

# **New Challenge Cup format to be introduced next season**

**The Scottish FA and SPFL this week confirmed the implementation of a new Cooperation System and Challenge Cup format for season 2025-26 to enhance youth player development in Scotland.**

The Cooperation System proposal has been passed by clubs following extensive consultation since the Scottish FA's Transition Report was published last year.

The report sought to establish trends in successful player development from across the world and formed the basis of the innovations confirmed today.

The Cooperation System provides greater flexibility to the existing domestic loan quotas by enabling players in the key 'transition phase' of 16-21, who are eligible to represent the Scotland national teams, to join a lower-league club but be able to move between the parent and cooperation club throughout the season to increase playing time.

A new Challenge Cup format for season 2025/26 has also, after a recommendation from the SPFL Competitions Working Group, been approved by the SPFL Board in a further move to support the progression of the best young players in the country.

The new set-up will include William Hill Premiership B teams in a league phase format, providing more opportunities for youth players aged under 21, as they move from the academy

environment to senior football. Further details on next season's competition format, as well as the Cooperation System, will be released in due course.

Ian Maxwell, Scottish FA Chief Executive, said: "Today's announcement is a significant step forward in enhancing first-team opportunities for the most talented young players in Scotland.

"The publication of the Transition Report – written by our Chief Football Officer, Andy Gould, and Head of Men's Elite Strategy, Chris Docherty – brought home not only the alarming trend of young players getting less and less game time but it also included a series of practical solutions that have been proven to have worked in leagues across the world.

"We are pleased that clubs have bought in to the principles of the report and that the first two innovations have been approved in time for next season.

"We look forward to seeing young Scottish players given a platform to fulfil their undoubted potential with greater opportunity."

Neil Doncaster, Group Chief Executive of the SPFL, said: "There are few things more exciting for football fans than a young player breaking through the system and making a successful impact on the first team, whether that's Lennon Miller at Motherwell or David Watson at Kilmarnock, who first made his debut aged 16 in the Challenge Cup.

"We believe that this new Cooperation System and new Challenge Cup format will help encourage more players to come through, which can only be good for the league and the men's national team.

"Our new Challenge Cup format will provide more opportunities for young Scottish players to progress than any previous competition set-up. We look forward to sharing further details

on the new format in due course.”