



# Irish Football Association



SCHOOLS'  
FOOTBALL  
STRATEGY  
2022 - 2025

# AN INTRODUCTION

In these times of uncertainty, when the Covid pandemic is still with us, sport in all its forms is of great societal value.

It is valuable in helping to build resilience, promoting mental wellbeing and general physical health.

At the Irish Football Association our sport is, of course, football.



The four key principles of the strategy are:

- **Promoting the provision of Football for All schools**
- **Appointment of a Schools Specialist**
- **Support for teachers in delivering football**
- **A manual for schools to deliver football in a fun, safe and inclusive environment**

One of our key aims through this new strategy for schools' football is to increase the popularity of football in schools, colleges and universities, reflecting the influence of the game in the social fabric of Northern Ireland.

Another aim is to ensure football becomes a curricular sport in all schools as well as an exemplar and point of interest for children and students.

Football can contribute to Covid recovery in many ways, not least in boosting mental wellbeing and encouraging young people in particular to look after their physical health.



As an association we believe the strategy's implementation will support the achievement of broader goals and targets set by the Northern Ireland Executive.

The draft Programme for Government (PfG), for example, talks about giving our children and young people the best start in life as well as the importance of ensuring our children and young people have good health and quality physical environments with space to play.

And this would be a stepping stone towards another aim in the PfG, which is to enable and support people to maintain their health and lead healthy, active lives, addressing the factors which impact on mental and physical health.

In addition the Executive's Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-30 talks about children and young people enjoying play and leisure and being physically and mentally healthy.

It notes participation in leisure activities can lead to a wide range of interrelated beneficial outcomes for children and young people, including promoting good physical, mental and cognitive health and development; happiness and emotional wellbeing; positive social development; and the development of risk management skills and resilience through experiencing and responding to unexpected or challenging situations.

Our schools' football strategy can also be aligned to the Department for Community's (DfC) draft Sports Strategy. It chimes with themes such as recovery from Covid, participation, inclusion, excellence and partnership.

We believe the strategy can be complementary to and supportive of a range of wider government goals and policies. We are keen to offer government departments potential solutions in a spirit of partnership to help them realise their objectives, and we believe we have the capacity and capability to do so if properly supported and resourced.



Partnership working is vital as we strive to implement this new strategy, whether it's working with education bodies, schools, football clubs and other sports clubs or with local communities and government departments for mutual benefit.

**David Martin**

Chair  
Irish FA Foundation

## SCHOOLS' FOOTBALL STRATEGY 2022-25

### THE MAIN AIMS

- To popularise football in schools, colleges and universities, recognising its influence in the social fabric of Northern Ireland.
- To embed football in the curriculum of schools as a curricular sport, exemplar and point of interest for children and students.





## **The Irish Football Association is introducing a three-year strategy and operational plan for schools' football in Northern Ireland.**

The purpose and goal of the strategic plan is to consider how to provide opportunities for every child to become, and stay, involved with football.



The level of engagement this strategy will provide will stretch across various types and levels of football, including playing, practising, supporting, studying, researching, illustrating, photographing and dreaming, in short as rich a football environment as can be created in schools.

To do this an operational plan will be established with the aim of setting goals and targets for the development of schools' football.

The operational plan shows how the Irish FA plans to achieve the aims of the strategy by creating new programmes for students in Northern Ireland.

The societal benefits of increasing participation in sport have been well documented and through this strategy the association will help to promote good physical, mental and cognitive health and development along with happiness and emotional wellbeing plus positive social development.

## THE VISION

**Involvement with football should be commonplace for all primary and post primary schools in Northern Ireland.**

Multiple opportunities should exist at all stages and levels of the education journey – to engage as many students as possible in the game.

Engagement should stretch across various types/levels of football and include playing, practising, supporting, studying, researching, illustrating, photographing and dreaming!

Schools should encourage enjoyment of the game among all pupils, from simply having fun kicking a ball around to providing opportunities for students to play at a higher competitive level if they would like to do so.

## THE KEY AREAS

**There are three key areas that will underpin every objective of the operational plan to ensure quality planning and delivery at an optimum level. These are highlighted below:**

### Development of a manual for the introduction and development of football in schools.

The development of a manual for schools' football will provide valuable resources for schools.

It will not only be vital in the Irish FA's development of football in schools but, more importantly, will also provide a legacy programme for teachers and schools to develop football where it has not been done before.

The manual will include active football and theoretical support of the game in line with the Northern Ireland curriculum.

The strategy could also support delivery of the physical education element of the curriculum, helping schools to meet the statutory recommended minimum of two hours of physical activity per week.







## Management of the Department of Education funded schools sports programme in schools.

It is vital to gain support from sponsors and stakeholders to raise the profile of schools' football in Northern Ireland.

The Department of Education Sports Programme is a vital award-winning programme that provides valuable physical, mental and social development to primary school pupils.

The programme is run by the Irish FA Foundation and Ulster GAA and is offered to primary schools in the 11 council areas across Northern Ireland.

This cross community/shared space working is in keeping with the principles in the draft DfC Sports Strategy, which include promoting participation, inclusion and community engagement along with a focus on partnership and integration.

It is critical to ensure this programme and others like it are resourced and young children have the opportunity to participate in their early years for their holistic development.

## Provide support for teachers to develop football skills and interest in the game.

Additional support will be provided for teachers within all aspects of the operational plan.

This will include coach education support for teachers to deliver football in schools at an accredited level as well as conferences, workshops and resources on how to develop football.

There will be a link with primary education to provide curriculum-based support through football programmes and a legacy programme of resources and equipment to maintain the delivery of football in schools.

The strategy provides scope for Irish FA Foundation coaches to help deliver the physical education element of the statutory curriculum, especially in schools facing budgetary pressures.

## THE OBJECTIVES

**The four key areas and the overall Irish FA strategic vision of promoting, fostering and developing football for all in Northern Ireland will be the foundation of how the operational plan will be delivered.**

The plan has been divided into four objectives that will each contribute to the comprehensive development of schools' football in Northern Ireland.

These objectives include increasing participation levels, building capacity, further education development and player development.

### Increasing Participation Levels

The goal is to increase youth participation rates in schools' football to 50,000 in 2025. This will include 10,000 girls playing football in schools and 2500 students with disabilities playing football in schools.

A focus will be placed on:

- Challenging all schools to offer football.
- Introducing children to football and creating interest in the game in early school life.
- Developing a resource for teachers showing how to introduce young people to football at Key Stage One and Key Stage Two.
- Enthuse and energise pupils with quality engaging programmes to retain students for their full school life.
- Inclusivity and diversity.
- Signposting to clubs and other programmes whilst leaving a legacy within the schools.
- Developing football resources and learning materials for play and education across the curriculum, including core subjects like Maths, English and Science.





## Targets

By 2025 we will achieve the following:

- **50,000 students** in schools and colleges playing football and futsal.
- **10,000 girls** playing football and futsal in schools and colleges.
- **2,500 students with disabilities** playing football and futsal.
- **2,400 girls** involved in our new UEFA-endorsed Disney Playmakers Programme with 30 new centres set up in primary schools across Northern Ireland. Playmakers targets girls' participation and features female coaches.
- **By 2025 we will have all 50 women's clubs linked with an IFA Football For All Quality Mark School** which also delivers a UEFA-supported Disney Playmakers Centre.





Additional programmes will be created to provide opportunities for school pupils to participate in football including:

- **Translink Schools' Gold Cup** opened up to more schools, with girls section from 2024.
- **New Grammar Schools' Cup competitions** for males and females to be launched in spring/summer 2024.
- **New disability and girls-only** Football For All School Festivals to be launched in 2024.
- **Irish FA Grassroots Reading Project** embedded in primary schools.
- **New Key Stage One 'Learning With A Ball' programme** which will teach fundamental football skills whilst also developing knowledge into school curriculum such as geography, numeracy, literacy, and the world around us.
- **New Further Education Colleges league and cup competitions** from 2024.







The schools' football pathway below shows how the strategy will provide football opportunities throughout school life as we strive to introduce football to all school pupils in Northern Ireland:

SCHOOL	AGE	PROGRAMME	SIGNPOST	GENDER
<b>Primary</b>	5-7	Learning With A Ball	Local Clubs and Games Development Programme	Boys and Girls
	5-7	UEFA Disney Playmakers	Local Clubs and Games Development Programme	Girls
	5-11	DENI School Sports Programme	Local Clubs and Games Development Programme	Boys and Girls
	6-11	After-School Programme	Local Clubs and Games Development Programme	Boys and Girls
	8-11	EFL Joy of Moving Programme	Local Clubs and Games Development Programme	Boys and Girls
	8-11	NISFA 5 and 7 aside Programme	PDP and Games Development Programme	Boys and Girls
	8-11	Futsal Programme	Local Clubs	Boys and Girls
<b>Post Primary</b>	12-18	NISFA Cup Competitions	Local Clubs and Elite Programme	Boys
	12-17	Futsal Programme	Local Clubs	Boys and Girls
	12-18	Girls Cup Competitions	Local Clubs and Elite Programme	Girls
	12-17	Translink Schools' Cup	Elite Programme	Boys
<b>Further Education</b>	17-20	Further Education League	Local Clubs and Elite Programme	Boys
	17-20	Futsal Programmes	Local Clubs and Elite Programme	Boys and Girls

## BUILDING CAPACITY

**Measures to build capacity in schools and colleges include the appointment of a Schools Specialist and Schools Manager to lead the Irish FA Foundation schools coaches and to oversee the development of schools' football both in the classroom and on the pitch.**

The Schools Manager will be the driving force for the strategy, ensuring targets are met, and will provide regular updates to the Board. They will bring radical thinking to make football a useful resource to all teachers across all subjects.

Another aim is to have 300 schools and colleges achieving the new Irish FA Foundation Football For All Quality Mark accreditation by 2025.

Football For All ambassadors will be appointed to Football For All Ambassadors Jamal Lewis and Megan Bell will be introduced. They will promote schools' football in Northern Ireland and shine a light

on the benefits of schools' football in terms of mental, physical and social development.

Building capacity in the development of women's and disability football is another must - with every women's club and disability football club in Northern Ireland partnering with an Irish FA-accredited school.

Other measures include the development of additional coach education programmes to enhance the quality of schools' football, which includes futsal and refereeing courses.

And there's also an aim to develop resources signposting coaches to opportunities in schools' and club football.





## Targets

By 2025 we will achieve the following:

- **Deliver a plan to embed Football For All** throughout all subjects in the curriculum.
- **400 schools** to be accredited with Irish FA FFA Quality Mark.
- **200 teachers/students** qualified as coaches.
- **100 teachers/students** qualified as referees.
- **70 female teachers/students** to have completed the Irish FA Female Football Leadership Programme.
- **Incorporate a new UEFA-endorsed Football For All Schools Teacher/Student Champion Coach and Referee Education Programme** into the existing Department for Education Northern Ireland DENI School Sports Programme and revamp the Irish FA Football For All School Quality Mark
- **Develop a new School Quality Mark** for Further Education Colleges and Disability Schools.
- **Further develop successful existing programmes** like DENI School Sports Programme, Football For All Schools Officers and Education Officers.
- **Provide training** to all existing Irish FA Schools' Football staff in new UEFA C Licence.
- **Establish Equipment and Coach Education Bursaries** to support Football For All School Champions and school/club links.



- **Provide an enhanced support package** developed to encourage more schools to get involved in the revamped Irish FA Football For All School Quality Mark Programme.
- **Encourage school/club links** with Irish FA-accredited inclusive ClubMark clubs.
- **Establish a Continuing Personal Development Fund** for schools' Heads of Football and sixth form students embarking on coaching/refereeing careers, helping them to gain experience at primary schools that feed their schools.
- **Run Recognition and Rewards Nights** for schools and teachers who are developing links to enhance schools' football.
- **Partner with Ulster University** to deliver a significant monitoring and evaluation programme.
- **Link with the FIFA 4 Schools Programme** and iCoachKids e-learning platform to provide best practice information.

## FURTHER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

**The Irish FA is planning to set up a new Foundation Football College (FFC) at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park in Belfast.**

The aim is to launch the FFC in 2025 with football-related GCSE, OCN and BTEC courses delivered from the stadium.

The college would have clear links with the Irish FA Performance School in Dungannon, the Irish FA Football Development School at Ashfield, Queen's University, Stranmillis University College, Belfast Metropolitan College and the Irish FA performance academies for boys and women based at Ulster University. It would also act as a feeder for the existing Irish FA/Ulster University part-time football degree.

The association is also aiming to develop educational pathways for young men and women aged 16-24, with girls only courses developed and two new female education officers appointed.

And the Irish FA will develop football-related curriculum and educational resources for teachers and lecturers – outsourcing development of resources to appropriate companies.





## Targets

By 2025 we will achieve the following:

- **Deliver courses to 100 students per year** in schools and colleges across Northern Ireland.
- **Create a Foundation Football College (FFC)** at National Football Stadium at Windsor Park with GCSE, OCN and BTEC courses delivered from the stadium by Irish FA Education Officers.
- **50 students** to have enrolled and completed courses at the FFC (at least 20 to be female).
- **Develop innovative football-related educational resources** for teachers and lecturers – outsourcing development of resources to appropriate companies and partnering with the likes of Premier League Stars Programme.
- **Source new partnership** to develop football-focused teacher resources that help deliver the Northern Ireland curriculum in schools.
- **Popularise football** in the classroom.
- **Introduce the new UEFA-endorsed Mental Health 'Ahead of the Game' Programme**, targeting 50 post primary schools.
- **Develop mental health training and professional resources** for children and teachers in schools – complementing the work supported through the UEFA Football and Social Responsibility (FSR) programme with Irish FA.
- **Establish, alongside Ulster University**, an annual evaluation and conference focused on Social Return on Investment in Schools' Football. This will build on UEFA's NI SROI 2020 research insights and findings.
- Organise a conference for Schools' Football champions and partners.
- **Deliver football and futsal coach and referee education** in Northern Ireland's teacher training colleges, targeting 20 student teachers per year.





## PLAYER DEVELOPMENT



NISFA (Northern Ireland Schools' Football Association) has been tasked with developing schools' football competitions regionally, nationally and internationally for boys and girls with support from the Irish FA via an annual grant.

NISFA will redesign and redevelop regional primary and post primary competitions, and it will introduce girls' competitions regionally and strive to increase the number of schools playing schools' football.

The Irish FA will support NISFA to have world class player development pathways for schoolboys and schoolgirls in both football and futsal.



## Targets

By 2025 we will achieve the following:

- **Introduce an annual grant of funding support for NISFA.** Grant aid, roles and responsibilities will be clearly defined with NISFA (by September 2022).
- **Set up a new national Futsal U18 Schools/Colleges competition** for boys and girls (due to launch in 2023) and engagement with NISFA about possible collaboration on Futsal Home Nations, using the sport as a further tool for player development.
- **NISFA to revamp the regional district schools' competitions** in both primary and post primary education for both boys and girls.
- **Develop and introduce a teacher and volunteer recognition programme.**





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