

Tender Specification

Executive Summary

The Irish FA seeks a qualified provider to design and deliver an 18-month Women's Leadership Development Programme to create a sustainable pipeline of female leaders in football. This programme will address low female representation, lack of pathways, retention challenges, and visibility gaps by equipping women with leadership skills, confidence, and practical experience across coaching, refereeing, governance, and media roles.

Background

The Irish Football Association (Irish FA) is committed to advancing gender equality and empowering women across all levels of football. In line with our strategic vision outlined in Together We Thrive – The Women's & Girls' Football Strategy, we are inviting proposals from suitably qualified providers to design and deliver a Women's Leadership Development Programme. This programme will play a pivotal role in creating a sustainable leadership pipeline for women in football, equipping participants with the skills, confidence, and networks needed to thrive in governance, administration, coaching, and volunteer roles.

Women's football in Northern Ireland has experienced significant growth in participation; however, representation in leadership and decision-making roles remains critically low. Only 5% of coaches are female, and there are a low number of female referees, highlighting a stark imbalance in technical and officiating positions. Governance and administration reflect similar disparities, with women occupying limited roles and only 20% representation on the Irish FA Board. There are currently no structured pathways for women to progress from grassroots involvement into leadership, and mentorship or sponsorship opportunities are scarce. Retention is another challenge, as many women leave leadership roles due to lack of support or recognition, with no formal mechanisms to understand or address these exits. Visibility also remains limited, with minimal media coverage and storytelling around the grassroots and domestic game, resulting in few role models to inspire the next generation.

The purpose of this tender is to appoint a provider who will collaborate with the Irish FA to design and deliver a comprehensive Women's Leadership Development Programme that:

- Builds leadership capacity among women involved in football at all levels.
- Creates clear pathways for progression from grassroots to governance and senior leadership roles.
- Provides mentorship and sponsorship opportunities to support retention and growth.
- Enhances visibility of female leaders and role models within the game.

Strategic Alignment

This initiative directly supports the Irish FA's commitment to gender equality and the delivery of Together We Thrive, ensuring that women's voices shape the future of football in Northern Ireland. It also aligns with global best practice in sports governance and leadership development.



Irish FA Women's Leadership Development Programme



Objectives

The Women's Leadership Development Programme will:

- *Develop Leadership Skills and Confidence*
Equip participants with practical leadership capabilities, strategic decision-making skills, and the confidence to influence change within football.
- *Support Career Progression and Retention*
Provide tools, resources, and structured support to help women advance in their roles and remain engaged in the game long-term.
- *Create Clear Pathways for Female Leaders*
Establish defined progression routes tailored to specific roles—coaching, refereeing, governance, and administration—ensuring visibility and accessibility.
- *Foster Male Allyship and Inclusive Support Systems*
Engage male stakeholders as allies to champion gender equality and create an environment where women can thrive.
- *Build a Post-Course Alumni Network*
Develop a sustainable alumni community to maintain connections, share best practices, and continue leadership development beyond the programme.

Scope of Work

The appointed provider will:

Co-Design and Delivery: Collaborate with the Irish FA to design and deliver a structured programme incorporating workshops, mentoring, coaching, and role model sessions.

Programme Phases: Deliver across four phases:

- Foundation (Months 1–3): Self-discovery, confidence building, leadership identity.
- Specific Learning (Months 4–12): Targeted development in chosen strands.
- Applied Experience (Months 13–16): Work experience, leadership projects, mentorship.
- Graduation (Months 17–18): Showcase event and alumni network entry.

Tailored Content: Ensure relevance to football and sports sector, including strand-specific learning.

Accessibility and Inclusivity: Guarantee inclusive participation and blended delivery (online and face-to-face).

Impact Measurement: Integrate robust monitoring and evaluation tools.



Irish FA Women's Leadership Development Programme



Target Audience

Women aged 18 years and above, currently involved or aspiring to leadership roles in football, including:

- Club and league administrators
 - Coaches and technical staff
 - Referees and match officials
 - School, community, or club personnel
 - Emerging leaders from across the football ecosystem
- Participants may select 2–3 strands for development.*

Programme Strands

- Coaching: Grassroots leadership, technical development, role model sessions.
- Refereeing: Laws of the game, shadowing opportunities, officiating pathways.
- Governance & Administration: Football administration qualifications, club-based projects.
- Media/PR: Storytelling, content creation, social media engagement.

Support Structures

- Mentorship and coaching circles
- Role model sessions
- Wellbeing check-ins
- Alumni network for post-programme support

Deliverables

The successful provider will be expected to deliver:

- Programme Design and Delivery Plan
- Participant Recruitment and Engagement Support
- Delivery of Agreed Programme Components
- Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
- Final Report

Budget

Value for money will be a key consideration in the evaluation process. Proposals should clearly demonstrate cost-effectiveness alongside quality and impact.

Timescales

Tender Issued: December 2025

Deadline for Submissions: Friday, 9 January 2026

Evaluation and Appointment: Friday, 30 January 2026

Programme Commencement: May/June 2026


Programme Completion: December 2027

For queries or to submit your proposal, please contact:

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Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

- *Relevant Experience and Track Record (25%)*
Demonstrated expertise in leadership development, particularly within sport or football.
- *Quality and Innovation of Proposed Approach (30%)*
Creativity, practicality, and alignment with best practices in programme design and delivery.
- *Understanding of Women's Football Context (20%)*
Evidence of knowledge and sensitivity to the unique challenges and opportunities within Northern Ireland's women's game.
- *Value for Money (15%)*
Cost-effectiveness and clear justification of budget.
- *Monitoring and Evaluation Methodology (10%)*
Robust framework for measuring impact and outcomes.

Submission Requirements

Interested providers must submit:

- A detailed proposal outlining approach, methodology, and timeline.
- Examples of previous relevant work.
- CVs or bios of key personnel involved in delivery.
- A comprehensive budget breakdown.
- At least two professional references.

Scoring Matrix

Criteria	Weighting (%)	Score (0–5)	Weighted Score	Comments
Relevant Experience & Track Record	25%			
Quality & Innovation of Approach	30%			
Understanding of Women's Football Context	20%			
Value for Money	15%			
Monitoring & Evaluation	10%			

Scoring Guide (0–5 scale):

- 0 – No evidence or fails to meet the requirement
- 1 – Very limited evidence; major concerns
- 2 – Some evidence; partially meets requirement
- 3 – Good evidence; meets requirement
- 4 – Strong evidence; exceeds requirement
- 5 – Excellent evidence; significantly exceeds requirement



Bidder Questions

Section 1: Organisational Experience

- Describe your organisation's experience in designing and delivering leadership development programmes, particularly for women in sport or football.
- Outline your experience working with diverse groups and promoting inclusion in leadership development.

Section 2: Programme Design & Delivery

- Explain your proposed approach to designing and delivering the Women's Leadership Development Programme.
- How will your programme be tailored to the specific context of women's football in Northern Ireland?
- What innovative elements or best practices will you incorporate to maximise impact?

Section 3: Monitoring & Evaluation

- Describe how you will measure the success and impact of the programme.

Section 4: Budget & Value for Money

- Provide a detailed budget breakdown for your proposal.
- Explain how your proposal represents value for money.

Section 5: Team & Delivery Capacity

- Who will be involved in delivering the programme?
- How will you ensure continuity and quality throughout the delivery period?



Guidance Notes for Bidders

Purpose of the Tender

The Irish FA is seeking a suitably qualified provider to design and deliver a Women's Leadership Development Programme aligned with our strategic goals for women's and girls' football.

Submission Format

Proposals should be clear, concise, and address all questions listed in the tender document. Submissions must include:

- A written proposal (maximum 10 pages)
- Detailed budget breakdown
- CVs or bios of key personnel
- Examples of previous relevant work
- Minimum of two references
- All documents submitted in PDF format

Evaluation Process

Submissions will be assessed by a panel using the published scoring matrix. Each criterion will be scored out of 5 and weighted accordingly. The highest-scoring bidder will be invited to contract negotiations.

Budget Guidance

Provide a detailed, VAT-inclusive budget covering all anticipated costs. Value for money will be assessed based on cost-effectiveness and alignment with programme objectives.

Programme Delivery Expectations

The successful provider will:

- Co-design the programme with Irish FA input
- Deliver high-quality, engaging content
- Ensure accessibility and inclusion
- Provide regular progress updates and a final impact report
- Include both in-person and/or online delivery options

Key Dates

Tender submission deadline: Friday, 9 January 2026

Evaluation period: 10–29 January 2026

Provider appointed: 30 January 2026

Programme start: May/June 2026

Programme end: December 2027

Late submissions will not be considered.

Confidentiality

All information provided during the tender process must be treated as confidential and used solely for preparing your submission.

