

Irish Football Association
Girls' and Women's Football Plan
2014 – 2018





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1. Foreword

Jim Shaw, IFA President.

Over the last two decades girls' and women's football has expanded rapidly throughout the world with unprecedented numbers playing the game at all levels. In Northern Ireland we too have witnessed an exciting growth in the game. However, despite the advancements being made locally we realise that there are many issues and challenges being faced by our clubs and volunteers. A lack of capacity within clubs, a shortage of volunteers, poor access to quality facilities and gaps in the player pathway, particularly at youth level, are just some of the obstacles within Northern Ireland.

Recently the Irish Football Association launched "We're not Brazil..., we're Northern Ireland", the Association's five year strategic plan, with a clear vision to 'promote, foster and develop football in Northern Ireland'. Within this document girls' and women's football is inextricably linked to the core objectives of the association and, indeed, is highlighted as a major strategic priority.

During the last two years IFA staff have worked tirelessly to develop this plan and it has been devised after widespread consultation with the football family and been guided under the stewardship of the IFA Women's Football Subcommittee. Annual operational plans will set out key performance indicators and form the basis of departmental target setting. This is an exciting and comprehensive plan – it is both challenging and ambitious and will hopefully drive girls' and women's football to a new level within Northern Ireland.

The production of the IFA Girls' and Women's Football Plan is a public and explicit commitment by the Irish FA to invest in the development of the female game and we look forward with anticipation to realising the objectives that we set out to achieve.

2. Executive summary

Girls' and women's football is rapidly growing in Northern Ireland, but too few girls are making the transition from becoming engaged at school to joining a club.

The player will be at the heart of this plan, which requires a 'joined-up' approach among all the stakeholders, which will have an impact upon her development and seeks to ensure that an unbroken player pathway is available so that she can realise her aspirations to the full.

It has been developed following widespread consultation and will be driven by the Women's Unit of the Football Development Department of the Irish Football Association (IFA) and in collaboration with all organisations involved in women's football.

The plan folds into the wider IFA perspective of pursuing wider participation and competitive success in football, as well as utilising the sport to achieve broader social goals.

The vision is:

'To develop, foster and promote girls' and women's football in Northern Ireland'.

Six objectives have been identified to realise this aim and each of these will be translated into concrete key performance indicators across all the operational areas.

The plan also includes arrangements for governance, monitoring and review. It is a 'living' document and will evolve as it is put into effect.



3. Overview

The IFA is the governing body for football in Northern Ireland and is responsible for developing, promoting and fostering international, domestic and grassroots football. The IFA is a member of FIFA and UEFA and is represented on the International Football Association Board, footballs' global rule making body. Founded in 1880, the IFA is the fourth oldest football association in the world.

In 1998 the IFA assumed overall responsibility for the development of girls' and women's football and the preparation of international teams. Following the release by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) of the "Creating a Soccer Strategy for Northern Ireland" in October 2001, the IFA appointed a Women's Football Development Officer with responsibility for developing girls' and women's football. During the last eleven years the biggest growth has occurred at grassroots level, particularly within primary and post primary schools. Today, the association employs 30 primary school coaches that work with approximately 250 schools and 8,000 girls each year. In addition, the Women's Unit work with over 80% post-primary schools within Northern Ireland on an annual basis.

The Northern Ireland Women's Football Association (NIWFA) is an affiliate of the IFA and is responsible for the administration and delivery of league football. Formed in November 1976, the NIWFA caters for 41 senior clubs (43 teams) within 6 divisions and 32 junior teams playing in small sided and 11 v 11 leagues. Each senior club also affiliates to their respective divisional association and in 2013 the County Antrim Football Association and Mid Ulster Football Association delivered an inaugural cup competition for their member clubs.



Worldwide girls' and women's football continues to flourish with 26 million players currently registered. The profile of women's football is at an all time high with record attendances at the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup in Germany, the London 2012 Olympics and more recently at the EUROS in Sweden.

According to UEFA, there are currently 1,275,728 registered players within Europe, with a further 528,443 youth players. As the governing body of football within Europe UEFA has invested heavily in the development of girls' and women's football over the last decade particularly through the delivery of elite competitions such as the Women's EURO, U19 Championships, Under 17 Championships and the Women's Champions League. More recently, UEFA has focused attention on

the grassroots level of the game through the appointment of a Women's Football Development Coordinator and the allocation of financial resources through the Hat Trick III Women's Football Development Programme (WFDP).

This plan will highlight the importance of encouraging more women to get involved in football, not only to produce better players but just as importantly to make a contribution in their lives and to society as a whole. The plan will seek to build on previous work and to identify areas where the IFA can work with key stakeholders to achieve collective aims and objectives.





4. Introduction

This plan aims to establish structures to help develop the game from grassroots level through to the international teams.

It signals a new era for girls' and women's football in Northern Ireland – one of clarity and focus.

Although a stand-alone document, the Girls' and Women's Football Plan flows directly from the IFA's overarching strategy by seeking to “develop, foster and promote football for all” and takes cognisance of the following IFA long-term objectives identified in Figure 1.

The Girls' and Women's Football Plan seeks to promote and encourage partnership working with all agencies and organisations involved in, or with the potential to be involved in, the delivery of girls' and women's football.

It is intended that this plan will constitute a ‘living’ document and be reviewed and updated on a regular basis and in line with the corporate objectives of the association.

The plan will be driven by the Women's Unit and outlines our vision for the next four years. It will include measurable targets for key areas of the game which will allow us to monitor our effectiveness in each of these areas and where necessary make adjustments to ensure continued progress and development. Regular reports will be submitted to the IFA Football Committee and, when required, the IFA Board.

Finally, this plan has been formed following consultation with the key stakeholders in girls' and women's football and therefore represents the opinions of the entire football family.

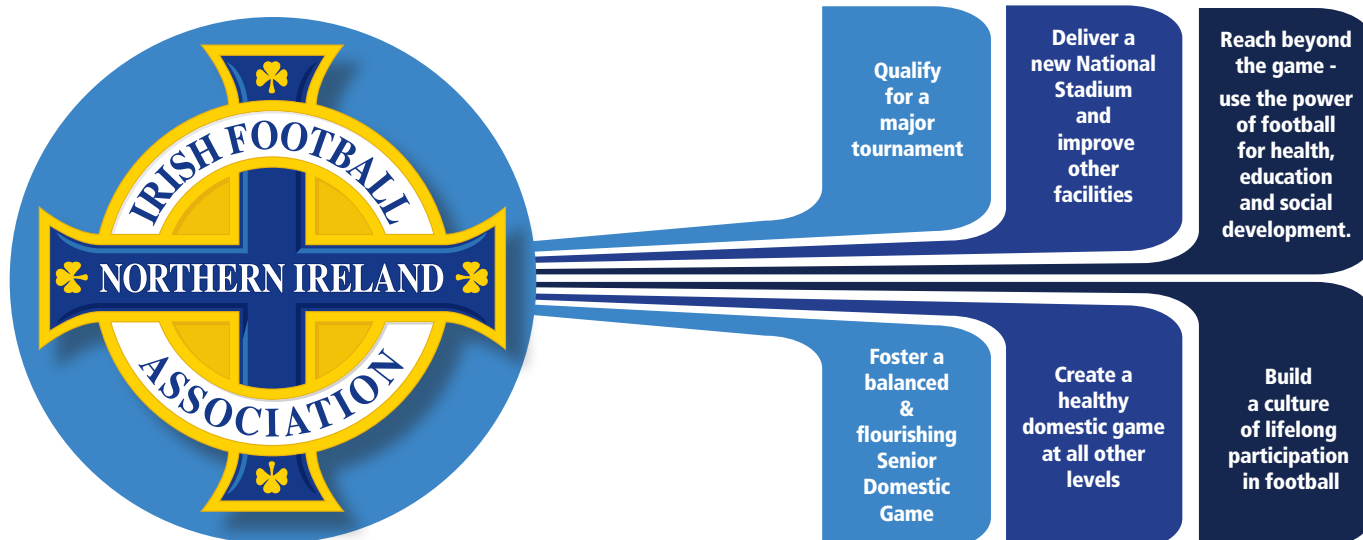


Figure 1: IFA long term objectives 2013 – 2018.



5. Where are we now?

Prior to 1998, the NIWFA was solely responsible for the administration and development of women's football. In 1989, Jimmy Somerville, Chairman of the NIWFA, described the state of the game in a questionnaire to UEFA:

"In the last four years women's football in Northern Ireland has developed from a disorganised body, without an existing set of rules and little or no control over its finances, to an association which has gradually become more professional and more organised, thus working in conjunction with its parent body (the IFA), the Divisional Associations and sporting bodies such as the Sports Council".

Today, many of the issues described in this document still persist including the over-reliance on a small number of volunteers within the NIWFA, lack of finances in the women's game, too few female coaches and female referees.

There have, however, been many successes particularly following the full integration of women's football into the IFA in 1998 and the appointment of a Women's Football Development Officer in 2002. In 1989, football was not offered to schoolgirls in Northern Ireland. Today, schools football at both primary and post primary level is an integral part of various IFA development programmes including the DENI Primary School Programme, the Grassroots Development Programme and specifically through the work of the Women's Unit.

In relation to the number of registered players and clubs within Northern Ireland progress has been slow. In 1989 there were 13 teams affiliated to the NIWFA with a total of 234 players and no youth teams. Today, there are 997 players registered within 43 clubs at senior level and over 400 players participating in junior teams.

Analysis of NIWFA participation statistics within the last eleven years illustrates that if we assume a linear trend there has been an absolute increase of 39.8% between 2002 and 2013 ($P < 0.001$; Fig 1). This translates to 713 registrations in 2002 with a peak in 2009 (1,285 registered; 80.2% increase since 2002). However, since 2009, the number of players has fluctuated with the most recent year, 2013, reporting the lowest number of registrations since 2007 (997 participants in 2013). Comparing the number of registrations in 2013 to the number in 2012 there has been a 9.2% reduction (101 fewer registrations in 2013 compared to 2012).

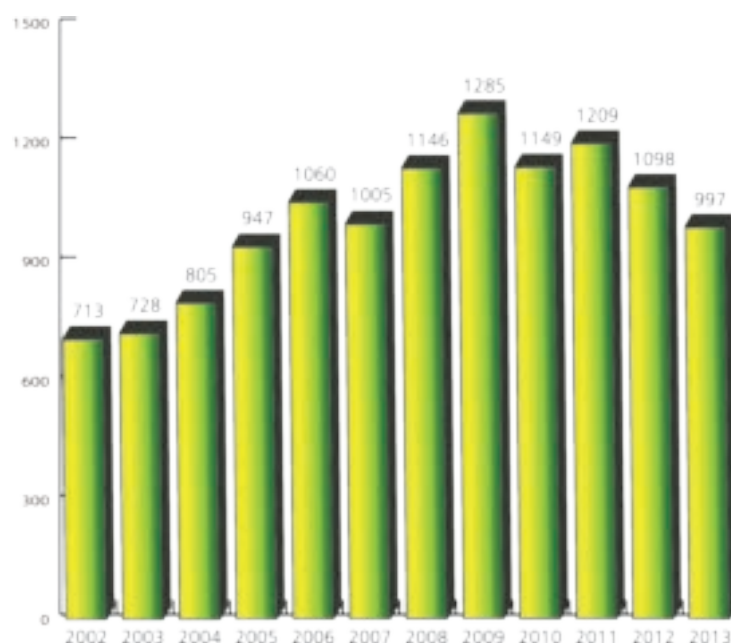


Figure 2: The total number of females registered in the NIWFA leagues 2002 - 2013



By mapping the teams registered in the 2013 NIWFA leagues it is possible to see the geographical spread of women’s football throughout Northern Ireland.

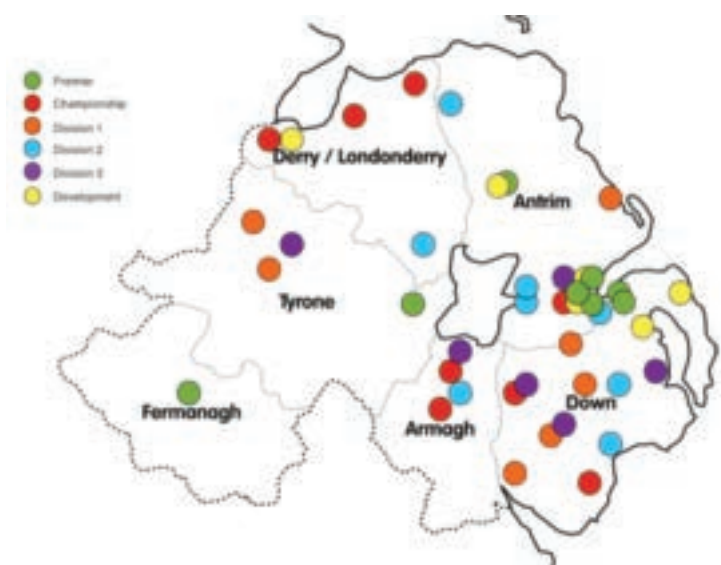


Figure 3: Location of 2013 NIWFA leagues teams.

Northern Ireland has a shortage of qualified female coaches above the IFA Level 1 coaching award (the lowest coaching award). Table 1 presents the number of female coaches, however, it does not illustrate how many of these females are actively coaching. Currently we have four female coaches working with our international teams with the highest coaching award of a UEFA ‘A’ Licence being held by the assistant coach to the national team and the U17 Head Coach. At club level the number of female head coaches is poor with approximately five females active at their clubs. In relation to female referees, we currently have 12 qualified referees.

Level	No of females
1(Grassroots Leader)	275
2 (UEFA ‘C’ Licence)	18
3 (UEFA ‘B’ Licence)	10
4 (UEFA ‘A’ Licence)	4
IFA Goalkeeping Certificate	24
IFA Goalkeeping Licence	1

Table 1: Number of female coaches in Northern Ireland





6. Strategic context

The Girls' and Women's Football Plan will provide a strategic framework for the IFA to develop the game. The plan takes cognisance of current research and priority areas established by the NI Executive and more specifically the DCAL and Sport NI. It is also placed within the context of current developments within UEFA and FIFA (Appendix 1).

Women's Football: International Context

The importance of women's football is globally recognised and promoted by world football bodies. At the 5th FIFA Women's Football symposium in Frankfurt (2011), Tatjana Haenni (Head of FIFA Women's Competition) commented that, "women's football is probably the most popular women's team sport on the planet, but there is still work to be done in many areas so that the game can continue its exponential growth. The sport must further develop, from grassroots to top level and, in order to be even more successful, it must establish itself as a professional sport".

In relation to women's football, "FIFA promotes the development of women's football and is committed to creating opportunities for female players, coaches, referees and officials to become actively involved in the sport of football". Through the Women's Football Development Programme (2012 – 2015) FIFA is encouraging all national associations to make women's football one of its main priorities, highlighting the importance women's football can make to the overall health and wellbeing of a society in general.

Specifically, the goals of the WFD programme include:

- Increasing the number of competitions and leagues within national associations;
- Increasing the number of female players at all levels of the game;
- Improving the infrastructure of women's football within national associations;
- Increasing the number of women in leadership positions;
- Enhancing opportunities for each national association to participate in FIFA tournaments and ultimately influence technical quality of participating teams.

Programmes eligible for the WFD support are categorised into four areas; Competitions, Management, Education and Promotion. A national association can avail of assistance ranging from expertise, teaching and promotional materials to football equipment and financial assistance.

Within Europe, UEFA is also working hard to develop and nurture girls' and women's football and in 2011 announced the investment of €21m between 2012 – 16 through the UEFA HatTrick III programme. To coincide with this programme UEFA recently published a Girls' and Women's Football Development Strategy focusing on nine core areas of work. In November 2011 the IFA was awarded €50,000 as part of the WFD pilot scheme to deliver the SCORE Pilot Project. This project aimed to build capacity levels within local women's clubs and helped them to establish links with their local primary and post-primary schools. The success of this programme was recognised in June 2013 when the IFA received the UEFA HatTrick Award for the 'Best Women's Football Development Project'.



NI Women's Football: History and Local Context

The IFA oversees the development of all football in Northern Ireland. It currently employs a Women's Domestic Football Manager who has been tasked with taking forward initiatives to promote and develop women's football.

The NIWFA started in 1976 with eighteen teams playing in a summer league. From those early beginnings the NIWFA has now expanded to its present size of 43 teams with 997 players (over the age of 14) competing in six divisions.

Women's football in Northern Ireland is organised as follows:

- **Club football** is divided into junior and senior sections. Senior club football is delivered under the auspices of the NIWFA and is organised into six leagues including Premier, Championship, Divisions 1 - 3, and a Development League. The Premiership winners represent Northern Ireland in the UEFA Champions League each year. In addition to the various divisional titles there are also divisional cups, with the Irish FA also running an Irish Cup competition. In 2013 the County Antrim Football Association and Mid Ulster Football Association also delivered an inaugural cup competition for their women's teams.
- At **Junior level** there is a growing base of players and many of the senior clubs now cater for junior teams. The NIWFA also delivers summer and winter leagues, while the IFA Women's Department facilitates school leagues. These junior leagues create the opportunity for girls to begin playing football at a young age. They also provide a clear progression within local clubs and with that the opportunity to continue into the higher echelons of the game.

- **First Kicks** cater for girls aged 6 - 11 and are based on fundamental movement skills and basic football techniques. The IFA currently deliver over 20 programmes in partnership with local councils, Active Communities coaches, DENI Primary School coaches and local clubs. More than 300 girls participate within First Kicks on a weekly basis.
- **Schools Football.** The IFA works with over 80% of post primary schools in Northern Ireland and has a network of 30 primary school coaches that work with 250 primary schools and approximately 8,000 girls each year. Activities delivered include festival days, leagues and cup competitions (both small sided and 11 v 11) and coaching programmes.
- **Centres of Excellence** provide 160 girls aged 11 - 16 years of age with quality coaching on a regional basis. These players are identified via a number of sources including schools football, junior football and the clubs. In total the players receive a minimum of 36 weeks of coaching coordinated by the National Women's Coach and relevant IFA staff.
- At **international level** there are teams at senior level, under 19, under 17 and under 15 (Development Squad) levels. All teams participate in international fixtures and competitions.

Currently grassroots football is undergoing significant change with the promotion and expansion of small-sided games (SSG) for people under the age of 12. Small-sided games are designed to meet the needs of children aged between 6 - 12 years. These games are the preferred method of training by professionals and are increasingly recognised as the most appropriate way of acquiring skills and developing young players.



Public Policy Context

As already acknowledged women's football is not solely concerned with the development of elite footballers. Rather its purpose is to give girls and women the opportunity to participate in sport, improve health, develop skills and character and to improve their quality of life. It, therefore, impacts upon many areas of society and wider public policy.

The NI Executive Programme for Government (2011 – 2015) sets out the government's spending plans and priorities for Northern Ireland. The over-arching aim is to build a peaceful, just and prosperous society in Northern Ireland where everyone can enjoy a better quality of life now and in years to come.

The DCAL vision, as set out in its **2011 – 2015 Corporate Plan** is for, “a confident, creative, informed and vibrant community”. DCAL has responsibility for developing strategies for sports in NI and sponsors Sport NI to help deliver these. DCAL, in partnership with Sport NI, published **“Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009 – 2019”**. The strategy focuses on key areas for development including: Participation; Performance; and, Places.

The quest for international sporting success is becoming increasingly intense and national governing bodies are frequently searching for ways to improve performances of individuals and teams.

Investing strategically in elite sports systems has become a necessity and it will be important to bear in mind the nine core components of the SPLISS (Sport Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success) model; (1) financial support & integrated approach to policy development; (2) foundation and participation; (3) talent identification and development system; (4) athletic and post-career support; (5) training facilities; (6) coaching provision and coach development; (7) scientific research; (8) international competition; and finally (9) agency partners; when planning a holistic performance pathway for our players in the future.

It is widely acknowledged that football covers all of society, regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, race, religious background and levels of ability or disability.

By using this information it is possible to gain an insight into the specific environment in which girls' and women's football exists within Northern Ireland (depicted pictorially in Figure 4). Specifically, this will help the association to deliver a strategic plan that makes a contribution to society as a whole by encouraging more girls and women to participate in sport and physical activity.

The relevance of the IFA Girls' and Women's Football Plan in relation to the overarching IFA objectives and the targets set by Sport NI for the next six years is outlined in Figure 5. It is important to note the synergy of the plan in relation to the key objectives as prioritised by the IFA and Sport NI.

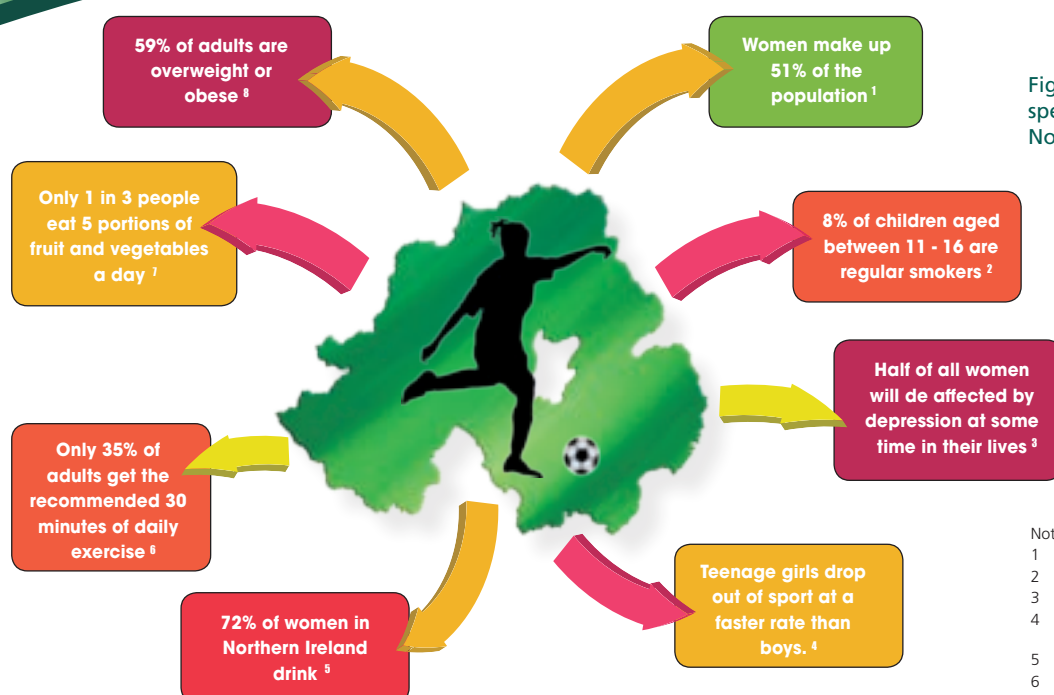


Figure 4: Diagram illustrating the specific issues relative to females in Northern Ireland

Notes.

- 1 Taken from NI Census 2011
- 2 Tobacco Control Strategy, 2012
- 3 Mental Health & Wellbeing Promotion Strategy
- 4 Get Active – Stay Active. Children & Young People, Sport NI
- 5 New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs
- 6 The Northern Ireland Sport and Physical Activity Survey, 2010
- 7-8 A Fit Futures: Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in NI 2012 - 2022

7. Vision

To promote, foster and develop girls' and women's football in Northern Ireland.

Strategic Aim

The Irish FA will strive to provide an environment in which players, coaches, referees and administrators within girls' and women's football are given the opportunity to participate and excel in their respective areas; that the women's game is showcased to a growing audience and contributes to the wider aims of a more confident, healthy, equal and prosperous society. Moving forward, the player will be at the heart of everything we do.

Values

- Professional
- Integrity
- Trust
- Honesty
- Caring and considerate



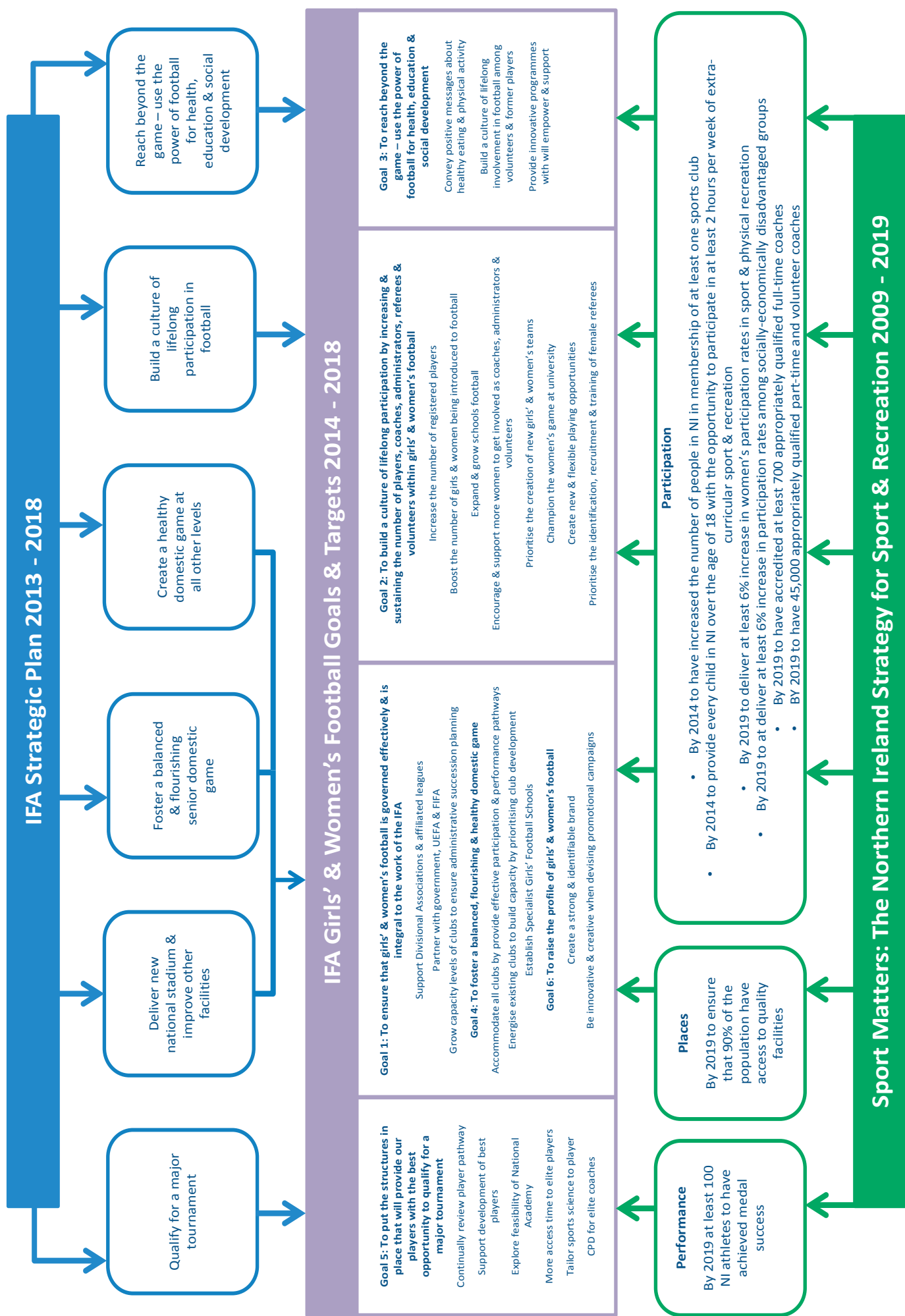


Figure 5: Diagram illustrating synergy between the IFA Girls' and Women's Plan and the long-term objectives of the Irish FA and current Sport NI objectives.



8. Strategic Goals

In line with the IFA strategy there are six key objectives that will constitute the strategic focus for Girls' and Women's Football in the association over the next four years. These reflect the strategic context in which they reside and the state of the women's game in Northern Ireland.

-
- Goal 1** To ensure that the governance of girls' and women's football is integral to the work of the IFA.
-
- Goal 2** To build a culture of lifelong participation in football.
-
- Goal 3** To reach beyond the game – use the power of football for health, education and social development.
-
- Goal 4** To foster a balanced, flourishing and healthy domestic game.
-
- Goal 5** To put the structures in place that will provide our players with the best opportunity to quality for a major tournament within the next 10-15 years.
-
- Goal 6** To raise the profile of girls' and women's football.
-



STRATEGIC GOAL # 1

Aim: To ensure that girls' and women's football is governed effectively and is integral to the work of the IFA

OBJECTIVES

To meet our aim we will:

- Provide strong leadership and clear guidance on rules and regulations in relation to the delivery of girls' and women's football.
- Support the Divisional Associations and other affiliated bodies to organise and administer leagues and cup competitions.
- Partner with governmental departments, UEFA and FIFA to ensure that women's football is represented externally on Boards and committees.
- Grow the capacity levels of girls' and women's clubs to ensure administrative succession planning for long-term viability of the game.

STRATEGIES

We will achieve our objectives by:

- Continually reviewing and reflecting on partnerships with key stakeholders and ensuring that agreed partnership outcomes are achieved.
- Keeping up-to-date with developments in women's football in UEFA and FIFA.
- Delivering an annual Female Football Leaders programme to up-skill more women and provide them with the skills and knowledge to move into leadership positions in football.
- Providing training and support to clubs and leagues in the administration of club management, player registration, refereeing, discipline and fixture management.





7. Achieving our goals

STRATEGIC GOAL # 2

Aim: To build a culture of lifelong participation by increasing and sustaining the number of players, coaches, administrators, referees and volunteers within girls' and women's football.

OBJECTIVES

To meet our aim we will:

- Reduce the decline in participation rates among registered players within girls' and women's football.
- Boost the number of players being introduced to the game and provide opportunities for girls and women to play football regardless of their age, ethnicity, disability, social status, sexuality or ability level.
- Ensure that girls' and women's football becomes integral to the work of all staff within the IFA Football Development Department and that all staff have specific and measured targets to achieve within the female game.
- Expand and grow the delivery of girls' football within primary and post primary schools.
- Create an environment in which the club system becomes the cornerstone of participation for girls and women.
- Encourage and support more women to get involved as coaches, administrators and volunteers.
- Strengthen and improve the quality of the player pathway and associated coach education pathway for the female game.
- Prioritise the creation of new girls' and women's teams and, where applicable, forge or consolidate links with boys' and men's clubs.
- Champion the women's game at university level by enhancing pathways for participation and working with educational institutions to support the development of women seeking football related careers including sports development, sports management, physiotherapy, sports journalism and marketing.
- Collaborate with the IFA Volunteer Development Officer to tailor bespoke training programmes for volunteers working within girls' and women's football.
- Support the work of the Referee Development Manager to prioritise the identification, recruitment and training of female referees, mentors, instructors and assessors.
- Create new and more flexible playing opportunities for girls and women.

STRATEGIES

We will achieve our objectives by:

- Establishing a baseline figure for the number of non-registered players participating in Northern Ireland.
- Commissioning research into barriers for participation and the reasons for 'drop out' among teenage girls.
- Being innovative and visionary in how we design and implement recruitment and development programmes for players, coaches, administrators, referees and volunteers.
- Enhancing school-club links to ensure that more girls make the transfer from school sport to the club setting.
- Establishing a quality mark for schools to ensure commitment to the provision of quality coaching to girls' football each week during curriculum time.
- Seeking additional sources of funding and sponsorship to facilitate the delivery of current and future development initiatives.
- Developing strong partnerships with key stakeholders in a variety of settings to assist with the delivery this plan.
- Working with Sport NI and local councils to appoint 11 Girls' Football coaches in each regional consortium through the Active Communities programme.
- Recruiting, up-skilling, deploying and rewarding current and new volunteers to support all facets of the women's game.
- Collaborating with key stakeholders to provide alternative versions of football including small-sided games, futsal and veterans' football.
- Supporting the work of the Disability Football Unit and Community Relations Unit to encourage more women with disabilities and from ethnic minorities to get involved in the game.
- Building on current provision for mixed football by working alongside the Northern Ireland Boys FA (NIBFA) to sustain and expand opportunities for girls to play.
- Working with local councils to lobby for equal access to quality facilities for girls' and women's football clubs.
- Encouraging administrators of boys' leagues to organise and deliver regional and national girls sections.
- Targeting programmes at girls transitioning from primary to post primary schools and between the ages of 14 – 18.





STRATEGIC GOAL # 3

Aim: To reach beyond the game – use the power of football for health, education and social development.

OBJECTIVES

To meet our aim we will:

- Utilise the power of football to convey positive messages about healthy eating, the importance of regular physical activity in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle and the development of life skills.
- Develop players to act as mentors / educators to deliver training on mental health, nutrition and the importance of physical activity.
- Promote social inclusion and strengthen partnerships targeting social need by purposefully working with schools, clubs, youth clubs and other voluntary organisations within socially deprived areas.
- Build a culture of lifelong involvement in football and encourage the retention of former players as coaches, administrators and volunteers.
- Provide innovative programmes that will empower and support girls and women in the development of skills and competencies required in their place of employment, study and throughout their everyday lives.
- Work with the Community Relations Unit to ensure the inclusion of girls in the Football Youth Forum and the delivery of the educational resource programme to girls and women's groups.
- Collaborate with Ulster Hockey, Ladies GAA, Ladies Camogie and Ulster Rugby through the Female Sports Forum to deliver joint programmes targeted at increasing participation levels and providing educational support in women's sport.



STRATEGIES

We will achieve our objectives by:

- Collaborating with relevant Government departments, local authorities and universities to develop programmes that are evidence based and supported by relevant and up-to-date research.
- Organising master classes and clinics that reinforce positive health messages.
- Working to improve self-esteem and confidence levels of girls and women through the medium of football.
- Promoting positive images of girls and women playing football.
- Partnering with governmental departments on initiatives to increase the health and wellbeing of girls and women.
- Establishing a NI Masters team to encourage players to remain involved in the game.
- Supporting the delivery of bespoke football programmes in schools aimed at addressing mental health issues.







STRATEGIC GOAL # 4

Aim: To foster a balanced, flourishing and healthy domestic game.

OBJECTIVES

To meet our aim we will:

- Professionalise, modernise and standardise our systems across the domestic game to help us make better use of existing resources and grow the capacity levels of volunteers working within our clubs.
- Accommodate all clubs in Northern Ireland by providing effective participation and performance pathways. We will cater for those players that aspire to play at elite domestic level by reviewing and working with leagues and divisional associations to develop competitive league structures for these players. In addition, we will work to provide opportunities for recreational players to participate at a level suitable to their ability and desire.
- Support and encourage volunteer and professional involvement at all levels of the female game.
- Energise existing girls' and women's clubs to assist them build capacity and support their growth and development.
- Collaborate with the IFA Club Licensing Department to ensure that all Irish League men's clubs in the Premiership and Championship have a bona fide women's club by 2017.
- Prioritise club development and the creation of 'fit for purpose' clubs by working alongside the IFA Club Development Officer to implement the IFA Club Excellence Mark.
- Establish strong links between the top women's clubs, secondary schools and regional colleges to create Specialist Girls' Football Schools to support the holistic development of female players and allow talented players the opportunity to access extra quality coaching sessions, strength / conditioning programmes and lifestyle management support.
- Implement a coordinated calendar of events to ensure that leagues are delivered to harmonise with the FIFA calendar.
- Work with the Referee Development Manager to enhance the development of female referees and to identify suitable female instructors, assessors, mentors and role models.
- Encourage the creation of partnerships between clubs and local facility providers, including schools, to improve access to quality facilities for girls' and women's clubs.

STRATEGIES

We will achieve our objectives by:

- Collaborating with the leagues and Divisional Associations to facilitate the development of strong league infrastructures and opportunities for girls and women to compete at a level appropriate to their ability
- Establishing excellent working relationships between the IFA, stakeholders and clubs based on mutual trust and respect.
- Making the inclusion of a women's team mandatory in the Domestic Club Licence for top tier men's clubs and imposing a regulatory mechanism to ensure compliance.
- Committing to the education of club coaches through the provision of regional and national coaching master classes and by using the National Women's Coach to deliver bespoke coach education programmes with individual clubs and clusters of clubs.
- Encouraging all leagues to administer U13 and U15 eleven aside leagues
- Providing training, advice and support to clubs through seminars and workshops.
- Supporting clubs to become 'community beacons' or hubs.
- Seeking funding to support the appointment of a Club Development Officer for each club within the Premier League in order to maximise community, school and club opportunities within their areas.
- Creating a strong, vibrant and professionally administered Premier League by 2015.
- Working in partnership with Specialist Girls' Football Schools to improve access to quality facilities and improve player recruitment for all Premier League clubs.
- Collaborating with Divisional Associations and the Referee Development Manager to deliver regional 'female only' recruitment and education programmes.
- Prioritising the ongoing education of club coaches and managers through the delivery of workshops and other educational opportunities.





STRATEGIC GOAL # 5

Aim: To put the structures in place that will provide our players with the best opportunity to qualify for a major tournament within the next 10-15 years.

OBJECTIVES

To meet our aim we will:

- Continually review and update our player pathway
- Support the development of our best players by focussing budget and coaching / sports science expertise on the most talented players.
- Explore the possibility of gaining entry to the Sports Institute and the establishment of a National Academy for women's football.
- More access and time with elite players and the introduction of extra training sessions for players aged between 15 – 22.
- Establish squads at each age group who will train with NI coaches on a regular basis and play for their clubs.
- Focus the budget and expertise on a select group of better players to develop into elite / international players.
- Tailor training and sports science programmes specifically for players.

STRATEGIES

We will achieve our objectives by:

- Keeping up-to-date with all the leading sports science developments and coaching practices.
- Securing the full integration of women's football into the Sports Institute at the University of Ulster and prioritising the development of our international players while allowing them to pursue further education opportunities within Northern Ireland.
- Preparing a Business Case to present to UEFA, FIFA and relevant Governmental departments to support hosting a major youth finals within the next ten years.
- Linking with educational institutions to provide opportunities for our best players to receive quality coaching and strength/conditioning programmes during school hours.
- Investing in continuous professional development of coaches at elite and international level.
- Ensuring that staff working in Football Development, Grassroots and the Primary Schools programme play an integral part in talent identification of players.
- Working closely with the women's clubs to support the holistic development of their players.





STRATEGIC GOAL # 6

Aim: To raise the profile of girls' and women's football

OBJECTIVES

To meet our aim we will:

- Create a strong and identifiable brand for domestic and international football in Northern Ireland.
- Be innovative and creative when devising promotional and marketing campaigns.
- Source additional funding to finance promotional campaigns around key events including national team fixtures, Irish Cup matches and the UEFA Champions League.
- Build on opportunities provided by social media such as Facebook and Twitter.
- Utilise role models within girls' and women's football to inspire more females to get involved in the game.
- Building on the success of the 2013 coverage of the Premier League and expanding to include all matches on a weekly basis.
- Encourage more spectators to attend domestic and international matches and work to provide fun-filled family occasions.

STRATEGIES

We will achieve our objectives by:

- Developing, in conjunction with the UEFA Marketing Department, an integrated marketing, communication and associated funding strategy for girls' and women's football.
- Increasing the number of images and content in local and national newspapers.
- Collaborating with the Community Relations Unit on the FFA Fans Strategy to ensure the inclusion of women's football.
- Maximising the media exposure around national team matches and the Irish Cup Final.
- Networking with the local media to ensure that they are well informed of fixtures and profile players.
- Offering training and support to clubs on developing / maintaining websites and the use of social media.





9. Monitoring and evaluation

Implementation of the plan will be a standing item on the IFA Football Committee. Specific work plans will be delivered for each of the objectives and will be carried out by the relevant department staff. Progress will be monitored in terms of the key performance indicators within each operational area.

The Women's Domestic Football Manager will be responsible for maintaining records of participation, programmes, outcomes, expenditure and records of achievement of objectives.

Monitoring will be undertaken to measure:

- The number of girls and women playing football;
- Equipment and facilities used;
- Participant profiles in terms of community/ethnic background, disability, and equality;
- Numbers and qualifications of coaches;
- The number of clubs;
- Performance of representative teams;
- The amount of funding generated for women's football;
- Feedback from girls' and women's clubs.

It will be important to broaden the scope of participation measurement beyond registered players to highlight the true scope of football activity and methods to achieve this will be investigated.

The plan will be subject to evaluation and review on an annual basis and, if necessary, targets not being achieved will be amended accordingly.

To inform the preparation of the next four-year iteration an independent evaluation will be carried out both at mid-term and at conclusion of the plan. The evaluation will assess the degree to which the objectives set out have been realised, using quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

10. Conclusion

Girls' and women's football is a global sport in which participation is rapidly rising at the grassroots level and whose profile is rapidly increasing through media exposure for international tournaments. Football in Northern Ireland needs to catch this wave, and preferably, be ahead of the curve.

There are many barriers to progress. Girls, particularly at adolescence, face challenges of body image and, for the sport inclined, there are other competitive attractions. As the consultation for this strategy has indicated arrangements are too patchy and uncoordinated and player pathways are too often missing key transitions.

This strategy therefore sets out to broaden the base of the pyramid of participation, to raise the apex of achievement and to bring all this to public attention. By its conclusion, girls' and women's football should have been taken to a new level which will provide a platform in turn for further progress.



11. References

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Appendix



FOOTBALL STRATEGIES / FUNDING

FIFA

Women's Football Development Programme

UEFA

Girls' & Women's Football Development Strategy



REGIONAL STRATEGIES

Sport Northern Ireland / Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure

Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation (2009-2019)

NI Executive Programme for Government (2011-15)

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Strategy on Children and Young People (2006 – 2016)

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

A Fitter Future for All: Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland (2012-2022)



RESEARCH

Sport Northern Ireland / Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure

The Northern Ireland Sport and Physical Activity Survey (2010)

Education and Training Inspectorate

An Evaluation of the contexts in which Children and Young People Engage in Sport and Physical Recreation, the Extent of their Engagement, and their Attitudes to Sport and Physical Recreation (2009)

Sport NI

A Baseline Survey of Timetabled PE in Post Primary Schools in Northern Ireland (2010)

Sport NI

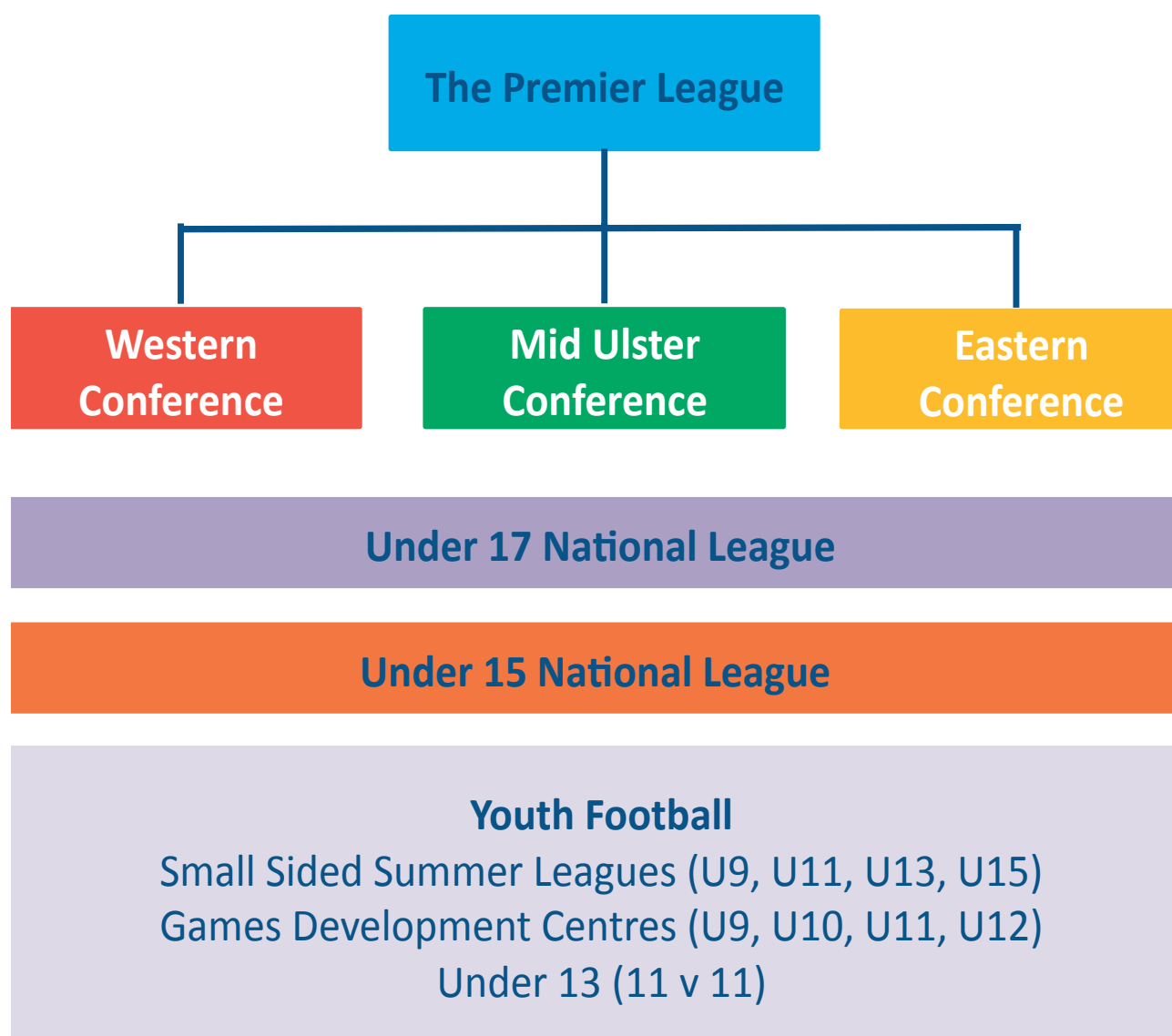
A Baseline Survey of Timetabled PE in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland (2009)

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Young People and Sport (2009) Secondary Analysis of Findings from the 2007 Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey

PLAYER PATHWAY

Age	Participation Pathway	Competition Pathway	Elite / Representative Pathway
6 – 11	<p>First Kicks</p> <p>Skills Development Centres</p> <p>Games Development Centres</p> <p>Club Development Programmes</p> <p>Recreational football Holiday Camps</p>	<p>NISFA Primary Schools Competition</p> <p>Small sided summer league (non – results based).</p>	
12 – 14	<p>Schools Football</p> <p>Festival days</p> <p>Holiday Camps</p> <p>Club Development Programmes</p> <p>Recreational football Futsal</p>	<p>7 v 7 and 11 v 11 School Leagues and Cup competitions</p> <p>NIWFA Small Sided Leagues</p> <p>NIWFA 11 v 11 Leagues</p>	Excellence Programme
15 – 19	<p>Schools Football</p> <p>Festival days</p> <p>Club Development Programmes</p> <p>Futsal</p> <p>Regional Colleges</p>	<p>7 v 7 and 11 v 11 School Leagues and Cup competitions</p> <p>NIWFA Youth Leagues</p> <p>NIWFA Senior Leagues</p>	<p>Strength & Conditioning</p> <p>Specialist Football Schools</p> <p>NI Under 17</p> <p>NI Under 19</p> <p>NI National Team</p>
19 +	<p>Futsal</p>	<p>NIWFA Senior Leagues</p> <p>National League</p>	<p>NI National Team</p> <p>National Academy</p> <p>Regional Colleges</p>







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