

# THE IMPACT OF THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOOT PASS ON THE STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS OF A PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL ACADEMY

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## INTRODUCTION

In an effort to ensure the future (success) of professional (club) football, the Belgian Football Association has implemented the quality assurance system Foot PASS. With the long-standing implementation of this quality project, this national football federation aims to emphasize the importance of a high-quality youth academy with regards to a (more) efficient development of home-grown talent. In this context, with the implementation of this specific quality programme, they also want to guide (the managers of) the clubs and the youth academies through the unavoidable process of professionalization. Influenced by these (external) pressures to adopt a more professional design, it is expected that over time there will also be an increase in the level of homogeneity regarding the structural dimensions of these football academies. Thus, in this study the focus is on the impact of the quality system Foot PASS on the structural attributes of a professional football academy.

## METHODS

At the core of the project is the concept of the 'Professional Academy Support System' (Van Hoecke, et al., 2006). Foot PASS PRO is developed in particular for the implementation of total quality and performance management within the youth academy of a professional football club. The actual model focuses on 7 quality dimensions - strategic planning (STRA), organizational structure (ORG), talent development (DEV), supporting activities (SUP), internal marketing (INT), external relations (EXT) and facilities (FAC) - on the one hand and a performance measurement to evaluate the effectiveness (EFF) at the other.

First and foremost, this computerised quality system is used for the objective assessment and certification of these clubs. At the moment, 19 first and second division clubs have been evaluated twice: a first time in the season 2002-2003 and a second time in the season 2005-2006. Between these two measurements, different supporting activities (post-audits, media debates, information sessions for club leaders, management courses for YA Directors, publication of a quality manual, etc.) have been organised to provide the youth academy directors with specific information and professional advice. Besides, most of these directors are using this frame of reference as a useful management tool in order to optimise their internal systems and processes. Anyhow, a better understanding of the quality determining factors and (more) positive evaluation of the organisational elements (e.g. facilities, procedures, systems) will enhance satisfaction by all stakeholders (players, parents, coaches, etc.) and largely determines the success of the youth academies.

## RESULTS

The main objective of this longitudinal study is to examine the impact of the Foot PASS project on the degree of professionalization of the youth academies in Belgian professional football clubs (N=19). To achieve this, objective data about 46 structural attributes are brought together per quality dimension of Foot PASS for 2003 and 2006. The differences between the measurements have been statically calculated by using One-way ANOVA. Based on the positive progress for all means of these dimensions (see Table 1), it can be concluded that the youth academies under consideration have changed at least in the right direction. Moreover, significant differences ( $P < 0,05$ ) are found for all means, except for facilities (FAC) and effectiveness (EFF). The fact is

that the number of throughput of home-grown players into the first team of the clubs, which is considered to be the central goal of any professional youth academy, seems to have decreased from 5,7 till 4,8.

Table 1: availability of CSF in 2003 and 2006 structured by the quality dimensions of Foot PASS.

N=19	CSF	2003		2006		Sig.	
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	P<0,05	
	<b>STRA</b>	5	2,37	1,64	3,89	1,33	,003*
	<b>ORG</b>	6	2,21	1,87	3,89	1,66	,006*
	<b>DEV</b>	16	8,21	3,22	12,74	2,18	,000*
	<b>SUP</b>	7	2,95	1,75	4,47	1,81	,012*
	<b>INT</b>	5	2,84	1,30	4,16	1,17	,002*
	<b>EXT</b>	3	1,21	1,08	2,37	0,68	,000*
	<b>FAC</b>	4	1,74	1,19	2,21	1,32	,253

Table 2: profiles of structural design attributes for the 5 clusters in 2006 related to the mean overall scores on Foot PASS.

Cluster	1 (n=7)	2 (n=4)	3 (n=2)	4 (n=2)	5 (n=4)
<b>Specialization</b>	Medium/High	High	Medium	Medium/High	Low/Medium
<i>of management</i>	<i>Very Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Very Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Very Low</i>
<i>of sport technical staff</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>
<i>of the organisational structure</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Very High</i>	<i>Very High</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>
<i>in qualification</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>
<b>Standardization</b>	High	Very High	High	Medium	Medium
<i>of administration</i>	<i>Very High</i>	<i>Very High</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Medium</i>
<i>of sport technical programmes</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Very High</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>of decision making</i>	<i>Very High</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>
<i>of evaluation procedures</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Very High</i>	<i>Very High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>
<b>(De)centralization</b>	Medium	High	High	High	Low
<i>Involvement in decision making</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Very High</i>	<i>Very High</i>	<i>Low</i>
<i>Involvement of stakeholders</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Very Low</i>
<b>Foot PASS (Total score)</b>	63,9%	68,2%	57,5%	62,0%	48,3%

Although this general (but moderate) shift towards a more professional organisation type, important differences in structural design attributes are still found between these 19 clubs. Using the framework of Kikulis et al. (1989), based on the assessment of the 3 structural dimensions 'specialization', 'standardization' and 'centralization', the clubs are clustered in 5 homogenous groups by the Ward method of hierarchical agglomerative clustering. This five-cluster solution not only explains the data set the best but also fits with the total scores of the Foot PASS evaluation.

## **DISCUSSION**

Referring to Slack and Hinings (1994), we can conclude that in spite of the general movement towards the prescribed design type of a youth academy, which is professional and more bureaucratic in nature, our data also demonstrate that some organisational characteristics do not change to the same extent as others. In general, the degree of standardization has increased the most, especially with regard to sport technical programmes and evaluation procedures of the structural dimensions. While the clubs in our study show considerable evidence of structural conformity to the quality system Foot PASS, they also demonstrate resistance. Among others, this probably also explains the different speeds of change among the clubs.

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