

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS



**FOOTBALL  
NSW**

**Review in to  
private academies  
and external providers**



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“In sunny Sydney, parents of football daft kids are spoiled for choice when it comes to academies. Much like the unseemly scramble for coveted spots at overpriced private schools, football academies in Sydney vie for the affluent and deluded dollar, fluttering their eyelashes and promising all kinds of untold riches, virtually mapping out the yellow brick road to soccer related success.

All of which of course is complete and utter bollocks.

Unlike elsewhere in the world the word ‘Academy’ means nothing here: it's a marketing label, with connotations that suggest elitism (true in the dollar sense, but nothing else), conjuring up images of well drilled kids starting off on the road to professional footballing careers. However unlike in the UK and elsewhere there are no scouts, no trials, no obstacles for entry into these elite training schools on silly things like actual footballing talent ... no obstacles at all ..... except (kerching!) the entry fee!”

***Craig Allan, “That’s not an Academy.... This is an Academy!”***  
***www.sunburntsoccer.com***

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## Limitations

Throughout the Review, gender-specific terms may have been used to either ease the flow of text or as part of a direct quote from a contribution. Whenever a gender-specific term is used, it should be understood as referring to both genders unless explicitly stated. The author fully recognises the popularity of women's and girls' football and that there are many female coaches, players and volunteers all making a wonderful and significant contribution to our sport.

Further it is acknowledged that most information contained in this Report is 'Sydney centric'. Again, no disrespect is meant to our Regional Branches, Associations, clubs and players, and is instead a reflection of both the low incidence of private academies and external providers in the regional/country areas and the fact that no submissions were received from these areas. Many of the recommendations contained in this Review apply equally in these areas and in the event that similar challenges begin to emerge and are required to be addressed.

This Review focuses primarily around private academies and external providers at the grassroots and community football level of the game. Being limited in time, and conscious that there are a number of other reviews currently underway with regard to Football NSW Youth Competitions and the SAP structure, there has not been a detailed analysis of the NPL nor HAL Academy space.

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No other aspect of society would allow this to happen!

Several hundred individuals - coaches, technicians, educators, teachers – trained and certified by the national governing body and therefore, effectively given credence, all working with our children and youth, in the country's most popular participant sport, yet doing so in a totally unregulated environment!

A multimillion-dollar industry sitting completely outside all formal football structures and governance with no registration, monitoring, regulation or compliance checks.

They do what they want and how they want! They say what they want and are completely unanswerable to anyone but their customers - of which there are thousands.

They sell the dream and the promise to future glory and parents lap it up.

Some are engaged by clubs to assist them in their youth development programs when struggling to find sufficient volunteers (usually mums and dads) with the requisite technical expertise.

Others have their websites and kits emblazoned with the colours, badges and names of some of the biggest clubs in the world suggesting directly or implicitly that by registering with their programs, your child will also play at that club.

Most say they just want to be their own boss, work in the football industry, earn an honest day's pay and contribute something back to the sport they love. They argue that they should be rewarded financially for their entrepreneurial efforts, having risked their personal funds, and invested in their own professional development.

Governing bodies, who should be showing leadership, direction and oversight, have done little or nothing to date.

And this will only get bigger and worse.

Peter Hugg  
Head of Football, Football NSW  
29 August 2018

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# SECTION ONE

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In attempting to pare this Review down and strip back the myriad of multi-layered topics contained in the pages that follow, the issue seems to be not so much private academies and external providers per se, but rather the quality of football coaching and youth development that our young Australian players are exposed to in their daily training environment.

Whilst the problem may manifest itself in the proliferation of private academies and external providers, the question seems to be one of options and the choices that parents make - as consumers - as to how their child interacts and 'engages' with this most popular but increasingly costly sport, particularly with regard to learning the game and developing the skills to play at a reasonable level.

Multiply this by the many tens of thousands of young players in the state of New South Wales and across the country, our national youth development programs are clearly the focus. It is perhaps worth considering whether there is any correlation and/or a cause and effect relationship between the proliferation of private academies and external providers, and the supposed decline in the youth development system and structures within football in Australia.

This has been acknowledged by Football Federation Australia (FFA) when it states:

*"youth development in Australia is presently inconsistent in both quality and approach due to factors such as the diversity and self-interest of clubs; coaches; agents; private academies; schools; etc. The quality of youth coaching is generally still very poor, and the competition structures are of insufficient duration and quality. If we are serious about one day challenging the best of the world, we have to make considerable changes and improvements in our approach to youth development."*<sup>1</sup>

It was further reinforced by the FFA in its recent announcement that it has:

*"... identified the need to take a more holistic approach to youth development to build upon the foundations in place .... regarding the state of play at youth level, including coaching, the affordability of the game, and the pathway from grassroots to higher levels of the sport as part of a national youth development review .... this process will complement an analysis of international youth football trends and standards, which will help Australia to benchmark itself against its competitors globally and better understand where key improvements need to be made for the game to continue to develop."*<sup>2</sup>

Almost every parent who contributed to this Review was of the strong view – perceived or otherwise – that the quality and intensity of training sessions, skill development, the discipline on offer and the overall football benefit was higher in the private academy setting that they had enrolled their child in than at their local community club.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The FFA's Coaching Philosophy [www.ffacoachingresource.com.au/about-the-curriculum/ffas-coaching-philosophy](http://www.ffacoachingresource.com.au/about-the-curriculum/ffas-coaching-philosophy)

<sup>2</sup> FFA Press Release, 26 July 2018. FFA to conduct youth development review as Eric Abrams departs National Technical Director role

<sup>3</sup> This could be the result of a certain element of 'self-justification' given their payment of fees and due to assessment being more on 'non-crucial' components of a youth development program eg. famous club names, logos, equipment branding and other extraneous aspects

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Whether these views are fair or unreasonable, properly informed or otherwise, this is the strong and overriding emotion that drives parents to invest their time, money and energies in to private academies and external providers.

In its Discussion Paper ‘Teaching Sport to Children’<sup>4</sup>, and citing its own research, the Australian Sports Commission claims:

*‘a large proportion of the community sports workforce (who are generally unpaid volunteers) are not interested in formal training or accreditation. This is not surprising given the voluntary nature of the work they do. This is also true for many teaching sports to children who are most likely parents or drawn from school and community networks with varying capability, motivation and commitment to sport, and to their role as a sport deliverer.’<sup>5</sup>*

There is, without a doubt, a general perception by all users (effectively the parents as decision makers), that local community clubs do not currently deliver the ‘quality’ of development that they require, desire and demand! As one contributor (a parent), succinctly stated:

*“I register my child with a club so that he can play games on the weekend, but I enrol him in an academy for him to get better”.*

Cost wise, this essentially means paying twice – the normal club registration fee and the additional cost of supplementary sessions for what is considered ‘more professional’ training. Several community clubs acknowledge this issue and engage external providers to cater for the lack of suitably qualified volunteers (usually parents).

Former Socceroo and now TV commentator, Craig Foster wrote in 2014:

*“Every time a child picks up a ball, bat or racquet, the cheque book comes out, but football is rapidly becoming the worst. If we don't arrest the slide now, and if Football Federation Australia doesn't act to stabilise and support the grassroots clubs and schools, this sport will be even more prohibitively expensive, to our great detriment. Parents are encouraged to pay exorbitant fees for a service that is, very often, big on sales and blather and shockingly short on quality, expertise and ethics. Every child is encouraged, sometimes forced, to pay for additional sessions that are not provided within the club environment, and everyone wins commercially, except the two parties that matter the most - the child and the parent.”<sup>6</sup>*

With Australian football experiencing somewhat of a boom period with participation rates, popularity and rewards at an all-time high, the football ‘economy’ has never been more buoyant or fiscally rewarding. There has never been more people – coaches, technical directors, development officers, administrators and so on – employed in the game. There has never been more football on TV (free to air or subscription), nor column inches, websites or social media forums devoted to the world game.

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<sup>4</sup> Teaching Sport to Children, Australian Sports Commission, August 2017

<sup>5</sup> ASC Community Coaching Insights: How can Clubs Support Community Coaches?

[www.ausport.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/653666/Community\\_Coaching\\_Insights.pdf](http://www.ausport.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/653666/Community_Coaching_Insights.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Craig Foster, Sydney Morning Herald, 2 March 2014 ‘Paying a high price for an unstructured academy system in football’

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As former FFA Chairman Sir Frank Lowy stated in the Foreword of the FFA's Whole of Football Plan:

*"Football in Australia is in more households, more local parks and more hearts and minds than ever before. The game is now part of the mainstream of our society in a way that is tangible and permanent."*<sup>7</sup>

The rewards of a possible A-League contract, national team selection, international travel and overseas contract opportunities have never seemed more attainable. With increased possibilities come an increased desire and in turn, a willingness to invest in self-development.

Whilst we have well developed coach, referee and (increasingly better) administrator education programs, there is no similar support or education framework for parents. There is no helpline or support mechanism for parents who desire answers to crucial questions and, in some instances, life changing decisions. Unfortunately, this lack of information or guidance for parents leads to naivety, ignorance and gullibility and, too often, parents falling prey to misleading claims and practices or their high expectations that do not match reality.

That said, not all private academy participants have stars in their eyes or a desire to progress through the elite pathway. Most contributors to this Review indicated they merely wanted their child to improve, have a better football experience and enjoy the game. Parental love, coupled with limited time and increased disposable income lead parents to look for the option that will deliver the best possible return. As suggested by one parent, this is no different to music, language or dance lessons, or other extra-curricular activities where money is paid for an additional education over and above normal schooling. In many ways, this reflects more societal and cultural trends rather than anything specific to football or sport.<sup>8</sup>

Some would suggest that we have taken the world's most popular, cheapest and universal sport, and 'taxed' participants to the point where it is no longer a 'game for all'. There is the very real risk that our very best young players are either being forced out or are not identified because of the cost of playing football. No longer is talent the sole determinant of access to the best pathways and for the 'cream to rise to the top'. In examining the cost of playing the game, one local football journalist quipped, *'we don't have enough favelas to fuel a production line of talent.'*<sup>9</sup>

Some community clubs, recognising the dearth of technically qualified and skilled volunteer coaches, have turned to external sources for turnkey coaching solutions. In some instances, these clubs have fallen afoul of what they argue are onerous competition regulations, which although well intentioned to the extent they intend to maintain a 'level playing field', have in some cases, restricted their use of suitably qualified coaches for their junior teams.

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<sup>7</sup> p5, FFA Whole of Football Plan

<sup>8</sup> One contributor expressed the view that this ongoing 'public v private' debate was no different to that experienced with schooling, health insurance/care and transport

<sup>9</sup> Mike Tuckerman, [www.theroar.com.au/2017/11/03/cost-junior-fees-next-crisis-australian-football](http://www.theroar.com.au/2017/11/03/cost-junior-fees-next-crisis-australian-football)

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## 1.1 Better Coaches, Better Football

Several years ago, the FFA adopted and promoted the mantra ***‘Better Coaches, Better Football’***. Assuming the validity of this claim, the greatest investment that governments and the game’s governing bodies, associations, clubs and all other stakeholders can make is in the area of coaching. Cheaper and greater accessibility to coach education courses, improved coaching knowledge through mentoring and broader discussions, and the overall development of coaching as a legitimate and well recognised and respected career will reap untold returns and will have significant and positive impacts on the game. The proposed reboot of the FFA’s Coach Development Framework, although very much in its infancy, will in many ways address these matters.

By any rough estimation, there are 2-3 times as many full time ‘professional’ coaches outside the formal football structure as inside it - be they working in private academies, external providers, schools (private or otherwise) or other unaffiliated organisations. Arguably, there needs to be a means whereby these coaches and advocates of the game are recognised and brought in to and adopted by the formal system.

Acknowledging that there are many good (and some ‘not so good’) private academies and external providers, further work needs to be done to recognise and ‘endorse’ those that are appropriately skilled and are of some real value to the game. The FFA has identified that in the future there will need to be 100,000 recognised coaches who display the essential behaviours and football acumen necessary to coach our players – there are currently just 24,000!<sup>10</sup> No longer can we continue to have some of our best coaches effectively ostracised and working ‘outside the tent’!

Private academies and external providers remain one of the few industries in society that has no formal licencing, accreditation or regulatory system. Whilst this remains the case, service levels will vary, the game and its participants will suffer, parents will continue to pay more, talented players may fail to be identified, and external suppliers of coaching services will continue to proliferate. Again, Foster states:

*“If this was a school environment, we would be last in academic standards in the world and, by extension, we are producing illiterate footballers through high charges and zero regulation.”<sup>11</sup>*

Unfortunately, there currently seems to be no appetite by governing bodies to implement any form of licencing or accreditation system for private academies or external providers. Whilst there are numerous models that could be implemented, any such model requires broad ‘buy-in’ and must be able to be applied nationally and consistently across the country and must be adequately resourced in order to ensure ongoing monitoring and compliance.

There is the very high risk of ‘rebel’ competitions and leagues being formed (not too dissimilar to what has occurred in Futsal) and this is clearly demonstrated with the recent announcement of the Premier Academy League – currently involving nine private academies over the summer.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> p37, FFA Whole of Football Plan

<sup>11</sup> Craig Foster, Sydney Morning Herald, 2 March 2014 ‘Paying a high price for an unstructured academy system in football’

<sup>12</sup> [www.premieracademyleague.com/](http://www.premieracademyleague.com/)

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There are also certain parallels here with player agents, once completely unregulated and unlicensed, but who are now accredited and registered, and have their own professional body - the Australian Football Agents Association<sup>13</sup> - with a code of ethics and other regulatory mechanisms. Similarly, at a broader level and led by the Federal Government, Australian sport has recently reaffirmed the model and role of Exercise and Sports Science Australia<sup>14</sup> (ESSA) aimed at developing professional standards and minimum required levels of knowledge and skills for sports science and exercise practitioners. ESSA and other similar organisations may serve as models for football to learn from and follow when developing any qualifications and standards framework.

The newly constituted Football Coaches Australia (FCA)<sup>15</sup> provides a very real opportunity for its stakeholders – coaches at all levels - to take a proactive and lead role in developing some key principles code of conduct/ethics and possibly some form of regulatory framework for private academies and external providers. Further it is believed that it is in the best interests of the FCA's membership that the profession of football coaching is appropriately recognised and remunerated and professionally managed.

In recent years, the game has seen increased fees and levies being charged in order to play the game. Despite the introduction of initiatives such as the National Premier League Youth competitions and SAP licences, and a desire to 'professionalise' and raise the standard of the football environment, there does not appear to have been a concerted and concurrent increase in investment by clubs in the professionalisation of coaches, youth development 'technicians' and technical directors.

It would appear that some elements of the game are willing to receive players' substantial registration fees (all set at the same level despite differing standards of service and benefits offered<sup>16</sup>) but seem reluctant to spend those funds on paying appropriate remuneration to coaches and Club Technical Directors and question the efficacy of investing in greater coach education and overall youth development. Again, the FCA can serve a valuable role here in formulating minimum standards and best practice. No doubt, the previously mentioned FFA Review will also look to address such concerns.

Despite well-established criteria, it is suggested that failure to adequately monitor and ensure compliance leaves room for abuse and neglect. The FFA's proposed 1-Star Club Academy Accreditation System (supposedly being rolled out for season 2019 to underpin the previously announced 2-Star system – refer to Annexure III) has the potential to make significant inroads in this area, however any such framework is only as good as both the compliance and monitoring system in place. Additional resources, in the form of Compliance Officers and regular audits, are required but, even more essential, is the need for increased investment in supporting Member Associations and Clubs.

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<sup>13</sup> [www.australianfootballagents.com](http://www.australianfootballagents.com)

<sup>14</sup> [www.essa.org.au](http://www.essa.org.au)

<sup>15</sup> [www.footballcoachesaus.org.au](http://www.footballcoachesaus.org.au)

<sup>16</sup> The capped fees charged by NPL and SAP clubs have effectively become the 'recommended retail price' rather than be related to the budgets and quality of club offering. That is, the 'best' program offering the best value and benefits charges the same as the 'lowest' quality program with the least benefits.

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## 2. OBSERVATIONS

- a) Private academies and external providers are a growing, omnipresent and, in some ways, a polarising sector of the football industry. On the whole, they sit outside the formal football structures and are not recognised, communicated or engaged with by football's governing bodies. From a footballing perspective, they remain unaccountable and unregulated.
- b) By their very nature, private academies and external providers are commercial and entrepreneurial small to medium enterprises in a growing sport and, as such, are subject to the same market forces as other sectors of the economy. Quality businesses and programs that meet customer satisfaction levels thrive, whilst those that are adjudged as 'poor', suffer and no doubt eventually fail, causing reputational damage, ill will and distrust for the industry. Some benefit from a continual flow of new and possibly unsuspecting and uneducated customers.
- c) Football's governing bodies, at the national, state and local levels, have remained silent and, to date, have not provided adequate leadership, governance and oversight in this area. Many have a particular view on the role of private academies and external providers, but few have done anything about to address this area.
- d) As the ultimate consumer of private academies and external providers, parents have not been provided with sufficient information, guidance and education to assist them to make informed decisions about what is best for their child's football development. Further, there are no means by which they can complain or seek redress for poor service or unscrupulous practices (other than via the relevant government regulator or civil action). Parents have essentially been left to make these decisions and deal with any issues on their own. It is very much a case of '*caveat emptor*' – buyer beware!
- e) As many of the technicians and practitioners in the private academy landscape are part-time or full-time professionals who coach and derive an income for their services, the quality of service is generally (but not always) better than that provided by well-meaning volunteer mums and dads at the community club level.
- f) In order to make a 'career' out of football coaching, these coaches will often derive their footballing income from a variety of sources. For example, they may do some work with a private academy, additional work with a high school, coach at a club, or act as a club's technical director<sup>17 18</sup>. In some cases, this leads to claims of conflict of interest as the coaches spread themselves across several different groups of players. For example, a club coach who also works for a private academy may be accused of selecting or favouring players at the club who are also customers of their private academy.

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<sup>17</sup> One well known coach took to driving for Uber in between sessions and various coaching positions to make a living

<sup>18</sup> Several staff members of the FFA's various National Teams are involved in their own eponymous academies

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- g) Most of the principals and staff in the private academy and external provider workforce are graduates of FFA Coaching Courses who, on completion of said courses, set up their own business in order to derive an income from the game. While successful completion of relevant FFA Coaching Courses should be a mandatory and a minimum requirement for anyone coaching football, the fact that coaches with private academies and external providers hold such qualifications can be interpreted by some consumers as tacit endorsement by FFA of the private academy or external provider. The same can be said for professional players who, upon retirement from playing, transition into coaching.<sup>19</sup> By referring to themselves as a 'Former Socceroo' or 'Former A-League player' with an FFA A License, a consumer could be easily misled (intentionally or otherwise) in to believing that player's academy is endorsed by the national governing body.
  - h) The increased quality of coaching and the offering of a high intensity and individualised training program vis-à-vis what is offered by a community club, are the main reasons parents cite for enrolling their child in a private academy or with an external provider.
  - i) That said, it must be acknowledged that private academies do not have the added burden of administering a club, preparing players to participate in (and win) competitive games of football, nor do they have to ensure adequate playing numbers and weekend formations, game strategies and the like. As such, most private academies solely dedicate their time and sessions exclusively to skills training and individual talent development in an environment of a compliant and for the most part well-behaved cohort of high paying participants, usually with parents present and observing.
  - j) In addition to the quality of training, there is the misguided perception among many parents that, if two sessions are good, three sessions are better and four (or more) sessions are ideal. These parents believe that the best way for their child to get an advantage over other peers is by paying for and attending extra training sessions (in educational terms, extra study and tuition).

When combined with club and, in some instances, school football, futsal and/or other sporting commitments, little to no regard is given to the total number of training hours/sessions per week that the child is undertaking. This gives rise to the risk of the child suffering overuse injuries at what is a crucial developmental age and growth phase. Several submissions from parents referred to their child experiencing Severs<sup>20</sup> and Osgood-Schlatter's issues.<sup>21</sup> Whilst a medical practitioner may be able to assist with a child's recovery from such injuries, due to the number of different programs the child is participating in, no one seemingly takes responsibility to ensure these injuries do not occur in the first place.

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<sup>19</sup> Some of the more well-known and popular private academies are run by former National Team, NSL/A-League and NPL players

<sup>20</sup> [www.physioworks.com.au/injuries-conditions-1/severs-disease](http://www.physioworks.com.au/injuries-conditions-1/severs-disease)

<sup>21</sup> [www.physioworks.com.au/injuries-conditions-1/osgood-schlatters-disease](http://www.physioworks.com.au/injuries-conditions-1/osgood-schlatters-disease)

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- k) In the main, participation in private academies is generally dominated by young male players and, although there are some female participants, there are very few, 'girls only' academies (although one was recently set up in Melbourne<sup>22</sup>). It is envisaged that this will change with greater emphasis on and promotion of girls' football, the increased popularity and continued success of the Matildas and the Westfield W-League and Australia's bid for the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.
  - l) Schools – both public and private – are increasingly becoming active as 'external providers' and are looking to recruit and offer scholarships to young talented players. There are seven sports high schools in the Sydney Metropolitan area – all with football programs – and one, Westfield Sports High, has been officially endorsed and accredited by the FFA as a 'High Performance School'.<sup>23</sup>

Like many other private academies and external providers, these schools 'fall outside' the formal structure of the game and run their programs parallel to Member Associations and Clubs – sometimes competing with training sessions and game day times. Private schools implement some of the best funded football programs with coaches, equipment, facilities, camps and tours that would be the envy of many professional clubs.

- m) Programs offered by private academies and external providers range from weekly training sessions over an extended period (for example, a term and several terms per annum), to one on one or small group ad-hoc training, specialist position coaching (especially for goalkeepers) or more 'left of centre' offerings such as strength and conditioning sessions or access to specialist equipment and facilities. Some are now using 'search' technology to offer an employment service for coaches (such as job boards).
- n) Beyond training, some private academies are beginning to seek (and create) opportunities to play games and effectively 'compete' against each other. Several mini-tournaments already exist during school holidays and the recently announced Premier Academy League<sup>24</sup> will commence in October 2018 with a summer season and most likely more activities to follow.
- o) In some cases, the line between community club and private academy (or external provider) is increasingly blurred. Some clubs are subcontracting directly with individual coaches to make up for a shortage of suitably qualified volunteers, and due to parental demand and a concurrent willingness to pay for a higher standard of coaching. Other clubs (for similar reasons) are completely outsourcing their coaching needs to external providers who provide turnkey solutions, whilst some clubs are forming relationships with private academies such that players must be customers of the private academy in order to gain selection for the club's Division 1 team (in the relevant age grade). Some private academies are beginning to 'morph' into clubs so as to play in local leagues.

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<sup>22</sup> [www.thewomensgame.com/news/former-victory-forward-ready-to-give-girls-an-elite-pathway-494314](http://www.thewomensgame.com/news/former-victory-forward-ready-to-give-girls-an-elite-pathway-494314)

<sup>23</sup> [www.myfootball.com.au/news/ffa-announces-high-performance-program-westfield-sports-high](http://www.myfootball.com.au/news/ffa-announces-high-performance-program-westfield-sports-high)

<sup>24</sup> [www.premieracademyleague.com](http://www.premieracademyleague.com)

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- p) There is, unfortunately, evidence of improper and unacceptable behaviors by operators of private academies and external providers, mainly related to (a) making false promises in relation to overseas trials and preying on gullible and naive parents and (b) compulsory attendance at (and thus extra fees) for private academy programs and linking these to the trial process for gaining selection in to a specific team.<sup>25</sup>
- i. It is considered that anything that is compulsory and forced upon players/parents is inappropriate especially when it relates to tying first division football with participation in a private academy program. No player should be required to pay additional private academy fees to play first team football. All efforts should be made to regulate against such practices, to the extent it is legally permissible to do so, and regardless, community clubs should be strongly discouraged from carrying out such practices. Talent alone, and not the capacity to pay, should be the principle determinant in team selection.
  - ii. Several private academies have linkages with overseas professional clubs for branding and promotional purposes. Although these private academies will argue otherwise, there is no real altruistic desire for overseas clubs to make Australian football stronger and to make our young players, and in turn, our national teams, better. Most marketing by these overseas clubs focuses on ‘playing the [club] way’, rather than ensuring the FFA National Curriculum is adhered to. Whilst it may seem appealing to a parent/player to learn to play ‘tiki-taka’ football like Barcelona, considering the team nature of the game, this is both unreasonable and idealistic. The efficacy of such an approach is questionable and has the potential to create confusion when the ‘philosophy’ or approach of such a private academy conflicts with the FFA National Curriculum.
  - iii. A number of overseas clubs (or their ‘agents’) and external providers conduct supposed ‘trials’ for young players, luring parents into funding attendance on the premise the trial is part of a formal talent identification process. These trials are attended in the usually naive and misplaced hope of securing an overseas trial with a ‘big name’ professional club and, ultimately, a professional contract with such a club. In reality, if a young player is sufficiently talented, they will usually already be well known (be ‘on the radar’ so to speak) and will already be part of the FFA’s Talented Player Pathway.

Furthermore, one shouldn’t have to pay to be ‘spotted’. The talent identification process is not (and should not be) provided at a cost to the player and should not be a revenue source for clubs or private academies. Further, and most importantly, there are strict FIFA regulations in place concerning the transfer of minors between National Federations which will often prohibit such opportunities in any event.<sup>26</sup> All necessary and legal steps should be taken to prohibit such trials by overseas clubs – especially when parents must pay for the ‘privilege’.

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<sup>25</sup> Worse still is the allegation of coaches asking for/receiving cash payments from parents for their child to be chosen for NPL teams

<sup>26</sup> Article 19 of the FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players

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- iv. A key offering of many private academies is overseas tours. Typically, these are to Europe (mainly England, Italy and Spain) although increasingly the USA, Asia and South America are becoming options. These tours need to be recognised for what they are, that is, they are akin to a school excursion, possibly a 'once in a lifetime' experience and an opportunity to see the world via football, rather than for any elite or trial purposes. Whilst such tours may provide participants with games against the youth teams of EPL or other professional clubs, their value as a means of 'talent identification' and being placed in front of scouts is questionable.
  - q) The Competition Regulations of two Football NSW competitions – namely the Champion of Champions Tournament and the State Cup – are increasingly perceived as overly onerous on clubs and difficult to administer and police. Also, to some extent, the Competition Regulations are inconsistent with the regulations of Member Associations with respect to private academies and external providers such that there have been situations in which Member Associations have expected Football NSW to reject clubs for entry into the abovementioned competitions on the basis of their link with a private academy despite the Member Association allowing that club to participate in its own competitions.
  - r) Further, several submissions argue that the regulations are potentially counterproductive to what clubs are seeking to achieve in terms of raising coaching standards and their internal youth development program. That said, there is strong recognition that there does need to be a spirit of 'fair play' and a level playing field applied in the conduct of what are broadly 'whole of community' grassroots competitions and that certain socio-demographic areas should not benefit because of having an ability pay for additional professional coaching services.
  - s) Increasingly, Member Associations are beginning to establish their own 'academy' or inhouse youth development programs. This is being done with a desire to provide participants with alternative options while assuring participants that these programs meet certain standards, for example, in relation to coaching qualifications, insurance cover, Working with Children verification and adherence to the FFA National Curriculum, and that any surplus funds from these programs are reinvested in the game.
  - t) Community clubs are also looking to provide distinct 'premium' offerings (generally at additional cost) for those who desire additional services beyond the normal 'base-level' offering. One of the obvious potential risks here is that selection to play 'First Division' football will be linked to these 'premium' offerings.
  - u) It is only appropriate that both the FFA and Football NSW provide as much support, guidance and assistance as possible to its Member Associations and Clubs, including, if deemed appropriate, the development of a 'best practice' model to be adopted and applied, together with all necessary program structures, session outlines, job descriptions, marketing collateral and so on.

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### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many findings and learnings from this Review. With the sport seemingly in a constant state of flux, there will always be means by which the sport can improve and aspects of it that we can do better. The recently announced Youth Development Review to be conducted by the FFA will no doubt introduce another series of changes and potentially a new approach to player development across the country.

No one could deny the potential that football can deliver to its players and the broader Australian community in terms of economic, social and health benefits. Inevitably, on occasion, this can be limited by resources, however, in the main, it will take a combination of strategic alignment and the concerted efforts of all stakeholders to achieve the FFA's mission to become *'the largest and most popular sport in Australia.'*<sup>27</sup>

Notwithstanding that we must 'do more and do better', the key recommendations from this Review can be divided in to four broad areas:

1. Regulatory Framework;
2. Competition Regulations;
3. Education and guidance; and
4. Support and assistance.

The recommendations should be considered as a holistic and total approach to dealing with the many challenges in this area.

No one recommendation is intended to work independently of the others and, in fact, some are intrinsically linked. For example, the recommendation that Member Associations and Clubs create their own 'academy' style program, with Football NSW working with them to do more in the youth development space (Recommendation 4), essentially presupposes that competition regulations will need to be reassessed and modified so as to remove the various restrictions (Recommendation 2) that currently restrict this from occurring. That is, it would not be reasonable to seek to regulate against private academies on one hand, yet actively promote similar programs merely because that are deemed 'within the formal structure' on the other.

In much the same way as utilising a set of fiscal levers to manage the economy, the recommendations below should be viewed as a series of tools to be pushed and pulled in the most appropriate manner to achieve the best possible outcome across the entire football ecosystem.

In short, it is anticipated that by providing greater assistance and support to Member Associations and Clubs, and by better educating and informing the consumer to demand a better service, no regulatory framework is required and competition regulations can be relaxed so as not to discourage those Clubs trying to improve the skills of their members, but rather incentivise all key stakeholders to deliver better services in the coaching and youth development space.

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<sup>27</sup> p6, David Gallop, Chief Executive Officer, FFA Whole of Football Plan

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### 3.1 Regulatory Framework

While there are strong arguments in support of a regulatory framework that could include some form of accreditation and licencing program, at this point in time, **it is not recommended that Football NSW proceed down that path**. This position is based on the following:

- a. There currently appears no appetite for Member Associations and the FFA to participate in such an exercise. For any regulatory framework to be adopted and successful, it needs broad support and ‘buy in’ from all sectors of the industry particularly those with the responsibility for governance, implementation and oversight. Until such a time as that exists, it will remain a folly that will not be sustainable and will quickly fail.
- b. Further, any such framework needs to be national and applied consistently across the country and not just in one state (notwithstanding that the majority of participants reside in the Football NSW footprint). For example, it would be perverse and confusing for consumers if a private academy was to be rated as ‘poor’ by Football NSW but ‘excellent’ by another Member Federation. For such a framework to function properly and to be suitably robust, the FFA (in conjunction with all Member Federations) needs to be committed and should either take responsibility for the implementation and oversight of the framework or at least be a supporter and major contributor to its implementation. At this stage, the FFA advises it is not prepared to be involved in any capacity.
- c. Pursuing such a framework requires a significant and continued investment in resources and energies. Such a framework would fail if it was not supported by an adequate budget and infrastructure to ensure ongoing monitoring and compliance. With a range of other issues confronting the sport at the present time, it is felt that there are more pressing priorities.
- d. Notwithstanding all the above, there is also the option of other, more appropriate bodies taking on this opportunity and responsibility. The newly created Football Coaches Australia (FCA) – established to be the representative body for football coaches – could drive this work on behalf of its members (professional and volunteer coaches). Undertaken in conjunction with the FFA, the PFA and Member Federations, this would have far greater support and industry recognition. Alternatively, the private academies themselves could come together and establish their own representative body and create their own self-regulating model. By way of example, the Australian Football Agents Association is a model that private academies could look to adopt – establishing a management committee, best practice principles, a code of conduct for their members to abide by and so on. This would establish a peer evaluation model to be applied across the industry.
- e. Consistent with the Review’s finding that ‘competitive market’ principles should apply, it is likely that these same market forces will act to ensure that, in the long run, only the better resourced and most competitively priced private academies will prosper.

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- f. Finally, it is also felt that the implementation of a number of the recommendations, including establishing and promulgating best practice principles within the private academy industry, educating parents so they become better informed and more discerning, and supporting Member Associations to develop their own Youth Development programs, will assist lifting overall standards across the industry.

### 3.2 Competition Regulations

After carefully considering the submissions received and in light of the other findings made as part of this Review, **it is recommended that Football NSW removes the relevant clauses concerning private academies and external providers from the Football NSW regulations governing participation in the State Cup and the Champion of Champions.**

The Review received a considerable amount of feedback from grassroots clubs to the effect that due to increasing shortages in available skilled volunteer coaches and increasing demands by parents for more highly skilled coaches, more and more they are being required to engage and pay for the services of professional or semi-professional coaches. With Football NSW wanting to encourage clubs to improve their Youth Development programs and provide their players with the best possible coaching and training environment, the Review recognised that the regulations may make it difficult for clubs to retain the services of highly experienced coaches who are deemed 'external' to the club, i.e. they are not volunteers or parents of players.

Football NSW separately recognises that there is a large number of skilled and well-trained coaches working in grassroots football who are (and deserve to be) paid for their services. Also, most, if not all, of these coaches have paid Football NSW and/or FFA to obtain a certain level of coaching qualification and accreditation. Football NSW believes these coaches should be entitled to develop their coaching careers in grassroots football and be paid for their services. Further, for the reasons identified above, grassroots clubs should be entitled to enlist the services of such coaches.

In all cases, and so as to develop a sense of a united and whole-of-club 'culture' and club branding across staff, players and volunteers, it is recommended that clubs be strongly encouraged to require any 'external providers' or private academy coaches to wear the club's clothing at all training sessions and match days. Football NSW encourages clubs to grow and develop their own culture, loyalty and legacy and sees no reason why coaches – particularly those that are paid – should not be provided with a club uniform and be obliged to wear that uniform when working for the club.

Football NSW is also of the view that these regulations served their purpose in the past, but that since their inception in 2014, circumstances (and the overall football landscape) have changed significantly. The approach of Member Associations and clubs in relation to private academies and external providers now varies across the Football NSW footprint. Some Member Associations allow private academies and external providers to participate and be involved in their leagues, some use their services, while others promote them and receive sponsorship revenues from them. This inconsistency across Member Associations needs to be recognised. If competition regulations had the effect of limiting the ability of clubs to improve the level of coaching they can offer to participants on the basis it would maintain a 'level playing field' (either within or across Member Associations), they would likely only discourage the more progressive clubs from trying to do better. Football NSW is of the view that all

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grassroots clubs should be working towards improving their respective training environments and increasing the benefits and overall experience of each player, team and club. Through the initiatives outlined in a later recommendation (Recommendation 3.4), Football NSW is confident these goals will be achieved.

Whilst administrative workload and the burden of implementation will never be the sole drivers of decisions and strategy, Football NSW's ability to oversee, manage and successfully enforce these regulations in a timely and consistent manner – at a time of other conflicting priorities - is beyond capacity. Alleged breaches are usually brought to the attention of Football NSW by other clubs and investigating and successfully enforcing them is onerous and time consuming during what is a particularly busy time of year.

The Review has also taken into account concerns some of the clauses in the regulations may impose restraints that are not reasonable.

Finally, it is recommended that Football NSW writes to all Member Associations and their clubs to fully explain the reasoning behind the removal of the regulations and to encourage these stakeholders to work within a series of principles designed to ensure best practice when engaging and working with private academies and external providers.

While recognising the desire of some Member Associations to maintain the status quo, for these reasons set out above, along with the anticipated benefits from the other recommendations contained in this Review, it is felt that removing the regulations will ultimately be beneficial to all stakeholders.

### 3.3 Education and guidance

A recurring message in the submissions received from clubs and parents was the lack of available information to guide and support parents in making crucial decisions about their children's participation in Youth Development in football. **It is recommended that Football NSW undertakes significant measures to better educate the general public in this area.**

Notwithstanding that there are a host of private academies, external providers and numerous websites, blogs and Facebook pages making certain claims, promises and statements, there is very little accurate and objective information provided by any of the governing bodies.

As such, it is recommended that:

- a) A series of educational materials be developed (in the form of pamphlets, fact sheets and website stories) to guide parents and young players in relation to:
  - i. the Talent Player Pathway and the structure of youth football in the Football NSW footprint;
  - ii. the factors they should consider when choosing a private academy or external provider, what to look for and what questions to ask. A draft of such a document can be found in Annexure IV; and
  - iii. A 'best practice' service standard outlining what an ideal private academy looks like.

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- b) Football NSW conduct ‘parent education/information’ evenings and forums as part of State Representative or Talent Support Program activities, with a view to broadening the audience in due course. The purpose of these events would be to better educate parents about Youth Development in football and also provide them with guidance in relation to the factors they should consider when choosing a private academy or external provider.

Ideally, all of this should be done with the collaboration of FFA (and possibly the PFA and FCA), such that identical information is rolled out nationally across all the Member Federations.

### 3.4 Support and assistance

Some of the strongest feedback received from Member Associations was their collective desire to create their own local Youth Development programs (in the form of an academy or similar) whereby they can both (i) control the quality and integrity of the coaching program and training environment and (ii) run it in a cost-effective manner thereby ensuring that any surplus funds generated remain in the game by reinvestment back in to their association.

Those Member Associations that provided this feedback were united in wanting Football NSW to support them to develop such programs.

As such, **it is recommended that Football NSW provide increased assistance and support to Member Associations and clubs** by:

- a. Conducting a workshop/forum with all Member Associations to fully explore what their requirements and parameters are;
- b. In accordance with the outcomes of the above workshop, creating and supporting the implementation of a ‘best practice’ model academy and user pay framework for an association/club-based Youth Development program covering such areas as:
  - i. name, colours/logo and branding including marketing taglines and similar;
  - ii. program structure, activities/curriculum and time tables;
  - iii. financial and budgetary matters;
  - iv. documentation including necessary forms, policies, duty statements; and
  - v. marketing and promotion collateral.
- c. Tasking a member of the Football NSW Technical Department with the specific responsibility for ‘academies’, including responsibility for assisting Member Associations and clubs in this area, with these responsibilities to be included in that employee’s position description.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> This has already been somewhat achieved with the employment of a Manager, Talented Player Pathways.