



PLAY

NATIONAL SCHOOL FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS HANDBOOK

2027



PURPOSE

This Handbook establishes the national framework for the administration and delivery of AFL-run school football competitions across Australia. It sets minimum standards that apply in all states and territories, while enabling Competition Management bodies to publish their own Competition Conditions to address local requirements.

The Handbook aims to:

- provide a consistent, national baseline for how school football competitions are structured and administered;
- make it easier for Competition Management bodies, schools, coaches, officials and other stakeholders to understand their rights and responsibilities;
- support safe, inclusive and high-quality playing environments for all students;
- protect and promote participation opportunities for girls and students living with disability;
- ensure the appropriate handling of conduct, complaints and disciplinary matters across all state or territory; and
- support the game to grow and connect more young Australians to Australian Football.

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This Handbook applies to all AFL-run school football competitions. It should be read alongside the relevant Competition Conditions published by your state or territory Competition Management body.

Where Competition Conditions differ from this Handbook, this Handbook prevails — unless the relevant Competition Condition has been expressly approved by the AFL.

For community football policy refer to the National Community Football Policy Handbook at play.afl.

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PART A – GENERAL

1. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions apply throughout this Handbook and are provided to ensure clarity, consistency and a common understanding of key terms used in the administration and delivery of AFL-run school football competitions.

AFL	means the Australian Football League (ACN 004 155 211).
AFL Community Concussion Guidelines	means the concussion guidelines published by the AFL from time to time, available at play.afl/clubhelp/resources/afl-community-concussion-guidelines .
Australian Football	means the game played pursuant to the Laws of the Game.
Coach	means a person holding Australian Football coaching responsibilities at a School, who is accredited (or required to be accredited) in accordance with section 9 of this Handbook.
Coach AFL Platform	means the AFL's online coaching platform, incorporating an accreditation portal and library of online training and resources.
Competition	means the AFL-run school football competitions administered under this Handbook.
Competition Conditions	means the document published by a state or territory Competition Management body that sets out local rules, modifications, competition-specific processes, venue requirements and any other matter relevant to the administration of the Competition in that state or territory.
Competition Management	means the state or territory body formally appointed by the AFL to administer school football competitions within that state or territory.
Compliance Lead	means the full-time AFL staff member appointed as Compliance Lead (or equivalent role) for the organisation.
Direct Tribunal Offence	means a Reportable Offence specified in section 4 of Appendix One of the National Policy Handbook.
Division	refers to the categories within the Competition, determined by school year and gender.
Extended Bench	refers to a team having more players on the interchange than is permitted pursuant to the relevant appendix.

First Aid Provider	means a person responsible for the provision of immediate care and injury management at a match, who is suitably qualified or experienced to deliver first aid support in a school or sporting environment, and may include a teacher, sports trainer, medical or health professional, or other approved individual. The requirement level of qualification or experience may be determined by Competition Management or applicable Competition Conditions.
Footy Rush	means the AFL-endorsed non-contact, modified Australian Football competition format delivered in school and youth participation environments, designed to maximise accessibility, safety and participation, including for girls and first-time participants.
Handbook	means this National School Football Competition Handbook, as amended from time to time.
Incident	means any event that resulted in, or had the potential to result in, an injury to a Person that was not reported by the umpire.
Incident Report	means the form schools are required to complete following any Incident.
Intentional Classifiable Offence	means a Reportable Offence specified in Table 1 of Appendix One of the National Policy Handbook, graded as 'Intentional' conduct.
Laws of the Game	means the Laws of Australian Football as administered and controlled by the AFL. Available at afl.com.au/about-afl/laws-of-the-game .
Match Manager	means the person appointed by Competition Management to oversee a match and/or venue.
National Junior Rules	means the National Junior Rules Handbook published by the AFL. Available at play.afl/junior-rules .
National Policy Handbook	means the National Community Football Policy Handbook published by the AFL. Available at play.afl/clubhelp/resources/national-community-football-policy-handbook .
Notice of Report	means the electronic form provided by the Match Manager to an umpire on request, detailing an identified Reportable Offence.
Official	means an umpire, Coach, trainer, Team Manager, School Co-ordinator, water carrier, interchange steward, timekeeper, scoreboard attendant, runner or any other match day official appointed by a School.

Person	means a School, Official, Player, school staff member, parent or guardian of a Player, spectator of a match, or any other person reasonably connected to the Competition.
Player	means any student nominated by their enrolled School to play in the Competition.
PlayHQ	means the AFL's online competition management platform, used to manage registrations, fixtures, results and ladder management.
Primary Divisions	refers to the playing groups within primary schools.
Reportable Offence	means any reportable offence identified in the Laws of the Game.
School	means any school that nominates to play in the Competition.
School Co-ordinator	means the school staff member appointed to co-ordinate all their nominated teams within the Competition.
Season	means the duration of the Competition in each calendar year.
Secondary Divisions	means the playing groups within secondary schools.
Team Manager	means the school staff member appointed to a specific team within a division.

2. APPLICATION AND GOVERNANCE

2.1 Governing Body

The AFL is the national governing body responsible for the management and development of Australian Football in Australia. This Handbook has been prepared by the AFL.

2.2 Application of This Handbook

This Handbook applies to all AFL-run school football competitions across all states and territories of Australia. It establishes minimum national standards and requirements that Competition Management bodies, schools, coaches, officials and participants must comply with.

2.3 Relationship with Competition Conditions

Each state and territory Competition Management body may publish Competition Conditions for their state or territory. Competition Conditions may include:

- local rules and modifications to the Laws of the Game;
- competition-specific draws, fixture formats and progression structures;
- venue requirements and match day logistics;

- local enforcement and conduct management arrangements; and
- any other matter relevant to the administration of the Competition in that state or territory.

Where a Competition Condition is inconsistent with this Handbook, this Handbook prevails, unless the Competition Condition has been expressly approved by the AFL. Competition Conditions are published by Competition Management and provided to Schools at the start of each Season.

2.4 Amendment

The AFL may amend this Handbook from time to time as it deems fit. Competition Management bodies will be notified of amendments and are responsible for communicating relevant changes to Schools.

2.5 Matters Not Covered

Any matter not dealt with or provided for in this Handbook may be dealt with in such manner as the AFL determines.

PART B – COMPETITION MANAGEMENT

3. ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMPETITION MANAGEMENT

3.1 Purpose of Competition Management

Competition Management is the state or territory body formally appointed by the AFL to administer school football competitions in their state or territory. Competition Management is responsible for administering, coordinating and overseeing the delivery of school football competitions in accordance with AFL policies, this Handbook and relevant Competition Conditions.

3.2 Key Responsibilities

Competition Management is responsible for:

- the general administration of the Competition, including distribution of information to Schools, allocation of Match Managers, determination of venue availability and liaison with School Co-ordinators, AFL staff, umpires and other persons;
- promotion of the Competition;
- distribution of nomination information and acceptance of nominations from Schools;
- constructing Competition draws;
- enforcement of Competition rules, including initiation of any investigation or disciplinary process under this Handbook;
- briefing Match Managers on their responsibilities;
- contacting Schools to confirm and discuss Incident Reports;
- addressing complaints in accordance with this Handbook;
- actively promoting, planning and delivering equitable participation opportunities for girls, including equitable venue access, match times and resources; and
- working with Schools to address barriers to girls' participation and retention, including through modified or alternative formats, including Footy Rush.

LOCAL FLEXIBILITY

Competition Management bodies may publish Competition Conditions to address matters specific to their state or territory including local rules, match formats, draw structures, venue requirements and enforcement arrangements.

All Competition Conditions must be consistent with this Handbook. Where inconsistency exists, this Handbook prevails unless the AFL has expressly approved otherwise.

4. SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 Pre-Match or Round Requirements

Prior to each match or round of Competition, the Team Manager or other school staff member must:

- Ensure all players are registered in accordance with Section 8 of this handbook;
- ensure all Coaches hold the required accreditation in accordance with section 9;
- ensure all Players are nominated in the correct Division;
- notify Competition Management at least seven (7) days before any scheduled match that the school intends to forfeit or withdraw;
- Where PlayHQ is implemented for the Competition, ensure all players are entered and team sheets are submitted via PlayHQ prior to the match;
- where PlayHQ is not implemented, or where an alternative process has been approved by Competition Management, complete and provide a team sheet listing each Player's full name, year level, date of birth and guernsey number; and
- ensure the team travels to each match with a first-aid kit.

Note 1: *If a Player is also registered via PlayHQ for Community Football, that same profile is to be used.*

Note 2: *Failure to provide seven (7) days' notice of a forfeit may result in a monetary fine as determined by Competition Management.*

Note 3: *If there are multiple matches in one day, Players and Officials listed on the team sheet must be the same for the whole day. Roles may be updated throughout the day.*

4.2 Match Day Requirements

During each round of Competition, the Team Manager or other school staff member must:

- ensure all teams are accompanied by a school staff member responsible for that team;
- ensure all Players are correctly attired and officials are appropriately dressed;
- ensure Coaches, Officials and Players comply with this Handbook;
- ensure any Incidents are reported and cross-checked with Competition Management if requested;
- ensure Persons associated with their School comply with any sanctions imposed by the AFL and cooperate with any investigation; and
- ensure Players and Officials comply with the AFL Community Concussion Guidelines, including return-to-play protocols.

Note 1: *Upon request, AFL may loan playing uniforms at the cost of cleaning.*

Note 2: *A School that fails to ensure associated Persons cooperate with an investigation may be deemed ineligible to compete in the Competition.*

4.3 Girls' Participation

Where a girls' competition is available, Schools are expected to nominate at least one girls' team, unless an exemption is granted by Competition Management.

Competition Management may grant an exemption where a School can demonstrate genuine barriers to participation. Competition Management must work with the school to support progression towards future participation.

Schools must provide girls with equitable access to facilities, resources and participation opportunities, and ensure safe and inclusive environments during the Competition.

Competition Management may utilise modified or alternative formats, including Footy Rush, to address barriers to girls' participation and retention.

4.4 Coach Accreditation — School Obligations

Schools are responsible for ensuring all Coaches, including assistant coaches, hold the required accreditation level before the first fixture of each Season. Competition Management may request evidence of accreditation at any time.

A School that fields a team coached by an unaccredited Coach may be subject to consequences as determined by Competition Management, including forfeiture of match results.

Note: Coaches returning from a previous season should ensure their accreditation points are current before the Season commences, as points reset annually on 1 November.

5. MATCH MANAGER RESPONSIBILITIES

Match Managers must wear an AFL polo for easy identification on match day.

5.1 Pre-Match

Prior to each match, the Match Manager must confirm:

- umpire flags, whistles, scoresheets and match results sheets are at the venue;
- two footballs are available (yellow balls for matches commencing after 3:00pm);
- A suitably qualified first aid provider (or equivalent)
- A fully stocked first aid kit; and
- Access to a stretcher or appropriate equipment to manage on-field injuries;
- the scoreboard is operational;
- a timekeeper is in place with a siren and a backup option available; and
- officials are present, correctly appointed, briefed and have the required equipment.

5.2 During the Match

During each match, the Match Manager must ensure:

- quarters and breaks are run on time; and
- scores are monitored and communicated; the Match Manager and goal umpires should meet at the end of each quarter to confirm scoring.

5.3 Post-Match

Following each match, the Match Manager must:

- compile match results sheets;
- meet with umpires and accept any Notices of Report;
- inform Competition Management immediately if there is any Notice of Report;
- complete and provide any Incident Report to Competition Management; and
- complete any other task required by Competition Management.

5.4 First Aid and Medical Requirements

All matches must meet minimum first aid and medical requirements to proceed.

Competition Management, Match Managers and Schools share responsibility for ensuring that appropriate first aid provision is in place prior to the commencement of each match.

At minimum, this includes:

- The presence of a suitably qualified first aid provider (or equivalent);
- Access to appropriate first aid equipment, including a fully stocked first aid kit;
- Clear processes for managing injuries, including concussion, in accordance with AFL Community Concussion Guidelines; and
- The ability to contact emergency services where required.

Matches must not proceed where minimum first aid or medical requirements cannot be met. Competition Management may provide additional requirements through Competition Conditions, including for higher-risk competitions or venues.

These requirements must be applied in conjunction with the National Community Football Policy Handbook and any applicable state or territory health and safety requirements.

PART C – NOMINATIONS, ELIGIBILITY AND REGISTRATION

6. NOMINATIONS

Each School wishing to participate in the Competition must apply by lodging the online nomination form provided by the relevant AFL state or territory body. By submitting a nomination, Schools agree to comply with this Handbook and all relevant AFL policies.

7. PLAYER ELIGIBILITY

All players must meet eligibility requirements in this section and be registered in accordance with section 8 prior to participating in the Competition.

7.1 School of Enrolment

A Player must be enrolled with the school that nominates them. Schools cannot nominate a Player from another School.

With written consent from Competition Management, a School may nominate a Player enrolled in distance education.

If a Player changes school during the Competition, they are no longer eligible to play for their former School. They may play for their new School provided their new School nominates them accordingly.

7.2 Playing Up

Players are permitted to play up one (1) Division higher for their gender (or to a Mixed Division), provided they:

- have written consent from their parent/guardian and the Head of Sport/Principal; and
- are not displacing any Player who is age eligible and available to play in that Division.

Playing up from a Primary Division to a Secondary Division is not permitted under any circumstance. Players are not permitted to play across multiple Divisions in one day.

7.3 Ineligible Players

For the purposes of this section, an Ineligible Player is:

- a Player who is not registered via the approved competition registration process in accordance with section 8;
- a Player who is not listed on the team sheet;
- a Player serving a suspension under this Handbook;
- a Player participating contrary to the AFL Community Concussion Guidelines;
- a Player enrolled in the incorrect school year for the specified Division, unless playing up under section 7.2;
- a Player participating as part of an Extended Bench without prior approval; or

- a Player enrolled with an alternate school to the one they are playing for.
- A player who is not included on the approved match day team list submitted in accordance with section 4.1;

A Player is also Ineligible if they are currently serving a suspension in Community Football for:

- an Intentional Classifiable Offence;
- any other Reportable Offence resulting in a sanction of at least three (3) matches; or
- any breach of Part C of the National Policy Handbook resulting in a sanction of at least three (3) matches.

Playing an Ineligible Player may result in:

- the loss of any Competition points;
- the team being prevented from progressing to the next stage of the Competition; and/or
- such other consequences as determined by Competition Management.

8. PLAYER REGISTRATION

8.1 Registration Requirements

Schools must register Team Managers, Players and Coaches via PlayHQ where the competition is administered on the PlayHQ platform, and Coaches (includes Assistant Coaches) on the Coach AFL Platform prior to the start of the competition.

Where PlayHQ is in use, all participants records, team lists and match day submissions (including team sheets) must be managed through PlayHQ unless otherwise approved by Competition Management.

Manual team sheets will not be accepted in Competitions administered via PlayHQ unless approved by Competition Management.

8.2 Exemptions from PlayHQ Registration

Where Competition is not administered via PlayHQ, or where a School is unable to use PlayHQ, Competition Management may approve an alternative process for participant registration and match day team sheet submission.

Any alternative process must ensure:

- All participants are appropriately recorded.
- Player eligibility requirements are met; and
- Minimum safety and compliance standards are maintained.

Competition Management will determine the appropriate alternative process, considering accessibility, participation and administrative requirements.

8.3 PlayHQ Administration

AFL-run school football competitions that meet the eligibility criteria will use PlayHQ as the nominated competition management platform. PlayHQ is used to manage participant registrations, fixture scheduling, results and ladder management, and player wellbeing and safety including concussion.

Competition Management will provide Schools with onboarding support and resources at the start of each Season. Schools experiencing difficulties with PlayHQ should contact their state or territory Competition Management body in the first instance.

Competition Management will identify which specific competitions are to be administered via PlayHQ.

9. COACH ACCREDITATION

All Coaches involved in AFL-run school football competitions must be accredited through the AFL Coach Accreditation Framework prior to the commencement of the Season. This is a condition of participation; a School cannot field a team coached by an unaccredited Coach.

9.1 Accreditation Framework

The AFL Coach Accreditation Framework uses a points-based approach with five accreditation levels:

- Registered - fewer than 90 points. The first step of registration. All three steps must be completed to be eligible to coach.
- Registered Accredited - 90 points. The minimum requirement to coach on game day.
- Bronze - 100 points. Entry-level accreditation with access to additional learning modules.
- Silver - 200 points. Intermediate accreditation with access to additional learning opportunities.
- Gold - 400 points. The highest level, requiring completion of the Advanced Coaching Course.

The minimum requirement for a Head Coach is Registered Accredited (90 points). Assistant Coaches must hold Registered status as a minimum.

9.2 Maintaining Accreditation

Accreditation points reset to the minimum required for the current level on 1 November each year. To maintain accreditation, Coaches must earn the following points each calendar year:

- Bronze: minimum 50 points (including 40 points from compliance modules and at least 10 points from an additional learning element).
- Silver: minimum 50 points (same requirements as Bronze).
- Gold: minimum 100 points per calendar year.

If a Coach does not achieve the required points in a calendar year, their accreditation will revert to one level below.

9.3 How to Register

Coaches register and complete accreditation via the AFL's learning management system at afl.androgogic.com.au. Points can be earned through online modules, face-to-face workshops, practical coaching and self-directed learning.

Coaches with prior coaching experience or qualifications may be eligible for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). To apply, log into your coaching profile and select 'Apply for RPL' under the 'Coach Hub' tab.

Full information is available at play.afl/coach.

10. INSURANCE

Students participate in AFL-run school football competitions at their own risk and are responsible for their own personal injury and accident insurance.

The AFL holds Public Liability Insurance to a limit of \$20,000,000 per occurrence to cover its legal liabilities in respect of third-party personal injury or property damage.

The AFL expects each School participating in Australian Football programs to procure and maintain public liability insurance to sufficiently cover its own legal liabilities.

Each School or individual may wish to consider purchasing personal accident insurance to cover non-Medicare medical expenses arising from participation.

PART D – COMPETITION RULES

11. LAWS OF THE GAME AND NATIONAL JUNIOR RULES

The Laws of the Game and the National Junior Rules apply to all Divisions unless modified pursuant to this Handbook or the relevant Competition Conditions. Where any discrepancy exists between those documents and this Handbook, this Handbook prevails.

Key references:

- Laws of the Game: play.afl/clubhelp/resources/laws-game
- National Junior Rules: play.afl/junior-rules

The National Policy Handbook does not apply to this Competition unless explicitly stated within this Handbook.

11.1 Competition Formats

AFL-run school football competitions may be delivered using:

- Traditional Australian Football formats, as per the Junior Rules
- Footy Rush format

The approved competition format must be clearly identified for each Competition and Division.

Footy Rush competitions are played in accordance with:

- The Footy Rush rules (as published by the AFL); and
- Any additional requirements set out in this Handbook or approved Competition Conditions.

STATE AND TERRITORY COMPETITION CONDITIONS

Each state and territory body may publish Competition Conditions. These conditions should be read in conjunction with this Handbook and may cover local rules, match formats, draw structures, progression criteria, venue requirements and other state or territory-specific matters.

Where Competition Conditions are inconsistent with this Handbook, this Handbook prevails unless the AFL has expressly approved otherwise.

12. GENERAL MATCH GUIDELINES

General match guidelines, including game times, football sizes, field sizes and team sizes, are set out in Appendix One. Where a state or territory has published Competition Conditions, those conditions should be read alongside Appendix One.

12.1 Disability Inclusion

The AFL is committed to ensuring all school football competitions are accessible, safe and inclusive for all students living with disability. Competition Management will proactively identify and implement reasonable adjustments; such as modified equipment, adapted match durations or sensory-friendly environments, to support full participation.

Refer to the relevant State and Territory Competition Conditions for state or territory specific inclusion arrangements.

13. PLAYING UNIFORMS

All Players must wear matching AFL guernseys, shorts and socks. Playing shorts must not have pockets of any kind.

Where required for cultural, religious or personal reasons, Schools may request approval for modifications or alternative uniform items (e.g. headwear, leggings). Requests must be submitted to Competition Management, who may approve variations provided they do not compromise player safety or competition integrity.

If a School is unable to arrange specific AFL playing uniforms, they must contact Competition Management, who may approve alternative uniforms at their discretion.

14. FORFEITS

If a team wishes to forfeit, their School must notify Competition Management as soon as possible.

If notice of a forfeit is given within seven (7) days of the scheduled match, the school may be fined to cover administrative costs as determined by Competition Management.

Where a team forfeits, the opposing team shall progress to the next stage of the Competition where progression is an option.

Note: *If a forfeit is necessary due to circumstances beyond a school's control (such as extreme weather or traffic), this will be taken into consideration before any fine is issued.*

15. EXTREME WEATHER

All matches must be conducted in accordance with the extreme weather guidelines and requirements outlined in the National Community Football Policy Handbook (Part D), including (but not limited to):

- Extreme heat and humidity;
- Lightning and storms;
- Air quality; and
- Sun protection.

Competition Management, Match Managers and Schools are responsible for monitoring conditions and making decisions in accordance with these guidelines to prioritise the health and safety of participants.

Where extreme weather or unsafe conditions result in a venue closure or prevent a match from proceeding, Competition Management will determine whether the match is to be delayed, relocated, rescheduled or cancelled in accordance with the National Community Football Policy Handbook.

Where a match cannot be completed or rescheduled, the outcome will be determined in accordance with the relevant Competition Conditions.

In the absence of a Competition Condition covering the circumstance, Competition Management may determine the outcome, which may include sharing match points or determining progression based on ladder position.

16. UMPIRES AND OFFICIALS

16.1 Umpire Appointments

Umpire appointments for each fixture type are outlined in the relevant Competition Conditions. Where umpires are not appointed by Competition Management, Schools may be required to provide a teacher-umpire or agree to a shared umpiring arrangement.

All umpires must be always treated with respect. Abuse or intimidation of umpires will be treated as a conduct breach under this Handbook.

16.2 Student Umpire Pathway

The AFL encourages Schools to identify students with an interest in umpiring. Student umpires play an important role in reducing the administrative burden of sourcing officials and provide a meaningful pathway for young people to remain connected to the game.

Schools are encouraged to:

- identify students who may be suitable to train as match day umpires, including those no longer playing or seeking a different form of involvement;
- nominate interested students to Competition Management at or following nominations each season; and
- support nominated students to participate in AFL-delivered umpire training and upskilling programs.

The AFL, through Competition Management, will provide training and upskilling support for nominated student umpires. The format of this support; including online modules, match day mentoring and face-to-face sessions, will be communicated to Schools at the start of each season.

Note: *The student umpire pathway is a developing program. Further detail on training requirements, match day eligibility and appointment processes will be communicated through Competition Conditions as the program is rolled out across states and territories.*

16.3 Officials

Each team is entitled to the following Officials:

- Coach
- Assistant Coach
- Team Manager
- First Aid Provider (or equivalent)
- Runner
- Water Carrier

All Officials must wear appropriate school sport or staff uniform and enclosed footwear.

Runners must wear an identified runner's vest or uniform supplied by the Match Manager.

All Coaches, including Assistant Coaches, must hold the required accreditation in accordance with section 9.

Runners are to deliver a Coach's message to a Player and immediately depart the field following delivery. If an umpire observes a runner in breach of this requirement, the umpire may direct the runner to leave the field for a period determined by the Match Manager.

Water carriers are permitted if they are a student enrolled or an employee at the relevant School or where required pursuant to the applicable State Extreme Heat Policy.

PART E – SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD SAFETY

17. CHILD SAFETY

The AFL is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people involved in school football competitions.

All participants, Coaches, Officials and volunteers must comply with:

- The safeguarding children and young people requirements set out in the National Community Football Policy Handbook; and
- All applicable state and territory child safety legislation and requirements.

For the avoidance of doubt, the behavioural standards and expectations outlined in the National Community Football Policy Handbook apply to all conduct within school football competitions, and any breach may be managed under this Handbook.

Competition Management bodies, schools and associated personnel must meet all Working with Children Check (or equivalent) requirements in accordance with applicable state and territory legislation and the National Community Football Policy Handbook.

Any concerns regarding the safety or wellbeing of a child must be reported immediately in accordance with applicable legislation and safeguarding requirements, including to the relevant School, Competition Management and, where required, the relevant government authority or AFL Integrity.

Schools are expected to comply with their own child safety policies and obligations under applicable legislation, in addition to the requirements outlined in the National Community Football Policy Handbook.

Note: Where statements or evidence are being obtained from minors, a parent/guardian or School supervisor must always be present.

PART F – MEMBER PROTECTION AND STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

18. RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PERSON

A Person must:

- make themselves aware of this Handbook and its contents;
- comply with this Handbook and any rules, regulations, by-laws, emergency protocols and policies formally adopted by the AFL in relation to the Competition;
- respect the spirit of fair play;
- be ethical, fair, honest and respectful in all dealings with other people;
- contribute to a safe sporting environment and respectful culture that is accepting of individual differences;
- prioritise the safety and welfare of children;
- recognise and display respect for the essential role of umpires and other Officials in Australian Football;
- comply with all relevant federal and state laws, including anti-discrimination and child protection laws;
- comply with any direction or investigative or disciplinary measure imposed by Competition Management in accordance with this Handbook; and
- comply with any sanction imposed following a finding of a Reportable Offence or breach of this Handbook.

19. GENERAL CODE OF CONDUCT

In connection with the Competition, a Person must not:

- engage in conduct which brings, or is likely to bring, the interests of Australian Football or the AFL into disrepute;
- act in a manner which is, or is likely to be, prejudicial to the interests of Australian Football or the AFL;
- directly or indirectly harass or bully (including cyber bully) any Person;
- make or post inappropriate, offensive or discriminatory comments in public (including on social media) about another Person or the AFL;
- victimise a person for making a complaint under this Handbook;
- verbally or physically abuse, threaten, assault, engage in violence with or intimidate another Person, or create a hostile environment;
- disclose information related to Australian Football that is of a private, confidential or privileged nature without required consent; or
- make a complaint under this Handbook that the Person knows to be untrue, vexatious, malicious or improper.

20. COACH CODE OF CONDUCT

In addition to the obligations under sections 18 and 19, a Coach must:

- hold and maintain the required accreditation level in accordance with section 9 of this Handbook;
- be reasonable in the demands made on the time commitment of Players outside of school hours, having regard to their health and wellbeing;
- use best endeavours to ensure Players gain equal playing time in matches and that every Player plays a minimum of 50% playing time;
- seek and follow the advice of appropriately qualified health specialists in relation to the participation of injured or ill Players;
- keep up to date with the principles of coaching, including skill development and accreditation requirements;
- display and foster appropriate sporting behaviour, including ensuring Players comply with their obligations under this Handbook;
- display and foster respect for Officials, opponents, parents and spectators; and
- ensure Players are involved in a positive environment where skill learning and development are priorities.

21. ALCOHOL, SMOKING AND VAPING

21.1 Alcohol

Alcohol must not be consumed in any unlicensed area when and where a School Football Competition is being played. The consumption of alcohol, or behaviour influenced by alcohol, must not compromise the safety, wellbeing or experience of participants, Officials, Schools or spectators, particularly where children and young people are involved.

State and territory Competition Conditions must outline local management and enforcement arrangements for alcohol consumption at venues, consistent with this national standard and relevant legislation.

21.2 Smoking and Vaping

Smoking and vaping are always prohibited when and where a School Football Competition is being played, including all competition venues, playing areas and environments involving participants, Officials and Schools.

State and territory Competition Conditions must outline local management and enforcement arrangements for smoking and vaping at venues, consistent with this national standard and relevant legislation.

PART G – COMPLAINTS AND DISCIPLINARY

22. AFL OWN-MOTION INVESTIGATION

If the AFL becomes aware that any Person may have breached Part F of this Handbook, the Compliance Lead (or the relevant state or territory appointed person, in accordance with applicable state or territory processes) may determine to investigate.

All Schools must use their best endeavours to require Persons associated with their School to cooperate with any investigation, including the provision of a statement on request.

Note: *Where statements are being obtained from minors, an adult must always be present.*

As part of the investigation, the Compliance Lead or state and territory appointed person will obtain a statement from the alleged contravening person, consistent with the applicable state or territory integrity or disciplinary framework.

If the Compliance Lead, relevant state or territory body, or appointed decision-maker is comfortably satisfied a breach has occurred, they may impose a sanction, which may include education, a requirement to participate in mediation, match suspensions or expulsion from the Competition.

Competition Management will inform the relevant School of the finding and any sanction imposed.

If a School wishes to challenge the finding, it must notify Competition Management by 5:00pm on the business day following the outcome being advised, and must substantiate at least one of the following grounds:

- the decision involved an error of law which had a material impact on the outcome;
- the decision was so unreasonable that no decision maker acting reasonably could have reached it, having regard to the evidence; or
- the sanction imposed was manifestly excessive or inadequate.

Where a finding or sanction is made under this section, the matter may be reviewed in accordance with:

- The relevant state or territory tribunal or appeal process; or
- An AFL-appointed panel; or
- The review process outlined in this section,

Provided the review body not been involved in the initial determination. A review body may confirm, amend or overturn the finding or sanction.

Where appropriate, matters may be referred to, or determined in accordance with, the processes outlined in Sections 24 or 25.

23. COMPLAINTS REGARDING SUSPECTED BREACH

23.1 Lodgement of Complaint

If a person considers that another person has breached Part F of this Handbook, that Person may submit a written complaint (or verbal complaint where permitted) to Competition Management or the Match Manager.

- Within seven (7) days of the alleged breach; or
- Within such other timeframe permitted under the relevant state or territory framework.

The complaint should, wherever practicable, include:

- The date the alleged breach occurred;
- The approximate time it occurred;
- Where the conduct occurred;
- Who the breach was target at (if anyone), including their role, school and division;
- Who alleged contravening person was, including role, school and division; and
- Exactly what occurred, including any witnesses

23.2 Initial Assessment and Evidence Gathering

Competition Management or the Match Manager will take reasonable steps to gather available information, including from the complainant, any witness and the alleged contravening person, and refer the complaint and any supporting material to the Compliance Lead.

Note: *When obtaining evidence from minors, an adult must always be present.*

23.3 Assessment by Compliance Lead

Upon receipt of a complaint, the Compliance Lead will assess the matter and determine the appropriate course of action.

This may include:

- Investigating the complaint;
- Requesting further information;
- Facilitating a conciliation or educational outcome;
- Referring the matter to a relevant external authority (including police or child protection agencies) where required; or
- Determining that no further action is required

23.4 Investigation and Outcome

Where the Compliance Lead elects to investigate the complaint and is comfortably satisfied that a breach of this Handbook has occurred, they may impose a sanction in accordance with this Handbook.

Competition Management will inform the relevant school of:

- The outcome; and
- Any sanction imposed

23.5 Review of Decision

If a school wishes to challenge a finding or sanction, the process outlined in Section 22 applies.

24. VILIFICATION

24.1 Prohibited Conduct

No person shall act towards or speak to any other person in a manner, or engage in any conduct, which threatens, disparages, vilifies or insults another person or group of persons on any basis, including but not limited to a person's race, religion, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity.

24.2 Making a Complaint

Any Person (including an umpire) who considers that another Person has breached section 24.1 may submit a complaint to the Match Manager or Competition Management, or through an equivalent state or territory reporting pathway. Complaints may be made in writing or verbally.

Note: *If a minor is providing a verbal complaint, a parent/guardian or school supervisor must be present.*

Complaints must be made within seven (7) days of the conduct occurring. The time limitation may be extended at the discretion of Competition Management but may not exceed thirty (30) days under any circumstances, unless otherwise required by law.

24.3 Contents of the Complaint

The Match Manager is to ensure the Vilification Complaint includes:

- the date the alleged vilification occurred;
- the approximate time it occurred;
- where the conduct occurred;
- who the vilification was targeted at (the Vilified Person), including their role, School, Division, whether they heard or saw the behaviour, and whether they are supportive of the complaint;
- who the alleged contravening person was, including their role, School and Division; and
- exactly what occurred, including the specific words used, how loud it was, and any witnesses.

Note: *If the name of the Vilified Person or Contravening Person is not known, a description should be provided.*

24.4 Evidence

The Match Manager or Competition Management is to take reasonable steps to obtain supporting evidence, appropriate to the circumstances and the involvement of school students.

This may include (and, where appropriate, in consultation with AFL integrity):

- statements from relevant parties (including the Contravening Person) statements may be taken verbally and documented;
- Available footage; and
- screenshots or other recordings where the conduct occurred online; and
- Any other relevant information available at the time.

Note: When obtaining a statement from a minor, a parent/guardian or School supervisor must be present.

Note: Competition Management is not expected to undertake complex investigations involving minors. Where matters are serious, sensitive, or unclear, they should be referred to AFL integrity or the relevant state or territory process.

24.5 Investigation

All material must be referred to the Compliance Lead (or dealt with in accordance with the applicable state or territory process). The Compliance Lead will assess the available information and determine the appropriate course of action, which may include:

- Requesting further information;
- Facilitating a conciliation process;
- Issuing a formal notice; or
- Referring the matter to AFL integrity where appropriate.

The Compliance Lead is responsible for any further investigation required and may seek assistance from AFL Integrity where matters are complex, series, or involve broader integrity considerations. Competition Management will support the process as required but it not responsible for undertaking formal investigations.

24.6 Confidentiality

The particulars of any Vilification Complaint and any conciliation must always remain confidential. No Person shall publicly comment on or disseminate information concerning a complaint or conciliation at any time prior to, during or after an investigation or conciliation.

24.7 Conciliation Process

Matters under this section may determined by:

- The relevant state or territory tribunal or review body; or
- An AFL-appointed panel; or
- The process outlined in sections 24.7 to 24.10

Provided the process is consistent with the principles of this Handbook.

The Compliance Lead, with assistance from the AFL, will determine the arrangements for conciliation, including the appointment of a conciliator and the date, time and format.

Persons entitled to attend the conciliation are: the Vilified Person, their parent/guardian and Team Manager; the Contravening Person, their parent/guardian and Team Manager; other persons the Compliance Lead considers ought to attend; any AFL employee directly involved;

and the conciliator. Parents/guardians and Team Managers are not to actively participate as advocates. Legal practitioners are not to attend in that capacity.

24.8 Agreed Outcomes at Conciliation

Conciliation participants may agree to any outcome or sanction, including suspension from playing or officiating, attendance at a community service program, completion of relevant education, or provision of a public apology. The Vilified Person, the Contravening Person and the AFL must all agree to any outcome. No outcome may bind or sanction any Person who is not a conciliation participant.

Where a matter is not resolved by conciliation, it must not proceed to determination under an appropriate tribunal, panel or review mechanism.

24.9 No Conciliation Outcome - Notice of Vilification

Where the matter has not been resolved by conciliation, the Compliance Lead must complete a Notice of Vilification and issue it to the Contravening Person's School, with a copy provided to the Vilified Person's School. The Notice of Vilification must include details of the conduct, supporting evidence, the prescribed sanction and a deadline to accept or contest the sanction.

Any sanction may be challenged in accordance with the applicable review or appeal process.

24.10 Determination by Review Panel

Where a Vilification Complaint is referred to a Review Panel, the following applies:

- A Review Panel must comprise a minimum of three (3) persons with sufficient knowledge.
- No person involved in assessing or determining the Vilification Complaint may sit on the Review Panel.
- The review is to be conducted by way of written submissions only, unless otherwise determined.
- The Review Panel is not bound by the rules of evidence.
- New evidence will only be considered where the Review Panel is satisfied it is of sufficient probative value such that the Compliance Lead would have reached a different decision.

Standard of proof:

All findings by the Review Panel must be determined on the balance of probabilities, to the standard of comfortable satisfaction, considering the seriousness of the allegations.

- A decision must be reached by majority and is final and binding.

25. REPORTABLE OFFENCES

This section establishes minimum National standards for reporting and determination of Reportable Offences.

State and Territory competitions may utilise their own report, tribunal or disciplinary processes, provided those processes are consistent with the Laws of the Game and this Handbook.

25.1 Umpire Report

Where an umpire considers that a Player or Official has committed a Reportable Offence, the umpire may direct that Player or Official to leave the field or their official role and advise them they are on report.

As soon as practicable after the match, the umpire must:

- Complete a notice of report outlining the reportable offence;
- Where appropriate, grade the offence in line with the early guilty plea sanction pursuant to Appendix One of the National Policy Handbook, or note if it is a Direct Tribunal Offence; and
- Advise each team manager of the notice of report

An umpire may also submit a Notice of Report following the conclusion of a match where an incident was not reported during play.

25.2 Referral and Review

A reportable offence will be referred to Competition Management for review where:

- The offence is classified as a Direct Tribunal Offence;
- The notice of report is disputed by a Team Manager within the required timeframe; or
- Competition Management otherwise determines the matter requires review.

Competition Management or the AFL may also review any incident as a Reportable Offence, without an umpire report, where it becomes aware of conduct that may constitute a breach of the Laws of the Game.

25.3 Determination Process

Where a Reportable Offence is referred for review;

- That matter may be determined by:
 - The relevant state or territory tribunal or disciplinary process; or
 - An AFL-appointed decision-maker or panel (where a state or territory process is not utilised);
- The determining body may consider the notice of report and any other relevant evidence; and
- A finding will be made as to whether a reportable offence occurred and any sanction to be imposed.

Where practicable, matters involving more series sanctions (including multi-match suspensions) should be determined through a tribunal or panel-based process.

25.4 Outcome and Sanctions

Competition Management will inform the relevant School of the finding and any sanction imposed.

Note: Where a Player or Official is suspended, the AFL may, where appropriate in accordance with applicable policies and processes, determine whether that suspension applies across other AFL-managed competitions.

25.5 No Referral by Schools

Schools must not independently issue notices of reports.

However, where a school becomes aware of an incident that may constitute a Reportable Offence and was not reported by an umpire, it may notify Competition Management for assessment in accordance with section 25.2.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE - GENERAL MATCH GUIDELINES

Creating the optimal experience for junior footballers across the country.

- [play.afl/junior-rules](#)
- [play.afl/footy-rush](#)

Appendix One will be updated from time to time to reflect any changes to National Junior Rules. Competition Management bodies may supplement Appendix One through Competition Conditions.

APPENDIX TWO - COMPETITION CONDITIONS

Each state and territory Competition Management body publishes Competition Conditions. These are separate to this Handbook and are provided to Schools by Competition Management at the start of each Season.

Schools must ensure they have read and understood both this Handbook and the relevant Competition Conditions prior to the commencement of the Season.

WHAT COMPETITION CONDITIONS COVER

Competition Conditions may include any of the following, and states and territories may add to this list based on their local needs:

- Local rules and modifications to the Laws of the Game
- Draw structures, fixture formats and progression criteria
- Venue requirements and match day logistics
- Umpire appointment arrangements
- Extreme weather protocols and alternative venue processes
- Disability inclusion and reasonable adjustment arrangements
- Student umpire program details
- Any other matter relevant to the Competition in that state or territory

State and territory Competition Conditions are available at:

NSW/ACT	play.afl/nswact/schools
Northern Territory	play.afl/northern-territory/schools
Queensland	play.afl/queensland/schools
South Australia	sanfl.com.au/schoolscomp/
Tasmania	play.afl/tasmania
Victoria	play.afl/victoria
Western Australia	wafootball.com.au/schools/#comps

APPENDIX THREE – NATIONAL COMMUNITY FOOTBALL POLICY HANDBOOK

The Handbook includes relevant community football policies across four sections: eligibility and registration; member protection & integrity; health & safety; disciplinary.

<https://play.afl/clubhelp/resources/national-community-football-policy-handbook#article-0>