear or if documents are not submitted, the application will be rejected.

### Geographical Reasons

There may be circumstances where, due to the rural 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 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 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

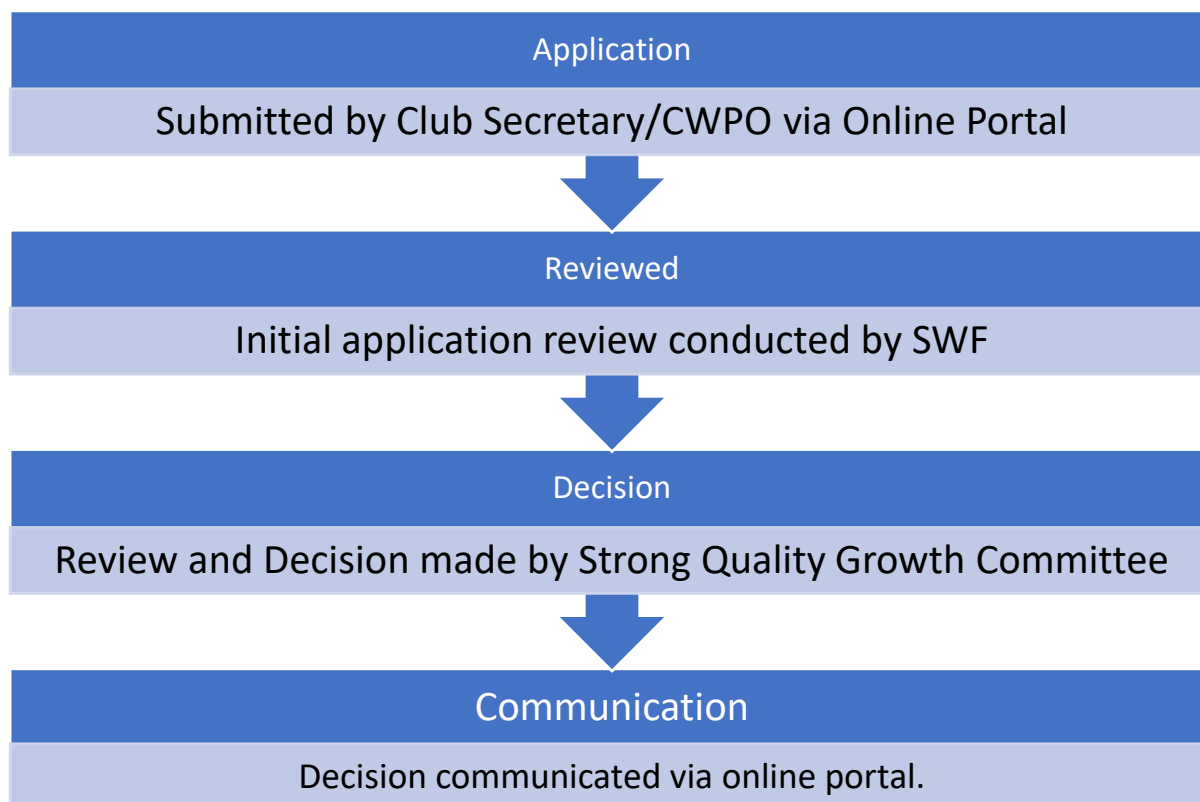
In certain exceptional circumstances, there may be a desire for a young person to play up to assist with their development as a footballer. This would mean a young person playing up for 4 years, and therefore, this requirement must have overwhelming evidence and reasons to back up the application. Where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

- Ensure that an underage young person's safety and well-being are not negatively impacted by playing up.
- The young person will be competitive in 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 currently playing in the team.
- Ensure that there will be appropriate playing time for that individual young person and the others within the team.
- The well-being 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 30 days of approval, which they must demonstrate to work for the development of the player. This should clearly detail a suitable pathway for the young person. For more information on Player Development Plans, please contact SWF.

## Application Process for Player Dispensation

All the applications must be submitted via the SWF Dispensation online [portal](#). Any supporting documentation beyond the statements collated online should be sent to [swf@scotwoemsfootball.com](mailto:swf@scotwoemsfootball.com) with the subject detailing the application reference number.



Clubs will be able to apply for dispensation throughout the year. Results will be issued based on when the application is received. See the table below.

Application Submitted	Reviewed and Outcome issued.
December and January	February
February and March	April
April and May	June
June and July	August
August	September



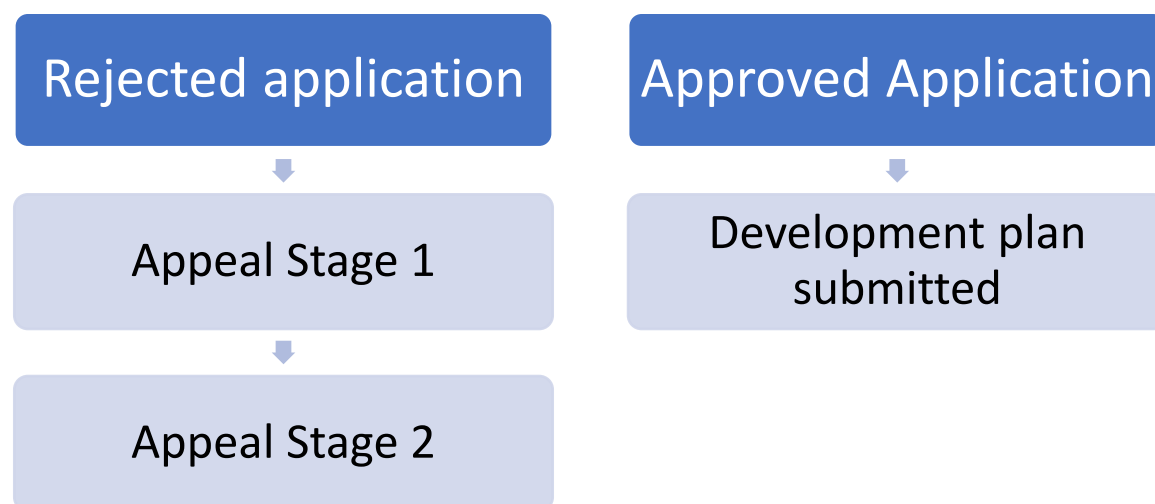
## Appeals Process for Player Dispensation

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. The Committee issued a Determination which it could not properly have issued on the facts of the case, evidence, and/or supporting documentation
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 the 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 well-being risks of allowing a young person to play outside 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 the SWF Appeals Procedure and Guidelines document on SWF's website and access the Appeals Form [here](#).

## Stage 2 Appeal – Scottish Football Association

If a stage 1 appeal is rejected, the club can then approach 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/](http://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](mailto:judicialpanelsecretary@scottishfa.co.uk) with appeals submitted within **5 working days** of receiving the appeal outcome.

## Appendix 1 Notes for Applicants

Dispensation applications can only be submitted by the club secretary or Club Wellbeing officer.

A minimum of two individuals must supply evidence in line with the SWF dispensation Rules and Regulations. The evidence provided must be relevant to each section of the application.

All supporting evidence provided by either a medical professional or educational institution must be provided on letter-headed paper and dated no earlier than 3 months from the date of the application. For any letters of support from charitable establishments, the charity details/registration information must also be noted on the letterhead paper.

All evidence outside of the web portal statements should be emailed to [swf@scotwomensfootball.com](mailto:swf@scotwomensfootball.com) using the application reference from the online submission. Approved sources for statements include GP, Nurse, Physiotherapist, Sports Scientist, Medical, Health-Wellbeing Practitioner, Teacher, Social Worker, Parent, Coach, CWPO or other Specialists (e.g., support workers, CAMHS specialists, etc). We cannot accept statements from individuals who are not known to the applicant.

Any applications submitted whereby no supporting evidence/information has been provided will not be considered and automatically returned. Therefore, please ensure all the relevant information has been provided in line with the dispensation criteria as noted in the Rules and Regulations.

When a complete application has been received, it will be reviewed by the Strong Quality Growth committee in the next available review meeting.

Application Submitted	Reviewed and Outcome issued.
December and January	February
February and March	April
April and May	June
June and July	August
August	September

\*No applications will be accepted in September and October. The Registration deadline is October, and there is no player movement at this stage of the season.

Players and their families must be made aware that the information shared with SWF shall be shared and reviewed by a committee and agree to that being done. SWF shall keep this information for the season that it is valid all in line with SWF's privacy policies. SWF shall however, continue to keep a record of all players who have applied and been approved for dispensation until the player has 'aged out' and dispensation requests no longer apply. Should players or their families not wish to share information about their child, then it may make the dispensation decision more challenging may not be able to be progressed.

## Appendix 2 DISPENSATION CHECKLIST

In line with the dispensation Rules and Regulations, below is a checklist of information required for submission. A minimum of two statements is required for any application; these statements should incorporate the details requested.

### Medical

The player has a long-term medical condition and or disability affecting their ability to participate within their appropriate age group. Please ensure that supporting information has been provided by a medical professional, which

- ☐ Identifies the player's long-term medical condition or disability,
- ☐ Identifies the particular characteristics of the above which are relevant to seeking dispensation to play outwith the player's own age group.
- ☐ Explains why this would place the player at a significant disadvantage over peers
- ☐ Explains why playing the year group above ( play up) or below ( play down) would reduce the disadvantage caused by the medical condition or disability.
- ☐ Explains why playing an age group above or below would not endanger other children
- ☐ The club secretary or child wellbeing officer has submitted the application form.

### Rural/Geographical

The player lives in a rural location. Please ensure the following supporting evidence has been provided;

- ☐ Current home address
- ☐ Name of the team they are looking to join
- ☐ Name of the nearest age-appropriate team
- ☐ Confirmation of the club training venue, address and postcode.
- ☐ Explains why playing an age group above or below would not endanger other children
- ☐ The club secretary or child wellbeing officer has submitted the application form.

### Player Development Play up

The player has exceeded the technical and tactical skill level of their appropriate age group. Please ensure the following supporting evidence has been provided;

- ☐ An overview of the skill level of the player in comparison to the skill level of players within their age group.
- ☐ Detail in relation to the well-being strategy for the player to have no negative effect from exposure to the older environment.

☐ The club secretary or child wellbeing officer has submitted the application form.

#### Player Development Play Down

The player falls below the technical, tactical skill level of their appropriate age group. Please ensure the following supporting evidence has been provided;

☐ An overview of the skill level of the player in comparison to the skill level of players within their age group.

☐ Detail in relation to coaching strategy for the player to meet the skill level of their age group in future.

☐ Detail in relation to the well-being strategy for the player to have no negative effect on the younger children's environment.

☐ The club secretary or child wellbeing officer has submitted the application form.