

IRISH FA BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

SAFE RECRUITMENT IN YOUTH FOOTBALL



SAFE RECRUITMENT AS A STATUTORY OBLIGATION

- **Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland (DHSSPS, 2017)** - states that organisations providing services to children and young people must have robust recruitment, selection, and training procedures for both staff and volunteers
- **Sport NI 'Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport' (2000)** - recommends that all adults taking responsibility for children in sport undergo a robust recruitment process
- **CPSU 'Club Framework for Safeguarding Standards in Sport'** - emphasises that good recruitment and selection procedures will help screen out and discourage those who are not suitable from joining sports clubs
- **The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007** - makes it an offence for an individual who has been barred from working with children to apply for a coaching role in youth football, and an offence for an organisation to knowingly employ or use a barred volunteer in such a role
- **AccessNI Code of Practice and Guidance** - provides guidance for registered bodies on when criminal record checks are needed and how to handle the information disclosed fairly and securely
- **Rehabilitation of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 (as amended)** - specifies that coaching roles in youth football are considered as 'exempt' under the Order and so all previous convictions must be declared in the recruitment process

GRASSROOTS RECRUITMENT

Grassroots football clubs are community enterprises and most individuals who volunteer to coach in youth football do so because of family ties - e.g. their son or daughter has begun their football journey and they want, or are asked, to be involved.

While the Irish FA acknowledges the often informal nature of becoming a volunteer, this should never over-ride the necessity for grassroots clubs to follow the safe recruitment procedures outlined in this guidance.

ADVERTISING THE ROLE

- Clubs wishing to recruit through advertisement should produce a person-specification which details the experience and personal qualities needed e.g. experience of working with children and being child-centred
- The advertisement must specify that the successful coach will be required to complete an enhanced disclosure through Access NI and undertake IFA Safeguarding Training within 3-6 months

INTERVIEWING

- Interviews do not have to be formal - but face to face discussion is recommended prior to appointing a new coach
- This will help the club to gauge the coach's approach to authority and discipline, their willingness to abide by Codes of Conduct and their commitment to promoting the welfare of children and young people in sport

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SEEKING REFERENCES

- Clubs who recruit coaches with prior experience of youth football are strongly advised to seek references from previous clubs
- This will indicate if the coach has ever experienced difficulty in complying with Codes of Conduct or has undergone any disciplinary proceedings that would affect their suitability to take up a new coaching role

INDUCTION PROCESS

- Safe recruitment is not limited to actions taken before a new coach begins their role
- It is important for clubs to provide a thorough induction for each new coach, to support them as they progress
- This may include:
 - review of Safeguarding Policy
 - Code of Conduct review (new coaches should sign the Code of Conduct to confirm they will be compliant)
 - responsibilities of the role
 - signposting to key staff and sources of support at the club

PROBATION PERIODS

- Clubs may wish to consider establishing a probation period for new coaches
- This will allow for closer supervision of new coaches and will further indicate their suitability to continue coaching
- Code of Conduct issues which arise during a probation period should be considered seriously by the club committee

IRISH FA ACCESS NI PROCESS

- Every newly recruited coach is responsible for applying for an online enhanced disclosure check through the IFA as a registered Access NI body before taking up their role
- Coaches must also complete the Irish FA Access NI self-declaration form and send to their club Welfare Officer
- The club Welfare Officer is then responsible for forwarding the self-declaration to the Irish FA Safeguarding Team so that the Access NI process can be completed
- A copy of the Irish FA Access NI Procedure 2025-2026 is available on the IFA website under 'Safeguarding - Access NI Checks'

RECRUITMENT AND SAFE SPORT RATIOS

- Clubs should consider NSPCC/Child Protection in Sport Unit guidance on Safe Sport Ratios during recruitment processes
- All teams must have a minimum of two adult supervisors at all times, and so recruitment should be sufficient as to maintain these numbers

IRISH FA AUDIT PROCESS

- The Irish FA enforces a robust Audit Process, which requires leagues, Small Sided Games Centres and clubs to provide evidence of safe recruitment practices through Access NI enhanced disclosure checks

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