

# Total Quality Management in Youth Academies of (Professional) Football Clubs: Innovation through Co-operation

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## Introduction

Total Quality Management (TQM) is defined as an organisation wide management approach that seeks to achieve quality through the participation of all stakeholders, by aiming at long-term success through customer satisfaction and benefits to all members of the organisation and society. Therefore, all primary, supporting and managerial processes have to be designed in a manner that ensures continuously optimal quality and added value in order to maximise the realisation of the stakeholders' aims (Mills & Tilley, 1992).

Customer satisfaction in professional football clubs (Youth Academies) is created by reaching the maximum potential of each young footballer, thereby giving them the very best chance of a career in football. Referring to the fundamentals of TQM, this asks for high standards of coaching and education (Youth Academy benefits), continuous improvement of all procedures (innovation) and total involvement and commitment (co-operation) of all stakeholders (staff, coaches, parents, etc.).

On the other hand long-term success of professional football clubs (as a result of this customer satisfaction) is guaranteed by the move up (throughput) of home grown players at the 1st team level. By consequence, in professional football clubs TQM is creating a mutual benefit: for the club (an increasingly valuable asset base) and the football scholars (becoming a professional player).

## Method / Project

The mission of this project is to ensure the future (success) of Belgian football (clubs) by means of the introduction of the principals of TQM in (professional) youth academies. Therefore, it is essential that all stakeholders in- and outside the clubs are involved and feel committed during the several stages of this long-term process. At the core of this project is a specific, (multi)-functional quality (assurance) system - QIKFoot<sup>®</sup> - that can be used on different levels for several purposes:

- *macro level*: the co-ordinating football association can use this quality evaluation system for the objective evaluation and certification of their well-functioning clubs (licensing or labelling). Furthermore, the accompanying monitoring tool, based on accurate data, can help them to (re)direct the clubs' strategy towards effective and efficient youth academies.
- *meso level*: the clubs and academies in particular, can use this frame of reference as an informative management tool in order to optimise their internal systems and processes. They can use it also as an extra (objective) argument to convince others to invest (more) in youth development.
- *micro level*: 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, ...) and largely determines the success of the academy.

The implementation of QIKFoot<sup>®</sup> will be conducted in three major stages in order to create a long-lasting upward spiral towards excellence:

- *'defining the quality standards'*: in this first stage (2000-2002) it is imperative to involve various stakeholders in the definition of the (sports specific) standards to obtain a Gestalt view of these organisations. Moreover, in order to create a solid basis for the next stages, it is important to communicate continually with the field.
- *'improving through evaluation'*: the main objective for this first implementation is measuring with an eye to improvement (bridging the gap). In this stage (2003-2005), QIKFoot<sup>®</sup> is primarily used as a tool for evaluation (self diagnosis), change (management) and benchmarking. The reporting of the results is done by means of clusters (certification levels) to preserve less successful clubs from discouragement. Permanent counselling is necessary to guide the clubs towards innovation.

- *'positioning by quality'*: in the final stage (2006-2008), QIKFoot© will be used as a marketing tool for positioning clubs with an excellent youth academy. Quality awards and labels will be important (objective) cues for external stakeholders to decrease their perceived risk.

## Results

The TQM matrix of QIKFoot is based on the Total Quality Model for Sport Services (van Bottenburg, et al., 1997) which includes internal and external quality components. Different stakeholders - directly and indirectly engaged in youth academies - were involved in the development of the instrument to get satisfactory information about the several targets of quality evaluation from appropriate judges. The actual model consists of 9 dimensions - 8 enablers and a performance measurement to evaluate effectiveness - and 290 weighted standards quoted on a total of 5000 points.

In the first implementation 33 clubs (91,7%) have been evaluated: 17 1<sup>st</sup> and 16 2<sup>nd</sup> division clubs. The average total score (TOT) is 50,5% ; 58,0% and 42,5% respectively for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> division. Significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) are found between both divisions for 6 dimensions: recruitment (RECR), education (EDU), support (SUP), facilities (FAC), human resources management (HRM) and effectiveness (EFF).

	%	ORG	STRA	RECR	EDU	SUP	FAC	COM	HRM	EFF	TOT
C1 (n=3)	MEAN	90,76	84,34	80,27	74,14	58,25	76,56	82,73	77,95	70,33	76,00
	STDV	3,26	12,73	1,72	2,78	18,79	1,40	13,46	12,92	5,01	4,17
	MED	90,43	79,63	79,43	74,29	65,68	76,42	85,25	77,67	72,71	76,50
C2 (n=5)	MEAN	85,97	66,97	69,59	63,69	48,25	73,96	62,47	55,53	56,36	64,34
	STDV	4,75	16,01	8,57	3,42	8,98	17,00	12,54	12,36	10,93	2,71
	MED	87,00	67,50	71,88	64,57	44,28	70,49	59,08	52,00	58,14	64,10
C3 (n=9)	MEAN	74,16	54,93	63,30	55,65	29,88	62,18	63,06	46,11	54,26	55,78
	STDV	16,77	15,31	7,81	7,46	8,28	6,17	13,44	13,65	19,81	3,56
	MED	81,17	56,75	59,70	54,63	28,25	63,64	65,00	48,00	57,14	57,00
C4 (n=7)	MEAN	69,35	49,45	45,20	46,59	16,20	53,01	53,52	34,14	36,86	45,34
	STDV	17,92	7,14	12,97	5,20	6,34	6,23	8,47	8,79	10,52	2,53
	MED	67,93	52,45	46,58	46,41	18,28	49,36	50,63	33,83	34,51	44,70
C5 (n=9)	MEAN	54,08	27,34	39,79	33,41	13,32	41,93	38,72	23,02	25,08	33,07
	STDV	16,51	14,96	23,52	6,23	5,44	5,81	11,12	7,45	12,79	6,00
	MED	47,10	30,05	44,63	33,17	11,38	42,02	33,95	21,33	25,71	33,30
TOTAL (N=33)	MEAN	70,96	50,74	55,55	50,56	27,83	57,80	56,10	41,60	44,39	50,51
	STDV	18,91	21,74	19,82	14,25	17,49	14,71	17,13	19,33	20,16	14,33
	MED	75,83	52,45	58,98	48,09	25,20	57,47	54,95	37,33	45,00	51,30

Based on 3 parameters (i.e. total score, sub scores per dimension and 20 CSF) 5 clusters have been developed: C1 - Summa cum laude (3 clubs), C2 - Advanced (5 clubs), C3 - Respectable (9 clubs), C4 - Adequate (7 clubs) and C5 - Youth Academy in development (9 clubs). The means, standard deviations and medians for the subscales are presented in table 1. One-way ANOVA shows significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between these subgroups for the total scores and most sub scores.

## Discussion

An evaluation of the project has shown that QIKFoot© is currently accepted in the field as an adequate frame of reference for youth academies of professional football clubs. In a questionnaire, returned by 21 clubs, the general value of this management tool is rated 'good' (13x) up to 'very good' (8x). Moreover, 81% of the clubs states that they have already put the plans into action. These positive developments are confirmed during the post-audits in which most of the clubs asked, among other things, for a permanent help-desk, a quality manual and specific courses for technical directors of youth academies in order to keep this project actual all the time. It is also an indication that they are prepared to learn from others outside the club; innovation through co-operation!

**References**

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