

FAI REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF FOOTBALL IN IRELAND

Strategic, Commercial, Operational and Governance Review of Football in Ireland



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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	03
1. Football in Ireland Visionary Group Members	07
2. Scope of Work	11
3. Governance	12
4. Improved Community Club Links and Development.....	15
5. Player Development	16
6. Women’s Football Development	20
7. Development of Game Officials and Referees	22
8. Professional Football League of Ireland (Men And Women)	23
9. Infrastructure	25
10. Commercial Partnerships and Media	27
11. Government Relationships and Major Partner Relations.....	29
12. Irish Football Fans.....	30
13. Objectives and Conclusion.....	31



Executive Summary

The Football Association of Ireland was formed in Dublin in September 1921, and was formed by the Free State of Ireland. Interestingly, it was post the formation of the League of Ireland by three months, and had previously been included in the participation of football throughout the island of Ireland.

Since those early days, the FAI has faced many stepping stones, and has a deep history from its inception into FIFA in 1923, through the many governance challenges and player eligibility controversies with the Irish Football Association, through the hardships of funding and qualification processes, the expansion of the league in Ireland, the increased growth of the game across villages, towns, cities, and provinces, the growth of the women's game, youth teams, inclusion of the Amateurs, Universities and Defence Forces teams as well as Cerebral Palsy, Blind, Deaf, Power Chair, Special Olympics and Amputees teams and the Homeless national sides, and the ultimate highs of World Cup and European Championship qualifications at various levels has seen our football progress to where it is today.

When looking to the future, one always stops to look at the past and appreciate where we have come from to know which road we must take to ensure the success, trial and tribulations of those before us were meant for a greater destination.

We have reached a new crossroads and it is incumbent upon the people of the country, the members of the current FAI, the Government, and all football loving Irishmen and women to respect what has gone before us to make the brave and courageous difficult steps to a new path and a new dawn of football in Ireland for the good of the game, the respect of the past, the responsibility of the present, and ultimately the right thing to do for the future.

This presentation and document looks to bring the thoughts of a group of independent dedicated Irish people with professional, scholarly, commercial and footballing backgrounds to help outline and present a way forward and a vision for the betterment and the good of football in Ireland, from grassroots and community levels, through the governance of the game and reaching the professional structure of a league of Ireland and national team structures at all levels and for all genders and participants of the game in the country.

The document will look to establish a framework from which the group will be able to further develop with the proper support of both the FAI, the Government, Sport Ireland, UEFA and the temporary formed Reform Group, to ensure the structures, governance, statutes and support elements are structured and established to define a better way forward and a stronger vision for the development of the sport in our country.

Executive Summary



OUR VISION FOR FOOTBALL IN IRELAND

The challenges of modern football call for a revision of our governance structures, development models and commercial initiatives now more than ever. Irish football finds itself increasingly marginalised between the huge draw of foreign enterprises such as the English Premier League and UEFA Champions League abroad, and the successful expansion of Gaelic games and rugby at home. Without a reimagining of approach and redeployment of resources, Irish football risks falling ever further behind, losing more of our playing pool at home to other sports, more of its potential stakeholders to foreign markets and, ultimately, finding itself unable to bridge the gap with our fellow European footballing nations. To address this, we envision a plan for the development of the game that better ensures player development, player welfare, greater access to all areas of the Irish community and stronger integration of people passionate about the game from all corners of the country.

We have a clear plan on how to ensure stronger, more efficient governance, characterised by enhanced transparency and accountability and greater commercial awareness and innovation at all levels. In short, we have looked to address the following key areas:

1. Better Governance

- ✓ Address weaknesses in the governance structure of the FAI Board
- ✓ Greater ownership of football development in each region
- ✓ Greater access to funds to develop football programmes in each region
- ✓ Infrastructure review and analysis leading to a more compelling and commercially viable alternative that facilitates the development of both the amateur game as well as sustaining, developing and supporting the player pathway and professional structures

2. Comprehensive Player Welfare

- ✓ Develop and provide holistic programs that develop players as people and prepare footballers for a future either within or outside the sport here at home, without having to leave our shores
- ✓ Evaluate and strengthen player development, player education and player welfare programmes
- ✓ Create education programs and partnerships that run parallel to the football development pathways

3. Privatisise the League

- ✓ Create an independent, private, commercial entity to run and operate the National League of Ireland
- ✓ Develop accessible, joined-up pathways between all levels of the game to provide all Irish players with a clear and structured route to progress to the highest level possible

4. Grow the Game for Women

- ✓ Strengthen the development, pathway and resources dedicated for women's and girls' football

5. Commercial Engagement

- ✓ Restructure the commercial packaging and programming for the main football properties under the administration

6. Public Engagement

- ✓ Strengthen Government relationship and assistance
- ✓ Develop clear community programmes across cities and towns that integrate stronger co-operation with corporate Ireland and a pathway for integration of private sponsorship (including but not limited to foreign-owned multinationals based in Ireland)

7. Grassroots

- ✓ Facilitate stronger support of recreation football across the country to increase participation and return on investment for partners
- ✓ Develop a stronger appreciation and refocus the affinity of the game and its administration amongst the people of Ireland.
- ✓ Focus on providing support, commercial sustainability programmes, processes and guidelines and training for volunteers and members across the amateur game throughout the country from grassroots kiddies programmes through to senior level and intervarsity and third level football.

We believe it is crucial to address these opportunities with a renewed vigour, informed by an appreciation of how the culture and process currently work but allied to the energy of fresh voices, new energy and fresh perspectives which appreciate the need for stronger, more transparent and resourceful governance from the top level down. This group proposes a framework for the development of these programmes which includes a more commercially viable professional league, stronger national team identity, improved safeguarding of player welfare and a soundly structured 'pathway to success' to help ensure that the Irish international footballers of tomorrow are not compelled to go abroad in order to better themselves but – as with the players from many European countries of similar size and standing to Ireland - have the opportunities, facilities and resources here at home to allow them progress, flourish and ultimately put our country among the most competitive in European and world football.



1. Football in Ireland Visionary Group Members

1. Niall Quinn (Chair)

Niall is a former professional football player who has represented the Republic of Ireland national team 92 times scoring 21 goals and remains our second highest goal scorer. Niall played in two World Cup Finals and one European Championship with Ireland. He played in the UK's top flight for Arsenal, Man City and Sunderland and has played both hurling and Gaelic football for Dublin. He is the former Chairman of Sunderland Football Club in the English Premier League as well as being a former board member of Sport Ireland as well as being a successful business man across diverse industries in Ireland and abroad.

2. Kieran Foley

Kieran is a former League of Ireland player and captained his senior school and University to National titles and captained the Irish Universities team. Kieran has developed major commercial partnerships in sport for O2, Heineken, Liverpool FC, Manchester City, Digicel and several other sports entities. He was the founder and creator of the only third party owned cricket franchise league in the World which currently has 220 Million viewers and is the number two, Twenty 20 cricket league, on the planet. Kieran has brokered major partnerships including the sale of an English Premier League team as well The Ryder Cup, Irish rugby, Usain Bolt, Fiji rugby, Manchester City, the NBA and West Indies cricket partnerships. Kieran has sat on CONCACAF committees for the redevelopment of football across the Americas region.

3. Roy Barrett

Roy captained Blackrock College a renowned rugby school to a senior schools soccer All Ireland and serves as the Managing Director of Goodbody Corporate Finance and Goodbody Stockbrokers and an Executive Director of FEXCO Holdings Ltd. Roy served as the Head of International Equities at NCB Group Limited from 1990 and joined Goodbody Stockbrokers in 1995 as head of Equities. He has extensive experience in international capital markets having worked previously in SG Warburg and Paribas Capital Markets (London). He serves as Non-Executive Director at The Irish Stock Exchange Plc. and as a Non-Executive Director of International Securities Trading Corporation Limited. He served as a Non-Executive Director of Collins Stewart ISTC p.l.c.

4. Gerry Muldowney

Gerry is a former League of Ireland Player who is currently running an independent educational consulting business after being the CEO and co-founder of the Dublin Business School which he successfully ran for several years. A keen sense of developing education pathways and furthering peoples development has seen Gerry develop several alliances between major corporations and captains of industry, and education pathways for people to develop. Gerry has championed the implementation of educational pathways for our younger generation through and parallel to their sporting endeavours for several years. Gerry's input on the education of our young star's football development of tomorrow is integral to the mission statement of this visionary group.

5. Lesley Spuhler

Lesley is the CEO of Sunderland's AFC Foundation of Light since its inception in 2002, where, through the power of football and education she brings the local business community together to empower young people to improve their lifestyle, education and increase their ambition, while improving the Club's standing as a pillar of the community. The Foundations work makes a real difference in the region, and despite the lack of obvious success, the club draws astonishing crowds regularly to the third tier of English football. Onlookers agree the Foundation is central to this remarkable success.

6. Barry Lysaght

Barry is a sports lawyer with extensive expertise in the international regulation of football, having worked at FIFA as legal counsel and group leader for several years. A qualified solicitor, Barry's responsibilities at FIFA included investigating breaches of FIFA rules as well as visiting football associations and clubs across the world at all stages of development to advise on regulatory issues and best practices. A specialist in the regulation of the football transfer market, Barry holds a Masters in Sports Law (with distinction) from De Montfort University where his dissertation on private football academies won the award for Best Thesis. A published contributor on sports law and former Managing Editor of the Asser International Sports Law Journal, Barry has also lectured on sports law at the Law Society of Ireland and the International Football Business Institute in Brussels. Now Senior Legal Counsel at FIA, the world governing body for motorsport, Barry is responsible for disciplinary, regulatory and anti-doping matters concerning Formula One, as well as the drafting of new sports regulations. A deeply passionate and lifelong supporter of Irish football, Barry is a trustee of the charity Football For Refugees and is also proficient in five languages.

7. Eoin Kellett

Eoin has over 30 years' experience in the Irish FMCG Industry, across a number of branded companies. After 10 years working in several different roles within Cadbury/Mondelez, he is now Managing Director of Mondelez Ireland. They manufacture and supply many well-known brands; most notably the Cadbury Brand, but also other leading brands including Oreo, Maynards Bassetts, Belvita and Philadelphia Cheese, with a total turnover of €200m. Eoin has a Marketing Degree from The Marketing Institute, and MBA from DCU and while a major lover of sports has been involved in the amateur administration of the game for several years.

8. James O Dowd

James O'Dowd is Managing Director at TPA Research, a government affairs firm that advises a number of Fortune 500 US multinational companies and large investment funds on regulatory, legislative and political developments across the European Union. James is also a Board Member at the international charity CBM Ireland. He chairs the Governance & Policy Committee at CBM Ireland which oversaw the introduction of a new code of conduct to ensure the charity is aligned with international best practice.

9. Gary Owens

Gary is an experienced professional with both National and International experience as an Executive / Independent Director. He has significant governance experience and has chaired audit and investment committees for both domestic and international businesses. Gary has worked with Sport Ireland on supporting and implementing new governance processes in both Athletics and Boxing. He was also a member of St Joseph's Football Club for many years and is a passionate football supporter. Gary has also been involved in working with volunteers supporting people with intellectual disabilities particularly Down Syndrome. Gary was the CEO Hibernian Insurance for several years, Independent Director AIG both in Ireland and on their European Board and is currently on Leaseplan Insurance Board where he chairs their Audit Committee - Large European Insurance business.

2. Scope of Work

- ✓ The group will seek to develop a proper framework for football in Ireland that would work as the foundation to restructure football in Ireland.
- ✓ The framework will be proposed by the group to the Reform committee
- ✓ Should the Reform committee approve the guidelines and scope of work, then the group would develop a larger framework that encapsulates a complete structure to action the guidelines as set out.
- ✓ The group would then have the responsibility to reconstitute the framework of football both from a Governance stand point, operational and commercial, and upon completion, hand back the complete running to the newly redeveloped FAI.
- ✓ This independent body could then ensure and facilitate the proper requirements to resume the confidence of the Government and the nation in the governance, development and structure of football in Ireland.

These elements would look to include:

A. **Governance:** Realign the governance structure of the FAI Board in line with best practice/UEFA directives

B. **Best practice and accountability:** Restructure the administration of the FAI and ensure that they are empowered for commercial and operational development of football while remaining answerable to the FAI Board on a monthly basis.

C. **League:** Formation of an independent entity that would operate and develop the League of Ireland (men and women) as the pinnacle of professional Irish club football.

D. **Player Development:** Evaluate current models for player development and player pathway structures against international equivalents and – while taking due account of national nuances - provide recommendations to improve the development of players.

E. **Referees:** Development of referees and a clear pathway to a professional structure.

F. **Outreach:** Community marketing and support provided to local clubs, provinces and volunteers

G. **International:** Rigorous review of international player pathway, entry and development (men and women).

H. **Engagement with Public and State:** reconstitute Government relations and funding and seek to restructure major international commercial partnerships as well as community initiatives to be as creative, exhaustive and resourceful as possible.

I. **Coaching:** Including quantity, locations, exchange programmes, development and support.

3. Governance

Governance Values



1. Values: - Setting the culture and ethos of the organisation
2. Leadership, Direction and Supervision: - Open communication, transparency, clear understanding of roles, accountability and support to staff
3. Policies and Procedures: - Formalizing policies and procedures, complying with legal, regulatory and footballing policies and standards.

Current FAI Governance Structure

- 59 council members
- Administration office
- Board of Management and Chairs of Committees
 - President (Donal Conway)
 - Vice President (Noel Fitzroy)
 - Committees: 12 Members with Chair as:**
 1. International (Mick Hanley)
 2. Domestic (Jim McConnell)
 3. National League Executive (Eamon Naughton)
 4. Legal & Corporate Affairs (Paraic Treanor)
 5. Underage (John Earley)
 6. Women's Football (Niamh O'Donoghue)
 7. Finance (Hon Treasurer)
 8. Development (Vice President)

Challenges with the current Board structure

While the FAI Board have a set of governance and compliance structures, it has become clear that a reorganisation to assist the board function and adapt more flexibly is required. The ability for the board to be dynamic or react to a changing environment has become beyond its capability as the number of members and power of action has been diluted significantly. The recent challenges have proven that accountability and governance are areas that need to be critically challenged at the FAI. While a new structure needs to align with UEFA and FIFA statutes, it needs to have a stronger focus on key structures and increased speed of decision making and action as well as a greater appreciation of checks and balances on power and decision making from within the organisation.



Proposed New Board Structure

For the reasons outlined it is proposed to restructure the Governance of the FAI:

1. Restructure the constitution and construction of the Board of the FAI in line with UEFA models and akin to newly adopted procedures at other UEFA Association members.
2. Address Term Limits for each board member
3. Control and accountability to remain with the Board.
4. Administration to address operational and commercial activity, answerable to the board with monthly updates/meetings.
5. Separate League responsibilities to address commercial and operational development of league and players
6. Wider incorporation of the football development bodies in Ireland
7. Mandatory minimum of 1 female Board member
8. Dedicated Board member with responsibility for women's game
9. Maximum age for Board members
10. Implement recommendations of Charity Regulator Governance Code as endorsed by Sport Ireland (https://www.sportireland.ie/Governing_Bodies/Governance/Governance-Code/, <https://www.governancecode.ie/>)
11. Dedicated child safeguarding officer
12. Recognise how the PFAI play a more involved/integrated role in process

4. Improved Community Club Links and Development

The proposed structure would also look to develop more autonomy and voice greater representation for each county and cumulatively for each region. It looks to ensure the development of the game through community and region, through schoolboys and girls, and with a greater appreciation on education and the wider understanding of both social inclusion and greater understanding of our new community lifestyles and culture.

Additional and specific funding and grants would be developed for each region and further programming and commercial sustainability programming with rights and entitlements from the many FAI commercial products being shared e.g. League of Ireland, national coaching and coaches programmes, image rights, media and content rights, digital programming etc. These regional programmes and sustainability programmes would be structured and provided through the administration for the co-ordinated and planned development of community and amateur football and be integrated to the player development pathway programme. While fundraising efforts at community level (community draws and raffles) will always reflect a viable option, they are by their nature limited in scope and somewhat ad hoc in nature. A more evolved vision of needs and requirements, coupled with a more ambitious and innovative approach towards meeting same, can lead to a more resourceful, efficient and structured approach to maximising the commercial potential of Irish football across the country. This can be secured while ensuring that regional members retain a degree of autonomy as well as easy access to support structures, as opposed to a “cap in hand” mentality approach.

Community workshops will be established to ensure there are regular and key learnings provided to the greatest number of volunteers and club members at the amateur level as possible as well as centralised distribution and support.

Key Alliances



5. Player Development

The area of Player Development is critical and core to the success of football in Ireland. The development of our players at a senior international level has been for too long over reliant on the inclusion and integration to the English club level and to seek to be a part of the higher echelons of that league while watching the demise of our own national league and the habitual floundering of the many thousands of young aspiring Irish players who leave these shores at a young age, pre finalising their own education in the hopes of “making it”, only to realise there is no structure which properly supports them or provides for them should they not make it in a non-domestic league in Ireland.

With domestic media deals inflating the value of clubs in England so that Everton are now wealthier than AC Milan, tells its own story that players from Ireland can no longer seek to develop their talents abroad as they face multi-million dollar talent opposition for places at underage levels, not to mention the tens of millions now paid for first team players. This simply furthers our own resolve to grow our own pathways, as while the English Premier League have their domestic media deals, we in Ireland have a partnership with Europe and are home to some of the largest multinationals and corporations the planet has ever seen.

The resources available to the FAI need to be developed but a compelling and stronger argument needs to be constructed to ensure the funds and partnerships are properly provided.

The group have put together a strong appreciation of how best to develop both our player pathway, it's development and how we integrate that both with education as well as player welfare and leading to a self-propagating national league that looks to build into a stronger national team at every level and gender.

Player Pathway (Men and Women)



1. Get more people playing the game

We aim to give everyone an opportunity to play the game and be more inclusive for minority and disadvantaged groups. We need to ensure people enjoy playing football, retain and increase participation. Areas need research and conversations with clubs and districts encouraged but from a top level:

- ✓ Encourage informal formats to adapt to lifestyles, such as 5-a-side and kickabouts.
- ✓ High quality facilities
- ✓ Developing processes and roles for club volunteers
- ✓ Helping them to develop players as well as promote participation.
- ✓ Introducing a player registration process for ongoing communication with every affiliated player in the game and promote opportunities for them to stay in football.

2. Develop better players and coaches

Football in Ireland needs better young players at every level, from local clubs to our international teams. To produce better players, we need to train the coaches who will develop them. We will deliver better coaches and players across the game by:

- ✓ Stronger links with provinces and schools and universities ensuring we increase access to high quality coaching for children in school education.
- ✓ Widen coaches participation and removal of some financial burdens to develop
- ✓ Develop club academies and providing opportunities in the game for players who leave professional football.

3. Promote a safe and fun experience of football

- ✓ Football is competing with other sports and entertainment for people's spare time. The experience needs to be positive. We will continue to raise standards in the game by multiple projects including
 - Pathway programme more visible, more tournaments, more visibility for national level
 - Promotion and marketing of the game locally and regionally and clubs
 - Promoting a safe environment for children by ensuring volunteer process, structures and support.
 - Referee structure, training, support and pathway to pro league

4. Increase and improve facilities

- ✓ Maximising investment into facilities from public and private sector sources, for example through sponsorship or by encouraging the growth of commercial 5-a-side football centres. Securing long-term leases and the granting of covenants for playing fields and green spaces by working with partners such as the Government. Developing sustainable funding and income models to make sure new facilities pay for themselves. Helping local people and clubs improve and protect their own facilities by providing information and guidance on what they can do.

5. Grow the women's game

- ✓ We need to actively develop a proper training and development pathway specific for girls and women. It needs to be properly funded and centrally included in our football development programmes and pathways. Football should be seen as the number one sport for young girls to participate in and for our women's senior and national teams to be a major international force by the year 2030.
- ✓ Proper academies, player welfare and education, representation and coaching needs to be focused on and provided real tangible targets and driven by the association with real intent

6. Coaching

- ✓ Development of coaches, support of Regional Development Officers (RDOs),
- ✓ Inclusion in schools programmes
- ✓ Wider coaching verification and administration of process in the country

7. Referees Development and Pathway

- ✓ Provide a stronger support structure for people to become part of the game
- ✓ Pathway to correlate to player development with specific coaching and analysis
- ✓ Ensure we develop the understanding of the game and assist the better functioning of the game with more qualified experienced referees
- ✓ Tie into the national professional league and develop opportunities for full time professional referees at the highest levels

8. Volunteers

- ✓ One of the key areas in the construct of our player development programmes are the people and manpower that make everything tick. From local area volunteers to community to regional administrators and parents, we need to have a clear structure that clubs and organisations can utilise and adapt to their own specific requirements in each instance
- ✓ Support elements to volunteers in terms of best practices, coaching them on principles, creating apps for them to organise, following protocols to ensure safety and consistency in our coaching and development of players
- ✓ Adapting to specific issues and having a national co-ordination of how we develop community programmes
- ✓ The GAA are a model in our country for outreaching to community programmes and a shared reverence across community gaelic games with respect to instructions and mandates that come from GAA HQ as a simple result of their shared commitment to the community values at local levels, is something we need to reflect on and better, utilising modern communications and technology and generating a centralised control mechanism to adapt.

9. Fans

- ✓ Most players start out as fans and their passion grows from the incubation period of being a fan of the game. We need to broaden our appeal and interaction with fans and create programmes that facilitate access for younger age groups with the game in Ireland and with our values.
- ✓ The creation of fan forums and closer interactions is something that has extreme value not only in commercial attributes but also in the ability to broaden the participation of the game, and the quality of play with aspirational sense.

10. Other areas to potentially address

- ✓ specialised projects focusing on the power of football to unite people and as a force for integration: e.g. special football initiatives for asylum seekers, refugees, immigrants (UEFA and FIFA funding available for this)
- ✓ football as outreach: collaboration with Gardai and Prison Service to provide football facilities and tournaments in deprived areas and prisons (UEFA and FIFA funding available to be tapped into).
- ✓ capitalise on peaks of major football interest during football calendar (World Cups, Champions Leagues) by organising pop-up football facilities, schools festivals
- ✓ beach soccer festivals for the west of Ireland during the summer (explore possible collaboration with Irish colleges and Gaeltacht communities) (FIFA funding available for this).
- ✓ boost public participation through deploying technology: e.g. create a FAI 'Uber-style' app, free for download, to help people all over the country find the nearest football pitch/playing surface to you (and to make bookings where applicable).

6. Women's Football Development

The growth of the game among women has been amongst one of the fastest growing sports and increasingly commercially popular as the social inclusion and awareness of gender equality thrives through society. The fact that the women's national representatives have had to fight for some proper appreciation of their status is shameful to the footballing community globally but with the tides quickly turning, we have the opportunity to lead the way with a properly structured and supportive complete player development programme for girls and women from underage all the way through to a complementary national professional league which would be akin to the National Men's league and youth boys system.

Our support for the national women's team and ensuring we have equally structured player development pathways, education programmes, referee support structures and bring more females into the sport in an inclusive manner, can only go toward radically increasing the participation levels of the game, to enhancing our overall suitability for corporate investment as well as a stronger argument for increased Government funding, to bringing Ireland to the fore of women's football globally, but ultimately because it is the right and proper thing to do for the betterment of our game in Ireland.

Women's football represents an enormous growth opportunity for football. The key focus areas are as follows:

1. The requirement for a centralised and strategic women's football plan to develop the game
2. Making football equally accessible to girls as it is to boys (including in clubs, schools and colleges) should be a major
3. At the elite level, women's football should continue to be developed technically and commercially, through the stable development of commercial structures, regulatory arrangements, and off-field support, in order to build towards sustainable professionalised competitions
4. At all levels, women's football must be better marketed and promoted to grow participation, build the audience and target potential partners.
5. Women's football is at a different development stage to men's football, and differs in other important respects on and off the field - hence it requires special focus and expertise to thrive. Therefore, expertise in women's football is a valuable and unique skill set. Such experts should be involved in all key decisions about the women's game e.g. former players should be targeted for development, leadership and management opportunities, Female coaches are especially important as visible leaders and role models on and around the field of play (especially ex-players),
6. Football, and especially women's football, will benefit from the involvement of women on governing bodies and in management. In principle, the FAI should have women involved at all decision-making levels, including the Executive Committee.



Objectives for the Women's game include:

1. World Cup Qualification by 2027
2. Double the number of female players by 2026
3. Raise the standards of women's football clubs and leagues across all clubs and provinces
4. Double the number of organised youth leagues by 2026 in order to address the dropout rate and sustain girls' participation in football
5. Ensure that by 2022, the FAI have a comprehensive women's football strategies
6. Develop and implement a Football in Schools Programme
7. Foster greater cooperation, education and advocacy for women's football between the Government, civil society organisations, employers, multinationals and the public in general.

7. Development of Game Officials and Referees

The importance of a strong and solid referee's structure cannot be understated in the development of the game across the country.

The advocacy of refereeing has never been pushed or promoted to our detriment, but we should enhance and support the opportunity for people with a passion for the game to become involved in refereeing, especially former players and entice them into refereeing in the same manner as we do for coaching and management.

The key areas of focus need to be developed along the some broad parameters but the focus must be toward the following:

1. Development of a uniform and consistent level of referee coaching and education.
2. Build consistency in the youth programmes and work from the ground level up.
3. Develop a stronger system in each local league, province and region that ensures the proper support, mentoring and coaching of referees.
4. Build programmes into school systems and local clubs to facilitate an easier transition into refereeing.
5. Refocus the culture nationally toward referees, their decisions and the reactions and attitudes of fans towards respecting referees through increased communication, training, media profiling and an overall greater involvement in the referee development pathway and the general public awareness.
6. Develop Elite Academy programming to increase the number of FIFA referees listed for international duty (currently 4 referees with a total of 15 officials).
7. Programme full time referees into the National League who will have more responsibility to develop the programming and increase the awareness, profile and participation as referees.
8. Build consistency in programming framework for decision process on the field for referees and especially at young entry level grades.
9. Integrate educational organisations to facilitate inclusion and programming into third level courses and cross programming of educational achievement.

Overall, the opportunities for the development of the game, increasing the general public's awareness of the process of the game, enhancing the culture of the game especially at local and club level as well as professional and international, providing more commercial opportunities and increased participation in the game itself, all lead to positive outcomes and objectives with clear target setting to properly redefine, restructure and address more enhanced referee development programming.

8. Professional League of Ireland – Men and Women.

The League of Ireland is the pinnacle of Irish football for player development for Men and Women, and the pathway we need to structure our grassroots football forward.

With the advent of digital media, the ease of distribution of sports products, the commercial success of football worldwide, and the overall quantity of people who play and consume the sport, the professional football league in Ireland requires immediate and complete transformation.

The realities and influence of the major internationalism of the English Premier League has curtailed the development of a lot of Irish players by top professional clubs in the UK, and with the impending effects of Brexit, more opportunities lie with us to develop our own league and our own players now, more than ever before.

The League changed the timeframe from winter to summer football period in order to replicate the Scandinavian model and to leverage greater opportunities for success in European competition, but no further appreciation of the commercial modelling or support of clubs, player development or community pathways were established to provide the necessary structure to support the notions of replicating the “Rosenborgs” of this World.

The visionary group would propose a new structure from the current framework in that the League would become an independent commercial body but play under the official regulations and statutes of the FAI, under UEFA and FIFA rules, but run independently commercially by a third party e.g. English Premier League structure.

The rights for the League would be developed both centrally and per team, with a clear distribution of centralised funds as well as team revenue opportunities. A clear understanding and management of all areas from sponsorship to broadcast and content creation, to event activities, merchandising, community programmes and more would be detailed in a new construct which would align all parties into a more cohesive plan for the benefit of all.

As well as Men’s, the league office would be responsible for the Women’s league and the development of the major elite development of our League of Ireland players.

The elite Referees and professional referee development plan would also come under the auspices of the league administration and with it, a greater sense of the commercial opportunities around the top tier marketing programmes for the national identity of the game played locally.

Brand Appreciation and Interaction Delivering Increased Revenues

The 6 Key Objectives:



Key Components

Players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Local and provincial structures to ensure player pathway ◆ Top ranked Players to be on International pathway
Commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Sponsorships and broadcast or digital media sales critical to P&L ◆ National commercial plan supplemented by regional commercial programmes
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ FAI / Government / PFAI / UEFA critical in first three years. ◆ Media, PR and Brand plan and management critical
Broadcast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ High Quality TV Production to a wide audience (digital/mobile/cable/terrestrial) ◆ Cover costs of high end production and drive profit and ROI for sponsors/Ptnrs.
Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Football must be credible and core product – legitimate and well received ◆ Strong core values to be derived with key differentiators to drive attendance
Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Model developed on supporting and developing teams ◆ Team owners to provide key strategic support



Central Management of Key Strategic components to ensure alignment

9. Infrastructure

The key aspect for any development of the game will live or die based on the access, use of and ultimate ownership of proper and efficient facilities and a strong effective infrastructure overall.

The professional game, player pathway programmes, club participation, school systems, and even increased amateur participation, all depend on our ability as a country to develop the proper facilities that properly support the development of the game, but as importantly, they need to be built as self-sufficient commercial properties with efficient management structures in place to keep them viable and growing.

While the playing surface will always need to be paramount, the effects of our weather and climate patterns needs to be accounted for, as well as the proper floodlighting, facilities, car parking space, changing rooms and capacity to ensure we can take advantage of the many programmes we need to develop. Some key elements would include:

- ✓ Program Development
A large part of sports facility management is program development. To develop facility programs for a variety of groups such as school-age kids, serious athletes, stay at home moms, high school age teens and more.
- ✓ Cost Containment
The profitability of sports facilities with effective cost containment strategies.
- ✓ Human Resources
Administration duties, hiring and training of staff, Sports Facilities Advisory/Sports Facilities Management maintaining a quality program to ensure the day-to-day operations of sports facilities run smoothly and efficiently.
- ✓ Marketing
Highly effective sports facility management that attracts sponsors, drives revenue and promotes the facility within the community and beyond.
- ✓ Asset Management
The FAI need to provide a central functioning of sites which includes management consulting with the staff and management to address its challenges with resources, tools, and systems that can be implemented within the sports facility to improve profitability and operations.

The key learnings have been around the opportunity to develop, and key to this will be a proper understanding on the unique land holding opportunities to be researched. Burden of not owning land to properly capitalize on commercial options is a threat.

As we look to substantially grow the development of the game, both socially, brand development through marketing, professionally with a league, breaking diversity with more programmes with inclusion initiatives and gender equality, there is more access to open discussions with Government and local councils to ensure the provision and venues specific for football development.

Potential partnerships with multinationals and local corporations, civil social organisations with benefits to develop local community fields for football by inclusion in wider national football benefits, structured centrally and managed nationally, would be advantageous for all concerned but need to be structured centrally and developed as part of a wider plan.

Development opportunities to include:

- ✓ Elite game and practice fields
- ✓ Astro turf Fields for practice and commercial opportunities
- ✓ Futsal and indoor facilities
- ✓ Partner forums and conference centres
- ✓ State of the art athletic centres with potential to attract visiting teams in other disciplines (including coaching expertise)



10. Commercial Partnerships and Media

There exists strong commercial opportunity for the FAI outside of the usual FIFA, UEFA, Government grants and Sport Ireland funding that, if properly restructured within the FAI could lead to more substantial commercial solidity while reducing the considerable reliance on FIFA and Government funding.

The restructuring of the league to provide for more commercial opportunity as well as the broadening of participation, the management services for infrastructure, the broader commercial programmes through community projects, more multinationals, wider ability for grant development.

Commercial Development



5 Key areas of Commercial Lifecycle



A strategy can focus on 5 key areas to ensure you engage your partners in a 2 way conversation which will build brand affinity for both, value, and achieve objectives.

11. Government Relations and Multinational Support

The current relationship with the Government and its various entities has lost complete confidence and requires a radical overhaul in both its working relationship as well as its interactions. We urgently require to address these challenges and our visionary group for football in Ireland have already taken initiatives to understand what the major challenges are and the opportunities to develop these relationships as well as opportunities in the private sector.

Some key areas for us to redesign our focus will include

1. Building (and Sustaining) Close Relationships with Elected Officials Through Consistent Communication
2. Manage Engagement with Officials and Staff – ensuring key messages are developed with key relevant personnel
3. Address Grants, wider social programming, relationships with multinationals and community programmes, inclusion programmes with Government support and national health and wellness programmes among others.
4. Information flow to be increased significantly both with partners and the public.

While the Government, its agencies, and civil social organisations are among some of our major partners, we are also conscious of our major partnerships with the World Governing body at FIFA and the European authority at UEFA. Having already established a strong understanding of our intent and opportunity with both, the visionary group is well positioned to ensure a seamless progression into a new stronger focus on development and transparency.

The final main partnership for major support will be a commercial one with some major private run organisations that offer great potential support for the country but require certain understandings for their own particular circumstances. Again, the visionary group have already taken the initiative and initial steps to further appreciate opportunities and programmes that could work for a greater benefit for all involved in Irish football but that would require a greater understanding from all parties involved.

12. Irish Football Fans

Last but certainly not least is the most integral part of the puzzle, which are the fans. The inclusion of fans has been the heartbeat of Irish football, and no more so than now, with football fans financing and owning League of Ireland teams, to volunteers being the backbone of every club team and amateur side in the country, to the coaches who double up their weekly workload by organising club events, games and activities just to see the players develop, and the game thrive in the country.

It is certainly fitting to ensure that the fans of the country, and the heartbeat of the game, are provided an appropriate forum and vehicle to interact with the administration and ensure that their thoughts, concerns, additions and suggestions are heard.

As such, the group would look to develop the right forum that provides fans and volunteers with the opportunity to more closely understand the developments in the game more opportunities for their inclusion, more support for their marketing programmes from a centralised structure that is designed for community football or amateur clubs, or aspiring professional league teams, that incorporates all social backgrounds, race, abilities, colour, religion and gender so that we can establish a stronger football culture and grow as a nation to be a stronger footballing country.



13. Objectives and Conclusions

The visionary group have a stated objective to deliver football in Ireland onto a stronger sustainable path that brings increased participation, a stronger professional league, wider marketed football league internationally, more inclusion and gender equality than ever before and a sustainable more robust commercial plan to ensure football starts to become more self-sustainable into the future.

The desired outcomes would be wide and varied but some highlights include the following:

- ✓ A new Governance structure adopted by the FAI by the end of 2019 and a new structure to come into effect
- ✓ A new and advanced relationship with the Government and all Government entities including grants process and central sports funding
- ✓ A new more complimentary governance structure as per FIFA and UEFA and to ensure a wider appreciation of the many development programmes and processes to be taken advantage of from footballs governing bodies
- ✓ The creation of an entity and transfer of ownership of all commercial IP and operational responsibilities of the national senior League to it by 2020 with the new league structure to commence no later than 2021
- ✓ An analysis report for the player development pathway including player welfare and player education by 2020 with a revised structure to be in place by 2021
- ✓ Create sustainable revenue and marketing programmes in each region of Irish football by 2023 and ensure a more robust commercial model in place
- ✓ The restructuring of commercial properties and adoption of a new commercial programme by 2020
- ✓ Increase participation in football by 7 ½ % year on year from 2020
- ✓ Create a viable and profitable League of Ireland by 2026
- ✓ Have one league of Ireland Team qualify for the group stages of the UEFA Champions League by 2027.
- ✓ Qualify for the FIFA Men's World Cup competition by 2026 and the European Championships by 2028 and the FIFA Women's World Cup by 2027
- ✓ Win an underage European Championship by 2032
- ✓ Qualify for the semi-finals of the FIFA World Cup in 2038