



# Irish Football Association



# ACTIVITY REPORT 2015-16



The National Football Stadium  
at Windsor Park.





**Jim Shaw**  
President, Irish Football Association

At the end of one of the most significant periods in the long history of the Irish Football Association it is my privilege to write the President's Report for 2015-16.

This is the year when two of the Association's main objectives have been delivered: the stadium and qualification for a major tournament.

The new National Football Stadium at Windsor Park is now effectively complete, except for the West Stand which will be finished in early autumn, and the new facilities are now in use including the office accommodation for all of the Irish FA staff. We now have a stadium which compares favourably with any of our counterparts across the football world.

But the greatest achievement during the past year was qualification for the European Championship 2016 finals in France which was finally achieved on that never to be forgotten night last October when we triumphed over Greece at Windsor Park to seal our place at Euro 2016.

To crown the achievement we then went on to draw with Finland in Helsinki to win the group and establish a record of being the first fifth seeded team to win a qualifying group in the Euros.

Congratulations to Michael O'Neill, the players, the support staff and the administration for the collective effort leading to the remarkable success.

Special credit to Michael who by exceptional leadership and attention to detail, both on and off the pitch, has transformed the Northern Ireland international team to a level that most of us could never have imagined.

To emphasise the success we recently were 26th in the FIFA world rankings, our highest ever placing, and we surpassed the previous record of consecutive games undefeated when we reached 10 with the friendly win against Slovenia, a remarkable outcome considering six of the 10 were competitive games.

On the international front I also congratulate the men's U19 team in qualifying for the elite stage of their European competition and the ladies U17 team who did likewise and the Regions Cup team for reaching the final round of games in their European tournament.

On the domestic front I congratulate the winners of the Association cups at each level of the game. Glenavon won the Irish Challenge Cup by 2-0 against Linfield at the new stadium with an attendance of more than 11,000, the largest crowd at a final in a decade. Tennent's came on board as the sponsor for the Irish Cup, in an agreement for the next five years, and I believe that this can be a successful partnership for both football and Tennent's. I thank Tennent's for their significant investment.

Institute won the Intermediate Cup, Harryville Homers won the Junior Cup for a remarkable third year in succession, Crusaders won the Harry Cavan Youth Cup and the Women's Challenge Cup went to Cliftonville Ladies.

I thank the press and media for their contribution and assistance to the promotion and success of football across all of Northern Ireland.

Kyle Lafferty won his 50th cap in the international friendly against Belarus.



I also pay tribute 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 Euros was at times incredible and the numbers at the games in France demonstrates how much the international team means to the supporters.

I thank all the sponsors associated with the Irish Football Association for their input during the past year and I hope that they get in return the benefits they deserve.

I thank Chief Executive Patrick Nelson and the staff of the Association, the Board, the Council and all the Committees for their contribution to football in Northern Ireland over the year and look forward to their continuing support to deliver the ambitious plans

and targets that the Association is setting for the future.

With a new stadium, the legacy of the 2016 Euros and the likelihood of further facilities investment in our game, there is optimism that we are well placed to create a successful future for football in Northern Ireland.

As this is my last President's Report I would like to thank you for your confidence in allowing me the privilege of being the President of the Association for the past five years and seven months and thank all in the football family for your support during that period.



Northern Ireland manager Michael O'Neill launched the Let Them Play youth football strategy along with Irish FA Vice President David Martin, Irish FA Director of Football Development Michael Boyd, Irish FA President Jim Shaw and Irish FA Chief Executive Patrick Nelson.

As always in this end of season activity report we try to offer a flavour of the wide range of activities we carry out at the Irish Football Association to promote and develop our sport throughout our country.

In these pages you will see the huge passion and pride generated by all of our staff as they go about their business.

The undoubted highlight of the year was the stunning qualification by our senior men's team for the finals of Euro 2016. Kyle, Steven and the boys hit the ground running at the start of the campaign and never stopped until they crossed the finish line.

And what a night it was back in October when group top seeds Greece came to Belfast and were blown away 3-1 on a night of huge emotion. Thirty years of disappointment dissolved in an instant as Dutch referee Bjorn Kuipers blew the final whistle and confirmed our place in France this summer.

The fact that our qualification came at home in the newly redeveloped National Football Stadium at Windsor Park was also of great significance.

From the first game against the Faroe Islands to the last game against Greece, the stadium changed each and every time as building work progressed, and by October the lower tier of the new South Stand was open, creating a tremendous atmosphere.

Several months on from that memorable night, the entire South Stand facilities including the upper tier, the hospitality areas, the state of the art changing rooms and the first class press facilities are also now in service, and the structure of the new West Stand is also in place.

Although we were excited when we worked on the original plans for the stadium with the architect and project team, nothing beats the reality of seeing the finished product, and in this new stadium we have a home for football in Northern Ireland worthy of that name: a compact, world class stadium which will be at the heart of



**Patrick Nelson**  
Chief Executive, Irish Football Association

our football development work for years to come.

The 18,500 capacity National Football Stadium itself will be complete by October this year when the FIFA World Cup 2018 qualifiers begin, and by the summer of 2017 we should also have the imposing new boulevard access from the Boucher Road open.

It has been long overdue that our game should have access to fine facilities like this, and I would like to pay tribute to everyone who has worked so hard to deliver such a fantastic product.

It is also worth mentioning that the National Football Stadium is not just for the senior men's team. On the May Day bank holiday this year we played both the Junior Cup and Intermediate Cup finals at the stadium, giving clubs who had reached these finals a great day out.

Also in May we staged the best attended Irish Cup Final in 10 years when Glenavon beat Linfield to lift the Tennent's Irish Cup, and we have scheduled our senior women's international against France in October to be played at the stadium.

Now that we have the stadium, and now that we have success with our senior men's team, we want more, and so our focus never strays too far from the next generations of players who we hope will grow up to

wear the green shirt.

Jim Magilton's Club NI programme, now backed by JD Sports as well as by investment from the Association, goes from strength to strength.

The increased contact time Club NI brings for our best young prospects, together with regular trips to GB and Europe to play in high quality tournaments and take part in training camps, bodes well for our future. The fruits of this work are starting to pay off with our under-19s progressing through their Euro U19 qualifying group last November (with a win over Norway and a draw against Russia) before bowing out at the elite stage back in March.

In a similar vein we have also continued to invest in girls' and women's football this season, in particular with an eye on the UEFA Women's Under-19 Finals which we will be proud to host next summer. We hope that the exposure provided by this tournament, bringing the best European footballing talent to our shores, will act as a catalyst to get more girls playing football here in Northern Ireland and help us build a more robust women's game.

When we launched our strategy We're Not Brazil, We're Northern Ireland back in 2013 we set ourselves some ambitious long term objectives, including qualifying for a major tournament and rebuilding the National Football Stadium, both of which have been achieved.

We also set ourselves the target of researching and delivering a youth football strategy, and after a considerable amount of effort, particularly in consulting our wide range of stakeholders, we were delighted to launch Let Them Play earlier this season.

Let Them Play is a 10-year plan which shines a light on the youth game and calls for both greater investment and increased focus to ensure that both the participation and elite ends of the football spectrum are boosted.

Investment when resources are scarce is a challenge for any company, however the board of the Association is determined to make the most of revenues generated by our Euro qualification this year and have ensured that a significant part of these UEFA funds will be invested in our future generations through Let Them Play.

Finally, I would like as always to pay tribute to everyone who plays their part in football in our country, from Association staff to Council members, from club administrators to coaches, from referees to kit men and from supporters to groundsmen. Without all of you we would not have this game, and our lives would be poorer for it. I hope you enjoy reading this review of football in Northern Ireland during 2015-16.



Irish FA directors and staff took part in a team photoshoot to mark their move into the Association's new offices at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park.



## The National Football Stadium at Windsor Park



### DEVELOPMENT WORK

The full redevelopment of the stadium will be completed by this autumn.

The Association moved into its new headquarters in the East Stand in February this year. The Education and Heritage Centre will be housed within that stand.

Work on the centre is progressing and we are gathering information and artefacts to create, in conjunction with our interpretive consultants, an informative and educational space which will provide an insight into the history of football and how the Irish Football Association has played its part in it.

The completed South Stand followed in March and is now operating as our hub during international games along with our significantly improved media facility. And our corporate hospitality venue in the stand is operating on matchdays.

The replacement of the West Stand has progressed to a very significant stage in terms of construction and will be fully operational for the start of our next campaign in October this year.

The continued support of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has made the development of the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park possible.



With an unbelievable amount of dedicated work and effort from all the people concerned we have achieved an amazing football stadium which we as an Association can be proud of. The pictures illustrating the development of the stadium over the 2015-16 period show what we have achieved.

## ACTIVITIES AT THE STADIUM

This year we have staged some amazing football events despite the complexities of the redevelopment process, more recently the Irish Cup semi-finals and final and the Slovenia and Belarus international friendly games. The stadium now has an incredibly high standard of facilities. These include a press conference room, media and photographers working area, four hospitality lounges, 10 corporate boxes, four dressing rooms, medical facilities and a players' lounge to name a few.

We look forward to welcoming audiences both old and new to the stadium, and are excited to bring Nitro Circus for what will be a very unique show on 10th June.

Thanks to everyone who participates and supports the events held at the stadium, and a special thank you to local residents for their support and understanding, particularly as we enter the final stages of the redevelopment.



The team which defeated Greece to send Northern Ireland on their way to the European Championship Finals in France this summer.

## Men's International

### Senior Team

Unbelievable. That word sums up the senior international team's efforts during the 2015-16 season.

Northern Ireland qualified for their first ever European Championship Finals thanks to a remarkable campaign which saw them become the first fifth seeded team to top a Euros qualifying group.

And Michael O'Neill's team may shortly be adding to their fantastic exploits during qualification for Euro 2016. The finals are being staged during June and July 2016 in France and Northern Ireland are keen to make an impact against Poland, Ukraine and Germany in the group stages initially and then see where that will take them.

The highlight of the Euro 2016 qualifying campaign was undoubtedly the game at the

National Football Stadium at Windsor Park in Belfast on 8th October 2015.

Greece provided the opposition and no-one among the 11,700 spectators that night will forget the incredible atmosphere both before and after the final whistle. It was something else.

Two goals from the team's playmaker and captain Steven Davis and another from Josh Magennis saw the team breeze past the Greeks to secure qualification. After securing a 3-1 win over the Greeks, the team then went on to top Group F a few days later thanks to a 1-1 draw away to Finland. Craig Cathcart was the scorer.

While away wins over Greece and Hungary and home successes against the Faroe Islands and Finland, plus a 0-0 home draw against Romania last June, had put the team in a strong position in the group during 2014-15, the exploits of 2015-16 provided the final push to get Northern Ireland to their first major tournament in 30 years.

A 3-1 success over the Faroes away in early September 2015 (scorers: Gareth McAuley (2) and Kyle Lafferty) was followed by a tense home game against Hungary a few days later. With 90 minutes on the clock it





Josh Magennis celebrates his goal in the famous 3-1 victory over Greece in October 2015 which secured Northern Ireland's place at Euro 2016.

looked as if Northern Ireland were heading for only their second defeat in the group, but three minutes into injury time Kyle Lafferty popped up to grab a late equaliser and secure a 1-1 draw. It was another pulsating night.

That draw against the Magyars, allied to other results in the group, meant Northern Ireland could qualify for Euro 2016 in France if they defeated Greece at home. From the first whistle it was obvious the players were in no mood to let the opportunity pass them by. They fired on all cylinders, with Steven Davis leading the charge. And it was only fitting that our leader on the pitch scored twice that night to secure the historic victory.

The plaudits rightly rained down on Michael O'Neill and his team after a brilliant campaign. And hopefully there is more to come from the master tactician who leaves

no stone unturned when preparing his team for games on the international stage...

### **Under-21 Team**

The U21s were drawn in Group 3 for the qualifying round of the 2017 UEFA European Under-21 Championship.

Joining them in the group were France, Iceland, FYR Macedonia, Scotland and Ukraine, with all of them aiming for a place at the finals in Poland next summer. Northern Ireland started their campaign with a double header home to Scotland and away to Iceland in September 2015, losing against Scotland at Mourneview Park and drawing 1-1 against Iceland.

The qualifying matches continued in October with a home game against Macedonia with the visitors winning 2-1 at Mourneview Park.

An extremely tough double header then followed in November. They played away to France, where they



The Northern Ireland Under-21s in action.

lost 1-0 to a goal in the 82nd minute, and then home to Ukraine where they narrowly lost 2-1.

In March this year the squad travelled across the Irish Sea to take on Scotland at St Mirren Park. They lost that game 3-1.

### **Under-19 Team**

The U19 squad started their season last October with two friendly matches in Iceland, earning a win and a draw. Charlie Owens scored the only goal in the win in the second game.

The European Under-19 Championship qualifying round tournament was held in Russia in November and was a strong group featuring Slovakia, Russia and Norway alongside Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland's first match in Group 9 was against Norway and finished in a 2-1 victory with goals from Ben Kennedy and Michael Newberry.

The second match was equally as tough for the Northern Ireland team as they faced Russia and drew 1-1 with the hosts, Ben Kennedy getting the Northern Ireland goal.

In the final match Northern Ireland were defeated by Slovakia 2-0. Slovakia went on to top the group with five points, however Northern Ireland qualified for the Elite round after securing second place with four points.

Northern Ireland were drawn in Group 4 of the Elite Round stage hosted by the Netherlands, who were in Northern Ireland's group along with Poland and Ukraine.

Stephen Craigan's squad started with a 2-1 defeat by Poland, Shayne Lavery scoring Northern Ireland's goal. In the second game Northern Ireland were narrowly

beaten 1-0 by the Netherlands.

In the final game only 14 players were fit for selection due to a spate of injuries, so it was no surprise when the U19s were beaten 2-0 by Ukraine.

### **Under-17 Team**

In preparation for the qualifying round for the UEFA European Under-17 Championship, the Northern Ireland squad travelled to Slovenia for two friendly matches.

Although they lost both games, it was a good chance for manager Jim Magilton to confirm his 18-man squad for the qualifiers, which took the form of a mini tournament in Israel in October against France, Norway and hosts Israel.

In the first match the French won 1-0 with

a penalty after 65 minutes.

Norway were the opponents in game two and in an exciting match Northern Ireland drew 1-1 with Chris Gallagher scoring.

In the final group match Northern Ireland played Israel, losing 2-1. Unfortunately Northern Ireland did not qualify for the Elite round after finishing third in Group 11.

## **Women's International**

### **Senior Team**

The Northern Ireland women's senior international team made a fantastic start to their UEFA Women's Euro 2017 qualifying group with a 3-0 win away to Georgia. Two goals from Avila Bergin and one from Julie Nelson rounded off a fantastic team performance.

They did not do so well in their second match against



The Northern Ireland Women's under-17 team in action.

international

Switzerland where they suffered an 8-1 defeat. The team's only goal came from a spectacular long range strike from Rachael Furness.

Their third fixture of the group had to be postponed due to unforeseen circumstances and will be played later on in the year.

In their most recent group match against a very strong Italy side, the team were very unfortunate to lose 3-1. Northern Ireland went ahead on 62 minutes but could not hold out for the win as the Italians finished with a three-goal flurry to take all three points.

Before the game against Italy the team travelled to Croatia in March where they competed in the Istria Cup. Alfie Wylie's team were unlucky to lose to Slovakia and Hungary, who scored a winner in injury time. The team went on to defeat the hosts 1-0 with Kirsty McGuinness popping up with the winner in the 86th minute against Croatia.

They were also due to play Georgia in Belfast on June 3 and were hoping to repeat their earlier success against them in the group.

### **Under-19 Team**

The women's U19s had a great start to their

UEFA European Women's Under-19 Championship qualifying campaign. They picked up a 0-0 draw with Montenegro and put in a fine display to beat FYR Macedonia 5-0.

Despite losing to Sweden in their final qualifying match the team progressed to the Elite round of the tournament.

It was unfortunate that Northern Ireland were drawn against very strong opposition in Denmark, Spain and Italy.

They suffered three defeats but, despite their results, reaching this stage of the competition was a great achievement by the team.

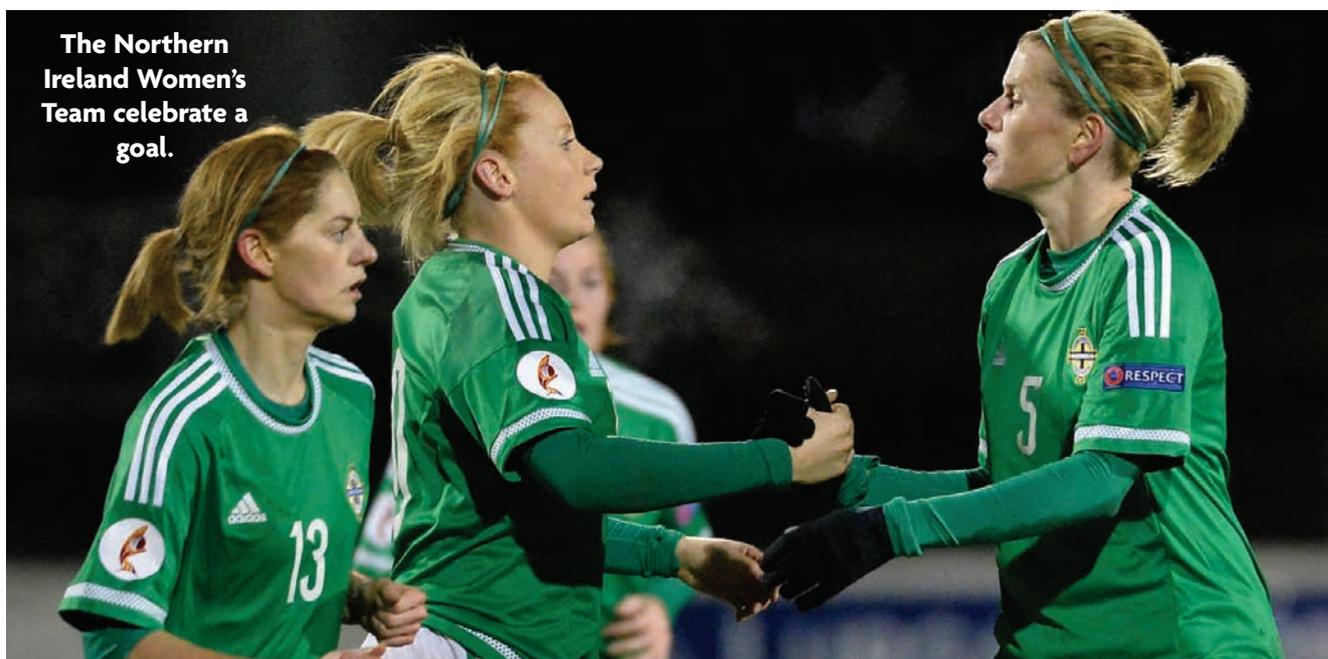
### **Under-17 Team**

The women's under-17 team started their UEFA European Under-17 Championship campaign with a 3-0 win over FYR Macedonia. This result was followed by a scoreless draw with Bosnia and Herzegovina and a 5-0 loss to a strong Italian side.

These results were enough, however, to see the team through to the Elite round of the competition where they faced tough matches against Denmark, Spain and Ukraine.

The Elite round fixtures took place in front of home support in Belfast. The girls suffered 4-0 and 5-0 losses against Denmark and Spain respectively, but finished the competition with a scoreless draw against Ukraine.

**The Northern Ireland Women's Team celebrate a goal.**



## Elite Performance Programme (Club NI)

Following on from the commitment to building a sustainable pathway to qualification and tournaments made in February 2014, the Elite Performance Programme entered its second full season in 2015-16.

The programme, which replaced the County Excellence Programme, has been set up to develop the next generation of senior internationals as well as create a club mentality among young players.

In the 2015-16 season the Elite Performance Programme continued to deliver results:

- 500 players were subject to talent identification in the Personal Development Programme
- 320 players in PDP programme
- 120 players were introduced into Talent Identification Regional Centres
- 120 games across all age groups in 2015-2016 in Club NI
- 19 players signed professional contracts in 2015-2016
- Six players pre-signed professional contracts at Premier League clubs in 2016
- 42 players have signed for professional clubs in the two years of the Elite Performance Programme

### Improvements to the Elite Performance Programme

- Elite Performance Operations Manager
- Player Welfare capacity
- Working to develop partnership with Northern Ireland schools to deliver player development and educational pathways, creating a holistic approach which will support talented young Northern Ireland players to achieve their potential.
- Restructuring to support information sharing to deliver sustainable pathway. And work is under way to improve communications with parents, clubs and other stakeholders.

### Partnerships

- JD Sport sponsorship
- JD initiative to find a future star
- Sports Institute Northern

Ireland

- The Neymar Jr Red Bull initiative Performance Focus Agreement
- Performed against the objectives set out by Sport NI

### A superb treble

Three teams from Club NI enjoyed remarkable success in Europe in May 2016.

The Club NI U12s travelled to Germany, the U13s to Greece and the U16s to Latvia - with all three age groups bringing home trophies.

The U16s competed in a UEFA Development Tournament against Latvia, Estonia and the Faroe Islands.

The boys managed to taste glory in the tournament for the first time ever by winning all three games and playing some scintillating football.

The U13s drew their opening two group games and were narrowly defeated by AEK Athens, who went on to reach the final. They then entered the Plate competition.

The high temperatures in Greece meant the going was tough at times but they overcame the challenging conditions and played some good football to secure the trophy. And en route to winning the plate they beat the Russian giants Anzhi Makhachkala.

The U12s travelled to Berlin to participate in the Westend Cup and set the tournament alight. All the Northern Ireland boys were outstanding in every game. They notched up five wins out of five, plus five clean sheets, and were widely praised by the neutrals and the opposition.

Wins over Borussia Dortmund, Hertha Berlin and Augsburg, all top German academies, meant the boys in green – they also wore blue in the tournament - certainly made their mark in Germany.



The Club NI U12s squad which won the Westend Cup in Berlin.



Under-17 action from the Girls' Festival of Football staged at Ballymena Showgrounds last summer.

## Regional Girls' Excellence Programme

The Regional Girls' Excellence Programme continued its weekly sessions in four regions across the country, offering quality coaching to girls aged 10 to 15 .

This year the number of sessions greatly increased with regular sessions during the day at the various holiday periods and school breaks .

In addition development squads were formed across four age specific bands with participants attending one central location for extra weekly sessions.

Girls in the older groups also completed fitness tests twice during the year, with programmes developed to help improve their fitness levels. A series of lectures and presentations took place on nutrition , lifestyle and the parent-player-coach triangle .

From the excellence programme the schoolgirls development squad is chosen to play in the Bob Docherty Tournament and once again this year the girls showed very good quality of performance, fitness, behaviour and enthusiasm during what was their first taste of playing football against other countries.

In the UEFA U17 Girls' Elite round it was great to see that 17 of the 18 girls selected to play for Northern Ireland had come through the programme in the last few years.

A first for the girls in all the regions this year was a set of tests on a range of skills under the Soccer Genius testing system. This was very popular with all of the girls who were able to see their results and compare them to players in other regions, generating a great level of competition. From the results the Regional Excellence coaches were then able to adapt their sessions to work on areas which needed a little extra time. The girls were tested twice during the year and it was encouraging to see the improvement from the first testing to the second.

Talent Appraisal continued throughout the year with the door always open for late developers, which ensures a freshness in the squads. And with inter-regional games and matches against boys' clubs, the girls get an opportunity to transfer the skills they have learnt on the training pitch into a game situation.

It is hoped that there will be 190 girls in the programme next season across the four regions, divided into five age bands.





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## The International Football Association Board (IFAB)

The Association continues to play a full role within IFAB with a major rewrite of the Laws of the Game approved at the AGM held in Cardiff in March.

The revision led by the IFAB Technical Sub Committee under the chairmanship of David Elleray, and containing an Irish FA representative, has introduced 95 changes and reduced the number of words in the laws by almost half in an attempt to make the laws more accessible, easy to understand and from a laws book perspective easier to navigate with a glossary included.

This AGM also introduced a major change in the law covering the denial of an obvious goal scoring opportunity to amend the so-called triple punishment.

From 1 June denial of a goal-scoring opportunity within the penalty area will result in a yellow card and penalty rather than a red card. Exceptions to this will be where the offence would have resulted in a red card elsewhere on the field of play (or hand ball).

IFAB also approved a plan to experiment with the possibility of video assistance for referees, and a number of offline tests will be held during 2016-17 with a view to live testing in 2017.

The Dutch FA has pioneered this innovation and along with other associations from across the globe will trial it.

The IFA as a member of IFAB will play a role in monitoring, assessing and analysing the tests and their outcomes. This work could very well play a major role in a video revolution within the game and we all look forward to the trials and the results.

## An Exciting Season

Another exciting domestic season culminated with three finals at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park in early May.

Glenavon, who had won the Irish Cup in the last final played at the 'old' Windsor Park in 2014, repeated the feat with a 2-0 victory over Linfield in front of a crowd of 11500. Prior to that final the stadium hosted two other finals. Harryville Homers retained the Junior Cup trophy with a 3-1 defeat of Rosemount Rec, while Institute upset the form book by taking the Intermediate Cup back to the North West by beating newly promoted Ards, again by a 3-1 scoreline.

In the other domestic finals Crusaders Colts took the Harry Cavan Youth Cup with a victory over Ballymena United Youth (4-1) and Cliftonville Ladies won the Women's Cup beating Crusaders Strikers in the final. The chance to stage the Junior and Intermediate Cup Finals at the National Football Stadium gave a great boost to the teams participating in those competitions and was appreciated by players and fans alike.

In the Irish Cup the association was delighted to bring Tennent's onboard as competition sponsor for the next five years and looks forward to working with them to increase the profile of the competition.

In the NIFL Premiership Crusaders were crowned champions for the second year in succession, the first time they had achieved such a feat, while Linfield, now managed by Northern Ireland legend David Healy, were runners-up.

During the season long-standing Portadown manager Ronnie McFall stood down from his post, ending over 30 years in the Shamrock Park hotseat and his position as the longest serving manager in European football. All within football in Northern Ireland will wish him well in his retirement.

Other managerial changes during the season saw Warren Feeney move to Newport County to be replaced by David Healy at Linfield, Tommy Breslin bring the curtain down on his reign at Cliftonville to be replaced by Gerard Lyttle and Mal Donaghy, and David Jeffery replace Spike Ferguson at Ballymena.

Season 2016-17 is certainly looking to be an interesting one. Crusaders along with cup winners Glenavon and Cliftonville, who came through the new NIFL play-off structure with an exciting 3-2 final victory over Glentoran, make up the Association's representatives in the UEFA club competitions for 2016-17. Both



Glenavon players celebrate their victory in the 2016 Tennent's Irish Cup Final.

Crusaders and Linfield progressed into the second round of European club competitions in 2015-16, once again improving the association's UEFA coefficient.

In a relatively quiet year for disciplinary and appeal matters the Association welcomed a new legally trained Chair and Vice Chair of the Disciplinary Committee, however the season has ended on a rather sour note with controversies over Portadown registrations and a Carrick Rangers suspension. The association urges all clubs at every level to pay particular attention to the rules and regulations and to ensure that all their players are eligible for the appropriate matches.

In June 2015 the Regions Cup squad continued their amazing run in this tournament by participating in the final tournament in Dublin. A win, draw and defeat against teams from Croatia, Germany and Poland were not enough to see Northern Ireland progress, however qualification for another final tournament puts the IFA squad among the most successful in this tournament in Europe and congratulations are due once again to team manager Harry McConkey for the preparation and organisation of the team throughout the tournament.

### 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 is also now spreading 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 domestic licences and six championship licences were awarded for season 2015-16, and 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 was successfully completed in September 2015 without any non-conformities identified.

The most recent licensing cycle concluded in April 2016 to award licences for incoming season 2016-17 and saw a record number of licence applicants (35) and licences awarded (28).

The increase in the number of applicant clubs can be attributed to the introduction of a mandatory championship licence required by those clubs seeking membership of the new second 'senior' tier of football in Northern Ireland commencing in season 2016-17.



This year's Intermediate Cup winners, Institute.

## Refereeing

The start of this year saw the launch of a new refereeing strategy, Every Referee - A Better Referee, which will be the focus for the association from 2016-2020. The strategy covers six key areas of refereeing:

### Recruitment and Retention

In 2016 we launched an online section to our referee beginners programme with a focus on practical work within a face to face workshop completed by the beginners. We have also worked with mentors and coaches in supporting new referees and focusing on talent identification at Junior levels. A number of referee coaching days have been completed around the country.

### Referee Development

Our National Development Group broke the 50 mark for the first time, and this year four regional centres of excellence will be launched to supplement the work completed by the National Development Group ensuring development reaches every referee. Mandatory pre-season workshops on safeguarding, child protection and laws of the game updates will be completed by every referee.

### Senior Refereeing

Our senior referees have completed a number of important appointments in 2016. Arnold Hunter became the first referee to officiate in the knockout stage of the Europa League and Tim Marshall was appointed to two Euro Under-21 qualifying matches as well as being nominated as reserve official for the Under-19 finals in Azerbaijan.

Raymond Hetherington and team were appointed to the Irish Cup Final and Andrew Davey and team to the League Cup Final.

### Referee Support Team

We have trained and confirmed five new observers at senior and grassroots level this year and will commence a coaching programme with referee coaches and mentors in 2016. We have also recruited and trained 12 new tutors to educate our referees at grassroots level.

### Referee Education

As well as the first ever mandatory pre-season seminar for referees, we are also keen to educate players, coaches and supporters on the update to the laws of the game. The redesigned Laws of the Game is a big change implemented by IFAB and FIFA and a lot of work will take place over the summer months to provide everyone with education. We are also running courses in futsal, powerchair refereeing and report writing.

### Referee Fitness and Welfare

While we continue to achieve great success at National Fitness Tests, we are developing our grassroots referees and targeting 100% of referees to be taking a fitness test by 2018. We are also developing an online portal for referees incorporating beginners courses and referee educational forms.



Referee Mervyn Smyth collects the match ball prior to officiating at the Tennent's Irish Cup semi-final between Linfield and Lurgan Celtic, which the Blues won 3-0.



**Johnny Hastings from Larne Youth receives the Foundation Club Mark Certificate from McDonald's Glengormley restaurant manager Neil McRoberts and Regional Grassroots Development Officer Steven Livingstone.**

accreditation along with an equipment pack and access to the Adidas free kit scheme.

### **Community Awards**

A record number of guests attended the annual McDonald's Community Awards at the City Hall, Belfast.

The evening recognised the key role volunteers and clubs play within football throughout Northern Ireland.

A record number of nominations were received

for the nine categories and the awards were presented by special guests and former internationals Pat Jennings and Jimmy Nicholl.

### **Small-Sided Games**

The McDonald's Small-Sided Games programmes continue to expand.

A total of 9335 children (aged 6-12) and 850 teams now play five, seven and nine a-side in 52 venues. And last year we also developed two new centres for girls, one at Mallusk and the other at Craigavon.

Coincidentally the promotion of our Silent Sidelines initiative across all Small-Sided Games centres informed clubs, coaches and parents of the importance of creating a positive playing environment for young players and encouraging independent decision making through a reduction in so-called sideline coaching.

### **Nutty Krust Holiday Camps**

A record number of 6500 children attended the Nutty Krust Football Camps in Northern Ireland over the Easter, summer and Halloween periods.

This is an increase of 15% on last year's figure. This year we expanded the reach of the camps to new areas such as Bushmillis and Cushendall. And camps at the MUSA (Cookstown), the Valley (Newtownabbey) and Lakeland Forum (Enniskillen) recorded attendances of over 100 children.

A new strand of the programme has been the development of a Nutty Krust camp in partnership with the Greater Village Regeneration Trust delivered

## **Grassroots**

All 13 Grassroots Development Officers (GDOs) have now been realigned to match the new-look council regions which came into effect in April 2015. To reflect the changes in local government, GDOs now have the title of Regional Grassroots Development Officers.

This year two new GDOs have joined the team from the Primary School Curriculum programme. Michael McClean is working within the Mid-and East Antrim council area and Jordan Reid is working within the Belfast City council area, covering south and east Belfast.

In addition and as part of the "Let them Play", Irish FA Youth Strategy, Sean Paul Murray has now moved from his role as a RGDO to his new position of Grassroots Coach Education Co-ordinator.

### **McDonald's Community Programme**

#### **Foundation Club Mark**

A total of 88 clubs have now attained the McDonald's Foundation Club Mark.

The mark is a 12-week programme delivered by the Regional Grassroots Development Officers to promote and improve club structures and includes coach mentoring.

Each club also receives a certificate of

**grassroots**



Northern Ireland captain Steven Davis says a big thank you to all the kids who supported the Nutty Krust Holiday Camps in summer 2015.

for the local community in and around the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park. This pilot scheme during last summer was very successful with more than 50 children attending the five-day summer camp.

### **Back In The Game (veterans football)**

The Back In The Game programme aims to use football as a tool to provide long term opportunities for men aged over 35 and over 45 and women aged over 30 to re-engage with football.

The project aims to improve mental health and wellbeing through physical activity and social engagement, with organised football matches and coaching opportunities for participants.

The four key elements of the programme are physical activity, social inclusion, mental awareness and nutritional awareness.

GDOs promoted the programme regionally via festivals. These events culminated with a National Festival at the Mid-Ulster Sports Arena in Cookstown with nearly 200 men and women competing in 24 teams playing seven-a-side to celebrate UEFA Grassroots Week.

Sadly last year Wesley Gregg passed away. Wesley worked as our Regional Grassroots Development Officer within the Ballymena, Carrick and Larne areas. Not only was Wesley a brilliant and a very well respected Development Officer but he was also a true gentleman. He is still sadly missed by all at the staff at the Irish FA and as a tribute to Wesley one of the McDonald's Community Awards now bears his name.

## Disability Football

### **Special Education**

#### **Coaching**

A comprehensive coaching programme continues to develop in Special Education. Free coaching blocks remain very popular with 32 schools receiving coaching in this period with over 500 pupils benefiting.

#### **Competition**

A total of 17 cup competitions for the various age groups, abilities and ELB areas took place throughout the year involving more than 40 schools and support units and involving more than 1500 pupils.

#### **National Winners**

FA Cup Under-15 SLD Schools – Sandleford, Coleraine

FA Cup Over-15 SLD Schools – Knockavoe, Strabane

Primary MLD Schools – Longstone, Dundonald

Yrs 8–10 MLD Schools – St Gerard's, Belfast

Yrs 11+ MLD Schools – Arvalee, Omagh

#### **Clubs**

The Irish FA, with the support of funding from DCAL, helped set up disability sections at six clubs -Sion Swifts, Portadown, Ballymena, Glentoran, TW Braga and Coleraine. This has worked very well with more than 100 children with various disabilities now belonging to their local football club. This 'inclusive club' initiative is something we are looking to progress in 2016 and beyond.

#### **Competition**

A total of 54 teams from across the UK and Ireland participated in the annual George Best Community Cup five-a-side competition for adults with a disability at the Billy Neill complex in Dundonald. This was the first year of a five-year sponsorship package secured through the George Best Foundation. There are four ability bands (divisions) in the competition.

Winners

Premiership – Foyle Belles (Londonderry)

Championship – Llandudno (Wales)

League 1 – Everton (England)  
League 2 – KARE (ROI)

### Deaf Football

Exciting new areas of development are progressing in Deaf Football thanks to a strong working partnership with Belfast Deaf United and Action On Hearing Loss. Areas of note are an under-18 section of Belfast Deaf Utd plus women's and veterans programmes in the Greater Belfast area. Belfast Deaf Utd U18s won the National Deaf Children's Society Northern Cup in Liverpool this year. It was their first appearance in the competition.

### Visual Impairment Football

Club side Lisburn Rovers continue to operate in partnership with the RNIB charity. Participation continues to grow and competitive opportunities are accessed through the UK VI League. Lisburn Rovers won the UK VI league championship this year.

### Cerebral Palsy

The Northern Ireland Cerebral Palsy Squad played in the 2015 World Championships at St George's Park in England. They finished in a creditable 13th place. Some fine performances included a 3-3 draw with current top eight side Argentina - and highlighted how this squad is developing. The next competition will be a World Cup qualifying tournament in Denmark this summer.

David Leavy, the captain of the Northern Ireland team, is currently in the GB squad preparing for the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

### Learning Disability

For the first time in the nine years of the competition's existence, Northern Ireland won the Home Nations Championships in Cardiff, Wales, in 2015. They notched up three victories out of three. They beat Scotland 2-1, Republic of Ireland 1-0 and Wales 3-0.

### Powerchair Football

Trailblazers Powerchair Football Club finished in second place in the AIPF Powerchair League that involves clubs from across the island of Ireland. Lightning competed in the AIPF Championship for the first time,



Eugene McGeehan was presented with his Volunteer of the Year Award by Northern Ireland goalkeeping great Pat Jennings.

finishing in a creditable third place.

### Coach Education

Coach education remains an important supporting structure in this area of football development. In this period six IFA Level 1 Coaching Disabled Footballers Awards were delivered to 90 coaches. One IFA Level 2 Coaching Disabled Footballers Award was also delivered in this period to 18 coaches.



The Northern Ireland u19 Learning Disability Squad who were successful in the 2015 Home Nations Championships.

# 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 ninth year.

The Irish FA employs 27 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.

This year 191 schools were involved in the programme. This equated to 785 classes a week with 18,500 children and more than 800 teachers benefiting from the initiative.

During extracurricular time the Irish FA primary school coaches have also delivered a number of complementary initiatives such as Healthy Families, Club Development and Coach Education workshops. These initiatives seek to provide participants with some practical and theoretical advice about how to improve lifestyle through physical activity, diet and sleep.

The primary school coaches are responsible for the delivery of Grassroots Fundamentals Awards which are delivered to teachers and volunteer club coaches with the aim of demonstrating how to develop fundamental movement skills and physical literacy and show how this has a direct impact on a participant's ability to become competent in sports specific tasks in the future.



Northern Ireland manager Michael O'Neill gave primary school kids some expert tips at the launch of the Let Them Play youth football strategy.

This year the Schools' District Player Development Programme was established. This talent identification and development programme spreads across 16 regions and is delivered to 360 boys and girls in Primary 6 and 7.

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 Programme.

As year on year physical health figures for Northern Ireland show some shocking results, it is now more important than ever that we produce 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 rates and in some way help counteract the health problems society faces.

The Irish FA believes that the Curriculum Sports Programme and the primary school coaches are important elements in addressing this issue.



Moya Feehan and Lauren Redpath from reigning champions Newry City Ladies joined Nicola McCleery of Danske Bank at the launch of the Women's Premiership ahead of the 2016 season, which kicked off in April

## Women's Domestic Football

The 2015-16 season saw the women's domestic unit undertake their second year of the IFA Girls' and Women's Football Plan (2014-2018). The plan works alongside the Irish FA's youth football strategy Let Them Play (2015-2025). Both strategies have key objectives that will be used to develop and improve the female game across Northern Ireland.

The annual FIFA Live Your Goals Schools' Festival took place on 10th June 2015 at Mallusk Playing Fields. Around 1000 girls from 50 schools across Northern Ireland took part in the prestigious event. Alongside the festival the Irish FA continued with its second year of Live Your Goals roadshows which were hosted across Northern Ireland in 12 different locations. The programme grew from the previous year with 2200 primary and post-primary girls passing through it.

The Schools' Indoor Cup took place in six regions, hosting girls' teams in three age bands (year 8/9; year 10/11 and year 12-plus). In 2015 a total of 130 teams from 55 schools participated in the competition. The winners of each heat progressed through to National Finals held at the Valley Leisure Centre. A total of 175 girls competed on the

finals day, with 56% of them also representing local club teams. Holy Cross College (Strabane) were winners of the year 8/9 section, Our Lady and St Patrick's Knock (Belfast) won the year 10/11 section and Mercy College (Belfast) won the tightly contested year 12-plus section.

In late 2015 Anna Signeul (Scottish Women's Senior National Coach) delivered a FIFA Technical Course to 18 participants over five days. This included classroom-based lectures and

workshops regarding all aspects of club and coaching development.

Last September the Irish FA were delighted to welcome Scort - The Football Club Social Alliance for a study visit focusing on women's football development. Scort delivered the annual Women's Club Development Conference during their visit. They brought coaches from QPR, Bayer Leverkusen and FC Basel to share knowledge and experience with those involved with the women's game in Northern Ireland.

The coaches each delivered presentations on themes such as 'Women's Football In European Professional Football Clubs' and 'How To Recruit And Retain Female Players' followed by masterclass coaching sessions on the pitch.

Glentoran Belfast United lifted this season's Futsal Cup in November 2015. They defeated Cliftonville Ladies in an exciting final held at the Shankill Leisure Centre.

Prior to the Futsal Cup, the women's season came to a close with the Female Football Fiesta on Sunday 6th December where clubs across the country competed in indoor U13, U15, senior and masters sections. A total of 185 players were involved in the event. Winners on the day were Crusaders Strikers (U15), Cappagh Spurs (seniors) and the IFA staff team (masters section).

The women's department held a prestigious event at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, to kick off activities for 2016. This particularly celebrated the 10 successful

graduates from the Female Football Leaders Programme.

January and February 2016 saw the return of the popular IFA Girls' Junior Futsal Cup hosted at the Shankill Leisure Centre. Forty teams at U11, U13 and U15 level took part in an exciting five-week programme that featured over 300 players.

This year's Northern Ireland Girls' Schools' Cup finals were action packed.

The two games - played at Mill Meadow in Castledawson - produced 10 goals between them.

There were eight goals in the Junior Cup decider between St Louise's (Belfast) and Parkhall Integrated (Antrim) and a further two in the Senior Cup final between Our Lady and St Patrick's Knock (Belfast) and Holy Cross College (Strabane).

Holy Cross lifted the Irish FA Senior Girls' Schools' Cup for the fourth year in a row after a 2-0 success, while St Louise's proved too strong for Parkhall, winning 6-2.

## FUTSAL

The Irish FA has begun to meet the Futsal targets presented in the Association's corporate strategy We're Not Brazil, We're Northern Ireland and the youth football strategy Let Them Play.

The Association is determined to change the historical participation of indoor football played with rebound boards, wide goals and a bright bouncy yellow ball. The Irish FA is seeking to create a culture of Futsal across Northern Ireland and support the only version of five-a-side football that is supported by FIFA and UEFA with World and European Championships for clubs and national teams.

At a domestic level the game has already witnessed growth among

female clubs. A senior and junior domestic competition was delivered across Northern Ireland and there are plans to see Futsal become a recognised part of the female domestic season moving forward. Plans for a male domestic league are progressing and the establishment of an international team is a realistic target for 2016.

The game has become extremely popular within the education sector. Primary, post primary, colleges and universities are all engaging in Football Development programmes and competitions. The establishment of a Futsal Introductory Award has provided more than 400 coaches with the basic understanding of the origins, global perspective and laws of the game combined with the practical support to deliver indoor specific sessions. Referee education continues to develop and a programme for development has been actioned.

The laws of Futsal promote skilful and creative play above physical contact. The game places considerable demand on technique, movement, tactical awareness, quick decision making and fitness. As a result the Irish FA believes that Futsal will play an instrumental role in developing our football talent and will also provide a viable positive option for those who believe they are less suited to football. As Futsal is predominantly played indoors it is also well suited to Northern Ireland's mild yet inclement weather.

The Irish FA will launch its first ever Futsal strategy, entitled Game Changer, this summer. It will target grassroots, domestic and performance development while establishing ambitious targets for coach and referee education over the next five years.



Futsal is starting to catch on in Northern Ireland.

## Club and Volunteer Development

The Irish Football Association is exploring ways to improve the provision of training and accreditations for clubs and volunteers at all levels of the game in Northern Ireland. The association's club and community development officer, Diarmuid O'Carroll, is taking the lead on designing changes to the Club Excellence Mark accreditation, club and volunteer seminars and the minimum standards each club in the country must have in place in order to compete.

In line with the Irish FA's Let Them Play youth strategy, the proposed changes will be implemented with a view to improving the professionalism of clubs and the skillset of club volunteers - and to ensure football here is inclusive for people from all backgrounds.

The main Irish FA club development accreditation is the Club Excellence Mark, which has been in place since late 2014. It aims to see clubs transform into community hubs which have provision for male, female and disability football. The accreditation was designed as a benchmarking system to help clubs instil a culture of best practice and strive to a quality standard that will help them to become hubs in the community. The criteria for the mark is now being reviewed and will be updated and improved in due course.

### Recognition for young volunteers

The three largest sporting bodies in Northern Ireland joined forces in

February this year to officially recognise young people involved in volunteering in their clubs. At a joint awards ceremony staged in Belfast's Wellington Park Hotel, the Irish Football Association, Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby put the spotlight on young sports volunteers as part of their delivery of the DSD-supported 'Sport - A Home For Lifelong Volunteering' initiative.

The celebration event officially recognised young people aged 14-24 who volunteer at their local sports club and have completed 50, 100 or 200 hours volunteering as part of the Millennium Volunteers GoldMark Programme.

Jack O'Connor from the Department for Social Development said: "The contribution and achievements of volunteers are essential to sport in Northern Ireland. There is no doubt that many clubs and communities would not be sustainable if it weren't for the commitment of their volunteers." Irish FA Football Committee representative Gerard Lawlor recognised the benefits volunteering can bring.

He pointed out: "I've been a volunteer for nearly my whole life and I know from personal experience the benefits it brings to the whole community. It's fantastic to see so many young people interested in volunteering and nights like this serve to highlight the value they bring while giving their achievements the recognition they deserve."



Clubs such as Ballynahinch Youth FC are striving to be at the centre of their community. The Irish FA has supported the Ballynahinch team's efforts to make improvements. Here Alan Perry from the club receives excellence awards from Claire Adams (Irish FA).



Andrew Woodside from Larne Youth FC was presented with a GoldMark certificate by Gerard Lawlor from the Irish FA Football Committee and Ross Redman of the Irish FA.

Jane Gribbin from Volunteer Now, which runs the Millennium Volunteers GoldMark Programme, said it was important to encourage volunteering. She added: “The certificates for 50, 100 and 200 hours volunteering is something these young people should be very proud of as it not only highlights their commitment and passion but also their skills which are greatly sought after by further education providers and employers.”

the Football Club Social Alliance to engage professional European clubs in supporting the development of social responsibility initiatives for promoting positive aspirations among young people through football. QPR, FC Basel, Bayer Leverkusen and Werder Bremen engaged with the

Irish FA on four study weekends, looking at working with young people at risk, disability football, girls’ and women’s football, and club and volunteer development.

## Community Relations

### Team NI take on the world in Amsterdam

Over the last year the work of the Football and Social Responsibility Unit within the Association’s Football Development department has continued to grow and inspire, working with a wide variety of people from many different communities, clubs and organisations. Using sport to educate and reach beyond the game has allowed the unit to make a difference in the lives of those experiencing difficulty and uncertainty, and support the development of the football family both on and off the pitch.

The NI Street Soccer team travelled to Amsterdam to participate in the Homeless World Cup tournament in July 2015. Following nine months of trials, training and preparation, an eight-man squad was selected for the tournament. Many of the players had overcome drug addiction, homelessness and alcoholism in order to make the life-changing trip. The Street Soccer project continues to run across Northern Ireland, providing weekly football training, educational support and personal development opportunities. The project provides a supportive environment for marginalised men and encourages them to engage with their local community.

### Football Social Alliance comes to NI

### Exciting new educational resources reach record numbers

The FSR team established a new partnership with the Scort Foundation, an organisation from Switzerland that uses networks through

The Football and Social Responsibility Unit has a range of new education and outreach programmes available for delivery. The Let Them Play strategy continues to create education and outreach pathways for schools, clubs, community organisations, colleges and individuals. After undergoing intense training, the unit is now equipped to deliver programmes in the following areas:

### OCN Level 2 in Football Administration

A new qualification, unique to the Irish FA, looking at the important aspects of running a football club. Through engaging and interactive content, learners look at managing the marketing of a club, how to implement good governance, and good practice for financial management.

### Show Racism The Red Card

To mark 100 years of the Show Racism The Red Card charity, the Irish FA has designed a new range of workshops using the SRTRC curriculum. The workshops are fun and interactive, and can be tailored to suit any audience. The unit can also offer a Train The Trainer course, teaching and empowering volunteers at clubs, schools or community organisations to deliver the material as well.

### Eat. Play. Win – Nutrition and Hydration for Football

As advanced sport and exercise nutritional advisors, the FSR team has designed an innovative resource based on nutrition and hydration for football. The content can be tailored for any audience, and to date has benefited elite players, disability squads, parents, Masters teams, staff, referees and coaches.

The workshop focuses on meal planning around training and matches, looking at macro nutrients, how to read and compare food labels, hydration advice and positive mental health awareness raising.

### Aspire Programme

This six-week programme is designed to engage with young people who have the potential to become young leaders in their

clubs, schools or communities. The programme supports the development of communication skills, teamwork and leadership skills, understanding equality and diversity and planning good relations in football.

### Young people continue to take centre stage in FSR work

The unit's engagement with young people continues on a regular basis through workshops, placements and work experience opportunities and ongoing programmes.

The Football for All Youth Forum continues to grow, with young people aged 15-18 coming from Belfast, Antrim, Ballymena and Derry/Londonderry. The main purpose of the group is to provide an opportunity for young people to have a meaningful voice in Northern Ireland football, and to provide feedback on initiatives being developed by the Association.

Through OFMDFM funding the Association delivered a cross-community Game of Three Halves camp in partnership with Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby. The week-long camp saw young people from a variety of sporting and community backgrounds come together to learn different sports, and to learn from each other through good relations workshops. Many of the participants on this camp consequently joined the Football for All Youth Forum.



The Northern Ireland Homeless World Cup team celebrate a win at the tournament in Amsterdam.



Crusaders – U17 NIBFA Cup Winners



Dungannon United Youth – U13 NIBFA Cup Winners



Glentoran – U15 NIBFA Cup Winners

## Northern Ireland Boys' Football Association (NIBFA)

NIBFA celebrates its 40th year in 2016 and the association has enjoyed its most active season to date with record numbers of teams affiliated (1280) and participation in the NIBFA Knock Out Cup & Plate competitions of 540 teams representing the nine affiliated leagues.

### NIBFA Knock Out Competitions

For age groups from U11 to U17, these serve as the boys' football equivalent of the FA Cup. The 2015/16 finals were held at Meadowbank Sports Arena, Magherafelt, on Bank Holiday Monday 2nd May.

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

Under 11 Plate	Ballymena United	3 v 2	Tristar Boys FC
Under 11 Cup	Linfield	2 v 1	Carrick Rangers Colts
Under 12 Plate	Warrenpoint Town	3 v 0	Castle Juniors Colts
Under 12 Cup	Ballymoor	1 v 1 (3-1 pens)	Lisburn Youth
Under 12 Cup	Glentoran	2 v 0	Portadown Youth
Under 13 Cup	Dungannon Youth	4 v 0	Ridgeway Rovers
Under 14 Cup	Linfield	2 v 1	Portadown Youth
Under 15 Cup	Glentoran	2 v 0	Crusaders
Under 17 Cup	Crusaders	3 v 2	Linfield
Under 16 Cup	Newhill	2 v 6	Glentoran

### The Mallusk Games Festivals 2015 - (40th Annual Tournament)

This small sided games festival celebrated its 10th year in 2015 with a full house of more than 1300 children involved. The festival helps promote the advantages of small-sided games in player development.

### International tournaments within Northern Ireland

Super Cup NI and the Hughes Insurance Foyle Cup held annually in July are a valuable addition to our sporting calendar and 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)

The Irish Football Association's Activity Report 2015-16 was compiled and edited by Nigel Tilson.

# Northern Ireland Schools' Football Association (NISFA)

## Inspiresport NISFA Schools' Quarter-Finals Festival

The biggest event in schools sport in Northern Ireland took place at Mallusk Playing Fields on 25th February when NISFA hosted the Inspiresport Quarter-Finals Football Festival Day. Spectators were treated to 21 exciting and competitive matches across eight different competitions, with 42 teams and more than 600 talented players involved. The action began at 11.30am and continued until late afternoon with exciting drama from start to finish.

## Inspiresport NISFA Schools' Finals Day

The sixth Schools' Cup Finals Festival Day was held at Ballymena Showgrounds in association with Inspiresport at the end of April. This year there were 20 teams involved in 10 exciting finals. There was a flurry of goals throughout the day with Boys' Model (Belfast) and Clounagh JH (Portadown) playing out an 11-goal thriller.

## Inspiresport Schools' Cups – 2016 Roll of Honour

Inspiresport Youth U18 Cup	– Grosvenor Grammar (Belfast)
Inspiresport Youth U18 Plate	– Corpus Christi (Belfast)
Inspiresport Senior U16 Cup	– St Columb's College (Londonderry)
Inspiresport Senior U16 Plate	– De La Salle College (Belfast)
Small Schools Cup (U15)	– Colaiste Feirste (Belfast)
Inspiresport Intermediate U14 Cup	– Boys' Model (Belfast)
Inspiresport Intermediate U14 Plate	– St Patrick's College (Belfast)
Small Schools Cup (U13)	– Devenish College (Fermanagh)
Inspiresport Minor U12 Cup	– St Columb's College (Londonderry)
Inspiresport Minor U12 Plate	– St Brigid's Derry

## British Isles Cup

NISFA hosted the 2015 U15 schools' championship for the Allen McKinstry Cup at the Billy Neill Centre. Northern Ireland were represented by Our Lady and St Patrick's Knock and St Columb's College in the British Isles tournament, however it was Calasanctius College from the Republic of Ireland who clinched the trophy.

## INTERNATIONALS U18

At under-18 level Northern Ireland regained the Lynn Nicholson Trophy with an 8-2 victory against Jersey and a 4-1 victory over Guernsey. The squad were unlucky throughout the Inspiresport Centenary Shield campaign but showed real character and performed right until the very end. The squad earned a 1-1 draw against Scotland at Lesser Hampden in their opening fixture. In the next game the team fought hard but eventually lost out 2-1 to England who scored a late penalty at Comber Rec FC. On St Patrick's Day the U18 team travelled to Arklow to play the Republic of Ireland, but although they dominated the game the team could not get the breakthrough goal and drew 0-0. In the final game of the Centenary Shield the squad produced their best display beating Wales 2-0 at Comber Rec FC.

The Northern Ireland Schools' U18 team who won the Lynn Nicholson Trophy and competed in the Centenary Shield.



At the start of 2015-16 there was a concerted effort to boost the association's commercial activities and we have made significant progress on this.

Apart from cementing the relationships with our international team sponsors Vauxhall and Adidas, we are delighted to have announced the following partnerships:

The Irish Cup is now the Tennent's Irish Cup after a significant five-year sponsorship deal was secured with Tennent's NI.

The association's ongoing relationship with JD has developed further. JD is not only our official retailer but it has also signed up to a six-figure sponsorship deal over the next four years that will work with Jim Magilton's Club NI team as headline sponsor and activate by helping identify new talent to join the Club NI programme.

The Irish FA is also working with Red Bull's Neymar Jr Five competition. It is a fun, fast-paced and technical game that will give young local footballers (aged 16-25) the opportunity to put teams of five to seven players together to compete to represent Northern Ireland at the World Finals in Brazil this summer.

New deals have been struck with Panini, Konami, Source Labs UK and Forever Collectables that will see Northern Ireland merchandise on sale in retailers across Northern Ireland.

Thomson Sport came on board as the Irish FA's official travel partner and Irwin's Bakery is continuing its support of football camps.

The international friendly against Slovenia in March 2016 coincided with the opening of the VIP facilities in the stadium's South Stand. Our VIP hospitality packages are proving very popular.

Six of our 10 corporate boxes in the South Stand have been sold.

The sales and marketing team are

using Euro 2016 as a platform to secure new partners and are in the process of identifying potential naming rights partners as well as other key partners for the association.

## INTERACTING WITH FANS...

The Irish FA has invested heavily in recruiting a top class communications and digital team to deliver exceptional growth figures over the next 18 months.

More than 10 million people watched Northern Ireland's games during the UEFA EURO 2016 qualifying campaign

The National Football Stadium was sold out for every Euro 2016 qualifier – up to 13,500 capacity

50,000 people applied for UEFA EURO 2016 tickets

The association attracted nearly 104,000 Facebook Likes

It now has more than 60,000 Twitter followers with an average two million impressions per month

Launched new Twitter page "NorthernIreland with 9590 followers in one month

Grew database by 300% to 40,000 names

Launched new responsive website – averaging one million hits per month and 40,000 unique users per month



The association's relationship with JD has been boosted through the company's sponsorship of Club NI.



Northern Ireland captain Steven Davis celebrates after scoring against Latvia in a Vauxhall International Challenge Match in Belfast last November. It was the only goal of the game.



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