



Player Development in Ireland

23th October 2020



**HIGH
PERFORMANCE**
EVOLVE | EXCEL | INSPIRE

Where do we want to be?

- Inspire the Nation with Pride & International Success!

Top 20 FIFA Ranking

- Need to know and need to do what the top 20 is doing!
- Benchmark other Associations

One Vision, one Team, one Goal

International

International success
Dedicated and skilled staff to support our best players

League of Ireland

Elite Coach Education & Development at National League Clubs
Player Development Programmes centred around National League Clubs (ETB/ETP)
Establishment of Social enterprises within National League Clubs

High Performance

Club & Player Development at high-performing Grassroots & LoI clubs
11 High-Performance Coaches driving a high-performance culture

Grassroots

Ensure all grassroots players are coached by an age-appropriate qualified coach
Increase and retain players, coaches, referees and volunteers
Implementation of a club-led model (Club Mark) to strengthen our clubs
8 Regions staffed to support the development of football in a consistent manner

International Benchmark Entering Pathway at Professional Clubs

| Country | Age they start Elite Football |
|-------------|---|
| Belgium | Professional club academies start at 8 years of age. |
| Denmark | Players can sign for professional clubs at 12 years of age. |
| Netherlands | Professional club academies start at 7 years of age. |
| England | Professional club academies start at 6 years of age. |
| Croatia | Professional club academies start at 8 years of age. |
| Spain | Professional club academies start at 6 years of age. |
| Iceland | All clubs have academies that start at 6 years of age in Iceland. |
| Switzerland | In Switzerland they start at ' 8 years of age and younger at professional clubs. |
| Wales | Academy structures begin at 10 years of age. |
| Portugal | Professional club academies start at 6 years of age. |
| Scotland | Some professional clubs begin working with players at 5 years of age. |
| France | Professional club academies start at 8 years of age. |
| Germany | Professional club academies start at 8 years of age. |

International Benchmark # Training Sessions per week

| Number of training sessions (plus 1 Match per week) | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Clubs/NA | U11 | U13 | U15 | U17 | U19 |
| KSI Iceland | 3/4 | 3/4 | 4/6 | 4/6 | 4/6 |
| Bayer Leverkusen | 3/4 | 4 | 4 | 4+ | 4+ |
| Dinamo Zagreb | 3/4 | 4/5 | 5/6 | 6/7 | 6/7 |
| AZ Alkmaar | 3/4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 6 |
| AEK, Athens | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| Panathanaikos, Athens | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| Inter Milan | 4 | 4/5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| Standard Liege | 3 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| FC Basel | 4/6 | 4/6 | 4/6 | 4/6 | 4/6 |
| Shaktar Donetsk | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Barcelona | 3 | 3 | 4/5 | 4/5 | 4/5 |

Domestic Benchmark # Training Sessions per week

| Number of training sessions (plus 1 Match per week) | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| LOI Clubs in Ireland | U11 | U13 | U15 | U17 | U19 |
| Club A | NA | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Club B | NA | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Club C | NA | 3 | 3/4 | 3/4 | 3 /4 |
| Club E | NA | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Club F | NA | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Schoolboy Clubs | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |

English Premier League Senior Squads: 2019-2020 Season

- 140 players of the top 6 clubs
- Average age of first team debut was 18 years of age and two months
- Average age at entry to professional club academy was 10 years and 5 months
- Average **duration in academy** before making 1st team debut was **7 years and 5 months**



Principles of ELITE Player Development

- The need for an elite player pathway in Ireland based on **international best practice**.
- Provide equal opportunities for **the best players** (boys and girls) **to play with and against the best players country wide**.
- Provide equal opportunities for young elite players (boys and girls) **with a long-term development** focus involving high-quality coaching and increased playing time.
- Provide equal opportunities for young elite players to play **more challenging structures at younger ages upwards in order to facilitate long-term player development**.
- Provide equal opportunities for the **best coaches** and **match officials** (male and female) to work with the best players (boys and girls).
- Keep **travel distances as low as possible** within a regional structure at a young age (regional leagues at U13/U14).



Principles of Player Development (I)

- The Player Development Plan (PDP) emphasises a player-centred approach to football in Ireland. That means that players of all abilities are facilitated in their development. It requires collaboration between clubs in grassroots and League of Ireland Clubs.
- Provide equal opportunities for all players (boys and girls) with the aim to Play, Learn and Enjoy the game.
- The majority of players will only ever play the game for recreational reasons and enjoy the health and social benefits that football offers.
- A small percentage of players have the potential to play the game at the highest level both nationally and internationally.
- The FAI has a responsibility to facilitate the development of both recreational players and players who could potentially make a career out of the game and go on to represent Ireland on the international stage.



Principles of Player Development (II)

- Young players develop at different rates and Grassroots Clubs play a major and vital role in nurturing players from 6 years of age through to adulthood.
- All players in Ireland between the age 6 - 12 are being developed by Grassroots clubs.
- From 12 years of age 1.7 % of the playing population are playing in the underage national league structures.
- The remaining 98.3 % continue to be developed within the Grassroots structures.
- Systems and structures need to be put in place to accommodate players along this range of abilities



Principles of Player Development (III)

- The Under 13 National League is in place to cater for the continued development of the most talented high-potential players. The successful transition of players from Grassroots Clubs to the National League requires communication between Grassroots Clubs and National League Clubs
- Many talented young players may not be accommodated in the Under 13 National League as they may be considered just below the standard required.
- The continued development of these players is very important and Grassroots Clubs are critical to this because many of these have the potential to develop significantly as they get older.
- We need to make sure that the coaching and competition structures are in place to give players every opportunity of fulfilling their potential.
- A player-centred approach means that every effort should be made by coaches to create an environment that nurtures players at all levels.
- The FAI needs to work with and support the Grassroots Affiliates to design competition structures below the National Leagues that assists the development of players of all abilities and encourages life-long participation.



Rationale Behind Elite Player Pathway Starting at U13

- **Best practice** across UEFA Member Associations for talented players to join professional clubs from 8 years of age onwards and to be involved in playing structures that are equivalent to the Under 13 League in Ireland.
- The judgement of the FAI is that **12 years of age is an appropriate time** for young talented players to be introduced to a regional competition structure where player development with age-specific expert coaching is the focus rather than winning at all costs.
- It provides opportunities for **Long-Term Player Development** with access to high quality coaching and appropriately challenging training and match contact time in a player centred environment.
- Focus more on **one sport** (football) in order to increase the chances.
- The FAI recommends that U13 players at club level should train in a club setting for a maximum of **4 sessions per week** (60-80 mins) plus 1 match (2 x 40 mins). This is a maximum of 400 minutes of club football time per week (6 hours and 40 mins).



Potential disadvantages of playing two sports at Elite level at the age of 12/13

- Sport for children is experienced only in a **structured way lead by adults**.
- There is **no free time** for the child to express him/herself in another way.
- There is a **constant pressure** to play competitive sports 7 days per week.
- There is **pressure from coaches** if fixtures clash.
- There is **little time for socialising** with friends and family.
- There is an **increased risk of injury** due to the lack of recovery between training sessions and matches.

- ☐ Best practice throughout Europe suggests that playing more football from the age of 12 onwards rather than diluting it with one or more other elite level sports leads to the development of higher quality senior players.
- ☐ The FAI encourages participation in other sports and physical activities on days when there is no club football training.
- ☐ We advise that these activities should not be at an elite level.



Underage National League Competition structures

Season 2021

- U13 league continues as the U14 league
- Player Pathway: **U14 / U15 / U17 / U19** National Underage Leagues

Season 2022

- U13 league planned to be reintroduced
- Player Pathway: **U13 / U14 / U15 / U17 / U19** National Underage Leagues



Summary

- ✓ Grassroots Clubs play a vital role in nurturing players from 6 years of age to adulthood.
- ✓ At 12 years of age players can enter the Elite Player Pathway with a LOI Club.
- ✓ Formal relationships between Grassroots Clubs and LOI Clubs is essential for the development of our young players.
- ✓ A unified, collaborative approach between the FAI, LOI Clubs and Grassroots Clubs is essential for the development of the game in Ireland.
- ✓ The recent collaboration on a new Domestic Compensation Agreement will ensure that a fair and equitable compensation system for the movement of players between clubs will be in place.
- ✓ Player Development requires all stakeholders to accept their roles and responsibilities for the development of the game.
- ✓ In areas of Ireland where no LOI Club exists, the Leagues play a critical role in the Elite Player Pathway.
- ✓ Competition structures need to be created in order to cater for the range of playing abilities that exist in Ireland. This will give all players the opportunity to fulfil their potential.
- ✓ Government, UEFA, FIFA and FAI will provide support for this player-centred approach.

