

# DELIVERING THE YOUTH STRATEGY

FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT  
DEPARTMENT



Foundation

*Serving the community  
through football*



May 2020

FB 05/20/04

Success indicators used to assess performance are dictated by the key objectives and targets set out in the Irish Football Association Let Them Play youth football strategy which covers the charitable objectives of the foundation.

## Target one – Participation and Football For All

Increase youth football participation rates by 100% by 2025, from 50,000 in 2015 to 100,000 by 2025.

2015: **50,000** participants

December 2018: **72,000**

1 March 2020: **77,804**

2025 target: **100,000**



## Target two – Schools and Colleges

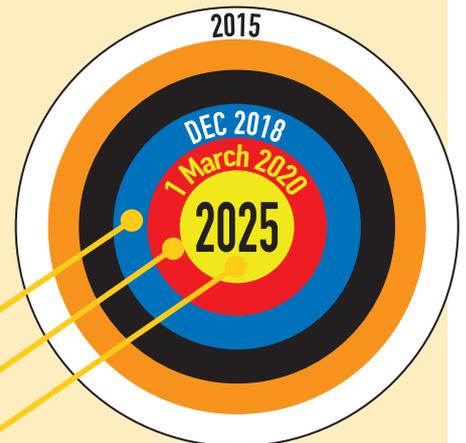
Revamp schools' and colleges' football by increasing the percentage of schools where football is played from 45% in 2015 to 90% by 2020 and increase the amount of young people playing in schools and colleges across Northern Ireland from 25,000 in 2015 to 60,000 by 2025.

2015: **25,000** young people playing in schools

December 2018: **29,230**

1 March 2020: **39,983**

2025 target: **60,000**



## Target three – Club and Volunteer Development

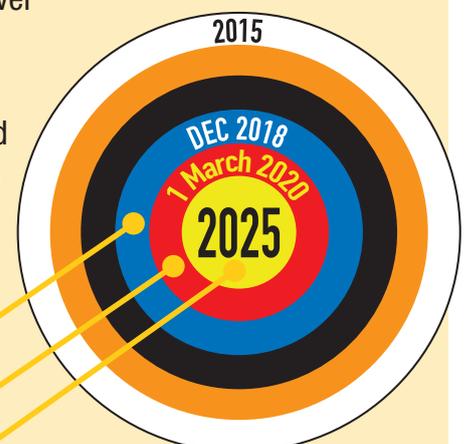
To embed a culture of club and volunteer development at grassroots level by 2025 that creates a fun, safe and inclusive environment throughout youth football. Supporting the development of youth football clubs that are run and managed by qualified, committed and Access NI authorised volunteers who encourage parents and young people to be attracted to and remain in the sport.

2015: **41** Accredited clubs / **50** volunteers

December 2018: **134 / 194**

1 March 2020: **153 / 299**

2025 target: **300 / 500**



## Football Development Team Reflection and Learning in Lockdown

The last few weeks have been some of the most challenging and difficult for the Irish FA Football Development Department. Usually we have more than 30 staff coaching in the community and supporting grassroots partners, people, clubs and schools.



On a normal week we have more than 70,000 people involved in our participation programmes as we deliver Let Them Play, the Irish FA Youth Football Strategy.

Before lockdown more than 14,000 young people played football regularly across Northern Ireland in our McDonald's football programmes and last year a record 8,447 children attended our Irish FA Foundation Nutty Krust Holiday Camps.

Approximately 40,000 school children were involved in our Department of Education funded sport programmes. 56 schools across the country had completed our Irish FA School Quality Mark and 30 additional schools would have completed the process had the pandemic not slowed us down. Thankfully we were able to complete our highly successful Translink Schools Gold Cup with a superb finals day in Antrim.

141 clubs had achieved our Irish FA Foundation club accreditation process and we launched our new People and Clubs online platform before lockdown.

Refereeing is one of the most important aspects of football development and before lockdown we had developed and supported more than 500 active referees.

In early March we took our U17 and U19 elite girls' international teams to Turkey for tournaments and we were extremely proud of how well the players and coaches conducted themselves. Our U19 girls did fantastically well to qualify for the elite rounds of UEFA competition but the pandemic stopped them performing in April.

Our senior international women's team completed a world-class training camp in Spain but unfortunately the pandemic stopped them playing a key qualifying game in April.

More than 6,000 girls were introduced to football through our exciting Irish FA Foundation Electric Ireland Shooting Stars programme. With support from leagues like the South Belfast Youth League and others we have seen a massive growth in girls' youth football programmes.

Our disability football for all programmes were also reaching record numbers with more than 2,000 people playing football regularly across 50 clubs. We had exciting trips planned for our learning difficulty, cerebral palsy and powerchair international teams which unfortunately now can't happen this year. We also had to postpone our George Best Community Cup, one of the largest disability football tournaments in Europe and a tournament that brings so much joy to so many.

The Northern Ireland Homeless Football men's and women's teams that we support also missed out on the opportunity to play at the Homeless World Cup in Finland, with the competition being postponed.

The pandemic has also impacted on the delivery of our highly successful education programmes, Stay Onside crime prevention programmes, Ahead of the Game mental health programmes and our structure work experience programmes.

So what have we learned from the lockdown experience? We have learned three important things:

## 1. Development goes on.

We can still serve the community extremely well remotely using online technology and platforms. Examples of this include our very successful free online resources pages which help parents home-school children. We update our resources weekly with videos and activity sheets.

Our People and Clubs online portal allows us to serve clubs in the community to become accredited in lockdown.

With help from Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Skype we can reach our partners, participants and players, providing free skill challenges, online funding webinars and leadership programmes reaching thousands of people on weekly basis.

Each week we email all our youth football clubs, women's teams and partners with updates on our ongoing services.

Our Club Community Development Officer, Volunteer Development Officer, Community Relations Officer and Let Them Play Officers remain busy serving the community.

## 2. Quality is always more important than quantity.

We are now focused on developing quality online courses, webinars and resources to support the football family.

Our Female Football Leadership Programme, Btec at Ashfield High School and part time degree courses at Ulster University have all evolved so we can educate and empower people remotely.

We may not be delivering as many programmes but we have enhanced the quality of our online courses and interaction.

Making sure we improve the quality of our services is important and we are working hard to revamp education courses for the future.



We may not be able to work with as many young people directly as before, but we can still reach and empower thousands of people each week by embracing new technologies and working smarter.

Our Education Officers are still fulfilling all their commitments to the pupils and schools we work with, and our peace-funded staff are amending their programmes to ensure we work with partners to increase shared learning.

## 3. Your health really is your wealth.

Nothing is more important than the health and well-being of our families and friends. The health and safety of our staff, volunteers and players remains our top priority. This is why we are running free Ahead of the Game webinars and providing regular updates on our website about how people can stay healthy in lockdown. The pandemic has given us all time to reflect, recalibrate and reboot. In the last couple of weeks our staff have been out in the community delivering food and medicine to the vulnerable.

We have all also been spending more precious time with our families. We realise time with loved ones is even more important than football and making sure we maintain that focus in the new normal is perhaps our most important goal yet.

## Grassroots and Youth Development

### People and Clubs

**Our Club and Community Development Officer Gavin Nelson, and Volunteer and Policy Development Officer Michael Carvill have continued to support clubs and volunteers during these uncertain times.**

### People and Clubs accreditation

**In February and March our Club Development Officer Gavin Nelson attended Inclusive Clubs workshops in Derry/Londonderry and Portadown to deliver talks on our People and Clubs programme and Ahead of the Game.**

Since the March lockdown another 41 clubs have signed up for People and Clubs accreditation via the Irish FA website and have been supported through the process. Currently 130 clubs have signed up for People and Clubs accreditation with eight having completed their accreditation during lockdown, with support from Gavin and Michael.



### Online resources

**We trialled a new case study series conducted over Microsoft Teams and the first episode featuring Greenisland Football Club was shared on the People and Clubs section of our website. This new case study section will share case studies from a variety of clubs and volunteers from across Northern Ireland.**

On the Club Education section of the People and Clubs website you can now find a social media workshop delivered by the BBC reporter Nicola McCarthy, which was delivered as part of the Stadium Community Benefits Initiative.

The People and Clubs section has been updated to include a funding section and downloadable resources that clubs can access.

### Ahead of the Game

**In February and March we delivered another three Ahead of the Game workshops to coaches and volunteers at Mid Ulster Ladies, Crumlin United, Lurgan Town and Aquinas football clubs.**

To support football clubs with their mental health during this period we adapted the Ahead of the Game guide to support clubs who were unable to attend the workshop and created an infographic to share online.

During Mental Health Awareness Week we will be delivering an Ahead of the Game webinar on Tuesday 19 May at 7-8.30pm.



## Department for Communities: Sport – A Home for Lifelong Volunteering



**From the start of 2020, our Club and Community Development Officer Gavin Nelson and our Volunteer Policy and Development Officer Michael Carvil also ran a variety of DfC: Sport – A Home for lifelong Volunteering events.**

Our Club and Community Development Officer and Volunteer and Policy Development Officer hosted a multi-sport forum at the Kingspan Stadium on 5 February alongside Ulster Rugby and Ulster GAA. The event focused on running your club and provided participants with information on marketing, funding and volunteer recruitment.

On Saturday 29 February the Irish FA along with Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby hosted a volunteering forum in Omagh for young volunteers aged between 16-24 years old.

They delivered a workshop to the young volunteers present, on the benefits of volunteering after which the groups had the opportunity to share their experiences with others from different sports. Afterwards the participants attended the Tyrone v Dublin Gaelic football match.

In March, Gavin and Michael received the great news that their roles have been funded for another year. They have met with their partners at Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby multiple times since then to adapt their delivery.

On Wednesday 29 April, Gavin and Michael ran a funding webinar in partnership with Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby as part of their Department for Communities: Sport – A Home for Lifelong Volunteering programme.

The funding webinar was delivered by Richard Forsythe, Grants Officer at the Irish FA. The objectives of this webinar were to:

- Increase prospects of securing funding for your club
- Identify potential new funding sources
- Covid-19 open emergency funds
- Learn other fundraising ideas and techniques

In total 123 people tuned in for the webinar with 45 people coming from football, representing 38 football clubs.

The webinar was very well received and attracted some extremely positive feedback.



## DfC GoldMark Awards

**Young sports volunteers took centre stage at the GoldMark Awards ceremony in Belfast at the beginning of March.**

The event which was compared by BBC Sport NI commentator Thomas Niblock, was jointly organised by Ulster GAA, the Irish FA Foundation and Ulster Rugby, and highlighted the huge volunteering effort among young people aged 14-24 across the three sports.

The young people heard first-hand from three sports stars about their experiences of volunteering and the impact volunteers had made on their sporting careers: David Jeffrey (Ballymena United manager), Connor McCann (Antrim GAA hurling captain) and Alan O'Connor (current Ulster Rugby and Ireland player).

The packed audience at the Crowne Plaza Hotel also heard from Caelan McEvoy of Kilcoo GAA who gave a powerful overview of his experience volunteering in sport after his playing career was cruelly cut short due to a severe illness. More than 100 young people were presented with GoldMark Millennium Volunteers Awards for 50, 100 and 200 hours of volunteering.

Congratulating the young volunteers, Ulster Rugby President Gary Leslie said: "To see so many young volunteers taking the time and effort to make a difference in supporting their local clubs is what we as sport administrators are screaming out for. All three sports represented here are definitely on the right pathway to ensure that local clubs continue to be the lifeblood of the local community across the whole of the province. For years the club volunteer was an ever-ageing phenomenon with only one likely outcome if nothing changed. With so many young volunteers coming through, the next challenge is how we maintain the enthusiasm and provide the additional skills to make them the future leaders of their clubs."

Acknowledging the role of youth volunteering in sport, Ulster GAA vice-chairperson Ciaran McLaughlin said: "The GAA is built on the support of our volunteers. There is a role for everyone, whether it be as a player, administrator or coach. Our clubs rely on the dedication and commitment of many volunteers to achieve on and off the field.



Our young people make a major contribution to their clubs through their volunteering efforts. The energy and enthusiasm they bring is infectious and our clubs are all the better for having young people playing a full part."

Irish FA vice-president Crawford Wilson pointed out: "Through Department for Communities funding the Irish FA Foundation, Ulster Rugby and Ulster GAA are able to work together to increase participation in volunteering – promoting and recognising our volunteers and also developing their skills and knowledge."



## Volunteer Now Platform: Be Collective

**The Irish FA joined with Volunteer Now and launched their new online platform for managing volunteers.**

The platform will make it easier to manage large groups of volunteers while providing further training and a database to store volunteer records. The platform also allows each volunteer to see other opportunities throughout Northern Ireland with which they can assist. Currently the Irish FA have welcomed 312 volunteers to the platform and ongoing training is planned to further help our volunteers. The new management platform has helped clubs share their efforts during the crisis as they reach out for further assistance.

## Grassroots Leaders

**The Grassroots leaders have had several webinars and training via Microsoft Teams.**

All 23 members attended the People and Clubs accreditation training. We also had an informal discussion during which Ryan Brown, an analyst with the international women's squad, presented on his role when travelling with the team. This was followed by questions and allowed the leaders to learn from each other's experience. During this difficult time the leaders have also assisted clubs with the online accreditation and provided support for the development of resources for clubs.

## Young Leaders Programme

**On 6 April we launched our first every Young Leaders Programme.**

The programme, supported by UEFA GROW, aims to provide a voice for young people in football and support the development of young leaders. It will also help the Foundation gain more insight into what young people want from the game. They have met a further three times during this period with Niall McCann being voted in as chair of the group and Nathan Woolsey voted in as vice chair. The young leaders have detailed their personal and collective goals for this programme and are looking at ways that they can assist to recruit more young leaders into volunteering, ready for the restart of football.

The participants, aged 18-24, will receive a variety of continuous professional development opportunities covering football-related topics provided by Irish FA staff and external stakeholders.

The programme's starting 11 come from different areas of the game, with players, coaches, referees, performance analysts and physiotherapists all represented.

In the line-up are: Aaron Rainey, Ben Faulkner, Eoghan Taggart, Jason Sloane, Joel Davey, Jonathan Harbinson, Lauren Clarke, Lewis Cowan, Nathan Woolsey, Niall McCann and Samuel Cartwright.



## Community Relations

### Anti-Sectarianism Workshops

**We developed our new anti-sectarianism workshop, *Show Me The Way* and delivered it to the shared education group for first time in The National Football Stadium after a tour.**

Working in partnership with TIDES, this programme offers an insight into and challenges the traditional religious divide, proving that we have more in common than we have differences, and highlighting the progression of our international team and fanbase.

### Anti-Racism Workshops

**Previously known as Show Racism The Red Card we have now rebranded the workshop as an anti-racism and equality programme called *Everybody's Game*.**

This workshop has been continually delivered within primary and post primary schools, youth and community groups and football clubs and academies.



### Inclusive Club Conferences

**Due to the pandemic we were only able to deliver two out of four of these conferences, however both were well supported and extremely successful.**

Our two areas of delivery were Da Vinci's Hotel in Londonderry and Seagoe Hotel Portadown, with over 20 grassroots clubs and academies attending each.

The aim of the conferences was to offer insight into what an inclusive club looks like, how it can be developed and discuss the programmes of support we as a Foundation can offer. We also used the Seagoe event to launch our first ever *Coaching Players with ADHD* module, which was extremely well received. Each club left enlightened, informed and with the added bonus of a precision gift pack for their club.

## 4 Corners Festival

**The 4 Corners annual festival this year wanted to work alongside football and we hosted a number of guests for a stadium tour before enjoying an evening with the chairmen of Belfast's four NIFL Premiership sides.**

Hosted by Joel Taggart in the Pat Jennings suite, the event gave the chairmen the opportunity to speak on the challenges of working within local football. This was a really successful night with a really engaging crowd and a partnership with the festival which will be maintained in future.

## Children in Care Day

**I supported Children in Care Day 2020 on 21 February, delivering football games to over 80 participants across the day.**

While many other companies and celebrities including Carl Frampton supported the day, we were only governing body of sport in attendance.



## Covid-19 Actions



**We are supporting development of online resources along with presenting an action plan to SLT at beginning of pandemic.**

I have continued to work remotely, completing all processes relating to last year's funding streams and assisting in the application of 2020/21 MEDF and CGRF funds.

I have also been in constant contact with community groups surrounding the stadium, with prizes confirmed to assist GVRT's successful street bingo programme and attending their surprise food drop to the local communities most vulnerable and isolated.

I also delivered the Foundation's first ever online workshop with the Bytes group, challenging them with *Everybody's Game* workshop.

## Going forward

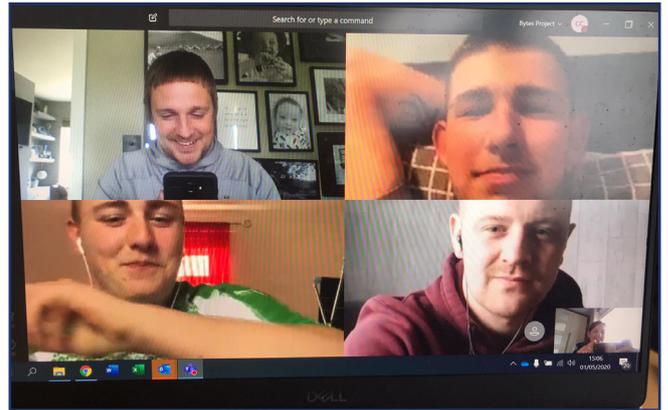
**There will be further online workshop delivery along with developing a community-based webinar, alongside confirmation of CGRF and MEDF funding, KickOff@3 programme, shared education and hopefully Erasmus and other funding applications.**

## Stay Onside

### Stay Onside Bytes Project Community Programme

**The Stay Onside programme in partnership with the Bytes project has continued to operate over the last few weeks with the following modules delivered to a group from North and West Belfast. The rest of the programme will be delivered in the future.**

- Referee intro and new rules of the game presentation, online presentation and videos, providing an interactive platform for participants to understand the rules of the game and obtain an interest in refereeing.
- Re-create your favourite goal on video competition. The group were given the opportunity to recreate their favourite goal, posting the video, with the winner receiving a prize.
- *Everybody's Game* racism and awareness online module. This proved a big success with Chris Wright delivering the session.



### Delivery and Funding

**Stay Onside community programmes are planned for a number of areas when we return.**

In consultation with the Irish FA Funding Officer a number of future areas have also been identified with the programme to be aligned to the new Irish FA hubs, ensuring local delivery of the concept and helping to address local community problems by identifying the right participants.

Stay Onside will also be integrated into the new Community Relations plan 2020-2024.

Funding has been received recently from, PSNI, Prison Service, Assets Recovery, DOJ and PCSP.

### Stay Onside Videos

**Three new videos have been commissioned for the programme.**

These will be used to promote the programme in the community and highlight the journey of Nathan, one of the Stay Onside ambassadors. The first video, providing an overview of the programme, has been circulated on the Irish FA social media platforms.

## Prison Programmes

**Prior to the restrictions there were a number of programmes being delivered with prisons.**

- Hydebank, 18-week OCN accredited programme, involving males and females
- Maghaberry, six-week programme with separated prisoners. This includes academic research carried out by Dr Conor Murray, Ulster University, School of Criminology

Discussions are ongoing with Prison Service regarding future delivery when it's safe to do so. No coronavirus cases have been reported in any of the Northern Ireland prisons to date.

## KickOff@3

**The partnership with the Community Relations Officer, PSNI and KickOff@3, to work with BAME communities has continued to grow, with a major tournament now postponed until the end of August.**

KickOff@3 originated in London to fight knife and hate crime and has grown throughout the UK and Ireland, being adopted by the PSNI. A funding bid has been forwarded to the Minority Ethnic Development Fund. The Rio Ferdinand Foundation is also keen to support any future programmes in Northern Ireland.

## Future Partnerships

**Stay Onside, GAA, Ulster Rugby and Belfast Giants have agreed to deliver a new initial two-year programme on behalf of the DOJ *Tackling Paramilitarism Task Force* and PSNI.**

The multi-sport programme will work with those at risk of being influenced by organised criminals and paramilitaries. A funding application has been submitted, with DfC and DOJ indicating it will be approved. The process has currently been put on hold due to the pandemic.

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## Education and Employability

**The Education Officers are continuing their work with Ashfield Boys' High School. As part of the partnership the education officers are delivering part of the BTEC Level 3 Sports.**

Despite the students not being in school we are carrying out distance teaching, preparing and sending presentations and assignments to students. We are in regular contact with students, parents, teachers and the school.

The rest of our programmes in NRC (Ballymena, Coleraine, Magherafelt and Newtownabbey), Larne High, Belfast MET, Boys Model and St Louise's finished before the Easter break. We managed to complete the delivery of these before the lockdown. In the last few weeks we have been sending certificates to the schools, colleges and students for this academic year.

We have had a number of positive meeting with schools and colleges over the past number of weeks and are putting plans and schedules in place for a return to the programme in September.

## Peace IV

The PEACE IV funded Sport Uniting Communities Community Sports Development Officers have been carrying out a number of projects over the last few months. These have included:

- A BME participation programme at Grosvenor Recreation Centre in conjunction with World United FC. Within this programme, which lasted for six weeks, 32 members of the BME community were involved in coaching and education sessions with the aim of providing them with new experiences and further help them integrate within their communities.
- A number of Irish FA Inclusive Clubs workshops have also taking place. These included a workshop for players involved in the Irish FA's Player Development Programme and was held at the Melvin Sports Complex, Strabane. 33 participants from 11 local clubs attended the workshop. The workshop focused around Football for All and Show Racism the Red Card, and culminated in a Futsal coaching session.



The Community Sports Development officers have also held two volunteer development events at Foyle Arena, Derry and Omagh Sports Complex. Over these events, 16 clubs and over 25 participants have taken part including representatives from Ballinamallard, Sion Swifts, Ardstraw and Beragh Swifts football clubs. The event consisted of the delivery of five workshops looking at volunteer development:



- Defining roles and responsibilities within clubs
- Volunteer recruitment and retention
- Succession planning for volunteers
- Becoming an inclusive club
- Volunteer leadership/mentoring

Feedback from clubs was very positive and clubs are keen to work together to run events in the local community to bring people from different backgrounds together.

Outside of the above, the Community Sports Development Officers have been delivering a number of Game of Three Halves across the province, Getting to Know the Irish FA Stadium Tours and a Youth Leadership Programme in Aquiness Grammar School.

## Schools' Programmes

The work plan for the Department of Education funded Sports Programme in primary schools has been amended for quarters one and two to reflect school closures and the absence of PE delivery.

It was decided with our partner, Ulster GAA and with approval from the Department, that we would focus on the following areas during Covid-19 lockdown:

- Development of online resources to support at home learning
- Development of resources for return to work
- Staff training and development
- Begin independent research project



The 12 LTPOs have developed more than 20 videos of physical activity challenges that children can try at home with their families. In addition, the LTPOs have developed activity sheets for at-home learning that links football to other areas of the curriculum such as art, literacy and the world around us. New videos and worksheets are released online each week to provide new content throughout the remainder of the school term. This content can be found at <https://www.irishfa.com/irish-fa-foundation/ifa-foundation-online-resources> under the title, Sports Programme.

The LTPOs along with their Ulster GAA counterparts have taken part in an online learning course from Open Learn, looking at the physical education curriculum and understanding current strategies for increasing young people's participation in physical activities. In addition, they are working closely with our Comms team to enhance their learning and experience of creating digital content, a tool that is likely to be used in the future delivery of the programme when there is a phased return to schools.

Phase one of research into the programme has been launched remotely with Physical Intelligence. Due to the challenges of Covid-19 the research has initially focused on remote work with coaches, schools and teachers around the key outcomes of the programme. It will move to a more direct approach with pupils as restrictions are lifted.

Staff are currently putting together an online fun day in absence of schools' sports days which will be launched end of May. School children will be able to take part in a variety of 'events' to encourage participation at this time.