

Academy football and data-driven analysis

A Kognia Report

Kognia Sports Intelligence

2025 global survey

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Introducing the Kognia Global Academy Survey 2025 Report.



Maurici A. López-Felip

CEO & Co-founder, Kognia Sports Intelligence

Thank you for taking the time to read the first Kognia global survey on data-driven analysis in academy football.

Our inaugural global survey provides crucial insights into the current landscape and future potential of leveraging tactical data for player development. This comprehensive analysis, drawing on responses from 43 professionals across various academies, highlights both the opportunities and the significant challenges in integrating data effectively. Understanding these dynamics is paramount as we strive to support clubs and federations in optimising development pathways and nurturing young talent.

The findings reveal a complex picture where the importance of data is widely recognised, yet its full potential remains largely untapped due to a confluence of cultural, practical, and technological hurdles. Furthermore, there's a clear need for enhanced staff and player training to ensure coaches, analysts and players can interpret it and translate it into actionable decisions.

Addressing these challenges - from fostering a data-driven culture and upskilling our personnel to improving interdepartmental integration and selecting appropriate technological tools - will be critical. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that data best serves the academies and their specific objectives, regardless how they may differ.

This survey offers a strategic roadmap for how we can better harness data to guide and accompany our young players on their journey.

A stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maurici'.

Mauri

Introducing the Kognia Global Academy Survey 2025 Report.

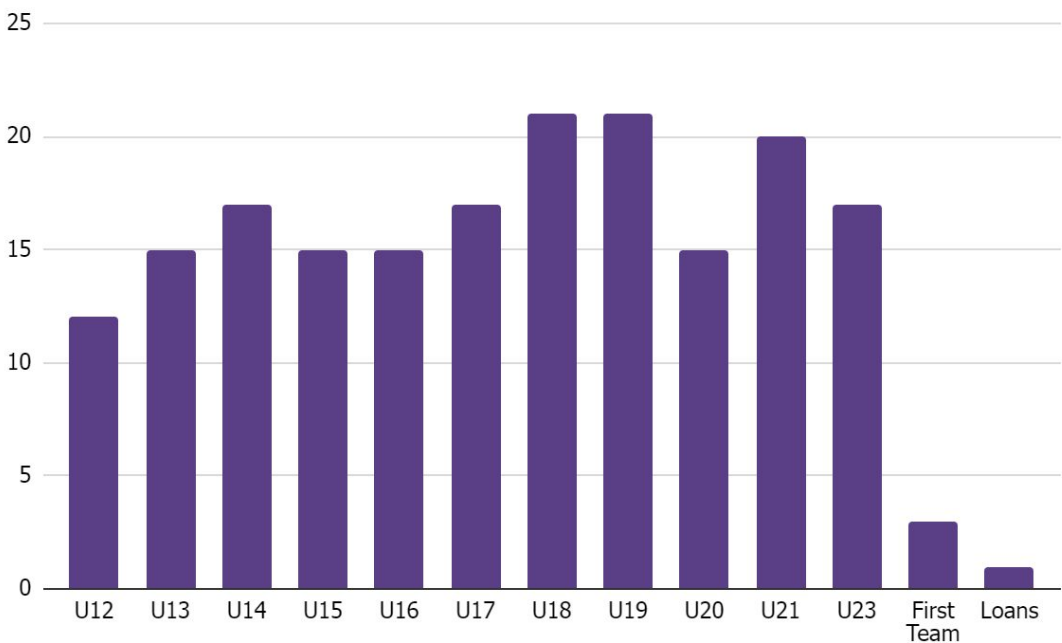
The survey launched on 29th October 2025, staying open until 17th November, providing the analyst community almost three weeks to respond and share their views and insights.

With 43 responses from 17 different countries, we are confident that the findings provide detailed and applicable insights that can:

- Shine a light on current academy analysis processes
- Identify where there is room for growth
- Demonstrate how organisations such as Kognia can better support academies when it comes to player development

Of these 43 responses, the age groups covered by analysts was diverse, with representation from U12 through to U23 (and some senior representation).

U18 & U19 were the most common age group that respondents worked with, however over 50% of the sample work with multiple age groups



Data availability.

“Data is only as good as the individual reading it. The knowledge to understand what you are looking at is a vital part, having the right person in-house to tackle the data is vital.”

Youth team analyst, based in the Republic of Ireland

74% of respondents noted their academies had access to physical data, whereas only 40% of respondents had access to tactical data



Within academies who are collecting tactical data, the majority are doing so via “in-house” techniques compared to using third parties.

Physical data is the type of data that is integrated within most academies, but tactical data is considered more important

When discussing the importance of physical data, 11 (26%) respondents ranked this with the highest possible answer (5/5).

When asked the same question was asked in the context of tactical data, the level of respondents who provided a 5/5 rank grew to 15 (35%).

Expert Kognia analysis, Ryan DeFreitas (former Manchester City and Leicester City analyst):



Physical data has long been collected via wearable devices, meaning the practitioner needs only process and visualise that information. To have technical and tactical data that is insightful enough to work alongside one another to influence decision-making and player development can take significant investment.

Physical data shouldn't be given more focus simply because it may be cheaper, less time intensive or has been “normal” for longer. It is time to move away from the narrative that performance analysis is a young discipline and start fully integrating the collection of technical and tactical data in to club processes. That narrative was acceptable 15 years ago. The importance of the discipline and the availability of a variety solutions for the collection of data means it is no longer acceptable.

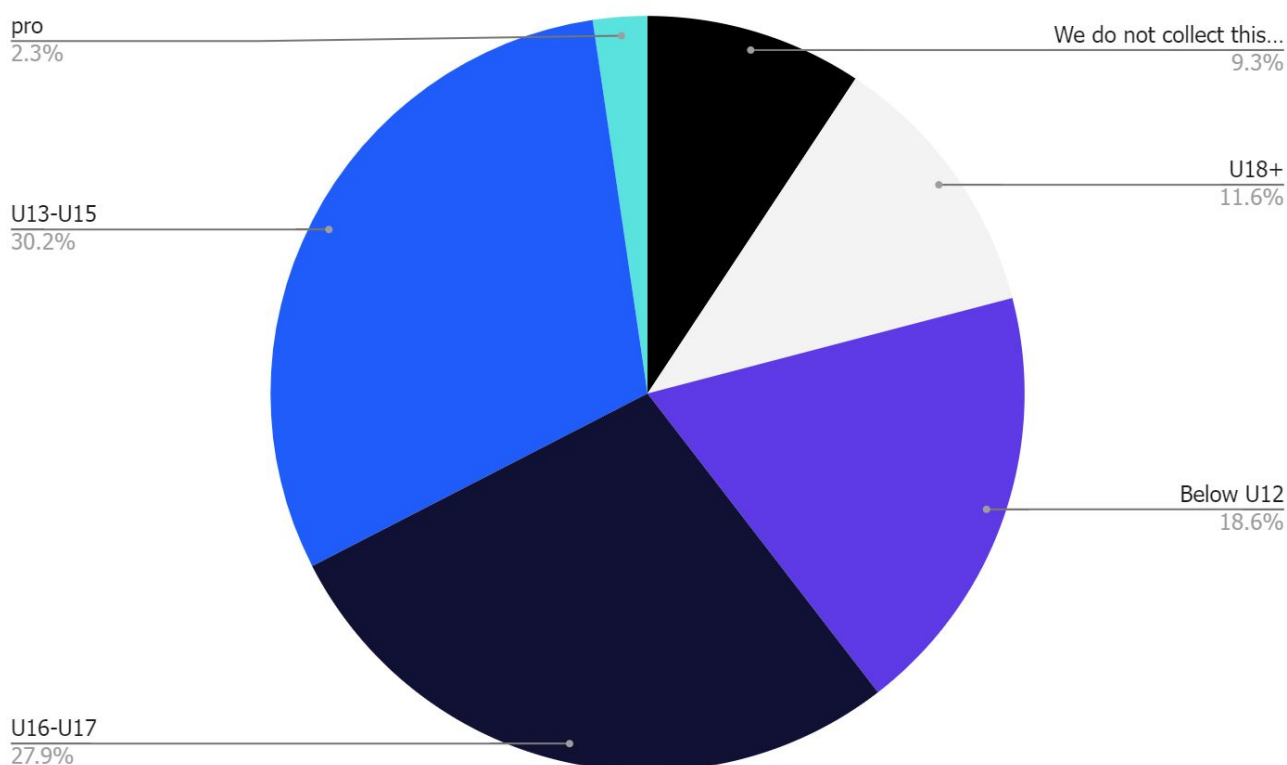
Feedback. Development. Benchmarking.

“Data analysis can definitely support the development of young players in different ways. For me the most important are:

- 1. Long-term tracking, a big range of players so you can compare different items and predict the future development.*
- 2. Individualize the plans for each player, or group of players.*
- 3. Being objective, having a good intuition it is okay sometimes, but if you can complement what you can see with some data it is better for yourself and the player.”*

U16/U18 analyst, who has worked in two European countries

From **U13–U15 is when the majority of respondents began their tactical & event data collection**



The majority of respondents began event and tactical data collection from U13–U15. Collection at this level was not aligned with one of two specific countries, and was spread across multiple.

Of the 15 who ranked the importance of tactical data as 5/5, 10 were part of the sample who collected tactical data from this younger age.

Feedback. Development. Benchmarking.

60% of academies do not use the same benchmarking data and KPIs as the first-team.

Perhaps the most notable statistic, the majority of clubs are not using the same benchmarking data as the first team when it comes to player development. While on first glance this may be surprising, this can often be for valid reasons.

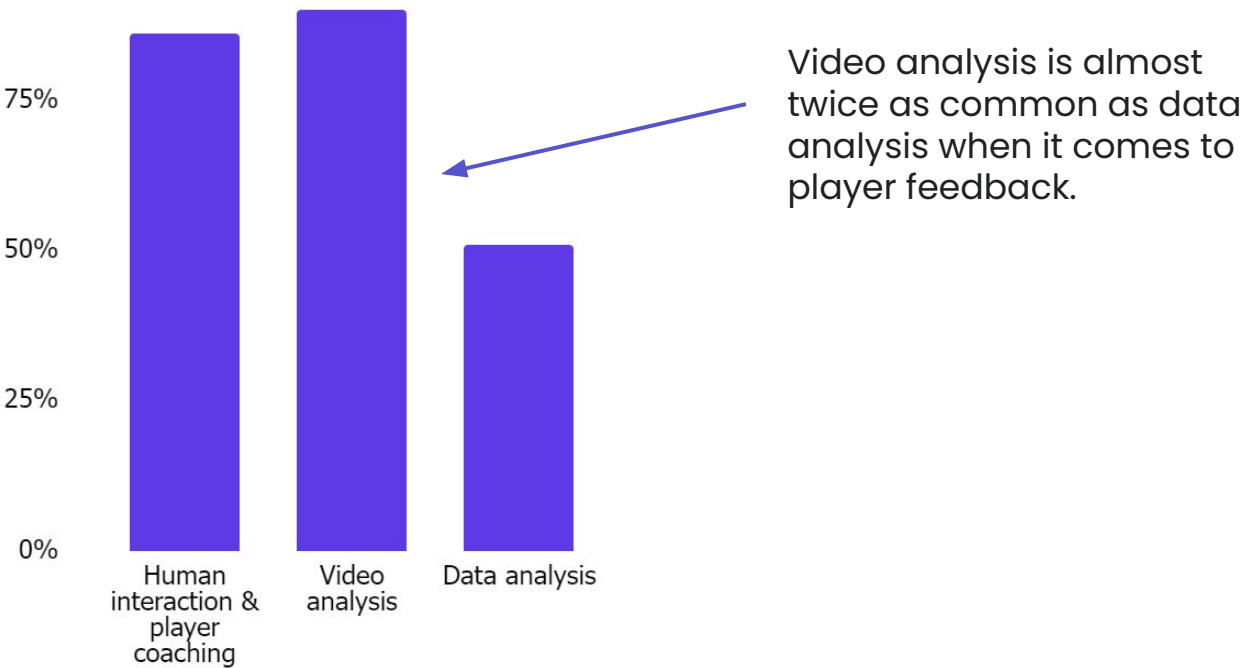
Expert view: Ryan DeFreitas, Kognia Sports Intelligence

PERFORMANCE ≠ DEVELOPMENT

It is important that academies have a philosophy of “play and development” and to monitor that might not be the same as monitoring KPIs that contribute to successful performance (i.e. winning). We want young players to be brave and enter scenarios that are difficult in order to develop a range of tools that will serve them effectively as they become professionals. It is important, though, that some level of consistency is present. Without it you will never have a tool to assess when players are 1st team ready or fit the required positional profiles that your 1st team demand.

I would always recommend collecting what is relevant and that includes player development but it also very much includes player progression.

How does your academy analyse players' technical performances to support improvement and development plans?



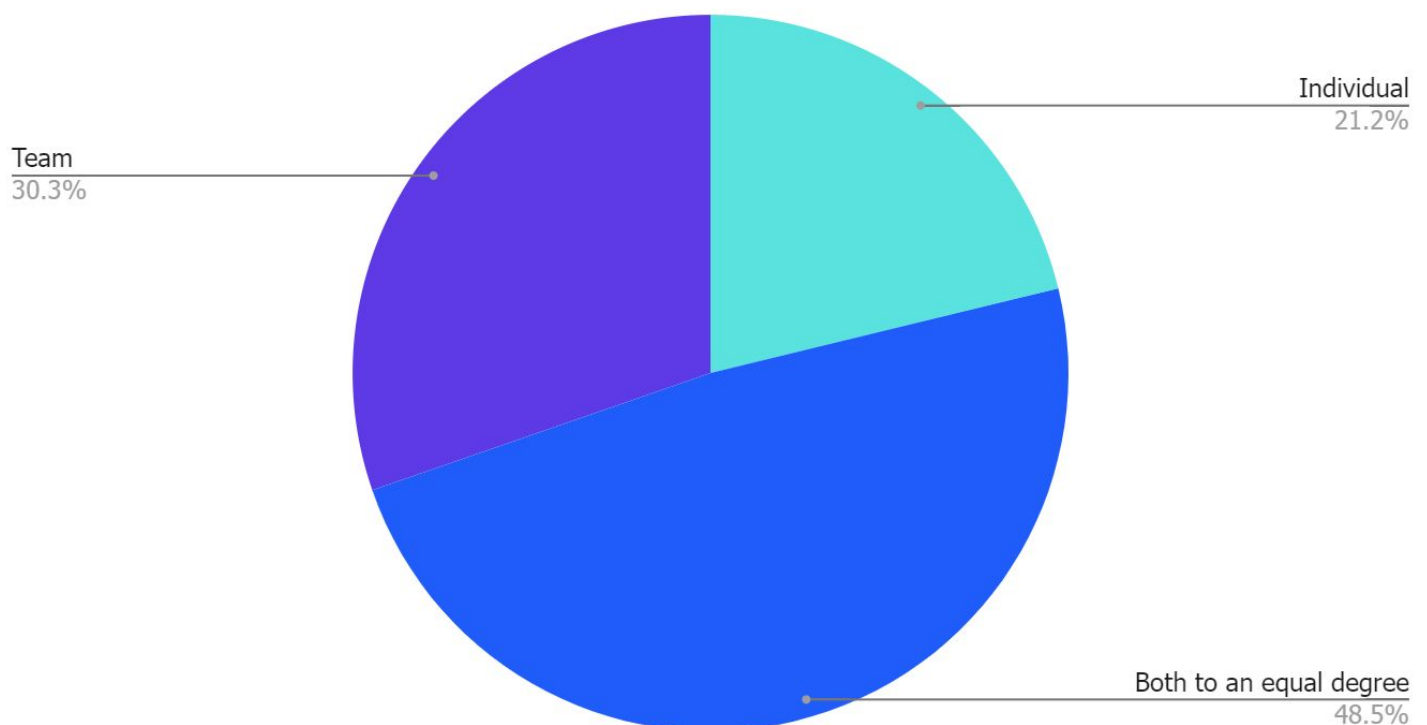
Feedback. Development. Benchmarking.

Almost half of respondents gave equal weighting when asked if the focus was on the **team** or **individuals** in the context of academy analysis

As with benchmarking and first-team comparisons, there is no definitive right answer on the best approach when assessing this area of analysis.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, striking that balance is key as there are often numerous possible objectives when it comes to academy development.

1. Winning (particularly in the context of cup competitions)
2. Develop first-team ready players
3. Produce individuals who may have a professional career, even if not at the parent club



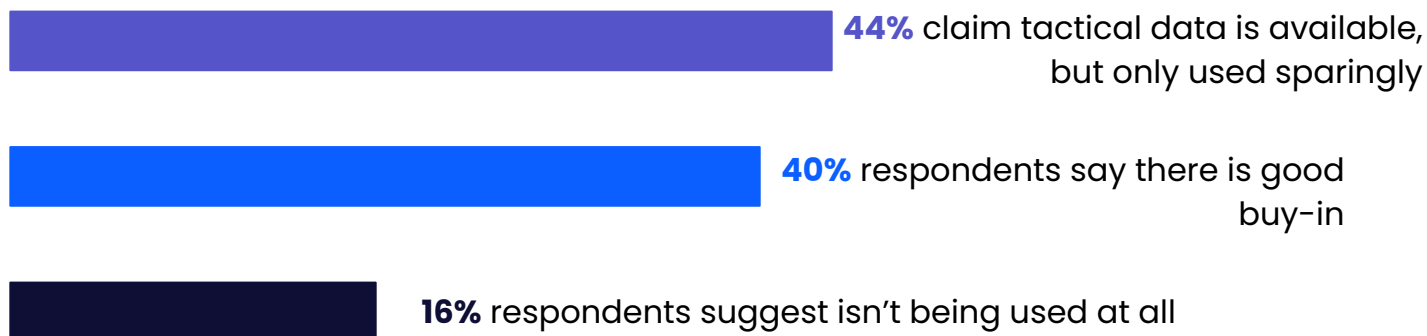
Implementation. Buy-in.

No respondent said their use of data in this context was “industry-leading”

There are clear barriers when it comes to tactically driven data analysis at academy level when compared to what we are seeing in first-team environments across Europe.

- Quality of footage
- The collection of data on U18 players
- Available resources in academy football
- Overall club priorities and ambitions

When we asked how academies would describe their level of tactical analysis, this is what we found:



Of the respondents who confirmed there was “good buy-in and application across the department” (40% of the respondents) – 100% of those are part of academy teams who begin collecting event and tactical data by the time a player is 16, and in the majority of cases this begins well before. Five respondents acknowledged this process started from the U12 level.

How can data analysis can support the development of young players?

"We create metrics & KPI's that the club think that are important to become a professional player at this team."

"Once you have the insights, we need to make decisions and set up a plan to improve the player. We'll create an individual player development plan in which we handle different, but clear points of improvement."

"It's important to get them (players) to buy into data analysis at an early age in the academy. This way as they progress through the age groups, hopefully ending at the first team, they are used to data analysis."

"Clear benchmarking and profiling allows you to identify a player's position within their development process and identify when and what type of interventions need to be made at that stage, ideally with past data from past players as a reference."

"For me the most importants are:

- 1. Long-term tracking, manage data of a big range of players so you can compare and predict future development.*
- 2. Individualize the plans for each player, or group of players.*
- 3. Being objective, having a good intuition is okay sometimes, but if you can complement what you can see with data it is better for yourself and the player."*

"It's a little piece of a big puzzle"

What are the biggest challenges regarding implementation of data at the academy level

“Alignment with first team, consistency of metrics and providers, player ownership over data, navigation of politics particularly in relation to recruitment or recruitment-related decisions.”

“Is the data reliable and how do we interpret it?”

“SLT and coach education - how to utilise, interpret, understanding what data does and doesn't give you.”

“Inconsistency of coverage between age groups”

“First of all you need good provider(s) with reliable data and the club needs to build a clear structure on how data will be used across departments. Then you'll need staff that can work with all this data in creating datasets, dashboards. You need staff that can get insights from dashboards. You need staff that can translate insights into action. So creating a clear vision and employing the right staff are the biggest challenges for me.”

If you started a job at a brand new academy, how would you approach data analysis?

“Same benchmarking across age groups”

“We need to spend more time looking at the dynamics of the teams and players. Rather than events that happen. Why does it happen? And what does not happen?”

“Start on problems coaches have and work backwards”

“Get as much historical data as I could afford either through buying existing datasets or retrospectively coding our matches, use this to profile pathways of each player and group by different levels (e.g. PL debut, EFL debut, released etc), identify trends in this dataset to build clear benchmarks that become club standard and stay relatively rigid due to being determined from such a large sample.”

If there's anything you have read in this report that you would like to discuss further, please get in touch.

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