

Review of Youth Football: Survey Responses

This paper is designed to inform discussion on the key aspects of youth football relevant to the development of a youth football framework in Northern Ireland.



Survey

This paper sets out the findings from the youth football survey carried out online between October and December 2023. In total 23,628 responses were received of which 22,418 were deemed complete and were analysed. The findings are presented across five sections:

- Introduction
- Methods
- Findings
- Themes
- Conclusion

Introduction

The Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030 sets out how government in Northern Ireland propose to improve the well-being of children and young people. The document notes that Children and Young People are experts in their own lives and wellbeing. Therefore, decision makers must consider and take into account the views of children and young people in all matters affecting them and provide appropriate opportunities for Children and Young People to be heard. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in Northern Ireland, noted that mainstreaming children's and young people's voices in decision-making processes requires further work. Therefore, it was crucial that this survey provided the opportunity for children and young people to have their voice heard in the process of this youth review. More than 13,000 players and 1,000 former players responded to the survey.

The significance of the review and the desire of stakeholders to support positive change is demonstrated through the more than 20,000 responses to the survey. The responsibility of those entrusted with leading youth football in Northern Ireland was reinforced by a coach response to the survey:

'I hope you take points made by everyone seriously. You have a great opportunity to make a real difference here to the standard of player currently being produced' (Submitted 2023-10-02 11:11:37).

A school teacher noted the importance and potential of the survey:

'Huge potential for improvement with this review. great initiative'

(Submitted 2023-11-09 21:41:17).

A further comment from a club official noted both the progress to date and the journey ahead for youth football in Northern Ireland:

'Youth football has come a long way, but a lot of work has still to be done'

(Submitted 2023-10-04 21:50:10).

The importance of providing players a voice was articulated by a player who stated:

'Offering this survey was a brilliant idea and it has allowed me to express how I feel and comment on the factors and potential changes in youth football'

(Submitted 2023-10-02 17:18:38)

A further club official highlighted the need for evidence to support change and the importance of leadership in delivering change:

'Sometimes there has to be disruptive leadership - insist on change backed up by the evidence from the youngest age groups' (Club Official).

In acknowledging these views, this paper presents the results of the thematic analysis of responses providing context to the previous elements of phase one of this review. This paper should be read in conjunction with the rapid research review and the proposed framework actions presentation.

Methods

A total of 22,418 participants from a range of stakeholder groups - players (14,011), parents (4,302), coaches (2,108), administrators (382), referees (218), school teachers (260) and former youth players (1,137) - completed the Irish FA developed youth survey.

The survey findings are divided into two sections: Closed questions – presented in graphical format and open questions presented as themes.

With relation to the open questions. A one-way MANOVA was carried out to investigate differences across stakeholder groupings in terms of perceived strengths and weaknesses of the current situation with regards to youth football in Northern Ireland. Data analysis was supported through the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (NVivo). This was used as part of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step procedure for thematic analysis to ensure a rigorous, deliberate and reflexive process of data analysis. Step one involved reading and re-reading the data for familiarisation and accuracy to produce codes, as part of a data driven process whereby the content itself guided the analysis. Common themes were established based on repetition, commonality across stakeholders and alignment with identified issues. Initial codes summarised the data; similar codes were then sorted into clusters as part of the search for themes using an inductive approach specifically related to the data. Codes were then checked to ensure their fit within each theme; followed by an assessment of the relationships between themes. Next, the individual narrative of each theme was checked against the overall picture for coherence and consistency. This methodology was finalised by selecting examples to underline each theme.

The representativeness of the sample in terms of role is outlined in Figure One. The chart demonstrates strong response rates across each stakeholder with more than 60% from players.

Figure 1: Role of Stakeholder

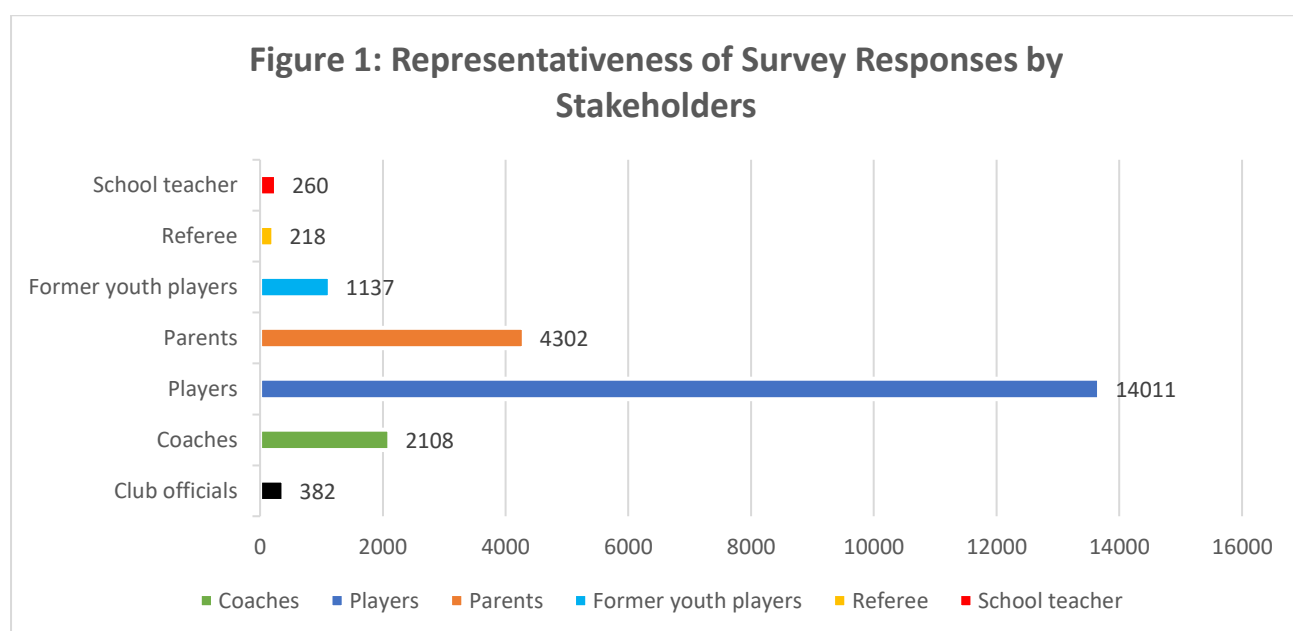


Table 1: Respondent by role

| Respondent Role | Count | Percentage |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Player | 14011 | 62% |
| Parent/Guardian | 4302 | 19% |
| Coach | 2108 | 9% |
| Former Youth Player | 1137 | 5% |
| Club Official | 382 | 2% |
| School Teacher | 260 | 1% |
| Referee | 218 | 1% |
| TOTAL | 22418 | 100% |

Table 1 summarises the respondents role indicating that more than 60% of respondents were current players. The importance of listening to the children’s voice was noted in the recent report titled UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Northern Ireland which suggested that although, there has been progress in developing structures to mainstream children’s voices in decision-making processes, more work is required. Therefore, decision makers such as the Irish FA must take into account the views of children and young people in all matters affecting them and provide appropriate opportunities for Children and Young People to be heard.

Figure 2: Regional spread by county

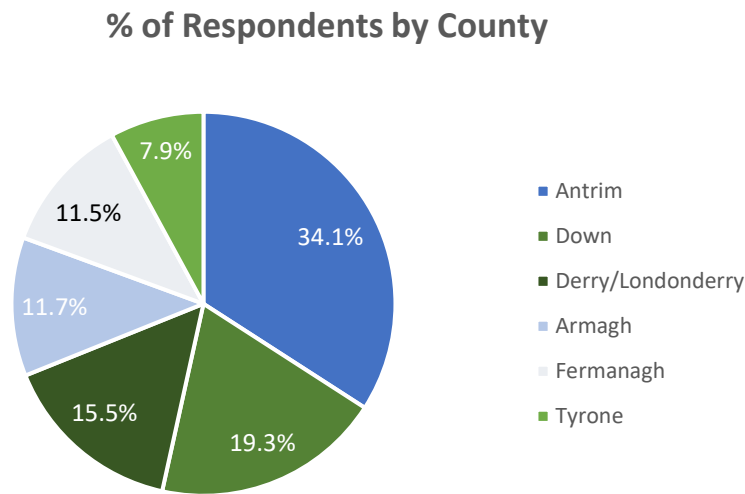


Figure 3: Actual Regional Population by County

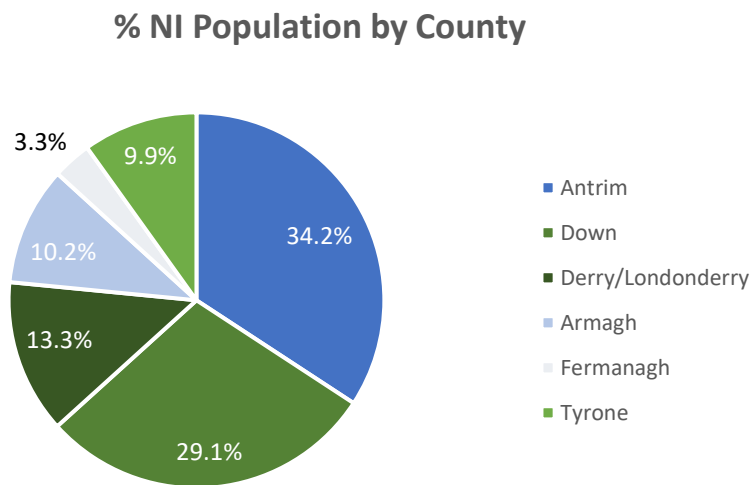


Table 2 indicates a representative sample across the majority of regions however, County Down has a 10% lower response rate (19.3%) in comparison to the actual population (29.1%) while Fermanagh demonstrates a higher response rate (11.5%) compared to the actual population (3.3%).

Table 2: Regional Spread by county

| County | % of Respondents by County | % of NI Population by County |
|-------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Antrim | 34.1% | 34.2% |
| Down | 19.3% | 29.1% |
| Derry/Londonderry | 15.5% | 13.3% |
| Armagh | 11.7% | 10.2% |
| Fermanagh | 11.5% | 3.3% |
| Tyrone | 7.9% | 9.9% |

Current Structures

The thematic analysis highlighted positive elements of the current youth football structure as well as areas for development. In particular, respondents commented on the growth in youth football and the vast number of volunteers who provide opportunities for young people to take part in sport and physical activity through football. Three positive aspects of the current youth football system were participation, people and community.

The growth of youth football was demonstrated by one club official who stated:

‘Over the past few months we have grown by over 200% with a huge influx of children from all ages and backgrounds...’(Club Official)

This was reinforced by a coach who suggested:

‘There’s opportunities everywhere no matter the age or level, there’s always someone, somewhere that will give a youth an opportunity’ (Coach).

The long term benefits of which were noted by a school teacher who suggested youth football:

‘Provides an opportunity for youth to develop and learn skills to help them in the future’ (School Teacher).

This was reinforced by a further club official who commented that youth football:

'Gives opportunities to so many young people to play, learn, develop and compete at a variety of levels to suit them' (Club Official).

The comments demonstrating the potential contribution to wider health and social outcomes from participation in youth football. The potential engagement with both boys and girls who also identified by a school teacher who highlighted:

'The sheer numbers of children both boys and girls that wish to play the game' (School teacher).

Similarly, a referee noted that:

'More kids are getting involved in football, including more girls. This is because of the wide range of teams' (Referee).

The growing opportunities for girls and the future potential of this was also noted by a further coach who suggested the:

'Increased popularity, especially in the girls' game, means there are lots more players coming through than in most other sports. That broadens the pool from which talent can be identified' (Coach).

A schoolteacher also highlighted the inclusive nature of football stating that:

'The diversity of children playing football is fantastic. Football is the largest most inclusive game we have and it is important to create more opportunities for all children to play competitively with each other across the country' (School teacher).

While a further schoolteacher described the broad benefits of youth football commenting that:

'The benefits of participation where lots of clubs in our local area give opportunities for primary school aged children to get involved in a team sport to foster a lifelong love of physical activity. It also helps develop their communication and teamwork skills alongside having fun and making friends' (School teacher).

People and the importance of volunteers, coaches and administrators was a further positive aspect identified across youth football in Northern Ireland in terms of growth, commitment and knowledge. As one club official noted the strength of youth football as the:

'The dedicated volunteers that coach and run clubs to facilitate youths getting the chance to play' (Club Official).

More specifically, a coach suggested:

'There are a lot of coaches who care a lot about developing players as people first' (Coach).

This was reinforced by a referee who highlighted the important role of coaches and clubs:

'Strengths lay within the coaches who can develop young players and also within the clubs and education of the right people to become coaches' (Referee).

The comment indicating coaches' awareness of the potential contribution of football to wider outcomes and the role of the coach in supporting the whole person not just developing them as a player.

The work of the off-pitch volunteers was also recognised by a referee who stated:

'The organisation behind each game is thorough and the commitment from said league committees is a massive strength' (Referee).

The extent and reach of this network of volunteers was captured by a school teacher who commented that:

'The high level of enthusiasm and dedication to local sport despite the lack of facilities. Families and volunteers have built a huge community who support the youth when they can, most beyond their own means' (School Teacher).

A further positive aspect of the current youth football structure in Northern Ireland was the importance of community. As noted by a club official who suggested that youth football was responsible for:

'Bringing communities together' (Club Official).

While a further club official noted that football allows players to have fun and be socially active:

"Kids out there having fun and being socially active with other kids' (Club Official).

A further club official recognised the importance of community to the rural communities, noting that:

'Whilst rural facilities are generally inadequate, the community volunteer support is immense' (Club Official).

Community was identified as the third theme reflected in both access and community relations, the importance of which was demonstrated by a comment from a club official who noted that:

'The future of your club is in the Youth of your community. Neglect the Youth of your community and you will neglect your club' (club Official).

This point was reinforced by a coach who suggested that:

'Clubs play a big part within the community and can entice players into football and ensure retention, progress is made with their development (Coach).

A comment from a coach suggested that football offers a inclusive opportunities:

'(Football) gives players the chance to come play football from all backgrounds' (Coach).

Reinforcing this point a referee commented on the inclusive access across Northern Ireland:

'There is a great selection of teams from all areas of the country and great community spirit within the teams' (referee).

A further coach suggested that football can have broader outcomes in building community engagement and break down barriers:

'It (football) brings children from all religious, social and economic backgrounds together under one banner. It makes me very happy to see kids play together unaware of religious differences' (coach).

A point endorsed by a further coach who noted that:

'Mending a partnership in a divided country for me I feel is youth footballs biggest strength'.

Nevertheless, while comments suggest football is open to all, mention is made of the need to ensure barriers are reduced. As one coach noted that we need:

'Better community facilities at a reasonable cost' (Coach).

While a further coach suggested that

'More help for clubs so fees for players can be reduced to stop Pricing children/families out' (coach).

The three positive aspects of the current structure Participation, People and Community provide a strong base for this youth football review to build on. Recognising the strengths of the current youth football structure in Northern Ireland and working with those involved in delivering youth football across the country offers an opportunity to maximise the benefits which can be achieved.

Underlying Principles

The survey responses also pointed to issues which need to be resolved in terms of how any youth football framework should be delivered. Three important underlying principles were identified: Equity; Transparency; Inclusion. It is proposed that these cross-cutting principles will underpin the delivery of the new youth football framework. Figure 4 articulates the rationale for the three underlying principles.

Figure 4: Underlying principles:



The need for these underlying principles were identified from a range of quotes. Equity was mentioned by a series of stakeholders in relation to facilities, opportunities, playing structures and pathways. One club official who commented:

'Rural areas are forgotten about and the support is not there on the ground'

The perception of inequity was reinforced by a club official who stated that:

'We need to have a province wide approach rather than it appears at the moment a Belfast based approach'.

This was also mentioned by a coach who stated that:

'In my opinion not all kids get the same opportunity as kids from Belfast or the so called big clubs',

Two further coaches noted the need for regional equity at different levels of the game:

'More regional leagues at grassroots level'.

And

'More coaching academies West of the province'.

The perceived difference between Irish league clubs and youth clubs was again highlighted by a club official who noted that:

'I believe Irish League clubs receive much better support from IFA etc than grassroots'.

This point was also discussed by a coach who commented that:

'A better control on players moving to top clubs all the time, which creates a massive gap between a handful of clubs and leaving local clubs . This creates a situation where the few clubs are constantly benefitting financially from selling young players who started their journey at other clubs, making them stronger' (Coach).

A further common issue raised was the lack of understanding of the issues faced on the ground with a club official noting there needs to be:

'More visibility of IFA out in regions'.

The mention of grading and playing teams of a similar level was noted by two coaches who commented that what is needed is:

'Fairness and equality. Teams to play teams near them instead of travelling to where they see the supposed best league' (coach).

'Improved league structures (should be) based on abilities. Leagues should work together more to make sure kids are playing at the levels that suit their abilities'(Coach).

With reference to girls football a club official noted the need to recognise the difference between girls and boys football in particular, suggesting girls football needs a bespoke approach rather than simply adding girls programmes to existing structures:

'The Irish FA is to be commended for the renewed emphasis that it has placed on Women's football in recent years but it will not be sustainable or worthwhile if the urgent issues facing girls youth football are not addressed. Youth football for boys has a clear structure and pathway for boys to get experience and develop but for girls teams, it is a significant challenge to find youth football structures that are well organised and delivered to give the same experience. 'Shoe-horning girls leagues into established boys leagues does little to enhance the girls' game and reinforces the narrative that girls and women's football is the poor relation, and not really an area of interest..... Recognising the differences between boys and girls youth football is a critical starting point and women and girls football clubs should be engaged with directly to begin to address the challenges faced and develop solutions' (Club Official).

A parent also noted the difference in culture relation to boys and girls football:

'We are delighted that my daughter plays in a mostly brilliant environment. She is nurtured and cared for and the focus is fun and improving. We haven't encouraged our son to play for a local club as the boys environment seems more difficult to manage and overly competitive' (Parent).

Regional inequity was mentioned by a coach who noted:

'Honestly outside of Belfast I struggle to see strengths we genuinely have to travel which is costly to offer best opportunities to our youth that put in tremendous amounts of effort' (Coach).

The equity of access and decisions was further reinforced by another coach who stated:

'Move training and matches out of Belfast so players from all over NI feel like they too can be selected if they're talented enough and work hard. Recent NI u16 girls squad...was anyone from the Northwest even looked at?' (Coach).

This point was also made by a school teacher:

'There needs to be a more visible presence in the schools and a greater pool of children picked for development squads outside the Belfast area. Most Northern Irish players are based in either Antrim, Down or Armagh. There needs to be a significant shift to identify talent from beyond just these areas' (School teacher).

A number of school teachers also raised the issue of equity in terms of engagement with non-traditional schools in rural areas

'More opportunities in rural schools. I worked in a city school last year and felt there were more opportunities for those children than my current role in a more rural school' (School teacher).

'Support ALL schools and youth teams, not just major clubs and larger communities' (School teacher).

'Most focus tends to be on traditional footballing schools (School teacher).

With reference to facilities specifically a number of coaches raised concerns related to equity:

'Better facilities provided to all areas, not just west Belfast/Lisburn..... More support from Ifa/councils' (Coach).

'Better facilities for country and village clubs, more help for parent/coaches to further develop their coaching skills. More funding to develop kids to go on to represent their country' (Coach).

'Coaches at county/national level to be independent and not affiliated to local teams' (Coach).

These points were endorsed by a school teacher who stated:

'Once again I feel that a survey and interest may lead to nothing changing. And when it does lead to funding, this seems to go to the bigger counties. It would be great to see a study of the current facilities in each county and weight the funding that way. The Belfast region always seems to receive more' (School Teacher).

The comments raising the perceived inequity and preferential treatment across regions and clubs in Northern Ireland youth football.

The second underlying principle identified from the survey was Inclusion. This principle was summed up by a school teacher who stated youth football should involve:

'Widen(ed) participation across all communities' (School teacher).

A series of stakeholders discussed the need for inclusion of all sections of society in youth football:

'More inclusivity for players with disabilities. Both learning, mental and physical where possible'. (Coach).

'More involvement/encouragement for those who don't normally play' (School Teacher).

'Girls are always just pushed in where there is room left' (Coach).

'The boys league have introduced girls but its just an add on'. (Coach).

'Our school is in a socially deprived area so opportunities for the children to develop their full potential is limited' (School Teacher).

'More opportunities for weaker kids to ensure they don't fall out of love with football and stop playing, therefore hitting the streets, it's essential they have plenty of options to play in their teenage years. Need to understand playing NL level is not the be all and end all' (coach).

'Providing football for all kids with different abilities. It also gives the kids an outlet to meet other children' (Coach).

'More inclusive - SEN/learning difficulties football. More opportunities for players in grassroot clubs to enjoy the same chance of individual success as those at higher club level' (School teacher).

'Our school is in a socially deprived area so opportunities for the children to develop their full potential is limited' (School teacher).

'I am a P2 teacher and feel that football training in this younger group should be encouraged more. Generally it is P3 upwards that get opportunities to be coached by a trained coach' (School teacher).

A coach also raised the issue of inclusion of futsal to promote its development commenting that there is:

'No plan or support is currently in place for youth Futsal development' (Coach).

The point of inclusion in performance pathways was discussed by two coach who stated that there needs to be:

'More inclusion for kids who aspire to play at a higher level. Some good players going unnoticed who don't play or have opportunities to play National League level (coach).

'A wider national high performance programme starting from a younger age.....Too few kids are exposed to elite coaching and other players' (Coach).

Transparency was identified as the third underlying principle to ensure dissemination of opportunities, access to support and so that rationale for decisions can be better understood.

One coach highlighted the uncertainty caused by the Irish FA restructure:

'Since the restructure of IFA local staff, it is difficult to know who to turn to for specific issues. Every club should be given a newsletter or info pack about who to go to locally for support (Coach).

A Parent discussed the broad issue of transparency at clubs stating that:

'More transparency within clubs. Lots of issues brushed under the carpet' (Parent).

More specifically a coach suggested that greater transparency was needed in selection for performance pathway commenting that:

'Transparency in selection processes for representative teams/programs' (Coach).

This was further reinforced by a coach who noted that:

'When comes to NI select squads or league representatives. Think there is a lack of scouting being done. Just maybe taking managers opinions or other coaches

opinions. .. think there is a lot of quality players not playing for the so called top Irish league teams.'..

A school teacher suggested:

*'Better communication between schools and the IFA and other regional bodies'.
(School teacher)*

While a referee made a broader point about communication stating that:

'More press and acknowledgment of all the good that goes on' (referee).

Two other referees suggested a need for more communication in relation to on pitch actions:

'More observers and game observers for spectators and more feedback to leagues and then to referees' (referee).

'I'd like more visibility of punishments applied to teams and contact made to affected refs afterwards. In serious cases refs should be involved in the process' (referee)

Children's Voice

The substantial response from players and former players was a significant positive from the survey. This was recognised by one player who stated:

*'Offering this survey was a brilliant idea and it has allowed me to express how I feel and comment on the factors and potential changes in youth football'.
(Player).*

The comments from players provide a valuable insight into the experiences of players which should be used by policy makers to inform future decisions. Of greatest concern is the comments from players related to feeling pressurised while involved in youth football, this included one player who just youth football should have:

'More Freedom And Less Pressure' (Player).

While a further player suggested the issue was the:

'Pressure on a child particularly in Irish league clubs, way some coaches speak to players on pitch' (player).

Other players identified the role of the coach in creating a supportive environment:

'More encouragement' (player).

'More encouragement from coaches' (Player).

“Better and more supportive coaches’ (player).

A further player pointed to the need for greater inclusion of all in youth football suggesting:

‘Including everyone in sports and the competitions’ (Player).

Players also suggested more teams, tournaments and competitions were needed, with four players commenting:

“More tournaments’ (Player).

‘More cup competitions’ (player).

‘More teams’ (player).

Figure 5: Children responses aged 6-10

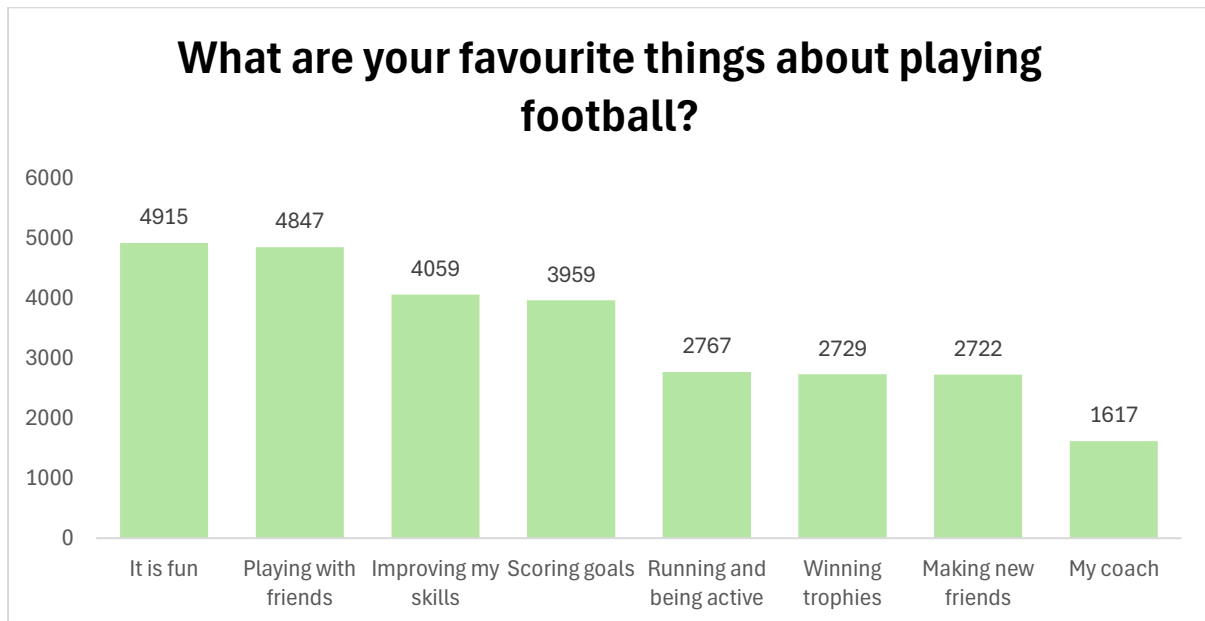


Figure 6: Children responses aged 11-14

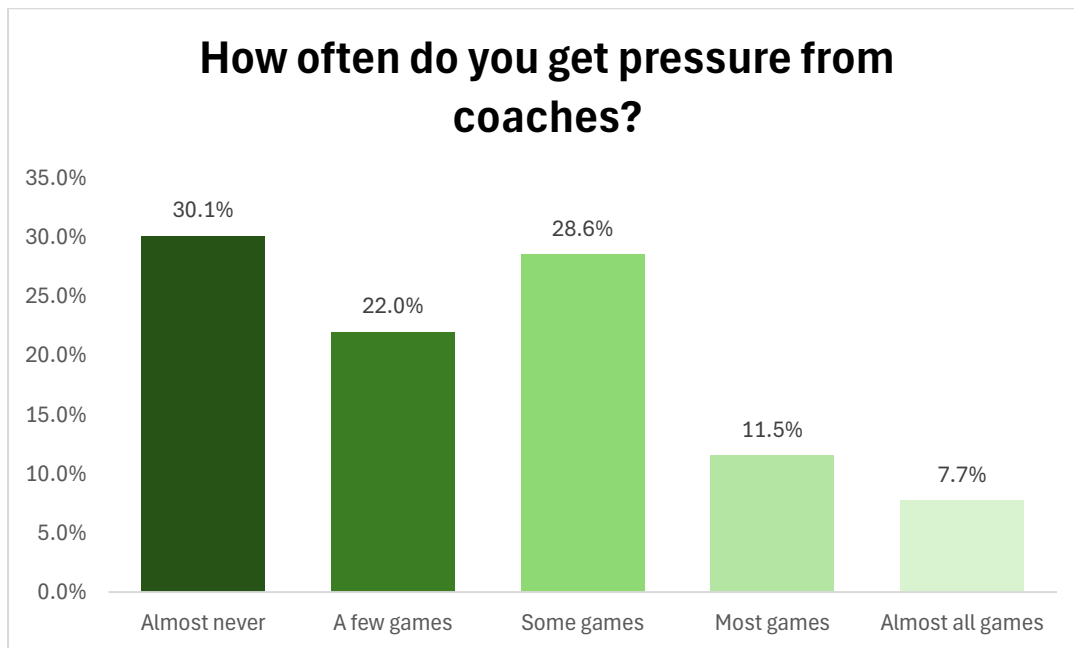
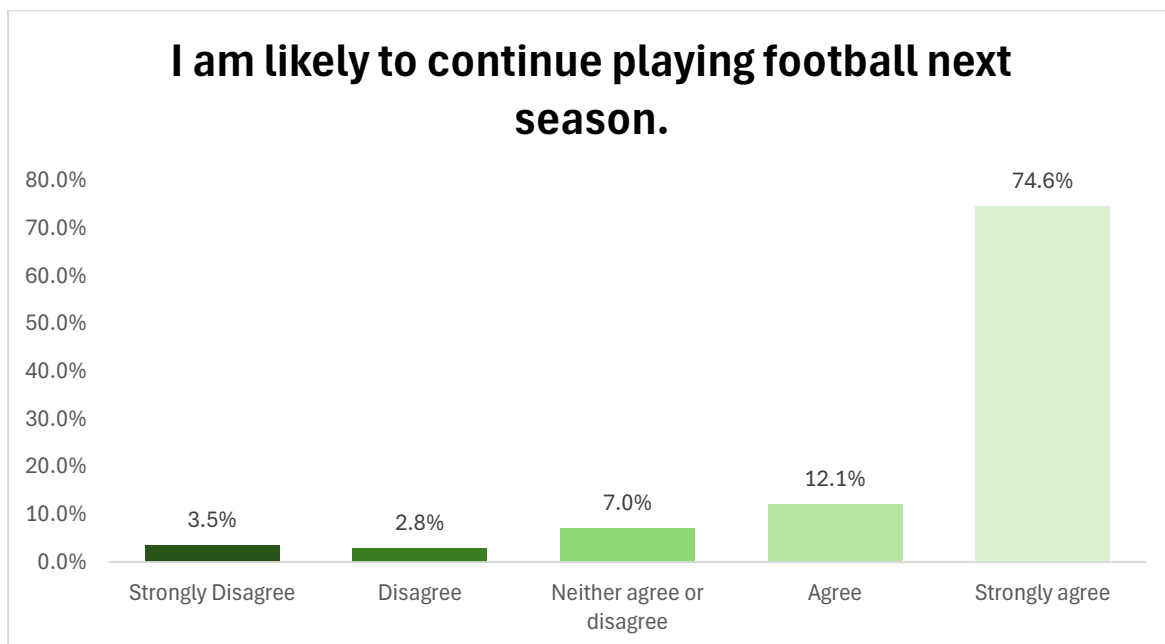
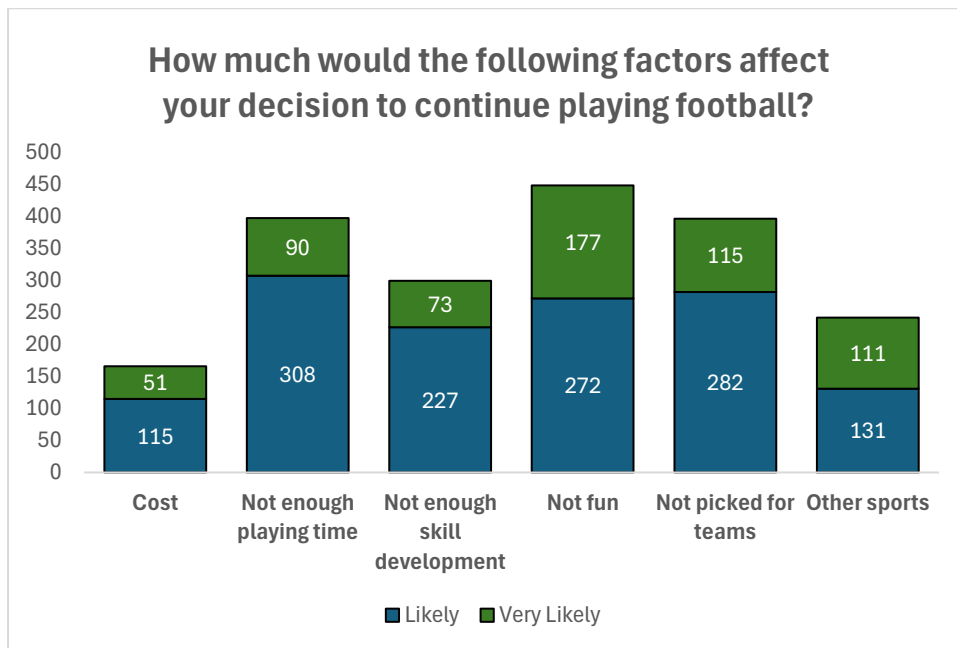


Figure 7: Children responses aged 15-18



6.3% (883) of the 15-18 year old players surveyed said they disagree or strongly disagree to the statement “I am likely to continue playing football next season”. Some of the reasons are illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Reasons for not playing football next season for 15-18 year olds.



Themes

The initial thematic analysis identified four common themes – Partnerships; Governance; Resources and Education. Each theme had a number of common sub themes which are presented in Figure 3. The themes were created based on the quotes from the survey summarised in Table 4.

Figure 9: Survey Themes



Figure 9 presents the four themes. Each theme is independent of the other but also interlinking.

The Partnership theme was reflected in responses related to collaboration, clarity, communication, pathways and recognition. The theme was summarised by a club official who commented that:

'Better collaboration between all parties instead of working against each other' (Club Official).

The issue was further reinforced by a parent who stated that:

'Speak with Rugby and GAA to stagger playing times. My son is 7 and wants to play all three but can't at present. I think it is important up to secondary school that the kids can play all sport' (Parent).

Collaborations outside of the football sector was also mentioned by a club official noting that we:

'Need to work closer with other codes in particular Ulster GAA. The clashing during the soccer season for development squads and championship games has a huge impact on player numbers and retention for clubs like ours with dual players. It's a real challenges and impacts progression of the club and in some cases has resulted in us being unable to field teams at certain age groups and having to withdraw from competitions' (Club official).

A further club official summarised the problem by suggesting that:

'NI youth football is ridiculously fragmented'. (Club Official).

This point was illustrated at a club level by a coach who highlighted the strain between youth teams and Irish league clubs commenting that:

'Youth football has a great product but needs to ensure smaller clubs aren't consistently losing players to clubs that are solely trying to build elite teams. It weakens the competition and in some instances threatens the existence of teams' (Coach).

The perceived difference between Irish league clubs and youth clubs was again highlighted by a two club officials who noted that:

'I believe Irish league clubs receive much better support from IFA etc than grassroots' (Club Official).

'The current system is too heavily weighted to earning NIFL clubs maximum development funds to the detriment of boys & girls clubs' (club Official).

While a further common issue around player transfers to senior clubs was discussed by a club official who suggested that there is a need to recognise the role of youth clubs in player development stating:

'Reward clubs for any player who plays senior football for any Irish League team' (Club official).

The area of talent identification was also noted by a club official who suggested there was a need for:

'A designated scout for each youth league to identify players who can progress'

More broadly a number of stakeholders provided suggestions to improve collaboration and clarity:

'Just get more togetherness between club and school' (School Teacher).

'That all leagues were monitored and came under one set of governance that they had to adhere to so the same format is rolled out through the country' (Coach).

'Better structured pathways and academies. Better communication between teams and IFA youth national teams' (Parent).

A further club official commented on the need to support and recognise those delivering youth football on the ground stating:

'Hopefully this review can support the local leagues as they do a great job with minimal volunteers'.

This was supported by a school teacher who stated:

'The high level of enthusiasm and dedication to local sport despite the lack of facilities. Families and volunteers have built a huge community who support the youth when they can, most beyond their own means'.

These points align with literature which suggests that the environment in which youth sport takes place contributes to the participation rates of children and young people. As such a collaborative effort is needed from all sectors to create a supportive environment for sport and physical activity (McFlynn et al., 2023). One which promotes equal access to resources and opportunities. The starting point is to articulate purpose, agree responsibility for defined outcome indicators and to coordinate existing structures. In doing so the effectiveness and efficiency of the interlinking elements of sport can be maximised (Ferguson 2023).

Figure 10 and 11 shows club officials' responses to perceived level of support from their youth league and the Irish FA showing more need for support to the clubs from top-down.

Figure 10:

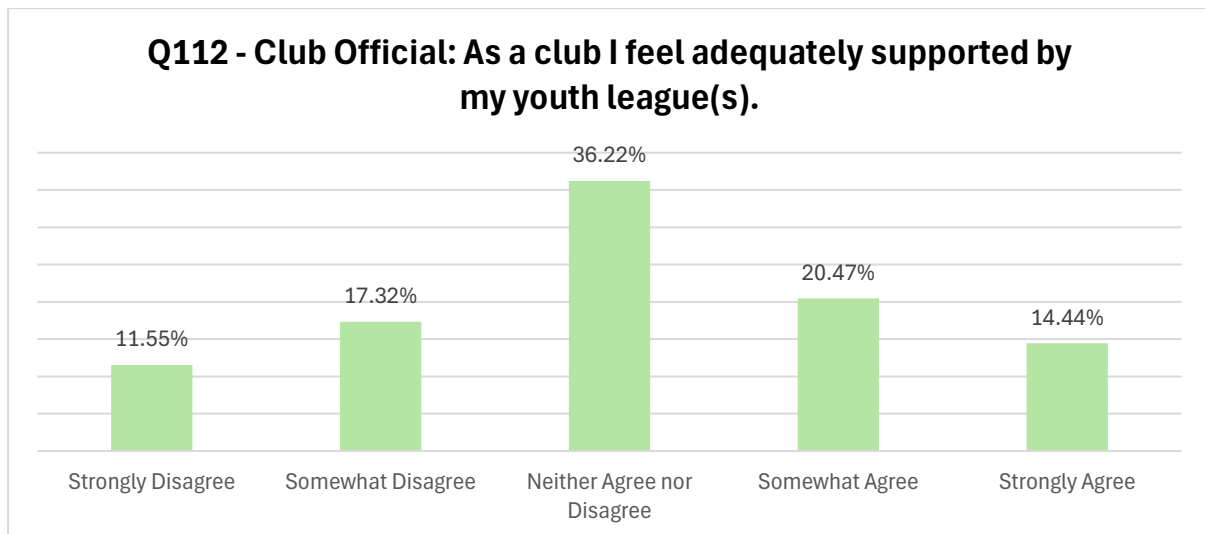
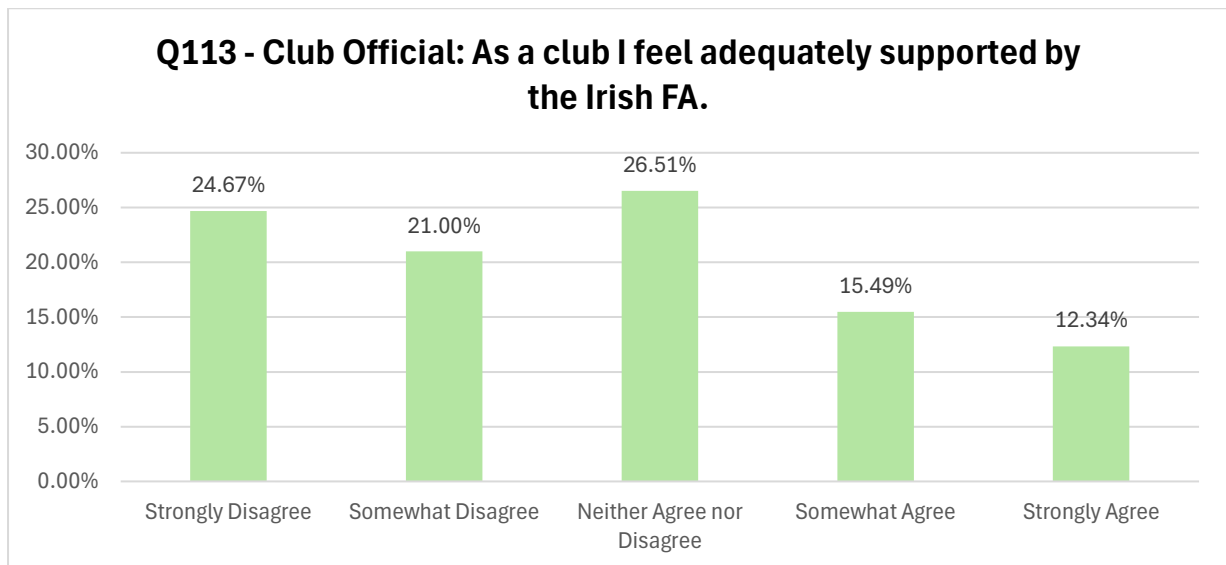


Figure 11:



Education

The education theme was reflected in responses related to personal and social development, coach education, physical literacy, behaviours and philosophy. Operationalised with particular focus on accessibility and flexibility.

The theme was summarised by a parent who commented that:

'There is so much opportunity for football in NI - coaches do need to be educated in youth development as opposed to just football to gain an understanding of the wider world of young people' (Parent).

This comment demonstrates the broad nature of the education theme. This was further endorsed by a club official who suggested:

"It would be great to have more coach education and workshops/courses offered out to all clubs for coaches, players, volunteers, parents. Ideally all volunteers should have safeguarding, first aid training, mental health support training, and also the opportunities to gain coaching qualifications and attend workshops about making football more inclusive...". (Club official).

This comment points to the expectations on clubs and the broad range of skills required by coaches. Nevertheless, it should be considered that the majority of coaches in Northern are volunteers (Sport NI 2019). A club official highlighted the pressures volunteer clubs face as youth football attempt to improve standards stating:

'There is far too much pressure from the IFA and associated organisations being put on clubs that are 100% made up of volunteers. The IFA is trying to drive a minimum operating standard from clubs that are run by volunteers who are also juggling jobs, young families and personal life' (Club official).

Further comments pointed to the need for flexibility and access in the delivery of education courses to meet the needs of the volunteers involved in youth football across Northern Ireland.

'Reduction in coaching course costs and greater accessibility. Online resources have been developed recently but more could be done in this space' (Club Official).

'More IFA presence / help / guidance with clubs. More in person interaction (IFA representation at matches, club visits etc). Clearer guidance to clubs on the structure within the IFA' (Coach).

The importance of educating parents and coaches on expected behaviours and expectations was noted by a coach who suggested:

'I would like youth football to be viewed as development first and results secondary. This will take a massive shift in coaches motivations/parents behaviour as I feel everyone gets dragged into the ultra competitive nature in NI. The first question every child or coach gets asked after their match is 'did you win'? We are missing the point....player development has to be at the forefront of everything we do in this country up until' (Coach).

This comment also highlights the importance of parents and coaches understanding the purpose of youth football and the need for a clearly articulated philosophy. This point was reinforced by a coach who suggested:

'People try and say that it's all about development, but this is nothing more than an empty statement by many, who really only care about winning. There needs to be more substance to this moving forward; clubs, parents and even players need to be better educated on this' (Coach).

It should be considered that while the majority of responses suggested the philosophy in youth football should prioritise development over winning. Table 4 provides comments from stakeholders who suggest more competition is needed or in the case of a club official:

'There needs to be a clear balance of football for all and having football being competitive to build resilience' (Club Official).

The level of competition was also raised with one coach noted that:

'Competitive matches must begin early' (Coach).

While a further coach agreed stating that:

'Kids need competition (Coach).

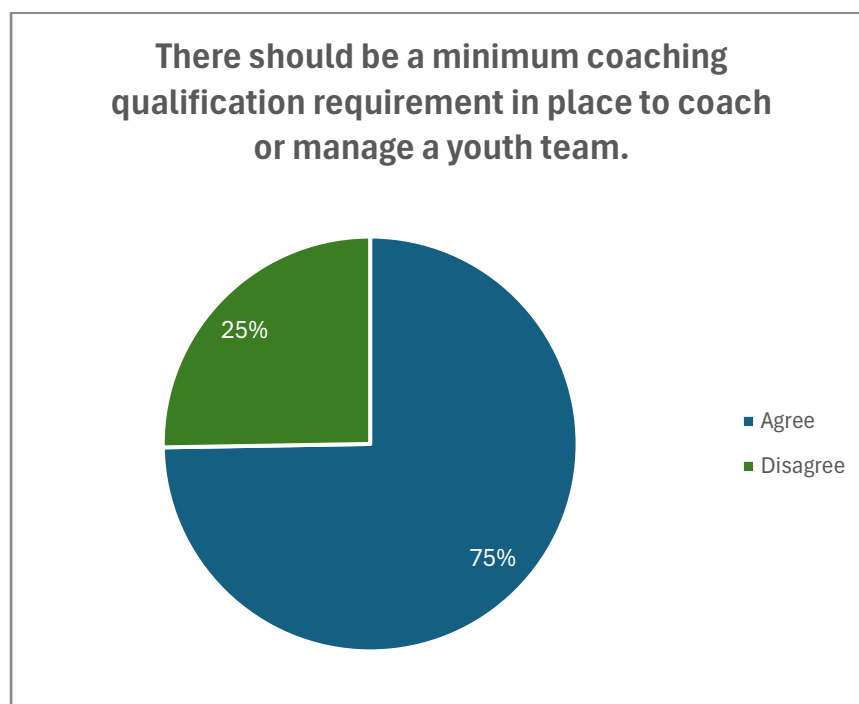
Parents are vital in supporting involvement in sport and physical activity (Harwood, Knight, et al 2019) therefore, we need to provide educational resources and programmes for parents (Burke et al 2023)

The final point under education aligned to comments under the governance theme, around the need for minimum standards. In this case a coach suggested there was a need for:

'Stricter rules on who can coach and a minimum coaching qualification to allow it' (Coach).

Figure 12 shows coaches responses to minimum coaching qualifications with the overall majority (75%0 in favour).

Figure 12:



The literature surrounding education suggested that It is important to recognise and support coaches the majority of which are volunteers. Better education will support coaches to gain the knowledge and understanding of the behaviours and activities necessary to satisfy the needs of children and young people (Sport NI 2019).

Children are more likely to join a club and stay with this club if they are encouraged and supported by enthusiastic coaches in a safe and fun environment. (Sport NI 2019). 'Coaches are responsible for creating a developmentally appropriate learning environments that ensures children maintain active sports participation (Bailey et al., 2023:56).

The next theme identified was Governance reflected in responses related to sub themes of Rules, Formats; Structure; Consistency; Regulations; Behaviour, Standards; Culture. The theme was summarised by a parent who commented that:

'Small sided games to last until an older age better transition when going to 11 a side for example pitch size and especially net size' (Parent).

The comment reflecting the need for children and young people to play football under rules and formats which meet their needs. This point was reinforced by two coaches who suggested that youth football should offer :

'3v3 to 11v11 stepping stones' (Coach).

and

'Exposure to opportunities' (Coach).

The comment reflective of the need for a tailored transition across youth football while offering players opportunities to take part in differing football activities. A point noted by a coach who suggested:

'We need to get our most promising Kids under the instruction of the best coaches we have to offer and don't just concentrate on results' (coach).

Specifically with regards formats, the success of the small sided games programme was noted by a club official:

'SSG format has been really successful since its introduction' (club Official).

This was reinforced by a referee who commented that:

'Programmes like Games Development Programme and shooting stars give a good opportunity to all kids both male and female which overtime will see a big improvement in both the men and women's game in years to come. These sort of programmes also help bring back the fun and enjoyment for youth football that was missing before it was put in place' (Referee).

Specifically, a coach highlighted the importance of the grading to allow players to play at the appropriate level.

'Different colour codes for SSG for players to play at correct level'.

Similarly, the adoptive rules were also identified as a strength of young football with a referee highlighting the positive influence of the:

'use of 'roll-on, roll-off subs' (referee).

Other considerations suggested where related to summer football and offering games suitable for all:

'Summer football for some of the younger players' (Coach).

'Kids being able to Play development in the year younger if that's what's best for the child' (coach).

'More leagues to support less able-bodied and weaker players' (Coach).

(For team registration) 'Go by School year' (Coach).

On a similar theme a referee suggested that at the younger age group coaches should be able to oversee matches ensuring refereeing resources can be reallocated to the older age groups.

'Refereeing resources wasted at younger age groups, club coaches should be used to allow referee resources at older/adult matches' (Referee).

Of concern was the common theme around disengagement from football this was articulated by a coach who stated that:

'At the younger ages we have them engaged. It's when they start to get older I believe we lose them' (Coach).

A player summarised the issue and highlighted a need for change in youth football by stating youth football needs:

“More Freedom And Less Pressure” (Player).

This concern was reinforced by a school teacher who commented:

‘There are a number of football clubs in our locality which our pupils can access but I feel that sometimes the enjoyment of the game is lost by the pressure to succeed’ (School Teacher).

The issue of selection and dropping players was also raised by a further two coaches and a school teacher who commented:

‘Clubs should be encouraged to bring inexperienced players in at all ages. It’s horrible to think of 9, 10, 11 year olds being told they aren’t good enough’ (Coach).

‘The selection & dropping of kids is not development’ (Coach).

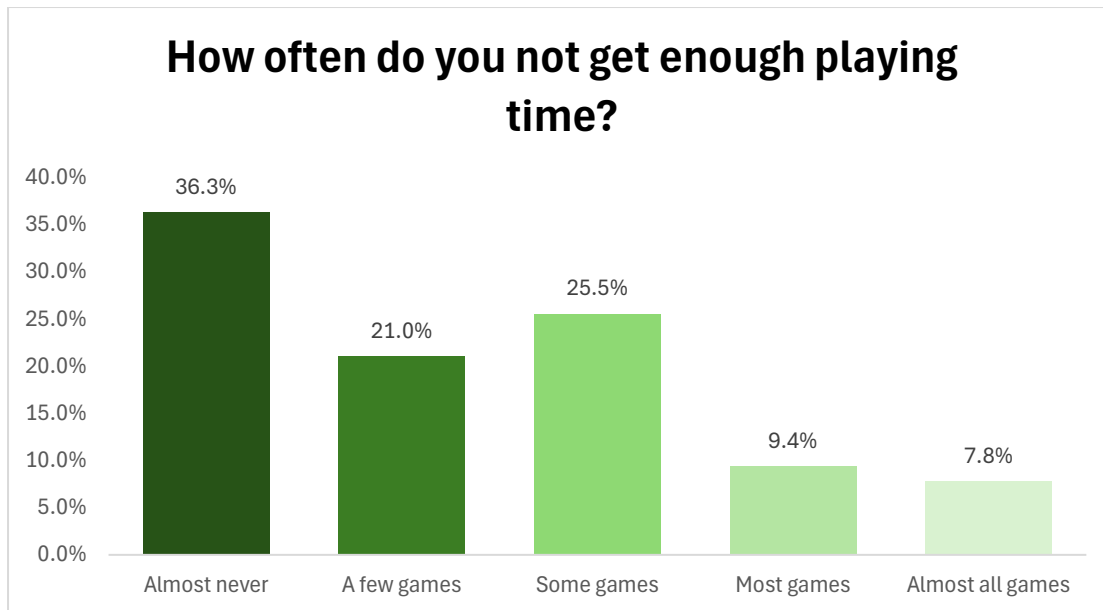
‘I dislike that teams make cuts as the children get older (School Teacher).

A referee provided on solution to the issue stating that:

‘Every player in the team should be given a certain amount of game time’ (Referee).

Figure 13 shows players aged 11-14 responses to game time. This shows that just over 17% of which feel that they do not get enough playing time ‘most games’ or ‘almost all games’.

Figure 13:

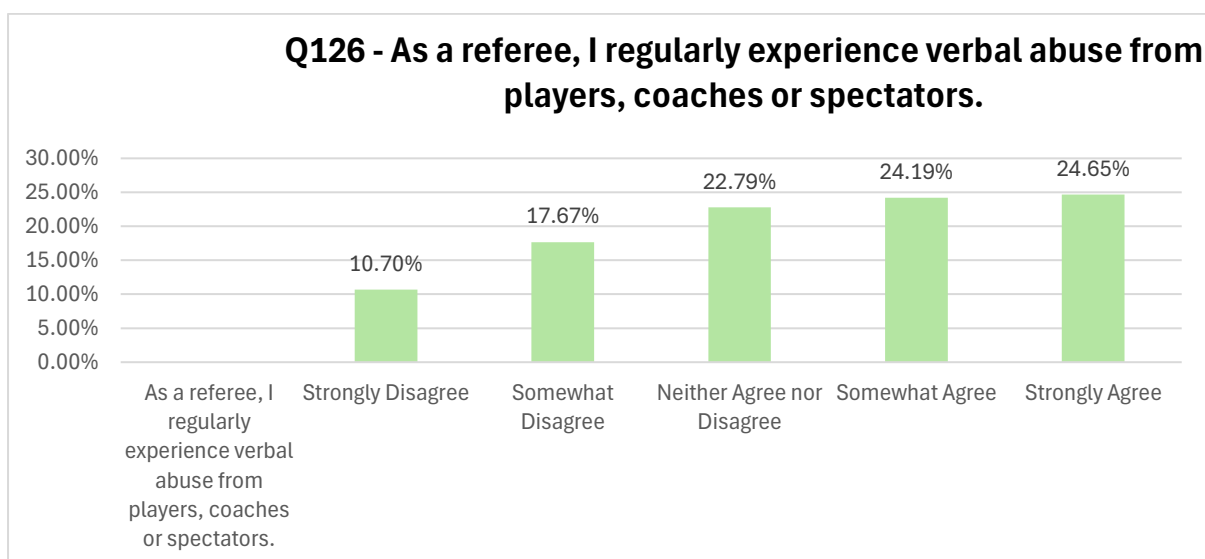


A further referee highlighted the behaviour off the pitch and its influence on the pitch suggesting there should be stricter regulation:

'Zero tolerance to referee abuse. Particularly from adults on the sidelines (coaches/parents). When parents behave poorly it immediately impacts players' behaviour' (Referee).

Figure 14 shows referee's responses to verbal abuse from players, coaches or spectators. Almost 49% of referees feel that they 'somewhat agree' or 'strongly agree' that they regularly experience verbal abuse from players, coaches or spectators.

Figure 14:



A number of stakeholders suggested that there should be a designated zone for supporters and that stricter regulations should be introduced to address these issues. In particular, one referee suggested:

‘Clubs should be responsible for parents behind the pitch perimeter. Harder fines / sanctions for not controlling the parents’ (referee).

The comments suggest the need for improved inclusion and a pathway within youth football for all, with more regulation to address poor behaviour in youth football. The need for greater oversight was also made by a parent regarding enforcing regulations at clubs commenting that:

‘Irish fa need more responsibility to actually checking out how clubs treat kids. Clubs state commitment to grassroots and go of the back of it when they don't show grassroots commitment or ethics’ (Parent).

Figure 15 shows that just over 66% of 6-10 year olds feel ‘very unhappy’ or ‘unhappy’ when spectators shout and tell them what to do.

Figure 15:

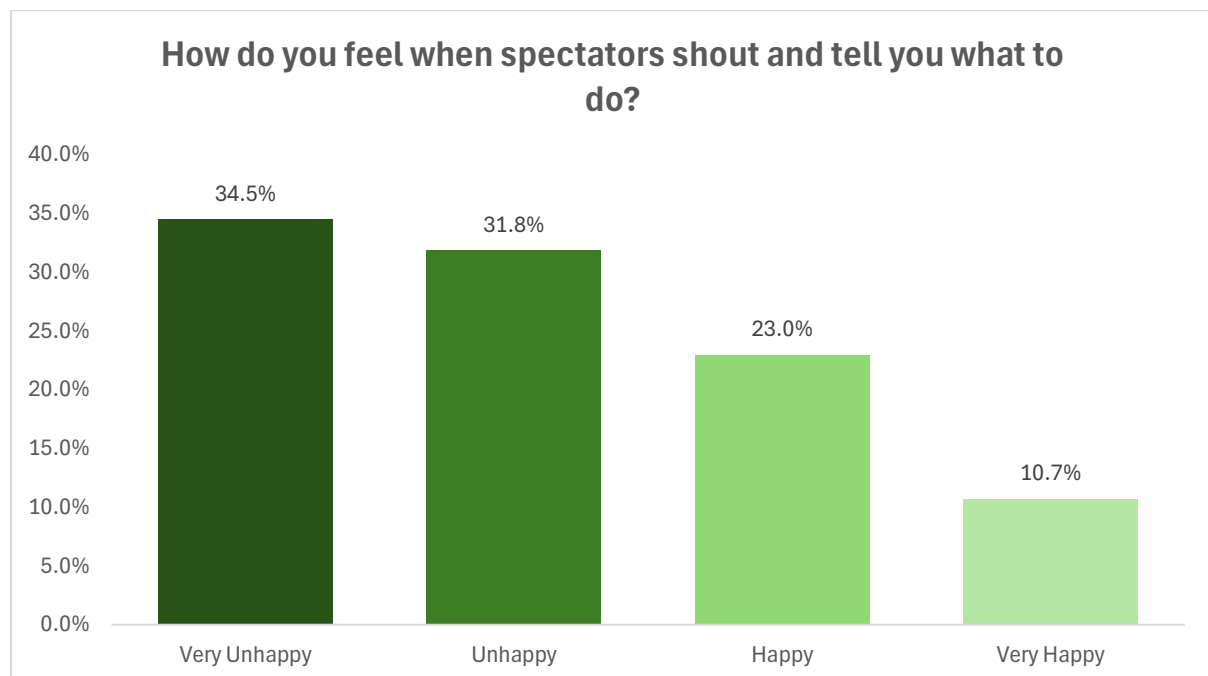
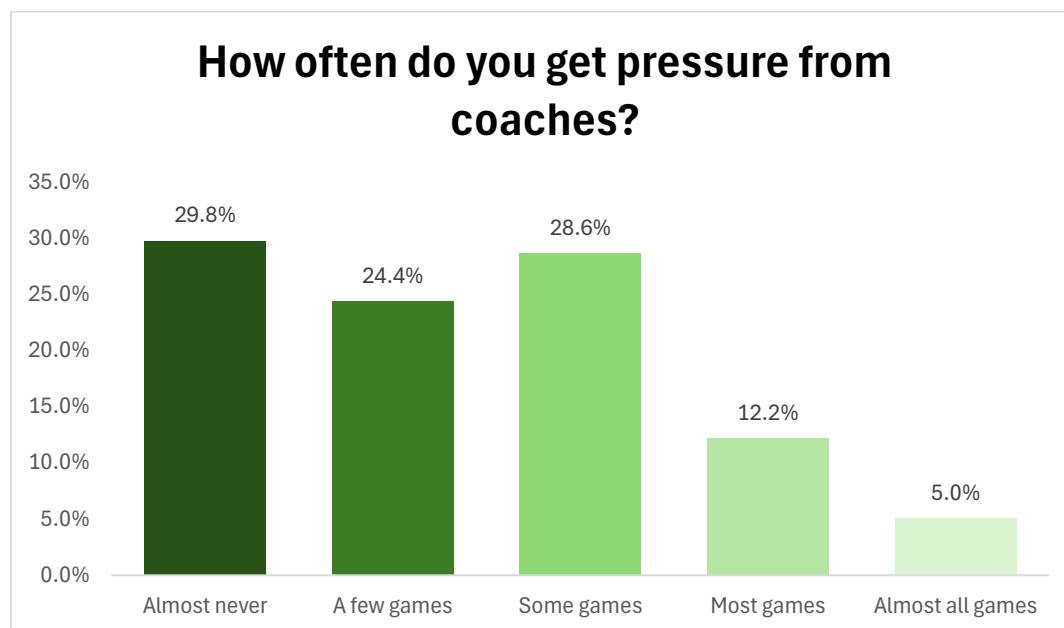


Figure 16 shows that just over 17% of 15-18 year olds feel pressure from coaches ‘most games’ or ‘almost all games’.

Figure 16:



The final comment under governance identified the need for those responsible for delivering youth football to have voice in decision making. A club official commented that there should be:

'More opportunities for clubs to feed into the decision making process at youth level. A more active and better club support mechanism with engaged staff' (Club Official).

The rapid review of literature related to governance suggested that sporting activities should take account of the developmental differences in age of children and young people to balance fun experience, with pathway engagements and social opportunities (Sweeney et al 2021, Carlin et al 2019, Bailey et al., 2013, McCarthy et al 2008). At the younger age groups development activities should be inclusive of technical skill and fundamental movement activities (Lundval 2015, Belton et al., 2014).

Parents can positively influence children and young people's experiences and help them fulfil their potential when they support their children properly (Burke et al. 2023). Adversely, the environment created by parents and coaches influences disengagement. Whether intended or not negative touchline behaviour can cause increased anxiety, reduced confidence, player drop out and negative parent-child relationships (Burke et al 2021, Carlin et al., 2019, Carlin et al 2015).

The final theme identified was Resources reflected in responses related to sub themes of Facilities; Funding; People and Data. The theme was summarised by a club official who commented that:

'Most importantly, for everyone that is involved in football in Northern Ireland, both at a youth and senior level, the facilities across Northern Ireland require significant (and long overdue) investment to ensure everyone has the opportunity to play/volunteer in a modern, clean, and safe environment' (Club Official).

The issue of facilities was raised by a number of stakeholders with concerns around the lack of regional equity and bespoke facilities to meet the specific needs of youth football. A coach suggesting the need for:

'Better facilities that are fit for purpose as there aren't anywhere near enough 7 or 9 aside pitches' (Coach).

A further coach suggested that a joined-up approach was needed with council and schools to maximise the use of facilities commenting that:

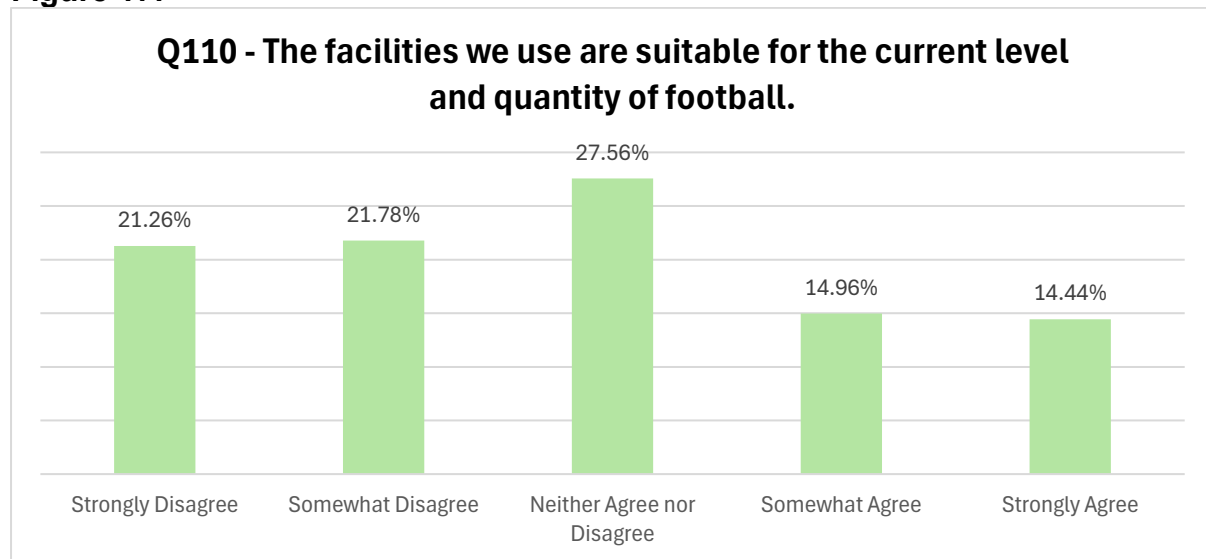
'More consultation with councils and schools to utilise facilities better throughout the year. A lot of secondary school have great facilities not being used in evenings and weekend that can be used but also councils need a joined up approach with gov bodies in what is need for each area and fund accordingly' (Coach).

A club official noted the need for a better understanding of the current standard and availability of pitches suggesting:

"A survey on pitch availability and the standard of facilities would be helpful". (Club Official).

Figure 17 shows that 43% of club officials 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree' that facilities are suitable for the current level and quantity of football.

Figure 17:



The concern related to facility availability is that a lack of facilities can drive up costs and ultimately negatively impact participation. A club official summarised the issue by stating that:

'Organized Youth football is only available to those families that can afford it. Clubs are having to charge high prices to meet the high costs and ultimately those who can't afford to pay, can't play' (Club Official).

In terms of people a referee highlighted the importance and expertise of those volunteers noting that the strength of youth football comes from the:

'Knowledgeable and dedicated Volunteers, referees, coaches and league committees' (Referee).

While a further club official noted that the importance of their role.

'Lots of volunteers ... are committed to doing the right things' (Club Official).

Supporting these volunteers was raised by a number of stakeholders with one club official commented that:

'Finance support and training for volunteers (was needed) to improve standards' (Club official).

A series of coaches highlighted the need to consider resources across the range of football activities inclusive of disability football, futsal and girls football. One coach commented that there was a need for:

'More inclusivity for players with disabilities. Both learning, mental and physical where possible' (Coach).

A further coach highlighted the support needed for futsal:

'No plan or support is currently in place for youth Futsal development' (Coach).

While a different coach stated that:

'Girls are always just pushed in where there is room left' (Coach).

This was reinforced by a further coach who stated that:

'The boys league have introduced girls but its just an add on' (Coach).

The rapid review of literature related to resources suggested dropping out of sport is common during school years with time, other commitments, access, costs and loss of interest suggested by children and young people as frequent barriers restricting participation in sport and physical activity (Bailey et al., 2013, Corr and Murtagh 2020). Therefore, to achieve the aim of lifelong involvement in sport and physical activity there is a need to create an environment which is welcoming to all, one which provides more opportunities to participate and have fun (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization 2015).

This report has summarised the key themes identified from the youth football survey, Table 4 provides more detailed responses of the common themes identified from the youth survey responses.

Cross Cutting Sub Theme

A sub theme which came across a number of the themes was culture. The importance of culture in partnership working, education, governance and resources meant that it was considered as a stand alone theme. Although not recorded as one of the final four themes it should be considered as a cross cutting sub theme. The comments below from a range of stakeholders articulate the importance of culture within youth football.

'IFA to be strong on mapping out a structure and policies that are adhered to by ALL to ensure the best environment is being provided for a safe and quality learning environment' (Club Official).

'Too much emphasis on winning/competition. This should only become a necessity at u14s upwards. Let kids develop at their own speed without this constant desire to beat somebody 1-0. Also there is an obsession with printing score lines on social media - no team needs to lose by double figures at primary school level without somebody publicising the event (coach).

'People try and say that it's all about development, but this is nothing more than an empty statement by many, who really only care about winning. There needs to be more substance to this moving forward; clubs, parents and even players need to be better educated on this' (Coach).

'Improved behaviour from the side lines. Let the players play in an encouraging environment and not winning at all costs' (Club Official).

'I would like youth football to be viewed as development first and results secondary. This will take a massive shift in coaches motivations/parents behaviour as I feel everyone gets dragged into the ultra competitive nature in NI. The first question every child or coach gets asked after their match is 'did you win'? We are missing the point....player development has to be at the forefront of everything we do in this country up until Senior Level' (Coach).

Table 4: Theme Comments:

| Table 4 Theme | Summary Quotes | Sub Theme |
|-------------------------|---|-----------|
| Summary Comments | <p><i>‘Sometimes there has to be disruptive leadership - insist on change backed up by the evidence from the youngest age groups’. (Club Official).</i></p> <p><i>‘Youth football is outgrowing itself in terms of facilities and volunteers’ (Club Official).</i></p> <p><i>‘More help, please. We want to grow, develop and support our boys and girls to enjoy their football’. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>‘IFA to be strong on mapping out a structure and policies that are adhered to by ALL to ensure the best environment is being provided for a safe and quality learning environment’ (Club Official).</i></p> <p><i>‘Once again I feel that a survey and interest may lead to nothing changing. And when it does lead to funding, this seems to go to the bigger counties. It would be great to see a study of the current facilities in each county and weight the funding that way. The Belfast region always seems to receive more’. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>‘We are delighted that my daughter plays in a mostly brilliant environment. She is nurtured and</i></p> | |

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| | <p><i>cared for and the focus is fun and improving. We haven't encouraged our son to play for a local club as the boys environment seems more difficult to manage and overly competitive' (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Offering this survey was a brilliant idea and it has allowed me to express how I feel and comment on the factors and potential changes in youth football'. (Player).</i></p> | |
| Governance | <p>CONSISTENCY</p> <p><i>Standardised structure and format throughout the various youth leagues. I see different formats, ie 9 aside and 11 aside, in different leagues at the same age group. In some cases this may be beneficial for players ahead of the curve to progress, but in some leagues that I see, this is not the reason behind the difference. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'More consistency across leagues, less focus on competition/winning, more safeguards in place over "rogue" independent leagues, more opportunities for teams to play solely on a friendly basis with no emphasis on winning (just on playing and having fun at an older age)' (Club Official).</i></p> <p><i>'Clear rules and laws of the game adaptations based on match sizes (7s, 9s)' (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>'I would like to see more thought going into the young youth structure for example what age the small sided games finish at. I would like to see a league structure in place that would allow teams to play more. I would like to see a league system</i></p> | <p>Consistency</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Equity</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Formats</p> <p>Regulation</p> <p>Behaviours</p> |

that allows teams that are at a development level play against other teams that are around the same playing level to make the games and leagues more enjoyable'. (Coach)

'Improved league structures (should be) based on abilities. Leagues should work together more to make sure kids are playing at the levels that suit their abilities'. (Coach)

'Opportunities for all and a focus on safe environment free from sectarianism'. (Parent).

CULTURE

'At the younger ages we have them engaged. It's when they start to get older I believe we lose them'. (Coach).

'Clubs should be encouraged to bring inexperienced players in at all ages. It's horrible to think of 9, 10, 11 year olds being told they aren't good enough'. (Coach)

'Focus on players staying in the game and not being dropped from clubs'. (Coach)

'Pressure on a child particularly in Irish league clubs, way some coaches speak to players on pitch'. (player).

'More Freedom And Less Pressure'. (Player).

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| | <p><i>'More encouragement' (player)</i></p> <p><i>'More encouragement from coaches'. (Player).</i></p> <p><i>"Better and more supportive coaches'. (player).</i></p> <p><i>Development of children and clubs is key, winning an U7, U8, U9, U10, U11 & 12 match at all cost is ridiculous'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'I would like youth football to be viewed as development first and results secondary. This will take a massive shift in coaches motivations/parents behaviour as I feel everyone gets dragged into the ultra competitive nature in NI. The first question every child or coach gets asked after their match is 'did you win'? We are missing the point....player development has to be at the forefront of everything we do in this country up until Senior Level'. (Coach)</i></p> <p><i>'Too much emphasis on winning/competition. This should only become a necessity at u14s upwards. Let kids develop at their own speed without this constant desire to beat somebody 1-0. Also there is an obsession with printing scorelines on social media - no team needs to lose by double figures at primary school level without somebody publicising the event'. (coach).</i></p> <p><i>'Better opportunities for children of a less ability'. (Parent).</i></p> | |
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'I am under the impression some Academies are seen (by those at the top of some clubs) as a business, rather than a place to grow children's football'. (Parent).

'Less emphasis on using youth football as a revenue stream for individual clubs'. (Parent).

'Small sided games, lots of good people on the ground, lots of development opportunities for coaches to learn and develop, opportunities for players to develop'. (Coach)

'There are a number of football clubs in our locality which our pupils can access but I feel that sometimes the enjoyment of the game is lost by the pressure to succeed' (School Teacher).

There needs to be a clear balance of football for all and having football being competitive to build resilience'. (Club Official).

'People try and say that it's all about development, but this is nothing more than an empty statement by many, who really only care about winning. There needs to be more substance to this moving forward; clubs, parents and even players need to be better educated on this' (Coach).

'More 'for fun' games opportunities for development centre level players at this age, rather than just the best players being selected for all matches'. (Parent).

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| | <p><i>'Including everyone in sports and the competitions'. (Player).</i></p> <p><i>'Exposure to opportunities' (Coach)</i></p> <p><i>'Development (should be) from a younger age'. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'The selection & dropping of kids is not development' (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'I dislike that teams make cuts as the children get older (School Teacher).</i></p> <p>FORMATS</p> <p><i>'Small sided games to last until an older age better transition when going to 11 a side for example pitch size and especially net size'. (Parent)</i></p> <p><i>'Smaller pitches,goals up to the age of 15,16! Adopt a similar model the Netherlands and most of continental Europe! (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'A major issue currently within School's are the creation of Football Academy programmes within schools. These courses will destroy the essence of School's competition and have a detrimental effect on School's participation in football'. (School Teacher).</i></p> | |
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| | <p><i>'More primary school mixed teams'. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>'More competitions for school children of all ages. Investment is required to allow pupils the opportunities of competitive football throughout the country. At present the reliance on volunteers is very heavy'. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>"More tournaments'. (Player).</i></p> <p><i>'More cup competitions'. (player).</i></p> <p><i>More teams' (player).</i></p> <p><i>'More competitions specifically for small schools'. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>'More IFA ran small sided competitions for years 8/9/10 to keep interest in Football and provide a wider pool of schools to play against'. (school Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>More IFA organised blitz throughout the year'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'3v3 to 11v11 stepping stone's'. (Coach)</i></p> <p><i>'Reduce team size for younger age groups e.g. U8s play 7v7 at IFA SSG. This should be 5v5 maximum to allow more game involvement, touches of the ball and hence player development. Year 8s at school, 11 year olds, play</i></p> | |
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| | <p><i>11v11 on full size pitches with full size goals. This is in no way conducive to developing players. 9 year olds are playing 9v9 matches. Players need smaller sided games to really promote enjoyment, technical ability and development'. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>'Smaller sided games at younger age groups (3v3 from age 6-8, 5v5 age 8-10, 7v7 10-12, 9v9 12-14, 11 a side age 14+. Also more opportunities for futsal and free play for children'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Size of nets for keepers age appropriate from 9 aside to 11 aside. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Smaller sided games for younger age groups e.g. 8 year olds currently play 7v7 at tournaments and SSG. This should be maximum 5v5 to promote player enjoyment, allow more touches of the ball and hence player development. 11 year olds play 11v11 on full size pitches with full size goals, this has to change if we are to decrease drop out, improve enjoyment, technical development and develop more elite level players'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Jump from 9 to 11 a side to great. Pitch too big and goals to big for age group'. (Parent).</i></p> <p>COMMUNICATION</p> <p><i>'More visibility of IFA out in regions'. (Club Official)</i></p> | |
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'There needs to be better communication across all sections of youth football' (Club Official).

'More opportunities for clubs to feed into the decision making process at youth level. A more active and better club support mechanism with engaged staff'.(Club Official).

'More transparency within clubs. Lots of issues brushed under the carpet'. (Parent).

'Irish fa need more responsibility to actually checking out how clubs treat kids. Clubs state commitment to grassroots and go of the back of it when they don't shoe grassroots commitment or ethics' (Parent).

'Better systems to manage administration and registration of players' (Coach).

EQUITY

'More respect for the womens game'. (player).

"More girl friendly'. (player).

'More girls academies'. (player)

'Stop with the preferences to coaches or 'mates' kids. It is well known and much talked about. This goes right up to playing for the national team. Also just because they have signed across the water does not mean they are a better player

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| | <p><i>automatically, especially if it's a lower division club in England or Scotland'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'More scouts'. (player).</i></p> <p><i>'Coaching. Too much reliance on parents being coaches. Coaching standard is poor and there is a real problem in NI with parents prioritising their own kids in their teams over other players. I believe parents should not be allowed to coach their own kids team'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Less parents being coaches, too many are & creates an unease, when things go wrong for their own child'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'More inclusion for kids who aspire to play at a higher level. Some good players going unnoticed who don't play or have opportunities to play National League level. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>Transparency in selection processes for representative teams/program's. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'A wider national high performance programme starting from a younger age.....Too few kids are exposed to elite coaching and other players'. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'The current system is too heavily weighted to earning NIFL clubs maximum development funds to the detriment of boys & girls clubs' (Club Official).</i></p> | |
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| | <p><i>'Kids being given opportunities based on ability rather than parents/family'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'A better control on players moving to top clubs all the time, which creates a massive gap between a handful of clubs and leaving local clubs . This creates a situation where the few clubs are constantly benefitting financially from selling young players who started their journey at other clubs, making them stronger'. (Club Official).</i></p> <p><i>'Youth football has a great product but needs to ensure smaller clubs aren't consistently losing players to clubs that are solely trying to build elite teams. It weakens the competition and in some instances threatens the existence of teams' (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'Big academy clubs taking players from smaller clubs so early in their development' (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Coaches picking based on effort rather than favouritism'. (Player)</i></p> <p><i>'Only A teams get recognition, very little praise or focus given to the B teams'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'We need to stop the big clubs taking boys from big distances from too young an age'. (Parent).</i></p> <p>BEHAVIOURS</p> | |
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*'Far too many parents with no coaching background (maybe an ex player at low level) are coaches. This problem is across clubs and can set the tone for parents behaviours at match days'.
(Parent).*

'Greater punishments to coaches and players who verbally abuse referees. It's the only way they will learn and I think we are heading in the right direction Coaches at times seem to think the kids are playing in a world Cup, every match, the attitude needs to change, and more on field coaching and appreciation is needed'. (Referee).

'Coaches still struggle to resist arguing with the referee in front of young kids.' (Referee).

*'More respect towards referees, kids are there to learn the game and make friends, they watch their coach abuse a referee from a young age and they then accept it is normal and do the same'.
(Referee).*

*'I would like to see more respect in football toward players and refs'.
(Player)*

*'It's great being a ref, when you have good kids, coaches and parents, but sadly this is not always the case...
Professional refs, can and do make mistakes, so it's only natural we will too.. no one is perfect.. let's all help each other.....'. (Referee).*

'Have seen far too many coaches and parents not interested in developing better players over trying to win games at every level.' (referee).

'Improved behaviour from the side lines. Let the players play in an encouraging environment and not winning at all costs' (Club Official).

REGULATION

"1. Too many clubs enter overage players and in some cases whole teams. It ends up being a confidence crusher for the correct aged kids. This tends to be the bigger, well known clubs who are more concerned about winning than player development. Perhaps some mechanism for reporting and follow up would stamp this out.

2. By the age of 9/10 most kids are aware of who is a better player etc and become very vocal about who should be playing together.....coaches should be directed to start streaming the players by ability by this stage. Players who are noticeably weaker than the others on the team, but are put in 'for development', have their confidence crushed and do not develop. Long time coaches may need refresher'. (Parent).

'Sin bins so we can tell children the difference between right and wrong without red cards being shown and following weekends ruined. I would also try and have parents nowhere near the pitch.' (Referee).

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| | <p><i>'Signage at all grounds reminding parents no referee no game'. (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>'Coaches to have id on their chest our arm and parents too stand behind rope 15 yards ether side of the hallway line'. (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>'Parents been kept behind sideline of a decent distance so the kids can play the way coach's are coaching them under no pressure'. (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>'more crackdown on harsh challenges and bad behaviour'. (player).</i></p> <p><i>'Parents not allowed on sidelines'. (player).</i></p> <p><i>'Minimum gametime requirement at ages'. (Player).</i></p> <p><i>Less of coaches allowed to coach / follow their child's team/age group. Remove the potential nepotism.</i></p> <p><i>'The power as a referee to be able to ask the home team or away team to remove verbally and abusive parents or people in general away to a distance where they can't have an influence on the game'. (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>'Clubs should be responsible for parents behind the pitch perimeter. Harder fines / sanctions for nit controlling the parents'. (referee).</i></p> | |
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'One governing body and as a referee a strict policy on teams who's coaching staff and parents abuse not only referees but other teams. Remove these clubs out of the game'. (referee).

'Sideline referees' (player)

'Zero tolerance to referee abuse. Particularly from adults on the sidelines (coaches/parents). When parents behave poorly it immediately impacts players' behaviour. I think youth football goes to full pitch too early. Some clubs are better than others, but it appears to me that some clubs are results-driven and often leave a number of young people on the subs bench with no minutes played. This would be disheartening to those children.'
(Referee).

'Abuse can not be tolerated but we need to determine what is abuse and what is part of our game there is a difference. Parents and coaches need to learn the difference but so do officials'
(Referee).

'Coaches at county/national level to be independent and not affiliated to local teams'
(Coach)

'Refereeing resources wasted at younger age groups, club coaches should be used to allow referee resources at older/adult matches'
(Referee).

'Referees earlier in the age grades to avoid difficulties in "self-refereeing" and consistency of approach'. (Coach).

'More silent sidelines'. (referee).

'I feel silent Saturdays are not done correctly coaches should be able to coach and not silenced , also some parents should be spoken to about there actions and words they say as we are dealing with young kids and words can affect them'. (Parent).

'Calling out bad behaviour from coaches and players and dealing with it rather than accepting it'.(Coach).

'More respect to officials from youth and from sidelines'. (School Teacher).

'I'd like more visibility of punishments applied to teams and contact made to affected refs afterwards. In serious cases refs should be involved in the process'. (Referee).

'.... a respect your coach campaign in line with respect for referees and mental health awareness. It's much needed. Voluntary observers where possible to observe sideline behaviour'. (Coach).

'I would like to see the policies enforced more. The behaviour of some coaches and parents on

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| | <p><i>other teams has been really poor. It's difficult to manage but I think it needs to be addressed not only for the sake of the kids but if not addressed it is only a matter of time before it boils over and someone gets seriously hurt'. (Club Official)</i></p> <p><i>'Better protection in order to retain players, clear and enforced regulations'. (Club Official)</i></p> <p><i>'Stricter rules against unruly and abusive parents'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Better system around complaints re poor behaviour from players/coaches/referees'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Stricter rules on who can coach and a minimum coaching qualification to allow it' (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'Too many unqualified coaches taking teams. Parents etc who have never played or coached at any level. All coaches should have a minimum required coaching badges before being hired by clubs'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Postcode restrictions for clubs signing young players'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Coaches at grassroots level being properly vetted for things like anger issues / bad temper'. (Parent).</i></p> | |
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| | <p><i>'From U14 down coaches should referee the games as with the expansion of youth football, refereeing has not kept pace and too many officials referee for money and they are not doing a service to the game or development of young players'. (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>'Players should play school year rather than year of birth'. (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>'Kids should be playing by school year not year of birth. Especially at GDC age group football is about enjoying the game and playing with your mates!' (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'The year groups. Should be school years as opposed to birth year for which team kids play for'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Every player in the team should be given a certain amount of game time'. (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>'To many young players leaving their hometown club a young age, kids should have to stay at at their hometown club until 16, (Irish league club) to many players being told their not good enough at 12-16'. (Parent).</i></p> | |
| Resources | <p>FACILITIES</p> <p><i>'...Most importantly, for everyone that is involved in football in Northern Ireland, both at a youth and senior level, the facilities across Northern Ireland require significant (and long overdue) investment</i></p> | <p>Facilities</p> <p>Finance</p> <p>Equity</p> |

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| | <p><i>to ensure everyone has the opportunity to play/volunteer in a modern, clean, and safe environment'. (Club Official)</i></p> <p><i>'Youth football has the biggest ever chance to blossom right now. At my club we have waiting lists at every age group. If facilities were available we could double in size tomorrow' (Club Official).</i></p> <p><i>'More access to facilities which would allow the sport to be played in various weather conditions' (Club Official).</i></p> <p><i>'More all weather pitches that are sized appropriately for each age group with clear line markings for each format'. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'Better facilities that are fit for purpose as there aren't anywhere near enough 7 or 9 aside pitches'. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'More changing facilities at grounds for girls of a certain age'. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'There needs to be a lot more training facilities and better pitches for young players'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Better facilities and pathways through the system'. (player).</i></p> <p><i>'Pitches and facilities are in a dire state. Our school doesn't have a pitch and both local playing</i></p> | |
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fields are so poor, some schools refuse to play against us on them'. (School Teacher).

'More matches'. (player).

'Better pitches'. (player).

FINANCES

'More grants, support and funding in schools. When schools can afford facilities they can then support their local communities and teams. A school is a more secure and monitored playground for good facilities, managed and maintained. If we can develop a hub within a school, we can then expand into the local community'. School Teacher).

'We permanently need more money. I have personally become a professional beggar'. (Club Official).

EQUITY

'Adequate facilities in all areas of Northern Ireland'. (Club Official).

'The government and IFA are not doing enough outside belfast to provide improve and more pitches to provide sufficient facilities apart from grass in the winter and dark evening to give the kids more coaching and playing time during the winter months'. (Coach).

'Organized Youth football is only available to those families that can afford it. Clubs are having to charge high prices to meet the high costs and ultimately those who can't afford to pay, can't play'. (Club Official).

'Girls football needs to be on par with the efforts and money that's put into boys football'. (Parent).

'Too much central organisation so rural areas suffer'. (Club Official)

Governance and support for all clubs to provide qualified coaches and facilities fit for purpose' (Club Official).

'Need transparency from IFA re application of UEFA and FIFA funds (Solidarity, Hat-Trick etc) - much more needs to flow to clubs'. (club official).

SUPPORT

'There is far too much pressure from the IFA and associated organisations being put on clubs that are 100% made up of volunteers. The IFA is trying to drive a minimum operating standard from clubs that are run by volunteers who are also juggling jobs, young families and personal life'. (Club Official).

'More support in regards to teaching kids the importance of healthy diets and more onsite physios, too many injuries'. (Parent).

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| | <p><i>'more hands on approach from IFA development officers'. (Club Official).</i></p> | |
| <p>Education</p> | <p>COACH EDUCATION</p> <p><i>'It would be great to have more coach education and workshops/courses offered out to all clubs for coaches, players, volunteers, parents. Ideally all volunteers should have safeguarding, first aid training, mental health support training, and also the opportunities to gain coaching qualifications and attend workshops about making football more inclusive. It would also be great to see girls football continue to grow. (Club official).</i></p> <p><i>'Availability of coach education is good, but often under-utilised by clubs and coaches in my experience. (coach).</i></p> <p><i>'Teachers need support in order to train, have equipment, know how to referee and organise tournaments etc'. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>Better standard of coaching - I see some very good coaches but the majority are not good enough. If the IFA could be more forceful in providing coach education that would help, but I appreciate this is a challenge when working with volunteers. But the culture does need to be improved - coaches need to recognise that education is there for their benefit'. (Coach).</i></p> | <p>Coach Education Access Development Behaviours</p> |

DEVELOPMENT

‘teach them respect and planting a seed to help further down the line as a referee we help to do this’. (Referee).

‘Child protection and ethics needs to be clear to all connected. Control of and a clear role of agents and scouting. Community focus for football. Promotion of enjoyment for all including referees, selectors, coaches, players, grounds staff’. (School Teacher).

‘IFA staff being more involved with coach development and creating lasting relationships with local club’s’. (Coach).

‘...better coach education, more info on how to deal with players all at different levels’. (Club Official).

‘More emphasis on player welfare the way some clubs can treat young players is unacceptable ever young person should have the right to being treated the same without prejudice and their should be no bias from coaches towards players nor should it be acceptable for coaches to refuse to talk to parents when they have questions/queries and they should have a level of respect for the parents and talk and engage with them in that way’. (Parent).

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| | <p><i>'There is so much opportunity for football in NI - coaches do need to be educated in youth development as opposed to just football to gain an understanding of the wider world of young people' (Parent)</i></p> <p><i>'More IFA presence / help / guidance with clubs. More in person interaction (IFA representation at matches, club visits etc). Clearer guidance to clubs on the structure within the IFA'. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'Would love to see development on health and well-being outside of training sessions'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'...I feel refereeing support or training courses for teachers that sub cover can be provided for is what I am in most need of'. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>'Clubs around province need support and audited more regularly, as there is a favouritism culture in all clubs'. (Parent)</i></p> <p><i>'More training for coaches in understanding the laws of the game. This is a bug bearer for me as a lot of coaches do not even have a basic understanding of most of the laws and thus do not have an understanding of why some decisions are given which leads to frustration on their part and can manifest into abuse towards me'. (referee).</i></p> <p><i>'Need to encourage more referees'. (School Teacher).</i></p> | |
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| | <p><i>‘Please look into having a dedicated representative that they’re sole purpose is to engage with grassroots clubs A representative could sit in on a committee meeting with a club and discuss visions,plans,advice etc I do understand this is an expense but also believe the benefits would outweigh the financial loss’. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>‘More support ie training for teachers, visits by FA to run sessions in school, advice’. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>‘If possible more development courses to learn basic skills , also the importance of respect for teams and other players and the importance of fair play regardless of the result’. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>‘Education for parent’s’. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>A code of conduct for parents (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>‘Coach/parental education - ease of access to a much improved quality of content. Research and evidence based methods’. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>‘More physical development to be brought in such as strengthen and core additional exercise’. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>‘Educating and encouraging players on being respectful to referees and other players’. (Referee).</i></p> | |
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'More personal interaction and learning from referees to clubs, coaches and players'. (Referee).

'IFA supporting youth referees..... Once you become a ref you and just thrown out into it and unless someone knows someone you dont get any help. Anyone that wants to moved forward as a ref isn't supported in the right ways'. (Referee).

'more mentoring lead roles for referees and monitoring at games for respect'. (Referee).

'Would be useful for healthy eating and strength and conditioning to be included in the programmes for all at club level from maybe about age 11'. (Parent).

ACCESS

'More opportunities for coaches to engage with each other. Example this year we had an online workshop with Brighton youth team coach. (Earning 5 CPD credits) but was a great opportunity to listen and share with other coaches'. (School Teacher).

'IFA needs to help the less experienced coaches and clubs through other avenues along with coach education! I do value the coach education system but for individuals and small clubs it can be expensive therefore they rely on the uneducated parent who may have played the game years

*before! Youth football is improving in many clubs!
But clubs and coaches would really value a proper
direction especially those with less experience!'.
(Coach).*

*'Better training more frequent and in our local areas
for coaches at more realistic and affordable prices'
(Club Official).*

*'I am a P2 teacher and feel that football training in
this younger group should be encouraged more.
Generally it is P3 upwards that get opportunities to
be coached by a trained coach'. (School Teacher).*

*'More involvement from IFA in our programmes to
see what happens week in and out and to see what
sort of impact our programmes can have on the
kids both socially and football ability wise. Having
the like of visits from the supervisors etc would be
great for the clubs to see that the IFA care about
everyone involved in their programmes'. (Referee).*

*'Greater opportunity for the girl's game to try and
allow more girls to feel accepted and encouraged
to play a male stereotyped sport'. (Player).*

*'Better access to coach education, not all coaches
can afford to do their badges but they are great
people and coaches'. (Coach).*

*'Reduction in coaching course costs and greater
accessibility. Online resources have been*

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| | <p><i>developed recently but more could be done in this space'. (Club Official).</i></p> <p><i>'Pyramid structure (is) needed for coaches. Quality coaches really need to be incentivised'. (Club Official).</i></p> <p><i>'IFA coaching courses available on Saturdays. Courses invariably on Sundays as are girls leagues reducing opportunity'. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'more involvement from IFA with clubs..bringing new ideas, sessions, & how to deal with scenarios'. (club Official).</i></p> <p><i>'I would love to see the IFA being more visible in the area and leading coaching sessions for players that have been ID'd by their local club. A lot of local clubs are parent volunteers who have limited technical coaching experience'. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'Better level of coach education in that i mean there should have to be a basic requirement at certain levels'. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'More input by the IFA towards schools. Providing discounted/free CPD courses for PE teachers in Football. As a PE teacher, I see some of my students more than their coaches outside of school and have the opportunities to work with them during PE lessons, lunchtime and afterschool practices. As I work in a school which has outstanding facilities, our students are able to avail</i></p> | |
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of this and with further funding towards staff to achieve additional qualifications these students would benefit greatly'. (School Teacher).

'Educated coaches and compulsory coaching courses for coaches, more support for coaches mentoring etc'. (Coach).

'We miss having the IFA coaches in school. The children are definitely missing out!'. (School Teacher).

'I would like to understand what the development route is like for young players aspiring to play for their their country. What does that journey look like, what is required commitment and access for children with support at home and in school. Am I doing enough to support the dream of my son to play for his country. Is he in the right club? Which clubs have best resources and opportunity for growth and development'. (Parent).

BEHAVIOUR

'I believe role models and the right behaviour starts with the coaches. They need to realise that these young people look to them as role models and it's the coaches that set the example of how to behave'. (referee).

'More information for parents at a younger level to manage expectations'. (Coach).

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| | <p><i>‘Behaviour of parents to change and stop treating it like its premiership and criticising coaches and being aggressive in front of kids’. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>‘Even at under 7, and under 10 matches, coaches and parents can behave atrociously at times creating intimidating and hostile environments for young kids. More needs to be done to monitor and discourage this behaviour’. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>‘I find coaches shouting too much at sidelines. I strongly believe that girls do not respond well to this type of coaching and my daughter has wanted to leave the club for this reason. A more supportive and encouraging environment would be more desirable. Only the best players get the positive feedback’. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>‘More qualified coaches who behave as role models for kids they are coaching. Emphasis should always be on development of players and not coaches stealing the limelight in relation to their trophy successes’. (referee).</i></p> <p><i>‘The biggest change would be the mentality around the game. Self respect, communication and a mature attitude in dealing with officials should be taught from a young age, this in itself will result in the massive change in attitude towards officials’. (Referee).</i></p> | |
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| | <p><i>‘More education around parents and coaches behaviour on match days. Clearer pathways to professional football’. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>‘Stronger message to parents (and some coaches) re behaviour on match days, unrealistic expectations and the importance of fun and development over winning and losing’ (Coach).</i></p> | |
| Partnerships | <p>COLLABORATION</p> <p><i>‘NI youth football is ridiculously fragmented’ (Club Official).</i></p> <p><i>‘Better collaboration between all parties instead of people working against each other’ (club Official).</i></p> <p><i>‘All the leagues accountable to one body, same laws, same fees, etc far from that atm’. (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>‘More consultation with councils And schools to utilise facilities better throughout the year. Alot of secondary school have great facilities not being used in evenings and weekend that can be used but also councils need a joined up approach with gov bodies in what is need for each area and fund accordingly’. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>‘I’d like one body that runs the lot, with improved communication it could be great for youth football in terms of retaining players’. (club Official).</i></p> | <p>Collaboration</p> <p>Equity</p> <p>Transparency</p> <p>Inclusion</p> |

'Development at grassroots is key to growth and getting children who don't normally play outside of school into team sport. So important for all, on a physical and mental health level'. (school Teacher).

'Need to work closer with other codes in particular Ulster GAA. The clashing during the soccer season for development squads and championship games has a huge impact on player numbers and retention for clubs like ours with dual players. It's a real challenges and impacts progression of the club and in some cases has resulted in us being unable to field teams at certain age groups and having to withdraw from competitions'. (Club Official).

'More funding and investment is obviously going to be widely mentioned and difficult to achieve in the current financial climate but maybe more grassroots clubs could form partnerships to ensure clubs don't fold and coaching staff and volunteers aren't stretched to breaking point leaving the kids to suffer'. (Parent).

'More consistency across leagues, less focus on competition/winning, more safeguards in place over "rogue" independent leagues, more opportunities for teams to play solely on a friendly basis with no emphasis on winning (just on playing and having fun at an older age)'. (club Official).

'More cohesion between the different leagues; more emphasis on coach education'. (club Official).

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| | <p><i>‘More regional leagues at grassroots level’. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>‘More systematic and organised coaching in primary schools’. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>‘More shared facilities and expertise with other codes. The IFA are doing a good job but could improve by facilitating more cross community and cross code initiatives’. (school Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>‘Just get more togetherness between club and school’. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>‘A massive increase in support from the IFA to primary schools football programmes’. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>‘The work from the foundation within education is very pleasing. The aspects of the game which are being developed for school children could greatly benefit from the involvement of school teachers, those who work with school children daily may provide a different perspective’. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>‘The goodwill of teachers and volunteers is at an all time low and I would expect to see schools football at primary school level no longer existing in my area if support from the governing body is not provided’. (School Teacher).</i></p> | |
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'Top academies need to stop illegal poaching of players (coach).

EQUITY

Equal Opportunities for all participants. Respect for all participants. More influence, recognition and appreciation for smaller clubs/players visa v NIFL clubs (coach).

'Play international games outside belfast to let more girls see the team'. (Parent).

'... a lot of clubs are over looked by IFA Development programmes'. (Parent).

'The whole system needs modernised to promote football and decrease drop outs especially in the West of the country where player drop out due to GAA involvement is extremely high'. (School Teacher).

A designated scout for each youth league to identify players who can progress'. (Club Official).

'More chance of being watched by Northern Ireland scouts'. (Player).

'Elite teams only being able to take players from smaller clubs from age 16. At moment a hierarchy has developed which inhibits chances of other clubs breaking through'. (Parent).

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| | <p><i>'Better structured pathways and academies. Better communication between teams and IFA youth national teams'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'A fair and balanced selection process for NI youth teams and not an over supply from 1 or 2 clubs'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Good players out there , but get lost in the system'. (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>'More opportunities for kids to develop and get chances to get to a higher level not just those "elite" players whose relatives are involved in Irish League football and at the top teams. Widen the search area to give others a chance. Make it more accessible for lots more kids to challenge themselves. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Need more scouts at the lower level football to look for talent (mid ulster football) not every child gets the chance to play National league football'. (Parent).</i></p> <p><i>'Rural areas are forgotten about and the support is not there on the ground'. (Club Official)</i></p> <p><i>'We need to have a province wide approach rather than it appears at the moment a Belfast based approach'. (Club Official).</i></p> <p><i>'Elite level kids across the water and down south get the opportunity to progress much earlier in</i></p> | |
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age with the amount of training time and much better facilities they get. At 7-8 they get the opportunity to be training 5-7 hours a week+ match time. Here we are lucky if r elite players at that age get 2 hours. A big disadvantage when it comes to the age of 14-15 our kids are playing catch up’, (Parent).

‘More opportunities in rural schools. I worked in a city school last year, and felt there were more opportunities for those children than my current role in a more rural school’. (School Teacher).

‘(Its) Good there is a restructure. I hope enough attention is brought towards the women/girls game in Tyrone. We don’t have development sessions for any players so there isn’t a platform for these players to get into the international set up. There is some serious talent being wasted down here due to lack of good coaches and irish fa attention’. (Coach).

‘Support ALL schools and youth teams, not just major clubs and larger communities’. (School Teacher).

‘Equal support to all schools for football and not just the select few. IFA coaches go into one school and stay there for years. Other schools get nothing’. (School Teacher).

‘There needs to be a more visible presence in the schools and a greater pool of children picked for

development squads outside the Belfast area. Most Northern Irish players are based in either Antrim, Down or Armagh. There needs to be a significant shift to identify talent from beyond just these areas'. (School Teacher).

TRANSPARENCY

'Better visibility for parents on leagues and competitions, instead of relying on club apps etc. Also speak with Rugby and GAA to stagger playing times. My son is 7 and wants to play all three but cant at present. I think it is important upto secondary school that the kids can play all sport'. (Parent).

'Would be nice if the IFA were contactable and open. Also seems to be the case that 3 or 4 clubs feed the national team. Surely others should get a look in'. (Parent).

'That all leagues where monitored and came under one set of governance that they had to adhere to so the same format is rolled out through the country'. (Coach).

'Better communication between schools and the IFA and other regional bodies'. (School Teacher).

'since the restructure of IFA local staff, it is difficult to know who to turn to for specific issues. Every club should be given a newsletter or info pack about who to go to locally for support'. (Coach).

'There is a more visible presence in the communities, but there is a lack of coaching in the schools. (School Teacher).

A survey on pitch availability and the standard of facilities would be helpful. (Club Official).

'More observers and game observers for spectators and more feed back to leagues and then to referees'. (school Teachers).

INCLUSION

'More inclusivity for players with disabilities. Both learning, mental and physical where possible'. (Coach).

'More involvement/encouragement for those who don't normally play'. (School Teacher).

'No plan or support is currently in place for youth Futsal development'. (Coach).

'Girls are always just pushed in where there is room left' (Coach).

'The boys league have introduced girls but its just an add on'. (Coach).

'Our school is in a socially deprived area so opportunities for the children to develop their full potential is limited'. (School Teacher).

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| | <p><i>'More inclusive - SEN/learning difficulties football. More opportunities for players in grassroots clubs to enjoy the same chance of individual success as those at higher club level'. (School Teacher).</i></p> | |
| Benefits | <p><i>'Over the past few months we have grown by over 200% with a huge influx of children from all ages and backgrounds...'</i> (Club Official).</p> <p><i>'Making friendships/Relationships and bringing communities together'. (Player).</i></p> <p><i>'The benefits of participation were Lots of clubs in our local area give opportunities for primary school aged children to get involved in a team sport to foster a lifelong love of physical activity. It also helps develop their communication and teamwork skills alongside having fun and making friends'. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p>Lots of teams in local areas with lots of pitches and often within a short distance'. (Referee).</p> <p><i>'Provides an opportunity for youth to develop and learn skills to help them in the future' (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>'Gives opportunities to so many young people to play, learn, develop and compete at a variety of levels to suit them' (club Official).</i></p> | <p>Growth</p> <p>Opportunity</p> <p>Community</p> <p>Development</p> <p>Progression</p> <p>People</p> <p>Life Skills</p> |

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| | <p><i>‘The sheer numbers of children both boys and girls that wish to play the game’. (school Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>‘The diversity of children playing football is fantastic. Football is the largest most inclusive game we have and it is important to create more opportunities for all children to play competitively with each other across the country’. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>‘The dedicated volunteers that coach and run clubs to facilitate youths getting the chance to play’. (Club Official).</i></p> <p><i>‘There are alot of coaches who care alot about developing players as people first’. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>‘Strengths lay within the coaches who can develop young players and also within the clubs and education of the right people to become coaches’. (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>‘The high level of enthusiasm and dedication to local sport despite the lack of facilities. Families and volunteers have built a huge community who support the youth when they can, most beyond their own means’. (school Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>‘Bringing continuities together’. (Club official).</i></p> | |
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| | <p><i>‘The future of your club is in the Youth of your community. Neglect the Youth of your community and you will neglect your club’. (Club Official).</i></p> <p><i>‘Clubs play a big part within the community and can entice players into football and ensure retention, progress is made with their development’. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>‘There is a great selection of teams from all areas of the country and great community spirit within the team’s’. (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>‘It (football) brings children from all religious, social and economic backgrounds together under one banner. It makes me very happy to see kids play together unaware of religious differences’. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>‘Mending a partnership in a divided country for me I feel is youth footballs biggest strength’. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>“Well structured leagues & cups provides kids with a good opportunity to learn the game in a competitive controlled environment’. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>‘Programmes like Games Development Programme and shooting stars give a good opportunity to all kids both male and female which overtime will see a big improvement in both the men and women’s game in years to come. These sort of programmes also help bring back the fun</i></p> | |
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| | <p><i>and enjoyment for youth football that was missing before it was put in place'. (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>'The organisation of NI Schools cup' (school Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>'Local school competitions which are organised by schools' (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>'Good to see different sized pitches, numbers on teams at age groups and more awareness around coaching'. (school Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>'Coaches who make football fun rather than pressuring the children to succeed'. (School Teacher).</i></p> <p><i>'Players willing to listen to ref's' (Referee).</i></p> <p><i>'The standard of coaching has got better, the standard of football has also improved' (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'Giving children the opportunity to be part of an organisation where skills are developed and life skills learnt'. (coach).</i></p> <p><i>'Learning to share and play together, building relationships, fitness and the ability to keep going'. (Coach).</i></p> <p><i>'Helps give children the chance to express themselves in a positive way'. (Coach).</i></p> | |
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Next Steps

The next phase of the youth review will be to carry out a range of focus group consultations and roadshows to better understand stakeholder views on the proposed youth framework pillars. This will validate whether we have interpreted what stakeholders have already told us in phase one of our youth review process. Once the framework is agreed a detailed Action Plan will then be developed to support delivery under each pillar, with measurement indicators for each pillar. An implementation plan will also be published with milestones and a measurement framework for review.

Summary

The youth review survey has provided rich data which provided insight into the environment in which football is played in Northern Ireland. Analysis of the data has generated four themes – Partnerships; resources; education; governance – which should be considered as contextualising factors alongside evidence gained from good practice and research. The survey also identified three underpinning principles – equity; transparency; inclusion - which should be adopted to support the delivery of the future youth football framework.