



Developing Girls' and Women's Football

Women's football is one of the fastest growing sports in the world. This is reflected here in Northern Ireland with the number of girls participating in our McDonald's Small-Sided Games increasing by 413% in the last year alone.

Earlier this year the Irish Football Association launched a new strategy aimed at boosting the development of girls' and women's football in Northern Ireland.

The Growing the Game – Maximising Impact strategic plan confirms the association's commitment to continue investing heavily in girls' and women's football, growing the game from grassroots up.

The new plan covers the period 2019-2024 and sets ambitious targets to increase women's participation levels. One of the key aims is to double the number of registered female players from 1,600 to 3,200 over the next five years.

The strategic plan also provides a framework to strengthen women's clubs and their volunteer base, improve infrastructure, promote leadership and effective governance, and to encourage more women to take up coaching, refereeing or administrative roles within the game.

Women in Sport's research, Understanding Women's Lives, found that "A woman's relationship with physical activity and sport is highly complex, based upon a web of personal, social and environmental factors, influences and triggers."

They found that the six core values that represent factors that are important to women in modern life are:

- Looking good
- Feeling good
- Achieving goals
- Developing skills
- Nurturing friends and family
- Having fun

Barriers

Women's participation rates in football are much lower than men's and this can be due to different barriers.

Some of the common barriers that stop women participating in football are:

- Lack of time (this can be due to work or family)
- Cost (people in certain areas may be unable to take part in activities due to not having the regular disposable income)
- Location (the venue may not be easy to get to)
- Body image (may feel self-conscious about their bodies)
- Lack of communication (not clear on where they need to be and when)
- Social confidence (worried about joining a new group/not being made to feel welcome)

Tips

- When you are advertising for new members let people know that your club is open to people of all abilities
- Be clear with your communication. Let people know when and where you train
- Let new members know that someone will meet, greet and introduce them to existing members at their first session
- After someone has their first session, speak to them to see how they found it. Let them know you're glad that they made the effort to attend and to be part of your club
- Keep communicating with your group in between sessions and set up a WhatsApp or Facebook group where people can communicate with each other. This will help boost the social side of the club
- Use facilities that are convenient and easy to get to for the people you are targeting
- See what funding may be available in your area for girls-only sessions
- Have current female members do case studies (videos, pictures) showing them in action and talking about how they enjoy the sessions
- Boost your social media presence
- Regularly ask all members for feedback
- Organise your sessions close to somewhere that people can socialise afterwards, i.e., a leisure centre with a café
- Keep it fun!

Organisations that may be able to support you

Irish FA Foundation

High schools

Sports clubs

Local council

Colleges

Universities

Useful Links

Growing the Game – Maximising Growth

<https://www.irishfa.com/news/2019/april/irish-fa-launches-new-girls-and-women-s-strategy-aimed-at-doubling-participation-by-2024>

Electric Ireland Irish FA Shooting Stars for girls aged 4-7 years old.

<https://www.irishfa.com/irish-fa-foundation/grassroots-and-youth-football/girls-and-womens-football/shooting-stars-programme>

NIFL Women's Premiership

<https://www.nifootballleague.com/womens-premiership/news>

Northern Ireland Women's FA

<https://www.irishfa.com/ifa-domestic/leagues/niwfa>

Nutty Krust Irish FA Football Camps

<https://www.irishfa.com/irish-fa-foundation/grassroots-and-youth-football/nutty-krust-irish-fa-summer-football-camps>

Irish FA Mentor Programme

