

IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION
EXCEPTIONS PANELS GUIDANCE IN RESPECT OF YOUTH PLAYERS
2025/26 SEASON

Unless otherwise defined in the Appendix to this guidance note, defined terms used in this note are set out in the IFA's Points Based System criteria for Governing Body Endorsements.

1. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on the process for requesting an Exceptions Panel in respect of a Youth Player.

Minimum requirements

2. In the revised PBS, there is no minimum points threshold which a Youth Player must achieve in order for the Club to request an Exceptions Panel. A Club can therefore request an Exceptions Panel for any Youth Player who does not meet the pass mark of 15 points (and is not required to evidence that exceptional circumstances prevented the Player from achieving 15 points).
3. However, Clubs will have to evidence that the Youth Player shows significant potential and is of sufficient quality to enhance the development of the game in Northern Ireland. If the Exceptions Panel is not satisfied by the evidence submitted by the Club, a GBE will not be granted.
4. Clubs will also have to comply with any Rules and/or guidance of their respective leagues regarding the number of Youth Players requiring a GBE that it may register per season.

Evidence

Although each case will be assessed on its merits, the IFA has set out in this section of the document the evidence that a Club is recommended to submit in respect of a Youth Player in order to satisfy the Exceptions Panel that the Youth Player shows significant potential and is of sufficient quality (paragraph 21(d) of the men's game criteria). Although Clubs are not required to submit each of these categories of evidence/information if they fail to do so a GBE may not be granted if the Exceptions Panel is not satisfied by the evidence before it.

5. A Club is recommended to submit:
 - a. A breakdown of:
 - i. the Youth Player's UEFA Youth League Minutes;
 - ii. the Youth Player's CONMEBOL U20 Libertadores Minutes;
 - iii. the Youth Player's Youth Competition Minutes; and
 - iv. the Youth Player's B Team Minutes
 - b. Statements from the applicant Club's manager, technical director or director of football (for example, supporting the application, commenting on the Youth Player's attributes and/or explaining how the Youth Player would fit into the Club's plans and system)
 - c. Statements from the manager, technical director or director of football of the Youth Player's former club (for example, recommending the Youth Player or commenting on the Youth Player's attributes)
 - d. A statement from the relevant manager(s) of the Youth Player's National Association
 - e. Scouting reports and/or analysis
 - f. Player technical and/or pathway analysis
 - g. Evidence that the Club is or has been actively negotiating with the Youth Player in respect of the potential transfer
 - h. Any additional supporting information to evidence that the Youth Player shows significant potential and is of sufficient quality to enhance the development of the game in Northern Ireland

Relevant factors

Although each case will be assessed on its merits, the IFA has set out in this section of the document the factors that the Exceptions Panel may take into account when deciding whether or not to recommend to the IFA that a GBE be granted. These factors are largely based on the evidence to be provided by a Club pursuant to the PBS and paragraph 8 above.

6. The Exceptions Panel may (but is not bound to) consider any or all of the following non-exhaustive list of factors:
 - a. The points achieved by the Youth Player under the PBS
 - b. Why the Youth Player did not achieve the pass mark
 - c. The Youth Player's involvement with first team football during the Reference Period (or any earlier period that the Exceptions Panel deems appropriate), including, but not limited to:
 - i. the Youth Player's Domestic Minutes
 - ii. the Youth Player's Domestic Cup Minutes and
 - iii. the Youth Player's Continental Minutes
 - d. The Youth Player's involvement with Relevant Youth Competitions, including, but not limited to:
 - i. the Youth Player's UEFA Youth League Minutes
 - ii. the Youth Player's CONMEBOL U20 Libertadores Minutes
 - iii. the Youth Player's Youth Competition Minutes and
 - iv. the Youth Player's B Team Minutes

This formed part of the criteria for Youth Players in the January transfer window in 2021 but will be used as an indicative measure of the Youth Player's experience going forwards (rather than formal criteria).
 - e. The Band of the Club(s) the Youth Player was registered for during the Reference Period
 - f. The Youth Player's involvement with Senior Competitive International Matches, including, but not limited to:
 - i. the Youth Player's International Appearances
 - ii. the Youth Player's call-ups and/or training with the senior team of the Youth Player's National Association
 - g. The Youth Player's involvement with Youth Internationals, including, but not limited to:
 - i. the Youth Player's Band 1 International Appearances
 - ii. the Youth Player's Band 2 International Appearances
 - iii. the age group of the relevant Band 1 Youth Internationals and/or Band 2 Youth Internationals)
 - h. The Aggregated FIFA World Ranking of the Youth Player's National Association
 - i. Any supporting information provided pursuant to paragraph 12.

The Exceptions Panel may also consider any other information and/or factors that it considers appropriate.

APPENDIX

GLOSSARY

Available B Team Minutes means the total number of minutes (including, for the avoidance of doubt, any injury time or added time) played by the B Team of the Youth Player's Last Club in the Last Season, minus the number of minutes that the Youth Player was Unavailable for Selection.

Available Band 1 Youth Internationals means the total number of matches played by the Young Player's National Association during the Reference Period in the Band 1 Youth Internationals the Young Player was eligible to play in, minus the number of matches that the Player was Unavailable for Selection. For the avoidance of doubt, a player who is eligible to play in specific age group matches (for example U17) shall not also be considered to be eligible to play in any older age groups matches unless he has appeared on the matchday squad list for that age group for at least one match during the Reference Period, in which case he shall be considered eligible to play in all matches for that age group from that date onwards until the end of the Reference Period.

Available Band 2 Youth Internationals means the total number of matches played by the Young Player's National Association during the Reference Period in the Band 2 Youth Internationals the Young Player was eligible to play in, minus the number of matches that the Player was Unavailable for Selection. For the avoidance of doubt, a player who is eligible to play in specific age group matches (for example U17) shall not also be considered to be eligible to play in any older age groups matches unless he has appeared on the matchday squad list for that age group for at least one match during the Reference Period, in which case he shall be considered eligible to play in all matches for that age group from that date onwards until the end of the Reference Period.

Available CONMEBOL U20 Libertadores Minutes means the total number of minutes (including, for the avoidance of doubt, any injury time or added time) played by the Youth Player's Last Club in the CONMEBOL U20 Libertadores in the Last Season, minus the number of minutes that the Youth Player was Unavailable for Selection.

Available UEFA Youth League Minutes means the total number of minutes (including, for the avoidance of doubt, any injury time or added time) played by the Youth Player's Last Club in the UEFA Youth League in the Last Season, minus the number of minutes that the Youth Player was Unavailable for Selection.

Available Youth Competition Minutes means the total number of minutes (including, for the avoidance of doubt, any injury time or added time) played by the Youth Player's Last Club in Youth Competitions in the Last Season, minus the number of minutes that the Youth Player was Unavailable for Selection.

B Team means a secondary team of a club which plays in a lower domestic professional division within the same league structure as the club's first team.

Band 1 Youth Internationals means any match played by the Youth Player's National Association in the following tournaments:

- 1) FIFA U20 World Cup Finals;
- 2) FIFA U17 World Cup Finals;
- 3) UEFA U21 European Championships;
- 4) UEFA U19 European Championships;
- 5) UEFA U17 European Championships;

- 6) CONMEBOL U20 South American Youth Football Championship;
- 7) CONMEBOL U17 South American Youth Football Championship;
- 8) CAF U20 African Cup of Nations;
- 9) CAF U17 African Cup of Nations;
- 10) CAF U23 Championship;
- 11) AFC U23 Asia Nations Cup;
- 12) AFC U20 Asia Nations Cup;
- 13) AFC U17 Asia Nations Cup;
- 14) CONCACAF U20 Championship;
- 15) CONCACAF U17 Championship;
- 16) OFC U20 Championship;
- 17) OFC U17 Championship;
- 18) Olympic Games; and
- 19) Toulon Tournament.

Band 2 Youth Internationals means any match played by the Youth Player's National Association in order to qualify for a Band 1 Youth International or any other competitive match played by the U17–U23 teams of the Youth Player's National Association.

CONMEBOL U20 Libertadores means the youth football competition organised by the South American Football Confederation.

Relevant Youth Competitions means competitions played by a B Team, the CONMEBOL U20 Libertadores, the UEFA Youth League or any Youth Competition

UEFA Youth League means the youth football competition ordered by the Union of European Football Associations.

Youth Competition means a top domestic youth league as defined by the relevant National Association or professional league as appropriate.

Youth Player means a player who is under 21 as at the date the application for a GBE is made.

Youth Player's B Team Minutes means the percentage of Available B Team Minutes the Youth Player played in.

Youth Player's Band 1 International Appearances means the percentage of Available Band 1 Youth Internationals the Youth Player played in.

Youth Player's Band 2 International Appearances means the percentage of Available Band 2 Youth Internationals the Youth Player played in.

Youth Player's CONMEBOL U20 Libertadores Minutes means the percentage of Available CONMEBOL U20 Libertadores Minutes the Youth Player played in.

Youth Player's UEFA Youth League Minutes means the percentage of Available UEFA Youth League Minutes the Youth Player played in.

Youth Player's Youth Competition Minutes means the percentage of Available Youth Competition Minutes the Youth Player played in.