



# Foundation



# RESEARCH AND PLAN AHEAD

May 2021



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## BACKGROUND

**Amateur football is a major area for development within Northern Ireland. It is a very diverse but important area and its development is a priority for the Irish Football Association and UEFA.**

From the initial consultation it was very apparent that different leagues and areas have different opportunities and issues, all of which are unique in their own way. These include standard of play, structure, facilities, coaching and developmental pathways.

The Amateur Football Game Development programme provides an opportunity for the Irish FA to increase its footprint and develop the amateur game across Northern Ireland, allowing all who participate or play a part within football to maximise their potential. To achieve this it is essential that a complete initial consultation is carried out and that communication is maintained at all levels of development.







# STRATEGIC CONTENT

There are three specific areas of strategic content which are relevant to the development of the amateur game in Northern Ireland:

- International
- Football specific within Northern Ireland
- Sport specific within Northern Ireland





## International

### TOGETHER FOR THE FUTURE OF FOOTBALL: UEFA Strategy 2019-2024

To ensure that the core values and pillars of the strategy are adhered to.

Specifically:

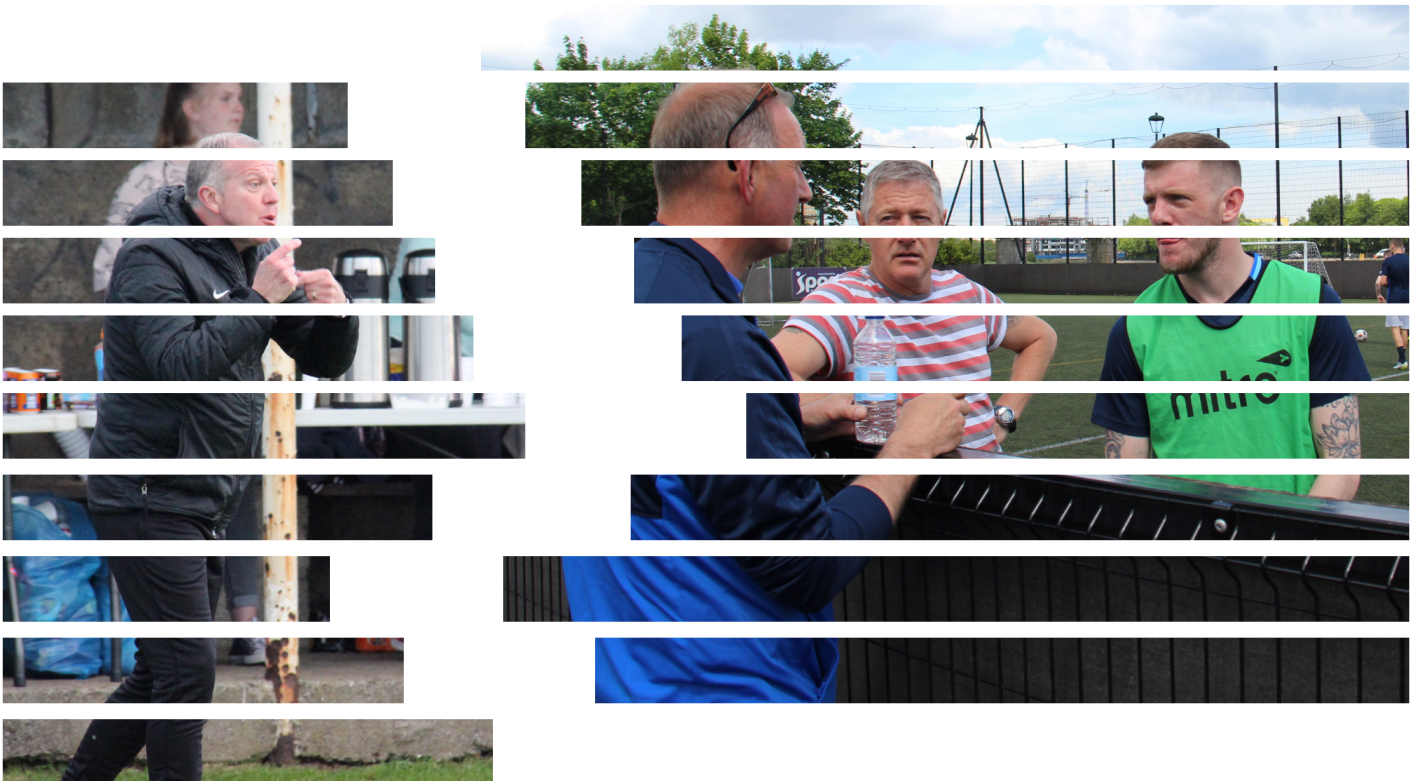
- Football
- Keeping football first in everything we do

#### Objectives

- Lead and support the advancement of national football associations
- Grow and secure long-term participation within European football
- Ensure football in Europe is accessible and available to all
- Promote and develop football infrastructure across Europe

## Grassroots game

Continue to give strong support to the amateur and grassroots game, providing opportunities for players of all ages and keeping participation high throughout society.





## Football specific within Northern Ireland

### Irish FA strategies

#### **PROMOTING, FOSTERING AND DEVELOPING FOOTBALL FOR ALL: The Irish FA's five-year strategy 2017-2022**

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##### **LET THEM PLAY STRATEGY 2015-2025**

The strategy includes five key objectives. In relation to the amateur game, special attention will be given to the following:

###### **Objective one**

Increase youth participation rates to 75,000 by 2020 and 100,000 by 2025.

###### **Objective two**

Increase the percentage of schools where football and futsal is played to 90% by 2020 and 100% by 2025.

###### **Objective three**

Embed a culture of club and volunteer development throughout youth football by 2020.

###### **Objective four**

Create new Irish FA youth football coach education pathways.

###### **Objective five**

Create new player development pathways and Irish FA club licensing criteria for NIFL Premiership clubs' youth development programmes.

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#### **PEOPLE AND CLUBS DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

The development plan includes three intervention areas that link to the amateur game and special attention will be given to the following:

- Club development
- Club operations
- People development

Amateur game delivery will aim to replicate the model of the People and Clubs Development Plan and make effective use of technology. Delivery will utilise the regional Football Community Hubs, be club and people centred, and be accessible.



## Sport specific within Northern Ireland

### SPORT MATTERS

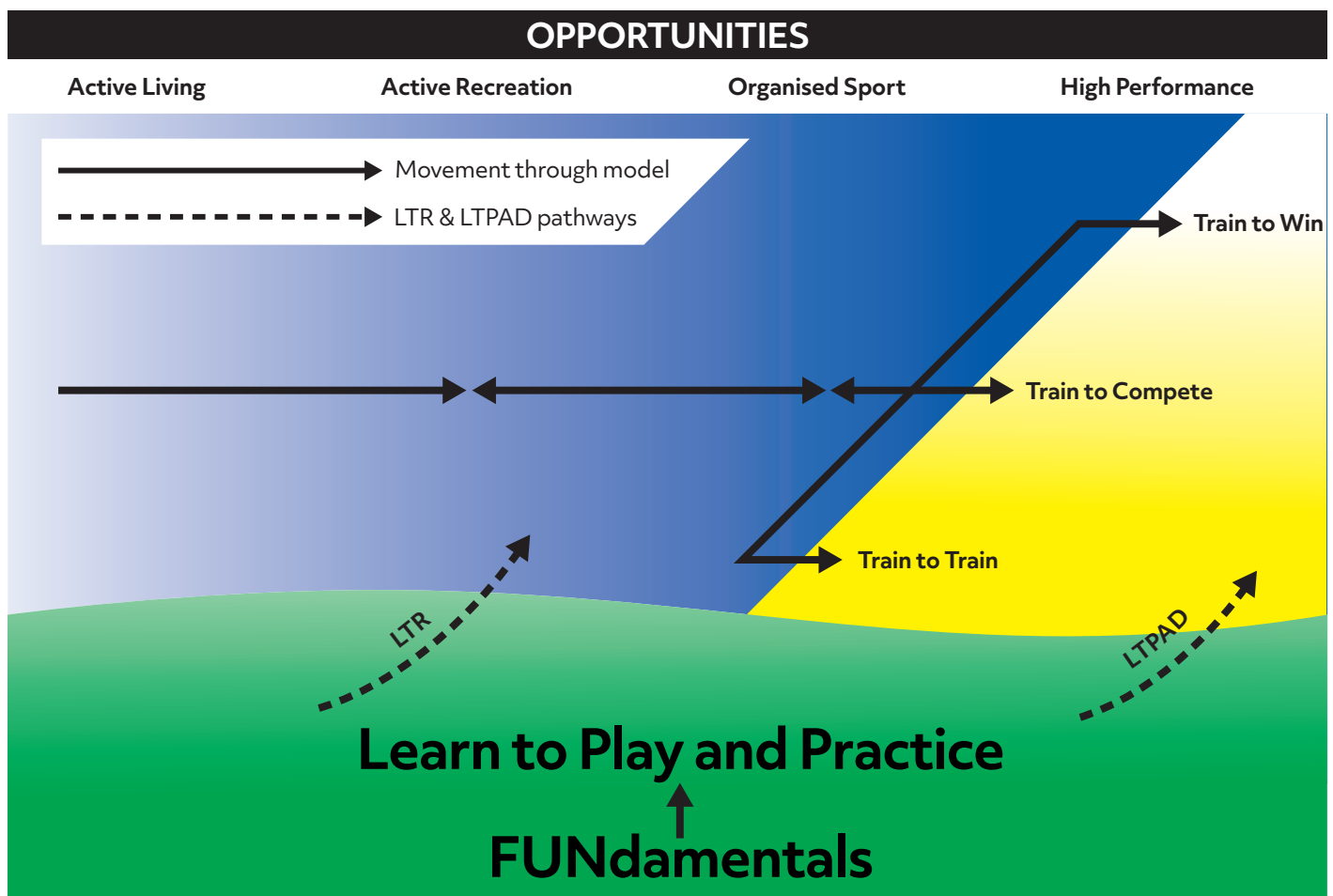
#### The Northern Ireland strategy for sport and physical recreation 2009-2019

To ensure that the three key themes of participation, performance and facilities are taken into consideration and that the best opportunities are provided to take part in football.

Additionally the strategy looks at the areas within the LIPSA model of sports development, as adopted by the national strategy, to ensure that the following areas are considered and acted upon to maximise successful extended participation:

- Fundamental development
- Training to train. Training to compete. Training to win
- Active living. Active recreation
- Organised sport

### LIPSA model



LTR = Long-term recreation • LTPAD = Long-term player athlete development



## RESEARCH AREAS

**From initial investigations it is very apparent that clubs in Northern Ireland fall within two distinct categories: recreational clubs and development clubs.**

Generally, the recreational clubs provide recreational opportunities for play and this is their primary focus. They can be seen to have a smaller club and organisational structure.

The developmental clubs are larger in stature, with progression and increasing in size being a primary motivator. These clubs have several other aspects which may include youth sections and exclusive use of their own facilities.

The two club categories are not mutually exclusive and several clubs have characteristics and aspirations of both. However, it is essential with any development to understand the context in which the club is operating, in order to support and develop.

It was very apparent that an audit was required in order to understand the current state of play, to ascertain the views of the clubs and to recognise areas for development. It was determined that the best and most effective method was face-to-face conversation with stakeholders, initiating dialogue and sustainable partnerships while increasing the Irish FA's footprint within football at all levels throughout Northern Ireland.

With the onset of the pandemic and subsequent national and international lockdowns, it was decided to devise a series of questionnaires and surveys that could be completed remotely. This would determine the current state of play among clubs and understand the views of all stakeholders including players, coaches, officials and supporters of the amateur game.

The research was split into two defined areas:

1. Carry out an audit and achieve a snapshot of the clubs **(survey)**.
2. Carry out research to determine the opinion of individual stakeholders within the amateur game. This included coaches, players, officials, supporters, volunteers and interested observers who may or may not have been involved in the game, and to identify opportunities for future development **(questionnaire)**.

The questionnaire and audit were devised in partnership with internal and external stakeholders. These included the Irish FA's Amateur Game Sub-Committee, senior management within the Irish FA, Regional Football Club Developers, Regional Grassroots Development Officers and the Irish FA communications department. Externally we consulted with local government, Sport NI and the Big Lottery.

The content was finalised and online links released in March 2020. Initially it was hoped to have the research concluded after 12 weeks, but due to the ongoing pandemic it was decided to run it for five months in order to maximise the response.





## RESULTS

The research was a great success with 173 clubs completing the club survey and 643 respondents completing the Amateur Football Games Development questionnaire. This exceeded the average expected response of 7% for surveys and questionnaires of this kind.

The research included all leagues, standards and geographical locations across Northern Ireland and it was felt that the results gave a true picture of the amateur game within the recreational and developmental sectors. The links for the full questionnaire and survey are listed in Appendix 1.

### CLUB SURVEY FOR AMATEUR GAME

**Question 1: Respondent's name.** To maintain anonymity, answers are not published.

**Question 2: How many adult teams do you field on a Saturday?**

No.of teams	Clubs
1	36
2	94
3	36
4	5
More than 4	5

The average club fields two teams on a Saturday for fixtures.

Total: 354 teams

**Question 3: Do you have a youth team?**

Yes	48%
No	49%
Other	3%

**Question 4: How many players do you have at each age level?**

	Number of players (mean response – no youth team)	Number of players (mean response with youth team )
U17	None	16-20
U16	None	16-20
U15	None	16-20
U14	None	16-20
U13	None	16-20
U12	None	16-20
U11	None	16-20
U10	None	16-20
U9	None	16-20
U8	None	16-20
U7	None	16-20
U6	None	1-10



### Question 5:

If you answered no to question three, are you interested in establishing a youth team in your club?

Yes	36%
No	12%
Maybe in the future	52%

### Question 6 and 7 asked about the club and the league.

Information was withheld to ensure anonymity.

### Question 8:

How many senior players do you have available on Saturday for all of your teams?

The answers ranged from 13-80+ with the average per club being around 35.

### Question 9: What is the age profile of your senior players?

Age	Average number of players at age group per club
16-17	4
18-20	6+
21-23	6+
24-26	6+
27-30	6+
31-34	6+
35-40	6+
41-45	4
45+	3

### Question 10: How often does your team train?

Never	0
Once a week	17%
Twice a week	80%
Three times a week	3%
More than three times a week	0

### Question 11: Do you use your own pitch or council facility for training?

Own pitch	17%
Private lease	14%
Council lease	9%
Council hire	41%
School hire	11%
Other	8%



### Question 13: Do you use your own pitch or council facilities for matches?

Own pitch	25%
Private lease	6%
Council lease	18%
Council hire	49%
School hire	2%
Other	0%

### Question 14: If other, please state.

Other answers included education authority lease.

### Question 15: What is your club status?

Community amateur sports club (CASC)	43%
Charity	13%
Neither	21%
Don't know	22%

### Question 16: Do you have a club constitution that designates roles and responsibilities?

Yes	82%
No	18%

### Question 17: Do you have a volunteer policy?

Yes	64%
No	26%

### Question 18: Do you have a club development plan?

Yes	57%
No	43%

### Question 19: Do you have qualified coaches within your club?

Yes	82%
No	18%

### Question 20: If yes, how many coaches and what are their qualifications?

Level	Mean number and level
Irish FA Grassroots Introduction To Coaching	5+
Irish FA National Coaching Certificate	5+
Irish FA C Diploma	1
UEFA B Diploma	1
UEFA A Diploma	0



### Question 21: Are your coaches CPD\* up-to-date?

Yes	41%
No	9%
Don't know	50%

\*Continual Professional Development

### Question 22: Do you have people in your club with up-to-date first-aid qualifications?

Yes	87%
No	2%
Don't know	11%

### Question 23: Do you have adequate insurance for your club?

Yes	74%
No	14%
Don't know	12%

### Question 24: Do you offer individual insurance for your players?

Yes	22%
No	67%
Don't know	11%

### Question 25: Do you have a person who looks after fundraising?

Yes	82%
No	18%

### Question 26 :

Would your club benefit from additional training and support as well as coach education, where clubs can come together and share best practice?

Yes	94%
No	6%

### Question 27: If yes, please state.

All clubs viewed the following list as important and useful to development.

Club management
First aid
Fundraising
Disability awareness
Strength and conditioning
Other





**Question 28: If other, please state.**

Answers included marketing, nutrition, mental health, grants, development planning and insurance.

**Question 29: Does your club actively keep in contact with former members?**

Yes	59%
No	4%
Occasionally	37%

**Question 30: Does your club have presence on social media and, if so, which channels?**

None	0
Facebook	169
Twitter	87
Instagram	36
LinkedIn	4
YouTube	10
Snapchat	6
Tiktok	0

**Question 31: Do you have any suggestions for development of the local game?**

Suggestions included summer football, more support from the Irish FA, equipment, balls, reduced costs and eradicating paying players.



# AMATEUR FOOTBALL GAME DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

## Question 1: What age category do you fall within?

16-17	11
18-24	53
25-30	102
31-35	103
36-40	114
41-45	69
46-50	52
51-55	5
55+	86

## Question 2: Do you have a connection with the amateur game?

Yes	96%
No	4%

## Question 3: If yes, what club are you affiliated to?

Respondents listed a range of recreational and developmental clubs throughout Northern Ireland. This covered clubs across the leagues.

## Question 4: Are you actively connected to the club?

Yes	94%
No	6%

## Question 5: If no, what are the reasons why you are not involved in your club or a club?

Answers included issues with personnel, coaches, managers at clubs, health reasons, work commitments, other sporting interests and following Irish League clubs.

## Question 6: What is/was your role within the club?

Player	306
Coach	293
Referee	17
Volunteer	169
Supporter	79
Official	250

## Question 7: Do you think the amateur game can be improved?

Yes	98%
No	2%



### Question 8: Do you think the profile of the amateur game can be improved?

Yes	100%
No	0

### Question 9: What do you think are the reasons for non-participation?

Lack of time	248
Too much commitment needed	278
Saturdays don't suit	149
Cost	222
Lack of insurance and support	201
Low standard of coaching	100
Poor facilities	288
Other sports	222
Other reasons	125

### Question 10:

Do you think the standard of coaching and coach education can be improved in the amateur game?

Yes	97%
No	3%

### Question 11:

Do you agree there should be a minimum standard of coaching for all clubs in the amateur game?

Yes	76%
No	24%

### Question 12: Should the amateur game have a specific coaching course?

Yes	74%
No	26%

### Question 13: Would coach mentoring benefit the amateur game?

Yes	90%
No	10%

### Question 14:

Would a referee being assigned to a club improve communication with officials?

Yes	73%
No	27%



**Question 15:**

Would the amateur game benefit from a national code of conduct or mutual respect policy for all stakeholders?

Yes	91%
No	9%

**Question 16:**

Do you think the role of volunteers should be formally recognised in the amateur game?

Yes	95%
No	5%

**Question 17:**

Is club structure, including a development plan, important to the amateur game?

Yes	95%
No	5%

**Question 18:**

Would you support additional recreational opportunities for players who aren't able to play on a Saturday while still being part of the club?

Yes	91%
No	9%

**Question 19:** Would summer football festivals be of benefit to the amateur game?

Yes	71%
No	29%

**Question 20:** Do you believe insurance is important in the amateur game?

Yes	95%
No	5%

**Question 21:** If yes, what do you think is important regarding insurance?

Cost	484
Level of cover	506
Range of cover	446
Optional personal cover	316
Other	26





**Question 22:**

Would you be interested in staying involved in your club after you have finished playing/coaching/officiating?

Yes	82%
No	2%
n/a	16%

**Question 23: Should remaining involved in your club be encouraged?**

Yes	99%
No	1%

**Question 24:**

Would you be interested in receiving regular news and information to support and promote the amateur game?

Yes	80%
No	20%

**Question 25: In your opinion, what else would help to develop the amateur game?**

Responses included facilities, games, leagues, players, referees, insurance.



# RESULTS OVERVIEW

## CLUB SURVEY

**Approximately half of respondents operated a youth section and 88% of those who did not would be interested in establishing one or looking at the option in the future.**

The leagues and divisions across Northern Ireland were well represented within the survey and the number of available players ranged from 13 to more than 80, with the mean age being from 18-30 years, with an even spread. Most clubs trained twice weekly and utilised council facilities for training (41%) and playing (49%), with the second biggest population being larger clubs using their own facilities for training (17%) and playing (25%).

Most clubs were registered as community amateur sports clubs (43%) or charities (13%) but surprisingly 43% of clubs fell into neither category or did not know their status.

82% of clubs operated with constitutions and defined roles and responsibilities but only 57% of clubs had an associated development plan, while only 64% had specific club direction with a volunteer policy.

Qualified coaches were seen to be viewed as a priority within clubs and, as expected, the majority of coaches were being trained at level one or grassroots level. Surprisingly only 41% of coaches had up-to-date CPD with the majority (59%) either not having CPD or not knowing if it was up to date.

Welfare of players can be seen to be of importance with 87% of clubs having up-to-date first-aid qualification and 74% of clubs providing insurance, but surprisingly only 22% of clubs provide individual cover, which can be viewed as a major barrier to participation.

Most clubs (82%) see the importance of fundraising with a designated individual allocated to this.

The majority of clubs (94%) would welcome additional training and networking opportunities in a range of non-football areas and this is an opportunity for development.

A small minority of clubs do not keep in contact with former members and this has highlighted a further area for development.

A large number of clubs have a social media presence, with Facebook being the most popular vehicle followed by Twitter and Instagram.



## AMATEUR FOOTBALL GAMES QUESTIONNAIRE

**The majority of respondents ranged from 25 to 40 years with the majority having a vested interest and connection with the amateur game (96%) and an active connection with a club (94%).**

The results showed a reduced level of participation in all levels of the amateur game among those aged under 25 and a marked reduction in the level of involvement among those aged over 40. This highlights areas for development in engaging these specific age groups.

The questionnaire demonstrated a good spread and range of roles and viewpoints within the amateur game with the highest number of responses coming from players (306), coaches (293) and officials (250).

The majority (98%) think the amateur game can be improved and 100% believe the profile can also be improved.

The majority highlighted poor facilities as a reason for non-participation. Too much commitment, lack of time, cost and other sports were also given as prominent reasons.

97% believe the standard of coaching can be improved with a substantial majority agreeing there should be a minimum standard (76%) and specific coaching course for the amateur game (74%). Significantly a larger majority (90%) identified that coach mentoring would benefit the amateur game.

The majority (73%) agreed that having a referee assigned to each club would improve communication with officials and a large majority (91%) believed a code of conduct and mutual respect policy for all stakeholders would benefit the amateur game.

95% thought the role of volunteers should be formally recognised in the amateur game and that an open development plan was a priority.

Without taking away from the Saturday game, 91% would support additional recreational opportunities during the week with 71% in favour of recreational summer football festivals.

Insurance was viewed as a priority by almost all (95%) with factors such as level of cover, cost, range of cover and optional personal cover being the priority factors.

A majority of 82% showed a willingness to stay involved in their club, with virtually all (99%) stating this should be encouraged, which presents an opportunity for development.

Finally, the research encouragingly showed a high level of interest in working and being involved with the Association with 80% of respondents wanting to be kept involved in any correspondence.

Overall, research has provided an extremely positive insight and developmental opportunities for the amateur game.

The game is in a healthy state but all are in agreement that it can be improved. Most importantly there is a willingness to improve the local amateur game by raising the standard of what is on offer in terms of help and opportunities to improve.



## GOING FORWARD:

### Priority list and key strategic themes

- Insurance – club and player
- Coach education
- Alternatives for additional, continuous play and club involvement during the week as well as outside of the normal season, specifically engaging players aged under 25 and players aged 40+
- Coach mentoring
- Club alumni programmes and initiatives to be developed alongside clubs
- Development of the profile and brand of the amateur game







## GOING FORWARD:

### Key priorities and implementation plan

It is essential to develop the amateur game, being careful to add additional value to the game, but not to replace or substitute the excellent work currently being undertaken.

Short term it is therefore proposed to initiate club and league-led pilot programmes:

- Coach mentoring
- Your Club programme
- Midweek recreational club programme

Mid term it is proposed to develop a range of initiatives:

- National Coaching Certificate for the amateur game
- Developing a brand and identity for the amateur game with the Irish FA
- Summer opportunities for additional play
- Recreational club registration programme
- Research cost-effective and effective insurance cover for clubs and individuals
- Increased communication and recognition of good practice within the amateur game
- Developmental workshops and webinars including club development, management and funding
- Quarterly newsletter and regular communication on information in support of the amateur game
- Develop links with Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA) members and other partners including the universities, Sport NI and other national governing bodies
- Organising a good practice visit to look at excellence in other European countries

Further research to be carried out periodically to ascertain stakeholders' perceptions, how the game is being developed and changing priorities.

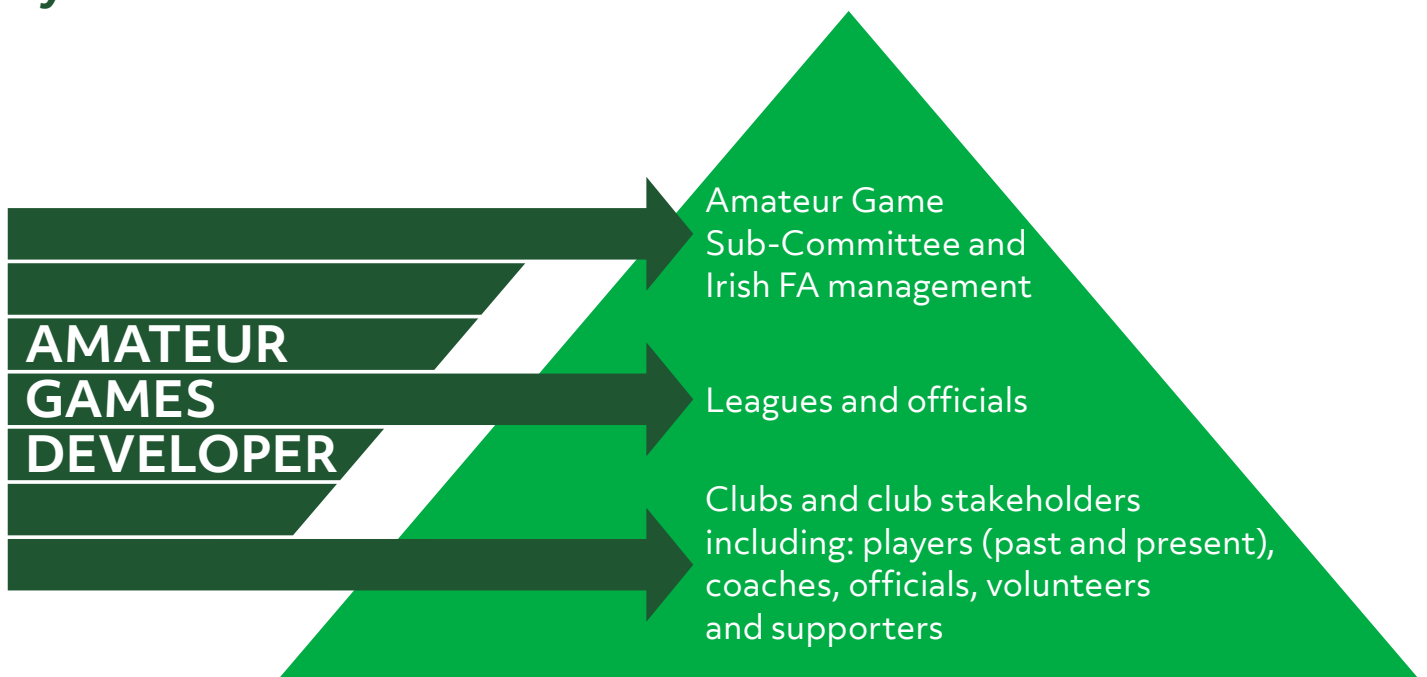
In addition actively seeking partnership for the amateur game to develop its equity and to help supply cost-effective equipment and elements needed for participation.



## COMMUNICATION

Communication is the key to successful development. It is the intention to focus on face-to-face communication, reinforced by other electronic methods, to increase the Irish FA's footprint across the amateur game in Northern Ireland. We plan to enhance and develop communication streams, ensure that all are fully informed of developments and opportunities in a clear and concise manner, and increase the profile of the amateur game.

### Pyramid of Communication



## COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

- Face-to-face meetings with leagues and regular contact with clubs across Northern Ireland.
- Utilise a mailing list, sending out information of interest and regular updates.
- Electronic newsletter about the amateur game.
- Recognition of volunteers and stakeholders within the game.
- Regular research to determine areas for development and progression.



## APPENDIX 1: Links to forms

### SURVEY

[https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=6R0-QU\\_E5UKFxO9YX2P2fO9RbwPSI\\_VPq00\\_HiJNTZFUNzdYSjJVT0REOEpaOURaRIQ3N1UxVkJTOC4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=6R0-QU_E5UKFxO9YX2P2fO9RbwPSI_VPq00_HiJNTZFUNzdYSjJVT0REOEpaOURaRIQ3N1UxVkJTOC4u)

### QUESTIONNAIRE

[https://forms.office.com/FormsPro/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=6R0-QU\\_E5UKFxO9YX2P2fO9RbwPSI\\_VPq00\\_HiJNTZFURTVBVIY5UUVRQVM1QkhISzcwVFkwQII5Sy4u&wdLOR=cF3669C60-4556-4583-B755-43B45F0E29E1](https://forms.office.com/FormsPro/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=6R0-QU_E5UKFxO9YX2P2fO9RbwPSI_VPq00_HiJNTZFURTVBVIY5UUVRQVM1QkhISzcwVFkwQII5Sy4u&wdLOR=cF3669C60-4556-4583-B755-43B45F0E29E1)

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## APPENDIX 2: References

### TOGETHER FOR THE FUTURE OF FOOTBALL: UEFA Strategy 2019-2024

[https://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/uefaorg/General/02/59/06/32/2590632\\_DOWNLOAD.pdf](https://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/uefaorg/General/02/59/06/32/2590632_DOWNLOAD.pdf)

### PROMOTING, FOSTERING AND DEVELOPING FOOTBALL FOR ALL: The Irish FA's five-year strategy 2017-2022

<https://www.irishfa.com/media/11437/ifa-5-year-strategy.pdf>

### LET THEM PLAY STRATEGY 2015-2025

<https://www.irishfa.com/media/18692/irish-fa-youth-strategy.pdf>

### SPORT MATTERS: The national strategy for sport in Northern Ireland

2009-2019 <http://www.sportni.net/sportni/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/SportMatters.pdf>

### PEOPLE AND CLUBS RESOURCES

<https://www.irishfa.com/irish-fa-foundation/community-volunteering/people-clubs>



For further information please contact:

**Dean Holmes**

Amateur Football Game Developer

Email: [dean.holmes@irishfa.com](mailto:dean.holmes@irishfa.com)

Tel: +44 (0) 7808 761934



**Gavin Nelson**

Club and Community Development Officer

Email: [gavin.nelson@irishfa.com](mailto:gavin.nelson@irishfa.com)

Tel: +44 (0) 7714 135642

**Michael Carvill**

Volunteer Development and Policy Officer

Email: [michael.carvill@irishfa.com](mailto:michael.carvill@irishfa.com)

Tel: +44 (0) 07454 125094

Irish Football Association Foundation  
The National Football Stadium  
Donegall Avenue  
Belfast BT12 6LU  
[www.irishfa.com](http://www.irishfa.com)