



Professional  
Footballers'  
Association


# GETTING THE RIGHT ADVICE



Youth Advisory

T: 0161 236 0575 E: [youthadvisory@thepfa.com](mailto:youthadvisory@thepfa.com)

**Our Youth Advisory Service was launched in 2013. It provides an independent resource dedicated to helping young players and their parents/guardians understand the rules and regulations that come with the pursuit of professional football.**



**The Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) is the union for all footballers and scholars in the Premier League, the FA Women's Super League (WSL), and the English Football League (EFL). All footballers who sign a Scholarship or professional contract will become a member of the PFA. As the only player-focused organisation in the country, we provide essential advice and guidance to footballers throughout their professional careers.**

Though academy players are not yet professional, we believe accessing independent advice about how to navigate the academy system is vital for their development. Our Youth Advisory Service is a free and confidential resource available to players, trialists, parents and guardians at Foundation, Youth and Professional Development Phases.

Since 2013, we've been helping young players, parents and guardians understand the rules and regulations that come with the pursuit of professional football.

Joining an academy is exciting. However, there are strict rules and regulations in place that you need to be aware of. Speaking with our team will give you a deeper understanding of trials, registration and academy system processes, ensuring you're fully aware of the commitments you make and the implications those decisions may have.



**For football.  
For life.**

# WHO WE ARE



George Bowyer, Youth Advisor

# THE TEAM

## George Bowyer

George entered the academy system at Rochdale Football Club and secured a Scholarship offer. However, he was struck with injury days after making his professional debut, aged 17. After enduring the long road back to recovery, and going on to captain both the Youth and Reserve teams, George became a finalist in the League Football Education's Apprentice of The Year award but was subsequently released by the club.

His understanding of the extreme highs and lows that can come with academy and professional football helps George relate to the experience of current young players and anticipate what their parents and guardians are going through.

Describing himself as a prime example of a player who focused solely on football without considering other options for the future, George is passionate about helping young players optimise their opportunities and avoid the pitfalls.



**As parents of an academy player, we have sought advice, support and guidance from George Bowyer over the past five years. On each occasion, he provided the help – and solutions – we needed.”**

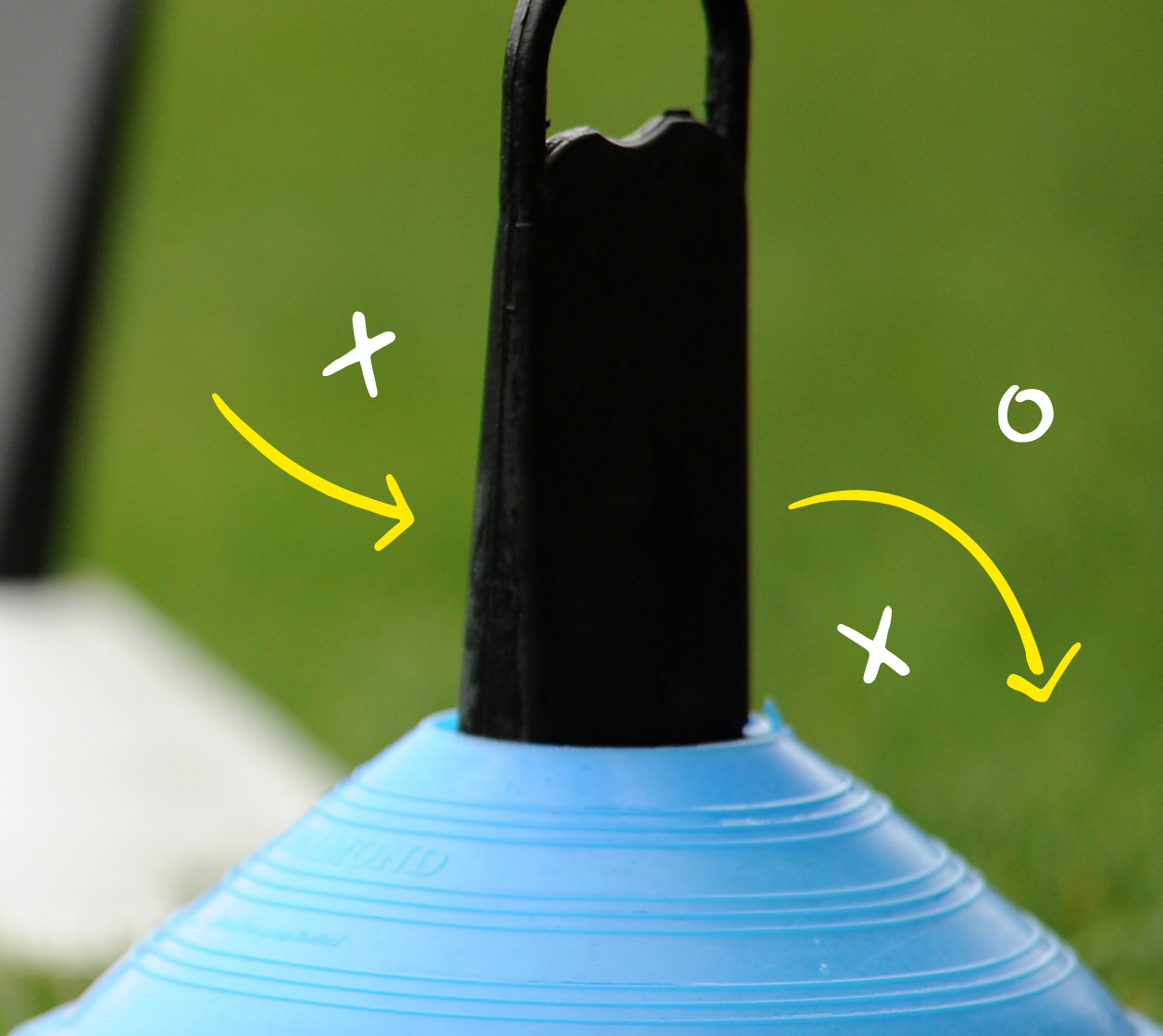


**Everton Academy Parent**





**We provide free, confidential advice that empowers players, parents and guardians to make better informed decisions about academy football.**



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# ACADEMY DEVELOPMENT PHASES

A photograph of two young soccer players in action on a green field. The player on the left is wearing a red and white jersey with a black Under Armour logo and a club crest, black shorts, and red socks. He is leaning forward, looking intently at the ball. The player on the right is wearing a dark blue jersey with a yellow Under Armour logo, a yellow and blue club crest, and Chinese characters '乐动体育' (Le Dong Sports) and 'PORTAL' on the front. He is also leaning forward, looking down at the ball. The background shows a large stadium with red seats and a goalpost. The overall scene is bright and dynamic, capturing a moment of intense play.



# FOUNDATION PHASE

(U9'S–U11'S)

Players joining academies at the Foundation Phase are registered for a period of one year. They find out if their club intends to retain or terminate their registration for the next season on or before the third Saturday in May.

When retention is offered, players can choose to stay or decline in writing to the club and the relevant league by the first Saturday in June. If players decline a registration and go on to register at another academy, the new club will have to pay compensation to the previous club for training and development.

Players who aren't retained will have their registration terminated on the first Saturday of June, leaving them free to seek registration with a new club, free of compensation.

Players in the Foundation Phase will combine football with their education on either a Part-Time or Hybrid basis. Players at this stage are likely to receive four hours of coaching education each week, rising to eight hours for older players in the age group.

If you have any questions about the Foundation Phase, please contact the PFA for free, independent and confidential advice.

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## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PHASE

(U12'S–U16'S)

The Youth Development Phase follows a similar structure to the Foundation Phase with one-year registrations, except for those in the u13's and u15's age groups, where players will be registered for a period of two years.

Clubs will let academy players registered in the Youth Development Phase know whether their registrations will be extended on or before the third Saturday in May unless they are part way through a two-year registration, which will automatically roll over.

Players' options at the end of the season are to either accept the offer or decline in writing to the club and relevant league by the first Saturday in June. If players decline an offer of extended registration and register elsewhere, the new club must compensate the old one for training and development.

Clubs who register Youth Development Phase players after not being retained are not liable for compensation.

Academy clubs can also be entitled to Contingency Fees for u12's and above. These fees may apply should the player achieve a number of first team appearances.

Youth Development Phase players may follow either the Part-Time, Hybrid or Full-Time training model, with the club's Head of Education liaising with families and schools to ensure football commitments do not negatively impact players academic studies. If players are offered a place on the Full-Time training model, their registration will be extended until the end of the academic year in which they turn 16, with all coaching and academic education provided.



Players in the Youth Development Phase are likely to receive between four to twelve hours of coaching education each week, depending on their training model and category of club.

If you have any questions about the Youth Development Phase, please contact the PFA for free, independent and confidential advice.

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## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PHASE

(U17'S–U21'S)

Clubs can offer Scholarships on or after 1st January in the year the player turns 14 or on/before 31st December in the player's u16's year. Scholarships start once the Youth Development Phase is completed and the player moves into the Professional Development Phase.

On receiving a Scholarship offer, an academy player must respond to the club making the offer within 28 days. Otherwise, it will be noted that the offer has not been accepted.

If a Scholarship offer is rejected and a player registers with another club in the future, compensation would be payable by the new club to the old club for training and development. Compensation for players who have been made a Scholarship offer, or who are in the u17's age group and older, may be determined by the Professional Football Compensation Committee.

Players who don't receive a Scholarship offer on or before the 31st December in their u16's year can seek registration with another club, free of compensation.

Clubs can offer players a professional contract no earlier than 1st November in their u16's year. However, the earliest point the player can sign the contract is on their 17th birthday.



If you have any questions about Professional Development Phase please contact the PFA.

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“ We knew little about the academy set up, but after discussions with George things were a lot clearer. This was very helpful as parents making important decisions for our son's future going forward.

Burnley Football Club - Academy parent



“ I contacted the PFA re academy issue and they explained questions in good clear detail. I would recommend any parents who are considering contact the PFA before meeting with the club.

Arsenal - Academy parent



# WHAT WE DO

## INDEPENDENT ADVICE

While entering the academy system is an incredibly exciting opportunity, it's also an introduction into a highly competitive environment.

The PFA strongly believes that all young players and their families should have access to free, impartial and accurate information about the academy system before making decisions about registrations.

As the players' union is unaffiliated with leagues, clubs or governing bodies, our team is best placed to provide this information through our confidential telephone and email service.

### We offer advice about:

Premier League and English Football League Youth Development Rules

Registration and contractual offers

Football Association (FA) and FIFA rules and regulations

Scholarship offers

time and distance rules and regulations

academy inductions

academy end of season procedures

requesting release

player development and progression

coaching & education programmes

compensation rules and regulations

player welfare

intermediaries

If you have any queries about these or any other aspect of the youth football system, please contact our Youth Advisory team for free, independent and confidential advice.

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## PLAYER REPRESENTATION

As players develop through the academy system, intermediaries may start to take an interest in their careers.

An intermediary (formerly known as an agent) acts on behalf of a player or club and may represent them in contractual negotiations. An intermediary cannot represent a player before 1st January of the year they turn 16.

We always advise players to consider taking independent legal advice or to contact our team before signing any representation agreements.

### **Before signing a representation agreement, remember:**

Any individual wishing to represent a player must be registered with the FA as an intermediary. A list of all registered Intermediaries can be found on The FA's website.

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If a player is under 18, the player's parent or legal guardian must countersign the representation agreement, and the intermediary must be permitted to represent minors.

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We advise you to always seek independent advice before signing. If you sign any agreement, ensure you date it and keep a copy for your records.

If you are approached by an intermediary or need advice about representation agreements, please get in touch with our team.

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## SAFETY NET

Teenage years can be challenging for any young person, even more so with the additional pressure of professional football aspirations.

Trialling and entering the academy system is a unique experience, so it's important young players have the correct support available at every stage.

The PFA Safety Net is an online educational platform that uses engaging content to deliver key messages that support young players.

Players who use Safety Net learn what's expected of them, how to identify problems, ways to manage their feelings and where they can seek support.

The platform can also be tailored by age to ensure players receive the appropriate level of information at every stage.

**Safety Net is also available for parents, guardians, carers and academy support staff. It's a valuable resource, which teaches them how they can help players:**

understand their responsibilities on and off the pitch

recognise behavioural addiction

deal with panic attacks, anxiety and depression

avoid gambling and substance abuse

manage insomnia or feeling homesick

navigate bullying and grief

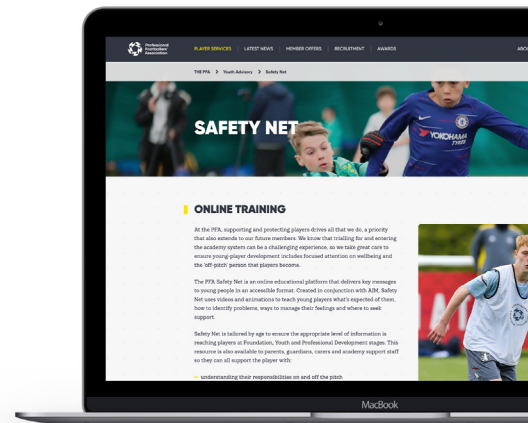
Safety Net ties into the PFA's extensive work around mental health in football. The videos and animations encourage young players to start practising healthy behaviours that will make it easier for them to recognise signs of mental health challenges. Crucially, Safety Net also encourages young players to feel comfortable enough to talk about how they feel and ask for help.



**The PFA's Youth Advisory Service provides an excellent support package to our young players. It provided parents/guardians with the knowledge and confidence to fully support their sons through their academy journey. The free, confidential advice and guidance that is on offer is an excellent tool that everyone should use."**



**Sunderland Football Club**





I would thoroughly recommend to any parent/ player to use the PFA Youth Advisory Service. They have been vital in us understanding the role of agents and protecting ourselves from entering into agreements that we would regret in the future. The service was swift and well informed and gave us the reassurance we needed to know we were doing the right thing for our son.”



Derby County Academy Parent





Young player completing the online course



**I was able to learn things that will benefit my future.”**

**Academy Player.**

## PFA INTRODUCTION COURSE

Moving from academy football into a Scholarship can be an exciting and challenging experience that requires careful management to ensure young players feel supported as they progress.

There are multiple external factors to consider besides talent on the pitch, including the very real possibility of being released before signing a professional contract. To help players prepare for either pathway, we have developed an Online Introduction Course.

Available to all new scholars through their club education or player care teams, this educational tool gives players a thorough insight into the challenges of full-time football.

The easy-to-follow modules are designed to support clubs with the induction process and teach players about key concepts that will help them acclimatise to their new role without feeling out of their depth.

Each module gives players valuable knowledge to help prepare them for the world of professional football by introducing them to the unique culture of playing at an elite level.

Most importantly, the course teaches young players transferable skills that will help them build knowledge and skills to help fulfil their potential.

**Identity**

Helping players to understand more about how they see themselves and how others might perceive them.

**Connection**

Teaching players why key relationships are important and how social links can enhance their careers.

**Values**

Highlighting the importance of knowing which values are consistent with success.

**Action**

Preparing players to take committed action toward achieving individual and collective goals.

**Readiness**

Exploring the concept of developing performance readiness.

**Intelligence**

Teaching players problem-solving skills to help them make better decisions.

**Flexibility**

Identifying ways for players to manage their feelings in line with their priorities.

**Resilience**

Instilling the importance of resilience in young players when pursuing a football career.

## EVENTS/TOURNAMENTS

We want every young player, parent and guardian to have access to our services, so our Youth Advisory team actively attends academy events across the country for Foundation, Youth and Professional Development Phases to connect with as many players and parents/guardians as possible.

For many parents and guardians, these tournaments provide an opportunity to ask important questions about academy football and the processes, rules, regulations and options that come with it.

Attending these tournaments allows us to share useful information about where to seek independent advice and guidance away from the influence of parties with vested interests. We pride ourselves on our integrity and will always remain impartial and confidential when discussing any questions or concerns you may have.

**Top:** AFC Wimbledon battle against Tottenham Hotspur in the fourth round of the FA Youth Cup.

**Bottom:** A young Lincoln City side celebrate after going ahead.

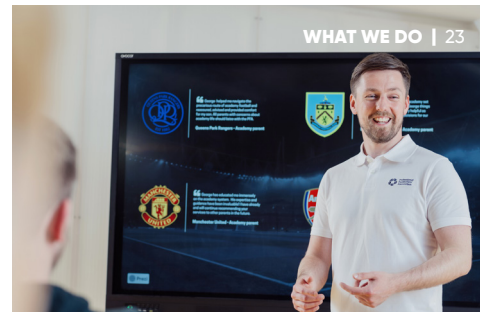




## CLUB WORKSHOPS

Once a young player has registered with a club, it becomes even more important to have independent advice when making decisions about their future. In the interests of transparency, clubs can refer families to our services, and we can ensure you have all the information you need to make better-informed choices.

When possible, we deliver workshops to parents and guardians at clubs, explaining the obligations, commitments and expectations that come with every stage of youth football. These workshops are also a great opportunity to introduce you to the wider work of the PFA and forge relationships that will help us to support players who may go on to become future PFA members.



George Bowyer, Youth Advisor, presenting at a Club Workshop



**The PFA's Youth Advisory Service is a fantastic platform for all of our players, parents & guardians. From the very youngest age groups to those transitioning into the first-team environment, their confidential and impartial advice across a breadth of services can help keep all involved abreast of support strategies to help young people on their journey through the Academy."**



**Lincoln City**



**We support young players  
by advising their parents  
and guardians to help them  
navigate academy football.**



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