

FutureFit · 2026/27 season

# A new shape for the grassroots game.

*England Football's FutureFit framework keeps younger players in smaller-sided formats for longer. Here's what's changing, and how to prepare your club for kick-off.*

Issued

**May 2026**

Audience

**Coaches and club staff**

In effect

**2026/27 season**

What's inside

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### Why this matters

England Football is introducing a new grassroots youth football framework from the 2026/27 season under its **FutureFit** programme. The main purpose is to keep children in smaller-sided formats for longer so they get more touches of the ball, more involvement in the game, and more age-appropriate development.

For clubs, the biggest structural change is a revised format pathway: **U7 moves to 3v3, 11v11 does not begin until U14, and every stage in between shifts up by one year.** This has practical implications for fixtures, coaching, equipment, pitch-marking, facility use, and parent communications ahead of next season.

<b>3v3</b> New U7 format	<b>U14</b> 11v11 begins	<b>+1yr</b> Each stage shifts	<b>26/27</b> Season in effect
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## 01 — Age-group pathway

## A revised route through the youth game.

England Football's updated pathway for the 2026/27 season is set out below, alongside the format clubs are moving away from. Highlighted rows show where the format has changed.

Age	New format (26/27)	Previous	Ball size — new	Ball size — previous
U7 <b>Changed</b>	<b>3v3</b>	5v5	Size 3	Size 3
U8	5v5	5v5	Size 3	Size 3
U9 <b>Changed</b>	<b>5v5</b>	7v7	Size 3	Size 3
U10	7v7	7v7	Size 3	Size 3
U11 <b>Changed</b>	<b>7v7</b>	9v9	<b>Size 3</b>	Size 3/4
U12	9v9	9v9	Size 4	Size 4
U13 <b>Changed</b>	<b>9v9</b>	11v11	Size 4	Size 4
U14 <b>Changed</b>	<b>11v11</b>	11v11	<b>Size 5</b>	Size 4
U15–U16	11v11	11v11	Size 5	Size 5

### Headline format changes

- **U7** moves from 5v5 to 3v3.
- **U9** stays at 5v5 instead of progressing to 7v7.
- **U11** stays at 7v7 instead of moving to 9v9.
- **U13** stays at 9v9 instead of moving to 11v11.

On ball sizes, the most notable change is at **U11**, where the transition from Size 3/4 to a standardised Size 3 reflects the smaller 7v7 format being retained for longer. **U14–U16** moves to a confirmed Size 5, replacing the previous Size 4/5 split.

02 – Pitch and goal requirements

# Aligned to each format's new footprint.

Age	Format	New pitch size	New goal	Previous reference
U7	3v3	15×10m – 20×15m	4×2.5ft	27×18m – 37×27m; 12×6ft
U8	5v5	27×18m – 37×27m	12×6ft	No change
U9	5v5	27×18m – 37×27m	12×6ft	46×27m – 55×37m; 12×6ft
U10	7v7	46×27m – 55×37m	12×6ft	No change
U11	7v7	46×27m – 55×37m	12×6ft	64×37m – 73×46m; 16×7ft
U12	9v9	64×37m – 73×46m	16×7ft	No change
U13	9v9	64×37m – 73×46m	16×7ft	82×46m – 91×55m; 21×7ft
U14	11v11	82×46m – 91×55m	21×7ft	No change in format size
U15–U16	11v11	82×46m – 100×64m	24×8ft	No change

For **U14**, England Football lists a recommended pitch of 82×50m and a goal of 21×7ft, stepping up to 24×8ft at U15. Clubs with limited space may need to review how smaller pitches are overlaid across the same site on a matchday.

03 · U7 3v3 introduction

## A smaller game, by design.

One of the most significant changes is the introduction of 3v3 football at U7. The rationale: smaller formats increase opportunities for each child to engage with the ball, make decisions, and stay physically active. Expect impacts on squad organisation, coach deployment, scheduling, and parent expectations.

Match length	<b>6–10</b> minutes per game	Total play time	<b>30–40</b> minutes per child
Squad size	<b>6–12</b> no substitutes	Officials	<b>0</b> pitch facilitator only

04 – For the club to consider

# What this means for your 2026/27 plans.

## Operational implications

– 01

### Equipment stock

Ball sizes and goal sizes across youth age groups, particularly at U7 (new 4x2.5ft goals required), U11, and U14–U16.

– 02

### Pitch layout plans

How many 3v3 and 5v5 areas can be marked or coned on existing sites alongside larger format pitches.

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### Fixture scheduling

Younger age groups may require more simultaneous small playing areas rather than fewer larger pitches on a matchday.

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### Coach and parent communication

Families will need clear, early communication about why format changes are being introduced and what a 3v3 matchday looks like.

## Recommended club actions

- 01     Audit every youth team by age group against the new FutureFit pathway and note where the old transition point no longer applies.

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- 02     Review current ball stock and replace where age-group sizing changes – particularly at U11 (Size 3), U14 (Size 5, up from Size 4) and the U15–U16 step to confirmed Size 5.

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- 03     Confirm portable goal availability for 3v3, 5v5, 7v7, and 9v9 environments. Note that 3v3 requires 4x2.5ft goals.

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- 04     Re-map home venue layouts to accommodate more smaller-sided pitches, including multiple 3v3 areas.

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- 05     Brief coaches and team managers on the new pathway and the developmental reasons behind each change.

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- 06     Update club handbooks, website copy, and parent FAQs before pre-season registration opens.

05 · Suggested wording for members

*"From the 2026/27 season, England Football is introducing its FutureFit youth football framework. Younger players will stay in smaller-sided formats for longer — U7s moving to 3v3, U8–U9s playing 5v5, U10–U11s playing 7v7, U12–U13s playing 9v9, and 11v11 football beginning at U14. The changes are designed to give children more touches of the ball, more involvement in matches, and a better developmental experience."*

Adapt for newsletters, websites and parent emails

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