**Irish Football Association**

**Volunteer Policy**



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Appendix 1 – IFA Volunteer Charter

1. **Background**

The Irish Football Association has been the governing body of football in Northern Ireland since 1880 and is a large professional organisation with extremely high standards. At present it employs over 110 staff members and governs over 960 football clubs, which includes over 25,000 players and thousands of volunteers.

Within the Irish FA Strategic Plan 2013-2018, two of the key actions include –

* Implement a volunteer development programme
* Develop an Irish FA Volunteer Policy

These actions are part of an aim “to build a culture of lifelong involvement in football”. As such the Irish FA has developed the following volunteering related mission statement –

***The Irish FA vision is to develop, foster and promote sustained volunteering opportunities for all; within all facets of Northern Ireland football***

1. **Strategic context and need**

Volunteering within Northern Ireland and more specifically the local sporting context, over the last few years, has been widely agreed to be at a crossroads. Research has shown that formal volunteering is at best static and informal volunteering falling substantially over the last number of years (Volunteer Now Strategic Plan 2011-2016).

In March 2012 the Department for Social Development published the “Join In, Get Involved, Build a Better Future” strategy, which provides an action plan for Northern Ireland volunteering. Within this document the NI Executive vision is documented as a society where –

* Everyone values the vital contribution that volunteers make to community well-being.
* Everyone has the opportunity to have a meaningful, enjoyable volunteering experience.

These two key principles form the basis of this policy, which will act as a practical tool used to achieve and advance them. The strategy outlines the following government priorities which, alongside IFA organisational need, has shaped the objectives of this policy –

* Provide effective infrastructure support to volunteering
* Improve volunteer management practice
* Increase the number and quality of volunteering opportunities
* Encourage and support the development of skills by volunteers
* Ensure that everyone has an opportunity to volunteer and that volunteering is representative of the diversity of our community
* Build public recognition for volunteering
* Recruit more volunteers

Furthermore, a report by the Volunteer Development Agency (now “Volunteer Now”) in 2009 documented the following statistics –

* 92.3% of sports clubs / governing bodies could not operate without the support of volunteers
* 6% of governing bodies in NI have a written volunteer policy
* 53.8% of governing bodies provide recognition / acknowledges (i.e. events, materials, certificates) for their volunteers
* 65.4% of governing bodies have written role descriptions for their volunteer positions

As a result of these statistics, the report makes the following key recommendation –

***“Ensure that all Governing Bodies have an operational volunteer policy.”***

The following recommendations are also made, which are addressed directly within this policy –

* Establishment of a named individual in each Olympic governing body to be the primary contact for information / recruitment of volunteers (IFA Volunteer Development and Policy Officer)
* Development of a clear value base for the involvement of volunteers in sport
* Development of governing bodies’ volunteer management practice through the delivery of training, for example:

1. When Everyone’s a Sporting Volunteer
2. Introduction to Managing and Motivating Volunteers
3. Principles of Recruitment and Selection
4. Support and Supervision of Volunteers

* Governing bodies should use the ***Investing in Volunteers*** framework as a guide for developing good practice in volunteer management. Those organisations who are well established in their good practice of involving volunteers should be supported and encouraged to work towards accreditation in the standard
* Accredited volunteer management training for staff of Olympic governing bodies of sport that are responsible for providing support to clubs through Clubmark NI (IFA Club Excellence).

Whilst research and statistics demonstrate the need for government and governing bodies to develop and implement an operational volunteer policy, it is perhaps the day to day experiences which stress the importance of doing so within the Irish FA. These experiences have shown the need for more structured processes and protocols in relation to volunteer management, recruitment and recognition. This will provide uniform policy, which will be implemented across and throughout the Irish FA with an aim to achieve the objectives found in section 3.0.

**Benefits to the IFA**

The establishment of an operational volunteer policy will benefit the IFA and the way it recruits, manages, retains and recognises its volunteers across the entirety of the organisation. The volunteer policy will become a practical tool and reference guide for all staff, ensuring volunteer management best practice and ultimately increasing the number of volunteers and their effectiveness whilst volunteering. It will be used as a valuable recruitment tool as prospective volunteers will see the merit, value and attraction in volunteering at the IFA.

**Benefits to the Individual Volunteer**

The volunteer policy will provide clarity to both existing and new volunteers in terms of the protocols and procedures in relation to volunteer management. It will also document commitments of the Irish FA to its volunteers, and provide scope for recognition and ongoing training and support. The policy will instil an open and welcoming ethos and practical management guide for Irish FA staff to commit to, ensuring that all volunteers are engaged and cared for. Finally, the policy commits to following the PITCH values which are central to the IFA Strategic Plan 2013-2018. This will ensure that the IFA is a credible and valuable place for individuals to volunteer.

1. **Aim and Objectives** 
   1. This policy is reflective of the ethos, mission and vision of the Irish FA and as such provides synergy towards achieving the overarching aims and objectives.
   2. **Aim of the Policy**The aim of the policy is to provide an operational, instructional and practical reference guide and tool for the recruitment, retention, management and recognition of volunteers within and under the auspices of the Irish FA. Furthermore it is the aim of the IFA to use this policy to encourage, nurture and attract volunteering from all backgrounds irrespective of age, gender, parental or marital status, colour, race, ethnic origin, creed, disability, social status or sexual orientation.
   3. **Objectives of the Policy**The policy has the following key objectives –

* Improved recruitment and retention of volunteers
* Improved management of volunteers including more efficient resource management
* Improved reputation of the Irish FA as an organisation open to potential volunteers and committed to their sustained involvement
* Improved personal development of new and existing volunteers
* Provision of guidance for new and existing volunteers
* Facilitation of an environment which is fun, inclusive and opportunity filled for volunteers
* Establishing best practice guidelines and helping the Irish FA become a respected leader in sports volunteering
* Development of a practical tool for all stakeholders to refer to
* Enhancement of the ***Investing in Volunteers*** accreditation scheme application

1. **Volunteering at the Irish FA**
   1. **Values**Our volunteering management, roles and expectations match the underlying values and principles (PITCH) of the IFA Strategic Plan (2013-2018). This includes –

* **P**rofessional

The IFA will commit a professional approach to volunteering ensuring that opportunities, uptake and the subsequent positive impacts are maximised. As a volunteer, you will work alongside and on behalf of a professional governing body with extremely high standards. Volunteers will be supported, engaged and mentored to ensure they are acting in this manner.

* **I**nclusive

A key overarching principle of the Irish FA and with regard to volunteering is the notion of inclusion. Volunteers will be fully supported and involved throughout all steps of the volunteering process. The Irish FA recognises the need to nurture relationships with volunteers to promote long term involvement. A key aspect of this is to ensure that volunteering is inclusive through the sustained provision of social, mental and physical outlet and engagement opportunities. We will endeavour to foster an attractive and enjoyable environment for volunteers to join and stay involved.

* **T**eam

Volunteers will be working within an organisation that has a strong team culture and atmosphere with set common goals/objectives. Social interaction is a key component to ensuring long term volunteer involvement and we recognise that a strong volunteer team is vital. As a volunteer, you will become an important and valued member of a specific team working to achieve set targets and aims. The Irish FA is committed to supporting such teams and providing training, mentorship and guidance where appropriate. At times, volunteers will be involved within teams that consist also of paid members of staff. The volunteer will be made to feel an equally as important and valued team member by management.

* **C**aring

The Irish FA commit fully to providing a caring and welcoming environment for volunteering. In line with this policy, new volunteers will be provided with a supervisor/mentor who will guide them through their induction period whilst providing the volunteer with encouragement, support and guidance. The welfare of our volunteers is vital and we will do everything possible to ensure an enjoyable, developmental and cathartic experience for those getting involved. Each volunteer will have the opportunity to sit with their supervisor in a one to one capacity, and will be provided with the appropriate support and guidance to fulfil their role. Each volunteer will also be introduced to other parts of the Irish FA where possible, and gain a sense of belonging and involvement.

As an organisation, we are thankful for the important work undertaken by volunteers on a regular basis and as such care greatly for them in both a personal and professional capacity. We strive to recognise and reward our volunteers through the ***‘Applause’*** system. Details of this system can be found on the Irish FA website or within the “Volunteering at the IFA" publication.

* **H**onesty

Honesty is a key watch word within the IFA Strategic Plan and thus equally important within volunteering at the IFA. We commit to and expect a two way process of honesty between the IFA and volunteers. An honest environment promotes trust, understanding and positive relations between the Irish FA, volunteers and external stakeholders.

1. **Recruitment of Volunteers**

**5.1 Who can volunteer?**

In line with its vision, the Irish FA is committed to providing opportunities for all in football – and this includes volunteers. The Irish FA strives to reflect the diversity of the football community we represent, and thus volunteering opportunities are open to all sections of our community. We will endeavour to advertise volunteer roles as widely as possible and will monitor the diversity of the team to enable us to target specifically underrepresented groups. In some cases, volunteering roles may be age restricted due to the specific tasks involved, but details of this will be promoted through the role descriptions. Those who wish to volunteer with the Irish FA can do so in two ways; either by registering their general interest or by applying for any advertised opportunity.

**5.2 Recruitment process – advertised opportunities**  
Each advertised volunteering opportunity will have a detailed application process attached therein. Each role will have a role description and specification to allow the Irish FA and the individual volunteer to assess the suitability of the applicant. There will be a clear recruitment process and this will be made evident through the advertising of the opportunity.

In most cases the process will follow as below:

**5.3 Registering volunteering interest**The Irish FA will also welcome general interest in volunteering from potential volunteers who can apply to join the IFA Volunteer Team (see section 7). Subject to suitability and appropriate checks, the applicant will be placed on our volunteer database with a view to matching them to future opportunities. This will be co-ordinated by the IFA Volunteer Development and Policy Officer who will in turn make available the list across departments in the Irish FA (ensuring compliance with our Data Protection policy).

The volunteer will be invited for an informal introductory interview with the Volunteer Development and Policy Officer as an initial assessment of suitability and introduction. At this stage, the VDPO will collect key information on the prospective volunteer such as interest, availability and experience. They will also clarify the next steps of the recruitment process and agree suitable communication methods. When a suitable opportunity becomes available, the successful volunteer will be contacted and made aware of the opportunity. If the individual is interested, they will be provided with the role description and asked to confirm their commitment. The recruitment process will begin at stage 3 above and the volunteer will be appointed a supervisor prior to getting started.

**5.4 References**The Irish FA reserves the right to request references from applicants within both recruitment schemes (section 5.2 and 5.3). The need for references may vary depending on specific volunteering role requirements.

**5.5** **Vetting**  
To ensure the effective safety and welfare of both the IFA and all stakeholders within our reach and remit, we will undertake appropriate checks and information gathering on the prospective volunteer.

**5.6 Unsuccessful applicants**Volunteers will be informed if their application has been unsuccessful, and will have the opportunity to request feedback. Subsequently, the Irish FA will endeavour to signpost the volunteer to alternative opportunities or organisations if possible.

1. **Management of Volunteers**
   1. **Volunteer Development and Policy Officer (VDPO)**

The appointed VDPO has overall responsibility for volunteering within the IFA to cover recruitment, management, recognition and co-ordinating operational components such as data management, insurance, and information sharing. At times, these roles or part thereof may be devolved to specific departments of the organisation. The VDPO is responsible for ensuring the training of key staff within the organisation and updating as necessary, to ensure they are confident and competent in managing volunteers in line with this policy.

* 1. **Volunteer supervisors**

Upon recruitment into a specific volunteering role, volunteers will be appointed a supervisor who will provide a number of functions to the volunteer depending on their experience and skills (training, induction, mentorship etc…). The volunteer supervisors are responsible for the individual volunteer including but not limited to their welfare, safety, inclusion, deployment, enjoyment and development.

* 1. **Role clarity**

All volunteers will be provided with a role description and personnel specification for their specific volunteering role. This will provide clarity and responsibility for both the Irish FA and the volunteer.

* 1. **Induction**

Each volunteer will be appointed a supervisor who will be responsible for providing support and engagement throughout an official induction period. The supervisor will be responsible for providing mentorship, social engagement and ongoing support to the volunteer, as well as identifying the needs of the individual and addressing these where possible and/or appropriate in line with this policy.

During the induction period, the volunteer will receive written information about policies and procedures that are directly linked to their volunteering role. They will be given information as to where they can locate these, and all other relevant Irish FA policies and procedures.

There will be a volunteer settling in period which will be determined depending on the specifications of each volunteering role. This will allow both the volunteer and the Irish FA to assess the suitability of the applicant. Upon completion of this settling in period, the volunteer will have an informal meeting with their supervisor to address any issues and concerns and plan future development.

* 1. **Ongoing support and supervision**The Irish FA will provide ongoing support and supervision to individuals throughout their volunteering. The volunteers will be made aware of what forms of support are available to them and points of contact within the Irish FA. Support will be provided as appropriate, but may take the form of one-to-one and/or group support sessions.
  2. **Volunteer feedback and communications**The Irish FA is committed to understanding and acknowledging the skills and knowledge of our volunteers, and as such will provide opportunities for volunteer feedback and opinion sharing. This feedback will be used by the Irish FA to help shape our future volunteer programmes. The Irish FA will communicate regularly with registered volunteers, and will endeavour to use a variety of communication methods which are suitable to both parties (as agreed in the recruitment process). Volunteers will also be made aware of changes within the organisation that may affect their volunteering. Volunteers will be made aware that they are fully entitled to refuse demands that they consider unrealistic, beyond the scope of the role or that they do not have the skills to carry out.
  3. **Training and support – Investing in our Volunteers**The Irish FA will provide relevant training and support to volunteers to allow them to confidently and competently undertake their volunteering roles. Various other training opportunities will be advertised through the Club and Volunteer Development website.
  4. **Ongoing volunteer opportunities**The Irish FA are committed to matching the skills and experiences of volunteers to the specific volunteering roles which suit both the IFA and the volunteer. Volunteers will be able to discuss their needs with their identified supervisor, and explore opportunities to get involved in other areas of volunteering across the organisation.
  5. **Training our staff**At the Irish FA we are committed to the development and inclusion of our volunteers within all areas of the organisation and its remit. Due to the large scope of work involved, we recognise that our staff must be trained appropriately in volunteer management. This training will be delivered and co-ordinated regularly and where appropriate by the IFA Volunteer Development and Policy Officer. We will undertake quarterly reviews to assess our organisational volunteer management training and implementation methods to address any identified needs.
  6. **Monitoring and review**To ensure our volunteer recruitment and management methods are efficient and effective we will monitor and review our volunteer management performance on a regular basis. This will use both quantitative (volunteer retention and deployment statistics) and qualitative (key stakeholder consultation) methods. If volunteers wish to raise a concern or issue, they should do so with their volunteer supervisor who will deal with it in line with the relevant Irish FA policy and procedure guidelines.

1. **Volunteer reward/recognition**

The Irish FA fully appreciates the vital work undertaken by many volunteers both within the IFA, its operations and the wider football community in Northern Ireland. As an ongoing thank you and recognition of the vital work that volunteers perform, the Irish FA will put in place a reward/recognition system, which will include different statuses of achievement and service of the volunteers. The name of this process is the ‘***Applause’*** system which will include four levels of achievements and reward.

The Irish FA will also develop and establish an IFA Volunteer Team, which will become a strong operational group to be involved within specific areas of work. Potential new volunteers will be able to apply to join the team, benefitting greatly from the volunteering opportunities, training and development, and the social outlet and engagement involved. From within the Irish FA volunteer team, volunteers will be assigned roles based on their experience and interests, as and when they become available.

1. **Ending the volunteering partnership**

**Volunteers wishing to leave**

Volunteers can leave the Irish FA and end the partnership if they wish to do so. They must notify the Irish FA, and upon leaving will be asked to undertake an exit questionnaire or interview, which will assess the reasons. The Irish FA will use this information to shape volunteering structures and processes.

**Termination of volunteering**

The Irish FA has a duty to protect the wellbeing and interests of all of its stakeholders. In the event of serious issues or breach of our volunteering standards, the Irish FA has the right to terminate the partnership with the volunteer. Where a criminal offence is suspected, the matter will be handed over to the police.

1. **Commitments of the Irish FA**
   1. **Investing in Volunteers**The Irish FA aim to establish long term relationships with its volunteers and are committed to investing time and resources into their development and management. The IFA have embarked upon a quality accreditation scheme called ***Investing in Volunteers*** which is co-ordinated through Volunteer Now in Northern Ireland.

The quality standard assessment involved has 9 indicators which the Irish FA fully endorses and commits to.

* There is an expressed commitment to the involvement of volunteers, and recognition throughout the organisation that volunteering is a two-way process which benefits volunteers and the organisation.
* The organisation commits appropriate resources to working with all volunteers, such as money, management, staff time and materials.
* The organisation is open to involving volunteers who reflect the diversity of the local community and actively seeks to do this in accordance with its stated aims.
* The organisation develops appropriate roles for volunteers in line with its aims and objectives, which are of value to the volunteers.
* The organisation is committed to ensuring that, as far as possible, volunteers are protected from physical, financial and emotional harm arising from volunteering.
* The organisation is committed to using fair, efficient and consistent recruitment procedures for all potential volunteers.
* Clear procedures are put into action for introducing new volunteers to their role, the organisation, its work, policies, practices and relevant personnel.
* The organisation takes account of the varying support and supervision needs of volunteers.
* The whole organisation is aware of the need to give volunteers recognition.
  1. **Child protection/vulnerable adults**

The Irish FA will ensure that safeguarding remains paramount within volunteering and will do everything in our power to safeguard children and vulnerable adults either as a volunteer or when in contact with our volunteers . Our Child Protection and Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy will be implemented within volunteering at the Irish FA, and all volunteers will be made aware of these policies.

**9.3 Data protection and confidentiality**The Irish FA is registered under the Data Protection Act (1998) and is committed to meeting all its obligations under this Act in respect of personal data held about its employees and volunteers. Any data held on volunteers will be subject to the same protocols found within the Irish FA Data Protection Policy.

**9.4 Volunteer expenses**The reimbursement of volunteer expenses may vary across different volunteering roles and specific details can be found within the volunteer role description. Eligible volunteer expense claims can be submitted using a standard “Volunteer Expenses” form.

**9.5 Employment substitution**The Irish Football Association is fully committed to ensuring that volunteering is never used as a substitute for paid employment, where there is a clear need and expectation for the latter. Furthermore, volunteering will not be used to cover any work during any industrial action.

**9.6 Insurance**Volunteers will be insured through Public Liability and Personal Liability Insurance. However, it is the responsibility of the volunteer to ensure that they have the correct insurance in place for driving duties (if applicable) within their role as a volunteer.

**9.7 Volunteering while claiming benefits**It is possible for those receiving benefits to volunteer as long as the individual continues to meet the conditions of the benefit or tax credit they are receiving. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to advise the jobs and benefits office of any volunteering they have committed to.

**9.8 Fostering a positive experience**The Irish FA are fully committed to providing, promoting and fostering a positive experience for all volunteers. This will include establishing a welcoming and inclusive environment, ensuring that volunteers are supported in their roles both by IFA staff, and are provided with the necessary equipment, materials and training. The Irish FA aims to create a long term relationship with volunteers, ensuring their lifelong involvement and input within football in Northern Ireland. As such, all reasonable steps will be taken to make volunteering at the IFA as enjoyable and valuable as possible.

1. **Intellectual property rights**

The Irish FA will make volunteers aware that the intellectual property rights of original work produced by volunteers (whilst in their IFA volunteering role) will automatically transfer to the Irish FA.

1. **Internal monitoring and evaluation of IFA volunteering programmes**

The Irish FA will monitor and review volunteering structures, processes and protocols within the organisation on a regular basis. This will be done to ensure the volunteer policy is being adhered to and implemented appropriately. If gaps are identified, the Irish FA will address these through the provision of additional volunteer management training, developing new procedures, consulting with stakeholders and potentially updating or revising the policy.

**This policy was adopted on 20/08/2014**

**The next review date will be 20/04/2015**

**Appendix 1 - IFA Volunteer Charter**

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| **Commitment of the Irish FA** | **Expectations of a volunteer** |
| At the Irish FA we commit -   * To fairly offer volunteer opportunities to all who are interested in getting involved * To provide a welcoming and positive introduction to all prospective volunteers * To provide an appropriate induction process for all new volunteers * To provide relevant training where appropriate * To provide each volunteer with our specific policies and procedures * To best match volunteers to specific roles based on their experience, skills and competency * To provide ongoing support and engagement with our volunteers, listening to what they have to say and addressing their needs and concerns * To provide appropriate insurance for volunteering activities * To provide the necessary equipment, support and instruction for the specific volunteering roles * To provide any agreed out-of-pocket expenses (as per the role specification) * To recognise and reward the achievements of our volunteers * To recognise and reward the loyalty and dedication of our volunteers | As a volunteer of the Irish FA it is expected that you –   * Strive to achieve excellence in all areas of your volunteering * Aim for high levels of reliability, trustworthiness and dependability in your volunteering * Adhere to the IFA policies and procedures * Always act in a professional manner which upholds and promotes the reputation of the IFA * Act responsibly and within the law at all times * Get fully involved and enjoy volunteering within the IFA * Be honest with your volunteer supervisor if any issues arise * Make the IFA aware of any issues arising that may influence your ability to volunteer to the highest standards * To promote volunteering at the IFA |