HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE
YEAR OF YOUNG PEOPLE 2018
SUBMISSION FROM Collective response from the Scottish FA’s Youth Ambassadors of Change, written by Joshua Barrie.

Key Points

- Emphasis on any policy affecting young people in sport should be focused around enjoyment, as this will result in happier and healthier young people.
- Young people should be made to feel that policy which directly affects them features their opinion.
- Young people should be made to feel included and accepted in a sporting environment.

Background

The Scottish Football Association is currently taking part in the UEFA Captains of Change project\(^1\). Through UEFA Captains of Change we are one of very few nations putting a specific focus on the protected characteristic of Age and working to give young people in Scotland a voice in football, whilst making football a more enjoyable and inclusive sport for all.

The Scottish FA Youth Ambassador programme\(^2\) has now been running for 20 months. Amongst a number of achievements, ambassadors have created support groups for referees, conducted public surveys and data analysis in response to key issues surrounding the Scottish game, been involved in many aspects of media work and more. Youth Ambassadors are constantly striving to make the Scottish game better, more enjoyable, more accessible and crucially increasingly inclusive.

Youth Ambassador’s range from ages of 16-24. This is a good point in life to reflect on each one of our individual ongoing experiences of being young people in sport, whilst developing the skills to gather the voice of other young people and communicate this and push for resulting change which we collectively deem necessary.

1. How well are the views and interests of young people taken into consideration in health and sport policy?

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\(^1\) [https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/social-responsibility/captains-of-change/_index_categories.html](https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/social-responsibility/captains-of-change/_index_categories.html)

\(^2\) [https://www.scottishfa.co.uk/scottish-fa/organisation/youth-ambassadors-of-change/](https://www.scottishfa.co.uk/scottish-fa/organisation/youth-ambassadors-of-change/)
A key lesson which we have learned throughout our time with the SFA is that often, no focus group, number of meetings or ideas will match simply asking young people themselves what their views are. Quite simply, the best way to learn the views and interests of young people so that they can be implemented into policy is through conversation. Throughout numerous consultations and feedback, often young people that Youth Ambassadors have come across on programmes run by the SFA will simply want to ‘play more football’.

Sometimes, there is a sense of coaches at grassroots level hijacking football teams to suit their ego, rather than give their players the most enjoyable sessions possible. If young people had more ownership and were listened to at a grassroots level, this wouldn’t be such an issue. Overcoaching, which we define as an unnecessary emphasis to work on skills and to drill technique into a young person’s game which they would better learn in a game environment, can be prominent in sport. Again, children will play more sport and be healthier if they are enjoying themselves, directed policy towards young people having more time playing rather than standing around and listening would be undeniably beneficial.

The emphasis on young people being involved in helping to form the policies they will train and play under gives them crucial ownership over their programme. This type of model involves children, and is naturally successful as the young people have a say as to what they enjoy.

2. What are the priorities of young people in health and sport?

Primarily, to enjoy themselves. Broadly, sport allows the best results when the player partaking is enjoying themselves. Whether that be due to a release of pressure, essential release of hormones or general increase in positive mood. Sport allows young people to be at their best. The SFA JD Performance Schools endorse the benefits of sport and support their students academically and in their football.

The Performance Schools have produced over 100 professional contracts; the youngest goal scorer for Heart of Midlothian FC; and the youngest player for Aberdeen FC. Crucially the above average grades secured by Performance School graduates is a reflection of the happiness of the students and success of the project.

The Performance school programme is successful because:

> The children are doing something they enjoy each day

> The pupils have an assigned child welfare officer who will listen to their feedback and proactively make sure something is done.

The Performance Schools are an excellent example of why young people’s priorities should be matched, because they in return will enjoy themselves more, learn more, work harder
and achieve more. This approach should be unanimous from elite programmes, to after school clubs and P.E lessons.

Participation, many people want to get involved but there are barriers to this. This ranges from basic location difficulties to genuine personal battles young people encounter with their identity. The ability for everyone who steps onto a sport field to feel equal, respected and have the same freedom to express themselves as others is crucial. Many young people aspire to be like their idols and so role models from a diverse background must be equally represented. Participation can be just getting involved in the sport in general but should also include the ability to play an active role in feedback and shaping that participation. Participation in the future of the game as well and having a voice. Further, equality of participation opportunities is essential. We have had conversations with young girls wishing to play football but finding there are no girl’s teams locally or they have to join the boy’s team, but are not treated equally.

Equality is for all, not just for gender or disabilities, everyone in Scotland should have an equal opportunity to take part in a sport they love or want to love but don’t get the chance. Equality should cover those who feel unwelcome currently in sport, but also those who struggle to access sport due to where they live or the difficulties being able to afford membership fees and equipment for their sport(s). Young people should be prioritised over cost of membership or cost of equipment. Conclusively, the priority of every adult involved in a young person’s involvement in sport should be to maximise pure enjoyment.