



Dear U11 Parents,

We hope you and the players have all enjoyed the U11 league season so far. We attach a copy of the Club's 'Development Structure' that is included with the Club's 'start of season' email. Your daughters have now reached the stage of the 'Junior Pathway Review' (see pages 3 and 4 of the Development Structure). This note explains how we will work through the review.

Step 1 - Continuing players

We'll circulate a survey to confirm player intentions for next season. Whilst we hope all players will continue, we also appreciate that it's normal for some players to stop at the end of each season.

Step 2 – Existing U7-U11 groupings come to an end

Whilst the players have played for the Blues, Whites or Reds this season and maybe in previous seasons, they are all Hitchin Belles players, representing the same club. We hope as many of them as possible will play with the club all the way up to U18 and beyond. A key aspect of the review is for players/parents/coaches to recognise that they are part of the club and not fixed with the specific team they might have joined when a player was just 6 years old.

Step 3 – Review of existing players in different formats

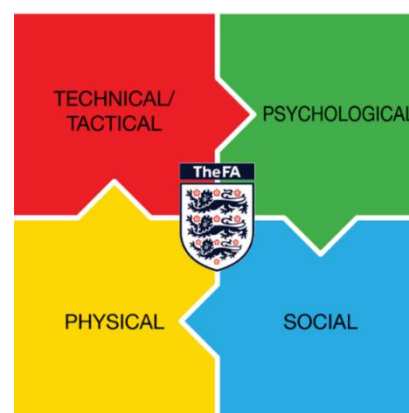
U12 is also the change to 9 a side football so is a helpful time to review players. More players, bigger pitches, bigger goals, offsides – all change the way the game is played. The coaches will plan a series of sessions with different formats, allowing players to be reviewed in different contexts, including:

- a) Mixed 9 a side friendlies;
- b) Mixed training sessions; and
- c) Attendance at current team training – for example a small number of players from 1 or 2 teams might attend a normal training session of a 3rd team. This is helpful as sometimes to review a player's technical ability (e.g. do we think her ability is Division X level?) it is important to see them playing with players we know are playing in Division X.

The coaches will work together to plan sessions and exact dates will depend on pitch/coach availability. We are aware players have their SATs at the start of May, so mixed sessions won't be planned during or immediately before the SATs week.

At U11 there are 8 coloured divisions, so we can expect 8 divisions at U12, when the divisions become numbered. At the moment the club has one team in what is effectively Division 1, 1 in Division 4 and 1 in Division 5.

Following the mixed sessions/friendlies, coaches will review all players based on the FA's 4 Corner Model (see graphic), simply asking, for each corner, which division they think is the best fit for the relevant corner. For example, coaches might consider a player has Division 1 technical/tactical ability, but she might be physically small and struggle with the more physical demands of Division 1, so they might consider that she is at Division 3 level on the physical corner. The same player might struggle psychologically if things don't go well, such as getting upset, which might not be a good fit for Division 1 where it is more competitive. At the end of this review, each player will be given an overall Division recommendation, which is the coaches' combined view of the division which would be the best fit for that player's football development and enjoyment.



Step 4 – Assemble squad groupings for existing players

Following Step 3, the players will be arranged in their divisions. Naturally we would expect those players to be spread over all 8 divisions, so we then look for 3 main groupings and start to build the teams around those

groupings. For example, if we had 6 players in division 7, 2 in 6 and 2 in 8, then we would look to form a team around the division 7 grouping.

There will naturally be a number of '50/50' players – for example we might have a Division 1 grouping and a Division 4 grouping and a player reviewed as Division 2/3. In this case we are asking what is best for that player's ongoing football development and would choose a group based on that. For example, if the player would benefit from building confidence (psychological corner) then Division 4 might be the better fit, allowing a slightly slower pace and more time on the ball for her to develop confidence in her game.

Coaches also have to ensure squads are balanced in terms of positions.

Finally, just because we currently have teams in what are effectively divisions 1, 4 and 5, does not follow that our teams will be in those divisions at U12. We will ask the league to put our teams in the divisions which we think are the best match for our groupings (i.e. if we think our groupings are around divisions 1, 4 and 6, we would ask the league for that).

Step 5 – Addition of new players

The survey in Step 1 will tell us how many players are continuing, expected to be around 37. At U12, with the move to 9 a side, we will have 3 squads of 14 players, so a total pool of 42 players, showing that we will need to add around 5 players to the year group.

The club run a social football group for this year (Friday nights 7-8, they train but don't play Saturday morning matches) so have around 13 players, many who are keen to join a Saturday team. Once we have allocated the existing players to groups we will look to fill any gaps by offers to players from social football or other enquiries.

Step 6 – Confirmation of squad offers

Once we have completed the process, by the end of May, we will confirm squads and coaches for next season

Not fixed forever

We know from experience that things change. As the players go through puberty they will experience changes and that can change the way they play football. The player we mentioned in Step 3 with Division 1 technical ability and Division 3 physical level might be physically very different by age 13 and ready for Division 1. The player who has a physical advantage aged 11 might be overtaken as others grow. So, whilst the next formal review isn't until the end of the U16 season, coaches will continue to review squads and we still expect player moves as and when suitable.

Friends

We appreciate that players will have made close friends in their existing groupings. However, from experience we know that the move to secondary school has a big impact on friendship groups, plus at this age players are very quick to get used to new teammates. In addition, coaches know that change needs support, so training sessions in the new groups will support the transition process by giving extra focus to fun/social/integration elements.

Every move is positive and your support

To carry out this review the coaches and club's development officer will be spending many hours over and above their existing training/match work. They do it all because they care and want all the players to have the best environment to develop as footballers.

We have years of experience seeing players develop. Players playing at a level that is too high for them often stop enjoying their football and in some cases leave – that is a shame when we know that same player, with a love for the game, could enjoy the game more playing at a different level. Players playing at a level that is not a challenge for them can become frustrated and again reduce their enjoyment. Many clubs only have 1 team

which can lead to the common experience of the most developed players leaving for teams in higher divisions and the least developed players leaving as they find it too challenging.

At Hitchin Belles, we put a lot of thought and care into these decisions because we want every player to be in an environment that's the best fit for their development at that point in time. Whatever team your daughter is placed with, it is a **positive decision** because we believe it is where she will enjoy her football the most - both for her football development and positive mental attitude in the long term.

As parents you play a vital role in supporting that message. If team placement is viewed negatively - in terms of a player being 'dropped' or 'moved down' - then your daughter may come to see it that way too. As you know, conversations you have at home or travelling to/from football can be really influential, and we'd greatly appreciate your support in reinforcing the message that players are placed in teams that are the best fit for their football development, which in turn means more enjoyment from their football in the long term.

Wellbeing Support

Moving from U11 to U12 and the team changes that come with it can be an unsettling time for some players. If you or your daughter would like confidential support, please email wellbeing@hitchinbelles.com and a member of our Wellbeing team will be in touch.

Any questions?

Hopefully this note and the attached Development Structure answer most questions (please read the Development Structure), but if you have any additional questions then feel free to message me on 07890316923.

Steven Haynes, Development Officer and U23 Manager, Hitchin Belles FC

12 March 2026

PURPOSE

To unlock the life potential of girls and women through football

VISION

Every girl and woman feels more powerful on and off the pitch
for having been part of our club

MISSION

We foster an environment that stretches girls and women to achieve
their full potential on and off the pitch

VALUES



Enjoyment rich



Future focused



In it together



Above and beyond

PILLARS

Brilliant behind the scenes

Stretch player potential

Empowering environment