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# PROMOTING, FOSTERING AND DEVELOPING FOOTBALL FOR ALL

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The Irish FA's Five-Year Strategy  
2017-2022





# IRISH FA FIVE-YEAR PLAN 2017-2022

NORTHERN  
Home of the Pen





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# FOREWORD: IRISH FA PRESIDENT

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In a specially designed cabinet in the new Education and Heritage Centre there is a carefully preserved minute book detailing the first ever meeting of the Irish Football Association.

The date, 18 November 1880, is handwritten in fountain pen and the unique piece of Northern Ireland football history records in fantastic detail how Cliftonville famously issued an invitation to the other clubs in Belfast to follow the lead of clubs in England, Scotland and Wales to form their own association.

The seven founding clubs were Alexander, Avoniel, Cliftonville, Distillery, Knock, Moyola Park and Oldpark. We owe the representatives who gathered around the table that night in the Queen's Hotel almost 138 years ago a great deal. It is their vision and passion for the game of association football that we carry on today. That historic meeting also serves as a reminder that the Association was founded by clubs and to this day continues to exist to serve its member clubs.

More recently, in 2013, the Irish FA launched an ambitious strategic plan –

**We're Not Brazil, We're Northern Ireland.** Originally planned to run until 2018, it set out bold aims: to qualify for a major tournament; to deliver a National Stadium; to foster a balanced, flourishing senior game; to create a healthy domestic game at all levels; to reach beyond the game and to build a culture of lifelong participation in football.

More than a year ahead of the conclusion of the timeframe outlined in **We're Not Brazil, We're Northern Ireland**, with many of our objectives met, and in view of the changing economic and political outlook, it's time for

a new five-year plan to continue to drive the association forward and to further promote, foster and grow football in Northern Ireland.

We want our international teams to challenge every time and to qualify every other time. With the National Football Stadium now complete and officially opened in October 2016, we now want to rebuild the football estate. We want to help our top clubs be more successful in Europe and want to reinvigorate the recreational game across all levels. We want our stadium to be commercially





**DAVID J MARTIN**  
IRISH FA PRESIDENT

successful while at the same time maintaining its special place as the home of football in Northern Ireland. As an Association we want to make as positive a contribution as possible to civic life in Northern Ireland and to be an efficient, well run organisation capable of delivering for everyone in the country.

I often wonder what those men who gathered in 1880 would make of the Irish Football Association now. I am sure they would marvel at the new state-of-the-art National Football Stadium that their successors have provided for the people of

Northern Ireland. They would share our pride at our senior men's international team having represented Northern Ireland at UEFA Euro 2016 in France. While it would have been far from the agenda back then, I am sure that they would be impressed at the rapid growth of women's football in Northern Ireland and share our excitement at hosting tournaments such as the UEFA Under-19 Women's Championship in the summer of 2017 and the Under-19 Men's Championship in the summer of 2020.

The four British Associations in 1886 formed the International Football Association Board to standardise the laws of the game. I believe that the Irish FA has continued to be at the cutting edge of any changes in the world's most popular sport.

Above all, perhaps our founding fathers would be most pleased at the number of people playing football in Northern Ireland and our absolute commitment to promoting, fostering and developing football for all.

David J Martin,  
**Irish FA President**



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# IRISH FA VALUES

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## THE IRISH FA'S VISION:

To promote, foster and develop football for all in NI

## THE IRISH FA'S INSPIRATIONAL DREAM:

To inspire every child in Northern Ireland to be a part of our football family and to dream of wearing the green shirt.



## THE ASSOCIATION'S CORE VALUES: PITCH

# PROFESSIONAL

We must be professional in all we do, meticulous in our planning and execution, leaving no stone unturned and nothing to chance.

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# INCLUSIVE

Football is truly for all and must be inclusive. Everyone loves the game regardless of gender, religion, politics, race or sexual orientation. We will continue to work to ensure all individuals and groups feel comfortable and welcome within the game in whatever role they fulfil.

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# TEAM

The Irish FA must work as a team, each with his or her own task as part of a greater whole – knowing our roles and supporting and encouraging other members of the team as we seek to achieve our winning goals.

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# CARING AND CONFIDENT

The Irish FA recognises its duty of care for all involved in the game – players, officials, supporters, referees, administrators. We have a responsibility to lead by example and ensure that all children and young people who participate in Association programmes do so in a positive, secure environment that is free from abuse and harm. The Irish FA must be confident that what we are doing is correct in all aspects of our work and that appropriate safeguards are in place.

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# HONESTY

Being honest, saying it as it is, i.e. not being underhand or devious. Honesty and integrity are watch words for the Irish FA.



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# INTRODUCTION

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The past four years have been among the most significant in the 137-year history of the Irish Football Association.

Our senior men's team qualified for a major tournament for the first time in 30 years. Michael O'Neill's team made history with that famous 2-0 win over Ukraine in Lyon and reached the last 16 of UEFA EURO 2016. The success of the summer of 2016 saw unprecedented interest in the Northern Ireland senior men's team. More than 40,000 people attended the fan-zone in Belfast's Titanic Quarter. The shirt was the best selling item of apparel in JD Sports three weeks running. Following UEFA Euro 2016 more than 50,000 people applied for just 3,000 campaign cards for the FIFA World Cup 2018 Russia qualifiers.

In October 2016 the new National Football Stadium at Windsor Park was officially opened. Supported by funding from the Northern Ireland Executive, it is now a transformed arena, a state-of-the-art home of football for everyone in Northern Ireland.

One of the most significant changes in recent years has been the formation of The Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL) at the start of the 2013/14 season. NIFL is the organising body of the Danske Bank Premiership, the NIFL Championship, the Premier Intermediate League, the League Cup, the Premiership and Championship Development Leagues as well as the Danske Bank Women's

Premiership and League Cup, with responsibility for the administration and commercial rights of these competitions.

Under NIFL's stewardship attendances have gone up year on year (12% in the first half of the 2016/17 season) and in March 2017 it agreed a new long term commercial deal with Danske Bank for the title sponsorship of the Premiership and Women's Premiership. Coverage of the Premiership is greater than ever before with BBC Northern Ireland showing highlights on Final Score and on a dedicated online programme. Sky Sports will show five Danske Bank Premiership fixtures and the NIFL League Cup Final in each of the next five seasons.

Significantly, BBC Sport NI will now also have a dedicated online programme to show the Danske Bank Women's Premiership.

We now have more people playing the game in Northern Ireland than ever before. The Irish FA has grown participation to approximately 58,000 young people between the ages of four and 24. In total, across small sided games, our primary schools programme, futsal and our disability initiatives, numbers are up by 16% year-on-year.



This success was founded on a strategy written in 2013 that set out an ambitious vision until 2018.

Called *We're Not Brazil, We're Northern Ireland*, it documented the association's goals up until 2018.

Those were to:

- Qualify for a major tournament
- Deliver a National Stadium
- Foster a balanced, flourishing senior domestic game
- Create a healthy domestic game at all levels
- Reach beyond the game
- Build a culture of lifelong participation in football

With the progress that the Irish FA has achieved over the past four years many of the goals that were set out in the 2013-18 strategic plan have now been met.



# WE'RE NOT BRAZIL, WE'RE NORTHERN IRELAND: **REVIEW**

<b>Qualify for a major tournament</b>			
	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Appoint an Elite Performance Manager			
Reconstruct Elite Coaching			
Identify Talent / Support Scouting			
Consolidate Elite Player Support			

<b>Deliver a new national stadium</b>			
	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Complete new stadium			
Create a stadium management company			
Adopt sub regional facility strategy			
Develop a national training centre			

<b>Foster a balanced, flourishing senior domestic game</b>			
	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Establish an independent body to manage senior football			
Review numbers of divisions and teams in our leagues and promote elite youth development in clubs			
Reduce debt burden among senior clubs			
Maximise value of senior football			

### Create a healthy domestic game at all levels

	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Introduce a club mark to support and develop amateur clubs	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Streamline and modernise models of football administration	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Consider establishing an amateur board to further develop the game	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Create clear strategies for women's, boys' and schools' football	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved

### Reach beyond the game

	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Launch a respect programme	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Use the power of football to foster community and personal development	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Strengthen partnerships targeting social need	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved

### Build a culture of lifelong involvement in football

	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Evolve and celebrate football in Northern Ireland	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Develop and promote a positive plan for disability football	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Excite our young people and give them a voice in the future of football	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Capture the passion of volunteers in football and the community	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved
Collaborate through sport to make a difference	Achieved	In Progress	Not Achieved



# THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The scale of economic uncertainty across the globe is almost unprecedented. Following a period of strong labour market growth since the turn of the decade, the UK vote to leave the European Union and recent local uncertainty around the Northern Ireland public expenditure budget has created an environment where businesses, investors and consumers are uncertain on the 'terms of trade' over the medium term.

Since 2012, Northern Ireland has emerged from a deep recession and has been enjoying strong job growth. In fact, employee jobs have increased by close to 40,000 since a low point in early 2012. Forecasts for the UK and NI from Ulster University suggest that growth will continue, but in two distinct phases – a 'Brexit Impact' phase where the pace of growth is expected to decline and then a 'Bounce Back' phase later in this decade when UK growth is expected to get back to c.2% per annum and NI growth is expected to accelerate to c.1.5% per annum.

The level of uncertainty surrounding economic forecasts is unprecedented due to a range of factors that are beginning to take hold or emerge including recent political instability, and a lack of an agreed public expenditure budget for Northern Ireland. Perhaps chief among the economic changes

facing Northern Ireland, from the perspective of the IFA, is the emerging cost of living squeeze and the implications it may have for spending patterns on leisure or spectating, coupled with changing employment and demographic trends.

## **COST OF LIVING SQUEEZE**

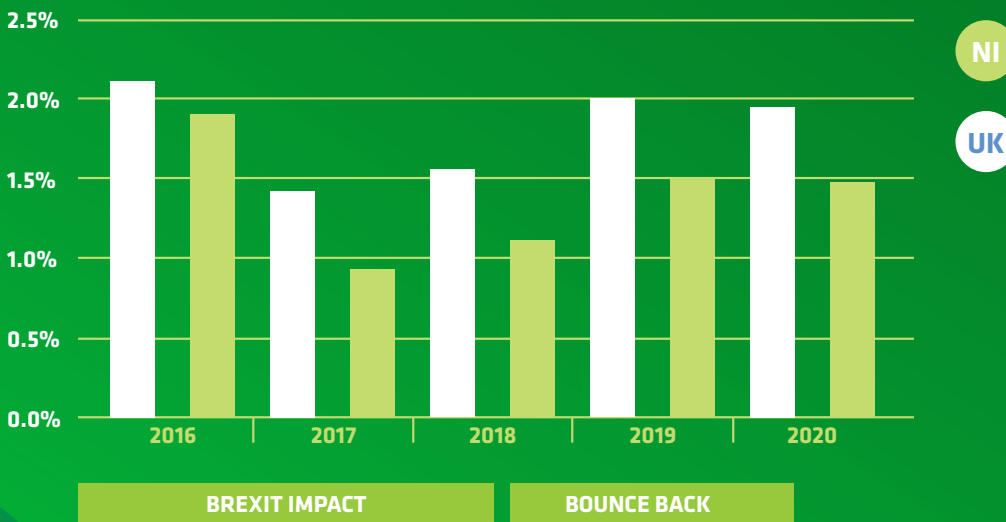
Northern Ireland has experienced a decade of stagnant wages. The chart overleaf shows that, in current prices, average wages are only now back at 2006 levels, having fallen considerably in the years following the global economic crash.

An era of low inflation has contributed to offset this real wage decline but the expectations are, from the Bank of England, that inflation will increase over 2017. Indeed, there is some tentative evidence emerging that consumer spending has run out of

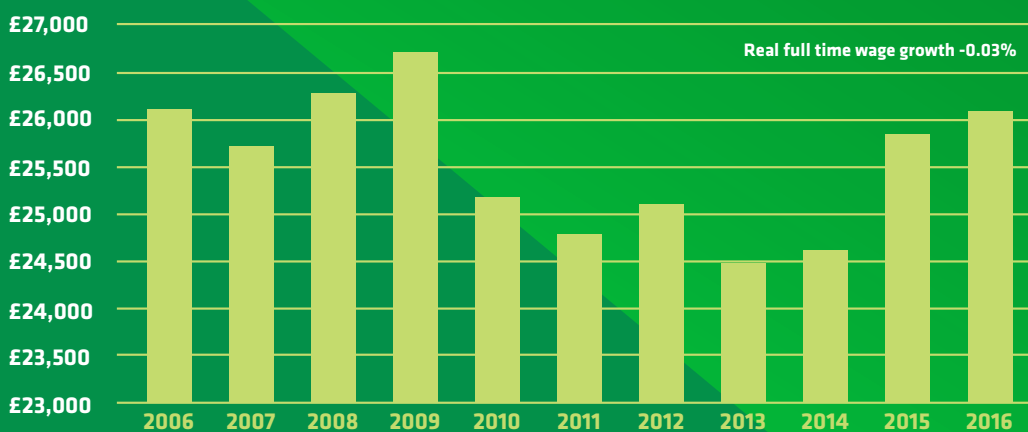
steam, and that higher inflation on essential items such as petrol and diesel is diverting spending away from discretionary spend.

For example, data from Barclaycard, which processes close to half the UK's credit and debit card transactions, shows that while consumer spending was up 4% in February 2017, expenditure on 'nice to have' goods was reversing, with department store spending down 5.2% and spending on electronics down 4.5%. Spending on petrol forecourts was up nearly 20%. Barclaycard's data suggests consumers are prioritising 'experience' purchases and social occasions over physical goods. In the medium term, inflation is expected to tick up to 2.4% by the beginning of the next decade.

## REAL GVA GROWTH RATE, UK VS. NI 2016-2020



## GROSS ANNUAL FULL TIME EARNINGS IN 2016 PRICES, NI, 2006-2016



### SHIFTING LABOUR TRENDS

A shifting labour market landscape, where part-time employment is delivering a majority of new jobs, is evident across Northern Ireland. Back in 1992, 25% of jobs here were part-time. Today that figure has increased to 45%. This impacts on confidence and decisions around housing purchases and other 'big ticket' consumer items.

### AN OLDER POPULATION

Northern Ireland's population profile is changing. By 2022, the NI Statistics and Research Agency suggest that our population will have reached just over 1.9 million. Within this total, the number of people aged 60 or above is expected to increase by over 50,000 from today's number meaning that one in four people here will be over 60 in 2022. At the other end of the age scale, the number of people

aged 0-14 is expected to increase but the key consumer group in the 15-29 age group will decline by 12,000 between now and 2022.

The selection of issues noted above all provide a downside risk to economic performance and consumer confidence. That said, consumer behaviour has confounded commentators since the UK vote to leave the European Union, with few expecting the increases that have been evident.

Latest forecasts from the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre are noting a significant divergence between their baseline forecasts and a lower and upper band scenario. In the baseline scenario, Northern Ireland is expected to increase its employment by 32,000 over the decade to 2026. A hard Brexit outcome could see this reverse to a 5,000 loss of jobs. Under

a scenario where corporation tax is lowered and an assumption that a range of economic policies are successfully implemented could drive a growth in employment of close to 90,000 additional jobs.

It is evident from the current socio-economic context that Northern Ireland faces a challenging environment. The current context is not without opportunity. The expected reduction in corporation tax, if successfully implemented, will bring new corporate entities to Northern Ireland and new commercial opportunities to the IFA. In addition consumer engagement with technology is changing the way spectators engage with sport, through streaming and social media. This too brings potential commercial opportunities. The IFA is alert to the challenges of the economic context and also to the opportunities that lie ahead.



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# TIME FOR A NEW STRATEGY

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To maintain growth and to continue to promote, foster and develop football for all in Northern Ireland, the board of the Irish FA decided in late 2016 to begin the process of formulating a new strategy that would ultimately run from 2017 until 2022.

Another significant factor that motivated the decision to create a new strategy was that qualification for UEFA EURO 2016 and reaching the last 16 of the tournament meant that the association benefited financially.

A new plan was required to ensure that the legacy of UEFA EURO 2016 has an impact on every level of football in Northern Ireland and that we use that funding to make sure that qualification for major tournaments doesn't just happen once in every generation but is something that happens regularly for all our international teams.

We want to build on the foundations laid in recent years and set new targets that will benefit the whole game in Northern Ireland.

To that end, and following consultations across the football family, we have set six new long term objectives.



Challenge every time, qualify every other time

Rebuild the football estate

Break the top 40 in European leagues

Reinvigorate the everyday game

Build a thriving stadium business

Serve the community better





# CHALLENGE EVERY TIME, QUALIFY EVERY OTHER TIME

When the Northern Ireland senior men's team qualified for UEFA EURO 2016, it created history. It was the first time in 30 years that our country's men's side had made a major tournament and it was the first time that Northern Ireland had competed at the EUROs.

We saw global media interest in Northern Ireland, huge increases in participation, our kit was the best selling item of apparel in JD Sports for three weeks running and qualification saw an £8 million economic benefit to the country.

In short, the effect of the senior men's team qualification was game-changing.

We want every team that represents Northern Ireland - boys, girls, men and women - to compete in qualification and to aim to qualify every other time.

To help achieve that we will:

## **BUILD A NEW NATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE**

We will build a new, state-of-the-art training centre that will serve as a centre of excellence for every Northern Ireland team - from the senior men's and women's international sides down to our youngest Club NI representative team.

Featuring up to six outdoor pitches, medical facilities, a physiotherapy clinic and a gym, this will ensure that every Northern Ireland team prepares at the highest standard of facility ahead of international matches.





### PERFORMANCE ACADEMY

We will work with our Universities to create performance Academies. We have already made progress in this area with Ulster University now the official Northern Ireland partner of the Irish FA's Girls' and Women's Football Academy. We want to replicate this model for young men. This will be aimed at 16-23 year olds and will build a football programme alongside an education pathway.

### TALENT ID MANAGER

We will appoint a full time Talent ID Manager who will be responsible for identifying male and female players at all levels in England and Scotland that can represent Northern Ireland. This person will also work in Northern Ireland to identify the best talent at Irish League clubs.

### PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS

We will establish six performance schools, across the geographical spread of Northern Ireland. Each of these will become a hub for post-primary school players.

In our current JD Club NI set-up our young players receive a maximum of 252 hours of coaching per annum. All the while, their counterparts in the rest of the UK, where the Academy set-up is already the norm, are receiving at least 450-500+ hours per annum. Through the schools programme we will have the opportunity to increase contact time and to better prepare our players to help them succeed in their career ambitions.

Becoming a professional footballer is one of the most competitive careers. As such, it is extremely important that players receive a good quality education. Working with our partner schools will help ensure that players are able to maintain a good school/football balance.

### DEVELOP AN ELITE COACHING METHODOLOGY

We will develop and formalise a Northern Ireland coaching 'DNA' that will inform our coaching - from our youngest Club NI representative side right up to the senior men's international team.



# CHALLENGE EVERY TIME, QUALIFY EVERY OTHER TIME

## INCREASE THE STANDING OF OUR UNDER-AGE TEAMS

We will invest more in our age-grade representative sides. We will provide the best facilities, the best equipment and the best player welfare to ensure that playing for Northern Ireland is the most premium experience possible.

## FURTHER PROMOTE INNOVATIVE TRIALS

In recent years we have been at the forefront of innovative trials, working with corporate partners such as JD to create new ways of discovering talent. Four players joined Club NI through our 'Are You JD Enough?' programme.

We will further promote trials such as these and seek more opportunities to be innovative through sponsor and partner activations.

## BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH CLUBS

We will seek to strengthen and deepen our relationships with our football clubs in Northern Ireland as well as those in England and Scotland. Our NIFL clubs do an excellent job in developing and nurturing talented young footballers in Northern Ireland, both men and women. We need to recognise that more and to support the academy and youth development work that goes on at club level more. With clubs in England and Scotland we want to cover every base in terms of eligibility but we also want to establish best practice across training, preparation for games and player welfare.

## DEVELOP A MENTOR PROGRAMME

We want to establish strong links between our senior internationals and those young boys and girls who are starting out on their football careers. We will create a mentor programme that sees our most experienced male and female players spend time with young players, sharing advice and tips to help them in their career.

## HOST MORE UEFA TOURNAMENTS

In the summer of 2017 we will host the UEFA Under-19 Women's tournament. This will provide a fantastic chance to showcase our country's grounds and facilities. It also means that our Under-19 women's team has the chance to play at that level for the first time.

We have had more success in this area. In December 2016 Northern Ireland was chosen to host the European Under-19 Championship in 2020. The decision by the UEFA Executive Committee said a lot about the positive reputation of the Irish FA within UEFA and follows the excellent work that the team has already put in ahead of the Women's Under-19 Championship.

With the completion of the new National Football Stadium at Windsor Park and with further investment in our club grounds to come, we have the opportunity to host more UEFA tournaments, to let our younger players compete in them and to enable our staff to grow in their capabilities by delivering them.









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# REBUILD THE FOOTBALL ESTATE

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The new National Football Stadium at Windsor Park shows what is possible with vision and investment. The Northern Ireland Executive helped to fund the new stadium, providing £31 million of backing. The new home of football in Northern Ireland is a modern, state-of-the-art arena and we want to build on that legacy by helping to rebuild the football estate. The Department for Communities is set to deliver £36 million of capital investment into the game. We want to be at the forefront of delivering that spend and maximising it for the benefit of all of football in Northern Ireland.

## £31m

funding by Northern Ireland Executive enabled us to build our stadium



## £36m

more funding to be delivered by the Department for Communities





### **NATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE**

We want to use some of the capital spend from the Department for Communities budget to deliver a National Training Centre. A state-of-the-art facility would benefit all of Northern Ireland – from the senior men and women’s sides down to Club NI. We would also use the National Training Centre as a base for clubs to prepare for European competition.

### **STADIA IMPROVEMENTS**

We will deliver several major stadia improvements. These will be significant, high profile redevelopments of NIFL Premiership grounds. These will radically improve the experience for supporters and will improve our chances of hosting further UEFA tournaments by increasing the number of quality stadia that we have in Northern Ireland.

### **PROJECTS**

We will complete up to 20 other smaller projects with clubs outside the NIFL Premiership. These will include intermediate and junior football clubs and will incorporate stadia and training facilities.

### **REGIONAL HUBS**

We will aim to deliver a football hub in each of the new super-councils. This will serve as a host venue for small-sided games and will become the focus for all local Irish FA activity.

### **FUTSAL**

We will work with Northern Ireland’s super-councils to ensure that every local area has a futsal arena and associated equipment.

### **LENDING STRATEGY**

We will develop and deliver a financial service where the association will serve as a lender to ensure that clubs can access the full range of government funds available to them.

### **PITCH STRATEGY**

We will provide subsidised training for club ground-staff and will host workshops and practical demonstrations at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park.



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# BREAK THE TOP 40 IN EUROPEAN LEAGUES

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The Northern Ireland Football League's (NIFL) co-efficient in Europe is 47th out of 54. This is based on performance in Europe. Qualification for the group stages of the Europa League or Champions League can result in a hugely significant windfall of UEFA funding – both for a successful club and for the league.

The Irish FA wants to support our NIFL Premiership clubs to achieve more in European competition but also to make life easier for clubs by supporting their everyday administration.







### **TWEAK THE SEASON**

We will work with the Northern Ireland Football League (NIFL) to propose a tweaking of the season so that clubs are playing in May and June. This will mean that clubs that have qualified for Europe are in peak form and fitness ahead of their competitive matches.

### **FACILITATE PREPARATION**

We will help support the clubs' preparation for their European matches. This will include the provision of top facilities, help with releasing players to participate in full time preparation and coaching clinics led by international managers and staff.

### **PERFORMANCE ACADEMY**

We want to create a performance Academy for players aged 16-23 where players would be owned by the clubs but their fitness, strength and conditioning and development would be furthered in an elite environment with a strong education element.

### **LIFESTYLE PROGRAMMES FOR CLUBS**

In order to be successful players at clubs need to be in the best possible physical condition. Through conditioning and training, the clubs already do a fantastic job of preparing their players for matches. The Irish FA wants to support the clubs by sharing best international practice in the areas of strength and conditioning as well as nutrition and lifestyle. The association will fund courses for clubs and will provide experts to help guide and form the clubs' training and nutrition programmes for players.

### **ADMINISTRATION AT CLUBS**

The Irish FA will provide a pot of funding to be used to help pay for administration staff at NIFL Premiership clubs. Our aspiration is that through our funding and through other partner support that there will be a full-time administration officer in every NIFL Premiership club. The association will also provide training, advice and annual refreshers on club administration.



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# REINVIGORATE THE EVERYDAY GAME

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Football is a sport enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of people in Northern Ireland. It is played by kids in pre-school to people in later life enjoying their retirement.

On Saturday afternoons hundreds of clubs the length and breadth of the country face each other in intermediate and junior football and rivalries can be as intense as anything you see in the English, Scottish or NIFL Premierships.

We need to focus on and help grow football outside of our top three divisions.

We also need to increase participation so that as many people as possible can have access to our sport.

## **PARTICIPATION**

Our football development team has made huge progress in terms of numbers playing football through the Let Them Play 10-year participation strategy. The Irish FA, working alongside partners, has grown participation to approximately 58,000 young people between the ages of four and 24 across Northern Ireland.

Significant growth and development have been driven in the Irish FA McDonald's Small-Sided Games centres, the Irish FA DENI funded Curriculum Sports Schools Programme and the Irish FA's new Disability, Referee, Futsal and Girls' strategic plans.

From 2017-2022 the Irish FA will continue to resource and fund Let Them Play to encourage growth in participation particularly among girls and women.

## **RESTRUCTURE INTERMEDIATE FOOTBALL**

The Irish FA will institute reforms so that there is a maximum of 88 teams in the combined senior and intermediate categories of the game.

The divisions in these areas will be structured and defined by the association but run by independent bodies.

### **The top three divisions will be run by NIFL.**

Below this, and with promotion/relegation to the Premier Intermediate league, will be two 'regional' intermediate sections (the definition of these regions will be defined following further consultation).

These two intermediate sections will consist of a maximum of 52 teams and will be run by the association on a paid contract basis. Interested parties will bid to run each section.

## PROPOSED NEW STRUCTURE

### Senior Football

Premiership – 12 teams  
Championship – 12 teams

### Intermediate Football

Premier Intermediate – 12 teams  
Section A – 26 teams      Section B – 26 teams

### Junior Football



This structure will come into operation from the 2019/2020 season.

This will give a two-year lead period to allow the Irish FA to manage the league bidding process and to define the appropriate criteria to select the 88 teams in this part of the game.

Teams not included in this structure will become junior clubs, however the new system will allow for promotion from junior football to the new intermediate league.

**This is a proposal at this stage and an intermediate football working group will lead on a future consultation with stakeholders.**

#### INTRODUCE A NEW IT SYSTEM

We will introduce a new IT system that will provide an online facility for discipline, registration and fixture management for all levels of the game.

#### REVIEW COACH EDUCATION

Our coach education system is highly regarded in the game. At the elite level it attracts some of the biggest names in football to study for Pro licences. At entry level we recognise that coach education is the key to helping develop our young players. We will review our coach education system to ensure that it is accessible and affordable for all.

#### SUPPORT CLUBS IN DEPRIVED AREAS

We will establish a new programme to support football clubs in areas of deprivation to develop volunteering and prepare funding plans.

#### ANNUAL STAKEHOLDERS CONFERENCE

We will establish an annual conference where representatives from across the recreational game can attend and discuss the major football issues in their clubs and communities.





# BUILD A THRIVING STADIUM BUSINESS

The National Football Stadium at Windsor Park is the home of football in Northern Ireland. It should be accessible for everyone in the football family and all club finals should be played in it.

The stadium is also the home ground of Linfield FC and the Irish FA aims to work positively with the club going forward.

We want to make sure that the stadium business is a success.

A significant percentage of both ticket and broadcasting income is the bedrock income for the stadium and it is the job of the association to reduce the stadium company's reliance on this core funding stream by identifying other income streams. This core funding can then be reallocated back into football development activities.

In short, we want to improve the profitability of the stadium business and to make it a thriving venue at the heart of football and the wider Northern Ireland community.

## CLUB FINALS

The National Football Stadium at Windsor Park is a fantastic venue but modern arenas such as ours come with increased running costs in terms of stewarding and utilities.

The Irish FA believes that all club finals should be played at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park. To offset costs, the association will set aside a fund to help

pay for stewarding and other related costs that currently make playing finals at the ground prohibitive.

## CONFERENCING

We will outsource our conferencing and banqueting to an industry leading services company who will deliver value for money and profitability.

## SHOP AND MERCHANDISING

We have worked with our official retail partner to open a Northern Ireland shop at the stadium. While this will be most busy on senior men's international match nights, it is a permanent shop that will service our fan base six days a week. It is also the only shop in Northern Ireland stocking official George Best memorabilia and it is a great addition for people coming to tour the stadium or visit the new Education and Heritage Centre.

## FAN ZONE

We will seek to work with sponsors and partners on making the Northern Ireland fan zone a premium experience for supporters. The redevelopment of the boulevard leading up to the new Olympia Leisure Centre will only improve this experience for children and young people in the years to come.

## COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

We will maximise commercial opportunities at the stadium through concourse TV, big-screen advertising and pitch-side boards.

## EDUCATION AND HERITAGE CENTRE AND GROUND TOURS

In March 2017 the Irish FA opened a new education and heritage centre at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park. The facility tells the unique story of Northern Ireland football using a variety of media, interactive displays and key artefacts from the 1880s to the present day. Visitors are able to relive the atmosphere of famous nights, gain insights into the drama on and off the pitch and feel the rush of emotions shared by everyone inside the stadium - win, lose or draw.

We have also introduced stadium tours which provide fans with behind the scenes access to the player areas, changing rooms and press facilities.

We want schoolchildren from across Northern Ireland to come to the centre and experience the stadium first hand. We believe that the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park can be a huge draw for tourists and visitors to Belfast as well as football fans.





### **NAMING RIGHTS AND SPONSORSHIP**

We will actively seek a Naming Rights partner for the stadium and will seek sponsorship for the spectator stands within.

### **OFFICE RENTALS**

We will employ a letting agency to ensure that the office space available at the stadium is fully utilised and brings the maximum amount of revenue back into the association.

### **A DYNAMIC STADIUM**

Working with partners such as Ulster University, who will begin hosting a degree course in the stadium in 2017, we will seek to create a living, breathing stadium that is flexible in its space. We will work with the burgeoning film industry to see if our space could be used in the creation of TV shows or movies. We want our stadium to be used for even more than the promotion of football.

### **UTILITY PARTNERS**

We will seek to gain value by establishing sponsorships or competitive contracts with energy suppliers that reduce our overhead costs. We will also seek to install renewable energy systems such as solar panels that create sustainability.

### **TICKET STRATEGY**

The Irish FA believes that everyone in Northern Ireland should be able to attend a game. Therefore we will establish a ticket policy that provides access to games for those who are most disadvantaged through incentives and discounts for community groups.

### **MATCHDAY HOSPITALITY**

Through the redevelopment of the National Football Stadium we have excellent matchday hospitality, both through corporate boxes and through lounges and premium bar areas. We will ensure that we sell all our available matchday hospitality at all our senior men's international matches and work to ensure maximum capacity for other events such as the Tennent's Irish Cup semi-finals and final as well as junior internationals.

### **CONCERTS AND MAJOR NON-FOOTBALL EVENTS**

The National Football Stadium at Windsor Park has the potential to become one of the best outdoor concert venues in Northern Ireland with a perfect mix of seated and standing areas. We want to establish the stadium as the go-to outdoor venue of choice by building strong partnerships with the major concert promoters and by hosting several major non-football events each year.

### **FRIENDS AND PATRONS SCHEME**

The stadium has played host to football since 1905. We want to reflect the special role that the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park has for football fans by creating a friends and patrons scheme whereby supporters can reflect their connection with the stadium in a tangible way – e.g. bricks on the new walkway into the stadium, or a GAWA fans wall.

### **UEFA MEGA-EVENTS**

With our new stadium we are perfectly placed to host major UEFA events. We will bid for the Super Cup and seek to bring the winners of the Champions League and Europa League to Belfast. We will also bid for major UEFA-led association events such as workshops and conferences.

### **RESIDENTS**

Our stadium has been part of the local community since 1905 and we recognise that our neighbours are families with residential homes. We want to play a pro-active role in improving the local area by bidding for local government funding to help develop the area around the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park. We will also work with residents to ensure that they are informed first of every event at the stadium and that they have access to tickets for every event that we host.



# SERVE THE COMMUNITY BETTER

We can have a huge positive impact on Northern Ireland society. We need to work as an association and with a wide range of existing partners to fund and deliver this impact and to use football to serve all of the community in Northern Ireland.

## A PUBLIC MISSION

We will write and put into the public domain the Irish FA's commitment to helping to deliver positive change in Northern Ireland through the power of football.

## ESTABLISH AN IRISH FA FOUNDATION

For the past 137 years, the Irish Football Association has organised, promoted and developed football. It has discovered some of the greatest talents to ever play the game, helped make history in major tournaments on the world stage and, perhaps most important of all, engendered a life-long love of football in generations of men and women.

We have established the framework for a new charitable arm – the Irish FA Foundation. A legacy of the senior men's successful EURO 2016 campaign, it will become the vehicle through which we will increase participation and continue to reach the goals of Let Them Play, our youth strategy.

The Foundation will have four main aims:

- + Develop amateur football, youth football, schools football and futsal.

- + Advance education by providing work experience and support to educational establishments and extra-curricular groups

- + To provide funds and football facilities in areas of economic need with the object of improving circumstances

- + To improve the health and wellbeing of people in Northern Ireland through football

Over the course of this plan we will make the new Irish FA Foundation operational and use it as the primary vehicle through which we can serve all of the Northern Ireland community.

## A MEASURED ANNUAL CORPORATE AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) PROGRAMME

We want to add an increased focus to our work by writing an annual CSR plan setting out our targets for the year and explaining how we will deliver them. This report will then be independently audited at the end of each year to determine societal impact and those findings will be shared with stakeholders.

## A 'COMMUNITY' KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR (KPI)

Each member of staff will be granted some time in their working month to volunteer on Irish FA or other corporate social responsibility initiatives to ensure that every member of staff feels empowered to make a positive impact through their work, whatever department they are in.

## A FULL-TIME PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

Increasingly government is using the Irish FA to deliver innovative and far reaching programmes, using football to help deliver positive change.

We will employ a full-time public affairs officer to liaise directly with government, identifying opportunities and auditing performance.

## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

To promote the work that the Irish FA does and the work that our delivery partners engage in, we will establish a bespoke communications and marketing plan and actively seek to engage media in this aspect of the Irish FA.







# ORGANISE TO SERVE THE FOOTBALL FAMILY BETTER

Staff teams need to be well chosen, well led, efficient and commercially successful. Investments will need to be made in ICT and staff development to enable this.

## **UEFA REVIEW**

We will invite UEFA to commission a review of our structures and processes to ensure that we are operating in the most efficient and dynamic way.

## **BETTER FAN ENGAGEMENT**

We will promote better engagement with fans attending senior men's international matches and other Northern Ireland men's and women's representative games. This will include information provision, ticketing, access to the stadium, travel to away matches and other supporter issues. We will gather feedback on improving the experience for fans at Northern Ireland matches and will continue to work closely with the Amalgamation of Official Northern Ireland Supporters' Clubs (AONISC). We will also consider ways to build the capacity for fan engagement within and between NIFL Premiership and other league clubs based on best practice from UEFA.

## **ESTABLISH A STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT OFFICER**

The Irish FA will establish a stakeholder engagement officer who will be responsible for managing questions, complaints and feedback from across the Northern Ireland football family. They will liaise with departments within the Irish FA and will ensure that clubs, officials, convenors, volunteers and everyone involved in football in Northern Ireland can get the information that they need from the Irish FA.

## **QUALITY MANAGEMENT**

We will apply for further quality management awards and will benchmark ourselves against the best industry standards.

## **NEW IT SYSTEM**

The Irish FA will seek to develop and introduce a new IT system. It will provide state-of-the-art solutions to issues such as registration, ticketing and discipline matters and will aim to make the role of administrators and secretaries at clubs easier.

Once designed and implemented the Irish FA will work with all leagues and clubs throughout Northern Ireland so that improvements in IT are made across the football community.

## **STAFF TRAINING**

To improve team cohesiveness and effectiveness we will continue to introduce programmes of staff development to make employees feel supported in their work and to ensure that they are performing at their full potential.

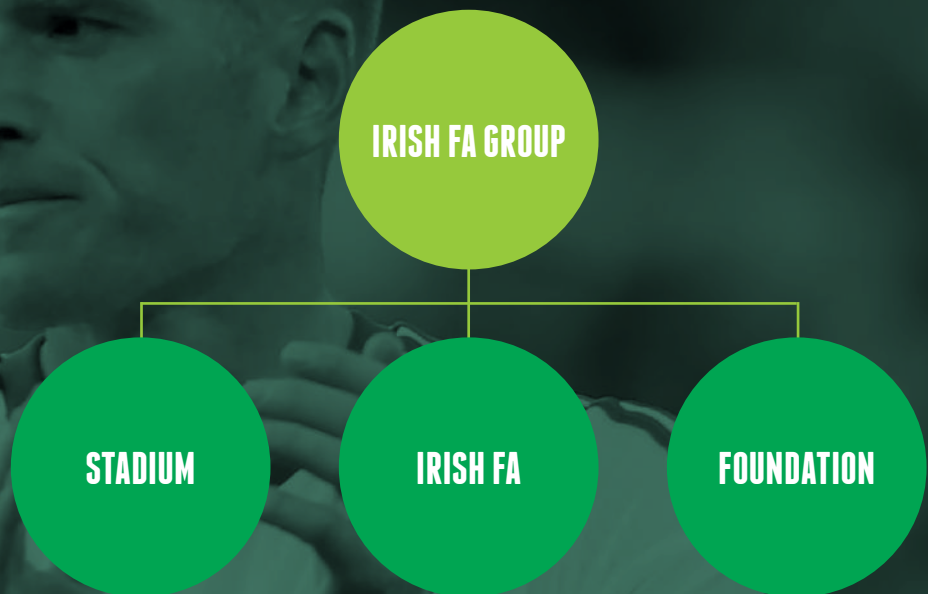




**SMOOTH OPERATING STRUCTURE**

There has, and will be, changes to the association with the development of the Stadium Development Company and the new Irish FA Foundation.

While these present huge opportunities for success, we must make sure that all three arms of the association relate well together and complement each other in the pursuit of common goals.





# TIMELINE

## Challenge every time, qualify every other time

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Build a national training centre						
Performance academy						
Performance schools						
Talent ID manager						
Develop an elite coaching methodology						
Increase the standing of our under-age teams						
Further promote innovative trials						
Build relationships with clubs						
Develop a mentor programme						
Host more UEFA tournaments						

## Rebuild the football estate

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Build a national training centre						
Stadia improvements						
Smaller stadia improvements						
Regional hubs						
Promote futsal						
Lending strategy						
Pitch strategy						

## Break the top 40 in european leagues

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Tweak the season						
Facilitate preparation						
Performance academy						
Lifestyle programme for clubs						
Support administration at clubs						

## Reinvigorate the everyday game

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Encourage participation						
Restructure intermediate football						
Introduce a new IT system						
Review coach education						
Support clubs in deprived areas						
Annual stakeholders conference						

<b>Build a thriving stadium business</b>						
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Club finals						
Conferences						
Shop and merchandising						
Fan zone						
Commercial opportunities						
Education and heritage centre/tours						
Naming rights and sponsorship						
Office rentals						
Dynamic stadium						
Utility partner						
Ticket partner						
Matchday hospitality						
Concerts						
Friends and patrons						
Liaise with residents						

<b>Serve the community better</b>						
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
A public mission						
Establish an Irish FA foundation						
A measured annual CSR programme						
A community KPI						
A full-time public affairs officer						
Corporate social responsibility communications plan						

<b>Organise to serve the football family better</b>						
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
UEFA review						
Appoint a supporter liaison						
Establish a stakeholder service						
Smooth operating structure						
Quality management						
IT system						
Staff training						



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# CONSULTATIONS

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NIFL Board

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North West FA

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Mid-Ulster FA

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Northern Ireland Women's FA/NIFL Ladies

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Two open sessions hosted at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park

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County Antrim FA

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Premier League Management Committee

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Northern Ireland Boys' FA

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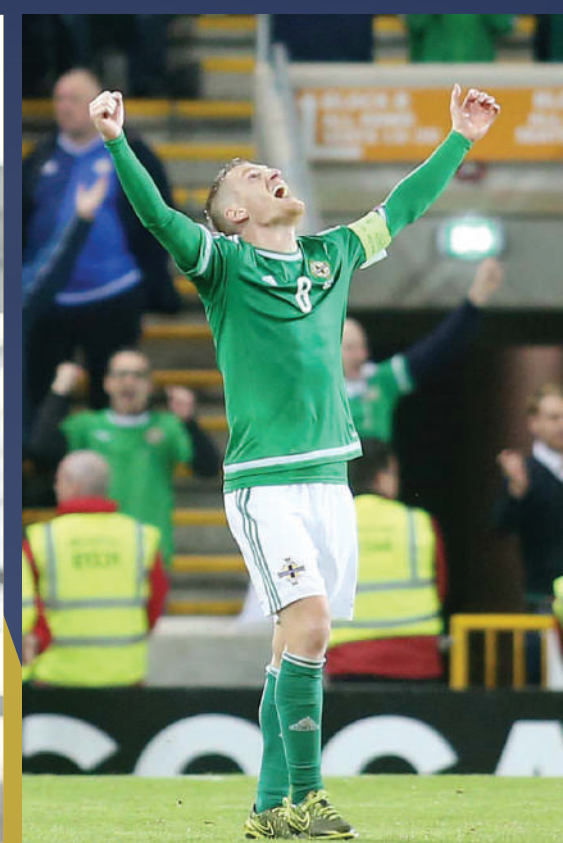
Premier Intermediate League/Championship Clubs

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Fermanagh and Western FA

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Amalgamation of Official Northern Ireland Supporters' Clubs







While the strategy will run until 2022, a review of progress will be presented to the board of the Irish FA in December of each year. This will track achievements against goals set, will analyse where improvements may need to be made and will provide an annual benchmark of the Irish FA's delivery of its five-year plan.

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