

IRISH FA

LET THEM PLAY

YOUTH FOOTBALL STRATEGY

Summary Document

2015-2025



www.irishfa.com

Welcome

Prior to 2015 the Irish Football Association (Irish FA) never had an overarching Youth Football Strategy. Development initiatives within the association's youth football provision, although often excellent, were piecemeal, led by individuals acting within their own remit often without regard for the wider Irish FA youth developmental needs. With around 50,000 young people playing the game regularly (DCAL, 2009), the Irish FA recognised the need for a fit for purpose youth football strategy in its Strategic Plan 2013-2018. It felt such a strategy was required to revitalise the culture of the youth game, drive participation up in a structured manner in clubs and schools, and to develop clear pathways for young people to become involved and stay involved in the game. That 10-year strategy, Let Them Play, was first introduced in 2015 and is continuing to evolve. It is important that the Irish FA not only provides football for all but that it puts in place strategic systems which will develop young boys and girls, whatever their background or ability level, and nurture them to reach their full potential. Ultimately the Irish FA wishes to produce a youth football culture which empowers boys and girls to develop a lifelong love for the game, not only creating talented players who can one day play for Northern Ireland but helping to create positive citizens who can contribute to society. Young people in Northern Ireland deserve the best and with Let Them Play the Irish FA aims to work with all our partners and stakeholders to deliver the best for them.



Michael O'Neill

Northern Ireland Senior Men's
International Team Manager

Michael Boyd

Director of Football Development

David Martin

President

Patrick Nelson

Chief Executive Officer

Vision

To promote, foster and develop youth football for all in Northern Ireland, creating a fun, safe and inclusive culture which inspires a lifelong love of the game and serves the community through football and education.

Strategic Context

SPORT MATTERS

1

- Promote sport and physical recreation as a primary health improvement tool
- A world class start and lifelong involvement in sport and physical recreation for all people
- World class performances by teams and individuals
- A sustainable sporting and physical recreation culture that contributes to broader government objectives



PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

2

- Growing a sustainable economy and investing in the future
- Creating opportunities, tackling disadvantage and improving health and well-being
- Protecting our people, the environment and creating safer communities
- Building a strong and shared community



IRISH FA STRATEGY

3

- Foster a balanced, flourishing senior domestic game
- Create a healthy domestic game at all other levels, i.e. intermediate, junior, women's, boys, schools
- Reach beyond the game, using the power of football for health, education and social development
- Build a culture of lifelong participation in football
- Use National Football Stadium at Windsor Park as a focal point for football in Northern Ireland



UEFA GRASSROOTS CHARTER

4

- Grow participation, especially amongst girls
- Design, develop and deliver youth specific coach education
- Enhanced club and volunteer development
- Football thriving in schools
- Promote equality at grassroots level



The Northern Ireland International Powerchair team at last year's Home International Championships



OBJECTIVES

1. Increase youth participation rates to 75,000 by 2020 and 100,000 by 2025.
2. Increase the percentage of schools where football and futsal is played to 90% by 2020 and increase participation by 100% by 2025.
3. Embed a culture of club and volunteer development throughout youth football by 2020.
4. Create new Irish FA youth football coach education pathways.
5. Create new player development pathways & Irish FA Club Licensing criteria for NIFL Premiership clubs' youth development programmes.



Young players before their match at the Bangor Small-Sided Games Development Centre

OBJECTIVE 1: Participation and Football For All

We will broaden the base of participation, especially targeting areas where football is weak, such as rural areas. This will increase the player pool and encourage a sense of belonging to football in the community. We will set clear targets for girls and players with a disability to fully integrate the Irish FA Football For All ethos into our plans moving forward.

The Irish FA has led the way in the provision of sporting opportunities for those with a disability with more than 5000 participants in football activities per calendar year. It is our intention to build upon this success by making disability provision a clear objective throughout this strategy and to approach work in the disability sector with a concerted effort throughout Football Development.

BY 2020 WE
WILL INCREASE
PARTICIPATION BY

50%

- 22,000 children aged 5-13 playing in Irish FA Small-Sided Games Development Centres, disability clubs and football camps annually by 2020.
- Senior men's and women's Northern Ireland international players to become official ambassadors of Irish FA Health and Respect campaigns.
- Parent/guardian education workshops delivered to ensure child friendly and value based ethos. The highly successful Irish FA Silent Sidelines campaign to take place on the first Saturday of every month to promote Respect NI message.
- 4,000 registered youth futsal players playing in Irish FA Futsal Development Centres by 2020 (25% of all players being female).
- Continue to develop and promote U15, U17 and U19 girls' youth development leagues.
- Work with Belfast City Council to support Football For All via the Stadium Community Benefits Initiative.

BY 2025 WE
WILL INCREASE
PARTICIPATION BY

100%

- All players and coaches to be registered with the Irish FA on a new IT platform.
- All players and coaches to have Irish FA ID numbers and online accounts, creating an online community.
- All leagues, clubs and development centres to be accredited and regularly assessed by Irish FA.
- Increase girls' participation by 25% and increase disability participation by 10%.
- Establish 12 Let Them Play Hubs across Northern Ireland.
- Develop Let Them Play partnership agreements.

PARTNERS



NIFL • NIWFA • NIBFA • Sport NI • Primary Schools
Post Primary Schools/Colleges & Universities • Local Councils
Disability Sport NI • Local Government • UEFA • FIFA

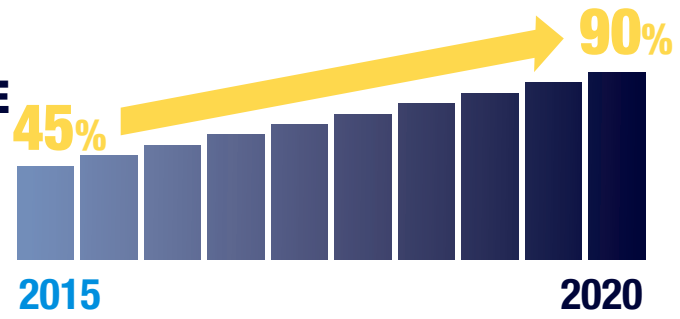
OBJECTIVE 2: Schools, Colleges and Universities

Schools and Colleges Football is one of the main areas where the Irish FA can access and influence young players on a regular basis. This objective seeks to revamp our Schools Football development work and take football back to schools where the connection has been lost or to schools that don't traditionally engage in football.

Futsal is a fantastic new vehicle to engage schools and school halls can be adapted to futsal with ease. Futsal encourages good technique and fast thinking attacking play, both of which are essential for the modern player. But the most important factor is that it is fun.

The District Schools' Player Development Programme will revolutionise how we identify and develop young players, preparing them for our boys' and girls' elite development programmes at Key Stage 2. The new Irish FA School Quality Mark is designed to build the capacity of schools and teachers to develop the game. The main development areas for the new Irish FA School Quality Mark are after-schools football, increased level of coaching, provision for girls and being able to demonstrate clear school/club links. The aim is to create Football Schools over a period of time. UEFA's new Grassroots Charter has identified Schools Football as a priority area for future development and UEFA have expressed an interest in officially supporting our new Schools Football plans as pilots.

BY 2020 WE WILL INCREASE THE PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS WHERE FOOTBALL IS PLAYED FROM 45% TO 90%



- We successfully launched the Irish FA Player Development Programme in September 2015 and continue to select 280 Primary School Players (Key Stage 2) on an annual basis (25% girls).
- Launched the Irish FA School Quality Mark in December 2015 and have a target for 80 Primary Schools and 25 Post Primary Schools to have achieved Irish FA School Quality Mark status by 2020.
- Launched our Futsal Strategic Plan in January 2016 with the aim of having 2,000 Futsal players (25% female and 10% disability) playing in Schools and Colleges Futsal Development competition by 2020.
- We were honoured to host a UEFA futsal seminar in June 2015 and the knowledge gained from this experience has informed the development of futsal within Northern Ireland.
- Partnership with 10 colleges and schools regarding Irish FA football education programmes.

We aim to have at least three Football Performance Schools and three Football Development Schools.

We will also establish two long term education partners supporting Irish FA Performance Academies for boys and girls.



Participants and staff at the launch of the first Irish FA Elite Performance School at Integrated College Dungannon

PARTNERS



NIFL • Primary Schools • Local Councils • Sport NI
 Post Primary Schools/Colleges & Universities
 Local Government • UEFA • FIFA

OBJECTIVE 3: Club and Volunteer Development

Clubs and volunteers are an integral part of grassroots football. The overarching aim of the Irish FA McDonald's Club Mark is to provide an accreditation process which clubs can adhere to. Within this process clubs will show evidence of best practice and what's required in order to become a sustainable club that provides football for all and has a structured plan designed for the club to develop efficiently.

Volunteers are the backbone of grassroots football. Within Northern Ireland we have more than 900 clubs and over 10,000 volunteers who contribute daily to football here. A football club is more than just the players on the pitch and the workforce continues to grow off the pitch, with more bespoke roles being created which collectively contribute to improving the grassroots game. Education is key and our clubs will receive guidance and support with a particular focus on how volunteers can be recruited, rewarded and retained. The Irish FA aims to allow volunteers the freedom within their clubs to develop individually and play a pivotal role in growing their clubs.

Grassroots volunteers are not paid. Not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless.



Volunteers at an Irish FA event



John Haveron and Iris McIlroy from Albert Foundry FC receive their Foundation Club Mark



Winners at the 2017 McDonald's Community Awards with Pat Jennings

By 2020

We will embed a culture of club and volunteer development throughout youth football.

- Support and develop 200 football clubs with youth football teams to have achieved Irish FA Club Mark.
- All NIFL Premiership clubs to have achieved Irish FA Club Mark status.
- To have a structured work experience programme which facilitates 80 young people per year.
- Recruit and retain 100 young volunteers aged 16-25 into Irish FA Volunteer Team.
- 50 Irish FA young volunteers placed with local clubs (who have achieved Irish FA Club Mark) and leagues.
- To provide volunteer opportunities via the Stay Onside or GOALS programmes to 25 young people per year who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- Recruit a minimum of 10 volunteers per year to monitor atmosphere in youth football and promote Respect NI campaign.
- Irish FA young volunteers to form Irish FA Youth Forum as part of the Sport Uniting Communities programme which will present its ideas and recommendations annually to the Football Development management team.
- Work with partners to introduce a new entrance criteria in 2018 for groups who want to start youth football clubs which encourages inclusive community clubs who provide football for boys and girls.
- To deliver mental health and wellbeing awareness to 1500 young people within grassroots coach education.
- To deliver the Ahead Of The Game mental health and wellbeing guide to 100 clubs.
- To embed mental health and wellbeing within the Irish FA Club Mark.
- To deliver an annual conference with focus on club and volunteer development from 2019.



Volunteers letting their hair down at the 2017 McDonald's Community Awards

By 2025

All leagues and development centres will be accredited.

- 500 football clubs with youth football teams to have achieved Irish FA club development accreditation.
- To have structured Irish FA Volunteer Trainee and Irish FA Football Apprenticeship programmes in place with relevant partners, setting targets for NEETS, BME (Black, Minority and Ethnic) groups and Protestant working class young people from areas that have been identified via research as most in need and/or under-represented.
- Recruit 500 young volunteers aged 16-25 into Irish FA Volunteer Team.
- All leagues or development centres to be accredited with club and volunteer development embedded in the criteria.
- Have youth futsal leagues and university development leagues established for males and females.
- To deliver the Ahead Of The Game mental health and wellbeing guide to 4000 within grassroots coach education.
- To deliver mental health and wellbeing workshops to 300 clubs.

PARTNERS



NIFL • NIWFA • NIBFA • Volunteer Now • Show Racism The Red Card
Local Councils • Sport NI • Local Government
UEFA • FIFA

IRISH FA PLAYER

GRASSROOTS

ACTIVITY	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
CURRICULUM AND AFTER SCHOOLS COACHING							
SMALL-SIDED GAMES 5-A-SIDE							
SMALL-SIDED GAMES 7-A-SIDE							
SMALL-SIDED GAMES 9-A-SIDE							
CLUB 11-A-SIDE							
SCHOOLS 7-A-SIDE - 11-A-SIDE							
FOOTBALL CAMPS							
FUTSAL							
SPECIAL SCHOOL REGIONAL GAMES							
DISABILITY CLUB LEAGUES							
DISABILITY FOOTBALL CAMPS							

PERFORMANCE

ACTIVITY	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
SCHOOL DISTRICTS PDP (MALE & FEMALE)							
CLUB NI (MALE)							
GIRLS EXCELLENCE (FEMALE)							
UNDER-15 INTERNATIONAL (MALE & FEMALE)							
UNDER-17 INTERNATIONAL (MALE & FEMALE)							
UNDER-19 INTERNATIONAL (MALE & FEMALE)							
UNDER-17 INTERNATIONAL FUTSAL (FEMALE)							
UNDER-19 INTERNATIONAL FUTSAL (MALE)							
NIFL CLUBS							
UNDER-21 INTERNATIONAL (MALE)							
SENIOR INTERNATIONAL FUTSAL (MALE & FEMALE)							
SENIOR INTERNATIONAL (MALE & FEMALE)							
CEREBRAL PALSY INTERNATIONAL							
MODERATE LEARNING DISABILITY INTERNATIONAL							
DEAF FUTSAL INTERNATIONAL							
POWERCHAIR INTERNATIONAL							

OBJECTIVE 4: Youth Football Coach Education

Youth coach education will be the vehicle to change the football culture and challenge hearts and minds. Our coach education courses aimed at youth level are designed to focus on the young player ensuring that the coaching delivered is appropriate to the specific age of the young players, thereby providing added value in terms of technical ability and game understanding. With futsal we will also be motivating coaches to champion this new game so that we create a culture of futsal which assists boys and girls to develop technique, quick thinking and to have fun. Our coach education ladder will show a clear pathway for coaches of youth age players, with a newly designed Irish FA Youth Certificate that is divided into three age related modules. It is our intention to encourage more coaches to consider developing their skills set by participating on the Youth Certificate.



Participants at a Level 1 coaching course

By 2020

We will create new Irish FA youth football coach education pathways.

3000 youth football coaches and teachers will have completed the Football Fundamentals and Grassroots Introduction to Football Irish FA coach education courses.

2000 coaches will have completed their Level 1 coaching award.

800 youth football coaches and teachers will have completed the Irish FA Futsal Introductory Award.

300 young people to have completed Grassroots Introduction to Football via Irish FA schools and college education partnerships, and the Irish FA Stay Onside young offenders programme.

By 2025

The Irish FA Youth Certificate will be regarded by coaches of youth football as an essential qualification for working at this level.

500 youth football coaches will have completed Irish FA youth modules.

200 coaches will have achieved the Irish FA Futsal B Licence award.

We will recruit and retain a pool of **12** qualified volunteers who can deliver club and volunteer workshops.

Every club will have a coach who has attended disability awareness training.

PARTNERS



NISFA • NIWFA • NIBFA • Local Councils • Local Government
Primary Schools • Post Primary School / Colleges & Universities
Sport NI • Show Racism The Red Card • UEFA • FIFA

OBJECTIVE 5: Player Development Pathways

This objective is designed to create clear player pathways for the best young talent, both males and females. We will maximise the elite player pool for Irish FA international managers and increase the number of professional footballers (both men and women) from which they can select. The targets are designed to improve relations between club and country with the focus on the well-being and welfare of young players.

By 2020

We will introduce new player development pathways and new club licensing criteria for NIFL Premiership clubs' youth programmes.

- The Irish FA Player Development Programme aimed at 280 Key Stage 2 pupils (25% girls) was launched in September 2015, feeding talented players with potential into further Irish FA Player Development programmes.
- Irish FA to work with NIFL to introduce new youth development criteria for senior NIFL clubs by 2019 as part of Irish FA Club Licensing, encouraging partnership approach with community/junior clubs.
- The Irish FA will develop a free Youth Development Coaching and Player Development Handbook for all clubs by 2019 which highlights the Northern Ireland football philosophy, player DNA and encourages Northern Ireland football playing systems. The Irish FA will hold open seminars for clubs on Youth Development and Talent Identification. Clubs will be encouraged to attend and there will be regular opportunities for clubs to showcase good practice.
- A rewards system will be developed in partnership with NIFL for clubs who reach an agreed quota of youth players within their first team squads by the end of 2018. Rewards will include coaching master classes from the Northern Ireland International Management Team and Irish FA Player Development Coaches.
- Irish FA will have a Deaf Futsal team, a Moderate Learning Difficulty team and a Powerchair team all representing Northern Ireland in international competition.
- A player development and life skills programme shall be established with key stakeholders.

By 2025

Players from player development programmes will be representing Northern Ireland Men's and Women's Senior Teams.

- At least five players from player development programmes to have progressed through to the Northern Ireland Senior A Men's and Women's teams and to be playing professional football at a high level on the world stage. A minimum of 10 players from the player development programmes to be involved in the Men's U21 and Women's U19 squads.
- Irish FA to have a world class training academy for player and coach development from U17 to U21, providing elite football and education programmes.
- 40 players from the player development programme playing in NIFL Premiership league.



JD Club NI players prepare for a match



NIFL • NIWFA • NISFA • NIBFA • Sport NI • Disability Sport • NI Paralympics
 Primary Schools • Post Primary School / Colleges & Universities
 Local Councils • Local Government • UEFA • FIFA

PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT MODEL



SUMMARY

This strategy supports the Irish FA's Football For All vision. It is ambitious and sets out challenging objectives for the Irish FA, its partners and stakeholders in youth football. It introduces a new youth football coaching framework and embeds futsal for the first time into development plans. It creates new player identification and development pathways and also introduces new innovative schools programmes.

The strategy addresses serious gaps in youth development here in Northern Ireland by making schools, clubs and volunteering core components for development moving forward. Investing in schools, clubs and volunteers will pay dividends in the long term (UEFA Grassroots Charter, 2015). This strategy supports Department For Communities' Sport Matters Strategy with clear targets to increase participation levels (with a special focus on increasing female and disability participation). It promotes lifelong enjoyment and will revolutionise how we identify potential talent, creating new player pathways which will increase the elite player pool to select future internationals, hopefully creating a golden generation in the years to come who can compete at the highest level for Northern Ireland.

It is an exciting time for the sport of football and there is untapped potential. By delivering the objectives set out in this strategy the Irish FA will be doing all in its power to ensure it is creating compelling pathways to grow the game, and for all young people to get involved and stay involved in the game. With a comprehensive youth football strategy in place the Irish FA can make a massive difference working with our partners in promoting Football For All, creating a fun, safe and inclusive culture throughout the game and reflecting a new and more confident Northern Ireland. All Northern Ireland's young people deserve the best and the Irish FA is aiming to deliver the best for them.



Irish FA Key contacts



**DIRECTOR OF
FOOTBALL
DEVELOPMENT**

MICHAEL BOYD
07894 614328
michael.boyd@irishfa.com



**GRASSROOTS AND YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER**

IAN STEWART
07930 759777
ian.stewart@irishfa.com



**FOOTBALL FOR ALL
MANAGER**

KEITH GIBSON
07809 657879
keith.gibson@irishfa.com



**FEMALE DOMESTIC
FOOTBALL MANAGER**

GAIL REDMOND
07515 994217
gail.redmond@irishfa.com

www.irishfa.com/girlsandwomensfootballstrategy



**WOMEN'S FOOTBALL
PERFORMANCE MANAGER**

ALFIE WYLIE
07931 956751
alfie.wylie@irishfa.com



**SCHOOLS AND FUTSAL
MANAGER**

JONATHAN MICHAEL
07802 327541
jonathan.michael@irishfa.com

www.irishfa.com/futsalstrategy



**SAFEGUARDING SERVICE
DELIVERY MANAGER**

KEVIN DOYLE
07889 057992
kevin.doyle@irishfa.com



**DEVELOPMENT MANAGER
DISABILITY FOOTBALL**

ALAN CROOKS
07894 614324
alan.crooks@irishfa.com

www.irishfa.com/disabilityfootballstrategy



**COACH EDUCATION
MANAGER**

NIGEL BEST
07894 614316
nigel.best@irishfa.com



**ELITE PERFORMANCE
DIRECTOR**

JIM MAGILTON
07841 917908
jim.magilton@irishfa.com



The Irish FA Foundation is dedicating Let Them Play to Wesley Gregg who unfortunately passed away in 2015. Wesley epitomised the enthusiasm and dedication we want to see in everyone connected to the youth game. He was proud to serve the community through football and this is exactly what we aim to do via this strategy. We are proud to dedicate this new youth football strategy to his memory and his family.

Wesley was an influential member of our Grassroots Development Team since 2005 and a former coach with Ballymena United FC, Institute FC and Coleraine FC.

He was a vibrant and energetic colleague who devoted so much of his time and his expertise to promoting football at all levels. He was an inspiration to those who met him.

Wesley formed many close friendships with people within local community groups, clubs and with volunteers over many years within his local area and beyond. Wesley was always a consummate professional in his chosen career and displayed kindness, consideration and friendship to all.

He was open minded yet principled, approachable and sympathetic, a mentor to many but above all else a true gentleman.

We have lost a friend, a much esteemed colleague and we will sorely miss the many characteristics that made Wesley the friend he was.



LET THEM PLAY



Irish FA

National Football Stadium at Windsor Park
Donegall Avenue
Belfast
BT12 6LU

www.irishfa.com

LET THEM PLAY