

# IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

## ACTIVITY REPORT

### 2017-2018





# WOMEN'S U19 EUROS ROUND-UP



Spain celebrate wildly after winning the 2017 UEFA Women's Under-19 Championship in Belfast. Tournament Golden Boot winner Patricia Guijarro (five goals) was on target twice as Spain defeated France 3-2 in the final staged at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park last August. The game attracted 3117 spectators and was a fitting finale for a memorable action-packed tournament. Spain's run to glory began with a 2-0 win against the host nation in front of 4289 spectators at the National Football Stadium - a record attendance for a women's international in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland's other group games they drew 1-1 with Scotland at Mourneview Park in Lurgan (1771 spectators) – Louise McDaniel created history by becoming the first Northern Ireland women's player to score at a major tournament – and lost to Germany (6-0) in front of 1783 fans at Ballymena Showgrounds.



Leyla McFarland takes on the Spanish defence during the 2017 UEFA Women's Under-19 Championship.



Northern Ireland striker Emily Wilson battles for possession against Germany.



Louise McDaniel was in tears after scoring in the 1-1 draw against Scotland. Louise created history by becoming the first Northern Ireland women's player to find the net at a major tournament.



Brenna McPartlan in the thick of the action against Scotland.



# PRESIDENT'S INTRODUCTION



## It has been another action-packed year for the Irish Football Association, both on and off the pitch.

The launch of a new Five-Year Strategy, our hosting of the Women's U19 Euros, the establishment of our first Performance School and the many fine performances involving our international teams at all levels are just some of the highlights within 2017-18.

It is, of course, a great shame that Northern Ireland will not be sending a team to the World Cup finals in Russia this summer.

But we should be proud of our senior men's team's efforts as they strived to become the first Northern Ireland squad to reach back to back major tournaments.

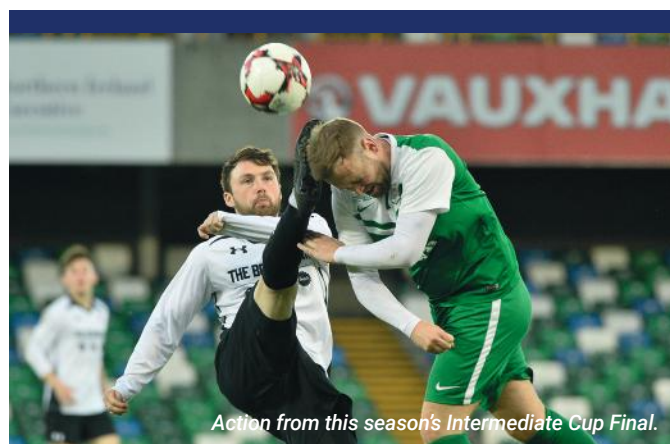
Our 2018 World Cup qualifying campaign brought great performances, sold-out games, fantastic support, excitement and, finally, disappointment after that herculean effort against Switzerland in Basel.

Despite the play-off heartache, the qualifying campaign must be regarded as a success. There is no shame in coming second in a group behind the world champions.

Naturally, everyone was flat following the team's elimination. However, we were all given a lift when Michael O'Neill signed a contract extension.

Recognising his significant contribution and also the overall development strategy of the association, the board offered Michael a four-year extension which was duly signed in February. In addition Michael now has the role of Chief Football Officer with the association, ensuring stability and continuity going forward.

His stated aim is to reach the Euro 2020 finals and he is upbeat about our chances of doing so.



Action from this season's Intermediate Cup Final.

The Irish Football Association's Activity Report 2017-18 was compiled, edited and written by Nigel Tilson.

# PRESIDENT'S INTRODUCTION



Northern Ireland manager Michael O'Neill signs his four-year contract extension as David Martin looks on.

The performance by the team in the friendly against South Korea back in March was certainly encouraging and no doubt the manager will use the upcoming friendly games against Panama and Costa Rica to bring some new faces to the squad as we look forward to the UEFA Nations League games in the autumn followed by the start of the Euro 2020 qualifiers next spring.

Meanwhile, congratulations must go to our national team captain Steven Davis on two fronts: on becoming an MBE for services to football and on reaching the milestone of 100 caps (in the first play-off game against the Swiss). He received his MBE at Buckingham Palace a week before he became just our third centurion.

I also had the pleasure of presenting the mercurial Aaron Hughes with a special award before the friendly against New Zealand last summer to mark his 100th appearance for his country, which had come a year before in the run-up to Euro 2016.

On the domestic front hearty congratulations to the winners of the association's cups at each level of the game.

Coleraine won the 2018 Tennent's Irish Challenge Cup by defeating Cliftonville in front of an impressive attendance of just over 12,000.

The winners of the Match Intermediate Cup, Queen's University, can now be highlighted as a classic example of the proverb 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again'. Their 4-1 victory against Dundela ended a 108-year wait for a major trophy.

Well done to Enniskillen Rangers, who won the Junior Cup for the second year running when they defeated Greenisland, and Linfield Rangers on retaining the Harry Cavan Youth Cup following a hard fought win against Cliftonville Strollers.

Congratulations as well to Sion Swifts Ladies, who won their first major trophy when they defeated Newry City Ladies in the Electric Ireland Women's Challenge Cup final.

There has been an immense contribution made by the media to the promotion and success of football across all of Northern Ireland and I take the opportunity of recording the association's gratitude for this.

Tribute must also go to the supporters at all levels of the game and particularly those who follow the senior international team at home and abroad. Their support during the World Cup qualifiers and the play-offs demonstrates how much the international team means to them.

A big thank-you to the sponsors associated with the Irish Football Association for their input during the past 12 months.



# PRESIDENT'S INTRODUCTION

On studying the content of this Activity Report it struck me that as an association we often do not realise the depth and breadth of the work we undertake each and every day.

I therefore thank everyone for their efforts, from Chief Executive Patrick Nelson and the staff of the association to the board, the council, all the committees and the many volunteers.

They have all made telling contributions to football in Northern Ireland over the past 12 months and I thank them for their continuing support to deliver the ambitious plans and targets that the association is setting for the future.

**David J Martin**  
**President**  
**Irish Football Association**



*Irish FA President David Martin presented veteran defender Aaron Hughes with a special commemorative cap to mark 100 appearances for his country prior to the 1-0 friendly win against New Zealand in Belfast last June.*



*East Belfast school Our Lady and St Patrick's Knock became the first post primary school to be awarded the Gold School Quality Mark via a tie-up between the Irish FA and Belfast City Council. Irish FA President David Martin and Belfast Lord Mayor Nuala McAllister presented Frankie Wilson, the school's Head of PE and Sport, with the award.*



*Team captain Steven Davis played his 100th game for Northern Ireland in the first leg of the World Cup play-off against Switzerland back in November. Irish FA President David Martin presented Steven with an award from UEFA to mark the occasion.*



*East Belfast Ladies won the 2018 Senior Women's Futsal Cup – defeating Linfield Ladies 5-4 in a thrilling final – and Irish FA President David Martin was on hand to present the trophy to the winning team.*

# CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT



Irish FA Chief Executive Patrick Nelson (left) and Irish FA President David Martin at the launch of the association's Five-Year Strategy in June 2017.

There is only one place I can start my report looking back at the 2017-18 season and that is on the sodden turf of St Jakob-Park in Basel.

Our players had given everything against Switzerland in our bid to reach a fourth FIFA World Cup finals tournament, and they were distraught on behalf of the whole nation.

We had come so close to achieving something Northern Ireland had never done before; qualification for two major tournaments in succession. The single goal in Belfast, fashioned by a hotly disputed penalty, was enough to stamp Switzerland's ticket to Russia and consign us to watching the greatest show on earth from afar.

Places at the FIFA World Cup are places in history and should be decided by the skill and endeavour of one team over another, not by a refereeing error.

However, as our captain Steven Davis said on the night in Basel, the campaign as a whole needs to be seen as a success. Coming second in the qualifying group to world champions Germany, who didn't drop a single point, and then taking Switzerland literally to the last minute over two legs in the play-offs was an incredible feat for such a small nation and we should be proud of our achievement.

Mind you, out of the ashes of the last campaign has come real hope. For two tournaments in a row we have effectively exited the competition at the last 16 in Europe stage, and with Michael O'Neill signed up to lead us for another six years we have the momentum and desire to build on the last four years and make a place at UEFA Euro 2020 our aim.

This year we warm up for our 2020 qualification campaign with UEFA Nations League matches against Austria and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the autumn, and I doubt that either of these two sides will fancy the trip to Belfast!

Elsewhere in the international sphere our senior women could be forgiven for thinking they had been dealt a very tough hand in their FIFA Women's World Cup qualifying group.

Not only did we get the reigning European champions the Netherlands but former Olympic, European and World champions Norway as well. An excellent win in Slovakia aside, results have not gone our way so far in this competition, however the squad will have memories for life of a tremendous occasion in Eindhoven when we played the Netherlands in front of more than 30,000 spectators.

The men's under-21 team have had a new lease of life this season under Ian Baraclough and at the time of writing are sitting with 11 points from seven matches, which is an excellent return. Although the final score did not go our way, the team showed incredible resilience to come back to equalise three times against the mighty Spanish at Portadown so let's hope the future is bright for these young players.



# CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT



*Northern Ireland's senior players gave everything against Switzerland in the two-legged World Cup play-off, but it was not to be.*

Finally, in relation to international football, Northern Ireland hosted the UEFA Women's U19 finals at the start of the season. Matches were played at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park, Ballymena, Lurgan and Portadown, and both as a country and a Football Association we did UEFA proud.

More than 18,000 spectators came to see the various matches in the tournament which was won by Spain, with a record home crowd of more than 4,000 for Northern Ireland's opening match.

No-one who was at Mourneview Park will forget Louise McDaniel equalising against Scotland to score our first ever women's finals tournament goal. The tournament as a whole bodes well for 2020 when UEFA have entrusted us with running the men's U19 finals.

Two years on from the reopening, we are now well settled in our new home for football in Northern Ireland, the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park.

This season, as promised, we have held all of our flagship finals in the stadium, giving professional and junior players alike a taste of what it must be like to be Steven Davis or Jonny Evans for a day. I was particularly pleased that NIFL chose to hold their League Cup final at the stadium as well this season.

We installed our giant screen early in the season in the South-East corner of the ground, and this also adds to the vibrancy of an occasion here. The Education and Heritage Centre has surpassed all expectations in its first season of operation, with more than 7,000 visitors so far. Already we are in the top 10 on Trip Advisor for things to do in Belfast, which is testament to the quality of work of our staff and especially our volunteer team.

Further investment in a stadium of this quality never stops, however. This summer we are scheduled to renovate the pitch and we will be upgrading the surface to include a carpet base with 5% fibre, which we hope will give the surface greater longevity.

I'm delighted to report the new IFA Foundation is bedding in well. Our charitable arm has two main aims, which it spends its time focusing on. These are executing the Association's Let Them Play youth strategy and trying to raise funds from new sources that the Association itself cannot reach.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone involved in football in Northern Ireland for their effort, involvement and commitment this and every other season. We could not operate at the level we do without the work our staff, board, council and committee members tirelessly put in to make their part of the game run smoothly. The people's game needs people to make it happen, and we are lucky to have so many people who love the game in Northern Ireland.

Please enjoy reading this activity report, reminding you of the highs and lows of 2017-18. And remember the new season is only just around the corner!

**Patrick Nelson**  
Chief Executive  
Irish Football Association

# STADIUM REPORT



The National Football Stadium at Windsor Park hosted the final of the 2017 UEFA Women's U19 Euros last summer. Spain defeated France in the decider.

## The Irish FA's Stadium Team hosted a large number of matches at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park during the 2017-18 season, both domestic and international games.

But prior to the season getting under way the team successfully helped to run the UEFA Women's U19 European Championships.

The stadium hosted eight UEFA matches throughout August 2017, welcoming new fans to the venue and playing a part in raising the profile of women's football on the international stage.

The senior men's World Cup qualifier between Northern Ireland and Germany was a highlight for the Stadium Team during the season. It was a challenging and highly technical match.

There was huge media interest last October when the world champions came to town and everything was scaled up from previous matches in the stadium. For example, the room normally used to house photographers in the media centre was transformed into a television studio and new temporary working areas for media had to be created, while a vast amount of equipment was needed on site for a double television production.

It was also a productive year in terms of building on relationships with contractors who play a key role in running and maintaining the venue, and helping the stadium personnel to prepare for matches which are showcased on the world stage.

These partners include CRL, who prepare the pitch, and CE World, who clean the stadium. Eventsec steward events and manage stadium security, while Sodexo provide quality food and beverage services and host events in the hospitality areas throughout the year and H&J Martin maintain the building to the highest standard.

The Education and Heritage Centre, which opened in March 2017, has enjoyed plenty of success in a short space of time. The centre attracted 7197 visitors - and 448 tour groups - between March and December last year. And it has just reached 6th position out of 236 'Things To Do In Belfast' in TripAdvisor's rankings as well as achieving a five-star TripAdvisor review.

The centre has hosted a number of VIP corporate hospitality events, both pre-match experiences and themed events. Former Northern Ireland international Keith Gillespie hosted a VIP event in the centre which created great interest and was a big success. And further tours led by legendary players are planned for the rest of the year.

There is also the distinct possibility of the stadium hosting a world title fight featuring Belfast boxer and huge Northern Ireland fan Carl Frampton this summer.



Main pic and bottom left: The World Cup 2018 qualifier against Germany last October (above and below) was a spectacular occasion and generated lots of media interest.

Bottom right: The stadium's Education and Heritage Centre attracted 7197 visitors between March and December 2017.





# INTERNATIONAL SENIOR MEN'S TEAM



*Josh Magennis celebrates after scoring against Germany in the World Cup 2018 qualifier at the National Football Stadium last October.*

## The men's senior international team came incredibly close to securing a place at World Cup 2018 in Russia.

After finishing second in Qualifying Group C behind world champions Germany they were thrust into a two-legged play-off against Switzerland back in November.

The Swiss, who were pipped at the final hurdle by Portugal in their qualifying group, squeezed past the boys in green in the first leg at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park thanks to a hotly disputed penalty. That 1-0 win for Switzerland, along with a scoreless draw in Basel in the second leg, was enough to secure a place in the finals in Russia.

The play-off came about following a decent finish to the World Cup 2018 Russia qualifying campaign.

After defeating New Zealand 1-0 in a Vauxhall International Challenge Match in Belfast last June - Liam Boyce scored the winner - the team headed for Azerbaijan.

The mission in Baku was to add to the impressive 10 points that had already been accumulated by that stage (Autumn/Winter 2016 – 0-0 v Czech Republic away, 4-0 victory over San Marino at home, a 2-0 defeat in Germany and a 4-0 home win against Azerbaijan; Spring 2017 – 2-0 home success v Norway).

Azerbaijan controlled large parts of the game played in warm conditions. They undoubtedly deserved something from the game – Jonny Evans said afterwards that he felt sorry for them! – but ultimately a sweet finish from Stuart Dallas two minutes into injury time at the end of the game gave Northern Ireland a 1-0 win.

Following the summer break the first stop for Michael O'Neill's team in the ongoing qualifying campaign was away to San Marino on 1 September.

The pitch was in poor condition and the boys in green spurned a series of chances before Josh Magennis broke San Marino's resistance in the 70th minute. He grabbed a second five minutes later before team captain Steven Davis scored from the spot to make it 3-0 on the night.

A much tougher assignment followed a few days later at the National Football Stadium when Czech Republic came to town.

Played under a remarkable blood red sky in Belfast, the game against the Czechs was arguably a duel for second place in the group.

Defender Jonny Evans headed Northern Ireland in front on 28 minutes before his West Bromwich Albion team-mate Chris Brunt fired in a superb free-kick before the interval.

The 2-0 success meant Northern Ireland had won five matches in a row for the first time.

At that stage there was still an outside chance of topping the group but the leaders of the pack, Germany, had other ideas.



# INTERNATIONAL SENIOR MEN'S TEAM

They arrived in Belfast in early October brimming with confidence after registering eight wins out of eight matches played.

And they were ruthless and clinical once again as they secured top spot in the group and a place in the World Cup finals this summer.

Sebastian Rudy beat Michael McGovern with a fantastic hit after less than two minutes on the clock before the Germans got their second midway through the first half with a neat Sandro Wagner finish.

The boys in green improved after the break and Conor Washington hit the bar before the Germans sealed the win through Joshua Kimmich with four minutes to go. However, there was still time for a consolation, Josh Magennis scoring with a powerful header to make it 3-1.

It was Northern Ireland's first competitive home defeat in four years, however other results meant at the very least a second place finish in the group was guaranteed.

By the time kick-off came around in their final qualifier against Norway, Northern Ireland had cemented a place in the play-offs for Russia 2018. Their slot among the best eight runners-up from the nine groups in the European qualifying series was confirmed by Scotland's 2-2 draw in Slovenia prior to the action in Oslo.

On the pitch the only goal of the game came when a cross from the left was pawed by Michael McGovern and Chris Brunt's attempted clearance dropped into his own net.

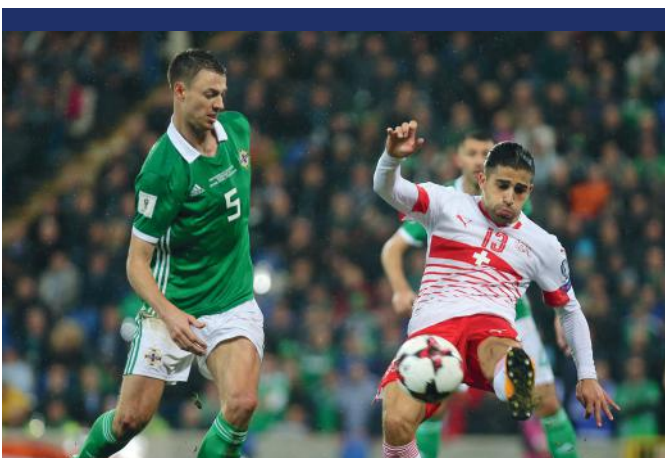
The defeat meant Northern Ireland were not seeded for the play-offs and they were paired with Switzerland, ranked 11th in the world, when the draw was made in Zurich in mid-October.

On 9 November Switzerland arrived in Belfast for the first instalment of the play-off and they were greeted by a wall of noise and a stadium filled with green and white foil flags.

The men from the Alpine nation dominated proceedings, although it later transpired Northern Ireland captain Steven Davis, the team's talisman, was carrying an injury in the game, which limited his influence on the proceedings. He was also shackled well by impressive young Swiss midfielder Denis Zakaria.

In the first half Michael McGovern produced a couple of fine stops, notably a fingertip save from Haris Serefovic in the 19th minute.

And Switzerland were lucky not to go down to 10 men when Fabian Schar took out Stuart Dallas with a late tackle.



*Home and away action from the two World Cup play-off matches against Switzerland back in November. The Swiss reached the finals in Russia this summer with a 1-0 aggregate win. A controversial penalty was ultimately the difference between the two sides.*



# INTERNATIONAL SENIOR MEN'S TEAM

*Northern Ireland manager Michael O'Neill and Germany boss Joachim Low call the shots during the qualifier in Belfast back in the autumn.*



The Swiss bossed things though. Xherdan Shaqiri produced a lovely curling effort just after the break which clipped the top of the bar, while Seferovic just failed to connect with an inviting low delivery from Blerim Dzemaili.

Then came the incident that ultimately defined the two-legged play-off.

In the 56th minute Shaqiri fired a volley towards goal which was blocked by Northern Ireland midfielder Corry Evans. Unbelievably Romanian referee Ovidiu Hategan pointed to the penalty spot when everyone in the stadium, including the Swiss team, thought the ball had gone out for a corner.

The official penalised Evans for handball, however television pictures clearly showed the ball had struck him on the top of his back.

Once the feverish objections to the decision had died down Swiss left-back Ricardo Rodriguez stepped up to the spot and sent McGovern the wrong way from 12 yards.

In the first game Northern Ireland failed to register a single shot on target for the first time since facing Poland at Euro 2016.

It was a different story in the second leg on 12 November, however, where Michael O'Neill's charges produced an excellent performance and were unlucky not to at least force the game into extra time.

Basel's St Jakob-Park was the venue for the momentous struggle.

The Swiss, who had lost only once in Basel in 17 matches spanning 16 years, again created numerous chances, with Seferovic particularly guilty of misfiring. And Michael McGovern again pulled off some fine saves.

However, Northern Ireland were much more dynamic than in the first game and also carved out several opportunities as they pushed for a goal in the rainy conditions. Chris Brunt came close with a couple of sizzling efforts, while Conor Washington headed wide when well placed. Overall the senior men's team had 12 shots, with five of them on target.

And they came within inches of a goal in injury time which would have forced the tie into extra time. Jonny Evans produced a powerful header from a pinpoint Chris Brunt delivery but his effort was cleared off the line by Rodriguez – and the World Cup dream was over.

Following the game there was plenty of speculation about whether the manager would stay or go – and if certain senior internationals would call it a day.

In February Michael O'Neill ended the speculation when he signed a four-year extension to his contract that will see him continue as Northern Ireland boss until 2024.

As part of his new deal Michael has also taken on the role of Chief Football Officer, giving him overall responsibility for the development of the game in Northern Ireland and the Irish FA's elite performance pathway.



# INTERNATIONAL SENIOR MEN'S TEAM

After signing the contract extension, the manager said: "I am extremely proud to manage my country and I am pleased to be extending my time in charge of the senior team. In recent months I have been approached about taking other opportunities in football. However, no other challenge attracted me as much as taking Northern Ireland back to a major tournament.

"I would like to thank the Irish FA for the belief that they have shown in me by granting this contract extension and for the fans for their ongoing support of me and of the Northern Ireland senior men's international team."

His first game in charge following the fresh deal was a Vauxhall International Challenge Match back in March against South Korea, who will be in Russia this summer.

And, despite being without a handful of senior players, the team did well against a strong South Korean outfit, winning the game at a packed National Football Stadium by two goals to one.

Kwon Changhoon opened the scoring with a neat finish before Northern Ireland equalised via an OG. Jamie Ward, cleverly set free by Oliver Norwood, fired in a cross which was turned into his own net by Kim Minjae.

Northern Ireland's winner in the 85th minute had the fans dancing in the aisles. The stadium erupted when QPR winger Paul Smyth latched on to a Conor Washington knockdown and glided past a defender before scoring with a low drive from 10 yards. It was a fantastic way for former Linfield man Smyth to mark his senior international debut.

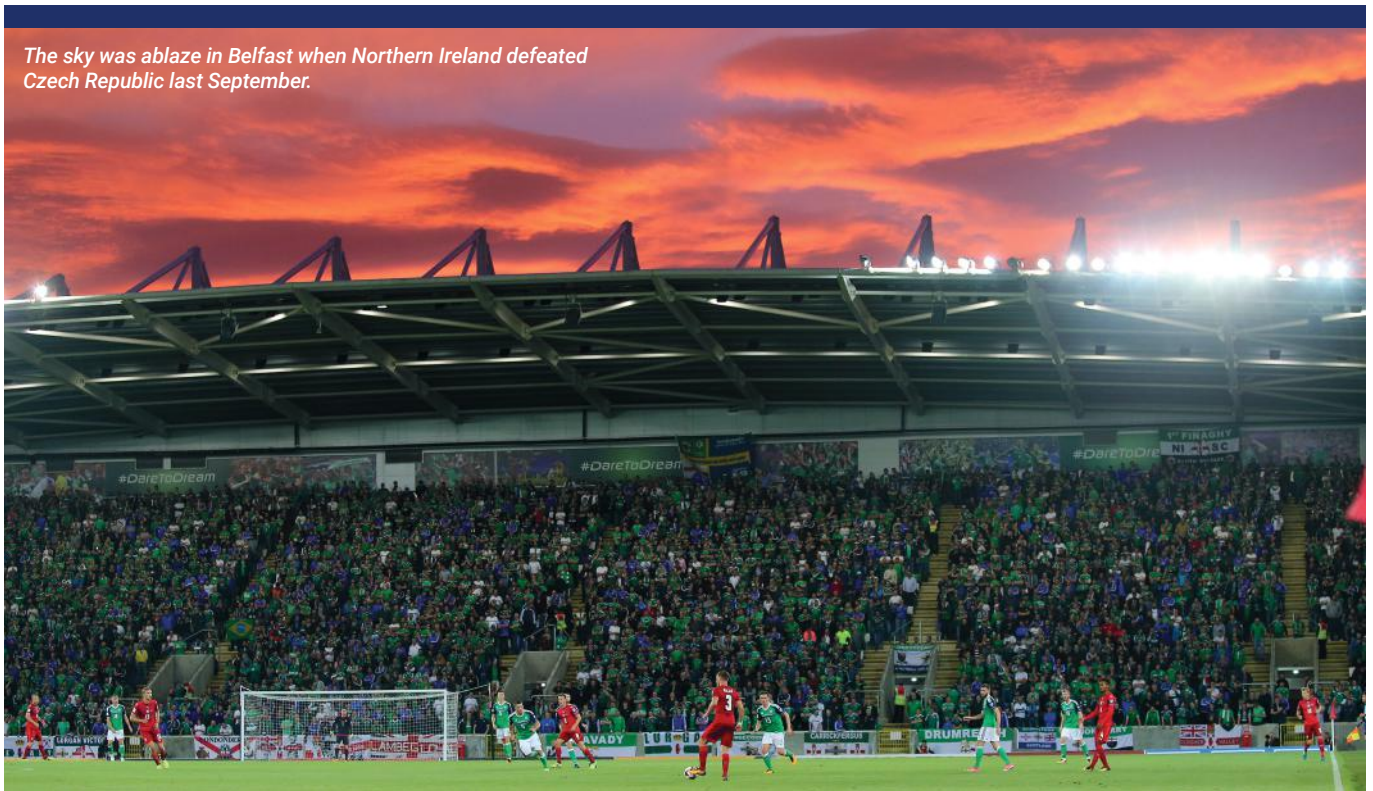
The match was the first of nine for Northern Ireland this year which will form the build-up to the start of the Euro 2020 qualifying campaign in March 2019.

Next up are friendlies away to World Cup-bound Panama and Costa Rica at the end of May/early June followed by home and away games in the autumn against Austria and Bosnia & Herzegovina in the new UEFA Nations League and friendlies against Israel and the Republic of Ireland.



*Paul Smyth scored the winner against South Korea on his senior international debut.*

*The sky was ablaze in Belfast when Northern Ireland defeated Czech Republic last September.*



# INTERNATIONAL MEN'S U21



Northern Ireland U21 forward Shayne Lavery wheels away in delight after scoring against Spain at Shamrock Park. Northern Ireland lost the game 5-3.

## A 2-1 victory away to Estonia last June kick-started an impressive run of results for the Under-21s in UEFA U21 Championship qualifying group 2.

That fine win in Tallinn represented a great start for Ian Baraclough in his first campaign in charge following his appointment in May 2017.

The success came courtesy of a goal from David Parkhouse and a last gasp penalty scored by team captain Luke Donnelly.

It was followed by a gritty 1-0 win in the team's first home game in the qualifying campaign back in August. Albania provided the opposition at Mourneview Park in Lurgan and the only goal of the game again came from the spot – and captain Luke Donnelly was again the scorer deep into injury time.

Former Motherwell and Sligo Rovers manager Baraclough suffered his first defeat with the U21s in September when his side were narrowly beaten 1-0 in Senica by Slovakia.

The following month the team got back to winning ways with an exciting performance against Estonia at Mourneview Park. A 4-2 victory was registered courtesy of goals from Ryan Johnson, Dale Gorman, Mark Sykes and a Matvei Igonen OG.

An away game against Albania in Tirana was next on the schedule. The game in November was a tight affair but Northern Ireland grabbed a deserved point, Shayne Lavery scoring in the 89th minute to make it 1-1.

Group leaders Spain represented a whole different ball game for Baraclough's boys when they took to the pitch at Shamrock Park in Portadown back in March.

With four wins out of four at that stage, and featuring several players with La Liga experience in their ranks, the Spanish were expected to stroll it.

However, they were made to battle all the way by Northern Ireland, who were lying in second place with their three wins, one draw and one defeat.

The U21s produced a brave performance in front of over 2000 spectators. They went down 5-3 but they caused the Spanish problems. Luke Donnelly, with two, and Shayne Lavery were the scorers. Borja Mayoral (hat-trick) and Mikel Oyarzabal (two) netted for Spain.

A game against Iceland at Coleraine Showgrounds a few days later represented an opportunity to quickly bounce back from that defeat.

Despite creating plenty of chances they just could not find a way past a resolute Icelandic defence and the game ended in a goalless draw.

The U21s go into the summer break lying third in their group with 11 points from seven games – seven points behind Spain (six wins out of six) and just a point behind Slovakia (12 points from seven matches).

They still have a slim chance of reaching a play-off for a spot at the U21 Euros in Italy/San Marino next summer, however they arguably need to win their three remaining games this autumn – against Spain and Iceland away and home to Slovakia – to make that happen.

Nine group winners will qualify for the finals in Italy and San Marino next year, while the four best runners-up will qualify for play-offs this autumn. And the two winners of the play-offs will in turn qualify for the final tournament alongside hosts Italy.



# INTERNATIONAL MEN'S U19 AND U17

## Under-19 Team

Stephen Frail, the Northern Ireland U19s and U17s boss, did not have a lot to cheer about during the season.

The U19s warmed up for a UEFA qualifying tournament in October with a couple of friendlies against Cyprus at Dungannon's Stangmore Park back in September.

The first game ended goalless but Liam McKenna pounced in game two to give Northern Ireland a 1-0 victory over the Cypriots.

In the qualifying tournament, which was staged in Poland, the U19s found the going tough.

Danny Amos scored in their opening game, which was against the host nation. However, the Poles won the encounter 2-1.

Then they took on Germany. They were level with the Germans at half-time – team captain Eoin Toal scored for Northern Ireland on 22 minutes – but they shipped six goals in the second half to slump to a heavy 7-1 defeat.

In their final game they restored some pride when they played out a goalless draw against Belarus.

## Under-17 Team

The Under-17 international team found the going tough during 2017-18.

They took part in the Nordic Cup last summer and registered three defeats and one victory.

Iceland defeated the U17s 3-0 in their first game at the tournament and then Poland put four past them. Callum Ferris grabbed a consolation goal in that one.

The third game at the Nordic Cup was also tough but the team's performance improved as they lost out 3-2 to Norway. Christopher Conn and Daniel Finlayson were on target for the boys in green.

Their final game at the Nordic Cup saw them defeat Faroe Islands 3-1 thanks to goals from Christopher Conn (two) and Jack Scott.

The Nordic Cup appearance was a warm-up for a UEFA U17 Euros qualifying tournament in Malta at the end of October.

Northern Ireland were drawn in a tough group and lost their opening two games, 5-0 to Switzerland and 3-0 to Belgium.

However, they did experience some joy. Ben Wilson scored the only goal of the game as they defeated hosts Malta by a goal to nil.

The Northern Ireland Under-16 development side, which will transition in to next season's U17s, turned on the style in a UEFA U16 development tournament on home soil in April. They beat Kosovo 4-1 and Luxembourg 2-1 before rattling eight past the Faroes in an 8-2 win.

# INTERNATIONAL SENIOR WOMEN'S TEAM

The senior women's team began their Women's World Cup Qualifying Group 3 campaign back in September with an away game to top seeds Norway .

Playing against a team fresh from the Women's Euros was always going to be a tough opener – and it proved to be just that.

Despite excellent defending and an outstanding debut for 16-year-old goalkeeper Lauren Perry, Norway ran out 4-1 winners in Fredrikstad.

Goals in added time at the end of the first half and again in the second half were tough on the Northern Ireland players who had scored an excellent goal through Caragh Milligan following a great build-up involving Rachel Newborough and Rachel Furness.

Four days later Northern Ireland took on Republic of Ireland at Mourneview Park in Lurgan. The game ended in a 2-0 defeat, and again one of the goals was conceded in added time at the end of the first half.

A tough game against Slovakia away in November brought the fixtures for 2017 to a close and what a performance Northern Ireland produced.

Playing against a team ranked 15 places above them and despite going a goal down against the run of play, the players showed great character, belief, determination and lots of ability to turn it around and record an excellent and fully deserved 3-1 victory in Zilina. The goals were scored by Julie Nelson, Rachel Furness and Caragh Milligan.

Next up was a trip to Turkey for the Gold City Cup in March. It was the first time Northern Ireland had taken part in the tournament and they began with an outstanding performance, defeating Kazakhstan 2-0 with goals from Lauren Wade and Kirsty McGuinness.

# INTERNATIONAL SENIOR WOMEN'S TEAM



The Northern Ireland senior women's team played in front of more than 30,000 spectators when they took on the Dutch in Eindhoven.

The tournament had a tight fixture schedule, with games being played every other day. Next up were Romania and again, in very warm conditions, Northern Ireland produced an excellent performance to draw 1-1, the goal coming from Megan Bell. It was her first at senior level.

In the third game the senior women took on Ukraine. They lost 3-1 in what was a hard fought game. Kirsty McGuinness scored the goal for the girls in green.

In their final game, and despite dominating the game, Northern Ireland lost 1-0 to an 88th minute strike from Kosovo.

Overall it proved to be a great preparation camp for the squad. Four players - Emily Wilson, Louise McDaniel, Rebecca McKenna and Yasmin White (all aged 16-18) - made their debuts having come through the U19s; three of them played in the U19 Euros last August.

A fifth player, Freya Holdaway, also made her debut. Freya plays in England with Crystal Palace.

Following on from Turkey, Northern Ireland played the recently crowned UEFA European champions The Netherlands in a Women's World Cup Qualifying Group 3 match.

The game was played at the excellent PSV Eindhoven ground in front of a record 31,342 spectators. It was an incredible experience for the Northern Ireland players.

The class of the Netherlands was evident from the first whistle and they simply oozed class as they defeated a gallant Northern Ireland by seven goals to nil.

Four days later Northern Ireland hosted another World Cup qualifier, this time welcoming Norway to Shamrock Park in Portadown.

It was another hard fought game with Northern Ireland defending well and trying to hit Norway on the break.

The match was scoreless at half-time but the Norwegians eventually broke through and recorded a slightly flattering 3-0 victory.

With being ranked fifth in the group it was always going to be a tough campaign for Northern Ireland. However, the number of young players making their debuts and some outstanding performances hints at better times ahead.



Northern Ireland forward Rachel Furness battles for possession during the Women's World Cup qualifier against the Netherlands.



# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S U19 AND U17

## Under-19 Team

After the high of competing in the UEFA U19 Women's Euros, a new-look squad travelled to Hungary to play two friendly games.

Both games were close affairs and gave the new additions an opportunity to impress. Unfortunately the results did not reflect how well the squad played with two narrow defeats: 2-1 (the goal being scored by Megan Beattie) and 1-0.

The squad travelled home optimistic for the UEFA Women's U19 qualifiers at the end of September.

These games were played in Portugal and in the opening game Northern Ireland faced the host country. Despite being the dominant side, and missing a number of chances, they conceded late goals to lose 2-0.

This was followed by a 7-0 defeat against Norway and then the tournament ended with a 2-1 win over Cyprus. The goals were scored by Caitlyn Hamilton and Rebecca Bassett.

Positives from the tournament included identifying players from outside the country who are eligible to play for Northern Ireland, including Caitlyn Collighan from England and Chloe Atkins from Canada. Following on from last summer's Euros Leyla McFarland continued her great form. Leyla, whose father is from east Belfast, is based in San Diego in the US.

## Under-17 Team

In August the U17s travelled to the Manchester City Academy for an insight into academy football and a game against the Man City Academy.

This was followed up in September with a game against Scotland at UJJ where goals from Megan Bell and Kelsie Burrows ensured a 2-2 draw.

That was the final preparation game before the squad travelled to Portugal to play their UEFA WU17 Qualifying Tournament.

The games were played in very high temperatures. In the first game Northern Ireland produced an excellent performance, narrowly losing 2-1 to the hosts. The GPS readings of the squad were the highest for any Northern Ireland WU17 team, showing again the amount of effort that the players put in. Leah McEvoy scored the goal early in the second half.

Two days later, again in high temperatures, the squad played Austria, the top seeds and favourites.

The amount of effort that the squad put in during the first game caught up on them as the match progressed and four late goals meant a flattering scoreline of 7-0 for the Austrians.

However, the resilience of the young squad could be seen in the final game where, despite tired legs, the girls in green put in an excellent performance. They were dominant from start to finish and deservedly won 2-0, with both goals coming from Megan Bell.

There were lots of positives with not only young Northern Ireland-based girls being identified as potential future senior internationals but also one from the United States, Breckyn Monteith, whose father had emigrated having been born in Omagh.

In February the squad travelled to Turkey. It featured several new players who were given an opportunity to step up as a number of the previous players had been moved up to the U19s.

The squad experienced two defeats against Turkey, losing 4-0 and 3-0. However, the experience held them in good stead as the majority of them played in a WU16 Development Tournament hosted by the IFA in April.

In the development tournament excellent performances by all of the squad meant they recorded three fine victories to win the event. They won 5-1 v Kosovo (Casey Howe 2, Joely Andrews, Cora Chambers and Teegan Lynch) and 2-0 against Luxembourg (Toni Leigh Finnegan, Kerry Beattie) and then 5-0 versus the Faroe Islands (Casey Howe, Kerri Beattie, Teegan Lynch, Caitlin McGuinness, Cora Morgan).



*The Northern Ireland Women's Under-17 team that were narrowly beaten 2-1 by Portugal in their opening Women's U17 Euros qualifier.*



# GIRLS' REGIONAL EXCELLENCE PROGRAMME/ACADEMY

## Girls' Regional Excellence Programme

The Girls' Regional Excellence Programme has continued to grow with a total of 210 girls now involved at four centres across the country.

The girls range from 2002 to 2007 birthdays and they receive 1.5 hours per week coaching for 32 weeks and also compete in inter regional games. Sessions also take place during the summer holidays, again at various centres around the country.

At the centres players are identified to join development squads - 2003 to 2006 - with between 14 and 18 players chosen per squad.

These squads receive a two-hour session on a Sunday made up of one hour in the gym and one hour of football coaching as well as two hours on a Monday with either one hour of gymnastics, strength and conditioning or fitness plus one hour of coaching.

All of the girls in the Regional Excellence programme also take part in summer training sessions.

In November a conference was held on wellbeing along with strength and conditioning and there was a special presentation from the technical director of Manchester City Girls' Academy on what it takes to be an academy player at the Premier League club.

Throughout the year a number of games were played against boys' teams as well as against the Metropolitan Girls League in Dublin and the Republic's Schoolgirls.

One of the highlights to date this year was in March when Northern Ireland hosted the Bob Docherty Tournament for U15 Schoolgirls.

It was a great event. Girls representing the Republic, Wales, England and Scotland as well as two squads from the Regional Excellence Programme stayed at Belfast's Stormont Hotel and played games at the Ulster University at Jordanstown.

The large crowds that turned up to watch over the three days witnessed a high standard of football.

A strong Republic of Ireland team were the overall winners, while Northern Ireland finished fourth following a great 2-0 victory over last year's champions Wales.

The 04 squad, often up against players a year older than them, put in three excellent performances and the experience of taking part can only be good going forward to next year.

Over the year there are a number of presentations to the players on a range of topics. One recent innovative addition saw the girls being the first players in Britain and Ireland to make use of the Soccer Mindset Academy Programme app to help with their preparation for challenges.

With the app the IFA is ensuring all four corners of the Player Development Model are covered. These pillars - technical/ tactical, psychological, physical and social - make up the DNA of a Northern Ireland international player.

## Girls' Performance Academy

The Irish FA's Girls' & Women's Performance Academy had an intake of 11 players in 2017-18.

The academy, which is seen as a natural progression from the Regional Girls' Excellence Programme and underage international development squads, has provided the players with extra coaching and extra fitness training at the university's world class facilities while also tapping in to some of the best coaches and sports scientists in Northern Ireland.

The introduction of the academy, which is aimed at giving our best young players access to top quality coaching, facilities and sports science, has already encouraged players to stay at home to develop their game and receive their education at Ulster University.

The academy has created a pathway for talented young female players to develop and thrive while they receive support through aided enrolment, a study programme, a scholarship which assists with tuition fees, and world class support services.

Within the current intake eight players have been selected to trial for the World University Games in 2019.

Academic mentors, flexible study options, training and recovery programmes, a programme of matches, individual development plans, coach qualification and placement opportunities plus guidance on how to maintain a healthy lifestyle are among the other benefits.

During the 2017-18 academic year more than 40 morning pitch sessions were held along with a similar number of gym sessions. This has improved the contact time with each player, and does not include additional university club training sessions.

With 2018-2019 on the horizon the expectation is that the academy will grow further with more players coming on board.



*Northern Ireland were on fire in a UEFA development tournament for under-16 girls' sides which also featured Faroe Islands, Kosovo and Luxembourg. They won all three games, scoring 12 goals along the way.*



# ELITE PERFORMANCE PROGRAMME CLUB NI



Club NI's U16s in action against Brazil in Dungannon.

## The Elite Performance Programme entered its fourth season in 2017-18.

The programme has been set up to develop a pathway for the next generation of senior Northern Ireland internationals and the impact of the programme can be seen in the increasing numbers of young players being recognised and signed by professional clubs.

In the 2017-18 season the Elite Performance Programme continued to deliver results through the operation of the four-pillar model focusing on the physical, technical, tactical and psychological/social development of players.

Extensive talent identification was completed and the Club NI technical team continued to build relationships with clubs and scouts. Coaches delivered three sessions per week along with residentials and international games to players in the programme to both develop and nurture them.

In July 2017 a total of 10 players from Club NI started with professional clubs, highlighting the positive impact of Club NI on the performance pathway.

In September the Irish FA launched its first Performance School at Integrated College Dungannon.

Thirteen players entered the school at Year 8 (first year)

level. The programme will enable Club NI to deliver player development and educational pathways to better support talented young Northern Ireland players as they strive to reach their potential.

Club NI is looking forward to continuing to develop the programme further and will also be looking at implementing education projects focused on the fourth pillar (psychological development).

### Improvements to the Elite Performance Programme in 2017-18

- Launch of IFA's first ever performance school at Integrated College Dungannon
- Games programme enhanced to allow for more matches against GB-based academies
- Implementation of showcase games
- Working to develop improved talent identification systems
- Ongoing work to continually improve communications with parents, clubs and other stakeholders.

### Partnerships

- JD Sport sponsorship
- JD initiative to find a future star
- Integrated College Dungannon

### Performance Focus Agreement

- Performed against objectives set out by Sport NI

# ELITE PERFORMANCE PROGRAMME

## CLUB NI



*The Club NI 2004s performed superbly at the inaugural West Ham United Cup.*

### Games Programme

Club NI continues to deliver a busy games programme at all age groups, helping to ensure young players are being exposed to and challenged at the highest level through regular participation in elite youth tournaments, academy visits to clubs in Britain and international games.

In 2017-2018 Club NI implemented additional opportunities to showcase players through more visits to GB clubs and during the season Club NI players participated in 45 games.

### Highlights for the various age groups included:

#### 2002s - Northern Ireland v Brazil

Northern Ireland U16s took on Brazil back in September at Stangmore Park in Dungannon.

The Samba Boys scored after just 16 seconds through Pedro Arthur but the Northern Ireland boys came close to equalising midway through the first half.

Brazil scored again on 32 minutes, playing some beautiful passing football that allowed Joao Peglow to outpace the home defence and slot home from 18 yards.

Northern Ireland performed much better in the second half and had their fair share of both possession and chances on goal but the Brazilians held out for a deserved 2-0 success.

Despite the result team manager Darren Murphy felt the match was excellent preparation for the Victory Shield competition and said playing against Brazil would be a memory his players would cherish.

#### 2003s - Northern Ireland v Fleetwood

The game against Fleetwood took place in March at Fleetwood's impressive training complex.

It was a showcase match organised by Elite Performance Director Jim Magilton, who has found focused games of this kind, aimed at scouts and academy managers, are a hugely successful way of highlighting the talented and well-prepared young players coming through the Club NI system.

The Club NI squad performed well and won comfortably - and 13 of the 16 Northern Ireland players taking part secured trials across 43 clubs as a result.

### 2004s – West Ham United Cup

2018 was the first year of the West Ham United Cup. The elite tournament took place at the end of March/early April. Club NI 2004s played five games - against West Ham United, Leicester City, Vancouver Whitecaps (Canada), Kashiwa Reysol (Japan) and Sandefjord Fotball (Norway) – and won four of them.

The high calibre competition proved to be an excellent development opportunity for Club NI players while exposing them to different styles of play (Asian, North American and Nordic).

The boys performed well over the five games with four wins, one defeat, 13 goals scored, one goal conceded - and there were only three shots on target against them during the whole tournament. Their only defeat was against overall winners Kashiwa Reysol – and they were beaten by an injury time strike.

### 2005s – Rangers

An annual visit to Rangers in Glasgow has become an established part of the Club NI games programme.

Such club visits are important to challenge the players and also help them learn more about academy set-ups. And, of course, they also enable academies to monitor Club NI players.

This year 2004s, 2005s and 2006s took on their peers at Rangers. It was the third year that Club NI visited the Glasgow club.

There were also additional academy visits to Celtic and Brighton and Hove Albion this year.



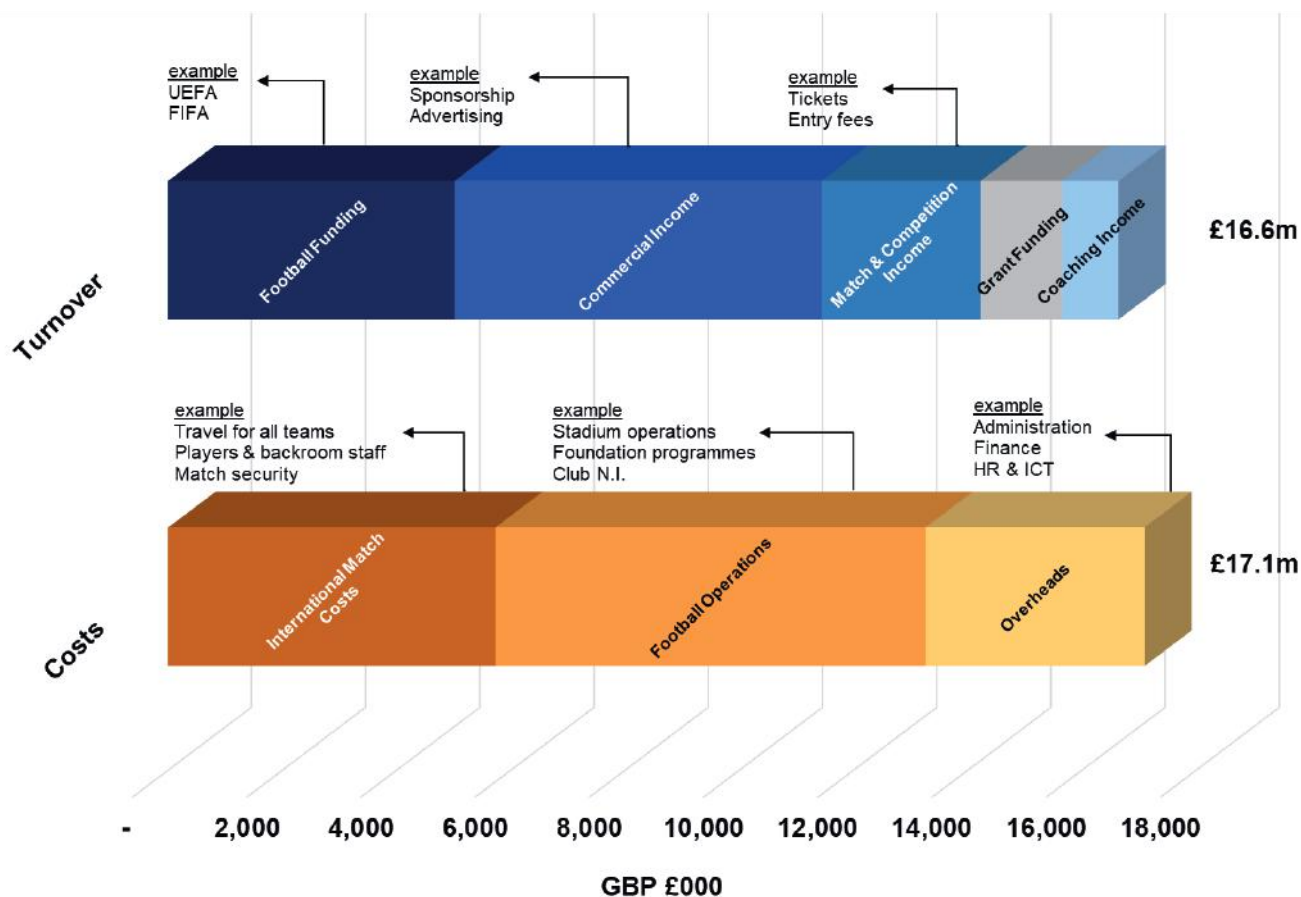
*The Irish FA launched its first Performance School at Integrated College Dungannon back in September.*



# FINANCE REPORTS

For the year ended 31 December 2017 the Irish FA had total turnover of £16.6m and total costs of £17.1m.

The main categories of turnover and costs are analysed as follows:



After accounting for financial gains of £0.3m the overall loss for the year was £0.2m.

This performance was anticipated in what was a non-tournament year.

The Irish FA Foundation was established at the end of 2016 and for the 13-month period to 31 December 2017 it recorded a deficit of £0.5m while the Irish Football Association including the Stadium Development Company achieved a profit of £0.3m.

The profit of £3.8m generated in 2016 reflected the success of Euro 2016 and one-off insurance proceeds associated with the new stadium development.

Cash balances at 31 December 2017 totalled £5.3m largely due to advance payments made by UEFA in relation to future events.

The external auditors, PWC, have issued an unqualified audit report to all the IFA companies, raising no material areas of concern.

# THE INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION BOARD (IFAB)

## The Irish Football Association continues to play an active role in world football's rules making body, the IFAB.

Following the extensive redrafting of the laws of the game approved in 2016, 2017 was a period of consolidation with some minor alterations mostly arising from the changes of the year before.

Top of the agenda was the vexing issue of Video Assistant Referees (VAR). The experimental phase which had commenced in the summer of 2016 was further progressed, VARs were used in a variety of FIFA competitions including the World U20 and the Club World Championship.

More tellingly VARs were used in both the Bundesliga and Serie A from the start of the 2017-18 season - in all matches - and they are also being used in another 40 countries including USA, Australia, South Korea, Japan, Portugal, Netherlands, Poland and Belgium.

The experiences of these nations (rather than the unconvincing use in a small number of FA Cup matches in England) were the backdrop for intensive academic research into VARs which culminated in a proposal to the March AGM that the use of VARs be authorised and permitted in the World Cup finals.

This decision was unanimously ratified in Zurich and we can all look forward to their utilisation in Russia this summer.

This will be a telling test for both the concept and the operation of the scheme, and the IFA looks forward to the review of its operation and further developments which might make the scheme more affordable and feasible for smaller associations such as the IFA.



*Video assistant referees (VARs) will be used at this summer's World Cup in Russia.*



# DOMESTIC FOOTBALL

*Darren McCauley, who scored a superb opening goal, on the ball for Coleraine during the 2018 Tennent's Irish Cup final against Cliftonville. The Bannsideers won the game 3-1.*



## Four finals within the space of four days were staged at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park at the end of the 2017-18 domestic season.

First up in the May feast of finals was the Tennent's Irish Cup decider between Cliftonville and Coleraine, which the Bannsideers won 3-1, followed by the Junior Cup, Harry Cavan Youth Cup and Intermediate Cup finals.

A peach of a goal from Darren McCauley opened the scoring for Coleraine before Rory Donnelly hit back for the Reds. However, Oran Kearney's side were not to be outdone in front of just over 12,000 spectators as substitute Aaron Burns slotted home neatly to make it 2-1 and a clever dink from veteran striker Eoin Bradley sealed the victory.

A week earlier Coleraine had been in the doldrums after Crusaders pipped them to the Danske Bank Premiership title.

It was a thrilling climax to the league race. Going into their final games against Ballymena United and Glenavon both teams were neck and neck. With 15 minutes left on the clock Coleraine were drawing 0-0 with Glenavon and the Crues were losing, however goals from Philip Lowry and David Cushey put the north Belfast side in the driving seat and they ran out 2-1 winners against Ballymena to claim the title. The Coleraine-Glenavon match ended goalless, meaning the Crues (91 points) won the league by a two-point margin in the end.

Two days after the Irish Cup final, the fonaCAB Junior Cup decider was won by holders Enniskillen Rangers. Two goals from striker Jason Keenan proved enough to see off Greenisland.

Later the same day Linfield Rangers and Cliftonville Strollers battled it out in the Harry Cavan Youth Cup final. Linfield opened the scoring in the first minute and grabbed a second midway through the first half – and that was enough to secure the victory. The goals were scored by Ethan Wynne and Adam Carroll.

The following day, in the Match Intermediate Cup final, Queen's University surprisingly overwhelmed NIFL Premier Intermediate champions Dundela.

# DOMESTIC FOOTBALL

Queen's, who had finished second to the Duns in the league, were irresistible as they ran out 4-1 winners, scoring some super goals along the way. And it meant Queen's secured their first major trophy in their 108-year history. Their scorers were Eamon Fyfe, Matt McManus, Ciaran O'Hare and Ronan Young. Jordan Morrison got Dundela's goal.

At the start of the 2017-18 season the National Football Stadium hosted the Electric Ireland Women's Challenge Cup decider. Sion Swifts Ladies proved too strong for Newry City Ladies, winning the game back in September by two goals to nil. Sion captain Kendra McMullan grabbed both goals.

And in February NIFL brought their League Cup final to the National Football Stadium. Dungannon Swifts won the trophy for the first time in their history thanks to a fine 3-1 victory over Ballymena United in the decider, while Ballymena also lost out to Crusaders (4-2) in the Co Antrim Shield final, which was staged at Ballymena Showgrounds.

## Junior international squad

The Northern Ireland Junior international team were cock-a-hoop back in October when they won the Umbro Quadrangular Tournament in Glasgow.

Team boss Harry McConkey was particularly delighted as it had taken him 12 years to get his hands on the trophy.

Northern Ireland registered a 2-0 win over the Republic of Ireland and defeated Isle of Man 4-0. And they also drew 2-2 with hosts Scotland in the tournament.



*Enniskillen Rangers (in red) won the Junior Cup for the second year running at the start of May. They eased past Greenisland by two goals to nil.*

# CLUB LICENSING AND FACILITIES

The club licensing process continues to set out defined quality standards and procedures by which clubs are assessed for continual improvement against sporting, infrastructure, personnel and administrative, legal and financial criteria.

The success and acknowledgement of the benefits of club licensing continues to spread across the world, with the system also being implemented in UEFA's sister confederations and their member associations as well as other sports such as basketball and rugby.

In order to participate in both UEFA and domestic club competitions it is not enough to qualify on sporting merit alone, with one of the admission criteria in the competition regulations being that a club must also have been issued with a licence.

Nine UEFA licences, 12 Premiership licences, five Promotion licences and 17 Championship licences were awarded for season 2017-18.

Just as clubs are required to fulfil minimum criteria the Association's Club Licensing and Facilities Unit must also comply with minimum requirements for operating the club licensing system.

Originally based on the internationally recognised quality management system ISO 9001:2000, the UEFA Club Licensing Quality Standard was devised to ensure consistency in the assessment principles and methods followed by all licensors, and to this end the annual UEFA/SGS audit of the IFA unit was

successfully completed in September 2017 without any non-conformities identified.

The most recent licensing cycle concluded in April 2018 to award licences for incoming season 2018-19. A total of 27 clubs were awarded a licence, once again highlighting the continued impact and importance of the club licensing system in Northern Ireland.



*NIFL Premier Intermediate champions Dundela (in green), who will be playing in the Championship next season, were no match for Queen's University in the Match Intermediate Cup final. Queen's ended a 108-year wait for a major trophy after defeating the Duns 4-1 in the decider at the National Football Stadium.*



# REFEREEING

*Female officials are now an integral part of the South Belfast Youth League.*



## The main focus for refereeing this year is recruitment at all levels of the game, while during 2017 development continued at all levels.

Over the past 12 months more than 750 referees have been trained in report writing and safeguarding and have undertaken diversity training, and all of them have been Access NI checked.

Six active development groups within Grassroots Football have been established and further regional work is being conducted with leagues.

In addition during the 2017-18 season 24 referees have enrolled in a High Potential National Development Group.

And the past 12 months have also seen the highest number of Grassroots assessments completed since 2013.

As a result of funding provided by Active, Fit and Sporty for Female Participation, the Irish FA has recruited 32 new female referees in Belfast, Mid-Ulster and Fermanagh. This has doubled the number of active female referees in Northern Ireland and provided a great platform for the development of female officials going forward.

Several of the young female referees are now officiating within the Small-Sided Games programme in the South Belfast Youth League. They are being mentored and given opportunities to act as referee, assistant referee and fourth official.

Highlights this season have included the first ever all-female team officiating a South Belfast League final - and there's also a record number of female referees enrolling to the summer-based women's football leagues.

Several female officials took part in their first games at international level during the recent Girls' Under-16 UEFA Development Tournament in Northern Ireland. The tournament provided a fantastic opportunity and insight for young officials on how games at international level operate.

Alongside the new raft of female officials more than 100 new referees passed their exam in the 2017-2018 season.

And Tim Marshall and Keith Kennedy were selected to represent the association at the UEFA Under-17 European Championships in England. They were part of a panel of 24 officials from around Europe.

The annual Irish FA Premiership Referee, Assistant and Observer Conference, staged at the Slieve Donard Hotel in Newcastle, ran over three days and covered changes to the game and injury prevention among other topics.

The guest speaker was Lee Probert, who has been a referee in England's Premier League for more than 10 years. Former Premier League and FIFA referee Mark Clattenburg, who refereed the UEFA Euro 2016 Final and the 2016 UEFA Champions League Final and various other high profile games, was also in attendance as part of an exchange with Saudi Arabia.

# GRASSROOTS PROGRAMMES



## McDonald's Community Programme

The restructured Club Mark accreditation programme now covers 192 grassroots and Premiership clubs over three development bands: McDonald's Foundation Club Mark, Club Mark and Advanced Club Mark.

As well as overseeing the implementation of good practice from an administration point of view, the Club Development Officer also complemented the 12-week programme with workshops on funding, age related coaching and several networking events.

This aspect of football development is essential to assist our clubs to create a positive football environment for young people and volunteers.

The undoubted highlight of the year was recognition from UEFA. The Gold Award for Best Grassroots Club was awarded to West Belfast-based St Oliver Plunkett FC for their off-field work in supporting young people in their community.

## Small-Sided Games

The McDonald's Small-Sided Games programme welcomed two new girls-only sections, in Belfast and Mid Ulster, as the Irish FA Foundation strives to promote football for all.

A target of 12,000-plus participants in Small-Sided Games Centres across Northern Ireland for 2018 is within the foundation's sights as more children are drawn to a safe, fun and challenging football environment.

The now well established five, seven or nine a side format is proving to be successful and continues to underpin the demand for Grassroots Introductory and Level 1 coaching awards.

The Silent Sidelines initiative across all Small-Sided Games Centres is a monthly routine and gaining momentum as the foundation continues to demonstrate the importance of creating a positive playing environment for young players and encouraging independent decision making through a reduction in so-called sideline coaching.

## Community Awards

The awards ceremony travelled outside Belfast for the first time in 2017 and was equally successful in the Guild Hall in Derry-Londonderry.

A record number of nominations - 155 - were received across eight categories and more than 1400 online votes were cast for the People's Award nominees.

The upward curve highlights the engagement of the foundation's grassroots development team with the awards as well as the confidence McDonald's places in the foundation's ability to deliver an outstanding programme.

## Hughes Insurance Football Camps

Holiday football camps have always been a key element of the Grassroots Team's work and 2017 was no different as the foundation embarked on a new partnership with Hughes Insurance.

In total 2177 children - 1970 boys and 207 girls - attended the football camps across Northern Ireland over the Easter, summer and Halloween periods.

More girls attended in 2017, in line with the foundation's commitment to encourage more female participation, and the inclusion of specific goalkeeping camps proved to be popular and will become an established part of the holiday camp programme.

## Back In The Game

The Back In The Game programme has grown across Northern Ireland with many success stories of inclusion and people seeking healthier lifestyles as well as simply continuing to enjoy the beautiful game.

Eight festivals in partnership with the Action Cancer NI charity were hosted across the regions and provided participation opportunities for a record number of men (458) and women aged over 30 of varying abilities. The number of registered clubs rose to 48 (40 male, eight female).

A standout example of the progress this initiative has made can be found in Ballymena where the Braidside Belters now boast more than 70 members and provide workshops and information sessions on topics such as nutrition, mental health and cancer awareness.

## Education and Employability Programme

The foundation's Education and Employability Programme started in September 2017.

The aim of the programme is to work alongside schools and colleges to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to gain employment in a wide variety of sports, and particularly in the football industry. It is a work-based learning programme with theoretical and practical learning situations.



# GRASSROOTS PROGRAMMES



To date the programme has been delivered to 241 pupils and 13 teachers in 12 schools and colleges.

Since September the foundation, via the programme, has delivered 10 Grassroots Introductory Awards, four Level 1 Coaching Awards, seven Futsal Intro Awards and various other courses and workshops.

It has also started two programmes aimed at NEETS (young people not in education, employment or training). The foundation is working in partnership with ABC (Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon) Council on its Kickback Programme and Belfast City Council on its Goals Programme.

## Youth Development Co-ordinators

Six personnel within the foundation – youth development co-ordinators - are now working closely with several senior men's and women's clubs in Northern Ireland to establish best practice, youth development pathways and mentoring opportunities.

The YDCs are supporting clubs to attain both domestic and UEFA licensing as part of a targeted club development intervention.

To date they have co-ordinated two Premiership Development Days which have enabled Premiership clubs, both male and female, to challenge each other in a developmental setting.

And the development days also acted as a talent identification exercise to further promote the strategic player pathway to elite football.

Participating clubs are Crusaders Strikers, Ballymena United, Carrick Rangers, Cliftonville Ladies, Sion Swifts Ladies, Portadown, Warrenpoint Town, Linfield Ladies, Glenavon, Portadown Ladies, Ballinamallard United, Derry City Ladies and Glentoran Belfast United.

## Images left to right:

*Irish FA President David Martin presented the UEFA Gold Award for Best Grassroots Club to West Belfast-based St Oliver Plunkett FC.*

*Kids having fun at one of the Hughes Insurance Football Camps.*

*Northern Ireland goalkeeping legend Pat Jennings handed out the trophies at the McDonald's Community Awards gala held in Derry-Londonderry.*

*Small-Sided Games Centres like this one in Poleglass are encouraging kids to get on the ball right across Northern Ireland.*

# DISABILITY FOOTBALL SPECIAL EDUCATION

## Coaching

A comprehensive coaching programme continues to develop in Special Education. Free coaching blocks remain very popular with 31 schools receiving coaching in 2017-18 with more than 1000 pupils benefitting. This figure is made possible with the support of and delivery by the IFA's primary school coaches.

## Competitions

Six National Cup competitions for the various ages and abilities took place throughout the year across Northern Ireland. These involved more than 40 schools and support units and more than 1000 pupils participated.

## National Winners

FA Cup Under-15 SLD Schools – Sandleford, Coleraine

FA Cup Over-15 SLD Schools – Parkview, Lisburn

Primary MLD Schools – Harberton, Belfast

Primary SLD Schools – Rathore, Newry

Years 8-10 MLD Schools – Cedar Lodge, Belfast

Years 11+ MLD Schools – St Gerard's, Belfast

# DISABILITY FOOTBALL ACTIVITIES

## Clubs

The IFA continues to support the creation of disability sections in mainstream clubs as part of the Inclusive Clubs project. In this period five new disability sections were created at Ards Rangers, Killen Rangers (Tyrone), Crusaders, St James' Swifts (Belfast) and Grove Athletic (Belfast).

## George Best Cup

A record 72 teams from across the UK and Ireland participated in the annual George Best Community Cup five-a-side competition for adults with a disability. Staged at the Billy Neill complex in Dundonald, it featured four ability bands (divisions). It was the third year of a five-year sponsorship package secured for the competition through the George Best Foundation.

## Winners

Premiership – Belfast Deaf United  
Championship – Llandudno (Wales)  
League 1 – Lisburn Special Olympics  
League 2 – CSP (Belfast)

## Deaf Football

Belfast Deaf United participated in the 2017-18 British Deaf Cup. They lost to Fulham 2-1 in the competition in the early rounds but are due to play in the Plate final this month - against Barnet in Carlisle.

Notable victories on the way to the plate final included a thumping 8-2 win against Brighton and Hove Albion.

## Cerebral Palsy Football

The Northern Ireland CP team finished in a creditable 11th place in the 2017 World Championships, held in San Jose, Argentina.

The highlight of the tournament for the team was a fine 2-1 victory over Portugal, a country ranked higher than the boys in green.

Northern Ireland are currently 13th in the world rankings and will compete in the 2018 European Championships in the Netherlands.

## Powerchair Football

Northern Ireland side Trailblazers Powerchair Football Club finished in second place in the AIPF Powerchair League that involves clubs from across the island of Ireland. And local team Lightning competed in the AIPF Championship, finishing in third place.

Northern Ireland played in the 2017 Home Nations Championships in Kent. They finished runners-up, beating the Republic of Ireland 2-1 along the way. First caps were recently awarded to members of this squad.

The IFA Foundation has successfully secured funding support from the Department for Communities to provide new chairs for 12 players. This will help develop the game and support two new clubs formed in 2017, the Devenish Warriors (Fermanagh) and Hot Wheels (Tyrone).

## Coach Education

Coach education remains an important supporting structure in this area of football development. During 2017-18 six IFA Level 1 Coaching Disabled Footballers Awards were delivered to 100-plus coaches. And one IFA Level 2 Coaching Disabled Footballers Award was also delivered in this period to 18 coaches.

## McDonald's Disability Club of the Year

This was awarded to Oxford Bulls, a club for players with Down's Syndrome in Co Londonderry. They have created and delivered an excellent programme and have raised the profile of disability sport across Northern Ireland.

## Ulster Disability Footballer of the Year

This prestigious award, presented by Castlereagh Glentoran Supporters Club, was won by Northern Ireland Cerebral Palsy team captain David Leavy in 2017.

David had played in the 2016 Paralympics in Brazil for Great Britain and led Northern Ireland to qualification for the 2017 CP World Championships in Argentina.



The Northern Ireland Powerchair Football team finished second in the Home Nations Championships.



The Northern Ireland Cerebral Palsy team which competed at the World Championships in Argentina.



# GRASSROOTS PRIMARY SCHOOLS



*Both the boys' and girls' sides from St Patrick's Primary School in Saul, near Downpatrick, were victorious at the National Primary Schools Futsal Finals held in the Valley Leisure Centre.*

## Primary Schools Curriculum Sports Programme (DENI)

The Curriculum Sports Programme is funded by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland and is now in its 10th year.

Through the programme the Irish FA Foundation employs 20 full-time specialist coaches with the aim of supporting and complementing existing Physical Education programmes to help develop the physical literacy of Foundation and Key Stage 1 pupils in primary schools throughout Northern Ireland.

The programme seeks to improve each participant's health and wellbeing and encourages them to embrace a healthy lifestyle from a young age. The lessons provided also engage children in a range of cross-curricular activities to help support their literacy and numeracy skills both through class-based sessions and homework projects.

In the 2017-18 academic year 177 schools were involved in the programme. This equated to 750 classes a week with 17,500 children and more than 750 teachers benefiting from the initiative. The programme continues to make a positive impact in producing citizens that are physically literate so that they have the ability, confidence and knowledge to engage in physical/sporting pursuits that will develop long term participation.

### Football For All Schools Programme

The Irish FA Foundation's primary school coaches and Football For All schools officers are responsible for several complementary school initiatives across Northern Ireland that are delivered during curriculum time and in after-school settings.

The combined schools team deliver coach education workshops, after-school programmes, festival events, futsal competitions and talent development programmes.

The team are responsible for the delivery of the Grassroots Fundamentals Award, Grassroots Introductory to Coaching Certificate and the Futsal Introductory Award.

These courses are delivered to teachers, pupils and volunteer club coaches with the aim of increasing the coaching knowledge and expertise that will work with participants of school age in the future.

The association now has a well-established primary and post primary futsal competition programme which is delivered across all 11 council areas and culminates in National Finals for both boys and girls. More than 2,500 players participated in programmes in 2017 which involved almost 300 schools.

The Irish FA continues to place a strong emphasis on the enhancement of schools' football across Northern Ireland through the Let Them Play strategy and feels that the development of schools' infrastructure and the collaboration with Northern Ireland Schools' Football Association are essential for football development.

# GRASSROOTS PRIMARY SCHOOLS



*King's Park Primary and Nursery School in Lurgan was the first primary school in Northern Ireland to achieve a Gold Award under the Irish Football Association's School Quality Mark programme.*

The School Quality Mark initiative looks to enhance and improve schools football at both primary and post primary level by providing them with the guidance to implement structures to build capacity and allow football to flourish. To date almost 30 schools have received the accreditation.

The Schools' District Player Development Programme is a talent identification and development programme spread across 12 regions in Northern Ireland and is delivered to more than 280 boys and girls in Primary 6 and 7 classes.

The programme is delivered by the primary school coaches and seeks to provide players with expert coaching at a young age and better prepare them for selection for the Irish FA Club NI and Girls' Excellence programmes.

## DOMESTIC FOOTBALL WOMEN'S CLUB FOOTBALL

The 2017-18 season for the bulk of leagues in Northern Ireland began as the NIFL Danske Bank Women's Premiership, which is played throughout spring and summer, was reaching its conclusion.

Linfield Ladies were crowned champions for the second time in their history and completed a double with a 6-3 win over Newry City Ladies in the NIFL Cup. The club continued to make history when hosting a Champions League qualifying tournament at the end of August. It featured teams from Finland, Poland and the Republic of Ireland as well as the Blues.

The following month Sion Swifts Ladies made history when winning the Electric Ireland Women's Challenge Cup 2-0 against a strong Newry side. It was their first major trophy.

In the NIWFA leagues Derry City secured promotion after winning the Championship league title. And Portadown Ladies made history when securing promotion to the Women's Premier League after defeating Killen Rangers 6-2 in the NIWFA Cup.

Comber Rec Ladies won the South 1 League with East Belfast winning North 1. Crewe United won North 2 and PSNI were victorious in South 2.

### Club Development

Consultations are currently under way on a new strategy focusing on the future development of women's football in Northern Ireland. Meetings have already taken place in Derry-Londonderry, Mid-Ulster and in the Belfast area (three). A wide range of ideas have been retrieved and will be reflected in the first draft of the strategy which is currently being written.

The introduction of youth co-ordinators in the NIFL Women's Premiership has made a huge impact in the women's game. All women's teams have youth programmes and are working towards Club Mark status. Mid-Ulster Ladies, Comber Rec, Bangor Ladies and Sion Swifts all achieved Club Mark in 2017.

A new partnership was started this year with Ascentiv Consultancy Coach Facilitators who are working with U19 development teams. The focus of their development workshops is to encourage and develop emotional resilience and leadership qualities within our young athletes.

The McDonald's Games Development Centre continued to give out bursaries to clubs who participated in a girls-only programme at Mallusk. Fifteen females and four males completed their Level 1 coaching qualification and are now actively coaching at their clubs.



# DOMESTIC FOOTBALL WOMEN'S CLUB FOOTBALL

*Sion Swifts Ladies (in yellow) defeated Newry City Ladies in the Electric Ireland Women's Challenge Cup final.*



## New Programmes

In partnership with Belfast City Council 2020 a new Mentor Programme was launched with Belfast girls' and women's clubs. The initiative currently has 14 clubs with 14 mentors and gives extra provision to coaches working within the female game through coach education and mentor support. The aim is to roll the mentor scheme out to all women's clubs because of the positive impact it has had on the game.

In partnership with Sport NI, Active, Fit and Sporty funding was secured for female participation in refereeing. A total of 32 new female referees were recruited in Belfast, Mid-Ulster and Fermanagh. In one fell swoop it doubled the number of active female referees in Northern Ireland and provided a great platform for the development of female officials going forward into this year and beyond.

A number of the young female referees are now officiating within the Small-Sided Games programme in the South Belfast Youth League. They are being mentored and given opportunities to act as referee, assistant referee and fourth official. It has ensured a record percentage of female referees are enrolling to the summer-based women's football leagues.

Active, Fit and Sporty funding has also supported the launch of the first ever Under-9 girls only Belfast Games Development Centre. There are currently 13 teams and 96 girls registered.

## Female Football Leaders Programme

Since its launch in 2013 the Female Football Leaders Programme has been a great success with 42 graduates to date.

The main aims of the project are to develop and extend the skills, knowledge and network of women in leadership and in decision-making roles within football with the intention of increasing the confidence, competence and capacity of women in a range of effective leadership behaviours.

It is also an aim of the programme to proactively support women to apply and progress in leadership roles within football clubs or on governing body committees and boards.

The latest Female Football Leaders course, which began in April, attracted 23 women.

# GRASSROOTS FUTSAL

## The Irish FA continues to meet the futsal objectives presented in the association's Let Them Play youth football strategy and the Game Changer futsal strategy.

The association is determined to change the historical participation of indoor football and replace it with a culture of futsal.

At a domestic level the game continues to grow with established leagues and cup competitions for both male and female senior players.

The male Northern Ireland Futsal League champions, Belfast United, represented Northern Ireland in the UEFA Futsal Champions League in Denmark in August 2017.

The youth female programmes still lead the way with provision from Under-9 to U17 level. However, there are plans for male U18 and U16 leagues to be established in the summer of 2018.

At a performance level Northern Ireland now has both senior male and female international teams.

The male side have competed in 10 international matches to date and will embark on their first World Cup qualifying campaign in early 2019. The female international side was established in late 2017 and the players will compete in European qualifying this summer.

The game continues to be extremely popular within the education sector. The Irish FA Foundation has created competitions at primary, post primary, college and university level. More than 2,500 participants (both male and female) have engaged with these programmes and the number continues to rise year on year.

Further grassroots programmes have been established within the association's Small-Sided Games programme with more than 2,000 youth footballers receiving a Futsal Games Programme during the winter period of their season.

Demand for futsal coach education remains strong with more than 700 coaches achieving their Futsal Introductory Award and over 100 completing the Futsal Level One Award to date.

Referee education continues to be delivered in all areas of Northern Ireland to meet the demands of futsal participation in all council areas. To date more than 100 referees have completed their Futsal Award and two referees have officiated in international futsal competitions.

The Irish FA is convinced futsal is playing an instrumental role in developing our football talent and is providing a viable positive option for those who believe they are less suited to outdoor football. With over 10,000 people involved in futsal programmes the popularity and demand of this indoor sport is growing at a fast rate.



*The Northern Ireland senior men's international futsal team in action against England.*



*Belfast United are the reigning Northern Ireland Futsal League champions.*



# GRASSROOTS VOLUNTEERING

## Volunteer development continued to flourish in 2017-18 – and 2017 in particular was an exciting year for the association’s volunteers.

The UEFA Women’s U19 Euros were delivered with the support of 130 volunteers. The roles they played ensured the tournament - it was staged last August - could reach its full potential and promote the women’s game to a wider audience.

The amount of unseen work behind the scenes was key to the smooth running of the event both on and off the pitch.

The Irish FA Foundation Volunteer Team also grew significantly as membership almost doubled with more people becoming aware of the opportunities within the Irish FA and the benefits of volunteering.

### Schools, Colleges and Universities

The Irish FA - for the first time in its history - set up a stall at Queen’s University’s Freshers Fair. As a result students from a range of backgrounds have now joined the Volunteer Team and using these new connections the Volunteer Development Officer can assist clubs in recruiting volunteers and creating a pathway for volunteers.



Members of the IFA Foundation Volunteer Team had a ball at the McDonald’s Community Awards gala. And their dedication to volunteering was recognised at the ceremony.

The association has also staged workshops for young people studying sport, recruiting them as volunteers for clubs across Northern Ireland. The Northern Regional College campuses in Ballymena and Coleraine both hosted workshops.

### Recognition For Volunteers

Members of the IFA Foundation Volunteer Team attended the McDonald’s Community Awards gala in Derry-Londonderry. The event was an excellent opportunity to recognise volunteers for their continued support and dedication to their various roles. Grassroots volunteers involved in clubs were rewarded for their devotion to developing the game.

### Goldmark 2018

More than 100 young volunteers who participate in Volunteer Now’s Goldmark Programme received accolades at a gala event in Belfast’s Wellington Park Hotel.

As part of a joint project by Ulster GAA, the Irish FA and Ulster Rugby volunteers aged 14-24 are given the opportunity to participate in the Goldmark initiative.

The programme encourages participants to volunteer in their chosen sport at grassroots level and has three sets of awards for volunteering: 50 hours, 100 hours and 200 hours. The 200-hour accolade is an award of excellence.

Irish FA President David Martin said: “It’s great to see so many young volunteers being recognised for their contribution to sport. Without the hours dedicated by volunteers football would simply not survive at grassroots level.”



Volunteers helped to ensure the 2017 Women’s U19 Euros were a big success.

# COMMUNITY RELATIONS PEACE PROGRAMME

Northern Ireland vice-captain Jonny Evans tried his hand at hurling at the launch of the Sport Uniting Communities project.



This year the Irish FA was awarded 1.7 million euros to deliver Sport Uniting Communities, a four-year project supported by the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

The project is being run by the Irish FA, Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby with the Football Association of Ireland acting as an official project partner.

It is a regional project that will use the reach of each sport to create meaningful and sustained contact between people from different communities and aims to improve attitudes, respect, inclusion and tolerance by engaging with a minimum of 16,996 participants and 180 sports clubs.

Research has shown sport delivers its most positive impacts on behaviour when it incorporates integrated mentoring, training, volunteering and work experience programmes. Based on this research the project partners have designed a range of activities focusing on education, training, empowerment and leadership directed to volunteers and clubs.

Since January the project has engaged with more than 1800 people across Ulster through Game Of Three Halves events, a Good Relations Conference, a Syrian refugee project and local schools visiting the Education and Heritage Centre at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park.

The project was officially launched in March at Queen's University's Dub playing fields in south Belfast.

The launch event was attended by Northern Ireland manager Michael O'Neill, Northern Ireland vice captain Jonny Evans and Senior Women's captain Marissa Callaghan who were joined by GAA All-Ireland title winning manager Peter McGrath, Monaghan GAA's Conor McManus and Down GAA's Jessica Foy, who plays for Northern Ireland's Senior Women's team, too.

Also there were Ulster Rugby's Operations Director Bryn Cunningham, Ulster and Ireland international Darren Cave and Ulster's Eliza Downey.

On the day players from the Northern Ireland U19 women's team, Ulster Ladies Gaelic Football Colleges All-Star team, Ulster Rugby, Dungannon rugby team and a Syrian football team had the opportunity to participate in a range of have-a-go activities in each of the three sports.

The activities were delivered by community sport development officers from the three governing bodies who will be rolling out the programme across Ulster. Elite players from football, GAA and rugby also passed on their expertise and shared stories of their involvement in other codes.

Clubs and volunteers are continually being recruited to take part in the project and events will be staged throughout 2018.



# NORTHERN IRELAND BOYS' FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION (NIBFA)



Ballymena Youth Academy celebrate their victory in the NIBFA U11 Cup.

NIBFA is celebrating its 42nd year in 2018 and the association has enjoyed its most active season to date with record numbers of teams affiliated (1440) and in participation in the NIBFA Knockout Cup and Plate competitions, which attracted 530 teams representing the nine affiliated leagues (Brendan Keogh Youth League, Carnbane Youth League, Downpatrick Youth League, Derry & District Youth Football Association, Harry Gregg Foundation League, Lisburn Invitational Junior League, NIBFA National League, South Belfast Youth League and Ballymena Small-Sided Games League).

## NIBFA Knockout Competitions

For age groups from Under-11 to Under-17 these serve as the boys' football equivalent of the FA Cup. The 2017-18 finals were held at Mid Ulster Sports Arena in Cookstown on Monday 7 May.

### The results were:

- U11 Plate Glentoran 2 -1 Rosario
- U11 Cup Ballymena YA 3-0 St Oliver Plunkett
- U12 Plate Ardoyne 2-1 Glenavon
- U12 Cup Lurgan Town 2-1 Glentoran
- U13 Cup Bertie Peacock Yth 4-2 Ballinamallard
- U14 Cup Glentoran 4-0 Linfield
- U15 Cup Linfield 4-0 Crusaders
- U16 Cup Linfield 3-1 Cliftonville
- U17 Cup Limavady Youths 4-3 Oxford United Stars

Full details and all this season's results can be found at [www.nibfa.org](http://www.nibfa.org).

## The Mallusk Games Festival 2017

The Small-Sided Games Festival celebrated its 12th year in the summer of 2017. There was a full house of more than 1300 children taking part. The festival helps to promote the advantages of small-sided games in player development.

## DB Champions Cup

The 6th Annual DB Champions Cup, which pitted the NIBFA National League champions against their counterparts from the Republic of Ireland, was played over the Christmas period. Northern Ireland sides were victorious in two of the four matches.

### The results were:

- U13 St Kevin's Boys 5 -1 Linfield
- U14 Glentoran 2-0 St Kevin's Boys
- U15 St Kevin's Boys 2-1 Linfield
- U16 Linfield 2-1 College Corinthians Cork

## International tournaments within Northern Ireland

Super Cup NI and the O'Neill's Foyle Cup, held annually in July, provide our local competitors with new and challenging opposition from various parts of the world. Details can be found on the respective websites [www.supercupni.com](http://www.supercupni.com) and [www.foylecup.com](http://www.foylecup.com).



There was U17 NIBFA Cup success for Limavady Youths this year.

# NORTHERN IRELAND SCHOOLS' FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

Action from the Victory Shield game between Northern Ireland and Wales which was staged at the Bangor Fuels Arena back in October. Northern Ireland's U16 Schoolboys won the game 1-0.



## Northern Ireland Schools' Cup competitions

There was another busy season of schools' football in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Schools' Cup competitions provided some excellent competitive matches across the various rounds. And schools right across Northern Ireland achieved success in the different age groups.

Seven games were staged on Schools' Cup Finals Day at Ballymena Showgrounds, while the Danske Bank U18 Schools' Cup final was played at Crusaders' Seaview stadium and the U14 Cup final was the first schools game hosted at the new Brandywell stadium in Derry-Londonderry.

### Schools' Cup 2018 Roll of Honour

Youth U18 Cup - St Columb's College (Derry-Londonderry)

Senior U16 Cup - St Columb's College

Senior U16 Plate - St Pius X (Magherafelt)

Small Schools Cup (U15) - St Patrick's (Lisburn)

Intermediate U14 Cup - Our Lady and St Patrick's College Knock

Invitational Cup U13 - St Columb's College

Small Schools Cup (U13) - St Patrick's (Lisburn)

Minor U12 Cup - Lurgan Junior High School

Minor U12 Plate - Larne High

### Primary Schools Five-a-side

The Northern Ireland Primary Schools Five-a-side Finals were held at Lisburn LeisurePlex.

Nine regional tournament winners were joined by last year's winners, King's Park, to vie for the overall title.

It took penalty kicks in both semi-finals to advance Mullavilly and Ballymacash to the final at the expense of Millburn and Holy Child. And Lisburn side Ballymacash defeated the Portadown side to win the tournament.

### Northern Ireland U18 Schoolboys

The Northern Ireland U18 Schoolboys team had a strong campaign as they set out to retain the Centenary Shield.

The team were undefeated, drawing three games and winning the other. They drew at home to Wales in Armagh and away against Scotland and eventual winners Republic of Ireland, while they impressively defeated England 3-1 at the Queen's Dub complex in Belfast. It means the schoolboys team have only lost once in the past two Centenary Shield competitions.

### U16 Victory Shield

As the host nation this year Northern Ireland performed well in the Victory Shield. They finished runners-up in the tournament behind the Republic of Ireland. The young Northern Ireland team narrowly lost their opening game to the Republic, however they responded with two fine wins against Scotland and Wales.



# COMMUNICATIONS SALES AND MARKETING

## COMMUNICATIONS

The association continues to use communications to promote our national teams and to showcase the work that the Irish FA does in promoting, fostering and developing football across the entire community in Northern Ireland.

### Social Media/Website

Our social media channels and website are among the best performing of any association in Europe, hitting all the targets we were set by UEFA as part of the GROW programme. Our total follower base has increased by 26% from 310,000 to 391,000. We added 19,720 new followers on Facebook and reached 1.4 million people in 2017 with dynamic and engaging content. We increased our Twitter following by 37,800 and added 8,400 new followers on Instagram. 578,000 people used our website with 2.6 million page views (the average across National Associations for website usage is -5%).

### Senior Men's Internationals

2017 will be remembered as a year of remarkable highs and some significant lows for our senior men's international side. The Communications Team helped facilitate media access for an ever-increasing number of journalists over the course of the 12 months. By the time of the Germany game in October more than 200 accredited media were in the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park and for the play-off against Switzerland that number increased even further. The Communications Team created bespoke content across traditional, online and social media to promote Michael O'Neill's team and to grow their fame in Northern Ireland and beyond.

### Senior Women's Internationals

The year also saw significant strides for the promotion of our senior women's international side. The Communications team secured a deal with BBC Sport NI that saw all of Northern Ireland's Women's World Cup qualification games screened live on the BBC website and on the BBC iPlayer.

The year also saw increased interest in the women's international team. 2017 saw the same media schedule used for the women's side as the communications team use for the senior men with a coach and captain press conference before and after the matches.

### Women's U19 Euros

One of the highlights of 2017 was the Irish FA's hosting of the UEFA Under-19 Women's Championship.

The Communications Team played the dual role of promoting the Northern Ireland team and promoting the tournament. Content was created around the team and Comms helped host the squad announcement in Victoria Square.

One video that was created was shown on Sky Sports News – a first for women's U19 football. The tournament saw record attendances and large TV audiences and the association's Communications Team played a role in both those successes.

### Foundation

2017-18 was the first full year of the Irish FA Foundation and the Communications Team provided support through a bespoke PR plan. The team helped showcase the work of the Foundation, particularly aspects such as futsal, Small-Sided Games, Back In The Game, the Stay Onside programme and the Take 5 mental health campaign.

The team also helped formulate and deliver the communications around the Foundation Open Day which was held at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park last June. Thousands of people from across the community attended and helped launch the Foundation. There was strong video and photographic content.

### Five-Year Strategy

The Communications Team played a significant role in formulating and producing the Irish FA's new Five-year Strategy. The team also helped prepare the launch materials as well as a promotional video to help showcase the new plan. Media attended and the launch was shown on BBC NI and UTV.

The team also continued to deliver numerous matchday programmes during 2017-18, both printed and digital versions.

## SALES AND MARKETING

The sales and marketing team have continued to secure commercial partnerships that support the Irish FA's broad body of work.

In 2017 the association welcomed six new sponsorship partners.

Electric Ireland became the first ever sponsors of Women's Football and shortly after Onecom signed up as the association's telecoms partner and sponsor of the IFA Business League.

Fulfil became an official snack partner and fonaCAB the official taxi partner and sponsor of the Junior Cup, while the Daily Mirror's Match on Tuesday supplement agreed to sponsor the Intermediate Cup.

Our new partners have generated a combined total of £175,000 for the association.

In addition the team attracted 10 sponsors for the Women's U19 European Championships last August. Electric Ireland were the title sponsor and Vauxhall, Asda, JD, Victoria Square, Fulfil, Adidas, Translink, Belfast City Council and Deep River Rock were supporting partners.

# FINANCE REPORTS

## Consolidated statement of total comprehensive income for all Irish FA activities for the year ended 31 December 2017

	2017 £'000	2016 £'000
<b>Turnover</b>	<b>16,639</b>	23,505
Cost of sales	<b>12,554)</b>	(16,247)
<b>Gross profit</b>	<b>4,085</b>	7,258
Administrative expenses	<b>(4,538)</b>	(3,834)
Other gains/ (losses)	<b>274</b>	(362)
Other operating expenses	-	(1,500)
Other operating income	-	2,248
<b>Operating profit / (loss)</b>	<b>(179)</b>	3,810
Income from other fixed asset investments	<b>6</b>	5
Interest receivable and similar income	<b>2</b>	10
Profit / (Loss) before taxation	<b>(171)</b>	3,825
Tax on profit / (loss)	<b>(96)</b>	(125)
<b>Profit / (Loss) for the financial year</b>	<b>(267)</b>	3,700
<b>Total comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>(267)</b>	3,700

This consolidated statement of total comprehensive income includes results for the following entities:

Irish Football Association Limited	Registered number: R0000327
IFA Stadium Development Company Limited	Registered number: NI608630
Irish FA Foundation Limited	Registered number: NI642595

Annual reports and financial statements for each of these entities are available upon written request to the company secretary at the National Football Stadium, Donegall Avenue, Belfast BT12 6LU.



# FINANCE REPORTS

## Consolidated balance sheet for all Irish FA activities at 31 December 2017

	2017 £'000	2016 £'000
<b>Fixed assets</b>		
Tangible assets	36,743	36,750
Investments	4,239	3,783
	<b>40,982</b>	<b>40,533</b>
<b>Current assets</b>		
Debtors	3,582	4,451
Cash at bank and in hand	5,318	1,568
	<b>8,900</b>	<b>6,019</b>
<b>Creditors:</b> amounts falling due within one year	<b>(10,352)</b>	<b>(8,811)</b>
<b>Net current liabilities</b>	<b>(1,452)</b>	<b>(2,792)</b>
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>	<b>39,530</b>	<b>37,741</b>
<b>Creditors:</b> amounts falling due after more than one year	<b>(28,907)</b>	<b>(28,446)</b>
<b>Provisions for liabilities</b>	<b>(421)</b>	<b>(325)</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>10,202</b>	<b>8,970</b>
<b>Reserves</b>		
Revaluation reserve	2,608	2,152
Profit and loss account	7,594	6,818
<b>Total reserves</b>	<b>10,202</b>	<b>8,970</b>

The financial statements of each entity comprising the Irish F.A. Activities have been independently audited by Martin Pitt (Senior Statutory Auditor) for and on behalf of PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and an unqualified audit opinion has been issued for all entities.

Copies of the full auditor's report for each entity are available as part of their annual report and financial statements.



**Gerry Mallon (Chairperson)**  
26 April 2018



**David Martin (President)**  
26 April 2018

*Northern Ireland captain Steven Davis and Switzerland captain Stephan Lichtsteiner battle for the ball during the second leg of the two countries' World Cup 2018 play-off. The game at St Jakob-Park in Basel back in November ended scoreless but the Swiss reached the World Cup finals in Russia this summer thanks to a controversial 1-0 win in the first leg in Belfast.*



**Irish Football Association**

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