



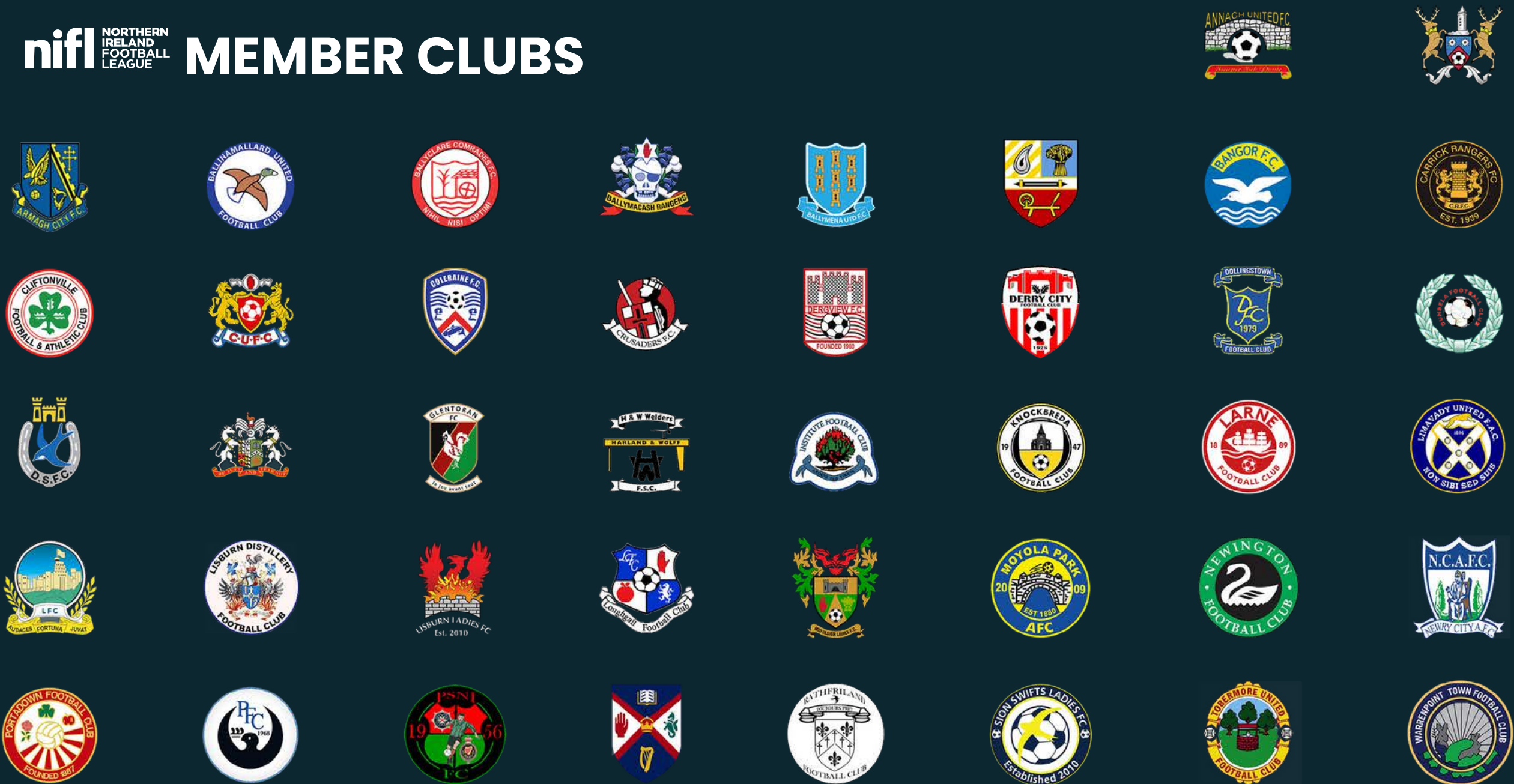
A BOLD & BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

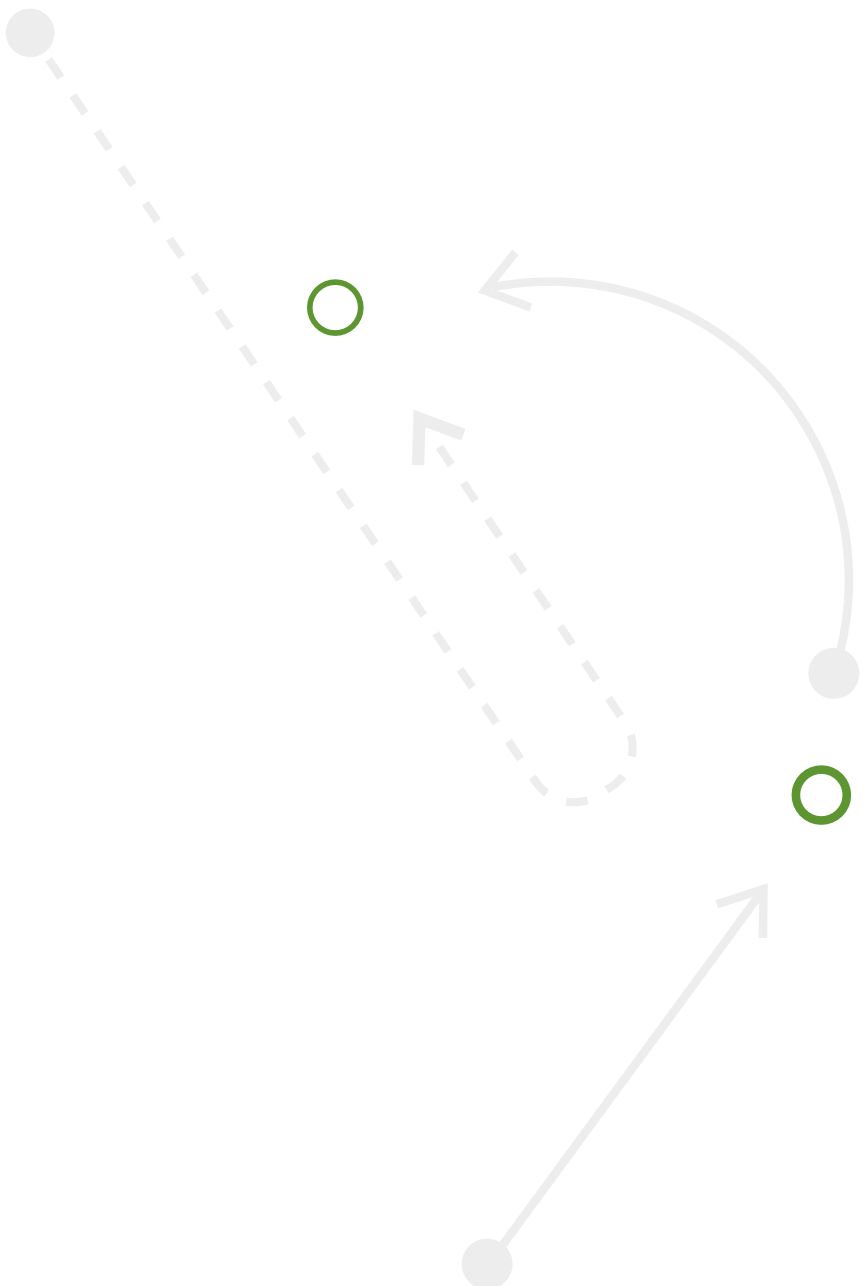
NIFL Strategy 2023-2028



nifl NORTHERN IRELAND FOOTBALL LEAGUE

MEMBER CLUBS





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ENDORSEMENTS

The NIFL strategy pledges a 'bold and brighter future for professional football in Northern Ireland'. This is an aspiration that I can fully endorse.

As President of the Irish FA, I want to see football at all levels in this country flourish. If that happens then every aspect of our game benefits. To that end, having a thriving elite league is crucial. This strategy will help continue the ascendancy it has experienced in recent years.

Conrad Kirkwood

President, Irish FA



I compliment NIFL on the objectives stated in the ambitious five-year policy plan. It shows the development of the league but also clearly indicates the responsible growth that is being pursued.

Good luck to all in Northern Irish football in achieving this together, and hopefully your membership of the European Leagues can also contribute. We are looking forward to continuing our relationships and are ready to assist whenever possible.

Jacco Stewart

Managing Director, European Leagues



INTRODUCTION

Currently NIFL is thriving; with increased attendances, record broadcast revenue and exposure, club investments, the game in Northern Ireland has simply never been in a better position.

Such success is laudable, but now is not the time to stand still – we must use it as a platform to kick on to even greater heights and attract new audiences.

I firmly believe all organisations must have a plan, a vision and in some cases a dream. I believe this document provides that for NIFL; it is a plan in where we wish to go, a vision on how to get there and contains the dream of further growth for our clubs both domestically and on the European stage.

It is important that this strategy challenges all within the professional game, but above all it must challenge ourselves as an organisation. We must respond and rise to the challenges of the 21st century and support our member clubs, on and off the pitch and in our broader communities – to retain our place at the top of people's affections and respect.

This strategy seeks to answer some of the long-standing questions within the professional game, while also trying to ascertain and explore the benefits of changes such as match-days, kick-off times and seasonality, whilst working closely with the Irish FA for the good of all within the football family of Northern Ireland.

Over the past six months the NIFL Board and senior management team have developed this strategy with support from independent consultants and our key stakeholders across all areas of the business. In particular, the feedback and support from our member clubs during our consultation period has been critical to the development of this strategy, both from their attendance at the consultation workshops, submissions to our survey and individual consultations.

Any progression or improvement plan has the requirement and need to be “bold”, but it must also provide a “brighter” future for clubs, players, supporters, and partners, and that is what we have attempted to achieve. This document is the first of its type for League football within NI – but hopefully not the last.

As we look to plot out the next five years, we hope there are benefits for everyone, there will be challenges and difficulties, some will have to soul search and ask serious questions – but with desire and goodwill we can sit back in five years and reflect on a different league, a progressive league and hopefully a sustainable professional league to be proud of.

Gerard Lawlor

Chief Executive Northern Ireland Football League





OUR MISSION

LEAD, PROMOTE & DELIVER
PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL
WITHIN NI.



OUR VISION

BUILDING ON OUR
HERITAGE TO TRANSFORM
OUR FUTURE.



OUR VALUES

- PASSION
- PROGRESSION
- INCLUSIVITY
- ACCOUNTABILITY
- INTEGRITY

OUR KEY PILLARS

COMPETITIONS

GOVERNANCE

REVENUE

ENGAGEMENT





COMPETITIONS PILLAR



Break into and maintain a position in the top 35 of the UEFA Club Coefficient rankings.

Actions

- Engage with member clubs and football stakeholders to investigate the key enablers to support a top 35 position.
- Develop and implement a European progression plan.

Lead and implement a change to the professional game playing calendar.

Actions

- Consult with stakeholders and member clubs to investigate the benefits of a change in calendar.
- Develop a timebound strategic roadmap for transition and implementation of playing calendar.

Restructure NIFL competitions in line with the IFA pyramid review.

Actions

- Work with Irish FA to develop a structure and a league pyramid system for the men’s domestic game.
- Create an open pathway to allow access for ambitious clubs to progress into NIFL.
- Implement a clear promotion and relegation system across all leagues.

COMPETITIONS PILLAR CONTINUED

Continue the growth of elite women’s competitions.

Actions

- To increase and grow commercial agreements for member clubs to support their development.
- Increase exposure of the league competitions by digital and broadcast awareness.
- Review the format and scheduling of competitions.
- Engage with senior men’s clubs to explore the integration of women’s teams into their set up.

Drive the improvement of facilities at NIFL member clubs.

Actions

- Support clubs in modernising and creating improved standards of stadia and facilities.
- Lobby Government for increased investment to maximise improvement of facilities.
- Support clubs in the development of improved match-day experiences for all fans.
- Engage with clubs and explore opportunities to become more family friendly and community focused.
- Improve accessibility and sustainability of grounds and facilities.

Develop and implement new elite academy structure.

Actions

- Partner with the Irish FA to review the current youth structure.
- Create a new elite academy league.

GOVERNANCE PILLAR



Continue to modernise the composition of the NIFL Board to reflect key principles of good governance, diversity, equality and expertise.

Actions

- Review the current structure and make-up of the Board.
- Recruit key independent industry professionals into NIFL roles.
- Develop board sub-committees to include Audit and Risk.

Increase NIFL representation and relationships with all key stakeholders.

Actions

- Increase NIFL representation and influence within the Irish FA, through securing senior positions.
- Work and partner with other football and non-sporting bodies, both locally and internationally, to position NIFL as a leading stakeholder.

Develop a staffing structure to support growth and efficiency of the league and member clubs.

Actions

- Continue to evolve the current NIFL staffing structure to ensure the ever-growing needs of our member clubs and competitions are achieved.
- Ensure NIFL is a leading employer of choice within NI.
- Develop and implement a staff development programme.

GOVERNANCE PILLAR CONTINUED

Improve NIFL regulatory frameworks to ensure they are fit for purpose for a modern day professional league body.

Actions

- Commission a third-party review of all NIFL Rules and Regulations.
- Support the annual review of our football regulatory framework, to ensure it meets the needs of a modern, professional league.

Work with the Irish FA to develop & deliver an administration and leadership programme for NIFL member clubs.

Actions

- Research and partner with independent education provider.
- Develop a bespoke education programme for club administrators.

Award a formal qualification upon successful completion.

REVENUE PILLAR



Double annual commercial revenues by 2028.

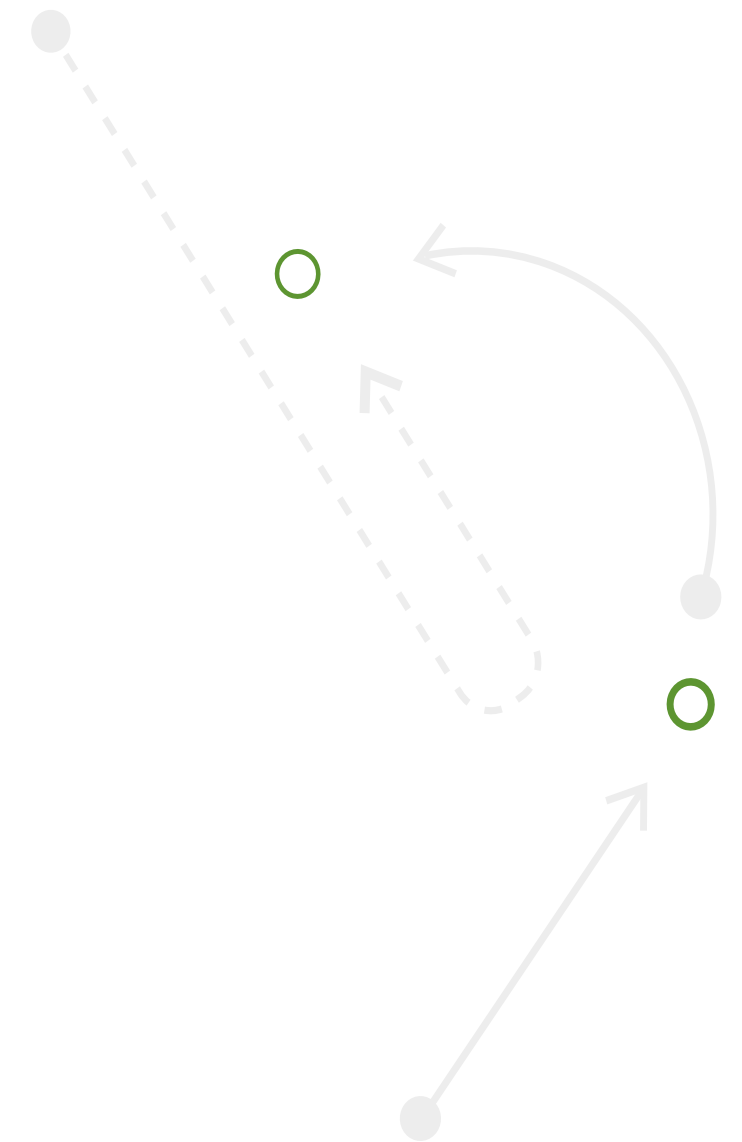
Actions

- Grow a framework of partners across all key sectors to support all league's commercial requirements.
- Offer a bespoke product that creates a strong commercial opportunity for partners.
- Market the leagues in a manner that increases engagement across attendances, digital and media.
- Explore new international opportunities for the growth of the league.

Increase total annual financial distributions to member clubs each year

Actions

- Increase competition prize funds through improved commercial and broadcast revenue agreements.
- Identify, explore and secure new sources of funding in line with annual budgets.



REVENUE PILLAR CONTINUED

Enhance financial stability by increasing reserves each year with a target to double by 2028.

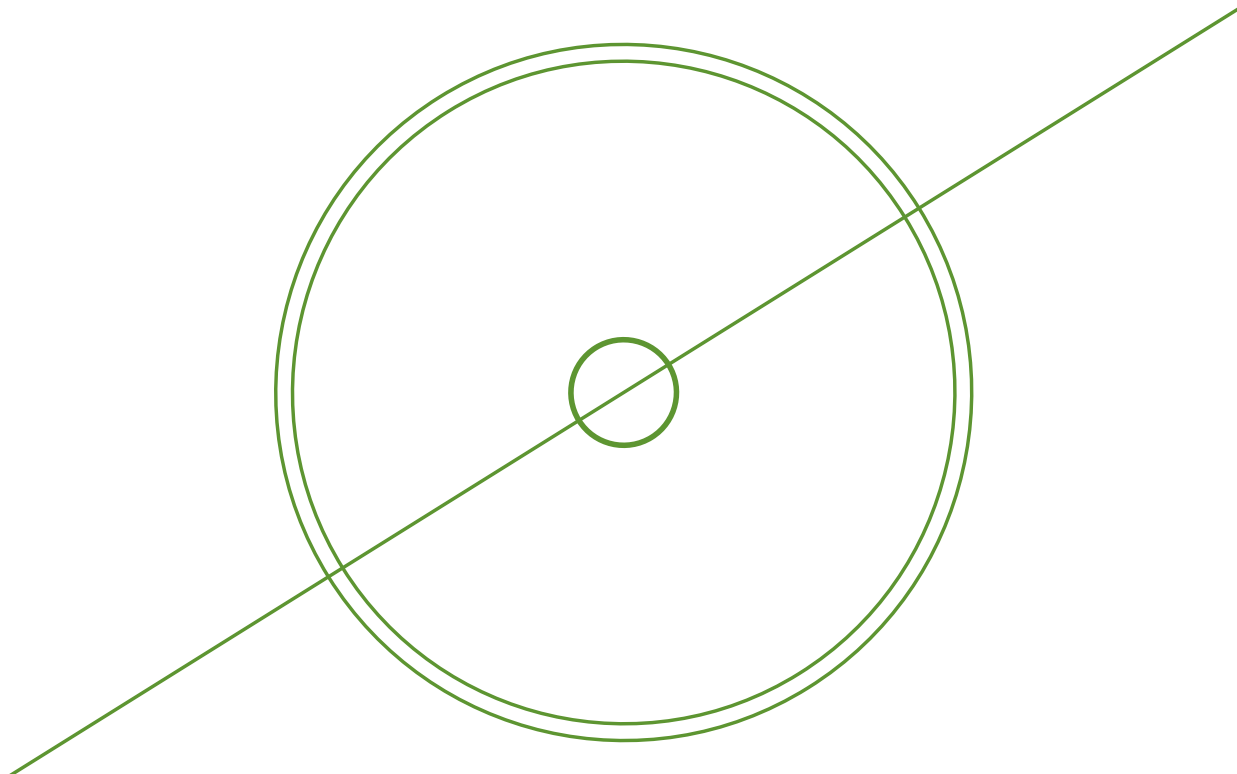
Actions

- Continue to deliver an annual budget to allow both clubs and leagues to grow.
- Manage and maintain a profitable business model.
- Investing company reserves to achieve maximum returns.

Escalate women’s annual commercial revenue fourfold by the end of the strategy.

Actions

- Engage and increase new commercial rights holders.
- Introduce broadcast rights for women’s competitions.
- Create a bespoke marketing plan to increase awareness and engagement of competitions.



ENGAGEMENT PILLAR



Increase total attendances at NIFL games by 40%.

Actions

- Drive overall awareness of NIFL through increased marketing.
- Grow and evolve match day experiences within stadia to attract new and lapsed supporters.
- Continue to deliver and improve a better family-friendly environment for everyone.
- Continue to lobby government to invest in stadia and facilities at NIFL clubs.
- Work with member clubs, to become hubs in their local communities and maximise their social value.

Attract and engage new and younger audiences.

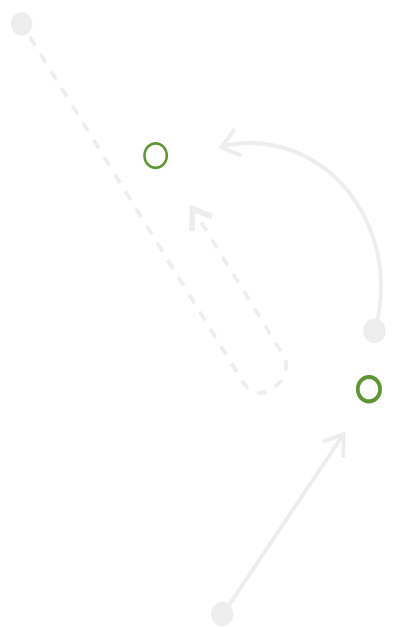
Actions

- Grow social media following to 350k.
- Continue to produce and deliver authentic and engaging content.
- Work with member clubs to promote activities and their heritage.
- Build and deliver a school engagement & outreach programme.

Grow broadcast audiences to 3.5m per annum.

Actions

- Lead and implement a change to the professional game playing calendar.
- Maximise and explore new match-days and kick-off times.
- Work with broadcast partners to evolve new technology to improve viewer experience.



ENGAGEMENT PILLAR CONTINUED

Transform NIFL into a commercial rights holder from its present position as a content and media manager to become a truly digital and media organisation.

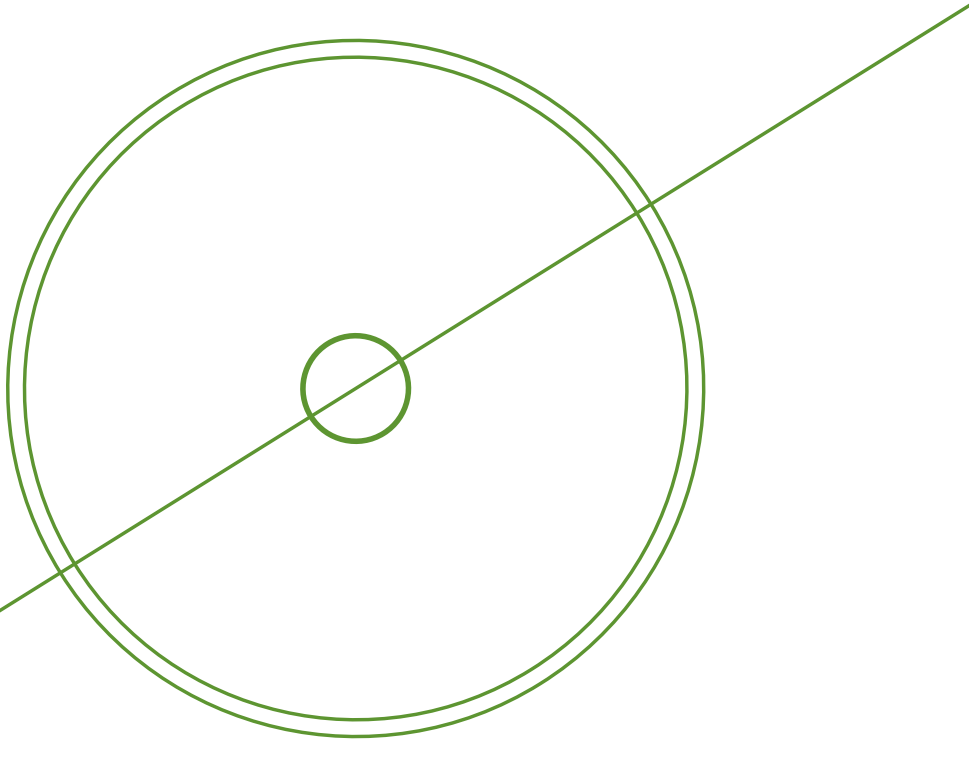
Actions

- Research and explore industry best practice models in sport.
- Develop an in-house technology infrastructure to support learnings.
- Deliver outputs to implement a digital and media platform for NIFL.

Provide a platform to give fans a voice in the running of the league.

Actions

- Implement a fans’ charter.
- Develop and facilitate a fans’ forum.





REAL FOOTBALL.

REAL FANS.