



## NATIONAL FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT PLAN



*Making Australia a World Leader in the World Game*



## CONTENTS

Introduction from the Chairman	2
FFA Strategic Plan	3
Creation of the Plan	4
What is Football Development?	5
Gaps in the Football Development System	7
The Talent Development & Identification Review - Critical Initiatives	8
Game Development	14
Talented Player Development Pathway	20
Leveraging Australian Football's New Heroes	24
Implementation: Bringing the Plan to Life	24





**Dear football supporter,  
providing national leadership and  
support for developing the Game and  
its talented players goes to the heart of  
a Sports Governing Body's purpose.**

Since its creation in 2004, Football Federation Australia (FFA) has recognised this. Indeed, along with qualifying for the World Cup, launching the Hyundai A-League, and engaging with Asia, "Serving the Football Community" was one of four key strategic priorities identified by the new organization back in October of that year. Since then, a substantial amount of work has been undertaken in establishing relationships, technology and expertise to allow FFA to provide significant benefits to the broad Football community into the future.

Like our other priority activities this work has provided a tremendous platform for the next phase of Football's development in Australia. On that platform FFA has now built a comprehensive National Football Development Plan – a "whole

of sport" approach aligning our huge grassroots community with the new aspirational properties at the top end of the game – like the Qantas Socceroos, the Matildas and the Hyundai A-League Clubs. Such a plan is critical because of the size of the challenge that still confronts us. Football, the "World Game", is a huge sport whichever way you look at it. And it is this scale, at home and internationally, that makes it such a formidable mission.

Internationally, for Australia to become and remain truly competitive, we must contend with scores of large, very well-resourced countries – for many of whom Football is not only the national sport, but the only sport! For us to genuinely challenge the likes of Italy, France, Argentina and Brazil, we must find ways to take the excellent but limited resources available across the country, and through innovation and collaboration, maximise their efficiency and effectiveness in attracting and developing the finest possible Australian players and teams of the future.

A consistent national Football Development Plan, will continually raise the overall technical standard of football in Australia, ensure opportunities for all to play and progress if they wish through a national pathway, and, in the meantime, foster life-long support for the game amongst its participants.

As a valued member of the football community we look forward to your support of these initiatives.



Frank Lowy  
Chairman

The FFA Strategic Planning framework was developed in the first half of 2007 and provides an overarching structure within which Football in Australia can collaborate in pursuit of our identified strategic priorities.

The framework is comprised of four main “pillars”, supported by four key areas of operational excellence. The Football Development “pillar”, however, sits at the heart of FFA strategic direction. There are obvious and fundamental interdependencies between Football Development and each of the other key pillars and areas of operational excellence, which necessitate a “whole of company” – indeed “whole of game” – approach. Football Development is truly the cornerstone of Australian Football’s future success.



Ben Buckley  
CEO, Football Federation Australia

### FFA Strategic Planning Framework

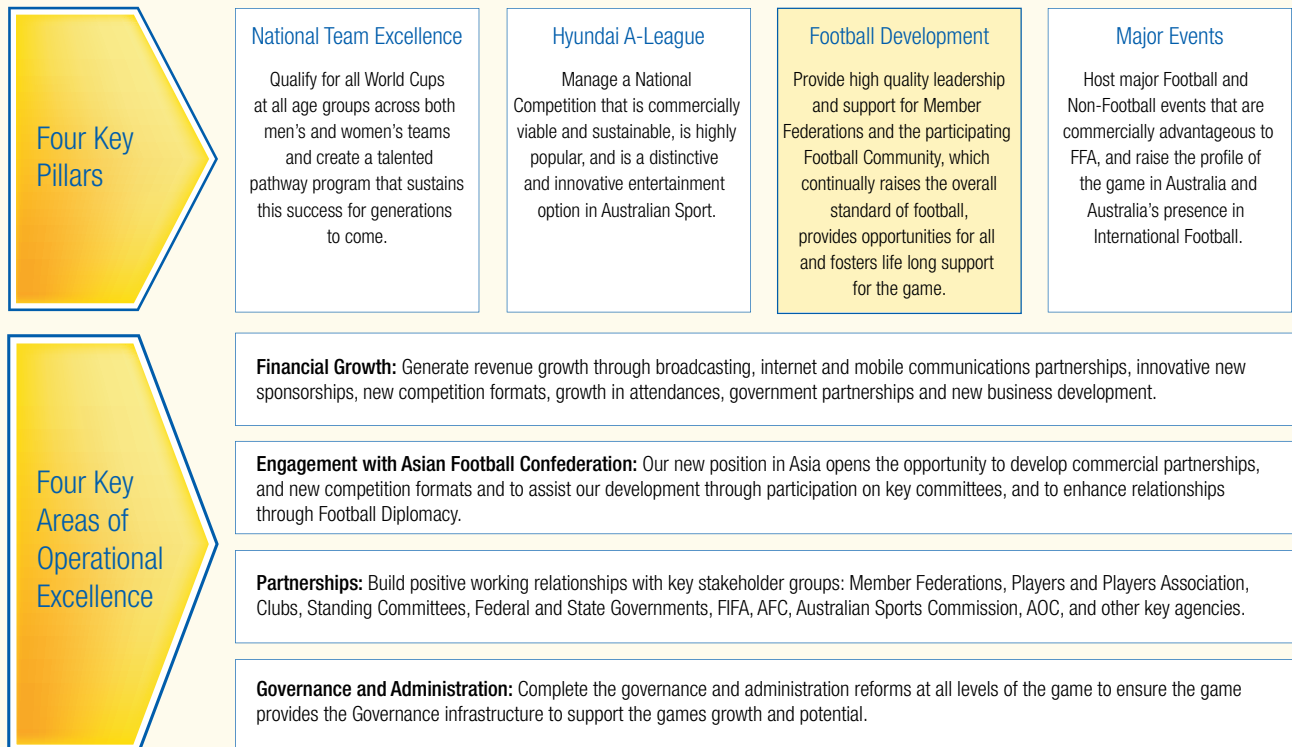


Figure 1

The “Football Development” pillar in the FFA Strategic Plan is now comprehensively outlined in this, the National Football Development Plan.

The National Football Development Plan draws on existing programs and systems, together with a suite of new initiatives in both the grassroots game development area and the talented player development area.

In particular, throughout 2006 and 2007 FFA embarked on a wide ranging Talent Development and Identification Review, designed to identify the gaps in the development of talented football players, and to produce initiatives to fill those gaps. The Review consisted of detailed on-site research of development systems in Brazil, USA, Japan, England, the Netherlands, France and Argentina, as well as consideration of the programs of other successful Australian sports and a thorough review of the published literature in this field. The Review was carried out by a group consisting of some of the best football technical experts in the country – including Alistair Edwards, Ange Postecoglou, Andy Harper, Tom Sermanni, and Robert Baan – and FFA personnel and consultants.

Throughout this period there has been close consultation with the range of stakeholders in football development in Australia, including Member Federations, Hyundai A-League Clubs, District Associations, State Clubs, State and National Institutes of Sport, Schools, private academies, coaches, referees, players (through the Professional Footballers Association) and other interested individuals. Written submissions, workshops, briefings and individual consultations have ensured that the wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm in the development of the game has been tapped.

Whilst the Plan recognises two distinct areas of football development – “Grassroots” **Game Development** on the one hand, aimed at developing the infrastructure and programs around the broad base of the sport; and **Talented Player Development** on the other, aimed at providing a clear pathway and specialised development for the most talented of Australian footballers – many of the initiatives and programs contained in the Plan cover both areas, and aim to meet both objectives

Amongst the new initiatives in the game development area which are adopted in the National Football Development Plan are the newly introduced grassroots coaching certificate, the new National Registration Regulations, and the introductory Football Anytime program.

Existing established programs such as Coaching and Referee

Education programs, the Institute of Sport systems, the National Youth Championships and National Futsal Championships, are incorporated into this comprehensive plan, so that all aspects of development of football in Australia are now combined in the one nationally directed and locally implemented system.

The National Football Development Plan is the complete compendium of all of these inputs and elements.

### Key inputs to National Football Development Plan

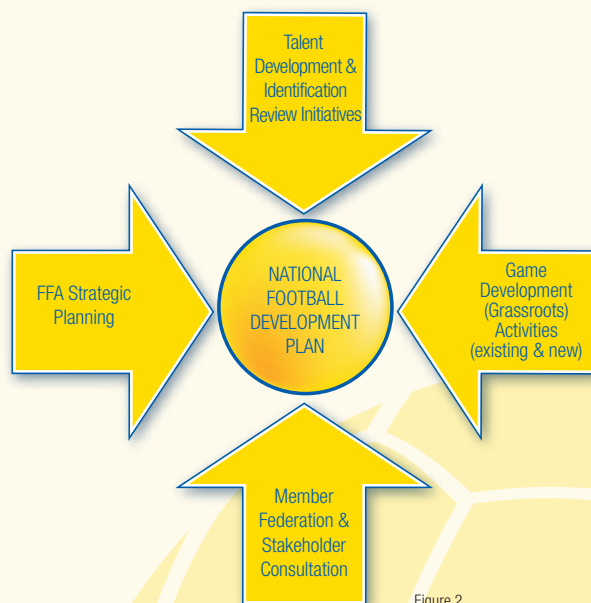


Figure 2

Football Development describes all the activities, programs, pathways and resources that are either existing, or need to be implemented, in order to ensure that our National teams are able to achieve success at the highest level. It begins when a participant enters the game for the first time, whether as a player, coach, referee or administrator, and continues through until he or she reaches their particular end point, be it representing the Socceroos or Matildas or becoming President of their local club. The scope and scale of Football Development is considerable, as are the resources that are required to approach it in the best possible manner.

Figures 3 and 4 depict what constitutes Football Development in terms of the key operational areas. These are explained in more detail in a subsequent section of the Plan.



Figure 3



From a functional point of view, FFA has separated Football Development into two distinct but closely related areas, namely **Game Development** and **Talented Player Development**, as shown in Figure 4.

**In essence, Game Development is the ‘grassroots’ of the game which underpins the development of talented players.**

It is the environment where the vast majority of people enjoy their football participation and also refers to the key infrastructure requirements such as facilities, coach and referee education, national registration regulations and club development.

In the earliest years of player development, grassroots football and talented player development are inseparable. That is, all players, including those who are very talented, will play football at the grassroots level. The most pertinent example of this is that in the future all players will begin their football experience playing small-sided games. At a particular point in their development, these talented players will move across into the talented player pathway into an environment where they can access specialised programs, expert coaching and professional support services. This also applies to talented coaches and referees and indeed administrators though there is less of a ‘formal’ pathway for the latter group.

It is appropriate to acknowledge that arrangements that are optimum for talent development will always have some impact and interdependence on grassroots football. This is particularly so for the earliest years of player development, since the training and playing regime in grassroots football provides the foundation for later talent development.

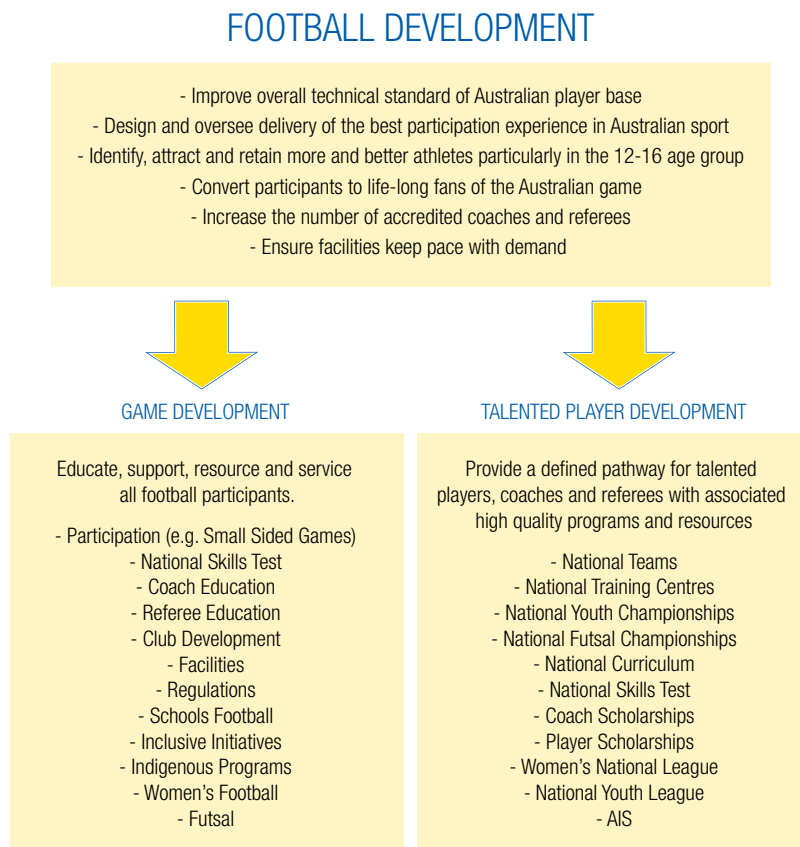


Figure 4

It would create a major problem if the ideal arrangements for early development of talented players was harmful or onerous for other players. In fact, the initiatives proposed in the Plan are actually beneficial for all young players. Implementing them will require the active cooperation and commitment of people throughout grassroots football. Hence the integrated approach bringing these two arms of planning together in the National Football Development Plan.



## Talented Player Development

In late 2006, FFA initiated a comprehensive review of Football's talent development and identification activities, with a view to proposing a soundly based, consistently coordinated national Talent Development and Identification System for Australian Football that will achieve a major improvement in the quality and performance of Australia's top players and teams. The key gaps that were identified in relation to talented player development in this country are listed below:

- **Technical skills are deficient in players in elite programs / competitions** - Virtually all coaches dealing with Australian representative teams as well as FIFA Technical Reports about Australian teams at major tournaments comment on the weaknesses in the technical skills of our players. The world's best players start developing technical skills at a young age. Australia cannot produce a significant number of world class footballers until it is world class in developing technical skills, that persist under pressure, in its young players.
- **Deficient game skills and game hardness evident in mid teens and later (particularly the 15 – 20 year old group)** – In the majority of the major footballing countries, by age 18 or 19, the best young players are competing in professional senior environments (with and against adult professionals), throughout the full season. In Australia this now typically does not happen until the players are in their early 20s, and even then it is for a season much shorter than overseas. Consequently, our young players have much weaker game skills, that is decision making and effectiveness in a competitive environment, than is typical in other "football countries".
- **Loss of a substantial amount of potential talent due to Relative Age Effect (RAE)** – Individuals born earliest within an age group tend to have size, speed, coordination, mental and emotional advantages over those born later in the same age group – even when they have

the same innate potential. This is known as the Relative Age Effect (RAE). This is particularly relevant given the fact that in Australia, during youth development programs and in competitions, individuals are grouped based on their birth dates.

There can be a tendency for coaches to recognise maturity rather than natural ability (which may not have been developed in younger players) and tend to pick older players. This means a lot of potentially talented players are lost to the sport simply because they were born in the "wrong" months, thus reducing the pool of talented adult players available to Australia.

- **Omission of a lot of potential talent from regional Australia** - In Australia and overseas, rural locations are much better, per capita, than big cities at generating athletes. However unlike other football codes in Australia, football has been predominantly a city game. This trend is clearly illustrated by the fact that three quarters of Australian Hyundai A-League players have been developed in large cities.
- **Abilities of coaches for talented young players and for senior teams** - On average, Australian coaches available for elite youth development and for state and national competition teams have less relevant experience, and consequently less expertise, than their counterparts in top football countries.

## Game Development

The following were identified as the major areas of need in relation to the enormous football community which underpins and ultimately contributes to the development of talented players:

- **Insufficient numbers of active coaches and referees who are accredited** – There is a real need to provide greater education and development opportunities for referees and coaches through accredited courses. This will ensure a greater proportion of active coaches and referees are accredited.
- **Difficulties in attracting volunteers to the game** – Whilst not a unique challenge to football, it is becoming more difficult for clubs and schools to find volunteers who are willing and able to undertake the variety of roles that need to be carried out each year.
- **Facilities not keeping pace with demand** – As participation in football continues to grow each year, the availability and quality of playing and training facilities becomes a more critical issue throughout the country. In more recent years the impact of the drought and the competitive demands of other sports have exacerbated this problem.
- **Schools Football** - This is a significant aspect of the game in Australia that continues to grow. The challenge is to provide an adequate level of resourcing and support to the schools football environment ensuring that effective links exist between this part of the game and the club environment, particularly in relation to talented players.
- **Football for Women and girls** – Despite strong growth in this area in recent years, it is critical that opportunities continue to be provided for females to access football in this country. This extends to talented players and the acknowledged need for a seamless pathway which includes the provision of suitable domestic competition opportunities for the best players in the country.
- **Futsal** – Historically, Futsal has not been given the level of service that it requires, especially when taking into consideration its growth and the important part it plays in the technical development of players. It needs to be integrated more effectively into the overarching football system as well as providing a seamless talented player pathway.
- **Making the game accessible to all** – As a sport, it is important that there are no barriers to participation for our community. Central to this is ensuring football is an inclusive activity and that football maximises participation for all.

The Talent Development & Identification Review (TDIR) was an extremely comprehensive process which included a thorough analysis of the approach to talent development in major football countries, desktop research, consideration of other Australian sports, submissions from Member Federations, forums and regular meetings of a TDIR working group.

From the outset, the review was clear that the system proposed must be an Australian solution – not a French solution, a Dutch solution, an American solution, an English solution, or a Brazilian one.

**Like every football country, Australia has some unique circumstances and so the optimum solution has to take them into account.**

Of course there is a great deal done elsewhere from which Australia can learn. The review visited a number of other countries (Argentina, Brazil, France, England, Holland, Japan and USA) to get first hand knowledge of their practices, circumstances and the outcomes.

The review is not a compilation of opinions. It is factually and analytically based. It consulted widely to ensure all relevant ideas and thinking were considered. Then those ideas were tested against what we had learned from overseas federations and from the strong body of relevant scientific research.

The review operated on the basis that the objectives can only be achieved through a fundamental transformation of Australian football. Taken together, the initiatives identified would achieve that. Achieving this will require a whole of sport approach – hence the National Football Development Plan espoused here. Many of the initiatives will require a great deal of effort and new approaches throughout



Australian football. Necessarily, an organisation in its relative early stages like the FFA, with limited resources and faced with a project of this scale and a Football community of this size must take a phased approach to implementation over a number of years.

This review identified the critical gaps that are outlined on page 9. A set of initiatives was then selected with the potential to have the biggest impact on closing these gaps. In the section that follows, an overview of each initiative is provided together with a set of objectives for each one.

## Initiatives

### 1. Small-Sided Games (SSG)

#### Overview

Small-Sided Games are a modified version of Association/club football, structured to more suitably address the needs of young players. The basis of SSG is that participants, playing on smaller fields and with smaller numbers,

will interact with the ball on more occasions and be required to make less complicated tactical decisions. The result for participants is more fun (more successful interactions) and better skill/technique development.

SSGs are currently played in some parts of Australia, but the format is not consistent and the particular form used is not always ideal for the age groups involved. Commencing in 2008, a nationally consistent format of SSG will be introduced as the standard football format for kids under 12 years old throughout Australia, with an age-related structure and size linked to progressively changing abilities and skill levels of children.

In promoting SSGs, it is important to emphasise that their purpose is skill development through fun. They benefit kids by making their early contact with the game more enjoyable while simultaneously providing an environment that will facilitate greater skill development.

## Objectives

- FFA to coordinate the rollout of SSG to all players in the Under 6 to Under 12 age group by the end of the 2011 season
- FFA to develop the playing formats, rules and operational requirements of SSG
- FFA to create and distribute resources to stakeholders to assist in the changeover to SSG, including a SSG Curriculum Guide, Operations Handbook and a dedicated DVD
- FFA to oversee a comprehensive communication and education plan in conjunction with Member Federations
- FFA to develop an education initiative aimed at providing parents with the rationale behind the introduction of SSG

## 2. National Skills Test

### Overview

FFA will introduce a national skills test for 7-12 year old players and make it readily available to the broad football community through schools, clubs and the internet. The tests will be largely self-administered however there will be some that require a partner and/or coach to conduct. The key purpose being to:

- emphasise the importance of skill development
- widely promote awareness of the importance of specific skill development;
- focus attention on critical skills and standards for age groups;
- provide feedback to individuals and coaches, to aid learning; and
- provide visibility about development performance of coaches, clubs, and other providers.

The test will be a web-based system that will outline how to practice and improve the skills nominated, and how to test yourself, and submit your results. It will also enable the capturing of

data, maintaining individual records over time, providing finely detailed age-based norms and generating advice to individuals and their clubs about suitable development of skills, given their scores.

### Objectives

- Develop the content for the National Skills Test
- Build an online tool that will house the National Skills Test and provide an opportunity for players to challenge themselves and compare their results with the best
- Provide an opportunity for selected players to receive high level coaching, particularly for those in rural and remote areas

## 3. Accreditation & Rating of deliverers

### Overview

Multiple entities (e.g. clubs, associations, schools, and private academies) are involved in the development of talented players. We expect that to continue. These entities can differ dramatically in the contribution they make to talent development – but currently the differences are often not readily apparent, in advance, to potentially talented young players and their parents.

It is proposed to introduce a system of accreditation & rating that will ensure program delivery in a uniform way, through professional structures within existing clubs, schools and private providers. The indicators would take two forms:

- Accreditation – based primarily on inputs (e.g. playing small-sided games, employment of accredited coaches; adherence to FFA curriculum, use of National Skills Test);
- Rating – based primarily on outputs (e.g. improvement in player skills; young players selected for representative teams).

## Objectives

- FFA to identify the criteria to be used within each category
- FFA to formulate a communication plan so that the football community is aware of the accreditation & rating process
- FFA to develop an administrative process around this initiative in terms of how football deliverers are able to enter this scheme
- FFA and Member Federations to monitor football deliverers against the criteria within each category

## 4a. Elimination of Competition Gaps – Men's

### Overview

As previously mentioned in this Plan, our best young players (18-21) are deficient in games skills and game hardness, a situation that exists because they do not play enough competitive matches against quality opponents during this critical period of their development. Whilst youth league competitions do exist in most states & territories, players in this age group do not have regular opportunities to play against the best players from around the country.

There is a need for competition opportunities to be introduced for young male players (18-21) to:

- be associated with Australian Hyundai A-League teams and compete in that framework during the Hyundai A-League season;
- where possible during winter compete in corresponding state premier league competition;
- provide reserves for Hyundai A-League;
- have sufficient players to ensure viable training squads after meeting Hyundai A-League needs;

The teams would be predominantly U21, with rules that allowed Hyundai A-League teams to include a minority over 20 (e.g. Hyundai A-League players returning from injury)

### Objectives

- Introduce a National Youth/Reserve League competition as per previous page
- Ensure that the AIS players are involved in this competition
- Provide opportunities for talented coaches to work with these players as appropriate
- FFA National Technical Director to provide technical direction to coaches involved with these players
- Linked to the above, ensure that these coaches adhere to the National Curriculum when working with these players
- Provide opportunities for talented referees to officiate in this competition

## 4b. Elimination of Competition Gaps – Women's

### Overview

The women's game is growing in Australia, and with it the competition opportunities need to grow. The talented female players have international commitments as members of the Matildas and Young Matildas, and in their NTC programs often play in boys' leagues in their states. The Talent Development and Identification Review determined that the need exists for a regular domestic competition where the best women footballers in Australia play against each other.

A new Women's National League of high quality and profile will achieve this.

### Objectives

- Establish a national women's league, with:
  - > broad age range;
  - > six to eight teams linked to Institutes and State Federations
  - > season duration of 3 – 5 months;
  - > formats complementing state league competitions

- FFA to work with stakeholders to implement this competition
- Provide opportunities for talented coaches to work with these players as appropriate
- FFA National Technical Director to provide technical direction to coaches involved with these players
- Linked to the above, ensure that these coaches adhere to the National Curriculum when working with these players
- Provide opportunities for talented referees to officiate in this competition

## 5. Allow Greater Financial Benefits to Developers of Players

### Overview

Football is governed by a comprehensive set of regulations which are imposed by FIFA. Within these regulations, and mirrored in FFA's National Registration Regulations, FIFA recognises two forms of player-related transfer payments:

- training compensation – normally applicable when a player signs his first professional contract; and
- transfer fees – payable when a professional player on contract with one club moves to another.

Currently it is somewhat difficult to determine who, within the talented player development pathway within Australia, is actually adding value in terms of player development. Proposed initiatives such as accreditation and rating should make it easier to identify those clubs that have made a significant contribution to the development of an individual player as a result of their particular approach. As this initiative is rolled out and deliverers become involved in this process, the FFA regulations should be reviewed to create stronger incentives for clubs, private academies, etc. to contribute actively to talent development.

### Objectives

- FFA to review the National Registration Regulations after the accreditation & rating system is made available to football deliverers to ensure clubs who play a key role in the development of a player are appropriately rewarded

## 6. Player Development Scholarships Overview

At the very earliest points of talent development and identification, football should be affordable and accessible for families. One outcome of the TDIR is to identify a way to reduce the occurrence of potential talent remaining estranged from football for reasons of finance and/or geography. At the local level, local bodies (clubs, associations, representative teams etc.) should develop local programs to subsidise (i.e. fee-free), as far as possible, participants in the talented player development pathway.

There are, however, situations where FFA scholarships for players would be appropriate:

- In some cases, players with high potential are excluded from FFA endorsed programs for reasons of isolation, and scholarships could cover such things as reimbursement for travel and accommodation costs, access to sports science and sports medicine.
- A national program of player exchange would benefit some highly talented young players, e.g. with FFA sponsoring overseas experience of selected young players, for elongated stay at overseas destination (e.g. France, Brazil, Argentina).

Use of this tool will enable football to catch and keep more players, particularly rural and regional. It would be introduced gradually and prudently to ensure its use created real value for football.

## Objectives

- FFA to formulate criteria that detail the eligibility for these scholarships
- Communicate these criteria widely throughout the football community
- Establish a committee to review applications as and when they are submitted

## 7. Coach Development Scholarships

### Overview

FFA has a well established Coach Education Program to enable coaches to obtain formal coaching accreditation. There is a need for a program to enable targeted coaches with a potential to develop to a higher level, through the provision of support over and above the formal education process. This initiative is aimed at addressing the lack of quality coaching for talented players through to National teams.

### Objectives

- Identify a small number of coaches as 'targeted' coaches suitable for a coach development scholarship
- Targeted coaches to be 'case-managed' in their development over the ensuing 3-5 years
- Each coach's area of expertise to be identified
- Individuals to be mentored by The National Technical Director and a senior coach
- Coaches to be provided with specific professional development opportunities such as overseas postings, short-term exchanges and advanced courses and conferences in Australia and overseas



## 8. National Curriculum

### Overview

A national curriculum will provide national development guidance that will dictate what players and coaches nationwide should be undertaking relative to their age and ability.

For each age group (and level within age group), there will be:

- specific, detailed skill sets (form of skill and standard) required, training guidelines etc
- relative importance of the different skills and training activities
- recommended means of developing each of these skills and other aspects of the game
- recommended distribution of time across various activities;
- remedial practices to apply where particular skills or other aspects are deficient;
- recommended testing protocols.

Coaches with the expertise to do so (a small proportion), would be expected to adjust the mix of activities to cope with particular shortcomings in their group.

### Objectives

- FFA through its Technical Director to develop a syllabus that includes essential technical knowledge, understanding and skills that all players and coaches can work towards mastering
- The National Curriculum must also:
  - be related to specific year levels instead of covering a range of years
  - acknowledge the central importance of the development of technique
  - be 'benchmarked' against the world's best equivalent standards
- FFA to provide a level of support in terms of education to coaches on the appropriate use of the National Curriculum
- The national curriculum will be tied into the national coach education program.

## 9. National Technical Director

### Overview

The National Technical Director has been appointed, and is a person with outstanding practical knowledge of football-specific skills and how to develop them. The role of the National Technical Director is to provide technical direction, coordination and leadership to FFA, to ensure that, so far as is possible, high quality technical thinking, based on good science and good football practice, is applied to the development of players and coaches, in the preparation of teams, and in the creation and management of related systems and programs throughout Australia. He has particular responsibility to improving the talent development environment and the skills of those working within it.

### Objectives

- Work alongside senior national coaches and with and through other relevant Australian football officials and coaches;
- Oversee development programs, for players and coaches, and the impact of those programs;
- Directly implement some TDIR recommendations and provide technical input to the implementation of others.
- Provide technical advice and input into other areas of FFA, e.g Hyundai A-League, Game Development, Coach Education, as and when requested

## 10. Traditional Club Role for Hyundai A-League

### Overview

Internationally, talent identification and youth development is typically undertaken, en masse, by clubs, as part of a "cradle to grave" traditional club structure. There is a long term aim for Hyundai A-League clubs to play a major

role in the development of talented players in Australia through the implementation of a three part of youth development structure:

- League Academies (U6-U11/12)
  - > user pays
  - > potential commercial benefit (fees + ticketing and memberships)
  - > augment (i.e. not replace) the players' local junior club
  - > multiple "branches" in each Hyundai A-League market
- League Juniors (U11/12 – U17)
  - > play in local state federation premier youth competition / partnership with State Institutes
- League Youth (U21's)
  - > play in National Youth competition, with an allowance for overage players ("reserve team" facility)
  - > 10-11 months football, 35-40 games per calendar year

These changes would address the key development gap of game hardness and experience; increase competition; increase the pool of playing talent at Hyundai A-League clubs, reducing "injury-list" problems; and create opportunities for young players.

There would also be opportunities for ex-players in coaching careers. In addition, it would harness club passion to nurturing, motivating, and developing talented young players.

### Objectives

- FFA to play a leadership role in the planning and implementation of such initiatives in the future
- FFA to manage this process in terms of ensuring effective communication between all stakeholders, in particular Hyundai A-League clubs and Member Federations

- FFA to provide clubs with a template of how the approach could be best undertaken
- Hyundai A-League clubs to become part of the accreditation & rating process to ensure quality of delivery

## 11. Link State Institutes and Hyundai A-League Clubs

### Overview

State Institutes (National Training Centres – NTC's) and Hyundai A-League clubs have complementary talent development abilities and objectives. There is potential for State Institutes to provide Hyundai A-League clubs with:

- sports science and related services
- NTC coaches to assist Hyundai A-League coaches when requested
- facilities, e.g. for strength and conditioning
- extra players for training sessions
- introduction of NTC players to Hyundai A-League as potential future talent

There is also potential for Hyundai A-League clubs to provide State Institutes with:

- training experience for NTC players with Hyundai A-League squad
- coaching mentoring of NTC coaches
- advice to NTC players about professional experience
- facilities, as appropriate
- enhanced opportunities for traineeships, and contracts for graduated NTC players

Promoting active cooperation between State Institutes and corresponding Hyundai A-League clubs would benefit both coach and player development at relatively low cost.

### Objectives

- FFA to facilitate the entering into a Memorandum of Understanding between the relevant NTC and Hyundai A-League club



in each major centre, the FFA and Member Federation to cooperate in the development of the talented players in these age groups

- In addition, institute teams should participate in state youth leagues with a connection to the Hyundai A-League development pathway
- FFA to provide advice and support to all stakeholders on how best to make these arrangements work
- FFA National Technical Director to oversee appointment of NTC Coaches

## 12. Regional Centres of Excellence

### Overview

In order to cater for those talented players who are geographically isolated and cannot access programs in major cities, it may be necessary to establish regional centres of excellence. These centres would be directed towards the talented 12 – 15 year age group and would have:

- the best training with the best
- coached by highly skilled, specialist development coaches

- emphasising strong technical skills and the start of good game skills.

There will be a nationally standardised approach to the development of these young players through adherence to the National Curriculum and following the criteria developed under the accreditation & rating scheme.

### Objectives

- To identify and provide training opportunities, for both boys and girls, who reside in regional and remote areas
- To provide high quality development for players with the view to them progressing to states institute programs

Referred to in the Plan, Game Development is essentially grassroots football and is the foundation of the game in terms of infrastructure, both in a facility sense but more importantly the enormous human element whose efforts and enthusiasm ensure that people are able to participate in football each and every year.

**Game Development describes the need for football’s governing bodies to provide leadership and support to this critical part of the game and as the name implies, it is about development of the game itself rather than simply individuals who are involved in it.**

The following section provides an overview of Game Development priorities and sets out some key objectives that FFA will be striving to achieve over the coming years. It is important to acknowledge that many of these activities and initiatives are already being undertaken and will continue to evolve and improve in the future. There are also other initiatives that are yet to be implemented which will contribute significantly to the overarching vision for the development of football in this country.

## 1. National Registration Regulations

### Overview

Australian Football’s regulatory framework was overhauled and standardised in 2006 through the creation of the National Registration Regulations (NRR). The NRR have now been adopted nationally in order to regulate the eligibility, registration, contracting, payments and loan and transfer of players who enter into, participate in, and leave football in this country. They provide a critical foundation for all of the stakeholders in Australian Football – from the FFA & the Member Federations through to

zones/districts, clubs and players and officials – to operate in a consistent and effective manner with reference to both FIFA’s regulations and our new national Football Development Plan in Australia.

FFA will continue to oversee the implementation of the NRR amongst the football community, including education of key stakeholders such as Member Federations and Hyundai A-League clubs and provision of advice on an ongoing basis with respect to how these regulations are interpreted, understood and apply to the conduct of football competitions, players contracts/registrations and matches played within Australia.

### Objectives

- FFA will implement appropriate systems and processes to educate the football community on all aspects of regulations.
- FFA will develop appropriate in house best practice management systems to service the community in regards to regulations.
- FFA will ensure understanding of and compliance with FIFA & FFA Regulations amongst the broad football community

To view the national regulations, visit [www.footballaustralia.com.au/regs](http://www.footballaustralia.com.au/regs)

## 2. Coach Education

### Overview

Coaches have a leading responsibility for the quality of participation experience offered to players and their families – hence the reason why FFA have adopted the slogan ‘Better Coaches, Better Football’. It is critical that there are sufficient coaches, and that they have access to appropriate development and education resources to ensure that they are properly equipped to carry out this important responsibility.

FFA has provided a tiered system of coach accreditation programs for many years. This has recently been divided into two distinct but related pathways, the community pathway, for those individuals coaching within the grassroots environment, and the advanced pathway, aimed at those coaches working with talented players and teams. The curriculum and assessment criteria for the Advanced Pathway courses is provided by the AFC, with the FFA responsible for the actual delivery. FFA develops the content, resources and assessment criteria for the Community Pathway courses with Member Federations the sole approved deliverers.

The shift implied under the new national Football Development Plan is towards developing the competence of coaches through courses, associated programs and resources that have relevance for the level of coaching they are involved in, thereby enabling them to provide players with quality learning experiences relevant to their needs.

### Objectives

- FFA will undertake a thorough review of the Community Pathway courses, ensuring the content reflects the National Curriculum
- FFA will create new course resources including printed material, multimedia applications and online tools
- FFA will work closely with Member Federations to ensure course instructors are adequately trained and resourced
- FFA will enhance communication with grassroots coaches through the inception of a Football Coaches Association and the staging of a National Coaches Conference





### 3. Referee Development

#### Overview

Match officials in football in Australia make an important contribution both to the technical standards of the game and to the level of enjoyment of participants. Like coaches, it is vital that Football attracts and retains adequate numbers of referees, and that they have access to the training and development resources necessary for them to officiate effectively.

FFA supports the continuous professional education and development of all active match officials through the provision of National programs. There are five levels of Referee programs, four of which are accredited. Candidates begin at the Level 5 course (Laws of the Game) and must successfully complete the Level 4 course before they are able to accept an official refereeing appointment.

The new national Football Development Plan aims to continue to develop and provide such resources at a consistent and high quality level

in future seasons. A key component of this is for the whole of football to provide appropriate support and backing for referees at all levels.

#### Objectives

- FFA to work with stakeholders to raise the profile and interest in refereeing and clearly articulate the development and competition pathway that exists for talented match officials
- FFA to conduct a major review of refereeing in Australia including the development pathway, course content and curriculum resources and infrastructure
- FFA to work closely with Member Federations to ensure course instructors and assessors are adequately trained and resourced
- FFA to devise and implement initiatives aimed at recruiting more match officials and develop retention strategies to keep them actively involved in refereeing
- FFA to oversee the education of the football community to ensure appropriate attitudes and behaviour are directed towards match officials and provide adequate support in these standards aren't adhered to

### 4. Club Development

#### Overview

Football Clubs are the backbone of our grassroots participation community. Football in Australia is extremely fortunate to have tens of thousands of capable, hard-working and dedicated administrators working at all levels, the vast majority of whom are volunteers. Historically, football's volunteers have carried out their duties with minimal support from governing bodies or recognition of the contribution they make to the sport. It is becoming increasingly difficult for clubs to identify volunteers whilst at the same time under ever-increasing pressure to cope with growing participant numbers and regulatory demands, with resources that are becoming proportionally smaller year on year.

FFA, through Member Federations and other stakeholders, will be seeking to assist in the recruitment, retention, training and recognition of volunteers throughout the country.



Resources will be produced including “How to” reference materials as well as technology support tools that will streamline and automate labour-intensive annual processes, such as player registration, competition management and the related communications tasks.

#### Objectives

- Complete the rollout of the Player Registration/ Competition Management system, including functionality, training and support, in order to assist clubs in their administration processes
- Provide education and training opportunities for administrators
- Develop resources for administrators that are either attached to formal courses or can be used as practical stand alone reference material
- Introduce a Volunteer Management initiative with the view to assisting in the recruitment, recognition and retention of volunteers

## 5. Facilities

### Overview

Given the significant growth in football participation, access to, and management of, adequate facilities remains a key challenge for grassroots Football, as the competitive demands of other sports and the impact of the drought make their presence felt. FFA and the Member Federations have been proactively participating in the Federal Government’s \$1bn community sports facilities program, to ensure that Football is optimally-placed to receive an appropriate share of this important funding, commensurate with the relative size of our community. In addition to this, resources to support clubs to be developed under the new national Football Development Plan will incorporate advice on optimising available facilities, and engaging effectively with relevant authorities to ensure additional facilities are available where necessary.

### Objectives

- FFA to work closely with Member Federations and other stakeholders in liaising with the Federal Government and state and territory governments on the facility requirements of football
- FFA to provide best practice advice and support to Member Federations and other stakeholders on effective approaches to facility management as well as assistance with the development of facility funding proposals aimed at securing new or improved infrastructure

## 6. Participation

### Overview

Attracting new young participants and providing consistent, high quality first time Football experiences is an important plank of any Game development strategy. The new national Football Development Plan allows for a revised approach to Telstra Football Anytime whereby clubs are encouraged to use the program as an ideal method of introducing their new players and



parents to small-sided games. The program will now target 5-8 year old children and will be largely delivered by parent volunteers. Importantly, these parents will be mentored by an experienced and accredited Head Coach with the view to equipping them with practical advice and training ideas for use with their 'own' team. Parents who commit themselves in this capacity will be given a Grassroots Coaching Certificate at the conclusion of the program as well as the accompanying resource.

The program content of Football Anytime will continue to focus on small-sided games and will also reflect the curriculum of the Grassroots Coaching Certificate.

#### Objectives

- FFA to maximise the opportunities for clubs to host the Football Anytime program
- Through Football Anytime, FFA to provide an environment where new parents and their children can be introduced to the game of football

- FFA to give clubs who conduct Football Anytime the opportunity to secure complimentary equipment for their club
- FFA to facilitate more effective links between clubs and schools through the Football Anytime program

## 7. Schools Football

### Overview

Football participation in schools continues to grow at an extraordinary pace across the country. Historically, schools football has operated relatively independently of national and state/territory governing bodies' activities. The new national Football Development Plan anticipates FFA and Member Federations providing enhanced support and resources to schools football, and an improved level of integration between the development curriculum and talent pathways which will exist in schools and club football.

### Objectives

- FFA to provide an appropriate level of support to schools football (commensurate with that provided to the club environment) across areas such as coach and referee education and development
- FFA and Member Federations to work with schools in the rollout of small-sided games for players in this environment
- FFA, through Member Federations, to help create more effective links between schools and clubs

## 8. Inclusive Initiatives

### Overview

Under the new National Football Development Plan, FFA will continue to expand the scope of existing initiatives and programs intended to ensure that the game is as accessible as possible to all Australians, in particular people with disabilities, but also those with other special needs, who because of their circumstances, have to overcome significant barriers in order to participate. FFA has also embarked on the Sport



Connect project through the Australian Sports Commission which will identify strategies and activities that will ensure that people with disabilities can become involved in football and enjoy a quality experience.

#### People with a Disability

- To determine what opportunities currently exist for persons with disabilities to participate in football
- To establish strong links with disability organisations as appropriate
- To identify and implement strategies that will maximise the football participation opportunities for people with disabilities, through the provision of appropriate information, advice and initiatives
- To incorporate 'disability' components into existing Coach Education courses and program

## 9. Indigenous Programs Overview

### Overview

FFA is committed to expanding our existing Indigenous programs. These programs will serve to promote participation in football as well as providing development opportunities for talented players.

### Objectives

- FFA to work with Member Federations on the delivery of initiatives aimed at Indigenous communities
- FFA, through Member Federations, to take the Indigenous Sports Program to more places within each State & Territory, thereby reaching more children and adults from Indigenous Communities.
- FFA to work with all stakeholders to help provide follow-up programs/resources to participants so that their involvement becomes sustainable
- Continue to focus on equipping adults with the skills and confidence to deliver football amongst their own community, again leading to greater sustainability

## 10. Women and girls football

### Overview

Despite extraordinary growth in recent years, Women's football remains one of the great as yet untapped opportunities for the game in Australia. The Football Development Plan foreshadows a project intended to explore the potential of vertically-integrating our approach to Women's Football specifically from the Matilda's down to grassroots. This will include providing a 'girls only' version of Telstra Football Anytime which specifically targets 5-12 year old girls.

### Objectives

- FFA to work with stakeholders to ensure that all women and girls are given the opportunity to participate in football
- FFA to coordinate the formal introduction of a 'girls only' Football Anytime program which clubs can conduct as appropriate
- FFA, through Member Federations, to ensure a seamless pathway is in place for girls especially as they enter the Talented Player Pathway



- FFA to encourage female participation in non-playing areas of the game such as coaching, refereeing and administration

## 11. Futsal

### Overview

Futsal is another part of our game which has enjoyed tremendous growth. Under the Football Development Plan, FFA will continue to work with Member Federations in the staging of a National Futsal Championships on an annual basis. There is also an identified need to establish a dedicated Futsal Development Plan that will focus on more effective integration with the outdoor game across areas such as coach and referee education as well as club development.

### Objectives

- FFA to work with Member Federations to ensure that Futsal is fully integrated into their organisational structures
- FFA, through Member Federations, to work with all stakeholders to encourage closer links between outdoor clubs and Futsal teams/centres
- FFA to provide better services and programs to Futsal including Coach and Referee Education and Development
- FFA to ensure that a clearly articulated pathway exists for talented players within Futsal

## 12. Private Providers

### Overview

These individuals and groups are currently a significant deliverer of football in the community. FFA will lead the process of developing a system whereby private providers can gain official accreditation with the aim of improving the overall quality of what they deliver and bringing it into line with both FFA technical direction and content, and with the national Talent Development & Identification program.

There may also be circumstances where these organisations can offer a service in an area/s where FFA and Member Federations are not able to do so, for reasons of geography or economics.

### Objectives

- FFA to identify where private providers are operating throughout the country
- FFA, working with Member Federations, to establish criteria that these organisations must meet if they wish to gain official accreditation
- FFA, through Member Federations, to work closely with private providers to communicate this criteria and maintain a high quality of delivery in this area of the game

The Talent Development and Identification Review (TDIR) which is outlined in detail on pages 8 to 13 identified a number of gaps in the pathway for talented players' development. The Review has introduced a number of particular initiatives to specifically deal with these gaps. The TDIR initiatives combine with the following existing assets to provide an enhanced Talented Player Development Pathway which ensures a seamless journey for the young talented player throughout his or her football development. (See Figures 5 and 6)

### MEN'S FOOTBALL TALENTED PLAYER PATHWAY

AGE GROUP	DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY	COMPETITION PATHWAY	REPRESENTATION PATHWAY
21	A-League Clubs Overseas Clubs	A-League Overseas Leagues	Socceroos Olyroos
19-20	A-League Youth → A-League State League Clubs Overseas Clubs	A-League National Youth League State League (Senior)	Olyroos Young Socceroos
17-18	AIS or A-League Youth State League Clubs	National Youth League State League (Senior)	Young Socceroos AIS
15-16	State Institutes (A-League Link)	State Youth League Institute Challenges	Joeys State Institutes
12-14	FFA Accredited Clubs, Schools and Academies or FFA Centres of Excellence	State Competition National Championships	State Teams
10-12	FFA Accredited Clubs, Schools and Academies	Club or State Competition	
6-10	FFA Accredited Clubs, Schools and Academies	Small Sided Games Including Futsal	

Figure 5

## WOMEN'S FOOTBALL TALENTED PLAYER PATHWAY

AGE GROUP	DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY	COMPETITION PATHWAY	REPRESENTATION PATHWAY
21	AIS Overseas Clubs/Universities State League Clubs	Women's National League Overseas Leagues State League (Senior)	Matildas WNL Team
19-20	AIS/State Institutes State League Clubs Overseas Clubs/Universities	Women's National League Institute Challenge State League (Senior)	Matildas Young Matildas State Institutes/WNL Team
17-18	AIS State League Clubs State Institutes	Institute Challenge State League (Senior)	Young Matildas State Institutes/WNL Team
15-16	State Institutes State League Clubs	State Youth League National Championships	National Under 17 Team State Institutes State Teams
12-14	FFA Accredited Clubs, Schools and Academies or FFA Centres of Excellence	State Competition National Championships	State Teams
10-12	FFA Accredited Clubs, Schools and Academies	Club or State Competition	
6-10	FFA Accredited Clubs, Schools and Academies	Small Sided Games Including Futsal	

Figure 6



## National Championships

### Overview

National Championships for the best young male and female players in each State will continue to be offered by FFA. Currently the age groups of these Championships are Under 14 and Under 15 for boys; and Under 15 and Under 17 for girls. The age groups are under active consideration by FFA and the State Federations.

### Objectives

- Provide competition experience for players in their early years of 11-a-side football, where the best play with and against the best
- Provide an opportunity for identification of talented players for progression to State Institutes of Sport and the AIS and the Under 17 Men's (Joeys) and Women's national teams.

## State Institutes of Sport

### Overview

The State Institute of Sport Football Programs (also known as National Training Centres – NTCs) are a partnership between FFA, the State Federation and the State Government through the Institute. There is a men's and women's Institute program in every State and Territory except WA and NT, and Victoria for the women. In WA and Victoria, an NTC has been set up between FFA and the State Federation in the absence of a commitment from the State Institute.

The boy's program is for players who are Under 16 and Under 15, with the objective of providing a pathway for players to the AIS program and to the National Under 17 Team (the Joeys). The women's program is for girls aged Under 15 and upwards to senior football. These programs provide the bulk of players for the National

Under 17, Under 20 (Young Matildas) and Matildas teams.

The Institute / NTC programs concentrate on individual player development, providing a high performance daily training environment for the best young players of these ages, with full time high level coaching expertise, sports science and medicine support, appropriate domestic and international competition, and career and education development.

They are a key part of the talented player pathway and will continue to remain so. The Talent Development and Identification Review has proposed that a closer link be developed between the State Institutes and the Hyundai A-League Clubs to provide a more seamless pathway, and so that high performance resources can be shared between these vital elements of the pathway.





## Objectives

- The Institutes / NTC are the core elements of the development pathway for the best players in each state in the appropriate age groups.
- The best players train with and play with the other best players
- The strong resources of Australian sport provided through the Institute system are made available to the nation's most talented young players
- The Institutes are part of the seamless Talented Player Pathway leading into the AIS, the Youth National Teams, and the Hyundai A-League, State Premier Leagues, and Women's League Clubs
- High quality competition between the Institutes is also provided by Institute Challenges organised annually between the Institute programs.

## The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS)

### Overview

Over more than two decades, the AIS has provided the highest level of training and development for talented male and female players, and most of the best Socceroos and Matildas have been developed through the AIS. Again the aim of the AIS programs is to develop the individual players to the very best of their potential and to prepare them for national team selection.

The AIS men's program is a full time residential program for Under 17 and Under 18 players, leading to Hyundai A-League Club positions, and sometimes overseas contracts. The program is the core of the National Under 20 Team (Young Socceroos).

The women's program is a non-residential program, providing high quality training camps and facilities to the Matildas and Young Matildas squads.

Under the Talent Development and Identification Review, the AIS programs will continue to play this essential role in the pathway, enhanced by better national competition opportunities for AIS players through the National Youth League and the Women's National League.

### Objective

- AIS programs provide the best intensive individual development for the players most likely to represent Australia in the senior national teams (Socceroos and Matildas)
- The AIS position in the talented player pathway is between State Institute programs and the commencement of a professional career for men, and for development of the best female players through to senior national representative ranks.

A fundamental aspect of developing a young player's relationship with the game is the availability of credible (particularly amongst peers), appealing, accessible heroes for these young people to relate to and seek to emulate.

A good deal of effort is currently being invested in building the profile and appeal of identified "hero" players in each of the Hyundai A-League teams. Making these players, and indeed the current crop of Socceroo and Matilda heroes more accessible and relevant to an aspiring young player will be the focus of a specific piece of Football Development planning and activity.

Associating profile Socceroo, Matilda and Hyundai A-League players with programs and initiatives in ambassadorial or promotional capacities will enhance and reinforce the aspirational appeal of those programs. For example, online community building can play a role in making these (often remote) players more accessible and relevant to young participants, and this would be compatible with the National Skills Test (Initiative 2 above).

## Implementation: Bringing the Plan to Life

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### Roles and Responsibilities

In recognition of the importance of the successful implementation of this plan, FFA has created a Football Development Unit which will provide leadership and support for all stakeholders with the objective of enhancing existing initiatives and effectively implementing new initiatives. FFA's primary responsibility will be to play a lead role in the creation of the National Football Development Plan, clearly define and articulate the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders and allocate resources as appropriate.

From an FFA perspective, this would include technical content and direction for initiatives such as small-sided games, skills testing and the national curriculum as well as the creation and production of support resources such as manuals, multimedia applications and equipment. FFA will also seek commercial partners for various aspects of the Football Development Plan as appropriate.

Member Federations will play a lead role in the delivery of initiatives in terms of communication and awareness, provision of personnel for coaching and other roles along with administrative support as appropriate. The particular role of Hyundai A-League clubs in the rollout of this plan will be determined by the nature of the initiative.

Associations and grassroots clubs will tend to play a more 'hands-on' role with some initiatives whilst for others they will be the beneficiaries, such as coach and referee education and club development.





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Member Federations  
Hyundai A-League clubs  
AIS/ASC  
State Institutes of Sport  
State League Clubs  
School Sports Australia  
Various private academies  
Professional Footballers Association





FOOTBALL  
FEDERATION  
AUSTRALIA