

# YOUTH ACADEMY STUDY

CONDENSED VERSION



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This research is based on the participation of ECA members and the administration of their clubs. The European Club Association has endeavoured to keep the information up to date, but it makes no representations or warranties of any kind, expressed or implied, about the completeness, accuracy, or reliability, with respect to this information. The aim of this research is purely informative.

March 2019



In partnership with



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# FOREWORD

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## **Edwin van der Sar**

ECA Youth Working Group Chairman  
ECA Vice-Chairman



Youth development matters. Basing itself on this simple premise, the ECA Youth Working Group has been focusing on this very important aspect of the football industry with the help of many ECA Member Clubs and other interested stakeholders. Over the years, the Youth Working Group has delivered practical results, such as facilitating the creation of the UEFA Youth League, and also knowledge sharing, particularly through the 2012 Report on Youth Academies in Europe, the Youth Academies Workshop in London in the same year, and the first Conference on Youth football held in Manchester in 2015.

Whilst there are many important considerations as to why youth development matters, such as fan pride, building club identity or even the economic logic of developing talent with the aim of generating crucial transfer revenue, there is one fundamental reason: without new generations of top talents, the game of football will cease to attract new generations of supporters. This simple aim of preserving the status of football as the most popular team sport in the world is something that must unite the smallest amateur clubs run by the players' families and the biggest global clubs with millions of supporters worldwide, who, ultimately, need to populate their squads with these top talents in order to remain competitive.

Having taken the first steps to launch a conversation on the current and future status of youth development in Europe and globally five years ago, the Youth Working Group felt that now was the right time to take

the next step. This time not only by providing an updated snapshot of the current situation on the ground, which is being done by presenting the results of the biggest-ever survey carried out by ECA in its 10-year history, but also through proposing a new way of looking at the entire mechanism of the youth development system that operates as an integral part of the football industry, and at the end of the day pays off for all its participants and stakeholders.

One of the recommendations from the 2012 Report suggested that clubs should focus on quality rather than quantity. Whilst in that case it applied more to the number of players being taken through the youth development systems at club academies, the issue of quality is one that sounds true across the entire world of youth development, and requires close attention from all of us in the football world.

The evolving nature of society, coupled with new and ever-emerging specific challenges in terms of health, education, technology or participation, to name just a few, mean that the recipes, which were successful even 20 years ago, may now need updating to cater for the new ingredients that have appeared in the meantime. This requires a truly multi-disciplinary approach: this time round, it is not enough to amend some regulations or edit some definitions. What is required is a full analysis of the roles and contribution of all participants in the youth development process and a new future-proof outlook on what *Quality* in youth development truly means, how it can be assessed, assured and improved.

ECA is an organisation that is run by clubs for clubs. We believe that by sharing these new insights with you, and by inviting you to our conversation, we will be in pole position to help the football industry define a new quality framework, which would serve as a global mechanism for safeguarding and promoting the development of future generations of talents that are so necessary for all levels of the game. In the meantime, we also aim to continue exchanging knowledge and information on key topics within the area of youth development, and ensuring this vital component remains high on the agenda at the top levels of football governance.

# BACKGROUND

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ECA is committed to the continued development of youth football at European football clubs and, in accordance with ECA's key pillar of knowledge sharing, this study details the practices of youth academies at ECA Member Clubs. Following the success of the ECA Report on Youth Academies published in 2012, a further and more extensive study into the practices of youth academies at ECA Member Clubs was carried out in 2016. This study was the biggest ever survey conducted by ECA, with **123 clubs** from 42 different National Associations participating. It was initiated by the ECA Youth Academies Task Force, a specialised Task Force consisting of 11 specialists under the umbrella of the ECA Youth Working Group. The Task Force was formed with the aim to develop a set of common good practices for youth academies at European football clubs. In turn, the objective of this study is to provide an overview of current practices at youth academies and to establish expert recommendations in the form of the 12 Professional Youth Academy Quality Areas.

# METHODOLOGY

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During the 2016/2017 season, the ECA Administration carried out a survey amongst ECA Member Clubs in order to better identify the current state of youth academies at European football clubs. In total, 123 clubs participated in the survey. The survey aimed to establish feedback on a variety of different topics such as clubs' administrative situation, vision, mission, strategy, values and philosophy of youth academies. As well as the results of the survey, the final study took into account the following qualitative research methods: an analysis of 12 domestic licences; Task Force meeting discussions; and Youth Working Group recommendations. Along with the support of our external partner LTT Sports, the ECA Youth Academy Study was produced, presenting the 12 Professional Youth Academy Quality Areas.



Scan the QR code and watch the ECA Youth Academy Study video

# Youth Task Force Members



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Jarosz

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Club Affairs



Konstantin  
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LTT Sports  
Strategic Council Member



Bodo  
Menze

FC Schalke 04  
Head of International  
Relations



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Club Secretary &  
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Olympiacos CF  
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Kindermans

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Technical Director  
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Chief Operating Officer



Patrick van  
Leeuwen

Maccabi Tel Aviv FC  
Performance Director



Allan  
Gaarde

Aalborg BK  
Sports Director, Head  
of Scouting & Former  
Player

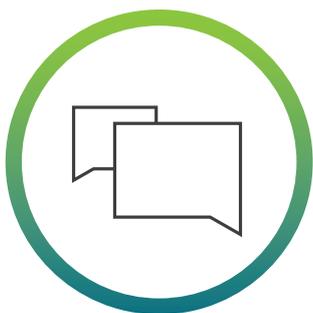


Stefano  
Braghin

Juventus FC  
Head of Academy

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This is a continuation of the work that began in 2012 with the publication of ECA's Report on Youth Academies in Europe; the publication consists of a quantitative part and analysis, as well as a discussion on future steps based on a framework for key structural elements of a youth development centre.



The project was carried out by a Task Force of the ECA Youth Working Group composed of experts in the field of football youth development.



The quantitative part presents the results of the biggest-ever survey conducted by ECA in its 10-year history, and highlights that most club academies are organisationally well developed, even if some aspects such as future planning or communication with stakeholders could be improved, technologically up-to-date, and easily satisfy current UEFA licensing requirements aimed at youth development. At the same time, the issue of youth development and its challenges has never been higher on the agenda of many European countries, with questions constantly being raised about the quality of players coming through and youth development systems in general.



The issue of youth development touches many different components of existing regulations within football and beyond including squad limits, club licensing, status and transfer of players, compensation and solidarity mechanisms, infrastructure development, education and dual careers, and many others. This survey's results indicate that most academy practitioners believe a coach should also be a pedagogue, whilst coach quality is highlighted as by far the number one influence on the level of an academy.



At domestic level, many countries in Europe have been introducing their own academy licensing and monitoring mechanisms to assure quality, but this does not allow for easy objective comparison or genuine support for clubs that consciously choose to produce players as part of their strategy.



Given this complexity, a fresh multilateral analysis of the value and production chains of youth development is being proposed together with a system of peer assessment, in order to update and upgrade all of these components, rather than adopting a piecemeal approach. The proposed direction of this analysis is shaped by quantitative and qualitative inputs and wants to shift the focus to the intangible quality elements: after all, according to the survey, industry practitioners believe that the key components of an academy are its football training, its human capital and its recruitment approach.

# STRATEGY

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**87%**

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Of the clubs have  
a defined youth  
academy vision

**90%**

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Of the clubs have  
a defined youth  
academy mission

**91%**

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Of the clubs have  
a defined youth  
academy strategy

# HUMAN RESOURCES

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75%



Of the clubs do not have a dedicated Academy Human Resources department

**However a specialised Academy Human Resources team is worth considering given the various specific issues related to youth development, such as:**

- Child protection
- Developmental psychology
- Talent Management
- Duty of care issues

# COACH AND PERFORMANCE TEAM

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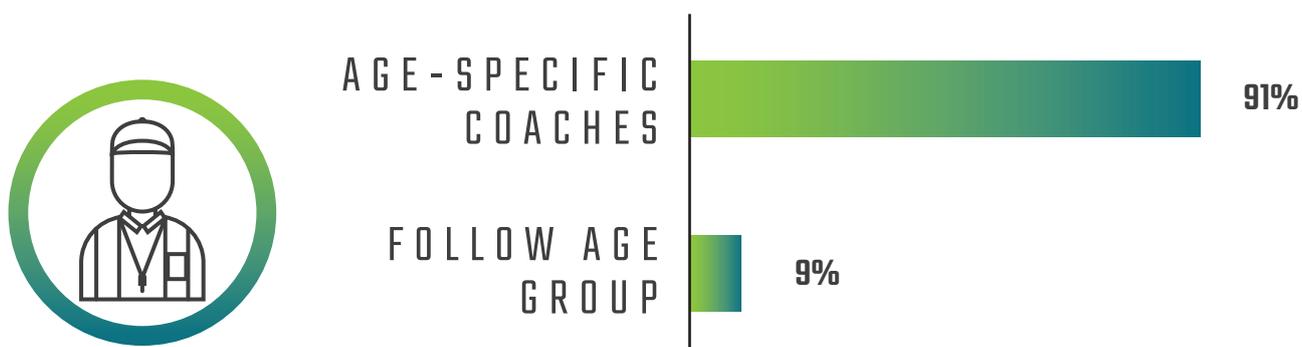


## Typical ratio of 1 coach per 10 players



## Do you think it is better to have age-specific coaches, or a coach to follow an age-group all the way?

R: 112



# TRAINING

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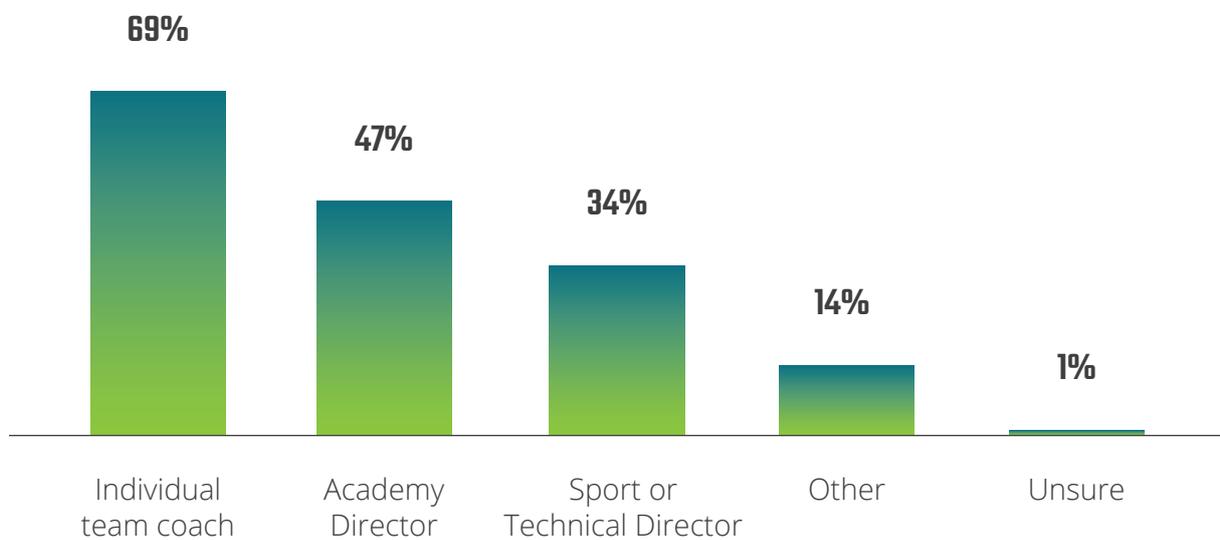
## Do you have a formalised training methodology in place?

R: 112



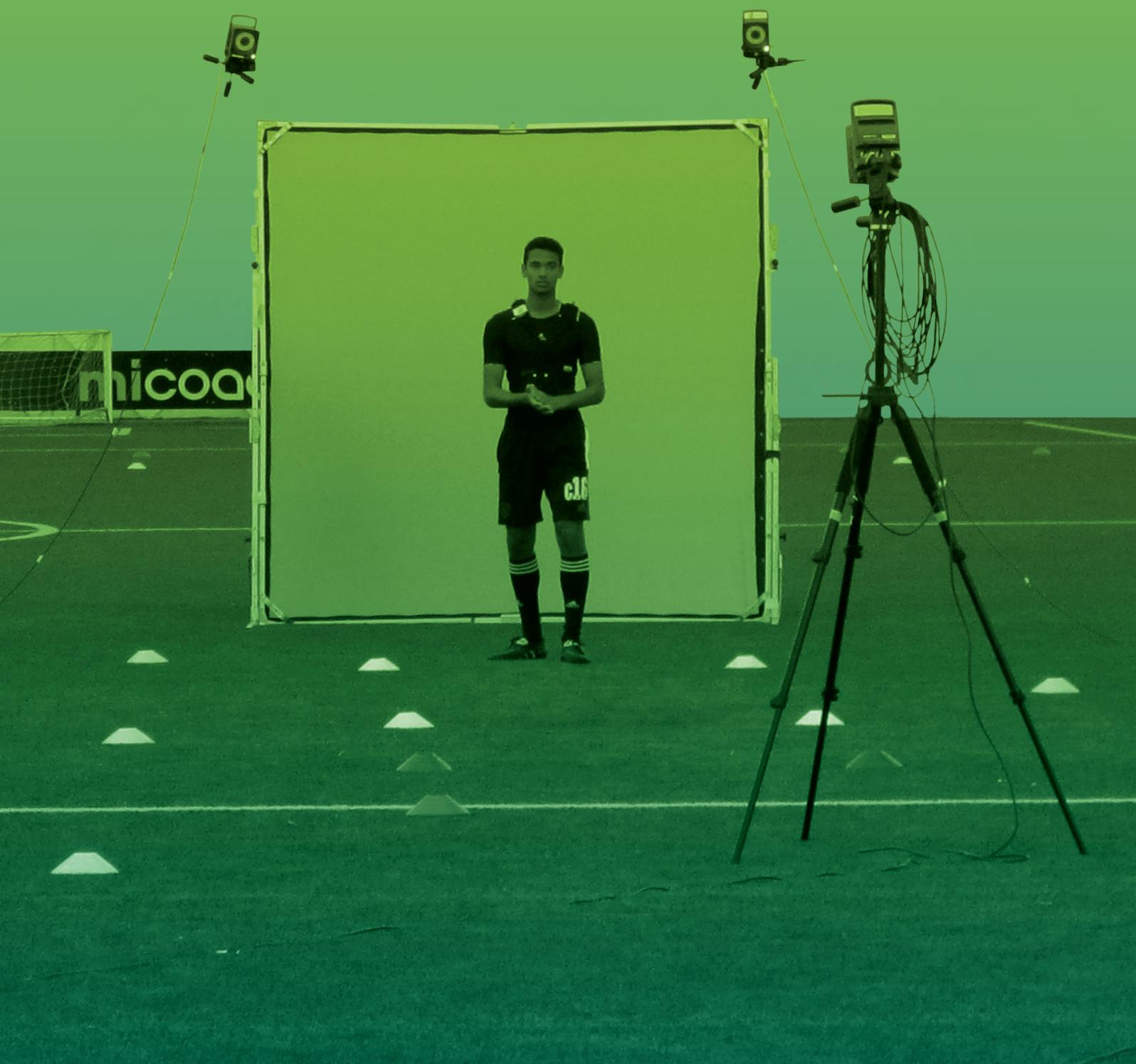
## Who decides on the content of the individual training sessions?

R: 112



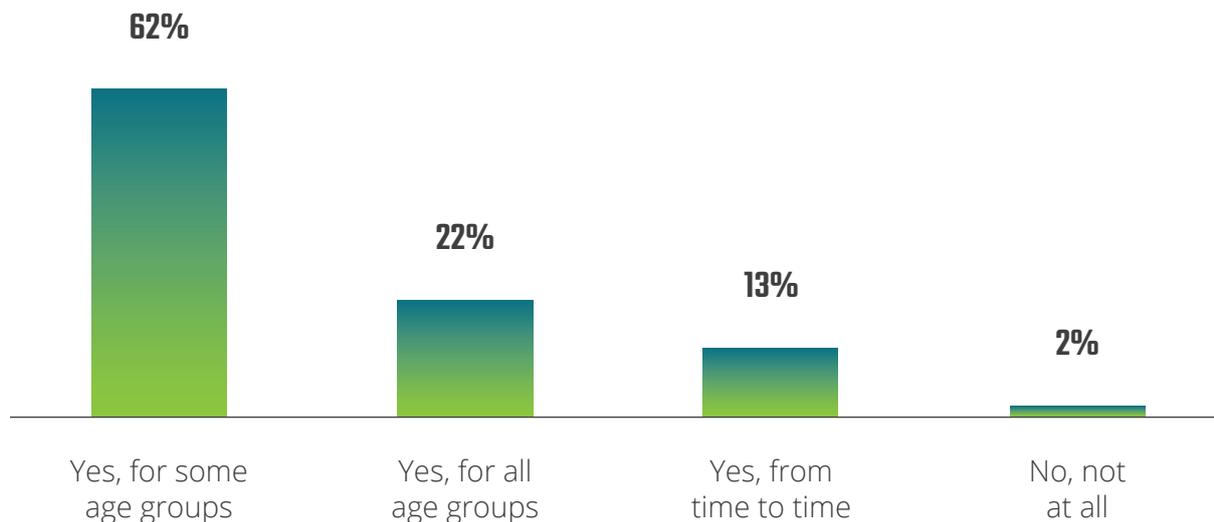
# TECHNOLOGY

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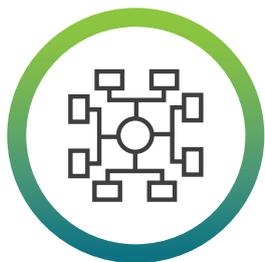
# Do you film youth matches for subsequent analysis?

R: 112



**65%**

Of the clubs work with a management software in their academy



**63%**

Of the clubs utilise a specialised scouting software to keep a detailed player database

# MEDICAL AND SPORT SCIENCE

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# Is the academy medical structure independent or integrated into the professional medical structure?

R: 112



**54%**

However for 54% of the clubs, the treatment level of academy players is lower than for the professional players. A dedicated academy medical team could be a better approach given the fact that the staff are dealing with growing children

# COMMUNICATIONS

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**20%**

Of the clubs have a dedicated youth academy website. The rest have a regularly updated page on the club's main website

## Do you provide social media training to your academy players?

R: 111



However for the clubs that do, the social media training will usually start when the academy players are 14-15 years old

R: 56

# BUSINESS

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## How much from the total club budget should be spent on its youth academy at a top-level player development club?

R: 112



## On a scale from 1-7, with 1 being the lowest and 7 being the highest, what is the correlation between more investment and the overall quality of a youth academy?

R: 103



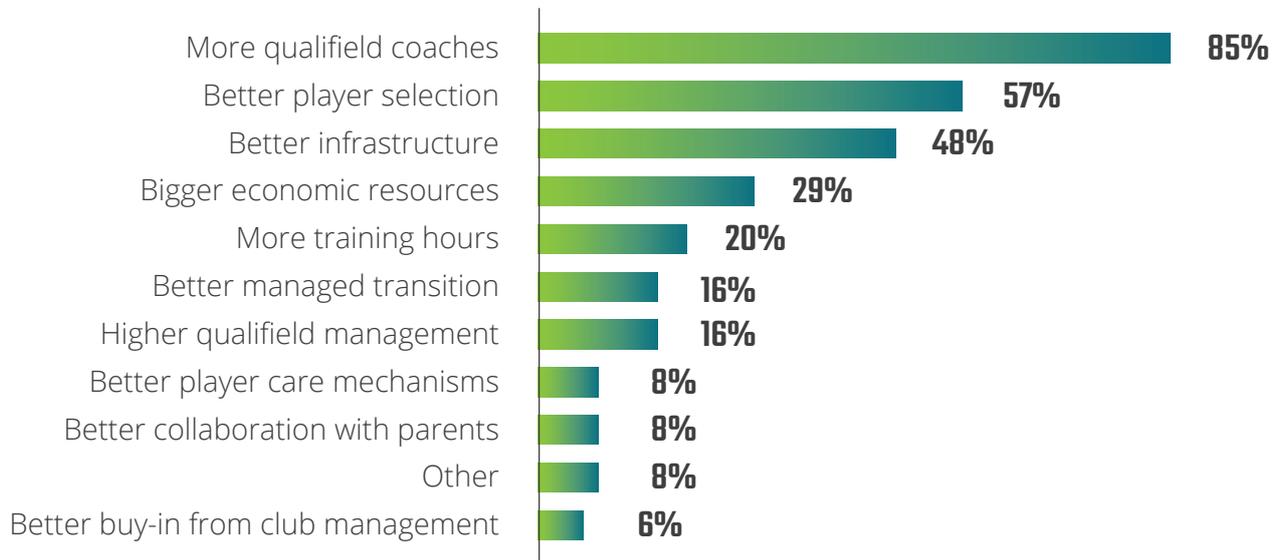
# KEY QUALITY FACTORS

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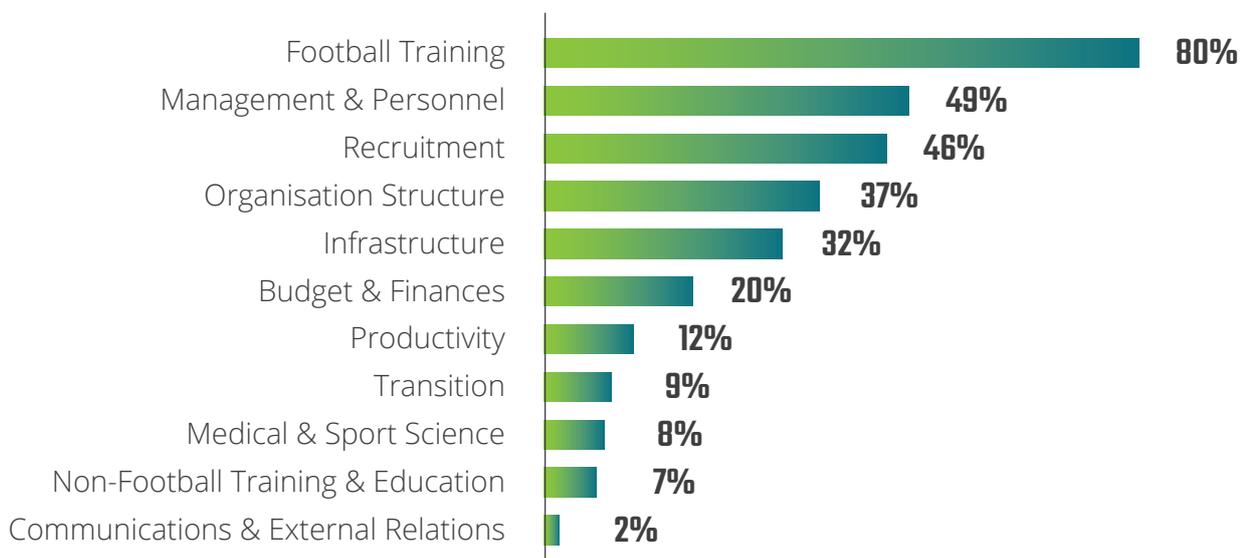
# What impacts more on the quality level of a youth academy?

R: 103



# What are the three most important elements within a youth academy structure?

R: 103



# QUALITY SELF-ASSESSMENT

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**On a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 being the lowest and 7 being the highest, how is the overall quality of the youth development system in your country?**

R: 103



**On a scale from 1 to 7, with 1 being the lowest and 7 being the highest, how is the overall quality of the youth development system in your club?**

R: 103



# OUTLOOK

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The topic of youth development in professional football is extremely complex to capture in its entirety, primarily because it has two very specific manifestations: the practical content, which is to do with education, talent identification and improvement, and the regulatory frame, which shapes the permitted approaches and creates certain patterns that are followed in the industry.

This publication, which is following in the footsteps of the ECA Report on Youth Academies in Europe edited in 2012, as well as the knowledge gained and exchanged through the vehicle of the ECA Youth Working Group, is aimed to become not only a useful statistical snapshot of the state of youth development amongst professional clubs in Europe, but also an inspiration in order to begin a comprehensive multilateral discussion on the future of this crucial element of football's health for decades to come.

Globalisation and professionalisation are two of the important factors that have been shaping the development of football in recent decades. The growth of major tournaments and leagues, and the emergence of global club powerhouses, have opened many discussions regarding the increasing commercialisation of the game and its reliance on developing revenue streams from a traditional match and stadium-oriented basis. At the same time, playing talent still is and will always remain at the heart of football, and sourcing future top stars is as prevalent a challenge for clubs and nations all over the world.

The emergence of talented players has always been shrouded in a bit of a mystery. Some clubs or countries always seem to be able to do it better than others, but quite often talent development successes are difficult to copy and repeat: there are reasonably few youth development success stories that have delivered consistent results over a long period of time.

At the same time, evolving urban culture, the emergence of youth academies and the development of highly regulated domestic competitions has left its imprint on current youth development practices. From a process that was built upon street football and identifying the more promising talents at a fairly late stage, football clubs have increasingly sought to bring talent development mechanisms in-house and for ever-lowering age groups. Whilst street football has almost died out in many parts of Europe, the football governing bodies have sought to frame and regulate this through competition rules, as well as club and academy licensing mechanisms.

These regulations have been building up particularly since the 1990s, and contain both a domestic and an international dimension. Issues such as squad size limits, club-trained players, player transfer mechanisms or training compensation/solidarity systems have all been on the agenda over the past years. This also includes the emerging player status system that is based more on maintaining a precarious balance rather than a healthy framework that everyone can be happy with, and one that addresses all the game's issues, whilst at the same time connecting domestic and international levels.

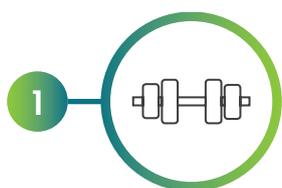
As it stands, we have reached a moment in time where the industry is mature enough to engage in an educated and comprehensive attempt to disentangle all of these interconnected elements, and do so for the benefit of the future health of the game of football in a rational and evidence-based way.

The authors of this publication have sought to base themselves on qualitative and quantitative evidence in order to begin a process of crystallising a new way of looking at talent development in football, based more on quality and peer review rather than the bureaucratic approach that has been prevalent so far. Our work has produced an initial list of important focus areas for modern youth academies, and an understanding that further communication between experts and stakeholders in the process is necessary. This is vital to arrive at a connected and peer-approved mechanism, which will be able to address the challenges of developing future generations of talent so crucial to the game of football.

So, as the first step for this discussion, you will on the next pages find the **12 Professional Academy Quality Areas**, that we believe are vital to youth football development.

# PROFESSIONAL YOUTH ACADEMY QUALITY AREAS

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1

PHYSICAL CARE



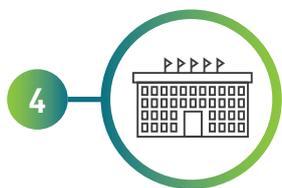
2

COGNITIVE CARE



3

FINANCES



4

FACILITIES



5

TALENT IDENTIFICATION





The ECA Youth Academy Study was elaborated by  
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Konstantin Kornakov, LTT Sports Strategy Council Member  
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Photos:

- P. 10 - ECA Club Management Programme
- P. 12 - Juventus FC
- P. 14 - Olympiacos FC
- P. 16 - GNK Dinamo
- P. 18 - AFC Ajax
- P. 20 - Juventus FC
- P. 22 - FC Barcelona
- P. 24 - FC Internazionale Milano
- P. 26 - Olympiacos FC
- P. 28 - Olympiacos FC



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