



“LET THEM PLAY”

Irish FA Youth Football Strategy
Summary Document **2015-2025**



INTRODUCTION



Football is Northern Ireland’s most played sport with around 50,000 young people participating regularly (*Hargie et al., 2015; DCAL, 2009*). The Irish Football Association (IFA), however, has never had an over-arching Youth Football Strategy. As a result, development initiatives within the IFA’s youth football provision, although often excellent, have been piecemeal, led by individuals acting within their own remit often without regards for the wider IFA youth developmental needs. The IFA has recognised the need to address such issues in its Strategic Plan 2013-2018, specifically the need for a fit for purpose Youth Football Strategy. Such a Youth Football Strategy is required to revitalise the culture of the youth game, drive participation up in a strategic manner in clubs and schools, and to develop clear pathways for young people to become involved and stay involved in the game. It is important that the IFA not only provides football for all but that it puts in place strategic systems which will develop young boys and girls, whatever their background or ability level, and nurture them to reach their full potential. Ultimately the IFA wishes to produce a youth football culture which empowers boys and girls to develop a lifelong love for the game, not only creating talented players who can one day play for Northern Ireland, but helping to create positive citizens who can contribute to society. Young people in Northern Ireland deserve the best and with this Youth Football Strategy the IFA aims to work with all our partners and stakeholders to deliver it!

Michael Boyd
Director of Football Development

Jim Shaw
President

Patrick Nelson
Chief Executive Officer

VISION



“To promote, foster and develop youth football for all in Northern Ireland, creating a fun, safe and inclusive culture which inspires a lifelong love of the game. Creating opportunities, inspiring change and helping young people fulfil their potential on and off the pitch. Serving the community through football and education.”

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

SPORT MATTERS

01

“Promote sport and physical recreation as a primary health improvement tool”

“A world class start and lifelong involvement in sport and physical recreation for all people”

“World class performances by teams and individuals”

“A sustainable sporting and physical recreation culture that contributes to broader government objectives”



PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

02

“Growing a sustainable economy and investing in the future”

“Creating opportunities, tackling disadvantage and improving health and well-being”

“Protecting our people, the environment and creating safer communities”

“Building a strong and shared community”



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IRISH FA STRATEGY

03

“Qualify for a major tournament”

“Deliver the new National Football Stadium and improve other facilities”

“Foster a balanced, flourishing senior domestic game”

“Create a healthy domestic game at all other levels, i.e. intermediate, junior, women’s, boys, schools”

“Reach beyond the game, using the power of football for health, education and social development”

“Build a culture of lifelong participation in football”



UEFA GRASSROOTS CHARTER

04

“Grow participation, especially amongst girls”

“Design, develop and deliver youth specific coach education”

“Enhanced club and volunteer development”

“Football thriving in schools”



OBJECTIVES



- 1 Increase Youth Football participation rates to 75,000 by 2020 and 100,000 by 2025
- 2 Increase the percentage of Schools where football is played to 90% by 2020 and increase participation by 100% by 2025
- 3 Embed a culture of Club and Volunteer Development throughout youth football by 2020
- 4 Create new IFA Youth Football Coach Education Pathways
- 5 Create new Player Development Pathways & IFA Club Licencing criteria for NIFL & NIWFA Premier Club's Youth Development Programmes

OBJECTIVE 1 - Participation and Football For All

We will broaden the base of participation, especially targeting areas where football is weak, such as rural areas, this will increase the player pool and encourage a sense of belonging to football in the community. We will set clear targets for girls and players with a disability to fully integrate the IFA Football For All ethos into our plans moving forward.

The IFA has lead the way in the provision of sporting opportunities for those with a disability directly through a sporting governing body with over 5000 participants partaking in football activities per calendar year. It is our intention to build upon this success by making disability provision a clear objective throughout this Strategy and to approach work in the disability sector with a concerted effort throughout Football Development.

**NIFL NIWFA NIBFA PRIMARY SCHOOLS POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS / REGIONAL COLLEGES
LOCAL COUNCILS - LEISURE SERVICES / SPORTS DEVELOPMENT UEFA FIFA SPORT NI DISABILITY SPORT NI
LOCAL GOVERNMENT - SPORT, LEISURE, EDUCATION, HEALTH, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**



22,000 5-13 year olds playing in IFA Small Sided Games Development Centres, Pan Disability Clubs and Holiday Camps annually by 2020.	Senior Men and Women's NI International Players to become official ambassadors of IFA Health and Respect campaigns.	Parent/Guardian Education workshops delivered ensure child friendly and value based ethos. The highly successful IFA Silent Weekends campaign to take place on the first Saturday of every month to promote Respect NI message.	2,000 registered Youth Futsal Players playing in IFA Futsal Development Centres by 2020 (25% of all players being female).	Develop and launch new U15 and U17 girl's youth development leagues in 2015/2016.
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All players and coaches to be registered with the IFA on a new IT platform.	All players and coaches to have IFA ID numbers and online accounts, creating an online community.	All leagues, clubs and development centres to be accredited and regularly assessed by IFA.	Increase girls participation by 25% and increase disability participation by 10%.
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OBJECTIVE 2 - Schools, Colleges and Universities

Schools and College Football is one of the main areas where the IFA can access and influence young players on a regular basis. This objective seeks to revamp our Schools Football development work and take football back to schools where the connection has been lost or to schools that don't traditionally engage in football. Futsal is a fantastic new vehicle to engage schools and school halls can be adapted to Futsal with ease. Futsal encourages good technique and fast thinking attacking play both of which are essential for the modern player but the most important factor is that it is fun. The Districts School Player Development Programme will revolutionise how we identify and develop young players, preparing them for our boy's and girl's elite development programmes at Key Stage 2. The new IFA School Quality Mark is designed to build the capacity of schools and teachers to develop the game. The main development areas for new IFA School Quality Mark are after schools football, increased level of coaching, provision for girls and being able to demonstrate clear school/club links. The aim is to create Football Schools over a period of time. UEFA's new Grassroots Charter have identified schools football as a priority area for future development and UEFA have expressed an interest in officially supporting our new Schools football plans as pilots.



NISFA PRIMARY SCHOOLS POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS / REGIONAL COLLEGES UNIVERSITIES
 LOCAL COUNCILS - LEISURE SERVICES / SPORTS DEVELOPMENT UEFA FIFA SPORT NI
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90%

By 2020 we will increase the percentage of Schools where football is played from 45% to 90%

45%

Launch IFA District Schools Player Development Programme in September 2015 with 360 Primary School Players (Key Stage 2) being selected on an annual basis (25% girls).

Pilot an IFA Post Primary Schools Player Development Programme for girls at Key Stage 3 and 4 in 2016.

New IFA School Quality Mark to be launched in December 2015 with 80 Primary Schools and 25 Post Primary Schools to have achieved IFA School Quality Mark status by 2020.

Launch School Futsal Plan in January 2016 with an aim of having 2,000 Futsal Players (25% female and 10% disability) playing in Schools and College's Futsal Development Leagues by 2020.

IFA have hosted UEFA Futsal seminar in June 2015 and has learned from best practice.



Have at least six Football Performance Schools (one per County) and two established long term education partners supporting IFA Performance Academies (for boys and girls) building on the FIFA Goal Project in 2015.

OBJECTIVE 3 - Club and Volunteer Development

Club and Volunteer Development will be at the heart of the IFA’s Football Development plans moving forward. Volunteers are the lifeblood of the game and clubs provide crucial opportunities for change in the lives of young people through development, education, training and accreditation. We will invest in clubs and volunteers at all levels and prioritise support for the ‘Community Beacons’ that provide inclusive youth development for boys and girls.





NIFL NIWFA NIBFA VOLUNTEER NOW SHOW RACISM THE RED CARD
 LOCAL COUNCILS - SPORTS DEVELOPMENT UEFA FIFA SPORT NI
 LOCAL GOVERNMENT - SPORT, LEISURE, EDUCATION, HEALTH, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

BY 2020

We will embed a culture of Club and Volunteer Development throughout youth football.

-  Support and develop 200 football clubs with Youth Football Teams to have achieved IFA Club Development Accreditation by 2020.
-  All NIFL Premiership clubs to have achieved IFA Club Development Accreditation status by end of 2016.
-  To have a structured work experience programme which facilitates 200 young people per year.
-  Recruit and retain 100 Young Volunteers aged 16-25 into Irish FA Volunteer Team by 2020.
-  50 IFA young volunteers placed with local clubs (who have achieved IFA Club Development Accreditation) and leagues by 2020.
-  To provide volunteer opportunities to 25 young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) per year.
-  Recruit a minimum of 10 volunteers per year to monitor atmosphere in youth football and promote Respect NI campaign.
-  IFA young volunteers to form IFA Youth Forum which will present its ideas and recommendations to the IFA Board annually.
-  Work with NIBFA to introduce a new compulsory accreditation scheme in 2016 for groups who want to start youth football clubs, which encourages inclusive community clubs who provide football for boys and girls.

BY 2025

All Leagues and Development Centres will be accredited.

-  500 Football Clubs with Youth Football Teams to have achieved IFA Club Development Accreditation by 2025.
-  By 2025 to have structured IFA Volunteer Trainee and IFA Football Apprenticeship programmes in place with relevant partners, setting targets for NEETS, BME (Black, Minority and Ethnic) groups and Protestant working class young people from areas that have been identified via research as most in need and/or under-represented.
-  Recruit 500 Young Volunteers aged 16-25 into IFA Volunteer Team by 2025.
-  All leagues or development centres to be accredited with club and volunteer development embedded in the criteria.
-  Have new Youth Futsal U14, U16, U18 and University Development Leagues established for men and women.

OBJECTIVE 4 - Youth Football Coach Education



Coach Education will be the vehicle to change the football culture and challenge hearts and minds. Our new Coach Education courses will be designed to be player focused, encouraging age appropriate coaching techniques which influence value based development. With Futsal, we will also be motivating coaches to champion this new game, so that we create a culture of Futsal which assists boys and girls to develop technique, quick thinking and to have fun. We will create a clear Youth Coach Football Education pathway, which encourages more coaches to aspire to ultimately achieve the IFA Youth Football Certificate. Disability awareness will also be a part of all the coach education courses that are delivered by the IFA.



PARTNERS

NIBFA NISFA NIWFA PRIMARY SCHOOLS POSTPRIMARY SCHOOL / REGIONAL COLLEGES
 UNIVERSITIES LOCAL COUNCILS - LEISURE SERVICES / SPORTS DEVELOPMENT
 LOCAL GOVERNMENT - SPORT, LEISURE, EDUCATION, HEALTH, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
 SHOW RACISM THE RED CARD FOOTBALL FOR PEACE BRITISH RED CROSS UEFA FIFA SPORT NI

2020

By 2020 we will create new IFA Youth Football Coach Education pathways.

Introduction to Football and Fundamental courses will be required before a Coach embarks on the IFA Level One award. This will be phased in from 2016.

1000 Youth Football Coaches and Teachers will have completed the compulsory Football Fundamentals and Introduction to Football IFA Coach Education Courses by 2020.

400 Youth Football Coaches and Teachers will have completed the IFA Futsal Introductory Award.

400 Youth Football Coaches and Community Workers will have completed a free Value Based IFA Coach Education Course.

2025

By 2025 the IFA Youth Football Certificate will be the standard for Youth Coaching.

500 Youth Football Coaches will have achieved the IFA Youth Football Certificate.

200 Coaches will have achieved IFA Futsal B Licence award.

We will recruit and retain a pool of **TEN** qualified volunteer Coach Educators who can deliver Youth Football Coach Education Courses.

EVERY club will have a coach who has attended disability awareness training.

OBJECTIVE 5 - Elite Player Pathways

This objective is designed to create clear player pathways for the best young talent, both males and females. We will maximise the elite player pool for IFA international managers, and increase the number of professional footballers (both men and women) from which they can select. The targets are designed to improve relations between Club and Country with the focus on the well-being and welfare of young players.

By 2020 we will introduce new Player Development Pathways and new Club Licensing criteria for NIFL and NIWFA Premier clubs' Youth Development Programmes.

IFA Primary School District Player Development programme aimed at 360 Key Stage Two pupils (25% girls) will be launched in September 2015, feeding talented players with potential into IFA Elite Boys, Girls and Disability programmes at U12.

IFA to work with NIFL and NIWFA to introduce new Youth Development Criteria for senior NIFL and NIWFA clubs by 2016 as part of IFA Club Licensing, encouraging partnership approach with community/junior clubs.

The IFA will develop a free Youth Development Coaching Manual for all clubs by 2016 which highlights the Northern Ireland football philosophy, player DNA and encourages Northern Ireland football playing systems. The IFA will hold free quarterly open seminars for clubs on Youth Development and Talent Identification where clubs will be encouraged to attend with regular opportunities for local clubs to showcase good practice.

A rewards system will be developed in partnership with NIFL for clubs who reach an agreed quota of youth players within their first team squads by 2016. Rewards will include coaching masterclasses from the Northern Ireland International Management Team and Irish FA Elite Coaches.

An Elite Youth Player Welfare and Development Forum will be established by January 2016 with key stakeholders such as NIFL, NIBFA, NISFA and NIWFA (along with two independent members) to encourage open and transparent dialogue focused on the needs of our best young players. The Forum will meet on a quarterly basis and will be tasked with developing an Elite Youth (Boys and Girls) Player Pathway Plan 2017-2020 which will include exploration of new youth football structures and the potential of summer football. The Northern Ireland Manager will present to the Forum at the first meeting.

IFA will have a Deaf Futsal team, a Moderate Learning Difficulty team and a Powerchair team all representing Northern Ireland in International competition.

By 2025 Players from Elite programmes will be representing NI Men's and Women's Senior Teams.

At least 5 players from the Districts Player Development programme to have progressed through to the Northern Ireland Senior A Men's and Women's teams and to be playing professional football at a high level on the world stage. A minimum of 10 players from the Districts Player Development Programme to be involved in the Men's and Women's U21 squads.

IFA to have a world class training academy for boys and girls from U17 to U21 providing elite football and education programmes.

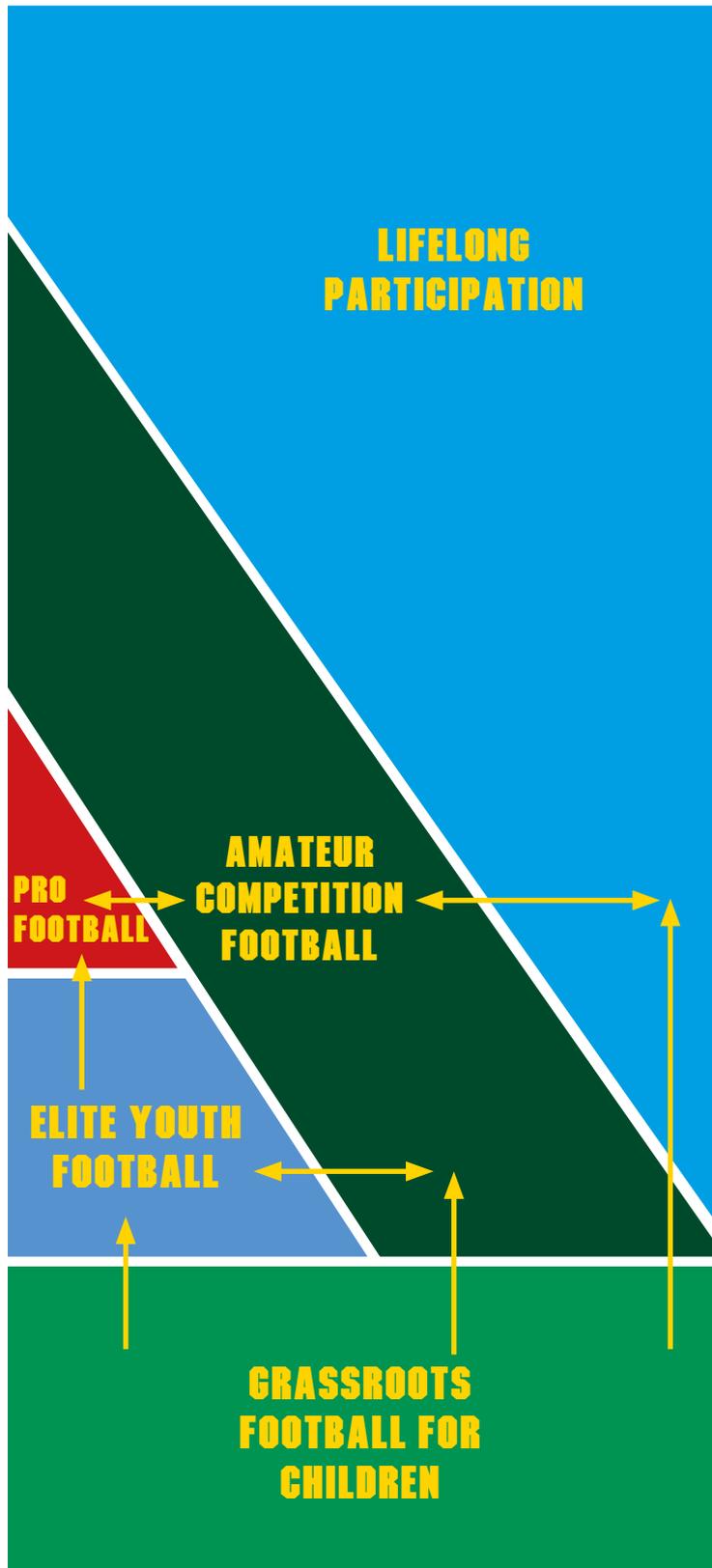
40 players from the Districts Player Development programme playing in NIFL and NIWFA top flights.



PARTNERS

NIFL NIWFA NISFA NIBFA UEFA FIFA SPORTNI DISABILITYSPORTNI PARALYMPICS
 PRIMARYSCHOOLS POSTPRIMARY SCHOOL/REGIONALCOLLEGES UNIVERSITIES
 LOCALCOUNCILS-LEISURESERVICES/SPORTSDEVELOPMENT
 LOCALGOVERNMENT-SPORT, LEISURE, EDUCATION, HEALTH, SOCIALDEVELOPMENT NSPCC

PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT MODEL



SUMMARY

This new strategy supports the IFA's Football For All vision. It is ambitious and sets out challenging new objectives for the IFA, its partners and stakeholders in Youth Football. It introduces a new Youth Football Coaching Framework and embeds Futsal for the first time into development plans. It creates new District Player Identification and Development Pathways and also introduces new innovative Schools programmes such as the UEFA-endorsed IFA School Quality Mark. The strategy addresses serious gaps in youth development here in Northern Ireland by making Schools, Clubs and Volunteering core components for development moving forward. Investing in Schools, Clubs and Volunteers will pay dividends in the long term (UEFA Grassroots Charter, 2015). This strategy supports DCAL's Sport Matters Strategy with clear targets to increase participation levels (with a special focus on increasing female and disability participation). It promotes lifelong enjoyment and will revolutionise how we identify potential talent, creating new player pathways which will increase the Elite player pool to select future internationals, hopefully creating a golden generation in the years to come who can do Northern Ireland proud on the international scene.

The building blocks of this new Youth Football Strategy are every bit as important as the building blocks of the new National Football Stadium, if we are to create Northern Ireland teams who can compete on the world stage in the future and make our fans proud. It is an exciting time for the sport of football and there is untapped potential. By delivering the objectives set out the IFA will be doing all in its power to ensure it is creating compelling pathways to grow the game, and for all young people to get involved and stay involved in the game. With a comprehensive Youth Football Strategy in place the IFA can make a massive difference working with our partners in promoting Football For All, creating a fun, safe and inclusive culture throughout the game and reflecting a new and more confident Northern Ireland. All Northern Ireland's young people deserve the best and the IFA is going to deliver the best for them.



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Wesley Gregg Tribute

The Irish Football Association is dedicating Let Them Play to Wesley Gregg who unfortunately passed away in 2015. Wesley epitomised the enthusiasm and dedication we want to see in everyone connected to the youth game. He was proud to serve the community through football and this is exactly what we aim to do via this strategy. We are proud to dedicate this new Youth Football Strategy to his memory and his family.

Wesley was an influential member of our Grassroots Development Team since 2005 and a former coach with Ballymena United FC, Institute FC and Coleraine FC. Wesley Gregg was a vibrant and energetic colleague who devoted so much of his time and his expertise to promoting football at all levels. He was an inspiration to those who met him.

Wesley formed many close friendships with people within local community groups, clubs and with volunteers over many years within his local area and beyond.

Wesley was always a consummate professional in his chosen career and displayed kindness, consideration and friendship to all.

He was open minded yet principled, approachable and sympathetic, a mentor to many but above all else a true gentleman.

We have lost a friend, a much esteemed colleague and we will sorely miss the many characteristics that made Wesley the friend he was.



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“LET THEM PLAY”

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